International Human Rights Law, the Abortion Debate, and Online Activism in Argentina from 2015 to 2022

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ABSTRACT

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Isabelle Victoria Bohn

This thesis examines the ways in which Argentina’s pro choice and pro life movements engaged with human rights in their online media presences. By understanding to what successes the movements employed human rights in their online activism, the goal of this work is to discover the implications of citing the international human rights framework in social media advocacy. This is complicated by the fact that abortion is not technically a codified right in the international human rights doctrine.

By analyzing the media content of seven pro choice organizations and seven pro life organizations, I venture to acknowledge why engaging with the language of international human rights law online was so impactful in Argentina among women’s organizations during the country’s abortion debates from 2015-2022. Looking directly at how the pro choice and pro life organizations engaged with international human rights law, I am able to conclude that the pro choice movements’ decision to explicitly confront both the international legal framework and the domestic one was significant to their success in legalizing abortion in Argentina in 2020. Furthermore, my thesis argues that because both the pro choice and pro life movements engaged with human rights, the international human rights framework has a valid place in womens’ rights movements. This thesis has larger implications when it comes to understanding how the international human rights framework resonates with domestic audiences and can be employed in future online activist fights.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

I. Introduction

Women’s human rights have been paramount to International Human Rights Law (IHRL) discourse since the ratification of The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1981. While it is widely agreed upon that women are human, and are therefore entitled to human rights, it is less certain what those rights specifically entail when it comes to reproductive health. Nowhere in the nine core international human rights law treaties is the ‘right to abortion’ explicitly stated.

However, not only have human rights based nonprofits recognized abortion as a human right, but UN bodies themselves have as well. According to a study conducted by The Human Rights Watch in 2005, the following established human rights have been interpreted by United Nations (UN) treaty bodies to include reproductive health: “the right to health, the right to life, the right to nondiscrimination, the right to security of person, the right to liberty, the right to privacy, the right to information, the right to be free from cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, the right to decide the number and spacing of children, the right to enjoy the benefits of scientific progress, and the right to freedom of conscience and religion.” Furthermore, well regarded human rights organizations, such as Amnesty International and UN Women, have recognized

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1 “Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women New York, 18 December 1979 | OHCHR.”
2 “The Core International Human Rights Instruments and Their Monitoring Bodies.”
4 “International Human Rights Law and Abortion in Latin America.”
that the rights decreed in CEDAW, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) allow for the right to safe and legal abortions. Finally, the United Nations’ Office of the High Commissioner’s (OHCHR) Working Group on the Issue of Discrimination Against Women in Law and in Practice reported in 2017 that “the fundamental principles of equality and non-discrimination require that precedence be given to protecting the rights of pregnant women over the interest of protecting the life in formation” and that “failure to provide women access to legal and safe abortion may amount to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment or torture, or a violation of their right to life.”

On December 30th, 2020, Argentina became the largest country in Latin America to legalize abortion. Before 2020, Argentina only permitted abortions in instances of proven rape or in order to save the mother’s life. After decades of activism, the Voluntary Interruption of Pregnancy Bill of 2020 passed in a 38-29 vote in the senate and allows for elective abortion during the first 14 weeks of pregnancy. In 2018, a similar bill was passed by Argentina’s chamber of deputies but struck down by the senate. However, by 2020, pro choice advocates had the newly elected President Alberto Fernández on their side. (By “pro choice,” I am referring to organizations and individuals that organized in favor of legalized abortion. By “pro life,” I am referring to organizations and individuals that organized in favor of keeping abortion illegal). Fernandez won his election against the incumbent President Mauricio Macri in 2019, and promised to introduce legislation that would make abortion legal and accessible. However, this

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5 Fine et al
6 “Working Group on Discrimination against Women and Girls.”
7 Goldberg, “In Historic Victory, Argentina Legalizes Abortion.”
8 Goldberg.
9 Ibid
10 Sieff and Mellen, “Abortion Rights Advocates throughout Latin America Draw Inspiration from Argentina Vote.”
is not to say abortion legalization in Argentina faced no opposition. In fact, Pope Francis, the current head of the Catholic Church and a native to Argentina, was very outspoken about the bill and even encouraged his followers on multiple occasions to mobilize against it.\textsuperscript{11} Despite the bill’s passage, several pro life and church affiliated organizations in Argentina have continued outwardly resisting the concept of legal abortion. For example, the pro life group, Unidad Provida, has begun using their online platforms to urge doctors, nurses, and technicians to fight for their “freedom of conscience” and promised to “accompany them in all the trials that are necessary.”\textsuperscript{12}

As a matter of fact, significant to the activism surrounding the Argentina abortion debate was the ability of pro choice and pro life organizations to reach and mobilize thousands of like-minded Argentinians through their social media forums. Social media in Argentina became a medium for spreading information on abortion and and human rights on \textit{both} sides of the debate. This is compounded by the fact that in the last decade, social media platforms have become instrumental in advancing the implementation of international human rights norms, which is the case both worldwide and in Argentina.\textsuperscript{13} Also significant to the Argentina abortion debate is that the Argentinian domestic court specifically remarked that the Human Rights Committee (HRC) had argued that abortion should be permitted in instances of rape.\textsuperscript{14} Furthermore, the HRC had expressed concern about restrictive interpretations of Argentina’s abortion law, citing that restrictive abortion laws are considered human rights violations.\textsuperscript{15} Taking explicit note of these comments, the Argentinian national court determined that \textit{all} women and girls who become pregnant (either as a result of rape, an accident, or by choice) can have a medically induced

\textsuperscript{11} CNA, “Pope Francis Encourages Argentine Women Opposing Legal Abortion.”
\textsuperscript{12} “Argentina’s Abortion Law Enters Force under Watchful Eyes | AP News.”
\textsuperscript{13} “How Social Media Is Changing The Face Of Human Rights Activism.”
\textsuperscript{14} Fine et al., “The Role of International Human Rights Norms in the Liberalization of Abortion Laws Globally.”
\textsuperscript{15} Boston et al.
abortion. This is especially interesting because it illustrates Argentina’s growing reliance on international human rights bodies when it comes to domestic policy making. The legal ‘right’ status of abortion was irrelevant to Argentina, granted that the HRC interpreted restricting access to abortions to be a human rights violation.

Research actually shows that international human rights norms (in addition to legally recognized rights) have had a growing influence on Argentina’s domestic policy-making since the country's democratization in 1983. In fact, human rights scholar, Kathryn Sikkink, argues that Argentina’s ratification of several IHRL treaties, and the subsequent implementation of their policies into domestic law, has made Argentina a “global protagonist” in the field of human rights. Argentina’s case is especially interesting because not only did the pro choice movements target domestic legislation, they explicitly cited relevant IHRL treaties in their social media posts.

Note: I am basing my work on the Britannica definition of movement: “an organized effort by a large group of people to achieve a particular goal, typically a social or political one.”

Furthermore, both the pro choice and the pro life movements employed what I term, ‘rights based language.’ This means that they continually referenced the concept of human rights in their online rhetoric without actually directly citing the law itself. For example, if an organization directly cited IHRL online, they might say something akin to “the ‘right to life’ is given in Article 6 of the ICCPR, which was ratified by the United States in 1992. It declares, “Every human being has the inherent right to life. This right shall be protected by law. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his life.” Without access to safe and legal abortions, circumstances such as ectopic pregnancies and miscarriages can be fatal for pregnant women.

16 Sikkink, “From Pariah State to Global Protagonist.”
17 ibid
18 Sutton, “Project MUSE - Abortion and Human Rights for Women in Argentina.”
19 “Social Movement | Definition, Types, Theories, & Facts | Britannica.”
20 “The Core International Human Rights Instruments and Their Monitoring Bodies.”
Therefore their right to life is violated when they don’t have access to abortion services.” On the contrary, if an organization were to use rights based language on the same subject, they might say something such as “Abortion violates the baby’s right to life.” This distinction between directly citing IHRL elements and simply employing rights based language is important because it characterizes how and why different organizations engage with the human rights terms that they do.

Understanding these choices and their various impacts has possible implications for the future of online human rights activism. What’s important to note is that pro choice organizations were fighting to change the legal status quo, while pro life organizations were fighting to maintain it. Recognizing the difference in approaches to engaging with IHRL based on the goals of the organizations may allow future online activists to strategically target their content based on their objectives. For example, other womens’ rights movements across the world may be inspired if researchers like me are able to point out which online engagements with international law proved successful in Argentina for different organizations.

Furthermore, this is all compelling because as aforementioned, ‘abortion’ is not technically codified as a right in international law. Why would organizations refer to IHRL and the concept of human rights if abortion’s legal status is murky?

