

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.



Cameroon

Population: 23.13 millions (#54 out of countries)

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Geography

Area: square km. Located in West Africa, Cameroon borders Nigeria, Chad, the Central African Republic, the Republic of the Congo, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, and the Bight of Biafra. A wide range of terrains and climates are found throughout the country, with southern areas consisting of flat terrain occupied by tropical rainforest, northwest highland areas comprised of mountains subject to tropical climate, and northern areas dominated by semi-arid plains and plateaus. Rivers in northern Cameroon drain into Lake Chad, which forms the northern boundary. Active volcanoes and the release of poisonous gases from lakes near active volcanoes are natural hazards. Environmental issues include deforestation, overgrazing, desertification, poaching, overfishing, and waterborne diseases. Cameroon is divided into ten administrative regions.

Peoples

Bamileke-Bamu: 24.3%,

Beti/Bassa, Mbam: 21.6%,

Biu-Mandara: 14.6%,

Arab-Choa/Hausa/Kanuri: 11%,

Adamawa-Ubangi: 9.8%,

Grassfields: 7.7%,

Kako, Meka/Pygmy: 3.3%,

Cotier/Ngoe/Oroko: 2.7%,

Southwestern Bantu: 0.7%,

Foreigners/Others: 4.5%

There are an estimated 250 ethnic groups that pertain to five regional-cultural groups. Including ethnic groups such as the Bamileke and Bamoun, Cameroon highlanders consist of the most populous regional-cultural group, reside in southwestern Cameroon near the Nigerian border, are usually Christian, and speak English as a second language. Coastal and southern tropical forest peoples populate coastal and southern areas, speak French as a second language, are generally Christian, and consist of ethnic groups such as the Baka, Fang, Bulu, and Ewondo. Predominantly Muslim peoples principally consist of the Fulani (Peulh) and reside in the central highlands and semi-arid north. Kirdi ethnic groups that reside in northern and central Cameroon and often recently converted to Islam or have resisted outside efforts to convert to Islam for centuries.[1]

Population: 28,524,175 (July 2021)

Annual Growth Rate: 2.77% (2021)

Fertility Rate: 4.61 children born/woman (2021)

Life Expectancy: male: 61.07 years female: 64.57 years (2021)

Languages: Approximately 270 indigenous languages are spoken. There are no reliable estimates for the number of speakers among the most commonly spoken native languages. However, none of these languages appear to have more than one million native speakers. English and French are the official languages and commonly spoken as second languages.

Literacy: 77.1% (2018)

History

Bantu African tribes have populated Cameroon for millennia. The Portuguese were the first Europeans to pass by coastal areas and named the territory Cameroon from the Portuguese word Camarões due to the large amount of shrimp in the area. The Portuguese and other Europeans later traded in these areas, but disease prevented European exploration of the interior until the late nineteenth century. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the Muslim Fulani conquered northern regions of Cameroon and displaced the indigenous, non-Muslim population. The slave trade prospered during the nineteenth century by the exploitation of the indigenous population from both the Muslim north and European-controlled coast. Christian missionaries arrived in the late nineteenth century. Germany established Cameroon (Kamerun) as a colonial possession in 1884. Following World War I, the League of Nations partitioned Cameroon equally between France and the United Kingdom by population with France administering most of present-day Cameroon and the United Kingdom controlling densely-populated territory along the Nigerian border. French Cameroon became independent as the Republic of Cameroon from France in 1960 following several years of armed conflict. Predominantly Christian areas of the southern third of British Cameroon voted to join the Republic of Cameroon in 1961 after Muslim areas in the remainder of British Cameroon voted to join Nigeria. Former British-held and French-held areas retained a high degree of autonomy after unification. The first president was a French-educated Fulani named Ahmadou Ahidjo who prohibited multi-party politics in 1966. In 1982, Ahidjo resigned and was replaced by a Bulu-Beti named Paul Miya who previously served as prime minister. Miya has remained in power despite a coup attempt in 1984 and flawed multi-party presidential elections in the 1990s and 2000s.[2] Boko Haram insurgency posed threats in northern areas in the 2010s. Separatists in the English-speaking highlands along the southwestern border with Nigeria sparked military conflict in the late 2010s which continued into the early 2020s. There has been little economic development since independence despite government efforts to reform the economy.

