

# Humanitarian Crisis: Thousands of Hurricane Maria Deaths in Puerto Rico. New Study

By [Stephen Lendman](#)

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*Puerto Rico is America's Okinawa, Japan's poorest prefecture - the rights, needs and welfare of people on both islands largely ignored.*

*Okinawans are harmed by America's presence, including rapes, murders, and other crimes committed by US military personnel, unacceptable noise, pollution, environmental contamination, and use of valued public land for imperial purposes - hostile to regional peace and stability.*

Puerto Rico is a virtual US colony, exploited by America since 1898, its people, governor and other officials powerless - the island ruled and exploited by Washington.

Islanders have no control over their lives, welfare and destiny, no say over foreign relations, commerce, trade, air space, land and offshore waters, immigration and emigration, nationality and citizenship, currency, maritime laws, military service, US bases on its territory, constitutionality of its laws, jurisdictions and legal procedures, treaties, radio and television, communications, agriculture, natural resources and more.

For 120 years, Puerto Ricans have been victimized by US imperial rapaciousness, transforming the island into wasteland of high unemployment, poverty, deprivation, and human misery - before Hurricane Maria struck last September, devastating Puerto Rico and its people.

They lack enfranchisement on the mainland - paying federal taxes, getting back pathetically little in return.

They suffer from gross mismanagement, political greed, widespread corruption, deplorable social services, and monied interests exploiting them, enforced by police state harshness.

Hurricane Maria was Puerto Rico's worst ever natural disaster, causing humanitarian crisis conditions - the island a long way from recovery, rebuilding painfully slow, many islanders lacking basic services, including rural areas and elsewhere without electricity and clean water.

Hundreds of thousands of people left the island for America. Nearly 300,000 are in Florida. Many never received federal aid. Others got pathetically little short-term, expired in most cases, desperate people ending up virtually homeless.

According to Trump regime disinformation, Hurricane Maria only caused 64 deaths, a disgraceful Big Lie, covering up a human catastrophe.

A new [Harvard University](#) study published in the New England Journal of Medicine reported an estimated 5,000 deaths – 70-fold higher than the fabricated official number, more than double Hurricane Katrina’s 1,833 deaths, also likely under-countered.

The leading cause of mortality in Puerto Rico was from “inability to access medications...and need for respiratory equipment requiring electricity,” reported the Harvard study, adding:

“(M)any households also reported problems with closed medical facilities...or absent doctors...In the most remote category, (many) households (couldn’t) reach 911 services by telephone.”

Basic services were lacking for months, including medical care, electricity, potable water, adequate food, shelter for many, and ability to communicate by phone.

Federal and island government indifference to essential human needs bear most responsibility for vital help left unaddressed. What was provided was woefully inadequate.

Eight months after Hurricane Maria, thousands of islanders still lack electricity, proper healthcare, and other vital services, the death toll likely rising, possibly much higher than Harvard’s 5,000 figure.

Washington spends trillions of dollars on militarism and warmaking, social justice on the chopping block for elimination to feed it.

America’s agenda reflects imperial viciousness and neoliberal harshness triumphing over governance of, by, and all its people, not just its privileged few.

The plight of long-suffering Puerto Ricans is Exhibit A.

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*My newest book as editor and contributor is titled “Flashpoint in Ukraine: How the US Drive for Hegemony Risks WW III.”*

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