

# In the Shadow of the Stars and Stripes: Testing the Malleability of U.S. Support for Puerto Rican Statehood

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September 3, 2020

Forthcoming in *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*

## Abstract

Do voters update their racialized political preferences in response to new information? To answer this long-standing question, we conduct an original survey examining U.S. mainland attitudes toward Puerto Rican statehood, a rare consequential racialized issue of low salience. To test whether public support for statehood can be changed, we embedded an information experiment describing Puerto Rico's political status and its relationship to the U.S. The treatment was designed to increase the perceived connection between the groups through effortful thinking. Descriptively, our results indicate that Americans are generally ambivalent to the idea of Puerto Rico becoming the 51st state. We further find that opposition to statehood is related to anti-immigration attitudes, conservative ideology, and lack of knowledge about the issue. Nonetheless, we also show that highly racialized opposition to statehood can be significantly decreased among all groups of voters by providing simple background information on U.S. and Puerto Rico's relationship.

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# Introduction

Do voters update their racialized political preferences? While scholars often find that such policy preferences—defined as being linked to deeply held attitudes toward disadvantaged racial groups—are not responsive to new information, this may be a result of examining issues of high *saliency* to voters, such as immigration. To see if this is the case, here we examine the attitudes of U.S. mainland non-Hispanic Whites toward Puerto Rican statehood—a rare consequential racialized issue which is yet of little saliency to most respondents.

While Puerto Ricans have been granted U.S. citizenship since 1917, they still do not have the right to vote in federal elections and lack meaningful Congressional representation. The status question has recently regained its importance with Puerto Rico’s economic crisis, which has been made worse after Hurricane Maria struck the island in 2017. In line with the result of the previous 2012 status referendum, 97% of Puerto Rican voters chose to become the 51st U.S. state in the latest 2017 election held only several months before the hurricane.<sup>1</sup>

Any change in Puerto Rico’s status, however, also requires a decision by the federal government since only the U.S. Congress can admit new states to the Union. While legislation has previously been submitted to begin the process of admitting Puerto Rico as a state, no progress has been made largely due to the limited support for the initiative in both Congress and among the U.S. public. Moreover, despite the fact that the status of Puerto Rico affects millions of U.S. citizens, there is little understanding of voter attitudes regarding the issue and whether these attitudes can be changed. On a more theoretical level, we argue that examining the malleability of attitudes toward Puerto Rican statehood can inform the growing debate on whether voters update their preferences in response to information in the case of other racialized issues such as immigration (Hopkins et al., 2019; Kustov et al., 2020).

To examine public attitudes toward Puerto Rican statehood, we conducted an original survey experiment with 1751 mainland non-Hispanic Whites. After completing a short background survey, the respondents were randomly divided into two equal experimental groups.

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<sup>1</sup>While statehood is supported by the plurality, Puerto Ricans are not unanimous on the issue—the 2017 referendum only had a 23% turnout and was boycotted by pro-Independence and pro-Commonwealth supporters.

While respondents in the control group were asked to read placebo information about a small tree frog native to Puerto Rico, the treatment group was exposed to information detailing Puerto Rico's historical and political connections to the United States and its current political status. The purpose of this information treatment was to increase support for Puerto Rican statehood by updating respondents' beliefs about the political relationship between Puerto Rico and the U.S., and decreasing the perceived differences between the two groups.

Overall, and in line with our expectations based on the relatively low salience of the issue, our results indicate that white Americans are generally ambivalent to the idea of Puerto Rico becoming the 51st state. Descriptively, we demonstrate greater opposition towards Puerto Rican statehood is significantly related to anti-immigration attitudes, concerns about the economy, conservative ideology, and lack of knowledge about the issue. Experimentally, we show that individual support for Puerto Rican statehood can be significantly increased by providing basic information about the historical and political connections between the U.S. and Puerto Rico. This positive effect is further present among all major demographic and political subgroups of (white) voters, including those of lower and higher initial support.

Our study makes several notable contributions. First, Puerto Rico's continuing economic turmoil and recent humanitarian crisis have brought forward many issues the island has had with governance as an unincorporated territory. One potential solution to solve Puerto Rico's issues is for the island to obtain full U.S. statehood. While our study does not aim to determine whether statehood is the socially optimal choice, our findings inform this debate by establishing that statehood could receive significant public support under certain conditions.

