

Missionary Atlas Project

Europe

Latvia

Snapshots Section

Country Name:

Conventional Long Form: Republic of Latvia

Conventional Short Form: Latvia

Local Long Form: Latvijas Republika

Local Short Form: Latvija

Country Founded in:

November 18, 1918 (from Soviet Russia)

Population:

2, 259, 810 (July 2007 estimate)

Government Type: (national, regional and local)

Parliamentary Democracy

Geography/location in the world:

Eastern Europe, bordering the Baltic Sea, between Estonia and Lithuania

Number of people groups:

7 people groups with 2% unspecified

Picture of flag:



Source: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/lg.html>

Religion Snapshot:

Major Religion and % of population:

All religions and % for each:

Lutheran 17%
Roman Catholic 20%
Russian Orthodox 4%

Government interaction with religion:

From 1941 until 1991 Latvia did not have religious freedom. In 1991, however, when Latvia declared freedom from the Soviet Union, the people of Latvia were once again enjoyed freedom of religion and worship.

Sources: www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/lg.html; WorldMark Encyclopedia of the Nations: Europe Vol. 5 200; Operation World: 21st Century Edition Patrick Johnstone and Jason Mandryk 2001

Country Profile

Basic Facts

Name:

Latvia (Latvijas Republika)

Demographics:

The population in Latvia as estimated in 2007 was 2,259,810 people. The population growth rate is -0.648 percent. The rural areas of Latvia have increased with people from 68 percent in 1980 to 74 percent in 2000. The capitol of Latvia is Riga. Riga had a population of 921,000 in 2000. Two other cities found in Latvia are Daugavpils with a population of 124,887 and Liepaja with a population of 108,256. The overall population found in Latvia is increasing in age with around 27 percent being retired.

Age Structure: 0-14 years: 13.6% (male 157,451/ female 150,184); 15-64 years: 69.6% (male 764,910/ female 808,848); 65 years and over: 16.7% (male 123,952/ female 254,465)

Median Age: Total: 39.6 years; Male: 36.6; Female: 42.7 (2007 estimate)

Birth Rate:

9.43 births/1,000 population (2007 estimate)

Death Rate:

13.64 deaths/ 1,000 population (2007 estimate)

Life Expectancy at Birth: Total Population: 71.6 years; Male: 66.39 years; Female: 77.1 years (2007 estimate); 1.28 children born/woman (2007 estimate)

The majority of the population in Latvia is made up of Latvians a little over half of the population. The net migration rate is -2.27 migrants/1,000 population (2007 estimate).

Population Ethnicity:

Latvian 57.7 %
Russian 29.6 %
Belarusian 4.1 %
Ukrainian 2.7%
Polish 2.5 %
Lithuanian 1.4%
Other 2%

Source: www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/lg.html; WorldMark Encyclopedia of the Nations: Europe Vol. 5 2001

Language

The Latvian language is also referred to as Lettish. Latvian is a Baltic language written from the Roman alphabet. In the Latvian language there are seven noun cases and six verb declensions. When speaking Latvian you are to stress the first syllable.

There are three different dialects that make up the Latvian language with Central in areas of writing, East and Livonian.

The official language of Latvia is Latvian which makes up 58.2 percent of the native speakers. Russian makes up 37.5 percent and Lithuanian and other languages make up 4.3 percent of the population. The Latvian language is an Indo-European, non-Slavic and non-Germanic language. There is only one other language in which it is similar and that is Lithuanian.

During the time in which the Russians were in Control of Latvia the Russians introduced words, phrases, and slang into the Latvian language. In 1989 when Latvian became the official language it was required by the government to be used in governmental business.

A male born in Latvia will always have the letter “s” at the end of his name with possible examples being Andris, Ivars and Visvaldis. If you are a woman born in Latvia then your name will end in the letter “a” with examples being Aina, Laima, Ausma, Ieva, Maija, and Zinta. An example of a word used frequently in the Latvian language stands for thank you, “*paldies*.”

Sources: <http://www.eunet.lv/VT/general/>; <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/lg.html>; WorldMark Encyclopedia of the Nations 10th Edition Vol. 5 2001; WorldMark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life Timothy L. Gall, Editor Vol. 4 –Europe 1998

Society/Culture

Latvians use folksongs as a way to be expressive. These are called *dainas*. The *dainas* have been written over many years talking about the human experience, feeling, and folk wisdom. The folk songs deal with a variety of topics such as birth, death, stories from invaders, marriage, and holidays. If you were to try and translate these folk songs you would be unable to gain the full meaning. The first *dainas* are thought to be from ancient riddles and magic incantations. The *dainas* that are composed today are now considered Latvian poetry and are more philosophical. To date more than 1.4 million *dainas* have been preserved.

For the Christmas holidays during the Latvians attend church services, decorate spruce trees with lights and ornaments, and spend time giving gifts to one another.

At Easter the Latvians dye eggs and make decorations from onion skins and herbs. Another activity that you will find the Latvians doing is building a swing and then taking turns swinging. When a person swings high then they will be able to repel the mosquitoes that could possibly bite them in the upcoming summer.

The Lutheran Cathedral Church in the Old Town of Riga holds the world's largest pipe organ that has been played by the most noted organists in Europe. Choral singing is the national hobby of Latvia and a beautiful part of their worship services.

World Christian Encyclopedia. 2nd Edition Oxford University Press 2001

For the Whitsuntide holiday the houses are decorated with birch branches. This day is celebrated November 18 which celebrates their proclamation of freedom for the republic.

