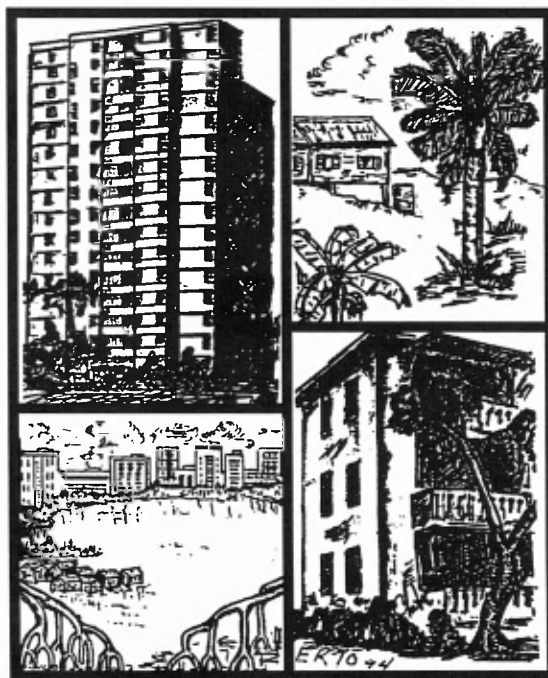


**LA POBREZA
EN
PUERTO RICO
Y
AMÉRICA LATINA**



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**ACCIONES
PARA
COMBATIR
LA POBREZA**

PUERTO RICAN POLITICAL PARTIES AND POOR COMMUNITIES: THE EROSION OF THE POLITICAL PARTIES' SOCIAL BASE

*Dr. Jorge Benítez Nazario**

INTRODUCTION

This paper focuses on the evolving relationship that exists between poor communities and the traditional political parties in Puerto Rico.¹ In particular, it shall address two aspects of this complex process, relying on a historical analysis of both the political parties and the communities selected, as well as in the preliminary findings of a survey research study conducted among a randomly selected sample of members of the communities under scrutiny.²

First, the study addresses the various ways in which the continuous growth, development and bureaucratization of political parties' structures and state institutions in the Island have deterred their ability to respond to the specific needs, interests and demands of economically deprived communities. Second, the paper assesses the development of new needs and values among the poor population of the communities addressed. Accordingly, this paper is both a reflection on the dynamic nature of the Puerto Rican political parties and its effects on public services for the poor. Finally, the study also intends to pinpoint and evaluate the particular organizational or spontaneous responses furthered by the various communities.

It is hypothesized that poor communities shall either re-define their relationship with political parties and the state institutions in the Island, or generate their own grass-roots movements, or both, in order to seek more

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¹ The Puerto Rican Independence Party (*Partido Independentista Puertorriqueño-PIP*) has been excluded due to its virtual absence among the Puerto Rican poor.

² All interviews were conducted between September and November of 1991. The final questionnaire was the result of an information gathering process which included the organization of eight focus groups (two in each community) and the administration of a pre-test during July and August of 1991. The results discussed in this paper are significant at a 95% confidence level. The obtained survey data was completed with information gathered with the administration of intensive interviews to community leaders.

pertinent solutions to their problems. This hypothesis arises from two basic assumptions.

First, it is assumed that due to the continuous growth and bureaucratization of the political parties and state institutions during the last forty years or so of Puerto Rican political history, their static organizational structures and decision-making spheres have become increasingly insensitive to the demands and needs of poor communities. Moreover, we are presuming that the fast and profound industrialization process that took place in Puerto Rico during the second half of this century and which provided economic security for most Puerto Ricans, has gradually transformed the population's traditional **materialist needs**, referring to the needs related to the struggle for survival, into needs which are more related to the quality of life. Therefore, from this perspective, the capacity of the political parties for maintaining popular support is conditioned by their ability to recognize this fact and thus, for eventually transforming their social policies toward the poor. Accordingly, it is argued that the present combination of an insensitive political structure with an old system of social policies that does not respond to the development of new (post-materialist) needs may promote the propagation of spaces of political emptiness (in terms of popular support for a given political party), where either political realignment or community grass-root movements might flourish.

I. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Throughout his works on the development of Caribbean societies, **Sidney Mintz** has emphasized that the transformation of peasant societies promoted by the advancement of capitalism in the region has resulted in a general feeling of isolation among the upcoming industrial working force. His studies identify a common response in the attitudes and behavior of the newly created proletariat which is committed to the search for the old community life.³ That is, Mintz believes that the industrial proletariat born in the Caribbean during the second half of the twentieth century misses the community's social support and, in turn, attempts to recover it within the context of political organizations such as political parties and workers' unions. Furthermore, Mintz's works demonstrate that in the absence of

³ For a detailed presentation of this argument see Sidney Mintz, *Worker in the Cane: A Puerto Rican Life History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1974).

A good recapitulation of Mintz' contribution regarding this problem may be found in the foreword by Francisco Scarano to the Spanish version of the same work, *Taso: el trabajador de la caña* (San Juan: Huracán, 1990).

political organizations to deal with the atomization promoted by a capitalist economy, even revivalist religious churches might become good alternatives to substitute the social network previously provided by community life. Therefore, Mintz identifies a kind of social emptiness that must be filled up by the structures of social support of the political party's or the union's or the churches' organization. Departing from this argument, we are sustaining that the Puerto Rican poor's identification with a given political party shall be conditioned upon the political party's ability to substitute the community's social support network.

Nevertheless, both—**Sidney Mintz's** and our argument—rest on the assumption that political parties can address the social needs and demands expressed by poor people. It is at this point that **Ronald Inglehart's** theory and empirical studies regarding the notion of the existence of **materialist and post-materialist values** continuum that fluctuates according to the degree of economic development of a particular society, becomes important in the explanation of political loyalties.⁴ Inglehart affirms that once people realize, from a historical perspective, that they have economic and personal security (materialist values), their concerns and needs become demands for more participation in the decision-making processes that take place in their work-place, community and government, and a concern for the environment in which they live and for civil rights and liberties (post-materialist values). In general, Inglehart argues that only when the material conditions for subsistence have been achieved, people can assign priorities to the social, political, intellectual and aesthetic aspects of life; to issues more closely related to the quality of life. Inglehart also believes that because of the technological and material progress attained by western industrial societies during the second half of this century, the possibility for such a transformation in the subjective perspective of the people becomes more feasible. Interestingly, and indeed very carefully, he points out that it is among those sectors of the population which are better off in economic terms that we should find clear evidence about the spread of post-materialist values.

However, notwithstanding **Inglehart's** argument (and in fact building upon it), we shall maintain that in societies in which welfare programs have extended to satisfy the material needs of most of the population (which definitely are not the better-off sectors) and where the cultural values

⁴ Ronald Inglehart, *The Silent Revolution: Changing Values and Political Styles Among Western Publics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977); *Idem* "Value Priorities and Socioeconomic Change", in Barnes, Kaase *et al.*, *Political Action: Mass Participation in Five Western Democracies* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1979); *Idem.*, *Culture Shift in Advanced Industrial Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).

adopted by both public and private communication webs reflect the world-views of the privileged, it is plausible to assume that even the poor can incorporate post-materialist values within their political perspectives. We believe this is the Puerto Rican case and that it is why we shall limit our focus to poor communities. Assuming we are on the correct trail, the relationship between political parties and poor people in Puerto Rico in the years to come shall be very much determined by the ability of the political parties in the Island to understand and respond to the above-described change in the poor's perspective.⁵

II. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In order to explain the re-structuring of the relationship of the political parties and the community during the second half of the twentieth century in Puerto Rico we must, at least, take a glance at the history of both the structures of the political parties and the communities assessed. Any overview of the **evolving** content of the public policies advanced in the programs of the two main populist parties in Puerto Rico, the pro-Commonwealth **Popular Democratic Party** (*Partido Popular Democrático-PPD*) and the pro-Statehood **New Progressive Party** (*Partido Nuevo Progresista-PNP*), shall inevitably demonstrate one thing: There has been little or no transformation at all of the ideological and programmatic stances of these political parties, specially concerning their positions on the welfare of the poor, which happens to be the main social force behind electoral processes on the Island since 1938.⁶ A closer look at the programs under scrutiny indicates that the existing policies toward the poor respond mainly to the needs and social problems that prevailed before the Puerto Rican economy was industrialized and a welfare type of state was established. That is, the present programs of both parties ignore historical transformations and insist on addressing problems that are not central any more. Apparently, the leaders and technical staff members of both parties have been unable to recognize that the industrialization process in the Island has transformed much more than the Puerto Rican economy. Indeed, the last fifty years of history have dramatically changed the lifestyles and world-views of most Puerto Ricans. But, in general, political parties' programs do not acknowledge this fact. Accordingly, the political

⁵ The Census of 1990 estimates the Puerto Rican population which lives under poverty levels in the Island in about 63 per cent.

