

TO Interested Parties
FROM Chris Anderson and Andrew Schwartz
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SUBJECT Partisan Preference of Puerto Rico Voters Post-Statehood

Conventional wisdom holds that, if Puerto Rico were admitted to the union as a state, it would be a consistent and reliable source of support for the Democratic Party. If the election of Donald Trump tells us anything, however, it is that conventional wisdom deserves close, skeptical scrutiny.

Indeed, attitudes and voting behavior on the island lend credence to Governor Rosselló's recent assertion that, if it were granted statehood, Puerto Rico could very well be a swing state. Republican politicians (e.g. Luis Fortuño) have had electoral success on the island (albeit running primarily on status issues). The pro-statehood party is aligned with the island's Republican Party. And many Puerto Rico residents could, as the saying goes, be Republicans who don't know it yet.

This conclusion is based on 20 island-wide polls conducted over the past decade, which consistently show natural ties between Puerto Ricans and the Republican Party based on religious, social, and fiscal issues.

Social and Fiscal Issues: Leaning to the right

Religion plays a much stronger role in Puerto Rican society than in communities on the mainland. In a 2012 poll we conducted, two-thirds of Puerto Rico voters (67%) identify as Roman Catholic, making Puerto Rico by far the most Catholic area in the country (Rhode Island and Connecticut come next, at around 50% Catholic). An additional 22% of Puerto Rico residents belong to another Christian denomination, while just 6% do not identify with any religion – again making Puerto Rico the most observant area in the country.

This religiosity aligns Puerto Ricans with a core Republican constituency. Nationally, Catholic voters broke for Trump by a 50-46% margin, and those who attended religious services weekly or more preferred the Republican 55-41%. Mitt Romney won those who attended services weekly or more by 20 points in 2012, and Catholics attending services weekly by 15 points.

Puerto Rico voters' religiosity goes hand-in-hand with a social conservatism that is closely aligned with traditional Republican Party positions. Consider the following, from an island-wide poll we conducted in March 2016 and compared to recent national surveys from Gallup:

- **On same-sex marriage**, 80% of island residents believe that marriage must be between a man and a woman. Nationally, less than half that number – 34% – oppose same-sex marriage.
- **On abortion**, one-third (34%) of residents say abortion should be legal, compared to nearly half of mainland voters (49%) who are pro-choice. Island residents are also overwhelmingly in favor of parental notification (84%).
- **On school prayer**, 85% agree that prayer should be allowed in public schools, more than 20 points higher than the 61% of mainland voters who feel that way. Seven-in-ten residents on the island (68%) favor displaying the Ten Commandments on government property.

Voters on the island also tend to take a Republican approach to fiscal issues. Our polling over the past decade has consistently found that voters believe the solution to the government's debt lies in cutting unnecessary government spending. Very few voters (just 12% in 2016) favor increasing taxes to help resolve the fiscal crisis.

Puerto Ricans who have moved to the mainland exhibit similar tendencies that reinforce the idea that this group is accessible to the Republican Party. Our polling of Puerto Ricans in central Florida indicates a relatively socially and fiscally conservative community. Indeed, while more Puerto Ricans in central Florida identify as Democrats (53%) than Republicans (18%), their ideological views tell a very different story. Equal numbers identify as conservative (29%) and liberal (29%), and the substantial bloc of moderates is nearly evenly split between the two parties.

Elephants on the Island

Republicans have held favorable profiles and enjoyed electoral success in Puerto Rico. The pro-statehood New Progressive Party (PNP) is the island's largest political party, and is closely tied to the local Republican Party. (One of its predecessor parties was called the Statehood Republicans.)

Statehood proponents' desires are also reflected in 2016 Republican Party platform, which recognizes recent pro-statehood island-wide referenda and expresses support for Puerto Rican admission to the union. The national Democratic Party platform, on the other hand, offers a more watered-down endorsement emphasizing self-determination for Puerto Ricans but not explicitly supporting statehood.

The island has elected Republican governors (Luis Fortuño in 2008) and resident commissioners (Jenniffer González in 2016, Fortuño in 2004) in recent island-wide elections. Moreover, the

current legislative leadership on the island (Senate President Thomas Rivera Schatz and Speaker of the House Johnny Méndez) and Lieutenant Governor (Luis Rivera Marín) are all Republicans.

