

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

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Ohio'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.

Between 1976 and 2014, the state of Ohio executed 53 men. Here are a few key findings of this research:

- Sixty-five percent of all executions carried out in Ohio between 1976 and 2014 were for crimes involving White victims despite the fact that 43% of all homicide victims are White.
- Only 27% of all homicide victims are female, but 52% of all executions carried out in Ohio were for homicides involving female victims.
- Homicides involving White female victims are six times more likely to result in an execution than homicides involving Black male victims.
- In cases where Black inmates were executed, 26% of all of the victims were White. In cases where White inmates were executed, just 8% of the victims were Black.
- Just four out of Ohio's 88 counties (Lucas, Summit, Cuyahoga, and Hamilton)—or just 5%—are responsible for more than half of the state's 53 executions.
- Only three counties (Summit, Cuyahoga, and Hamilton) have produced more than five executions each. More than three-quarters of all Ohio counties (69) have never produced an execution.
- Lake County has an execution rate that is 11 times the state's average execution rate of .36 executions per 100 homicides. Belmont County's rate is more than eight times the state average.
- The three most populous counties (Cuyahoga, Franklin, and Hamilton) have very different execution rates, even though their homicide rates are relatively similar. Hamilton has the highest execution rate at .60 executions per 100 homicides: this is more than double the execution rate in Cuyahoga, and nearly nine times the rate in Franklin County.

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. 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 10 and 30 years earlier. The crimes for which Ohio inmates were executed through the end of 2014 were committed between 1982 and 2003.

- The homicide rate in counties that have produced no executions (.47 homicides per 1,000 population) is dramatically lower than the homicide rate in counties that have produced executions (1.79 homicides per 1,000 population).

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

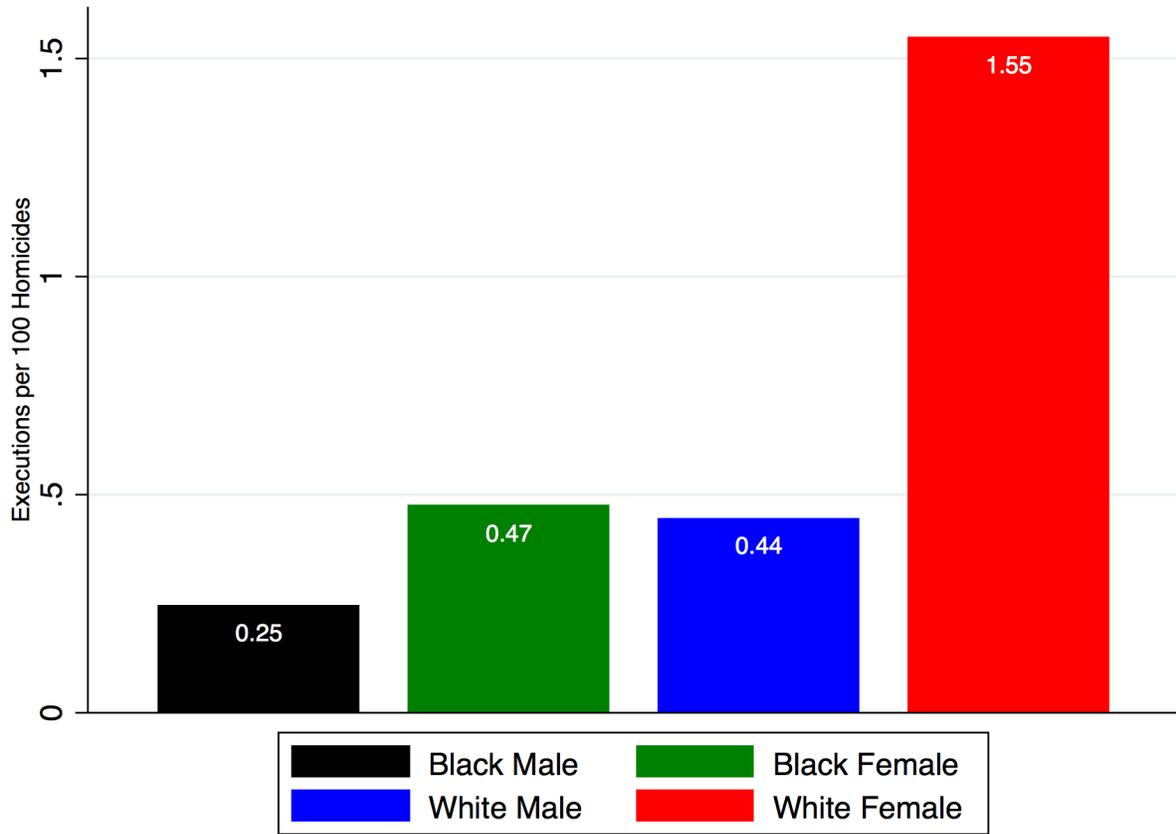
Victim Characteristic	Homicides		Executions		Executions Per 100 Homicides
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	
Whites	6,763	42.98	55	65.48	0.81
Blacks	8,832	56.14	26	30.95	0.29
Other, Unknown	139	0.89	3	3.57	-
Total	15,734	100.00	84	100.00	0.53
Males	11,527	73.26	40	47.62	0.35
Females	4,204	26.72	44	52.38	1.05
Unknown	3	0.01	-	-	-
Total	15,734	100.00	84	100.00	0.53
White Female	2,264	14.39	35	41.67	1.55
White Male	4,499	28.60	20	23.81	0.44
Black Female	1,903	12.10	9	10.71	0.47
Black Male	6,929	44.04	17	20.24	0.25
Other, Unknown	139	0.89	3	3.57	-
Total	15,734	100.00	84	100.00	0.53

