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Classified By: Acting DCM William Duncan for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1. (SBU) SUMMARY. March 1, voters in the autonomous community of Galicia head to the polls in regional elections (regional elections will be held the same day in the Basque Country). The candidates for regional president are the Partido Popular's (PP) Alberto Nunez Feijo, the Partido Socialista Galego's (PSG) Emilio Perez Tourino, and the Bloque Nacionalista Galego's (BNG) Antxo Quintana. While



recent polls forecast that the ruling Socialist-Nationalist coalition will hold this year, other political analysts believe that the Partido Popular might win enough votes for an absolute majority. The Galician outcome can be viewed as a national referendum. President Zapatero wants this vote of confidence for his second term, especially as PSOE grapples with the consequences of the global financial crisis and Spain's weakening economy and rising unemployment. PP leader Mariano Rajoy (a Galician) seeks to regain his home state as a traditional party stronghold and win confidence in his leadership at a time when he is battling a prolonged espionage and corruption scandal implicating PP senior officials. END SUMMARY.

2. (U) March 1, voters in the autonomous community of Galicia head to the polls in regional elections. The candidates for regional president are the Partido Popular's (PP) Alberto Nunez Feijo, the Partido Socialista Galego's (PSG) Emilio Perez Tourino, and the Bloque Nacionalista Galego's (BNG) Antxo Quintana. The PSG and BNG together won 38 seats in the 2005 election (PSG 25 and BNG 13), when the PP won 37 seats. Perez Tourino is the serving President and Quintana is Vice President.

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PROJECTED ELECTORAL OUTCOMES  
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3. (U) The Spanish Center for Sociological Research (CIS) conducted a survey in early February and based on 3,000 interviews predicts that the Socialist-Nationalist coalition will hold this year with the PSG and BNG winning 40 seats, or two more than the number needed for an absolute majority in the Parliament. The CIS results projected the following 2009 outcome:

PP 35-36 seats 43 percent of the vote  
PSG 27 seats 33 percent of the vote  
BNG 12-13 seats 18 percent of the vote.

With respect to the 2005 election results, the forecast is for the PP to lose one or two seats, the BNG to potentially lose one seat, and the PSG to gain two seats. The CIS survey also concluded that 29.8 percent of voters preferred current President Perez Tourino (PSG), while 23.9 percent favored his opponent Nunez Feijo (PP).

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POLITICAL PARTY EQUITIES  
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4. (U) Galicia was long considered a stronghold for the conservative Partido Popular under the leadership of Manuel Fraga from 1990 until 2005. Fraga, who rose to prominence in the Franco regime, helped write the 1978 Spanish Constitution and is considered the founder of the Partido Popular. The Socialist Party (PSOE) made history in 2005 by breaking



Fraga's sixteen-year grip on power by forming an alliance with the Galician nationalists. Current PP leader Mariano Rajoy is Galician; he and many other high-profile PP politicians travel frequently to Galicia to support Nunez Feijo's candidacy. In fact, during fifteen days of official campaigning, Rajoy will spend twelve days in Galicia - an unprecedented amount of time for a national leader - and three in the Basque Country.

5. (SBU) As indicated by Rajoy's investment of time and energy, the Galician election is acknowledged as a referendum on the PP. Rajoy will find it awkward to maintain his party leadership if his "home state" is lost to the Socialist/Nationalist coalition a second time. As one Spanish paper framed the issue, "Rajoy - burial or resurrection at home." Candidate Nunez Feijo has announced he will resign as PP Galicia Chairman if his party loses the elections (although not likely to lose the absolute vote count, the PP may fail to gain the number needed for absolute majority of Parliamentary seats). The PP has undertaken a

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multi-level strategy, attempting to gain back young voters who rejected the PP's conservative agenda, while maintaining the traditional base in rural areas that kept the party in power for so long. Nunez Feijo, projecting young and dynamic leadership, firmly rejects any attempts to link his team with the past policies of Fraga/Franco.

6. (SBU) For President Zapatero, a win by the PSOE candidate Perez Tourino would reinforce the socialist consolidation of power in the 2008 national election. It would also be viewed as a vote of confidence for PSOE as it grapples with the consequences of the global financial crisis and Spain's weakening economy and rising unemployment. The PSOE-led government has taken steps to place Perez Tourino in a position of strength. In national spending aimed at combating the financial crisis, Galicia is getting a significant injection of cash through the Public Works Ministry. The new Justice Minister appointed this week (reftel b) is a well-liked Galician native and has been actively campaigning to raise the PSG profile. The national party also takes a non-confrontational stance on regional language and Galicia's efforts to obtain more autonomous powers.

