

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.



Trinidad and Tobago

Population: 1.22 millions (#159 out of countries)

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Geography

Area: 5,128 square km. Located north of Venezuela in the southern Caribbean, Trinidad and Tobago consists of the larger, more populous island of Trinidad and the smaller, less populated island of Tobago. The islands experience a tropical climate subject to a rainy season from June to December and have few hills and small mountains. Forests cover undeveloped landscape. Water pollution and deforestation pose the greatest environmental hazards. Trinidad and Tobago are administratively divided into nine regional corporations, two city corporations, three borough corporations, and one ward.

Peoples

East Indian: 35.4%

African: 34.2%

Mixed: 23.0%

Other: 1.3%

Unspecified: 6.1%

British colonialism brought East Indians and Africans to the islands for work on plantations. Mixed ethnicity claims those from both Indian and African backgrounds. Other ethnic groups include Chinese, Arab, and those with mixed ancestry, which include native peoples. The negative population growth rate results from high immigration to the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States combined with a low birth rate. East Indians form the largest percentages of the population in central and southern Trinidad. Tobago is populated primarily by individuals of African descent.

Population: 1,215,527 (July 2018)

Annual Growth Rate: –0.23% (2018)

Fertility Rate: 1.7 children born per woman (2018)

Life Expectancy: 70.5 male, 76.4 female (2018)

Languages: English and Creole English (95%), other/unspecified (5%). English and Creole English are most widely spoken. English is the official language. Less spoken languages include Hindustani, French, Spanish, and Chinese. English is the only language that numbers over one million speakers, with many speaking Creole or English as a second language.

Literacy: 99% (2015)

History

Arawak Amerindians settled the islands thousands of years prior to Spanish exploration and colonialism that began at the start of the sixteenth century. Greater immigrant populations began to settle the islands for the following centuries. The British took control in the early nineteenth century and heavily cultivated sugarcane. African slaves worked in the plantations until the end of slavery in the British Empire in 1834. Indentured servants from India arrived between the mid-nineteenth century and 1917 to increase sugar production after the end of slavery. In the early twentieth century, oil was discovered and led to increased exports. Independence from the United Kingdom occurred in 1962. Trinidad and Tobago benefits from a diversified economy that has brought greater wealth than most other Caribbean nations. A recent surge in violent crime has posed significant challenges for the government to address.

Culture

The British have influenced many areas of society ranging from law to customs. East Indians and Africans have also maintained many of their native customs and traditions. Christian, Hindi and Muslim holidays are all celebrated nationally. Recently arrive immigrants have also infused local culture with their own food and customs. Cigarette consumption rates rank lower than the worldwide average, whereas alcohol consumption rates are comparable to the worldwide average rate alcohol use.

Economy

GDP per capita: $31,300 (2017) [52.3% of U.S.]

Human Development Index: 0.784 (2017)

Corruption Index: 41 (2018)

Trinidad and Tobago enjoys some of the strongest, consistent economic growth in the Caribbean and serves as the region’s economic center. However, the economy has been in recession for several years. Most of the economy’s success comes from oil and natural gas revenues, which produce 80% of the exports and 40% of the GDP. One of the largest natural gas liquefaction facilities in the Western Hemisphere is located in Trinidad and Tobago. The industry sector employs only 11.5% of the population, whereas 85.4% of the workforce is in services. Tourism is an important and growing part of the economy, especially on Tobago, which is not as developed as many other Caribbean nations. Greater diversification of the economy will likely continue as foreign investment continues in manufacturing industries, including aluminum and plastics. Trinidad and Tobago supply cement and many manufactured goods to nearby island nations. Agriculture accounts for less than 1% of the GDP and primarily produces cocoa, rice and citrus. The United States is the largest import and export partner.

The level of corruption is comparable to Argentina. Drug traffic from South America often transits Trinidad and Tobago to the United States and Europe. Marijuana is widely produced. Crime is often punished according to law, but increasing favoritism and flexibility of law toward officials and politicians has raised concerns. The level of perceived corruption in the country per Transparency International has slightly improved in the past decade.

