

# **The Impact of Race, Gender, and Geography on Florida Executions**

Frank R. Baumgartner  
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill  
[Frankb@unc.edu](mailto:Frankb@unc.edu)

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Florida's use of the death penalty in the modern era has been marked by substantial disparities by the race and gender of the victim of the crime, and by geography.<sup>1</sup> These disparities are so great that they call in to question the equity of the application of the harshest penalty, adding to growing concerns that the death penalty is applied in an unfair, capricious, and arbitrary manner.

Between 1976 and 2014, the state of Florida executed 89 men and women. Here are a few key findings of this research:

- 72% of all executions carried out in Florida between 1976 and 2014 were for crimes involving White victims despite the fact that 56% of all homicide victims are White.
- Only 26% of all homicide victims are female, but 43% of all executions carried out in Florida were for homicides involving female victims.
- Homicides involving White female victims are 6.5 times more likely to result in an execution than homicides involving Black male victims.
- No White person has been executed in Florida for a homicide involving a Black victim. In contrast, 71% of the executions carried out against Black inmates were for homicides involving White victims. In cases where Black inmates were executed, 56% of all of the victims were White.
- Just six out of Florida's 67 counties are responsible for more than half of the state's 89 executions.
- Only four counties (Miami-Dade, Orange, Duval, and Pinellas) have produced more than five executions. More than half of all Florida counties (36) have never produced an execution.
- Seven Florida counties (Bradford, Wakulla, Santa Rosa, Madison, Colombia, Lake, and Hernando) have execution rates that are more than triple the state's average execution rate of .30 executions per 100 homicides.
- The homicide rate in counties that have produced no executions (1.11 homicides per 1,000 population) is significantly lower than the homicide rate in counties that have produced executions (1.62 homicides per 1,000 population).

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<sup>1</sup> A more complete analysis is available in the following article, which is based on the same dataset as used here. That published and peer-reviewed article contains a full bibliography of relevant studies on the issue of race-of-victim effects. See Baumgartner, Grigg and Mastro 2015. Homicide victims data stem from a U.S. Department of Justice report that covers 1976 through 1999. Homicide data by county stem from annual BJS reports from 1984 through 2012, the most recent year available. These reports do not allow separation by race and gender of the victim, however. In any case, the two homicide datasets show very similar results, though they cover slightly different time periods. Executions carried out in 2014 are typically for crimes committed between 15 and 30 years earlier. The crimes for which Florida inmates were executed through the end of 2014 were committed between 1971 and 2000.

Table 1. Florida Executions and Homicides by Race and Gender of Victims.

