



# QUARTERLY REPORT

JANUARY 2026 EDITION



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Data collected, analyzed, and rendered by the JP Data team

Layout and design by JP Comms Team

DATABASE UPDATES

# Q4 2025 HIGHLIGHTS



The final quarter of 2025 brought greater refinements to our understanding of the unreached world. Here's what changed in our database.



## POPULATION AND DISCIPLESHIP DATA

We updated population figures for **87 people groups** and refined Christian Adherent percentages for **16 groups** and Evangelical percentages for **12 groups**.

These shifts could represent both data improvements and real movements of the gospel among specific communities.



## LANGUAGE RESOURCES AND SCRIPTURE

Translation agencies reported remarkable progress October – December '25:

4 people groups can now access **complete Bibles** in their heart language, 16 have **New Testament** access, and 48 have access to **Scripture portions**. We also added 224 **language resources** additions (exclusive of Scripture translations).



## FRONTIER AND UNREACHED STATUS SHIFTS

**Two groups** moved out from the unreached status. **Four groups** moved from Frontier (*the least-reached communities with less than 0.1% Christian adherence*) to unreached status (*less than 2% Christian adherence*).

### THE SOBERING NEWS

**13 groups** newly classified as Frontier. These represent either newly identified communities or groups where clearer data reveals less than 1 in 1,000 people have access or response to the gospel.

Each shift represents real people and real spiritual need.

[Click here to access updates to our database from 2025 Q4.](#)

# HEARING THE DEAF



## QUICK SUMMARY

*The Deaf community represents a distinct linguistic and cultural people group of **27-30 million** individuals who communicate through unique sign languages and share stronger bonds with each other across countries than with hearing people in their own communities. Deaf individuals can rapidly learn other sign languages, creating opportunities for effective cross-cultural evangelism within their community. Joshua Project classifies them as one global cluster with **approximately 200 country-specific groups**, recognizing their shared experience transcends geography and language. With less than 2% following Jesus, they represent one of the most overlooked unreached people groups globally.*

The Deaf are an interesting example of how Joshua Project defines people groups.

Most of the **Deaf community** doesn't view their lack of hearing as a disability. They see themselves as part of a linguistic and cultural community. They communicate through sign languages that are completely distinct from the spoken languages around them. American Sign Language isn't signed English. It is a distinct language with unique grammar, syntax, and cultural expressions.

In many societies, Deaf people face exclusion and misunderstanding. Even in developed nations, Deaf schools often become the center of life for Deaf adults who end up living at or around these schools, somewhat isolated from broader society. These barriers create a reality where Deaf individuals often feel disconnected from the hearing world around them, including their own families.

Those same barriers create something else: **deep bonds within Deaf communities**. The Deaf often feel a stronger connection to other Deaf individuals, even across countries and continents, than they do to hearing people in their immediate surroundings. A Deaf person in Kenya may feel more kinship with a Deaf person in Brazil than with their hearing

neighbor next door. Even when their sign languages differ, they share a visual way of experiencing the world. They share

cultural understanding. They share identity markers that run deeper than geography.

Deaf people can often learn another sign language in a matter of months, sometimes weeks. This creates a unique cultural cohesion where Deafness itself holds groups together in ways that transcend linguistic differences. It also creates an opportunity for Deaf believers to evangelize other Deaf communities more effectively, breaking down

With **less than 2%** following Jesus, the Deaf represent one of the most overlooked unreached people groups globally.



language barriers that would stop most cross-cultural gospel work.

We classify Deaf communities the way organizations like *Door International* and *SIL* do. There is one Deaf cluster ([https://joshuaproject.net/people\\_groups/19007](https://joshuaproject.net/people_groups/19007)), one Deaf people group across countries, and about 200 Deaf people groups in specific countries. Some of those groups include Deaf communities that use more than one sign language, because the shared experience of Deafness creates bonds stronger than language barriers.

The numbers tell the story: approximately 27-30 million Deaf people worldwide. Less than 2% know and follow Jesus. One of the most overlooked unreached people groups on the planet.

The Deaf aren't just a category in our database. They're a people, by every definition that matters.

Learn more about the deaf here

[Click the link here](#)

Or Scan the QRCode



## WHY JOSHUA PROJECT'S COUNT CHANGED FROM 17,700 TO ~16,380



### QUICK SUMMARY

*Joshua Project's people group count dropped by **1,400**, but no groups disappeared. We moved tiny diaspora segments (under 5,000 population, less than 0.25% of their global total) off public lists to focus attention on actionable engagement opportunities. All data remains in the database and accessible through "Other Minor Groups" buttons. Similar thresholds apply to South Asian districts. Isolated groups stay visible regardless of size. This isn't deletion; it's strategic visibility.*

If you've visited Joshua Project recently, you noticed our people group count dropped by about 1,400. Did these groups disappear? No. They're still in our database and still matter. What changed is how we display information to make it more actionable for mission engagement.

### HOLDING THE TENSION

Joshua Project lives in a creative tension: every people group matters (Revelation 7:9), yet our data

must be actionable for churches, agencies, and field workers. Over time, our database grew to include thousands of tiny diaspora segments scattered across dozens of countries that would be nearly impossible to identify or engage with directly in those locations.

