

# Puerto Rican Citizen Voting-Age Population in 2019

**RESEARCH BRIEF**

By: *Carlos Vargas-Ramos*

Issued October 2020

Centro DS2020-10

The Puerto Rican population that is eligible to register to vote in the United States—because they are citizens of the United States and 18 years of age or older—continued to grow in 2019. According to an analysis of recently released survey data from the U.S. Census Bureau, the Puerto Rican population in the United States that is potentially able to participate in the elections is more than four million.



While nationally Puerto Ricans represented 1.7 percent of the voting-eligible population, this proportion varied by state, raging between 1 percent in Ohio and nearly 8 percent in Connecticut, among the states with the largest Puerto Rican populations in the country. Puerto Ricans, therefore, represent a non-trivial segment of the electorate in highly competitive states such as Florida, Ohio and Pennsylvania. The data for the present analysis derives from one-year estimates of the 2019 American Community Survey, the most recent data released by the Census Bureau, as well as data from the same survey for 2015,

2017 and 2018.

In 2019, there were an estimated 4,083,332 Puerto Ricans in the United States who were potentially eligible to vote because they were of voting-age (18 years of age or older) and U.S. citizens by virtue of the political relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States.<sup>1</sup> In order for these four million Puerto Ricans to become actual voters they need to register to vote, the ultimate requirement for eligibility.

**Table 1. Puerto Rican Share of the Voting Eligible Population 2015-2019**

	2015	2017	2018	2019
<b>United States</b>	<b>1.6</b>	<b>1.7</b>	<b>1.7</b>	<b>1.7</b>
Connecticut	7.3	7.5	7.6	7.9
Florida	5.3	5.4	5.6	5.6
Illinois	1.5	1.6	1.6	1.6
Massachusetts	4.2	4.4	4.5	4.6
New Jersey	5.5	5.2	5.5	5.2
New York	5.7	5.7	5.7	5.8
Ohio	0.9	0.9	1.0	1.0
Pennsylvania	2.9	2.9	3.2	3.2
Virginia	1	1	1.2	1.2

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2015, 2017-2019 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates

Nationally, Puerto Ricans were 1.7 percent of the voting-age, citizen population. But they exceeded this proportion in six of nine states surveyed, including highly competitive states such as Florida and Pennsylvania (see Table 1). These states with Puerto Rican overrepresentation among the voting eligible population were: Connecticut (7.9%), New York (5.8%), Florida (5.6%), New Jersey (5.2%), Massachusetts (4.6%) and Pennsylvania (3.2%).

The four million Puerto Ricans in the United States who were potentially eligible to vote in 2019 represented a 4.7 percent increase since 2017 and a 10 percent increase since 2015, when the 3.7 million Puerto Ricans reached voting-age (see Table 2). States with the fastest growing Puerto Rican voting eligible population between 2017 and 2019 were Virginia (11%), Pennsylvania (9.4%), Florida (5.9%), Connecticut (5%), which included some of the states with the most competitive elections in recent cycles.

The growth of the Puerto Rican population potentially eligible to vote also increased slightly faster (4.7%) than the growth of the Puerto Rican population in the United States overall (4.3%) from 2017 to 2019. This pattern of growth is evident not only nationally but also in many of the states with the most Puerto Ricans in the country (see Table 3). Thus, while the growth of the overall Puerto Rican popula-

tion in Massachusetts was 1.8 percent between 2017 and 2019, the Puerto Rican voting eligible population grew by 4.7 percent. Similarly, while the overall Puerto Rican population in Ohio grew by 3.3 percent, the Puerto Rican voting eligible population grew 4.8 percent.

**Table 2. Puerto Rican Voting Eligible Population Growth, 2017 - 2019**

	Rate of Growth 2017-2019
<b>United States</b>	<b>4.7</b>
Connecticut	5.0
Florida	5.9
Illinois	4.7
Massachusetts	4.7
New Jersey	-3.7
New York	-0.4
Ohio	4.8
Pennsylvania	9.4
Virginia	11.0

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2017-2019 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates

**Table 3. Puerto Rican Population Growth 2017-2019**

	2017	2018	2019	Percent Change 2017-2018	Percent Change 2018-2019	Percent Change 2017-2019
<b>United States</b>	<b>5,588,664</b>	<b>5,791,453</b>	<b>5,828,706</b>	<b>3.6</b>	<b>0.6</b>	<b>4.3</b>
Connecticut	291,603	298,006	302,027	2.2	1.3	3.6
Florida	1,128,225	1,187,437	1,190,891	5.2	0.3	5.6
Illinois	195,046	206,543	207,109	5.9	0.3	6.2
Massachusetts	334,959	329,713	340,893	-1.6	3.4	1.8
New Jersey	470,640	488,181	455,615	3.7	-6.7	-3.2
New York	1,113,123	1,070,071	1,096,823	-3.9	2.5	-1.5
Ohio	126,554	137,104	130,700	8.3	-4.7	3.3
Pennsylvania	445,442	477,312	493,255	7.2	3.3	10.7
Virginia	96,085	106,886	106,781	11.2	-0.1	11.1

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2017 - 2019 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates

Nationally, Puerto Ricans represented 1.7 percent of the voting-age (citizen) population and 13.2 percent of the Hispanic electorate in 2019.<sup>2</sup> Puerto Ricans represented the majority of the Hispanic voting eligible population in three states: Connecticut (62.6%), Pennsylvania (57.3%) and Massachusetts (50.2%). Puerto Ricans also exceeded their national proportion of the Hispanic voting eligible population in New York (38.4%), Ohio (35.9%), New Jersey (33.6%), Florida (27%) and Virginia (20.2%).

