Reviewer 1

* Cite Andrew Little and Jennifer Gandhi on informational purposes of elections
  + MY RESPONSE << DONE
    - Add a few sentences to literature review
      * Little (2017) argues that elections can serve both a strength-signaling and an information-gathering function
      * However, Little (2017) notes that the informational value of an election conditional on how much the expected result is allowed to vary
        + Such that dictators may even manipulate this expectation, for example by inviting international monitors to observe the elections (Little 2015)
      * In describing the case of Kenya, Gandhi (2015) notes that the informational problem extends also to the various types of information: because there are too many plausible causes for an election, it is not possible to determine which, or which combination of factors are responsible
    - Additional points to consider
      * Little (2015), Little (2017) discuss the value of elections as tool to project information. I focus on the other direction
      * Little (2017) also discusses the importance of information from elections being revealed to citizens may improve their outcomes
        + I agree
        + Will cite Little (2017) in discussion

Little (2017) argues that even non-competitive elections can be welfare enhancing for citizens. My results show that it may be true

At least could be welfare enhancing for regime agents

* + - * Little (2017) also says that elections can serve both a strength-signaling and an information-gathering function
        + Cite this in lit review/theory
      * Gandhi (2015) argues that it’s important to look at actors who do not compete in elections but whose actions are necessary
        + This is what my paper does
* Discuss the use of election results to identify talented leaders for promotion
  + (see Boix and Svolik 2013, Soloman 2007, Bui 2020, Malesky and Schuler 2011)
  + MY RESPONSE
    - Malesky and Schuler 2013 (Star Search) says that elections, specifically the 2007 VNA election, did not serve to help identify cadres for promotion
      * Instead, regime preplans who the leaders should be and uses the VNA elections as a way to ratify these leaders’ appointment
      * This echoes Salomon 2007 who also emphasized the importance of pre-election candidate selection process over the election results
    - Add this to Figure 1
      * Also Geddes (2006)
* Discuss exactly what is the regime seeing that allows them to make the decision that defeats = local dissatisfaction
  + MY RESPONSE << DONE
    - Add 1-2 paragraphs before the “Localized Defeats and Motivation(s) for Authoritarian Elections”
    - It was not immediately clear that the regime is always ready to see defeats as evidence of local dissatisfaction
      * Official narratives for election results have often highlighted the over-determination problem, always resorting to language that says there are multiple causes for any defeat
      * Writing for the state-controlled Journal of Legislative Study (published by the Institute for Legislative Study under the Standing Committee of the National Assembly), former Chairman of the Office of the National Assembly (“the main administrative and management core of the National Assembly – Salomon 2007) Bui Ngoc Thanh listed out no less than four reasons a candidate may win or lose
        + Whether the candidate succeeded in demonstrating his/her qualities
        + Whether the provincial government was enthusiastic In supporting the candidate
        + Whether the grassroots officials distribute candidates to districts appropriately
        + The voters’ choice
        + <http://lapphap.vn/pages/tintuc/printpage.aspx?tintucID=208575>
      * In another commentary for the Communist Review, Bui Ngoc Thanh adds further
        + Whether candidate gets assigned to district where voters see benefit in his/her occupation
        + Whether the candidate did a good job with his/her manifesto and campaign
        + <https://www.tapchicongsan.org.vn/web/guest/media-story/-/asset_publisher/V8hhp4dK31Gf/content/bao-dam-va-tang-cuong-su-lanh-dao-cua-dang-trong-cuoc-bau-cu-dai-bieu-quoc-hoi-khoa-xv-va-dai-bieu-hoi-dong-nhan-dan-cac-cap-nhiem-ky-2021-2026>
    - These narratives show that the regime acknowledges the over-determination problem i.e. that there could be multiple causes behind a central candidate defeat
      * Acknowledge that provinces face conflict of interest between needing to have central nominees elected and wanting to ensure victories for local candidates
      * Acknowledge that voters could still say no to candidates that the central government deems qualified
    - At the same time, these words should be taken with a grain of salt
      * For the regime, being transparent and explicit about its motivation may defeat its purpose
      * Some causal attribution seems suspicious
        + Stressed the importance of the candidate’s qualities, their messages and campaigns

When it is very well known that voters rarely know and rarely pay attention

Very limited campaigning, no media appearance for all the candidates

Few people attend rallies and meet candidates – like with the negotiation meetings, only the old, retired party members do (Salomon 2007)

When grassroots officials do mobilization, they mainly just convey “suggestions” on whom voters should vote for

* + - * + Note the role of grassroots officials but do not connect them to failures

Grassroots officials in districts with unfavorable results also reported suffering no punishment

