

Public Diplomacy for Statehood: the wrongs and rights of the strategic narrative of Puerto

Ricans statehood supporters

Abstract:

Puerto Rico is known as the oldest colony in the world. Since 1898, it has been a territory not incorporated in the United States. Most recently, the call for a solution to the territorial situation is gaining traction in Congressional circles, and new narratives appear for what is the best solution for Puerto Rico. A popular one is still the call for statehood. Through the years, the statehood supporters have presented narratives that while including strong claims of democracy and human rights, fail to successfully present the case in Congress for statehood for Puerto Rico. This paper takes a look at the narrative built by statehood supporters, the principal points on why it fails and how to possibly acknowledge some of the criticism. This is done by understanding the context of a new Public Diplomacy, in an ecosystem of multiple sources of messages and narratives, and where strategic narratives take major importance, and the battle of narrative obligates narratives to be ever changing.

I. Introduction

Public diplomacy is an expanding and evolving field of study. According to the USC Center on Public Diplomacy, it is a broad term that invites multiple definitions (CPD, 2018). Nonetheless, it can be loosely defined as “the public and interactive dimension of diplomacy” that is “not only global in nature but involves a multitude of actors and networks” (CPD, 2018). This discipline is a key mechanism used by nations to gain trust and create a productive relationship with foreign audiences and other nations (CPD, 2018). Most traditionally, public

diplomacy searches to create transparent relationships with other countries, communicating with its citizens and governments to promote the national interest and advance its foreign policy goals.

This type of public diplomacy was based on an “antiquated, linear and simplistic model” of communication that saw the recipients of the messages as just passive listeners who would assimilate whatever message received as true (Goodall, Trethewey, Corman, 2008). Given years of study and technological advances, theorists have realized that those who are on the receiving end of a message have agency and are the ones who give meaning and importance to the said message (Goodall et al, 2008). As Goodall et al (2008) explain, it is a more complex way of understanding the dynamic in communications, one that is always audience-based, culturally dependent, and meaning centered. In that sense, communication is now seen as a mutual construction of meaning, or “as a tenuous joint venture informed as much by culture, ambiguity, silences, metaphor, and activity as by the clarity of a campaign of holy words, the depth of market saturation, or the righteousness of intentions” (Goodall et al., 2008). Communication happens in a set reality, a communication environment that informs the messages (Miskimmon et al, 2013). Or as Goodall et al. emphasized, communications are part of an “ongoing narrative stream that informs, surrounds and constitutes” the messages. These narratives also allow one to understand the dynamics that are seen during public affairs efforts and public diplomacy (Miskimmon et al, 2013). Miskimmon, et al., like many other scholars, believe that these narratives shape the world and the way it is understood. They also establish that these narratives are strategically used by political actors to obtain a political goal. And lastly, that the effect and flow of these narratives are affected by the communication environment in where they are

deployed. The three statements are not in contradiction to Goodall but take the discussion further into the communication ecology of the 21st century.

During this century, technology has changed the way people see and perceive the world because it has made it more transparent (Livingston, 2003). With the rise of image and information technologies, like WIFI, digital cameras, social media, information has become democratized to the point that it has changed the way narratives are built, and diplomacy executed (Livingston, 2003). What was once a linear track between government, press, people, has become more chaotic, to give space to new actors in the process of creating stories and narratives that can get global recognition (Livingston, 2003). This transformation calls for new public diplomacy, one that takes into consideration the role this non-state actor plays in communicating and engage meaningfully with foreign publics and thereby developing and promoting public diplomacy policies and practices of their own (CPD, 2018); new diplomacy that works in a new media environment, where there is no distinction between foreign and domestic, and where anyone has access to the creation and reception of messages (Hocking, 2005)

In a world where the information behaves in an ever-changing way, it is necessary to approach public diplomacy from an angle that improves the strategic communication used to fight ideas and properly communicate with audiences of foreign countries (Goodall et al., 2008). To do so, Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, and Roselle propose a new methodological frame to study narratives and the impacts they have on different audiences. The framework also allows understanding the mistakes in the narratives that set them up for failure in an ever-changing world of information. That is why, for the purpose of this paper, the territorial case of Puerto

Rico and its claim for statehood represents a unique situation to understand the mistakes in a narrative in the new ecology of information.

