

Dean E. Mann, "Mormon Attitudes Toward
the Political Roles of Church Leaders."
Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought, Vol.
2 No. 2 (1967): 32–48.

MORMON ATTITUDES TOWARD THE POLITICAL ROLES OF CHURCH LEADERS

Dean E. Mann

In an effort to provide specific data concerning actual effects of alleged violations of the separation of church and state, the following study was made of reactions by L.D.S. Church members to President David O. McKay's widely reported "endorsement" of Richard Nixon in the 1960 presidential race; Dean Mann, Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of California, Santa Barbara, is the author of a number of books and articles, most recently the co-author of AMERICAN DEMOCRACY IN WORLD PERSPECTIVE, just published by Harper and Row.

During the 1960 presidential election campaign both candidates — Senator John F. Kennedy and Vice-President Richard M. Nixon — made appearances in Salt Lake City. Each was greeted cordially by David O. McKay, President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. But there was a slight difference in his statements to the two candidates. To both he offered support if elected, but to Vice-President Nixon he added, “. . . I say to you today that I hope you are.”¹

Under different circumstances these words might have received little attention. But the 1960 election was characterized by an extraordinary sensitivity regarding religious issues, owing to the candidacy of a Roman Catholic on the Democratic ticket. Because of the fact that President McKay not only presides over the Mormon Church,

but is also considered by faithful Mormons to be a "prophet, seer, and revelator," that is, a channel of communication between God and man, it was expected that his "endorsement" would have a powerful influence over Mormon voting behavior in favor of the Vice-President.

Informed observers appear to agree that President McKay's statement was a spontaneous and unplanned utterance, not calculated to give the Church's endorsement to Nixon. Subsequently, the Mormon leader stated that he endorsed Nixon "as a Republican and a personal voter."² Nevertheless, careful political analysts of Western voting behavior purported to discern a decided effect of his statement. In Idaho it was reported that precincts with large Latter-day Saint populations voted less heavily for Senator Kennedy than they normally did for Democratic candidates, and throughout the West the endorsement "was believed to have greatly influenced members of that faith"³

Assertions of "influence" are easy to make but more difficult to demonstrate. Suspicious of these assertions, I attempted to make a somewhat more systematic analysis of Mormon reactions to President McKay's statements by means of a questionnaire which was distributed after the election. The questionnaires were distributed personally and by mail to male priesthood holders in three locations — Washington, D.C., Logan, Utah, and Tucson, Arizona. Of a total of 725 distributed, 297 questionnaires (41%) were returned.

The study was not designed as a careful scientific study of Church member opinion. Those who responded were a highly select group, consisting primarily of those who were actively engaged in Church work, and presumably were devoted to the Church leaders. Nor was the sample even representative of this more limited group, since for lack of interest or other reason a large number failed to respond. The goal was to provide some hypotheses about the response of Church members to Church leader direction on political subjects. These hypotheses, hopefully, may be later subjected to more rigorous testing.

REACTION TO PRESIDENT MCKAY'S STATEMENT

A high percentage (83%) of those responding were aware that President McKay had expressed his preference for Vice-President

¹ *New York Times*, October 11, 1960.

² *New York Times*, October 13, 1960; see Frank H. Jonas, "The 1960 Election in Utah," *Western Political Quarterly*, XIV (March, 1961), 365.

³ Boyd A. Martin, "1960 Elections in Idaho," *Western Political Quarterly*, XIV, 342; Totton J. Anderson, "The Political West in 1960," *Western Political Quarterly*, XIV, 287.

Nixon in 1960. In view of the usual silence of the First Presidency of the Church on political matters a majority of the membership of the Church may have been surprised at his action. But the attitudes of members of the Church regarding President McKay stating publicly his preference differed sharply (Table I). An overall majority approved his action but Democrats were more critical of President McKay's public expression than were Republicans and Independents. A large majority of Republicans expressed approval of President McKay's utterance, while a plurality of Democrats expressed disapproval. Age, education, and occupation appear to have had little significance in explaining the reactions of members of the Church.

The sizeable minority of Democrats who approved President McKay's action suggests both a willingness on their part that the leader of the Mormon Church take an active role in politics, in spite of his opposed opinion, and also a reverence for the man and the office he holds.

