Feminist Mobilization and the Abortion Debate in Latin America: Lessons from Argentina

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When Argentine President Mauricio Macri announced in March 2018 that he supported a "responsible and mature" national debate regarding the decriminalization of abortion, it took many by surprise. In a Catholic country with a center-right government, in which public opinion regarding abortion had hardly moved in decades—why would the abortion debate surface in Argentina when it did? Our answer is grounded in the social movements literature, as we argue that the organizational framework necessary for growing the decriminalization movement was already built by an emergent feminist movement of unprecedented scope and influence: *Ni Una Menos*. Through expanding the movement's social justice frame from gender violence to encompass abortion rights, feminist social movements were able to change public opinion and expand the scope of debate, making salient an issue that had long been politically untouchable. We marshal evidence from multiple surveys carried out before, during, and after the abortion debate and in-depth interviews to shed light on the sources of abortion rights movements in unlikely contexts.

When Argentine President Mauricio Macri announced in March 2018 that he supported a "responsible and mature" national debate regarding the decriminalization of abortion, many were surprised. After all, in 2015 he was the first conservative president elected in Argentina in over a decade, and no debate had emerged under prior center-left governments. Moreover, Argentina is a Catholic country, which has if anything seen an uptick in religiosity over the past decade, and little recent movement in public support for abortion rights preceding Macri's announcement. Given that extant scholarship indicates public discussions regarding abortion decriminalization appear on the political agenda when countries become more secular, play host to supportive public opinion, and when there is a left majority in both the executive and the legislature, the timing and intensity of the abortion rights movement in Argentina poses an intriguing puzzle.

In light of recent legislative debates regarding abortion in other countries in Latin America, this paper addresses the following question: Why did the abortion debate surface in Argentina when it did, in spite of a litany of factors that suggest it would be an unlikely case for decriminalization? To answer this question, we focus on the social movements literature, and a nascent Argentine feminist movement that has achieved unprecedented scope and influence: *Ni Una Menos* ("Not one [woman] less"). Emerging in Argentina in the aftermath of several grisly murders of young women in 2015, it transformed into an international movement against femicide and gender violence, and eventually served as a platform for mobilization around abortion rights, helping feminist activists to overcome traditional barriers to collective action. In a country where protest participation has effectively normalized (Moseley 2018), the massive number of women advocating for abortion rights made the issue impossible for policymakers to ignore.

We argue that the *Ni Una Menos* movement drew on its newly-interconnected component organizations to mobilize women for abortion rights, and persuaded Argentine citizens to take up their cause by framing abortion decriminalization as an issue of social justice, intrinsically connected to their claims regarding gender violence. Feminist activists argued that as long as abortion was illegal, *Ni Una Menos* would be a misnomer, given that clandestine abortions constitute one of the leading causes of maternal mortality. We maintain that without the existing platform for mobilization supplied by *Ni Una Menos*, Argentina's abortion debate never would have gotten off the ground. Even though abortion decriminalization has not yet been passed in the

country, the sudden change in its salience as a crucial political issue is a testament to the growing strength of feminist mobilization within the country. In sum, rather than emphasizing long-term trends in public opinion or religiosity, or the policy priorities of the incumbent government, we maintain that the abortion debate in Argentina is a consequence of strengthening feminist mobilization, which brought the issue to the forefront of the political agenda.

To test our argument, we marshal evidence from 1) multiple surveys carried out before, during, and after the legislative debate regarding abortion legalization in Argentina and 2) in-depth interviews and media reports that shed light on the sources of abortion rights movements in unlikely contexts. The quantitative component of our analysis is drawn from the 2012-2019 AmericasBarometer national surveys of Argentina, and reveals a spike in female protest participation beginning in 2015, with shifting public opinion regarding abortion *following* (rather than prior to) mobilization surrounding the legislative debate in 2018. We complement these survey data with excerpts from in-depth interviews conducted in Buenos Aires in 2018 and 2019, which offer initial support for the argument that the *Ni Una Menos* movement supplied the organizational structures necessary for building the abortion rights movement, and the social movement framing devices that won many Argentines over to the side of decriminalization.

Existing Explanations of Abortion Politics in Latin America

Scholarship shows (Htun 2003, Morgenstern 2012, Lopreite 2012, Blofield 2013, Sutton and Borland 2013, Kreitzer 2015, Tabush et al. 2016) that public discussions about abortion decriminalization appear on the political agenda when a country grows increasingly secular, plays host to supportive public opinion, and there is a left majority in both the executive and the legislature. Examining recent changes in abortion policies in Latin America, Blofield and Ewig also highlight an additional factor: "the *type* of left party in power"[1] (p.482).

[1] Their argument is that an "institutionalized partisan left or movement left governments are more likely to liberalize abortion policies, as they respond to mobilization in their support bases. In populist machine and populist left governments, this process is cut off, as presidents concentrate and personalize power and respond to instrumental concerns, as we discuss" (Blofield and Ewig: p.484-5).

The emphasis on declining religiosity in explaining movements for abortion rights would seem to find support in modern day Latin America. Though Catholicism remains the dominant religion in Latin America, with a growing Evangelical minority, church attendance has been on the decline (Pew Research Center 2014, 4). Further, "widespread reports of sexual abuse scandals and their cover-up by Catholic authorities has reduced trust in an institution that had previously been seen as untouchable" (Blofield and Ewig 2017: 485-6). Notably, the only two countries in Latin America where abortion is fully decriminalized are also two of the *least* religious, Cuba and Uruguay, and these cases also share some of the contextual factors that the literature has recognized as key in decriminalizing abortion: a relatively weak local presence for the Catholic Church, a president not opposed to abortion decriminalization, and a strong partisan left.[2] Mexico City—the only subnational jurisdiction in Mexico with legalized abortion—is far less pious than other regions, lending credence to the notion that flagging religiosity paves the way for the abortion debate (LAPOP 2004-2017). It also highlights the importance of taking sub-national variation into account when studying the politics of reproductive rights (Lopreite 2014) and abortion decriminalization, in particular.

Public opinion data regarding support for abortion decriminalization from a handful of Latin American countries show that a majority of citizens (from 64 percent in Nicaragua to 84 percent in Chile) support women having abortions in cases where there is risk to their lives; support is also above 50 percent for cases of fetal deformity, and is lower than 50 percent for cases of rape only in Nicaragua (36 percent). Support for total decriminalization varies significantly from 56 percent in Uruguay to 14 percent in Nicaragua (see Blofield and Ewig 2017: 492 for a full report). The fact that Uruguay is the only democratic country in the region that has fully legalized abortion throughout its territory, and where public opinion has shifted to the point that a majority of the population favors legalized abortion, offers evidence for the importance of changing societal norms in placing the abortion debate on the public agenda.

Partisan politics also seems to matter in determining whether or not countries debate abortion laws. Reflecting on the effects that the recent recent "left turn" in Latin American politics has had on gender issues, Blofield et al. (2017) observe "improvement in the less-contentious outcome areas of political representation

[2] See Fernandez Anderson 2017 for an analysis of the case of Uruguay.

and violence against women, and mixed results in the more-contentious areas of women's economic autonomy (especially that of poor women), indigenous women's political empowerment, and reform of abortions laws" (p.358). Focusing on abortion decriminalization, the authors find that "left governments only liberalize abortion when strong, mobilized feminist organizations can back them up in confrontations with opposed groups" (Blofield et al 2017: 361). Moreover, the authors recognize that abortion is a policy area where there is significant variation in policy outcomes—from full legalization to total prohibition. "Abortion liberalization succeeded, but slowly, under the institutionalized partisan lefts of Uruguay and Chile, but was rejected in populist Ecuador and even saw regression in the populist machine case of Nicaragua" (Blofield et al. 2017: 361).

