



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.



Kuwait

Population: 2.74 millions (#141 out of countries)

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Geography

Area: 17,818 square km. Kuwait consists of a small area of land on the far northwest of the Persian Gulf and borders Saudi Arabia and Iraq. Hot, dry weather occurs throughout much of the year and slightly abates during the mild winter. Desert plains cover the country. Natural hazards include cloudbursts and sandstorms. Limited access to fresh water forces Kuwait to desalinate ocean water. Pollution and desertification are also environmental issues. Kuwait is divided into six administrative governorates.

Peoples

Asian: 37.8%

Kuwaiti: 31.3%

Other Arab: 27.9%

African: 1.9%

Other: 1.1%

Population estimates for Kuwait widely vary from as low as 2.9 million to as many as 4.4 million. Foreigners comprise more than two-thirds of the population.

Population: 2,875,422 (July 2017)

Annual Growth Rate: 1.46% (2017)

Fertility Rate: 2.4 children born per woman (2017)

Life Expectancy: 76.8 male, 79.6 female (2017)

Languages: Arabic is widely spoken and the official language. English is also commonly used. Languages indigenous to South

Asia and the Philippines are spoken by immigrant workers. Only Arabic has over one million speakers (1.7 million).

Literacy: 95.7% (2016)

History

The territory of present-day Kuwait was initially controlled by the Greeks and later the Parthian Empire. The Sassanid Empire ruled the region between the third and seventh centuries until the arrival of Islam. Permanent settlers did not arrive until the eighteenth century and were led by Sabah I Bin Jaber, who became the first Emir of Kuwait. The Ottomans ruled the region but allowed autonomy to Kuwait. Starting in 1899, Kuwait signed a treaty with the British that gave the British control of foreign relations and defense. Independence occurred in 1961. Iraq attacked and annexed Kuwait in 1990. The invasion was promptly repelled by allied forces in 1991, and power was restored to native Kuwaitis. During the Iraq army retreat, more than 700 oil wells were set ablaze. In the past several decades, Kuwait has grown increasingly wealthy due to the nation's abundant oil reserves. Arab Spring protests also occurred in Kuwait, and have resulted in greater representation of oppositionists and independents in the legislature.

Culture

Kuwait shares many cultural similarities with neighboring Arab nations. Hospitality and greeting are heavily emphasized. Tea and coffee are widely consumed and offered to guests; refusal is seen as impolite. Wealth, occupation, and ethnicity determine socio-economic class. Polygamy is permitted. Calligraphy is a celebrated form of art. The rate of alcohol use is low, whereas cigarette use is high and comparable to Western Europe.

Economy

GDP per capita: \$66,200 [111% of U.S.] (2017)

Human Development Index: 0.800

Corruption Index: 39 (2017)

Despite its small size and population, Kuwait holds the fifth largest oil reserves in the world, which have fueled strong economic growth and made it one of the wealthiest nations. Oil profits account for 80%–95% of government revenue. The unemployment rate is low, and in the past as much as 60% of the workforce has been foreign. Industry accounts for approximately 60% of the GDP, whereas services account for the remaining 40% of the GDP. Trade partners include China, Japan, South Korea, United States, and the United Arab Emirates.

Corruption appears to be increasing and among the highest for developed Arab nations. Bribery and corruption from government officials appear the greatest concerns.

Faiths

Muslim: 76.7%

Christian: 17.3%

Other/unspecified: 6.0%

Christians

Denominations – Members – Congregations

Catholic – 60,000

Evangelicals – 46,391

Coptic Orthodox – ~10,000

Armenian Orthodox – 4,000

Greek Orthodox – 3,500

Greek Catholic – 2,000

Latter-day Saints – 345 – 1

Seventh Day Adventists – 195

Anglican – 100

Religion

The majority of the population is Sunni Muslim. Approximately 30% of Muslims are Shias. Estimates place the Christian population around 500,000. There are 267 Christian Kuwaiti citizens; the remainder of Christians is noncitizen expatriate workers. Among the expatriate population, 63% are Muslim, 27% are Christian, and 10% follow non-Abrahamic faiths. There be as many as 25,000 Bohras, 10,000 Sikhs, and 400 Baha'is^[1]

