

The Impact of Race, Gender, and Geography on Missouri Executions

Frank R. Baumgartner
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
Frankb@unc.edu

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Missouri'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.¹ 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.

Here are a few key findings of this research:

- A person convicted of homicide in St. Louis County is three times more likely to be executed than if they were convicted of the same crime in the vast majority of other counties in the state, and 13 times more likely to be executed than if they are convicted of the same crime in the city of St. Louis.
- Homicides committed in Callaway, Schuyler, and Moniteau counties are 30 to 70 times more likely to result in an execution than homicides committed in the vast majority of state's counties.
- A majority of the state's 80 executions that occurred between 1976 and 2014 come from just three, or 2.6%, of the state's 114 counties and the independent city of St. Louis.
- Homicides involving White victims are seven times more likely to result in an execution than those involving Black victims.
- Homicides involving White female victims are nearly 14 times more likely to result in an execution than those involving Black male victims.
- Eighty-one percent of the individuals executed in Missouri were convicted of killing White victims even though White victims are less than 40% of all murder victims in the state.
- Even though the vast majority of murders involve an offender and victim(s) of the same race, 54% of the African-American men executed by Missouri were convicted of crimes involving White victims.

Between 1976 and 2014, the state of Missouri executed 80 men. Eighty-one percent of these men were executed for the murder of White victims. This is striking given that 60 percent of all homicide victims in Missouri are Black. White women represent just 12 percent of all homicide victims, but constitute 37 percent of the victims in execution cases. Black men, by contrast,

¹ 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.

Note that the homicides data stem from a U.S. Department of Justice report that covers the 1976 through 1999 period. Percentages by race, gender, or a combination of race and gender change little over time, however. Further, executions in 2014 are typically for crimes committed 10 to 30 years previously. The crimes for which Missouri inmates were executed through the end of 2014 were committed between 1977 and 1998.

represent 52 percent of all homicide victims, but just 12 percent of the individuals who were executed were convicted of killing Black men.

Table 1 shows these data.

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

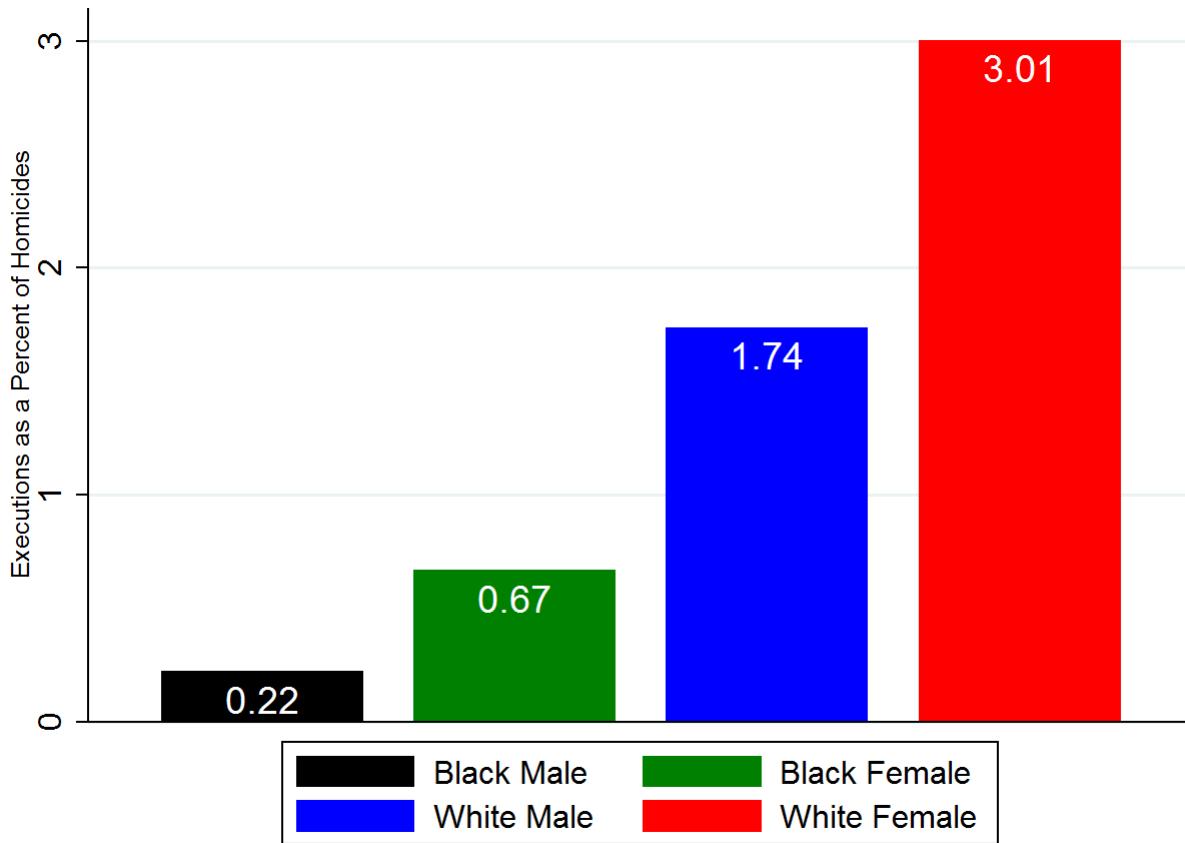
	Homicides		Executions		Executions Per 100 Homicides
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	
Whites	4,036	36.23	87	80.56	2.16
Blacks	7,027	63.08	21	19.44	0.30
Others	41	0.37	-	-	-
Males	8,588	77.09	60	55.56	0.70
Females	2,545	22.84	48	44.44	1.89
White Female	1,331	11.95	40	37.04	3.01
White Male	2,705	24.28	47	43.52	1.74
Black Female	1,198	10.76	8	7.41	0.67
Black Male	5,828	52.31	13	12.04	0.22

