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# Bridging Regions, Aligning Values: AI Governance and Democratic Innovation in the EU, ROK and Taiwan

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# Overview of the Presentation

- The European Union, the Republic of Korea and Taiwan: the regulation of AI-driven technologies for civilian purposes
- **EU:** human rights-driven framework-AI governance has been guided by its long-standing emphasis on human dignity, civil rights, protection of privacy, and transparency, incorporated in the 2024 EU AI Act.
- **ROK and Taiwan:** “democratic innovation” model. This means that their focus is on fostering innovation ecosystems that support public participation and reflect democratic values. However, they remain commercially competitive and responsive to technological advances.
- This comparison of different normative models provides opportunities to also explore the impact of their relations at the international level: “**friendship**” and “**horizontal binding**”
- Furthermore, it paves the way for assessing potential collaboration in developing **multilateral frameworks** that explore if, and how, the ethical implications of AI can also be conducive to innovation – debate in the EU

# Friendship and Horizontal Binding

- Dual theoretical framework:
- The construction of identity through **international friendship** (Klose, 2022): foregrounds how international actors construct their identities through shared narratives and joint projects with like-minded others -> constructivism in IR theory

*These are relations built not only on strategic convenience but on shared narratives and mutual recognition*

- Secondary state binding (Simon and Klose, forthcoming): how states like Korea and Taiwan—traditionally considered “secondary” in the international system—can assert autonomy not only by hedging or band-wagoning, but by **actively binding themselves to multiple partners**, both vertically (with major powers) and horizontally (with peer democracies) > “new types of friendships”

In the case of the EU, South Korea, and Taiwan we mostly refer to horizontal binding ties among fellow democracies.

- Against this backdrop, we argue that AI governance in the EU, South Korea, and Taiwan is not merely a matter of technical regulation, but a strategic practice reflecting actor’s identity and shaped by evolving understandings of the dynamics of relations with ‘friendship’ partners

## Comparison: Key dimensions

- Trustworthy AI (safety and transparency for users)
- Normative strength
- User protections (risk-based approach)
- Economic competitiveness/Innovation

# The EU

## *Trustworthy*

- White Paper on Artificial Intelligence in 2020, the European Union has pursued a distinctly **human-centric and values-based approach to AI governance**
- ecosystem of trust: uphold core European values such as human dignity, privacy and consumer protection (the EU international identity)
- Ambition to become a global leader in ethical AI (European Council, 2020; European Parliament and Council, 2024): EU strategy to assert a **leading role** in the increasingly intense great power competition within the technology sector. In other words, the EU leverages its ability to develop democracy-inspired norms and promote them globally as a means of securing influence in this evolving landscape.

## *User protections → risk-based approach*

- EU AI Act on 1 August 2024

## *Normative strength*

- the AI Act introduces an enforcement regime where **sanctions** are calibrated based on the severity and duration of an infringement: The shift in legislation from voluntary guidelines to legally binding obligations demonstrates the seriousness of this commitment

## *Economic competitiveness*

- Limitations?

# ROK

The Republic of Korea (ROK) has taken proactive steps not only in advancing technological innovation but also in shaping the normative frameworks that govern its use. Second country after the EU to enact a comprehensive AI regulatory framework: December 2024 adopted the **Artificial Intelligence (AI) Basic Act**, which is set to enter into force in January 2026

## *Trustworthy but flexible risk-based approach*

- it still identifies key areas of concern, including risks to human life, physical safety and fundamental rights but:
- *Normative strength*
- more flexible than that of the EU: While the EU AI Act imposes legally binding obligations, particularly for high-risk AI systems – including stringent transparency and risk management requirements – South Korea’s framework focuses more on **encouragement and guidance** (promotes risk assessments and ethical considerations)

## *Economic competitiveness*

- strategic balance between fostering innovation and protecting societal values
- ROK excels in a leading digital industry, notably with Samsung’s role in device and network manufacturing (Baron et al. 2023).

--> **hybrid model:** balancing liberal democratic rights with regulatory development. ROK adopts an approach to the regulation of new technologies that is grounded in ethics, safety, and inclusivity, drawing partial inspiration from the EU framework, but that also strives to reconcile consumer protection without constraining innovation

# Taiwan

Pivotal position in the global tech landscape. In July 2024, the National Science and Technology Council (NSTC) took a significant step towards formalising AI regulation by unveiling a draft version of the AI Basic Act

## *Economic competitiveness*

- Priority, it's a question of "survival"
- Taiwan's draft legislation takes a flexible, innovation-oriented approach to AI governance

## *Flexible trustworthy but no risk-based approach*

- In Taiwan's framework, trustworthiness is partly achieved by defining clear roles and responsibilities within the AI ecosystem and assigning duties to developers, deployers and users
- While the AI Basic Act asserts its commitment to human rights protections, particularly with regard to data privacy BUT: as AI advancement may require greater flexibility in the use of personal data, it would mean potentially including data collection without explicit consent

## *Normative strength*

- This aims to establish a minimum level of accountability, and the overall regulatory structure is more **encouraging than prescriptive**

# Discussion

- EU human-driven approach reflects the EU identity (rule of law, multilateralism, and liberal norms) – ROK/Taiwan: combining democratic identity with economic competitiveness

*Open-questions:* why ROK and Taiwan are more influenced by geopolitical constraints than the EU? And, if not a normative power, so why the EU does not invest more on innovative?

## **Preliminary findings:**

1) partnerships among like-minded actors : what Klose (2022) would describe as emergent *international friendships* - >engaging in cooperative projects with democratic partners that help affirm and extend its self-understanding

Confirm what theory says, that like-minded actors tend to share similar norms

2) novelty: it's a way of creating binding ties among secondary state. ROK and Taiwan: *secondary state strategic binding with the EU*, leveraging their AI governance choices

3) spillover effect:

- ROK cooperates with other Asian democracies on ethical frameworks
- Taiwan, though diplomatically more isolated, actively participates in global dialogues on democratic technology governance and has built coalitions around digital democracy and civic tech innovation – it made of the defence of democratic values it's own “battle”

# Conclusion

- Taken together, these legislative and governance trajectories reveal three distinct yet complementary models of democratic AI governance.
- The EU leads through binding regulatory architecture and global norm projection
- South Korea balances ethical commitments with regulatory pragmatism
- Taiwan, more flexibility, leverages flexibility and digital innovation as vehicles for autonomy and legitimacy
- **Each case demonstrates how AI governance is not merely a technical or administrative task, but a strategic exercise in shaping identity, asserting agency, and forging cross-regional partnerships rooted in democratic principles and assert security**