

7,000+ or 4,000+ unreached people groups?

How We Count the World's People Groups
and Why It Matters for Global Missions



Why Does Counting Matter?

What gets **measured** gets **managed**.

IN GLOBAL MISSIONS:

Counting helps us understand the remaining task

Data shapes mission strategies

Statistics influence mobilization and funding

Accurate numbers help organizations prioritize efforts

Better measurements lead to better decisions

KEY QUESTION:

How should we count the world's people groups?



What is a People Group?



A People Group is
A group of people who share
common language, culture,
identity, traditions, and social
relationships.

A people group is about identity, not nationality.



EXAMPLES

Hausa

Bambara

Fulani

Yoruba

Pashtun

Understanding Ethne

The Biblical Idea of "Ethne"

The Greek word *ethne* means:

Nations

Peoples

Ethnic communities

In the Great Commission:
"Make disciples of all
nations..."

"*All nations*" refers
primarily to peoples or
ethnic groups rather than
modern countries.

KEY IDEA

God's mission
concerns people
groups, not just
political
borders.

The Big Question

Question:

Are these:

One people group?

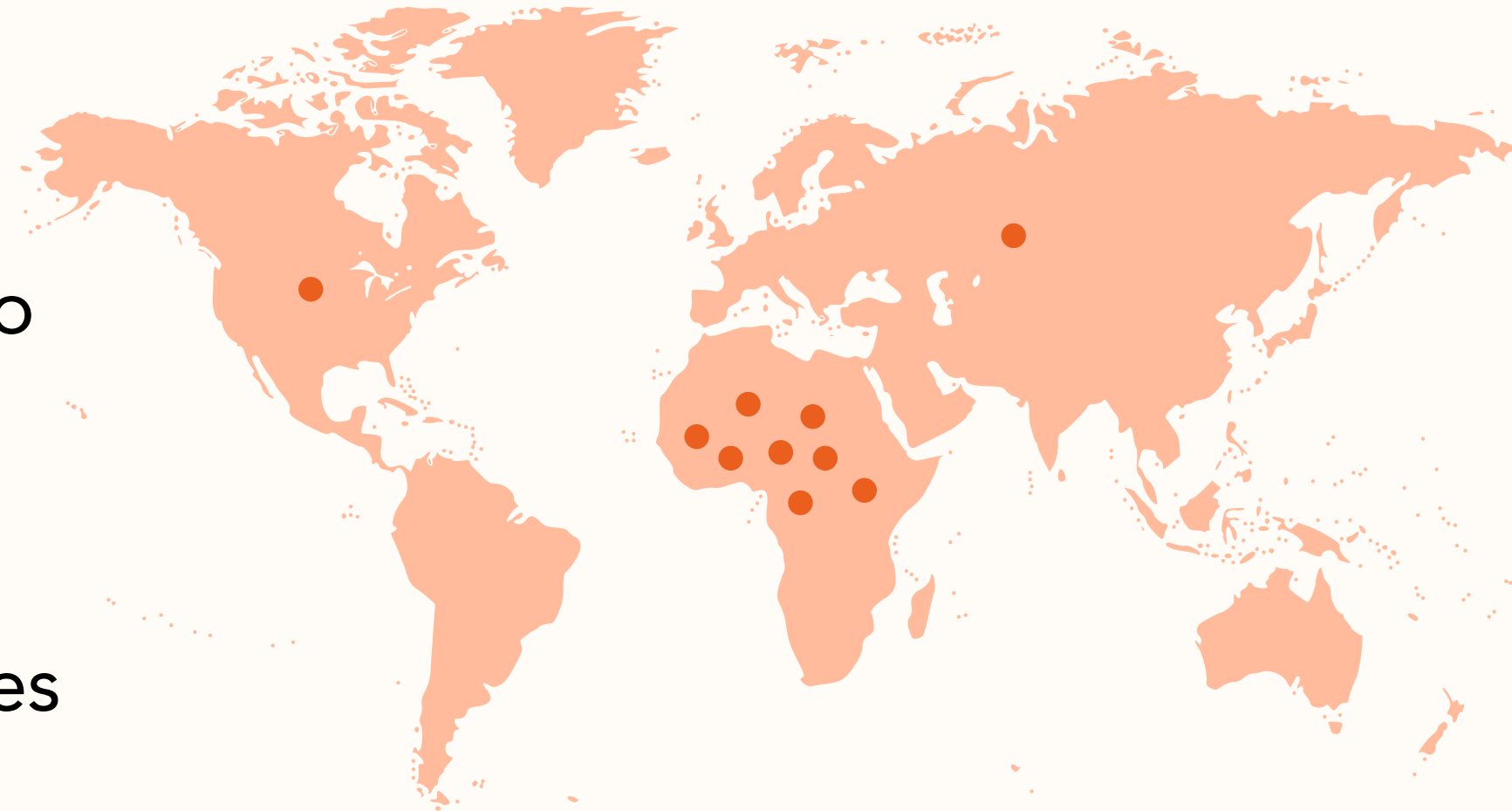
OR

Multiple people groups?

