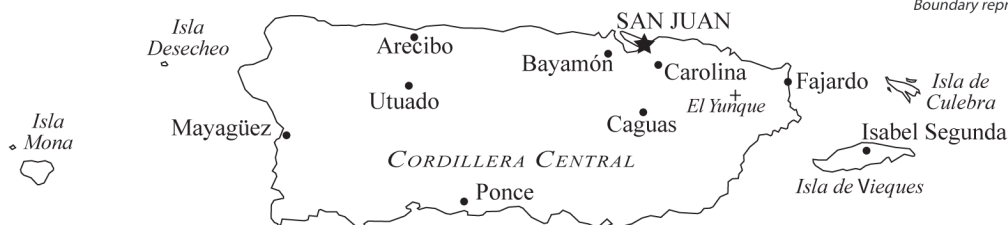




Boundary representations are not necessarily authoritative.



## BACKGROUND

### Land and Climate

Area (sq. mi.): 5,324

Area (sq. km.): 13,790

Puerto Rico is about the same size as Montenegro or as the U.S. states of Delaware and Rhode Island combined. Its territory includes the islands of Culebra, Vieques, Desecheo, and Mona. The waters between Isla Mona (Mona Island) and the capital, San Juan, form a key shipping lane for vessels heading to the Panama Canal. San Juan has one of the Caribbean's best natural ports. The island of Puerto Rico is characterized by the Cordillera Central (a high central mountain range), a dry southern coast, fertile northern coastal plains, low eastern mountains, and El Yunque rain forest. Relatively little land, roughly 7 percent, is available for cultivation. The coastal plains are densely populated.

Widespread deforestation of the island in the early 1900s combined with the current level of industrialization and population density have left few animal species remaining in the wild. The government has set aside land to protect the nation's flora and fauna.

Puerto Rico's climate is mildly tropical, with warm and sunny weather. Rain falls mainly between May and December; it is moderate in coastal regions and heavier in the mountains. The island is often affected by excessive rains that accompany regional storms. Temperatures average 70 to 80°F (21–27°C) year-round. Several destructive hurricanes have hit the island.

### History

#### *Indigenous People and Colonization*

The indigenous Taíno people were living in Puerto Rico when Columbus arrived in 1493. He named the island San Juan Bautista and claimed the island for Spain at that time, but colonization did not begin in earnest until 1508. The Spanish introduced slavery and diseases that decimated the indigenous population. In 1511, thousands of Taíno were killed and thousands more fled the island after a failed revolt. European settlers began to import African slaves in 1513. Slavery was not abolished until 1873.

The Spanish-appointed governor strictly controlled Puerto Rico. Despite protests, few promised reforms were ever implemented. An increasing sense of frustration led Puerto Ricans to rebel. The 1868 revolt, El Grito de Lares, ended swiftly and brutally, leaving hundreds of protesters dead. However, Spain began to slowly open the political process until in 1897 it granted Puerto Rico self-rule under the leadership of Luis Muñoz Rivera.

#### *Association with the United States*

Self-governance was short-lived, for in 1898, as part of the Spanish-American War, the United States invaded the island and conquered its Spanish defenders. Spain ceded the island to the United States that same year. In 1917, Puerto Rico officially became a U.S. territory and its people were granted citizenship.

In 1946, President Harry S. Truman appointed Jesús Toribio Piñero as the first governor who had been born on the island. Two years later, Puerto Ricans directly elected a

governor, Luis Muñoz Marín. Puerto Rico became a commonwealth of the United States, with its own constitution in July 1952.

Opposition to commonwealth status has at times erupted into violence. In 1954, militants from Puerto Rico shot several congressional representatives in Washington, D.C., during a session of the House of Representatives. Since then, political groups have occasionally debated the island's status and its relationship with the United States. Puerto Ricans today remain divided by the issue of whether to request U.S. statehood or remain a commonwealth. A small group advocates full independence. Plebiscites in 1967 and 1993 approved the commonwealth status, but the margin of victory in 1993 was slim. A non-binding vote in 1998 also favored staying a commonwealth, although 47 percent of voters favored statehood.

#### **Political Issues**

In May 2003, the U.S. Navy pulled out of the Island of Vieques, where it had been practicing bombing for more than 50 years. Eventually the land owned by the Navy will become a wildlife refuge. Although the base had been an economic boon to the island, residents opposed the Navy's presence.

In 2006, street protests were sparked by the implementation of Puerto Rico's first sales tax, aimed to alleviate budget deficits like the one that led to temporary closure of the island's public schools and most public agencies. Luis Fortuño, an advocate for statehood, was elected governor in 2008 and announced major public spending cuts, which were also protested by many.

