

# Towards a mission hostility index

## Initial explorations

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### Abstract

This article explores the feasibility of creating a mission hostility index based on the data of the World Watch List regarding discrimination and persecution of Christians. Using Jordan as a case study, clusters of questions on (1) social risk of individual Christian witness and (2) obstructions of collective Christian witness are found to be sufficient to establish such an index. Questions on (3) conversion and (4) anti-Christian activities have complementary value. Extensive critical considerations mark the way for further phases in exploring a mission hostility index.

### Keywords

Mission, conversion, hostility, restrictions, index, transnational comparison, World Watch List.

## 1. Introduction

As a researcher of both freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) and mission studies, I am intrigued by the interconnections between these two fields. Having examined various approaches to measuring FoRB or persecution over the years, as well as various studies and indices on related sub-questions, I have wondered about the feasibility of an index measuring hostility against Christian mission.

In this paper, to introduce the topic, some examples of contemporary hostility against Christian mission are presented, followed by reflections on the connection between mission and religious freedom. Next, the article reflects on the rationale for and potential approaches towards a mission hostility index, and then it introduces the data source used for this exercise. The core of the article is a fea-

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sibility study on establishing separate criteria regarding “social risk of individual Christian witness,” “obstructions of collective Christian witness,” “conversion-related matters,” and “anti-Christian activities” and whether and how these could be combined into an index. The article concludes with an extensive assessment of questions excluded, issues not covered by the data, a comparison with existing scales, reflections on generic limitations of a mission hostility index based on the said data, and indications of a possible way forward in research.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. Examples of contemporary hostility against Christian mission

Eighteen employees of International Assistance Mission were detained by the Taliban security forces in Afghanistan in September 2023 on charges of “inviting people to join Christianity” or “propagating and promoting Christianity” (VoA 2023). The organization responded, “We stand by the principle that aid will not be used to further a particular political or religious standpoint. All IAM staff agree to abide by the laws of Afghanistan.”<sup>3</sup>

When authorities in the Philippines want to silence their critics, including Christian missionaries tending to the needs of the vulnerable poor and down-trodden, they label these people as communist recruiters or financiers. Numerous Christian leaders and missionaries, both Protestant and Catholic, have been red-tagged, arrested, and driven into hiding since the May 2022 elections. Others disappear completely or are imprisoned, tortured, or murdered, usually at the hands of security personnel with sweeping powers and guaranteed impunity (Kendall 2023).

The Home Secretary of the UK clarified on 8 September 2023 that “silent prayer, within itself, is not unlawful” in a letter for the police forces across the country. This statement comes in response to many months of controversy over “buffer zones” outside abortion facilities that have led to the arrest of several citizens for praying silently inside a buffer zone (OIDAC 2023).

These three examples illustrate how hostility against Christian mission, aid work, and peaceful persuasion activities manifests itself around the globe in Western (UK), majoritarian Christian (Philippines), and decidedly anti-Christian (Afghanistan) contexts.

<sup>2</sup> A prior article emanating from the same research project was published in German (Sauer 2024). Although there is a substantial overlap in data, the prior article put Jordan in the foreground and compared the data with research by Feldtkeller on Jordan, whereas the present article emphasizes the exploration of the feasibility of a mission hostility index, de-emphasizes the details on Jordan, and adds substantial new and critical reflection on a mission hostility index. Thus, there is sufficient new material in this article, in addition to making this research accessible in English for the first time.

<sup>3</sup> After a decree in November 2022 that prohibited women from working with foreign and domestic organizations, several international aid agencies, including faith-based NGOs, closed their operations in Afghanistan (IAM 2023).

### 3. Connections between mission and religious freedom

Mission and religious freedom are “like two sides of the same coin” according to Andreas Feldtkeller (2002:261),<sup>4</sup> a leading professor of religious studies and misiology at Humboldt University in Berlin. Religious freedom provides “leeway to make use of alternatives regarding religious orientation.” If no religious alternatives are available in a society, freedom is indeed limited.

Mission in the broadest sense means for Feldtkeller (2002:267)<sup>5</sup> “that religious teachings are made accessible to people who are not already connected to these teachings through their ancestry.” This takes the shape of a non-coercive offer that can be voluntarily accepted or freely rejected. This needs to be distinguished from two other basic types of transmission of religion, which occur, respectively, within the framework of the community of descent<sup>6</sup> or with a connection to the expansion of political rule.<sup>7</sup> Mission, in contrast, has a different intention from these types of transmission of religion, namely to “make known to all people a way to overcome a deficit common to all.” (Feldtkeller 2002:267) Therefore, the social appearance of mission is different from cultural inheritance and conquest: “People are put before a decision as individuals” and won for a religion (Feldtkeller 2002:267). All this happens by peaceful means. In history, of course, there have been hybrid forms, mixing the said three types of transmission of religion. This is also a problematic factor in the history of Christian mission.

