

Measuring persecution

The new questionnaire design of the World Watch List

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Abstract

The “World Watch List” (WWL) of the advocacy agency Open Doors annually scores and ranks the 50 countries where persecution of Christians is worst. In view of its broad use by the media as well as criticism, the questionnaire for the WWL has been revised. This article examines the methodological challenges involved in measuring religious persecution with a focus on the questionnaire design. The WWL is placed in the context of other instruments for measuring religious freedom/persecution and the criticism of the WWL is analyzed. Questionnaire-related issues involve the selection of questions, their grouping and their balancing. Measuring and weighing indicators, the coding of questionnaires, and how to arrive at a final score for a country are discussed. Various problems such as variations within inhomogeneous countries, delimitation, transparency and feasibility are addressed.

Keywords World Watch List, Open Doors, questionnaire, measuring, ranking, persecution.

The World Watch List² of Open Doors International,³ appearing since 1993, is probably the oldest among the annual scoring instruments which are currently in use for measuring religious persecution and religious freedom.

1. A phenomenology of religious freedom scoring instruments

In the *World Christian Encyclopedia*'s first edition a “Religious Liberty or Persecution”-score is allocated to all countries (Barrett 1982:100, 777). The second edition (Barrett 2001:46, 834f), adds a computed *Christian Safety Index* and estimates of the total number of martyrs and martyrdom situations since AD 33.⁴ These measures all reflect larger time periods rather than annual assessments. Those indices have been continued in the *World Christian Database* and in the

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² www.worldwatchlist.us; www.opendoorsuk.org/resources/persecution/.

³ www.opendoors.org. It emerged from the ministry of “Brother Andrew” (1967). For a short description of Open Doors International and the role the WWL plays in its ministry cf. Sauer (2013:97f).

⁴ The estimates of numbers of martyrs have been strongly criticised (e.g. by Schirmacher 2011).

World Religions Database respectively which are only accessible to paying subscribers.

Another approach has been taken by Paul Marshall in *Religious Freedom in the World* in 2000 and 2008. The latter gives narratives on 101 countries representing 95% of the world's population based on a standardized questionnaire of 122 questions in 10 groups. This is translated by expert consensus into a comparative single *Religious Freedom Rating* on a scale of 1 to 7 applicable to all religious groups in whole countries or parts thereof. Again, this is not an annual survey.⁵

While equally broadly measuring religious freedom for adherents of any religion or belief, the reports issued by the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life, the latest of which bears the title *Rising tide of restrictions on religion*, are based on a sociometric methodology developed by Grim and Finke (2006). They differentiate two indices, a *Government Restriction Index* and a *Social Hostilities Index*, without consolidating these into one single score per country. This is based on the coding of 18 widely available, frequently cited written primary sources which appear regularly. The reports represent a transnational comparison of 198 whole countries, with the exclusion of North-Korea due to a lack of sufficient current information. To date three reports have appeared in 2009 and 2011 and 2012. The first provided a baseline for the period of mid-2006 to mid-2008, followed by comparisons for mid-2009 and mid-2010. This means the reports currently appear 2 years after the period under investigation. The narrative focuses on the presentation of the results regarding the 25 most populous countries and is strictly non-partisan.

In addition many advocacy agencies employ rudimentary measuring instruments when grouping the situations in various countries on certain scales and publishing them on maps for popular use (Sauer 2008:36-40).

In comparison to the above instruments, the *World Watch List* by Open Doors (OD) has the following combination of features: It appears *annually* ten weeks after the completion of the period under consideration, it is restricted to *Christians*, it is mainly based on *grassroots sources* from the Christian, missionary and advocacy community, and its interest is *pragmatic* rather than scholarly, primarily serving the purpose of strategy planning and mobilisation of support for persecuted Christians from a missionary perspective.