Note: Numbers refer to the number of victims, not offenders. There were 80 executions in Missouri from 1977 through 2014, with 108 victims

With 80 executions in the modern period, but over 11,000 homicides, the average likelihood that a homicide will lead to an execution is 0.696 percent: very low. However, Table 1 shows that this likelihood that a murder will result in an execution is 2.16 percent when the victim is White, but only 0.30 when the victim is Black. The percent is 0.70 when the victim is male and it is 1.89 percent 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 3.01 percent when the victim is a White female and decreases to 0.22 percent when the victim is a Black male.

Figure 1 puts these differences in stark comparison.

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

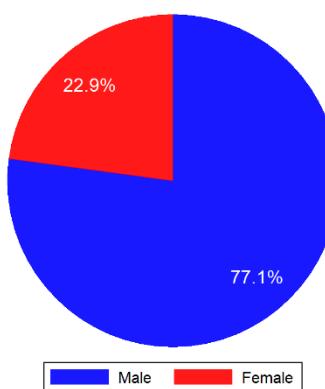


Note: The figure shows the percentage of homicides that eventually result in an execution.

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 77.1 percent of the victims. Among execution cases, however, men are a lower percent of the victims: 55.6 percent. Figure 3 shows the equivalent data for race, and Figure 4 shows race and gender combined.

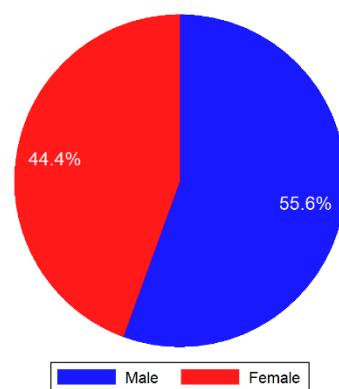
Figure 2. Gender of Victims

All MO Homicides 1976 - 1999



Based on all homicides from 1976 through 1999 as reported by US DOJ.