An Aberrant Case? Putting Argentina in Comparative Perspective

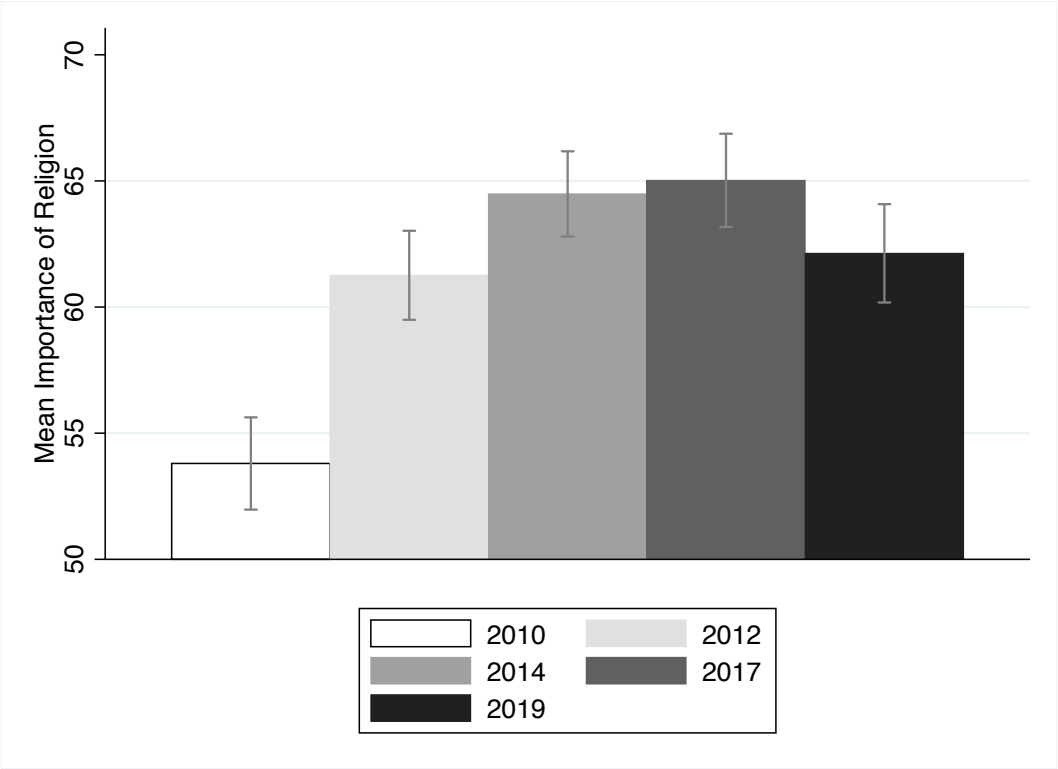
Dating back to 1921, abortion is illegal in Argentina except under two conditions: 1) risks to the life of the pregnant mother and 2) rape. In 2012, the Supreme Court issued a ruling ratifying the right to abortion for victims of rape with an affidavit, without the need for a police report or the judicialization of the case. The Court urged the nation and the provinces to publish hospital protocols for their effective compliance. Non-punishable abortions (i.e., legal interruptions of pregnancies) have had partial compliance throughout the national territory. In 2019, only 10 of the 24 jurisdictions had non-punishable abortion care protocols that correspond to the requests of the Supreme Court. In other words, more than half of the jurisdictions in the country do not have a regulation that ensures the compliance of the rights granted in 1921, which makes abortion effectively inaccessible even under the two conditions when it is technically legal (see Ruibal 2018).[3]

The timing of the recent legislative debate in Argentina challenged the received wisdom regarding abortion liberalization in comparative perspective, as discussions about abortion decriminalization began in a country represented at the maximum Church authority in the Vatican. According to the Pew Research Center, 71% of Argentines continued to identify as Catholic in 2014, and 91% of them held favorable views of the

[3] Ruibal and Fernández Anderson (2018) correctly note that the abortion rights movement in Argentina has utilized a multi-pronged strategy in pursuit of their demands, which includes a national campaign for decriminalization, an effort to actually enforce the laws on the books, and the provision of services for women who seek abortions in spite of its illegality. In this paper, we are largely focused on the first strategy—the national campaign for legal reform.

Pope—his highest favorability score in Latin America (Pew 2014). That said, Argentines tend to be more liberal than other Latin American populations in terms of their attitudes towards birth control, divorce, and allowing priests to marry (Pew 2014), and Argentina exhibits low rates of church attendance compared to other South American countries (LAPOP 2017). But religiosity has undoubtedly risen in Argentina, which seems inconsistent with a renewed abortion debate. Figure 1 plots mean religiosity over time (as measured by the importance respondents place on religion in their lives), based on data from the AmericasBarometer. Religiosity increased steadily from 2010 to 2017, by nearly 20%, which seems to undermine the notion that Argentina's abortion debate is the result of it becoming less devout.

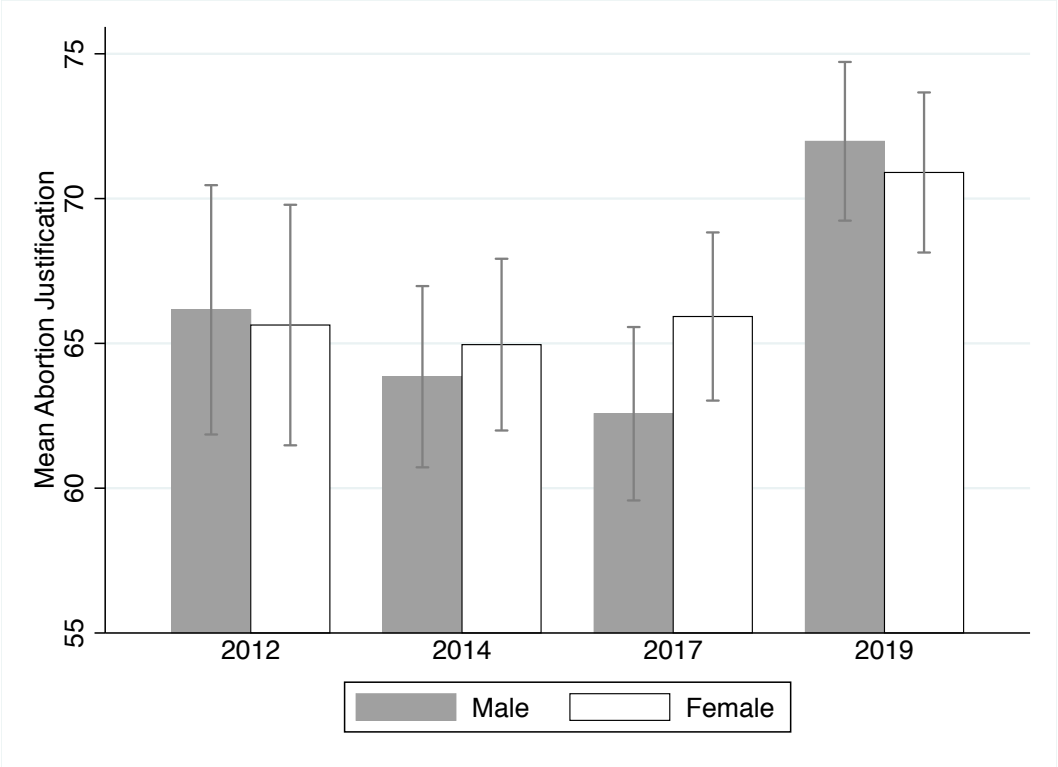
Figure 1. Mean Religiosity in Argentina over Time (2010-2017)



Nor have we observed obvious trends in public opinion towards a wider societal embrace of abortion rights. In Ireland, for example, there was a steady softening in public attitudes towards abortion in the lead-up to its legalization in 2018 (Loscher 2018). In Argentina, no such trend was evident in public opinion data leading up to the abortion decriminalization debate (Figure 2). If anything, men had become less supportive of abortion

when the mother's health is at risk, while women remained fairly consistent in their attitudes over the three preceding rounds of the AmericasBarometer surveys (LAPOP 2012-2019). Argentina did rate higher than most other Latin American countries in terms of abortion justification,[4] but it is unclear that a recent uptick in public support explained the issue's emergence. Attitudes only changed after 2018, when feminist social movements took to the streets in pursuit of legalization, and the decriminalization bill was hotly debated in the Chamber of Deputies and Senate.

Figure 2. Abortion Justification over time in Argentina (2012-2019)



Another perplexing feature of the abortion debate in Argentina is its political timing. After three terms under the leftist governments of the Kirchners, Néstor and Cristina, the country's debate about abortion only began to take place under the right-wing government of Mauricio Macri, whose most high-profile co-partisans,

[4] This measure is, admittedly, imperfect. We do not have a measure of support for abortion *decriminalization* over time, and are instead relying on "abortion justification" (Cohen and Evans 2018), which has been asked in the AmericasBarometer surveys since 2012. While this item asks about circumstantial support for abortion rights—namely, when the mother's life is at risk—rather than full legalization, we believe any significant shifts in opinion as measured via this question are meaningful with respect to the decriminalization debate.

in addition to the majority of his party, would eventually vote against the bill in Congress. The fact that a real debate regarding abortion rights only emerged following the election of a conservative government seems to contradict much of the existing literature, and regional trends. As discussed in the previous section, in 2012 Uruguay became the second country in the region after Cuba to fully decriminalize abortion, and it did so under the leftist government of Pepe Mujica's *Frente Amplio*, which also managed to legalize marijuana and same-sex marriage (Fernandez Anderson 2016). While abortion is illegal throughout the rest of the country, Mexico City allows abortions up to 12 weeks into pregnancy—not coincidentally, leftist parties have held political control of the capital city since the late-1990s.