2. History and reception of the World Watch

OD's research department developed the first standardized questionnaire on the persecution of Christians from 1991 to 1992. This led to the compiling of the WWL

⁵ In addition Paul Marshall in *Religious Freedom in the World* in 2008 included an independently calculated index based on Grim & Finke (2006) as an appendix to his book.

in 1993, which has been published annually and has sporadically evolved ever since. In the period from 2002 to 2009 some questions were clarified and others added. Increased cross checking of information, including by external experts, was made possible with the growth of staff.

Over time the number of questions in the questionnaire for the WWL had grown to fifty, and this questionnaire was used the last time for the WWL 2012. In the past OD did not disclose the exact wording of these questions to the public; instead it mentioned 25 topics in the interpretative narrative. The outcome presented in the WWL includes a table of the 50 nations ranking worst in their degree of persecution on a scale between 1 and 100. A further column estimated how much higher this score would be if more information could be ascertained, and a fourth portrayed the differences in score to the previous year. The interpretative narratives put the spotlight on the ten countries with the highest persecution and also highlighted the changes compared to the previous year. Of late, profiles of all 50 countries have been made available.

The reception of the WWL ranges between uncritical use and various levels of criticism. The keenly interested use of the WWL by the media⁶ and politicians⁷ led to increased scrutiny of its methodology and public criticism.

On the one end of the scale the phenomenon of an uncritical use of the country ranking can be observed. These users sometimes emphasise the relative ranking of a country instead of its absolute score. Even worse, some erroneously emphasise the changes in the ranking of a country from one year to another,⁸ seemingly mistaking them for real changes, whereas a country might simply have moved up or down the list due to real changes in other countries. In future, a disclaimer should accompany the WWL warning of such misinterpretation of the data.⁹

Criticisms of the WWL are on various levels, which will be briefly presented here, while the scholarly issues at hand will be discussed later. Some are critical of the WWL because of its *origin*. They do not like the fact that it is issued by a

⁶ According to Baake (2012:98) in January 2011 German media reported on the WWL more intensely than ever before. A recent example is the German weekly FOCUS 37/12, 10. September 2012, 40-45.

⁷ For example, Ute Granold of CDU in Germany links to WWL on her personal website: www.granold.de/Christen-weltweit-am.208.0.html (Accessed: 17 October 2012).

⁸ For example, question no. 9 for a hearing of the Human Rights Commission of the German Bundestag on 9 May 2012. www.bundestag.de/bundestag/ausschuesse17/a17/anhoerungen/2012-05-09_Christen/Fragenkatalog_Version_Internet.pdf.

⁹ This disclaimer should state that first of all the interpretation must focus on the score of a country and not on its ranking. It must secondly emphasise that the ranking is only a relative and not an absolute measure and that therefore no direct conclusions may be drawn from minor changes in the ranking of a country. Actually OD intends to publish a dedicated WWL website for professionals as from 2013 apart from the one for popular consumption.

Christian mission agency, or that OD is an organization involved in fund raising,¹⁰ or they are unsympathetic to the evangelical profile of OD.¹¹ Most other criticism is more scholarly in character: Some harbour *fundamental doubts of the feasibility* of a comparative scoring of countries, simply because the situations are so diverse and they consider it impossible to find one single grid that covers them all.¹² Criticism of the *delimitation* objects to focussing on Christians only or to the perceived arbitrariness of limiting the list to 50 countries. For others it is a matter of *transparency*: They refuse to take the WWL seriously as long as its methodology has not been made fully transparent to them.¹³ Some are sceptical of the *quality of the sources*, namely the competence of the respondents. Finally, those informed might criticise various *details of the methodology*. However, most of the criticism is voiced in side comments or orally. I am not aware of any detailed substantiation of such criticism or any scholarly article critically engaging with the WWL.