II. Research Questions and Significance

This study aims to answer the following question: “What was the impact of Argentina’s pro choice and pro life organizations’ online engagement with abortion and International Human Rights Law from 2015-2022?”
Specifically collecting data on pro choice and pro life movements that organized via Instagram, Facebook, and their personal websites, the following sub-questions were kept in mind:

a) How and why did the actors in Argentina’s abortion debate use social media to organize themselves in relation to both domestic and international human rights law?

b) How did the international ‘right’ status of abortion affect the ways in which Argentina’s pro choice and pro life groups presented themselves online?

c) What, if any, international human rights norms did pro life and pro choice movements cite in their online activism?

d) Is there a difference between how the pro choice and pro life groups employed human rights?

e) Is there a difference in impact between directly citing elements of IHRL and employing rights based language in online activism?

I believe this work is significant because it is one of the first studies to research the implications of how Argentina’s pro choice and pro life movements used social media as a medium to engage with human rights, as well as how this impacted the domestic and international status of abortion. There have been several scholarly studies on the types of abortion movements in Argentina (Ruibal et al), the pro choice movements’ use of IHRL (Sutton et al), and the impact of social media organizing in IHRL (Chenoweth et al). However, my research is explicitly looking at the connection between abortion’s status as a human rights norm

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21 Here, I am referencing the idea of political organizing, which means to “rally people around a specific goal and work within [or against] a political system to realize the goal.” July 05 and 2017, “How to Be a Political Organizer.”

and the success of Argentina’s abortion movements. Furthermore, to my knowledge, mine is the first English language study to be specifically conducted on the social media activity of Argentina’s abortion movements from both sides of the debate. I believe this is noteworthy because it may have future implications for the future of online human rights advocacy when the right in question is still being catalyzed.
Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

This paper is guided first and foremost by the international human rights framework. I situate this project specifically in the human rights enshrined by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights. To answer my research question about the impact of employing the human rights framework online, I analyze instances of Argentina’s pro choice and pro life groups referring to and directly referencing these protocols on social media. I attempt to hold the elements of human rights law that the pro choice movements referenced with the same weight as the elements that the pro life movements referenced. Recognizing that the rights to health and non discrimination are equally valid as the right to life is an important guiding principle of this paper. No human right legally outweighs any other. Furthermore, understanding that the rights enshrined in the above conventions have been interpreted but not codified to include the right to abortion is an essential concept for this paper as well. This theoretical framework allows me to recognize and better understand how and why pro choice and pro life groups focused on the human rights that they did.

Furthermore, I take the theoretical work of Johanna Fine, Barbara Sutton, Hugo Rabbia, and Erica Chenoweth and apply it to Argentina’s abortion debate.

In Fine’s article, *The Role of International Human Rights Norms in the Liberalization of Abortion Laws Globally*, she discusses how human rights norms have evolved significantly to recognize that the denial of abortion care is a violation of multiple international human rights. Fine argues that this evolution of norms has equally amplified and been amplified by civil society’s acceptance of and advocacy for human rights. Fine writes, “high courts have
increasingly relied on international human rights standards in determining whether their countries’ laws and practices adequately secure women’s reproductive autonomy.”

She points out that when states draw upon the international human rights framework in their domestic policy making, human rights norms become legitimized both on an international scale and for the country itself.

I take Fine’s work and apply it directly to my case study on Argentina: Since Argentina’s democratization in 1983, the country has seen a vast growth in general acceptance of international human rights norms. This has led to several social justice movements in Argentina employing human rights language in their activism as a way to appeal to larger sections of the population. Consequently (and in a self-fulfilling manner), human rights become vindicated on both an international and national scale. By ‘self-fulfilling manner’ I am referring to the ways in which these two factors are both causes and effects of each other. The growing national acceptance of human rights encourages activists to employ the human rights framework. When activists engage with international human rights law on a large scale, there is usually a growing acceptance of the framework domestically that follows.

Each of these factors contributed to the efficacy and the impact of human rights as a social media framework amongst the Argentinian population. Because Argentina’s pro choice and pro life groups both grappled with the international human rights framework in some form, I argue that engaging with human rights is an incredibly impactful online organizing tool amongst women’s movements (both for and against elective abortions).

Dr. Barbara Sutton is a Professor in the Women’s and Gender Studies department at Albany State University. Sutton is a specialist in the different women’s rights movements that


24 Sikkink, “From Pariah State to Global Protagonist.”
fought to legalize abortion in Argentina: specifically The National Campaign for the Right to Legal, Safe, and Free Abortion (The Campaign). I considered her article, *Abortion and Human Rights for Women in Argentina* an inspiration for my own research project. Sutton argues that The Campaign was in part successful because they drew on IHRL norms in their activism. She claims that rights based advocacy enables “activists to draw on what legal scholar Martha Minow terms ‘a rights consciousness.’”

According to Sutton, in Argentina, a ‘rights-centered’ activism has had particular traction in the abortion movement because Argentina has ratified and historically supported a large number of the IHRL treaties since its constitutional reform in 1994 that gave IHRL treaties legal supremacy (Sutton 2019). Furthermore, the international human rights framework also allowed the Campaign to signal support with international organizations as a way to “convey that there is international pressure for Argentina to guarantee the right to abortion.”

Sutton has also written, *Queering Abortion Rights: Notes from Argentina*, and *Abortion Rights in Images: Visual Interventions by Activist Organizations in Argentina*. Both of these works are relevant to my research because of their focus on pro abortion social movements in Argentina. They specifically help me answer my research question because of the emphasis on how the human rights framework was employed by the pro choice movements.

I use Sutton’s theoretical framework and take it a step further. Instead of simply looking at how Argentina’s pro choice movements engaged with human rights, I assess how and why they did so specifically on social media. I also assess the pro life movements in tandem with the pro choice movements in order to discern a difference between the two. Furthermore, because my research question is about the *impact* of employing a human rights framework online, I

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25 Sutton, “Project MUSE - Abortion and Human Rights for Women in Argentina.”
26 Ibid
analyze the different ways that the pro choice and pro life movements’ use of international human rights affected their successes.

Alba Ruibal's article, "Legal obstacles and social change: strategies of the abortion rights movement in Argentina," analyzes the strategies used by the pro choice movement in Argentina to advance their cause. Ruiba’s scholarship greatly framed my thesis because of her focus on the human rights aspect of political organizing. The article examines the challenges faced by the movement, including legal obstacles and opposition from conservative groups, and highlights the importance of building broad-based coalitions and engaging in strategic activism that targets both international and domestic actors. One of Ruibal's main findings is that the pro choice movement in Argentina was successful in part because it has been able to shift the conversation from being about morality to being about human rights and the right to access healthcare. I will explain this further in my findings section, but I found that many of Argentina’s pro life organizations still centered their arguments on the morality of legalized abortion. On the other hand, the pro choice movements focused directly on human rights law and information about healthcare.

While I originally intended my project to focus a lot more on the religious arguments proposed by pro life organizations, Ruibal’s research encouraged me to change my scope. At first, I hypothesized that religion would play a much more prominent role in the activism of both the pro life and pro choice organizations because of how heavily Catholic Argentina is. However, Ruibal points out that one of the main successes of the pro choice movements in Argentina is their strategic use of framing the debate around the rights and health of women. This is also confirmed by the work of Daby and Mosely in their article, “Feminist Mobilization and the Abortion Debate in Latin America: Lessons from Argentina.” They explain that before the
widespread protests over abortion in Argentina, much of the pro choice activism was centered around how immoral it is to deny a woman access to an abortion. However, in the five or so years leading up to the 2020 decision, they also confirm that this conversation shifted to be more about human rights. They write, “by expanding the movement's social justice frame from gender violence to encompass abortion rights, feminist activists were able to change public opinion and expand the scope of debate, making salient an issue that had long been politically untouchable.”

Because of these two papers, I made the choice to focus specifically on the human rights aspects of the pro choice and pro life activism in Argentina.

Erica Chenoweth's article, "Struggles from Below: Literature Review on Human Rights Struggles by Domestic Actors," offers insights into the ways in which domestic actors engage in struggles for human rights. The article argues that grassroots mobilization and social movements have a massive role in facilitating the national level implementation of international human rights norms. Chenoweth’s discoveries have greatly framed my research. With the understanding that it could be possible for domestic actors in Argentina to make a difference in national policy by advocating in favor of international law, I analyzed the ways in which both the pro choice and pro life movements engaged with IHRL. While Chenoweth’s research was not specifically centered on social media activism, I believe that their principles can be applied to my thesis based on the significant amount of social media posts that referenced human rights law in the Argentina abortion debate. This work provides a theoretical framework for understanding the ways in which these online campaigns are part of broader struggles for human rights and social justice in Argentina.