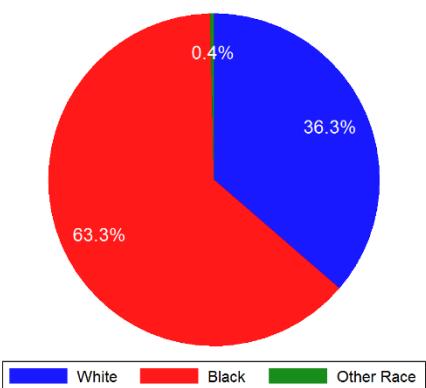
All MO Executions 1976 - 2014



Based on 80 executions from 1976 through 2014, with 108 victims.

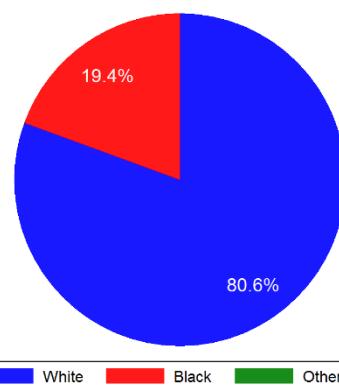
Figure 3. Race of Victims

All MO Homicides 1976 - 1999



Based on all homicides from 1976 through 1999 as reported by US DOJ.

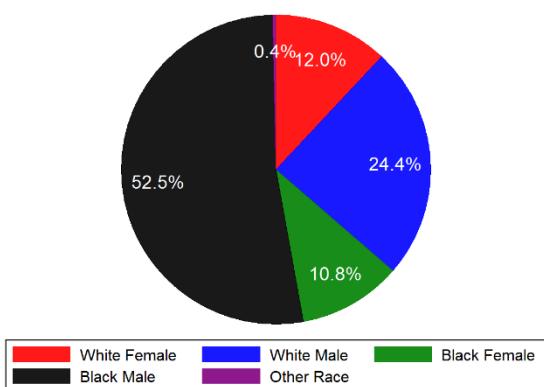
All MO Executions 1976 - 2014



Based on 80 executions from 1976 through 2014, with 108 victims.

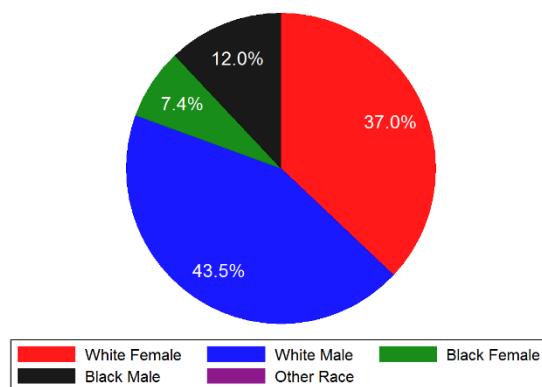
Figure 4. Race and Gender of Victims

All MO Homicides 1976 - 1999



Based on all homicides from 1976 through 1999 as reported by US DOJ.

All MO Executions 1976 - 2014



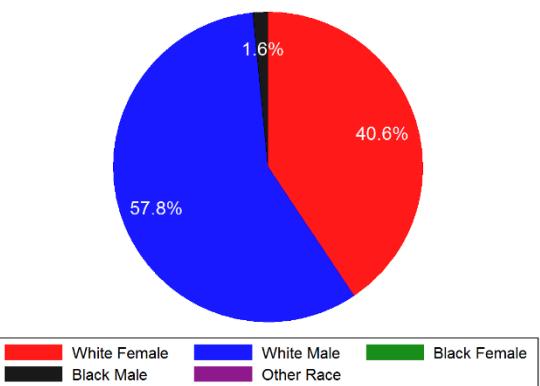
Based on 80 executions from 1976 through 2014, with 108 victims.

Figure 4 makes clear that Black males are severely underrepresented among victims in execution cases, considering that they constitute a majority of all homicide victims statewide. Figure 5 compares the race and gender of victims with the race of the executed offender. Of the 80 men who have been executed by the state of Missouri between 1976 and 2014, 48 were White males, 31 were Black males, and one was a Native American male. Table 2 shows the relevant data.

