**Impact of Heuristics and Cognitive Biases on Tax Decisions: A Systematic Literature Review**

Review Result

(Do not write the identity of author(s) or affiliation in the manuscript to ensure a double blind review process. The identity of author(s) is written on the title page in a separate file and included in the supplement file in OJS submission)

**Abstract.** Heuristic and cognitive biases in Indonesia have caused tax compliance issues, as public prejudice leads to tax avoidance and overconfidence among authorities results in less effective tax policies. The purpose of this study is to investigate the use of heuristics and cognitive biases in tax decision-making by individuals and businesses. This study examines the use of heuristics and cognitive biases in tax decision-making, selecting 25 recent research articles from scientific journals. The research shows that the use of heuristics in tax decision-making can lead to biases and errors among both individual taxpayers and professionals. To mitigate this issue, it is important to adopt a comprehensive approach that includes educational initiatives, integration of advanced technology, establishment of structured decision-making processes, promotion of interdisciplinary collaboration, and fostering a culture of critical analysis within tax-related organizations. Therefore, addressing biases driven by heuristics in tax decision-making requires a combination of educational efforts, technological advancements, and cooperative and interdisciplinary efforts to enhance the accuracy and efficiency of decision-making.

**Keywords**: Cognitive Biases, Heuristics, Psychological Factors, Tax Decision-Making

[**JEL Classification**](https://www.aeaweb.org/econlit/jelCodes.php?view=econlit): D91, G40, M41

**INTRODUCTION**

Tax decision-making is a crucial aspect that directly impacts the finances and well-being of individuals and business entities. This process encompasses not only the obligation to pay taxes but also the strategies for planning, reporting, and optimizing tax burdens within the existing regulatory framework (Atria Curi, 2019; Tsindeliani et al., 2019). In this context, psychological factors such as heuristics and cognitive biases play a significant role (Acciarini et al., 2020; Ishfaq et al., 2020). Heuristics facilitate quick decision-making based on practical rules (Brown & Salmon, 2019; Niittymies, 2020), whereas cognitive biases can distort information processing, potentially leading to suboptimal tax decisions (Espinosa et al., 2022; Khan et al., 2023). For example, confirmation bias and overconfidence can result in less optimal tax decisions, where individuals and businesses might take excessive risks based on a misunderstanding of tax regulations (Dhami et al., 2019; Haufler & Nishimura, 2023). Furthermore, an individual's ethical perception influences their tax decisions, with those holding higher ethical standards paying closer attention to tax rules and regulations, unlike those with lower ethical standards who might tend to evade tax obligations (Lokanan, 2023). External factors such as market pressures and tax regulations can moderate the effects of heuristics and cognitive biases, indicating a complex interaction between internal and external factors in tax decision-making (Nuijten et al., 2020). This highlights the importance of understanding these dynamics to make more informed and strategic tax decisions.

In Indonesia, issues arising from the influence of heuristics and cognitive biases in tax decision-making include a gap between expected tax compliance and reality. For instance, confirmation bias, the tendency to seek, interpret, prioritize, and recall information that confirms one’s beliefs or values, can lead to tax avoidance due to the belief that their tax burden is too high or the tax system is unfair (Korteling et al., 2023). Moreover, tax authorities are affected by overconfidence bias, meaning excessive confidence in their judgments about tax compliance, which can result in less effective policies or actions in enhancing tax compliance (Subandi & Tjaraka, 2023). This situation demands more innovative and evidence-based strategies in designing and implementing tax policies to mitigate the negative impacts of heuristics and cognitive biases.

This research shares similarities with Yamini's (2021) study in examining the influence of biases and heuristics in decision-making, although with a different focus. Both use literature reviews to explore the psychological impacts in business decision-making. With Sudirman et al., (2023) the similarity lies in exploring how cognitive biases affect decisions and employing quantitative methods (SEM-PLS) for analysis. Misuraca et al., (2021) and this research both consider susceptibility to bias in decision-making, albeit in different contexts. Lastly, the similarity with Nuijten et al., (2020) includes a focus on the influence of cognitive biases in small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) decision-making, with this research extending the context to tax decisions. The main difference between this study and Yamini's (2021) lies in the context of application; this study emphasizes tax decisions, while Yamini's (2021) focuses on inventory decisions. Sudirman et al., (2023) focus on investment decision-making using SEM-PLS, whereas this study is broader in examining the influence of heuristics and biases on tax decisions, not limited to any specific quantitative method. Misuraca et al., (2021) investigate bias tendencies in individuals with optimal decisions, whereas this study takes a broader perspective on tax decision-making by individuals and business entities. Nuijten et al., (2020) focus on external accountants' perspective towards bias in SME decisions, while this study encompasses a wider review of tax decision-making.

