

# **THE ROLE OF TAX FAIRNESS AND TAXPAYER TRUST IN BUILDING VOLUNTARY COMPLIANCE IN MSME TAXPAYERS**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The aim of this study is to explain the role of tax fairness (procedural and distributive) and taxpayer trust (cognitive) in building voluntary compliance of micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) taxpayers in Malang Raya, Indonesia. To achieve this, the study uses a positivist paradigm approach with a judgment sampling method. Data were collected from questionnaires, which were created using the Google Forms platform and distributed online. Furthermore, the response was obtained from 204 respondents. The study results show that the two observed factors, i.e tax fairness (procedural and distributive) and taxpayer trust (cognitive), significantly influences voluntary compliance among MSME taxpayers in Malang Raya, Indonesia.

**Keywords:** Tax fairness, trust, tax compliance, MSME.

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Tax is an essential instrument for state development and Indonesia is a country that relies on tax revenues for state development activities. The Indonesian government's target for tax revenue in 2020 was IDR 1,404 trillion, which was expected to cover 51% of the total state needs, according to the revised 2020 expenditure plan. This plan was revised due to the COVID-19 pandemic and was outlined in Presidential Regulation Number 72 of 2020, which amended Presidential Regulation Number 54 of 2020 regarding The Changes in Posture and Details of the State Budget for Fiscal Year 2020. Furthermore, in reality, tax revenues as of August 2020 were still approximately IDR 676 trillion or 48% of the 2020 tax revenue budget (Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Indonesia, 2020). The tax ratio in 2020 was projected to depreciate by 9% compared to previous years (DDTC News, 2020).

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In Indonesia, tax compliance remains low with only 60% of 19 million taxpayers reporting taxes accurately (Suwiknyo, 2020). This highlights the need to improve both the practical and formal aspects of tax compliance. Additionally, Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) play a significant role in the Indonesian economy. In 2018, there were 64 million Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) recorded, and 99.9% of business activities were supported by MSMEs (Ministry of Cooperatives and Small and Medium Enterprises of the Republic of Indonesia, 2019; Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Indonesia, 2021). Despite this, tax compliance among MSMEs remains low, with only 2.3 million MSMEs registered as taxpayers, representing only 0.36% of total MSMEs in Indonesia (Setiawan, 2020). In 2019, MSMEs contributed only 1.1% of the total income tax revenue of IDR 711.2 trillion (Catriana, 2021), thus limiting the full potential of tax revenue from the MSME sector.

For MSMEs to fulfill their tax obligations, voluntary compliance is essential. Indonesia has had a self-assessment system for tax reporting in place since 1983, with the government serving as both supervisor and policy maker (Hanum et al., 2019; Hanum et al., 2019; Regulation of the Minister of Finance of the Republic of Indonesia, 2015; Palil, 2010). However, the self-assessment system has not been fully effective, leading to opportunities for tax avoidance (Darmayasa et al., 2018). Taxpayers must therefore be motivated to comply voluntarily, and previous studies have shown that fairness and trust in tax authorities can increase compliance levels (Angeles, 2021; Erin, 2021; Gilligan & Richardson, 2005; Muslichah & Graha, 2018; Novikasaria et al., 2021; Rachmawan et al., 2020).

In this regard, the present study focuses on the role of procedural and distributive fairness and cognitive trust in increasing voluntary compliance among MSME taxpayers in Indonesia, specifically in the region of Malang Raya. This area is located in East Java and has contributed significantly to Indonesia's economic growth over the past three years (Santoso, 2021; Statistics Central Bureau of Indonesia, 2019, 2020). The study also aims to expand upon previous study on voluntary compliance among MSME taxpayers in Yogyakarta (Albab & Suwardi, 2021). Therefore, this study has global significance, as tax compliance remains a problem in many countries (Hassan et al., 2021) and MSMEs play a crucial role in economic development and social stability (Ensari & Karabay, 2014). As a result, tax revenue generated from the MSME sector is of great importance to the state.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1. *The Psychology of Fairness Theory***

