



Trust Reciprocity and Power: An Integration to Create Tax Compliance

THERESIA WORO DAMAYANTI¹ and SUPRAMONO SUPRAMONO²

¹ Associate professor of the Accounting department, Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas Kristen Satya Wacana, Indonesia, E-mail : woro@staff.uksw.edu

² Professor of the Management department, Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas Kristen Satya Wacana, Indonesia, E-mail : supramono@staff.uksw.edu.

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ABSTRACT

Previous studies have used the slippery slope framework that integrates trust and perception on tax authorities' power as a tax compliance mode in several countries. This research aims to show and to develop slippery slope framework in Indonesia by adding the test of trust reciprocity. We use a 3 x 2 factorial inter-subject experiment study that involves 324 students as our participants. Our results show that trust, perception on tax authorities' power and the interaction of both variables affect tax compliance. More interestingly, taxpayers exhibit the highest tax compliance when they have trust reciprocity. In this case, perception on tax authorities' power is no longer significant in explaining tax compliance. Thus, mutual trust is very important. Tax authorities must continue to foster an attitude of trust in taxpayers and vice versa as the key to success for the government to increase tax compliance.

INTRODUCTION

The Indonesian government is currently adopting expansive fiscal policies as indicated by increased governmental expenditures. However, data from the last five years show that the actual tax revenues as the main revenue component in financing these expenditures are only around 82%-96% of the targeted tax revenues (LKPP, 2017). It is therefore important to ensure taxpayers' compliance in paying tax in order to realize targeted tax revenues. Meanwhile, previous studies (Scholz and Lubell, 1998); Slemrod and Yitzhaki, 2002) suggest that taxpayers' trust on government significantly affects taxpayers' compliance. Taxpayers' trust is their perception whether tax authorities have performed their official responsibilities in administering tax revenues reliably and trustworthily (Braithwaite, 2016; Kogler et al., 2013). Rothstein (2000) argues that there are two conditions of tax authorities' trustworthiness, namely improving bureaucratic efficiency and ensuring that tax compliance delivers many benefits to the public.

Although taxpayers' trust is important to increase their tax compliance, it is insufficient for tax authorities only to rely on taxpayers' trust because not all taxpayers trust their tax authorities. As suggested by Kircher et al. (2008) in their slippery slope framework, increasing tax compliance needs not only taxpayers' trust, but also power. When taxpayers perceive that their tax authorities possess strong taxation power, it is likely that their tax compliance will increase because they believe that non-compliant tax behavior may imply tax investigation or even legal sanctions (Palil et al., 2013). Tax authorities can show their power by investigating and even charging fines to non-compliant taxpayers (Kirchler et al., 2008). Guala and Mittone (2005) show that taxpayers tend to increase their tax compliance after tax investigation. Previous literature (Clark et al., 2004; Wahl et al., 2010; Muehlbacher et al., 2011) also indicates the relationship between power and tax compliance.

This study aims to investigate and to develop slippery slope framework in increasing tax compliance in Indonesia. It makes two research contributions. First, prior studies have investigated the interaction between trust and power in the slippery slope framework in numerous countries, especially in European countries such as in Turkey (Benk and Budak, 2012); Austria (Muehlbacher et al., 2011); Austria, Hungary, Romania, and Russia (Kogler et al., 2013), Italy (Kastlunger et al., 2013), the Netherlands (Gangl et al., 2013), Greece (Kaplanoglou and Rapanos, 2015), and Sub Saharan countries (Mas'Ud et al., 2015). However, there is only limited literature on Asian countries such as Indonesia that actively expand their tax revenues through tax advocacy program, tax amnesty, and issuance of some tax regulation related to access to information for tax purposes. Second, this study addresses reciprocity trust. Previous studies use taxpayers' one-way trust (trust on their tax authorities) in their analysis. Trust reciprocity refers to the condition when taxpayers not only trust on their tax authorities but also believe that their tax authorities trust on them.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

T. Ritsatos (2014) suggest that a slippery slope framework is a comprehensive approach in explaining factors that affect tax compliance. H. Ellfers (2006) introduces this term in relation to the tax compliance issue. A slippery slope framework is an approach that aims to integrate psychological and economic factors in explaining tax compliance (Kirchler et al., 2008). Taxpayers' trust on tax authorities represents the psychological factor, and tax authorities' power indicates the economic factor.

