



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on November 8, 2012

Puerto Rico Vote for Statehood Questioned

Puerto Rico, a U.S. territory since 1898, voted in favor of statehood for the first time Tuesday, with 61 percent of the island's voters opting for inclusion as the 51st state in a non-binding referendum. Yet the same voters gave a narrow victory in the governor's race to Alejandro Garcia Padilla, whose Popular Democratic Party opposes statehood. Padilla appears to have edged out incumbent Luis Fortuno of the New Progressive Party by less than one percent of the [vote](#).



In a two-part question, voters rejected, by 54 to 46 percent, continuation of their current commonwealth status. On the second question, 61 percent of the voters chose statehood as the alternative, with 33 percent opting for a semi-autonomous "sovereign free association" and only six percent in favor of complete independence. It was the first vote in favor of statehood, something island residents voted against in 1967, 1993, and 1998. A troubled economy and an exodus of residents from the island had a significant effect on the vote this time, Puerto Rico Secretary of State Kenneth McClintock [told](#) Cable News Network.

"I think people just came to realize that the current relationship simply does not create the number of jobs that we need," McClintock said, noting that 58 percent of Puerto Ricans now live on the U.S. mainland. "When you have a political status that scares away half of your population, it is time to reject that political status," he said.

Not everyone on the island is convinced, however, that statehood is truly the choice of a majority of the residents. Some say the question concerning the continuation of the commonwealth status was badly worded, leading many to vote "no." The choice of alternatives was left blank on a third of all ballots cast. And the option favored by the Popular Democratic Party — to consider a report by the Obama administration, offering several options to the status quo, before voting on an alternative — was not on the ballot.

Puerto Rico residents were made citizens of the United States in 1917, nearly 20 years after the U.S. captured the island from Spain in the Spanish-American War. The island is not included in the Electoral College, however, so its residents cannot vote in presidential elections. They are represented in Congress only by a non-voting [resident commissioner](#) in the House of Representatives. Tuesday's vote was non-binding, though it would likely have some influence on members of Congress. Statehood for the island would require a two-thirds affirmative vote in each chamber.

Given the tax and spending issues currently facing the nation, with existing tax cuts due to expire in the coming "Taxmageddon" of January and a sequester threatening continued funding of both military and social programs, statehood for Puerto Rico appears likely to remain on the back burner for the time being — at least until Puerto Ricans themselves more clearly sort out the option they prefer.

"It isn't clear what change we want," Jorge Benitez, a political science professor at the University of Puerto Rico-Rio Piedras told CNN, "but we want change."



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