



Reignite Multilateralism
via Technology

D4.2 Overview employing the ACF to differing advocacy coalitions in the EU, the US and China

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Background of the REMIT project

The REMIT project aims to “**Reignite Multilateralism via Technology**”. A reigniting that not only reacts to China’s rise as a systemic technology rival or Russia’s resurgence as a technology abuser or the dominance of large U.S.-based digital platforms, but that sets a clear vision for the future — one in which Europe plays a leading role.

Coordinated by Maastricht University, the REMIT project brings together leading European researchers from nine partners from Belgium, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Romania and the United Kingdom. The goal is to develop recommendations, clear understanding of the status quo and innovative methodologies that support effective policies to revitalize global democratic structures.

REMIT aims to re-mobilize a transnational collective spirit that addresses global problems through technology, because

1. Technology has strong effect on economic competitiveness
2. Technology is important to national security including threats to democratic principles
3. Technology is crucial to the solutions for global challenges

By focusing on technology and the policy areas that emerge from the REMIT researchers’ expertise, the project provides the needed analysis and the theory building to support the EU. The four technology areas are also instrumental in finding solutions to all important challenges, including climate, digital transitions, the rise of inequalities, ageing and disabilities, migrations, health pandemics, and information disorder. Ultimately, REMIT intends to design policy recommendations that will give a remit to reignite multilateralism via technology.

The detailed objectives of the REMIT project are:

» **Objective 1:** To define the EU’s role in leading the renewal and defence of multilateralism starting with the global governance of technologies in four crucial policy areas (digital, health bio, security and defence, and financial technologies). The lack of comprehensive, multilateral tech regulations represents material national security threats to the EU and its allies by allowing others (especially China) to set the rules for the digital future.

» **Objective 2:** To provide evidence-based advice to reinforce European institutions in the field of technology that work and propose innovative, multilateral-governance constructs for those that do not.

» **Objective 3:** To develop policy recommendations and scenario testing workshops offered to relevant EU administrators, important regional groups, and national officials.

» **Objective 4:** To share knowledge among stakeholders and to communicate policy recommendations. REMIT will recommend policy action for the European Union that further re-conceptualizes multilateralism in the four technology areas.

The REMIT project is carried out from March 2023 until February 2027 and has a total budget of almost €3 million, of which €2.6 million is funded by the EU’s Horizon Europe research and innovation program and €370k is provided by the UK government through the UK Research and Innovation fund (UKRI). The project is being carried out by internationally recognized researchers from Maastricht University, Universitatea Babes Bolyai, Universitaet Bremen, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Luiss Libera Universita Internazionale Degli Studi Sociali Guido Carli, Erasmus University Rotterdam, the Finnish Institute for International Affairs and the University of Tartu. In addition, the European Cyber Conflict Research Initiative (ECCRI) joins the consortium as an associate partner, receiving funding from UKRI.



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List of Abbreviations and Definitions

Abbreviation	Definition
ACF	Advocacy Coalition Framework
ACN	Actor Congruence Network
AI	Artificial Intelligence
AIIB	Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank
ASEAN	The Association of Southeast Asian Nations
AUKUS	Trilateral security partnership between Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States
BBU	Babes-Bolyai University



BISA	The British International Studies Association
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Egypt, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Iran and the United Arab Emirates
CCN	Concept Congruence Network
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CSDP	Common Security and Defence Policy
DMA	Chips, Digital Markets
DSA	Digital Services
EDF	European Defence Fund
EISA	European International Studies Association
EU	European Union
EUIA	European Union International Affairs Conference
EUR	Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam
EUXGLOB	Centre for the Study of the European Union's External Relations and Global Order
FIIA	Finnish Institute of International Affairs
IoT	Internet of Things
IP	Intellectual Property
IPSA	International Political Science Association
ISR	International Studies Review
LUISS	Libera Università Internazionale degli Studi Sociali Guido Carli
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Non-governmental organization
Quad	Quadrilateral Security Dialogue
REAIM	Summit on Responsible Artificial Intelligence in the Military Domain
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organisation
SNA	Social Network Analysis
STEP	Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform
S&T	Science and technology
UM	Maastricht University
UN	United Nations
US	United States
US-EU TTC	US-EU Trade and Technology Council
WTO	World Trade Organization





WP	Work Package
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Executive Summary

Deliverable 4.2. provides an overview employing the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) to identify and analyse various advocacy coalitions contributing to global strategic technology policy with a specific focus on the EU, the US and China. The research detailed in this report is linked to *Task 4.2 Analysis of Policy subsystems*, which entails the identification of advocacy coalitions in these same main actors. This deliverable focuses on the broader strategic narratives and global events that shape advocacy coalitions within the EU, including examples from regulation of contentious technologies, such as biometric identification systems; the decision-making dynamics affecting strategic technologies in US foreign policy; and China's strategic technology policy and subsystems with special attention paid on genome-editing. The results show divergence within both the EU and the US on how to approach strategic technologies. Whereas the EU's conceptual framings are becoming more securitized and more congruent in some domains, like digital technologies, in the US power is shifting to those propagating isolationist but at the same time innovation-based policies. China is by and large dominated by the choices of the central government while allowing for some bottom-up influence. The Trump-Xi-Putin factors, rapid technological progress and securitization of technologies will nevertheless make it difficult to advance in multilateral governance of strategic technologies in the near future.

1. Introduction

The global competition over technology is a dynamic and multifaceted arena where states and businesses vie for supremacy in innovation, economic power, and geopolitical influence. This contest is driven by rapid advancements in fields such as artificial intelligence, biotechnology, cybersecurity, and digital infrastructure. Countries like the United States and China are at the forefront whereas for the EU and its member states the discussion rather focuses on technological sovereignty or strategic autonomy. Each actor is striving to lead in technological development and the setting of global standards.

At the heart of this competition is the quest for technological dominance, which can significantly impact national security, economic growth, and societal progress. Nations are investing heavily in research and development, fostering innovation ecosystems, and implementing strategic policies to gain an edge. This race is not just about technological prowess but also about shaping the future of global governance, ethical standards, and international cooperation. These fundamentals form the very basis of the REMIT project.

Work Package (WP) 4 and its tasks are integral for analysing how to address great-power competition in technology governance. In the first phase of WP4 research, the various geopolitical stances of the EU, US and China were defined. This allows researchers to now delve into competing advocacy coalitions within these powers, and how these coalitions affect strategic technology policies, in general, and specific technologies, in particular.

In this second year, the researchers have—along the lines of Task 4.2.—concentrated on utilizing and developing the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) to chart coalitions, pinpoint their members, as well as understand their belief systems, policy positions, and the strategies they use to promote policy preferences. The aim of this Deliverable is to introduce the coalitions, which will ultimately serve as a foundation for research examining how multilateral governance can be enhanced. As they progress with future tasks, WP researchers will remain vigilant to any significant shifts in the strategies of major powers and developments in international forums. One such significant factor is the shift from the Biden to the Trump 2.0 administration in the United States.

This deliverable is structured through six sections. Section two explains the ACF in more detail and discusses its specific parameters and how it is contextualized for research forming Deliverable 4.2. Section three explains the pertinent activities, and the main findings are presented and discussed in Section four, where each of the three powers in focus in the REMIT project—the European Union, the United States and China—is examined in terms of the advocacy coalitions affecting technology governance. The deliverable concludes with findings brought together with an eye towards policy recommendations and a summary of the next steps.



2. The ACF and Its Contextualization to the REMIT Setting

Deliverable 4.2. provides an overview employing the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) to identify and analyse various advocacy coalitions contributing to global strategic technology policy with a specific focus on the EU, the US and China, in addition to which the applicability of ACF to the case of China will be discussed. As summarized in *REMIT's Methodological Handbook*, the ACF's main conceptual building blocks comprise advocacy coalitions, policy subsystems and policy change.¹ Policy subsystems pertain to networks comprising actors, organizations, and institutions involved in a specific policy domain (that can be topical or geographical). Advocacy coalitions are groups of actors sharing common beliefs, values, and interests regarding a particular policy issue. Policy change refers to processes of policymaking and implementation, including the strategies used by advocacy coalitions to influence policy outcomes.