IMAGINE:

The Bambara people live in:

1. Mali
2. Senegal
3. Ivory Coast
4. Burkina Faso
5. Guinea
6. France
7. United States
8. Niger
9. Mauritania
10. Gambia



This question created two counting methodologies.

Two Major Counting Approaches

METHOD 1

PGIC

People Groups
In Countries

A people group is
counted **separately**
in every country
where it lives.



METHOD 2

PGAC

People Groups
Across Countries

A people group is
counted **once**
globally, regardless of
where it lives.



Understanding

PGIC People Groups In
Countries (PGIC)



BASIC PRINCIPLE

Country boundaries
determine the count.

Example:

Bambara in Mali = 1 group

Bambara in France = 1 group

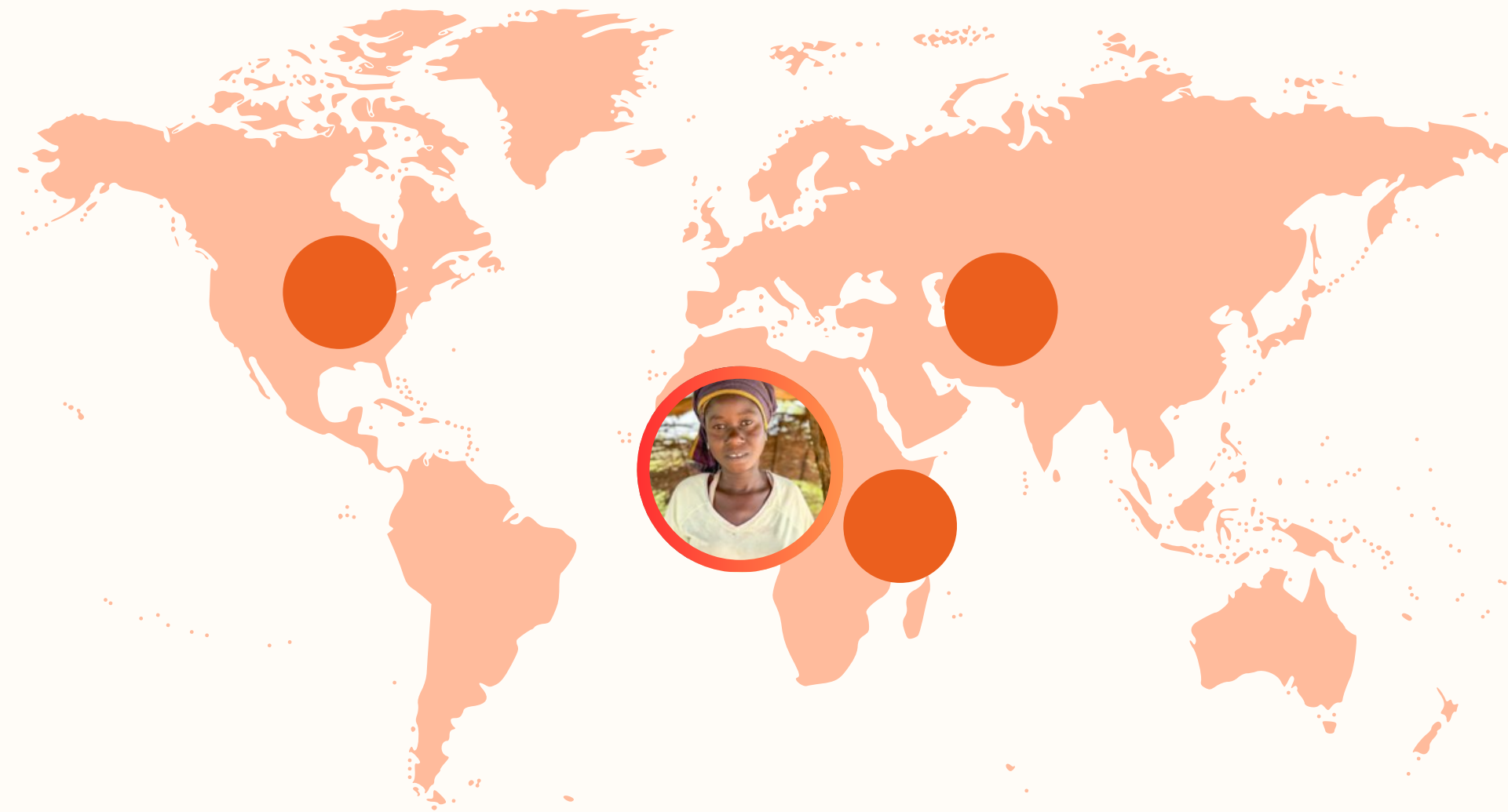
Bambara in USA = 1 group

Bambara in Senegal = 1 group

Total: 4 people groups

Understanding

PGAC People Groups Across
Countries (PGAC)



