



THE 2024 ASSESSMENT OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN ALBANIA

DRIVERS, FORMS, AND THREATS





U.S. EMBASSY
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for Democracy
and Mediation

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1. Key Findings

- ⬆️ 43.4% of the respondents agree that political extremism in Albania is concerning.
- ⬇️ 16.3% report there are individuals or groups in the area where they live that incite political extremism.
- ⬇️ 30.6% of the respondents are concerned about religious extremism in Albania.
- ⬇️ 6.6% report there are individuals or groups in the area where they live that incite religious extremism.
- ⬆️ 27% of the respondents are concerned about ethno-nationalist extremism in Albania.
- ⬇️ 3.5% report there are individuals or groups in the area where they live that incite ethno-nationalist extremism.

Socio-economic drivers

- ⬇️ 70.5% believe that many young people have fallen prey to vices and/or dangerous behaviour in the area where they live.
- ⬇️ 36.9% view their religious community as well-represented in politics and state institutions.
- ⬇️ 50.3% believe that in general, well-educated people in the area where they live have good job positions.
- ⬇️ 43.5% point to the presence of religious groups offering economic privileges or material gain to those who practice their religion in the area where they live.
- ⬇️ 30.7% perceive fast wealth creation as not wrong, regardless of how it is achieved.

Political drivers

- ⬆️ 46.3% view the political system in Albania as unfair and they agree that it has to be changed even with violence if needed.
- ⬆️ 41.2% believe people have the right to take the law into their own hands when their rights and freedoms are denied by state institutions.
- ⬇️ 64.6% agree that inciting of or engagement of civilians in armed conflicts abroad must not be allowed
- ⬇️ 26.4% agree that it is the duty of each believer to protect their values and religious dignity at any price and by any means
- 🟡 40.9% believe that the impunity of people with high-ranking positions in Albania is increasingly coming to an end.
- ⬇️ 28.5% agree that religious activities should not be overseen by the state.



↑ 13.6% agree that a true believer should not denounce members of their own community who hold religious extremist views.

↓ 36.2% perceive countries with a Christian majority population in the Balkans as having more support from the West precisely due to their religious affiliation.

Cultural drivers

↓ 11.6% perceive it is difficult to be a practicing Muslim believer in Albania nowadays.

↓ 14.9% believe the faith, traditions and dignity of their religious community in general is under constant pressure and threat.

↓ 40.5% think people have the right to follow unofficial religious interpretations if they do not agree with the respective religious communities.

Emerging trends of violent extremism

• 29.2% report that there are politicians who explicitly call for violence against political opponents in the area where they live.

• 74% agree that some members of the political elite have connections with criminals and serve each other's interests.

• 25.5% believe the political opposition in Albania offers alternatives and hope for better governance.

• 76.5% perceive governing actors in Albania as misusers of state institutions and resources for narrow political interests.

• 68% view nepotism as an obstacle to finding good job opportunities in the area where they live.

• 38.9% believe there is a big conspiracy to depopulate Albania and replace its citizens with foreign immigrants.

• 38% think Albanians should not mix with other races.

• 21.7% believe that belonging to a minority group brings numerous social and economic benefits in the area where they live.

Legend

% All percentages refer to the accumulated responses for somewhat agree/strongly agree.

↓ Refers to statements for which there is a decrease in percentage points compared to 2021 assessment.

↑ Refers to statements for which there is an increase in percentage points compared to 2021 assessment.

• Refers to questions that are either revised from 2021 or new questions introduced for the first time in this survey.



2. Introduction

This is the fourth national assessment of violent extremism conducted by the Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM) over the past decade. The first assessment ‘Religious radicalism and violent extremism in Albania’¹ (2015), examined religious radicalization and violent extremism in the country to inform policymakers and other relevant stakeholders on how to address the phenomenon. The 2015 assessment, which supported the drafting of the Albanian National Strategy on Countering Violent Extremism and its accompanying Action Plan, helped in understanding the relevant factors or ‘drivers’ that can lead to radicalization and the level of support for religious violent extremism in Albania. The second assessment ‘Violent Extremism in Albania’² (2018), while still focusing on religious extremism, provided the preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) community and state institutions with a broader study, examining the perceptions, attitudes and first-hand experiences of Albanians in relation to the drivers of violent extremism. The 2018 assessment noted an increased potential for non-religious types of extremism in the country. The third assessment ‘The Status of Violent Extremism in Albania’³ (2021), assessed the state of affairs following six years of P/CVE actions in Albania, and the relative salience of drivers and other related factors that feed into or enable violent extremism. The 2021 assessment offered P/CVE stakeholders a body of knowledge that helped to shape prevention policies, disengagement programmes, institutional measures and stakeholders’ capacity to rehabilitate and reintegrate returnees and other victims of extremist ideologies. The 2021 assessment confirmed a growth in non-religious forms of violent extremism in the country. This trend was subsequently recognized and incorporated into the new P/CVE strategy of Albania 2023–2025.⁴

Since the previous IDM assessment in 2021, the government of Albania has made several changes in the P/CVE domain. In February 2023, it adopted a new cross-sectoral strategy for 2023–2025 and two action plans to prevent violent extremism and fight terrorism.⁵ This new strategy integrates both violent extremism and terrorism for the first time into a unified strategy – replacing the 2020 cross-sectoral counterterrorism strategy and the 2015 national CVE strategy and their respective action plans.

As mentioned in the previous assessments, the Albanian government established the Coordination Centre for Countering Violent Extremism in 2018. The centre is in charge of capacity-building and coordinating CVE activities across government institutions and beyond, and oversees the implementation of the relevant parts of the national CVE and



- 1 Vurmo, G. (2015). Religious Radicalism and Violent Extremism in Albania. Tirana: Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM). Retrieved via <https://idmalbania.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Religious-Radicalism-Albania-web-final.pdf>.
- 2 Vurmo, G., & Sulstarova, E. (2018). Violent Extremism in Albania: A national assessment of drivers, forms and threats. Tirana: Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM). Retrieved via <https://idmalbania.org/sq/study-violent-extremism-in-albania-november-2018/>.
- 3 Vrugtman, et al. (2021) The Status of Violent Extremism in Albania. Tirana: Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM). Retrieved via https://idmalbania.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Violent-Extremism_EN-2021-online.pdf.
- 4 Decision of the Council of Ministers no. 81, 14 February 2023. ‘Cross-sectoral Strategy for Preventing Violent Extremism and the Fight Against Terrorism and its Action Plans’. See official gazette: <https://qbz.gov.al/share/IWfcPcMzQZ2RaMTzxBP4jw>.
- 5 Decision of the Council of Ministers no. 81, 14 February 2023. ‘Cross-sectoral Strategy for Preventing Violent Extremism and the Fight Against Terrorism and its Action Plans’. See official gazette: <https://qbz.gov.al/share/IWfcPcMzQZ2RaMTzxBP4jw>.



counterterrorism strategy. A noteworthy development occurred in April 2022, when the centre was moved from the prime minister's office to the ministry of interior.

In terms of repatriation efforts, since the last assessment Albania has successfully completed two missions to retrieve Albanian citizens stranded in Syria. In August 2021, five women and 14 minors were repatriated,⁶ while a subsequent operation in May 2022 saw the safe return of another four women and nine minors.⁷ The total number of repatriated nationals since 2020 now stands at ten women and 27 minors. The Special Prosecution Office for Organized Crime and Corruption has initiated criminal proceedings against all repatriated women for involvement in a terrorist organization and involvement in military operations in a foreign country.⁸ There are still thought to be around 35 to 45 Albanian nationals remaining in Syria, of whom nine seem to be in prisons run by the Syrian Democratic Forces.⁹ The Albanian authorities continue to seek the return of the remaining women and children from the Syrian camps.

Concerning violent extremist actions, there was a notable decline in the total number of criminal proceedings for terrorism offences between the years 2021 and 2022. Specifically, the figures reveal a substantial reduction from nine cases in 2021 to only one instance in 2022.¹⁰ In December 2022, the Special Court for Organized Crime and Corruption sentenced an Iranian citizen to 15 years in prison for preparing terrorist acts against People's Mojahedin Organisation of Iran (MEK), an Iranian dissident group based in Albania.¹¹ In 2023, charges were brought against two individuals for incitement to commit terrorist acts.¹²

International donors continued to play an instrumental role in improving the P/CVE efforts in the country. The United States of America, the European Union, United Nations agencies and Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF) have engaged state institutions, civil society organizations and religious communities. Their contribution has helped reintegration efforts, community resilience, strategic communication, and has further enhanced the capacity of frontliners.

As the country approaches a decade of P/CVE implementation, notable progress has been achieved. Despite these advancements, the dynamic landscape of violent extremism continues to create challenges, which underscores the ongoing need for regular assessments and targeted efforts. The current priorities in the P/CVE domain include building community resilience to all forms of violent extremism, advancing rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders and returnees from conflict zones, development of strategic communication, countering

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- 6 Euronews Albania. (2021). Five women and 14 children are repatriated from ISIS camps in Syria, Rama: The operation was dangerous. Retrieved via: <https://euronews.al/pese-gra-dhe-14-femije-riatdhesohen-nga-kampi-al-hol-ne-siri-rama-operacioni-i-rrezikshem/>.
 - 7 Ministry of Interior (2022). 13 women and children are repatriated from Syria, Minister Çuçi welcomes them at the airport: Grateful to the USA. Operations with partners will continue. Retrieved via <https://mb.gov.al/13-gra-dhe-femije-riatdhesohen-nga-siria-ministri-cuci-i-pret-ne-aeropot-mirenjohje-per-shba-operacionet-me-partneret-do-te-vijojne/>.
 - 8 Hoxhaj, E. (2023). Women returned from Syria, on trial for "involvement in a terrorist organization". Reporter. Retrieved via: <https://www.reporter.al/2023/12/06/grate-e-kthjera-nga-siria-ne-gjyq-per-pjesmarrje-ne-organizate-terroriste/>.
 - 9 European Commission. (2023). Albania Progress Report 2023. p. 49. Retrieved via: https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-11/SWD_2023_690%20Albania%20report.pdf.
 - 10 General Prosecution Office (2023). Report of the Prosecutor General on the Situation of Criminality in Albania in 2022. p. 148. Retrieved from https://www.pp.gov.al/rc/doc/Raporti_Vjetor_kriminaliteti_2022_Kuvendit_Prokuroria_e_Pergjithshme_6915.pdf.
 - 11 European Commission. (2023). Albania Progress Report 2023. p. 49. Retrieved via: https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-11/SWD_2023_690%20Albania%20report.pdf.
 - 12 Zëri i Amerikës (2023). The suspected radical from Kavaja is arrested for ISIS propaganda. Retrieved from <https://www.zeriamerikes.com/a/7047374.html>; see also Zëri i Amerikës (2023). Accused of propaganda for terrorist purposes, the case of the 30-year-old from Durrës is on trial. Retrieved from <https://www.zeriamerikes.com/a/7075070.html>.



online radicalism, strengthening inter-institutional mechanisms, improving the capacities of practitioners and working on exit strategies and action plans. These can be achieved through multi-stakeholder solutions by not only engaging stakeholders at the central level, but also at the local level.

While diligently addressing the P/CVE priorities, it is also crucial to regularly assess the current state of affairs of violent extremism in the country. These assessments serve as invaluable tools, offering insights into the evolving landscape of violent extremism. They not only help in monitoring the effectiveness of ongoing initiatives but also provide actionable data in order to fine-tune and optimize these efforts for greater impact. This is the aim of this assessment: to inform decision-makers and improve the capacities of P/CVE stakeholders by offering a body of knowledge that will identify emerging trends and help shape policies, programmes and institutional measures to address this phenomenon and strengthen community resilience. Ultimately, this will enhance P/CVE efforts, sustain the impact of these actions and contribute towards a better-informed public debate, while narrowing the pathways for violent extremist ideologies to gain traction.



3. Methodology

This study seeks to assess perceptions and evidence concerning violent extremism in the Albanian context. This analysis comes after nine years of whole-of-society campaigns on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE), focusing on the identification of key drivers and other contributory factors that enable an environment conducive to violent extremism. It aims to expose the key features of VE, its extent and depth, at-risk communities, vulnerable groups, threats and other implications associated. The overarching aim of the study is to augment Albania's efficacy, impact and capacity in P/CVE efforts through informed discussions, evidence-based interventions and an enriched comprehension and knowledge base among key actors – including state and non-state entities – as well as the community of donors supporting Albania in its P/CVE efforts.

To enable comparison with two previous national studies – ‘Violent extremism in Albania’ (IDM, 2018) and the 2021 national assessment – this study adopts a similar approach. Both assessments were rooted in the methodology of the first baseline assessment ‘Religious radicalism and violent extremism in Albania’¹³. In turn, these studies have all used the framework of socio-economic, political and cultural drivers of violent extremism as outlined by Denoeux and Carter in *Guide to the Drivers of Violent Extremism* (2009). As in the previous assessments, two political drivers – ‘local conflict’ and ‘state support’ – were excluded as they are not relevant to Albania, but ‘discredited governments and missing or co-opted legal oppositions’ was added in the 2024 version.

Table 1. Matrix of violent extremist drivers, according to Denoeux and Carter, 2009; IDM 2015, 2018, 2021

SOCIO-ECONOMIC DRIVERS		CULTURAL DRIVERS		
Perceptions of social exclusion & marginality	Social networks and group dynamics	Islam under siege		
Societal discrimination	Unmet social and economic needs	‘Proactive’ religious agendas		
Frustrated expectations & relative deprivation	Greed or the proliferation of illegal economic activities	Broader cultural threats		
POLITICAL DRIVERS				
Denial of political rights and civil liberties	Poorly governed or ungoverned areas	Foreign occupation	Intimidation or coercion by violent extremist groups	Perception that the int. system is fundamentally unfair and hostile to Muslim societies and peoples
Harsh government repression and gross human rights violations	Endemic corruption and impunity for well-connected elites	Political and/or military encroachment	Discredited governments and missing or co-opted legal oppositions	

¹³ The IDM 2015, 2018 and 2021 studies are available at <http://idmalbania.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Religious-Radicalism-Albania-web-final.pdf>; https://idmalbania.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Study_Violent-Extremism-in-Albania-2018-_-web-1.pdf; and https://idmalbania.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Violent-Extremism_EN-2021-online.pdf

In this report, a distinct chapter is dedicated to examining non-religious forms of violent extremism, including political and ethno-nationalist tendencies identified in previous assessments. This section delves into issues specific to Albania by utilizing a sequence of open-ended questions and statements. These inquiries are designed to explore citizens' perceptions regarding various aspects of violent extremism, including its political dimensions, the overall political climate, ethno-nationalism, xenophobic attitudes and inclinations to conspiracy theories. Such analysis aims to shed light on emerging threats that warrant attention.

Research instrument

The IDM team prepared the logistics for conducting survey fieldwork with a nationally representative sample of 1,600 respondents in October 2023. The survey was conducted among the general population with participants aged 18 years and above who were permanent residents of Albania at the time of the survey. The sampling frame was based upon the latest National Civil Registry population data (1 January 2023) by municipality and sex.¹⁴ The rate of emigration of Albanian citizens was calculated from a Quantitative Residence Coefficient based on both the census and the population size according to the 2023 civil registry (Albanian citizens) and their distribution among the different municipal units. Data from the 2023 civil registry was weighted by the Quantitative Residence Coefficients for each of the 61 municipalities, all of which were selected from to obtain the best geographical coverage.

Statistical error estimates are as follows:

→ At the 95% confidence level, for a population size of 2,180,897¹⁵, the confidence interval is ± 2.45 .

→ At the 99% confidence level, for a population size of 2,180,897, the confidence interval is ± 3.22 .

The group of interviewers was trained in late September 2023 and the fieldwork for the national survey, consisting of paper-assisted face-to-face interviews, took place in October 2023. Strict criteria for the selection of interviewees within each municipality and administrative unit, as well as rigorous quality assurance mechanisms covering the survey fieldwork and administration of questionnaires, were applied throughout the process. Survey data was entered, cleaned and processed in a database using SPSS software,¹⁶ before analysis of the preliminary findings started in November 2023. The main survey data is reported with decimal places, whereas cross-tabulated survey data presented in this study is rounded to the nearest tenth. Due to rounding, percentages may not always appear to add up to 100%.

14 Provided by the General Directorate of the Civil Registry, Ministry of Internal Affairs via Freedom of Information Request, on 20 March 2023.

15 The population aged 18 years and above on 1 January 2023 – an estimation of the authors.

16 IBM's Statistical Product and Service Solutions (SPSS)



4. Profile of survey respondents

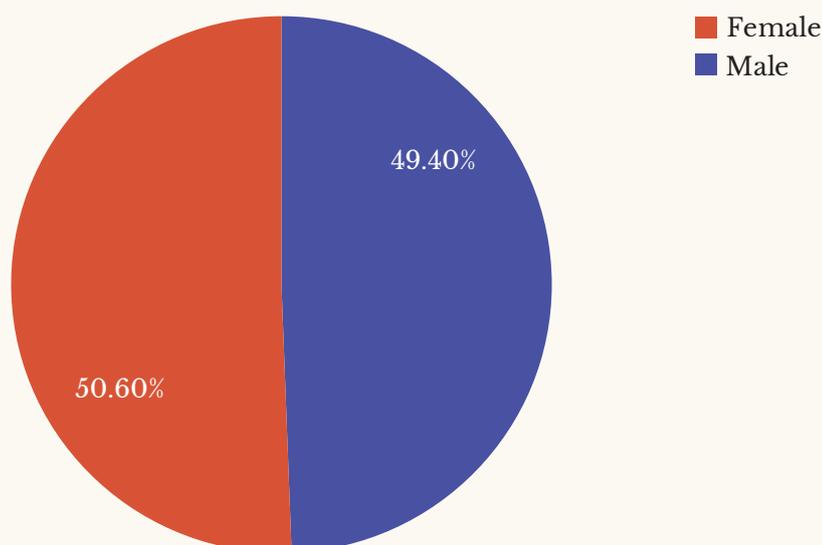
The bulk of research on violent extremism suggests that a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon can facilitate early detection, prevention and more effective responses against current forms of violent extremism, as well as against extremist individuals and groups. Indeed, the studies carried out in Albania focusing on violent extremism, radicalization, public perceptions of extremism, media discourse on extremism and related issues have significantly advanced the understanding of Albanian P/CVE stakeholders. These efforts have raised public awareness, strengthened the resilience of religious communities, and empowered vulnerable groups with better skills and capacities to counter and prevent violent extremist ideas and actions.

The present study delves into the perceptions and attitudes of Albanians towards various forms of extremism, including political, religious and ethno-nationalist violent extremism. Additionally, as the dynamics of extremism continue to evolve in the country, this study evaluates novel and emerging forms.

Demography of the sample

The survey was conducted using a nationally representative sample. The current resident population of Albania is 2,761,785 people, comprising 1,366,921 men (49.46%) and 1,394,864 women (50.54%).¹⁷ Our sample, consisting of 1600 individuals living in Albania, comprises 50.60% women (N=809) and 49.4% men (N=791), almost identical to the gender composition of the Albanian population as a whole (see Figure 1).¹⁸

Figure 1: Gender composition of survey respondents (N=1600)

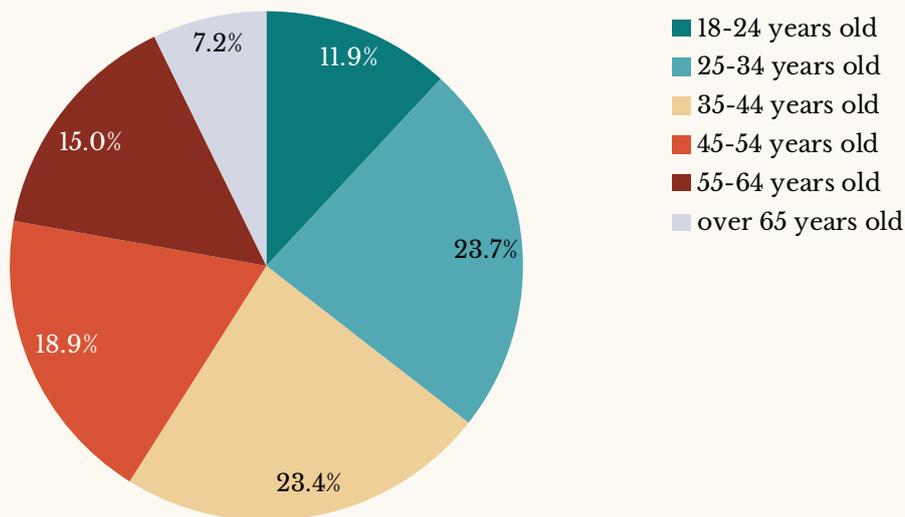


¹⁷ INSTAT. (2023). Population of Albania, 1 January 2023. See: <https://www.instat.gov.al/media/9830/tab1.xlsx>

¹⁸ Demographical data presented in the following chapters is rounded to the nearest tenth. Due to rounding, percentages may not always appear to add up to 100%.

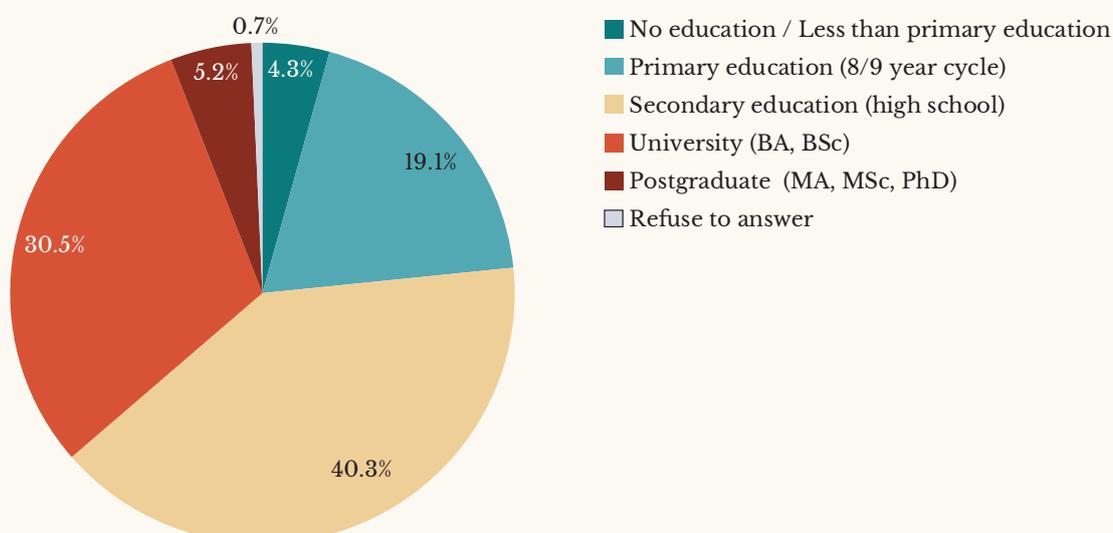
The survey only took responses of the adult Albanian population, with 59% of the sample being younger than 45 years old. Specifically, 11.9% of the respondents were 18 to 24 years old, while 23.7% were 25 to 34 years old. Approximately a quarter (23.4%) were 35 to 44 years old, while a fifth of responders (18.9%) were 45 to 54 years old. Respondents aged 55 to 64 years old constituted 15% of the sample, and those over 65 years old represented 7.2% of the sample (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Age of survey respondents (N=1600)



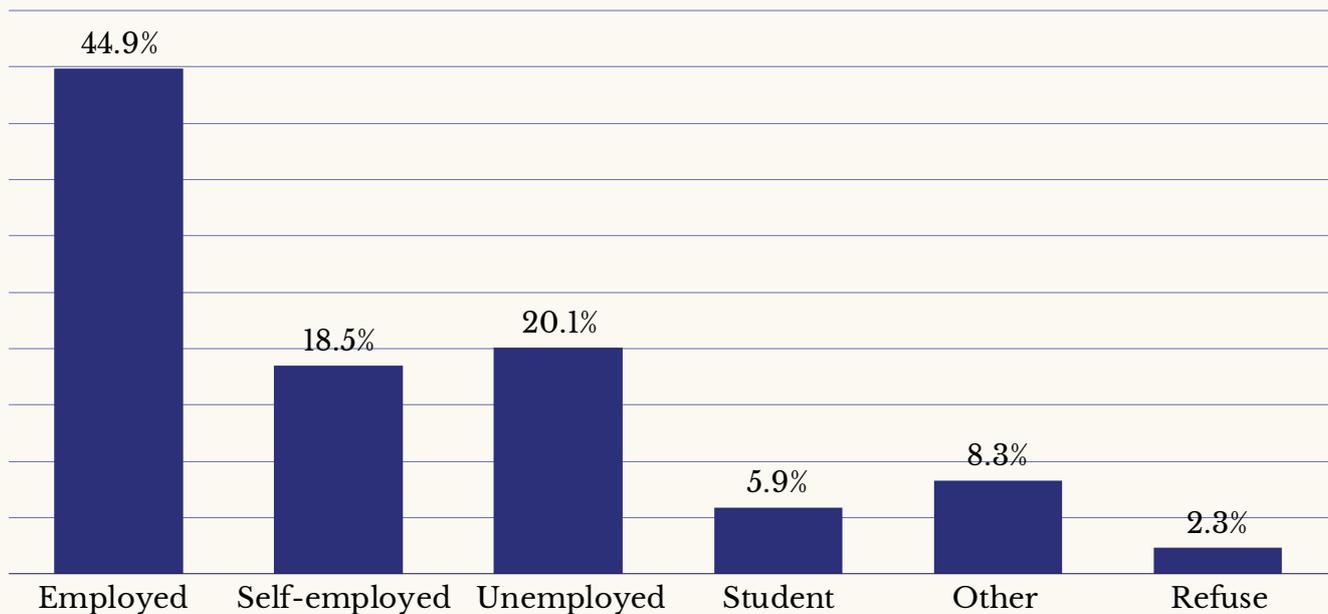
The vast majority of the respondents (76%) completed their secondary education or a higher level of education (see Figure 3). 23.4% completed primary education or less, and a minimal percentage (0.7%) refused to answer. 4.3% of respondents either had no formal education or had completed less than the primary eight or nine-year cycle, while 19.1% of respondents had completed their primary education. 40.3% of respondents had completed secondary education, 30.5% held a university-level degree (BA, BSc), and 5.2% have completed postgraduate education (Masters-level or higher).

Figure 3: Level of education of survey respondents (N=1600)



The respondents were asked to share their employment status. The majority of the respondents (63.4%) were an active part of the labour force, with 44.9% employed (on payroll) and 18.5% self-employed. Unemployed respondents represented a fifth of the sample (20.1%) and 5.9% of the respondents were students. Another 8.3% of the respondents indicated an employment status of 'other', the majority of which were pensioners, with a smaller proportion consisting of homemakers or individuals with disabilities. 2.3% of respondents refused to answer this question.

Figure 4: Employment status of survey respondents (N=1600)



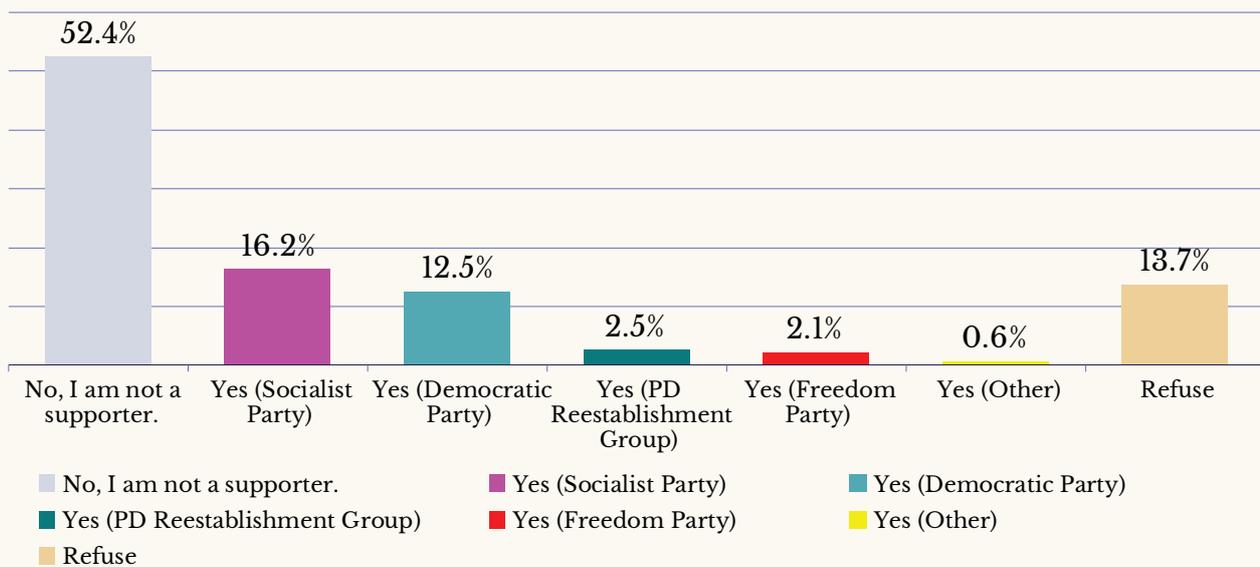
This survey introduced a question regarding political affiliation. The majority of Albanians (52.3%) surveyed did not align with any specific political group. One-third expressed support for one of the primary political parties in Albania, namely the Socialist Party, Democratic Party or Freedom Party. Acknowledging the internal divisions within the Democratic Party in Albania,¹⁹ the survey distinguished between the Democratic Party and the Democratic Party's Reestablishment Group. The findings indicated that 16.20% of respondents support the Socialist Party, 12.50% support the Democratic Party, 2.50% support the Democratic Party's Reestablishment Group and 2.1% support the Freedom Party. A marginal percentage (0.6%) supported other political groups, while 13.70% chose not to disclose their political support.



19 European Commission, Albania 2023 Report, available at https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-11/SWD_2023_690%20Albania%20report.pdf.



Figure 5: Political support of survey respondents

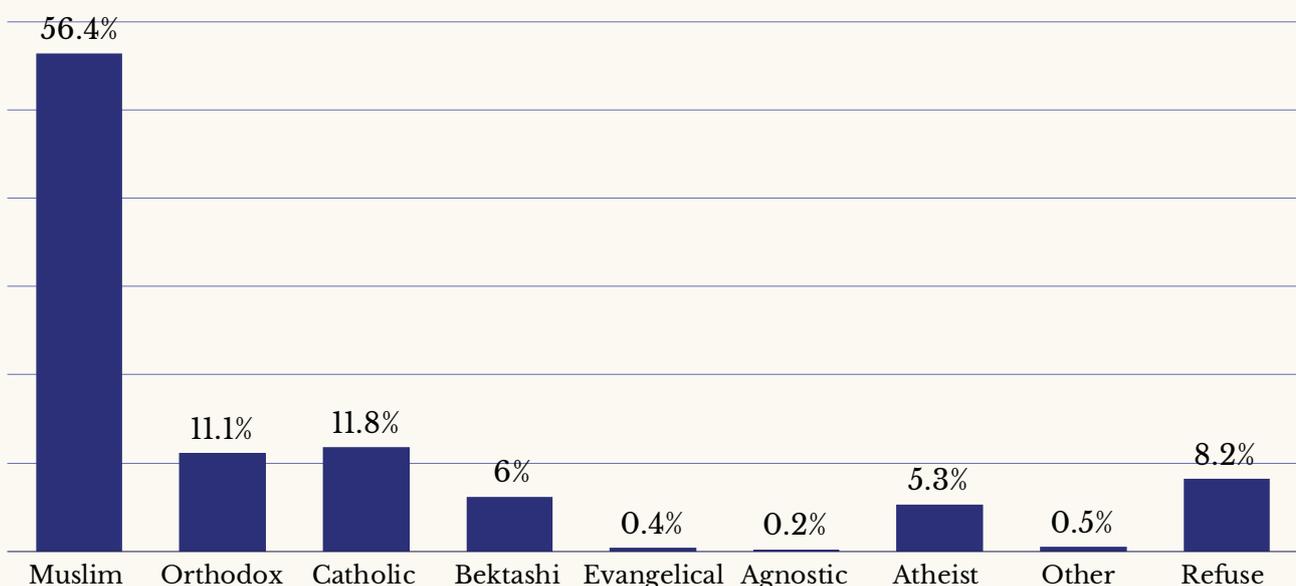


Religious background and practices

Religious coexistence and tolerance are considered a fundamental value of Albanian society. Albania is home to several religious communities that have been established for many centuries, as well as faith communities that have been introduced more recently i.e., in the past three decades. For the purposes of this research, we asked respondents about the religion of their families and their own religion. The latter is especially useful in contextualizing the perceptions respondents may have formed due to their family's historic religious affiliation.

