



Reaching the Nations International Church Growth Almanac

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.

Niger

Population: 17.47 millions (#63 out of countries)

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Geography

Area: 1,266,700 square km. Landlocked in Sub-Saharan Western African, Niger is landlocked and borders Libya, Chad, Nigeria, Benin, Burkina Faso, Mali, and Algeria. The Sahara Desert experiences a hot, arid climate and occupies all but the southern 20% of the country. Agriculture is limited to the southern areas with savannahs receiving the most precipitation. The terrain is very flat with a few mountains in the middle of Niger. The Niger River runs through the far western portions of the country. Overgrazing, desertification, and water contamination are the primary environmental concerns. Niger is divided into eight administrative regions, one of which is the capital district.

Peoples

Hausa: 53.1%

Zarma/Songhai: 21.2%

Tuareg: 11.0%

Peuhl: 6.5%

Kanuri: 5.9%

Gurma: 0.8%

Arab: 0.4%

Tubu: 0.4%

Other/unknown: 0.7%

Hausa live in the most densely populated areas in southern Niger and in northern Nigeria. Zarma/Songhai populate areas along the Niger River. Tuareg reside in northern desert areas, the Peuhl or Fulani live in Central Niger, and the Kanuri populate southeastern areas. Niger has the highest fertility rate in the world at over six children born per woman.

Population: 19,866,231 (July 2018)

Annual Growth Rate: 3.16% (2018)

Fertility Rate: 6.35 children born per woman (2018)

Life Expectancy: 55.0 male, 57.7 female (2018)

Languages: Hausa (52%), Zarma (19%), other (29%). French is the official language. Nineteen native languages are spoken. Languages with over one million speakers include Hausa (10.0 million) and Zarma (3.6 million).

Literacy: 19.1% (2015)

History

African tribes settled Niger thousands of years ago. Various African kingdoms have exerted influence on the region, namely the Songhai, Mali, and Hausa. France began trading and exploring the area in the nineteenth century but did not make Niger a colony until the 1920s. Independence from France occurred in 1960 followed by single-party military rule until 1991. Niger held its first multi-party elections in the early 1990s that led to the establishment of a democratic government in 1993. The democratic government was short-lived and was overthrown in 1996 by military leader named Ibrahim Bare. Pro-democracy fighters killed Bare in 1999 and reestablished the democratic government. Mamadou Tandja was president during most of the 2000s and was removed from office by a military coup in February 2010. Fighting between ethnic groups and little government control of Niger has consistently hurt economic development and stability. Insurgency has regularly occurred with some marginalized ethnic groups, mainly the Tuaregs. The Tuaregs rebelled in 2007 and brought war to northern Niger for two years before a ceasefire was reached. Issoufou Mahamadou was elected president in April 2011 and remained in office as of early 2020.

Culture

Islam heavily influences society. Polygamy is widespread and socially accepted. At least one-third of women are in a polygamous marriage.^[1] Niger has low rates of substance abuse, including alcohol and tobacco. The population suffers from having few social and educational institutions. Only 11% of women are literate.

Economy

GDP per capita: \$1,200 (2017) [2.00% of U.S.]

Human Development Index: 0.377 (2018)

Corruption Index: 34 (2018)

Niger is one of the poorest nations in the world and has consistently ranked as one of the worst for quality of life. Niger was rated lowest among countries of the world by Human Development Index in 2018. The greatest obstacles that have prevented growth and continue to curtail economic development include rapid population growth, a landlocked location, recurrent drought, and desertification. There are ample mineral resources in Niger, including some of the world's largest uranium deposits, but low prices for many of these minerals has deterred greater extraction and development of the mining industry. Agriculture employs approximately 80% of the workforce and produces 42% of the GDP. Services account for 39% of the GDP but employ only 3% of the population. Nearly half of Nigeriens live below the poverty line. Primary agriculture products include cowpeas, cotton, and peanuts. The largest industry is uranium mining, which provides the majority of the export earnings. Fluctuating world prices in uranium heavily influence the overall economy. Several mineral resources remained poorly or not fully exploited including gold, coal and oil. Primary trade partners include France, Thailand, and China.

Niger has widespread corruption that has also limited economic growth and development. Corruption levels rank average for the rest of Africa. The previous president dissolved parliament and the constitutional court in order to retain his power after these institutions declared that he could not run for a third term.[\[2\]](#) Perceived corruption has slightly improved within the past decade.