The above description of mission can be applied to the activities of any religion or worldview. In the context of this paper, the present time (rather than prior history), the freedom to *do* mission, and the *de facto* restrictions on Christian mission are of specific interest.

The protection of religious freedom under international law (in article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and other instruments) expressly also protects the right to what is called proselytism in that context (cf. Bielefeldt et al. 2016). There should be no need to remind readers of this fact, but unfortunately it is sometimes ignored.

### 4. The “why” and “how” of a mission hostility index

There are various reasons for which different actors might be interested in knowing about hostility against Christian mission. In the world of praxis, interested

4 Translation by author.

5 Feldtkeller promotes the study of *missio religionum* (the mission of any religion) within the framework of religious studies.

6 The individual and collective self-perception is then dominated by the statement “I am (or we are) born as ...,” e.g., Muslims or Christians.

7 The individual or collective self-perception might then be dominated by statements of coercion or incentives such as “since my people were conquered by XY, it has become so difficult to hold on to our religion,” “we were offered benefits,” or “we were forced to convert to the religion of our new rulers.”

parties might include those conducting Christian mission or advocating for religious freedom as a human right. Researchers interested in the issue might include those studying issues related to Christian mission, most often within theological faculties.<sup>8</sup> Or people may refer to mission hostility when examining – through the lenses of various human sciences or law – the right to peacefully manifest and non-coercively propagate one's religion or belief, or restrictions and prohibitions imposed by state or societal actors or any hostile counter-reactions to mission.

Those interested might wonder whether mission hostility can be measured and compared across delimited entities. To my knowledge, there has been no such attempt to establish anything like a mission hostility index (MHI).

To create one, different options come to mind. One would be to design an index and methodology from scratch and bear the burden of acquiring the data needed, possibly through original field research.

Another approach would be to examine existing tools and consider whether their data contains questions and results that might be reprocessed to build a mission hostility index.

Various reports or indices endeavor to describe or measure restrictions and violations of religious freedom, social hostility on account of religion, or discrimination and persecution of Christians.<sup>9</sup> Which of these would offer itself most readily to explore the feasibility of an MHI based on its data? My choice for an initial project was the World Watch List (WWL) on persecution of Christians, produced by the Christian aid agency Open Doors International, because the most common alternative sources of data appeared to have different degrees of limitations or obstacles for capturing mission hostility, as summarized in Table 1.<sup>10</sup>

## 5. Data source on mission hostility

Among the FORB reports that appear with some regularity, the WWL contains the most extensive data pertaining to Christians, makes use of one of the most complex methodologies, and has unique access to grassroots sources. Its focus on Christians permits it to go into a degree of depth and detail that the other reports cannot achieve. Compared to another promising source, the Religion and State dataset (Fox 2017), the WWL additionally provides narrative country dossiers that help to interpret the numerical data.

<sup>8</sup> The author started his theological career as a missiologist.

<sup>9</sup> For a review of a wider range of general FORB reports, cf. Marshall 2021; also see Petri 2022.

<sup>10</sup> The following table is tentative and is not meant to make statements on the general quality of these data. I am not claiming that it would be impossible to pursue a similar project with some of the other data sources. However, most of them would have more obstacles. For example, while disaggregated Pew data can be requested, it is only disaggregated by question, not by religious group. In the meantime, I have also conducted an analysis of RAS data (unpublished manuscript).

Table 1: Other global data on religious freedom		
Report/Ranking	Characteristics	Limitations re MHI
The Religion and State Project (J. Fox)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• all countries above 250,000 inhabitants</li><li>• dataset every 10 years</li><li>• current data 1990-2014</li><li>• 3 questions on restrictions on proselytizing</li><li>• differentiated scale</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• dated at the time, not annual</li><li>• no narrative country profiles or explanation of numerical data</li></ul>
Aid to the Church in Need: International Religious Freedom Report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• every two years</li><li>• all countries</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• limited frequency</li><li>• no scoring</li><li>• probably fewer mission related questions</li></ul>
US Department of State: International Religious Freedom Report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• annual</li><li>• all countries</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• no scoring</li><li>• limited information on Christians</li><li>• no particular interest in mission</li></ul>
USCIRF: Annual Report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• annual</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 28 countries only</li><li>• as above</li></ul>
Pew Research Center: Global Religious Restrictions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• (annual)</li><li>• focus on government restrictions and social hostilities against any religion</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• limited access to detailed data</li><li>• limitations of source</li><li>• limited interest in mission</li></ul>

