**Reviewer 1**

* Summary of my paper
  + *“They argue that the same election result can signal different information and so authoritarian elections are less of a clear source of information that we might otherwise think. The author(s) contend that autocrats must control the electoral environment (how much manipulation, what type) in order to make the election as informative possible in terms of the type of information they are looking for. They focus on the trade-off between information on performance of local agents and discontent with the regime. The main contribution the article tries to make is providing a test to allow scholars to infer what type of information the autocrat is interested from autocrats' responses to electoral defeats.”*
* Summary of my main argument
  + *“The author(s) argue that autocrats are either interested in information about subnational variation in opposition to the regime or they are interested in performance of local officials. However, an electoral defeat in a district caused by general dissent and local poor performance may be observationally equivalent. To ameliorate this problem, the autocrat controls the electoral process to make sure they get the information they want. If the autocrat cares more about understanding the electorate's approval of the regime, they will not encourage local agents to extensively manipulate the results to guarantee the victory of centrally backed candidates. If central candidates lose in these elections, then the regime knows they are unpopular in that area. If the autocrat cares more about understanding the performance of local officials, they will encourage selective manipulation. If central candidates lose in these elections, then the regime learns that the local agents in that constituency are shirking or incompetent.”*
    - Misunderstand the first step. I argue that regime *always* use selective manipulation, but decides how selective based on what information they care about
      * The reviewer thinks that if the autocrat cares about understanding the electorate’s approval they will not do manipulation at all
  + *“[T]he author(s) propose we can learn what strategy the autocrat is using by observing their response to these electoral defeats. The logic of the test, as the author(s) propose it, is as follow. If the autocrat cares about general discontent, an electoral defeat signals to the regime that citizens in that area are unhappy with the regime. Fearing mass dissent, the regime is likely to increase central transfers to these areas in order to appease citizens. However, if the autocrat cares about performance of local officials, a defeat signals that they are performing badly so the regime will cut central transfers to punish these officials.”*
* Argument can be written in less abstract way with more examples and specifics of what selective manipulation looks like
* If local performance matters to the regime because incompetent/corrupt local officials may generate dissent against the regime, then the regime caring about incompetent/corrupt local officials is the same as caring about dissent >> no longer two separate things
  + Malesky and Schuler 2011 actually said that local performance matters because it is likely to generate dissent against the regime as time goes on
* Reviewer does not believe that the regime would punish local agents by cutting transfer
  + There are other alternative options; cutting transfers is too roundabout
  + If regime believes local performance matters because it can generate discontent, then cutting transfers leads to discontent which is not ideal
* Concern about generalizability re: perfect separation between central and local candidates
  + In other countries, even central candidates may have a local record, making their vote records more difficult to interpret
  + RESPONSE: this is similar to Party list (or the list vote in Mixed systems e.g. Germany)
    - In different countries signal comes from different things
* Concern about generalizability re: frequency of defeats
  + In other countries, defeats may be more common, thus less surprising and thus less informative
    - Especially the larger category of “electoral autocracies”
  + In effect it would not be possible to generalize the test to electoral autocracies
  + RESPONSE: criteria of “surprising” localized defeats must vary depending on context
    - For each case the specifics of the test must vary
* Generally, need to clearly spell out how we can perform similar test in a range of authoritarian contexts, esp. electoral autocracies
  + RESPONSE: essentially a section on generalizability
* More details about case are needed
  + What do MPs do? Do they do constituency service?
  + Are cases of defeat results of central candidate fighting against a strong, well-liked local guy
    - RESPONSE: not true, they often lose to the average local guy (e.g. the third most popular guy)
  + Specific details about individual cases of defeats – why did these defeat happen?
    - E.g. Can Tho case + another case that operates by the proposed mechanism
* Empirical methods are convincing, but need to be written more clearly
  + Explicit details about number of cases + provinces + observations in each panel (i.e. stuff in balance table) need to be presented earlier
  + Some 'and this is what that method gets me here' sentences/punchlines would be helpful

**Reviewer 3**

* Finding is similar to Miller (CPS 2015) but contribution is smaller
  + Miller says that autocrats give concession after electoral defeats/close elections, and were specific about what kind of policy concession
  + My paper is only one case, and the case is anomalous
  + RESPONSE: The Miller finding is true in Vietnam, but is not necessarily true elsewhere. What I provide is a test to see if that finding travels to any case
* Generalizability re: harmless elections in Vietnam
  + Reviewer notes that elections as a mechanism by which regime collapse is becoming increasingly common (citing Knutsen et al. World Politics 2017), making Vietnam a special case
    - In Vietnam, the regime does not allow multiparty contests
* Generalizability re: local-only elections
  + Reviewer notes that Vietnamese election has no national-level executive or party on the ballot, which is applicable to only very few regimes
  + When local and national ballots occur together all players interpret localized information as signal about national executive power
    - Not just about local dissent or local agent quality/performance
* Theory relies on assumption that voter approval of central regime must not reflect dissatisfaction with local agents
  + RESPONSE: This is more a perception of the central government. So I only need to assume that central government believes voter approval of central regime and voter approval of local agents as separate.
    - Citing “hierarchical trust” as a potential support
* Finding may simply pick up the fact that local officials who got elected reward the constituency with more funding
  + RESPONSE: I need to be clear that officials who got elected != executive officials who are being evaluated and who have the power to reward
    - The Can Tho case says there is no connection between election and “rewarding”
* The “potential for such conflict [between informational motivations for elections] in post-election responses needs to be specified earlier than page 5
* Need to think more about distinction between agent effort vs. agent quality
  + It looks like the regime is incentivizing local agents and supervising them only based on effort
* Need evidence for a “large and penetrating security apparatus” in Vietnam
  + RESPONSE: Maybe Freedom House?
* Should note that the costs of central candidate defeat is still pretty low
  + RESPONSE: Note that central candidate defeat still leads to major inconvenience for the regime, and is PR defeat. This is a “sweet spot” such that defeat is costly enough for the regime to avoid but not too much that it still tolerates the possibility of defeat happening
* Reviewer is confused why central incumbent would still be punished through withholding central transfers if they were defeated
  + RESPONSE: Same as before, I need to be clear that officials who got elected/defeated != executive officials who are being evaluated
* Reviewer is skeptical that voters would hold incumbents accountable if they fear of being punished, or that voters would provide credible dissenting information if they believe the regime discards electoral results or manipulates tallies
  + RESPONSE: I should say that spoiled ballots or votes against central candidates are similar, in that both represent “weapons of the weak”, or forms of non-compliance mostly for expressive purpose
* Reviewer needs more information about electoral contests
  + RESPONSE: Reviewer probably doesn’t read carefully the relevant section. If space permits I can add more information (e.g. a table)
* Reviewer is skeptical that investment in public projects correctly capture non-punishment or non-reward for local officials
  + RESPONSE: It is not necessary that these are non-rewards. If they can be rewards i.e. opportunity for corruption, then giving them to provinces mean the central govt is NOT punishing. So it is more clearly that they are non-punishment.
* Reviewer recommends citing Geddes (2018) and Jensen and Malesky (2018) similarly
  + Both should be cited as a chapter in a co-authored book.