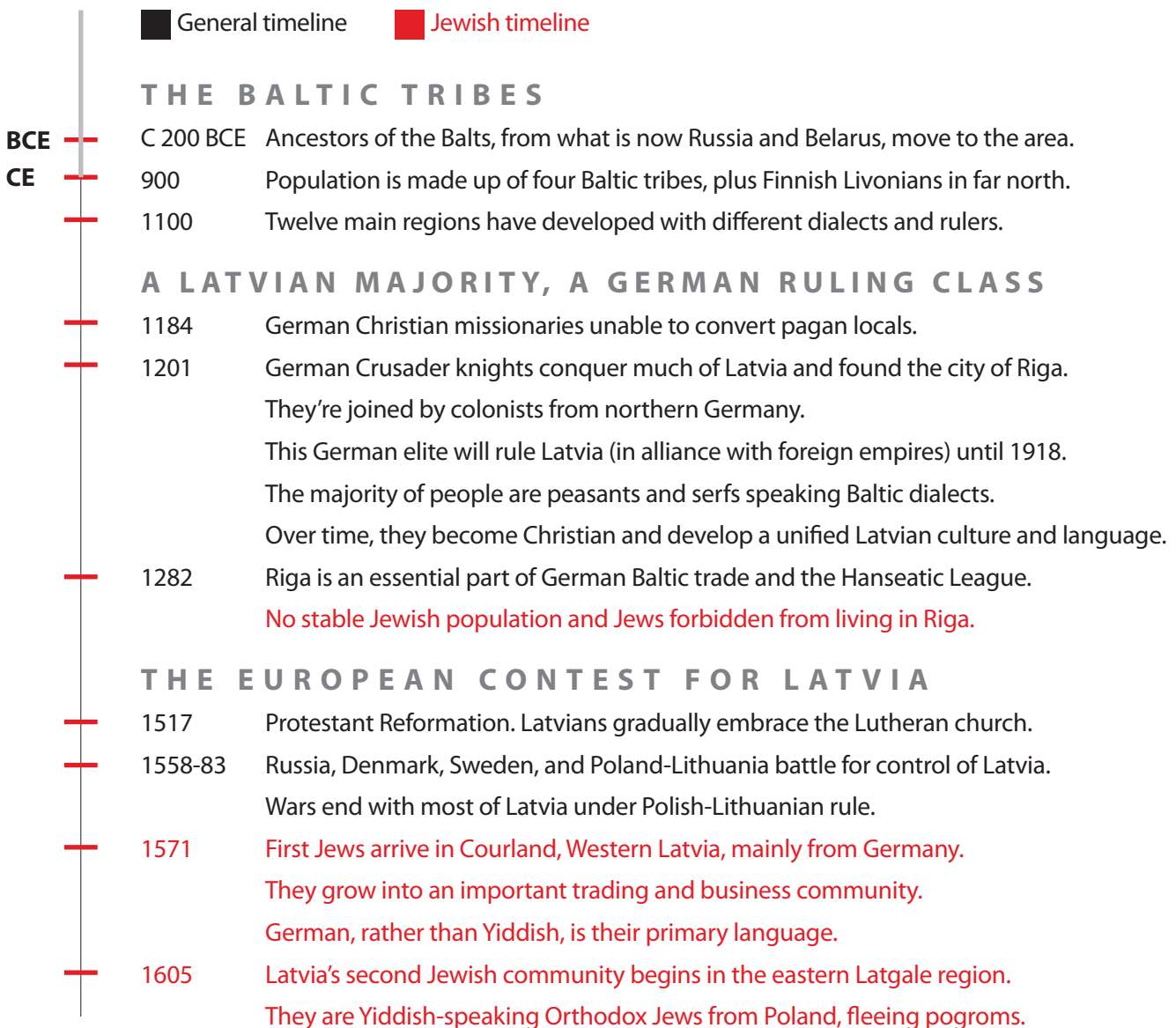




## LATVIA THROUGH THE AGES

Latvia is now a stable and beautiful country, but as a small land located alongside powerful neighbors and empires, its history has been tumultuous and sometimes tragic. Indeed, Latvia has, for most of its history, been ruled over by others and did not become an independent nation until the twentieth century. This timeline traces the rulers and empires that have come and gone in Latvia and focuses on the multi-ethnic population, including the country's once-dynamic Jewish community that lived under them. Many of the dates and figures are approximate only.



- 1629 They are a poor community of small farmer & traders.  
Except for a handful of exceptions, Jews still prohibited from living in Riga.
- 1700-21 Western and Northern Latvia, including Riga, now part of the Swedish empire.
- 1717 Latvia's population declines by 40 % due to famine and plagues.
- 1717 Jews of Courland suffer discriminatory taxes and threat of expulsion.
- 1760 Many Jews are forced out of Courland. Latgale's Jewish community numbers 3000.

