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Puerto Rico Poll Times

Polls open at 8:00am EDT.
Polls close at 3:00pm EDT.

Polling stations will be open from 8:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Puerto Rico is in the Atlantic time zone but does not observe daylight savings time, so right now the time in Puerto Rico matches the time on the East Coast.

A Sunday primary? Tuesday elections are the norm in the 50 states. But Puerto Rico law says that the Democratic presidential primary must be held on the first Sunday in June.¹

Delegates Available in Puerto Rico on June 1
At stake in the primary are the commonwealth’s 55 Democratic pledged delegates, which will be apportioned according to each candidate’s share of the vote. Puerto Rico also has 8 superdelegates.

McCain won all 20 Republican pledged delegates in the Feb. 24 Republican caucuses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Territory</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Who can participate</th>
<th>Dem delegates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Puerto Rico</td>
<td>Open</td>
<td>When voter signs registration list at polling place, it is understood that the voter is joining the Democratic Party and he or she shall not participate in the candidate or delegate selection process of any other party. Anyone having participated in GOP presidential event is not permitted to participate in Dem event.</td>
<td>55 in the primary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>36 district level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>19 territorywide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8 super-delegates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Total: 63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Pledged district level delegates are allocated according to the primary vote in each of the commonwealth’s 8 senate districts, with a 15% threshold. Pledged statewide delegates are allocated according to the territorywide vote, with a 15% threshold.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Puerto Rico’s Democratic Primary

Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens who live in an ambiguously defined commonwealth, enlist in the military at higher rates than in most states, but can't vote for president in the general election.

Puerto Rico is usually a mere footnote in U.S. presidential politics. But with 55 pledged delegates up for grabs Sunday in the Democratic primary, Puerto Ricans are reveling in a rare moment of national attention.²

With 55 delegates at stake, Obama theoretically could clinch the nomination, but Clinton is widely considered the favorite going into Sunday’s primary.³

Polling data is scarce, but Clinton is thought to have the edge: an early April survey had Clinton ahead of Obama by 13 percentage points, 50 percent to 37 percent. Clinton has been doing better than Obama among Hispanic voters. Clinton’s home state of New York includes a plurality of the 3.4 million Hispanics of Puerto Rican descent who live on the U.S. mainland.⁴

Clinton is counting on a victory to bolster her claim to have won the majority of popular votes cast in all Democratic contests. Clinton wants to run up a big margin in the popular vote total in Puerto Rico to help convince undeclared superdelegates that she would be a stronger candidate than Obama in a general election against McCain.⁵

Clinton has been especially active in Puerto Rico, combining American and Latin American campaign techniques in hopes of demonstrating her strength in yet another Hispanic constituency. She has not only employed television and radio advertisements in Spanish and English, but has also sent batucada percussion ensembles and mobile loudspeakers playing reggaeton chants into the streets to spread her message.

Clinton is a familiar figure to Puerto Ricans, dating to her time as first lady, when she got involved in disaster relief after Hurricane Georges in 1998 and met with protesters seeking an end to the Navy’s use of the island of Vieques for bombing practice.

"My commitment to Puerto Rico did not start last month or last year," Clinton said on May 24, taking a swipe at Obama. "It stretches back more than a decade."

In Congress, Clinton has pushed to include Puerto Rico fully in government social welfare programs and has sponsored legislation specifically for the benefit of the island, which sends only a nonvoting delegate to Congress.

On May 24 Clinton told a Puerto Rican crowd, "I believe you should have a vote in picking the president," even before the issue of the island's status is resolved, and promised that if elected, her administration would “fully clean up” the Vieques site.⁶

Clinton has flatly promised to remove a cap – decried by area politicians – on federal funding that sharply limits Medicare and Medicaid reimbursements. She also promised to extend the federal child tax credit to locals.⁷

The U.S. territory of 3.9 million people averages about two homicides a day. Clinton is promising to boost federal funding for local police in Puerto Rico if she is elected president.⁸

Over Memorial Day weekend in stops at Aguadilla, Ponce and other towns, Clinton tapped the island's growing anti-war sentiment by speaking to soldiers' families and pledging to bring home the troops.⁹

