

**Forum:** Special Political & Decolonization Committee (GA4)

**Issue:** Discussing the Puerto Rico statehood movement and its right to self determination



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**Position:** Deputy President

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## Personal Introduction

Dear Delegates,

My name is Georgios Miliopoulos, and I am an 11th grade student at the German School of Thessaloniki. For the 8th annual ACGMUN, I have the utmost honor of serving as a Co-Chair of the Special Political & Decolonization Committee (GA4). First and foremost, I would like to welcome you all to the 8th annual ACGMUN Conference and applaud your choice of selecting this committee.

During the debate session, the committee will focus on two pressing issues, one of them being “Discussing the Puerto Rico statehood movement and its right to self-determination”. The aim of this study guide is to present the essential information on the topic, enabling you to form draft resolutions and be active delegates throughout the duration of the debate. However, it is heavily encouraged that delegates conduct their own research to fully comprehend their respective countries' policies and gain a thorough understanding of the topic. The bibliography in this document's final pages can serve as a starting point for independent research.

I am eager to meet all of you this March, and I am sure that this committee will conduct a fruitful and engaging debate on the topics at hand. Finally, I would like to highlight the fundamental role that MUN has in our modern world; if we start solving pressing global issues now, who knows what we will be able to accomplish in the future? If there are any further questions you may have regarding your country's policy, the topic as a whole, or your resolutions, do not hesitate to contact me through my email address.

Best regards,  
Georgios Miliopoulos (gmiliopoulos@yahoo.com)

## Topic Introduction

The political status of Puerto Rico has been a source of heavy debate for decades. Puerto Rico is an unincorporated territory of the United States, an administrative classification that means it is controlled by the US but has its own government. Its unique status has sparked many arguments about its future, especially the question of whether it should pursue statehood, independence, or maintain its status with certain changes. Central to this discussion is the principle of self-determination, a basic right under international law. This allows people to determine their political, economic, and social status free from external pressure.

Colonization and complex socio-political factors have shaped Puerto Rico's political history. The island became a US possession in 1898, following the Spanish-American War and has never achieved full representation in Congress or voting rights in presidential elections while under American jurisdiction. There have been a couple of referendums, the last being in 2020, where a slim majority favored the option of statehood. However, internal discussions among both American Congressional members and members of Puerto Rican society as well as the international community, have brought questions regarding the practical viability of the solution of any status quo, the legality of any official transition process and the moral responsibility to resolve the status of the country. This topic raises significant questions such as the economic dependence of Puerto Rico on the USA, the protection of national identity, and what duties the international community has to honor the self-determination of its people.

Furthermore, the resolution of Puerto Rico's status carries profound implications not only for its citizens but also for the broader political and economic landscape of the United States. A transition to statehood would grant Puerto Ricans full representation in Congress and equal rights under American law, yet it would also require adjustments in taxation, federal funding, and governance structures. This debate directly ties into the theme of "Balancing Infinite Opportunities," as it requires carefully weighing the political, economic, and cultural possibilities available to Puerto Rico while ensuring that its people's right to self-determination is upheld.

## Definition of Key Terms

### Self-Determination

The right of people to freely determine their political status and pursue their economic, social, and cultural development without external interference, as recognized under international law.

### Non Self-Governing Territories

Territories whose people have not yet attained full self-government, as defined by the United Nations (UN), and are listed for decolonization under the UN Special Committee on Decolonization.

### Decolonization

The process through which colonies and territories gain independence or move towards self-determination, often facilitated by international legal and political frameworks established by the United Nations.

### Statehood

“The condition or status of being a political state.”<sup>1</sup>

### Sovereignty

“The supreme governing power of a state or community.”

### Unincorporated Territory

“An unincorporated territory of the United States is a self-governing country which is, however, dependent on the absolute power of the US Congress, as well as the US armed forces exercise extensive control over it. The citizens of an unincorporated territory are under the control of the Department of Interior and thus, they are not given the full rights of US citizenship.”<sup>2</sup>

### Democratic Deficit

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<sup>1</sup> “Statehood - Quick Search Results | Oxford English Dictionary.” *Oed.com*, 2025, [www.oed.com/search/dictionary/?scope=Entries&q=statehood](http://www.oed.com/search/dictionary/?scope=Entries&q=statehood).