<http://www.li.lv/en/?id=3>

National Holidays:

January 1 – New Year's Day

April 6 – Good Friday

April 8 – Easter

April 9 – Easter Monday

May 1 – Labour Day, Convocation of the Constituent Assembly of Latvia

June 23 – Ligo Day

June 24 – St. John's Day (Summer Solstice)

November 1 – All Saints Day

November 18 – Proclamation of the Republic of Latvia/National Day

December 25 – Christmas Day

December 26 – St. Stephen's Day

December 31 – New Year's Eve

Source: <http://www.journeymart.com/tools/country/ctryLatvia.htm>

Government

Latvia's government is a parliamentary democracy and is based upon a civil law system. The country is divided into 26 different counties which are referred to as *rajons*. There are seven municipalities* with these 26 counties. The counties are Aizkraukles Rajons, Aluksnes Rajons, Balvu Rajons, Bauskas Rajons, Cesu Rajons, Daugavpils*, Daugavpils Rajons, Dobeles Rajons, Gulbenes Rajons, Jekabpils Rajons, Jelgava*, Jelgavas Rajons, Jurmala*, Kraslavas Rajons, Kuldigas Rajons, Liepaja*, Liepajas Rajons, Limbazu Rajons, Ludzas Rajons, Madonas Rajons, Ogres Rajons, Preilu Rajons, Rezekne*, Rezeknes Rajons, Riga*, Rigas Rajons, Saldus Rajons, Talsu Rajons, Tukuma Rajons, Valkas Rajons, Valmieras Rajon, Ventpils*, Ventpils Rajons.

The universal age of suffrage in Latvia for all citizens is 18 years of age.

There are three different branches in the Latvian government. They are the Executive, Legislative and Judicial branches.

Executive Branch:

Chief of State: President Vaira VIKE-FREIBERGA (came into office July 8, 1999)

Head of Government: Prime Minister Aigars KALVITIS (came into office December 2, 2004)
(appointed by the President)

Cabinet: Council of Ministers nominated by Parliament for a four-year term (no term limits) (last election held May 31, 2007 next election 2011)

Election Results: Valdis ZATLERS elected president; parliamentary vote: Valdis ZALTERS 58, Aivars ENDZINS 39; Valdis ZATLERS is scheduled to take office July 7, 2007

Legislative Branch:

A Unicameral Parliament or Saeima is made up of 100 seats; members are elected by proportional representation from party lists by popular vote to serve four-year terms
Elections: Last elections held October 7, 2006 (next elections will take place October 2010)

Judicial Branch:

Supreme Court (judge's appointments are confirmed by Parliament)

Constitutional Court (judge's appointments are confirmed by Parliament)

Source: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/lg.html>

Economy

Latvia's economy is experiencing an average GDP rate over 7% in the last several years. In 2006 Latvia saw their GDP rate increase to 10.2%. The majority of companies, banks, and real estate properties have been privatized. The government of Latvia still has sizable stakes in a few of the large enterprises.

Latvia officially joined the World Trade Organization in February 1999. Latvia joined the European Union in May 2004 which was a top foreign policy goal. The current account deficit is more than 15% of GDP in 2006. Inflation is a major concern.

Currency: Latvian Lat (LVL)

Lati per US dollar – 0.5597 To \$1

GDP Purchasing Power Parity – \$36.49 billion (2006 est.)

GDP Official Exchange Rate – \$16.5 billion (2006 est.)

GDP Real Growth Rate – 11.9% (2006 est.)

GDP – Per Capita – \$16,000 (2006 est.)

GDP Composition by Sector: Agriculture – 3.7%; Industry – 26.3%; Services – 70%

Inflation Rate – Consumer Prices: 6.8% (December 2006)

Labor Force – 1.136 million (2006 est.): Agriculture – 13%; Industry – 19%; Services – 68%

Primary Agriculture Products: Grain, Sugar Beets, Potatoes, Vegetables, Beef, Pork, Milk, Eggs, Fish

Export Partners:

- Lithuania 11%
- Estonia 10.8%
- Germany 10.2%
- UK 10.2%
- Russia 7.9%
- Sweden 7.8%
- Denmark 5.3%
- Poland 5.3%

Import Partners:

- Germany 13.9%
- Lithuania 13.6%
- Russia 8.5%
- Estonia 7.9%
- Poland 6.4%
- Finland 5.9%
- Belarus 5.8%
- Sweeden 5.1%

The main industries found in Latvia make buses, vans, street and railroad cars, synthetic fibers, agricultural machinery, fertilizers, washing machines, radios, electronics, pharmaceuticals, processed foods, and textiles. Latvia is dependent on imports for energy and raw materials.

Source: <http://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/lg.html>

Literacy:

The Latvian people over the age of 15 are able to read and write.

Total Literate Population: 99.7%

Male Literate: 99.8%

Female Literate: 99.7%

Source: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/lg.html>

The first system for education was operated in Riga by Roman Catholic clergy in the 13th century. For children, time in school began in the 16th century.

Russification, the process by which one would integrate Russian ideology into the education could be seen as early as 1789 when the schools began to teach in Russian. Beginning in the 1860s the schools could no longer teach in Latvian. It was required to teach in Russian.

While the Soviet Union was in control the model of schooling followed the Russian style. The Soviet model began with a child 6 months old until age 3 being in nursery schools. The child would then attend kindergarten until age 6 or 7 followed by elementary school at age 10.

From the time a child was 10 until age 14 they attended what was the equivalent of middle or junior high school. There they began to focus on history, geography, biology, and a foreign language. Once a student reached eighth and ninth grade, physics, chemistry, and electives would be added. Upon completing the ninth grade a student was able to choose a vocational school, a professional technical school, or preparatory high school. In order for the student to have the opportunity to attend a high school they would take and pass a test in language and math. Otherwise, their only option was attend a vocational or professional technical school. For a student to attend a university it was very challenging for them to gain a spot.

Since 1990 and the release of Latvia out from under Russian control, opportunities have changed along with the structure of the schooling system. The primary education of a small child does last for nine years and then they move to secondary education which takes three years.

When it comes time for a student to attend the university there are now public and private institutions for the student to choose from if they have been able to pass the entrance exam. A survey of the American Latvian Association showed that 55% of Latvians that are now located in the United States said they were able to either complete their college degree or had nearly completed it. Within the United States there are 600 Latvian scientists and scholars teaching at American universities and just about as many physicians and dentists.

