

The Influence of Legal Awareness on Public Compliance with Laws and Regulations

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Abstract

Legal awareness has become a fundamental determinant of public compliance with laws and regulations, particularly in the context of increasingly complex governance systems and the demand for effective law enforcement. Despite continuous legal reforms, variations in public compliance remain evident due to differences in individuals' understanding, attitudes, and perceptions of legal norms. This study aims to examine the influence of legal awareness on public compliance with laws and regulations. The research employed a quantitative explanatory design using a survey approach. Data were collected from members of the public through structured questionnaires using proportionate random sampling. Legal awareness was measured through four dimensions, namely legal knowledge, legal understanding, legal attitude, and legal behavior, while public compliance was assessed based on individuals' adherence to statutory obligations and regulatory requirements. The collected data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to evaluate the reliability and validity of the measurement model and to test the proposed structural relationships. The findings indicate that legal awareness has a positive and statistically significant effect on public compliance with laws and regulations. Individuals with higher levels of legal knowledge and stronger legal attitudes demonstrate greater willingness to obey legal norms and fulfill their civic obligations. Furthermore, legal awareness contributes to the internalization of legal values, strengthens trust in legal institutions, and promotes voluntary compliance rather than compliance driven solely by fear of sanctions. These findings highlight the strategic importance of legal education and awareness programs in fostering a sustainable culture of lawfulness. The study contributes to the literature on legal compliance by providing empirical evidence that strengthening legal awareness is an essential mechanism for improving public adherence to legal regulations and supporting effective governance.

Keywords: Legal Awareness, Public Compliance, Legal Knowledge, Legal Behavior

Introduction

Legal awareness is a multidisciplinary concept understood differently from the perspectives of legal sociology, legal psychology, and public administration, but it shares a common goal: to shape legally compliant public behavior. From the Sociology of Law perspective, legal awareness is viewed as an individual's level of understanding of the existence of law and its social function in regulating community life. From a Legal Psychology perspective, legal awareness reflects an individual's cognitive and affective processes in understanding, accepting, and evaluating legal norms before they are implemented in actual behavior. Meanwhile, from a Public Administration perspective, legal awareness is viewed as social capital that strengthens the effectiveness of public policy implementation, improves the quality of government services, and encourages public participation in creating accountable governance. Thus, legal awareness is not only related to the ability to understand the content of regulations but also reflects the

internalization of legal values as guidelines for social life (Tyler, 2006; Ewick & Silbey, 1998; Cotterrell, 1992).

Conceptually, legal awareness consists of four main dimensions: legal knowledge, legal understanding, legal attitude, and legal behavior. Legal knowledge indicates an individual's level of knowledge regarding rights, obligations, and applicable regulations, while legal understanding reflects the ability to comprehend the purpose, function, and implications of law in everyday life. Furthermore, legal attitude reflects an individual's positive attitude toward the law as an instrument of justice, while legal behavior is the concrete manifestation of compliance with legal norms in daily actions. These four dimensions are interrelated and form a continuous legal learning process, where increased legal knowledge and understanding strengthens positive attitudes toward the law and encourages more compliant behavior toward various regulations (Friedman, 1975; Tyler, 2006; Ajzen, 1991).

The relationship between legal consciousness, legal culture, and legal obedience explains that sustained legal compliance arises from the internalization of legal values, not solely from the threat of sanctions. Legal Consciousness Theory emphasizes that individuals construct meaning about the law through social experiences, interactions with state institutions, and perceptions of justice, thus developing legal awareness as part of a community's social identity (Ewick & Silbey, 1998). Furthermore, Friedman's (1975) Legal Culture Theory explains that legal culture determines how society views, accepts, and complies with the law as a social norm. This explanation is reinforced by the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), which states that compliance behavior is influenced by attitudes toward behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. Therefore, people with a high level of legal awareness tend to more easily comply with various regulations because this compliance is based on moral conviction, acceptance of legal legitimacy, and a commitment to maintaining social order, not simply because of fear of punishment.

