



Case Studies on Analyzing Growth Trends by City or Administrative Division

>

Analysis of LDS Growth in Java, Indonesia

Author: Matt Martinich

Posted: April 22nd, 2014

Overview

Java is the world's most populous island but only the thirteenth largest island by geographic size. In 2010, Java had 136.6 million inhabitants;^[1] more than 50% of the entire population of Indonesia at the time. Java is divided into six administrative divisions including four provinces (Banten, Central Java, East Java, and West Java), one special capital territory (Jakarta), and one special region (Yogyakarta). In the early 1970s, the LDS Church established an initial presence in Java and assigned missionaries. The Church has experienced slow but steady growth in Java within the past several decades as evidenced by stagnant national outreach expansion within the past four decades, extremely slow congregational growth within the past two decades, and two of the three districts maturing into stakes during the early 2010s.

This case study reviews the history of the Church in Java. Church growth and missionaries successes are identified and opportunities and challenges for future growth are examined. The growth of the Church on other major islands in Indonesia is summarized and the size and growth trends of other missionary-focused Christian groups that operate in Indonesia is reviewed. Limitations to this case study are identified and prospects for future growth are predicted.

//

LDS Background

The Church opened Java to missionary activity in 1970 and assigned missionaries to Jakarta, Bandung, and Bogor.^[2] By year-end 1973, missionaries were serving in eight cities on Java: Bandung, Bogor, Jakarta, Malang, Semarang, Surabaya, Surakarta (Solo), and Yogyakarta.^[3] The Church organized its first district in 1972 (Jakarta) and opened the Indonesia Jakarta Mission in 1975. Additional districts were organized in Surakarta (1977) and Surabaya (1978). Rapid membership growth occurred during the 1970s and 1980s as total church membership increased from less than 100 in 1970 to 770 in 1974^[4] and 3,100 in 1985.

Problems obtaining foreign missionary visas resulted in the Indonesia Jakarta Mission undergoing several iterations of closing and reopening during the last quarter of the twentieth century. The mission closed in 1981, reopened in 1985, closed in 1989, and reopened in 1995. During the 1980s, the Church achieved considerable progress augmenting the size of the indigenous Indonesian full-time missionary force. The number of local members serving missions within Indonesia climbed from 24 in 1981 to 49 in 1987.^[5]

In the 1990s and 2000s, little progress occurred in accelerating membership growth and congregational growth. The number of branches on Java increased from approximately 17 in 1987 to 21 in 2005 and declined to 19 in 2010. Total church membership for Indonesia slowly increased from 3,600 in 1987 to 6,683 in 2010. Provided with the number of branches in parentheses, the Church operated three districts on Java in 2001 in Jakarta (6), Surabaya (4), and Surakarta (7). At the time the Church reported nine cities with branches established (Bandung, Bogor, Jakarta metropolitan area, Magelang, Malang, Semarang, Surabaya, Surakarta, and Yogyakarta). By early 2014, the Church operated eight wards and one branch in the Jakarta Indonesia Stake, six wards and one branch in the Surakarta Indonesia Stake, and three branches in the Surabaya Indonesia District. At the time the Church reported official congregations operating in the same nine cities as in 2001 but had member groups operating in three locations that had no LDS presence in 2001 (Blitar, Klaten, and Sidoarjo). During the 13-year period between 2001 and 2014, the Church closed two branches: The Malang Selatan Branch in the Surabaya Indonesia District and the Cigudeg Branch

in the former Jakarta Indonesia District. It is unclear whether the Church currently operates a member group in Cigudeg.