Resident Commissioner González is the most popular politician on the island, according to our recent polling. Fortuño was very popular early in his time in office, though the 2008 economic crisis hurt his numbers as his term came to an end.

On a national level, George W. Bush was also very well-regarded – particularly during the beginning of his term. Bush’s favorability on the island generally mirrored that of voters nationally: strongly favorable throughout his first term, with declining ratings over the course of his second term. George H. W. Bush was consistently popular throughout his presidential term.

The Great Unknowns

Two major unknowns cloud projections of Puerto Rico voters’ partisan leanings after statehood:

1. The devastation wrought by hurricanes Irma and Maria last fall has, without a doubt, introduced a major element of uncertainty into the political discussion on the island. Like any state suffering similar devastation, Puerto Rico will clearly need national help to recover. Whether that aid arrives and the extent to which Republicans (or Democrats, for that matter) are seen to be providing much-needed assistance could increase affinity for one party or the other.
2. Similarly, given the popularity of statehood (our polling in 2016 and 2017 indicates roughly twice as many voters favor statehood as oppose it), it stands to reason that the national party that takes the lead on making the island a state could gain a substantial amount of goodwill from island residents. If Puerto Rico gains statehood under a Republican administration or from a GOP-controlled Congress, it could strengthen voters’ affinity for the Republican platform.

The National Picture

The Reapportionment Act of 1929 established a 435-seat benchmark for Congress. Although the ranks swelled slightly when Alaska and Hawaii were admitted to the union, Congress returned to 435 seats within four years. This benchmark controls the effect of Puerto Rican statehood on both Congress and, by extension, the Electoral College.

Based on 2020 Census projections, Democratic states would lose more Representatives than would Republican states in the reapportionment process. So even if Puerto Rico voters set aside their agreement with Republicans on social issues and vote for Democratic candidates, it would have a minimal impact on the partisan makeup of Congress.

Similarly, the simple Electoral College calculus that Puerto Rican statehood would add seven electoral votes for the Democrat is incorrect. Reapportionment (and thus electoral votes) would

lead to a minimal Electoral College change: if Puerto Rico had been a state in 2016 and had voted for Clinton, Trump would still have garnered 304 electoral votes.

Overall, then, Puerto Ricans' fiscal and social conservatism suggests an electorate that could very well swing towards Republican candidates. Puerto Ricans have a long history of electing Republican candidates to positions of leadership. And the likely implications of reapportionment suggest limited downside for the GOP even if Puerto Ricans put aside these considerations and opt for Democratic candidates.

About Anderson Robbins Research

Anderson Robbins Research is a Boston-based firm specializing in providing highly accurate research to political and corporate clients. ARR President Chris Anderson has provided polling to a presidential campaign, numerous ballot initiative campaigns, local and state political candidates, and co-directs national polling on for the Fox News Channel.

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APPENDIX: KEY POLLING DATA – FROM ISLAND-WIDE SURVEYS OF PUERTO RICO VOTERS

I'm going to read you the names of some political figures. After each one, please tell me whether you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of that person or group. If you've never heard of someone, please just say so. **[IF FAVORABLE/UNFAVORABLE: Is that strongly or only somewhat [FAVORABLE/UNFAVORABLE]?)**

	-----Favorable-----			-----Unfavorable-----			(Not sure / Ref.)	
	<u>TOTAL</u>	Some- Strongly	what	<u>TOTAL</u>	Some- what	Strongly	Never heard of	
Jennifer González								
June 27, 2017	63%	46	17	28	8	20	2	7
May 2017	59%	35	24	29	9	20	5	8
November 21, 2016	71%	50	21	22	9	14	2	4
November 4, 2016	50%	39	11	32	7	25	4	14
November 1, 2016	57%	39	18	32	12	20	2	9
October 23, 2016	53%	34	19	35	11	24	3	9
October 11, 2016	58%	33	25	36	12	24	1	5
September 29, 2016	55%	31	25	33	12	21	4	7
September 19, 2016	57%	32	24	29	11	18	5	9
August 2016	60%	37	23	28	10	17	5	7
June 2016	62%	39	23	31	10	20	3	4
May 2016	58%	30	28	29	13	16	3	10
March 2016	56%	25	31	30	16	14	4	10
September 2012	39%	12	27	41	21	20	5	14
September 2010	42%	11	31	38	24	14	11	9
Luis Fortuño								
September 2012	49%	19	30	45	19	26	4	1
September 2010	45%	16	29	51	12	39	4	<1
October 2008	63%	36	27	32	11	21	5	1
November 2007	70%	37	33	21	8	13	8	2
November 2006	72%	43	29	20	9	11	7	1
July 2006	75%	41	34	19	9	10	5	1
November 2004	56%	32	24	29	12	17	10	5
August 2004	52%	29	23	38	12	16	14	6
December 2003	54%	29	25	24	8	16	15	7
November 2003	42%	21	21	27	10	17	18	14
December 2002	24%	11	13	18	8	10	14	44
November 2001	32%	15	17	17	9	8	15	37

