


# 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.**



## Burundi

**Population: 10.4 millions (#86 out of countries)**

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**Geography**

**Area:** 27,830 square km. Burundi is a small, landlocked country in Central Africa surrounded by Rwanda, Tanzania, and Democratic Republic of Congo. Hilly, mountainous terrain covers most of the country, along with several lakes, including Lake Tanganyika to the west. Abundant fertile land suits widespread agriculture. Tropical, wet climate is modified by altitude in many areas. Little forest remains due to deforestation and soil erosion. Burundi is administratively divided into 17 provinces.

**Population:** 10,216,190 (July 2011)

**Annual Growth Rate:** 3.462% (2011)

**Fertility Rate:** 6.16 children born per woman (2011)

**Life Expectancy:** 57.09 male, 60.52 female (2011)

**Peoples**

Hutu: 85%

Tutsi: 14%

Twa: 1%

Both Hutus and Tutsis are Bantu peoples. Twa are a Pygmy people and account for one percent of the population.

**Languages:** Kirundi (90%), other or unknown (10%). Kirundi and French are both official languages. Swahili is most used along the coastal areas of Lake Tanganyika and Bujumbura as a second language. Only Kirundi has more than one million speakers (9.2 million).

**Literacy**: 90.7% (2003)

**History**

A Tutsi monarchy rose to power in the eighteenth century and maintained a close relationship with the Hutus under a system of rule and society similar to serfdom as the Hutus pledged their allegiance to their Tutsi overlords and appealed for protection in return for the use of pastures, arable land, and loans of livestock. In 1899, Burundi came under the administration of German East Africa. In 1916, Belgian forces occupied the area. Rwanda and Burundi were united as the territory of Ruanda-Urundi after World War I under a mandate from the League of Nations delegated to Belgium. Independence from Belgium was achieved in 1962. Civil conflict and ethnic tensions characterized much of the remainder of the twentieth century as several coups and rebellions occurred between Hutus and Tutsis. In 1987 an estimated 150,000 were killed due to ethnic violence between the Tutsi-dominated military and the Hutu majority. Political instability worsened in 1993 as Burundi's first Hutu president was assissinated and civil war enveloped the country. Political instability spilled over into neighboring Rwanda during this period, precipitation in the 1994 Rwandan Genocide. Hundreds of thousands fled Burundi to neighboring countries to flee the civil war, which officially ended in 2006. The last rebel group disarmed and demobilized in 2009. The government is currently rebuilding the country's infrastructure and focusing on improving its foreign relations.[1]

**Culture**

Christianity and agriculture are the primary influences on society and local culture. The long lasting struggles between Hutus and Tutsis have created a culture plagued with hate and insecurity. Burundi is well known for its drums and drummers. Poverty is widespread as approximately two-thirds of the population lives below the poverty level. Common foods include corn, sweet potatoes, and peas. Meat is rarely eaten. Alcohol consumption rates are comparable to the world average. Polygamy was made illegal in 1993 and is practiced by few.[2]

**Economy**

**GDP per capita:** $300 (2010) [0.63% of US]

**Human Development Index:** 0.282

**Corruption Index:** 1.9

Agriculture drives the small, undeveloped Burundian economy. Nearly 94% of the workforce labors in agriculture which generates a third of the GDP. Services account for almost half of the GDP. The economy is significantly influenced by world prices of the most important exported crops including coffee, cotton, sugar, and tea. Few natural resources limit future economic growth, together with a poor country infrastructure. There are some unexploited mineral resources. The end of widespread political instability and violence has allowed some economic growth, but there is still strong dependence on foreign aid. Primary trade partners include Germany, Saudi Arabia, and Switzerland. Corruption in government is a major problem, especially as the economy begins to recover after the many years of war. Anti-corruption leaders have been the targets of violence.

**Faiths**

Christian: 75%

Indigenous beliefs: 20%

Muslim: 5%

**Christians**

**Denominations Members Congregations**

Catholic 6,129,714

Seventh Day Adventists 125,141 270

Jehovah's Witnesses 9,840 186

Latter-Day Saints 194 2

**Religion**

Burundians are predominantly Christian. 60% of the population is Catholic and 15% is Protestant. The size and influence of the Catholic Church over many decades has prevented some syncretism between Christianity and indigenous religions. Muslims account for five percent or less of the population and are concentrated in urban areas.[3] Leaders of many Christian groups condemned past ethnic violence.

