

# Argentina's lower house passes bill to allow abortion

Monday 14 December 2020, by [GOÑI Uki](#), [PHILLIPS Tom](#) (Date first published: 11 December 2020).

## Argentina will become only fourth Latin American country where abortion is legal

Argentina is poised to become the first major Latin American country to legalize abortion after legislation was given the green light by lower house.

The bill, which was [submitted last month by the leftwing president, Alberto Fernández](#), was approved on Friday morning by a margin of 131 to 117 votes after a 20-hour debate. It will be voted on by the senate at the end of this month.

The televised announcement of the “*resulta afirmativo*” sparked carnival-like scenes of joy outside Argentina's national congress, where thousands of activists had been anxiously following the marathon session on big screens. One local news website, Infobae, called it “a tsunami of joy”. [Abortion](#) is currently a crime in Pope Francis's homeland in virtually all circumstances.

“I feel really, really excited and happy,” said Mariela Belski, Amnesty International's executive in Argentina, who was among those who had spent the night camped outside congress in Buenos Aires waiting for the news. “It was an amazing night.

“When the bill was passed, everyone was shouting, celebrating, crying,” added Belski, who said the legislation would help to save the lives of impoverished women who undergo illegal and often dangerous procedures in underground clinics or at home.

“This is a victory for the women's movement that's been campaigning for this for many, many years,” said the journalist and campaigner Ingrid Beck, emphasising the importance of the consensus-building effort by pro-choice campaigners and the current Fernández government. “The fact that this bill is sponsored by the government makes all the difference.”

Many of those celebrating wore green masks, the colour that has come to symbolise the pro-choice campaign and women's rights in general in Argentina.

At the other end of the square, in front of congress, anti-abortion campaigners, who wore light blue, voiced disappointment. “We're hopeful the senators won't approve the bill,” one woman was quoted as saying by Infobae. “It's not a rabbit that a woman carries in her womb, it's a human being.”

Elizabeth Gómez Alcorta, Argentina's minister for women, gender and diversity, commemorated the result on Twitter using the widely shared hashtag #QueSeaLey (Let it be Law). “Today we have written a new chapter in our history,” she [wrote](#).

There was also celebration in other parts of Latin America, a predominantly Roman Catholic region where women's rights activists hope that the move could help to accelerate similar legislative changes.

Latin America has some of the world's most restrictive abortion laws, with only three countries – Cuba, Uruguay and Guyana – permitting elective abortions and several, including El Salvador, Nicaragua and Honduras, outlawing them altogether. [Millions of illegal and often unsafe procedures](#) are conducted in Latin America each year.

“This is a really important decision, not just for Argentina but for the whole of Latin America,” said Debora Diniz, a prominent reproductive rights activist from Brazil, where terminations are outlawed for all but a few circumstances involving rape or risk to the mother's life. Even then, it is sometimes far from easy. In August, [religious extremists persecuted](#) a 10-year-old Brazilian girl who was trying to undergo a legal abortion after being raped, allegedly by her uncle.

Diniz said the size and regional influence of Argentina, which has a population of 45 million, meant that the “utterly innovative” decision would have a “contagion” effect. “I haven't the slightest doubt [other countries could follow Argentina's lead],” Diniz said.

Argentina's feminist movement has spent decades pushing for change, with an attempt to decriminalise abortion failing to clear the senate in 2018. But the pro-choice “green wave” received a boost in October 2019 when [Fernández was elected](#) and pledged to place LGBTQ and women's rights at the heart of his administration.

Belski said Fernández's support would be critical in getting the bill, which decriminalises abortions up to 14 weeks, past the senate.

A similar bill, which the then president Mauricio Macri said he personally opposed, cleared the lower house but [was rejected](#) by the senate in August 2018 amid [intense pressure from the Catholic church](#).

“This project is absolutely different because this project was produced by the president – he sent it to congress ... because he knew he was going to win,” Belski said.

“This is a Peronist and we know Peronists never put forward a project they know will be defeated,” she added, pointing to the fact that Argentina's vice-president, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, was the senate president.

A source at the Casa Rosada presidential palace told the Guardian that the senate would probably vote on the bill in the final days of December.

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