

The Politics of Student Activism in the State School System in Puerto Rico

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Abstract: The Politics of Student Activism in Puerto Rico

This Capstone seeks to explain the differences between student activism in Puerto Rico and its counterpart on the mainland. It applies social movement theory to understand the broader political role of the student movement in Puerto Rico and identify the causes that make it unique. Puerto Rico holds a “commonwealth” relationship with the federal government since 1952, but its status remains a hot-button issue in local politics. Local parties are aligned with certain status preferences such as statehood, independence, and preserving the current relationship. The status issue pollutes all forms of public debate, but the student movement is unique in that it offers a platform for the pro-independence minority. This phenomenon is found to be a result of the unresolved status issue in Puerto Rico, the lack of enfranchisement, and the increased polarization among politically active students in its public University of Puerto Rico. Social movement theory reveals that there is a frame that polarizes public debate and prompts gridlock in all forms of policymaking. It becomes apparent that a new paradigm is needed in Puerto Rico’s political discourse to allow for post-partisan collaboration and fruitful policy debates.

This thesis seeks to portray how the political process, resource mobilization, and framing theories of social movement can help explain the ideological nuances that are unique to student protests in the main public university system in Puerto Rico. These student protests are examined within the context of public universities in the United States, since the University of Puerto Rico (UPR) relies on essentially the same type of federal and state funding and adheres to the same

standards for accreditation.¹ Once the relationship between the grievances that present political opportunities for pro-independence or anti-incumbent nuances is established, the thesis will address the underlying issue of Puerto Rico's unresolved legal status debate and how it is imperative to address this issue promptly to allow for objective political discourse on the Island.

First, it is necessary to understand how the current fiscal situation of the University of Puerto Rico is presenting political opportunities for a student movement otherwise mobilized toward ensuring tuition affordability and accessible higher education. The following paragraphs provide context in the form of recent fiscal remedies at the state level across the continental United States and Puerto Rico. After describing the state of Puerto Rico's public university system, two state university systems – University of Maryland and University of California – will be presented as comparable cases to be examined under the same set of social movement theories.

In January 2009, newly sworn-in President Barack Obama signed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act into law. The act, also known as the “stimulus bill,” provided one-time federal funding increases that spurred infrastructure investments and sought to stabilize state budgets. This delayed otherwise immediate action to offset budget cuts and revenue shortfalls, particularly in education. Thus far, some of the most noticeable fiscal stabilization measures have pertained to state school systems, with universities suffering tuition increases, temporary enrollment fees, and across-the-board cuts in the form of hiring freezes, department shrinking, and payroll cuts.

¹ The University of Puerto Rico is accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education. A case study for this thesis, the University of Maryland, adheres to the same accreditation standards. (See www.msche.org).

Some states managed to get by on “a lot of belt tightening but few drastic cuts.”² However, spending freezes and budget cuts were insufficient to prepare school districts and state universities from the inevitable expiration of stimulus funds. By mid-2010, fiscal stabilization blueprints became commonplace. Puerto Rico was no exception. During the spring semester in 2010, the University of Puerto Rico, which operates 11 campuses throughout the Island, announced a set of budget-cutting and deficit-reduction measures, including a temporary enrollment fee of \$400. The fee, however postponed until the spring 2011 semester, was the most controversial measure in the university budget. The student strike that it prompted the following summer, resumed late in the fall semester, is at the heart of this research’s thesis.

The issue at hand is the broader role of student activism in Puerto Rico’s state universities, compared to other schools in the United States facing budget cuts, tuition increases, or other budgetary measures due to fiscal strain. Although the prompts – mainly budgetary measures such as tuition increases or stabilization fees – are of similar nature, the reaction to them varies in style, goals, mobilization, and eventual success, not to mention different degrees of partisan and non-partisan political involvement. This last element is what presumably sets student activism in Puerto Rico apart from any similarly situated campuses stateside.

In order to understand student activism in Puerto Rico, it is necessary to possess basic knowledge of its relationship with the United States. In order to understand the true cost of tuition in Puerto Rico, it is necessary to understand federal fund disbursement in the Island’s Department of Education. Last but not least, this topic requires a basic understanding of Puerto Rican politics, particularly the political parties that appear on its ballots. Every single one of

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these topics is inherent to the question of Puerto Rico's legal status; that is, the way Puerto Rico relates to the federal government and the international community. What follows is a brief summary of Puerto Rico's history since becoming a U.S. territory, particularly its form of government and relationship with the federal branches. Since the University of Puerto Rico's affordability is at the heart of this thesis, a description of several areas where Puerto Rico receives disparate treatment in federal funding is also provided. These examples will show how education differs from other areas in that virtually all federal education programs allocate funds to Puerto Rico on equal footing with other states.

Puerto Rico became a U.S. territory after the Spanish-American War of 1898. Spain, which governed Puerto Rico since 1493, transferred the archipelago to the United States as part of the terms of the Treaty of Paris of 1898. Although the Foraker Act of 1900 created a civil government on the Island, the President of the United States would appoint its governors, most of them high-ranked officers in the U.S. Army or Navy. The Foraker Act also created a legislative assembly comprised of locally elected representatives and the Office of Resident Commissioner, which remains Puerto Rico's sole and nonvoting representative in the U.S. Congress.³

The Jones Act of 1917 reorganized the civil government of Puerto Rico as one with a bicameral legislative assembly consisting of a State Senate and State House of Representatives. Governors would continue to be appointed by the U.S. President. It was not until 1948 that Puerto Rico inaugurated its first native Governor: Jesús T. Piñero. After Piñero, the United States Congress passed what is known as Public Law 600, which allowed Puerto Rico to draft its own

³ The Resident Commissioner serves in the U.S. House of Representatives. Rep. Pedro Pierluisi (D) is the current Resident Commissioner of Puerto Rico.

Constitution. The resulting document would define Puerto Rico as a Commonwealth of the United States, though the official document defines it as the *Estado Libre Asociado* or “Free Associated State” of Puerto Rico.

The Jones Act of 1917 also conferred U.S. citizenship to the people of Puerto Rico, but the Constitutional Assembly of 1951 produced a document that preserved the territorial status of Puerto Rico.⁴ Virtually every U.S. territory that has ever convened to draft its own constitution has done so as part of the state admission process.⁵ The Constitution of Puerto Rico does not forbid the enhancement of U.S. citizenship required to fulfill its admission as a State, but rather welcomes it.⁶

With statutory U.S. citizenship, the people of Puerto Rico began to participate in federal aid programs, to which they contribute on varying levels. Puerto Rico remains exempt of federal income tax, except in the case of federal employees on the Island. Participation in federal programs remains restricted to the corresponding tax revenue that residents contribute, but equal contribution often results in unequal treatment.

There are clear-cut examples of disparate allocation when it comes to Puerto Rico and federal aid, particularly under health care related programs. It goes without saying that economic strain is placed on territories due to disproportionate and unequal funding. This becomes increasingly relevant when the University of Puerto Rico’s budget decisions are examined later.

⁴ The territorial status is defined as Puerto Rico’s status as a U.S. territory in terms of the applicability of U.S. laws, judicial jurisdiction, and the terms of the Territorial Clause of the U.S. Constitution that dictates Congress’ ultimate authority to organize and dispose of territories and their governments. (See Article Four of the U.S. Constitution).

⁵ Dávila, Luis. *Breakthrough from colonialism : an interdisciplinary study of statehood* / [w] . San Juan: Ed. de la Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1984. Print.

⁶ See Preamble to the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. Translated version available at <http://www.topuertorico.org/constitu.shtml>. (“We consider as determining factors in our life our citizenship of the United States of America and our aspiration continually to enrich our democratic heritage in the individual and collective enjoyment of its rights and privileges.”)

First, it is important to provide examples of how federal allocations vary according to contribution and the political influence exerted at the time each program was created. Puerto Rico compensates for unequal political representation with strong participation in House of Representative committee deliberations and by, on occasion, appealing directly to the Executive branch in the form of agency heads, cabinet members, and White House staff. Uncertainty over Puerto Rico's political future overwhelms its political discourse, but it is also a causal factor in many aspects of the territory's economic strain. The history of Puerto Rico's path toward legal definition informs the identifiable frame of its public debate. Medicaid and Medicare programs are the most staggering examples of discrimination toward Puerto Rico in federal fund allocation. They are listed here in contrast of fair treatment in federal education funding. These are the numbers:

Medicaid reimbursements in the Island are capped at 17% of health care costs for qualified low-income individuals. In other states, reimbursements constitute a 50% minimum and may even cover 85% of health care costs for those who qualify. With conservative estimates of the poverty rate at 44.8%,⁷ it is not unlikely that equal terms were deemed 'unreasonably costly'⁸ due to higher need for Medicaid coverage.