Culture

With over 200 ethnic groups pertaining to five regional-cultural groups, Cameroon exhibits a high degree of cultural and ethnic diversity. British influence is most apparent in the western highlands, whereas French influence is most visible in southern

areas. Fulani culture and Islam are predominant influences on society in the north. Christianity is the primary influence on culture in the south, especially in the western highlands. Meat, fish, vegetables, fruit, cassava, yam, and potato are commonly eaten foods.[3] Alcohol consumption rates are moderate compared to the world average whereas cigarette consumption rates are low.

Economy

GDP per capita: $3,642 (2019) [5.8% of U.S.]

Human Development Index: 0.563 (2019)

Corruption Index: 25 (2020)

Cameroon benefits from abundant natural resources, a sizeable population, and a strategic location in Central Africa for trade. Fertile soils in the country yield productive harvests. Exports include fruit, coffee, lumber, cocoa, and rubber. Oil reserves have been exploited for decades. The wide range of climate in Cameroon has provided the opportunity for the country to capitalize on diversifying its economy in agriculture. However, the economy is very sensitive to the worldwide demand and prices for oil and agricultural products. Potential for regional and international trade is not fully realized, and corruption and poverty have limited economic growth for decades. Half of the population lives below the poverty line, and the distribution of wealth is highly uneven. Government economic reforms have been largely unsuccessful. Agriculture employs 70% of the workforce, whereas industry and services employ 13% and 17% of the workforce, respectively. Services generate more than half of the GDP, whereas industry and agriculture generate 26.5% and 16.7% of the GDP, respectively. Common crops include coffee, cocoa, cotton, rubber, bananas, oilseed, and grains. Livestock and lumber are additional agricultural products. Oil extraction and refining, aluminum production, food processing, textiles, and ship repair are major industries. Primary trade partners include China, the Netherlands, and Nigeria are primary trade partners.

Corruption in Cameroon is perceived at the highest levels among nations in Sub-Saharan Africa and is present in all areas of society. Human trafficking is a major concern, as the government has failed to address trafficking issues regarding the forced labor and commercial sexual exploitation of women and children. Cameroon is a transshipment point for trafficking children between Gabon and Nigeria and Nigeria to Saudi Arabia.

Faiths

Christian 70.7%

Muslim 24.4%

Traditional religions 2.2%

Other 0.5%

None 2.2%

Christians

Denominations – Members – Congregations

Roman Catholic – 10,924,759

Seventh Day Adventists – 115,371 – 1,569

Orthodox 98,556

Jehovah’s Witnesses – 43,542 – 582

Latter-day Saints – 2,245 – 14

Religion

Christians account for most of the population, reside in all regions of Cameroon, and are most heavily concentrated in the south and west. Catholics comprise over a third of the Christian population, whereas Protestants constitute over a fourth of the population. Western English-speaking regions tend to be Protestant, whereas southern and western French-speaking regions tend to be Catholic. Orthodox Christians and other Christian groups account for 7% of the Christian population. One-fourth of the population is Muslim. Several ethnic groups are traditionally Muslim, such as the Fulani in the north and the Bamoun in the west. There are sizeable Christian and Muslim populations in all major cities. Indigenous religious beliefs are generally only practiced in rural areas.[4]