<sup>2</sup> “What Is Unincorporated Territory | IGI Global.” *Www.igi-Global.com*, [www.igi-global.com/dictionary/decolonizing-guam-with-poetry/96184](http://www.igi-global.com/dictionary/decolonizing-guam-with-poetry/96184).

Democratic deficit is “a term used to denote a situation where institutions and their decision-making procedures may suffer from a lack of democracy and accountability.”<sup>3</sup>

## Background Information

### Historical Background

Puerto Rico’s history has been shaped by its colonial legacy and changing relationship with the United States. The island was settled by the Taíno people and colonized by Spain beginning in 1493, and it remained a Spanish territory for more than 400 years. After the Spanish-American War of 1898, Puerto Rico was turned over to the United States under the Treaty of Paris. Six years later, the Jones Act granted Puerto Ricans American citizenship, but it remained an unincorporated territory with no full political representation. During the mid-20th century, Puerto Rico underwent transformational change, including the establishment of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico in 1952, which gave the island significant local self-governance while leaving USA’s sovereignty intact. Puerto Rico's political future, as a new state, a new nation, or a new commonwealth, has remained undetermined since then, despite several non-binding referendums that showed changing preferences in the population.

### Current Political Status

Today, Puerto Rico is an unincorporated territory of the United States. Its people have a municipal government that they elect but no electoral representation in Congress and no right to vote in presidential contests. The United States House of Representatives elects a Resident Commissioner who serves at the discretion of the House of Representatives but only has limited voting powers. It has held several referendums on its political status. In a 2020 plebiscite, 52.5% of voters backed statehood, but the results have yet to be acted upon by Congress. The "Puerto Rico Status Act" has garnered support in recent years and seeks to create a binding mechanism for determining the status question, but bipartisan consensus continues to evade Congress.

The debate over Puerto Rico’s status remains highly polarized, with political parties on the island and in the USA holding differing views on its future. The New Progressive Party (PNP) strongly advocates for statehood, arguing that full integration into the USA would grant Puerto Ricans equal rights and economic stability. Meanwhile, the Popular Democratic Party (PPD) supports maintaining or

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<sup>3</sup> EUR-Lex. “EUR-Lex - Democratic\_deficit - EN - EUR-Lex.” *Eur-Lex.europa.eu*, 2024, [eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/glossary/democratic-deficit.html](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/glossary/democratic-deficit.html).

modifying the current commonwealth status, citing concerns over cultural identity and economic autonomy.

The Puerto Rican Independence Party (PIP) and other pro-independence groups push for full sovereignty, emphasizing the right to self-determination and an end to colonial rule. At the federal level, Congressional gridlock and competing legislative priorities have stalled significant progress, leaving Puerto Rico's political status unresolved. The lack of clear action from Congress continues to fuel frustration among Puerto Ricans, many of whom feel their voices are ignored despite repeated referendums expressing a preference for change.

### **Social Impacts**

The political uncertainty has serious social impacts on Puerto Ricans. Statehood advocates claim it would offer full citizenship rights, more representation, and equality with residents of the 50 states. But there are also concerns over the loss of cultural identity. The diaspora plays an important role as many Puerto Ricans migrate to the USA in search of economic opportunities and producing a dynamic that shapes conversations on the island and in Congress.

### **Economic Impacts**

Puerto Rico's economic difficulties are closely connected to its political status. As a territory, it does not receive the same federal funding and benefits as American states do, deepening problems with poverty, unemployment, and infrastructure deficiencies. Advocates of statehood contend that inclusion would mean more federal investment, jobs, and growth, while critics warn of higher taxes and a loss of the competitive tax advantage which they say comes with being a territory. The island's immense public debt crisis, aggravated by natural disasters like Hurricane Maria in 2017, highlights the importance of a stable and sustainable economic plan. Its current condition means that Puerto Rico has become reliant on federal assistance but can't fully control its own fiscal future, a development many in Puerto Rico consider one of the largest impediments to economic progress.

### **Political Impacts**

Puerto Ricans currently lack voting representation in Congress and cannot vote in the USA's presidential elections; this means that the American federal laws still apply to them, but they have no local input on the decision-making process. Without voting representatives, Puerto Rico has less influence on disaster relief, funding and economic policies meaning that they often receive unequal

treatment in comparison to other states. This leads to the policies and programmes not fully reflecting the needs of Puerto Rican citizens, putting them at a lower priority compared to other US citizens.

