

2023 Current and Former Latter-day Saint Survey

Beliefs, Practices, and Moral Foundations

A Brief Summary of Selected Results



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I. Introduction

The religious landscape of the United States has undergone significant changes in recent years, with many individuals re-evaluating their faith and some choosing to disaffiliate from their religious traditions. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, also known as the Mormon Church, has not been immune to these shifts. Understanding the beliefs, practices, and moral foundations of current and former members of the Church is essential for gaining insights into factors that contribute to religious commitment and disaffiliation.

Previous studies, such as the 2011 Pew Survey ($N = 1,019$) and the 2016 Next Mormons Survey ($N = 1,696$) conducted by Jana Riess and Benjamin Knoll have provided valuable information on Latter-day Saint demographics, beliefs, and practices. The 2023 Current and Former Latter-day Saints (CFLDS) Survey ($N = 3,865$) adds to this data by significantly increasing the number of current and former Latter-day Saints surveyed and introducing new data related to k-means cluster analysis and Moral Foundations Theory.

This document provides a brief summary of the findings of the survey.

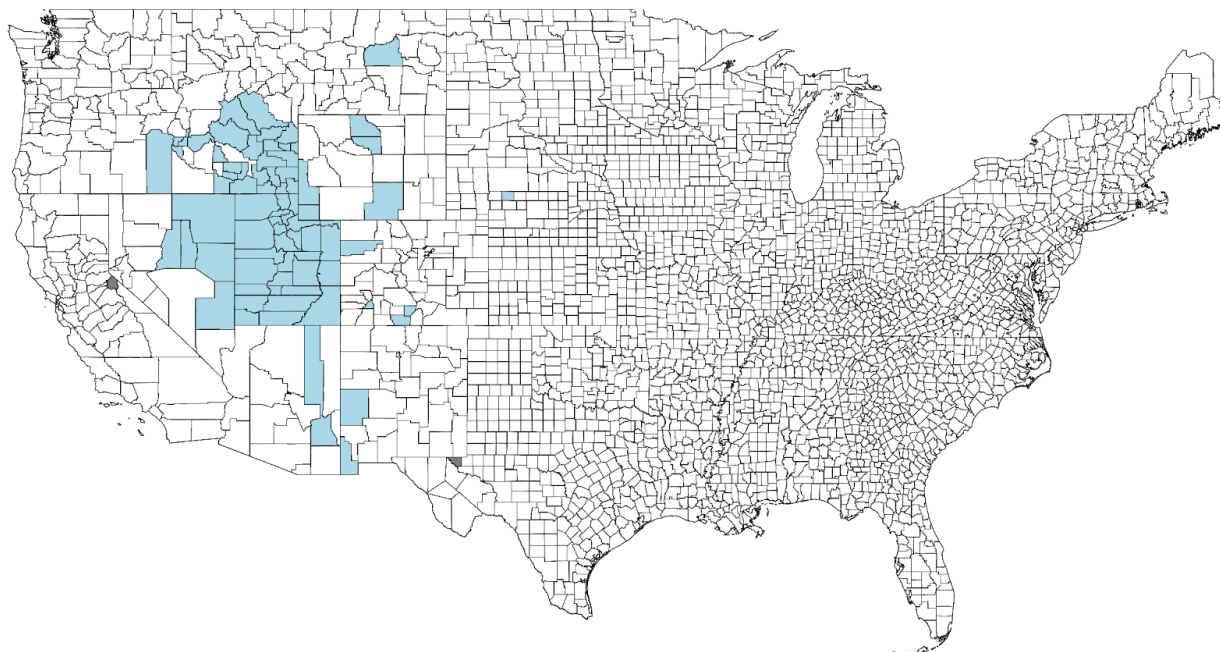
II. Survey Methodology

The 2023 CFLDS Survey employed a multi-modal approach to ensure a representative sample of current and former Latter-day Saints within the Mormon Corridor. The survey consisted of two main components:

1. Address-based mailer survey: Nearly **80,000** postcards were sent to a random distribution of households within counties containing populations of **at least 15%** Latter-day Saints, based on the 2020 US Religious Census estimates. This component aimed to represent the “Mormon Corridor” region, which encompasses the sociocultural center of the Church. This includes Utah, Idaho, and parts of Arizona, Nevada, and Wyoming and makes up **about 37%** of Latter-day Saints in the United States.