While Puerto Rico is not in itself an independent country, it's also not a state of the United States, creating a unique colonial relationship between the island and the United States. Puerto Rico has been a United States territory since the U.S. invasion in 1898. Because of this, Puerto Rico is engaging in a battle of narratives in the United States concerning the colonial situation of the island. To change the situation, many factions have built narratives around what Puerto Ricans want, and they have tried to find ways to sustain the claim. A strong narrative from Puerto Rico relating to the status is that Puerto Ricans want to become a state, and it has been "proven" by 3 recent democratic exercises where Puerto Ricans vote for statehood. This claim has been perceived very differently by Americans and politicians from different political parties. While the Republican party members have been consistent that they wouldn't support statehood or a change of status for Puerto Rico, the Democrats have shown support to change the territorial status of the island, even the now president Joe Biden said that he believed that statehood for PR is the right thing to do.

Amid this scenario, the Puerto Rican party for statehood, - the New Progressive Party -, and its allies have stated that they will keep fighting to bring statehood to Puerto Rico and hope that with the Democrats majority the status will change. But the support by the Democrats to the cause has been divided by the strong voice of other non-government actors in Puerto Rico that oppose statehood and believe a better solution to the territorial status is possible. These voices have gained a large amount of support and have questioned the validity of the Statehood Narrative. If statehood is to become a reality for Puerto Rico, the defenders of the ideal would

have to successfully navigate the new media ecology and create a narrative strong enough that takes into consideration the new way of public diplomacy.

II. Narratives in Public Diplomacy

Before we go into more details about the strategic narrative approach for statehood for Puerto Rico, it is necessary to understand further the role of narratives in public diplomacy.

According to Miskimmon et al, a narrative is a framework that allows humans to create connections between phenomena that may be unrelated to each other. These connections create sequences of human actions that allow us to understand the phenomena and give an overall sense of the event. A narrative entails the inclusion of actors (characters that are part of the stories told); events, plots, and time (temporal space where the action evolves); and setting and space (the place where the action takes place) (Miskimmon et al, 2013).

So, narratives are the connected stories – “particular sequence of related events that are situated in the past and recounted for rhetorical/ideological purposes”- that give meaning to the world (Halverson, Goodall & Corman, 2011; Miskimmon et al, 2013, p. 5). That is why, as storytellers, humans build the understanding of their world according to the stories they share and the way they tell it (Halverson, et al., 2011, p. 15). The events told in stories and built in narratives are specially selected or framed to reflect an interpretation of the events, an evaluation of the problem, and/or the solution to it (Miskimmon et al, 2013, p. 7) This way, narratives are passed generation through generation, creating strong ideas that can explain the present situation.

Through the use of strategic narratives, government officials and elites try to set meanings to past, present, and future events to achieve political objectives (Miskimmon et al, 2013, p.5). The use of this strategic use of narratives and its battle set the world order and the relations in the

international spheres. Miskimmon et al believe that to understand the international relationship, narratives must be distinguished from each other in three categories: system narrative, identity narratives, and issue narratives.

As defined by Miskimmon, an identity narrative is the way actors give meaning to themselves and others. It establishes one's desires, goals, intentions, credibility, reputation, etc. As many argue, identity is something diverse and multifaceted and in constant change, and therefore is reconstructed over time. It establishes how much a character, or a state - when seen from a public diplomacy perception -, understands its interests worth pursuing and who the opponents are to those interests. Nations build identity-based narratives that justify the power of the political elites. It is a construction of the self-image based on the political scenario, history, myths, symbols, language, and cultural norms.

System narratives define the relationship and the nature of the structure that upholds the world order in international affairs (Miskimmon et al, 2013, p. 7). Like in literary work, these narratives are often presented in simple binaries to understand relationships: who is good and who is evil, who is democratic or an authoritarian (Miskimmon et al, 2013, p. 62). Through the use of strategic system narratives, the countries can create a plausible narrative that resonates with the audiences and explains the ideal world order for that country. That is how countries define how the world functions. Like Miskimmon states, given that every country creates its own assessment and hope of how the world works, there is not a unified system narrative.

And lastly, issue narratives define the setting in which the actions take place. It sets the terrain where the policy is discussed. These narratives are issue-driven and search to explain the background in which the narratives affect. Sometimes, these narratives rely completely on

identity narratives, others in system narrative. There are cases where the combination of both results in the expression of an issue narrative.