The ACF has many conceptual, methodological and analytical benefits and is a conceptually mature yet continually improving framework for policy process analysis. It is a methodological tool that can sharply identify pertinent factors influencing change in key areas of strategic technology policy, assisting REMIT researchers to understand, analyse and predict policy outcomes. Existing ACF literature has largely focused on policy scenarios with Western democracies as a starting point, with methodologies usually being executed through four clearly defined steps:

1. Identify the policy subsystem;
2. Identify the actors and organizations in the policy subsystem;
3. Identify the advocacy coalitions;
4. Analyse the resources and strategies of the advocacy coalitions.

Although the ACF was originally pioneered in public policy research by Paul A. Sabatier and Hank C. Jenkins-Smith (1993),² this methodological outline has guided REMIT researchers when undertaking analysis for Deliverable 4.2. In line with the evolution of the ACF through a broad application to multiple policy scenarios, including foreign, security and defence policy, REMIT researchers have sought to examine the wider relevance of the ACF to explain policy change also beyond the nation-state for multi-level governance (EU) and in authoritarian contexts (China). In Deliverable 4.2., REMIT researchers both applied and adapted ACFs to scenarios. These involved, among others:

- the broader strategic narratives and global events that shape advocacy coalitions within the EU; with examples from regulation of contentious technologies, such as biometric identification systems.
- the decision-making dynamics affecting strategic technologies in US foreign policy.
- China's strategic technology policy and subsystems.

The ACF offers a dynamic and adaptive conceptual outlook for examining important policymaking influences in different social and political contexts. In terms of conceptual, methodological and analytical dimensions, the ACF has at least seven advantages for policy researchers. First, it can explain change or stagnation in policy processes. Second, it supports many types of data and analyses. Third, it can be adapted for a stronger focus on either theoretical or empirical ideas. Fourth, it supports both the development and/or the testing of new hypotheses. Fifth, it supports comparative analysis between different policy subsystems. Sixth, the ACF can also provide practically orientated analysis, which increases policymaking relevance. Finally, it helps researchers to analyse, understand and predict policy outcomes by identifying plausible factors influencing policy change. The ACF has several specific benefits for REMIT's main subjects of analysis. In strategic technology policy, it can be a sharp methodological tool identifying the most influential stakeholders shaping this complex field, helping researchers to navigate a myriad of governmental, non-governmental (NGO) and commercial organizations. Beyond

¹ See Haar and Yang 2023.

² Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993.



governments and prominent NGOs, influential advocacy coalitions can also comprise industry associations and/or academic, legal and technology experts.

The ACF can also pinpoint the formation, development and policy advocacy of actors that are central to creating practices, rules and norms. Eventually these may provide foundations for multilateral cooperation. The ACF emphasizes interactions and intersections within policy subsystems between actors that often lead on multilateral norm creation, including regulatory agencies, international institutions, and interest groups. As multiple advocacy coalitions compete to convert policy-related beliefs into public policy, the ACF expects policy actors to coordinate behaviour when coalitions are formed. The ACF enables assessment of each advocacy coalition's capacity to mobilize resources, frame policy issues, engage in policy networks, and employ persuasive strategies to influence policy outcomes.

Despite the highlighted benefits emerging from ACF applications to strategic technology policies in Deliverable 4.2., some important criticisms of the framework were also revealed through the analysis carried out for the deliverable. The ACF was mostly focused on domestic and pluralist public policy in Western democracies in previous literature. However, when contemplating technology as a matter of global security and governance, sovereign states are most often the main policy actors. It therefore becomes relevant to look beyond the ACF's emphasis on shared beliefs to the states in the system that are seeking to create coalitions, where other underlying rationales for this behaviour are likely to be in play. Integrating this conceptual adjustment can improve the ACF as a tool to analyse global security and governance scenarios, such as cooperation to regulate military AI or how to deal with facial recognition techniques. Overall, the research pointed to the need to pay more attention to how advocacy coalitions co-exist in areas of policymaking that involve strong considerations of national interests and/or high levels of secrecy. This will also lend clarity to other ACF components, including the typology of policy actors, the resilience of belief systems, and a coalition's openness to policy learning and policy change.

Further, the ACF conceptualizes the belief system as the primary source of presuppositions through which actors filter information, interpret the world, and make decisions.³ However, for subsystems in global security and governance, national interests are a crucial component in the belief system. Thus far, the central tenets of the ACF have understandably neglected this factor. With a domestic public policy focus, the ACF typically examines coalitions within single countries, where national interests are considered secondary to ideologies, beliefs, and party politics. Integrating national interests will therefore conceptually strengthen the ACF when applied in global security and governance contexts.

The ACF broadly examines the dynamics within advocacy coalitions, viewing developments outside these coalitions as "external shocks" that can either positively or negatively influence their direction. However, within the global military AI governance subsystem, for instance, factors like geopolitical alignments and competition affecting the behaviour of involved actors are not mere "shocks" but integral components of an environment where advocacy coalitions emerge and develop. Therefore, these contextual elements may need to be independently considered.

Overall, adapting the ACF to explain the formulation and outcomes of strategic technology in the EU, US and China serves to update the ACF in terms of conceptual application, while reaffirming it as an important approach helping to create new insights within what has become an existential area of international politics. Nevertheless, analysis undertaken for Deliverable 4.2. also indicated some flaws, blind spots and oversights in the ACF after it was adapted to examine global security and governance case studies in detail. This criticism creates scope to revise and rework the ACF so that it obtains greater conceptual, methodological and analytical relevance and rigor to support future REMIT deliverables as well as the wider debates in global governance and security policy.

3. Description of Work

While the first year of WP4 research focused on exploring the geopolitical stances of the EU, US and China, the second year builds on the findings with the purpose of applying the ACF to the same powers.

³ Nohrstedt et al. 2023.



Ultimately, the aim is to identify different coalitions, their policy preferences and strategies to achieve them. This ranges from broader strategies of technology governance to specific coalitions in respect to particular technologies. In all these cases, geopolitical competition as presented in Deliverable 4.1 remains valid and pertinent.

In their work, WP4 researchers have employed the ACF in identifying and analysing coalitions as reported in the previous section, but also other methods have been used. Besides the ACF, a constructivist framework, with a focus on both norm theory and strategic narrative analysis has been adopted. Such an approach builds on qualitative and interpretive methods to investigate governance approaches in emerging digital technologies. Similarly to the ACF, constructivism provides the basis for understanding how ideational factors - such as beliefs, identities, norms and narratives - shape the behaviour and interactions of international actors.⁴ Also, interviews have been conducted with European experts and policymakers to complement the analyses.

Besides academic articles and policy-oriented papers produced by WP4 researchers,⁵ the bulk of the work is composed of two special issues that REMIT researchers in WP4 started to work on already in the first project year: ***The Geopolitics of Strategic Technology Governance*** for the journal *Geopolitics* and the forum section for International Studies Review (ISR) called ***The Advocacy Coalition Framework: A New Approach for Understanding Global Governance of Technology***. The first special issue is co-edited by REMIT researchers Thomas Christiansen (LUISS), Ville Sinkkonen (FIIA) and Sophie Vanhoonacker (UM), and the second SI is co-edited by Catherine Yuk-ping Lo (UM), Michal Onderco (EUR), and Carolina Polito (LUISS). While the former is still a work in progress, the latter was submitted to the forum section of the ISR and was rejected. The authors re-submitted to the journal *Politics* and in February 2025 received the news that the proposal was accepted to undergo the review process.

The contributions to the *Geopolitics* special issue approach the study of the geopolitics of strategic technology governance from the constructivist perspective and/or the ACF. This implies a focus on the processes that inform the construction of geopolitical rivalries and alliances, on the linkages that are being established between political power, regulatory activity and technological progress, on the perceptions that actors develop on questions such as threats or status through inter-state and transnational relations, and the manner in which identities and interests are constructed in and through the (geo)political competition and cooperation in strategic technologies.