Criticized for procedural errors, not for results

* + - * In private conversations ranking members and grassroots cadres were more cynical
        + Aware the provinces have their own “priorities” and would prefer to get their priorities done first (Personal Interview with CSO members, 2016)

Grassroots cadres basically convey both the provinces and the central governments’ priorities at the same time (Personal Interview with grassroots cadre, 2016)

* + - * + Fully aware that voters may be “disappointed” and channeled that by voting for anyone but the most qualified candidates (Personal Interview with NA delegate, 2020)
      * Additional evidence supports the second interpretation
        + A CSO member alleges the only one case of result manipulation so far

Secretary General Nguyen Phu Trong received only 68 percent of support, forcing officials to change the result back to 86 percent

Given his personal popularity, hard to think that this has anything to do with Trong himself

* + - * + In addition, close to the election, there’s also a flurry of petitions, complaints, and accusations being sent to the central government. (Bao Chinh Phu 2016)
    - Ultimately, it is credible that the regime could see the result either way, but it is not super clear whether it has more reason to believe one versus the other
      * The regime may have to make a decision
        + Which is not necessarily the right one…
* A table showing which provinces had central nominees lose for 2007, 2011 and 2016
  + Especially if central nominees lose in different provinces
  + **MY RESPONSE << TO DO**
    - Add exactly this table in an Appendix
      * Easily do this in R
      * List out the ones who lose
* Description of central nominees, their backgrounds, expectations that the regime has for them in the VNA and government
  + Who are the ones to lose – are they different in backgrounds or prospective roles compared to the rest?
  + Are losing candidates also slated to chair VNA committees?
  + MY RESPONSE << SOMEWHAT DONE
    - Add 1-2 sentences to page 8 in current manuscript describing the central nominees in more details (after “Nearly a quarter of these candidates”)
      * 27% (57/197) are the regime’s very top leaders: all the top regime and party leaders, plus most government ministers and minister-level officials, top military and security personnel
      * The remaining are from two blocs
        + 113/197 are from VNA offices

Either current chairs, deputy chairs and members of VNA committees and leadership of the Office of VNA

Or high-ranking officials in other governmental offices, presumably are designated to begin holding VNA leadership once elected (Malesky and Schuler 2013)

E.g. Hoàng Văn Liên, deputy chair of the Long An PCOM, formerly judge at the Supreme People’s Court, once elected begun to serve in the Justice Subcommittee

* + - * + 31/197 are from state-sponsored organizations under the Vietnam Fatherland Front
    - **Add one table in appendix listing out the profiles of every central candidate in 2016**
      * **Full profiles:** [**http://www.dukcqtw.dcs.vn/danh-sach-197-ung-cu-vien-do-trung-uong-gioi-thieu-ung-cu-dai-bieu-quoc-hoi-khoa-xiv--duk3208.aspx**](http://www.dukcqtw.dcs.vn/danh-sach-197-ung-cu-vien-do-trung-uong-gioi-thieu-ung-cu-dai-bieu-quoc-hoi-khoa-xiv--duk3208.aspx)
      * **May have to translate this…**
    - Add one paragraph to page 10 in current manuscript (around “Certainly, a degree of electoral risk still exists…”) << note: footnote
      * Almost of these candidates are nominated by VNA offices or state-sponsored mass organizations under the VFF
        + They don’t belong to the “absolutely-must-win” categories
      * Schuler 2020 suggests that central nominees are slated to chair VNA committees
        + Not necessarily true since there are way more central candidates than chair positions; many are slated to serve as non-chair members of VNA committees
        + It is not clear what positions the defeated candidates would hold in the new VNA, but among the 4 from the VNA and lost in 2016, there’s one deputy committee chair, two standing committee members, and one Department Chair within the Office of the VNA.
        + It is unlikely they will hold any lower position than these if elected
      * The non-VNA members are mostly top leaders in mass organizations
    - **Add one table in appendix listing the profiles of those who lost in 2016**
      * **Or as part of the Table 1 as balance check**
        + **i.e. a candidate-level balance check**