Several notable church growth developments occurred on Java during the early 2010s. The Jakarta Indonesia District became a stake in 2011. In 2012, a second stake on the island was organized in Surakarta. Indonesian members reported that the mission president requested that local members and church leaders keep better track of members who moved to cities where no LDS unit operated in an effort to examine opportunities for expanding outreach. These efforts resulted in the organization of member groups in at least three locations where no LDS units previously functioned. In April 2012, the Church organized the Indonesia Jakarta Mission Branch to facilitate the finding of members residing in cities without an LDS presence on Java. The mission branch included areas within Central Java that did not fall within the boundaries of the Surakarta Indonesia Stake. Later in 2012 the Church organized the Sidoarjo Group under the Surabaya 2nd Branch. In 2013, the Church organized the Blitar Group. In 2013, missionaries serving in the Surakarta Indonesia Stake reported that stake leaders made preliminary plans to organize a member group in Klaten. In January 2014, the stake officially opened the Klaten Group with 26 attending the first sacrament meeting.^[6] In early 2014, local members reported goals for the Surabaya Indonesia District to become a stake and for each of the stakes in Jakarta and Surakarta to divide to create two additional stakes by 2017. Methods employed to reach these goals included better member participation in reactivation work, identifying cities without an LDS presence with isolated Latter-day Saints, and organizing member groups in these cities when feasible.

A map displaying the location of cities on Java with 100,000 or more inhabitants and status of LDS outreach can be found [here](#).

Successes

The establishment of stakes constitutes a major success for the Church in Java. A district must meet certain membership, activity, and priesthood leadership requirements for a sustained period of time in order to qualify as a stake. These requirements generally consist of at least 1,900 members on church records, five congregations that meet the criteria to function as wards, and meeting certain ratios of active, full-tithe paying Melchizedek Priesthood holders to general church membership. In 2012, the Church in Indonesia had 6,900 members nationwide with nearly all of these members residing on Java. The Church in Indonesia achieved a significant milestone organizing two stakes with relatively few members nationwide considering the Church in many other countries often surpasses 7,000 members but is unable to organize a single stake. The advancement of districts in Jakarta and Surakarta into stakes indicates that the Church has made progress in increasing the number of active, full-tithe paying Melchizedek Priesthood holders notwithstanding slow membership and congregational growth rates within the past decade. Additionally, the creation of stakes also indicates maturing local church leadership capable of meeting the administrative demands for a stake to properly function such as operating a high council, interviewing members for temple recommends and full-time missionary service, advancing male members to the Melchizedek Priesthood, and the calling of a patriarch.

The organization of three member groups within the past two years signifies a turning point in outreach expansion efforts as virtually all cities on Java with a current LDS presence had a church presence established during the early 1970s. The only cities on Java that appear to have had an official branch organized within the past 35 years include Magelang and Cigudeg; the latter of which had its branch discontinued in 2010 and reverted into a member group. The Church has effectively redistributed many of its resources from helping districts to become stakes to identifying suitable locations to target for missionary work and making preparations to organize member groups. Unity in maintaining outreach expansion vision has also been apparent as the area presidency, mission presidency, stake and district presidencies, ward and branch leaders, local members, and full-time missionaries have all shared the enthusiasm and interest in making the first real strides in expanding LDS outreach on Java since the early 1970s. Although not all of these efforts will likely result in the formation of branches and the long-term establishment of LDS community in additional locations, this change in focus has been desperately needed in order for the Church to make greater headway in taking the gospel to the people of Java, improve member activity and convert retention rates, and accelerate membership and congregational growth.

The Church in Jakarta has become an important center of strength for the Church on Java. Jakarta was the only metropolitan area that experienced a net increase in the number of congregations operating between 2001 and 2013 as the number of congregations increased from five branches to eight wards. This growth has occurred as a result of many Indonesian Latter-day Saint families who originally joined the Church in Central Java and East Java relocating to the Jakarta metropolitan area over the years in search of better employment and higher living standards. Small numbers of convert baptisms have also contributed to growth in Jakarta during this period.

Opportunities

Isolated Latter-day Saints residing in cities with no nearby LDS congregation present the greatest opportunity for opening additional locations to missionary activity and establishing additional member groups. There are currently 102 cities on Java with 100,000 or more inhabitants without an LDS presence according to 2010 population figures.^[7] Stake and district leaders coordinating with mission leadership to identify which cities have Latter-day Saints and these leaders regularly visiting isolated members will play an important role in efficient church planting efforts that make frugal use of limited missionary manpower and foster self-sufficiency in newly organized congregations.

