



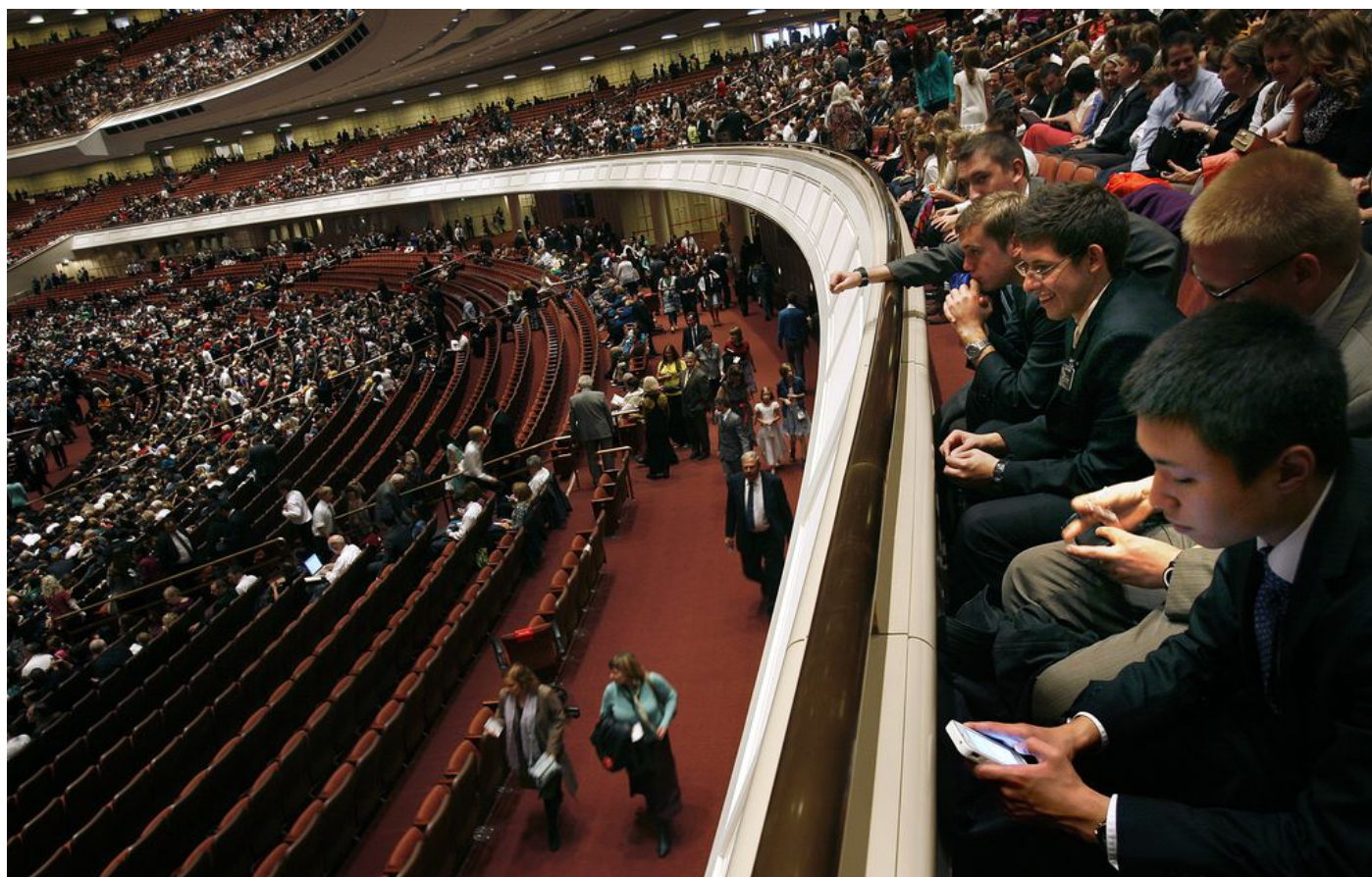
THIS DAY IN HISTORY

1996

Bella Hadid, the American model, is born.