TABLE I
REACTION TO PRESIDENT MCKAY'S PUBLIC EXPRESSION OF A PREFERENCE, BY PARTY

<i>Party Affiliation</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>Approve</i>	<i>Disapprove</i>	<i>No Opinion</i>	<i>Total</i>
Republican.....	125	66 (%)	15 (%)	17 (%)	100 (%)
Democratic.....	82	32	44	24	100
Independent.....	29	56	30	15	101
Not registered.....	25	58	26	16	100
Other.....	4	25	—	75	100
Total.....	265				

Percentages do not add to 100% because of rounding.

QUESTION: "What was your immediate reaction to his (Pres. McKay's) public expression of a preference?"

Some differences were found among members of the Church in relation to the office in the priesthood they held. Fifty-nine percent of the High Priests were inclined to approve President McKay's action. The degree of support for President McKay's statement declined somewhat through the offices of Seventy (54%) and Elder (49%), and the proportions of those who disapproved increased (20%, 25% and 28%, respectively). The few in the sample who held only the Aaronic priesthood tended to disapprove President McKay's action. It is not clear that the priesthood held in itself affected this reaction. It is obvious, however, that those holding the higher priesthoods had committed themselves more to the *institution* of the Church.

Respondents were invited to indicate verbally their reactions and a few responses may be illustrative. One Western Republican who voted for Nixon explained his favorable reaction: "As our President, he probably felt the need for us to reorganize our thoughts and com-

pare the ideals and objectives of both parties with those of the church and make us mindful of our obligation to be knowledgeable [*sic*] of all things." Another confirmed Republican commented, "Probably spoke out because of dislike for ultra-liberal Democrats whom Kennedy seemed to favor at that time." Still a third said, "Offered guidance to fence-sitters, from a position of greater inspiration."

On the other hand a Democrat who disapproved of his public utterance asserted that President McKay did so "Because he expected his public statement to help sway a large body of people toward Republican party in that election." A Democrat who voted for Kennedy could only say his reaction was "Mixed. Four years ago I'd have been violently negative; however, my reaction might best be described as one of sympathy due to some realization of the perspective of one in his office must have. While I dislike Nixon enough to disagree, I still couldn't be so sure President McKay was wrong as to react with any real disagreement." The difficulty in expressing a disapproving reaction to the powerful figure of a prophet of God is indicated by one respondent who said, "Whereas I generally approve of President McKay's action, I do so not wholeheartedly. It might be better to say I do not disapprove."

VIEWES ON PRESIDENT MCKAY'S INSPIRATION IN POLITICAL CHOICES

For the devout Mormon, the President of the Church is a prophet of God and the leader to whom God reveals his doctrine and his guidance for mankind. His words and his decisions therefore become authoritative for the Church on any question on which he speaks under the direction of the divine inspiration to which he is entitled. Mormon theology allows, however, that he may also speak as a man with or without the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and when he so speaks Mormon communicants are under no obligation to follow his lead. (His statement, however, may constitute the official position of the Church, as did a recent pronouncement in opposition to federal aid to education.⁴) Nevertheless, he is a man who is looked upon as having a close relationship to God and Mormons tend to attribute great authority to his utterances, even when they are clearly labeled matters of opinion.

When asked if President McKay was inspired in making his presidential choice, 43% of those responding believed that the President of the Church was not inspired. Twenty-seven percent were unsure about whether the President received divine guidance in making

⁴ *Deseret News*, "Church Section," Nov. 10, 1962, p.3.

up his voting decision, while 30% believed him to be inspired. These figures suggest that many Mormons are able and willing to make a distinction between civil and religious realms, but they also suggest that a considerable number of Mormons are not entirely clear in their own mind about the extent to which the President's inspiration in the religious carries over into civil affairs.

Men holding prominent positions in the Church hierarchy, either in the priesthood or in a specific assignment in the Church organization, tended to ascribe inspiration to the President's political decision to a greater degree than those holding lesser positions, as indicated in Tables II and III. Especially was this true among the Seventies, the missionary group in the Church. Similarly, those who

TABLE II
VIEWS ON INSPIRATION RELATED TO PRIESTHOOD OFFICE

<i>Priesthood</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>Inspired</i>	<i>Not Inspired</i>	<i>Not Sure</i>	<i>Total</i>
High Priest	(67)	36%	40%	24%	100%
Seventy	(57)	36	32	32	100
Elder	(143)	29	44	27	100
Aaronic	(19)	11	63	26	100
Total	286				

presided over stakes, the stake presidency, high council, and patriarch, and also the presidents of the priesthood organizations tended most strongly to attribute inspiration to the President, while those holding auxiliary positions were much less inclined to do so. Members of bishoprics proved an exception. Holders of the Aaronic or lower priesthood all tended not to see the President's decision as inspired. The large percentage of those not sure indicates the degree of uncertainty even among those holding higher offices. Several respondents explained that one could know if the President was inspired or not by the fact that he would say so. Otherwise, in their

