

Title:

Rethinking Omnibalancing: Democracies, Methodological Revisions, and Rare Case Applications in Belarus, Britain, and Trump-Era United States

Abstract:

This paper revisits and refines Steven David's omnibalancing theory to explore its applicability beyond Cold War-era autocracies and Third World paradigms, assessing its relevance for autocratic and democratic regimes in contemporary contexts. Omnibalancing posits that foreign policy alignments are often driven by internal threats to regime survival rather than state-level interests. Building on a revised set of enabling conditions—including fragmented elites, low state capacity, institutional degradation, vulnerable geopolitical positioning, and leadership legitimacy—this study seeks to adapt the theory for contemporary and complex political contexts. The paper argues for a more methodologically rigorous applied method for omnibalancing, which is informed by explaining-outcome process tracing. It uses Belarus as a textbook case of autocratic omnibalancing juxtaposed with two rare examples of democratic contexts: the United States during the first Trump Administration and Brexit Britain.

The analysis frames Belarus as an archetype of successful omnibalancing, where the 2020 Belarusian mass protests crisis necessitated external alignments with Russia to safeguard regime survival. In contrast, the United States under Donald Trump exemplifies an attempt at crisis-driven omnibalancing, as evidenced by the use of external military alignment towards Ukraine to counter domestic political threats during the 2019 impeachment crisis. Similarly, Brexit Britain's external repositioning, while framed as national policy, arguably had underlying dynamics of omnibalancing, with Conservative leadership using the UK's recalibrated foreign alignments to resolve internal party crises and elite fragmentation.

Through these cases, the paper seeks to provide greater theoretical and methodological clarity to omnibalancing theory. Omnibalancing is neither confined to nondemocratic regimes nor developing-world contexts. Rather, it remains a highly adaptable framework for explaining alignment behaviours driven by the intersection of domestic and international threats. This study contributes to ongoing debates in international relations and comparative politics by scrutinising specific enabling conditions and providing fresh insight into how both democratic and authoritarian regimes navigate regime- and elite-level survival pressures via external alignments.