Obama's campaign has vowed to create a task force to boost economic development and create jobs on the Caribbean island, which has a per capita income about half that of the poorest U.S. states.
Obama's plan would provide incentives to encourage U.S. businesses to generate jobs in Puerto Rico. He also wants to encourage investment in rural Puerto Rico and explore programs to develop renewable energy to help charge the local economy, which has entered its third consecutive year of recession.\textsuperscript{10}

Obama is committed to giving Puerto Ricans child and income tax credits, and to raising the minimum wage.\textsuperscript{11}

Obama, toured Puerto Rico last Saturday\textsuperscript{12}, is not expected to win on Sunday. But Puerto Rico has still emerged as a field test of what has become one of the first orders of business for the Obama campaign in its transition to general-election mode: redoubling and rethinking its effort to win over Hispanic voters, a demographic it lost to Clinton and will need against McCain.\textsuperscript{13}

Obama’s Puerto Rico backers include Gov. Anibal Acevedo-Vila. Obama won the support of Gov. Acevedo in February, a bitter-sweet endorsement after Acevedo was indicted a month later on federal campaign finance and tax violations.\textsuperscript{14} In late March, Acevedo was charged with 19 counts of violating federal election and campaign finance laws, and he stepped down as co-chairman of the Obama campaign.\textsuperscript{15}

Earlier last week, Gov. Bill Richardson of New Mexico campaigned for Obama in the streets of Ponce, the main city on the southern coast of the island, accompanied by the city's mayor, nominally a Clinton supporter, and former Gov. Rafael Hernandez Colon, the popular patriarch of Puerto Rican politics.

"There is no question that Hillary Clinton has more name recognition" and that voters are aware of the governor's problems, said Eduardo Bhatia, a chairman of the Obama campaign. "But we have been making up ground fast."\textsuperscript{16}

Both candidates have carefully avoided taking sides in the debate over Puerto Rico's relationship to the United States.\textsuperscript{17}

Turnout is high for elections in Puerto Rico, where political parties are defined by their position on the island's unsettled relationship with the United States. Many still predict a large turnout for the primary, but the presidential primary does not seem to have generated the same excitement as other island elections; events involving Clinton and Obama have not attracted more than a couple hundred people.\textsuperscript{18}

Labor unions, especially those affiliated to mainland internationals, are expected to play a big role in voter turnout. The United Service Workers, an affiliate of AFSCME in the U.S., has opened Clinton campaign offices. Local affiliates of the Service Employees International Union are actively supporting Obama.\textsuperscript{19}

Clinton, who recently finished a three-day campaign swing through Puerto Rico, will return on May 30 and stay through the primary Sunday.\textsuperscript{20}

Bill Clinton has visited Puerto Rico on behalf of his wife. Chelsea Clinton has made more than one trip to the island. Earlier in May the U.S. Navy denied Chelsea permission to campaign on a former bombing range on the outlying island of Vieques. The range was closed in April 2003 after years of protests over two errant bombs that killed a security guard.\textsuperscript{21}

Salsa icon Willie Colon has endorsed Clinton.\textsuperscript{22}

Michelle Obama has toured San Juan on behalf of her husband.\textsuperscript{23}
Profile of Puerto Rico
The island was claimed by Spain in 1493 after Columbus' second voyage. Ceded by Spain to the United States in 1898, at the end of the Spanish-American War, Puerto Rico is a semi-independent U.S. commonwealth that is associated with the U.S. but governs its own internal affairs.

Puerto Rico residents were granted U.S. citizenship in 1917, and three decades later Congress allowed the island to elect its own governor. A 1952 law established Puerto Rico as a commonwealth. For years, the biggest political issue on the island has been whether it should become a state, become completely independent or maintain its current commonwealth status.

It’s the issue marks Puerto Rico's political life, defines allegiances and drives voters to the polls at one of the highest rates in the world: the island's political status. The ruling Popular Democratic Party supports keeping the status quo as a commonwealth. The New Progressive Party would make Puerto Rico a state. A third group, the Independistas, want a clean break from the United States.

The status debate saturates local media and casual conversation daily. Elections for governor – the island's top executive post – are surrogate votes on the question and are celebrated as holidays. Observers say similar excitement surrounds the June 1 primary, the first in decades to influence the Democratic party's nomination process.

