

The Death Penalty in Harris County

- Harris County prosecutors have secured death sentences for **297 people** since 1974.
- In the 1990s, Harris County juries routinely sent **as many as 15 people to death row** each year.
- While Harris County remains the top sentencing county in Texas, jurors there have imposed just **three new death sentences since 2016**. A jury sentenced Lucky Ward to death in March 2020, just before the pandemic brought all other capital trials to a halt.
- There are **77 people on death row** who were convicted in Harris County; this constitutes more than one-third of Texas's current death row population.
- **20 of the last 21 defendants** sentenced to death in Harris County are people of color (16 are Black, three are Hispanic, and one identifies with another race/ethnicity).
- In the 1990s, the Harris County District Attorney's Office was **three times more likely** to seek the death penalty against Black defendants than similarly-situated white defendants.
- Harris County accounts for **130 executions** since 1982, more than any state except Texas and twice as many as any other county.
- Since 2016, 33 people have been removed from death row because of sentence reductions or deaths in prison; **40% of these cases came from Harris County**.
- **Of the 13 death row exonerees in Texas, three were convicted in Harris County**. Alfred Dewayne Brown spent a decade on death row for a crime he did not commit. He was released from prison in 2015 after the Harris County District Attorney's Office dropped the charges against him; in 2019, he was declared "actually innocent." Prosecutors had withheld important phone records that corroborated his alibi.
- According to the Houston Area Survey for 2020, conducted by the Kinder Institute for Urban Research at Rice University, only **20 percent of Houstonians** think the death penalty, rather than life imprisonment, is the most appropriate punishment for murder.

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