TABLE III
VIEWS ON INSPIRATION RELATED TO SPECIFIC POSITION HELD

<i>Office</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>Inspired</i>	<i>Not Inspired</i>	<i>Not Sure</i>	<i>Total</i>
Stake presidency, high council or patriarch	(12)	50%	17%	33%	100%
Priesthood presidency	(39)	49	30	21	100
Bishopric	(20)	35	40	25	100
Stake auxiliary officer	(28)	29	50	21	100
Ward auxiliary officer	(49)	35	35	31	101
Ward auxiliary or priesthood teacher	(51)	26	39	35	100
No answer	(70)	24	57	19	100
None	(9)	22	56	22	100
Total	278				

Percentages do not add to 100% because of rounding.

opinion, one could assume that he was not. In the event that he was inspired, commented one Kennedy voter, "he should state or make a statement to that effect to be handed down through the priesthood and not a public announcement."

EFFECT ON VOTERS

The respondents were asked to reflect on their reaction to President McKay's statement in terms of their own voting intention (Table IV). This requires the respondent to reflect on an attitude which he held several months earlier and which he may only dimly

TABLE IV
RECOLLECTIONS OF REACTIONS TOWARD CANDIDATES AFTER PRESIDENT MCKAY'S STATEMENT

	N-174	N-14	N-9	N-11	Total — N-256
<i>Reactions toward Nixon</i>	<i>Favoring Nixon</i>	<i>Undecided Leaning to Nixon</i>	<i>Undecided</i>	<i>Undecided Leaning to Kennedy</i>	<i>Favoring Kennedy</i>
Considerably more favorable	3%	14%	—%	—%	4%
Somewhat more favorable	18	36	11	—	2
Unchanged in attitude	77	43	78	82	90
Somewhat less favorable	1	7	11	—	2
Considerably less favorable	1	—	—	18	2
Totals	100	100	100	100	100

	N-60	N-14	N-8	N-12	Total — N-248
<i>Reactions toward Kennedy</i>					
Considerably more favorable	—%	29%	—%	25%	2%
Somewhat more favorable	1	7	13	8	6
Unchanged in attitude	89	36	88	67	87
Somewhat less favorable	9	21	—	—	6
Considerably less favorable	1	7	—	—	—
Totals	100	100	101	100	101

Percentages do not add to 100% because of rounding.

QUESTION: "Please think back to the campaign and the time you first learned that President McKay preferred Nixon. As well as you can recall, after thinking about it carefully, indicate how his statement made you feel concerning the candidates."

remember or may entirely mistake during the interim. To this extent, the procedure is faulty. Nevertheless, the evidence may be indicative of the long term reaction of members of the Church to the President's statement. Those who intended to vote for Nixon indicated that their attitudes for the most part were unchanged, although 21% showed a more favorable attitude toward Nixon. They

registered a slightly less favorable attitude toward Kennedy. The relatively few who were undecided but tending toward Nixon showed a tendency to favor Nixon even more strongly. Those who were undecided appeared to be relatively unchanged in their attitudes toward both candidates. Similarly, those who preferred Senator Kennedy were not particularly affected by President McKay's statement, although there was some slight evidence of a reverse reaction in favor of the Senator. Mormon voters appear to have made up their minds to a considerable extent prior to President McKay's statement, and his statement, therefore, had only a negligible effect on their views.

In comparing voting intentions with actual voting in 1960 (Table V), in only two instances did individuals who had made voting decisions switch to the opposite candidate, one in each direction. But among those who were completely undecided, Kennedy received five out of the seven votes.

TABLE V
ACTUAL VOTES CAST, IN TERMS OF PREVIOUS PREFERENCES FOR CANDIDATES

<i>Candidate voted for</i>	N-194	N-14	N-9	N-12	Total — N-286 N-57
	<i>Favoring Nixon</i>	<i>Undecided Leaning to Nixon</i>	<i>Undecided</i>	<i>Undecided Leaning to Kennedy</i>	<i>Favoring Kennedy</i>
Nixon	93%	71%	22%	—	2%
Kennedy	1	14	56	75%	91
Other candidate	—	—	—	—	—
Did not vote	7	14	22	25	7
No answer	—	—	—	—	—
Totals	101	99	100	100	100

Percentages do not add to 100% because of rounding.