In the theory "Psychology of Fairness", fairness is divided into three aspects namely procedural, distributive, and retributive fairness. The focus of the procedural aspect is on the fairness of the tax system, while the distributive focuses on the fairness of tax distribution (Lind & Tyler, 1988). However, retributive fairness, whose focus is on fairness in the provision of sanctions for tax obligation violations, is not included in this study (Tyler et al., 1997). Studies have shown that both procedural and distributive fairness can improve taxpayer compliance, with taxpayers who feel the taxation system is fair being more likely to comply with their tax obligations voluntarily (Feld & Frey, 2007; Saad, 2011; van Dijke & Verboon, 2010; Verboon & Goslinga, 2009). As a result, the following hypothesis was proposed in this study:

*H1a: Higher levels of perceived procedural fairness result in higher levels of voluntary taxpayer compliance.*

*H1b: Higher levels of perceived distributive fairness result in higher levels of voluntary taxpayer compliance.*

## **2.2. The Slippery Slope Framework (SSF)**

The SSF and The Psychology of Fairness Theory both play important roles in shaping taxpayer compliance. Furthermore, the power of tax authorities and taxpayer trust are the two crucial factors that impact taxpayer compliance (Kirchler et al., 2008). This study specifically focuses on cognitive trust, which involves a belief based on evidence, facts, and a professional attitude (Colquitt et al., 2012; Gobena & Van Dijke, 2016).

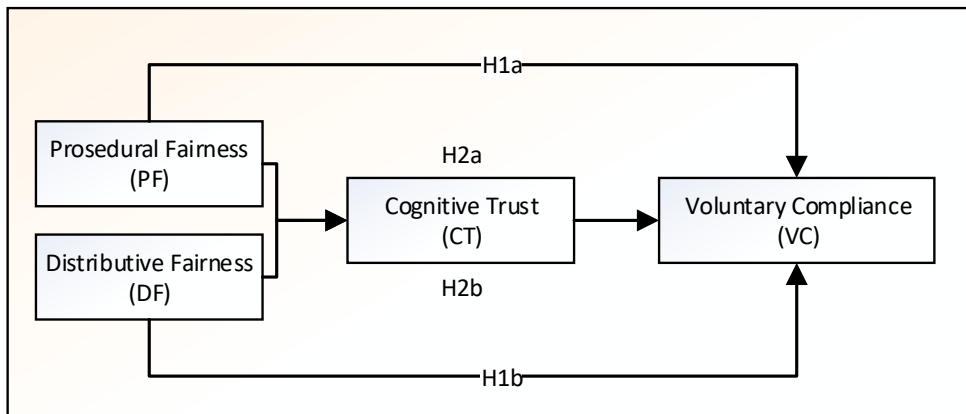
Previous studies have shown that trust in tax authorities and fairness play a crucial role in shaping voluntary compliance (Verboon & van Dijke, 2007; Wenzel, 2002). Therefore, procedural and distributive fairness both contribute to building taxpayer trust and obedience, as taxpayers believe that the tax system as well as distribution of tax proceeds are fair (Gobena & Van Dijke, 2016; van Dijke & Verboon, 2010). The following hypotheses have been proposed based on the literature review:

*H2a: Cognitive trust is positively influenced by procedural fairness and this leads to increased voluntary taxpayer compliance.*

*H2b: Cognitive trust is positively influenced by distributive fairness, which also leads to increased voluntary taxpayer compliance.*

From the aforementioned literature, a conceptual framework was derived by combining the elements of the psychology of fairness theory and the SSF.

**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework**



### **3. METHODOLOGY**

This study adopts a quantitative method to examine the perceptions of MSME taxpayers in Malang Raya towards tax fairness (both procedural and distributive), trust (cognitive), and their impact on voluntary compliance. Following this, the samples were selected based on judgment sampling, which involves the selection of respondents who meet specific predetermined criteria (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). The criteria for selection were derived from the Indonesian Government Regulation Number 23 of 2018 on income tax for businesses with certain gross circulation. The criteria indicate that respondents must have a Taxpayer Identification Number, a gross turnover of less than IDR 4.8 billion per year, and they must not have been keeping financial books prior to the time they were surveyed (Government Regulation, 2018).

