



# Reports

---

*Christof Sauer (with assistance by Frans Veerman)*

Suggestions for an appropriate  
use of World Watch List data (2021)

**2022 / 02**

International Institute  
for Religious Freedom





International Institute  
for Religious Freedom

**Internationales Institut für Religionsfreiheit**  
**Institut International pour la Liberté Religieuse**  
**Instituto Internacional para la Libertad Religiosa**

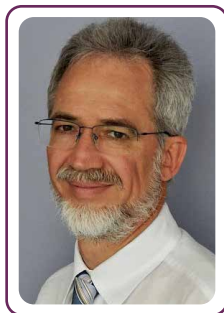
The International Institute for Religious Freedom (IIRF) was founded in 2007 with the mission to promote religious freedom for all faiths from an academic perspective. The IIRF aspires to be an authoritative voice on religious freedom. We provide reliable and unbiased data on religious freedom – beyond anecdotal evidence – to strengthen academic research on the topic and to inform public policy at all levels. Our research results are disseminated through the *International Journal for Religious Freedom* and other publications. A particular emphasis of the IIRF is to encourage the study of religious freedom in university institutions through its inclusion in educational curricula and by supporting postgraduate students with research projects.

The IIRF has a global presence with academic and advocacy partners on all continents. We perform original research and in collaboration with our partners. The IIRF is also a “meeting place” for all scholars that take an interest in religious freedom.

We understand Freedom of Religion and Belief (FoRB) as a fundamental and interdependent human right as described in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. In line with CCPR General Comment No. 22, we view FoRB as a broad and multidimensional concept that needs to be protected for all faiths in all spheres of society.



**Dr. Dennis P. Petri**  
**(V.i.S.d.P.)**  
*International Director*



**Prof. Dr. Christof Sauer**  
*Research Director*



**Prof. Dr. Janet Epp Buckingham**  
*Executive Editor of the International Journal for Religious Freedom (IJRF)*

# CONTENTS

20 Suggestions in brief .....	5
Detailed Explanation .....	7
The making of the World Watch List .....	8
1. Background and Context of Statistics .....	8
2. The Statistics Point to People .....	9
3. Persecution includes both Pressure and Violence .....	9
4. The WWL Reporting Period .....	10
5. The Number of Persecuted Christians.....	10
6. The Number of Christians Killed .....	11
7. WWL Country Ranking.....	12
8. WWL Score more meaningful than Rank.....	13
9. When a Country Score has Changed .....	13
10. No more than an Approximation to Reality.....	13
11. Country Dossiers indispensable for Understanding .....	14
12. Country Situations usually not Uniform .....	14
13. Non-Linear Scale .....	14
14. Strongly Affected Categories of Christians.....	15
15. Violence against Christians.....	15
16. Scale for Scoring Violence.....	15
17. The Maximum Score .....	16
18. The 50 Countries List.....	17
19. Danger of “Lopsided Decision Criteria” .....	18
20. Open Doors Analytical Website .....	18
References .....	18

