Does Corruption Undermine Fundamental Rights Protection Level? The Effects of Corruption of Lawmakers, Judges, Bureaucrats, and Police and Military on Labor Rights and Freedom of Association at the Country Level

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Abstract

This study investigates whether corruption among public officials undermines fundamental rights, analyzing data from 142 countries using the Rule of Law Index. The results show that corruption among judges and bureaucrats erodes fundamental rights, including labor rights and freedom of association. The study underscores the critical role of bureaucracy in protecting rights and the devastating consequences of bureaucratic corruption. The trend of executive power abuse further complicates this issue. To combat corruption and safeguard fundamental rights, this article recommends robust mechanisms to ensure accountability and transparency, emphasizing the importance of democratic oversight.

Key words: fundamental rights; corruption; rule of law index

Ⅰ. Introduction

Corruption is often cited as the primary cause of government failure and numerous social issues. Social scientists have dedicated decades to studying the dysfunctions of corruption (Liu & Mikesell, 2014; Liu et al., 2017). Their findings, based on rigorous empirical studies, confirm that corruption has a detrimental impact on various public sector domains. It compromises the quality of public service (Rose-Ackerman, 1997), hampers investment (Tanzi & Davoodi, 1998; Wei & Wu, 2002), distorts resource allocation, thereby undermining economic efficiency (Easterly & Levine, 1997; Mauro, 1995; Rose-Ackerman, 1999; World Bank, 1997), and exacerbates income inequality, poverty, and public health service (Bassole, 2010; Gupta et al., 2002; Lee et al., 2016; Lee & Nam, 2024). In the past decade, Liu and his colleagues have reported that corruption erodes the managerial and financial capacity of the government (Lee & Liu, 2022; Liu & Mikesell, 2019; Liu et al., 2017; Liu et al., 2021; Moldogaziev et al., 2017). Furthermore, corrupt public officials curtail investment in welfare for vulnerable groups (Liu & Mikesell, 2014). These empirical studies suggest that corruption might erode the fundamental rights of vulnerable populations as governments strive to enhance citizens' quality of life and protect their fundamental rights, particularly those of vulnerable groups. Scholars such as Andersen (2018), Boersma and Nelen (2010), Kim et al. (2012), and Kumar (2003) have proposed a causal link between corruption and fundamental rights. Nevertheless, empirical confirmation of the relationship between corruption and fundamental rights remains elusive (Kolthoff, 2016). Therefore, this study, grounded in robust empirical research, aims to fill this gap by examining the relationship between corruption and fundamental rights, with a specific focus on the impact of corruption on labor rights, given that the laboring class constitutes a primary and vulnerable segment of society. The potential impact of this research is significant, as it can

enhance our understanding and help address the negative effects of corruption on fundamental rights.

This study confirms the negative effects of corruption on fundamental and labor rights by using a robust panel dataset from 142 countries surveyed to measure the Rule of Law (ROL) Index. The ROL Index measures how well each country tries to improve the issues related to the rule of law—fundamental rights, corruption, democracy, and civil conflicts. The ROL Index has the advantage of disaggregating human rights according to the specific rights it aims to protect and measuring corruption by disaggregating it based on which branch of government is involved. Thus, this study enables the view of the multilateral relationship between corruption and fundamental rights.

The remainder of this article is structured as follows. The first section reviews the literature on the concept and determinants of fundamental rights, particularly labor rights. It also discusses the hypothetical effects of corruption on public officials, such as lawmakers, judges, bureaucrats, and police and military officers. The second section illustrates the research design—the data, variables, and method. The third section shows the empirical results of descriptive statistics, simple correlation analysis, and multiple regression analysis using a fixed effects model. The final section concludes this study with a summary and implications of the analysis results.

II. Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

1. Concept of Fundamental (Labor) Rights

Fundamental rights are the basic rights and freedoms that are considered essential to the dignity and worth of every human being (Khol, 1968; 1970; Sepúlveda et al., 2004). These rights are considered universal, inalienable, and indivisible, meaning they belong to every individual, regardless of nationality, ethnicity, gender, or other characteristic. They are institutionalized and protected by a country's constitution and legal system (Alexy, 2006). As a citizen, an individual has the right to require the state to defend their rights and improve their life quality. The state, shaped by the social contract, must realize its citizens' enjoyment of their fundamental rights. The state's public officials, such as politicians, judges, bureaucrats, and police and military officers, realize citizens' fundamental rights through policy decisions and implementations (Sepúlveda et al., 2004).

