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Puerto Rico's Unique Relationship to the United States An Overview of the Historical Relationship, the Island's Evolving Political System and Immigration to the Mainland

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Puerto Rico's Unique Relationship to the United States

An overview of the historical relationship, the Island's evolving political system and immigration to the mainland

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I. Introduction

Over the course of my first three years at Bard, I've had the opportunity to take a number of Political Studies courses concerning Latin American politics. Prior to my studies, I had always taken a particular interest in Latin America and the island of Puerto Rico. This grew out of the many trips my family and I would make to the island. These visits were an opportunity to meet my mother's many relatives who reside on the island. In fact, both sets of my mother's grandparents emigrated to the New York City area in the 1950's, where they joined the large and expanding community of Puerto Ricans whose lives would forever change.

Like so many other immigrants of their generation, the United States represented an ideal of economic opportunities that did not exist in Puerto Rico at that time. These families adjusted to a new climate, a new language, and a life to be lived among New York City's many other immigrant communities. Like many minority communities, recent inhabitants encountered prejudice from New York City's more established communities. Despite this, Puerto Rican-American citizens thrived in the United States. The Puerto Rican community were ambitious in their efforts to realize the American dream, which consisted of buying a home and providing their children a college education. I imagine there were probably winter days when they longed for their island home and the family members they left behind. Air travel was a luxury they could not easily afford and these people were faced with the reality that their new life began and part of their life was left back on the island.

Cultural shifts in migration are an interesting phenomenon in the sense they vary depending on the ethnicity and history of that specific community. Peoplehood, a term frequently

brought up in the text *Mambo Montage*, refers to the largest collective identity codified in modern/colonial world system to name, classify, differentiate, homogenize, and regulate bodies and populations according to Western capitalist regimes of power and knowledge.¹ After WWII, there was a noticeable shift in migration. This was especially true in the Tri-state area. Following the Second World War, the number of Puerto Ricans in the United States escalated from 69,967 individuals in the 1940s to 887,662 in the 1960s. During this time, there was an economic fallout occurring on the island, leaving many with no options and very little resources. Individuals were forced to either live through the economic downfall that was striking the island or test their luck in the United States and try to make an earning. Currently, Latin American groups make up a large portion of the communities in the New York/New Jersey area, consisting of 8.9% of New York City's total population. In fact, three cities with the highest Puerto Rican population all belong on the East Coast. New York City is the leader with over 723,621 Puerto Ricans, Philadelphia is a close second with 121,643, and Newark has 35,993. Chicago has 102,703 Puerto Ricans and is the only major city in the Midwest to have a significant population of citizens from the island.

Being the newer wave of migration meant that the Puerto Ricans had a support system in place to assist others from the island to settle in the city. The immediate reaction was not to assimilate. Instead there began movements of counter colonial resistance and as well as collective self-fashioning and community making, including the imaging of collective self and memory and existential practices of self affirmation². Much of the Latin American identity was framed within

¹ Laoì-Montes, Agustìn, and Arlene M. Dalvíla. *Mambo Montage: the Latinization of New York*. Columbia Univ. Press, 2001.

² Laoì-Montes, Agustìn, and Arlene M. Dalvíla. *Mambo Montage: the Latinization of New York*. Columbia Univ. Press, 2001.

the “contact zone”, between the rising US transoceanic empire and its southern neighbors³. Some Latin Americans believe labels have been imposed on them by dominant powers to homogenize, regulate, and discriminate them as a group and discredit their values. Similar to every other ethnic group first arriving to the states, Latin Americans faced racism and ignorance in their attempt to fit in with the current culture.

A major contributor towards the counter colonial resistance occurring between Puerto Ricans in the United States were the FALN. The FALN, or Fuerzas Armada de Liberación Nacional Puertorriqueña, were a clandestine paramilitary organization of Marxist-Leninist orientation that sought political independence for Puerto Rico through direct action⁴. Established in 1974, this small group of individuals were responsible for over 100 attacks on the US during a ten-year span. Most members of this group were second generation Puerto Ricans who were born and raised in the United States. They planned on following in the footsteps of both Algeria and Vietnam by embodying a form of leftist revolutionary nationalism whose primary objectives were cultural affirmation, self-determination, and decolonization⁵.

The main purpose of the bombings was to protest U.S. Military presence in Puerto Rico, draw attention to Puerto Rico’s political relationship with the United States, and object to increase influence of US-based corporate and financial institutions on the island⁶. Despite violence being the groups central tactic in drawing attention to their problems, they never had any inten-

³ Laõ-Montes, Agustín, and Arlene M. Dalvíla. *Mambo Montage: the Latinization of New York*. Columbia Univ. Press, 2001.

⁴ US Department of Homeland Security

⁵ US Department of Homeland Security

⁶ US Department of Homeland Security

tions of killing or hurting American civilians. Instead, they wanted to prove they can destabilize US Authority while gaining support for the Puerto Rican Independence cause.

One aspect of their lives that I often found confusing was that while they said they were citizens of the United States they never truly considered themselves Americans. I wasn't sure if they developed this view growing up on the island and absorbing its history of being "acquired" by the U.S. in a manner I'll describe further down, or the product of the prejudices they encountered as part of the traditional immigrant experience.

My relatives migrated to the United States for the same reasons other ethnic groups do, they want take advantage of the opportunities administered in the United States. Puerto Rico's economy is poor and work isn't as abundant. By moving to the mainland, they are open to more careers provided for American citizens with the possibility of affording an education. They assimilated by working and living among the immigrant groups before them. Their children (my grandmother and grandfather) had the fortune of growing up in the dynamic environment New York City provided in the 1950's and 60's. They embraced their native Puerto Rican culture by retaining fluency in Spanish, learning to cook the cuisine, and following many of the traditions of their parents' homeland. The relatives who were native inhabitants of the island had passed away and the familial ties to the Island have faded. I chose this topic because I felt an obligation to understand the island's history, it's unique relationship with the U.S. mainland, and why those ties (which have been challenged over the years) remain in place.