This lack of political representation also means that Puerto Rico has limited power in shaping legislation that directly affects its economy, infrastructure, and social services. Federal policies on taxation, healthcare, and disaster response are often crafted without direct input from Puerto Rican officials, leading to delays and inefficiencies in addressing the island's needs. Additionally, the absence of voting power weakens Puerto Rico's ability to negotiate for greater federal support, leaving it vulnerable during crises such as hurricanes and economic downturns. As a result, Puerto Ricans experience a democratic deficit.

## Major Countries and Organizations Involved

### Puerto Rico

As the centerpiece of the discussion, Puerto Rico's residents are staunchly divided on the island's political future. Though some seek statehood for equality and federal benefits, others may want independence to preserve cultural identity or commonwealth status to maintain a balance between autonomy and continuing ties with the USA. Numerous local governments have voted on the matter in referendums, but no consensus has ever been reached. Resolving Puerto Rico's political status is crucial to ensuring its citizens receive full democratic representation, equal access to federal resources, and the right to determine their own political and economic future.

### United States of America (USA)

The USA is ultimately sovereign over Puerto Rico and decides its political status. Congress would have to approve any change—statehood or independence. Although there is bipartisan support for Puerto Rico's self-determination among many members of Congress, others are reluctant, pointing to political, economic, and logistical considerations. The United States' active involvement in resolving Puerto Rico's political status is essential to uphold its democratic values, address longstanding disparities, and ensure a fair and representative decision-making process for the island's future.

## Venezuela

Venezuela, which promotes anti-imperialist policies, has long been critical of the USA's relationship with Puerto Rico, calling it neocolonial. The country has asked the international community to focus on Puerto Rico's right to self-determination, frequently citing it as a model of persistent colonial legacies in contemporary geopolitics. It has historically supported Puerto Rico's right to self-determination, aligning with its broader anti-colonial stance and advocacy for Latin American sovereignty.

### **Puerto Rico Federal Affairs Administration (PRFAA)**

The PRFAA is the chief representative of Puerto Rico to the USA's federal government and Congress. Its principal function is to lobby for legislation favorable to Puerto Rico, including resolutions relating to political status, federal appropriations, and disaster recovery initiatives. To advance the issue, PRFAA must intensify its lobbying efforts, ensuring that Puerto Rican voices are heard in Congress while pushing for concrete legislative action on the territory's political status. By leveraging diplomatic engagement, public awareness campaigns, and legal advocacy, PRFAA can help secure greater political representation and ultimately influence the decision on Puerto Rico's future.

### **Puerto Rico Statehood Council (PRSC)**

The council is a strong advocate for statehood for Puerto Rico. It lobbies in Congress and works to educate American citizens and lawmakers about the benefits of granting Puerto Rico statehood, including equal rights for its residents and economic integration. With its influence in political circles, the PRSC works to educate policymakers, engage with federal officials, and push for legislation that would grant Puerto Rico statehood. Given its position, the PRSC must continue amplifying Puerto Rican voices, strengthening bipartisan support, and ensuring that the issue remains a priority in USA's political discourse.

## **Blocs Expected**

### **Alliance 1 - Pro-Statehood and Integration**

This group would consist of nations that support Puerto Rico's statehood, advocating for full political representation and economic benefits under the USA's governance. Countries like the United States of America, the United Kingdom, France, and Canada may align with this stance, emphasizing stability, economic integration, and democratic representation.

## Alliance 2 - Pro-Self-Determination and Decolonization

This bloc would support Puerto Rico’s right to self-determination, arguing for independence or a free association model that grants full sovereignty. Countries such as Venezuela, Cuba, Mexico, and various Pacific and Caribbean nations may side with this perspective, emphasizing anti-colonialism, regional autonomy, and historical justice.

