

World
Watch
Research

WWL – Frequently asked questions

Update: October 2023

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Open Doors International / World Watch Research

Update: October 2023

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WWL – Frequently Asked Questions

Update: October 2023

This document is intended for quick reference purposes and provides brief answers to common questions raised concerning the World Watch List (WWL). More details are available in the “Short version of WWL methodology” and “Complete WWL methodology” available at:

- <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-documentation/>
- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/> (password: freedom).

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1. How is the WWL compiled?

In WWL methodology, two main expressions of persecution are distinguished:

- i) *squeeze* - the pressure Christians experience in all areas of life;
- ii) *smash* - plain violence.

While *smash* can be measured and tracked through reported incidents of violence, *squeeze* needs to be tracked by discerning how Christian life and witness is being squeezed in different areas of life. Different persecution engines and drivers become identifiable from the answers to country questionnaires covering the reporting period. This was previously 1 November – 31 October but was changed for WWL 2021 onwards to 1 October – 30 September. (This change has allowed more time for analysis and reporting.) A final score is calculated for each country which is then used to determine the order of countries experiencing high, very high and extreme levels of persecution (i.e. countries scoring 41 points or more in WWL analysis).

2. What key elements make WWL methodology distinctive?

a) Information is gathered as far as possible down to grass-roots level

For each country being researched, violence data and detailed descriptions of pressure on Christians are supplied by:

- **In-country networks** – who contribute as much grass-roots level information as possible.
- **Open Doors country researchers** – who assemble input from their in-country networks, add their own expertise and fill out WWL questionnaires for the specific countries under research.
- **External experts** – who provide information which can be used for cross-checking the filled-out country questionnaire.
- **WWR analysts** – who combine the above research with their own monitoring results and compile a final version of the completed questionnaire.

b) The use of a scoring grid makes quantitative analysis possible

The questions in Blocks 1 to 5 of the WWL questionnaire are not answered with a simple yes or no. A set of variables are taken into consideration:

- 1) Number of categories of Christian communities affected by persecution (max. 4 points);
- 2) Proportion of general population living in the territory affected by persecution (max. 4 points);

- 3) Intensity of persecution (max. 4 points);
- 4) Frequency of persecution (max. 4 points).

A scoring grid - see table below - is used to convert the descriptive questionnaire information into numerical. A score for each Block question is calculated¹ from the average of the number of points recorded for each of the four variables.

Diagram of WWL scoring grid

	0 points	1 point	2 points	3 points	4 points
(1) Number of categories of Christian communities affected ²	None	1 out of 4	2 out of 4 <i>but see footnote 2</i>	3 out of 4 <i>but see footnote 2</i>	4 out of 4 <i>but see footnote 2</i>
(2) Proportion of general population in territory affected	None	Above 0% – 25%	26% – 50%	51% - 75%	76% - 100%
(3) Intensity ³	None	Low	Medium	High	Very high
(4) Frequency	None	Sporadic	Quite frequent	Frequent	Permanent

The resulting score for each question thus contributes to the overall score for pressure in the question’s relevant Block. With the overall score for each Block calculated, the levels of pressure in the corresponding ‘Spheres of life’ (e.g. Block 1 = Private life; Block 2 = Family life etc.) become visible.

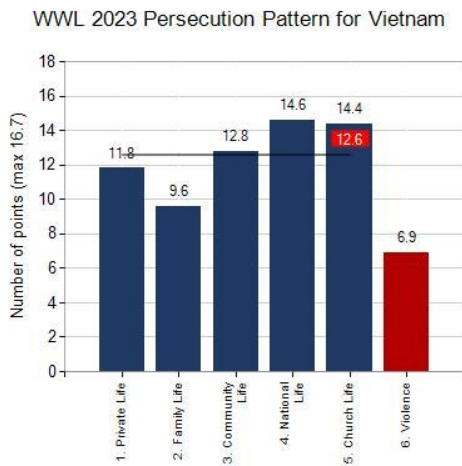
¹ See scoring example in Appendix 2 of WWL Short Methodology and WWL Complete Methodology, available at: <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/> (password: freedom).