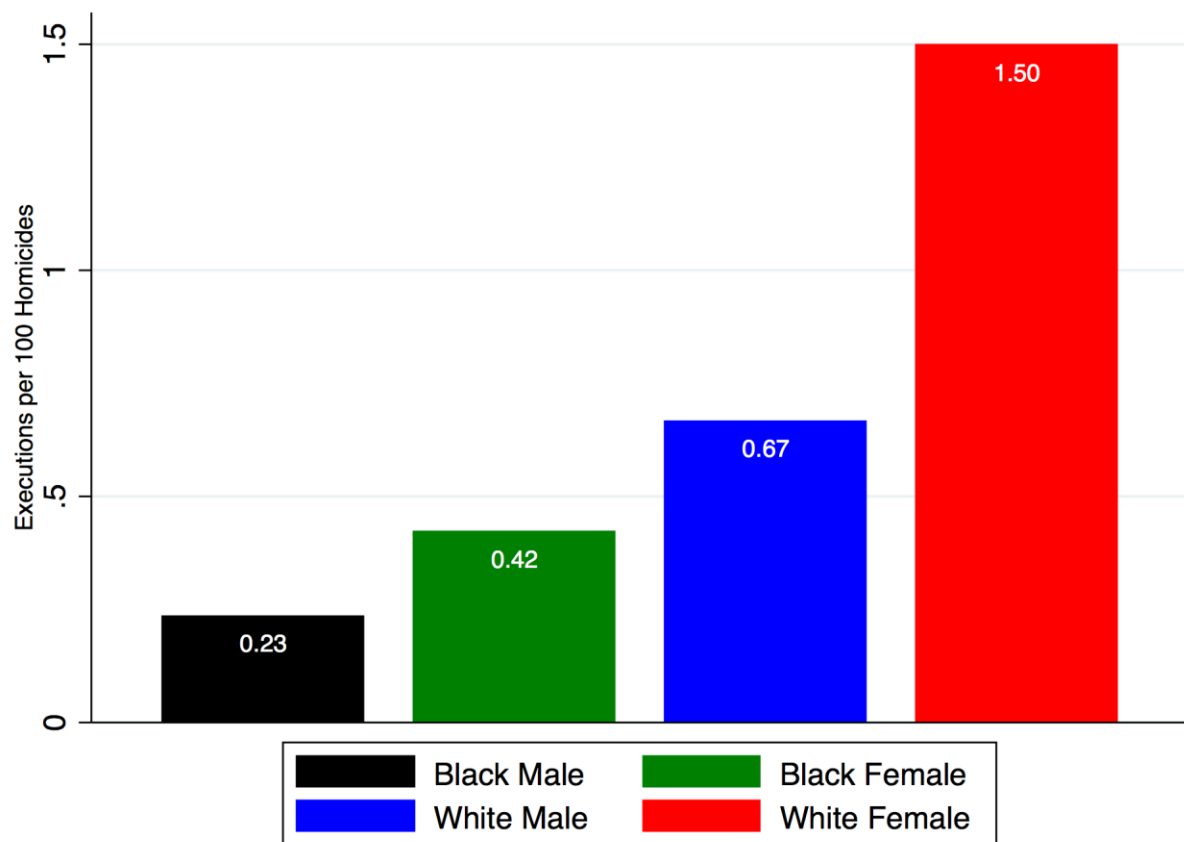
Victim Characteristic	Homicides		Executions		Executions Per 100 Homicide Victims
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	
Whites	11,383	56.00	103	72.03	0.90
Blacks	8,738	42.99	24	16.78	0.27
Other, Unknown	204	1.00	16	11.19	-
Total	20,325	100.00	143	100.00	0.70
Males	15,026	73.93	82	57.34	0.55
Females	5,208	25.62	61	42.66	1.17
Unknown	91	0.45	-	-	-
Total	20,325	100.00	143	100.00	0.70
White Female	3,274	16.11	49	34.27	1.50
White Male	8,109	39.90	54	37.76	0.67
Black Female	1,904	9.37	8	5.59	0.42
Black Male	6,834	33.63	16	11.19	0.23
Other, Unknown	204	1.00	16	11.19	-
Total	20,325	100.00	143	100.00	0.70

*Note: Numbers refer to victims, not inmates executed. Florida executed 89 inmates between 1976 and 2014 for crimes involving 143 victims. Ratios not calculated for other or unknown categories because these are not compatible across the two data sources.*

With 89 executions in the modern period, but over 20,000 homicide victims between 1976 and 1999, the average likelihood that a homicide will lead to an execution is 0.70 percent: very low. However, Table 1 shows that the likelihood that a homicide will result in an execution is .90 percent when the victim is White, but only .27 percent when the victim is Black. The percent is .55 when the victim is male, and 1.17 when the victim is female. The greatest disparity occurs when combining race and gender, as the likelihood that the crime will result in an execution increases to 1.50 when the victim is a White females, and decreases to just .23 percent when the victim is a Black male.

Figure 1 illustrates these stark comparisons.

Figure 1. Comparison of Likelihood of Execution by Race and Gender of Victim



*Note: Figure 1 shows the percentage of homicides that eventually result in an execution.*

Figures 2, 3, and 4 show how homicides (on the left side) and executions (right) compare. Each is a simple pie chart. Figure 2, for example, shows that homicides are largely focused on men, who constitute 74.3 percent of the victims. Among execution cases, however, men are a lower percent of the victims: 57.3 percent. Figure 3 shows the equivalent data for race, and Figure 4 shows race and gender combined. Figure 4 makes clear that Black males are severely underrepresented among victims in execution cases, considering that they constitute 33.9 percent of all homicide victims statewide.

