

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.



Libya

Population: 6.24 millions (#108 out of countries)

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Geography

Area: 1,759,540 square km. Located in North Africa, Libya borders Egypt, Sudan, Chad, Niger, Algeria, Tunisia, and the Mediterranean Sea. Libya possesses some of the driest and hottest areas of the Sahara Desert, which occupies the entire country with the exception of some coastal areas. Terrain primarily consists of barren flat plains with scattered depressions and plateaus. Coastal areas experience a Mediterranean climate, and in some coastal locations, there is arable land suited for agriculture. Frequent dust storms and sandstorms are natural hazards. Environmental issues include desertification, inadequate fresh water supplies, and pollution. Libya constructed the world's largest water development project by extracting ancient aquifers deep under the Sahara and transporting the water to coastal areas. Libya is divided into twenty-two administrative states.

Peoples

Berber and Arab: 97%

Other: 3%

Most the population is mixed Berber-Arab. There are some Berber communities in the interior with few inhabitants. Foreigners primarily originate from other North African and Middle Eastern nations.

Population: 6,653,210 (July 2017)

Annual Growth Rate: 1.58% (2017)

Fertility Rate: 2.04 children born per woman (2017)

Life Expectancy: 74.9 male, 78.5 female (2017)

Languages: Arabic dialects [primarily Libyan-spoken] (95%), Berber languages [primarily Nafusi] (4%), immigrant/migrant worker languages (1%). Standard Arabic is the official language. Italian and English are commonly spoken second languages. Only Arabic dialects have over one million speakers (6.32 million).

Literacy: 91% (2015)

History

Foreign civilizations, empires, and nations have ruled present-day Libya throughout much of its known history, beginning with the Phoenicians, Carthaginians, Greeks, Romans, Vandals, and Byzantines. Islam spread in the seventh century as a result of invading Arab forces and overtime led to the conversion of most native peoples and adoption of the Arabic language and cultural customs. The Ottoman Empire conquered Libya in the sixteenth century and meddled little with local affairs until Italy invaded in 1911 and made Libya a colony. Italy retained control of Libya until Italian forces were defeated by Allied powers in 1943 during World War II. Libya achieved independence in 1951 and was among the first African countries to become independent. A constitutional monarchy under King Idris governed until ousted by a coup in 1969, led by Mu'ammar Abu Minyar al-Qadhafi and the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC), which emphasized socialism and tribally-influenced Islam to create a "direct democracy." Foreign interests and military forces stationed in Libya were promptly ordered to leave, and by the early 1970s, all foreign installations were closed. Qadhafi attempted to spread his unique political ideologies abroad by sponsoring terrorism targeting Western interests. Bombings sponsored by Libya in the 1980s included an attack on American military personnel at a discotheque in Berlin, Germany and the bombing of Pan Am flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland. The United States responded militarily in 1986 by attacking targets inside Libya. Throughout the late 1980s and 1990s, Libya was isolated from much of the worldwide community through United Nations sanctions.[1] In the 2000s, Libya took responsibility for the Lockerbie bombing and began to comply with the international community's demands to end its development of weapons of mass destruction and terrorist sponsorship. Political relations with much of Western Europe and the United States were reestablished with Libya in the late 2000s. Sparked by the Arab Spring movement, civil war erupted in early 2011. By the end of 2011, rebel forces killed Qadhafi and overthrew his regime. In 2011, Libya became a parliamentary republic governed by the elected General National Congress (GNC) under a temporary Constitutional Declaration. However, the GNC governed Libya for only a few years. Although there are efforts to unify various factions and political forces through the Libyan Political Agreement (LPA), Libya continues to remain in civil war. As of mid-2018, various portions of Libya were controlled by six different entities: the Libyan National Army and Zintan Brigades, pro GNC and Banyum Marsus, Islamic State, Tuareg militas, Tebu militias, and Amazigh militias. However, most populated areas are either under control of the Libyan National Army and Zintan Brigades (Benghazi and eastern Libya) or pro GNC and Banyum Marsus (western areas along the coast near Tripoli).

Culture

Islam is the primary influence on Libyan culture. In recent times, Qaddafi has contributed to Libyan culture through propagating his Islamic-socialist philosophies. Mediterranean and Arab cuisine are commonly consumed. Asida, an Arab pudding dish, is the traditional dessert.[2] Like many Muslim nations, alcohol is banned in accordance with Muslim teachings. Cigarette consumption rates are low compared to the worldwide average. Polygamy is permitted although its practice is uncommon.

Economy

GDP per capita: $10,000 (2017) [16.8% of U.S.]