The survey questions are based on previous studies by Murphy (2004), Verboon and van Dijke (2007), Gobena and Van Dijke (2016), and Kirchler and Wahl (2010) for procedural fairness, distributive fairness, cognitive trust, and voluntary compliance respectively. The questionnaires were administered through Google Forms due to the ongoing lockdown in the Greater Malang area, which was caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The study was conducted over a period of two months and 204 responses were received. Furthermore, data analysis was performed using the Partial Least Squares (PLS) approach, which evaluates the predictive effect of partial hypotheses and models by measuring latent variables or constructs (Hair et al., 2012).

### **4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Before the hypothesis test was conducted, the validity and reliability of the data collected through the Google Form account were first verified. The convergent validity test revealed that four indicators, PF10, PF11, DF1, and DF4, in the constructs of Procedural Fairness (PF) and Distributive Fairness (DF), showed values below 0.7. Accordingly, Chin (1995) stated that indicators with loading factors less than 0.7 should be removed from the study model. After removing these indicators, the results of the convergent and discriminant validity tests met the criteria set by Chin (1995), and the results of the reliability tests met the standards set by Hair et al. (2012).

**Table 1:** Convergent Validity Testing

Variables	Indicators	Loading factor	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	Communality
<b>Rules of Thumbs</b>		<b>&gt;0.7</b>	<b>&gt;0.5</b>	<b>&gt;0.5</b>
<b>Procedural Fairness</b>	PF1	0.818	0.684	0.684
	PF2	0.823		
	PF3	0.820		
	PF4	0.802		
	PF5	0.867		
	PF6	0.785		
	PF7	0.845		
	PF8	0.832		
	PF9	0.847		
<b>Distributive Fairness</b>	DF2	0.773	0.640	0.640
	DF3	0.840		
	DF5	0.784		
<b>Cognitive Trust</b>	CT1	0.744	0.603	0.603
	CT2	0.768		
	CT3	0.721		
	CT4	0.838		
	CT5	0.861		
	CT6	0.715		
<b>Voluntary Compliance</b>	VC1	0.838	0.666	0.666
	VC2	0.793		
	VC3	0.848		
	VC4	0.821		
	VC5	0.811		
	VC6	0.813		
	VC7	0.799		
	VC8	0.797		
	VC9	0.793		
	VC10	0.846		

**Table 2:** Discriminant Validity Testing (AVE root & correlation between variables)

	Roots of AVE	Procedural Fairness	Distributive Fairness	Cognitive Trust	Voluntary Compliance
<b>Procedural Fairness</b>	0.827	1.000	0.646	0.701	0.448
<b>Distributive Fairness</b>	0.800	0.646	1.000	0.484	0.401
<b>Cognitive Trust</b>	0.776	0.701	0.484	1.000	0.653
<b>Voluntary Compliance</b>	0.816	0.448	0.401	0.653	1.000

*Note:* Roots of AVE > variables correlation was valid.

**Table 3: Discriminant Validity Testing (Cross Loading)**

	<b>Procedural Fairness</b>	<b>Distributive Fairness</b>	<b>Cognitive Trust</b>	<b>Voluntary Compliance</b>
<b>PF1</b>	<b>0.818</b>	0.499	0.545	0.329
<b>PF2</b>	<b>0.823</b>	0.561	0.489	0.363
<b>PF3</b>	<b>0.820</b>	0.477	0.622	0.437
<b>PF4</b>	<b>0.802</b>	0.537	0.469	0.265
<b>PF5</b>	<b>0.867</b>	0.594	0.557	0.400
<b>PF6</b>	<b>0.785</b>	0.580	0.606	0.370
<b>PF7</b>	<b>0.845</b>	0.510	0.646	0.400
<b>PF8</b>	<b>0.832</b>	0.465	0.644	0.371
<b>PF9</b>	<b>0.847</b>	0.601	0.589	0.361
<b>DF2</b>	0.395	<b>0.773</b>	0.297	0.347
<b>DF3</b>	0.576	<b>0.840</b>	0.430	0.318
<b>DF5</b>	0.562	<b>0.784</b>	0.422	0.302
<b>CT1</b>	0.586	0.401	<b>0.744</b>	0.294
<b>CT2</b>	0.560	0.375	<b>0.768</b>	0.346
<b>CT3</b>	0.455	0.308	<b>0.721</b>	0.425
<b>CT4</b>	0.542	0.432	<b>0.838</b>	0.586
<b>CT5</b>	0.579	0.444	<b>0.861</b>	0.676
<b>CT6</b>	0.545	0.287	<b>0.715</b>	0.611
<b>VC1</b>	0.346	0.269	0.524	<b>0.838</b>
<b>VC2</b>	0.392	0.384	0.553	<b>0.793</b>
<b>VC3</b>	0.316	0.306	0.533	<b>0.848</b>
<b>VC4</b>	0.346	0.394	0.473	<b>0.821</b>
<b>VC5</b>	0.314	0.215	0.444	<b>0.811</b>
<b>VC6</b>	0.394	0.307	0.605	<b>0.813</b>
<b>VC7</b>	0.404	0.340	0.617	<b>0.799</b>
<b>VC8</b>	0.378	0.323	0.555	<b>0.797</b>
<b>VC9</b>	0.291	0.299	0.453	<b>0.793</b>
<b>VC10</b>	0.441	0.412	0.513	<b>0.846</b>