The WWL<sup>11</sup> is, according to my knowledge, the prime source that specifically assesses in detail questions on freedom of Christian mission or hostility against it, and that it does this for numerous countries on an annual, incident-level basis and scores the results. The WWL and its associated data are among the most cited tools for measuring discrimination or persecution of Christians and violations of religious freedom and – in my opinion – provide a useful tool for nuanced understanding and transnational comparison, if used appropriately (Sauer 2022a, 2022b, 2023).<sup>12</sup>

To assess the feasibility of using WWL data, its methodology<sup>13</sup> has to be properly understood. Any limitations regarding its research design might potentially

11 The original documentation of the World Watch List data is found at [opendoorsanalytical.org](https://opendoorsanalytical.org) (password: freedom).  
12 For a critical study of the conformity of the WWL questionnaire with international human rights law, see Hoffmann 2017.  
13 My narrative seeks to summarize succinctly the most relevant aspects of a highly complex tool. The extensive published methodology document spans 107 pages (WWR 2024).

have implications for the results of a mission hostility index. While World Watch Research monitors all countries and uses simplified tools and indices by others to assess which countries meet the threshold to be examined in detail, the extensive methodology outlined in the following is applied to those 76 countries considered to have the highest levels of persecution of Christians currently (status: WWL 2022).

The basis is a standardized questionnaire that asks, among other things, 84 questions about country-specific events and conditions; the answers are assessed and given a point score. The questionnaire is completed country by country in the course of each year by Open Doors field staff and church and network leaders, either directly in the countries concerned or with the assistance of staff involved with the countries, as well as by independent experts who have competence about the religious freedom situation of the country. All receive training about the use of the questionnaire, and the meanings of questions and terminology are defined. Many have built up extensive experience in applying this tool over the years. The questionnaire does not ask about opinions but about facts, experience and knowledge that can be substantiated. The data collection method can therefore be qualified as “structured expert interviews.”

This data is then processed by persecution analysts at World Watch Research. They verify the responses received and the scores given, asking for justifications or rectifications along the way. These persecution analysts have extensive experience regarding their respective portfolio of countries. Every year, they proceed country by country and question by question to consolidate a final response and to score each question based on the input received, taking the results achieved in the previous cycle as a starting point. The scores awarded by the respondents are not blindly aggregated arithmetically, e.g., as an average, as this is not an opinion survey. Rather, the respondents’ input is calibrated into scores congruent with the qualitative responses. The perceived competence and nationwide comprehensiveness of the respective respondents is taken into account in the process. The aim is collective, complementary competence. Analysts also consult country-specific published sources and news reports collected throughout the year. The persecution analysts record how they arrived at the final scores and justify any possible deviations from the previous year’s score. The final question-level scores are then aggregated quantitatively to calculate scores on ‘spheres of life’ and a final overall score.

Furthermore, prior to publication, these results are externally audited on a sample of countries for their validity and for the consistent application of the stated methodology.<sup>14</sup> Thus, the final answers to the WWL questionnaire and the result-

<sup>14</sup> I coordinated and conducted this audit for almost 10 years after first having advised World Watch Research about improving the methodology in 2013. For my reflections from that early stage, see Sauer (2012).

ing scores for any specific country emanate from a qualified expert assessment that triangulates information from informed practitioners, expert researchers, and published sources. In addition, the analysts at times exercise a degree of peer review to make sure that they have interpreted the questions consistently across countries.

As for the architecture of the questionnaire itself, the 84 questions are grouped into six blocks, all equally weighted for the final country scores of the WWL. One block covers physical violence; the other five cover different aspects of pressure on Christians.

The 12 questions on physical violence include how many Christians were killed and how many places of worship were damaged or destroyed for faith-related reasons. The nature of these questions does not lend itself to measuring mission hostility specifically,<sup>15</sup> and we therefore leave them aside. The remaining 72 questions about pressure on Christians cover four spheres of life (the private sphere, family life, local social life and the national level); plus, as a fifth sphere, church life. I scrutinized these questions for their relevance to a mission hostility index.

The scoring grid used for each question consists of a scale from 0 to 4 (for “No” and four categories of “Yes”) and four variable answer elements, namely: (1) the number of categories of Christian communities affected by persecution, (2) the proportion of the general population living in the territory affected by persecution, (3) the intensity of persecution, and (4) the frequency of persecution.<sup>16</sup> Each of these elements and the allocation of points are more closely defined. The question score is the average of the four answer elements. Special rules apply when the question is not applicable or the answer is unknown. (See Table 2)

Concerning the Christian communities affected by persecution, the WWL methodology differentiates categories. Not all may be present in a given country and they may be affected differently by persecution. The four categories include expatriate Christians (if they are forced to meet separately), historical Christian communities, non-traditional Christian communities, and converts. (See Table 3)

Among the 84 numerically scored questions of the WWL, almost a quarter could be identified that directly or indirectly touch on aspects of mission. They can be grouped into four categories: (1) social risks of individual Christian witness, (2) obstructions of collective Christian witness, (3) dealing with conversions as a fruit of mission, and (4) anti-Christian activities.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> There is no record of whether, for instance, killings of Christians are related to mission hostility.

