

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
96.38	Afghanistan	1	81.53	Bhutan	25	70.43	Myanmar	50
94.11	Algeria	2	81.52	Mali	26	69.24	Djibouti	51
94.00	Iran	3	81.23	Libya	27	69.09	Indonesia	52
91.94	Bangladesh	4	80.58	India	28	69.04	Guinea-Bissau	53
91.07	Tunisia	5	78.29	Senegal	29	68.72	Qatar	54
90.62	Pakistan	6	78.12	Oman	30	68.26	Sri Lanka	55
89.53	Turkey	7	77.51	Syria	31	67.84	Eritrea	56
89.03	Morocco	8	77.28	Uzbekistan	32	67.36	Serbia and Montenegro	57
88.57	Yemen	9	76.59	Japan	33	65.74	China	58
87.88	Maldives	10	76.40	Somalia	34	65.26	Sierra Leone	59
86.55	Nepal	11	76.03	Jordan	35	64.93	Taiwan	60
86.28	Azerbaijan	12	75.95	Turkmenistan	36	64.63	Georgia	61
85.73	Western Sahara	13	75.80	Chad	37	64.42	Brunei	62
85.01	Korea North	14	75.72	Kuwait	38	64.09	Malaysia	63
84.66	Cambodia	15	75.25	Thailand	39	63.52	Tanzania	64
84.33	Comoros	16	75.14	Bahrain	40	62.44	Ivory Coast	65
84.26	Mongolia	17	75.09	Tajikistan	41	61.80	Benin	66
84.08	Iraq	18	74.64	Israel	42	61.45	Nigeria	67
83.72	Saudi Arabia	19	74.56	Viet Nam	43	61.00	Russia	68
82.81	Laos	20	74.02	Gambia	44	60.36	Mozambique	69
82.60	Niger	21	73.83	Egypt	45	60.12	Burkina Faso	70
81.91	Guinea	22	73.82	Mayotte	46	59.96	Bosnia-Herzegovina	71
81.90	Kyrgyzstan	23	72.84	Sudan	47	59.60	Central African Rep	72
81.83	Mauritania	24	71.42	United Arab Emirates	48	58.67	Liberia	73
			71.38	Kazakhstan	49			

57.16	Ethiopia	74	37.54	Argentina	125	24.81	Ecuador	176
56.82	Togo	75	37.53	Uganda	126	24.76	El Salvador	177
56.46	Palestine	76	37.07	Sweden	127		Netherlands	
55.37	France	77	37.07	Sweden	127	24.11	Antilles	178
54.70	Belarus	78	36.71	Greece	128	24.05	Barbados	179
54.64	Singapore	79	36.66	Mauritius	129	23.75	Saint Lucia	180
54.37	Guyana	80	36.16	Andorra	130	23.63	Portugal	181
53.52	Ghana	81	35.85	Jamaica	131	23.60	Brazil	182
52.80	Lebanon	82	35.25	Finland	132	23.55	Honduras	183
52.71	Cameroon	83	34.98	Czech Republic	133	23.45	Turks & Caicos Is	184
52.54	Macedonia	84	34.97	Chile	134	23.13	Vanuatu	185
52.17	Kenya	85	34.31	Zimbabwe	135	22.73	Aruba	186
51.84	Netherlands	86	33.69	Venezuela	136	21.95	Antigua	187
50.02	Gibraltar	87	33.61	Congo-Zaire	137	21.54	San Marino	188
49.49	Estonia	88	33.33	Uruguay	138	21.52	Martinique	189
49.43	Zambia	89	33.33	Slovenia	139	21.44	Poland	190
48.78	Liechtenstein	90	32.81	Saint Vincent	140	21.44	Bolivia	191
48.36	Bulgaria	91	32.42	Cayman Islands	141	21.21	Greenland	192
48.22	Moldavia	92	32.25	Sao Tome & Principe	142		Dominican Republic	
48.07	Ukraine	93	32.17	Romania	143	21.20		193
47.74	Equatorial Guinea	94	32.04	Croatia	144	21.19	Micronesia	194
47.33	Trinidad & Tobago	95	31.85	French Guiana	145	20.51	Korea South	195
46.96	Austria	96	31.62	Hungary	146	20.17	French Polynesia	196
46.60	Armenia	97	31.32	Switzerland	147	19.96	Nicaragua	197
46.40	Gabon	98	31.02	Isle of Man	148	19.68	Panama	198
46.28	Albania	99	30.93	Belize	149	19.09	Solomon Islands	199
46.03	Madagascar	100	30.90	Paraguay	150	18.67	Tonga	200
45.83	Germany	101	30.65	American Samoa	151	17.67	Samoa	201
45.21	Italy	102	30.20	Colombia	152	17.42	Lesotho	202
45.15	Cyprus	103	29.83	Botswana	153	17.38	Costa Rica	203
44.80	Cuba	104	29.74	Denmark	154	17.37	British Virgin Is	204
44.75	Spain	105	29.74	Denmark	154	16.99	Dominica	205
44.71	East Timor	106	29.33	Guatemala	155	16.59	Kiribati	206
43.76	Philippines	107	28.94	New Zealand	156		Saint Kitts & Nevis	
43.68	Lithuania	108	28.64	Mexico	157	15.99		207
43.07	Britain	109	28.60	Peru	158	15.61	Swaziland	208
43.03	Belgium	110	28.37	Papua New Guinea	159	15.27	Cape Verde	209
42.87	Namibia	111	27.57	New Caledonia	160	14.40	Guam	210
41.49	Reunion	112	27.51	Haiti	161	13.75	Palau	211
41.29	Malawi	113	27.36	Ireland	162	13.15	Anguilla	212
41.28	Congo-Brazzaville	114	27.26	Rwanda	163	12.95	Cook Islands	213
41.25	Latvia	115	27.06	Seychelles	164	12.50	Tuvalu	214
40.48	South Africa	116	27.06	Angola	165		Saint Pierre & Miquelon	
40.27	Australia	117	26.92	Slovakia	166	12.25		215
39.73	Suriname	118	26.83	Norway	167	12.03	Wallis & Futuna Is	216
39.51	Canada	119	26.83	Norway	167	10.58	Malta	217
39.14	Fiji	120	26.58	Bahamas	168	10.07	Guadeloupe	218
38.72	Monaco	121	26.55	Iceland	169	9.07	Faeroe Islands	219
38.56	Northern Mariana Is	122	26.50	Burundi	170	8.51	Montserrat	220
38.14	United States	123	26.50	Virgin Is of the US	171	7.23	Saint Helena	221
37.64	Luxembourg	124	26.46	Puerto Rico	172	5.81	Grenada	222
			25.71	Marshall Islands	173			
			25.67	Bermuda	174			
			25.42	Nauru	175			

