



Politics

Has been ruled by the Germans, Danes, Poles, Swedes and Russians since the Middle Ages. Its brief independence from Russia (1917-1940) was ended by Stalin's re-conquest. Stalin liquidated a fifth of the population, deported many more and forcibly settled Russians in their place. This history still influences modern politics as the large Russian minority struggles to find its place and role in modern Latvia. Independent in 1991 as a multiparty democracy. Joined NATO and the EU in 2004.

Religion

Long and deep pagan roots; among the last European peoples to be Christianized (13th Century). Latvians were early supporters of Luther, and much of the population converted to Lutheranism. The churches were harshly persecuted under both the Nazis and the Communists. Religious freedom in 1988 caused a burst of re-affiliation that has since mostly petered out. Freedom for all forms of religious expression.

Latvia

Republic of Latvia

Europe

Geography

Area 64,610 sq km. A fertile plain with 3,000 lakes; indented by the Gulf of Riga. The central of the three Baltic republics.

Population	Ann Gr	Density
2010	2,240,265	-0.46%
2020	2,152,631	-0.41%
2030	2,049,164	-0.50%

Capital Riga 707,000. **Urbanites** 68.2%. **Pop under 15 years** 14%. **Life expectancy** 72.3 yrs.

Peoples

European 98.7%.

- Baltic** 59.1%. Latvian 57.7%; Lithuanian 1.4%.
- Slavic** 38.9%. Russian 29.6%; Belarusian 4.1%; Ukrainian 2.9%; Polish 2.4%.
- Other** 0.7%.

All other 1.3%.

Literacy 99.7%. **Official language** Latvian (Lettish). **All languages** 13. **Indigenous languages** 5. **Languages with Scriptures** 2Bi 3NT 3por.

Economy

A robust but vulnerable economy. Poorest EU nation, but fastest economic growth in the EU for several years running. Also has highest inflation in EU, a dangerously high external debt and trade deficit. A lack of natural resources has forced Latvia to develop – faster than other former Soviet states – an industrialized economy and a liberalized, privatized market economy. But the growing gap between rich and poor is a major issue.

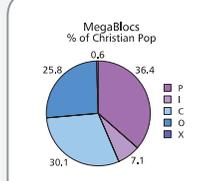
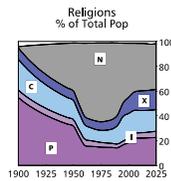
HDI Rank 48th/182. **Public debt** 19.5% of GDP. **Income/person** \$14,964 (32% of USA).

Religions	Pop %	Population	Ann Gr
Christian	60.00	1,344,159	-0.2%
Non-religious	38.44	861,158	-0.9%
Other	0.90	20,162	0.7%
Muslim	0.42	9,409	0.5%
Jewish	0.24	5,377	-3.5%

Christians	Denoms	Pop %	Affiliates	Ann Gr
Protestant	16	21.81	489,000	-0.3%
Independent	15	4.27	96,000	0.7%
Catholic	1	18.08	405,000	-1.2%
Orthodox	6	15.46	346,000	0.9%
Marginal	2	0.28	6,000	3.1%
Unaffiliated		0.10	2,000	0.0%

Churches	MegaBloc	Congs	Members	Affiliates
Lutheran Church	P	303	300,000	450,000
Catholic Church	C	273	242,515	405,000
Latvian Orthodox	O	122	194,805	300,000
Old Believers	I	69	33,750	67,500
Ukrainian Orthodox	O	59	23,529	40,000
Baptist Church	P	88	6,800	13,600
Message of Hope	I	3	5,455	12,000
New Generation Min	I	4	4,091	9,000
Seventh-day Adventist	P	60	4,100	7,380
Pentecostal Churches	P	23	3,500	6,300
Other Protestant	P	50	3,333	6,000
Jehovah's Witnesses	M	28	2,500	5,000
Other denominations[28]		105	14,001	25,943
Total Christians[40]		1,137	835,046	1,341,723

TransBloc	Pop %	Population	Ann Gr
Evangelicals			
Evangelicals	7.0	157,351	1.2%
Renewalists			
Charismatics	3.2	71,431	3.5%
Pentecostals	0.4	8,748	0.8%



Challenges for Prayer

1 **The general social climate** has changed since independence. The Soviet departure left a moral vacuum, which many negative influences rushed to fill. EU money has also brought EU-style social problems. Alcohol, drugs, a rapidly growing sex trade, high abortion rates, the world's fourth highest suicide rate and notable corruption in government all indicate that something is not right. Despite economic growth there is a prevalent attitude of spiritual apathy, even of hopelessness. Pray for society to awaken to this challenge and to build a nation characterized by hope and righteousness.