Human Development Index: 0.716

Corruption Index: 17 (2017)

The economy is almost entirely dependent on revenues from oil and natural gas. With the ninth largest proven oil reserves and some of the world's highest quality petroleum discovered, Libya's oil wealth has yet to improve living standards and economic conditions for common citizens. Other natural resources include natural gas and gypsum. However, ongoing political instability and uncertainty from the ongoing civil war have stifled efforts for Libya to reach oil production levels prior to the overthrow of Qadhafi. Unemployment and low living standards continue to be major challenges toward improving economic development and growth. As a result of limited arable land, Libya relies on food imports to meet its needs. The Great Manmade River Project and seawater desalinization are methods with which the government has sought to address water scarcity issues and to potentially increase agricultural output. Industry generates 63.8% of the GDP, whereas services account for 34.9% of the GDP. Primary industries include oil, chemicals, mining, food processing, textiles, and cement. Grains, olives, dates, fruit, vegetables, and peanuts are major crops. Italy, China, Spain, France, and Turkey are primary trade partners.

In 2017, Libya was perceived as one of the most corruption nations in the world. Government corruption has prevented greater improvements of living conditions. Libya is a destination and transshipment country for human trafficking for forced labor and commercial sexual exploitation. Little has been done by the government to address human trafficking issues.

Faiths

Muslim: 97%

Other: 3%

Christians

Denominations – Members – Congregations

Coptic Christians – ~60,000

Catholic – ~50,000

Seventh Day Adventists – 121

Latter-day Saints – less than 10

Religion

Sunni Muslims account for 97% of the population. Christians constitute the majority of the remaining population and consist almost entirely of nonnatives, namely sub-Saharan Africans, Egyptians, and Westerners. Copts and Catholics appear to be the largest Christian denominations.[3] Nearly the entire indigenous Jewish population has immigrated to Israel.

Religious Freedom

Persecution Index: 17th

The interim constitution identifies Islam as the state religion and indicates that sharia is the primary source for legislation. Religious discrimination is banned and non-Muslims are permitted to freely practice their religion. Some political groups, such as Islamic State, have killed Coptic Christians and Sufi Muslims. There are not current laws that prohibit the right to change ones religious status, proselyte, or for Muslims to convert to other religions. However, the law forbids insulting Islam. Militias have reportedly restricted religious freedom in some areas of the country in recent years. Societal practices emphasize a conservative interpretation of Islam. For example, women are reportedly denied international travel without a companion even though there are no laws for such restrictions.[4]

Largest Cities

Urban: 80%

Tripoli, Benghazi, Misrata, Tarhuna, Al Khums, Zawiya, Zuwara, Ajda-biya, Surt, Al Jadi-d, Tobruk, Sabratha.

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

None of the twelve largest cities has an LDS presence. Fifty-five percent (55%) of the national population resides in the twelve largest cities.

LDS History

Latter-day Saints among the United States military held meetings in Libya prior to the removal of all foreign military personnel in the early 1970s.[5] In 2000, Libya was assigned to the Europe West Area.[6] In 2008, the Middle East/Africa North Area began administering Libya.

Membership Growth

LDS Membership: less than 10 (2018)

There are no known indigenous Libyan Latter-day Saints. Any Latter-day Saints in Libya today are likely Westerners and Southeast Asians.

Congregational Growth

Wards: 0 Branches: 0 (2012)

In 2018, it was unclear whether a group operated. Any LDS congregation likely meets as a member group under the Middle East/Africa North Area Branch.

Language Materials

Languages with LDS Scripture: Arabic, Italian, English.

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

Meetinghouses

Church meetings for expatriates likely occur in members' homes if they occur at all.

Health and Safety

Civil war, violence that targets religious minorities, and degradation of the country's infrastructure and economy all pose significant health and safety concerns that prohibit the assignment of full-time missionaries.

Humanitarian and Development Work

The Church has engaged in refugee response in Libya.[7]

Opportunities, Challenges, and Prospects

Religious Freedom

The government provides greater religious freedom and tolerance for Christians than many other Maghreb states. Latter-day Saints benefit from the lack of legislation under the interim constitution in regards to conversion of citizens from Islam and potential freedom to hold meetings for non-Muslims. Prospects for a church establishment among nonnatives appear uncertain due to ongoing civil war and political instability.

Cultural Issues

Islam strongly influences daily life and local culture. Latter-day Saints as of yet have not found successful approaches toward performing mission outreach in nations that implement many elements of Sharia law like Libya and consequently will likely experience little success with the Arab-Berber population if mission outreach occurs one day. Those engaged in a polygamous marriage must end relations in divorce and be interviewed by a member of a mission or area presidency to be baptized. Increasing numbers of immigrants may generate a cosmopolitan atmosphere in the larger cities that is more suitable for Latter-day Saint mission outreach over the long-term.