In Medicare, which should be addressed according to its different programs and each program's specific source of funding, Puerto Rico is again dealt a losing hand. Hospitals in Puerto Rico find themselves filling gaps in Medicare rebates due to unequal treatment. The Disproportionate share hospital program under Medicare ('Medicare DSH') is meant to

⁷ http://uspoverty.change.org/blog/view/who_cares_about_puerto_rico

⁸ Federal allocations to residents of Puerto Rico only need to survive rational basis, which the Legislative Director to Rep. Pedro Pierluisi (PR) describes as "proving that the cost of equal treatment is unreasonably high or that that territory's contribution to the source of funding for the specific item is insufficient to justify equal apportionment."

reimburse for medical services provided in jurisdictions with high homelessness rates but excludes Puerto Rico completely, whereas participation in Medicare parts B and D is grossly disparate. It is worth noting that residents of Puerto Rico contribute to the sources of funding for both these programs (Pierluisi 2010).⁹

Medicare Part A is funded by payroll taxes, which residents of Puerto Rico contribute to equally. Part B has optional enrollment, but despite payment of the monthly premium, benefits are not the same for patients in Puerto Rico. Since Congress reserves discretion on the allocation of funds for Medicare Part B, it is presumable that Puerto Rico's unequal treatment in the program is intentional, even if its reasoning is flawed.¹⁰ Funding for Part D is also discretionary, although the benefits it provides are exceeding the revenue it is collecting against it. However, with consistent charges on beneficiaries and invariable sources of general revenue, Puerto Rico continues to participate on unequal footing in this program as well.¹¹

The U.S. Census database provides us with comparable data and specific allocation amounts for different federal programs. It breaks down federal expenditures by state and by item, which sheds light on funding disparity, even in entitlements to which residents of Puerto Rico contribute indiscriminately. What could constitute rational basis for providing unequal funding in unemployment and disability benefits? Are varying degrees of need a criterion? The poorest state in the Union, Mississippi, receives \$2 billion more than Puerto Rico in retirement and disability

⁹ Pierluisi, Rep. Pedro. "Newsletter January 2010." *Pierluisi Newsletter January 2010 (pdf)*. Cong. Pedro Pierluisi, Jan. 2010. Web. 16 Nov. 2010. <<http://pierluisi.house.gov/images/photos/Newsletter/01-14-10-english.pdf>>.

¹⁰ Redhead, C. S. "CRS Report - Health Care Appropriations." *HAP Online*. 14 Oct. 2010. Web. 16 Nov. 2010. <http://www.haponline.org/downloads/CRS_Appropriations_and_Fund_Transfers_in_the_PPACA_10142010.pdf>.

¹¹ Pierluisi, Rep. Pedro. "Newsletter January 2010." *Pierluisi Newsletter January 2010 (pdf)*. Cong. Pedro Pierluisi, Jan. 2010. Web. 16 Nov. 2010. <<http://pierluisi.house.gov/images/photos/Newsletter/01-14-10-english.pdf>>.

payments (U.S. Census 2009).¹² Could population be the determinant factor? Kentucky has merely 300,000 more residents than Puerto Rico, and it receives \$14 billion – twice as much as Puerto Rico (U.S. Census 2009). Even when considering specific items that are contingent upon the state’s employment rate and qualified retirement, such as “Social Security Retirement Insurance,” Puerto Rico receives over \$10 billion less than Mississippi, despite having historically similar unemployment rates (U.S. Census 2009).¹³

Medicare Part A, which consists of Hospital Insurance and is funded by payroll taxes that apply to residents of Puerto Rico as well, is also allocated disparately. Specifically, Puerto Rico received approximately \$876 million toward Medicare Part A in 2009, while Kentucky received \$3.4 billion and Mississippi received \$2.6 billion. Statistics show that Puerto Rico has a higher life expectancy rate, which challenges one of the few plausible explanations for this discrepancy. No arguments seem to be available from congressional or journalistic sources in favor of unequal allocation in this program. Cong. Pierluisi says, “The disparities that Puerto Rico faces in Medicare are even more unfair because Puerto Ricans contribute to this program.” (Pierluisi, 2010).

Medicare Part B enrollees in Puerto Rico receive \$1.6 billion in insurance benefits. In a state of similar population size, Kentucky’s enrollees get \$2.6 billion. In the poorest state, Mississippi, the allocation exceeds \$1.8 billion (U.S. Census). Part D, which means to cover prescription drug costs, allocated \$1.4 million to Puerto Rico and \$248 million to Kentucky (U.S.

¹² In this section, Mississippi and Kentucky are used as comparables: Mississippi, for its similar unemployment rate and for being the poorest state in the Union, and Kentucky, for having the most similarly sized population.

¹³ The current spread is wider, with Puerto Rico’s unemployment estimated at about 16% and Mississippi consistently between 10 and 11% since January 2010.

Census). Federal funds targeted specifically at prescription drug coverage are not reported for Mississippi, but the state provides Part D coverage via a group of private insurers.

Many of these numbers already reflect adjustments made by provisions in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) from 2009 that increased Medicaid funding for Puerto Rico to a more reasonable level. The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act allocated \$925 million, the bulk of appropriations for all U.S. territories, to Puerto Rico as a potential host of the health insurance exchanges that would allow individuals seeking to purchase health insurance to compare plans and premiums while providing subsidies to low-income individuals that do not qualify for Medicaid.¹⁴ It should be noted that Medicare Part D receives its funding from the Supplementary Medical Insurance Trust Fund, to which residents of Puerto Rico also contribute equally.

According to Cong. Pierluisi's Legislative Director, John Laufer, Gov. Fortuño was the first representative for Puerto Rico to use earmarks to address federal funding shortcomings back in 2005. Although Puerto Rico's congressional office was no stranger to earmarks, specifically in spending or infrastructure bills, Fortuño was the first to ask municipalities, agencies, and constituents to submit proposals that could be forwarded in order to request inclusion in spending bills (Laufer 2010). These requests for federal allocations are now listed on Rep. Pierluisi's website under "Appropriations Requests".¹⁵

¹⁴ Redhead, C. S. "CRS Report - Health Care Appropriations." *HAP Online*. 14 Oct. 2010. Web. 16 Nov. 2010. <http://www.haponline.org/downloads/CRS_Appropriations_and_Fund_Transfers_in_the_PPACA_10142010.pdf>. (PDF format document).

¹⁵ Pierluisi, Rep. Pedro R. "Appropriations 2011." *Cong. Pedro Pierluisi*. Web. 16 Nov. 2010. <<http://pierluisi.house.gov/PDF/appropriations/2011/UPDATE%2005.27.10-2011%20Appropriations%20Website%20Document.pdf>>.

Beside earmarks, the method for achieving fairer treatment in spending bills and appropriations has usually consisted of aggressive campaigns targeting committee leadership, staff, and even White House legislative advisors (Laufer 2010). The main political parties in Puerto Rico are aware of these discrepancies, and they have channels for mobilizing for funding parity.

In education, such efforts have rarely been necessary. Puerto Rico has been treated fairly and on equal footing with all other states, and no searchable data proves otherwise. Although none of these examples is used as a case study for this thesis, public universities in the states of Kentucky and Mississippi are used as comparables due to their similar poverty rates or population sizes.

Federal education benefits in Puerto Rico require a two-tier analysis: direct aid to students via Pell Grants and Work Study awards and federal student aid's role in the University of Puerto Rico's affordability. The Department of Education holds that both take place on equal footing with other states, but statistics show higher allocations in Pell Grant and Federal Work Study awards compared to similarly situated states.¹⁶

The Department of Education of Puerto Rico receives \$951,021,465 in Pell Grants for disbursement; Mississippi receives \$324,668,075. Kentucky has roughly 300,000 more residents than Puerto Rico and receives \$362,867,444 in Pell Grants for disbursement. Since financial aid for students is determined by individual applications, it is fair to assume that this disparity in funding is due to higher poverty levels. Also, increases in funding due to American Recovery

¹⁶ Gathered from U.S. Census database by agency allocations (<http://harvester.census.gov/cffr/asp/Agency.asp>). Similarly situated states are identified based on population size and poverty level, Kentucky having the most similar population size and Mississippi having the lowest median income by state, roughly three times that of Puerto Rico. Population and median income data also gathered from U.S. Census database.

and Reinvestment Act allocations did little to bridge existing gaps in Pell Grant awards among these three jurisdictions. Students in Puerto Rico were already receiving roughly three times as much in Pell Grant awards as these similarly situated states before additional federal funding was injected into their budgets. Pell Grants are usually capped at \$4,731, but Recovery Act allocations allowed the U.S. Department of Education to increase that maximum to \$5,350.

Federal Work Study awards (FWS) do not vary as much in amounts. Puerto Rico received \$19,501,719 in FWS allocations in 2009, while Kentucky received \$19,383,849 and Mississippi received \$11,736,391. It is more difficult to factor in these discrepancies, but population size seems to be the determinant factor. In other words, FWS awards seem to vary so little in size and term that any differences can be attributed to population size and the inherent volume of applications.

The University of Puerto Rico is the main public institution of higher education in Puerto Rico. It encompasses eleven campuses throughout the main island. Its tuition costs at the undergraduate level are \$49 per credit (for residents) for the 2010-2011 academic year, a small increase from the \$47 per credit cost in the previous academic year.¹⁷ The University of Kentucky, also the largest public institution of higher education in that state has a tuition cost of \$343 per credit for the 2010-2011 academic year.¹⁸ The University of Mississippi, although not the largest public institution of higher education in that state¹⁹, has an approximate cost of tuition

¹⁷ Gathered from the University of Puerto Rico website. (<http://www.uprm.edu/upr/estudiantes/ayudas/costos.html>).

¹⁸ Gathered from the University of Kentucky's Office of the Registrar website. (<http://www.uky.edu/Registrar/feesgen.htm>)

¹⁹ Statistics from Mississippi State University, the largest public institution of higher education in the state, are not as readily compatible.

of \$226.50.²⁰ Therefore, similarly sized need-based grants such as the Pell Grant are available to residents of Puerto Rico in equal footing with residents of other states and awarded often and presumably in larger amounts, while the University of Puerto Rico remains the least expensive public institution of higher education under United States jurisdiction. This distinction makes changes in affordability much more controversial, while student protests eventually become the arena for underlying ideological debates. Although the local political parties do not usually channel student protests, there have been instances of local parties endorsing the student movement. These instances of party support have usually been limited to parties out of power, although ideological alignment due to the legal status question have also influenced party support toward student protests.