Figure 2. Gender of Victims

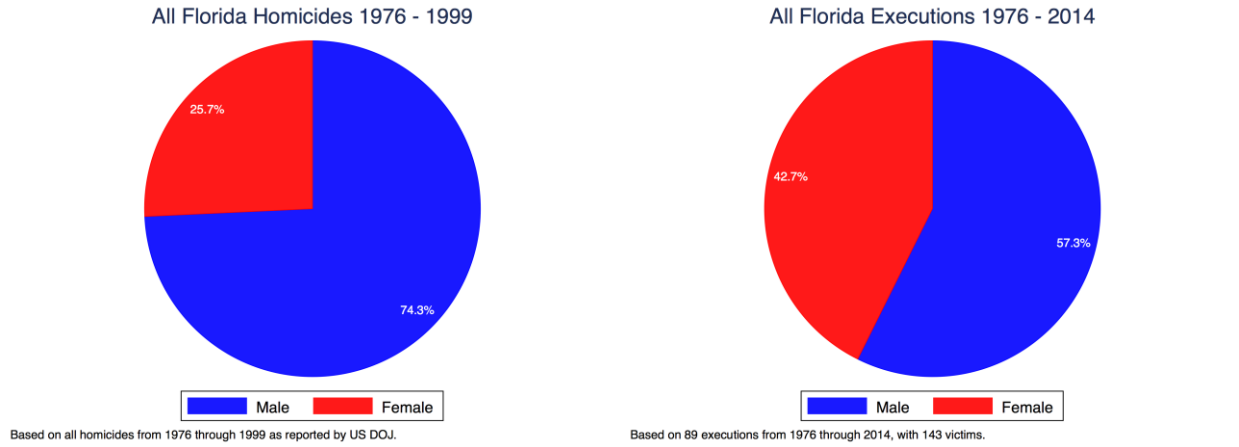


Figure 3. Race of Victims

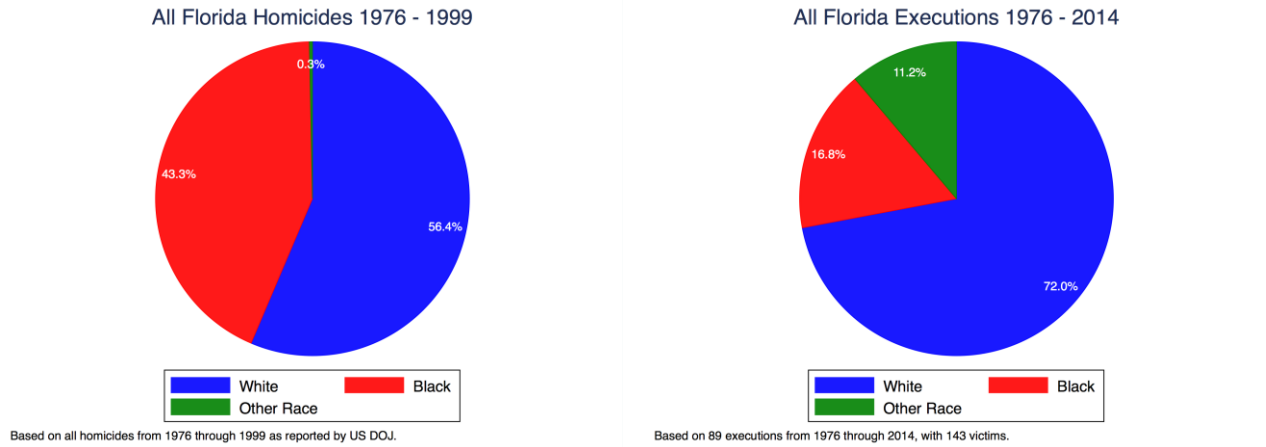


Figure 4. Race and Gender of Victims

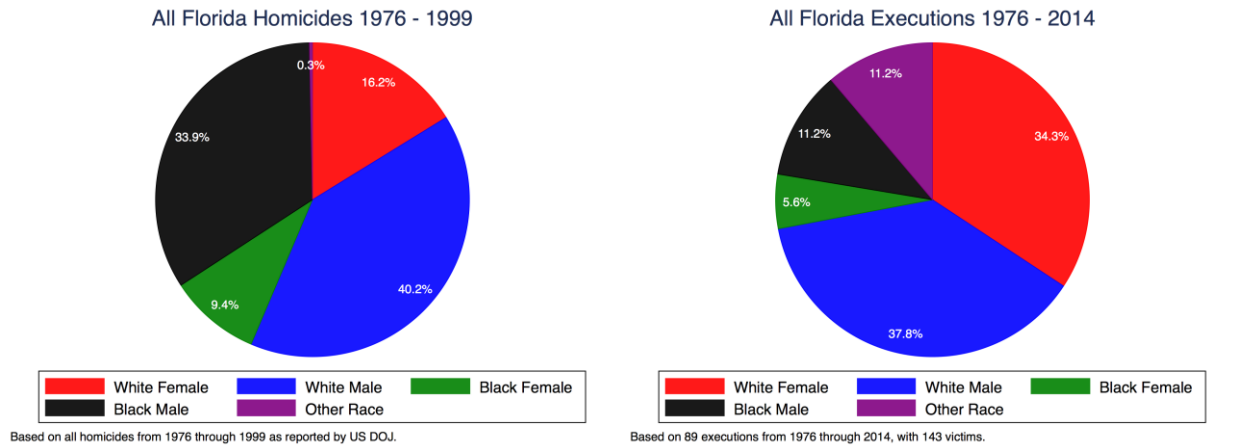


Figure 5 compares the race and gender of victims with the race of the executed offender. Of the 89 men and women who have been executed by the state of Florida between 1976 and 2014, 51 were White males, 28 were Black males, seven were Latino males, and one was a Native American male. Two