Furthermore, we find evidence that people can be swayed to change their mind even on a significantly racialized and potentially polarizing issue such as Puerto Rican statehood, opinion about which appears to be significantly rooted in ethnocentrism and related ethnoracial predispositions. Unlike earlier work documenting the stability of immigration attitudes (*ibid*), our findings thus suggest that voters sometimes do update their policy preferences in light of new relevant information, at least when the issue is relatively low in salience.

## Background

The question about Puerto Rico's status has been raised and debated in Puerto Rico and in the U.S. since the U.S. took control of the island from Spain in 1898. Puerto Rico is now officially considered to be a Free Associated State (Estado Libre Asociado), meaning that, while subject to federal laws like U.S. states and territories, Puerto Rico has its own constitution. Since the Jones Act of 1917, Puerto Ricans are also granted U.S. citizenship by birth. Nonetheless, while Puerto Rico residents are currently exempt from paying income taxes, they are unable to vote in federal elections or to have congressional representation.

Some argue that Congress enacted the Jones Act in order to appease Puerto Ricans and quell the calls for increased autonomy and independence. Under this view, U.S. sovereignty would reign and ensure that "Puerto Rico will never go out from under the shadow of the Stars and Stripes" (Fernandez, 1992, 68). While Congress finally extended citizenship to the island with the Jones Act, it was clear that representatives were not yet willing to admit Puerto Rico as a U.S. state. Consequently, while officially an unincorporated territory of the United States, Puerto Rico's relationship with the United States has often been described as colonial in nature (*ibid*). For that relationship to change, not only do Puerto Ricans need to support statehood, but so does Congress. One of the major ways to persuade Congress to act may be to increase support for Puerto Rican statehood among mainland U.S. citizens.

Based on our review of existing and proposed legislation, current opposition to Puerto Rican statehood by House members mainly fall under three arguments: that Puerto Ricans are too culturally and ethnically distinct from most Americans, that the admission of Puerto Rico would be too economically costly for the U.S., and finally that Puerto Rico would skew political representation in favor of a particular party (H.R. 2499 2010). Nonetheless, there have yet to be any studies that have investigated how mainland (non-Hispanic white) Americans feel about the possibility of Puerto Rico being the 51st state, and whether these attitudes can be changed. Here we examine public opposition to Puerto Rican statehood and test its potential malleability in response to factual information about Puerto Rico.

## Theoretical expectations

Given the dearth of existing research on public attitudes towards Puerto Rico and its status, we primarily rely on theoretical mechanisms previously used to explain (the change in) attitudes towards other racialized policy issues. In doing so, our study particularly builds on the vast literature examining negative U.S. public opinion on immigration, which has become increasingly linked to anti-Latino attitudes in recent years (Reny et al., 2020). Although Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens, they are Hispanic and they do migrate from the island to the mainland. Consequently, even despite the notable political differences between Puerto Ricans and other Hispanic groups on the issue of immigration specifically (Cardona-Arroyo, 2020), some mainland voters may equate Puerto Rican statehood to an influx of Spanish-speaking immigrants, thereby sparking a conservative backlash against such status change (Abrajano and Hajnal, 2015).

Just as members of Congress have opposed Puerto Rican statehood on economic and cultural grounds, scholars have frequently conceptualized public perceptions of immigrants as a “group threat” rooted in resource competition or concerns about cultural differences. Relatedly, research has increasingly found that public attitudes towards immigration are largely driven by voters’ “sociotropic” concerns about its impact on the host society, rather than merely about their self-interest (Hainmueller and Hopkins, 2014). Building on this literature, we consider the following individual-level variables as likely predictors of attitudes toward Puerto Rican statehood: partisanship and political ideology, education, immigration attitudes, economic perceptions, and knowledge of Puerto Rico. Given the observable partisan differences between Puerto Rican migrants across the country (see Cardona-Arroyo, 2020) and other contextual factors, we also control for respondents’ state of residence.

The important question remains: can these attitudes be changed? As growing evidence demonstrates, providing new information rarely works for immigration and related issues that are politically salient and rooted in stable ethnic or racial predispositions (see Tesler, 2015; Kustov et al., 2020). While being evidently racialized, Puerto Rican issues had not

been widely covered by the news when our survey was administered. Therefore, it is likely that people will hesitate to come to any firm opinion regarding Puerto Rican statehood, even though their initial reaction may be shaped by their attitudes toward Latinos or more general attitudes toward marginalized ethno-racial groups. Indeed, the polls administered around the time of our survey have shown the question regarding the status of Puerto Rico has one of the highest “don’t know” rates (26%).<sup>2</sup> However, this low issue salience also implies that most voters will lack a strong incentive to engage in motivated reasoning to defend the position of their partisan or ideological group(s) (Erisen et al., 2014). Consequently, we argue that this issue provides a rare opportunity to test the malleability of racialized political preferences in response to new information.

