Tanya Domi:
Hi, this is Tanya Domi. Welcome to The Thought Project recorded at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, fostering groundbreaking research and scholarship in the arts, social sciences, and sciences. In this space, we talk with faculty and doctoral students about the big thinking and big ideas generating cutting edge research, informing New Yorkers and the world.

Tanya Domi:
Joining us today is Brenna McCaffrey, a PhD candidate in anthropology at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. Her research broadly explores the interaction of medical technologies, feminisms, and biomedicine within the fields of sexual and reproductive health. Her dissertation: “All Aboard the Abortion Pill Train: Activism, Medicine, and Reproductive Technologies in the Republic of Ireland” examines the impact of abortion pills on the legalization of abortion in Ireland in 2018. The successful legalization of abortion in Ireland in 2018 is one of the many recent shifts in the global debates over the role of reproductive freedom in modern societies. McCaffrey followed these changes through politics, activism, and medicine, over a three-year period. She homes in on the abortion pill as a medical and pharmaceutical technology that sat at the nexus of Ireland's abortion debates. Before legalization, activists in Ireland facilitated access to illegal abortion pills, aided by transnational feminist organizations that advocated for self-managed abortions.

Tanya Domi:
While conducting research in Ireland, she began to make videos on the social media app TikTok to spread information about the history, safety, and logistics of self-managed abortion in the United States. After the passage of Senate Bill 8, the Texas law which would ban all abortions after fetal cardiac activity can be detected, she began to receive many comments and messages from young people in Texas seeking resources and information about self-managed abortion. She is now outlining her second research project to examine the organizations who advocate for self-managed abortion in the face of rising abortion restrictions in the United States, as well as the informal networks on places such as social media apps that facilitate information and access to these medications.

Welcome to The Thought Project Brenna McCaffrey.

Brenna McCaffrey:
Thank you having me.

Tanya Domi:
So how did you get interested in Ireland's fight for legal abortions?

Brenna McCaffrey:
I actually started out in the U.S., and then went to Ireland, and then came back to the U.S. So, a long time of thinking about this issue of abortion rights. I became aware that Ireland had a ban on abortion when I was in college in New York. It was around 2011 when a lot of the restrictions that we’re now seeing come to head were starting to be introduced in U.S. legislatures and was concerned for what might happen. So, I started to look around at the rest of the world to see what feminist activists were doing under worse conditions, so that we could be in preparing activism in the United States to do similar things. I'm of Irish descent, so finding out that Ireland had this ban really felt close to home for me. So, I became very interested in what feminist activism was doing around that issue in Ireland. So,
have been really following it from 2012 when a major event happened in Ireland related to abortion, which is the death of Savita Halappanavar. She was an Indian woman who died due to a denial of an abortion in Galway in 2012. And that really galvanized the activism going forward and really helped culminate in the legal change that happened in 2018.

Tanya Domi:
Very interesting. And of course, I thought you would be Irish with your surname McCaffrey. Ireland, like America, until Roe was made a constitutional right to access safe and legal abortion through the first trimester. Ireland had banned and criminalized abortion initially all the way back to 1861.

Tanya Domi:
And over the years, there were other actions taken as well, probably tweaking that original law, just like what happened in America as well. And until the referendum came before the Irish public, where they voted in a landslide 66.4% affirmatively approving abortion rights. In your research, you report that Irish women were forced into reproductive tourism through the necessity of getting access to an abortion outside of Ireland. Many times, going to England. And then what changed the game it seems in many ways, as you plot out and explain in your research, abortion pills became available. Why did this radically reconfigure possibilities for abortion access in Ireland? Tell us that story, because it really is pretty dramatic in my view.

Brenna McCaffrey:
Well, one thing I think is very important to point out is the ban that was put in place in 1983, which came to be known as the Eighth Amendment was a reaction to Roe v. Wade, was a reaction of conservative Irish politicians afraid of what could happen if feminism reached their shores in that way. So, there’s a lot of cross Atlantic connections there. And that was a complete and total ban essentially on abortion since 1983 in Ireland.

Brenna McCaffrey:
So, from that point, and even before that point because it was still illegal under the English Offences Against the Person Act, which had been in place since 1861. From the point when travel became an option essentially, women in Ireland had been traveling to England yes to get abortions, but also to escape persecution as single parents, single mothers. People who were otherwise seen as sinful in the Catholic world that they were living in. So that reproductive tourism was a long-standing history as it is in a lot of other places, especially in other countries where borders are a lot easier to cross.

