

Poll: Most of Ireland favors wider abortion access

January 10 2013, by Shawn Pogatchnik



Bishop Christopher Jones, left, and Father Timothy Burke arrive to attend a parliamentary committee on abortion in Dublin Thursday Jan. 10, 2013. A poll suggests that most people in Ireland want their lawmakers to give clearer and wider access to abortion in a bill due to be unveiled this year. The survey was published Thursday as senior figures from several churches testified to a parliamentary committee investigating possible reforms to Ireland's ban on abortion. (AP Photo/ Barry Cronin/PA) UNITED KINGDOM OUT

(AP)—Most people in Ireland want lawmakers to give women wider access to abortion, a poll revealed Thursday as senior clerics testified before a parliamentary committee investigating Ireland's ban on the

practice.

Prime Minister Enda Kenny's government has pledged to legalize abortion for women whose lives are deemed in danger from a pregnancy, including those who threaten to commit suicide if denied an abortion.

Opponents of abortion argue that the suicide-threat rule would be open to deceit and permit increasingly broad access to abortion in this predominantly Catholic country.

The move has been delayed in Ireland for two decades despite a 1992 [Supreme Court ruling](#) that life-saving abortions should be Irish law.

The issue gained renewed momentum in November after a 31-year-old Indian woman who was suffering a protracted miscarriage died in an Irish hospital from blood poisoning. Her widower accused doctors of letting her die, because they refused her pleas to remove the 17-week-old fetus until its heart had stopped beating, a three-day delay.

The poll published Thursday found that 35 percent supported the [government plan](#) to propose a law to legalize abortions for life-threatening cases including suicidal women. Some 29 percent said they wanted the government to go farther and legalize abortion on demand, the law in neighboring Britain since 1967. Pro-abortion sentiment ran strongest among younger adults and those living in and around Ireland's largest city, Dublin.

The survey of 1,002 adults across Ireland, conducted this week by pollsters RedC for the Irish bookmaker Paddy Power, had an error margin of 3 percentage points.

It found that just 8 percent want Ireland's constitutional ban on abortion kept intact with no exceptions.

A further 26 percent said they wanted the government to make a third attempt to reverse the 1992 Supreme Court judgment that ruled a credible threat to commit suicide is enough grounds for a legal abortion in Ireland. In that case, the government had prevented a 14-year-old girl who had been raped and impregnated by a neighbor from traveling to England for an abortion.

Previous Irish governments in 1992 and 2002 had held referendums seeking support for constitutional amendments that would permit life-saving abortions but exclude suicide as an allowed reason. Both amendments were defeated as activists on both sides of the issue rejected the proposal for opposite reasons.

The Irish parliament's health committee has spent much of this week hearing testimony from obstetricians and psychiatrists about whether suicide risks for pregnant women can be credibly diagnosed or treated in all cases without resorting to abortions. Opinion was divided.

On Thursday, the leaders of pro- and anti-abortion groups and senior clerics from all of the country's major religions had their say.

Catholic leaders appealed for a third referendum to block the suicide-threat option, but Kenny and other senior Cabinet ministers said this won't happen.

The leaders of several Protestant denominations, who represent about 5 percent of the people in Ireland, said current Irish abortion law was an ill-defined nightmare for pregnant women in medical crises. They said doctors needed clear rules so they can end pregnancies in rare cases without the fear of facing lawsuits or criminal charges.

"It is wrong to allow a mother to die. It is wrong to take the life of a child. But in such circumstances, it may be necessary to choose what is

least wrong," said the Rev. Trevor Morrow of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.

Ali Selim, a senior Muslim cleric in Dublin, argued against proposals to permit abortion for women impregnated in cases of rape. He said such women "deserve due sympathy and help, but a child conceived in this unfortunate situation still has the right to live."

Michael Nugent, leader of the Atheist Ireland group, said abortions should also be legalized for pregnancies caused by both rape and incest, and in cases where the fetus had been diagnosed with a fatal abnormality or severe handicap. Such pregnancies typically are ended in England, where more than 4,000 pregnant Irish women receive abortions annually.

"Whatever laws you pass, please base them on human rights and compassion and on applying reason and empirical evidence, and not on religious doctrines," Nugent told lawmakers.

The government expects to publish its [abortion](#) bill by Easter and pass it by June.

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