2. Facebook advertisement campaign: Recent research has demonstrated that properly weighted Facebook advertisements can be an effective tool for survey recruitment. (Schneider & Harknett, 2022). The 2023 CFLDS Survey utilized targeted Facebook (Meta) ads to solicit survey respondents both inside and outside the Mormon Corridor.

The survey collected a total of **3,865 valid responses**, with **2,625** from current members and **1,183** from former members. The data were weighted to ensure representativeness based on the demographic characteristics of Latter-day Saints in the United States, as derived from the Cooperative Election Study (CES) for the years 2020-2022.



*Counties highlighted in blue have a Latter-day Saint population of at least 15%.
Source: 2020 US Religious Census*

III. Summary of Selective Findings

Although the 2023 CFLDS Survey is the largest representative survey of current and former Latter-day Saints to date, it is relatively limited in the number and variety of topics covered in the survey questions. The following are some of the more interesting findings.

Current Latter-day Saints

The survey yielded answers from **2,625** self-identified Latter-day Saints from both inside and outside of the “Mormon Corridor”.

Beliefs and Practices

Most Latter-day Saints (who identify as such) are active in the Church with **about 71%** attending nearly every week, and **85%** holding temple recommends. Members outside of the “Mormon Corridor” scored slightly lower in both metrics. Respondents indicated that they generally believe in God, the Book of Mormon, the First Vision, and in the priesthood authority of the president of the Church.

Gender and Sexuality

About 4% of Latter-day Saints identify as LGBTQ+, significantly fewer than the **9%** of Americans reported by Pew in 2023. **About half** of this group are **neutral or disagree** that the Church should solemnize same-sex marriages in the temple.

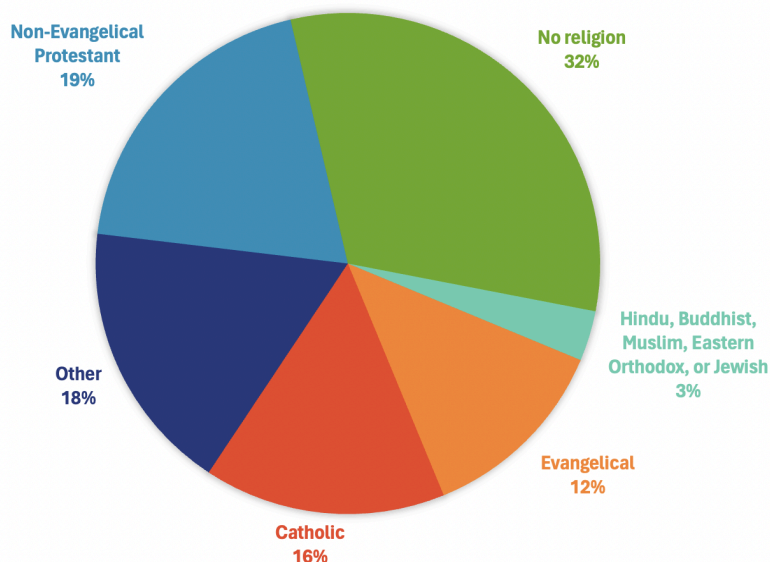
Marriage and Divorce

Latter-day Saint respondents answered a number of questions about marriage and temple sealing. The data indicates an **estimated divorce rate of 15%** for couples who married in the temple first (as opposed to being sealed later) but **57%** for couples who married outside the temple. This is similar to the national rate of divorce. Those who are married outside the temple initially but were later sealed later **did not** show significantly higher divorce rates than those who had married in the temple first.

Background and Conversion

The survey asked respondents to indicate which religions they had ever been a part of. **About 17%** of members reported that they had identified with a different specific religion or no religion at some point in their lives. Nearly **one-third** of converts previously identified with no particular religion.

WHERE DO LATTER-DAY SAINT CONVERTS COME FROM?



