

Reaching the Nations International Church Growth Almanac

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



Sudan

Population: 35.48 millions (#37 out of countries)

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Geography

Area: 1,861,484 square km. Located in northeastern Africa, Sudan borders Eritrea, Ethiopia, South Sudan, the Central African Republic, Chad, Libya, Egypt, and the Red Sea. The Nile River and its tributaries enter the country from Ethiopia and South Sudan and flow north through Egypt. Most of the country is arid or semi-arid, with lower rainfall amounts the further one travels north. Plains cover most areas. A few mountains may be found in the south and by the Rea Sea. Dust storms and drought are natural hazards. Environmental issues include desertification, drought, water scarcity, hunting, and soil erosion. Sudan is divided into eighteen administrative states. South Sudan retained autonomy as a result of the civil war and became a separate nation in July 2011 after voting for independence in early 2011. Abyei State is controlled by Sudan but claimed by South Sudan.

Peoples

Sudanese Arab: 70%

Other (e.g. Fur, Beja, Nuba, Fallata): 30%

Sudanese Arabs primary inhabit the largest cities and northern areas. The most populous minority groups traditionally reside in southern areas such as Darfur and the Nuba Mountains.

Population: 37,345,935 (July 2017)

Annual Growth Rate: 1.64% (2017)

Fertility Rate: 3.57 children born per woman (2017)

Life Expectancy: 62.3 male, 66.7 female (2017)

Languages: Arabic (75%), Bedawiyet (5%), Fur (2%), Masalit (1%), Nobiin (1%), Central Kanuri (1%). other or unknown (15%). Arabic and English are the two official languages of Sudan. As many as 70 languages may be spoken in Sudan. Languages with over half a million speakers include Arabic (27 million), Bedawiyet (2.14 million), and Fur (744,000).

Literacy: 75.9% (2015)

History

Civilizations have inhabited and flourished in present-day Sudan for millennia. Sudan was known as Nubia or Cush and served as the location of civilizations with close ties to the Egyptians. Isaiah the Prophet in the Old Testament referred to Cush as one of the locations in which scattered Israel would be gathered from. Christianity and later Islam spread to Sudan, with Islam eventually claiming most Sudanese's religion. Several kingdoms and principalities governed the area for centuries until Egypt conquered the area and unified northern Sudan. The United Kingdom annexed Sudan in the late nineteenth century and maintained rule until 1956 when independence was granted.[1]

As independence was granted to Sudan, tensions between the north and south were exacerbated and resulted in civil war. The Sudanese government desired to institute an Islamic form of government and Shari'a law, which the south opposed. Civil war continued for much of the rest of the century and officially ended in 2005. South Sudan became independent in 2011. The Sudanese government has proven ineffective in controlling its peripheries, resulting in separatist movements that have spilled over into neighboring nations. Among the most severe problems with civil unrest are notably in the Darfur region, where violence and instability have spilled over into Chad and the Central African Republic. Serious human rights violations and accusations including genocide of non-Arab peoples in Darfur have severely hurt Sudan's reputation in the international community and led to economic sanctions. Estimates for the number of deaths resulting from the civil wars and current conflicts in the Darfur region number in the millions, with millions more displaced from Sudan or displaced to Sudan from neighboring African countries. The current Sudanese government has done little to address problems with slavery other human rights violations. Political instability continues in several border regions of Sudan today such as the Eastern Front along the Eritrean border, Darfur, Abyei, South Kurdufan, and the Blue Nile.

Culture

Islam is the primarily influence on society as most the population is Muslim and the government draws from Shari'a law for its legislation. Tribalism occurs in some peripheral states, such as the Darfur and southern and eastern regions. Nearly constant warfare and insurrections in numerous administrative states have characterized daily life for the past half century. Archaeological sites from ancient empires abound along the Nile River. Cuisine shares many similarities with the Arab world and Ethiopia. Cigarette and alcohol consumption rates are low.

Economy

GDP per capita: $4,600 (2017) [7.73% of U.S.]

Human Development Index: 0.490

Corruption Index: 16 (2017)

Oil profits drove economic growth between 1999 until the secession of South Sudan in 2011. The economy has struggled to recover since Sudan lost three-quarters of its oil revenues as most of its prior oil output originated from South Sudan. Eight percent (80%) of Sudanese are employed in agriculture. Recent reforms in currency and economy have occurred in order to attract greater foreign investment and spur greater, long term economic growth. Hydroelectric power generated from dams on the Nile River provides much of the needed electricity for the country. Additional natural resources include small reserves of valuable and industrial metals and minerals. Services constitute approximately 60% of the GDP, whereas agriculture comprises most of the remaining 40%. Oil, cotton, clothing, cement, cooking oils, sugar, soap, and shoes are major industries. Common crops include cotton, peanuts, grains, sugarcane, cassava, fruit, and gum Arabic. The United Arab Emirates and Egypt are the primary trade partners.