Organizations of Argentine women have advocated for abortion since the country transitioned to democracy in 1983. *La Comisión por el Derecho al Aborto* was founded in 1988. As Sutton and Borland (2013) document in their detailed analysis of the abortion rights movement in Argentina, annual *Encuentros*—national women's meetings—have advanced reproductive rights since the mid-1990s, which led to the 2005 launch of the National Campaign for the Right to Legal, Safe, and Free Abortion. But mobilization for abortion rights has often provoked a strong backlash from conservative groups in the country, most notably those affiliated with the Catholic Church. Moreover, previous attempts at placing the issue on the legislative agenda all failed before they could get off the ground. "After the return of democracy in Argentina, several bills to liberalize abortion were presented in Congress, but none were discussed in commission or within political parties" (Htun 2003: 152). In 1998, Alberto Maglietti, a former Radical Party senator who authored the bill to decriminalize abortion said: "No one has demonstrated interest in considering this bill, it is an impolitic issue for the political environment of our country. To speak publicly in favor of abortion is impolitic" (Htun 2003: 152).[5]

As outlined above, abortion rights have largely been viewed by Argentine politicians as politically untouchable. But other issues related to women's reproductive rights have found their way onto the legislative agenda in the democratic era. On the heels of sustained mobilization, particularly in the capital city, and drawing on framing devices borrowed from the transnational women's movement, Argentina adopted a federal plan for

[5] Twenty years later, institutional rules now require senators to speak publicly about their position with regards to abortion legalization. Hence, while abortion is still illegal in the country, politicians are unable to remain mute about their position

the distribution of contraception and other reproductive health services in 2003 (Lopreite 2012). Yet advocates for universal access to contraception argued that providing impoverished citizens with reproductive services was critical to *preventing* abortions, thus constraining the debate to what was politically feasible and leaving the controversial issue of abortion legalization for another day (Ibid).

Mass Mobilization in Argentina and the Dawn of *Ni Una Menos*

The visibility and magnitude of feminist mobilization in the streets since 2015—amplified by mass media coverage and social media activity—might help demystify the timing of the public discussion of abortion decriminalization in Argentina. Over the past two decades, protest participation has effectively normalized in Argentina (Moseley 2018)—it is a country characterized by high levels of citizen engagement in politics, and relatively weak political institutions (Levitsky and Murillo 2005; Machado et al. 2011), which has produced some of the highest rates of participation in street protests in Latin America, a region characterized by widespread contention (LAPOP 2008-2017). Mass demonstrations have emerged in Argentina during times of crisis, such as the *cacerolazos* and lootings that occurred during the debt default in 2001 that triggered multiple presidential resignations (Auyero 2007), but also during times of plenty, like the 2008 mobilization by farmers against an unpopular export tax on soy (Mangonnet and Murillo 2020). *Ni Una Menos* clearly tapped into this tradition of contention, and borrowed from the well-developed protest repertoire of a country that is frequently suffused with protests.

Not only have protests been common in Argentina, but there have also been several high-profile examples of street mobilizations having demonstrable successes in achieving movement goals. The 2008 protests against a planned export tax hike on soy producers eventually derailed the government's plans when President Cristina Kirchner's own vice president cast a tie-breaking vote against the measure in the Argentine Senate. Previously, the incorporation of social movement leaders in Néstor Kirchner's government was widely credited for the social policy expansion that occurred throughout his term as president, which responded to the demands of groups that had been adversely affected by the country's 2001-2002 economic crisis (Garay

2016). Protest is not always effective in Argentina, but there are enough prominent examples of government responsiveness to street activism to justify civil society's continued reliance on the tactic.

The *Ni Una Menos* (NUM) movement began as a massive march of over 200,000 women in Buenos Aires on June 3, 2015 in front of the Argentine National Congress. The goal of the mobilization was to make visible the need to address femicide—or the killing of women for being women—in the country. Following the femicide of Chiara Páez, a group of female journalists, writers, and activists organized the mobilization. Páez was 14 years old and three months pregnant (during the autopsy doctors discovered that she had tried to have an abortion) when her boyfriend killed and buried her in his grandparents' backyard. Though it was this particular murder that lit the match, there were a series of femicides before and after the Páez case that contributed to build and sustain the movement. One day before the initial *Ni Una Menos* demonstration, 51% percent of Argentines said they intended to participate, and 71% were aware of the mobilization's stated goals.[6]

The diverse throng of attendants surprised not only the organizers, but also politicians and social movement leaders who had not experienced a salient and visible women's movement since the *Madres* and *Abuelas de la Plaza de Mayo*. While those previous human rights-focused movements had been organized by women, they had never adopted an overtly feminist posture as in the case of *Ni Una Menos*. Explanations of *Ni Una Menos'* success are largely anchored in the motivating grievance itself—at the time, crime data reported that a woman was killed by a man every 36 hours in Argentina—and the opportunity social media provided to organize large numbers of people to take to the streets. Facebook and Twitter played a crucial role in disseminating the message and slogan (Terzian 2017).

The *Ni Una Menos* movement has proven remarkably resilient since its emergence in 2015. Each subsequent year, on June 3rd, hundreds of thousands of activists have congregated to commemorate the anniversary of the movement's origin. On other occasions, typically following high profile cases of femicide, movement organizers have quickly mobilized their followers to hold the government to account. As we will elaborate in the following section, numerous social movement organizations that originated during the initial mobilization have remained active since. However, assessing the accomplishments and remaining challenges

[6] Teresa Sofía Buscaglia, *"#NiUnaMenos sin banderías una sola consigna será el clamor de todos*," La Nación, June 3, 2015.

confronting *NUM* reveals a mixed bag. While the movement obtained significant concessions from Congress—including a pledge to provide more women's refuges across the country, to officially report femicides as such, and to guarantee universal access to legal representation for victims of abuse—the government has only created a small percentage of the promised refuges, and the femicide rate actually increased in 2019 compared to 2018 (CNN 2019). Nevertheless, *Ni Una Menos* is now inscribed in Argentine women's historic struggle to defend and expand their own rights.

How *Ni Una Menos* Fueled the Abortion Rights Debate

Our dependent variable is the months-long national debate around abortion decriminalization, which began in earnest with Macri's announcement in March 2018, and carried on through the vote in the Chamber of Deputies in June (it passed 129-125) and in the Senate in August (it was rejected 38-31). During those months, abortion dominated the public conversation, as politicians were forced to weigh in on the issue for the first time in their careers, and as activists filled the streets of Buenos Aires and other cities to voice their support for or opposition to the bill. The mobilization for abortion decriminalization was massive and diverse.[7] Beyond the high turnout, women who participated varied in terms of color, social class, and age. Indeed, scholars, journalists, and demonstration participants frequently highlighted the presence of high school and college students as a signal of changing times, a fact that the feminist scholar and activist, Luciana Peker (2019), examines in her recent book, entitled, *The Revolution of the Daughters*. As a well-known feminist activist told the authors the day of the vote in the Chamber of Deputies, "I looked around me and I knew we won. Most of those around me were teenagers."[8]

Yet, how did the push for decriminalization get to that point? Abortion laws had not been updated in years and nevertheless Argentines, who are used to taking to the streets to make claims for social justice and

[7] By Ruibal and Fernández Anderson's (2018) estimate, there are over 300 organizations involved in the campaign for legal reform.

[8] Author's phone conversation with an active participant at the Congress building during the day of the Congressional vote. This and all subsequent translations from Spanish are by the authors.

economic rights, had not had mobilized in mass before. What explains the recent emergence and sustainability of the mobilization for abortion rights in Argentina—the transition from "impolitic" to politics?

Our answer traces the emergence of the abortion rights movement to continued feminist mobilization since *Ni Una Menos*, beginning in 2015. Women's groups involved in *Ni Una Menos* formed a natural social movement "base" (Zald and Ash 1966) for abortion decriminalization. Participants in *Ni Una Menos* were mobilized through social networks that provided the necessary information and organizational structure for overcoming collective action barriers that prevented abortion rights activism from emerging previously—echoing the key theoretical takeaways from resource mobilization theory (McCarthy and Zald 1977). Once feminist issues were visible, and feminist groups were activated, discussing abortion decriminalization became a possibility. Yet, we argue that it was framing the subject as a question of social justice, intrinsically connected to the claims made by *Ni Una Menos*, that explains the possibility to persuade and activate larger and more diverse audiences who had not been previously mobilized towards this goal. In short, our argument explains the emergence of a feminist movement for abortion rights in Argentina as the result of two key mechanisms: 1) the cooptation of recently-established *Ni Una Menos* mobilization networks and 2) the strategic utilization of familiar collective action framing that grew the movement's following.