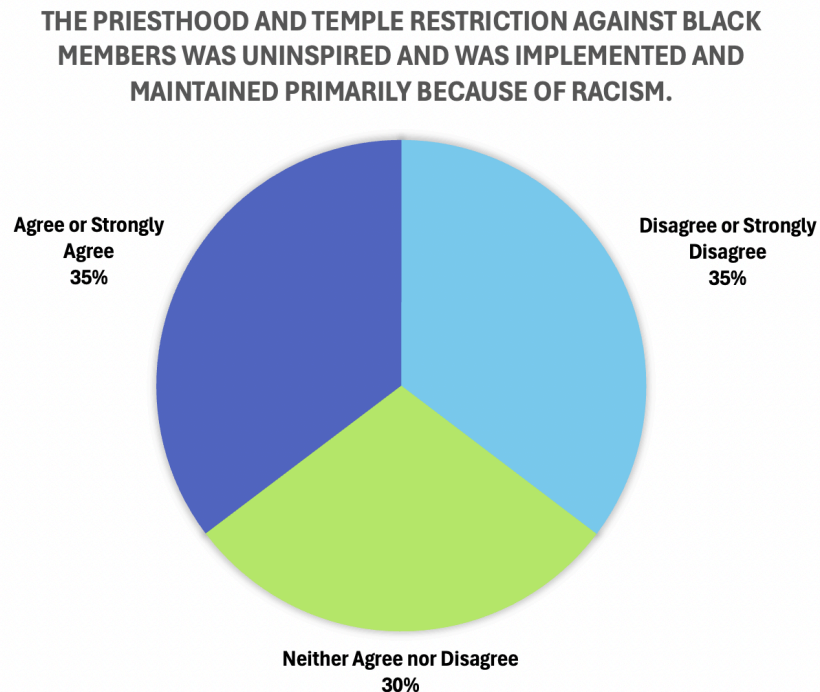
Tithing and Taxes

About 83% of Latter-day Saints reported paying a full tithe, and **the majority** of which reported calculating tithing before taxes.

Race and the Priesthood

Regarding the reasons for the historical priesthood and temple restriction for Black Saints, Latter-day Saint respondents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the following statement: *“The Priesthood and temple restriction against Black members was uninspired and was implemented and maintained primarily because of racism.”*

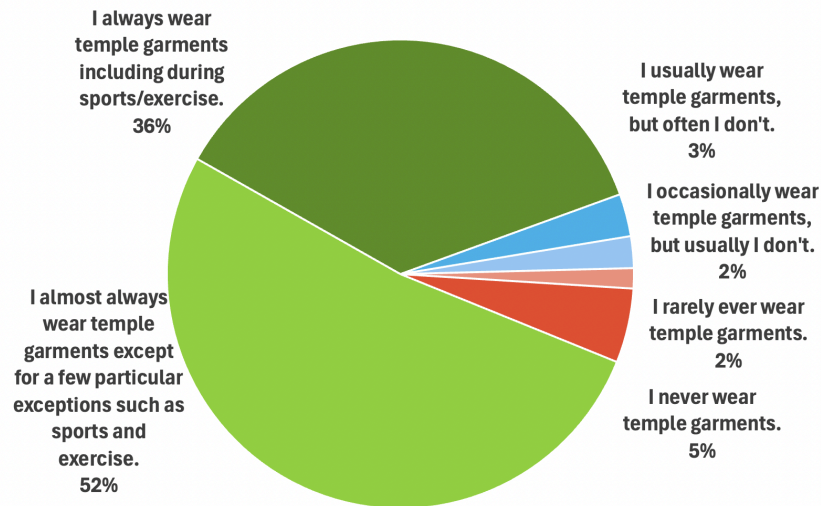
Latter-day Saints were **close to evenly split** between agree/strongly agree, disagree/strongly disagree, and neither agree nor disagree.



Temple Garments

About 87% of Latter-day Saints reported always, or almost always wearing temple garments, though this varied by generation. Boomers are significantly **more likely** to wear temple garments compared to the younger generations. When comparing genders, there was **no significant difference** between men and women wearing temple garments.

WEARING TEMPLE GARMENTS



Two Clusters

Religious traditions are often seen as monolithic, but within any faith, there is a spectrum of beliefs and practices. This is also true within The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Through a K-means cluster analysis two distinct statistical groups are found based on their theological beliefs and religious behaviors.

“All-in Adherents”

This group, comprising the majority (**about 81%**) of respondents, holds more traditional beliefs and engages more frequently in religious practices. Members of this group attend church regularly, read scriptures daily, pay tithing consistently, and wear temple garments. They firmly believe in the literal truth of Latter-day Saint teachings, such as the divine authority of the Church's priesthood and the historical authenticity of the Book of Mormon.

“Selective Adherents”

This smaller group (**about 19%**) is characterized by more progressive beliefs and less frequent religious participation. Members of this group are more likely to support same-sex marriage and the ordination of women within the Church. They are also less certain about the divine origin of Latter day Saint doctrines and the historical events described in the Book of Mormon. This group attends church less regularly, prays less often, and is less likely to wear temple garments, pay tithing or hold a temple recommend.

