

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.



Vietnam

Population: 93.42 millions (#15 out of countries)

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Geography
Area: 331,210 square km. Vietnam is a long, narrow country which borders the South China Sea, Cambodia, Laos, and China in Southeast Asia. There are a few small islands in extreme northern and southern Vietnam. Southern Vietnam has a tropical climate whereas northern Vietnam experiences monsoon climate from May to September and a dry, warm season from October to March. The terrain consists of large river deltas in the north and south, highlands or mountains in the center and extreme northwest, hills in the interior, and plains along the coast. The Mekong River empties into the South China Sea in southern Vietnam. Natural hazards include typhoons and flooding. Environmental issues include deforestation, soil erosion, water pollution, and urbanization.

Population: 88,576,758 (July 2009)
Annual Growth Rate: 1.137% (2009)
Fertility Rate: 1.98 children born per woman (2009)
Life Expectancy: male 69.24, female 74.45 (2009)

Peoples
Kinh (Viet): 86.2%
Tay: 1.9%
Thai: 1.7%
Muong: 1.5%
Khome: 1.4%
Hoa: 1.1%
Nun: 1.1
Hmong: 1%
Other: 4.1%

The Viet population mainly resides in southern Vietnam, coastal areas, and in the north around Hanoi. Tay and Thai live in the north in the interior and mountainous areas. Muong primarily populate the Thanh Hoa Province and surrounding areas. Khome are related to the Cambodian Khmer and live in the Mekong Delta and along the Cambodian border. Hoa, who are Han Chinese, Nun, and Hmong reside in northern Vietnam.

Languages: Vietnamese (86%), Tay (2%), Muong (1.5%), Khmer [Cambodian] (1.4%), other (9.9%). Vietnamese is the official language. 106 native languages are spoken. Languages with over one million speakers include Vietnamese (65.8 million), Tay (1.48 million), Muong (1.14 million), and Khmer (1.06 million),
Literacy: 90.3% (2002)

History
The Chinese Han dynasty conquered northern Vietnam in the 1st century BC and ruled the region for the next 1,000 years. Vietnam became an independent kingdom in 939 AD. In the 15th century, the kingdom conquered the Champa Kingdom and extended its borders south to the Mekong Delta. Tensions arose in the 17th and 18th centuries between the north and south, resulting in sporadic civil war. In 1858, the French began annexing Vietnam and the entire country fell under French rule within 30 years. Growing anti-colonial sentiment began from French-educated Vietnamese in the 20th century and resulted in a communist movement for independence in the 1940s under Ho Chi Minh. Vietnam declared independence in 1945 but a

French presence in the region continued for another decade. In the late 1940s, a division between north and south ensued due to the political polarization of communists and anti-communists. This resulted in two different nations by 1954. The United States provided military assistance to South Vietnam to fight the Viet Cong – armed guerilla fighters who infiltrated the south – in the early 1960s. The United State' had more than half a million US soldiers stationed in the country by 1969. The United States withdrew its forces in the 1970s, allowing the North to annexthe South by 1975 and reunify the country. Vietnam attacked Cambodia in 1978 and engaged inborder skirmishes for several years. The government remains a communist state, but has seen increasing integration into the international community.

Culture
The communist government controls the media and regulates entertainment. Daily life has centered on agriculture for millennia; industrialization has begun only recently. Diet consists of a large amount of vegetables and seafood. Cuisine is clean and light as little oil is used. Vietnam enjoys a rich history of folk literature and poetry. Soccer is the most popular sport. Alcohol is consumed less than in most countries and rates of cigarette usage are similar to rates in most Western European nations.

Economy
GDP per capita: $2,900 (2009) [6.25% of US]
Human Development Index: 0.725
Corruption Index: 2.7
The economy has made progress despite a destructive civil war and the loss of economic support from the Soviet Union. During much of the 1990s and 2000s, the economy grew rapidly as many industries were privatized, foreign investment increased and the large work force was mobilized. Poverty rates have also declined, yet 15% live below the poverty line. The limited degree to which the economy developed in the past two decades is apparent as agriculture employs 56% of the workforce and generates only 21% of the GDP. Primary agricultural products include rice, coffee, and rubber. Industry produces 40% of the GDP and provides labor for 19% of the workforce. Primary industries include food processing, clothing and shoe manufacturing, and machinery. Vietnam has recently become one of the largest oil producers in Southeast Asia. The global financial crisis has slowed economic growth and increased unemployment. Primary trade partners include China, the United States, Japan, and Singapore.