In Puerto Rico, the political parties do not mirror national parties. Even though the Democratic and Republican parties operate locally in Puerto Rico, there are no official candidates for either party on the state ballot. Instead, the current New Progressive Party of Puerto Rico (PNP) stemmed from the old Republican Party of Puerto Rico and is the main political channel for the pro-statehood electorate. The Popular Democratic Party (PPD), whose founder Luis Muñoz Marín kept close ties with Democratic presidents as well as the party, keeps a close relationship with the Democratic National Committee. However, pro-statehood Democrats have also reached leadership positions within that Party. The current top-ranking Democrat from Puerto Rico is Rep. Pedro Pierluisi, its current Resident Commissioner in the U.S. House of Representatives.

²⁰ Gathered from the University of Mississippi's query service for cost of tuition at the Office of the Registrar website. (http://www.olemiss.edu/cgi-bin/tuition/fall10_11/query.pl)

There is a third Puerto Rican Independence Party, which is the main pro-independence electoral franchise in Puerto Rico. Ballots usually consist of candidates for each of these three parties, although 2008 marked an exception with the creation of the Puerto Ricans for Puerto Rico Party²¹ that sought to distance itself from the legal status debate.²²

Although the main channels for anti-U.S. sentiment have disappeared throughout the years, there are still groups that employ nationalist and anti-American rhetoric. Some of these groups have official or unofficial status as student organizations within the University of Puerto Rico, particularly the main campus in Rio Piedras. Most of these groups are remnants of a powerful separatist movement that reached a violent peak in 1971 with protests that cost the lives of two students, one of them an ROTC cadet, and two riot-squad policemen.²³ Then-Governor Luis A. Ferré, the first to be elected from the pro-statehood PNP he founded, held meetings at the Executive Mansion of *La Fortaleza* to foster cooperation and peaceful coexistence with pro-independence groups within and outside the University of Puerto Rico.²⁴

Reports from 1971 show the students' straightforward attitude about the ideological nature of the protests. The ongoing protests lack that candor, although certain groups are eager to note the anniversary of those violent protests. The 1971 protests are frequently cited as the reason for limited police intervention in campus events, but the "non-confrontational" policy that

²¹ The *Puertorriqueños por Puerto Rico* or "Puerto Ricans for Puerto Rico" party did not register enough votes in the 2008 election to retain its electoral franchise. The Puerto Rican Independence Party also lost its electoral franchise, as it had for the first time in the 2004 elections. Both have petitioned for re-recognition by the State Electoral Commission.

²² The party failed to register enough votes to retain its franchise and therefore has no legislative representation.

²³ *Special to The Washington Post* By Irwin Goodwin. The Washington Post, Times Herald (1959-1973). Washington, D.C.: Apr 18, 1971. p. 7

²⁴ Ibid.

stemmed from those protests was suspended after a State Supreme Court ruling denied the existence of a students' right to strike and described a state interest in keeping the public university accessible and operational in spite of student government deliberations.²⁵

Student activism in Puerto Rico should be framed as a social movement. The literature is simply too sparse and too disparate to be admitted without the degree of skepticism that contemporary social movement research demands.²⁶ Surveys could provide a clearer description of the members of the student movement²⁷, but the make-up of the movement is not relevant to this research. It is the broader political role of the movement's leaders and supporters that pertains the most to this thesis. This ideological nuance, manifest in the very words of current student leaders, can be gathered empirically and later compared to the student rhetoric stateside. Whether or not this rhetoric mirrors that of the system's student body in the UPR is impossible to determine, since a sample would have to include activists and supporters of the strike as well as non-partakers. Support for strikes is certainly not unanimous, but its opposition is even more difficult to measure, since abstention from student assemblies is extremely common, with many general assemblies declared out of order due to lack of quorum.²⁸

Klandermans and Staggenborg suggest that resource mobilization and political process theories both neglect collective identity, culture, and emotion as relevant factors.²⁹ Resource mobilization, however, does pose questions of motivation that may still address the unique

²⁵ UPR v. Laborde, *Tribunal Supremo de Puerto Rico*. CT-2010-008.

²⁶ Klandermans and Staggenborg 2002, p. ix

²⁷ Ibid. p. 4

²⁸ Hernandez 2010

²⁹ Klandermans and Staggenborg 2002, p. xii

rhetoric and make-up of Puerto Rico's student protests.³⁰ The political process theory need not be counter to the resource mobilization approach as long as proper context is provided for newspaper data and other otherwise inadmissible sources used to gather evidence. The political opportunities that student strikes in Puerto Rico so unabashedly present should not be neglected by any responsible researcher. Thus, the political arena with which the political process theory frames its approach allows any research of Puerto Rico's student movement to amplify the partisan and ideological exploitation of that movement's goals. The framing theory, as applied in this paper, helps ascertain the *frame*, alternatively referred to as "discourse,"³¹ that is unique to Puerto Rico and its student movement. Johnston says frames orient our expectations based on past experience, indicating "what to look at and what is important according to one's scope of experience."³² Therefore, it can be easily predicted that Puerto Rico's unique political history presents a frame fundamentally different to that of social movements on the mainland. Frames become relevant to collective action when they are "shared by enough individuals to channel their behaviors in shared and patterned ways."³³ The frame that shapes political behavior – which this thesis argues is the unresolved legal status question – is common to all in Puerto Rico, making its inherent definitions easily perceivable in the student movement.

Although student protests became commonplace in the United States due to tuition increases and other fiscal stabilization measures³⁴, the notion of the student body's right to strike is exclusive to Puerto Rico.³⁵ Since the bloody 1971 protests that mirrored similar student

³⁰ Ibid. p. x

³¹ Johnston 2002 p. 64

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid. p. 66

³⁴ O'Leary 2009

³⁵ Hernandez 2010

mobilization in the continental United States, the local government and the autonomous UPR agreed to a “non-confrontational policy” that barred state police from interfering in the University’s campuses. The State Supreme Court, however, ruled that this perceived right to strike was nonexistent; that what the students call ‘strikes’ are merely “organized protest.”³⁶ By striking down this “talisman,” the Supreme Court did not abridge the students’ First Amendment rights to assemble, petition, or speak freely, but it clearly limited their actions to non-disruptive options.³⁷ Student protesters would no longer be allowed to disrupt campus operations, including classes and the expected student attendance. Unlike other student protests across the United States, Puerto Rico’s student rhetoric usually channels political ideology: mainly that of pro-independence groups. Since there has not been a pro-independence Chief Executive in the history of Puerto Rico’s civil government, this political nuance antagonizes student activists and hurts their overall goals. In other words, a vote to strike or mobilize presents a political opportunity for an aggrieved sector of the population: the pro-independence groups. This ideology has lost most of its organizational support, as elaborated further, due to the inactivity of most pro-independence political parties, except for the Puerto Rican Independence Party (PIP). However, the PIP has lost its electoral franchise in the last two elections (2004, 2008) by not meeting the minimum vote threshold.³⁸

Why does this happen? A set of incisive interview questions will inform the research about the real intentions behind pro-independence rhetoric in student activism in Puerto Rico.

³⁶ Ibid. Supreme Court Opinion cited.

³⁷ Jorge Farinacci, now a clerk at the Puerto Rico Supreme Court, held several Leadership positions in the UPR student government, specifically in the main Rio Piedras campus. Farinacci was interviewed on the role of student protests in local politics, the students’ tactics, and their ties to the pro-independence ideology. He described the prevailing tactical view among student protests in Puerto Rico as one that encompasses disruptive and non-disruptive actions to either entirely or partially interrupt school operations.

³⁸ *Comisión Estatal de Elecciones* (State Electoral Commission) data.

Are student protests just the means by which political opportunists voice concerns about the territory's political future? Is it a tool for mobilizing increased support around the more fiscally oriented goals of the movement? Is it uninvited language, unwelcome by the legitimate student leaders of Puerto Rico? We can later compare these elements with student protests in California, for example, where similar fiscal measures have been announced or implemented.³⁹ In California, student resistance has been widely reported so as to provide a reasonable amount of data against which to compare our findings on Puerto Rico's student movement.

What role do partisan politics play in a similarly situated school system such as California's? Is there partisan animosity against the incumbency? Do state parties ever score political points by getting involved with student protests? When is it that Puerto Rico becomes its own separate breed in the realm of student activism?

Case studies will be examined in the same way in order to compare results. It also informs the frame that encompasses Puerto Rico's public debate. Historical data and similar examples of pro-independence rallies and protests should provide the necessary data with which to approach this topic as per the resource mobilization theory. Against this background, contemporary data can be admitted and incorporated under the political process theory. This design should provide a thorough understanding of the reasons behind the broader political role of student activism in Puerto Rico.

What the resource mobilization theory contributes to this thesis is the reason for outside support and the underlying goals of the movement. This is historically relevant when examining the 1971 protests that garnered substantial outside support from ideologically aligned

³⁹ O'Leary 2009

organizations in Puerto Rico. What the political process theory contributes is the variable of anti-incumbency as motivation for seizing on the political opportunity of unpopular budgetary decisions. However, anti-incumbency is not unique to Puerto Rico, and outside support as identified by the resource mobilization theory can be easily gathered from student protests in California, while the framing theory contributes an entirely new scope of causes for the unique form of student protest in Puerto Rico.

In the summer of 2010, due to the imminence of a \$400 enrollment fee and the consolidation and elimination of summer courses, the student government of the UPR's main campus in Rio Piedras called for a general assembly.⁴⁰ The result was a vote to strike that would keep 10 out of 11 campuses of the UPR network closed for approximately two months. The most notable success of the strike was an agreement ratified by a 3,000-student⁴¹ general assembly comprised of all UPR campuses, under which the enrollment fee was consolidated into one yearly \$800 fee to be charged for the first time in the spring 2011 semester. The leaders of the movement still revered the strike as a "historic achievement" and a "student victory."⁴²

As per the Supreme Court decision that ruled any disruption of the campuses' operations as illegal and unprotected by the Constitution's free speech provisions, state and municipal police were deployed to all campuses where strikes had been declared by the respective student governments. Police presence has only persisted on the main campus in Rio Piedras.