Fundamental rights encompass a wide range of rights, including the right to life, the right to equality, labor rights, freedom of association, freedom of expression, freedom of religion, voting rights, environmental rights, women's rights, children's rights, disability rights, and sexual orientation and gender identity rights. Among these various rights, labor rights are particularly important because workers constitute the majority in society and are also a vulnerable group. The struggle for the rights of ordinary people against the ruling elite and capitalist interests has been associated with the struggle for labor rights.

Labor rights are composed of the following rights (World Justice Project, 2023): freedom of association, the right to collective bargaining, the absence of discrimination concerning employment, and freedom from forced labor and child labor. Freedom of association refers to the right of individuals to come together and form associations, such as labor unions, to advocate for their interests and protect their rights. This right is essential for workers to have a collective voice and to negotiate with employers to improve their working conditions, wages, and benefits. The right to collective bargaining is a

labor right that allows workers to negotiate with employers to improve their working conditions, wages, and benefits. It is essential for workers to have a say in the workplace and to ensure that their interests are represented. The absence of discrimination concerning employment refers to the right of all individuals to be treated equally and without discrimination in the workplace. This includes the right to equal pay for equal work, the right to equal opportunities for promotion and career advancement, and the right to be free from harassment and discrimination. Freedom from forced labor and child labor refers to the right of all individuals to be free from exploitation and abuse in the workplace. This right prevents workers from being exploited by forced labor.

2. Determinants of Fundamental (Labor) Rights Protection Level

The concept of fundamental rights has evolved within democratic regimes, with higher-developed democratic regimes protecting higher degrees of civil liberties. International indicators of democracy measure the degree of protection of fundamental rights, mainly civil and political rights. Democracy contributes to social rights, such as labor rights and education, health, and standard of living, as the democratic control of politicians and bureaucrats encourages public officials to try their best for the public welfare (Besley & Kudamatsu, 2006; Blanton et al., 2015; Cingranelli & Tsai, 2003; Mosley & Uno, 2007; Neumayer & De Soysa, 2006; Poe et al., 1999; Richards et al., 2001; Safaei, 2006).

Some researchers have examined the effects of partisan ideology on democracy. Cole (2013) found that leftist governments improve labor rights through favorable labor laws and practices. Blanton et al. (2015) also observed the positive effects of leftist governments on labor rights. However, democracy-centered studies have been criticized for ignoring non-democratic regimes (Geddes, 1999; Geddes et al., 2014). Tsai (2006) included various non-democratic regime types in his model, finding that all three negatively affected political freedom.

Tsai (2006) also examined the effects of socioeconomic variables on political freedom. He constructed empirical analysis models based on state power militarism theory, modernization theory, external dependency theory, and ethnic fractionalization theory. Because Tsai's study was published about two decades ago, this subsection reviews the updated theoretical discussions of state power militarism, modernization, economic globalization, and civil conflict theories.

State power-militarism theory examines the military's influence on developing countries' modernization. Many modernizing states have rejected citizens' political rights, justifying authoritarianism to maintain social stability and achieve rapid economic growth (Geddes et al., 2014; Im, 1987; O'Donnell, 1978). The military has been used to restrict civil liberties, and military members have reversed democratization to maintain privileges (Acemoglu et al., 2008; Brauner, 2012). Increased military spending can harm fundamental rights and reduce expenditures for education and health (Vadlamannati & Pathmalal, 2010; Shin, 2020; Tsai, 2006).

Modernization theory posits that economic development is crucial for democracy and civil liberties (Acemoglu et al., 2008; Barro, 1999; Lipset, 1959; Przeworski et al., 2000; Tsai, 2006). Industrialization creates a middle class, leading to a more advanced legal system and bureaucracy (Lipset, 1981). Empirical evidence suggests that democracy thrives in wealthier countries (Cheibub et al., 1996; Heid et al., 2012; Moral-Benito & Bartolucci, 2012; Paldam & Gundlach, 2018). Even if some studies (e.g., Burke & Leigh, 2010; Dorsch et al., 2015; Gassebner et al., 2013) find a negative relationship

between income and democracy, long-term economic growth and higher incomes positively influence democracy (Acemoglu et al., 2008; Paldam & Gundlach, 2018; Treisman, 2020).

