

Puerto Rico's seven status plebiscites: The myth of a pro-statehood mandate

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Abstract: The governing *Partido Nuevo Progresista* (PNP) has organised six out of seven status plebiscites since 1967. The statehood option (becoming the 51st state of the US) secured the majority of the vote in the past four, leading to a claim of a pro-statehood mandate. This article examines the historical evolution of the Puerto Rico status debate, the outcomes of the seven status plebiscites, the claim of a pro-statehood mandate, and the conditions and alternatives needed to move forward in the resolution of the status question.

Keywords: colonialism, plebiscites, politics, Puerto Rico status, referendum, US-Puerto Rico relations, USA

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Introduction

Puerto Rico is a possession of the United States of America (US), an unincorporated territory that belongs to, but is not part of, the US. As such, it is governed under the powers of the territorial clause of the US Constitution, Article IV, Section 3, Clause 2, which gives the US Congress the “power to dispose of and make all needful rules and regulations respecting the Territory or other Property belonging to the United States”.

On 25 July 1952, Puerto Rico became an unincorporated territory organised with a degree of self-rule, designated as the *Estado Libre Asociado de Puerto Rico* (Free Associated State), designated in English as the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. This status was presented to the United Nations (UN) General Assembly in November 1953 as an exercise in “self-determination”: the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico had been written by a locally elected assembly under the authorisation and supervision of the US Congress, and was approved by the ‘Puerto Rican People’ in a yes/no referendum on 3 March 1952. The UN thus proceeded to approve Resolution 748 (VIII) excluding Puerto Rico from the list of colonial territories and exempting the US government from reporting on Puerto Rico under Article 73(e) of the UN Charter. In local politics, it was presented as an intermediate formula on the road to either statehood (annexation as a state of the Union) or independence. This ambiguity has resulted in a continued political struggle to resolve the Puerto Rico status question. The status formula favoured – Commonwealth, statehood, or independence – is the major divide for political parties in Puerto Rico.

Since 1967, the government of Puerto Rico has held seven status plebiscites. Commonwealth won the first two (1967, 1993); in the third (1998), the majority vote was for “none of the above”. Statehood got the majority vote in the next four plebiscites (2012, 2017, 2020, 2024), organised by the pro-statehood *Partido Nuevo Progresista* (PNP, New Progressive Party) governments. These victories however were the result of the PNP presenting alternative definitions of Commonwealth in the ballot, dividing it in ways that presented it as both a continuation of colonial subordination and inequality or as a quasi-pro-independence choice that would lead to ending the ‘benefits’ of US citizenship and federal welfare subsidies and

grants. The other mechanism used to achieve and inflate a pro-statehood majority was to leave out of the count blank ballots cast as protest votes, instructed by the pro-Commonwealth *Partido Popular Democrático* (PPD) and the pro-independence *Partido Independentista Puertorriqueño* (PIP).

This article examines the historical evolution of the Puerto Rico status debate, the outcomes of the seven status plebiscites, the claim of a pro-statehood mandate – based not just on an electoral majority – and the conditions and alternatives needed to progress in resolving the status question.

From colony to Commonwealth

Puerto Rico, along with Cuba, the Philippines, and Guam, was invaded by, and became a colony of, the US as a result of the Spanish-American War of 1898. From 1898 to 1900, Puerto Rico was ruled by a military government. The Foraker Act of 1900 established a civilian government. The US President appointed a civilian governor and all cabinet members, with the advice and consent of the US Senate. An 11-member Executive Council, which functioned as an upper legislative chamber, was established, also appointed by the US President: five members were selected from Puerto Rico residents while the rest were selected from top cabinet members, including the Island's attorney general and the chief of police. The Act provided for an elected House of Representatives with 35 members from the local political parties and a Resident Commissioner to the US Congress with no right to vote. A judicial system with a Supreme Court was also established, with all judges appointed by the US President. As the federal laws of the US were to be in effect on the Island, a United States Federal District Court was also established. Puerto Rican citizenship was created therefore making Puerto Ricans “foreign in a domestic sense”, in the words of US Supreme Court Justice Edward Douglas White in 1901 (Duffy Burnett & Marshal, 2001, p. 13).

