



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.



Algeria

Population: 38.81 millions (#34 out of countries)

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Geography

Area: 2,381,741 square km. Located in North Africa, Algeria is geographically the largest African country and borders Tunisia, Libya, Niger, Mali, Mauritania, Western Sahara, Morocco, and the Mediterranean Sea. The Sahara Desert, arid mountains and plateaus, and dry basin plains cover all of Algeria except for coastal regions in the extreme north. The narrow coastal plain and nearby Atlas Mountain Ranges experience a Mediterranean climate. In the interior, the dry, sparsely vegetated Ahaggar Mountains stand in south central Algeria and contain the highest peaks. Earthquakes, mudslides, and floods are natural hazards. Environmental issues include soil erosion, desertification, water pollution, industrial waste disposal, and insufficient water supplies. Algeria is divided into forty-eight administrative provinces.

Peoples

Arab-Berber: 99%

European: 1%

Arabs and Berbers have intermarried over several centuries. Fifteen percent (15%) of Algerians have predominately Berber roots. Many Europeans are French.

Population: 40,969,443 (July 2017)

Annual Growth Rate: 1.7% (2017)

Fertility Rate: 2.7 children born per woman (2017)

Life Expectancy: 75.6 male, 78.4 female (2017)

Languages: Arabic dialects (81%), Berber languages (18%), other (1%). Arabic is the official language. Languages with over one million speakers include Arabic (33.2 million), Kabyle (5.0 million), and Tachawit (2.13 million).

Literacy: 80.2% (2015)

History

Known anciently as Numidia, Algeria was among the first areas in the Mediterranean to be settled, due to its fertile soil and suitable climate along the northern coast. The Berbers emerged as an ethnic group by the first millennia BC. The Carthaginians ruled many areas of Algeria until losing power as a result of the Punic Wars, initiating the establishment of Berber kingdoms that fell to Roman rule in the second century BC. Roman control was initially confined to the Mediterranean coastal regions of Algeria and reached significant portions of the interior only after the first century AD. Following the Roman Empire until the Vandal invasions and collapse of Rome in the fifth century AD, sporadic independence and self-rule followed, punctuated by Vandal raids and the expansion of the Byzantine Empire. Arabs arrived in the seventh century and influenced local politics. Algeria was Islamicized, and the Arabic language was adopted between the eighth and eleventh centuries. Muslim caliphates established territorial rule, conquered and Islamicized Morocco, and fought with Spain for control of the southern Iberian Peninsula. The Spanish established small forts along the Algerian coast following victory in the 700-year reconquista of Spain, but Spanish influence never achieved significant reach into the interior. Ottoman influence increased in the seventeenth century. The introduction of square-rigged, heavily armed ships instead of galleys by Captain Jack Ward, an English privateer and Islamic convert turned pirate who operated from Tunis, provided the Barbary Pirates with technological superiority that facilitated their domination of the Western Mediterranean for nearly two centuries. Barbary Pirates operating from bases in Algeria and Tunisia captured thousands of ships and raided long segments of the Spanish and Italian coasts; an estimated 1–1.25 million Europeans were enslaved by the Barbary Pirates. Piracy finally ceased only with the French conquest in 1830.

Algeria achieved independence in 1962, and the National Liberation Front (FLN) has remained in power ever since. In 1991, the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) challenged the FLN's central role in politics in an election. The military intervened due to concerns that elections would result in the FIS initiating a radical Islamic government. Between 1992 and 1998, over 100,000 perished from intense fighting between insurgency FIS supporters and the military. Abdelaziz Bouteflika became president in 1999, and the FIS disbanded in 2000. Bouteflika has remained in power and has eliminated the presidential term limits by amending the constitution. Algeria faces many humanitarian problems due to inadequate housing, poor living conditions, and high unemployment. Radical Islamic groups such as Al Qaida in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb have perpetrated terrorist acts directed toward the Algerian government and the West.

Culture

Islam influences everyday life and family customs. The government and the population struggle to determine to what extent Islam should influence government and law. Some aspects of Shari'a law are implemented. There is little tolerance for non-Muslims and Westerners, partially due to Algeria's colonial legacy. Literature draws upon Arab and French influences. Rai, a mixture of pop and folk music, is Algeria's most known music genre.^[1] Cuisine consists of Mediterranean and Arab foods. Alcohol consumption rates are low, whereas cigarette consumption rates are moderate. Polygamy is uncommon but legal.

Economy

GDP per capita: \$15,100 (2017) [25.4% of U.S.]

Human Development Index: 0.745

Corruption Index: 33 (2017)

Abundant oil and natural gas reserves have facilitated economic growth and development. Exports of these fossil fuels account for 30% of the GDP and 95% of export revenue. However, corruption and government inefficiency have slowed the pace of infrastructure improvements and banking development. In 2006, 23% of the population lived below the poverty line. The unemployment rate was 11.7% in 2017. Tight government control over the economy and significant corruption have dissuaded foreign investment. Industry generates 36.1% of the GDP and accounts for 30.9% of the workforce, whereas services generate 50.7% of the GDP and account for 58.4% of the workforce. In addition to oil and natural gas, mining, chemicals, and food processing are primary industries. Common crops include wheat, oats, barley, fruit, and olives. Primary trade partners include Italy, France, China, and Spain.