Theoretically, our treatment aimed to increase support for Puerto Rican statehood by increasing the perceived connection between Puerto Ricans and mainland Americans. Voters have been found to oppose immigrants because they believe they are too different from themselves (Hainmueller and Hopkins, 2014). By informing our respondents about the shared citizenship and experiences of Puerto Ricans and other Americans, we provide them with information that makes the connection between the two groups stronger. This connection should be further strengthened through the additional information provided in the treatment explaining that Puerto Ricans have served in the U.S. military since World War I, and that the people of Puerto Rico have defended the U.S. for more than a century. In other words, showing respondents that Puerto Ricans are willing to risk their lives to protect the U.S. is likely to shrink the perceived distinctiveness between the groups (Mandel and Litt, 2013).

Given the general lack of public awareness about the issue and its low political salience, our baseline expectation is that most white Americans will neither support nor oppose the prospect of Puerto Rican statehood. Accordingly, as our main hypothesis, we also expect more white Americans to support the inclusion of Puerto Rico into the U.S. as the 51st state after being presented with background information regarding Puerto Rico’s current political

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<sup>2</sup>See *Economist/YouGov Poll* from May 17, 2016

status. Factual information pertaining to Puerto Rico may be successful in creating support for Puerto Rican statehood because it updates respondents' beliefs about the relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States. Post-treatment, if respondents are more likely to believe that Puerto Ricans should keep their citizenship and that their current, non-state status is unfair, this suggests the treatment successfully manipulated respondents' views of Puerto Ricans as deserving of political status equal to U.S. citizens like themselves.

In addition to increasing perceived connectedness, new information about a given subject has the ability to promote “effortful thinking” (Erisen et al., 2014). Requiring respondents to read background information that is directly relevant to the topic at hand encourages cognitive reasoning that is deliberate and effortful. By promoting such thinking, we are activating pathways in the brain through which individuals make semantic associations between various objects and categories. After receiving the treatment, our respondents should be directly engaging with information about Puerto Rico and comparing it to their other ideas about the island, rather than relying on predispositions to determine their policy attitudes.

## **Data and Methods**

Our study is based on a quasi-representative survey of 1751 (non-Hispanic) white U.S. mainland citizens recruited online by Cint in February 2016. This heterogeneous national sample, targeted to match census demographics, was obtained from an initial pool of 1873 respondents after accounting for response quality (attention check and survey completion). The inclusion of all respondents in the analysis, however, does not affect the results (not shown). Although younger and more educated, the sample was largely representative of the white population across important demographic and political characteristics (see Table A1). Importantly, the survey was conducted prior to Hurricane Maria and the significant political and media attention that ensued. Thus, the economic problems of Puerto Rico and the issue of its statehood were likely not on the minds of most respondents. Accordingly, we find that

only 15% claimed they were very informed about Puerto Rico’s debt crisis (and 37% claimed they were moderately informed). This is in line with other polls finding that few voters know that Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens.<sup>3</sup>

After agreeing to a standard consent form, respondents were asked various questions that sought to measure their opinion on political topics, including partisanship, ideology, perceptions of the national economy, immigration attitudes, and knowledge of Puerto Rico’s debt crisis.<sup>4</sup> Respondents were then placed equally into either an uninformed (placebo-control) group or an informed (treatment) group. The control group was given a fact sheet about the Coquí, a small tree frog native to Puerto Rico. In order to increase perceived connectedness of Puerto Rico through effortful thinking, the treatment group received information describing the current political status of Puerto Rico and island’s historical relationship with the United States (for details, see Appendix).

After being exposed to one of the treatment conditions, respondents were then asked three questions used as dependent variables (and manipulation checks). In particular, respondents were asked (1) whether it is fair for Puerto Ricans not to have any electoral votes for U.S. president; (2) whether it is fair for Puerto Ricans not to have a voting Congressional representative; (3) and whether Puerto Ricans should be allowed to keep their citizenship status. After answering these questions (combined into a “political support” index with  $\alpha = 0.85$ ), respondents received the final question used as the main dependent variable of this study: should Puerto Rico become the 51st state of the Union?