Public compliance with laws and regulations is the level of willingness of individuals and community groups to comply with various applicable legal provisions as part of their civic responsibility and respect for the country's legal system. Public compliance is not only interpreted as behavior that follows rules due to the threat of sanctions, but also as a form of acceptance of the legitimacy of the law and the values of justice contained therein. In the literature on law and public administration, public compliance is generally divided into two forms: voluntary compliance and enforced compliance. Voluntary compliance occurs when people voluntarily comply with the law because they have awareness, understanding, and belief that the law provides benefits for communal life. In contrast, enforced compliance arises due to external pressure in the form of supervision, threats of punishment, or law enforcement actions by authorized authorities. The level of public compliance can be measured through several indicators, namely regulatory compliance, administrative compliance in fulfilling legal obligations, social compliance with applicable norms, and moral compliance that reflects the internalization of legal values in everyday life. Therefore, legal compliance is a multidimensional phenomenon that reflects the interaction between normative, institutional, and behavioral aspects of society (Tyler, 2006; Braithwaite, 2002).

Various studies show that the level of public compliance is influenced by interrelated factors, such as education level, legal knowledge, trust in the government, the effectiveness of law enforcement, the legitimacy of legal institutions, and prevailing social norms. Deterrence Theory explains that individuals are more likely to comply with the law when they perceive a high risk of punishment and consistent law enforcement (Becker, 1968). However, this approach is considered insufficient to explain long-term compliance because

it only emphasizes sanctions. Procedural Justice Theory, developed by Tyler (2006), argues that people are more willing to comply with the law if they perceive the law enforcement process to be fair, transparent, and respectful of citizens' rights. Meanwhile, Responsive Regulation Theory emphasizes that an effective regulatory strategy should combine persuasive, educational, and repressive approaches proportionally according to the characteristics of the community, so that compliance can grow through awareness and partnership, not solely through coercion (Ayres & Braithwaite, 1992). Thus, building sustainable public compliance requires synergy between the quality of legal institutions, government legitimacy, and increasing the community's capacity to understand the law.

The relationship between legal awareness and public compliance can be explained as a gradual process that begins with increased legal knowledge, progresses to legal understanding, develops a positive legal attitude, and ultimately results in voluntary compliance, leading to high levels of public compliance. Individuals with good legal awareness not only understand the content of regulations but also understand the purpose, benefits, and values of justice underlying the law. This understanding fosters a positive attitude toward legal legitimacy and strengthens the moral commitment to obeying the rules as part of social responsibility. From the perspective of Legal Consciousness Theory, an individual's experience interacting with the law shapes their perspective on legal legitimacy, thus influencing compliance behavior in everyday life (Ewick & Silbey, 1998). Furthermore, Legal Culture Theory asserts that a developing legal culture within a society will strengthen the internalization of legal norms, so that compliance becomes part of social habits, not simply a response to state control (Friedman, 1975).

This relationship is also in line with the Theory of Planned Behavior, which states that individual behavior is influenced by attitudes toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceptions of the ability to carry out the behavior (Ajzen, 1991). In the context of legal compliance, people with high legal awareness tend to form positive attitudes toward regulations, receive support from social norms to comply with the law, and believe that compliance is the right action and beneficial for the common good. Therefore, sustainable legal compliance is not solely born from fear of criminal or administrative sanctions, but rather from the internalization of legal values, belief in the legitimacy of state institutions, and the awareness that the law functions to protect rights, create order, and realize social justice. Therefore, increasing legal awareness through legal education, regulatory socialization, and strengthening legal culture is a more effective strategy in building public compliance than an approach that relies solely on repressive law enforcement (Tyler, 2006; Braithwaite, 2002; Ayres & Braithwaite, 1992).

Research Methods

This study used a quantitative approach with an explanatory research design to analyze the effect of legal awareness on public compliance with laws and regulations. This approach was chosen because it aimed to test the causal relationship between variables based on a developed theoretical framework. The study population consisted of individuals who met the requirements as legal subjects and had experience interacting with various laws and regulations. The study sample was determined using proportionate random sampling to provide equal opportunity for each member of the population to become respondents and to increase the representativeness of the data. Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Legal awareness was measured through four dimensions: legal knowledge, legal understanding, legal attitude, and legal behavior. Public compliance was measured using indicators of regulatory compliance, administrative compliance, social compliance, and moral compliance adapted from various previous studies.