In international relationships, narratives are negotiated between international actors. This gives them a fluctuating characteristic that asks for a constant evaluation of the history, reputation, understanding, and expectations of the states. In that sense, the strategic narrative would aim to constantly unify in a coherent narrative the events that reflect the identity, system, and issue narrative of a nation. For Puerto Rico and the United States, it is important to understand the narratives from each “country” in order to understand the current relationship they have and how those narratives can be used in favor to push forward the goal of statehood. As established, narratives are strong beliefs that shape the understanding of the world. No state narratives exist on their own. They find themselves competing and overlapping with other narratives. Sometimes, narratives from different countries find themselves clashing, making it difficult for the countries to succeed on their goal in the international order (Miskimmon et al, 2013, p. 102). It is in this moment that the countries find themselves in a battle of narratives and public diplomacy to legitimize their narrative (p104). Miskimmon et al. propose that for a narrative to be convincing and succeed in the battle of narratives it must have 8 aspects to consider.

Table 1. Aspect of the narrative that are contested

Aspect	Definition
Informational content	Narratives must contain information that is useful, relevant, and of interest to an audience. It must be clear, repeatable, salient and grab their attention.

Emotional content	Narratives don't just present information but lead the audience to create judgements of the nature of the characters, the problem, and the solution. Narratives must engage the audience on an emotional level, and make the audience feel an array of emotions.
Epistemology	Narratives must be based on a plausible shared way of viewing the world. It can draw from religion, laws, science, economics, or any other way of knowing the world.
Degree of Ambiguity	Words carry a level of ambiguity. But in public diplomacy, this should be intentional. They must be flexible and sufficiently ambiguous to allow the changes and understanding that audiences require from the narratives.
Relation to action	The narrative is consistent with the action of the state and its representants
Process of formation	Narratives must come from clear and legitimate processes that take into account the country's values, interests, and aspirations.
Process of projection	The messenger must be believable, have a good reputation and trustworthy. The narrative must also be shared through the right channel.
Process of reception	As the new models of communication, the messenger must allow audiences to decipher the message under their own impression and listen and attend the responses to the narrative.

These considerations are the key to a successful narrative. And while the interpretation of the narratives may not always be the same to all the audience, it can maximize its effect (Miskimmon et al, 2013, p.19).

In the situation between the United States and Puerto Rico, politicians have tried to make a strong case for statehood by appealing to United States narratives. But they haven't been completely convincing with the narrative. This paper will examine what are the narratives of interest for each country and understand why the narrative that Puerto Rico built to contest the United States has been falling.

III. The United States and Puerto Rico Narratives about the territorial status

A. Puerto Rico Narratives

Since the Spaniard invasion in 1493, Puerto Rico has only known a colonial state that percolates in every aspect of the life of Puerto Ricans. According to a psychologist in Puerto Rico, Puerto Ricans suffer from a complex of colonized citizens that have impacted not only their economic, political, and health care situation, but also their mental health and national self-esteem (Wiscovitch, 2020). Nonetheless, Puerto Ricans have learned to find a strong bond between their national identity and the culture on the island. This way, they have been able to create a parallel narrative of cultural pride, where the status and its relationship with EEUU don't take away from their culture and identity as Puerto Ricans. They have found an identity and pride in sports, beauty pageants, and other cultural encounters on a global level. So much so that promoters of statehood have promised a type of statehood in which they can enjoy this cultural independence (Pierluisi, 2020).

Although Puerto Ricans identify primarily as Puerto Ricans, they do recognize their American citizenship as an advantage and have become an important aspect of the dichotomy of Puerto Ricans identity. Given the history of poverty and violence that Puerto Ricans have endured, they are represented as resilient and brave people in the face of adversity. Communication campaigns have been created to routinely remind Puerto Ricans of the attributes they possess.

As system narratives go, Puerto Rico consciously paints its situation as one that should be bettered and attended to. It recognizes itself as a colony of the United States that has been neglected for more than 100 years. This has created an island that can't recognize its place in the world order and the exchanges that happen in it. This has created a rift between Puerto Rico and the rest of the world, but especially with its neighbor countries in Latin America. Puerto Rico is not represented in the United States but is neither thought of as part of Latin America. As so, for Puerto Ricans, Puerto Rico can feel like a territory in the Caribbean Sea with no allies.