BASIC PRINCIPLE

The ethnic identity
determines the count.

Example:

Bambara in Mali

Bambara in France

Bambara in USA

Bambara in Senegal

= One global Bambara people
group

Total: 1 people group

Side-by-Side Comparison

Question	PGIC	PGAC
Counting Unit	Country + Ethnicity	Ethnicity
Borders Matter?	Yes	No
Diaspora Counted Separately?	Yes	No
Number of Groups	Larger	Smaller
Stability	Less Stable	More Stable

Global Statistics

Comparing the Numbers

Metric	PGIC	PGAC
Total People Groups	16,436	10,432
Unreached People Groups	7,162	4,486
Percentage Unreached	43.60%	43.00%
Frontier Unreached Groups	4,823	3,218

A Surprising Discovery

The mission task remains enormous regardless of methodology.

Although the total number changes dramatically:

PGIC

16,436 groups

PGAC

10,432 groups

Reduction:

Approximately **37%**

However, Percentage Unreached remains nearly the same:

43.6%

vs.

43.0%

Why Did PGIC Become Popular?

PGIC developed during a
different era:

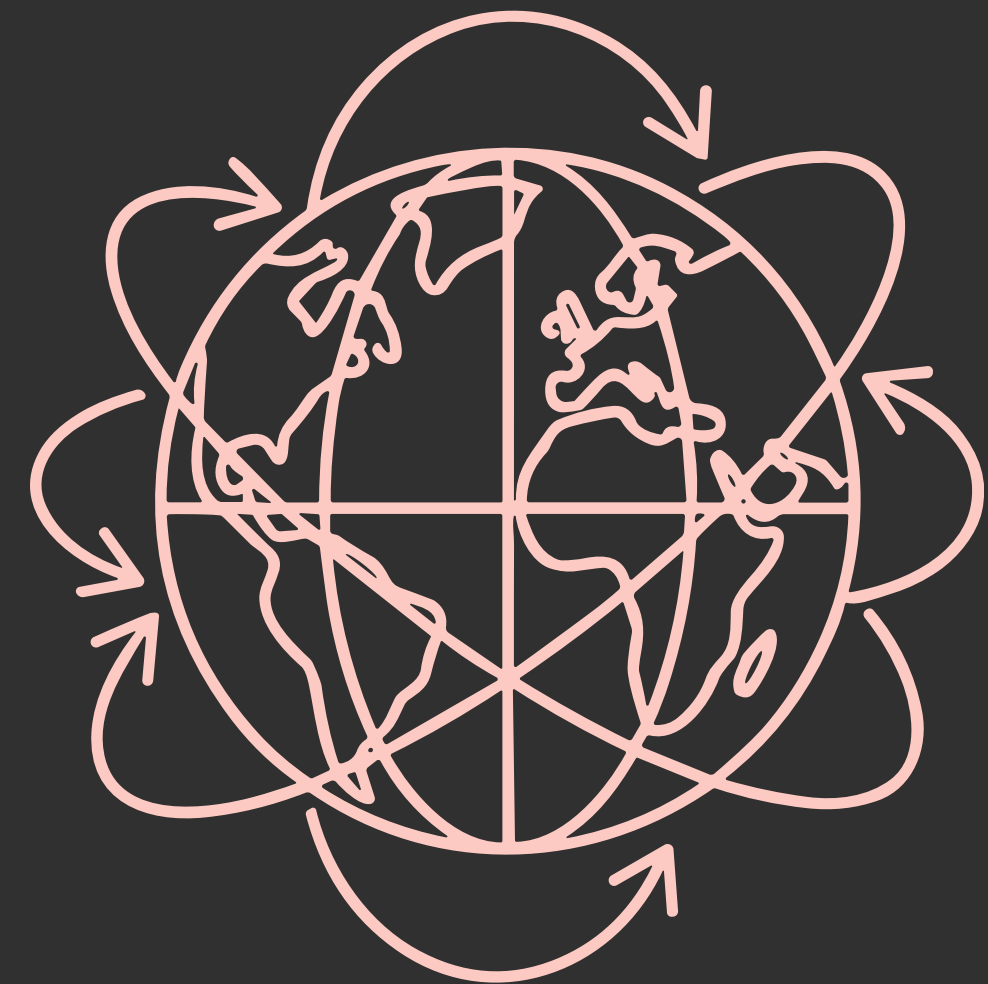
International travel was difficult

Communication was slow

Migration was limited

Countries were major barriers
to missions

Country-specific planning
made sense



In that context, PGIC was
practical and effective.

