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## **Abortion Bill fails in Argentina, but movement takes hold across Latin America**

***Analysts say movement's rise is changing the region in ways that would have been impossible just years ago***

The Irish Times (12.08.2018) - <https://bit.ly/2MOgAQQ> - They narrowly lost the vote. But as supporters of a Bill to legalise abortion in Argentina began to shake off a stinging defeat in the Senate last Thursday, they took consolation in having galvanised a reproductive-rights movement across Latin America and began to consider how to redirect their activism.

A coalition of young female lawmakers who stunned the political establishment by putting abortion rights at the top of the legislative agenda this year seemed to be on the verge of a historic victory with the Bill. But intense lobbying by Catholic Church leaders and staunch opposition in conservative northern provinces persuaded enough senators to vote against it.

After a 17-hour hearing, the Bill was defeated early on Thursday by a vote of 38-31, with two abstentions. "We will no longer be silent and we won't let them win," said Jimena Del Potro, a 33-year-old designer who fought back tears as she spoke. "Abortion will be legal soon. Very soon."

Despite the setback, many proponents marvelled that Argentine lawmakers had come so close to passing the measure, which would have allowed abortion during the first 14 weeks of pregnancy and fractured the near-total prohibition on abortion in Latin America.

### ***Demonstrators***

The measure had already been approved in the lower chamber of Congress. Current law allows abortions only in cases of rape or when a mother's life is in danger. The Bill energised hundreds of thousands of demonstrators across Argentina in a women's rights movement known as Ni Una Menos – Not One Less – and enthused women from Brazil to Mexico.

"What Argentina did was mobilise young women and create the memory that we almost won," said Debora Diniz, an anthropologist at the University of Brasília who helped write a petition now before Brazil's supreme court that challenges the constitutionality of its anti-abortion laws.

"They changed the way we talk about abortion," Diniz said. "It's not just feminists, intellectuals. It's young women, your daughter, your sister."

Ninety-seven per cent of Latin American women live in countries that ban abortion or allow it only in rare instances. Only Uruguay, Cuba, Guyana and Mexico City allow any woman to have an early-term abortion.

### **Priority**

"Abortion rights was a priority and it will be deeply discouraging to have come this far and fail," said Benjamin Gedan, an Argentina expert at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington. But he said women's rights advocates already had achieved successes, such as the passage of a law that seeks to have an equal number of male and female lawmakers.

"If we make a list of the things we've gained and the things we've lost, the list of things we've gained is much bigger," said Eburne Cárdenas, a lawyer at the Centre for Legal and Social Studies, a human rights group in Argentina that favours legal abortion. "Sooner or later, this will be law."

President Mauricio Macri of Argentina opposed the Bill, but said he would have signed it. After the vote, administration officials said they planned to ease abortion penalties in an overhaul of the penal code that will be presented on August 21st. Women getting abortions can be charged with a crime and imprisoned under the current law, although that happens very rarely.

The penal code changes had been in the works for some time, but they appeared to reflect Macri's realisation that the reproductive-rights movement in Argentina was now an established force.

"The women's movement mobilised all regions of Argentina; it was intergenerational and exceeded everybody's expectations," said Françoise Girard, the president of the International Women's Health Coalition, which supports legal abortion. "The new generation of teenage girls who came out in such numbers will not be stopped."

### **Violent death**

The organised movement that pushed the Bill started in 2015 with the brutal murder of a pregnant 14-year-old girl by her teenage boyfriend. Her mother claimed the boyfriend's family didn't want her to have the baby. A journalist, Marcela Ojeda, despairing over yet another woman's violent death, posted a tweet: "Aren't we going to raise our voice? They're killing us."

Her anger struck a chord. Within weeks, hundreds of thousands of demonstrators marched across Argentina, after organising on social media around the hashtag #NiUnaMenos. The slogan spread to neighbouring countries, including Mexico, Peru, Chile and Colombia, where it was used to denounce violence against women, demand reproductive rights and draw attention to related causes.

Analysts said the movement's improbable rise already had begun to change the region in ways that would have been impossible just years ago. The campaign is credited with inspiring debate on a variety of women's issues, including domestic violence, a subject that has long been taboo.

