

U.S. Executions are a Regional Aberration

Many Americans mistakenly assume that most of the population in most U.S. states thinks that justice requires the death penalty. In fact the use of the death penalty in the U.S. is heavily localized in the Bible belt, the former slave-holding states.

Over Eighty-five percent (85.8%) of the 1,419 state-level U.S. executions in the last 39 years (from 1976 through 2015) **have occurred in the Bible belt**, the area of the U.S. consisting of the eleven states and territory (Oklahoma) of the Confederacy and the slaveholding Border States. Moreover, even generally, the death penalty as actually used is an anomaly, not a rule. **Consider that:**

- **92.9% of those 1,419 state-level U.S. executions have taken place in just 15 of the 50 states.**
- **In 2014**, just three states, **Texas** (10), **Missouri** (10), and **Florida** (8), were responsible for 80% of the country's executions.
- **In 2015**, just three states, **Texas** (13), **Missouri** (6), and **Georgia** (5), were responsible for 85% of the country's executions.
- **More than two-thirds of U.S. jurisdictions**, the other 35 states and the District of Columbia, are either not participating at all (17 with no executions) or virtually not participating (e.g., 11 with 3 or fewer executions) in 39 years.
- **The extent of this anomaly is even more apparent when viewed at the county level.** The notion that America is strongly wedded to the death penalty is not supported by a review of its use over the past 40 years. When examined closely, the practice of the death penalty in the U.S. is highly clustered in relatively few jurisdictions.... However ... when focusing on the use of the death penalty on a county level ... the real disparities are revealed.
 - Only a small minority of counties regularly use capital punishment. Eighty percent (80%) of the counties in the U.S. currently have no one on their states' death row.
 - **Eighty-five percent (85%) of the counties have not had a single person executed in over 45 years.**
 - **Over half of the executions carried out since 1976 come from cases originating in 2% of U.S. counties.**

[The 2% Death Penalty: How a Minority of Counties Produce Most Death Cases at Enormous Costs to All (Washington, DC: Death Penalty Information Center, 2013)]