Then-President of the UPR, José Ramón De la Torre, struggled with the threat of strike, the legitimacy of some student demands, and the Middle States Commission on Higher

⁴⁰ Hernandez 2010

⁴¹ The UPR hosts approximately 64,511 students according to data reported on its main website.

⁴² Hernandez 2010

Education's probation imposed on the state schools after the previous two-month strike.⁴³ De la Torre resigned on Friday, February 11th, 2011. The President of the UPR's Board of Trustees later alleged that De la Torre had written the Superintendent of the state police requesting the removal of officers from all campuses.⁴⁴ Among the issues currently straining the school's stability, particularly in Rio Piedras, there are allegations of police brutality,⁴⁵ as well as reports of students using smoke bombs to clear classrooms, as well as turning desks over or removing them to prevent classes from taking place.⁴⁶

This is the current state of affairs and the starting point for our research. In the following chapter, this thesis will compare certain similarly situated universities and their student protests or lack thereof in response to similar prompts. The University of Maryland, specifically the College Park campus, was at the heart of student unrest after the tuition increases of 2009. However, protests failed to materialize, because the goal of college affordability was not compelling enough to oppose what was perceived as a modest tuition increase.⁴⁷ These case studies should help single out those variables exclusive to Puerto Rico's student movement.

Whereas the resource mobilization and political process theories both explain similar relationships between budgetary decisions and student responses across case studies, the framing theory does not materialize as a variable in other cases. However, it proves to be the only independent variable that presents a different outcome when applied to Puerto Rico's student

⁴³ Caribbean Business 2011

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Former UPR Student Council President Gabriel Laborde suggests that members of the movement use the prospect of police brutality as a way to regain the public support for the movement that has dwindled recently.

⁴⁶ *El Vocero* (main local newspaper) 2011

⁴⁷ From interview with former UMD – College Park Student Government Association President Steve Glickman.

movement. The following chapter elaborates on these theories as applied to Puerto Rico and the comparable case studies.

Chapter Two: Applied Social Movement Theory and the Politics of Student Activism in Puerto Rico

This paper argues that the role of student activism in Puerto Rico is broader due to the unresolved question of the Island's legal status. Applied social movement theory proves that this could be attributed to a frame in Puerto Rico's political discourse, as opposed to the motivations and prompts identified by the resource mobilization or political process theories. The research question requires us to compare the student movement at the University of Puerto Rico to similarly situated public universities in the mainland. Protests at the University of California's campuses and at the University of Maryland present useful comparisons. These schools depend on federal funding at a level comparable to that of the UPR, and made similar budgetary decisions in a time of economic distress. They also have an identifiable response to these same budgetary decisions that can be scrutinized and compared to the student protests at the heart of this thesis. They possess similar institutions in terms of their school administrations and how these relate to the student body, mainly the available forms of student government. Puerto Rico's parallel institutions were identified in Chapter One, including the local political parties and their corresponding ideologies – all intrinsic to the legal status issue –, the University's student government and its administrative entities, particularly the Board of Trustees at the UPR.

Applying social movement theory to the politics of student activism in Puerto Rico requires an identification of the present variables. For purposes of this thesis, student protests in response to similar budgetary decisions – or lack thereof – are a dependent variable, while social movement theories are applied as independent variables to each case study. The hypothesis relevant to Puerto Rico is that prompts such as tuition increases and the temporary enrollment fee

at the heart of recent protests only bring political rhetoric to the forefront because of the unresolved legal status issue. In other words, if the legal status issue is resolved, student protests would replace the frame that polarizes support for the student cause among partisan and ideological lines with a more pragmatic alternative.

Partisan support for student protests has traditionally come from pro-independence political groups, though recent political endorsements stem almost exclusively from the Puerto Rican Independence Party leadership. During the violent 1971 protests described in Chapter One, outside support included unofficial political parties such as the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party and the Puerto Rican Socialist Party, both of which still exist, though at nearly non-operational levels.⁴⁸ Pro-Independence student organizations such as the *Federación Universitaria Pro-Independencia* (best known by its acronym – FUPI and translated as University Pro-Independence Federation of Puerto Rico) became highly relevant because of the widespread use of pro-independence rhetoric. The protests during summer 2010 did not amass outside support to that extent, mainly because of the absence of ideologically-aligned political organizations or political parties. The tactics employed during 1971 – masks, smoke bombs, widespread vandalism – are still employed by small groups within the UPR student movement.⁴⁹ The FUPI has been replaced by the *Unión de Juventudes Socialistas* (or UJS, translated as Socialist Youth Union), which shares common goals – such as achieving the independence of Puerto Rico and promoting socialist reforms – with the older FUPI and provides a nexus with local labor unions via its relationship with the *Movimiento Socialista de Trabajadores* (or MST, translated as

⁴⁸ The Puerto Rican Socialist Party is now known as the October 27 Committee and is more focused on state-side activism than any operations on the Island. *Special to The Washington Post*. By Irwin Goodwin. The Washington Post, Times Herald (1959-1973). Washington, D.C.: Apr 18, 1971. p. 7

⁴⁹ Joel Ortiz Rivera for *El Nuevo Día* (local newspaper)

Socialist Workers' Movement) founded in 1982. In terms of organizations involved with the cause and tactics employed, the movement has retained very noticeable pro-independence nuances.

Although the *Partido Popular Democrático* (PPD, translated as Popular Democratic Party) – currently the minority party in the state legislature - has criticized current Gov. Fortuño's handling of the student protests at the University of Puerto Rico, it has not traditionally aligned itself with the student cause.⁵⁰ The *Partido Popular's* President until March 2011, Héctor Ferrer, consistently used the student protests as an opportunity to criticize the present administration.⁵¹ This highlights the anti-incumbent aspect of the rhetoric in Puerto Rico's student protests. The PPD is the other main political party in Puerto Rico and the only one with a significant chance at unseating the *Partido Nuevo Progresista* (PNP, translated as New Progressive Party) in the 2012 elections. Its new President and only gubernatorial candidate to date, State Sen. Alejandro García-Padilla, has stated his intent to lift the controversial \$800 temporary enrollment fee if elected. Budgetary decisions in the UPR, however, are made by autonomous entities within the University's administration.

All examined protests are responses to budgetary decisions by the examined state university administrations. The question is why the resulting student response to these budgetary decisions has such a limited scope on the mainland, whereas student protests in Puerto Rico have a broader scope that encompasses local political parties and the overarching debate on the Island's political future. The relationship between these variables seems best examined by the

⁵⁰ In 2001, the PDP had a legislative majority and controlled the executive branch. The legislative caucus and the executive attempted to reform the University of Puerto Rico, but inaction by the Board of Trustees and student opposition prevented the reform. (<http://www.elnuevodia.com/nohubovoluntaduniversitaria-917600.html>)

⁵¹ *El Vocero de Puerto Rico* 2010.

political process theory, but in some regards will be better explained by its overlap with the resource mobilization theory or some of its components. It allows closer scrutiny of the underlying political motivations of the student movement and makes the interviews with student leaders and administration officials admissible so as to inform the research. This chapter's hypothesis also shows an inclination to regard Puerto Rico as an example of political opportunity. The resource mobilization theory allows for motivations or resources to be external to the movement, but requires there to be specific goals to each movement. Applying resource mobilization theory would require determining the extent of the movement's dependence on outside support. In one regard, however, resource mobilization theory may prove essential to this research: the question of whether the movement's motivations are external. The explicit goals of fee elimination and affordability are clearly internal, but the relevant motivations and aspects of the movement under scrutiny could be better examined as external to the movement.

The main question to be answered by this thesis is why student protests in Puerto Rico become platforms for partisan and ideological goals such as the status question and anti-incumbency. We must first examine how the political process theory depicts each case's prompt to mobilize toward explicit goals. Implicit goals can be incorporated when applying the resource mobilization theory. Similarly, applying the framing theory should encompass not only the explicit and implicit goals of each movement, but also the cognitive schema that results from individual experience and collective agreement on definitions.⁵²

In California, tuition increases and budget cuts were widely protested in 2010. Students and teachers protested throughout the state and demanded that the state government preserve

⁵² Johnston 2002 p. 66

current funding, identify additional sources of revenue, and broaden education services. In this regard, budgetary decisions due to fiscal strain presented a political opportunity for teachers' unions and activists supportive of education funding increases. Political opportunity in the form of widespread unrest over tuition increases and budget cuts seized by teachers unions and political minorities. Goodwin and Jasper say that political opportunities are often metaphorically referred to as "windows" that open and close.⁵³ Activists in California certainly seized on widespread unrest over budget woes, but even the support of State Assembly Democratic majority leader Alberto Torrico was not enough to translate rhetoric into action. In terms of protest tactics, there are clear parallels between Puerto Rico's student movement and University of California protesters, both of which employed disruptive tactics to partially or completely paralyze university campuses.⁵⁴

A tuition freeze at the University of Maryland kept the cost of attendance at 2005 levels for 5 years. In 2010, tuition increased by 3%.⁵⁵ Although the increase faced some opposition, UMD students at its College Park campus did not seem compelled to protest. Student Government Association President Steve Glickman explicitly weighed the tuition increase against a continuing reduction in course availability: "'What's worse,' he said. 'A \$200 increase or an extra semester in school?'"⁵⁶ Students at the University of Maryland, therefore, did not embrace a tuition increase, but there was not enough outside support or compelling justification to protest. Their explicit goal of college affordability had been satisfactorily met. The difference between Maryland and California is that advocates for college affordability in Maryland actually

⁵³ Goodwin and Jasper 2004. p. 12

⁵⁴ McKinley 2010

⁵⁵ De Vise 2010

⁵⁶ Gathered from Huffington Post's Citizen Report on Maryland student protests.

connected with a popular Chief Executive in Gov. Martin O'Malley, whereas California activists had State Assembly Majority Leader Torrico, whose hands were tied as he sought additional tax revenue to cover budget shortfalls in education.⁵⁷

In Puerto Rico, unpopular fiscal stabilization measures had already stirred opposition to the present administration when the UPR announced budget cuts, tuition increases, and a temporary enrollment fee.⁵⁸ Payroll cuts in the form of approximately 20,000 lay-offs prompted protests, presenting a political opportunity for political minorities and anti-incumbent rhetoric, as well as for student leaders aggrieved by unpopular budgetary decisions and an ideological disconnect with the administration. In terms of the political opportunity window, the spring of 2010 presented the best possible scenario for student protests in Puerto Rico. The Governor's approval rating was at 43%,⁵⁹ recent protests had garnered partisan support from the minority PPD, and anti-incumbent rhetoric went largely uncontested due to the general public's skepticism. After his term – during which the student assembly voted for the summer 2010 strike – Student Council President Gabriel E. Laborde dedicated his efforts to opposing student groups that called for further protests. He perceived these protests as politically motivated and detrimental to the school's integrity,⁶⁰ arguing that disrupting school operations would further jeopardize the institution's accreditation and public support for the movement's legitimate causes.