Economic globalization theory examines the effects of external factors on fundamental rights, with a specific focus on labor rights. Economic globalization can affect labor rights positively and negatively through different mechanisms (Blanton et al., 2015; Gallagher, 2005; Hafner-Burton, 2005; Mosley & Uno, 2007). Mosley and Uno (2007) found that foreign direct investment inflows positively impact labor rights. Traditional external dependency theorists argue that dominant industrial countries exploit developing countries, leading to economic stagnation and socioeconomic inequality (Frank, 1967; Kentor, 1998). International finance institutions like the IMF and World Bank have undermined labor rights in recipient countries (Blanton et al., 2015). Roberts (2021) observed that manufacturing exports from developing countries to developed countries negatively impact workers' collective rights. Peksen and Pollock (2021) concluded that "de facto" globalization worsens labor rights, while "de jure" globalization positively impacts labor conditions. On the other hand, Takiyar and Rao (2020) found no significant impacts of economic globalization on human rights, while they found positive impacts of globalization's social and political dimensions.

Civil conflict theory argues that it deters political stability, government capacity, economic growth, and democracy (Tsai, 2006). In unstable surroundings, people face risks like violence and terrorism (Lee & Nam, 2024; Manning, 2002). Governments restrict civil liberties to suppress challenges to their rule. Tsai (2006) found no link between ethnic, language, or religious fractionalization and political freedom. However, civil conflicts or war negatively impact labor rights (Mosley & Uno, 2007; Blanton et al., 2015) and social rights, such as health and environmental rights (Conner et al., 2001; Dunkle et al., 2004; Lee & Nam, 2024; Manning, 2002; Rutherford & Unruh, 2019).

The literature has explored the determinants of fundamental rights protection, focusing on political-economic and environmental factors. Environmental factors are significant, but state organizations are crucial in protecting fundamental rights. Since adopting the UN Convention against Corruption in 2003, international society has recognized the link between corruption and fundamental rights (Kim et al., 2012). Building on this trend, scholars have theoretically examined the impact of public officials' corruption on fundamental rights protection. The following subsection delves into corruption theory and presents empirical hypotheses.

3.   Hypotheses: Corruption and Fundamental (Labor) Rights

Corruption has been studied across social sciences, including criminology, economics, political science, and public administration. Researchers have defined corruption differently (Lancaster & Montinola, 1997; Liu & Mikesell, 2014; Liu et al., 2017) but commonly agree that it involves misusing public authority for personal gain. The prevailing definition in social science is the exploitation of public authority for personal benefit (Jain, 2001a; 2001b; Tavits, 2007).

Corruption is classified in various ways, focusing on form, arena, and involved parties (Amundsen, 1999; Andvig et al., 2001; Begovic, 2005; Jain, 2001a; Tanzi, 1995). Forms of corruption include bribery, embezzlement, fraud, extortion, and favoritism (Jancsics, 2019). Arena-centered classification categorizes corruption by context, including international and intranational corruption (Andvig et al., 2001). Agent-oriented classification mainly distinguishes political corruption

(involving politicians) and bureaucratic corruption (involving bureaucrats) (Batzilis, 2019; Jain, 2001a; Schleiter & Voznaya, 2014). Judicial corruption, where judges abuse their authority for personal gain, is also a concern (Buscaglia, 2001; Gong, 2004). Corruption of security agencies such as police and military can severely impact society because they have actual force to limit citizens' freedom and rights (Jancsics, 2021).

Corruption can infringe upon fundamental rights, even in procedurally acceptable democracies (Rothstein, 2020). Constitutions stipulate that the primary goal of the state and government is to protect individuals' fundamental rights; thus, public officials like lawmakers, judges, bureaucrats, and police and military officers exist to protect and improve fundamental rights. However, corrupt public officials exercise their power arbitrarily for personal gain, which harms fundamental rights (Jain, 2001a, 2001b; Kumar, 2003; Tavits, 2007). Hence, fundamental rights are significantly influenced by the quality of governance and corruption level (Anagnostou & Mungiu-Pippidi, 2014; Rothstein, 2020).

In the grip of powerful vested interests, corrupt lawmakers craft laws that justify suppressing ordinary people or minorities. While lawmakers are supposed to check the other branches of government, corrupt representatives disregard the violence inflicted by other public officials on their citizens. Similarly, corrupt judges hand down sentences that favor powerful vested interests or violent government officials. By capturing corrupted judges, the wealthy are more likely to emerge victorious in litigation, while the poor are more likely to face harsher punishment. In authoritarian countries, judges are often swayed by the pressure of repressive governments, leaving civil liberties vulnerable to national violence.