**Compare with**

**Candidates who lost narrowly**

**All central candidates not including party and government leadership**

**All central candidates**

* + - Additional arguments to use later…
      * Cite Malesky and Schuler 2013 to say that central nominees are slated to hold leadership positions in the VNA
      * Also cite Malesky and Schuler 2013 to say that VNA delegate who are local candidates are more loyal to their provinces, as per one VNA delegate
      * <http://la34.com.vn/tin-tuc/ba-nguyen-thi-kim-ngan-co-vi-tri-phai-trung-cu-dbqh-moi-duoc-giu/>
        + According to NTKN, positions in govt = okay to lose elections, but positions in VNA = cannot lose elections
        + But then Nguyễn Kim Hồng lost election in Đồng Tháp but are still allowed to hold VNA position
      * <http://sobn.ninhthuan.gov.vn/library/tabid/240/postid/2793/Danh-sach-cac-vi-tri-lanh-dao-cap-cao-phai-la-Dai-bieu-Quoc-hoi.aspx>
        + “Luật Tổ chức Quốc hội quy định các chức danh trong bộ máy Nhà nước bắt buộc phải là đại biểu Quốc hội, gồm: Chủ tịch nước, Phó Chủ tịch nước; Thủ tướng Chính phủ; Chủ tịch Quốc hội, Phó Chủ tịch Quốc hội, Ủy viên Ủy ban thường vụ Quốc hội, Chủ tịch Hội đồng Dân tộc, Chủ nhiệm Ủy ban của Quốc hội.”
* Examples of how provinces used the additional state transfers and whether development expenditures were visible to citizens
  + Ideally if there are highly demonstrable projects
  + **MY RESPONSE << TO-DO**
    - Add a paragraph to section titled “Effect of Increased Central Transfers”
      * A close look at provincial budget documents for Can Tho, Soc Trang and Tra Vinh shows a number of major infrastructure projects being started right in 2017.
        + A new major hospital in each of the three provinces
        + Road constructions in Can Tho and Soc Trang
        + Irrigation upgrades in Tra Vinh
      * Add an appendix listing a non-comprehensive list of projects that are most certain to have benefited from central funding
        + Those with start date in 2017

And with funding decision after the 2016 election

* + - * + And those with funding structure that does not show 100% coming from explicitly provincial funds

Provincial funds are funds from sources generated completely within the provinces, and the provinces do not have to share

Thus these projects must at least have \*some\* funding from central government

Excluded are projects that benefit indirectly from central funding

E.g. by central transfers freeing up provincial funds elsewhere

* + - * Transition to quantitative analysis
        + The existence of these projects alone does not necessarily capture the entire effect of central transfers to provinces

Unclear about the counterfactual – no way to know if each project would have been implemented if no central nominee defeat happened

Not sure how much of these projects came from the increased transfers

* + - * + A reduced-form approach: look at the amount of development expenditure and employ similar panel-data methods as before

Result shows big effect on development expenditure, no decrease in administrative expenditure

* Discussion of national and local news coverage of individual central nominees’ defeats
  + Are those interpreted in similar ways to the author’s interpretation
  + MY RESPONSE << DONE
    - Add a few sentences to the discussion about what the regime is saying
      * State media is often muted In analysis, only mentions the defeats in factual terms
      * In one rare instance, when discussing the defeats of two central candidates, the media mentions one’s stellar career in one case (Tran Dong A - <https://www.baogiaothong.vn/gs-tran-dong-a-khong-trung-cu-dbqh-d153515.html>) but the other’s controversial statement e.g. “the right to silence is not a human right” in another (Do Van Duong - <https://www.baogiaothong.vn/dai-bieu-gay-soc-do-van-duong-khong-trung-cu-quoc-hoi-d153489.html>)
      * Overall, this echoes the hesitation by the regime’s other outlets to attribute specific causes to the defeats.
      * This only suggests that it is less useful to rely on what the regime says; instead should focus on what they do instead
    - Salomon 2007 mentions that Central Committee members who run and won with less than 60 per cent have to undergo self-criticism; those who lost must give up their Central Committee seat
    - Fforde and de Vylder 1996, Malesky 2008 note that in Vietnam local officials are notorious for “stretching or outright flouting central initiatives” (as cited in Malesky Schuler 2013)
* Appendix C on the drop one analysis should be in the main text
  + MY RESPONSE
    - Add a “Robustness” section before the “Additional Evidence”
      * And add “Robustness to small sample size” as a subsection
      * Add 1-2 paragraphs from Appendix C here
* Appendix D2 to recover vote shares for losing candidates should be in the main paper
  + MY RESPONSE
    - Add a “Findings for previous elections” as a subsection of the “Robustness” section
      * Add 1-2 paragraphs from Appendices D2 and D3 here
* Discuss how generalizable is the LATE i.e. what if only the weakest candidates are placed in close and losing elections
  + MY RESPONSE
    - Malesky and Schuler 2013 find that among central nominees, there is no favoritism towards government officials by assigning them easier district
    - Do an analysis comparing strength of candidates within and outside of the range
    - Try different boundaries, see if treatment effect changes, to see whether the LATE is different
* Copyedit to fix typos and grammatical mistakes
  + MY RESPONSE
    - Try to find a copy-editing service
* Check these citations
  + Little, A.T., 2017. Are non-competitive elections good for citizens?. Journal of Theoretical Politics, 29(2), pp.214-242.
  + Little, A.T., 2015. Fraud and monitoring in non-competitive elections. Political Science Research and Methods, 3(1), p.21.
  + Gandhi, J., 2015. Elections and political regimes. Government and Opposition, 50(3), p.446.
  + Malesky, E. and Schuler, P., 2013. Star Search: Do Elections Help Nondemocratic Regimes Identify New Leaders?. Journal of East Asian Studies, 13(1), pp.35-68.
  + Bui, T.H., 2020. Governance, the Socialist Market Economy, and the Party-State in Vietnam and China. In The Socialist Market Economy in Asia (pp. 117-140). Palgrave Macmillan, Singapore.
  + Salomon, M., 2007. Power and Representation at the Vietnamese National Assembly. In Vietnam's new order (pp. 198-216). Palgrave Macmillan, New York.
  + Boix, C. and Svolik, M.W., 2013. The foundations of limited authoritarian government: Institutions, commitment, and power-sharing in dictatorships. The Journal of Politics, 75(2), pp.300-316.

