



The Relationship between Facts and Norms in Judicial Legal Reasoning: An Analysis of the Ratio Decidendi in Court Decisions

Doni Sabdan Tanjung,¹ Rahmayanti,² Donly Calner Aruan,³ Faisal Lutfi.⁴

Panca Budi Development University

E-mail: donisabdan@gmail.com rahmayanti888@yahoo.com aruandonly@gmail.com faisal.lutfi.dr@gmail.com

Article Info	Abstract
<p>Article History Received: 2025-12-05 Revised: 2025-12-25 Published: 2025-01-10</p> <p>Keywords: <i>Legal Reasoning; Ratio Decidendi; Court Decisions</i></p>	<p><i>Court decisions are the result of a judge's legal reasoning process that reconciles legal facts with legal norms through juridical argumentation. The essence of this process is reflected in the ratio decidendi, namely the legal reasoning that forms the basis for determining the verdict. This article aims to analyze how the relationship between facts and norms is constructed in the judge's legal reasoning through the construction of the ratio decidendi in court decisions. This study uses a normative legal research method with a conceptual approach and a case approach. The conceptual approach is used to examine the theory of legal reasoning, legal facts, legal norms, and the concept of ratio decidendi, while the case approach is used to examine the judge's legal considerations in court decisions. The results show that the relationship between facts and norms in court decisions is not mechanical, but rather is constructed through a process of fact selection, norm interpretation, and rational legal argumentation. The ratio decidendi serves as a meeting point between facts and norms and as an indicator of the quality of the judge's legal reasoning. The clear, coherent, and argumentative construction of the ratio decidendi reflects the responsible use of the judge's discretion and contributes to the realization of legal certainty and substantive justice in judicial practice.</i></p>

I. INTRODUCTION

The judiciary serves as the final mechanism for resolving legal disputes between disputing parties. In practice, judges do not simply mechanically apply positivistic norms to trial facts, but also engage in complex thought processes to bridge concrete facts with abstract legal norms. This thought process is known as legal reasoning, the judge's process of simultaneously interpreting norms and facts to produce a just and rational decision (Umam, 2017).

The essence of a judge's decision lies not only in the verdict, but primarily in the legal considerations. In Anglo-Saxon jurisprudence, the term ratio decidendi is used, which refers to the primary reason or legal basis that directly motivates a judge to reach a verdict in a case (Cambridge University Press, 2022). The concept of ratio decidendi originates from Latin, meaning the reason or basis for a decision, and serves as a

legal foundation explaining how facts are connected to legal provisions to reach a final decision (Wikipedia, 2025).

In legal systems that adhere to the principle of precedent (such as the common law tradition), the ratio decidendi holds strong relevance because it serves as a rule or principle that can serve as the legal basis for subsequent decisions. This principle is not merely a description of the facts or additional commentary (obiter dicta), but rather a foundation that determines the outcome of a decision (Cornell Law School, 2025). Although Indonesia operates a civil law system, an understanding of the function of the ratio decidendi remains necessary because judges must explicitly and rationally connect facts to norms so that decisions can be scientifically accountable (Herliana, 2023).

Legal reasoning itself has a multidimensional and multifaceted character, as it involves not only written rules but also

interpretations of norms that sometimes do not explicitly cover the facts faced by judges. Umam (2017) explains that judges' understanding of legal reasoning plays a crucial role in formulating ratio decidendi, particularly in resolving various normative constraints such as legal rule gaps (leemten in het recht), conflicts between norms (legal antinomies), or unclear norms (vague normmen). Thus, legal reasoning is not merely the literal application of articles but also encompasses the process of fact selection, norm interpretation, and justification for the choice of norms used.

The relationship between facts and norms in simple decisions is described as a dialectical process, in which legal facts are the result of a selection of trial facts relevant to the disputed norm. These legal facts are then combined with the norm, allowing the judge to elaborate the general legal principles applicable in the case. The philosophical theory of ratio decidendi demonstrates that ratio is not merely an application of simple logic, but rather a union of facts and norms that results in a legal judgment that is rational and accountable both internally and externally (Goodhart, 1930).

