# LATTER-DAY SAINTS MEMBERSHIP GROWTH IN HAITI, 1978–2018[1]

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## Introduction: The End of Mormon Membership Growth in Latin America?

In 1984, sociologist of religion Rodney Stark predicted there could be 267 million Mormons in the world by 2080, after extrapolating the 1982–1983 Latter-day Saints (LDS) growth rates into the far future. "His optimistic projections have so warmed the hearts of the faithful that they are often quoted over the pulpit, even in general conference now and then," Armand Mauss dryly noted.[2] Stark argued that this growth explosion offered scholars a unique opportunity to witness the emergence of a new world religion that could achieve a following comparable to other major world religions.[3] Forty years later seems a good time to check up on Stark's scholarly prophecy. By year-end 2024, there

1. An earlier version of this article benefited much from the detailed critical comments and suggestions by Carter Charles, Alan Epstein, Sara Rahmani, and David Stewart. This thoroughly revised version was again critically reviewed by Carter Charles, and also by Amaechi Okafor—many thanks! Many thanks also to Jennifer Huss Basquiat for sharing her PhD thesis and to the two anonymous peer reviewers recruited by *Dialogue*, who did an excellent job.

2. Armand L. Mauss, "Guest Editor's Introduction," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 29, no. 1 (1996): 1–7.

3. Rodney Stark, "The Rise of a New World Faith," *Review of Religious Research* 26, no. 1 (1984): 18–27, updated in Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Mormonism* (Columbia University Press, 2005).

were 17.5 million Mormons worldwide.[4] After decades of spectacular membership growth, LDS expansion stagnated around 2000–2005 for two main reasons: (1) because the Church struggles to recruit new members and (2) because it struggles to retain the members who were born into the faith or converted to it later in life.

Nowhere is the current Mormon membership stagnation more visible than in Latin America. Massive Mormon membership growth occurred across the continent in the 1970s and especially the 1980s. But then something strange happened. Mormon membership growth slowly tapered off in the 1990s and virtually ended in almost all Latin American countries after 2000 (see table 1). What happened? And why did it happen?

One obvious indicator of Mormon expansion in Latin America is the average annual growth rate (AAGR) for its membership in each country. For 2016–2017, the Mormon AAGR was in the negative (Puerto Rico) to +2.5% range for no less than sixteen of the twenty Latin American countries. Only four countries had a Mormon AAGR above 2.5% in 2016–2017: Nicaragua (2.9%), Costa Rica (2.9%), Haiti (3.2%), and Panama (5.2%).

It is true that Mormon membership expansion across Latin America was always highly uneven, since some countries were more receptive than others.[5] The simplest growth indicator is the Mormon member-

4. Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, *General Conference Statistical Report*, April 2025, https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/2024-statistical-report. Throughout this paper, I use the terms "Mormon" and "LDS" interchangeably. Both terms refer to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and its members.

5. See David Knowlton, "Mormonism in Latin America: Towards the Twenty-first Century," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 29, no. 1 (1996): 166: "In absolute numbers more than 80 percent of Mormons in Latin America congregate in just seven of the twenty countries that form the region: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico and Peru." Twenty-one years later, 78% of the Mormon membership on record in Latin America is still located in those same seven countries (see table 1).

Table 1. Registered Mormon membership in Latin America, year-end 2017

| Country (year of arrival) | Membership | % Population | AAGR 2016–2017 | HDI 2017 (Rank) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Chile (1956) | 590,124 | 3.32 % | 0.7 % | 0.843 (2) |
| Uruguay (1948) | 104,996 | 3.12 % | 0.9 % | 0.804 (4) |
| El Salvador (1948) | 125,936 | 2.04 % | 1.0 % | 0.674 (16) |
| Honduras (1952) | 175,028 | 1.94 % | 1.7 % | 0.617 (19) |
| Peru (1956) | 590,121 | 1.90 % | 2.0 % | 0.750 (11) |
| Bolivia (1964) | 203,073 | 1.82 % | 2.0 % | 0.693 (15) |
| Guatemala (1947) | 272,449 | 1.76 % | 1.9 % | 0.650 (18) |
| Nicaragua (1953) | 98,534 | 1.64 % | 2.9 % | 0.658 (17) |
| Ecuador (1965) | 243,730 | 1.50 % | 1.8 % | 0.752 (8) |
| Panama (1941) | 55,458 | 1.48 % | 5.2 % | 0.789 (5) |
| Paraguay (1939) | 93,412 | 1.35 % | 1.6 % | 0.702 (14) |
| Dominican Republic (1978) | 134,743 | 1.26 % | 2.1 % | 0.736 (13) |
| Mexico (1876) | 1,417,011 | 1.15 % | 1.6 % | 0.774 (7) |
| Argentina (1925) | 452,309 | 1.02 % | 1.6 % | 0.825 (3) |
| Costa Rica (1946) | 48,841 | 0.99 % | 2.9 % | 0.794 (6) |
| Puerto Rico (1964) | 23,234 | 0.69 % | –0.4% | 0.845 (2015) (1) |
| Brazil (1928) | 1,383,799 | 0.67 % | 2.2 % | 0.759 (10) |
| Venezuela (1966) | 168,123 | 0.54 % | 0.5 % | 0.761 (9) |
| Colombia (1966) | 158,954 | 0.42 % | 2.0 % | 0.747 (12) |
| Haiti (1978) | 23,046 | 0.22 % | 3.2 % | 0.498 (20) |
| Total Latin America | 6,339,875 | 1.48 % | 1.8 % | 0.750 [11] |
| Total Central America | 776,246 | 1.64 % | 2.6 % | 0.697 [15] |

*Note:* AAGR: Average annual growth rate (in percent)

*Sources:* Mormon country data from Cumorah.com, accessed July 19, 2021, http://www.cumorah.com/index.php?target=countries; HDI from United Nations Development Program (UNDP), *HDI Report 2018,* accessed January 16, 2019, http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles.

ship on record as a percentage of the total population for each country. Based on this, Chile (3.3%), Uruguay (3.1%), El Salvador (2%), Honduras and Peru (1.9%), Bolivia and Guatemala (1.8%), and Nicaragua (1.6%) are the *most* Mormon countries of Latin America. By contrast, Puerto Rico and Brazil (0.7%), Venezuela (0.5%), Colombia (0.4%), and especially Haiti (0.22%) are the *least* Mormon countries. However, this indicator obscures the fact that across Latin America, only 15 to 20% of all members on record are active and go to church at least once a month.[6]

## The Case of Haiti

Haiti can shed some light on the stagnating Mormon membership growth after 2000 in almost all Latin American countries. Haiti, whose national languages Creole and French make it unique in the region, has 11.8 million inhabitants and occupies the mountainous western one-third of the island originally known as Hispaniola (the Spanish-speaking Dominican Republic fills the rest).[7] Haiti is the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, with unemployment between 20 and 40%, and almost 60% of the population living under the poverty line.[8] Haiti also has a highly uneven income distribution, with a 2012 Gini coefficient of 41.1.[9]

6. Seth Bryant, Henri Gooren, Rick Phillips, and David Stewart Jr., "Conversion and Retention in Mormonism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Religious Conversion*, ed. Lewis R. Rambo and Charles E. Farhadian (Oxford University Press, 2014), 756–85. Activity is 30% in Haiti; see Matthew Martinich, "Mormonism in Haiti," in *Encyclopedia of Latin American Religions*, ed. Henri Gooren (Springer, 2019), 1020.

7. CIA, "The World Factbook: Haiti," accessed May 2, 2024, https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/haiti/#economypip.worldbank.org/country-profiles/hnd.

8. CIA, "World Factbook: Haiti."

9. CIA, "World Factbook: Haiti."

The LDS Church gained its first Haitian member, businessman Alexandre Mourra, in 1977 in the Haitian diaspora; he received his baptism on June 30, 1977, in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, before returning to Haiti. On July 2, 1978, twenty-two Haitians were baptized and a branch was organized with Mourra as president.[10] Following a complicated two-year process, the LDS Church was eventually officially recognized by the Haitian government of Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier in August 1980,[11] officially recognizing the first LDS missionaries who had arrived in June 1980. The first LDS branch opened in October 1980;[12] the LDS Haiti mission opened there in April 1983; and the first stake was organized in September 1997.[13]

Although a planned Global Mormon Studies conference in Haiti in January 2019 was canceled over violent street protests in Port-au-Prince, I collected data on Latter-day Saint membership growth and seized the opportunity to apply my new country church growth

10. Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, "Haiti: Overview," accessed June 26, 2024, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/global-histories/haiti/ht-overview?lang=eng.

11. Carter Charles, "Un nouveau culte réformé: Documents et raisons de la protestantisation de l'Eglise de Jésus-Christ en Haïti," *Haitian History Review* (summer 2024): 6.

12. Jennifer Huss Basquiat, "Between Eternal Truth and Local Culture: Performing Mormonism in Haiti" (PhD diss., Claremont Graduate University, 2001), 75–76.