Corruption is perceived as widespread and tied to state-owned companies and government. In 2006, the government agreed to form an anti-corruption agency, which was not approved until 2010. Corruption is linked to the exploitation of Algeria's rich oil and natural gas resources and infrastructure projects.^[2] There has been no significant progress in recent years to address concerns with corruption in society and government.

Faiths

Muslim: more than 99%

Others (primarily Christian): less than 1%

Christians

Denominations Members Congregations

Protestants – 45,000

Catholic – 45,000

Egyptian Coptic - ~1,000-1,500

Seventh Day Adventists – 74

Latter-day Saints – less than 20

Religion

Sunni Muslims constitute all but 1% of the population. Islam strongly influences daily life, government, and society. Most Christians and Jews fled Algeria after independence or in the 1990s due to intolerance and violence from Muslim extremists. Evangelicals are the largest Christian denomination followed by other Protestant groups and Catholics. Recent estimates indicate there are likely around 200 Jews. Many Christians consist of foreigners from Western Europe and sub-Saharan Africa.^[3] However, the number of Algerian converts to Christianity has increased in recent years. Christians primarily reside in Algiers, Annaba, Oran, and the Kabylie region.

Religious Freedom

The constitution allows for freedom of thought and religious practice as long as an individual's religion does not oppose Islamic teachings and public order and morality. Islam is the official state religion. Few non-Islamic religious groups are registered with the government. Christian groups that have recently attempted to obtain recognition include the Protestant Church of Algeria and Seventh Day Adventists. The proselytism of Muslims is illegal, although this law is not entirely enforced. Conversion from Islam is not considered a civil crime. Many Christian converts keep a low profile in order to avoid persecution and violence from Islamic fundamentalist groups that call for the killing and persecution of formerly Muslim Christians. Reports of church closures have occurred recently. Citizens and foreigners are permitted to bring religious literature and Bibles into the country, yet their distribution is prohibited. The denial of church registrations has resulted in many Christians holding private meetings in the homes of members. Only Muslims may become president. Several laws originate from Shari'a law, particularly regarding family matters.^[4]

Largest Cities

Urban: 72.6%

Algiers, Oran, Constantine, Annaba, Batna, Blida, Sétif, Sidi bel Abbès, Chlef, Biskra, Tlemcen, Djelfa, Tébessa, Skikda, Bejaïa, Tiaret, Béchar, Ouargla, Bordj Bou Arreridj, Mostaganem, Médéa, Souk Ahras, Touggourt, Saïda, Ghardaïa, Guelma, Khenchela, Jijel, El Eulma, El Oued, Relizane.

None of the thirty-one cities with over 100,000 inhabitants have an LDS congregation. Twenty percent (20%) of the national population resides in the thirty-one largest cities.

LDS History

There has never been an official LDS presence in Algeria. Foreigner Latter-day Saints living in Algiers or elsewhere may have begun meeting in groups in the past two decades.

Membership Growth

LDS Membership: less than 20 (2018)

In 2018, the Church reported no membership totals for Algeria. Europeans and North Americans most likely constitute the majority of Latter-day Saints in Algeria.

Congregational Growth

Branches: 0 Groups: 1? (2018)

Any groups functioning in Algeria report under the Middle East/Africa North Area Branch.

Activity and Retention

Active membership is limited to those who attend private meetings in LDS member homes or those who follow Church teachings without a nearby congregation. Over half of known membership may be active due to higher activity rates in Middle Eastern and Northern African nations among Westerners, often influenced by increased desire for social interaction.

Language Materials

Languages with LDS Scripture: Arabic, French, English.

All LDS scriptures and many church materials are available in Arabic and French.

Humanitarian and Development Work

The Church conducted its first development project, a clean water project, in Algeria in the 2000s.[\[5\]](#) LDS Charities has conducted sixteen humanitarian and development projects in Algeria that have included clean water initiatives, community projects, emergency response, refugee response, and wheelchair donations.[\[6\]](#)

Opportunities, Challenges, and Prospects

Religious Freedom

The Church is not officially registered with the government. Official recognition appears unlikely in the foreseeable future due to delays reported by other Christian denominations who have sought official registration in recent years. The Church cannot openly proselyte due to legal restrictions. Opportunities exist for humanitarian and development work, which over time may lead to improved relations.

Cultural Issues

The strong Islamic identity of Algerians and lack of religious diversity is a major cultural obstacle to LDS mission outreach, as it is the origin of anti-proselytism legislation and intolerance of non-Islamic religious groups. Prospective converts would most likely face severe ostracism and persecution from family and friends. Low alcohol use rates correlate with Church teachings. Polygamy is not common in Algeria, providing a cultural advantage for standards of strict monogamy over many Muslim nations where polygamy is more widespread. The small Algerian Christian minority and foreign Christians present the greatest opportunities for outreach given cultural similarities with LDS teachings and fewer cultural barriers for outreach.

