

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.



Egypt

Population: 86.9 millions (#16 out of countries)

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Geography

Area: 1,001,450 square km. Located in Northern Africa, Egypt borders Sudan, Libya, the Gaza Strip, and Israel. Half of Egypt's borders consist of coastline along the Mediterranean and Red Seas. The Sinai Peninsula forms a land bridge linking Africa with Asia. The Suez Canal runs between Africa and the Sinai Peninsula. Desert plateau subject to hot, dry summers, and moderate winters covers most areas with the exception of the Nile River valley and delta. Some mountains occupy the southern Sinai Peninsula and along the Red Sea. Several oases are scattered throughout the desolate interior. Natural hazards include droughts, earthquakes, flash floods, landslides, and dust and sand storms. Erosion of productive soil on agricultural lands due to wind, decreasing soil quality, desertification, pollution, and rapid population growth along the Nile are environmental issues. Egypt is divided into twenty-seven administrative governorates.

Peoples

Egyptian: 99.6%

Other: 0.4%

Population: 97,041,072 (July 2017)

Annual Growth Rate: 2.45% (2017)

Fertility Rate: 3.47 children born per woman (2017)

Life Expectancy: 71.6 male, 74.4 female (2017)

Languages: Arabic dialects (99%), Bedawiyet (1%). Arabic is the official language. Egyptian Arabic and Sa'idi Arabic are most frequently spoken dialects. Languages with over one million speakers include Arab dialects (90+ million) and Bedawiyet (1.0 million).

Literacy: 73.8% (2015)

History

Some of the most renown and powerful ancient civilizations thrived along the Nile in present day Egypt. A unified kingdom arose as early as 3200 BC and maintained control of Egypt until conquered by the Persians in 341 BC. Other civilizations controlled Egypt for the next millennia, including the Greeks, Romans, and the Byzantine Empire. The Arabs introduced Islam and Arabic in the seventh century and ruled until the thirteenth century when a military group named the Mamluks took control. The Ottoman Empire conquered Egypt in the sixteenth century, but the Mamluks maintained control over local government thereafter. In 1869, the Suez Canal began trafficking ships from the Mediterranean to the Red Sea, drastically reducing travel times from Europe to Asia and increasing trade and commerce. The British took control in 1882, and Egypt did not become completely independent until 1952. With assistance from the Soviet Union, the Aswan Dam was completed in 1971. The dam has prevented nutrient rich waters from inundating agricultural land along the Nile, resulting in declining soil quality. Egypt has struggled to meet the needs of its burgeoning population with adequate infrastructure and economic development. Between 1900 and 2010, the population grew from eight million to eighty million. Egypt has recently become one of the most militarily powerful nations in the region. In early 2011, Arab Spring protests overthrew the government. Mohamed Morsi, a member of the Muslim Brotherhood until his election, was elected as president of Egypt in 2012. Violent protests in spring of 2013 precipitated in the removal of Mosi from office by the Egyptian Armed Forces. A new constitution was approved by voters in 2014 and Abdelfattah Elsisi was elected president.

Culture

European and Middle Eastern culture has been historically influenced by ancient Egypt. Today as the most populous nation in the Middle East and North Africa, Egypt and its largest cities serve as centers of learning and culture for much of the Arab world. Past colossal architectural achievements such as the Pyramids of Giza, the Sphinx, and the many temples found along the Nile continue to attract international interest and awe. Modern aspects of Egyptian culture that have attracted interest include many novelists, musicians, and athletes. Alcohol use rates are very low, whereas cigarette consumption rates are comparable to Western Europe. Polygamy is legal but not widely practiced.

Economy

GDP per capita: $13,000 (2017) [21.8% of U.S.]

Human Development Index: 0.691

Corruption Index: 32 (2017)

Most economic activity occurs along the densely populated Nile River valley. Major economic reforms in the past two decades have brought increased foreign investment and strong economic growth. However, significant business reforms appear warranted in order to spur greater economic development. Egypt has also been historically self-sufficient in its energy needs. Although only 28% of the population lives below the poverty line, most experience poor living conditions. Services employ half the workforce and produce slightly more than half the GDP. Agriculture and industry each account for a quarter of the workforce and generate 12% and 33% of the GDP, respectively. Agricultural products include cotton, grains, fruits, vegetables, and livestock. Textiles, food processing, tourism, and construction materials are major industries. The United Arab Emirates, the United States, China, and Italy are the primary trade partners.

