DEATH PENALTY INFORMATION CENTER
Facts about the Death Penalty

Updated: February 10, 2020

NUMBER OF Executions SINCE 1976: 1515

RACE OF DEFENDANTS Executed

- White: 845
- Black: 516
- Hispanic: 129
- Other: 25

More than 75% of the murder victims in cases resulting in an execution were white, even though nationally only 50% of murder victims generally are white.

RACE OF VICTIMS IN DEATH PENALTY CASES

- White: 75%
- Black: 15%
- Hispanic: 7%
- Other: 2%

DEATH PENALTY STATES (29)
Alabama
Arizona
Arkansas
California
Colorado
Florida
Georgia
Idaho
Indiana
Kansas
Kentucky
Louisiana
Mississippi
Missouri
Montana
Nebraska
Nevada
North Carolina
Ohio
Oklahoma
Oregon
Pennsylvania
South Carolina
South Dakota
Tennessee
Texas
Utah
Virginia
Wyoming
U.S. Gov’t
U.S. Military

NON-DEATH PENALTY STATES (21)
Alaska
Connecticut
Delaware
Hawaii
Illinois
Iowa
Maine
Maryland
Massachusetts
Michigan
Minnesota
New Hampshire
New Jersey
New Mexico
New York
North Dakota
Rhode Island
Vermont
Washington
West Virginia
Wisconsin
District of Columbia
† 1 prisoner remains on death row.

Other 1.7%
Hispanic 8.5%
Black 34.1%
White 55.8%

Other 2%
Hispanic 7%
Black 15%
White 75%
## Persons Executed for Interracial Murders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>294</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Def./ Black Victim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Def./ White Victim</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

## Race of Death Row Prisoners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Prisoners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Other

3%

### Hispanic

13%

### White

42%

### Black

42%

### Race of Death Row Prisoners

- California: 727
- Florida: 348
- Texas: 219
- Alabama: 177
- Pennsylvania: 152
- North Carolina: 144
- Ohio: 140
- Arizona: 120
- Nevada: 74
- Louisiana: 69
- U.S. Gov’t: 61

### DEATH ROW PRISONERS BY STATE: October 1, 2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Prisoners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>727</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>348</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>219</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nevada</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. Gov’t</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oklahoma</td>
<td>47</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mississippi</td>
<td>43</td>
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<tr>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>40</td>
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<tr>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kentucky</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missouri</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nebraska</td>
<td>12</td>
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<td>Kansas</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Idaho</td>
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<tr>
<td>Idaho</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>U.S. Military</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Dakota</td>
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<td>Montana</td>
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<tr>
<td>New Mexico</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Hampshire</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wyoming</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total:** 2,639

**Race of Death Row Prisoners and Death Row Prisoners by State** Source: NAACP Legal Defense Fund, “Death Row USA” (October 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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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TX</td>
<td>569</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>NE</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>DE</td>
<td>16</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td></td>
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<td>MO</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>CA</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>US GOVT</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>GA</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>IL</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AL</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>NV</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>OH</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>TN</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NC</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>UT</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
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<td>SC</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>MD</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AZ</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>AR</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>WA</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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EXECUTIONS BY REGION*

- **South**: 1240
- **Midwest**: 186
- **West**: 85
- **Northeast**: 4
- **Texas**: 569

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

DEATH SENTENCING

295 death sentences were imposed in the U.S. in 1998. The number of death sentences per year has dropped dramatically since then.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sentences</td>
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<td>223</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>34</td>
<td></td>
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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).
- A DPIC study of 30 years of FBI Uniform Crime Report homicide data found that the South has consistently had by far the highest murder rate. The South accounts for more than 80% of executions. The Northeast, which has fewer than 0.5% of all executions, has consistently had the 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.

EXECUTIONS SINCE 1976 BY METHOD USED

- **Lethal Injection**: 1336
- **Electrocution**: 162
- **Gas Chamber**: 11
- **Hanging**: 3
- **Firing Squad**: 3

30 states plus the US government use lethal injection as their primary method. Some states utilizing lethal injection have other methods available as backups. New Hampshire abolished the death penalty in 2019, but the law was not retroactive, leaving one prisoner on death row and the lethal injection protocol intact.

JUVENILES

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

WOMEN

There were 57 women on death row as of July 1, 2019. This constitutes less than 2% of the total death row population. (NAACP Legal Defense Fund, July 1, 2019). 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
Drug/Alcohol abuse
Family problems/child abuse
Lack of programs for mentally ill
Crowded courts
Ineffective prosecution
Too many guns
Gangs
Insufficient use of the death penalty

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.

The Death Penalty Information Center has available more extensive reports on a variety of issues, including:

- “The Death Penalty in 2019: Year-End Report” (December 2019)
- “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)