

## **Hallah Abu-Atieh**

Mormons and Migration: How do the religious and political identities of Latter-day Saints shape their stance on immigration?

## **Faculty Sponsor**

Dr. Emily Fulmer



## **Abstract**

Despite being a majority Republican constituency, many Latter-day Saints do not endorse the party's views on immigration, as it contradicts key principles set out in religious teachings and texts. However, with recent heightened immigration enforcement and legislation, many LDS followers are looking to the Church for guidance in these unprecedented times but have been met with shifting or ambiguous answers. This analysis seeks to determine how religion influences political attitudes toward immigration among Mormon elites and Mormon laity. Drawing on two foundational frameworks, I first examine the evolving stance of LDS clergy toward migrants before and after President Trump's return to office. I then consider how the absence of a unified message from Church leaders has led to varying positions among Mormon adherents on the matter. I present two confounding factors, missionary experience and the "outsider" effect, as potential reasons swaying LDS members' political views toward non-native populations.

## Introduction

Political Scientists have become increasingly interested in how voters' religious beliefs shape their partisan identification and policy preferences. One group commonly overlooked is the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, or Mormons. One reason for the lack of attention in this area may be that Mormons overwhelmingly self-identify with the Republican Party. According to a 2024 Pew Research Center report, 75% of Mormons identify with or lean toward the Republican Party, compared to 23% who favor the Democratic Party ("Changing Partisan Coalitions," 2024). This lack of diversity among Mormons in terms of their party affiliation makes it difficult for researchers to decipher whether LDS political actions stem from their strongly held religious convictions or partisan cues.

While Mormons represent a significant unified voting bloc of the Republican Party, LDS church teachings and sacred texts regarding immigration do not always align with the strict policies and aggressive tactics of the current administration. With heightened immigration enforcement activity in residential communities, such as the most recent deaths of Renee Good and Alex Pretti by ICE agents in Minneapolis, MN, many Americans are witnessing the impacts of federal policies close to home in real time. Pope Francis himself declared the Trump administration's "plan to deport millions of migrants a 'disgrace' ... and 'major crisis' for the U.S." (McElwee, 2025). Before his passing in April, the pontiff implored "all the faithful of the Catholic Church ...not to give in to narratives that discriminate against and cause unnecessary suffering to our migrant and refugee brothers and sisters" (McElwee, 2025).

In the same vein, many Mormon parishioners are looking to the Church for guidance on how to navigate these unprecedented times and how their faith instructs them to respond. Understanding how Mormon clergy and laity's religious views define their feelings toward current immigration policy is relatively new territory for scholars who study the role of religion in political behavior (Perry, 2015, p.3). For instance, in Luke Perry's 2015 review of the 2014 book *Seeking the Promised Land: Mormons and American Politics* by Campbell, Green, and Monson he points out that their "innovatively researched book is now the centerpiece of a small but growing body of literature on Mormons and American politics (Perry, 2015, p.3). Therefore, newfound conclusions are of interest to party leaders who have come to rely on consistent votes from this constituency in elections.

After explaining my theoretical frameworks, I will apply them to both Mormon elites and Mormon laity, analyze relevant studies, and draw conclusions about how religion has versed LDS attitudes towards immigrants and immigration regulations over time. I expected to find that in the past, when immigration was not such a salient wedge issue, and people had greater autonomy to live freely without

immediate repercussions, Mormon leaders' religious and moral worldviews more directly framed their preferences about the matter. However, today, with the increased pressure of white Christian Nationalist ideology coming from the White House and the substantial social pressures online to conform to their definition of "Americanness," the role of spirituality in political participation among the Mormon clergy has shifted. Among Mormon laity, I anticipated seeing a comparable transition in how religion influences their political outlook. However, I discover that other confounding factors at the congregational level may amplify the leverage of their ethical vantage point on such issues. I conclude my literature review with a prospective look into the future of the LDS Church and recommendations for further research on these topics.

## **Theoretical Frameworks and Hypotheses**

At the heart of my research is the question of how religion shapes political views – something political behavior scholars have attempted to address through various frameworks or approaches. One such framework presupposes that an individual's personal religious experience informs their moral worldview, which in turn delineates their political actions. From this perspective, one might assume that a Mormon's opinion on immigration policy and enforcement would stem from strongly held virtues and norms precipitated by the religious tenets of the LDS Church.

There are some clues in official church statements that might offer insights into how faith underpins personal philosophy regarding attitudes toward immigration. For example, the LDS Church's official published creed, as of January 2025, emphasizes "love, law, and the family unit" as its highest priority, not only as a reflection of its theology but also as a standard for its shared conduct ("Church Reaffirms Immigration Principles," 2025). Platitudes such as "love thy neighbor" and the value placed on the nuclear or extended family speak to their rational and compassionate interpretation of this situation. The LDS are popularly recognized for their care of those in need and their dedication to missionary work abroad through the Gospel. As of 2024, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints reports having spent "\$1.45 billion" on "global humanitarian projects, donations of food and other goods, and services from welfare and self-reliance operations," both domestically and internationally ("Caring for Those in Need," 2024, p.16). With over "6.6 million hours volunteered" and "3,836 humanitarian projects" completed in 2024 alone, Mormon giving is largely unmatched ("Caring for Those in Need," 2024, p.16).