We asked ourselves: Does listing 540 Mexicans scattered across Finland actually help anyone reach them? In most cases, the strategic path to these tiny diaspora communities runs through their larger

populations in home countries or significant diaspora nodes.

## COUNTRY-LEVEL CRITERIA

We implemented a Small Group Display Policy that moves specific, very small segments off public-facing lists while keeping them fully available in our database. This is a visibility decision, not a deletion decision. A group is moved off the public list only if **ALL FOUR conditions** are met:

Population **under 5,000** in that country

**Less than 0.25%** of the group's worldwide population

**Less than 0.25%** of the host country's population

No exceptional strategic or **missiological significance**

If a group fails even one criterion, it stays on the main list. And these groups remain accessible: at the bottom of any country page, you'll find an "*Other Minor Groups*" button (when applicable) that opens a pop-up displaying all groups affected by this policy in that country.

## SOUTH ASIA DISTRICT-LEVEL CRITERIA

Joshua Project provides district-level people group data for South Asia, where caste, language, and religious identity are highly localized. Without thresholds, these lists become overwhelming and less useful. A group is moved off the public district list only if **BOTH conditions** are met:

Population **under 1,000** in that district

**Less than 1%** of that people group's total population in the country

This two-part rule preserves regionally concentrated groups. For example, if a district has

only 870 Bagdi people, but that represents more than 1% of all Bagdi in India, that district remains visible; it's a meaningful concentration worth highlighting for engagement purposes.

Unlike the country-level data, district-level hidden groups are not individually viewable on the website. The number of affected groups is displayed, but the groups themselves are not. However, these hidden groups are still used in calculating district populations and total people group populations—no data is lost from the underlying numbers.

## WHAT'S ALWAYS PROTECTED

**Isolated or uncontacted groups:** The Sentinelese, Amazon basin tribes, and certain Australian Aboriginal groups always remain visible regardless of size. These represent entire people groups, not scattered subsets, and require specialized engagement considerations.

### Data Integrity

All groups remain in our database; suppression is reversible, and the system dynamically recalculates as populations change. Nothing is lost. If you're working with a community that doesn't appear publicly, including multi-node engagement strategies, the data is still there.

Our vision hasn't changed. Every people group still matters. We've made our lists more useful for those turning data into effective action, and better stewardship of the information we've been entrusted to provide.

This is a **visibility** decision, not a **deletion** decision

Learn more here our  
Small People Group Policy

[Click the link here](#)

Or Scan the QRCode



# NIGERIA'S FULANI

## ONE PEOPLE, ONE STRATEGY

Why Joshua Project consolidated  
Nigeria's Fulani into a single people group



### QUICK SUMMARY

*Joshua Project merged Nigeria's Fulani into one people group based on 80-90% mutual intelligibility, shared cultural identity, and linguistic convergence. **Cameroon's Adamawa Fulani** remain separate due to distinct sociolinguistic contexts. Early reports show Gospel movement among Nigeria's Fulani despite persecution, while Cameroon faces harder spiritual ground. This change aligns with how Nigerian churches already operate through a unified "Fulani Desk" and enables coordinated engagement across Nigeria's 15+ million Fulani while maintaining distinct strategies for Cameroon.*

Joshua Project has officially updated its classification of the Fulani (Fulbe) people in Nigeria. Following comprehensive field research, linguistic analysis (2025), and consultations with the **Nigeria Evangelical Missions Association (NEMA)**, we have consolidated the Fulani of Nigeria into a single people group record while maintaining a distinct classification for the Fulani of Cameroon (Adamawa Fulani).

This update is not merely administrative; it aligns our database with the operational reality of the Nigerian church and offers a sharper lens for engagement.

### THE CHANGE: NIGERIA UNIFIED

Previously, the database distinguished between "Nigerian Fulani" and "Adamawa Fulani" within Nigeria. These have now been merged into a single entry: **Fulani, Nigerian**.

*Why the Merge?* We determined that both the Barrier of Understanding and Barrier of Acceptance between these groups are low to nonexistent based on three key factors:

**A Unified Identity:** Despite internal distinctions (pastoral vs. settled, regional speech patterns), Fulani communities share a cohesive identity rooted in the ethical code of *Pulaaku*, historical experience, and extensive mobility networks. Treating the population as one strategic entity rather than parallel tracks, Nigerian believers and NEMA already operate a single "Fulani Desk" for mobilization.

**High Mutual Intelligibility:** Research confirms that Hausa-States (Nigerian) Fulfulde (fuv) and Adamawa/Yola Fulfulde (fub) form a dialect continuum with 80–90% mutual intelligibility. Glottolog classifies Nigerian Fulfulde as a language of "wider communication."

**Linguistic Convergence:** A 2025 study documents that Adamawa-area speech is converging toward Northern Nigeria norms due to increased trade, schooling, and settlement. Specifically, the growing adoption of Hausa loan words in Adamawa-speaking areas is bringing the dialect closer in line with Hausa-States Fulfulde (fuv). As a result, Scripture audio and preaching resources travel well across both varieties with minimal adjustment.<sup>1</sup>

## THE DISTINCTION: CAMEROON REMAINS SEPARATE

While the Nigerian Fulani are now unified, the Adamawa Fulani of Cameroon remain a separate people group record.