National Outreach

The entire population remains unreached by the Church with the exception of those who have close personal contacts with foreign Latter-day Saints temporarily living or visiting the country. Eighteen percent (18%) of the national population would be reached by the Church if mission outreach centers were established in Tripoli. European and Egyptian Christians appear to be the most realistic populations for mission outreach due to a lack of societal restrictions on conversion in comparison to their Arab-Berber Muslim counterparts. Locating Christians may be challenging due to the somewhat private nature of their worship and limited numbers.

There are over one million North Africans in Italy. Concentrated outreach among North Africans may facilitate the development of an LDS community among Libyans abroad in countries where they can be legally reached. Many Libyans do not return to their home country, but the establishment of an LDS community may contribute to an eventual Church presence among Libyans in their home country.

Member Activity and Convert Retention

No convert baptisms appear to have occurred in Libya since the departure of American military personnel following the 1969 revolution. Member activity rates likely resemble those of nations from which foreigner Latter-day Saints originate, namely the United States and Europe.

Ethnic Issues and Integration

Immigration and migrant workers have diversified the demographics of the population, but most nonnatives originate from the

Arab world and assimilate into Libyan culture with few challenges. A potential Latter-day Saint presence among non-Westerners will likely encounter few challenges integrating various ethnicities into the same congregations. Integrating non-Arab foreign Latter-day Saints with Libyan or Arab converts into the same congregation may initially create some challenges due to language and cultural barriers.

Language Issues

A wide selection of LDS Church materials is available in Arabic, but no materials have been translated into the Libyan dialect. Italian- and English-language church materials may be used in mission outreach, as these languages are frequently spoken second languages. Speakers of Berber languages indigenous to Libya will likely have no LDS materials translated for decades following any official church establishment due to the lack of Latter-day Saints speaking these languages and lack of mission outreach opportunities in nations where most Berbers live.

Missionary Service

No LDS missionaries are known to have served from Libya, and no full-time missionaries or humanitarian couples had been assigned to Libya as of 2018.

Leadership

Any current church leadership positions in Libya are held by foreigners.

Temple

Libya pertains to the Frankfurt Germany Temple district. Libya may be assigned to the Rome Italy Temple when it is completed. Organized temple trips do not appear to occur. Members attend the temple on an individual basis or with members in other nations in the Middle East/Africa North Area.

Comparative Growth

Tunisia, Morocco, and Egypt are the only North African nations with branches or permanent groups that have been established for many years. Egypt appears to be the only nation in North Africa that has some native members attending congregations, whereas there are greater numbers of native Latter-day Saints in the Middle East in Lebanon, Jordan, and Israel. Algeria and Libya appear to have only small groups of Latter-day Saints meeting on an inconsistent basis. No nations in North Africa have an official LDS presence. No Islamic nations in the Middle East or North Africa have proselytizing missionaries.

Missionary-oriented Christian denominations report no significant breakthroughs with the Arab-Berber population, and their membership almost entirely consist of foreigners. Historical proselytism bans have resulted in few or no indigenous converts over the past decade.

Future Prospects

Improving political relations with Western Europe and the United States, prospects for more foreign investment by Westerners, and greater tolerance for Christians to worship than during the Qadhafi era create an optimistic outlook for a permanent future LDS presence among nonnatives once the civil war ends. However, ongoing political instability, significant degradation of the economy and the country’s infrastructure, and religious violence pose significant barriers for a Church presence at present. Furthermore, uncertainty with the outcome of the civil war indicates that religious freedom conditions may deteriorate once political stability is achieved. Libyans living abroad present the greatest opportunities for the Church to gain native converts although it is unlikely many of these individuals would ever return to Libya one day given societal restrictions on religious freedom and emphasis on conservative Islam.

[1] “Background Note: Libya,” Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, 17 November 2010. http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5425.htm

[2] “Culture of Libya,” Wikipedia.org, retrieved 11 December 2010. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Culture_of_Libya

[3] “Libya,” International Religious Freedom Report 2017. Accessed 22 August 2018. https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2017&dlid=280996#wrapper

[4] “Libya,” International Religious Freedom Report 2017. Accessed 22 August 2018. https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2017&dlid=280996#wrapper

[5] “The Church in Europe,” Ensign, Aug. 1973, 16–35.

[6] Lloyd, Scott. “European continent realigned into three new areas,” LDS Church News, 16 September 2000. http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/38475/European-continent—-realigned-into-three-new-areas.html

[7] “Where We Work,” LDS Charities. Accessed 22 August 2018. https://www.ldscharities.org/where-we-work