² If all four categories of Christian communities (CCCs) exist in a country, each category affected receives one point. However, it often occurs that not all CCCs are present in a country and/or not all of them are affected by the persecution covered by the Block question. The scoring for this variable is then calculated according to the following table:

Points	Number of categories of Christian communities (CCCs) affected by persecution			
	4 CCCs are present in the country	3 CCCs are present in the country	2 CCCs are present in the country	1 CCC is present in the country
1	1 out of 4 affected	-	-	-
2	2 out of 4 affected	1 out of 3 affected	1 out of 2 affected	-
3	3 out of 4 affected	2 out of 3 affected	-	-
4	4 out of 4 affected	3 out of 3 affected	2 out of 2 affected	1 out of 1 affected

³ Detailed definitions of ‘Low - Very high’ and ‘Sporadic - Permanent’ can be found in Section 3.1 of the Complete WWL methodology available at: <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/> (password: freedom).

Please note: In Block 6 of the questionnaire a different scoring system is used: The first two questions, which deal with killings of Christians and attacks on churches and other Christian buildings, are scored up to a maximum of 30 points each. The other 10 questions together share a maximum total of 30 points.



c) The scores for pressure and violence form a pattern

Using the scoring grid for Blocks 1-5 and collation of data for Block 6, overall scores for each Block can be calculated. These Block scores make the pattern of persecution in a country visible for the WWL reporting period in question - see the example “WWL 2023 Persecution Pattern for Vietnam”⁴, where the average pressure over all spheres of life

was 12.6 points (out of a maximum of 16.7) and the highest levels of pressure on Christians occurred in the National and Church spheres of life. Although the score for violence fell to the level of 6.9 points, there was nevertheless one killing reported and several churches were attacked.

d) The scoring method makes it possible to compare countries with very different persecution situations

By employing the scoring grid, it becomes possible – so-to-speak – to compare apples with pears. A comparison of countries, despite their differing persecution situations, has now become possible. It is possible because the methodological starting point focusses on what Christians are experiencing in their daily life (Blocks 1-4) or what difficulties the Church is facing on a daily basis (Block 5). Violent incidents (all recorded in Block 6) can occur in any of the Spheres of life (Blocks 1-5).

Thus, for instance, a country in which the main Persecution engine is *Islamic oppression* can be compared with a country where *Organized corruption and crime* is dominant.

For a more detailed description of WWL methodology and other background information, please see: Short version of WWL methodology or Complete WWL methodology, both available at: <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/> (password: freedom).

⁴ This information is taken from the WWL 2023 Full Country Dossier for Vietnam published in January 2023, available at: <https://www.opendoors.org/persecution/reports/Full-Country-Dossier-Vietnam-2023.pdf> and <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Vietnam-Full-Country-Dossier-January-2023.pdf>.

3. How are the countries scored?

See 2b) above. A more detailed example on the method of scoring can be found in Appendix 2 of both the “Short version of WWL methodology” and “Complete WWL methodology”, available at: <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/> (password: freedom).

4. How come countries with the same WWL score are ranked differently?

The published version of the WWL Table of scores and ranks gives the total score for each country as a rounded number displaying no decimal places. In the event that countries are listed with the same score the actual decimal fraction will determine which country appears higher in the list (see example from the WWL 2019 table of scores below). In reality such minute differences in score are of very limited relevance, especially since statistical analysis shows that a possible margin of uncertainty of +/- 2 points (maximum) and +/- 0.5 points (minimum) needs to be taken into consideration. Too much emphasis on the ranking of a country – particularly where this bases on fractions of a point – can be seriously misleading.