The concept of taxpayers' trust on governments adopts the psychological contract theory of L. Feld and B. Frey (2007) that argues that there is a relationship between tax authorities' behavior and taxpayers' behavior. Taxpayers will appreciate tax authorities who treat them well by exhibiting tax-compliant behavior. Trust also describes special quality of the interacting relationship between tax authorities and taxpayers in which they both have a positive perception on each other and are motivated to sustain the relationship. If tax authorities treat taxpayers as partners honestly, fairly, informatively, and beneficially, it is likely that tax compliance will increase (Torgler and Schaltegger, 2005). J. Slemrod and S. Yitzhaki (2002) empirically confirm that countries with trustworthy governments exhibit lower incidences of tax evasion. J. Scholz and M. Lubell (1998) also indicate that taxpayers' trust significantly reduces the probability of tax avoidance. Further, Van Dijke and P. Verboon (2010); H. Hammar et al. (2009) show that trustworthy policymakers affect taxpayers' compliance.

Besides taxpayers' trust on governments, another dimension of the slippery slope framework is taxpayers' perception on the power of tax authorities. Power refers to perception on tax authorities' ability to detect and to punish tax avoider (Kirchler et al., 2008). Power increases when there are comprehensive tax investigation and indiscriminate sanctions on non-compliant taxpayers. D. Ratmono and N. Cahyonowati (2013) suggest that tax compliance is likely to increase when there is a higher probability of tax investigation and significant monetary sanctions on non-

compliant behavior. Some previous studies empirically show that higher taxpayers' perception on tax authorities' power increases their tax compliance (Muehlbacher et al., 2011; Faizal et al., 2017; Wahl et al., 2010).

E. Fehr and S. Gächter (2000) and L. P. Feld and B. S. Frey (2002) thoroughly discuss the effect of a reciprocal relationship in economic decision-making. J. Schnellenbach (2006) discuss this issue in the taxation field. Trust reciprocity refers to trust from both parties, namely taxpayers and tax authorities or in other words, how taxpayers trust on governments and how taxpayers perceive tax authorities trust on them. Trust reciprocity is important in strengthening the effect of trust on tax compliance. If taxpayers perceive that they gain trust from tax authorities comparable to how they trust on tax authorities, tax compliance will likely increase.

Slippery slope framework explains the interaction between trust and power. Within a taxation system, higher taxpayers' trust on tax authorities, supported with their higher perception on tax authorities' power, increases tax compliance. I. Wahl et al. (2010) show that when taxpayers' trust on tax authorities and their perception on tax authorities' power are high, tax compliance is at the highest level. B. Kastlunger et al. (2013) and K. Gangl et al. (2013) empirically find similar results.

Based on the slippery slope framework and the support of the results of previous empirical studies to respond to research objectives relating to factors influencing tax compliance, we propose four hypotheses as follows;

H₁ : Taxpayers' perception on tax authorities' power affects tax compliance.

H₂ : Taxpayers' trust on tax authorities affects tax compliance

H₃ : Trust reciprocity exhibits a greater effect on tax compliance than one-way trust

H₄ : Interaction between trust and power affects tax compliance.

2. METHODS

This experimental study uses a 3x2 factorial between-subject approach. We manipulate our first factor, taxpayers' trust, into three levels: taxpayers have low trust on tax authorities, taxpayers have one-way trust, and taxpayers have trust reciprocity. For the second factor, perception on power, there are two levels: taxpayers' a low level of perception on tax authorities' power and taxpayers' a high level of perception on tax authorities' power. Our participants are bachelor students majoring in accounting who enroll in Tax Management course at the Faculty of Economics and Business, Satya Wacana Christian University. There are 324 students voluntarily participate in this research.

We operationalize the trust variable by using two items developed by Mulder et al. (2009) namely a) tax authorities administer tax revenues reliably, and b) tax authorities always facilitate taxpayers fulfill their tax responsibilities. We measure trust reciprocity by using two question items adapted from B. Jahnke (2015), namely a) taxpayers feel that tax authorities trust that they pay tax correctly, b) taxpayers believe that tax authorities trust that they have performed all tax responsibilities.