II. How the Island became a U.S. possession

In international law, Puerto Rico is considered an unincorporated territory associated with the United States. One feature of this territory in constitutional and international law, as defined in the US insular cases, “appurtenant and belonging to the United States, but is not part of the United States within the revenue clauses of the Constitution”.⁷ Puerto Rico’s official government label is as a Commonwealth. The Commonwealth status does not describe or provide for any specific political status or relationship between the United States. It has been applied to states and territories in the past but when used in connection with areas under US sovereignty that are not states, the term describes an area that is self-governing under a constitution of its adoption and limited right of self-government will not be unilaterally withdrawn by congress.⁸ The relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States can be traced back to the era of the Spanish-American war. Beginning in 1894, the US Naval War College developed plans to go to war with Spain with both the Cuban and Puerto Rican islands valued for their sugar crops which the U.S. mainland lacked.⁹

The US Naval War College drafted plans for war with Spain as early as 1894 in hopes of protecting American businesses operating in Cuba. Lieutenant William Kimball constructed the official plan in 1896, which entailed a two front war on Spain’s colonies in the Caribbean and the

⁷ *U.S. Supreme Court Insular Cases*

⁸ *U.S. Supreme Court Insular Cases*

⁹ Akiboh, Alvita. “Puerto Rico's Relationship With The United States.” *Ushistoryscene.com, ushistoryscene.com/article/puerto-rico/*.

Pacific.¹⁰ Finally, in July of 1898 while the Spanish American War was underway, the U.S. invaded Puerto Rico. General Nelson A. Miles, Commanding General of the United States Army, led the U.S. forces that landed in Guanica, Puerto Rico. General Miles stated claims to the people of Puerto Rico that the U.S. military did not “come to make war upon the people of a country that for centuries has been oppressed, but, on the contrary, to bring you protection, not only to yourselves, but to your property, to promote your prosperity, and to bestow upon you the immunities and blessings of the liberal institutions of our Government.”¹¹

At the conclusion of the war in August of 1898, Spain conceded three of its sovereign territories to the United States including the Philippines, Guam and Puerto Rico. Spain's decision to officially cede Puerto Rico to the United States continued until the Treaty of Paris came into effect in April, 1899, which facilitated United States control over Cuba, Puerto Rico, Philippines, and Guam from Spain.¹² This political procedure ceded any remaining nations in the Spanish Empire and evidently marked a prominent shift for United States as a world power.

¹⁰ Akiboh, Alvita. “Puerto Rico's Relationship With The United States.” *Ushistoryscene.com*, ushistoryscene.com/article/puerto-rico/.

¹¹ Akiboh, Alvita. “Puerto Rico's Relationship With The United States.” *Ushistoryscene.com*, ushistoryscene.com/article/puerto-rico/.

¹² Akiboh, Alvita. “Puerto Rico's Relationship With The United States.” *Ushistoryscene.com*, ushistoryscene.com/article/puerto-rico/.

III. Puerto Rico's Evolving Political System

The Foraker Act was enacted in 1900, eliminating US military government systems in Puerto Rico. In response to this, a government designed around a civil structure was implemented.¹³ As part of its design, the U.S. President delegated a governor and executive council on the island and Puerto Ricans elected their own 35-member House of Representatives.¹⁴ They also received a judicial system with a Supreme Court, as well as a Resident Commissioner that would be sent to the U.S. Congress, but would not vote. These acts formally recognized Puerto Ricans as citizens.

Despite being thought after as a freely associated state, Puerto Ricans are limited to how much control they actually have over their homeland. Over the years, the United States has imposed a set of strict guidelines on how the Commonwealth should be organized. As opposed to obtaining the privilege to vote for the President of the United States, citizens receive a significantly lesser contingency in voting for a Resident Commissioner of the island. Citizens eighteen years and older vote for a Resident Commissioner, who resides in the U.S. House of Representatives.¹⁵ This vote holds very little value in the sense that it has almost no impact on the United States government. The elected official is allowed to speak before members of congress but is prohibited to cast an individual vote.

¹³ *Constitution of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico*

¹⁴ Garrett, R Sam. "Political Status of Puerto Rico: Options for Congress." *Congressional Research Service*, pp. 1–52.

¹⁵ *Constitution of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico*

Another unique aspect within Puerto Rico's governmental structure are its restrictions within the constitution. The Constitution of Puerto Rico may be altered by the Commonwealth so as long as its articles do not conflict with the US constitution or the Puerto Rican Federal Relations Act¹⁶. In 1950, President Truman authorized a bill that would enable Puerto Rico to draft a local constitution for Federal approval with the condition that the new document would not change Puerto Rico's status as a territory.¹⁷ Along with the bills that were passed were a series of proposals, some enacted and others not, that looked to further stabilize the United States' role within the island. These bills are labeled as Presidential task forces.

In an attempt to connect with the people of Puerto Rico, the United States government created a series of orders concerning the well being and political agendas of civilians living on the island. As noted in the document assembled by Congress, "The task force has developed these options after listening to and considering the views of individuals, elected officials, and other representatives of the people of Puerto Rico to ensure that views and positions have been objectively considered irrespective of affiliation or ideology"¹⁸. The Task Force's are designed to help improve the treatment of Puerto Rico in federal programs and to provide recommendations on policies that promote job creations, education, health care, clean energy, and economic development.¹⁹

¹⁶ *Constitution of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico*

¹⁷ *Constitution of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico*

¹⁸ *Report By The Presidential Task Force On Puerto Rico Status*

¹⁹ *Report By The Presidential Task Force On Puerto Rico Status*

The purpose of the task force is to provide recommendations for the Commonwealth's future status. They also discuss such proposals with representatives of the people of Puerto Rico and the Congress; to work with leaders of the Commonwealth and the Congress to clarify the options to enable Puerto Ricans to determine their preference among options for the islands' future status that are not incompatible with the Constitution and basic laws and policies of the United States; and to implement such an option if chosen by a majority, including helping Puerto Ricans obtain a governing arrangement under which they would vote for national government officials, if they choose such a status.²⁰ The Task Force membership constitutes the director of the Office of Intergovernmental Affairs in the White House and officials from each executive department.

