



Reaching the Nations

Country reports on the LDS Church around the world from a landmark almanac. Includes detailed analysis of history, context, culture, needs, challenges and opportunities for church growth.



Qatar

Population: 2.12 millions (#146 out of countries)

By David Stewart and Matt Martinich

Geography

Area: 11,586 square km. Located on the Arabian Peninsula surrounded by the Persian Gulf, Qatar occupies the Qatar Peninsula. The arid climate experiences mild winters and hot summers. Terrain consists of flat desert with little to no vegetation. Haze and dust storms are common natural hazards. The greatest environmental issues are pollution and overreliance on desalinated sea water to meet fresh water demand. Qatar is divided into eight administrative municipalities.

Peoples

Arab: 40%

Indian: 18%

Pakistani: 18%

Iranian: 10%

Other: 14%

There are only approximately 269,000 Qatari citizens. As a result, 88.4% of the population is non-Qatari. More men than women reside in the country due to male immigrant workers being unable to obtain visas for their families or being unable to afford family travel.

Population: 2,314,307 (July 2017)

Annual Growth Rate: 2.27% (2017)

Fertility Rate: 1.9 children born per woman (2017)

Life Expectancy: 76.8 male, 81 female (2017)

Languages: Arabic, English. Arabic is the official language. Predominant immigrant languages include Farsi, Filipino languages, Urdu, Malayalam, Tamil, Sinhalese, and Balochi. Most immigrant workers do not learn Arabic. Only Arabic has over

one million speakers.

Literacy: 97.3% (2015)

History

Ancient peoples inhabited the Qatari Peninsula for millennia prior to the birth of Christ. Islam arrived in the seventh century AD, and exploring and trading occurred with peoples throughout the Indian Ocean during the Middle Ages. The British took control in the nineteenth century and made Qatar a protectorate in 1916. Influence from the British declined in the mid-twentieth century and independence occurred in 1971. The royal al-Thani family has ruled Qatar since the nineteenth century. Over the past four decades, the country has transformed from a poor nation into one of the wealthiest. Qatar has seen very few acts of terrorism and violence. However, Qatar has recently experienced turbulent relations with its neighbors regarding its support of popular revolutions during the Arab Spring.

Culture

Qatar shares many similarities in culture with neighboring Saudi Arabia. Sharia law provides the basis for governance, but Qatar has more liberal laws than many other Arab nations. Education is highly emphasized. Alcohol and pork are not served publicly. Coffee is widely consumed, and it is rude for a guest to refuse tea or coffee offered by a host. Cuisine includes Indian, Pakistani, and North African influences. Seafood is the primary native cuisine. Foreign worker salaries differ on country of origin. Qatari women prefer to stay in the home. Most marriages are arranged and require the consent of the bride. Polygamy continues with some Qataris but has declined in popularity in recent years. A woman may divorce her husband if he takes another wife.^[1]

Economy

GDP per capita: \$124,500 (2017) [209% of U.S.]

Human Development Index: 0.856 (2017)

Corruption Index: 63 (2017)

Qatar has experienced rapid economic growth over the last several decades through oil and natural gas exploitation. However, recent decreases in oil and gas prices have resulted in reduced government revenue. In the past decade, significant manufacturing, financial services, and construction industries have developed. Today, oil and gas produce slightly less than half the GDP. Proven natural gas reserves are the third largest in the world. Industry and services each account for approximately half of the GDP. Unemployment ranks the third lowest in the world (0.6%), and the GDP per capita is the second highest in the world. Primary trade partners include Japan, South Korea, China and the United States.

Corruption levels are among the lowest in the Middle East. Greater awareness of corruption in Qatar has risen in recent years, yet there remain no anti-corruption organizations. Allegations of corruption are most numerous towards higher ranking Qatari officials.

Faiths

Muslim: 67.7%

Christian: 13.8%

Hindu: 13.8%

Buddhist: 3.1%

Other/unaffiliated: 1.6%

Christians

Denominations – Members – Congregations

Roman Catholics – 200,000

Evangelicals – 14,552

Orthodox – less than 10,000

Anglicans – 10,000?