**Religious Freedom**

**Persecution Index:**

The constitution protects religious freedom and is upheld by the government. Religious discrimination is prohibited. Several major Christian and Muslim holidays are recognized national holidays. Religious groups are required to register with the government and maintain a headquarters in the country. To register, religious groups must provide information regarding its administrative structure and legal representatives, the address of the religious group's national and international headquarters, a copy of the religious group's basic beliefs, and state its religious affiliation. Those continuing to violate these conditions face penalties including imprisonment. There are no restrictions on foreign missionaries serving in the country and there have been no reported instances of societal abuse of religious freedom in recent years.[4]

**Major Cities**

**Urban: 11%**

Bujumbura, **Gitega, Muyinga, Ngozi, Ruyigi, Kayanza, Bururi, Rutana, Muramvya, Makamba.**

One of the ten largest cities has an LDS congregation. 7% of the national population resides in the ten most populous cities.

**LDS History**

The first Burundian members joined the Church in Europe in the 1980s. Several of these converts later returned to their home country and prepared the way for the Church's arrival in the early 1990s. Elder Earl C. Tingey visited Burundi to register the Church with the government in the early 1990s. He reported how he narrowly received permission for the Church to enter the country through his giving of a For Strength of Youth pamphlet to a government official, which impressed him about the Church's standards for its youth.[5] Burundi became part of the Ivory Coast Abidjan Mission and four African missionaries were sent to serve in the Bujumbura Branch in 1993.[6] The missionaries were withdrawn shortly thereafter due to political instability and violence. Burundi was included in the Democratic Republic of Congo Mission later in the 1990s and the Bujumbura Branch was discontinued around the year 2000. Burundi became part of the Africa West Area in 1998 and later the Africa Southeast Area in 2003.

President Headlee of the Democratic Republic of Congo Kinshasa Mission visited in December 2009 on a fact-finding trip to assess conditions and prepare for the Church's formal reestablishment. There were hundreds of prospective members meeting in nearly a dozen congregations in late 2009 desiring to learn more about the Church in Bujumbura and Cibitoke Province. Potential members were told that the Church would first be established in Bujumbura shortly thereafter but would not arrive in rural areas like Cibitoke for a couple more years. Literature and scriptures were distributed in French to these congregations. At this time many Burundian members had returned and several members from Kenya lived in Bujumbura awaiting the organization of the Church. In July 2010, Burundi was assigned to the newly-organized Democratic Republic of Congo Lubumbashi Mission. In September 2010, the Church assigned six full-time missionaries and two senior couple missionaries to Bujumbura to reestablish an official presence and hold LDS worship services. The following month, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland dedicated Burundi for missionary work on a hilltop outside of Bujumbura. The first independent branch was organized in early 2011 in Bujumbura. The Church was likely official recognized by the government sometime in 2010.

**Membership Growth**

**LDS Membership:** 194 (September 2011)

In mid-1993 there were 36 members.[7] By 2000, there were 25 members. In September 2010, there were eight known Latter-day Saints in Bujumbura. As a result of convert baptisms occurring nearly on a weekly basis during late 2010, church membership reached 50 by early 2011. In late 2009, Burundians desiring to join the Church in unofficial congregations numbered over 500 in late 2009. Senior missionaries reported that there were 194 members by September 2011. In 2010, one in approximately 200,000 was LDS.

## Congregational Growth

### Branches: 2

The first branch in Burundi was organized in late 1992 and discontinued around 2000. The first Swahili-speaking branch outside of East or Central Africa was created in the Salt Lake City area in early 2009. Some of the members in the new branch emigrated from Burundi. A group began operating in September 2010 when missionaries were assigned. In early 2011, the Bujumbura Branch was organized and six months later the Bujumbura 2nd Branch was created. Both branches report directly to the Democratic Republic of Congo Lubumbashi Mission.

### Activity and Retention

At the first meeting of the Bujumbura Branch in the early 1990s there were 39 in attendance. The first LDS sacrament meeting held in late September 2010 had 70 in attendance, including many prospective members and isolated members residing in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo from the cities of Uvira, Baraka, and Fizi. By early 2010, there were approximately 100 attending church services weekly, including many investigators and members from the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. Estimated active membership is 160, or 80-90% of known Latter-day Saints in Burundi.