27 Daby and Moseley, “Feminist Mobilization and the Abortion Debate in Latin America.”
28 Chenoweth uses they/them pronouns and will be referred to as such in this paper
Furthermore, Chenoweth’s article, "Reform, Resistance, and Revolution," was also significant in framing my data collection process. In this piece, they explore the different strategies that social movements (on a much broader level) use to achieve their goals. Chenoweth argues that successful human rights movements often use a combination of engaging with domestic legal structures and international ones. While both the pro choice and pro life groups in Argentina engaged with the national and international legal structures in their activism, they did so incredibly differently. For this reason, I kept Chenoweth’s findings in mind to determine which strategies of engaging with legal frameworks were more successful.
Chapter 3: Methodology

I. Overall Methodology

My overall goal for this investigation was to discover how the international human rights framework might have a place in online organizing around human rights that aren’t yet fully recognized. Researching the impact of engagement with IHRL on social media allowed me to do this. When I write, “IHRL framework,” I am referring to the use of any component of international human rights law as a paradigm for understanding reproductive rights.29

I chose to specifically highlight Argentina because of how recently the country legalized abortion (December 2020), and how contested the ‘human right to abortion’ is. Much of the scholarship on Argentina’s relationship with abortion legalization and human rights is relatively recent; furthermore, no English-Language study has specifically been conducted on the social media platforms employed by both the pro choice and the pro life movements. In my personal experience, I have found that many people tend to believe that only left-leaning organizations and movements employ the human rights framework in their advocacy. Consequently, much of the scholarship on the relationship between human rights law and abortion is situated around the activism of pro choice movements. For this reason, I specifically chose to focus on how both the pro choice groups and pro life groups engaged with human rights. This allowed me to compare how groups with different ideologies make sense of and advocate in favor of the same international legal structure.

I explicitly chose to hone in on the 2015-2022 time frame because I found that this is when the majority of both pro choice and pro life movements decided to create an online

29“Framework Definition & Meaning - Merriam-Webster.”
While pro and anti abortion groups have been active in Argentina for decades, the move to social media is a more recent one. Furthermore, while abortion was officially legalized in Argentina on December 30th, 2020, I found that many pro life and pro choice groups have continued their online organizing efforts. In fact, many pro life groups only started calling for mobilization (wide-spread public protests and demonstrations) after the abortion decision was reached. This is why I chose to include the years 2021 and 2022 in my research in addition to 2015-2020.

I initially intended to do an extensive media study on the movements’ official Websites, and any existing print and video statements; however, I ultimately decided to shift my focus to the organizations’ Instagrams, and Facebooks. I ended up studying their official websites if the content on Instagram and Facebook was not substantial. Instagram provided a perfect medium to research my original question. Unlike other platforms such as Twitter, Instagram is centered on the concept of visual content. An Instagram post can only be published if it includes at least one video or photo element. Captions (words accompanying photos) or hashtags (“a word or phrase preceded by a hash sign (#) used on social media sites and applications to identify digital content on a specific topic,” 30 are completely optional. My decision to focus on this content allowed me to understand how movements used social media tools and eye catching materials to engage with the human rights framework. According to a public opinion survey conducted by Latinobarometro in 2018, the use of Instagram is “widespread among the younger segments of the [Argentinian] population.” In August 2018, “around 43% of Instagram users in Latin America were between 15 and 25 years old and in Argentina that figure reached 64%.” 31 Instagram, therefore, has become a popular channel for posting eye-catching graphics and

30 “Hashtag Definition & Meaning - Merriam-Webster.”
31 “Latinobarometro.”
encouraging younger users to care about a cause. For these reasons, I would have only focused my research on Instagram; however, I found that a few organizations were more active on Facebook or their official websites (active, in this sense, refers to how often the organization posted).

Accordingly, I decided to use Facebook and official websites to supplement Instagram in my research. If an organization was equally active on Facebook and Instagram, I opted for Instagram because of the study referenced above. If an organization did not have a website, but had both a Facebook and Instagram account, I researched the Facebook and Instagram. If an organization only used one of the three media platforms, I used that platform. I believe that my choice to alternate between platforms did not have any significant limitations on my research. My goal was to study the visual and written content that organizations used to advocate in favor of or against abortion legalization in Argentina. I was able to do exactly that, in addition to recognizing how and why they engaged with IHRL.

“Pro choice” and “Pro life” are terms that originated within the American abortion debate. I decided to use these terms in my research instead of “pro abortion” and “anti-abortion” because I find them to be specifically relevant to the human rights context. ‘Choice’ is significant because it reflects a person’s right to choose what happens to their body. While the right to abortion might not be specifically codified in IHRL, the right to a woman’s agency and ‘security of person’ is. Furthermore, the term “life” is significant because the ‘right to life’ is a fundamental element of several IHRL treaties.

Because my research was concerned with the ways in which movements employed IHRL online, I decided to focus on seven pro choice organizations and seven pro life organizations from Argentina. This number was decided based on the amount of organizations I felt I could

32 “Pro-Choice and Pro-Life.”
personally research within the timespan of a year. Furthermore, many of the scholars I encountered in my research only spoke about one or two organizations. My choice to research seven allowed me to better situate the pro choice and the pro life movements as a whole within the human rights context. I decided on these organizations by first parsing through the existing literature on Argentina’s pro choice and pro life groups. I recognized and noted the groups that were mentioned by multiple authors. In order to limit bias, I also conducted an internet search for the organizations. I used the platform Google and searched the phrases, “Argentina Pro choice organizations,” “Argentina 2015-2022 Pro choice groups,” “Argentina pro abortion organizations,” “Argentina Pro life organizations,” “Argentina 2015-2022 Pro life groups,” and “Argentina anti-abortion organizations.” Using the same Google searches for both sides of the debate was important because I wanted to find organizations with similar goals and online engagement with IHRL, but with different ideologies. This later allowed me to understand and better analyze the varying ways in which pro choice and pro life groups engaged with the human rights framework. The pro choice organizations I ultimately decided to study are as follows:

1. The National Campaign for the Right to Legal, Safe, and Free Abortion (The Campaign)
2. The Collective Apostasy Movement
3. The Center for Studies on State and Society
4. Catholics for Choice Argentina
5. Profesionales de la Salud por el Derecho a Decidir (Health Professionals for the Right to Chose)
6. Soccorra Rosa (Pink Rescue)
7. Lesbianas y Feministas (Lesbians and Feminists)
Each of these movements has different objectives and organizing strategies. I have made a table outlining this below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization Name</th>
<th>Media Analyzed</th>
<th>Organization Goals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| The National Campaign for the Right to Legal, Safe, and Free Abortion            | Website, Instagram     | Umbrella organization of 100+ smaller organizations. Main goal is pushing for domestic legal reform. Specific target is safe and free legal abortion at a woman’s request during the first 14 weeks of a pregnancy.  
33                                                                                   |
| The Collective Apostasy Movement                                                  | Website, Facebook      | Public Apostasy en masse (official resignation from the Catholic Church), demanding the public to question the Church’s implication in societal oppression.  
34                                                                                   |
| The Center for Studies on State and Society                                      | Website, Facebook      | Emphasizing the roles of lawyers and bureaucrats in the abortion fight: Guiding the implementation of abortion laws within the Argentine legal system, training personnel of the judicial branch on the interpretation of the current legal framework, creating a federal network of feminist lawyers working on reproductive rights.  
35                                                                                   |
| Catholics for Choice Argentina                                                    | Website, Instagram     | Fighting for feminist demands while claiming a Catholic identity.  
36                                                                                   |
| Health Professionals for the Right to Chose                                       | Website, Instagram     | Health Professions with the goal of increasing access to abortion for all                                                                               |

33 “Who We Are – National Campaign for the Right to Safe and Free Legal Abortion.”
34 “#ApostasiaColectiva.”
35 Ruibal and Anderson, “Legal Obstacles and Social Change.”
36 “What Do We Do? – Catholics for Choice Argentina.”
unwanted pregnancies, regardless of legality. Interpreting the domestic legal framework broadly in order to provide abortion access.37

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pink Rescue</th>
<th>Website, Facebook</th>
<th>Providing women with scientific information on having an abortion, accompanying women to their appointments, and providing women with aftercare once the abortion is complete. Challenging the current legal framework in order to advance legal reform.38</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lesbianas y Feministas</td>
<td>Website, Facebook</td>
<td>Providing information on abortions or abortion services for all women who want an abortion. Launched the first hotline in the country to offer information on how to procure a safe abortion with medication.39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Argentina’s pro choice groups and their goals.