Note: Numbers refer to victims, not inmates executed. Ohio executed 53 inmates from 1976 through 2014 for crimes involving 84 victims. Ratios not calculated for other or unknown categories because these are not compatible across the two data sources.

With 53 executions in the modern period, but nearly 16,000 homicides between 1976 and 1999, the average likelihood that a homicide will lead to an execution is just .53 percent. However, Table 1 shows that the likelihood that a homicide will result in an execution is .81 percent when the victim is White, but only .29 when the victim is Black. The percent is .35 when the victim is male, and 1.05 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 1.55 when the victim is a White female, but decreases to just .25 percent when the victim is a Black male. The likelihood that a homicide will result in an execution is nearly identical when the victim is a White male or a Black female.

Figure 1 illustrates these stark comparisons.

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

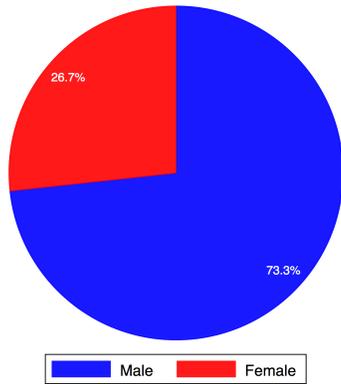


Note: Figure 1 shows the percentage of homicides that eventually result in an execution.

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 73.3 percent of the victims. Among execution cases, however, men are a lower percent of the victims: 47.6 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 44.1 percent of all homicide victims statewide.

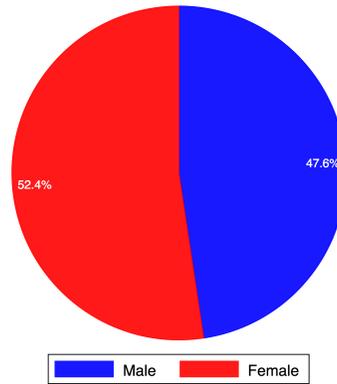
Figure 2. Gender of Victims

All Ohio Homicides 1976 - 1999



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

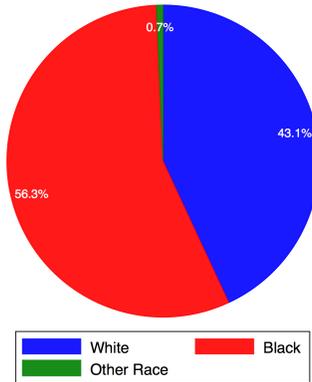
All Ohio Executions 1976 - 2014



Based on 53 executions from 1976 through 2014, with 84 victims.

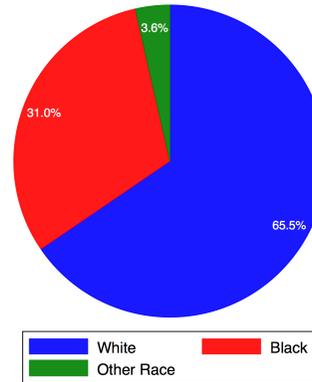
Figure 3. Race of Victims

All Ohio Homicides 1976 - 1999



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

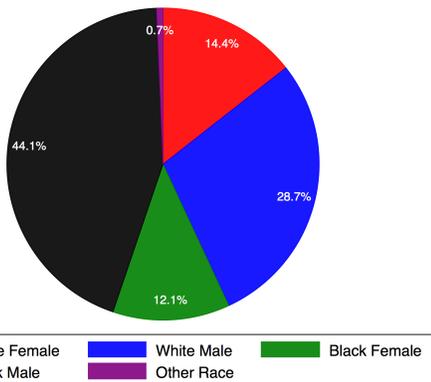
All Ohio Executions 1976 - 2014



Based on 53 executions from 1976 through 2014, with 84 victims.

