

World  
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Research

# WWL – Frequently asked questions

Updated October 2022

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**OpenDoors**

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research

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# WWL – Frequently Asked Questions

- updated October 2022

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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://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 calculated<sup>1</sup> from the average of the number of points recorded for each of the four variables.

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<sup>1</sup> 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).

Diagram of WWL scoring grid

	0 points	1 point	2 points	3 points	4 points
(1) Number of categories of Christian communities affected <sup>2</sup>	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 <sup>3</sup>	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.

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 example below (Vietnam WWL 2022), where the

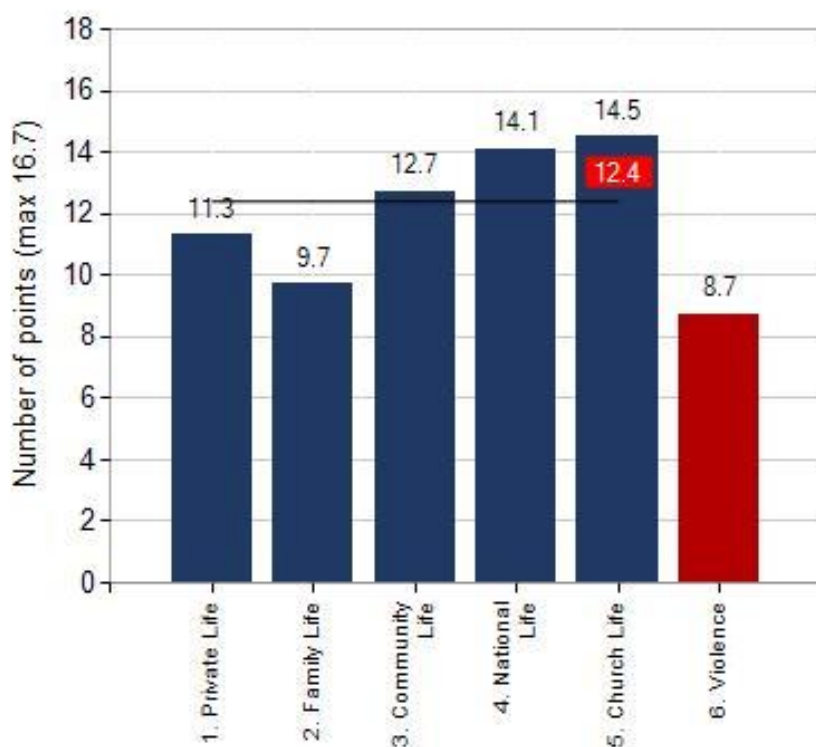
<sup>2</sup> If all four categories of Christian communities (CCCs) exist in a country, each category affected receives one point. However, it often occurs that not all CCCs are present in a country and/or not all of them are affected by the persecution covered by the Block question. The scoring for 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

<sup>3</sup> 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).

average pressure over all spheres of life is 12.4 points (out of a maximum of 16.7) and the highest levels of pressure on Christians occur in the Church life and National life spheres. Persecution in Vietnam has always been violent – the score for violence reached the level of 8.7 points. (However, killings do not happen on a large scale; the recorded incidents show that the Communist government's preferred means are prison sentences or deportation.)

WWL 2022 Persecution Pattern for Vietnam



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).

### 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)<sup>4</sup> has been published in cooperation with Brill publishers (USA)<sup>5</sup> 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).

<sup>4</sup> WCD website: <https://www.brill.com/publications/online-resources/world-christian-database>

<sup>5</sup> 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 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 2022, the WWL research team consists of one managing director, seven persecution analysts and one editor/communicator, all with university degrees. Three of the team (including the managing director) have or are completing PhDs. Five are lawyers with experience in the field of human rights, constitutional law or governance. 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 other part-time 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)<sup>6</sup> 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.

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<sup>6</sup> See IIRF website: [www.iirf.eu](http://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 2022 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 2021.)