# Suggestions for an appropriate use of World Watch List data (2021)

Discussion Texts, no. 1 (4th revised edition, 2021),  
19 February 2021

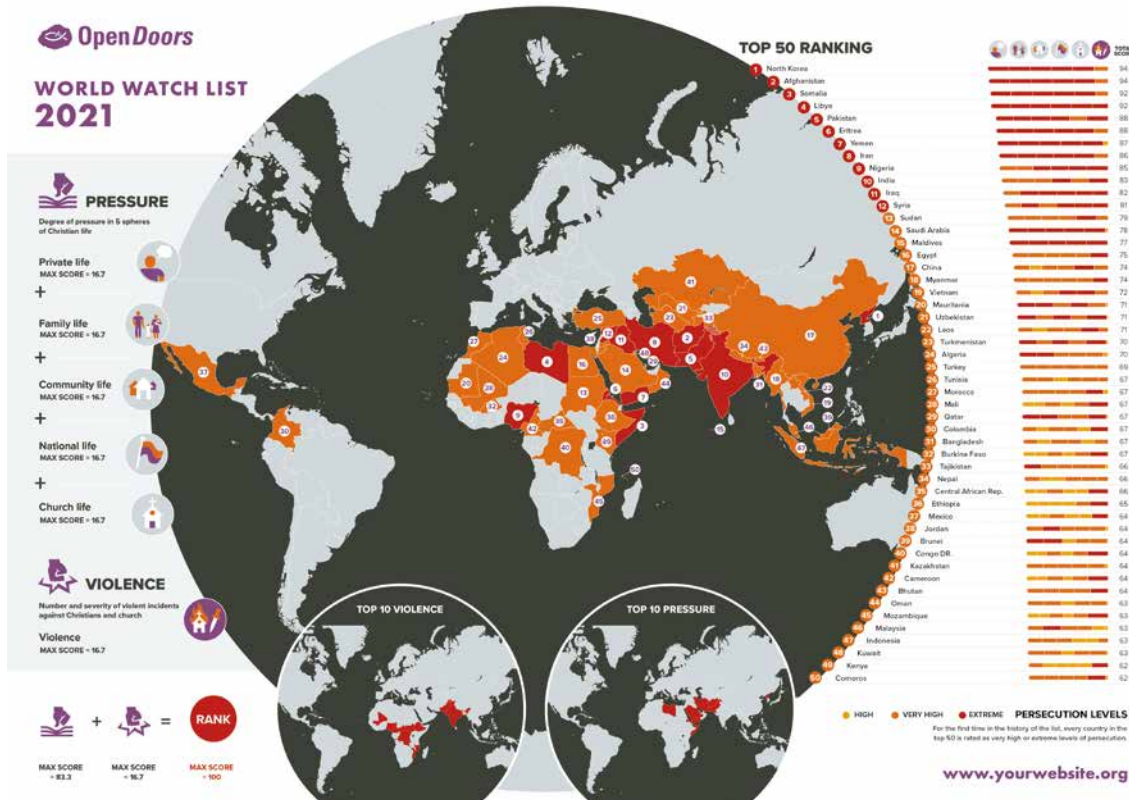


Illustration 1: The 50 countries of the World Watch List 2021; © Open Doors

## 20 Suggestions in brief

The World Watch List of Open Doors and its underlying statistics are among the most quoted – and sometimes misquoted or misunderstood – instruments for measuring the discrimination or persecution of Christians and violations of their religious freedom. The following suggestions and explanations are meant to contribute to a better understanding of the World Watch List (WWL) and to help to objectify the discussion on the numerical assessment of persecution.

1. It is vital to carefully consider the background and context of the various statistics in order to see clearly what they mean and what they do not mean.
2. Even though there are many scores and statistics presented in the WWL, the authors rightly emphasize that it is ultimately about real human beings and about their fate, and in this case specifically about Christians.

3. The WWL uses the expression “persecution” for a wide range of phenomena, which includes discrimination, intolerance and violence and which reflects the everyday experience of the local Christians.
4. The reporting period of the WWL does not correspond to the calendar year. The current WWL 2021 refers to the time from 1 October 2019 to 30 September 2020.
5. The number of Christians affected by high levels of persecution or discrimination calculated in the WWL 2021 (342 million) is a minimum and does not reflect the total figure for the global situation.
6. The number presented in the WWL of Christians killed in connection with their faith in the reporting period equally does not reflect a total figure for the global situation but is a minimum number for the top 50 countries on the World Watch List and further 24 countries scoring “high levels of persecution”.
7. The significance of the ranking of the countries on the World Watch List must not be overestimated.
8. The score of a country is more meaningful than its ranking. Comparisons should always be based on scores.
9. If the score of a country has changed, one first has to rule out other reasons like a corrected assessment or better accessibility of information before one can claim a factual change in the real situation.
10. Any attempt at measuring religious freedom or persecution can ultimately lead to no more than an approximation to reality. This equally applies to the methodology of the WWL, however meticulously it has been developed.
11. For an understanding of the situation of individual countries and for an interpretation of their scores it is indispensable to consult the detailed country dossiers.
12. The situation in one and the same country is usually not uniform regionally and in its effect on different groups.
13. The World Watch List must be read in a non-linear way. This means that when one country scores twice the number of points on the WWL than another country, it does not mean that persecution is twice as strong in that country.
14. The situation of strongly affected categories of Christians influences the country score disproportionately when the different categories of Christians are not affected equally. This is true even if some of the affected groups only make up a small or even marginal part of the Christian population by absolute numbers.
15. The criterion of violence against Christians contributes only one sixth of the potential persecution score a country can receive. This capping comes by design to ensure that the variety of types of pressure on Christians would not be overlooked. Christians experience pressure equally as persecution, just as they do with violence.