The pro life groups I concentrated on are as follows:

1. Unidad Provida (United Pro Life)
2. Médicos Por la Vida (Doctors for Life)
3. Abogados X Vida (Lawyers X Life)
4. Unidos Por Las Dos Vidas (United for Both Lives)
5. Fans de Lupe Batallan (Fans of Lupe Batallan)

   a. Note: Lupe Batallan is a young Argentine pro life activist who rose to viral fame in the late 2010’s. She is well known for speaking out on Catholic and Pro life

37 “Redsaludddecidir.Org.”
38 Ruibal and Anderson, “Legal Obstacles and Social Change.”
39 “(Chile) Lesbianas y Feministas Por El Derecho a La Información”; Ruibal and Anderson, “Legal Obstacles and Social Change.”
issues on Instagram and Tiktok. While she made her personal Instagram private in 2021 and I was unable to access it, her followers keep the public updated via the account I researched. I chose to focus on this because of her strong online influence over pro life youth in Argentina.

6. Valores Vida Familia (Family Life Values)

7. Live Action Argentina

Similar to the pro choice groups I analyzed, each of these organizations has different goals and organizing strategies. I have made another table to explain:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Media Analyzed</th>
<th>Organization Goals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unidad Provida</td>
<td>Instagram, Website</td>
<td>A network of more than 150 organizations that promote the right to live for both women and unborn children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctors for Life</td>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>Creating online forums for Argentine doctors to signal support for the Pro Life movement. Providing medical facts online to a pro life population.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lawyers X Life</td>
<td>Website, Facebook</td>
<td>Organizing Argentine lawyers in defense of “the constitutional rights of the unborn.” Posting and explaining the legal framework that forbids abortion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unidos Por Las Dos Vidas</td>
<td>Website, Instagram</td>
<td>Supporting those who hope to save</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

40 “Unidad Provida 💕 (@unidadprovida) • Instagram Photos and Videos.”
41 “(1) MEDICOS POR LA VIDA ARGENTINA | Rosario | Facebook.”
42 “Abogados Por La Vida | Nosotros.”
both the life of the mother and of the child. Engaging with the online population to ensure abortion is “neither legal nor clandestine.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Platform</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fans of Lupe Batallan</td>
<td>Instagram</td>
<td>Posting memes created by and for fans of Lupe Batallan. Spreading Lupe Batallan’s quotes and adjacent pro life imagery.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valores Vida Familia</td>
<td>Instagram</td>
<td>Group of parents and young people hoping to be an online “bridge of information” regarding abortion and traditional family values.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live Action Argentina</td>
<td>Website, Instagram</td>
<td>Promoting the “culture of life and protection of human rights through information campaigns.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Argentina’s Pro Life groups and their goals

II. Codifying Themes

For this project, I decided to take a traditional investigative approach combined with grounded theory analysis. This means that I started my project by reading the existing literature on the intersections between human rights, social media, Argentina, and abortion.

Next, I collected my data from Facebook, Instagram, and the websites. This data included the visual content uploaded by the organizations as well as the captions, hashtags, and comments.

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43 “ salvarmos Las 2 Vidas” on Instagram.
44 “Fans de Lupe Batallán (@fans_de_lupe_batallan) • Instagram Photos and Videos.”
47 See Chapter 2: Literature Review
accompanying the posts. To do this, I logged into my personal Instagram and Facebook accounts and examined each organization’s posts from 2015-2022. I considered creating fake Instagram and Facebook accounts to research the content (as many social media researchers often do). However, I decided that because I was not actively engaging with the content or the organizations in any way (I was simply viewing them), this was not necessary. During my first time examining the content, I took note of common themes that I observed across the accounts, such as “referring to human rights,” “using comedy and memes,” “posting about an event or rally,” etc. Next, when I viewed the accounts for a second time, I took screenshots of each post that explicitly engaged with these themes and began to categorize them in relation to my research question. This means I explicitly focused on the posts that referenced human rights and noted how and when they were being referenced. For example, I grouped posts that engaged with the domestic framework and the international one together. I grouped posts that referenced human rights alongside comedic imagery together. I grouped posts that used human rights language but not actual IHRL doctrines together. After three careful examinations of each organization’s media accounts, and after collecting and grouping my data, I began to identify relationships between the categories. I did this by analyzing which themes were most often associated with specific movements and accounts. In this process, I was able to specifically note the differences in how the pro choice and the pro life movements were employing the themes. This helped me answer my research question to see which themes were resonating among certain audiences and which were unsuccessful. Finally, I compared these findings with the work of Sutton, Ruibal, Rabbia, Chenoweth, and others in order to make final conclusions on my analyses.

The main themes that emerged in my research are as follows. I will explain the evidence for these categories and their significance in the “Findings” section of this thesis.
1. Human Rights
   a. Examples of movements referencing human rights (in any form)
   b. Examples of movements specifically citing components of international human rights law

Regarding human rights, I had to distinguish between the online posts that used rights based language and those that specifically referred to elements of international human rights law. When an organization posted an image, caption, or hashtag that employed the terms, “human rights,” “human right,” “right to,” “rights,” or “right,” I classified the post in section (a). When an organization posted an image, caption, or hashtag that specifically referenced an element of IHRL, I classified it under section (b). ‘Elements of IHRL’ include any references to UN treaties, treaty bodies, conventions, declarations, or recognized organizations.

2. Organization
   a. Examples of movements working in spite of the Argentinian domestic legal structure
   b. Examples of movements working to change the Argentinian domestic legal structure
   c. Examples of movements working within the Argentinian domestic legal structure
   d. Examples of movements working against the Catholic Church
   e. Examples of movements working within the Catholic Church

In my research, I discovered that the ways in which certain groups organized themselves in relation to the law and to the church differed depending on their alignment with pro choice or pro
life ideology. Groups that posted information or encouraged actions that would have been considered illegal under Argentinian domestic law (at the time they were posted) were classified as “movements working in spite of the Argentinian domestic legal structure.” Groups that posted images or phrases that advocated in favor of amending or erasing aspects of Argentinian laws were classified as “movements working to change the Argentinian domestic legal structure.” Groups that posted information or content specifically intended for actors in the Argentinian legal system (lawyers, judges, lobbyists, paralegals, etc.) were classified as “movements working within the Argentinian domestic legal structure.” Groups that posted visual or written material either directly targeting the Catholic Church or encouraging action against it were classified as “movements working against the Catholic Church.” Groups that posted Catholic imagery or information that directly aligned themselves with the Church were classified as “movements working within the Catholic Church. By “Catholic imagery,” I am referring to any depiction of the Virgin Mary, Jesus, angels, Bethlehem, or the Cross.

3. Online Imagery and Rhetoric
   a. Examples of movements using memes to dispel a message
   b. Examples of movements posting calls to action
   c. Examples of movements posting violent rhetoric against adversaries
      i. Examples of movements evoking images of The Holocaust and employing Nazi rhetoric. By “Nazi rhetoric,” I am referring to any word or phrase that references Nazism, World War II, or Adolf Hitler.

Because my research focused entirely on social media, it was important for me to classify the visual content I was encountering. Memes, defined as “an amusing or interesting item (such

\footnote{I will delve into these differences in the next section, but will use this space to explain my theme classification.}
as a captioned picture or video) or genre of items that is spread widely online especially through social media,”⁴⁹ were especially numerous given the nature of my study. I classified any post that used humor or popular ‘meme formats’⁵⁰ as “examples of movements using memes to dispel a message.” When groups posted visual or written information about upcoming events, protests, teach-ins, demonstrations, etc, I classified them as “examples of movements posting calls to action.” Occasionally, I came across instances of groups using social media as a means to threaten (or imply a threat of) violence against an opposing group. I classified these images and phrases as “examples of movements posting violent rhetoric against adversaries.” Considering my research specifically focused on human rights, I encountered a shocking amount of Nazi rhetoric and imagery in my research. Any instance of a group posting references to nazism, Adolf Hitler, or World War Two were classified both as “examples of movements posting violent rhetoric against adversaries” and “examples of movements evoking images of The Holocaust and employing Nazi rhetoric.”

