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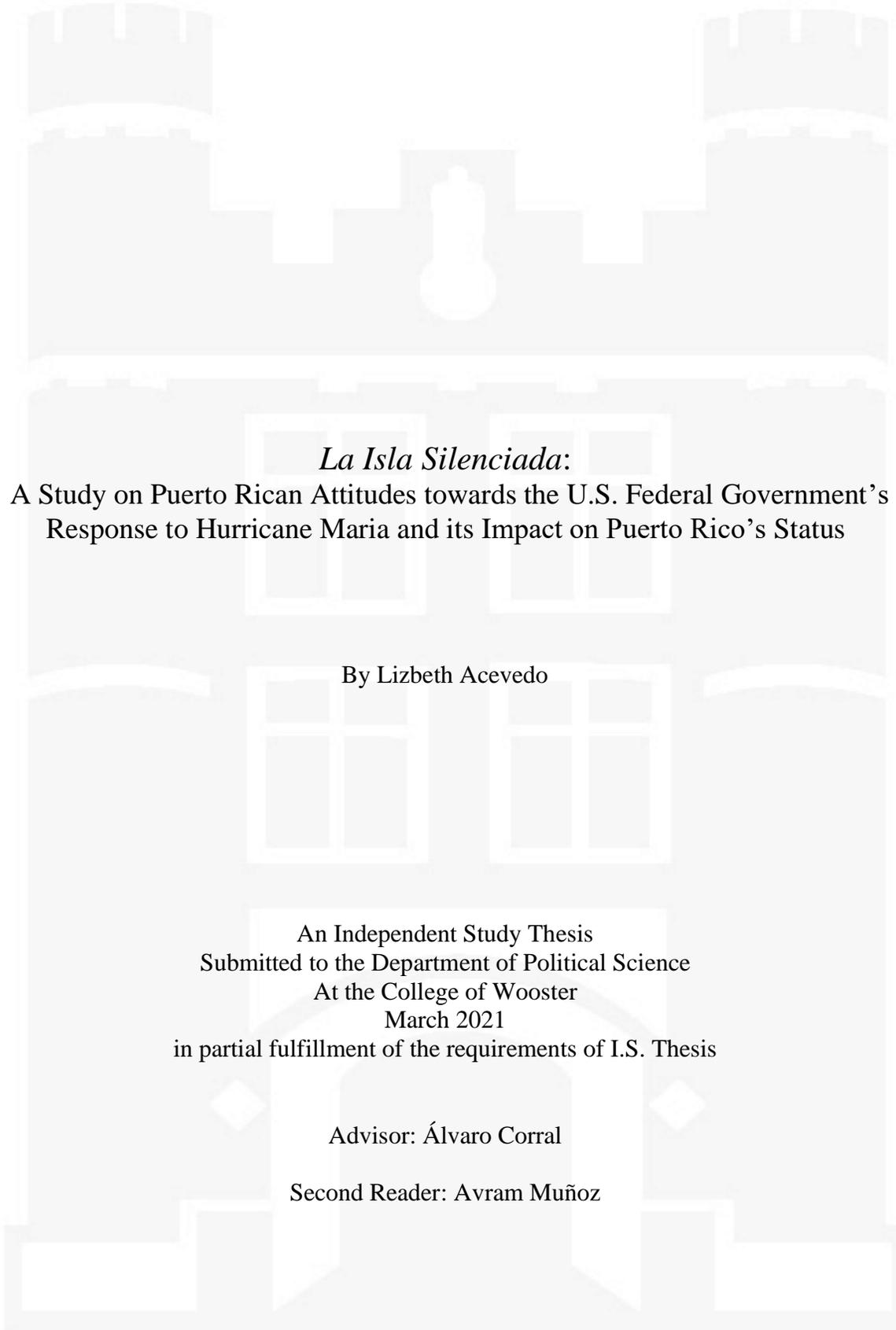
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*La Isla Silenciada:*  
A Study on Puerto Rican Attitudes towards the U.S. Federal Government's  
Response to Hurricane Maria and its Impact on Puerto Rico's Status

By Lizbeth Acevedo

An Independent Study Thesis  
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in partial fulfillment of the requirements of I.S. Thesis

Advisor: Álvaro Corral

Second Reader: Avram Muñoz

### Abstract

Puerto Rico's ongoing economic crisis and the inadequate emergency response to the devastation of Hurricane Maria are deeply tied to the island's neo-colonial political arrangement with the United States. The two-principle alternative political arrangements—statehood and independence—are the subject of vigorous ongoing debate both on the U.S. mainland and the island. However, the results of periodic plebiscites on the island are often poor indicators of the island residents' true preferences on the matter because they are often subject to politicization and abstention campaigns. Therefore, I use a survey with a representative sample of island residents conducted in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria to explore the issue. I propose that island residents' views of the U.S. federal government heavily influence the political preferences about statehood and independence. In order to account for the island's unique political context, results take into account the role of U.S. political parties and leaders in these matters. Based on the results, Puerto Ricans who viewed the U.S. federal government and leaders positively would prefer pro-statehood, while those who viewed them negatively preferred pro-independence. Not only does the project offer greater clarity on these questions due to its methodological approach, but I also believe that it fills a gap in the current scholarship which often explores the political views of U.S.-mainland residents of Puerto Rican descent.

### Acknowledgements

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I am grateful for my *amigas* for being there for me and willing to share tears, laughter, joy, stress and anxiety together. We were in this together and I wouldn't be able to complete these four years at Wooster without any of you. We have grown and flourish together and I wouldn't have it any other way. So, thank you.

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To my parents and brother,

*Gracias por motivarme. Gracias por darme la oportunidad de ir a Wooster lejos de ustedes. No fue fácil tenerlos lejos pero siempre sabia que estaban allí cuando los necesitaba. Sus sacrificios siempre los tendré en mi corazón y los tendré presente en cada aspecto de mi vida. Los amo con toda el alma. I love you.*

*Finalmente, Esto es para mi isla.  
Lucha Fuerte.*

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

Puerto Rico is my mother's home, and it is where our culture is rooted. In Puerto Rico, a majority of the islanders are born into poverty while others get to live a life of luxury. The island is beautiful, warm and rich in culture but that does not completely represent the island. Behind the scenes, Puerto Rico is going through a crisis that has impacted the majority of its habitants in low-income communities and the territorial status of Puerto Rico. During colonial times, Puerto Rico was under Spanish rule until the US gained possession of the island, which currently holds the designation of Commonwealth of the United States. Since the incorporation of Puerto Rico under U.S. rule, the island has been granted U.S. citizenship through the Foraker Treaty. Like those in other Latin American countries, Puerto Ricans migrate to the US to find better opportunities for themselves and their families, but unlike other Latin American immigrants, Puerto Ricans do not have to battle with the harshest forms of the U.S. immigration system because Puerto Ricans are citizens of the United States.

However, U.S. citizenship for many Puerto Ricans living on the island can feel meaningless—like a false promise. Despite the vast amount of political and economic power the U.S. wields over the island, Puerto Ricans have struggled to be heard. Ed Morales, a scholar who has reported on Puerto Rico for 20 years, refers to this political arrangement as “self-rule without sovereignty” (Herrera 2019). While Puerto Ricans on the island have voting rights, access to healthcare, and the quality of their political representation and government services fall well short of those enjoyed by Puerto Ricans

who happen to reside on the mainland. This stark contrast in political rights and services has driven record migration to the mainland.

Due to the ongoing crisis in Puerto Rico, economic opportunities are scarce influencing Puerto Ricans to migrate to the United States in order to provide for their families. Although Hurricane Maria in 2017 led to more migration to the US, Puerto Ricans have consistently sought opportunity on the mainland. Data from the Pew Research Center shows many Puerto Ricans were leaving the island prior to Hurricane Maria suggesting the magnitude of the economic mobility problems on the island (Cohn, Patten, and Lopez 2014). Under U.S. rule, Puerto Rico has been characterized by economic inequality, economic pressures and migration. The economy has gotten so bad that the economic pressures drive many to leave the island entirely. Although many of these people do not wish to leave, they are forced to do so in order to survive.

On September 20, 2017, Hurricane Maria, a category 5 hurricane, inflicted major destruction throughout the nations of the Caribbean. Puerto Rico was one of the islands devastated by the hurricane, affecting millions of Puerto Ricans. It is estimated that there were 2,975 casualties in Puerto Rico, but many scholars believe that the number could be higher (Lynch Baldwin and Begnaud 2018). The island was destroyed but the most affected were the poor and the vulnerable. This resulted in the loss of communication between families as the island's electrical grid failed , a scarcity of water, delayed arrival of aid, and immense number of necessary repairs. It became evident that there were discrepancies surrounding the emergency response process. The U.S. was delayed in providing aid to Puerto Rican victims as well as electricity to some of the poorer and

rural parts of the island. This began to incite an interest to investigate why that was the case. Therefore, it is important to understand how the relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico is perceived by Puerto Ricans.

Throughout this investigation, I want to analyze Puerto Rican's attitudes towards the United States federal government and how that influences Puerto Rican's views about Puerto Rico's territorial status. This will hopefully result in a deeper understanding about the relationship between Puerto Ricans' concerns about the island's colonial status and whether Puerto Rico should be independent, become a U.S. state, or maintain the status quo.

The research question at the center of this study is as follows:

*How do views of the U.S. federal government shape preferences about statehood and independence among island residents in the post-Hurricane Maria context?*

To answer this question, I will rely on the work of various scholars including Ed Morales, Lisa Garcia Bedolla and Ariana J. Valle to better understand the political crisis that is happening in Puerto Rico. Through their expertise on Latinx politics, neocolonialism, and citizenship I will be able to recognize the various discrepancies within the political system of Puerto Rico and how that could be rooted in the discrimination and oppression of Puerto Ricans within the United States political system. Throughout history, Puerto Rico has been taken advantage of by the United States, exploiting their land and their people. This was evident throughout the aftermath of Hurricane Maria as the recovery effort was severely delayed and often not prioritized by the U.S.

As a commonwealth territory of the United States, mainland and island residing Puerto Ricans have noticed the political mistreatment of Puerto Rico that has affected them, especially during times of crisis. The United States has failed to implement proper representation within the U.S. federal government's institutions in a way that provides Puerto Rico support on par with the 50 states. To better understand the relationship between Puerto Rico's colonial status and island-residing Puerto Ricans opinions, a quantitative analysis of a public opinion survey will be suitable as it recounts the experience of Hurricane Maria victims a year after. The questions asked Puerto Rican residents to reflect on the adequacy of the emergency response from various governmental authorities and to share their views on various political figures that are important within Puerto Rican politics and on the status question. The public opinion survey which serves as the basis of data for this investigation is The Washington Post and Kaiser Family Foundation's *Survey of Puerto Rican Residents*, conducted in 2018 with a sample of 1,500 respondents.