WWL 2019		1. Private life	2. Family life	3. Community life	4. National life	5. Church life	6. Violence score	TOTAL SCORE WWL 2019	TOTAL SCORES DISPLAYED TO 3 DEC. PLACES
Rank	Country	(Max. score per block is 16.7)							
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	10.9	94	94.261
2	Afghanistan	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	10.6	94	93.891
3	Somalia	16.3	16.7	16.6	16.5	16.4	8.9	91	91.218
4	Libya	15.3	15.0	15.1	16.0	16.3	9.6	87	87.369
5	Pakistan	14.3	14.1	13.9	15.0	13.2	16.7	87	87.186
6	Sudan	14.7	15.0	14.6	15.6	16.1	10.6	87	86.530
7	Eritrea	14.7	14.9	15.8	16.0	15.2	9.4	86	86.045
8	Yemen	16.6	16.3	16.4	16.7	16.7	3.1	86	85.796

Extract from WWL 2019 Table of Scores and Ranks with an extra column showing the total country scores displayed to three decimal places.

5. Why does World Watch Research use World Christian Database statistics?

Since 2007, the World Christian Database (WCD)⁵ has been published in cooperation with Brill publishers (USA)⁶ who aim to meet the information requirements of specialized academic target groups. For an annual fee, World Watch Research receives access to comprehensive statistical information on world religions, Christian denominations and people groups. This information is updated regularly by staff at the Center for the Study of Global Christianity at the Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary (USA).

⁵ WCD website: <https://www.brill.com/publications/online-resources/world-christian-database>

⁶ Brill website: <https://www.brill.com/about/mission-statement>

Please note: Where Open Doors estimates differ from WCD figures, this is clearly indicated in the WWL Full Country Dossiers and in the WWL Country Religious Statistics.

6. What are persecution engines and persecution drivers?

Please see the definitions and explanations in the appendices of the “Short version of WWL methodology”. For more detailed background discussion, see the “Complete WWL methodology”, available at <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/> (password: freedom).

7. What gives the WWL credibility?

World Watch Research (WWR) is the research department of Open Doors International. It has been set up to carry out well-documented research that withstands scholarly scrutiny and accepts scholarly guidance. WWR has been gathering and publishing detailed data on the persecution of Christians since 1992. One of their main tools for tracking and measuring the extent of persecution in the world is the World Watch List (WWL). WWL methodology has gradually evolved since the 1990s and in 2012 the methodology was comprehensively revised in order to provide greater credibility, transparency, objectivity and academic quality.

As of October 2023, the WWR team consists of one managing director, seven persecution analysts and one editor/communicator, all with university degrees. One of the team has a PhD and another is working on it. Five studied law in the field of human rights and constitutional law. Two additional researchers are responsible for questionnaire analysis and the production of annual reports on Gender-specific, Children/Youth-specific and IDP/Refugee-specific religious persecution. An Arabic language assistant and freelance consultants assist in monitoring news reports and other tasks. The persecution analysts collaborate closely with researchers and other experts operating at regional, national and subnational level. Some of these are Open Doors staff, others are external experts who come from a variety of professional backgrounds.

Since 2014, the International Institute for Religious Freedom (IIRF)⁷ has audited the WWL process. By selecting sample countries for investigation, it has repeatedly confirmed the correct application of WWL methodology for scoring and for making transnational comparability possible. The main focus of the audit is on consistency in the processing of the WWL questionnaires.

The annual WWL audit statements express IIRF’s conclusions, enhance the quality of the WWL and contribute to the objectivity and transparency of the results. However, IIRF stresses that additional statements and interpretations by Open Doors based on or associated with the publication of WWL documentation remain outside the scope of their audits.

⁷ See IIRF website: www.iirf.eu.

8. How is it possible to measure and compare persecution in different countries?

WWR's starting-point is the everyday life of the Christian and the Church. The analysts gather country data on how Christians live their lives in situations where they face pressure and/or violence because of their faith, and how church communities are affected by this pressure and/or violence. WWL methodology takes the levels of pressure and violence experienced in a set number of spheres of life which can then be compared from country to country, regardless of the origin of the hostilities involved. Whether this pressure or violence originates from the same or different persecution engines and drivers is not relevant for the final score, although it is relevant for the narrative explained in the text of the Full Country Dossier. (See above: "2. What key elements make WWL methodology distinctive".)