Source: Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life Vol. 4 – Europe Timothy L. Gall, Editor 1998

Land/Geography:

Latvia is located in Eastern Europe. It borders the Baltic Sea, between Estonia and Lithuania. Latvia is bordered by Belarus for 167km, Estonia for 343 km, and Lithuania for 576 km, and Russia for 282 km. The total land boundaries that make up Latvia is 1,368 km.

Latvia is slightly larger than West Virginia. The geography of Latvia is composed of fertile, low-lying plains with some hills in the east. The climate of Latvia is wet with moderate winters.

There are several environmental issues in Latvia. Latvia has benefited from a shift to service industries after the country regained independence. The main environmental issues in Latvia are improving drinking water quality, sewage problems, household, and hazardous waste management, as well as reduction of air pollution.

In the year of 2001 Latvia was able to close the EU accession negotiation chapter on environment committing to full enforcement of EU environmental directives by 2010.

Source: www.exportinfo.org/maps/latvia_map.gif;
www.russia-ukraine-travel.com

History

The ancient Balts were apart of the trading network across the continent of Europe. Latvia's coast became the place known for amber. Up until the time of the Middle Ages, amber was worth more than gold. One would have heard about the amber of Latvia as far away as Ancient Greece and the Roman Empire.

During the 10th century Baltic tribal cultures began to form. These were the Couronians, Latgallians, Selonians, and Semigallians. The largest tribe, which was also the most advanced in its socio-political development, was the Couronians. This group of people did a lot of plundering and pillaging.

Due to the location of the country of Latvia it has been a country that has been invaded by larger nations. Because of this the fate of Latvia was sealed. Toward the end of the 12th century traders visited the region from Western Europe on their way down the longest river in Latvia which was the Daugava, traveling towards Russia.

During this time German traders came along with preachers who brought the Christian faith and tried to convert the pagan Finno-Ugrian tribes to the Christian faith. The pagans of Latvia resisted being converted and news of this spread to the Pope. He chose to have Crusaders visit Latvia to try and help influence what was going on.

The city of Riga was founded in 1201 and slowly became the largest and most beautiful city in the southern part of the Baltic Sea. Upon the arrival of the Germans there was no further development of the separate tribal realms of the ancient Latvians.

During the 13th century the Livonian Confederation formed under the German authorities which was made up by Latvia and Estonia. The Hanseatic League (Hansa), also known as the Northern German Trading Organizations, was made up of Riga, Cesis, Limbazi, Koknese, and Valmiera. From this time on the city of Riga became a central point for trading between the East and the West, forming close cultural contacts with Western Europe.

During the late 15th century the Latvians were experiencing great changes such as the Reformation and the collapse of the Livonian nation. The Latvian War lasted from 1558-1583, after which time, what is known today as Latvia, came under Polish-Lithuanian rule. However, in Latgale there remained a strong Catholic hold.

After the completion of the Polish-Swedish War in 1629 the city of Riga was ruled by the Swedish. Riga continued to be known as the largest and most developed city. The city of Vidzeme was referred to as the "Swedish Bread Basket" because its supplying the Swedish

kingdom with wheat. However, the rest of the country of Latvia remained under Polish control until 1793 when it became Russian.

During the 17th century there was a merger of the Couronians, Latgallians, Selonians, Semgallians, and Livonians, creating a nation that was culturally unified which became known as the Latvians, speaking the common Latvian language.

In 1700, the Great Northern War broke out. It was due to the outcome of this war that has direct relation to today's Latvian territory and the claims made by the Russian Empire. The Russians set out claiming the city of Riga, a rich and famous town. Then, in 1710, the Russian Tsar, Peter I was able to take control of Vidzeme. It was through the cities of Riga and Vidzeme that Russia was able to lay a clear passage to Europe. At the end of 18th century, all of Latvia's territory was under Russian rule.

Serfdom was done away with in Courland in 1818 and in Vidzeme in 1819. In 1849 there was a law passed creating a legal basis for the creation of peasant-owned farms. In Latgale, serfdom was not abolished until 1861. Industry developed very quickly and so therefore the number of people living there increased.

Latvia became one of Russia's most developed provinces. From the 1850's to the 1880's there developed the first Latvian National Awakening among the intellectuals. This movement was similar to the nationalistic trends in other parts of Europe. The movement was a literary and cultural movement with political implications. The Latvians who were involved met with severe conflict from the Baltic Germans.

During this time there was an increase in pauperization in rural areas and a growth in urbanization. A loose, but broad leftist movement called the "New Current," arose in the late 1880s. Rainis and Peteris Stucka led the movement. The movement was soon influenced by Marxism which brought about the creation of the Latvian Social Democratic Labour Party. In the 20th century there was an explosion of popular discontent leading to the 1905 revolution.

During the time of World War I, Latvia began to see the possibilities of having freedom and being independent. The Latvian riflemen fought for the Russians during the war. They earned recognition for their bravery far into Europe. The Latvians took part in fighting during the Russian civil war (1917-1922) and were on both sides, with one group called the Latvian Red Riflemen supporting the Bolsheviks. In the autumn of 1919 the Red Latvian Division was a part of a battle against the "white" anti-Bolshevik army headed by the Russian general Anton Denikin.

Latvia was a part of the German-led United Baltic Duchy which collapsed after the defeat of the German Empire in 1918. Once the end of World War I came along, with it came chaos so Latvia took advantage of this time and chose to declare its independence. Latvia officially claimed independence on November 18, 1918. This date is now Latvia's Independence Day.

The first group of people to acknowledge Latvia's independence was the Russian SFSR on August 11, 1920. The authority over the Latvia nation and territory once and for all times was returned to Latvia. Unfortunately, the promises given to the Latvians in 1920 were promises that would later be taken back. Internationally Latvia's independence was recognized on January 26, 1921. On September 22, 1921 Latvia became a member of the League of Nations.