In order to find significance to my research question, I propose two main hypotheses that I believe will be expected after analyzing the findings.

*H1: Negative perceptions of the United States Federal Government will lead to increase support for independence.*

*H2: Negative perceptions of the United States Federal Government will lead to increase support for statehood.*

*Null Hypothesis: Positive perception of the United States Federal government will lead to support for maintaining the status quo political arrangement of commonwealth status.*

To test my hypotheses, I analyzed opinions regarding the emergency responses of five levels of jurisdictions that include the U.S. federal government, Governor Ricardo Rosselló (Former Governor of Puerto Rico), the Municipal Government and Mayor, the Puerto Rican Government, and President Trump. I then explored how these key independent variables influenced respondent's opinions about the island's political status.

In the findings, I discuss the possible significance within respondents' opinions of the emergency response of the key independent variables and their opinion on choosing statehood, independence, or commonwealth. It is important to analyze the Hurricane Maria response as this is the turning point for many Puerto Ricans as they begin to recognize the fragility of Puerto Rico caused by the United States' neglect. The Maria responses can provide an explanation about whether the U.S.'s continuous colonial authority over Puerto Rico is to blame or if it can propose a new narrative.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

Throughout the history of the people of Puerto Rico, the island's residents have been subjected to major shifts in sovereignty. From foreign intervention and colonial arrangements beginning in 1493 with the Spanish until the present day with the neo-colonial relationship between the island and the United States since 1898. Though states like Alaska and Hawaii were the last to transition from territory to state in 1959 respectively, the debate about the Puerto Rican statehood has persisted both in Congress and on the island itself, there is still much debate and controversy over Puerto Rico being transitioned into statehood by its citizens and Congress (National Constitution Center 2020). It has been 61 years since Congress last approved statehood for a previous territory. In this time, Hawaii has undergone a process of political assimilation through U.S. colonialism, but Congress has so far refrained from allowing Puerto Rico to do the same. Like Puerto Rico, other territories like American Samoa, U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, and the North Mariana Islands have an unequal distribution of constitutional rights and representation. There is a widespread ignorance in American society about the political status of incorporated territories and this unfamiliarity has led to the hiddenness of the inhabitants and their place in the American polity. The issue of statehood for Puerto Rico specifically has entered the national conversation after many have noticed the inability of the U.S. to create stable lives in these territories as well as the refusal to grant greater political representation as a way to combat the economic and social problems they face.

The benefits of incorporation into the U.S. typically includes universal citizenship, voting rights, and legal migration for individuals, but Puerto Ricans experience an unequal distribution of rights between island and mainland Puerto Ricans on the basis of residence. For example, residents on the island receive only “fundamental” constitutional rights, but this means that 3 million Puerto Ricans, a population larger than about 20 of U.S. states, lack full representation in the U.S. Congress (U.S. Census Bureau 2019). Overall, it may seem that Puerto Ricans have fewer barriers to entry and more access to rights than other Latin Americans from Mexico, Central, and South America who are often scrutinized for illegal migration to the U.S. However, while this is true, the privileges of migration are also accompanied by a different set of challenges. I argue that under the current political status quo arrangement Puerto Ricans on the island suffer from an inferior form of democratic citizenship that shows its inadequacy in during moments of crisis like the aftermath of Hurricane Maria in 2017.

### **The Historical Context of Puerto Rico – U.S. Relations**

After the Spanish-American War, the United States gained territories including Puerto Rico, the Philippines and Cuba, but while the latter two would eventually gain full independence, Puerto Rico continued on the path of subordination to the U.S. From 1898 to 1900, Puerto Rico was under military rule until Congress passed the Foraker Treaty, which helped establish a civil government and free commerce between the U.S. and Puerto Rico (García Bedolla 2014). This act enables for the U.S. to appoint a governor, an executive council (similar to a senate), and an elected legislator of 35 members, which

can include Puerto Ricans and Americans. Most importantly, it allowed Puerto Rico to have a non-voting representative in Congress (García Bedolla 2014). In 1917, the Jones Act granted U.S. citizenship Puerto Ricans in the midst of World War I [is there anything about how this was done in order to be able to conscript/draft them to fight as soldiers?], but this extension of citizenship differed in a few important ways from citizenship on the mainland. The central difference is that U.S. citizenship status was granted by law not by birthright, which gives Congress permission to void the citizenship of Puerto Ricans should it decide to do so. With the passage of the Jones Act, Puerto Ricans were granted more control over their government, but many island residents did not agree with continuing being under U.S. “control” (García Bedolla 2014). With the U.S. under scrutiny by Puerto Rican nationalists, Puerto Rico officially entered “commonwealth” status in 1952 and has been a self-governing state with its own constitution that is followed alongside the U.S. Constitution. Although there are benefits to ‘representation’ in the U.S., it also has its limitations. Puerto Rico is considered to be a post-colonial state but under extensive influence from the U.S. as it exerts social, economic, and political control over Puerto Rico’s politics. The U.S.’s treatment of Puerto Rico has been questionable over the years, especially after recent natural disasters that exposed the U.S.’s inability to respond accordingly.

This colonial history of Puerto Rico and its contemporary legacy illustrates how the island has been in a constant state of repression by the U.S. Whether because of racism or a product of colonialism, there is a growing sense that the U.S. has failed to maintain the livelihood of Puerto Ricans on the island. The response by the U.S. to

Hurricane Maria's destruction in 2017 left no "shadow of doubt that residents of Puerto Rico have never really been first-class citizens" (Morales 2019). Thus, the illusion of U.S. citizenship seemed to be almost a reality for many on the island, but recent events have revealed that the island's residents lack true autonomy and are denied a voice. The island's residents lack the ability to exercise the full extent of their voting power during presidential elections and their voice in the U.S. Congress is minimized as a consequence.

### **Hurricane Maria & The Puerto Rican Statehood Debate**

It is imperative that we are able to understand the perspective of island residing Puerto Ricans on their views on statehood since they are the ones being oppressed and targeted by U.S control. While much of the focus is about elites and the decisions they make, there still needs to be attention on Puerto Rican perspectives as it reveals something deeper about their sense of citizenship. To that end, the research question at the center of this study is the following:

*How do views of the U.S. federal government shape preferences about statehood and independence among island residents in the post-Hurricane Maria context?*

In order to answer this question, the project will investigate island and mainland Puerto Ricans' views of the U.S. federal government and Trump Administration and its effect on their views of statehood. My goal is to deliver insights about why Puerto Ricans remain divided about the complex decision to change the course of the island's political status to U.S. statehood or independence? Thus, do Puerto Ricans want to be independent of the U.S., become a U.S. state, or maintain the current status quo?

The issue of Puerto Rican U.S. statehood has been up for debate by politicians, island residents and mainland Puerto Ricans but no development has ensured that a

change could eventually happen. While the U.S. Congress has failed to seriously consider the possibility of statehood on the basis of electoral and partisan grounds, the question of statehood and the island's status is an "undercurrent in virtually every policy matter in the island" (Garrett 2017). To some voices on the island, the U.S.'s refusal to meaningfully engage on the issue of status results in the continued denial of full citizenship rights to 3 million people (population of Puerto Rico), especially for potential and eligible voters on the island that could voice their opinion in future presidential elections. The neglect of the statehood issue by Congress affects the island's potential to receive more representation in Congress as well as on the island.

Historically, Puerto Rico has been an island prone to hurricanes, earthquakes and flooding and other natural disasters that will likely worsen with the onset of global climate change. However, the U.S. has not instituted any policies that can make the reparations process flow easier when tragedy strikes. For example, after Hurricane Maria destroyed much of the island's energy and electrical infrastructure in 2017, the U.S. ignored the situation and prioritized the rebuilding of tourist regions of the island, leaving poor sectors to find aid through non-profits and community help (Amnesty International 2018). Even years after the damage of Maria was incurred, the Trump Administration failed to provide proper attention to the situation. A year after the hurricane, Trump stated that "Puerto Rico was unsung success but difficult to repair after Hurricane Maria since there was no electricity beforehand" (New York Times, 2018). The Trump administration's characterization of its response to Hurricane Maria as a "success" demonstrates the ability to be informed of Puerto Rico's current crisis but actively

ignoring the, the unemployment as well as the immense debt that continues to accumulate and drain the island.

One potential explanation for the failed response to Hurricane Maria could simply rest with issues specific to the Trump Administration. The administration's record of incompetence in dealing with large-scale mobilizations of governmental resources could partially explain the anemic response. Alternatively, the administration's reluctance to provide a robust response could lie with the President's pattern of public expressions of anti-Latinx animus. Trump's attacks on the Latinx community throughout his presidency also suggests that his hostile orientation toward countries of the Global South and his negative stereotypes about Puerto Rico as rife with corruption are examples of this animus.

These underlying concerns could provide insight on the delay for reparations including aid and emergency funds for Puerto Rico after the 2017 Hurricane that has been affecting many inhabitants of the island to this day. Yet, one question that arises is whether the treatment and reparations effort be different if Puerto Rico was a state? I am interested in whether this negative experience with the U.S. federal government has fundamentally altered island-residing Puerto Ricans' views of statehood. For example, it could be the case that a greater share of Puerto Ricans on the island and on the mainland interpreted the federal government's response as indicative of their place in the U.S. racial hierarchy.

One indicator of the failure on the part of the U.S. government to address the island's wellbeing and assure its financial stability has been the rising levels of

emigration from Puerto Rico to the U.S. after Hurricane Maria (Flores and Krogstad 2019). Even before Hurricane Maria struck Puerto Rico, the island's population had been rapidly decreasing due to the widespread perception of declining economic opportunities on the island (Cohn, Patten, and Lopez 2014). The current economic situation in Puerto Rico indicates a wider pattern of the island's mistreatment and suggests that the political status quo has become untenable for many of the island's inhabitants and the Puerto Rican diaspora in the U.S.

Much of my research will investigate the perception of Puerto Ricans have concerning the federal government and its effects on their view of the country's colonial status. This is important to the investigation since this can help identify whether the quality of representation experienced by Puerto Rico impacts public attitudes about Puerto Rican statehood and independence.

### **Conceptualization**

To better understand why the perception of Puerto Ricans about the federal government is through knowing the details of both individual and collective rights of Puerto Ricans in relation to the U.S. Individual rights pertain to the differences of being a U.S. citizen on the island compared to the mainland U.S. while the island's collective rights as a people include the lack of representation given to Puerto Rico in Congress.