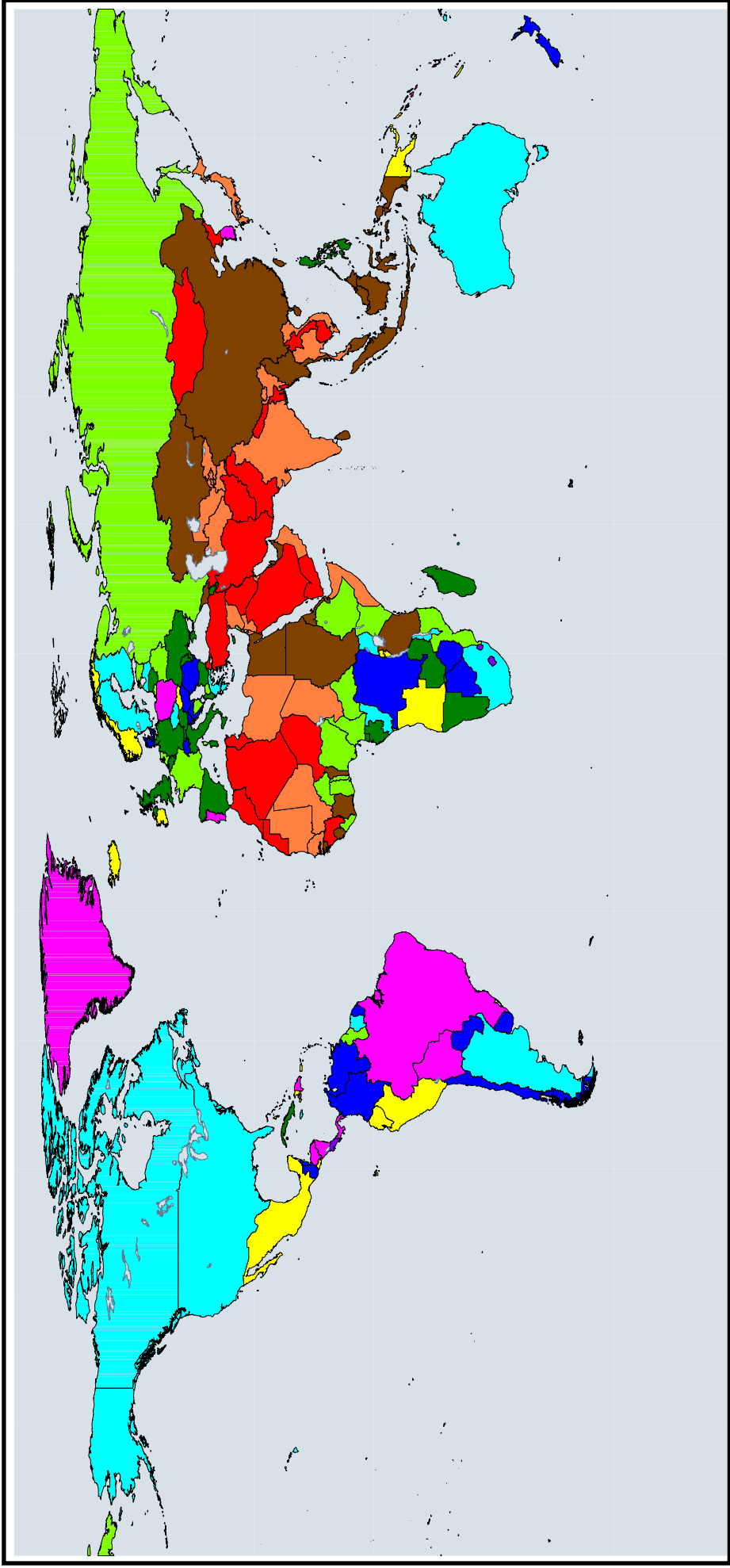


Figure 1 - Great Commission Prioritization of Countries

Legend

Lowest Priority

- Prioritization Score 18.2 or less
- Prioritization Score greater than 18.2 to 24.0
- Prioritization Score greater than 24.0 to 28.6
- Prioritization Score greater than 28.6 to 35.0
- Prioritization Score greater than 35.0 to 42.7
- Prioritization Score greater than 42.7 to 49.5
- Prioritization Score greater than 49.5 to 61.6
- Prioritization Score greater than 61.6 to 74.0
- Prioritization Score greater than 74.0 to 81.9
- Prioritization Score greater than 81.9

