

Poland's top political leaders support total ban on abortion

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Poland's prime minister and the powerful leader of its conservative ruling party both said Thursday they support a total ban on abortion.

Abortion is currently only allowed in mostly Catholic Poland when the pregnancy poses a threat to the woman's health or life, if it results from a crime like incest or rape or if the fetus is damaged.

But these regulations dating to 1993, which have been considered a tough compromise between the views of the country's liberal and Catholic circles, are now being contested under Poland's new conservative government.

A new civic group called "Stop Abortion" is gathering support to impose a total ban and is backed by Poland's influential Roman Catholic Church.

Prime Minister Beata Szydlo and party leader Jaroslaw Kaczynski said, as Catholics, they support the total ban but if it comes to a vote in parliament, party lawmakers will be able to vote as they wish.

"I am a Catholic so my position is obvious. But there is no party discipline on these issues," Kaczynski said.

The party, which has a parliamentary majority, won power last year promising a return to traditional Catholic values and support for families with children.

In a statement to be read in churches Sunday, Poland's bishops are calling for the protection of human life "from conception to natural death."

But Grzegorz Schetyna, leader of the opposition Civic Platform party, said it's in Poland's interests to preserve the existing legislation. Raising the sensitive issue again would only add to the existing political conflict, he said.

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