⁶ I reviewed the political platforms of the Popular Democratic Party since 1948 and the New Progressive Party since 1968, when it was founded.

programs of the two parties insist too much on promoting social policies to only guarantee survival conditions for the poor.

In addition to the programmatic staticism just described, we have to consider the fact that in both instances the organizational and administrative structures of the **PPD** and the **PNP** have stayed intact since their origin. That is, the organizational and administrative structures of these parties have not evolved according to the constant growth and the increasing political capacitation of their rank and file membership, which in turn, translates into an ongoing and increasing process of claims for more participation in the decision-making processes. Therefore, the people's trust in the political party's ability to respond to their demands for a more active role, as well as the **PPD**'s and **PNP**'s followers political party affiliation, may have just begun to vanish because of the two parties' reluctance to democratize their organizational and administrative structures.⁷

The history of the four communities assessed must be addressed at two different levels. **First**, we should refer to the more general effects that the Puerto Rican industrialization process had upon community life in the Island. **Second**, we should focus on the particular historical process that characterizes and differentiates the communities assessed. The latter may be the source for understanding the existence of specific sets of needs and demands for each case.

In general, the industrialization process in the Island which developed under the sponsorship of **Operation Bootstrap**⁸ in the 1940's had a disrupting effect upon community life. **First**, we should point out that the speed and intensity that characterized the industrialization of Puerto Rico, indeed a capitalist one, generated a dramatic process of proletarianization of a working force that for decades had relied upon a household small-crop type of agricultural economy in order to complement the insufficient and

⁷ For a more detailed discussion of the undemocratic character of the Popular Democratic Party see Robert W. Anderson, *Party Politics in Puerto Rico* (California: Stanford University Press, 1965). For the case of the New Progressive Party, the best analysis is Edgardo Meléndez, *Puerto Rico's Statehood Movement* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988).

The Puerto Rican political party structure fits very well within the boundaries of what Maurice Duverger calls **weak articulated party structures**. In his view, these structures, molded upon the organization of government, are basically centralized and elitist in nature. Within these party structures, the effective participation of the rank and file members is almost nil. *Vid.* Maurice Duverger, *Los partidos políticos* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1980), pp. 70-90.

⁸ A detailed explanation of the implementation and consequences of **Operation Bootstrap** may be found in Eliczer Curet Cuevas, *El desarrollo económico de Puerto Rico: 1940 a 1972* (San Juan: Management Center, 1972).

unstable wages paid by the sugar cane, tobacco and coffee industries in the Island. Together with the disappearance of the semi-proletarian Puerto Rican working force and the subsequent appearance of **free** workers, economic subsistence was increasingly determined more by the individual effort and the state than by the traditional community support and solidarity.⁹ **Second**, insofar as the industrialization that took place in the Island was established mostly around the metropolitan region of San Juan, substituting and eventually destroying the old quasi-feudal agricultural system,¹⁰ thousands of workers were left unemployed in the countryside. These huge mass of jobless workers were forced to migrate, either to the not so many openings generated by the (now) female-oriented textile industries established in the San Juan suburban belt, or to the more numerous job opportunities created by the economic boom in the Eastern United States.

