

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.



Yemen



Population: 26.05 millions (#48 out of countries)

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Geography

Area: 527,968 square km. Located on the southern Arabian Peninsula, Yemen borders Saudi Arabia, Oman, the Arabian Sea, and the Red Sea. Several small islands also belong to Yemen, notably the Socotra archipelago and islands in the Red Sea. The climate is hot year round with the exception of mountains in the west that receive seasonal monsoons. Coastal areas are humid, whereas the interior and eastern areas are dry. A narrow plain runs along most coastal areas. Most the interior consists of hills and plateaus. There are mountains in the western interior. Sand and dust storms are natural hazards. Environmental issues include a lack of fresh water, soil erosion, and desertification. Yemen is divided into twenty-two administrative governorates.

Peoples

Arab: 95%

Somali: 3%

Other: 2%

Population: 28,036,829 (July 2017)

Annual Growth Rate: 2.28% (2017)

Fertility Rate: 3.63 children born per woman (2017)

Life Expectancy: 63.7 male, 68.2 female (2017)

Languages: Arabic dialects (96.0%), Hindi (1.5%), Somali (1.5%), other (1%). Arabic is the official language and the only language with over one million speakers. Soqotri is the native language of the Socotra archipelago.

Literacy: 70.1% (2015)

History

Access to fresh water and fertile soil has allowed a longer legacy of civilization in Yemen compared to other nations on the Arabian Peninsula. Several civilizations and empires were based in Yemen between 2000 BC and the seventh century when the Islamic Empire quickly integrated the region into its control. Prior to assimilation in the Ottoman Empire, several dynasties from

other Near East nations controlled Yemen. The British East India Company took control of South Yemen in the nineteenth century to curb pirate attacks on trade ships. In 1918, North Yemen became independent from the Ottoman Empire, whereas South Yemen gained independence from the British in 1967. In 1970, a Marxist government came to power in South Yemen and resulted in hundreds of thousands of Yemenis fleeing from the south to the north. Friction between the two Yemeni states occurred during the 1970s and 1980s. Unification of North and South Yemen occurred in 1990, but hostilities between the north and south remained, resulting in a fragile Yemeni state. Many Yemenis continue to identify according to their tribe rather than their nationality, giving rise to internal conflict and insurrection. As in several other Arab nations in 2011, Yemen experienced major protests and sustained civil disorder as a result of allegations of corruption in government, low living standards, and poor economic conditions. Clashes with anti-government rebels and loyalist armed forces intensified during the year and ultimately resulted in president Salih leaving office.

Former Vice President Abd Rabuh Mansur Hadi won the presidential election in February 2012 and made plans to reform a variety of social, constitutional, and political issues. However, the Houthis did not believe their concerns were adequately addressed in these proposed reforms, expanded their influence in the north, and captured Sanaa in September 2014. During the past several years, efforts to help reconcile the conflict between the Houthis militia and government forces have been unsuccessful as the country has spiraled into civil war and famine, with additional countries, such as Saudi Arabia and Iran, supporting opposing sides of the conflict. In August 2018, Iran-backed Houthis controlled Sanaa and most areas in the northwest that previously pertained to the Yemen Arab Republic, whereas Saudi-backed federal forces and allies controlled most areas of the defunct People's Democratic Republic of Yemen. Additionally, al-Qaeda and tribal allies controlled small portions of central Yemen at the time.

Culture

Yemen's rich ancient history continues to strongly influence modern culture. Several World Heritage sites are in Yemen, most of which are ancient walled cities. The Socotra archipelago boasts a large number of indigenous species and has developed its own unique culture separate from mainland Yemen. Qat is an evergreen shrub that Yemeni commonly cultivate and chew that some nations classify as an illegal drug. Yemeni Jews have a rich cultural tradition that began from King Solomon seeking out the finest materials in present-day Yemen to build the temple in Jerusalem. Islam strongly influences daily life and is the source for Yemeni law. Yemen has low rates of alcohol and cigarette use. Polygamy is legal and practiced by a minority.

Economy

GDP per capita: $1,300 (2017) [2.18% of U.S.]