Throughout the second year, townhall events, dashboards and opinion pieces have been part of the work to disseminate and test preliminary research findings.⁶ It is noticeable that the work of the second year, especially with the special issues, is a work in progress yet to be published. The forthcoming publications also provide insights into other key actors like Russia or Brazil. Moreover, the findings contribute to the research to be done in the third year. The work also entailed adapting ongoing research to features of great power competition, which at times moves at a fast pace.

4. Advocacy Coalitions in the EU, US and China

The work undertaken by WP4 has zoomed in on applying the ACF to the EU, the US and China with the aim of providing an overview of advocacy coalitions within these three key players in the field of

⁴ Wendt 1999; Hopf 2000.

⁵ For example: Haar 2024.

Passalacqua and Polito 2024; Caloianu 2023; Creutz 2024.

⁶ For example: Pleasure, Art & Science Festival (PAS), Maastricht University in Sept 2024; EISA Pan-European Conference on International Relations (PEC), 27-31 August 2024; the 12th Biennial Conference of the ECPR Standing Group on the European Union; Helsinki Security Forum 28 Sept 2024. See also Erasmus University Rotterdam Hosts REMIT Event on AI in Warfare, April 17, 2024, <https://www.remit-research.eu/events/publicevent/erasmus-university-rotterdam-hosts-remit-event-on-ai-in-warfare/>, as well as dashboards by EUR on “European Union and Military AI” and by UM on “Chinese Vaccine Diplomacy”.



technology governance more broadly or in relation to specific technological applications in four policy areas (digital, health bio, security and defence, and financial). The emphasis placed on these technologies has varied across the different actors, yet the work of researchers in Task 4.2. will ultimately pave way for analysing what barriers and opportunities there are for coalition-building across national boundaries in accordance with Task 4.3. and the broader goal of providing policy recommendations. It is also noteworthy how the exploration of advocacy coalitions and governance aspirations within these three powers is done in connection to the other two powers. Therefore, a salient feature of the advocacy coalitions are their policy stances towards the other powers.

4.1. The EU, Technology Governance and Advocacy Coalitions

The EU is forced to navigate in an increasingly geopoliticised international landscape, which challenges its traditional normative power role, threatens its security architecture and forces the Union to consider and develop its role as a geopolitical actor. The new international order in formation is undergirded by rising multipolarity, especially visible in the Eastern and Northernmost parts of the Union, that is, the Black and Baltic Sea regions.⁷ Russia's aggression, the sabotage of crucial data connectivity infrastructure and the prevalence of disinformation campaigns are visible examples of this shift. REMIT researcher Valentin Naumescu (BBU) has called the Black Sea Region "a barometer of the new international order" that the EU should monitor especially closely.⁸

At the same time, the development of technology is speeding up with, for example, Chinese DeepSeek, reports about AI replicating itself, and a pro-cryptocurrency administration taking power in the United States. The potentially waning alliance with the US is a risk for the Union as it seeks to govern strategic and disruptive technologies, not to mention Donald Trump's transactionalist approach to international relations and his marked dislike of the EU as a negotiation partner in its own right. The first weeks of Trump's administration in 2025 have indeed caused headache in Brussels, with predictions of "disruption and chaos to achieve revolutionary rather than evolutionary change"⁹ being visible. The EU sits uncomfortably between its engagement with multilateral forums and geopolitical competition.¹⁰ The so-called Brussels effect will certainly be facing headwinds from the United States, which will likely embark on a general deregulatory path on technologies. The prominent role of the so-called "tech oligarchs"—that is Elon Musk and other tech owners like Jeff Bezos and Mark Zuckerberg—as well as the attempts by the administration to link up deregulation to US security assurances and the extent of economic retribution in the form of tariffs may drive the uptake of more innovation-oriented policy also in Europe. What appears clear is that the United States, considering views held in both the executive and legislative branches, will tilt in favour of innovation and more room for manoeuvre when it comes to technology companies, rather than working together with other countries on regulating technologies. The EU must come to terms with this fact.

4.1.1. Strategic convergence?

Several REMIT researchers are in the process of analysing, or have analysed, broader strategic descriptions and their interplay guiding the EU's approach to technology governance, and especially its relations to the outside world, including China and the United States. Strategic autonomy is the conceptual tool of choice that many in the EU and the research community have clung to describe the imperative of strengthening Europe's agency in the accelerating geopolitical competition or in times of crisis.

Recent developments in EU strategic autonomy could be conceptualized through four different "waves."¹¹ The first came as CSDP's crisis management focus evolved into the 2000s; the second with debate on EU capacity to react to military conflicts in its neighbourhood in Libya, Syria and Ukraine in the 2010s. The third wave entailed increasing awareness of Europe's defence dependencies on US

⁷ Naumescu 2024; McNamara 2024.

⁸ Naumescu 2024.

⁹ Salonijs-Pasternak and Sinkkonen 2025, p. 2.

¹⁰ Christiansen et al., unpubl. manuscript.

¹¹ Helwig and Sinkkonen 2022, pp. 3-4.



support for NATO, which was highlighted by the acrimony during Donald Trump's first stint in the White House. It also had an economic component: the Trump term exhibited the US' willingness to use tariffs and secondary sanctions to force Europe's hand, while Europe also became more attuned to China's geoeconomic power plays through, for instance, the sprawling Belt and Road Initiative. The fourth wave, initiated by the Covid-19 pandemic brought questions of welfare, consumer protection, human rights, climate questions and data privacy centre stage, a movement captured by the term "open strategic autonomy".¹² Therefore, as the Covid crisis has dissipated, strategic technologies, whether digital, AI, 5G/6G, health and bio or quantum computing, began to assume a larger-than-before role in the EU's strategic autonomy debate. Such strategic technologies have been predicted as existential in the evolution of society and the future of geopolitics. Transposing strategic autonomy into the sphere of technology indicates, among other things, de-risking or diversifying critical supply chains, but also increasingly investing in European industry and innovation.¹³

On-going REMIT research by Thomas Christiansen, Flavia Lucenti and Sophie Vanhoonacker, argues that the EU has been buffeted by a multiplicity of challenges in the tech space, from China acquiring European companies relevant to the global tech competition to US tariffs under Trump and state subsidies for American companies during the Biden era.¹⁴ Economic security measures have thus been central in the EU's pursuit of strategic autonomy in the sphere of strategic technologies. At the Union level, this has included investment screening, export controls and even public procurement. Member states have altered policies on state aid to industries, while the Union has adopted the Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform (STEP), key legislation like the Chips, Digital Markets (DMA) and Digital Services (DSA) and AI Acts. The Commission also recognizes four "high risk" technology areas (AI, semiconductors, quantum and biotech), while the AI Act adopted a risks-based approach to regulating that technology, which is supposed to strike a balance between protection and innovation. The Union, and its member states have therefore moved after some initial resistance and fierce discussions from espousing a borderline naïve understanding of openness (in terms of trade and markets) to one focused on securing the Union's single market and protecting EU citizens from the most negative reverberations of the adoption of key technologies.

Working with Céleste Bonnamy, REMIT researchers Thomas Christiansen, Flavia Lucenti, Ville Sinkkonen and Sophie Vanhoonacker are currently researching the evolution of the EU's strategic narratives on digital connectivity and digital sovereignty.¹⁵ The two narratives emphasized different logics at their inception, with the former focused on benefits of globalization and free trade and the latter linked to strategic autonomy and grounded on the EU's ability to act independently in the world in defence of EU markets and values. However, they have converged during the first von der Leyen Commission. Both narratives have come to emphasize security alongside of economic and normative considerations in reaction to "external shocks" in ACF parlance.

With the connectivity narrative, this change happens gradually with the realization of China's growing assertiveness and the global pandemic, ultimately captured in the EU's China Strategy (2019) and the inception of the EU Global Gateway (2021), which constitutes the Union's response to the Chinese Belt and Road initiative¹⁶, and, more specifically, the Digital Silk Road.¹⁷ The Global Gateway, and subsequent connectivity and digital partnerships with like-minded countries like Japan and South Korea, as well as key partners like India and ASEAN, are a thinly-veiled response to fears regarding China's ability to create third-country dependencies, challenge European security, and diffuse authoritarian practices—a realization that has been driven home further by Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. There is thus convergence between the Commission, the EEAS and the member states, specifically on the imperative of achieving trusted, sustainable and *secure* connections in the digital domain through

¹² Ibid.; see also Juncos and Vanhoonacker 2024.

