



# Clarifying the Remaining Frontier Mission Task

by R. W. Lewis

## *A Chart Makes a Difference*

Charting the frontiers of mission can be a very strategic tool in mobilizing God's people. It happened forty years ago when Ralph Winter chose to use a simple "pie chart" to bring a new awareness of the thousands of people groups being completely overlooked by mission agencies and churches around the world. The success of outreach in places like Korea, Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa, the Pacific islands, and Papua New Guinea had given a false sense of completion, and some were insisting that missionaries were no longer needed. The assumption was that national churches were in every country and we simply needed to partner with them in finishing the task of world evangelization.

Winter had done the statistical work on the remaining task. The size and scale shocked him. It was clear to him that some 17,000 people groups had never had a significant witness in their own mother-tongue language, most had no Bible translations, and they had no indigenous worshipping fellowships in their own language. He introduced this new awareness to evangelical leaders on a world stage (1974), and founded a new agency dedicated to reaching these peoples (1976). But he was a bit mystified when evangelical leadership responded with disbelief and resistance. This knowledge was not as easily transferable as he originally had thought, but without this awareness churches and agencies would continue to overlook these "hidden peoples." If the task was unclear, people would not be sent.

This is when the original unreached peoples "pie chart" was created (figure 1, page 154). Ralph Winter and his wife, Roberta, had committed their mission organization to awakening one million evangelicals to this challenge, and they believed charting this missiological challenge for "at-a-glance" understanding was necessary for reaching the evangelical in the pew. Winter forged his statistics into a pie chart entitled "Penetrating the Last Frontiers"; it was sent to hundreds of thousands of people (see page 154 for photo of 1978 chart). Over the years, that chart has awakened thousands of churches and

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hundreds of mission agencies to the plight of the unreached peoples and has encouraged new Western and global South mobilization efforts on their behalf.<sup>1</sup>

So, how are we doing? The *good news* is that significant progress has been made, and movements have been started in a number of these people groups, even those that are still counted as *unreached people groups* (UPGs)—those whose population is less than 2% evangelical. However, the *bad news* is that no discernible progress is being made in more than half of the UPGs, which I will refer to as *frontier people groups* (FPGs). The question of the hour is “Why?”

I believe there are at least eight factors that have impeded the progress of the gospel among the frontier people groups: lack of demographic clarity; difficulty of access; the power of multi-cultural religious systems; fear of shame; extraction conversion of those in diaspora groups; the increasing shift from long-term to short-term teams; increased focus on partnering vs pioneering efforts; and what I see as lack of missiological clarity. I’ll explain these more below, but the lack of demographic clarity is where a new pie chart could serve us well. As Winter found out, when the task is not clear, people are not sent.

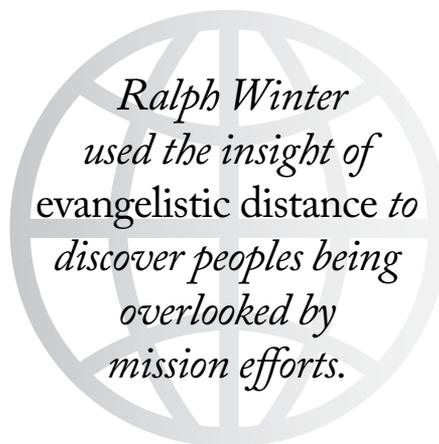
So, over the past year, a number of mission demographers have collaborated to produce a new updated pie chart (on pages 158–159) looking at the frontier people groups, namely *those where there are no movements to Christ, no breakthroughs of indigenous faith, and less than 0.1% of the population is Christian*. I would like to review this updated pie chart by looking at three key components that have been largely overlooked in the mobilization and training of new personnel.

### *Three Key Components Needed for Demographic Clarity*

#### **I. Identifying which non-believers can be reached by believers in their own people group vs. those who need pioneering witness**

In the past 40 years, the organizations involved in mission demographics have sought to distinguish between people groups with sufficient evangelical believers to continue reaching their own people (“reached people groups”) and those groups which lack a critical mass of believers (“unreached people groups” which was set at 2% evangelical in the 1990s.)<sup>2</sup>

However, the original focus was on discerning which people groups lacked an indigenous movement to Christ



and where no progress was being made—those in distinct ethnolinguistic people groups beyond the reach of normal evangelism. These groups need someone to come from other people groups, learn their language and culture, and attempt to communicate the gospel in a way that leads to movement of indigenous faith in Christ.

Ralph Winter used the insight of *evangelistic distance*, in the early 1970s, to discover thousands of peoples being overlooked by mission efforts. Winter distinguished by geographic area those people who could be reached by active believers within their own people group from those who live in ethnolinguistic groups with no or very few believers and who were therefore isolated

from any effective witness. In 1974, he clarified these categories by coining the terms E-0, E-1, E-2, and E-3. In 1978, he portrayed this evangelistic distance in a pie chart entitled “Penetrating the Last Frontiers” (pictured on page 154).

#### *Categories of Evangelistic Distance*

On that original pie chart the “Active Christians” were shown as bright yellow (see page 154). On the updated 2018 pie chart, the active Christians are now called “evangelicals” (due to data collecting constraints), and are an estimate from all denominations, including charismatics and Pentecostals (see pages 158–159). The people these believers can reach fairly easily in their own language, in their own culture, and without having to cross a cultural barrier, are represented by the first two categories, E-0 and E-1.

“E-0” **Evangelism:** Inactive Christians, or “other Christians” (or as some would call them, “nominal” Christians who identify as Christians but have yet to encounter Christ personally), are shown in paler yellow. These *nominally Christian people need a revival* or renewal of their faith. Winter called their “evangelistic distance” from the believers “E-0.” These people identify themselves as Christians already but may never have read the Bible or encountered God personally. E-0 evangelism is most needed in places like Europe with a high percentage of Christians, but a low percentage of evangelicals.

“E-1” **Evangelism:** *Culturally-near* non-believers are the second category of people that active Christians are able to reach in their own culture and language. They are shown in *green* and represent those non-believers in the same people group as active Christians. These people are at a greater evangelistic distance (E-1) because they have not heard about Jesus or are antagonistic to the Christian faith. But, if they decide to follow Christ, *they can become part of the same churches as the active Christians who are reaching them, since an indigenous faith has already been established in their people group.*

The E-1 task is most needed in people groups with strong Jesus movements but where most of the population has not yet come to faith in Christ, such as in China among the Han Chinese, or in Korea. In some places, like Japan, there are many believers, but their faith expression is still very foreign, so it is more difficult for them to reach their neighbors.

**“E-2” or “E-3” Evangelism:** Winter’s core insight was that there were many people groups with few if any believers in Christ among them and little access to the gospel. On the original pie chart, the blue areas represented these *culturally-distant non-believers* living in ethnolinguistic groups (or people groups) with virtually no active believers who could reach them in their own language and culture. Any believer would have to cross significant ethnolinguistic and religious barriers to bring the gospel to these people. The greater evangelistic distance is represented by using the terms “E-2” or “E-3,” the difference being the degree of cultural distance between the witnesses and those they are trying to reach. Evangelistic distance is increased not only by degree of language and cultural differences, but also by things like caste or racial prejudice and historical animosity. An example of an E-2 distance would be a Muslim-background believer from India having to learn Bengali to witness to a Muslim in Bangladesh. If the same witness went to reach Buddhists in Thailand, or Brahmin Hindus in India, it would be an E-3 evangelistic distance.

“Frontier missions” always involves E-2 and E-3 evangelism, because witness needs to happen in people groups where no breakthrough movement to Christ has yet taken place. As a result, *any witness must come from believers who belong to a different ethnolinguistic group.* Most Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist groups fall into this category. The people in these “frontier people groups” were displayed in blue on the original pie chart.

On the 2018 pie chart there’s been a slight change. All culturally-distant non-believers are still shown in blue,

## **C**harts reveal some startling missiological realities that have been obscured more recently in the larger unreached peoples databases.

but those living in frontier people groups are shown as *dark blue*, and a *lighter blue* has been used for non-believers in UPGs where noticeable progress has been made. In these lighter blue groups, there are now emerging movements to Christ resulting in 0.1% to 2% evangelical believers who can minister in an E-1 evangelism to their families and neighbors.

The gospel has made such significant progress in the last 40 years that many former blue areas are now displayed as green. Once a people group has a *self-sustaining* movement to Christ among them, the remaining population of that people group moves from blue (needing pioneer witnesses from other people groups with evangelistic distances of E-2 or E-3) to green (being reachable by E-1 evangelistic efforts of their own people). This shift explains the huge difference displayed in China between the 1978 and 2018 pie charts, a result of the dramatic movements to Christ among Chinese people groups, such as the Han Chinese.<sup>3</sup> (Compare the original and updated pie charts on pages 154 and 158–159.)