Brenna McCaffrey:
I think what’s very specific in the Irish situation, Ireland is an island. So, you have to cross a sea to get anywhere else where abortion might be available. So, of course it first was just getting the boat from Dublin to Liverpool, which is a very short little ferry ride. And as soon as the clinics in England started realizing how many Irish women they were seeing, they actually set up their clinics to accommodate them. They made specific early in the morning appointments for them so that they could come in and get the procedure done and have enough time to recover to catch the ferry back the same day. So, I looked at archive research that showed these advertisements from the 1970s and '80s specifically targeting Irish women with Marie Stopes clinics, which are kind of the dominant clinic in England.

Brenna McCaffrey:
So that travel was a long-standing paradigm. And of course, once cheap overseas flights became available through Ryanair where you can get a $60 flight to London, you, we now saw women flying from Ireland to London, Manchester, and sometimes Amsterdam, sometimes France. So, different places that had access to abortion.

Brenna McCaffrey:
So, because that was a dominant mode of access, it also really shaped how the activists were enacting their protests against the ban, because it was symbolic of the exile of Irish women and of the state kind of failing Irish women and forcing them into shame and silence. So, a lot of the activism involved taking that boat ride and sharing information about abortion in activist protest ways to show we’re being forced to do this. Lots of us every day are being forced to take this boat. So activist groups would take the boat and be chanting coming into Dublin Harbor and calling attention to that.

Brenna McCaffrey:
So, what began to change in, I located this shift right around 2000, which is when Rebecca Gomperts who created Women on Waves, which was a project to assist women in countries with full abortion bans by providing them abortions aboard her ship in international waters where no laws were controlling.

Tanya Domi:
Very interesting.

Brenna McCaffrey:
So, she wanted to make her first trip to Ireland because she knew that was one of the places with a very strict ban. And of course, it brought on a lot of counter protests of pro-life protests. Really upset that this woman, this foreign European doctor was coming to take Irish women out into the sea and perform these abortions.

Brenna McCaffrey:
What was interesting is that at the time, the discourse was, "I can't believe she's doing these surgeries on a boat." But Dr. Gomperts was actually providing medication abortion with the pills Mifepristone and Misoprostol, which had become throughout the 1990s a pretty dominant form of access to abortion in places like Britain and earlier even in places like France and Sweden and other European countries. So that was growing already and certainly was very little known in Ireland, but that was the first time that I think the shift started to happen. And what's really important there is instead of Irish women and being exiled to another state, abortion came to them. So, them being kind of stuck on an island, this paradigm of being exiled kind of flipped on its head.

Brenna McCaffrey:
Women on Waves shut down a few years later and decided to become a telemedicine site called womenonweb.org, and to send abortion pills to anyone in countries with abortion bans through the mail, after a consultation online with Dr. Gomperts. And that launched in 2005, and that really started the shift in Ireland.

Brenna McCaffrey:
So activist groups going into I think the early 2010s is really where we see them paying more attention to it. Activist groups both in Northern Ireland and in the Republic of Ireland we’re seeing that this was an option that they could be ordering pills through Women on Web, even if they weren’t currently pregnant to have pills on hand for when a friend gets in trouble. And activist groups started to organize these into formal and informal networks of access.

Brenna McCaffrey:
By the time we get to 2014, which is where I locate the start of abortion pill protests, the pills were no longer just being used in these secret networks of a wait access for those who could not travel, but were also being used as a way to call attention to the fact that the Irish law was not going to hold because women and people were having abortions anyway.

Tanya Domi:
So let me just ask you a couple things about that, because I thought that was a really interesting part of your research where you say that the pills were not only for access. But in terms of organizing, they changed to protests, pills as protest. And you also write that this protest activism that was organized was used to educate people and to provoke the authorities. Became a process of awareness raising and also became a performative form of protest. And then it sort of morphs into technologies of access and protest as well. Can you talk about that? That’s very different I think from the American experience.

Brenna McCaffrey:
Yeah. So, I use the term technologies of protest to talk about specifically how abortion pills became used symbolically in protest. So, this term can also be used to talk about any activist group that uses some object or technology that had previously been used only as a way to access something. A lot of times, this has to do with the realm of healthcare or disability rights. But something that really essentially created to help people access something, but then that thing is turned into a symbolic and important part of the public protests.

