

Piety and pay: Why religious states like Utah have larger gender wage gaps

Same goes for nations, partly because of how religions such as Mormonism define roles for women and men.





more religious than in more secular states.

But there are ways to fix that, researchers say, and the remedies start by being aware that piety can affect pay.

Each of the six major world religions — Buddhism, Christianity, Folk, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism — promotes differentiated gender roles for men and women, which shape social norms, including in the workplace, according to “[The Hidden Cost of Prayer: Religiosity and the Gender Wage Gap](#),” published in October in the *Academy of Management Journal*.

“It’s not that one religion is better or worse, with respect to the gender wage gap. ... It’s just whether religion is crucial to people’s day-to-day,” said Elizabeth M. Campbell, an assistant professor in the University of Minnesota’s Department of Work and Organizations, who co-wrote the study with University of Colorado Denver associate professor Traci Sitzmann.

This applies across the United States and internationally. And while the report does not specifically focus on The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Campbell said it falls under the Christianity umbrella in the research.

Salt Lake City is home to the headquarters of the 16.5 million-member global faith, and roughly [60% of Utahns are Latter-day Saints](#).

“We’re such a religious state,” said Susan Madsen, founder and director of the Utah Women and Leadership Project at Utah State University. Utah also consistently has [ou](#)



Research.

The gender wage gap is a complex issue, with multiple factors contributing to it. Religiosity, the latest study noted, is one factor that can help explain it.

“You can still have religious norms and ... faith as a component of the culture and an open part of what’s discussed and valued,” Campbell said. “But what you need to do to block that from having an impact on how women’s work is evaluated compared to men’s, is you need to overemphasize gender egalitarian policies.”

Bigger gaps in more religious places

In their study, Campbell and Sitzmann examined how religiosity affects the gender wage gap in all 50 states and across 140 countries.

In nations where 95% or more of the population reported that religion is an important part of their daily lives, such as Pakistan, the Philippines and Sri Lanka, women earn 46% as much as men, according to the report. In places where less than 20% of the

populace endorsed the importance of religion, including Estonia, Sweden and Denmark, women earn 75% of men’s wages.

The United States ranked 101st among the countries for its religiosity, according to Campbell, and 90th for the size of its gender wage gap.

That pay gap is larger in the five most religious U.S. states than in the five least religio





Most and least religious states

Mississippi was the most religious state in 2012, followed by Utah, Alabama, Louisiana and Arkansas, according to a Gallup survey. The five least religious states included Vermont, New Hampshire, Maine, Massachusetts and Rhode Island. The order varies slightly each year, but these states are consistently at the top or bottom.

Most religious states, based on % very religious

Mississippi	58%
Utah	56%
Alabama	56%
Louisiana	53%
Arkansas	52%
South Carolina	52%
Tennessee	50%
North Carolina	50%
Georgia	48%
Oklahoma	48%

Least religious states, based on % very religious

Vermont	19%
New Hampshire	23%
Maine	24%
Massachusetts	27%
Rhode Island	29%
Oregon	29%
District of Columbia	30%
Nevada	31%
Hawaii	31%
Alaska	31%
Connecticut	31%
Washington	31%

Source: Gallup Organization

GRAPHIC BY CHRISTOPHER CHERRINGTON
The Salt Lake Tribune

(Christopher Cherrington | The Salt Lake Tribune)

To see how religiosity affects the difference in men and women's pay over a number of years, researchers compared each state's gender wage gap to that state's religious attendance.

Overall, "the average U.S. wage gap significantly narrowed," but states that were considered less religious saw a bigger decrease compared to those with greater religiosity, researchers found. In fact, they estimate the wage gap will take 28 years to close in secular states, compared to roughly 109 years in religious states.






“To put it in perspective,” Campbell explained in an email, “the fastest five are narrowing the gender wage gap more than 12 times faster than the slowest five, on average.”

In Utah, the salary difference between women and men employed full time has narrowed by 3.85 percentage points over a decade, she said. According to her calculations, women in the Beehive State earned approximately 69% of what their male colleagues made in 2008, compared to 73% in 2018.

Gender roles in the LDS Church

Every religion has nuances, said [Neylan McBaine](#), author of “[Women at Church: Magnifying LDS Women’s Local Impact](#)” and founder of the [Mormon Women Project](#). But one of the best ways to understand how the LDS Church views gender roles, she said, is to read “[The Family: A Proclamation to the World](#).”