13. Carter Charles and Clorméus Lewis-Ampidu, "L'Eglise de Jésus-Christ des Saints des Derniers Jours en Haïti: De la présence médiatique à l'enracinement local (1853–2021)," *Journal of Haitian Studies* 28, no. 2 (2022): 13–14. The LDS Church earlier ignored Haiti in its mission work because of the LDS priesthood ban for Blacks, which was lifted in 1978. See Armand Mauss, "The Fading of the Pharaohs' Curse: The Decline and Fall of the Priesthood Ban against Blacks in the Mormon Church," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 14, no. 3 (1981): 10–45; and Mark Grover, "Religious Accommodation in the Land of Racial Democracy: Mormon Priesthood and Black Brazilians," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 17, no. 3 (1984): 23–34.

protocol to analyze these church statistics, even though collecting additional ethnographic data during a visit was not possible.[14] Hence, this is a *theoretical* article that uses my new country church growth protocol to analyze and explain Latter-day Saint membership church growth in Haiti between 1978 and 2018 by identifying the relevant factors, (missing) data, and periods.

This article first applies the country church growth protocol to delineate and analyze the main Mormon membership growth periods in Haiti. I correlate these periods to Emile Durkheim's anomie concept, operationalized here through external factors such as poverty, natural disasters, diseases, corruption, and political violence in Haiti's recent history.[15] Next, I analyze the internal factors in church growth by zooming in on Mormon members at ward level in Haiti based on the literature. The conclusion connects the internal and external factors of the country church growth protocol to the secular transition theory, which predicts low Mormon membership growth once a country's UN Human Development Index (HDI) value gets above 0.8.[16]

14. Reviewer 2 requested I add a brief positionality/limitation statement. I am a fifty-seven-year-old Dutch, white, male, middle-class cultural anthropologist working at Oakland University in Rochester, Michigan. I am not a member of the LDS Church. I tried to be mindful of these biases and to approach the research with a critical eye.

15. Analyzing LDS growth around the world, Lowell C. Bennion and Lawrence A. Young found that Mormonism grows more rapidly in volatile countries rather than in more stable countries. Their emphasis on political and economic stability is explored here by connecting it to Durkheim's anomie concept. See Lowell C. Bennion and Lawrence A. Young, "The Uncertain Dynamics of LDS Expansion, 1950–2020," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 29, no. 1 (1996): 24–26.

16. Ryan T. Cragun and Ronald Lawson, "The Secular Transition: The Worldwide Growth of Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses and Adventists," *Sociology of Religion* 71, no. 3 (2010): 349–73.

The UN HDI weighs life expectancy, years of schooling, and gross national income per capita for each country.[17] The value 0.8 is defined as the starting point for the "very high human development" category. This 0.8 value was first reached by Chile, Argentina, and Uruguay, yet LDS membership growth across almost *all* Latin American countries sharply decreased after 2000.[18] The question is, Why? What happened? The country church growth protocol may provide some clarification.

## The Country Church Growth Protocol

The original country church growth model, developed for Guatemala, analyzed church growth at country level as the result of four religious and four nonreligious factors, which could be both internal and external to the churches under study.[19] Here I develop an updated and improved version of this model: the country church growth protocol (see table 2).[20] The *internal religious factors* are (1a) appeal of doctrine, rituals, code of conduct, mystical experiences, healing, and liturgy (including music) and (1b) evangelization activities, missionaries, and public street prayer and preaching. The *internal nonreligious factors* are (1c) the appeal of the church organization, training, leaders, and social networks and (1d) natural growth, effective membership socialization, retention, and member demographics. The *external religious factors*

17. United Nations Development Program (UNDP), *HDI Report 2018*, accessed January 16, 2019, http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles.

18. Henri Gooren, "Comparing Mormon and Adventist Growth Patterns in Latin America: The Chilean Case," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 46, no. 3 (2013): 47.

19. Henri Gooren, "Reconsidering Protestant Growth in Guatemala, 1900–1995," in *Holy Saints and Fiery Preachers: The Anthropology of Protestantism in Mexico and Central America*, ed. James W. Dow and Alan R. Sandstrom (Praeger, 2001), 169–203.

20. Adapted, with extensive changes, from Gooren, "Reconsidering Protestant Growth in Guatemala," 177.

Table 2. The new country church growth protocol

| | (1) Internal Factors | (2) External Factors |
|---|---|---|
| **Religious Factors** | 1a) Appeal of doctrine, rituals, code of conduct, morality, theology, mystical experiences, healing, tithing, liturgy | 2a) Dissatisfaction with doctrine, rituals, etc. of parental religion and other competing churches |
| | 1b) Evangelization events, activities, missionaries, public prayer/preaching | 2b) Evangelization activities of competing churches/ leaders |
| **Nonreligious Factors** | 1c) Appeal of the organization, skills, training, education, leaders, networks | 2c) Appeal of competing secular organizations, clubs, parties, etc. |
| | 1d) Natural growth, membership socialization & retention, membership demographics & generational effects | 2d) Urbanization process; social, economic, and/ or psychological anomie (poverty, war, crime etc.) |

are (2a) dissatisfaction with the doctrine, rituals, and so forth of one's parental religion and other competing churches and (2b) evangelization activities and so forth of competing churches and leaders. The *external nonreligious factors* are (2c) the appeal of competing secular organizations, associations, and so forth and (2d) social, economic, and/or psychological *anomie* stemming from the urbanization process, which uproots people and makes them more likely to join a new church,[21] and from poverty, war, and political violence.

This article develops the earlier country church growth model into the country church growth *protocol*, which also systematically analyzes

21. Emilio Willems, *Followers of the New Faith: Culture Change and the Rise of Protestantism in Brazil and Chile* (Vanderbilt University Press, 1967); Bryan R. Roberts, "Protestant Groups and Coping with Urban Life in Guatemala City," *American Journal of Sociology* 73 (1968): 753–67; Christian Lalive d'Epinay, *Haven of the Masses: A Study of the Pentecostal Movement in Chile* (Lutterworth, 1969).

and assesses all available church growth statistics to establish the main church growth and decline periods for a country. The country church growth protocol details the operationalization of individual, institutional, and cultural-political factors from my earlier conversion careers approach.[22] The new country church growth protocol is then applied to analyze the case of Haiti.

## Non-Catholic Church Growth and Incipient Secularization in Haiti, 1900–2015

Protestant and Pentecostal churches both arrived relatively early in Haiti. The available church statistics document that Protestant growth also started early in Haiti compared to most Latin American countries. As early as 1900, Protestants already made up 4.8% of the Haitian population, then 84.7% Catholic.[23] By 1970, the Protestant population percentage was already 12.9%, whereas the Catholic percentage had declined to 80.6% (see table 3). No data are available on the timing of the earliest Protestant booms, although these probably occurred after most Pentecostal churches arrived in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s.

After 1985, the first (recent) Protestant boom started, reflected in the Protestant population percentage increasing from 13.6% in 1982 to 17.2% in 1985 (*Operation World*), 22.3% in 1990 (*WCE2*), 22.7% in 1995 (*WCE2*), 25.7% (*Operation World*) or 22.3% (*WCE3*) in 2000, 20%

22. Henri Gooren, *Religious Conversion and Disaffiliation: Tracing Patterns of Change in Faith Practices* (Palgrave, 2010).

23. Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 3rd ed. (Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 361. Hence, the strong presence of Protestantism already preceded the US occupation. Yet Basquiat, "Between Eternal Truth and Local Culture," reports that the US Marines "pursued with extraordinary vigor the destruction of Vodou and . . . heavily introduced and favored the practice of Protestantism in Haiti" (57).

Table 3. Religious affiliation by population percentage in Haiti

| | 1970 | 1980 | 1990 | 2003 | 2010 | 2015 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Roman Catholic | 80.6 % | 82.6 % | 72.5 % | 54.7 % | 69.3 % | 67.8 % |
| Protestant | 12.9 % | 13.7 % | 22.3 % | 28.5 % | 20.0 % | 24.9 % |
| No religion | 0.9 % | 1.2 % | 1.4 % | 10.2 % | 1.95 % | 2.7% |
| Mormon | — | 0 % | 0.06 % | 0.14 % | 0.17 % | 0.2 % |
| Other religions | 2.4 % | 2.0 % | 0.5 % | 4.6 % | 2.9 % | 2.9 % |
| Vodou | 2.2 % | 75 % (est.) | 75 % (est.) | 2.1 % | 75 % (est.) | N.A. |

*Sources:* David B. Barrett, *World Christian Encyclopedia* (Oxford University Press, 1982); David B. Barrett, George T. Kurian, and Todd M. Johnson, *World Christian Encyclopedia,* 2nd ed. (Oxford University Press, 2001); CIA, *The World Factbook* (2024); Patrick Johnstone, *Operation World* (OM Publishing, 1995); Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, *World Christian Encyclopedia,* 3rd ed. (Edinburgh University Press, 2020); Jason Mandryk, *Operation World,* 7th ed. (Biblical Publishing, 2010).

in 2010 (*Operation World*), and almost 25% by 2015 (*WCE3*).[24] After the January 2010 earthquake and October 2010 cholera explosion, non-Catholic church growth increased remarkably. The Protestant population percentage increased from 22% in 2000 to 25% in 2015. *WCE3* places this growth primarily among the Pentecostal churches: Church of God Cleveland (4.5% compound AAGR), Nazarenes (4.9% compound AAGR), Assemblies of God (5.9%), United Pentecostal Church (7.5%), Church of God of Prophecy (16.8%), and Church of God in Christ (20% compound AAGR). Independent Christian churches likewise grew strongly after the 2010 earthquake: Mormons (4.85% compound AAGR, yet lower than in 2000–2010: 6.2%), Witnesses 5.0%, and Adventists 5.3% compound AAGR. Yet Episcopals stagnated and Baptists decreased.