Reviewer 2

* Expand on the idea that different types of information cannot coexist
  + And give examples
  + MY RESPONSE << DONE
    - Acknowledge that I haven’t made the point clear enough
    - Expand more and be more specific about every step of the argument
      * Maybe dial down the “selective manipulation” part?
    - Objectively, the more types of information being allowed to exist mean that the regime gives up more control of the electoral process
      * Extension of the classic information-certainty trade-off by Wintrobe 2000, Rozenas 2016 and Morgenbesser 2016
      * Little 2017: election becomes more informative if the results can vary more, less informative if it varies less
    - Subjectively, the more types of information the regime believes to exist, the harder it is for regime leaders to draw solid conclusions about any set of results
      * This is the over-determination problem: when there are too many causes for the same effect
        + Gandhi 2015 mentions this problem

Election setbacks facing the Kenyan regime “may have been due to external pressure, the defection of regime insiders, the coordination of opposition efforts, or any combination of these factors”

* + - * This is followed by the practical problem: the harder it is to draw solid conclusions about results, the harder it is to make policy in response
        + When there are multiple conclusions, logical responses to some conclusions may backfire when looking at some other conclusions

In Egypt, Blaydes (2011) find that the regime interprets election setbacks as evidence of opposition strongholds and disloyal ruling party members who mobilized for the opposition, and reacts by cutting funding and thus services to this area.

However, the defeats could have been a result of citizen dissatisfaction, in which case a placation strategy by offering policy concessions or increased funding (Miller 2015) would have been necessary instead.

Koehler (2018) finds that service provisions have mixed effects depending on whether the opposition is already there to capture and control its allocation