Religious Freedom

The constitution protects religious freedom, which is upheld by the government. Several Christian holidays are recognized national holidays. Religious groups must be approved and registered through the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization (MINATD) to operate, but there are no specific penalties for unregistered groups that function in the country. To register, a religious group must submit a list of the names of the group's officials and their roles, a charter summarizing the group's activities, and a request for authorization. The president ultimately approves registration pending recommendation from MINATD. Registration grants some privileges to religious groups, such as receiving real estate as tax-free gifts. Indigenous religions are not mandated to register. There have been increasing instances of societal abuses of religious freedom, particularly in areas with Anglophone separatists. However, there have also been instances of crime or unrest in congregations in major cities.[5]

Largest Cities

Urban: 57.6% (2020)

Douala, Yaoundé, **Bamenda**, **Bafoussam**, **Garoua**, **Maroua**, **Ngaoundéré**, **Kumba**, **Nkongsamba**, **Buéa.**

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

Two of the ten largest cities have a Latter-Day Saint congregation. Thirty percent (30%) of the national population resides in the ten most populous cities.

Latter-Day Saint History

The first Latter-day Saints to live in Cameroon arrived in the 1980s and earlier on temporary assignment from various health organizations.[6] The Cameroon Yaoundé Mission was organized in 1992 and originally included Equatorial Guinea and Gabon, but the mission was relocated to Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire in 1993. The Church obtained legal status from the government in 1993.[7] Seminary and institute were both functioning by 1995. In 1998, Cameroon was assigned to the Africa West Area.[8] Cameroon was reassigned from the Cote d'Ivoire Abidjan Mission to the newly created Ghana Cape Coast Mission in 2005.[9] Sometime between 2005 and 2008, Cameroon was reassigned to the Democratic Republic of Congo Kinshasa Mission. Apostle Elder Jeffrey R. Holland dedicated Cameroon for missionary work in 2009. Cameroon was assigned to the Republic of Congo Brazzaville Mission in 2014. In 2020, the Church reestablished the Cameroon Yaoundé Mission. That same year, Cameroon

was reassigned to the newly organized Africa Central Area.

Membership Growth

Church Membership: 2,245(2019)

There were fewer than one hundred Latter-day Saints in 1993. Membership increased to 200 in 1997 and totaled 155 by year-end 2000. Slow membership growth occurred during the first half of the 2000s as membership numbered 181 in 2002 and 278 in 2004. Rapid membership growth occurred during the remainder of the 2000s as membership reached 492 in 2006, 727 in 2008, and 1,003 in 2010. Annual membership growth rates during the 2000s ranged from a high of 35% in 2005 to a low of –2% in 2001 but were generally between 14% and 30%. In the 2010s, the Church generally reported moderate membership growth rates that typically ranged from 6-10%. Church membership increased to 1,359 in 2013, 1,628 in 2016, and 2,245 in 2019.

In 2019, one in 11,890 was a Latter-Day Saint on Church records.

Congregational Growth

Wards: 0 Branches: 14 (2020)

The first branch was organized in Yaoundé in 1992. A group began meeting in Douala in the mid-1990s and became a branch in 2004. Three additional branches were organized in Yaoundé in 2006 (Bastos 2nd), 2009 (Ekounou 1st), and 2010 (Ekounou 2nd). In 2011, the Bonaberi Group in the Douala area became a branch. In 2012, the first district was organized in Yaoundé. In 2015 Douala created a district with five branches. The number of branches increased from one in 1993 to two in 2004, three in 2006, four in 2009, five in 2010, six in 2011, seven in 2014, ten in 2015, twelve in 2016, thirteen in 2017, and fourteen in 2019. However, the Church discontinued the Manguier Branch in Yaounde in 2020—the first instance of the Church in Cameroon officially discontinuing a branch. Currently, there are two districts in Cameroon: one in Yaoundé and one in Douala.

Returned missionaries reported in 2020 that there were plans to create at least two branches in Yaoundé and one new branch in Douala in 2021. According to local leaders, impediments to creating a stake in Yaoundé include not having enough members who have attended the temple, insufficient number of active priesthood holders, and low member activity rates.