24. *Operation World*, *WCE2*, and *WCE3* refer to, respectively, Patrick Johnstone, *Operation World* (OM Publishing, 1995); David B. Barrett, George T. Kurian, and Todd M. Johnson, *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed. (Oxford University Press, 2001); and Johnson and Zurlo, *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 3rd ed.

There are *five main Protestant growth periods* in Haiti. Few data are available for 1900–1970, when Protestant growth advanced at a high rate of about 3.2% annually. Major recent Protestant membership booms occurred in 1975–1985, 1985–1990, and especially in 1990–1995. The compound Protestant AAGR in 1970–2000 was 4.3%. In 2000–2015, compound Protestant growth decreased to 2.2% a year, although some Pentecostal and independent churches experienced a boom following the 2010 earthquake and cholera epidemic.

Meanwhile, the Catholic Church initially held on to its membership relatively well, as reflected in a stable Catholic population percentage of over 80% until 1980. Afterward, it went down considerably to 75–76% in 1982–1985, 72.5% in 1990, and 68% in 2015. A main factor aiding the retention of Catholics was the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, which arrived in Haiti in 1972 and exploded in the 1970s and 1980s.[25]

Apart from the rise of Protestantism and Mormonism, and the decline of Catholicism, incipient secularization forms the third main change in the religious landscape of Haiti: the slow but steady rise of the nonreligious population. *WCE3* documents the increase of this population from 0.9% in 1970 to 2.4% in 2000, 2.7% in 2015, and an estimated 3% in 2020.[26] The biggest jump in the nonreligious population occurred between 1970 and 2000, which included a long period with high anomie (the economic crises and political turmoil of the 1970s and 1980s) but also a brief period of political stability and growing prosperity in the 1990s. Based on the 2003 census, another big nonreligious explosion occurred between 2000 (2.4%) and 2003 (10%). Could secularization now be starting in Haiti? I define secularization as growth of the nonreligious population, associated with a decline of the influence of religion

25. David B. Barrett, *World Christian Encyclopedia* (Oxford University Press, 1982), 349.

26. Johnson and Zurlo, *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 3rd ed., 361. However, their main text ignores this statistical evidence of slow but steady secularization.

in the public sphere, including in government, politics, education, and the mass media.[27]

I review both internal and external factors from the country church growth protocol to analyze how the timing and continued rate of Mormon membership growth compare to Protestant growth and incipient secularization in Haiti.

## External Factors in LDS Growth in Haiti: Assessing the Impact of Anomie

The church statistics in table 3 are sometimes contradictory, but three trends are clear. First, the Roman Catholic population percentage decreased especially after 1990, from 80.6% in 1970 to 72.5% in 1990 and 68% in 2015. Second, the Protestant population percentage strongly increased from 12.9% in 1970 to around 22% in 1990 and almost 25% in 2015. Third, the percentage of Haitians who say they have no religion jumped up from only 0.9% in 1970 to over 10% in the 2003 census or almost 3% in 2015. Much of this increase, as with the Protestant growth, occurred after the start of democracy in 1990.

How did anomie in Haiti influence non-Catholic church growth? And how do the LDS growth periods compare to the Protestant growth periods? I will analyze the membership growth of the LDS Church (see table 4) using the country church growth protocol, which identifies *anomie* as a key factor. French sociologist Emile Durkheim defined anomie as an absence or erosion of generally accepted norms and values in society that threatens to cause the breakdown of social bonds between individual and society.[28] Anomie resulting from poverty,

27. An excellent overview of definitions of secularization can be found in Isabella Kasselstrand, Phil Zuckerman, and Ryan T. Cragun, *Beyond Doubt: The Secularization of Society* (New York University Press, 2023), 10–12.

28. Emile Durkheim, *Suicide: A Study in Sociology* (1897; Free Press, 1966).

natural disasters, diseases, corruption, and political violence is a sad constant in Haiti's history.

Saint Domingue, "the pearl of the Antilles," was a prosperous French colony where enslaved peoples harvested sugar cane, cotton, and other crops and suffered from exceedingly cruel treatment. This caused a massive uprising of forty thousand enslaved persons in 1791, led by General Toussaint L'Ouverture (1743–1803). L'Ouverture's fighters under his successor and former principal lieutenant Jean-Jacques Dessalines (1758–1806) defeated Napoleon Bonaparte's army in 1803 and declared the independent state of Haiti in 1804.[29] Haiti was the first independent nation of Latin America and the Caribbean, the second newly established republic in the Americas (after the United States), and the only country in the world that was born out of a successful slave revolt. Black and mulatto military warlords fought for power throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. US Marines invaded Haiti in 1915, ostensibly to protect US business interests, only to withdraw in 1934.[30] Since the 1930s, the United States has dominated the Haitian economy and influenced election outcomes.[31]

The Duvalier dynasty controlled Haiti from 1957 until 1986. Dr. Francois Duvalier was elected president in September 1957 and soon after declared himself president for life, extorting money from business owners. Duvalier's dreaded secret police, the Tonton Macoutes, tortured and assassinated thousands of dissidents. Economic stagnation and the collapse of tourism created a massive Haitian diaspora to France, Canada, and the United States. In 1971, Dr. Duvalier died and his son Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier took over the government. Using more subtle repression, the economy gradually improved and

29. Basquiat, "Between Eternal Truth and Local Culture," 21–25.

30. Basquiat, "Between Eternal Truth and Local Culture," 57–67.

31. Johnson and Zurlo, *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 3rd ed., 361–62; CIA, "World Factbook: Haiti."

some tourism returned. Yet unemployment remained high throughout the 1970s and 1980s and combined with hurricanes to increase poverty and misery in Haiti. After an outbreak of swine flu, US agricultural authorities forced Haiti to eradicate its pig population in 1982, creating famine among Haitian peasants. The global economic crisis of 1982–1985 further exacerbated the existing poverty and hunger on the island. Pope John Paul II declared that "things must change in Haiti" during his March 1983 visit. In October 1985, street demonstrations and raids on food-distribution warehouses started in Gonaives and spread to other cities. On February 7, 1986, under pressure from a popular uprising (*Dechoukaj*) and the Reagan administration, Duvalier flew to France on a US Air Force plane.[32]

After some military transition governments, the first free elections in Haiti took place on December 16, 1990, and were won, with nearly 70% of the vote, by Jean-Bertrand Aristide, a Roman Catholic priest and social worker inspired by liberation theology.[33] However, a surprise military coup in September 1991 ousted the increasingly isolated and authoritarian Aristide. US, French, and Venezuelan diplomats saved Aristide's life by convincing the military to let him go into exile in France.[34] The Cedras military government increased repression, leading again to a massive diaspora. US pressure from the new Clinton administration allowed Aristide to return to Haiti in October 1994 and finish his term by December 1995. René Préval, an Aristide ally, won the December 1995 elections with 88% of the vote. Préval encouraged tourism and privatized many former state enterprises, leading to a boost in GDP growth and a decrease in unemployment.

32. For a detailed history of the Duvalier regime, see Elizabeth Abbott, *Haiti: A Shattered Nation* (Overlook Duckworth, 2011).

33. Anthony P. Maingot, "Haiti and Aristide: The Legacy of History," *Current History* 91, no. 562 (1992): 65–66.

34. Maingot, "Haiti and Aristide," 68–69.

Aristide won the December 2000 elections and returned to power again. However, Aristide's second government (2001–2004) faced economic sabotage from the United States and France, leading to a crippled economy and increased unemployment. A military coup on February 28, 2004, forced Aristide to leave the country on a US Air Force plane bound for the Central African Republic. Aristide later said he was kidnapped by the US military. US Marines arrived in March 2004 to restore order and a UN peacekeeping force arrived on June 1, 2004.

Following a military interim government, René Préval again won the February 2006 elections with 51.5% of the vote. Préval's second government (2006–2011) improved relations with Latin American and Caribbean countries, including the Dominican Republic. It also received financial and oil support from President Hugo Chávez in Venezuela. A devastating magnitude 7 earthquake in January 2010 killed over 230,000 people and made more than a million homeless. The Préval government was heavily criticized for its inefficient response.[35]

Michel Martelly, a nightclub owner and former musician, won the second election round in March 2011 with 60%. The Martelly government (2011–2016) was likewise criticized for the slow post-quake reconstruction, although most houses were rebuilt. President Martelly was accused of corruption and money laundering, leading to violent demonstrations, but no judicial investigation ensued. After earlier being postponed twice, presidential elections were held in November 2016 and won by Jovenel Moïse with 55.7%. President Moïse was a businessman and banana farmer, a member of Martelly's party yet a political outsider, and thus not perceived as being corrupt (since he had no previous political experience). However, in late 2018, demonstrations started after many Haitians considered Moïse and his cabinet to be inept and

35. See CIA, "World Factbook: Haiti"; "Haiti," Encylopedia.com, updated August 13, 2018, https://www.encyclopedia.com/places/latin-america-and-caribbean/caribbean-political-geography/haiti; and Abbot, *Haiti*.