In the speech given by Rep. Jenniffer González Colón to the House of Representatives on November 19 (González, 2020), she presents a Puerto Rico that has decided to become part of the union as a state, after three plebiscites that favored the option of statehood. She does this by appealing to the idea that Puerto Ricans are also American citizens that, while contributing to the country, have no political benefits, given that they can't vote for the president nor have proper representation in Congress. In an attempt to use the resilience and hard work of Puerto Ricans that contribute to the country in the form of science, capital or military service, she expresses that Puerto Ricans have helped build the country. Interestingly, during her speech, she also appeals to the history of Puerto Rico like a colony and how the United States has neglected to attend that

before. Lastly, it is mentioned the ideal principles of democracy in the Puerto Rican island as a reminder of the political similitude with the Country of the United States.

Table 2. Puerto Rico Narratives

Country	Identity Narratives	System Narratives	Issue Narratives
Puerto Rico	<p>Oldest Colony in the world</p> <p>Strong National pride</p> <p>American Citizens</p> <p>Resilient Country</p> <p>Brave people</p> <p>Diverse people with diverse backgrounds</p> <p>Rich and strong colorful Culture</p> <p>Democratic institutions</p> <p>Puerto Ricans are confused about their proper identity after years of colonialism</p>	<p>Not part of the world trade/ order</p> <p>Neglected colony of the United States – Territorial status with United States</p> <p>Dichotomy of being part of the Latin- Caribbean American Family vs United States Territory</p>	<p>Puerto Rico is treated as second class citizens by the United States</p> <p>Puerto Ricans are denied their rights to vote and proper representation in Congress</p> <p>United States ignores Puerto Rico’s claim for proper territorial definition</p> <p>Puerto Rico is suffering from a fiscal and humanitarian crisis because the colonial status</p> <p>The Jones Act</p> <p>The United States enforced a Fiscal Board. Puerto Rico has no fiscal or governmental sovereignty</p> <p>High necessity of federal fu A growing sentiment against statehood</p>

United States Narratives

For a long time, the United States has been seen as a country that represents democracy (Yong, 2021). Its strong foundations in the belief of a government for the people and by the people, and a Constitution that adapts the principles of a liberal democracy have given the country the recognition of being a functional healthy democracy all around the world (Yong, 2021; PEW Research, 2018). As a liberal democracy, it is a propulsor of human rights, where people are right-bearing individuals and should be treated as such (USDS, 2021). It is a country of brave citizens that doesn't give up in the face of adversities. It is a country where everyone is believed equal and has equal rights.

While the country has a recent complicated story with immigration, it is also true that the United States, for the most part, has believed that it grows stronger with the contributions of immigrants and citizens from diverse backgrounds to different aspects of the country. And that is why one of its identity narratives is a country built by immigrants that worked hard for their dreams. A country of fighters for what is right.

These ideals of American exceptionalism can also be seen in its approach to system narratives that are relevant to its situation with Puerto Rico. They are defenders of democracy. They will protect human rights and fight for the rise of democracy in the whole world, because it is in what they believe and who they are. They are guides for other countries' injustice, rights, and hope. For many times, they've pledged their forces to defend those who can't fight for themselves, but also their freedom.

Table 3. United States Narratives

Country	Identity Narratives	System Narratives	Issue Narratives
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<p>United States</p>	<p>Stronghold of democracy</p> <p>A melting pot- Country of immigrants</p> <p>Government by and for the people</p> <p>Country founded in equal rights</p> <p>Strong Constitution</p> <p>Land of the Brave -</p> <p>Freedom Fighters- Strong army</p> <p>Country of dreamers -Hardworkers make their own future</p> <p>American Exceptionalism</p>	<p>The United States spread democracy around the world</p> <p>The United States has to defend the “underdogs” countries from menace to their democracies</p> <p>United States support the enactment of Human Rights and Equality in other countries</p> <p>The United States represents hope and justice for countries around the world</p>	<p>U.S neglects Puerto Rican’s statehood democratic process</p> <p>U.S. invaded Puerto Rico in 1898, and has kept it as a colony ever since</p> <p>The U.N. declared that U.S. have to end colonial status</p> <p>Puerto Rico’s extreme poverty and political instability vs Puerto Rico has become a fiscal paradise for USA rich citizen</p> <p>The US congress established a Fiscal Board in PR. (Antidemocratic)</p> <p>Imperialism</p>
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All these narratives create a United States that conflicts with itself when dealing with Puerto Rico. That is why the fighters for statehood for Puerto Rico use those same narratives of democracy, social and political justice, and equality to create a connection between Puerto Rico and the United States. The narratives selected by statehood supporters look to appeal to the

