


DEATH PENALTY FACTSHEET

BASIC FACTS

- The death penalty has been abolished in some states, but is legal in some states as well as at the federal level.
- 185 people on death row have been exonerated in the U.S. since 1973.
- 1532 people have been executed in the U.S. since 1973.
- Concealing evidence and false or forced confessions by the defendant or witness often are the leading causes for wrongful death sentences.
- Inadequate counsel also leads to wrongful death sentences.
- Experts estimate that 20% of people on death row have serious mental illness.
- 44 people with intellectual disabilities were executed before the Supreme Court stopped this practice in 2002.
- 366 people who were juveniles at the time of the offense were executed before the Supreme Court banned executions for juveniles in 2005.
- States that have the death penalty do not have lower rates of murder than states that do not.
- In Texas, a death penalty case costs about 2.3 million dollars.




RACIAL INJUSTICE

- Black people make up 42% of death row, but just 16% of the U.S. population.
 - In Georgia, someone who has killed a White person is 17 times more likely to be executed than someone who has killed a Black person.
 - 75% of murder victims in capital punishment cases were White even though White people make up only 50% of all murder victims.
 - Death row is 42% White, 41% Black, 14% Hispanic.
 - Capital punishment was first used as a means to discourage lynchings.
 - Lynchings were gradually replaced by capital punishment. Black men were executed for alleged or attempted rape of white women in the early 20th century.
 - Since executions resumed in 1977, 295 Black people have been executed for killing White people, while only 21 White people have been executed for killing Black people.
 - A Black person who is exonerated is 22% more likely to have experienced police misconduct.
 - Two thirds of these cases have included false accusations or perjury. This is more prevalent among defendants of color.
 - It takes Black exonerees an average of 4.3 years longer to get off of death row than White exonerees.
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ARBITRARINESS

- In 1972, *Furman v. Georgia* effectively ended the death penalty in the U.S. because of arbitrariness - it was reinstated four years later.
 - Those who kill white victims are much more likely to get death than those who kill black victims.
 - Women commit 10% of murders, but only make up 1% of executions.
 - A person is 2.8 times more likely to be given death for killing a woman than for killing a man.
 - 2% (59) of all counties in the U.S. accounted for all death sentences.
 - Inadequate representation leads to increased chances of execution. It is common for the lawyers of people who end up on death row to later get in trouble for poor performance.
 - Studies found that jurors do not understand the process of arriving at a death penalty and are often uninformed about what qualifies for the death penalty.
 - Many people who have committed heinous crimes are sentenced to life in prison.
 - There are many examples of single victim murders that received the death penalty because they had previous convictions.
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DEATH PENALTY IN 2020


- Colorado became the 22nd state to abolish the death penalty.
- 13 people were executed in 2020.
- Executions completely stopped at the state level due to the pandemic.
- Trump oversaw more executions than any other president in the 20th or 21st century. They were the first executions overseen by a lame duck president in over a century.
- Every person who was executed last year was either a juvenile at the time of offense or had one of the following conditions: mental illness, brain injury, developmental brain damage, intellectual disability or childhood trauma.
- 5 people were exonerated in 2020.
- 34 states have either repealed the death penalty or not carried out an execution in over 10 years.
- There was a 57% approval rating for the death penalty.
- First ever execution of a native person for a crime on native land.
- First federal execution of teenage offenders in 78 years.

- <https://deathpenaltyinfo.org/policy-issues/arbitrariness>
 - <https://deathpenaltyinfo.org/facts-and-research/dpic-reports/dpic-special-report-the-innocence-epidemic>
 - <https://deathpenaltyinfo.org/facts-and-research/dpic-reports/dpic-year-end-reports/the-death-penalty-in-2020-year-end-report>
 - <https://deathpenaltyinfo.org/facts-and-research/dpic-reports/in-depth/enduring-injustice-the-persistence-of-racial-discrimination-in-the-u-s-death-penalty>
 - <https://cdn2.assets-servd.host/alike-kingfisher/production/documents/pdf/FactSheet.pdf>
 - <https://eji.org/issues/death-penalty/>
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BASIC FACTS

- The death penalty has been abolished in some states, but is legal in some states as well as at the federal level.
 - Lethal injection is the primary method of execution used, but death by firing squad, electrocution, gas chamber and hanging are still legal in some states.
 - Since 1973, 1532 people have been executed and 185 people have been exonerated. This is a staggeringly high margin of error.
 - Black people make up 42% of death row, but just 16% of the U.S. population.
 - States that have the death penalty do not have lower rates of murder than states that do not.
 - Experts estimate that 20% of people on death row have serious mental illness.
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DEATH PENALTY RESOURCES



To learn more, we encourage you to engage with the resources listed below.

- **Ted Talks:** *We Need to Talk About an Injustice* - Bryan Stevenson; *A Juror's Reflection on the Death Penalty* - Lindy Lou Isonhood
 - **Books:** *Death of Innocents* - Sister Helen Prejean; *Dead Man Walking* - Sister Helen Prejean
 - **Podcasts:** *Trump, the death penalty and its links with America's racist history* - Today in Focus
 - **Twitter Accounts:** @helenprejean
 - **Websites:** www.deathpenaltyinfo.com ;
<https://www.aclu.org/other/case-against-death-penalty>
 - **Articles:**
<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/26/opinion/stop-executions-biden-virginia.html> ;
<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/10/style/sister-helen-prejean.html>
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