The sociolinguistic ecology of northern Cameroon is fundamentally different. There, Fulfulde serves as the regional lingua franca (unlike in Northern Nigeria, where Hausa fills that role), and the environment is shaped by Francophone and Arabic influences. These differences in language function and colonial heritage justify maintaining separate strategies and records for Cameroon.

## SPIRITUAL DYNAMICS: A TALE OF TWO CONTEXTS

Beyond the demographic data, early field reports highlight a divergence in spiritual responsiveness that mission leaders should note.

- **IN NIGERIA:** Despite facing intense opposition and persecution, there are early, unverified indications of significant movement toward Christ among the Fulani. The pressure on the church and Fulani believers is high, yet the Gospel appears to be advancing through these barriers.
- **IN CAMEROON:** Conversely, although opposition is lower than in Nigeria, there are currently no reported significant Gospel breakthroughs among the Adamawa Fulani in Cameroon. The spiritual ground there appears harder to plow despite a relatively more open environment.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR YOUR STRATEGY

Coordinate under a unified Nigerian framework. Move away from parallel tracks for "Adamawa" vs. "Nigerian" Fulani within Nigeria.

Leverage resources across Nigerian dialects. Recognize that comprehension is high; resources developed for one region may be adequate nationwide.

Maintain distinct strategies for Cameroon. Do not assume that Nigerian resources or strategies will perfectly transfer to the

Francophone, Fulfulde-dominant context of northern Cameroon.

The Fulani remain among the most significant unreached people groups in Africa. This data update aims to help the global church engage them effectively, recognizing the unity that enables collaboration in Nigeria and the diversity that requires contextualization in Cameroon and other West African contexts.

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[1]: Bello, I. (2025). "A descriptive analysis of linguistic change in the Adamawa Fulfulde in Nigeria." *Journal of The Linguistic Association of Nigeria*, 5(1), 110–125.



# UNDERSTANDING BIAS IN MISSIONS DATA



## QUICK SUMMARY

Joshua Project can't guarantee any single data point because all missions data passes through biased human observers. Availability bias, confirmation bias, strict versus loose definitions, and funding pressures distort numbers in both directions. In oral cultures, testimony serves different purposes than reporting, and honor-shame dynamics shape responses to Western researchers. Rather than chase precision, Joshua Project triangulates multiple sources using methods like the Delphi process to produce conservative estimates. Perfect data is impossible, but understanding bias helps us see clearly.

At Joshua Project, we're often asked how confident we are in our data. The honest answer: we can't be confident in any single data point. **What we can do is understand the forces that distort information and build systems that account for human limitations.**

## THE REALITY OF BIAS

Every piece of mission data passes through human hands, and humans are flawed observers. The biases that shape our reporting aren't signs of dishonesty; they're features of how our minds work. Recognizing them is the first step toward better data.

**Availability Bias** affects everyone. We're limited by the sources we can access and the experiences we've had. When a team hasn't personally witnessed a breakthrough, that direct experience causes them to discount reports from other contexts. If our primary sources are workers who haven't seen movement, we unconsciously weigh their perspective more heavily. "If we haven't seen it, it must not be happening."

**Confirmation Bias** cuts both ways. Once we've invested years working among an "unreached" group, we may unconsciously filter for information that confirms continued unreachedness while dismissing evidence of emerging movements. As Hans Rosling states in *Factfulness*, activists tend to exaggerate the problems to which they've dedicated themselves, not deliberately, but unknowingly.

**Definitional Bias** creates systematic differences. Workers using stricter definitions of "believer" (requiring church membership, excluding syncretistic believers) will consistently undercount compared to those using broader definitions. The same reality gets reported as dramatically different numbers.

**Geographic Blindness** compounds the problem. Workers in one region often have little visibility into other districts or states; yet they extrapolate from their limited context to describe an entire people group.

**The Money Factor.** Financial pressures create distortions in both directions. When funding depends on a group remaining classified as "unreached," there's subtle pressure to underreport progress. When donors reward visible results, the pull to emphasize results can inflate numbers. Neither tendency requires malice, just humans responding to incentives.

**Cultural Dynamics.** In many societies, particularly oral cultures, numbers function differently from how they do in Western contexts. This isn't a flaw to be corrected. It's a different framework we must understand when collecting data.

When a local leader says, "many have come to faith," he is offering qualitative testimony about God's work. When a Western researcher presses for a specific count, the dynamic shifts. The leader may ask, "What number would mean 'many' to you?" If told 500 would be significant, he might adopt that figure—not to deceive but to interpret their experience into the framework being imposed. What began as testimony becomes a statistic entered into global databases as if it were precise.

**Honor and shame dynamics** compound this. In many cultures, relationships matter more than abstract accuracy. A leader may sense what answer would please the questioner and provide it, honoring the relationship. Saying "I don't know" or offering disappointing numbers can feel like poor hospitality. The result is numbers shaped by relational obligations rather than careful enumeration.