The increased level of criticism necessitates giving attention to improving the credibility of the WWL. This requires a greater transparency on the gathering and coding of the data and the analysis of the results as well as an improved methodology. With an improvement of the questionnaire and a diversification in the presentation of its results, Open Doors is striving to make the WWL the best, the best known and the most authoritative research instrument for tracking and measuring the extent of persecution of Christians in the world today. What are the challenges and questions one faces when designing or revising such an instrument?¹⁴

3. Methodological challenges

The first question is, what kind of *product* or contribution to knowledge is desired? Initially OD only wanted a list of the ten worst countries, embedded into a list of the 50 nations with the highest level of persecution of Christians. These countries were to be ranked and each should have one single score. In the future two additional lists are to be published: “The top ten most violent places in which to live as a Christian” and “Top fifteen most persecuted Christian communities in the world.” In addition, OD wants to publish information on the main glob-

¹⁰ The fundraising aspect is mentioned in a side remark by Oehring (2012b:36).

¹¹ The Humanistic Press Service in Germany takes offence at the missionary and evangelical character of OD (Humanistischer Pressedienst, 19.06.2007, Nr. 2210, <http://hpd.de/node/2210>).

¹² This position is maintained, for example, by Oehring (2012a:79). Oehring (2012b:36) called the WWL “number games”.

¹³ For example, Anhelm 2012:5.

¹⁴ The terminology used seeks to be appropriate to the subject under consideration. Some of the technical language has been aligned with the standard reference work by David de Vaus (2002), *Surveys in social research*, 5th edition, London.

al persecution dynamics from the non-scoring part of the questionnaire. The country profiles are to be updated every two months. In terms of social science terminology this is exclusively descriptive research and not explanatory research (De Vaus 2002:31).

A second question faced is that about *delimitation*. While Pew has the resources to cover all countries of the world and needs to do so due to its non-partisan nature, OD, because of its limited resources and ministry emphasis, focuses firstly on Christians only and secondly on the countries with the worst religious persecution. According to the experience of OD in the past, a list of 50 covers all countries with absolute, extreme or severe persecution.¹⁵ In order to know which countries to include into the survey, OD uses a *Rapid Appraisal Tool* combining information from other sources and internet search.

A third question concerns the *clarification of concepts* (De Vaus 2002:43ff). How are Christians and persecution defined? With its definition of a Christian as “anyone who self-identifies as a Christian and/or someone belonging to a Christian community as defined by the church’s historic creeds”, OD follows the tendency of statisticians of Christianity to use broad definitions. The definition of persecution chosen, however, is theological and subjective: “Any hostility, experienced from the world, as a result of one’s identification with Christ. This can include hostile attitudes, words and actions towards Christians both from within and outside Christianity”. This raises the question, how well a theological term such as “the world” can be understood by non-Christians, and whether the aim to communicate well, including to secular media, would not be better served by a sociological definition that is sensitive to theological concerns, such as that of Charles Tieszen.¹⁶ In my opinion, his definition equally “covers the full range of hostility experienced by Christians as a result of their Christian walk, rather than limit the term persecution to more purely deliberate or extreme forms of suffering” as Boyd-MacMillan (2012:7) rightly calls for.

A fourth challenge emanates from the *variation within countries*: How are the variations in highly populous countries such as China, India, Indonesia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nigeria, or even in smaller inhomogeneous countries such as Iraq and Turkey handled? How can one do justice to additional differences between rural

¹⁵ The presentation of the final list uses a colour coding for all countries by grades of persecution, which are defined as follows on a scale between 1 and 100 points: Sparse persecution: 26-40, moderate: 41-55, severe: 56-70, extreme: 71-85, absolute: above 85 (Boyd-MacMillan 2012:7).

¹⁶ Tieszen sought to develop a brief standard definition which could be understood outside the Christian community. He defines religious persecution of Christians as “any unjust action of varying levels of hostility perpetrated primarily on the basis of religion and directed at Christians, resulting in varying levels of harm as it is considered from the victim’s perspective” (Tieszen 2008:76).

and urban areas, between low and high social standing, between uneducated and educated people, as well as to ethnographic differences? The presentation of scores for whole nations only is not sufficient in that respect and calls for complementary information which needs to be given, for example, in the country profiles or through additional surveys.

