

Great Commission

Prioritization of Countries



Helping to Make Completing the Great Commission More Meaningful for All Believers

Abstract: Where are the people who have not heard about Jesus? This article seeks to answer this question and address the great need to prioritize the Great Commission. Because most Christians can more easily locate countries rather than people groups, readily available missions information was used to prioritize the nations using ten criteria. Data for 15,893 people groups and 222 countries were used to evaluate the status of Christianity in the nations. The results have many possible applications about world evangelization efforts. People in nations with little access to the gospel especially need prayer, gospel tools, and new missionaries. Greater emphasis needs to be placed on bringing the awesome truth of Jesus to the least reached.

Great Commission Prioritization of Countries

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In areas where there are no hospitals or schools, most people would agree that it should be a priority to provide medical help or education to the people who live there. In a similar way, where very few people have heard the Gospel, most Christians would agree that we should prioritize bringing the truth about Jesus. As Paul said, “It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation. Rather, as it is written ‘Those who were not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand.’” (Romans 15:20, 21)

David Bryant said, “Today five out of six non-Christians in our world have no hope unless missionaries come to them and plant the church among them.”¹ If this is true, perhaps we should do something about it.

Where are the people who have not heard about Jesus? This is a critical question that will be addressed in this article since there is a great need to prioritize and strategize. Because many Christians and churches cannot locate unreached people groups on a map or target them with their missions giving, this article focuses on a country-by-country approach. Thus we will look at the status of the Great Commission in the nations of the world to answer the question, “Where do people have the least opportunity to hear the Gospel?” The nations will then be prioritized using available data. Such findings can be helpful for praying, for churches regarding their missions program, for individual giving towards the Great Commission, etc. Possible next steps are offered. It is hoped that a country prioritization approach will provide a more concrete, understandable way for more Christians to emphasize the least reached in their Great Commission involvement.

Excellent missions-related information is available today. For example, the Joshua Project² (JP) has large amounts of data available freely to churches, organizations, and individuals who can apply it to their specific applications as was done in this paper. Similarly, information from the World Christian Trends AD 30 – AD 2200³ (WCT) book was also used in this country prioritization.

There are numerous parameters that could be used to evaluate the state of the Great Commission in the nations of the world. The weighting of the final ten criteria used here to evaluate countries and produce an overall score out of 100 possible points is shown in Figure A1 and explained in the appendix.

For 15,893 people groups, the Joshua Project has scores for progress, ministry tools, and location (identified as “Country Indices” in Table A1). The JP article MFPrioritizationArticle.doc⁴ provides a description of these three criteria. Using a simple computer program, these three scores were separately multiplied by the respective populations of all the people groups in a given country and then added together. These country totals were then divided by the total population of the people groups in each country to provide an average score for these three categories in each nation.

The JP web site⁵ also provides information about each country regarding the percentage of people living in a least reached people group, the population in least reached people groups, the number of least reached people groups, and the total population. Barrett and Johnson¹ provide data regarding the number of disciple offers per person per year, the number of Christian workers per million population, and the cost (to lead to the baptism) of each new convert.

Table 1 shows the resulting total scores for 222 countries in common between the JP and WCT using the previously mentioned weighting. The highest scores indicate the poorest Great Commission status

and the highest priority, starting with rank / priority #1. Great Commission prioritization scores for the countries are shown by color on a world map in Figure 1 with red representing the highest priority.

These scores are not intended to show minute differences that can distinguish between consecutive countries in the list. Rather, one could possibly say that countries within 20 places or ten points may have a similar priority.

This study is based on statistics. While it is certainly very important to be led by the Holy Spirit, the data here most likely reflect on the truth of the status of the Great Commission. Thus, such information can be used to help make prayerful and objective decisions regarding world evangelization efforts.