Activity and Retention

In early 1994, there were approximately one hundred attending church meetings a week; more than half of whom were not members.[10] In 2009, approximately 400 members attended a special meeting with Elder Holland in Yaoundé. The average number of members per congregation increased from 155 in 2000 to 211 in 2009. Most branches appeared to have approximately 30-70 active members in 2010.

Based on member reports of district conference attendance in 2021, there were 1,300 members in the District of Yaoundé of which there are 450 active members or 35% of total membership. There are approximately 900 members in the Douala District of whom there are about 300 active members or 33% of total district membership. As of 2020, nationwide active membership is estimated at 750, or 33% of total church membership.

Language Materials

Languages with Latter-Day Saint Scripture: French, English.

All Latter-Day Saint scriptures and most church materials are available in French. The Testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith and Gospel Principles are translated into Fulani. Only the Testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith is translated into Fang.

Meetinghouses

The majority of Latter-Day Saint meetinghouses consist of rented spaces and renovated buildings. There is a one building built by the Church in Yaoundé.

Health and Safety

The risk of infectious disease is very high for hepatitis, typhoid fever, bacterial and protozoal diarrhea, malaria, yellow fever, meningococcal meningitis, rabies, and schistosomiasis. Civil unrest has occurred periodically.

Humanitarian and Development Work

As of early 2011, LDS humanitarian and development work has been limited to a clean water project in Ngambe and Pong.[11] Prospects for additional clean water projects appear high.

Opportunities, Challenges, and Prospects

Religious Freedom

The Church and its members benefit from full religious freedom in Cameroon to proselyte, assemble, and worship. Foreign full-time missionaries from Africa and North America regularly serve in Cameroon with no reported challenges obtaining needed visas or documentation. Political instability in areas around Lake Chad and in the Cameroonian Highlands may discourage the placement of full-time missionaries due to concerns with violence.

Cultural Issues

High levels of interest in Christianity have contributed to strong receptivity to the Church in recent years. Poverty and modest literacy rates create economic challenges for the Church to develop self-sustaining leadership and for local members to provide for themselves financially. Higher rates of alcohol consumption in the general population may create challenges for some to completely end their alcohol use before and after baptism in accordance with Latter-Day Saint teachings. Polygamy is not a current hinderance to for the Church in Cameroon as polygamy is practiced more often in the outlying villages rather than in the cities where the Church operates.

Cameroon is one of the most politically and socially stable Central African nations but has experienced periodic states of unrest in specific areas. There is a continuing civil war going on in the English-speaking part of the country because secessionists want to create an independent English-speaking state. Civil unrest in the future could create challenges for stationing larger numbers of foreign full-time missionaries if this conflict spreads to additional areas.

National Outreach

Twenty-five percent (25%) of the national population is reached by Latter-Day Saint mission outreach in the most populous

cities of Douala (3.5 million) and Yaoundé (3.5 million). The average branch in Douala has 700,000 people within its geographical boundaries, whereas the average branch in Yaoundé has 438,000 people within its geographical boundaries. The remainder of the population is totally unreached by the Church. Vast areas of Douala and Yaoundé are lesser-reached or unreached by Latter-Day Saint missionaries at present, as only five congregations operate in Douala and eight congregations operate in Yaoundé. Notwithstanding a Latter-Day Saint presence since the early 1990s, a second branch was not organized in Yaoundé until 2006. Overall, Latter-Day Saint outreach in Cameroon has been extremely limited, as proselytizing full-time missionaries were not permanently assigned until the 2000s, current outreach is restricted to select areas of only two major cities, and most the general population has no awareness of a Latter-Day Saint presence in Douala and Yaoundé at present.