*While the pie charts are good for showing how many non-believers are outside of the witness of existing believers, they do not show other important things. In which people groups has no progress been made? With which religions do they identify? Where are the missionaries or witnesses going or not going?*

### II. Identifying which people groups have no movements of believers (frontier people groups) and their size, location, and religions

The distinction between “reached” people groups and “unreached” people groups (<2% evangelical and <5% Christian) has not adequately distinguished between the UPGs which now have movements established among

them and those that still have no movements at all. By the time a people group has as many as one or two out of 100 people following Christ (1% to 2%), it is usually sufficiently engaged *by its own people* (E-1) and the gospel is spreading. To show the people groups that still need frontier mission type outreach (E-2/E-3), data bases and mobilizers need to show as clearly as possible which unreached people groups still have no sign of movements to Christ.<sup>4</sup> Some of the databases are moving in this direction.

The new 2018 pie chart separates the non-believers living in “frontier people groups” (shown in dark blue), those requiring frontier mission efforts, from other types of non-believers. But it does not identify anything about who those frontier people groups are, where they specifically live, what religion they practice, or what the population is of each people group. To make progress we need these additional things clarified as well.

#### *What Maps of Frontier People Groups Reveal*

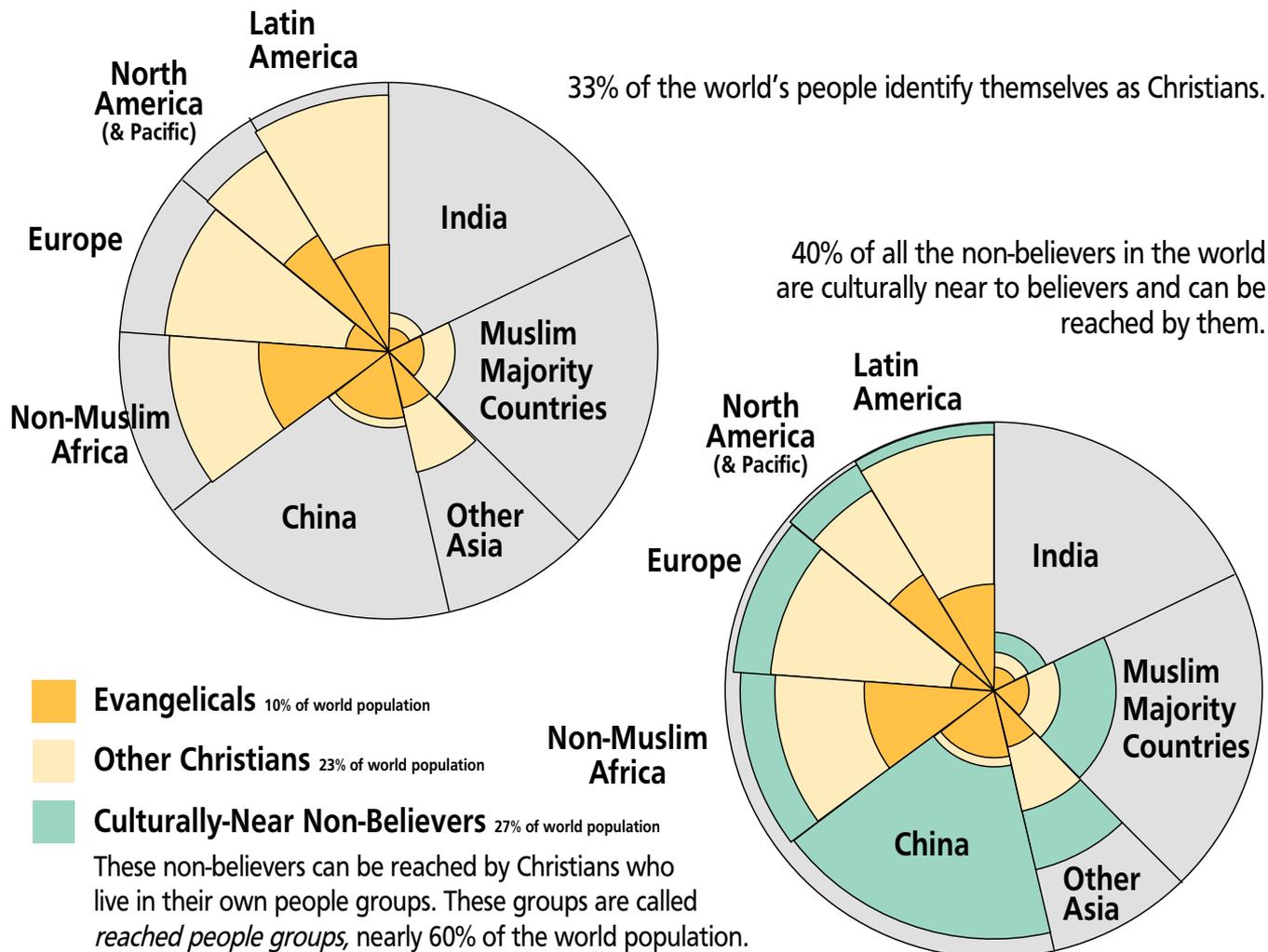
Joshua Project has begun separating these frontier people groups—those with no sign of movements or breakthroughs—by using a rough quantitative measure of *less than or equal to 0.1% Christian* (one out of 1000). They have begun putting these groups onto separate maps, charts, and lists for the purpose of separate analysis. If you look closely at the Joshua Project charts which highlight just the frontier people groups, you will notice some startling missiological realities that have been obscured more recently in the larger UPG databases.

#### **Religious Breakdown:** *About 85% of all FPGs are either Hindu or Muslim.*

This startling fact is easily seen when frontier people groups are put onto a world map by religion, and shown by religion on “donut” circles. By comparison, Buddhist groups make up

Figure 2.

# The Spread of the Gospel in the World

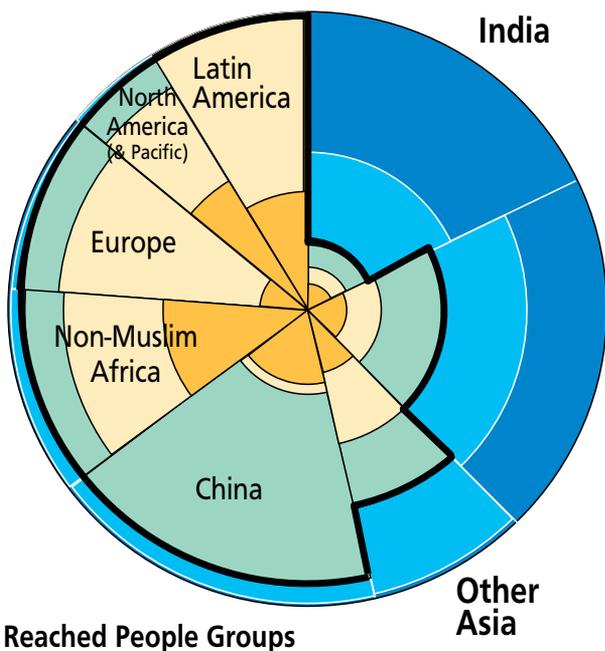


Frontier Mission Pie Chart Data (2018) <sup>5</sup>						
Region (Countries listed in endnotes)	Population	Evangelicals (subset of Total Christians)	Total Christians	Culturally Near Non-Believers (not in UPGs) *	Culturally Distant Non-Believers (in UPGs) *	Non-Believers in FPGs **
India	1,336,000,000	10,200,000	27,600,000	35,300,000	1,273,000,000	961,000,000
Muslim Majority Countries	1,484,000,000	24,800,000	89,400,000	215,000,000	1,179,000,000	689,000,000
Other Asia	647,000,000	29,800,000	135,000,000	165,000,000	347,000,000	30,000,000
China	1,375,000,000	85,300,000	108,000,000	1,082,000,000	185,000,000	40,600,000
Non-Muslim Africa	850,000,000	198,000,000	562,000,000	177,000,000	111,000,000	17,400,000
Europe	736,000,000	18,400,000	509,000,000	191,000,000	36,500,000	11,100,000
N. America & Pacific	402,000,000	103,000,000	307,000,000	81,400,000	13,400,000	1,470,000
Latin America	646,000,000	102,000,000	587,000,000	57,600,000	809,000	89,800
<b>World</b>	<b>7,475,000,000</b>	<b>572,000,000</b>	<b>2,326,000,000</b>	<b>2,004,000,000</b>	<b>3,145,000,000</b>	<b>1,750,000,000</b>
			These 3 columns add up to the total population.			
* UPGs = Unreached People Groups; ** FPGs = Frontier People Groups (subset of non-believers in UPGs)						
Data is derived from Operation World DVD (see operationworld.org) and Joshua Project website (joshuaproject.net).						