Brenna McCaffrey:
So, this is what started happening in Ireland. In 2014, a group of Irish feminists ran an abortion pill train. They got on a train from Dublin to Belfast where a bunch of activists that they knew had ordered abortion pills online. They met in the train station, handed over the pills, went back to Dublin, and came off of the train with this giant banner advertising Women on Web. "Here's how you get abortion pills at home." And then a bunch of the activists, including a politician who was in office at the time took a Mifepristone pill in front of media so that it was really clear that these are available, and these are safe. It’s not a scary thing, and that people can use them.

Brenna McCaffrey:
Now that was the first use of abortion pills in a symbolic way. And it was later taken up. These Irish activists did it again as a bus. They've done it as a drone. They've done it in a lot of creative ways. But then we saw activists in South Korea do a very similar thing. And now we are seeing the very beginnings of the same paradigm of abortion pills in protest happening in the United States, which I think is very telling of where we are with the abortion access in the United States. And also very exciting, because it can help to reinvigorate activism that has been going on for a long time and might not be working. So, when you have new creative ideas for protests, it can really shake things up.
Tanya Domi:
So full disclosure, I have been in the women's movement in the United States. And I've been a very, very strong critic of the reproductive rights organizations. And there was an action taken in 2012 by the Virginia governor who signed a bill that said any woman who's going to get an abortion has got to get a transvaginal ultrasound. And there was a reaction to that that was atypical. It was apart from the national organizations. And women surrounded the building of the legislature and said, "We are not leaving until you change this law." And they in fact were ultimately successful. And I have to say as much regard as I have for Cecile Richards and other women that have led these organizations, they never engaged in civil disobedience. And we continue to lose case after case, and the courts in America chipping away at Roe over all these years.

Tanya Domi:
And I think now, the emergence of gen Zoomers and Millennials, I believe they're not going to put up with it. I think we're at a turning point, and I agree with you. I just want to say that I'm affirming what you've said about this new emergence of activism in the United States. So, you also go on to say that these mass demonstrations became acts of destruction and disruption of everyday life and routines. And this is how they garnered the public's attention. Is it not?

Brenna McCaffrey:
Exactly. So, one thing that's important about abortion pill protests is that they're very distinct from using abortion pills only as a method of access. So, when they're only being used as a method of access, it's really a direct-action project to get people what they need in the moment, to serve those who are most vulnerable.

Brenna McCaffrey:
Bringing it into protests really is about disrupting the norm, making people react, making people disgusted and making people curious. So, it's very performative and really along the lines of the social movement tenants of civil disobedience, and protest as performative.

Brenna McCaffrey:
Which I think was also why, and I write about this as well. It became a point of contention that the Irish feminist movement did not as a whole support these protests. There was a lot of inner discussion of, "Is this the best way to go about getting more supporters for our cause and spreading this information? Or is it going to do more harm than good?"

Brenna McCaffrey:
I think we always see activist groups where there's always someone who's a little more on the extreme side. And they always help to really nudge everyone in that direction, whether or not they fully go in that direction. But that was certainly what the abortion pill protest in Ireland did. It really disrupted the norm not only in Ireland as a whole as a culture, but within the pro-choice movement there.

Tanya Domi:
That makes sense that there would be a divergence of opinions, and the tactics are always open to debate. I don't care what movement it is. You also talk about bearing witness, the idea of bearing witness in these protests. It's really an act of solidarity. Isn't it?
Brenna McCaffrey:
Yes. Part of the performance in a lot of those protests, actually in the earlier travel protest as well was really to show, "This many Irish people per day are taking this boat feeling sick and miserable, and you're letting it happen." So, to really take something that was silenced and pushed down out of sight, and to put it up into the light and say, "You think this is an abortion free country. You think you're protecting life, but this is what you're really doing. You're taking this girl who lives in your small village, and you're making her go through this experience."