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

a. White Inmates

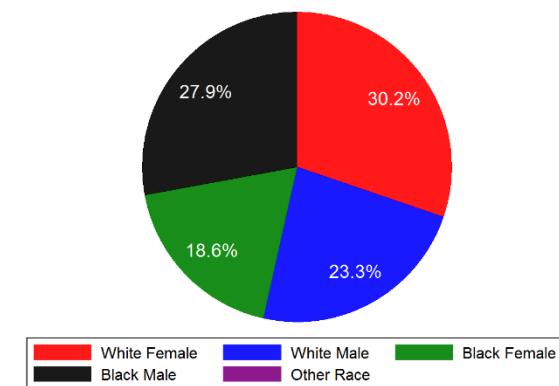
Victims of White Inmates Executed 1976 - 2014



48 White inmates were executed from 1976 through 2014, with 64 victims.

b. Black Inmates

Victims of Black Inmates Executed 1976 - 2014



31 Black inmates were executed from 1976 through 2014, with 43 victims.

Table 2. Victims of White and Black Male Inmates Executed.

Victims	White Inmates		Black Inmates	
	N	%	N	%
White Female	26	40.6	13	30.2
White Male	37	57.8	10	23.3
Black Female	0	0.0	8	18.6
Black Male	1	1.6	12	27.9
Other Race	0	0.0	0	0.0
Total	64	100.0	43	100.0

One Native American male has been executed in Missouri; he had a single White female victim. No Hispanic/Latino or Asian-American inmates have been executed in Missouri.

Just a single White person has been executed in Missouri for the crime of killing a Black person. Baumgartner, Grigg, and Mastro (2015) provide this short description of the crime:

Robert O'Neal, MO, December 6, 1995: In 1984, Robert O'Neal was a member of a White supremacist prison gang and had been incarcerated since the age of 18 for murdering a 78-year-old man during the commission of a burglary. On February 3, 1984, O'Neal, Rodnie Stewart, and Lloyd E. Schlup, approached a Black inmate, Arthur Dade. Stewart threw hot liquid in Dade's eyes and Schlup restrained the victim while O'Neal

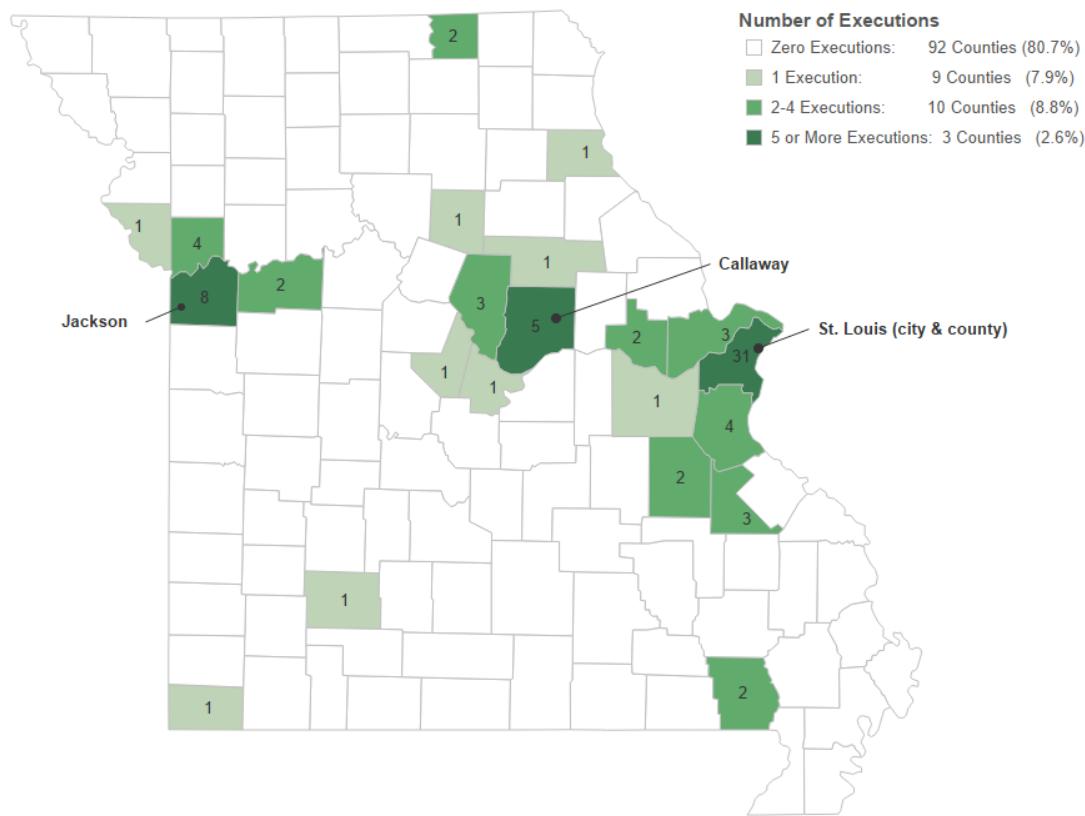
stabbed him to death with a 12 inch long homemade knife. Prosecutors called the murder an “Aryan hit.”