# Understanding the Remaining Mission Task (2018)

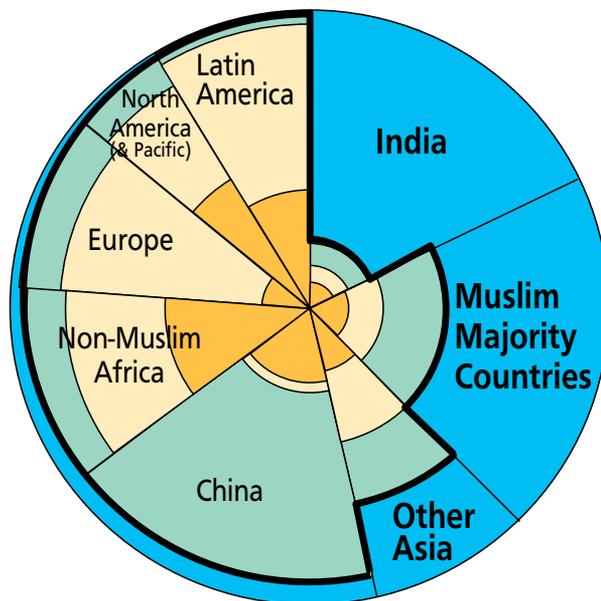
## Culturally-Distant Non-Believers

60% of all the non-believers in the world are culturally distant from believers. They live in *unreached people groups* (UPGs = <2% evangelicals and <5% Christian), which still need missionaries from other cultures.



Reached People Groups

- Evangelicals
- Other Christians
- Culturally-Near Non-Believers



Muslim Majority Countries

## The Frontier Mission Task

These non-believers have virtually no chance of hearing about Jesus from somebody in their own people group:

## Culturally-Distant Non-Believers in Frontier People Groups

If there is no movement to Christ of indigenous faith in a people group, and it is <0.1% Christian, it is a *frontier people group* (FPG). FPGs total 25% of the world population.



## The Mobilization Challenge:



For every 30 missionaries that go to the reached people groups of the world . . .



. . . roughly ONE missionary goes to the unreached people groups, including the frontier groups.



# 30 to 1

Evangelicals are Christians who emphasize and adhere to these four things:

1. The Lord Jesus Christ as the sole source of salvation through faith in Him.
2. Personal faith and conversion by the Holy Spirit.
3. Recognition of the Bible as the ultimate basis for faith and Christian living.
4. Commitment to biblical witness, evangelism, and mission.

Evangelicals are largely Protestant, Independent, or Anglican, but some are Catholic or Orthodox.

under 5% of the total and ethnic and all other religions comprise only 11%. By population, the difference is even more extreme (see map of all frontier people groups, top of page 161), and the “donut” circles showing the percentages of people groups count and population by religion (bottom of page 161).

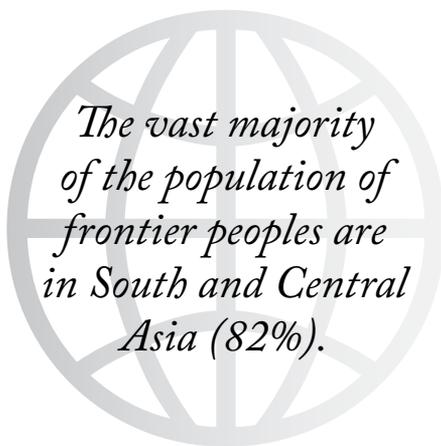
**Geographic Location:** *72% of the people in FPGs live in South Asia.* The frontier people groups map reveals that the vast majority of the population of frontier peoples are in South and Central Asia (82%), fewer than 20 countries. Look at the special table and pie charts showing FPG population by area of the world (page 162). The cartogram on page 163 is a different way of showing where the bulk of the people in FPGs live. Also, note that the FPGs “diaspora vs. homeland” map reveals that less than 3% of the people in FPGs are outside of their homeland in diaspora groups (page 167).

**Population of FPGs:** *One-fourth of the world’s population reside in these FPGs.* Maps showing the frontier people groups by location, religion, and size reveal a startling demography: *almost the total population of FPGs reside in large people groups.* Although half the total number of these FPGs are actually small, less than 0.3% of the total people in the 4700+ FPGs are in small groups (the 2200+ groups with less than 10,000 population). In fact, almost 90% of the population of all FPGs are in just 400 groups with populations greater than 500,000. See the map showing the FPGs over 500,000 in size (page 165). The link to this map and list is located [www.joshuaproject.net/frontier/3](http://www.joshuaproject.net/frontier/3).

**Half are in Just 31 Groups:** *Almost half of the entire population of FPGs are in just 31 people groups over 10 million in size.* To make significant progress in frontier people groups will require focusing on the largest groups, which may in turn have a considerable influence on the smaller groups around

them. Of the people in FPGs, almost 900 million reside in *the thirty-one largest frontier people groups* (>=10 million in size each). See the map showing just the thirty-one largest frontier people groups (page 165). The recently published prayer booklet entitled “Pray for the 31” indicates that eighteen are Muslim and thirteen are Hindu—and sixteen are in the country of India ([www.joshuaproject.net/frontier/5](http://www.joshuaproject.net/frontier/5)).

All of these maps and charts from Joshua Project are very helpful in clarifying which of the unreached people groups are still needing “frontier mission efforts” because there exists no indigenous movement of believers to carry forward the evangelizing of



their own people). In addition, they help immensely by showing the people groups by size, religion, and location, as well as a list with names, profiles, and other important facts for people who are praying or going.

*However, these excellent graphics still fail to reveal how the number of “sent” mission workers corresponds to the bulk of this remaining task.*

### III. Identifying where the mission workers are going and what they are doing

In the last forty years, UPGs have been tracked, but most of the demography of UPG sites does not show where the mission workers are going, or not

going. Our charting of the task must communicate this if the global church is going to be able to send people strategically to the most neglected peoples. It has been roughly estimated that over 95% of global missionaries are going to help existing active Christians reaching out to nominal or culturally-near non-believers in their own people groups. (See the first three categories of the 1978 and 2018 pie charts, on pages 154 and 158–159.) The shock of this kind of disparity sparked the *frontier* mission movement forty years ago and it continues to this day.

Notice that Ralph Winter made the problem of unequal missionary distribution clear on the original pie chart. (See the middle circle, page 154.) While more people are aware of and concerned with UPGs, *as of 2018 approximately thirty times as many global missionaries go to the reached people groups, to work with existing churches in training and outreach, as go to the unreached people groups (including the FPGs).*

An organization called Finishing The Task (FTT) was formed after the year 2000 to address this problem and to renew interest in tracking those unreached people groups which have no long-term witnesses<sup>6</sup> whatsoever (“unengaged unreached people groups” UUPGs). Their goal is to make sure each UUPG, no matter how small, has a church-planting witness. But a single witness is not sufficient for the largest groups, so FTT is beginning to track the numbers of workers in each people group, with a goal of 1 per 50,000.

Once there are some evangelical believers within a people group, they can witness even more effectively to their families and friends (E-1) than outsiders can (E-2/E-3). If the number of national believers reaches 1 per 1000, the people group is no longer considered a “frontier people group” because that ratio usually indicates that some kind of indigenous movement to Christ is underway. It is admittedly