Religious Freedom

The constitution grants freedom of religious belief and practice as long as it does not disturb public order or contradict public morality. The state religion is Islam. Non-Sunni Muslims face many restrictions, including a ban on the proselytism of Muslims that is strictly enforced. However, there is no legislation that prohibits the conversion of Muslims to other faiths although there are legal consequences for Muslim men who convert, such as annulment of marriage. Seven Christian churches have full government recognition: National Evangelical, Roman Catholic, Coptic Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox, Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholic, and Anglican. Indian Orthodox, Mar Thoma, Latter-day Saints, and Seventh Day Adventists do not have legal recognition but have permission to assemble in rented villas, homes, or buildings of recognized denominations.^[2] Most Christians report no major challenges with worship or assembly although many keep a low profile to avoid government suspicion. Christian denominations are barred from posting signs on the outside of their meeting location. Recognized Christian churches are usually unable to acquire more land for chapels, resulting in severe overcrowding of functioning facilities.^[3]

Largest Cities

Urban: 100%

?awall?, Farwaniya, Funtas, Jahra, Jan?b al-Kuwayt, Mangaf, Firdous, Mubarak al Kabeer, Sulaibiah, Sulaibekhat.

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

One of the ten largest cities has a congregation. Nineteen percent (19%) of the national population lives in the ten largest cities. Ninety-three percent (93%) of the national population lives in the Kuwait City metropolitan area.

LDS History

Church members have lived in Kuwait since the 1970s. At the time there were six members, including four from one expatriate family.^[4]

Membership Growth

LDS Membership: 345 (2017)

In 2009, Westerns formed a third of the Kuwait branch's active membership. Other nationalities include Indians and Filipinos.^[5] There were an estimated seventy active members in Kuwait in 2009.^[6] Church membership increased to 223 in 2011, 267 in 2013, and 345 in 2017. In 2017, one in 8,335 was LDS.

Congregational Growth

Wards: 1 Groups: 1? (2018)

The Kuwait Branch has functioned for several decades and pertains to the Manama Bahrain Stake. In 2012, the Kuwait Branch became a ward. A military group has historically served the needs of American military stationed in Kuwait although it is unclear whether the group still functions or was combined with the Kuwait Ward.

Activity and Retention

In mid-2009, there were sixty active members in the Kuwait Branch. Activity for known membership appears to be around 60-80% based on official membership figures. Overall activity is likely somewhat lower, as there may be an unknown number of inactive members who joined the LDS Church in the United States, the Philippines, or elsewhere but are not known to the Church.

Language Materials

Languages with LDS Scripture: Arabic, English, Bengali, Farsi, Hindi, Telugu, Tagalog, Tamil, Urdu.

All LDS scriptures are available in Arabic and Tagalog. Book of Mormon translations have been completed for Hindi, Farsi, Telugu, and Urdu; only Book of Mormon selections are available in Bengali. Most Church materials are available in Arabic and Tagalog whereas Hindi, Telugu, Urdu, and Farsi have more limited Church materials. Gospel Principles and The Testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith are available in Farsi and Gospel Principles, The Testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith, and the Articles of Faith are translated into Bengali. The only Church materials in Malayalam are Gospel Fundamentals and The Prophet Joseph Smith's Testimony. The Liahona annually has twelve issues in Tagalog, four in Telugu, and three issues in Urdu.

Meetinghouses

The Kuwait Ward meets in a small detached villa in central Kuwait City.^[7] Unlike many areas in the Middle East, the Church publishes the Kuwait Ward meetinghouse location on lds.org/maps.

Humanitarian and Development Work

No major humanitarian or development work has occurred due to the nation's prosperous circumstances. Small service projects are likely carried out by members.

Opportunities, Challenges, and Prospects

Religious Freedom

The Church is prohibited from conducting missionary work among Muslims. Members are allowed to talk to non-Muslims about the Church. Public online information for the location of the Kuwait Ward meetinghouse provides interested individuals with easy access to make contact with the Church in Kuwait. Obtaining full government recognition will likely be challenging as no additional Christian groups have obtained such recognition in recent years.

Cultural Issues

In accordance with the Muslim day of worship, LDS Church services are held on Fridays. The frequent offering of tea and coffee to guests presents a challenge for members to refuse without offending their Kuwaiti hosts. Legal and cultural restrictions place the entire Muslim population unreached by the Church's missionary program. Those engaged in polygamous relationships must divorce polygamous spouses and be interviewed by a member of the area presidency in order to join the Church. Although Kuwaiti citizens may learn about the Church on their own and convert, significant legal and societal ramifications make conversion highly unlikely. The Church has no developed teaching or missionary materials tailored to those with an Islamic religious background.

National Outreach

Kuwait's small geographic size and urban population concentrated in Kuwait City require few outreach centers. The current meetinghouse is centrally located in the metropolitan area. However, most of the population is inaccessible due to legal and

cultural restrictions. Non-Muslim immigrant groups can be reached by member-missionary efforts in accordance to local law.

