



# News and information

- [: INNOCENCE BLOG](#)
- [: PRESS RELEASES](#)
- [: LEGAL INFORMATION](#)
- [: FACT SHEETS](#)
- [: AUDIO & VIDEO ARCHIVE](#)
- [: NEWSLETTERS](#)
- [: NATIONAL VIEW](#)
- [: LINKS](#)
- [: E-MAIL THIS PAGE](#)

## Facts on Post-Conviction DNA Exonerations

[\[Print Version\]](#)

There have been 244 post-conviction DNA exonerations in the United States.

- The first DNA exoneration took place in 1989. Exonerations have been won in 34 states; since 2000, there have been 178 exonerations.
- 17 of the 244 people exonerated through DNA served time on death row.
- The average length of time served by exonerees is 12 years. The total number of years served is approximately 3,077.

- The average age of exonerees at the time of their wrongful convictions was 26.

### Races of the 244 exonerees:

146 African Americans  
 70 Caucasians  
 21 Latinos  
 2 Asian American  
 5 whose race is unknown

- The true suspects and/or perpetrators have been identified in 104 of the DNA exoneration cases.
- Since 1989, there have been tens of thousands of cases where prime suspects were identified and pursued—until DNA testing (prior to conviction) proved that they were wrongly accused.
- In more than 25 percent of cases in a National Institute of Justice study, suspects were excluded once DNA testing was conducted during the criminal investigation (the study, conducted in 1995, included 10,060 cases where testing was performed by FBI labs).
- About half of the people exonerated through DNA testing have been financially compensated. 27 states, the federal government, and the District of Columbia have passed laws to compensate people who were wrongfully incarcerated. Awards under these statutes vary from state to state.
- 22 percent of cases closed by the Innocence Project since 2004 were closed because of lost or missing evidence.

### Leading Causes of Wrongful Convictions

These DNA exoneration cases have provided irrefutable proof that wrongful convictions are not isolated or rare events, but arise from systemic defects that can be precisely identified and addressed. For more than 15 years, the Innocence Project has worked to pinpoint these trends.

**Eyewitness Misidentification Testimony** was a factor in 74 percent of post-conviction DNA exoneration cases in the U.S., making it the leading cause of these wrongful convictions. At least 40 percent of these eyewitness identifications involved a cross racial identification (race data is currently only available on the victim, not for non-victim eyewitnesses). Studies have shown that people are less able to recognize faces of a different race than their own. These suggested reforms are embraced by leading criminal justice organizations and have been adopted in the states of New Jersey and North Carolina, large cities like Minneapolis and Seattle, and many smaller jurisdictions.

**Unvalidated or Improper Forensic Science** played a role in approximately 50 percent of wrongful convictions later overturned by DNA testing. While DNA testing was developed through extensive scientific research at top academic centers, many other forensic techniques – such as hair microscopy, bite mark comparisons, firearm tool mark analysis and shoe print comparisons – have never been subjected to rigorous scientific evaluation. Meanwhile, forensics techniques that have been properly validated – such as serology, commonly known as blood typing – are sometimes improperly conducted or inaccurately conveyed in trial testimony. In other wrongful conviction cases, forensic scientists have engaged in misconduct.

**False confessions and incriminating statements** lead to wrongful convictions in approximately 25 percent of cases. In 35 percent of false confession or admission cases, the defendant was 18 years old or younger and/or developmentally disabled. The Innocence Project encourages police departments to electronically record all custodial interrogations in their entirety in order to prevent coercion and to provide an accurate record of the proceedings. More than 500 jurisdictions have voluntarily adopted policies to record interrogations. State supreme courts have taken action in Alaska, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Hampshire, New Jersey, and Wisconsin. Illinois, Maine, New Mexico, and the District of Columbia require the taping of interrogations in homicide cases.

**Snitches** contributed to wrongful convictions in 16 percent of cases. Whenever snitch testimony is used, the Innocence Project recommends that the judge instruct the jury that most snitch testimony is unreliable as it may be offered in return for deals, special treatment, or the dropping of charges. Prosecutors should also reveal any incentive the snitch might receive, and all communication between prosecutors and snitches should be recorded. Fifteen percent of wrongful convictions that were later overturned by DNA testing were caused in part by snitch testimony.

### RELATED LINKS

[Today's News: The Innocence Blog](#)

[Understand the Causes of Wrongful Conviction](#)

[What Can You Do?](#)