Human trafficking and illegal drugs are major sources of corruption. The trafficking of women and children for sexual exploitation and domestic servitude from abroad and within Egypt remains an issue that has not been adequately addressed. Egypt serves as a transit point for drugs destined for Europe and North Africa. Vulnerability to money laundering due to poor enforcement of financial regulations is a concern.

Faiths

Muslim: 90%

Christian: 10%

Christians

Denominations – Members – Congregations

Coptic – 8,733,696

Catholic – less than 200,000

Jehovah's Witnesses – 1,000-1,500

Seventh Day Adventists – 748

Latter-day Saints ~100 – 1

Religion

Islam has become the primary influence on Egyptian society, and its followers have grown increasingly intolerant of non-Muslims. Ninety percent (90%) or more of Christians belong to the Coptic Orthodox Church. Various Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant denominations operate with some churches having hundreds of thousands of followers. Christians may be found throughout Egypt but are concentrated in southern Egypt and in the largest cities, primarily Cairo and Alexandria. There are approximately 2,000-3,000 Baha'is.[1]

Religious Freedom

The constitution allows for religious freedom, but government restricts these rights through legislation stemming from Shari'a law. Islam is the official religion. Terrorism frequently occurs and has targeted Muslims and Christians alike. Those committing acts of violence and persecution directed toward non-Muslims are rarely prosecuted. However, most Christians and Baha'is do not report consistent persecution and generally worship without interference. Converts to Christianity from Islam tend to experienced marked harassment from society and government. In 2017, the government rebuilt seventy-eight churches or church-owned properties destroyed in mob violence during 2013. Coptic Christians appear to receive the greatest amount of persecution from Muslim sectarian groups. Muslim-born citizens who convert to Christianity may be monitored by government officials. Many officials consider conversion from Islam for Muslim-born citizens illegal as it is prohibited in Shari'a law. However, no civil or penal codes prohibit the efforts of non-Islamic groups to proselyte Muslims or the conversion of Muslims to non-Islamic groups. Government registration for religious groups requires consent from the pope of the Coptic Orthodox Church or the sheikh of Al-Azhar as well as the president. The government continues to not recognize Jehovah's Witnesses, Latter-day Saints, and Bahais.[2]

Largest Cities

Urban: 43%

Cairo, **Alexandria, Al Ji-zah, Bu-r Sa'i-d, Suez, Al Mah,allah al Kubrá, Luxor, Asyu-t,, Al, Mans,u-rah, T,ant,a-, Al Fayyu-m, Az Zaqa-zi-q, Ismailia, Kafr ad Dawwa-r, Aswa-, Qina-, H,ulwa-n, Damanhûr, Al Minya-, Su-ha-j, Bani- Suwayf, Banha-, Idfu, T.alkha, Kafr ash Shaykh, Mallawi-, Dikirnis, Bilbays, Al 'Ari-sh, Jirja-, Al H,awa-midi-yah, Idku-, Bilqa-s Qism Awwal, Disu-q, Abu- Kabi-r, Qalyu-b.**

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

One of the thirty-six cities with over 100,000 inhabitants has a congregation. Twenty-seven percent (27%) of the national population lives in the thirty-six largest cities.

LDS History

The Church organized its sole branch in Cairo in 1974 after LDS students and teachers began holding meetings. The branch began meeting in a leased villa starting in 1981 and grew as a result of expatriate families temporarily residing in the country for development aid or business.[3] Students from Brigham Young University (BYU) have taken part in archaeological digs and research in Egypt for several years.[4] The first known Tanzanian convert joined the Church in Cairo in 1991.[5] That same year, Egypt became part of the Europe/Mediterranean Area.[6] Prior to becoming part of the Greece Athens Mission in the early 1990s, the International Mission and later the Austria Vienna East Mission administered Egypt.[7] In 2008, Egypt became part of the Middle East Africa North Area. Egypt has not been assigned to a missions since 2008.

