A record 20th execution in Florida, a torturous lethal injection in Texas

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Two men were put to death in the United States on Thursday, November 19. Florida killed Thomas Mitchell Overton, 71, its 20th execution of the year—a state record. Less than two hours later, Texas killed Reinaldo Dennes, 70, in a lethal injection that took more than an hour, during which he cried out repeatedly in pain.

The two states have led the country in state killing since the US Supreme Court reinstated capital punishment in 1976. Texas has carried out 605 executions, and Florida is second with 145, according to the Death Penalty Information Center.

Thursday's executions follow two on November 12, when Oklahoma killed James Pavatt and Texas killed John Allen Rubio, and three on November 5, when Indiana, Florida and Alabama killed Jeffrey Weisheit, Jesse Guardado and Michael Shannon Taylor, respectively. Seven people have been put to death in 15 days. The national total for 2026 now stands at 39, more than half of them in Florida under Republican Governor Ron DeSantis.

The killings come seven weeks after Tennessee's failed attempt to execute Christa Pike on September 30. Pike survived two doses of pentobarbital, which her attorneys believe flowed into the tissue of her arms rather than her bloodstream, leaving them burned and blistered. She was placed on a ventilator in a Nashville-area hospital and has since been returned to prison, where she says she is in constant physical and mental pain. Governor Bill Lee has refused to commute her sentence, leaving open a second attempt to kill her.

Thomas Mitchell Overton in Florida

Overton was pronounced dead at 6:19 p.m. at Florida State Prison. He was convicted in 1999 of the August 1991 murders of Michael MacIvor, 30, and his wife Susan "Missy" MacIvor, 29, who was eight months pregnant, in their home in Tavernier in the Florida Keys. The couple were strangled and she was raped. The case went unsolved until 1996, when Overton, who had worked at a gas station near the MacIvors' home, was arrested on an unrelated burglary charge and his DNA was matched to semen found at the scene.

Overton maintained his innocence to the end. Strapped to the gurney, he declared, "I've never sexually assaulted anyone. I never killed anyone. I didn't kill the MacIvors." The drugs of Florida's three-drug protocol began flowing immediately afterward. He panted and breathed heavily before all movement stopped.

At trial, Overton's attorneys argued that he had been framed and suggested that police had planted the semen evidence. They said he had been working at the gas station at the time of the murders and that timesheets that would have proved it had been destroyed, leaving him without an alibi. Overton charged that police had a motive to target him: he had had a three-month affair with a Monroe County deputy whose husband was a detective in Marathon, according to an archived *Miami Herald* report.

Floridians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty (FADP) said the execution "lays bare the steady cruelty with which this administration has chosen the condemned." The group noted that Overton had survived abuse at the hands of the state at the Dozier School for Boys, had served in the US Army and had always maintained his innocence, and that several of his jurors did not believe he should be sentenced to death. "Governor DeSantis hopes to be remembered as the governor who carried out more executions than any other in Florida's history," the group said. "He will be."

The Dozier School in Marianna operated for 111 years before closing in 2011. Boys sent there for offenses such as truancy and running away were beaten, tortured and raped by staff, and 55 unmarked graves were later found on the grounds. A 2025 Marshall Project analysis found that 50 former students of Dozier and the state's Okeechobee reform school made up 19 percent of Florida's death row. Jesse Guardado, executed November 5, was also a Dozier boy. In 2024, DeSantis signed a law compensating those abused at the two schools. "On one hand, Florida recognizes the harm they caused these men and authorize compensation, but then turns around and executes them," FADP's Maria DeLiberato said last year.

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Reinaldo Dennes in Texas

Dennes was convicted in 1997 of the January 1996 murder of Janos Szucs, a wholesale diamond dealer, during a robbery of Szucs's office in a Houston building where Dennes ran a jewelry business. Some $3.6 million in diamonds and $200,000 in cash were taken. A security guard, David Copeland, was shot twice but survived and identified Dennes as the gunman.