Mechanism #1: The Organizational Base of Ni Una Menos

The success of feminist groups in putting abortion on the agenda resulted in part from their ability to leverage existing organizational structures supplied by *Ni Una Menos*, which linked women to one another based on a common feminist identity. Abortion activists drew on the social movement "base" constructed by NUM—i.e., "movement organizations, networks, participants and the accumulated cultural artefacts, memories, and traditions that contribute to social movement campaigns" (Tilly and Tarrow 2007: 114)—to overcome collective action problems and articulate their shared claims. With the requisite feminist organizational structure in place, shifting focus to abortion rights and framing the issue as one directly relevant to the motivating claims aired by NUM became a real possibility.

The NUM movement drew on a diverse array of feminist organizations to articulate their claims—some of which were established women's advocacy groups, and others that emerged as the movement gained traction. Among the more traditional social movement organizations on the frontlines of NUM, the *Fundación para el Estudio y la Investigación de la Mujer* (FEIM) was founded in 1989, and has advocated for access to contraceptives and against gender violence for decades. FEIM has formally supported abortion decriminalization since 2005 (Uranga 2018). On the other hand, *Mala Junta* was established in 2015 amidst the rise of NUM, and represents the embodiment of "popular feminism," focused on combatting neoliberal policies more broadly, which includes Argentina's prohibition on abortion, which disproportionately penalizes poor women. Other groups, like *MuMaLá* (*Mujeres de la Matría Latinoamericana*), are formally tied to political parties—in this case, the leftist *Libres del Sur*—and have deep roots in existing social movements.

The aforementioned social movement organizations offer examples of groups that were deeply involved in mobilizing followers during *Ni Una Menos*, and have also protagonized the abortion rights movement. In the case of *Mala Junta* and *MuMaLá*, the organizations initially mobilized against gender violence, and then eventually pivoted to include abortion rights in their platform. Many of the constituent feminist groups framed their advocacy in terms of social justice—i.e., that it is impossible to separate wage inequality, gender violence, and Argentina's prohibition on abortion, as they all contribute to a fundamentally unequal and patriarchal society, and they all affect poor women most acutely. The feminist social movement organizations that appeared in concert on June 3, 2015 for the initial NUM demonstration almost uniformly became part of the mobilization for abortion rights in the following years.

While *Ni Una Menos* built on existing networks of feminist activists, it also contributed to mobilize women who had never participated in politics before. Journalistic accounts noted that young women, many of whom were high school students, were particularly visible in the demonstrations for *Ni Una Menos*. In our view, this mobilization constituted an entry point for many women, or in the words of one of our interviewees "a wakeup call" to the political world—and their nascent feminist identity. Many of these young women would eventually become key actors in the mobilization for abortion rights, while also changing understandings about

abortion within their own families and communities. For many of these women, then, NUM represented a feminist call to action, and facilitated their eventual transformation into advocates for reproductive justice.

As countless social movements scholars have noted, constructing a successful movement depends as much on organization as it does the motivating grievance (see Jenkins 1983). Women have died for decades from clandestine abortions in Argentina, but only when their capacity to organize was expanded did the movement for decriminalization gain traction. Established social movement organizations partnered with new collectives to bring attention to gender violence, and in the months and years to come shifted their focus to abortion rights—the organizational base for the abortion decriminalization movement was thus already in place thanks to *Ni Una Menos*. What old and new organizations had in common extended beyond a concern for gender violence itself—rather, most of the groups active during NUM adopted overtly feminist philosophies, which facilitated the inclusion of abortion rights in their platforms. Yet mobilizing extant organizations to pursue decriminalization was only part of the story—in the following section, we address how activists framed the issue to persuade the Argentine public to take up their cause.

Mechanism #2: Expanding the NUM Frame to Include Abortion Rights

The second mechanism that we argue explains the emergence of a powerful abortion rights movement in Argentina was the effort activists made to frame abortion as a social justice issue, not dissimilar from gender violence. Collective action frames are "schemata of interpretation" (Goffman 1974) that are "intended to mobilize potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilize antagonists" (Snow and Benford 1988, 198). Instead of arguing about the origins of life and the viability of the fetus, or legal justifications regarding a right to privacy, Argentine feminists framed the discussion in terms of social equality and justice—particularly economic justice. By moving the discussion away from frames grounded in personal freedoms, and providing evidence that mostly poor women die due to clandestine abortions, feminists succeeded in changing the conversation. Instead of broaching a philosophical discussion about whether abortions *should* be legal, the movement has relentlessly argued that women who want to have an abortion are still going to have them regardless of what law is on the books, but in unsafe conditions.

In Latin America, restrictive laws regarding reproductive rights coexist with high levels of clandestine abortions. These abortions pose serious public health questions. "In countries where abortion is illegal, many women undergo the procedure in clandestine circumstance at great risk to their health. Complications from botched abortions are a leading cause of maternal mortality in many countries and produce a major drain on the public health system" (Alcaraz 2018: 142). This point was echoed by virtually every affiliated social movement organization that advocated for decriminalization, including the collective *Actrices Argentinas,* politicians, writers, social media influencers, and celebrities who were in favor of legalization and appeared daily on television, radio, and social media, as well as traveling across the country, transmitting the message.

As one of the most repeated *cantitos* (songs) during the mobilization explains, "*aborto legal, en el hospital*" (legal abortion, in hospitals), feminists wanted abortions to be legal and safely performed in public hospitals. By framing abortion as a social justice issue, anti-abortion activists had a more difficult time justifying their position. First, some of those who supported abortions in cases of rape or when the mother's health is compromised had to explain the internal contradiction of their argument: if abortions imply the murder of innocent human beings, abortion should be criminalized in all circumstances. Second, pro-life activists did not have a good answer to statistics indicating how many women, who were mostly poor, died due to illegal abortions. The same Argentines who are anti-abortion often oppose the types of policies related to sex education and poverty reduction that might ameliorate this particular public health problem. Third, abortion rights activists reiterated that punitive laws on abortion are hardly ever enforced. As Ardaillon's (1997; 105) study of abortion in Brazil finds, "it is as if there is an enormous social investment in [abortion's] prohibition and little interest in its de facto criminalization."

Our argument focuses on the effectiveness that framing abortion as a social justice issue had in broadening the support for abortion decriminalization. In developing this framework, feminists focused on the prevalence of clandestine abortions, and the disparity in access to safe illegal abortions for women based on their social class. Many women, including journalists and celebrities, publicly shared their experience as well as trauma after having experienced illegal abortions, contributing to make the issue more visible and less taboo.

Social movement organizations highlighted the connection between abortion rights and other daily forms of injustice suffered by poor women in particular, including domestic violence and wage inequality.

Public testimonies opened conversations about the reality of abortion while also making visible how differences in class translated into differences in access to healthcare, and ultimately in differences between life and death. "Whereas just 13% of higher income urban women suffer from post-abortion complications, 44% of poor urban women and 54% of poor rural women suffer from complications" (Alan Guttmacher Institute 1994 quoted in Htun 2003: 155). Much of the solidarity that emerged in the feminist movement was anchored in this injustice, and Argentina has a long history of street-based activism in the name of economic justice. In framing abortion as a social justice issue, women from all classes built a sense of community that contributed to constructing solidarity—which "makes it easier to face the risks and uncertainties of collective action" (della Porta and Diani 2006). Everyone should have a right to have a safe abortion, as written on the green handkerchiefs used to symbolize the pro-choice movement— "*aborto legal, seguro, y gratuito*" (legal, safe, and free abortions).[9]

The framing devices that emerged during the mobilization for abortion rights in Argentina were not entirely novel. Lopreite (2012) notes in her article about the debate in the late-1990s and early-2000s surrounding access to reproductive services that advocates for the 2003 sexual health law borrowed framing devices from transnational women's movements that zeroed in on the economic ramifications of unequal access to contraception (see also Piscopo 2014). "The rationale for adopting new contraceptive policies was framed primarily as a way to help poor women… In countries with a weak tradition of civil rights, the focus on health, poverty and inequality may provide a strategic option for seeking [abortion] reforms, especially as they face strong organized opposition" (Lopreite 2012, 124). The chair of the Senate health commission at the time of the sexual health policy debate, Mercedes Oviedo, argued that access to contraception would "save the lives of

[9] The *Abuelas and Madres de la Plaza de Mayo* still constitute a famous example of women's mobilization for human rights. Abortion rights activists undoubtedly borrowed from this historical and political tradition, and repurposed important symbols—notably, the use of head scarves to show support for the cause.

our sisters who do not have access to information and, when they become pregnant, perform abortions on themselves" (in Piscopo 2014, 116).