9 OCT

Utah sees Latter-day Saint slowdown and membership numbers drop in Salt Lake County

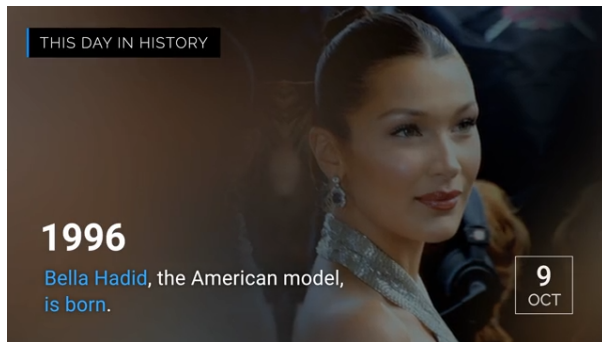


(Scott Sommerdorf | Tribune file photo) People file in and wait for the afternoon session of the 183rd LDS General Conference, Saturday, October 5, 2013. Utah's Latter-day Saint population continues to grow, but the growth rate has





counties saw the actual number of members decline.



at Lake County, which saw the roster of Latter-day
largest county grew by 10,000 people.

mondom? Why would Utah, a state with a vibrant
ation growth, experience a sudden slowdown in
ith?

That’s a hard question to answer because the organization with the most insight — the church itself — declined to offer any context.

But a review by The Salt Lake Tribune, relying on the insights of demographers and close observers of the church, indicates that the membership stagnation is likely due to a rise in resignations among disaffected and largely inactive members and major demographic trends seen in Utah, such as families having fewer children and more people, many of whom are not Latter-day Saints, moving here for jobs.

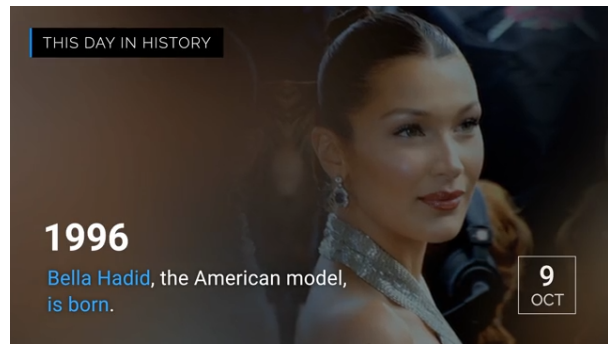
“I would likely argue that 2019 represents a statistical anomaly in which a variety of factors combined to create a ‘bad’ year for membership growth,” said [Matt Martinich](#), a Latter-day Saint and independent demographer based in Colorado, who reviewed the data for The Tribune.

The church has been handing over county-by-county membership numbers to Utah officials for decades. The Tribune has access to this data from 1989 forward.





The church provided the 2019 data, which goes from Oct. 1, 2018, to Sept. 30, 2019, to



...n declined a request for an interview with a ...cial to help explain these surprising figures.

t:

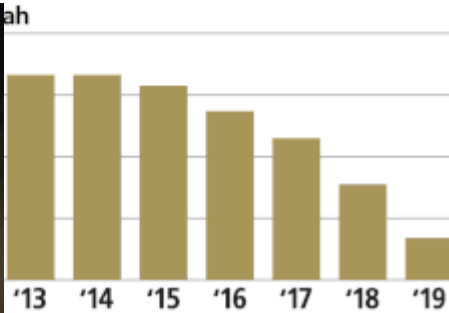
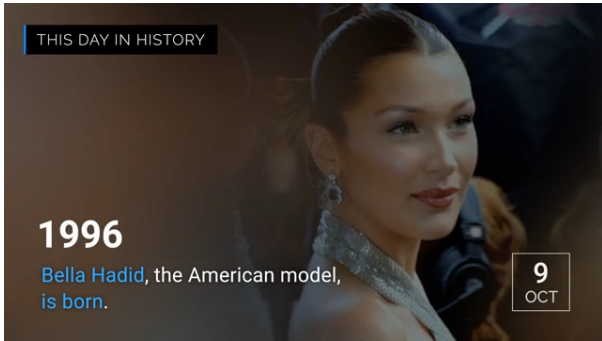
- The church added 4,909 members in Utah in 2019, while the state estimates Utah’s population grew by 53,000. That’s a church growth rate of 0.25%, the lowest since The Tribune has tracked this data. This marks only the second time that church rolls grew by less than 10,000. The first was 2018, when membership rose by 9,067.
- Salt Lake County saw its Latter-day Saint membership decline by 6,710. The second-biggest drop was in Davis County, where membership decreased by 838. Utah County, home to church-owned Brigham Young University, saw the biggest numerical increase in members at 8,487, followed by Washington County at 2,441.
- Utah is now 60.68% Latter-day Saint. This stat relies on state population estimates and could change after the official 2020 Census count.