Many of the respondents indicated their personal reactions to President McKay's statement in terms of their voting decision. One of the two who switched his vote, explained his vote for Nixon,

I felt Mr. Kennedy was still a very capable man. It was Nixon I had to reappraise. Deep down, the desire to vote for Mr. Kennedy was there, but I could not bring myself to do so for fear I did not have all the facts and may be making a wrong choice. I finally chose; a *very* difficult choice. [Respondent's emphasis]

A Kennedy voter wrote,

I was concerned because I didn't know whether to consider Pres. McKay's opinion as God's will or not (at first). Later, this was clarified, but I thought the whole thing was handled rather badly.

A Democrat who voted for Kennedy stated,

If he had indicated that he spoke as the prophet of the Church, I would have voted for Nixon; but since he spoke only individual opinion, I was not swayed.

Most respondents indicated they were not particularly influenced by the statement, but a significant number wrote that they felt more sure of themselves as a result. One stated,

There had been some question early in the campaign as to which candidate I would support. By the time President McKay announced his choice, I had leaned toward Nixon over Kennedy. However, this action (Pres. McKay's) gave me confidence or assurance in my thinking.

Another said,

I had favored Nixon slightly over Kennedy and after President McKay's statement, was pleased to hear he did also, because he is, in my opinion, a brilliant and inspired man.

Two other comments were: "Made me think we had a wise president and I hoped his statement was based on inspiration," and "President McKay reassured us that an already strong opinion was properly founded."

Several indicated they were more favorably disposed toward Kennedy, although not necessarily enough to vote for him. One Nixon voter stated,

My first reaction was, "This is the first time that I recall anything like this happening." It seemed to me that the Republican beliefs of the Church broke through into the open. Also I felt that perhaps it was pressure, of a sort, on me to vote the same way — and I resented it.

Another Nixon voter said,

I felt it was none of his business and both reported expressions of preference were entirely out of order.

Finally, one who had long disassociated himself from the Church stated,

It made me more certain that Kennedy was the best man, knowing the backward, conservative attitude of the Church and feeling quite sure McKay tried to use his position of religious authority to influence Church members to vote Nixon.

VOTING TRENDS IN THE WEST

The evidence provided by voting returns would appear to substantiate the conclusion that President McKay's endorsement had minimal overall effect. The states which had the heaviest concentration of Mormons, namely Utah and Idaho, appeared to move in

the same direction and in the same magnitudes as other Western states without such concentrations (See Table VI). Overall, the Rocky Mountain states tended to move in the same direction during the period from 1952 through 1960. All went Republican in 1952 and remained Republican in 1956. Four of eight, however, showed a decline in Republican presidential vote in 1960 over 1956, while the other four increased their Republican strength. In 1960, however, the region showed a marked drop in Republican vote, with two states, Nevada and New Mexico, entering the Democratic column again. Of particular interest is the fact that there was nearly a 10% drop in Republican percentage of the presidential vote in Utah, the largest drop in any state in the region. Idaho also ranked among the states with the largest percentage of decline.

TABLE VI
REPUBLICAN PERCENTAGE OF THE VOTE FOR PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES, ROCKY MOUNTAIN STATES,
1952-1960

State	1952	1956	1960	Reduction in Republican Percentage 1956-1960
Arizona	58.3	61.0	55.5	5.5
Colorado	60.8	59.5	54.6	4.9
Idaho	65.5	61.2	53.8	7.4
Montana	59.4	57.1	51.1	6.0
Nevada	61.4	58.0	48.8	9.2
New Mexico	55.4	57.8	49.8	8.0
Utah	58.9	64.6	54.8	9.8
Wyoming	62.7	60.1	55.0	5.1

(Data derived from the *Statistical Abstracts of the United States*, 1960 and 1961.)

Moreover, when the Utah counties are classified in accordance with the percentage of Mormon population,⁵ the number of counties with high Mormon populations having a decline of 10% or more in the Republican vote was equal to the number of such counties with smaller Mormon concentrations. The most populous counties in the state, Salt Lake, Weber, Utah, and Davis — with lesser densities of Mormon population — tended to distribute themselves rather closely around the state average of 9.8% decline in the Republican vote. One of the least Mormon counties, Carbon, had the next to largest percentage drop of 17.5%, while one of the counties with a strong concentration of Mormon population, Emery, had the third largest decline, 13.1%, in the state.