The novelty of this research lies in the conceptual integration of heuristic and cognitive bias theories in the context of tax decision-making by individuals and business entities. Through a literature review method, this study aims to fill the knowledge gap by comprehensively mapping how various heuristics and cognitive biases affect the tax decision process, which has not been thoroughly explored in the existing literature. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the use of heuristics and cognitive biases in tax decision-making by individuals and business entities. The contribution of this research primarily lies in developing a deep understanding of the role of heuristics and cognitive biases in tax decision-making by individuals and business entities. Through a literature review approach, this study successfully identifies and maps how various types of heuristics and cognitive biases specifically affect tax decisions, filling the knowledge gap in the existing literature. Thus, this research provides new and comprehensive insights into the psychological dynamics in tax decision-making, laying the groundwork for further theoretical development and practical application in designing more effective tax policies and compliance strategies tailored to the cognitive behavior of taxpayers.

Top of Form

**RESEARCH METHOD**

This study is a systematic literature review aimed at exploring a specific research topic, namely to investigate the use of heuristics and cognitive biases in tax decision-making by individuals and business entities. It involves the process of collecting and evaluating studies related to a particular focus area. The literature review helps researchers identify gaps between theory and practical application based on research findings. To find relevant studies, a structured search was conducted across various sources.

Table 1. Selected sources

| Sources | Study Findings | Selected Studies |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Spriger | 7 | 1 |
| Wiley | 24 | 3 |
| Emerald | 13 | 2 |
| MDPI | 38 | 4 |
| ScienceDirect | 14 | 2 |
| Sage Journals | 5 | 2 |
| Tailor & Francis | 9 | 3 |
| Sinta | 4 | 1 |
| Frontiers | 12 | 2 |
| APSA | 2 | 1 |
| EASR | 2 | 1 |
| EJST | 2 | 1 |
| Deqepub.org | 5 | 1 |
| Cambridge University Press | 3 | 1 |
| Total | 140 | 25 |

Table 1 presents a summary of selected sources along with their study findings and the number of selected studies. Springer contributed to 7 research findings, with 1 study selected. Wiley made a significant contribution with 24 research findings and 3 selected studies. Emerald contributed 13 study findings, with 2 of its studies selected. MDPI stood out with the highest number of study findings at 38, and 4 of its studies were selected. ScienceDirect contributed 14 study findings, with 2 studies selected. Sage Journals had 5 study findings, with 2 studies selected. Taylor & Francis contributed 9 research findings, with 3 studies selected. Sinta, APSA, EASR, and EJST each contributed 2 to 4 research findings and selected 1 study each. Deqepub.org and Cambridge University Press both made a modest contribution with 5 and 3 research findings respectively, each having 1 selected study. Frontiers contributed 12 study findings, with 2 studies selected. In total, all sources accounted for 140 research findings, with 25 studies selected for further attention.

**Research Criteria**

This stage is conducted to determine whether the data found are suitable for use in a Systematic Literature Review or not. A study qualifies for selection if it meets the following criteria:

*Inclusion criteria:*

1. Studies conducted in the last 5 years
2. Studies in the form of scientific journals
3. Research related to heuristics, cognitive biases, and tax decision-making

*Exclusion criteria:*

1. Studies published more than 5 years ago
2. Studies in the form of proceedings, books, thesis/dissertations, websites, news
3. Research not focused on heuristics, cognitive biases, or tax decision-making

**RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

Figure 1 illustrates the process of selection and inclusion of articles in a systematic review or research. Initially, 1,280 articles were obtained from electronic databases. After removing duplicates, the number decreased to 640. Thec reasonn, following the screening of titles and abstracts, another 480 articles were eliminated, leaving 160 articles for further assessment. After a full-text assessment, 140 more articles were excluded because 94 of them lacked relevant data, and 46 were excluded because their studies were not published in scientific journals. The end result of this process added 5 articles to the review, thus resulting in 25 studies being included in the review.