2 **Christianity is characterized mostly by nominalism**, since the excitement of the 1990s has yielded to a lethargic status quo. Although 60% belong to a Christian confession, only a small minority actually practice their faith. The Lutheran, Catholic and Orthodox churches dominate the religious scene; and while they are trusted, social institutions need an injection of spiritual dynamism and renewal. The spread of cults, both Christian and pagan, is a challenge to Christianity. Pray for a new move of the Spirit in the mainline churches; there are certainly many signs of life already. Pray for the many nominal Christians to become true believers.

3 **Unprecedented unity in the churches** was caused in part by challenges to biblical morality in society. The aggressive lobbying by homosexual and anti-family agendas in particular elicited joint statements and coordinated activism by the churches. But more important are the prayer and worship summits attended by the leaders of almost every denomination and confession – these meetings are the foundation for revival in Latvia. Pray that this unity might reverse the moral tide in Latvia, and that the laity might emulate their leaders to worship and work together for the Kingdom.

4 **Missions vision** in Latvia is still in its infancy, but is demonstrating impressive diversity and determination. Pray that this spark might grow into a flame to take the life-changing gospel to the less-reached in Latvia and beyond. Pray also for groups such as Bridge Builders International, the Latvian Evangelical Alliance and its CP-21 vision, which seeks to work with indigenous churches to plant new churches and reach every Latvian. Peoples of special note for prayer are:

a) **Rural populations.** They have far fewer opportunities to encounter the living Christ. Pray for renewal in their mainline congregations and for more teams such as **YWAM** that will evangelize in villages.

b) **The Russian minority** – mostly non-religious or Orthodox. Pray for increasing reconciliation and partnerships between believing Latvians and ethnic Russians – a painful legacy is still not entirely resolved.

c) **The 7,000 Jews** in Latvia, very resistant to the gospel and increasingly subjected to anti-Semitism. Pray for a loving and patient Christian witness to them.

5 **Ministry to young people** is strategic – this includes campus, youth and children's ministries as well as summer camps. **IFES** and **Agape (CCCI)** are having an impact on Latvian and, increasingly, international students. **CEF** is reaching up to 40,000 primary students every week through religious instruction in school. **SU**, **YWAM**, Latvian Christian Mission and others hold summer camps/events and minister to youth from Latvia and indeed all Eastern Europe. Pray for more workers with the vision to reach young people. Pray that this generation might be reached before they lapse into the irreligion or atheism of their forebears.

6 Christian media.

- a) Scripture.** A new NT in Latvian was released in 2007 and work on the OT continues. Pray for widespread distribution of Scripture in Latvia. The Bible Society uses its ecumenical platform to cooperate with many denominations.
- b) Radio ministry** is very well resourced and still growing. Examples are:
- i Lutheran Hour* and other Christian programmes, broadcasting on national and local radio as well as live broadcasts of services on TV. Lutheran Hour also broadcasts discipleship programmes and has a Bible Correspondence Course.
 - ii Russian Christian radio (FEBC and World Harvest Radio)* runs 24/7.
 - iii Latvian Christian Radio* has had broadcasts 24/7 in Latvian since 1993.
- c) TV.** The Lutheran Church broadcasts a series of services, Christian films and talk shows. Pray for more Latvian Christian television programmes that will profoundly communicate Jesus.
- d) Internet evangelism** is proving a very cost-effective and creative medium for sharing the good news. Pray for the websites and forums in Latvian to have a great impact.
- i The Latvian Bible* is available in its entirety online.
 - ii Internet radio (QBS)* is focused on reaching an unchurched generation.