In sum, an Aryan nation prison murder is the only case in which a White person has been executed for killing a Black person in the modern history of Missouri.

In contrast, of the 31 Black men who have been executed in Missouri, a majority of their victims have been White. Nationally, the Bureau of Justice Statistics reports that from 1980 through 2008, White perpetrators killed 84 percent of White victims of homicide, and 93 percent of Black victims were killed by Black perpetrators. 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. In other words, the race and gender of the victim is a key determining factor in deciding who faces execution in Missouri.

Missouri’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. The map below shows the number of executions across the state’s 114 counties.

Executions in Missouri, 1976-2014
A Majority of Missouri's 80 Executions Are From Just 2.6% of the State's 114 Counties



As the legend makes clear, 92 counties have had no executions, and just 3 counties and the independent city of St. Louis account for 44 of the 80 executions that have taken place in the modern period. Table 3 provides more complete information. Table 3 also 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. The table includes only those counties with any executions, with the note providing summary information about the others.

Table 3. Missouri 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
St. Louis County	998,954	1,008	23	1.01	2.282
St. Louis City	319,294	4,462	8	13.97	.179
Jackson	674,158	2,879	8	4.27	.278
Callaway	44,332	22	5	0.50	22.727
Clay	221,939	550	4	2.48	.727
Jefferson	218,733	105	4	0.48	3.810
Boone	162,642	136	3	0.84	2.206
St. Charles	360,485	117	3	0.32	2.564
St. Francois	65,359	37	3	0.57	8.108
Butler	42,794	49	2	1.15	4.082
Lafayette	33,381	29	2	0.87	6.897
Warren	32,513	17	2	0.52	11.765
Washington	25,195	15	2	0.60	13.333
Schuyler	4,431	4	2	0.90	50.000
Greene	275,174	218	1	0.79	.459
Platte	89,322	204	1	2.28	.490
Franklin	101,492	75	1	0.74	1.333
Cole	75,990	58	1	0.76	1.724
McDonald	23,083	25	1	1.08	4.000
Marion	28,781	24	1	0.83	4.167
Randolph	25,414	21	1	0.83	4.762
Audrain	25,529	19	1	0.74	5.263
Moniteau	15,607	3	1	0.19	33.333
Total for state	5,988,927	11,489	80	1.92	.696

Note: The table lists all Missouri counties with any executions and the independent city of St. Louis. Homicide data come from the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics and have been aggregated from annual reports from 1984 through 2012, all the reports that are available. Among the 92 counties in Missouri with no executions in the modern period, the average number of homicides is 15, and the range is from zero to 107. The state totals include counties with no executions.

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 0.7 executions per 100 homicides, St. Louis County has more than three times that rate. St. Louis City, with four times the number of homicides and more than 10 times the

homicide rate, has fewer than 0.2 executions per 100 homicides. Callaway County, with five executions, has seen only 22 homicides over several decades.

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 is convicted, inappropriately influence who is executed in Missouri. 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 to fairly 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 Missouri'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 Missouri.

References:

- 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.