Faiths

Muslim: 99.0%

Christian: 0.7%

Animist: 0.2%

None: 0.1%

Christians

Denominations – Members – Congregations

Roman Catholic – 30,000

Evangelicals – 21,541

Seventh Day Adventists – 959 – 15

Jehovah's Witnesses – 322 – 9

Latter-day Saints – less than 10 – 0

Religion

Islam dominates society and daily life. Indigenous beliefs are primarily followed in rural areas among minority groups, but the nation has become increasingly Muslim. There is a small Christian community in the larger cities, especially Niamey, which also comprise foreigners from nearby African nations.

Religious Freedom

The constitution provides religious freedom, which is usually upheld by the government. Religious groups must register with the government to operate as legal entities. Registered religious groups must complete a three-year review and probationary period to obtain permanent legal status. There were no reports of problems with religious groups obtaining government registration. Political parties are not permitted to integrate religion with politics. The government has not shown favoritism to particular religious groups. There are current bans on open-air, public proselytism due to safety concerns. However, there are no legal restrictions that prohibit proselytism in a private setting or conversion from one faith to another. There are no restrictions on foreign religious leaders visiting Niger albeit long-term residency must be approved by the Ministry of the Interior. Most report positive societal relations between Muslims and Christians.[\[3\]](#)

Largest Cities

Urban: 16.5% (2019)

Niamey, Maradi, Zinder, Tahoua, Agadez, Arlit, Birni N’Konni, Dosso, Gaya, Tessaoua.

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

None of the ten most populous cities have a Church congregation. Twelve percent (12%) of the national population lives in the ten most populous cities.

Church History

In 1998, Niger was included in the Africa West Area. There has never been a Latter-day Saint presence in Niger.

Membership Growth

Church Membership: less than 10 (2019)

Few or no Nigeriens have joined the Church. There were five Latter-day Saints in Niger in 2013.[\[4\]](#) Members living in Niger are either Nigeriens who joined the Church in other nations and returned back to their homeland or foreigners.

Congregational Growth

Branches: 0 (2019)

No congregations are organized in Niger. Niger was assigned to the Africa West Area Branch when it was organized in 2011. Niger has never been assigned to a mission.

Activity and Retention

Active members likely only consist of native or foreign members who live Church teachings but do not meet for worship

services.

Language Materials

Languages with Latter-day Saint Scripture: French, Arabic.

All Latter-day Saint scriptures and nearly all Church materials are available in French. The Church has translated all Church scriptures and many unit, priesthood, Relief Society, Sunday School, young men, young women, primary, missionary, family history, and audiovisual materials into Arabic. The Church has translated Gospel Principles and The Testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith in Hausa and two Fulani languages (Fula and Futa).

Meetinghouses

There are no Latter-day Saint meetinghouses in Niger.

Health and Safety

HIV/AIDS infects 0.3% of the population. Poor sanitation conditions exist and medical infrastructure is limited.

Humanitarian and Development Work

The Church has conducted twenty humanitarian and development projects in Niger since 1985, including refugee and emergency response and community projects.[\[5\]](#) The Church has conducted emergency relief from drought and development work for agriculture. Using funds donated from members during a fast in 1985 for those stricken by famine in Africa, the Church funded a project to start nurseries to provide trees for farmers to plant in order to reduce soil erosion. This project involved government agencies to ensure success in the long run.[\[6\]](#) Forty tons of Atmit, a nutritious porridge for those suffering starvation, arrived in Niger in 2005 to feed 7,000 malnourished children. Additional shipments were also made. Logistics were provided by the Catholic Church.[\[7\]](#)

Opportunities, Challenges, and Prospects

Religious Freedom

The Church has not taken advantage of the degree of religious freedom enjoyed in a homogeneously Muslim country. No legal issues appear to have prevented the Church's establishment.

Cultural Issues

The influence of Islam may be the largest obstacle for the Church to face. Muslims have been much more tolerant of minority religious groups and should not pose a challenge to proselytism. However, Islam's influences on daily life and family may produce challenges for Muslim converts who may face ridicule and ostracism for joining the Church.

The low literacy rate will greatly challenge the Church's establishment, as most cannot read or write. Low literacy for women has contributed to the high birth rate, as they are less likely to find employment and instead stay at home. Leadership development will be challenging if converts are illiterate. The Church has the opportunity to provide service and find investigators through literacy programs.