These statistics were supported by the solicited observations of three political scientists who are close observers of Utah politics. One observer stated,

⁵Estimate was made by an informed Mormon politician, since no figures on distribution of Mormon population were available.

I don't think President McKay's statement had much effect on Utah voting. [The Church] has been less successful when it makes a public announcement or otherwise comes out into the public with its action and statements by leaders.

Articulate Mormons and non-Mormons in Utah have learned to distinguish between an authority of the Church speaking as a prophet and speaking for himself, although the Church authorities deliberately fail to make this distinction clear at times, deliberately obscuring their position in order to take advantage in a temporal realm of their position in the Church with its spiritual overtones.

A Republican observer stated,

As to the impact of President McKay's statement, I doubt that it increased Nixon's majority by more than one or two percent at most. A few people who are hostile to alleged LDS efforts to control politics may have voted for Kennedy to show their independence, and a few active LDS people who were undecided and having trouble making up their minds may have been encouraged to solve their problems by voting for Nixon the way that President McKay was voting.

In general, he felt that President McKay's statement helped reinforce the convictions of those who were going to vote for Nixon and tended to stabilize the pro-Nixon sentiment of the state.

A Democratic observer felt that President McKay's endorsement intensified the attachment of Mormon Democrats to Kennedy but tended to lead Mormon independents of orthodox persuasion toward Nixon.

The more orthodox are willing to take Church suggestions in politics while the non-orthodox deeply resent Church interference in political matters. . . . [Finally, he emphasized a] fundamental, built-in factor in Mormon culture: opposition to the Catholic Church. Against that kind of background no one needs to come out and say, "You ought not to vote for a Catholic candidate for President." I therefore conclude that the effect of President McKay's endorsement of Nixon was simply to reinforce basic political preference for non-Catholic candidates that are already built into the equation in the state.

POLITICAL IMAGE OF THE CHURCH

Since Mormon philosophy encompasses many interests and activities of concern to the politician and to the party organizations, the respondents were asked to identify the party which most accurately reflects the philosophy of the Mormon Church (See Table VII). Not surprisingly, a large majority of the Republicans believed that the philosophy of the Mormon Church was most accurately reflected in the Republican party, although a significant number believed that no party accurately reflected its philosophy. On the other hand, Democratic respondents tended to identify the philosophy of the

TABLE VII

VIEWS OF WHICH PARTY MOST ACCURATELY REFLECTS MORMON PHILOSOPHY, BY PARTY

<i>Party which reflects Mormon philosophy</i>	— Party of Respondent —					Total — N-260
	N-121 Republican	N-79 Democrat	N-3 Other	N-32 Independent	N-25 Not Registered	
Republican	67%	33%	—%	38%	56%	
Democratic	1	10	—	—	—	
Other	2	8	—	3	—	
No Party	30	49	100	59	44	
Totals	100	100	100	100	100	

QUESTION: "In your opinion, the philosophy of the Mormon Church is most accurately reflected in which of the following parties?"

Mormon Church with none of the parties. Of greater interest, however, is the very high percentage of Democratic respondents who felt that the philosophy of the Mormon Church was most accurately reflected in the Republican party. For the devout member, this kind of conflict must be resolved either by voting for Republican candidates or by refusing to accept the application of Mormon philosophy to practical political interests and therefore feeling free to vote for Democratic candidates. He may, of course, just refuse to vote and thus avoid the potential conflict. Independents and those who were not registered tended to identify Mormon philosophy either with the Republican party or with no party at all. None saw the Democratic party as the party of Mormon philosophy. There was a strong tendency for them to explain President McKay's preference for Nixon in terms of his preference for a Republican approach toward domestic issues.

When questioned about their view of the party which the Church leadership tended to prefer, the respondents identified the Church leadership with the Republican party to a greater extent than they identified Mormon philosophy with the Republican party (Table VIII). Only one respondent identified the Church leadership with

TABLE VIII

VIEWS ON POLITICAL PREFERENCE OF CHURCH LEADERSHIP, BY PARTY

<i>Party preference of Church leadership</i>	— Party of Respondent —					Total — N-264
	N-122 Republican	N-83 Democrat	N-3 Other	N-32 Independent	N-24 Not Registered	
Republican	78%	83%	33%	59%	71%	
Democratic	—	1	—	—	—	
Other	4	2	—	—	—	
No party	18	13	67	41	29	
Totals	100	99	100	100	100	

Percentages do not add to 100% because of rounding.