We should underline the fact that this migration process, ignited by the development of a capitalist industrial system in Puerto Rico not only dislocated community and family life in the Island, but generated a novel social dynamic within the context of an emerging system of shanty towns around San Juan.¹¹ In these shanty towns or *arrabales* the Puerto Rican poor (now urban poor) would coexist without the family ties and the open spaces which characterized life in the communities in which they were born. Accordingly, even though in the new urban communities people lived closer to each other (physically speaking), most of them would learn to live in isolation. Thus, ironically, with the advancement of capitalism in the Island, the conditions for subsistence of the Puerto Rican poor and the quality of their lives were not necessarily improved. Nevertheless, in order to prevent the political violence that usually comes along with the above described process, welfare policies have been increasingly implemented by the State during the last four decades to assist the urban poor in Puerto Rico up to the point that the material conditions for their subsistence have been assured.¹²

⁹ A good theoretical approach to this process may be found in Alan de Janvry, *Proletarianization Processes in Latin America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).

¹⁰ About this issue see Ángel G. Quintero Rivera, *Conflictos de clase y política en Puerto Rico* (Río Piedras: Huracán, 1977).

¹¹ The best political study about the creation and development of shanty towns in Puerto Rico can be found in Rafael Ramírez, *El arrabal y La política* (Río Piedras: Editorial Universitaria, 1972).

A good analysis of the social dynamics within these shanty towns in Puerto Rico can be found in Helen I. Safa, *The Urban Poor of Puerto Rico: A Study in Development and Inequality* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972).

¹² For a good analysis about the political considerations that justified these welfare policies in the Island, see Leonardo Santana Rabell, *Política y planificación en Puerto Rico: un análisis crítico* (San Juan: Editorial Cultural, 1989).

The communities assessed in this study represent both faces of the coin. That is, examples from the old rural communities disrupted by the industrialization process and the urban communities which resulted from the subsequent migration to the San Juan sub-urban region were selected. The two rural communities surveyed were **Pueblito del Carmen**, in the southern town of Guayama, and **Barrio Garrochales**, which stands within the limits of the northern city of Arecibo. The two urban communities selected were **Cantera**, which divides the Santurce and Río Piedras sectors in the capital city of San Juan, and **Puente Blanco**, in the suburban town of Cataño, which stands a couple of miles away from the Old San Juan area.

Pueblito del Carmen was once a prosperous community during the 1940's when it stood as the commercial linkage between the towns of Guayama and Salinas. The **Census Bureau** indicates that between 1940 and 1950 the population of this Community increased dramatically from about 400 persons to as much as 3,000. However, during the 1960's, as the agricultural activity declined in the region and the **miracle of Operation Bootstrap** took over the Island's economy, this community began to lose commercial importance and the number of available jobs started to decline. By the beginning of the 70's, not only had **Pueblito del Carmen** seen its commercial activity vanish and its population reduced to about 2,000 people (mainly due to the migration of the young population who left for San Juan and/or New York looking for jobs), but services such as telephone lines, health services and potable water system were dismantled. It was not until 1990 that the remaining population of **Pueblito del Carmen** was organized as a community, beyond political party boundaries, and recovered the telephone service and potable water they had enjoyed two decades before. Currently, the community is still trying to reopen the old Public Health Center, which has become more necessary now that most of its population is aging.

Sectors **I** and **II** of **Barrio Garrochales**, in Arecibo, is another community that was dislocated as its young population migrated—either to the San Juan or New York suburbs—when the industrialization process replaced the agriculture-oriented economy during the 1950's. Previously, it was the site of one of the largest sugar mills in Puerto Rico, which not only employed the working population of the region but some thousand more during harvest season as well. The **Census Bureau** reports that sectors **I** and **II** of **Barrio Garrochales** had a population size of over 6,500 persons by 1950. The population census of 1990 identifies 4,763 persons living in the same area. The Community has kept all the state-sponsored services that it started to receive at the beginning of the 60's with the expansion of the welfare type of government in Puerto Rico (contrary to the, maybe,

extreme experience of the **Pueblito del Carmen** community). However, it is noteworthy that its community has also begun to organize beyond political parties' boundaries. The issue at stake is the establishment, since 1978, of the city's commercial garbage disposal site which has seriously polluted the air of the region with sulfur and bad smells.