Brenna McCaffrey:
So, both with travel and with the fact that people were using abortion pills, which was an improvement in a lot of ways. It was a lot cheaper. It was a lot easier for people who needed to hide that they were getting an abortion. But it also was something that people felt very scared because of the criminalization that was kind of hanging over their heads at the time. So it wasn’t that just the fact of going through medication abortion was inherently scary. But going through it under the legal conditions and political conditions in Ireland at the time made it that much more scary. So, by bringing it out into the light, by taking those pills in front of the media, in front of courthouse, in front of politicians, it was really a part of that kind of bearing witness and bringing things into the light.

Tanya Domi:
So, it would've been very hard for them to make arrests. Were people arrested for taking the pills?

Brenna McCaffrey:
None of the activists in public protests were ever arrested. There's a funny story the activists often tell, which is when they were doing the abortion pill bus, a police officer came up to them. And they were terrified because they had abortion pills on the bus. They weren't sure if they were about to get arrested. And the officer just said, "You're parked in front of this no parking zone. Could you go down the street? There's free parking in front of the church." So, they ended up in front of a Catholic church on the advice of the police officer-

Tanya Domi:
Of the police officer.

Brenna McCaffrey:
However, what did happen was a lot of people involved in direct action access were disrupted. There were at least three specific raids of the homes of activists who were known or alleged to have been involved in abortion pill networks. And of course, those people I think knew that was a risk they were taking on. But what that really did that was harmful was add more fear to the people who were not part of the activism or were just trying to get something that they needed for themselves, or their daughter needed, or whoever. And also, it sometimes disrupted the flow of abortion pills into Ireland.

Brenna McCaffrey:
Because again, we have this island. There's no way to sneak it in other than through the mail. It's always crossing this very harsh border. So that's why Northern Ireland became very important in that flow as well, because it was part of the UK. So, there's a little bit less of a stringent border for the pills to cross.
Tanya Domi:
Interesting. So, you mentioned previously the doctor that performed abortions in international waters. What other solidarity within Europe itself? Can you talk about solidarity work and support from Europe for this effort?

Brenna McCaffrey:
Yeah, and it was I would say also beyond Europe. I mean, I was at the time involved in a group of New York for abortion rights. Ireland is an immigration center. There are more Irish American and Irish people-

Tanya Domi:
Here in New York. Yes.

Brenna McCaffrey:
Exactly. So, I think the diaspora, it was a very important part of making a sort of international effort and pressure on Ireland to make a change. And also then thinking on a more legislative bent, the European Court of Human Rights making a number of rulings saying that Ireland was infringing on the human rights of people who needed abortion and kind of suggesting, harshly suggesting, "You need to make a change to this law or else you'll be found in contempt of the Convention of Human Rights, the European Convention-

Tanya Domi:
Human rights. Yes.

Brenna McCaffrey:
So that pressure also helps. I think very much again, whereas in 1983 and 1992 which were important crisis moments for abortion in Ireland, it was very much this insular. This is our Catholic nation. We're dealing with it internally, but this is very much Ireland as part of the international community, as part of the European community. And that really helped to make the change. When Savita died in 2012, the vigils that popped up, I mean there was a vigil in London. There was a vigil in Brussels, in New York, in her hometown in India. So that was also something that helped it to get international media attention that maybe wouldn't have gotten if it was just this blip in something that happened in Ireland. But because there were people who showed up so massively in condemning this tragedy that happened, that helped to keep the pressure on Ireland as well just socially through the media.

Tanya Domi:
I remember her death. I remember the action around the world on her death and the attention it brought to the issues. I wanted to ask you, of course the Roman Catholic church is a dominating institution within Ireland historically. By this moment going into the 2000s and as you approach the referendum, was there a church that really didn't dominate as it previously did over the years? Or how much influence did it really carry in attempting to refute this movement?

Brenna McCaffrey:
I would say there was some movement away from the church. And at the same time, there were ways that it really kept a hold on people. One really important thing was that in 2015, Ireland legalized gay
marriage by popular vote. So that was already a knock to the church. And that was what people continuously said to me when I was doing research, that the church had been knocked down during that. That it was clear that they did not have this dominance over the religious and spiritual nature of Irish people anymore. But there was also, I think there's such a strong sense of cultural religiosity, cultural-

Tanya Domi:
Yes.

Brenna McCaffrey:
There are many people in Ireland wouldn't consider themselves Catholic and adhering strictly to guidelines but do find a lot of comfort in being in a Catholic church and saying certain prayers. It's also in very rural places, community centers.