## Results

Since this is the first study on this topic, we begin with a simple descriptive analysis of public attitudes toward Puerto Rico and its potential statehood. The control condition offers support for our baseline expectations that most white Americans neither support nor

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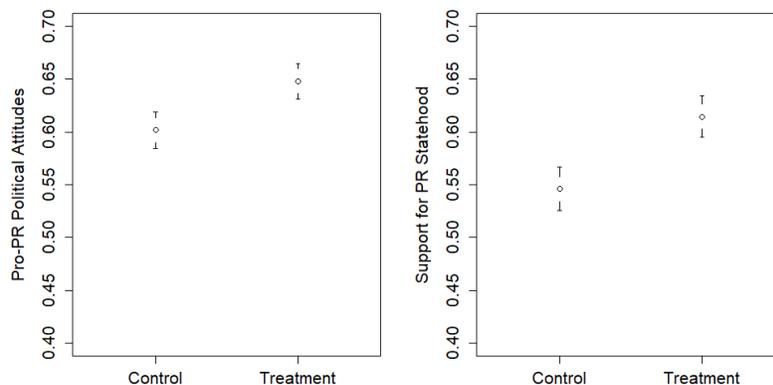
<sup>3</sup>See *Economist/YouGov Poll* from May 17, 2016; *New York Times* from September 26, 2017.

<sup>4</sup>The (post-treatment) demographic question block also asked respondents their age, gender, income, state of residence, and education.

oppose the addition of Puerto Rico as the 51st state. The mean response in the control group as to whether Puerto Rico should become a state is 0.53 in which the plurality (32%) of respondents are undecided and the majority (69%) do not have a strong opinion either way. Still, 17% of respondents indicate that they are strongly supportive of statehood and 15% that they are strongly opposed to it.<sup>5</sup>

While there are few differences based on demographics (including education), most factors identified by previous research as key predictors of immigration attitudes also matter for political support of Puerto Rico. Accordingly, the most supportive individuals are those who are pro-immigration, liberal, and optimistic about the national economy. There is a slight difference along party lines as well, with Democrats being more supportive of Puerto Rico than Republicans and Independents. Finally, those who report more knowledge about the debt crisis in Puerto Rico are also more supportive of statehood for the island. For details, see the regression results in Table A3.

Figure 1: Effects of Providing Background Information on Puerto Rico Support



The plot shows estimates for the effects of the background information treatment on respondents' political attitudes toward Puerto Rico. Bars represent 95% CIs. For variable descriptions, see Appendix.

Turning to the experimental results (Figure 1), those who received the treatment are indeed more politically supportive of Puerto Rico compared to the control group (ATE =  $0.05 \pm 0.02$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). In other words, the informed participants are more likely to believe that Puerto Ricans deserve to have rights like those enjoyed by other U.S. citizens. In

<sup>5</sup>To report these descriptive results for the control group, we weighted our sample to match the population estimates for education, age, and gender from the 2016 Current Population Survey (see Table A1).

turn, these results suggest that, as a potential causal mechanism, our information treatment increased perceived political connections between Puerto Ricans and other Americans.

As a result, we find those in the informed group are also more likely to support Puerto Rican statehood ( $ATE = 0.07 \pm 0.03, p < 0.01$ ), consistent with our expectations. In particular, the informed group had significantly higher levels of support (51% vs. 40%) and lower levels of opposition (19% vs 26%) to statehood relative to the uninformed group. These effects are further robust to the inclusion of various pre-treatment covariates in the regression specification (Table A4).

Finally, we explored the possibility of heterogeneous treatment effects. While we did not pre-specify our expectations, we follow prior research and test the robustness of our results for major subgroups of respondents. Figure A1 illustrates that the treatment had a statistically similar effect regardless of respondents' partisan affiliation. Similarly, we do not find any effect differences in the case of other key moderators, including education, immigration attitudes, economic perceptions, and issue knowledge (see Table A5 and Figure A2). While the effects appear to be somewhat stronger for subgroups with lower levels of baseline support, these effect differences are not statistically significant, especially after adjusting for multiple comparisons using Bonferroni-Holm method.

