

EUROPE

Irish Voters Speak Out on Landmark Abortion Referendum

By PALKO KARASZ APRIL 28, 2018

Ireland plans to hold a landmark referendum on abortion at the end of May.

Voters will be asked to consider a repeal of Article 40.3.3 of the Irish Constitution, known as the Eighth Amendment, which gives an unborn fetus a right to life equal to that of its mother.

The referendum comes as voters in the traditionally Roman Catholic and socially conservative country have shown increasingly liberal attitudes. But the campaign has been highly divisive and accompanied by fears of foreign influence.

The Times asked readers in Ireland to reflect on the coming referendum. Here is a selection of responses, edited for length and clarity.

‘Irish Society Is Starting to Listen’

“When I was 17, I got pregnant three months before I was to sit my major state exam which

would see me to college. My mum ordered pills from Women on Web and I took them after school on Wednesday, told my friends I was sick on Thursday and was back at school on Friday. I believe Irish society is starting to listen to the voices and needs of women and ignore the propaganda pumped into us by the Catholic Church that no longer has any kind of foothold in the minds of Irish people today. It's time.”

Annie Forrester, 27, an illustrator in Cork

“Fundamentally, this is a class issue. Those who can afford to travel to the U.K., which includes related expenses like taking time off work or post-procedure counseling services, have full access to safe abortions. The Eighth Amendment to our constitution merely penalizes the poor rather than protecting life in any meaningful sense. It offers choice to the few, not the many. It dictates morality to the many, not the few.”

Paul Bruun-Nielsen, 22, a student at Trinity College in Dublin

‘I Have Been Personally Targeted’

“Even as a 21-year-old Irish, female, pro-life student, I have been personally targeted when simply stating my opinion. The fact is that a large proportion of the country is silent on the matter for fear of extremists singling them out and claiming they may either be backward and sexist, or (on the other end of the spectrum) too liberal.”

Sarah Gillespie, 21, of Donegal, a student at University College Dublin

“I don’t believe the baby should die for the evil their father has perpetrated. In cases where life limiting conditions are detected in utero, I don’t agree that prematurely ending the life of a baby aids anyone in this painful situation. What is really needed is perinatal hospices. Over all,

there is no situation in which I could condone the ending of any human life, whether inside or outside the womb. There are people in my life who are alive today solely because of the Eighth Amendment and I couldn't imagine life without them!"

Maire Ni Eineachain, 27, a factory worker at a medical device company in Galway

"I am Catholic and I am pro-choice. I support the referendum because it is not the place of the church to dictate our laws and there has not been a defense of the pro-life stance that does not rely on the religious view that life begins at conception — that a zygote is equivalent to a 6-month-old infant. I support the referendum because any person with a uterus is more than their uterus."

Michael Flattery, 23, an app developer in Galway

'Women of Childbearing Age Deserve a Say'

“Thirty-five years ago, my mother marched against the introduction of the Eighth Amendment while pregnant with me. This year, I too marched while pregnant to call for its repeal. Women of childbearing age deserve a say in how we’re treated in pregnancy.”

Emily Sullivan, 34, a marketing consultant in Dublin

“In my lifetime, I’ve been asked to vote on my right to be allowed to travel while pregnant. I’ve been asked to categorize a woman’s right to choose in terms of the kind of sex she had in order to get pregnant. Or her mental health. And these are still the questions being asked.

“For me, the arguments around why this shouldn’t be in the Constitution are the same as they’ve always been: We’ve had to wait for the men to grow up and trust women. And that’s not anything new.”

Pamela Weaver, 46, a technology marketing manager in Cork

“I know my body inside and out, and I know what I want out of my life and future.

“Yet if I were to become pregnant, either due to failed contraception or even as a result of a nonconsensual assault, the country that I have lived in my entire life would force me to negate my own plans, feelings toward having children, and expectations for myself and to bear an unwanted child and thus abandon the future I have worked for thus far.”

Emma Hughes, 27, a medical student in Dublin

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