

Puerto Ricans overall satisfied with response to pandemic: Statehood maintains strong support amongst voters

The Puerto Rico Herald obtained the key findings from two surveys of Puerto Rico registered and likely voters. The first one was conducted Friday May 22nd to Monday June 1st, 2020 and the other previously conducted May 3-7, 2020 by two nationally recognized public opinion research firms. Both polls, not conducted for any candidate or party, included questions on a wide array of important topics, using a scientifically designed sample across all of Puerto Rico regions, age groups, gender and socioeconomic levels to produce reliable findings regarding the current attitudes of registered voters about issues and potential candidates for office.

When asked about the treatment Puerto Ricans in the Island have received during the COVID-19 emergency, 76% of respondents expressed they are OK with the performance by President Donald Trump with 37% expressing it has been excellent or good.

PNP (New Progressive Party or “Partido Nuevo Progresista”) candidates hold leads in the races for Governor, Resident Commissioner (non-voting delegate to Congress), and on the generic legislative ballot. *However*, high levels of third-party support and undecided voters mean these races remain extremely volatile.

The YES side of the November plebiscite is currently poised for a resounding victory, largely based on the idea that Puerto Ricans deserve equal rights and a level playing field. *However*, low participation in the plebiscite (due to an organized boycott or the belief that an affirmative vote for statehood will not change anything) is a potential vulnerability that opponents could leverage to discredit a statehood victory.

Most voters are convinced that Puerto Rico would be doing better economically if it were a state. *However*, belief in statehood’s ability to significantly improve the economy has slipped somewhat amidst a national recession and public health crisis.

Governor Vázquez is enjoying newfound popularity amid a wave of support for her handling of the coronavirus crisis. *However*, the durability of this bounce is uncertain – there is universal approval of her stay-at-home order, but evaluations



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of specific components of her response (such as handling testing or preventing economic damage) are middling at best. Among the key findings:

1. Puerto Ricans are rallying around their leaders as they grapple with the coronavirus crisis. Approval of Governor Vázquez (+12 points) and Resident Commissioner González (+19 points) is up sharply since the start of the crisis.

The increase in Vázquez's approval is primarily driven by two groups with relatively little overlap: seniors (+19 points) and those on Twitter (+18 points).

2. An astounding 97% of voters support the governor's stay-at-home order, and approval of her handling of COVID is up 17 points since mid-March. Her largest gains have come from PPD (Popular Democratic Party or "Partido Popular Democrático") partisans (+19) and those who do not identify with either major party (+22).
3. However, just half of voters (48%) say Vázquez has done an excellent or good job protecting public health. Only about a quarter give positive grades on reducing economic damage (29%), handling testing (26%), and managing relief funds (24%).
4. Vázquez's held a narrow five-point lead over Pedro Pierluisi in the PNP primary for governor – a notable turnaround after trailing by 12 in March and 33 points in February. But in May, that difference widened with now 48% of PNP self-identified voters supporting Wanda Vazquez and 30 % supporting Pedro Pierluisi.

Eduardo Bhatia retains a lead in the PPD nomination fight, though his 10-point lead over Charlie Delgado Altieri is a far cry from the 35-point edge he held in March, suggesting Delgado is a potential dark horse on the PPD side.

5. Both PNP candidates hold double-digit leads over Bhatia – but neither secures even 30% of the vote. With a majority of voters unwilling to commit to a major party candidate – not to mention an unprecedented global pandemic – this race is extremely volatile.



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The PNP's prospects in the legislature are similar: the party now holds a seven-point edge on the generic ballot, but the large number of undecided and third-party voters make for an unsettled electoral picture.

González held a 33-point lead over Aníbal Acevedo Vilá (up from an 11-point edge in March) in May and captures nearly half (48%) of the vote. But in late May and early June, when asked if they had to choose between Jenniffer Gonzalez and former Governor Anibal Acevedo Vilá, 56% chose Gonzalez while only 13% picked Acevedo. This race may be moving into more solid territory for the PNP.



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