Due to the situation of the world economy dissatisfaction began to take hold in the early 1930s. On May 15, 1934 in Riga, Prime Minister Karlis Ulmanis, who was one of the fathers of Latvian independence, took power by a bloodless coup d'état: the activities of Parliament and all political parties were suspended.

In the 2nd half of the 1930s there was much economic growth which pushed Latvia to one of the highest living standards in Europe. Due to the increase in living standards in Latvia there was not an opposition to the authoritarian rule of Prime Minister Karlis Ulmanis.

The Molotov-Ribbentrop pact was signed between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany on August 23, 1939. Latvia, along with Estonia and Lithuania, signed a mutual assistance pact with the Soviet Union allowing up to 25,000 troops onto Latvian soil. Following an initiative from Nazi Germany, Latvia, on October 30, 1939 decided upon an agreement to send the ethnic Germans back in the wake of a Soviet takeover.

The Soviet foreign minister Molotov accused the Baltic states of being a part of a conspiracy against the Soviet Union. On June 16, 1940 the Soviet Union declared for Latvia that the government was to be replaced and that an unlimited number of troops be allowed into the country. The Latvian government decided to allow the Soviets to take over the government. The Soviet troops took over the country on June 17th.

The Soviets had elections staged during July 14-15, 1940 while the results were announced in Moscow 12 hours before the polls were closed in Latvia. It was shown that the documents with the election results were forged. The newly elected party was the People's Assembly that affirmed Latvia as a Socialist Soviet Republic and asked for permission to be admitted into the Soviet Union illegally under the interwar constitution on July 21. Latvia was included into the Soviet Union on August 5, 1940. However, the Latvian government continued to operate in exile while the republic was under Soviet control.

During the spring of 1941 the Soviet government began planning to remove anti-Soviet elements from the Baltic States. General Ivan Serov, Deputy Commissar of Public Security of the Soviet Union, signed Order No. 001223, "Regarding the Procedure for Carrying out the Deportation of Anti-Soviet Elements from Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia." During the time of June 13-14, 1941, 15,424 inhabitants of Latvia including 1,771 Jews and 742 ethnic Russians were deported out of Latvia into camps and special settlements, mostly in Siberia. There were a total of 25,000 people deported during the first year of Soviet occupation. However, when the Nazi invasion occurred, it stopped short the deportation of several thousand people throughout the Baltic States.

Nazi troops took over Riga on July 1, 1941. After the Nazi takeover, there began a slow elimination of the Jewish and Gypsy populations with a number of killings taking place in Rumbula. The killings were done by the Einsatzgruppe A, the Wehrmacht, and Marines. Latvian collaborators, including the 500-1,500 Arajs Commandos killed around 26,000 Jews and 2,000 or more Latvian members of the SD. By the end of 1941 almost the entire Jewish population had been killed or placed in death camps. The Holocaust claimed approximately 85,000 lives in Latvia.

There were a great number of Latvians who resisted the German occupation. The resistance movement was divided into two different groups; one was pro-independence under the Latvian Central Council and the other pro-Soviet under the Latvian Partisan Movement whose headquarters were in Moscow. Their Latvian commander was Arturs Sprogis.

The Nazis wanted to Germanize the Baltic States after the war. In 1943 and 1944 two divisions of the Waffen SS were formed, made up of Latvian volunteers who chose to help Germany fight the Red Army. In 1944 when the Germans arrived in Latvia they were met with opposition and a battle broke out where ultimately the German forces were defeated.

While the war was going on both the German army and the Red Army were attempting to gather people for their purposes of trying to build their armies. When this was taking place, Latvia's "live resources" were becoming smaller and smaller. During 1944 once again part of Latvia was controlled by the Soviets in which they chose to re-establish pre-war order. It was seen then and there, that the Soviets were there to stay.

In the initial years following the war it was a very somber and dismal time for the Latvian nation. The Gulag, which was a Soviet concentration camp, housed over 120,000 Latvian prisoners. However, some of the Latvians were able to dodge the SS. On March 25, 1949, nearly 43,000 rural residents were deported to Siberia in a sweeping repressive action.

A program was initiated in Latvia stating the Latvian and Russian languages would be used with a dwindling of other lesser-known languages. In some areas of Latvia there was Russification or Latvianization. During the time after the war Latvia was made to adopt Soviet-farming methods. The economic infrastructure developed in the 1920s and 1930s was purposely destroyed. The rural areas were forced into collectivization management programs.

Educated specialists in Moscow decided that some of the Soviet Union's most advanced manufacturing factories were to be based in Latvia. Some of the new industries that took hold in Latvia were a major machinery factory and electro technical factories. Some of the food and oil processing plants were brought to Latvia. Since there were not enough Latvians in the country to man the factories Russian workers were brought in which began to show in the number of Latvians and the number of Russians living within the country. There was a drastic drop in ethnic Latvians within the country. Before the war ethnic Latvians made up 77% of the population whereas after the war the percentage dropped to 52% of the people. From 1989 to 2005 there again has been a decrease in the number of Latvians in Latvia.

On August 23, 1989 it had been 50 years since the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact. In order to help the world focus on the fate of the Baltic nations, Latvians, Lithuanians and Estonians joined hands in a human chain that stretched 600 kilometers, from Tallinn to Riga to Vilnius. It symbolically represented the united wish of the Baltic States for independence.

On May 4, 1990 a big step was taken towards restoration of independence. The Latvian SSR Supreme Council held the first democratic election since the 1930s. They adopted a resolution for restoring independence that included a transition period. On August 21, 1991 parliament voted for an end to the transition period, thus restoring Latvia's pre-war independence. On September 6, 1991 Latvian independence was once again re-instated by the USSR.

Once Latvia was again seen as an independent nation they became a member of the United Nations, very quickly becoming one of the democratic nations again in the free world. In 1992 they became eligible for the International Monetary Fund and in 1994 took part in the NATO Partnership for Peace program. That same year they also signed a free trade agreement with the European Union. Latvia became a member of the European Council and a candidate for the membership in the European Union and NATO. Latvia was the first of the three Baltic nations to be accepted into the World Trade Organization.