The community of **Puente Blanco** exhibits all the **collage** kind of social relationships that a shanty town composed of families that came from every corner of the Island, with all sorts of occupational and racial backgrounds, may present. **Puente Blanco** is also a good place to be educated about the social behavior of the unemployed, since it was inhabited mostly by those families that could not find jobs after migrating to the San Juan suburbs and, at the same time, were **not fitted** to occupy a job in New York. In fact, a community developed during the 1950's, Puente Blanco is indeed considered as one of the first **welfare state-dependent** communities in Puerto Rico. The **Bureau of the Census** in 1960 stated that in this community of over 7,000 people most jobs held were unskilled, sporadic and related to domestic services. According to the 1990 population Census, things are almost the same. This community, as most other shanty towns in San Juan, either still lack many basic public services or receives the worst of them despite its geographical closeness to most of the state-owned providers. Because of this situation, it is no accident that the community of **Puente Blanco** nowadays struggles to obtain basic public services from the state agencies (like mail service) or to improve the existing ones, or to get rid of some of the social problems related to the absence of social goods such as a good school or a decent job. As the community of Puente Blanco demonstrated in 1968, they are willing to deal with whichever political party is in power in order to solve their particular problems.

The community of **Cantera**, despite its shanty town configuration which makes it resemble the physical contour of **Puente Blanco**, was born in the mid fifties as a community of working people who provided skilled labor force for the construction and textile industries of San Juan. However, because of both the substitution of labor-intensive industries for capital-intensive ones during the 1970's and the implementation of tax-exempt bylaws in the countryside during the same decade, most of its working population found itself unemployed at the beginning of the 80's. As a result, many members of the Community, specially those from its working age groups, migrated to New York or became jobless, not only reducing the community's population size but disrupting its social balance. The **Census Bureau** reports that by 1970 the population size there was well over 3,000 people, while in 1990 the reported population size diminishes to about 2,500 persons. Academic and professional studies conducted in the region

also indicate that the unemployment rate reaches almost seventy percent of the working age population and that the aging population of **Cantera** clearly overcomes the size of its young adult population. Accordingly, the Community has organized itself during the past ten years in order to obtain services for the old people and to struggle against the criminal activities that flourish in a soil fertilized by unemployment and food stamps. Very recently, in response to the state's overt intentions for expropriating a significant portion of its territory, the different community-based organizations have mobilized as one, beyond all political party considerations, to ensure the necessary housing units in other sectors of the community so that **Cantera** can keep its social integrity.

III. FINDINGS

First, we shall go over some descriptive data in order to **operationalize** what we consider as a poor community within the context of the Puerto Rican society.

Information on the family income structure from the four communities assessed indicates that **65** per cent of the families in each community earned between \$5,000.00 and \$10,000.00 a year, while as much as **20** per cent of the families in each community earned less than \$5,000.00 a year. In order to qualify this information it is good to know that the average family in these communities has six members. However, this figure varies between urban and rural areas, with about five members per family in the urban region and seven members per family in the rural zone.

The unemployment rate in all four communities was much higher than the official one.¹³ The lowest unemployment rate reported was **43** per cent in **Puente Blanco**, followed by **57** per cent in **Garrochales**, **61** per cent in **Pueblito del Carmen** and **76** per cent in **Cantera**. Nevertheless, we should mention that in all cases about **20** per cent of the unemployed admitted having some kind of unreported side-line job or business in order to complement the earnings received from different sorts of public assistance programs.

Regarding the housing and transportation situations, our data indicates that over **80** per cent of the people surveyed own the house they occupy. Meanwhile, close to **35** per cent of those who own a house admitted that they did not own the plot of land where their houses are built. In fact, in

¹³ According to the Department of Labor of Puerto Rico, official figures have fluctuated between 16% and 19% for the last five years. However, it should be noted that in order to be considered officially unemployed, a person must be **actively looking for a job** under governmental guidance for a period that lasts 12 months in average. Thus, structural unemployment is not considered.

almost all occasions when a family did not hold the title of its property, the sites were owned by the state. Also, it is noteworthy that in all communities assessed, less than **60** per cent of the families interviewed owned a car, thus depending on the inefficient and insufficient public and commercial transportation systems to move around.

Finally, we should address the low degree of schooling which characterizes the populations of the four communities under scrutiny. In all cases, the average person did not make it to high school. This situation worsened in the countryside as in **Pueblito del Carmen** and **Garrochales** where the average person did not study beyond the sixth grade. Furthermore, we found that overall, **11.5** per cent of the subjects interviewed are practically illiterate.