In November of 1992, President George H. W. Bush issued a memo regarding the relationship between the Federal Government and Puerto Rico. The report, titled *Memorandum of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico*, states,

Because Puerto Rico's degree of constitutional self-government, population, and size set it apart from other areas also subject to Federal jurisdiction under Article IV, section 3, clause 2 of the Constitution, I hereby direct all Federal departments, agencies, and officials, to the extent consistent with the Constitution and the laws of the United States, henceforward to treat Puerto Rico administratively as if it were a State, except insofar as doing so with respect to an existing Federal program or activity would increase or decrease Federal receipts or expenditures, or would seriously disrupt the operation of such program or activity. With respect to a Federal program or activity for which no fiscal baseline has been established, this memorandum shall not be construed to require that such program or activity be conducted in a way that increases or decreases Federal receipts or expenditures relative to the level that would obtain if Puerto Rico were treated other than as a State.²¹

²⁰ *Report By The Presidential Task Force On Puerto Rico Status*

²¹ *Memorandum of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico*

In response to the document contracted by President George H. W. Bush regarding the islands political status, the first Presidential task force was issued in 1997 and entails restrictions and opinions about results during annual referendums. HR 856 reads as; the United States-Puerto Rico Political Status Act - Declares that: (1) if the referendum held under this Act results in approval of sovereignty leading to Statehood for Puerto Rico, the English language requirements of the Federal Government shall apply to Puerto Rico to the same extent as Federal law requires throughout the United States; and (2) it is in the best interest of Puerto Rico to promote the teaching of English as the language of opportunity and empowerment in the United States in order to enable public school students to achieve English language proficiency by the age of ten. Requires a referendum to be held by December 31, 1998, on Puerto Rico's political status, for either: (1) retention of its present Commonwealth status; (2) full self-government through separate sovereignty leading to independence or free association; or (3) full self-government through U.S. sovereignty leading to statehood.²²

It also requires the President to develop and submit to the Congress for approval legislation for: (1) a transition plan of not more than ten years which leads to full self-government for Puerto Rico; and (2) a recommendation for the implementation of such self-government consistent with Puerto Rico's approval. Requires the transition plan, if the vote favors statehood, to: (1) include proposals and incentives to increase the opportunities of the people of Puerto Rico to expand their English proficiency, including teaching in English in public schools, awarding fellowships and scholarships, and providing grants to organizations to promote English language skills;

²² Don. "H.R.856 - 105th Congress (1997-1998): United States-Puerto Rico Political Status Act." Congress.gov, 15 July 1998, www.congress.gov/bill/105th-congress/house-bill/856.

(2) promote the use of English by U.S. citizens in Puerto Rico; and (3) include the effective date of Puerto Rico's incorporation into the United States. Authorizes the Government of Puerto Rico, in the event of a vote in favor of Commonwealth, to call a Special Convention to develop proposals for submission to the President and the Congress for changes in Federal policy on economic and social matters of concern to the Puerto Rican people.²³ The Popular Democratic Party (PDP) was adamantly against the bill claiming it had labeled Puerto Rico a colony as opposed to a true Commonwealth. The Popular Democratic Party is one of the more prevalent political groups on the island in part because they are in favor of the Commonwealth status and want to remain so in order to receive whatever benefits the United States may provide.²⁴ Ultimately, the bill died in the Senate citing issues over English becoming the primary language and Puerto Ricans receiving their own citizenship.

In response to the Task Force that was initiated but failed to pass, a referendum was held on the island in 1998 which included 5 alternative political preferences that had not been present in years past. Since being claimed by the United States, Puerto Rico has had 5 referendums take place over the last 50 years with varying results regarding its status.²⁵ Many have voted to remain a territory within the United States while others incline on becoming a state within the United States. Even fewer citizens favor outright independence, subject to whatever treaty

²³Don. "H.R.856 - 105th Congress (1997-1998): United States-Puerto Rico Political Status Act." Congress.gov, 15 July 1998, www.congress.gov/bill/105th-congress/house-bill/856.

²⁴ Don. "H.R.856 - 105th Congress (1997-1998): United States-Puerto Rico Political Status Act." Congress.gov, 15 July 1998, www.congress.gov/bill/105th-congress/house-bill/856.

²⁵ Don. "H.R.856 - 105th Congress (1997-1998): United States-Puerto Rico Political Status Act." Congress.gov, 15 July 1998, www.congress.gov/bill/105th-congress/house-bill/856.

arrangements are agreed on both sides. The United States implemented three conditions within its political structure between Puerto Rico in the form of a Presidential Executive Bills, Bills in the US Congress, as well as Referenda's that are held on the island. ²⁶

Both Statehood and Independence remained on the ballot in 1998 but competed against options such as Free Association, Territorial Commonwealth, and None of the Above. Members of the Commonwealth party urged citizens to go against the ballot and vote for "None of the Above" in part because they believed the definition of the term as they saw it on the ballot, "Failed to recognize both the constitutional protections afforded to our US citizenship and the fact that the relationship is based upon the mutual consent of Puerto Rico and the United States"²⁷. A staggering 50% of the population (787,900 people), voted in favor of "None of the Above" which raised the issue that the voting system is controversial. Statehood received a considerably large number of votes with 728,157 (46.6%), while the movement towards Independence hindered with only 39,838 people (2.6%). In total, 1,555,270 citizens participated in this referendum (Refer to Appendix Figure. 1). ²⁸

The second task force, which was appropriated twelve years later, discussed voting restriction and implications during balloting concerning the islands status. HR 2499 reads as followed; Puerto Rico Democracy Act of 2010 - Authorizes the government of Puerto Rico: (1) to

²⁶ Bea, Keith, and R Sam Garrett. "CRS Report For Congress." *Congressional Research Service*, Sept. 2007.

²⁷ Garrett, R Sam. "Political Status for Puerto Rico: Options for Congress." *Congressional Research Service*, 7 June 2011, pp. 1–56.

²⁸ Garrett, R Sam. "Political Status for Puerto Rico: Options for Congress." *Congressional Research Service*, 7 June 2011, pp. 1–56.

conduct a plebiscite giving voters the option to vote to continue Puerto Rico's present political status or to have a different political status; (2) if a majority of ballots favor continuing the present status, to conduct additional such plebiscites every eight years; and (3) if a majority of ballots favor having a different status, to conduct a plebiscite on the options of becoming fully independent from the United States, forming with the United States a political association between sovereign nations that will not be subject to the Territorial Clause of the Constitution, being admitted as a state of the Union, or continuing its present political status.²⁹

Prescribes the eligibility requirements for voting in a plebiscite. Requires the Puerto Rico State Elections Commission to: (1) certify plebiscite results to the President and Congress; and (2) ensure that all ballots used for a plebiscite include the full content of the ballot printed in English.³⁰ Directs the Commission to inform persons voting in a plebiscite that if Puerto Rico retains its current political status or is admitted as a state: (1) the official language requirements of the federal government shall apply to Puerto Rico; and (2) it is the best interest of the United States for the teaching of English to be promoted in Puerto Rico as the language of opportunity and empowerment in order to enable students in public schools to achieve English language proficiency. Requires the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico to pay all costs associated with such plebiscite (including the costs of printing, distribution, transportation, collection, and counting of all ballots).³¹