At the end of 1999 in Helsinki, the heads of the European Union governments invited Latvia to begin negotiations to come into the European Union. In 2004 Latvia was admitted into the European Union and NATO. On April 2nd Latvia was voted a member of NATO and on May 1st along with the other two Baltic nations, Latvia joined the EU.

Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Latvia; Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life Vol. 4 Europe 1998

Religion

Non-Christian Religions:

Jewish:

During the reign of Nazi Germany 1940-1945 most of the Jews were annihilated. After the Nazi period, many Jews fled to Latvia running from Stalin's persecution. A large portion of the synagogues in Latvia were seized by the state and turned into other buildings. There was a renewal in the Jewish community once Latvian independence was obtained.

In 1994 there were 5 Jewish congregations. By 1995 there were 14,000 Jews although the number has been declining due to an immigration of the Jewish people back into Israel.

Atheists and Nonreligious:

The atheists and the nonreligious groups form the largest non-Christian group in Latvia. These two groups were made up of only 1,500 individuals in the beginning of the 20th century. By 1970, 47% of the population was within the atheist and nonreligious group.

Several reasons explaining such a large shift include the forces of modernity, Communist education, and official anti-church propaganda. During the 1980s and 1990s the people of Latvia were in the process of breaking away from Communism and Soviet domination. Many began to quickly turn back to the Christian faith of their ancestors. By 1995 atheists and nonreligious had dropped to 6.2 and 27.9% of the population, respectively.

Orthodox Church:

In 988 A.D. Russians converted to Orthodox Christianity. At that time, people in the eastern sections of Latvia made tribute payments to principalities in the regions further to the east. In this experience, the people of Latvia came into contact with Christianity. The pioneer missionary who brought Christianity to Latvia was Meinhard, a monk from Holstein. He came to Latvia in 1180 arriving after German merchants. Six years later he was named bishop of Uxkull.

Christianity only made progress in Latvia when the third bishop, Albert of Buxhoevden, arrived in the country with 23 ships and 500 Saxon soldiers. He believed that the only way to evangelize Latvia was to come behind a “vanguard of protection and under a canopy of domination.” In 1202 Albert of Buxhoevden was given permission from Pope Innocent III to found the Order of the Brothers of the Sword, which was also known as the Livonian Order. The soldier-missionaries began to spread the gospel and conquered until the tribal kingdoms were beaten. Albert gave pieces of land (fiefs) to his knights for them to govern, thus the country’s civil and spiritual rule was under the bishop.

From 1282 Riga was an archbishopric. By the end of the 15th century, 70 churches served the land. During the time of the Middle Ages, clergy were frustrated that the people were mixing beliefs from the pre-Christian faith and from Christianity. Complaints were heard even up into the 18th century. Lutheran pastors stated that ancient songs, tales and fables affected the beliefs of their parishioners.

The Orthodox Church grew from both Slavic immigration and from Latvian conversion. The Latvians chose to align with the Russians in order to be in opposition to the German nobility that had ruled over them for so many years. Latvia’s Orthodox Church was free and independent before Nazi occupation, but were forced under the Moscow Patriarchate when Latvia was taken over by the Soviet Union.

Today, the Orthodox churches report over 105,000 members in five groups. This number represents almost 5 % of the population of Latvia. The church reports a negative growth rate of 7.5%. The Russian Orthodox Church is the largest of the Orthodox groups reporting 110 congregations and over 65,000 followers.

Catholic Church:

The Jesuits were very active in Latvia during the 16th century. Because of their actions a large portion of the Catholic churches remained in later years. The province of Latgale has been the Catholic stronghold in the southeastern part of Latvia.

During the mid-17th century most of the Catholic clergy spoke Polish and the ecclesiastical leadership was all Poles. The Catholic clergy was able to be a big part of the cultural society in Latvia by encouraging the intellectual people of Latvia, also standing against Russification.

In 1983 Julijans Vaivods was elevated to the status of a Cardinal from Rome. During this time in Latvian history the Communist government allowed Catholicism. Cardinal Vaivods' elevation marked the first time that a person in Latvia had attained such a rank in Latvian history and throughout the USSR. He was 87 at the time that he was raised to this status and served for seven years, leading and fighting against communism.

There was a revitalization of the Catholic faith seen in the number of baptisms. In 1985 there were 5,167 which jumped to 10,661 in 1991. The Catholics in Latvia were seen to be spreading more throughout the country when only 42% of the Catholic population lived in Latgale.

The Holy See has diplomatic relations with Latvia and in 2000 was represented to the government and the Catholic hierarchy by a nuncio residing in Vilnius (Lithuania).

Currently, Roman Catholics number almost 20% of the people in Latvia with over 241 congregations. The church records a negative growth rate (-1.2%).

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints:

There were 4 churches for the Latter-day Saints. There are 200 people that make up those congregations.

Jehovah's Witnesses:

There are 18 congregations of Jehovah's Witnesses. The percent of the population that is Jehovah's Witness is 0.07.

Scientology:

In 1999 there was one Scientology church in Latvia. The religion of Scientology leads the followers to believe that you are to become certain of your spiritual existence, your relationship with the Supreme Being, and your role in eternity. Scientology means "the study of truth." In scientology a person is able to solve his/her own problems, gain happiness, and know their abilities by being aware of all that goes on around them.

Evangelical Groups

Lutheran Church

Luther's ideas made their way into Latvia very early. During the 1520s some of Riga's leading citizens were supporting and promoting the early stages of the Reformation. The debate became what types of reform should come to the church and how. Mobs began to attack monasteries and churches. For the first time Christian worship was performed in the Latvian language along with Latvians becoming part of the clergy although these things did not happen for decades. The Catholic Teutonic Knights were defeated in several places so were unable to remain in control of Livonia which is now modern day Latvia. The land was then portioned between Sweden and Poland-Lithuania. The part of under Swedish control had a strong and well-organized Protestant church.