9. What sort of pressure is being measured in the "Spheres of life"?

The 'five spheres concept' tracks the various forms of pressure being experienced in the different areas of a Christian's life. The categories are explained in the appendices of the "Short version of WWL methodology". For more detailed background discussion, see the "Complete WWL methodology". Both are available at: <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/> (password: freedom).

10. Why does the WWL only focus on Christians?

The WWL focuses only on Christians for two main reasons. First, the mandate of Open Doors is to support suffering Christians worldwide. The WWL is essentially a tool for both Open Door's leadership and constituency to obtain insight into the nature, scope and geographical location of the persecution of Christians. Secondly, via its long-standing in-country networks, Open Doors can research down to "village level". Hence, WWR is uniquely equipped for specifically researching the persecution of Christians. The research team is aware that in many situations other minority groups are also suffering alongside Christians. This is clearly mentioned in the WWL Full Country dossiers under the separate section entitled "Persecution of other religious minorities".

11. Why is the WWL limited to 50 countries?

A list of Top 50 countries is only made for practical communication purposes. In reality, the WWL is an index of all countries experiencing high, very high or extreme levels of persecution (i.e. an index of countries scoring 41+ points). It must be stressed that several countries scoring 41 points or more (i.e. experiencing high levels of persecution) do not make it to the Top 50. WWR designates these countries "Persecution Watch Countries" (PWCs).

In WWL 2023 there were 26 PWCs, of which five were countries in which Christians faced a 'very high' level of persecution and 21 a 'high level' of persecution. See color-coding in the tables below. (The columns on the far right simply give a comparison to the scores and ranks in WWL 2022.)

a) WWL 2023 / Countries scoring 81 – 100 points

WWL 2023 Rank	Country	1. Private Life Score	2. Family Life Score	3. Community Life Score	4. National Life Score	5. Church Life Score	6. Violence Score	Total WWL 2023 Score	WWL 2022 Rank	TOTAL WWL 2022 Score
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	14.4	98	2	96
2	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.6	8.7	92	3	91
3	Yemen	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	5.9	89	5	88
4	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.5	15.9	15.7	12.2	89	6	88
5	Libya	15.6	15.5	15.9	16.1	16.3	9.1	88	4	91
6	Nigeria	13.8	13.8	14.6	14.8	14.4	16.7	88	7	87
7	Pakistan	13.4	13.8	14.8	14.8	12.9	16.7	86	8	87
8	Iran	14.5	14.6	13.8	15.8	16.5	10.7	86	9	85
9	Afghanistan	15.4	15.7	15.4	16.1	16.6	4.6	84	1	98
10	Sudan	14.1	14.2	14.9	14.9	15.5	9.4	83	13	79
11	India	12.3	13.1	13.0	14.8	13.3	15.7	82	10	82