In 2011, Barack Obama—who has said he would respect the will of the Puerto Rican people on the question of statehood—became the first U.S. president since John F. Kennedy to officially visit the territory. Elections in November 2012 saw Fortuño lose to García Padilla, though for the first time in history, a majority of voters supported the idea of statehood in a non-binding referendum. The validity of the referendum was, however, questioned by some, who raised concerns about both the referendum's design and the interpretation of results. In any case, the U.S. Congress would have to approve Puerto Rican statehood, a move that is unlikely to happen without a Democratic majority in both houses since Puerto Rico is largely Democrat.

#### **Recent Events and Trends**

- **Economic troubles:** By the fall of 2013, Puerto Rico's long-struggling economy had worsened to the point that analysts feared it might have to default on its debt. Puerto Rico has the highest amount of debt in the United States, apart from California and New York, which have much higher populations. Governor Padilla's government has responded with unpopular austerity measures.

## **THE PEOPLE**

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### **Population**

*Population:* 3,620,897

*Population Growth Rate:* -0.65%

*Urban Population:* 99%

About 76 percent of the Puerto Rico's population is of Hispanic origin, another 7 percent is black, and others have a mixed Spanish, African, and Taíno heritage. The effects of the different cultures can be seen in the island's music, arts, food, and traditions. About one-third of the population lives in the greater area of San Juan, which includes Bayamón and Carolina. Roughly 1.5 million Puerto Ricans live in the United States, many in New York City, a destination for emigrants. Migration rates generally fluctuate relative to the strength of the U.S. economy. People tend to emigrate when there are better work opportunities on the mainland.

### **Language**

Spanish and English share official status in Puerto Rico. For a short time in the early 1990s, Spanish was declared the only official language, but English has since regained equal status. Spanish is the language of school instruction and daily life. English is required as a second language in school and is used in business. Most people can speak English to some extent. The official status of either language often depends on the political climate surrounding Puerto Rico's relationship with the United States. The close relationship Puerto Rico shares with both the United States and English has led people to mix many English words with spoken Spanish. Locally, people call this mixed speech *Spanglish*, and it is a comfortable, informal method of communication.

### **Religion**

Roman Catholicism is the major Christian religion in Puerto Rico and claims about 85 percent of the population as members. Most of the remainder belong to various Protestant and other Christian churches, and their numbers are growing. Although there is a separation of church and state, Catholic traditions and customs prevail among the people. Puerto Ricans consider themselves religious and often attribute their good fortunes to Deity.

### **General Attitudes**

Puerto Ricans are sensitive people, quick to express sympathy and equally quick to resent a slight. They are gregarious and fond of *fiestas* (celebrations). The Puerto Rican concept of time is somewhat relaxed. If a friend, relative, or business associate drops in unexpectedly, Puerto Ricans will stop everything they are doing to visit, even if they have other commitments. They admire people who are intelligent, hardworking, dedicated, and humble. Puerto Ricans consider open criticism, aggressiveness, and greed offensive. Many believe a person's destiny is God's will, although individuals must also watch for opportunities.

Puerto Ricans value a good education, and a large number of students not only finish high school but also attend college or another institution of higher learning. Gaining a good education is considered a key to a better future. Being able to buy land for a home or business is a universal goal.

National and regional pride are strong. Political influence is desirable; individuals who have such power are admired. Though attitudes toward the U.S.–Puerto Rico relationship vary, many people are satisfied with the island's current status, fearing that independence might bring poverty and

statehood could mean a loss of cultural identity.

### Personal Appearance

Puerto Ricans take great pride in what they wear in public. Young people favor popular North American fashions and sporty styles. Sloppy, overly casual, or revealing dress is considered inappropriate. Because of the warm climate, people tend to prefer lightweight fabrics. Jeans are popular at all age levels for informal activities and outdoor work. Tennis shoes and sandals are the most commonly worn footwear. People living in interior towns may wear sweaters and jackets during winter months, as nighttime temperatures can be cool. Shorts are acceptable casual wear. However, for most parties and social gatherings more formal clothing is expected.

## CUSTOMS AND COURTESIES

### Greetings

People usually shake hands when greeting. Close friends often greet by grasping shoulders and kissing each other on the cheek. Women normally kiss women or men in this manner, but men do not greet other men this way. However, men may embrace a good friend or relative after a long absence. People stand very close when talking, and females often touch each other with their hands. Moving away, even slightly, may be considered an insult.