In numerous empirical studies, the practice of ratio decidendi exhibits significant variability between judges and between courts. This is evident in decision analyses that emphasize how judges select relevant norms and interpret facts to establish their legal basis. For example, in a study of PKPU (Debt Suspension) decisions analyzed by Gaol (2025), judges' reasoning patterns indicate that decisions often prioritize legal certainty for creditors despite presenting challenges for debtors and business continuity, illustrating how ratio decidendi truly reflects the balance between legal certainty and the social realities faced by courts (Gaol, 2025).

Good legal reasoning also avoids purely formalistic decision-making practices. Smejkalová (2020) notes that a judge's use of prior decisions can demonstrate their choice in assessing the relevance of previously decided facts and principles. Although certain legal systems do not explicitly apply stare decisis, the fact of the relevance of prior decisions remains a crucial element in the legal reasoning process (Smejkalová, 2020).

Another conceptual debate in the study of ratio decidendi is the distinction between the parts of a decision that constitute ratio decidendi and other parts that are merely supplementary opinions (obiter dicta). Obiter dicta, while often informative, are not determinative and do not

have the binding force of ratio decidendi (Wikipedia, 2025). This distinction is important in the context of decision analysis because only ratio decidendi reveals how facts and norms are rationally connected to produce a legal decision.

Thus, this study will examine in depth how judges construct the relationship between facts and norms through the ratio decidendi in their legal reasoning. This study is crucial for assessing the quality of judges' legal reasoning in the context of court decisions in Indonesia. The focus is not solely on what is decided but rather on how the decision is formed through rational legal reasoning and based on clear legal principles.

II. RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a normative legal research method, positioning law as a norm or rule applicable in the judicial system. The approaches used include a conceptual approach and a case approach. The conceptual approach is used to examine and formulate the concept of judges' legal reasoning, the relationship between facts and norms, and the definition and function of the ratio decidendi in court decisions based on the views of legal scholars (Marzuki, 2017; Ibrahim, 2006). Meanwhile, the case approach is carried out by analyzing court decisions that explicitly contain judges' legal considerations, especially in the ratio decidendi section, to see how legal facts are constructed and connected to legal norms in the decision-making process (Mertokusumo, 2009). The legal materials used consist of primary legal materials in the form of court decisions and relevant laws and regulations, as well as secondary legal materials in the form of legal textbooks, scientific journals, and previous research results discussing legal reasoning and legal argumentation. All legal materials are analyzed qualitatively using prescriptive and argumentative analysis techniques to assess the quality of judges' legal reasoning in constructing the ratio decidendi.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Judges' Legal Reasoning and the Relationship between Facts and Norms in Court Decisions

Legal reasoning is the core of the adjudication process undertaken by judges. Judges do not merely act as mechanical implementers of legal norms, but rather as subjects actively engaging in the legal thinking process to bridge the concrete facts revealed in court with abstract and general legal norms. Within this framework, legal reasoning cannot be understood as a simple activity of matching articles to events, but rather as an intellectual process involving the selection of facts, the interpretation of norms, and the formation of rational and accountable legal arguments (Mertokusumo, 2009).

The facts emerging in a trial are essentially empirical or social facts. These facts are not necessarily all relevant in a legal context. Therefore, one of the initial stages in a judge's legal reasoning is constructing legal facts from existing empirical facts. Legal facts are facts that are legally directly related to the elements of the legal norms to be applied. This selection process demands the judge's precision and accuracy, as errors in determining legal facts will lead to errors in the application of the norms (Marzuki, 2017).

Legal norms, on the other hand, are general, abstract, and formulated to regulate events broadly. Norms never fully describe the concrete events a judge faces. Therefore, applying norms to facts is impossible without an interpretive process. Legal interpretation is an integral part of legal reasoning, as it is through interpretation that judges determine the norm's meaning, scope of application, and relevance to the legal facts being examined (Sidharta, 2000).

The relationship between facts and norms is not automatic or mechanical. The relationship between the two is established through argumentative legal reasoning. Judges must be able to explain why certain facts are considered relevant, which norms are selected, and how those norms are applied to the facts that have been constructed as legal facts. In this context, legal reasoning is not only logical but also normative and evaluative, as it is always related to legal objectives such as justice, certainty, and utility (Radbruch in Mertokusumo, 2009).