b) WWL 2023 / Countries scoring 61 – 80 points

WWL 2023 Rank	Country	1. Private Life Score	2. Family Life Score	3. Community Life Score	4. National Life Score	5. Church Life Score	6. Violence Score	Total WWL 2023 Score	WWL 2022 Rank	TOTAL WWL 2022 Score
12	Syria	13.2	14.1	13.6	14.1	14.1	11.3	80	15	78
13	Saudi Arabia	15.2	15.3	14.9	15.8	16.7	2.4	80	11	81
14	Myanmar	12.5	11.6	13.9	13.9	12.9	15.4	80	12	79
15	Maldives	15.4	15.3	13.8	16.0	16.4	0.2	77	16	77
16	China	12.9	10.0	12.7	14.5	15.6	11.1	77	17	76
17	Mali	11.1	10.1	14.7	10.3	15.1	15.0	76	24	70
18	Iraq	14.1	14.6	14.0	14.8	13.9	4.6	76	14	78
19	Algeria	14.1	14.1	11.5	13.7	15.1	4.8	73	22	71
20	Mauritania	14.5	14.2	13.3	14.1	14.2	1.3	72	23	70
21	Uzbekistan	14.9	12.7	13.9	12.7	15.6	1.5	71	21	71
22	Colombia	11.8	8.9	13.1	11.3	10.4	15.4	71	30	68
23	Burkina Faso	9.4	9.7	12.5	9.6	13.8	15.6	71	32	68
24	Central African Republic	10.3	8.6	13.9	9.6	12.2	15.6	70	31	68
25	Vietnam	11.8	9.6	12.8	14.6	14.4	6.9	70	19	71
26	Turkmenistan	14.5	11.3	13.6	14.1	15.7	0.6	70	25	69
27	Cuba	13.1	8.3	13.1	13.2	14.9	7.0	70	37	66
28	Niger	9.4	9.5	14.5	7.7	13.1	15.4	70	33	68
29	Morocco	13.2	13.8	10.9	12.2	14.5	4.8	69	27	69
30	Bangladesh	12.6	10.7	12.8	11.3	10.6	10.7	69	29	68
31	Laos	11.7	10.2	13.3	14.2	14.0	5.0	68	26	69
32	Mozambique	9.3	8.5	13.9	8.4	12.5	15.6	68	41	65
33	Indonesia	11.3	12.0	11.6	11.1	9.2	12.8	68	28	68
34	Qatar	14.2	14.1	10.5	13.2	14.4	1.5	68	18	74
35	Egypt	12.7	13.5	11.6	12.1	10.8	7.0	68	20	71
36	Tunisia	12.0	12.8	10.4	12.0	13.5	6.5	67	35	66

c)

WWL 2023 Rank	Country	1. Private Life Score	2. Family Life Score	3. Community Life Score	4. National Life Score	5. Church Life Score	6. Violence Score	Total WWL 2023 Score	WWL 2022 Rank	TOTAL WWL 2022 Score
37	Congo DR (DRC)	8.0	7.9	12.6	9.7	13.0	15.6	67	40	66
38	Mexico	10.3	8.3	12.5	11.0	10.5	13.9	67	43	65
39	Ethiopia	9.9	10.3	13.1	10.4	12.1	10.6	66	38	66
40	Bhutan	13.2	12.3	11.6	13.9	14.2	1.1	66	34	67
41	Turkey	12.8	11.5	11.8	13.0	11.5	5.7	66	42	65
42	Comoros	12.7	14.0	11.2	12.4	14.2	1.5	66	53	63
43	Malaysia	12.8	14.3	11.4	12.2	11.1	3.9	66	50	63
44	Tajikistan	13.8	12.2	12.3	12.8	13.4	1.1	66	45	65
45	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	7.2	13.1	15.9	65	44	65
46	Brunei	14.8	14.6	10.1	10.9	14.4	0.4	65	46	64
47	Oman	14.0	14.1	10.3	13.3	12.9	0.6	65	36	66
48	Kazakhstan	13.2	11.6	11.9	12.7	14.2	1.1	65	47	64
49	Jordan	13.0	14.0	10.5	12.3	12.7	2.0	65	39	66
50	Nicaragua	10.8	5.9	11.9	12.8	13.6	9.4	65	61	56
51	Kenya	10.3	9.2	11.4	8.0	11.5	13.3	64	51	63
52	Kuwait	13.5	13.7	9.8	12.3	13.1	1.1	64	49	64
53	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	15.6	63	55	61
54	United Arab Emirates	13.4	13.4	9.9	11.2	12.8	1.1	62	54	62
55	Nepal	12.0	9.8	9.4	13.0	12.6	4.4	61	48	64