Puerto Rico has for decades fielded delegations to the national conventions of both major political parties — the Democrats give the island relatively more delegate voting strength than the Republicans. But Puerto Rico is not a state, and it doesn’t cast votes in presidential elections and it is not allocated any votes in the electoral college.

A presidential primary in Puerto Rico is far more complicated than in the states. The pro-statehood New Progressive Party, for instance, contains both a Democratic and a Republican wing, while the pro-commonwealth Popular Democratic Party includes both a Democratic and a more pro- Independence wing.

Because Puerto Rico is a semi-autonomous commonwealth and not a state, only Puerto Ricans living on the mainland can cast ballots for president in November.

Puerto Rico is represented in Congress by a resident commissioner, Luis Fortuño, who aligns with the Republican Party. He sits on the GOP side in congressional committees but — like his delegate colleagues from the District of Columbia, Guam, the Virgin Islands and American Samoa — lacks full voting power on the House floor.

The island typically has a high voter turnout: On average, 83 percent of registered voters participate in elections, compared with less than 50 percent on the mainland.

The last day to register to vote for the June 1, 2008 election in Puerto Rico was May 2, 2008. According to the State Electoral Commission of Puerto Rico, there were 2,366,674 registered voters by May 2.

About four million people live in Puerto Rico, and a roughly equal number of Puerto Ricans reside on the mainland, with the largest concentration in the three-state New York City metropolitan area.

Puerto Rico’s 2007 population of 3.94 million – not too shockingly – includes a far higher percentage of the Hispanic population than the nation as a whole, according to U.S. Census Bureau statistics.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Selected Characteristics</th>
<th>Puerto Rico</th>
<th>U.S.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Median age</td>
<td>34.7</td>
<td>36.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>52.0%</td>
<td>50.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White alone, not Hispanic or Latino</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>66.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black alone</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>12.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic or Latino</td>
<td>98.7%</td>
<td>14.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median household income</td>
<td>$17,621</td>
<td>$48,451</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign born</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persons below poverty</td>
<td>45.4%</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s degree or higher (age 25+)</td>
<td>20.7%</td>
<td>27.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median home value</td>
<td>$98,700</td>
<td>$185,200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Puerto Rico’s land area – 3,435 square miles – is nearly three times the size of Rhode Island.34
Puerto Rico's Democratic Delegates
According to its delegate selection plan, Puerto Rico has 63 delegates, of which 55 are “pledged” to back a candidate and eight are unpledged “superdelegates.”35

Puerto Rico’s 55 pledged delegates are nearly twice the combined total of Montana and South Dakota, the states with balloting on June 3 that will bring the primary season to an end.36

Never mind that the island is not a state and that residents of the commonwealth cannot vote in November's election. Puerto Rico’s June 1 primary offers more delegates - 55 - than 27 states and the District of Columbia.

How come Puerto Rico has more convention clout than such far-from-tiny states as Arkansas, Connecticut, Kansas, Oklahoma and Oregon? The short answer is that the commonwealth has more people (just under four million) and that the Democratic Party treats Puerto Rico as though it were a state.37

Since its population is about 4 million, there are actually more pledged delegates at stake in Puerto Rico (55) than in Kentucky (51), where Clinton trounced Obama on May 20.38

For decades, both major parties have allocated at least a few convention delegates to the island and U.S. possessions such as Guam, the U.S. Virgin Islands and American Samoa.

But the Democrats, as part of the national charter they enacted in 1974, mandated that Puerto Rico "shall be treated as a state." The provision was adopted largely in the hopes of wooing Latino voters on the mainland.

This year the Democratic National Committee chose to award the commonwealth a base number of 44 delegates, roughly the same as for states of similar size. In addition, Puerto Rico, like other places, received a 15 percent add-on - seven delegates - of party leaders and elected officials whose presidential affiliation is determined by the primary. And it got a four-delegate bonus for holding off on its primary until the final stages of the process. That adds up to 55 delegates - not counting eight additional unpledged superdelegates.39

Of the 55 pledged delegates, 36 are district-level delegates that are distributed among eight senatorial districts based on population. In the 50 states, district-level delegates are allocated based on the Democratic turnout in recent elections, including the 2004 presidential race. But allocating delegates by political performance is not possible in Puerto Rico, which doesn’t vote in the presidential general election and where the political parties are not the Democratic and Republican organizations on the U.S. mainland. That is why most of the pledged delegates instead are allocated to districts on the basis of population.

