

Report: The Puerto Rican Vote Nationwide and in Florida¹

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For the last decade, the Puerto Rican population has grown substantially in the United States, so much that it has surpassed the Puerto Rican population living on the island. One of the top destination states of the recent migration wave, especially after Hurricane Maria, has been Florida. Florida has surpassed New York as the state with the largest Puerto Rican population.

As the official date for the 2018 mid-term elections approached, November 6th, researchers at University of South Florida (USF) conducted a survey to gauge the continental U.S.'s Puerto Rican population's political ideologies and party preferences, including a subset of Florida Puerto Ricans and a subset of Puerto Ricans who moved to the continental U.S. after September 20, 2017, when Hurricane Maria struck the island. This report illustrates how Puerto Ricans feel about the two main political parties in the U.S., how they approached the 2018 mid-term elections, and their attitudes about some key issues at play in this election. It also includes information on how Puerto Ricans feel about the federal response to Hurricane Irma and Maria and their aftermath.

The survey was conducted online between October 30th to November 3rd, among a national sample of 520 Puerto Rican adults², with 35% (n=182) of them residing in Florida.³ From the national sample, researchers identified 89 (17.1%) who resided in Puerto Rico on September 20, 2017, when the category 5 Hurricane Maria struck the island, leaving 2,975 deceased in its wake. The majority of the U.S. subset was born in Puerto Rico (77.7%), with 90.1% of the Florida subset having been born on the island.⁴

¹ This study was funded by the University of South Florida.

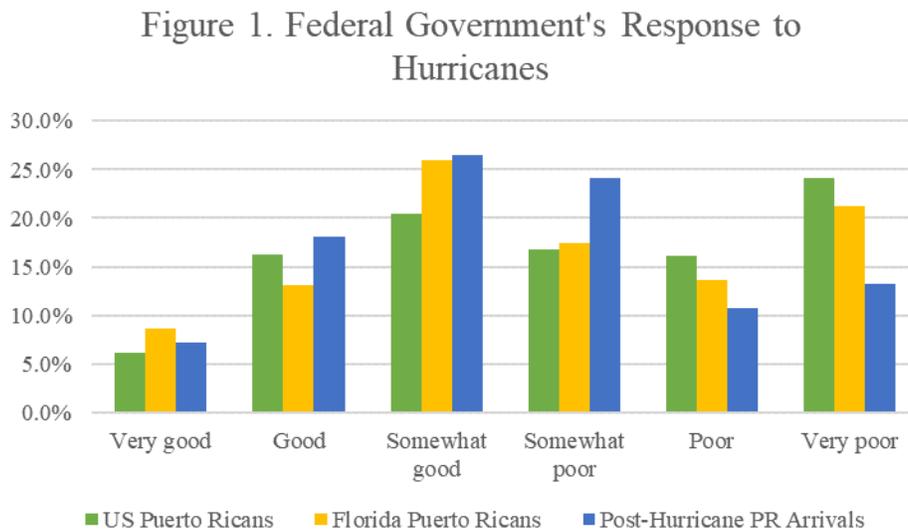
² The overall sample was weighted by age and gender using data from the [American Community Survey \(ACS\) 2017](#) taking into account the "18 and over" population.

³ The online sample consisted of a panel survey carried out by Qualtrics. The data do not represent a random sample of Puerto Ricans as they are mostly Puerto Rican-born.

⁴ Our analysis includes three subsets: The U.S subset (all states except Florida), the Florida subset (weighted for age and gender using the ACS 2017), and the respondents who moved to the U.S. (including all 50 states) after Hurricane Maria impacted Puerto Rico on September 20, 2017.

Federal Response to Hurricane Maria

When asked to rate the federal government's response to Hurricane Maria and its aftermath, within the U.S. subset 22.5% rated it as good or very good, 20.5% somewhat good, 16.8% somewhat poor, and 40.2% rated it as poor or very poor. Among the Florida subset, 21.7% rated the federal government response as good or very good, 26% as somewhat good, 17.5% as somewhat poor, and 34.8% as poor or very poor. Among those who left the island after the hurricane, 25.3% rated the response as good or very good, 26.5% as somewhat good, 24.1% as somewhat poor, and 24.1% as poor or very poor (see Figure 1).