## Discussion and Conclusion

With a population larger than in nearly half of the U.S. states, Puerto Rico has over 3 million residents who currently lack federal political representation despite their likely preference for statehood. Considering there are another approximately 5 million Puerto Ricans living in the mainland United States, the question of Puerto Rican statehood affects a sizeable share of U.S. citizens. One of the most cited reasons for the stalemate on this issue is the lack of sufficient support in the U.S. Congress and the public at large. Nonetheless, there is scant political science and public opinion research to confirm these claims.

To remedy this omission and inform policymakers, we conducted an original survey experiment. Our descriptive results show that most white Americans do not have strong views about Puerto Rico becoming the 51st state, suggesting a relatively low issue salience. Nonetheless, many voters still have meaningful, yet rather polarized, opinions on the issue. Although our particular topical focus is unique in the U.S. public opinion literature, our study demonstrates that well-established theories related to immigration and racial politics can be usefully applied to the question of Puerto Rican statehood. We find that those who oppose immigration, have negative economic perceptions, and lean conservative are more likely to oppose statehood, much like in the broader immigration politics literature.

Given that Puerto Rico is not a widely discussed topic, we also hypothesized that mainland voters (who are generally not knowledgeable about the issue) can be persuaded to support statehood by learning background information about Puerto Rico aimed at increasing its perceived connection to the U.S. mainland. The information respondents received described Puerto Ricans as having been U.S. citizens since 1917 and serving in every major U.S. war since WWI. It also explained that Puerto Ricans do not have the ability to vote for U.S. President, nor do they have a voting representative in Congress advocating for their interests. White Americans who were treated with this information were more likely to believe Puerto Ricans should maintain their U.S. citizenship, which likely caused an increase in perceptions of closeness between Puerto Rico and the United States.

The results of our experiment strongly support this interpretation. A 10% increase in support among the informed group implies that establishing a perceived connection of commonality between Puerto Ricans and white Americans is an effective way of creating support for the Puerto Rican statehood movement. In the U.S. Congress, where the decision for Puerto Rican statehood will ultimately be decided, this could be the difference that decides whether the island of 3 million achieves full U.S. statehood. It is also important to note that the treatment had a similar effect of increasing support for Puerto Rican statehood among all major subgroups of respondents, including those with lower baseline support.

While the treatment used in this experiment provides a method for overcoming the apathy and opposition felt by white Americans towards Puerto Rico becoming a state, it also demonstrates the potential of increasing perceived national connection in shaping attitudes toward other marginalized groups in the U.S. and elsewhere (also see Charnysh et al., 2015). Furthermore, our results are instructive to the growing literature on various separatist and self-determination movements around the world. A new state has not been added to the U.S. since Hawaii was admitted in 1959. This is a rare phenomenon and researchers should take advantage of this opportunity to study a vibrant political movement for unification rather than secession. Finally, our findings on the malleability of attitudes toward Puerto Rican statehood inform public opinion literature on immigration that so far has rarely documented meaningful preference change in response to factual information (Kustov et al., 2020).

Of course, our research is not without limitations. First, our treatment combines several lengthy and distinct pieces of information, which can all potentially have a separate effect besides their demonstrated joint effect. Such complexity, however, arguably also increases the external validity of our experiment since it is more in line with the somewhat convoluted mainstream media coverage of Puerto Rico and its status in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria.<sup>6</sup> Second, and related, there are uncertainties regarding whether our results would generalize to the U.S. population in the more salient post-Hurricane Maria context. Given the absence of any meaningful heterogeneous treatment effects and the limited knowledge of this subject among the general public even now, however, we are optimistic about the generalizability of our results but await future replications. Third, it is unclear to what extent an analogous treatment could increase inclusionary political attitudes in other cases where the marginalized group does not legally share a common citizenship (but see Collingwood et al., 2018). Future studies could further address some of these issues by replicating our experiment for Puerto Rico and related topics in a more recent representative sample.

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<sup>6</sup>See *USA Today* from September 26, 2017; *NBC News* from October 3, 2017; *NPR* from October 13, 2017.