## Language Materials

**Languages with LDS Scripture:** French, Swahili

All LDS scriptures are available in French and Swahili. Most Church materials are available in French whereas a limited number of LDS materials are available in Swahili. LDS materials available in Kirundi include Gospel Principles, the Testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith, and the Living Christ: The Testimony of the Apostles.

## Meetinghouses

LDS meetings occur in a renovated, remodeled building in Bujumbura. The meetinghouse was expanded within a few months of use to accommodate the large number of members and investigators in attendance, but does not appear capable of feasibly seating more than 120 at a time. Unofficial meetings in the name of the Church have occurred in the past at homes or small chapels of pastors waiting to join the Church.

## Humanitarian and Development Work

The Church has provided emergency relief for refugees in the past.[8]

## Opportunities, Challenges and Prospects

### Religious Freedom

Latter-day Saints benefit from full religious freedom and no reported societal abuse of religious freedom. Member freely proselyte, assemble, and worship.

### Cultural Issues

Poverty is the primary cultural obstacle for LDS outreach as most live below the poverty line and Burundi ranks among the world's poorest nations. Expanding humanitarian and development outreach will meet local needs and increase the awareness of Burundians of the Church and provide a segue for missionary activity. Overall receptivity to missionary-oriented Christian groups is high. Violence and past conflict between Hutus and Tutsis is an ongoing cultural concern for LDS mission outreach. Any Burundians who took part in the ethnic violence in the 1990s and desire to join the Church will likely not only need to be interviewed by a member of the mission presidency, but may need permission from the First Presidency to be baptized. The prevalence of polygamy may deter Church growth. Those who join the Church must first divorce polygamous spouses and be interviewed by a member of the mission presidency.

### National Outreach

Six percent of the national population resides in Bujumbura, the only city with an LDS congregation. Nearly the entire population of Bujumbura is unaware of an LDS presence as the Church has only assigned full-time missionaries to the city during a brief period in the early 1990s and beginning in September 2010 and most of the original members that joined the Church in the early 1990s emigrated or lost contact with the Church over the years.

The opening of Burundi to missionary work in 2010 has thus far been a major success for the LDS Church largely attributed to the allocation of a sizeable full-time missionary force comprised of two senior missionary couples and four young, full-time missionary companionships, a handful of local members who are capable of staffing leadership positions for two branches, and a highly receptive population to LDS outreach. War, political instability, ethnic conflict, isolation from LDS outreach centers, and few mission resources dedicated to the region were the primary reasons for the lack of an LDS presence until 2010. At present, the Church possesses significant opportunities to expand outreach in Bujumbura by organizing additional congregations closer to the homes of some members that reside far from the LDS meetinghouse. Organizing dependent branches and home groups may accelerate growth while simultaneously providing leadership experience and mentoring for prospective future LDS leaders among recently baptized converts. Expanding outreach outside of Bujumbura will most likely occur as investigators from these areas demonstrate a consistent desire to attend meetings when possible in Bujumbura and follow church teachings. Efficient member-missionary programs will be required to properly expand outreach to the 89% of the population residing in rural areas due to logistical and transportation challenges for full-time missionaries.

**Member Activity and Convert Retention**

The Church prepared for reentering Burundi for over a year prior to assigning full-time missionaries in 2010 allowing for many members and investigators living in the country to learn about the Church's reestablishment by word of mouth. Today Burundi experiences one of the highest member activity rates in the world as missionaries have stressed the need for developing weekly church attendance and personal testimonies in new converts. Reliance on full-time missionaries over the medium term may reduce member activity and convert retention rates as this has occurred in nearly all countries following an initial LDS establishment.

**Ethnic Issues and Integration**

Assimilating Hutus, Tutsis, and nonnative members in the same congregations presents challenges due to past ethnic violence and ongoing ethnic tensions. As of early 2011, missionaries have not reported any instances of ethnic integration issues manifesting at church.

**Language Issues**

The homogenous Kirundi-speaking population simplifies mission outreach by requiring only the translation of LDS materials in Kirundi to reach nearly the entire population. As few Burundians have joined the Church previously, the body of LDS materials in Kirundi is insufficient for holding church services as there are no church manuals and no LDS scriptures available. Prospects for the translation of additional materials into Kirundi appear high due to rapid membership growth and high retention. French LDS materials will continue to be utilized until more materials are translated into Kirundi.