Bureaucratic corruption may create a more severe impact than corruption among lawmakers and judges. Bureaucratic corruption is routinized, widespread, and clandestine (Lee & Bae, 2022). Corrupt bureaucrats demand bribes from ordinary people; if refused, they exercise power arbitrarily. In particular, security agency officers like police and military officers are more likely to use violence due to their authority and resources (Andersen, 2018). Those in danger of arrest or whose family members have already been arrested pay bribes to avoid prison (Andersen, 2018). Without bribes, they may be beaten by police officers (Alam & Teicher, 2012; Andersen, 2015, 2018; Islam, 2013; Sharma & Andersen, 2017). Corrupt security agency officials also arrest criminals for personal gain. Bohara et al. (2008) confirmed that corruption is positively associated with the incidence of torture. Thus, it is hypothesized that corruption undermines fundamental rights.

H1: Public officials' corruption undermines fundamental rights.

H1a: Lawmakers' corruption undermines fundamental rights.

H1b: Judges' corruption undermines fundamental rights.

H1c: Bureaucrats' corruption undermines fundamental rights.

H1d: Security agency officers' corruption undermines fundamental rights.

Corrupt public officials are self-interested (Lee & Liu, 2022; Liu et al., 2017; Liu & Mikesell, 2014). They act for those who give them benefits. Corrupt lawmakers legislate labor laws that favor businesspeople over workers because businesspeople have wealth to help lawmakers increase their income or political money. In addition, even if lawmakers legislate labor laws that favor workers, labor rights will be limited if the courts and bureaucracies are corrupt (Brudney et

al., 1999; Forbath, 1991). Corrupt judges do not punish businesspeople who have violated labor laws because businesspeople bribe or will employ them after their retirement. Corrupt bureaucrats do not monitor labor rights violation cases for the same reason. They regulate labor activity organizations rather than monitoring businesspeople. Corrupt police officers are not diligent when investigating and prosecuting labor law-related crimes (Aguilar, 2013; Chen & Xu, 2012). Instead, they illegally obstruct the association of labor activists. Furthermore, corrupt public officials cling to their positions of power because their benefits are directly tied to their authority (Akech, 2011; Breaky, 2017; Lee & Bae, 2022). To achieve this, they attempt to silence their critics by suppressing their freedom of association, thereby preventing their opponents from organizing and gathering. This is a deliberate attempt to maintain their dominance and avoid accountability, as they fear their actions will be scrutinized and their power will be checked. Therefore, it is hypothesized that corruption undermines labor rights and freedom of association.

H2: Public officials' corruption undermines labor rights.

H2a: Lawmakers' corruption undermines labor rights.

H2b: Judges' corruption undermines labor rights.

H2c: Bureaucrats' corruption undermines labor rights.

H2d: Security agency officers' corruption undermines labor rights.

H3: Public officials' corruption undermines freedom of association.

H3a: Lawmakers' corruption undermines freedom of association.

H3b: Judges' corruption undermines freedom of association.

H3c: Bureaucrats' corruption undermines freedom of association.

H3d: Security agency officers' corruption undermines freedom of association.

III. Research Design

1. Primary Dataset: Rule of Law Index

To test hypotheses, this study mainly uses the Rule of Law Index (ROL) dataset, which the World Justice Project (WJP) has compiled since 2012. The WJP has consistently expanded its coverage, measuring the rule of law in increasing countries each year. The dataset has grown from 97 countries in 2012-13 to 142 countries in 2023. WJP constructs the dataset by surveying its expert network, comprising scholars and practitioners, as well as general citizens from around the world. The surveys ask the respondents to mark their perceived level (very likely ~ very unlikely) on the degree of a country's constraints on government power, absence of corruption, order and security, fundamental rights, open government, effective regulatory enforcement, and civil and criminal justice systems (World Justice Project, 2023). The perceived level is aggregated and estimated from 0 to 1.

2.　Dependent Variables

The dependent variables of this study are the overarching category of "Fundamental Rights" and its constituent sub-indicators, specifically labor rights and freedom of association. The "Fundamental Rights" category is comprised of the following sub-indicators: the right to equality, the right to life and security, the due process of law and the rights of the accused, freedom of association, freedom of religion, freedom of expression, the right to privacy, and labor rights.

Labor rights are assessed by evaluating the effective enforcement of fundamental labor rights, including freedom of association, collective bargaining, non-discrimination in employment, and freedom from forced and child labor. Freedom of association is measured by examining how individuals can participate in community meetings, join political organizations, engage in peaceful public demonstrations, sign petitions, and express dissenting opinions regarding government policies and actions without fear of reprisal.