QUESTION: "In your view which party does the Church leadership tend to prefer?"

the Democratic party while the overwhelming majority of Democrats thought that the Church leadership tended to prefer the Republican party.⁶

For the most part, Republicans explained the preference of the Church leadership for the Republican party with reference to the similarity of Church and party philosophies (See Table IX). How-

TABLE IX
REASONS GIVEN FOR PREFERENCE OF CHURCH LEADERSHIP, BY PARTY AFFILIATION

<i>Reasons for preference of Church leadership</i>	N-120 Republican	<i>— Party of Respondent —</i>			Total — N-281
		N-87 Democrat	N-5 Other	N-33 Independent	N-27 Not Registered
Similarity of philosophy of Church and party	64%	23%	40%	36%	37%
Economic and social background of Church leaders	39	56	20	30	33
Economic interests of the Church.....	23	56	40	15	26

Totals do not add to 100% because respondents could select more than one response.

QUESTION: "If the Church leadership tends to prefer a particular party, what do you think causes this preference?

- 1) Similarity of philosophy of Church and party
- 2) Economic and social background of Church leaders
- 3) Economic interests of the Church"

ever, many Republicans believed that the economic and social background of Church leaders and even the economic interest of the Church tended to influence the leadership in the direction of the Republican party. Democrats, on the other hand, were convinced that the economic and social background of Church leaders was a much more determining influence, with the economic interests of the Church running second and philosophy only a poor third. Independents or those not registered tended to follow the viewpoint of the Republican respondents, although with more emphasis on the economic and social background of Church leaders and the economic interests of the Church.

ATTITUDES TOWARD GUIDANCE BY CHURCH LEADERS ON POLITICAL ISSUES

A large number of Mormons make distinctions in terms of their willingness to accept advice from Church leaders on specific political

⁶ This image is corroborated by a study of the labor philosophy of the Mormon Church, wherein it was found in a sample of Church members that the leadership of the Church, consisting of stake presidents and bishops, was more strongly oriented toward the Republican party than was the general membership. J. Kenneth Davies, "A Study of the Labor Philosophy Developed within the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints," unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Southern California, 1960.

and religious issues. Respondents were asked to identify those issues on which they felt Church leaders should advise Church members (See Table X). Mormons tended to reject a role for Church leaders on such obvious governmental and political issues as taxation, foreign aid, compulsory health insurance, and, in spite of Apostle Ezra Taft Benson's involvement in the agricultural issue, agricultural surpluses. At the other extreme were issues such as juvenile delinquency, gambling, and liquor, all of which were identified heavily as matters on which the Church officials should give the membership guidance. All three of these problem areas are among those on which the Mormon places greatest emphasis. Occupying a middle range were such issues as corruption in government and business and Communism and Fascism. The relatively low position for such issues as birth control and released-time religious education may suggest the kinds of cross-pressures to which the Mormons are subject as a result of the general orientation of the Church and conflicting economic and social barriers — particularly with regard to

TABLE X

ISSUES ON WHICH MEMBERS BELIEVE CHURCH OFFICIALS SHOULD ADVISE CHURCH MEMBERS, BY PARTY

Issue	— Party of Respondent —						
	N-297 Total	N-129 Rep.	N-86 Dem.	N-5 Other	N-33 Ind.	N-28 Not Reg.	N-16 No Ans.
Labor Management							
Relations	24%	35%	15%	—%	21%	14%	19%
Social Security	24	35	15	—	21	14	19
Federal Aid to							
Education	26	36	20	—	18	14	25
Unemployment							
Compensation	23	33	15	—	18	14	19
Foreign Aid	21	27	14	—	21	18	19
Taxation	21	27	14	—	21	14	13
National Defense	25	32	19	—	15	28	25
Compulsory Health							
Insurance	24	36	15	—	15	14	19
Agricultural Surpluses..	23	31	16	—	18	18	19
Corruption in Business	50	57	43	20	49	50	44
Corruption in							
Government	57	66	50	20	55	54	56
Released Time Religious							
Education	41	46	40	20	39	36	31
Segregation	41	46	35	20	39	50	31
Free Speech	46	50	44	40	45	39	44
Communism	64	69	59	40	52	71	69
Fascism	53	56	50	40	45	54	63
Juvenile Delinquency....	75	79	80	40	58	75	69
Gambling	71	74	73	40	58	64	75
Liquor	71	73	74	40	58	64	75
Birth Control	42	50	34	20	39	43	50

Percentages do not add to 100% because respondents could select none or all items as within the purview of Church leadership guidance.

