Updated: July 11, 2019

NUMBER OF EXECUTIONS
SINCE 1976: 1500

RACE OF DEFENDANTS EXECUTED

- White: 836
- Black: 513
- Hispanic: 127
- Other: 24

RACE OF VICTIMS IN DEATH PENALTY CASES

- White: 76%
- Black: 15%
- Hispanic: 7%
- Other: 2%

Over 75% of the murder victims in cases resulting in an execution were white, even though nationally only 50% of murder victims generally are white.
Persons Executed for Interracial Murders

Race of Death Row Prisoners and Death Row Prisoners by State Source: NAACP Legal Defense Fund, “Death Row USA” (April 1, 2019). The combined state totals are slightly higher than the reported national total. That is because a few prisoners are sentenced to death in more than one state. Those prisoners are included in each state’s totals, but only once in the national total.
EXECUTIONS BY STATE SINCE 1976

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EXECUTIONS BY REGION*

- **South**: 1227 executions
- **Midwest**: 184 executions
- **West**: 85 executions
- **Northeast**: 4 executions

*Federal executions are listed in the region in which the crime was committed.

DEATH SENTENCING

The number of death sentences per year has dropped dramatically since 1999.

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MENTAL DISABILITIES

- **Intellectual Disabilities**: In 2002, the Supreme Court held in Atkins v. Virginia that it is unconstitutional to execute defendants with 'mental retardation.'
- **Mental Illness**: The American Psychiatric Association, the American Psychological Association, the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill, and the American Bar Association have endorsed resolutions calling for an exemption of the severely mentally ill.

DETERRENCE

- A report by the National Research Council, titled Deterrence and the Death Penalty, stated that studies claiming that the death penalty has a deterrent effect on murder rates are “fundamentally flawed” and should not be used when making policy decisions (2012).
- Consistent with previous years, the 2016 FBI Uniform Crime Report showed that the South had the highest murder rate. The South accounts for over 80% of executions. The Northeast, which has less than 1% of all executions, had lowest murder rate.
- According to a survey of the former and present presidents of the country’s top academic criminological societies, 88% of these experts rejected the notion that the death penalty acts as a deterrent to murder. (Radelet & Lacock, 2009)

**Do executions lower homicide rates?**

- Yes 5%
- No 88%
- No Opinion 7%

EXECUTIONS SINCE 1976 BY METHOD USED

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<th>Method</th>
<th>Count</th>
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<td>Electrocution</td>
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<td>Gas Chamber</td>
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<td>Hanging</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>Firing Squad</td>
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32 states plus the US government use lethal injection as their primary method. Some states utilizing lethal injection have other methods available as backups. Though New Mexico has abolished the death penalty, its law was not retroactive, leaving 2 prisoners on its death row and its lethal-injection protocol intact.

JUVENILES

- In 2005, the Supreme Court in Roper v. Simmons struck down the death penalty for juveniles. 22 defendants had been executed for crimes committed as juveniles since 1976.

WOMEN

- There were 53 women on death row as of July 1, 2017. This constitutes less than 2% of the total death row population. (NAACP Legal Defense Fund, July 1, 2017). 16 women have been executed since 1976.
PUBLIC OPINION AND THE DEATH PENALTY

- A 2009 poll commissioned by DPIC found police chiefs ranked the death penalty last among ways to reduce violent crime. The police chiefs also considered the death penalty the least efficient use of taxpayers' money.

Lack of law enforcement resource 20
Drug/Alcohol abuse 20
Family problems/child abuse 14
Lack of programs for mentally ill 12
Crowded courts 7
Ineffective prosecution 6
Too many guns 5
Gangs 3
Insufficient use of the death penalty 2

Support for Alternatives to the Death Penalty

- A 2010 poll by Lake Research Partners found that a clear majority of voters (61%) would choose a punishment other than the death penalty for murder.

What Interferes with Effective Law Enforcement?

FINANCIAL FACTS ABOUT THE DEATH PENALTY

- Oklahoma capital cases cost, on average, 3.2 times more than non-capital cases. (Study prepared by Peter A. Collins, Matthew J. Hickman, and Robert C. Boruchowitz, with research support by Alexa D. O'Brien, for the Oklahoma Death Penalty Review Commission, 2017.)
- Defense costs for death penalty trials in Kansas averaged about $400,000 per case, compared to $100,000 per case when the death penalty was not sought. (Kansas Judicial Council, 2014).
- A study in California revealed that the cost of the death penalty in the state has been over $4 billion since 1978. Study considered pre-trial and trial costs, costs of automatic appeals and state habeas corpus petitions, costs of federal habeas corpus appeals, and costs of incarceration on death row. (Alarcon & Mitchell, 2011).
- Enforcing the death penalty costs Florida $51 million a year above what it would cost to punish all first-degree murderers with life in prison without parole. Based on the 44 executions Florida had carried out since 1976, that amounts to a cost of $24 million for each execution. (Palm Beach Post, January 4, 2000).
- The most comprehensive study in the country found that the death penalty costs North Carolina $2.16 million per execution over the costs of sentencing murderers to life imprisonment. The majority of those costs occur at the trial level. (Duke University, May 1993).
- In Texas, a death penalty case costs an average of $2.3 million, about three times the cost of imprisoning someone in a single cell at the highest security level for 40 years. (Dallas Morning News, March 8, 1992).

The Death Penalty Information Center has available more extensive reports on a variety of issues, including:
- “The Death Penalty in 2018: Year-End Report” (December 2018)
- “Behind the Curtain: Secrecy and the Death Penalty in the United States” (November 2018)
- “Battle Scars: Military Veterans and the Death Penalty” (November 2015)
- “The 2% Death Penalty: How a Minority of Counties Produce Most Death Cases at Enormous Costs to All” (October 2013)
- “Struck By Lightning: The Continuing Arbitrariness of the Death Penalty 35 Years After Its Reinstatement in 1976” (June 2011)
- “Smart on Crime: Reconsidering the Death Penalty in a Time of Economic Crisis” (October 2009)
- “A Crisis of Confidence: Americans’ Doubts About the Death Penalty” (2007)
- “Blind Justice: Juries Deciding Life and Death with Only Half the Truth” (2005)
- “Innocence and the Crisis in the American Death Penalty” (2004)