A fifth challenge is the *variety* of persecutors and of the types of Christians affected by persecution. Will there be a differentiation? The WWL chooses to differentiate different types of Christians: (1) Expatriate or migrant Christians, (2) members of historical Christian communities and/or government controlled churches, (3) converts to Christianity from “persecutor background” (majority religion or ideology, traditional religion, mafia, etc.) and/or house churches, and (4) members of non-traditional Protestant Christian Communities (like Evangelicals, Pentecostals) and/or other Christians not yet included. This differentiation is used as a weighing factor for the responses in most blocks (as explained below) and also will feed into a separate report on the top 15 most persecuted communities. The differentiation concerning persecutors is made in the non-scoring final section of the questionnaire and distinguishes eight different “persecution dynamics” (mainly ideologies or power groups) and 11 different “agents of persecution.”

A sixth question consists in the *choice of measurements*. Should the severity or intensity of damage caused by persecution be measured? Should the frequency of persecution, that is the number of cases, be measured? Or should the variety of types of persecution be mirrored? The WWL chooses to combine all three in a complex procedure which will be explained below.

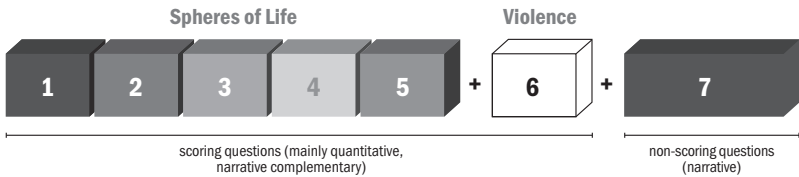
A seventh challenge lies in the *validity* of the results. Should a *Mean Certainty Ranking* be introduced, based on the sources used? Should a margin of possible statistical error be estimated? In my opinion the latter should at least feature in a general comment in the overall interpretative narrative.

An eighth challenge is the decision which weight to give to both *transparency* and *simplicity of the questionnaire*. Should a respondent to the self-administered questionnaire know the overall score produced by his/her responses? Should he/she be able to simply add up scores without the help of a calculator/computer? Is the questionnaire simple enough to give the responses on paper or is it so complex that it can only be done reliably on a computer? The revised WWL questionnaire opts for transparency but tends to sacrifice simplicity.

The ninth challenge is posed by the *questionnaire design*. This will be discussed in the next section which attempts to integrate responses to some of the above challenges. It will cover selection and grouping of indicators/questions, the coding of responses as well as the scoring of countries.

4. Questionnaire design

The criteria raised by the advisors in the process of revising the WWL were transparency of process and outcomes for the respondents, feasibility and simplicity of the self-administered questionnaire for respondents (including non-academic practitioners), best approximation to reality with a manageable number of indicators/questions, striking a balance of various factors of persecution and spheres of



Composition of Questionnaire (7 blocks of questions)

life in the overall country score, and avoiding overemphasis on any single indicator. The analysis below will show how well this was achieved.¹⁷

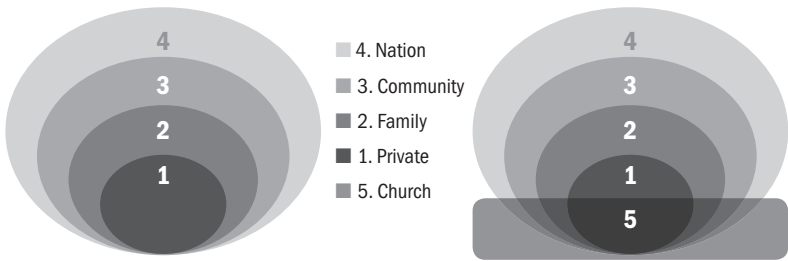
4.1 Grouping of questions

While before 2013 the 50 questions were not presented in an explicit grouping, the 2013 version groups the questions according to five spheres of life: private life, family life, community life, national life and church life. The identification of those spheres emerged from brainstorming among experts and I am not aware that others have used similar rubrics. Grouping of questions is recommended for surveys in social science research (De Vaus 2002:111).