Summing up, from the analysis of the descriptive data obtained we can conclude that the members of the communities studied are not only poor but, indeed, they lack the tools to overcome the social deprivation in which they live (such as a job or schooling). Nevertheless, despite the economic hardships confronted by these families, this paper insists that, politically speaking, they do adopt **post-materialist** positions. Our hypotheses shall be tested in terms of the communal problems identified by the populations surveyed, their recognized attitudes toward political participation and the character of their political party affiliation. Information offered by the subjects interviewed indicates that even though most of the local problems identified were of a **materialist** character, **post-materialist** values occupy a significant place in their world-views. Furthermore, our study indicates that while most of the problems identified locally concur with the national problems recognized by other studies, it is also true that several local problems were specific to each community. That is, while this study cannot deny the fact that for the majority of the members of the communities assessed most of the recognized local problems dealt with **materialist** and/or national concerns, **post-materialist** problems, which were specific to their communities, have indeed become important to the poor in each case studied.

On the one hand, a constant cluster of problems arose in all four communities surveyed. This cluster includes concerns in regard to **crime (37.2%)**, **drug usage (33.4%)**, **lack of or polluted water (28.2%)**, **governmental corruption (24.3%)**, **unemployment (23.6%)**, **housing conditions (19.0%)**, **cost of life (17.5%)**, and **inefficiency of public services (such as mass transportation, electric energy and schools) (15.7%)**. It is noteworthy that **water pollution**, **governmental corruption**, **inefficiency of public services** belong to the sphere of **post-materialist** values.

On the other hand, each community identified a specific set of local problems. The community of **Puente Blanco** was very concerned about **the absence of postal services (56.2%), the absence of sewer systems (47.0%)** and **the rat-infested grade school cafeteria (32.6%)**. In Cantera most people were concerned about the **pollution of the stream (caño) that surrounds it (22.3%), the precarious condition of housing facilities (30.4%)** and **the continuous noises generated by the cars that drive across the slim roads (45.1%)**. Answers offered by members of the **Garrochales** community evidenced a great deal of concern about **the smells produced by the garbage dump nearby (73.8%)** and **the bad conditions of the roads in the community (47.3%)**. In **Pueblito del Carmen** people were worried about **the conditions of the school structure (52.1%), the absence of recreational facilities for the youth and the elderly (39.9%), the absence of telephone lines (65.0%)** and **the long distance they have to travel in order to make it to the nearest medical facilities (23.7%)**. Therefore, again, if we circumscribe our analysis to the context of local problems, **post-materialist** concerns come forward.

In recapitulation, it is evident that despite the economic deprivation suffered by all the subjects interviewed, a significant number of them claim that they worry about the quality of life in their communities when, for example, they assign priority to issues such as environmental pollution.

Another level where we can investigate the development of **post-materialist** orientations among the population assessed is in its attested political behavior. As much as **87.6** per cent of all the subjects interviewed said that they planned to participate in the next electoral process. When asked about the reasons that generated such a massive commitment to vote, **63.5** per cent of those who support that kind of political action expressed that **it was their democratic duty to do so**. Twenty two percent (**22%**) said that they had to vote in order to **protect a right that cost much struggles**. A significant **14.5** per cent explained their behavioral support for the electoral process in terms of **the absence of other institutional means for political participation in the Island**. This answer was particularly interesting in view of their manifested skepticism regarding the effectiveness of voting (**43%** of the subjects interviewed).

When questioned about their political party preference, **47.5** per cent of those who said they have participated in the electoral process supported the New Progressive Party (**PNP**). Forty two percent backed the Popular Democratic Party (**PPD**), **4.5** per cent said they belonged to the Puerto Rican Independence Party (**PIP**), and six per cent (**6%**) were undecided or argued they were non-partisan. A first glance at these figures only confirms the continuous existence of the traditional political party alliances which