were White females. Table 2 shows the race of the victims for both the White and Black male inmates who have been executed.

Figure 5. Race and Gender of Victims for White and Black Inmates Executed

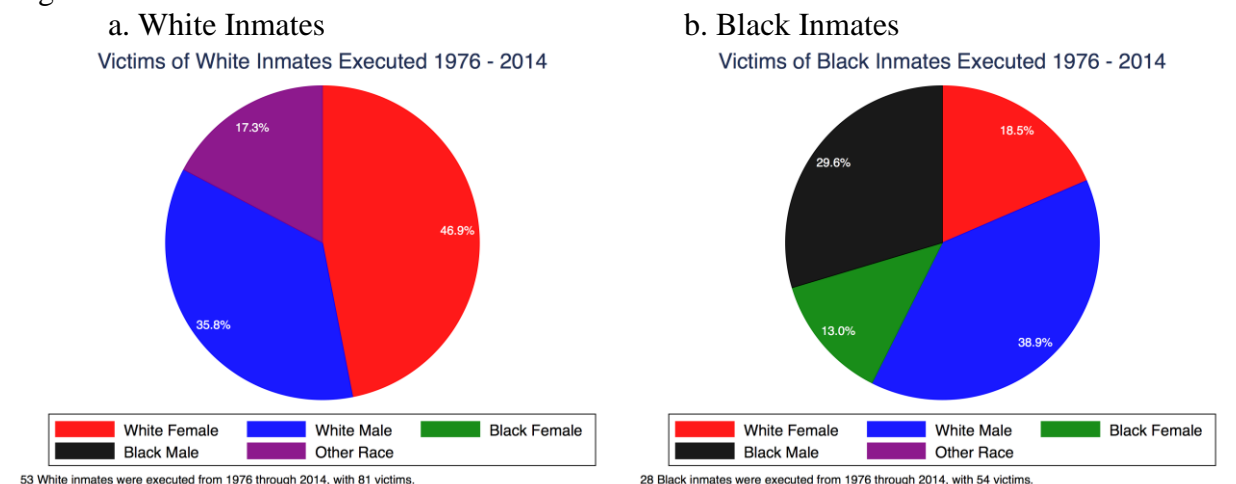


Table 2. Victims of White and Black Male Inmates Executed

Victims	White Inmates		Black Inmates	
	N	%	N	%
White Female	38	46.9	10	18.5
White Male	29	35.8	21	38.9
Black Female	0	0.0	7	13.0
Black Male	0	0.0	16	29.6
Other Race	14	17.3	0	0.0
Total	81	100.0	54	100.0