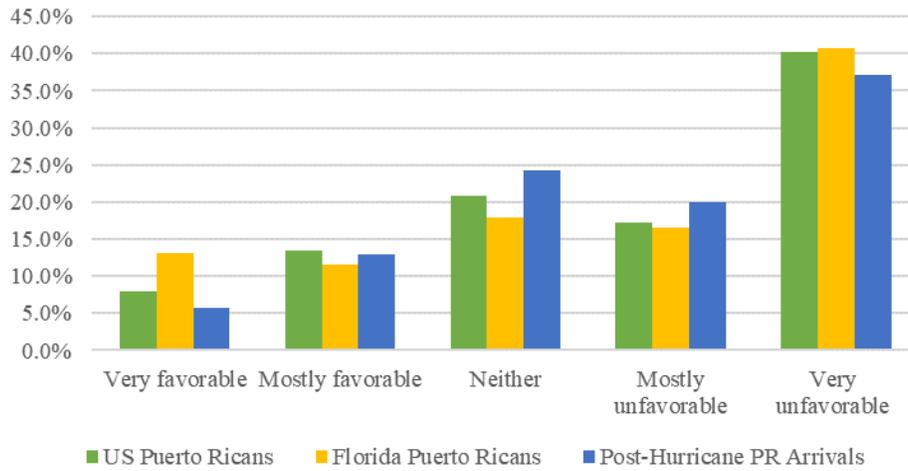


Political Ideology and Party Identification

Regarding their political views, among the U.S. subset, 27.6% described their political views as conservative or very conservative, 43% as moderate, and 29.5% as liberal or very liberal. Among the Florida subset, 33.3% described their views as conservative or very conservative, 39.9% as moderate, and 26.7% as liberal or very liberal. Among those who came to the U.S. after the hurricane, 24% described their political views as conservative or very conservative, 47.9% as moderate, and 28.1% described them as liberal or very liberal.

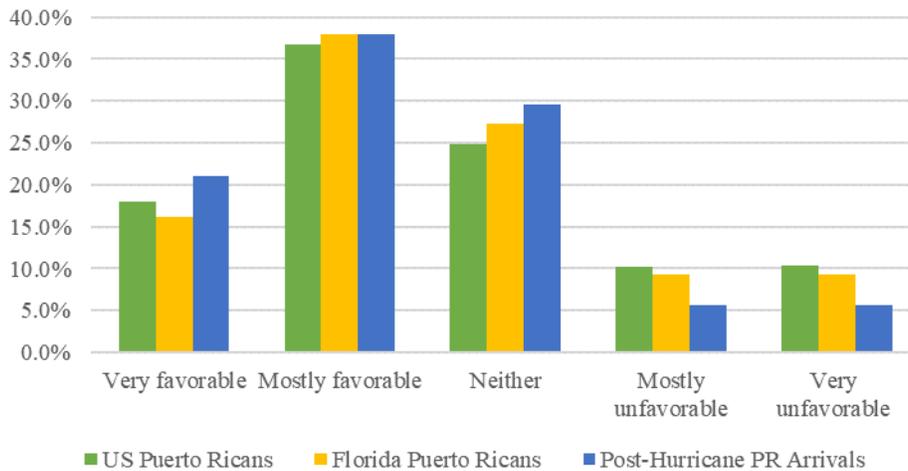
When asked about their overall opinion of the Republican Party, most respondents rated it unfavorably: 57.6% of the U.S. subset, 57.4% of the Florida subset, and 57.1% of the post-hurricane migrant subset rated it mostly or very unfavorable. About 21.5% of the U.S. subset rated it mostly or very favorable in comparison to 24.6% among the Florida subset and 18.6% of the post-hurricane migrant subset. Around 20.9% of the U.S. subset rated the Republican Party neither favorable nor unfavorable; the numbers for the Florida and post-hurricane migrant subsets were 17.9% and 24.3% respectively (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Opinion of Republican Party



On the other hand, when asked about their overall opinion of the Democratic Party, the majority of respondents rated it favorably: 54.7% within the U.S. subset, 54.1% of the Florida subset, and 59.1% of the post-hurricane migrant subset rated it mostly or very favorable. About 20.5% of the U.S. subset, 18.6% among the Florida subset, and 11.2% for the post-hurricane migrant subset rated the democratic party mostly or very unfavorable. Around 24.8% of the U.S. subset rated it neither favorable or unfavorable, 27.3% among the Florida subset, and 29.6% among the post-hurricane migrant subset (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Opinion of Democratic Party