Next, we measure the power variable by using three question items adapted from Muehlbacher et al. (2011) namely a) tax authorities have greater power to apply sanctions to taxpayers, b) tax authorities are able to expose tax avoidance because of their knowledge and authority, and c) tax authorities intensively conduct tax investigation. Lastly, we measure the taxpayers' compliance variable by using indicators developed from Kirchler and Wahl (2010), namely (a) always pay tax correctly as stipulated by laws and regulations, (b) always comply administrative responsibilities.

Before the experiment starts, we run the pilot test to ensure that our instruments are usable in the real experiment. We partition our 324 participants into 6 cells, namely a) taxpayers with low trust and a low level of perception on power, b) taxpayers with low trust and a high level of perception on power, c) taxpayers with one-way trust and a low level of perception on power, d) taxpayers with one-way trust and a high level of perception on power, e) taxpayers with trust reciprocity and a low level of perception on power, and lastly f) taxpayers with trust reciprocity and a high level of perception on power.

Table 1. Experimental Matrix

	Low trust	One-way trust	Trust reciprocity
Low level of perception on power	Cell 1	Cell 2	Cell 3
High level of perception on power	Cell 4	Cell 5	Cell 6

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Our participants' age ranges from 18 to 22 years with 30.2% of them are 19 years old. Female participants make up 61.1% of total participants. Most participants (75.0%) have GPA between 3.00 and 3.49. Table 2 displays the distribution of participants' characteristics based on manipulated variables.

Table 2. Characteristics of Participants

Explanation	Low trust	One-way trust	Trust reciprocity	Randomization Test	
	<i>n</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>F-test</i>	<i>sig</i>
Age					
18 years (<i>n</i> = 38)	14	11	13	1.045	0.311
19 years (<i>n</i> = 98)	24	41	33		
20 years (<i>n</i> = 97)	37	28	32		
22 years (<i>n</i> = 91)	34	29	28		
Sex					
Male (<i>n</i> = 126)	40	42	44	0.712	0.146
Female (<i>n</i> = 198)	69	67	62		
GPA					
<2.50 (<i>n</i> = 5)	3	2	0	0.918	0.699
2.50-2.99 (<i>n</i> = 68)	23	21	24		
3.00-3.49 (<i>n</i> = 243)	82	82	79		
>3.49(<i>n</i> = 8)	1	4	3		

To ensure that our randomization is effective, we test the effects of demographic characteristics on the tax compliance variable by using *one-way ANOVA*. Our results show that age (*f-test* = 1.045; *sig*=0,311), sex (*f-test*.=0.712; *sig*.=0,146), and GPA (*f-test* = 0.918; *sig*.=0,699), do not exhibit significant differences. These results suggest that our randomization is effective in ensuring that only manipulated variables affect differences in each cell. Each cell has a comparable number of participants, ranging from 48 to 58. This indicates that our randomization also succeeds in ensuring comparability of participant numbers.

Table 3. Participants Distribution

Cell	Perceptions of Power	Trust	Participants Number	Percentage
1	Low	Low	54	16.67
2	Low	One-way	55	16.97
3	Low	Reciprocity	48	14.81
4	High	Low	55	16.97
5	High	One-way	54	16.67
6	High	Reciprocity	58	17.90
		Total	324	100

We run ANOVA to ensure that participants have received effective manipulations. As shown by Panel A Table 1, our results show that taxpayers with trust reciprocity exhibit the highest level of tax compliance (mean=78.30 from the theoretical value of 100). Concerning the power variable, our findings indicate that participants with a high level of power perception exhibit higher tax compliance (mean=62.09) than those with a low level of power perception (58.91). With a significance level of 0.000 for the trust variable and 0.061 for the power variable, these results confirm that our manipulation of trust on tax authorities and perception on power is effective.

Table 4. Test Result

Panel A. Testing Manipulation (One Way ANOVA)			
Variable		Mean	Sig
Trust	Low	43,76	0,000***
	One-way	60,09	
	Trust reciprocity	78,30	
Perceptions of Power	Low	58,91	0,061*
	High	62,09	
Panel B. Hypotesis Testing (Univariate Regression)			
Variable		Mean Square	Sig
Trust		33.264,6	0,000***
Power		490,2	0,014**
Trust*Power		1.024,7	0,002***

Note: * significant at α 10% ; ** significant at α 5% ; *** significant at α 1%

We test our hypothesis using regression analysis. Panel B Table 4 above shows that the significance of the trust and power variables are below 5%. These imply that both our hypothesis 1 (taxpayers' perception on tax authorities' power affects tax compliance) and hypothesis 2 (taxpayers' trust on tax authorities affects tax compliance) are supported.