have dominated our political history for the last 30 years or so. Thus, according to the analysis of the numbers presented here, the advancement of **post-materialist** values among the communities addressed does not necessarily disrupt the traditional political relationships between the poor and political parties in the Island. However, what is relevant from the data obtained in our study is that from those supporting the **PNP** and the **PPD** many were inclined to vote for candidates from the opposition. Almost **37** per cent of the **PNP** members expressed their willingness to vote for candidates from other political entities. In similar fashion, our results indicate that among the **PPD** supporters, the number of subjects willing to cross party lines increased to **52** per cent. This tendency was more or less constant among the four communities studied, with the exception of **Pueblito del Carmen** where as much as 49 per cent of the **PNP** supporters and **73** per cent of the **PPD** loyals said they would cross party lines in the next elections. In the particular case of **Pueblito del Carmen** this finding was not a surprise, given the fact that an important leader of the **PIP** had been instrumental in acquiring the pipes for the implementation of a new drinking water system at the time we surveyed the region.¹⁴

Nevertheless, in any case, what is significant according to our theoretical perspective is the identification of parallel processes of both value transformations and a tendency to use the vote in a novel manner in all four communities researched. This result was indeed intriguing given the fact that almost half of the subjects who now qualify their political support for the **PNP** or the **PPD** (in fact **47.6%**), said they were willing to vote for a candidate from the **PIP**, mostly because of their exhibited administrative honesty. The remainder **53.4%** said they were thinking of voting for any good candidate from a different political party at the municipal level for two main reasons. First, many (**39.2%**) argued that **they were tired of voting for bad or unknown candidates from their own political party just because they enjoyed the sponsorship of the party's national leadership**. Others (**23.5%**) said that it was difficult to give their unconditional support to a political party (even it is was the party of their preference from an ideological standpoint) **when city leaders were not giving any serious consideration to local concerns and when community party followers did not really have an important saying or participation in the elaboration of the party's policies and programs**. Therefore, apparently, it may be that the prevailing massive support for the **PNP** and the **PPD** is now conditioned

¹⁴ We are referring to the intervention of House of Representatives Minority Speaker (PIP) David Noriega Rodríguez.

upon the inexistence of another political organization that can respond more adequately to the advent of new needs regarding both the quality of life and their demands for more direct and effective political participation.¹⁵

IV. CONCLUSION

The preliminary survey results discussed in this paper underline three basic facts about the political world-views of the Puerto Rican poor. **First**, it appears that in a society where either state social welfare programs ensure that most poor people satisfy their basic **materialist** needs, such as shelter, clothing and food, or where even the most poor have been socialized by their constant exposure to mass media and **public instruction** in order to believe they are not so poor any more, **post materialist** interests, such as demands for environmental protection and more effective political participation may still spread throughout all social sectors. In this sense, the evidence provided might be helpful in upholding that in certain situations **post-materialist** values are indeed not exclusive of those social sectors which are better-off in economic terms. **Second**, even though it is clear that some important problems were common to all the communities addressed, our preliminary results also demonstrate that each community identified problems that were specific to its particular historical context. Accordingly, political programs that only address national problems may be considered foreign to communities that because of their economic deprivation are not fully integrated to the rest of society. Finally, it is evident that political party affiliations have been weakened in view of the inability of traditional political party structures to both consider the growth of **post-materialist** values in industrialized societies and account for the particularity of poor communities' concerns; which happens to be what matters to the majority of the Puerto Rican voting population.

In view of these findings we uphold that poor communities in Puerto Rico face a huge gap between what they demand from the existing political parties and what those political parties offer them. On the one hand, this political emptiness may either be filled by a political organization, old or new, which recognizes the situation and takes advantage of it, or promotes the growth of political skepticism and apathy among the communities affected, or encourages people to adopt novel ways of political action and develops grass-root movements... going beyond party structures. In any

¹⁵ This growing skepticism has been recently identified and discussed in a national study on political culture conducted by Angel I. Rivera Ortiz *et al.*, "La Cultura política y la estabilidad del sistema de partidos en Puerto Rico," *Caribbean Studies* 24:2-3 (1991).

case, it is clear that a political solution to the problem definitely requires a re-definition of the relationship that now exists between poor communities and political parties in Puerto Rico. On the other hand, the institutionalized inertia assumed by all political party organizations in Puerto Rico (which prevents them from providing adequate structures for political participation and for developing more sensitive programmatic agendas) might continue to generate opportunities for other kind of political organizations; either as religious or in the form of social and cultural movements.

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