In 1917, the US Congress enacted the Jones-Shafroth Act, reshaping the legal and political relationship between Puerto Rico and the US. The law conferred statutory US citizenship on Puerto Ricans, established an elected Senate, and introduced a Bill of Rights, while preserving the existing elected House of Representatives. Though citizenship enabled Puerto Ricans to be drafted into the US military – a timely move as the US prepared to enter World War I – it also served broader strategic purposes. The act reinforced US dominance in the Caribbean, particularly after the opening of the Panama Canal in 1914, a key asset in US global military and trade strategy. By granting citizenship, Congress not only secured Puerto Rican soldiers for wartime service but also tightened US political control over the island, signalling a deeper commitment to its imperial presence in the Caribbean.

No major changes to the ‘Jones Act’ were made until 1946. The end of World War II and the creation of the United Nations (UN) promoted a decolonisation process aimed at dismantling the colonial system. Under pressure to decolonise, US President Truman responded by appointing the first Puerto Rican governor in 1946. A year later, Public Law 362 provided for the election of the Puerto Rican governor. In 1948, Puerto Ricans elected the first colonial governor under US sovereignty, Luis Muñoz Marín, leader of the PPD.

The PPD leadership ‘conceived’ a new political formula: The *Estado Libre Asociado* (Commonwealth, in English). The legal framework for this new political status was the Puerto Rico Federal Relations Act of 1950 (Public Law 600). It was designed to provide Puerto Rico with a greater measure of self-government, while maintaining its status as an unincorporated territory. Public Law 600 explicitly stated that the core provisions of the Jones Act of 1917

would remain in force, while derogating and amending sections relating exclusively to the organisation of the local government. The new Puerto Rican government would run the internal affairs of the territory and write a constitution that would follow and be subordinate to the Constitution of the US.

In 1952, US Congress passed the Federal Relations Act of 1952, Public Law 447, ratifying its endorsement of the *Constitución del Estado Libre Asociado de Puerto Rico*, drafted by the Puerto Rico Constitutional Assembly. The Constitution was overwhelmingly accepted by the Puerto Rican people in a 'yes or no' referendum on 3 March 1952.

The Nationalist Party, which favoured independence and opposed Commonwealth as a 'colonial ploy' to relieve the US from UN supervision on Puerto Rico, was heavily repressed before the 1952 vote. Many nationalists were imprisoned and a 'gag law' (Law 53) was passed in 1948 prohibiting "seditious" speech before the Commonwealth referendum. The vote in favour of the Commonwealth Constitution was 374,649, 88% of all votes cast, but only 48% of total registered voters (781,914). Political repression and low turnout were the basis for the nationalists' argument that Commonwealth was not approved by the majority of the people.

After the UN's recognition that Puerto Rico had exercised its right to self-determination and the adoption of the Constitution of the Commonwealth, with attributes of sovereignty and self-rule and voluntarily associating to the US, the Island was removed from the list of non-independent territories, exempting the US from reporting on its status and affairs.

Yet, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico maintained its status as an unincorporated territory according to the US Constitution, with the Federal Government controlling foreign affairs, defence, migration, customs, and international trade. A special issue of *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* published in 1953 celebrated this new form of self-rule without independence as a showcase of democracy for the world's "dependent areas". The volume included contributions by major academic and political figures involved in the making of Commonwealth. Harvard Law professor Rupert Emerson noted, "that the status which they now have does not differ greatly in substance from that which they had before", but there was "a great symbolic effect of entering into a compact with the United States and governing themselves under an instrument of their own fashioning..." (Emerson, 1953, p. 10).

To secure electoral support for Commonwealth, its proponents left the door open for a future resolution of the political status through independence or statehood. Commonwealth was defined as transitional, and the 'colonial question' remained the axis of political debate. Political parties organised on the basis of status preferences. The struggle for independence and for statehood was taken to the US Congress where the leaders of the *Partido Estadista Republicano* (PER) opposed the Fernós-Murray bill, arguing that any changes to Commonwealth should be subject to a specific mandate from a status plebiscite (Fernós Isern, 1974, p. 433).