#### *Individual Rights*

Concerning voting rights, Puerto Rico is not allowed to vote in Presidential and Vice-Presidential elections. Due to their status as a commonwealth of Puerto Rico, it limits the residents exercise to vote in national level elections. In 1997, residents from

Puerto Rico argued to SCOTUS (Supreme Court of The United States) that it was essential for Puerto Ricans to vote in presidential elections, this was known as *Igartua de la Rosa vs. The United States* (1997) I. During this, there were two groups of Puerto Rican citizen, the first group consisted of residents of the island that have always been there while the other group were former state residents that moved to Puerto Rico. These groups came together to argue for their right to vote for in presidential elections but were denied that access due to the argument that Puerto Rico was not a state. The supreme court at the time did not see voting rights given solely on the argument of citizenship but that Puerto Rico was not a state (Romn 2002). An interesting fact within this hearing was that the majority of the supreme court was adamant that the first group of Puerto Rican citizens could not vote because of their residence in a non-US state but for the second group were given the suggestion of using an absentee ballot since they were former state residents (Romn 2002). In a way, this suggestion can be confusing as there is a clear divide between certain groups of Puerto Ricans. Clearly, those born on the island are not receiving the same treatment as those who moved to Puerto Rico. Those who have moved to Puerto Rico are able to vote through absentee ballot but other cannot do the same. This can be perceived as a loophole for Puerto Ricans born on the island since they could choose to temporarily reside in the states and then, move back creating the opportunity to send in their vote through an absentee ballot. Although this can be a possibility, Puerto Rican residents shouldn't have to use a loophole to use their voice, it should be an automatic right.

The supreme court did recognize that the right to vote was “a function of citizenship and that U.S. citizens residing in Puerto Rico have the right to participate in Presidential elections” some of the plaintiffs were from U.S. states but this did not apply for residents who were born in Puerto Rico even though they are “U.S. Citizens” (Romn 2002). Although multiple hearings went on until 2005 with more plaintiffs arguing for their right to vote in nation-wide elections, they were ultimately denied the right to vote thus continuing the ongoing debate about Puerto Rico’s unique political status.

### *Collective Rights*

One potential solution to this problem is if the quality of political representation in the U.S. Congress was improved by expanding it from one person, the Resident Commissioner, to something that mirrored or mimicked the representation of other states in Congress, like Hawaii and Alaska. The Resident commissioner of Puerto Rico, and of other territories, is a delegate that is elected to represent a dependent state within the House of Representatives. The Resident Commissioner is a delegate that has very limited voting privileges and have an otherwise marginalized role in Congress. They are able to vote in committees and in certain issues on the House floor, but they are unable to represent their respective territories on decisive votes. In addition to the fact that resident commissioners are not able to exert sufficient power in the chamber, the ratio of constituent to representative is also severely unbalanced. For example, on average, a member of congress represents about 700,000 people in a district while the Resident Commissioner of Puerto Rico represents the total population of the island, or about 3 million people. If these forms of political inequality were remedied and if Puerto Rico

were to be a state, would the representatives be more inclined to improve on the issues that are happening in PR? By moving towards statehood, the representation for Puerto Rico would increase to about 7 representatives in Congress, 5 in the House and 2 in the Senate, which would be a better solution than having ONE representative in the house with no voting power. Some speculate that such a change would lead to positive outcomes for the island in terms of management and resources.

### **Puerto Rican Statehood**

After Hurricane Maria, Puerto Ricans have realized that the island is slowly deteriorating as the United States as not made any effort to make a significant change towards Puerto Rico's status. The status debate has lingered in Puerto Rican politics for many years now but after viewing how the United States handled the reparations process after Maria, it demonstrates the inefficiency of the U.S. federal government. Due to the political fallout from the Hurricane Maria debacle, it could be the case that perceptions of the U.S federal government have become, on whole, more negative since it is clear U.S. intervention on the island has created more problems for the island. When Puerto Rico was annexed in 1898, it was assumed that it would eventually become a state of the U.S., but these expectations never materialized as Congress adopted the position that the Island cannot be a part of the union. Even though it has become a Commonwealth of the United States, their status as a territory of the U.S. does not change. The U.S. has complete control over Puerto Rico and its laws, hopefully ensuring the illusion of having U.S. citizenship will be enough to avoid bringing up statehood. For many on the island, Hurricane Maria revealed that the U.S government has no intention to treat Puerto Rico

on par with other states. Recently, however, a new bill was introduced in Congress by representatives Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY) and Nydia Velazquez (D-NY) who each claim Puerto Rican heritage. The bill H.R. 8113, Puerto Rico Self-Determination Act of 2020, proposes “creating a ‘status convention’ made up of delegates elected by Puerto Rican voters who would come up with a long-term solution for the island’s territorial status- whether that be statehood, independence, a free association or any option other than the current territorial arrangement”(Acevedo 2020). A key aspect of the Puerto Rico Self- Determination Act of 2020 is that Ocasio-Cortez and Velázquez hope that this will be “developed by Puerto Ricans and for Puerto Ricans, not dictated to them like so many previous policies” (Ocasio-Cortez and Velázquez 2020). This seems to be a priority for these two Congresswomen as Puerto Rico has waited too long for the acknowledgement that they have been neglected enough. Within their reasoning for this bill, they mention Trump’s behavior towards Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria. This included Trump’s inquiry about the possibility of selling the island, which was confirmed by the administration’s former Acting Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security Elaine Duke (Cole 2020). Although this suggestion was discarded by advisors, it demonstrated the degree to which the Trump Administration viewed Puerto Rico as disposable and expendable.

Ocasio-Cortez and Velázquez believe this bill needs to be introduced as the past five plebiscites held on the island received no validation or execution to move forward any kind of status besides the status quo (Ocasio-Cortez and Velázquez 2020). Those in favor of the bill’s passage hope that Congress comes to an agreement with Puerto Rican

voters on the upcoming November referendum in part because the coronavirus pandemic has negatively impacted the livelihood of many Puerto Ricans on the island. These significant changes could have a positive impact on island residents since this can ensure that many can receive better healthcare services and more emergency aid to improve the island's crippled infrastructure.

The Trump Administration's stance on statehood has been an "absolute no" which some attribute to Trump's personal disapproval of the San Juan Mayor Carmen Yulis Cruz, who openly accused Trump and his administration of failing to provide adequate aid to Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria (Morales 2019, 214). As 2020 determines whether or not Trump will be reelected for another four years, Joseph Biden and Kamala Harris have a different perspective on how to fix the crisis that is drowning the island. They plan to support "a full recovery and infrastructure reconstruction, invest in Puerto Rico's future through economic development, provide relief from debt and expand access to education and workplace development" (Biden and Harris 2020). Statements from the campaign also indicate that they promise to ensure a fair process concerning Puerto Rico's status through working with representatives who support each of the status options. It is not known just yet what Puerto Rican voters would choose and whether Congress would be agreeable to these plans, but Biden's administration demonstrates a greater commitment to aiding Puerto Rico after years of being neglected by the Trump administration.

## **Puerto Ricans' Views of Unequal U.S. Citizenship**

Citizenship in Puerto Rico has it in discrepancies making it easier for the United States to take over the island, asserting their presence in every aspect of everyday operations. Puerto Rican born residents are considered to be U.S. citizens equal to those born on American soil but the contrast between the experiences in the quality of citizenship between island and mainland Puerto Ricans is obscured by residence. Research now suggests that it is not until individuals migrate to the U.S., for reasons like poverty, employment or family reunification, that they realize the extent to which they have been deprived of certain federal programs that could have improved their lives on the island.

Through a series of focus groups interviews with nearly 100 Puerto Ricans (both U.S. born and island-born), Ariana J. Valle finds that Puerto Ricans living in the U.S. have developed what she calls a “colonial/racialized citizenship” which has been produced by “unequal citizen status, differentiated citizen rights, and exclusion from the American national imaginary” (Valle 2019, 27). Citizenship possesses power and rights, it defines “who has full rights and complete access to political, economic, and social institutions” (Valle 2019, 26). Valle also offers a detailed historical overview of Puerto Rico’s political status and analyzes the meaning of citizenship for Puerto Ricans. According to Valle, U.S. citizenship is an exclusive social good, which has the power to exclude those deemed outsiders. Much of Valle’s argument informs how Puerto Ricans are constantly struggling to be recognized as equal to Americans but are stymied by their colonial status and lack of representation. With regard to PR’s denial of voting rights and

full representation in the US Congress, Valle argues that the island's territorial status, "produces critical inequalities including unequal funding for federal programs in Puerto Rico, shipping laws that create trade disadvantages for the island, and exclusion from federal bankruptcy options for Puerto Rican entities" (Valle 2019). Valle's analysis is critical to my research question as it relates to possible reasons for Puerto Rico's ongoing inferior political status. These examples of the systematic denial of constitutional rights and mistreatment is indicative of the larger pattern to be explored here about the lack of quality representation of Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans within the US government.

While Valle's work is important for discussing PR's conception of citizenship, my study will build upon this work in a few important ways. First, Valle's study was conducted among PRs living in the U.S. and while some were in fact island-born, many had been living in the U.S. for decades. The mere fact that these respondents were living and residing in the U.S. and have experienced a process similar to that of immigrants from other non-U.S. countries likely alters their perceptions of rights compared to individuals who have lived on the island all their lives and can thus not compare their situation to a U.S. alternative. Second, her focus group interviews pre-dated Hurricane Maria in 2017 which was a major event that shaped the views of the island's residents and altered the island's political landscape. Not only did an estimated 4,645 thousand people perish during the storm, but the botched response also set off a national conversation about the island's political situation that forced many to revisit the fundamental question of statehood.