²⁹ *Report By The Presidential Task Force On Puerto Rico Status*

³⁰ *Report By The Presidential Task Force On Puerto Rico Status*

³¹ *Report By The Presidential Task Force On Puerto Rico Status*

Independence has been a priority for Puerto Ricans who reside in both the United States and in Puerto Rico. In an attempt to convince more people to vote for this cause, Representative Luis Gutierrez introduced a bill before Congress that would end Puerto Rico's territorial status.³² Gutierrez, a native of Chicago, is adamantly against statehood stating, "Puerto Rico will give up its nationhood, its culture, its Olympic teams, its language and the ability to determine its own future without a master".³³ What makes this bill different from others presented before Congress is that it only includes Independence options such as Free Association and Complete Independence. A major issue detailed in the document were the voting restrictions on individuals not living on the island. HR 900 permits anyone outside of Puerto Rico from participating in the vote. This was deemed controversial in the sense that most Puerto Ricans migrate to the United States and continue to have ties to the island despite not being present.³⁴ This, as to what I believe, is the major contributor as to why the HR 900 never came into effect.

The bill is titled HR 900 and it read follows,

"This bill requires the Legislative Assembly of Puerto Rico to provide for a referendum in Puerto Rico in which eligible voters shall express their preference between the non-territorial options of either independence or free association. An individual shall be eligible to vote in such referendum if that individual was born in, or has a parent who was born in, Puerto Rico. The President shall negotiate a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation and other bilateral agreements with the government of an independent Puerto Rico that will provide for equitable economic relations. Such treaty shall establish the details of the bilateral relations of Puerto Rico and the United States under specified guidelines with respect to citizenship, vested rights, trade, public debt and economic transition, currency, and defense. The President shall negotiate the terms for a Compact of Free Association with the government of Puerto Rico, which shall be submitted to Congress and the people of Puerto Rico for ratification under specified agreed guidelines with

³² *United States, Congress, HR 900. 2007. Congress.gov Congress.*

³³ "LUIS GUTIERREZ INTRODUCES BILL TO FORCE INDEPENDENCE ON PUERTO RICO." *Pasquines, Essaf, pasquines.us/2017/02/23/luis-gutierrez-introduces-bill-force-independence-puerto-rico/.*

³⁴ *United States, Congress, HR 900. 2007. Congress.gov Congress.*

respect to Puerto Rican sovereignty and self-government, the termination of the free association relationship when Puerto Rico becomes fully independent, the continuation of U.S. citizenship for citizens of Puerto Rico, and the continuation of trade relations with the United States.³⁵

³⁵ *United States, Congress, HR 900. 2007. Congress.gov Congress.*

IV. Puerto Rico's Political History

As noted earlier in the document, referendums are held on the island an attempt to gather information about its citizen's perspective on its current status. The first referendum was held in 1967 and saw a considerable amount of voters at the podium. Around 703,692 citizens voted during this election with a strong majority in favor of the Commonwealth status. Voters chose between three options, Independence, Statehood, and Commonwealth. A total of 425,132 people, which was 60% of the voters, preferred to remain a commonwealth while 274,312 (39%), were in favor of statehood. A considerably smaller portion voted for independence at 4,248 (.6%), along with 3,601 of these ballots labeled invalid (Refer to Appendix in Figure. 1).³⁶

A second Referendum took place 24 years later in 1991 and was accompanied by a major increase in voting across the island. The 1991 referendum saw close to a million more voters participating with a total of 1,700,990 of Puerto Rico's citizens. The specific proposals included in the referendum were the right to determine the status of Puerto Rico without being subject to the plenary powers of Congress, guarantees of the continuance of Puerto Rico's culture (including official use of the Spanish language and retention of a separate Olympic team), and a guarantee of U.S. citizenship based on constitutional, not statutory, authority.³⁷ Both the PDP and the PIP urged a "yes" vote. By casting a "yes" vote, Puerto Rico would be allowed to operate as a separate entity without being entirely detached from the United States. While the idea of Indepen-

³⁶ Garrett, R Sam. "Puerto Rico's Political Status and the 2012 Plebiscite: Background and Key Questions." *Congressional Research Service*, 25 June 2013, pp. 1–17.

³⁷ Bea, Keith, and R Sam Garrett. "CRS Report For Congress." *Congressional Research Service*, Sept. 2007.

dence seems beneficial, it would actually make things worse for Puerto Ricans on the island because they'd lose all United States benefits, including tax incentives.³⁸

Once again the Commonwealth status was favored with 826,326 individuals electing this option, which was 48.9% of the total votes. The option of becoming a state within the United States increased tremendously and came in a close second at 788,296 votes, or 46.6%. Independence movements even increased with 75,620 people voting for this option. While this number is significantly larger than in years prior, it was only 4.5% of the islands population, leading one to believe that the Independence movements occurring on the island aren't nearly as strong as I was originally lead to believe. (Refer to Appendix in Figure. 1).³⁹

The 2012 election is regarded as one of the most questioned elections in Puerto Rico's modern era in which Puerto Rican delegates reexamined their relationship between the United States federal government. In this election, voters were asked to answer two distinct questions about their opinions on the United States. The first question regarded whether they wished to maintain Puerto Rico's political status. The other examined their preference for statehood, independence, or status as a sovereign free associated state. According to results certified by the Puerto Rico State Elections Commission, approximately 54% of those who cast ballots answered "no" to the first question⁴⁰. A majority vote of 61.2% of voters elected statehood as their political

³⁸ Garrett, R Sam. "Puerto Rico's Political Status and the 2012 Plebiscite: Background and Key Questions." *Congressional Research Service*, 25 June 2013, pp. 1–17.

³⁹ Garrett, R Sam. "Puerto Rico's Political Status and the 2012 Plebiscite: Background and Key Questions." *Congressional Research Service*, 25 June 2013, pp. 1–17.