Concurrently, pro-independence forces (*Partido Nacionalista*, *Partido Independentista Puertorriqueño* and the *Movimiento Pro Independencia*) lobbied the UN for the inclusion of Puerto Rico as a territory that had not exercised self-determination and remained a colony. Puerto Rican pro-independence leaders were influential in the adoption of UN resolution 1514 XV of 1960, which opened a space for the inclusion of the island as a non-independent territory. In 1972, the UN's Decolonisation Committee resolved that Puerto Rico did fall under purview of Resolution 1514 XV; but the UN General Assembly did not act on this (Anglada López, 2018, pp. 23, 26, 566-68, passim).

Hence, under, heavy pressure from the pro-statehood and pro-independence parties, the governing PPD held a status plebiscite in 1967 presenting independence, statehood, and Commonwealth as the choices. Commonwealth received 60% of the votes, but support for statehood grew again, obtaining 38% support. In the 1956 general election, four years after the Commonwealth plebiscite, PER got 27% of the vote, then 32% in 1960, and 34% in 1964. There had been a rift over participating or not in the plebiscite. The results of the 1967 vote led to the creation of the PNP in 1968: this would become the leading pro-statehood party, winning the 1968 election.

The Commonwealth formula paved the way for the transformation of Puerto Rico from an agrarian economy into the first export-oriented manufacturing entity in the world. A new economic development strategy known as ‘Operation Bootstrap’ and the Commonwealth provided the required juridical, political and economic framework. Commonwealth would become a neocolonial “showcase” of democracy, with development undertaken via “imperialism without colonies” (Magdoff, 1969; Pantojas-García, 1990).

The pervasive colonial question

Within seven years of the creation of Commonwealth, the PPD government requested ‘cosmetic’ changes to Law 600. Despite all the political manoeuvring, many UN members and a growing sector of the Puerto Rican electorate and political leadership continued to denounce the island’s status as colonial. The Fernós-Murray Bill was introduced in Congress in 1959 to enact those cosmetic changes enhancing the appearance of political autonomy. This would be the first of over a dozen bills that since then that have ‘died’ in Committee or were rejected by one of the chambers of Congress.

Since 1959, there have been two noteworthy initiatives in Washington DC to modify Puerto Rico’s status. Both initiatives came from the US President and occurred in the context of major shifts on inter-American policy. The first came from the Kennedy Administration (1961-63) and was linked to the Alliance for Progress. The Alliance was a policy shift to counter the potential spread of socialist revolutions throughout Latin America. Economic aid, technical assistance, and the promotion of democracy would be used as a counter to the influence of the Cuban revolution. The creation of the Alliance was announced by President Kennedy on 13 March 1961 (Kennedy, 1961). This event took place a month before the failed Bay of Pigs invasion in Cuba, and a few years before the second US invasion of the Dominican Republic. The treaty creating the Alliance for Progress was signed in August 1961 and, in November of that year, Teodoro Moscoso (the architect of Puerto Rico’s Operation Bootstrap) was appointed coordinator of the Alliance and regional administrator for Latin America of the US International Agency for Development (USAID).

In December 1961, after breaking relations with Cuba, President Kennedy travelled to Latin America to promote the Alliance, visiting Puerto Rico, Venezuela and Colombia. Governor of Puerto Rico Luis Muñoz Marín played a key role in Kennedy’s new Latin American policy, as he was part of what at the time was called ‘the democratic left’ in Latin America. As a reward for the services of Muñoz Marín as liaison with Latin American presidents in launching the Alliance, President Kennedy sent a letter to the Governor on the 10th anniversary of Commonwealth (25 July 1962), backing the celebration of a status plebiscite to allow the “growth” of Commonwealth and “establishing an unequivocal record, to consult the people of Puerto Rico, as you propose to do, so that they may express any other preference, including independence, if that should be their wish” (Kennedy, 1962). After

Kennedy's tragic death in 1963, hopes for the 'enhancement' of the Commonwealth's autonomy through Presidential and Congressional action were put on hold. Although a plebiscite was eventually held in 1967 and Commonwealth won, President Lyndon B. Johnson did not follow through on Kennedy's promise.