16. The scale for scoring violence and killings is particularly sensitive for low numbers of cases. This is due to the fact that scoring of acts of violence does not happen on a linear scale, and in addition is capped.
17. It is nearly impossible for a country to reach the maximum score of 100 points. This has to do with the fact that the WWL assesses a variety of different persecution phenomena, which don't occur all in one country simultaneously. Nowhere does full-scale violence and maximum pressure in all spheres of life occur simultaneously.
18. The 50 countries annually listed on the WWL do not display the overall global picture but rather illustrate the worst cases that were identified among the countries assessed by means of the WWL methodology.
19. Because of all the reasons mentioned above, decisions whether or not to reach out to Christians in certain countries must not be based exclusively upon the rankings or the scores of these countries on the WWL. Such decisions should particularly not be solely based on the inclusion of countries in the top ten or among the top 50 of the WWL.
20. The original and most in-depth sources concerning all details of the World Watch List are to be found in World Watch Research documentation on [www.opendoorsanalytical.org](http://www.opendoorsanalytical.org) (password: freedom).

For comments on religious freedom resources and current events see our website: [www.religionsfreiheit.global](http://www.religionsfreiheit.global), or follow us on Facebook: \* PRFCV (German) \* [christof.sauer.12](https://www.facebook.com/christof.sauer.12) (English)

## Detailed Explanation

The World Watch List of Open Doors and its underlying statistics are among the most quoted – and sometimes misquoted or misunderstood – instruments for measuring the discrimination or persecution of Christians and violations of religious freedom.

From 2011–2013, the author (as an independent expert) assisted World Watch Research, the research unit of Open Doors International, in the improvement of the data gathering methodology of the World Watch List. Since 2014, he coordinates the annual independent audit of the results of the World Watch List by the International Institute for Religious Freedom.

Overall, the World Watch List is a useful tool for understanding discrimination and persecution of Christians, on the condition that it is understood correctly and – within its limitations – used appropriately. The following suggestions and explanations are meant to contribute to a better understanding of the World Watch List (WWL) and to help to objectify the discussion on the numerical assessment of persecution.

## The making of the World Watch List

To do this, it is helpful to first understand how the scores are derived. This is explained in a comprehensive methodology document.<sup>1</sup> The basis is a questionnaire with a total of 84 questions that inquires about incidents and situations and are used to assign points. Further questions serve to illuminate the context and history. The questionnaire is completed in the course of the year by Open Doors staff and leaders of churches and networks either directly in the countries concerned or by staff working on the countries, as well as by independent external experts from various professions. On this basis, the persecution analysts consolidate a final score by the end of the period under research. The questionnaire includes six areas, all equally weighted: four spheres of life (private life, family life, community life, and national life), plus a fifth sphere of church life. All these categories measure pressure on Christians. The sixth area, on the other hand, covers all forms of physical violence.

For each question, the score depends on four factors: Frequency, intensity, how many different categories of Christian communities are affected, and what proportion of the country's population lives in the affected parts of the country. This exercise leads to a final score for each country from which its ranking on the index is derived. Since not all countries in the world can be covered due to capacity constraints, preliminary research identifies the most problematic countries for detailed research.

In addition to these factors, which are decisive for the allocation of points, the annual survey leads to a large amount of further useful information, which is documented in various ways, such as in country dossiers, interpretations of the global situation and special reports on the different effects on men, women and children, etc.

### 1. Background and Context of Statistics

**It is vital to carefully consider the background and context of the various statistics in order to see clearly what they mean and what they do not mean.**

This should be obvious, but when people quote or criticize the WWL one can repeatedly observe shallow reading, misunderstandings and misinterpretations, and an “overburdening” of numerical data and comparisons. Appropriate usage or criticism would only quote these figures and comparisons in the context of their intended meaning and carefully discern the referential framework.

---

<sup>1</sup> World Watch Research (Open Doors International), 2020. Complete World Watch List Methodology, Updated October 2020, [www.opendoorsanalytical.org](http://www.opendoorsanalytical.org) (password: freedom).