**Missionary Service**

The missionary force remains entirely reliant on foreign missionaries principally from French-speaking African nations. There were eight young, full-time missionaries and two senior missionary couples assigned to exclusively work in Bujumbura by the end of 2010. Very few if any native Burundians have serve full-time missions. Prospects appear high for the first Burundian natives to serve full-time missions within the coming couple years.

**Leadership**

In mid-1993 there were four Melchizedek Priesthood holders, with several priests awaiting ordination.[9] The branch president left Burundi following the civil strife which arose in 1993. Few priesthood holders remained among members, which challenged the Church's reestablishment. In early 2011, the entire branch presidency consisted of local members and local leadership appeared largely self-sufficient despite the recent organization of the branch. Senior missionary couples provide mentoring and leadership support when needed.

**Temple**

Burundi is assigned to the Johannesburg South Africa Temple District. No known temple trips have occurred from Burundi as of early 2011. The temple is largely inaccessible for members due to distance and transportation costs. A prospective future temple in Nairobi, Kenya or in the Democratic Republic of the Congo would reduce travel costs and simplify visa documentation challenges.

**Health and Safety**

Ethnic tensions between Hutus and Tutsis have erupted violently in the past and may reoccur. Peace and living conditions in late 2009 were better than most countries in the Democratic Republic of Congo Kinshasa Mission. The risk for infectious disease is very high, especially for hepatitis, typhoid fever, malaria, schistosomiasis, rabies, and bacterial and protozoal diarrhea. HIV/AIDS infects 3.3% of the adult population.

**Comparative Growth**

Burundi and Somalia were the only two African countries in the 2000s that once had an LDS presence but no longer had a presence. Burundi is one of the most recently-entered nations for the LDS Church in Africa. As of May 2011, other nations which had an LDS presence recently established, reestablished, or pending included Rwanda (2008), South Sudan (2009), Djibouti (2010), and Gabon. In 2010, Burundi had one of the smallest church membership in Africa.

Other missionary-minded Christian denominations experience moderate to rapid growth. Seventh Day Adventists number over 100,000 due to a long-term presence, self-sufficient local leadership, and a church-planting approach to missionary activity and growth in urban and rural areas. Unlike the LDS Church, most Christian denominations were able to endure the violence and instability in the 1990s and 2000s. The LDS Church was unable to maintain a presence because it entered the country too late to develop a large enough number of Burundian members who could lead congregations and continue to conduct missionary work with no regular visits from outside church leadership.

**Future Prospects**

The outlook for future LDS Church growth appears excellent due to the allocation of sizeable mission resources, high convert retention and member activity, and strong receptivity to Christianity among the general population. In the coming years, additional congregations will likely be organized in Bujumbura and become incorporated into a district. Other areas of the country will likely have their first congregations established within the next decade. Unofficial congregations of Burundians waiting for the Church's establishment could provide for rapid, sustained membership and congregational growth if properly approached. Burundi and Rwanda could become its own mission one day due to the high administrative demands on the Uganda Kampala and Democratic Republic of Congo Lubumbashi Missions and expanding opportunities for LDS outreach in the region.

[1] "Background Note: Burundi," Bureau of African Affairs, 10 February 2011. http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2821.htm

[2] "Burundi," Social Institutions and Gender Index, retrieved 17 May 2011. http://genderindex.org/country/burundi

[3] "Background Note: Burundi," Bureau of African Affairs, 10 February 2011. http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2821.htm

[4] "Burundi," International Religious Freedom Report 2010, 17 November 2010. http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2010/148667.htm

[5] "Tingey, Elder Earl C. "Establishing eternal patterns," LDS Church News, 5 May 2002. http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/41814/Establishing-eternal-patterns.html

[6] "From around the world," LDS Church News, 21 August 1993. http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/22942/From-around-the-world.html

[7] "From around the world," LDS Church News, 21 August 1993. http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/22942/From-around-the-world.html

[8] "Projects - Burundi," Humanitarian Activities Worldwide, retrieved 17 May 2011. http://www.providentliving.org/project/0,13501,4607-1-2008-143,00.html

[9] "From around the world," LDS Church News, 21 August 1993. http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/22942/From-around-the-world.html