Figure 3. All Frontier People Groups

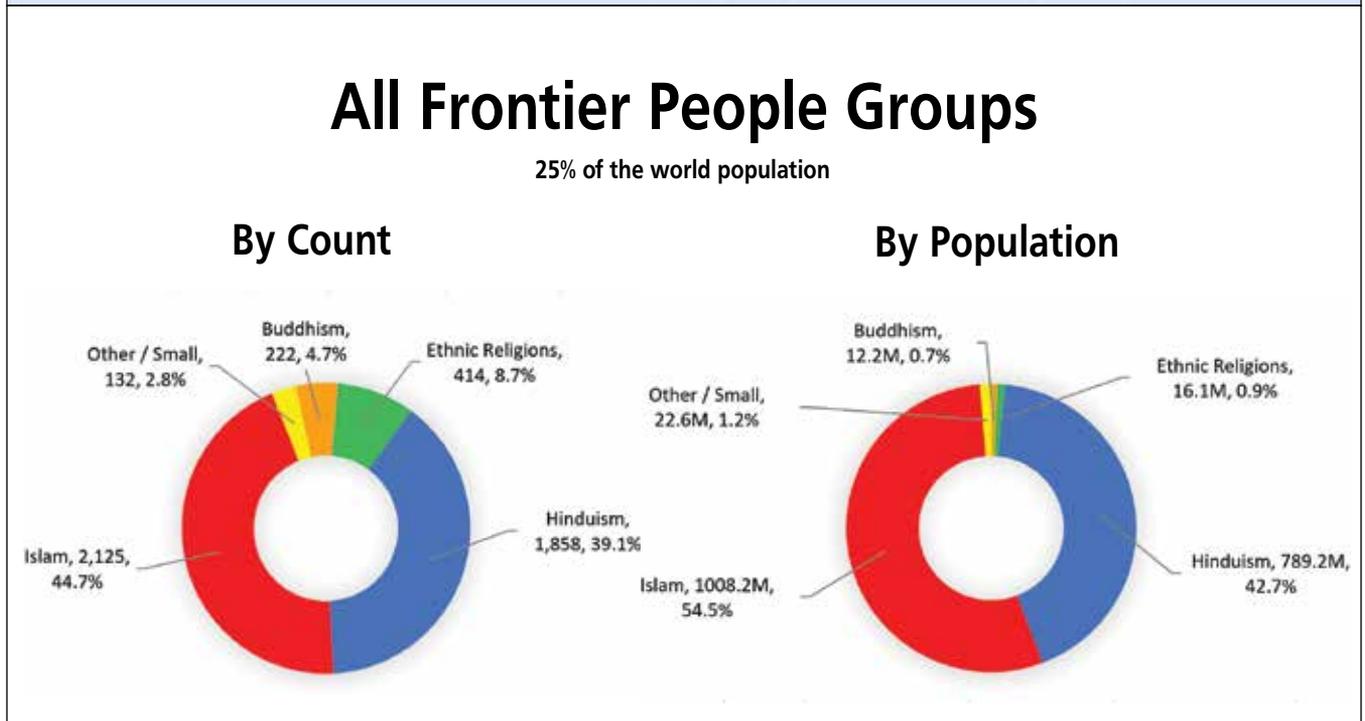
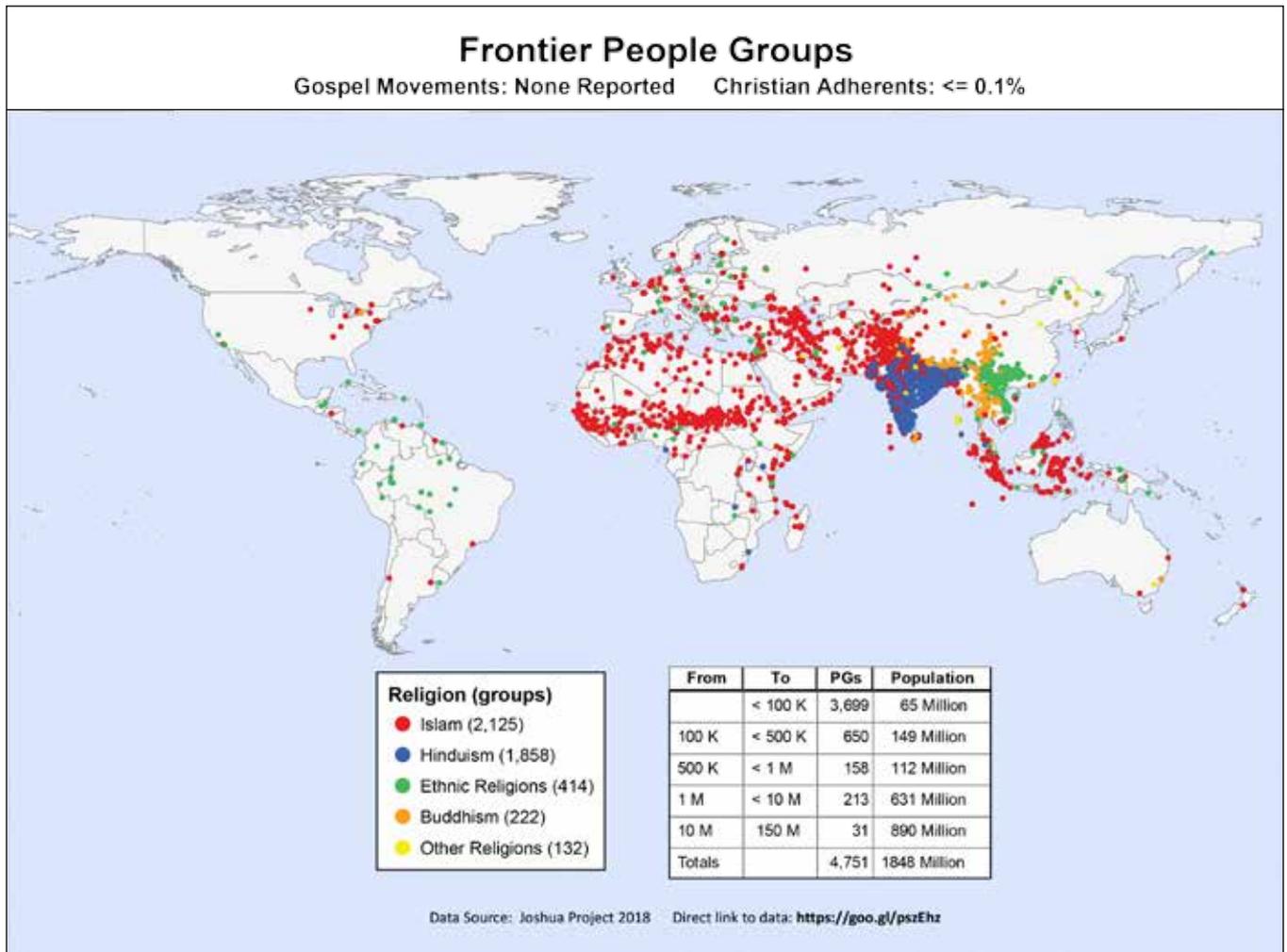
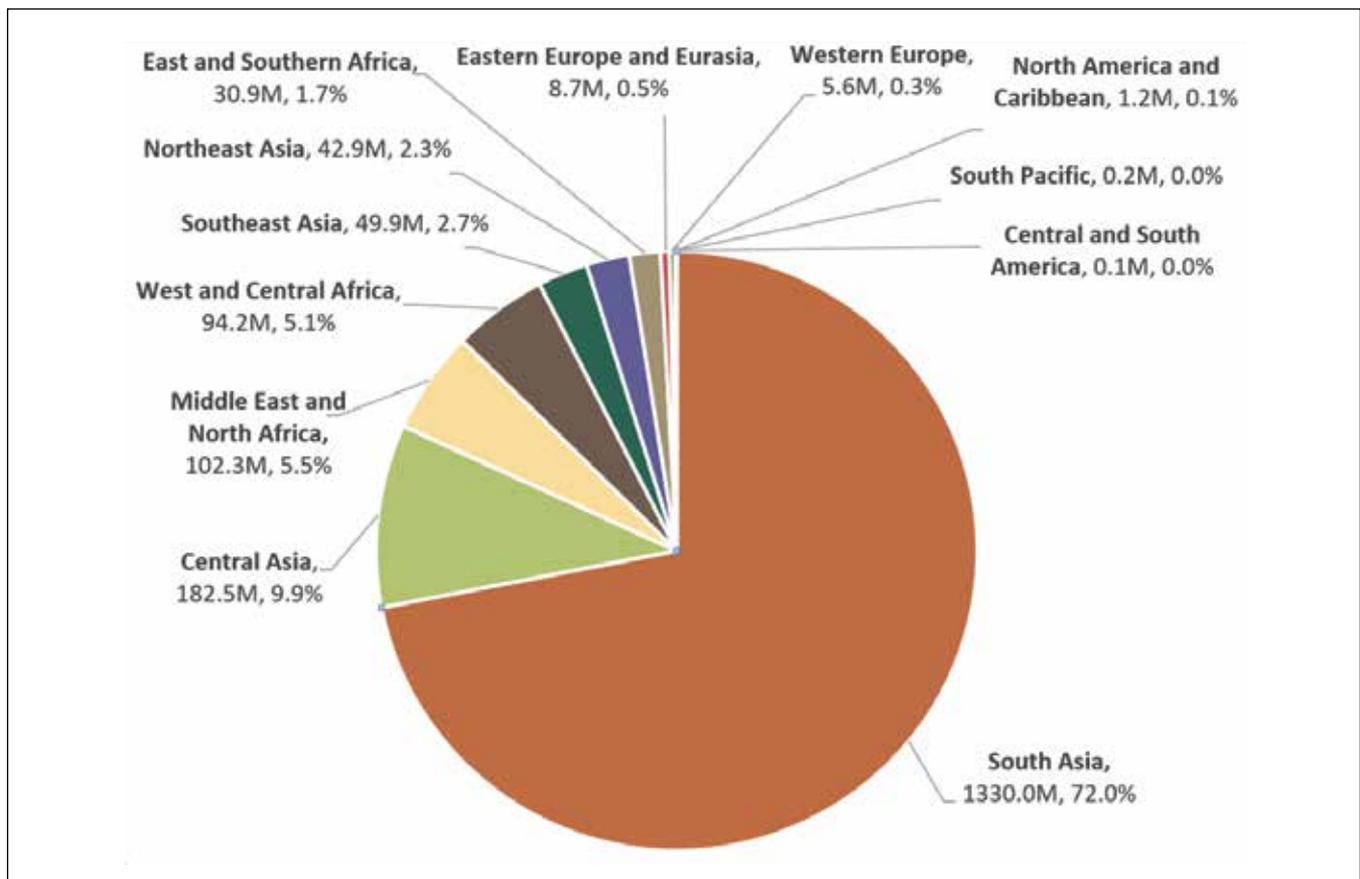