Although Spanish is most common, both Spanish and English greetings are used. One might hear *Good morning* or *Buenos días*, *Good afternoon* or *Buenas tardes*, *Good evening* or *Buenas noches*, and *Hi* or *Hola*. When one meets a person for the first time, it is polite to say *How are you?* or *¿Cómo está?* Young friends often begin a conversation with *¿Qué tal?*, a casual way to ask “How are you?” The language speakers use depends on the situation (e.g., on the street, in a business meeting) and the relationship between the people talking.

When addressing others in formal situations, one may use titles of respect or profession alone or in combination with a person's surname. These might include *Señor* (Mr.), *Señora* (“Mrs.” or “Ms.”), *Señorita* (Miss), *Doctor/a* (Dr.), and so on. One respectfully addresses an older person by combining the title *Don* (for men) or *Doña* (for women) with the person's first name. Friends address each other by given name or nickname. Most Puerto Ricans have two surnames in addition to one or two given names. The family name is the father's surname; this appears as the second-to-last name, while the mother's surname appears last. Therefore, a man named Victor Arocho Ramos would be called *Señor Arocho*. Women do not change their surnames when they marry.

### Gestures

One beckons by waving all fingers with the palm down; beckoning people with the palm facing up is improper. Wiggling the nose is a way of asking “What's going on?” To point, people often purse or pucker their lips in the direction they are indicating. During conversation, Puerto Ricans might interrupt each other; this generally is not considered rude. Nonverbal forms of communication, such as hand movements

and facial expressions, are very important. Although peers may tease each other in informal situations, such joking is not appropriate in formal settings.

A person can get another's attention by saying “pssst.” This is common and not rude, but if a man does it to a woman, she will usually ignore him. Men often smile and stare at women, but it is considered improper for a woman to smile indiscriminately at strangers. It is appropriate for a man to offer his seat to a woman on public transportation. On longer trips, people often share food, and refusing such an offer is impolite.

### Visiting

Visiting friends and relatives is considered a social obligation. While inviting guests to the home is not uncommon, most casual visits occur in the early evening without prior arrangement. Visits are relaxed and the entire family participates. Guests are treated to refreshments such as juice, soda, crackers, and cookies. If visitors arrive at mealtime, the hosts generally invite them to join the meal. In most cases, guests politely decline the offer a few times before finally accepting. Unannounced visits are usually short (one or two hours), but planned activities can last longer. Friends and relatives invited for dinner are expected to stay after the meal to relax and enjoy conversation with the hosts. Invited guests are not expected to bring gifts, except on special occasions. However, hosts may appreciate a gift of flowers, candy, or fruit. If offered, gifts are opened in the presence of the giver.

### Eating

Puerto Ricans eat three meals each day, and dinner is the main family meal. The eating atmosphere is relaxed and cordial. Diners always keep both hands above the table. Spoons and forks are commonly used; knives are used when appropriate. Some foods are eaten with the hands. Food left on the plate may be interpreted as a sign that the guest did not enjoy the dish. Hosts might offer second helpings when guests finish their food, but guests may politely decline.

On the street, people normally eat food near the stand where they purchase it, but it is not uncommon for people to eat while walking in public. At a restaurant, leaving a 15 percent tip is customary when service is not included in the bill.

## LIFESTYLE

### Family

Families are close-knit and supportive. Extended families usually do not share a household, but they often live in the same neighborhood or town. This proximity facilitates frequent visits and allows grandparents to provide child care when both parents work.

On average, families have three children. Parents consider themselves responsible for their children throughout life and expect to give adult children financial or emotional support if needed. Children often remain at home until they marry. Traditionally, children share the responsibility of caring for elderly parents; however, more elderly Puerto Ricans are

being placed in nursing homes, often because of medical or economic concerns.

If families emigrate to New York or elsewhere, one parent may move first and establish a home before the rest of the family joins him or her.

### Housing

Most homes, built of cinderblocks covered with stucco, are made to withstand hurricanes. Young families often begin living in a small apartment with the goal of later moving to a house with a small lawn, citrus trees, and an herb garden. The amount of land a house sits on is considered very important. Floors tend to be made of ceramic tile, which stays cool in the heat. Ceiling and portable fans are essential since air conditioners are expensive to maintain, though many homes have a small unit in one bedroom. Family pictures and paintings of typical island scenes are displayed in the main rooms of the house, while religious objects like a bust of the Virgin Mary, the cross, and a rosary may be found in bedrooms.

### Dating and Marriage

Teens begin dating in groups but eventually pair off into boyfriend-girlfriend relationships. Dates may include going to the movies or on a picnic, dancing, or spending time at the beach. In rural areas, the relationship usually does not become serious until the young man has met the young woman's parents.