Highest Priority

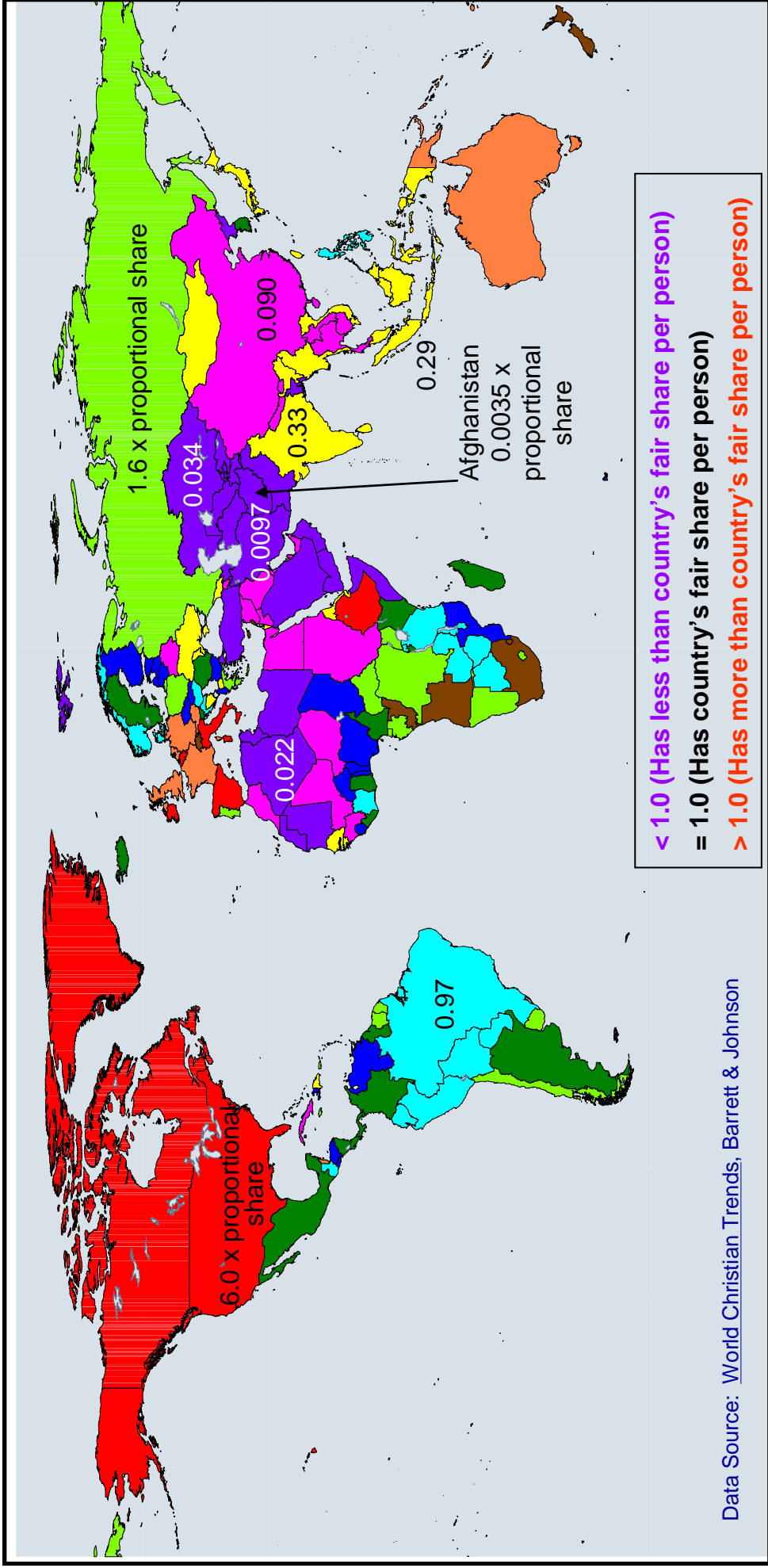


Figure 2 - Ratios of Countries' Portions of the World's Christian Workers on a per Person Basis

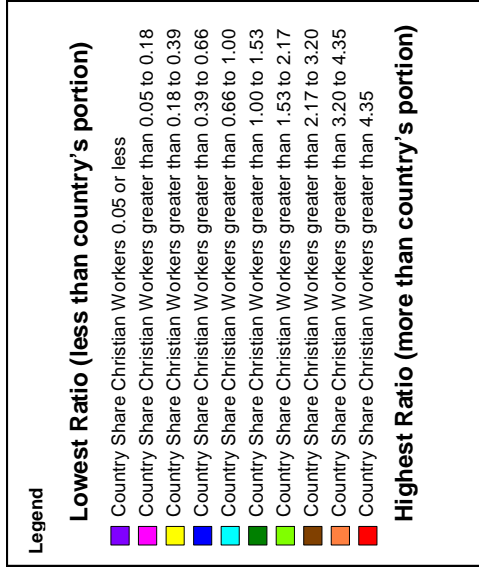


Table 2 – Comparison of Christian Resources/Criteria in