

PUERTO RICO: A STATE OR NOT A STATE?

Background and context

Puerto Rico, officially the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, is a self-governing unincorporated territory of the United States located in the northeastern Caribbean. Many believe that Puerto Rico should move beyond its status as a territory to become a state within the United States of America. While a majority of Puerto Ricans have voted for continued status as a territory, there are rising calls for statehood.



The main questions include whether it is important for Puerto Ricans to gain full rights as citizens, and whether statehood is a superior means to achieving this than independence. Others include whether Puerto Rico will gain economically from statehood (vs the status quo and independence). Socially and culturally, is Puerto Rico consistent with the characteristics that have defined other states entering the United States, such as Alaska or Hawaii? Will English be the primary language, or a co-official language along with Spanish? And this raises the question, is English the only possible official language possible in a US state - as English-only advocates would have it - or is it possible to have another language as an official language as well? Are there cultural concerns, both for Puerto Ricans who have a strong national identity and for Americans, who might have to change the look of their flag to incorporate a 51st star? Finally, will Democrats or Republicans benefit more politically from Puerto Rican statehood? Is there a self-motivated bias coming from American politicians pushing for Puerto Rican statehood? The pros and cons are outlined below.

Do Puerto Ricans deserve full citizenship and rights?

YES	NO
<p>Puerto Ricans deserve full political rights and citizenship. "They should not have to wait any longer to gain constitutionally-guaranteed citizenship with full political rights and responsibilities. Puerto Ricans would then share as everyone else in full benefits from our government, while paying taxes like everyone else."</p> <p>Puerto Ricans have earned statehood through support of US. "The Puerto Rican people have earned it through their steadfast support of our country, our flag, and by sending their sons and daughters to fight in US wars, our wars, ever since the Spanish</p>	<p>Puerto Ricans have rejected statehood many times now. Puerto Ricans have already made their voices heard on this issue many times since the late 1960's. The Washington D.C. based advocacy group Pro English shows that the island has repeatedly voted to remain a commonwealth when votes were taken in 1967, 1993, and 1998.</p> <p>Puerto Ricans are already considered Americans. "Puerto Ricans are already considered to be American citizens who can freely come and go between the island and the states like all Americans."</p>

<p>American War in 1898."</p> <p>Puerto Rico has waited for too long for full citizenship. "Puerto Ricans have been waiting over 100 years for equal treatment; from 1898 when the United States wrested control of the island from Spain following the Spanish-American War, until today. That is a long time to wait. No other U.S. Territory has been held in limbo for this length of time."</p>	<p>Puerto Rican statehood would require changing the US flag. It would require changing the American flag by re-arranging the stars. While 50 stars can fit into the rectangular space, 51 cannot. For this reason, proposed new flags could include a circular arrangement of stars. But, changing the flag is regarded by many as changing American identity in a significant way. And this is, for some, a source of concern.</p>
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Is language a problem in this debate?

<p>YES</p> <p>English is not a problem for Puerto Rico statehood. US Council for Puerto Rico Statehood. "What about the issue of the English language? Some have made the argument that Puerto Rico should not be a state because Puerto Ricans do not speak English, and we should not have a non-English speaking state. This is a red herring issue for the following reasons: English is already an official language on the island, as is Spanish Puerto Ricans are already citizens of the U.S., and have been since the Jones Act of 1917. There was no language requirement with the granting of citizenship then, so it makes no sense to ask this question now. In fact, there has never been a language requirement of territories entering the union in our history. English is a required subject in public schools through high school. English is the only language of the Federal Court system and all U.S. government agencies in Puerto Rico and is the common language in banking, commerce, real estate and the tourism industry. Learning English as well as Spanish just makes good sense. English is the international language of business, science, and increasingly, diplomacy. Puerto Rico should do all it can to increase English language capability. But, making it a requirement of statehood would ignore the precedents of Enabling Acts of Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Arizona."</p>	<p>NO</p> <p>Puerto Rico violates idea of states with English as official language. "The foreignness of English in Puerto Rico is greater in magnitude than it was in any state at any time in our national experience. Census data show that just 20 percent of the island's residents speak English fluently. By comparison, California has the lowest proficiency rate among the 50 states, but its 80 percent proficiency rate dwarfs Puerto Rico's. The deeply rooted preference for Spanish makes Puerto Rico's 1993 elevation of English to "co-official" status practically irrelevant. Authentic "official English" policies increase English learning, but they will not work when English is merely an add-on to a pre-existing official language that is spoken in 95 percent of homes. Congress should condition statehood on making English the sole official language, which would still allow Spanish translations for a population in transition while insisting on acceptance of the lingua franca of the Union."</p> <p>English is a cultural requirement for entry as state. The fact that English is "foreign" to many in Puerto Rico raises red flags. English, like languages in many other countries, is a defining characteristic of American culture. It does not make sense, therefore, to accept a state where Spanish is the official language.</p>
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Does Puerto Rican statehood make sense economically?