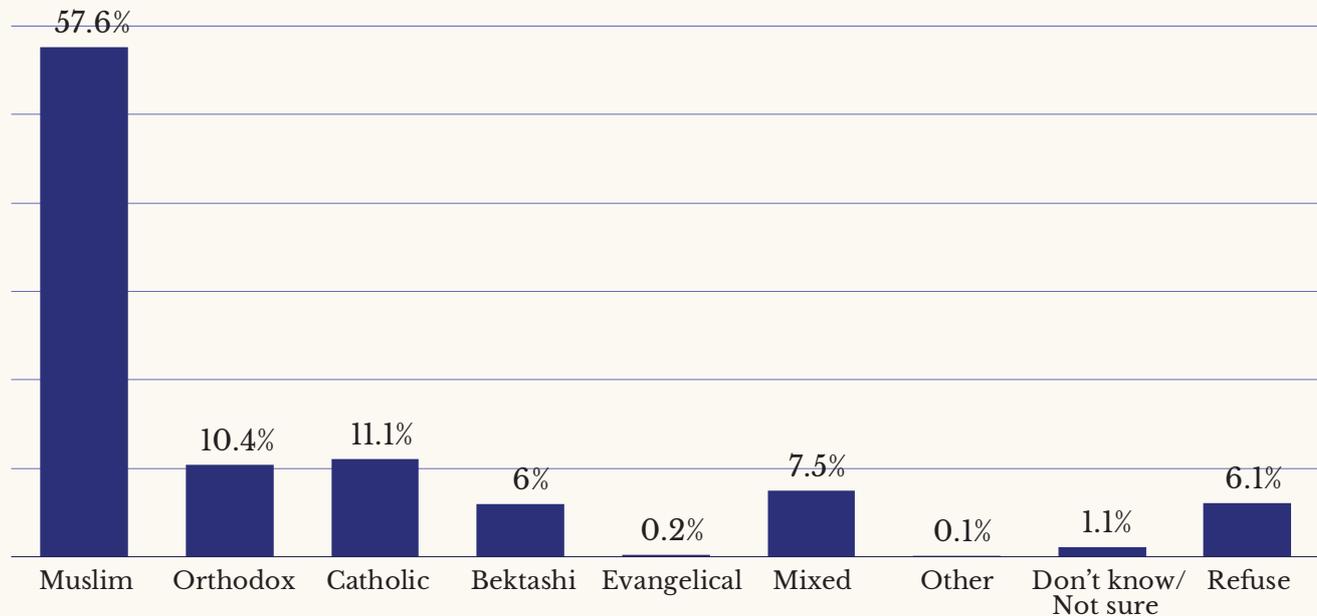
In our sample, 56.4% of respondents identified as Muslim, 11.8% Catholic, 11.1% Orthodox, 6.2% Bektashi, 0.4% Evangelical, and 0.5% identified with other religious denominations. A further 5.3% of respondents identified as Atheist, 0.2% as Agnostic and the remaining 8.2% refused to answer this question.

Figure 6: Religious affiliation of survey respondents



Regarding the religious affiliation of their families, 57.6% of respondents said they come from Muslim families, 11.1% from Catholic families, 10.4% from Orthodox families, 6% from Bektashi families and 0.2% from Evangelical families. Additionally, 7.5% of respondents come from mixed-religious families, 1.1% were uncertain about their family's religion and 6.1% chose not to respond to this question.

Figure 7: Religious origin of survey respondents

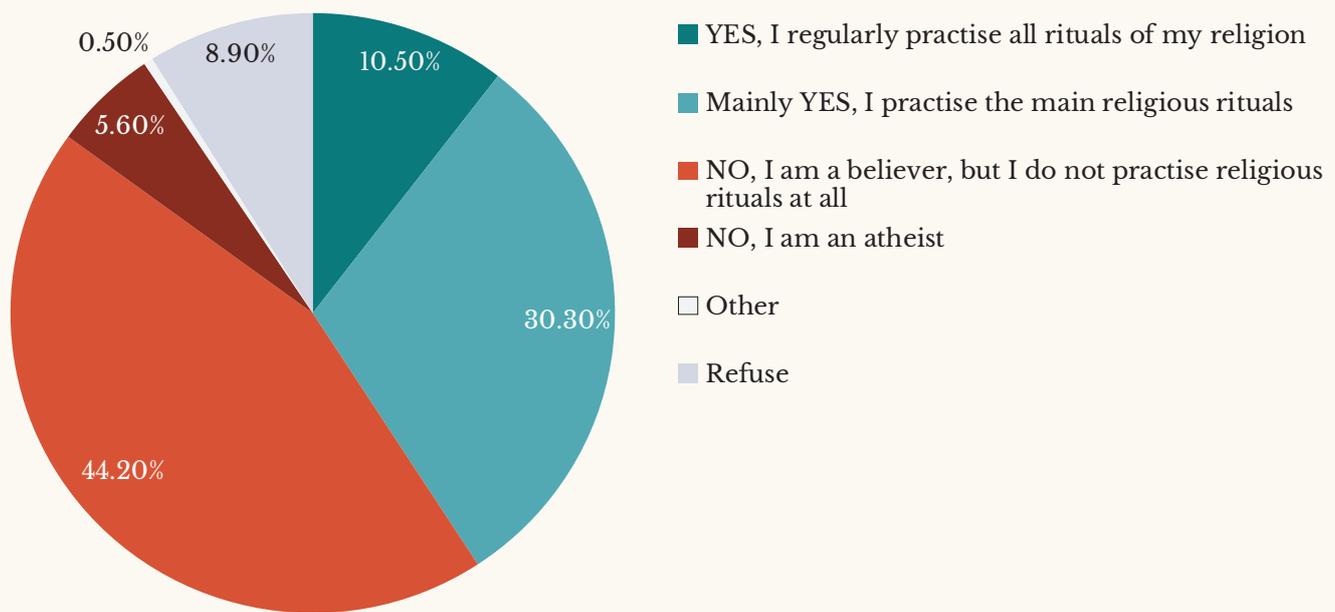


In order to assess the religiousness of respondents, two questions were included asking whether individuals considered themselves to actively practice religious obligations (i.e., performing religious rituals, praying) and how often they do so.

Respondents were first asked to choose an option on a scale that describes their religious practice: from a believer who regularly fulfils the requirements of their faith, one who observes the main rituals and rules of the faith but who neglects the rest, the nominal but non-practicing believer, to the non-believer. In comparison with the 2021 survey, a discernible trend emerges, indicating a decrease in both extremes of the spectrum – a decrease in those engaging regularly in religious practice and also in the number of those who identify as Atheists.

Approximately half of respondents (44.2%) consider themselves to be believers but do not practice religious rituals at all, marking a noticeable (10.7 percentage point) increase from the 2021 data. 30.3% of respondents practice the main religious rituals, reflecting a 5.6 p.p. decrease from the 2021 data. Additionally, 10.5% regularly practice all the rituals of their religion, reflecting a 9.3 p.p. decrease from the 2021 data. Another 5.6% of respondents do not practice religious rituals, due to being Atheists, which represents a drop of 3.9 p.p. compared to 2021 data (see Figure 6). The remaining 8.9% of responders chose not to respond to this question.

Figure 8: Practice of religious rituals among respondents (N=1600)

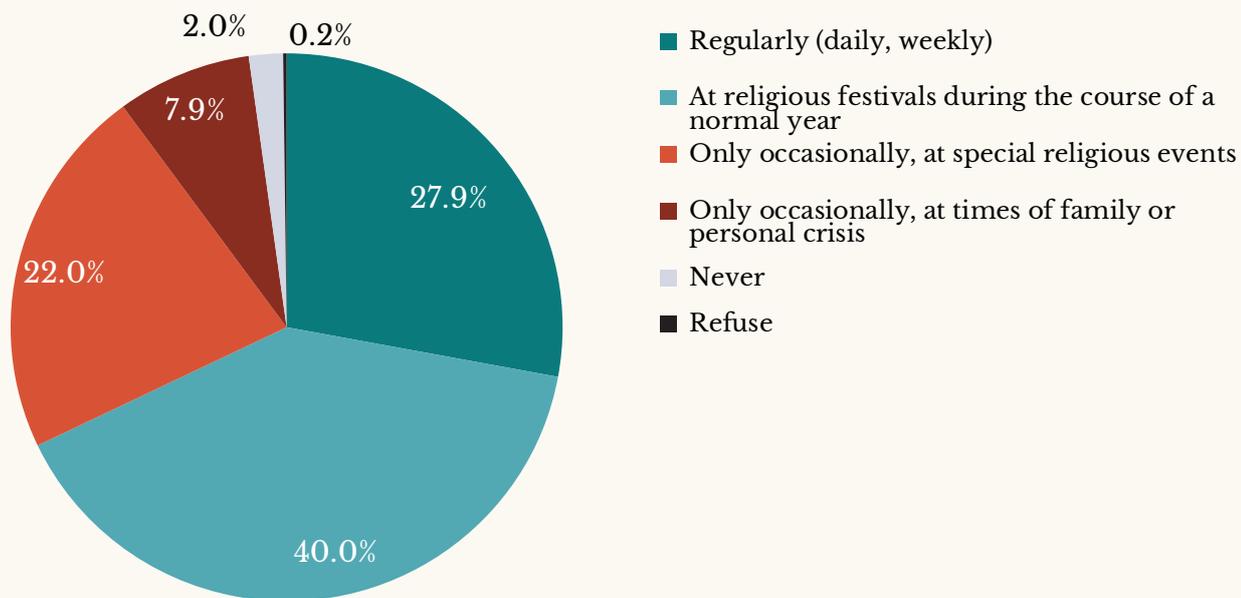


Another way to assess the religiousness of individuals is to ask about their piety or devotion towards their religion. An indicator of piety is prayer, the attempt to communicate with a deity or deities, supernatural beings or forces. Prayer is probably the most individualized act in Abrahamic religions, and at the same time is a collective expression of piety, highly ritualized with specialized clergy and rules to follow. Therefore, we put the following question to the respondents: ‘How often do you pray?’. They were provided with an option indicating a committed believer who regularly prays every day or every week, two options for believers who pray only during collective rituals, an indicator of less piety, an option for believers who largely lead a secular life and turn to religion in dire circumstances, and options for ‘I never pray’ or refuse to. The trends in prayer practices from the present survey demonstrate a shift towards more periodic prayers, particularly during special religious events, while indicating a decline in the percentage of respondents who never pray, reflecting the evolving religious practices of respondents.

In the course of a normal year, 40% of respondents said they pray only during religious festivals or rituals, maintaining a similar percentage (39.6%) as the 2021 data. Notably, 27.9% pray on a regular basis, either daily or weekly, reflecting an increase of 6.1 p.p. from the 2021 data. The survey findings indicate that 29.9% of respondents pray occasionally, with 22% practicing prayer only at special religious events – an increase of 10.7 p.p. from 2021 data – and 7.9% turning to prayer at times of family or personal crisis, a 2.9 p.p. decrease. A smaller proportion (2%) of respondents said they never pray, reflecting a 13.5% p.p. decrease from the 2021 data, and an even more significant decrease (21.9 p.p.) compared to the 2018 data.



Figure 9: Prayer practice among respondents (N=1600)



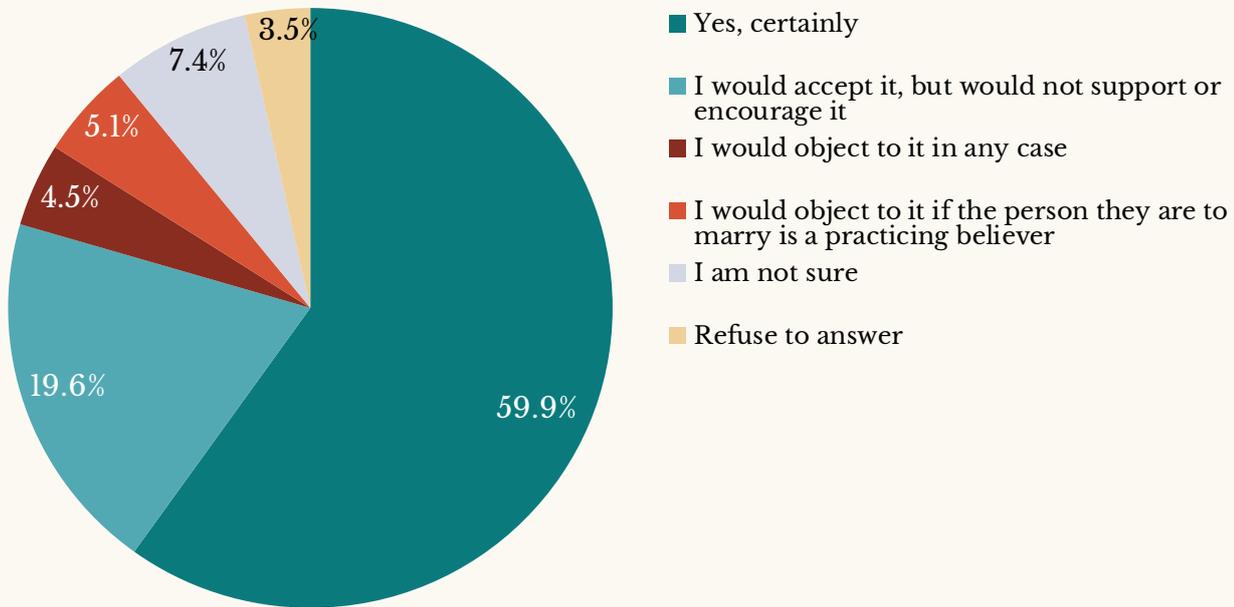
The two questions regarding prayer practices present contrasting trends. On one hand, the results of the first question (practice of religious rituals) highlighted a discernible decrease in actual religious practice compared to the 2021 survey, while emphasizing the persistence of religious belief. On the other hand, the second question (prayer practice) points to a shift in prayer practices towards more periodic engagement, especially during special religious events, and a sharp decline in the percentage of respondents who never pray. While these trends might appear contradictory at first glance, they underscore the complexity of individual religious behaviors in Albania. It is likely that respondents are altering the frequency and context of their prayer, engaging in religious practices during specific events while potentially reducing daily or routine observances. These results prompt the need for a deeper exploration of the nuanced relationship between religious beliefs and the manifestation of those beliefs in daily practices, in order to increase our understanding of the evolving dynamics of religious expression among Albanians.

Albania, with its five official religious communities, is recognized as a multi-religious society where individuals routinely encounter people of diverse faiths in their daily lives. Nevertheless, this exposure does not always translate into the establishment of meaningful relationships, particularly within familial settings. To mitigate potential societal biases that could lead respondents to typically offer positive responses when questioned about interreligious marriages more broadly, we specifically inquired whether they would personally support a family member marrying a person belonging to another religion. This addition to the survey aims to refine the measurement of societal tolerance, acknowledging that individuals may prefer partners from their own religious background as a matter of personal choice without necessarily being intolerant of the practice. By framing the question in this way, we seek a more nuanced understanding of tolerance, recognizing that individuals may have diverse perspectives on such matters.

The majority of respondents (59.9%) said they would certainly support a family member (sibling or children) if they were to marry a person of another religious affiliation. This indicates a slight decline of 5.6 p.p. compared to the 2021 data. Another 19.6% would accept such a marriage, but not support or encourage it, reflecting a 3.4 p.p. increase from 2021 data. Conversely, 5.1% would object if the person they were to marry is a practicing believer, while

4.5% would object in any case. 7.4% of respondents were unsure what their reaction would be in such a situation, while the remaining 3.5% refused to provide an answer to this question (see Figure 10).

Figure 10: Respondents' support for the inter-religious marriage of a family member (N=1600)



5. Drivers of violent extremism in Albania

5.1 Socio-economic drivers

This chapter explores the impact of socio-economic root causes that render an individual vulnerable to exposure to violent extremist groups or engagement in violent terrorist activities. Domestic grievances related to sociological motivators, such as social exclusion, marginalization and discrimination — but also economic factors such as unemployment, absolute and relative poverty, illegal economic activity or financial incentives — are all known to be potential risk factors.

In the present national study several socio-economic drivers have been taken into consideration in order to understand their impact in different regions of the country and the threat they may pose to society by providing conditions for the emergence of radical religious and violent extremist groups. The table below outlines the drivers (from Denoeux and Carter 2009).

Table 2: Socio-economic drivers

Perceptions of social exclusion and marginality	This perception may be particularly prevalent among peri-urban/slum youth and in environments where family structures have eroded, normal social controls no longer check behaviour, and youth have too much time on their hands, which may help them fall prey to dangerous behaviours and attitudes. In the aftermath of this sense of anomie and isolation, violent extremist groups may exploit this isolation by offering an escape, a sense of purpose and inclusion in a collective movement.
Social networks and group dynamics	Social networks are an important factor in radicalization and recruitment. Individuals may drift into violent extremist groups with friends or as a result of the influence of relatives, neighbours or a charismatic local preacher.
Societal discrimination	Real or perceived discrimination towards an individual or community (or both) in a broad sense can be a driver for violent extremism. In places where Muslims are a small minority, socio-economic and/or political discrimination may be perceived as linked to disrespect for Islam and Muslims, provoking radicalization.
Frustrated expectations and relative deprivation	Relative deprivation and frustrated expectations are powerful drivers of violent extremist activity among youths. Youths with more education are likely to feel that they deserve better life outcomes than their societies can deliver. They generally cannot obtain the sorts of jobs they feel they deserve; they recognize the nepotism that impedes access to jobs.



Unmet social and economic needs	Deprivation of socio-economic needs – especially when combined with widespread corruption and lack of security and justice – may be exploited by violent extremist groups, which may offer wages or services. It is not poverty per se that elicits support for violent extremism, but an acute form of social exclusion from government and society.
Greed or the proliferation of illegal economic activities	Violent extremist organizations’ illegal activities offer lucrative economic opportunities for those who seek an income. Violent extremist groups and illegal economic networks have a mutually beneficial relationship – providing each other with revenue, experience in concealment and ideologies to legitimize illegal behaviour.

Albania experienced a notable economic rebound following the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2022, Albania’s GDP per capita was estimated to be \$6,743,²⁰ though this was significantly lower than the EU’s €34,159 average that year.²¹ This growth, fuelled by increased employment and higher wages, pushed employment to a record 63.9% by the second quarter of 2023 – the highest since 2019.²² Despite these positive trends, the economy faces challenges from rising food and energy prices, which threaten to lower real incomes, hinder poverty reduction efforts and constrain government budget flexibility.

In Albania, where nearly a quarter of the population lives in poverty, social assistance reaches only 20% of those in need.²³ The gap is partly mitigated by remittances from emigrants, which in 2023 hit a 15-year high of €677 million.²⁴ For many households, these remittances are essential, helping them manage living costs amid economic uncertainties. Unsurprisingly, the issues of economic stability and the emigration of skilled workers, or brain drain, stand out as the two most important problems facing the Albanian economy, as highlighted by the 2023 Balkan Barometer.²⁵

The demographic shift towards an older population compounds these challenges, with one in four individuals now aged 60 or above. This ageing demographic puts pressure on state pension schemes, which struggle to support a growing number of retirees with a diminishing base of contributors. Currently, the ratio of contributors to pensioners is approximately 1.20 to 1,²⁶ indicating a strained system heavily reliant on a shrinking workforce.

The significant gap in meeting the social and economic needs of the population, combined

20 World Bank, Country Overview – Albania, available at <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/albania/overview#1>

21 Trading Economics, European Union GDP per Capita, available at <https://tradingeconomics.com/european-union/gdp-per-capita>

22 World Bank, Western Balkans Regular Economic Report, 2023 available at, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/region/eca/publication/western-balkans-regular-economic-report>

23 Monitor, ‘Economic aid covers only 20% of the poor in Albania, among the lowest in Europe’, 24 April 2023, <https://www.monitor.al/ndihma-ekonomike-mbulon-vetem-20-te-te-varferve-ne-shqiperi-nder-me-te-uletat-ne-europe/>

24 Eliza Gedikku, ‘Remittances reach the record of 15 years, they reached 677 million euros in 9 months! Migrant remittances help families in the face of high prices’, Shqiptarja, 12 December 2023, <https://shqiptarja.com/lajm/remitancat-kapin-rekordin-e-15-viteve-arriten-677-mln-euro-bsh-emigrantet-sollen-233-mln-euro-ne-sezonin-veror>

25 Regional Cooperation Council, Balkan Barometer 2023 Public Opinion, available at https://www.rcc.int/balkanbarometer/key_findings/2/public

26 ISSH, Statistika të Sigurimeve Shoqërore, January–June 2023, available at https://www.iss.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Permbledhje_statistika_06_23-web.pdf



with high levels of poverty, creates an environment in which illegal economic activities are a means of survival. These conditions not only fuel greed but also present a risk factor for engaging in or supporting violent extremist ideologies as an alternative way of meeting these unfulfilled needs. These disparities are noticeable especially in the socio-economic peripheries of the country. While investment is concentrated in central Albania, rural areas remain largely marginalized, leading to uneven development.

Perceptions of social exclusion & marginality

Social networks and group dynamics

This perception may be particularly prevalent among peri-urban/slum youth and in environments where family structures have eroded, normal social controls no longer check behaviour, and youths have too much time on their hands, which may help them fall prey to dangerous behaviours and attitudes. According to a research report from the British Council in Albania, one in four young individuals feel a low sense of integration with their local communities (i.e., not feeling a part of it at all or only to a slight extent). The majority experience varying degrees of connection, from somewhat to very much feeling like a part of their local environment.²⁷ Violent extremist (VE) groups may seek to exploit this sense of anomie and isolation by offering an escape, a sense of purpose and inclusion in a collective movement. Social networks are an important factor in radicalization and recruitment. Individuals may drift into VE groups with friends or as a result of the influence of relatives, neighbors or a charismatic local preacher.

Research into the dynamics of violent extremism within Albania has shed light on the multiple factors which influenced Albanian Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTFs) to engage in the Syrian conflict during the wave of radicalization between 2011 and 2014.²⁸ Social issues, notably dysfunctional family situations, feelings of exclusion from society and a lack of representation within formal institutions, have been significant in pushing individuals towards radicalization. These individuals often turned to alternative figures of authority who offered them a sense of belonging and purpose but also led them towards extremism. Furthermore, the personal bond formed with radical imams, who were seen as uncorrupted champions of true Islam, played a crucial role. For this reason it is essential to continually gain insights into prevailing social dynamics and the challenges encountered, in order to guide targeted interventions and support structures to effectively tackle the spread of VE.

Statements in these drivers:

- Many young people have fallen prey to vices (gambling, alcohol, drugs, etc.) and/or dangerous behaviour (violence, vandalism, etc.) in the area where I live.
- There are individuals or groups in the area where I live that incite political extremism
- There are individuals or groups in the area where I live that incite ethno-nationalist extremism
- There are individuals or groups in the area where I live that incite religious extremism

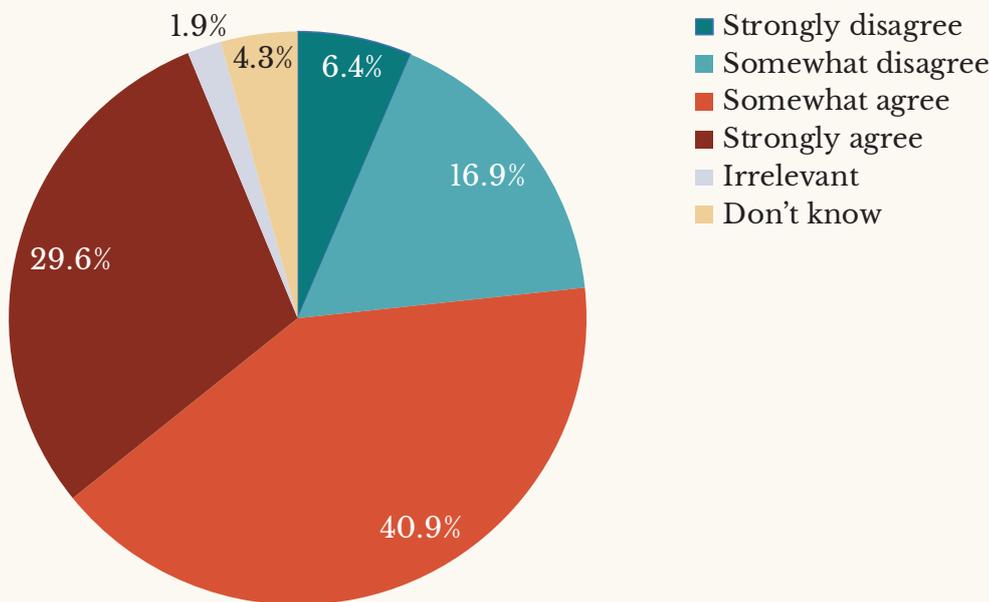
27 Iliasov, Aibek., Elodie Causier, Ana Babic (2023). Next Generation Albania. British Council. doi.org/10.57884/8Y5S-EH57

28 Mishkova, Diana, et al. (2021) Working Paper on Enabling Environments, Drivers and Occurrence/Non-occurrence of Violent Extremism in the Balkans, PREVEX Project Publication, available at www.prevex-balkan-mena.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/D5.2-final.pdf

Statement: Many young people have fallen prey to vices (gambling, alcohol, drugs, etc.) and/or dangerous behaviour (violence, vandalism, etc.) in the area where I live.

Respondents were asked to rate whether they agree or not with the statement on a 4-point scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4). 70.5% of respondents agreed with the statement, which marks a notable decrease over the past few years. A further 23.3% of the respondents strongly disagreed or somewhat disagreed with the statement, whereas 6.2% found the statement irrelevant or responded with 'Don't know'. This indicates a decrease of 13.9 percentage points (p.p.) from 2021 (when 84.8% agreed) and a decrease of 10.3 p.p. from 2018 (when 80.8% agreed), indicating a positive trend in the perception of youth behaviour in this respect.

Figure 11. Support for the view that youth have fallen prey to gambling, alcohol, drugs and dangerous behaviour (N=1600)



When checking across demographics, respondents over 65 years old (76%), and those who are supporters of the Freedom Party (82%) were more inclined to agree with the statement. The perception that youths have fallen prey to dangerous behaviours was also high among believers who pray regularly (75%).

Statements

To what extent respondents are concerned about political/ethno-nationalist/religious extremism?

There are individuals or groups in the area where I live that incite political/ethno-nationalist/religious extremism.



In the survey, respondents were provided with definitions of three forms of extremism and asked to report their concerns for each, as well as to indicate the presence of individuals or groups inciting such forms of extremism in the areas where they lived. For religious extremism, 30.7% of respondents found it concerning or very concerning, and 6.6% observed incitement in their local areas (with 4.8% somewhat agreeing and 1.8% strongly agreeing to the presence of individuals or groups inciting religious extremism). In contrast, political extremism was deemed more concerning, with 43.4% expressing concern, and 16.3% reported witnessing incitement (10.2% somewhat agreeing and 6.1% strongly agreeing) in the area where they lived. Ethno-nationalist extremism was seen as least concerning at 27%, with only 3.5% of respondents recognizing its incitement in their areas (2.3% somewhat agree, 1.2% strongly agree).

Reflecting on the data from 2021, current findings indicate a reduced presence of individuals or groups inciting violent extremism in the surveyed areas. For religious extremism, the level of agreement has declined by 5.5 p.p. from 2021, when 12.1% agreed. Although it remains a concern, the level of agreement for political extremism has also decreased by 11 p.p. from 2021, when 27.3% agreed. Similarly, perceptions of ethno-nationalist extremism have shown a slight decrease of 3.6 p.p. from 2021, when 7.1% agreed.

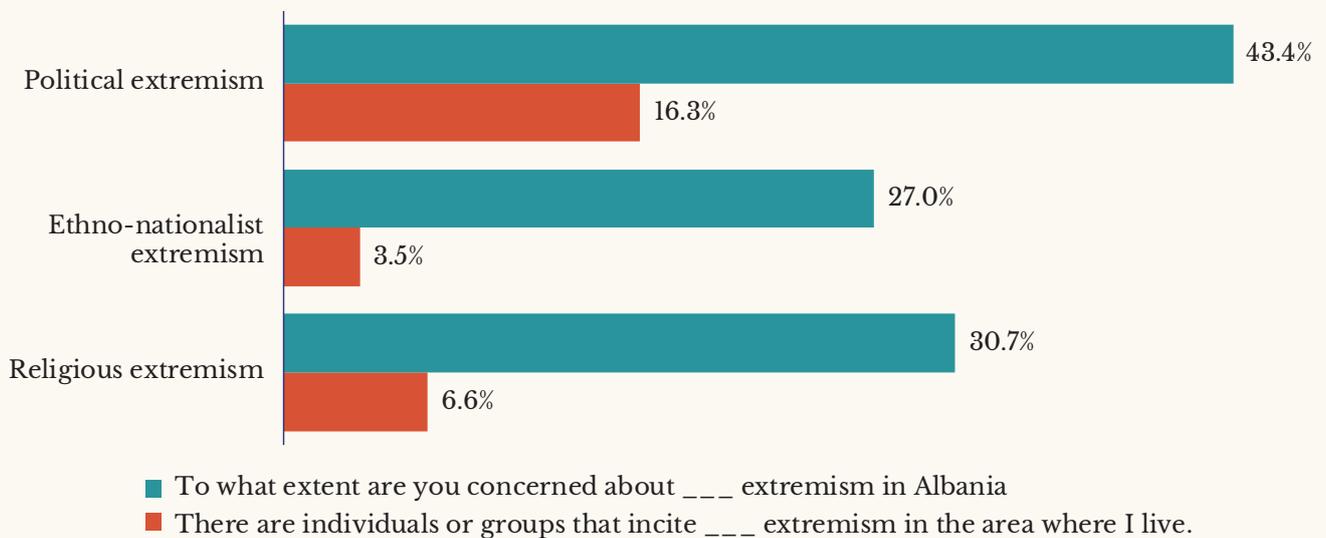
When checking across demographics, respondents with a postgraduate degree (54%), those who support the Freedom Party (59%), and those who are self-employed (50%) were more likely to agree that individuals or groups in the area they live incite political extremism. The perception is commonly shared among respondents who adhere to Orthodoxy (50%) and Bektashism (56%), and those who regularly practice all the rituals of their religion (52%).

Respondents with no education (35%) and those who refused to disclose their level of education (54%) were more likely to indicate to the presence of individuals or groups in the area where they live that incite ethno-nationalist extremism. In addition, Freedom Party (38%) and Democratic Party (33%) supporters were more inclined to agree with the statement. The same was true for respondents who adhere to Orthodoxy (34%), those who regularly practice all the rituals of their religion (33%) or those who never pray (46%).

The perception that individuals or groups incited religious extremism in the areas where they lived, was commonly shared among respondents that were 45–54 years old (40%) and those with a postgraduate degree (37%). Respondents who support the PD Reestablishment Group (43%) were more inclined to agree with the statement. Among religious believers, respondents whose families originally belong to the Orthodox faith (37%), who identify as Orthodox themselves (36%), those who regularly practice all the rituals of their religion (44%), and those who practice the main religious rituals (36%) were all also more likely to point to the presence of such individuals or groups in the area where they lived.



Figure 12. Percentage of concerned-very concerned respondents about political/ethno-nationalist/religious extremism in Albania (N=1600) vs. respondents who agree or strongly agree that there are individuals/groups that incite political/ethno-nationalist/religious extremism in the area where they live (N=1600)



Statement: If you chose (somewhat agree - 3; or strongly agree - 4) for any of the forms of extremism, please specify what kind of extremist behaviours, actions or attitudes you have witnessed in the area where you live.

Respondents who indicated there are individuals or groups in the area where they live that incite one of the types of extremism – either political, ethno-nationalist or religious – were asked to specify what kind of extremist behaviours, actions or attitudes they had witnessed.

On the survey, this open-ended question was positioned after a series of close-ended questions and statements that help the respondent reflect on how widespread violent extremism is in Albania and more particularly, in the area where they live in. The preceding questions included an assessment of actions that could be described as violent extremism according to the respondent's opinion and a close-ended question, asking the respondents to what extent they are concerned about political, ethno-nationalist and religious extremism in Albania, while providing a definition for each of these types of extremism. By doing so, the respondent was guided into reflecting on types of extremist behaviours, actions or attitudes they have witnessed themselves. In response to the open-ended question, 93 respondents identified behaviours indicative of religious extremism, 42 pointed to ethno-nationalist extremism, and a significant 242 respondents reported the presence of political extremism in their local area.

Political extremism was most commonly associated with negative campaigning, with 47 respondents highlighting biased attacks and a lack of respectful dialogue. Voter inducement was reported by 45 respondents, revealing unethical practices such as offering benefits or job opportunities in exchange for votes. Vote-buying, while less common, was still a concern with 10 instances reported. Interpersonal violence due to political affiliation was noted by 22 respondents, indicating a polarized and potentially violent political climate. Additionally, 22 respondents reported coerced political participation, suggesting forced engagement in political activities. Political favouritism or cronyism was seen as a form of extremism by 18 respondents, illustrating perceived unfair advantages for those affiliated with the ruling party. Instances of employment retaliation due to political affiliation were reported three times. Political discrimination, including denial of rights and services, was cited by 16 respondents,



as was concern over a lack of political alternatives and stifled democratic processes. Finally, 15 respondents linked political extremism to patronage systems, radical political support and ties between politics and criminal activities. Chapter 6 below provides a detailed breakdown of these categories.

Respondents who reported witnessing various forms of **religious extremism** in their local areas, were classified into six main categories. The most frequently mentioned was 'religious intolerance' with 22 reports, including disrespect towards different faiths, coercion, distinctiveness from national culture and proselytism. 'Islamophobia' was the second most cited category, with 17 respondents reporting explicit instances or attitudes indicative of such prejudice. Concerns related to 'Islam' were noted 13 times, touching on issues like coercion, proselytism and the presence of extremists. There were 11 reports on 'Jehovah's Witnesses', often related to their proselytizing efforts. 'Ideological manipulation' was mentioned in six instances, describing the exploitation of vulnerable groups by various ideologues. Lastly, the 'ripple effect of global conflicts' was observed by four respondents, reflecting on how international tensions affect local sentiments. Findings from this open-ended question about religious extremism are detailed below, in the Cultural Drivers section.

Regarding the presence of **ethno-nationalist extremism**, incidents of extremism based on ethnic background included one death threat, four cases of nationalism, three acts of violence, and one instance of psychological violence. Discrimination was the primary concern, reported by 11 respondents, followed by hate speech by five respondents, and denial of rights due to ethnicity by two. The potential escalation of the Kosovo-Serbia conflict as a trigger for ethnic extremism was a concern for five respondents. Various forms of discrimination or hate speech were directed against ethnic minorities, notably the Roma and Egyptians (three mentions), Greeks, Serbs, and Macedonians (two mentions each), and one mention each for Bulgarians and refugees from conflict zones. Discrimination against Albanian immigrants in Greece was also reported once. For more details on these categories, see chapter 6 on the emerging trends of violent extremism in Albania.

