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| **Issue** | **Reviewer** | **Solution** |
| * Empirics focus only on one election * Empirics have too few obs | 1, 3 | * Explain that only 2016 election offers good opportunity to do rigorous analysis and overcomes causal inference problem * Argue that the few cases from 2016 nearly represents the universe of cases already; analysis also explicitly allows for reliable inference for finite sample. * Try cruder analysis for 2007 and 2011 regardless |
| * Findings may be confounded by 2015 Budget Law | 1 | * Discuss in more details the budget negotiation process * Stress that the balance table shows reject the scenario that Reviewer 1 suggests: provinces with losses are actually poorer ones, with no statistical difference between treated and control. * Try cruder analysis for 2007 and 2011 regardless |
| * Informational story not convincing because electioneering diminishes quality of information | 1, 2 | * Double-down that manipulated elections still provide information and may even do it better.   + Acknowledge and cite literature about trade-off between uncertainty and information (Rozenas 2016, Morgenbesser 2016, Schedler 2013 in particular), says that the main argument extends as well to trade-off between different types of information, even conditioning on the same amount of uncertainty   + Reiterates that this paper is about how a regime partially handles the trade-off but cannot do so completely. At the end of the day election still provides too many types of information; for information to be usable the regime needs to start making assumption |
| * Concern that local elections may already fulfill information needs | 2 | * Argue better why local elections cannot provide the same kind of information |
| * Scope condition about level of competition and absence of opposition not explicit enough | 2 | * Clarify how the lack of competition influences the informational problem   + Reduces the intensity of the problem in two ways a) eliminates many alternative potential explanations for election results, and b) reduces the amount of manipulation required (or increases the amount of manipulation permitted), making it easier to achieve some other goals of elections, leaving room for manipulation tactics designed for information collection   + This makes the empirics of the paper tractable, as there are fewer informational goals that the regime could pursue, meaning fewer tests for us to check   + Theoretically, it highlights the problem of using authoritarian elections for information, which I argue to be serious and which other authors have stressed (in more categorical terms). In other words: if unsolvable information problems exist in a country like Vietnam they must exist elsewhere too. It may be harder to detect with certainty which informational goal is being prioritized, but we can be sure that some prioritization is happening. |
| * Implication of absence of opposition on plausible response to defeats | 1 | * Clarify why lacks of opposition makes placation better than punishment   + Given lack of opposition, negative votes can only means dissatisfaction with the regime (“rebelling against the incumbent” as per Reviewer 1)   + Reviewer 1 is right that these votes of dissatisfaction does not threaten the regime. The defeat signals that there are enough votes to warrant attention, but even then the dissatisfaction is never enough to threaten the regime   + The regime does not need voters to just vote its way – there are many other ways they can prevent an election defeat. The priority is what underlying problem the negative votes signal.   + Given the signal of dissatisfaction, it should be noted that this is still a minority; punishing the whole districts for a minority’s action is not reasonable. * Clarify that the qualitative distinction between hybrid vs single-party regimes distinction does not matter as much as the quantitative difference in level of uncertainty, both over electoral outcomes and over the potential explanation for electoral outcomes. |
| * Implication of the placation strategy on future elections – would this strategy incentivize voters to keep voting against the regime |  | * Clarify that it is difficult for voters to make the connection, but it is also possible that the regime does not have clear plan for it. * Run analysis using voter response in the current election after having received the transfers in previous election |
| * Concern that because transfer shares are negotiated in cycles, there should be no shift in the long term | 1 | * Run 2 analyses, one with transfer shares as the outcome, and one with the transfer outside of fixed shares as the outcomes   + To find out whether the effect goes through the negotiated transfer shares or through the other parts of the budget |
| * Concern that wins/losses are not best measure of “surprise” | 1 | * Run analysis using difference in total/average vote shares for central candidates as the treatment variable. * Clarify that even difference in vote shares are not easy to contextualize |
| * Concerns that some defeats are not bad for the regime at all, and may even be desirable | 2 | * Add an argument that the regime has plenty of opportunity to weed out elites before the elections, no need to have referendum on their popularity if the regime already wants them out. * Clarify that the regime does not promote election as a platform for competition and thus does not need it to look competitive. * Track down candidates who were defeated in one election but get to run again or get promoted elsewhere |
| * Concerns that ballot is not secret | 2 | * Clarify that it is the perception of secrecy that matters * Use data from NELDA and PEI to show that even though ballot in Vietnam is not secret but it is the least of a problem |
| * Typos and other clarification | 3 | * Clarify that records of provincial leaders who served in 2006 and 2011 are only to suggest the lack of a “punishment culture” in Vietnam. * Fix typo on page 11: “popular” >> “unpopular” |