<sup>16</sup> Persecution is defined as “any hostility experienced as a result of one’s identification with Christ” (WWR 2024:7).

<sup>17</sup> In a complex matrix of the usual differentiations, such as *forum internum* and *forum externum*, individual and collective manifestation of religion, legal frameworks and *de facto* lived reality, as well as government restrictions versus social hostilities and assaults, a different grouping of questions would have been conceivable. But focusing on a perspective of mission, the grouping presented here made the most sense to me.

**Table 2: Scoring grid for the WWL questionnaire**

	<b>0 points</b>	<b>1 point</b>	<b>2 points</b>	<b>3 points</b>	<b>4 points</b>
(1) Number of categories of Christianity affected by persecution	None	(see Table 3 below)	(see Table 3 below)	(see Table 3 below)	(see Table 3 below)
(2) Proportion of general population living in the territory affected by persecution	None	Above 0%-25%	26%-50%	51%-75%	76%-100%
(3) Intensity of persecution	None	Low	Medium	High	Very High
(4) Frequency of persecution	None	Sporadic	Quite frequent	Frequent	Permanent

**Table 3: Scoring for the number of categories of Christian communities (CCC)**

<b>Points</b>	<b>4 CCCs present in country</b>	<b>3 CCCs present in country</b>	<b>2 CCCs present in country</b>	<b>1 CCC present in country</b>
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

The complexity of the data led me to reduce the scope of initial explorations to a single country analysis. Consequently, limitations concerning the generalizability of certain results remain, and fuller verification would require a broader, multi-country study. By evaluating the respective results for Jordan<sup>18</sup> in the WWL 2022 dataset, I tested whether the questions selected are sufficiently mission-spe-

<sup>18</sup> The choice of the sample country had to do with the prior essay (Sauer 2024).



cific to contribute reliably to an MHI. I also tested how each group of questions by itself would contribute to an MHI and whether any by itself or a selection of them would suffice to establish an MHI.

In the next section, I examine the four categories of questions individually.<sup>19</sup>

## **6. Social risks of individual Christian witness**

The three questions addressing this issue in the WWL all come from the block of 10 questions about “private life.”

### **6.1. *Has it been risky for Christians to speak about their faith with those other than immediate family (extended family, others)? (Q1.8 = 3.5p)*<sup>20</sup>**

The reason for the very high question-level score of 3.5 (on a scale of 0 to 4) is that Christians speaking to Muslims about their faith would be easily misunderstood as an attempt at evangelization, which is forbidden in Jordan, and understood as a threat to national security (WWR 2021:27).

Due to space limitations, I will not discuss the details regarding Jordan as thoroughly as I did in a previous German-language paper (Sauer 2024). There, I established that mission hostility aspects in Jordan were properly assessed by these questions and correspond with the systemic background interpretation in a scholarly source (Feldtkeller 1998).

### **6.2. *Has it been risky for Christians to display Christian images or symbols? (Q1.5 = 3p)***

Displaying Christian images or symbols is avoided by secret converts for fear of giving themselves away and by traditional Christians for fear of animosity.<sup>21</sup>

### **6.3. *Has it been risky for Christians to reveal their faith in written forms of personal expression (including expressions in blogs and Facebook etc.)? (Q1.4 = 3p)***

The risk is again strongest for converts, for the same reasons as above (WWR 2021:26f).

The methodological challenge in combining the scores of these three questions lies in the fundamental problem of which mathematical method would

19 Questions that were not specific enough, while also relating to mission, were excluded from the evaluation (see section 10.1).

20 “Q” signifies the original numbering of the respective question in the WWL questionnaire. Thereafter, the points scored in WWL 2022 are given. Regarding the exclusion of the parallel question 1.7 see section 10.1 below.

21 I thank World Watch Research for access to the results on a question level, as the country dossiers discuss only the four questions with the highest scores each per category.

come closest to reality: an accumulation or averaging, the exclusive concentration on the most problematic factor, or a weighted evaluation? I have opted for the following combination in processing the WWL questions for an MHI. First, overlapping questions are bundled and unified and the average of their scores is taken, so as not to give a single topic too much weight. Then, this result and all other questions are treated equally and their average is calculated. In the case of the questions about social risk, I saw no necessity of bundling, so a simple average was calculated (See Table 4).