Faiths

Christian: 65.8%

Hindu: 18.2%

Muslim: 5.0%

Other/Unspecified: 8.8%

None: 2.2%

Christians

Denominations – Members – Congregations

Catholic – 262,554

Pentecostal – 145,863

Baptist – 83,871

Anglican – 69,285

Presbyterian/Congregational – 30,388

Seventh Day Adventists – 66,148 – 185

Jehovah's Witnesses – 10,030 – 127

Latter-day Saints – 3,464 – 9

Religion

Most Trinidadians of African descent are Christian, and a few are Muslim. Most East Indians in Trinidad are Hindu or Muslim, with some Christians. Hindus and Muslims have the strongest concentrations in southern Trinidad. Catholics and Anglicans report decreasing Church attendance and clergy.[1] Approximately half of East Indians are Hindu.[2] Tobago is primarily Christian. Rastafarian ideology has influenced Christian groups the most. Many Protestants experience steady growth.

Religious Freedom

The constitution and government protect religious freedom. Government does not favor any religious group and seeks to promote religious harmony and prosecute crimes targeting religious groups. Foreign missionaries may operate without limitations except that they must represent a registered religious group, cannot stay longer than three years, and are limited to no more than thirty-five foreign missionaries per religious group at a time.[3]

Largest Cities

Urban: 53.2% (2018)

San Fernando, San Juan, Port of Spain, Arima, Marabella, Point Fortin, Tunapuna, Sangre Grande, Tacarigua, Chaguanas.

All cities over 5,000 people have a congregation of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints within city limits or within five miles. Twenty-five percent (25%) of the national population lives in the ten largest cities.

Church History

Missionaries returning from South Africa in late 1940 stopped in Trinidad briefly and taught a congregation. Elder Ezra Taft Benson stopped in Trinidad during a tour of the Caribbean in 1955. The first Trinidadian members joined the Church in other nations and returned to their homeland in the mid-1970s. The first sacrament meeting occurred in November 1976. The first convert baptisms occurred in 1977, the same year formal missionary work started in Port of Spain under the direction of the Venezuela Caracas Mission. Three years later, the first branch was organized in the city. Difficulty in obtaining missionary visas and restrictions on proselytizing limited missionary work until the late 1980s. The first eighteen missionary visas were obtained in 1988, which increased to thirty-five a few years later. Trinidad and Tobago was transferred to the West Indies Mission in 1983, and in 1991 an independent mission was organized in the country that operated for three years. The Trinidad and Tobago Mission was discontinued in 1994, and the headquarters of the West Indies Mission, which included most of the islands in the Caribbean, was transferred from Barbados to Trinidad.[4] Elder M. Russell Ballard dedicated Trinidad and Tobago for

missionary work in February 1990.[5] Seminary and institute began in the early 1990s. In 2006, the Caribbean Area was created and included Trinidad and Tobago. A year later, the West Indies Mission was realigned, and the Puerto Rico San Juan Mission was split to create a third mission, the Puerto Rico San Juan East Mission. Following the closure of the Puerto Rico San Juan East Mission in 2010, the West Indies Mission also administered Barbados. The West Indies Mission was realigned after the creation of the Barbados Bridgetown Mission in 2015 and renamed the Trinidad Port of Spain Mission. The mission reported problems obtaining foreign missionary visas for Trinidad and Tobago in the late 2010s. As of early 2019, the Trinidad Port of Spain Mission also included Aruba, Bonaire, Curaçao, Guyana, and Suriname. Elder Ulisses Soares visited members in Trinidad in March 2019.[6]

Membership Growth

Church Membership: 3,464 (2017)

When the Trinidad and Tobago Mission was created in 1991, there were 600 members in its boundaries, which also included Guyana and Suriname.[7] There were 700 members in Trinidad and Tobago by 1993, increasing to 1,100 by 1997. There were 1,682 members at the end of 2000.

Membership growth increased slowly during the early 2000s to 1,770 at the end of 2003. Accelerated growth began in 2004 with membership reaching 2,115 in 2006 and 2,489 in 2008. Starting in 2004 around 125 converts joined the Church per year, increasing to 234 convert baptisms in 2008. When the application was submitted for the Port of Spain Trinidad District to become a stake, there were 2,130 members in the district.

Annual membership growth rates ranged from –0.5% to 3% during the early 2000s. Growth rates steadily increased from –0.5% in 2003 to a high of 9.6% in 2008. The drop in membership during 2003 was likely due to emigration and few convert baptisms. Slow membership growth occurred in the 2010s as annual membership growth rates generally ranged from 2-4%. However, membership increased by only 0.3% in 2017. Church membership totaled 2,885 in 2010, 3,058 in 2012, 3,405 in 2015, and 3,464 in 2017.

In 2017, one in 352 was a Latter-day Saint.