There are several advantages to this differentiated approach: First of all, it gives the questionnaire more structure and logical flow. Secondly, by giving each of the spheres equal weight for the calculation of an overall country score, an appropriate balance between the various expressions of persecution is maintained in the assessment and an overemphasis on any one single sphere is avoided. Thirdly, this approach also offers the opportunity of identifying in which contexts of life persecution mainly occurs and of tracking a change of persecution spheres over time.

The examination of the five overlapping spheres moves from the most intimate to increasingly public areas of life and the question in each case is whether the persecutor seeks to dominate this space by various measures and actions. One of

¹⁷ This assessment is based on the WWL questionnaire as used by OD in September 2012 for the 2013 WWL. There was a pilot test of the questionnaire before that.



Spheres of Life

the challenges in the questionnaire design was convincingly defining these spheres and allocating indicators/questions to specific spheres.¹⁸

Private life is the interior life of a person (*forum internum*) which should be protected by freedom of thought and conscience. Once this sphere is affected, persecution is rather intense. In many contexts persecutors are content to simply achieve the absolute privatization of faith. But in some other contexts, the state seeks to ban all expressions of faith, even at home. In some nations where there is a Muslim majority it is rather the family culture hostile to the Christian faith that bans any expression of it by other family members.

Family life is considered the most intimate sphere next to the rights of the individual. Here the state, the extended family or even a member of the nuclear family might seek to hinder the transmission of faith and/or the free exercise of family life. This can be the most difficult sphere of persecution which Christian believers of Muslim background face.

Community life covers the local neighbourhood in which a person lives. This is a particularly relevant sphere in societies where living space is organized according to tribe or race. For example, in Pakistan, the main source of trouble for Christians comes from local agents of persecution in the neighbourhood such as local police, or tribal figures or religious leaders rousing a mob. The questions asked query how vulnerable Christians are, once they step out of their front door.

National life concerns any restrictions by the central government or any other subnational administrative entities of equal and free participation of Christians in civil society or public life. In Iran for example, Christians primarily experience persecution from the state and less from the family or community.

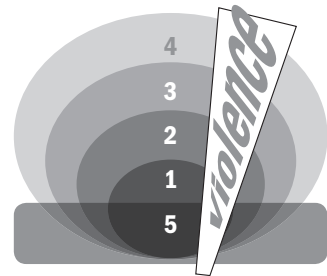
¹⁸ Due to the length restrictions of this article the detailed questions cannot be reproduced here. However, as an example a number of the main indicators used in the sphere of Church life, as well as those used for the block of physical violence are presented here.

The sphere of *Church life* is not simply an extension of the previous four spheres. It concentrates on the collective dimension of religious freedom and examines in which way Christians are limited or hindered in communally expressing their faith. This is covered by indicators such as registration of churches, their monitoring or closing, church building and renovation, expropriation and non-return, disturbance or disruption of services, prevention of activities inside or outside churches or among youth, acceptance of converts, harassment of leaders or their families, monitoring of public expressions including media and internet, election and training of leaders, religious materials/Bibles and their production, possession, importation or dissemination, interference with ethical convictions or personnel policy of Christian institutions, public expression, broadcasting, internet, participation in communal institutions, Christian civil society organizations, social activities, and foreign Christian workers. Another indicator is denouncing of persecution by government.

A sixth block on *physical violence* separately groups all related questions, which obviously cut across all five spheres of life. The score of this block is given the same weight for the final score as any score of the other blocks. Within this block faith related killings and serious damage/destruction of communal Christian buildings each have one third of the weight. The last third is allocated to ten questions covering such matters as detention, jailing, abduction, forced marriage, sexual harassment and rape,

physical harm, eviction and internal displacement, forced flight from country, and serious damage to homes, shops or businesses of Christians.