The second major Washington initiative to resolve the Puerto Rico status question came from President George H.W. Bush in 1989, in the context of the Enterprise of the Americas Initiative which eventually became the Free Trade Areas of the Americas (FTAA) initiative. In his first State of the Union Address, President Bush called on Congress to act on Puerto Rico's political future. Bush stated: "I've long believed that the people of Puerto Rico should have the right to determine their own political future. Personally, I strongly favour statehood. But I urge the Congress to take the necessary steps to allow the people to decide on a referendum" (Bush, 1989). The President's request resulted in the introduction on 4 April 1989, of the 'Puerto Rico Status Referendum Act' (S. 712). As chair of the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, charged to deal with issues relating to the US possessions, Senator Bennett Johnston held extensive hearings. For the first time since the enactment of Law 600 and the creation of Commonwealth, Congress embarked on a process of hearings and substantial deliberations on the Puerto Rico status question. The process was so inclusive that the leader of the Puerto Rican Independence Party expressed great satisfaction with the fact that Congress provided for the first time in history a viable and mutually agreeable definition of independence. Various books were later written about what was termed the process of negotiations and consultations of 1989-1990 (Berrios-Martínez, n.d.; García-Passalacqua & Rivera Lugo, 1991). In reality, these were Congressional Hearings. But: not accustomed to openness and exchange of views with members of Congress, the local politicians and pundits thought they had participated in consultations and negotiations to advance the bill. Indeed, they were shocked when the bill was not approved in the 101st Congress. Reintroduced in the Senate as S. 244 in the 102nd Congress, the bill again 'failed to approve' in the Committee of Energy and Natural Resources, never making it to the Senate floor or the House.

A complementary bill, HR 4765 was introduced in the House of Representatives, offering funding measures for the plebiscite proposed in the Johnstone bill and to incorporate the Puerto Rican diaspora in the voting. It passed the House; but, again, it went no further in the Senate.

The last noteworthy attempt of the twentieth century to provide for a congressionally sanctioned solution to the Puerto Rico status question was the introduction of the 'US-Puerto Rico Political Status Act' by Alaska Republican Don Young in the 104th Congress in 1996 (H.R. 3024) and again in the 105th Congress in 1997 (H.R. 856). Although the 'Young Bill' was passed in the House (barely, with 209 to 208 votes) in 1998, it was referred to the Senate (S. 472) but never made it to the Senate floor. These failed attempts at 'developing' Commonwealth by providing a greater degree of autonomy or resolving it through statehood provided the fodder for a round of six plebiscites.

Both the PNP's electoral victory in 1968 and the endorsement of statehood by President Bush in 1989 suggested that statehood was within reach. Moreover, the PNP shifted the pro-statehood 'ideal' towards a populist discourse: its 1968 electoral campaign was built on such slogans as: "the poor will come first" (*los humildes serán los primeros*), and "things must change" (*esto tiene que cambiar*). It also proposed the idea of a 'creole statehood' (*estadidad jíbara*), meaning no assimilation to US culture; and a "statehood for the poor", meaning that more federal welfare benefits would flow to poor families (Pantojas García, 1990, pp. 130-135).

The stalemate: six plebiscites

For any status plebiscite to be meaningful, it needs to be sanctioned by the US Congress, where Puerto Rico's sovereignty resides. It needs the consensus agreement of all parties and sociopolitical organisations on the formulas presented, and it needs to be binding so that, once an alternative gets a majority vote, the process of transition to a new status or the reform of the present status gets underway. These conditions have only been met once: in the 1989 'Johnston Bill' (S712) discussed above. The plebiscites organised by the PNP governments have never met any of these conditions.