Corruption is found in all levels of society. Freedom of speech is limited and complicates the exposure and punishment of corruption. Government has stepped up its fight towards corruption among government officials and police, but has seen limited results.

Faiths
Buddhist: 9.3%
Christian: 7.2%
Hoa Hao: 1.5%
Cao Dai: 1.1%
Muslim: 0.1%
None: 80.8%

Christians
Denominations Members Congregations
Catholic 6,150,000
Seventh-Day Adventists 9,758 7
Latter-Day Saints 1,000 2
Jehovah's Witnesses 50

Religion
Most are irreligious. Approximately half the population is nominally Buddhist. Many Buddhists and non-religious individuals also adhere to teachings from Daoism and Confucianism. Catholics form the second largest religious group and number between six and eight million. Hoa Hao and Cao Dai are religions which originated in Vietnam in the 20th century. Hoa Hao shares many similarities with Buddhism whereas Cao Dai is a syncretism of many religious traditions, particularly Buddhism and Christianity. [1]

Religious Freedom
Persecution Index: 6th
The constitution allows for religious freedom but this right is sometimes restricted. There is no official religion and no religions receive favoritism. All religious activities, whether by officially recognized or unrecognized religious groups, require some registration by the government. Registered religious groups and congregations receive greater rights for assembly whereas unregistered congregations can be closed downMany Christian congregations have applied for recognition but remain unregistered. Obtaining land and approval for constructing meetinghouses is challenging.

Missionaries may serve in Vietnam but require approval from the government and a sponsor from a national or local religious group. Open proselytism is frowned upon. Travel for religious purposes requires government approval which is generally granted. The printing of religious material is restricted and the shipping of religious materials into the country can be difficult and requires special permissions. Some registered and unregistered groups report pressure to renounce their beliefs. In recent years, the government has grown increasingly more accommodating to many religious groups and restrictions of religious freedom have decreased.[2]

Largest Cities
Urban: 28%
Ho Chi Minh City, Hanoi, **Hai Phong**, **Da Nang**, **Bien Hoa**, **Hue**, **Nha Trang**, **Can Tho**, **Rach Gia**, **Qui Nhon**, **Vung Tau**, **Nam Dinh**, **Long Xuyen**, **Cam Pha**, **Phan Thiet**, **Hong Gai**, **Cam Ranh**, **Buon Me Thuot**, **Thai Nguyen**, **Da Lat**, **My Tho**, **Soc Trang**, **Play Cu**, **Thanh Hoa**, **Ca Mau**, **Bac Lieu**, **Vinh Long**, **Hoa Binh.**

Cities in bold have no LDS congregation. Two of the 28 cities with over 100,000 inhabitants have a congregation. 11% of the national population lives in the 28 largest cities.

LDS History
The first LDS members likely lived in Vietnam as early as the 1950s. American members arrived in greater numbers in the 1960s as a result of the Vietnam War. At year-end 1965, membership numbered 140 in Saigon. There were 17 Vietnamese members in the city. Membership grew to over 5,000 in 1968 and members met in over 60 groups; most members were U.S. servicemen and support personnel. Three districts met the needs of the membersprior to the end of the war. Vietnamese membership increased to 70. The translation of Church materials into Vietnamese began in the late 1960s. By March 1975, there were approximately 300 Vietnamese members. Membership was fairly evenly divided between males and females. Missionaries were withdrawn the following month and almost 100 Vietnamese members left the country. The last Church services in Saigon were held on April 27th, 1975.[3] Between 150 and 200 members remained in South Vietnam following the war.

In 1993, two senior missionary couples were assigned to Hanoi on humanitarian assignment.[4] In May 1996, President Gordon B. Hinckley visited the country and rededicated the land in Hanoi.[5] Vietnamese natives began serving missions within their own country since the mid-2000s and carefully follow laws and regulations. In 2008, there were nine missionaries serving from Vietnam; eight served in the Cambodia Phnom Penh Mission.