The Latvians held to their Lutheran religion less strictly. The clergy in the parishes were German, controlled by the German landowners. Also, the clergy lived in a completely different world and so there was not great understanding between the two cultures. During the 18th century when Latvia came under Russian rule the Germans were still deciding who would be taking over the pastorates.

There was a renewal in the Lutheran church, however, with the German Pietist missionaries, especially the Moravian brethren from Herrnhut. By 1738 a seminary had been built and 4,000 members made up the congregations. Also, because Lutherans had an emphasis on education, they contributed to the spread of literacy through Latvia.

The Lutheran church in Latvia was part of a season of growth and health from 1920 until 1940. During this time hymns in the Latvian language were composed, the New Testament was translated into the Latvian language, and Latvian clergy were recruited, many who would ultimately lead the denomination. By 1935 68.35% of ethnic Latvians were Lutheran and 55.2% of the nation overall.

While the Nazi's were in power the Lutheran church lost much of its leadership to death, escape to the west, or deportation to Siberia. Many of the church buildings suffered greatly or were destroyed. The number of Lutherans dropped from 600,000 in 1956 down to 25,000 in 1987 when Latvia was under the control of the Soviets.

In 1987 a group of young, well-educated theologians and clergy in the Evangelical Lutheran Church organized the Rebirth and the Renewal movement. The goals they set included working towards parish renewal, structural renewal of their denomination, and confronting the Communist officials. The group was small in number, but they were able to have a large impact in the life of the church and eventually in the nation. In 1989 at the Lutheran synod all of the leadership of the denomination was voted out and members of the Rebirth and Renewal group

were voted in. Some of the movement's members helped to found the Popular Front of Latvia which played a major role in the newly-independent country.

Once Communism fell in Latvia the religious climate very quickly changed and the Lutheran church came alive in new ways. Some of the new changes took form in church buildings being rebuilt and restored. Christian instruction was given in schools and sermons were published in the media.

In 1999 there were over 301 Lutheran churches throughout Latvia. Membership is reported with numbers anywhere from 160,000 members up to 300,000 adults

Seventh - day Adventist:

There are 44 congregations that make up the Seventh - day Adventist churches in Latvia with nearly 4000 members.

Baptist:

In 1998 there were over 6,200 Baptists in Latvia in as many as 75 congregations. The report estimates around 0.12 percent of the population in Latvia is Baptist. The Latvian Baptist churches make up the Union of Baptist Churches of Latvia. The group as a whole is a member of the Baptist World Alliance.

Pentecostal:

Within Latvia there are 49 of congregations. Within the church there are 4,000 adult members.

Sources: <http://www.nationsencyclopedia.com/Europe/Latvia-RELIGIONS.html>;
http://www.cesnur.org/testi/bryn/br_gills.htm; <http://www.randburg.com/lv/religion.html>; www.scientology.org;
World Christian Encyclopedia 2nd Edition 2001

People Groups

100516

Armenian

The Armenian people live in the region of Eastern Europe and Eurasia. Other names that might be referred to of the Armenian people are Armiane, Ermeni, Ermini, Hai, and Western Armenian. There are 2,700 Armenians living in Latvia. The language spoken by this people group is Armenian.

The primary religion is orthodox Christianity. Within this population in Latvia 50% is Orthodox and 5% are Evangelical.

100675**Azerbaijani, North**

The Azerbaijani, North are located in Eastern Europe and Eurasia. Other names for this people group are Azerbaijan, Azeri Turk, and Turkmen. Among the region of Latvia there are 2,400 people in this group. The primary language spoken is Azerbaijani, North.

This group makes up one of the least-reached people groups. The main religion is Islam with no adherence to Christianity within this group.

101100**Bashkir**

The Bashkir are located in Eastern Europe and Eurasia. Other names for this people group are Bashkirian and Bashkort. The population of this people group within Latvia is 600. The language spoken among this people is Bashkir.

The major religion is Sunni Islam. There is less than a 5 percent adherence to Christianity.

102927**British**

The British people group is located in Eastern Europe and Eurasia. Other names one might find for this people group is Anglo-Pakistani, Euronesian, Scottish, Anglophones, Scot, and White. There are 400 British living in Latvia. The primary language is English.

Their primary religion is Christianity with a 70 percent adherence.

101722**Bulgarian**

The Bulgarian people are located within Eastern Europe and Eurasia. Other names one might hear them referred are Balgarski, Moldovian, Pomak, Bogomil, or Palityan. Within Latvia there are 400 Bulgarians. The language spoken among this people is Bulgarian.

They are not a part of the least reached people groups in Latvia. The primary religion is Christianity with a 72 percent adherence.

101833**Byelorussian**

The Byelorussian can be found in Eastern Europe and Eurasia. The population within this country is 92,000 people. Another name that might be used to refer to this people group is Belarussian. The language spoken among this people is Belarusan.

The primary religion among this people group is Catholicism with a 59 percent adherence rate.

102226
Chuvash

The Chuvash people are located within Eastern Europe and Eurasia. Other names that might refer to this people group are the Bolgar or Bulgar people. The population within Latvia is 1,300 people.

The primary religion is Orthodox with a 35 percent adherence rate.

114916
Deaf

The deaf are located in Eastern Europe and Eurasia. It is unknown as of right now what the deaf population in Latvia is. They are able to communicate with the Latvian Sign Language. The primary religion among this group is Christianity.

102954
Estonian

The Estonian people are located in the region of Eastern Europe and Eurasia. Other possible names that might be referred to of this people group are Estlased, Northern Estonian, Estonia, and Southern Estonian. Their population within this country is 2,600. They speak the language Estonian.

The primary religion is Christianity with a 61 percent adherence rate.

103021
Finnish

The Finnish people are located within Eastern Europe and Eurasia. These people are a part of the Finnish people group. The population of the Finnish people in Latvia numbers 400. The language spoken among this people is Finnish.