3.　Independent Variables

The independent variables are the perceived levels of corruption within each branch of the state. These variables are derived from the "absence of corruption" indicators by subtracting them from 1. Specifically, the independent variables include: corruption within the legislature, which measures the extent to which lawmakers accept bribes or other incentives in exchange for political favors or favorable votes on proposed legislation; corruption within the judicial branch, which assesses the extent to which judges accept bribes to perform their duties or expedite legal processes, as well as the impact of improper influence from government, private interests, or criminal organizations on judges' decisions and sentencing; corruption within the executive branch, which measures the extent of embezzlement, bribery, and other forms of corruption in the provision of public services and enforcement of regulations, as well as the transparency of government procurement and public works contracts; and corruption within the security agencies, which measures the extent to which police and military officers solicit and accept bribes for performing their security services, as well as the impact of improper influence from private interests or criminal organizations on their actions.

While the WJP corruption data is based on surveys of the general population and related experts, it has limitations in terms of objectivity compared to hard data, such as the number of corruption convictions and the amount of embezzled public funds. However, there is no hard data on corruption at the national level, and even hard data has limitations (Lee & Bae, 2022). Hard data may not capture exact figures due to corruption's secrecy (Johnston & Kpundeh, 2002), and the definition of corruption can vary across countries (Lee & Bae, 2022; Klitgaard, 1988). Despite these limitations, perception-based data reported by international agencies reflect various aspects of corruption, making it a helpful tool for country-level studies (Lee & Bae, 2022; Montinola & Jackman, 2002; Pellegrini & Gerlagh, 2008; Treisman, 2000).

4.　Control Variables

Following the literature review, this study controls for the following variables: i) civil conflict, ii) leftist government, iii) the share of military spending in the GDP, iv) GDP per capita, v) trade, vi) FDI inflow, vii) participation in IMF assistance

program, and viii) participation in the World Bank assistance program. Although democracy is an important variable for fundamental rights, it is excluded in the empirical model because the measures of democracy already include the measurement of fundamental rights and corruption.

Civil conflict is expected to undermine fundamental rights, including labor rights and freedom of association because it enables public officials to suppress citizens and disrupts the governmental capacity to improve public welfare. The data source for civil conflict is the absence of civil conflict in the Rule of Law (ROL) Index[1], estimated by subtracting this absence from 1.

A leftist government, as represented by the ruling party variable, is expected to enhance not only labor rights but also other fundamental rights, as leftist parties tend to advocate for the rights of ordinary people and minorities, in contrast to rightist parties. This binary variable (1: leftist, 0: rightist or centrist governments) is based on election results from each country. The share of military spending in GDP is controlled for, as previous studies have consistently shown its significant impact on fundamental rights. Additionally, GDP per capita, trade, FDI inflows, and participation in IMF and World Bank assistance programs (participation: 1, non-participation: 0) are controlled for by modernization and economic globalization theory. The economic data are sourced from the World Bank website, except for IMF assistance program participation data, which is sourced from the IMF website. Table 1 presents the data and variables used in the empirical analysis of this study.

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Table 1. Data and Variables

Variables	Description
Dependent Variables	
Fundamental Rights	Rule of Law Index: 0 ~ 1
Labor Rights	Rule of Law Index: 0 ~ 1
Freedom of Association	Rule of Law Index: 0 ~ 1
Independent Variables	

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[1] The absence of civil conflict is under the "Order and Security" category.

Corruption	Rule of Law Index: 0 ~ 1
Lawmakers' Corruption	Rule of Law Index: 0 ~ 1
Judges' Corruption	Rule of Law Index: 0 ~ 1
Bureaucrats' Corruption	Rule of Law Index: 0 ~ 1
Police and Military Corruption	Rule of Law Index: 0 ~ 1
Control Variables	
Civil Conflict	Rule of Law Index: 0 ~ 1
Leftist Government	Leftist ruling party: 1, rightist ruling party: 0
Military Spending	Share of military spending in GDP (%)
GDP Per Capita	Real GDP (2015 USD) divided by population (natural log)
Trade	Imports plus exports divided by GDP (%)
IMF Programs	IMF loan (participation: 1, no participation: 0)
World Bank Programs	World Bank loan (participation: 1, no participation: 0)
FDI Inflows	FDI inflows divided by GDP (%)

5. Method

This study tested the hypotheses using a fixed effects model (FEM) with a panel dataset collected primarily from the ROL reports from 2012 to 2023. Panel data is beneficial for empirical analyses as it allows for the identification of effects stemming from individual differences and those that evolve within individuals (Wang & Ho, 2010). The FEM is employed in panel data regression analysis models to account for the endogeneity of time-invariant variables, such as gender and a county's distance from a river, within a panel regression framework (Hansen, 2021; Wooldridge, 2012). To address endogeneity concerns, this research incorporates year dummies to control for unobserved effects on the dependent variables.

