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Classified By: ACTING CONSUL GENERAL HELEN C. HUDSON FOR REASONS 1.4 (B ) AND (D).

1. (C) Summary: In March 2 meetings in Ekiti State, political party representatives, journalists and civil society leaders told Poloff that the upcoming rerun election for governor has little to do with real issues, but displays the typical power politics of the People,s Democratic Party (PDP) in Southern Nigeria. Former governor Ayo Fayose was being courted by both the PDP and Action Congress (AC) to support their candidates, demonstrating that despite his 2006 impeachment and accusations of rampant corruption and dirty politics, he continues to be a powerful force in the state. Civil society and AC supporters criticized current Governor Segun Oni,s lack of action during his two years in office

and questioned his ability to rule effectively. These groups claim that AC candidate Dr. Kayode Fayemi is mature and competent enough to turn the tide of Ekiti politics.

Regardless of the outcome of the election, all contacts agreed that the Ekiti elections will be a turning point in South-West politics, as the outcome will either uphold the PDP,s stronghold in the region, or diminish its position as the majority party in the South-West. Most sources believe that the potential for election-related violence is high as fear of vote rigging by the PDP appears in the works. End summary.

2. (C) Poloff visited Ekiti State on March 2, engaging with contacts from the People,s Democratic Party (PDP), Action Congress (AC), the National Union of Journalists (NUJ), and civil society. Ekiti has been the focus of party politics in the South-West since the February 17 Court of Appeals ruling ordering a gubernatorial election rerun in 64 wards across 10 of the 16 local government areas (LGAs). The date for the election has been set for April 25.

PDP Power Politics

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3. (C) The Chairman of Appropriations of the State House of Assembly and former Speaker of the House, Femi Bamishile (PDP), told Poloff on March 2 that despite being a PDP House of Assembly member, he realizes that the PDP in Ekiti is not concerned with ideology or policy, but is simply a vehicle for political leaders to advance their own interests. He argued that politics in Ekiti have never been about the "real issues" like development and the economy, but politics have increasingly been "on the rough side," where politicians use force to promote their own agendas.

4. (C) Abiodun Oyeleye, a human rights activist and the director of the non-governmental organization New Initiative for Social Development, also told Poloff on March 2 that many locals believe the PDP will rig this election like it did in the December 2008 LGA elections, which were boycotted by the AC and only contested by PDP candidates. Oyeleye told Poloff that civil society hoped for free and fair elections, but he doubted that will happen; the general consensus was that the the ruling PDP was preparing to fix the rerun elections. He stated, that unlike the December 2008 elections, this time the AC was ready for the contest, and he feared the election had the potential to become a violent "free for all." He believed that people wanted change, but the PDP would attempt to maintain power "by fire or by force."

The Fight for Former Governor Fayose,s Support

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5. (C) Bamishile stated that former governor Ayo Fayose, who was impeached in 2006 and is currently under investigation by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), knows politics and knows how to play the rough political game. (Note: Fayose is also thought to be behind political violence and political assassinations during his tenure, and has been described by other contacts as one of the more brutal governors of Southern Nigeria in recent times. End

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note.) Oyeleye agreed that Fayose continues to be extremely popular because although he employs violence, he finds ways to appeal to the people, and during his administration he completed several development projects. Tai Oguntayo, the president of the Ekiti branch of the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) affirmed that Fayose,s popularity was due in part to the handouts that he continues to give to the people. For example, people attended his rallies because they were provided with stipends by Fayose, and the ex-governor paid journalists to write favorable stories.

Oyeleye and Oguntayo agreed that Fayose continued to exert influence in Ekiti because he hoped to run for governor again in the 2011 elections.

6. (C) In a February 27 meeting with Chief Supo Shonibare, the Lagos chairman for Afenifere, a leading Yoruba socio-political organization in the South-West, Shonibare stated that both the PDP and the AC had courted Fayose, whose support they believe will determine the outcome of the elections. Bamishile, as a prominent member of the PDP in Ekiti, reaffirmed that both parties were trying to get Fayose to campaign for them in order to garner more grassroots support. For his part, Fayose publicly stated that he would only support the PDP if he is given power to re-organize the structure of the state PDP, hand pick the governor,s cabinet (if Oni wins), and secure the immediate release from prison of his aides accused of murder during his administration. On March 13, Fayose announced that while he remained a member of PDP, he would be campaigning for Fayemi throughout the gubernatorial re-run.

#### Evaluating the Candidates

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7. (C) With so much focus on PDP party politics and the role Fayose will play in these re-runs, there appears to be little

discussion about the qualifications of either candidates. Bamishile argued that the competence of the candidates is irrelevant in the Ekiti political game. He did say that Oni was viewed as "too civil" to be a competitive candidate and he had few results to show for his two years in office. Oyeleye agreed that civil society has seen little from Oni, and doubts that he has much public support. He stated that in two years, the people have not seen him complete any development projects. As an example, the federal government allocated funds to Ekiti through the Millennium Development Goals project to provide clean water in local communities. Several newly installed community water faucets were visible near major roads in local Ekiti communities, but, Oyeleye explained, Oni never invested any state funds in the project and the faucets did not actually connect to water sources.

8. (C) Churchill Adedipe, an Action Congress State House of Assembly member, told Poloff that the AC is focused on real development issues. After the rigged 2007 elections, he said, the AC went to court to bring change to Ekiti. He described the issues that the AC candidate Kayode Fayemi is focusing on, including women,s rights, clean water, and community-based development projects. Adedipe said that the Ekiti people were now determined to change, and looked to the state government for basic services like education and

health; he believes that the majority of citizens are tired of power politics and are ready for a drastic change. He claimed that the AC has always engaged in peaceful campaigning, used legal means to ensure justice, and will continue to campaign peacefully.

#### Ekiti as the Turning State for South-West Politics

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9. (C) Shonibare told Poloff that the South-West populace is starting to tire of the PDP's rule after 6 years without tangible progress in economic development. Following Lagos, lead, he believes that other states in the South-West will turn away from the PDP. If Fayemi wins the rerun in Ekiti, Ekiti will be a turning point in the South-West, minimizing the hold of the PDP in the region. Bamishile, despite being aligned with the PDP, added that if the party loses in these elections, it will be lost forever. He believed the strength

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of the AC is the belief that its power is increasing, and that the party has the potential to take over the entire South-West. Adedipe referred to Ekiti as the "litmus state for Nigerian democracy." If these elections are free and



fair and the AC wins, he believes this will indicate real progress towards democracy, as well as the demise of the PDP,s power in the region.

10. (C) Comment: The ongoing power politics in recent years have yielded little development for Ekiti State and allowed political violence to continue unchecked. The potential for change brings hope that the state government will address real development issues rather than be consumed by the power struggles of the influential and wealthy. Regardless of the political party that wins, the process of the reruns will demonstrate the progress of democracy in the South-West and whether it is possible, in a politically sensitive state, to carry out peaceful elections, and if the outcome is an AC victory, a peaceful transition. Right now it appears doubtful that this election rerun will be violence free. End comment.

11. (U) This cable has been coordinated with Embassy Abuja.  
HUDSON

**References to this document in other cables**

[09LAGOS211](#)

**References in this document to other cables**

[09LAGOS163](#)  
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