## 2. The Statistics Point to People

**Even though there are many scores and statistics presented in the WWL, the authors rightly emphasize that it is ultimately about real human beings and about their fate, and in this case specifically about Christians.**

Such a focus on Christians is justifiable, since this kind of data-gathering requires a lot of effort and the means and personnel are limited. Experience also demonstrates that comprehensive religious freedom reports that cover multiple or all religions or worldviews can only give limited attention and space to specific groups.<sup>2</sup> In comparison to most other regularly issued country-based religious freedom reports, the WWL achieves the greatest depth and density of information on Christians, and this is due specifically to its strict focus. It is therefore not necessary that any given persecution report includes all different worldviews. Reports exclusively or mainly focusing on specific groups also have their significance.

In the WWL's accompanying country dossiers<sup>3</sup> there is a brief section highlighting, where members of other religions or none also suffer from discrimination and persecution. To access more details about other groups it is possible to consult additional reports such as those of the "Humanists International" regarding humanists, atheists, rationalists, secularists, agnostics and free thinkers.

## 3. Persecution includes both Pressure and Violence

**The WWL uses the expression "persecution" for a wide range of phenomena, which includes discrimination, intolerance and violence and which reflects the everyday experience of the local Christians.**

This includes legal, administrative and societal restrictions of religious freedom, violation of religious freedom by state and non-state actors as well as faith-related discrimination that presents no or less serious violation of religious freedom according to human rights standards. Examples of the latter also include pressure and harassment in daily life, such as not being able to talk about one's faith within the immediate family without being at risk or ostracized by family members because of a different faith or because of being in touch with other Christians. Additional examples are: Harassment of children at school because of their Christianparents' faith, disinheritance or pressure to divorce after conversion to the Christian faith, psychological pressure and abuse, social pressure regarding faith-related dress codes, as well as non-governmental surveillance. Discrimination in employment and access to basic social care also fall into this category.

---

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Christof Sauer: Alarm bells against discrimination. What global surveys and country comparisons on persecution are helpful for. Discussion Papers, no. 2, Professorship for Religious Freedom and Research on Persecution of Christians, FTH Giessen, 2019, [www.religionsfreiheit.global](http://www.religionsfreiheit.global).

<sup>3</sup> World Watch Research provides 25-55 page dossiers for over 70 countries at the Open Doors Analytical website: <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/country-dossiers/> (password: freedom).

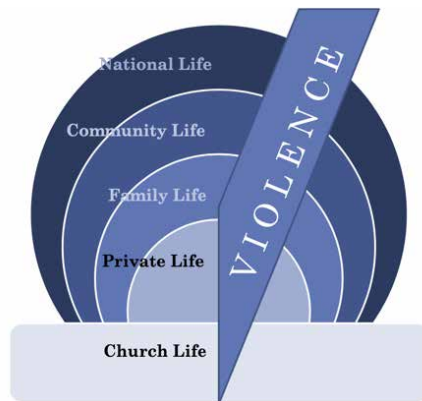


Illustration 2: Categories of measurement in the World Watch List; © Christof Sauer

#### 4. The WWL Reporting Period

**The reporting period of the WWL does not correspond to the calendar year. The current WWL 2021 refers to the time from 1 October 2019 to 30 September 2020.**

This is important, as any incidents after 30 September 2020 will not be part of the WWL 2021 evaluation, although these incidents may very likely be in the reader's mind as they may have been mentioned in the latest media reports at the time of publication of the WWL. In addition, one commonplace rule is repeatedly forgotten by users of the WWL: One should never quote numerical data without its corresponding time reference! Any given statistics of incidents or situations need to refer to a clearly defined period of time or date.

#### 5. The Number of Persecuted Christians

**The number of Christians affected by high levels of persecution or discrimination calculated in the WWL 2021 (342 million)<sup>4</sup> is a minimum and does not reflect the total figure for the global situation.**

It only refers to the 74 countries researched by Open Doors where it is most difficult to live as a Christian. In all those countries an “extreme”, “very high” or “high level of persecution” has been identified. It is a careful estimation, which happens country by country and only takes into account the portion of Christians in that country presumably affected by such level of persecution.

The total changes annually due to numerous factors in addition to changes in the number of countries with at least a high level of persecution, namely, natural population growth, migration, and changes in estimates of the number of “affected” Christians.