	-----Favorable-----			-----Unfavorable-----			Never heard of	(Not sure / Ref.)
	<u>TOTAL</u>	Strongly	Some-what	<u>TOTAL</u>	Some-what	Strongly		
Barack Obama								
Oct 1-11, 2016	81%	54	27	13	4	9	1	6
June 20-30, 2016	76%	49	27	17	9	8	1	6
Sep 21-30, 2012	80%	46	34	14	10	4	5	1
Sep 19-26, 2010	89%	61	28	5	3	2	4	1
Oct 6-13, 2008	75%	48	27	14	6	8	10	1
Nov 12-26, 2007	12%	4	8	9	3	6	11	68

George W. Bush

Oct 6-13, 2008	30%	11%	19	66	15	51	1	4
Nov 12-26, 2007	39%	16%	23	51	15	36	4	6
July 2006	48%	24%	24	42	14	28	2	8
November 2004	56%	27%	29	32	11	21	4	8
October 2004	61%	30%	31	29	12	17	3	7
August 2004	49%	23%	26	38	20	18	2	11
December 2003	66%	33%	33	26	13	13	1	7
November 2003	66%	35%	31	23	12	11	1	10
December 2002	75%	47%	28	14	9	5	2	9
December 2001	86%	50%	36	8	5	3	1	5
November 2001	90%	65%	25	5	3	2	1	4

Do you favor or oppose seeking statehood for Puerto Rico? [IF FAVOR / OPPOSE: Is that strongly or just somewhat (favor/oppose)?]

	-----Favor-----			-----Oppose-----			(Not sure) (Ref.)	
	<u>TOTAL</u>	Strongly	Some-what	<u>TOTAL</u>	Some-what	Strongly		
June 27, 2017	63%	47	16	26	7	19	9	2
June 7, 2017	61%	50	11	21	5	15	15	4
May 2017	63%	51	12	25	7	18	9	3
November 4, 2016	61%	53	8	23	4	19	12	3
November 1, 2016	63%	50	12	24	6	18	10	3
October 23, 2016	60%	49	10	29	7	23	9	2
October 11, 2016	64%	49	15	27	6	20	8	2
September 29, 2016	59%	46	13	31	9	23	8	2
September 19, 2016	58%	49	8	27	6	22	13	2
August 2016	62%	47	15	26	7	19	9	3
June 2016	68%	56	11	28	7	22	3	1
May 2016	63%	50	13	28	7	21	7	2
March 2016	65%	54	11	23	6	17	10	2
October 2015	61%	45	16	24	7	17	14	2
December 2014	60%	53	17	24	8	16	13	3

Please tell me if you agree or disagree with the following statements. **[IF AGREE / DISAGREE: Is that strongly (agree/disagree), or only somewhat?]** **[RANDOMIZE]**

		-----Agree-----			-----Disagree-----			(Not sure)
		<u>TOTAL</u>	<u>Strongly</u>	<u>Some- what</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>	<u>Some- what</u>	<u>Strongly</u>	
Abortion should be legal.	March 2016	34%	19	15	61%	10	51%	5
	November 2006	18%	11	7	78%	5	73%	3
Marriage has to be between a man and a woman.	March 2016	80%	73	7	17	7	10	3
	November 2006	91%	88	3	7	3	4	2
Prayer should be allowed in public schools.	March 2016	85%	72	13	11	6	5	4
	November 2006	86%	76	10	20	6	14	5