* + - * + The problem increases with the number of plausible explanations, and with the restriction in policy discretion
* Explain why the regimes must choose only between popular opposition or bad officials
  + MY RESPONSE
    - I already made the argument in “CPV’s Response to Central Candidate Defeats” but will expand it
    - The central reason is that Vietnamese politics are highly institutionalized, with most decisions requiring ratifications by the National Assembly or the Central Committee, even if nominally.
      * Punishment decisions require high levels of consensus and not easy to come by
        + Local punishment decisions are often controlled by local governments, central govt does not have direct control over
      * Meanwhile, central transfers are part of annual policy makings, thus remain one of the few levers that can be pulled
* Explain why even when candidates are not from these provinces elections may still be testing the officials effect
  + MY RESPONSE
    - To clarify, the actors are: regime leadership, provincial officials (effectively governors), and VNA candidates
    - Each province is presented with a few central candidates who are not from the province, and many local candidates who are from their provinces
    - Each province is told to ensure that central candidates are elected, but this
      * Requires effort on their part
      * Necessarily takes away at least one or more seats from local candidates
    - Thus getting central candidate elected requires from local officials both the capacity to organize the elections and the intention to accept sacrificing some of their own people
* Explain why firing the officials is not the most straightforward response when punishing
  + And show evidence for firing
  + MY RESPONSE
    - The Vietnames regime rarely uses punishment, reserving it for only very extreme levels of violation
      * Reason: need to maintain unity, preserve confidence in the top echelons
        + Extraordinary events
      * Notable: anti-corruption punishments
      * Because they are so rare, incidents of punishments/firings are very public
    - I identified every single instance when a top province-level official was punished in in the period from after the election in 2016 to end of 2017
      * Cầm Ngọc Minh, Phó Bí thư Tỉnh ủy, Bí thư Ban cán sự đảng, Chủ tịch UBND tỉnh Sơn La: violations in appointing private contractor
      * Nguyễn Tử Quỳnh, Phó Bí thư Tỉnh ủy, Bí thư Ban cán sự đảng, Chủ tịch UBND tỉnh Bắc Ninh: violations in land allocations
      * Dương Anh Điền, Bí thư Thành uỷ Hải Phòng: for wasting state money in a frivolous investment
      * Trần Công Chánh, Bí thư Tỉnh ủy Hậu Giang: for enabling grand corruption by Trịnh Xuân Thanh
      * Trịnh Xuân Thanh, Phó Bí thư Tỉnh uỷ Hậu Giang: for grand corruption
      * Phùng Quang Hùng, Phó bí thư Tỉnh ủy Vĩnh Phúc nhiệm kỳ 2010-2015, Bí thư Ban cán sự đảng, Chủ tịch UBND tỉnh Vĩnh Phúc nhiệm kỳ 2011-2016: for several violations including inappropriate appointments, losing public funds through inappropriate investment
      * Hoàng Thị Thúy Lan, Bí thư Tỉnh ủy Vĩnh Phúc nhiệm kỳ 2015-2020
      * Nguyễn Văn Trì, Phó bí thư Tỉnh ủy nhiệm kỳ 2015-2020, Chủ tịch UBND tỉnh nhiệm kỳ 2016-2021
      * Lê Phước Thanh, nguyên Bí thư Tỉnh ủy, nguyên Bí thư Ban cán sự đảng, nguyên Chủ tịch UBND tỉnh Quảng Nam: inappropriate appointments including his own son
      * Đồng chí Đinh Văn Thu, Phó Bí thư Tỉnh ủy, Bí thư Ban cán sự đảng, Chủ tịch UBND tỉnh Quảng Nam: for involvement in Lê Phước Thanh case
      * Nguyễn Xuân Anh, Bí thư Tỉnh uỷ Đà Nẵng: corruption
      * Ngô Văn Tuấn, Tỉnh ủy viên, Phó Chủ tịch Ủy ban nhân dân tỉnh, nguyên Bí thư Đảng ủy, nguyên Giám đốc Sở Xây dựng tỉnh Thanh Hóa: for favoritism
    - For district-level officials, the number of incidences is also in the single-digit
      * With the exception of Hoc Mon district, District 7, in Ho Chi Minh and Me Linh district in Ha Noi, none of these incidences involve provinces where a central nominee was defeated
* “More engagement with Malesky and Schuler’s work on Vietnam, which directly relates to issues like elite management and information-gathering”
  + MY RESPONSE
    - Add a few sentences right at the end of the manuscript’s page 10 (after “it seems plausible that it also uses the VNA elections for informational goals”)
      * Also rewrite this to say “it seems plausible that this electoral risk was willingly tolerated in exchange for information”
      * Using qualitative evidence from Vietnam’s top leadership in the late 1990s and early 2000s, Malesky and Schuler 2011 (Dictator’s Dilemma) has argued that the CPV sees in the VNA a plausible channel to gather information on both individual leaders at the local levels and on the level of regime support.
        + And that the CPV can seek these types of information from the electoral process
        + They argue that the ex ante manipulation tactics that the CPV uses – already detailed above – allows such information to arise from the elections.
        + Specifically, national election results, which are collected across the country and tabulated at every administrative level, measured in standardized metrics and closely followed by both central-level and local-level officials, offer the ideal information
      * All of what Malesky and Schuler 2011 found for Vietnam in the 1990s and 2000s still hold true today: Consistent with the profile of an authoritarian regime intentionally tolerating electoral risk in exchange for information, the CPV evidently engages in selective manipulation.
    - Add a few sentences to the last paragraph just before “Localized Defeats and Motivation(s) for Authoritarian Elections” (beginning with “The CPV’s inferential problem arises…”)
      * Although it remains as true today as it was in the 2000s that the VNA elections may provide the CPV with information either on regime popularity or on regime agents quality, Malesky and Schuler 2011 did not fully acknowledge that they cannot do poth.
        + Add a footnote saying that Malesky and Schuler 2013 (Star Search) did find that VNA elections cannot serve all goals equally well. They find specifically 2007 VNA election, did not serve to help identify cadres for promotion
* Elaborate on empirical techniques
  + Discuss whether there are sufficient close cases on either side of threshold for RDD
  + Discuss how synthetic control was constructed
  + Maybe look up papers that use these methods to see how they describe it…
  + MY RESPONSE
    - Rewrite the “Estimation Methods” and “Identifying Close Defeats and Victories” to merge them into one single section
      * Start by highlighting the importance of doing close elections (i.e. first two paragraphs of “Identifying Close Defeats and Victories”)
      * Then talk about Fixed effects sample and Model
      * Then talk about RDD sample and Model
      * Then talk about Synthetic control
    - Add the following details to the LFE design
      * Number of cases on both sides (stressing panel data)
    - For the RDD, the information is already on page 21 of the original appendix, with details about the samples in Table 1
    - Add the following details to the RDD design
      * Number of cases on both sides
      * How the treatment effects are estimated
        + Stressing panel data and simple covariates to reduce variation
        + But also add analysis using simple cross-sections
        + Importance of randomization inference
    - For the Synthetic control, add more details on how the synthetic control was constructed
      * It uses an interactive fixed effects model with $r$ time-varying coefficients to estimate for each treated unit a synthetic counterfactual or synthetic control that is identical to it in terms of pre-treatment outcomes.
        + $r$ being selected through cross-validation
        + Inference using parametric bootstrap
      * Argue that it is appropriate for cases with very small number of treated units – similar to a “quantitative case study”
* Simple first analysis using simple randomization inference to show how large the funding shifts of treated provinces are compared to all other shifts
  + MY RESPONSE
    - Add 2 new simple cross-sectional analyses
      * Doing the treated provinces + all other provinces
      * Doing the narrowed sample
* Qualitative discussion of each of the cases
  + Why there was a loss, how officials were dealt with, and funding patterns
  + MY RESPONSE
    - Add an appendix detailing what happened in each of the province with defeat
      * Can Tho
        + Election outcome