Studies included in review (n= 5)

Excluded after full-text assessmen (n=140)

* No relevant data (n: 94)
* The study is not in the form of a scientific journal (n=46)

Duplicates removed (n=640)

Articles retrieved from electronic databases (n = 1280)

Records after duplicates removed (n=640)

Full-text articles screened (n=160)

Studies included in review (n= 25)

Removed after title and abstract screening (n= 480 )

Figure 1. Study selection process

Table 2 displays the distribution of publications across various journals from 2020 to 2023, where each journal recorded one publication. These journals are published by various publishers, including Springer, Wiley, Emerald, MDPI, and others.

Table 2. Distribution of publications in journals

| No | Year | Source Type | Journal Name | Database | Number of journal |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 2023 | Journal | Humanities and Social Sciences Communications | Springer | 1 |
|  | 2020 | Journal | Futures and Foresight Science | Wiley | 1 |
|  | 2020 | Journal | Management Decision | Emerald | 1 |
|  | 2023 | Journal | Economies | MDPI | 1 |
|  | 2022 | Journal | Frontiers in Psychology | Frontiers | 1 |
|  | 2022 | Journal | European Accounting Review | Tayor & Francis | 1 |
|  | 2020 | Journal | Journal of International Accounting, Auditing and Taxation, | ScienceDirect | 1 |
|  | 2023 | Journal | American Review of Public Administration | Sage Journals | 1 |
|  | 2021 | Journal | Management Decision | Emerald | 1 |
|  | 2023 | Journal | European Review in Accounting and Finance | Deqepub.org | 1 |
|  | 2023 | Journal | Journal of Intelligence | MDPI | 1 |
|  | 2021 | Journal | Journal of Economics, Business, and Government Challenges | Sinta | 1 |
|  | 2022 | Journal | Journal of Risk and Financial Management | MDPI | 1 |
|  | 2023 | Journal | Cogent Business & Management | Taylor & Francis | 1 |
|  | 2020 | Journal | Journal of Behavioral Public Administration | American Political Science Assosiation (APSA) | 1 |
|  | 2023 | Journal | Cogent Economics and Finance | Taylor & Francis | 1 |
|  | 2020 | Journal | Review of Public Personnel Administration | Sage Journals | 1 |
|  | 2023 | Journal | Frontiers in Psychology | Frontiers | 1 |
|  | 2022 | Journal | Sustainability | MDPI | 1 |
|  | 2021 | Journal | Production and Operations Management | Wiley | 1 |
|  | 2022 | Journal | Engineering and Applied Science Research | Engineering and Applied Science Research (EASR) | 1 |
|  | 2023 | Journal | International Journal of Project Management | ScienceDirect | 1 |
|  | 2022 | Journal | European Law Journal | Wiley | 1 |
|  | 2023 | Journal | Perspectives on Politics | Cambridge University Press | 1 |
|  | 2020 | Journal | European Journal of Science and Theology | EJST | 1 |

**The Influence of Heuristics on Tax Decision Making**

The influence of heuristics on tax decision-making is a fascinating and complex topic, closely related to human psychology and decision-making behavior. Heuristics are practical rules or approaches used for making decisions or assessing problems quickly and efficiently (Hjeij & Vilks, 2023). Although heuristics can help reduce the complexity of decision-making, they can also lead to biases and errors (Schirrmeister et al., 2020). In the context of taxation, heuristics can affect how taxpayers understand and respond to their tax obligations. For example, the availability heuristic, which is the tendency to estimate the frequency or probability based on how easily examples come to mind, can affect decision-making when taxpayers recall highly publicized tax audit incidents or tax evasion cases, allowing those incidents to disproportionately influence their perception of risk regarding tax compliance. Research by Ahmad et al., (2020) and Alm et al., (2023) shows how the availability heuristic can influence people's judgments and decisions, which can be applied in the tax context to understand how taxpayers assess audit risk.

The representativeness heuristic, which involves judging probabilities based on how representative or similar an object is to a specific category, can also influence tax decision-making. For instance, taxpayers might assume that because they are small business owners, they are less likely to be audited compared to large corporations, without considering the actual factors tax authorities use to determine audits. Research by Berthet, (2022) and Blaufus et al., (2022) on heuristics and biases in decision-making highlights how such assumptions can lead to biased and inaccurate judgments. Anchoring heuristic also plays a role in tax decision-making. Anchoring is the initial piece of information received by an individual, which then serves as a reference point for subsequent decisions. In the tax context, anchors can come from information taxpayers receive about tax rates, penalties, or other tax-related information. For example, if taxpayers are initially informed of high tax rates, they are likely to assess all subsequent tax information based on those high rates, even if the actual rates might be lower. Research by Eberhartinger et al., (2020) demonstrates how anchors can influence financial expectations and decisions, including in the tax context.

