

# South leads in executions as national total declines

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Florida has executed 66 inmates since the state's first modern execution in 1979 — an average of about two a year.

The state has executed two inmates this year and no date has been set for the next execution, so 2008 will be an average year.

But a new report shows that the number of people executed in the United States this year will be the lowest since 1994.

The report from the Death Penalty Information Center shows that nearly all those executions occurred in southern states — most in Texas.

New death sentences also were at or near a three-decade low this year and dropped 60 percent from 1998, reflecting a steady decline over the last decade, the nonprofit center reports.

The center reported 37 executions in 2008, with no more expected for the remainder of the year. That's down 12 percent from 42 in 2007 and a 30 percent drop from 2006.

The report from the center, which opposes the death penalty, also indicates that executions in the United States have essentially become a regional phenomenon.

All but four of the 37 executions this year occurred in the South and Texas, with Ohio and Oklahoma providing the exceptions. Half of the executions occurred in Texas, where 18 inmates were put to death.

Currently, 390 people sit on Florida's death row. At a rate of two executions a year, the vast majority of them will die of old age, not execution.