The large number of Nigeriens in polygamous marriages challenges missionary efforts. Those married to a polygamous spouse must divorce polygamous spouses in order to join the Church. Those with formerly polygamous background traditionally require an interview with a member of the mission or area presidency to approve their baptisms.

National Outreach

No mission outreach occurs in Niger. Only a few members may reside in the country. Outreach will likely begin from Nigeriens joining the Church in other nations and returning to their homeland, and/or foreign African members who temporarily relocate to Niamey for employment purposes. However, prospects for foreign members to live in Niamey also appears unlikely in the foreseeable future given low levels of economic development.

Urban centers with small Christian populations provide the greatest opportunities for establishing the Church. These locations allow those in surrounding rural areas to travel and learn about the Church and prepare for additional cities to open. Niamey will be key to future outreach given its visible Christian minority, large population, and accessibility to international air travel.

Member Activity and Convert Retention

Member activity is limited to relocated members living the teachings of the Church.

Ethnic Issues and Integration

The Church may face some integration challenges between the Hausa majority and other ethnic groups once a presence is established.

Language Issues

The Church benefits from limited language materials in Hausa and a large body of materials in French. There are also a couple missionary and gospel study materials available in two Fulani languages. No Latter-day Saint materials are available in other native languages, such as Zarma. Additional language materials in Hausa may be forthcoming given growing Latter-day Saint membership in central Nigeria. However, materials translated into other Nigerien languages are unlikely until a large, strong local membership is developed.

Leadership

The Church lacks local members and does not appear to have any capable of leading a congregation.

Temple

Niger is not assigned to a temple district, but members would likely travel to the Accra Ghana Temple.

Comparative Growth

Several continental African countries have had no reported Church activity like Niger, including The Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Mauritania, and Chad. These nations generally have a significant Muslim majority and low standards of living, and are distant from established Latter-day Saint centers such as in Ghana and Nigeria. There is also no Latter-day Saint presence in Hausa-dominated areas of northern Nigeria, including the major city of Kano (population 4.6 million).

Christian denominations have struggled to establish congregations and attract converts for the past several decades. Jehovah's Witnesses and Seventh Day Adventists both had less than one thousand members each in 2018. Evangelical groups also report severely limited outreach. The greatest organized Christian activity appears to occur with the Catholic Church, which has had a long legacy compared to Protestant denominations. The strong influence of Islam on daily life and the remoteness of Niger appear especially responsible for the low success of Christian proselytism.

Future Prospects

Establishing the Church in Niger will be challenging, as there has never been a Church presence in Niger, and there are very few, if any, Nigeriens who have joined the Church abroad. A Church presence in Niger appears unlikely for many more years given poverty, illiteracy, political instability, and a homogeneously Muslim population. The Church appears most likely to establish a presence in Niger once there are multiple Latter-day Saints who live in Niamey and request the Africa West Area presidency for an official Church establishment. Area leadership and senior missionaries can help identify isolated members or prospective members to prepare for a future Church establishment. Religious freedom conditions in Niger are nearly unprecedented among countries where Muslims comprise 99% or more of the population. Expansion of Latter-day Saint Charities humanitarian and development projects may be an effective method to alleviate local suffering and establish a positive relationship between the Church and the government.

[1] "Gender equality and social institutions in Niger," Social Institutions and Gender Index, retrieved 5 February 2010.
<http://genderindex.org/country/niger>

[2] "Corruption Perceptions Index 2009, Regional Highlights: Sub-Saharan Africa," Transparency International, 2009.
<http://www.transparencia.org.es/INDICE%20DE%20PERCEPCI%C3%93N%202009/Regiones.%20Africa%20subsahariana.pdf>

[3] "2018 Report on International Religious Freedom: Niger." U.S. Department of State. Accessed 3 January 2020.
<https://www.state.gov/reports/2018-report-on-international-religious-freedom/niger/>

[4] Martinich, Matt. "Prospective LDS Outreach in Niger." 30 October 2014.
https://cumorah.com/index.php?target=view_case_studies&story_id=390&cat_id=6

[5] "Where We Work." Latter-day Saint Charities. Accessed 3 January 2020.
<https://www.latterdaysaintcharities.org/where-we-work>

[6] "Program 'tailored to meet special needs,'" LDS Church News, 26 May 1990.
<http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/20498/Programs-tailored-to-meet-unique-needs.html>

[7] Weaver, Sarah Jane. "Efforts to help starving children in Niger," LDS Church News, 20 August 2005.
<http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/47709/Efforts-to-help-starving-children-in-Niger.html>