Brenna McCaffrey:
So, in the lead up to the referendum, a lot of ... I think it was a bishop. I will have to check that. But someone high up in the church instructed the individual parishes to tell their congregations the week ahead of the vote that if you were a good Catholic, you would not vote yes for this overturning the abortion ban. And a lot of people that I spoke to even who were very involved in activism felt terrified when that happened, because they knew how much even if someone didn't think, "Okay, this is a sin under God," that this person held a lot of respect in their community. And they were afraid of how people would see them as part of the community if they didn't adhere to those rules. There were also people who stood up and said absolutely not to the priests when that happened. So, there's kind of both happening at the same.

Tanya Domi:
Sure. But in the end, almost 66.5% of people voted for abortion rights. So that kind of tells you where the church actually sat in that referendum. What's also unfortunate though, very unfortunate and not in Ireland, but what now you're seeing is this rise of autocracy throughout the world. And now to EU member states, Poland and Croatia have banned abortion. And Russia did too. And that happened in Russia a while ago. No surprise there with Putin and his progressive party being anti-gay. And of course, really coming down hard on women as well. And I'm actually concerned about that in the areas of Europe that are not EU members yet like Bosnia, Serbia, places like that, where you've got a real retrenchment. And you also have a rise of illiberalism. This remains a concern, and we'll just have to see where it goes. But it's not a good development to see what's happened in Poland and Croatia. For sure.

Brenna McCaffrey:
Yeah. The other thing I'd say about that that's very interesting is there's a number of scholars tracing this anti-gender campaigns is often how it's phrased, which-

Tanya Domi:

Brenna McCaffrey:
Exactly. Which increasing is not just the Catholic church. The Pope in Rome saying something. It's now Catholics, and evangelicals, and Orthodox, different Briton groups coming together under this pro-life, pro-family movement. Mobilizing not just to put abortion bands in place, but also mobilizing to make being transgender illegal.

Tanya Domi:
Absolutely.

Brenna McCaffrey:
So again, rather than thinking of Ireland as this insular Catholic anomaly of Europe, it's actually looking at it in the context of this growing pan-European pro-life movement that's actually very scary in the light of some of the changes that are happening in the countries you mentioned.

Tanya Domi:
Absolutely. And one of those groups that's intimately involved is the World Congress of Families based in Illinois. And it's on the Southern Poverty Law Center hate group list. I actually track that in my research area, which is the Balkans.

Tanya Domi:
So, it's a very bizarre time, and Orban is holding sway against banning gender studies in Central European University that was forced to move to Vienna from Budapest. And a friend of mine was actually a department chair head of gender studies in Central European University. And now he's effectively banned in all Hungarian universities. And this is very much focused on LGBTI, and it's very alarming to see this evolve. But now, not only have you done this research on Ireland. This is your dissertation. Is that correct?

Brenna McCaffrey:
My first publication should be out in the next year.

Tanya Domi:
That's fantastic. Congratulations. But the second project that you're now engaged on is self-managed abortions in Texas since the passage of Senate Bill 8, which effectively banned abortions in the state of Texas. And your research was reported in the Dallas Morning News, which is how I found you Brenna.

Brenna McCaffrey:
Yeah. And I'll just make a correction. I wouldn't call that specifically a research project. I think that really grew out of my activism, having seen what happened in Ireland for so long. And actually, being a researcher and not being an activist, I felt very adrift from U.S. politics when I returned home. And then of course the pandemic happened.

Brenna McCaffrey:
So, while I was home in pandemic lockdown, I joined the Tik-Tok app. And there was a lot of here's some feminist ideas floating around. And I realized there was no information about abortion pills, which I thought was something that was important to spread information about just the same way those Irish
activists were doing. It's something that I also am passionate about as an activist. And I was also of course aware that we were going to increasingly need them as a mode of access in the United States.

Brenna McCaffrey:
So, I started making videos there, and then got a lot of attention to the videos in the aftermath of Senate Bill 8 passing in Texas. And then of course the Mississippi law in the last couple of months. And in the end of 2021, those videos which I just put out there to see if anyone would-

Tanya Domi:
Reaction. Yeah.