## a) Countries scoring 81 – 100 points in WWL 2022

WWL 2022		1. Private Life	2. Family Life	3. Community Life	4. National Life	5. Church Life	6. Violence	TOTAL SCORE WWL 2022	WWL 2021	TOTAL SCORE WWL 2021
Rank	Country	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score		Rank	
<b>1</b>	<b>Afghanistan</b>	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	15.0	<b>98</b>	2	94
<b>2</b>	<b>North Korea</b>	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	13.1	<b>96</b>	1	94
<b>3</b>	<b>Somalia</b>	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.6	8.5	<b>91</b>	3	92
<b>4</b>	<b>Libya</b>	15.6	15.5	15.9	16.2	16.3	11.5	<b>91</b>	4	92
<b>5</b>	<b>Yemen</b>	16.7	16.6	16.5	16.7	16.7	5.2	<b>88</b>	7	87
<b>6</b>	<b>Eritrea</b>	14.6	14.9	15.5	15.9	15.6	11.1	<b>88</b>	6	88
<b>7</b>	<b>Nigeria</b>	13.8	13.8	14.3	14.5	14.4	16.7	<b>87</b>	9	85
<b>8</b>	<b>Pakistan</b>	13.6	14.0	15.1	14.9	13.1	16.7	<b>87</b>	5	88
<b>9</b>	<b>Iran</b>	14.5	14.6	13.6	15.8	16.5	10.4	<b>85</b>	8	86
<b>10</b>	<b>India</b>	12.7	12.7	12.9	14.7	13.3	15.6	<b>82</b>	10	83
<b>11</b>	<b>Saudi Arabia</b>	15.1	15.1	15.0	15.9	16.7	3.1	<b>81</b>	14	78

## b) Countries scoring 61 – 80 points in WWL 2022

WWL 2022		1. Private Life	2. Family Life	3. Community Life	4. National Life	5. Church Life	6. Violence	TOTAL SCORE WWL 2022	WWL 2021	TOTAL SCORE WWL 2021
Rank	Country	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score		Rank	
<b>12</b>	<b>Myanmar</b>	12.4	11.5	13.8	13.4	13.1	14.8	<b>79</b>	18	74
<b>13</b>	<b>Sudan</b>	13.4	13.4	14.3	13.6	15.7	8.5	<b>79</b>	13	79
<b>14</b>	<b>Iraq</b>	14.0	14.6	14.0	14.8	13.9	6.9	<b>78</b>	11	82
<b>15</b>	<b>Syria</b>	12.9	13.8	13.5	14.3	13.9	9.3	<b>78</b>	12	81
<b>16</b>	<b>Maldives</b>	15.4	15.3	13.7	15.8	16.5	0.4	<b>77</b>	15	77
<b>17</b>	<b>China</b>	12.6	9.8	12.2	14.4	15.5	11.1	<b>76</b>	17	74
<b>18</b>	<b>Qatar</b>	14.2	14.1	11.1	13.0	14.3	7.2	<b>74</b>	29	67
<b>19</b>	<b>Vietnam</b>	11.3	9.7	12.7	14.1	14.5	8.7	<b>71</b>	19	72
<b>20</b>	<b>Egypt</b>	12.7	13.2	11.5	12.7	10.8	10.0	<b>71</b>	16	75
<b>21</b>	<b>Uzbekistan</b>	14.9	12.7	14.1	11.8	15.6	1.7	<b>71</b>	21	71
<b>22</b>	<b>Algeria</b>	14.0	14.0	11.1	13.4	14.1	4.1	<b>71</b>	24	70
<b>23</b>	<b>Mauritania</b>	14.3	13.9	13.1	14.0	14.1	0.9	<b>70</b>	20	71
<b>24</b>	<b>Mali</b>	9.4	8.2	13.9	10.3	12.8	15.0	<b>70</b>	28	67
<b>25</b>	<b>Turkmenistan</b>	14.5	11.3	13.6	13.3	15.7	0.6	<b>69</b>	23	70
<b>26</b>	<b>Laos</b>	12.0	10.3	13.2	13.3	14.1	5.9	<b>69</b>	22	71
<b>27</b>	<b>Morocco</b>	13.1	13.8	10.8	12.8	14.2	3.9	<b>69</b>	27	67
<b>28</b>	<b>Indonesia</b>	11.3	11.5	11.5	11.0	9.6	13.5	<b>68</b>	47	63