Membership Growth
LDS Membership: 1,000 (2009)
A mixture of expatriates and Vietnamese comprise membership. When President Hinckley visited in 1996, 26 attended in Ho Chi Minh City and 19 in Hanoi.[6] Membership numbered approximately 100 by 2000. In 2009, there were an estimated 1,000 members.[7]

Congregational Growth
Branches: 2
Responsibility for Vietnam was held by the Thailand Bangkok Mission in the early and mid-1990s. The Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City Branches were organized in 1995.[8] Vietnam became part of the newly created Cambodia Phnom Penh Mission in 1997. A third branch met on the outskirts of Ho Chi Minh City in 1999. Branches in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City are the only congregations recognized by the government. Groups or dependent branches meeting in the privacy of members' homes may function in other areas of the country.

Activity and Retention
In 2006, government officials gave permission for convert baptisms to occur in Vietnam.[9] In mid-2009, approximately 125 attended meetings held in Ho Chi Minh City. Hanoi had around 50 active members in 2008. Active membership likely stands around 200-250, or 20-25% of total membership.

Language Materials
Languages with LDS Scripture: Vietnamese, Khmer, Chinese
All LDS scriptures are available in Vietnamese, Khmer and Chinese. The Church has translated some priesthood, relief society, Sunday School, young women, primary, missionary, audio/visual, family history, and scripture materials into these three languages. Some CES materials are also available in Khmer.

Meetinghouses
Meetings for the Ho Chi Minh City Branch are held in a rented duplex. The Hanoi Branch likely meets in a rented space or renovated building.

Health and Safety
Like many Southeastern Asian countries, Vietnam has a high risk for infectious diseases. Health risks caused by poor sanitation, poverty and rapid industrialization pose safety hazards. 0.5% of the population is infected with AIDS/HIV.

Humanitarian and Development Work
In 1992, the Church donated medical supplies and prostheses.[10] Senior missionary couples have taught English for service since 1993.[11] In 2008, the Church donated wheelchairs.[12]

Opportunities, Challenges and Prospects

Religious Freedom
Vietnam has steadily gained greater religious freedom over the past two decades. The government has given permission for humanitarian missionaries to enter, recognized two congregations, allows baptisms to occur, and permits Vietnamese natives to serve as full-time missionaries. Open proselytism is restricted, and non-Vietnamese missionaries can serve as proselytizing missionaries. The creation of new congregations is difficult as the Church is not officially recognized and many Christian groups face resistance from multiple levels of government. In 2009, Church attorneys were working diligently to get the Church official recognition. Several Protestant groups received official recognition in 2008.

Cultural Issues
The large irreligious population poses the greatest cultural challenge to the growth of the Church. The several decades of communism have created a society unfamiliar with religion. The large number of ethnic minorities is challenging for proselytism due to the diversity of cultural practices and religious beliefs. However, Vietnam has one of the highest percentages of Christians in Southeast Asia. Outreach among Christian Vietnamese may provide the greatest convert retention and growth as many of these individuals have developed religious habits in considerable harmony with LDS teachings. Some investigators addicted to cigarettes face challenges quitting smoking prior to baptism and must remain vigilant to not relapse. Substance

abuse rates are lower than in most Asian nations, mitigating some difficulties experienced in other cultures.

National Outreach
The Church's presence is limited to Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City; at least 94% of the population lives in areas without a LDS congregation. Government regulations limit proselytism and Church contact to friends of members. Most ethnic groups do not have a single Church member and have never had contact with the Church. Greater national outreach is unlikely to occur until full government recognition is achieved, and as for other Christian denominations with government recognition, achieving permissions to organize new congregations may be difficult. The greatest opportunities for improving national outreach is likely to be through the Church conducting humanitarian service in areas without congregations, as well as the influence of isolated members who follow church teachings. Such efforts foster positive relations with local and national government and may facilitate approval for additional congregations.