Corruption is perceived at one of the highest rates worldwide and is pervasive and the primary obstacle to economic growth. There has been little done to address corruption issues.

Faiths

Muslim: 80%

Other: 20%

*Estimates for the number of non-Muslims in Sudan widely vary from as low as 3% to as high as 20%.[2]

Christians

Denominations – Members – Congregations

Seventh-Day Adventists – 105

Jehovah's Witnesses – 703 – 15

Latter-day Saints – less than 10

Religion

Religion is highly correlated with ethnicity, as nearly all Arabs are Sunni Muslims. Many ethnic groups in northern areas are traditionally Muslim, whereas ethnic groups in other regions of the country tend to follow a mixture of indigenous religions and Christianity or Islam. Christians are marginalized by the government and society. Most Christians live in major cities or in the Nuba Mountains of South Kurdufan. Major Christian groups include the Catholic Church and the Episcopal Church. There are long-established communities of Coptic Orthodox and Greek Orthodox Christians in Khartoum and northern cities.[3]

Religious Freedom

The government protects religious freedom, but Islam is the source for legislation and government policy. In practice, religious freedom is limited for non-Muslims. Conversion from Islam to another religion may be punishable by imprisonment or death, but there have been no instances of the government carrying out a death sentence for conversion from Islam. Defaming Islam and blasphemy are punishable crimes. The government regulates the operation of mosques and imams. Religious groups are required to register with the government to receive tax-exempt status, own land, and apply for work permits. A religious group must have at least 30 members to register although a church leader may have fewer members and obtain registration if proof is provided of the organization's financial stability. Other requirements for religious group registration include the organization not be based in a country that is in a state of war with Sudan, registration with the government in the organization's country of origin, and have an approved registration certificate obtained by the Sudanese embassy or a diplomatic mission. No laws prohibit proselytism by religious groups, but the government has reportedly charged those who openly proselyte with apostasy. All public and private schools must provide Islamic education from preschool to the second year of university classes. Friday is designed as the day of prayer in accordance with the traditional Islamic workweek. The law mandates employers to provide Christians two hours off of work on Sundays for religious activities. Christians are heavily persecuted by the government. The government has arrested, detained, or intimidated Christians; denied church construction permits; closed or demolished churches; restricted non-Muslim groups and missionary activity; and censored religious leaders and materials. However, there appear to be good societal relations between Christians and Muslims. Societal abuses of religious freedom are uncommon and may be better accounted by ethnic conflicts.[4]

Major Cities

Urban: 34.6%

Omdurman, Khartoum, Khartoum North, Nyala, Port Sudan, El Obeid, Kassala, Medani, Gedaref, El Fasher, Kosti, El Duein, Ad-Damazin, El Geneina, Rabak, Sennar, Atbarah.

Cities listed in **bold** have no LDS congregation.

None of the seventeen cities with over 100,000 inhabitants have an LDS congregation. Twenty-four percent (24%) of the national population resides in the seventeen most populous cities.

LDS History

The first Sudanese Latter-day Saints joined the Church in Europe, the United States, and Australia. Nearly all LDS Sudanese converts have originated from South Sudan. A Canadian Latter-day Saint living in Khartoum introduced the Church to several Sudanese acquaintances who later moved to Juba, South Sudan and joined the Church in 2010. Sudan has been assigned to the Africa Southeast Area since 1998. Sudan was assigned to Uganda Kampala Mission between late 2008 or early 2009 until late 2017. The Africa Southeast Area has directly administered Sudan since late 2017. No official LDS presence has ever existed in Sudan.

Membership Growth

LDS Membership: less than 10 (2018)

In 2017, the Church reported no membership totals for Sudan. There appear to be only a few Latter-day Saints in Sudan that either joined the Church abroad or are foreigners temporarily living in Khartoum. Very few, if any, Sudanese natives have joined the Church. However, many South Sudanese have joined the Church abroad.

Congregational Growth

Branches: 1 Groups: 0 (2018)

The Africa Southeast Area – Sudan Branch (Administrative) supervises church activity in Sudan. This branch appears to primarily function to keep track of isolated members who may live in the country. Any church meetings likely occur in private in members' homes.

Language Materials

Languages with LDS Scripture: Arabic, English.

All LDS scriptures and most Church materials are available in Arabic.

Health and Safety

Political instability, war, and ethno-religious conflicts are major safety concerns. Millions have perished over the past few decades as a result of civil war and ethnic hostilities.