Despite these acts of charity and goodwill, as a faith community broadly, Mormons have shown little outright political support for immigrants since President Trump's second term in office and subsequent crackdown. This choice could be, in part, because the LDS are strictly against infringing upon or breaking

rules and regulations. According to the foundational doctrine of the Church, The Articles of Faith, Mormons strongly “believe in being subject to kings, presidents, rulers, and magistrates, in obeying, honoring, and sustaining the law” (“The Articles of Faith,” n.d.). Such a creed could override their philanthropic approach to caring for undocumented immigrants. Future survey research could examine whether the saliency of these two core LDS beliefs have varying implications on immigration policy attitudes at the congregational level.

A second theoretical framework that political behavior scholars use to understand how religion shapes political actions is to examine the interactive effects of Christian Nationalist ideology. According to Nilay Saiya’s 2025 journal, “The Varieties of American Christian Nationalism,” she defines the term as “a political theology that seeks a privileged place for Christianity in American public life” (Saiya, 2025, p.1). With this model, religion matters politically, not necessarily as a belief system, but as a symbolic identity tied to the nation itself. From this perspective, scholars look for signs that one’s religious identity has become synonymous with “Americanness,” which allows in-groups to create boundaries between who is a “real” American and who is not. President Trump and his administration have embraced and even encouraged a vision of America that divides “real” – white and Christian – Americans from foreigners and immigrants, often referred to as “invaders” (LeVine & Sacchetti, 2023). Through both his in-person speeches and social media posts online, Trump consistently uses inflammatory rhetoric toward immigrants, claiming they are “poisoning the blood” of the country (LeVine & Sacchetti, 2023). The President also famously contended that immigrants “in Springfield, Missouri, [were] eating the dogs, the people that came in, [were] eating the cats. [They were] eating the pets of the people that live there” (Herman, 2024). Beyond that, according to the White House’s 2025 article “President Trump’s Top 100 Victories for People of Faith,” he boasts having brought “back religion in our country,” noting that “for America to be a great nation, we must always be one nation under God,” which exists as a primarily Judeo-Christian value (“President Trump’s Top 100,” 2025).

When applying this framework to the topic of Mormons and immigration attitudes, we might investigate whether the Trump administration’s statements above, which foster a distrust of racial and ethnic minorities, has had an impact on the LDS’ conceptions of and sentiments towards migrants. With the President’s heightened depiction of undocumented foreigners as violent, murderous, criminal “invaders,” it may be that Mormons are feeling pressure to back off their public stance in favor of non-natives and refugees to show their “Americanness.” As a tradition, the LDS faith has long been perceived as non-Christian by other Americans. At a public favorability rate of “15%,” Mormons may feel the need to conform to the white Christian Nationalist definition of what it means to be an American, thus reinforcing their Republican party identification and solidifying the choice to

avoid overt expressions of support for immigrants (“Americans Feel More Positive,” 2023). Coupled with an increased presence on social media and the reality that speaking out or choosing the “wrong” side can lead to further social excommunication in what we know as “cancel culture,” the expectation to stay under the Republican banner becomes more crucial.

Drawing on a religious-moral worldview and an interdimensional Christian Nationalist framework, I develop a line of inquiry to explain the existing dichotomy between the Church’s doctrinal principles and its outward approach to immigration. The interplay of these dynamics has a distinct meaning for every individual Mormon; however, they offer insight into the perceived predictors of how they will likely navigate the matter. With both in-group and out-group implications tied to their actions, the LDS hang in a delicate balance between their spiritual lives and public image.

## **Shifts Among the Mormon Elite**

Among Mormon elites, I argue that there has been a change over time in the way religion has influenced their political beliefs regarding immigrants and immigration policy. This modification is most evident during the period from before President Donald Trump’s first term through his current second term in office. For a more in-depth exploration of this shift, I turn to Robert Welch’s 2024 study, “Strangers and Foreigners or Fellow Citizens with the Saints?” To gain insight into the LDS’s regard for non-native communities, Welch examined all addresses delivered at the Church’s General Conferences from 1851 to 2019 that mentioned immigration, migration, or migrants. He found that from 1850 to about 1940, there were few mentions of these topics; however, most remained relatively favorable toward immigrants and aimed to offer balanced advice guided by the Gospel. Mormon leaders seemed to draw on their origins of alienation in American society and their strongly held commitment to charity to sympathize with the precarious circumstances of many foreigners, reassuring them that the same blessings of the Gospel would come to them as well, regardless of location. This historical precedent is consistent with my hypothesis that their religiously based moral worldview and outsider perspective are more salient when it comes to political interpretation of immigration before Donald Trump.