Legal reasoning is often described in the form of a syllogism, with a general norm as the major premise, a legal fact as the minor premise, and a decision as the conclusion. However, a syllogistic approach alone is insufficient to explain the complexity of judges' legal reasoning. In practice, judges are not always confronted with clear norms and simple facts. Many cases involve conflicting norms, legal gaps, or vague norms. In

such situations, judges' legal reasoning is no longer merely deductive but also involves interpretive and constructive reasoning (MacCormick, 1978).

This legal reasoning finds its concrete manifestation in the ratio decidendi. The ratio decidendi is the essential legal reasoning that determines why a judge reaches a particular decision. This section demonstrates how the judge links legal facts to legal norms through rational argumentation. Goodhart (1930) emphasized that the ratio decidendi cannot be understood solely from the formulation of the cited norm, but rather from a combination of the facts the judge deems material and the legal principles applied to those facts.

In this context, the ratio decidendi is a primary indicator of the quality of a judge's legal reasoning. A good decision is one with a clear, coherent ratio decidendi and a traceable line of thought. Conversely, a decision that only cites articles without explaining the relationship between facts and norms indicates weak legal reasoning. This situation often gives rise to criticism that judges are too formalistic and do not delve deeply into the substance of justice (Achmad Ali, 2015).

The relationship between facts and norms in the ratio decidendi is also closely related to the concept of legal discovery. In a civil law system, judges do not essentially create law, but rather discover the law applicable to specific events. This legal discovery is accomplished through legal interpretation and construction, all of which are part of legal reasoning (Mertokusumo, 2009). In the process of legal discovery, judges often must go beyond the literal meaning of norms to find a meaning that aligns with the goals of the law and society's sense of justice.

Legal reasoning also serves as a mechanism to limit judicial discretion. Judges do have some freedom to assess facts and interpret norms, but this freedom is not absolute. Judicial discretion must be exercised within a framework of rational and open legal argumentation. The ratio decidendi serves as a means to demonstrate that this discretion is used responsibly and not arbitrarily (Hart, 2012).

In Indonesian judicial practice, the quality of the ratio decidendi varies. Some decisions detail the relationship between facts and norms, but many others simply present brief, normative legal reasoning. This variation indicates that the understanding and mastery of legal reasoning among judges is not yet fully unequal. However, in

the context of a state governed by the rule of law, court decisions must not only be formally valid but also be rationally and scientifically accountable (Marzuki, 2017).

Analysis of the ratio decidendi is also important in the context of legal education. Through this study, law students can learn how legal norms operate in practice, how facts are selected and qualified, and how legal arguments are constructed. Legal studies that focus solely on statutory texts without examining court decisions will result in a partial and less applicable understanding of the law (Sidharta, 2000).

Furthermore, a judge's legal reasoning, reflected in the ratio decidendi, also plays a role in establishing the consistency and integrity of the legal system. Although a judge's decision in a civil law system is not formally binding, the ratio decidendi still has persuasive value and can serve as a reference for other judges in similar cases. Thus, the quality of the ratio decidendi helps determine the direction of legal development through judicial practice (MacCormick, 1978).

Thus, it can be emphasized that the relationship between facts and norms in court decisions cannot be separated from the judge's legal reasoning. The ratio decidendi serves as the meeting point where legal facts and legal norms are linked rationally, argumentatively, and responsibly. Analysis of the ratio decidendi is not only crucial for understanding the outcome of a decision but also for assessing the quality of a judge's legal thinking and the degree to which legal objectives are achieved in judicial practice.

B. The Construction of the Ratio Decidendi as a Meeting Point between Facts and Norms in Court Decisions

As outlined in the previous discussion, a judge's legal reasoning is an intellectual process that reconciles facts and norms through legal argumentation. The meeting point of this process lies in the ratio decidendi, the essential legal reasoning that determines the outcome of a decision. Therefore, to fully understand how legal reasoning operates in court decisions, an analysis of the construction of the ratio decidendi is crucial. The ratio decidendi is not merely a formal part of a decision, but rather a concrete representation of the judge's legal thinking in resolving a case (Goodhart, 1930).