## DEVELOPMENT, DIVERSITY & DISASTER UNDER THE RUSSIANS

- 1795 Latvia is now part of the Russian Empire.  
Re-established Jewish community in Courland thrives economically.  
Full Russian citizens. Haskalah (Jewish enlightenment) movement grows.
- 1817 Serfs emancipated, but German landowners continue to dominate peasantry.  
Beginnings of Latvian nationalist movement, opposition to German nobility.  
Increasing urbanization and industrialization. Riga is Russian Empire's key port.
- 1850 Latvia now has three main Jewish communities:  
Western Courland – more prosperous, Jewish population jumps to 51,000.  
Riga – Jews now allowed to settle in the city.  
Eastern Latgale – 11,000 Jews, poor, some confined to Pale of Settlement shtetls.
- 1881 Anti-Semitism spurs emigration to US, Palestine.
- 1897 A multi-ethnic population: Latvians 68%, Russians 12%, Jews 7%, Germans 6%.  
20,000 Jews in Riga, they play a growing role in its culture and economy.  
Riga houses a culturally diverse Jewish community.  
Reform and Orthodox Judaism, Socialism, Zionism all influential.
- 1905 Latvian nationalist movement strengthens as Russian Empire weakens.
- 1914 World War I leads to chaos and political instability.  
190,000 Jews in Latvia. Many Jews exiled to Russia on suspicion of spying for Germany.  
Others flee fighting and become refugees, especially in Russia.
- 1917 The Russian Revolution: The Bolsheviks replace the Tsarist empire.  
Latvians unsuccessfully seek independence from Russia.  
Jewish population has plummeted to 60,000-80,000.
- 1918 Germans briefly occupy Latvia but retreat after defeat in WWI.

## INDEPENDENCE AND ITS END

- 1918 Latvia's War of Independence begins.
- 1920 Latvian nationalists defeat Red Army and local socialists declare independence.  
A liberal democratic constitution is established.
- 1925 Jews begin to return to Latvia; population rises to 95,500.  
40,000 Jews in Riga, predominantly upper-middle class.  
Large amount of communal, religious, and cultural activity.  
German, Russian, Yiddish, and Hebrew-language Jewish schools.
- 1934 Latvia moves toward fascism under prime minister Kārlis Ulmanis.  
Jewish position declines severely. Many emigrate, including to Palestine.
- 1938 16,573 Latvians in the USSR executed as "spies" during Stalin's Great Terror.
- 1939 Nazi Germany secretly agrees that Soviets will annex Latvia.  
Most Latvian Germans move to Nazi-conquered areas of Poland.

- 1940 Red Army occupies Latvia.
- 1941 Soviets squash opposition: 34,000 Latvians exiled to Siberia.

## THE HOLOCAUST

- 1941 Hitler breaks pact with Stalin and invades USSR, quickly conquering Latvia. Many Latvians welcome Nazis as liberators from Soviet rule.  
Some Jews flee Germans; 80,000 remain in Latvia.  
Latvian Arajs Commandos and Nazis burn Jews alive in Riga synagogue.  
November 30: 14,000 Jews shot dead in Rumbula Forest near Riga.  
Latvia's Jewish community decimated: 69,750 of 80,000 killed.
- 1942 15,000-23,000 Jews from elsewhere deported to Latvia and murdered.
- 1944 Red Army defeats Nazis. Latvia becomes part of Soviet Union.  
200,000 Latvians, including Jews, killed in war.

## A RESTLESS SOVIET SATELLITE

- 1945 Latvian farms collectivized and industry nationalized under Communists. Sustained anti-Soviet activity meets fierce response by government.
- 1949 Many Kulaks (wealthier peasants) & Latvian nationalists exiled or imprisoned.  
Some Jewish survivors & refugees return to Latvia. Others moves to Palestine.  
Authorities downplay Latvian role in Holocaust. Few collaborators punished.
- 1952 Country profoundly altered by mass killings, imprisonments, exile since 1939.
- 1959 Many Russians move to Latvia; Russian language officially favored.  
Jewish population increases to 36,000 with arrival of some Russian Jews.  
Economy based on machine-manufacturing for Soviets.
- 1970 Latvia, a center of Jewish dissident and Zionist movements in USSR.
- 1980 Jewish communal life almost non-existent. Emigration increases.
- 1987 USSR under Gorbachev permits greater Latvian freedom of expression. Baltic states (Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania) push for independence.
- 1989 Hands Across the Baltics: Huge, non-violent independence protests.  
Jewish population 22,900, mainly in Riga.
- 1990 Gorbachev allows elections in Latvia. Non-communists win.  
Population peaks at 2.67 million with Russian influx. Ethnic Latvians just 52%.

## INDEPENDENT AGAIN

- 1991 Soviets use force to try to keep Baltic states in USSR.  
Even with large Russian minority, 73% of Latvians vote for independence.  
Communist rule in USSR collapses. Latvia declares independence.  
Democratic government confronted with significant economic problems.
- 1994 KGB files opened; many Latvians served as KGB informants.
- 2000 Riga's Jewish Community Center established.  
Government supports Holocaust memorials but no action against war criminals.
- 2003 Latvia joins European Union. Average income is just 35% of EU average.  
Population declining due to birth rates and emigration.
- 2009 Severe recession temporarily interrupts period of rapid economic growth.
- 2018 Latvia rated 38th most democratic state out of 167.
- Today Latvia's population: 1.95 million. Jewish population: 5,000-10,000, mainly in Riga.