



THE ROLE OF LEGAL SOCIOLOGY IN UNDERSTANDING PUBLIC COMPLIANCE WITH INDONESIAN REGULATIONS

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Abstract

This study examines legal compliance from the perspective of the sociology of law, emphasizing the interaction between legal norms and social realities. The increasing complexity of modern society requires legal systems that are not only normatively valid but also socially effective. However, the persistence of low public compliance with legal regulations indicates a gap between law in theory (*das sollen*) and law in practice (*das sein*). This research employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical design, relying on secondary data derived from academic literature, legal documents, and relevant scholarly sources. The findings reveal that legal compliance is influenced by a combination of internal factors—such as legal awareness, education, moral values, and legal knowledge—and external factors, including law enforcement effectiveness, regulatory quality, social environment, cultural norms, media influence, and economic conditions. Furthermore, the study highlights that structural, cultural, and interactionist approaches provide a comprehensive framework for understanding compliance as a multidimensional social phenomenon. The effectiveness of law is strongly determined by legitimacy, public trust, and the perception of substantive justice. The study concludes that a sociological approach is essential for bridging the gap between normative law and its practical implementation, and for developing more responsive, inclusive, and effective legal policies.



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INTRODUCTION

The increasing complexity of social life in modern society necessitates the presence of a legal system that is capable of regulating diverse patterns of interaction among individuals and groups. Law functions not only as a mechanism of social control but also as an instrument to ensure order, justice, and legal certainty within society (Maulana, 2021). As social dynamics continue to evolve rapidly due to technological advancements, globalization, and cultural shifts, legal frameworks are required to adapt in order to remain relevant and effective. However, despite the existence of comprehensive legal regulations in Indonesia, there remains a persistent issue concerning the relatively low level of public compliance with these laws. Various forms of legal violations, ranging from minor infractions to more serious offenses, indicate that the mere existence of legal norms does not automatically guarantee their implementation in everyday life. This phenomenon highlights a significant gap between the normative validity of law (*das sollen*) and its empirical reality in society (*das sein*), suggesting that legal effectiveness cannot be fully understood through a purely doctrinal or normative approach (Widodo, 2024).

In this context, the sociology of law emerges as a crucial perspective that examines law as a social phenomenon influenced by various societal factors such as culture, values, social structures, and levels of legal awareness. Rather than viewing law solely as a set of formal rules, the sociological approach seeks to understand how law operates within the lived experiences of individuals and communities. It explores why people obey or disobey legal norms, how social environments shape legal behavior, and what conditions contribute to the success or failure of legal enforcement. The low level of legal compliance in society may be attributed to multiple factors, including limited legal awareness, lack of trust in legal institutions, socio-economic disparities, and inconsistencies in law enforcement practices. Therefore, understanding these underlying social determinants is essential for developing more effective legal policies and strategies (Utomo, 2023).

Furthermore, the importance of studying legal compliance through a sociological lens lies in its potential to bridge the gap between law in theory and law in practice. By identifying the social factors that influence compliance, policymakers and legal practitioners can design more responsive and context-sensitive regulations that align with the realities of society. This approach not only enhances the effectiveness of law enforcement but also promotes greater public trust and participation in the legal system. Consequently, this study aims to analyze the concept of the sociology of law in understanding public legal compliance, identify the key social factors that influence such compliance, and explain the contribution of sociological perspectives in improving the effectiveness of legal implementation. Through this analysis, the research is expected to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between law and society, as well as offer practical insights for the development of more adaptive and effective legal policies.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical design to examine legal compliance from a sociological perspective. The qualitative method is chosen because it enables an in-depth understanding of social phenomena, particularly the interaction between law and society, as well as the underlying factors influencing public compliance. The study focuses on interpreting concepts, theories, and social realities rather than measuring variables numerically. The data used in this research are primarily secondary data obtained through a literature review. Sources include academic books, peer-reviewed journal articles, legal documents, and relevant policy reports related to sociology of law, legal compliance, and regulatory effectiveness. This approach allows for a comprehensive exploration of theoretical frameworks and empirical findings that support the analysis. Data collection is conducted through systematic documentation, where relevant literature is identified, classified, and analyzed based on the research objectives. The analysis technique used is qualitative content analysis, which involves interpreting and synthesizing information to identify patterns, relationships, and key themes related to legal compliance. The study also applies a conceptual approach by examining major sociological theories—such as structural, cultural, and interactionist perspectives—to provide a multidimensional understanding of the issue.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Role of Sociology of Law in Understanding Legal Compliance