There are several advantages to measuring physical violence separately. Firstly it can be portrayed as one particular factor. Secondly one avoids letting the frequency or magnitude of physical violence skew the total score or to prevent the proper noticing of other factors of persecution. In the documentation accompanying the questionnaire the assumption that “the most violent persecutors of the church are its main persecutors” is actually called a myth (Boyd-MacMillan 2012:2). In Northern Nigeria the most violent persecutor currently is the Islamic terrorist group Boko Haram, very unsubtly attempting to destroy the Christian church by bombing churches and shooting pastors. However, the greatest threat for Christians is seen to come “from a creeping cultural Islamisation which has been stealthily progressing” (Boyd-MacMillan 2012:2) until Christians find themselves as second-class citizens.



Violence across Spheres of Life

This increasingly hostile climate and increasing restriction of Christian life and witness in all areas of life cannot be tracked through incidents. While incidents of physical violence usually lead to a stronger cohesion of the church, legal strangling and social suffocation might over time cause the church to shrink and possibly even die (Boyd-MacMillan 2006:21-81).

A seventh block of 12 *additional indicators* (examined by 33 questions) is not included in the scoring of the WWL, but is used for the interpretative narrative and separate listings mentioned earlier. The questions cover the persecution dynamics (forces), the agents of persecution, types of Christians and churches persecuted, and various changes concerning growth, killings, imprisonments or level of fear among Christians, early warning signs, specifics to a country not covered by the questionnaire, information on marginalized or persecuted non-Christian religious minorities and on the most important changes affecting the church.

4.2 Weighing and selecting indicators

As reported above, it was decided to give equal weight to each of the six scoring blocks of indicators for the total score of a country as anything else could not be justified. Concerning the selection of indicators/questions in each block, in an attempt to cover as many phenomena and aspects of a sphere as possible, the number of indicators/questions has been increased compared to the pre-2013 questionnaire. In the process it was discovered that some spheres lend themselves to more indicators than others. Due to the unequal density of indicators, the idea of achieving equal numbers of indicators in each sphere was abandoned. Instead an attempt was made to keep the number of questions as small as possible.¹⁹ Currently the number of questions for most blocks ranges between 12-16 questions, with “church life” peaking with 27 questions. The different number of questions per block has two consequences. Firstly, the relative impact of an individual question on the final score of a country differs from block to block. This must not be a negative, as long as the sum of all questions in any block best mirrors reality. Secondly, the consolidated score of each block needs to be multiplied with a proportional reduction factor in order for each block to have equal weight and to arrive at a consolidated country score of a maximum of 100.

Whether the selection of questions has been convincing or whether a revision is needed will be revisited after the completion of the 2013 survey. Therefore this topic is left for a different paper, including the technical aspects of conceptualization, operationalization, validity and reliability.

¹⁹ This is in line with the guidelines by De Vaus (2002:50) on the question of how many indicators to use. He maintains that a limited number of questions will suffice if the others do not add anything to the index. However, the key concepts must be thoroughly measured.

4.3 Coding and weighing responses

	Yes, absolutely 3 points	Yes, significantly 2 points	Yes, rarely 1 points	No 0 points	Scores
(1) Types of Christianity	70% - 100%	35% - 70%	0% - 35%	0	
(2) Part of country	2/3 - 3/3	1/3 - 2/3	0 - 1/3	None	
(3) Degree of persistence	Situation was systemic / was always there	Situation happened often	Situation happened now and then	Nothing happened	

Rounded Average Score →

Scoring Grid (for each question in Blocks 1 - 5)

In the blocks on the spheres of life (1-5) all questions are of the closed-choice type and feature the same numerical rating scale between 0 and 3 points for responses (0 = No; 1 = Yes, rarely; 2 = Yes, significantly; 3 = Yes, absolutely). The challenge of the choice of measurements (frequency or intensity, territorial coverage, relevance to overall Christian population) was countered by a complex scoring grid composed of three elements applied in each case: How many of the prevalent types of Christianity defined above are affected?²⁰ What proportion of the country is involved (none, up to 1/3, up to 2/3, up to 3/3)? How persistent is the persecution pressure in relation to the phenomenon mentioned (systemic, often, every now and then, nothing happened)? The rounded average of the three scores provides the final score for each question. So the answers and their numerical values are very clearly defined. As long as one is able to use the menu-driven spreadsheet form of the questionnaire on a computer which automatically fills in scores and calculates the average depending on the responses clicked, this is a brilliant idea. However, if one has to fill this in on paper it requires a lot of mental arithmetic and I wonder whether the numerical results would be quite the same even with the same respondent.

