

Psychological arguments helped Argentines win abortion rights, scholar says

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In Argentina, perhaps the most psychoanalyzed country in the world, the rhetoric of psychology proved important in the push for a 2020 federal law that for the first time guaranteed free and safe access to abortion

through 14 weeks of pregnancy.

A new scholarly paper on the subject published by Verónica Garibotto, professor of Latin American literary & cultural studies at the University of Kansas, has come out at a time when those [reproductive rights](#) are being targeted by new president-elect Javier Milei, who opposes [abortion](#).

And even before Milei's Nov. 19 election victory, the 2020 law and the psychological discourse behind it "has enabled interlocking forms of oppression" such that gestating persons from marginalized populations—such as those from rural areas—still can't access abortion as readily as big-city residents, Garibotto wrote in her article, "[The Desiring Woman: Psychoanalytic Discourses of Abortion in Argentine Feminism \(2005–2020\)](#)," in the September edition of the journal *Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society*.

A native of Buenos Aires, Garibotto said that the most typical rhetorical binary regarding abortion in the United States—"pro-life" versus "pro-choice"—does not exactly apply in Argentina.

"In Argentina," she said, "the idea of choice is not very common. The main dichotomy would be pro-life and pro-rights. And the idea of having the right to abortion is mostly conceptualized in terms of desire, instead of in terms of choice."

Garibotto said that "desire" is a concept drawn from a combination of Lacanian and Freudian psychoanalysis.

"But in the public sphere, what that code means is that a fetus is not a human being unless it goes through desire—unless someone really desires that fetus and then transforms them into a human being," she said. "So they use this notion to dismantle that idea that if you're

performing or having an abortion, you're killing a human being. There was no human being to begin with because there was no desire in the first place."

Garibotto cites Argentine psychoanalyst, physician and public intellectual Martha Rosenberg as the leading figure pushing this line of thinking during the period in question.

The KU researcher is writing a book whose working title is "Paradoxical Ideologies, Psychoanalysis and Intersectionality in Argentina," saying, "I'm interested mostly in how this psychoanalytic culture and these popular discourses based on psychoanalysis always have this paradoxical double edge. On the one hand, they help achieve [social justice](#). They resonate with a large population. Since 2000, they have helped to pass several progressive laws: the one enhancing rights to abortion, another enhancing rights for [transgender people](#) and one ensuring same-sex marriage equality. And yet this psychoanalytic discourse is also one that can create marginalization."

Garibotto said her new article deals with this paradox in the specific case of abortion. On the one hand, according to data from Argentina's Ministry of Health, the new law has had an overall positive impact. The number of abortions has remained the same, yet maternal deaths have significantly decreased. And the number of people who have had safe and [free access](#) to the procedure in [public hospitals](#) has been much higher than the number previously admitted to public hospitals for complications related to unsafe abortions.

"However, the most vulnerable social groups in Argentina are still not represented in this notion of desire, and for them this 14-week window really does not make a difference," Garibotto said. "Very specifically, that means people who live in the suburbs or in [rural areas](#), or Indigenous women who might not have access to specialized care until much later in

their pregnancies."

More information: Verónica Garibotto, The desiring woman: Psychoanalytic discourses of abortion in Argentine feminism (2005–2020), *Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society* (2023). [DOI: 10.1057/s41282-022-00367-0](https://doi.org/10.1057/s41282-022-00367-0)

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