The most noticeable way in which the political process theory affects the student movement is by emphasizing the collective's relationship with the elite. The establishment

⁵⁷ McKinley 2010

⁵⁸ Baribeau 2011

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ From interview with former UPR Student Council President Gabriel E. Laborde. Transcript enclosed as Appendix B.

leaders – O’Malley in Maryland and Torrico in California – are enabled to see the movement’s goals through, and are therefore welcome to the movement, although a seeming lack of sympathy from California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger went unpunished in most statewide protests in 2010. The crowds made their demands loudly and coherently, hoping that empowered supporters would seize on the opportunity. In Maryland, Governor O’Malley had already appeased affordability advocates by enacting the tuition freeze, avoiding angering them by ending the freeze for a perceivably modest increase 5 years later. It also helped that UMD’s SGA President Steve Glickman was openly understanding of the need for an increase in tuition and skeptical about the student body’s desire to mobilize against it.

In contrast, politically active students in Puerto Rico constitute a group that feels deprived and mistreated by the system that binds them. It has also been established that the most vocal of outside supporters have either disbanded or become non-operational since the most successfully mobilized student protests of 1971.

The organizational strength considered vital to these movements’ success under the political process theory has also been lacking in Puerto Rico. In 1971, outside support was at its peak and the politically and ideologically charged rhetoric of the movement did not seem to hamper its goals: the Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC) was moved to an off-campus location and banned from recruiting on the Rio Piedras campus, while a non-confrontational policy between state police and student protesters created an impression that student protests in Puerto Rico were a legitimate form of strike.⁶¹ However, it seems premature to dismiss recent student protests as lacking effective leadership and resources since inside groups are still

⁶¹ This was the notion that was struck down by the State Supreme Court in 2010 by the opinion in *UPR v. Laborde, Tribunal Supremo de Puerto Rico*. CT-2010-008.

regarded as operational and the school's prominent role in Puerto Rico's culture makes student protests appealing and enables broad public support.⁶²

The movement also lacks McAdam's four potential causes of political vulnerability that would present the student movement with an opportunity to strike.⁶³ There is no increasing political pluralism, at least not within the predominant ideology among student protesters. There is no "decline in repression," since the non-confrontational policy in effect since 1971 has always allowed the same type of leeway to the UPR student activists. In fact, some would argue that the decision in *UPR v. Laborde* only allowed for increased repression by not only ruling that police intervention in the campus was legal, but suggesting that it was necessary. There is no "division within elites" in terms of the University of Puerto Rico's administration. The Board of Trustees and University President have been largely in sync for most if not all of the deliberations on the budget and their handling of student protests.⁶⁴ The administration has also been wholly supportive, with the PNP majority in the state legislature even approving legislation to facilitate payment of the \$400 per semester – later one yearly installment of \$800 – temporary enrollment fee.⁶⁵ Increased political enfranchisement is not noticeable in the University of Puerto Rico, since the outside groups that have traditionally supported student protests have been reduced to just the single Puerto Rican Independence Party, which did not register enough votes in 2008 to retain a legislative delegation and lost its electoral franchise.

The resource mobilization theory proves promising when assessing the effectiveness of movement leadership and the availability of resources, as well as the implicit goals of the

⁶² From interview with Gabriel E. Laborde. Transcript enclosed.

⁶³ Goodwin & Jasper 2004, p. 7

⁶⁴ Caribbean Business 2011. It is worth noting, however, that exiting UPR President De la Torre requested the removal of police from the Rio Piedras campus in his letter of resignation.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

movement. In its overlap with the prompts of movement formation articulated by the political process theory, resource mobilization helps explain why the UPR student protests of 1971 proved effective by subversive means because of broader outside support, while recent protests lack significant outside support but adhere to similar tactics.

When applying the resource mobilization theory to Puerto Rico and the comparable case studies, certain aspects of the theory prove particularly relevant. The theory's stress on effective leadership is consequently relatable to each movement's success. Its scrutiny of available resources allows us to gauge outside support, particularly supportive organizations and political parties.

California's 2010 protests against budget cuts in education and tuition increases garnered outside support in the form of schoolteachers, parents, and student organizations from other state universities.⁶⁶ According to participants' testimony, the implicit goals of increasing education funding and broadening the scope of education services are an ongoing campaign to many of them. The explicit goal of the 2010 protests was less ambitious: to preserve funding and identify additional sources of revenue. The movement's leadership was evidently effective: simultaneous protests sprung from strategic locations throughout the state, ranging from University of California campuses to California State University campuses and even the state capitol.⁶⁷ The movement even appealed to political leaders such as Alberto Torrico in the State Assembly.

The parallel student movement in Maryland benefited from broad and influential outside support. The election of Governor O'Malley materialized efforts by politically aligned groups – probably gathered under the local Democratic Party – that were supportive of the college

⁶⁶ McKinley 2010

⁶⁷ Ibid.

affordability cause. The freeze in tuition increases became law shortly after O'Malley's swearing in, and remained in place for nearly 5 years. The proper ingredients for successful resource mobilization were present: support from outside organizations – mainly the Democratic Party –, broad availability of resources in the form of donors and supporters, and effective leadership by a prospective governor.

Resource mobilization may help to understand Puerto Rico's student movement in terms of its previous success, but it falls short of identifying the cause of its broader political role. As described previously, the 1971 student protests had substantial outside support in the form of currently inactive political parties and prominent leaders ideologically aligned with the student movement's leadership. Outside support diminished in the following decades, but the movement retained its zeal and goals. As Farinacci noted, the student movement in Puerto Rico remains a relevant political force in Puerto Rico, "because when the labor, environmental or even opposition political movements have been incapable of organizing opposition to government policies, the student movement has been able to mobilize and serve as the only political opposition."⁶⁸

The student assembly early in summer 2010 that prompted the first wave of protests was in reaction to the administration's revealing of its budget proposal and the attached stabilization measures. The student body's response was clear: rejection of the enrollment fee, rejection of the proposed budget cuts, and threat to paralyze school operations by means of a student strike.⁶⁹ The budget proposal included a \$400 per semester enrollment fee and a plan to cut expenses by downsizing school operations. In a June 2010 assembly, the student government voted to strike.

⁶⁸ From interview with Jorge Farinacci. Appendix A.

⁶⁹ Maritza Díaz for local newspaper *Primera Hora*.

The school was paralyzed for a month and a half. New groups such as the *Comité Negociador Nacional* (CNN, translated to “National” Negotiation Committee) intervened on behalf of the student government to reach an agreement with the University administration. These groups operated illegitimately, parallel to the General Student Council, which Laborde presided at the time. Laborde became a vocal opponent of these groups and their tactics after completing his term.⁷⁰ In August 2010, an agreement was outlined pending further discussions, but the \$400 per semester enrollment fee was consolidated into an \$800 yearly fee to be collected in the spring 2011 semester. The budget cuts are still in place and the administration has not hinted at lifting the enrollment fee, yet protesters insist and seek ways to boost their diminished public support.⁷¹ The groups that remain active in support of the protests, Laborde says, are “left-wing political organizations” that support violent action.⁷²

The issue of Puerto Rico’s legal status belongs to the larger political arena in which local political parties are the main relevant players. Any desired change to the legal status can therefore be considered a goal beyond the realm of Puerto Rico’s student movement. It is understandable that with dwindling relevance in the broader political arena, the movement is exploited by political minorities in the anti-incumbency aspect of its rhetoric. In his farewell remarks as PPD President, Héctor Ferrer prided himself in the more than 300 press conferences hosted in response to the current administration’s policies.⁷³ Several of these were related to student protests at the University of Puerto Rico, where he described the Governor’s response to the protests as “irresponsible” and related students’ concerns over budget cuts and increases in

⁷⁰ From interview with Gabriel E. Laborde. Appendix B.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Keila López for *El Nuevo Día*.

enrollment costs to overall administration policies that sought to cut expenses and reduce the local deficit.⁷⁴ In this regard, the internal goals' relationship with external resources is evident in the current minority party's use of the protests to criticize the current administration.

