



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.



Cuba

Population: 11.05 millions (#78 out of countries)

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Geography

Area: 110,860 square km. The largest country in the Caribbean, Cuba consists of one main island and countless small islands and keys located southwest of Florida between the Caribbean Sea and Atlantic Ocean. Isla de la Juventud is the largest island off of mainland Cuba. Flat terrain covers most of the main island with the exception of some mountains in the center and along the extreme southeastern coast. Mangroves and swamps cover many coastal areas. Weather is tropical year-round with some seasonal fluctuations in temperature and precipitation. The United States operates a military base in Guantanamo Bay. Frequent hurricanes and droughts are natural hazards. Environmental issues include pollution and deforestation. Cuba is administratively divided into 14 provinces and one special municipality.

Population: 11,477,459 (July 2010)

Annual Growth Rate: 0.217% (2010)

Fertility Rate: 1.61 children born per woman (2010)

Life Expectancy: 75.36 male, 80.05 female (2010)

Peoples

White: 65.1%

Mulatto and Mestizo: 24.8%

Black: 10.1%

Languages: Spanish (100%). Spanish is the official language and spoken by the entire population.

Literacy: 99.8% (2002)

History

Amerindian tribes populated Cuba prior to Spanish discovery in 1492. The Spanish quickly colonized the island and established plantations which were worked by African slaves. Cuba served as an important center of commerce and operations for Spain in the New World for several centuries due to its central location in the Caribbean. Independence movements were met with stiff oppositions and were unsuccessful until the involvement of the United States in the Spanish-American War in 1898. The war brought Cuba under United States' sovereignty until becoming an independent nation in 1902. For the next half a century, several different governments came to power, most of which were backed by the military or were headed by corrupt politicians. Fidel Castro took control in 1959 and established a communist government with strong Soviet ties. In 1961, the United States strove to remove the communists from power in the failed Bay of Pigs Invasion. The Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962 brought the Soviet Union and the United States dangerously close to war due when Soviet troops positioned nuclear warheads within striking distance of much of the United States. Since the 1960s, the United States has embargoed Cuban goods, negatively affecting economic growth. Cuba experienced major economic challenges following the termination of aid from the Soviet Union in 1990, but has since gained economic support from China, Venezuela, and Bolivia. Fidel Castro remained in power until 2008 when power was transferred to his brother Raul, who has initiated some reforms. Many Cubans have fled to the United States over the past half century. Cuban-Americans numbered over 1.6 million in 2008.^[1]

Culture

Indigenous Amerindians, the Spanish, African slaves, the United States, and communism have each contributed to Cuba's rich culture. Cubans are known for their friendly and intellectual personalities and have produced a large amount of literature. Many sports popular in the United States are also popular in Cuba, such as baseball and basketball. Cuisine consists of an amalgamation of Spanish and Caribbean dishes. Alcohol consumption rates rank lower than many nations whereas cigarette

consumption rates compare to the United States. Divorce rates are high.

Economy

GDP per capita: \$9,700 (2009) [20.9% of US]

Human Development Index: 0.863

Corruption Index: 4.4

The Cuban economy remains underdeveloped and dependent on other nations to meet its basic needs. The quality of living remains lower than at pre-1990s levels due to the loss of Soviet aid and continued presence of a highly centralized authoritarian government. In recent years, Cuba has exchanged labor for oil and other needed resources with nations sympathetic to its cause, such as Venezuela. Services employ 61% of the labor force and produce 75% of the GDP whereas industry accounts for 20% of the workforce and produces 21% of the GDP. Major industries include sugar, petroleum, tobacco, and nickel. Cuba boasts the second largest nickel deposits in the world. Primary trade partners include China, Canada, Venezuela, and Spain.

The strict control of society by the communist party for half a century has likely lessened corruption rates. Most other nations in the region experience more widespread corruption. However, corruption is perceived as a major problem in government and society.