National Outreach

With the exception of those with close personal contacts with Church members, the entire population remains entirely unreached by LDS mission efforts due to legal restrictions regarding Christian proselytism and the lack of Latter-day Saints in Algeria. Even if Algiers had a mission outreach center, fewer than 10% of the national population would be reached. With few, if any, native LDS members, Algerians have little or no opportunity to make a personal contact with a Latter-day Saint.

Some European nations that allow proselytism have large Algerian populations; over 1.5 million individuals of Algerian descent live in France. Some Algerians have joined the LDS Church in Europe; however, few return home due to low standards of living, high unemployment, and an oppressive environment toward Christians. LDS Internet outreach may be able to reach some Algerians who cannot be reached by traditional methods.

Member Activity and Convert Retention

The few native Algerian Latter-day Saints who have been baptized elsewhere and returned to their home country likely experience low member activity rates due the lack of organized LDS congregations, societal pressures to conform to Islam, and perceived threats from terrorist groups. If there are a small number of Latter-day Saints in Algeria, they remain too few in numbers or lack sufficient activity in following church teachings to warrant the organization of an official branch.

Ethnic Issues and Integration

Arabs and Berber peoples have integrated into society due to intermarriage and shared culture and legacy, but clan identity remains an ethnic integration issue.

Language Issues

Algeria experiences one of the greatest language complexities of Arab Muslim nations in North Africa and Middle East, as Algerian Arabic is significantly different than Middle Eastern Arabic, and many Berber languages continue to be widely spoken. Current LDS materials in Arabic may be of some use to Algerians, as Standard Arabic is used in schools, on television, and in most books, but 20% are illiterate, and many others have only limited literacy. Algerian Arabic is the most widely spoken language in daily life but varies considerably among regions and even villages within a region. The millions of Algerians who speak Berber languages will remain without LDS materials for perhaps decades following the development of an indigenous Algerian Latter-day Saint community.

Missionary Service

No known members from Algeria have served full-time missions, and no LDS missionary activity has occurred.

Leadership

Potential church leadership may depend on non-Algerians for many years due to the lack of native members. If assigned, humanitarian missionaries may play an important role developing stronger church leadership.

Temple

Algeria appears to pertain to the Frankfurt Germany Temple district. Temple trips are costly and time consuming. With the exception of the Rome Italy Temple, no temples appear likely to be built closer to Algeria in the near future.

Comparative Growth

Algeria is the most populous sovereign country that has never had a known LDS ward or branch. The LDS Church has the most limited presence in North Africa in Algeria and Libya. Morocco, Tunisia, and Egypt have had branches or permanent groups established for several years. Egypt appears to be the only nation in North Africa that historically has had some native members attending congregations, whereas there are greater numbers of native Latter-day Saints in the Middle East in Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, and Israel. No nations in North Africa have an official LDS presence. No Islamic nations in the Middle East have proselytizing missionaries.

Many Christian groups report that North Africa is more receptive to mission efforts than the Middle East and have an unofficial presence in Algeria. Seventh Day Adventists, Pentecostals, Evangelicals, and Jehovah's Witnesses all appear to have a larger presence in Algeria among Arab-Berbers and permanent foreign residents than Latter-day Saints in Algeria or in any other Middle Eastern country. Many of these groups have engaged in limited proselytism for several decades to attract a few converts and have proselytized Algerians residing in Europe. For example, Jehovah's Witnesses operated approximately seventeen congregations in France in 2018 that held meetings in Kabyle or Tachawit. Hundreds of Arabic-speaking Witness congregations function throughout Europe.

Future Prospects

With one of the largest populations in North Africa, Algeria is a nation that presents no realistic opportunities for outreach at present due to bans on proselytism, persecution of Christians, civil unrest, the small number of expatriate Latter-day Saints in the country, and few if any native members. Although there may be some opportunity for expatriate members to engage in limited worship, there are no opportunities to share the gospel with native Algerians within their home country, and the outlook

for future growth and official Church establishment is poor. Humanitarian and development work in Algeria combined with mission outreach to Algerians and other North Africans in Europe may bear fruit in coming years, but are unlikely to lead to the establishment of a church presence in Algeria under present conditions.

[1] "Culture of Algeria," Wipedia.com, retrieved 26 August 2010. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Culture_of_Algeria

[2] "Algeria creates special anti-corruption agency," Middle East Online, 26 August 2010.
<http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=40890>

[3] "Algeria," International Religious Freedom Report 2017." 11 August 2018.
<https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2017&dliid=280976#wrapper>

[4] "Algeria," International Religious Freedom Report 2017." 11 August 2018.
<https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2017&dliid=280976#wrapper>

[5] "Projects—Algeria," Humanitarian Activities Worldwide, retrieved 24 August 2010.
<http://www.providentliving.org/project/0,13501,4607-1-2008-55,00.html>

[6] "Where We Work," LDS Charities, 11 August 2018. <https://www.ldscharities.org/where-we-work>