Central Java and East Java present good opportunities for expanding missionary activity into additional cities and organizing member groups in these locations. Returned missionaries report that populations exhibit higher receptivity in Central Java and

East Java than in areas outside the Jakarta metropolitan area in West Java and Banten due to greater religious plurality and societal tolerance of Christian groups. Christian groups can build meetinghouses in Central Java and East Java without obtaining special permission from civic leaders whereas meetinghouse construction or renting meetinghouse space can be challenging in West Java and Banten. The LDS Church has historically experienced its greatest membership and congregational growth within these two provinces compared to West Java, suggesting that there are continued opportunities for growth if mission, stake, and district leaders maintain appropriate vision and strategy to open additional areas to missionary work. Returned missionaries report that small numbers of Latter-day Saints reside several cities in East Java where no LDS unit currently operates such as Banyuwangi, Gresik, and Kediri. Mission and district leadership regularly meeting with these members, requesting full-time missionaries and branch missionaries to regularly visit these cities, and organizing cottage meetings and family home evening (FHE) groups have the greatest potential to augment the number of members and investigators who would likely attend church services if a member group is established.

The Jakarta metropolitan area is one of the most favorable locations for engaging in church planting and outreach expansion efforts due to its enormous population that exhibits higher receptivity to LDS outreach than many other cities on Java and its immense geographical size. In late 2013, Jakarta ranked as the fourth most populous urban agglomeration in the world with 26.4 million people as only Tokyo, Japan; Guangzhou, China; and Shanghai, China had larger populations. The Jakarta Indonesia Mission headquarters are located in South Jakarta, permitting good accessibility to mission resources. Coordination between mission and stake leaders in identifying suitable locations to organize member groups or branches and beginning efforts to establish congregations by holding FHE groups and cottage meetings has good potential to accurately access the long-term prospects for successfully organizing additional congregations. Provided with population totals as of 2010, cities in the Jakarta metropolitan area that appear most favorable for church planting efforts include Depok (1.74 million), Cikarang (712,000), Cibinong (327,000), and Gunung Putri (310,000).

Challenges

Receptivity to LDS outreach is low in many areas of Java as evidenced by the Church experiencing slow membership growth trends within the past 25 years. Most the population exhibits strong religious ties to Islam, a particular Christian denomination, or other religions such as Buddhism. Areas where Muslims constitute a larger majority often experience limited religious freedom and societal tolerance for Christian activity, such as in Banten and many areas of West Java. Local members in West Java and Banten report that obtaining leases on rented meetinghouse facilities has become increasingly more difficult within the past three decades. Returned missionaries observe that some meetinghouse do not have the Church's logo on the exterior due to threats of violence by radical Islamist groups. Although greater religious freedom exists in areas with greater religious diversity, these populations nonetheless exhibit low to modest receptivity to LDS outreach. Some Christian groups engage in counter-proselytism efforts in an effort to inoculate their membership against the proselytism efforts of Latter-day Saints and LDS missionaries. Consequently many Christians refuse to seriously investigate the LDS Church and meet with missionaries because of the admonition given by their religious leaders. The persecution of Christians and other religious minority groups by radical Islamists has strengthened the faith of many of these religious minorities as those with weaker faith convert to Islam or do not actively practice their faith at all.

The Church in Java provides a good illustration of how self-sufficient local leadership, sizable numbers of local members serving full-time missions for several decades, and moderate member activity rates do not always correspond with rapid membership growth and outreach expansion. The Church in Indonesia has experienced the most dismal progress of any country in Southeast Asia in expanding missionary work into previously unreached locations within the past four decades. There have been several factors within the Church in Indonesia that have delayed and have continued to delay outreach expansion efforts. Local members in the Jakarta metropolitan area report that many members do not attend their assigned ward according to current geographical ward boundaries. This results in confusion in determining how many active members reside in particular communities and challenges in opening additional congregations if members refuse to attend their assigned unit. Little progress will likely occur in opening additional congregations within closer proximity of membership and target populations until local membership becomes more organized and compliant with attending their assigned congregations. Mission and district leaders took little accountability prior to the early 2010s in keeping up-to-date membership records for individuals who did not live within cities where official LDS units operated. Consequently the Church has had to update these records in order to accurately assess where isolated members reside so that church leaders may appropriately identify the most favorable locations to open for missionary work.