Latter-Day Saint missionary activity and outreach expansion has been delayed in Cameroon, notwithstanding widespread religious freedom and a highly receptive population to Latter-Day Saint mission efforts, largely due to other African nations taking greater priority for limited mission resources dedicated to the region, the lack of French-speaking senior missionary couples, low standards of living, distance from other established mission outreach centers, and several mission boundary realignments over the past three decades until Cameroon finally became its own mission in 2020. Past missions that have administered Cameroon have included three or more nations within their boundaries, and most mission resources were dedicated to the nation in which the mission was based. It is likely that information about local membership and leadership in Cameroon was not properly passed on to succeeding or newly transferred missionaries, mission presidents, and regional leaders. It is not entirely clear why the Church relocated the Cameroon Yaoundé Mission to Cote d'Ivoire in 1993, but higher receptivity and closer proximity to Latter-Day Saint Church centers in Ghana likely influenced the decision. Cameroon's geographic separation from missions it has pertained to over the years has likely resulted in inadequate training and lower emphasis placed on the retention of converts. Furthermore, when Cameroon was under the jurisdiction of the Ghana Cape Coast Mission, missionaries would have to learn French if transferred to the country. This would complicate mission presidency members traveling to Cameroon and providing training and assistance if they did not speak French. Greater numbers of full-time missionaries and mission resources have been dedicated to Cameroon since reassignment to the Democratic Republic of Congo Kinshasa Mission, which has contributed to the increase in Latter-Day Saint congregations. The creation of the Cameroon Yaoundé Mission will grant added resources and training to local leaders in Cameroon and provide greater saturation of mission outreach in the current Church centers in Yaoundé and Douala.

The Cameroon Yaoundé Mission serves the Central African Republic, Equatorial Guinea, and Gabon. Having this mission will facilitate church growth in all these countries. Widespread use of French in the region greatly simplifies language issues when initially establishing the Church in additional nations in the region. The establishment of additional congregations in currently unreached cities will most likely depend on local member-missionary work among relatives and friends outside of Douala and Yaoundé.

Member Activity and Convert Retention

The member activity rate is about 33% or 750 members out of 2,245 members. Retention of converts one year after baptism is approximately 40%. Latter-Day Saint missionaries serving in Yaoundé report that some sectors of the city experience member activity challenges, and if more members were active, additional congregations would likely be organized. Lacking local leadership in many areas, distance to the nearest meetinghouse, and rushed baptismal preparation appear likely reasons for member inactivity and convert attrition problems.

Ethnic Issues and Integration

Latter-Day Saint missionaries have reported no major ethnic integration issues at church, notwithstanding extreme ethnic diversity in Cameroon. The relatively peaceful coexistence of differing ethnicities in the same regions has likely contributed to the lack of ethnic tensions manifested in the Church. The Church may experience ethnic integration challenges if it expands its presence into currently unreached regions of the country.

Language Issues

Full-time missionaries speak French, and church services are conducted in French. One branch in Yaoundé translated sacrament talks and held segregated Sunday school and elder's quorum and Relief Society in French and English in 2010. The mission president requested that translation no longer take place due to logistical challenges and church services lasting longer than allocated times. No indigenous languages appear likely to have Latter-day Saint scriptures or proselytism materials forthcoming due to relatively few speakers and the widespread use of French and English as second languages.

Missionary Service

Two senior missionary couples were assigned to Cameroon in the early 1990s, but the Church struggled to replace couples completing their missions due to a lack of French-speaking senior missionary couples.[12] In March of 2008 there were ten full-time missionaries assigned to Cameroon with four in Douala and six in Yaoundé. Two senior missionary couples were also serving in Cameroon, with one in each city. At the beginning of 2009, a senior missionary couple was assigned to Cameroon, and the couple was authorized to give Patriarchal blessings to local members. Several Church members in Cameroon had served missions, some of whom had served in their home country. In March 2020, there were fourteen missionaries serving in Douala and eighteen missionaries serving in Yaoundé. With the new mission in Yaoundé, there should be approximately fifty missionaries serving in Cameroon once the mission is fully staffed.