Cluster Demographics

The most significant difference between the All-in and the Selective groups is generational. Boomers are significantly **overrepresented** in the All-in group, whereas Millennials and Gen-X are **overrepresented** in the Selective group. The younger generation, Gen-Z was found to be **equally represented** in both groups, which indicates that Gen-Z is **significantly more** “All-in” than their parents.



Using an unsupervised K-means clustering method, two groups were identified within the survey data of Latter-day Saints based on beliefs and practices. The first group (shown in blue) has a tighter centroid, indicating commonality in beliefs and practices. The second group (shown in yellow) is less concentrated but statistically distinct from the first group.

The following table is a summary of the *averaged* beliefs and practices of the two different statistical groups found in the survey:

Belief or Practice	“All-in” Latter-day Saints (about 81%)	“Selective” Latter-day Saints (about 19%)
Church Activity	Every Week	2-3 times per month
Prayer	Once per day	Several times per week
Believes the Church should solemnize Same-sex marriage	No	Neutral to somewhat yes
Knows God exists	86%	33%
Believes the Church should ordain women	No	Somewhat yes
Reads the scriptures	Several times per week	Almost once a week
Pays a full tithing	94%	38%
Always wears temple garments	97%	45%
Does not believe humans evolved from lower forms of life	63%	17%
Has a temple recommend	95%	About 50%
Attends temple	More than several times per year	Less than once or twice per year
Believes the Book of Mormon is literal history	98%	31%
Avoids caffeine because of the Word of Wisdom	40%	15%
Believes plural marriage will exist in the afterlife	Somewhat yes	Somewhat no
Believes historical plural marriage was a mistake	No to somewhat no	Yes to somewhat yes
Believes the historical priesthood ban for Black Saints was uninspired	Neutral	Yes

Believes Joseph Smith saw God	Strong yes	Neutral to somewhat no
Believes the Church's priesthood is the only authorized priesthood	Strong yes	Neutral
The President of the Church is God's representative	Strong yes	Neutral

Former Latter-day Saints

The survey yielded responses from 1,183 self identified Latter-day Saints from both inside and outside of the “Mormon Corridor”. It is important to recognize that many former Latter-day Saints may have no interest in participating in a survey about their former religion, and so these responses only reflect those who did have an interest in responding.

Demographics

The survey found that former Latter-day Saints are generally **younger** than current members, with a **similar** gender distribution. Notably, former members are over **four times** as likely to identify as LGBTQ+ compared to current Latter-day Saints.

Beliefs

The data reveal a significant shift in belief in God among former Latter-day Saints. **Nearly half** (about 44%) stated they do not believe in God or that they are uncertain about the existence of God and believe there is no way to find out. However, **about 29%** of former members indicated they either know God exists or tend to believe in God. Despite many of them believing in God, **nearly 90%** of former members identified as having no religious affiliation.

Gender and Sexuality

About 18% of former Latter-day Saints identify as LGBTQ+, significantly more than the **9%** of Americans reported by Pew in 2023.

Marriage and Divorce

Former Latter-day Saints are **twice** as likely to have experienced divorce. **About 20%** are currently married to current Latter-day Saints, while **approximately 30%** are married to former Latter-day Saints. Additionally, former members are **more than four times** as likely to have never been sealed in the temple compared as current members.

Disaffiliation

Three out of four former members have a negative view of the Church as an institution but maintain a neutral to positive attitude towards individual members of the Church.

Despite their disaffiliation, **two-thirds** of former Latter day Saints reported keeping their membership records with the Church. However, **less than 8%** expressed any interest in returning to church in the future.

Moral Foundations

A novel feature of the 2023 CFLDS survey is the inclusion of questions related to Moral Foundations Theory (Haidt & Joseph, 2004; Graham et al., 2013) which attempts to shed light on the complex mechanisms of human morality. The theory proposes that the following five foundational values form the basis for moral judgments and decision-making:

fairness/reciprocity

(e.g. “justice is the most important requirement for a society.”)

harm/care

(e.g. “it can never be right to kill a human being.”)

ingroup/loyalty

(e.g. “people should be loyal to their family members, even when they have done something wrong.”)

