

# Reformulating Omnibalancing: Democracies, Methodological Revisions, and Rare Case Applications Using Belarus, Brexit Britain, and the Trump-Era United States

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# Cases of Democratic Omnibalancing

- Main purposes of this Presentation:
  1. To argue that omnibalancing, while suited for autocratic regimes, can take place in democratic regimes, too.
  2. To provide example cases of omnibalancing in democratic regimes.
  3. To argue (if there is time), against Düben's (2023) claim that omnibalancing renders a political system autocratic or semi-autocratic.

# What is Omnibalancing?

Where a regime in one state uses its external relations with another state to balance (meaning to check or to counter) internal threats to the regime's continued survival (David, 1991, pp. 235–236).

# David's (1991) Original Method

- David's original method uses (pp. 235–243):
  - Alignment that is puzzling for orthodox balance-of-power theory
  - Three enabling conditions
  - Qualitative case-study
- Ideal for studying Third World states

# An Ideal Case of Omnibalancing?

An ideal Case is (Gerring 2017, pp. 45 and 58–62):

- A case that exemplifies the typical or central features of a phenomenon within a broader population.
- Serves as a representative example against which other cases can be measured, compared, or evaluated.
- The representativeness and typicality of the ideal case make it especially useful for hypothesis testing, demonstration, or as a reference point to assess variation among other cases.

# Ideal Cases of Omnibalancing

Negative Ideal Case (Sovereignty Traded for Regime Survival):

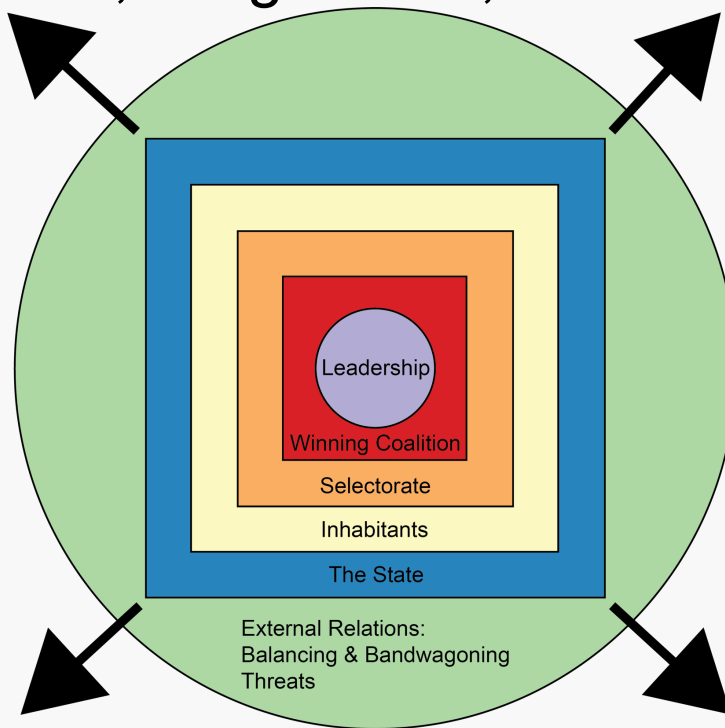
- Belarus under Lukashenka (2020–2021) (Braga 2021)
  - existential internal threat: 2020 protests
  - aligns closely with Russia, sacrificing sovereignty for support

Positive Ideal Case (Sovereignty Maintained and Regime Preserved):