United States by reminding that Puerto Rico's statehood is the right thing the United States should do by Puerto Ricans and by their own identity. Nonetheless, the audience that Puerto Rican statehood supporters have to convince, at the moment, is a highly divided audience that searches for different things at the moment to support and get convinced by a narrative. For one side, Republicans have repeatedly ignored the call for statehood given the story of corruption and embezzlement by Puerto Rican politicians. They are also worried that statehood for Puerto Rico would give Democrats more power in Congress. Meanwhile, Democrats (who do support a change of status for Puerto Rico) are divided into what could be the best way to proceed with the island given the history of voter fraud that clouds the democratic exercises that ask for statehood.

In this disjunctive, Puerto Rico finds itself trying to build a narrative that contests both arguments against statehood for Puerto Rico.

IV. Narrative Contestation: Statehood for Puerto Rico

While many attempts have been made to better the territorial status of Puerto Rico, it is the first time that Puerto Rico holds three consecutive plebiscites asking for statehood, and a Congress debating between different projects that would change the status. In different instances, the representatives of Puerto Rico have been able to address members of Congress in favor of statehood. The most recent example was during the Full Committee Insular Legislative Hearing on Puerto Rico from April 14th of 2021. During this hearing, statehood supporters (including Commissioner Resident Jenniffer González and Governor Pedro Pierluisi) were able to share with the committee the reasons they should pass a bill designed to offer statehood to Puerto Rico (NaturalResourcesDems, 2021).

They presented a narrative that called on the United States, the banner of democracy, to accept the democratic process that took place on the island and allow Puerto Rico to join the United States as a state. On the last referendum of Puerto Rico, the statehood supporters reaffirm that Puerto Ricans want statehood. The referendum showed that 52% of voters were in favor of it. Besides the democratic call, they've also assured that as a country with a strong Constitution that reaffirms humans' equal rights, statehood is the right path for the country. They understand the request for statehood is one for equality. As history proves, the United States must hear the claims of equality, as it did during the Civil Rights Movements, because having second-class citizens would go against the constitution and the founding fathers.

Likewise, they have appealed to the patriotic sense. Since Puerto Ricans are American citizens who have served in the military and have contributed greatly to the victories and defense of the country, Puerto Ricans and the veterans that served deserve fair treatment in the eyes of the government, where their voices are heard.

While those factors are credible, it was the same narrative presented before that was not able to successfully attend to growing issues Democrats and Republicans had with the idea of statehood for Puerto Rico. But also, they ignored the growing Puerto Rican forces that oppose their narrative. Given the current communication ecosystem, these anti-narratives have been getting stronger and making it difficult for statehood supporters to hold their narrative. And in order to succeed in the battle of narrative, they must be able to build a narrative that proves convincing to at least Democrats and Republicans, and where there is no space left for rival narratives from Puerto Ricans.

Table 4. Aspects of Narrative Contestation that are convincing and unconvincing from the statehood narrative

What Aspect of the narrative is contested	Convincing	Unconvincing
Informational Content		52% is not a vast majority of Puerto Ricans, taking into consideration that only less than the 50% of voters participated in the referendum.
Emotional Content	The reminder of the mistreatment of fellow American citizens by denying equal rights is something that many liberal and progressive democrats take into consideration when supporting statehood for Puerto Rico.	
Epistemology		<p>Puerto Rico is a conservative Island, given to its Christian roots. Giving statehood to PR would mean having another state that may be Republican.</p> <p>Puerto Ricans don't share many cultural similarities with United States</p> <p>For Republicans, having another poor state that depends on federal help is not an appealing sign.</p>
Degree of ambiguity	While the message is targeted to democrats for the most part, the reminder of the military service by Puerto Ricans can appeal to Republicans	
Relation to action	The United States have called themselves defenders of democracy and have justified their actions around the world with "democracy".	The United States does not always obey its own rules of democracy and Human Rights.