Early dating leads some Puerto Ricans to marry, either formally or in a common-law partnership, at an early age (16–17). The majority of young women prefer marriage at a young age to single motherhood. However, an increasing emphasis on formal education has resulted in more Puerto Ricans marrying at a later age (19–21).

Whether a marriage is performed by a judge or in a church, a wedding is a time of great celebration and family gatherings. Families spend large amounts of money on decorations, food, and music, both traditional and modern.

### Life Cycle

Today, when naming a child it is popular to create new names by combining traditional names. For example, “Iremar” is the combination of “Irene” and “Maragarita.” Baptism in the Catholic Church happens within the first two months of a baby's life and is followed by a big family celebration. Children are given godparents (*compadre* and *comadre*), with whom they typically have a close relationship. The *quinceañera* (fifteenth birthday) marks a girl's transition into womanhood.

When the dead are buried, their tombstones often include an image of the Virgin Mary or Jesus Christ and a short message or scripture. Following the burial, Catholics hold a *novenario*, which is a daily reciting of rosary prayers. This is followed by an annual mass commemorating the day of death. Widows generally wear black or neutral colors for a brief period after the death of a husband.

### Diet

Foods in Puerto Rico come from a variety of ethnic

backgrounds, reflective of the people's mixed ancestry and colonial associations. The most commonly eaten main meal is beans and rice. Other popular dishes include *arroz con pollo* (rice and chicken), *bacalao con viandas* (boiled cod made with cassava and potatoes), *arroz con gandules y pernil* (rice with peas and roasted pork), and foods made with plantains. Plantains are a starchy banana-like fruit that must be cooked to be eaten. Chicken, pork, and beef are favorite meats. Seafood (shrimp, octopus, clams, fish) and fruits (pineapples, mangoes, bananas, papaya, grapefruit, and oranges) are also common in the diet. Pasta and fast foods tend to be popular among younger generations.

Packaged snack foods are as common as they are in the United States, but people also enjoy locally prepared snacks such as *frituras* (foods fried in oil). Popular varieties of *frituras* include *alcapurrias* (plantains with meat) and *sorulllos* (corn flour). The local flat bread typically eaten with meals, *pan sobao*, is made with flour, water, and shortening.

### Recreation

Puerto Ricans' favorite sport is baseball, but people also enjoy basketball and volleyball. Families enjoy going to the beach or the park for picnics. Fishing, bird watching, and horse riding are also popular. In their leisure time, people may visit one another or watch television or videos. Card and board games are also popular. A favorite strategy game is dominoes, in which two to four people play individually or on teams. The individual who places all of his or her tiles wins the game.

### The Arts

The arts enjoy a wide following and reflect both African and Spanish influences. Long before the United States took possession of Puerto Rico, a strong tradition of literature and music, as well as scholarship, had been established. Indeed, art and music are fostered in the home; most Puerto Ricans can play a musical instrument, and a display of musical talent is usually expected at parties. The most popular forms of music for dancing and singing include salsa, *bomba* (dance music influenced by West African rhythms and traditions), *plena* (folk music that deals with life's hardships), and *danza puertorriqueña* (Puerto Rican dance music). The prestigious Pablo Casals Festival (late May–early June) features special concerts.

Puerto Rican films and other cultural arts are known throughout the world. Among the most common folk arts are the carved religious figurines, called *santos*, which are found in almost every home. They represent the local patron saint or other Christian personages.

### Holidays

Puerto Ricans celebrate New Year's Day as part of the Christmas season. The season ends with the Day of the Three Kings (6 Jan.), when each child receives a gift. Puerto Rico celebrates both local and U.S. national holidays. Holidays include the Birth of Eugenio María de Hostos (11 Jan.), Martin Luther King Jr.'s Birthday (second Monday in January), Presidents' Day (third Monday in February), the Abolition of Slavery (22 Mar.), Easter (including Good

Friday), José de Diego's Birthday (third Monday in April), Memorial Day (last Monday in May), U.S. Independence Day (4 July), Luis Muñoz Rivera's Day (17 July), Constitution Day (25 July), José Celso Barbosa's Birthday (28 July), Labor Day (first Monday in September), All Souls' Day (2 Nov.), Discovery of Puerto Rico Day (19 Nov.), Thanksgiving, and Christmas.

An important part of the Christmas season is the *parrandas*, when groups of friends sing Christmas songs door-to-door. After they sing, the groups are usually given food and drinks in return for this entertainment.