IV. Empirical Analysis Results

1. Descriptive Statistics

The sample size must be 1,199 (=97+99+102+113*2+126+128+139+140+142).[2] However, the sample size is reduced to 1,068 due to missing data on some countries' military spending or GDP per capita. Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for the sample. Notably, Table 2 reveals that lawmakers' corruption is perceived as the most severe, with an average ranking that stands out.

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[2] The World Justice Project has measured the Rule of Law Index in 97 countries in 2012 – 13, 99 countries in 2014, 102 countries in 2015, 113 countries in 2016 and 2017 – 18, 126 countries in 2019, 128 countries in 2020, 139 countries in 2021, 140 countries in 2022, and 142 countries in 2023.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics

Variables	Obs.	Mean	Standard Deviation	Min.	Max.
Dependent Variables					
Fundamental Rights	1,068	.58	.16	.20	.93
Labor Rights	1,068	.59	.14	.20	.95
Freedom of Association	1,068	.64	.18	.10	.98
Independent Variables					
Corruption	1,068	.48	.19	.04	.84
Lawmakers' Corruption	1,068	.63	.20	.01	.98
Judges' Corruption	1,068	.41	.23	.01	.89
Bureaucrats' Corruption	1,068	.49	.18	.05	.78
Police and Military Corruption	1,068	.41	.21	.02	.82
Control Variables					
Open Government	1,068	.53	.15	.22	.93
Civil Conflict	1,068	.07	.18	.0	.96
Leftist Government	1,068	.42	.49	0	1
Military Spending (%)	1,068	1.63	1.35	.07	33.55
GDP Per Capita ($)	1,068	13,514.64	17,967.67	426.23	107,792.2
Trade (%)	1,068	77.57	52.94	0	388.12
FDI Inflows (%)	1,068	3.16	15.01	-391.44	106.59
IMF Programs	1,068	.22	.42	0	1
World Bank Programs	1,068	.60	.49	0	1

Table 3 reveals the top 25 countries in the world, as ranked by their performance in fundamental rights and absence of corruption, according to the 2023 ROL dataset. Nineteen countries, including Denmark, Norway, Finland, Sweden, Germany, Luxembourg, Belgium, Austria, Netherlands, Estonia, Ireland, New Zealand, Canada, Uruguay, United Kingdom, Spain, Lithuania, Japan, and Australia, appear in both indexes. Interestingly, the top 5 countries in the absence of corruption, excluding Singapore, also rank among the top 4 in fundamental rights. This suggests a negative correlation between corruption and fundamental rights. Table 4, which showcases the correlation between dependent and independent variables, offers compelling evidence that reinforces the likelihood of each hypothesis being confirmed, further solidifying the relationship between corruption and fundamental rights.

Table 3. Top 25 countries in the fundamental rights and absence of corruption (2023)

Fundamental Rights	Score	Absence of Corruption	Score
Denmark	0.92	Denmark	0.96
Norway	0.91	Norway	0.94
Finland	0.90	Singapore	0.91
Sweden	0.87	Sweden	0.90
Germany	0.86	Finland	0.89
Luxembourg	0.85	New Zealand	0.87
Belgium	0.84	Netherlands	0.87
Austria	0.84	Luxembourg	0.85
Netherlands	0.84	Hong Kong SAR, China	0.83
Estonia	0.83	Canada	0.83
Ireland	0.82	United Kingdom	0.83
New Zealand	0.82	Germany	0.82
Canada	0.81	Japan	0.82
Uruguay	0.80	Ireland	0.82
United Kingdom	0.80	Australia	0.81
Costa Rica	0.79	Estonia	0.81
Spain	0.79	Austria	0.80
Lithuania	0.78	Belgium	0.79
Japan	0.78	United Arab Emirates	0.78
Czechia	0.78	France	0.75
Australia	0.78	Uruguay	0.73
Latvia	0.77	United States	0.73
Portugal	0.76	Spain	0.73
Slovenia	0.75	Lithuania	0.72
Korea, Rep.	0.75	Poland	0.71

Source: World Justice Project, 2023

Table 4. Simple Correlation between Dependent and Independent Variables

	FR	LR	FA	C	LC	JC	BC	PMC
FR	1.0000							
LR	0.8562*	1.0000						
FA	0.8977*	0.7165*	1.0000					
C	-0.8031*	-0.7341*	-0.5842*	1.0000				
LC	-0.6051*	-0.6006*	-0.4035*	0.8800*	1.0000			
JC	-0.7979*	-0.7054*	-0.6008*	0.9244*	0.6798*	1.0000		

BC	-0.7901*	-0.7259*	-0.5949*	0.9701*	0.8892*	0.8423*	1.0000	
PMC	-0.7911*	-0.7015*	-0.5716*	0.9498*	0.7363*	0.8938*	0.8990*	1.0000

*p<.001 (two-tailed). FR: Fundamental Rights; LR: Labor Rights; FA: Freedom of Association; C: Corruption; LC: Lawmakers' Corruption; JC: Judges' Corruption; BC: Bureaucrats' Corruption; PMC: Police and Military Corruption.