**Table 4: Social risks of individual Christian witness**

WWL #	Question	Points (of 4)
1.8	Risk of expressing faith beyond the family circle	3.5
1.5	Risk of manifestation of images/symbols	3
1.4	Risk of written expressions of faith	3
	<b>Average</b>	<b>3.16</b>

None of these questions could be identified as particularly representative for this group of questions.

## **7. Obstructions of collective Christian witness**

This group of five questions differs from the previous one in the communal aspect. They emanate from the spheres of “national life” (2 questions) and “church life” (3 questions) in the WWL, which indeed overlap.

### ***7.1. Have Christians, churches or Christian organizations been hindered in publicly displaying religious symbols? (Q4.12 = 3p)***

There was pressure in 2021 to remove Christian banners containing verses from a biblical psalm from places in the capital city. However, crosses on (traditional) churches are tolerated (Cf. WWR 2021:12).

### ***7.2. Has openly selling or distributing Bibles and other Christian materials been hindered? (Q5.14 = 3.5p)***

Bible distribution has been a classic means of mission. Opposition to the Christian faith usually also turns against the Bible as its central document of faith. In Jordan, the distribution of Christian material is permitted only in certain designated places affiliated with churches and must not be perceived as proselytism (WWR 2021:12).

**7.3. Have churches, Christian organizations, institutions or groups been prevented from using mass media to present their faith (e.g. via local or national radio, TV, Internet, social media, cell phones)? (Q5.16 = 3.5p)**

A missionary aspect can always be implied in public media dissemination of religious content in a multi-religious context (WWR 2021:15).

**7.4. Have Christians been hindered in expressing their views or opinions in public? (Q4.8 = 3.75p)**

The high score seems plausible due to the very limited freedom of speech, which causes Christians to exercise self-censorship (WWR 2021:29).

**7.5. Have churches been hindered from organizing Christian activities outside church buildings? (Q5.5 = 3.75p)**

Faith-promoting activities must often be practiced outside church walls. Ten arrests were reported in this connection (WWR 2021:7, 30).

For an evaluation, the questions can be bundled into three equally weighted subgroups. (See Table 5).

Table 5: Obstructions to collective Christian witness			
Sub-group	WWL #	Question	Points (of 4)
1	4.12	Public manifestation of religious symbols	3
2	5.14	Bible/Scripture dissemination	3.5
3	5.16	Use of media for the presentation of faith	3.5
	4.8	Public expression of opinions	3.75
	5.5	Christian activities outside church buildings	3.75
		<b>Weighted Average*</b>	<b>3.42</b>

\* Weighted Average =  $[Q4.12 + (Q5.14 + Q5.16)/2 + (Q4.8 + Q5.5)/2]/3$ . The letter “Q” precedes the number of the respective question in this formula. In the following tables, the subgroups mentioned in the left-most columns are all weighted equally.

The questions on Bible or Scripture distribution or media use for faith presentation could possibly be representative of obstructions of collective Christian witness, as for Jordan their scores (from WWL 2022) are closest to the average.

**Table 6: Overall assessment on Christian witness**

	Points (of 4)
Social risks of individual Christian witness	3.16
Obstructions to collective Christian witness	3.42
Average	3.29

When we compare the scores for individual and collective Christian witness (see Table 6), the score for collective witness is about 10 percent higher. In the synopsis of the two topical scores, an average of 3.29 points results when both are weighted equally.

One could already be satisfied with this result with regard to an MHI. However, since numerous other complementary questions in the WWL shed light on related topics, these will also be examined for comparison.

## **8. Conversion: opposition, sanctions, non-recognition**

In discussions of the right to freedom of religion or belief, change of faith forms a mirror image of mission.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, one might be tempted to simply answer the question of the freedom to do mission in praxis in terms of freedom to convert. It is interesting to examine the conversion-specific questions of the WWL to see how opposition to conversion and mission hostility score comparatively and to what degree the realities they cover overlap. These questions come from four different areas of life in the WWL questionnaire (private life, family life, national life, church life).

### **8.1. *Has conversion been opposed, forbidden, or punishable, including conversion from one type of Christianity to another? (Q1.1 = 3.5p)***

The question is aimed both at state measures to prevent conversions and at conversion-averse pressure from the dominant majority society.

The score is justified by the fact that leaving Islam, although not criminalized, is nevertheless not permitted. Several converts from Islam were reportedly physically or mentally abused, especially during police interrogations (WWR 2021:26).

<sup>22</sup> The UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief at the time, Heiner Bielefeldt, dealt with the “right to try to convert others by means of non-coercive persuasion” as an element of his thematic report on the “right to conversion as part of freedom of religion or belief” (cf. Bielefeldt 2017). In his scholarly capacity, he and his research colleagues commented, “The right to convert others, for example through missionary activities, is inherently intertwined with the right to change one’s own religion or belief” (Bielefeldt et al. 2016:196).