[Then-President Gordon B. Hinckley](#) delivered the proclamation at the women’s general Relief Society meeting in September 1995, saying, “Gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose.”

The proclamation goes on: “By divine design, fathers are to preside over their families in love and righteousness and are responsible to provide the necessities of life and protection for their families. Mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children. In these sacred responsibilities, fathers and mothers are obligated to help on 



criticize it as men putting women on a pedestal without true equality. But McBaine said she tries to help people recognize the sincerity and authenticity that Latter-day Saints have in respecting these distinct, but complementary, gender roles.

In the study, researchers found that each of the six major world religions has patriarchal themes, and that “patriarchy and religiosity are likely reinforcing.”

“A key point of departure is that patriarchal contexts advocate for the dominance of men and subjugation of women,” the report stated, “whereas religiosity emphasizes that men and women are different and serve specialized roles.”





(Rick Egan | Tribune file photo) Neylan McBaine speaks in 2018.

The LDS Church has a patriarchal structure, with men holding the vast majority of leadership positions, McBaine said. At the same time, motherhood and the domestic domain are not disparaged or viewed as subordinate.

Some may disagree, McBaine added, but she sees the proclamation stating that mothers are “primarily responsible” for nurturing children as giving people some leeway.

“It puts an emphasis on the spirit of law,” she said, “rather than the letter of law.”

Utah women have a higher rate of participation in the labor force than women nationally. [They are more likely to work part-time jobs](#), though, which tend to be lower paying while offering more flexibility.

Latter-day Saints’ emphasis on the so-called traditional family “definitely has a doctrinal component,” McBaine said, but it also arose as the church strove to become a mainstream institution. It was in the 1950s, when the faith embraced these gender roles, she explained, that the LDS Church “got this feeling it had arrived,” and Latter-day Saints were more socially accepted.





“It’s inescapable,” McBaine said.

Men raised in the church do not see a female authority figure in the faith’s administration after they are 12 years old, according to McBaine. They sit in many meetings with women and may have female Sunday school teachers, but, in terms of stewardship, they will never be led by women after the children’s Primary president.

“There’s no doubt,” she said, “that affects what both men and women bring to the workplace on Monday morning.”

How religiosity affects the pay gap

The study points to three general areas in which religions distinguish gender roles: social domain, sexuality and agency.

“Religious societies tend to reinforce traditional values,” researchers wrote, encouraging women to prioritize family responsibilities and motherhood, while men should focus on their careers and the public sphere. Even if women do work, researchers wrote, “the expectation is that they will put their family first.”

Women, therefore, “must overcome social expectations that they are less committed to their careers than men,” who are “deemed a better fit for demanding jobs that require people to arrive on time, work long hours, and devote their total attention to work.”

“Wages are tied to job valuation,” the study stated, “and organizations can perpetuate inequality as they match and route men and women to jobs.”

A focus on women’s sexuality can draw “attention away from their mental capabilities and competencies,” the report warned. If women go against expected gender roles and work in highly valued, male-dominated occupations, they may face harassment.





study noted, “and these career interruptions contribute to direct earning losses and delayed promotions to higher-wage promotions.”

Religiosity also encourages men to “pursue power and decision-making authority, while women should heed power and defer to men’s authority,” according to the report. “This unequal power relationship results in women’s underrepresentation in leadership positions, spanning from churches and temples to corporations and governments, such that women are underrepresented in supervisory roles, in elected positions, and on corporate boards in religious cultures.”

If women are not in these powerful roles, researchers said, “they are unable to reverse gender-biased treatment” and can’t help elevate other women.

Counteracting religiosity’s effects

It’s important, the study pointed out, for managers and policymakers to understand how religiosity plays into the gender wage gap.

Leaders in religious cultures can counteract some of these issues by supporting both men and women to be actively involved in their children’s lives, implementing strict sexual harassment policies and investing in female leaders’ career development, the

report stated. They also need to be aware of biases in wage allocation, boost transparency and promote accountability.

Campbell said she hopes their research encourages people to have an open conversation about this dynamic in the workplace. “You can have religious norms and gender-egalitarian norms co-occur.”