## **Debt Crisis**

Regardless of status, Puerto Rico is simply viewed as a separate and unequal territory due to how the United States has developed the island's economy towards an economy of dependence. Puerto Rico becoming a part of the US as an unincorporated territory limited the chances for the island to have a diversified economy with sustainable growth patterns. Taking away those chances for rejuvenation on the island, would eventually make it impossible for the island to recover from drastic events like Hurricane Maria. Before Hurricane Maria hit Puerto Rico in 2017, the island's economic instability has loomed over the island since the U.S.'s lack of management of Puerto Rican finances. Puerto Rico has accumulated a debt of \$ 74 billion, which they have been unable to pay back and have reduced by the U.S. Economically, the relationship between the US and Puerto Rico began to be characterized as imperial, "in which a metropolitan economy, possessing a superior currency as well as production and distribution apparatus, asserted domination over an inferior, peripheral economy" (Morales 2019). When the U.S. colonized Puerto Rico, it implemented policies that benefited money flow into the U.S including making Puerto Rico becoming depending on U.S exports which ensure there would be a "lack of any plan for economic growth based on locally based businesses..." (Morales 2019, 53). Morales makes the argument that the economic model imposed on Puerto Rico "was designed to increase production and profits for American corporations but markedly lower percentages of that profit would remain on the island to reinvest in the local economy" (Morales 2019, 54). The United States' economic policies ensured that Puerto Rico would be subject to subjugation and dependency. In 1984, Congress

reformed tax laws that would have long-term effects on Puerto Rican finances. These reforms caused Puerto Rico to be excluded from bankruptcy protections due to these reforms solely protecting states of the United States. Due to this change, the Republican control of Congress reduced “regulation of the financial sector and freeing capital from taxation so it could be used to speculate in markets ... expanding municipal bond market” (Morales 2019, 65). As a result, Puerto Rico became eye candy for investors avoiding spending too much on taxes or wages but looking to invest on bonds, now that it was impossible for the island to seek bankruptcy relief. Congress made these changes to tax laws neglecting to view how this could negatively impact Puerto Rico. Combining the triple-tax exemption from city, state, and federal taxes and the inability to declare bankruptcy guaranteed investors to buy any bonds, making Puerto Rico a bond-issuing machine (Morales 2019, 66). This resulted in the government of Puerto Rico resort to borrowing to maintain the illusion that Puerto Rico was a stable place to live for everyone, even though unemployment rates, migration to the U.S. and poverty were increasing on the island over the next few decades.

Recently in a document created by the U.S. Government Accountability Offices called, *Factors contributing to the Debt Crisis and potential federal actions to address them*, the organization investigates the potential causes that has contributed to the economic crisis in Puerto Rico (U. S. Government Accountability Office n.d.). Three main factors have been concluded seem to be a major influence on Puerto Rico’s economic standing. Firstly, the government of Puerto Rico’s financial management is criticized due to excessive amount of overspending knowing that revenue is lacking.

Secondly, the Puerto Rican government persistent borrowing of funds to balance out annual deficits (GAO-18-387). The 2 factors being mentioned are mostly due to the island's government mismanaging their finances, which triggered short-term viability of their everyday operations as well as were willing to maintain "a system of patronage and corruption", rooted in American imperialism (Morales 2019, 81). Lastly, outmigration and lack of labor force in the island makes it difficult for revenue to increase when individuals cannot find employment or better income to sustain day to day expenses.

*PROMESA = Pobreza*

After it was announced by the Puerto Rican government to the US that the debt was not going to be paid due to lack of funds available, the Obama administration saw possible solutions through making a program that could be beneficial to Puerto Rico's crisis. As a preventive measure towards the debt crisis, the Obama administration passed PROMESA (Puerto Rico Oversight Management and Economic Stability Act) into law in 2016. Through the perspective of the U.S., this program was necessary to ensure that Puerto Rico cut down on spending in order for the island to be able to reduce its debt but instead, it allowed for the U.S. to continue to force more of their presence on the island and assert power (Morales 2019, 149).

Imposing austerity on Puerto Rico would eventually hurt funding for federal programs, healthcare, Puerto Rico's infrastructure and the overall economy. Although PROMESA was to reduce government spending and impose budget cuts in areas that are less of a priority, it would be faced with criticism after Hurricane Maria. Hurricane Maria revealed to many on the island and the mainland that PROMESA would not be able to

reduce the accumulating debt as it did not prepare for the potential natural disasters on the island. The combination of the crisis since 2006, Hurricane Maria in 2017 and the earthquakes in early 2020 publicized the urgency individuals feel to find an answer to the status debate and hopefully decolonize from the United States, to find true autonomy and equality. Alongside PROMESA, another austerity measure was created in 2017 called FOMB, the Federal Oversight and Management Board. In an essay by Pedro Cabán, a professor of Latin American, U.S Caribbean and U.S. Latino Politics, an argument is given that illustrates the negative advantages these austerity measures have over Puerto Rico. By creating PROMESA and FOMB, Congress asserts it “prerogative to impose restrictions on the policy and law making responsibilities of the insular government” (Cabán 2018). These two programs create limitations on the Puerto Rican government that impacts the wellbeing of the island residents. PROMESA “holds supremacy over any territorial law or regulation that is inconsistent with the Act or Fiscal reform plans.” The Board has “broad sovereign powers to effectively overrule decisions by Puerto Rico’s legislature, governor and other public authorities” (Congressional Budget Office 2016). This is a painful reminder for Puerto Ricans that they are to be tied down to the United States and that their autonomy was only an illusion. The passage to PROMESA and FOMB signaled the lack of confidence the United States has over Puerto Rico’s ability to govern the island or increase economic, political and social growth.

### *Long-Term Effects*

The economic crisis in Puerto Rico has affected all aspects of living on the island, which affects every individual living on the island. Much of the austerity measures taken

to reduce the Puerto Rican debt has created school and hospital closures, doctors leaving the island for lack of resources/pay, manufacturing factories moving to other locations leaving many on the island unemployment, and lastly, more Puerto Ricans leaving the island to the mainland. Included within this crisis is also the lack of healthcare and medical staff/equipment on the island. Most of the population of Puerto Rico depend on Medicaid and Medicare but as the economy stagnated, cuts on funding were approved by Congress and privatization on the health care system to a possible solution. On the contrary, privatizing the healthcare system removed many public clinics as well as physicians to private sectors. Most of the Puerto Rican population receive federal entitlements (Medicare/Medicaid) but due to the political status of the island not being state, individuals do not receive full entitlements and aid for federal programs are capped (Morales 2019, 216). With these limitations, it became difficult for funding to reach hospitals or clinics and people could not afford treatments. Before Hurricane Maria, the electrical platforms were very unstable and at times, blackouts would happen all over the island which affected hospitals that had patients who required specific medical equipment to be kept alive. Hurricane Maria made these conditions to become worse, “for more than a year after the Hurricane, the instability of the electrical system to keep supplies like insulin refrigerated to the cuts in visiting nurse programs, from chronic worsening of diseases like diabetes and hypertension to the lack of access to treatment for those in rural areas” became massive problems that were neglected by the U.S. (Morales 2019, 218). Alongside these problems, new health complications appeared within the mental health spectrum due to anxiety and dislocations of residents losing their home/land or loved

ones after the Hurricane. The federal government's response towards the debt crisis as well as the reparations process after Hurricane Maria demonstrates parallel traits of neglect as delayed aid and mismanagement of finances made Puerto Rico become more dependent on a country that has no inclination to make the island and its residents succeed.

### **Current/Existing Findings**

In the book, *Fantasy Island: Colonialism, Exploitation, and the Betrayal of Puerto Rico*, Ed Morales makes the argument that Hurricane Maria has lifted the veil revealing the corruption, economic crisis, and an abundance of exploitation that has haunted Puerto Rico. Ed Morales is a New York-born Puerto Rican passionate about the situation happening in Puerto Rico that has prevented the island from moving forward away from US domination. Morales shows how the U.S. has continuously held control over Puerto Rico's political, social and economic aspects of its government. When the Jones Act was introduced to Puerto Rico, it ensured U.S. citizenship for all Puerto Ricans, which many island residents believed would guarantee them to be on equal footing with all Americans on the mainland. Overtime, it seems that US intervention has created more issues that have left many Puerto Ricans to realize that all US has given is an illusion. Concerning the idea of Puerto Rico becoming a state, Morales believes the status debate is met with racism rooted in the idea that Puerto Ricans will never be viewed as ideal Americans, he says, "we are bodies that should not mix with the body of white America, for we are already stained with mixture...bodies marked for exclusion/destruction, [and]objects of violence..." (Morales 2019, 5). When Congress

was debating on the possibility of statehood for Puerto Rico, it was met with racist animus, deeming Puerto Ricans as “mongrels” and an “alien race” unfit to govern themselves (Morales 2019, 4). Racist rhetoric dictates how the U.S. pursues their actions towards Puerto Rico, especially when it is convenient for them. In history, Puerto Rico was subject to numerous experiments that had long-term effects on its people, the US made Puerto Rico a “military post, laboratory for birth control experiments, and dry run for free-trade policies like the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)” (Morales 2019, 8). This would serve as a prelude to the economic crisis that would affect Puerto Rico to this day.

### **Alternative**

Post-Hurricane Maria demonstrates that Puerto Ricans were never a part of the United States as U.S. citizens. The extension of citizenship to Puerto Rico was forced upon them, giving the island the illusion that they were part of the U.S. which would mean receiving all the benefits as such. Instead of the painful and tiresome process of naturalization for other immigrants, Puerto Rico has it easier to migrate to the U.S. But there are differences of what it means to be a citizen on the island and mainland. The tipping point for Puerto Ricans to realize the inequality within their citizenship was Hurricane Maria. In 2017, Hurricane Maria devastates the island accelerating the deterioration of the island and exposing the racism rooted within the treatment received from the United States. The delayed response for aid from the U.S. federal government and the mockery received from Donald Trump as U.S president, revealed that Puerto Ricans could not be classed as U.S. citizens based on this treatment. An article by Bianca

Gonzalez-Sobrinio, Puerto Rico's politics of exclusion, mentions an interesting quote that demonstrates how Puerto Ricans are perceived by the colonizer, "though citizens, Puerto Ricans are treated as though they are clinging, grasping, whining hangers- on, trying to exert a citizenship that is but a technicality" (Gonzalez-Sobrinio 2018)

## **Chapter Three: Research Design and Methodology**

### **Introduction**

Puerto Rican perspectives are essential in reviewing how the U.S federal government responds towards the crisis in the island as well as the hurricane that devastated Puerto Rico in 2017. Puerto Ricans on the island have witnessed the unfinished recovery work that was left behind by the United States after Hurricane Maria. During the past three years of delayed repairs, many Puerto Ricans remain homeless or living under blue tarps and its power grid is very fragile which leads to major power outages. FEMA's (Federal Emergency Management Agency) approval of funds, totaling an estimated \$7.3 billion to help rebuild Puerto Rico's "critical infrastructure and historical buildings" came three years after Hurricane Maria (Castro and Cokinos 2020). The fragility of the political system in Puerto Rico demonstrates how unprepared the island is for natural disasters which is rooted from the neglect of United States. Although there has been a constant debate on the colonial status for many years now, Congress has not made a definitive decision on the status of Puerto Rico. Puerto Rico being a part of the United States has its benefits like obtaining U.S. citizenship for its residents, but it also comes with its many disadvantages. For example, U.S. citizenship in Puerto Rico is very limited on the island compared to the mainland and voting rights are limited to local elections, it does not include presidential elections.