Considering the increasing cases of synthetic drug seizures in Albania²⁹, it is no wonder that over two-thirds of respondents recognized the prevalence of vices and dangerous behaviours among youths. Nevertheless, there has been a significant positive shift in perceptions over the past few years, with a decrease of more than 10 p.p. from previous surveys, suggesting an improvement in youth behaviour or at least its perception.

When assessing the presence of individuals or groups that incite different forms of extremism, the perception of political extremism (16.3%) prevails over concerns about ethno-nationalist and religious extremism, equating to 1 in 6 respondents acknowledging its presence in their area. Notably, reported behaviours associated with political extremism include negative campaigning, voter inducement and interpersonal violence due to political affiliations, reflecting a tense and polarized political atmosphere. In contrast, concerns about ethno-nationalist (4%) and religious extremism (6.6%) are lower, although respondents have witnessed discrimination, hate speech and religious intolerance, indicating varied forms of societal marginalization.

This disparity in the level of concern over political extremism compared with other forms underscores the major role that social networks and group dynamics play in shaping perceptions, further amplified by feelings of social exclusion and marginality among the youth. Additionally, there have been slight decreases in the perception of all forms of extremism over time, with political extremism showing a significant drop of 11 p.p. since the last survey period. This suggests a potentially improving situation or an increased effectiveness of counter-extremism measures, even as more than 200 respondents reported witnessing specific extremist behaviours, actions or attitudes in their communities.

29 GI-TOC, Rising synthetic drug seizures in Albania suggests local demand for these substances is growing, Risk Bulletin, August 2023, <https://riskbulletins.globalinitiative.net/see-obs-016/05-rising-synthetic-drug-seizures-in-albania.html>

Societal discrimination

Real or perceived discrimination towards an individual or community (or both) in a broad sense can be a driver for VE. In places where Muslims are a small minority, socio-economic and/or political discrimination may be perceived as linked to disrespect for Islam and Muslims, provoking radicalization. However, in Albania, Sunni Muslims constitute up to 57% of the population, although only a small percentage of Albanians consider themselves to be practicing believers. Overall, there is a broad acceptance of the country's religious diversity, with a firm stance against any notion of dominance by any religion, regardless of size.³⁰

Despite this, in 2022, the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination (CPD) in Albania reviewed four allegations concerning hate speech and discrimination on religious grounds, underscoring the nuanced nature of such assessments. One of them pertained to accusations against a public figure for purported hate speech in a Facebook post about Muslim prayer practices during Eid al-Fitr. The Commissioner determined the post, although critical of public prayer rituals, did not constitute hate speech against Muslims. The CPD office reviewed three other complaints of religious discrimination, concluding in each instance that there was no discriminatory conduct.³¹ These were an employment dispute attributed to religious and political beliefs, challenged in the Tirana Administrative Court; a claim of religious and gender discrimination, deemed outside the Commissioner's jurisdiction; and a non-governmental organization's allegation of hate speech in a Facebook post related to Eid al-Fitr, which was not substantiated.

Statements in this driver:

- People with the same religious denomination as me benefit less from opportunities for economic and social development due to our religious belonging.
- The long beard (for men) or headscarf (for women) reveal that we are dealing with religious extremists.
- The religious community I belong to is well-represented in politics and state institutions.

Statement: People with the same religious denomination as me benefit less from opportunities for economic and social development due to our religious belonging.

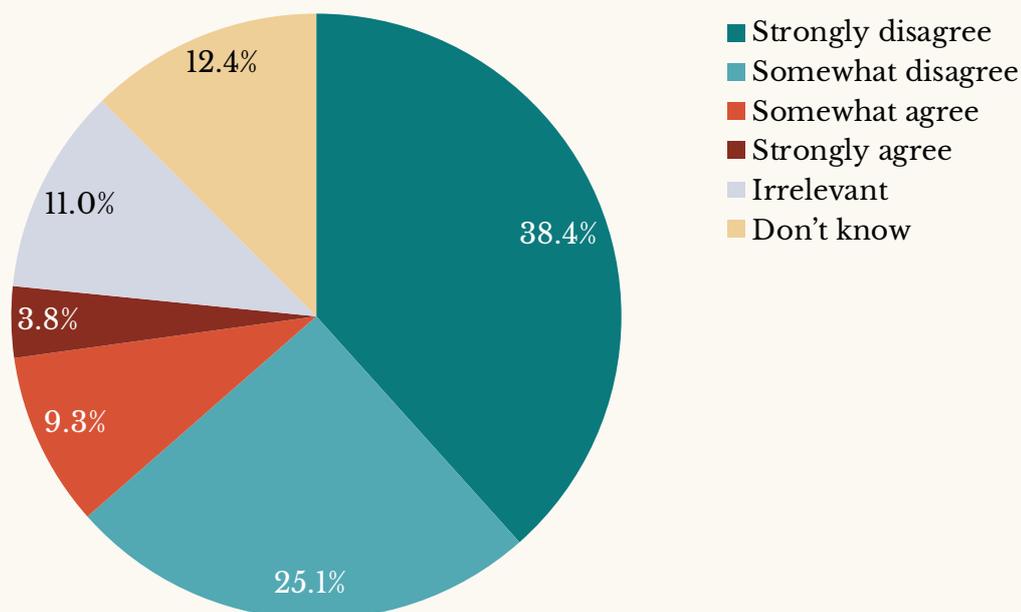
Respondents were asked to rate whether they agree or not with the statement, on a 4-point scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4). 13.1% of the respondents somewhat agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, whereas 63.5% of the respondents somewhat disagreed or strongly disagreed. Compared to 2021, when 12% agreed with the statement, there has been a slight increase of 1.1 p.p. in the proportion of respondents agreeing with the statement. 11% found the statement irrelevant and 12.4% did not know whether to agree with the statement or not.

30 IDM and UNDP, Religious tolerance in Albania, 2018, available at <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/migration/al/English-report-religious.pdf>

31 US Department of State, 2022 International Religious Freedom Report: Albania, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/albania/>.



Figure 13. People with the same religion benefit less from opportunities for economic and social development (N=1600)

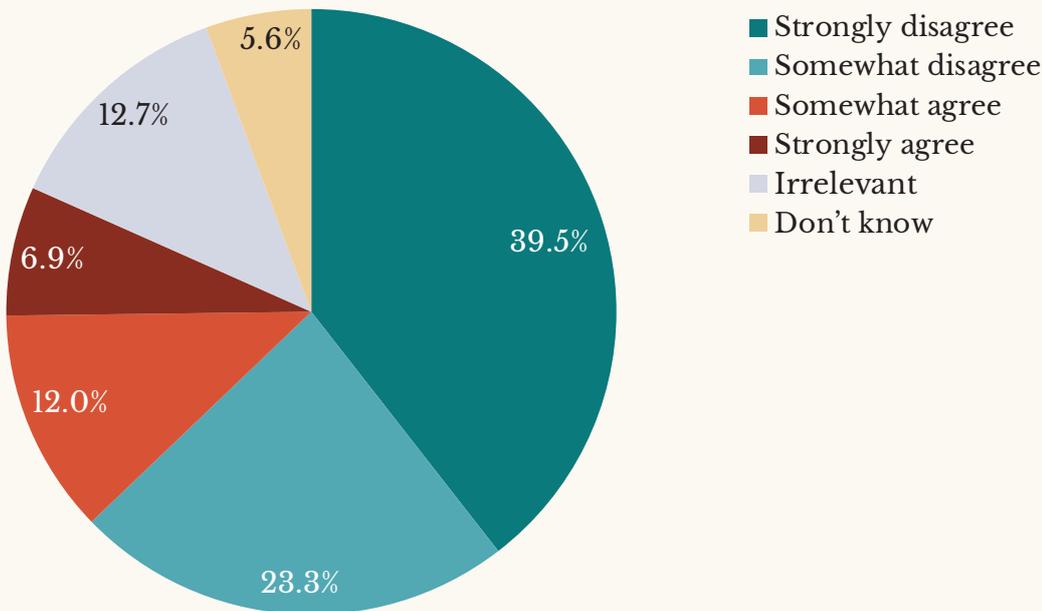


Among religious believers, those who adhere to Orthodoxy (18%), and those who regularly practice all the rituals of their religion were more likely to agree with the statement. Supporters of the Freedom Party (24%) and the Democratic Party (21%) were also more likely to agree that people with the same religion, benefit less from opportunities for economic and social development.

Statement: The long beard (for men) or headscarf (for women) reveal that we are dealing with religious extremists.

When asked, 18.9% of the respondents agreed with the statement, whereas the majority of respondents (62.8%) somewhat disagreed or strongly disagreed. This represents a steady decrease in the association of the long beard and headscarf with religious extremism over the years, with a 6.9 p.p. decrease from 25.8% in the 2021 survey which was itself a 4.7 p.p. decrease from the 30.5% in the 2018 survey. 12.7% of the respondents found the statement irrelevant and 5.6% did not know whether to agree or not with the statement.

Figure 14. The long beard or headscarf reveal that we are dealing with religious extremists (N=1600)



Among religious believers, those who adhere to Orthodoxy (32%) and Catholicism (28%), and those who regularly practice all the rituals of their religion (26%) were more likely to associate the long beard (for men) and the headscarf (for women) with religious extremism. Supporters of the PD Reestablishment Group (53%) were more likely to support this statement.

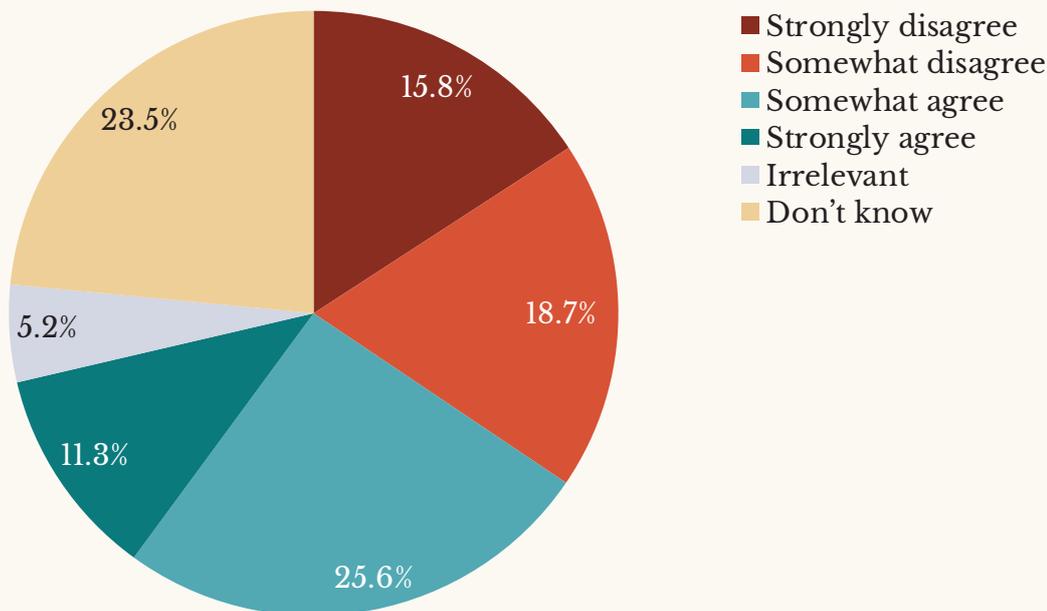
Statement: The religious community I belong to is well-represented in politics and state institutions.

Respondents were asked to indicate whether they agree or not with the statement, using a 4-point scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4). 36.9% of respondents somewhat agreed or strongly agreed with the statement while 34.5% indicated disagreement. In 2021, the proportion of respondents agreeing that their religious community is well-represented in politics and state institutions rose to 41.6% from 30% in 2018. However, this year, there has been a decrease of 4.7 p.p. in this proportion.

A significant 23.5% indicated they did not know whether to agree with the statement or not and 5.2% found the statement irrelevant – indicating that the religious affiliation of public officials is not a primary concern for them.



Figure 15. The religious community I belong to is well-represented in politics and state institutions (N=1600)



This perception is commonly shared by Muslim respondents (42%) and those who are believers but do not practice religious rituals at all (42%), or those who pray only occasionally at times of family or personal crisis (48%).

When checking across demographics, Orthodox believers (18%) tended to believe that individuals sharing their religion benefit from fewer opportunities for economic and social advancement. Furthermore, when considering the symbols of religious extremism, Orthodox (32%) and Catholic adherents (28%) were more inclined than the national average to associate the wearing of long beards by men and headscarves by women with extremist beliefs.

When assessing societal discrimination overall, the survey found that a modest portion, 13.1% of the respondents, perceived their religious denomination as a barrier to economic and social opportunities, marking a slight increase from the previous year. In addition, 18.9% of the respondents associated the long beard (for men) or headscarf (for women) with religious extremism. These findings are further supported by input received when asked about cases of open discrimination or hate speech that respondents had witnessed in the last year.³² Discrimination and hate speech due to religious belief was reported in 19 cases, out of which 11 cases reportedly targeted Muslim believers specifically. The data, indicating a low incidence rate of both perceived and actual discrimination, suggests that such incidents are isolated and this driver is less likely to have a significant impact on Albanians' perception of religious extremism.

Considering that the Albanian population predominantly follows a secular lifestyle, characterized by limited understanding or interest in religious matters and a refusal to allow religious beliefs to influence or dictate their way of living,³³ it is understandable why there is a diminishing tendency to associate physical religious symbols with extremism. This perception has seen a notable decrease over the years, with less than 1 in 5 respondents now making such a connection, a reduction of nearly 7 p.p. from the 2021 survey. Similarly, a substantial portion of respondents, about 1 in 4, remain undecided or indifferent to the

³² Explored through an open-ended question on section 5. Emerging trends of violent extremism

³³ IDM and UNDP, Religious tolerance in Albania, 2018, available at <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/migration/al/English-report-religious.pdf>.

relevance of religious affiliation in political representation, pointing to a general disinterest in religious affiliation as a criterion for political and institutional engagement.

Frustrated expectations & relative deprivation

Relative deprivation and frustrated expectations are powerful drivers of violent extremist activity among youths. Concerns were raised regarding the transparency and the impact of informality in the job-seeking process.³⁴ Furthermore, the discrepancy between the diplomas awarded by educational institutions and the skills demanded by the job market suggests that even highly educated young individuals face challenges securing employment. Oftentimes, this leads them to migrate. Out of those willing to move, almost 8 in every 10 Albanians indicated that they intend to move for better employment opportunities,³⁵ or potentially for better educational prospects. Data from the Balkan Barometer suggest that 36% of the Albanian respondents are either completely or mostly dissatisfied with education, whereas 30% are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.³⁶

Youths with higher levels of education are likely to feel that they deserve better life outcomes than their societies can deliver. They feel that nepotism impedes access to jobs or generally feel they cannot obtain the sorts of jobs they deserve. This was exemplified in the protests of Albanian medical students in 2023, opposing a recent government decision that requires them to work for five years in Albania before obtaining their diplomas.³⁷ The measure was an attempt of the government to prevent the mass emigration of medical students from the public faculty of medicine. Medicine graduates frequently move to work or obtain a specialization in EU countries, particularly Germany, as soon as they get their degree. Reportedly, they do so in order to benefit from updated curricula, better educational facilities and equipment, and enhanced opportunities to specialize in their field of interest.

Ultimately, this phenomenon of frustrated expectations and relative deprivation not only fuels the desire of young professionals to migrate but can also set a dangerous precedent – leading other young people to presume that their concerns will be unheard. This, in turn, can push vulnerable individuals toward extremist ideologies that promise a sense of purpose, belonging or social justice.

Statements in this driver:

- In general, well-educated people in the area where I live have good job positions.
- The main source of income for youth in the area where I live is from individual, law-abiding work.



34 Iliasov, Aibek., Elodie Causier, Ana Babic (2023). Next Generation Albania. British Council. doi.org/10.57884/8Y5S-EH57

35 Iliasov, Aibek., Elodie Causier, Ana Babic (2023). Next Generation Albania. British Council. doi.org/10.57884/8Y5S-EH57

36 Regional Cooperation Council, Balkan Barometer 2023 Public Opinion, available at https://www.rcc.int/balkanbarometer/key_findings/2/public

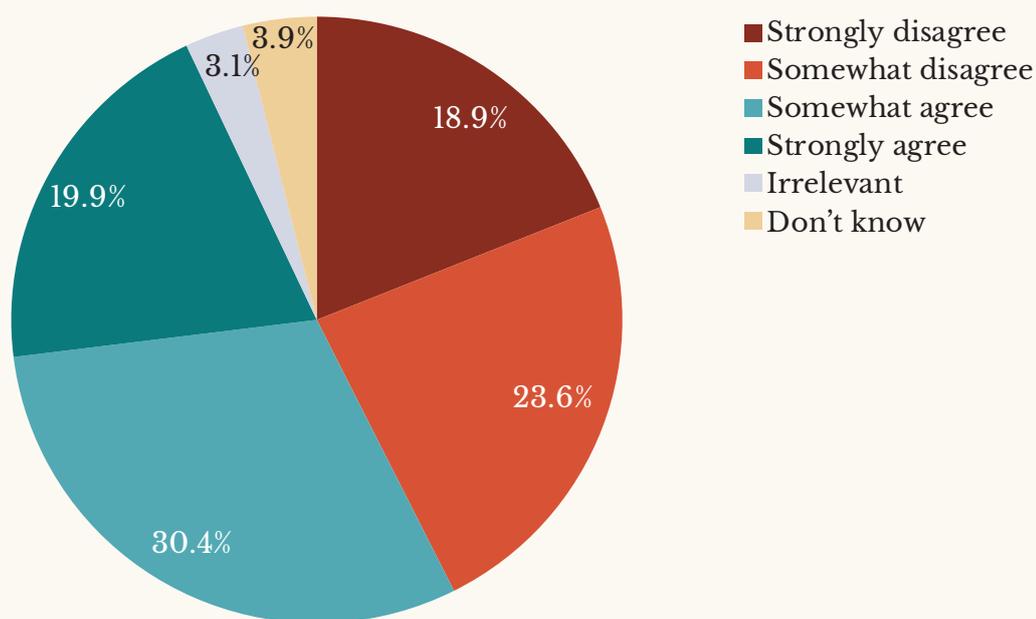
37 Fjori Sinoruka, 'Albania Medical Students Protest Over Obligation to Stay in Country', Balkan Insight, 2 October 2023, <https://balkaninsight.com/2023/10/02/albania-medical-students-protest-over-obligation-to-stay-in-country/>.



Statement: In general, well-educated people in the area where I live have good job positions.

Half of the respondents (50.3%) believed that, in general, well-educated people in the area where they live have good job positions, whereas 42.5% disagreed with this statement. In 2021, the proportion of respondents agreeing that well-educated youth in their area have good jobs rose significantly by 33.8 p.p. to 57.9%, from 24.1% in 2018. However, by 2023, this proportion has decreased by 7.6 pp from the 2021 level.

Figure 16. In general, well-educated people in the area where I live have good job positions (N=1600)

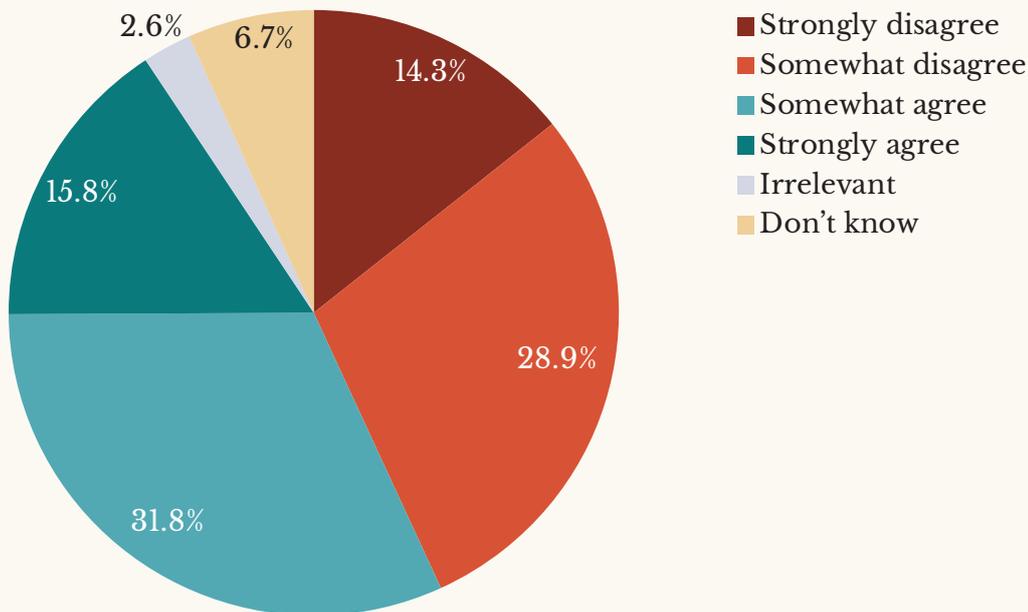


When checking across demographics, respondents over 65 years old (85%) and those who support the Socialist Party (68%) were more likely to agree that well-educated people in the area where they live have good job positions. Among religious believers, this perception is shared mainly by those who adhere to Orthodoxy (62%) and those who regularly practice all the rituals of their religion (58%).

Statement: The main source of income for youth in the area where I live is from individual, law-abiding work.

Respondents were asked to indicate whether they agree or not with the statement, using a 4-point scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4). 47.6% of respondents somewhat agreed or strongly agreed with the statement while 43.2% indicated disagreement. About 9% of the respondents did not know whether the main source of income for youth in the area where they live is from individual, law-abiding work, or they found the statement irrelevant. Compared to 2021, when 63.5% of respondents agreed with the statement, there has been a sizeable 15.9 p.p. decrease in 2023, following a slight (1.8 p.p.) increase from 2018, when 61.7% agreed.

Figure 17. The main source of income for youth in the area where I live is from individual law-abiding work (N=1600)



Respondents between 55 and 64 years old (53%), supporters of the Socialist Party (63%) were more inclined to agree that the main source of income for youth in the area where they live is from individual law-abiding work. Orthodox believers (53%) and those who practice the main religious rituals of their faith (54%) and those who pray at religious festivals during the course of a normal year (58%) were also more likely to agree with the statement.

The findings point to frustrated expectations and relative deprivation among the Albanian youth, particularly concerning employment opportunities and the alignment between education and job market demands. While half of the respondents believe well-educated individuals secure good job positions, a significant 42.5% disagreed, reflecting a profound scepticism towards the educational system's efficacy in facilitating employment. This scepticism is further compounded by a notable decrease of 7.6 p.p. from 2021 in the proportion of respondents who were optimistic about the employment prospects for the well-educated. Additionally, there has been a significant decline in the perception that the main source of income for youth is derived from individual, law-abiding work, with a 15.9 p.p. decrease from 2021. This decline suggests growing concerns over the transparency and fairness of the job market, possibly exacerbated by informality and nepotism.

These perceptions highlight a significant gap between the aspirations of the youth and the realities of the job market, underscoring a broader societal issue where the promise of education as a pathway to prosperity remains unfulfilled for many, potentially driving them either towards migration or extremist narratives. The salience of this driver suggests that frustrated expectations and relative deprivation can render the Albanian youth susceptible to extremist ideologies that exploit these grievances.

Unmet social and economic needs

High levels of poverty and unemployment in peripheral and deprived areas, as well as poor social services, make local communities vulnerable to the activities of groups with radical or extremist agendas. Unmet socio-economic needs – especially when combined with other factors such as widespread corruption and lack of security and justice – may be exploited by VE groups by offering wages or services. It is not poverty per se, however, but the acute sense of social exclusion from government and society that elicits support for VE.



In many peripheral and under-developed regions, many people are dependent upon state welfare and economic assistance. Therefore, it is crucial for state institutions to work professionally with individuals and families in need, not just because of the poverty, but also because of the acute feelings of neglect and exclusion that prompt radicalism, extremism and violent behaviour. In developing countries such as Albania, it is common for civil society groups to build partnerships with the state to provide relief, assistance and training to persons in need. Besides secular international humanitarian charities and non-profit organizations (NPOs), foreign faith organizations have been active in the country, providing material help, health services, education and spiritual consolation to many such citizens. Sometimes – as was particularly the case in the 1990s – these organizations have been a cover for religious extremists to spread their agenda and turn Albania into an operational base for their activities in other countries. They had a great impact in impoverished peripheral areas and recruited followers, mainly young men, who started to practice rituals that were unknown in traditional Albanian Islam. When links between international terrorism and some of these ‘charities’ were revealed in the mid-2010s, they were forced to terminate their activities in the country.³⁸

To combat the terrorist financing abuse of NPOs, the intergovernmental Financial Action Task Force (FATF) Recommendation 8 requires Albania to conduct a risk assessment of NPOs to identify any terrorism financing risks they pose.³⁹ To this end, the FATF has adopted a functional definition of NPOs, encompassing any ‘legal person or arrangement or organization that primarily engages in raising or disbursing funds for purposes such as charitable, religious, cultural, educational, social or fraternal purposes, or for the carrying out of other types “good works”’. An assessment report on Counter-Terrorist Financing for NPOs in Albania, highlights that, given their currently known income sources, the non-profit sector in Albania is not deemed to be at significant risk of exploitation by terrorist activities.⁴⁰ However, it is imperative to foster an environment where self-regulation is promoted within the non-profit sector, and transparency is enhanced. This is vital to ensure that NPOs, in particular those who engage in service provision – maintain accountability. Alongside this, it is equally important to cultivate an understanding among the population that, while NPOs play a crucial role in complementing state services, they are not substitutes for these services. This distinction helps prevent an overdependence on the non-profit sector, ensuring a balanced approach to addressing societal needs. By doing so, the sector can not only adhere to the FATF's functional definition but also safeguard against potential abuses, thereby reinforcing its integrity and the trust of stakeholders.

To better understand this phenomenon, the respondents of this study were presented with three statements.

Statements in this driver:

- In the area where I live, state institutions for social and economic assistance operate in a professional and abuse-free manner.
- In the area where I live there are religious groups that offer economic privileges or material gain to those who practice their religion.

38 Balkan Investigative Reporting Network. (2014). Zanafilla e islamit radikal në Shqipëri. Reporter.al, available online: <https://www.reporter.al/zanafilla-e-islamit-radikal-ne-shqipëri/>

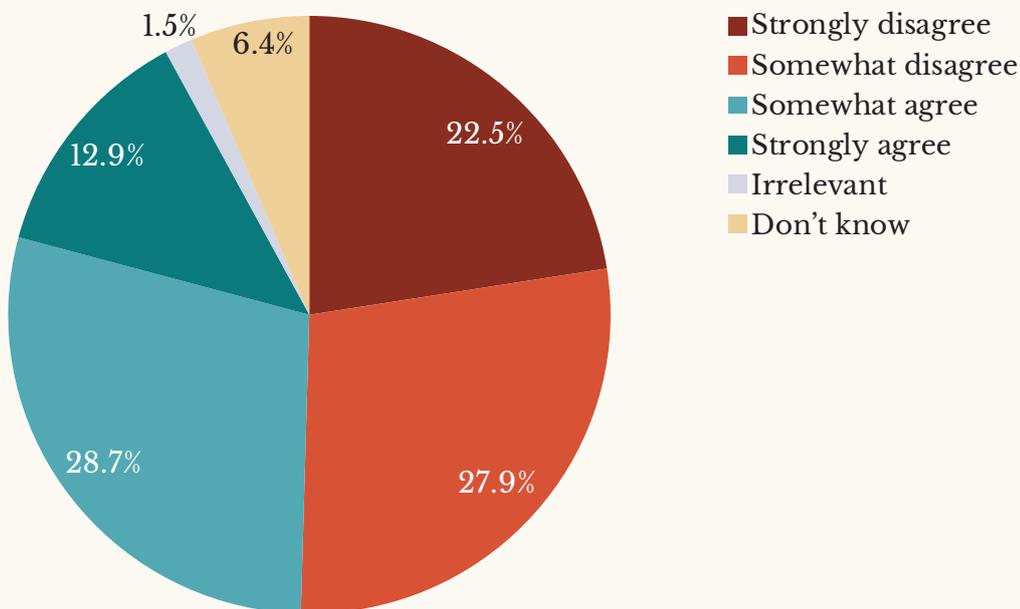
39 FATF (2023), BPP-Combating the Terrorist Financing Abuse of Non-Profit Organisation, FATF, Paris, www.fatf-gafi.org/en/publications/Financialinclusionandnpoissues/Bpp-combating-abuse-npo.html

40 Assessment Report on Legal and Regulatory Framework on Counter-Terrorist Financing and Anti-Money Laundering for Non-Profit Organizations in Albania <https://www.partnersalbania.org/News/prevention-of-restrictions-on-civil-society-organizations-in-the-name-of-preventing-money-laundering-and-the-fight-against-terrorist-financing-in-albania/>

Statement: In the area where I live, state institutions for social and economic assistance operate in a professional and abuse-free manner.

When asked whether state institutions for social and economic assistance operate in a professional and abuse-free manner in the area where they live, 41.6% agreed with the statement. Half of the sample (50.4%) somewhat disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, whereas 7.9% of the respondents either did not know or found the statement irrelevant. In 2023, there was a 6.2 p.p. increase to 35.4% of respondents agreeing that state institutions in the area where they live operate in a professional and abuse-free manner, compared to 2021. This follows a 9.6 p.p. increase from 2018, when only 25.8% agreed with the statement.

Figure 18. In the area where I live, state institutions of social and economic assistance operate in a professional and abuse-free manner (N=1600)



When checking across demographics, respondents aged 45–54 (48%), and those who were over 65 years old (47%) were more likely to agree with the statement. The perception that state institutions for social and economic assistance operate in a professional and abuse-free manner in the area where they live was also common among supporters of the Socialist Party (62%), and those who identified as Orthodox (52%).

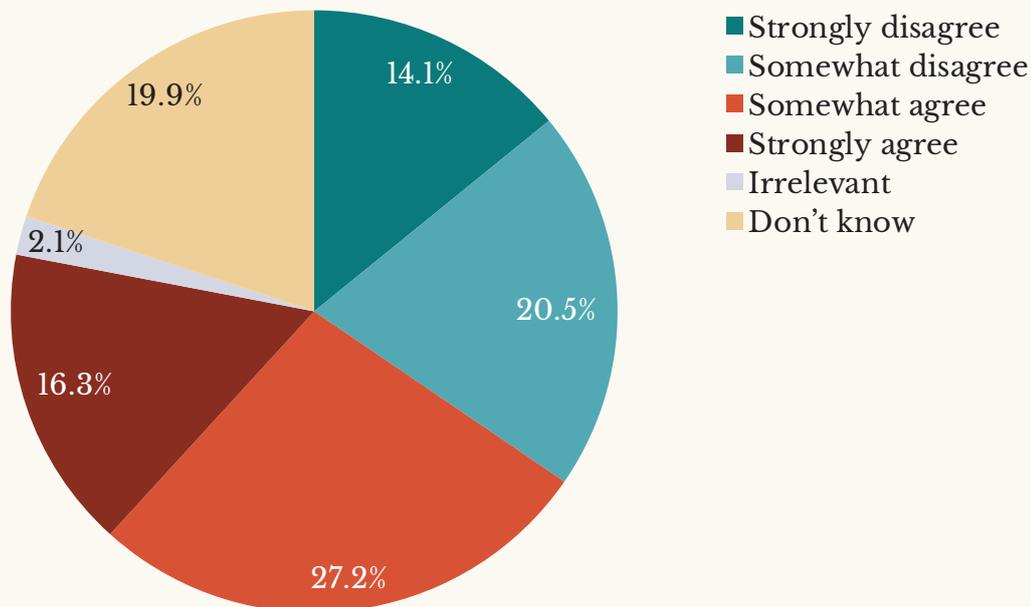
Statement: In the area where I live there are religious groups that offer economic privileges or material gain to those who practice their religion.

According to 43.5% of the respondents, there are religious groups that offer economic privileges or material gain to those who practice their religion in the area where they live. The proportion of those who somewhat disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement was 34.6%. 19.9% of the respondents did not know whether to agree or disagree with the statement and 2.1% found the statement irrelevant.



In 2023, there was a 10 p.p. decrease from 2021's 53.5% of respondents agreeing that religious groups offer economic privileges or material gain to those who practice their religion in the area where they live. This followed a considerable increase of 22.8 p.p. from 2018, when only 30.7% of respondents agreed with the statement.

Figure 19. In the area where I live there are religious group that offer economic privileges or material gain to those who practice their religion (N=1600)



When checking across demographics, respondents between the ages of 55-64 (50%) and those who refused to disclose their level of education (55%) more likely to agree with the statement. Supporters of the PD Reestablishment Group (80%) were highly likely to agree that there are religious groups that offer economic privileges or material gain to those who practice their religion in the area where they live. This statement was also broadly true for respondents who are Bektashi (55%), Orthodox (53%), and those who regularly practice all the rituals of their religion (54%).

The findings from these statements offer a critical insight into the complex dynamics of unmet social and economic needs in Albania, highlighting a landscape where the interplay between socio-economic deprivation, institutional performance and the influence of religious groups shapes community vulnerabilities to radical or extremist agendas. Notably, just over two-fifths of respondents believed that state institutions of social and economic assistance operate professionally and without abuse, yet half of the surveyed population disagreed, indicating a significant level of distrust or dissatisfaction with the efficiency and integrity of these institutions. However, there has been a positive trend over the years, with a gradual increase in trust from 2018 to 2023, suggesting some improvements in the public perception of institutional conduct.