Benefits of PGIC

1. Familiarity

Most mission leaders know this system.

2. Historical Continuity

Allows comparison with decades of historical data.

3. Cross-Agency Comparisons

Many organizations still use country-based reporting.

The Challenge of PGIC

The Problem of
"Moving Goalposts"

AS PEOPLE MIGRATE:

New countries → **New entries** → Larger lists

Example:

Bambara move to:

France

USA

Canada

Germany

Italy



PGIC creates
five additional
records.

Result: The list
keeps growing.

Why Moving Goalposts is a Problem

Question: How do you finish a race if the finish line keeps moving?

CONSEQUENCES:

✗ The task appears

✗ ^{endless} Donors become

✗ Churches feel ^{discouraged} progress is impossible

✗ Statistics may grow faster than engagement efforts

Homeland and Diaspora Disconnect

PGIC TREATS:

Small Bambara
community in Paris
and
Large Bambara
population in Mali
as equally separate
strategic units.

But today's reality
is different.

PEOPLE

Call each other daily

Share social media

Travel frequently

Influence one another

They remain deeply
connected.

Why PGAC Emerg

The world has changed.

TODAY, WE HAVE

Global migration

Instant communication

Social media

Affordable travel

Digital communities

People groups now function globally.

Mission strategies must reflect this reality.

Benefits of PGAC

1. Methodological Stability

The number of groups remains relatively fixed.

2. Strategic Synergy

Diaspora and homeland can be reached together.

3. Greater Consensus

Research organizations show higher agreement using PGAC.

Why Stability Matters

A fixed finish line is easier to pursue.

STABLE NUMBERS HELP ORGANIZATIONS:

Measure progress accurately

Set realistic goals

Mobilize churches effectively

Maintain donor confidence

Develop long-term strategies

Strategic Synergy



INSTEAD OF:

Country A Strategy

Country B Strategy

Country C Strategy

PGAC ENCOURAGES:

One integrated global strategy for one people group.

Example:

Bambara believers in Europe may help reach Bambara communities in West Africa.

Challenges of PGAC

Despite its advantages,
PGAC also faces
challenges.

CHALLENGE 1

User Re-education

People must learn to think
beyond countries.

CHALLENGE 2

Data Mapping

Converting historical PGIC
records into PGAC requires
significant effort.

Result: The list
keeps growing.



How Joshua Project Handles Both Systems

THE PLATFORM SUPPORTS

PGIC views

PGAC views

DATABASE STRUCTURE

PGAC



Parent profile

PGIC



Country-specific profiles

Example:

Bambara (Global)

→ Bambara in Mali

→ Bambara in France

→ Bambara in USA

When PGIC and PGAC are the Same

If a people group
lives in only one
country:
PGIC = PGAC
No difference exists.

The difference
appears only when a
people group spans
multiple countries.

Jebala in Morocco 

The Jebala have only been reported in Morocco



Photo Source: Hawkeye58 - Wikimedia
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Adopt the Jebala

Bulletin Insert

Prayer Cards

Summary Comparison

Area	PGIC	PGAC
Main Focus	Countries	Ethnic Identity
List Growth	Continually Expands	Relatively Stable
Strategic View	Fragmented	Integrated
Migration Impact	Creates New Groups	No New Groups
Finish Line	Moving	Fixed

Key Takeaways

REMEMBER THESE FIVE IDEAS

People groups are ethnic communities, not countries.

PGIC counts groups within countries.

PGAC counts groups globally.

Both methods show about 43% of people groups remain unreached.

PGAC provides a more stable and unified framework for modern mission strategy.

Final Reflection

The Shift Is Bigger Than Statistics

MOVING FROM PGIC TO PGAC IS:

Not merely changing numbers.

It is changing how we:

Understand globalization

View diaspora communities

Measure progress

Mobilize the Church

Pursue the Great Commission

The goal is a clearer understanding of the remaining task and a clearer path toward the finish line.

Thank
You

The globalized *Ethne* are no longer bound by borders. Understanding them well helps us engage them wisely.

Learn more at:

joshuaproject.net