After decisive electoral victories by the PNP in 1992 and 1996, and the drop in the Commonwealth vote from 60.1% in the 1967 plebiscite to 48.6% in 1993, statehood appeared within reach for PNP leaders. Moreover, the approval of the 'Young Bill' (HR 856) on 3 March 1998, marked the first time since 1953 that a Puerto Rico status bill had been presented and passed in the US Congress. This was hailed as a historic event and the basis for achieving statehood.

As part of its pro-statehood offensive, the PNP organised a status plebiscite for December 1998. To ensure that Commonwealth would not win again the ballot prepared for that event split Commonwealth into two distinct formulas: 'territorial' and 'sovereign Commonwealth'. The former reaffirmed the colonial nature of Commonwealth while the latter emphasised the 'separatist' or close-to-independence nature of developed or 'enhanced' Commonwealth. This debate inside the PPD was divisive. Commonwealth needed reform; but there was no consensus on how radical this should be. The PNP used scare tactics to argue that 'sovereign Commonwealth' could mean losing US citizenship and the benefits of federal subsidies, welfare transfers and grants on which most Puerto Rican families depended (Pantojas-García, 2007). So, Commonwealth was presented as two alternatives: a colonial one (territorial), or a quasi-independence one. Independence was presented as a sub-optimal alternative leading to underdevelopment and poverty typical of neighbouring Latin American republics or failed socialist regimes such as Cuba and Nicaragua. To counter the divisive manoeuvre, a coalition of pro-independence and PPD leaders went to court to add a fifth alternative, "none of the above". The court mandated that the fifth alternative be added in the ballot, and it got the most votes: 50.3%; statehood got 46.5%. Although this plebiscite was not held in an electoral year the turnout was high: 71.3%. The PNP governor claimed that statehood won because none of the above was not an alternative. In 2000, the PPD won the general election, restoring the belief in the vitality of Commonwealth.

Table 1 shows the changing forms of presenting Commonwealth in the plebiscites held between 1998 and 2024. In 2020, the status vote was a 'yes or no' referendum on statehood. Since the 1998 plebiscite, the Commonwealth formula had been split into two: sovereign and territorial or a quasi-independence option that risks losing the US passport and federal funds. In the 21st century, the pro-statehood movement has succeeded in presenting Commonwealth as a colonial formula where Puerto Ricans are second class citizens. According to the pro-statehood narrative, equality – first class citizenship – could only be achieved through statehood. Independence is presented by the PNP and the PPD as a path to poverty and economic failure.

Table 1: Status Options in Ballots

1967	1993	1998	2012	2017	2020	2024
Statehood	Statehood	Statehood	Statehood	Statehood	Statehood	Statehood
Independence	Independence	Independence	Independence	Independence		Independence
Estado Libre Asociado Commonwealth	Commonwealth	Sovereign Commonwealth	Sovereign Free Association	Free Association / Independence		Sovereignty in Free Association with the US
		Territorial Commonwealth		Present Territorial Status		
		None of the Above			* Yes or No	

In the plebiscites of 2012, 2017 and 2024, Commonwealth was again presented with alternative definitions constructed unilaterally by the PNP government using their legislative majorities to approve the definitions of the formula in the enacting legislation. The 2012 plebiscite added a unique twist. Held as part of the regular election (with an election turnout of 77%), the status ballot was divided into two parts: The first half was a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ vote on Commonwealth asking: “Do you agree that Puerto Rico should continue to have its present form of territorial status?”. The second part of the ballot presented statehood, independence and ‘sovereign Free-Associated State’ as alternatives. The PPD leadership called for a ‘yes’ vote on the first half and to leave blank the second part, as it did not include Commonwealth/*Estado Libre Asociado* as a choice, but a variation of it. Not surprisingly, the vote on the first part of the ballot was a rejection of Commonwealth. Of the ballots cast, 51.7% voted ‘no’ to the continuation of Commonwealth, 44.1% voted ‘yes’, and 3.6% were left blank. On the second part of the ballot, 44.4% voted for statehood, 24.2% for sovereign Free-Associated State, 4% for independence and 26.5% left blank. Claiming that blank ballots, specifically called for by the PPD, did not count the PNP claimed victory for statehood with 61.2% of the ‘valid’ votes. Paradoxically, the pro-Commonwealth PPD candidate for governor won that election and both chambers of legislature. In the controversy that ensued presenting the results to President Obama and Congress the 61% spin did not prevail. The reaction from President Obama was to authorise the approval of “\$2,500,000 for objective, nonpartisan voter education about, and a plebiscite on, options that would resolve Puerto Rico's future political status” (Pantojas-García, 2013, p. 50). This money has never been used as the PNP refuses to comply with the mandate of including Commonwealth in the plebiscites organised under its governments.