⁴⁰ Garrett, R Sam. "Puerto Rico's Political Status and the 2012 Plebiscite: Background and Key Questions." *Congressional Research Service*, 25 June 2013, pp. 1–17.

status but were overruled by state governors who believed the system was inconclusive. Although voters endorsed a change in the status quo and favored statehood, they also voted out the pro-statehood occupant governor Luis Fortuño.⁴¹ Puerto Ricans also voted out territorial legislatures who were believed to be generally supportive of the statehood status. No change in Puerto Rico's political status could occur without congressional action.⁴²

The options presented on the 2012 ballot created a slew of issues because the instructions asked voters to select an option in question 2 regardless of their answer to question 1. Voters argued that the options provided favored statehood, which has been historically more popular than independence or free association. The statehood and independence options on the ballot were largely self-explanatory. The "sovereign free associated state" option was somewhat less clear, although the description listed on the ballot provided additional information. Because free association implies independence (but presumably more ongoing connections to the United States than the "independence" option), the final ramifications of this option remain to be seen if it were selected in the future.⁴³

The 2012 ballot also included no option for expressing a preference for the Pro-Commonwealth position other than answering "yes" to question 1, which was deemed vague for a voting system. In particular, it is unclear which option was desirable for those who prefer the

⁴¹ Garrett, R Sam. "Puerto Rico's Political Status and the 2012 Plebiscite: Background and Key Questions." *Congressional Research Service*, 25 June 2013, pp. 1–17.

⁴² Garrett, R Sam. "Puerto Rico's Political Status and the 2012 Plebiscite: Background and Key Questions." *Congressional Research Service*, 25 June 2013, pp. 1–17.

⁴³ Garrett, R Sam. "Puerto Rico's Political Status and the 2012 Plebiscite: Background and Key Questions." *Congressional Research Service*, 25 June 2013, pp. 1–17.

Commonwealth status.⁴⁴ The legislation authorizing the plebiscite suggests that the “sovereign free associated” language was adapted from PDP platform language, a point that some in the PDP have disputed.⁴⁵ The 2012 ballot also did not include “enhanced commonwealth” status, which favors the perspective that Puerto Rico’s status is somewhere between that of a territory and that of a state.

In response to the 2012 referendum, former Resident Commissioner Pedro Pierluisi introduced a bill advocating for Puerto Rico to become a state within the United States. HR 2000 reads as followed, Puerto Rico Status Resolution Act - Authorizes the State Elections Commission of Puerto Rico to provide for a ratification vote on the admission of Puerto Rico as a state of the United States on an equal footing with the several states in all respects.⁴⁶ Requires (if a majority of votes cast in the ratification vote are for the admission of Puerto Rico as a state): (1) the President to submit to Congress legislation to admit Puerto Rico as a state, and (2) Congress to act, through legislation, to admit Puerto Rico as a state.⁴⁷

Although some have urged Puerto Rico to become a state within the United States, many fear that this theory that will never come into fruition. Since claiming Puerto Rico from Spain in 1898, the United States has been adamant on retaining Puerto Rico as a territory. Puerto Rico faces a series of obstacles that would prevent them from becoming a state, including its enormous debt that exceeds over 72 billion. On top of that, many in the United States are against

⁴⁴ Garrett, R Sam. “Puerto Rico’s Political Status and the 2012 Plebiscite: Background and Key Questions.” *Congressional Research Service*, 25 June 2013, pp. 1–17.

⁴⁵ Garrett, R Sam. “Puerto Rico’s Political Status and the 2012 Plebiscite: Background and Key Questions.” *Congressional Research Service*, 25 June 2013, pp. 1–17.

⁴⁶ *United States, Congress, HR. 2000. 2013.*

⁴⁷ *United States, Congress, HR. 2000. 2013.*

adding a Spanish speaking state to the nation. Puerto Ricans are already citizens of the United States and receive many of the same incentives as those living on the mainland. Although Puerto Rico has more citizens than over 20 states within the United States, the standard of living is too poor to make the argument convincing. Both the President of the United States and members of Congress have also been very vocal against this movement, claiming the voting results during referendums aren't convincing enough.

The fifth and final Referendum was held as recently as 2017 but was once again spoiled by a boycott led by the Popular Democratic Party. In total, 502,801 voted in favor of statehood, which was 97.18%. For free association/independence, a total of 7,786 were in favor which was around 1.50%, once again proving the movements for independence simply don't have any weight on the island. The 2017 referendum had a participation rate of 23 percent with roughly 2.26 million registered voters.”⁴⁸

After examining referendum results from years past, it is evident just how much power the Commonwealth Party has over the people of Puerto Rico. Remaining a Commonwealth is beneficial for both Puerto Rico and the United States because it gives Puerto Rican citizens free access to a world power and allows the United States to remain in control over whatever events may be occurring on the island. The United States has been vocal against allowing Puerto Rico to remove its Commonwealth status because they want to remain in control.

⁴⁸ Dwyer, Colin. “Puerto Rico Overwhelmingly Votes On U.S. Statehood In Nonbinding Referendum.” NPR, NPR, 11 June 2017, www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2017/06/11/532482957/puerto-rico-votes-on-statehood-though-congress-will-make-final-call.

While Puerto Ricans may be in favor of changing their current status to statehood, Congress has the power to ignore these results claiming they are nothing more than an opinion. In the past, Congressional Resolutions have expressed support for following the beliefs of the Puerto Rican people and would be willing to work with the island if election results were not tampered with. A main reason as to why United States is unwilling to change its position or resolve the status problem is because Puerto Rico does not have a voting representative in Congress. Without a representative in Congress, Puerto Rico will forever remain in this standstill position.

V. History of Independence Movement

The Puerto Rican Independence Party, or PIP for short, is one of three political parties on the island combating for independence with the United States. Founded in 1946, the independistas have fought for the opportunity for Puerto Rico to become its own nation for over 70 years. The party represents the independence sector of Puerto Rican elite, consisting of mostly professional middle class and merchants.⁴⁹ Some of the logistics of PIP include their idea for the island's base economy which would comprise of tourism, manufacturing, agriculture, service industries, new foreign trade and tariff restrictions imposed by the US government.⁵⁰ They are deeply devoted to electoral participation and have avoided mass organization.

They demand a demilitarized, nuclear free republic: no foreign bases, no nuclear weapons in its territory; dual citizenship with the US; the right for the citizens of the republic of PR to enter freely into the US for 25 years. A free trade zone between US+PR for 20 years, retention of section 936 benefits for 20 years; the adoption of the US dollar as legal currency in Puerto Rico for 10 years; the transfer to the republic of local bank stocks in federal institutions; the continuation of all US transfers to individuals; the transfer to the republic of all social security funds owned by Puerto Ricans; 25 year tax exemption for interest payment on Puerto Rican bonds; all federal payments to individuals and the Commonwealth be transferred to the republic as a block

⁴⁹ Melendez, Edgardo. "Front Matter." *Caribbean Studies*, vol. 24, no. 3/4, 1 Jan. 1991. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/25613034?refreqid=search-gateway:1d472dbc8d1582073f53230707a30f0e.