Faiths

Christian: 65%

Other: 35%

Christians

Denominations Members Congregations

Catholic 6,900,000

Jehovah's Witnesses 91,651 1,250

Seventh-Day Adventists 29,533 273

Anglican 22,000

Methodist 21,000

Presbyterian 15,000

Latter-Day Saints 50 1

Religion

The majority of Cubans are Christian or nonreligious. Catholics account for the largest religious group and Catholic authorities estimate 10% of adult followers attend mass regularly. Interest in religion is growing nationwide. Protestants are growing rapidly and number over half a million.[\[2\]](#) Pentecostals, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Seventh-day Adventists appear to be gaining the most followers.

Religious Freedom

Persecution Index:

The constitution protects the individual right of religious belief and practice, but this right is restricted by law and government enforcement. Government monitors all aspects of social life, and religious groups are subject to surveillance. Greater tolerance has been granted to many religious groups recently, but needed permits to renovate or construct religious buildings remains difficult to obtain. There is no state religion and references to atheism were removed from the constitution in 1992. Religious groups must obtain permission to operate and must to register with the government in order to worship in a specific location, invite foreign visitors, and allow local religious leaders to travel abroad. In recent years, religious groups have experienced greater ease in importing religious materials, using the Internet, and bringing in foreign religious workers.[\[3\]](#)

Largest Cities

Urban: 76%

Havana, **Santiago de Cuba, Camagüey, Holguín, Guantánamo, Santa Clara, Las Tunas, Bayamo, Pinar del Río, Cienfuegos, Matanzas, Ciego de Ávila, Manzanillo, Sancti Spiritus, Palma Soriano.**

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

One of the 15 cities with over 100,000 inhabitants has a congregation. 46% of the national population lives in the 15 largest cities.

LDS History

In 2010, Cuba belonged to the Mexico Area.

Membership Growth

LDS Membership: 50 (2009)

Membership growth accelerated during the late 2000s. In 2007, there were an estimated 15 members.[\[4\]](#) The following year, membership doubled to 30.[\[5\]](#)

Congregational Growth

Branches: 1

Members have met in a small group in Havana since the early 2000s. A branch has been organized more recently.

Activity and Retention

The majority of Church members appear to actively attend church meetings. Local members and leaders maintain responsibility for teaching and baptizing converts.

Language Materials

Languages with LDS Scripture: Spanish

All LDS scriptures and most church materials are translated in Spanish, including an LDS edition of the Bible.

Meetinghouses

The Havana Branch rents space from another church to hold Sunday meetings.[\[6\]](#)

Humanitarian and Development Work

The Church has been largely unsuccessful in carrying out humanitarian and development work due to restrictions imposed by the Cuban government as well as the U.S. embargo against Cuba.

Opportunities, Challenges and Prospects

Religious Freedom

The government has not granted registration to the Church, but has given permission for some Church activity. In a written government agreement, the Church is entitled to hold meetings and baptize converts. In 2008, the Church expressed frustration with the government denying humanitarian aid destined for hurricane victims.[\[7\]](#) Christian groups often openly proselyte without government interference. No legal restrictions appear to prevent the introduction of full-time missionaries from Caribbean nations.

Cultural Issues

Although communism has created a more secular environment over the past half a century, many have maintained their Christian backgrounds yet lack the societal and familial pressures challenging Cubans from join non-Catholic denominations. This has resulted in high receptivity to many religious groups recently.

National Outreach

The currently reached population consists only of those in personal contact with Church members in Havana. 19% of the national population resides in Havana, a city of central importance in future mission outreach. The population is more urbanized than many nations in the Caribbean, allowing for fewer mission outreach centers. However, there are approximately 110 cities with over 10,000 inhabitants. Even if missionary work progresses as fast as in the Dominican Republic, which saw some of the most rapid national outreach and membership growth ever seen in the past 30 years, it would take over three decades to establish congregations in most these cities.

Member Activity and Convert Retention

Strong member involvement in missionary work combined with demands for self sufficiency due to government regulations have resulted in likely high rates of member activity and convert retention. Little contact with Church leaders may make members more susceptible to doctrinal misunderstandings or administrative difficulties. Long distances from members' homes to the current meetinghouse and less convenient public transportation on Sunday create challenges for members to attend church weekly.

Ethnic Issues and Integration

Tension between different ethnic groups remains low due to shared language and culture. Communism has also likely reduced potential ethnic integration issues, thereby creating a favorable environment for mission outreach among all ethnic groups in Cuba.