Generally, the growth of the Hispanic voting-age citizen population tended to be greater than the Puerto Rican voting eligible population (see Table 4). In the states with most Puerto Ricans in the country, Puerto Rican (citizen) voting-age population growth was 4.7 percent between 2017 and 2019 compared to 7 percent for all Hispanics. However, in Virginia (11%), Ohio (4.8%), and Pennsylvania (9.4%) the growth of that segment of the Puerto Rican population was faster than for Hispanics overall (8.7%, 5.6% and 10.1%, respectively) (see Table 5).

**Table 4. Hispanic Share of the Voting Eligible Population 2015-2019**

	2015	2017	2018	2019
<b>United States</b>	<b>11.7</b>	<b>12.4</b>	<b>12.8</b>	<b>13.1</b>
Connecticut	11.2	11.7	12.3	12.6
Florida	18.6	19.8	20.5	20.8
Illinois	10.4	11.2	11.7	12.2
Massachusetts	7.9	8.7	8.9	9.2
New Jersey	14.2	14.8	15.4	15.5
New York	14.1	14.6	14.8	15.2
Ohio	2.4	2.6	2.7	2.7
Pennsylvania	4.7	5.1	5.4	5.6
Virginia	5.1	5.4	5.5	5.7

**Table 5. Hispanic Voting Eligible Population Growth 2017-2019**

	2017	2018	2019	Percent Change 2017-2018	Percent Change 2018-2019	Percent Change 2017-2019
<b>United States</b>	<b>28,777,653</b>	<b>29,826,572</b>	<b>30,778,042</b>	<b>3.6</b>	<b>3.2</b>	<b>7.0</b>
Connecticut	306,204	321,257	329,594	4.9	2.6	7.6
Florida	2,976,237	3,141,934	3,229,500	5.6	2.8	8.5
Illinois	1,018,331	1,064,834	1,106,567	4.6	3.9	8.7
Massachusetts	436,238	448,318	465,240	2.8	3.8	6.6
New Jersey	918,336	957,045	954,992	4.2	-0.2	4.0
New York	2,029,519	2,033,344	2,094,324	0.2	3.0	3.2
Ohio	226,666	237,803	239,267	4.9	0.6	5.6
Pennsylvania	500,784	527,340	551,612	5.3	4.6	10.1
Virginia	329,257	343,754	358,027	4.4	4.2	8.7

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2015, 2017-2019 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates

While at the national level, the share of the Puerto Rican (citizen) voting-age population appeared level between 2017 and 2019 (at 1.7%) (see Table 6), its growth was faster than for non-Hispanic whites, blacks, and comparable to the growth of Asians (see Table 7). At the state level, the growth of the Puerto Rican voting eligible population was greater than among the non-Hispanic white population in the nine states with most Puerto Ricans in the country, it was greater than for black Americans in six of those states, and greater than for Asian Americans in four of those states (see Appendix, Tables A1, A2 and A3).

The Puerto Rican voting eligible population continues to grow and it does so in both states competitive at election time as well as in states which tend to favor one political party over another. While Puerto Ricans in highly competitive states should be a desirable target for political parties looking for an electoral advantage, they nevertheless provide an overall advantage as a growing constituency in need of consistent mobilization. This mobilization is the purported purview of political parties; but in their absence or neglect, locally-based or in-group civil society associations may want to take up the slack in activating a growing segment of the population.

**Table 6. Citizen, Voting-Age Population by Ethnic Group in the United States**

	2015	2017	2018	2019
<b>Puerto Rican</b>	<b>1.6</b>	<b>1.7</b>	<b>1.7</b>	<b>1.7</b>
Hispanic	11.7	12.4	12.8	13.1
Non-Hispanic White	69.1	68	67.4	67
Black	12.7	12.8	12.8	12.9
Asian	4.1	4.3	4.4	4.5

**Table 7. Citizen, Voting-Age Population Growth by Ethnic Group in the United States**

	2017-2019
<b>Puerto Rican</b>	<b>6.5</b>
Hispanic	7
Non-Hispanic White	0.2
Black	2.5
Asian	6.4

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2015, 2017-2019 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates

# Appendix

Table A1. Non-Hispanic White Voting Eligible Population Growth 2017-2019

	2017	2018	2019	Percent Change 2017-2018	Percent Change 2018-2019	Percent Change 2017-2019
<b>United States</b>	<b>157,336,388</b>	<b>157,538,871</b>	<b>157,717,987</b>	<b>0.1</b>	<b>0.1</b>	<b>0.2</b>
Connecticut	1,929,266	1,919,416	1,897,088	-0.5	-1.2	-1.7
Florida	9,256,799	9,325,209	9,388,752	0.7	0.7	1.4
Illinois	6,193,023	6,155,989	6,117,633	-0.6	-0.6	-1.2
Massachusetts	3,930,307	3,920,473	3,911,205	-0.3	-0.2	-0.5
New Jersey	3,905,106	3,866,635	3,835,196	-1.0	-0.8	-1.8
New York	8,648,132	8,553,329	8,524,766	-1.1	-0.3	-1.4
Ohio	7,296,341	7,294,535	7,293,876	0.0	0.0	0.0
Pennsylvania	7,920,358	7,890,171	7,873,298	-0.4	-0.2	-0.6
Virginia	4,162,850	4,175,696	4,166,730	0.3	-0.2	0.1

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2017-2019 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates

Table A2. Black Voting Eligible Population Growth 2017-2019

	2017	2018	2019	Percent Change 2017-2018	Percent Change 2018-2019	Percent Change 2017-2019
<b>United States</b>	<b>29,552,874</b>	<b>29,859,672</b>	<b>30,279,445</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>1.4</b>	<b>2.5</b>
Connecticut	258,520	265,142	276,252	2.6	4.2	6.9
Florida	2,263,285	2,302,492	2,330,705	1.7	1.2	3.0
Illinois	1,343,504	1,332,512	1,335,520	-0.8	0.2	-0.6
Massachusetts	328,213	337,379	348,589	2.8	3.3	6.2
New Jersey	858,691	854,268	856,874	-0.5	0.3	-0.2
New York	2,157,160	2,139,909	2,152,967	-0.8	0.6	-0.2
Ohio	1,037,355	1,040,599	1,052,562	0.3	1.1	1.5
Pennsylvania	1,016,974	1,013,276	1,038,791	-0.4	2.5	2.1
Virginia	1,205,957	1,222,486	1,238,107	1.4	1.3	2.7

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2017-2019 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates

**Table A3. Asian Voting Eligible Population Growth 2017-2019**

	2017	2018	2019	Percent Change 2017-2018	Percent Change 2018-2019	Percent Change 2017-2019
<b>United States</b>	<b>10,027,256</b>	<b>10,376,975</b>	<b>10,672,920</b>	<b>3.5</b>	<b>2.9</b>	<b>6.4</b>
Connecticut	80,707	81,519	86,316	1.0	5.9	6.9
Florida	336,951	350,164	352,200	3.9	0.6	4.5
Illinois	379,680	386,422	398,896	1.8	3.2	5.1
Massachusetts	225,420	244,395	244,675	8.4	0.1	8.5
New Jersey	458,272	457,244	464,742	-0.2	1.6	1.4
New York	912,367	922,184	921,239	1.1	-0.1	1.0
Ohio	109,446	123,266	132,192	12.6	7.2	20.8
Pennsylvania	219,662	232,421	238,614	5.8	2.7	8.6
Virginia	303,091	320,693	326,275	5.8	1.7	7.6

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2017 -2019 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The U.S. Congress extended statutory U.S. citizenship to Puerto Ricans in 1917, and birthright citizenship in 1940. More than two-thirds of Puerto Ricans in the United States were born in one of the fifty states; thirty percent were born in Puerto Rico.

<sup>2</sup> Puerto Ricans represented 9.6% of the total Hispanic population in the United States in 2019.

**The Center for Puerto Rican Studies (Centro)** is the nation’s leading university-based institution devoted to the interdisciplinary study of the Puerto Rican experience in the United States. Centro is dedicated to understanding, preserving and sharing the Puerto Rican experience in the United States. Centro invites Centro Voices contributors to make use of the extensive archival, bibliographic and research material preserved in its Library and Archives.

**The Centro Library and Archives** is devoted to collecting, preserving and providing access to resources documenting the history and culture of Puerto Ricans. The Centro Library and Archives was established in 1973 as a component of the Center for Puerto Rican Studies. The collections include books, current and historic newspapers and periodicals, audio, film & video, manuscripts, photographs, art prints, and recorded music. The Library and Archives provides services and programs to the scholarly community as well as the general public. Constituents are diverse and come from the United States and abroad. The Library and Archives facilitates access to information on its holdings through the City University’s online public catalog or CUNY+. It also provides research and information assistance via phone and email.

### Centro Library and Archives

Silberman Building,  
2180 Third Avenue at 119th Street,  
Room 121, New York, N.Y. 10035  
Library: 212-396-7874  
Archives: 212-396-7877

[centropr.hunter.cuny](http://centropr.hunter.cuny)  
Follow us @centropr

**Hunter College,**  
**The City University of New York**  
695 Park Avenue, E1429  
New York, N.Y. 10065  
VoiceMail: 212-772-5688  
Fax: 212-650-3673