III. Limitations

a. Organization of Movements

One of the larger difficulties I found in analyzing the pro life organizations is that they were not as succinctly organized as the pro choice organizations. They more so presented themselves as individuals and smaller groups as opposed to a large unified movement. Furthermore, I had specific difficulties with ‘Unidad Provida,’ which I had seen scholars and reporters refer to as the pro life version of ‘The Campaign.’⁵¹ Unidad Provida claims to be an

⁴⁹ “Definition of MEME.”
⁵⁰ “Meme Templates - Imgflip.”
⁵¹ “Argentina’s Abortion Law Goes into Effect under Watchful Eyes.”
umbrella group of 150+ pro life organizations. However, despite extensive searching, I could not find any official list of these organizations. Each time I tried to open the official Unidad Provida website, I received an error message that said “Looks Like This Domain Isn’t Connected To A Website Yet! Is this your domain? Connect it to your Wix website in just a few easy steps.”

Because of the website issues, I was only able to search for content on Unidad Provida’s Instagram channel. Similarly, other pro life organizations either did not have official websites, or they had not updated the website since before 2015 (which is outside my research period). The combined factors of the lack of structural organization and the lack of official websites made the pro life media data much more difficult to collect than the pro choice media data. This was a limitation to my research because I was unable to verify the specific structural organization of many of the pro life groups. As noted in Finding 2, this is an important aspect of my research that the pro life groups fell short on.

b. Spanish Language Sources

While I can read Spanish on a moderate level, I am not a native speaker. Because of this, I often found myself using translation services to ensure that I accurately understood the online posts I was reading. While I was incredibly meticulous and double checked each translation, I consider this a mild limitation of my work. Furthermore, the growing prevalence of internet slang and colloquialisms can affect the use of online translation services, and may have caused a loss or degradation of language nuances that were only clear to native Spanish speakers.

52 https://www.unidadprovida.org/
c. Generalizability

It was impossible for me to study every single pro choice or pro life social media account in Argentina. This was only a year-long project, so I had a time constraint that forced me to limit how much I could feasibly research. For this reason, I generalize my findings with caution. I am not seeking to provide a single answer to how human rights advocates can use media as a tool for political change when a ‘human right’ is still in the making. I am instead using Argentina as a case study to better understand which online tools have proven effective in human rights advocacy, specifically when a ‘right’ isn’t technically codified.
Chapter 4: Findings and Significance

Finding 1: Efficacy of Human Rights as an Online Organizing Tool

1.1 Human rights on its own as an online organizing tool

Both pro life and pro choice movements used Human Rights based language to appeal to their followers. In fact, I found that all of the movements I researched (on both sides of the debate) used ‘rights based language’ in their online activism (See appendix section 1.1a-1.1b).

I’ve found that one of the main differences between the two movements is not whether they used human rights language or not, but how they did it. The main right that Pro life movements refer to online is ‘the right to life’ in reference to the life of the unborn fetus. The main rights that the Pro choice movements refer to online are the right to non discrimination, right to be free from torture, right to dignity, right to health, and right to life. Many of the Pro choice groups explicitly refer to the international human rights framework, international human rights organizations (such as Amnesty International), and directly quote IHRL treaties and conventions online. The same cannot be said of the Pro life movements. While both sides employed rights based language and called for the defense of rights, it was the Pro choice groups that actually consistently cited IHRL norms and conventions. Pro life groups tended to use more generic language without citing the international legal doctrines. When pro life groups did actually reference the international human rights legal framework, they did so either in meme formats or without citations to actual treaties and conventions.

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53 See appendix section 2.1b
54 See appendix section 2.1c
55 See appendix section 2.1d - 2.2
I argue that the pro choice movements were successful because of *how* they engaged with and employed human rights in their online discourse. Not only that, but the number of rights they referred to is significant as well. As shown by the images in my appendix, multiple pro choice movements repeatedly referred to IHRL norms such as the right to non discrimination, right to be free from torture, right to dignity, right to health, and right to life. Meanwhile, Pro life movements usually only reference the right to life and the right to be born (it should be noted that ‘the right to be born’ is *not* an international human right, nor is it currently recognized as an IHRL norm). Furthermore, while the pro life movements did *reference* the IHRL framework, there was significantly less engagement with actual treaties and conventions. I propose that this is the case for two reasons.

1. Because abortion is not technically a codified right in IHRL, pro choice movements had to over emphasize the existing human rights that are interpreted to include abortion. Argentina’s case shows us that when advocating for a right that isn’t codified, it is beneficial to actively engage with IHRL legal writings. In fact, Barbara Sutton proposes that using the international human rights framework “allows social justice movements to signal the relevance of international law to target demands.”  

56 Sutton, “Project MUSE - Abortion and Human Rights for Women in Argentina.”

57 Chenoweth, "Reform, Resistance, and Revolution.”
2. Perhaps the pro life movements did not feel the need to engage with IHRL as much because abortion was already illegal nationally. They were fighting to maintain the status quo while pro choice groups were fighting to change it. I propose that the pro life organizations were engaging with human rights language as a defense mechanism against the pro choice groups, rather than an offensive tactic against the national government. The right to life is codified in both the UDHR and the ICCPR. While General Comment 36 on the ICCPR’s right to life argues that voluntary interruption of pregnancy does not violate the right to life, the right to abortion still has not been internationally codified. So, engaging with rights based language was a way for pro life groups to signal to pro choice groups that their position holds ultimate legal superiority. Even though pro life activists technically had legal superiority (both internationally and domestically) at the height of their advocacy, they consistently failed to reference and explain aspects of international human rights law. My research shows that national level positive change in Argentina required the belief in and active engagement with international structures. Pro choice groups effectively used the international interpretation of ‘abortion as a right’ as a means to assert the superiority of their position over the national one.

1.2 Human Rights Alongside Religious Rhetoric

Moving on, I found that using religious rhetoric alongside human rights language was not limited to the pro life movements. In my bias, I originally assumed that the majority (if not all) of the pro life groups would be associated with the Catholic church, and the pro choice groups would be secular. I hypothesized that using religion as an argument for any abortion based arguments would prove unsuccessful given its lack of scientific or legislative roots. However, I

58 “OHCHR | General Comment No. 36 on Article 6.”
found that there were pro choice groups who used their identification with Catholicism as an online organizing tool as well. Considering the success of the pro choice movement, I propose that identification with religion was not a defining factor in the success or the failure of either movement. Religious arguments resonate with both sides of the abortion debate in Argentina. However, I do propose that using religion-based arguments in tandem with human rights based language is significant. Both Catholics for Choice and The Collective Movement for Apostasy referred to actual IHRL treaties and conventions online, whereas the Pro life religious groups failed to do so. It was not the religious rhetoric that either bolstered or discredited pro life groups. Rather, it was their lack of ability to engage extensively with IHRL.

1.3 Human Rights Alongside Memes, Violence, and Nazism

On both Instagram and Facebook, I found that pro life movements were much more likely than pro choice movements to post memes alongside rights based language. In fact, despite my extensive research, I could not actually find any instances of the pro choice movements posting memes. While the pro choice accounts mostly posted calls to action, information on rallies, information on human rights, or information on how to access abortions, the pro life accounts took a much more comedic approach. This is not to say that the pro life accounts did not post calls to action or information on rallies, just that this specific type of content was much more interspersed with memes and attempts at comedy. I propose that this is significant to the pro choice movements’ success. Calls to action and rallies are proven to mobilize populations. Memes may appeal to an audience’s morality, but do less in terms of making legal change. The memes I included in my appendix are yet another example of the pro life movement using

59 See Appendix section 2.1a,
60 See Appendix section 2.3
generic “rights based language” online without actually citing specific international human rights laws.

Furthermore, the memes posted by the pro life groups often used vulgar language or violent rhetoric against pro choice adversaries. In fact, many of the pro life memes I found referred to naziism or nazi-adherent language. The photos that I included in the appendix are not even half of the ones that I found in my research. Situating this violent imagery alongside the language of human rights was a common theme I had not expected to find when I first started this project. The goal seemed to be to position the pro life movement as a force of ‘good’ compared to the ‘evil’ pro choice movements who violate human rights in a manner similar to the Nazis. This tactic certainly appealed to the ethos of viewers; however, it contained contrasting ideologies. Given that the modern International Human Rights framework literally developed out of the need to sanction Nazism,61 Nazi rhetoric is factually antithetical to human rights advocacy. While it’s true that these posts referenced the international human rights framework, I propose that the pro life movements who posted these memes actively disengaged with IHRL by engaging with Nazism. While the goal to incite moral outrage amongst followers and the connection to human rights was clear, I argue that this tactic was not an effective online organizing tool in terms of human rights advocacy. Thus, using Nazi rhetoric is not a worthwhile or productive way to organize online for human rights.