¹³ Adler Nissen and Eggeling 2024.

¹⁴ Christiansen, Lucenti and Vanhoonacker, unpublished manuscript.

¹⁵ Bonnamy et al., unpublished manuscript.

¹⁶ Karjalainen 2022; Karjalainen 2023.

¹⁷ Okano-Heijmans 2024.



international partnerships—even if member states can be protective of their own development and connectivity brands.¹⁸

The digital sovereignty discourse—essentially strategic autonomy in the digital domain—came in vogue because of various factors, including the Edward Snowden revelations, the realization that the EU was being squeezed by US tech giants, remained dependent on semiconductors made in Asia, and China’s challenge became more concrete through the BRI. This discursive shift was spearheaded by Germany during its Council presidency in 2020,¹⁹ and initially referred to protecting European markets and values, as captured on the policy document level by, for instance, Shaping Europe’s Digital Future communication and through the inception of concrete projects, like GAIA-X. The final turning point has been Russia’s war of aggression in Ukraine. Since then, the EU has linked digital sovereignty explicitly to security, including in the 2022 Versailles Declaration, various key speeches, and in the Digital Compass. This goes alongside substantial regulatory activity to protect European consumers, the single market and European values via, inter alia, the DMA and DSA and the AI Act.

The studies, therefore, point to increased EU-level convergence on the level of narrative when it comes to the macro-level centrality of strategic technologies for European security. This is increasingly framed not just in the economic sphere or in the protection of European citizens’ privacy, but more holistically in terms of societal resilience as well as security and defence.

4.1.2. Tensions in multi-level governance and missing agency

The EU poses a special case in terms of analysing advocacy coalitions by virtue of its *sui generis* or multi-level governance environment. The ACF has featured as a prominent theory in exploring EU policies,²⁰ but challenges such as the interaction between private and public actors at varying levels next to the formal institutions remain. The ACF can be seen as a supplement to other methods of analysing EU policy changes, and especially the EU’s energy and pharmaceutical policies have been under investigation previously.²¹

Research by REMIT researcher Carolina Polito (LUISS) takes the making of the EU AI Act as a case study by analysing how the Act was formulated in response to facial recognition techniques as a disruptive technology. Her findings demonstrate that policy changes in EU’s technology governance are shaped by the complex interplay between different policy coalitions and the three EU legislative bodies—the Commission, the Council, and the Parliament. Each of these institutions plays a distinct role, influenced by their regulative and constitutive norms when it comes to shaping the final policy outcomes on contentious issues like facial recognition technology.²² The legislative process highlights the saliency of societal concerns, particularly those raised by a *maximalist* coalition, which advocated for a strong regulatory stance, including a potential full ban on certain uses of the technology. These concerns were amplified by a series of external shocks, specifically the swift expansion of the facial recognition technology market, the debate in the US over use of facial recognition in the wake of the Black Lives Matter protests and the reverberations of China using this technology to quell democracy protests in Hong Kong. These events influenced the EU’s perception of the societal risks posed by the technology, leading to initial proposals that reflected a more cautious and restrictive approach.

However, the final legislative text differs significantly from the original proposal of the European Commission, as it includes several key exceptions to the envisioned full ban. These deviations can be attributed to the lobbying efforts of the security industry, which represents *the minimalist coalition* advocating for a less restrictive framework. This coalition successfully leveraged the internal dynamics of the EU Council, where Member States are represented, to influence the legislative process in their favour. They capitalized on a notable policy disjuncture between the European Council and the European Parliament, which held differing views on the appropriate regulatory framework for facial recognition.

¹⁸ Cf. Soler i Lecha 2025.

¹⁹ Lambach and Oppenmann 2022.

²⁰ Rozbycka 2013.

²¹ Brooks 2018; von Malmberg 2023.

²² Polito, unpubl. manuscript.



This strategic manoeuvring allowed the minimalist coalition to secure a more favourable outcome that aligned with their interests, emphasizing the importance of security and technological development over blanket restrictions.

The divergence between the European Council and the European Parliament reflects broader tensions within the EU's governance framework, as the institutions operate under distinct norms and priorities. The resulting fragmentation suggests that the EU's approach to regulating emerging technologies is not as unified as might be expected, even at the highest levels of decision-making. This observation raises important questions about the future of EU technology governance. To what extent will such fragmentation become the norm in regulating disruptive technologies that have far-reaching societal and multilateral implications?

Beyond such divergence between EU institutions, there are also domains in which the EU is altogether missing as an actor in its own right. One such field is military AI—in stark contrast to the civilian use of AI and the concomitant EU AI Act. REMIT researchers Mahmoud Javadi, Michal Onderco and Sophie Vanhoonacker seek to explain the EU's almost total absence from the debate on military AI. Based on the analysis of the governance preferences on military AI of four EU member state—Austria, France, Germany, and the Netherlands—and key international forums, two main insights have emerged. Firstly, the analysis indicates that the preferences of key EU member states oscillate between state-centric multilateral and transnational forums, and many of them would prefer looser forms of cooperation. These preferences, however, rule out pluricentrism focused on more stringent forms of cooperation, which is what the EU has thus far preferred. The forum that the EU offers in terms of dealing with AI is far removed from the preferences of the four countries in question. Novel fora such as REAIM and the Political Declaration are more attractive. In contrast to an existing forum like the UN, they can adapt quickly and in addition, they offer more loose forms of cooperation like a dialogue or code of conduct.

A second insight is that when trying to understand the absence of the EU as a player in the field of military AI, an explanation merely based on its limited competencies in the security domain does not suffice. In the past, we have seen several instances where policy entrepreneurs at both the EU and member state levels have leveraged significant challenges as opportunities to establish new competencies or develop novel policies and instruments. A pertinent example is the successful establishment of the European Defence Fund (EDF) in 2020, which finances joint European research and co-finances the collaborative development of military capabilities. Given the formidable challenges posed by military AI, its dual-use nature, and the EU's pioneering role in AI regulation, one might expect EU member states to seize this moment to advocate a more active EU role in this burgeoning field. However, this has not materialized. The research points to two pertinent reasons: divergence between the preferences of the Union and its member states on how to proceed with respect to the bindingness of military AI regulation as well as the existence of alternative fora that member states can opt for to pursue their policy preferences.

Therefore, by building on the forum-shopping literature, this research has shown that the existence of several alternatives for governing military AI is an additional interesting piece in addressing this 'absent EU' puzzle. The Union might not, even in instances where potentially existential questions are at play, be the preferred forum for Union members.

The on-going research on the EU by REMIT leads to three tentative conclusions. First, there is a clear realization in the EU institutions and member states that strategic technologies are a security imperative for the Union, which has implications for how it develops relationships with other actors—especially the United States and China—in the future, also with respect to governance solutions. Here convergence on a strategic narrative emphasizing security and societal resilience with respect to both connectivity and digital sovereignty is an apt example. However, as the research on facial recognition technologies bears out, this macro-level narrative convergence does not mean that tensions between institutions in their reading on how to deal with specific governance problems has dissipated. Moreover, as the military AI case illustrates, the member states may opt for alternative fora even when innovative approaches at the EU level might be available that deal with the challenges of strategic technologies, then, is not only a matter of capabilities but also an act of will.