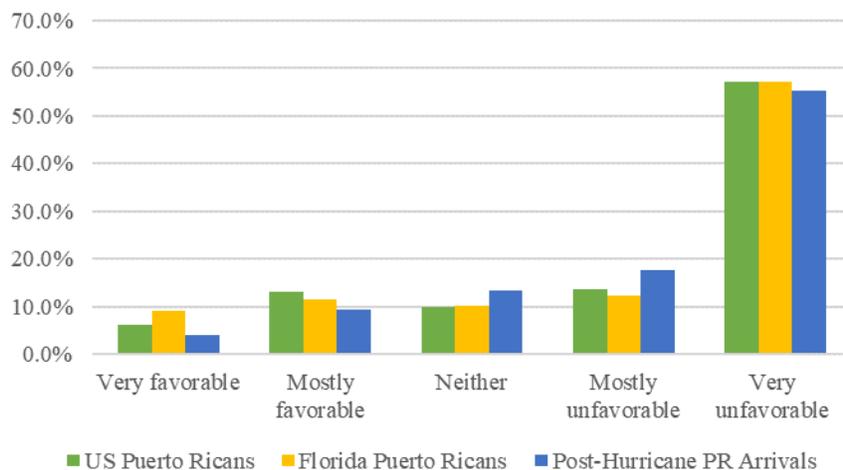
Regarding political party identification, among the U.S. subset 52.1% identified with the Democratic Party, 15.2% with the Republican Party, 7.5% with multiple parties, and 24.1% did not identify with any of the parties. For the Florida subset, 44.6% identified with the Democratic Party, 21.5% with the Republican Party, 6.4% with multiple parties, and 27.5% did not identify with any party. Among the post-hurricane migrant subset, 50.6% identified with the Democratic

Party, 11.7% with the Republican Party, 2.6% identified with multiple parties, and 35.1% did not identify with any party.

Opinions of President Trump

President Trump’s approval rate fared worse than the Republican party among the U.S. subset: 70.8% rated him mostly or very unfavorable, 19.4% rated him mostly or very favorably, and 9.9% rated him neither favorable nor unfavorable. Among the Florida subset, 69.5% rated him mostly or very unfavorable, 20.5% rated him very or mostly favorable, and 10.1% rated him neither favorable nor unfavorable. Among the post-hurricane migrant subset, 73% rated him mostly or very unfavorable, 13.6% rated him very or mostly favorable, and 13.5% rated him neither favorable nor unfavorable (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Opinion of President Donald Trump



When asked if participants agreed or disagreed with the statement “President Trump’s administration is committed to serving the Puerto Rican people” 15.7% of the U.S. subset agreed or strongly agreed, 10.3% somewhat agreed, 11% somewhat disagreed, and 63% disagreed or strongly disagreed. In comparison, among those in the Florida subset, 14.3% agreed or strongly agreed, 14.8% somewhat agreed, 5.7% somewhat disagreed, and 65% disagreed or strongly disagreed. Among those in the post-hurricane migrant subset, 15.1% agreed or strongly agreed, 19.8% somewhat agreed, 12.8% somewhat disagreed, and 52.3% disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement.

Voting Patterns

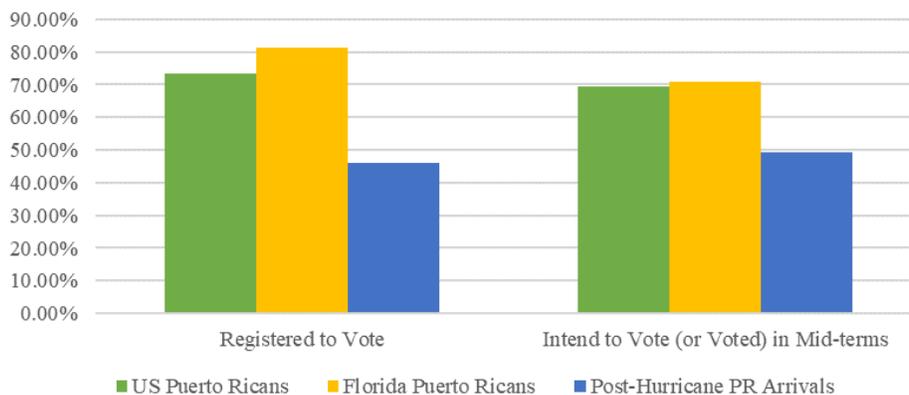
Of those in the U.S. subset, 73.4% were registered to vote in the U.S. elections, 81.3% for the Florida subset, and 46.1% among post-hurricane migrant subset. For those who were not registered, there were three main reasons: lack of time, lack of interest, and lack of understanding of the U.S. election system. For the 26.6% not registered to vote in the U.S. subset, 39.2% of this group reported that they were not interested in voting in the U.S. elections, 37.2% did not have time to register to vote, and 11.2% did not understand the U.S. election system. For the 18.7%

not registered to vote in the Florida subset, 43.1% reported that they were not interested in voting in the U.S. elections, 35.8% did not have time to register, and 4.6% did not understand the U.S. election system. For the 53.9% of the post-hurricane migrant subset not registered to vote, 37.8% reported that they were not interested in voting in the U.S. elections, 16.2% did not understand the U.S. election system, and 37.8% did not have time to register to vote (see Figure 5).