The sociology of law plays a fundamental role in explaining why individuals and groups choose to comply with or violate legal rules within a given society. Unlike normative legal approaches that primarily focus on the formal validity of rules and sanctions, the sociological perspective emphasizes that compliance is not solely driven by coercion or fear of punishment. Instead, it is shaped by a complex interplay of social, cultural, economic, and psychological factors that influence how individuals perceive and respond to legal norms. Through sociological analysis, it becomes possible to uncover the underlying motivations behind legal obedience, such as trust in legal institutions, perceived legitimacy and fairness of the law, social expectations, and collective values. At the same time, this approach also helps explain non-compliance, which may arise from dissatisfaction with legal outcomes, structural inequalities, weak institutional credibility, or limited legal awareness (Undang-Undang (UU) Nomor 17 Tahun 2023 Tentang Kesehatan, 2023).

From this perspective, legal behavior is understood as a social phenomenon that reflects broader societal dynamics rather than merely individual decision-making. Individuals are embedded within social structures and are influenced by family, community, peer groups, and institutional environments. These influences shape their attitudes toward the law and determine whether they perceive legal rules as binding, negotiable, or even irrelevant. For instance, in communities where law enforcement is inconsistent or perceived as unjust, individuals may develop a tendency to disregard legal norms. Conversely, in societies where the rule of law is upheld consistently and fairly, compliance tends to emerge as a social norm reinforced through collective expectations.

The relationship between social values and legal compliance is therefore central to the sociology of law. Legal norms that are aligned with prevailing cultural values and moral beliefs are more likely to be internalized by individuals, leading to voluntary compliance without the need for external enforcement. This internalization process transforms law from an external constraint into a shared social commitment. On the other hand, when there is a gap between legal rules and societal values—such as laws perceived as unjust, culturally insensitive, or imposed without public participation—resistance and non-compliance are more likely to occur. This misalignment often leads to the emergence of informal norms that compete with or even override formal legal provisions.

Moreover, the sociology of law provides critical tools for assessing the effectiveness of regulations by situating them within their social context. A regulation may be legally valid and formally enacted, yet fail to achieve its intended objectives if it does not resonate with the lived realities of the المجتمع it seeks to regulate. Factors such as socio-economic conditions, levels of education, cultural diversity, and access to legal information significantly influence how laws are interpreted and applied in practice. For example, regulations that impose strict requirements without considering local capacities or economic limitations may inadvertently encourage non-compliance (Alfiansyah & Nisa, 2024).

In addition, this approach highlights the importance of legitimacy as a key determinant of legal effectiveness. Legitimacy is not derived solely from formal authority but from public perception that the law is fair, just, and applied consistently. When individuals perceive legal institutions as legitimate, they are more likely to comply voluntarily, even in the absence of strict enforcement. This concept underscores the shift from a purely coercive model of law enforcement to a more participatory and trust-based model, where compliance is achieved through mutual recognition between the state and society.

Furthermore, sociology of law encourages a multidisciplinary understanding of compliance by integrating insights from sociology, psychology, and political science. It examines how power relations, social inequality, and institutional structures shape access to justice and influence patterns of compliance. In doing so, it reveals that legal compliance is not evenly distributed across society but often varies based on class, education, and social position. This realization is crucial for policymakers, as it highlights the need for inclusive and context-sensitive legal frameworks.