Table 4. Registered LDS membership in Haiti, % population, AAGRs, and HDI scores, 1977–2018

| Year-End | Registered Membership | % Population | AAGR in % | HDI |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1977 | 12 | 0 % | 41.7 % | N.A. |
| 1978 | 17 | 0 % | 35.3 % | N.A. |
| 1979 | 23 | 0 % | 239 % | N.A. |
| 1980 | 78 | 0 % | 140 % | N.A. |
| 1981 | 187 | 0 % | 57.2 % | N.A. |
| 1982 | 294 | 0 % | 61.6 % | N.A. |
| 1983 | 475 | 0.01 % | 89.3 % | N.A. |
| 1984 | 899 | 0.01 % | 51.4 % | N.A. |
| 1985 | 1,361 | 0.02 % | 38.9 % | N.A. |
| 1986 | 1,890 | 0.03 % | 15.6 % | N.A. |
| 1987 | 2,184 | 0.03 % | 37.8 % | N.A. |
| 1988 | 3,009 | 0.04 % | 22.7 % | N.A. |
| 1989 | 3,691 | 0.05 % | 23.1 % | N.A. |
| 1990 | 4,544 | 0.06 % | 3.8 % | 0.409 |
| 1991 | 4,717 | 0.06 % | 3.7 % | N.A. |
| 1992 | 4,893 | 0.07 % | 2.6 % | N.A. |
| 1993 | 5,020 | 0.07 % | 1.0 % | N.A. |
| 1994 | 5,140 | 0.07 % | –1.6 % | N.A. |
| 1995 | 5,058 | 0.07 % | 4.1 % | N.A. |
| 1996 | 5,263 | 0.07 % | 10.0 % | N.A. |
| 1997 | 5,787 | 0.07 % | 12.3 % | N.A. |
| 1998 | 6,497 | 0.08 % | 25.6 % | N.A. |
| 1999 | 8,157 | 0.10 % | 13.6 % | N.A. |

| Year-End | Registered Membership | % Population | AAGR in % | HDI |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2000 | 9,266 | 0.11 % | 9.6 % | 0.442 |
| 2001 | 10,157 | 0.12 % | 11.5 % | N.A. |
| 2002 | 11,329 | 0.13 % | 7.5 % | N.A. |
| 2003 | 12,184 | 0.14 % | 5.4 % | N.A. |
| 2004 | 12,842 | 0.14 % | 3.7 % | N.A. |
| 2005 | 13,321 | 0.14 % | 2.1 % | N.A. |
| 2006 | 13,604 | 0.14 % | 6.5 % | N.A. |
| 2007 | 14,493 | 0.15 % | 6.9 % | N.A. |
| 2008 | 15,489 | 0.16 % | 5.4 % | N.A. |
| 2009 | 16,322 | 0.17 % | 3.6 % | N.A. |
| 2010 | 16,902 | 0.17 % | 3.0 % | 0.470 |
| 2011 | 17,407 | 0.17 % | 4.4 % | 0.477 |
| 2012 | 18,165 | 0.18 % | 5.8 % | 0.481 |
| 2013 | 19,216 | 0.18 % | 6.2 % | 0.486 |
| 2014 | 20,414 | 0.19 % | 4.9 % | 0.490 |
| 2015 | 21,414 | 0.20 % | 4.2 % | 0.493 |
| 2016 | 22,323 | 0.21 % | 3.2 % | 0.496 |
| 2017 | 23,046 | 0.21 % | 2.9 % | 0.498 |
| 2018 | 23,723 | 0.21 % | 1.0 % | N.A. |
| 2020 | 24,192 | 0.22 % | N.A. | N.A. |
| 1981–2018 | 37-year compound AAGR | | 14.0 % | |

*Notes:* AAGR: Average annual growth rate (in percent); N.A.: Not available.

*Sources:* membership statistics from LDS Church, Correlation Research Division, Salt Lake City (formerly the LDS Church Research Information Division); HDI from United Nations Development Program (UNDP), *HDI Report 2018*, accessed January 16, 2019, http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/; calculations for compound average annual growth rates from https://calculatorbox.com/calculator/standard-cagr.

corrupt.[36] By January 2019, thousands of demonstrators turned increasingly violent, and four were killed by the police in early February.[37]

Below I list the periods after the official start of the Mormon mission in 1983 when anomie was either (much) lower or (much) higher than usual and also hypothesize how this affected LDS membership growth in Haiti.

**1982–1985:** A global economic recession hit Haiti hard (annual GDP growth: –2.7% to +0.2%), leading to increased poverty, increased unemployment (12.2% in 1982, see table 5, col. 2), increased urbanization, and a strengthening of resistance to the dictatorship of Duvalier junior. *Higher* Mormon growth predicted.

*True*: The average annual LDS membership growth rate was 61.6% in 1982–1983, 89.3% in 1983–1984, and 51.4% in 1984–1985.

**October 1985–February 1986; February 1986–November 1990:** Massive street protests eventually forced Duvalier to leave the country in February 1986; the army and various interim governments alternated power in a chaotic situation that lasted for almost five years. Annual GDP growth was still low in the –0.7% to 1.1% range (table 5). *Higher* Mormon growth predicted.

*True*: The average annual LDS membership growth rate was 38.9% in 1985–1986 and 15.6% in 1986–1987.

**December 1990–September 1991:** Progressive priest Jean-Bertrand Aristide won the elections by a landslide, ushering in new optimism for Haiti. *Lower* Mormon growth predicted.

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36. See Christian Antoine Girault, "Haiti in the 21st Century," Brittanica.com, accessed October 31, 2025, https://www.britannica.com/place/Haiti/Haiti-in-the-21st-century.

37. British Broadcasting Corporation, "Haiti Protestors Call On President Jovenal Moïse to Quit," BBC, February 10, 2019, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-47193837. In July 2021, President Moïse was killed in his house by a commando in a unit of twenty-five armed Colombian mercenaries; "Foreign Commando Killed Moïse, Haiti Claims," BBC, July 9, 2021, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-57766749.

*True*: Only 3.8% average annual Mormon membership growth for 1990–91.

**September 1991–October 1994:** Political and economic optimism was crushed by the Cedras military government, leading to an economic crisis, increased unemployment (from 7% to 8%), and higher anomie. Annual GDP growth crashed from +4.2% to –13% annually (table 5). *Higher* Mormon growth predicted.

*False*: Only 2.6% average annual LDS membership growth in 1992–1993 and 1% in 1993–1994.

**October 1994–December 1995:** Aristide was allowed to return to Haiti and finish his presidential term, creating more optimism. *Lower* Mormon growth predicted.

*True*: –1.6% average annual LDS membership growth in 1994–1995.

**1996–2000:** The (first) Préval government brought political stability, economic growth, and increased optimism. However, unemployment remained high, in the 7% range, and annual GDP growth low, in the 1% to 4% range (table 5). *Lower* Mormon growth predicted.

*False*: The average annual Mormon membership growth per year in 1996–2000 was a high 15.4%, ranging from 10% in 1996–1997 to 12.3% in 1997–1998, 25.6% in 1998–1999, and 13.6% in 1999–2000. Perhaps there is a time lag before a more stable government and improving economy lead to lower Mormon membership growth?

**2001–2004:** The second Aristide government faced economic sanctions from the United States and France, leading to higher urbanization, economic stagnation, and unemployment (increasing from 11% to 14%, see table 5). *Higher* Mormon growth predicted.

*True*: The average annual LDS membership growth per year in 2001–2004 was a relatively high 8.1%, yet declining from a high 11.5% in 2001–2002 to 7.5% in 2002–2003 and a modest 5.4% in 2003–2004. However, these represented a downward growth trend.

**February 2004–February 2006:** Interim military governments struggled to improve the economy. Annual GDP growth improved

Table 5. Annual GDP growth, unemployment, and Protestant growth in Haiti, 1970–2018

| Year | Annual GDP Growth % | Unemployment Rate % | Protestant AAGR |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1970 | N.A. | N.A. | 2.1% |
| 1971 | N.A. | N.A. | 2.1% |
| 1972 | N.A. | N.A. | 2.1% |
| 1973 | N.A. | N.A. | 2.1% |
| 1974 | N.A. | N.A. | 2.1% |
| 1975 | N.A. | N.A. | 8.9% |
| 1976 | N.A. | N.A. | 8.9% |
| 1977 | N.A. | N.A. | 8.9% |
| 1978 | 4.8 % | N.A. | 8.9 % |
| 1979 | 7.3 % | N.A. | 8.9 % |
| 1980 | 7.6 % | N.A. | 8.9 % |
| 1981 | –2.7 % | N.A. | 8.9 % |
| 1982 | –3.4 % | N.A. | 8.9 % |
| 1983 | 0.8 % | 12.2 % | 8.9 % |
| 1984 | 0.3 % | N.A. | 8.9 % |
| 1985 | 0.2 % | N.A. | 8.9 % |
| 1986 | –0.1 % | N.A. | 6.5 % |
| 1987 | –0.7 % | N.A. | 6.5 % |
| 1988 | 0.8 % | N.A. | 6.5 % |
| 1989 | 1.1 % | N.A. | 6.5 % |
| 1990 | –0.1 % | 11.25 % | 14.1 % |
| 1991 | 4.2 % | 7.64 % | 14.1 % |
| 1992 | –13.2 % | 7.89 % | 14.1 % |
| 1993 | –2.4 % | 7.91 % | 14.1 % |
| 1994 | –8.3 % | 7.98 % | 14.1 % |
| 1995 | 4.4 % | 6.95 % | 2.3 % |
| 1996 | 2.7 % | 7.16 % | 2.3 % |

