Why dictators hold elections:

* Miller (2012, 2013, 2015): information about popularity of the regime, then calibrate policy
* Gandhi and Przeworski (2006) (Talk about democratic institutions in general sense): To mobilize cooperation[[1]](#footnote-2)
* Lust-Okar (2006): platform to contest over patronage results in pro-regime parliament even without manipulation
* Geddes (2006), Magaloni (2006) & Simpser (2008): obtain resounding victory, show that opposition is futile i.e. “show of strength”
* Geddes (2006); information about the strength or popularity of the opposition
* Magaloni (2006): information about bases of support and opposition strongholds
* Blaydes (2008): information about the competence of local party leaders or bureaucrats
* Lust-Okar (2005): to divide opposition and co-opt some of them into the regime
* Magaloni (2008): platform to mitigate commitment problem, enable dictator to credibly commit to power-sharing
* Acemoglu & Robinson (2005) and Cox (2008): platform for opposition to compete non-violently
* Boix and Svolik (2013): help dictators recruit elites

Evidence that authoritarian governments use electoral data to monitor subordinates:

* Larreguy (2013): PRI uses electoral data to monitor brokers in Mexico. Where electoral data is more informative better control is enforced

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|  |  | **Purpose** | **Citation** | **What defeat means** | **Reaction** | **Target of reaction** |
| Platform/power-sharing | A1 | For opposition to compete non-violently | A&R (2005)  Cox (2008) | Not relevant (power-sharing is working) | No reaction | No effect |
|  | A2 | For elites to contest over patronage | Lust-Okar (2006) | Not relevant (power-sharing is working) | No reaction | No effect |
| Information | B1 | General regime popularity | Miller (2012, 2013, 2015) | Regime is generally unpopular | Policy change – pork, redistribution etc. in the whole country  Increased propaganda | National level i.e. no difference across provinces |
|  | B2 | General opposition strength or popularity | Geddes (2006) | Opposition is generally strong (not relevant in VN) |  |  |
|  | B3 | Distribution of bases of support and opposition strongholds | Magaloni (2006) | Opposition is strong in Province A | Policy change – pork, redistribution etc. in Province A only  Improve electioneering | Provincial level |
|  | B4 | Loyalty or competence of subordinates – local bureaucrats | Blaydes (2008) | Bureaucrats in Province A is disloyal/incompetent | Punish – reduce opportunity to seek rent  Punish – demotion/deny promotion | Individual level – provincial leaders |
|  | B5 | Popularity of individual subordinates – candidates |  | Central candidates running in Province A is weak | Punish – demotion/deny promotion[[2]](#footnote-3) | Individual level – candidate level |
| Co-optation | C1 | Divide opposition, co-opt into regime | Lust-Okar (2005) | Local candidates running in Province A is strong | Co-opt – promotion | Individual level – candidate level |
| Show of strength | D1 | Show of strength | Geddes (2006)  Magaloni (2006)  Simpser (2008) | Regime is exposed as “weak” | Policy change – pork, redistribution etc  Increased propaganda  Improve electioneering | National level i.e. no difference across provinces |

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| **Outcome variable** | **Target of change** | **Direction** |  | **Implied purpose of election** |  |
| Pork/transfer | National | Increase | +B1  +D1 | Information – General popularity  Tool of rule – Show of strength |  |
|  | National | Decrease | -B1  -D1 |  |  |
|  | Provincial only | Increase[[3]](#footnote-4) | +B3  -B4 | Information – Distribution of bases of support and opposition strongholds | i.e. defeat provides info about the province |
|  | Provincial only | Decrease | +B4  -B3 | Information – Loyalty or competence of subordinates – local bureaucrats | i.e. defeat provides info about the local leader |
| Promotion | Local leader | Promotion | -B4 |  |  |
|  |  | Demotion/stalled | +B4 | Information – Loyalty or competence of subordinates – local bureaucrats |  |
|  | Central candidate | Promotion | -B5 |  |  |
|  |  | Demotion/stalled | +B5 | Information – Popularity of individual subordinates – candidates | i.e. defeat provides info about the defeated central candidate(s) |
|  | Local candidate | Promotion | +C1 | Divide opposition, co-opt into regime | i.e. defeat provides info about the victorious local candidate(s) |
|  |  | Demotion/stalled | -C1 |  |  |
| Electioneering | Provincial | More | +B3  +D1 | Information – Distribution of bases of support and opposition strongholds  Show of strength |  |
|  |  | Less | -B3  -D1 |  |  |
| No change |  |  | +A1  +A2 |  |  |

Why would dictators permit defeat? Surely with their control of the election process they could have avoided repeated defeats!

* Maybe they just can’t – the forces working against them is too strong
  + Maybe the regime is too unpopular
    - This means defeat happens in provinces with stronger opposition
  + Maybe local agents are disloyal
    - This means defeat happens in provinces with stronger local power vis-a-vis central. But the government knows which provinces are strong! So why do they still send in central nominees there?
      * Maybe there’s an informal requirement that central nominees must be present in all provinces. In which case they probably will send only weak candidates to provinces with stronger local power, accepting these to be defeated anyway i.e. we would see weaker candidates in provinces with high “strength”
    - If there’s no such requirement, it is only possible that the government believes that disloyalty is not tied to fixed factors in provinces i.e. tied to individuals
  + Maybe local agents are ineffective
    - This means defeat happens in provinces with weaker officials. The government does not know this information prior to this election
  + Maybe the candidates are weak…
    - This means defeat happens in provinces with weaker candidates. The government does not know this information prior to this election (or know this information imperfectly)
* Or maybe there’s some utility from the defeats?
  + Lorenzstein 2013: China permits protest as a way to both acquire information about corruption and also allow discontented communities to be identified and paid off >> same for elections?
    - According to this argument, defeat happens because the dictators let them happen. Also means that defeat happens in provinces with intermediate “strength” not necessarily in those with weaker or stronger. Also would only happen to weak candidates i.e. we would see weaker candidates in provinces with moderate “strength”
* One key consideration is that whatever information a defeat gives, a low vote share alone already provides i.e. it is important to think what the “added value” of a defeat is compared to just low vote share

1. Citation in Democratization by Elections Revisited not correct, need to fix. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Not very likely except in the case of top leaders, since in most cases voters have no idea who the central nominees are... [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. May consider balance between transfer that benefits the whole population vs. transfer that benefits only the leader [↑](#footnote-ref-4)