There are many possible applications for data like these. For example, the overall prioritization of the U.S. is 123 and of Afghanistan is 1. Table 2 emphasizes the severe lack of Christian resources in Afghanistan, India, and China and the excessive amount in America. 27.8% of the world's full-time Christian workers and 34.1% of all Christian personal or church income are in the USA while 0.0013% and 0.00002% of these resources, respectively, are in Afghanistan.³ Figure 2 shows the nations' relative shares of the world's Christian workers on a per capita basis. Considering the overabundance of Christian resources in the United States, perhaps we should consider minimizing our Great Commission investment in this country where most people have many opportunities to hear the truth about Jesus while there are so many people around the world who have heard little or nothing. For instance, of the 1,533,000 Christian workers in the U.S.,³ 1.28 million or 83.4% of these Christian workers could perhaps be missionaries in another country in order to achieve global equity.⁶

People living in the countries with the highest scores typically have little or no exposure to the Gospel or opportunity to hear about Jesus. For this reason, the people in these countries really need prayer especially since there are few Christians there to pray for all the lost people. It could also be strategic to send new missionaries and focus more outreach on the higher priority nations because many of the people groups in these nations have little or no evangelical activity.

There is a great need to prioritize the Great Commission and strategize. There are many ways that this information can be practically applied to prioritize participation in the Great Commission based on need. For example, we can all maximize our investment in high priority nations. Churches and individuals can evaluate the missionaries / organizations they support and consider focusing more on countries near the top 1/3 of the priority list. Churches could especially think about adding more new missionaries in high priority nations. Churches can establish goals to increase the percentage of their support in the top nations. Scripture / gospel literature support could be earmarked for high priority countries. Lastly, greater emphasis could be placed on international student ministry, in particular seeking to reach people from high priority nations. It can be very easy and strategic to befriend and reach out to future international leaders who are studying in universities away from home.

As agreed upon by more than 2,300 evangelicals from more than 150 nations in the Lausanne Covenant of 1974,⁷

“We are convinced that this is the time for churches and para-church agencies to pray earnestly for the salvation of the unreached and to launch new efforts to achieve world evangelization. A reduction of foreign missionaries and money in an evangelized country may sometimes be necessary to facilitate the national church's growth in self-reliance and to release resources for unevangelized areas. . . . The goal should be, by all available means and at the earliest possible time, that every person will have the opportunity to hear, understand, and receive the good news.”⁸

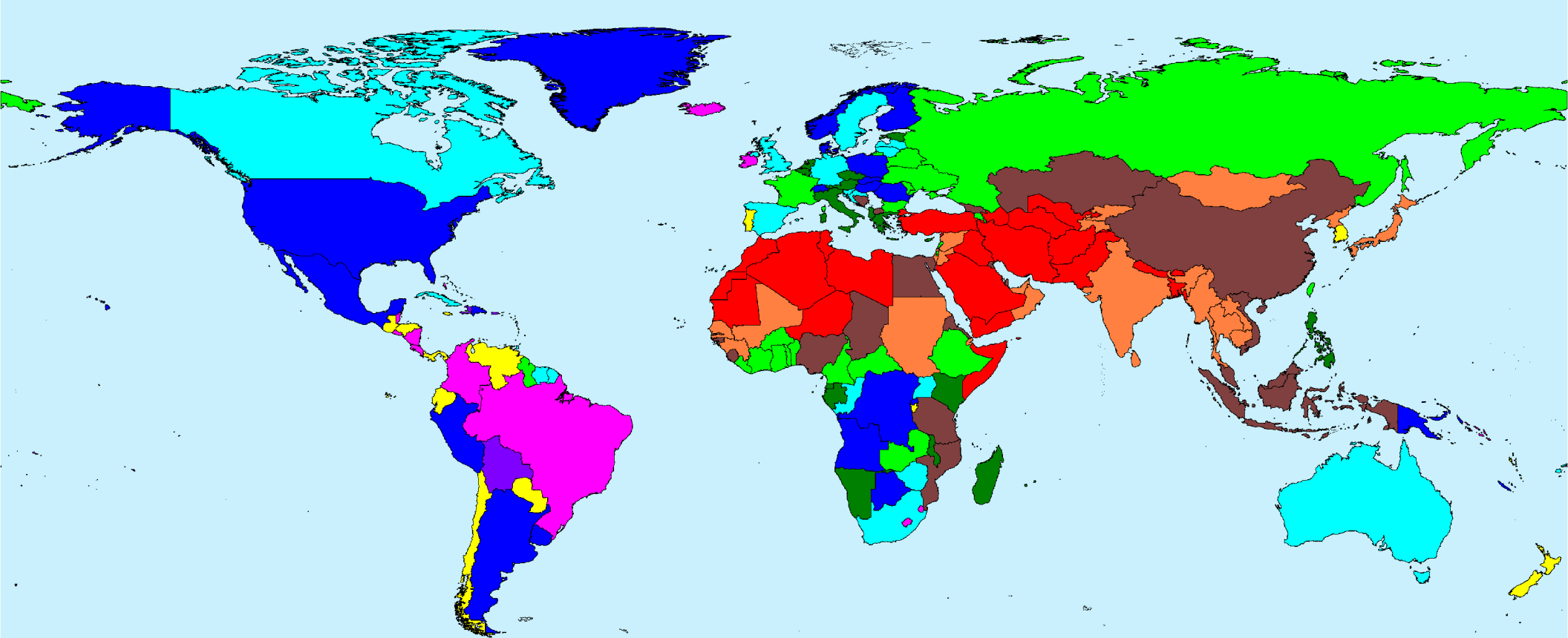
In conclusion, in order to more quickly complete the task Jesus left the church to do, there is a great need to prioritize reaching people who have little or no access to the Gospel. Country prioritization like that done in this article can be used to help churches, ministries, and individuals prioritize their participation in the Great Commission. Many follow-up actions like more focused prayer and new missionaries or gospel resources targeted for countries with many least reached people can be pursued.