Kuwait has a large Christian minority numbering half a million, which provides opportunity for member-missionary work and mission outreach at the congregational level. Unique opportunities exist for members to speak to Coptic Christians about the Church. This denomination has experienced little to no LDS mission outreach, as Coptic Christians primarily live in Muslim nations that ban or severely restrict proselytism and have very few LDS members. The small number of active LDS members in Kuwait, the preponderance of members from the United States and the Philippines who do not speak the languages of many local Christians, and limited member-missionary participation all limit the extent and potential of member-missionary outreach.

Member Activity and Convert Retention

Membership records are difficult to update and keep accurate, as finding less active or inactive members is very difficult or impossible given religious freedom restrictions and the Church's legal status in the country. The Kuwait Ward has historically been described as tight-knit, which may make church participation difficult for members or investigators who do not feel that they fit in. Few converts have joined the Church in Kuwait and consist primarily of Westerners, Filipinos, and Indians.

Ethnic Issues and Integration

The Kuwait Ward must accommodate a wide range of cultures. The wide ethnic diversity in Kuwait has facilitated greater understanding between different ethnic and cultural traditions. However, misunderstandings between these groups are possible due to differences in language, religious background, and culture. The presence of Filipino and Indian members in the branch allow for greater understanding, outreach and fellowship among these ethnic groups.

Language Issues

Church meetings in Kuwait are primarily conducted in English. The wide range of languages spoken complicates efforts to strengthen members and expand outreach to non-Muslims. The Church has Church materials in nearly all languages spoken by foreign workers. However, distribution of these materials is difficult and must occur according to Kuwaiti law. Many of the languages have few or no LDS speakers in Kuwait, lessening the likelihood of members forming associations or being able to reach out to speakers of these languages. Given increases in church membership in the past decade, the establishment of a Tagalog-speaking branch or ward may be likely if member language needs warrant it.

Leadership

Local leadership is adequate and well-trained. The branch president in 2009 was an American expatriate. His counselors were American and Indian. A former branch president was Filipino.^[8] The bishop of the ward in 2018 appeared to be a Westerner.

Temple

Kuwait is assigned to the Frankfurt Germany Temple district. Temple trips are likely organized with the rest of the Manama Bahrain Stake and are challenging, as the temple is 3,000 miles away. Greater membership and congregational growth in other Middle Eastern nations may one day result in a temple being constructed in the region, perhaps in the United Arab Emirates.

Comparative Growth

Despite Kuwait's sizable Christian minority, the Church's presence remains smaller than in many Persian Gulf states. However, the rate of membership growth in Kuwait has outpaced other Persian Gulf states that have historically had more members than Kuwait. The Church was established later in several other Arab nations and today has more members in these countries than in Kuwait. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have the most members, whereas Qatar, Kuwait, Oman, and Bahrain have the fewest members.

Few efforts occur by other Christian groups to gain converts from other Christian denominations. The size of Christian denominations is primarily determined by the demographics of foreign workers and the religious makeup of their home countries.

Future Prospects

The outlook for growth in Kuwait among non-Muslims appears favorable due to the multi-cultural presence in the Kuwait Ward and permission by the government for church meetings to occur. Bans on open proselytism limit outreach to member-missionary efforts and challenge outreach to both Muslims and non-Muslims. Language-specific congregations may be organized once the

meetinghouse becomes too small to accommodate active membership. Tagalog appears the most likely to have a language-specific congregation in the future.

[1] "Kuwait," International Religious Freedom Report 2017." 30 August 2018.
<https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2017&dliid=280992#wrapper>

[2] "Kuwait," International Religious Freedom Report 2009," 26 October 2009. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2009/127351.htm>

[3] "Kuwait," International Religious Freedom Report 2017." 30 August 2018.
<https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2017&dliid=280992#wrapper>

[4] Ballentine, Toby. "The World Is My Home," New Era, Oct 1976, 44.

[5] Bushman, Harriet Petherick. "A Mormon branch in Kuwait: Peaceful, once you get there," Mormon Times, 23 June 2009.
http://mormontimes.com/people_news/people_church/?id=9349

[6] "Kuwait," International Religious Freedom Report 2009," 26 October 2009. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2009/127351.htm>

[7] Bushman, Harriet Petherick. "A Mormon branch in Kuwait: Peaceful, once you get there," Mormon Times, 23 June 2009.
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[8] Bushman, Harriet Petherick. "A Mormon branch in Kuwait: Peaceful, once you get there," Mormon Times, 23 June 2009.
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