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Between The Cross and the Sword: The (De) Criminalization of Abortion in Latin America

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ABSTRACT.

From the comparative analysis of the cases of Uruguay, Argentina and Brazil, this paper seeks to understand the variations in policies on abortion in Latin America, a region in which the hegemony of the Catholic Church is threatened by the numerical and political advance of evangelicals. Liberalization of voluntary termination of pregnancy is confirmed to be associated with favorable public opinion, low levels of religiosity, gender equality, high physician density and lower rates of social inequality. Moreover, it is identified that the political participation of evangelicals – who use anti-abortion discourse and other moral issues (like anti-gender discourse and LGBT rights opposition) as a strategy for mobilizing and capitalizing on Christian suffrage – is negatively associated with the decriminalization of the practice.

Keywords: comparative politics; Latin America; abortion; Catholic Church; evangelicals.