Table and Figure 4. Frontier Peoples Population by Region

Frontier Peoples Population by Region			
Region (# of countries)	Count	Population (in millions)	% Global Frontier Peoples Population
South Asia (8)	2,934	1330.0M	72.0%
Central Asia (10)	267	182.5M	9.9%
Middle East and North Africa (19)	237	102.3M	5.5%
West and Central Africa (24)	205	94.2M	5.1%
Southeast Asia (11)	323	49.9M	2.7%
Northeast Asia (8)	292	42.9M	2.3%
East and Southern Africa (28)	159	30.9M	1.7%
Eastern Europe and Eurasia (23)	145	8.7M	0.5%
Western Europe (28)	107	5.6M	0.3%
North America and Caribbean (30)	40	1.2M	0.1%
South Pacific (27)	15	0.2M	0.0%
Central and South America (22)	27	0.1M	0.0%
<b>All Frontier People Groups</b>	<b>4,751</b>	<b>1848.4M</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Listing of Countries in Regions at: [joshuaproject.net/global/regions](http://joshuaproject.net/global/regions)  
 Frontier Peoples listings and maps at: [joshuaproject.net/frontier/1](http://joshuaproject.net/frontier/1)



a rough estimate, but better tracking of actual movements is becoming increasingly available.

Knowing where the global missionaries are going is a crucial component of discerning the remaining task, and the Center for the Study of Global Christianity has collected this data country by country (although it includes all missionaries, Catholic, Protestant, etc., including those going to another country to work with Christians from their own country who are living abroad). One startling fact their data reveals is that the more Christians there are in a country, the more missionaries they receive from other countries. In fact, the USA receives more missionaries than any other country, some 32,000 in 2010, according to the *Atlas of Global Christianity*.<sup>7</sup> This makes some sense, since most missionaries are sent to help existing believers or to partner with existing churches and seminaries.

*But it is not good enough to know where the missionaries are going. We also need to know what kind of mission work they are*

*doing when they arrive.* Unfortunately, what missionaries actually DO has not been tracked. But estimates from knowledgeable sources reveal that the vast majority of missionaries are being trained and sent to help active believers rather than to pioneer in frontier people groups. Certain questions should be asked:

*Are they working with the active believers to disciple them?*

Many workers teach in seminaries, pastor churches, and serve active Christians. Foreign workers can serve existing churches through short-term teams and training or bringing in requested expertise in theology, business, education, translation, technical, medical agricultural, etc. An example is an American who pastors an international church in a foreign city. These types of missionaries might also work with Christians from their own countries, like Brazilian missionaries going to the United States to work with Brazilian Christians in Portuguese-speaking churches.

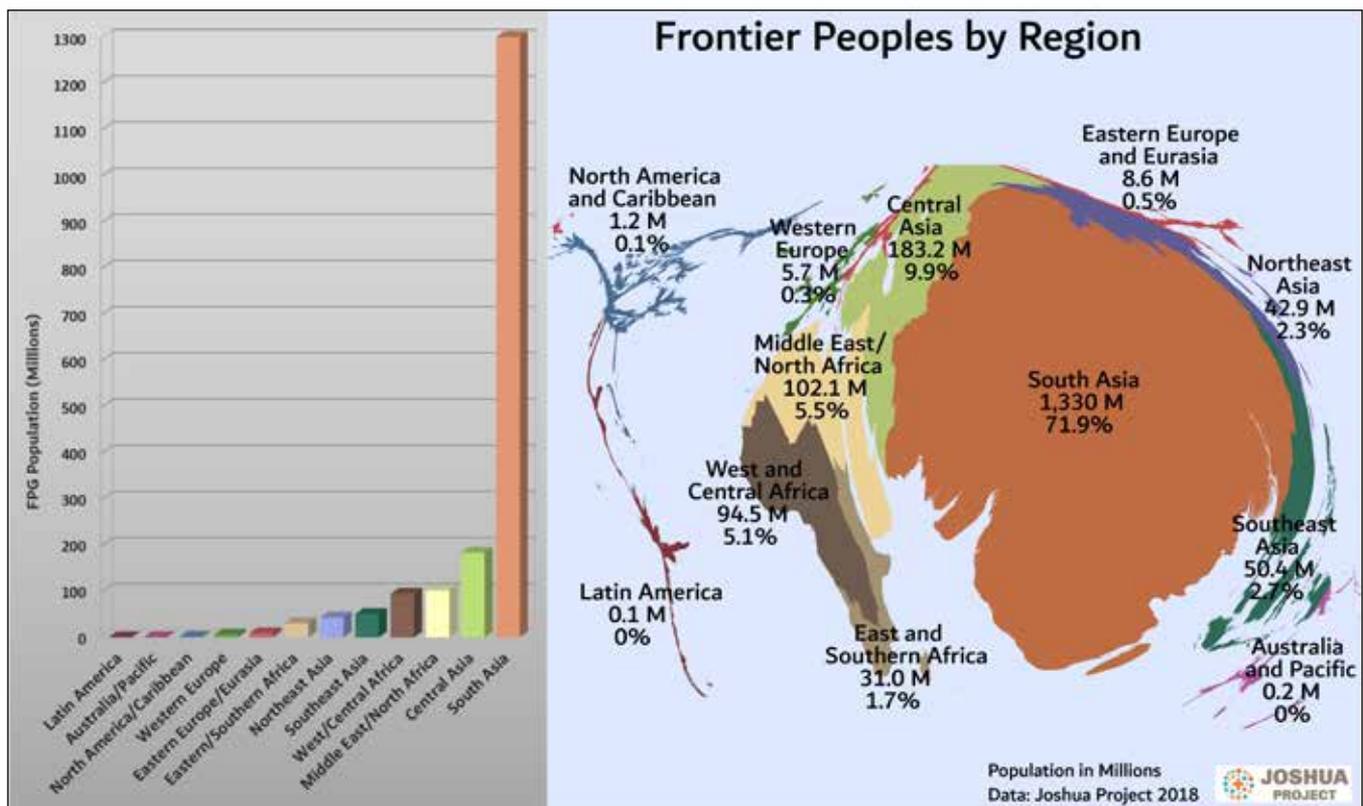
*Are they helping active believers with renewal efforts (E-0 evangelism)?*

Some foreign (either Western or global South) workers partner with existing churches to bring renewal of faith among nominal Christians in people groups with long histories of identification with Christianity, e.g., Europe and Latin America. This category would include a Latin American pastor who helps to plant evangelical churches or run Alpha programs in Spain among Catholics.

*Are they helping active believers with outreach to non-believers in their own culture (E-1 evangelism)?*

Active believers should always be encouraged and trained to reach the non-believers in their own culture, especially their own relatives, neighbors, and co-workers. When foreign missionaries come alongside existing movements to Christ in non-Christian people groups, it can be either helpful or detrimental depending on how it is done. National believers witnessing and doing Bible

Figure 5. Cartogram of Frontier Peoples Population by Region with Proportional Country Sizes



studies among non-believers has led to powerful movements historically—in places such as Korea and China, most notably. Foreign missionaries often partner with existing believers to help in these E-1 outreach efforts. For example, a short-term trainer could show interested French believers how to start Bible studies among the French people who are atheists.