Notably, the collective action frame chosen by feminist activists leading up to and during the abortion debate in Argentina eschewed arguments familiar to the U.S. context related to individuals' right to privacy or the viability of the fetus. Sutton and Borland's (2013) analysis reveals that dating back to the 1990s, abortion rights groups were far more likely to frame their advocacy for abortion rights in terms of economic/social justice or as a public health issue, rather than one grounded in civil rights. According to one of Lopreite's interviews with a female legislator who supported abortion, "There is no way that abortion would be passed in Congress using the argument of privacy rights. This is not something that would help us gain support from other legislators" (2012, 121).

Ultimately, the social justice frame implemented by social movement organizations represented a natural "bridge" (Benford and Snow 2000) between *Ni Una Menos* and abortion rights. By emphasizing the public health dimension of clandestine abortions, thus connecting the NUM moniker to maternal mortality, and highlighting how poor women in particular suffer under conditions of abortion prohibition, the abortion decriminalization movement was able to leverage its built-in social movement base to capture the attention of policymakers and make inroads in changing public opinion regarding abortion rights. By grounding their advocacy for legal abortion in the social justice language of *Ni Una Menos*, while arguing that reproductive rights were vital to protecting poor women from unsafe clandestine abortions, activists constructed a particularly *resonant* frame for the Argentine context, echoing the dynamics of abortion rights movements in other contexts (see Ferree 2003).

Three years after the onset of *Ni Una Menos*, the possibility to discuss abortion decriminalization became a reality. Following a massive demonstration in favor of abortion decriminalization on February 19, 2018, newspapers reported that President Macri had decided to open up the debate in the new legislative session. One of the two most important Argentine newspapers, *Clarín*, published on its front page that Macri had "given the green light to discuss abortion in the Congress" (Braslavsky 2018). In *La Nación*, the other venerable national newspaper, an article published on March 2 speculated that, "It wasn't just that the President

was motivated by calls from within his party in the legislature… [it was that] feminism, through massive mobilizations and growing public adhesion to its demands, had provided a roadmap" (Ini 2018).

In sum, we argue that *Ni Una Menos* served as an entry point for an eventual decriminalization debate. Given the country's endemic problems with domestic abuse and femicide, the original motivating claim regarding gender violence was one that inspired enormous support among the Argentine population, and required politicians to offer some sort of response for how they would address the issue. When claims for abortion decriminalization effectively piggybacked on *Ni Una Menos*, harnessing its organizational structure and central framing devices, it obviously engendered a more polarized response than with the issue of gender violence—yet, without the existing framework supplied by *Ni Una Menos*, organized demand-making for the right to abortion might not have ever gotten off the ground.

From this theoretical discussion, we derive three observable implications of our argument that we intend to test in the following section. First, we hypothesize that Argentina experienced an unprecedented uptick in feminist mobilization, beginning with the dawn of *Ni Una Menos* in 2015 (H1). This mobilization aimed to draw attention to gender violence would eventually translate into mobilization surrounding reproductive rights. Second, we expect that public opinion regarding abortion began to shift *after* this surge in female mobilization, rather than before it. In other words, the abortion debate was not a consequence of evolutionary change in terms of public opinion regarding abortion in Argentina—rather, public opinion only began to move once feminist mobilization was well underway (H2). The first two hypotheses we aim to test utilizing multiple rounds of survey data. Third and finally, we hypothesize that framing abortion as an issue of social justice—intrinsically connected to the claims advanced by *Ni Una Menos*—was a particularly effective and culturally resonant tool for appealing to new supporters of decriminalization (H3). This hypothesis we tackle by drawing on interviews with movement participants and other public statements by individuals involved in the abortion rights movement.

Data and Methods

The empirical portion of this paper proceeds in two stages. First, drawing on survey data from the AmericasBarometer national surveys of Argentina from 2012, 2014, 2017, and 2019, we provide evidence for the significant uptick in female participation in protest participation in the lead-up to the abortion legalization debate, and report results from three predictive models of abortion justification. Second, we draw on recent in-depth interviews from Argentina and secondary sources to support our claim that Argentine women were converted from *Ni Una Menos* sympathizers into advocates for abortion decriminalization in 2018.

Evidence from the AmericasBarometer: Feminist Mobilization and Abortion Attitudes in Argentina

The AmericasBarometer surveys are conducted by the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) based out of Vanderbilt University. LAPOP carries out nationally representative surveys of more than 25 countries in the American continent on a biennial basis. The surveys of Argentina are nationally representative on key demographic variables, and stratified by region—Capital Federal, Greater Buenos Aires, Buenos Aires Province, the Center, the Northeast, the Northwest, Cuyo, and Patagonia are all represented in the sample according to their percentage of the total national population in the most recent census. We utilize four rounds of the AmericasBarometer—2012, 2014, 2017, and 2019—each of which include our key dependent variables of interest.

Our first dependent variable is drawn from a question that has been utilized in numerous recent studies of protest across Latin America (e.g., Machado et al. 2011; Moseley 2018): "In the past twelve months, have you participated in a demonstration or public protest?" Response options were "yes" or "no," necessitating logistic regression models of past participation. Overall rates of protest participation increased from about 8 and 9 percent in 2012 and 2014, respectively, to 14 percent in 2017 and 13 percent in 2019, in keeping with our expectation that the *Ni Una Menos* movement produced higher rates of street mobilization throughout the country, particularly among women. In our models of protest participation, we also include a number of control variables including socioeconomic status, education, and community activism, in addition to other demographic

predictors commonly referenced in the protest literature.[10] We expect to see a spike in protest activity among women in 2017 and 2019.

We begin by presenting the results for two predictive models of protest participation in Argentina in Table 1. Model 1 constitutes a baseline model, whereas Model 2 includes data from all four rounds of the AmericasBarometer, and features an interaction between gender and survey year, illustrating how the effect of the former changes over time. Specifically, we find that the interaction terms for *Female x 2017* and *Female x 2019* are significant, indicating that gender exerted a more powerful positive effect on participation in 2017 and 2019, compared to 2012.

Table 1. Logistic Regression Models of Protest Participation in Argentina (2012-2019)

	Participated in a Protest in Previous 12 Months (1 Yes 0 No)	
Variables	(1)	(2)
Female	0.258***	-0.128
	(0.093)	(0.206)
Age	-0.014***	-0.013***
	(0.003)	(0.003)
Quintile of Wealth	0.052	0.055
	(0.035)	(0.036)
Education	0.521***	0.518***
	(0.074)	(0.074)
Interest in Politics	0.019***	0.019***
	(0.001)	(0.001)
Urban	-0.066	-0.059
	(0.180)	(0.181)
Size of Place	-0.120***	-0.122***
	(0.045)	(0.045)
Civic Activism	0.013***	0.014***
	(0.002)	(0.002)
Sociotropic Evaluation	0.000	0.000
	(0.002)	(0.002)
Skin Color	0.031	0.027
	(0.034)	(0.034)
Presidential Approval	-0.013***	-0.013***
	(0.002)	(0.002)
2014	-0.147	-0.123
	(0.149)	(0.204)
2017	0.231*	-0.048
	(0.138)	(0.195)

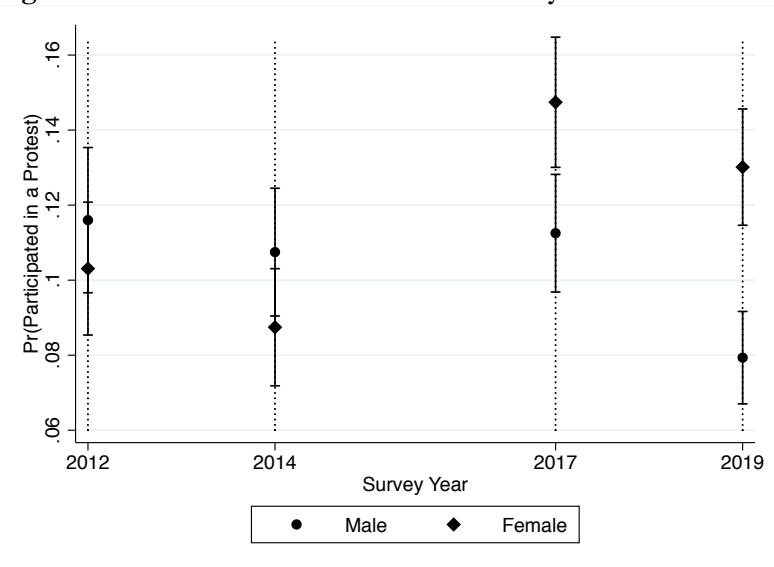
[10] See www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/ for additional information regarding sampling and question wording.