authority/respect

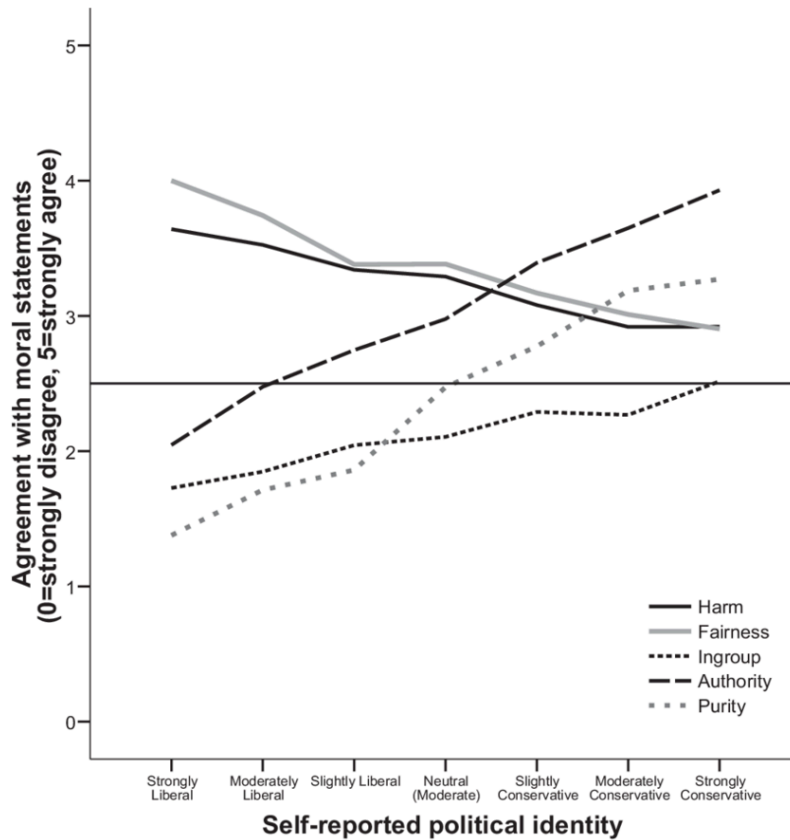
(e.g. “respecting the rule of law is important in our society.”)

purity/sanctity

(e.g. “people should not do things that are disgusting, even if no one is harmed.”)

These values can be divided into “socially binding” values (purity, authority and ingroup), which promote communitarian cohesion and “individualizing” values (fairness

and harm), which encourage mutual interpersonal concern and justice for others. Both socially binding values and individualizing values are essential for the development of a society that is both cohesive and respectful of individual differences.



In their 2009 paper “Liberals and Conservatives Rely on Different Sets of Moral Foundations,” Jesse Graham, Johnathan Haidt and Brian A. Nosek argued that political liberals construct their moral system primarily upon two psychological foundations, whereas political conservatives construct their moral systems more evenly upon five psychological foundations.

When applying Moral Foundations Theory, there is a contrast between current and former Latter-day Saints and a contrast between “all-in” members and “selective” members of the Church.

Latter-day Saints: Scored **relatively high** across all values, **similar** to the average politically moderate American, with the exception of Purity/Sanctity which was **significantly higher** than the average politically moderate American.

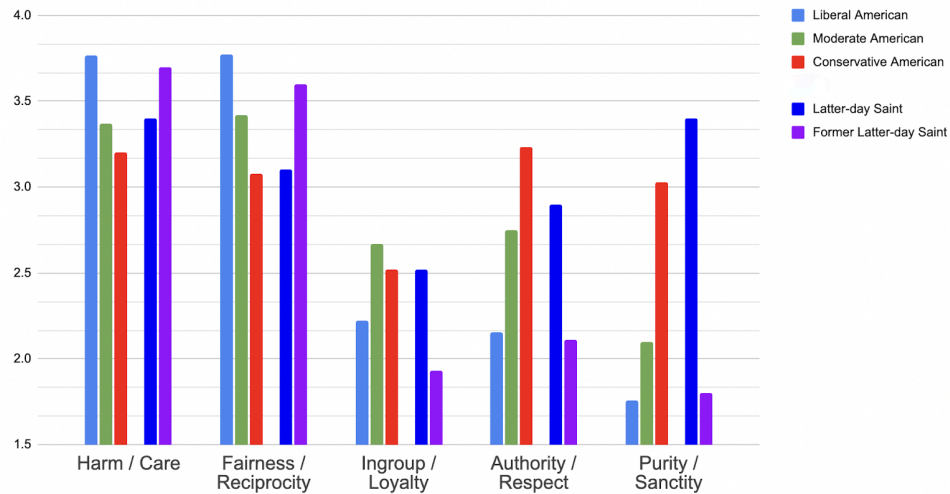
Former Latter-day Saints: Scored **high** on individualizing values and scored **low** on socially binding values. Values are **similar** to those of the average politically liberal American, with the exception of Ingroup/Loyalty which was **significantly lower** than the average politically liberal American.