Defeat happened in Electoral District 2

Central candidate is Nguyen Van Quyen, Chairman of Vietnam Lawyers Association, Deputy Party Secretary and Vice Chairman of VFF Central Committee and Member of CPV Committee on Judicial Reform

Primary local candidate is Tran Quoc Trung, Can Tho Party Secretary, won by too many votes – 74.35%, leaving too few for other candidates, causing Nguyen Van Quyen to fail the 50% threshold

* + - * + Funding patterns

Can Tho has consistently been a net contributor to the national budget

The amount it has been contributing has been increasing for the few years before the election

After the elections, however, in 2017, the contribution was reduced for the first time, and then again by 2018

Total amount of contribution in 2017-2019 smaller than 2014-2016, despite economy having grown

* + - * + Officials

Secretary: Trần Quốc Trung

Remain in power for the full duration of his term until Sep 2020, then retire

Succeeded by his 2nd Deputy Secretary Lê Quang Mạnh

PCOM Chairman/1st Deputy Secretary: Võ Thành Thống

Held the same office until May 2019

Then promoted to Deputy Minister of Ministry of Planning and Investments

* + - * Dong Thap
        + Election outcome

Defeat happened in Electoral District 1

Central Candidate is Nguyen Kim Hong, Deputy Chair of VNA Legal (?) Subcommittee (Uy Ban Phap Luat), won only 48.9% of votes

Two strong central candidates are Tran Van Cuong, Political Commissar in Dong Thap Military Command, and Huynh Minh Thong, Director of the Department of Science and Technology, both won more votes.

Most voters chose to vote these local candidates who are clearly locals, as opposed to someone sent from above

* + - * + Funding patterns

Dong Thap has been a net recipient

Prior to election, between 2014-2016, experiencing fluctuating level of net transfers, average of 1,870 billion VND.

After the elections, in 2017, saw unprecedented increase by 1,153 billion VND

The post-election average level of net transfers is 2,980 billion VND, nearly 60% increase

* + - * + Officials

Secretary: Lê Minh Hoan

Held the same office until October 2020

Then promoted to Deputy Minister of Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development

PCOM Chairman: Nguyễn Văn Dương

Remain in power until December 2020, then retired

* + - * Phu Yen
        + Election outcome

Defeat happened in Electoral District 1

Central Candidate is Y Thong, a Phu Yen native who was serving as standing member of the VNA’s Council on Ethnic minorities

Of the 5 candidates, there were two strong local candidates, Nguyễn Thái Học and Phan Anh Khoa.

Y Thông could have won the third seat, but unexpectedly lost to Phạm Thị Minh Hiền, the Deputy Director of the Department of Labor

Should be noted that the two losing candidates are both members of the Ede ethnic group, which comprised only 5% of the local population

Y Thông, as member of the VNA Council on Ethnic minorities, is clearly seen as being sent to meet the quota for ethnic minorities, as the remaining candidate is simply too weak in comparison

* + - * + Funding patterns

Phu Yen has been a net recipient

Prior to election, between 2014-2016, experiencing decreasing level of net transfers, falling from 2,100 billion VND in 2014 to 1,740 billion VND in 2016

After the elections, in 2017, saw unprecedented increase by 900 billion VND, bringing level of net transfers to highest ever recorded of 2,600 billion VND. Increased even further, to 2,800 billion VND in 2008