2019	-0.044	-0.491**
	(0.146)	(0.205)
2014 * Gender		-0.080
		(0.289)
2017 * Gender		0.513*
		(0.264)
2019 * Gender		0.803***
		(0.263)
Constant	-3.527***	-3.061***
	(0.389)	(0.372)
Observations	5,687	5,687

Standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

We graph predicted probabilities of protesting in Figure 3 to illustrate the substantive strength of this finding. Whereas being female had a slight negative effect on protest participation in previous iterations of the AmericasBarometer, that trend reversed in 2017 with the NUM movement, as women were about 40% more likely to have protested than men. The significant effect of being female remains in 2019, with women nearly twice as likely to have protested as men. Given that this runs counter to regional patterns in terms of the relationship between gender and protest (Moseley 2018), this constitutes a significant finding, and suggests that NUM had a fairly unprecedented impact on female mobilization in Argentina.

Figure 3. Predicted Probabilities of Protest by Gender and Year



Women participated in protests at unprecedented rates in 2017 and 2019. But what kind of change did feminist mobilization effect in terms of attitudes regarding abortion? Figure 2 displays a clear uptick in abortion justification from 2017 to 2019—the first statistically significant change in abortion attitudes in Argentina since the AmericasBarometer included the item in 2012. But here, we seek to examine the determinants of abortion justification to shed some light on the process by which attitudes changed in 2019. Our expectation is that individuals who were exposed to social justice messaging during the debate were persuaded to support decriminalization, but that shift in public opinion only occurred during and after mobilization, rather than beforehand.

Table 2 reports results from three logistic regression models of abortion justification. All three models include dummies for the year of the survey: 2014, 2017, and 2019. We also included a number of variables that we suspect might be related to abortion attitudes: gender, age, wealth, education, interest in politics, urban, size of place, and religiosity.[11] As expected, being a woman generally has a positive effect on the justification of abortion when the mother's life is in danger. Other variables like religiosity, level of education, and socioeconomic status have the predicted effect on abortion attitudes, though age actually has a slight *positive* effect on abortion justification, contrary to the journalistic narrative in Argentina. Digging deeper, it appears that middle-aged people report the highest levels of support for abortion when mothers experience complications, rather than the oldest age cohorts.

Table 2. Logistic Regression Models of Abortion Justification in Argentina (2012-2019)

	Abortion is Justified when Mother's Life is at Risk (1 Yes 0 No)		
VARIABLES	(1)	(2)	(3)
Female	0.124*	0.123*	0.121*
	(0.065)	(0.065)	(0.065)
Age	0.012***	0.012***	0.013***
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Quintile of Wealth	0.098***	0.098***	0.097***
	(0.025)	(0.025)	(0.025)

[11] We include religiosity, rather than church attendance, because the church attendance item was not asked in 2014 and we did not want to drop an entire survey year's worth of cases. The two variables are, as one might expect, highly correlated and the results of interest when church attendance is included in the models are substantively identical.

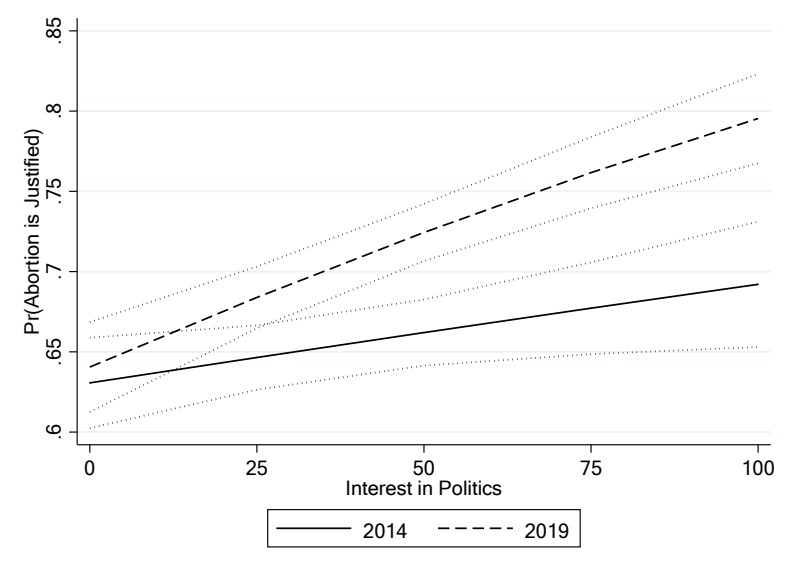
Education	0.322***	0.196*	0.321***
	(0.051)	(0.115)	(0.051)
Interest in Politics	0.005***	0.005***	0.003
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.003)
Urban	0.017	0.011	0.016
	(0.113)	(0.113)	(0.113)
Size of Place	-0.079**	-0.080**	-0.079**
	(0.036)	(0.036)	(0.036)
Religiosity	-0.006***	-0.006***	-0.006***
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
2014	-0.063	-0.210	-0.061
	(0.104)	(0.278)	(0.156)
2017	-0.112	-0.290	-0.212
	(0.102)	(0.275)	(0.154)
2019	0.172*	-0.362	-0.017
	(0.104)	(0.285)	(0.157)
2014 * Education		0.080	
		(0.139)	
2017 * Education		0.099	
		(0.136)	
2019 * Education		0.279**	
		(0.140)	
2014 * Interest in Politics			-0.000
			(0.003)
2017 * Interest in Politics			0.003
			(0.003)
2019 * Interest in Politics			0.005*
			(0.003)
Constant	-0.456*	-0.211	-0.372
	(0.240)	(0.310)	(0.258)
Observations	4,742	4,742	4,742

Standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

The most important results are those for the interactions between survey year and education and interest in politics. If feminist mobilization, and the accompanying coverage in social media and the news, were what shifted attitudes, models of opinion change would suggest that educated and politically interested citizens were the most likely to respond to the changing environment through shifting their attitudes regarding abortion (Zaller 1992). This is indeed the case. While education and interest in politics were both correlated with abortion justification in each prior survey year, that relationship became stronger in 2019. In other words, politically aware citizens were more likely to support (in this case, limited) abortion rights in 2019 than prior. There were no statistically significant differences among respondents with low levels of education and political interest

across survey years—this cross-time variation only occurred among the politically engaged. Figure 4 illustrates this result—clearly interest in politics was more strongly related to abortion attitudes in 2019 than in 2014, as the ongoing debate won over politically aware citizens who might not have considered the issue before, or who had never associated abortion with social justice.

Figure 4. Predicted Probabilities of Abortion Justification by Interest in Politics and Year



In this section, we have provided two pieces of evidence that support our account of the abortion debate in Argentina; first, female mobilization experienced a significant uptick before the movement emerged, and second, abortion justification rose during and following that mobilization, and was most pronounced among individuals paying close attention to politics. Mobilization, then, would seem to have acted as the catalyst in putting abortion rights on the agenda, preceding a significant shift in public opinion, and a generating a real debate regarding the issue for the first time in years. However, this evidence is merely suggestive, as we lack the type of quantitative data that would allow us to directly test for the causal relationship between feminist mobilization and the abortion debate. To shed light on that relationship, we look to qualitative data from in-depth interviews carried out as the decriminalization debate transpired.

Evidence from the Field: The Origins of an Abortion Rights Movement

Having established that female protest participation spiked following 2015, and that a meaningful change in public opinion regarding abortion only occurred *following* the emergence of *Ni Una Menos* and the dawn of the abortion debate, we proceed in this section to outline the mechanisms underlying the emergence of the decriminalization debate in Argentina. We argue that NUM provided feminist movements with organizational tools and a sizeable following to advocate for abortion mobilization. By framing abortion as a social justice issue, feminists succeeded in translating the demands to end violence against women into demands for abortion decriminalization. In this section, we look to qualitative evidence to trace the process by which *Ni Una Menos* activists were converted into abortion decriminalization supporters. Drawing on direct observations that took place in feminist group meetings, in-depth interviews, recorded testimonies, and lengthy conversations, we illustrate some of these linkages.