Human Development Index: 0.482

Corruption Index: 16 (2017)

The Yemeni economy has dramatically weakened due to the current civil war. The GDP per capita has decreased from $3,300 in 2015 to $1,300 in 2017. Prior to the current civil war, Yemen had one of the least developed economies in the Middle East and was strongly dependent on oil revenues for economic growth. The current humanitarian situation is dire as there are millions affected by cholera and famine. Recent estimates indicate four-fifths of the population needs humanitarian assistance. Poverty is a major concern, as 54% of Yemenis lived below the poverty line in 2014, and 27% were unemployed in 2014. Most work in agriculture and animal husbandry. Agricultural products include grain, fruits, vegetables, and qat. Oil production and refining is the primary industry. Major trade partners include Egypt, Thailand, Belarus, the United Arab Emirates, and China.

Legislation combating corruption was passed prior to the current civil war, but limited natural resources, a rapidly growing population, and political instability have contributed to widespread corruption for decades. Allegations of corruption have been directed toward nearly all major government institutions, such as elections, customs, taxation, and the judicial system. Currently Yemen is perceived as one of the most corrupt nations in the world, and the most corrupt state on the Arabian Peninsula.

Faiths

Muslim: 99%

Other: 1%

Christians

Denominations Members Congregations

Evangelicals – 4,275

Latter-day Saints less than – 10 – 1

Religion

The population is homogeneously Muslim. Most of the Christians are foreigners temporarily living in Yemen for employment. Most Christians are Roman Catholic or Anglican. There are an estimated 50 Jews who remain in Yemen.[1]

Religious Freedom

The constitution does not proclaim or protect religious freedom. Islam is the state religion, and legislation is based on Islamic Shari'a law. The proselytism and conversion of Muslims is forbidden. Apostasy from Islam can result in the death penalty. Government permits individuals to practice their religious beliefs and allows assembly with no government interference with some restrictions. In the late 2000s, Jews, Christians, and Baha'is received marked persecution from some Muslim groups, with many foreigners facing deportation or voluntarily making plans to leave the country.[2] Government does not usually pursue prosecution of those committing violence against religious minorities and has done little to ensure their safety. There are no provisions for the registration of religious groups. Oppression of Christians has increased in areas controlled by Houthi rebels.[3]

Largest Cities

Urban: 37%

Sana'a, Taizz , Al Hudaydah , Aden, Ibb, Dhamar, Al-Mukalla, Chanffar, Sayyan, Asch-Schir.

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

One of the ten largest cities may have a congregation. Twenty-one percent (21%) of the population lives in the five largest cities.

LDS History

Foreign Latter-day Saints have lived in Yemen since the 1970s.[4] Yemen was assigned to the Middle East/Africa North Area in 2008. Yemen pertains to the Manama Bahrain Stake although no official branch has ever appeared to operate within Yemen. Since the outbreak of the civil war, it is unclear whether any Latter-day Saints remain in the country.

Membership Growth

LDS Membership: less than 10 (2018)

Any LDS members are likely Western expatriates living temporarily in Yemen for employment or humanitarian purposes.

Congregational Growth

Wards: 0 Branches: 0 Groups: 1? (2018)

A group may meet in Yemen under the supervision of the Manama Bahrain Stake.

Activity and Retention

There likely have been few or no convert baptisms in Yemen. Activity rates for members likely represent members' home nations. Inactive members are likely unknown to the Church, as the Church does not have an official presence. Many members who actively follow Church teachings may not participate in worship services, as they are unaware where meetings are held. Active membership like consists of fewer than ten members.

Language Materials

Languages with LDS Scripture: Arabic, English, Hindi

All LDS scriptures and many Church materials are available in Arabic. A Hindi translation of the Book of Mormon is available as well as a wide, although limited, selection of Church materials. Somali language Church materials are limited to Gospel Principles and The Testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith.

Meetinghouses

Any Church meetings are likely held in the privacy of members' homes.