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WWL 2022		1. Private Life	2. Family Life	3. Community Life	4. National Life	5. Church Life	6. Violence	TOTAL SCORE WWL 2022	WWL 2021	TOTAL SCORE WWL 2021
Rank	Country	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score		Rank	
29	Bangladesh	11.8	10.7	12.9	11.3	10.2	11.3	68	31	67
30	Colombia	11.5	8.8	13.1	11.0	9.9	13.3	68	30	67
31	Central African Republic	9.0	8.6	13.6	9.6	11.4	15.6	68	35	66
32	Burkina Faso	9.4	9.7	12.0	9.6	12.1	14.8	68	32	67
33	Niger	9.4	9.5	13.9	7.2	12.8	14.8	68	54	62
34	Bhutan	13.4	12.4	11.7	13.7	13.8	1.7	67	43	64
35	Tunisia	11.9	12.7	10.6	11.3	13.4	6.5	66	26	67
36	Oman	13.8	14.0	10.3	13.2	13.4	1.5	66	44	63
37	Cuba	12.3	8.1	12.6	13.2	14.0	5.9	66	51	62
38	Ethiopia	9.9	10.3	13.1	10.3	12.3	9.8	66	36	65
39	Jordan	12.9	14.0	11.0	12.3	12.5	3.0	66	38	64
40	Congo DR (DRC)	8.0	7.9	12.6	9.7	12.0	15.6	66	40	64
41	Mozambique	9.3	8.5	11.3	7.9	12.5	15.6	65	45	63
42	Turkey	12.6	11.5	11.4	13.2	11.6	4.6	65	25	69
43	Mexico	10.3	8.3	12.5	10.8	10.3	12.6	65	37	64
44	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	7.2	13.1	15.4	65	42	64
45	Tajikistan	13.8	12.3	12.0	12.6	13.2	0.7	65	33	66
46	Brunei	14.8	14.5	10.3	11.0	13.2	0.6	64	39	64
47	Kazakhstan	13.4	11.6	11.1	12.6	13.5	1.7	64	41	64
48	Nepal	12.4	9.8	9.9	13.6	12.7	5.2	64	34	66
49	Kuwait	13.5	13.7	9.8	12.3	13.1	1.1	64	48	63
50	Malaysia	12.5	14.3	11.5	11.6	10.2	3.3	63	46	63
51	Kenya	11.7	9.2	11.4	8.0	11.5	11.1	63	49	62
52	Sri Lanka	12.9	9.9	11.4	11.3	9.4	7.8	63	52	62
53	Comoros	12.7	11.1	11.2	12.4	14.2	0.9	63	50	62
54	United Arab Emirates	13.4	13.6	10.1	11.8	12.2	1.3	62	53	62
55	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	13.7	61	57	58

c) Countries scoring 41 – 60 points in WWL 2022

WWL 2022		1. Private Life	2. Family Life	3. Community Life	4. National Life	5. Church Life	6. Violence	TOTAL SCORE WWL 2022	WWL 2021	TOTAL SCORE WWL 2021
Rank	Country	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score		Rank	
56	Azerbaijan	13.1	9.9	9.3	11.0	13.4	3.3	60	61	56
57	Palestinian Territories	13.0	13.4	9.8	10.2	12.0	0.9	59	56	58
58	Djibouti	12.3	12.3	11.1	10.0	12.2	0.7	59	59	56
59	Kyrgyzstan	12.9	10.1	11.1	10.4	12.0	1.5	58	55	58
60	Bahrain	12.5	13.2	9.1	11.1	10.2	0.9	57	60	56
61	Nicaragua	9.1	5.6	11.1	11.8	11.3	7.6	56	63	51
62	Russian Federation	12.3	8.0	10.2	10.6	12.3	2.2	56	58	57
63	Chad	11.5	8.2	10.2	9.6	10.3	5.6	55	62	53
64	Burundi	7.6	7.8	9.7	9.2	9.6	8.1	52	64	48
65	Venezuela	5.6	4.5	11.2	9.4	11.1	9.6	51	(Below 41 points)	
66	Angola	6.8	6.7	8.1	10.1	11.4	7.8	51	68	46
67	Rwanda	8.1	5.5	6.7	10.3	10.1	9.3	50	72	42
68	Honduras	7.2	5.1	10.5	7.7	9.2	8.7	48	67	46
69	Uganda	8.1	4.6	7.4	6.7	9.1	11.7	48	65	47
70	El Salvador	7.7	4.6	10.7	5.7	9.1	7.2	45	74	42

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WWL 2022		1. Private Life	2. Family Life	3. Community Life	4. National Life	5. Church Life	6. Violence	TOTAL SCORE WWL 2022	WWL 2021	TOTAL SCORE WWL 2021
Rank	Country	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score		Rank	
71	Togo	9.2	6.7	9.3	7.1	9.8	2.4	44	71	43
72	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.7	8.3	8.8	1.7	44	70	43
73	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	7.0	8.1	2.0	43	66	47
74	South Sudan	5.7	0.9	7.0	6.3	7.8	15.0	43	69	43
75	Ivory Coast	9.8	8.6	8.2	5.5	7.9	2.0	42	73	42
76	Israel	9.8	8.4	5.6	6.6	6.6	4.3	41	(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 2022 Compilation document](#), pp.16-19). 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.