We start to notice a difference in the language of LDS leadership leading up to President Trump’s first term in 2017, indicating a willingness to directly challenge some of his more anti-immigrant reforms and perhaps an increase in the relevance of their outsider status. After Trump’s reversal of DACA and a series of conflicts at the U.S.-Mexico border, LDS clergy released a statement to demonstrate their ongoing commitment to DACA recipients, also known as “Dreamers”, in their fight for residency and equality. “Dreamers have demonstrated a capacity

to serve and contribute positively to our society, and we believe they should be granted the opportunity to continue to do so” (“Deferred Action for Childhood,” 2018).

While this brief from LDS higher-ups does appear to serve as an early, direct rejection of one of Trump’s anti-immigrant platforms, I reason it is still consistent with their religiously based moral worldview, but perhaps more so derived from their own identity as the “odd man out” in American society. Dreamers, for example, came to the United States as children with no legal status. DACA provided a legal pathway for young people to remain in America, attend school, and work legally. Although not born in the United States, Dreamers obeyed the law and contributed to their community – a distinction other groups of perceived outsiders might logically connect to their own status in society. The Mormon elite, in this case, demonstrated their support for a law that they wanted to remain on the books (i.e., not encouraging lawlessness) and emphasized that a minority group does have the capacity to bring value to the country.

This outcome may indicate the increased prominence of Mormons’ marginal position in the United States, which could potentially lead to greater solidarity with other minority groups subject to federal administrative actions. However, I contend that, instead, political officials, particularly in the Republican Party, are seeking to envelop anti-immigration legislation in white Christian Nationalist ideology, effectively pressuring their co-partisans to comply and conform to maintain their sense of “Americanness.”

Officials in the Church appear to have embraced this approach during Trump’s second term. In January 2025, Donald Trump returned to the presidency after being reelected by American constituents following his loss to Joe Biden in 2020. During the transition, he issued a wave of Executive Orders that attempted to reshape the country and to set forth his conservative agenda, much of which expressed language consistent with Christian Nationalist ideals. For instance, in President Trump’s January 20, 2025, Executive Order entitled “Ending Radical and Wasteful Government DEI Programs and Preferencing,” he sought to overturn Executive Order 13985, “Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government” (“Ending Radical,” 2025). Within a matter of a single signature, President Trump removed the resources and safeguards put in place by the government to protect the advancement of racial and ethnic minority communities in the U.S., which largely includes immigrants. This presidential directive effectively shut down countless diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives across the country in federal departments, schools, businesses, and churches. Beyond that, Trump uses harmful language to describe these programs as “radical” and “wasteful,” which closely aligns with Christian Nationalist jargon and adjoining beliefs (“Ending Radical,” 2025). As a result, many organizations in

the public and private sectors had to make changes overnight to remain in compliance with this standard; otherwise, they faced termination.

Just ten days after the initial Executive Order, the overarching Mormon ministry published a statement titled “Church Reaffirms Immigration Principles: Love, Law and Family Unity.” According to the bulletin, the Latter-day Saints explain that:

- As disciples of Jesus Christ, the following principles guide the Church’s approach:*
- 1. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints obeys the law.*
  - 2. We follow Jesus Christ by loving our neighbors. The Savior taught that the meaning of ‘neighbor’ includes all of God’s children.*
  - 3. We seek to provide basic food and clothing, as our capacity allows, to those in need, regardless of their immigration status. We are especially concerned about keeping families together (“Church Reaffirms Immigration Principles,” 2025).*

This narrative reflects the LDS’s attempt to act in accordance with Trump’s executive orders and national agenda without contradicting them in any way. It feels intentional that the very first point emphasizes that the Church will follow the rules laid out by Trump. Meanwhile, the other priorities generally highlight the LDS’ moral obligation to charitable causes and acts of amity. What is missing from this release is any mention of how this overturning will negatively impact immigrant populations, nor is there a rejection of the “us-vs-them” terminology implemented to promote such changes.

The Mormon elite face a challenging task of remaining true to the church’s orthodoxy and navigating the larger societal perception of their community as “non-Christian” outsiders. This message from 2025 was not only a public declaration, but also a directive for Mormon laity. To them, it connotes a continued dedication to philanthropic efforts whilst providing clear instructions for comply-

## **Shifts among the Mormon Lay Community**

In this section, I examine how religion influences the political behavior of the Mormon lay community. Just as we saw with the LDS leadership, Mormon adherents must balance their secular and non-secular lives as they search for their place in the greater societal context. LDS parishioners strongly identify with the Republican party at a rate of 75%, which endorses a much more explicit angle on immigration than their own church has provided in the previous statements (“Changing Partisan Coalitions,” 2024). In contrast, a wide scope of opinions and responses exists among local Mormon congregations on this matter, with some relying on a religiously based ethical worldview and others on a recommitment to their partisan identity.