The student movement in Puerto Rico is a platform for pro-independence rhetoric of nationalist nuance. It is also a platform for anti-incumbency and a political battleground where local politics are sampled disparately and polarized. In other words, the student movement leadership is not representative of Puerto Rico's electorate. According to Farinacci, most of the leadership "hails from the socialist left," which he describes as "*incidentally* pro-independence."⁷⁵ The political party that's most homogeneously left-wing is the Puerto Rican Independence Party (PIP), a party that registered support in the single digits in the last two general elections.⁷⁶ It is unlikely that any accurate sample of the population would render a pro-independence majority, which is why the student movement and mainly the student leadership at the UPR becomes a platform for that ideology. However, debate becomes increasingly polarized due to this unrepresentative sample and the movement becomes divisive, driving a wedge between it and the party in power. The politics of the student movement embodies the unresolved legal status issue of Puerto Rico, which suggests that pending its resolution, public debate on real issues will remain polluted by this ideological tug-of-war. Anti-incumbency and the legal status debate overshadow even the purely inherent goals of Puerto Rico's student movement. They are

⁷⁴ In 2009, the Legislature passed Law 7, known as the Fiscal Emergency Law, calling for a restructuring of government in response to economic distress that prompted layoffs of up to 17,000 government employees. The PPD attributed much of the University of Puerto Rico's fiscal woes as a result of this legislation.

⁷⁵ From interview with Jorge Farinacci. Appendix A.

⁷⁶ General election results from 2008 available at (http://ceepur.org/elecciones2008/CEE_Events/ELECCIONES_GENERALES_2008_4/NOCHE_DEL_EVENTO_7/default.html)

not taken seriously because of their apparent bias, prompting a glass ceiling of public support that only curbs the movement further when they employ violent tactics.

In March 2011, support for the current strike deteriorated severely after a group of student activists attacked Rio Piedras Chancellor Ana Guadalupe and the campus security vehicle in which she was transported. The vehicle's broken windows and the continued assault by the group of students inflicted lacerations on the Chancellor's shoulder, for which she was treated at a nearby hospital.⁷⁷ As discussed in the previous chapter, violence has been a controversial tool for Puerto Rico's student movement since the heated protests of '71 took the lives of two UPR students from the Rio Piedras campus. However, these tactics are also witnessed in California student protests, where students in the University of California's Santa Cruz campus paralyzed the school during the 2010 protests and broke windshields.⁷⁸

The UPR's internal issues, budgetary or otherwise (as with the ROTC in 1971), present political opportunities for outside movements. Presently, these issues offer a political opportunity for opposition to the ruling party. The PPD, currently a legislative minority and out of power in the Executive, is more comfortable seizing on these political opportunities to stir anti-incumbency even though they are not ideologically aligned with the student leadership. This can be explained by voter behavior in Puerto Rico: pro-independence voters will occasionally support the PPD to ensure defeat of the pro-statehood PNP. Since the Puerto Rican Independence Party (PIP) has never won a general election, there may be a sense that a vote for that party is inconsequential, whereas support for the PPD could ensure that the pro-statehood party remains out of power. Likewise, the PPD does not see pro-independence rhetoric as a threat, since the

⁷⁷ "Llevan a la rectora al hospital (Campus Chancellor Hospitalized)". *El Nuevo Día*, local newspaper.

⁷⁸ McKinley 2010.

independence option has never garnered a substantial plurality in local plebiscites for Puerto Rico's legal status. Therefore, the anti-incumbency variable is more tangible when it receives the partisan endorsement of the PPD. In 1971, the PNP was also in power, and the student protests suggested that support for statehood implied support for the nation's policies i.e. the Vietnam War and military recruitment. This perceived relationship between support for statehood and support of federal policies seemed to fuel anti-incumbency and pro-independence rhetoric in the student movement.

The movement's persistent goals have consisted of opposition to tuition hikes in order to ensure a universally accessible college education and an overarching opposition to privatization of government entities, including the perceived threat of the UPR's privatization.⁷⁹ This perceived threat is exaggerated among students to stir both socialist sentiment and anti-incumbency, making the socialist left of the student leadership, the pro-independence ideology in Puerto Rico, and anti-incumbent sentiment nearly inseparable when mobilized. Jorge Farinacci, a longtime student leader and current clerk at the Puerto Rico Supreme Court, offers an accurate portrayal of the ideological alignment of student leaders in Puerto Rico.

According to Farinacci, a former president of the Rio Piedras campus student government and student representative in that campus' bodies as well the university's governing bodies, most of the student leadership "hails from the socialist left," which he describes as "*incidentally* pro-independence."⁸⁰ The pro-independence nuance may be incidental, but it is still very tangible. The political discourse in Puerto Rico is so polluted by the status debate, that the historical relationship between the ideological left and the independence ideology is now perceived as

⁷⁹ From interview with Farinacci. Appendix A.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

inseparable. Although Farinacci considers this relationship incidental, there is a solid paradigm in Puerto Rico that binds pro-statehood ideology to the right wing and deems the socialist left as inevitably pro-independence. He admits as much by suggesting that the pro-statehood members of the student leadership are inherently right wing. Applying the conditions for mobilization articulated by the resource mobilization and political process theories, the student movement in Puerto Rico seems to meet most of them. Resources, outside support, and media attention are all traits emphatically present in the student movement in Puerto Rico, even if this fails to explain the movement's broader political role. The school itself provides the platform for mobilization in the form of a traditionally radical student government. The uniqueness of the protests and their historical significance all but assure substantial media attention, and the nature of their claims allows for alliances with the minority party, especially when that party is not diametrically opposed to their predominantly pro-independence ideology. When the prompts occur, be it a tuition increase or the enrollment fee announced in 2010, all the right ingredients for mobilization are already present. If so, then why do they always fail? Not since the removal of the ROTC from the main campus in Rio Piedras and the creation of the non-confrontational policy has the student movement achieved anything it has explicitly set out to do.

The ongoing protests in Puerto Rico set out with considerable public support, but have failed to enlist the necessary outside support to meet their goals. Lacking the broad partisan and organizational support they had counted on in the past, the movement's leadership appealed directly to state legislators in early January 2011. At a rally before the steps of the state capitol, student leader Xiomara Caro called for alternatives to the enrollment fee and seemed optimistic

about future meetings with state Rep. Antonio Silva⁸¹, chairman of the Commission on the Treasury of the state House of Representatives.⁸² Although outside groups had gathered in support of the students, their claims fell on deaf ears. To this day, none of the student leadership's proposals have translated to legislation, despite efforts made by the state House and Senate leadership to meet with them. The movement has failed to meet its goals, whereas partisan free-riders within the PPD have successfully taken advantage of the opportunities the protests have provided.

The student movement in Puerto Rico would probably have a better chance of success if their rhetoric, tactics, and pro-independence nuance had not polluted their discourse and polarized them against the political establishment whose support they require. By becoming a platform for the pro-independence ideology and anti-incumbent rhetoric, the student movement has become a channel for external goals, unrelated issues, and partisan politicking. The student movement itself is a political opportunity for the disenfranchised, the aggrieved minorities, and free-riders.

An important question in this thesis is why the student movement in Puerto Rico has become so grossly ineffective save as a political opportunity factory for outside supporters and opportunists. The movement has failed to achieve any of its explicit goals recently because it is too polarizing. The status debate in Puerto Rico requires careful treading to prevent ideological gridlock, but the student leadership is always willing to flaunt its partisan and ideological nuances, even if these are completely unrelated to their goals. The movement is also too violent,

⁸¹ Some of the students' recommendations were incorporated into the \$30 million scholarship fund created to aid those unable to cover the temporary enrollment fee.

⁸² Díaz, Miguel for *El Nuevo Día*.

as demonstrated in the '71 protests and the recent vandalism and assaults on school officials. They are too disenfranchised to garner important partisan support when they need it the most. The Pro-Independence Party, traditionally a staunch supporter of the student cause, does not have the leverage required to influence legislation or policy decisions at a larger scale. For these and other reasons, the student movement is simply too unpopular in Puerto Rico. This prevents them from garnering enough public support to bargain with, especially when the only remaining pro-independence party with electoral franchise registered 2.04% of the vote in the 2008 general elections and was forced to seek re-recognition as a party for the second election cycle in a row.⁸³

The framing theory of social movement provides an additional lens through which to survey and understand why the student movement is perceived as polarizing and why they fail to consolidate substantial support across party lines. In fact, it is the theory that best explains the movement's broader political role in Puerto Rico. The paradigms addressed earlier are frames through which people in Puerto Rico understand the local political discourse. This framing is inescapable: same as Farinacci considers the socialist left in the student leadership "incidentally" pro-independence, opposition to strikes is perceived as pro-statehood or pro-establishment. Even when they support the overall cause of the movement, statehood supporters in the student movement do not feel welcome. By not being ideologically aligned with the student leadership, they are sidelined and inspire suspicion. In general assembly debates, an opponent of the call to strike or related action is perceived as supportive of the UPR administration. There are, of

⁸³ General election results from 2008 available at (http://ceepur.org/elecciones2008/CEE_Events/ELECCIONES_GENERALES_2008_4/NOCHE_DEL_EVENTO_7/default.html)

course, several pro-statehood leaders in the student movement, but the ones that succeed in this role are perceived by fellow statehood supporters as anti-incumbents.

Our comparable case studies lack this type of rhetoric and its polarizing effect. In Maryland, the tuition freeze marked a success for advocates of college affordability, while those supportive of a broader academic offer understand the need for modest increases in tuition. California activists also remain within the realm of education-related claims, despite the broader range of demands during their 2010 protests.⁸⁴ Their frame is fundamentally different from that of Puerto Rico's student movement. Past experience frames their views on the issue based solely on the issue of state and federal funding for education. California and Maryland activists do not seem to go beyond this issue when they mobilize, regardless of what other ideological or political stances they hold. In Puerto Rico, the population is innately exposed to the debate on the Island's legal status, and it becomes the lens through which all political debate is viewed. There is evidence of this frame in the political parties and their *raison d'être*, which is moving the Island toward their preferred legal status option.