Language Issues

High literacy rates and universal usage of Spanish, the language with the most extensive Church literature other than English, provide enormous potential for Cubans to understand the gospel without language barriers frequently experienced in other nations.

Leadership

Few trained leaders appear one of the largest obstacles for more immediate church growth. In mid-2010, no missionaries appeared to have served from the Havana Branch. Priesthood holders are few in number and have restricted contact with Church headquarters and regional Church leaders. Although opportunities for training and mentoring are few, isolation from the international Church has likely facilitated greater resilience among local leadership.

Temple

The Santo Domingo Dominican Republic Temple is the closest temple which members in Cuba may attend. Few if any members have been to the temple and coordinated temple trips do not presently occur for members of the Havana Branch.

Comparative Growth

Cuba remains the last sovereign nation in North and South America without an official LDS Church presence and one of the least reached predominantly Christian countries in the world. Cuba is the only nation in the Western Hemisphere which has had a long-standing communist government with a large immigrant population in the United States. Cuban communities in South Florida have been among the most receptive in the region to LDS mission outreach. Spanish-speaking nations in Central America and the Caribbean have experienced strong membership growth and an official Church presence for several decades. The Church entered the Dominican Republic in the late 1970s and in 2009 had 115,000 members, 18 stakes, and 11 districts. Nations with recent or current communist governments have tended to initially experience large increases in convert baptisms followed by dissipating increases in national outreach, active members, and congregations.

Many Christian denominations have been established in the past several decades and experience rapid growth in membership, especially Seventh-day Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses. Many of these denominations have been successful in drawing upon membership outside the United States to assist in establishing their churches in Cuba and have downplayed American connections. Jehovah's Witnesses have over 1250 congregations and Seventh Day Adventists have over 270 in Cuba, compared to just one LDS congregation. Such figures reflect the potential of church growth for outreach-oriented faiths, as well as the advantages of JWs and SDAs from indigenous growth through effective member-missionary programs in contrast to the

LDS reliance on a large missionary force staffed primarily with North American missionaries.

Future Prospects

Poor diplomatic relations between Cuba and the United States over the past 50 years have likely delayed the establishment of the Church in Cuba as Church headquarters is based in the United States. Furthermore, adequate Church infrastructure and self-sufficiency in missionaries and leadership did not occur in the Dominican Republic until the past decade and still has yet to occur in much of the Caribbean, thereby reducing the body of missionaries needed to staff functioning missions while simultaneously opening new ones. In late 2009, missionaries serving in the Dominican Republic reported that the Church was taking the first steps need to open Cuba for missionary work by utilizing missionaries from Caribbean nations. Canada may be another supplier of future missionaries to Cuba due to positive political relations and the number of full-time missionaries available. The rapid growth of other outreach-oriented faiths in Cuba as well as the relative receptivity of Cuban-Americans to the gospel suggest much greater potential for church outreach in Cuba than suggested by LDS progress to date.

Much of the challenge impeding LDS growth in Cuba consists in overcoming traditional LDS paradigms relying on full-time missions staffed with North American missionaries, and instead focusing on growth through member-missionary work and native or regional full-time missionaries. In the past couple years, consistent increases in membership and government agreements permitting Church meetings and convert baptisms is a positive development needed to establish the Church.

[1] "2008 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates," U.S. Census Bureau, retrieved 23 June 2010.

http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/DTTable?_bm=y&-geo_id=01000US&-ds_name=ACS_2008_1YR_G00_&-_lang=en&-mt_name=

[2] "Cuba," International Religious Freedom Report 2009, 26 October 2009. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2009/127386.htm>

[3] "Cuba," International Religious Freedom Report 2009, 26 October 2009. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2009/127386.htm>

[4] "Cuba," International Religious Freedom Report 2007, retrieved 23 June 2010.

<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2007/90249.htm>

[5] "Cuba," International Religious Freedom Report 2008, retrieved 23 June 2010.

<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2008/108521.htm>

[6] "Cuba," International Religious Freedom Report 2009, 26 October 2009. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2009/127386.htm>

[7] "Cuba," International Religious Freedom Report 2009, 26 October 2009. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2009/127386.htm>