QUESTION: "On which of the following issues do you believe Church leaders should advise Church members?"

birth control: although the Mormon Church has formerly inveighed against artificial methods of controlling conception, leadership pronouncements on this matter are relatively infrequent, and the very real problems of raising large families are all too keenly felt.

There are sharp differences in the extent to which Democrats and Republicans believed that Church officials should advise them on social issues. On issues which appear to have a high political content and are lacking in a moral issue, few Democrats were inclined to believe that Church officials had a role to play in influencing the thinking of Church members. A considerably higher percentage of Republicans — usually around twice the percentage of Democrats — felt that the Church leadership had a role in advising them. To a certain extent this difference may be explained on the basis of the content of that advice. For the most part, leader opinion has favored Republican positions on these issues and the Democrats are thus naturally wary of such advice.

TRADITIONAL PRACTICES AND ATTITUDES

Direct and active participation by Church leaders in controversies over candidates and issues is not an unheard-of occurrence in Mormon history. Both in the Middle West and in the Rocky Mountains the Mormons established theocratic forms of government. The Church hierarchy ruled its State of Deseret until territorial government was established and President Brigham Young was appointed governor. Operating later through the Council of Fifty and the People's Party, the Church continued to exercise great influence over political affairs until that party's abandonment in 1890.⁷ Moreover, Mormon theology had long emphasized the identity of spiritual and temporal matters so that the distinction between civil and ecclesiastical authorities appeared to run counter to Church teaching.⁸

Since the Church extricated itself from formal participation in the political process, only in exceptional circumstances and especially on issues relevant to Church doctrine have Church officials taken a public stand. One notable exception occurred in 1936 when President Heber J. Grant endorsed Governor Alfred Landon, the

⁷ James R. Clark, "The Kingdom of God, The Council of Fifty and the State of Deseret," *Utah Historical Quarterly*, XXVI (April 1958), 131-148. Leland H. Creer, "The Evolution of Government in Early Utah," *Utah Historical Quarterly*, XXVI (April 1958), 23-42, and Everett L. Cooley, "Carpetbag Rule — Territorial Government in Utah," *Utah Historical Quarterly*, XXVI (April 1958), 107-129; G. Homer Durham, "A Political Interpretation of Mormon History," *Pacific Historical Review*, XIII (June 1944), 136-150 and "The Development of Political Parties in Utah: The First Phase," *Utah Humanities Review*, I (April 1947), 122-133.

⁸ See Doctrine and Covenants, Sections 29, 34, 35, and 88: 78-80.

Republican candidate for the presidency. But the official position of the Church stated in August 28, 1962, is as follows:

The General Authorities of the Church as such do not favor one political party over another; the Church has no candidates or candidate for political office; we do not undertake to tell people how to vote. We do, however, most earnestly urge every citizen of our beloved country to take advantage of the privilege and opportunity to participate in the local primaries where representatives of both political parties will be selected and that they exercise their God-given franchise to make their wishes known at the election polls.⁹

Attempts to identify the Church leaders with radical conservative groups, such as the John Birch Society, have evoked public censure by the Church presidency.¹⁰

The leadership of the Church has in recent years been identified with economic conservatism and the Republican Party. Articulate Church leaders who held high public office, such as Senator Reed Smoot, Secretary of Agriculture Ezra Taft Benson, Undersecretary of State J. Reuben Clark, helped create this image; but other bases are found in the large economic interests of the Church, its recent emergence from a strongly rural environment, and its profound sense of separatism fostered by its history of persecution and its sense of mission as a chosen people.

This conservatism is not monolithic, however. Many Mormons and from time to time some leading Church officials have clearly identified themselves with the Democratic party and liberal causes. B. H. Roberts, a perennial candidate for the House, was a Democrat while holding leading priesthood offices and acting as Church Historian. Hugh B. Brown, now a counselor to President McKay and formerly an apostle, took an active part in the 1958 Utah congressional campaign, keynoting the Democratic state nominating convention and speaking for Democratic candidates on television and in various parts of the state.¹¹ Both former Congressman David King and Senator Ted Moss from Utah are well-known Mormons and Democrats.

⁹ *Deseret News* (Salt Lake City, Utah), August 28, 1962.