Growth among Utah Latter-day Saints slows suddenly

The state has seen Latter-day Saints rise by about 20,000 each year in the past decade. But in 2019, that number dropped below 5,000.

50K Total LDS members added in Utah





GRAPHIC BY CHRISTOPHER CHERRINGTON | The Salt Lake Tribune

(Christopher Cherrington | The Salt Lake Tribune)

To assess what might be driving this erosion, let’s start by identifying the ways members might be dropped from a county’s tally. They could move to another area. They could die. They could be excommunicated. They could have been added as a baby but dropped when they were never baptized. Or they could have requested that the church remove their names from the membership rolls.

Some long-term demographic trends are clearly at play in Utah that would result in a slowing of growth among Latter-day Saints, but they don’t fully explain the quick drop-off in 2018 and 2019, according to demographers such as Pam Perlich, with the University of Utah’s Gardner Policy Institute.

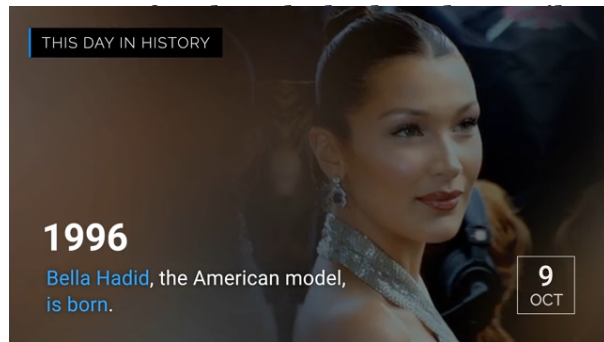
Members moving

Perlich, who leads the committee that creates the state’s population estimates, has tracked moving patterns in the state. Generally, they show new residents flocking to Salt Lake County who tend to be younger and are less likely to be Latter-day Saints, with families, and presumably many Latter-day Saint families, moving from Salt Lake County to suburban areas, including fast-growing Utah County.





County's growth rate among members even dipped. It had held relatively steady at 2% in 2018, when it slumped to 1.7%. In 2019, it was 1.6%.



As more people are likely moving out of Salt Lake County, this trend is likely to continue.

During this decade, every county witnessed another big shift. Births continued to decline, a sign of the state's [shrinking fertility rate](#), while deaths went up.

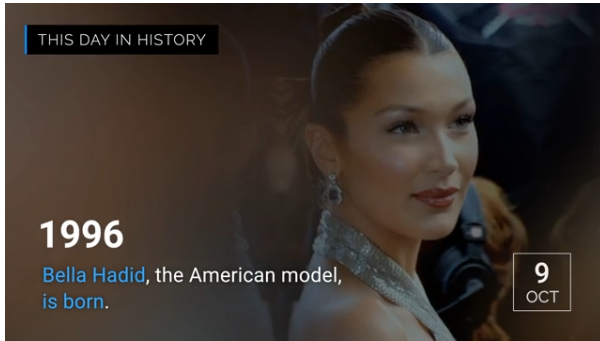
When you combine births and deaths, you get what demographers call the “natural increase.” In 2010, Utah's natural increase was roughly 38,600 people. In 2019, it was 28,600.

Fewer births and more funerals likely impact Latter-day Saint membership in the state, Perlich said.

“As we get older, the probability of death goes up,” she said. And those older generations are more likely to resemble old Utah — white, from bigger families and more likely to be Mormon.

Utah's dropping fertility rate also likely means that Latter-day Saint families that once had four, five or six kids, may have two or three — though how pronounced an impact this has is hard to gauge.





(Serrington | The Salt Lake Tribune)

ated

force out members for a variety of reasons from protesting too aggressively against church decisions.

But is it possible that excommunications in Utah, and in Salt Lake County in particular, have risen significantly in the past few years? Probably not.

“Given the cultural politics in the state of Utah, if there were a spike in excommunications, we would have heard about it,” said [Patrick Mason](#), head of Mormon studies at Utah State University.