The worldwide surge in the number of members serving full-time missions has had little impact on augmenting the number of full-time missionaries assigned to the Indonesia Jakarta Mission due to extremely limited numbers of foreign missionary visas available to the Church and the tiny number of mission-aged Indonesian young single adults. Past challenges obtaining foreign missionary visas and the opening and closing of the Indonesia Jakarta Mission during the 1980s and 1990s significantly influenced LDS outreach expansion efforts on Java. Limited missionary manpower available and the disruption of mission leadership due to the mission closing twice within less than a decade appears rooted in the inability of the Church to orchestrate the opening of additional cities to missionary activity for so many consecutive decades. Efforts to advance districts in Jakarta and Surakarta into stakes also appeared to consume any surplus missionary manpower that could be channeled into opening additional cities to missionary work.

The failure of some new member groups to increase active membership within their jurisdictions may discourage some church leaders from pursuing additional outreach expansion efforts. Some recently organized member groups have had very few or no new converts baptized since a member group was established. The Sidoarjo Group did not have a single convert baptism for over a year resulting in the removal of full-time missionaries from the group due to poor productivity. Success in assessing conditions for expanding missionary work into additional locations will require the removal of full-time missionaries if efforts to

baptize, retain, and reactive are unsuccessful and the assignment of these missionaries to additional locations previously unreached by the Church.

The Church may experience challenges simultaneously maintaining current congregations and steadily opening additional units due to members relocating to Jakarta for better employment and higher living conditions. Returned missionaries and local members report that active members relocating from Central Java and East Java to the Jakarta area has been one of the primary reasons for a lack of greater growth in these two provinces notwithstanding populations exhibiting higher receptivity than other provinces in Java. Depending on individual need and circumstance, the Church may discourage some from relocating away from their home cities to help strengthen the Church and expand outreach.

Comparative Growth

The Church outside of Java maintains an extremely limited presence and has experienced no progress opening additional locations to missionary activity and establishing congregations. All but three LDS branches in Indonesia operate on Java. The Church has operated its sole branch on Sulawesi (Manado) for nearly three decades with little progress augmenting the number of active members until the past few years. In Sumatra, the Church has maintained its sole branch in Medan for nearly two decades and has experienced extremely slow growth and mediocre member activity rates. In Papua, the Church briefly operated a small branch in the mid-2000s but closed the branch due to active members relocating elsewhere. In Bali, the Church organized its first branch in Denpasar in 2011 but has not appeared to extend any overt missionary activity on the island. In Batam, a member group began meeting in the early 2010s but no formal missionary activity has occurred in this location. No LDS presence has ever appeared to operate in Kalimantan, Kepulauan Bangka Belitung, the Maluku Islands, or Nusa Tenggara.