We gathered evidence by attending meetings with different social movements that have participated in the campaign for abortion decriminalization in 2017, 2018, and 2019. We have also interviewed female high school and college students from private and public schools and colleges. Both of us have been conducting interviews with social movements for over a decade and discussions about abortion decriminalization have been ubiquitous in our recent fieldwork in the city and province of Buenos Aires and Mendoza province. One of us was on the field conducting a survey in poor neighborhoods while these events were taking place, and several interviewees, most of them women, referred to these issues in open-ended questions. Our field diary notes from 2018 and 2019 registered a total of 47 conversations, 15 with feminist scholars and journalists, and 32 with activists. Given the dynamic nature and the horizontal organization of the feminist movement for abortion legalization, we were unable to build a random sample of activists and participants. Instead, we used a snowball technique to conduct our interviews (Handcock and Gile 2011, Noy 2008). The challenge of using this technique is missing influential activists that are not part of these networks. However, this shortcoming is not particularly challenging for our purposes, given that we are only focusing on networks that favor abortion legalization.

Beyond our observations in local meetings in poor neighborhoods in the province of Buenos Aires, and meetings with a diverse group of neighbors in a cultural center in the city of Buenos Aires, we have relied

on the constant and comprehensive coverage of the movement in social and mainstream media. We followed over 50 accounts on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, in addition to articles and testimonies from Argentina's most prominent national newspapers: *Clarín* and *La Nación*.[12] The combination of our conversations with activists, organizers, and participants in organizational meetings, in conjunction with published accounts in mainstream media and social media, contributes to support our argument.

Constructing Feminist Consciousness through Ni Una Menos

The feminist movement for abortion rights in Argentina comprises a plurality of women from all ages, classes, and political affiliations. This diversity can be easily observed on the streets—during street mobilizations—and online, where many members of the movement actively participate. *Ni Una Menos* contributed to changing the ways in which many women self-identify. Thinking about her participation in *Ni Una Menos*, Lucía, an upper-middle class teenager, described how the movement enabled her to identify as a feminist:

> "It was very powerful. We were all there. The woman who works in my parents' house had the '*Ni Una Menos'* decal. It was all so powerful. It was then that everything changed… when I began to change. It was then that I began to think that maybe I was a feminist." (Lucía, 18 years old).

María, a lower-income resident from Greater Buenos Aires, who worked cleaning houses in the city, also began thinking critically about domestic violence after participating in the mobilizations. The women in the house she cleans were attending *Ni Una Menos* demonstrations, and the mother and two daughters asked her to join them. Participating in the mobilizations enabled María to begin questioning the status quo of domestic violence in her life and community.

> "We had always lived with violence. Maybe before I wouldn't have called it violence, but for me it was nothing new… *Ni Una Menos* made me think: 'Maybe it doesn't have to be the way it's always been? Maybe I could have a better husband.' Someone who didn't beat me and take my money." (Maria, 46 years old).

The construction of a movement that encompassed women from different ages, classes, religions, and geographies carried enormous power. Several testimonies from those who participated in the movement for

[12] We also consulted information gathered by Aruguete and Calvo (2020) for a forthcoming book about information, polarization, and conflict in social networks. Chapter 10 examines over 4 million tweets from the networks for and against abortion legalization during the congressional discussions.

abortion rights, describe a sense of connection and empowerment that led them to feel "*acompañadas*" (less alone). We argue that the *Ni Una Menos* contributed to building an "imagined community" of women (Anderson 1983) that the abortion rights movement successfully mobilized. The linkage between *Ni Una Menos* and abortion rights, and the construction of this imagined community of women, becomes clear in the case of high school students. Female high school students became key political actors in the movement for abortion legalization by wearing the green scarfs on their school backpacks, displaying publicly their support for abortion rights, and participating in every mobilization, which contributed to changing the minds of their parents and legislators.

Official statistics concerning violence against women show that homicides of women between 16- and 20-years old quadrupled between 2014 and 2016, and tripled for those aged 11- to 15-years old (Alcaraz 2018: 109). The most visible cases of femicide that fed the *Ni Una Menos* movement were young women; a fact that had a direct effect on the mobilization of high school students:

> "Before what happened with Anahí [Benitéz, another victim of 16 years old] I never considered myself a feminist—admitted Sofía Montenegro—After living through so much though, there wasn't any other option. And, I love all that this movement has accomplished when we are altogether." (Testimony cited in Alcaraz 2018: 110)

This testimony that connects the occurrence of femicide with the recognition of feminism as a personal identity was repeated in several interviews. Reading through journalistic and scholarly accounts, Alcaraz (2018) observes a clear trend of women discovering and self-identifying as feminist. The testimony also shows the importance of togetherness, which became immortalized in one of the songs that is repeated in every mobilization and that illustrates the coming together—"now that we are together"—and the visibility that the movement of women has won—"now that you can see us."

We observed this sense of community in meetings we attended where college students from Universidad Torcuato Di Tella, an elite university, came together with college students from public universities such as Universidad de Buenos Aires, San Martín and General Sarmiento. Beyond a common age and social status as college students, these women did not have much in common in terms of class background. Yet, they all share their commitment for the cause of abortion decriminalization.

> "I can tell you a thousand things, but I was shocked to think so similarly as someone so different […] If you were blind [and could not see differences in the way they were dressed] you would not know who had money and who didn't. I'm fascinated to have found this sisterhood."[13]

> "Inside the meeting we are all equal, but you go out and I have to take the train and two buses to get home, and one of the girls was driving an Audi."[14]

The intersectional nature of the movement, spanning generations and social classes, as well as the feminist imagined community was described by Rosana Fanjul, a member for the National Campaign for the Right to a Legal, Safe, and Free Abortion, and was evident in every mobilization in which one could observe the diversity of activists:

> "I don't know if I can describe what I've experienced. Out on the street, I thought about my grandmother, who I would have liked to have lived through what I was living… how happy she would have been to see me and her granddaughter supporting her on this journey." (Testimony cited in Alcaraz 2018: 9-10).

A female activist told us that participating in this movement remind her of the sense of community she experienced when attending soccer games with her family. Beyond their support for the team, she and her family do not have much in common with other game attendants. Yet, every time her team scores a goal she could hug anyone because she believes the feeling is universal among those in the community.[15]

From Ni Una Menos *to* ¡Aborto Legal Ya! *(Legal Abortion Now!)*

When activists marched to commemorate the first-year anniversary of *Ni Una Menos*, there was a notable shift in terms of the extent to which leaders mentioned abortion rights in the lead-up to the event. The issue first appeared in an official *Ni Una Menos* manifesto on May 9, 2016, weeks before the annual march. In the communique, activists made explicit the connection between abortion laws and gender violence, using the case of a girl in Tucumán province who was imprisoned after having a miscarriage:

> "When a young woman is imprisoned in Tucumán, condemned to eight years in prison for homicide when she had a miscarriage, in a fraudulent case, it obligates us to reiterate the claim that without legalized abortion, there is no *'Ni Una Menos*,' and go back to the streets with more resolve than ever before. To *machista* violence and those who would perpetrate it, we say: *Ni Una Menos*, and against our bodies, Never Again."

[13] Author interview, December 2018.
[14] Author interview, December 2018.
[15] Author interview, August 2018.

The communique also connects the demand of the contemporary movement *Ni Una Menos* with the historic Argentine Human Rights movement demand of *Nunca Más* (*Never Again)*. The phrase, which was written in the preamble of the National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons (CONADEP), but was already used in the street demonstrations leading to the return of democracy in 1983, echoed a demand made from the bottom-up to change the status quo. In using that phrase and connecting it with their contemporary claim, NUM sought to build in this rich tradition of street-based movements leading to significant social, political, and cultural change.

The construction of a transversal abortion rights movement also took place in politics, where several female legislators made a block to support abortion legalization, which highlighted the power of women working together. This was expressed in the words of Silvia Lospennato, a deputy from the PRO (Macri's political party), whose discourse was one of the most powerful, memorable, and emotional as she mentioned every single woman—from different political parties, human rights movements, organizations, and judges, some dead and some alive—who had dedicated their careers to the expansion of rights for girls and women.

> "I came to politics for that reason—to address real problems. For the sisterhood, the multi-partisan group of women who came to Argentine politics to stay… united in our differences, always supporting women. For the women in our homes, our mothers and daughters… we want abortion to be legal, safe, and free. That it be law." Silvia Lospennato (PRO)

The most high-profile case of *Ni Una Menos* changing public opinion regarding abortion rights was undoubtedly that of former President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner. In explaining her change of position from being against to being in favor of abortion decriminalization, the former president recognized the importance of the massive mobilizations that took place in the country:

> "If you want to know who it was that made me change my mind, it was the thousands of girls who took over the streets. It was seeing them become true feminists." (Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner. Speech from August 8, 2018).