**8.2.    *Have churches been hindered from openly integrating converts? (Q5.7 = 4p)***

The maximum score is due to routine surveillance activities by state intelligence agents, which make most church leaders wary of openly welcoming and integrating Muslims or converts for fear of negative consequences, including possible closure of their church (WWR 2021:29).

The other three questions deal with negative consequences in terms of personal status and family law in the lives of converts.

**8.3.    *Have officials at any level refused to recognize an individual's conversion as recorded in government administration systems, identity cards, etc.? (Q4.2 = 3.5p)***

The mention of religion in official documents or registers can become a trigger for religious discrimination. If such an entry cannot be changed after birth, this has potentially far-reaching discriminatory implications for a person's legal status, as well as in family law (Andrews 2016).

**8.4.    *Have spouses of converts been put under pressure (successfully or unsuccessfully) by others to divorce? (Q2.11 = 3p)***

Female converts are particularly at risk (WWR 2021:34).

**8.5.    *Have Christians lost their inheritance rights because of their conversion to Christianity or (if a person already was a Christian) other types of Christianity? (Q2.13 = 3.25p)***

Table 7: Hostility to conversion			
Sub-group	WWL #	Question	Points (of 4)
1	1.1	Conversion ban/rejection	3.5
2	5.7	Hindrance of church integration	4
3	4.2	Impossibility of changing religion in official documents	3.5
	2.11	Pressure to divorce	3
	2.13	Loss of inheritance rights	3.25
		Weighted Average	3.58

The right of inheritance of apostates from Islam could be withdrawn by sharia courts. The influence of the clan is decisive (WWR 2019:23; WWR 2020:20).

A conversion hostility marker (see Table 7) could be calculated from three equally weighted values: (1) the rejection of conversion in general (Q1.1), (2) the hindrance of church integration (Q5.7), and (3) the bundled personal status and family law issues (Q4.2, 2.11, 2.13).

In search of a potentially representative question, either that about prohibition of conversion or that about change of religion in official documents could be representative of the question of hostility to conversion, as their rating for Jordan is very close to our conversion hostility marker.

As a next step, it is of interest to compare the hostility to mission to the hostility to conversion. (See Table 8).

Table 8: Comparison of hostility to mission and hostility to conversion		
	Points (of 4)	
Social risks of individual Christian witness	3.16	3.29 (average)
Obstructions to collective Christian witness	3.42	
Hostility to conversion	3.58	
Difference	0.29	

With a slight difference of 9 percent, the conversion hostility marker appears to be a relatively good indication of the approximate degree of mission hostility. At the same time, it is only of limited use for the more precise determination of mission hostility, as it takes into account only the situation of converts, whose religious freedom is even more restricted than that of traditional and non-traditional Christian entities. In this respect, it makes sense to collect data on an MHI separately from conversion issues.

## **9. Anti-Christian activities: From disinformation to pressure to apostatize**

There remains a fourth cluster of questions to be examined. Hostility to Christian mission might be accompanied by various measures directed against Christians to make them give up their faith. Such matters are considered in the areas of community life and national life in the WWL questionnaire.

**9.1. *Has media reporting been incorrect or biased against Christians? (Q4.10 = 3p) Have Christians been subject to smear campaigns or hate speech? (Q4.11 = 3p)***

Media bias is reportedly because the media are mainly controlled by the government, which protects Islam. The greatest pressure, however, is seen in social media, where Islamists agitate against Christians. Converts and evangelical Christians are most likely to be affected.<sup>23</sup>

**9.2. Have Christians been put under pressure to take part in non-Christian religious ceremonies or community events? (Q3.5 = 3p)**

This is seen to affect all Christians during Ramadan. They are also expected to participate in the Muslim fast, especially in the countryside. Even in the capital city, public eating by non-Muslims is punishable by a heavy fine.

Converts of Muslim descent who keep their Christian faith secret are forced to participate in Islamic or ethnic events, as well as Islamic rites and traditions, so as not to betray themselves.

**9.3. Have Christians been pressured by their community to renounce their faith? (Q3.7 = 3.5p)**

“Pressure can be expected on converts from Islam whose Christian faith has become known, especially where the local community is made up of conservative Muslim families” (WWR 2021:28).

It appears appropriate to bundle the two media-related questions to avoid redundancy in establishing a marker for “anti-Christian activities.” (See Table 9).

