

The Geography of the Death Penalty

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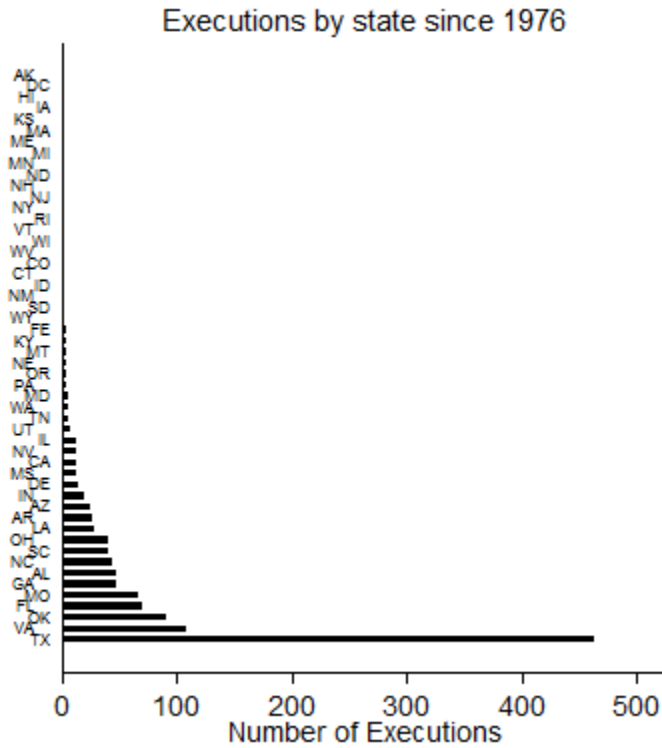
Since the reinstatement of capital punishment by the Supreme Court in 1976, 1,229 individuals have been executed; three by the federal government and the remainder by the states. (The US military has not carried out an execution since 1961.) Figure 1 shows the distribution of executions over time.

Figure 1. Executions by year.



Executions increased dramatically throughout the 1980s and 1990s, reaching a peak of 98 in 1999 before declining steadily since then. In 2008, just 37 executions were carried out. The distribution of executions is highly uneven across states and localities. Figure 2 shows the number of executions across the 50 states.

Figure 2. Executions by State.

