Our lab was established in 2020 to study the effect of emerging technologies—drones, artificial intelligence, social media platforms, digital currencies, and planetary defense—on domestic and international politics. What makes our lab different from other similar centers, both nationally and globally, is that we break down disciplinary silos between the physical and social sciences to address pressing, real-world problems. Our interdisciplinary approach engages both the engineering and computer science side of a technology but also the politics and ethics of how that technology is used or misused.

Mission, Vision, & Research Agenda

The Tech Policy Lab is a community of quantitative social scientists conducting innovative and empirical research to study the effects of emerging technologies on the politics of defense, democracy, and health in the United States and globally.

We aim to foster interdisciplinary and collaborative research at the intersection of technology and politics, with the ultimate purpose of influencing policy.

The goal of our affiliated faculty and students is to provide meaningful insight for policymakers to improve regulation, increase awareness of potential technological threats, and promote equitable policy actions.

Lab Output

• Policy-briefs for U.S. and global decision-makers.
• Expert advice during U.S. government conferences and events.
• Academic journal articles to define and advance key debates for tech policy.
• Commentary within leading U.S. global and international media outlets.
• Participation in domestic and international conferences.
• Expert analysis on U.S. and global podcasts and television.

Research Impact

• Shape congressional testimony and policy to mitigate civilian casualties in U.S. counterterrorism strikes.
• Shed light on the political economy of cryptocurrencies.
• Develop new research on US space policy, including planetary defense and privatization of space launches.
• Inform the debate about US industrial policy, specifically on the consequences of reshoring semiconductor manufacturing to the United States.
• Provide public health guidance for messaging on vaccination campaigns.
• Offer insight for policymakers on consumer response to cannabis liberalization.

Research Clusters

_Drones, Public Opinion, & Legitimacy_

• How is drone warfare changing globally and what are the implications for public opinion?
• How do emerging patterns of drone warfare globally shape the public’s perceptions of legitimate strikes?
• How does variation in international approval shape public attitudes for drone strikes?
• What are the implications of competing drone targeting standards for the collateral damage effects of U.S. strikes abroad?
• How does the perceived legitimacy of drone strikes compare to other forms of force, especially when varying real-world conditions?
• What are the implications of drone warfare for the perceived legitimacy of global order?

Our research investigates these questions through survey experiments and empirical analysis of administrative data on military actions.

_Health Policy_

• What explains the public’s willingness to take up innovations such as pandemic surveillance or vaccines?
• How have medical and recreational cannabis legalizations changed consumer demand for pharmaceutical drugs?
• When does state policy action (or inaction) create racial and socioeconomic disparities in health outcomes?
• How can impactful health policy research be translated into effective and actionable policy prescriptions?

Our research investigates these questions through econometric analysis of administrative claims data and survey experiments.

_Artificial Intelligence & Disinformation_

• What are the uses and misuses of large language models (e.g., GPT-3) in politics?
• Can malicious actors generate large-scale disinformation through natural language models that generate novel text?
• Can members of Congress use these same types of models to connect with and better represent constituents?

Our research investigates these questions by using AI-based language models to generate Tweets, legislative correspondences, and constituent letters to members of Congress and comparing how individuals interact with these AI-generated versus human-written content.

Digital Currency

• How are digital currencies affecting the political landscape, specifically how countries generate revenue for war?

• How has cryptocurrency become a political movement, cross-cutting constituencies and lobbying for de-regulation?

Our research provides an economic history of the relationship between money and war, touches on the rise of digital currencies such as cryptocurrencies, and shows the way that these currencies can affect democratic accountability in the context of war and peace.

Space Policy & Planetary Defense

• What are the causes and consequences of space research privatization in the past 50 years?
• How are public attitudes toward planetary defense formed and what underlies these risk preferences?

Our research examines the mechanisms of risk preference formation regarding space and planetary defense policy using survey experiments and behavioural risk analysis.

Global & Industrial Policy

• Why did US industrial policy historically succeed (or not) in protecting American industries such as steel and oil?
• Why does the public favor reshoring even if doing so increases the cost of goods?

Our research investigates why, after decades of losing market share in semiconductor manufacturing, the United States is now pursuing industrial policy and providing incentives and investment in reshoring the semiconductor industry. This project is in collaboration with the Brookings Institution and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization.