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# Poland votes down an extreme abortion ban after thousands of women go on strike

Updated by Emily Crockett · @emilycrockett · emily@vox.com · Oct 6, 2016, 12:41p

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(AP Photo/Czarek Sokolowski)

In Poland on Monday, **thousands of women** in 60 cities went on strike, dressed in all black, and protested in the streets against a proposal to ban all abortion in Poland with no exceptions.

And on Thursday Poland's parliament **voted down** the controversial bill, 352 to 58.

Remarkably, the Guardian **reported Wednesday**, the so-called "Black Monday" protests seem to have really worked in convincing Poland's conservative government to reject the ban. Jarosław Gowin, Poland's minister of science and higher education, said that the protests had "caused us to think and taught us humility."

It's important to note that in Poland, abortion is already mostly illegal. The only exceptions are for rape, incest, danger to a woman's life or health, or a serious fetal abnormality — and many doctors still refuse to perform abortion even in those limited circumstances.

Poland's existing laws are so restrictive that last year, the international abortion rights organization Women on Web launched the first-ever **"abortion drone"** to deliver abortion medication from Germany to Poland in a way that circumvented Poland's laws. It was mostly a publicity stunt and a proof of concept, but it also called attention to the fact that most women in Poland have no safe, legal abortion options in practice.

But the proposed total ban in Poland would have been much worse. It would criminalize abortions in all cases with no exceptions — and it would also threaten women with jail if they seek abortion, which isn't currently the case in Poland.

In practice, that would also mean throwing women in jail for **miscarriages** — which is already the case not just in countries like **El Salvador**, where abortion is banned, but **also occasionally in America**, where abortion is supposed to be legal.

Especially when they're induced by medication, abortions are medically similar to a miscarriage. So if law enforcement suspects that a woman who had a miscarriage really gave herself an abortion, there isn't a lot she can do to defend herself.

Reproductive rights advocates have been fighting hard against severe abortion bans abroad — especially in Latin American countries **afflicted with the Zika virus**, which causes serious birth defects. In some of those countries, Zika has led to an **increase in women seeking self-induced abortions** — but efforts to relax local laws haven't been too successful.

So it's pretty remarkable that the protest in Poland has had such an immediate, decisive impact.

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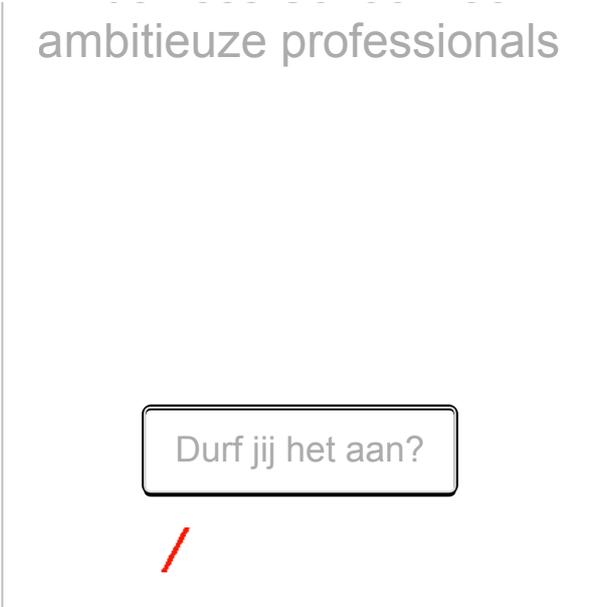
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