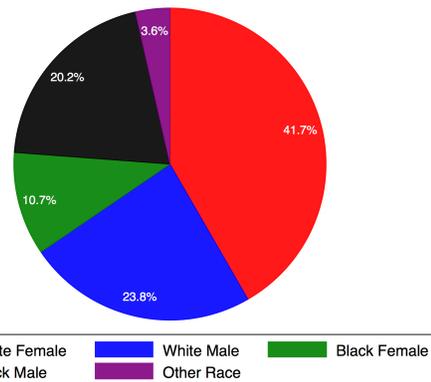
Figure 4. Race and Gender of Victims

All Ohio Homicides 1976 - 1999



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

All Ohio Executions 1976 - 2014



Based on 53 executions from 1976 through 2014, with 84 victims.

Figure 5 compares the race and gender of victims with the race of the executed offender. Of the 53 men who have been executed by the state of Ohio between 1976 and 2014, 34 were White males and 19 were Black males. 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

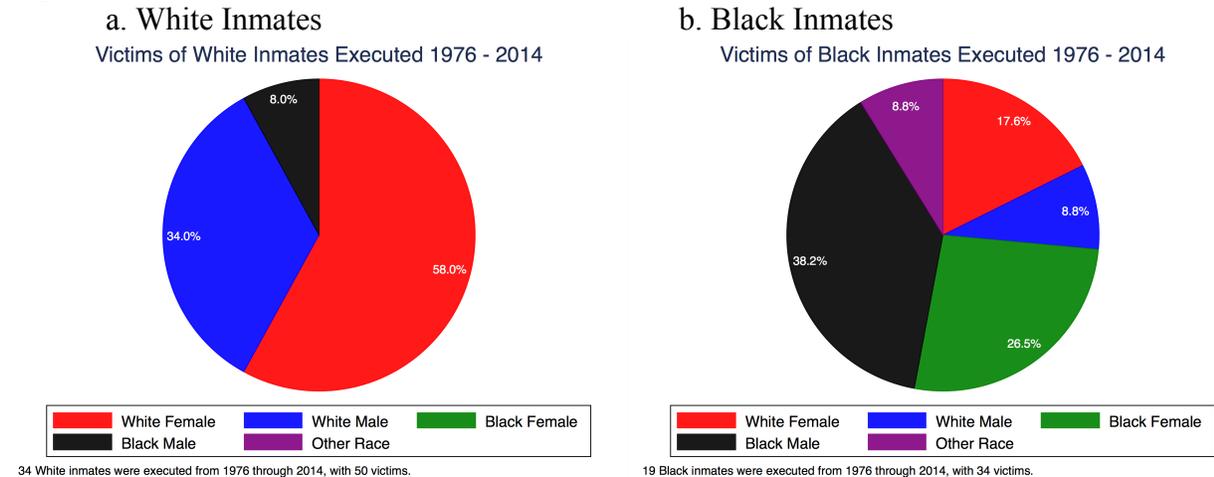


Table OH 2. Victims of White and Black Male Inmates Executed

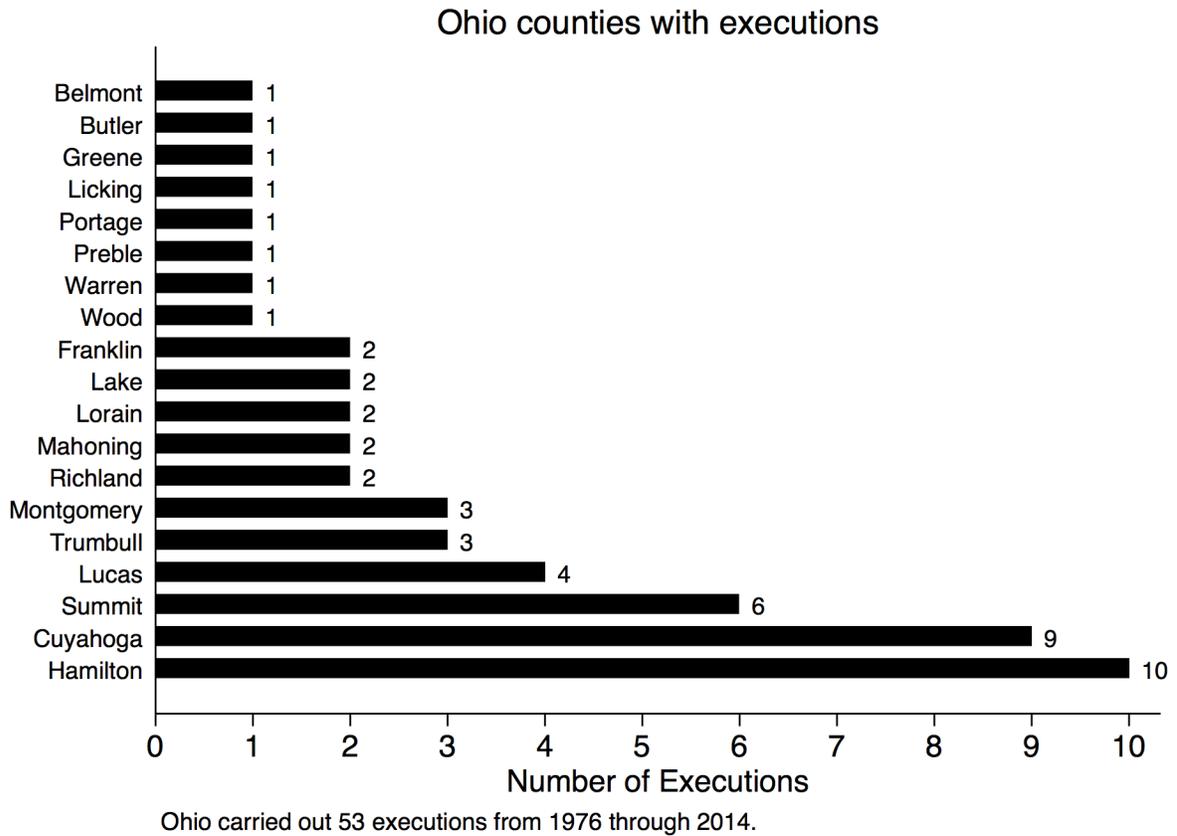
Victims	White Inmates		Black Inmates	
	N	%	N	%
White Female	29	58.0	6	17.6
White Male	17	34.0	3	8.8
Black Female	0	0.0	9	26.5
Black Male	4	8.0	13	38.2
Other Race	0	0.0	3	8.8
Total	50	100.0	34	100.0

In cases where Black inmates were executed, 26.5% of all of the victims were White. In cases where White inmates were executed, just 8% of the victims were Black. 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). 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 within-race and cross-race crimes. In other words, the race and gender of the victim is a determining factor in deciding who faces execution in Ohio.

Ohio'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 88 counties.

Figure 6. Executions by County



As Figure 7 below makes clear, 69 counties have had no executions. Just four out of Ohio's 88 counties (Lucas, Summit, Cuyahoga, and Hamilton) are responsible for more than half of the state's 53 executions. Only three counties have produced more than five executions. More than three-quarters of all Ohio counties have never produced an execution.