This dichotomy, which pits politically minded and religiously minded individuals against one another, has shifted from being solely ideological to manifesting in local interactions among Mormon and migrant populations. The former, rooted in party loyalty, appears among the actions of Brigham Young University as they “shut down its ‘Dreamers’ resource hub for undocumented students [last January], after facing backlash from state leaders who complained that their tithings were being used for illegal immigrants” (Li, 2025). Many white, Republican LDS followers similarly exist on this extreme, showing compassion to individual non-native brothers or sisters in their ward, but simultaneously “condemn[ing] all immigrants” to the general public (Li, 2025).

On the other end of the spectrum are individuals acting under the premise of their religious background and moral obligations. For example, there are Mormons with migration backgrounds who laud the Church for its emphasis on “loving thy neighbor” and on keeping the family together. There are some who are calling for the church to take a clearer stance that outlines ways to keep places of worship a “safe haven for all – including undocumented brothers and sisters” (Kemsley & Stack, 2025). Others, such as Victoria Gomez, a Mormon daughter of a Mexican immigrant family, are calling the LDS’ release on ‘Love, Law, and Family Unity’ “self- contradictory” (Kemsley & Stack, 2025). She argues: “If we really do care about undocumented immigrants, then we cannot be siding with harmful laws” (Kemsley & Stack, 2025).

As an organization, the LDS Church represents over 17.2 million members worldwide, meaning it must cater to this range of ideas if it claims to be emblematic and welcoming to all. In the absence of a strong statement from LDS leaders about how their theology should inform their views about immigration policy, the laity must lean on their own understanding and experiences with migrant communities to govern how they proceed in the face of this ever-evolving social climate.

## **Other Factors of Variation Among LDS Churches**

When investigating whether the average Mormon layperson relies on their religiously based moral worldview or partisan ideology to form an opinion on immigration, we must explore congregational-level features that may amplify or subdue these effects. At the local level, it may depend on the characteristics of the individual’s background in their religious institution. While this manuscript does not offer an exhaustive evaluation of these attributes, in the next segment, I consider two confounding determinants, missionary experience in disadvantaged areas and social identity factors, as positions in which Mormons might develop in-group and out-group ties. It is worth noting that Mormons can overwhelmingly support the

Republican party but not necessarily agree with all of President Trump's ideas. The commentary below aims to address the reasons why they may disagree with said ideas.

### **Missionary Experience**

The first element is LDS missions, in which Mormon men and women between the ages of 18 and 25 “choose to spend between 1.5- and 2-years teaching others about the gospel of Jesus Christ” (“Meet the Mormon Missionaries,” n.d.). Missionaries serve as full-time volunteers who are placed in areas around the world on behalf of the LDS Church to share and represent the word of the Book of Mormon and the Bible. Berinsky, et al analyze how LDS missions and the location of service affect missionaries' policy views toward undocumented immigrants. They interviewed a sample of 1,084 young people before and after their work away from home across diverse locations worldwide. Along with general data gathered for all missionaries, participants also responded to several political and social prompts, whilst also providing their ideological self-placement and partisan identification.

According to Berinsky, et al, “in general, the opportunity of living in a new location pushed all missionaries in a more liberal direction in their immigration-related policy views” (Berinsky et al, 2020, p.23). They found that after their mission, the more tolerant missionaries were those who helped non-native folks in the United States. And the most tolerant missionaries were those serving in American communities with larger Hispanic populations or those assigned to speak a language other than English.

The figure below from Berinsky, et al reflects this outcome with “missionaries who only served in the US [becoming] about 0.07 points more pro-immigrant on policy-relevant questions than those who went abroad, a difference of more than one-third of the standard deviation of the pre-mission scale” (Berinsky et al, 2020, pp.14-15).

