Updated: August 28, 2020

NUMBER OF EXECUTIONS SINCE 1976: 1524

- White: 852
- Black: 517
- Hispanic: 129
- Other: 26

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.
**Persons Executed for Interracial Murders**

- **295**
  - **21** White Def./Black Victim
  - **274** Black Def./White Victim

**Race of Death Row Prisoners**

- **42%** White
- **41%** Black
- **14%** Hispanic
- **3%** Other

**Death Row Exonerations**

- **170**
  - **29** by State Total
  - **13** Florida
  - **10** Texas
  - **9** North Carolina
  - **9** Oklahoma
  - **6** California
  - **6** Georgia
  - **5** Ohio
  - **4** Missouri
  - **4** Massachusetts
  - **3** Alabama
  - **2** South Carolina
  - **2** North Dakota
  - **2** Arkansas
  - **2** Arkansas
  - **1** Delaware
  - **1** Kentucky
  - **1** Montana
  - **1** New Hampshire
  - **1** South Dakota
  - **1** Wyoming

**DEATH ROW PRISONERS BY RACE**

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<tr>
<td>Wyoming</td>
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**TOTAL: 2,603**

**INNOCENCE**

- Since 1973, more than 165 people have been released from death row with evidence of their innocence. (Staff Report, House Judiciary Subcommittee on Civil & Constitutional Rights, 1993, with updates by DPIC).
- An average of 3.5 wrongly convicted death-row prisoners have been exonerated each year since 1973, peaking at 7.6 per year between 1999-2004.

**RECENT STUDIES ON RACE**

- Jurors in Washington state are three times more likely to recommend a death sentence for a black defendant than for a white defendant in a similar case. (Prof. K. Beckett, Univ. of Washington, 2014).
- In Louisiana, the odds of a death sentence were 97% higher for those whose victim was white than for those whose victim was black. (Pierce & Radelet, Louisiana Law Review, 2011).
- A study in California found that those convicted of killing whites were more than 3 times as likely to be sentenced to death as those convicted of killing blacks and more than 4 times more likely as those convicted of killing Latinos. (Pierce & Radelet, Santa Clara Law Review, 2005).
- A comprehensive study of the death penalty in North Carolina found that the odds of receiving a death sentence rose by 3.5 times among those defendants whose victims were white. (Prof. Jack Boger and Dr. Isaac Unah, University of North Carolina, 2001).
- In 96% of states where there have been reviews of race and the death penalty, there was a pattern of either race-of-victim or race-of-defendant discrimination, or both. (Prof. Baldus report to the ABA, 1998).
EXECUTIONS BY STATE SINCE 1976

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EXECUTIONS BY REGION*

- **South**: 1244
- **Midwest**: 190
- **West**: 86
- **Northeast**: 4

*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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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.

Do executions lower homicide rates?

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

EXECUTIONS SINCE 1976 BY METHOD USED

- **Lethal Injection**: 1344
- **Electrocution**: 163
- **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

What Interferes with Effective Law Enforcement?

Percent Ranking Item as One of Top Two or Three

20
20
14
12
7
6
5
3
2

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.

Support for Alternatives to the Death Penalty

Life with parole
Life without parole
Life without parole plus restitution
No opinion
Death penalty

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)