The wording of the overall responses actually becomes secondary, as it is the calculated numerical scores that actually count. But it should be pointed out that the first two responses express intensity (absolutely and significantly) and the third (rarely) expresses frequency which is inconsistent. Regardless of this detail, the

²⁰ Note that this question does not ask for the proportion of the Christian population affected, which would be difficult to enumerate. Rather it makes the respondent initially establish how many of the four defined types of Christianity there are in the country under consideration in order to establish a baseline. Then for each question the respondents must establish how many of those types are affected, expressed in percentage. Each of the response values between 1 and 3 corresponds to a percentage range.

approach provides the greatest amount of specificity on which types of Christians are persecuted where and with what intensity in any given country.²¹

The common misperception that this differentiated approach wants to dispel is the myth that “the more incidents of persecution there are, the more persecution there must be.” The memo accompanying the questionnaire uses the case of the Christians in the Maldives to demonstrate that the scenario might as well be the opposite. Christians there suffer from such intense pressure from friends, neighbours, family and the government that they can hardly express their faith at all. They are figuratively “squeezed to death” by their persecutors. However, the list of incidents where Christians were beaten, put in jail or deported is rather short. Boyd-MacMillan (2012:2) explains: “Sometimes the degree of persecution is so intense, and so all-pervasive, it actually results in fewer incidents of persecution, since acts of public witness and defiance are rare.”

4.4 Processing of questionnaires and scoring of countries

Once submitted, each questionnaire is processed by OD staff, then all questionnaires on one country are aggregated to arrive at a country score, and finally the countries are ranked according to their scores and country profiles are produced. Some of the details of the process are not yet transparent. From what I gathered in conversation I would assume that the responses are assessed for probability and consistency, for example, whether numerical values and corresponding comments are congruent. In case of doubt the respondents will be asked to clarify. In addition the response options “Unknown” and “Not applicable”, which the respondents are discouraged from using, will need to be dealt with. If verbal comment has been given, it might be possible for the assessor to still allocate a score to that question. If there has been more than one questionnaire received on that country, the one without a response to a question could simply be ignored when aggregating the final score. This will of course only work if the aggregation proceeds question by question. In this way the gaps in expertise of any one respondent can potentially be made up by the expertise of the others.

The coding of the response “not applicable” has been predetermined for certain scenarios (Boyd-MacMillan 2012:4). When a question is not applicable to a particular country, and this is the result of persecution, automatically the highest score is given. For example, the questions whether Christians could be put under surveillance for faith related reasons does not really apply in North Korea, because Christians are instantly jailed. But because the inapplicability is a result of persecution,

²¹ A comments column for each question requests the respondent to provide further clarification and details on the response given. In this way the closed-question approach is complemented by an open component for each indicator.

the highest score is justified. As another example, all the questions in the block on church life assume that there is a functioning church allowed. But in a country like Somalia the church has completely disappeared due to the intensity of persecution. Therefore all questions in this block receive the highest score in such a scenario.

No information is given according to which formula the questionnaires on the same country are actually aggregated. However, I received indications that there is the intention to solve discrepancies by open conversation.

4.5 Characterization of overall questionnaire design

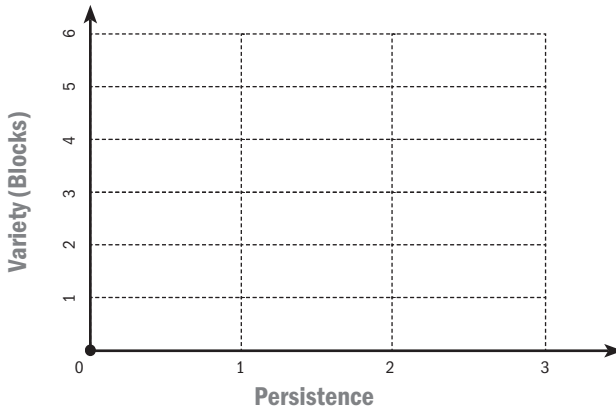
As could be observed, the questionnaire design of the WWL combines a variety of approaches and dimensions. Firstly it combines a quantitative methodology for the scoring section with a qualitative approach for the non-scoring narrative section. Secondly on the micro level, it combines three different factors in the standard responses in blocks 1-5. Thirdly, in the block on violence *capped scales* are used for all questions and the questions are grouped in two sections according to their different weight.