| Year | Annual GDP Growth % | Unemployment Rate % | Protestant AAGR |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1997 | 1.4 % | 7.24 % | 2.3 % |
| 1998 | 3.1 % | 7.26 % | 2.3 % |
| 1999 | 2.71 % | 7.20 % | 2.3 % |
| 2000 | 0.87 % | 8.59 % | 0.7 % |
| 2001 | –1.04 % | 10.11 % | 0.7 % |
| 2002 | –0.25 % | 11.37 % | 0.7 % |
| 2003 | 0.36 % | 12.63 % | 0.7 % |
| 2004 | –3.52 % | 14.49 % | 0.7 % |
| 2005 | 1.81 % | 15.03 % | 0.7 % |
| 2006 | 2.25 % | 16.15 % | 0.7 % |
| 2007 | 3.34 % | 16.80 % | 0.7 % |
| 2008 | 0.84 % | 16.55 % | 0.7 % |
| 2009 | 3.08 % | 15.47 % | 0.7 % |
| 2010 | –5.50 % | 15.95 % [32.7 % OW] | 3.9 % |
| 2011 | 5.52 % | 13.72 % | 3.9 % |
| 2012 | 2.89 % | 14.10 % | 3.9 % |
| 2013 | 4.23 % | 13.85 % | 3.9 % |
| 2014 | 2.81 % | 13.94 % | 3.9 % |
| 2015 | 1.21 % | 14.05 % | N.A. |
| 2016 | 1.45 % | 14.00 % | N.A. |
| 2017 | 1.17 % | 13.99 % | N.A. |
| 2018 | 1.4 % | 13.53 % | N.A. |
| 2019 | –1.2 % | N.A. | N.A. |

*Notes:* AAGR: Average annual growth rate; N.A.: Not available.

*Sources:* Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, *World Christian Encyclopedia,* 3rd ed. (Edinburgh University Press, 2020); CIA, *The World Factbook* (2024); World Bank 2018 Database, accessed December 18, 2018, https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG?end=2017&locations=HT&name_desc=false&start=1997.

from –3.5% to +2%, but unemployment exploded from 14% to 16% (see table 5). *Higher* Mormon growth predicted.

*False*: The average annual Mormon membership growth in 2004–2006 was a very low 2.4%, ranging from 3.7% in 2004–2005 to 2.1% in 2005–2006.

**September 2004:** Tropical storm Jeanne killed over three thousand people. *Higher* Mormon growth predicted.

*False*: The average annual LDS membership growth in 2004–2005 was a low 3.7%.

**2006–2011:** The second Préval government strengthened both the economy and relations with countries in the region. Annual GDP growth was in the 2–3% range, only to crash again to –5.5% in 2009–10 and turn around again to +5.5% in 2010–11 (table 5). However, unemployment only marginally improved from almost 17% to almost 14%. *Lower* Mormon growth predicted.

*True*: The average annual Mormon membership growth per year in 2006–2011 was a low 5.1%, ranging from 6.5% in 2006–2007 to 6.9% in 2007–2008, 5.4% in 2008–2009, 3.6% in 2009–2010, and 3% in 2010–2011. Moreover, this was clearly a downward growth trend again.

**January 2010:** A devastating magnitude 7 earthquake killed over 230,000 people and made over a million homeless.[38] October 2010–2018: A widespread cholera outbreak killed ten thousand people up to 2018. *Higher* Mormon growth predicted in 2010.

*False*: The average annual LDS membership growth in 2010–2011 was a low 3%, although it rose to 4.4% in 2011–2012, 5.8% in 2012–2013, and 6.2% in 2013–2014.

**2011–2016:** The Martelly government slowly strengthened the economy. GDP growth was –5.5% in 2009–10, improved strongly in

38. Possibly the only positive side effect of the earthquake was the renewed strength of interreligious dialogue in Haiti. See Clorméus Lewis-Ampidu, "L'Eglise catholique face à la diversité religieuse à Port-au-Prince (1942–2012)," *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* 166 (2014): 169–74.

2010–14 in the +2–5% range, yet decreased to barely +1–1.5% annually in 2014–18 (table 5, col. 1). Meanwhile, unemployment remained stable, around a high 14% (table 5, col. 2). October 2016: Hurricane Matthew killed over five hundred people. *Higher* Mormon growth predicted.

*Contradictory data*: The average annual LDS membership growth per year in 2011–2017 was a lowish 4.8%, ranging from 4.4% for 2011–2012, 5.8% in 2012–2013, 6.2% in 2013–2014, 4.9% in 2014–2015, 4.2% in 2015–2016, and 3.2% in 2016–2017. Note that the trend in membership growth for 2011–2017 was clearly downward once again, especially after 2014. However, compared to other countries in Latin America, these Mormon AAGRs were quite high (see table 1).

Reviewing the evidence from the data, the value of anomie, operationalized as a combination of economic and political turmoil, as an *external* explanation of LDS membership growth in Haiti seems limited. Out of a total of twelve periods, the anomie hypothesis was true in six cases, false in five cases, and there was contradictory data for the period 2011–2016.

Anomie is also correlated with strong and chaotic urbanization. The urbanization process took off relatively late in Haiti, and urbanization has not reached as high a rate as in other countries in the region. In 1960, still only 15.6% of the total Haitian population lived in cities and urban areas. This gradually increased from 19.8% in 1970 to 20.5% in 1980, 28.5% in 1990, 35.6% in 2000, and 47.5% in 2010. In 2017, 54.35% of the total Haitian population of 11.8 million lived in cities and urban areas. In summary, the strongest urbanization increases occurred in the 1980s, 1990s, and especially early 2000s. Urban growth expanded considerably after 1982 and exploded after 2000.[39] Carter Charles and Clorméus Lewis-Ampidu report that most LDS members are concentrated in the capital, Port-au-Prince, and its suburbs, "and then in the

39. "Urban Population—Haiti," World Bank, accessed December 31, 2025, https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.URB.TOTL.IN.ZS?locations=HT.

large cities of the country."[40] How does urbanization compare to the timing of the recent LDS membership growth periods?

The available membership data indicate the following *four main Mormon membership growth periods in Haiti* between 1977 and 2018 (see table 4):

1. 1977–1989: *growth explosion.* The AAGR for this thirteen-year period is 65.7%, ranging from a low of 15.6% to a high of 239%.
2. 1990–1995: *low growth.* The AAGR for this six-year period is only 2.3%, ranging from a (record) low of –1.6% to a high of 4.1%.
3. 1996–2002: *high growth.* The AAGR for this seven-year period is 12.9%, ranging from a low of 7.5% to a high of 25.6%.
4. 2003–2018: *modest growth.* The AAGR for this sixteen-year period is only 4.5%, ranging from a low of 2.1% to a high of 6.9%.

How do these recent LDS membership booms compare to the data on strong and chaotic urbanization in Haiti? The main LDS booms occurred in 1977–1989 (mean LDS AAGR 65.7%, although urbanization was very low), 1996–2002 (LDS AAGR 12.9%; urbanization high), and more modestly in 2003–2018, when the LDS AAGR was only 4.5%, whereas urbanization was extremely high. LDS membership stagnation occurred in 1990–1995, coinciding with high urbanization in the 1990s. Hence, strong and chaotic urbanization only coincided with LDS membership growth in the brief period 1996–2002. When urbanization was still low in the 1970s, LDS membership exploded right after its arrival in Haiti in 1978. By contrast, when urbanization was at its (recent) peak, in the period 2000–2010, the average annual LDS growth rate was only moderate: between 2% and 7% (compound LDS AAGR 6.2%). In conclusion, not only the explanatory value of anomie in Haiti, operationalized as a combination of economic and political turmoil, was limited. The same is true for anomie, operationalized as strong and chaotic urbanization, as an external explanation of LDS membership growth.

40. Charles and Lewis-Ampidu, "L'Eglise de Jésus-Christ en Haïti," 16.

## Internal Factors in LDS Growth: Haitian Members Performing Mormonism in Port-au-Prince

Of course, national Mormon membership statistics and growth periods do not tell the whole story of Mormonism in Haiti. The country church growth protocol also delineates the *internal* factors in church growth, such as the appeal of the church's doctrine (rituals, code of conduct, morality, theology, mystical experiences, healing, tithing, liturgy), mission work, and appeal of the organization, including member education and training, skills, networks, and the role of the leadership (see table 2, factors 1a, 1b, and 1c). A closer look at ground level is required to get the complete picture: zooming in on the active Mormon members in the stakes, wards, districts, and branches of Haiti.

The first LDS branch opened in July 1978, the first LDS missionaries arrived in June 1980, the Haiti Port-au-Prince mission opened in April 1983, the Port-au-Prince stake was created in 1997,[41] and the first temple opened in Port-au-Prince in 2015. By 2018, Haiti had 23,723 official members in five stakes, four districts, twenty-six wards, and twenty branches.[42]

Conducting ethnographic fieldwork in Pétion-Ville, a Port-au-Prince suburb, in 1998–1999 for her PhD dissertation, Jennifer Huss Basquiat set out to study "How Haitians Do Mormonism," using key concepts such as performance from Marvin Carlson and *bricolage* from the French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss.[43] Basquiat writes: "The

41. Jennifer Huss Basquiat, "Embodied Mormonism: Performance, Vodou, and the LDS Faith in Haiti," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 37, no. 4 (2004), 3–4.

42. Cumorah.com, accessed July 19, 2021, http://www.cumorah.com/index.php?target=countries.

43. Basquiat, "Between Eternal Truth and Local Culture," 3; Marvin Carlson, *Performance: A Critical Introduction* (Routledge, 1996), 49; Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (University of Chicago Press, 1966), 17.