* + - * + Officials

Secretary: Huỳnh Tấn Việt

Held the same office until October 2020

The promoted to Secretary of the Party Committee for Central-level agencies, the umbrella party organization supervising every party committee within government and party agencies at the central level. One level below the Politburo

PCOM Chairman: Hoàng Văn Trà

Held the same office until August 2018

Then promoted to Deputy Chairman of the Central Inspection Commission of the CPV, the organization directly in charge of the anti-corruption campaign

He also ran and won the 2016 election, thus also serving in the VNA as a delegate

* + - * Tra Vinh
        + Election outcome

Defeat happened in Electoral District 1

Central candidate Sa Văn Khiêm were members of the VNA’s Secretariat and is Head of the Department of Ethnic Minorities under the ONA

Sa Văn Khiêm got fewer votes than all the local candidates

Except for Ngô Chí Cường who was the standing Deputy Secretary of the Provincial Party Committee and who got a very high number of votes, all the other local candidates got roughly the same amount

Suggesting that a large number of voters voted for Ngô Chí Cường and spread their votes equally among the remaining local candidates

i.e. “anything but” the central candidate

* + - * + Funding patterns

Tra Vinh has been a net recipient

Prior to election, between 2014-2016, has received steady level of net transfers averaging 2,560 billion VND

After the election, in 2017, saw large increase of 920 billion VND, bringing level of net transfers to an average of 3,410 billion VND in the three post-election years

* + - * + Officials

Secretary: Trần Trí Dũng

Held the same office until October 2020, then retire, succeeded by Ngô Chí Cường

In 2016, following the elections, also became Chairman of the provincial legislature

PCOM Chairman: Đồng Văn Lâm

Held the same office until November 2020, then retire

* + - * Soc Trang
        + Election outcome

Defeat happened in Electoral District 2

Central candidate is Phạm Thành Nam, Member of the Inspectorate and Chairman of the General Department of the Office of the CPV Central Committee

Primary local candidate is Hồ Thị Cẩm Đào, member of the provincial Party Committee. Hồ Thị Cẩm Đào secured a large number of votes – 75.0% -- meaning that the other have to be split thinly

None of the remaining candidate got enough votes to clear the 50% threshold

Phạm Thành Nam himself secured only 35.9%, meaning that 64.1% of voters actively objected

He got fewer votes than Trần Khắc Tâm, a local businessman

* + - * + Funding patterns

Soc Trang has been a net recipient

Prior to the election, between 2014 and 2016 has received steady net transfers averaging 3,450 billion VND

After the election, in 2016, saw ramp-up increase, reaching 4,980 billion VND in 2019. The average level in the 2017-2019 period is 4,000 billion VND

* + - * + Officials

Party Secretary: Nguyễn Văn Thể

Formerly Deputy Minister of Transport

Appointed to Sóc Trăng in October 2015 just before the elections

Held the same office until October 2017

Then promoted to Minister of Transport, a position he still holds today

He also won VNA election in 2016, and served as the head of the Sóc Trăng delegate until before his appointment to the Ministry of Transport, succeeded by Hồ Thị Cẩm Đào

PCOM Chairman: Nguyễn Trung Hiếu

Held the same position until shortly after the election in June 2016,

Appointed to be the Deputy Chair of the CPV Steering Committee for the Southwest Region

Retired after this organization was abolished in October 2017

* + - * Common themes across all cases
        + Difficult to pinpoint exactly why central candidates were defeated when they were

True that some of them were made to run against highly-ranked (and presumably popular) local candidates, who secured much more votes than necessary

However, because there are multiple seats up for contest, the real competition is not against the #1 local candidate, but against the #2 (or #3) local candidate who are significantly less strong

Mostly mid-level officials, heading department-level offices within the province.

More votes however still fall to these secondary local candidates than to the central candidates

In some cases central candidates didn’t even secure 50% of votes

* + - * + Given the uncertainty with which these defeats can be explained, however, the central government’s response seems very uniform
        + The 2016 election marks a breakpoint in their funding patterns, after which net transfers were increased for all five provinces

All provinces saw the starting of major public projects

* + - * + None of the officials governing in the provinces and overseeing the defeats seem to have been punished

A number got promoted to higher positions in Ha Noi

The rest got to finish their career in the same position

* + - * + It seems plausible that the central government reacted to the central candidate defeats in these provinces with increased transfers, and chose to dismiss the possibility that local officials were at fault

However to correctly pin point this we need to compare with provinces where defeats did not happen, to see if the patterns we observed in these five are different from them, and not the result of some across-the-board change