Figure 7. Map of Ohio Executions by County

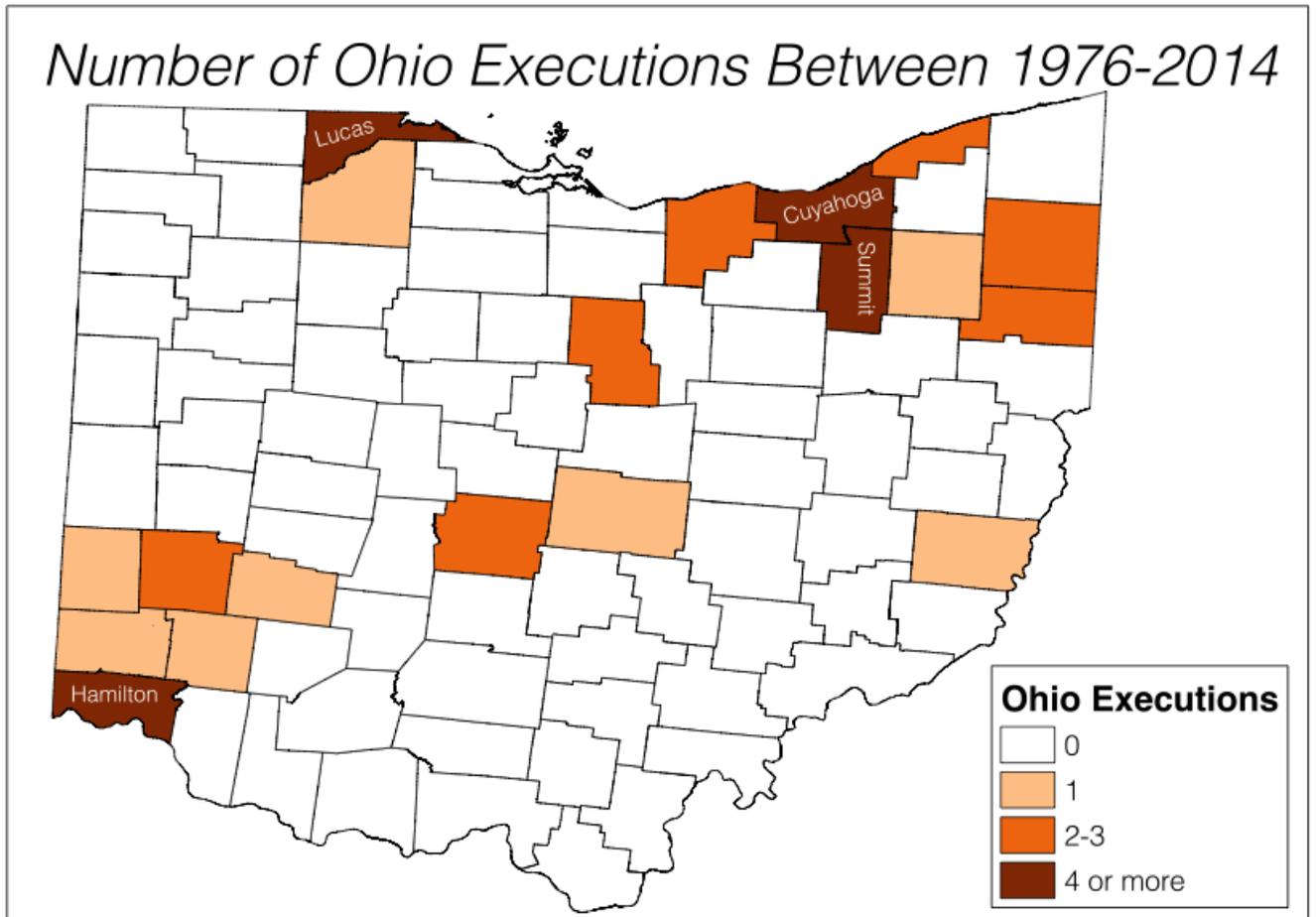


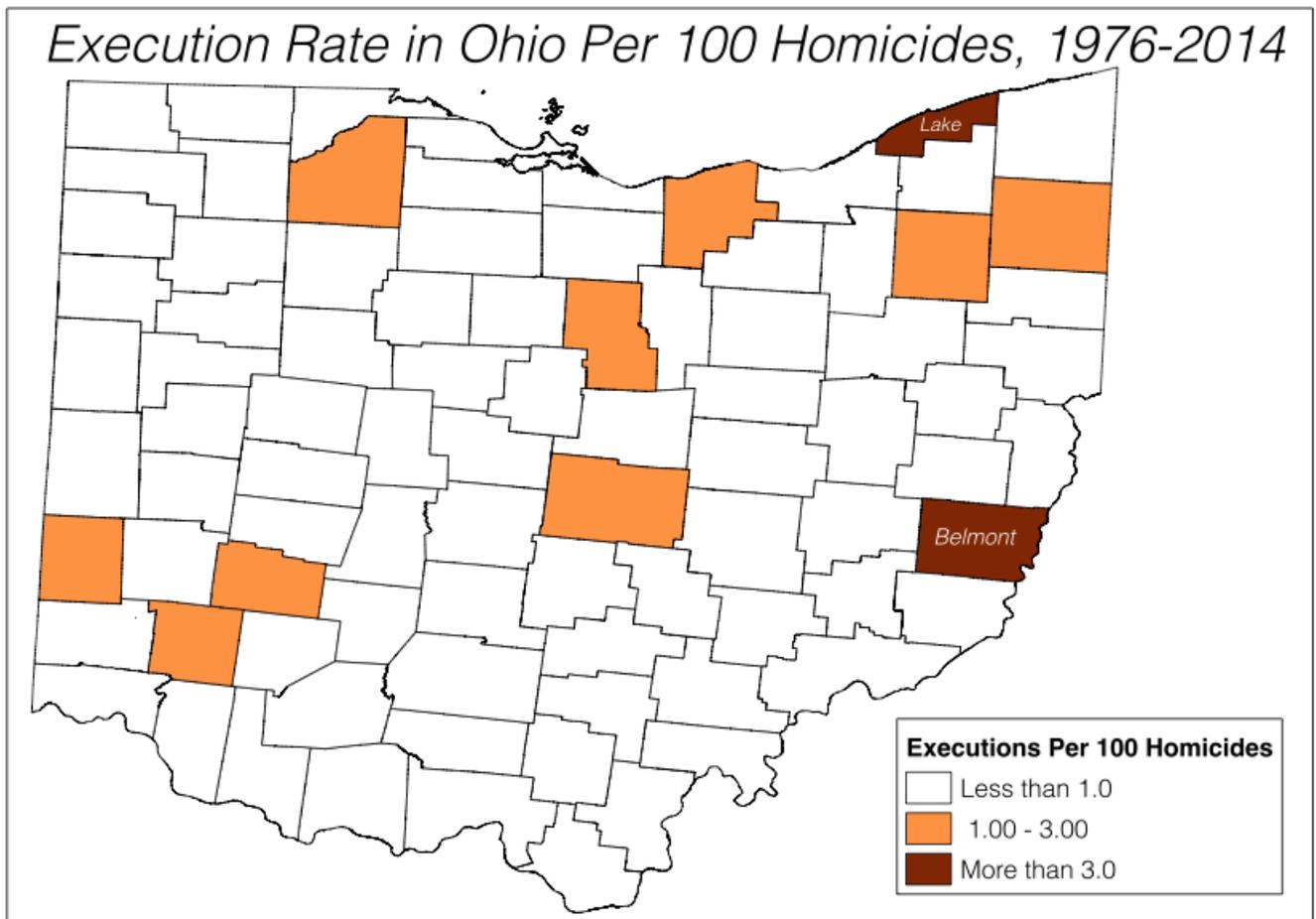
Table 3 below shows the 2010 population, the total number of homicides reported by the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics for the period of 1984 through 2012, the number of homicides, and the rate of homicides per 1,000 population, and the number of executions per 100 homicides for each county in Ohio.

Table 3. Ohio 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
Hamilton	802,374	1,676	10	2.09	0.60
Cuyahoga	1,280,122	3,581	9	2.80	0.25
Summit	541,781	636	6	1.17	0.94
Lucas	441,815	838	4	1.90	0.48
Montgomery	535,153	1,308	3	2.44	0.23
Trumbull	210,312	172	3	0.82	1.74
Franklin	1,163,414	2,745	2	2.36	0.07
Lake	230,041	50	2	0.22	4.00
Lorain	301,356	180	2	0.60	1.11
Mahoning	238,823	1,019	2	4.27	0.20
Richland	124,475	101	2	0.81	1.98
Belmont	70,400	33	1	0.47	3.03
Butler	368,130	269	1	0.73	0.37
Greene	161,573	61	1	0.38	1.64
Licking	166,492	40	1	0.24	2.50
Portage	161,419	56	1	0.35	1.79
Preble	42,270	35	1	0.83	2.86
Warren	212,693	54	1	0.25	1.85
Wood	125,488	41	1	0.33	2.44
Counties with no Executions	4,358,373	2,029	-	0.47	-
Total	11,563,504	14,924	53	1.29	0.36

Note: Sixty-nine counties in Ohio 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 Ohio 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 by county. Whereas the overall average for the state is approximately 0.36 executions per 100 homicides, Lake County has an execution rate that is 11 times the state's average execution rate, and Belmont County's rate is more than eight times the state average. The three most populous counties (Cuyahoga, Franklin, and Hamilton) have very different execution rates, even though their homicide rates are relatively similar. Hamilton has the highest execution rate at .60 executions per 100 homicides: this is more than double the execution rate in Cuyahoga, and nearly nine times the rate in Franklin County.

The homicide rate in counties that have produced no executions (.47 homicides per 1,000 population) is dramatically lower than the homicide rate in counties that have produced executions (1.79 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 Ohio. 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 Ohio'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 Ohio.

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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