Conversely, a substantial proportion, nearly half of the respondents, acknowledged the presence of religious groups offering economic incentives or material gain for religious participation. This finding underscores the potential for exploitation of socio-economic vulnerabilities by certain groups to expand their influence or recruit followers, particularly in the context of poverty and unemployment. However, there has been a notable decrease in the perception of such activities (10 p.p.) since 2021, indicating a potential reduction in the visibility or prevalence of these practices.

These insights reveal a nuanced picture of Albania's struggle with socio-economic challenges, institutional trust and the influence of religious groups offering material incentives. The data points to a critical need for enhanced professionalism, transparency and effectiveness in state social and economic assistance programmes to address the root causes of vulnerability and prevent exploitation by groups seeking to radicalize or recruit individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds. The decreasing trend in the perception of religious groups offering material inducements could reflect successful efforts to limit the influence of extremist groups, though it remains a significant concern that requires ongoing attention and action.

Greed or the proliferation of illegal economic activities

Violent extremist organizations' illegal activities offer lucrative economic opportunities for those who seek an income. Illicit economic networks and violent extremist groups have a mutually beneficial relationship – with the former providing revenue and experience in concealment, and the latter an ideology with which to legitimize illegal behaviour. Indeed, prisons are a locus for violent extremist recruitment.

Although violent extremism and terrorism are classified as politically oriented crimes, they are also closely related to other illegal activities that have economic aims. Terrorist organizations engage in illegal economic operations to finance their activities: they purchase arms, false documents and other logistics from traffickers, and launder money through channels also used by organized crime. As noted in the driver 'Unmet social and economic needs', in the past some Islamic charities in the Balkans have acted as cover organizations for terrorist activities, providing terrorists with fake documents produced on the black market and funding their trips in the region through bank transfers.⁴¹ In order to explore the extent to which Albania offers space for the nexus of criminal activity and violent extremism, this study asked respondents what lengths they would be willing to go through to make ends meet.

Statements in this driver:

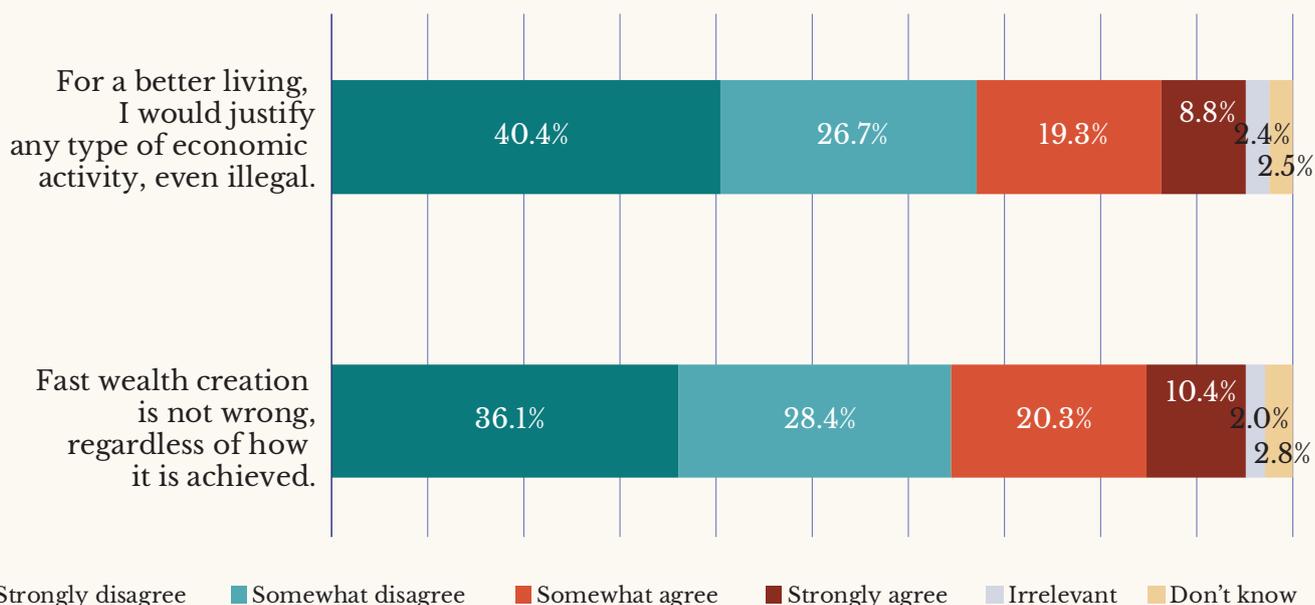
- For a better living, I would justify any type of economic activity, even illegal;
- Fast wealth creation is not wrong, regardless of how it is achieved.

28.1% of the respondents confirmed that they would justify any type of economic activity, even illegal, for a better living. However, 67.1% of respondents strongly disagreed or somewhat disagreed with the statement. Similarly, 30.7% of the respondents agreed that fast wealth creation is not wrong, regardless of how it is achieved, while 64.5% disagreed with the statement.

41 Zoto, E. (2013) Failure and Success of the Jihadi Information Operations on the Internet. Master's thesis. Monterey (CA): Naval Postgraduate School.



Figure 20. Support for justifying any type of economic activity, including illegal and that fast wealth creation is not wrong (N=1600)



Respondents with limited educational backgrounds – specifically, those with no education or less than primary education (40%) and those with only primary education (50%) – were more likely to justify economic activities of any nature for a better living and to see rapid wealth accumulation as acceptable, irrespective of the means. The unemployed demonstrated similar inclinations, with 33% justifying any economic activity for a better standard of living and 36% agreeing that fast wealth creation is not objectionable, regardless of its legality.

Believers from mixed religious families and Bektashis showed a notable openness towards all forms of economic activities, with 54% of those from mixed religious backgrounds and 33% of Bektashi adherents agreeing with the justification of such activities. Additionally, 52% of respondents from mixed religious backgrounds believed that quickly acquired wealth is permissible, regardless of the method.

Albeit minimal, there is a concerning acceptance among a notable minority of Albanians towards engaging in or justifying illegal economic activities for financial gain, reflecting the allure of immediate wealth in the face of economic pressures. Specifically, nearly 3 in 10 respondents would justify any type of economic activity, including illegal ones, if it meant a better standard of living, while a similar proportion saw nothing wrong in fast wealth creation irrespective of the means. This highlighted a significant level of economic desperation or moral flexibility among less-educated segments of the population, potentially making them more susceptible to the influences of violent extremist organizations and organized crime networks that exploit such vulnerabilities for recruitment and operation financing. The majority, however, showed a clear stance against illegal means for economic betterment, suggesting a prevailing adherence to legal and ethical standards despite economic challenges. This dichotomy underscores the importance of addressing the root causes of economic vulnerability and improving legal income opportunities to prevent the enticement of illegal activities and their associated risks.

Socio-economic drivers – conclusion

A total of six drivers were analyzed in the category ‘political drivers to violent extremism’, three of which are particularly relevant in the Albanian context: (1) perceptions of social exclusion and marginality; (4) frustrated expectations and relative deprivation; and (6) greed or the proliferation of illegal economic activities. Although it is still important to continue monitoring these drivers, (2) social networks and group dynamics; (3) societal discrimination; (5) unmet social and economic needs appear to be less concerning.

The findings from Albania highlight critical societal issues, including the widespread recognition of youth involvement in vices and dangerous behaviours (70.5% agreeing). Yet there was marked improvement in perception, with a more than 10 percentage point reduction in negative views compared to previous surveys. Despite this trend, the data unveils considerable challenges in the employment and education sectors. A significant 42.5% of respondents expressed doubt in the effectiveness of the educational system to ensure good job opportunities, underscored by a 7.6 p.p. decrease in optimism for the employment prospects of the well-educated since 2021. Moreover, respondents were less likely to believe that youth income primarily comes from lawful work, compared to 2021 (15.9 p.p. decline). These trends highlight scepticism towards job market fairness, likely exacerbated by informal practices and nepotism.

Economic pressures have led to a concerning level of acceptance among some Albanians of illegal economic activities as a route to better living standards, with nearly 3 in 10 justifying any economic activity, legal or not, for financial gain. This desperation or moral flexibility, more pronounced among the less-educated, increases vulnerability to recruitment by extremist groups and organized crime. However, the majority still firmly oppose illegal methods for economic improvement, indicating a strong adherence to ethical standards despite economic challenges. This dichotomy emphasizes the urgent need for interventions that address economic vulnerabilities and mitigate the allure of illegal activities.

The relatively low levels of institutional trust and societal discrimination should be continuously monitored. This proactive approach is essential to address and mitigate any challenges and tendencies that could escalate into violent extremism. Political extremism, identified by 16.3% of respondents as a concern, overshadowed worries about ethno-nationalist and religious extremism, reflecting a tense political landscape marked by negative campaigning and voter intimidation. Despite this, there has been an 11 p.p. drop in the perception of political extremism since the 2021 survey, suggesting an improving situation or more effective counter-extremism measures. Meanwhile, ethno-nationalist (3.5%) and religious extremism (6.6%) concerns are less pronounced but still present, with discrimination and hate speech indicating societal marginalization. Notably, the perception of all forms of extremism has seen a decrease over time, pointing to potential progress in combatting these issues.

On the other hand, distrust or dissatisfaction with the efficiency and integrity of state social and economic assistance institutions remains high, with only two-fifths of respondents viewing these institutions as professional and abuse-free, although trust has gradually increased between 2018 and 2023. The presence of religious groups offering economic incentives for participation highlights the exploitation of socio-economic vulnerabilities, although the visibility or reported prevalence of such practices has decreased by 10 p.p. since 2021. Additionally, a slight increase in perceived religious discrimination suggests isolated incidents rather than widespread trends, with a secular lifestyle and a diminishing tendency to associate religious symbols with extremism reflecting a broader disinterest in allowing religious beliefs to dictate lifestyle or political engagement. These insights underscore the importance of enhancing state institutions’ transparency and effectiveness, and addressing the vulnerabilities that can be exploited by groups seeking to radicalize or recruit, amidst an overall trend of reducing extremism and perceived discrimination.



5.2 Political drivers

Most political drivers are related to the state of democracy, governance and functioning of the rule of law in a country. For these drivers, it is not only the actual state of democracy, governance, and rule of law – it is also the perceptions of citizens that affects people’s dissatisfaction with the state and its institutions. In the case of Albania, this holds true for the drivers ‘denial of political rights and civil liberties’, ‘harsh government repression and the violation of human rights’, ‘endemic corruption and impunity for well-connected elites’, ‘poorly governed or ungoverned areas’, and ‘discredited governments and missing or co-opted legal oppositions’. The drivers ‘foreign occupation’ and ‘political and/or military encroachment’ do not describe Albania’s current reality or context, yet it remains important to examine whether certain groups of citizens perceive these drivers as relevant, for example for their community or local context.

The driver ‘perceptions that the international system is unfair and hostile to Muslim societies’ relates mostly to public perceptions and attitudes towards the West and the international system in general. The political drivers are assessed by this study using contextually relevant developments for Albania that influence the overall perceptions of the respondents (Table 3).

Table 3: Political drivers as in Denoeux and Carter, 2009; IDM, 2015, 2018, 2021

Denial of political rights and civil liberties	The lack of political rights and civil liberties, and closed, unresponsive political systems, can instill a belief that violence is the only means for political change. Civil liberties and political rights also may represent a critical—but not representative—link between economic development and vulnerability to violent extremism.
Harsh government repression and violations of human rights	Cruel, degrading treatment (including torture) to an individual at the hands of the police or security forces can lead to a desire for revenge. The harsher and more widespread the brutality, the greater the spur to violent extremist activities and the more support violent extremism may garner from the local communities.
Foreign occupation	Countries subject to (perceived) foreign occupation are at risk of insurgency and rights abuses. Support for violent extremist activities may derive from individuals seeking to redeem disgrace to their person and their community.
Political and/or military encroachment	Large-scale political or military intrusion into internal affairs can act as a unifying element, with the community resorting to violence to redeem individual and collective honour. In communities with a historically high degree of autonomy and self-regulation, strong resistance is likely.



Endemic corruption and impunity for well-connected elites	This driver prompts civic disengagement and political apathy at the least and can foster a profound sense of moral outrage. The more corrupt the environment, the easier it is for violent extremist groups to establish themselves as a righteous alternative and to lash out at immoral governing elites.
Poorly governed or ungoverned areas	These areas are isolated, low population density regions that constitute safe havens where violent extremist organisations can establish themselves with little hindrance, and even garner support from communities ignored by the government.
Discredited governments and missing or co-opted legal oppositions	When a regime is entirely discredited, and there is no viable opposition, those who wish to oppose the government and bring about reform will be pushed outside normal political channels and may support VE groups.
Intimidation or coercion by violent extremist groups	Where governments cannot provide security and protection for its citizens, violent extremist groups use intimidation and coercion to force support for their movement.
Perception that the international system is fundamentally unfair and hostile to Muslim societies and peoples	Populations may accept violent extremist propaganda that the global political and economic system discriminates against the Muslim world, which can mesh with personal or communal feelings of discrimination.

The list reported in Table 3 is not exhaustive, nor do the political drivers operate in isolation from one another or from drivers within the cultural and socio-economic categories. Nonetheless, Denoeux and Carter (2009) argue that these political drivers often provide for an enabling environment for VE:

“One or several of these political drivers also may be closely intertwined with some of the social and economic drivers discussed earlier. For instance, corruption may sap state capacity by undermining the government’s ability to confront the social exclusion which, as discussed above, often fuels VE.”⁴²

It is therefore important to understand the broader political environment while analysing the salience of drivers in this category, as well as their interplay with other drivers and contextual factors that define the Albanian reality. Compared to the previous assessments of drivers, forms, and threats of violent extremism in Albania, the country’s democracy rating remains unchanged. Albania is still considered ‘partly free’, scoring 28/40 points for respecting political

42 Denoeux, G. and Carter, L. (2009). Guide to the drivers of violent extremism. USAID. p. 27. Available via: https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/Pnadt978.pdf



rights and 40/60 points for civil liberties⁴³.

Moreover, the overall democracy rating declined from 47.02 to 46.43 (out of 100) in the last three years. In 2022, Albania's democracy faced significant challenges, especially during special elections in March across six municipalities, and through political party restructurings and efforts at cross-party collaboration. Many of Albania's political leaders showed a lack of support for core democratic values, particularly the importance of equality before the law and the rule of law. Political parties were often controlled by authoritarian leaders, a fact that was reflected in how candidates were chosen for the special municipal elections, the selection of local party leaders, and preparations for the regular local elections in May 2023.⁴⁴ More than half of Albanians polled perceived a lack of transparency in both the central government and municipal governments. In 2023, political parties, parliament, the judiciary, and prosecutorial bodies were identified as the institutions with the lowest levels of trust.⁴⁵

Albania's accession process to the EU is currently in a critical stage following the completion of the screening process meetings. The Albanian government had hoped to commence negotiations on the first cluster by the end of 2023, but this has been postponed to the first half of the current year, pending the fulfilment of opening benchmarks. For Albania's EU accession negotiations to begin, several benchmarks, particularly within the first cluster titled "Fundamentals," need to be addressed. These benchmarks revolve around the areas of judiciary and fundamental rights, corruption, organized crime, and human rights, including minority rights and freedom of expression.⁴⁶

Accordingly, the findings of the present study on the salience of political drivers in the context of violent extremism come as no surprise given Albania's progress at a snail's pace towards a consolidated rule of law, delays in implementation of judicial reform, lack of a track record in successfully prosecuting high level corruption, and the lingering trend of public distrust in institutions. The following part of this section elaborates on the findings for each of the political drivers based on the nationally representative survey.

Denial of political rights and civil liberties

Findings from the U.S. Department of State's 2022 Human Rights Report on Albania⁴⁷ indicate several concerns that indirectly point to issues with political rights and civil liberties, such as corruption across different sectors, a lack of independent media, and judicial independence and integrity issues. These problems hinder the full exercise of political freedoms and civil rights, potentially contributing to an environment where the political system may appear unresponsive to the public's needs. Civil liberties and political rights may represent a critical — but not representative — link between economic development and vulnerability to violent extremism. As such, this climate can foster the belief that violence is the only option for political change.



43 Freedom House. (2024). Freedom of the World 2021 report for Albania. Available via: <https://freedomhouse.org/country/albania/freedom-world/2024>

44 Freedom House (2023). Nations in Transit 2023 report for Albania. Available via: <https://freedomhouse.org/country/albania/nations-transit/2023>

45 Institute for Democracy and Mediation (2023). Trust in Governance Opinion Poll 2023. Available via: <https://idmalbania.org/trust-in-governance/>

46 European Commission, (2023). Albania Report 2023. Available via: https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/albania-report-2023_en#details

47 US Department of State, 2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Albania, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/albania/>



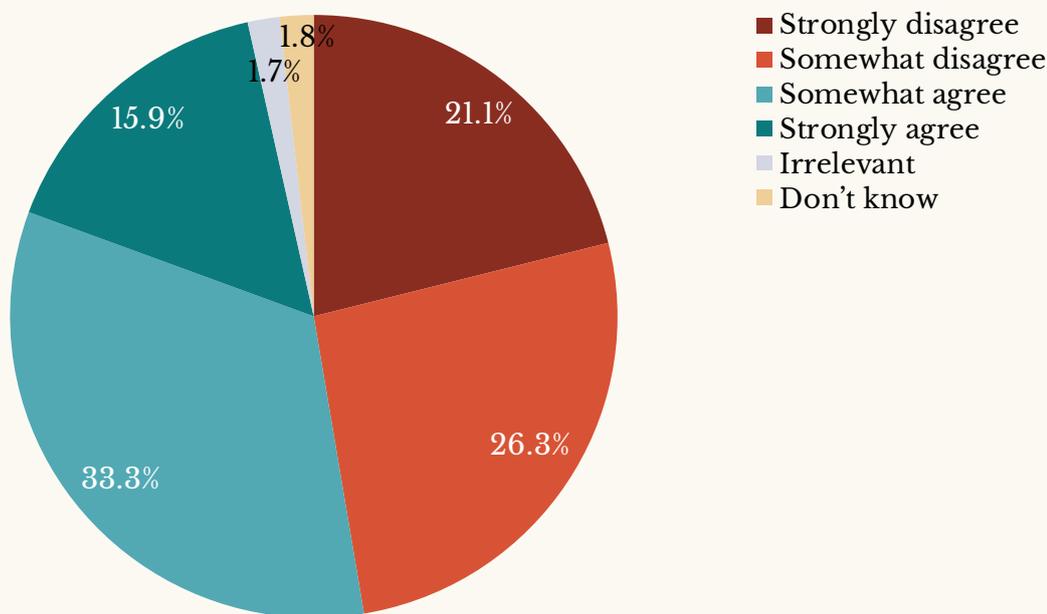
Statements in this driver:

- In general, citizens' rights and freedoms are respected by state institutions.
- The political system in Albania is unfair and has to be changed even with violence if needed.

Statement: In general, citizens' rights and freedoms are respected by state institutions.

Respondents were asked to rate whether they agree or not with the statement on a 4-point scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4). Almost half of the respondents (49.2%) agree with the statement, while 47.4% indicated disagreement with the statement. The percentage of support towards this statement remains similar as in 2021, when 48.9% of the respondents agreed with the statement.

Figure 21. Citizens' rights and freedoms are respected by state institutions (N=1600)



When checking across demographics, respondents between 55-64 years old (55%), those who have completed a Postgraduate program (59%), and those who are supporters of the ruling party, the Socialist Party (77%) are more likely to agree with the statement. No significant differences were noted when checking the demographics for believers.

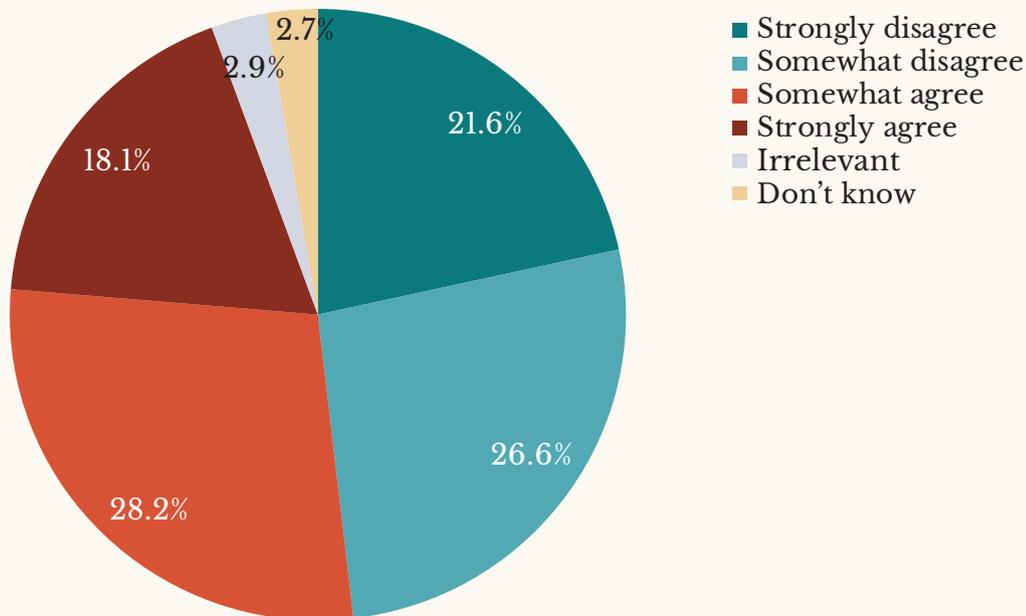
Statement: The political system in Albania is unfair and has to be changed even with violence if needed.

46.3% of the respondents agree with the statement, while 48.2% tend to disagree. When comparing with previous assessments, the trend in agreement with the statement that Albania's political system is unfair and needs change, possibly with violence, shows a slight return



towards 2018 levels, with a minor decrease from 47.7% to 46.3%, indicating a relatively stable viewpoint among respondents over the years.

Figure 22. The political system in Albania is unfair and has to be changed even with violence if needed (N=1600)



Respondents between 35-44 years old (53%), those who are unemployed (57%), those who are supporters of the Democratic Party (58%) and the PD Reestablishment Group (63%) are more likely to agree with the statement. Respondents who identified as Agnostics (100%) and Atheists (57%), and respondents who pray regularly (50%) were more inclined to agree with the statement.

Considering that a lack of political rights and civil liberties, along with closed, unresponsive political systems, can lead to a belief that violence is the only means for political change, the survey results under this driver are concerning. The data suggest that nearly half of the respondents (49.2%) believe their rights and freedoms are respected by state institutions, indicating a somewhat divided perception of the state's respect for civil liberties. This level of agreement has remained stable since 2021, suggesting that there hasn't been a significant change in public perception of rights and freedoms over the past year.

Furthermore, the agreement rate regarding the necessity for potentially violent change in the political system due to its perceived unfairness stands at 46.3%, a slight decrease from the previous assessment. This indicates a stable, yet significant, portion of the population believes that the current political system is unfair and might require drastic measures for change. This viewpoint suggests a link between the suppression of political rights and civil liberties and the propensity towards violent extremism.

Harsh government repression and gross violations of human rights

Cruel, degrading treatment (including torture) to an individual at the hands of the police or security forces can lead to a desire for revenge. The harsher and more widespread the brutality, the greater the spur to violent extremist activities and the more support violent extremism may garner from the local communities.

Statements in this driver:

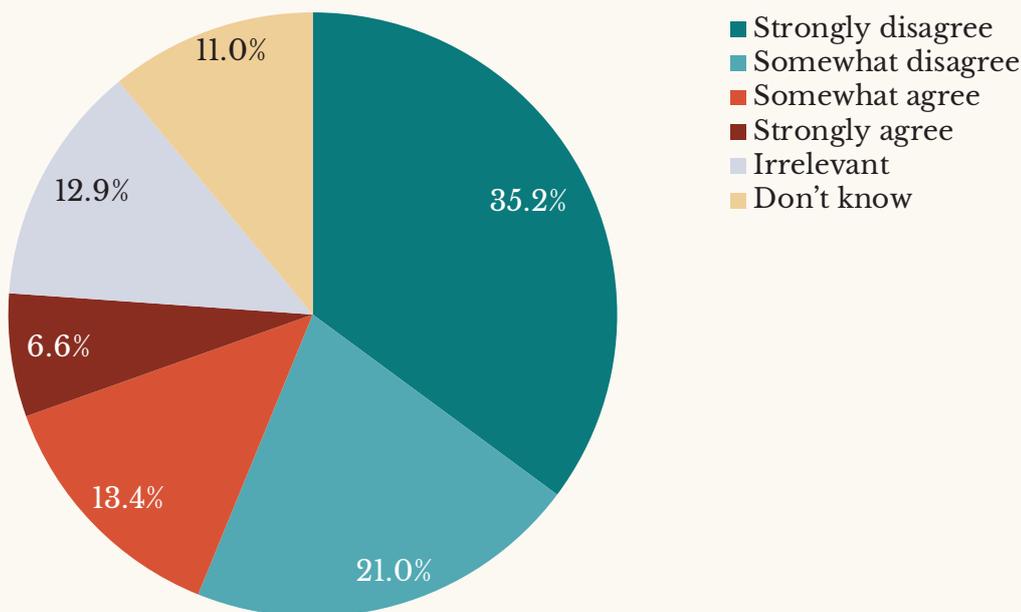
- Law enforcement institutions (police, prosecution, courts) are harsher with practicing Muslims.
- People have the right to take the law into their own hands when their rights and freedoms are denied by state institutions.

Statement: Law enforcement institutions (police, prosecution, courts) are harsher with practicing Muslims

According to 20% of the respondents, law enforcement institutions are harsher with practicing Muslims. However, 56.1% strongly disagree or somewhat disagree with the statement, whereas 23.9% find it irrelevant or do not know.

In 2023, the proportion of respondents perceiving law enforcement institutions as harsher towards practicing Muslims slightly decreased from the 2021 figure by 2.7 pp, though it remained significantly higher than in 2018 by 6.8 pp, reflecting a growing concern over differential treatment by law enforcement over this period.

Figure 23. Law enforcement institutions are harsher with practicing Muslims (N=1600)

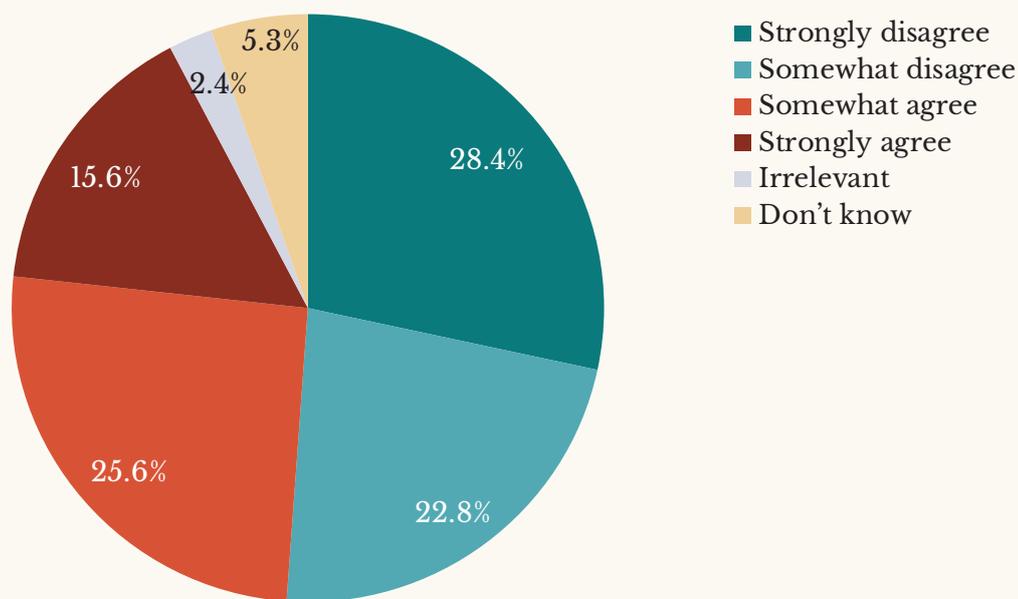


Respondents with no education (34%), supporters of the Freedom Party (32%), those who are self-employed (26%) or unemployed (27%) are more likely to agree with the statement. The same is true for respondents who regularly practice all rituals of their religion (31%) and pray on a daily or weekly basis (28%).

Statement: People have the right to take the law into their own hands when their rights and freedoms are denied by state institutions.

When asked whether people had the right to take the law into their own hands when their rights and freedoms are denied by state institutions, 41.2% of the respondents agree with the statement, while 51.2% of the respondents disagree. The 2023 findings marked an increase of 6.1 pp in this statement, compared to the 35.1% agreement rate in 2021 and slightly above the 35.8% agreement rate in 2018.

Figure 24. People have the right to take the law into their own hands when rights and freedoms are denied (N=1600)



When checking across demographics, respondents with less than primary education (49%), those who are unemployed (50%) or self-employed (47%) are more likely to agree with the statement. Supporters of opposition parties such as the Freedom Party (62%), the PD Reestablishment Group (55%) and the Democratic Party (51%) are more likely to agree with the statement. The same is true for respondents who are Bektashi (52%), as well as those who pray at religious festivals during the course of a normal year (50%).

Cruel, degrading treatment by police or security forces can fuel a cycle of revenge, potentially escalating into violent extremism and gaining local community support for such actions. To tackle the issue of police impunity, February 2022 saw the launch of an independent Police Oversight Agency, separate from the Albanian State Police, tasked with conducting investigations and ensuring law enforcement officials are held responsible for their actions. This initiative has resulted in a significant number of investigations, as well as arrests and suspensions, showcasing the government's commitment to reducing abuses within the security forces.

Nevertheless, approximately 1 in 5 respondents perceive law enforcement institutions as being harsher towards practicing Muslims, a slight decrease from 2021 but still notably higher than in 2018, indicating an increasing concern over time regarding differential treatment by law enforcement. Meanwhile, a significant portion, over 2 in 5 respondents, believe that it is justified to take the law into their own hands when their rights and freedoms are denied, marking a noticeable increase from both 2021 and 2018. This suggests a growing frustration or disillusionment with state institutions' ability to protect and respect individual rights and freedoms.

Respondents with no education, the self-employed, the unemployed, supporters of the Freedom Party, and those who regularly practice their religion are more likely to view law enforcement as harsher towards practicing Muslims. Similarly, those with less formal education, the unemployed, self-employed, and supporters of opposition parties, along with the Bektashi, and those who pray during religious festivals, are more likely to support the idea of taking the law into their own hands.

Foreign occupation

Countries subject to foreign occupation – even when this is only perceived occupation according to specific groups – are at risk of insurgency and rights abuses. Support for violent activities may derive from individuals seeking to redeem disgrace to their person and their community. Although this driver is not directly relevant for the Albanian context, the inclusion of these question – and more broadly both the drivers ‘foreign occupation’ and ‘military and/or political encroachment’ – helps us to assess citizens’ support of the 2014 amendments to the Penal Code that criminalised the acts of joining, financing, and recruiting for armed conflicts abroad.

Statements in this driver:

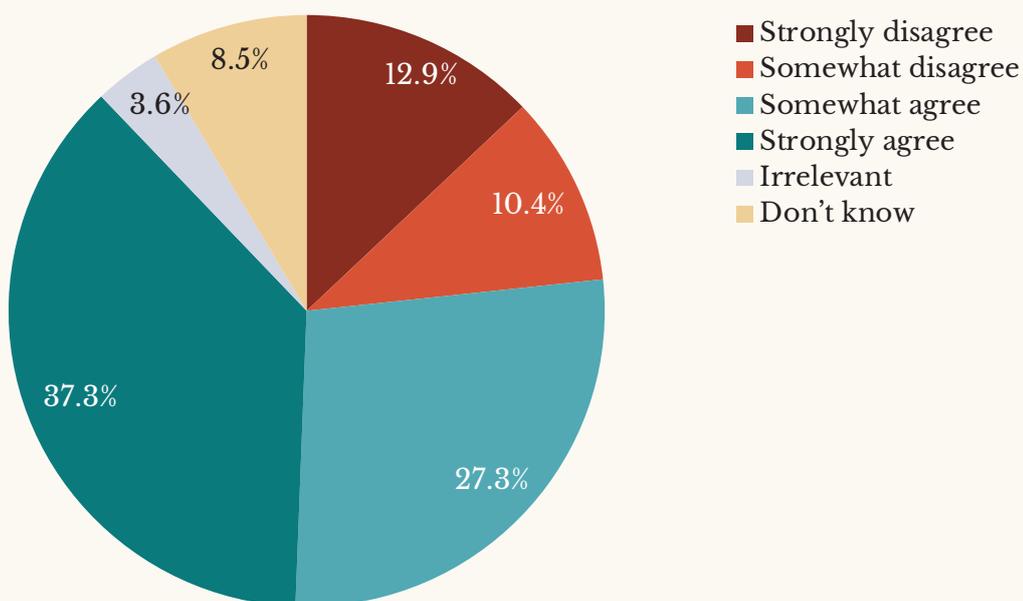
- Inciting of or engagement of civilians in armed conflicts abroad must not be allowed.
- Albania’s contribution to military missions in Afghanistan and Iraq were an insult to Muslims.

Statement: Inciting of or engagement of civilians in armed conflicts abroad must not be allowed.

Respondents were asked to rate whether they agree or not with the inciting of civilians in armed conflicts abroad must be allowed. In 2023, 64.6% of the respondents indicated they strongly agree or somewhat agree with the statement, whereas 23.3% strongly disagree or somewhat disagree with the statement.

Between 2021 and 2023, the proportion of respondents agreeing that inciting or engaging in armed conflicts abroad should be allowed, decreased by 11.4 pp from 76%, reflecting a decline in support for allowing civilians to participate in armed conflicts abroad.