Humanitarian and Development Work

The Church has conducted 14 humanitarian and development projects in Sudan since 1985. These projects have included emergency and refugee response, and immunization initiatives.[5]

Opportunities, Challenges, and Prospects

Religious Freedom

Government restrictions prohibit the LDS Church from sending full-time missionaries to openly proselyte. Any prospective missionary activity may only occur by local members among Christians and must be in harmony with local laws and government practices. Persecution of Christians by the government creates an unfavorable environment for LDS missionary activity. However, societal conditions indicate opportunities for missionary efforts among Christians.

Cultural Issues

Islamic law restricts proselytism. Muslims who convert to Christianity are often harassed and discriminated against. The strong ethno-religious ties of Arabs and Islam presents a nearly insurmountable obstacle for LDS proselytism. There are no LDS missionary approaches tailored to teach those with a Muslim background. Literacy rates are comparatively low and pose challenges for establishing self-sufficient local leadership if an LDS Church presence is established one day. Overall non-Arab ethnic groups are receptive to Christian proselytism. Low smoking and drinking rates complement LDS teachings. Polygamy is widespread nationwide and encouraged. Those desiring to join the Church must divorce polygamous spouses before baptism

National Outreach

The entire population is completely unreached by the LDS Church. The lack of any LDS mission outreach in Sudan results from persistent civil war and political instability in peripheral states, government restrictions on religious freedom, persecution of Christians, few LDS foreigners living in the country, and few LDS members currently residing in government-controlled areas.

South Sudanese converts will likely play a significant role in any prospective LDS outreach in Sudan as several converts previously lived in Khartoum and likely continue to maintain contact with any family or friends residing in the north. Initial LDS

outreach will most likely commence near the South Sudanese border or in Khartoum if permitted one day.

Member Activity and Convert Retention

Few, if any, Sudanese natives to Sudan have joined the LDS Church abroad. There have been no known LDS convert baptisms to have occurred in Sudan.

Ethnic Issues and Integration

Integration issues or ethnic conflicts could arise from Arabs and non-Arabs meeting in the same congregation. Christians are concentrated among non-Arabs, which may lead to LDS congregations comprising almost entirely of blacks if an LDS presence were established, due to prohibitions on proselytizing Arabs.

Language Issues

Arabic and English are widely spoken first or second languages and reduce the need for the translation of LDS materials into local languages at present. There are no realistic prospects of local languages indigenous to Sudan to receive translations of LDS materials, as there are few or no Latter-day Saints who speak these languages and no feasible method of reaching populations who speak these languages due to government policies that restrict proselytizing.

Leadership

Potential church leadership may depend on South Sudanese and foreigners for many years due to a lack of members. Humanitarian missionaries may play an important mentoring and administrative role if assigned and LDS worship services are held.

Temple

Sudan is assigned to the Johannesburg South Africa Temple district. Sudan may be reassigned to the Nairobi Kenya Temple when it is completed.

Comparative Growth

Sudan remains one of a few African nations with sizeable Christian minorities without an LDS Church presence; other such nations include Chad and Burkina Faso. Eritrea, Somalia, the Maghreb countries, and Sudan rank among the least tolerant of foreign religious groups and exhibit the poorest religious freedom records in Africa.

Most missionary-minded Christian groups operate in Sudan among non-Arabs and have reported mixed results in regards to proselytism success and growth. The greatest growth has occurred in rebel-held areas and areas near the South Sudanese border. Jehovah’s Witnesses operate 15 congregations nationwide. Most of these Witness congregations meet in Khartoum and hold services in Arabic. Seventh-Day Adventists report approximately one hundred members. Adventists have not published information on the number of congregations in recent years likely due to concerns with government persecution and harassment. Christian groups generally conduct missionary activity through local members, allowing for growth to occur despite government restrictions, whereas Latter-day Saints rely on full-time missionaries and have no prospects of establishing an official presence for the foreseeable future.

Future Prospects

The outlook for an official LDS Church establishment in Sudan is poor due to government policies that restrict religious freedom and persecute Christians, few members in the country, and political instability. South Sudanese Latter-day Saints offer meaningful prospects for future outreach if religious freedom conditions improve one day. Continued humanitarian and development work is greatly needed and may establish a positive relationship with the government.

[1] “Background Note: Sudan,” Bureau of African Affairs, 8 April 2011. http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5424.htm

[2] “Sudan,” International Religious Freedom Report 2016. Accessed 23 July 2018. https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2016religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2016&dlid=268700#wrapper

[3] “Sudan,” International Religious Freedom Report 2016. Accessed 23 July 2018. https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2016religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2016&dlid=268700#wrapper

[4] “Sudan,” International Religious Freedom Report 2016. Accessed 23 July 2018. https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2016religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2016&dlid=268700#wrapper

[5] “Where We Work,” LDS Charities. Accessed 23 July 2018. https://www.ldscharities.org/where-we-work