To begin my investigation, I hope to answer this research question:

*How do views of the U.S. federal government shape preferences about statehood and independence among island residents in the post-Hurricane Maria context?*

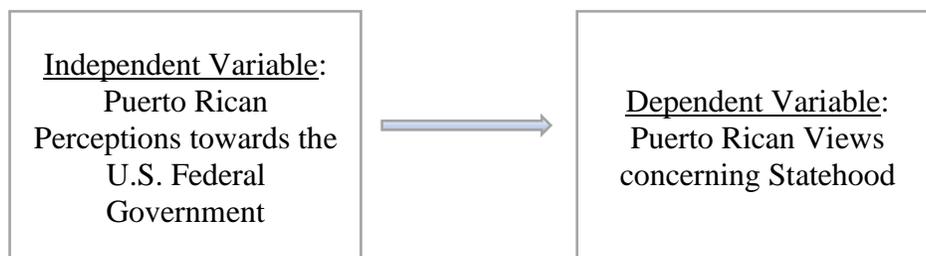
The research question will investigate the complex crisis that is looming over Puerto Rico. Looking into Puerto Rican perceptions of the U.S. federal government can be a decisive factor in how they view Puerto Rico's status as a Commonwealth and the relationship Puerto Rico has with the U.S. In order to answer this research question, I propose testing two main hypotheses:

*H1: Negative perceptions of the United States Federal Government will lead to increase support for independence.*

*H2: Negative perceptions of the United States Federal Government will lead to increase support for statehood.*

*Null Hypothesis: Positive perception of the United States Federal government will lead to support for maintaining the status quo political arrangement of commonwealth status.*

### **Proposed Causal Pathway**



Historically, in Puerto Rico, political parties have been vocal in whether they support or oppose a change in PR's political status. There are three major parties that have contributed to the status debate of Puerto Rico, which are the Popular Democratic Party, the New Progressive Party, and the *Independistas* (Independents). Their

involvement in the status debate encourages the island residents in voting during the periodic Referendums Congress has concerning the future of Puerto Rico (Garrett 2017).

The *Partido Popular Democratico* (PPD, Democratic Popular Party) was considered the dominating party until 1968 and advocates or the maintaining of the status quo of Puerto Rico because it was the only way to preserve the cultural identity of Puerto Rico (Nohlen 2005, 545).

The *Partido Nuevo Progressista* (PNP, New Progressive Party) emerged after the United Statehood Movement in 1967 and completely support the integration of Puerto Rico into statehood. The PNP typically targets their appeals to Puerto Ricans in low-income areas or in regions with extreme poverty on the basis that Puerto Rican statehood will be expected to bring more social aid for the islands underserved populations (Nohlen 2005, 546). Lastly, the *Partido Independentista Puertorriqueño* (PIP, Puerto Rican Party for Independence) believes in the island becoming a “moderately socialist independent republic” alongside the *Partido Socialista Puertorriqueño* (PSP, Puerto Rican Socialist Party) and the *Fuerzas Armadas de Liberacion Nacional* (FALN, Armed Forces for National Liberation). These three political parties aim to encourage Puerto Rico’s independence through a Marxist-Lenin party campaign modeled on Cuba, bomb attacks and assassinations.

Although there is not much information on Puerto Rican public attitudes on the island concerning statehood or Puerto Rico’s current political crisis, the results from the various referendums from 1967,1993, 1998, 2012, and 2017 provide insight on the views of Puerto Ricans on this matter. From 1967 to 1998, the majority of the population

supported the Commonwealth status for Puerto Rico because businesses that thrived on foreign investors feared that integration to the U.S. would make Puerto Rico less attractive for business and subjected to U.S. federal taxation (Nohlen 2005, 547). The results of the referendums between 1967 and 1998 show a growing preference for statehood but the majority choosing to maintain the status quo. Even in 1998, the majority votes were towards “none of the choices” as many were not sure if they would like to see Puerto Rico as part of the U.S. or become an independent state (Nohlen 2005). Since the majority of Puerto Ricans favored “none of the choices”, it was concluded to maintain Puerto Rico as a Commonwealth. A significant event that could have triggered this outcome was Hurricane George. Hurricane George hit Puerto Rico on September 1998 and it was reported to be a category 3 hurricane leaving more than 700,000 people without water and 1 million people without electricity (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 1998). Knowing the influencing factors within the referendum is important to understand since it provides insight on the kinds of issues island residents considered when making their choice on Puerto Rico’s status.

### **Methodological Approach**

For this project, data for the analysis of Puerto Rican views of statehood will be conducted through a quantitative analysis of a public opinion survey of island-residing Puerto Ricans. To date, the vast majority of scholarship of Puerto Rican political attitudes tend to rely on surveys of U.S. mainland residing Puerto Ricans. The Washington Post and Kaiser Family Foundation’s *Survey of Puerto Rican Residents* of 2018 is a suitable data source for this project because it asks respondents about their experiences on the

island a year after Hurricane Maria struck the island. The themes identified through the research show different dimensions to the US's response to Puerto Rico as well as how residents reacted to the tragedy in light of the U.S.'s delayed support (The Washington Post-Kaiser Family Foundation 2018). Another advantage of this survey is that its emphasis on the role of the U.S. federal government provides appropriate questions for testing my hypotheses.

This survey was conducted in-person among a random sample of 1,500 Puerto Rican adults between the ages of 18 and 93. Survey administrators also targeted individuals who were present on the island when Hurricane Maria struck the island because many of the questions related to their opinions about the adequacy of the disaster response. Given that the sample is comprised of island-residing Puerto Ricans, all the interviews were conducted in Spanish, but the foundation provided a copy of the survey in English.

### **Operationalizing the Variables**

#### *Dependent Variable*

The WPKFF *Survey of Puerto Rican Residents* was selected for analysis because it includes questions that closely relate to my dependent variables of interest which is Puerto Rican attitudes pertaining to statehood. The survey offers two questions that I will use as my dependent variables. The first is based on a survey question that asks:

*“In your opinion, do you think the federal government’s response to Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico would have been better, worse, or about the same if Puerto Rico was a state?”*

This question is unique because it asks residents to consider the outcome of a counter-factual scenario in which Puerto Rico would have been a U.S. state and whether such a status would have altered the nature of the emergency response. The advantage of this question is that it avoids directly asking a question about statehood in the traditional way it is often posed in plebiscite votes. Instead, it asks residents to consider whether statehood status would offer/grant the island a superior outcome in terms of disaster response.

The second question that I will use to capture Puerto Rican residents' attitudes about statehood is based on a question that most approximates the traditional formulation of the statehood question that island residents have likely encountered in the past. The question asks:

*“In the future, do you personally think Puerto Rico should become a completely independent nation, should it remain a territory of the United States, or should it be admitted to the United States as the fifty-first state?”*

The responses to this question will provide insight about how Island-residents would react to the possibility of Puerto Rico becoming a state of the U.S. or acquire independence.

Many Puerto Ricans have begun to realize that neglect is the only thing the United States is willing to give but what should be received from them is the respect to listen to what Puerto Rico needs and begin to rebuild the entire island not just the parts that continues the money flow.

### *Independent Variable*

The neglect from the U.S. in responding to the needs of Puerto Ricans on the island has been up for debate. The U.S. has a lot of power over the island's politics as it is responsible for most of the debt that has accumulated since it is not being paid. Although this economic and political crisis has been going on since the colonization of Puerto Rico, the island residents have begun to realize the mistreatment after the failure of rebuilding PR post-Hurricane Maria. The aftermath of Hurricane Maria was a revelation to many islanders of the priorities the U.S. has that put Puerto Rico in a disadvantage.

My independent variable is Puerto Rican perceptions towards the U.S. federal government, and it will be measured by the responses to the following question(s), question 16:

*“How would you rate the job (INSERT) has done in responding to Hurricane Maria? Excellent, very good, good, fair, or poor?”*

The responses from these questions are critical to the analysis of Puerto Rico's view of the U.S. federal government that could potentially influence their view of statehood since it examines the efforts residents have seen by President Trump, the federal government, the Puerto Rican government, Governor Rossello, and the municipal government and mayor.

My expectation is that perceptions of unfair treatment on the part of the U.S. federal government will serve as a strong signal of the island's second-class/inferior status compared to U.S. states thus diminishing support for the status quo commonwealth arrangement and increasing support for either the independence or statehood alternative. Those who view the US's colonial authority over Puerto Rico as a major contributing

factor for the inadequate response will be more likely to view commonwealth status as untenable thus leading to support for change.

### **Project Variables and Specified Coding**

The survey data was recoded using the STATA statistics program for accurate analysis. For gender, “male” was coded as 0, and “female” was coded as 1. Nativity included “Puerto Rico” was coded as 0, “United States” was coded as 1, and “other country” was coded as 2. Household income had “Less than \$20,000” was coded as 0, “\$20,000-\$50,000” was coded as 2, and “More than \$50,000” was coded as 3. Partisanship included “Democrats” was coded as 1, “Independents” was coded as 2, “GOP” was coded as 3, and “Other/Don’t Know/ Refused” was coded as 4. Age was not recoded. Education had “High School Grad or less” coded as 0, “Some College” was coded as 1, and “College Grad +” was coded as 2. Damage on homes included “No Damage” coded as 0, “Don’t Know/Minor Damage” was coded as 1, “Major Damage” was coded as 2, and “Home Destroyed” was coded as 3.

The key independent variables that analyze the different governments’ (Federal Government, Municipal Government and Mayor, President Trump, Governor Rossello, and Puerto Rican Government) response to Hurricane Maria were all coded on the same level, “poor” was coded as 0, “fair” was coded as 1, “good” was coded as 2, “very good” was coded as 3, and “excellent” was coded as 4.

For the dependent variable, they will be examined by the respondent’s choice on the statehood question (Q64). Each option, Statehood, Status-quo and Independence were separated into dummy variables creating it into a dichotomous variable this will help

simplify the analysis in the logistic regression. The statehood question included, “51” coded as 0, “territory” was coded as 1, “Nation-hood” was coded as 2, and “Don’t know/Refused” was coded as 3. For the dummy variables, it was separated into three different variables for each option. The option for statehood was renamed “Pro-Statehood” with “Not Pro-Statehood” coded as 0, and “Pro-Statehood” was coded as 1. The option for status-quo was renamed “Pro Status-Quo” with “Not Pro Status-Quo” coded as 0, and “Pro Status-Quo” was coded as 1. For the option for independence, it was renamed “Pro-Independence” with “Not Pro-Independence” coded as 0, and “Pro-Independence” was coded as 1.

