

Latino evangelicals call for end to death penalty in groundbreaking vote

by [Jonathan Merritt](#) in the [April 29, 2015](#) issue

A leading group of Latino evangelicals has called for an end to state-sanctioned capital punishment, the first national association of evangelicals to do so.

In a unanimous vote March 27, the National Latino Evangelical Coalition urged its 3,000 member congregations to work to end capital punishment across the country.

“As Christ followers, we are called to work toward justice for all,” coalition president Gabriel Salguero said. “And as Latinos, we know too well that justice is not always even-handed.”

Salguero said the decision came after a years-long discernment process that included prayer as well as dialogue with antideath penalty groups such as Equal Justice USA.

“EJUSA has found that evangelicals are eager to take another look at this issue, reflecting what we’re seeing in the country as a whole,” said Shari Silberstein, EJUSA’s executive director.

American support for the death penalty has hit the lowest level in 40 years, and a 2014 poll by Barna Group showed that Christian support for the practice is also waning, especially among young adults. According to Barna, only 5 percent of Americans think Jesus would support the government’s ability to execute criminals.

Many religious groups, including the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, oppose the death penalty, but evangelical groups tend to take a more affirmative stance.

The 16-million-member Southern Baptist Convention, America’s largest Protestant denomination, issued a resolution in 2000 supporting “the fair and equitable use of capital punishment.” The Assemblies of God states that opinion among its members is “mixed,” but that more people associated with the Assemblies favor it for certain types of crimes.

Silberstein said that while the Latino coalition was the first to take this stance, “I don’t think they will be the last.”

The National Association of Evangelicals supports the use of capital punishment. But its position hasn't been updated since 1973, and sources within the NAE say that leadership is considering a change in the months ahead.

"The truth is that a fallen system does not mete out justice with equanimity," Salguero said. "The gospel calls us to speak out for life, and our unanimous decision today to call for the end of capital punishment is part of that commitment."

—Religion News Service

*This article was edited on April 14, 2015.*