Factors Influencing Public Compliance

Public compliance with legal regulations is shaped by a complex interaction between internal and external factors that collectively influence individual and collective behavior. These factors determine not only whether individuals choose to obey the law, but also the extent to which compliance is voluntary or coerced. Understanding these dimensions is essential for explaining variations in legal behavior across different social contexts.

Internal factors originate from within individuals and are closely related to their cognitive, moral, and psychological orientations toward the law. One of the most significant internal determinants is legal awareness, which refers to an individual's understanding of legal norms and their recognition of the importance of law in maintaining social order. Individuals with a high level of legal awareness tend to perceive compliance as a necessity rather than an obligation imposed from outside. Education further reinforces this awareness by enhancing critical thinking skills and enabling individuals to evaluate the rationale behind legal rules. A well-educated society is generally more capable of understanding the broader implications of legal compliance, including its role in protecting collective interests (Aribandi & Yandi Wahyudi, 2024).

In addition to awareness and education, moral values play a crucial role in shaping compliance. Individuals who possess strong moral principles are more likely to obey the law because they perceive

it as inherently right, not merely because of the threat of sanctions. Religious values also contribute significantly by embedding obedience to rules within a broader ethical and spiritual framework. In many societies, religion functions as a moral compass that aligns personal behavior with social expectations, thereby strengthening legal compliance. Furthermore, legal knowledge—distinct from general awareness—provides individuals with concrete information about specific rules, rights, and sanctions. This knowledge reduces uncertainty and enables individuals to anticipate the consequences of their actions, thereby encouraging more rational and law-abiding behavior.

However, internal factors alone are insufficient to ensure compliance without the support of external conditions. External factors arise from the broader social, institutional, and structural environment in which individuals operate. One of the most critical external determinants is the effectiveness of law enforcement. When laws are enforced consistently, fairly, and transparently, they generate a sense of certainty and deterrence, which increases compliance. Conversely, selective or inconsistent enforcement undermines the credibility of the legal system and may encourage violations.

The quality of regulations is another important factor. Laws that are clear, coherent, and aligned with societal needs are more likely to be accepted and followed. Ambiguous or overly complex regulations, on the other hand, create confusion and may lead to unintentional non-compliance. In this regard, the role of government as a model of legal adherence becomes highly significant. Ethical leadership and exemplary conduct by public officials can strengthen public trust and encourage citizens to follow the law. When authorities themselves violate legal norms, it sends a negative signal that weakens the normative force of the law (Maqashid et al., 2025).

Social control mechanisms within communities also play a reinforcing role. Informal monitoring, social sanctions, and peer influence can be highly effective in promoting compliance, especially in tightly knit communities. The social environment, including family, peer groups, and local institutions, shapes behavioral expectations and establishes norms that either support or discourage legal obedience. Local culture and traditions further influence how laws are interpreted and practiced. In societies where cultural values are consistent with legal norms, compliance tends to be higher, whereas cultural resistance may lead to persistent violations.

Mass media has emerged as a powerful external factor in shaping public attitudes toward the law. Through news coverage, public campaigns, and digital platforms, media can disseminate legal information, raise awareness, and influence perceptions of justice and enforcement. Positive media representation of law enforcement and legal processes can enhance legitimacy, while negative coverage may erode public trust.

Economic conditions also significantly affect compliance. Individuals facing economic hardship may prioritize immediate survival over adherence to legal norms, particularly when laws are perceived as burdensome or inequitable. Poverty, unemployment, and inequality can create structural pressures that increase the likelihood of non-compliance. Therefore, legal compliance cannot be fully understood without considering the broader socio-economic context in which individuals make decisions.

Sociological Approaches to Analyzing Compliance

The sociology of law employs multiple analytical approaches to understand the complexity of legal compliance within society. These approaches provide different but complementary perspectives that explain how law operates not only as a formal system of rules but also as a social institution embedded in broader societal structures. Among the most prominent approaches are the structural, cultural, and interactionist perspectives, each of which offers unique insights into the determinants of compliance.