Egyptian Copts – 3,000

Latter-day Saints – 556 – 3

Seventh-Day Adventists – 241

Religion

Sunni Muslims are the majority, whereas Shi'a Muslims comprise a visible minority. Hindus number over 300,000, whereas Buddhists total less than 72,000. Most Christians are Catholic. Notable Christian minorities include Anglicans, Egyptian Copts, and Greek and Eastern Orthodox. The Mesaymeer Religious Complex provides locations for many registered and unregistered churches to meet.^[2] Fewer than 500 Qatari citizens are Christian.^[3]

Religious Freedom

Persecution Index: 27th (2018)

Legislation and the constitution allow for individuals to associate, assemble, and worship as long as they preserve morality and public order. Islam is the official religion. Proselytism by non-Muslims is forbidden and can result in up to a ten-year jail sentence. Those in possession of materials supporting or promoting non-Muslim religions can be imprisoned for up to two years; however, there has never been a case where this law has been enforced since its passage. Law restricts places of worship. Conversion of Muslims to other religions is classified as apostasy although there has been no instance in which this has been enforced since independence. Both Muslims and non-Muslims are subject to elements of both secular and Shari'a law. Violence directed towards religious minorities is rare.

Christian groups can receive government recognition if they have over 1,500 members living in Qatar.^[4] Only eight groups are recognized: Catholic, Anglican, Greek Orthodox, Syrian Orthodox, Coptic, Lebanese Maronite, evangelical Protestant, and Indian Christian. Christian churches with smaller memberships may worship and receive government security if needed. The publication, importation, and distribution of religious books is controlled by the government.^[5]

Largest Cities

Urban: 99.1% (2018)

Doha, Ar-Rayyan, Al-Wakrah, Al Shahaniya, Al Thakhira, Al Khor, Umm Salal Mohammed, Al-Wukayr, Al Kheesa, Mesaieed.

Cities listed in **bold** have no congregations of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

One of the ten largest cities has a congregation of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Ninety-five percent (95%) of the national population lives in the ten largest cities. Nearly the entire national population lives in Doha and its suburbs.

Church History

The first official congregation was organized in 1995 in Doha. In 2000, Qatar was assigned to the Europe Central Area and had one congregation. Qatar was assigned to the Middle East/Africa North Area upon its creation in 2008. As of 2018, the Church did not have legal recognition from the government.

Membership Growth

LDS Membership: 556 (2017)

The Church has not consistently reported year-by-year membership totals for Qatar. However, membership in the Arabian Peninsula Stake stood at 900 in 2004. By 2009, membership in the Arabian Peninsula Stake reached 1,950.^[6] In late 2009, many expatriate Western members continued to relocate to Qatar. Most of the expatriates came from Texas, consisting primarily of oil and gas industry employees and their families in addition to U.S. military personnel. Increases in membership growth come primarily from members moving to the area and from non-Muslim converts, mainly Filipinos.

In 2017, one in 4,162 was a Latter-day Saint.

Congregational Growth

Wards: 2 Branches: 1 (2018)

The Doha Branch likely became a ward in the mid-2000s and was later divided in 2007 to create the Doha 2nd Branch, which soon became a ward. The Doha 2nd Ward meets the needs of Filipino members and conducts church services in Tagalog, whereas the Doha 1st Ward serves other members and holds meetings in English. In early 2013, Doha 3rd Branch was organized to meet the needs of U.S. military personnel stationed at Al Udeid Air Base. All three congregations are assigned to the Abu Dhabi Stake.

Activity and Retention

It is very difficult to determine activity rates, as the bulk of membership arrived in the past decade, and there are likely many inactive members not on Church records for Qatar. In 2009, the Doha 1st Ward had around 170 attending sacrament meetings and fifty-five children in primary. Activity rates are likely over 50%. Retention of new converts appears to be high.

Language Materials

Languages with LDS Scripture: English, Arabic, Iranian Persian (Farsi), Tagalog, Cebuano, Sinhalese, Tamil.

All LDS scriptures are available in Arabic, Cebuano and Tagalog. Only the Book of Mormon has been translated in Iranian Persian, Sinhalese, Tamil, and Urdu. Most Church materials are available in Arabic, Cebuano, and Tagalog. Gospel Principles, The Testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith and Book of Mormon selections are available in Iranian Persian. Church materials in Urdu include The Testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith and a couple of audiovisual materials. Several DVD movies such as Finding Faith in Christ and The Restoration are available in Tamil in addition to temple recommend instructions, limited priesthood and leadership resources, Gospel Principles, and some primary resources. Limited Church material translations for priesthood, relief society, Sunday School, young women, and primary are available in Sinhala.

Meetinghouses

Church meetings have been held in a rented villa. Meetings for members in the military occur on base.