61 “Universal Declaration of Human Rights - Amnesty International.”
Finding 2: Domestic vs International Activism

Secondly, I found that while each pro choice group engaged with different themes and different political actors in their online activism, they shared several organizational and advocacy tactics. The themes and types of activism that the pro choice organizations engaged with are detailed below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The National Campaign for the Right to Legal, Safe, and Free Abortion</td>
<td>Calls for mobilization, Referencing human rights in any form, Specifically referring to IHRL, Working to change the domestic legal framework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Collective Apostasy Movement</td>
<td>Calls for mobilization, Working in spite of the Catholic Church, Religious Imagery, References to Human Rights in any format</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Center for Studies on State and Society</td>
<td>Working within the legal framework, Working to change the legal framework, Calls for Mobilization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholics for Choice Argentina</td>
<td>Working within the church, Working to change the legal framework Calls for mobilization, Referencing Human Rights in any form, Religious imagery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Professionals for the Right to Chose</td>
<td>Working in spite of the legal framework, Working to change the legal framework, Working within the legal framework, Referencing Human Rights in any form, Specifically citing IHRL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pink Rescue</td>
<td>Movements that worked within the legal framework, Movements that worked in spite of the legal framework, Calls to action, Reference to human rights in any format, Specifically citing IHRL</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Lesbianas y Feministas | Movements that worked *in spite of* the legal framework, Movements that worked *to change* the legal framework, Reference to Human Rights in any format

| Table 3: Themes for Argentina’s pro choice groups |

Interestingly, I found that every pro choice organization I researched aligned itself with the Argentinian legal framework in some manner. In fact, each movement fell into at least one (if not multiple) categories regarding ‘legal structure.’ While some organizations solely advocated in favor of legal change, there were other organizations that did so alongside committing illegal acts and/or engaging with legal actors. Furthermore, there were two organizations who engaged directly with the Church in addition to their engagement with domestic law. I have created the following venn diagram to demonstrate how the pro choice movements organized themselves:
Figure 2: Venn Diagram representing how Argentina’s Pro Choice Groups organized themselves in relation to the state and the church.

While each pro choice movement that I studied engaged with international legal framework in some form, every single one of them also specifically grappled with Argentinian domestic law in some fashion. This is significant especially in the context of Fine’s work: She shows that translating human rights norms from the international to the domestic level requires strong civil society advocacy coalitions that engage equally with both the national and international legal systems.63

62 By “grappled,” I am referring to all organizations that specifically worked within, attacked, or worked to change the domestic law of Argentina.
In contrast, I found that the pro life groups I studied organized themselves online differently: both differently from each other as well as differently from the pro choice groups. I have created the following table to demonstrate how the pro life movements organized themselves:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unidad Provida</td>
<td>Reference to human rights in any format, Calls to action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctors for Life</td>
<td>Calls to action, Religious rhetoric and imagery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lawyers X Life</td>
<td>Working <em>within</em> the domestic legal framework, Religious rhetoric and imagery, Violent rhetoric against adversaries, Holocaust Imagery, Calls to action, Use of memes to dispel a message</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unidos Por Las Dos Vidas</td>
<td>Nazi rhetoric and Holocaust imagery, Use of memes to dispel a message, Reference to human rights in any format, Violent rhetoric against adversaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fans of Lupe Batallan</td>
<td>Use of memes to dispel a message, Violent imagery against adversaries, Referencing human rights in any format</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valores Vida Familia</td>
<td>Religious imagery and rhetoric, Referencing human rights in any format, Calls to action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live Action Argentina</td>
<td>Nazi rhetoric and imagery, Violent rhetoric against adversaries, Religious imagery, Reference to human rights in any format, Use of memes to dispel a message</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Themes for Argentina’s Pro Life groups
As I mentioned briefly in my limitations section, I found that The pro life organizations were less succinctly organized than the pro choice groups (at least online) and worked more individually of each other. Furthermore, many aligned themselves either directly or indirectly with the church. However, to my surprise, some were entirely secular as well, such as ‘Medicos por la Vida’ and ‘Fans of Lupe Batallan.’ Conversely, while some organizations, such as Unidad Provida, claimed to be entirely secular, I found that they were still using religious rhetoric and imagery online. Furthermore, I initially classified Abogados x Vida as secular because of their strong alignment to domestic law. However, as I did more digging, I found a public facebook forum hosted by the organization in which dozens of photos containing religious imagery were posted. For that reason, I included Abogados x Vida in the middle section of my venn diagram.

Other than Abogados x Vida, there was significantly less interaction with the Argentine legal system amongst the pro life movements I researched. My understanding of how the pro life movements organized themselves online looks like this:

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64 In my bias, I originally hypothesized that most, if not all pro-life groups would be aligned with the Church.
While all of the pro choice movements that I studied aligned themselves with the Argentinian domestic legal framework in some fashion, the same cannot be said of the pro life movements. I propose that the pro choice’s movements’ active engagement with national legislative bodies in addition to IHRL was one of the essential reasons for their success. Argentina’s case illustrates that movements engaging with human rights norms don’t necessarily have to align themselves with or against specific institutions (the Catholic church, for example) to be successful. However, they do have to engage in some format with both the domestic and international legal systems. This is also confirmed by human rights scholar, Erica Chenoweth in their article, Struggles from Below (2017): Literature Review on Human Rights Struggles by Domestic Actors.\textsuperscript{66} Chenoweth writes,

“Organizational structure matters, but there is not an ideal type of organization that consistently is more successful in advocating for improved human rights; rather, organizational type, formality, and complexity depends on the right being fought for, the goals of the rights movement, and contextual factors such as regime type or level of repression.”\textsuperscript{67}

Argentina shows us that the human rights framework provides a medium to facilitate connections between national and international legislation. I argue that promising change in favor of evolving human rights is possible by active involvement in existing national and international institutions.

\textsuperscript{65} Chenoweth uses they/them pronouns and will be referred to as such in this paper
\textsuperscript{66} “Struggles from Below (2017).”
\textsuperscript{67} Ibid
Finding 3: Domestic Support for Human Rights Facilitated by Social Media

Argentina’s social media coverage of the abortion debate existed alongside growing domestic support for human rights. In my review of the literature, I discovered that Argentina has seen a significant increase in public support for human rights law in the last two decades. First, Argentina has seen the growing presence of “transnational legalism.” According to Javier Corrales, Argentina exhibits a “type of globalization that is especially helpful, and which incidentally, is scarce in the United States—transnational legalism.” This term refers to the “ease with which a country’s legal system borrows from international cases to set legal precedents domestically.” Essentially, it refers to a continued reliance on and reference to IHRL norms in the process of domestic policy making. Argentina has a relatively recent (but still vast) history of enacting national legislation as a result of international obligations. This is a political condition that proved essential to Argentina’s legalization of abortion. In fact, during the abortion rulings, Argentina’s national court specifically noted that UN human rights bodies had condemned restrictive abortion laws. Furthermore, there is a substantial amount of literature supporting the idea that civil society movements and media discourse play a large role in implementing IHRL developments on national levels. In her article, Reproductive Rights are Human Rights: The Critical Role of International Human Rights Law in Decriminalizing Abortion in Argentina and Mexico, Melissa Padillia indicates that there is an increase in attention by local press in the periodic review process during the year of IHRL periodic reviews. This is significant because it demonstrates

68 Corrales, “Argentina Gay Marriage - Legalization of Marriage in Argentina.”
69 Ibid
that the periodic review process matters to domestic audiences beyond just members of human right movements and organizations.  

![Figure 28: Chart from Padilla, “Reproductive Rights Are Human Rights.”]

The above chart, created by Padilla, emphasizes how IHRL norms are accepted and implemented on a national level. I am specifically interested in the bottom left section called “Public Discourse: Media Coverage.” My research on the content posted to the social media and official websites of the movements is a great example of this. In this case, domestic level judicial change regarding an evolving human right was facilitated by public discourse in favor of interpreting abortion as a right even though it was not directly codified.