*bricoleur* becomes a master at selectively crafting a performance from various sources."[44] Haitians are superb *bricoleurs* and so are Haitian Mormons, Basquiat argues.

In 1991, there were only 4,717 LDS members in eighteen branches, with 140 full-time missionaries (only twenty-six were Haitians: 18.6%).[45] Because of continuing political turmoil and violence in Haiti, the US missionaries were withdrawn between 1991 and 1996.[46] By November 1998, however, there were still only forty-eight missionaries (two-thirds were Haitians by now). Basquiat reports that in 1998–1999 the "prevailing stereotype" in Haiti was that the LDS Church and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) "are one and the same."[47] Consequently, many Haitians believed that "to join the Mormon Church is to 'sell out to the CIA!'"[48] Basquiat writes that several Haitian members, leaders, an ex-missionary, a key informant, and several nonmembers all believed that the LDS Church was part of the CIA.[49] She provides three main reasons: "First, the Mormon Church is extremely wealthy *and* the product of the United States; second, in reality, the CIA does have a disproportionately high number of Mormons in its ranks; third, the

44. Basquiat, "Embodied Mormonism," 7.

45. Basquiat, "Embodied Mormonism," 4.

46. Basquiat, "Between Eternal Truth and Local Culture," 78.

47. Basquiat, "Embodied Mormonism," 5. Dr. Carter Charles (BYU) consistently found as a missionary in Haiti that Haitians saw the LDS Church as "an opportunity to climb a ring of the social ladder." Charles also noted that Haitians associated Americanness with whiteness (personal email, August 23, 2021).

48. Basquiat, "Embodied Mormonism," 5.

49. Basquiat, "Between Eternal Truth and Local Culture," 84–86. The Haiti LDS mission president and several missionaries told Basquiat that "this particular stereotype" was "detrimental to Church membership."

very structure and appearance of the Mormon Church lends credence to images of governmental secrecy."[50]

Basquiat calls it "an unfortunate error in judgment" that the LDS Church and its missionaries evacuated from Haiti right after the October 1991 coup: "With the mass exodus of the Mormon Church the appearance was created that there was no longer a reason to stay in the country as the Mormons' work had been done. . . . Mormon leaders and missionaries took with them their leadership, their access to resources and their religious convictions, leaving Haitians to perpetuate a fledgling religious community on their own. . . . It is precisely this behavior that caused many Haitians to see the Mormon Church and the CIA as inextricably linked to one another. The CIA leaves the country (or at least reduces its numbers) and the Mormon Church quickly follows. . . . Wouldn't true missionaries have stayed if their primary goal were to teach the gospel?"[51] Still, despite this popular stereotype—or possibly because of it?—Haitians were joining the LDS Church in record numbers in the late 1990s (LDS growth period 3).

Rousseline's conversion story during this time period illuminates the perceptions many Haitians had about LDS missionaries, Haiti's poverty and governmental corruption, and elements of the LDS Church that young Haitians found appealing:

> The situation in my country is critical; corruption exists in all forms of government, especially at the top. . . . We were very fortunate to have

50. Basquiat, "Between Eternal Truth and Local Culture," 86. Reasons 1 and 2 fall under "guilty by association"; the subsequent section explains reason 3 by positing that the extreme wealth of the LDS Church makes it suspect and associates it with corruption in Haiti. Basquiat provides documented evidence that the CIA was behind the September 1991 military coup that ousted Aristide. Basquiat, "Between Eternal Truth and Local Culture," 88–89.

51. Basquiat, "Between Eternal Truth and Local Culture," 90–91. Basquiat also notes that the highly visible pairs of young white US missionaries everywhere on Haiti with "shortly cropped hair, pressed white shirts, ties, slacks and often sunglasses" fitted the international stereotype of CIA agents perfectly.

parents who sacrificed to make it possible for us to attend a Catholic girls' school. There we began to develop our faith in Jesus Christ. As we were growing up and attending catechism at the Catholic school, I had many unanswered questions about religion. . . .

In my country of Haiti, we heard many people saying that the missionaries are either FBI or CIA. Wanting to know the truth, when I was 17 years old, I saw the missionaries passing by my house and I called them to question them about their beliefs, and most especially, to ask if they were really FBI or CIA. The missionaries smiled and invited us—me, Rousseline, my sister, Rousselene, and our little sister, Rousseland—to go to church and see for ourselves. When Sunday came, I did go to their church, and that Sunday was a fast and testimony meeting. I became curious when a missionary bore his testimony and said: "I know that this is the only true church."

There are thousands of churches all over, so I thought how can he say, "this is the only true church?" So I decided to take the missionary lessons with my sisters in order to know more about "this only true church." The third missionary lesson, which is now the first one, is my favorite, because it talks about the prophet Joseph Smith. A prophet has been called for our time!! This is amazing. . . .

After that discussion with the missionaries, our Father did not want them to come teach us anymore. Father said to the missionaries: "My children have a Bible; they don't need any more Bible. . . ." Since the missionaries could not come over anymore to our house, we decided to have the missionary lessons at the chapel close to our house instead of basket lessons at school. We finished the missionary lessons, and a month later we were baptized without our Father's knowledge. Mother knew about it and approved. . . .

When Father found out about our baptism, and that we were going to the "Mormon Church," it was a really difficult time for us. It was our time of trial. Father became careless about his responsibility towards us as a provider and we lacked many necessities. We endured to the end because of the power of the scriptures. And from them we received what we needed to stay strong. . . . After much fasting and prayer, we were finally allowed to again attend Church. Father's persecutions weren't gone, they were just lightened. The Lord poured His blessings upon us.

> After I had found the Restored Gospel of Jesus Christ, I wanted to serve a full-time mission. Everything seemed impossible when I had that desire, but the Lord blessed me. He sent people who helped me accomplish the things that I wanted. On December 23, 2003, I left my country of Haiti to serve full-time mission for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the Florida Fort Lauderdale Mission. This was the greatest experience of my life. I was able to see the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ change the lives of many people. . . .
>
> Our Father's heart softened over the years and he has since allowed our five younger siblings to also be baptized. My mother and father were also eventually baptized.[52]

Why was there strong LDS growth in the late 1990s? The majority of Church members in Haiti were "young, single men," unlike in Latin America where most (new) members were young families.[53] Basquiat concludes that "many Haitians ignore Mormonism's claim of absolute truth; instead, they borrow only what appeals to them and add it to already existing patterns of belief and behavior."[54] For example, Haitian Mormons were very fond of Joseph Smith; they could easily identify with him because of his humble beginnings, poor and uneducated, and his experience as a seer: "Haitians readily accept present-day revelation through visions."[55]

Basquiat's ethnographic fieldwork shows and analyzes how Haitian Mormons put a unique touch on the standardized markers of Mormon

52. Mark Albright, "Haiti: I Thought the LDS Missionaries Were All CIA or FBI," *Meridian Magazine*, January 31, 2016, https://www.latterdaysaintmag.com/haiti-i-thought-the-lds-missionaries-were-all-cia-or-fbi%E2%80%8F.

53. Basquiat, "Between Eternal Truth and Local Culture," 182–83.

54. Basquiat, "Embodied Mormonism," 3.

55. Basquiat, "Embodied Mormonism," 14. Alex, a recent LDS member in the Pétion-Ville ward, told Basquiat: "Joseph Smith is like me. He came from humble beginnings and was a simple man. He was not an intellect." Basquiat concludes: "Such a realization suggests that even the poorest and uneducated of Haitians is important in the eyes of God." Basquiat, "Between Eternal Truth and Local Culture," 176–77.

membership:[56] baptism, testimony Sunday, family home evening (celebrated with other members at the ward chapel in Haiti), and experiencing the LDS general conference live through satellite link. Basquiat concludes that embodied Mormonism provides Haitian members "the ability to create personal cosmologies within the general framework of Mormonism. . . . Haitian Mormons, acting as *bricoleurs*, lift patches of Mormonism's tapestry and sew these individual scraps together with other experiences to produce something personal and unique to the user. What is perhaps most remarkable is that they have found space within the practice of Mormonism to do so."[57]

Basquiat explains: "Haitian Mormons, despite their faith in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, often find themselves seeking the help and guidance of a *hougan* or Vodou priest. This reliance on more than one cosmology is not seen as oppositional, but complementary, again illustrating the skill many Haitians have in piecing together seemingly incongruous material."[58] The LDS missionaries did not understand this Haitian skill in piecing together "seemingly incongruous material," that is, Mormonism and Vodou, and certainly could not approve of it. As Basquiat recounts, Elder Vigliotti's companion, Elder Christensen, lamented the fact that Haitian Mormons "have no problem understanding that the Church is the only true church, but [claim] that there are just other true churches, too. You can ask them if they believe this is the only true church and they say yes. But then you ask them if other churches are true and they say yes. It doesn't make a lot of sense."[59] Basquiat adds: "What makes little sense to Mormon missionaries makes perfect sense to many Haitian members. Why would a

56. Charles made the important observation that such differences are also common in many other cultural areas where Mormons form a small religious minority (personal email, August 23, 2021).