Leadership

Local members serve as branch presidents for all branches in the country. There are two districts operating in Yaoundé and Douala. Increasing the number of local members serving missions and returning to Cameroon after their missions will provide a major source of local leadership for years to come.

Temple

Cameroon is assigned to the Kinshasa Democratic Republic of Congo Temple district. Travel to the temple is difficult, time consuming, and costly which has reduced the number of local members who have attended the temple before. There are no foreseeable prospects for the Church to announce a temple closer to Cameroon within the foreseeable future.

Comparative Growth

Latter-Day Saint membership growth rates in Cameroon have often ranked among the highest in the world since the mid-2000s. No other country had fewer than 300 members in 2004 and in 2010 had over 1,000 members. However, membership growth rates have substantially slowed since the early 2010s. Congregational growth rates in Cameroon have appeared higher than most countries in Central Africa which currently have fewer than 3,000 members. Convert retention rates have ranked significantly lower than neighboring Francophone nations. The percentage of Latter-day Saints in the general population is among the lowest in Sub-Saharan Africa among nations that have had a Latter-Day Saint presence since 2000 or earlier. In early 2020, Cameroon ranked as the country in the world with the tenth most Latter-day Saints without a stake. At the time, Malawi was the only other African country with more Latter-day Saint without a stake. The Church's decision to organize the Cameroon Yaoundé Mission appeared coordinated with the establishment of separate missions in several other African nations with at least 20 million people where no missions were headquartered such as the Ethiopia Addis Ababa Mission and the Tanzania Dar Es Salaam Mission—both of which were also organized in 2020.

Most missionary-minded Christian groups have operated in Cameroon for decades longer than Latter-day Saints, have a presence in most areas of the country, and report tens of thousands to hundreds of thousands of adherences. The Seventh-day Adventist Church reported 114,497 members meeting in 981 churches (large or well-established congregations) in 2020. About half of these members were in northern Cameroon where there is no Latter-day Saint presence. However, Adventists have reported essentially stagnant membership growth during the past decade, and there has been no increase in the number of churches during that time. Jehovah's Witnesses claimed 43,542 active members organized in 582 congregations in 2020—only approximately 7,000 more active members than a decade earlier. However, the number of Witness congregations has significantly increased by more than 200. Most Christian denominations place greater emphasis and greater application of member missionary work programs than Latter-day Saints. Witnesses and Adventists have been able to maintain a self-reliant Church that readily expands into previously unreached areas, whereas Latter-day Saints have relied on the international Church for missionary manpower which is channeled into only two cities.

Future Prospects

The organization of the Cameroon Yaoundé Mission is a major development with the Church's efforts to reach the 25 million people who live in Cameroon. The creation of the new mission is likely to be a significant catalyst for greater saturation of mission resources within Yaoundé and Douala, and more mission resources and mission president oversight may help to rectify compounding member inactivity problems in a nation which has historically achieved good member activity and convert retention rates. Additionally, the establishment of the Africa Central Area in 2020 also suggests greater amounts of attention and

resources will be made available to nations like Cameroon. The organization of stakes within Yaoundé and Douala appears feasible by 2025 if branches can be adequately stabilized and reach a sustained number of active members to become wards. The establishment of the Church in additional cities appears unlikely for many years to come given the Church's priority to organize stakes in Yaoundé and Douala, and the low level of mission outreach currently extended in each of these cities where millions of Cameroonians are easily accessible in urban areas. Augmentation of the native Cameroonian missionary force is desperately needed, and success in the Church with reversing recent trends of decelerating growth and worsening member inactivity and convert retention will most likely hinge on greater numbers of Cameroonian youth serving full-time missions, remaining active during their post-mission lives, and serving in leadership positions in fledging congregations and district positions.

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[5] "2019 Report on International Religious Freedom: Cameroon." U.S. Department of State. Accessed 11 May 2021. https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-report-on-international-religious-freedom/cameroon/

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[12] "From the world," LDS Church News, 22 January 1994. http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/24203/From-the-world.html