
Abortion in Ireland

The political issue explored in this engagement activity is the issue of abortion in Northern Ireland. I chose this problem of illegal abortion in Northern Ireland because the legalization of abortion is a much talked about subject, especially for women that undergo the same problems. It raises questions about the equal access to human rights and what the government can do about it. I also thought it was interesting that a country thinks the human rights of an unborn child are more important than those of an official citizen of the country. I thought this was interesting, because the unborn child has no role in society, has no emotional ties with someone, can't think, speak or remember anything because it is a fetus and yet is seen as a person. This makes me wonder why the life of someone that is not born yet is put before the choice of women to remove it and what has caused this law to be as it is. This problem links back to the main course: Human rights. The issue links back to this course because every human in this world is entitled to these rights and in the current situation in Northern Ireland, not everybody is entitled to all the human rights they should be entitled to. When deciding as a country to enter the law that abortion is not legal you land in a tough spot. Some people agree that you take away the human right to life of the child in the belly of the women and others think that you take away the human right to have their own choice of the women that bear the child. This is now the case in Ireland, where abortion is forbidden.

Abortion is made illegal by the constitutional protection of the right to life of the unborn and legalization. This implies that killing the baby inside the belly of women in Northern Ireland is a crime with serious jail time if being exceeded. Only when the baby threatens the physical or mental health or well-being of the mother the baby can be removed. Many women do not agree with this, because they carry an unwanted baby, even though they are healthy, that can't be removed legally. They think that this is exceeding their human right to have their own choice. This law causes that these women need to travel to another country, in this case mostly the United Kingdom, and have the abortion done over there. This costs a lot of money which is not financed by the state, but by the women themselves. How can it politically be done to make abortion legal in Northern Ireland? This is the research question that is answered throughout the PEA. The answer to this question could solve the problem for the women in Northern Ireland that want to have a legal abortion law. The United Kingdom has plans to finance the abortion of the women that have an income of fewer than seventeen thousand euros. I think this is a good thing to do of the United Kingdom, but ridiculous of Northern Ireland to let it come so far that another country has to pay for their citizens because of them not fulfilling the basic human rights. This makes me wonder if their cultural/religious characteristics shaped the abortion laws. If it was only politically decided they could have changed the law already, but the roots of this law are probably found deeper.

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To get an answer on the research question my partner in this engagement activity Floris Timmer and I had to do many hours of research on why abortion was illegal in Northern Ireland the first place and the situation in general. We found out that there is going to be a referendum in May of June 2018 about raising the ban on abortion. As engagement activity, we came up with the idea to set up a campaign that convinces people to vote for the legalization of abortion. Men don't care as much about the legalization of abortion, because they don't go through the pain pregnant women go through, so the main focus should be on women. So we came to the conclusion that women need to unite to get the majority of the votes to legalize abortion. Setting up a campaign to convince women to vote for the legalization of abortion in the referendum helps to raise the ban on abortion.

If the ban has been lifted than our political issue does not exist anymore and is this politically solved. There were some problems that we encountered and the biggest one was that we can't travel to Ireland to held a campaign over there. As a solution we came up with the idea to do a test campaign in Rotterdam and see if we got positive reactions on it. We made all sorts of banners from big to small with puns and facts. We went to the city with some friends that we asked to help and searched for a spot on the Hoogstraat. We announced that there was going to be a referendum in Ireland about lifting the ban on abortion and that women needed to unite to get the majority of the votes. We asked women if they were put in the situation of having an unwanted child, but not be able to have an abortion and if they wanted to spend hundreds of euros for the abortion plus the trip to another country. By far most of the women said that they support the women in Ireland and want the ban to be raised and the ones that did not changed their minds after we told them this: what is a woman is raped or when the baby dies in the womb, because in these situations abortion is still illegal in Northern Ireland. We got many positive reactions of people for raising attention about this issue.