- ¹“100 World Christian Quotes.” March 2007.
<http://thetravelingteam.org/?q=node/196>.
- ²“Joshua Project – Downloads.” April 2006.
<http://www.joshuaproject.net/download.php>.
- ³Barrett, David, and Todd Johnson. World Christian Trends AD 30 – AD 2200. Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2001, pp. 416-425.
- ⁴“MFPrioritizationArticle.doc.” March 2007.
<http://www.joshuaproject.net/assets/MFPrioritizationArticle.doc>.
- ⁵“Global Countries Listing.” May 2006. <http://www.joshuaproject.net/globalctry.php>.
- ⁶“Great Commission Priorities.” March 2007, slide 9.
http://www.geocities.com/AdvocatesForTheUnreached/Great_Commission_Priorities.pps.
- ⁷“The Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization.” March 2007.
<http://www.lausanne.org/Brix?pageID=12891>.
- ⁸“The Lausanne Covenant.” March 2007.
<http://www.perspectives.org/about/lausanne.html>.

Table 1 – Country Great Commission Status Scores and Prioritization Ranks

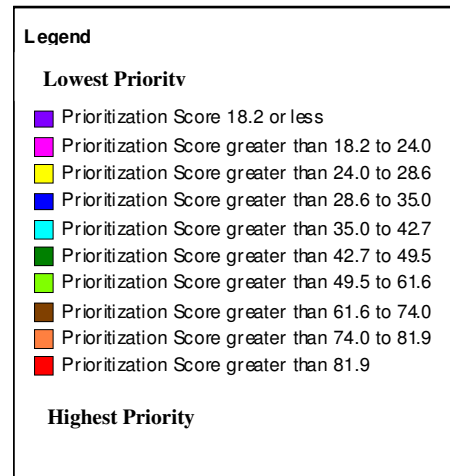
Total Score	Country	Rank Priority	Total Score	Country	Rank Priority	Total Score	Country	Rank Priority
85.14	Korea North	25	73.60	Guinea-Bissau	50			
85.01	Guinea	26	72.51	Kuwait	51			
84.20	Mali	27	72.47	Chad	52			
83.91	Cambodia	28	72.38	Viet Nam	53			
83.69	Mongolia	29	72.34	Eritrea	54			
83.34	Thailand	30	70.09	Qatar	55			
83.18	Oman	31	69.44	Bosnia-Herzegovina	56			
82.45	Laos	32	69.04	Egypt	57			
81.65	Mayotte	33	67.14	Malaysia	58			
81.03	Senegal	34	66.29	China	59			
80.33	Djibouti	35	65.09	Nigeria	60			
79.59	India	36	64.64	Brunei	61			
79.41	Kyrgyzstan	37	64.39	Serbia and Montenegro	62			
79.04	Japan	38	64.23	Tanzania	63			
78.86	Gambia	39	64.19	Sierra Leone	64			
78.71	Myanmar	40	63.12	Macedonia	65			
78.20	Sri Lanka	41	62.81	Mozambique	66			
78.05	Israel	42	62.55	Georgia	67			
77.95	Syria	43	62.43	Ivory Coast	68			
76.81	Jordan	44	62.27	Ethiopia	69			
76.80	United Arab Emirates	45	62.19	Taiwan	70			
76.75	Sudan	46	61.99	Lebanon	71			
75.24	Kazakhstan	47	61.85	Burkina Faso	72			
73.89	Indonesia	48	61.26	Benin	73			
73.67	Bahrain	49	59.70	Russia	74			