---

<sup>4</sup> The exact sum of calculations is 341 868 000. Open Doors chooses to communicate the number “more than 340m”, with the rationale that there are others outside the 74 countries with 41+ points that are not counted.

Minimum number of Christians affected by persecution					
Report	WVL 2021	WVL 2020	WVL 2019	WVL 2018	WVL 2017
Christians	342 M	312 M	286 M	215 M	214 M
Countries	74	73	73	58	50

Table 1: Christians affected by persecution

## 6. The Number of Christians Killed

The number presented in the WWL of Christians killed in connection with their faith in the reporting period equally does not reflect a total figure for the global situation<sup>5</sup> but is a minimum number for the top 50 countries on the World Watch List and further 24 countries scoring “high levels of persecution”.<sup>6</sup>

The numbers are assessed country by country. Wherever it is possible to access information, it is based on documented individual cases and only those are considered where faith-related reasons are a plausible cause and where a minimum of details are known. In countries where it is not possible to access such information because of the order of magnitude and the volatile situation, the WWL gives a conservative estimate based on indirect evidence. The same applies to the numbers of attacks on public Christian buildings or the destruction thereof and other acts of violence.

Minimum number of Christians killed						
Report	WVL 2021	WVL 2020	WVL 2019	WVL 2018	WVL 2017	WVL 2016
Christians	4,761	2,983	4,305	3,066	1,207	7,106

Table 2: Christians killed

<sup>5</sup> In the WWL 2019 an attempt to provide a global assessment was made, adding data from the Observatory on Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians in Europe (<http://www.intoleranceagainstchristians.eu/advanced-search.html>) and other sources which together added 22 killings to the global total.

<sup>6</sup> There were at least 4761 killings of Christian recorded or estimated in the reporting period of the WWL 2021. In WWL 2020 there were 2983, in WWL 2019 there were 4305, in WWL 2018 there were 3066, in WWL 2017 there were 1207, and in WWL 2016 there were 7106 Christian killings recorded. The 24 “Persecution Watch Countries” are countries that score 41 or more points and are not on the WWL top 50.

## 7. WWL Country Ranking

**The significance of the ranking of the countries on the World Watch List must not be overestimated.**

Comparing the position to the previous year only makes sense when there is a strong variation that verifiably does not exclusively stem from the change of score of other countries, better intelligence, or from other factors.<sup>7</sup>

In addition, any statements about changes or even trends have to be made with great care. Changes of scores or rankings from one year to the next do not yet constitute a trend. This would need consideration over a longer period of time with methodological conditions remaining constant. An attempt at this has been made since WWL 2019 by introducing the section “5 year trends” in the country dossiers.

The top 10 countries: World Watch List 2021					
Rank	Country	Total points	Points previous year	+/-	Rank previous year
1	North Korea	94	94	±0	1
2	Afghanistan	94	93	+1	2
3	Somalia	92	92	±0	3
4	Libya	92	90	+2	4
5	Pakistan	88	88	±0	5
6	Eritrea	88	87	+1	6
7	Yemen	87	85	+2	8
8	Iran	86	85	+1	9
9	Nigeria	85	80	+5	12
10	India	83	83	±0	10

Table 3: Excerpt from World Watch List

<sup>7</sup> On the website of Open Doors Germany, nine different constellations of rank and scores of the top 50 countries are rightfully distinguished and color-coded: new on the list, higher ranking and higher score, higher ranking but same score, same ranking but higher score, same ranking and same score, same ranking but lower score, lower ranking but higher score, lower ranking but same score, and lower ranking and lower score. (<https://www.opendoors.de/christenverfolgung/weltverfolgungsindex/weltverfolgungsindex-detailansicht> [as of Jan. 13, 2021]). If one goes beyond the top 50 countries, one would have to add the category of countries that dropped out of the top 50 or were pushed out by other countries. A further category is constituted by those countries that have dropped out of the “persecution watch countries” category due to their score dropping below 41 points, which excludes them from all Open Doors listings.

## 8. WWL Score more meaningful than Rank

**The score of a country is more meaningful than its ranking. Comparisons should always be based on scores.**

For example, Sri Lanka as an extreme example moved from rank 30 in WWL 2020 to rank 52 in WWL 2021 but only scored 3 points less than in the previous assessment cycle. A similar movement is true for Russia (from rank 46 to 58) and Central African Republic (from rank 25 to 35) with only 3 or 2 points less respectively.