*Are they going to people groups with no believers or churches, pioneering in “frontier” mission outreach?*

Any time mission work goes into people groups “where Christ has not been named,” and where there are virtually no known believers with whom to partner, it is called frontier missions. Roughly thirty times as many missionaries go to “reached” people groups to work with Christians, as go to UPGs. Far less go to the FPGs, where there are as yet no believers.

*Are they trying to train Christians in other people groups to do frontier outreach?*

Some organizations are seeking to persuade believers in proximate people groups to reach out to FPGs, such as training believers in one tribe to reach out to a nearby tribe. This can work; however, it is not easy to train others to do frontier mission outreach unless you yourself have experience doing frontier missions. For example, if someone has been successful in starting Discovery Bible Studies (DBSs) in his own culture, he may be sent to another foreign Christian group to try to teach them how to start DBSs in an “unreached” people group that lives near them. However, the trainer may have never started a DBS in a culture completely different from his own, where the language is different and where he might have been rejected. So, the training he gives would be of questionable value for UPG or FPG outreach. Better for him to try it himself first, at least in diaspora groups, before becoming a trainer of others.

The fact remains that there has been little progress in many very large people groups in understanding that

Jesus is their savior too—this, despite a century or more of attempted outreach. It is also fully possible that once more workers are sent into these very large groups, we will find out that they consist of several smaller people groups lumped incorrectly into one very large group.

### *Responding to the Charts and Maps: A Further Examination of Our Progress in Frontier Mission*

The 2018 pie chart begs a question: *Why are so many of these people groups still dark blue with less than 0.1% Christian?* Hopefully, charting the remaining task has brought clarity and helped to clear up this *demographic confusion*.



But there are seven other reasons I alluded to at the beginning of this article that contribute to the lack of progress. Certain conditions (the first four listed here) are more geopolitical or socio-religious and are generally *out of our control*. However, we can actually change some of the factors (the final four below) that have impeded the gospel in frontier people groups. We would need to shift our church practice and mobilization strategies. I will first list the conditions which impede progress (1-4), and then the strategies we can choose to change (5-8). But I want to give some emphasis to number 8, what I call lack of “missionological clarity,” and “how” we might see a strategic way forward.

## I. Four difficulties we face in this frontier mission task

### *Difficulty of Access*

Frontier peoples tend to be isolated from the gospel witness, because they live in places that are difficult to access politically or geographically.

### *Global Religious Identities*

Most frontier people groups are themselves part of larger multi-people religious identity groups, like Islam, Hinduism, or Buddhism that provide a global identity. As a result, Christianity is viewed as an opposing religious and perhaps even a hostile political power, representing Western imperialism.

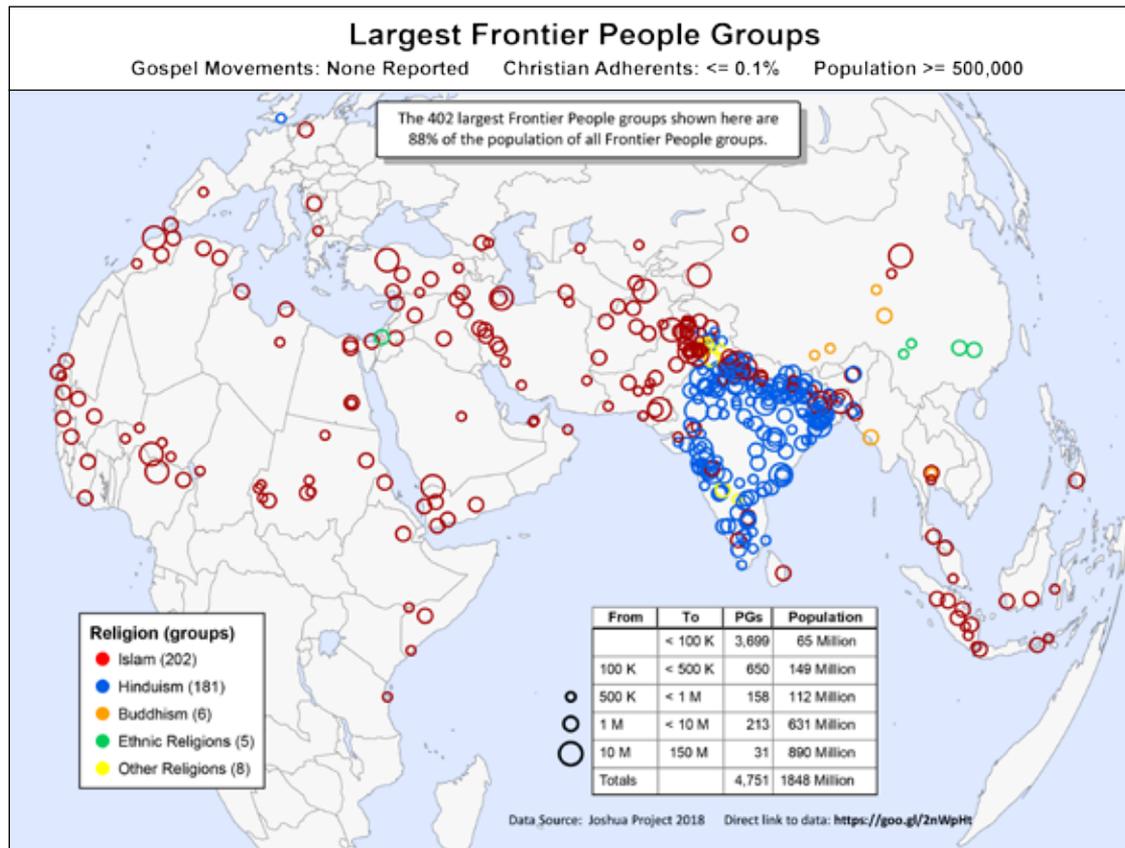
### *Fear of Shame*

Today many families who are part of frontier peoples may be aware of and respect Jesus. They do not see Jesus as the savior of the world, but only of the Christians. They fear that faith in Jesus will cause family members to reject their cultural and/or religious traditions and identity which could cause them to be expelled from their communities. The whole family will be shamed and ostracized from their community as a result, so sometimes believers hide their faith or leave to protect their families.

### *Extraction Conversions of Those in Diaspora Groups*

Frontier peoples tend to stay in their homelands wherever possible. Less than 3% of the total population of people in frontier people groups are in diaspora groups. But individuals from frontier people groups living in diaspora groups who come to faith are often extracted from their diaspora community and enfolded into Western churches with a resulting loss of identity and loss of ties to their family and communities back home. They are perceived to be traitors by their families and are shunned or sometimes killed; or they are forced to be secret believers, which also impedes the flow of the gospel (see FPG Diaspora vs. Homeland Map, page 167).

Figure 6. Largest Frontier People Groups



**The 402  
Largest  
Frontier  
People  
Groups**

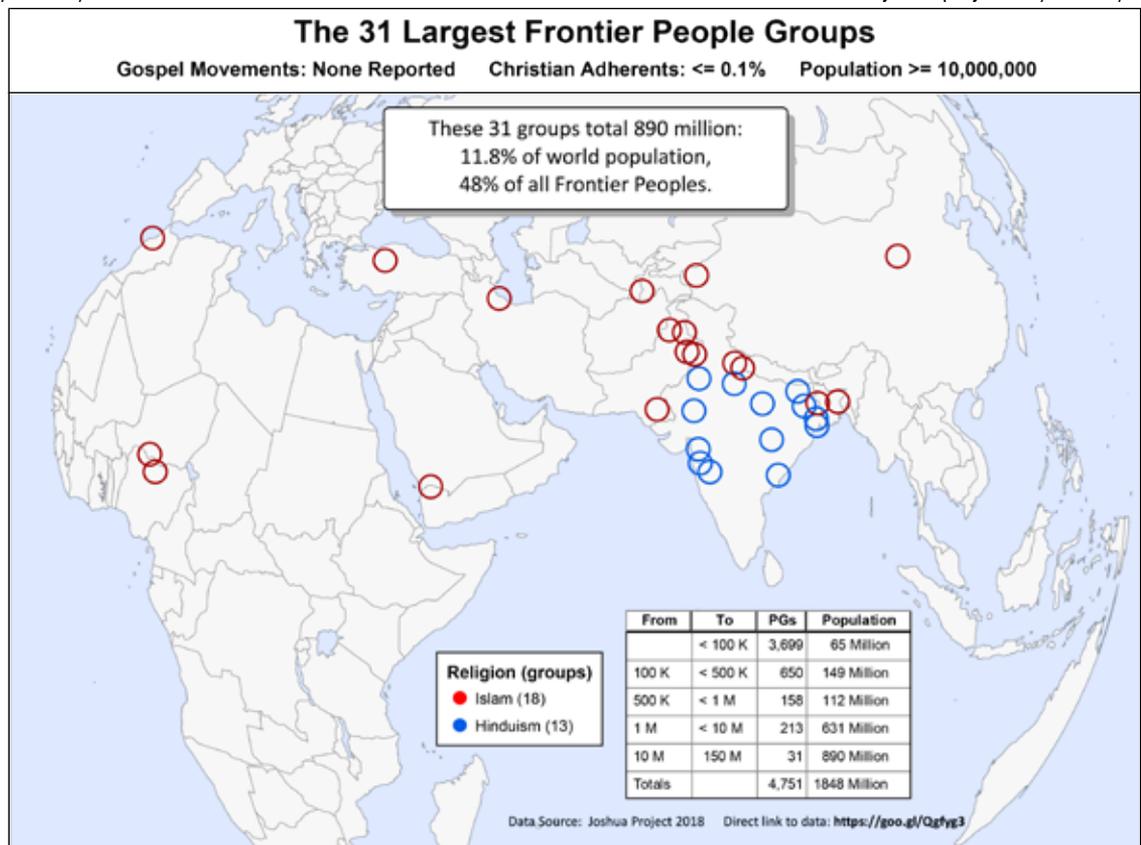
**88% of the  
population  
of all  
Frontier  
People  
Groups**