The structural approach focuses on the role of legal institutions, governance systems, and the distribution of power within society. From this perspective, compliance is largely influenced by how effectively institutions function in creating, implementing, and enforcing laws. Strong institutions characterized by transparency, accountability, and consistency tend to generate higher levels of public trust, which in turn fosters voluntary compliance. Conversely, weak institutional performance such as corruption, selective enforcement, or lack of coordination can undermine the authority of the law and reduce its effectiveness. This approach also highlights the importance of power relations, emphasizing that legal outcomes are often shaped by political and economic structures. Groups with greater access to resources and influence may experience the law differently than marginalized groups, leading to unequal patterns of compliance. Therefore, the structural perspective underscores that legal compliance

is closely linked to institutional legitimacy and the equitable distribution of legal authority (Peturun, 2021).

In contrast, the cultural approach emphasizes the role of shared values, beliefs, traditions, and social norms in shaping legal behavior. Law is seen not merely as a formal system but as a reflection of the cultural context in which it operates. Compliance is more likely to occur when legal norms align with the moral values and customary practices of the المجتمع. In such cases, individuals internalize the law as part of their everyday behavior, reducing the need for external enforcement. However, when laws conflict with deeply rooted traditions or local customs, resistance may emerge in various forms, including passive non-compliance or active opposition. This approach is particularly relevant in pluralistic societies where diverse cultural groups may interpret and respond to legal norms differently. It also highlights the role of informal norms, often referred to as "living law," which may coexist with or even override formal legal provisions in guiding behavior.

The interactionist approach offers a micro-level perspective by examining how legal meanings and compliance are constructed through everyday interactions between individuals and legal actors. Rather than viewing law as a fixed set of rules, this approach considers it as a dynamic and evolving process shaped by communication, interpretation, and social experience. Interactions between law enforcement officials and the public play a critical role in shaping perceptions of fairness, legitimacy, and authority. For example, respectful and procedurally just treatment by police officers can enhance public trust and encourage compliance, while discriminatory or abusive practices can lead to resentment and resistance. This perspective also emphasizes that individuals interpret legal norms based on their personal experiences and social contexts, meaning that the same law may be understood and applied differently across situations (Damanik et al., 2023).

Furthermore, the interactionist approach highlights the importance of symbolic meaning in legal processes. Law is not only enforced through sanctions but also through symbols, language, and social cues that convey authority and legitimacy. Court proceedings, legal rituals, and official communication all contribute to shaping how individuals perceive the law. In this sense, compliance is influenced not only by what the law dictates but also by how it is communicated and experienced in everyday life.

Taken together, these three approaches demonstrate that legal compliance is a multidimensional phenomenon that cannot be explained by a single factor. The structural approach emphasizes institutional strength and power dynamics, the cultural approach focuses on values and social norms, and the interactionist approach highlights the role of everyday social interactions. By integrating these perspectives, the sociology of law provides a more comprehensive framework for understanding how and why individuals comply with legal norms. This integrated understanding is essential for developing legal policies that are not only formally valid but also socially effective, culturally sensitive, and responsive to the realities of human behavior.

Analysis of Legal Effectiveness from a Sociological Perspective

From a sociological standpoint, the effectiveness of a regulation cannot be assessed solely based on its formal enactment or normative validity, but must also be evaluated in terms of how it is received, interpreted, and implemented within society. Law, in this sense, is not merely a set of written rules but a social institution whose success depends on its interaction with the المجتمع it governs. One of the primary indicators of legal effectiveness is the level of public acceptance, which reflects the extent to which legal norms resonate with societal values, expectations, and lived experiences. When regulations are perceived as relevant, reasonable, and aligned with the interests of the community, they are more likely to be internalized and followed voluntarily without the need for coercive enforcement.