The law that states that abortion is illegal in any sort of way in Northern Ireland is formed by the Constitution of Ireland. The law is called the Eight Amendment and recognizes the fact that the life of a fetus is equally important than the life of pregnant women. Because of this amendment, it is impossible for any government to raise the ban on abortion. The Eight Amendment passed on the 7th of September in 1983 with 67% of the voters being against abortion. In Northern Ireland, 83% of the population stated that they were Christian in 2011 and back in that time it was probably even more. Christians believe that all humans beings are made in the eye of God and therefore possesses dignity and are entitled to human rights. Human rights are the rights that every human being is entitled to regardless of sex, race, religion, language, nationality, and another status. In the eyes of a Christian is a fetus a human being, so entitled to these rights. Around the eighties, the stereotype of a housewife was a very common thing. The men went to work to prove food and money for the family while the wives stayed at home to do the house tasks like cleaning, cooking and taking care of the children. They did not have much interest in politics and left that to their husbands. It was also more common to have multiple children which

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would make abortion unnecessary. Because the majority of the people believed that a fetus should have human rights and that women were not as important in the society back then as the Eight Amendment passed. Today the day equality between men and women is completely normal. Both men and women go to work and the voting percentage is about the same. That's why currently the topic to raise the ban on abortion is very popular. Women don't want their human rights to be taken away. They don't want a law that decides what women can/can't do to her body. Women want to have the right to their own choice.

During the campaign, I noticed that many women became a little angry when we told them that abortion is illegal in Northern Ireland and that they could go to jail for 14 years if they exceeded this law. This anger that the women feel in The Netherlands must be much worse in Ireland. The only way the Eighth Amendment can be repealed is by a referendum. This referendum is held in May or June of 2018. The ratio between men and women in Northern Ireland is 0.97 males per female, so women are the majority of the citizens. If all the women unite their anger and vote for the legalization of abortion then the Eighth Amendment will be repealed from the Constitution of Ireland. To do this people need to set up campaigns and riots to raise attention for the upcoming referendum and to convince other people to vote for the legalization of abortion. What I learned from my own campaign was that planning is very important. You need to do a lot of research beforehand, so you don't stand empty-handed during the campaign. In the beginning, we made the mistake of going to everybody we saw and told them about our campaign, but many didn't want to listen and walked right passed us. This caused frustration and a negative vibe, but this changed after we targeted specific people like pregnant women, students, and couples. During the campaign, we counted how many people had a religious background. The result was that 8 persons had a religious background and 23 persons had no religious background. In Northern Ireland only 10% of the population has no religion, so to get the majority of the votes in Northern Ireland also men need to vote to raise the ban on abortion.

It is clear that the thoughts about the Eighth Amendment have changed over time. In 1983 were 67% of the voters for the ban on abortion. Most of these voters were Christians and believed that all humans beings are made in the eye of God and therefore possesses dignity and are entitled to human rights. This is linked to the concept Constructivism. Constructivism is that concepts are constructed by society. This can be seen in the fact that 67% of the voters were for the ban on abortion. Morals have changed over time and nowadays women want to raise the ban on abortion. For some people, the government loses it's legitimacy, because of their inability to have the right of their own choice. They want to make their own choices about what happens they can/can't do to their body. Legitimacy is the right and acceptance of an authority. The women not having the right to their own choice they stop accepting the Northern Ireland government. My research question "How can it politically be done to make abortion legal in Northern Ireland?" Is answered throughout the essay.

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A simple and short answer is to get the majority of the votes in the referendum in May or June 2018. This is however not as simple as it looks, to get the majority of the votes people need to be convinced that legal abortion is more convenient. I did this together with my partner Floris Timmer by setting up a campaign. Our goal with the campaign was to raise attention and convince people that legalization of abortion is more convenient. It went laboriously at first, but as time passed we got more experienced in convincing people that legalizing abortion is better and the reactions got more positive. As concluded after the campaign not only women need to be convinced to vote, but also men. This is because about 90% of Northern Ireland's population has a religious background. The law was formed 35 years ago by Christians that believed that the unborn is equal to pregnant women and now women want to have the right to their own choice.

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