Applying the framing theory does not render a different result when surveying California student protests. Their protests do not encompass goals outside of their inherent issue, even if varying success could contribute to different schema between them and the Maryland student movement. Arguably, the reason why student protests on the mainland do not bring outside issues into their rhetoric is to increase their odds of success. Increased polarization does not aid in achieving compromise. It makes sense to activists to assume pragmatic positions and decrease

⁸⁴ McKinley 2010.

divisive rhetoric.⁸⁵ The frame is not only different; it is also more welcoming to the student cause. This greater success per frame is attributable to greater pragmatism on the mainland movements, which is not unfeasible in Puerto Rico, but the evident political bias of the student leadership makes it difficult to assume.

A frame can shape a movement if there is collective agreement on definitions.⁸⁶ It is possible that frames in the mainland case studies do not allow for a broader political role because movement supporters are not ideologically homogeneous. There does not seem to be an inherent divisiveness in supporting the movement, but rather a common concern for the issue. In Puerto Rico, concern for the issue does not go that far. Participation in the movement almost requires ideological synchronicity on a broader range of issues, even if a pro-independence nuance is only incidental, as Farinacci claims.

The following chapter will examine how this frame can be replaced by mirroring existing paradigms of public debate and adopting a pragmatic approach. By abandoning the paradigm that aligns status preference with political ideology, Puerto Rico's public debate could improve and make for better policy decisions or even improve policy continuity. The student movement is just one example of the many ways in which the status issue pollutes the political discourse in Puerto Rico. As long as the status issue is pending, parties will not have distinct and ideologically consistent platforms to offer. Their proposals will be nuanced according to their legal status preference, creating increased partisanship where there is actually agreement.

⁸⁵ This does not ignore violent tactics by small groups within that movement – such as the disruption of campus operations in the University of California Santa Cruz campus during the 2010 protests – but rather refers to the broader message of the movement and its leadership. McKinley 2010.

⁸⁶ Johnston 2002 p. 66

In order to understand the need for a new paradigm or a re-framing of Puerto Rico's public debate, we first need to understand the current state of affairs in that area. Understanding why Puerto Rico's relationship with the United States has remained unchanged since 1952 is crucial in order to provide a blueprint out of political stagnation.

Chapter Three: De-Polarizing the Frame in Puerto Rico

The framing theory argues that social movements are mobilized by collective agreement on definitions;⁸⁷ suggesting the requirement of a common denominator of beliefs in order to prompt a social movement. In the Maryland and California case studies, this agreement is restricted to education-related issues, resulting in a narrower scope of activism. In Puerto Rico, agreement among movement leaders includes social issues (Farinacci) and political motivations (Laborde), in addition to opposition to budget cuts and other fiscal stabilization measures.

When applied to Puerto Rico's student activism, the framing theory rendered a distinct result that did not hold for other case studies. The student movement's broader role in Puerto Rico can be attributed to its inherently different cognitive schema, product of the Island's unresolved legal status question. In Maryland and California, protests in reaction to similar prompts have narrower scopes. Student activists in Maryland seem to limit their role to preserving college affordability and possibly broadening the academic offer at the University of Maryland. In California, there is a broader movement that supports increased state funding in education but limited its 2010 protests to opposing looming budget cuts. The student movement targets a broader range of issues. In 1971, they opposed the Vietnam War and the ROTC's recruitment with the support of socialist and nationalist political organizations. Opposition to student protests implied support of national policies, while supporting the protests' explicit goals of removing the ROTC from the main campus and preserving the school's autonomy from the central government required an ideological alignment with the socialist left. It can be gathered,

⁸⁷ Johnston 2002 p. 66

therefore, that the student movement in Puerto Rico is framed differently from those on the mainland. The reasons for this frame are found in the collective experience of the status issue.

The student movement does not seem to contribute its own frame to public debate in Puerto Rico, but rather borrows its definitions and equations from the broader political discourse on the Island. The student leadership – particularly within the radical groups that Laborde referred to in his interview – seems eager to equate student opposition to protests with alignment with the pro-statehood ideology, which is also perceived as inherently right wing. From outside, the general public perceives the student movement as insincere and rife with external ideological motives.⁸⁸

These definitions and equations filter public debate in Puerto Rico and increase polarization, which consequently impedes compromise. By assuming an unpopular ideology with limited political influence and an endangered electoral franchise, the student movement in Puerto Rico limits its reach. The movement then becomes exploited by political minorities, particularly the PPD, and is left without proper support in the establishment. The party system in Puerto Rico is based on legal status preferences rather than stances on social or economic issues, but this does not mean these issues are neglected in the public debate. What Puerto Rico's unique frame seems to create are additional dimensions of political identity that divide public servants on issues where they could feasibly agree. For example, there are prominent members of the Democratic Party within the ranks of both the pro-statehood PNP and the pro-status quo PPD.⁸⁹ Some of the

⁸⁸ Laborde himself became a vocal opponent of politically motivated protests after his term as president of the General Student Council. Interview enclosed as Exhibit B.

⁸⁹ This is tangible in the way Democratic primaries in Puerto Rico were operated. Co-chairs – one from the PPD and one from the PNP – directed the campaign(s) to assure neutrality on the issue of Puerto Rico's legal status. For then-Sen. Hillary Clinton's primary campaign, current Secretary of State Kenneth McClintock from the PNP and former candidate to the Resident Commissioner's Office Roberto Prats from the PPD were equally responsible for

most prominent Democratic leaders in Puerto Rico assumed co-chair positions during the Democratic primaries in 2008, but each campaign had one co-chairman from each of the main parties. Therefore, there is ideological agreement that surfaces occasionally on national issues but it does not translate into bipartisan effort at the state level. If the issue of Puerto Rico's legal status were solved, there would be no need for this additional dimension of public debate. If there is no additional dimension in Puerto Rico's public debate, consensus on issues other than the legal status would become more feasible.

The unresolved legal status issue pollutes the student movement's discourse and the overarching political debate in Puerto Rico. Until this schema of political identity based on status preference is removed from Puerto Rico's frame, the student movement and public debate overall will both remain stagnant. Failed attempts at addressing this issue have consisted of direct votes among three or more legal status options.⁹⁰ In two plebiscites – 1967 and 1993 – the “Commonwealth” option garnered a 60% majority and a 48% plurality. For the first time in 1998, the option was defined as territorial – that is, subject to the rules and regulations of a U.S. Territory⁹¹ – and garnered 0.1% of the vote. In 1991, the government of Puerto Rico held a referendum for incorporating certain extralegal powers to the current “Commonwealth” status.

overseeing the campaign. For President Barack Obama's primary campaign on the Island, the co-chairs were current Resident Commissioner Pedro Pierluisi from the PNP and current State Senator Eduardo Bhatia.

⁹⁰ Three plebiscites have been held in Puerto Rico to gauge support for different options. In 1963, the “Commonwealth” option garnered a 60% majority of the vote. In 1993, it garnered a 48% plurality. In 1998, it was defined as territorial – that is, subject to the rules and regulations of a U.S. Territory – and garnered 0.1% of the vote. Support for statehood has seen an upward trend throughout each plebiscite, garnering 39% in 1967, 46.3% in 1993, and 46.5% in 1998.

⁹¹ Section 3 of Article Four of the U.S. Constitution empowers Congress to “dispose of and make all needful Rules and Regulations respecting the Territory or other Property belonging to the United States.” In 1998, the PPD campaigned for a separate ballot option – “None of the above” – since it was dissatisfied with the territorial definition of the current legal status. “None of the above” garnered 50% of the vote.

The people of Puerto Rico rejected the proposition by a 55% majority.⁹² Support for the current “Commonwealth” status in the 1993 plebiscite may have been an endorsement of these enhancements to the territorial relationship. By the end of that decade, the federal Department of Justice had already established these enhancements as unconstitutional in step with the 1998 plebiscite definitions.⁹³ A memorandum by the federal Department of Justice identified only two non-territorial status options: sovereign independence or statehood. President George W. Bush’s Task Force on Puerto Rico’s Status confirmed these limited options for non-territorial status.

Some of these plebiscites were often in response to failed congressional action or presidential support for self-determination.⁹⁴ In 1992, President George H.W. Bush issued a Memorandum to all federal agencies directing them to “treat Puerto Rico administratively as if it were a State insofar as doing so would not disrupt Federal programs or operations.”⁹⁵ In 1997, Rep. Don Young (R-AK) introduced House Resolution 856 calling for a local plebiscite among legal status options before December 1998.⁹⁶ The resolution was not enacted, but a plebiscite was nonetheless held with the support of Puerto Rico’s Legislative Assembly. In 2007, then-Rep. Luis Fortuño, serving as Resident Commissioner of Puerto Rico in the U.S. Congress, introduced the “Puerto Rico Democracy Act” consistent with the format recommended by President George W. Bush’s Task Force on Puerto Rico’s Status.⁹⁷ The bill was reintroduced by current Resident

⁹² From Report By The President’s Task Force On Puerto Rico’s Status (2005) p. 3. Enclosed as Appendix C.

⁹³ Ibid. Appendix C: Office of Legislative Affairs, Department of Justice, Memorandum to Hon. Frank H. Murkowski, Chairman of Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee (2001).

⁹⁴ Ibid. p. 4. See President Harry S Truman’s appointment of the first native Puerto Rican governor and the federal law allowing Puerto Ricans to elect their governor.

⁹⁵ Ibid. p.2.

⁹⁶ Ibid. p. 4

⁹⁷ Ibid. Appendix C. The Task Force recommended a two-tier plebiscite that would first ask the people of Puerto Rico whether they wish to remain a territory or pursue non-territorial options. The second round, should the people choose to pursue non-territorial options, would include independence and statehood. The bill passed the House Committee on Natural Resources but was never taken to a vote on the House floor.