In the context of legal reasoning, the ratio decidendi serves as an argumentative bridge connecting legal facts with legal norms. Legal facts constructed through the evidentiary process will

have no legal meaning without being linked to relevant norms. Conversely, abstract legal norms will not be operational without being contextualized within concrete facts. The construction of the ratio decidendi demonstrates how judges select facts deemed material, determine the applicable norms, and formulate reasons why those norms are appropriately applied to those facts (MacCormick, 1978).

Conceptually, the ratio decidendi is not identical to all of the legal considerations contained in a decision. Not all of the judge's explanations are considered the basis for a decision. The part referred to as the ratio decidendi is the part that contains the legal principles or primary reasons that directly determine the outcome of the case. Meanwhile, other parts that are additional explanations, illustrations, or hypothetical views fall into the obiter dicta category, which do not determine the decision (Hart, 2012). This distinction is important because errors often occur in reading decisions, where all of the judge's considerations are considered the ratio decidendi when in fact they are not.

In Indonesian judicial practice, the construction of the ratio decidendi is heavily influenced by how judges formulate legal facts. Legal facts are not simply summaries of events, but rather facts that have been legally qualified according to the applicable normative elements. This qualification process requires the judge's analytical ability to select which facts are relevant and which should be disregarded. If the selected facts are inappropriate, the ratio decidendi constructed will also lose its rational basis (Marzuki, 2017).

In addition to fact selection, the quality of the ratio decidendi is also determined by how the judge interprets legal norms. The norms used in decisions are often general and open to interpretation. Under certain circumstances, norms can be vague, open to multiple interpretations, or even not explicitly regulate the specific event at hand. In such situations, judges are required to interpret and construct the law as part of legal reasoning. The ratio decidendi provides the space where judges explain the results of these interpretations and demonstrate their relevance to the legal facts (Sidharta, 2000).

A good ratio decidendi construction must demonstrate a coherent and logical line of thought. Judges need to explain the causal relationship between facts and norms, not simply state that a norm has been violated or fulfilled.

The legal arguments developed must be traceable and understandable to both the parties and the public. From the perspective of legal argumentation theory, the ratio decidendi serves as a form of rational justification for the judge's decision (MacCormick, 1978).

However, in practice, weak or inadequate ratio decidendi are often found. These weaknesses can include repetition of articles without analysis, the use of norms irrelevant to the facts, or the absence of explanations regarding the relationship between facts and norms. Such decisions reflect formalistic legal reasoning and minimal argumentation. Achmad Ali (2015) criticized this tendency because it can erode public trust in the judiciary and create the impression that judges are merely "mouthpieces for the law."

In the context of the civil law system, although a judge's decision is not formally binding, the ratio decidendi remains important. It can serve as a persuasive reference for other judges in similar cases and contributes to the consistency of legal application. In other words, the ratio decidendi plays a role in building continuity and stability in the legal system through judicial practice, even though it is not recognized as a formal source of law (Mertokusumo, 2009).

The construction of the ratio decidendi is also closely related to the use of judicial discretion. Discretion is the freedom a judge has in assessing facts and interpreting norms. However, this discretion must be limited by rational and transparent legal reasoning. The ratio decidendi is the primary instrument for demonstrating that discretion is used responsibly and not arbitrarily. Thus, the ratio decidendi serves as a mechanism for judges' intellectual accountability for the decisions they render (Hart, 2012).

In academic analysis, the ratio decidendi can be used as a tool to assess the quality of a judge's legal reasoning. A decision with a strong ratio decidendi indicates that the judge has conducted a thorough analysis of the facts and norms and developed a coherent argument. Conversely, a decision with a weak ratio decidendi indicates problems in the legal reasoning process, whether at the fact selection, norm interpretation, or argumentation stages (Marzuki, 2017).

The relationship between facts and norms reflected in the ratio decidendi also has important implications for legal development. Through the ratio decidendi, judges not only apply existing law but also contribute to shaping new

understandings of legal norms. To some extent, the ratio decidendi can be a means of legal evolution through judicial practice, particularly when existing norms are no longer fully adequate to address emerging social issues (MacCormick, 1978).