57. Basquiat, "Embodied Mormonism," 25.

58. Basquiat, "Embodied Mormonism," 25.

59. Basquiat, "Embodied Mormonism," 25–26.

person rely on only one religious system or cosmology when multiple mythologies are available, especially when one of the possibilities is the culturally significant practice of Vodou?"[60]

Indeed, why risk your salvation on only one true church when you could rely on two or three?[61] Several ward members, who insisted on remaining anonymous, admitted to Basquiat that they "kept altars for Vodou worship in their homes consisting of small spaces devoted to particular *lwas* [gods], upon which they would place the *lwas*'s favorite foods, colors, images, and even monetary offerings." Basquiat suspected that they attend Saturday evening Vodou ceremonies that included *lwa* possession and consult neighborhood *houngans* "for spiritual or secular guidance as well as for homeopathic remedies for common ailments. Typically, these Haitian Mormons maintained that their allegiance to Vodou did not undercut their faith in the Mormon Church. They professed a strong belief in Mormonism and saw the inclusion of Vodou, not as oppositional but as complementary. In terms of shaping their own cosmologies, these Haitian Mormons select ideas and beliefs from both Mormonism and Vodou to create what they consider a better design for living."[62]

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60. Basquiat, "Embodied Mormonism," 26.

61. "Les croyants tentent de se protéger des menaces d'une Église en allant dans une autre église. Et lorsqu'ils se retrouvent à nouveau dans le malheur, ils retournent dans leur culte d'origine, pensant qu'ils ont été punis de changer." (Believers try to protect themselves from the threats of one church by going to another church. And when they find themselves in trouble, they return to their religion of origin, thinking that they have been punished for changing; author's translation) André Corten, "Pentecôtisme, baptisme et système politique en Haïti," *Histoire, mondes y cultures religieuses* 29, no. 1 (2014) : 126–27.

62. Basquiat, "Embodied Mormonism," 27–28. However, Basquiat expects that the LDS Church will adopt a more active policy of forcefully suppressing Vodou in the future "as the Church strengthens its roots in Haiti"; Basquiat, "Between Eternal Truth and Local Culture," 226.

Basquiat's conclusion raises the valid question of whether a similar process of *bricolage* (creating what she calls *indigenous Mormonism*) could be happening with Mormonism in other cultures, particularly those with high levels of illiteracy in the Caribbean, Latin America, and Africa?[63] Or with the many Haitians who have affiliated themselves with the plentiful Protestant churches? Although Vodou was outlawed by the Catholic Church and actively persecuted by its clergy from the 1940s to the 1980s, President Aristide granted Vodou the status of an officially recognized state religion in 2003.[64] Combined with the lack of an official or even informal policy outlawing Vodou and its practices in the LDS Church, this newfound state recognition created fertile ground for Vodou to prosper among many Haitians—whether Catholics, Protestants, or Mormons. One important limitation of Basquiat's research is that it was conducted in the wealthy residential area of Pétion-Ville in a single LDS congregation, raising the question of how representative the views of her informants, and hence Basquiat's conclusions, are.[65]

A recent article by Catherine S. Freeman analyzes surprising parallels between Mormonism and Vodou in Haiti.[66] Apart from their obvious historical differences, she concluded they both shared "fundamental beliefs relating to rebelling against oppressive government, persisting in religious practices, and maintaining strong relationships

63. Basquiat, "Embodied Mormonism," 29.

64. Basquiat, "Embodied Mormonism," 31.

65. Charles did not think that that Basquiat's data and conclusions from a single Pétion-Ville ward could be generalized to all Haitian Mormons (personal email, August 23, 2021).

66. Catherine S. Freeman, "Drum Rhythms and Golden Scriptures: Reasons for Mormon Conversion with Haiti's Culture of Vodou," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 55, no. 3 (2022): 72–73. Basquiat also identified four similarities between Mormonism and Vodou: both believe in a celestial couple in heaven with multiple wives (polygyny), the possibility of deification, and both are living religions in constant change thanks to continuing revelation and strong local leaders (bishop and *hougan*); Basquiat, "Between Eternal Truth and Local Culture," 226–36.

with the dead."[67] Mormonism and Vodou both stress that the world we live in is enchanted and that the thin veil between the living and the dead can be broken. But Mormonism has the additional unique features of eternal families and the exposure to American culture "as a path to social mobility" and also possibly geographical mobility as two strong conversion factors for Haitians.[68]

However, other factors might negatively impact LDS membership growth and retention in Haiti: its anti-Black history until the opening of the priesthood to all in 1978 and "the overarching whiteness of the leadership and institution."[69] Gina Colvin and Joanna Brooks note: "Today, the church is experiencing tremendous growth in Africa, but church leaders have stumbled in limited efforts to move white North American Mormons to recognize and reject the racism of Mormon doctrine that excluded men and women of African descent from priesthood ordination and temple worship."[70] Harvard historian Janan Graham-Russell writes poignantly: "Something very curious happens when the images of the divine that reside in holy places don't look like

67. Freeman, "Drum Rhythms and Golden Scriptures," 72.

68. Freeman, "Drum Rhythms and Golden Scriptures," 73. A Haitian convert living in the United States told Freeman that "most Haitians are fascinated with America because of the socioeconomic possibilities this country can provide them" (50). Freeman further notes: "What seems to make Mormonism most noticeable in Haiti are the luxurious meetinghouses and the Port-au-Prince temple" with "modern plumbing, electricity, internet access, air conditioning, and other amenities . . . available only to the wealthiest Haitians" (51–52).

69. This is a direct quote from reviewer 2, who writes "there is a glass ceiling to inclusion" of Black LDS members that ultimately contributes to "dwindling activity in these countries" (such as Haiti).

70. Gina Colvin and Joanna Brooks, "Introduction: Approaching a Postcolonial Zion," in *Decolonizing Mormonism: Approaching a Postcolonial Zion*, ed. Gina Colvin and Joanna Brooks (University of Utah Press, 2018), 6. However, Basquiat reports that "most Haitian members of the Mormon Church in Haiti are unaware of this racial tidbit of Mormon history [the priesthood ban]"; Basquiat, "Between Eternal Truth and Local Culture," 83.

you. Moreover, though the restrictions dissolved, the revelatory voices continue to come from white Western lips. . . . Ask yourselves, do representations of Blackness and deep skin tones in Mormonism embody the call that 'all are alike unto God'? How would you react to a depiction of God with black or brown skin? Would you find comfort? Representation—not in pursuit of managing a quota or the placation of guilt—is the counter-narrative to the construction of race within the Mormon imagination."[71] The LDS Church has recently made efforts to promote a handful of Black Caribbean men into area and general leadership, most notably Elder Kevin G. Brown of Jamaica, who was sustained as a General Authority Seventy in 2025. However, Graham-Russell's point continues to be compelling—the top echelons of the LDS Church remain overwhelmingly in the hands of white American men.

Basquiat likewise points to the troubling implications of the LDS Church's texts, talks, and religious reflections—exported throughout the world—that emerge largely from or through white men. She writes: "Haitian Mormons are asked to read a plethora of written texts to prepare themselves for eternal progression, written texts that are the product (externally guided or not) of privileged white men. However, they are also asked to adopt a history that is not their own, but based exclusively on the trials and tribulations of privileged white people in the United States. Consequently, this celebration of the written word renders white, Mormon text superior to the black, Haitian body."[72] Nevertheless, despite these systemic racial problems noted by scholars,

71. Janan Graham-Russell, "A Balm in Gilead: Reconciling Black Bodies within a Mormon Imagination," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 51, no. 3 (2018): 190–91.

72. Basquiat, "Between Eternal Truth and Local Culture," 164–65. Basquiat next mentions the famous quotes from Frantz Fanon (*The Wretched of the Earth* [1963], 42) about Black people still being encouraged to "join the Church of the white man" and to scorn Black experience to find salvation: "The Church in the colonies is the white people's Church, the foreigner's Church. She does not call the native to God's way, but to the ways of the white man." Basquiat then writes: "Ironically, it is precisely this calling that draws some Haitians to the Mormon Church."

Basquiat reports that most Haitian members in the late 1990s thought of the LDS Church as "lack[ing] a history of racial discrimination."[73]

Ironically, the fact that the LDS Church emerges from America (even white America) may be a central source of its appeal to Haitians. Basquiat quotes Haitian physician and cultural critic Frentz Large, who says that "for privileged and literate Haitians," this is the main reason to join Mormonism: "It is *the* motivation: to be American, to have some part of the West here."[74] Obviously, more ethnographic fieldwork research is required to analyze the dynamics of this process.

## Conclusion: Analyzing (The Future of) LDS Growth in Haiti

There are *four main Mormon membership growth periods* in Haiti (see table 4):

1. 1977–1989: growth explosion. The AAGR for this thirteen-year period is 65.7%, varying from a low of 15.6% to a high of 239%.
2. 1990–1995: low growth. The AAGR for this six-year period is only 2.3%, ranging from a (record) low of –1.6% to a high of 4.1%. This stagnation exactly coincides with the withdrawal of US missionaries for security reasons from late 1991 to early 1996.[75]
3. 1996–2002: high growth. The AAGR for this seven-year period is 12.9%, ranging from a low of 7.5% to a high of 25.6%. After the US missionaries return, growth explodes again.
4. 2003–2018: modest growth. The AAGR for this sixteen-year period is only 4.5%, ranging from a low of 2.1% to a high of 6.9%.