Hypothesis 3 predicts that trust reciprocity exhibit greater effect on tax compliance than one-way trust. Our findings support this hypothesis. More specifically, participants with trust reciprocity exhibit greater tax compliance (78.30) than those with one-way trust (60.09). Our results confirm that taxpayers with trust reciprocity exhibit greater tax compliance.

Table 4 also shows the effect of the interaction between trust and power variables on tax compliance. The interaction exhibits a significance value of 0.002 that implies that the interaction between power and trust affects tax compliance and thus supports our H4. Figure 1 also displays the interaction. In the condition of the low level of trust, participants with a high level of perception on power exhibit greater tax compliance than those with a low level of perception on power.

Figure 1. The interaction between Perceptions of Power and Trust in Tax Compliance

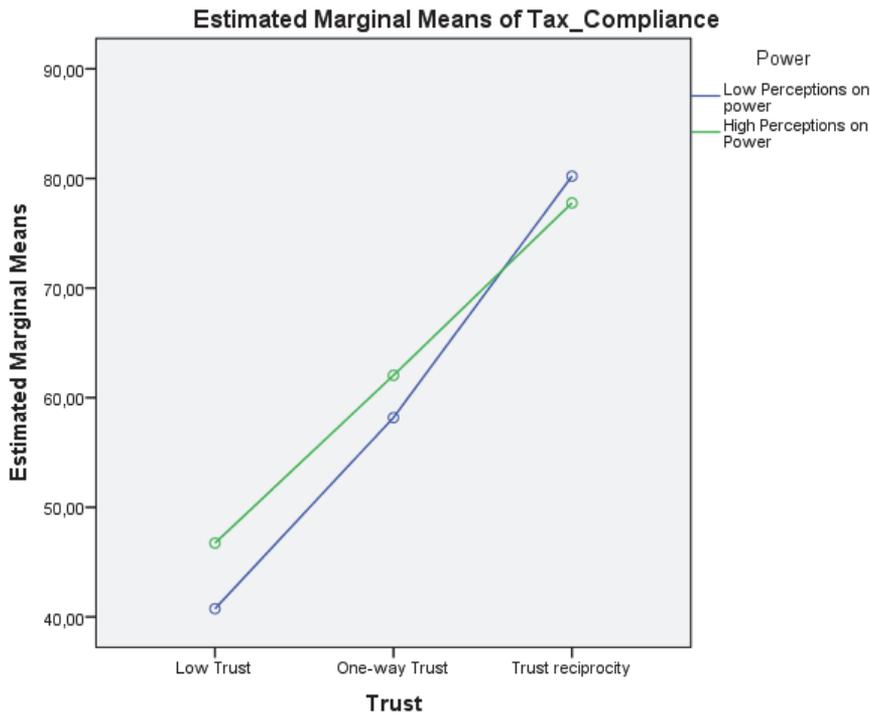


Table 5 suggests that participants with both a low level of trust (LT) and perception on power (LP) only exhibit tax compliance of only 40.74 while those with low trust (LT) but with a high level of perception on power (HP) have tax compliance level of 46.72. With a significance level of 0.001, our results show that both groups of participants (LT-LP vs. LT-HP) exhibit significantly different levels of tax compliance. Participants with one-way trust (TO) and a high level of perception on power (HP) exhibit similar results. The significance level of 0.026 indicates that there is tax compliance difference between participants with one-way trust (TO) and low level of power perception (LP) and those with one-way trust (TO) and a high level of power perception (HP). Participants with one-way trust (TO) and a high level of power perception (HP) exhibit higher tax compliance (62.03) than those with one-way trust (TO) and low level of power perception LP with an average of 58.18. However, trust reciprocity shows a different pattern. With significance value of 0.164, this implies that when all participants have trust reciprocity, participants with a high level of power perception do not have a different level of tax compliance than those with a low level of power perception.