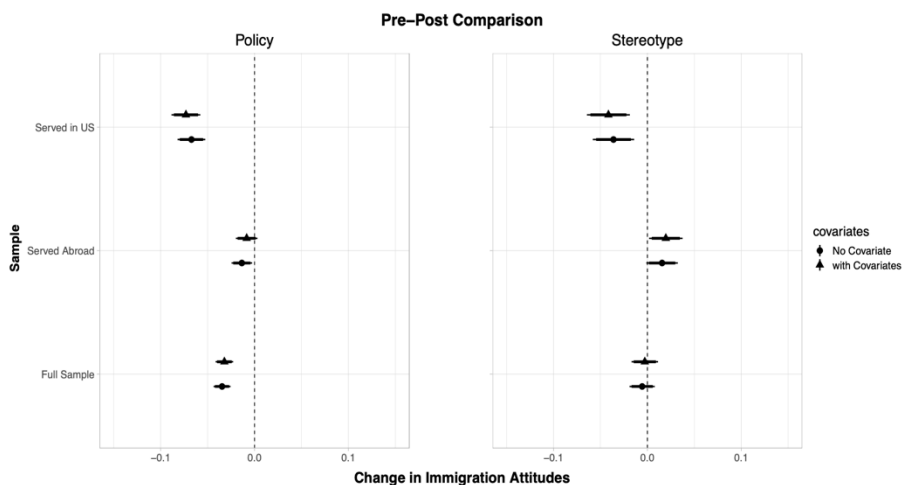


Figure 3

Pre-Post Comparison: Responses to policy-related survey questions. Larger values indicate higher levels of anti-immigrant sentiment. Thicker error bars indicate 90% confidence interval and the thinner ones represent 95% confidence interval.

Source: Berinsky, et al, 2020, p.15

Berinsky, et al demonstrate that a Mormon layperson's context and contact with different cultures affect their political beliefs. They posit that "the experience of living and working with immigrant communities, and in settings where others have positive attitudes about immigrants, induces measurably warmer attitudes toward immigrants that are sustained over time" (Berinsky et al, 2020, p.23). Having the opportunity not only to meet but also to live among and work with the people directly impacted by U.S. immigration policies builds empathy and broadens one's viewpoint.

In conjunction with missionary accounts, there is a significant number of individual members within local congregations who have had favorable interactions with immigrants. For instance, "as part of its Immigrant Services Initiative [in 2021], the LDS Church opened more than a dozen welcome centers throughout North America ... to help immigrants and refugees integrate into their new communities" (Pugmire, 2021). With locations in Utah, Texas, Arizona, and Nevada, many local LDS members received the unique opportunity to interact and form relationships with new migrants to the U.S.

Wald, Owen, and Hill (1988) found that the local congregation has a substantial impact on its members' political sentiments, even beyond the individual. Putnam and Campbell (2012) illustrate that social life within a denomination allows people to connect their religious values to political positions in similar ways. I would argue that these efforts, along with the types of missionary activities mentioned above, might redirect the shared standards of local Mormon assemblies and steer them toward a more pro-immigrant angle.

## **The Outsider Perspective**

The second set of factors that may influence Mormon adherents' political attitudes about immigration is their status as a minority religious group in the United States and how that membership reflects into people's character, integrity, and even political mindsets. In this section, I will draw on existing research and apply a common theory developed by social scientists to explain how communal surroundings shape one's identity.

In the late 1970s, social psychologists Henri Tajfel and John C. Turner first introduced the Social Identity Theory, which "explores the relationship between group membership and self-esteem, highlighting how individuals derive their self-concept from both personal and social identities" ("Social Identity," n.d.). Tajfel and Turner delineate that "personal identity encompasses individual traits and achievements, while social identity is tied to group affiliations such as ethnicity, political orientation, and occupation" ("Social Identity," n.d.). Based on these classifications, "the theory posits that individuals categorize themselves and others into ingroups and outgroups" ("Social Identity," n.d.). Often, humans develop their identity through participation in an "in-group" where norms are shared and reinforced. One's "group," or inner circle has significant control over their ideological leanings. In-group engagement provides positive feelings of belonging, but that often coincides with a distrust, dislike, and bias against the people they deem as their "out-group." This divide tends to foster hatred, misguided stereotypes, and conflict among the two.

Both in-group involvement and aversion to an out-group inform how a person develops and solidifies their own individuality. Mormons, as a minority religious community in the United States, may have a strong in-group bond with fellow churchgoers in their denomination that dictates their principles and political views. Yet simultaneously, they are considered an "out-group" that non-Mormons might have strong antipathetic feelings toward. I will contend that both experiences impact the Mormon laity's political perspectives on immigration.

Mormons have a long history in the Americas as an "out-group." Their story is one of westward migration and rejection by the general public. In the early 1800s, other Americans saw the LDS as heretics who did not respect the separation

of church and state, subsequently resulting in them having to flee from their homes and potentially facing violent persecution in several states for their doctrines.

Today, Mormons make up only 2% of the total US population, with 69% of them living in the Western United States, a legacy of their westward migration (“Latter-day Saints,” n.d.). Being such a small percentage of the populace concentrated in specific pockets across the United States means that many non-Mormon Americans likely have little or infrequent encounters with the LDS. With little connection between the two entities, many non-Mormons have developed a significant dislike or skepticism of LDS communities. For instance, drawing on conclusions from Campbell, Green, and Monson’s 2014 book *Seeking the Promised Land: Mormons and American Politics*, reviewer Luke Perry underscores that “being Mormon leads to more negative connotations than positive ones” (Perry, 2015, p.2). In fact, according to the Pew Research Center, when asked, “32%” of non-Mormon Americans say that Mormonism is not a Christian religion (“Mormons in America,” 2012). “Sixty-eight percent” of non-Mormon Americans say that Mormonism is not mainstream (“Mormons in America,” 2012). As of 2022, Pew Research Center reports that “15%” of Americans have a “very or somewhat favorable” view of Mormons, while “25%” of Americans have a “very or somewhat unfavorable” perception of the LDS (“Americans Feel More Positive,” 2023). While there has certainly been progress over the past 25 years, animosity still reigns supreme by 10% (“Americans Feel More Positive,” 2023).