2. Regression Analysis Results of Fixed Effects Models

Table 5. Regression Analysis Results of Fixed Effects Models

DV	Fundamental Rights	———	Labor Rights	———	Freedom of Association	———
Corruption	-0.256***		-0.281***		-0.283***	
Lawmakers' Corruption		0.028		-0.042		0.023
Judges' Corruption		-0.136***		-0.104*		-0.143***
Bureaucrats' Corruption		-0.165***		-0.174**		-0.296***
Police and Military Corruption		-0.074**		0.018		0.074
Civil Conflict	0.002	0.004	0.028	0.027	-0.049**	-0.049**
Leftist Government	0.009***	0.009***	0.001	0.001	0.004	0.005
Military Spending (%)	0.000	-0.000	-0.002	-0.002	-0.001	-0.001
GDP Per Capita (log)	-0.041***	-0.044***	-0.018	-0.021	-0.061**	-0.068***
Trade	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
FDI Inflows (%)	0.000	0.000	-0.000+	-0.000+	0.000	0.000
IMF	0.006*	0.006*	0.007	0.008+	0.010*	0.012**
World Bank	0.015**	0.013*	0.007	0.003	0.021*	0.018*
Constants	1.037***	1.089***	0.875***	0.919***	1.273***	1.358***
Observations	1,068	1,068	1,068	1,068	1,068	1,068
R-sq Within	0.335	0.355	0.170	0.177	0.319	0.335
R-sq Between	0.067	0.044	0.370	0.335	0.122	0.073
R-sq Overall	0.025	0.069	0.351	0.318	0.044	0.021

+p<.1 *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001 (two-tailed). Year dummies are included in the model.

Table 5 displays the regression analysis results of the fixed effects models. The analysis confirms that corruption has a detrimental impact on fundamental rights, labor rights, and freedom of association. In addition, the analysis reveals that corruption among judges and bureaucrats diminishes the extent of fundamental rights, labor rights, and freedom of association. Notably, corruption within the police and military forces has a more limited impact, primarily affecting

fundamental rights. Conversely, corruption among lawmakers does not exert a statistically significant influence on the dependent variables. The findings suggest that the judicial and executive branches play a more critical role in advancing human rights than the legislative branch. This phenomenon may be attributed to the legislature's limited ability to influence governance quality in advanced democratic countries. This study conducts additional regression analysis on two separate groups of countries: those with an open government index score exceeding 0.7 (advanced democracies) and those with a score below 0.7 (undeveloped democracies) in the ROL dataset. The study chose 0.7 as the cutoff point because, according to the Economist Democracy Index, South Korea and Japan are considered at the lower end of the full democracy, with scores of 0.72 and 0.7, respectively. Tables 6 and 7 present the additional regression analysis results.[3]

Table 6. Regression Analysis Results of Fixed Effects Models (Advanced Democracies)

DV	Fundamental Rights	Labor Rights	Freedom of Association
Lawmakers' Corruption	-0.063	**-0.181***	0.015
Judges' Corruption	**-0.165+**	-0.247	-0.152
Bureaucrats' Corruption	**-0.161***	0.088	**-0.330***
Police and Military Corruption	0.029	0.076	**-0.413***
Civil Conflict	-0.008	-0.060	-0.020
Leftist Government	0.005	-0.005	0.012+
Military Spending (%)	0.007	0.025	-0.010
GDP Per Capita (log)	0.038	-0.159	0.050
Trade	0.000	0.000	-0.000
FDI Inflows (%)	0.000	-0.000	0.000
Constants	0.456	2.432*	0.467
Observations	181	181	181
R-sq Within	0.252	0.198	0.303
R-sq Between	0.580	0.070	0.690
R-sq Overall	0.551	0.018	0.593

+$p<.1$ *$p<.05$, **$p<.01$, ***$p<.001$ (two-tailed). Year dummies are included in the model.