I concluded earlier that the explanatory value of anomie in Haiti, operationalized as a combination of economic and political turmoil, was limited. The same is true for anomie, operationalized as strong and chaotic urbanization, as an external explanation of LDS membership growth. Table 5 showed no correlations between the unemployment rate, the annual GDP growth rate, and the average annual Protestant

73. Basquiat, "Between Eternal Truth and Local Culture," 83.

74. Basquiat, "Between Eternal Truth and Local Culture," 166.

75. Basquiat, "Between Eternal Truth and Local Culture," 78.

membership growth rates. The only clear correlation was between strong Mormon and Protestant membership growth in the 1980s and high anomie resulting from a devastating economic crisis, unemployment, poverty, as well as political turmoil and violence. Most LDS members are concentrated in the capital Port-au-Prince, its suburbs, and other large cities.[76]

What about demographics as an explanatory growth factor? The percentage of the population under fifteen years old in Haiti has fluctuated: 39.6% in 1950, 40.3% in 1960, 41.8% in 1970, 41.1% in 1980, 43.1% in 1990, 40.3% in 2000, and 36.2% in 2010.[77] While still relatively high, it rose slightly to 37% in 2020. Haiti has a relatively young population, but the percentage of people under fifteen is projected to reach 30% by 2033 and to keep decreasing steadily after that.[78] The main LDS and Protestant boom periods occurred in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, when the youth percentage was still high in Haiti: between 40% and 43%.

I identified *five main Protestant growth periods* in Haiti. Few data are available for 1900–1970, but Protestant growth advanced at a high compound rate of 3.2% annually on average. The major recent Protestant membership booms occurred in 1975–1985 (AAGR almost 9%), 1985–1990 (6.5%), and especially in 1990–1995 (14%; see table 5). After 1995, however, Protestant growth decreased considerably, although a fourth, more modest, Protestant boom occurred in 2010–2015 following the 2010 earthquake and cholera epidemic.

There is some overlap between the timing of LDS membership growth periods and the Protestant booms, especially for the periods 1977–1985 and 1985–1990. In 1990–1995, both Protestant and LDS

76. Charles and Lewis-Ampidu, "L'Eglise de Jésus-Christ en Haïti," 16.

77. United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, "World Population Prospects 2022: Demographic Indicators by Region, Subregion, and Country, Annually for 1950–2100," accessed July 17, 2022, https://population.un.org/wpp/.

78. See statista.com, "Demographics of Haiti," accessed May 30, 2024, https://www.statista.com/statistics/795192/population-total-age-haiti.

membership growth sharply declined, leading to stagnation. Between 1996 and 2002, there was another LDS growth explosion, with an average annual growth rate of almost 13%, ranging from a low of 7.5% and a high of 25.6%. In 2000–2010, both Protestant and LDS growth were low and seemed headed toward stagnation. Between 2003 and 2018, LDS growth stabilized at a lower, more modest rate (4.5% AAGR), ranging from a low of 2% to a high of almost 7%. By contrast, in 2000–2010, all Protestants combined increased by only 0.7% (*WCE3*) or 1.9% (*Operation World*), compared to 6.2% compound annual LDS growth. Yet by 2010–2015, all Protestants combined increased strongly by almost 4% (*WCE3*), slightly below the LDS AAGR of 4.85%.

What about a possible correlation between incipient secularization and Mormon membership growth in Haiti? The biggest jump in the nonreligious population occurred between 1970 and 2000, which included a long period with high anomie (economic crises of the 1970s and 1980s; political turmoil until the 1990s) but also a brief period of political stability and increasing prosperity in the 1990s. Based on the 2003 census, another big nonreligious explosion occurred between 2000 (2.4%) and 2003 (10%). The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints arrived in Haiti in 1978 and experienced spectacular growth in 1978–1985, with AAGRs fluctuating between 35% and 239%, only to suddenly see a membership stagnation in 1990–1995, strong growth again in 1995–2000 (with AAGRs in the 10% to 25% range), and relatively consistent moderate to high growth after 2002 in the 2% to 7.5% AAGR range. After 2016, annual LDS growth is around 3% (see table 4).

In summary:

1. In 1975–1985 (1978–1985 for the LDS) and 1985–1990, annual Protestant and LDS membership growth were both very high. At the same time, there was a slow but steady increase of the nonreligious population in Haiti.
2. In 1990–1995, Protestantism exploded (AAGR 14%), whereas LDS growth markedly decreased. The Mormon AAGR in 1990–1995 was only 2.3%, ranging from a low of –1.6% to a high of 4.1%. This period included the political optimism and economic recovery of the early

1990s. Meanwhile, the slow but steady increase of the nonreligious population continued.

3. In 1996–2000 (1996–2002 for the LDS), Protestant growth decreased sharply while Mormon growth recovered. Nonreligious growth exploded between 2000 (possibly even earlier) and 2003, according to the 2003 census.
4. In 2000–2010, all Protestants combined increased by only 0.7% (*WCE3*) or 1.9% (*Operation World*), whereas the compound Mormon AAGR was 6.2%. Nonreligious growth also exploded between 2000 (or earlier) and the 2003 census.
5. In 2010–2015, Protestant growth picked up again to an almost 4% AAGR, reflecting strong growth especially among some Pentecostal churches (with 4% to 20% AAGRs!) and the Seventh-day Adventists (5.3%) and Jehovah's Witnesses (5%), while the Mormons also continued their earlier growth from 2000 to 2010, now down only slightly (4.85% compound AAGR). Meanwhile, the nonreligious population grew strongly from almost 2% to 2.7%.

For the future, *WCE3* projects the steady increase of the nonreligious population from 3% in 2020 (336,000 people) to a projected 5.4% or 762,000 people by 2050.[79] Yet the 2003 census already reported 10% nonreligious Haitians, almost double the projected 2050 rate! *WCE3* conservatively projects there will be 26% Protestants in Haiti in 2020 and around 30% Protestants by 2050, which would make another major Protestant boom on the island unlikely.

What about the future of LDS growth in Haiti? The secular transition theory established a clear correlation between church growth and socioeconomic development, operationalized in the United Nations Human Development Index (UNHDI).[80] The UNHDI weighs life expectancy, years of schooling, and gross national income per capita for each country.[81] Cragun and Lawson demonstrated that low Mormon membership growth becomes the norm once a country's UNHDI value

79. Johnson and Zurlo, *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 3rd ed., 361.

80. Cragun and Lawson, "Secular Transition," 367–370.

81. UNDP, *HDI Report 2018*.

gets above 0.8, the starting point for the "very high human development" category as defined by the United Nations.[82] In Latin America, this happened first in Chile, Argentina, and Uruguay.[83] Is the secular transition theory confirmed by the recent data on Mormon membership growth in Haiti? Does it explain why there will be neither 267 million LDS members by 2080, as Stark predicted, nor thirty-five million by 2020 (as Bennion and Young projected)?[84]

Haiti appears somewhat anomalous with regard to the secular transition theory. Haiti's UNHDI value of 0.498 was much lower than the next-lowest Latin American country: Honduras (0.617). Yet, Haiti's average annual Mormon membership growth rate of 3.2% in 2016–2017 was, while higher than Honduras (AAGR 1.7%), quite comparable to Nicaragua (AAGR 2.9% with a low HDI of 0.658), Costa Rica (AAGR 2.9% with a high HDI of 0.794) and especially Panama (AAGR 5.2% with HDI 0.789).[85] No data on Mormon evangelization activities and missionary distribution are available (factors 1b and 1c in the country church growth protocol). Factor 2c (anomie resulting from poverty, natural disasters, diseases, corruption, and political violence) thus became a main factor to explain the Mormon growth periods in Haiti—although its value proved limited. Anomie from an economic recession, urbanization, poverty, and political violence explained high Mormon growth in 1982–1991 well, but the results were contradictory after the start of formal democracy in late 1990. Political violence, poverty, diseases, hurricanes, and earthquakes had little or no impact on the annual Mormon membership growth after 2001, which hovered between 3% and 7.5% a year and after 2013 never reached 5%.

Surprisingly, Haiti had only moderate average annual Mormon membership growth in 2016–2017 (3.2%), despite having the lowest

82. Cragun and Lawson, "Secular Transition," 370.

83. Gooren, "Comparing Mormon and Adventist Growth Patterns," 47.

84. Bennion and Young, "Uncertain Dynamics of LDS Expansion," 29.

85. UNDP, *HDI Report 2018*.

UNHDI value of the Western Hemisphere: 0.498. This value is still far removed from the 0.8 that delineates the start of the UN "very high human development" category and is correlated with low annual LDS growth. To explain this contradictory trend, more in-depth (ethnographic) fieldwork research is needed on the Mormon Church in Haiti to explore why the same factors that supported high growth in the 1980s and 1990s no longer do so after 2001. Rousseline's LDS conversion story highlights Haiti's poverty and corruption, having a living LDS prophet for our time, and her unique mission experience in Florida. Basquiat emphasizes the bricolage of Haitian Mormons, some of whom continued Vodou practices while simultaneously loving the humble Joseph Smith as a prophet, accepting present-day revelation through visions, putting their own unique touches on the standard Mormon markers of baptism and testimony, and celebrating the Church's US connection. Freeman also explores surprising parallels between Mormonism and Vodou, while adding eternal families and the US connection as pull factors in conversions among Haitians.

If Haiti's HDI stagnates around 0.5, stronger LDS growth remains likely. Looking at other Latin American and Caribbean countries, one would expect LDS membership growth in Haiti to eventually decrease to the 1% to 3% per year range that is currently common in almost all countries of the region. If that indeed happens, and if Haiti's UNHDI value slowly keeps moving closer to 0.8, then the secular transition theory would be confirmed. And if it does *not* happen, then the secular transition theory would be falsified by at least one country case.

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