All-in Latter-day Saints: Scored **similar** to the average Latter-day Saint. Scored **slightly lower** in individualizing values and **slightly higher** in socially binding values when compared to the average Latter-day Saint.

Selective Latter-day Saints: Scored **similar** to the average former Latter-day Saint, with the exception of Purity/Sanctity. Scored **slightly lower** in individualizing values and **slightly higher** in socially binding values when compared to the average former Latter-day Saint.

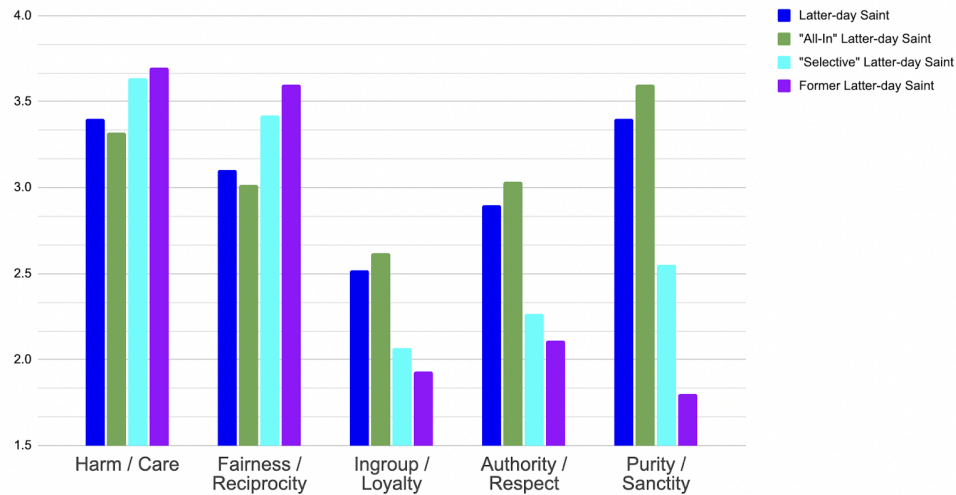
Moral Foundation Scores (Americans/LDS)

(CFLDS2023, MFQ30 and Graham 2012)



Moral Foundation Scores (Latter-day Saints)

(CFLDS2023, MFQ30 and Graham 2012)



IV. Limitations and Future Work

Limitations

Although the 2023 CFLDS Survey is the largest representative survey of current and former Latter-day Saints to date, there are several important limitations to consider when evaluating the strength of the findings.

- The survey is a point-in-time snapshot of current beliefs and practices and does not offer any insight into trends over time.
- Respondents outside of the “Mormon Corridor” were solicited online via advertising channels that are weighted by Utah-centric affiliations, such as Utah sports teams or academic institutions. This likely excluded a portion of current and former Latter-day Saints who have no interests in or ties with Utah.
- Former Latter-day Saints who have “moved on” from their former religious affiliation and have no interest in participating in a survey about their former religion make up an important population that may be significantly different in their beliefs and practices from the former Latter-day Saints who chose to participate in the survey.
- The scope of the survey is limited to the United States, which does not represent the majority of the global Latter-day Saint population.

Future Work

Additional data often begets additional questions. The following are questions that would benefit from further research.

- Does the shift in Moral Foundations for former Latter-day Saints occur before, during or after deconversion?
- Is there movement between the “All-in” and the “Selective” groups? And if so, what are the causes of these shifts? What proportion of former Latter day Saints come from which group?
- Are there delineations in beliefs and practices of former Latter-day Saints based on time since disaffiliation with the Church?
- Why is the proportion of sexual minorities among former Latter-day Saints twice that of the general US population?
- What factors contribute to the proportion of sexual minorities among Latter-day Saints being less than half that of the general US population?

- What is the relationship between marriage, divorce, and leaving the Church? What is the sequence in which these events typically occur and how are they related?

Additional information related to the 2023 CFLDS Survey can be found at bhroberts.org.