Among themselves, Mormon assemblies serve as an “in-group” where the values and teachings of their faith are disseminated in service and strengthened in the immediate residential areas around this locus. Individual members develop their own identity alongside their co-religionists. The specific context in which someone creates their character could influence their outlooks on migrants and immigration legislation. For example, as discussed in the previous section, if the local LDS church itself encourages and celebrates missionary efforts in underprivileged communities, that is likely to affect its political judgments on social welfare programs and immigration regulations. This correlation is an intriguing one that warrants further inquiry into the influence of religion on politics in forthcoming studies.

Nevertheless, this dynamic is precisely the mechanism that Knoll examines in his 2009 study titled “And Who is My Neighbor?” In it, he seeks to uncover “why and how religion plays a substantive role in the formation of attitudes regarding immigration reform policy?” (Knoll, 2009, p. 313). While Knoll proposes multiple hypotheses regarding this query, for the purposes of this review, his third proposition is the most relevant. He predicted that members of minority religions in the United States, including Latter-day Saints, would be more likely to support liberal immigration policies than members of other religious groups.

Knoll's journal relied on data from the Pew Research Center and the Pew Hispanic Center's 2006 Immigration Survey. In said survey, analysts asked respondents: "Should illegal immigrants be required to go home (a), or should they be granted some kind of legal status that allows them to stay here (b)?" (Knoll, 2009, p.318). Researchers then used subsequent questions to gauge participants' partisanship and ideological self-identification. Knoll's multivariate investigation found that his hypothesis was supported – members of minority religious groups, including Mormons, were more likely to approve of liberal immigration policies than members of larger religious groups in the U.S. Knoll cites involvement in missionary work and minority religious membership as primary reasons why LDS believers maintain higher rates of affinity toward migrant demographics compared to their non-Mormon counterparts.

In summary, by combining both missionary experience and group identity properties, we can evaluate how specific trademarks of local congregations might influence individuals' presumptions about immigration reform. Mormons understand what it is like to exist as a minority faith and as an "out-group" in the dominant society. This social exclusion is a reciprocal reality among Mormon disciples and among many migrants in the United States. Maureen Craig and Jennifer Richeson's 2016 journal on, "Stigma-Based Solidarity" examines "how perceived discrimination may shape intergroup relations among members of different stigmatized groups" (Craig & Richeson, 2016, p.1). They highlight that "perceived discrimination is ... a potentially common experience for members of different stigmatized groups that at times elicits coalitional attitudes but is often solely experienced as a threat to social identity and thus elicits intergroup derogation" (Craig & Richeson, 2016, p.1). The defining line between coalition and derogation comes down to "the dimensions on which individuals are stigmatized, aspects of their discrimination experiences, and [other] contextual factors" (Craig & Richeson, 2016, p.1). As for Latter-day Saints and immigrants, further research awaits whether their joint marginalization could create a degree of familiarity or solidarity between them.

Additionally, according to the Pew Research Center, 43% of Mormon men and 11% of Mormon women have missionary backgrounds in impoverished regions, which Knoll claims has shaped their compassion by putting them in the shoes of immigrants and other "outsiders" ("Mormons in America," 2012). In this way, a shared sense of benevolence toward the foreign cause and mutual identity as fellow "outsiders" could affect individual LDS political views in support of pro-immigrant platforms. However, churches where these characteristics are less prominent may establish expectations in the opposite direction, aligning more closely with the desire to conform to societal pressures to prove their "American-ness," as associated with the Republican Party's more anti-immigrant agenda.

## Discussion and Conclusion

With this analysis, I sought to contribute to the ongoing exploration of how religion informs political conduct in the United States. My emphasis on Mormon leaders and laity over time, I hope, provides a novel approach to the use of ‘Religious-Moral Worldview’ and ‘Christian Nationalist’ frameworks to understand the often forgotten LDS denomination by behavioral Political Science researchers. Applying these two lines of reasoning can help scholars better grasp how sacred beliefs shape Mormon standpoints on immigration, and how that influence may change over time in response to various external and internal factors.