4.2. The US, Technology Governance and Advocacy Coalitions

In the United States, foreign policy debates unfold amongst a collection of actors encompassing elected officials and political appointees, the different government agencies along with think tanks, journalists and other policy influencers. These expert circles are fertile ground for the birth of competing advocacy coalitions, creating opportunities for employing the ACF in various policy domains. The research undertaken by Roberta Haar (UM) and Ville Sinkkonen (FIIA) explored the kinds of advocacy coalitions that formed in recent years in the US with respect to multilateral engagement, focusing specifically on the US-China relationship and the role of strategic technologies therein. Moreover, the research zoomed in on how the coalitions impacted the thinking of the Biden administration and their impact in policy implementation, the analysis also allowed for future-oriented prognoses regarding the new Trump administration.²³

The US' engagement with institutions of global governance has traditionally ebbed and flowed between more unilaterally and multilaterally oriented periods.²⁴ Liberal internationalists especially have stressed the role that multilateral institutions have played not only in entrenching American power into the structures of international order, but also in legitimising US leadership by making its power more bearable for others.²⁵ Moreover, the fact that post-Second World War international institutions came to possess liberal undertones was a function of the value base of the leading state. As John Ruggie famously put: “it was less the fact of American *hegemony* that accounts for the explosion of multilateral arrangements than it was the fact of *American* hegemony”.²⁶ Therefore, multilateralism has not only served US interests but also diffused American (and liberal and Western) values into the international arena. However, recent administrations have increasingly veered towards the use of less formalised, minilateral institutions and coalitions of the willing to pursue US interests, opting for enhancing the US' room for manoeuvre in the process.²⁷ In this sense, it could be argued that the US approach to multilateralism – while always marked by tension – has begun to diverge further from that held by the EU, for which multilateralism is central to its entire *raison d'être*, written into the treaties and underwriting the logic of cooperation between the member states.²⁸ By implication, the EU is less inclined than the US to deal with multilateral institutions in an instrumental manner, as mere means to an end.

Fluctuations in the US approach to international institutions cannot be dissociated from the various changes – external events in ACF parlance – that have unfolded in the international system and order in the past decades. On a macro level, the power transition from US-centric unipolarity to an era of multipolarity has evidently been underway for the better part of the 2000s²⁹, while the liberal rules-based order, largely a US- or West-centric creation³⁰, has had to deal with the ascent of rising powers (especially China, but also India, Brazil, South Africa to name a few) as well as challengers (Russia, Iran and North Korea, for example). These powers have benefited from inclusion in its core institutions, like the WTO, but have also set up alternative institutions, whether the BRICS, the AIIB or the SCO, to drive their preferred agendas³¹.

Concurrently, the idea that China's rise to global prominence could be managed through its inclusion in core institutions of the liberal order has become discredited, especially in Washington D.C. but also to an increasing extent in Europe³². Fears regarding China's increasing technological prowess were raised in the US already in the early 2000s³³, and increased in the wake of the 2007/8 financial crisis when

²³ Haar and Sinkkonen, unpubl. manuscript.

²⁴ Cronin 2001; Daalder and Lindsay 2003.

²⁵ Ikenberry 2001; Nye 2017.

²⁶ Ruggie 1992, 568, emphasis added.

²⁷ Patrick 2023.

²⁸ Lai 2008.

²⁹ Nye 2011.

³⁰ Acharya 2018; Cooley and Nexon 2020; Ikenberry 2012; Mukherjee 2022.

³¹ Ikenberry 2018; Johnston 2019; Cooley and Nexon 2020.

³² cf. Zoellick 2005; Campbell and Ratner 2018; Friedberg 2022; Nye 2024; Wright 2017.

³³ United States General Accounting Office 2002.



China became the US' main creditor. Beijing interpreted the crash as evidence that the Western capitalist system was failing³⁴, which likely played a role in China's more assertive foreign policy in its near abroad, as well as its unwillingness to heed American warnings regarding IP theft or skirting of international trade norms.

At the same time, the rules-based order has not shielded Western societies from the downsides of globalization.³⁵ In the US body politic, this has led to decreased support for an internationally engaged foreign policy and contributed to deepening political polarisation and an anti-elite backlash.³⁶

By the time the Trump administration entered the White House in 2017, it was ideally placed to undertake a shift in US China policy, and, relatedly, the US' approach towards multilateralism. Covid-19 brought home the realisation that China could not be trusted and that global supply chains of critical technologies – including digital and bio – could be weaponised for geostrategic and geoeconomic gain. In fact, technological progress has rejiggered what it means to be a leading power, placing increased focus on enablers like semiconductors or the possession of rare earths.

Keeping in mind the ACF, the policy subsystem under scrutiny by Haar and Sinkkonen was therefore US foreign policy regarding multilateralism and China, particularly with respect to strategic technologies. The period for analysis was the four years of the Biden era. Strategic technologies—as understood here—included a broad collection encompassing 5G/6G, civilian AI, military AI, biotechnology, blockchain, cloud computing, cyber technologies, the Internet of Things (IoT), Quantum, and robotics. The selection of technologies was inductive, arrived at during the coding process of the documents selected for analysis.

4.2.1. Multilateralists, new isolationists and flexilateralists during the Biden administration

Upon assuming office in January 2021, President Biden pledged to restore multilateralism and re-engage with the international community. Yet, when it came to strategic technologies and trade relations with China, Biden upheld and refined the hardline stance established by the Trump administration. This apparent duality—espousing multilateralism while implementing containment-like policies—reflects the complex interplay of competing advocacy coalitions in the US foreign policy landscape.

Central to the analysis was the identification of three separate advocacy coalitions influencing US policy on strategic technology governance: the multilateralists, the new isolationists, and the flexilateralists. These coalitions possess distinctive deep core, near core and policy beliefs that render them distinctive groupings, although there are relevant overlaps.

The multilateralists, whose deep core beliefs are largely in line with those of traditional liberal internationalists: they believe it is in the US' interests (and central to the US' identity) to defend the liberal international order and to strive for positive-sum cooperation with others, while arguing that fostering interconnected global trade and technological partnerships reduces conflict and promotes peaceful dispute resolution.³⁷ In their near core beliefs, multilateralists regard the narrative construction of the US-China relations in terms of competition as oversimplified and dangerous, leading to misinformed policy decisions that crowds out cooperation on key areas – like clean tech – and leaves everyone worse off.³⁸ In addition, in their secondary beliefs, multilateralists are critical of industrial policy aimed at subsidising large multinationals, export and investment controls and tariffs that have been designed to “decouple” or “derisk” from China, instead advocating intergovernmental dialogue and public investments in research and education.³⁹

³⁴ Haar 2020.

³⁵ Ikenberry 2018; Schweller 2018.

³⁶ Kupchan 2020; Smeltz and Kafura 2024; Dueck 2020; Jackson 2022.

³⁷ Posen 2023.

³⁸ Bateman 2022; Chen Weiss 2022; Medeiros 2021.

³⁹ Thornton 2021.



By contrast, the new isolationist coalition’s deep core beliefs largely align with Trump’s “America First” inclinations, prioritizing US sovereignty and freedom of action in the international arena. They are sceptical of international institutions and alliance commitments, and view external diffusions into the country, whether in the form of people or goods, in a negative light. Moreover, new isolationists regard great-power competition—both as a description of the current state of affairs and as a policy prescription—as the driving imperative in the international arena.⁴⁰ When it comes to their near core beliefs, they regard China and its party state as the greatest threat to the United States⁴¹, while some want to prioritise Asia over other theatres of international competition⁴², and most advocate for a hard decoupling from China to mitigate dependency on Chinese supply chains and leverage strategic technologies for geopolitical competition.⁴³ For secondary beliefs, this means advocating for tariffs, restrictions on in- and out-bound investment, curbs on transfer of technology, investment screening, bans on platforms and hardware, as well as strategic acquisitions of companies deemed crucial for national security.