### **Implications**

The lack of progress the US has made in appealing to the Puerto Rican locals and the particular neglect shown toward rural and low-income regions of the island in favor of touristic businesses shows initial signs that a growing sector of the population is growing more dissatisfied with the current political arrangement. The widespread disapproval of the disaster response coupled with the ongoing debt crisis perceived by many Puerto Ricans as a burden inflicted by the U.S. on the island invite an urgent reassessment of the public opinion landscape. Reports suggest that there is a growing sense among Puerto Rico’s most economically marginalized sectors that political elites on the island and the mainland have prioritized business interests instead of improving the livelihood of the wider Puerto Rican population. If my hypothesis is supported by the statistical evidence and there is a positive relationship between negative perceptions of

the U.S. federal government and support for statehood and independence, then this would have major implications for the future of Puerto Rican-U.S. relationship.

## **Chapter Four: Results and Analysis**

### **Introduction**

To reiterate my previous expectations, I expect for Puerto Rican respondents who perceive the United States federal government negatively will be more in favor of Puerto Rican statehood or independence while respondents perceiving the federal government positively, they would be more in favor of maintaining the status quo. The following data analysis of Puerto Rican views on the island's political status was conducted using a quantitative analysis of a public opinion survey from The Washington Post and Kaiser Family Foundation. The survey data was collected in 2018, a year after the landfall of Hurricane Maria which devastated the island's infrastructure and was associated with an estimate of 2,975 number of casualties (Lynch Baldwin and Begnaud 2018). My expectations about the association between approval of the U.S. federal government's response and views of statehood was selected in order to test whether a major event that requires the federal government to respond to a crisis influence positions on the island's broader governing structure, autonomy, and sovereignty. The survey questions ask about Puerto Rican residents' experiences before, during and after Hurricane Maria and their evaluations of the federal government's and Puerto Rican government's response to the natural disaster.

### **Descriptive Statistics**

The key independent variables analyzed with the dependent variable are based on the responses of the federal government's, municipal governments', Governor Rossello's, the Puerto Rican government's, and President Trump's towards Hurricane Maria. The

question that respondents were asked to answer that will contribute to the analysis of the independent variables was as follows:

*“How would you rate the job (INSERT) has done in responding to Hurricane Maria? Excellent, very good, good, fair, or poor?”*

Table 4.1, below, presents the average approval rate of each jurisdiction’s responses based on respondents’ answers to the question above. According to the data displayed, the municipal government received the highest approval rate, then federal government,

<b>Table 4.1. Average Approval Rates of Hurricane Response</b>			
	Mean	Standard Dev.	Observations
Federal Government	1.434	0.04	1,454
Municipal Government	1.439	0.08	1,476
Governor Rossello	1.171	0.04	1,464
Puerto Rican Government	1.036	0.03	1,473
President Trump	0.678	0.03	1,425

Governor Rossello, the Puerto Rican Government, and lastly, President Trump received the lowest approval rate. Respondent’s average answer for Municipal Government and Federal Government were seen between fair and good. These results suggests that respondents saw the hurricane response of these governments to be adequate compared to the others. Governor Rossello’s and the Puerto Rican government’s response to Maria was considered to be fair. Compared to the other jurisdictions, respondents considered President Trump’s response to Maria as poor. This data already shows that respondents viewed positively viewed most of the governments’ responses above the rank of fair,

which is significant as my hypothesizes of the data do not correlate with what is presented.

Alongside the key independent variables, the dependent variable was analyzed based on the answers respondents choose in the following question:

*“In the future, do you personally think Puerto Rico should become a completely independent nation, should it remain a territory of the United States, or should it be admitted to the United States as the fifty-first state?”*

This question is significant in the survey data as it represents Puerto Rican views on the status debate of the island. To find some initial relationships between the independent variables and the dependent variables, table 4.2 displays correlations between hurricane responses with the Puerto Rican positions on status. According to the table, there is a

<b>Table 4.2. Hurricane Response by Puerto Rican Positions on PR Status Correlation</b>				
	Pro-Statehood	Pro-Commonwealth	Pro-Independence	Observations
Federal Government	0.12	-0.01	-0.15	1,454
Municipal Government	-0.01	0.02	-0.02	1,476
Governor Rossello	0.22	-.10	-.17	1,464
Puerto Rican Government	0.16	0.06	-.13	1,473
President Trump	0.12	-0.03	-0.14	1,425

positive correlation between Federal government response and the pro-statehood stance.

It seems that as the approval rate of the federal government increases, the likelihood of respondent’s favoring statehood increases. There is a negative correlation between federal government, pro-commonwealth, and pro-independence. As the approval rate of the federal government decreases, the likelihood of respondent’s favoring independence

increases. This is also a negative correlation with pro-commonwealth and federal government, but respondent's likelihood of favoring independence seems higher than maintaining the status quo. Similar results can be seen in the data for Governor Rossello's and President Trump's responses. They both have positive correlations with pro-statehood, signifying the likelihood of favoring that stance as the approval rate of those governments increases. It also suggests the negative correlation with pro-independence and pro-commonwealth signaling the likelihood of respondents favoring independence over commonwealth as the approval rate decreases. The Puerto Rican government has a positive correlation with pro-statehood and pro-commonwealth suggesting that the likelihood of respondents favoring pro-statehood is higher than pro-commonwealth as approval rate increases. Pro-independence and Puerto Rican government have a negative correlation signifying the likelihood of favoring independence if approval rates are decreasing. Municipal government has contradicting results as it has a negative correlation with pro-statehood and pro-independence, but it has a positive correlation with pro-commonwealth. This signifies that as the approval rate decreases, statehood and independence are likely to be favored than commonwealth. The relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variables shows that there is a significant correlation between how respondents view the government's response and how that potentially effects their stance on Puerto Rican statehood. Unexpectedly, the data suggests that respondents that rate the federal government positively are more likely to favor statehood and less likely to favor independence, which is contradicting one of my hypotheses.

## Bivariate Analysis

Table 4.3. displays the dependent variables and the key independent variables in analyzing the hurricane response approval rate by the Puerto Rican positions on status. It should be noted the means are based on the “poor” ranking, and the difference from “poor” to “fair”. The table includes the respondents that were unsure or refused to answer the status question. Based on the data below, respondents that rated the federal government positively are more likely to favor statehood. Within the table, measures in

<b>Table 4.3. Hurricane Response Approval Rate by Puerto Rican Positions on PR Status</b>				
	Pro-Statehood	Pro-Commonwealth	Pro- Independence	Don't Know/ Refused
<i>Federal Government</i>	0.36	0.27	0.21	0.16
Municipal Government and Mayor	0.04	-.03	-.04	0.03
Governor Rossello	.10***	-.03	-.10***	.03
Puerto Rican Government	.13***	-.05	-.09***	.003
President Trump	.09***	.04	-.06***	.004
*** P < 0.05				

Rossello, Puerto Rican Government, and President Trump were significant. In Rossello, significant measures were in pro-statehood and pro-independence, signaling that the greater approval rate of Rossello is associated with more support for statehood but less support for independence and commonwealth. Pro-statehood and independence are significant in the Puerto Rican Government’s approval rate demonstrating the pattern of respondents favoring statehood over independence. Overall, the results have shown that respondents view the federal government response to Maria positively. The previous tables have presented these results as well, demonstrating a possible pattern of a positive

federal government rating with favoring statehood and a negative federal government rating with favoring independence.

## **Multivariate Analysis**

### *Logistic Regression Analysis*

Table 4.4 displays the results from a logistic regression analysis predicting whether respondents express a pro-statehood position. The first measures listed in the table assess the effect of approval ratings of each government system during Hurricane Maria. The table is separated into six different models in which the singular effect of each governing body's approval rating is isolated on views of statehood. The first includes the measure of approval of each of the following governing institutions: the U.S. federal government (Model 1), the municipal government and mayor of a respondent's town or city of residence (Model 2), Governor Rossello (Model 3), the Puerto Rican government (Model 4), and President Trump (Model 5). Model 6 has combined all five government systems to analyze with the key dependent variable. Alongside the key independent variables, the effects of gender, age, income, education, nativity, partisanship, and a measure of damage to their homes that individuals suffered from as a consequence of the storm were also considered as potential factors that influence a respondent's views toward the island's political status.

**Table 4.4. Logistic Regression Analysis Predicting Pro-Statehood Response**

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Approval of Federal Government	1.19** (0.07)					0.98 (0.06)
Approval of Municipal Gov.		1.05 (0.05)				0.99 (0.05)
Approval of Governor Rossello			1.44*** (0.09)			1.45*** (0.13)
Approval of Puerto Rico Gov.				1.28*** (0.08)		0.96 (0.09)
Approval of President Trump					1.33*** (0.09)	1.18# (0.10)
Damage	1.03 (0.08)	1.06 (0.08)	1.07 (0.08)	1.07 (0.08)	1.07 (0.08)	1.06 (0.08)
Independents	0.47*** (0.09)	0.43*** (0.08)	0.43*** (0.08)	0.43*** (0.08)	0.44*** (0.09)	0.48*** (0.10)
GOP	5.01*** (1.28)	5.23*** (1.31)	4.34*** (1.13)	4.80*** (1.25)	4.73*** (1.20)	4.28*** (1.14)
Other/ Don't Know/Refused	0.72* (0.09)	0.71** (0.09)	0.69** (0.09)	0.71** (0.09)	0.70** (0.09)	0.73* (0.10)
United States	1.31 (0.30)	1.22 (0.28)	1.28 (0.30)	1.27 (0.29)	1.30 (0.31)	1.46 (0.35)
Other Country	1.56 (0.64)	1.56 (0.64)	1.48 (0.61)	1.44 (0.61)	1.79 (0.74)	1.74 (0.73)
Education Attainment	1.00 (0.03)	0.99 (0.03)	1.01 (0.03)	1.01 (0.03)	1.01 (0.03)	1.01 (0.03)
Income	0.84 (0.10)	0.85 (0.10)	0.83 (0.10)	0.84 (0.10)	0.84 (0.11)	0.84 (0.11)
Income Undisclosed	0.80 (0.19)	0.82 (0.20)	0.83 (0.20)	0.80 (0.19)	0.84 (0.20)	0.80 (0.20)
Age	1.00 (0.00)	1.00 (0.00)	1.00 (0.00)	1.00 (0.00)	1.00 (0.00)	1.00 (0.00)
Gender	0.68** (0.09)	0.69** (0.09)	0.64** (0.09)	0.68** (0.09)	0.69** (0.09)	0.65** (0.09)
Observations	1450	1471	1460	1468	1421	1359

Exponentiated coefficients; Standard errors in parentheses; #  $p < .10$ , \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

## Pro-Statehood

According to the data recorded in table 4.4, across all independent variables there were significant results in six categories. For federal government response (1.19\*\*), as respondents move in the direction of greater approval of the federal government's response to Maria, it is associated with a rise in the likelihood of respondent's being more in favor of pro-statehood. Model 2 shows that respondents who rate Governor Rossello's response (1.44\*\*\*) to Maria more positively are also more likely to favor pro-statehood. Model 3 demonstrates that as respondents approval rate for the Puerto Rican government (1.28\*\*\*) increase the probability of favoring pro-statehood increases as well. In model 5, as the approval rate of President Trump increases the likelihood of respondents favoring pro-statehood increases. It should be noted that Federal government and President Trump could be considered similar entities, meaning the analysis for both variables will be similar in the rest of the tables. This also relates to Puerto Rican Government and Governor Rossello to connected as they are in the same branch of government. Compared to the other models, Model six shows a level of significance in Governor Rossello's response, meaning that respondents approved of Rossello's response to Maria positively which will lead to them becoming more in favor of choosing statehood. Concerning partisanship, it should be mentioned the reference variable is compared to democrats since their stance is maintaining the status quo. According to the data, the GOP are more likely to be in favor of pro-statehood. Respondents who identify with independents are less likely to favor pro-statehood but may favor another stance.