59.66	Guyana	75	37.65	South Africa	126	22.08	Chile	175
58.25	Togo	76	37.42	French Guiana	127	21.84	Panama	176
57.40	Central African Rep	77	36.90	Congo-Brazzaville	128	21.75	Paraguay	177
56.73	Singapore	78	36.78	Monaco	129	21.31	Belize	178
56.32	Palestine	79	35.97	Australia	130	20.97	Micronesia	179
55.85	Liberia	80	35.67	Zimbabwe	131	20.61	Brazil	180
55.17	Bulgaria	81	35.29	Northern Mariana Is	132	20.33	Colombia	181
54.18	France	82	34.74	Cuba	133	20.06	Seychelles	182
53.92	Cameroon	83	34.58	Slovakia	134	19.75	Nicaragua	183
53.19	Belarus	84	34.01	Uruguay	135	19.57	Isle of Man	184
52.85	Ghana	85	33.16	San Marino	136	19.32	Solomon Islands	185
52.50	Ukraine	86	33.13	Switzerland	137	19.07	Bahamas	186
51.87	East Timor	87	33.01	Hungary	138	18.75	Turks & Caicos Is	187
50.84	Armenia	88	32.98	Argentina	139	18.75	Ireland	188
48.85	Moldavia	89	32.82	Romania	140	18.46	Iceland	189
48.34	Zambia	90	32.82	Romania	140	17.88	British Virgin Is	190
48.23	Cyprus	91	32.56	United States	141	17.28	Swaziland	191
48.19	Kenya	92	31.97	Botswana	142	17.24	Lesotho	192
47.46	Liechtenstein	93	31.97	Botswana	142	17.09	Costa Rica	193
46.84	Austria	94	31.44	Denmark	143	17.09	Wallis & Futuna Is	194
46.67	Belgium	95	31.33	Peru	144	16.66	Is	194
46.35	Philippines	96	31.26	Poland	145	16.25	Bermuda	195
46.21	Reunion	97	30.73	Papua New Guinea	146	16.21	El Salvador	196
46.14	Madagascar	98	30.60	Greenland	147	15.95	Dominica	197
46.02	Italy	99	30.50	Rwanda	148	15.94	Cape Verde	198
45.92	Greece	100	29.41	Congo-Zaire	149	15.94	Marshall Islands	199
45.91	Estonia	101	28.76	Finland	150	15.36	Guadeloupe	200
45.62	Gibraltar	102	28.58	Norway	151	15.21	Haiti	201
45.40	Netherlands	103	28.15	Mexico	152	13.92	Tuvalu	202
45.35	Albania	104	27.55	New Caledonia	153	13.70	Bolivia	203
44.79	Gabon	105	27.07	Angola	154	13.70	Virgin Is of the US	204
44.24	Equatorial Guinea	106	27.07	Dominican Republic	155	13.29	Puerto Rico	205
44.19	Czech Republic	107	26.53	Cayman Islands	156	13.17	French Polynesia	206
43.96	Namibia	108	26.26	Sao Tome & Principe	157	13.12	French Polynesia	206
43.83	Andorra	109	26.13	Principe	157	12.63	Nauru	207
43.55	Malawi	110	26.04	Ecuador	158	12.37	Grenada	208
43.31	Mauritius	111	26.04	Netherlands	158	12.00	Antigua	209
43.06	Spain	112	25.70	Antilles	159	11.00	Malta	210
42.77	Slovenia	113	25.41	Barbados	160	10.94	Anguilla	211
42.46	Germany	114	25.41	Jamaica	161	9.75	Palau	212
41.93	Fiji	115	25.32	Saint Vincent	162	9.65	Saint Lucia	213
41.35	Luxembourg	116	25.00	Guatemala	163	9.14	Faeroe Islands	214
41.21	Latvia	117	24.85	Aruba	164	8.73	Guam	215
41.17	Lithuania	118	24.77	Portugal	165	8.13	Kiribati	216
41.04	Croatia	119	24.73	Honduras	166	7.86	Montserrat	217
40.35	Trinidad & Tobago	120	24.56	New Zealand	167	7.30	Saint Helena	218
40.24	Canada	121	24.42	Vanuatu	168	5.33	Tonga	219
39.64	Uganda	122	23.79	Venezuela	169	4.80	Cook Islands	220
39.53	Sweden	123	23.60	Burundi	170	3.61	Samoa	221
38.35	Suriname	124	22.95	American Samoa	171	1.88	Saint Pierre & Miquelon	222
38.27	Britain	125	22.89	Saint Kitts & Nevis	172			
			22.78	Nevis	172			
			22.43	Martinique	173			
			22.23	Korea South	174			