Flexilateralists, in turn, straddle the space between multilateralists and new isolationists. At their core, flexilateralists buy the idea of great-power competition, also acknowledging the influence and some merits of new isolationist ideas, specifically when it comes to putting America’s own house in order and placing some restrictions on free trade. However, they do not entirely shun international cooperation – even with China—especially when it comes to solving intractable global challenges like the climate crisis or pandemics.⁴⁴ Flexilateralists believe that engagement with China has failed to bring about a constructive US-China relationship, allowing China to take advantage of its inclusion in the institutions of the liberal international order instead.⁴⁵ Unlike new isolationists, in their near core beliefs, flexilateralists embrace the centrality of alliances and partnerships in meeting China’s challenge but are wary of the trade component of the international order, pushing for trade that delivers for the American middle class.⁴⁶ This entails selective decoupling from China. In their secondary beliefs, therefore, flexilateralists want to strengthen US alliances in the Indo-Pacific, erect selected barriers to curb China’s access to critical technologies, subsidise US production of critical technologies – including Chips – and “friend shore” manufacturing, and align policies with allies through different fora like the Quad and the US-EU TTC.⁴⁷

With key protagonists positioned within pivotal institutions such as the National Security Council and the Department of State, the Biden administration’s ‘blunting’ strategy against China exemplifies the influence of the flexilateralists. The objective was not full-scale decoupling but “de-risking” —borrowing a term preferred by EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen – through a small yard/high fence approach.⁴⁸ Key measures supported and implemented by the Biden administration included export controls on advanced US technologies, restrictions on Chinese telecommunications giants like Huawei, and efforts to curtail China’s access to key components from allied nations. These policies were coupled with significant domestic investments in innovation and strategic technologies to enhance US competitiveness. While these actions aligned with the flexilateralists’ goals, they also resonated with new isolationist perspectives, highlighting the coalitional overlap and the complex dynamics shaping US foreign policy. However, the flexilateralists’ pragmatic approach extended beyond economic policies to encompass alliances with likeminded states aimed at countering China’s growing influence. New multilateral coalitions, such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) and the AUKUS partnership, reflected Biden’s internationalist instincts while serving narrower national security objectives. The US-EU TTC, in turn, provided a forum for coordination with European allies on strategic technologies. These initiatives illustrate the flexilateralists’ capacity to adapt multilateral frameworks to serve US strategic interests, even at the expense of traditional values like inclusivity and representativeness.

⁴⁰ Colby and Skylar Masto 2022; Schweller 2018.

⁴¹ Heritage Foundation n.d.; Kroenig 2020; Schadow 2023.

⁴² Colby and Velez-Green 2023.

⁴³ Lighthizer 2023.

⁴⁴ Ahmed et al. 2020; Lissner and Rapp-Hooper 2020; Wright 2021.

⁴⁵ Campbell and Ratner 2018.

⁴⁶ Sullivan 2021.

⁴⁷ Sullivan 2023; Blinken 2022.

⁴⁸ Sullivan 2023; Yellen 2023.



4.2.2. From flexilateralists to new isolationists under Trump 2.0

The ascendance of the new isolationists following the 2024 presidential election signals a potential shift in US foreign policy. Trump's victory underscored the alignment of isolationist arguments with a significant segment of the American electorate, propelling a more comprehensive disengagement from China. This transition could exacerbate tensions, with China perceiving these moves as economic containment and technological isolationism. The resulting fragmentation of the global economy may lead to distinct technological spheres of influence, further polarizing the international order. The new isolationists' unilateral approach could also undermine existing governance structures for global challenges, creating regulatory vacuums that China might exploit. Non-aligned nations in the Global South may gravitate toward Beijing's orbit, challenging US efforts to maintain its leadership in technology norms and trade rules. The multilateralists caution against such fragmentation, emphasizing the risks of escalating great-power rivalry and the loss of cooperative mechanisms essential for addressing transnational issues.

While the espousal of flexilateralism offered a pragmatic pathway during the Biden administration, it also facilitated the eventual rise of isolationist policies. By integrating elements of new isolationist thinking, the flexilateralists inadvertently legitimized more hardline positions, setting the stage for a policy environment increasingly shaped by unilateralism, mercantilism and isolationism. This trajectory underscores the importance of understanding the interplay between advocacy coalitions and their influence on US positions on strategic technology governance.

In conclusion, the research findings highlight the dominant role of flexilateralism in navigating the complexities of US-China relations and multilateral engagement during the Biden administration. By balancing selective decoupling with cooperative frameworks, the flexilateralists managed to address national security concerns without fully abandoning multilateralism. However, the rise of new isolationism poses significant challenges for the future, raising questions about the sustainability of US leadership in an increasingly fragmented global order. The findings underscore the need for continued analysis of advocacy coalitions and their impact on shaping policy in an era of (or a return to) great-power competition.

For the European Union, and considering the objectives of REMIT, the analysis of US advocacy coalitions provides much-needed background information on how American elites think about questions of technology governance against the backdrop of a worsening US-China relationship. In particular, the empirically robust research illustrates how American thinking on multilateral engagement on strategic technologies possesses an acute sense of urgency—there is a pressing need to react to China's challenge even at the risk of undermining multilateral frameworks. For the flexilateralist coalition, this downside needs to be mitigated through engagement with allies and partners, for the new isolationists, *America First* will ultimately trump diplomatic niceties. This reality is further underlined by the manifest lack of influence of the multilateralist coalition in today's Washington D.C. Knowledge on the contending paradigms in the US with respect to strategic technologies thus allows European analysts and policymakers to consider alternative future pathways for how the US will likely approach this policy domain in the coming years, also considering the fluctuating political fortunes of the different policy coalitions as power changes hands from Democratic to Republican administrations.

4.3. China, Technology Governance and Advocacy Coalition(s)

4.3.1. Exploring advocacy coalitions in autocracies

Despite prevailing assumptions, scholars argue that advocacy is possible in authoritarian or non-democratic states, although the means and methods may vary from those employed in liberal democracies.⁴⁹ This will be assessed, in the context of REMIT's focus on multilateralism and technology, at the end of this section.

⁴⁹ Grömping and Teets 2023.



There is vast scholarship proving that analyses on advocacy coalitions in China are worthwhile endeavours and that the ACF is apt to explore China's policy processes. While top-down governance characterizes policy processes in China, research has found that especially negotiation and learning among coalitions affect the formulation of Chinese policy.⁵⁰ Arguably, the ACF has become more applicable to the Chinese context with some changes in China's political system.⁵¹ However, it cannot be overlooked that China is a one-party-ruled country and that President Xi Jinping has tightened his grip on power in recent years. In the words of Li and Weible, applying the framework to China requires theoretical adaptation,⁵² as the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) can impose its will across the society. The ACF can, for example, put increased emphasis on intergovernmental analysis or supplement the analysis with other theories of policy change.

Chinese technology governance approaches have been frequently studied in recent years,⁵³ spurring conclusions that “[t]he state cooperates closely with the private sector in a community of practice, acting as a catalyst in the early stage, a supporter in the mid-stage, and a supervisor in a later stage of the AI standardization process”.⁵⁴ Yet these studies have not brought together Chinese technology governance and the ACF, but advocacy coalitions have been tested in connection to China especially in policy sectors such as urban development,⁵⁵ education, family planning and birth control policies,⁵⁶ and climate policies.⁵⁷ REMIT researchers Catherine Yuk Ping-Lo (UM) and Hengyi Yang (UM) sought to combine these two fields by utilizing the ACF to explore China's technology governance broadly, but also specifically through the prisms of the technologies AI and genome-editing.

4.3.2. The central government as the dominant coalition in strategic technology governance

Studies show that in contrast to the advocacy coalition scenery in Western or liberal societies, there are not always competing advocacy coalitions in China—at least not in horizontal terms. However, within the different segments of the government from top down, varying beliefs can be held. Chinese political decision-making is not executed in a monolithic manner, instead the role played by various parts of the machinery has been described as “fragmented authoritarianism”.⁵⁸

Nonetheless, it is important to recognize that applying the ACF to the Chinese context may require some adjustments.⁵⁹ Additionally, when dealing with a policy subsystem that involves geopolitical and foreign policy dimensions, the scope for investigation is largely confined to the dominant coalition, that is, the beliefs of the Xi administration.⁶⁰ These considerations lead to two key adjustments: first, instead of analysing specific technologies, a broader approach is chosen by Lo and Yang focusing on China's national Science and technology (S&T) strategy; second, the central government's core beliefs as well as secondary aspects are explored.⁶¹

Most studies identify at least one advocacy coalition in various Chinese policy sectors. Due to the dominant position of the Chinese Communist Party, the Xi administration or the central government constitutes the dominant coalition in terms of strategies on technological development. During President Xi's rule, power has been shifting away from the Politburo and its standing committee – the main political decision-making bodies—to the leading groups, which help to coordinate the party and

⁵⁰ Li et al 2024.