The 2017 plebiscite was a fiasco, with the PPD and the PIP boycotting it as they were left out of consultations for the definitions and presentations of the Commonwealth and independence alternatives on the ballot. Statehood got 97% of the vote; but the number of votes cast was the lowest of all the PNP organised plebiscites: 508,862, or around 23% (see [chart 1](#)).

The 2020 vote was a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ referendum on statehood. Being held during the COVID-19 pandemic, the electoral process confronted problems and a lower-than-average turnout rate of 54.7% that undermined the credibility of the results. Again, the opposition parties, PPD, PIP and the new parties participating in that plebiscite, *Movimiento Victoria Ciudadana* (MVC) and *Proyecto Dignidad* (PD), boycotted or ignored the process calling for blank votes or leaving voting to the discretion of the individuals. The 2020 vote resulted in the

first over 50% vote for statehood: 52.2%. Counting blank votes statehood got 50.8% yes, 47.5% no, and 1.7% blank.

In the 2024 plebiscite, held on election day and again with the PIP and PPD calling for blank votes to deny legitimacy, and the MVC and PD leaving it at their supporters’ discretion but not endorsing any alternative, statehood won by yet another disputed margin. This time, 56.9% not counting blank votes; or 48.3% including blank votes cast in protest as called by the PPD and PIP (see [Table 2](#)). The new twist in 2024 was that independence got nearly 10% of the vote: the highest share in any plebiscite. Moreover, the PIP candidate, in alliance with the MVC, came second in the election with 30.8% of the vote: again, an exceptional level of support for a pro-independence candidate. [Table 2](#) presents the results of the seven plebiscites including turnout rates.

Table 2: Plebiscites vote by status alternative (by %).

	1967	1993	1998	2012	2017	2020	2024
Commonwealth	60.1	48.6	N/I	N/I	N/I	N/I	N/I
Statehood	38.8	46.3	46.5	44.4	97.1	50.8	49.1
Independence	0.6	4.4	2.5	4.0	1.4	N/I	9.9
Free Association	N/I	N/I	0.3	24.2	1.5	N/I	24.8
Blank/None Above	N/I	N/I	50.3	26.5	N/I	49.2	15.0
<i>Turnout</i>	<i>66.4</i>	<i>73.5</i>	<i>71.3</i>	<i>76.7</i>	<i>23.2</i>	<i>54.7</i>	<i>64.6</i>

