

Evangelicals and Electoral Politics in Latin America: A Kingdom of This World

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Abstract

Why are religious minorities well represented and politically influential in some democracies but not others? Focusing on evangelical Christians in Latin America, I argue that religious minorities seek and gain electoral representation when a) they face significant threats to their material interests and worldview, and b) their community is not internally divided by cross-cutting cleavages. Differences in Latin American evangelicals' political ambitions emerged as a result of two critical junctures: episodes of secular reform in the early twentieth century and the rise of sexuality politics at the turn of the twenty-first. In Brazil, significant threats at both junctures prompted extensive electoral mobilization; in Chile, minimal threats meant that mobilization lagged. In Peru, where major cleavages divide both evangelicals and broader society, threats prompt less electoral mobilization than otherwise expected. The multi-method argument leverages interviews, content analysis, survey experiments, ecological analysis, and secondary case studies of Colombia, Costa Rica, and Guatemala.