Reviewer #2: This is a timely paper addressing the purported information collection function attached to authoritarian elections. The paper utilised an impressive body of empirical evidence to validate its argument. Moving forward, there are a range of problems that warrant attention. These include  
  
1)      The key scope condition, which is relatively understated by the author, is the focus on one-party elections in hegemonic Vietnam. I don't recall the author stating explicitly that the elections are uncompetitive at any point in the paper. This issue is important in terms of the framing of the paper, which directly engages with the scholarship on autocratic elections but tends to ignore the fact that many of the proposed functions are limited to hegemonic regimes like Egypt (Blaydes), Jordan (Lust-Okar), Mexico (Magaloni), Singapore (Miller), and Russia (Krastev and Holmes (2012). The difference between one-party and multi-party elections under authoritarianism is critical because it has an inordinate effect on the level of manipulation required and permitted (see Schedler, 2013). This difference subsequently has an effect on the utility of the information function for the ruling party. So in terms of framing, it would be prudent for the author to be more explicit about  
his/her contribution and declare/include scope condition clearly in the literature review section (pages 2-5).  
  
2)      The literature review itself is missing some key scholarship. Besides Schedler's latest book, the (informational) functions of elections have been examined in China (Manion, 1996, 2006; Landry et al., 2010), Azerbaijan (Herron, 2011), Malaysia (Brownlee, 2007) as well as Cambodia, Myanmar and Singapore (Morgenbesser, 2016). The last author, in particular, has been very critical of the information function for authoritarian elections on similar grounds to what is stated in this paper: "The institutionalization of this function depends on the use of restraint. In effect, authoritarian regimes must limit their malfeasance to manipulation of the vote (i.e., the counting, tabulation, and reporting of results), rather than manipulation of the voter (i.e., the formation and expression of preferences). The latter constitutes undue influence on citizens and essentially ignores their actual beliefs. This would make the collection of information via elections next to impossible."  
The above scholarship therefore deserves to be reconciled with the paper. Beyond the information function itself, does the author buy the legitimation function of authoritarian elections, including in Vietnam? This is important in relation to the next point:  
  
3)      The author states repeatedly that central candidates are key party leaders for whom defeat would be embarrassing (page 7); any defeat would provide a data point so different from their informational prior, guaranteeing that it contains more signal than noise (page 12) etc. This reviewer would argue, instead, that some defeats are not embarrassing, unexpected or even unwelcome. If the CPV wants to convey that the election is "competitive" to the electorate, it will allow some key candidates to lose for the sake of their authoritarian facade. This speaks to the need maintain credibility (possibly legitimacy) without sacrificing control. The implication is that not all localized defeats are equal, which means the responses (the key variable of interest) are predetermined and irrelevant. While they increased central transfers to the provinces, they also removed a disloyal, incompetent or ageing elite from the ruling party. The "punishment" (page 1), then, is the individual  
elite losing the election and the "reward" is the province getting more transfers. In both cases, the CPV wins because it satisfies the need for both credibility and control.  
  
4)      A key plank of the paper is that the CPV's most pressing informational needs are "local level of regime popularity" and the "quality of local officials." This begs an obvious question: what is the actual role of local elections in Vietnam? Do that not satisfy these two needs more accurately? An explanation for the function of local elections would be a welcome inclusion, especially since the author states that, despite its immense apparatus, the CPV does not have information of these two variables (page 5). Finally, a source is required to substantiate the claim that the secret ballot is alive and well in Vietnam page 10). This claim was especially jarring consider the stated role of local cadres (page 9).