



## The Death Penalty in the United States

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**3350** people sit on death rows in the United States, condemned to death by states or the federal government. In addition to the federal government and United States military, 38 states have the death penalty. New York's highest court declared its death penalty statute unconstitutional in 2004, and serious abolition efforts may soon add Maryland and New Jersey to the list of states that do not use capital punishment.

### EXECUTIONS

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**Nearly 1100** people have been executed in the United States since 1976. Of those, 373 people – 34% – were African American. In 80% of cases where the defendant has been executed, the victim was white. The vast majority of executions (over 890) have been carried out by Southern states. Texas and Virginia lead the nation in executions, with over 500 executions between them since 1976.

**53** people were executed in 2006, down from 60 in 2005. 40 have been executed in the first half of 2007, in Texas, Oklahoma, Ohio, Alabama, Indiana, Tennessee, Arizona, South Carolina, Georgia, and South Dakota. The number of executions has been declining steadily since the all-time high of 98 executions in 1999.

### RACE

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**More than half** of the people on death row in this country are people of color. Of the 3350 condemned, 1397 (42%) are Black, 359 (11%) are Hispanic, and 1517 (45%) are White.

Prominent researchers have documented a pattern of discrimination in the application of the death penalty based on the race of the victim, race of the defendant, or both, in nearly every state that uses capital punishment. All but 1% of the chief prosecutors in death

penalty states are white.

In 80% of the cases resulting in execution since 1976, the victim was white. Only 50% of murder victims nationwide are white. Nationwide, researchers found that 15 white people had been executed for murder involving a black victim, whereas 217 black people had been executed for murder involving a white victim.

## INNOCENCE

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Over 120 people have been released from death row after evidence of their innocence came to light. Eight inmates were freed from death row and exonerated in 2000, another 9 in 2001-2002, and 12 in 2003. Six more were exonerated in 2004.

## SENTENCING

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The death sentencing rate has dropped steadily each year since 1999. From 277 death sentences in 1999, the number of death sentences declined to 128 in 2005.

Overall support of the death penalty is also on the decline. A 2006 Gallup Poll found that overall support was down to 65% from 80% in 1994. When respondents are given a choice of life without possibility of parole as an alternate sentencing option, more chose life without parole (48%) than the death penalty (47%).

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- Data from Death Penalty Information Center, at [deathpenaltyinfo.org](http://deathpenaltyinfo.org).