The major religion within this people group is Christianity with a 90 percent adherence. There is currently one evangelical fellowship per every 10,000 individuals.

103298
Georgian

The Georgian people are located in Eastern Europe and Eurasia. Other possible names that this people group might be referred to are the Adjari, Gorji, Imerxev Georgian, Kartveli, Adzhar, Gruzin, Kartuli, or the Western Georgian. Their population within Latvia is 1,200. The language used to communicate is Georgian.

The primary religion is Orthodox with a 40 percent adherence to Christianity. They are more than 5 percent evangelical with a growing number of new fellowships.

103305

German

The Germans are located within Eastern Europe and Eurasia. Other names the Germans might be referred to are the German, Standard; Saxon; Volga German; High German; and Transylvanian. The population within Latvia is 1,400. The language used to communicate is German, Standard.

The primary religion among the Germans is Catholicism and Orthodoxy with a 78 percent adherence rate. The evangelicals make up more than 10 percent of the population with one fellowship per 10,000 individuals.

013480

Greek

The Greeks are located within the region of Eastern Europe and Eurasia on the continent of Europe. Other names that the Greeks might be referred to are the Dimotiki, Greek Cypriot, Hellenic, Romei, Romeos, and the Urum. The population of Greeks in Latvia numbers 300. The language spoken among this people is Greek.

The primary religion is Orthodox with a 90 percent adherence rate. The number of evangelicals is not known, but they make up more than 5 percent of the population with a growing number of new fellowships.

103918

Hungarian

The Hungarian people are located within the region of Eastern Europe and Eurasia on the continent of Europe. Other possible names that you might hear the Hungarians referred to are the Magyar, Siculi, or the Szekely. The number of Hungarians in Latvia is 300. The language spoken among the Hungarians is Hungarian.

The primary religion is Catholicism with an 85 percent adherence level. There is more than a 10 percent adherence rate among evangelicals with one fellowship per every 10,000 believers.

210100

Jew, Latvian

The Jews in Latvian are located in Eastern Europe and Eurasia on the continent of Europe. The population in this country is 8,200. The language which they use to communicate is Latvian.

They are a part of the least reached people groups in Latvia. The primary religion among this group is the ethnic religions with a smaller division of Judaism. It is not known if there are any Christians among this group.

104657
Karelian

The Karelian people can be found in the region of Eastern Europe and Eurasia on the continent of Europe. The Karelians (also Karels) are descendants of Baltic Finns whose historic homeland, Karelia, is in Finland and the Republic of Karelia in Russia

Within Latvia there are 400 Karelian people. One other name that this people group would be referred to would be the Norgorod.

The primary religion of the Karelian people is Russian Orthodox with a 67 percent adherence. It is not known exactly how many evangelicals are among this people. There is an accelerating number of new fellowships among this people.

104791
Kazakh

The Kazakh people are located in the region of Eastern Europe and Eurasia on the continent of Europe. Other names that might refer to the Kazakh people are Gazaqi, Hazake, Kazax, Qazaq, and Qazaqi.

The population of this people within Latvia is 900. The language used to communicate is Kazakh.

This group of people is a part of the least-reached people group. Their primary religion is Sunni Islam. At this point and time it is not known if there are any adherents to Christianity.

105674
Latvian

The Latvian of Latvia is located in Eastern Europe and Eurasia on the continent of Europe. Other names that might refer to this people group are East Latvian, Lett, Upper Latvian, Latgalian, and Lettish. The number of Latvians is 1,249,000 people. The language spoken among this group is Latvian.

The primary religion among this people is Roman Catholicism as 78 percent of the people follow Catholicism. There is a recorded 13.2 percent noted evangelicals reporting more than one fellowship per 10,000 individuals.

105742
Lezgian

The Lezgian of Latvia is located in Eastern Europe and Eurasia on the continent of Europe. Another name for this group of people is Lezghi. The population of this people group in Latvia is 200. The language that is spoken among this people is Lezgi.

The major religion that is adhered to is Sunni Islam. The Lezgian are one of the least reached people groups. Currently, the number of believers to Christianity is meager, if any.

105803
Lithuanian

The Lithuanian people are located in Eastern Europe and Eurasia on the continent of Europe. The population of Lithuanians within Latvia number 30,000. Another name that this people group could possibly go by is the Samogit. The language spoken among this people group is Lithuanian.

Their primary religion is Roman Catholicism. There is an 85 percent adherence to Catholicism. It is not known how many people are evangelical. The number of evangelicals ranges from less than one percent up to as high as two percent.

105805
Livonian

The Livonian people are located in Eastern Europe and Eurasia on the continent of Europe. The language spoken among the Livonian people is Liv. The population within Latvia is made up of 20 members.

The primary religion is Christianity with a 70 percent adherence rate to Christianity, but it is not known the number of Evangelicals.

105877
Mari, Low

The Mari, Low is located in Eastern Europe and Eurasia on the continent of Europe. Other possible names that this people group might be referred to as are the Cheremis, Low Mari, Eastern Mari, and the Mari. Their population within Latvia is 400. The primary language spoken among the Mari, Low is Mari, Eastern.

The primary religion among this people group is Orthodox. There is a 90 percent adherence to the Orthodox. The number of Christian evangelicals is not known.

106730
Moldavian

The Moldovian people are located in Eastern Europe and Eurasia on the continent of Europe. The population within the Latvia is 2,800. The primary language spoken among this people is Romanian.

The primary religion is Orthodox with an 82 percent adherence rate. They are not part of the least reached people groups. The number of evangelicals is not known. However, there are evangelical fellowships among this people.

106791
Mordvinian

The Mordvinian people are located in Eastern Europe and Eurasia on the continent of Europe. The population of this people group found in Latvia is at 900 people. The language they speak is Erzya.

The primary religion is Orthodox with 65 percent adherence rate.