¹⁰ *Salt Lake Tribune*, January 4, 1963; editorial, "Church Section," *Deseret News* (Salt Lake City, Utah), March 26, 1966; for instances when Church authorities did involve themselves politically see Frank H. Jonas, "J. Bracken Lee and the Mormon Church," *Proceedings of the Utah Academy of Science, Arts and Letters*, XXXIII (1956), 149-160; Ross Thomson, "Utah: The Mormon Church and the Amendment Fight," *Frontier*, VI (January 1955), 10-11.

¹¹ See Frank H. Jonas, "Third Man in Utah Politics," *Proceedings of the Utah Academy of Arts*, XXXI (1960).

CONCLUSIONS AND SPECULATIONS

Clearly, there are difficulties in attempting to generalize from the foregoing data about Mormon voting behavior and the influence of Church leaders on that behavior. President McKay's statement was a relatively isolated occurrence for which many Church members were unprepared. President McKay himself is a unique figure because of the great respect and devotion in which he is held by the dedicated members of the Church. Now over 90 years old, he is revered both for his leadership position and for his great human qualities. Moreover, his intervention in the 1960 election placed his influence over Mormon voters against powerful forces of party devotion, personal attraction of the presidential candidates, the currents of religious conflict, and economic self-interest of the voters. The degree of influence which his statement might have had under contrary conditions — if such statements were common, if someone other than President McKay were involved, if it occurred in an election without such powerful cross-currents — is, of course, unclear.

As noted earlier, there are limitations in the data, making the inferences of this study only suggestive. The sample of Mormon communicants from whom opinions were obtained was clearly biased in favor of the devoted members. The members who had disassociated themselves from the Church were little represented. There is also evidence that some Church members who were approached considered such an inquiry as an affront to the President of the Church or as a Democratic plot. Only men were included in the sample, and it may be that women would show somewhat different reactions to the views of the Mormon leader.

Nevertheless, the conclusion of this study — that President McKay's statement had little effect on Mormon voting behavior — tends to confirm the conclusions of earlier studies which suggest that religious affiliation was only a latent cross-pressure exerting minor influence at the rational level.¹² Other studies suggested that the religious factor itself plays a relatively insignificant role, far outweighed by socio-economic or minority status.¹³ Benton Johnson, however, asserted that "ascetic Protestantism" — which includes Mormons in his definition — tends to foster political conservatives.¹⁴

The results suggest some dimensions of the reaction of voters

¹² Wesley and Beverly Allinsmith, "Religious Affiliation and Politico-Economic Attitude: A Study of Eight Major Religious Groups," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, XII (Fall 1948), 377-389.

¹³ Robert Lane, *Political Life* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1959), p. 247.

¹⁴ Benton Johnson, "Ascetic Protestantism and Political Preference," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, XXVI (Spring 1962), 35-46.

toward the intrusion of the leadership of a highly integrated Church organization in political affairs. Far from considering conformity to the President's views as a test of faith, it appears that the membership reacted primarily in terms of other voting determinants, such as party and attraction toward a candidate. Presumably, the situation would have been different had President McKay stated that his opinion was based on divine inspiration. But how different? It is entirely possible that the reaction against dictation of a political decision by the Church leadership might have been greater than it was when the President expressed only his personal opinion.

It is also clear that Mormon opinion regarding the extent to which its leadership is inspired on matters normally considered non-religious is divided. Relying on the data presented here and the author's own experience, it is clear that some Mormons believe that virtually anything said by the President or leading authorities on any subject constitutes the word and will of God. Others are unwilling to admit this, basing their views on the fact that there are obvious differences of opinion among Church authorities on many non-religious matters.

The image of the Church leadership is preponderantly a one-party image, making it difficult for some Mormons to feel comfortable as Democrats and virtually forcing those who are both to discriminate between political and religious affairs. This is borne out by divergent opinions of Republicans and Democrats on the issues on which they feel the Church leadership should provide guidance, the Democrats tending to prefer restriction of leadership guidance to more clearly moral issues.

The infinite number of common concerns of the state and the Church in promoting the welfare of its citizens or communicants makes conflicts inevitable. They are all the more inevitable when the citizenry are divided on political issues along partisan lines. Since the Church, as an institution, or the President, as an individual, can participate in the political arena only by taking positions of a more or less definite character, the Church members who dissent cannot help but feel cross-pressured. Since it is the prerogative of the Church leadership to determine when such intervention should occur, it is their burden to be sensitive to the difficult choices which Church members must make.