From a legal education perspective, analyzing the ratio decidendi offers significant benefits. Law students can learn how legal reasoning works in practice, how facts are constructed into legal facts, and how norms are interpreted and applied. Legal studies that emphasize the analysis of the ratio decidendi will produce law graduates who not only understand the text of the law but also are able to think critically and argumentatively when addressing concrete legal issues (Sidharta, 2000).

Thus, the ratio decidendi can be seen as the most concrete manifestation of a judge's legal reasoning. It encompasses the relationship between facts and norms, established through legal argumentation. The quality of the ratio decidendi reflects the quality of a judge's legal thinking and serves as an indicator of the quality of justice achieved through court decisions. Therefore, analyzing the construction of the ratio decidendi is not only relevant for understanding specific decisions but also crucial for evaluating judicial practice as a whole.

As a final point, it can be emphasized that the relationship between facts and norms in a judge's legal reasoning cannot be separated from the existence of ratio decidendi. Ratio decidendi is the meeting point where legal facts and legal norms are linked rationally, argumentatively, and responsibly. Through ratio decidendi, judges demonstrate how the law works in practice and how justice is pursued in concrete contexts. Therefore, strengthening the quality of ratio decidendi is a strategic step towards improving the quality of judges' legal reasoning and the quality of court decisions in Indonesia.

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A judge's legal reasoning is an intellectual process that determines how legal facts and legal norms are linked in a court decision. The relationship between facts and norms is not mechanical, but rather constructed through argumentative construction, clearly reflected in the ratio decidendi. Through the ratio decidendi, the judge demonstrates his or her legal thinking in selecting relevant facts, interpreting applicable norms, and formulating the legal reasons that form the basis for the decision. Therefore, the

quality of the ratio decidendi is a primary indicator of the quality of a judge's legal reasoning and a reflection of the level of rationality and accountability of court decisions.

This analysis demonstrates that the ratio decidendi plays a strategic role as the meeting point between facts and norms in a judge's legal reasoning. The ratio decidendi serves not only as a legal rationale for decisions but also as a means of controlling judicial discretion, a medium for legal learning, and an instrument for evaluating the quality of justice. By strengthening the rational, transparent, and argumentative construction of the ratio decidendi, court decisions will not only be formally valid but also scientifically accountable and contribute to the realization of substantive justice in judicial practice.

Zweigert, Konrad, and Hein Kötz. 1998. *An Introduction to Comparative Law*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

REFERENCE LISTAN

- Achmad Ali. 2015. *Uncovering Legal Theory and Judicial Theory*. Jakarta: Kencana Prenadamedia Group.
- Goodhart, Arthur L. 1930. *Determining the Ratio Decidendi of a Case*. *The Yale Law Journal*, Vol. 40 No. 2.
- Hart, HLA. 2012. *The Concept of Law*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ibrahim, Johnny. 2006. *Theory and Methodology of Normative Legal Research*. Malang: Bayumedia Publishing.
- Kelsen, Hans. 2007. *Pure Theory of Law*. Translated by Max Knight. New Jersey: The Lawbook Exchange.
- Larenz, Karl. 1995. *Methodenlehre der Rechtswissenschaft*. Berlin: Springer-Verlag.
- MacCormick, Neil. 1978. *Legal Reasoning and Legal Theory*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Marzuki, Peter Mahmud. 2017. *Introduction to Legal Science*. Jakarta: Kencana Prenadamedia Group.
- Mertokusumo, Sudikno. 2009. *The Discovery of Law: An Introduction*. Yogyakarta: Liberty.
- Radbruch, Gustav. 2006. *Legal Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Sidharta, Bernard Arief. 2000. *Reflections on the Structure of Legal Science*. Bandung: Mandar Maju.
- Shidarta. 2013. *Legal Reasoning and Legal Reasoning*. Yogyakarta: Genta Publishing.
- Soekanto, Soerjono. 2014. *Introduction to Legal Research*. Jakarta: UI Press.
- Utrecht, E. 2019. *Introduction to Indonesian Law*. Jakarta: Ichtar Baru van Hoeve.