Commissioner Rep. Pedro R. Pierluisi in 2009. Rep. Pierluisi's bill passed the U.S. House of Representatives by a 223-169 vote margin but died in the Senate's Energy and Natural Resources Committee after the 2010 congressional elections. On March 11th, 2011, President Barack H. Obama's Task Force on Puerto Rico's Status issued its Report recommending a new format, which prompted local debate on whether – and how – to outline a future plebiscite consistent with the Department of Justice's reasoning and all previous President's Task Force reports.

The most recent Task Force report recommended several formats, indicating a preference for a two-tier plebiscite based on the question of Puerto Rico's desire to remain part of the United States or pursue independence as a sovereign nation. The majority PNP supports another version of the Task Force's recommendations: a plebiscite would be held before December 2011 among non-territorial options⁹⁸ and the prevailing option would be paired against the current relationship in a second round of voting. It is concerning that any legislation for this plebiscite would not bind the next Legislative Assembly in Puerto Rico, especially if the PNP loses its current majority in the 2012 elections, since the second round of voting is scheduled for early 2013. The issue of Puerto Rico's legal status must be resolved to allow these divisive paradigms to be replaced with a more ideologically coherent – more pragmatic – frame.

The most noticeable way in which purging the status issue from Puerto Rico's political discourse could improve public debate is by vindicating otherwise pragmatic movements such as student activism in the University of Puerto Rico. Although there is some disagreement among student leaders on the degree of pro-independence advocacy that nuances student protests, the movement is clearly a channel for aggrieved political minorities, whether partisan or

⁹⁸ The options would include Independence, Free Association, and Statehood. From Report By The President's Task Force On Puerto Rico's Status (2011) p. 28. Enclosed as Appendix D.

disenfranchised. The movement provides a platform for disenfranchised independence supporters who lack effective leadership outside the UPR. This lack of outside leadership is greatly due to ideological differences within the pro-independence ideology itself. As a result of Puerto Rico's relationship with the United States, there is a resulting *frame within a frame* that creates additional perceivable affiliations and increases divisiveness. According to current and former student leaders interviewed for this paper, student protest leadership is of a nearly homogeneous political make-up. Farinacci accurately described them as members of the socialist left that are incidentally supportive of Puerto Rico's independence. In spite of their straightforward political views, these leaders lack proper political channels and instead use the student movement as a platform for unrelated issues.

The student movement in Puerto Rico should dispose of the ideological nuances that compromise their goals, but this does not change the fact that the socialist left needs a political franchise outside of the main state university system. In the short-term, providing guarantees or looser standards to the pro-independence electoral franchise could provide an outlet for this rhetoric. However, a clear path toward political leadership in the PIP or another pro-independence electoral franchise would arguably remove any incentive for student leaders to assume more pragmatic positions. In the long-term, this lack of proper channels could be addressed by replacing the status-oriented paradigm in Puerto Rico's public debate. It is therefore harmful to Puerto Rico's student movement to assume a broader political role than its parallels in California or Maryland, since these have greater levels of effective leadership and success. Until the frame that binds Puerto Rico's student movement is depolarized by resolving the legal status issue, it is unforeseeable that it would have greater degrees of success in the

future. A blueprint out of Puerto Rico's political gridlock requires a prompt definition of its legal status in a way that satisfies a majority of its electorate. Until such a day where political identity in Puerto Rico is defined by something other than preference for a legal status option, ideological coherence, compromise, and reasonable debate will all become increasingly unfeasible.

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APPENDIX A

Jorge Farinacci, esq. Interview on Student Activism in Puerto Rico

1. How would you describe your role in student activism in Puerto Rico?

-While I was a student at UPR-Rio Piedras Campus (BA; MA and JD from 1999-2010) I was very active in the student movement, as a member of political organizations (both student political organization as well as part of broader national organizations that had student branches), as an elected member of student government structures (President of the UPR-Rio Piedras General Student Council 2000-2002, member of its Board of Directors 1999-2003, 2007-2008, and other positions), and as an elected student representative to official UPR governing bodies (member of the UPR-Rio Piedras Academic Senate 2000-2003, 2006-2008, member of the UPR System University Board 2002-2003, 2007-2008 and sole student member of the UPR Board of Trustees 2008-2009). I participated in countless student assemblies, forums, marches, festival and others.

2. How do you view the role of student activism in Puerto Rico's politics?

-I rate it as very important. First, many current PR political leaders where, in one way or another, student activists at the UPR, whether left or right. Second, what happens at the UPR is national news, because of the importance of the UPR in society and because of the militancy of student protests, as well as because on several occasions such protests have been massive. Third, many issues and causes taken up by the UPR student movement have national transcendence: the struggle to end the war in Vietnam, the struggle to end the bombing campaign by the Navy in Vieques, the opposition to privatization of government corporations and agencies, the opposition of the sales tax and the firing of thousands of public employees. Fourth, because when the labor, environmental or even opposition political movements have been incapable of organizing opposition to government policies, the student movement has been able to mobilize and serve as the only political opposition.

3. What are the main goals of student activists in the state school system in Puerto Rico?

-For several decades, there have been two strategic goals for the student movement. First, the transformation of the structure of the University ruling entities so that it is governed by democratically elected bodies representative of the university community: mainly students, professors and non-teaching employees. Second, opposition to the constant privatization and elevation of tuition costs so that the UPR, as a public institution, offers free, public and quality higher education.

4. How would you describe the strategy of recent student protests in Puerto Rico?

-There is, nor has there ever been, a single strategy. The student movement is not a unified and homogeneous body. It has internal contradictions, frictions and variety of opinion, ideology and tactics. There are several competing views. Some believe in mass protests, particularly in alliance with labor unions. Some believe in lobbying different political bodies of the State. Some believe in constant mobilization that interrupts, but doesn't stop completely, the functioning of the UPR. Some believe in direct action carried out by a few but dedicated students. Most, I think, believe in a combined strategy. Mass protests, alliances with labor unions and, most importantly, the courting of public opinion. In the last year, given the stubbornness of the UPR management, the movement has concentrated on large-scale work and academic stoppages, as well as intercommunity mobilization to politically pressure both the UPR board of trustees and the central government itself. In 2010, this strategy was quite successful. In 2011, the use of police force, the courts, new laws, suspension of student leaders and, on the other hand, several tactical blunders of the movement leadership mixed with physical and emotional frustration, have halted large scale stoppages but has not prevented the protests or has that implied that the ISSUES pressed by the student movement no longer command a majority of its population.

5. Do you believe the status question plays an important role in these student protests?

-Maybe moderately. Several members of the student movement leadership are of statehood or commonwealth persuasion. Many, if not most of the leadership, hail from the socialist left. The socialist left is INCIDENTALLY pro-independence, but it is mostly concentrated on social and economic issues. Except where the particular issue is of a status-related nature (such as Vieques, the war in Iraq, the ROTC, etc.), when the issue is social or economic, which tend to be more frequent than the purely status-related ones, I believe the status question is considerable secondary. During the 1970's and the war in Vietnam, status played a decisive role. Now, even though most of the leadership is pro-independence, I believe this is incidental.

6. Do you believe student protests in Puerto Rico influence partisan politics? If so, how?

-There are close to 70,000 students in the UPR system. That's hundreds of thousands parents, uncles and aunts, neighbors, etc. Since de 1940's, what happens at the UPR tends to be a campaign issue: either to denounce state brutality, or to denounce the presence of subversive elements in the country, or to champion some student issues such as privatization, access to higher education, etc. More so, political parties have always desired control of the UPR because of its budget, prestige and importance in national life. Just an example: one of the few gubernatorial debates conducted in 2008 was at the UPR Theatre directed mainly at the student body as a public.

APPENDIX B

Gabriel E. Laborde Interview on Student Activism in Puerto Rico

1. How would you describe your role in student activism in Puerto Rico?

During my time as Student Government President, my role was representing what the general assembly demanded and approved. Although, during spring 2010 (before the 62 day shutdown) I opposed a strike, I ended up supporting it due to my position.

After my presidency, my role was one of presenting a strong opposition to groups which, for political reasons, promoted a strike. The opposition I presented was based on my concern for the university's reputation being affected by constant conflicts, having its accreditation under review, and thinking that the motivation for the protests were political.

2. How do you view the role of student activism in Puerto Rico's politics?

Student activism in Puerto Rico plays an important role in politics. The University enrolls around 64,000 students (the number goes down 5K-7K during the spring session) and has educated hundreds of thousands of Puerto Ricans, which still hold some type of affection to the institution. Having so many people attached to it makes it vulnerable to protests whenever government threatens to change anything in the institution.

Also, due to the high number of political organizations (mainly socialists), protests will emerge from the university not only when government will intervene in the institution, but also for other social causes. Examples include student strikes whenever the Teachers' Federation (FMPR) strike, protests against government layoffs, environmentalist issues, among others. We could conclude that activist students, and not student activism, plays an important role in politics in non-electoral years.

3. What are the main goals of student activists in the state school system in Puerto Rico?

Question answered above.

4. How would you describe the strategy of recent student protests in Puerto Rico?

The recent strategy attempted to victimize students by provoking conflicts with police in order to regain the sympathy they had lost with the December riots. The attempt however was unsuccessful because most of the students that remained active in the movement were mainly radicals associated with left-wing political organizations and acted violently.

5. Do you believe the status question plays an important role in these student protests?

No. Most people believe that people who support independence are the ones who are active in student protests. Although, most of the organizations promoting protests and its leadership do support independence, protests like the spring 2010 one include many people who support statehood as well as people who are associated with the Popular Democratic Party.

6. Do you believe student protests in Puerto Rico influence partisan politics? If so, how?

They have little influence on partisan politics. Whenever the protests have a strong support, the opposition party will join in an attempt to receive support from protestors and people supporting them.

APPENDIX C

APPENDIX D