Figure 25. Inciting of or engagement of civilians in armed conflicts abroad must not be allowed (N=1600)



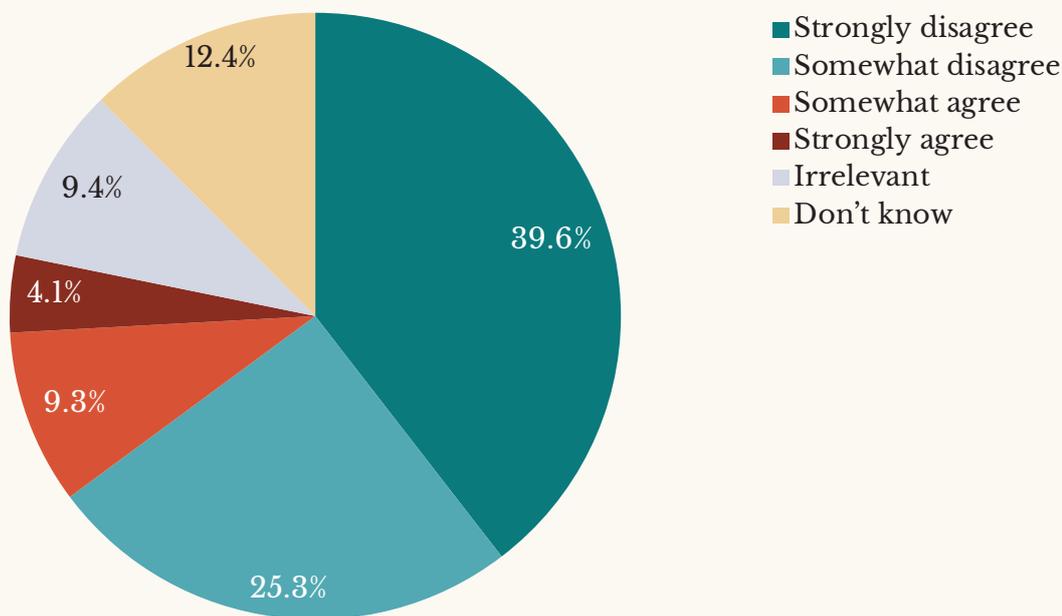
Respondents between the ages of 45-54 years old (70%) and those who are employed (70%) are more likely to agree that inciting of or engagement of civilians in armed conflicts abroad must not be allowed. Supporters of the PD Reestablishment Group (73%) are more likely to share the same opinion, indicating they are the least likely group to support the incitement of civilians to engage in armed conflicts abroad.

Statement: Albania’s contribution to military missions in Afghanistan and Iraq were an insult to Muslims.

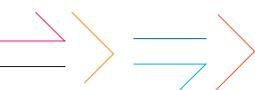
13.4% of the respondents agree with the statement, while 64.9% of the respondents somewhat disagree or strongly disagree. 9.4% indicated that the statement is irrelevant and 12.4% does not know whether to agree or disagree with the statement. Between 2021 and 2023, the agreement with the statement declined by 8.4 pp (21.8% agreeing in 2021), closely mirroring the 2018 level (13% agreeing).

When checking across demographics, supporters of the Freedom Party (24%) and the Democratic Party (20%) were more likely to agree with the statement. Respondents who regularly practice all rituals of their religion (20%) are more likely to agree that Albania’s contribution to military missions in Afghanistan and Iraq were an insult to Muslims.

Figure 26. Albania’s contribution to military missions in Afghanistan and Iraq were an insult to Muslims (N=1600)



The insights gained from these survey responses shed light on the broader attitudes and possible motivations behind the stance of Albanian respondents on participating in foreign conflicts. With 64.6% being against the involvement of Albanian civilians in conflicts abroad, there exists a pronounced consensus against such involvement. However, it's important to recognize how underlying sentiments regarding international military missions and their perceived implications on religious and cultural grounds might shape individual inclinations towards involvement in active conflicts abroad. Although



merely 13.4% view Albania's military engagements as offensive to Muslims – political, economic, or religious factors can intricately influence the perspectives of Albanians on international conflicts and their potential involvement.

Political and/or military encroachment

In this driver, we assess to what extent possible extremist narratives can build support through a perceived need to redeem religious dignity or ideology more broadly. Political or military intrusion into internal affairs can act as a unifying element, with the community resorting to violence to protect individual and collective honour.

Statements in this driver:

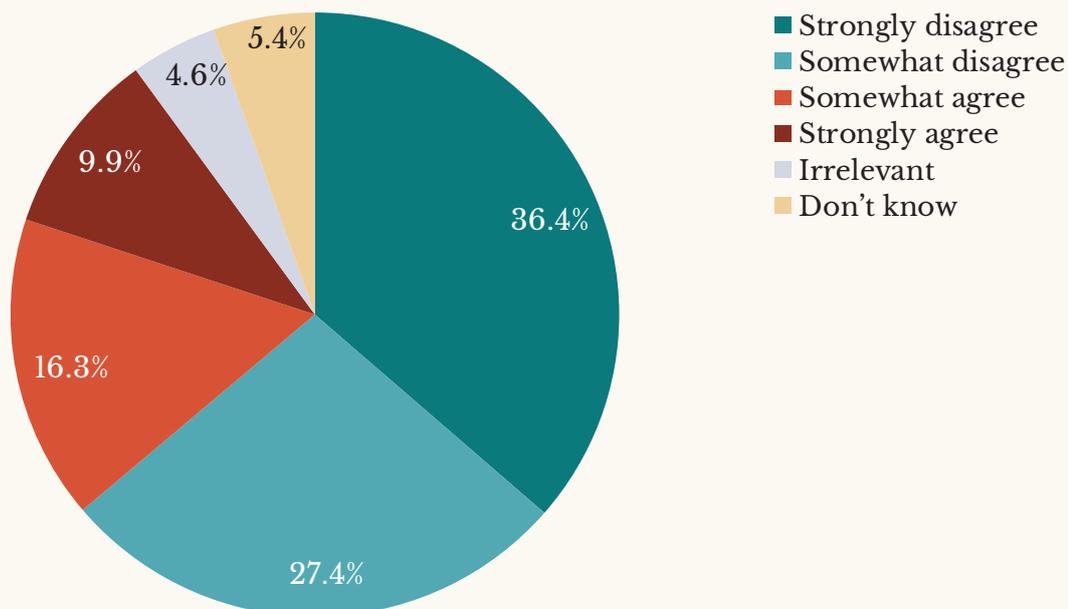
- It is the duty of every citizen to protect their ideology at any price and by any means.
- It is the duty of every believer to protect their values and religious dignity at any price and by any means.

Statement: It is the duty of every citizen to protect their ideology at any price and by any means.

26.2% of the respondents agreed with the statement, while the majority, 63.8% of the respondents, disagree.

When comparing with the 2021 findings, there is a decrease of 6.1 pp in the proportion of respondents agreeing with the statement, from 32.3% to 26.2%.

Figure 27. It is the duty of every citizen to protect their ideology at any price and by any means (N=1600)



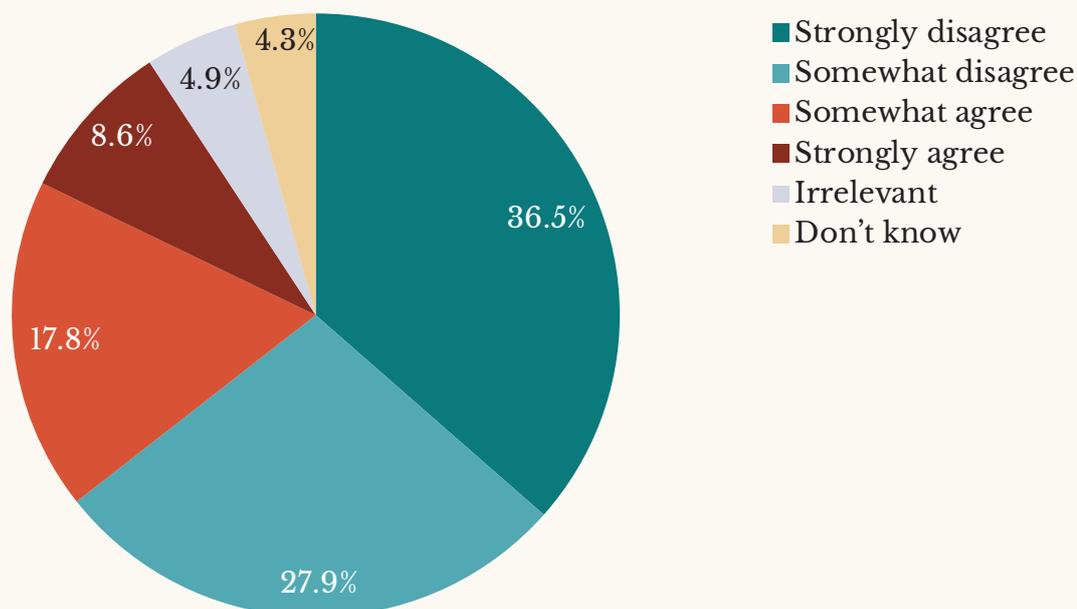
Respondents between the ages of 18-24 years old (32%) and those who are self-employed (32%) are more likely to agree that it is the duty of every citizen to protect their ideology at any price and by any means. This opinion is commonly shared also among supporters of the opposition parties such as the Freedom Party (42%), the Democratic Party (36%) and the PD Reestablishment Group (35%).

Statement: It is the duty of every believer to protect their values and religious dignity at any price and by any means.

When asked about the religious aspect, whether it is the duty of every believer to protect their values and religious dignity at any price and by any means, 26.4% indicated agreement with the statement. 64.4% of the respondents either somewhat disagree or strongly disagree with the statement.

This marks a continued decline in agreement with the statement regarding the duty of every believer to protect their values and religious dignity at any price and by any means, with a drop of 7.8 pp from 34.2% in 2021 to 26.4% in the latest survey, and a total decline of 14.2 pp from 40.6% in 2018.

Figure 28. It is the duty of every believer to protect their values and religious identity at any price and by any means (N=1600)



When checking across demographics, those with less than primary education (32%), those who are self-employed (36%), and supporters of the Freedom Party (47%), PD Reestablishment Group (43%), and the Democratic Party (40%) are more likely to agree with the statement. Among believers, those whose families belong to the Orthodox faith (34%), identify as Orthodox themselves (35%) and regularly practice all rituals of their religion (47%) are more likely to agree that it is the duty of every believer to protect their values and religious dignity at any price and by any means.

The survey findings indicate about one in four respondents agrees on the duty to protect ideology and religious dignity at all costs. Specifically, 26.2% believe it's every citizen's duty to protect their ideology by any means, a decrease from previous surveys, while a similar 26.4% uphold the duty of every believer to defend their religious values and dignity at any cost, also noting a decline. This trend suggests a growing reluctance among the population to endorse violence for ideological or religious reasons.

Young adults, the self-employed, and supporters of various opposition parties, particularly from opposition parties, such as the Freedom Party, Democratic Party, and PD Reestablishment Group, show a higher likelihood to agree with these statements. Additionally, respondents practicing Orthodox Christianity also tend to support the notion of defending ideology and religious dignity.

Endemic corruption and impunity for well-connected elites

Albania's battle against corruption has seen significant developments, particularly with the prosecution of high-profile cases such as that of a former Prime Minister (DP), former Deputy Prime Minister (SP), and former Environment Minister (SP)⁴⁸ and former Deputy Prime Minister Arben Ahmetaj (SP)⁴⁹, and the detainment of former Environment Minister, Lefter Koka⁵⁰. In 2024, the Albanian government took a significant step by establishing the position of Minister of State for Public Administration and Anticorruption, signaling a dedicated effort to address corruption systematically⁵¹. The recent report by Transparency International also recognizes the advancements made, highlighting that further substantial progress is contingent upon strengthening criminal justice legislation and ensuring effective oversight of the executive branch. However, the report places Albania in the 98th position out of 180 countries, with a score of 37 out of 100⁵², reflecting the ongoing challenges of corruption that pervade public and business sectors.

Given such a background, the reality of disengagement and political apathy in Albania is unsurprising. Yet, it can foster a sense of moral outrage. Although in Albania this is not as severe as is the case in conflict-ridden countries, it is important to examine civic engagement and potential dissatisfaction with politics and governance: the more corrupt the environment, the easier it is for violent groups to establish themselves as a righteous alternative and to lash out at immoral governing elites.

Statements in this driver:

- Albania would have more justice if more people would join my religion.
- Countries with strong religious faith have less corrupt governments.
- The impunity of people with high-ranking positions in Albania is increasingly coming to an end.

48 Reuters, 'Albanian prosecutors charge former Prime Minister Sali Berisha in corruption probe', 22 October 2023, available at <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/albanian-prosecutors-charge-former-pm-berisha-corruption-probe-2023-10-22/>.

49 Tirana Times, 'From exile, Albania's ex deputy PM alleges massive corruption at top of SP leadership', 6 February 2024, available at <https://www.tiranatimes.com/?p=154290>.

50 Gjergj Erebara, BIRN, 'Former Albanian Environment Minister Jailed for Corruption', 25 September 2023, available at <https://balkaninsight.com/2023/09/25/albania-former-minister-sentenced-for-corruption/>.

51 Euronews Albania, 'President decrees new State Minister for Public Administration and Anticorruption', 15 January 2024, available at <https://euronews.al/en/president-decrees-new-state-minister-for-public-administration-and-anticorruption/>.

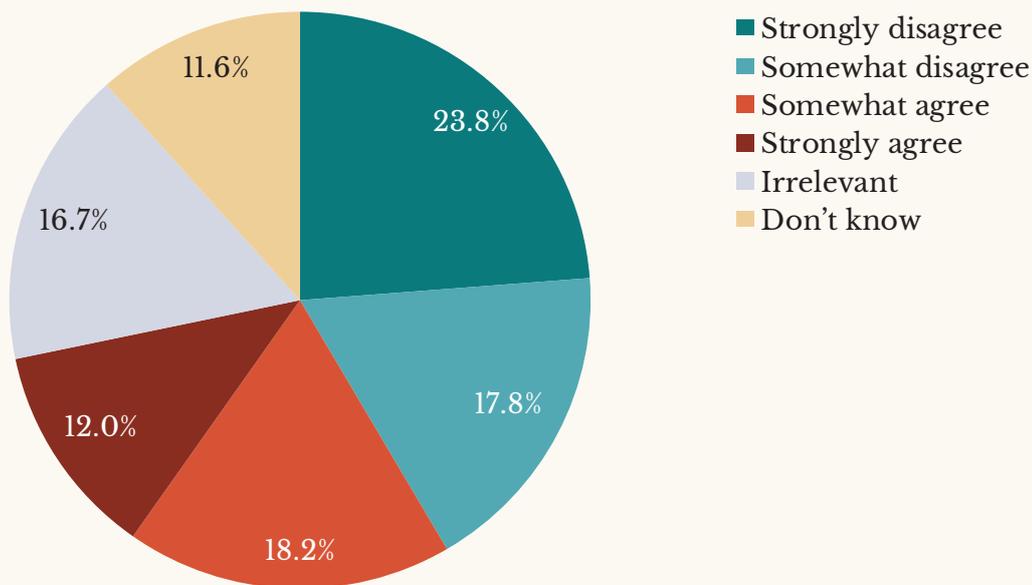
52 Transparency International, '2023', available at <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2023/index/alb>.



Statement: Albania would have more justice if more people would join my religion.

In 2023, 30% of the respondents agree with the statement, while 41.6% disagree. When comparing with 2021, the proportion of respondents believing that Albania would have more justice if more people joined their religion decreased by 8 pp, from 38.0% to 30%. This followed a modest increase of 2.5 pp from 2018 to 2021, indicating a recent shift in opinion away from this belief.

Figure 29. Albania would have more justice if more people would join my religion (N=1600)

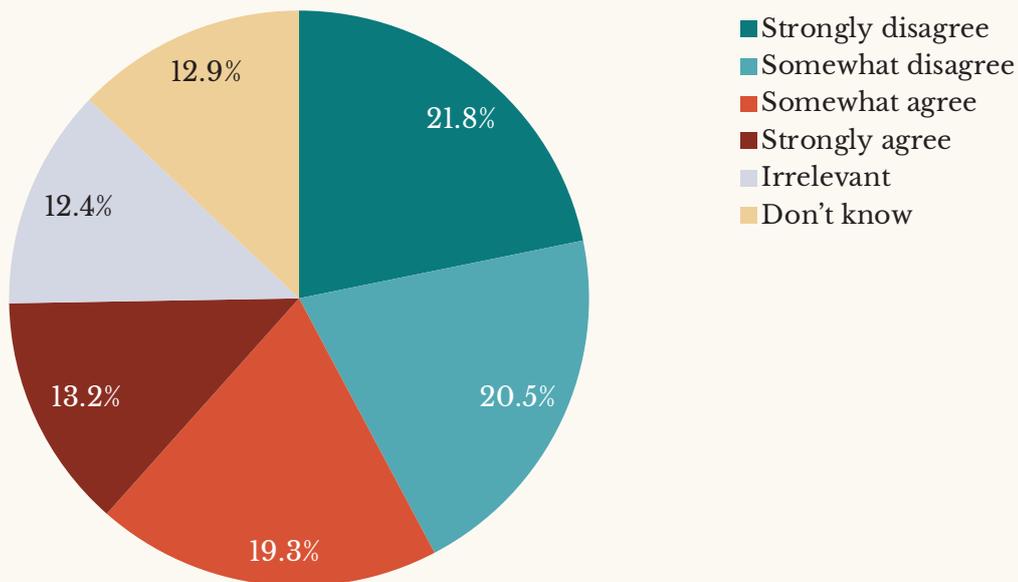


Respondents with less than primary education (46%) and supporters of the Democratic Party (38%), PD Reestablishment Group (35%) and the Freedom Party (35%) are more likely to agree with the statement. Those who adhere to the Catholic faith (40%), and those who regularly practice all rituals of their religion (54%) are more likely to agree that Albania would have more justice if more people would join their religion.

Statement: Countries with strong religious faith have less corrupt governments.

Respondents were asked to indicate whether they agree or not with the statement on a 4-point scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4). In 2023, 32.4% of the respondents agree with the statement, while 42.3% of the respondents disagree. 2023 saw a decrease of 5.9 pp in the proportion of respondents agreeing that countries with strong religious faith have less corrupt governments, dropping from 38.3% in 2021.

Figure 30. Countries with strong religious faith have less corrupt governments (N=1600)



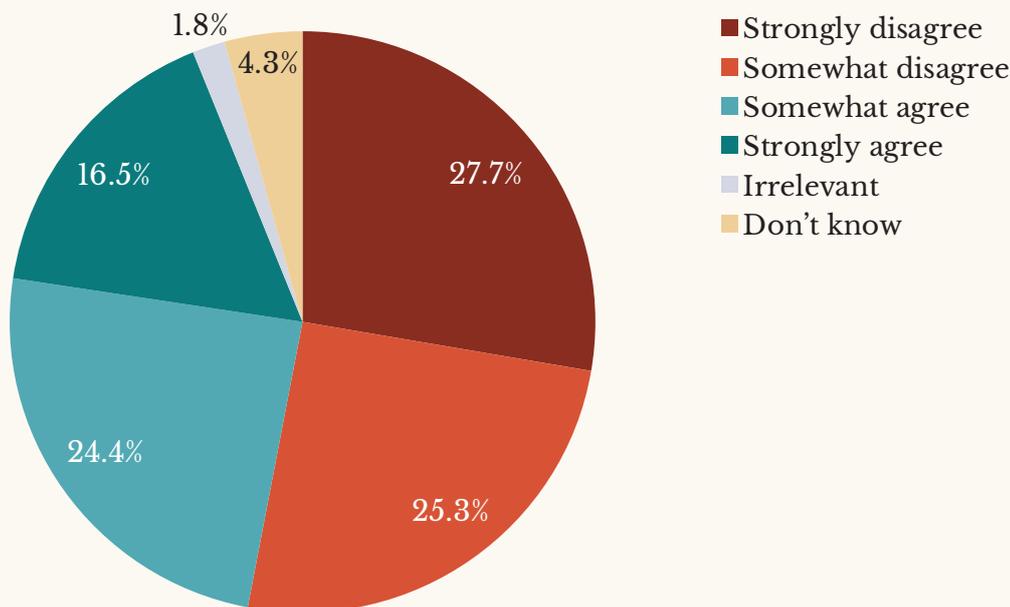
When checking across demographics, respondents over 65 years old (43%) and those with less than primary education (54%) showed a greater inclination to agree. Respondents who regularly practice all rituals of their religion (55%), those who never pray (46%) and those who pray regularly (46%) are more likely to agree that countries with strong religious faith have less corrupt governments.

Statement: The impunity of people with high-ranking positions in Albania is increasingly coming to an end.

Respondents were asked to rate whether they agree or not with the statement on a 4-point scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4). 40.9% of the respondents believe that the impunity of people with high-ranking positions in Albania is increasingly coming to an end, whereas more than half of the sample – 53% – somewhat disagreed or strongly disagreed. 6.1% of the respondents found the statement irrelevant or responded with 'Don't know'.



Figure 31. The impunity of people with high-ranking positions in Albania is increasingly coming to an end (N=1600)



Respondents with primary education (47.5%), and those who are supporters of the Socialist Party (61.8%) are more likely to agree that the impunity of people with high-ranking positions in Albania is increasingly coming to an end.

Survey findings reveal 30% believe that Albania would be more just if more people joined their religion, noting a slight decrease from previous years. This view is more prevalent among those with less education and adherents to the Catholic faith. Additionally, 32.4% agree that countries with strong religious faith have less corrupt governments, though this represents a decline in agreement, suggesting growing scepticism about the correlation between religious faith and governmental integrity. Despite some optimism, with 40.9% believing the era of impunity for high-ranking officials is ending, a majority remain sceptical, underscoring a critical perspective on the effectiveness of recent anti-corruption measures. Across demographic lines, there is a notable pattern where respondents with less education and deeper religious practices are more inclined to believe in the impact of religion on justice and the potential for overcoming governmental corruption.

Poorly governed or ungoverned areas

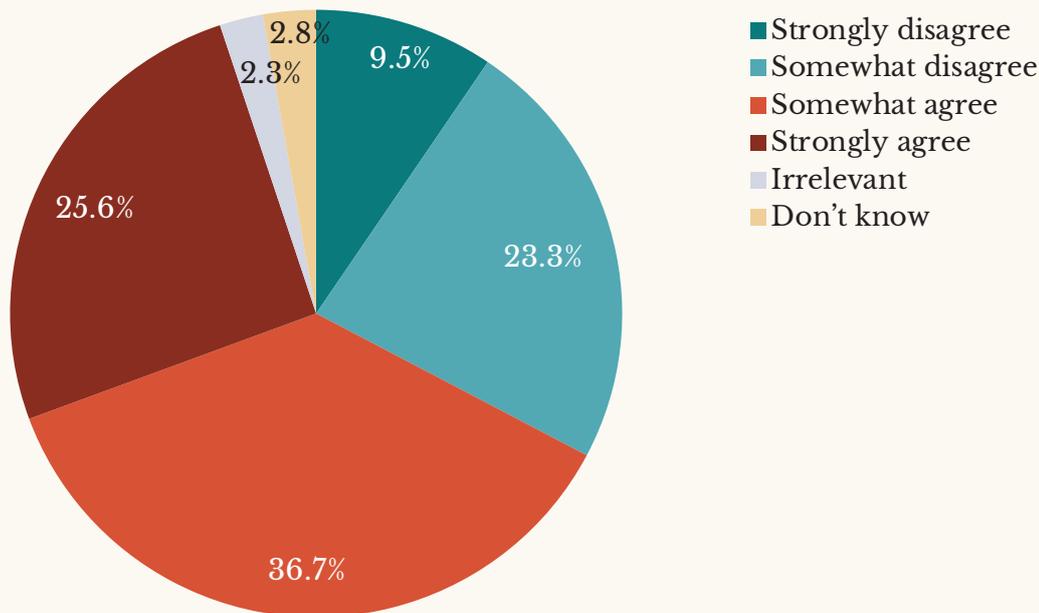
Low population density regions can traditionally constitute safe havens where violent extremist organisations can establish themselves with little hindrance, and even garner support from communities that feel ignored by the government. Violent extremist groups might gravitate towards 'states of limited strength'—as opposed to failing states—where they can have the infrastructure necessary to develop their network and carry out operations. While isolated areas that are poorly governed or ungoverned are not an issue in Albania, the present study tries to examine the extent in which Albanian citizens perceive the government as citizen-centred and as the primary (public) service provider in their area. The statements help determine the risks from possible extremist narratives but also the space for violent extremist groups to fill any gap in the provision of quality public services in certain areas. Additionally, the study looks at the presence of the state in rural areas, as well as at public perceptions on a need to monitor religious activities in Albania.

Statement: In the area where I live the 'state as law enforcement authority' is present more than the 'state as provider of public services for citizens'

In 2023, 62.3% of the respondents agree with the statement, while 32.8% disagree.

The support for the statement has slightly decreased by 1.9 pp from 64.2% in 2021, following a more substantial decrease of 6 pp from 2018 to 2021.

Figure 32. 'State as law enforcement authority' present more than the 'state as provider of public services for citizens' (N=1600)



When checking across demographics, students (67%) are more likely to agree with the statement. Opposition party supporters, such as the majority of respondents who support the Freedom Party (71%) and the PD Reestablishment Group (70%) are more likely to view the state as law enforcement authority, rather than as a provider of public services for citizens in the area where they live.

Statements in this driver:

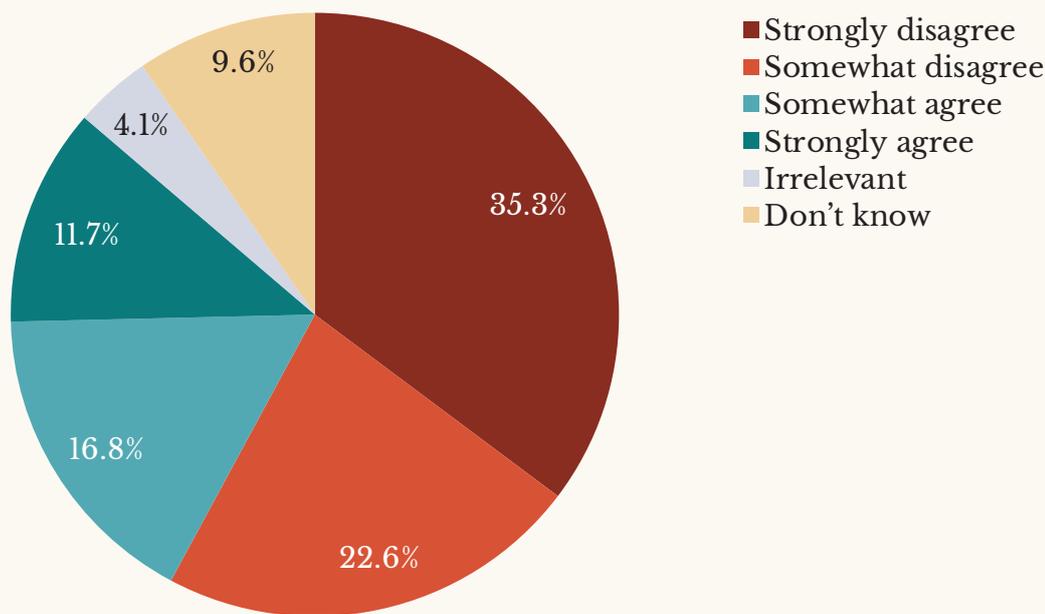
- In the area where I live the 'state as law enforcement authority' is present more than the 'state as provider of public services for citizens'
- Religious activities should not be overseen by the state.

Statement: Religious activities should not be overseen by the state.

Respondents were asked to indicate whether they agree or not with the statement on a 4-point scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4). In 2023, 28.5% of the respondents agree with the statement, while the majority, 57.9% of the respondents disagree. The agreement level with the statement dropped by 9.2 pp, from 37.7% in 2021.



Figure 33. Religious activities should not be overseen by the state (N=1600)



Respondents between the ages of 35-44 years old (35%), those with no education or less than primary education (47%) and those who support the Freedom Party (41%) are slightly more inclined to agree with the statement. Among religious believers, the Evangelical (67%) are slightly more inclined to agree with the statement, as well as those who regularly practice all rituals of their religion (39%).

A significant majority of Albanians view the state more in terms of law enforcement than as a provider of essential services to citizens, with 62.3% agreeing with this perspective. Although the prevailing view is of the state's role being as predominantly authoritative, the agreement rate has slightly diminished since 2021. Demographically, students and supporters of opposition parties are notably more likely to perceive the state in this manner.

Regarding the oversight of religious activities by the state, less than one-third of respondents agree that religious activities should not be monitored by the state, reflecting a significant decrease in agreement from 2021 and indicating that increasingly more people support state involvement in religious affairs. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that individual interpretations of the statement "Religious activities should not be overseen by the state" are influenced by a matrix of factors, including personal experiences, cultural backgrounds, and the prevailing political climate. Responses to this statement may vary significantly; a portion of the respondents may advocate for the principle of secular governance, emphasizing the importance of a government that formulates its laws and policies grounded in rationality, equality, and universal principles, rather than religious ideologies. Conversely, other respondents might perceive the statement as a direct encroachment on their religious freedoms, interpreting it as a potential risk to their religious expressions, such as the mandated removal of religious symbols in public spaces or educational settings.

This perspective varies across different age groups, educational backgrounds, and political affiliations, with those aged 35-44, those with less or no education, and supporters of the Freedom Party showing a higher inclination to resist state oversight of religious practices. Evangelicals and those deeply engaged in their religious practices also show a significant preference for less state interference in religious activities.

Discredited governments and missing or co-opted legal oppositions

The 2023 general elections in Albania was conducted relatively smoothly, yet issues such as the improper use of government resources, reports of coercion against voters and public employees, and accusations of purchasing votes were noted. The election saw a notably low participation rate of just 38.2%. Furthermore, the European Union Commission's progress report for 2023 on Albania pointed out ongoing political polarization, set against a backdrop of enduring significant rifts within the major opposition faction, the Democratic Party (DP).

This driver suggests that the combination of a thoroughly discredited government and a missing, “tamed” or co-opted legal opposition appears to be particularly conducive to the development of VE. Populations that view the existing order as bankrupt, and that do not believe that they can change or reform the political system through peaceful, legal means, provide an audience that is particularly susceptible to the message of VE organizations. To shed light on this topic, the researchers designed the statements below, underscoring a scenario where the government's misuse of institutions and collusion with criminal elements, alongside a compromised or ineffective opposition, fuel public disillusionment with the political system.

Statements in this driver:

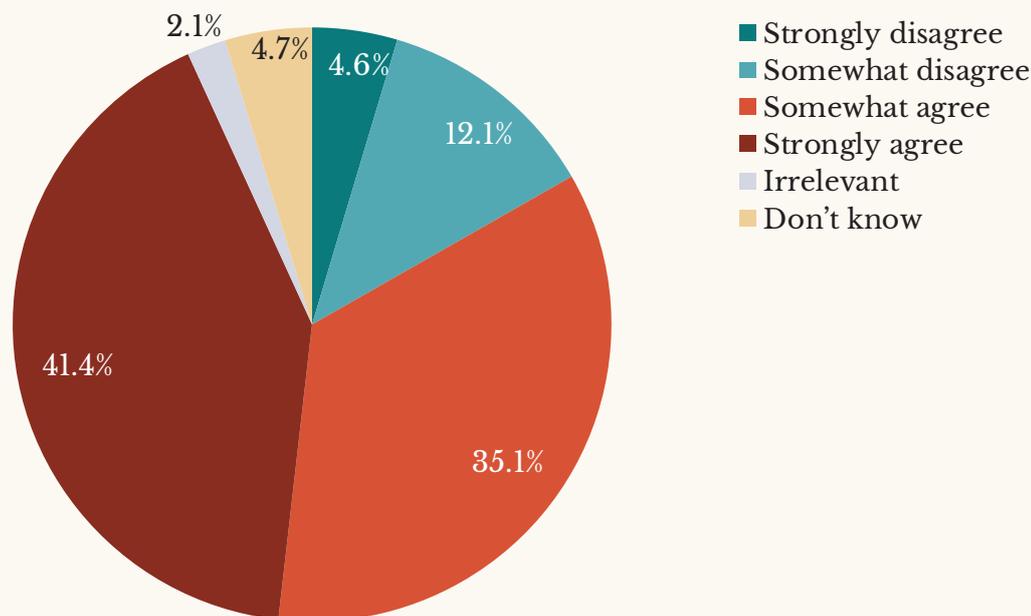
- Governing actors in Albania misuse state institutions and resources for narrow political interests.
- Some members of the political elite have connections with criminals and serve each other's interests.
- The political opposition in Albania offers alternatives and hope for more good governance.

Statement: Governing actors in Albania misuse state institutions and resources for narrow political interests.

The majority of the respondents, 76.5%, somewhat agree or strongly agree that governing actors in Albania misuse state institutions and resources for narrow political interests. Disagreeing with the statement, 16.7% of the respondents do not share the same belief. 6.8% of the respondents find the statement irrelevant or are unsure about it.