Each of the eight senatorial districts in Puerto Rico is assigned four to six delegates. As is the case in any other U.S. state or territory, delegates will be awarded proportionally to Clinton and Obama based on the primary vote; a candidate needs 15 percent of the vote to qualify for delegates. A six-delegate senatorial district, for example, would produce a 3-3 tie between Clinton and Obama if the winner takes less than 58.3 percent of the vote. A 4-2 delegate split would ensue if the winner takes between 58.3 percent of the vote and 75 percent of the vote.

The other 19 pledged delegates at stake include 12 “at large” delegates and seven party leaders and elected officials (known in the Democratic vernacular as PLEOs.) They will be distributed to Obama and Clinton based on how they do in the island-wide vote.40

The Republican National Committee does not treat Puerto Rico as a state. At this summer's GOP convention, the commonwealth will have 23 delegates, fewer than South Dakota or Montana, which have far smaller populations. At the GOP Convention, Puerto Rico will have more delegates than only a few states, including Delaware, Vermont and Hawaii.41
Puerto Rico’s Democratic Primary History

Puerto Rico had its most competitive presidential primary in 1980, when President Jimmy Carter was challenged for renomination by Massachusetts Sen. Edward M. Kennedy. There was affection on the island for the late President John F. Kennedy, and Edward M. Kennedy actually made a campaign visit to the island in February, one month ahead of the March 16 primary.

Carter defeated Kennedy by 52 percent to 48 percent in a contest that drew more than 870,000 Democratic votes. Pro-statehood Democrats supported Carter, while their pro-commonwealth colleagues lined up Kennedy – even though both men had declared themselves impartial on the issue. Carter’s narrow victory was generally attributed to the close division over the statehood question.

Though Kennedy lost to Carter, his showing at that time was his best performance in a presidential primary election outside of his home state of Massachusetts.

The 1984 primary lacked competition. Walter F. Mondale received 99 percent of the vote and all the delegates after Gary Hart withdrew from the primary under protest. Hart said the event was unfairly structured to favor Mondale. Jesse Jackson missed the filing deadline in 1984 and was ruled ineligible.

Puerto Rico hosted a fairly competitive Democratic presidential primary in 1988, when the Rev. Jesse L. Jackson defeated Massachusetts Gov. Michael S. Dukakis, the eventual nominee, by 29 percent to 22 percent in a mid-March race in which the other major candidates were Illinois Sen. Paul Simon (18 percent) and Tennessee Sen. Al Gore (14 percent).

In 1992, Bill Clinton won the Democratic primary in Puerto Rico by an overwhelming margin over rival Jerry Brown. Clinton won 96 percent of the vote.

Puerto Rico’s Democrats did not hold a primary in 1996. The delegation had decided to unanimously support President Bill Clinton and save money by not holding a primary.

In 2000, Vice President Al Gore secured all of the delegates from Puerto Rico before the April 9 caucuses because every candidate for the elected delegate slots had already declared themselves committed to Gore.

In 2004, John Kerry had secured the nomination long before Puerto Rico’s scheduled June caucuses; Kerry had the support of all Puerto Rico’s delegates.

In 2008, the island switched from a caucus to a primary after Super Tuesday’s inconclusive outcome prolonged the Democratic contest. The hope was that a full-scale vote would prompt candidates to make commitments on local issues.

Puerto Rico’s original plan called for selecting delegates at caucuses June 7. However, after the DNC approved the plan in December, it was discovered that the date was typo and should have read June 1, DNC officials said.
Endnotes

1 CQ TODAY ONLINE NEWS, “Five Questions About the Puerto Rico Democratic Presidential Primary,” May 27, 2008.
5 CQ TODAY ONLINE NEWS, “Five Questions About the Puerto Rico Democratic Presidential Primary,” May 27, 2008.