Table 7. Regression Analysis Results of Fixed Effects Models (Undeveloped Democracies)

DV	Fundamental Rights	Labor Rights	Freedom of Association
Lawmakers' Corruption	0.021	-0.020	0.026
Judges' Corruption	**-0.117***	**-0.084+**	**-0.133***
Bureaucrats' Corruption	**-0.146***	**-0.250***	**-0.260***

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[3] The models for advanced democracies omit IMF and World Bank assistance program participation, as these institutions do not provide aid to advanced democracies.

Police and Military Corruption	**-0.103***	0.048	0.052
Civil Conflict	-0.000	0.024	-0.053**
Leftist Government	0.009**	0.007	0.002
Military Spending (%)	-0.000	-0.002	-0.001
GDP Per Capita (log)	-0.034**	0.010	-0.057**
Trade	0.000	-0.000	0.000
FDI Inflows (%)	-0.000	-0.000	-0.000
IMF	0004	0.008+	0.011*
World Bank	0.006	-0.001	0.016
Constants	0.953***	0.802***	1.199***
Observations	887	887	887
R-sq Within	0.402	0.215	0.361
R-sq Between	0.208	0.281	0.006
R-sq Overall	0.172	0.196	0.004

+p<.1 *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001 (two-tailed). Year dummies are included in the model.

In advanced democracies, lawmakers' corruption also has no significant impact on comprehensive fundamental rights and freedom of association, whereas it significantly diminishes labor rights. Judges' corruption significantly impacts fundamental rights, whereas police and military corruption affects freedom of association. Bureaucrats' corruption, however, significantly impacts both comprehensive fundamental rights and freedom of association. These findings imply that labor rights issues rely on legislation in advanced democracies. In contrast, issues related to other rights, such as freedom of association, depend on implementing laws and policies.

Table 7 presents similar analysis results to Table 5. In underdeveloped democracies, lawmakers' corruption does not significantly impact dependent variables, whereas the other three variables significantly diminish comprehensive fundamental rights. Judges' and bureaucrats' corruption also reduces labor rights and freedom of association.

Interestingly, the control variable GDP per capita exhibits a negative correlation with fundamental rights and freedom of association in Tables 5 and 7, defying modernization theory's expectations. This unexpected finding may suggest that underdeveloped democracies prioritize economic development by compromising on fundamental rights. Civil conflict has a significant and detrimental impact on freedom of association. Conversely, leftist governments have a positive and significant effect on comprehensive fundamental rights, although they do not significantly influence labor rights, contrary to expectations.[4] Military spending and trade do not have a significant impact on any of the dependent variables. Notably, IMF and World Bank assistance programs are found to be beneficial for both fundamental rights and freedom of association.

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[4] Leftist governments may not significantly impact labor rights, as leftist parties have historically adopted rightist policies in response to the welfare state crisis (Han, 2020; Huber & Stephens, 2001; Mudge, 2011).

V. Discussion and Conclusion

In modern states, public officials are entrusted with the responsibility of protecting and promoting individuals' fundamental rights. However, when public officials are corrupt, the very fabric of these rights is compromised. Despite the significance of this topic, the empirical evidence on the effects of corruption on fundamental rights is limited. This study fills the knowledge gap by analyzing a panel dataset of 142 countries based on the Rule of Law Index. The results confirm that public officials' corruption undermines fundamental rights. Specifically, corruption among judges, bureaucrats, and security agency officers (police and military) harms fundamental rights. Lawmakers' corruption undermines labor rights only in advanced democracies. The findings indicate that labor rights issues are uniquely dependent on legislation in only advanced democracies, whereas other fundamental rights issues are affected by implementing laws and policies by bureaucracy in both advanced and undeveloped democracies.

This study's findings underscore the critical role of bureaucracy in protecting fundamental rights, highlighting the importance of effective bureaucratic governance. Bureaucratic corruption is detrimental to fundamental rights; thus, robust mechanisms for controlling bureaucratic corruption are essential to protect fundamental rights. However, reality is moving in the opposite direction, with the power of bureaucracy (executive branch) growing stronger. In the United States, where the concept of separation of powers originated, presidents have abused their authority, issued executive orders, and vetoed legislation, disrespecting congressional approval. This trend has been replicated in countries that have adopted the presidential system, including South Korea, where the President has been accused of abusing his powers, issuing pardons to individuals with close ties to the President and circumventing the legislative process.

In conclusion, this study underscores the critical importance of democratic oversight in ensuring the accountability and transparency of bureaucracy, judges, and police/military officials. By strengthening democratic controls, we can prevent the erosion of fundamental rights and promote a more just and equitable society. The framework presented in this study provides a roadmap for achieving this goal, and we hope that it will serve as a catalyst for further research and policy reform.

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