⁵⁰ Melendez, Edgardo. "Front Matter." *Caribbean Studies*, vol. 24, no. 3/4, 1 Jan. 1991. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/25613034?refreqid=search-gateway:1d472dbc8d1582073f53230707a30f0e.

grant for ten years at current levels, with a reduction of 10% yearly for the next 10 years.⁵¹ In terms of income the island collects a considerable amount of property used by the Federal Government, which includes a military base that is on the island. They also want an economic grant accompanied by all this. These demands were heavily criticized by the Bush Administration and the definition of Independence became quite limited.⁵²

The Bush Administration claimed there will be no demilitarization, nuclear-free republic, since the United States is to keep a military presence in Puerto Rico and any changes will have to be negotiated and consented by the US government; there is to be no dual citizenship and only a limited entry to the United States of citizens of Puerto Rico for 25 years; there will be no section 936 for an independent Puerto Rico; there is to be no free-trade between PR and US, although a trade agreement is to be negotiated after independence; and the United States may consider a most-favored nation status for Puerto Rico and participation in the Caribbean Basin Initiative; also, the United States will seek a General System of Trade Preference status for Puerto Rico. Only remaining initial proposals were to continue payment of federal benefits to individuals (social security, veterans, benefits, etc.); and a block grant transfer for 10 years at current transfer levels.⁵³

Despite facing discrimination during the early stages of assimilation into American culture, Puerto Ricans never victimize themselves for the sake of a cause. In fact, many Puerto Ri-

⁵¹Melendez, Edgardo. "Front Matter." *Caribbean Studies*, vol. 24, no. 3/4, 1 Jan. 1991.JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/25613034?refreqid=search-gateway:1d472dbc8d1582073f53230707a30f0e.

⁵² Melendez, Edgardo. "Front Matter." *Caribbean Studies*, vol. 24, no. 3/4, 1 Jan. 1991.JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/25613034?refreqid=search-gateway:1d472dbc8d1582073f53230707a30f0e.

⁵³Melendez, Edgardo. "Front Matter." *Caribbean Studies*, vol. 24, no. 3/4, 1 Jan. 1991.JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/25613034?refreqid=search-gateway:1d472dbc8d1582073f53230707a30f0e.

cans were furious by the actions of the FALN and felt they were foolish group with a weak cause. They had every right in the world to feel such anger and hatred towards this organization because they were attacking the most pivotal facet of their deal between the United States. Why implode a deal as convenient as the PR/US relations? In October 1950, President Truman signed the Puerto Rico Commonwealth Bill which enabled the island's people to establish their own constitution for the first time ever. Some Puerto Ricans Nationalists opposed the new law and resorted to in state violence. A lot changed in 1951 when Puerto Ricans overwhelmingly approved the commonwealth status in a referendum, and the island's constitution was proclaimed again on July 25, 1952. The constitution reaffirmed the post of an elected governor, created a legislative branch in which minority representation were guaranteed, and they set up a new judicial system based on civil liberties. Prior to the hurricane, Puerto Rico may have had a chance at eventually becoming a state.

A second political party with a significant amount of pull on the island is the Popular Democratic Party. Enhanced Commonwealth and sponsored Industrial Incentive Act of 1947 (which inaugurated the industrialization program under operation bootstrap) and the formation of Commonwealth in 1952 marked the definitive abandonment of the party's 'populist' program and its defense of Independence.⁵⁴ Since then, the PPD has argued that Operation Bootstrap and Commonwealth are the basis for PR's economic and political development. Gov. Luis Munoz Marin and Popular Democratic Party initiated "Operation Bootstrap" to lure business to Puerto Rico with the promise of low-wage labor and government built factories and tax

⁵⁴ Melendez, Edgardo. "Front Matter." *Caribbean Studies*, vol. 24, no. 3/4, 1 Jan. 1991. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/25613034?refreqid=search-gateway:1d472dbc8d1582073f53230707a30f0e.

exemptions.⁵⁵Emphasized industrialization as the development strategy most likely to create jobs as quickly and effectively as was needed to have significant impact on people's economic condition. Advocates for shifting towards an export-based economy in which the bulk of the islands production was aimed at the America Market instead of the comparatively tiny market.⁵⁶ Modernizing Puerto Rico economy because the government understood that this would only be possible through foreign investment, much of it involved providing tax exemptions to American corporations who set up in PR.

Also established *Estado Libre Asociado (ELA)*: Free Associated State-- that was approved by referendum in 1952, under ELA Puerto Rico is a part of the United States for purposes of international trade, foreign policy and war. Not subject to federal income tax and is not eligible for all federal benefits.⁵⁷ Emphasized industrialization as the development strategy most likely to create jobs as quickly and effectively as was needed to have significant impact on people's economic condition.⁵⁸ Advocates for shifting towards an export-based economy in which the bulk of the islands production was aimed at the America Market instead of the comparatively tiny market. Modernizing Puerto Rico economy because the government understood that this would only be possible through foreign investment, much of it involved providing tax exemptions to American corporations who set up in Puerto Rico.

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⁵⁶ Melendez, Edgardo. "Front Matter." *Caribbean Studies*, vol. 24, no. 3/4, 1 Jan. 1991.JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/25613034?refreqid=search-gateway:1d472dbc8d1582073f53230707a30f0e.

⁵⁷ Melendez, Edgardo. "Front Matter." *Caribbean Studies*, vol. 24, no. 3/4, 1 Jan. 1991.JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/25613034?refreqid=search-gateway:1d472dbc8d1582073f53230707a30f0e.

⁵⁸ Melendez, Edgardo. "Front Matter." *Caribbean Studies*, vol. 24, no. 3/4, 1 Jan. 1991.JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/25613034?refreqid=search-gateway:1d472dbc8d1582073f53230707a30f0e.