Ahead of the vote, supporters rallied in Uruguay, Brazil and neighbouring Chile, where they gathered in front of the Argentine embassy in Santiago, chanting and wearing the

green handkerchiefs that symbolised the movement. Many coupled their disappointment at the outcome in Argentina with optimism.

“When you undergo a process like this, you must keep fighting,” said Susana Chávez, an activist in Lima, Peru, who directs the Centre for the Promotion and Defence of Sexual and Reproductive Rights, a nongovernmental group. She said activists were already planning a march in Lima on Saturday.

### **Public outcry**

The abortion debate in Mexico has been accompanied by a public outcry over violence against women and a renewed push for gender equality, led mostly by women’s and human rights groups. Last autumn, protests under the Ni Una Menos banner in at least five Mexican cities demanded an end to violence against women. The protests were a response to the rape and murder of Mara Castillo, a college student, after a taxi ride in the city of Puebla.

In El Salvador, which bans abortion under all circumstances, two Bills were proposed in Congress this spring that were pushed by women’s rights groups and their allies, opening debate on the issue for the first time.

For Argentina, the debate over abortion tugged at the country’s sense of self. It is the birthplace of Pope Francis, who recently denounced abortion as the “white glove” equivalent of the Nazi-era eugenics programme. But the country in recent years has inched away from a close church-state relationship.

In 2010, Argentina became the first country in Latin America to allow gay couples to wed – a move the church fought with a vigour similar to its battle against abortion. Francis, then the archbishop of Buenos Aires, called that Bill a “destructive attack on God’s plan.”

### **'Very emotional'**

The church had many allies in the abortion debate, including women who spent hours outside Congress in the Argentine winter cold as the debate got under way on Wednesday night. Many expressed relief at the result. “It was a very emotional day,” said María Curutchet, a 34-year-old lawyer. “We were out in huge numbers and showed that we will defend the two lives, no matter the cost.”

Some prominent female political leaders also came out against the measure, including vice-president Gabriela Michetti. But Macri’s health minister, Adolfo Rubinstein, testified in Congress in favour of legalisation and estimated that some 354,000 clandestine abortions are carried out every year in the country.

Complications as a result of those abortions are the single leading cause of maternal deaths in the country, according to Mariana Romero, a researcher at the Centre for the Study of State and Society, a nonprofit organisation.

While the measure failed in the Senate, it made some inroads. Among the senators who voted for it was Cristina Kirchner, who as president had opposed legalising abortion. “The ones who made me change my mind were the thousands and thousands of girls who took to the streets,” she said.

## **Argentina lawmakers in marathon abortion debate**

***Lawmakers in Argentina spent Wednesday afternoon and the entire night debating whether to allow women to have abortions in the first 14 weeks of pregnancy.***

BBC (14.06.2018) - <https://bbc.in/2MrAvoU> - A vote on a draft bill is due to be held in the lower house later on Thursday.

Deputies have been split almost evenly in the highly divisive debate and the result could go either way.

If approved, the bill will still have to go to the Senate.

President Mauricio Macri is strongly opposed to the bill but has said that he would not veto it if it was passed by Congress.

Abortion is currently illegal in Argentina, except in cases of rape or when the life or health of the woman is at risk. Women seeking abortions also have to apply to a judge for permission, which critics say can unnecessarily delay the procedure.

### ***Divided, but not along party lines***

Lawmakers for and against the bill had five minutes each to outline their position and try to sway deputies from the other side.

President Macri had told members of his party to vote according to their conscience.

The debate was rare in Argentine politics in that it was not divided along party lines, but that there were opponents and supporters both on the left and the right.

Before the session started at 11:30 local time on Wednesday (14:30 GMT), more than a dozen lawmakers had said that they were still undecided.

It is these that the lawmakers speaking are trying to convince. More than 200 took to the podium in the first 19 hours of the debate.

Axel Kicillof of the Justicialist Party urged his colleagues to "give women the right to decide over their bodies".

But Mario Horacio Arce of the Radical Civic Union argued that the bill would be unconstitutional.

"The national constitution does not distinguish between different phases of pregnancy, it protects life from the moment of conception," he said.

Silvia Martínez, also of the Radical Civic Union, disagreed: "This is a great opportunity. I ask you to reflect, let's not tell women making these demands 'no'."

The divisions inside the chamber were mirrored on the streets outside, where opponents and supporters gathered for all-night vigils.

