



STATESIDE PUERTO RICAN ACTIVIST SURVEY FINDINGS

National Institute for Latino Policy

In early 2006, the National Institute for Latino Policy conducted an Internet survey of close to 500 Puerto Rican community leaders and activists throughout the United States. This is a report of the findings in two parts. The first explores issues related to the political status of Puerto Rico, and the second on issues affecting Puerto Ricans stateside.

1. STATESIDE PUERTO RICANS SUPPORT PLEBISCITE

A survey of close to 500 Puerto Rican community leaders from across the United States found broad support for the holding of a plebiscite on the future political status of Puerto Rico. While 73% were in favor of such a vote, they were split on the options to be voted upon. Those supporting the proposal made by the President's Task Force on Puerto Rico's Status (December 2005) that the vote be ultimately limited to the options of Statehood versus Independence made up 31% of the total respondents. A larger group (43%) supported including the option of Commonwealth in the proposed plebiscite.

The IPR Opinion Survey was conducted over the Internet by the Institute for Puerto Rican Policy on February 24 through March 6, 2006. The survey had a total of 574 respondents, including 88 non-Puerto Rican members of the Institute's national network of community leaders.

Commonwealth Unconstitutional?

Despite support for the inclusion of the Commonwealth option in the proposed plebiscite, a majority (52%) of the Puerto Rican respondents felt that this option is unconstitutional and a vestige of colonialism. This negative view of the current political status of Puerto Rico by the Stateside Puerto Rican leadership reflects the strong support for Independence among them.

Although among the general Puerto Rican population, support for Independence is probably closer to what it is in Puerto Rico (about 5% or so), among the Stateside Puerto Rican leadership, according to our poll, 45% support Independence. This is consistent with past polls of Stateside Puerto Rican leaders conducted by the Institute in the late 1980s that found 44% of Stateside Puerto Rican leaders supporting Independence. Stateside Puerto Rican leaders' support for independence was strongest in the Midwest (68%), the West (50%) and New York State (45%), and weakest in the South (24%) and the Northeast (outside of NYS) (39%). The South was the only region where Commonwealth was supported by the largest percentage of the Stateside Puerto Rican leadership (29%).

Support Stateside Puerto Ricans Voting in Plebiscite

US Congressman José Serrano has proposed that Puerto Ricans in the United States (outside of Puerto Rico) be allowed to vote in such a plebiscite if they are of voting age and were born in Puerto Rico. Close to half of the Stateside Puerto Rican leaders (48%) support

this position, while another quarter (27%) believe that all Stateside Puerto Ricans of voting age should be able to vote in the plebiscite, whether or not they were born in Puerto Rico. On the other hand, close to a quarter of the Puerto Rican respondents (23%) do not believe Stateside Puerto Ricans should be allowed to vote in the proposed plebiscite, which they feel should be limited only to the residents of Puerto Rico.

Strongly Oppose FBI Raids in Puerto Rico

When asked about the recent FBI raids in Puerto Rico against pro-independence activists, the Stateside Puerto Rican leadership overwhelmingly condemned these actions by the FBI. Three-quarters (75%) stated they opposed the raids and only 8% supported the FBI. Those indicating they didn't know enough about the issue or didn't care represented 17% of the total.

Asked if the FBI raids might taint the plebiscite process and make it impossible to have a fair vote on the status question, the largest percentage (35%) said that it wouldn't. However, a majority had doubts with 25% saying it has tainted process and another 28% saying it may have.

Puerto Rican Government Office in US Gets Poor Rating

The Puerto Rican Federal Affairs Administration (PRFAA) is an agency of the government of Puerto Rico based in Washington, DC with regional offices in different states. One of its purposes is to provide services to the Stateside Puerto Rican population, among these being voter registration and education campaigns. Since the current governor took office, this agency, under the leadership of Eduardo Bhatia, has met with much criticism from the Stateside Puerto Rican leadership for being unresponsive to community needs and not consulting with them.

Asked to rate the job PRFAA, the largest group of Stateside Puerto Rican leaders stated that they had never heard of this agency (43%). More than a third (34%) rated their performance as "poor" and 14% as "fair". Only 9% rated PRFAA's work with the Stateside Puerto Rican community as "excellent" and "good". This agency received its best ratings ("excellent" plus "good") in the Midwest (25%) and the South (17%), and its lowest in the West (0%) and New York State (4%).

2. SERRANO MOST INFLUENTIAL PUERTO RICAN STATESIDE, ACCORDING TO SURVEY

US Congressman José Serrano from the Bronx is considered the most politically influential Puerto Rican in the United States, according to a recent survey of close to 500 Stateside Puerto Rican community leaders. Congressman Serrano topped the list with 15%, followed by Congressman Luis Gutierrez of Chicago (12%) in second place and Congresswoman Nydia Velazquez of New York (5%) in third place. Another 4% of the Puerto Rican respondents identified the three Puerto Rican Congress members in groups of 2 and 3 as well.

This is a departure from past surveys of this group where local political leaders used to be seen as most influential alongside some Members of Congress. The ascendancy of the three Puerto Rican Congresspersons as the major power players in the Stateside Puerto Rican community is a new development.

Others making the top list were SEIU Local 119 President Dennis Rivera in 4th place with 4%, and NYC Mayoral candidate Fernando Ferrer in 5th place with less than 4%.

However, the largest number of the Puerto Rican respondents either did not answer this question (19%) or stated that they considered “no one” to be the most politically influential Puerto Rican or that they didn’t know (22%) (41% combined).

Regionally, Congressman Serrano was seen as most influential in New York State (by 22%) and the West (15%). Congressman Gutierrez was seen as most influential in his hometown region, the Midwest, by 52%, the South (14%) and the Northeast (outside of NYS)(13%).

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Education Top Problem

By far the largest group of Stateside Puerto Rican leaders surveyed feels that Education is the number one problem facing their community (30%). This was followed by Economics-Employment (10%), Poverty (9%), Discrimination (8%), Disunity (7%), Apathy- Ignorance (6%) and Leadership (5%).

Leaders Positive About Progress and Future

However, the Stateside Puerto Rican leadership was very positive about the progress being made by their community and about its future. About the progress made by their community in the last decade, 15% were “very positive” and 57% were “somewhat positive.” About the future of their community, 18% were “very optimistic” and 51% were “somewhat optimistic”.



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