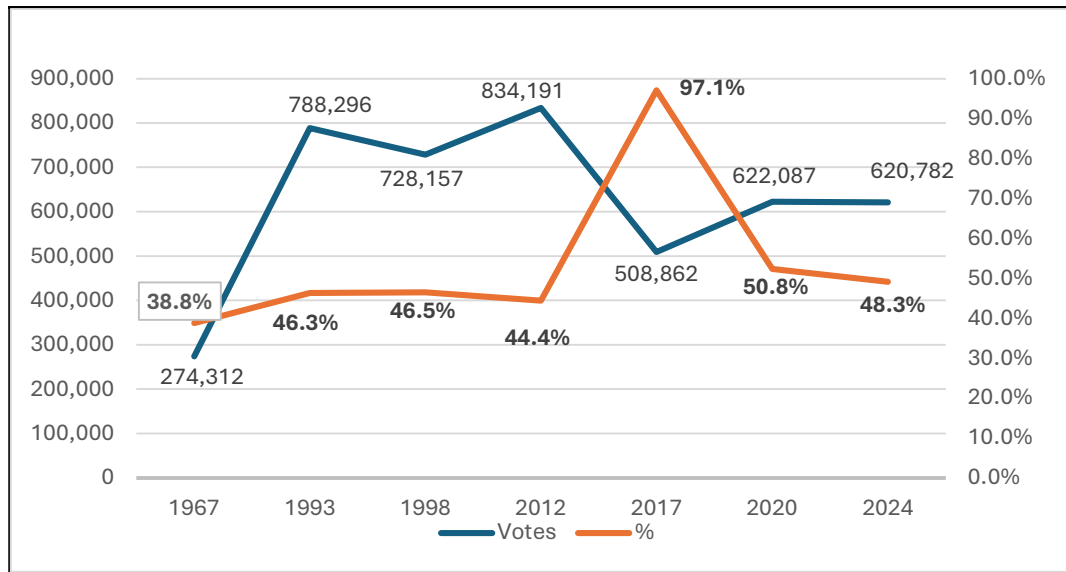
N/I = Not Included

Conclusion: A pro-statehood mandate?

The statehood option has prevailed in each of Puerto Rico’s four most recent status plebiscites: 2012, 2017, 2020, 2024. However, these outcomes have been shaped by strategic ballot design and political manoeuvring; particularly the exclusion or fragmentation of the Commonwealth option. The PNP has consistently divided Commonwealth supporters between those advocating for greater autonomy or ‘sovereignty’ (*soberanistas*) and those favouring a ‘permanent union’ with the US: an arrangement that preserves the perceived benefits of what Jorge Duany (echoing Juan Flores) calls “post-colonial colonialism,” including US citizenship, federal subsidies, and access to welfare programmes (Duany, 2010).

Despite these victories, the statistical consistency of the pro-statehood vote remains questionable. Support for statehood across plebiscites has fluctuated, when blank ballots – mainly cast in protest – are included in the calculation of the percentage vote ([Chart 1](#)). While there is a recurring plurality, only one plebiscite (2020) yielded a narrow majority of 50.8%, and the 2017 result of 97% is widely regarded as a statistical fluke due to low voter turnout and opposition boycotts. Hence, the US Congress has ignored these results, not acting on any of the bills presented on the status of Puerto Rico.

Chart 1: Vote for Statehood 1967-2024.



Beyond electoral and statistical manoeuvring and manipulation, the PNP has employed fear-based narratives to discredit independence, suggesting that it would lead to economic collapse and the loss of federal benefits. The pro-statehood party has also made culturally charged promises (“outrageous claims”), such as having a separate Puerto Rican Olympic team and Miss Universe pageant under statehood and preserving Spanish as the primary language of education and governance. These claims, often at odds with federal law and political realities, reflect a broader cultural resistance to assimilation. This sentiment has been amplified by popular figures like international mega star performer Bad Bunny, whose song *Lo que le pasó a Hawái* critiques the commodification of Indigenous culture under US statehood.

Nearly a dozen congressional initiatives have been presented in the US Congress seeking to resolve Puerto Rico’s status or grant statehood since 2000. Yet, none have advanced to full legislative consideration. The political climate in Washington DC has grown more hostile to Puerto Rican statehood: Republican leaders view it as a threat to Congressional balance. The 2024 symbolic presidential vote, where Kamala Harris secured 75% of the Puerto Rican vote, entrenched Republican partisan opposition to Puerto Rican statehood.

There is a stalemate in the colonial status question in Puerto Rico, and there is no clear mandate for statehood. The plebiscite results reflect a pattern of political manipulation by the PNP’s leadership rather than a clear and sustained popular mandate, and a failure to unite parties across the political spectrum. The notion of a culturally distinct ‘creole statehood’ is incompatible with prevailing federal norms and US partisan interests. As Puerto Rican national pride rises amid growing anti-Hispanic sentiment in the US mainland, the status question lingers, and the claim of a pro-statehood mandate lacks substantive legitimacy or statistical electoral validity.

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