c) WWL 2023 / Countries scoring 41 – 60 points

WWL 2023 Rank	Country	1. Private Life Score	2. Family Life Score	3. Community Life Score	4. National Life Score	5. Church Life Score	6. Violence Score	Total WWL 2023 Score	WWL 2022 Rank	TOTAL WWL 2022 Score
56	Djibouti	12.3	12.6	12.7	10.1	12.3	0.6	60	58	59
57	Palestinian Territories	13.0	13.3	9.7	10.3	12.0	2.0	60	57	59
58	Azerbaijan	13.2	10.0	9.5	12.0	13.6	0.6	59	56	60
59	Kyrgyzstan	12.9	10.2	11.0	10.4	12.0	2.0	59	59	58
60	Chad	11.6	8.2	10.2	10.2	10.3	7.6	58	63	55
61	Russian Federation	12.3	7.9	10.3	11.8	12.8	2.0	57	62	56
62	Sri Lanka	12.8	9.1	10.6	11.3	9.5	3.9	57	52	63
63	Rwanda	9.4	7.7	9.0	10.4	11.7	8.9	57	67	50
64	Venezuela	6.0	4.6	11.7	10.2	11.4	11.7	56	65	51
65	Burundi	7.6	7.8	9.4	9.8	9.7	11.1	55	64	52
66	Bahrain	12.7	13.3	8.7	10.7	8.8	0.9	55	60	57
67	Honduras	7.1	5.0	11.9	7.6	9.8	11.9	53	68	48
68	Angola	6.8	6.7	8.1	11.5	11.4	7.2	52	66	51
69	Uganda	8.1	5.0	7.4	6.7	9.2	14.8	51	69	48
70	Togo	9.2	6.7	9.3	7.1	11.0	5.4	49	71	44
71	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	8.3	10.5	3.0	48	73	43
72	South Sudan	5.7	4.4	7.0	6.3	7.6	15.0	46	74	43
73	El Salvador	7.7	4.2	10.6	7.4	9.1	6.7	46	70	45
74	Ivory Coast	12.0	6.5	8.7	5.9	8.0	3.3	44	75	42
75	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.9	8.8	8.9	1.1	44	72	44
76	Belarus	9.5	3.8	4.8	9.4	12.1	3.3	43	Below 41 points	

12. Does the WWL take Christians of all denominations into consideration?

Yes, the WWL includes all Christian denominations in its country analysis. For details concerning the “Categories of Christian communities”, please see the definitions and explanations in the “Short version of WWL methodology”. For more detailed background discussion, see the “Complete WWL methodology”. Both available at at: <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/> (password: freedom).

13. Is the WWL figure for the total number of persecuted Christians an ‘educated guess’ or a verifiable figure?

World Watch Research uses verifiable data for estimating the total number of persecuted Christians.

Background information on how the total number of persecuted Christians has been derived is available in the document “Total number of persecuted Christians and derived statements” (to be found in [WWL 2023 Compilation document](#), pp.15-18). It is important to realize that WWR takes into account the varied Christian population level in different parts of a country and/or the specific church denominations affected by persecution. WWR makes use of World Christian Database (WCD) information which supplies both country totals for the number of Christians (and other religions) and also data for separate provinces and church denominations. WWR combines this data with in-country details on how persecution affects Christians and church denominations in different provinces and states.

14. Did the COVID-19 pandemic affect research and scoring for WWL?

There was little disruption to report in the WWL 2023 reporting period. However, in the WWL 2021 and 2022 reporting periods, travel restrictions and other measures introduced by the governments of various countries to combat the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic did cause delays and create the need for restructuring grass-roots research in some cases. Through the agile cooperation of In-country networks, Open Doors country researchers, External experts, WWR analysts and an increased use of technological options, Open Doors remained confident that all WWL scoring, analysis and documentation maintained required levels of quality and reliability.

15. How is the WWL used today?

Question in more detail: WWL was originally created for Open Doors to better understand where and how Christians were being persecuted and thus prioritize allocation of support. Does it still serve this purpose or has it become more about raising awareness in countries not experiencing such levels of persecution?

Answer: It still serves both purposes and more. Besides being important for mobilizing the freer Church to engage with persecuted Christians elsewhere in the world, the WWL and accompanying documentation serve OD-Field's strategic planning (referred to as SPMM). Additionally, the WWL results are important input for Advocacy tasks at various levels, ranging from an in-country grassroots level to that of international bodies.

16. Is persecution really increasing – or are the higher WWL scores of late simply the result of more detailed research and reporting?