[www.joshuaproject.net/frontier/3](http://www.joshuaproject.net/frontier/3)

[www.joshuaproject.net/frontier/5](http://www.joshuaproject.net/frontier/5)

**The 31  
Largest  
Frontier  
People  
Groups**

**48% of the  
population  
of all  
Frontier  
People  
Groups**



## II. Four strategies which must be corrected

### *A Lack of Demographic Clarity*

There has been increasing confusion about the terms and concepts of unreached people groups, unengaged people groups, and what we're now calling frontier people groups. Many mobilization efforts are not making clear which people groups are most neglected. As was discussed in *IJFM* 35:1, it is no longer apparent to the churches which people groups are still waiting to hear about Jesus for the first time in history, versus which people groups have either strong movements underway, or actually have declining churches which need revival. The previous pages have shown some graphics created to help with this problem.

### *The Move from Pioneering to Partnership Strategies*

Emphasis has once again moved away from pioneering in places where there are no believers to partnering with local (national) believers. With the ease of modern travel, mission agencies have been bypassed, and partnering with local believers has become a popular church-to-church "mission" strategy. However, frontier people groups are being ignored by partnership strategies which *automatically direct mission workers to people groups that already have believers and churches*, to help in the various ways listed above (see page 163).

### *The Move from Long-Term Workers to Short-Term Workers*

Mission dollars have increasingly been shifted from supporting long-term workers to short-term teams. But these short-term team members almost never learn languages nor are sent where there are no Christians. Although the number of short-term mission trips has grown exponentially since the year 2000, very few participants go on to work long-term in frontier areas as was initially hoped. Even "career" missionaries now rarely last more than 5-10 years on the field, hardly long enough to become

effective. In fact, some workers now spend more years training to go than they do in mission work once they arrive.

### *A Lack of Missiological Clarity about the Frontier Mission Task*

Distinct kinds of training are required for ministry by pioneer workers to start movements to Christ in groups that are completely untouched by the gospel. However, missionary training has increasingly focused on methods that work in the West such as partnering with Christians to plant churches or Bible studies. In addition, "church planting" strategies have inadvertently shifted the emphasis away from making the gospel fully understandable within the families and kinship networks of specific people groups, as has been done



successfully in tribal areas. Instead, especially in the world's cities, the focus has turned to the starting of Western-style meeting- and program-based churches that promote the aggregation of strangers together. This new pattern has not been shown to lead to indigenous movements in frontier people groups.

## III. Making progress in frontier people groups

Some of these factors were discussed in more depth in my previous article entitled "Losing Sight of the Frontier Mission Task" (*IJFM* 35:1). In that article, I introduced the category of "frontier people groups," defined as people groups still requiring "frontier mission" efforts because no breakthrough or indigenous

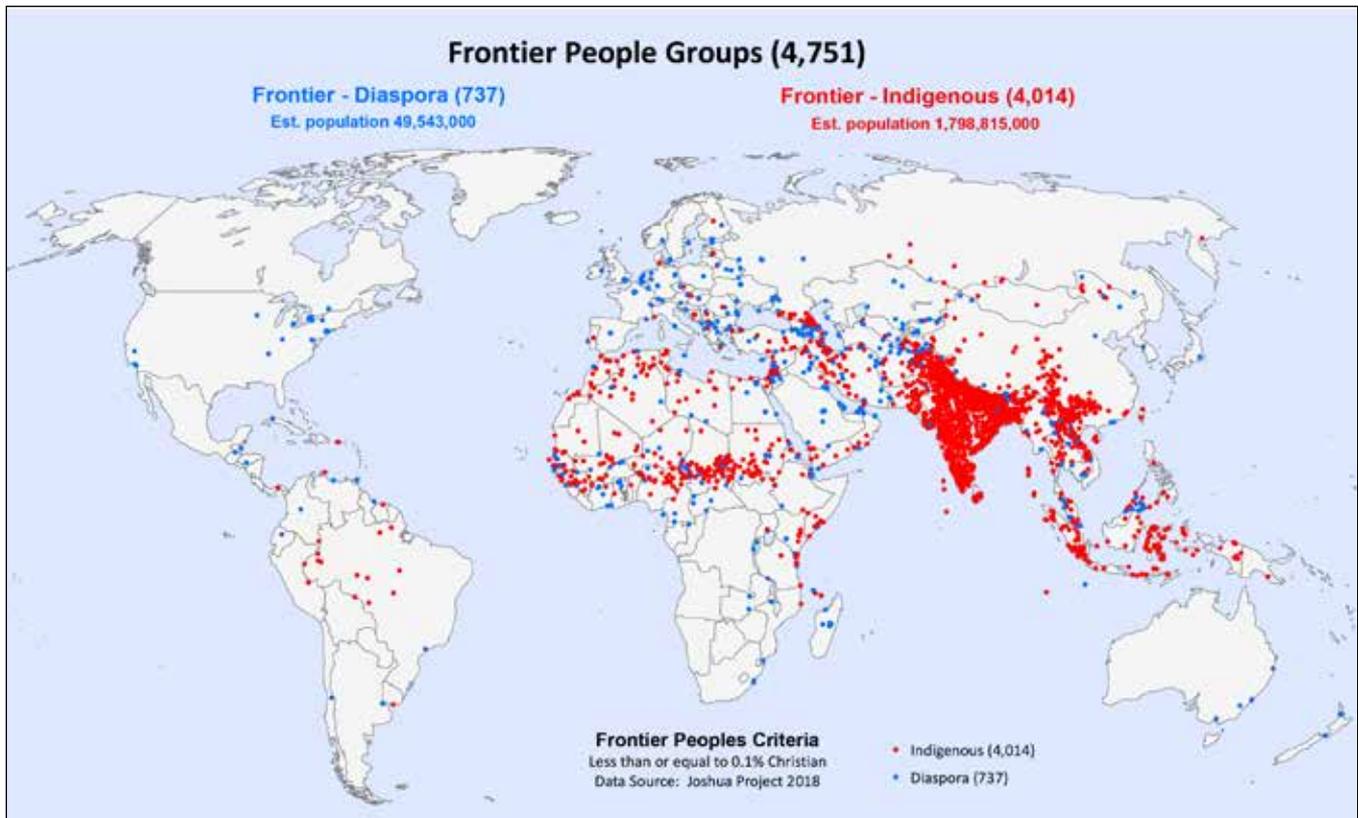
movement<sup>8</sup> to Christ has happened yet. It is unfortunately insufficient to bring clarity to the demographics (where to go) without also addressing the need for clarifying the missiological task (what to do when we get there). Together these two clarifications will hopefully lead to a returning to "frontier mission" outreach—the kind of outreach necessary to make progress toward *indigenous movements* in the remaining frontier peoples. But in my opinion, we cannot use the same methods that are being used within people groups who have populations in which various levels of faith in Christ already exist.

For a frontier people group to be won to Christ, or to be appraised as "reached," at some point *an indigenous movement to Christ must develop within that group*. For this to happen, movements of whole families and clans must come to Christ, enabling the spread of the gospel to overtake population growth.