Finally, **testimony** serves purposes different from those of reporting. When a movement leader shares about God's work, the goal is to glorify God and encourage the faithful, not to provide defensible statistics. These narratives may use round numbers symbolically or collapse multiple events into a single powerful story. None of this is dishonest in its original context. The problem arises when we extract testimonies and treat them as data points.

When collecting information from non-Western workers, we're not simply gathering facts; we're navigating cross-cultural translation where precision and meaning operate by different rules.

## BUILDING BETTER SYSTEMS

Understanding these biases doesn't mean abandoning measurement. It means designing processes that compensate for our blind spots.

We're implementing confidence scores alongside data points, tracking phases of engagement and diversifying our sources. We typically gather over a dozen perspectives using methods such as the Delphi process. We ask questions in multiple ways to triangulate responses, and we work to apply equal scrutiny to data, whether it confirms or challenges our expectations.

### The Goal: Triangulation Over Precision

Rather than trusting any single source, we seek convergence. When multiple independent reports

point in the same direction, confidence grows. When they diverge, we investigate further. The goal isn't perfect data; that's unattainable. The goal is to produce statistically robust, conservative estimates based on triangulated evidence.

Ultimately, this work requires humility. We see through a glass dimly. Our database represents our best understanding, not reality itself. God may be moving in places we haven't yet heard from, and reported breakthroughs may prove more complicated than initial accounts suggest.

The unreached deserve our best efforts to see clearly. And seeing clearly starts with admitting how easily our vision can be clouded.



## BRING JOSHUA PROJECT TO YOUR ORGANIZATION

Don't just present missions statistics. Transform how your team understands and engages unreached people groups. Our speakers deliver compelling presentations tailored to your context, turning complex data into actionable strategy. Choose from full-day intensives, half-day workshops, or virtual sessions. With 150+ years collective experience and proven impact across denominations, we equip leaders with clear vision for reaching the world's least-reached populations.

**Explore this Opportunity on a Call**

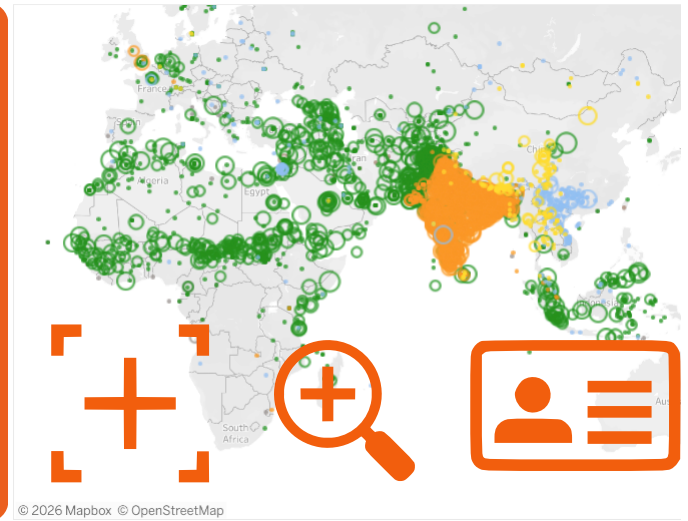
**Click the link here**

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# A NEW ERA FOR PEOPLE GROUP MAPPING



## QUICK SUMMARY

*Joshua Project replaced static PDF maps with interactive polygons that zoom, print, and cover every people group in every country outside South Asia. Phase I is live now. Phase II will add South Asia, people cluster maps, and language family maps color-coded by reached status (green) versus unreached (red). These cluster and language maps reveal near-culture mobilization opportunities where reached communities sit geographically close to unreached groups, enabling faster learning and more effective engagement than outside workers could provide.*

For years, we at Joshua Project have provided detailed maps showing where people groups live around the world. These static maps, carefully researched and designed by our mapping specialist, have served users well. But as we look toward the future, particularly internationalization, we recognized a significant challenge: *every PDF map would need to be reproduced for each language we support.* Add to that the reality that not all people groups have been mapped yet, and we knew it was time for a new approach.

**We are excited to announce that Phase I of our new mapping protocol is complete.**

Rather than static images, people group locations are now rendered as polygons over an interactive base map. This means you can zoom in to see local detail, zoom out for regional context, view the map in full screen, or print what you need. Most importantly, this approach gives us the ability to provide a map for every people group in every country, something that would have taken years to accomplish under the old system.

Phase I covers all regions except South Asia, where we had previously used a different mapping methodology. You can see these new maps now on any non-South Asian people group profile.

Phase II is already in development. This phase will bring South Asia under the same interactive paradigm and introduce two powerful new map types: people cluster maps and language family maps.

These new maps will display people group locations color-coded by Joshua Project's progress scale: red for unreached and green for partially or significantly reached. The strategic value here is significant. People clusters share cultural similarities, so when you see a reached group in geographic and cultural proximity to unreached or frontier groups, you are seeing an opportunity for near-culture mobilization. Workers from within a cluster's reached communities can often engage their unreached neighbors more effectively than outsiders.

Language family maps serve a similar purpose. Even when cultures differ, linguistic similarities



mean workers can learn related languages more quickly and communicate the gospel more clearly. These maps will help identify where language bridges exist between reached and unreached communities.