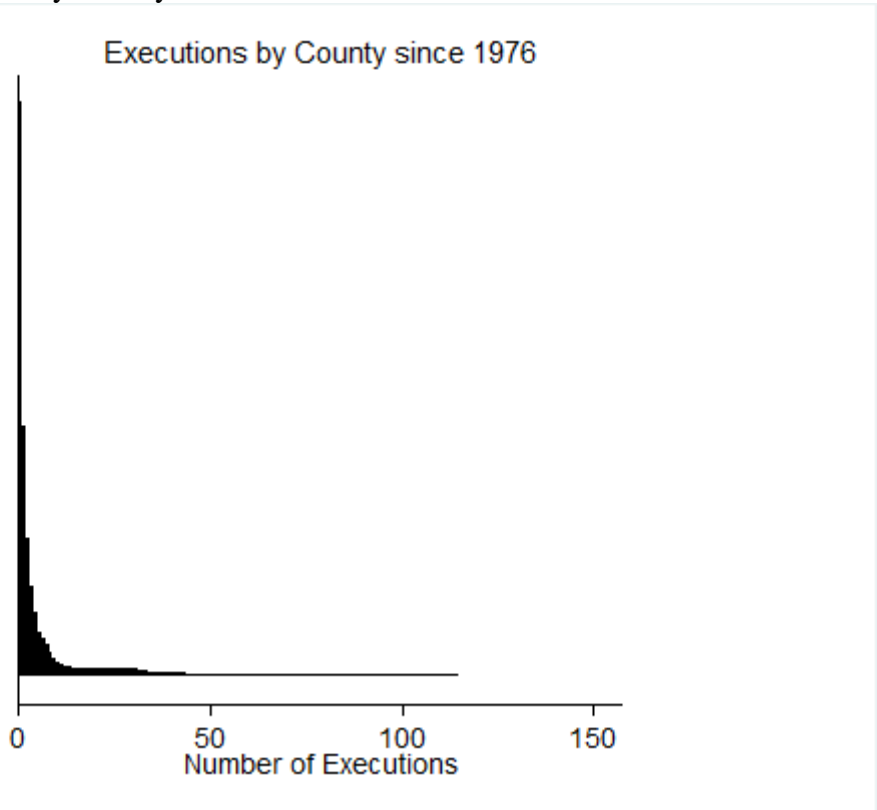


Seventeen states have executed no one in the modern era. On the other hand, Texas (463), Virginia (108), and Oklahoma (91) combine for 662, or more than half of the total. Table 1 lays out the numbers by state (it has 52 entries because the table includes the District of Columbia and the US Federal government).

(Insert Table 1 about here)

The disparities in the application of the death penalty are even clearer when we look at counties. Figure 3 shows the dramatic skew in the number of executions.

Figure 3. Executions by County.



Note: The figure shows the distribution of executions across the 454 US counties that have executed at least one inmate since 1976.

Harris county, Texas has executed 115 individuals, but the vast majority of US counties have not executed a single individual. In fact, only 454 counties out of 3146 counties have carried out any executions. Just 14 counties have executed more than 10 individuals, but together these counties constitute 30 percent of the national total. Table 2 shows the number of executions by county.

(Insert Table 2 about here)

Table 1. Executions by state.

Rank	State	Executions
1	TX	463
2	VA	108
3	OK	91
4	FL	69
5	MO	67
6	AL	48
7	GA	48
8	NC	43
9	OH	41
10	SC	41
11	LA	28
12	AR	27
13	AZ	24
14	IN	20
15	DE	14
16	CA	13
17	MS	13
18	NV	12
19	IL	12
20	UT	7
21	TN	6
22	MD	5
23	WA	5
24	NE	3
25	KY	3
26	MT	3
27	FE	3
28	PA	3
29	OR	3
30	CO	1
31	NM	1
32	WY	1
33	ID	1
34	SD	1
35	CT	1

States with no executions:

MI, ND, NJ, WI, NH, HI, NY, ME, AK, VT, MN, DC, WV, MA, KS, RI, IA

Table 2. Executions by County.

Rank	State	County	Executions	Cumulative Percent of National Total
1	TX	Harris	115	9.36
2	TX	Dallas	44	12.94
3	OK	Oklahoma	36	15.87
4	TX	Tarrant	34	18.63
5	TX	Bexar	31	21.16
6	MO	St. Louis	16	22.46
7	TX	Montgomery	14	23.60
8	TX	Brazos	12	24.57
9	TX	Jefferson	12	25.55
10	OK	Tulsa	11	26.44
11	TX	Potter	11	27.34
12	AL	Jefferson	10	28.15
13	MO	St. Louis	10	28.97
14	TX	Nueces	10	29.78
21 additional counties			6 to 9	42.47
36 counties			4 to 5	55.41
38 counties			3	64.69
89 counties			2	79.17
256 counties			1	100.00
2,692 counties			0	100.00

Note: Data include each county in the 50 states as well as entries for the District of Columbia and the federal government. Information on the county of the trial was unavailable for two executions in Virginia and one in South Carolina.

A note on sources:

All data reported here come from publicly available sources. Most helpful have been the “DPIC list” of executions (<http://www.deathpenaltyinfo.org/executions>) and the data made available by the office of the Prosecuting Attorney for Clark County, Indiana (<http://www.clarkprosecutor.org/html/death/usexecute.htm>). Where information on the county of the trial was not available on these sites, news searches were conducted as necessary and individual state department of corrections web sites were consulted. This led to the identification of the county for 1,226 out of 1,229 executions.