

# Nicaragua Eliminates Last Exception to Strict Anti-Abortion Law

The New York Times  
November 20, 2006

MEXICO CITY, Nov. 19 — Hopes among women's groups in [Nicaragua](#) that President Enrique Bolaños would stop one of the most restrictive [abortion](#) laws in Latin America from taking effect have been dashed, as the president signed it into law late Friday.

Abortion has been illegal in Nicaragua for more than a century, and most women who decide to end unwanted pregnancies seek procedures at underground clinics. But the new law strikes out a clause that made it possible for a woman to obtain an abortion legally when three doctors certified that unless she did, her own life would be in danger.

For months, the proposed law has drawn fierce criticism from several local women's groups, the country's association of gynecologists, the [United Nations](#), the [World Health Organization](#) and [Human Rights Watch](#), among others.

"This is a throwback to the Middle Ages for women's rights," Juana Jiménez, the leader of the Women's Autonomous Movement in Nicaragua, said after the law was passed.

The law was the fruit of the recent presidential election, as conservatives saw a chance to gain its passage in Parliament during the election season.

The country is 85 percent Roman Catholic, with most other voters belonging to conservative evangelical churches. Four of the five presidential candidates supported it.

Daniel Ortega, the former Marxist who was president from 1985 to 1990 and the leader of the Sandinista Party, abandoned his ideological roots and supported passage of the law in an effort to gain support from the [Roman Catholic Church](#) in his campaign to regain the presidency. He narrowly won the election, on Nov. 5, with about 38 percent of the vote.

The support of the Sandinistas in the National Assembly was critical, because they had blocked similar measures in the past. The bill passed on Oct. 26.

Some opponents to the law had hoped Mr. Bolaños, a conservative, would not sign the bill because it did not include the stiffer sentences he had wanted for women who had had illegal abortions, or for those who had performed abortions. The six-year prison term remains unchanged under the law. The president had asked for a 30-year prison term.