Health and Safety

Conditions for foreign missionaries in Yemen are very precarious and are currently unfavorable even for humanitarian assistance. In the late 2000s and early 2010s, several missionaries were kidnapped by Islamic extremists and remain missing. The current civil war poses significant safety concerns.

Humanitarian and Development Work

The Church has recently conducted refugee response assistance in Yemen.[5]

Opportunities, Challenges, and Prospects

Religious Freedom

The government does permit meetings for non-Muslim religious groups, which likely indicates that any LDS gatherings would likely not be met with government interference. However, non-Muslims have been the focus of increased violence and persecution in recent years. Meetings would likely have to be done in private in order to avoid any potential threats. The Church is barred from the proselytism of Muslims, rendering all but a few thousand inhabitants legally unreachable by potential missionary efforts. There are no legal procedures for religious groups to obtain government recognition, which may discourage an LDS establishment one day if conditions improve and no formal process for the registration of religious groups is established. Rebel-controlled regions experience less religious freedom and will be likely unsuitable for any LDS activity among foreigners until government control is restored.

Cultural Issues

The strong influence of Islam on daily living and legislation creates the greatest cultural obstacle restricting the Church's activities. The chewing of qat is a cultural habit that stands against LDS church teachings. Those practicing polygamy who desire to be baptized must end polygamous marriages in divorce and get interviewed by a member of the mission or area presidency; however this issue is largely moot as no proselytism is permitted among Muslims. The Church has no teaching or missionary materials tailored to individuals with an Islamic background, which may pose difficulties for Muslims to accurately understand LDS teachings if proselytism is permitted one day.

National Outreach

The entire population is unreached by the Church. Future mission outreach possibilities will likely first concentrate on the non-Muslim foreign workers, many of whom are Christians.

Member Activity and Convert Retention

The sensitive nature of the Church in Yemen restricts the Church from publishing meeting times and locations for foreign members. Some members living in Yemen are likely unaware of a Church presence. Those inquiring about meetings for Church services may contact the Church's Middle East Desk at Church headquarters for additional information. A telephone number and e-mail address for the Middle East Desk are available on the Church's meetinghouse locator website.[6]

Ethnic Issues and Integration

Potential outreach among the native population will likely face challenges assimilating Yemenis from conflicting tribes.

Language Issues

Any church meetings that may occur are likely conducted in English. The widespread use of Arabic dialects simplifies any future outreach. Many immigrant workers have some Church materials in their native language.

Leadership

Leadership is likely very limited and only able to support a member group.

Temple

Yemen is assigned to the Frankfurt Germany Temple district.

Comparative Growth

Only a few other Middle Eastern or North African nations have no reported Church congregations or membership but may have a small number of active members privately holding worship services. These nations include Algeria, Iran, Libya, and Tunisia. Most nations in the Arabian Peninsula have at least two congregations (one for the military and one for other members). Few Christian groups report membership information for Yemen. Since the outbreak of the civil war, no Christian groups have appeared to achieve measurable progress in the establishment of a permanent presence among the Yemeni population.

Future Prospects

Civil war makes any greater Church establishment in the near future unlikely given challenges with safety, famine, and low standards of living. It is likely that the current conflict has resulted in the departure of most, if not all, Latter-day Saints in the country. Outreach among Yemenis living in nations with mission outreach may provide the first steps needed toward a greater Church presence in Yemen. The arrival of additional LDS foreign workers, a peaceful resolution to the civil war, and improved protection of the rights of religious minorities are needed before any greater progress can be achieved.

[1] “Yemen,” International Religious Freedom Report for 2017. Accessed 25 August 2018. https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2017&dlid=281014#wrapper

[2] “Yemen,” International Religious Freedom Report for 2009, 26 October 2009. http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2009/127361.htm

[3] “Yemen,” International Religious Freedom Report for 2017. Accessed 25 August 2018. https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2017&dlid=281014#wrapper

[4] “Comment,” Ensign, Dec 1979, 66.

[5] “Where We Work,” LDS Charities. Accessed 25 August 2018. https://www.ldscharities.org/where-we-work

[6] Phone Number: 1-801-240-2146, Email: MiddleEastDesk@ldschurch.org