Furthermore, the influence of heuristics in tax decision-making is not limited to individuals but also impacts how tax professionals, such as accountants and tax lawyers, advise their clients. These professionals can also be influenced by heuristics in their decision-making process, which in turn can affect the advice they provide to taxpayers. Research by Gershgoren & Cohen, (2023) explores how tax professionals process information and make decisions, showing that they are susceptible to the same biases as taxpayers. In conclusion, heuristics play a significant role in tax decision-making, affecting both individual taxpayers and professionals. While heuristics can aid in simplifying the decision-making process, they can also lead to biases and judgment errors that can impact tax compliance and tax management strategies. Therefore, understanding the influence of heuristics is crucial for developing more effective tax strategies and policies, as well as for providing better tax education for taxpayers and tax professionals.

**Cognitive Bias and Tax Decision Making**

Cognitive bias in tax decision-making is a complex phenomenon that has received widespread attention in the finance and taxation literature. Scientific studies indicate that tax decision-making is not always rational and is often influenced by various cognitive biases rooted in human psychology. In this context, cognitive bias is defined as a systematic deviation from logic or rationality in judgment, leading to conclusions or decisions that are often inaccurate or inefficient. Heuristics, as rules of thumb used to simplify the decision-making process, often contribute to the formation of cognitive biases. Although heuristics enable individuals and business entities to make quick and efficient decisions in the face of tax regulation complexities, they also lead to vulnerabilities to judgment errors. For example, the availability heuristic, which refers to the tendency of individuals to rely on easily remembered or accessible information when making decisions, can lead to confirmation bias. This bias occurs when individuals tend to search for, interpret, or recall information in a way that justifies their prior beliefs or decisions, ignoring contrary evidence. Research by Rauwerda & De Graaf (2021) and Blaufus et al., (2022) has highlighted how heuristics facilitate quick decision-making in complex tax environments, but also emphasized the potential risks arising from decisions distorted by cognitive biases. Loss aversion, a concept discussed by Rullah et al., (2023), is another example of cognitive bias where individuals exhibit a stronger tendency to avoid losses than to acquire gains. In the tax context, this can affect how individuals or businesses respond to potential tax risks and tax-saving opportunities.

Overconfidence, studied by Mata, (2023) and Yulianis & Sulistyowati (2021), is another cognitive bias that plays a significant role in tax decision-making. Overconfident individuals tend to overestimate their own knowledge or abilities, disregarding the risks or complexities associated with tax decisions, leading to poor tax compliance or ineffective tax planning decisions. The preference for fairness, as explored in the research by Rahamneh et al., (2022) and Khozen & Setyowati (2023), also shows how psychological factors influence tax perceptions and decisions. Individuals with differing views on what constitutes a fair tax system might adopt different approaches to compliance and tax planning, with some seeking ways to reduce their tax burden through legal loopholes or tax incentives, while others may prefer to fully comply with their tax obligations. Berthet (2022) presents evidence that the use of heuristics is often accompanied by confirmation bias and overconfidence, impacting tax decisions. This indicates the need for a more careful and critical approach in tax decision-making, recognizing and addressing potential cognitive biases. The concept of Nudge theory, as discussed by Vainre et al., (2020), provides a useful perspective in understanding how cognitive biases can be manipulated or diverted to encourage more responsible tax behavior without stripping freedom of choice. Through carefully designed interventions, it may be possible to 'nudge' individuals and businesses towards more optimal tax decisions. In conclusion, tax decision-making is a multifaceted process that is governed not only by economic and legal considerations but is also heavily influenced by various cognitive biases. Recent studies emphasize the importance of understanding and addressing these biases to improve the accuracy and effectiveness of tax decision-making. Therefore, a deep understanding of heuristics and cognitive biases, along with the application of strategies such as Nudge theory, becomes crucial in formulating efficient tax policies and facilitating higher tax compliance among taxpayers.