The lack of a mission in Vietnam limits national outreach. Vietnamese missionaries also serve in the three Vietnamese-speaking branches in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. The limited number of Vietnamese missionaries sometimes results in the removal of some missionaries from Vietnam to provide language training to newly-arrived foreign missionaries serving in the Vietnamese-speaking branches in Cambodia. Missionaries serving from Vietnamese-speaking branches in Phnom Penh cannot serve in Vietnam currently. If government oneday permits foreign proselyting missionaries, Vietnamese missionaries from Cambodia and the United States will be a valuable asset to humanitarian service and national outreach.

Member Activity and Convert Retention
The hiatus in Church activities between 1975 and the 1990s resulted in the Church losing contact with almost all 150-200 members. Few have been found and are active in the Church in Vietnam today. Members living substantial distances from congregations likely struggle to actively participate in meetings and are prone to become less active. The absence of foreign proselyting missionaries and government restrictions on proselytism may facilitate increased member activity and convert retention as local members actively fulfill member-missionary responsibilities and converts usually attend Church meetings forer extended periods prior to baptism.

Ethnic Issues and Integration
Native members are primarily or entirely Vietnamese. The Church has not experienced issues integrating different native ethnicities due to the lack of ethnic diversity in membership. Friction between Vietnamese and Western expatriates appears minimal and limited to communication and language issues. Potential challenges may occur once greater national outreach occurs.

Language Issues
The Church has an exceptionally large array of ecclesiastical materials in Vietnamese for a nation with such a small Church membership. Translations of the scriptures and church literature have come primarily as the result of mission efforts among the Vietnamese in South Vietnam during the Vietnam War and among Vietnamese in the United States. Vietnamese speakers form the majority of the population.However, the non-Vietnamese speaking population presents a daunting challenge to the Church for outreach. Many of these languages have only recently had the Bible fpublished and have had minimal Christian evangelism. Furthermore many of these groups populate remote regions far from established Church centers. The easiest of these groups to reach are the Khmer and Chinese, as Church materials are available in these languages and both reside near outreach centers.

The small Vietnamese Church membership and many English-speaking American expatriates cause linguistic challenges. In Ho Chi Minh City, meetings are conducted in Vietnamese but English is used frequently, whereas in Hanoi meetings are held in Vietnamese with translation for English speakers. Greater growth in foreign and Vietnamese membership may result in the creation of language-specific congregations to facilitate gospel understanding and fellowshipping.

Leadership
Both branches have a native branch president. However, Vietnamese leadership is limited. A counselor in the Cambodia Phnom Penh Mission presidency resides in Vietnam and is an American. Vietnam has produced a consistent number of missionaries despite a tiny membership and government restrictions. The majority of missionaries serve from Ho Chi Minh City.

Temple
Vietnam belongs to the Hong Kong China Temple district. Trips to the temple likely require government approval and occur infrequently. Members face great challenges in finances and time to go to the temple.

Comparative Growth
Vietnam has experienced slow membership and congregational growth since the Church's reestablishment. Growth rates and the output of native missionaries are comparable to other Asian nations with limited religious freedom such as Nepal. Countries in Southeast Asia with religious freedom have seen strong membership growth in the past decade, but low retention and modest congregational growth.

Most Christian denominations have seen steady increases in membership but little or no increases in reported congregations and have experienced difficulty achieving government recognition for new congregations. Other Christian groups have had a presence for many decades and have a much larger presence than the LDS Church with more developed local leadership and greater member-missionary outreach.

Future Prospects
The Church has enjoyed a positive relationship with the government due to expansive humanitarian and educational work and its care in observing government regulations. Many other religious groups have obtained recognition recently and official registration of the LDS Church may be possible within the next decade. Additional congregations may be organized in Ho Chi Minh City to serve language needs. A district may be organized for Vietnam, and home groups may be established outside cities with congregations. However, restrictions on religious expression and practice continue to limit growth.

[1] “Vietnam,” International Religious Freedom Report 2009, 26 October 2009.
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[4] “Couples enter Vietnam to teach English,” LDS Church News, 30 January 1993.
http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/23222/Couples-enter-Vietnam-to-teach-English.html
[5] “Pres. Hinckley dedicates Cambodia: Gives ‘addendum’ to prayer during his visit to Vietnam,” LDS Church News, 8 June 1996.
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[12] “Wheelchairs,” Humanitarian Services, retrieved 9 March 2010.
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