For now, we invite you to explore Phase I on Joshua Project. Pull up any people group profile outside South Asia and see the new interactive map in action. We believe this represents a meaningful step forward in how we visualize and strategize for the remaining task.

**Browse Frontier People Groups  
in Country (SE Asia View N/A)**

[Click the link here](#)

Or Scan the QRCode



## HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT RECOGNIZING ALEVIS AS A DISTINCT PEOPLE GROUP



### QUICK SUMMARY

*Turkey's four million Alevis have been invisible to missions because they share language and nationality with Sunni Turks, but they reject mosques, don't practice the Five Pillars, and have endured centuries of persecution. Standard "Ministry to Muslims" approaches offend them by answering questions they're not asking. Alevis respond powerfully when the gospel connects to their concepts of the Perfected Human and unjust suffering. Shared language doesn't mean shared access to the gospel. When our categories are too broad, millions remain unreached.*

Four million people, hidden in plain sight, Alevis have historically been understood as a religious stream rather than a distinct people group. Previously, the only Alevis listed by the Joshua Project was the 400,000 Northern Zaza people. However, after an interview with a long-term worker who has lived in Turkey for nearly forty years, we began looking

more closely. The 2018 KONDA Lifestyles Survey found that 5% of Turkey's population self-identifies as Alevi, roughly 4 million people. This estimate is conservative; the actual number is likely higher, as political sensitivities discourage many Alevis from publicly identifying as such.

Alevis share language, schooling, and national identity with Sunni Turks, and Turkey's census does not recognize them as a separate group. Urbanization has blurred the village distinctions that once made Alevi communities easier to identify. These factors explain why Alevis were not previously recognized as a distinct people group. But with millions self-identifying as Alevi, the question arose: should they be listed separately?

We believe the answer is yes. Joshua Project defines **a people group as the largest group within which the gospel can spread without encountering barriers**, and barriers clearly exist between Alevis and Sunni Turks. Inter-marriage, one of the clearest indicators of social boundaries, remains uncommon, especially outside university settings. Worship spaces are separate, with Alevis gathering in cemevis ("assembly houses") rather than mosques. Their spiritual vocabulary, including words such as Hak (God), pir (guide), and dede (a pastor-like figure), differs significantly from Sunni Islamic vocabulary. Alevis do not perform pilgrimage to Mecca or fast during Ramadan. Instead, they visit Hacı Bektaş and observe a 12-day fast in honor of the Twelve Imams. Women do not cover their heads, and men and women pray together. A long history of persecution continues to shape Alevi-Sunni relations. These enduring differences create a distinct worldview and real barriers to gospel movement between communities.

A Turkish pastor who grew up in an Alevi family described both the barriers and bridges he has encountered. Small misunderstandings of Alevi customs can quickly damage trust. In one example, he had been sharing the gospel with an Alevi family.

The son and daughter decided to follow Jesus, and even the hesitant parents continued inviting him to read the Bible with them. During one visit, the daughter brought American workers she had met at a Turkish church. The family invited them to sit on the floor to eat, a normal Alevi tradition but uncommon among Sunni Turks. Without realizing it, the visitors offended the father by jumping over the eating mat rather than walking around it. He kicked them all out of the house. The ignorance of culture became a barrier for that family.

Yet this same pastor also highlighted how Alevi spiritual language can create bridges. When he enters a cemevi, he often sees phrases like "Tanrı sevgisi" (love of God) and "insan sevgisi" (love of people) on the walls. He shows those gathered that the same teaching appears at the heart of the Bible. He has also noticed that many Alevis appreciate Jesus's confrontations with religious hypocrisy,

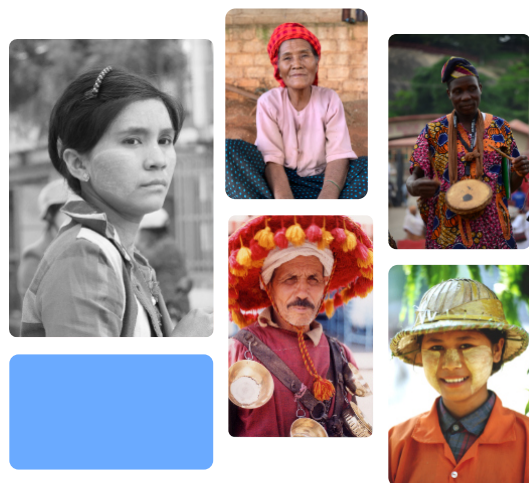
stories that resonate with their own values. These shared themes help Alevis explore the gospel with curiosity and a sense of familiarity.

Recognizing Alevis as a distinct people group brings needed clarity to a community that has long existed at the edges of formal classification. Millions of people can remain invisible when we assume shared language or nationality means shared access to the gospel. Careful people group work, asking where barriers exist, where intermarriage is accepted, where ministry naturally transfers, opens doors to understanding. And understanding opens doors to gospel receptivity, disciple-making, and church planting.

Millions of people can remain invisible when we assume shared language or nationality means shared access to the gospel.