Table 9: Anti-Christian activities			
Sub-group	WWL #	Question	Points (of 4)
1	4.10	Disinformation in the media	3
	4.11	Smear campaigns or hate speech	3
2	3.5	Pressure to participate in non-Christian traditions	3
3	3.7	Pressure to apostatize	3.5
		Weighted Average	3.17

A closer look at the questions suggests that at least the first two do not necessarily correlate with hostility to mission. This consideration speaks against in-

23 Cf. also the incident with the publicly displayed psalm (section 6.1).

cluding this block of questions in an MHI. It is, however, certainly of interest (a) as a separate measure of its own that can be read alongside an MHI, as well as (b) for a more comprehensive determination of the pressure of discrimination and persecution on Christians.

### 10. Delimiting a mission hostility index

Having established four different markers – namely social risks of individual Christian witness, obstructions of collective Christian witness, hostility to conversion, and anti-Christian activities – we need to recapitulate which are suitable to become part of a mission hostility index. Comparing the four markers, the average of the two markers on Christian witness is midway between the scores of hostility to conversion and of anti-Christian activities in the case of Jordan (See Table 10).

**Table 10: Comparison of hostility to mission, hostility to conversion, and anti-Christian activities**

Marker	Points (of 4)	Average
Social risks of individual Christian witness	3.16	3.29
Obstructions of collective Christian witness	3.42	
Hostility to conversion	3.58	
Anti-Christian activities	3.17	
Average	3.33	

If one were to try to combine all four markers equally into a comprehensive mission hostility index by calculating their average, the result would be a very similar value for Jordan as for its average of the markers of Christian witness by itself. This might suggest that methodologically it could be redundant and uneconomical to go beyond considering the explicit questions on Christian witness for an MHI. However, this cannot be verified on the basis of a single example. Furthermore, and much more importantly, it was argued in terms of content that the marker of hostility to conversion is latently higher by nature than hostility to mission, and that the elements of anti-Christian activities do not necessarily correlate with hostility to mission. Therefore, both these markers should be excluded from an MHI for reasons of factual focus.



## 11. Critical review

It remains to put these results in context in view of methodological issues. Therefore, this final section will critically review the WWL questions excluded from consideration for an MHI and the issues not covered by the questions selected, conduct a comparison of the resulting scores with existing WWL scores and sub-scores, and point out some generic limitations of an MHI based on WWL data, before proposing a way forward to further advance this line of research.

### 11.1. Questions excluded

Some questions from the WWL questionnaire had to be excluded from consideration for an MHI due to their lack of specificity, even though they were initially considered.

Question 1.7, *“Has it been risky for Christians to speak about their faith with immediate family members?”* covers many other family constellations beyond those of the Christian converts and their witnessing to their non-Christian families. Thus, this question is not specific enough to detect mission hostility even though it does cover mission hostility to some extent.

The following two questions were excluded because they do not differentiate between missionary and non-missionary purposes: Q4.4, *“Have Christians been hindered in travelling for faith-related reasons?”* and Q5.19, *“Have churches been hindered in their interaction with the global church (both foreigners visiting and nationals being able to visit Christians in other countries, attend conferences etc.)?”*

Q2.4, *“Have Christian baptisms been hindered?”* could be a natural follow-up to the questions on conversion. However, this question may also apply to the baptism of descendants of Christian parents, and thus it is not uniquely linked to mission.

### 11.2. Issues not covered

When brainstorming more systematically about potential indicators of mission hostility, one can find numerous aspects that are not covered by the WWL questions or are subsumed in more general questions. The main reason is that the WWL questionnaire is designed to mirror the lived experience of Christians rather than more abstract and structural concepts. It also focuses on Christian life in general and not solely on mission.

Table 11 illustrates the plethora of aspects that could be considered if one were designing an MHI from scratch. This does not necessarily falsify the results achieved with the current sample of questions. However, it may indicate that an MHI designed from scratch could possibly achieve more precise results.

**Table 11: Issues not or less covered by WWL questions**

History	Is there historical baggage in the collective memory of this country regarding what they perceive as Christian mission or as Western impositions (forced Christianization, crusades, colonialism, imperialism)?
	Has there been a disparate development of different areas in this country or among different ethnic groups, where one part has accepted the Christian faith and the other not?
Predominant culture	Is there a non-Christian majority religion or Christian denomination perceiving itself as superior, acting in an exclusivist manner and using state power and social influence to oppose or hinder Christian (or denominationally different) mission?
	Is there an ideological antagonism by the state or majority society against Christianity or particular expressions of Christianity?
	Is there a secular antagonism against truth claims or an antagonism against criticism of non-Christian religions?
	Are truth claims automatically linked with imposition, manipulation, compulsion, or violence?
Constitution	Is there a state religion or ideology anchored in the constitution?
	Is peaceful spreading of one's faith to those not already adhering to it part of the constitutionally protected manifestation of faith within the framework of religious freedom?
Law	Are there specific laws forbidding or limiting Christian mission or aspects thereof (anti-apostasy, anti-conversion, anti-blasphemy, anti-proselytism, anti-hate speech, etc.)?
Security and Public Order	Are national security concerns hindering Christian mission (terrorism, extremism labels, red-tagging)?
	Are public order concerns hindering Christian mission (health risks of prayer for healing, hurting public sentiment)?
Administration	Are administrative measures used to limit or hinder Christian mission (license requirement, censorship of literature, importation bans, regulations on NGOs, regulation on receiving foreign funding, etc.)?
Christian subculture	Is there an intra-Christian hostility against mission (e.g., due to a pluralist theology of religion, or a dislike of apologetics or polemics)?