However, throughout the centuries, movements to Christ have been stillborn in a lot of the remaining frontier people groups, even when missionaries were sent. Why is this the case? I believe a primary reason is that when we got to these particular people groups, mostly Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists, *we changed our message and our methods*. We have not continued to introduce the message as "good news" for the whole people group or community, as evangelicals have continued to do with small pagan tribal groups everywhere. Instead, with these very large groups associated with global religions, we have won individuals to Christ and *then removed them from their people group* to identify with a different people group which is "Christian," or to join an aggregate church of people from multiple backgrounds.

Virtually all tribal groups are very religious, but new tribal believers have not been encouraged to leave their families and move to a different Christian tribe, learn a new language, change their name, eat differently, and marry into and adopt the identity of a different tribe, as has so often happened to Hindus, Muslims, or

Figure 7. Frontier People Groups Diaspora vs. Homeland Map



Buddhists who become believers. For example, Sawi believers in Papua New Guinea were not helicoptered out to join the churches in the Dani tribe.

The gospel has been able to permeate and change animistic tribal groups, many of whom suffered from very demonic spirits and were quite violent, because *the believers have continued to be a part of the tribe*. In many cases, whole tribes or whole clans made the decision together as a group to follow Jesus, sometimes after months of hearing about it together.

But we seem to change our message and methods when reaching out to people groups that are a part of vast, transcultural religious groups. Suddenly missionaries have insisted that those becoming believers must leave their families and communities in order to follow Jesus. When Hindus come to Christ, their faith is suspect if they won't eat beef or marry into a community of believers from a different culture and caste. Likewise, Muslims may be expected to prove their faith in Christ by eating pork

or by not fasting during Ramadan. Such defilement insures that their families will be shamed, and that their communities will ostracize them. Sometimes they are even encouraged to change their names from their original family names, which sound Hindu or Muslim, to names that sound "Christian." Is it any surprise that the communities from which they come, have become very resistant to any further wooing away of their relatives? The communities themselves quickly begin evicting or shunning anyone who starts to put their faith in Jesus, making sure the cancer doesn't grow.

I believe we will continue to have little success in these remaining frontier groups if we do not return to the fundamental biblical principles of *frontier* missions that have been demonstrated again and again in people groups throughout history—and as were first put forth by the Apostle Paul. Much more discussion and research is needed on this subject. Suffice it to say, Paul faced a situation similar to the one we now face in these

transcultural religious spheres when he brought the gospel into the Roman Empire. It also had a large transcultural religious system and the presence of unifying religious-identity elements. We need to recognize and recapture Paul's message and methods that have worked in the past and use them when entering these large religious-affinity worlds of the Hindu and the Muslim.

Charting and mapping the unfinished frontier task should force the church to recognize "at-a-glance" that one fourth of the people in the world who live in these frontier people groups have yet to hear about Jesus and the good news of the kingdom of God. Charts need to also make clear that less than one percent of the global missionary force is going to frontier peoples and reveal that, although some frontier people groups have had workers for decades, comparatively little progress has been made. Then we can begin to re-examine and reincorporate the necessary missiological principles of the frontier mission task. **IJFM**

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Roberta Winter's book, *I Will Do a New Thing* (originally *Once More Around Jericho*), a story of the initial years of this project, was also a publication that was used to arouse the evangelical churches.

<sup>2</sup> And not more than 5% Christian in the Joshua Project data base. The term "reached" became a problem, because if people thought of individuals instead of groups, "reached" implied "saved." So instead of seeing the 2 evangelicals out of 100 people as being very sufficient to reach out to both the nominal Christians and the non-believers in a people group, without outside help, the 98% that are not committed believers made the group still seem "unreached."

<sup>3</sup> The Han Chinese are technically not one people group linguistically and even culturally, but they have an identity and a written language that unites them.

<sup>4</sup> Note that for security reasons, it is not necessary to make a show of those that DO have movements to Christ, only those that do not.

<sup>5</sup> The Appendix, to the right, is a table listing all the countries used in each section (region) of the 2018 pie charts, on pages 158 and 159. The number of countries is noted in parentheses under each heading. The regions of China and India are each just the one country in their sections of the pie chart because they each contain one fifth of the world's population and have unique demographics. The rest of the countries have been sorted by demographic similarities.

<sup>6</sup> The definition of "unengaged" according to *Finishing the Task* is: "They are unengaged, which means that no church, no mission agency—no one has yet taken responsibility to tell them of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ" . . . "Our goal is to remove a people group once it is confirmed that a solid church planting strategy, consistent with evangelical faith and practice, is under implementation."

<sup>7</sup> Todd M. Johnson and Kenneth R. Ross, eds., *Atlas of Global Christianity*, Center for the Study of Global Christianity (Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 283.

<sup>8</sup> Movements can be variously defined as a self-replicating movement of believers extending to four generations of witness, or David Garrison's definition of a movement in his book *A Wind in the House of Islam*: either 1000 believers or 100 fellowships in a given people group.

## Appendix

Countries Used in Each Section of the 2018 Pie Charts *					
Latin America (47)	Muslim Majority Countries (53)	N. America & Pacific (31)	Non-Muslim Africa (36)	Other Asia (19)	Europe (47)
Anguilla	Afghanistan	American Samoa	Angola	Bhutan	Andorra
Antigua and Barbuda	Albania	Australia	Benin	Cambodia	Armenia
Argentina	Algeria	Bermuda	Botswana	China, Hong Kong	Austria
Aruba	Azerbaijan	Canada	British Indian Ocean Territory	China, Macau	Belarus
Bahamas	Bahrain	Christmas Island	Burundi	East Timor	Belgium
Barbados	Bangladesh	Cook Islands	Cameroon	Israel	Bulgaria
Belize	Bosnia-Herzegovina	Fiji	Cape Verde	Japan	Croatia
Bolivia	Brunei	French Polynesia	Central African Republic	Korea, North	Cyprus
Brazil	Burkina Faso	Greenland	Congo, Democratic Republic of	Korea, South	Czechia
British Virgin Islands	Chad	Guam	Congo, Republic of the	Laos	Denmark
Cayman Islands	Cocos (Keeling) Islands	Kiribati (Gilbert)	Equatorial Guinea	Mongolia	Estonia
Chile	Comoros	Marshall Islands	Ethiopia	Myanmar (Burma)	Faroe Islands
Colombia	Côte d'Ivoire	Micronesia, Federated States	Gabon	Nepal	Finland
Costa Rica	Djibouti	Nauru	Ghana	Philippines	France
Cuba	Egypt	New Caledonia	Kenya	Singapore	Georgia
Curacao	Eritrea	New Zealand	Lesotho	Sri Lanka	Germany
Dominica	Gambia	Niue	Liberia	Taiwan	Gibraltar
Dominican Republic	Guinea	Norfolk Island	Madagascar	Thailand	Greece
Ecuador	Guinea-Bissau	Northern Mariana Islands	Malawi	Vietnam	Hungary
El Salvador	Indonesia	Palau	Mauritius		Iceland
Falkland Islands	Iran	Papua New Guinea	Mozambique		Ireland
French Guiana	Iraq	Pitcairn Islands	Namibia		Italy
Grenada	Jordan	Saint Pierre and Miquelon	Nigeria		Latvia
Guadeloupe	Kazakhstan	Samoa	Reunion		Liechtenstein
Guatemala	Kosovo	Solomon Islands	Rwanda		Lithuania
Guyana	Kuwait	Tokelau	Saint Helena		Luxembourg
Haiti	Kyrgyzstan	Tonga	Sao Tome and Principe		Macedonia
Honduras	Lebanon	Tuvalu	Seychelles		Malta
Jamaica	Libya	United States	South Africa		Moldova
Martinique	Malaysia	Vanuatu	South Sudan		Monaco
Mexico	Maldives	Wallis and Futuna Islands	Swaziland		Montenegro
Montserrat	Mali		Tanzania		Netherlands
Nicaragua	Mauritania		Togo		Norway
Panama	Mayotte		Uganda		Poland
Paraguay	Morocco		Zambia		Portugal
Peru	Niger		Zimbabwe		Romania
Puerto Rico	Oman				Russia
Saint Kitts and Nevis	Pakistan				San Marino
Saint Lucia	Qatar				Serbia
Sint Maarten	Saudi Arabia				Slovakia
St Vincent and Grenadines	Senegal				Slovenia
Suriname	Sierra Leone				Spain
Trinidad and Tobago	Somalia				Sweden
Turks and Caicos Islands	Sudan				Switzerland
Uruguay	Syria				Ukraine
Venezuela	Tajikistan				United Kingdom
Virgin Islands (U.S.)	Tunisia				Vatican City
	Turkey				
	Turkmenistan				
	United Arab Emirates				
	Uzbekistan				
	West Bank / Gaza				
	Yemen				

\*The regions of China & India are just one country each.