Table 5. Tax Compliance with Trust and Perceptions of Power Interactions

	Mean	LT-LP	TO-LP	RT-LP	LT-HP	TO-HP	RT-HP
Mean		40.74	58.18	80.20	46.72	62.03	77.75
LT-LP	40.74		(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.001)	(0.000)	(0.000)
TO-LP	58.18			(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.026)	(0.000)
RT-LP	80.20				(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.164)
LT-HP	46.72					(0.000)	(0.000)
TO-HP	62.03						(0.000)
RT-HP	77.75						

Note : LT: Low Trust, TO:Trust One Side, RT: Reciprocity Trust, LP:Low Power, HP: High Power
 () level of significance

Our experiment study shows that taxpayers' perception on tax authorities' power affects tax compliance. Taxpayers who have a high level of perception on tax authorities' power likely perceive that there is a higher possibility that tax authorities will investigate and sanction them if they exhibit non-compliant behavior. This eventually will cause taxpayers to comply with tax regulations. This compliant behavior is mainly driven by taxpayers' efforts to avoid possible investigation and legal sanctions. Overall, our results support J. Clark et al. (2004); C. Kogler et al. (2013); S. Muehlbacher et al. (2011) and I. Wahl et al. (2010).

Taxpayers' trust on tax authorities also affects taxpayers' compliance. Taxpayers who believe that tax authorities manage tax revenues honestly and trustworthily and facilitate taxpayers in fulfilling their tax obligation will likely increase their tax compliance. These findings are in line with L. Feld and B. Frey (2007), H. Hammar et al. (2009), E. Kirchler et al. (2008), J. Scholz and M. Lubell (1998), C. Kogler, et al. (2013), G. Richardson (2008), J. Slemrod and S. Yizhaki (2002). However, one-way trust is insufficient in improving tax compliance. Trust reciprocity produces the highest level of tax compliance. Empirically, this study shows that trust reciprocity produces greater tax compliance than one-way trust

Our research also empirically supports the effect of interaction between trust and power on tax compliance. This is in accordance with the slippery slope framework that argues that taxpayers' trust on tax authorities and perception on tax authorities' power have a significant effect on tax compliance. Our findings support previous studies of K. Gangl et al. (2013), B. Kastlunger et al. (2013) and C. Kogler et al. (2013).

This study also shows that when taxpayers exhibit low trust on tax authorities, their perception of power affects tax compliance. Similarly, when taxpayers have one-way trust, they will show greater tax compliance when they have a high level of perception on tax authorities and vice versa. This is in line with the slippery slope framework that argues that high trust on authorities accompanied with a high level of power perception produces the greatest tax compliance and when taxpayers only have low trust on tax authorities and a low level of power perception will likely cause less tax compliance.

This pattern is different when taxpayers have trust reciprocity. When taxpayers have trust reciprocity, both taxpayers with a high and a low level of power perception will have greater tax compliance. This implies that when taxpayers have trust reciprocity, then their perception on tax authorities' power is no longer significant in explaining tax compliance. However, when taxpayers do not have trust reciprocity then their perception on tax authorities' power significantly affects tax compliance.

CONCLUSION

This research empirically shows how the slippery slope framework integrates taxpayers' perception on tax authorities' power and their trust as a suitable framework in the Indonesian setting to improve tax compliance. Taxpayers who perceive that their tax authorities possess greater power and are trustworthy tend to be more tax-compliant.

Our main contribution is that we use the variable of trust reciprocity in our research design. This indicates that when taxpayers exhibit trust reciprocity, then power is no longer significant in affecting tax compliance. Therefore, mutual trust is very crucial. Directorate General of Taxes has to pay particular attention to taxpayers' perception that they trust taxpayers. Change in the self-assessment system should be a valuable evidence that tax authorities trust on taxpayers. In addition, it is important to implement the web-based tax filling or e-filling. The current e-filling system still requires taxpayers to fill in all items in tax files, including paid taxes and attach all evidence, including payment and deduction proofs. Taxpayers may interpret these requirements as an indication that tax authorities do not trust them because tax authorities still require all evidence. Thus, if

the tax authority proposes to increase their trust on taxpayers, it is necessary to integrate their databases of taxes paid into e-filing so that taxpayers do not have to fill in the items and attach the evidence. Consequently, taxpayers' perception that tax authorities trust on them will likely improve.

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