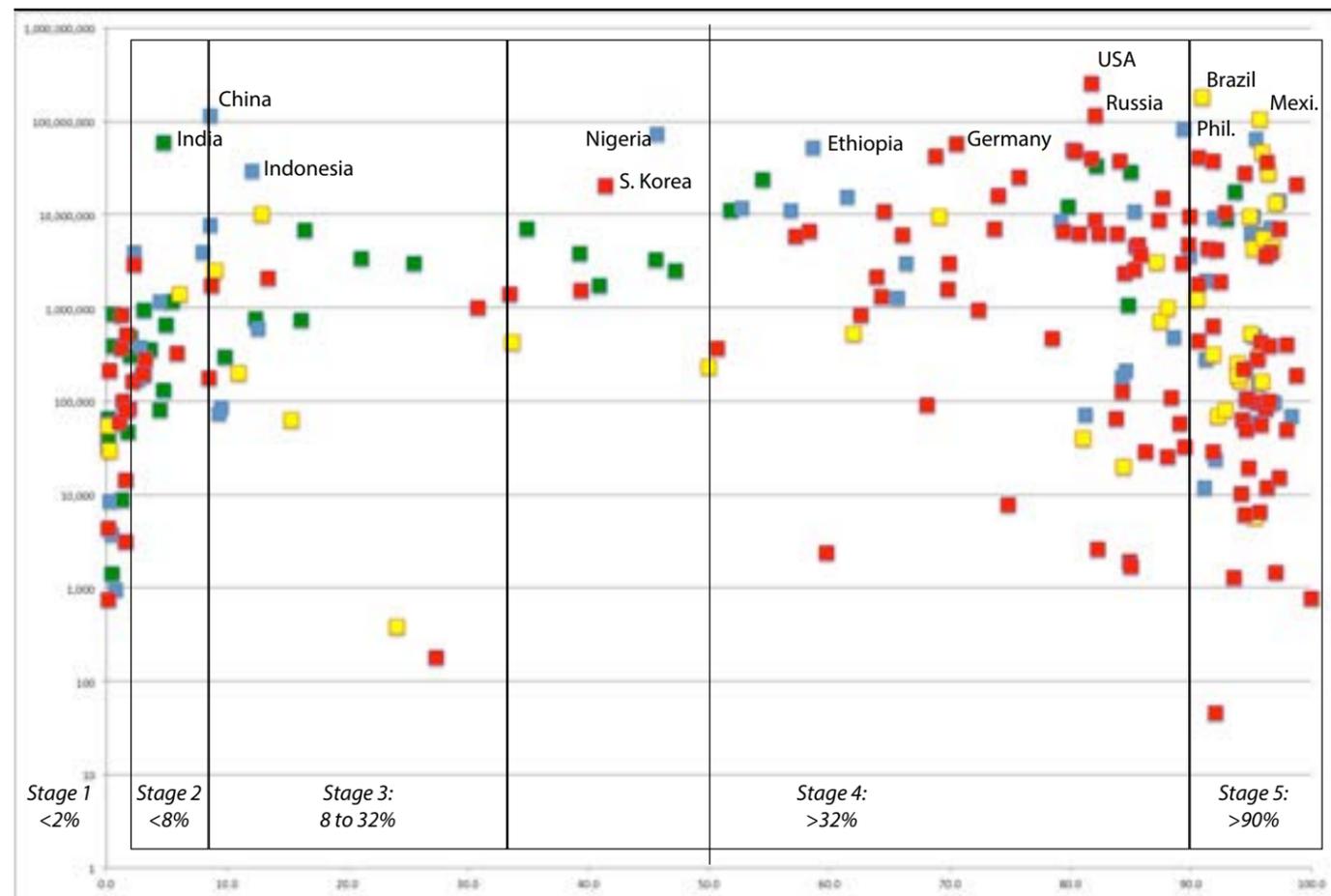


Global Diagram 1: Christian populations and Percent Christian, 2010

Vertical axis: total Christian population (all traditions), from the *Atlas of Global Christianity*, as of 2010. Arranged in logarithmic scale to highlight large populations.

Horizontal axis: percent Christian for each country, from the *Atlas of Global Christianity*, as of 2010.

Colors: Years to double in population.
 Green: 25 years or less (1 generation).
 Blue: 26 to 50 years.
 Yellow: 51 to 75 years.
 Red: over 75, or not growing.



| 1. Large Christian pop., Large %C | | | 2. Large Christian pop, Small %C | | | 3. Large %C, Fast Church Growth | | | 4. Smallest %C, Christians >0.1m | | |
|-----------------------------------|-------|-----|----------------------------------|-------|-----|---------------------------------|-----|-----|----------------------------------|-----|-----|
| Country | C | TTD | Country | C | TTD | Country | % | TTD | Country | C | % |
| 1. USA | 257.3 | 144 | 1. China | 115.0 | 27 | 1. Timor | 84% | 18 | 1. Turkey | 0.2 | 0.1 |
| 2. Brazil | 180.9 | 65 | 2. India | 58.3 | 19 | 2. Uganda | 85% | 21 | 2. Bangladesh | 0.8 | 1.3 |
| 3. Russia | 115.1 | — | 3. Indonesia | 28.9 | 45 | 3. Burundi | 93% | 23 | 3. Iran | 0.3 | 0.5 |
| 4. Mexico | 105.0 | 72 | 4. S. Korea | 20.1 | 180 | 4. Angola | 93% | 24 | 4. Thailand | 0.8 | 1.3 |
| 5. Philippines | 83.1 | 42 | 5. Egypt | 10.2 | 51 | 5. Kenya | 82% | 24 | 5. Uzbekistan | 0.3 | 1.3 |

C = Christian population, in millions. TTD = Time to double, based on annual growth rate (72/AGR). % = % Christian of country.