11.3. Comparison to existing scores

Another form of critical review is to compare the results against the existing scores already calculated and published by the WWL, and to double-check if there would be any potential proxy value that would make the separate exercise of calculating an MHI superfluous (See Table 12).

Table 12: Comparison of MHI scores to WWL sphere scores									
	Individual	Collective	MHI	Country Score	Private Life	Family Life	Community Life	National Life	Church Life
2022	3.16	3.42	3.29	2.64	3.09	3.35	2.63	2.95	2.99
Average 2019-23				2.59	3.11	3.31	2.66	2.85	2.99

To make this comparison, the WWL scores are transposed to a scale of 0 to 4 from the country scores on a scale of 100 and the spheres of life scores on a scale of 16.7. To test the degree of fluctuation of the WWL scores, the respective average scores for the WWL from 2019 to 2023 have been added. This demonstrates rather negligible deviations over the years.

The question to what extent a country's score on the WWL is a proxy for the score on the MHI cannot be reliably answered from data on a single country. However, the fact that this one sample country yields an MHI score significantly higher than its general WWL country score makes such a proxy function unlikely.

Among the scores on the different spheres distinguished in the WWL, the score for family life (3.35p) comes mathematically closest to the MHI (3.29p) for Jordan in 2022. However, none of the questions from this sphere are actually employed for the MHI. The fact that mission hostility and pressure in family life show the same intensity in Jordan might be a coincidence. The other four areas all score significantly lower (2.63 to 3.09), although individual questions from three of those blocks were used for the MHI. This might indicate that mission hostility is indeed a distinct measure and tends to have an intensity that exceeds the levels of hostility, discrimination and persecution experienced on average,

as well as in private life, community life, national life and church life in general. However, this possibility would need to be tested on a larger sample of countries.

#### ***11.4. Generic limitations of an MHI based on WWL data***

A final question concerns the limitations of the proposed MHI, emanating from the nature of the WWL research design and data and from their inherent limitations.

First, the WWL does not cover the whole world. The number of countries covered is limited to those where persecution levels are highest, which for WWL 2022 numbered 76. This means that Western countries are not assessed, even though mission hostility expressed by secularism would be of interest for comparison. The scale of the WWL is also difficult to apply to countries with lower levels of persecution, because it was not designed for these.

Second, the situation of converts is over-represented in the scores. They receive 25 percent of weight where they exist as a group, even if they are only a tiny fraction of all Christians in a country. This was done purposefully in the WWL methodology so as not to overlook their fate, as would easily be the case in some other approaches.

Third, subnational scenarios, particularly in indigenous territories in Latin America or in regions of territorially large countries, might not be sufficiently detected because the WWL score is a macro-level aggregate.

## **12. Conclusion**

This article has demonstrated the feasibility of creating a mission hostility index based on the data of the WWL produced by Open Doors International. Using Jordan as a case study, four clusters of relevant questions were identified. Clusters of questions on social risk of individual Christian witness and on obstructions of collective Christian witness were found to be sufficient to establish an MHI. A formula has been established to reasonably combine these. While questions on conversion and on anti-Christian activities have complementary value, they should be excluded from an MHI proper. Extensive critical considerations showed the added value of an MHI compared to the WWL country scores or sphere scores, as well as the limitations of this exercise, and marked the way forward for further steps in exploring a mission hostility index.

A second phase on the way to an MHI could test the indications established in this pilot study on a limited number of countries with very different contexts and drivers of persecution. This would help to minimize the effects of country-specific idiosyncrasies as well as of possible patterns prevalent in contexts with the same type of forces that are hostile to Christian mission. I would therefore suggest using one country from each of the eight “drivers of persecution” categories identified in the WWL. In addition, all continents should be represented, and it

might be preferable to select those countries with the largest Christian\ populations covered in each category, if possible.

As a third phase, one could proceed to a tentative evaluation for all countries represented in the WWL.

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