

"Critical Technologies" and the Law and Geopolitics of Innovation Policy

Michael Burstein

Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law

Fiona E. Murray (co-author)

The shift to an era of geopolitics changes the political landscape in which innovation policy is designed and developed. We examine how innovation policy changed in two nations - the United States and the United Kingdom - from 2016 onwards with a sharp move away from a globalized perspective on innovation to one focused on sovereignty and dominance. Through the lens of three domains of the innovation policy toolkit - capital, talent and ideas, we examine how the political narrative shaped the actual substance of innovation policy. Using archival analysis of policy documents and legal statutes, we observe a profound rise in "economic security" as a rationale for innovation policy and the expanded use of export and foreign investment controls. We observe that the deployment of new these tools focused on issues of protection and control rather than on promotion and support. We also note that these tools were more widely used across an array of so-called critical technologies. Much of the innovation scholarship has been relatively silent on politics. But as geopolitical contests for power have supplanted neoliberal notions of free trade and investment, we find that the emphasis on economic security in innovation policy moves politics front and center. This has significant implications for policy makers but also has important theoretical implications for traditional innovation policy scholarship.