Note: Most of the purple nations are (small) islands

Figure 1 - Great Commission Prioritization of Countries



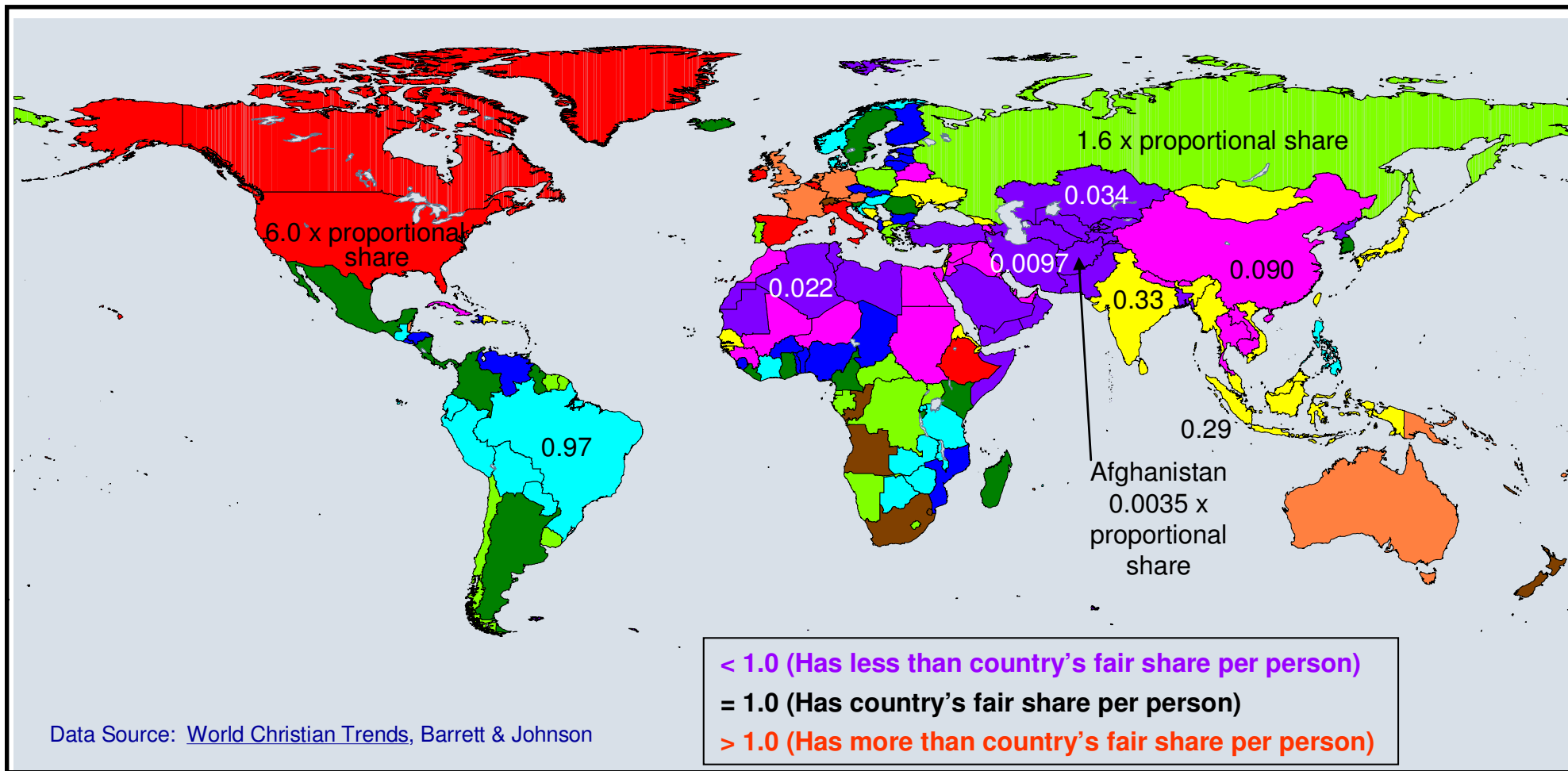


Figure 2 - Ratios of Countries' Portions of the World's Christian Workers on a per Person Basis

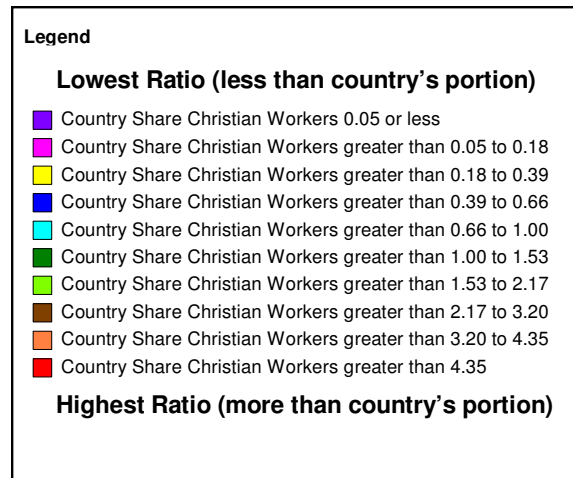


Table 2 – Comparison of Christian Resources/Criteria in the USA, Afghanistan, India, and China

	USA	Afghanistan	India	China
Priority	123	1	28	58
% of World's Full-Time Christian Workers	27.8% ³ (6.0 x % pop.)	0.0013% ³ (1/292 x % pop.)	5.6% ³ (1/3.0 x % pop.)	1.9% ³ (1/11 x % pop.)
% of All Christian Personal or Church Income	34.1% ³ (7.4 x % pop.)	0.00002% ³ (1/19,000 x % pop.)	0.14% ³ (1/120 x % pop.)	0.36% ³ (1/58 x % pop.)
% of World Population	4.6% ³	0.38% ³	16.7% ³	20.9% ³
# Discipleship Opportunities per Person per Year	368 ³	Less than 1 ³	13 ³	16 ³
% Population Least Reached in the Country	0.3% ⁵	99.9% ⁵	89.8% ⁵	15.1% ⁵
% Christian	76%	0.03%	2.3%	7.3%
% Evangelical Christian	32.5% ⁵	0.0% ⁵	1.8% ⁵	6.0% ⁵
Average Cost / Convert	\$1,551,000 ³	\$30,000 ³	\$9,803 ³	\$15,828 ³