<p>Process of formation</p>	<p>The NPP has been one of the biggest political parties in Puerto Rico for at least 100 years.</p>	<p>The history of voting fraud and corruption in the island has made it difficult to project a trusty image to the United States, in political and economic terms.</p> <p>The voting process in the island has also been followed by claims and demonstration of voting fraud and suppression, making the results of the referendums untrustful.</p> <p>Many Puerto Ricans reject the narrative that is built around statehood.</p>
<p>Process of projection</p>	<p>Pierluisi, current governor of Puerto Rico, has really good relationships with the Democratic party in the United States. He is respected by his colleagues, given his years of service in Congress</p>	<p>Puerto Rican’s politicians have earned the fame of being corrupted and untrustworthy.</p>
<p>Process of reception</p>	<p>Puerto Rico has allowed the United States official to create their own opinions based on their identities (democratic, patriotic, human rights).</p>	<p>The dual messages to Puerto Rican audiences feed the idea that Puerto Rico needs more federal funds.</p>

The narrative of statehood supporters, after careful analysis, appears to be unconvincing to both Democrats and Republicans. Even though one important aspect of the pro-statehood

narrative is the claim that an immersive majority of Puerto Ricans have asked for statehood in different plebiscites (2012, 2017, 2020), the evidence of each plebiscite signals that none of them are representative data of Puerto Rico (Varela, 2021). This has raised the concern of Democrats and Republicans alike because of the long-standing story of voting fraud that has made politicians distrust any result that could come from the island. (Varela, 2021). Some of those politicians are important progressive voices in the media that hold a huge impact on progressive democrats all around the country, like Nydia Velázquez and Alexandra Ocasio Cortez.

This distrust is further explored when the process of projection of the narrative is analyzed. When talking about projection, it is expected that the messengers have standing and are backed by honesty and credibility (Miskimmon et al, 2013). Governor Pedro Pierluisi and Jennifer González enjoy good relationships with the members of Congress. And while Jennifer González is a Republican that has been questioned for her inconstancy on some issues, she is still highly respected by her Republican colleagues. Now, Pedro Pierluisi and Jennifer González both are aligned to the New Progressive Party (NPP) a party that has slowly lost support from Puerto Ricans given the history of corruption. The party has been marked by arrests of mayors, representatives, senators, heads of agencies and other public employees accused and convicted of embezzlement, theft, and corruption of power (Primera Hora, 2019). And as US Attorney Stephen W. Muldrow said, "public corruption poses a threat to our democratic institutions and erodes trust in government" (TelemundoPR, 2020). Their affiliations with the party and some acts of nepotism have made it every time more difficult to progressive Democrats to believe in their word.

When looking for the epistemology factors of the narrative, different levels of the message are not congruent with the way the audiences, especially Republicans, see the world. From a

cultural standpoint, Republicans mentioned during the hearing, Puerto Rico is politically and culturally too different from the United States, believing that the Puerto Ricans are not ready for the possible cultural clash that would be inevitable in politics and other aspects of statehood (NaturalResourcesDems, 2021). From an economic perspective, a fiscal conservative American doesn't see value in adding a corrupt territory, in debt and that is slowly losing its young workforce. It would represent a huge cost for the country and a great amount of the older population that is not able to produce (Milligan, 2018). Republicans see Puerto Rico as a federal funds blackhole.

This idea is not successfully contested by the statehood supporters but fed by the narrative pro-statehood in Puerto Rico. A constant campaign promise from statehood supporters to Puerto Ricans is an increase of federal funds to Puerto Rico. During the recent natural crises in Puerto Rico, Governor Pedro Pierluisi, Resident Commissioner Jenniffer González and other statehood allies in Congress have emphasized the importance of helping the American citizens on the island with statehood and more federal funds for education, Medicaid, and crisis relief expenses (González, 2021). This narrative further alienates Republicans, who -like said before- believe that statehood for Puerto Rico is an increase of federal funds to a corrupt island. It is important to highlight that in the new ecosystem of communication, non-governmental actors can create counternarratives that challenge the one that is being shared by the political elite, like the Commissioner Resident and the Governor. With the help of social media, op-ed in digital media, videos and other activities, different sectors of Puerto Ricans that believe in other options have strongly criticized the narrative pro-statehood. These actors are the one that constantly raise the question of the validity of the votes and make sure that progressive leaders listen to them. They have also worked hard to keep relevant the corruption that the party and its

members are guilty of. They have created a strong contra argument to the statehood narrative: “The data don’t represent the truth, they are corrupt, they’ve been feeding on our money. Let’s do a process that is truly democratic”. And is in this way that many Puerto Ricans support other bills of decolonization, ignoring the pro-statehood narrative.