PRO

Statehood offers huge opportunities to Puerto Ricans. "I have to say that in this case knee-jerk Puerto Rican nationalism seems mighty illogical. The United States of America is basically the richest country on earth, and being a part of it gives Puerto Ricans a lot of practical advantages that the independent countries of the Spanish-speaking Caribbean lack. The right to move to the US-proper and work here legally, for example, is extremely valuable and was even in a time when Puerto Ricans living in America were subject to considerably more racist discrimination."

Puerto Rico statehood will benefit US economically United States Council for Puerto Rico Statehood. "Why should the U.S. want Puerto Rico as a state? We would benefit from it. Puerto Ricans have brought much to our society; politically, economically, culturally."

Hawaii and Alaska show potential benefits for Puerto Rico. "Look at what happened to the last two states admitted to the Union, Hawaii and Alaska. Both economies grew substantially after being admitted to the Union and became net contributors to the U.S. Treasury. Puerto Rico would receive equal treatment in both taxes and benefits, the same as the other states. Benefits to the island under the current system are limited by Congress. Those limitations would be removed. At the same time, payments of federal taxes would be phased in, as provided by the enabling legislation. We estimate Puerto Rico as a state will contribute nearly \$2 billion to the U.S. Treasury each year. How is that possible? Through economic growth. With economic growth there are more jobs, fewer unemployed, and less of a public assistance burden."

CON

Puerto Rico would burden US welfare system English First. "The unemployed in Puerto Rico will at least have higher welfare benefits to fall back on if statehood is granted, meaning more money lost to the U.S. treasury. Even with the gain to the U.S. Treasury of taxes now not being paid by Section 936 companies, the CBO put the cost of Puerto Rican statehood as \$9.4 billion in the first four years. These costs do not include matters like government and court translation expenses should Puerto Rico declare itself to be a solely Spanish-speaking land. Nor does it include the costs to the U.S. Treasury of as many as seven representatives and two Senators whose continuance in office will depend on their pleasing an impoverished constituency. Legislation to increase federal spending on social programs of all sorts need not fail narrowly in either house of the U.S. Congress if Puerto Rico's delegation (twice the size of West Virginia's) enters the equation. Clearly neither the United States nor Puerto Rico can afford Puerto Rican statehood."

Puerto Rico statehood is not economical for US. "The facts say that the United States can't afford a 51st state of Puerto Rico: Puerto Rico's per capita income of \$8,509 is less than one third of the US average, and about one half that of Mississippi, the poorest state. The government sector in Puerto Rico generates approximately 380,000 jobs, or 33% of total employment. Percentage of the economy of Puerto Rico from manufacturing: 42%. Percentage of the economy of Puerto Rico from tourism: About 6%. Total employment in Puerto Rico provided by 936 corporations: 11%. The average monthly per capita income in Puerto Rico \$709 per month. Social Security Disability payments are at least \$790 per month. Rank of a state of Puerto Rico as a state among states based on population: 25th."

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How would Puerto Rico affect American politics?

<p>PRO</p> <p>Puerto Rico statehood does not clearly benefit one party. "Many Republicans suspect that congressional Democrats support statehood for the same reason they want to pretend that Washington, D.C., is a state — to get two more senators (and in Puerto Rico’s case, perhaps six members of Congress). Such Republicans mistakenly assume that the island’s population of 4 million has the same Democratic disposition as the 4.2 million Puerto Ricans in the Bronx and elsewhere on the mainland. Fortuno disagrees, noting that while Republicans on the mainland were losing in 2008, he was elected in the island’s biggest landslide in 44 years. The party he leads won more than two-thirds of the seats in both houses of the legislature, and three-fifths of the mayorships, including that of San Juan. Fortuno, who calls himself a “values candidate” and goes to Catholic services almost every day, says Puerto Ricans are culturally conservative — 78 percent are pro-life, 91 percent oppose same-sex marriage, 30 percent of the 85 percent who are Christian are evangelicals. A majority supports his agenda, which includes tax-and-spending cuts, trimming 16,000 from public payrolls to begin eliminating the deficit that was 45 percent the size of the budget."</p>	<p>CON</p> <p>Democrats want Puerto Rican statehood to gain votes. "Puerto Rico, a self-governing commonwealth whose residents are U.S. citizens, has already voted three times (1967, 1993 and 1998) against becoming the 51st U.S. state. But Congressional Democrats, hoping to add to their numbers in Congress, keep pushing for statehood. Late last month, the House voted 223 to 169 to begin yet another attempt to have the island join the union. [...] This kind of blatant rigging of the political system provoked opposition from several Puerto Ricans serving in Congress, but the Democratic leadership under Nancy Pelosi rammed it through anyway. With statehood would come two new U.S. Senators and perhaps half a dozen new House members. In a closely divided nation, Puerto Rican statehood is clearly seen by Democrats as an insurance policy to protect their long-term control of Congress."</p> <p>Puerto Rico would outrank 26 states in size/representation. "Pre-1990 census data indicated that the new state of Puerto Rico would instantly outrank 26 other states in population size, entitling it to as many as seven Congressman as well as two Senators. The Puerto Rican delegation to Congress would be the size of Alabama's or almost twice the size of West Virginia's."</p>
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