Our qualitative evidence shows how participating in *Ni Una Menos* provided women with a sense of community that empowered them. Several testimonies echoed the one from former President Fernández de Kirchner. In our conversations, many interviewees pointed out the relationship between NUM and the campaign for abortion liberalization. When we were sharing our thoughts with a female activist about the visibility of the mobilization for abortion decriminalization a couple of days after the positive vote in the lower

chamber, she was utterly surprised that we did not mention *Ni Una Menos*. As we were talking, she interrupted us and said: "Wait, women have been mobilizing in this country for a while now…" and to our surprise, she did not mention the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo* that we had explicitly referred to minutes before, but to the *Ni Una Menos* movement. She had a clear point: "We cannot think about abortion rights without thinking about the mobilizations for *Ni Una Menos*."[16] Our fieldwork notes are full of testimonies that connect the mobilizations of *Ni Una Menos* with the campaign for abortion decriminalization. As one participant said "*Ni Una Menos*, legal, safe and free abortion, and the fight against machismo. For me all of these causes are one and complementary. They are a revolution against the patriarchy."[17]

Once abortion decriminalization had been absorbed into the set of claims articulated by *Ni Una Menos*, activists made a conscious decision to frame the issue in terms of social justice, rather than employing the rights-based frames familiar to observers of the abortion debate in the U.S. Numerous civic organizations emphasized the socioeconomic contours of abortion in Argentina, providing data to support the notion that women from marginalized groups are the most likely to die during clandestine abortions. From the *Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales*:

> "Middle- and upper-class women are able to access relatively high-quality sanitary conditions and rarely suffer post-abortion complications. Poor women, and in many cases teenagers, are the ones who must expose themselves to precarious facilities and practices. The highest rates of maternal mortality caused by illegal abortions are found in the Northeast and Northwest of the country… the regions characterized by the highest poverty rates in the country."

Ensuring that abortion was free and accessible to women across the socioeconomic spectrum became an important feature of the movements' evolving demands. In an official manifesto on the NUM website from September 25, 2017 entitled "*Ni Una Menos Por Aborto Inseguro*," the movement's leaders outlined clearly the economic ramifications of abortion remaining illegal:

> "Even more so among those with less economic resources, illegality hits them the hardest… what kills is not abortion, but the insecurity that characterizes the practice when it's illegal."

[16] Author's conversation, June 2018.
[17] This was the testimony of Evelyn López quoted in the Chicago Tribune (March 8, 2019).

According to this framing of the issue, abortions will occur regardless of whether or not the practice is legal—however, when women die from clandestine procedures, they are almost always poor women. While recent abortion decriminalization movements in countries like Ireland and South Korea have focused on the dangers of clandestine abortions, in Argentina, that argument has been linked directly to socioeconomic status in a way that builds on previous claims regarding gender violence made by *Ni Una Menos*, but also appeals to a society where political fault lines have long been drawn around class. For this reason, the central claim voiced by activists has become not only that abortion is legal, but that it is also safe and free—a *resonant* framing device in the context of Argentina (Ferree 2003).

Abortion Decriminalization in Mainstream Media

Our argument highlights the role of social movements and framing in opening the public debate for abortion mobilization. We argue that the strength of feminist social movements and social justice framing contributed to bringing the issue of abortion to the fore of Argentine politics. Here we use qualitative evidence to illustrate these mechanisms by describing changes and challenges in television and mass media that were a direct response to feminist movements and ultimately contributed to strengthening and visualizing feminist movements' demands for abortion liberalization. We illustrate these mechanisms by examining first, the discussion of abortion decriminalization in Intruders (*Intrusos*), a daily gossip television show whose primary audience is housewives. Second, we discuss the open defiance of journalists working in the leading national newspaper, *La Nación*, against their employers' editorial stance against abortion and in favor of teenage pregnancies.[18]

During the summer of 2018, *Intrusos* paused its 19 consecutive years of coverage of entertainment gossip to discuss feminism and abortion legalization. It all began with an interview with actress Araceli Gonzalez, who said that she did not think of herself as a feminist because she "had a wonderful husband and a beautiful son." The response on the Internet was intense, as activists highlighted what they viewed as a

[18] When in January 2018, the actress, Muriel Santa Ana, wrote on Twitter that she had had an abortion, the issue was deeply controversial. By July 2018, after and during the discussions about abortion legalization in Congress, the majority of the country's heavyweights in the entertainment industry had publicly expressed their position in favor of abortion legalization. The list includes Susana Giménez, Marcelo Tinelli, Alejandro Fantino, and Adrián Suar.

common misunderstanding of feminism. The show then booked a feminist scholar to explain the concept the following day, and the ratings were, surprisingly, excellent. Jorge Rial, the host of the program, self-defined as a "*machista* in recovery," and decided to open up his program to discuss feminism. The program's placard read "Feminism: the debate that began in *Intrusos*." The guests saw a unique opportunity to discuss abortion decriminalization, and on Friday, February 2nd Rial opened his program wearing the green scarf on his right wrist (he later got a green handkerchief tattoo).[19]

In an editorial published February 1, 2019 in *La Nación*, editors praised two cases of thirteen years old girls who had become mothers. In both cases, the mothers of the young girls, one who was sexually abused, asked their daughters to have an abortion. Entitled "Teen Mothers with Capital Letters" ("*Niñas madres con mayúsculas"*), the editors celebrated the girls' maternal instinct. The editorial produced a backlash, represented by a hashtag #niñasnomadres (#girlsnotmothers) that trended on Twitter. The editorial was repudiated by politicians, feminists, human rights groups, celebrities, and even the employees of the newspaper. Hours after the editorial was published, a large number of *La Nación* employees took a picture in the newspaper's newsroom, holding signs with the hashtag to express their rejection of their publication's position. Nora Bár, a known contributor to the newspaper for thirty years, published that she "did not agree with the editorial about teenage mothers published in the newspaper." Several writers and human rights activists used the editorial to highlight that in their effort to defend abortion prohibition, the editorial was overshadowing that those girls were raped.[20]

The surprising discussion of feminism and abortion legalization in a gossip television show, and the severe backlash a national newspaper received for supporting abortion criminalization contribute to support our argument. Examining these events together, we illustrate the mechanisms through which feminist mobilization contributed to change existing ideas about feminism, motherhood, and abortion in mass media.

[19] Luciana Peker, Florencia Freijó, Malena Pichot, Julia Mengolini, Señorita Bimbo (Virginia Godoy) were the first guests to talk about feminism and abortion decriminalization on the program. NPR Morning Edition covered this event: "An Argentinian daytime talk show, known for stoking fights among scantily clad cabaret dancers, broke format and suddenly invited nuanced conversations about feminism, sexual harassment, and abortion." See: https://www.npr.org/2018/07/26/632566945/feminism-gets-a-new-platform-in-argentina

[20] Indeed, one of the girls mentioned in the editorial got pregnant as a result of sexual abuse. There is no consensual sex at 13 years of age (and in some cases 12 years old as they got pregnant earlier).

The mass media's response to the abortion debate, on the heels of several years of feminist mobilization, reflects the depth of the changes in public opinion and the strength of feminist social movements in Argentina.

Conclusion

This paper represents merely a first shot at explaining why the abortion debate gained traction in an unlikely context. Despite relatively stable public opinion regarding abortion rights, increasing religiosity, and a conservative party in government, Argentina experienced unprecedented rates of activism for decriminalization in 2018. We argue this unexpected turn in Argentine politics is explained by the existing mobilization structures supplied by the *Ni Una Menos* movement, and a framing device for claim-making that emphasized how abortion rights deepen social inequities in Argentina.

We find that women's participation in protests reached unprecedented levels between 2014 and 2017 in Argentina. Whereas traditionally, men are more likely to take part in street demonstrations in Latin America, that trend was reversed in 2017 on the heels of *Ni Una Menos'* emergence. The groups that mobilized in *Ni Una Menos* then provided a platform for expanding the group's claims to encompass abortion rights, based on evidence that underprivileged women were more likely to suffer fatal consequences from under-the-table abortions than affluent ones. Activists thus adopted abortion decriminalization as part of their overarching struggle for social justice, and convinced many women and politicians of its importance along the way.

Our paper strongly suggests that messaging grounded in social justice is more persuasive than rights-based arguments in Argentina—if so, this would have significant implications for numerous countries engulfed in debate regarding one of politics' most contentious issues. Increasingly, abortion decriminalization is becoming a topic of conversation in traditional Catholic countries like those found in Latin America. And even in countries that already have legalized abortion, like the U.S., conservative parties have found recent success in rolling back abortion rights. How feminist movements frame their arguments seems paramount to understanding the political future of abortion rights in all of these contexts.

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