Police had earlier erected barricades to keep the two sides apart but that did not prevent the occasional shouting match.

### ***Growing momentum***

The vote comes a year after lawmakers in neighbouring Chile approved lifting that country's total ban on abortions.

The momentum in favour of a change in the law in Argentina has grown over the past months and was further boosted by the overwhelming vote for overturning the abortion ban in Ireland.

There have been huge marches backing the bill led by #NiUnaMenos (#NotOneLess), a movement first created to fight violence against women but which has since expanded across much of Latin America to stand up for women's rights.

Tens of thousands of people have shown their support by wearing green handkerchiefs but there has also been stiff opposition led by the Catholic Church.

Non-governmental organisations say an estimated 500,000 abortions a year are carried out clandestinely, often in conditions which pose a health risk for women and girls.

In most of Latin America there are tight restrictions on abortions and in some countries such as the Dominican Republic, El Salvador and Honduras there is a total ban.

If Argentina were to pass the bill it would be the most populous nation in the region to lift restrictions on abortions.

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## **Public outrage shakes Argentina after murder of Anti-Femicide activist**

***The latest victim of gendered violence in the country was an anti-femicide activist who had been missing for a week.***

To Μωβ (09.04.2017) - <http://bit.ly/2nEJDxB> -

**"Ni una menos!"** ("Not one less!")

**"Vivas nos queremos!"** ("We want ourselves alive!")

**"Estado responsable!"** ("The state is responsible!")

These were some of the chants heard in the town of Moreno, Buenos Aires, where thousands gathered Saturday (8/4) to protest the femicide of **Micaela Garcia**, who herself was an activist against sexist violence.

The 21-year-old Argentine had been missing for a week after she had attended a nightclub in nearby Gualeguay. Her naked body was found Saturday morning in a rural area with signs of having been strangled.

Her suspected killer, Sebastian Wagner, arrested the same day, is a serial rapist with previous charges of rape against him. While his original sentencing was to be imprisoned for those instances of rape until at least 2020, when he was convicted in 2010, a judge had reduced his sentence. As such, the target of the protests in Moreno was also Judge Carlos Rossi, who had been responsible for releasing Wagner early.

*"Here are two people responsible: the murderer of Micaela and a judge who released him despite being advised against doing so,"* said Fabiana Tuñez, the president of the National Women's Council.

Garcia, a university student, was involved with various social movements and championed the struggle against femicides of women in Argentina, her father told reporters.

*"We are going to live to try to achieve a more just society, as Micaela intended. Pain has to serve us to change society,"* explained Nestor Garcia, the young woman's father.

A recent documentary by Alejandra Perdomo, titled "Every 30 Hours," found that gendered violence in Argentina kills one woman every 30 hours.

According to Casa del Encuentro, almost 3,000 women have been killed since 2008, when the organization started to monitor femicides. Despite the inclusion of "femicide" in the criminal code in 2012, only one man has been sentenced for femicide charges since then.

According to Pedromo, the anti-femicide movement "Ni Una Menos" made the issue more visible, resulting in a surge of complaints.

While Argentina has been a pioneer in implementing laws defending the rights of the LGBTI community over the past decade during the progressive administrations of Nestor Kirchner and Cristina Fernandez, the country only recently started to measure the extent of the femicide issue, after an accumulation of horrendous murders were covered in the media.

The movement against femicide saw a resurgence in Argentina last year, sparking a wider uprising across the region against gender violence and the systemic impunity enjoyed by the perpetrators of femicide and domestic abuse.

For additional, important information, from "Newsweek", 10 April:

Pope Francis—one of Argentina's best-known citizens—telephoned Garcia's parents, Yuyo Garcia and Andrea Lescano. Writing on Facebook, Yuyo Garcia said: *"This is how far your fight and message has come, my beautiful. Thank you Holy Father for your humility and your respect!"*

Speaking to the Argentinian Radio Mitre on April 9, Argentine President Mauricio Macri argued that "the laws we have are enough" but criticized the judge for releasing Wagner early.

*"We cannot keep these kinds of judges. We all have to understand that we have to take responsibility, there is not a president or a government that solves the problems magically, we all are."*

According to La Casa del Encuentro, an Argentinian feminist organization monitoring femicides in the country, 230 women were murdered between January 1 and October 31, 2016—roughly one every 30 hours.