Question in more detail: [WWL 300 years documentation](#) seems to show that in the last 3 decades the persecution of Christians has increased both geographically and in strength. How much of that 'increase' is a result of more and better reporting through WWR developing and refining its research methodology?

Answer: More and better reporting may sometimes play a role at country level, but as a global pattern that is not the case. WWR has published a [WWL-overview from WWL 1993 onwards](#), taking into consideration – as far as possible – the changes in methodology over the years. This revised table clearly shows that overall global persecution was somewhat higher in the first decade than in the second decade, but became seriously higher in the third decade. So, this increase in persecution is to be understood as real and not related to refinements in WWL methodology.

17. How many countries in total are covered by WWR's analysts?

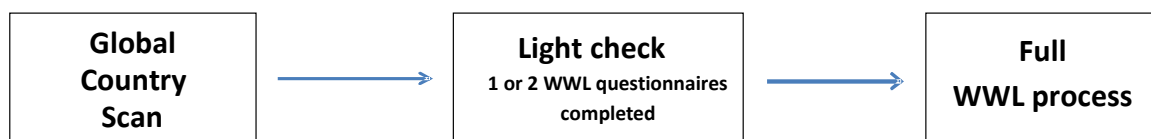
Answer: As far as the persecution of Christians is concerned, WWR tries to keep an eye on the whole world. Where our attention is alerted, a deeper look is taken and then a decision is made as to whether full research is needed. Currently approximately 100 countries are in the full research category.

See: Complete WWL Methodology, p.35:

The world has many countries, and it would be very laborious to investigate all countries using the extensive WWL questionnaire. In order to know which countries to include in in-depth investigations, the WWL methodology has developed a three-step approach for monitoring hostilities against Christians in all countries of the world. (This method could also be adapted for use for monitoring hostilities against other religious minorities.)

As can be seen in Diagram 16, the first component of the system is the Global Country Scan which combines information gathered from the internet and other sources (2.2). Early warning signs flagged up by the Global Country Scan necessitate further research in the form of a ‘Light check’ through the completion of 1 or 2 WWL questionnaires by external experts. If the need for further in-depth research becomes clearly evident, the full WWL process is set in motion (2.3).

Diagram 16: Three step system for integral monitoring of hostilities against Christians worldwide



18. Why are WWL country rankings sometimes different to those used by other organizations?

There are several organizations publishing data on religious persecution. Their results may differ from those of WWR. The two main reasons are: 1) Very often other organizations focus on all major religious groups, while WWR concentrates on Christians. 2) Each organization has its own system of persecution categorization. If only the second reason is applicable, WWR expects a fair degree of similarity in results.

WWR is confident in the quality of its research process and results, involving many contributors from grassroots level upwards. If questions arise about differences in findings between other organizations and WWR for specific countries, then it is suggested that the background documentation is consulted and compared, as well as the methods employed. For WWR this would be the annually revised “Complete WWL methodology” available at:

- <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-documentation/>
- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/> (password: freedom).

19. Why has the “Total Number of Persecuted Christians” changed over the years?

For many years, WWR used the number of 200 million, which is said to have been first used by Paul Marshall (at the time Senior Fellow at the Center for Religious Freedom, Freedom House, Washington DC) in his 1997 book “Their Blood Cries Out”. Open Doors reduced this estimate to

100 million for a number of years. However, from WWL 2017 onwards, Open Doors made the decision to link the total figure more directly to WWL country scoring:

WWL 2017 – 41 points or more – 215 million

WWL 2018 – 41 points or more – 215 million

WWL 2019 – Top 50 – 245 million / 41 points or more: More than 245 million

WWL 2020 - Top 50 – 260 million / 41 points or more: More than 260 million

WWL 2021 - Top 50 – 309 million / 41 points or more: 340 million

WWL 2022 - Top 50 – 312 million / 41 points or more: 360 million

WWL 2023 - Top 50 – 312 million / 41 points or more: 360 million

In countries scoring less than 41 points, there will, of course, be Christians facing persecution; however these are not included in the above estimates.