Corrales, Fine, and Padilla all show that civil society and media discourse about international human rights norms is incredibly influential in the creation of domestic legislation. My social media study confirms this. I propose that the fact that almost all of Argentina’s pro choice organizations engaged with specific IHRL norms (in tandem with engaging the domestic legal system) was fundamental to their success. Furthermore, this success was in part due to the

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71 Padilla, "Reproductive Rights Are Human Rights.
72 Padilla, "Reproductive Rights Are Human Rights."
already growing civil support for and public discourse about human rights in Argentina. I propose this is significant because abortion is not already a specifically recognized human right. My findings emphasize that regardless of abortion’s legal ‘right’ status, there was already immense domestic support for the human rights framework and conversations about where abortion fits into it. Argentina shows us that when an international human right is still in the making, social media is an important and viable medium for domestic audiences to encounter support for the acceptance of that right.
Chapter 5: Discussion

This study set out to understand how and why human rights was such an impactful framework amongst women’s rights organizations in Argentina. However, because of abortion’s international right status (or rather lack thereof), I found that the ways in which the pro choice and pro life organizations referenced IHRL was extremely significant. Simply referring to the ‘right to life’ or the ‘right to be born’ without citing the international protocols proved detrimental to the pro life movements’ goals. Furthermore, situating rights based language alongside violent imagery and Nazi rhetoric was ironically antithetical to human rights discourse. On the other hand, Argentina’s pro choice organizations consistently referred to actual codified international human rights in addition to contending with domestic political actors. These rights were: the right to be free from discrimination, the right to health, the right to health, the right to security of person, the right to liberty, the right to privacy, the right to information, the right to be free from cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, the right to decide the number and spacing of children, the right to enjoy the benefits of scientific progress, and the right to freedom of conscience and religion.

While some Argentinian citizens might not be aware of the nuances of certain issues, framing them as ‘human rights violations’ allows for greater accessibility to and mobilization of movements. Both pro choice and pro life movements created social media posts that situated Argentina’s national government as a violator of human rights. The language of violation inspired audiences on both sides to rally as a way to protect those human rights. Whether it was the ‘right to life’ or ‘the right to health’ being protected, both sides of the debate organized around the human rights framework.
Ultimately, the success of Argentina's pro choice groups, situated alongside the vast amount of codified human rights that they referred to in their online activism, illustrates how IHRL is a useful organizing framework that resonates among domestic audiences. It is important to note here that my first finding does not exist without my second or my third. This is to say that human rights would not not be an effective online organizing framework if not for the pro choice movement’s equal engagement with domestic actors as well as Argentina’s growing support for human rights. While I have proven that both sides of Argentina’s abortion debate found human rights to be a valid organizing tool, it was the pro choice movements who ultimately did it effectively. Strong civil society movements that hold their governments accountable for international obligations are critical to the implementation of international human rights on a domestic level. This creates a self fulfilling loop in which general acceptance for human rights becomes the norm and thus catalyzes more civil society groups into action. Each of these factors contributed to the efficacy and the impact of human rights as a social media framework amongst the Argentinian population.

Finally, I propose that it actually does not matter whether or not abortion is technically codified into international human rights law. I’ve shown that people and organizations on both sides of the abortion debate use human rights language to frame conversations around abortion. That, in addition to the pro choice movements’ success demonstrates that abortion is recognized as a human right. In the long run, abortion did not require codification status to mobilize hundreds of thousands of people across the country. People of all political and religious affiliations in Argentina were moved by the human rights based language and took to the streets…not in favor of making a norm into a right, but rather in favor of translating an already socially recognized human right into domestic law.
Chapter 6: Conclusions

Ultimately, I propose that the international legal ‘right’ status of abortion had a significant impact on how Argentina’s pro choice and pro life organizations organized themselves online. Because abortion is not technically a codified right in IHRL, it would not have been beneficial for pro choice organizations to simply say “abortion is a human right,” and leave it at that. Instead, they had to over emphasize the existing international human rights that are currently interpreted to include abortion. Explaining how limiting access to abortion is a violation of the right to health, the right ot be free from torture, the right to non discrimination, and other legally codified rights, allowed for Argetina’s pro choice movements to ground themselves in a legal framework that superceded their national one. Furthermore, engaging with international human rights law was an impactful medium for these movements to signal to their politicians that Argentina may be held legally responsible for human rights violations if abortion was not legalized. Argentina’s case shows us that when advocating for a right that isn’t codified, it is beneficial to actively engage with international human rights conventions and treaties that have been ratified by the domestic state.

In the same vein, while Argentina’s pro life movements did engage with human rights based language online, they did not feel the need to engage with the international legal framework as often or as crucially as the pro choice organizations. I propose this is the case because abortion was already illegal in Argentina under most circumstances: Argentina’s pro life organizations were fighting to maintain the existing conditions in the country, whereas the pro choice organizations were fighting to change them. My research illustrates that national level
positive change in Argentina required both the belief in, and active engagement with domestic and international structures. While the claim to human rights was evident and valid, the pro life groups simply did not engage efficiently with both the domestic and the international legal systems. Furthermore, I propose that the pro life organizations were engaging with human rights language as a defense mechanism against the pro choice groups, rather than an offensive tactic against the domestic government. This means that they pointed to the ‘right to life’ as a sort of “gotcha” against pro choice groups. The right to life is codified internationally and the right to abortion is not, so it was a way for pro life groups to signal to pro choice groups that their position holds ultimate superiority. However, while valiant, the pro life movements’ efforts to ground themselves in international law fell short and ultimately ended in failure.

Given the relatively limited time frame for the completion of this research, I believe that my thesis sufficiently argues how human rights was such an impactful framework amongst women’s rights organizations in Argentina. If allotted more time, I believe this research could be bolstered with interviews from pro choice and pro life activists in Argentina. While I initially intended to conduct interviews, I was unable to reach any of the activists that I contacted online. In order to strengthen my arguments, I would find it beneficial to interview the social media directors and account owners of the movements I researched. Furthermore, I believe that it would be interesting to hear the perspective of regular Argentinian citizens who engage with these accounts on social media. If given the opportunity, I would ask them about their experiences following the abortion debate online and why certain posts either resonated or did not resonate with them. It is undeniable that I discovered how Argentina's pro choice and pro life movements engaged with the international legal framework in different ways and to different successes;
however, my research falls short of truly understanding the point of view of the followers of the accounts.

Furthermore, I believe that it would be incredibly interesting for future researchers to address the same questions in a different culture and political context. As I point out, one of the significant reasons that the human rights framework was so impactful in Argentina was significantly due to the country’s growing domestic support for international law. Would the same discoveries be found if this study were conducted in another Latin American country who recently legalized abortion, such as Uruguay and Colombia? What about in a country with a well established distaste for the international human rights legal structure, such as the United States of America?

Regardless, I believe this work is exceptionally significant because it is one of the first studies to research the implications of how Argentina’s pro choice and pro life movements used social media as a medium to engage with international human rights law. Furthermore, I assess how this impacted the domestic and international status of abortion. My research explicitly analyzed the connection between abortion’s status as a human rights norm and the success of Argentina’s abortion movements. I argue this is rather noteworthy because it has future implications for the future of online human rights advocacy when the right in question is still being catalyzed. Social media provides a means for political activists to reach hundreds of thousands of citizens with a single click. Furthermore, the international human rights framework provides a medium for organizations to ground their advocacy in legal legitimacy. As international human rights law becomes more accepted worldwide, and as advances in technology are made more accessible, I believe the intersection between the two will become
more and more prevalent. Ultimately, my research provides a considerable step in understanding the directions that intersection will take.

(11,176 words)
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Appendix

Images referenced in this paper:

1.1 (a) Examples of Pro-Choice Groups engaging with ‘rights-based language’

![Figure 4: Screenshot from the section of Catholics for Choice’s Website titled, “Strategic Lines”](image)

Relevant translation: “Advocacy to guarantee the current regulatory frameworks and move towards the correct application of the law on abortion…Activism and social mobilization to defend women's rights.”
Figure 5: Screenshot from the section of *The Collective Apostasy Movement*'s website titled "What is Apostasy?"

Relevant translation: “Apostasy is your right. Let them not speak in your name!”

Figure 6: Screenshot from the homepage of the *Lesbianas y Feministas* website

Relevant translation: “Lesbians and Feminists for the Right to Information”
Figure 7: Screenshot from the Health Professionals for the Right to Decide website
Relevant translation: “Training actions aimed at all health professionals who wish to be trained as legal and safe abortion providers, from a human rights and gender perspective…protection of those health professionals prosecuted for guaranteeing rights, specifically regarding legal abortion.”

Figure 8: Screenshot from the Socorra Rosa Instagram page, @socenredarg, posted May 25, 2021
Translation: “The right to abortion is law throughout the entire healthcare system.”
Figure 9: Screenshot from the “Who are we” section of the Campaign’s website

Relevant translation: “We assume a commitment to the integrity of Human Rights, and we defend the right to abortion as a just cause to recover the dignity of women and with them, that of all human beings.”
1.1 (b) Examples of Pro-Life Groups engaging with ‘rights-based language’

Figure 10: Screenshot from the *Unidos Por las Dos Vidas* Instagram account, @unidos_por_las_dos_vidas posted July 5th, 2018. Translation: “there is no right to kill, what exists is the **right to life**.”