⁵¹ Li and Weible 2021.

⁵² Li and Weible 2021.

⁵³ See e.g. Zhu 2024; Cheney 2021; Gao 2022; Galloway and He 2014.

⁵⁴ Zhu 2024.

⁵⁵ Lee 2016.

⁵⁶ Li and Wong 2020; Li et al. 2023.

⁵⁷ Aamodt and Stensdal 2017; Francesch-Huidobro and Mai 2012; Han et al. 2014; Stensdal 2014; Zhan and Tang 2013.

⁵⁸ See Mattlin, Paltemaa and Vuori 2022; Brodsgaard 2017; Lai and Kang 2014.

⁵⁹ Lo and Yang, ‘Learning from Crisis’, unpubl. manuscript, p. 6.

⁶⁰ Lo and Yang, ‘Learning from Crisis’, unpubl. manuscript, p. 6.

⁶¹ Lo and Yang, ‘Learning from Crisis’, unpubl. manuscript, p. 6.



state on several issues relating to, for instance, finances and foreign affairs. This power transition highlights the significance of President Xi. Still, it appears clear that the coalitions in particular policy subsystems like technology governance remain “stable and resistant to challenge”.⁶²

Lo and Yang’s research on China’s technology governance strategy is based on a temporal comparison with the 5th Plenary Session of the 19th Central Committee of the CCP in October 2020 as a watershed. The importance of this plenary session stems from Xi’s launch of a new strategy of “Science and technology self-reliance and self-improvement”. The researchers use discourse network analysis to measure and visualize data extracted from People’s Data, which features Chinese news reports from politicians, scholars and business leaders. While this database is monitored by the central government and hence only consists of reports that align with official Chinese policy, the employed dataset is representative of the dominant coalition. The research analysed altogether 2856 statements in Chinese as communicated by 108 organizations in relation to 138 concepts.

The Actor Congruence Network (ACN) analysis conducted by Lo and Yang helps to reveal beliefs and policy proposals within the dominant coalition. The main findings illustrate increased cohesion within the dominant coalition after the 2020 shift from innovation to self-reliance and improvement. This occurred even though more agencies or ministries than before were involved in the discourse on technology governance. Lo and Yang find new voices in the debate, including the national Development and Reform Commission and numerous local-level governments, as well as the National Science and Technology Ethics Committee.⁶³ These findings support President Xi’s comprehensive approach, which involves all relevant interested parties on different governance levels in centralized planning and policymaking. These findings also found support in the lesser involvement of state-owned enterprises in policy-formulation.

The Concept Congruence Network (CCN) analysis of Lo and Yang demonstrate “a more structured narrative” in the post-2020 period featuring both traditional motivations for the strategic shift, including national rejuvenation, economic development and geopolitical competition within science and technology. The significance of the technology governance field for China’s place in the geopolitical competition overall is highlighted. Concerning the global ethical governance of S&T, the dominant coalition’s beliefs centred increasingly on “technology for good” and “ethics-first”, as Lo and Yang posit. Advancing the regulation of emerging technologies is seen as a window of opportunity for China, when it comes to working together with emerging economies, Russia, the European Union and BRICS, to name a few explicitly mentioned partners in both bilateral and multilateral settings.

The research reveals a contradiction between the desire to strengthen Chinese leadership in technology governance and the strategic focus on self-reliance and self-improvement. The temporal dimension of China’s efforts is important in this respect. Lo and Yang explain that “‘self-reliance’ serves a short-term response to US containment, whereas ‘opening-up’ represents a long-term strategy in anticipation of opportunities arising from the S&T revolution, China’s growing innovation capacity, and the declining US hegemony”.⁶⁴

4.3.3. Policy-oriented learning and crisis-induced change: The case of genome-editing

The conducted research shows that changes to Chinese policymaking within the dominant coalition can take place especially through policy-oriented learning driven by a shock. Lo and Yang, explore the effect played by “an external event or internal shock”, in ACF-terminology, upon policymaking.⁶⁵ Weible and others⁶⁶ define an external event or shock as “shifts in policy core attributes of the subsystems”. This can materialize through, for example, increased resources, power shifts among coalitions or simply

⁶² Lo and Yang, ‘Geopolitical’, unpubl. manuscript.

⁶³ Lo and Yang, ‘Geopolitical’, unpubl. manuscript.

⁶⁴ Lo and Yang, ‘Geopolitical’, unpubl. manuscript

⁶⁵ Lo and Yang, ‘Learning from Crisis’, unpubl. manuscript.

⁶⁶ Weible, Sabatier and McQueen 2009.



changing beliefs.⁶⁷ The external event as an accelerator for change is in the ACF closely connected to policy learning, which can gradually evolve over time or be jumpstarted through the external shock.⁶⁸ The ACF Handbook guiding the REMIT project, also acknowledges that particularly in the technical policy fields, the role of new or accumulated information may play a heightened role.⁶⁹

Lo and Yang apply the ACF to investigate the policy-oriented learning processes of the Chinese central government in response to the genome-editing technologies in the aftermath of the “He Jiankui incident” in 2018. The incident refers to the Chinese scientist He, who in 2018 declared to have successfully conducted genome-editing together with two colleagues resulting in the birth of twins Lulu and Nana, among others.⁷⁰ Initially, in 2018, the Chinese officials commended the successful genome-editing. However, this stance swiftly evolved, prompting an analysis of how Chinese scientists, journalists and the public may have affected or even altered the strategies and policies of the Chinese administration on health biotechnology, and genome-editing in particular.

By innovative discourse network analysis of 162 relevant news media reports in Chinese language between 2018-2023, it was found that in response to “He Jiankui Incident”, Chinese policy actors in the policy system of bio-tech ethics formulated multiple advocacy coalitions focusing on various policy issues and with the intent to sway the current policies. Three main coalitions were identified alongside smaller and peripheral coalitions, advocating for policy changes consisting of, for example, legislation, educational measures, reviews, and regulation—the foremost being Chinese legislation and administrative review.⁷¹

A systematic analysis of relevant policy documents issued by the Chinese central government in the aftermath of the incident consequentially sought to explore to what degree, if any, the coalitions managed to change Chinese policy. The widely advocated policy beliefs, including legislative regulation and administrative review, all featured in the policy documents released after the incident, which indicates that voices of public discussion were influential to Chinese government’s adjustments of both policy core beliefs and secondary aspects. Accordingly, in response to the incident of genome-editing, China’s policymaking process allowed for voices of public discussion to influence policy formulation. The dominant coalition was affected by a bottom-up pattern involving multiple stakeholders.

Summing up the research findings on China, three aspects are discernible. First, China’s foreign policy goals are embedded in a paradoxical framing where the long-term goal of being a vital, if not leading, player in the global tech story coincides with the short-term need of investing in domestic innovation and resilience. Simultaneously, China meets increasing challenges from the United States that are fast accelerating with the second Trump administration. It is important for the EU to understand this Chinese balancing of the shorter and longer term aims, which may open a window of opportunity for pursuing possible joint interests. Second, such cooperative boosts may also arise from policy failure either nationally or internationally, as demonstrated by the case of genome-editing. Third, the EU and its member states should appreciate that policy change in China does not come about from horizontal advocacy, but rather from vertical advocacy within the central government. Advocacy by various local or mid-level actors can affect the policy formulation of technology governance within China, despite strategic technology governance remaining in the firm grip of President Xi.

4.3.4. Assessment on the use of ACF in the case of China and strategic technologies

The ACF analyses advocacy coalitions (i.e., plural), policy-oriented learning and policy change—all of which constitute theoretical emphases of the framework.⁷² Given the focus of the REMIT research on multilateralism and strategic technologies, a relatively new policy subsystem, the initial findings of WP4

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Nohrstedt 2005.

⁶⁹ Haar and Yang 2023, p. 18.

⁷⁰ Normile 2019.

⁷¹ Lo and Yang, ‘Learning from Crisis’, unpubl. manuscript.

⁷² Li and Weible 2021, pp. 706-707.



research show, at this stage, limited value in utilizing the framework to China. Before on-going and future research is finalized,⁷³ the following observations and/or caveats are in order.