Figure 34. Governing actors in Albania misuse state institutions and resources for narrow political interests (N=1600)

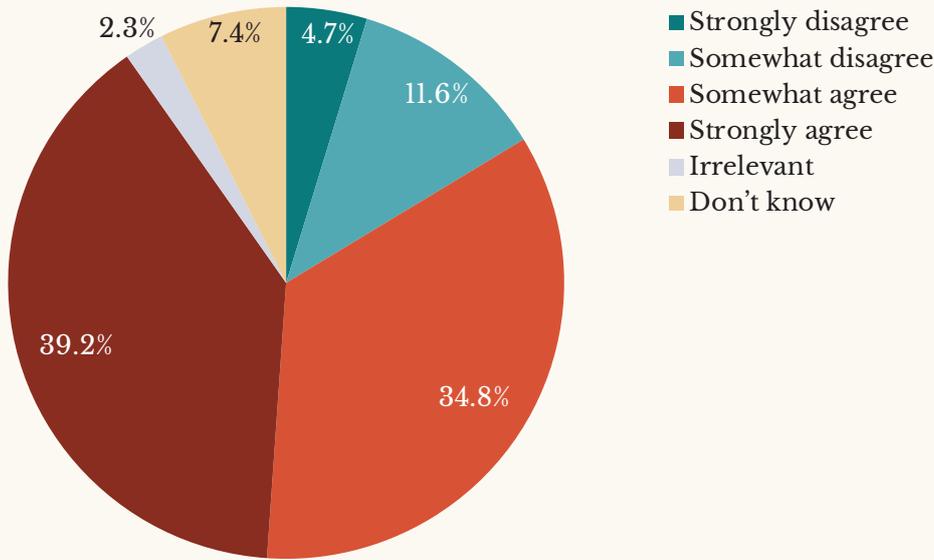


Those who are supporters of the PD Reestablishment Group (92.5%), other parties (88.9%), the Democratic Party (85.9%), or not supportive of any party at all (83.4%), are more inclined to agree that governing actors in Albania misuse state institutions and resources for narrow political interests. This view is mostly shared among unemployed respondents (84.2%) and students (82.1%).

Statement: Some members of the political elite have connections with criminals and serve each other's interests.

74% of the sample agrees that some members of the political elite have connections with criminals and serve each other's interests. Conversely, 16.3% of the respondents somewhat disagree or strongly disagree with the statement. 9.7% of the respondents find the statement irrelevant or noted they do not know.

Figure 35. Some members of the political elite have connections with criminals and serve each-other's interests (N=1600)

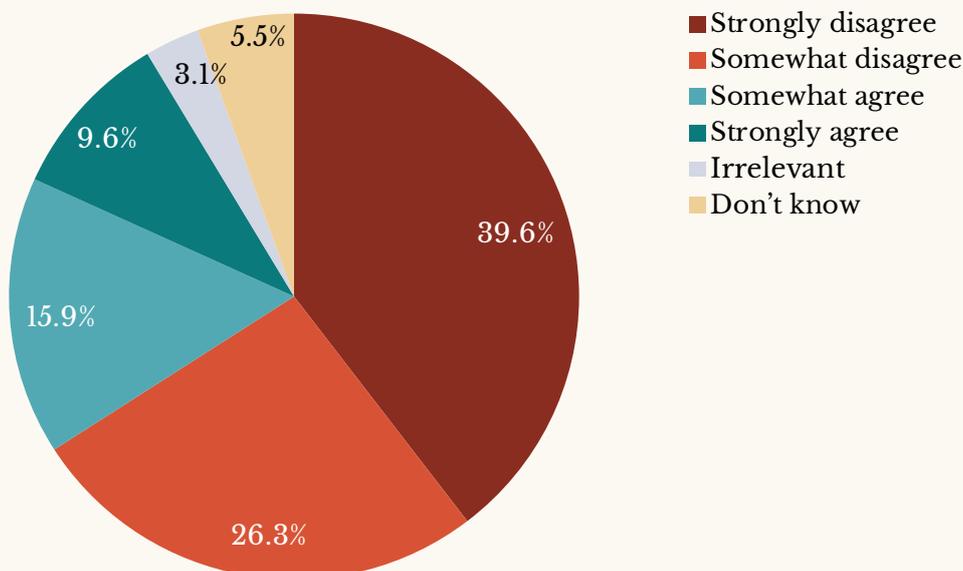


Those who are supporters of the PD Reestablishment Group (95%), other parties (88.9%), not supporters of any party (80.6%), or the Democratic Party (80.4%) are more likely to agree that some members of the political elite have connections with criminals and serve each other's interests.

Statement: The political opposition in Albania offers alternatives and hope for more good governance.

A quarter of the sample believes that political opposition in Albania offers alternatives and hope for more good governance, with 25.5% somewhat agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement. Conversely, 65.9% somewhat disagree or strongly disagree with this statement.

Figure 36. The political opposition in Albania offers alternatives and hope for more good governance (N=1600)



When checking across demographics, respondents over 65 years old (33%), and those with less than primary education (46%) were found to be more likely to agree that the political opposition in Albania offers alternatives and hope for more good governance. This view is shared mostly among supporters of the PD Reestablishment Group (40%), Freedom Party (35%), and other parties (33%).

In the context of the low voter turnout in the latest general elections and allegations of electoral misconduct, these findings reflect the public perceptions of political integrity and governance. A substantial 76.5% of respondents agree that governing actors in Albania misuse state institutions and resources for their political interests, and a similar sentiment is shared among 74% concurring that some members of the political elite have connections with criminals. Contrastingly, only a quarter of the sample, 25.5%, believes that the political opposition in Albania offers hopeful alternatives for better governance. These findings illustrate a deep-seated disillusionment with both the governing bodies and the opposition, potentially exacerbating vulnerabilities to VE due to perceived systemic failings.

Supporters of the PD Reestablishment Group consistently show the highest level of agreement with the statements regarding both the misuse of state resources (93%) and the connections between political elites and criminals (95%). This strong consensus is also reflected among supporters of various political groups, including the governing Socialist Party (SP), indicating a broad-based concern that transcends party loyalties. Within respondents who support the SP, 51% concur that governing figures exploit state institutions and resources, while 49% acknowledge that certain members of the political elite maintain relationships with criminals, mutually benefiting from these connections.

The unemployed (84%) and students (82%) suggest they are the most observant of the political and economic ramifications of such misuse and connections. Furthermore, optimism towards the opposition's capacity for introducing positive change is more likely to be found among older individuals and those with less formal education, and is particularly evident amongst supporters of the PD Reestablishment Group and the Freedom Party. This pattern suggests that while disillusionment with the political system is widespread, certain demographics—potentially due to their socio-economic status, political affiliations, or experiences—show a more acute perception of the issues at hand.

Intimidation or coercion by VE groups

Where governments cannot provide security and protection for its citizens, violent extremist groups use intimidation and coercion to force support for their movement. Although this driver does not describe the Albanian reality, hidden forms of coercion or even peer pressure that might cause one to adhere to, or tolerate, radical or violent extremist ideologies. To assess this driver in the Albanian context, the present survey sought to assess whether respondents were likely to denounce members of their own community who hold religious extremist views.

As reported in the cultural drivers section and the chapter on other emerging threats, the survey findings indicate that while religious extremism is recognized more often than ethno-nationalist extremism, both are considerably less prevalent than political extremism according to the perceptions of the surveyed population. Specifically, religious extremism is reported by 6.6% of respondents, marking it as less frequently observed than political extremism, which 16.3% of participants noted, but more prevalent than ethno-nationalist extremism, acknowledged by only 3.5%.

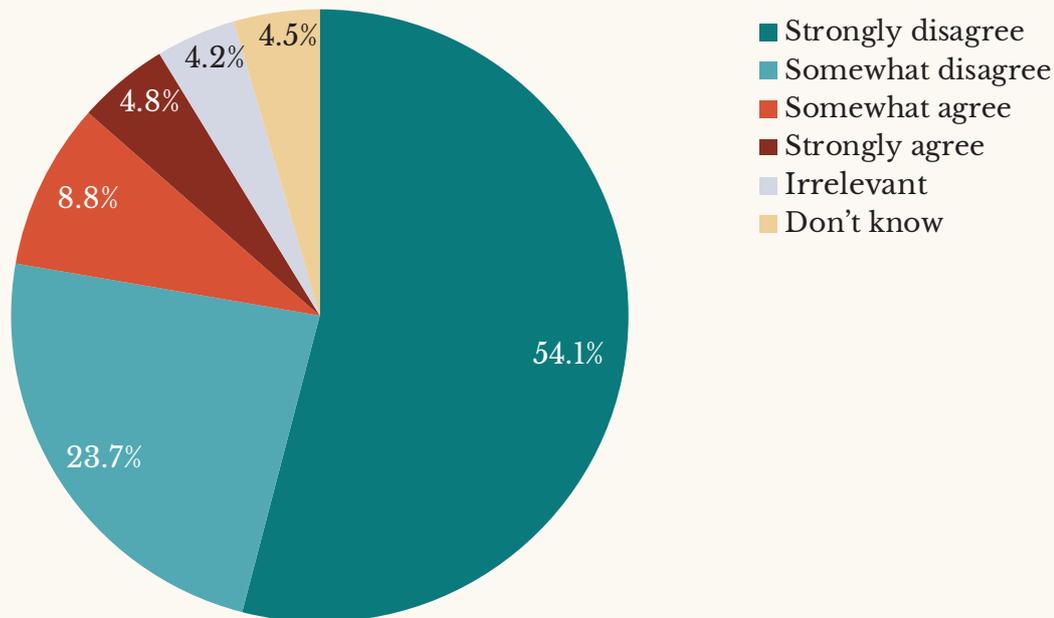
Statement in this driver:

- ☞ A true believer should not denounce members of their own community who hold religious extremist views.



Respondents were asked to indicate whether they agree or not with the statement on a 4-point scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4). 13.6% of the respondents agree with the statement, while 77.8% of the respondents disagree. Support for the statement has remained stable over time, witnessing a minimal increase of 1.1 pp from 2018 to 2021 and a similar increase from 2021 to 2023.

Figure 37. A true believer should not denounce members of their own community who hold religious extremist views (N=1600)



When checking across demographics, respondents with less than primary education (24%), those who are self-employed (19%) are more likely to agree with the statement. The view is commonly shared among those who are supporters of the PD Reestablishment Group (23%) and the Democratic Party (19%) are more likely to agree with the statement.

In an environment where governmental security and protection might be lacking, the potential for violent extremist groups to employ intimidation and coercion to garner support is a recognized concern. However, this driver does not fully align with the situation in Albania, where subtler forms of coercion or peer pressure could influence individuals to accept or tolerate radical ideologies. Regarding community denouncement of religious extremism, a significant majority (77.8%) of respondents disagreed with the statement that a true believer should not denounce members of their own community who hold religious extremist views, indicating disapproval of religious extremism.

Perception that the international system is fundamentally unfair and hostile to Muslim societies and people

In the Western Balkans, Albania stands out for its strong pro-European sentiment, with the latest data indicating a notable enthusiasm for EU membership, with support rising to



92%, marking an increase from previous years⁵³. International organizations typically enjoy widespread support and they continuously rank as the most trusted institutions in Albania. The latest Trust in Governance report ranks NATO (77%), the UN (74%) and the EU (75%) as the most trusted institutions, as opposed to the parliament (29%) and political parties (26%)⁵⁴.

Religious tolerance in Albania is considered as a core societal value deeply rooted in the country's tradition and civic values. However, the rise of populism worldwide and prejudices in EU countries, especially towards refugees from Muslim countries, have reached the domestic public and influenced their opinions. In such a context, populations may accept violent extremist propaganda that the global political and economic system discriminates against the Muslim world, which can mesh with personal or communal feelings of discrimination. In order to examine this driver, this study looked at the perceptions of Albanians towards the international system and the West, both globally and in the Balkans region, including perceptions regarding the EU and the USA.

Statements in this driver:

- Global political and economic structures (e.g. UN, IMF) are an invention of the West to rule Muslim countries.
- Countries with a Christian majority population in the Balkans have had more support from the West precisely due to their religious affiliation.
- The European Union has been unfair with countries in the Balkans with a considerable Muslim population (Albania, Kosovo, BiH, North Macedonia).
- USA has been unfair with countries in the Balkans with a considerable Muslim population (Albania, Kosovo, BiH, North Macedonia).

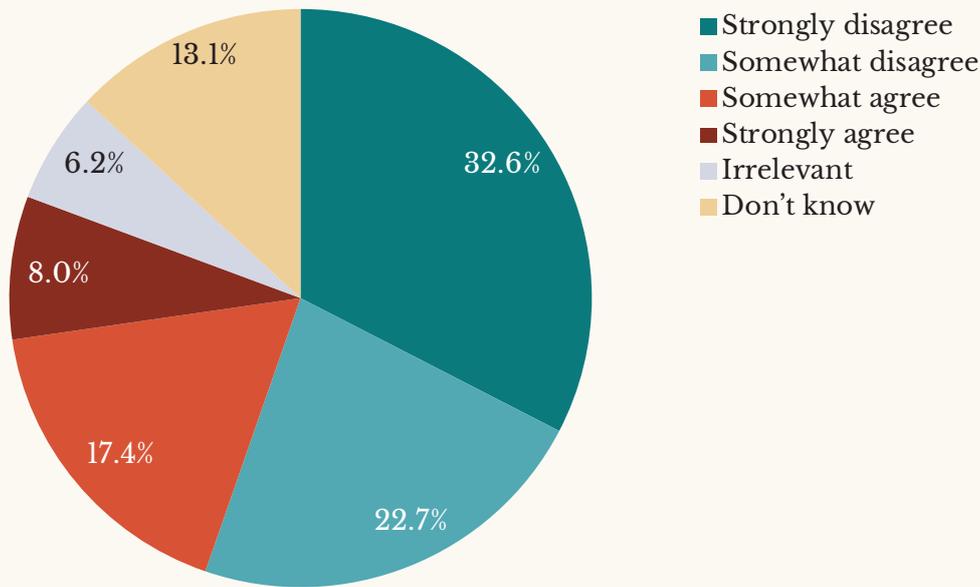
Statement: Global political and economic structures (e.g. UN, IMF) are an invention of the West to rule Muslim countries.

Respondents were asked to indicate whether they agree or not with the statement 'on a 4-point scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4). 25.4% of the respondents somewhat agree or strongly agree with the statement, while 55.3% of the respondents disagree. 13.1% of the respondents did not know whether to agree or disagree and 6.2% found the statement irrelevant. The agreement with the statement that global political and economic structures are a Western invention to rule Muslim countries slightly decreased by 0.8 percentage points in 2023 to 25.4% from 26.2% in 2021, following a 7.7 percentage point increase from 2018's 18.5%.

53 Regional Cooperation Council, 'Balkan Barometer 2023 Public Opinion', available at <https://www.rcc.int/balkanbarometer/publications>.

54 Institute for Democracy and Mediation (2023). Trust in Governance Opinion Poll 2023. Available via: <https://idmalbania.org/trust-in-governance/>

Figure 38. Global political and economic structures (e.g. UN, IMF) are an invention of the West to rule Muslim countries (N=1600)



Supporters of the Freedom Party (56%), the Democratic Party (37%) and the PD Reestablishment Group (35%) are more likely to believe that the global political and economic structures are an invention of the West to rule Muslim countries. This perception is commonly shared among those who regularly practice all rituals of their religion (42%) and pray regularly (40%).

Statement: Countries with a Christian majority population in the Balkans have had more support from the West precisely due to their religious affiliation.

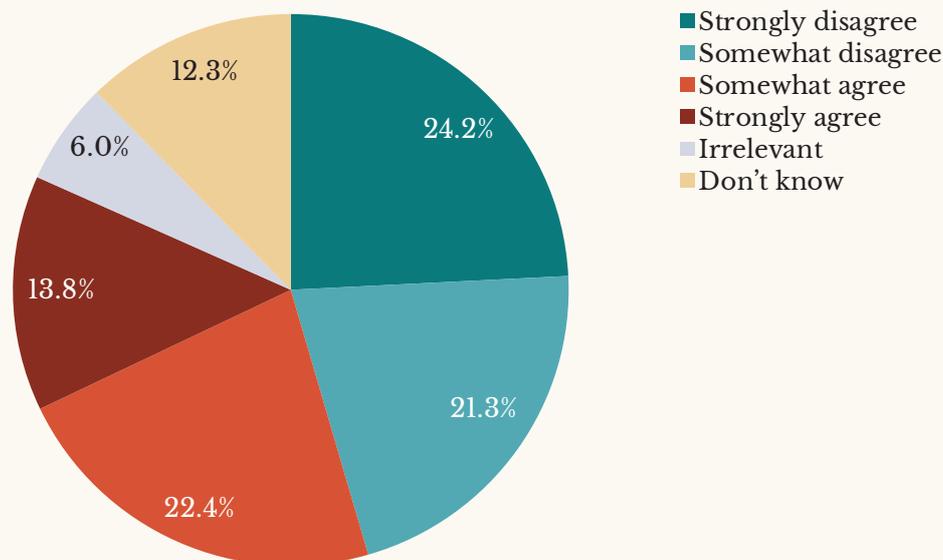
36.2% of the respondents somewhat agree or strongly agree with the statement, while 45.5% of the respondents disagree. 18.3% does not know or find the statement irrelevant.

In 2023, the level of agreement with the statement decreased by 11 pp from its 2021 peak (47.2% agreed), yet it was 1.7 pp higher than the 2018 level (34.5% agreed).

Respondents who support opposition parties, such as the PD Reestablishment Group (65%), the Freedom party (62%) and the Democratic Party (44%) are more likely to agree with the statement. Respondents who are postgraduates (49%), those who regularly practice all rituals of their religion (51%) and pray regularly (57%), and those who never pray (46%) are more likely to believe that countries with a Christian majority population in the Balkans have had more support from the West precisely due to their religious affiliation.



Figure 39. Countries with a Christian majority population in the Balkans have had more support from the West precisely due to their religious affiliation (N=1600)



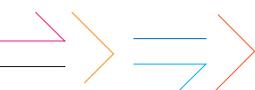
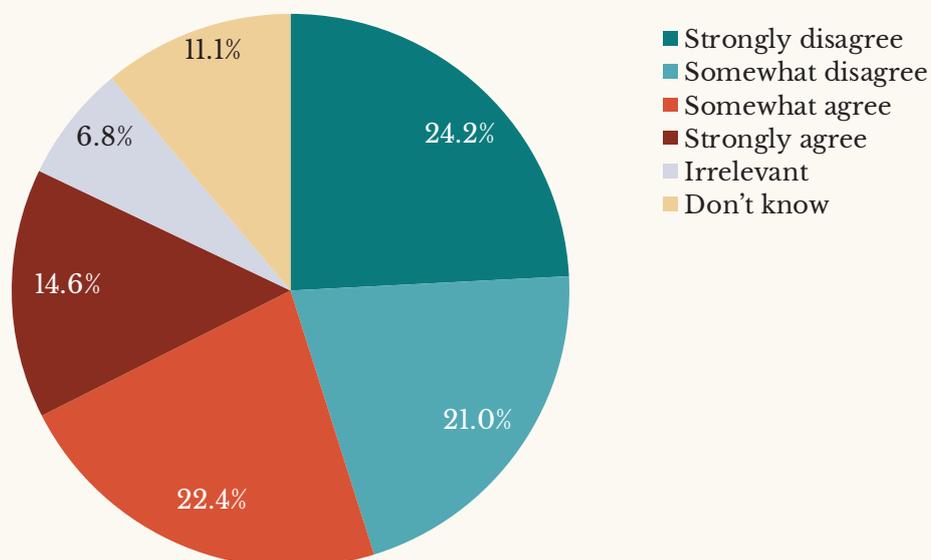
Statement: The European Union has been unfair with countries in the Balkans with a considerable Muslim population (Albania, Kosovo, BiH, North Macedonia).

37% of the respondents agree with the statement, while 45.2% of the respondents disagree.

Although the proportion of respondents agreeing to this statement decreased by 6.9 pp from 43.9% in 2021, it still marks a significant increase of 9.3 pp from the 27.7% recorded in 2018, indicating a sustained rise in concerns over the EU's fairness towards Balkan countries with a considerable Muslim population.

When checking across demographics, respondents who are postgraduates (47%) and those who are Bektashi (44%) are more likely to believe that the European Union has been unfair with countries in the Balkans with a considerable Muslim population.

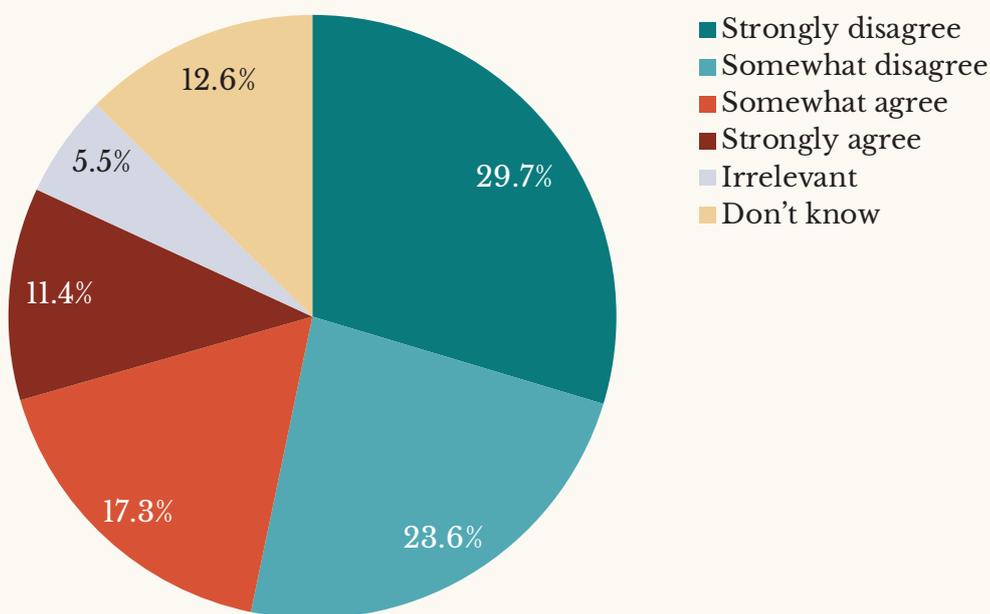
Figure 40. The EU has been unfair with countries in the Balkans with a considerable Muslim population (N=1600)



Statement: USA has been unfair with countries in the Balkans with a considerable Muslim population (Albania, Kosovo, BiH, North Macedonia).

Respondents were asked to indicate whether they agree or not with the statement on a 4-point scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4). In 2023, 28.7% of the respondents agree with the statement, while 53.3% of the respondents disagree. Slightly less respondents tend to agree with the statement regarding the USA's fairness towards Balkan countries with considerable Muslim populations. The agreement rate decreased by 6.3 pp from 2021 to 2023, after having increased by 13.4 pp from 2018 to 2021.

Figure 41. USA has been unfair with countries in the Balkans with a considerable Muslim population (N=1600)



When checking across demographics, respondents who support opposition parties such as the Freedom Party (53%), the PD Reestablishment Group (43%) and the Democratic Party (41%) are more likely to agree with the statement. Respondents who regularly pray (49%) and practice all rituals of their religion (44%) are more likely to perceive USA as being unfair to Balkan countries with a considerable Muslim population.

Approximately 1 in 4 respondents believe that global political and economic structures are designed by the West to dominate Muslim countries, marking a slight decrease from previous years. Similarly, 36.2% agree that Christian-majority Balkan countries receive more Western support due to their religious affiliation, showing a decrease from previous years but still slightly higher than in 2018. Concerns about the European Union's fairness towards Balkan countries with significant Muslim populations are agreed upon by about 37% of respondents, despite a decrease from 2021, indicating a sustained rise in concerns over time. The perception of the USA's fairness also saw a decrease in agreement, with about 28.7% concurring.

Supporters of opposition parties such as the Freedom Party, Democratic Party, and PD Reestablishment Group are more inclined to view international structures and Western support as biased against Muslim countries or in favor of Christian-majority nations. This belief is also stronger among those regularly engaged in religious practices, indicating a correlation between political leanings, religious devotion, and perceptions of international fairness. Postgraduates and those adhering to the Bektashi faith, show higher levels of agreement with statements critiquing the fairness of the EU and USA.



Political drivers – conclusion

Out of nine drivers analysed in the category of political drivers to violent extremism, three drivers seem particularly relevant in the Albanian context: (1) Denial of political rights and civil liberties, (6) Poorly governed or ungoverned areas, (7) Discredited governments and missing or co-opted legal oppositions, and one additional driver which is somewhat relevant: (5) Endemic corruption and impunity for well-connected elites, and in some communities. These drivers are supported by approximately half of respondents and more often than not by people with low levels of education.

The survey points to increased saliency for political drivers, where nearly half of the respondents (49.2%) feel their rights and freedoms are respected by state institutions, revealing a divided perception of civil liberties respect. Stability in this perception since 2021 suggests no significant shift in public views on rights and freedoms. Additionally, almost half of the population (46.3%) sees the political system as unfair and potentially necessitates violent change. These findings underscore the link between the suppression of political rights, civil liberties, and the inclination towards violent extremism. Moreover, 30% of respondents believe Albania would be fairer with more adherence to their religion, with decreased confidence in the correlation between religious faith and governmental integrity.

In terms of governance and state roles, a majority view the state primarily as an enforcer rather than a service provider. The diminished agreement on the state's oversight of religious activities suggests a growing support for state involvement in religious affairs, influenced by various factors including cultural backgrounds and political climate. Furthermore, widespread disillusionment with political governance is evident, with a high percentage of respondents acknowledging the misuse of state resources by governing actors and their connections with criminals, alongside a minimal belief in the opposition offering better governance solutions. This disillusionment spans across political affiliations, with notable observations among the unemployed and students, indicating a broad-based concern for political integrity and the potential exacerbation of vulnerabilities to extremism due to perceived systemic failings.

The findings point to a landscape marked by dissatisfaction with state institutions, perceived international biases, and a critical stance towards extremism and involvement in external conflicts. A significant majority (77.8%) express disapproval of religious extremism, showing strong communal rejection. Moreover, 64.6% oppose Albanians' involvement in foreign conflicts, indicating a consensus against such participation. Additionally, about one in four respondents sees the protection of ideology and religious dignity as paramount, albeit with a decline in such views, suggesting a slight predisposition towards violence for ideological or religious reasons. Over 40% of respondents justify self-administered justice when feeling their rights and freedoms are compromised, highlighting a growing disillusionment with the state's protective roles. Notably, around one in five respondents perceives a bias in law enforcement against practicing Muslims, suggesting concerns over unequal treatment. On the international front, slight concerns persist about the fairness of the European Union and the perceived bias of Western support towards Christian-majority Balkan countries, with approximately 36.2% and 37% noting these issues, respectively.



5.3 Cultural drivers

The Western Balkans is an intersection of Western and Eastern influences, which create a diverse tapestry of ethnic and religious groups where faith intertwines with local tradition. The ripple effects of global conflicts, coupled with pervasive technology that conveys real-time information, results in a sharp convergence of local dynamics and traditions with broader, international issues.

The identity of individuals is also important in this context. Identity can be understood in two linked senses, which may be termed 'social' and 'personal'. A 'social identity' refers simply to a set of persons marked by a label and distinguished by rules deciding membership and (alleged) characteristic features or attributes. In the second case, a personal identity is some distinguishing characteristic (or characteristics) that a person takes a special pride in or views as socially consequential but more-or-less unchangeable.⁵⁵ Religion can be part of these two senses, and while religious individuals maintain rooted connections in their local communities, a sense of belonging to a broader global community of believers persists. This may occur naturally, but it may also be propagated by groups and individuals who also belong to that specific in-group. As asserted by Roy (2013), fundamentalist and radical movements within major world religions seek to detach religion from its cultural roots, presenting it as 'pure religion', and thereby making it conducive to globalization.⁵⁶ This kind of supranational religious identification remains relatively weak in the Balkans, having been shaped by the diverse experiences of nation-building, modernization and secularism during periods of communism and transition.⁵⁷ Indeed in the case of Albania, this supranational religious identification has not spread because Albanians, the majority of whom are Sunni Muslims, have developed a pluralistic approach to religion, and have also had a long exposure to secularism and nationalism for most of the post-Ottoman period in the early twentieth century.⁵⁸

Violent extremist propaganda is designed to exploit such identity issues and provide its audience with a dichotomist discourse of 'us versus them'.⁵⁹ While Albania, like other predominantly Muslim communities in the Balkans, has traditionally maintained limited transnational links and rejected a dichotomist discourse, the allure of a global jihad against the West disseminated through violent extremist propaganda, has found resonance among vulnerable and radicalized Muslims in the country.

To delve deeper into the perceptions of individuals in the region, we have incorporated a section on cultural drivers in our survey. Building upon Denoeux and Carter's (2009) framework,⁶⁰ we explore three key cultural drivers relevant to religious-based violent extremism: (1) religion under siege; (2) broader cultural threats; and (3) proactive religious agendas. This approach aims to unravel the complex interplay of cultural influences and identity preservation in the face of evolving global dynamics. In addition, we have included questions relating to another driver – 'disputed authority of religious institutions' – in order to explore the Albanian context further.

55 Fearon, J. (1999), 'What is identity (as we now use the word)', Stanford University, <https://web.stanford.edu/group/fearon-research/cgi-bin/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/What-is-Identity-as-we-now-use-the-word-.pdf>.

56 Roy, O. (2013). *Holy Ignorance: When Religion and Culture Part Ways*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

57 Merdjanova, I. (2013) *Rediscovering the Umma: Muslims in the Balkans between Nationalism and Transnationalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 58.

58 Endersen, C. 2015, 'Faith, fatherland or both? Accommodationist and neo-fundamentalist Islamic discourses in Albania', in Arolda Elbasani and Olivier Roy (ed.) *The revival of Islam in the Balkans: From identity to religiosity*, pp. 222–241. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.

59 J.M. Berger (2018). 'Extremism'. Massachusetts Institute of Technology, MIT Press, <https://direct.mit.edu/books/book/4142/Extremism>.

60 Denoeux, G. and Carter L. (2009). *Development Assistance and Counter Extremism: A Guide to Programming*. United States Agency for International Development.



Table 4: Cultural drivers as in Denoeux and Carter, 2009; IDM, 2015, 2018, 2021

Religion under siege	A strong correlation exists between the success of violent extremist groups and the perception that the West is attacking Islam and Muslims. Individuals who experience repression and humiliation in their daily life may be more susceptible to highly politicized and emotional images of fellow Muslims suffering in other countries.
Broader cultural threats	The population may perceive a broader cultural threat – to traditions, customs, values and sense of collective/individual honour and dignity.
Proactive religious agendas	Groups promoting these agendas will try to impose their version of Islam, jihad, etc. on the local population, weakening traditional and more moderate and tolerant religious structures and practices. This may set the stage for VE.
Disputed authority of religious institutions	Domestic disagreements between groups from the same religion in Albania, when combined with foreign influence and propaganda, prevent religions from establishing a shield against violent extremism and may lead to more radical religious narratives in society.

Religion under siege

This is the most salient cultural driver and refers to the feeling that Islam and Muslims are under systematic attack by external influences (especially the West); that they are being denigrated, vilified and demonized; that they face orchestrated campaigns to marginalize, oppress or subdue them; and that on-going political struggles in various parts of the globe reflect this attack, the stakes of which are nothing less than the survival of the faith. Sometimes, the perceived threat is not only from the West, but also from within – from Muslims who have strayed from the ‘true path’ (i.e., are a different sect) or have ‘betrayed their religion’ by siding with the West.⁶¹ The 2015 baseline assessment of violent extremism in Albania conducted by IDM reported cases of self-proclaimed imams preaching hatred against other Albanian Muslims, calling them hypocrites or even *kafir* (disbelievers) and accusing them of being collaborators with the West’s politics against Islam.⁶² Recent research further corroborates these findings, revealing that violent extremists in Albania characterize the Muslim Community of Albania – the sole official institution representing Islam – as an extension of the state apparatus

61 Sarah Ladbury and Maliha Hussein, ‘Developing the Evidence Base for Hypotheses on Extremism and Radicalisation in Pakistan’, (Study commissioned by the UK Department for International Development, April 2008).

62 Institute for Democracy and Mediation (2015) ‘Religious Radicalism and Violent Extremism in Albania’. Tirana. pp. 89–90.

intended to suppress the Albanian Muslim population.⁶³

Empirical research has shown that such perceptions of Islam being ‘under siege’ correlate very strongly with support for, or involvement in, VE endeavours.⁶⁴ The feeling that Islam is under attack may trump the political and socio-economic drivers that often receive more attention in explanations of violent extremism. For instance, research on Albanians who went to fight in Syria and Iraq in the early 2010s, reveals that many who made the journey to Syria did so out of a perceived sense of solidarity towards Muslims there who were being oppressed.⁶⁵ They were presented with videos depicting the hardships faced by Muslim ‘brothers’ and ‘sisters’ in Syria, accompanied by appeals for support. Motivated by a desire to contribute positively to their co-religionists, they held the belief that standing up for Islam and supporting Muslims globally constituted a religious obligation.

While the situation in Albania has improved compared to the 2010s, it is crucial to continue to monitor the perceptions of the Albanian population regarding these propaganda narratives.

Statements in this driver:

- Nowadays it is difficult to be a practicing Muslim believer in Albania;
- Nowadays it is difficult to be a practicing Christian believer in Albania;

Statement: Nowadays it is difficult to be a practicing Muslim believer in Albania

Respondents were asked to rate whether they agree or not with the statement on a 4-point scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4). 11.6% agreed that it is difficult to be a practicing Muslim believer in Albania, while the overwhelming majority (79.2%) disagreed. Compared to the results of the 2021 study, when 19.9% of the respondents agreed, the proportion of respondents who agree with the statement has decreased by 8.3 p.p.

When checking across demographics, no substantial differences were found for gender, age or religious affiliations. Respondents who practice all their religious rituals (26.2%) and those with no education or less than primary education (19.1%) were more likely to agree with the statement. Respondents with a postgraduate degree (3.6%) were less likely to agree with the statement.

