



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on May 30, 2018

British PM Pressured to Legalize Abortion in Northern Ireland After Ireland's Repeal of Right to Life Amendment

On Friday, Irish voters cast votes to legalize abortion in a historic referendum vote that repealed Ireland's Eighth Amendment, which protected the right to life of unborn children. And though Northern Ireland has stated it will not bow to pressure to follow suit, British Prime Minister Theresa May is reportedly being asked to consider executive action to legalize abortion in the region.



Northern Ireland is governed differently from the rest of Ireland, and a power struggle has left the government without an executive since January 2017, the *Daily Caller* writes, which compelled British officials to assume the authority to make major decisions. Sensing a weakness in a strongly pro-life government, abortion advocates are now pushing Theresa May to use the opportunity to legalize abortion.

Northern Ireland already has the option to align with Britain's abortion laws, which allow women to seek abortions up to 24 weeks, but its assembly voted against this option in February 2016, before its government collapsed, leaving it without an executive.

The repeal of the Eighth Amendment means that Northern Ireland is the only remaining place in the U.K. and Ireland where abortions remain outlawed, according to *The Guardian*. Abortions are permissible in Northern Ireland only if the life or mental health of the mother is at risk.

And when 66 percent of voters in Ireland overturned the country's abortion ban on Friday, one lawmaker, Democratic Unionist MP Ian Paisley, vowed that Northern Ireland would not be "bullied into accepting abortion on demand."

Paisley pointed out that Northern Ireland is not constrained by constitutional legalities on the issue of abortion, but instead by laws that are supported by its people that protect the life of the unborn. "Northern Ireland did not have a constitutional imperative on abortion; it is governed by laws that can be changed," he observed. "The settled will of the people has been to afford protections to the unborn life and protect the life of the mother."

For now, May has refused to take action in Northern Ireland, according to her spokesperson. "It is important to recognize that the people of Northern Ireland are entitled to their own process which is run by elected politicians," the spokesperson said. "Our focus is restoring a democratically accountable devolved government in Northern Ireland so that locally accountable politicians can make decisions on behalf of the public they represent."



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May's decision is upsetting to pro-abortion advocates in Parliament, who see nothing wrong with imposing their will on the people of Northern Ireland whether they like it or not. "This is an injustice. No woman in the U.K. should be denied access to a safe, legal abortion," Britain's Labour Party shadow minister for women and equalities, Dawn Butler, said in response to May's statement, Reuters reported.

Liberal Democrat leader Sir Vince Cable also asserts that May should act in the absence of an executive in Northern Ireland despite being in direct opposition to what the people of Northern Ireland want.

"Since there is, effectively, direct rule from Westminster, the Government has responsibility and it can and should take the opportunity to deal with this issue properly," he argued.

The *Irish Times* reports that approximately 140 members of Parliament would support an amendment to legalize abortion in Northern Ireland.

But the U.K.'s *Independent* notes that May's parliamentary authority rests heavily on the support of the Democratic Unionist Party, which is vehemently pro-life.

DUP leader Arlene Foster has already warned the prime minister against intervening on the issue, saying: "Friday's referendum has no impact upon the law in Northern Ireland, but we obviously take note of issues impacting upon our nearest neighbor.... Some of those who wish to circumvent the assembly's role may be doing so simply to avoid its decision."

Friday's vote in Ireland has strengthened the resolve of pro-life groups in Northern Ireland to oppose any efforts to ease restrictions on abortion. Bernadette Smyth, leader of Precious Life, called Ireland's repeal vote "the most tragic day in Irish history" in a statement released following the referendum.

She added, "Every unborn child still has the right to life. Northern Ireland is now the beacon of hope to the pro-life movement around the world."

Meanwhile, the U.K. is considering an amendment to the Domestic Violence Bill that would standardize abortion law across all of the United Kingdom, effectively legalizing abortions in Northern Ireland. For now, the amendment has been tabled, though it has the support of more than 150 parliamentarians, the *Belfast Telegraph* writes.

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