How do we measure which countries are “most Christian”? Several countries have very large Christian populations and slowing church growth, because most of their population considers themselves Christians. Others (such as China) have large Christian populations which are nevertheless small shares of the total population, leaving room for growth (situation 2). These will likely overtake the existing large Christian populations in terms of absolute numbers. A few mostly-Christian countries have high growth rates, caused by a high birth rate: the percentage of the population that is Christian will not change as a result. Finally, several countries have large Christian populations, but they represent very tiny minorities: much work remains here. **Diagram Editor:** Justin D. Long. **Data source:** *Atlas of Global Christianity* and *Operation World*. All data at 2010.

Just how Christian? Size, Share and Growth

by Justin D. Long

Occasionally people note a stunning number: by 2030, it is likely that China will have the largest Christian population. Would that make it the most Christian nation? The reality is complex. This chart looks at three different ways of considering “how Christian” a country is: the size of the Christian population, the share of the overall population that is Christian (% Christian), and the growth rate of Christianity in the country. (This ignores the greater complexity of subdivisions of Christianity, and issues of nominalism, “true Christianity,” and evangelicals.)

More Christian = more Christians?

The vertical axis looks at the size of the Christian population. We organize this logarithmically to separate very small and very large populations. Immediately we see that while China has a large number of Christians (and perhaps, by 2030, will have the largest number), it is not the only large Christian population: there are 11 Christian populations in excess of 50 million (with five over 100 million). China may occupy the top spot in 2030, but it will not be vastly ahead of other ‘Christian nations’ as ranked by total Christian population.

More Christian = more % Christian?

The horizontal axis looks at “percent Christian” in 2010—the share of a country’s population that is Christian. I have broken the graph into five categories that I frequently use, each one representing two ‘doublings’ of percent Christian (excepting Stage 5, which is the high end of extreme concentration).

The distribution of dots horizontally shows the “all-or-little” reality of Christianity. There are very few dots ‘in the middle’ compared to the edges. Most of the countries with large Christian percentages see very large percentages, typically in excess of 80% (‘most-more-than-more’).

To the far left, we see another intriguing situation: larger populations have gained larger numbers of Christians; smaller populations have smaller percentages. These small populations are often very restricted-access countries.

More Christian = growing faster?

Another (and less frequently used) measure is to suggest a nation is more Christian if the church is growing dynamically. The markers are colored according to the time it will take the respective populations to double (based on annual growth rates from *Operation World*). Green dots are growing the fastest, likely to double in less than 25 years (or a generation). Red dots are barely growing at all: most are projected to take more than 100 years to double in size.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, most of the “green” growth rates are countries where Christianity occupies a low percentage of the population, while most of the high-percentage populations have very low or nil growth rates. When a population claims to be 90% Christian, most of the “growth” will be transfers from one tradition to another (e.g. Protestants converting Catholics to Protestantism), or emigration, or demographic growth (which in most of these countries has been significantly reduced).

In the low-percentage Christian countries, we can see growth results are mixed. Larger Christian populations tend to be growing: we see a lot of red when a church is both less than a million people in size and a small minority. Oppression and persecution can retard the growth of Christianity in a country.

In the high-percentage Christian countries, we do find a small handful of “green” fast-growing countries. What is the situation of these? The growth rates we’re using for this chart incorporate demographics and conversions. In these countries, the birth rate is very high, leading to a very low time to double. But the national population is growing at the same rate, so the percentage of the population that is Christian will remain about the same.

Another look at China (and others)

China, India and Indonesia are in the interesting position of having very large Christian populations that represent very small minorities within their respective countries. China and India both have

doubling times of right around 25 years; Indonesia, more like 50 years. Yet these “doubles” would not make these “majority-Christian” (as measured by % Christian). If China were to double to around 230 million (and by current growth rates, that is not altogether assured), it would make up about 20% of China’s population. A doubled Indian Christianity would represent even less of a percentage. There may be a large number of Christians but there are an even larger number of non-Christians. What sort of influence will the Christians have? What sort of persecution or restrictions are they likely to face?

In conclusion, most importantly—

While much remains to be done in countries that are less than 50% Christian, we can see the significant resources available “near” the harvest. When a nation has more than a million believers, it seems obvious that the task remaining is less one of pioneering, and more one of partnering with the massive harvest God has birthed in these nations.

However, while this chart is largely about illustrating the issue of “how Christian is a country,” it again reveals the unreached: the cluster of red dots on the far left hand side are very small Christian populations within very large non-Christian areas. A rough approximation can easily be made: a church of 100,000 on the 1% line is within a population 100 times larger (or 10 million). The “red” tells us these populations are not growing: as the populations around them increase in size, their share of the population will shrink (thus the % Christian in each of these countries will become smaller). Work is needed here!