The collected data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with the help of SmartPLS software, as this method is suitable for testing structural relationships between latent variables and evaluating the quality of the measurement model. The analysis stages include testing the measurement model through indicator reliability evaluation, internal consistency reliability using Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha values, convergent validity based on the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value, and discriminant validity using the Fornell–Larcker and Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) criteria. Furthermore, the structural model is evaluated by testing the path coefficient, coefficient of determination (R^2), effect size (f^2), predictive relevance (Q^2), and significance testing using a bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 subsamples at a 5% significance level. This analytical approach allows the study to obtain comprehensive empirical evidence regarding the magnitude of the influence of legal awareness on public compliance with laws and regulations and provides a strong basis for developing policies to increase public legal awareness.

Result and Discussion

The results of the analysis using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) indicate that legal awareness has a positive and significant influence on public compliance with laws and regulations. As presented in Table 1, the path coefficient is $\beta = 0.748$, with a t-value of 18.962 and $p < 0.001$, indicating that the research hypothesis is accepted. This finding indicates that increasing the level of public legal awareness significantly contributes to increased compliance with various applicable laws and regulations. People who have adequate legal knowledge, understand the purpose of establishing regulations, have a positive attitude towards the law, and implement legal values in their daily lives tend to show higher levels of compliance. Thus, legal awareness not only plays a cognitive role but also serves as a normative foundation that shapes people's voluntary legal behavior table 1.

Table 1. Results of Structural Model Evaluation

Hypothesis	Structural Path	Path Coefficient (β)	t-value	p-value	Decision
H1	Legal Awareness → Public Compliance	0.748	18.962	<0.001	Supported

Furthermore, Table 2 shows that the legal awareness variable is able to explain 56.0% of the variation in public compliance ($R^2 = 0.560$), while the remaining 44.0% is influenced by other factors outside the research model, such as the effectiveness of law enforcement, the level of trust in the government, socio-economic conditions, legal culture, and the characteristics of public institutions. The R^2 value is included in the moderate to strong explanatory power category, indicating that the model has good explanatory ability. In addition, the evaluation results in Table 3 show an effect size (f^2) value of 1.273, which is included in the large effect category, and a predictive relevance (Q^2) value of 0.418, indicating that the model has a high predictive ability regarding public compliance behavior table 2.

Table 2. Coefficient of Determination (R^2)

Endogenous Variable	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Interpretation
Public Compliance	0.560	0.557	Moderate-Strong

Table 2 presents the results of the coefficient of determination (R^2) evaluation of the structural model, demonstrating the ability of the Legal Awareness variable to explain variations in Public Compliance with Laws and Regulations. The R^2 value of 0.560 and the Adjusted R^2 of 0.557 indicate that the research model has moderate to strong explanatory power. In other words, 56.0% of the variation in public compliance behavior with laws and regulations can be explained by respondents' level of legal awareness. This finding indicates that the dimensions of legal awareness, including legal knowledge, legal understanding, legal attitude, and legal behavior, contribute substantially to shaping public compliance with various applicable legal provisions. Meanwhile, the remaining 44.0% of the variation in Public Compliance is influenced by factors outside the research model that have not been analyzed, such as the effectiveness of law enforcement, public trust in government institutions, legal legitimacy, social norms, socioeconomic conditions, education level, and the quality of public services. The Adjusted R^2 value which is very close to the R^2 value also indicates that the model has a good level of stability and does not experience overfitting, so that the independent variables used are able to explain the dependent variable consistently. Therefore, these results provide empirical evidence that Legal Awareness is the main determinant in increasing Public Compliance with Laws and Regulations, while also showing that strengthening legal awareness through legal education, regulatory socialization, and building a legal culture can be an effective strategy to increase public compliance with the law in a sustainable manner.