Congregational Growth

Wards: 5 Branches: 4 Groups: 4? (2018)

The Church organized its second branch in Trinidad in 1987 in San Fernando. In the 1990s, additional branches were created in Sangre Grande (1992), Arima (1994), and Couva (1996). The Port of Spain Trinidad District was created in 1996. In 1997, there were five branches.

The Church organized several additional branches in the 2000s in additional cities and towns, including Curepe (2003), Chaguanas (2004), Scarborough (2007), and Point Fortin (2008). Branches were also created in Princess Town and Siparia for the first time during the 2000s. The number of branches totaled eight in 2003, ten in 2005, and twelve in 2008. In 2005, the Port of Spain Trinidad District was split to create a second district for southern Trinidad in San Fernando. In 2008, San Fernando Trinidad District was discontinued in order to prepare for the establishment of a stake. A second branch in San Fernando was created in the 2000s but a couple of years later was recombined with the first branch to increase the number of active members to organize a ward. Another branch was consolidated in the Arima area to prepare other branches to become wards.

The first stake was organized in March 2009 and included the Arima, Couva, Curepe, Port of Spain, San Fernando, and Sangre Grande Wards and the Chaguanas and Princess Town Branches. In 2010, branches in Port Fortin, Siparia, and Tobago reported directly to the mission. These branches were later reassigned to the stake sometime in the early to mid 2010s. The Arima Ward was downgraded to a branch in 2010. Missionaries were working to establish a congregation in Caparo in late 2009. However, these efforts were unsuccessful and no branch was organized. Additional branches created in the 2000s that were later discontinued included the Princess Town (discontinued in 2012) and Siparia (discontinued in 2016). In the 2010s, full-time missionaries reported that member groups were organized in Matura, Penal, and Valencia. However, it was unclear whether any of these member groups continued to operate as of 2019.

Activity and Retention

One hundred eight attended the dedicatory services for missionary work in 1990.[8] 900 members from Trinidad and neighboring islands attended President Hinckley's visit in 2002.[9] Eighty attend church services in Arima in the early 2000s. 750 attended the organization of the first stake in 2009.[10] The average number of members per congregation fell from 280 in 2000 to 207 in 2008, indicating that active membership had increased or the number of active members per congregation had decreased. The strength of the older branches is manifest, as all branches created before 2000 became wards in 2009. Branches have generally had small active memberships. The Siparia Branch had thirty active members out of eighty in late

2009 and the Tobago and Port Fortin Branches likely had less than fifty each. Total active membership in the West Indies Mission was 2,600 out of 10,000 in late 2009, with the highest activity likely occurring in Trinidad. During the 2008–2009 school year, 171 were enrolled in seminary or institute.

In the mid-2010s, the number of active members per congregation was as follows per returned missionary reports or local member reports: San Fernando (110), Curepe (90), Arima (75), Couva (40-60), and Sangre Grande (30-40). In the late 2010s, the number of active members per congregation was as follows per returned missionary reports: San Fernando (100), Couva (55), and Tobago (20). In early 2019, approximately twenty of the 109 members on the records of the Scarborough Branch were active. Member activity rates appeared to worsen in the 2010s. The average number of members per ward or branch increased from 245 in 2009 to 385 in 2017. Active membership is likely around 500, or 15%.

Language Materials

Languages with Latter-day Saint Scripture: English, Arabic, Chinese, Hindi, Spanish.

English has all Latter-day Saint scriptures and the widest body of church materials available of any language. No materials are available in Trinidadian or Tobagonian English Creole. Materials and all Latter-day Saint scriptures are available in Arabic, Chinese, and Spanish. The Book of Mormon and some church materials are translated into Hindi, but none are available in the dialect of Hindustani spoken on Trinidad.

Meetinghouses

Most units in the Port of Spain Trinidad Stake meet in church-built meetinghouses or renovated buildings. Recent economic growth has increased property prices, creating greater financial problems in obtaining land for additional meetinghouses. Mission branches typically meet in rented spaces or renovated buildings. Some members travel up to two hours to attend church meetings.

Health and Safety

Floods and hurricanes are natural hazards. Medical infrastructure is limited. Dengue fever and other tropical diseases are present in Trinidad and Tobago, but uncommon. Violent crime has escalated over the past decade. Smoking rates are similar to the United States. HIV/AIDS infects 1.1% of the population.