the USA, Afghanistan, India, and China

	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

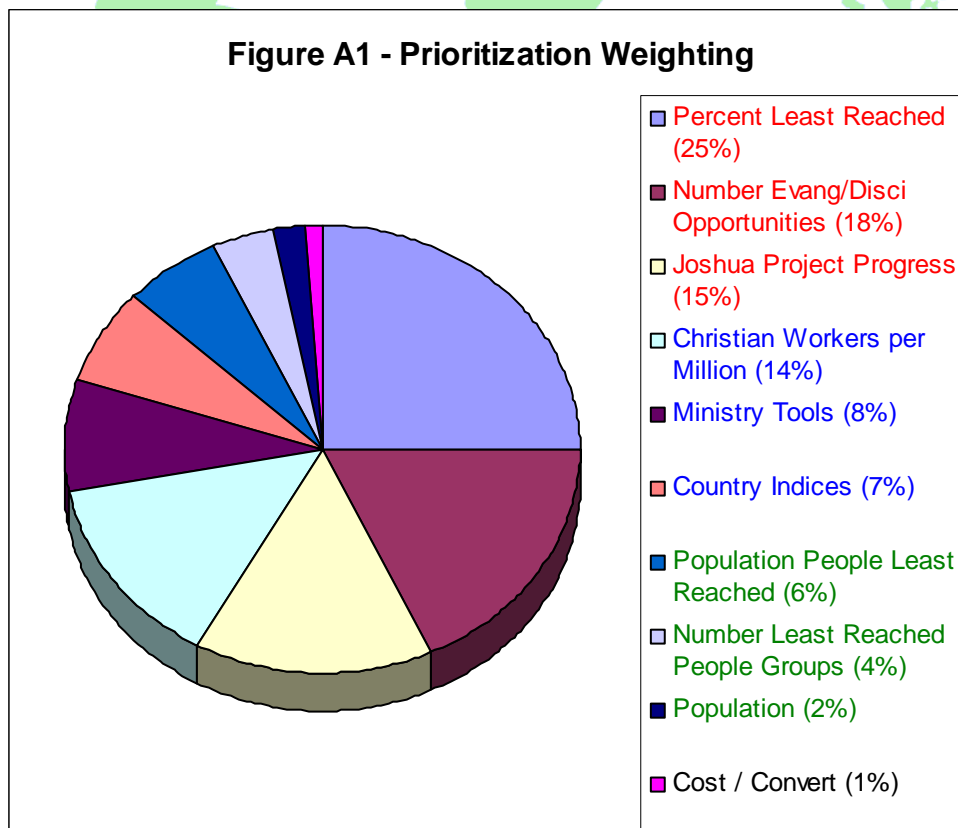


Table A1 – Prioritization Weighting Criteria and Description

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.