Brenna McCaffrey:
Yeah. They became a source of information for people who were in dire need in Texas. So, I started hearing from people through comments and messages through the app of young people in Texas who were terrified and confused and didn't know where to turn. I'm certainly not the-

Tanya Domi:
You're not officially, officially researching. But it had enough to interest that the Dallas Morning News wanted to report on it. And you are a medical anthropologist. So, you do have some credibility here. What were some of the reactions that the article says that people were asking you about resources? Where should they go? How can they get help? Is that the general genre of these questions?

Brenna McCaffrey:
Yes. And this has kind of led me into this next research project, which is looking at abortion pill activism in the United States growing out from what I learned from the people on Tik-Tok. Which yes, people are asking for information on how can I get access to these pills? How can I get them as cheaply as possible? How do I know that they're safe? And increasingly, we have a lot of telemedical options especially with the changes that were brought by COVID where people can see a doctor over a Zoom call and get them in certain states. But as the pro-life, anti-abortion movement learned about this, they immediately started enacting bans on mailing pills, which luckily the FDA recently-

Tanya Domi:
That's right.

Brenna McCaffrey:
So that's actually a good thing, but in terms of it being a universal solution to the possible loss of Roe v. Wade, official telemedicine certainly wasn't. So, there's sort of this self-managed abortion movement arising to spread information about these pills, which are incredibly safe. Which you are able to get through a lot of different avenues. And there are formal organizations. One that I often point people to is plancpills.org, which is a report card on online sources of abortion pills. Which there are a lot, and a lot of them are connected to Indian pharmacies, European pharmacies, Russian pharmacies. And they look really sketchy, but this organization went through.

Tanya Domi:
They vet them all?
Brenna McCaffrey:
Yeah. They lab tested the pills. So, this is a resource that I think is really crucial for the young people in Texas who think they're living under a complete abortion ban, which isn't true, but it is almost true. Right? And then even for places that don't have official legal bans, where access is just so dire that going to a clinic is not an option for people.

Tanya Domi:
Yeah, like there's one clinic in the two Dakotas. One clinic. I mean, we have huge swaths of rural areas in the United States. So, you have to be really concerned about those people. And didn't the FDA recently rule that you could get access to these pills without a prescription? Is that not, correct?

Brenna McCaffrey:
They ruled that they could be mailed to people.

Tanya Domi:
They could be mailed. Okay.

Brenna McCaffrey:
So that would be to be prescribed to you by a doctor. The other thing is that abortion pills are not available through pharmacies in the United States yet. We're hoping that will change. But they have to go specifically be dispensed from doctors who have a specific license to administer Mifepristone, which for a drug that is 10 times safer than Tylenol is absurd and clearly political. People are fighting that. But right now, the restrictions on how to access them is still very difficult because of the control on doctors and what they can do. So increasingly these sub-legal, sub-medical avenues are becoming important.

Tanya Domi:
Very interesting. And the other tactic by the anti-abortion groups is to, I know that they've done this in the past where they approach pharmacists and say, "Here's a conscious clause. Sign off if you don't agree with issuing this medication to people." And I know that's been one of their tactics as a way to actually stop it at the pharmacy.

Brenna McCaffrey:
And I think we're going to increasingly see that the anti-abortion movement is realizing that clinics are not the only place they can fight. And they are recognizing that there is this medication abortion growth. Because I actually just looked this up before we started talking. This year so far, 12 states have introduced bills to make it mandatory for doctors to tell patients that the abortion pill is reversible, which is not medically true. Which is actually a dangerous procedure that has not been medically vetted. So, there are a number of states where doctors have to legally when giving someone abortion pills, say, "If you change your mind, I can reverse this," even though they cannot.

Brenna McCaffrey:
So, this is kind of the ways that the anti-abortion movement is catching up to how we can use this as a mode of access, which is frightening. But I do still think it's very much going to be a central avenue going forward for access in these restricted states.
Tanya Domi:
So now that you're back here in the as an activist, you're sort of engaged in an informal role as a researcher, we're now faced with the Mississippi case, that the Supreme Court of the United States has taken up. And in their oral arguments, most of the court Watchers are shaking their heads. And they're saying this does not look good. And that they have already demonstrate this court, this new 6-3 court dominated by the conservatives, that they're likely to ignore precedent law that is Roe. And they are likely to overturn it. What are your thoughts about that?

Brenna McCaffrey:
Yes. Well, I'm certainly not a legal scholar, but I can-

Tanya Domi:
Of course. Of course. I'm not asking you about the law. I'm asking you about the idea that Roe could go away in June.