Humanitarian and Development Work

The Church has completed 42 humanitarian and development projects since 1985. Professional basketball players offered basketball training clinics in 1991 under the Church's name.[11] Wheelchair donations were made as early as 2002.[12] Other projects have included emergency response, maternal and newborn care, and community projects.[13]

Opportunities, Challenges, and Prospects

Religious Freedom

The Church faced problems with obtaining missionary visas during early years of its presence, and continues to face limitations on the number of missionaries that can serve in the country. In the late 2010s, there were periods of time when few missionaries were permitted to serve in the country due to visa restrictions. Legal restrictions prevent the assignment of more than 35 foreign full-time missionaries per religious group. These restrictions indicate that the Church must rely on its local membership to expand its full-time missionary operations.

Cultural Issues

The large range of cultures complicates efforts to unify members in congregations, as converts come from a wide range of religious and social backgrounds. Religious harmony typically prevails, but segregation often occurs on a social level. Rastafarian philosophy conflicts with many Church teachings, including drug use and doctrinal issues pertaining to the gathering of Israel.

National Outreach

The small size of Trinidad allows for a single stake to meet the needs of members in the stronger congregations throughout the island. Although congregations serve all of the largest cities, 75% of the population lives outside the ten largest cities. Several administrative corporations do not have a congregation, including the regional corporations of Diego Martin, Penal-Debe, and Rio Claro-Mayaro with a combined population of around 220,000 or 18% of the national population. These lesser-reached regional corporations may have had some missionary areas, and all likely have both less active and active members who attend nearby congregations. Diego Martin and Penal-Debe especially provide good opportunities for the Church to establish additional congregations in areas with higher population densities, which likely have a few active members capable of leading new congregations.

No lasting mission outreach occurred on Tobago until 2007. With only 50,000 inhabitants on the island, missionaries travel throughout its territory. Church meetings are only held in Scarborough, which creates challenges for outreach to areas on the northwestern half of the island.

Delays in obtaining missionary visas resulted in limited missionary work until the late 1980s and limited national outreach, as proselytism has been primarily limited to the last three decades. Since the relocation of the West Indies Mission to Trinidad, limited outreach has resulted from the large burden administrating the other nations within the boundaries of the mission. The combined population of the islands covered by the mission in early 2010 was four million, with 30% of the population in Trinidad and Tobago. However, by 2019 the realigned Trinidad Port of Spain Mission included more than 2.8 million people in its boundaries – 43% of whom lived in Trinidad and Tobago. A larger membership and greater receptivity in Guyana has also drawn away a large amount of missionaries and resources.

Many of the rural areas of Trinidad are unreached by current mission outreach centers. These areas are difficult to assign full-time missionaries to, as they have small populations scattered over a large geographic area. The implementation of cottage meetings and organization of dependent groups and branches may help establish congregations in unreached areas of the country, especially in the corporations of Diego Martin and Penal-Debe. Efforts in the 2010s to organize additional branches have thus far been unsuccessful despite diligent efforts by mission leadership to better reach Trinidad's population with congregations and full-time missionaries. This lack of success appears attributed to fluctuations in the number of full-time missionaries assigned and difficulties with local leadership development in fledgling congregations. Recent shortages in full-time missionaries have resulted in some smaller congregations without a full-time missionary companionship assigned. The Church also has yet to create a website specifically tailored to Trinidad and Tobago. Such a website can help reach people who live far from Church meetinghouses.

Member Activity and Convert Retention

Trinidad's active membership provides opportunities for future growth. The greatest strength in member activity is in the older congregations, as these units have had more seasoned members and larger active and total memberships. Wards have more resources for fellowshipping, and the branches usually have few baptisms and limited active membership.

No increase in member attendance at important national church events in recent years indicate problems with member activity. The establishment of a stake suggests that active membership has experienced some increase in the past twenty years, although the number of active members in the past decade appers to have decreased. The number of congregations has nearly doubled since 2002, yet membership has increased at a slower rate.

Ethnic Issues and Integration

Trinidad enjoys widespread tolerance and cooperation between differing ethnic groups. Separateness between unlike religious and ethnic groups may carry over to church congregations. Differences in culture likely create additional issues for leaders to address in fellowshipping and teaching both seasoned members and recent converts.

Language Issues

The widespread use of English requires fewer language-specific resources to conduct outreach. There are adequate materials for teaching minority groups in their native languages, but outreach among groups lacking English proficiency is difficult, as few missionaries or members speak these languages. Creole languages have not had translations of Church materials. Translations in these languages appear unlikely to be forthcoming due to their vernacular nature and small number of speakers.

