

The national coalition against the death penalty

[Law](#), [Death Penalty](#)



The death penalty has been a fairly contentious issue in the United States since 1930 when statistics first began to be regularly collected. By the late 1960s, an unofficial moratorium took place due to mounting opposition to the law that was authorized in all but 10 states. In 1972, the Supreme Court struck down the 'arbitrary and capricious' state and federal death penalty laws (History of the Death Penalty, "Death Penalty" & "Moratorium").

However, the 1976 rulings re-imposing the capital punishment brought to the fore the gravity of the issue for the American public. The Supreme Court decision bringing back the controversial law was met with concerted efforts by those who vigorously oppose death penalty. One entity that perhaps best symbolizes opposition to its reinstatement is the National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty (NCADP), a coalition organization formed shortly after the Supreme Court ruling.

The NCADP has, since its formation in 1976, been the only national organization with a full staff that is devoted exclusively to the abolishment of the capital punishment. Its work includes the providing of information and public policy advocates and the mobilization of, and support for, individuals and institutions sharing the unconditional rejection of the death penalty (National Coalition 1).

NCADP Mission and Goals

The main argument of the NDADP in its stand against the death penalty is the belief that the ultimate punishment equates to the devaluation of all human life. With the execution of the capital offender, the organization believes that the spiritual transformation intrinsic to every human being is denied. The organization also argues three other critical concerns, namely:

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the irrevocability of the capital punishment within a dishearteningly fallible judicial system; the law's race and class bias against the poor and racial minorities, and the death penalty's intrinsic violation of our most basic human rights.

The National Coalition for the Abolition of the Death Penalty, based in Washington D. C., boasts of a 30-year history of organizing opposition to the U. S. death penalty (Hogan & Hartson Announcements). One of the more prominent heads of NCADP has been Sister Helen Prejean CSJ, a Roman Catholic nun of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Medaille.

Serving the organization from 1993 to 1995, Prejean became a crusader against the death penalty following her ministering and witnessing many executions beginning with that of Louisiana convicted murderer Elmo Patrick Sonnier. Her autobiographical account of the relationship she made with Sonnier became the basis for the film and opera *Dead Man Walking*. (Helen Prejean ¶ 1-4).

The mission of the National Coalition Against the Death Penalty is organized around the four central mission areas of legislative advocacy, grassroots advocacy, media advocacy and human rights advocacy.

Believing that the abolition of the capital punishment in the United States can be achieved using a multi-faceted approach, the NCADP spells out its four-core mission as follows:

- Legislative Advocacy - cooperating with policy-makers and their constituents to adopt legislation that opposes the death penalty at the local, state, as well as national level.
- Media Advocacy - using mainly local and state media to broaden the public criticism of the capital punishment.
- Grassroots Advocacy - providing assistance to NCADP affiliates in organizing activities that oppose the death penalty and in reaching out to American communities to take a stand against the death penalty.
- Human Rights Advocacy - highlighting the capital punishment as a violation of human rights and working to gain the support of the world in abolishing the death penalty in the United States. (National Coalition " Our Focus").

NCADP Strategy and Tactics

The organization conducts its campaign against capital punishment using its four non-violent advocacy methods at the local, state and national levels.

(National Coalition, Wikipedia 2). The use of information dissemination is an important tool of the NCADP towards the goal of abolishing death penalty in the United States. Primarily using the local media, which it believes to be the greater news source of the American public, NCADP works to inform about facts and figures that strengthen the call against capital punishment.

Through other media outlets including its website www.ncadp.org and the national media, it presents many eye-opening if not disturbing data on the modern implementation of death penalty in the country.

The death penalty related information the NCADP provides is essentially statistics-based, perhaps in the effort to be scientific and less incontrovertible. It extensively collects and presents telling information such as:

- 95 percent of the nearly 4, 000 death convicts are so poor that they were unable to hire a private attorney.
- African Americans comprise 42% of those currently on death row despite the fact that they make up a mere 12% of the total population.
- More than 60% of those convicted to die for childhood offenses since the 1976 re-imposition have either been African Americans or Latinos (National Coalition, Fact Sheet). Being a coalition organization, the NCADP strategy in seeking the legal abolition of death penalty includes forging linkages with state and local, national and international affiliates. It has local affiliates in Alabama, Arizona and California and its national affiliates include Amnesty International, USA Program to Abolish the Death Penalty.

The NCADP also counts international affiliates from the United Kingdom (Death Penalty UK Death Row: Reprieve UK), Germany (German Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty (GCADP), France (Coalition for Truth and Justice; Ensemble contre la peine de mort) and Botswana (The Botswana Centre for Human Rights). The NCADP also list as an ally the Missourians Against State Killing organization (National Coalition " Affiliates").

Successes and Failures

In evaluating its success or failure, many factors can be used to gauge the NCADP. Organization- and support-wise, America's leading financial evaluator of independent charities, Charity Navigator, shows a successful picture of the NCADP.

The National Coalition for the Abolition of the Death Penalty is considered a charity organization and its continued existence as the largest in its advocacy reflects the considerable support the American public has given it. No less than Charity Navigator gives it a thumbs up for financial health. Moreover, Charity Navigator has for the last three years given NCADP a consistent four-star overall rating (60++ percent from 2003-2005). Rating the coalition three stars for efficiency and four stars for capacity, Charity Navigator gives NCADP the highest overall peer rating along with the A. J. Muste Memorial Institute. (Charity Navigator " Rating," " Peer Analysis").

In terms of the success of its mission of abolishing the capital punishment, the milestones in the collective efforts of all anti-death penalty advocates can be considered as success for the coalition organization itself.

The NCADP recognizes the 2003 commutation for over 150 death convicts—the largest in modern American history—by Illinois Gov. George Ryan as ' a turning point in the debate over capital punishment' in the country (NCADP Welcomes 1 & 3). A most recent development is the 2005 Supreme Court in *Roper V. Simmons* ruling against the imposition of the death penalty for those under 18 years of age at the time of the crime. Another good news

came in 2004 when the high court of New York declared death penalty unconstitutional.

In terms of failures, the most obvious proof that NCADP has not met its goal is the fact that the capital punishment still exists as legal over more of the United States. Specific legislations have also strengthened death penalty as when President Bill Clinton signed two anti-terrorism laws in 1994 and 1996 that expanded federal death penalty and restricted federal court reviews, respectively (Information Center " Timeline").

However, judging by public support for and against the death penalty based on protracted Gallup Poll surveys, it would seem that the efforts of the anti-death penalty advocates—including the NCADP's media advocacy—appear to be finally paying off. From the 1970s when the organization was formed until 1994, a great majority of Americans favored the death penalty over life imprisonment as penalty for murder. From 1994 to 1997, however, the number of Americans favoring life imprisonment instead has grown steadily. As of May 2004, even after the September 11 attacks, the number of those who favor death penalty was only marginally higher than those who go for life imprisonment (Information Center " Public Support").

NCADP has a charity privacy policy that requires the donor to inform the charity to remove his or her name and other contact information from the mailing lists sold, traded or shared. Current leadership of the NCADP has Diann Rust-Tierney as Executive Director and Jason Zanon as the Interim Executive Director (Charity Navigator " Donor Privacy Policy" ; " Leadership").

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