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# Online Appendix

## Pre-treatment questions

1. How informed about Puerto Rico's current debt crisis would you consider yourself to be? (Knowledge of PR Debt Crisis) [Very informed (1), Moderately informed (.5), Not very informed (0)]
2. Generally speaking, do you consider yourself to be a Democrat, a Republican, an Independent, or what? Would you call yourself a strong Democrat (Republican), or not a very strong Democrat (Republican)? Do you think yourself closer to the Democratic Party or to the Republican Party?
3. When it comes to politics do you consider yourself to be? (7-point Ideology Scale) [Extremely Liberal (0) - Extreme Conservative (1)]
4. Generally, do you think immigrants coming to the United States make American society better in the long run, make American society worse in the long run, or don't you think immigrants coming to the U.S. have much of an effect on American society one way or the other? (Anti-immigration attitudes) [Better (0), Worse (1), Not much of an effect (0.5)]
5. How would you rate the current state of the economy? (Economy Perceptions) [Excellent (1), Good (0.75), Average (0.5), Poor (0.25), Terrible (0)]

## Placebo Treatment (Uninformed Group)

“Below you will find some information on Puerto Rico. **Please read all of it carefully before proceeding with the survey.**”

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The Puerto Rican coquí is a very small - tiny - tree frog about one-inch long. Coquíes have a high pitched sound and can be heard from far away.

The coquíes begin to sing when the sun goes down at dusk. Their melody serenades islanders to sleep. Coquíes sing all night long until dawn when they stop singing and head for the nest.

During the time of the Taíno Indians trillions of coquíes serenaded Puerto Rico. Many Taíno Indian myths surround the coquí. Coquíes are found in much of the Taíno art like pictographs and pottery.

In Puerto Rico all coquíes are called coquí even though not all sing "co-quí". Only two of the species the "Coquí Común" and the "Coquí de la Montana or Coquí Puertorriqueno" actually sing "co-quí".

Contrary to frogs, the coquíes do not go through a tadpole stage and break out of their egg - a small replica of their parents. Some coquíes are terrestrial some are arboreal. The Coquí Dorado is the only specie in the world that bears live young. It is the male coquí that sings - not the female.

Coquíes are in danger of extinction due to deforestation and actually two of them are already extinct - the Coquí Dorado and the Coquí Palmeado. People have destroyed their habitat or homes (nests) destroying their eggs and destroying their source of food and nourishment.

Source: <http://www.elboricua.com/coqui.html>

## Experimental Treatment (Informed Group)

“Below you will find some information on Puerto Rico. **Please read all of it carefully before proceeding with the survey.**”

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Puerto Rico is the easternmost of the Greater Antilles (18 15 N, 66 30 W), and the fourth largest island in the Caribbean. Based on the latest U. S. Census, the population of Puerto Rico is roughly three million seven hundred thousand (3,725,789) people. Additionally, there are over five million (5,266,738) people of Puerto Rican descent currently living in the United States. All Puerto Ricans, whether on the island or on the mainland, have been citizens of the United States since 1917.

Puerto Rico was discovered by Christopher Columbus in 1493 and shortly thereafter the island was conquered and settled by the Spaniards. It remained a Spanish possession for 400 years. Puerto Rico came under United States sovereignty on December 10, 1898, when the Spanish-American War ended. In 1950, the United States Congress enacted Public Law 600, which authorized the people of Puerto Rico to draft and adopt their own Constitution. The Puerto Rican Constitution was overwhelmingly approved by the people of Puerto Rico and then approved by the United States Congress and the President of the United States. It became effective on July 25, 1952. Puerto Rico’s relationship with the United States is referred to as commonwealth status.

The United States and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico share a common defense system, economy, and currency. Puerto Rico exercises basically the same control over its internal affairs as do the 50 U.S. states. It differs from the U.S. states in its relationship with the federal government. The people of Puerto Rico are citizens of the United States but are not allowed to vote in national elections. They are represented in the U.S. Congress by a Resident Commissioner who has a voice in the House of Representatives but does not vote. Puerto Ricans have served in the U.S. military in every major U.S. war since World War I.

Except for Social Security taxes, Puerto Rico does not collect most federal taxes from its residents. No federal income tax is collected from Puerto Rico residents on income earned in Puerto Rico, except for certain federal employees.

In a 2012, a majority of Puerto Rican voters (54%) disagreed with “the present form of territorial status.” Instead, most (61%) supported full U.S. statehood over the current situation (33%) and full independence (which only 5% of Puerto Ricans supported). Clearly the vast majority of Puerto Ricans want to maintain a connection with the United States.

Source: <http://www.bgfpr.com/economy/puerto-rico-facts.html> ”Puerto Rico’s Political Status and the 2012 Plebiscite: Background and Key Questions” (PDF). fas.org. Congressional Research Service.