## 9. When a Country Score has Changed

**If the score of a country has changed, one first has to rule out other reasons like a corrected assessment or better accessibility of information<sup>8</sup> before one can claim a factual change in the real situation.**

For example, in WWL 2021 there were changes amounting to more than two points in the scores of 23 countries among the top 50. Among these the increase of points for Bangladesh was reportedly due in part to “improved reporting from the tribal areas”.<sup>9</sup>

## 10. No more than an Approximation to Reality

**Any attempt at measuring religious freedom or persecution can ultimately lead to no more than an approximation to reality. This equally applies to the methodology of the WWL, however meticulously it has been developed.**

The score for each country is based on an extensive assessment of a number of factors from five different spheres of life and different means of violence. The main concern is to make a variety of very different phenomena comparable with each other. Changing the weighting of these factors in this model would result in somewhat different scores. In addition, a possible margin of uncertainty of +/- 2 points (maximum) and +/- 0.5 points (minimum) needs to be taken into consideration. Furthermore, the index is purposefully designed to underestimate situations, when there is no precise and verifiable information provided by the respondents to the questionnaire. Consequently, an improvement in the quality of information available might lead to a rise in a country score.

---

<sup>8</sup> An information gap or complicating circumstance were reported in WWL 2021 in 3 cases among the top 50 countries on the list. For example, in Afghanistan, it was getting more difficult to collect detailed information; in Mali, it was difficult to distinguish clearly between religiously and ethnically based violence; and in the Central African Republic, the constant fluidity of the already very complex situation makes it more difficult to track persecution.

<sup>9</sup> In the previous WWL (2020) three changes were reportedly due in part to scoring improvements (Iraq) or the reassessment compared to a neighboring country (Qatar, Oman)

## 11. Country Dossiers indispensable for Understanding

**For an understanding of the situation of individual countries and for an interpretation of their scores it is indispensable to consult the detailed country dossiers.<sup>10</sup>**

The detailed country profiles are based on the critical analysis of the field research, the assessments of experts, further in-house research and a multitude of external reports, publications and media reports, and their documentation often fills hundreds of pages.

## 12. Country Situations usually not Uniform

**The situation in one and the same country is usually not uniform regionally and in its effect on different groups.**

The different categories of Christians are usually affected differently. While historical Christian communities might be tolerated and even embraced, non-traditional Christian communities and communities of converts could be persecuted intensely.

In addition, there might be vast differences depending on the geographical area within a country. Sometimes, the religious demography and composition of different parts of the same country would mean that persecution could be very high in a particular part of the country and lower in other parts, such as in Nigeria.

There might also be a dramatic contrast between big urban centers and rural areas. Variety and contrast of situations is particularly strong in countries with large populations and territories, such as India.

<b>Categories of Christian communities in the World Watch List</b>	
1.	Communities of expatriate Christians
2.	Traditional Christian communities
3.	Communities of Christian converts
4.	Non-traditional Christian communities

Table 4: Categories of Christian communities in the World Watch List

## 13. Non-Linear Scale

**The World Watch List must be read in a non-linear way.**

This means that when one country scores twice the number of points on the WWL than another country, it does not mean that persecution is twice as strong in that country.

<sup>10</sup> Available at: <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/country-dossiers/> (password: freedom).

The strength of the WWL lies in discovering and describing situations of discrimination or persecution against Christians which are particularly frequent, intense, diverse and widespread.

#### **14. Strongly Affected Categories of Christians**

**The situation of strongly affected categories of Christians influences the country score disproportionately when the different categories of Christians are not affected equally. This is true even if some of the affected groups only make up a small or even marginal part of the Christian population by absolute numbers.**

The WWL is therefore particularly sensitive to the situation of converts to the Christian faith<sup>11</sup> and of comparatively younger Christian churches and groups (like evangelical or Pentecostal churches as well as renewal movements within traditional churches).