Missionary Service

Three missionary zones used to divide Trinidad into northern, central, and southern sections. Many new proselytizing areas opened as missionaries were relocated from Guyana following visas issues in the fall of 2009. However, the number of full-time missionaries assigned to Trinidad in recent years has significantly decreased. There were only seven missionary apartments in Trinidad as of early 2019. In late 2009, around thirty-six Trinidadian members had served missions, three were currently serving missions, and six were working on their mission papers. Local leadership anticipated at the time that increasing numbers of Trinidadian returned missionaries will provide for greater membership growth and activity in the future.[14] Many members are

not married. Marriages between members occur frequently, but it is challenging to for members to marry in the temple due to long distances and financial constraints. Increasing numbers of Trinidadian youth serving missions is a welcome development that will contribute to strengthening the body of leadership in the years to come. Attendance in seminary and institute rose dramatically in the late 2000s and appears a major contribution toward increasing the number of local member serving missions.

Leadership

In early 2019, all congregations appeared led by local members. The Church in Trinidad and Tobago benefits from enough active priesthood holders to fill leadership positions notwithstanding small general membership. This allows greater attention to new converts and less active members. A significant policy shift occurred in mid-2009 when a new mission president arrived. Local leadership has demonstrated self-reliance despite the short amount of time in which it has developed. The Church has also benefited from small branches lead by willing and local members. However, some returned missionaries have complained about the quality of local leadership and note there appears to be an insufficient number of local leaders to properly operate a stake. Given the small size of active membership, Trinidad is vulnerable to have the stake discontinued given recent growth trends.

Temple

Trinidad and Tobago is assigned to the Caracas Venezuela Temple district, but members often attend the temple in the Dominican Republic due to the political situation in Venezuela. Temple attendance requires great sacrifice for members to participate in temple ordinances due to distance, travel expense, and time. For example, members often travel by airplane to Miami, Florida and then to Santo Domingo to attend the temple.[15] Mission and international church leadres have emphasized the importance of the temple in the past decade. In 2010, mission president Gamiette challenged missionaries and members to increase the number of endowed members to 1,000 to increase member activity and to prepare the way for a future temple. A temple in Trinidad would significantly improve accessibility to the temple for many members in the Lesser Antilles and the Guianas. However, the current small size of the stake in Trinidad and slow growth trends suggest a temple is unlikely for years or decades to come. Family history work is challenging due to limited genealogical records, as many arrived as slaves or indentured servants.

Comparative Growth

Trinidad and Tobago became the first English-speaking nation in the Caribbean to have a stake organized. Other English-speaking Caribbean nations have had a Church presence for at least as long as Trinidad and Tobago, yet have few Latter-day Saints, low member activity rates, and do not have a stake. Non-English speaking nations have experienced the strongest growth in the region. The Church first arrived in the Dominican Republic in the late 1970s and in late 2017 had 135,000 members, twenty stakes, nine districts, and a temple. In 2018, Trinidad and Tobago numbered among countries with the fewest members with a stake. The percentage of Latter-day Saints in the population is slightly less than most countries in the Caribbean.

Most Christian denominations have a strong presence. Many of the Christian denominations have functioned in the country many decades before The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints first arrived. Pentecostals and Evangelical churches have experienced rapid, sustained growth over the past fifty years. Seventh-Day Adventists and Jehovah’s Witnesses each report over 100 congregations and have experienced steady growth in the past decade.

Future Prospects

The outlook for future growth appears mixed. The Church continues to operate a stake in Trinidad despite comparatively few members and low activity rates. Also, the reduced geographic size of the mission since 2015 permits greater mission president oversight and resources for proselytism and expansion. Moreover, the population remains receptive to proselytism efforts by the Church. However, the Church struggles with dependence on foreign, full-time missionaries to meet local proselytism needs. Given recent limitations with the number of visas granted to the Church for foreign full-time missionaries, the Church is understaffed in its missionary force on the islands. This situation underscores the need for greater self-sufficiency both in the Church in Trinidad and Tobago, and in the Caribbean as a whole, to meet local proselytism needs. The Church continues to struggle with greater local leadership development as evidenced by no new wards or branches organized since the late 2000s. As a result, no new wards or branches appear likely to be organized within the foreseeable future.

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[12] “Hundreds more wheelchairs distributed,” LDS Church News, 28 December 2002. http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/43004/Hundreds-more-wheelchairs-distributed.html

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