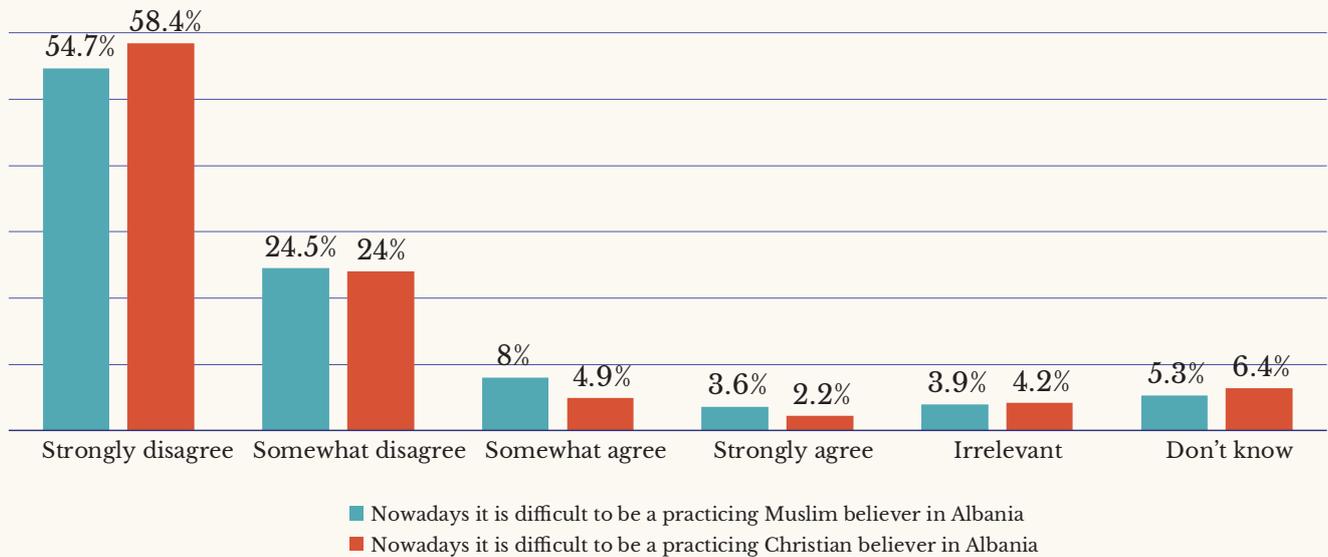
63 Center for the Study of Democracy and Governance, ‘Exploring the development of a strategic communication on P/CVE in Albania’, February 2021, <https://hedayah.com/app/uploads/2021/09/Exploration-of-P-CVE-strategic-communication.pdf>.

64 Denoeux, G. and Carter L. (2009) ‘Development Assistance and Counter Extremism: A Guide to Programming’, United States Agency for International Development.

65 Counter Extremism Report, ‘Albania: Extremism and Counter-Extremism’, New York: Counter Extremism Project (2017). See also: Redion Qirjazi and Romario Shehu, ‘Community Perspectives on Preventing Violent Extremism in Albania’, Research, Berlin: Berghof Foundation (2018), pp. 1–2.



Figure 42: Nowadays, it is difficult to be a Muslim believer (N=1600) vs. Christian believer (N=1600) in Albania



Statement: Nowadays it is difficult to be a practicing Christian believer in Albania

For this statement, only 7.1% of the respondents indicated that they agreed, while the overwhelming majority of the respondents (82.4%) disagreed. In comparison with the 2021 results, when 9.5% agreed with the statement, there was a 2.4 p.p. decrease in the proportion of respondents who agreed. When checking across demographics, no substantial differences were found for age, gender, religious affiliation, religiousness or employment status. The only difference was that respondents with no education or less than primary education (14.7%) were more likely to agree with the statement.

As mentioned above, empirical research has shown that people who feel oppressed or marginalized can be more susceptible to supporting, or becoming involved in, violent extremist endeavours.⁶⁶ Although the hate speech propagated by radical imams noted in the 2015 study on violent extremism is not as prevalent today, it is important to continue to monitor whether Albanians of a certain religion feel marginalized. The responses to the statements in the driver 'Religion under siege' show that the vast majority of Albanians do not perceive it difficult to be a practicing Muslim or Christian believer in Albania.

Compared to the 2021 survey, the current survey indicated a decrease of 8.3 p.p. in the proportion of Albanians who believe that it is difficult to be a Muslim practitioner in Albania. Likewise, there was also a 2.4 p.p. decrease in those who believe that it is difficult to be a Christian practitioner in Albania. The trends in this survey indicate a notable improvement in the public perception of practicing religion within the Albanian context. The identified decreases in the proportion of individuals finding it challenging to be a Muslim or Christian practitioner in the country suggest a slight positive shift in attitudes. However, while these findings are encouraging, it is imperative to acknowledge that concerted efforts in ensuring freedom of religion and raising awareness of VE should include practicing believers as well as the general

⁶⁶ Denoex, G. and Carter L. (2009) "Development Assistance and Counter Extremism: A Guide to Programming", United States Agency for International Development.

population. By doing so, a comprehensive strategy can effectively address not only the perceptions of discrimination faced by religious practitioners but also combat prevalent issues such as islamophobia. The pursuit of broader societal awareness and understanding is essential to fostering an inclusive environment that respects diverse religious beliefs and cultivates tolerance within the community at large.

Broader cultural threats

A cultural threat is perceived as the fading of ‘authentic’ traditions and the erosion of group solidarity under external cultural influences. Communities may resort to violence, or support the violence of some of their members, because they perceive it as a necessary means to prevent the loss of control over their cultural future, or because they seek to prevent their assimilation or incorporation into another cultural sphere.⁶⁷ In such instances, what is involved is not so much the defense of religion per se, but the effort to affirm broader cultural boundaries (many of which are intertwined with religion, can be expressed in a religious idiom, or can be defended through means for which religion can provide a justification).

Following the lifting of the ban on religion, missionaries of all faiths flocked to post-communist Albania and got involved in the religious ‘revival’ process. Beginning from the early 1990s, concerns were expressed in Albania about the introduction of religious teachings and norms that were foreign to the religious traditions in the country. In order to measure public perceptions of threats to traditional ways of practicing Islam or other religious denominations in Albania, survey respondents were presented with two statements.

Statements in this driver:

- ➔ Muslim believers in Albania are faced with foreign influences from conservative Islam;
- ➔ The faith, traditions, and dignity of my religious community in general is under constant pressure and threat;

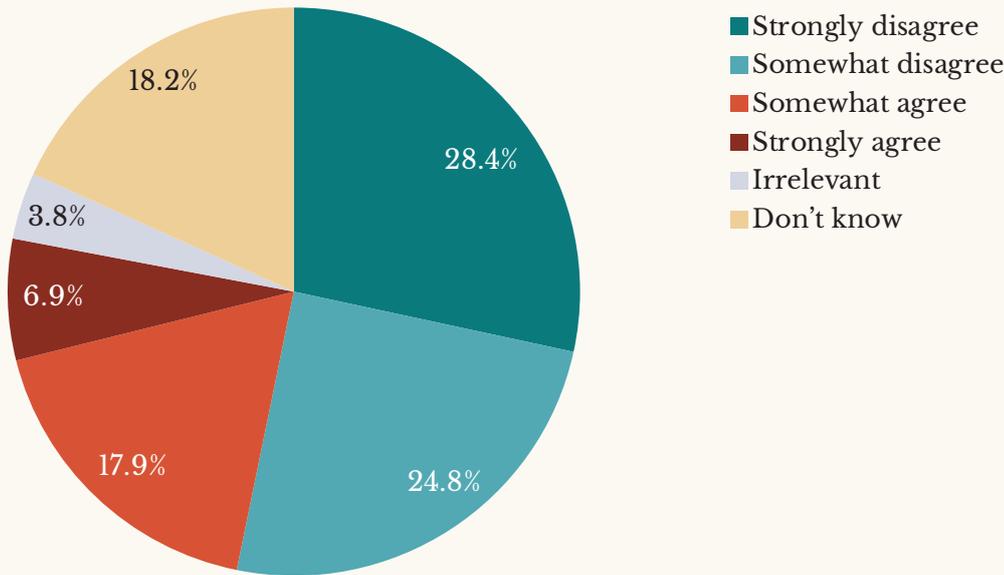
Statement: Muslim believers in Albania are faced with foreign influences from conservative Islam

Respondents were asked to rate their agreement through a 4-point scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4). 24.8 percent agreed with the statement, while 53.2 percent disagreed and 18.2 percent did not know how to respond. In comparison with the 2021 results, when 39.1 percent agreed with the statement, there was a notable 14.3 p.p. decrease. When checking across demographics, no substantial differences were found for gender or employment status. Respondents with a postgraduate degree (40%), those who regularly practice all the rituals of their religion (35%), those in the 45 to 54 age group (33%) and Catholics (32%) were more likely to agree with the statement.

67 Denoex, G. and Carter L. (2009) ‘Development Assistance and Counter Extremism: A Guide to Programming’, United States Agency for International Development.



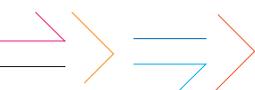
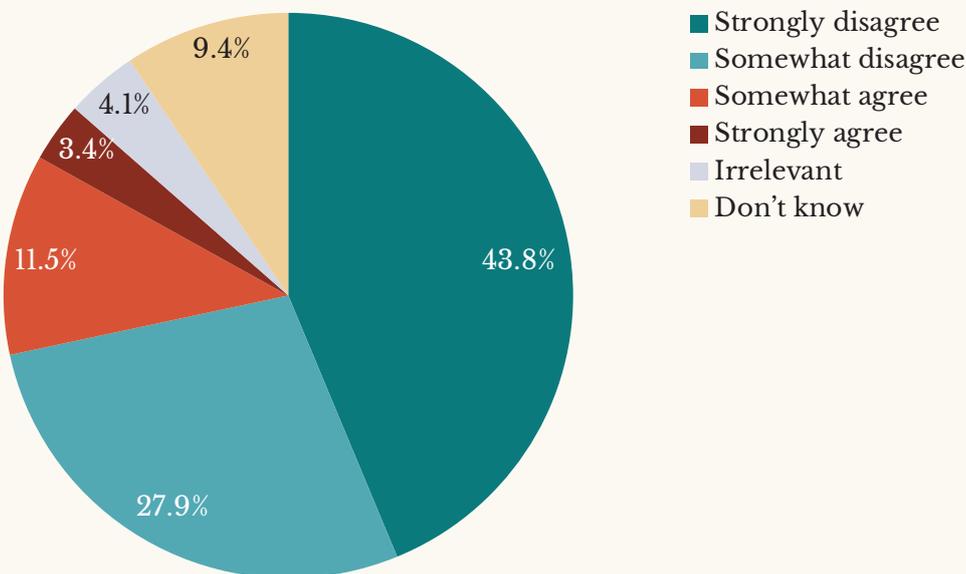
Figure 43: Muslim believers in Albania are faced with foreign influences from conservative Islam (N=1600)



Statement: The faith, traditions and dignity of my religious community in general is under constant pressure and threat.

Respondents were asked to rate the statement ‘the faith, traditions and dignity of my religious community in general is under constant pressure and threat’ on a 4-point scale, from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4). 14.9% of respondents agreed with the statement, while 71.7% disagreed. Compared to 2021, when 21.7% of the respondents agreed, there has been a 6.8 p.p. decrease in the proportion of respondents agreeing to the statement. When checking across demographics, no substantial differences were found for gender, education or religious affiliation. Responders who regularly practice all the rituals of their religion (28%) were more likely to agree with the statement. Responders in the 18 to 24 age group (10%) were the least likely to agree with the statement.

Figure 44: Faith, traditions and dignity of my religious community is under constant pressure and threat (N=1600)



The perceived cultural threat stems from the decline of 'authentic' traditions and the weakening of group identity under external cultural influences. Communities, perceiving violence as a necessary measure, may resort to or endorse violent actions to safeguard control over their cultural future and resist assimilation, or incorporation into another cultural sphere. In the case of Albania, one in four respondents believed that Muslims are faced with foreign influences from conservative Islam. While the current figure remains a cause for concern, notable improvement is observed in comparison to the 2021 data, with a reduction of 14.3 p.p. in the number of respondents who perceived Muslims to be subject to external influences from conservative Islam. Furthermore, a total of 14.9% of respondents believed the faith, traditions and dignity of their religious community in general is under constant pressure and threat. This data also remains a cause of concern, but there was also an improvement compared to the 2021 data, with a reduction of 6.8 p.p. It is important that foreign influence in domestic religious affairs and on Albanian believers continues to be monitored. Approaches which promote dialogue and foster accountability would enable vulnerable individuals to engage in a safe space, not only to address their concerns against others, but also to reflect on principled identity-building. This would enable these individuals to acknowledge their transformative potential and take on a more active role in society by acting as mediators, thus reducing the influence of malicious cultural threats while safeguarding traditional customs and values. Building on national values, such as religious harmony, inclusive dialogue would allow for non-mainstream stances to be discussed in a productive and safe manner.

Proactive religious agendas

Unlike the two aforementioned drivers, this one does not involve reacting to a perceived malign action by others. Instead, it entails proactively taking steps to reshape society in line with one's own views. This is not a case of backlash against alien forces intruding into their 'cultural turf', but an aggressive intrusion into the cultural territory of others.⁶⁸ From a cultural or religious perspective, individuals and groups driven by this agenda do not merely aspire to be left alone, but seek to restructure the religious or cultural territory of others in order to make it conform to their own views of how society ought to be organized and run its affairs.

When speaking of the relationship between religion and culture in modern religious groups, there are two key positions: accommodationist groups and fundamentalist groups.⁶⁹ Accommodationist religious groups consider that religion is embedded within a culture and that a shared culture is a prerequisite for the existence of a religion. This means that a believer of one religion can share a common culture with a non-believer and the believers of other religions. The fundamentalist position, on the other hand, seeks a separation of religion from culture.

When extremist or radical groups promote their own, fundamentalist, version of their faith to local populations, it weakens traditional and more moderate and tolerant religious structures and practices. Indoctrination into such a rigid version of faith aims to detach the believer from their surrounding culture and society leading individuals and groups towards religious extremism. The possibility and threat of radical individuals and groups taking up a proactive religious agenda in Albania is measured through three questions. The first question assesses to what extent Albanians are concerned about religious extremism in the country, while the second statement evaluates whether there are individuals or groups who incite religious extremism in the area where they live. Respondents were subsequently asked what extremist behaviors, actions or attitudes had they observed in the area where they live.

68 Denooux, G. and Carter L. (2009) "Development Assistance and Counter Extremism: A Guide to Programming", United States Agency for International Development.

69 Roy, O. (2013) Holy Ignorance: When Religion and Culture Part Ways. Oxford: Oxford University Press.



Statements in this driver:

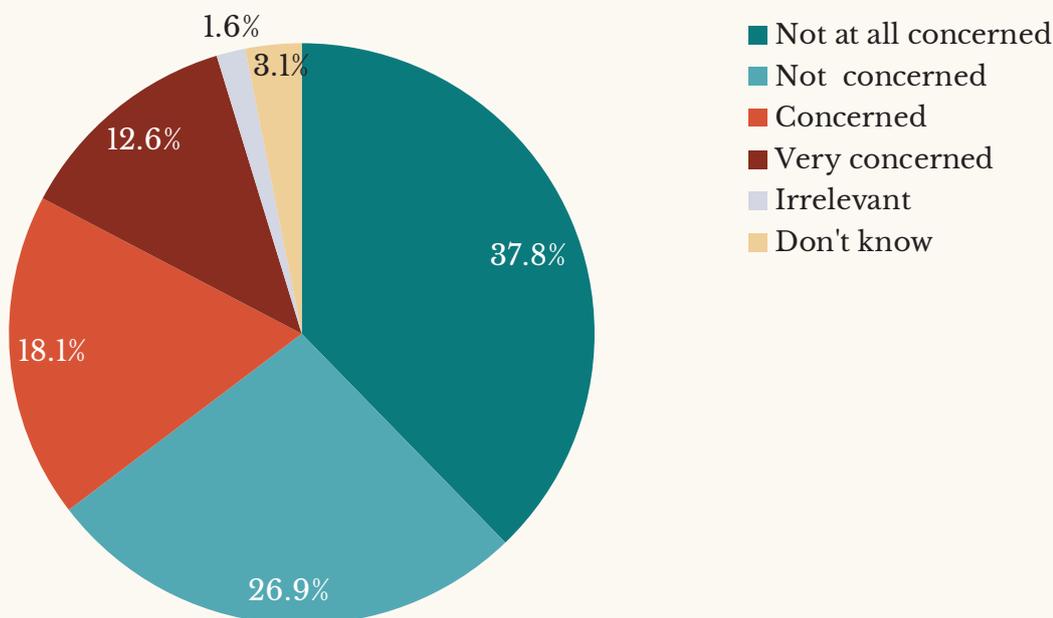
- To what extent are you concerned about religious extremism in Albania?
- There are individuals or groups in the area where I live that incite religious extremism
- What extremist behaviours, actions or attitudes had they observed in the area where they live?

Statement: To what extent are you concerned about religious extremism in Albania?

Respondents were asked to indicate to what extent they are concerned about religious extremism in Albania on a 4-point scale from not at all concerned (1) to very concerned (4). 30.6% of respondents were concerned about religious extremism in Albania, whereas the majority (64.7%) were not concerned. Compared to 2021, when 31.8% of the respondents were concerned about religious extremism, the difference is slight (-1.2 p.p.). When checking across demographics, no substantial differences were found according to gender or employment status.

Respondents of mixed religion (18%), those who identify as believers but do not practice religious rituals (25%), and those in the 18 to 24 age group (25%) were less concerned about religious extremism in Albania. Responders who regularly practice all the rituals of their religion (44%), those in the 45 to 54 age group (40%), responders with a postgraduate degree (37%), those who identify as Bektashi (36%), those who practice the main rituals of their religion (36%), and those who identify as Orthodox (36%), were all typically more concerned about religious extremism in Albania.

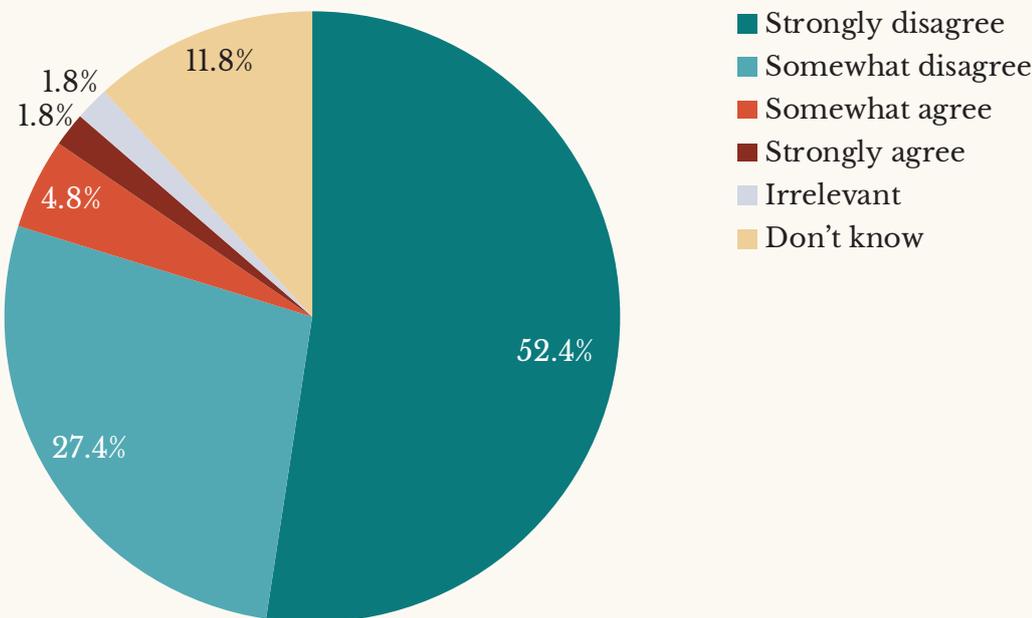
Figure 45: Concern about religious extremism in Albania (N=1600)



Statement: There are individuals or groups in the area where I live that incite religious extremism.

6.6% of respondents agreed that there are individuals or groups in the area where they live that incite religious extremism, while the overwhelming majority (79.9%) disagreed, and 11.8% did not know how to respond. Compared to 2021, when 12.1% of the respondents agreed, there was a 5.5 p.p. decrease in the number who agree that there are individuals or groups in the area where they live that incite religious extremism. When checking across demographics, no substantial differences were found for gender, age, religious, religiousness or employment status. Respondents with no education or less than primary education (2%) were less likely to agree with the statement.

Figure 46: Presence of individuals/groups that incite religious extremism in the area where I live (N=1600)



Statement: What extremist behaviours, actions or attitudes had they observed in the area where they live

Respondents who confirmed the presence of individuals or groups that incite religious violent extremism in the area where they live, were subsequently asked in an open question what extremist behaviours, actions or attitudes they had observed. We received a total of 89 responses, with 81 deemed valid after careful review, which we put into categories. It is worth noting that certain responses provided information that spanned multiple categories, resulting in their inclusion in more than one count. Responses were grouped into six categories. Religious intolerance was the highest reported category (N=22) comprising several sub-categories. Respondents highlighted instances where individuals or groups had exhibited disrespect towards other religions, coupled with the dissemination of derogatory comments. Additionally, respondents expressed concern about perceived religious coercion within their communities, pointing to the manipulation of religious beliefs as a means



of control by certain individuals or groups. Furthermore, participants voiced grievances about 'religious distinctiveness,' noting instances where religious individuals abstained from celebrating national holidays, expressed opposition to inter-religious marriages and tended towards religious isolation. The final sub-category within 'religious intolerance' was 'religious proselytism'; instances where efforts to convert others to a particular faith were identified as a form of extremist behaviour. In the same open question responses, a discernible category emerged that can be labelled as 'Islamophobia.' This was the second most reported category (N=16) and encompasses two distinct types of answers. The first were explicit reports of individuals witnessing Islamophobia. The second were responses that referred to broader Islamophobic attitudes, including statements stigmatizing individuals based on outward expressions of their faith, such as associating beards or headscarves with extremism and labelling practices like fasting as indicative of extremism. The third reported category 'Islam' (N=14) comprised several sub-categories. Within this category, respondents articulated a series of interconnected issues, revealing a complex web of experiences and perceptions relating to Islamic extremism. They highlighted instances of 'religious coercion', where Muslim individuals or groups had tried to impose their religious views onto others, giving rise to concerns about religious coercion as a form of influence. 'Proselytism' emerged as another sub-category in this regard. The 'presence of extremists' associated with Islam, and apprehensions regarding the 'ideological manipulation' of vulnerable groups' were other sub-categories. The latter referred to the potential exploitation of susceptible individuals through the propagation of extremist ideologies within the Islamic context. Further contributing to the complexity of this category were references to the 'expansion of Islam'. Participants noted concerns about the growth and influence of Islam, reflecting apprehensions about the trajectory and impact of the faith within the surveyed area. The fourth category was 'Jehovah's Witnesses' (N=11). Respondents occasionally cited 'religious proselytism' here, noting encounters with Jehovah's Witnesses who actively engaged in outreach, including knocking on their doors. In some instances, respondents did not specify particular concerns but associated Jehovah's Witnesses with extremist behaviours, actions and attitudes. The fifth reported cross-cutting category, 'ideological manipulation' (N=7), refers to instances where vulnerable groups have reportedly been exploited by the promotion of religious ideologies, although respondents did not mention a particular religion. Respondents described cases where individuals or groups, not necessarily associated with a defined religious belief, took advantage of vulnerable populations by providing material support to advance their own ideological agenda. The final reported category, 'other' (N=11), encompassed a range of other answers. Respondents reported a 'ripple effect of global conflicts' where conflicts in distant regions had influenced individuals within the surveyed areas. Respondents noted the impact of global conflicts – such as the recent Israel–Palestine conflagration – on local perceptions, behaviours or attitudes. This highlights the interconnectedness of such conflicts and their potential reverberations across geographical boundaries. Respondents said they had witnessed cases of extremist religious propaganda. Additionally, some of the respondents expressed anti-religious sentiments, resenting those who hold religious beliefs or those who practice religion.

When extremist or radical religious groups promote their own fundamentalist interpretation of faith, the traditional and more moderate religious structures are weakened. The threat of radical individuals and groups taking up a proactive religious agenda in Albania were measured by assessing respondents concerns about religious extremism in the country, the presence of individuals and groups who incite religious extremism in the area where they live and what extremist behaviours, actions or attitudes they had observed. A sizeable 30.6% of respondents were concerned about religious extremism in Albania, reflecting a marginal decrease (1.2 p.p.) from 2021 data. A minority of respondents (6.6%) expressed the belief that there are groups or individuals who incite religious extremism in the area where they live, marking a reduction of 5.5 p.p. compared to the 2021 data. In terms of extremist behaviours, actions or attitudes, respondents provided several answers. Religious intolerance was the highest reported category comprising disrespect towards other religions, perceived religious coercion within their communities, religious distinctiveness from national culture and religious proselytism. Other categories include Islamophobia,



Islam, Jehovah's Witnesses, ideological manipulation and the ripple effect of global conflicts. The findings under this driver demonstrate the need to promote dialogue, as a means of building resilience, on the basis of common Albanian religious values and traditions. To this end, religious authorities have a crucial role to play in dispelling fundamentalist influence from the Albanian religious narrative.

Cultural drivers conclusion

The majority of Albanians overwhelmingly asserted that practicing as a Muslim or Christian believer in Albania poses no significant difficulty, and there was a reduction in the number of respondents who perceived constraints on their religious practices compared to the 2021 data. Although 11.6% still reported challenges in being a practicing Muslim in Albania, there is a noticeable improvement (8.3 p.p. decrease) compared to the 2021 data. Similarly, only 7.1% expressed difficulty in being a practicing Christian believer in Albania, indicating a 2.4 p.p. decrease from the 2021 data.

There was a notable decrease of 14.3 p.p. in the proportion of respondents who believed that Muslims in Albania are faced with foreign influences from conservative Islam compared to the 2021 data. While this indicates commendable progress, it remains concerning that a quarter of respondents (24.8%) have the perception that Muslim believers in Albania are faced with foreign conservative influences.

The prevailing sentiment among Albanians (71.7%) is that the faith, traditions and dignity of their religious community remain largely free from pressure and threat. Although those who feel that the faith, traditions and dignity of their religious community in general is under constant pressure and threat had decreased by 6.8 p.p. compared to the 2021 data, 14.9% of respondents still held that view.

While the majority of Albanians (64.7%) did not express concerns about religious extremism in Albania, almost one in three respondents (30.6%) did feel concerned about religious extremism in the country. This indicated only a slight decrease of 1.2 p.p. compared to the 2021 data.

The overwhelming majority of Albanians (79.9%) did not believe there are individuals or groups in the area where they live that incite religious extremism. This is a noticeable decrease (5.5 p.p.) compared to the 2021 data. However, this still left 6.6% of respondents who tended to agree with the statement.

Respondents perceive several behaviours, actions or attitudes as 'extremist' in their community. Religious intolerance was the highest reported category comprising disrespect towards other religions, perceived religious coercion within their communities, religious distinctiveness from national culture and religious proselytism. Other categories included Islamophobia, Islamic extremism, Jehovah's Witnesses, ideological manipulation and the ripple effect of global conflicts.

The above findings indicate some progress has been made in Albania during the last two years in terms of cultural drivers of extremism. There are still concerns related to foreign religious influences and religious marginalization. This suggests a need to continue monitoring these issues and build a whole-of-society approach to create a space for inclusive dialogue which enables individuals to undertake their civic duties in a responsible and informed manner. In turn, this would enable marginalized communities to engage in cohesive dialogue, where they can address their concerns, while fostering accountability. Building on long-standing national values, such as religious harmony, inclusive dialogue would allow for non-mainstream stances pass through the filters of Albanian society – counterbalancing any foreign influences that would seek to interfere with Albanian identity. Religious authorities in particular, would have a crucial role to play in this regard.



Disputed authority of Albania's religious institutions

In addition to these cultural drivers of violent extremism, the following section outlines results relating to the wider context of violent extremism in Albania. It observes respondents' support towards the leadership of their religious community in the country, support towards local religious clerics, tolerance for following unofficial religious interpretations, and perception over the religious education of their local religious clerics. The domestic disagreements within religious groups combined with foreign influence and propaganda prevent religions from establishing a 'shield' against violent extremism, and may lead to more radical religious narratives in society. The role of religious clerics in the community and their religious formation can be instrumental in helping radicalized individuals to develop critical thinking skills, in order to understand the manipulation process and disengage from it. The level of trust and support religious communities enjoy helps to strengthen harmony both within a religious community and between different religions.

Statements in this driver:

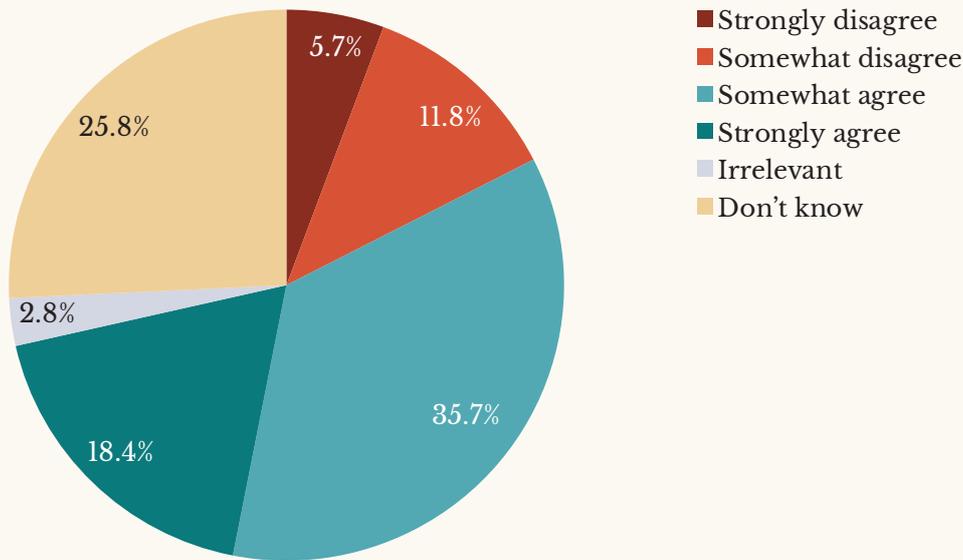
- The positions or stances of the chair of my religious community (in Tirana) enjoy the full support of the believers in the area where I live;
- Religious clerics in the area where I live have a large influence on their respective believers;
- People have the right to follow unofficial religious interpretations if they do not agree with the respective religious communities;
- In my religious community there are clerics without adequate religious education.

Statement: The positions or stances of the chair of my religious community (in Tirana) enjoy the full support of the believers in the area where I live.

Respondents were asked to rate whether they agree or not with the statement on a 4-point scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4). The majority of respondents (54.1%) agreed, while 17.4% of disagreed. 2.8% said that they found the statement irrelevant and 25.8% didn't know whether to agree or disagree. Compared to 2021, when 58.2% agreed with the statement, there has been a decrease of 4.1 p.p. in the proportion of respondents who feel that the chair of their religious community (in Tirana) enjoys the full support of the believers in the area where they live. When checking across demographics, no substantial differences were found for gender or age, or religiousness. Respondents with no education or less than primary education (30.9%), those with mixed religious families (26.7%) and those who are self-employed (23%) were more likely to disagree with the statement. Bektashi responders (12.1%) were the least likely to disagree with the statement.



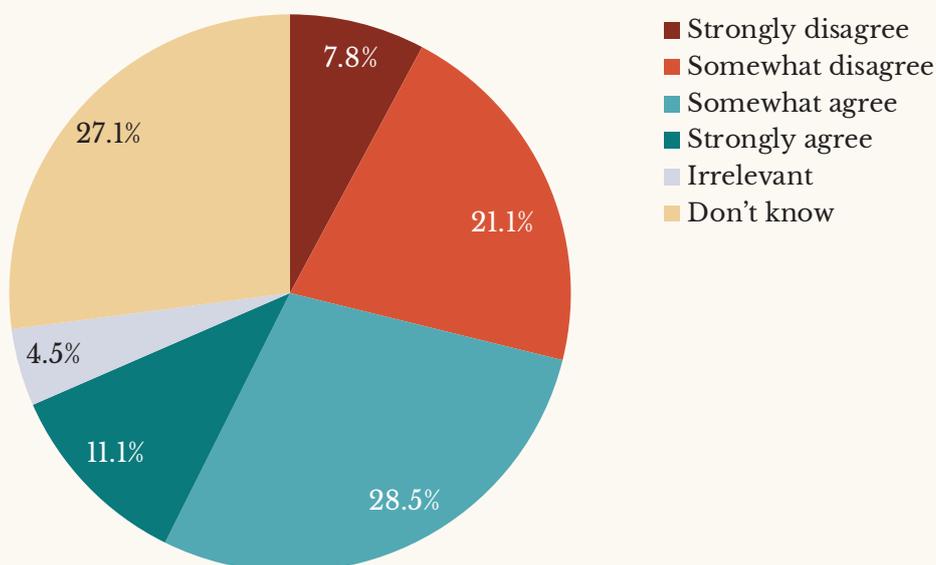
Figure 47: The positions or stances of the chair of my religious community (in Tirana) enjoy the full support of the believers in the area where I live (N=1600)



Statement: Religious clerics in the area where I live have a large influence on their respective believers.

When asked to rate on a 4-point scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4) whether 'religious clerics in the area where they live have a large influence on their respective believers, 39.6% of respondents agreed with the statement, and 28.9% disagreed. 27.1% of respondents were not sure whether to agree or not. Compared to 2021, when 49.3% of respondents agreed with the statement, there has been a decrease of 9.7 p.p. in the proportion of respondents that agree with the statement. When checking across demographics, no differences were found for gender, age, religion or employment status. Responders with no education or less than primary education (45.6%) and those who regularly practice all the rituals of their religion (34.5%) were the most likely to disagree with the statement. Respondents with a postgraduate degree (21.7%) were the least likely to disagree with the statement.