Two objectives the party keeps in mind are seeking the Commonwealth's "culmination" as a "permanent" status as well as achieve greater internal autonomy through the culmination of Commonwealth as a permanent status because this would close the door to both statehood and Independence, facilitating more autonomy for Commonwealth.⁵⁹ The need for this is evident because more autonomy allows the Commonwealth to manage the economy more effectively and strengthen its political legitimacy in Puerto Rico. The Commonwealth status has furthered Puerto Rico's economic and political integration into the US; but this increase integration imposes limits to the Commonwealth's economic and political development. As read in the preamble to the constitution of Puerto Rico,

"That we consider a determining factor in our lives the citizenship of the United States of America and the inspiration to continually enrich our democratic beliefs in the enjoying collectively or individually of its rights and prerogatives; the loyalty to the postulates of the Federal Constitution; the coexistence in Puerto Rico of the two greatest cultures of the American Hemisphere."⁶⁰

This political group is in full belief that the pact they had agreed upon is permanent stating, "The inviolable common citizenship as the prime base for the permanent union between Puerto Rico and the United States".

The New Progressive Party is a more radical group in the sense they are in favor of becoming a state within the United States. Members of the Progressive Party stress the need for economic growth and sense it would be impossible to improve on without a serious change in

⁵⁹ Melendez, Edgardo. "Front Matter." *Caribbean Studies*, vol. 24, no. 3/4, 1 Jan. 1991. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/25613034?refreqid=search-gateway:1d472dbc8d1582073f53230707a30f0e.

⁶⁰ Melendez, Edgardo. "Front Matter." *Caribbean Studies*, vol. 24, no. 3/4, 1 Jan. 1991. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/25613034?refreqid=search-gateway:1d472dbc8d1582073f53230707a30f0e.

status. Studies show that the island would enrich there economic growth rate 2.2-3.5% faster than if they were to remain a commonwealth.⁶¹ Faster economic development under statehood will mean higher incomes for U.S. citizens living in Puerto Rico, which would lead to better living conditions for all. They also share the belief that new investor would take an interest in the island unlike the fading one's already on the island. The party has significant political stronghold on the island in the sense that they currently hold both the seat of governor and resident commissioner of the island. They also hold $\frac{2}{3}$ majority in both the Senate and House of Representatives.⁶²

The New Progressive Party tries to provoke two sets of ideologies, the first being "Statehood as Sovereignty" . This details matters of language and culture that assure Puerto Ricans that they will remain so under statehood. "Statehood as Equality", the other agenda they try and push across, is the notion of statehood as equality tries to define the social and economic relationship of Puerto Rico with the United States.⁶³ This offers economic security in American welfare states. They also attempt to legitimate the Puerto Rico statehood demands before the leading sectors in the US. It is presented as a demand for equality from the second-class citizens of the American Colony of Puerto Rico.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Melendez, Edgardo. "Front Matter." *Caribbean Studies*, vol. 24, no. 3/4, 1 Jan. 1991.JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/25613034?refreqid=search-gateway:1d472dbc8d1582073f53230707a30f0e.

⁶² Melendez, Edgardo. "Front Matter." *Caribbean Studies*, vol. 24, no. 3/4, 1 Jan. 1991.JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/25613034?refreqid=search-gateway:1d472dbc8d1582073f53230707a30f0e.

⁶³ Melendez, Edgardo. "Front Matter." *Caribbean Studies*, vol. 24, no. 3/4, 1 Jan. 1991.JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/25613034?refreqid=search-gateway:1d472dbc8d1582073f53230707a30f0e.

⁶⁴ Melendez, Edgardo. "Front Matter." *Caribbean Studies*, vol. 24, no. 3/4, 1 Jan. 1991.JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/25613034?refreqid=search-gateway:1d472dbc8d1582073f53230707a30f0e.

VI. Migration to the Mainland and Impact on Economy

As citizens, the people of Puerto Rico can move throughout the 50 states just as any other Americans can—legally, this is considered internal migration, not immigration. However, in moving to the mainland, Puerto Ricans leave a homeland with its own distinct identity and culture, and the transition can involve many of the same cultural conflicts and emotional adjustments that most immigrants face.

As citizens, the people of Puerto Rico can move throughout the 50 states just as any other Americans can—legally, this is considered internal migration, not immigration. However, in moving to the mainland, Puerto Ricans leave a homeland with its own distinct identity and culture, and the transition can involve many of the same cultural conflicts and emotional adjustments that most immigrants face. Some writers have suggested that the Puerto Rican migration experience can be seen as an internal immigration—as the experience of a people who move within their own country, but whose new home lies well outside of their emotional home territory.

At first, few Puerto Ricans came to the continental U.S. at all. Although the U.S. tried to promote Puerto Rico as a glamorous tourist destination, in the early 20th century the island suffered a severe economic depression. Poverty was rife, and few of the island's residents could afford the long boat journey to the mainland. In 1910, there were fewer than 2,000 Puerto Ricans

in the continental U.S., mostly in small enclaves in New York City, and twenty years later there were only 40,000 more.⁶⁵

After the end of the Second World War, however, Puerto Rican migration exploded. In 1945, there had been 13,000 Puerto Ricans in New York City; in 1946 there were more than 50,000.⁶⁶ Over the next decade, more than 25,000 Puerto Ricans would come to the continental U.S. each year, peaking in 1953, when more than 69,000 came.⁶⁷ By 1955, nearly 700,000 Puerto Ricans had arrived and by the mid-1960s, more than a million had.⁶⁸

As noted in the text, *Puerto Rican Nation On The Move*, “migration can accomplish what economic development programs on the island cannot do quickly-- that is, create jobs and sources of income, while reducing population growth”⁶⁹. Population growth was once the norm in Puerto Rico. The island’s population grew by 10% from 1980 to 1990, and by 8% from 1990 to 2000. But as the effects of a decade-long economic recession have mounted, Puerto Ricans who are U.S. citizens at birth have increasingly moved to the U.S. mainland with economic opportunity one of the primary drivers. In fact, population losses in Puerto Rico have accelerated in recent years, affecting every corner of the island and continuing the largest outmigration in

⁶⁵ Duany, Jorge. *The Puerto Rican Nation on the Move: Identities on the Island & in the United States*. Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2003.

⁶⁶ Duany, Jorge. *The Puerto Rican Nation on the Move: Identities on the Island & in the United States*. Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2003.

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more than 50 years. Overall, the island's population was an estimated 3.47 million in 2015, down 334,000 from 2000 – a 9% decline. Three-quarters of this population loss has taken place since 2010. Puerto Rico's population declined by 7% from 2010 to 2015, compared with a 2% loss from 2000 to 2010.⁷⁰

There were a number of reasons for this sudden influx. The continuing depression in Puerto Rico made many Puerto Ricans eager for a fresh start, and U.S. factory owners and employment agencies had begun recruiting heavily on the island. In addition, the postwar years saw the return home of thousands of Puerto Rican war veterans, whose service in the U.S. military had shown them the world. But perhaps the most significant cause was the sudden availability of affordable air travel. After centuries of immigration by boat, the Puerto Rican migration became the first great airborne migration in U.S. history.

