

([HTTPS://WWW.INNOCENCEPROJECT.ORG](https://www.innocenceproject.org))

DNA Exonerations in the United States

Fast facts:

1989: The first DNA (<https://www.innocenceproject.org/cases/gary-dotson/>) exoneration took place

365 DNA exonerees to date

37: States where exonerations have been won

14: Average number of years served

5,065.5: Total number of years served

26.6: Average age at the time of wrongful conviction

43: Average age at exoneration

20 of 365 people served time on death row

41 of 365 pled guilty to crimes they did not commit

69%: Involved eyewitness misidentification

(<https://www.innocenceproject.org/causes/eyewitness-misidentification/>)

42% of these cases were a cross-racial misidentification

32% of these cases involved multiple misidentifications of the same person

27% of these cases involved misidentification through the use of a composite sketch

44%: Involved misapplication of forensic science

(<https://www.innocenceproject.org/causes/misapplication-forensic-science/>)

Other facts:

130 DNA exonerees were wrongfully convicted for murders; 40 (31%) of these cases involved eyewitness misidentifications and 81 (62%) involved false confessions [as of July 9, 2018]

102 DNA exonerations involved false confessions; the real perp was identified in 76 (75%) of these cases. These 38 real perps went on to commit 48 additional crimes for which they were convicted, including 25 murders, 14 rapes, and 9 other violent crimes [as of July 24, 2018]

180 of the DNA exonerees (50%) had the real perpetrator(s) identified in their cases [as of August 22, 2018]

137 of the DNA exonerees had the real perpetrator(s) identified through a cold database hit [as of October 19, 2018]

How DNA makes a difference in the criminal justice system

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% 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).

An Innocence Project review of our closed cases from 2004 – June 2015 revealed that 29% of cases were closed because of lost or destroyed evidence.