

U. S. Citizenship and Immigration Services

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Response to Information Request Number:	NIC03001.ZAR
Date:	February 23, 2003
Subject:	Nicaragua: Information on Dissidents in the Political Party, Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN), Sandinista National Liberation Front
From:	INS Resource Information Center
Keywords:	Nicaragua / Dissidents / Journalists / Political parties / Political violence

Query:

What has been the fate of dissidents within the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN), Sandinista National Liberation Front, and have internal critics been subject to threats or violent retaliation, including in northern departments such as Jinotega?

Response:

After the FSLN lost the 1990 elections, divisions within the party became more pronounced until 1995 when a reformist faction led by Sergio Ramirez and others broke away to form the Movimiento Renovación Sandinista (MRS), Sandinista Renewal Movement, sometimes referred to as the Movimiento Renovador Sandinista. Daniel Ortega, president of the country until 1990 and leader of the so-called orthodox group within the FSLN, retained leadership of the party, with the second position held by Tomás Borge, the hard-line former interior minister. Ramírez, vice-president under Ortega in the former Sandinista government, was elected president of the MRS, and former FSLN guerrilla commander Dora María Téllez as his deputy. The MRS itself has been vulnerable to divisions, as in 2001 when Téllez, then MRS president, signed an electoral alliance with Ortega, a move rejected by Ramírez (LATIN AMERICA REGIONAL REPORTS: CARIBBEAN 22 Jun 1995;

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AP 19 Jan 1996; LATINAMERICA PRESS 25 Oct 2001).

Some social and professional groups traditionally allied with the Sandinistas also took a reformist line, for example, the Unión de Periodistas de Nicaragua (UPN), Union of Journalists of Nicaragua. The UPN was originally under the full control of the FSLN. But after the FSLN lost power, the UPN distanced itself and backed efforts to reform the party such as those by Sergio Ramirez and the others who went on to form the MRS. The UPN continues to be viewed as the leftist journalist group in Nicaragua, in contrast to the conservative Asociación de Periodistas de Nicaragua (APN), Association of Journalists of Nicaragua. Still, the extent of the UPN break from the orthodox, Ortega-dominated FSLN has been evident in joint UPN-APN communiqués and the UPN cooperating with the APN on the issue of securing journalist pensions. The UPN has branches in most departments of the country, including Jinotega (EL DIARIO NUEVO 10 Jan 1998 & 19 Apr 2002).

With regard to the FSLN response to internal critics, expulsion has been common, practically systematic. In 1999, a number of prominent party members were expelled for criticizing a pact negotiated by Ortega between the FSLN and the ruling, right-wing Partido Liberal Constitucionalista (PLC), Liberal Constitutionalist Party, of then-president Arnoldo Alemán that gave the two parties a virtual monopoly on the political system and granted former presidents (Ortega and eventually Alemán) immunity from prosecution by making them congressmen for life. In September 2001, Marc Cooper, writing from the left in Mother Jones magazine, reported: "Over the past few years Ortega has steamrolled internal opposition, expelled his own allies by the dozens...Ortega has crushed repeated attempts to democratize the FSLN, expelling internal critics and launching smear campaigns against outsiders" (MOTHER JONES 1 Sep 2001; EFE 22 Dec 1999).

Moreover, a number of FSLN dissidents have publicly claimed that they have received death threats, including former Managua councilman and radio figure Carlos Guadamuz, Rev. Miguel Angel Casco, who once occupied an FSLN leadership position, and Zoilamérica Narváez Murillo, Daniel Ortega's stepdaughter and FSLN activist whom he allegedly abused. Narváez Murillo claimed to have been subjected to death threats and other forms of intimidation after she went public in March 1998 with her allegations of more than a decade of sexual abuse. It was also rumored that members of the FSLN who called for a public forum on this or other controversial issues would have their party membership suspended or be disciplined in other ways (EFE 17 Nov 2000; WASHINGTON POST 14 Mar 1998; CANADIAN BUSINESS AND CURRENT AFFAIRS Sep 2001).

In 2001, Tina Rosenberg, member of the New York Times editorial board and longtime Latin American analyst, compared Ortega's "authoritarian nature" to the Somoza regime the Sandinistas overthrew in 1979. In March 2002, at the time of the FSLN party congress, Oscar Martínez, the FSLN political secretary in the southwestern city of Masaya, told the press that in the congress "everything is bolted down," with no room for those who diverged from Ortega's orthodox line. Another Sandinista dissident, Mónica Baltodano, said that "there was no opening in the congress. It probably closed even more." Tomás

Borge referred to Baltodano, Irvin Davila and others calling for a new party leadership as "an insignificant minority" (NYT 29 Oct 2001; EFE 17 Mar 2002, AP 19 Mar 2002).

The RIC has been unable to find reports of the FSLN actually responding with extreme violence against party dissidents. But the possibility exists, particularly in violence plagued departments such as Jinotega, where political animosity, personal vendetta and rampant criminal violence frequently overlap, making it difficult for Nicaraguan media and non-governmental groups to discern politically motivated violence. Further complicating the issue is the continued existence in Jinotega and neighboring areas of remnants of former Sandinista army units and former anti-Sandinista Contras. Jinotega and other departments in the north and northeast have been identified by the Organization of American States (OAS) as the most adversely affected by the decade long civil war in the 1980s, where governmental institutions and law enforcement remain weak and undermined by corruption or non-existent. In 1998, the non-governmental Centro Nicaragüense de Derechos Humanos (CENIDH), Nicaraguan Center for Human Rights, reported hundreds of incidents of violence and more than three murders per month in Jinotega and neighboring Matagalpa department, although it did not say to what extent any of the incidents involved politics (LATINAMERICA PRESS, 28 May 2001 & 27 Mar 2000; LA PRENSA 21 Nov 2002; U.S. DOS 4 Mar 2002; EL NUEVO DIARIO 11 Jan 1998).

Remarking on the continued existence of armed groups in rural areas and the propensity for violence in the country generally, former Sandinista guerrilla commander and cabinet minister Henry Ruíz recently stated: "In Nicaragua, we have never believed in either laws or institutions. In our history, conflicts have always been resolved through guns, through violence" (NACLA 1 Jan 2001).

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the RIC within time constraints. This response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum.

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