However, the implementation of legal regulations often encounters various obstacles that limit their effectiveness. Structural constraints, such as limited institutional capacity, inadequate resources, and lack of coordination among enforcement agencies, can weaken the ability of the legal system to function properly. Weak enforcement mechanisms, including inconsistent application of sanctions or selective law enforcement, further undermine the credibility of legal institutions. In addition, social resistance may arise when communities perceive regulations as burdensome, culturally incompatible, or imposed without adequate participation. These challenges illustrate that the existence of law does not automatically translate into compliance, and that effectiveness must be understood as a dynamic process shaped by multiple interacting factors.

A significant issue highlighted by the sociology of law is the persistent gap between legal expectations (*das sollen*) and empirical reality (*das sein*). While laws are designed to achieve certain objectives, the actual level of compliance in society often falls short of these expectations. This gap may be attributed to differences in social conditions, varying levels of legal awareness, and unequal access to legal resources. As a result, the effectiveness of a regulation should be measured not only by its intended outcomes but also by its practical impact on behavior and social order (Sutisna et al., 2023).

Central to this analysis is the concept of legitimacy, which plays a decisive role in shaping public compliance. Legitimacy refers to the perception that laws and legal institutions are rightful, fair, and deserving of obedience. It is not derived solely from formal authority but from the quality of governance, procedural fairness, and consistency in law enforcement. When individuals perceive that laws are created through transparent processes and applied equally to all members of society, they are more likely to comply voluntarily. Conversely, when legal systems are perceived as biased, corrupt, or serving the interests of particular groups, compliance tends to decline.

In addition to legitimacy, the notion of substantive justice is equally important in determining legal effectiveness. Substantive justice concerns the fairness of outcomes produced by legal rules, rather than merely the fairness of procedures. Even if laws are applied consistently, they may still be resisted if they are perceived as producing unjust or unequal results. For example, regulations that disproportionately disadvantage certain social groups may generate dissatisfaction and encourage non-compliance. This highlights the importance of ensuring that legal frameworks not only follow procedural standards but also deliver equitable and socially acceptable outcomes.

Furthermore, sociological analysis emphasizes the role of social context in shaping legal effectiveness. Factors such as cultural diversity, economic inequality, and social stratification influence how laws are interpreted and implemented across different segments of society. In heterogeneous societies, a uniform legal approach may not always be effective, as different groups may have distinct needs, values, and levels of access to legal resources. Therefore, adaptive and context-sensitive legal policies are necessary to ensure broader acceptance and compliance.

Ultimately, the effectiveness of law is determined by the interaction between normative frameworks and social realities. A regulation is considered effective not when it merely exists, but when it is able to influence behavior, resolve social problems, and maintain order in a manner that is perceived as fair and legitimate by the community. By adopting a sociological perspective, policymakers and legal practitioners can better understand the conditions under which laws succeed or fail, and can design more responsive and inclusive legal systems that bridge the gap between theory and practice.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that legal compliance cannot be understood solely through a normative or formal legal perspective, but must be analyzed as a social phenomenon influenced by a complex interaction of internal and external factors. The sociology of law provides a comprehensive framework for explaining why individuals comply with or violate legal rules, emphasizing the importance of social values, institutional legitimacy, and everyday interactions in shaping legal behavior. The findings indicate that internal factors such as legal awareness, education, moral values, and legal knowledge play a significant role in fostering voluntary compliance. At the same time, external factors including law enforcement effectiveness, regulatory quality, social environment, cultural norms, media influence, and economic conditions substantially determine the extent to which laws are obeyed in practice. The interaction between these factors highlights that compliance is not a uniform phenomenon but varies across different social contexts. Furthermore, the application of structural, cultural, and interactionist approaches reveals that legal compliance is multidimensional. Institutional strength, cultural alignment, and the quality of interactions between authorities and the public all contribute to shaping perceptions of law and influencing behavior. In this regard, legitimacy and substantive justice emerge as key elements in ensuring the effectiveness of legal regulations.

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