## Post-treatment questions

PR Political Support Index: an average of the three items

1. It is unfair that Puerto Rico does not have a voting representative in Congress.
2. It is unfair that Puerto Rico does not have any electoral votes.
3. Puerto Ricans should continue to keep their American citizenship.

Puerto Rico should be admitted into the United States as the 51st state. (Support for PR statehood) [Strongly agree (1); Somewhat agree (0.75); Neither agree nor disagree 0.5; Somewhat disagree (0.25); Strongly disagree (0)]

Table A1: Descriptive Statistics: Sample Demographics (n = 1751)

Variables	Current Population Survey	This Study
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	49%	47%
Female	51%	53%
<b>Age</b>		
18-34	32%	39%
35-55	36%	48%
55+	34%	13%
<b>Income</b>		
Less than \$50,000	43%	54%
Greater than \$50,000	57%	46%
<b>Education</b>		
Less than College Diploma	72%	56%
More than College Diploma	28%	44%
<b>Party ID</b>		
Democrat	34%	38%
Republican	25%	29%
Independent	41%	32%
<b>Region</b>		
Northeast	18%	20%
Midwest	21%	23%
South	37%	38%
West	24%	19%

Table A2: Descriptive statistics: Attitudinal Variables

Statistic	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Pctl(25)	Pctl(75)	Max
Support for PR Statehood	0.58	0.31	0.00	0.50	0.75	1.00
PR Political Support Index	0.62	0.26	0.00	0.50	0.83	1.00
(Negative) Economy Perceptions	0.56	0.25	0	0.5	0.8	1
Anti-immigration Attitudes	0.51	0.44	0	0	1	1
Knowledge of PR Debt Crisis	0.33	0.36	0.00	0.00	0.50	1.00

Table A3: Individual-level Predictors of Political Attitudes toward Puerto Rico

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	Political Support Index	Support for Statehood
	(1)	(2)
Female	0.010 (0.012)	-0.051*** (0.014)
Age	-0.079* (0.034)	0.043 (0.040)
Education	0.002 (0.026)	0.007 (0.030)
Income	-0.049 (0.031)	-0.037 (0.037)
Republican	-0.044** (0.015)	-0.004 (0.018)
Independent	-0.053** (0.018)	-0.030 (0.021)
(Conservative) Ideology	-0.114*** (0.025)	-0.120*** (0.030)
(Negative) Economy Perceptions	-0.124*** (0.027)	-0.157*** (0.032)
Anti-Immigration Attitudes	-0.087*** (0.015)	-0.162*** (0.018)
Knowledge of PR Debt Crisis	0.056** (0.018)	0.039 (0.021)
State FE	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>
Observations	1,738	1,738
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.147	0.158

All models are OLS regressions based on the full sample. For variable description, see Appendix. The standard errors are given in parentheses, \*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01; \*\*\*p<0.001.

Table A4: Treatment Effects with Control Variables

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Political Support Index		Support for Statehood	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Treatment	0.046*** (0.012)	0.045*** (0.012)	0.069*** (0.015)	0.065*** (0.014)
Female		0.013 (0.012)		-0.048*** (0.014)
Age		-0.077* (0.034)		0.046 (0.040)
Education		0.001 (0.025)		0.006 (0.030)
Income		-0.049 (0.031)		-0.037 (0.036)
Republican		-0.045** (0.015)		-0.005 (0.018)
Independent		-0.052** (0.018)		-0.029 (0.021)
(Conservative) Ideology		-0.117*** (0.025)		-0.124*** (0.030)
(Negative) Economy Perceptions		-0.119*** (0.027)		-0.150*** (0.032)
Anti-Immigration Attitudes		-0.087*** (0.015)		-0.162*** (0.018)
Knowledge of PR Debt Crisis		0.058** (0.018)		0.042* (0.021)
State FE	<i>No</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Yes</i>
Observations	1,751	1,738	1,751	1,738