## BEHIND THE DATA

# HOW WE DEFINE PEOPLE GROUP BOUNDARIES



### QUICK SUMMARY

*Joshua Project balances comprehensive data with strategic action by identifying people groups where barriers actually matter for church planting. Every decision asks two questions: Is there an **understanding barrier** (language hindering Scripture comprehension)? Is there an **acceptance barrier** (identity blocking gospel transfer)? Inter-marriage patterns serve as the primary test. Adding groups requires credible evidence; removing them requires verification from two independent sources. Field workers often see realities desk research misses.*

At Joshua Project, we take the accuracy of our people group data seriously. Our mission depends on it. That's why we've recently developed comprehensive policies governing how we add, split, merge, and update people group records. We're currently implementing these changes, and we want to share how this process works and how you can help.

### BALANCING COMPREHENSIVE AND STRATEGIC

We constantly navigate a tension in our work. Being **comprehensive** would mean micro-segmenting and listing every possible subgroup. Being **strategic** means presenting actionable data that helps mobilize effective ministry. People group identity sits at the intersection of these two goals. We aim to identify groups at the level where the distinction actually matters for church planting, not so broad that real barriers are overlooked and not so narrow that the data becomes unwieldy or impractical.

### OUR GUIDING PRINCIPLE

Our core principle is simple: **easy to add, careful to remove**. When field workers or researchers identify a potential new group, we'd rather add it provisionally and schedule a review than risk overlooking an unreached people. No group should fall through the cracks. Removal, however, requires careful verification.

### THE TWO QUESTIONS WE ASK

Every people group decision comes down to two fundamental questions. **First, is there an understanding barrier?** Do language or dialect differences materially hinder comprehension of Scripture, teaching, or testimony? **Second, is there an acceptance barrier?** Do identity boundaries (whether religious, caste, tribal, historical, etc.) block the natural transfer of the gospel between groups?

We rate each barrier as none, low, moderate, or high. If either barrier is moderate or high, that typically indicates distinct people groups requiring separate ministry strategies.

## THE PRACTICAL TEST

Our primary proxy for social acceptance is intermarriage. Is marriage between the groups broadly taboo, uncommon and contested, or common and accepted? Supporting indicators include whether groups eat together in homes and whether they attend each other's funerals and celebrations. We also consider group cohesion, whether a population maintains a shared sense of identity through community structures, gatherings, or a collective "we." The underlying question is straightforward: if the gospel does not naturally transfer across a boundary, that boundary likely defines distinct groups.

## EVIDENCE MATTERS

We don't make these decisions lightly. Adding a group requires credible evidence and removing one requires verification from at least two independent sources. We prioritize field corroboration. What workers on the ground observe often outweighs what desk research suggests. When sources conflict, we dig deeper rather than make assumptions.

We aim to identify groups at the level where the distinction actually matters for church planting, not so broad that real barriers are overlooked and not so narrow that the data becomes unwieldy or impractical.

## WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU

If you're working among a people and notice distinct subgroups where the gospel doesn't flow freely, whether due to language differences or social barriers, we want to hear from you. Field reality matters deeply to us. Conversely, if you observe that previously distinct groups now intermarry freely and worship together without barriers, that's valuable information too.

We're also exploring how to tag groups whose identity is shifting over time. Assimilation happens on a continuum, and even early signals that a group's distinctiveness is fading help us track these changes and maintain accurate data.

We're committed to ensuring no people group is overlooked while maintaining data integrity. Your field observations help us steward this responsibility well.

