

# Trump says Puerto Rico death toll rose 'like magic' and was in 'no way' possible



President Donald Trump is pictured speaking during a Congressional Medal of Honor Society Reception in the East Room of the White House. AP photo

As the East Coast battled the ravages of tropical storm Florence, President Donald Trump's own bluster continued Friday, claiming Hurricane Maria's death toll a year ago rose suspiciously "like magic" and that there was "no way" the count was accurate.

Trump tweeted at 7:05 p.m. Friday, about four hours after the first reported deaths from Florence were announced, that he visited Puerto Rico last October and was told by officials on the island that 16 people had died.

"Over many months, it went to 64 people," Trump tweeted. "Then, like magic, '3,000 people killed."

Trump's rhetoric on Maria has been persistent in the last two days. On Thursday

he claimed that the death toll in Puerto Rico was a Democratic ploy to “make me look as bad as possible.”

Public health experts have estimated that nearly 3,000 perished because of the effects of Hurricane Maria. But Trump, whose efforts to help the island territory recover have been persistently criticized, has intently insisted for two days that the numbers are unrealistic.

“FIFTY TIMES LAST ORIGINAL NUMBER - NO WAY!” he tweeted late Friday.

The president has also questioned the findings of a detailed study commissioned by the Puerto Rico’s government and claimed that its conclusion was politically motivated.

Democratic politicians were especially harsh in the denunciation of Trump’s tweets.

Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., called Trump’s tweets “shameful” and said the president owes “3,000 families in Puerto Rico an apology.”

Florida Republican Sen. Marco Rubio wrote on Twitter that “even tragedy becomes political” in the current environment and he backed the finding that nearly 3,000 people died.

“Both Fed & local gov made mistakes,” he said. “We all need to stop the blame game & focus on recovery, helping those still hurting & fixing the mistakes.”

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**Voices:** Trump’s denial of Maria death toll a punch ‘in the face’ to Puerto Ricans on the island

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