107699
Ossete

The Ossete is a people group located in Eastern Europe and Eurasia. Other names that might be used to refer to the Ossete people are Allagir, Iron, Tagaur, Western Ossete, and Western Ossetian. The population within this country is 400. The primary language is Osetin.

Their primary religion is Sunni Islam. The Muslim groups of adherents make up 36 percent of this people group. The number of Christian evangelicals is varies between 2 and 5 percent.

108096
Polish

The Polish are located in Eastern Europe and Eurasia on the continent of Europe. The population of Polish people in Latvia is 51,000 people. Several other names that might be used for this people group are Pole, Silesian, and Poles. The language used to communicate among this group is Polish.

Their primary religion is Roman Catholic. It is recorded that 85 percent of this people adhere to Catholicism. The number of Evangelicals among the Polish people is less than two percent.

108397
Romani, Baltic

The Romani, Baltic are located in Eastern Europe and Eurasia on the continent of Europe. Other names that this people group might use are Arliski, Baltic Gypsy, Jerides, Koochi, Roma, Arliski

Balkan Gypsy, Dzambazi, Kochi, Kuchi, or Zagari. Their population within Latvia is 7,500 people. The language that is spoken is Romani, Baltic.

Their primary religion is Christianity with a 61 percent adherence rate. It is not known the number of evangelicals that are located within Latvia.

108398

Romanian

The Romanian people are located within Eastern Europe and Eurasia on the continent of Europe. A couple of other names that might be used for this people group are Istrio-Romanian and Ottenia. Their population within Latvia is 800 people. Their language is Romanian.

The primary religion is Catholic and Orthodox with an 85 percent adherence rate. It is not known the number of Evangelicals within Latvia.

108452

Russian

The Russians people group are located in Eastern Europe and Eurasia on the continent of Europe. Other possible names that might be used to refer to the Russian people are Eluosi, Olossu, or Russ. Within Latvia there are 742,000 people that make up the Russian population. The language used to communicate is Russian.

Russian Orthodox is the primary religion. There is an adherence percentage of 50 percent. The number of Christian evangelicals number less than a half of a percent.

109733

Tajik

The Tajik people are located in Eastern Europe and Eurasia on the continent of Europe. The population of the Tajik people in Latvia is 300. Other names that could be used to refer to the Tajik people are Persian Tajik, Persian, Dari, Tadzhik, or the Tadzhiki. The language spoken among this people group is Tajiki.

The primary religion that is practiced is Sunni Islam. There are no known adherents to the Christian faith among the Tajik people.

109874

Tatar

The Tatar people can be found in Eastern Europe and Eurasia on the continent of Europe. Within the country of Latvia there are 4,200 people. Other possible names that the Tatar people might be referred to are Dada, Dadan, Kazan Tatar, Lipka, Tartar, Tata'er, Tura, or the Turkish Tatar.

The primary religion among the Tatar's is Islam with a sub-division of Sunni. There is a 1.5 percent adherence to Christianity, but it is not known if there are few if any evangelicals.

110362 Udmurt

The Udmurt people of Latvia are located in the region of Eastern Europe and Eurasia on the continent of Europe. Another name that might be used for this people group is Kalmez or Votyak. There are 400 people of the Udmurt people group located in Latvia. The primary language used to communicate is Udmurt.

The primary religion is Orthodox with a 55 percent adherence rate. The numbers of evangelicals are few, if any.

110376 Ukrainian

The Ukrainian of Latvia is located in Eastern Europe and Eurasia on the continent of Europe. The population of the Ukrainians in Latvia is 68,000 people.

The primary religion of this people group is Orthodox with a 64 percent adherence rate. It is unknown how many people within the Ukrainians are evangelical Christians.

110472 Uzbek, Southern

The Uzbek, Southern are located in Eastern Europe and Eurasia on the continent of Europe. In Latvia the population of the Uzbek, Southern is 800. Other names that might be used for the Uzbek, Southern people are Afghan Uzbek, Southern Uzbek, Uzbek, or Uzbek. The language which is spoken within this people group is Uzbek, Southern.

The primary religion practice within this people group is Sunni Islam. No evangelicals are known to exist within the Southern Uzbek.

Source: www.joshuaproject.net

Missiological Implications:

1. Evangelical Christians and churches should emphasize evangelism and church starting among the large and growing population of non-religious peoples in Latvia. This

population segment is present in all nations and demands attention on every front. Evangelicals need to formulate and teach a methodology for reaching the non-religious.

2. Evangelical Christians need to develop and train Latvian Christians in the methods of sharing the Good News with Catholics and Orthodox peoples. These methods will of course not insure salvation but will give Latvian believers better ways to approach the Catholics and Orthodox persons.
3. Evangelical Christians and churches should seek ways to communicate the Good News to the populations of Uzbek persons in Latvia. The Uzbeks as a whole are seriously under evangelized.
4. Evangelical Christians and churches should pray that the governing powers in Latvia will insure and maintain religious freedom. This effort will be in the face of efforts of the Orthodox and Catholic churches to restrict this freedom.
5. Evangelical Christians and churches should also emphasize evangelism and church starting among the Polish peoples who are 51,000 strong in Latvia.
6. Evangelical Christians and churches should pray for a general spiritual awakening in Latvia. The spiritual urgency of the early 1900's has declined into a situation of spiritual apathy. Only some 2 % of the people are actually engaged in Christian worship and service. Nominalism is found even in the Lutheran Churches.
7. Evangelical Christians and churches should seek to help Latvian Christian groups to provide more leadership training—especially in the areas of lay witness and leadership.
8. Evangelical Christians and churches should introduce the concepts of small group evangelism, worship, and house churches.

The people of Latvia have been under oppression for many years and just recently have they been able to come out from under that oppression. Pray that they would be able to hear the gospel and that it would spread throughout Latvia.

Pictures:

<http://www.galenfrysinger.com/latvia.htm>

Links:

<http://www.baltictimes.com/>;

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Latvia>; <http://www.latvia-usa.org/>