Sometimes religiosity's effects show up in the workplace in subtle ways, such as through unconscious biases, said USU's Madsen. She pointed to a 2018 report identifying [Utah as the second-most sexist state](#), with women's own internalized sexist attitudes in the Beehive State largely playing into that.

This latest study “gives us some real practical implications on how to get rid of the wage gap,” Madsen said, “but also to really be more careful about how we're putting men and women into buckets.”

As a religious society, we can still value families and women in Utah, whether they choose to work or stay at home, she said. This research just provides insight to help Utahns think about “how can we do better.”

Becky Jacobs is a [Report for America](#) corps member and writes about the status of women in Utah for The Salt Lake Tribune. Your donation to match our RFA grant helps keep her writing stories like this one; please consider making a tax-deductible gift of any amount today by clicking [here](#).



bjacobs@sltrib.com

Follow @ruthyjacobs

[Donate to the newsroom now.](#) The Salt Lake Tribune, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) public charity and contributions are tax deductible

RELATED STORIES

Utah women ‘significantly underrepresented’ in legal careers, where they face bias and harassment

Utah women discuss what's helpful, challenging in getting more female leaders in government





Poll: LDS women want to close the wage gap, see more female leaders



IN CASE YOU MISSED IT



Salt Lake City eliminated from race to host 2024 Republican National Convention





Here are the worst drive-thrus in Utan, according to you

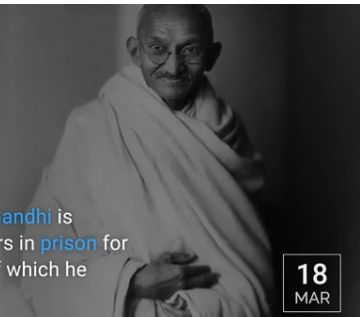


THIS DAY IN HISTORY

1922

In India, [Mohandas Gandhi](#) is sentenced to six years in [prison](#) for [disobedience](#), of which he has only two.

18 MAR




[Photos] She Didn't Understand Why Her Photo Went So Viral, Then She Saw This in

12Up | Sponsored



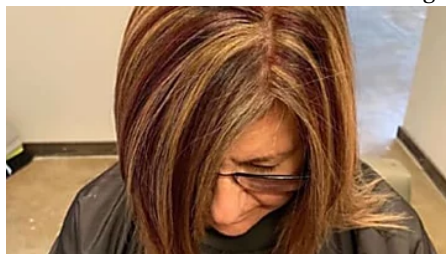
Food Items You Should Never Buy At Costco, Here's

BetterBe | Sponsored



This Game is So Beautiful. If You Have a Computer it's a Must-Have.

Raid: Shadow Legends | Sponsored



[Photos] Don't Dress Yourself Old: 45 Items That

Last Night On | Sponsored



[Pics] Awkward Live TV Moments Where The

InvestingFuel | Sponsored





THE LATEST

Music community rallies around Utah's Heavy Metal Shop after its matriarch dies

Jose V. Borjon: Why Mexico is suing U.S. gun manufacturers

The air on Salt Lake City's west side may enjoy a brighter future. Here's why.

BYU women's basketball seniors are not shying away from their lofty NCAA Tournament goal

Conservation groups say Iron County water project is unnecessary

Rash of wrong-way crashes has Utah Highway Patrol urging caution, advice for drivers

Return to Story

CONNECT

Facebook

Twitter

Instagram

YouTube

RSS

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Subscribe to print + digital

Subscribe to digital only

Free digital for print subscribers

Email newsletters

Login to your print account

Login to your digital account

Subscription FAQs





- Board and advisers
- Officers and staff
- First Amendment Society
- Donors and tax filing
- Privacy policy
- California privacy
- Editorial policies and ethics

- Store
- Podcasts
- Archives
- Story tip line
- Support The Tribune
- Donate
- Cookie Preferences
- Commenting Policy



ABOUT US

TERMS OF SERVICE

PRIVACY POLICY

EDITORIAL POLICY

ADVERTISE

CONTACT US

HELP

COOKIE PREFERENCES

SUPPORT

WEEKLY PRINT EDITION

EMAIL NEWSLETTERS

PODCASTS

NEWS TIPS

APP STORE

GOOGLE PLAY

DONATE

Report a missed paper by emailing subscribe@sltrib.com or calling 801-237-2900

For e-edition questions or comments, contact customer support 801-237-2900 or email subscribe@sltrib.com