Figure 11: Screenshot from the Instagram account @fans_de_lupe_batallan, posted May 30th, 2021. Translation: "**Respect human rights.** It's not an option, it's a must.”
Figure 12: Screenshot from the *Abogados x Vida* Instagram account, @abogadosporlavidasantafe, posted May 21st, 2021

Relevant Translation: *The fundamental right to conscientious objection & its regulation*

Figure 13: Screenshot from the Live Action Argentina Instagram account, @Live.action.argentina, posted February 15th, 2022.

Translation: *Girls just want to have the right to live*
Figure 14: Screenshot from Unidad ProVida’s Instagram account @unidadprovida, posted November 20th, 2020.
Translation: “Girls and boys have the right to be born”

Figure 15: Screenshot from the Instagram account @valores.vida.familia, posted January 15th, 2021.
Translation: “Living is a right, not a privilege to be loved”
Figure 21: Screenshot from the Unidad ProVida Instagram account @unidadprovida, posted December 26th, 2020.
Translation: “Abortion is a violation of International Human Rights”

1.1 (c) Examples of Pro-Choice Groups specifically referencing IHRL

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<td>En 2018, el Congreso argentino debatió sobre cómo legislar el aborto por primera vez desde 1921. Fue un proceso histórico íntimo. Durante tres meses, 845 expositoras presentaron sus conocimientos y opiniones en los plenarios de comisiones y en las sesiones de la Cámara de Diputados y el Senado. Los argumentos de salud pública y de derecho a la salud ocuparon un lugar central en este debate. Con las presentaciones en 2019 del proyecto de ley de la Campaña nacional por el derecho al aborto legal, seguro y gratuito y en 2020 del proyecto del poder ejecutivo nacional, REDAAS entendió la necesidad de actualizar estos argumentos a la luz de la experiencia y evidencias recogidas por los países que han profundizado sus políticas o han realizado cambios jurídicos sustantivos para ampliar el derecho al aborto seguro.</td>
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Figure 16: Screenshot from a December 2020 blogpost on The Center for Studies on State & Society's Website.

Relevant Translation: In 2018, the Argentine Congress debated how to legislate abortion for the first time since 1921…The arguments of public health and the human right to health occupied a central place in this debate.

Figure 17: Screenshot from the Health Professionals for the Right to Decide Instagram account @RedSaludxelDerechoADecidir, posted on December 28th, 2020.

Relevant translation: “The right to health, as well as the right to abortion, are human rights founded on Human Dignity and protected by the National Constitution and International treaties that have constitutional hierarchy, to which Argentina subscribes. Argentina, as a State party to the United Nations Organization, has received fourteen recommendations since 1999 to guarantee the safe practice of abortion in girls and women, as well as access to Sexual and Reproductive Health programs and to Comprehensive Sexual Education. We insist that forcing a person to gestate and give birth is torture. The criminalization of abortion implies gender discrimination and affects equal rights in the field of health, life and autonomy. We affirm that violence against women and other corporalities constitutes a violation of human rights and fundamental freedoms.”
Necesitamos un Código Penal que respete los derechos humanos y no que los vulnere

Desde la Campaña Nacional por el Derecho al Aborto Legal, Seguro y Gratuita, repudiamos enérgicamente la maniobra dilatoria y regresiva en términos de derechos humanos del Poder Ejecutivo Nacional que, en un nuevo intento por condicionar nuestros derechos sexuales y reproductivos, envió al Congreso de la Nación un proyecto de reforma del Código Penal que implica no solo un desconocimiento de la normativa internacional en materia de OD, HH, vigente, sino también un grave retroceso en relación con el debate social del 2018 y la media sanción de nuestro proyecto de ley de interrupción voluntaria del embarazo (IVE).

Sabiendo esta iniciativa del Poder Ejecutivo Nacional busca modificar varios artículos, desde la Campaña nos detenemos solamente en analizar aquellos que se relacionan con nuestros derechos sexuales y reproductivos, específicamente, con la interrupción legal del embarazo (ILE) los artículos 35, 86, 87 y 88 del CP.

El proyecto de modificación sigue una línea punitiva e incorpora como delito la "lesión a la persona por nacer" (artículos 95, 96 y 97), en su forma dolosa con intención y culpa con ilícito devenir. Este nuevo "delito" le otorga al futuro estado jurídico determinado, ¡pensado y dictado al cuerpo de la mujer o persona con capacidad de gestar, en un intento de equipararla a una persona ya nacida! Esta cuestión ha sido ampliamente discutida, y tanto la Corte Suprema de Justicia de la Nación en el fallo F.J.L., como la Corte Interamericana de Derechos Humanos en la causa Marta Menchón concluyeron que no representa defiende.

La Campaña Nacional por el Derecho al Aborto Legal, Seguro y Gratuito ha reclamado a la Nación y al Poder Ejecutivo Nacional que tomen en cuenta el gran avance social cumplido en el 2018 con el debate en el Congreso de la Nación de la reforma del Código Penal. Incluso, en el año 2018, el Poder Ejecutivo Nacional creó el head office para la campaña "En Marcha el Aborto Legal", y en el mes de abril del 2018, se convocó la Marcha para el Derecho a la Salud Reproductiva, que estuvo conformado por miles de personas en todo el país. En ese momento, el Poder Ejecutivo Nacional, buscando condicionar nuestros derechos sexuales y reproductivos, aprueba una nueva reforma del Código Penal, abre la puerta al arresto domiciliario y a la violación de la intimidad.

Relevant translation: “we strongly repudiate the delaying and regressive maneuver in terms of human rights of the National Executive Power that, in a new attempt to condition our sexual and reproductive rights, sent to the Congress of the Nation a project to reform the Penal Code that implies not only a lack of knowledge of international regulations on human rights the but also a serious setback in relation to the social debate of 2018.”

Figure 19: Screenshot from the Health Professionals for the Right to Decide Instagram account @RedSaludxelDerechoaDecidir, posted on September 27th, 2020.

Translation: “Enshrined rights are difficult to guarantee in the context of this health crisis. It is much more difficult to guarantee a right that is not yet legislated. It’s urgent!”
1.2 (d) Examples of Pro-Life Groups specifically referencing IHRL

Figure 20: Screenshot from the Live Action Argentina instagram account, @Live.action.argentina, posted January 19th, 2021.
Translation: “The same human life, the same human rights”

The caption accompanying this post reads, “All human rights must be systematically protected. The unborn child has rights already recognized from conception in various international treaties and in our Argentine National Constitution. These rights must be respected at all stages of the human person equally.”
1.3 Human Rights alongside Memes, Violence, and Nazism

There is a man exclaiming “ew I stepped in shit.” His shoe reads “el aborto es un derecho humano.” The implication in this meme is that abortion is not a human right and to think so is a “shit” opinion.
Figure 23: Screenshot from the Instagram account, @fans_de_lupe_batallan, posted on January 3rd, 2022.

Translation: “When you were out with your candlelight to pray and accidentally spilled 2 gallons of gasoline #sorrynotsorry.”

A blonde woman is smiling in front of a large fire that has “planned parenthood” photoshopped on top of it. The implication is that the woman in the photo purposefully lit a fire at planned parenthood and claims it was an accident. As noted in section 2.1 (b), this image is posted alongside images referring to human rights.
A puppy is accompanied by the words, “to kill him: cruelty,” while an unborn fetus is accompanied by the words, “to kill him: a right.” The implication of this meme is that it is ironic that the pro-choice movement considers abortion to be a right, while they consider puppy murder to be cruel.
The implication of this meme is that legalizing abortions is as grave of a violation of human rights as Nazism was.

Figure 26: Screenshot from the Instagram account @live.action.argentina, posted on April 24th, 2021.

The meme implies that planned parenthood is worse than Adolf Hitler because Hitler only killed 6 million Jewish people instead of the supposed 7 million babies that planned parenthood has killed.

Figure 27: Screenshot from the Instagram account @unidos_por_las_dos_vidas, posted December 12th, 2020

Translation: "my body, my choice…the fetus is not a human…if he’s not a human, he doesn’t have rights…if he doesn’t have rights, i can kill him.”

The implication of this meme is that pro-abortion activists are similar to Hitler in their violation of human rights.
The Holocaust, Apartheid, and Slavery were all legal in their time too.

The implication of this meme is that abortion will someday be considered as grave of a crime as slavery, The Holocaust, and Apartheid.