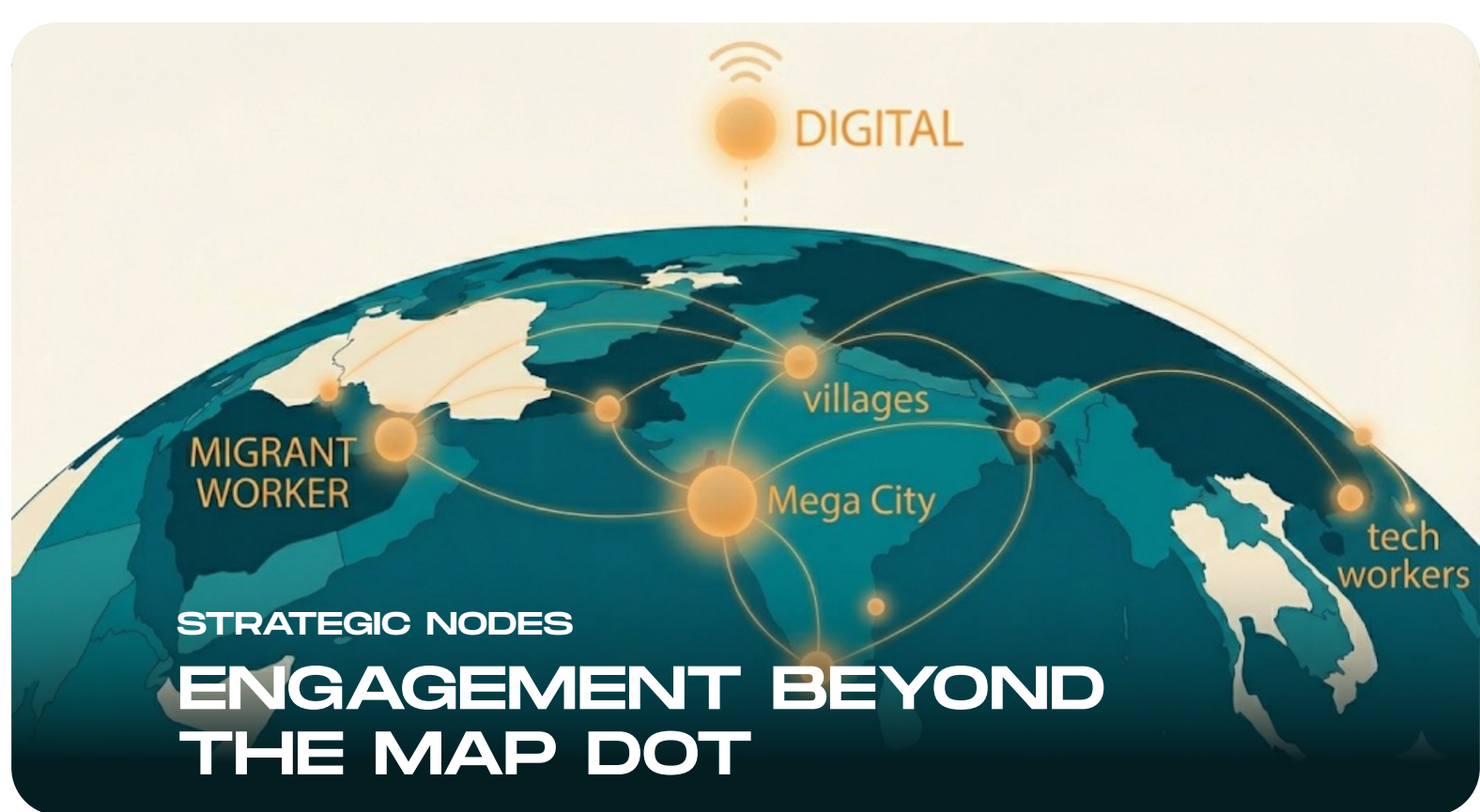
**Learn more about the people groups boundaries**

**[Click the link here](#)**

**Or Scan the QRCode**







## QUICK SUMMARY

*Mission strategies focus on megacities or villages, but **36% of humanity lives in overlooked towns**. People groups exist as webs of interconnected nodes: villages, towns, cities, diaspora communities, and online spaces. No single organization can work all nodes. Joshua Project is exploring how to catalog strategic nodes for large frontier groups, enabling collaboration where organizations can coordinate complementary efforts across the network.*

The urbanization picture we've been working with is incomplete. For decades, mission strategies have operated with two mental categories: **remote villages** and **sprawling megacities**. The 2025 UN World Urbanization Prospects report reveals a more nuanced reality, one with significant implications for engaging frontier people groups.

## THE DATA THAT CHANGES THE CONVERSATION

The UN report classifies human settlements along a continuum using a new "*Degree of Urbanization*" framework:

**45% of the world lives in cities**

**36% live in towns** (clusters of 5,000+ with moderate density)

**Only 19% remain in rural areas**

The report defines cities as contiguous areas with at least 50,000 people and high density (1,500+ per km<sup>2</sup>). Towns are intermediate settlements with at least 5,000 people and moderate density (300+ per km<sup>2</sup>), located outside of cities.

This means 81% of humanity now lives in urban-like environments. Yet 96% of the world's 12,000+ cities have fewer than 1 million inhabitants. The world is mostly urban, but not mostly megacity.

Towns remain the most common settlement type in 71 countries, including India, Nepal, Uganda, and the United States. In sub-Saharan Africa and Central/Southern Asia, regions central to the unfinished task, town populations are expected to grow rapidly through 2050.

For mission strategists, this exposes a blind spot: *over a third of humanity lives in towns, yet most*

*strategies focus on large urban cores or rural villages, leaving towns largely overlooked.*

## WHY MULTI-NODE THINKING MATTERS

Rather than thinking of a people group as a dot or blob on a map, picture a web of interconnected nodes: homogeneous villages, market towns, regional cities, cross-border locations, diaspora communities, and online spaces. These aren't theoretical categories. They're how people actually live.

The strategic question shifts from "Where do they live?" to "Which nodes give us the best leverage for gospel breakthrough and multiplication?"

Consider the Turks, one of the largest frontier people groups. Engagement could happen in Istanbul, the massive urban center, but also in a mid-size Anatolian town, among the large Turkish diaspora in Europe or North America, or through Turkish-language digital platforms that cross all borders. Each node offers different access, different openness, and different potential for gospel flow. A church planted in Germany might catalyze fruit that eventually reaches a hometown in Turkey through family networks.

## WHY THIS REQUIRES COLLABORATION

No single organization can work all the nodes for a given people. One ministry excels at rural church planting, another at diaspora engagement, another at digital outreach, and another at professional placements in cities. A multi-node reality demands collaboration. The network is larger than any one organization's capacity.

Yet collaboration requires shared visibility. If agencies don't know which nodes exist or who else might be working a particular node, coordination remains aspirational.

## WHAT WE'RE EXPLORING

This multi-node perspective connects to the 3D Engagement Scales framework introduced in the previous issue. Among the accelerators we're testing (factors that can help move a people group toward sustained gospel presence), multi-node engagement stands out as increasingly essential given how people actually live and move today.

