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Sierra Leone weighs legal abortion

Sierra Leone has the [third-highest maternal mortality rate](#) in the world. As part of an expansive set of laws aimed at making motherhood safer, President Julius Maada Bio announced last week that he and his cabinet unanimously backed legalizing abortion.

Activists celebrated the move to repeal a colonial-era law and contrasted Bio's support with the narrowing of reproductive rights in the U.S. Others saw it as out of step with society and as a bid to appease international donors — a similar bill [passed Parliament](#) in 2015 but was [rejected by the president at the time, Ernest Bai Koroma](#), after public pressure, particularly from religious groups.

Bio's supporters point to his success in abolishing the death penalty, but the bill must still pass in Parliament, where it may face fierce opposition from politicians keen to please a religious bloc.

If abortion is legalized, access may be hampered by poor infrastructure and stigma. But for some, the reopening of a public debate on the issue is a hopeful sign.

“As a teenager I nearly bled to death after a backstreet abortion,” Josephine Kamara, an activist, [said in a statement](#). “Let this generation be the last to experience the horrors of what happens when women's most basic reproductive health needs are pushed underground.” — *Lynsey Chutel, a Briefings writer*