## Timeline of Events

Date	Description of Event
November 19, 1493	Christopher Columbus lands in Puerto Rico and claims the island for Spain during his second voyage to the Americas
December 10, 1898	The Treaty of Paris is signed, officially ceding Puerto Rico to the United States following the Spanish-American War
March 2, 1917	The Jones Act is passed, granting American citizenship to Puerto Ricans and allowing limited self-governance
July 25, 1952	The Commonwealth of Puerto Rico is officially established, adopting its constitution and providing for local self-rule under American sovereignty
September 20, 2017	Hurricane Maria makes landfall on Puerto Rico as a Category 4 hurricane, causing widespread devastation
November 3, 2020	A non-binding referendum is held, with 52.5% of voters supporting statehood for Puerto Rico

## Relevant UN Resolutions, Treaties & Events



UN General Assembly Resolution 1514 (XV): Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples - December 14, 1960

This resolution affirmed the inalienable right of all peoples to self-determination and called for the end of colonialism in all its forms, forming the basis for arguments supporting Puerto Rico's decolonization.

UN Special Committee on Decolonization Resolution on Puerto Rico (2023) - June 20, 2023

Reaffirmed Puerto Rico's right to self-determination and independence, urging the USA to expedite the process of allowing Puerto Ricans to determine their political future.

UN Special Committee on Decolonization Resolution (1972) - June 28, 1972

One of the earliest resolutions discussing Puerto Rico's political status, highlighting its importance in international discussions on decolonization.

## Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

### The 2012 Plebiscite

The 2012 referendum was a historic moment in Puerto Rican history. For the first time, 54% of voters rejected the current Commonwealth status, a clear indication of widespread dissatisfaction. Of the available alternatives offered above, 61% of the respondents who answered the second question chose statehood. This was controversial—there were many blank votes on the second question from supporters of the Commonwealth option who opposed the way the plebiscite was structured. Critics said it took away from the legitimacy of the outcome, and proponents viewed it as a definitive mandate to change. The vote was noted by the USA's Congress but brought no meaningful action, a reflection of the complex political and economic ramifications of any change in status.

### The USA Congressional Response

Proposals aimed at resolving Puerto Rico's political status have been repeatedly undertaken in the American Congress. These include statehood bills and plans for binding referendums. But these

initiatives are often bogged down by partisan divides, cost concerns, and discussions over Puerto Rico's cultural and political integration.

One significant legislative effort came in the form of the Young Bill of 1998, which tried to create a process for resolving Puerto Rico's status. Although the bill received backing from statehood supporters, it encountered strong resistance in the Senate and failed to advance. In turn, the 2022 Puerto Rico Status Act attempted to provide a binding option on statehood, independence, or free association but, like the previous one, failed to pass the Senate after its success at the House of Representatives. Congressional inaction has caused frustration on the island that has only added to feelings of neglect and political marginalization.

## **Possible Solutions**

### **Granting Puerto Rico Statehood**

One possible way forward regarding the political status is for Puerto Rico to become the 51st American state. Proponents of statehood say that would ensure that Puerto Ricans are treated equally and make them more economically stable. Puerto Rico would also qualify for heightened federal resources in education, health care, and infrastructure. This synchronization would also afford Puerto Ricans the same constitutional protections as anyone else, thus ending decades of second-class citizenship.

But statehood comes with real challenges. Some critics fear such statehood would dilute Puerto Rico's cultural heritage, including its own language, Spanish, and its diverse traditions. Moreover, any bipartisan consensus in the American Congress would be fraught with difficulty, as political salience and resistance to new political coalitions could slow down the process. Finally, fully aligning Puerto Rico's tax system and its economy with the USA's federal system may represent some significant short-term hardships.

### **Building on the Road to Sovereign Independence**

One possible option is for Puerto Rico to gain independence and become its own sovereign state. This would give Puerto Ricans the same right to self-determination that other people have to establish their own government and implement policies that reflect their cultural and economic interests. It also could give Puerto Rico the ability to negotiate its own trade agreements and become a member

of various international agencies, like the UN. This framework could protect and celebrate Puerto Rico's rich cultural identity and independence untainted by outside governance.

In contrast, independence would bring enormous economic uncertainty, as Puerto Rico would cut ties to federal funding that now funds many aspects of the island's economy, health care, and education. Setting up a new political system could also take effort to logistically manage, particularly if internal splits over independence remain. Moreover, the island's large diaspora in the mainland United States may also be opposed to such an extreme move, complicating consensus on independence as a potential solution.

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