#### **15. Violence against Christians**

**The criterion of violence against Christians contributes only one sixth of the potential persecution score a country can receive. This capping comes by design to ensure that the variety of types of pressure on Christians would not be overlooked. Christians experience pressure equally as persecution, just as they do with violence.**

Due to such a differentiated assessment the documentation of WWL 2021 equally offers separate rankings for overall violence against Christians, for the individual elements of violence by themselves, as well as a ranking of the countries with the highest pressure.<sup>12</sup>

#### **16. Scale for Scoring Violence**

**The scale for scoring violence and killings is particularly sensitive for low numbers of cases. This is due to the fact that scoring of acts of violence does not happen on a linear scale, and in addition is capped.**

The murders or executions of Christians and attacks against churches or public church property potentially weigh one third each of the maximum possible score for violence, whereas the other 10 expressions of violence assessed together make up for the final third.

---

<sup>11</sup> It is likely that the number of known converts would be much higher if societal and government pressure against conversion (and against making conversions public) would be lower.

<sup>12</sup> World Watch Research (Open Doors International), January 2021. World Watch List 2021 Documentation, pp. 4-6 and 15-44, [www.opendoorsanalytical.org](http://www.opendoorsanalytical.org) (password: freedom).



Killings and attacks against churches etc. each score with three points per case in the respective category of violence, up to the first 10 cases. Thereby, on the bottom line, each of these cases contributes a bit more than half a point to the final score of a country. Due to a rounding of decimal fractions one such case might change a country score by one point in some instances.

Allocation of points for physical violence (except killings and attacks on churches)				
Cases	none	1	2–9	10 and more
Points	0	1	2	3

Table 5: Allocation of points for physical violence

The capping takes effect as soon as a certain threshold is reached in each category, namely 10 cases for killings, attacks on churches etc. or incidents in any other violence category, which are scored with less points. Due to this capping, “mass phenomena” always score the same number of points regarding violence even if the situation in one country is far more serious than in another.<sup>13</sup>

One also has to consider that the methodology does not put the frequency of such violent incidents in relation to the number of Christians in a country. Therefore – as can be expected – among the countries more susceptible to violence, those with a larger Christian population potentially will reach the maximum score faster and more easily than countries with a small general population or a minimal Christian population.<sup>14</sup>

In all cases, the factual basis is transparent because the absolute numbers can be reviewed in the charts showing minimum numbers of all 12 distinct violence phenomena (such as killings, attacks against churches or sexual violence – the latter mainly against women).

## 17. The Maximum Score

**It is nearly impossible for a country to reach the maximum score of 100 points. This has to do with the fact that the WWL assesses a variety of different persecution phenomena, which don't occur all in one country simultaneously. Nowhere does full-scale violence and maximum pressure in all spheres of life occur simultaneously.**

<sup>13</sup> However, the impact of mass violence reflects in the other blocks measuring pressure, especially for countries with high levels of impunity regarding such violence.

<sup>14</sup> WWL 2021: Highest score in violence in relation to the rounded number of Christians: Nigeria 16.7 (95M), Pakistan 16.7 (4M), DRC Congo 16.1 (85M), Mozambique 16.1 (17M), Cameroon 15.7 (16M); lowest score in violence: Azerbeidjan 0 (246K), Djibouti 0 (10K), Bhutan 0 (30K), Maldives 0.4 (a few thousand), Gambia 0.6 (108K). However, this does not apply to the following countries with a low Christian population that score high in violence nonetheless, e.g.: Mali 15.4 (467K), Libya 12.4 (35K), Iraq 11.5 (175K), North Korea 11.1 (400K), Niger 10.6 (64K), Afghanistan 10.2 (thousands), Somalia 9.8 (hundreds); equally it does not apply to certain countries with a high Christian population and yet a low score in violence: Kazakhstan 2.4 (4.9M) and Malaysia 2.4 (3M).



For that reason even the nations at the top of WWL 2021, North Korea (94) and Afghanistan (94), do not reach the maximum score.

Rank	Country	Total score
1	North Korea	94
2	Afghanistan	94
3	Somalia	92
4	Libya	92
5	Pakistan	88

Table 6: Countries with the highest scores on WWL 2021

## 18. The 50 Countries List

**The 50 countries annually listed on the WWL do not display the overall global picture but rather illustrate the worst cases that were identified among the countries assessed by means of the WWL methodology.**

The limitation of the publicized list to 50 countries constitutes an artificial capping. Open Doors investigated a total of 116 countries in depth for WWL 2021, and watches out for early warning signs in all countries and territories of the world. Open Doors also publishes details about the countries causing most concern beyond the top 50 listed.