Membership Growth

LDS Membership: ~100 (2018)

In 1991, there were almost 150 expatriate members in Cairo.[8] In 1993, membership in the branch declined to 115 and almost all members lived in Cairo with a few isolated members in Alexandria.[9] In late 2008, there were approximately seventy

members in the Cairo Branch. Estimates for the number of members in the country as of the mid-2010s were approximately 100.

Congregational Growth

Branches: 1 (2018)

The Cairo Branch is the only branch to have ever functioned in Egypt. The branch pertained to the Amman Jordan District as of mid-2018.

Activity and Retention

Many members attend Church weekly and actively live the gospel; however, most of the members are expatriates. Some native members report not attending or attending only irregularly due to intimidation, cultural pressures, and governmental surveillance.

Language Materials

Languages with LDS Scripture: Arabic, English.

All LDS scriptures and many Church materials are available in Arabic.

Meetinghouses

The Cairo Branch meets in a two-story rented villa in Maadi, Cairo.

Health and Safety

Terrorist attacks and violence directed towards non-Muslims is a major concern for the Church and any potential missionary activity.

Humanitarian and Development Work

The Church has completed 133 humanitarian and development projects since 1985.[10] Projects have provided emergency aid, medical equipment and care, needed appliances, and training.[11] In 2009, the Church donated wheelchairs and provided vision treatment.[12]

Opportunities, Challenges, and Prospects

Religious Freedom

Despite the LDS Church having a continual presence for over forty years, the government has still not granted legal recognition. There has been no overt government interference, but some natives who joined the Church elsewhere and returned did not attend meetings for fear of harassment and complained of government surveillance.[13] Furthermore, Egyptian Christian leaders have identified Latter-day Saints as an extremist and heretical group.[14] As government recognition requires consent from both Coptic and Muslim religious leaders and approval from the president, current prospects appear unlikely for the Church to obtain legal recognition. Consequently, the Church has appeared to keep a low profile in order to continue to maintain its sole branch in Cairo without opposition from government or national religious leaders.

Cultural Issues

Egypt’s central geographic position among Islamic nations and large population make it of key importance in missionary activity in the region. The growing influence of fundamentalist Islam and Shari’a law on daily living, society, and government continue to jeopardize any Church activity. Native members appear to have only joined the Church outside of Egypt and later return. Worship services are held on Fridays in accordance with the Muslim holy day of worship. The Church has never extended formal proselytism efforts among Coptic Christians and as a result it is unclear how this group may respond to the LDS gospel

message once it is properly presented to them.

National Outreach

Cairo remains the only city with a Church presence as one congregation administers to 18.2 million people. The mission outreach center has potential to reach 19% of the national population if a missionary program were actively pursued. However local laws, customs, and violence directed towards non-Muslims has resulted in the Church taking a nonproselytism stance. Church activities appear limited to meeting the spiritual needs of existing members and conducting humanitarian work.

Coptic Christians appear the most likely source of converts and one of the few opportunities to expand national outreach if active missionary work is pursued. The Church may experience challenges adapting gospel teaching to their needs and understanding given that LDS proselytism approaches and materials have been tailored to those with a Protestant or Catholic background.

The Internet has already been an effective tool in introducing the Church to some interested Egyptians. The Church provides contact information for its Cairo Branch on its meetinghouse locator website. This is the only means to make contact with the local Church in Egypt unless through personal association with branch members.

Member Activity and Convert Retention

Membership primarily consists of non-Egyptians from North America and Europe and consequently member activity and convert retention rates tend to reflect these regions. The few native members have joined the Church abroad and experience significant challenges once they return to Egypt. Some of these societal and governmental pressures to revert back to Islam can be a source of irregular church attendance.

Ethnic Issues and Integration

Integrating the few native members with the mostly foreign membership appears the greatest ethnic integration challenge. Socio-economic differences as well as former religious affiliation for LDS converts may create potential member integration issues.

Language Issues

Church services are held in English. A wide selection of Church materials translated in Arabic provides ample literature for native members and interested individuals. Ninety-nine percent (99%) of the population has Church materials translated into their native language, but low literacy rates—especially for women—create challenges in gospel understanding and self-reliance. Minority-spoken languages, such as Bedawiyet, will likely have no Church materials translated for several decades following the beginning of active missionary work in Egypt.