Essentially all missionary-focused Christian groups with a worldwide presence report a more widespread presence on Java than Latter-day Saints. Most of these groups have experienced slow membership growth rates similar to the LDS Church but have maintained a longer presence and have been more aggressive in expanding outreach. Evangelicals claim between one and five percent of most ethnolinguistic groups indigenous to Java.^[8] The Seventh Day Adventist Church reports a widespread presence in Java but has experienced slow growth within the past decade. In 2012, Adventists reported nearly 59,000 members, 2,403 new members, 291 churches (large congregations), and 107 companies (small congregations).^[9] Jehovah's Witnesses operate in many areas of Java and experience modest growth. In 2013, Witnesses reported over 24,500 active members and 398 congregations in Indonesia,^[10] with most of these members and congregations located on Java. Witnesses have established a significantly more widespread presence in many of the most populous cities compared to the LDS Church. In early 2014, Witnesses appeared to operate as many as 50 congregations in the Jakarta metropolitan area (including Bogor), 11 congregations in Bandung, 10 congregations in Surabaya, 7 congregations in Semarang, and 4 congregations in Surakarta. Both Adventists and Witnesses translate printed proselytism and instructional materials into Standard Indonesian and Javanese. In 2012, the Church of the Nazarene reported 5,291 full members, 151 associate members, an average weekly worship attendance of 4,678, and 118 congregations (62 organized churches, 56 churches not yet organized) on the islands of Java and Bali.^[11]

Limitations

Official LDS membership figures for Indonesia were utilized for Java membership figures during 1970, 1974, and 1985 as the Church's presence in Indonesia was restricted to Java until 1984 when the Manado Branch was created on Sulawesi. The Church does not publish official membership figures for Java or other islands or administrative divisions in Indonesia. It is unclear how many cities and towns without an LDS unit have Latter-day Saints. The Church does not publish official information regarding the location, name, and number of member groups due to their semi-official status. Membership and congregation data from other religious groups do not use the same criteria and definitions as the LDS Church and these criteria and definitions significantly differ between denomination. The Church does not publish the annual number of convert baptisms by mission or administrative division. No official data regarding member activity and convert retention rates were available.

Future Prospects

The outlook for future LDS growth in Java appears favorable due to mission, stake, and district leadership demonstrating a unified approach to revamping outreach expansion efforts and achieving real growth on Java. Some recently organized member groups may become branches within the foreseeable future and additional member groups may be organized in previously unreached cities, especially in Central Java, East Java, and the Jakarta metropolitan area. The Church may organize additional branches and wards within the Jakarta Indonesia and Surakarta Indonesia Stakes once there are a sufficient number of active members and priesthood leaders to support additional units, and greater organization and compliance is achieved by local members attending their assigned congregations. The Church may announce a small temple in Jakarta to service membership in Indonesia and surrounding nations due to long distance to the nearest temple in Hong Kong, China, the recent establishment of stakes, and the Church in Indonesia exhibiting good self-sufficiency in church administration since the 1970s.

- [1] "INDONESIA: Administrative Division," www.citypopulation.de, retrieved 8 March 2014.
<http://www.citypopulation.de/php/indonesia-admin.php>
- [2] Craig, Alison. "The Saints in Indonesia", *Ensign*, Jan. 1977, 86. <https://www.lds.org/ensign/1977/01/the-saints-in-indonesia>
- [3] "Indonesia," *Deseret News 2013 Church Almanac*, p. 499
- [4] "Indonesia," *Deseret News 2013 Church Almanac*, p. 499
- [5] "Indonesia," *Deseret News 2013 Church Almanac*, p. 499
- [6] Flamifollya, S. Devia. "Pembukaan Kelompok Klaten - Pasak Surakarta," *Ids.or.id*, 5 February 2014.
<http://ids.or.id/pembukaan-kelompok-klaten-pasak-surakarta>
- [7] "INDONESIA: Cities and Urban Settlements," www.citypopulation.de, retrieved 12 March 2014.
<http://www.citypopulation.de/Indonesia-CU.html>
- [8] "People Group Cluster: Java," joshuaproject.net. retrieved 12 March 2014. <http://joshuaproject.net/clusters/196>
- [9] "West Indonesia Union Mission (1997-Present)," www.adventiststatistics.org, retrieved 8 March 2014.
http://www.adventiststatistics.org/view_Summary.asp?FieldID=U10122
- [10] "2013 Service Year Report of Jehovah's Witnesses Worldwide," jw.org.
- [11] "Church of the Nazarene Growth, 2002-2012," nazarene.org, retrieved 19 November 2013.
<http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=3&ved=0CDwQFjAC&url=http%3A%2F%2Fnazarene.org%2F>