Note: Cross loading >0.7 in each variable was valid.

**Table 4: Reliability Testing**

	<b>Cronbach's Alpha</b>	<b>Composite Reliability</b>
<b>Rules of Thumbs</b>	<b>&gt;0.7</b>	<b>&gt;0.7</b>
<b>Procedural Fairness</b>	0.942	0.951
<b>Distributive Fairness</b>	0.718	0.842
<b>Cognitive Trust</b>	0.868	0.901
<b>Voluntary Compliance</b>	0.944	0.952

In this study, a mediation model was established to investigate the impact of tax fairness (procedural and distributive) and trust (cognitive) on the voluntary compliance of MSME taxpayers in Malang Raya. The mediation analysis follows the Baron & Kenny (1986) method, with both direct and indirect tests conducted. The results of the hypothesis testing show that procedural fairness has a significant effect on voluntary compliance through the mediating role of cognitive trust, supporting Hypothesis 2a. On the other hand, distributive fairness has a direct impact on voluntary compliance without the influence of cognitive trust, confirming Hypothesis 1b.

**Table 5: Hypotheses Testing**

	$\beta$	T values
<b>Procedural Fairness → Voluntary Compliance</b>	-0.115	1.111
<b>Distributive Fairness → Voluntary Compliance</b>	0.157*	1.917
<b>Procedural Fairness → Cognitive Trust</b>	0.667*	13.272
<b>Distributive Fairness → Cognitive Trust</b>	0.053	0.663
<b>Cognitive Trust → Voluntary Compliance</b>	0.657*	9.130

Note: \*  $p$  value >0.05.

The results obtained from this study show that tax fairness (procedural and distributive) and trust (cognitive) play a crucial role in fostering voluntary compliance among MSME taxpayers in Malang Raya, Indonesia. This conclusion is aligned with the Psychology of Fairness Theory and SSF, which suggest that tax fairness and taxpayer trust drive voluntary taxpayer compliance. The study also indicates that cognitive trust acts as a mediator between procedural fairness and voluntary compliance. Additionally, trust, based on evidence and facts, has been demonstrated to encourage taxpayers voluntarily fulfill their tax obligations (Gobena & Van Dijke, 2016; Kirchler et al., 2008; van Dijke & Verboon, 2010).

## 5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the results of this study suggest that in order to improve voluntary compliance among MSME taxpayers, it is essential to establish fairness and trust between the government (tax authority) and the taxpayers. In a self-assessment system, the government must improve its procedural and distributive fairness. The greater the perceived fairness by taxpayers, the higher the level of trust in the government, leading to increased voluntary compliance. Therefore, the government must strive to create a fair tax system, which will foster confidence and belief in its ability to manage the tax funds paid by taxpayers. As MSME taxpayers and citizens, it is also essential to increase tax literacy and understand the role of taxes in the development of the country.

However, this study has some limitations, such as the broad categorization of business specifications, which affects the responses of the respondents, who are mainly business actors engaged in exchanging goods or services. Therefore, future study could include a more detailed categorization of business classifications in order to obtain more precise results. Additionally, the role of tax knowledge on tax compliance could also be explored in further study. With the availability of digital access, taxpayers have the opportunity to increase their tax literacy and understanding of the complexities of taxation, and it is important to examine the impact of this understanding on tax compliance.

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