One could argue that the overall score of a country is simply the aggregated sum of minutely defined individual scores of individual indicators. However, taking the overall picture into account, one cannot deny that variety of persecution is also a factor influencing whether a country receives a high score. However, this is moderated by two factors, firstly by the intensity of persecution reflected in the scales applied to the responses, secondly by the fact that persecution-caused non-applicability of questions automatically is awarded the highest score.

This becomes evident when comparing possible scores of two opposing constructed scenarios: A country with the maximum variety of persecution would need to feature at least with “Yes, rarely” (1 point) on all questions and have one incident for each of the questions on violence. It would at least score 33 points on a scale of 100. A country with a low variety of persecution (one third of the possible phenomena) would need a high intensity of persecution, for example, at least maximum points in one third of the six blocks in order to achieve the same score. If that same country were additionally given full scores, for example, for “church life” due to persecution-related non-applicability of that block, it would score at least 50 points out of 100.

A country with consistent responses of “Yes, absolutely” in four blocks out of six would score 66 points. If the intensity, however, ranged at a low level (“Yes, rarely”), a country with a variety of two thirds of persecution phenomena would only score 22 points on a scale of 100.

This shows that in this research design *variety* of persecution and *intensity* of persecution theoretically have the same influence, but that practically, due to automatic full scoring for persecution-related non-applicability of questions, intensity of persecution actually has the greater influence on the final score of a country.



Impact of Variety and Persistence on Scores

However, it needs to be remembered that “intensity of persecution” here stands for the conglomerate of the degree of persistence of persecution pressure, diversity of Christian groups affected and the degree of prevalence across a nation.

5. Further issues of research design and project implementation

The reliability and success of the WWL survey largely depends on the quality of the responses. Therefore the following recommendations are given: (1) The selection and training of respondents is a crucial issue. In order to really reach “the deepest layers of persecution” and “tapping the depth of local knowledge of underground persecuted communities” as OD intends (Boyd-MacMillan 2012:7), the best experts per country, both among OD staff and among scholars, need to be identified.²² (2) The different respondents on one country ideally should have complementary expertise. (3) All need appropriate training in understanding the questionnaire. They should also be assured of the complete anonymity of their identity. (4) The written instructions need to be sufficient, clear and unambiguous. (5) The respondents ideally should monitor the country and record incidents and observations throughout the year. The intention of OD to have its staff update country profiles every two months is a good step in that direction.

For the processing of the data of the questionnaires, once they are received by OD, a document outlining and defining all steps and recording all default decisions

²² The aim is to have a minimum of three respondents per country for the 2013 WWL. For 2014 the plan is to have two parallel streams of respondents, one of OD and an academic one, which has the potential of doubling the number of respondents.

towards the aggregation of country scores should be developed. This process must be defensible, consistent, fully transparent and replicable for new and future staff. In this sense, it improves on Boyd-MacMillan's "Memo", which has not incorporated all of these aspects.

Whether respondents actually need to know how their answers are processed, is a matter debated among researchers. This might be different between grassroots practitioners and scholars. However, transparency of methodology goes a long way in providing scholars an opportunity to probe the design of this important monitoring and scoring tool and establishing trust in its sufficiently reliable representation of the complex reality of the persecution of Christians.²³

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²³ Cf. Sauer (2013:108f) on seven values for responsible conduct in measuring persecution: honesty, fairness, objectivity, reliability, scepticism, accountability and openness.

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