Gender was also significant resulting in women are far less likely to favor statehood compared to men.

### Pro-Independence

Table 4.5 displays the predictivity of respondents being in favor of pro-independence. Similar to table 4.4, the dependent variable was exposed to 6 different models containing the same independent variables. The federal government, Governor Rossello, and President Trump's response to Maria are the variables with the most significance in the table. According to the data, as the approval rate of the federal government response (0.61\*\*\*) increases, the likelihood of respondents being in favor of pro-independence decreases. The approval rate of Governor Rossello's response (0.54\*\*\*) is positive which will decrease the likelihood of respondents favoring pro-independence. Puerto Rican government's response (0.65\*\*\*) is slightly significant but results in respondents less likely to favor pro-independence. President Trump's response to Maria (0.45\*\*\*) is significant but as the approval rate of his response increases, respondent's favoring pro-independence decreases. The significance shifts in partisanship as respondents who identify as independent are more likely to favor pro-independence, as the table shows that this option has the greatest significance. In table 4.5, independents are less likely to view statehood, but this notion shifts when nationhood becomes an option. The GOP respondents do not seem to likely favor independence but rather statehood as shown in table 4.4. Compared to the previous table, education and income is significant within favoring nationhood.

<b>Table 4.5.   Logistic Regression Analysis Predicting Pro-Independence Response</b>						
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Approval of Federal Government	0.61*** (0.09)					0.79 (0.12)
Approval of Municipal Gov.		0.93 (0.09)				1.04 (0.10)
Approval of Governor Rossello			0.54*** (0.08)			0.61** (0.10)
Approval of Puerto Rico Gov.				0.65* (0.11)		1.11 (0.24)
Approval of President Trump					0.45*** (0.07)	0.62** (0.10)
Damage	1.17 (0.13)	1.21# (0.13)	1.20 (0.13)	1.19 (0.13)	1.16 (0.13)	1.19 (0.14)
Independents	10.48*** (3.59)	10.77*** (3.51)	10.44*** (3.63)	11.00*** (3.59)	10.76*** (3.70)	9.79*** (3.75)
GOP	0.10* (0.11)	0.10* (0.11)	0.13# (0.14)	0.12# (0.13)	0.11* (0.12)	0.13# (0.15)
Other/ Don't Know/Refused	1.58 (0.49)	1.62 (0.49)	1.59 (0.49)	1.64# (0.49)	1.62 (0.49)	1.62 (0.50)
United States	0.86 (0.29)	0.81 (0.26)	0.80 (0.26)	0.78 (0.25)	0.79 (0.26)	0.87 (0.31)
Other Country	0.36 (0.39)	0.34 (0.41)	0.40 (0.50)	0.41 (0.47)	0.35 (0.40)	0.38 (0.44)
Education Attainment	1.29** (0.10)	1.32*** (0.10)	1.30** (0.10)	1.31** (0.10)	1.34*** (0.11)	1.32*** (0.11)
Income	1.93** (0.43)	1.89** (0.43)	1.85* (0.44)	1.86** (0.43)	1.68* (0.35)	1.72* (0.37)
Income Undisclosed	1.05 (0.54)	1.18 (0.59)	1.01 (0.55)	1.10 (0.58)	1.01 (0.51)	0.92 (0.50)
Age	1.00 (0.01)	1.00 (0.01)	1.00 (0.01)	1.00 (0.01)	1.00 (0.01)	1.00 (0.01)
Gender	0.91 (0.19)	0.82 (0.17)	0.93 (0.20)	0.86 (0.18)	0.85 (0.18)	0.93 (0.20)
Observations	1450	1471	1460	1468	1421	1359
Exponentiated coefficients; Standard errors in parentheses; # $p < .10$ , * $p < .05$ , ** $p < .01$ , *** $p < .001$						

As the respondent receives higher education, they are more likely of favoring pro-independence. This is also seen with respondents with higher income, they are more likely of favoring independence as well.

### Pro-Commonwealth

Table 4.6 demonstrates the predictivity of favoring the pro-commonwealth stance by analyzing the approval rates of the key independent variables. Within the table, significant measures are seen in Rossello (Model 3&4), Puerto Rican Government (Model 4), and President Trump (Model 5). For Rossello (0.79\*\*), as respondents rate his response positively, it is associated with a declining likelihood of respondents favoring pro-commonwealth. Greater approval rates of the Puerto Rican government (0.87<sup>#</sup>) and President Trump (0.87<sup>#</sup>) is associated with respondents less likely to favor commonwealth. Compared to previous tables, damage has significant measures in model 5 and model 6. The damage variable relates to respondent's level of damage their house received during hurricane maria and if that influences their view on status. If a respondent received major damage to their residence, it is unlikely for them to favor commonwealth. For partisanship, all models for independents, GOP, and other/DKR had significant measures. Independents are less likely to favor pro-commonwealth as they seem to favor independence from the previous table. This is similar for GOP and Other/DKR, they are less likely to associate with pro-commonwealth. It should be noted that if Democrats were to be included in the table, it would have significant measures demonstrating greater likelihood for these respondents to favor commonwealth.

<b>Table 4.6. Logistic Regression Analysis Predicting Pro-Commonwealth Response</b>						
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Approval of Federal Government	0.97 (0.06)					1.11 (0.08)
Approval of Municipal Gov.		0.96 (0.05)				1.01 (0.06)
Approval of Governor Rossello			0.79** (0.06)			0.74** (0.07)
Approval of Puerto Rico Gov.				0.87# (0.06)		1.08 (0.11)
Approval of President Trump					0.87# (0.07)	0.88 (0.07)
Damage	0.88 (0.07)	0.88 (0.07)	0.88 (0.07)	0.87 (0.07)	0.87# (0.07)	0.87# (0.07)
Independents	0.43*** (0.10)	0.47*** (0.10)	0.43*** (0.10)	0.44*** (0.10)	0.45*** (0.10)	0.44*** (0.11)
GOP	0.19*** (0.06)	0.19*** (0.06)	0.23*** (0.07)	0.21*** (0.06)	0.21*** (0.06)	0.23*** (0.07)
Other/ Don't Know/Refused	0.63** (0.09)	0.63** (0.09)	0.65** (0.10)	0.63** (0.09)	0.68* (0.10)	0.66** (0.10)
United States	0.69 (0.21)	0.68 (0.21)	0.68 (0.22)	0.65 (0.20)	0.67 (0.20)	0.63 (0.20)
Other Country	0.24# (0.18)	0.24# (0.18)	0.27# (0.20)	0.25# (0.19)	0.24# (0.18)	0.26# (0.19)
Education Attainment	0.87*** (0.03)	0.88** (0.03)	0.88** (0.03)	0.88** (0.03)	0.87*** (0.03)	0.86*** (0.04)
Income	0.84 (0.13)	0.81 (0.12)	0.83 (0.12)	0.84 (0.13)	0.85 (0.13)	0.82 (0.12)
Income Undisclosed	0.73 (0.23)	0.68 (0.21)	0.68 (0.21)	0.72 (0.22)	0.65 (0.20)	0.66 (0.20)
Age	1.00 (0.00)	1.00 (0.00)	1.00 (0.00)	1.00 (0.00)	1.00 (0.00)	1.00 (0.00)
Gender	1.23 (0.18)	1.25 (0.18)	1.27 (0.19)	1.22 (0.18)	1.23 (0.19)	1.27 (0.20)
Observations	1450	1471	1460	1468	1421	1359
Exponentiated coefficients; Standard errors in parentheses; # $p < .10$ , * $p < .05$ , ** $p < .01$ , *** $p < .001$						

Previous tables did not show significance in respondents from other countries but table 4.6, shows that respondents from other countries are less likely to favor pro-commonwealth. For these individuals, it should be noted that they are currently living in Puerto Rico and were on the island when Maria hit. In table 4.5, it is shown that respondents with higher education are more likely to favor independence but, in this table, these individuals are less likely to favor pro-commonwealth.

### Opinions on State Status of Puerto Rico

Alongside the key dependent variables of Pro-Statehood, Pro-Commonwealth, and Pro-Independence, respondents were asked to give their opinion to the following question:

*“In your opinion, do you think the federal government’s response to Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico would have been better, worse, or about the same if Puerto Rico was a state?”*

This explores the respondent’s views on whether they could have seen a difference in preparedness from the federal government if Puerto Rico was a state before Hurricane Maria. The table 4.7, presents respondent’s opinions on this question while also assessed with the independent variables analyzed in the previous tables. According to the data, there are significant measures in the approval rates of federal government, Governor Rossello, Puerto Rican government, and President Trump. Federal Government has significance in Model 1 and Model 2, as the rating of the federal government (1.18\*\*) is seen positively, respondents are also likely to express that statehood could have improved the Maria response. This pattern is also seen with approval rates of Rossello (1.28\*\*\*) and the Puerto Rican government (1.24\*\*\*).