By examining existing research on this subject through these two hypothetical models, I have developed a new theory to guide prospective studies and subsequent outcomes in the field. I argue that in the past, Mormon elites may have relied more on their religiously based worldview to prioritize charitable efforts intended for immigrant populations. However, as of January 2025, their attitudes may be shifting in reaction to the Republican Party’s anti-immigration platform and pressure to conform to the growing white Christian Nationalist ideological definition of “Americanness.” In the absence of a strong, centralized message from LDS clergy on how theology should inform policy preferences, we may see an extensive array of perspectives on migrants among Mormon congregants. Therefore, there are significant opportunities to examine whether internal, congregational-level factors, such as missionary experience, “out-group” identity in the broader society, or “ingroup” solidarity, might shape Mormon laity’s interactions with non-natives and their sentiments on immigration reform in the United States.

Peter Drucker, an Austrian American author, once said that “in turbulent times, [we] cannot assume that tomorrow will be an extension of today.” Given the current Trump administration and unfolding political climate, the relationship between Mormons and migrants will inevitably continue to evolve over the next few years as people react to developments that either pull them together or push them apart. LDS sentiments on these issues are diverging from previous precedents and lack a clear directive for congregants, which, I reason, makes other factors more salient at the local level. Mortensen’s 2011 book, entitled *The Mormon Church and Illegal Immigration*, aptly highlights that a steadfast solution will come once the LDS Church president has spoken directly and unequivocally. The vast majority of constituents will follow his lead, which is why his call holds such authority. Mortensen suggests that there are a few routes the LDS president could take to address this concern.

One option is to continue the current “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy, which does not ask about immigration status and therefore does not treat it as a problem requiring a response. A more hardline approach, Mortensen offers, is to end missionary work and baptism intended for illegal immigrants and to ask them to return to their home countries to strengthen the LDS presence abroad. A third alternative is to proclaim that “the love of God’s Children surpasses adherence to the laws and borders established by man” and to continue baptisms of illegal immigrants, granting them full standing in the Church. Or Mortensen proposes a fourth and final avenue to “quietly suspend all baptisms of illegal immigrants until the federal government changes current legislation.” In the meantime, the Church should aim to help migrants maintain a crime-free lifestyle, provide them with resources to live comfortably, and begin the citizenship application process (Mortensen, 2011, p. 17).

Should LDS clergy opt for any of these strategies outlined by Mortensen, social scientists and political behaviorists will have the opportunity to investigate how religion affected these resolutions at the elite level. An official testimony from Mormon leadership could also provide academics the chance to perform a before-and-after study to measure how cues from religious higher-ups dictate the spiritual-based influences on political attitudes among the laity.

Until then, there are endless amounts of research awaiting the areas of immigration and the LDS Church. There are multiple frameworks and methods scholars could apply to inquire about this long-overlooked religious minority in the United States. For example, they could examine the lasting effects of membership in an “out-group” as American political culture continues to embrace increasingly stringent notions of what it means to be American. There is also value in exploring how Mormons view and interact with immigrants domestically and internationally. Most of all, I hope to see a more rigorous study of how various characteristics of local congregations impact their members’ political viewpoints.

For too long, researchers have discounted the LDS tradition, which includes over 17.2 million members worldwide. As an international organization, Church officials must strike a balance between strict adherence to the law of the land and the responsibility to welcome new disciples as they integrate into American life now more than ever before. Mormon parishioners also have an obligation to preach the Gospel as it was shared with them, regardless of the storm around them. The United States’ broken immigration system is a real issue affecting real people, which means it is a situation we should not take lightly nor ignore completely. Leviticus 19:33-34 states: “When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them ... Love them as yourself ... for you were foreigners in Egypt [too].” Ultimately, how the Mormon church interprets this core biblical principle and how it manifests in LDS political stances on immigration should be of interest to us all.

## Bibliography

- Alper, B. A., Cooperman, A., Diamant, J., Fahmy, D., Kallo, A., Mohamed, B., Nortey, J., Rotolo, C., Smith, G. A., & Tevington, P. (2025). "Decline of Christianity in the U.S. Has Slowed, May Have Levelled Off – Religion and views on immigration and diversity." Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2025/02/26/religion-and-views-on-immigration-and-diversity/>.
- "Americans Feel More Positive Than Negative About Jews, Mainline Protestants, Catholics." (2023). Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2023/03/15/americans-feel-more-positive-thantive-about-jews-mainline-protestants-catholics/.nega->
- Berinsky, A. J., Karpowitz, C. F., Peng, Z. C., Rodden, J. A., & Wong, C. J. (2020). Social Contact and Immigration Attitudes: A Study of LDS Missionaries.
- "Caring for Those in Need: 2024 Summary of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints." (2024). The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. [https://assets.churchofjesuschrist.org/55/ua/55uami2tnuduu6gvkl7wohkw4zt-ne-c8irhkl7tkn/2024\\_wsrs\\_caring\\_report.pdf](https://assets.churchofjesuschrist.org/55/ua/55uami2tnuduu6gvkl7wohkw4zt-ne-c8irhkl7tkn/2024_wsrs_caring_report.pdf).
- "Changing Partisan Coalitions in a Politically Divided Nation" (2024). Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2024/04/09/party-identification-among-religious-groups-and-religiously-unaffiliated-voters>.
- "Church Reaffirms Immigration Principles: Love, Law and Family Unity." (2025). The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/church-reaffirms-immigration-principles-love-law-family-unity>.
- Craig, M. A., & Richeson, J. A. (2016). Stigma-Based Solidarity: Understanding the Psychological Foundations of Conflict and Coalition Among Members of Different Stigmatized Groups: Current Directions in Psychological Science, 25(1), 21-27.
- "Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) Statement." (2018). The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/daca-statement-january-2018>.