Reviewer 3

* Discuss why it has to be either “geographic distribution of regime support” vs. “competence or loyalty of local agents” when it comes to responding to election defeats
  + Discuss why it’s NOT conceivable that incompetence could warrant greater assistance rather than punishment
  + MY RESPONSE
    - Add a paragraph to the Effect of Increased central transfers subsection
      * Right after the paragraph added from above talking about individual spending projects
      * Say that there have been virtually no projects aimed at increasing local capacity
        + E.g. no capacity building project, no new equipment purchase
      * Refer to appendix for list of projects
    - Central transfers are useful because their primary uses are very well delimited
      * Biggest expenses in all provinces are development expenditure
        + Most of it are capital expenditure
      * Second biggest expenses are administrative expenditure
        + Most of it is salary and equipment purchases
    - For the government, central transfers are one of the rare policy tools over which it has discretion
    - HOW TO GENERALIZE THIS TO OTHER REGIMES THOUGH?
* Discuss why punishment is targeted at province level and not at those lower than them
  + Relatedly, discuss why center-periphery conflict is mostly between central and province; within province accountability is more secure
  + And how most politics happen at the province level
  + Provide evidence at lower levels of government to rule out the incompetence/disloyalty explanation altogether
  + MY RESPONSE
    - Add to paragraph at the end of page 15 (“In particular, the central Party leadership…”) information about levels of politics in Vietnam
      * Like in China, Vietnam’s model of accountability is also “one-level-down”
      * However, most politics happen at province level, and the central-periphery conflict between the central government and provincial governments are more stark than anything else
        + Central government officials do not manage districts directly, but have to go through provincial governments

Thus from the central government’s perspective it is not possible to directly target individual districts

It is up to the districts then to target the funds; the central only has control over what category of expenses the funds are being used for

* + - * + Lower-level officials from district down to grassroots officials are much more accountable to provincial leaders than provincial leaders are to central government

Local officials are bound to province by hukou

Provincial leaders may move around

* + - * + Maybe cite the Local government in Vietnam book
      * Also sentences at the beginning of page 11 (around “…including the discretion over candidate lists and the logistics of mobilization campaigns”)
        + Lower-level officials from the district level down to grassroots officials are much more accountable to provincial leaders, and thus follow their order closely
    - Do analysis looking at changes to districts where defeat happened, within provinces where defeat happened
* May need a rewrite to acknowledge that the dictator may still seek and may even be able to address multiple kinds of information concurrently
* Discuss the disconnect between the RDD logic and the information signal
  + Following RDD, victory and defeat should be narrow that they can be assumed to be generated by chance
  + However, if this is the case how could a defeat still convey a strong signal
  + MY RESPONSE
    - Result from RDD is very conservative
    - On one hand, close defeats even when close are still significant
      * Has future consequences on personnel decision
      * Publicly observed by everyone, even including those who do not pay attention
      * i.e. the fact that they could have been generated by chance does not diminish their now very real impact
    - On the other hand, it is likely that the regime may discount these close defeats
      * But this would work against my results!
      * It is possible that the effect for less-close defeats may be stronger
        + We just can’t tell because cannot isolate the effect from other confounders
      * Do an analysis expanding the boundary
    - Highlight the fact that the regime is responding to signals about winning/losing above all
      * Qualitatively, discussion of the results rarely mention vote shares. It is the wins/defeats that draw attention
* Discuss why earlier defeats are not predictive of later defeats
  + Why geographic distribution of regime/support discontent is not “sticky” over time
  + Do the results just verge on the classic “whack-a-mole” game?
  + MY RESPONSE
    - Add a paragraph at the end of the “Insights from the Vietnam case” subsection in Discussion and Conclusion to discuss the accuracy of the Vietnamese government’s choice
      * Acknowledging that elections do not repeat, suggest that if it is perhaps the regime has succeeded in placation
      * But elections defeat do still happen elsewhere!
        + Either that the targeted placation is not a sustainable long term strategy
        + Or the regime has simply mis-diagnosed the problem
      * Clarify that the results do not say that election defeats happen because the regime are more popular – there’s just not enough evidence
        + The regime thinks so, doesn’t mean it’s true!
* Sentence on page 11 beginning with "At the same time, the anonymity…" has some error
  + MY RESPONSE
    - Fixed
* Clean up discussion of synthetic control on page 21
  + MY RESPONSE
    - Fix this!
* Table 1 Columns 6-10 exactly duplicate columns 1-5 which should be the case
  + MY RESPONSE
    - Fix this!
* Figures 2-4 need more informative y-axes
  + Particularly Figure 4
  + MY RESPONSE
    - Fix this!
* Figure 4 caption should say “vertical dashed line” instead of “horizontal dashed line”
  + MY RESPONSE
    - Fix this!
* Tone down part where I “rule out” an alternative mechanism on basis of Can Tho to avoid using the “rule out” language
  + MY RESPONSE
    - Fix this!