Rank	Country	Rank	Country
51	Cuba	58	Russian Federation
52	Sri Lanka	59	Djibouti
53	United Arab Emirates	60	Bahrain
54	Niger	61	Azerbaijan
55	Kyrgyzstan	62	Chad
56	Palestinian Territories	63	Nicaragua
57	Tanzania	64	Burundi
Rank	Country	Rank	Country
65	Uganda	70	Gambia
66	Guinea	71	Togo
67	Honduras	72	Rwanda
68	Angola	73	Ivory Coast
69	South Sudan	74	El Salvador

Table 7: Countries with 41 or more points outside the top 50 countries

## 19. Danger of “Lopsided Decision Criteria”

**Because of all the reasons mentioned above, decisions whether or not to support Christians in certain countries must not be based exclusively upon the rankings or the scores of these countries on the WWL. Such decisions should particularly not be solely based on the inclusion of countries in the top ten or among the top 50 of the WWL.**

If a donor would stop supporting Christians just because their country dropped out of the top ten, this would be a misguided conclusion based upon lopsided decision criteria. It is also contrary to Christian values if a country receives no or only little attention by Christians simply because the country ranks lower than others or is not listed in the top 50. Christian solidarity is required for Christians under pressure for their faith in all cases, independent of the degree of severity. Moreover, advocacy that succeeds in preventing the worsening of a less extreme situation must also be considered a meaningful intervention.

18

## 20. Open Doors Analytical Website

**The original and most in-depth sources concerning all details of the World Watch List are to be found in World Watch Research documentation on [www.opendoorsanalytical.org](http://www.opendoorsanalytical.org).<sup>15</sup>**

For those who want to thoroughly understand the WWL or to critically engage with it, it is indispensable to revert to this information. It does not suffice to remain at the level of the information processed for the general public by the various national offices of Open Doors. In case of doubt it is the original source that counts. This is where the most complete, most detailed and most current information is to be found. Too frequently, critics ignorantly and often erroneously claim a lack of transparency or methodological reflection because they do not make the effort of reading all available information and looking up the original source.

Thus, I can gladly repeat: Overall, the World Watch List is a useful tool for understanding discrimination and persecution of Christians, on the condition that it is understood correctly and used appropriately.

## References

World Watch Research (Open Doors International), 2020. Complete World Watch List Methodology, Updated October 2020, <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/> (password: freedom).

---

<sup>15</sup> The published documentation for WWL 2021 amounts to more than 2,000 pages if the country dossiers for the Persecution Watch countries beyond the top 50 are taken into account. Roughly 100 pages alone deal with the methodology in detail. Available at: [www.opendoorsanalytical.org](http://www.opendoorsanalytical.org) (password: freedom). This is currently the most extensive publicly accessible information available.

World Watch Research (Open Doors International), 2021. World Watch List 2021 Documentation, January 2021, <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/> (password: freedom).

World Watch Research (Open Doors International), 2021. Full Country Dossiers, <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/country-dossiers/> (password: freedom).

For comments on religious freedom resources and current events see our website: [www.religionsfreiheit.global](http://www.religionsfreiheit.global) or follow us on Facebook: \* PRFCV (German) \* [christof.sauer.12](https://www.facebook.com/christof.sauer.12) (English)

## Imprint

### Address

c/o World Evangelical Alliance  
Church Street Station  
P.O. Box 3402  
New York, NY 10008-3402  
United States of America

Friedrichstr. 38  
2nd Floor  
53111 Bonn  
Germany

International Director: Dr. Dennis P. Petri (V.i.S.d.P.)  
Research Director: Prof. Dr. Christof Sauer  
Executive Editor of the IJRF: Prof. Dr. Janet Epp Buckingham  
President: Prof. Dr. Dr. Thomas Schirrmacher

Contact: [info@iirf.global](mailto:info@iirf.global)  
Donations: <https://iirf.global/donate/>

Occasional journal with special reports, research projects, reprints and documentation published by VKW Culture and Science Publ.

Follow us:





International Institute  
for Religious Freedom

International Institute for Religious Freedom

**Bonn | Brussels | Cape Town**

**Colombo | Brasília | Delhi**

**Tübingen | Vancouver**

iirf.global • [info@iirf.global](mailto:info@iirf.global)