Members blessed but not baptized

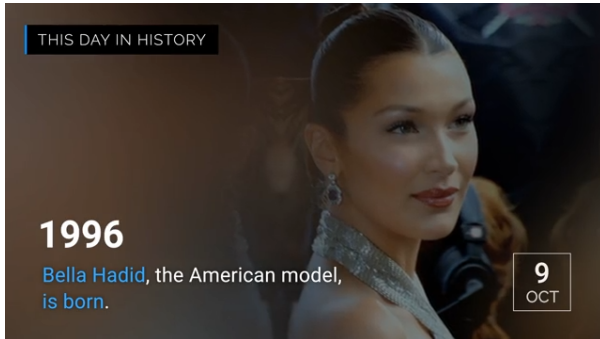
It is possible that some of the slowdown could be from people who were blessed as a baby but never baptized. This is generally an indication of activity level within the faith, particularly among those who are in their child-rearing years. Without numbers from the church, however, that’s a hard one to track. And Martinich argues that Utah’s activity level hasn’t fallen suddenly.

“Interestingly, there is a lot of data that suggests that things are improving perhaps with member activity and participation,” the independent demographer said in mid-December. “For example, there has been a net increase of over 100 wards and branches in Utah during 2019 thus far. The last time we saw such a large net increase in wards and branches in a single year in Utah was in 2006.”

Mason, though, says it is possible that part of Utah’s slowdown has come from people **✕**



This is based on the reaction to the [2015 policy](#) that labeled members in same-sex relationships “apostates” and blocked their children from being baptized. That [policy](#) [came](#) it sparked a significant backlash and that has



Members resigning

One impact from that now-discarded policy was a [spike in member resignations](#). And there is some data to back this up.

[Mark Naugle](#), a Salt Lake City-based immigration attorney, had offered through Reddit to help people resign their membership. He’d write the letter and act as their attorney, blocking any contact from a bishop or other church leader. He got a few hundred takers through the years. Then the 2015 policy was announced.

“And it just exploded,” he said.

He says he’s now processed about 35,000 resignations through his website — [QuitMormon.com](#). At The Tribune’s request, he narrowed the list to confirmed

resignations — times when the church sent a letter saying the person’s name has been removed — in Salt Lake County. In 2016, that number was about **360**. In 2018, it surpassed 1,500 and, in 2019, it was 1,300.

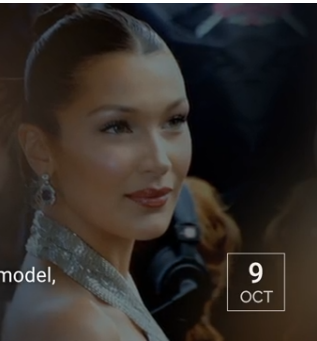
It may have dipped in 2019, because [the church added a new requirement](#) to resignation requests submitted through QuitMormon. They now have to come with a notarized letter to combat potential fraud.





membership used Naugle’s service. Other options would be resigning through a bishop, resigning First Presidency or hiring another attorney.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY



1996
Bella Hadid, the American model, is born.

9 OCT

Mason said, “that we’ve seen a significant increase in resignations.”

There are two other possibilities, though there’s not enough information available to determine if they are factors in Utah’s slowing Latter-day Saint growth rate. First, it is possible that missionaries are finding it more difficult to convert people in Utah, and there is data showing that [missionaries in many parts of the world are finding it harder to baptize new members](#). Second, it is possible some of the member reductions are due to lay membership clerks cleaning up outdated lists for their congregations, called wards.

But, generally, Mason believes a combination of rising resignations and a changing population are at play.

Martinich counsels caution. He sees that the 2019 data may be eye-catching but suggests it is probably worth getting a look at the numbers in 2020 and beyond before drawing strong conclusions about Utah’s changing population and Latter-day Saints’ place in it.



mcanham@sltrib.com

Follow @mattcanham

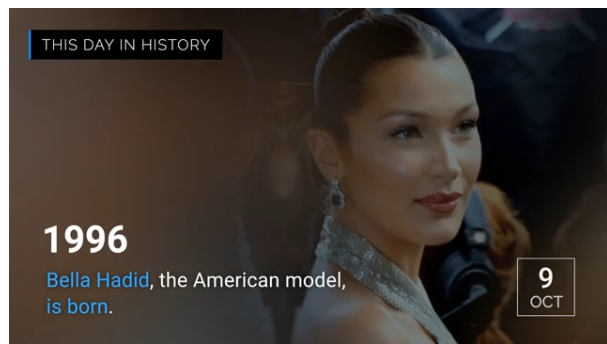
[Donate to the newsroom now.](#) The Salt Lake Tribune, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) public charity and contributions are tax deductible