**Strategies for Overcoming Heuristics and Cognitive Bias in Tax Decision Making**

To address heuristics and cognitive biases in tax decision-making, the strategy that can be implemented includes a multidisciplinary approach integrating psychology, economics, and tax law. First, comprehensive education and training for policymakers and tax practitioners are necessary to enhance awareness of the existence and impact of heuristics and cognitive biases (Almansour et al., 2023; Cantarelli et al., 2020; Korteling et al., 2023). This could include training sessions focused on identifying types of cognitive biases, such as confirmation bias, availability heuristic, overconfidence, and anchoring effect, and how to recognize and overcome them in a tax context. Second, the use of objective data-driven decision systems can reduce reliance on often biased subjective intuition (Geva & Tsechansky, 2021; Žigienė et al., 2022). The application of information technology, such as data-based decision support systems and advanced analytical tools, can assist in accurately processing tax data and providing objective recommendations for decision-making. Third, the implementation of structured and standardized decision-making procedures can minimize the space for cognitive biases (Lawani et al., 2023; Ponhan & Sureeyatanapas, 2022). These procedures should include steps for fact verification, systematic alternative assessment, and periodic decision evaluation to ensure that decisions are based on thorough and objective analysis. Fourth, collaboration and consultation with experts from various disciplines can help provide diverse perspectives and reduce potential cognitive biases (Rangone, 2022; Soest, 2023). Through discussions and idea exchanges with experts in economics, psychology, tax law, and other fields, policymakers can gain broader and more objective insights. Fifth, promoting a critical and reflective culture within the tax organization can foster an openness to evaluation and criticism, thereby reducing cognitive biases (Petranova & Rysová, 2020; Rangone, 2022). The establishment of a dedicated team or unit tasked with regularly reviewing and evaluating the tax decision-making process can provide a control mechanism to ensure decisions are free from irrational biases. In conclusion, the strategy to overcome heuristics and cognitive biases in tax decision-making requires a comprehensive and integrated approach, involving awareness enhancement, technology application, structured procedure setting, multidisciplinary collaboration, and the development of a critical and reflective organizational culture.

**Research Implication**

First, from a cognitive theoretical perspective, this research reveals how a deep understanding of heuristics and cognitive biases can enrich decision-making theory in the context of taxation. These findings offer new insights into how individuals and tax professionals process information and make critical decisions in designing more effective and fair tax systems. By understanding the role of heuristics such as availability, representativeness, and anchoring, as well as cognitive biases like confirmation and overconfidence, policymakers can develop more accurate strategies to educate and guide taxpayers, reduce judgment errors, and increase tax compliance. Second, from a research development perspective, this study encourages further investigation into how psychology-based interventions and public policies can be used to address cognitive biases. For example, experimental studies on the effectiveness of 'nudge' strategies in enhancing tax compliance or the impact of specific training to reduce overconfidence and confirmation bias can provide useful empirical evidence for formulating more effective tax policies.

Third, in terms of user benefits, this research has significant implications for governments, communities, and industries. For governments, these findings can aid in designing tax systems that consider taxpayers' cognitive tendencies, allowing them to develop more effective policies and programs in enhancing tax compliance and revenue collection. For communities, understanding how cognitive biases affect tax decision-making can improve tax awareness and education, assisting individuals and small businesses in making more informed and responsible tax decisions. For the industry, particularly consulting firms and tax software companies, these insights can be used to develop tools and services that help their clients identify and address cognitive biases in tax planning and decision-making. In conclusion, the implications of this research encourage a synthesis between theory and practice, highlighting the importance of an interdisciplinary approach in understanding and addressing heuristics and cognitive biases in tax decision-making. This not only contributes to the academic field but also provides practical guidance for policymakers, tax practitioners, and taxpayers in developing fairer, more transparent, and efficient tax strategies. Thus, this study offers significant added value in supporting more informed and responsible decision-making, which ultimately can support inclusive economic and social development.

**CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION**

This research reveals that the use of heuristics and cognitive biases plays a significant role in tax decision-making by individuals and business entities, influencing how they assess risk, estimate probabilities, and make tax-related decisions. Although heuristics help simplify the decision-making process amidst the complexity of the tax system, tendencies such as availability, representativeness, anchoring, and overconfidence often lead to biased and inaccurate judgments, which can affect tax compliance and tax management strategies. The study also highlights the importance of addressing cognitive biases through comprehensive education and training, the application of information technology, structured decision-making procedures, multidisciplinary collaboration, and the development of a critical and reflective organizational culture to facilitate more accurate and efficient tax decision-making. Thus, understanding and addressing heuristics and cognitive biases is crucial not only for individuals and business entities in optimizing their tax decisions but also for policymakers in designing effective tax policies and facilitating higher tax compliance. The limitation of this study lies in the potential lack of representation from various global tax contexts, which could affect the generalization of findings. For future research, it is recommended to conduct comparative studies between countries with different tax systems to understand how heuristics and cognitive biases affect tax decision-making in diverse contexts.

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