⁷⁰ Krogstad, Jens Manuel. "Historic Population Losses Continue across Puerto Rico." *Pew Research Center*, 24 Mar. 2016, www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/03/24/historic-population-losses-continue-across-puerto-rico/.

VII. Conclusion

At the start of my research on Puerto Rico and its independence movements, I was hoping to find a significant portion of data supporting the annexation of the island from the United States. To my surprise, I found very little information supporting this cause. In fact, I found that a large majority of its island's citizens are in favor of remaining a Commonwealth in hopes of retaining a positive relationship between the two entities. The United States is of great value to the people of Puerto Rico because it is a nation that provides more opportunity than what is presented on the island. As citizens of the United States, Puerto Ricans receive a number of benefits including access to the country at any point in time, eligibility to receive an American education as well as a number of federal benefits, such as not having to pay personal income taxes. A majority of Puerto Ricans have family members who have migrated over to the United States, leading one to believe that they'd be in favor of retaining the current status in order to maintain familial relationships.

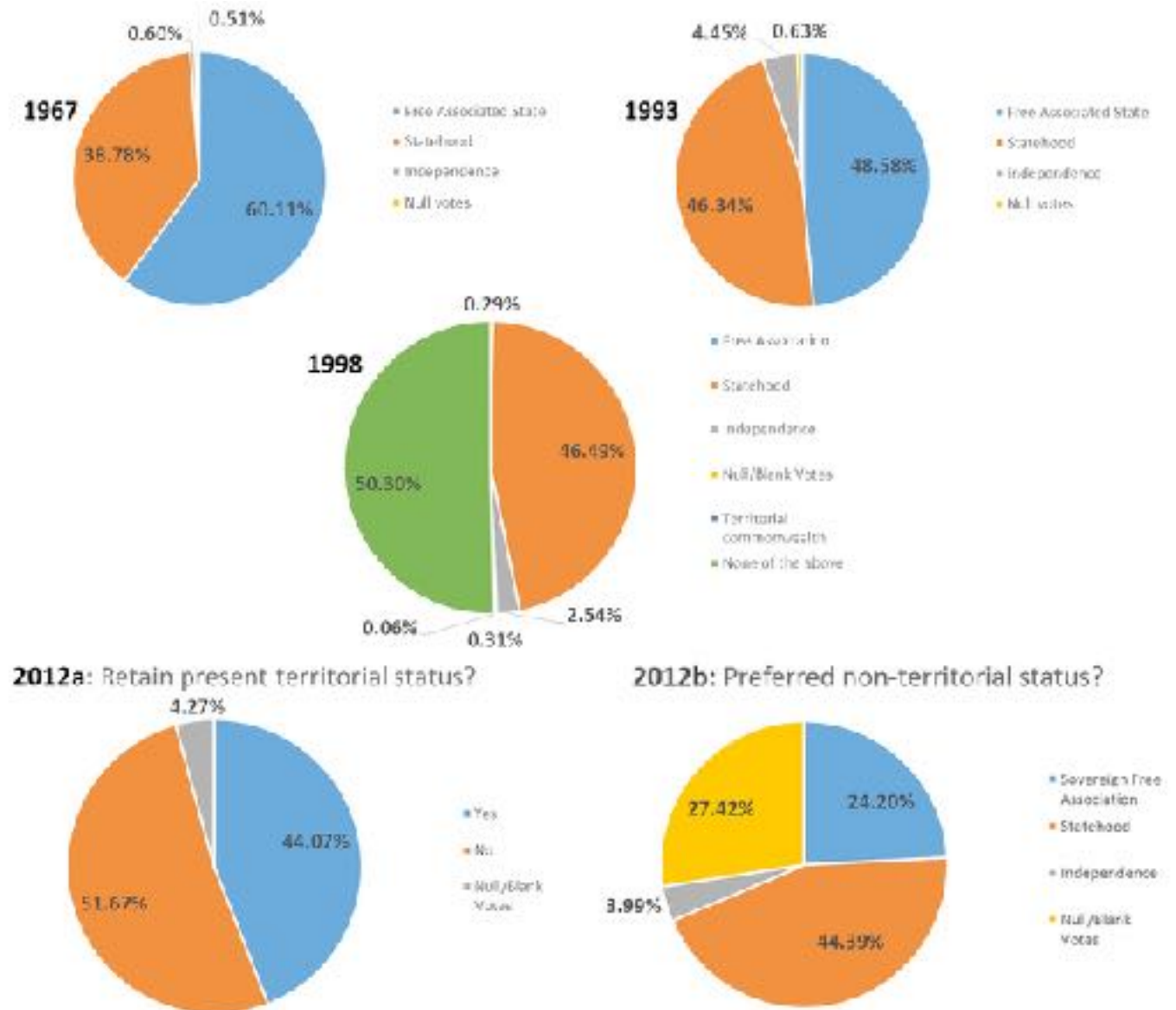
Over the last several months, Puerto Rico and the United States have made headlines regarding relief efforts on the island post Hurricane Maria. Despite being associated with the United States for over sixty years very little was done to help the people of Puerto Rico, whose island was nearly destroyed by the catastrophe. Many Puerto Rican went months without basic food and water sources and have endured almost a year without electricity. Citizens of the island have been very critical of the United States because they feel there attempts to show support have been both half hearted and overdue. The Mayor of San Juan, Carmen Cruz, was especially critical of the United States in the sense that she went on TV advocating for people to help out with relief efforts. The United States responded poorly to this matter, with President Trump threaten-

ing to pull emergency responders due to the regional and economic chaos, making one question whether we value Puerto Rico as much as we say we do?

From what I've gathered over the past couple of months it is clear that the Commonwealth status is the preferred status among the people of Puerto Rico. After dissecting referendum results and bills presented in congress, its clear that representatives in the United States as well as in Puerto Rico have made it extremely difficult to shift towards Independence. As much as Congress insists on shifting towards Statehood, requirements such as implementing English as the official language would never pass. Puerto Rico is also currently in a debt over 70 billion dollar, which would make it almost impossible to operate self sufficiently. Overall, Puerto Rico simply doesn't have the power or resources to operate on the level of other world powers and needs to remain within the United States in order to be recognized as a legitimate entity.

VIII. Appendix

Figure 1



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