Humanitarian and Development Work

No humanitarian or development work has been sponsored by the Church in Qatar. The government has issued deportation orders to members of a Christian group for unauthorized charity work among workers in labor camps. However, these orders were never carried out.^[7]

Opportunities, Challenges, and Prospects

Religious Freedom

The Church is not recognized by the government and therefore cannot publicly provide information concerning locations and times for worship services. Members who relocate to Qatar have had challenges locating the Church. In 2009, the Church made available the bishops' contact information on its meetinghouse locator site, which allows interested individuals to inquire about meeting times and locations. Church leader contact information for all three congregations remains available on the official

meetinghouse locator website as of 2018. Members report that the Church is viewed positively by many of their Qatari neighbors

Cultural Issues

Islam and daily life are intimately intertwined and prevent active proselytism. Qataris who wish to join the Church face many cultural hurdles including family and friend disapproval and ostracism. Those who participate in a polygamous relationship must divorce additional spouses and be interviewed by a member of the mission or area presidency prior to baptism. Coffee and tea's central role in Qatari cuisine creates barriers between active members and natives. Cultural similarities between Qataris and Church members, such as strong emphasis on family, a love for children, and high moral values, have resulted in some friendships between the two groups. In accordance with the Muslim day of worship, Church meetings are held on Fridays. The Church has yet to develop teaching and gospel study resources tailored to individuals with an Islamic religious background.

National Outreach

The Church is banned from any proselytism, resulting in the entire population being unreached by missionaries. Only non-Muslims with close associations with members living in Qatar have any outreach to the Church. The high concentration of the population in Doha requires fewer meeting locations and permits the establishment of wards despite less than 600 known members nationwide. Members living in areas distant to the current meetinghouse provide opportunity for the creation of additional congregations.

Member Activity and Convert Retention

Converts who join the Church in Qatar are limited to non-Muslims and are mostly Filipinos. Member activity and convert retention in the country of origin most likely reflect member and convert activity in Qatar. Higher activity and convert retention may occur at least in part due to members and converts seeking social interaction in a foreign country.

Ethnic Issues and Integration

The demographic complexity of Qatar creates challenges for members to assimilate into the same congregation with differences in language and culture. Hostilities between ethnic groups appear minimal. A rich demography in congregations provides for far-reaching outreach through members' efforts.

Language Issues

The division of the original Doha Ward was likely partially influenced by language differences between the large group of Tagalog-speaking Filipinos and English-speaking Westerners primarily from the United States. Non-Muslim immigrant workers from South Asia are difficult to reach as the Church has few members in these countries, yet many of these individuals likely have some competency in English. Very few members speak Arabic fluently, limiting associations with Arabic speakers

Leadership

Leadership is developed and well-trained, as indicated by the operation of two wards and one branch despite less than 600 members on Church records. Native leadership is nonexistent, as most members joined or were raised in the Church in the United States or the Philippines. Western Church leaders help to maintain doctrinal integrity but may have some difficulty relating with non-Muslim immigrant workers, the only group eligible for converts to join the Church.

Temple

Qatar is assigned to the Frankfurt Germany Temple district. Trips to the temple are challenging due to long distance and time. Potential for a future temple in the United Arab Emirates or elsewhere in the Middle East would eliminate many of the limitations members face to go to the temple.

Comparative Growth

Qatar was the last Gulf State to have an official branch organized. During the 2000s, Qatar experienced accelerated membership growth comparable to the United Arab Emirates. However, church growth trends in Qatar during the 2010s have significantly slowed like other Gulf States. The degree of religious freedom for Latter-day Saints is comparable to Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates.

Some Christian denominations have obtained legal recognition by exceeding 1,500 members. However, these denominations

have had a presence much longer than The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The most recently arrived groups experience few conversions in Qatar and report less than 1,000 members.

Future Prospects

The outlook for continued membership and congregational growth is favorable. The growing economy continues to bring more members to Qatar. However, relocating members continue to experience difficulty finding the Church. Prospects for member-missionary work among non-Muslims remain favorable. Additional congregations may be organized if meetinghouse space becomes inadequate to accommodate members who attend church. Some recognition from the government may soon occur, allowing the Church to publish meeting times and locations online.

[1] "Qatar," Countries and their cultures, retrieved 4 March 2010. <http://www.everyculture.com/No-Sa/Qatar.html>

[2] "Qatar," International Religious Freedom Report 2017. Accessed 12 November 2018. <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2017&dliid=281002#wrapper>

[3] "Qatar," International Religious Freedom Report 2009, 26 October 2009. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2009/127356.htm>

[4] "Qatar," International Religious Freedom Report 2009, 26 October 2009. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2009/127356.htm>

[5] "Qatar," International Religious Freedom Report 2017. Accessed 12 November 2018. <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2017&dliid=281002#wrapper>

[6] Chatterly, Matt. "Growth, friendship serve as Middle East 'Miracles,'" LDS Church News, 7 March 2009. <http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/56735/Growth-friendship-serve-as-Middle-East-miracles.html>

[7] "Qatar," International Religious Freedom Report 2009, 26 October 2009. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2009/127356.htm>