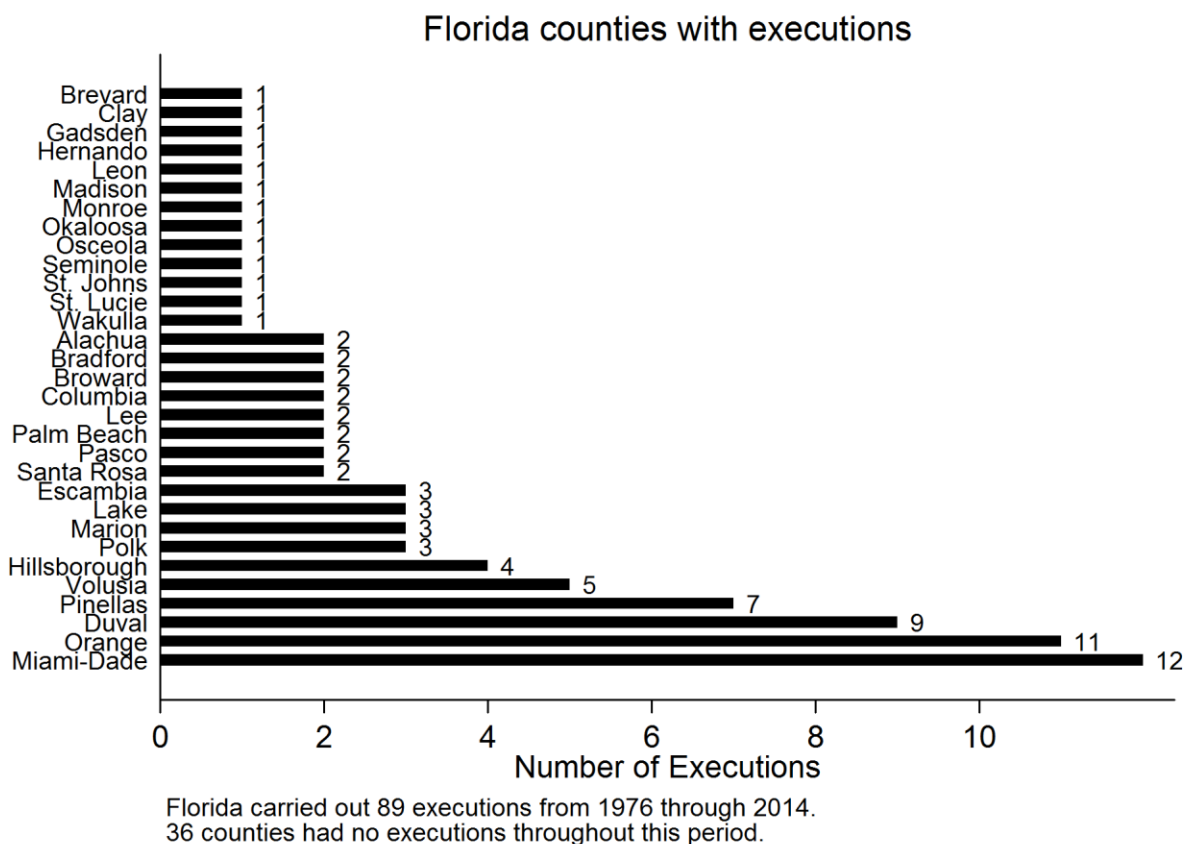
No White person has been executed in Florida for a crime with a Black victim. Black inmates, on the other hand, have frequently been executed for homicides involving White victims. The vast majority of homicides involve perpetrators and victims of the same race.

