

Key Findings

Puerto Rico has been a U.S. territory since 1898. Puerto Ricans were granted citizenship in 1917. It is now 2022 and the promise of statehood remains unfulfilled. Politicians, pundits, and Puerto Ricans themselves talk about statehood, but also wonder aloud when the time might come for action and results to replace avoidance and rhetoric. A more centrist political realignment of Hispanics on the mainland; a recent US Supreme Court case; statements of support from both Republican and Democrat officials; and now this survey of Puerto Ricans living on the mainland shows that the time for a more specific and serious conversation about Puerto Rico statehood could be now.

Puerto Rico statehood has been a Democrat priority, it was one of the first bills introduced in 2021 under a Democrat controlled Congress. President Joe Biden, Democrat Senator Martin Heinrich, and Democrat Congressman Darren Soto have all been vocal supporters of Puerto Rico statehood. Yet, Congresswoman Jenniffer González-Colón (R), and 18 other House Republicans have supported legislation for statehood. Additionally, many prominent Republicans have publicly supported the notion of Puerto Rico statehood including Senators Marco Rubio, Rick Scott and President Donald Trump as well as the Republican Party Platform since 1940.

Though other Republicans have consistently and almost reflexively claimed that Puerto Rico statehood would bring “two liberal senators to DC”, recent surveys of Puerto Ricans living stateside, including a recent poll that we conducted in Ohio, Pennsylvania, Florida, New York, Texas, and Georgia, suggest the policy preferences and the political leanings may surprise legislators on both sides of the aisle.

Mainland Puerto Ricans in these six states mirror the national attitude of the general population evidenced in many other recent public polls. Inflation is the number one issue; 7 in 10 think the country is heading in the wrong direction; and a similar number disapprove of Joe Biden's job as president. Over 6 in 10 approve of President Trump's performance while in office. The opposite is true of President Biden: nearly half strongly disapprove of his handling of that same job here and now.

Puerto Rico statehood is important to these mainland voters, with over 6 in 10 say very/somewhat important, and just 19% claiming it is “not at all important.” Yet, just 53% claim to pay a great deal or fair amount of attention to news coverage of Puerto Rico, 43% admit they pay little to no attention to news in Puerto Rico. Further, a clear majority (63%) believe Puerto Rico becoming a state is a better option than becoming an independent nation or remaining a U.S. territory.

The expected benefits Puerto Rico would enjoy if it became a state, including more aid, funding, relief, and economic opportunity, were highly attractive to survey respondents. When asked to share their hesitations about statehood, the highest responses were “no hesitation” (36%) and “no opinion” (15%). Furthermore, the common resistance cited by politicians “Puerto Rico would have two liberal senators” did not register in this open-ended series among Puerto Ricans living on the mainland in these six states.

Each of the five distinct advantages of statehood were presented, in rotated fashion, to the survey respondents. Each of the following garnered above 87% in “total importance” as a factor for their own support for statehood.

- Puerto Rico would receive an additional \$10 billion per year in federal funds.
- Would be able to vote in presidential elections.
- Having full access to federal benefits to help with financial difficulties, natural disasters, and events like the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Having Congressional representation with full voting power.
- Attracting businesses to start or expand in Puerto Rico.

In a list of statements asking voters what would make them more or less likely to support statehood, we find each statement receives overwhelming majority support.

Over 7 in 10 are more likely to support statehood for the following 3 statements:

- “Statehood would offer more protections and benefits to U.S. territories such as Puerto Rico.”
- “The U.S. Congress approved Puerto Ricans being granted U.S. citizenship in 1917, which historically is a first step for becoming a state.”
- “Puerto Rico is the oldest territory of the United States, having come under the rule of the United States in 1898.”

And over 6 in 10 are more likely to support statehood after hearing the following 4 statements:

- “The Federal Government has not been able to provide for the needs of Puerto Rico as a territory.”
- “Citizens of Puerto Rico have the same responsibilities as citizens of the United States, but they do not have the same rights.”
- “Statehood is supported by Republicans and Democrats.”
- “Not including the original 13 colonies, nearly every state was first a territory, and then granted statehood. Puerto Rico is the only territory that has requested statehood and has been denied.”

In this series, the rationale and messaging for pro-statehood cures the information gap among mainland Puerto Ricans.

Decoupling DC statehood and Puerto Rico statehood is an imperative. Nearly 8 in 10 think it is unfair that DC receives many benefits that Puerto Rico does not, despite both being considered territories. Facts like these show a distinction with a difference between the two, and bolster the likelihood of having a clear, direct proposal and greater possibility of success.

At the conclusion of the survey, 75% of Mainland Puerto Ricans living in these six states agree that Puerto Rico should become a state so it can enjoy the rights and privileges other states have. Only 15% prefer that Puerto Rico should become an independent nation.

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Support for Puerto Rico statehood also carries notable political currency. Nearly 7 in 10 are more likely to support a candidate that supports Puerto Rico becoming a state. Just 13% are less likely.

Those more likely to vote for a candidate who support Puerto Rico statehood include Ages 30-49, Men 18-49, Women 18-49, Conservative Women, HS or less, Catholics, Urban, Texas and Pennsylvania.

Somewhat surprisingly, conservative women consistently were found to be among the highest supporters of the benefits tested and statehood. Republicans, HS or less, Texas residents, younger voters, those in the mainland for greater than 10 years consistently showed higher support than any other demographics.

Relatedly, the survey results show tri-partisan support for statehood. Stateside Puerto Rican Republicans support statehood, and at an even higher rate than self-identified Liberal or 2020-Biden voters.

Republicans showed growth among all Hispanic voters in 2020 up and down the ticket. Puerto Rico statehood could be another step in the right direction in their focus to deliver for key constituencies in swing states that are aligning more with Republicans views and values. Republicans can use these persuasive messages and focus on the benefits for Puerto Ricans while exposing Democrats as focused on the benefits to themselves, “two liberal senators”.