

Portugal's parliament rejects bills legalizing euthanasia

May 29 2018, by Barry Hatton



In this May 24, 2018 file photo, people stand on the steps of the Portuguese parliament in Lisbon during a protest against euthanasia. After legalizing abortion and same-sex marriage in recent times, Portuguese lawmakers will decide Tuesday, May 29, 2018 on another issue that has brought a confrontation between faith and politics in this mostly Catholic country: whether to allow euthanasia and doctor-assisted suicide. (AP Photo/Armando Franca, File)

Portuguese lawmakers Tuesday narrowly rejected a proposal to make Portugal one of only a handful of countries in the world allowing

euthanasia and doctor-assisted suicide.

After a landmark debate, lawmakers voted to reject four broadly similar bills introduced by left-leaning parties. The bill that came closest to succeeding was the work of the governing Socialist Party, which failed on a 115-110 [vote](#) with four abstentions.

Euthanasia—when a doctor kills patients at their request—is legal in Belgium, Canada, Colombia, Luxembourg and the Netherlands. In Switzerland, and some U.S. states, assisted [suicide](#)—where patients administer the lethal drug themselves, under medical supervision—is permitted.

The outcome of Portugal's vote was expected to be close as the two main parties, the Socialists and the main opposition Social Democratic Party, allowed their lawmakers to vote according to their conscience. The two parties have 175 of the 230 members of the Republican Assembly, Portugal's parliament.

Euthanasia was forced onto the political agenda by a public petition urging its introduction in 2016.

The deeply divisive issue is the latest point of friction between faith and politics in this predominantly Catholic country. The Portuguese parliament, prodded by a series of left-leaning governments determined to bring about what they called a "modernization" of the country, has in recent times voted to permit abortion on demand and same-sex marriage.

Four political parties—the governing center-left Socialist Party, the radical Left Bloc, the Green Party, and the People, Animals, Nature [party](#)—have tabled bills proposing [euthanasia](#) and doctor-assisted suicide. Inciting or assisting euthanasia is currently punishable by up to three years in prison.

Left Bloc spokeswoman Catarina Martins pledged to keep fighting for legislation to legalize medically assisted suicide.

"We have come a long way," she said after the vote. "So many people now recognize the need to respect people's end of life choices."

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