Brenna McCaffrey:
Yeah. And that's certainly what activists are prepping for and are expecting. They are expecting a decision to come that is not going to uphold Roe, that will either completely overturn it or severely undermine it. And preparing for that moment when that goes into place. There are 21 states right now that have laws in place ready to go, that would immediately make abortion essentially illegal in those states. There are a few states that have protections to the right to abortion, but it's fewer than those that have these restrictions. So, they have 12 states with trigger bans in place so that if Roe goes away, these existing laws would kind of come into place to replace.

Tanya Domi:
Immediately. Immediately. Yes.

Brenna McCaffrey:
So that is what the movement, the reproductive rights movement is preparing for. And I think there is a lot of different opinions about how we should best prepare. And this is again where my interest always falls at intergroup fighting. But the conflict between people in this movement who support the same thing, who are all trying to support access and the right to abortion. But how do we go about that? Is really going to be through the law, through laws that will protect the right to abortion? Or is it really going to be through making sure abortion clinics stay open? Or is it really going to be through abortion bills, which is one of the arguments?

Brenna McCaffrey:
So as an activist right now, in the context of the research I have done working to prepare for even more people. The way that I got a lot of people reaching out from Texas when that law went into place. If the same thing happens in 21 states at once, I assume we’re going to have people rushing to Aid Access, which is Rebecca Gompert's U.S. arm, which she started in 2018. So, they provide for free, if you have financial need, abortion pills to anyone in the United States. Right now, because of COVID slowdown of the mail, it's taking two to three weeks to get to people. [inaudible 00:39:13] weeks pregnant is not a time that you can wait. And there's certainly the concern that the demand is going to be so high, that one woman in Amsterdam cannot supply abortion pills for the entirety of the United States. So, there's
really a sense that local groups need to prepare for this in their area and their specific conditions of what they think is going to happen, and make sure we have other avenues of access open.

Tanya Domi:
Well, I would hope some of my friends in Planned Parenthood, I would hope this kind of looks like a military logistic operation from my perspective. And I hope they're pre-positioning pills all over the country in clinics and in other places, so that they're able to help women by providing pills.

Brenna McCaffrey:
I will also say for anyone listening, Aid Access is also providing advanced provision pills. So, you do not have to currently be pregnant. You can fill out a consultation. And as long as you are medically suited to get abortion pills, they can be sent to you to have in your cabinet in case you or someone needs them. And they are good if kept in the right conditions for about 18 months. So, it's one way that people are preparing.

Tanya Domi:
Very interesting. So, my good friend [Mary Ann Hennessy 00:40:30] who's an American friend of mine, who also has an Irish passport and has deep roots in Ireland participated in these protests that led up to the referendum. And she said, "The abortion referendum was part of a whole society realization of how much Ireland had changed, changed its relationship with the church, the state, and with traditional Irishness." She calls on and says America needs a similar process. So, what are your thoughts about that apart from what we've already discussed? What are your thoughts about this anticipated decision we've already discussed? The decision, but what about how people organize around abortion and its access to safe and legal procedures in America?

Brenna McCaffrey:
I want to be able to use what we've learned from watching activism in other places to inform what's going on in the United States. But I do also worry that Ireland is a country of 4 million people, and the United States is-

Tanya Domi:
330 million. Yeah.

Brenna McCaffrey:
So, population, geographic size, demographic makeup, I think it's going to look, that movement is going to look very different. I don't think what happened in Ireland can be directly replicated in the U.S. because we're coming from a different history politically, socially, religiously. Different values. But I do think we will be seeing a fight, and a strong fight, no matter what occurs in the outcome of the Dobbs decision that we're going to continue to see these social changes happening in the way Americans think about and fight for the access to and the right to abortion.

Tanya Domi:
Thanks so much for sharing your research with us and your observations about what is happening not only around the world, but here at home.
Brenna McCaffrey:
Thank you.

Tanya Domi:
Thanks for tuning into The Thought Project. And thanks to our guest Brenna McCaffrey, a PhD candidate in anthropology at the CUNY Graduate Center.

Tanya Domi:
The Thought Project is brought to you with production, engineering, and technical assistance by Kevin Wolfe of CUNY TV. I'm Tanya Domi. Tune in next week.