Every town honors its patron saint annually with several days of activities, which include going to amusement parks, gambling, singing, dancing, and participating in religious ceremonies. A beauty queen is selected for almost every activity.

*Carnaval* celebrations held before Lent (during February or March) are most visible in Ponce. Lively festivities there, as well as in Arecibo and other towns, feature “monsters,” or *vejigantes*, who wear bells and elaborate papier-mâché masks with multiple horns. The *vejigantes* roam the streets, threatening to hit people on the head with a dried pig's bladder while children try to gather bells from their costumes.

## SOCIETY

### Government

*Head of State: Pres. Barack Obama (U.S.)*

*Head of Government: Gov. García Padilla*

*Capital: San Juan*

The Commonwealth of Puerto Rico has 78 municipalities. The head of state is the U.S. president, but the head of government is a locally elected governor.

As commonwealth citizens, Puerto Ricans do not pay federal income tax and do not vote in U.S. national elections, but they do elect their own officials. They are subject to the draft and receive partial welfare benefits. Puerto Ricans have no voting representation in the U.S. Congress and are restricted by federal controls in managing their territory. A locally elected resident high commissioner represents Puerto Rico in the U.S. House of Representatives. The high commissioner cannot vote but can introduce legislation, express opinions, and engage in dialogue on issues that relate to Puerto Rico.

Puerto Rico's Legislative Assembly is composed of a 27-seat Senate and a 51-seat House of Representatives. All citizens age 18 and older may vote. Puerto Rico generally has a very high voter turnout rate. Elections are held on the same schedule as in the United States. Political parties include the pro-statehood New Progressive Party, the pro-commonwealth Popular Democratic Party, and the Independence Party.

### Economy

*GDP (PPP) in billions: \$64.84*

*GDP (PPP) per capita: \$16,300*

Since World War II, industrialization and duty-free trade with

the United States have produced a dynamic economy in what used to be a poor, agrarian-dominated island. Not even 1 percent of the population is now engaged in agriculture; 50 percent works in the industrial sector. The government, services, and tourism sectors provide the remainder of the nation's jobs.

Puerto Rico exports sugar, coffee, petroleum products, chemicals, pharmaceuticals, textiles, and electronic equipment. Drawbacks to industrialization include the fact that most foods must be imported, which makes them more expensive. But U.S. investment and labor laws have improved the standard of living for most people. However, recent years have seen the economy shrink, the public deficit rise, and unemployment rates, which are usually higher than in the United States, reach nearly 16 percent. The U.S. dollar (USD) is the official currency.

### Transportation and Communications

*Internet Users (per 100 people): 74*

*Cellular Phone Subscriptions (per 100 people): 84*

*Paved Roads: NA*

Roads generally are in good condition, and most families have at least one car. Buses and taxis are available in large urban areas. *Públicos* serve most of the island. These large cars, fitting as many as six passengers, travel from each terminal to a fixed destination (with no stops in between). Air service operates domestically and internationally.

Puerto Rico has numerous radio and television stations and newspapers. Most people have telephones and benefit from a modern communications network. Cellular phone and internet use is common.

### Education

*Adult Literacy: 91%*

*Mean Years of Schooling: NA*

Education is highly valued and the school system is continually improving. Primary and secondary schooling are the same as in the United States. Children begin kindergarten at age five or six. A high school diploma, earned upon completion of the 12th grade, is necessary to get a good job or go to college.

Higher education is provided by vocational schools and several universities and colleges, including the University of Puerto Rico, with its 11 campuses and roughly 64,500 students. Other institutions include the Inter-American University, Catholic University, Turabo University, Sacred Heart University, and Puerto Rico Junior College. The literacy rate is higher among the youth than adults.

### Health

A network of urban and rural health care centers and four medical schools (one public and three private) serve Puerto Rico's medical needs. The system of health care is similar to that in the United States, although people are not always eligible for the same federal funds.

**AT A GLANCE**

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**Contact Information**

Puerto Rico Tourism Company, 666 Fifth Avenue, 15th Floor, New York, NY 10103; phone (800) 866-7827; web site [www.seepuertorico.com](http://www.seepuertorico.com).

**Country and Development Data**

Capital	San Juan
Population	3,620,897 (rank=130)
Area (sq. mi.)	5,324 (rank=161)
Area (sq. km.)	13,790
Human Development Index	NA
Gender Inequality Index	NA
GDP (PPP) per capita	\$16,300
Adult Literacy	90% (male); 91% (female)
Infant Mortality	8 per 1,000 births
Life Expectancy	75 (male); 82 (female)
Currency	U.S. dollar

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