- “Ending Radical and Wasteful Government DEI Programs and Preferencing.” (2025). The White House. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/ending-radical-and-wasteful-government-dei-programs-and-preferencing/>.
- Herman, A. (2024). “‘They’re eating the cats:’ Trump rambles falsely about immigrants in debate.” The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/article/2024/sep/10/trump-springfield-pets-false-claims>.
- Kemsley, T., & Stack, P. F. (2025). “As immigration tensions rise, LDS Church tip-toes into the debate, stressing love, law and family unity.” The Salt Lake Tribune. <https://www.sltrib.com/religion/2025/01/30/immigration-tensions-rise-lds/>.
- Knoll, B. R. (2009). “And who is my neighbor?” Religion and immigration policy attitudes. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 48(2), 313-331.
- “Latter-day Saints (Mormons).” (n.d.). Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/religious-landscape-study/religious-tradition/latter-day-saint-mormon/>.
- LeVine, M., & Sacchetti, M. (2023). “Trump reprises dehumanizing language on undocumented immigrants, warns of ‘invasion.’” The Washington Post. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2023/12/18/trump-immigrants-invasion-dehumanizing/>
- Li, H. (2025). “Latino members of Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints seek support as ICE raids escalate.” Los Angeles Times. <https://www.latimes.com/delos/story/2025-10-09/latino-mormons-church-of-latter-day-saints-byu-utah-immigration-stance-ice>.
- McElwee, J. (2025). “Pope Francis tells US bishops Trump’s immigration policy ‘will end badly.’” Reuters. [https://www.reuters.com/world/pope-francis-criticizes-trumps-immigration-crackdown-letter-us-bishops-2025-02-11/#:~:text=-VATICAN%20CITY%2C%20Feb%2011%20\(Reuters,force%20%22will%20end%20badly%22](https://www.reuters.com/world/pope-francis-criticizes-trumps-immigration-crackdown-letter-us-bishops-2025-02-11/#:~:text=-VATICAN%20CITY%2C%20Feb%2011%20(Reuters,force%20%22will%20end%20badly%22).
- “Meet the Mormon Missionaries: A Day in the Life of a Latter-day Saint Missionary.” (n.d.). The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. <https://pacific.churchofjesuschrist.org/meet-the-mormon-missionaries>.

- “Mormons in America – Certain in Their Beliefs, Uncertain of Their Place in Society.” (2012). Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2012/01/12/mormons-in-america-executive-summary/>.
- Mortensen, R. W. (2011). The Mormon Church and illegal immigration. Perry, L. (2015). Review of *Seeking the Promised Land: Mormons and American Politics*, by D.E. Campbell, J. C. Green, & J. Q. Monson. *Journal of Church and State*, 57(3), 594–596. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24708769>.
- “President Trump’s Top 100 Victories for People of Faith.” (2025). The White House. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/articles/2025/09/president-trumps-top-100-victories-for-people-of-faith/>.
- Pugmire, G. (2021). “LDS Church welcome centers provide resources to immigrants, refugees.” *Daily Herald*. <https://www.heraldextra.com/news/2021/jun/17/lds-church-welcome-centers-provide-resources-to-immigrants-refugees/#:~:text=The%20Church%20of%20Jesus%20Christ%20of%20Latter%20Day%20Saints%20is,of%20their%20own%20immigrant%20grandparents>.
- Putnam, R. D., & Campbell, D. E. (2012). *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us*. Simon and Schuster.
- Saiya, N. (2025). The varieties of American Christian nationalism. *Politics and Religion*, 18(2), 171–189. doi:10.1017/S1755048325000069.
- “Social Identity Theory.” (n.d.). EBSCO. <https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/psychology/social-identity-theory>.
- “The Articles of Faith of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints” (n.d.). The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. <https://www.churchofjesus-christ.org/study/scriptures/pgp/a-of-f/1?lang=eng&id=12>.
- Wald, K. D., Owen, D. E., & Hill Jr, S. S. (1988). Churches as Political Communities. *American political science review*, 82(2), 531-548.
- Welch, R. L. (2024). Strangers and Foreigners or Fellow Citizens with the Saints? How Leaders of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Have Portrayed Immigration Over Time. *Mormon Social Science Association*, 91.