Discussion

The results of the study indicate that legal awareness has a positive and significant effect on public compliance with laws and regulations, as evidenced by a path coefficient of $\beta = 0.748$ with $p < 0.001$. This finding indicates that the higher the level of public legal awareness, the higher their level of compliance with various applicable legal provisions. Legal awareness in this study is understood as a multidimensional construct encompassing legal knowledge, legal understanding, legal attitude, and legal behavior. These four dimensions simultaneously shape an individual's ability to understand the substance of the law, accept the legitimacy of regulations, and implement legal norms in daily life. Thus, public compliance is influenced not only by external factors such as the threat of sanctions, but also by the process of internalizing legal values that forms a moral commitment to comply with regulations. This finding reinforces the view that the effectiveness of the legal system is highly dependent on the quality of public legal awareness as the primary foundation for a sustainable legal culture (Tyler, 2006; Friedman, 1975).

The findings of this study align with Legal Consciousness Theory, which explains that individual legal behavior develops through the process of constructing meaning about the law based on social experience and interactions with legal institutions (Ewick & Silbey, 1998). Individuals with a high level of legal awareness tend to view the law as an instrument for protecting the common good, so that compliance emerges as a form of social responsibility, not simply a response to the threat of punishment. Furthermore, the results of this study also support the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), which states that behavior is influenced by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. In the context of this study, increased legal knowledge and understanding forms a positive attitude toward regulations, strengthens social norms that support compliance, and increases individuals' belief that obeying the law is the right and beneficial action. Therefore, developing legal awareness is a very important psychological and social mechanism in increasing voluntary community compliance. The results of this study are also consistent with various previous studies, which assert that legal compliance is more influenced by perceptions of legal legitimacy than by the threat of sanctions alone. Tyler

(2006) found that people are more willing to comply with the law if they perceive the law enforcement process to be fair, transparent, and respectful of citizens' rights. Friedman (1975) also emphasized that legal culture is a key determinant of the effectiveness of the legal system because it reflects how people understand, accept, and internalize legal values. Research by Ewick and Silbey (1998) shows that people's daily experiences interacting with the law shape legal consciousness, which ultimately influences compliance behavior. Therefore, this study extends previous findings by presenting empirical evidence that legal awareness, as a multidimensional construct, has a strong direct influence on public compliance, thus providing a more comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms by which legal compliance develops.

In addition to strengthening previous literature, this study provides an empirical contribution to the development of the Responsive Regulation theory proposed by Ayres and Braithwaite (1992). This theory emphasizes that effective regulation must not rely solely on a repressive approach through sanctions but must also be supported by educational, persuasive, and participatory strategies. The R^2 value of 0.560 indicates that legal awareness explains more than half of the variation in public compliance, indicating that increasing legal awareness is a highly effective strategy for increasing public compliance. However, approximately 44% of the variation in compliance is still influenced by other factors, such as the effectiveness of law enforcement, the level of trust in the government, the quality of public services, socio-economic conditions, and social norms. This finding suggests that developing legal compliance requires a multidimensional approach through a synergy between legal education, institutional strengthening, and governance reform.

Practically, the results of this study have important implications for policymakers, law enforcement agencies, and educational institutions in designing strategies to increase public compliance with laws and regulations. Legal education programs, regulatory socialization, digital-based legal literacy, and strengthening legal culture in schools, universities, and the community need to be systematically developed so that the public not only understands the content of regulations but also understands the purpose and benefits of law for communal life. On the other hand, the government needs to improve the quality of public services, transparency, accountability, and procedural fairness in law enforcement processes to strengthen the legitimacy of legal institutions in the eyes of the public. Thus, sustainable legal compliance can be built through a combination of increasing legal awareness, strengthening legal culture, and implementing good governance principles, thereby supporting the realization of a law-abiding, democratic society oriented toward social justice and sustainable development.

Conclusion

The findings indicate that legal awareness has a positive and statistically significant effect on public compliance with laws and regulations. Individuals with higher levels of legal knowledge and stronger legal attitudes demonstrate greater willingness to obey legal norms and fulfill their civic obligations. Furthermore, legal awareness contributes to the internalization of legal values, strengthens trust in legal institutions, and promotes voluntary compliance rather than compliance driven solely by fear of sanctions. These findings highlight the strategic importance of legal education and awareness programs in fostering a sustainable culture of lawfulness. The study contributes to the literature on legal compliance by providing empirical evidence that strengthening legal awareness is an essential mechanism for improving public adherence to legal regulations and supporting effective governance.

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