

The Sentencing Project

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.sentencingproject.org/news/for-tsarnaev-would-life-without-parole-be-less-humane-than-death/>

Policy Issue Resources

1705 DeSales St, NW
8th Floor
Washington, D.C. 20036
202.628.0871
(fax) 202.628.1091
staff@sentencingproject.org

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On Wednesday, a jury will begin deliberations on whether Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, one of the Boston Marathon bombers, should be executed for his crime.

In his case, a sentence of life without parole is seen as the more humane option. The alternative is death, and there is some evidence that, as states turn more to life without parole, it is partly from a humane desire to move away from the ultimate punishment, reports the *Christian Science Monitor*. Yet the rapid expansion of life without parole also speaks the array of laws, spawned by the get-tough-on-crime 1980s, that remain on the books and mandate such sentences.

The Sentencing Project has documented a [historic rise in life sentences](#) in the United States, with the lifer population more than quadrupled in size since 1984 while violent crime rates have continued to decline.

Meanwhile, a growing body of research suggests many people age out of criminal behavior. A 2004 report by The Sentencing Project notes that individuals released after receiving life sentences with parole were rearrested at much lower rates than the overall prison population 21 percent versus 68 percent.

Nearly 2,500 of the 50,000 inmates sentenced to life without parole were convicted of crimes that occurred before they turned 18, The Sentencing Project found.

People will debate if people are deserving of long term sentences and if societies should punish, and that's a legitimate debate to have, says Marc Mauer, director of The Sentencing Project. [But] we do know there are many people who have changed substantially after a couple decades of incarceration and don't present nearly the public safety risk they did at the time of their crime.

Read the full article at the [Christian Science Monitor](#).

Sentencing Policy

Increase in number of women incarcerated in the U.S. since 1980

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Washington, D.C. 20036
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(fax) 202.628.1091
staff@sentencingproject.org

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