RELIGION

Salt Lake County is now minority Mormon, and the impacts are far reaching



replacement rate' for the first time

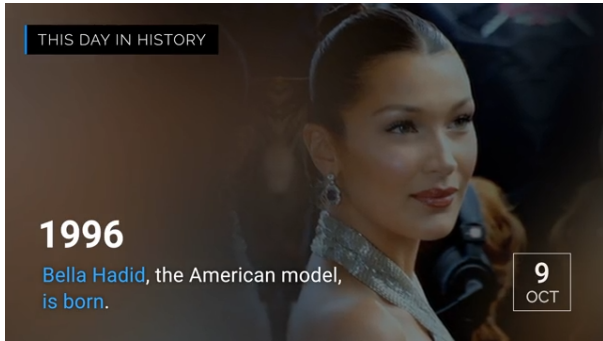
to health and the economy, here's how Utah

changed this decade

RELIGION

'Mormon Land': Unlike many faiths, the LDS Church is growing but not like it used to. A look at the hot spots and cold ones.





ade fix Red Butte Garden's fence

nsion of Bears Ears and Grand
Friday

ilized 'fish-lizard' at Flaming Gorge

FROM THE WEB

Recommended by

**Girls From The '90s
Everyone Had A
Crush On**

Gazillions | Sponsored

**Neuropathy & Nerve
Damage? Do This
Before Bed**

fitnesstrends.org | Sponsored

**He Was A
Legendary Actor -
Now He Works 9 to**

Gazillions | Sponsored


**21 Celebrity
Cheerleading Pics
From School.**

Gazillions | Sponsored





THIS DAY IN HISTORY



1996
Bella Hadid, the American model, is born.

9 OCT

You
t

New Senior Apartments Coming to Centreville (Take Senior Living | Search Ads |

Nobody Has Scored 14/15 On This Classic Mascot Quiz (Auto Overload | Sponsored



Most Affordable Camper Vans
Camper Vans Warehouse | Sponsored



How Dogs Cry For Help: 3 Warning Signs Your Dog Is Crying For Help
www.thecaninecode.com | Sponsored



Take 1 Cup Before Bed, Watch Your Body Slim
drkellyannwellness.com | Sponsored



If You Have Nail Fungus, Do This Immediately (Genius!)
Fast Nail Solution | Sponsored



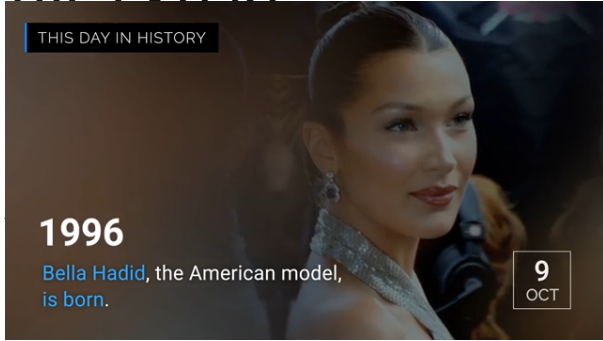
Wearing an Ill-fitting Bra Might Affect Your Health -
Bra And Panty Sets | Search Ads |





THE LATEST

THIS DAY IN HISTORY



1996

Bella Hadid, the American model, is born.

9 OCT

apostles, tech executives and lawmakers weigh in.

r, a new COVID drug with surprisingly effective

David Brooks: Here's the mindset that's tearing us apart

Lionsback Resort above Moab is under construction, after delays and litigation

The creepiest place to read this Newberry Award-winning author's newest book

Stanley Tucci's passion was acting. Now, it's food.

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





History and mission

Our nonprofit model

Legal notices

Store

Podcasts

Archives

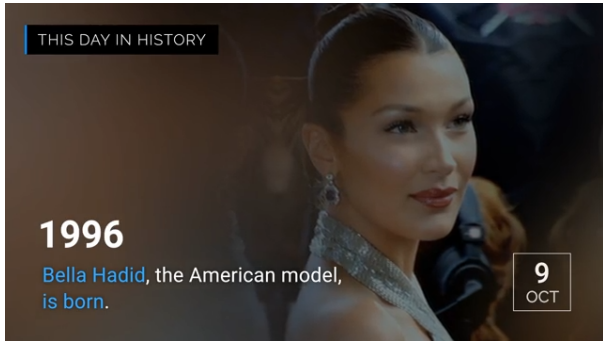
Story tip line

Support The Tribune

Donate

Cookie Preferences

Commenting Policy



Editorial policies and ethics



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





THIS DAY IN HISTORY

1996

Bella Hadid, the American model, is born.

9
OCT