Missionary Service

No native members appear to have served missions. Some humanitarian senior missionary couples have been on assignment in Egypt monitoring development and aid projects.

Leadership

Foreign members appear to constitute the entire branch presidency. Egyptian converts prepare for future leadership by learning leadership and administration skills from foreign members.

Temple

Members travel to the Bern Switzerland or Frankfurt Germany Temples. Temple trips occur infrequently and exact significant sacrifices in time and money. Prospects for a closer temple appear unlikely, although Egypt may become part of the Rome Italy Temple district once the temple is completed.

Comparative Growth

No other nation in North Africa has as strong of a Church presence as Egypt. However, membership consists primarily of expatriate members rather than indigenous converts. Many nations in the Middle East, including the United Arab Emirates and

Saudi Arabia, have more members and have experienced greater membership growth, as these nations have larger foreign worker populations whereas Egypt has very few foreign workers. Egypt has seen few native converts join the LDS Church, characteristic of North Africa and the Middle East. Other countries in the Middle East have stronger and more developed native leadership than Egypt such as Jordan and Lebanon.

Most Christian denominations have seen little growth. Seventh Day Adventists have experienced membership and congregation declines over the past decade due to emigration.

Future Prospects

Continued poor relations between Muslims and Christians, together with the lack of native LDS converts, create an atmosphere unlikely to spur noticeable membership growth for many years. Humanitarian projects may one day help the Church gain legal status and stir interest in the Church among Egyptians, but recent events indicate that this is not within the foreseeable future. Egyptian Christians present the greatest opportunity for missionary efforts if the Church is able to obtain government recognition one day. Despite having the largest population in the Middle East and North Africa, Egypt will likely remain almost totally unreached by missionary efforts for decades to come.

[1] “Egypt,” International Religious Freedom Report 2017. 28 July 2018. https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2017&dlid=280980#wrapper

[2] “Egypt,” International Religious Freedom Report 2017. 28 July 2018. https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2017&dlid=280980#wrapper

[3] Haroldsen, Edwin O. “Branch in land of pyramids is ‘home away from home,’” LDS Church News, 12 June 1993. http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/23629/Branch-in-land-of-pyramids-is-home-away-from-home.html

[4] Hill, Greg. “BYU archaeological team uncovers treasures in Egypt,” LDS Church News, 17 June 1995. http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/26016/BYU-archaeological-team-uncovers-treasures-in-Egypt.html

[5] “Gospel takes root in Tanzania,” LDS Church News, 29 November 2003. http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/44749/Gospel-takes-root-in-Tanzania.html

[6] Cannon, Mike. “Diversity in land, people and climate,” LDS Church News, 7 December 1991. http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/21327/Diversity-in-land-people-and-climate.html

[7] “Egypt,” Deseret News 2003 Church Almanac, p.326–327.

[8] Cannon, Mike. “Diversity in land, people and climate,” LDS Church News, 7 December 1991. http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/21327/Diversity-in-land-people-and-climate.html

[9] Haroldsen, Edwin O. “Branch in land of pyramids is ‘home away from home,’” LDS Church News, 12 June 1993. http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/23629/Branch-in-land-of-pyramids-is-home-away-from-home.html

[10] “Where We Work,” LDS Charities. Accessed 28 July 2018. https://www.ldscharities.org/where-we-work

[11] “Projects—Egypt,” Humanitarian Activities Worldwide, retrieved 18 June 2010. http://www.providentliving.org/project/0,13501,4607–1–2008–255,00.html

[12] “Wheelchairs,” Humanitarian Services, retrieved 18 June 2010. http://www.lds.org/library/page/display/0,7098,6213–1–3215–1,00.html

[13] “Egypt,” International Religious Freedom Report 2009, 26 October 2009. http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2009/127346.htm

[14] Fayez, Rami. “The story of three extremist Christian groups banned by the Church Order. 5 August 2017. Accessed 28 July 2018. http://www.vetogate.com/2812997(Article in Arabic).