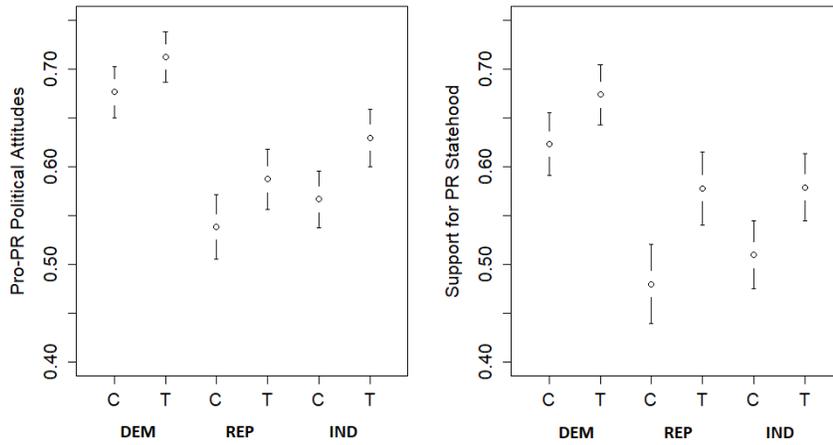
All models are OLS regressions based on the full sample. For variable description, see Appendix. The standard errors are given in parentheses, \*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01; \*\*\*p<0.001.

Table A5: Treatment Effects by Major Covariates

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>									
	Political Support Index					Support for Statehood				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
Treatment	0.042*	0.052**	0.047**	0.037*	0.041*	0.054**	0.061**	0.086***	0.042*	0.067***
	(0.017)	(0.016)	(0.017)	(0.015)	(0.016)	(0.021)	(0.019)	(0.021)	(0.018)	(0.019)
Republican	-0.144***					-0.144***				
	(0.019)					(0.023)				
Independent	-0.119***					-0.114***				
	(0.023)					(0.028)				
T x Republican	0.024					0.057				
	(0.026)					(0.032)				
T x Independent	-0.018					-0.030				
	(0.033)					(0.040)				
College+		0.032					0.026			
		(0.017)					(0.021)			
T x College+		-0.014					0.014			
		(0.025)					(0.029)			
Knowledge of PR Debt Crisis			0.064***					0.100***		
			(0.017)					(0.020)		
T x Knowledge of PR			-0.003					-0.035		
			(0.024)					(0.029)		
Anti-Immigration Attitudes				-0.135***					-0.216***	
				(0.017)					(0.020)	
T x Anti-Immigration Attitudes				0.013					0.050	
				(0.024)					(0.028)	
(Negative) Economy Perceptions					-0.111***					-0.121***
					(0.017)					(0.020)
T x Economy Perceptions					0.004					-0.007
					(0.024)					(0.029)

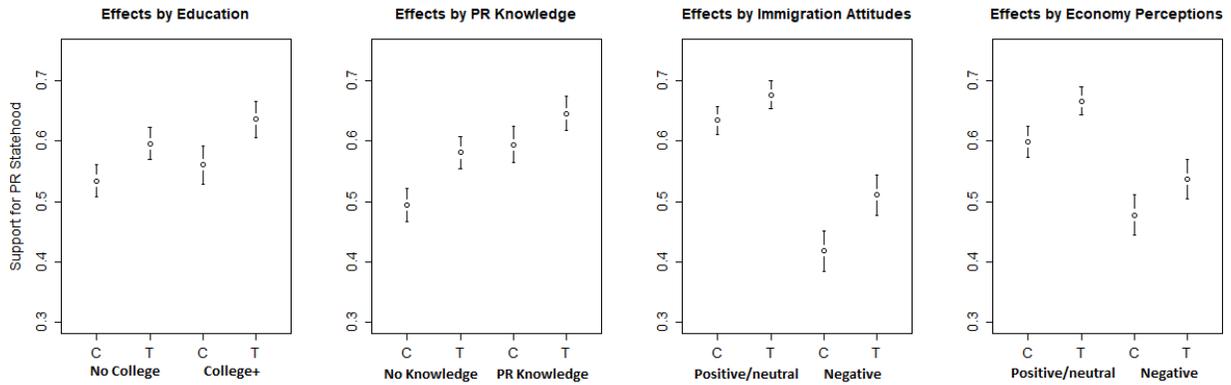
All models are OLS regressions based on the full sample. For variable description, see Appendix. The standard errors are given in parentheses, \*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01; \*\*\*p<0.001.

Figure A1: Treatment Effects by Partisanship



The plot shows estimates for the effects of the randomly assigned treatment on respondents' political attitudes toward Puerto Rico by partisanship. Bars represent 95% CIs. For variable descriptions, see Appendix.

Figure A2: Treatment Effects by Major Covariates



The plot shows estimates for the effects of the randomly assigned treatment on respondents' political attitudes toward Puerto Rico by major covariates. Bars represent 95% CIs. For variable descriptions, see Appendix.