**Over a third of humanity lives in towns, yet most strategies focus on large urban cores or rural villages, leaving towns largely overlooked.**

Joshua Project is exploring how to catalog strategic nodes for large frontier people groups. For peoples like the Turks or Yadav, listing the network of engagement opportunities, not just homeland location, could help organizations identify where they might focus and who else might be working complementary nodes. Over time, this could support coalitions seeking to coordinate, but for now, we're exploring how to make strategic nodes visible.

**The goal:** serving the Body of Christ with shared intelligence so that workers and resources can be matched to nodes where they may be most effective, and so that those working different nodes for the same people can find each other.

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# UNDERSTANDING CHRISTIAN PERSECUTION IN CONTEMPORARY INDIA



## QUICK SUMMARY

*Since 2014, Hindu nationalist political power has transformed India into one of the world's most challenging environments for Christians. Believers face arrest on terrorism charges, mob violence, and systematic legal harassment, particularly in states with minimal Christian presence. The persecution intensifies as church growth accelerates among marginalized communities. Mission leaders must recognize India's urgency. Share this article sensitively.*

India presents a puzzling contradiction. The world's largest democracy, with constitutional protections for religious freedom, has become one of the most challenging places for Christians to practice their faith. To understand why requires looking at both history and present-day politics.

## HISTORICAL ROOTS OF RELIGIOUS IDENTITY

Hinduism encompasses a range of ancient, localized traditions across South Asia that gradually formed into what we recognize today as a religious system. For Hindu nationalists, this isn't just about theology. It's about identity and who gets to define what it means to be truly Indian.

Islam arrived through Mughal conquests. Christianity came through British colonialism. Both became associated with foreign invasion in the Hindu nationalist worldview. The Mar Thoma Church established roots in India centuries before Christianity reached Britain, but this detail rarely appears in nationalist narratives.

## THE POLITICAL ARCHITECTURE OF PERSECUTION

When India gained independence in 1947, the new constitution guaranteed religious freedom. Hindu nationalism, however, has always existed alongside this secular vision. One Hindu nationalist even assassinated Mahatma Gandhi.

The shift came in 2014 when Narendra Modi of the BJP Party became prime minister. Modi is a committed Hindu nationalist. Since his election, persecution of religious minorities has grown steadily worse. The 2020s have seen further acceleration, largely in response to increased church growth.

Most of this growth happens among communities at the bottom of India's social hierarchy. Christianity offers something these communities haven't historically possessed: inherent dignity rooted in being made in God's image rather than assigned by caste status. This represents more than a theological difference. It challenges existing power structures.

When marginalized people discover their worth independent of social rank and accept Christ's authority, those who benefit from the old system lose control. Hindu nationalist politicians have recognized the usefulness of this tension. They frame Christians as agents of Western imperialism and traitors to Indian civilization. The rhetoric taps into real historical wounds while serving current political goals.

## HOW PERSECUTION UNFOLDS

The pattern has become predictable. Local law enforcement arrests Christian leaders and takes their phones. Officials search for baptism photos to identify other believers they consider traitors. They scrutinize bank records carefully. Any connection to Western funding confirms what they already believe: that foreign powers are using local converts to undermine Hindu India.

The charges usually include terrorism. A single arrest typically generates three or four separate legal cases. Each case requires its own court proceedings. For Christians from economically vulnerable backgrounds, the mounting legal costs become impossible to manage. Many simply give up their legal defense.

The violence can be extreme. Some believers have been stripped and beaten. Others have been forced to bow before Hindu idols. Death threats are common. Some have been killed.

The intensity varies by region. States where Christianity has had minimal historical presence see the worst persecution. Chhattisgarh recently banned home groups, which are essential for discipleship in hostile environments. In Rajasthan, where only one in a thousand people follows Christ, mob violence has become routine. Last February, a congregation was attacked and multiple people were seriously injured.

Local police often side with the attackers rather than the victims. They accuse Christians of forcing conversions, despite evidence to the contrary. Prime Minister Modi has remained silent about the violence. Nothing suggests the situation will improve soon.

The pressure has broken some believers, who have publicly returned to Hinduism. When they later come back to the church, other Christians wash their feet. It's a way of honoring what they endured.

## WHAT THIS ASKS OF US

This isn't just a distant problem requiring sympathy. Something remarkable is happening through the suffering. Police officers and prisoners are encountering the gospel through the witness of persecuted believers. The early church knew this pattern well. Attempts to silence the message often amplify it instead.

Mission leaders need to see India clearly. This isn't a completed task or a stable field. It's one of the most urgent contexts for strategic support and

sustained engagement. Our brothers and sisters there need more than prayers, though prayers matter deeply. They need practical solidarity, advocacy, and the knowledge that they haven't been abandoned.

History suggests that persecution often marks the places where God's kingdom advances most powerfully. India appears to be one of those places right now.

**Sources:** Private newsletter from the 24:14 Coalition, September 2025  
International Christian Concern. "Chhattisgarh Authorities Further Restrict House Churches." August 25, 2025.  
Christianity Today. "Attack, Assault, Arrest, Repeat." March 11, 2025.





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