

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 2015**. A jury sentenced Lucky Ward to death in March 2020.
- 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 non-white 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 in the country 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 16 death row exonerees in Texas, four were convicted in Harris County.** In 2019, Alfred Dewayne Brown was declared "actually innocent" after spending a decade on death row; he was released in 2015 after charges against him were dropped. Prosecutors 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. 04/01/21