

Gay rights in Utah amid a changing church

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Pride Flag in front of the LDS Salt Lake City Temple

Jacob Sagers – As the Utah State Legislature convenes this week, a bill [codifying](#) its gay and gender conversion therapy bans marks a win for gay rights advocates and the LGBTQ+ community in Utah. Amid the US Congress passing gay marriage into federal law last year, this bill represents a rapid change in public opinion. Utah voters approved a constitutional amendment banning gay marriage in 2004 and the state fought against gay marriage in *Kitchen v. Herbert* until the Supreme Court's decision in 2015. Part of this shift has been from the LDS church's position rapidly changing; its support was vital for the bill's success and shaping various Utah communities' beliefs.

The LDS church is a global institution, but its ability to change its views, and the way they become accepted, happens in towns and cities. The LDS church serves as a locale, or institution that organizes people in a place. Within North Logan, for example, the church serves as a focal point for organizing communities and its actions. It helps shape culture and politics in the area which then influences political and cultural change. The LDS church's

positions help it hold great ideological power, or the ability to get others to do what you want, in Utah. Mike Peterson, the bill's sponsor who is also a Latter-day Saint, is a legislator and therapist from North Logan. His bill was created to alleviate therapists' concerns while solidifying it into law. The conversion therapy bans, among Utah's LGBTQ+ nondiscrimination laws, have generally been contingent on the church's support and input. The church's support for these bills allowed their passage and been necessary for gay rights advocates' success.

Still, the LDS Church does not hold complete hegemony over the state. The bill was amended to address Equality Utah's concerns. The gay rights movement has gained ideological power in recent years amid campaigns and protests. Support for same-sex marriage and gay rights nationwide has grown rapidly in the past decade. This has altered LDS church policy to support non-discrimination laws and rescinding automatic excommunication of members in same-sex marriage. Both would have been unfathomable a decade ago. As church members follow societal trends the church has changed its positions and retained its influence. However, the question is to what lengths will the church continue to amend policy amid the growing ideological power of the gay rights movement?

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