

Executions in Florida and Tennessee as state killing spree reaches highest level in over a decade

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11 December 2025

The United States has seen a dramatic acceleration in state-sanctioned killings this year, reaching a total of 46 executions so far in 2025, a level not witnessed in more than a decade. This figure stands in contrast to the 25 executions carried out in 2024, confirming an alarming upward trend driven almost entirely by the political machinations of a handful of states—chiefly Florida, Texas, Alabama and South Carolina, which together account for three-quarters of the killings.

This surge in executions is in line with the deeply reactionary political climate fostered by the pro-death penalty administration of President Donald Trump and the ultra-conservative Supreme Court which upholds this reactionary agenda. Trump’s executive order, “Restoring the Death Penalty and Protecting Public Safety,” signed on Inauguration Day, explicitly directed the pursuit of capital punishment in all applicable federal cases and encouraged the attorney general to assist states in carrying out executions.

Florida governor sets execution record

The bulk of the state killing spree is attributable to the arbitrary exercise of power by Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, who has overseen a shocking 18 executions this year. This figure shatters Florida’s previous record of eight executions set in 2014.

The 18th person put to death in Florida this year was Mark Allen Gerald, 58, who died by lethal injection at Florida State Prison near Starke on Tuesday, December 9, at 6:15 p.m. local time.

Gerald was convicted in 1990 for the 1989 murder of 33-year-old Tressa Lynn Pettibone in Panama City Beach. Pettibone, a mother of two, was beaten repeatedly, had her wrists bound with plastic ties, and was fatally stabbed with a kitchen knife. Her eight-year-old son found her body upon returning home from school. Prosecutors alleged Gerald, a carpenter who had previously worked on the home, tortured Pettibone trying to find \$7,000 in cash he believed was in the house.

Gerald was diagnosed with antisocial personality and bipolar disorders and had a history of criminal activity. He had also been involved in a jailbreak with four other inmates while awaiting trial in 1990. In the final weeks before his execution, Gerald filed a motion to waive his remaining appeals, asking to die.

Opponents of the death penalty charged that the state capitalized on Gerald’s despair, turning his execution into an opportunity to add to the DeSantis administration’s death count without confronting serious legal and constitutional defects in his case. Forensic evidence, including blood, fingerprints and hair found at the scene, reportedly did not match Gerald, and critics stress that DNA analysis was never performed to identify the unknown subjects.

Gerald’s execution moved forward despite his mental state being barely addressed during the waiver hearing, underscoring the arbitrary nature of the state’s process. Protesters, including representatives from Death Penalty Action and Journey of Hope—From Violence to Healing, demonstrated outside the prison, striking gongs so the sound might reach the condemned inmate.

Governor DeSantis, who holds the sole and opaque power to set execution dates in Florida, justifies the

unprecedented pace by arguing that “justice delayed is justice denied” and that he owes victims’ families closure for decades-old crimes. However, critics point out serious allegations of racial bias in his warrant signing, noting that a statistical analysis showed defendants convicted of killing a white victim were over 15 times more likely to be executed under his administration than those whose victims were not white. Claims that executions provide “closure” to victims’ families has also been widely debunked.

Florida’s assembly line of killings is not done yet for 2025. Frank Athen Walls, 58, is scheduled to be the state’s 19th execution of the year, on December 18.

Tennessee’s third execution of 2025

Nichols was sentenced to death in 1990 for the brutal rape and murder of 20-year-old Karen Pulley in 1988. He broke into her home, raped her and beat her head with a two-by-four board, resulting in massive brain injuries that led to her death the next day. He confessed to the killing and admitted he would have continued his violent behavior had he not been arrested.

Post-conviction filings describe Nichols as having been beaten regularly, exposed to domestic violence and subjected to humiliating treatment as a child. Advocates noted that he reported being sexually victimized as a youth, which was later cited in clemency efforts as an unaddressed trauma.

Court and clemency materials describe Nichols’ long-standing mental health concerns, including symptoms consistent with post-traumatic stress and other mood or personality-related problems, though he was not given sustained or effective treatment as a child or adolescent. Nichols also began using alcohol and drugs at a young age.

Much of this history of abuse, trauma and mental health issues was either minimally developed or not fully explained to the original sentencing jury and later became central in appeals and clemency petitions. Several jurors said they would have reconsidered a death sentence had they known more about these issues.

Despite Nichols taking responsibility for his crimes and pleading guilty—a fact his attorneys highlighted as making him the first person executed for a crime after pleading guilty since Tennessee reinstated the death penalty in 1978—Governor Bill Lee refused to intervene. Lee upheld the sentence after “deliberate

consideration” and a “thorough review.” Nichols’ attorneys, who argued that he had demonstrated model conduct and personal rehabilitation, stated they were “deeply saddened and gravely disappointed” by Lee’s decision.

Further highlighting the crisis surrounding lethal injection protocols, Nichols’ execution moved forward despite ongoing legal challenges. His legal counsel was denied access to records regarding previous lethal injection executions, which is particularly concerning given that Tennessee’s last executed inmate, Byron Black, said he was “hurting so bad” in his final moments.

With the execution of Nichols, the US tally stands at 46 for the year. If two executions scheduled before year’s end proceed—Stacey Humphreys on December 17 in Georgia, Frank Athen Walls on December 18 in Florida—the US is on pace to see 48 executions in 2025.

This increase in state-sanctioned killings, concentrated in just a few states, is a terrifying yardstick of the political brutality currently promoted by the Trump administration and gripping the American justice system, including the ongoing Gestapo dragnet against immigrants and White House’s criminal military pursuits around the globe.



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