

Now with this vote, this capital city became the largest entity in Latin America, outside Cuba and Puerto Rico, to permit women to have abortions on demand in the first trimester. The vote, which legalized abortion within the federal district, means that the 10 million women in Mexico City and its suburbs will have easy access to an abortion. And anyone living in [Mexico](#) could travel here for an abortion.

Proponents of the law say they hope it will become a model for states in Mexico, most of which only allow abortion under conditions like rape or danger to the mother's health.

Many on each side of the issue predicted it would ultimately be challenged on constitutional grounds before the Supreme Court. Opponents said they would challenge it on the grounds that there was a prohibition in the Mexican Constitution against the death penalty that could be broadly interpreted to grant the right to life to unborn children.

Supporters of the vote argue that in 2002 the Supreme Court ruled that abortion was legal in circumstances like rape and incest, and therefore they say it is unlikely that the court would agree to overturn the new law.

Catholic Lawyers, the opposition group, complained that the city assembly had violated the Constitution and its own laws by ignoring a petition for a referendum on the issue. More than 36,000 people had signed the document.

The speeches and legislative maneuvering continued throughout the day before the vote at 6 p.m. Conservatives argued that legalizing abortion would not solve the underlying social problems leading to unwanted pregnancies, while liberals said the conservatives were not facing reality.

“The women of the Federal District are dying from clandestine abortions,” said Leticia Quezada, of the leftist Democratic Revolution Party, which controls the assembly. “What we want is not one more death, not here, not anywhere.”

On the other side, Jorge Romero, of the National Action Party, said legalizing abortion would encourage irresponsible sex. “What we are legislating now, what we are asked to approve, is to support juvenile imprudence, unexpected pregnancies,” he said. “Understand this, lawmakers, you are legalizing killing.”

In the end, the vote was 46 to 19 with one abstention. The no votes came mostly from President [Felipe Calderón](#)’s conservative National Action Party, which had mounted a media campaign in recent days against the bill.

For older women, the vote represented a long overdue recognition of their plight. Women are seeking abortions, legal or not, they said. The rich fly to the United States or go to certain doctors at private hospitals who do the procedure secretly, they said. The poor must resort to underground clinics and midwives.

Among the supporters of the law gathered on Juárez Avenue near the assembly building a carnival atmosphere reigned. The demonstrators waved signs saying, “My body is mine,” and “It is my right to decide.”

On Donceles Street outside the legislature, the police guarding the building vastly outnumbered the anti-abortion protesters. A block away from the building, about 50 abortion rights advocates had a shouting match with about 200 opponents across the line of riot police separating them. “If there’s life, let it be born,” said Margarita Cerón, the elderly leader of a group of outdoor merchants from a poor suburb.

On Sunday, [Pope Benedict XVI](#) publicly condemned the bill. The next day, the archbishop of Acapulco, Felipe Aguirre Franco, said the lawmakers who voted for it would be automatically excommunicated. Liberals replied that the church should not interfere in secular matters.

President Calderón, a conservative who opposes abortion, has stayed above the fight. The first lady, Margarita Zavala, however, has spoken out against the bill.