Nationally, the Bureau of Justice Statistics reports that between 1980 and 2008, 84 percent of the victims of White perpetrators were also White. Similarly, Black perpetrators killed Black victims 93 percent of the time. Further, this tendency for crimes to be within racial group remains true even among “stranger homicides” – where the victim does not know the offender. Just 26.7 percent of stranger homicides were cross racial (as were just 9.7 percent of homicides involving friends or acquaintances) (BJS 2011). Black-on-Black crimes are extremely unlikely to be punished with the death penalty, however. The importance of the victims’ race in the application of the death penalty has created a system where Whites are likely to face the death penalty only for within-race crimes, and Blacks for cross-race crimes: Table 2 shows that most Black inmates

executed had White victims. In other words, the race and gender of the victim is a determining factor in deciding who faces execution in Florida.

Florida's death penalty system is arbitrary not only on the basis of the race and gender characteristics of the victims, but it also shows dramatic disparities by geography. Figure 6 below shows the number of executions across the state's 67 counties.

Figure 6. Executions by County



As Figure 7 below makes clear, 36 counties have had no executions. Just six out of Florida's 67 counties are responsible for more than half of the state's 89 executions. Only four counties (Miami-Dade, Orange, Duval, and Pinellas) have produced more than five executions. More than half of all Florida counties have never produced an execution.