V. What can be done?

The new ecology of communication has proven a challenge for pro-statehood supporters. They struggle to produce a coherent narrative that is convincing for Democrats, Republicans, and other Puerto Ricans. And even though creating such a narrative is a difficult task because a communication strategy alone cannot overcome faulty decisions and problematic policies (Goodall, Trethewey, Corman, 2008), some mistakes are possible to correct. By utilizing the theory for strategic narratives for Narrative Contestation and the principles of counter-messaging, it will be possible to create a cohesive, clear yet ambiguous, and honest narrative.

The first step would be to set a plausible goal for our narrative. Goals have to be achievable and set in reality. Given the bigger goal is to gain statehood for Puerto Rico, the goal for the counter-message should be to create a convincing counter-message for Republicans and Democrats in Congress that oppose statehood.

The second step would be based on setting the audience to whom the message will be directed. In this new era of information, one must remember that even people that are not necessarily intended to be the audience could become an audience. That is why it is important to create a message thinking about our audience and goal, but also the peripheries of the audience. For this specific situation, the audience should be Republicans in Congress and a separate

audience Progressive Democrats. The audience in the peripheries that should be thought about is sectors of Puerto Rico that may or may not support statehood and that are interested in the topic. In the third place, the model calls for a design of a message that is aligned with the audience. According to the analysis of narrative contestation, it is possible to identify the points that should be touched on for each audience. For the progressive Democrats, it would be important to eliminate from the narrative created by statehooders the words and synonyms of “immense majority”. It would be intellectually honest for statehood supporters to accept that 52% is not an immense majority, but a democratic simple majority. In democracies, decisions are taken by a simple majority. By acknowledging this simple but big change, it allows a message honest and transparent to multiple audiences.

When talking about the messaging for Republicans, it is important to understand the strong opinion they have of Puerto Rican politicians. After the natural disasters, Puerto Rico became a center for scandals surrounding federal funds. But also, Republicans understand the fear of losing more power by granting statehood to a country that may be Democrat. That is why the best approach to build a message for Republicans would be through highlighting the contribution Puerto Rico makes for the country and minimizing any possible mention of federal funds. Republicans should be remembered for the military service and the victories Puerto Rican soldiers have brought to the United States. It also should be highlighted that the cultural structure of Puerto Rico is a conservative one, and that, in any case, Puerto Rico would become important votes for the electoral college and their political wins (Flores, 2021). Puerto Rico would become a fiscal and social conservative swing vote.

The fourth step would be to find the perfect messengers for the distribution of the narrative. While Pierluisi and González are both respected politicians by their colleagues, in the

eyes of many they are tainted by the party's history. That is why Pedro Pierluisi and Jenniffer González should reinforce the notion that they are fighting for statehood, not in the name of their party or backed by their party, but because of a democratic mandate by the Puerto Ricans. Also, in a world where the elites are not the only ones that contribute to the creation and dissemination of narratives, statehooders should bet on other actors – political organizations not affiliated with the NPP to share the message and give a new validity to the claim with new messengers. Lastly, Statehooders must create a message that is consistent and delivered through the right channels. This involves planning strategically to be able to deliver the message in a timeline manner and in a way that proposes discussion in Congress, but also through the population of the United States and Puerto Rico. This would include not only inserting the new points in national outlets through op-ed and opinion pieces but by inserting the topic through the new lenses in social media.

In the battle of narratives for the proper solution of the territorial status of Puerto Rico, winning the battle of narratives is an important role on which lives depend. That is why a valid solution to the territorial status of Puerto Rico shouldn't have a strategic narrative that is not coherent, clear, and convincing. The call to solve Puerto Rico's status situation has been long overdue, and it is up to statehood supporters to present a valid claim for a valid solution. Time has changed, and linear ways of communicating your ideas are not effective. Narratives are contested, and supporters of statehood have to be prepared to strategically present a cohesive narrative that defends the ideal. By properly identifying the strong component of the narratives of each country, finding the weak spot of one's narrative, and creating a proper plan of counter-messaging, statehood supporters could sustain validity to a claim that is about democracy and human rights.

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