<b>Table 4.7. Logistic Regression Analysis Predicting Opinion that Puerto Rican Statehood Status Would Have Improved Hurricane Maria Response</b>						
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Approval of Federal Government	1.18** (0.07)					1.19* (0.09)
Approval of Municipal Gov.		0.99 (0.05)				0.93 (0.05)
Approval of Governor Rossello			1.28*** (0.08)			1.22* (0.09)
Approval of Puerto Rico Gov.				1.24*** (0.08)		1.05 (0.09)
Approval of President Trump					1.07 (0.08)	0.87 (0.08)
Damage	1.10 (0.08)	1.11 (0.08)	1.14# (0.09)	1.13 (0.09)	1.14# (0.09)	1.12 (0.09)
Independents	0.73 (0.17)	0.70 (0.16)	0.66# (0.14)	0.69# (0.15)	0.66# (0.14)	0.76 (0.18)
GOP	2.94*** (0.69)	3.11*** (0.73)	2.63*** (0.64)	2.79*** (0.67)	2.84*** (0.69)	2.42*** (0.62)
Other/ Don't Know/Refused	1.13 (0.18)	1.09 (0.17)	1.10 (0.17)	1.12 (0.17)	1.10 (0.17)	1.13 (0.18)
United States	1.60# (0.39)	1.39 (0.33)	1.43 (0.35)	1.48 (0.36)	1.40 (0.33)	1.61# (0.40)
Other Country	1.17 (0.46)	1.17 (0.46)	1.27 (0.55)	1.10 (0.42)	1.35 (0.54)	1.42 (0.61)
Education Attainment	0.99 (0.04)	0.98 (0.04)	0.99 (0.04)	0.99 (0.04)	0.98 (0.04)	0.98 (0.04)
Income	0.92 (0.11)	0.94 (0.11)	0.94 (0.11)	0.93 (0.11)	0.95 (0.11)	0.91 (0.11)
Income Undisclosed	0.80 (0.19)	0.82 (0.20)	0.88 (0.21)	0.81 (0.19)	0.88 (0.21)	0.84 (0.21)
Age	0.99*** (0.00)	0.98*** (0.00)	0.99*** (0.00)	0.99*** (0.00)	0.99** (0.00)	0.99** (0.00)
Gender	0.87 (0.11)	0.88 (0.11)	0.83 (0.10)	0.87 (0.11)	0.84 (0.10)	0.83 (0.11)
Observations	1450	1471	1460	1468	1421	1359
Exponentiated coefficients; Standard errors in parentheses; # $p < .10$ , * $p < .05$ , ** $p < .01$ , *** $p < .001$						

Although respondents positively rate the federal government's, Rossello's, and the Puerto Rican government's response, they feel that Puerto Rico being a state of the United States would have improved the outcomes of the disaster. Compared to table 4.6, respondents with major damage (0.14<sup>#</sup>) on their home believe in the Maria response could have been improved if Puerto Rico was a state. Based on the previous tables, the GOP respondents are more likely to be in favor of statehood. In this table, there is a level of significance in all models for GOP respondents. As the approval rate of the federal government is positive, they expressed that it could have been better if Puerto Rico was a state. Independents expressed the opposite of the GOP; they do not believe the response would have improved if Puerto Rico was a state. This connects with table 4.4, as it was shown that they are less likely of favoring statehood in the future. In Model 1 & 6, respondents from the United States were slightly significant, suggesting Puerto Rican statehood would have improved Maria response. Compared to previous tables, age seem to be significant in all models. This result can suggest that older respondents are less likely of thinking statehood status would have improved Maria response.

### **Analysis**

This study has introduced contradicting evidence towards my expected outcomes of the results. Prior to analyzing the independent and dependent variables, I proposed two main hypotheses:

*H1: Negative perceptions of the United States Federal Government will lead to increase support for independence.*

*H2: Negative perceptions of the United States Federal Government will lead to increase support for statehood.*

*Null Hypothesis: Positive perception of the United States Federal government will lead to support for maintaining the status quo political arrangement of commonwealth status.*

Findings indicate that (1) negative perceptions of the federal government's response are associated with respondents favoring pro-independence, (2) positive perceptions of the federal government's response are associated with pro-statehood, (3) neutral/positive perceptions of the federal government's response are associated with pro-commonwealth, and (4) party identification is divided by the status debate. There is a pattern of respondents viewing the federal government's response towards Hurricane Maria positively, which has affected how they viewed the Puerto Rican status debate. In the tables, all models indicated that there is significance in Puerto Ricans viewing the federal government positively and negatively. Pro-independence is mostly favored by respondents who identify as independents, have higher education, and higher income. Based on these factors, the results support the hypothesis aiming towards independence, since it can be inferred that these respondents do not view the federal government positively. For example, in table 4.7, Independents expressed their negative view of the federal government by indicating that Puerto Rico as a state would not have improved the Hurricane Maria response. Pro-Commonwealth seemed to be favored by respondents who viewed the federal government neutrally and positively. Respondents who identify as democrats seem to be favor the status quo. Based on table 4.7, Age is a significant

measure indicating that older respondents are less likely to agree with Puerto Rico becoming a state since they expressed that the federal government's response would not have improved. This can suggest that older individuals would prefer pro-commonwealth or pro-independence. Pro-statehood was largely favored by the GOP, respondents with major damage on their homes, and respondents that positively approved of the federal government's response. Based on this evidence, my second hypothesis is not supported as Puerto Ricans' with positive perceptions of the federal governments tend to favor pro-statehood.

Party identification seems to be an important factor in analyzing Puerto Rican views on status. Each status option seems to be accompanied with a certain Puerto Rican political party. It should be mentioned that United States political parties and Puerto Rican political parties have different ideologies on the incorporation of Puerto Rico as a state. As indicated in the results, Pro-statehood is favored by the Puerto Rican Republican Party (*Partido Nuevo Progresista*). Pro-Commonwealth is favored by the Puerto Rican Democratic Party (*Partido Popular Democratico*). Pro-Independence is favored by the Independent Party (*Partido Independistas Puertorriqueño*). Party affiliation seems to be an influencing factor in individuals favoring a certain option for Puerto Rican status. Overall, the findings have indicated that Puerto Rican attitudes on the federal government's response towards Hurricane Maria can impact their views on statehood through various factors that include party affiliation, education, gender, age, income, and damage.

## **Limitations**

During the study, there are some limitations that could have potentially contributed to the outcomes of the findings. Puerto Rican politics and literature are limited as scholars have not become more in-depth in their research concerning the colonialization of Puerto Rico by the U.S. In the future, if I would like to improve on my investigation, I would change my methodological approach from survey analysis to doing in-person interviews with Puerto Ricans on the island. Although the survey I utilize for my analysis was sufficient to complete my study, I would have like to ask a series of different questions to respondents. For example, racial identity was not included as part of the questions. This would have been an important factor to analyze in the logistic regression since there is a diverse amount of Puerto Rican racial identities on the island. I would like to get more specific details as to why respondents favored a certain status option and if that influences how they view certain political figures.

## **Chapter Five: Conclusion**

This project set out to answer the following research question:

*How do views of the U.S. federal government shape preferences about statehood and independence among island residents in the post-Hurricane Maria context?*

The finding of this study has indicated there is a relationship between Puerto Rican perceptions of the federal government's response to Hurricane Maria and their views on Puerto Rico's territorial status. This is important since the data analyzed has shown that there is significance in negative and positive perceptions of the emergency response of Hurricane Maria and how they shape preferences about statehood and independence. Earlier in the study, I proposed two main hypothesis that I expected would be supported by the results of the data analysis. The hypotheses that I stated are as follows:

*H1: Negative perceptions of the United States Federal Government will lead to increase support for independence.*

*H2: Negative perceptions of the United States Federal Government will lead to increase support for statehood.*

*Null Hypothesis: Positive perception of the United States Federal government will lead to support for maintaining the status quo political arrangement of commonwealth status.*

The first hypothesis concerning the how Puerto Ricans view the option of Pro-Independence is supported by the findings shown in this study. The data demonstrates that Puerto Ricans who viewed the U.S. federal government's response negatively were

more likely to express pro-independence views. This can suggest that the federal government's response to Hurricane Maria has been analyzed by Puerto Ricans as being insufficient. Recognizing the discrepancies of the responses is significant in Puerto Ricans choosing independence. They do not see the value in continuing under a nation that does not view Puerto Rico and its inhabitants as a priority. It was also demonstrated that individuals reporting higher education and have higher income are also more likely to adopt a pro-independence position. This can suggest that individuals that are better educated could be more informed about the relationship between the U.S. and Puerto Rico and its roots in colonialism and oppression. This could also be suggested for those with higher income since they have the resources to be informed on the current situation and potentially not satisfied with the current economic crisis.

Pro-statehood was the option favored by a majority of Puerto Ricans but the factors that influence this decision is based on their evaluation of the Hurricane Maria response. The hypothesis I expected for this status option was that negative perceptions would be associated with the pro-statehood position. Based on the data, however, I did not find support for this hypothesis. Instead, Puerto Ricans who viewed the federal government's response and other political figures' responses more positively, are more likely to choose pro-statehood. This suggests that these individuals did not see anything wrong with the emergency response post-Maria. They viewed the response to be adequate, but they recognize Puerto Rico's inability to become independent. Another factor that was associated with pro-statehood is major damage on homes. This suggest that those with more damage on their homes are more likely to choose pro-statehood.

Unexpectedly, the hypothesis concerning pro-statehood was not supported, but the data indicates that these results are significant to answer my research question. As expected, the pro-independence hypothesis was supported by the data and significant for my study. Pro-commonwealth option was preferred by those who identify as democrats.

A major contribution of this work was to show how party identification plays a large role in shaping Puerto Rican's views toward the island's political status. It should be noted that parties in Puerto Rico and the United States do not share the same ideologies. Those respondents who identify with the GOP (Republican) are most likely to prefer pro-statehood, which is supported by the data. Pro-independence is an option for respondents that identify as independents, as supported by the data. Pro-commonwealth was more likely to be chosen by individuals who identified as Democrats. This suggests that party identification is divided according to the Puerto Rican status question. Thus, individuals who identify with a political party in Puerto Rico, will most likely choose the status option that corresponds to that party.

Puerto Rico has had to withstand an economic crisis and a hurricane while being unprepared. The United States has neglected the island before and after Maria. This is rooted in the colonization of the island and the constant oppression of Puerto Ricans. Puerto Ricans on the island continue to suffer from an inferior form of democratic citizenship that shows its inadequacy in stark terms in moments of crisis like the aftermath of Hurricane Maria in 2017. Hopefully, as more political figures in Congress continue to advocate for Puerto Rico's survival, there will be an affirmative decision that will help Puerto Rico and its islanders to receive adequate representation, rights, and freedom.

### Future Research

My investigation is significant and has exposed important factors of Puerto Rico's history while being marginalized by the United States. While my study is sufficient to make these arguments, there are some aspects of my data analysis that I would improve on if there is a chance to reinvestigate this topic. While the survey I analyzed was suitable for my study and the questions asked were helpful, I think I would have added some more questions that asked respondents about the reasons for their status preference. Although I analyzed factors that contribute to status preference, my assumptions of their logic would be better supported with a why question. In-person interviews conducted with new survey questions would be ideal as that could add more background information of respondents' race and ethnicities since Puerto Rico is an island with a diverse number of racial identities.

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