Figure 7. Map of Florida Executions by County

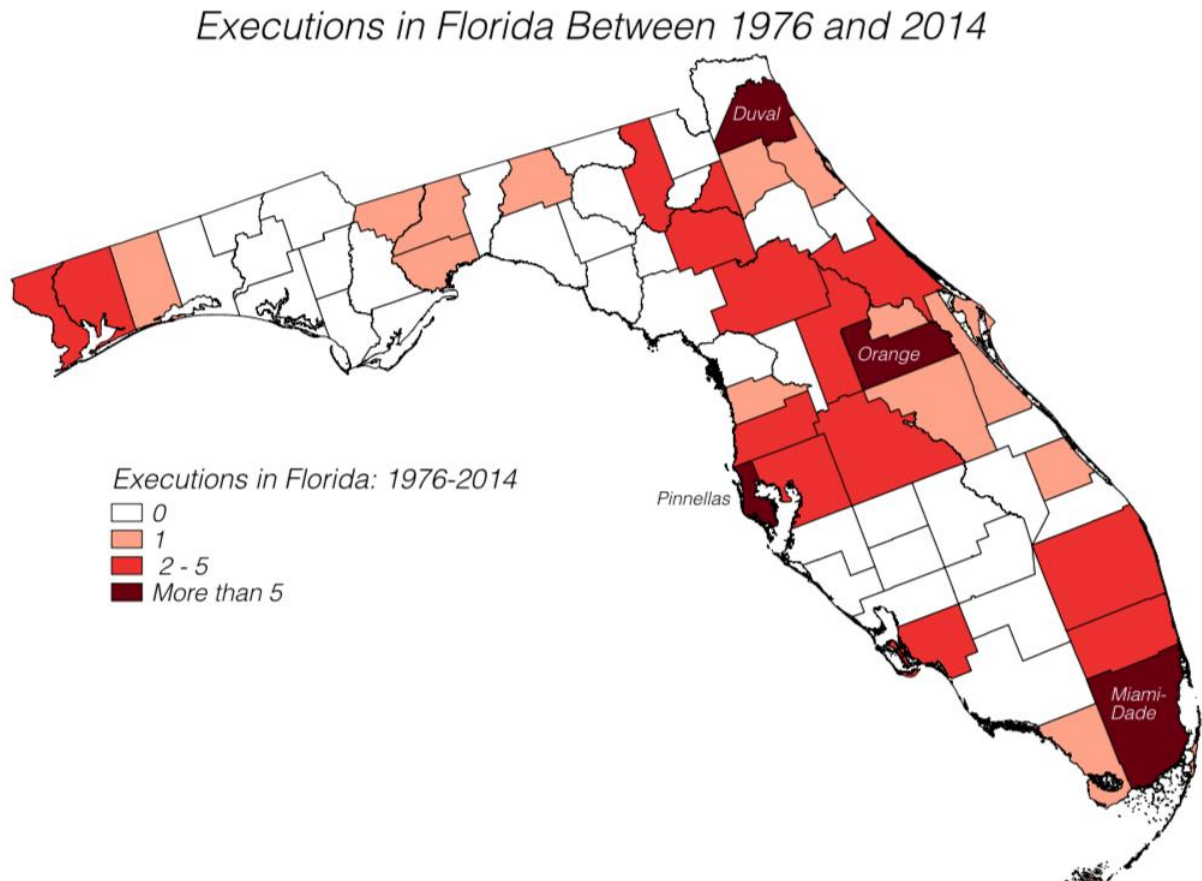


Table 3 below shows the 2010 population, the total number of homicides reported by the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics for the period of 1984 through 2012, the number of homicides, and the rate of homicides per population and executions per homicide for each county in Florida.

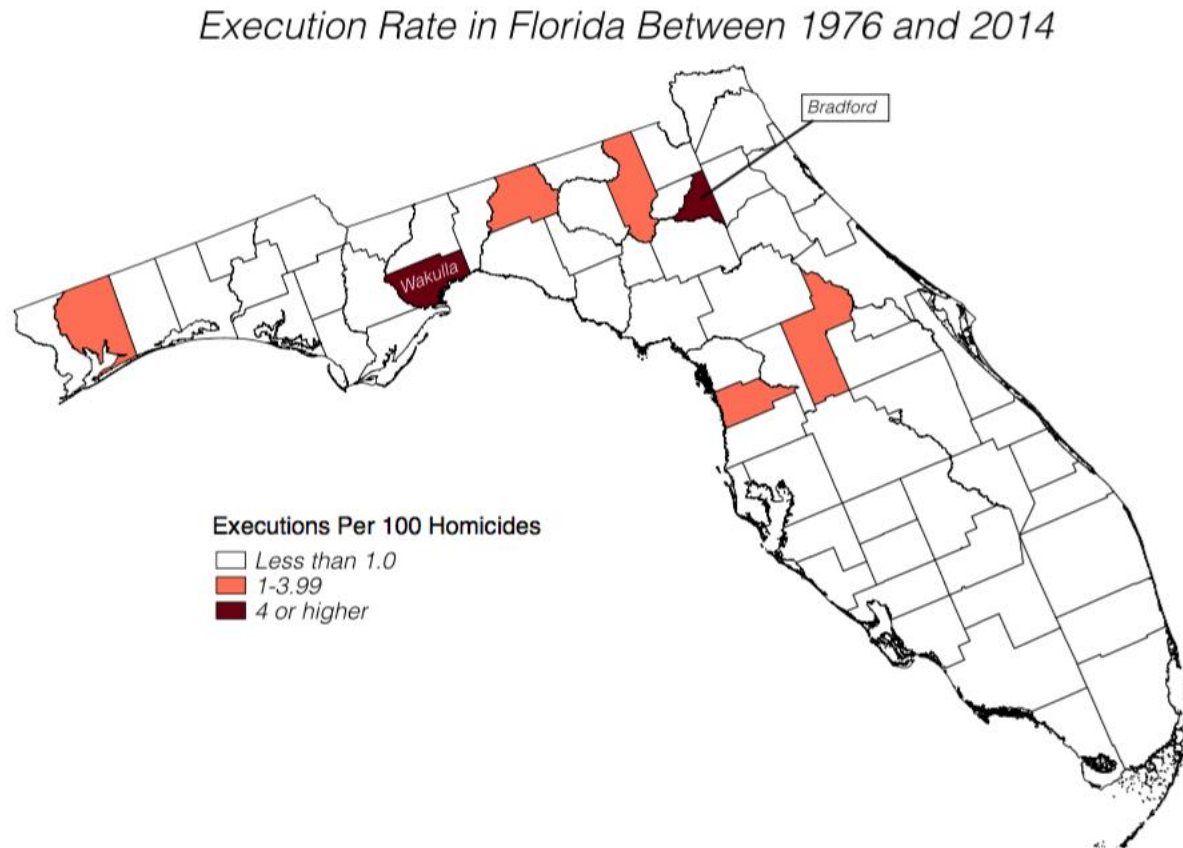
Table 3. Florida Counties with Executions, by Homicides and Population