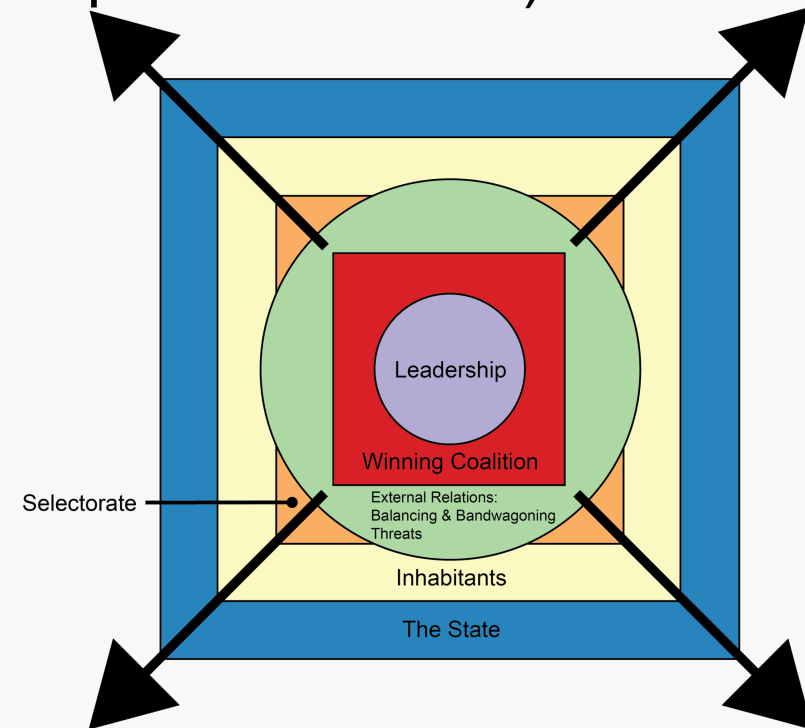
- Uzbekistan under Islam Karimov (1990s into 2000s) (Miller & Toritsyn 2005)
  - significant threats from Islamic extremists and opposition
  - aligns with Russia (allowing for Russia military presence)
  - later withdraws from the CIS Collective Security Treaty in 1999

# Omnibalancing & Autocracies

- Omnibalancing logic is theoretically suited to nondemocratic regimes (Bader 2010; Braga 2025; Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003)



State with a Democratic Regime



State with a Nondemocratic Regime

Source: Braga (2025, pp. 55 and 57).

# Democracies Can Also Omnibalance

My revised approach to omnibalancing (Braga 2025) has seven enabling conditions:

- (1) Significant internal threat(s)
- (2) High personal stakes
- (3) Checks degraded/absent
- (4) Low state capacity
- (5) Low legitimacy
- (6) Fragmented elite
- (7) Vulnerable geopolitical position

These can contribute to (but do not necessitate) a regime leadership choosing to omnibalance.

The next slides will provide examples of democracies omnibalancing



# Trump, Ukraine, & Hunter Biden (2019)

July 2019: Trump freezes military aid to Ukraine. Then attempts to Omnibalance against Biden using alignment with Ukraine in 2019

Trump has four of the seven enabling conditions present:

- (1) **Significant internal threat(s)** (e.g., removal of Trump from office)
- (2) **High personal stakes** (e.g., prison threat from Harris in June 2019)
- (3) **Checks degraded/absent** (e.g., Justice department supports Trump)
- (4) Low state capacity
- (5) Low legitimacy
- (6) **Fragmented elite** (e.g., Republicans are anti-system party)
- (7) Vulnerable geopolitical position

These contribute to Trump trying to use alignment with Ukraine to counter the internal threat of Biden returning to the presidency.

# Brexit as Omnibalancing

Cameron Gov't's use of Brexit is technically omnibalancing

Under the Cameron Government, only two enabling conditions are present:

- (1) Significant internal threat(s) (e.g., collapse of conservative party)
- (2) High personal stakes
- (3) Checks degraded/absent
- (4) Low state capacity
- (5) Low legitimacy
- (6) Fragmented elite (e.g., 1922 Committee within the party)
- (7) Vulnerable geopolitical position

NOTE: there are many reasons for Brexit, not just omnibalancing

# Other Democratic Cases?

- South Korea?
  - High political stakes for the president (often go to jail)
  - Fragmented Elite
  - Vulnerable geopolitical position
- These enabling conditions are suggestive that contemporary (post-autocracy) South Korea would be a promising case to investigate for instances of omnibalancing

# Questions & Criticisms

- Can you think of additional cases of democratic regimes omnibalancing?
- Are there any better ideal (positive or negative) nondemocratic cases that come to mind?
- What is the relevance of attempted and unsuccessful cases of omnibalancing? What relevance do they hold for the study of omnibalancing?
- What about system of government? Is omnibalancing more applicable or likely in parliamentary systems, such as the UK's, compared to presidential systems, like that of the United States? What about semi-presidential systems, as in much of the post-Communist and post-Soviet space, such as in Ukraine, Belarus, Russia, and Hungary?