First, strategic technologies and multilateralism are topics closely related to important foreign policy priorities of the Xi administration to which non-governmental actors or actors at different government levels have varied level of access. As policy formation and change is tightly controlled by one dominant coalition, the ACF is applied to within-coalition analysis rather than traditional inter-coalition dynamics. Against this backdrop, the utility of the research for external actors like the EU, which are pondering pathways to multilateral cooperation, remains limited. The value of the ACF lies in applying it to the nascent stages of the formation around a technology-related policy issue when the strategic nature of that technology is not yet evident.

However, there is preliminary value in the conducted research. In terms of policy-oriented learning and policy change, the initial findings of WP4 research support previous results of applying the ACF to China, according to which policy change occurs based on learning within the coalition or due to external events or shocks rather than through negotiations.⁷⁴ This pattern was exemplified by the case study on genome-editing.

5. Conclusion

The findings of this Deliverable have revealed that **governance pursuits on strategic technologies at the global level are lagging the pace of technological progress**. While Europe has, within its own single market, embarked upon the path of regulation and a certain Brussels-effect has been identified, **recent developments threaten to leave Europe sidetracked** and perplexed. The technological race is bypassing Europe, and the transatlantic relationship is in for a windy, if not stormy, ride. With technology being more and more securitized, finding solutions that states and actors across the world can buy into will be increasingly challenging. This will be a difficult climate for the European Union to navigate, given that **ad hoc or à la carte multilateral solutions run counter to its very identity**—the Union has, after all, been built on the promise of ever deepening multilateral cooperation. At worst, such wilful erosion of multilateralism could end up hurting the EU's internal cohesion, if member states begin to gravitate towards mechanisms that sidestep the Union altogether.

The EU's approach to strategic technologies initially oscillated between strategic autonomy and connectivity. This **strategic unclarity allowed Europe to pursue several different partnerships** while slowly placing more weight on the competition posed by China. In a broader picture, **the strategic accounts of Europe on technology governance are converging**. Yet, such **rapprochement has not necessarily translated to the governance of specific technologies**, such as military AI or facial recognition techniques, where the EU sometimes lacks agency altogether or simply suffers from its unique but complex structure.

The Trump administration 2.0 means that policymakers in Brussels have less support than during the Biden era for pursuing multilateral solutions aimed at managing the technological challenges. The fate of cooperation fora, like the EU-US Trade and Technology Council is up in the air. **Traditional cooperative mechanisms along with a pragmatic agenda may be out of play** in the near term. With the new isolationists dominating the other coalitions, the flexilateralists and the multilateralists, added to the close relationship between Trump with US tech leaders and the Silicon Valley, **Europe must find new solutions when it comes to dealing with the Washington elite**—or turn to other partners altogether. The new isolationists will most likely firmly attempt to thwart any Brussels-effect with a deregulated innovation-first agenda.

⁷³ For instance, on China's AI policymaking by UM including discourse network analysis on thousands of statements issued by hundreds of organizations.

⁷⁴ Li and Weible 2021, p. 709, 720.



In tune with the propositions of the ACF, the research presented here has shown that **various coalitions or advocates learn from policy failures or even crises**, as was demonstrated by the case of genome-editing and the dominant coalition in China. **Such cases may open a window of opportunity** for policymakers to constructively engage with their geopolitical competitors. The specifics of the dominant coalition in China, namely the central government, also emphasize the **importance of vertical contacts in policymaking**, showing that bottom-up influencing cannot be excluded even in the Chinese central governments' policy outcomes. Europe should be mindful about this observation, as it strives for multi-level engagement, that is, maintaining contacts with local governments, administrative agencies and other actors partaking in the Chinese technology debate.

Although this Deliverable has focused on three key players—the EU, US and China—it is important to acknowledge and note that **many other actors can substantiate or undermine how technologies are governed**. Hence, there are reasons to **look beyond the present power triad** to get a more comprehensive picture of technology governance. Accordingly, there are players that **depending on whom they side with, can tip policymaking in different directions**. For example, East and South Asia dominates the semiconductor industry, thereby making the region a crucial player in the industry together with the US. Russia again plays a **disruptive role through various hybrid means**—even to the point of sabotaging critical technology infrastructure under cover of plausible deniability. However, it has also shown itself capable of acting as a norm entrepreneur globally. Here the United Nations Cybercrime Convention, where Russia has managed to bring in its normative agenda in the guise of non-interference and sovereignty, is indicative. **For Europe, there are reasons to pay close attention to Japan and South Korea, who as like-minded partners** share interest in, for example, regulating military AI and enhancing digital connectivity.

Next steps

The findings of this deliverable, some of which are final and others preliminary, point to the existence of various advocacy coalitions in technology governance within the three powers. Recent ACF literature has, however, identified several open questions in the application of the ACF more broadly that REMIT research can build upon in the future: coalition awareness, coalition influence, coalition resources and strategies.⁷⁵ In the words of Nohrstedt and Heinmiller commenting on the research challenges of the ACF, “we still know little about, for instance, how resource pooling, joint strategizing and reputation management vary across coalitions, nor do we know much about factors facilitating or inhibiting them”.⁷⁶ At the same time, the transnational element that REMIT is premised upon will test the framework in novel ways, as will the challenge posed by the Trump administration to stable coalitions.

Halfway through the REMIT project, the next steps of the WP4 research in REMIT will indeed seek to answer—at least partially—the above questions by turning attention to barriers and opportunities for advancing multilateral technology governance in the four pertinent fields of security and defence, bio and health technology, financial technology and digital technologies. This next step is *Task 4.3 Identify barriers and opportunities to improve multilateral-governance*. Significantly, the relevant research findings will be tested at multiple Scenario Testing Workshops (STW) in 2025 and 2026, allowing for the refinement of policy recommendations for the EU, which is linked to *Task 4.4: Policy Recommendations that go beyond state-of-the-art*. An important factor in these times of flux is also to pay constant attention to major changes in the key actors and their strategies to govern or “ungovern” technologies—whether within national or multilateral forums. This requires constant preparedness to adapt to changes in geopolitical realities, if and when, they occur.

In near future, WP4 continues its work to finalize two special issues, one focusing on the governance of strategic technologies (*The Advocacy Coalition Framework: A New Approach for Understanding Emerging Technology Governance*), and one exploring key actors (*The Geopolitics of Strategic Technology Governance*). The first Scenario Testing Workshops presenting the results of the REMIT project more broadly will be arranged in June and September 2025 on military AI governance in

⁷⁵ Nohrstedt and Heinmiller 2024.

⁷⁶ Nohrstedt and Heinmiller 2024, p. 311.



Rotterdam and Helsinki, respectively, engaging regional experts and members of the REMIT Stakeholder Advisory Board. In the coming months, research includes applying the ACF to political landscapes marked by fluctuating alliances, strategic ambiguity and centralized decision-making (like Turkey), organizing and participating in panels in international conference such as the EISA, BISA, EUIA, IPSA and EUXGLOB with REMIT topics, as well as shifting to comparative research topics like Sino-US health biotechnology. An important part of REMIT research is also to encourage and engage with students at all levels. Such research cooperation takes place, for instance, within UM's excellence programme on research-based learning MaRBLe.

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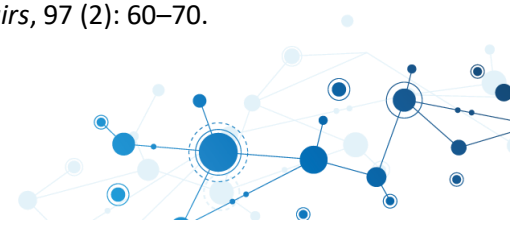
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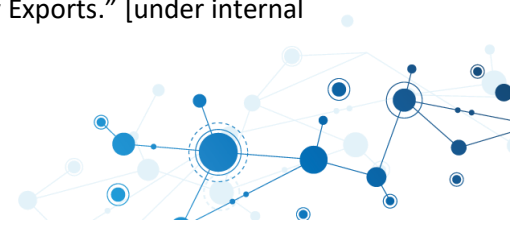
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