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).

In describing the election in the original manuscript, I explored in quite a lot of details how the CPV’s electioneering has helped deliver results nearly identical to what the regime has intended. I also describe how it specifically ban independent and self-nominated candidates from running, and how nearly all candidates both central and local are still regime agents.

To further connect these features of the VNA elections to larger questions about scope condition, I also added a section to the literature review discussing what makes an authoritarian election informative. In this section, I suggest that authoritarian elections are mostly informative when held by strong hegemonic regimes who can vary their level of manipulation across different domains. This explains why the scholarship has been limited to hegemonic regime. This allows me to clarify the scope condition not just for the paper, but also the literature on informational theories of authoritarian elections as a whole: these theories are most likely to hold in hegemonic regimes governed by strong and disciplined ruling parties.  
  
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:

I added a review of the literature to the section above where relevant e.g. I excluded Landry and Herron because they don’t talk about information being intentionally sought by the dictators. I wholeheartedly argree that the informational function requires a level of restraint that is rarely feasible. The point by Morgenbesser 2016 is particularly important here: it is restraint in terms of what is being manipulated, not necessarily in how much manipulation there is, that determines whether an election an generate any usable information at all. I argue that regimes that can selectively employ high levels of manipulation in certain areas while keeping others relatively free are best positioned to acquire information from elections. This, as you have noted in point 1), seems to be an ability more commonly found in hegemonic regimes, especially those packed by a strong and efficient ruling party.  
  
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).

Local elections are not as helpful to the central government because the central government does not have as strong a control. Specifically, they do not control who gets nominated to run; this power instead if often captured by local elites (Malesky and Schuler 2011, see also Malesky, Nguyen and Tran 2014). Without the ability to shape some parameters of the race, it is not easy to extract information.

I toned down the claim about the secret ballot: what matters is that people perceive individual ballots to be anonymous. Overall there is no pretension that the elections in Vietnam are far from free and fair, but the public and experts alike agree that violation of the secret ballot is the least serious of all the concerns.