Regarding voting practices, around 54.5% of the U.S. subset voted in the 2016 presidential elections: 66% for Hillary Clinton, 24.2% for Donald Trump, and 9.7% for another candidate. The Florida subset did not depart much from these numbers, with 66.6%, 22.3%, and 11.1% respectively. If the presidential elections were held today, 19.1% of the U.S. subset indicated they would vote for a Republican candidate, 58.1% for a Democratic candidate, and 12.3% indicated they would not vote. Among the Florida subset, 22.5% indicated they would vote for a Republican candidate, 57.4% for a Democratic candidate, and 9.9% indicated they would not vote. Within the post-hurricane migrant subset, 14.7% indicated they would vote for a Republican candidate, 66.2% for a Democratic candidate, and 11.8% indicated they would not vote.

When those that reported having a voter registration were asked if they were going to vote (or had already voted) in the 2018 mid-term elections, 69.3% of the U.S. subset of eligible voters said yes, 70.9% in the Florida subset intended to vote (or had already voted), but only 49.2% among the post-hurricane migrant subset had voted or intended to vote in the mid-term elections.

Figure 5. Voter Registration and Intent to Vote in Mid-Term Elections



Attitudes About Social Issues

When it comes to their attitudes regarding social issues that have been important this election season, the majority of the Puerto Ricans held similar opinions. Of those in the U.S. subset, 66.8% believed religion should be kept separate from government policies, 74.9% in the Florida subset, and 79.8% within the post-hurricane migrant subset. Among the U.S. subset, 67.8% believe there are still significant obstacles that make it harder for women to get ahead in the U.S. than men, 67.8% in the Florida subset, and 66.3% within the post-hurricane migrant subset. Last, around 75.5% of the U.S. subset believes that the United States' openness to people from all over

the world is essential to who we are as a nation; 78.8% in the Florida subset agreed with this assertion, and 76.4% within the post-hurricane migrant subset agreed.

Understanding the Puerto Rican vote in the United States⁵

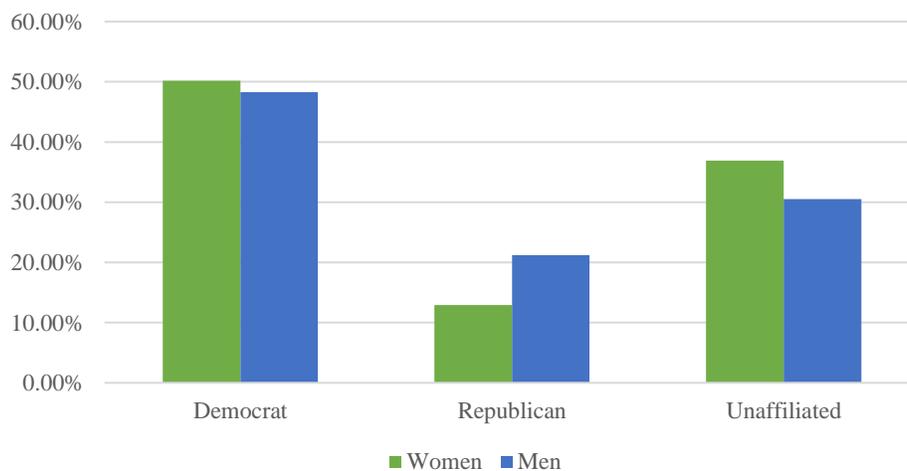
When considering the whole sample (n=520), our study highlights that recent Puerto Rican migrants are not affiliated with the political parties in the U.S.; however, the longer they reside in the continental U.S., the more likely they are to register to vote and affiliate themselves with one of the two main political parties (i.e., Republicans or Democrats). Though among Puerto Ricans who have been here the longest, there was a higher tendency to identify as Democrats, it was those that identified as Republicans that were more likely to vote in 2016 (see Table 1).

Table 1. Likelihood of being affiliated by years lived in the USA

	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Constant	0.059	0.165	0.128	1	0.721	1.061
Years lived in USA	0.025	0.007	14.917	1	0.000	1.026

Importantly, members of both parties expressed a greater willingness to cast their votes in the 2018 elections (compared to 2016), though this increase was greater among Democrats than Republicans. When considering gender, men were more likely to identify as Republicans, while women were more likely to identify as Democrats or as unaffiliated (see Figure 6).

Figure 6. Party Affiliation by Gender



To the degree that our findings translate into the real-world political context, currently, there is a significant number of Puerto Ricans that are unaffiliated (33.6%)⁶ and the longer they live in the U.S., the more likely they will come to affiliate with one of the two main political parties.

⁵ The results in this section are based on the whole sample of respondents (n=520).

⁶ These results include unaffiliated and multiple parties.