7. (U) The Bloque Nacionalista Galego (BNG) was formed in 1982 to promote devolution of power to the Galician Parliament within the unity of Spain, along with affirmative action for the Galician language. By 1997 it managed to win 25 percent of the popular vote and held 18 of 75 Galician Parliament seats. Although it lost a percentage of vote in subsequent elections, in 2005 the BNG's share of votes



enabled it to form a coalition government with the Galician Socialist Party (PSG). The BNG leader, Antxo Quitana, serves as the regional vice president. Despite efforts to have BNG members demonstrate positive change through administration of the Galician Housing, Rural Environment and Industry portfolios, it is unclear if the party can hold on to the same percentage of voters/parliamentary seats.

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FACTORS INFLUENCING ELECTION OUTCOME  
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8. (C) Voting by Spanish citizens living outside the country plays a major role in the Galician elections. Many Galicians emigrated abroad, particularly to Argentina and other South American countries during the last century. 334,000 of the 2,637,601 potential voters counted in the 2009 electoral census live abroad. (Note: we have heard Rajoy say privately that Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez cost the PP a seat in the last Galician election by holding up the Spanish diplomatic pouch containing the ballots. End note.) All the political parties are courting the expatriate Spaniard vote; both Perez Tourino and Nunez Feijo made campaign swings to Argentina within the last three months and have active "get out the vote" mechanisms in South America (along with allegations of vote buying on each side). For the first time, Spaniards abroad are required to present a copy of their Spanish ID card or passport when they submit ballots. Both parties are worried that the new requirement will affect their voters, but the PSOE in particular said it is concerned that its political supporters may not have the documentation needed to cast a ballot.

9. (C) Some political analysts are hedging, noting that the PSG will be hampered by the economic crisis, rising unemployment rates and potential lower voter turn-out. Perez Tourino has worked hard to counter these factors, using his stump speeches to outline his administration's investments in development and job creation, along with the provision of social services. His speeches are full of carefully calibrated rhetoric outlining the PSG's vision of maximal autonomy for Galicia within the framework of the Spanish central government. Perez Tourino, a trained economist, is a polished public speaker and handles questions about the financial crisis and employment outlook with ease. PSOE Vice Secretary General Pepe Blanco is Galician and has devoted large amounts of time and attention to polling and campaign strategy in support of Perez Tourino. Blanco is strongly urging far-left leaning voters, who might abstain, to come out and vote for the PSG. He implies that an abstention is the same as facilitating a return to Franco-era stagnation.

10. (SBU) As the PP attempts to regain its standing in Galicia, it will be hampered by continuing corruption



investigations linked to key party officials, as well as the

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political fallout of the PP illegal surveillance scandal that revealed deep divisions within the party leadership (ref a). All the candidates are pointing out the failings and perceived abuses of power among their opponents. Nunez Feijo has admitted past PP failings, but put them in context as minor points in a long sixteen-year history of achievement and development, arguing that the PSG has managed more screw-ups in only 4 years. The PP has accused Perez Tourino of lavish spending on office furniture and his official limousine. Pepe Blanco said February 26, in a markedly guarded statement, that the PSOE needed another four years of leadership to firm up its agenda and correct its course. BNG officials have denied allegations of influence peddling and inappropriate financial ties with Galician industrialists.

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COMMENT  
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11. (C) As a PSOE headquarters official, born and raised in Galicia, told Poloff, "Galicians are notoriously inscrutable." PSOE is definitely pulling out all the stops to win enough votes to keep Perez Tourino as Galician President in a coalition with the BNG. If the PP loses this election, Rajoy will be further weakened, having lost two general elections, lost regional control in the Balearic Islands and Navarre, and lost public confidence during the prolonged espionage and corruption scandals in Madrid, Valencia and elsewhere. One final voter turn-out factor all the candidates are worried about -- the elections take place on the final day of the raucous Carnival celebrations in Spain. There will definitely be some painful hangovers on Monday, whoever wins the election. END COMMENT.

CHACON