Michael Graczyk of the Associated Press, who has witnessed nearly 500 lethal injections in Texas since 1983, wrote that Dennes' execution was "like no other." Prison officials later acknowledged an unknown number of failed attempts to find a vein before IV lines were inserted in Dennes' left foot and the left side of his neck.

After his final statement, Dennes told the warden, "Go." Almost at once he cried out, "The pain! Go! Go!" For nearly three minutes he moaned and called out to God, saying his right leg was "killing me." "I don't think this is normal," he said. "Take me, Father. Don't let me suffer like this." After three loud groans, he made a series of snoring sounds and fell silent. He was pronounced dead at 7:08 p.m. Central Time, more than an hour after he was strapped to the gurney.

The Rev. Jeff Hood, Dennes' spiritual adviser, who stood beside him in the chamber, called it "by far the worst" of the 15 executions he has attended. Hood said Dennes began "shifting violently on the gurney," screamed, "My leg, my leg, my leg," and twice cried out, "It's not working like it's supposed to." "There's no question that this was a botched execution," Hood told KHOU-TV.

Texas Department of Criminal Justice spokeswoman Amanda Hernandez insisted that all procedures had been followed and suggested Dennes was faking, claiming he had complained of pain where no IVs had been placed and before the drugs began to flow. "There was nothing abnormal on our part," she said. Hood rejected the state's account: "My hand was on Reinaldo's shoulder the entire time I was in that chamber. I know what I saw. … Texas does not get to tell a different story."

Texas killed Dennes with pentobarbital, the drug Tennessee used on Pike, its third pentobarbital execution since Pike survived hers. Texas has kept up its supply in part by retesting the potency of doses nearing their expiration dates and then relabeling them. A 2015 state law keeps secret the identity of any person or business involved in an execution. Dennes had joined Rubio and another prisoner in a lawsuit charging that the state's pentobarbital was unreliably produced or expired. State courts threw it out.

Dennes' final appeals argued that David Balderas, who testified at trial linking him to a 1995 burglary, was a police informant, a fact Dennes alleged Houston police had concealed. The Texas Court of Criminal Appeals denied the appeal Wednesday. On Thursday, the US Supreme Court rejected his application for a stay and his petition for review, in which his attorneys argued that his trial lawyer had failed to investigate and present mitigating evidence on his childhood, family history and cognitive functioning.

Dennes was the ninth person executed by Texas this year, the most since 2019.

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Public support for capital punishment has fallen to its lowest level in 55 years. A recent Gallup poll found that only 49 percent of US adults favor the death penalty for convicted murderers, while 45 percent oppose it. Yet the pace of state killing continues to accelerate, buoyed by the pro-death penalty agenda of the Trump administration.

Three more executions are scheduled for this year, which would bring the 2026 total to 42. Florida plans to execute Ricardo Gonzalez on December 1 and Willie Seth Crain Jr. on December 19, for a total of 22.

On December 3, the military plans to execute former Army Maj. Nidal Hasan by firing squad at Fort Hood, Texas, in the first military execution since 1961. In November 2009, Hasan, an Army psychiatrist, opened fire on soldiers preparing for deployment to Afghanistan, killing 13 people and wounding 32. Police shot him, leaving him paralyzed from the waist down. Secretary of War Pete Hegseth announced in October that the execution would be livestreamed, but Trump called off the broadcast a week later amid overwhelming public opposition. The military is still preparing to shoot a paralyzed man to death at the site of his crime.

The Socialist Equality Party and the *World Socialist Web Site* unconditionally oppose the death penalty, for both the guilty and the innocent. Its abolition cannot be left to the courts or to the Democratic Party, which following their victories in the midterm elections is promoting austerity and collaboration with Trump. The fight to end state killing is bound up with the struggle of the working class against war, dictatorship and the capitalist system that produces them.

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