County	Population (2010)	Homicides (1984-2012)	Executions (1976-2014)	Homicides Per 1,000 Population	Executions Per 100 Homicides
Miami-Dade	2,496,435	6,494	12	2.60	0.18
Orange	1,145,956	1,784	11	1.56	0.62
Duval	864,263	3,083	9	3.57	0.29
Pinellas	916,542	1,292	7	1.41	0.54
Volusia	494,593	633	5	1.28	0.79
Hillsborough	1,229,226	2,258	4	1.84	0.18
Polk	602,095	912	3	1.51	0.33
Marion	331,298	433	3	1.31	0.69
Lake	297,052	222	3	0.75	1.35
Escambia	297,619	513	3	1.72	0.58
Santa Rosa	151,372	79	2	0.52	2.53
Pasco	464,697	387	2	0.83	0.52
Palm Beach	1,320,134	2,119	2	1.61	0.09
Lee	618,754	802	2	1.30	0.25
Colombia	67,531	93	2	1.38	2.15
Broward	1,748,066	2,540	2	1.45	0.08
Bradford	28,520	30	2	1.05	6.67
Alachua	247,336	319	2	1.29	0.63
Wakulla	30,776	25	1	0.81	4.00
St. Lucie	277,789	455	1	1.64	0.22
St. Johns	190,039	164	1	0.86	0.61
Seminole	422,718	360	1	0.85	0.28
Osceola	268,685	220	1	0.82	0.45
Okaloosa	180,822	130	1	0.72	0.77
Monroe	73,090	132	1	1.81	0.76
Madison	19,224	40	1	2.08	2.50
Leon	275,487	308	1	1.12	0.32
Hernando	172,778	100	1	0.58	1.00
Gadsden	46,389	143	1	3.08	0.70
Clay	190,865	128	1	0.67	0.78
Brevard	543,376	580	1	1.07	0.17
Counties with no Executions	2,787,783	3,099	0	1.11	0.00
Total	18,801,310	29,877	89	1.59	0.30

*Note: Thirty-six counties in Florida had no executions. Their combined population and homicide numbers are shown in the second to last row above. Table 3 refers to the numbers of inmates executed and the total number of homicides by county, whereas Table 1 referred to the number of victims.*



Figure 8. Map of Florida Counties by Execution Rate



Perhaps the most relevant demonstration of the great disparity in the use of the death penalty is in comparing executions per 100 homicides. Whereas the overall average for the state is approximately 0.30 executions per 100 homicides, seven counties have more than three times that rate. The homicide rate in counties that have produced no executions (1.11 homicides per 1,000 population) is slightly lower than the homicide rate in counties that have produced executions (1.62 homicides per 1,000 population). There is no correlation between the homicide rate in a given county and the execution rate.

### **Conclusion:**

The findings of this research indicate that factors such as the victims' race and gender, as well as the county in which the offender was convicted, inappropriately influence who is executed in Florida. At the very least, this data should give prosecutors pause when determining whether to seek the death penalty. If left unaddressed, these racial, gender, and geographic disparities may erode judicial and public confidence in the state's ability fairly to administer the ultimate punishment. A punishment that is so arbitrarily and unfairly administered could reasonably be deemed unconstitutional. As the nation considers so many elements of the debate surrounding

capital punishment, we should look closely at the recent history of how it has actually been administered. This review of simple statistics associated with Florida's modern experience with the punishment shows clearly that it is geographically arbitrary and that the race and gender of the victim of the crime are associated with dramatic disparities in the likelihood of execution for the offender. These disparities are not measured by a few percentage points of difference. Rather, they differ by orders of magnitude, clearly demonstrating that vast inequities characterize the implementation of capital punishment in Florida.

### **References and Credits:**

Frank R. Baumgartner, Amanda Grigg, and Alisa Mastro. 2015. #BlackLivesDon'tMatter: Race-of-Victim Effects in US Executions, 1977-2013. *Politics, Groups, and Identities* 3, 2: 209–21.

U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics. 2011. Homicide Trends in the United States, 1980-2008. Washington, DC: US DOJ, NCJ236018, November.

Maps created by Policy Analyst and Urban Historian Adam Gosney.

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