Appendix – Description of Prioritization Criteria and Method

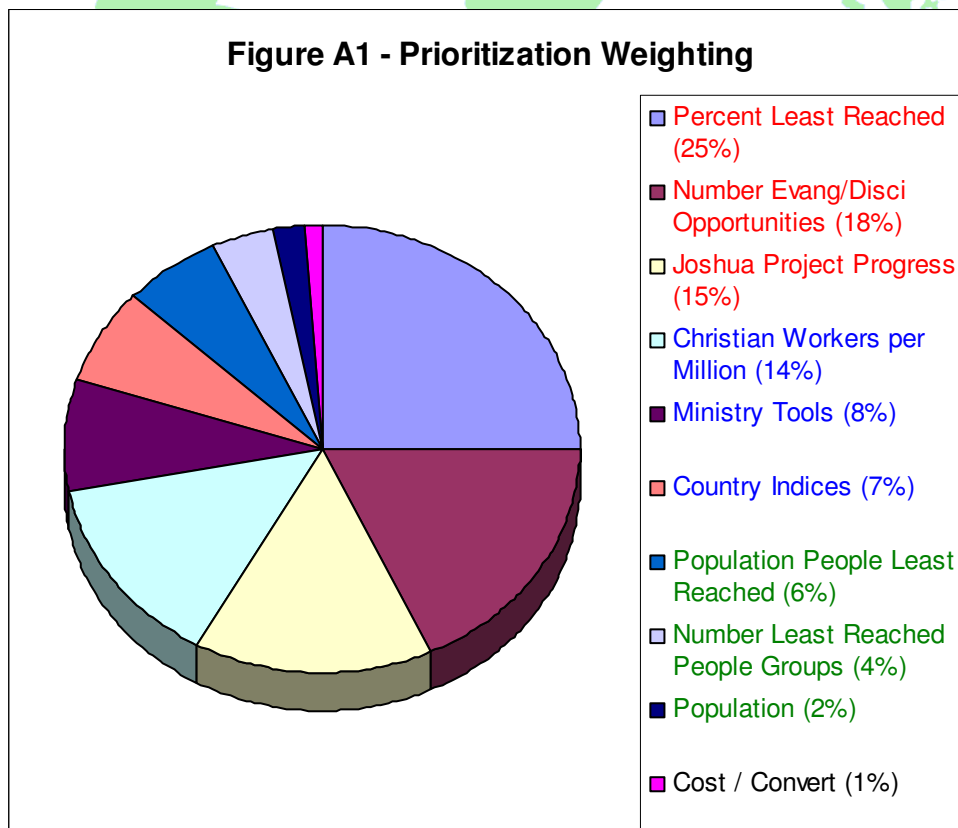


Table A1 – Prioritization Weighting Criteria and Description

Criteria (Percent Weighting)	Description
Percent Least Reached (25%)	Percent of the country's population living in a least reached people group
Number Evangelism/Discipleship Opportunities (18%)	The (average) number of discipleship offers per person per year in the country
Joshua Project Progress (15%)	Progress of or response to the Gospel
Christian Workers per Million (14%)	Number of Christian workers per million population
Ministry Tools (8%)	Bible translation status, Jesus film, audio recordings, & Christian radio broadcasting
Country Indices (7%)	Location indices (country persecution index, human development index, & percent evangelical)
Population People Least Reached (6%)	Population living in a least reached people group
Number Least Reached People Groups (4%)	Number of least reached people groups in the country
Population (2%)	Population of the country
Cost / Convert (1%)	Average cost to lead to a baptism

Numerous weighting parameters of the ten prioritization criteria were analyzed. The categories are described in Table A1. For a while, the actual numerical values of the criteria were used. However, because extreme values skewed some aspects of the relative comparison, countries were ranked and scored from 1 to 222 for each of the topics and these numbers were used to produce the final weighted scores.

The **top three criteria** provide a good indication of the current status of the Great Commission. The **percent of people living in a least reached people group** is most heavily weighted because it is an important indicator of the country's need for the Gospel. Similarly, the average **number of opportunities** a person in a given country has **to become a disciple of Jesus in a year** reveals a helpful glimpse about the status of evangelism. Originally **Joshua Project Progress** was weighted the most because it incorporates information for all people groups but the data appeared less discriminating than other parameters and thus it was reduced.

The **next group of three categories** represents **vehicles (tools or people) that can be used to share the Gospel** and also a composite score of Christian life in the country. Ministry Tools initially had the largest weight of these three topics but it was reduced because some of the data seemed to be less consistent. In general, somewhat greater emphasis was typically given to data more directly related to the Great Commission.

Three population items were used to add more weight for countries with more people. The total of 10% for these three criteria was selected in attempt to not excessively bias the influence of population.

Finally, the cost per baptism (i.e., convert) was included mostly because it is an interesting statistic although it could potentially be used as a tiebreaker.