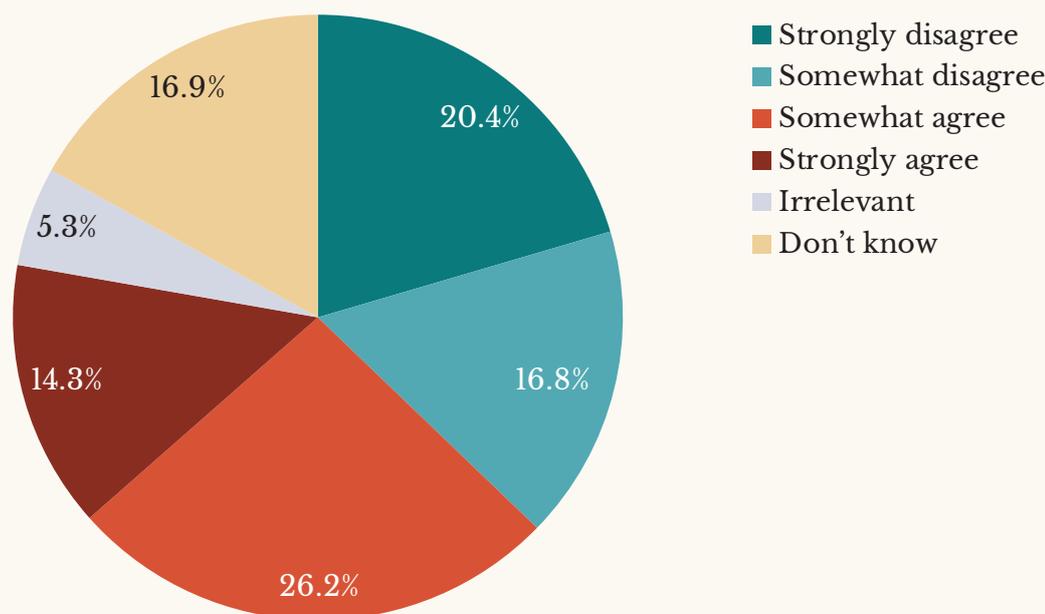
Figure 48: Religious clerics in the area where I live have a large influence on their respective believers (N=1600)



Statement: People have the right to follow unofficial religious interpretations if they do not agree with the respective religious communities.

Respondents were asked to rate whether they agree or not with the statement on a 4-point scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4). A total of 40.5% of respondents agreed that people have the right to follow non-official religious interpretations if they do not agree with the interpretation of their official religious community, while 37.3% of respondents disagreed with the proposition. 16.9% of the respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement and 5.3% found the statement irrelevant. Compared to 2021, when 45.7% of respondents agreed with the statement, this represents a decrease of 5.2 p.p. When checking across demographics, no substantial differences were found for gender or religion. Respondents who have a postgraduate degree (48.2%) and those who are believers but do not practice religious rituals at all (45.8%) were more likely to agree with the statement. Respondents who have no education or less than primary education (25%), those over 65 years old (30.4%), those who regularly practice all the rituals of their religion (33.9%) and students (34.7%) were less likely to agree with the statement.

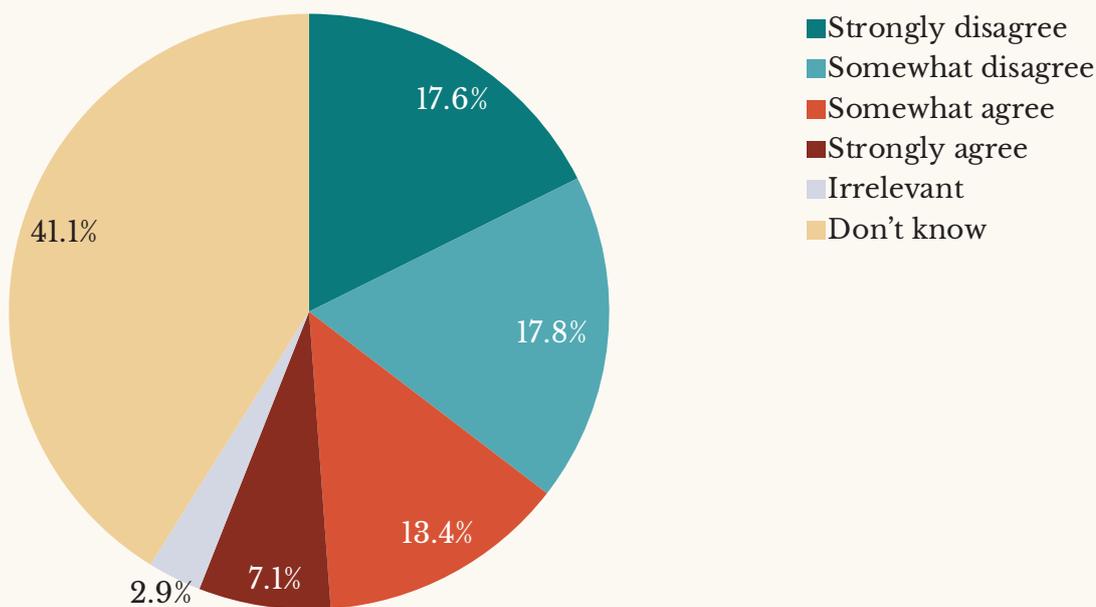
Figure 49: People have the right to follow religious interpretations that do not align with the official religious community (N=1600)



Statement: In my religious community there are clerics without adequate religious education.

Respondents were asked to rate their support for the statement on a 4-point scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4). 20.5% of respondents agreed with the statement, while 35.4% disagreed. A considerable proportion of respondents (41.1%) didn't know whether to agree or disagree. Compared to 2021, when 23.8% of the respondents agreed with the statement, there is a slight decrease of 3.3 p.p. When checking across demographics, no substantial differences were found for gender, age, religious or religiousness. Respondents with a postgraduate degree (30.1%) were more likely to agree with the statement. Student respondents (9.5%), however, were less likely to agree with the statement.

Figure 50: In my religious community there are clerics without adequate education (N=1600)



The findings presented in this section indicate that a majority of respondents (54.1%) believe that the positions or stances taken by the leadership of their religious community enjoy the full support of the believers in their local area. It is notable, however, that this represents a decrease of 4.1 p.p. compared to 2021. This decline may be attributed to domestic disagreements within religious groups, coupled with external influences and propaganda. These factors hinder the formation of a 'united shield' against violent extremism, and may lead to increased intra-religious rivalries and more radical religious narratives in society. As such, it is imperative to delve into the internal dynamics of these tensions and implement appropriate interventions.

Similarly to previous assessments in 2021 and 2018, Albanians continue to perceive local religious clerics as somewhat less influential compared to the chairs of religious communities in Tirana. This survey highlights that 39.6% of respondents believe that religious clerics in the area where they live have a large influence on their respective believers. It is noteworthy that this reflects a decrease of 9.7 p.p. compared to 2021, denoting the need to strengthen the role of religious institutions at the local level. The level of trust and support enjoyed by religious communities contributed significantly to strengthen harmony both within a religious community and across different religions.

In Albania, individuals have the freedom to practice their religions without necessarily adhering strictly to the teachings of official religious institutions. However, the susceptibility to manipulation by non-official religious interpretations underscores the theological security provided by these official institutions. This survey indicates that a considerable part of respondents (40.5%) believe people have the right to follow unofficial religious interpretations if they do not agree with the respective religious communities. Despite experiencing a decrease of 5.2 p.p. compared to 2021, this acceptance of unofficial interpretations remains considerable. Given the diverse array of influences on religious affairs from external sources, it is not surprising to observe such widespread acceptance of following unofficial religious interpretations. However, when the narrative is not monitored by a central and recognized authority, it could be that more radical and intolerant interpretations of faith spread in the country. These interpretations could leave people less connected with their physical surroundings, with Albanians of different faith, or even with Albania's tolerant environment altogether. Conversely, it is important for official religious communities to maintain tolerance towards alternative interpretations of the same faith, embrace inclusivity of diverse ideas, and ensure equitable representation of all believers within their religious community.



Ultimately, one-fifth of respondents (20.5%) believe there are clerics without adequate religious education in their religious community, noting a decrease of 3.3 p.p. compared to 2021. The first step towards empowering religious institutions is through education. Clerics perceived as lacking adequate religious education, whether accurate or not, risk undermining the credibility of their respective religious communities and potentially fostering acceptance of non-official religious entities. The role of religious clerics in the community and their religious formation can be instrumental in helping radicalized individuals to develop critical thinking skills, in order to understand the manipulation process and disengage from it.



6. Emerging trends of violent extremism: political and ethno-nationalist tendencies in Albania

The survey's nuanced findings across different forms of extremism highlight the importance of context specificity for a comprehensive understanding. While the analysis primarily addresses religious violent extremism, through the lens of Deneoux and Carter, this chapter reflects on Albania's growing inclination toward non-religious forms of violent extremism, as indicated by the previous national assessment.⁷⁰ It delves into Albania's non-religious manifestations of violent extremism – political and ethno-nationalism – with a special focus on the political, which, according to the present assessment remains more prevalent than other forms of violent extremism. Citizens' insights in this section should be understood within the broader context of societal issues in Albania, including perceived nepotism, political coercion, inter-ethnic relations, concerns over demographic change and conspiracy theories. The literature underscores that individual vulnerability to extremism is heavily influenced by exposure to environments that encourage moral shifts, emphasizing the significance of both personal traits and social context in the process of radicalization.⁷¹

While the public perception poll reveals that respondents are just as concerned about political extremism (43.4%) as in 2021, concerns over ethno-nationalist extremism have slightly increased (at 27%, 10.3 p.p. more than in 2021). While the reasons behind the increased concern about ethno-nationalism among respondents may differ, the year 2023 was marked by several notable events. Although they cannot be directly attributed to a rise in ethno-nationalist extremism, these events might have played a role in shaping public perceptions on the matter. For instance, in the 2023 local elections, an opposition candidate and member of the Greek minority, was detained on allegations of vote-buying.⁷² This drew strong condemnation from Athens and the Albanian opposition, who criticized it as a violation of legal principles and minority rights, alleging political motivations behind the arrest.

The Greek minority was also at the centre of a contentious debate surrounding ethnicity during the 2023 population census.⁷³ Allegations of irregularities⁷⁴ and external interference⁷⁵,

70 Vrugtman, Leonie, Sara Kelmendi, Romario Shehu, and Diori Angjeli. 2021. "The Status of Violent Extremism in Albania: A National Assessment of Drivers, Forms, and Threats." Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM). <https://idmalbania.org/the-status-of-violent-extremism-in-albania-2021/>.

71 Rottweiler, Bettina, Paul Gill, and Noémie Bouhana. 2022. "Individual and Environmental Explanations for Violent Extremist Intentions: A German Nationally Representative Survey Study", *Justice Quarterly* 39, no. 4: 825-846. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07418825.2020.1869807>.

72 Fjori Sinoruka, "Albanian Prosecution Seeks Jail Term for Mayor-Elect of Himara." *Balkan Insight*, 13 February 2024. <https://balkaninsight.com/2024/02/13/albanian-prosecution-seeks-jail-term-for-mayor-elect-of-himara/>.

73 Albanian Government, 2023 Population and housing census underway, most important statistical operation in Albania, Press Release, 13 September 2023, <https://www.kryeministria.al/newsroom/nis-censi-i-popullsisë-dhe-banesave-2023-operacioni-me-i-rendesishem-statistikor-ne-shqipëri/>

74 Stavros Tzimas, Albania census amid concerns of manipulation, *Ekathimerini*, 6 October 2023, <https://www.ekathimerini.com/opinion/1221778/albania-census-amid-concerns-of-manipulation/>

75 Klan TV News, Ardi Bido's alarm: Attempts are being made to manipulate the 2023 census in Dhërmi and Himare to exclude the Greek minority, 18 September 2023, <https://tvklan.al/alarmi-i-ardit-bidos-po-tentohet-te-manipulohet-censusi-i-2023-shit-ne-dhermi-dhe-himare-per-ti-nxjerre-minoritete-grek>



particularly regarding the representation of the Greek minority, fuelled tensions and perceptions of marginalization, potentially fomenting ethno-nationalist sentiments.

Incidents of violence driven by political motives have occurred sporadically. During the 2021 general election campaign, there was a deadly confrontation between followers of the Socialist Party (SP) and the Democratic Party (DP).⁷⁶ This incident illustrates the heightened risk of political violence during election periods, particularly as electoral competition intensifies. Other similar incidents have included physical confrontations between party militants,⁷⁷ and an unprecedented attack on the opposition leader, initially believed to be politically motivated, though carried out by an individual with a history of mental illness and no ties to organized groups.⁷⁸

Other incidents in the region, though mainly affecting Kosovo Albanians, likely heightened concerns about ethno-nationalist extremism within Albania as well. In May 2023, following disputes over local election outcomes, tensions escalated in Northern Kosovo, where Serbs clashed with Kosovo police forces and NATO peacekeepers. Additionally, in September 2023, an attack by Serb militants on a Kosovo police patrol in Banjska resulted in the death of a Kosovo policeman, with the subsequent exchange of gunfire resulting in three Serbian militants' fatalities.⁷⁹

Citizens' Perceptions of Violent Extremism

Understanding how citizens perceive violent extremism is essential for comprehensively grasping the nuances of VE within Albania. This involves delving into the populace's perspectives on what actions might constitute VE, as well as identifying the specific concerns and fears associated with such extremism. The main purpose of understanding how VE is understood by respondents is not only to contextualize the phenomenon, but also to inform policymaking and provide P/CVE practitioners with empirical insights into effective strategies.

Close-ended question: To what extent are you concerned about political/ethno-nationalist extremism in Albania?

Respondents were asked to indicate to what extent they are concerned about political and ethno-nationalist extremism in Albania on a 4-point scale from not at all concerned (1) to very concerned (4). Respondents were most likely to be concerned about political extremism: 43.4% of the respondents indicated that they are concerned (25.6%) or very concerned (17.8%). More than a quarter of the sample (27%) expressed concern about ethno-nationalist extremism as well, with 16.5% indicating that they are concerned, and 10.5% very concerned.

When comparing to survey data from 2021, the number of respondents expressing concern over political extremism has increased by 1.4 p.p. whereas the number of respondents expressing concern over ethno-nationalist extremism in Albania has increased by 10.3 p.p.

76 ABC News. "Vritet Pjerin Xhuvani i PS në Elbasan, 3 të plagosur. Policia merr plumb në këmbë pas përplasjes për votat në Elbasan" [transl. "Pjerin Xhuvani of the SP was killed in Elbasan, 3 injured. Policewoman takes a bullet in the leg after the clash over the votes in Elbasan."] 21 April 2021, <https://abcnews.al/vritet-pjerin-xhuvani-i-ps-ne-elbasan-2-te-plagosur-policia-merr-plumb-ne-kembe-pas-perplasjes-per-votat-ne-elbasan/>

77 "Socialists See Elbasan Clashes as Political Provocation," Albanian Daily News, 14 March 2021, <https://albaniandailynews.com/news/socialist-sees-elbasan-clashes-as-political-provocation-1>

78 Alba Mborja, "Albania's Opposition Leader Attacked During Anti-Government Protest." EXIT, 6 December 2022. <https://exit.al/en/albanias-opposition-leader-attacked-during-anti-government-protest/>

79 Alice Taylor, "Pristina, EU at Odds over Banjska 'Terrorist Attack' Report," Euractiv, 15 January, 2024, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/pristina-eu-at-odds-over-banjska-terrorist-attack-report/>



Regarding their level of concern about political extremism in Albania, a total of 52.7% were either not at all concerned or not concerned, whereas 3.9% of the sample expressed uncertainty or deemed the question irrelevant. Similarly, when asked about their concern over ethno-nationalist extremism in the country, 67.7% were not concerned, whereas 5.3% indicated either a lack of knowledge on the matter or found the statement to be irrelevant.

Figure 51. Concern over political extremism vs. ethno-nationalist extremism (N=1600)



When checking across demographics, respondents who have completed a postgraduate degree (54%), those who are self-employed (50%), and supporters of the Freedom Party (59%), were more likely to be concerned about political extremism in Albania.

In contrast, respondents with less than primary education (35%) and those who refused to answer about their level of education (54.5%) were more likely to be concerned about ethno-nationalist extremism. Respondents who support the Freedom Party (38%) and the Democratic Party (33%) generally shared this concern, as well as those who are Bektashi (35%) and Orthodox (34%).

Close-ended question: In your opinion, can the following actions be described as violent extremism?

Respondents were provided with a list of actions⁸⁰ and were asked when these actions could be described as violent extremism according to a 5-point scale (never, rarely, sometimes, often or always). The action most commonly perceived as violent extremism was physically threatening an individual or a large number of people for political, religious or ideological reasons, with 45.5% of respondents saying this is 'always' the case. Involvement in a criminal act for these reasons was viewed as 'always' violent extremism by 37.1% of respondents. Verbally assaulting someone for similar reasons was 'always' violent extremism for 33% of participants, while sharing or liking content promoting violence was 'always' violent extremism for 26.6% of the sample.

⁸⁰ Question and variables adapted from: "Understanding Extremism in Scotland: Public Perceptions and Experiences." (27 July 2023), Scottish Government, Retrieved from <https://www.gov.scot/publications/understanding-extremism-scotland-public-perceptions-experiences/pages/4/>.

Verbally assaulting someone was described as ‘often’ being violent extremism by 27.3% of respondents; sharing or liking violent content by 26.4%; involvement in a criminal act by 24.1%; and physically threatening individuals by 23.9%. Actions with a notable proportion saying ‘sometimes’ were: making derogatory remarks (24.9%), sharing or liking violent content (24.1%), verbally assaulting someone (20.5%) and physically threatening individuals (15.2%). A small percentage of respondents were unsure about these classifications, ranging from 1.5% to 2.3% across the different actions.

Table 5. Proportion of respondents describing actions as violent extremism (N=1600)

In your opinion, can the following actions be described as violent extremism?						
	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	Don't know
a) Attending a peaceful protest for political, religious or ideological reasons	53.6%	23.2%	12.7%	5.2%	3.1%	2.3%
b) Making derogatory remarks about someone for political, religious or ideological reasons	13.4%	24.8%	24.9%	20.3%	15.1%	1.5%
c) Involvement in a criminal act for political, religious or ideological reasons	6.4%	11.5%	19.1%	24.1%	37.1%	1.7%
d) Sharing or liking content promoting the usage of violence for political, religious or ideological reasons	6.4%	14.2%	24.1%	26.4%	26.6%	2.3%
e) Verbally assaulting someone for political, religious or ideological reasons	6.1%	11.0%	20.5%	27.3%	33.0%	2.1%
f) Physically threatening an individual or a large number of people for political, religious or ideological reasons	5.9%	8.1%	15.2%	23.9%	45.5%	1.5%



Close-ended question: Which of the following consequences of violent extremism is the most concerning in the case of Albania?

When asked about the most concerning consequences of violent extremism in Albania, the most prevalent response (28.3%) was that it threatens the lives of citizens. The second highest concern for respondents was that violent extremism consequently brings violations of the rights and freedoms of citizens (18.3%), followed closely by the violation of national security (12.5%). Of less concern was the idea that violent extremism harms the image of Albania (4.1%), or that it harms Albania's relations with neighbouring countries (1.2%). Notably, 7.7% of respondents did not view violent extremism as a concern, while a small percentage either didn't know (0.7%) or refused to answer (2.6%).

Table 6. Proportion of respondents indicating the most concerning consequences of VE in Albania (N=1600)

	Percentage (N=1600)
It threatens the lives of citizens	28.3%
It violates national security	12.5%
It violates the rights and freedoms of citizens	18.3%
It drives violent political behaviour	8.4%
It damages the economy	5.1%
It incites hatred and mistrust in society	11.3%
It harms the image of Albania	4.1%
It harms Albania's relations with neighbouring countries	1.2%
Violent extremism is not a concern	7.7%
Other (please specify)	0.1%
Don't know	0.7%
Refuse to answer	2.6%

The increasing concern over political and ethno-nationalist extremism suggests a rising awareness and apprehension among the population regarding these issues. These concerns could be a reflection of heightened exposure to such forms of extremism, as well as to broader regional tensions. Instances like the detention of a Greek minority candidate over vote-buying allegations, or tensions in Kosovo, could influence perceptions. As a result, respondents are more inclined to see the consequences of VE mainly in terms of threats to citizens' lives, violations of rights and freedoms and national security implications.

To mitigate the effects VE acts can have on the population, it is crucial for media reporting to remain neutral when covering sensitive topics. These topics can be easily framed through an ethno-populist lens, which seeks to harness populism's anti-elitist approach and its appeal to the 'common people' against perceived elites.⁸¹ This is combined with a focus on nationalism that emphasizes a cohesive national identity, often by excluding minorities or rejecting external influences.



81 Varshney, A. Populism and Nationalism: An Overview of Similarities and Differences. *St Comp Int Dev* 56, 131–147 (2021), <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12116-021-09332-x>.



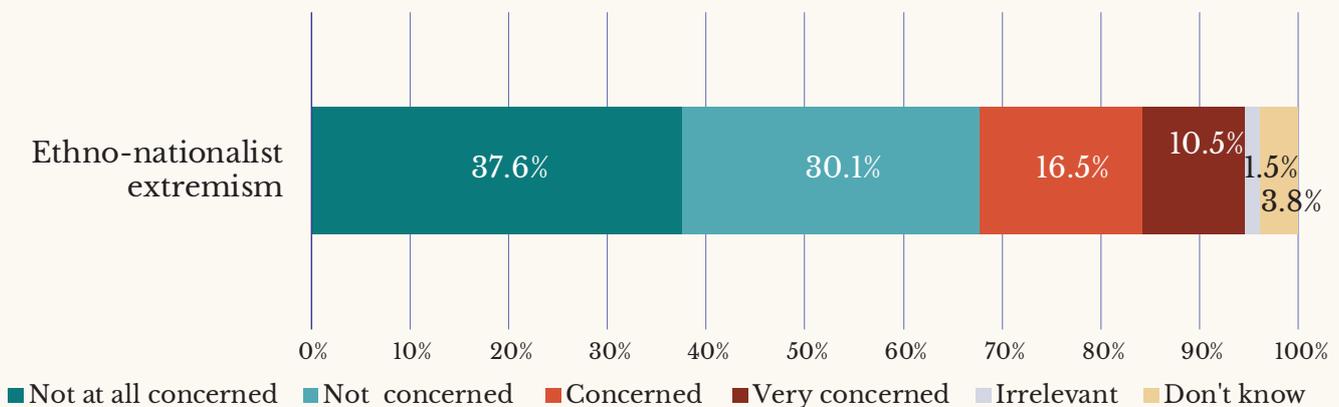
The findings under this section indicate a nuanced understanding of what constitutes VE acts. There is a discernible hierarchy in the actions thought to constitute VE, with physical threats and involvement in criminal acts receiving the highest level of concern. However, a small portion of respondents said they rarely or never perceive involvement in criminal activities (17.9%) or making physical threats against individuals or groups (14%) as forms of VE, even when those actions are carried out for political, religious or ideological motives. Additionally, one in five Albanians did not see the sharing of content that promotes violence for political, religious, or ideological reasons as problematic. These observations highlight a crucial need for continued efforts in raising awareness about VE issues.

Political extremism and political climate

Statement: There are individuals or groups in the area where I live that incite political extremism.

16.3% of respondents agreed that in the areas where they live, there are individuals or groups that incite political extremism, while the majority (70.5%) disagreed and 13.2% were unsure or found the statement irrelevant. Compared to the 2021 national assessment, there has been an 11 p.p. decrease in respondents reporting the presence of individuals or groups that incite political extremism in their areas. Supporters of the PD Reestablishment Group (35%) were the more likely demographic to agree with the statement.

Figure 52. Individuals or groups that incite political extremism (N=1600)



Respondents who reported individuals or groups inciting political extremism were asked to describe, in an open question, the extremist behaviours, actions or attitudes they have witnessed. Out of 242 responses received (15.1% of the overall sample), 14 answers were deemed invalid.

Respondents typically associated political extremism with negative campaigning (47 respondents), which refers to deliberately spreading biased or misleading information to attack or harm an opponent. The absence of respectful dialogue between political opponents and discourse marked by hate speech, defamation and aggressive language were frequently identified under this type of extremist behaviour.

Voter inducement was the second most reported category, with 45 respondents referring to attempts to incentivize voters. This ranged from offering non-financial benefits or favours in exchange for votes, reflecting a significant challenge to the integrity of the electoral process. While less frequently mentioned than voter inducement, vote-buying was also a significant concern, with 10 respondents saying they had witnessed cases where votes were directly exchanged for money or goods.

Interpersonal violence due to political affiliation was also observed frequently (22 respondents), especially during electoral campaigns – indicating a highly polarized environment in which political affiliation can lead to personal conflicts and violence. In addition, respondents had also witnessed threats of physical violence (seven respondents) and death (two respondents) due to political affiliation. Five respondents also referred to cases when citizens were subjected to verbal attacks due to their political affiliation.

Coerced political participation (22 respondents) was also a frequently reported issue by respondents, i.e., that individuals in the area where they live are compelled to become political party members or participate in political events or activities, like electoral campaigns or protests, under duress. This type of coercion undermines voluntary political engagement and indicates an oppressive political environment.

In this context, 18 respondents also saw political favouritism/cronyism as a form of extremism. They believe that being affiliated with the governing party confers significant advantages, including enhanced job opportunities for citizens, exemption for businesses from various penalty fees and a general societal preference towards party members. Testifying to this, there were also at least three reported cases of employment retaliation due to political affiliation. Furthermore, 16 respondents indicated witnessing citizens being denied rights and services or being discriminated against due to their political affiliation.

Lastly, 16 respondents reported a lack of political alternatives, characterized by a centralization of power within the governing party, as a form of political extremism and noted internal conflicts within opposition parties, indicating a stifled political landscape and challenges to the democratic process. Others (15 respondents) reported the political extremism in their area as taking the form of the patronage system (patronage networks), radical support towards a political candidate or political ties with criminal groups.

Table 7. Behaviours, actions or attitudes reported as political extremism (N=242)

Behaviours, actions or attitudes reported	Respondents
Interpersonal violence due to political affiliation	22
Death threats due to political affiliation	2
Threats to physical violence due to political affiliation	7
Verbal violence due to political affiliation	5
Coerced political participation	22
Negative campaigning	47
Denial of rights and services & political discrimination	16
Employment retaliation due to political affiliation	3
Political favouritism/cronyism	18
Voter inducement	45
Vote-buying	10

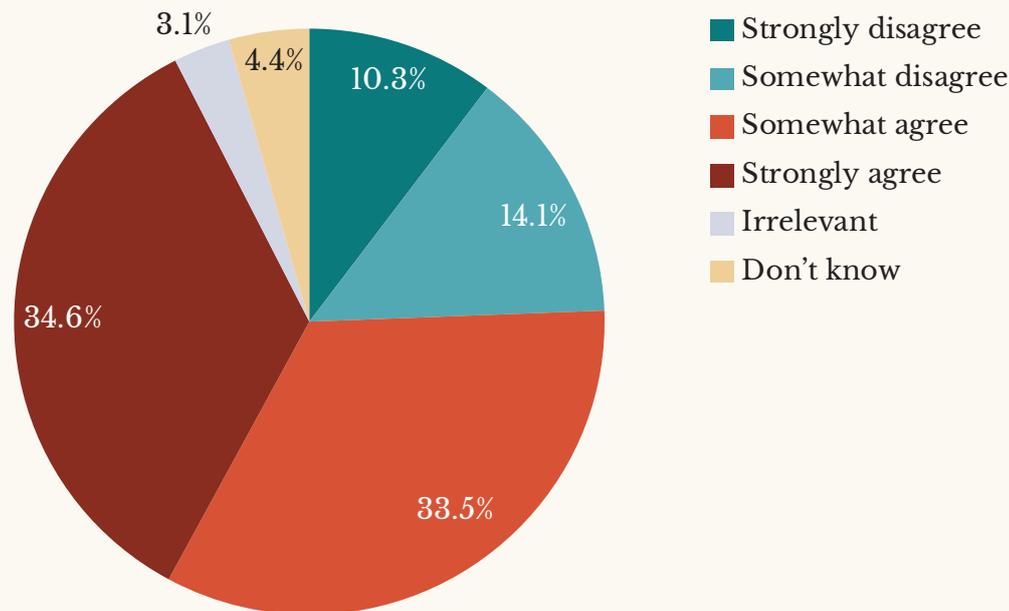


Behaviours, actions or attitudes reported	Respondents
Lack of political alternatives	16
Other	15
Invalid responses	14
TOTAL	242

Statement: In the area where I live, voting for the governing party is mandatory to keep one's job in the public administration.

Respondents were asked to rate whether they agree or not with the statement on a 4-point scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4). The majority of respondents (68.1%) said that voting for the governing party is mandatory to keep one's job in the public administration in the area where they live. Nearly a quarter of the sample (24.4%) disagreed with the statement. 7.5% of the respondents indicated they did not know or found the statement irrelevant.

Figure 53. In the area where I live, voting for the governing party is mandatory to keep one's job in the public administration (N=1600)

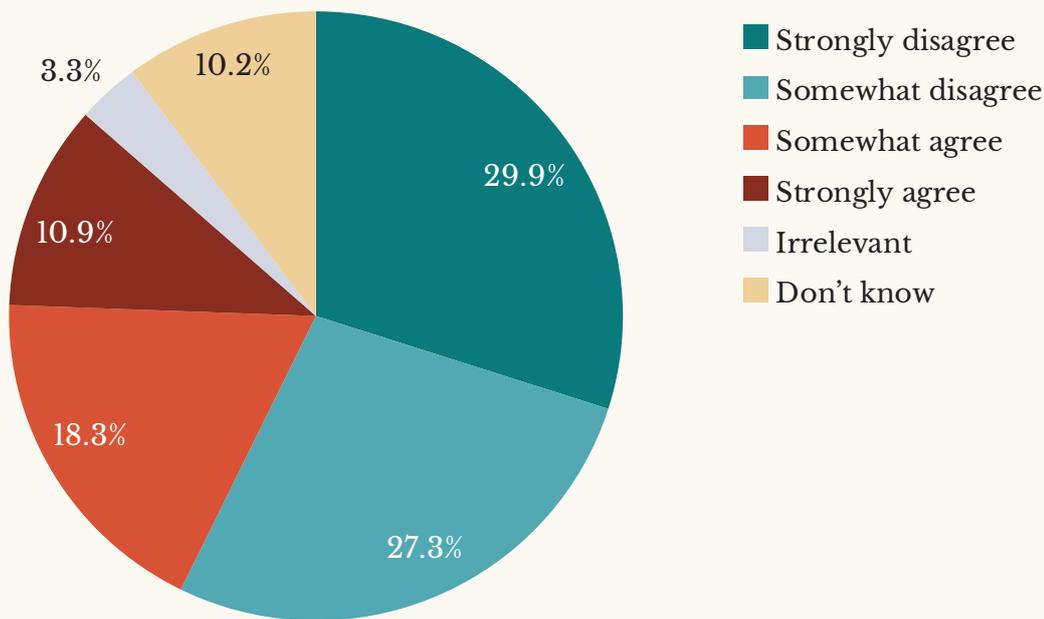


Apart from supporters of the ruling Socialist Party (SP), the PD Reestablishment Group (80%), the Democratic Party (80%), the Freedom Party (77%) and those who do not support any political groups (74%) were all inclined to agree that in the area where they live, voting for the governing party is mandatory to keep one's job in the public administration.

Statement: In the area where I live, there are politicians who explicitly call for violence against political opponents.

More than a quarter of the sample (29.2%) pointed to the presence of politicians who explicitly call for violence against political adversaries in the area where they live, while only 57.2% disagreed with the statement. In addition, 10.2% responded with 'don't know' and 3.3% deemed the statement irrelevant.

Figure 54. In the area where I live, there are politicians who explicitly call for violence against political opponents (N=1600)



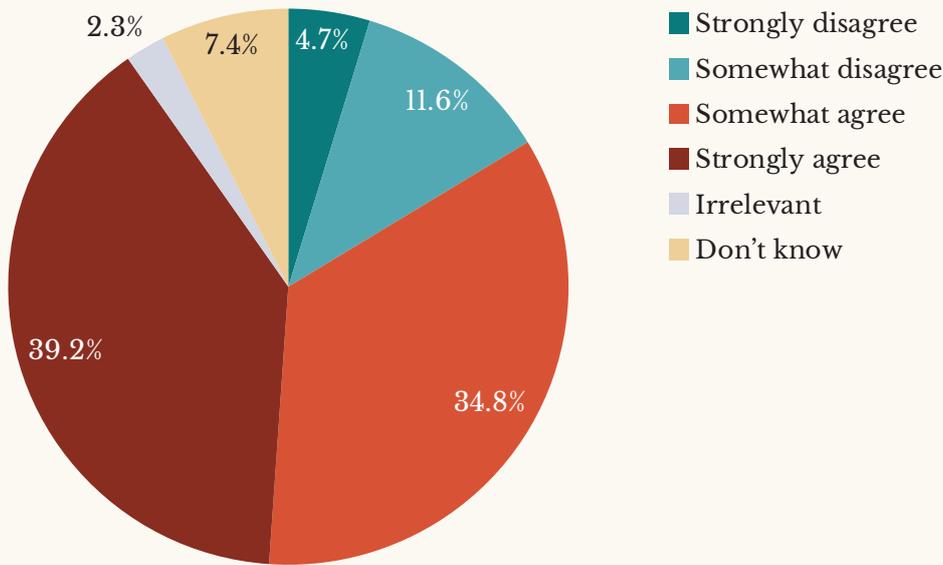
When checking across demographics, those who had completed a postgraduate degree (39%) as well as those who refused to disclose their level of education (36%) were the most likely to agree with the statement.

Statement: Some members of the political elite have connections with criminals and serve each other's interests.

74% of the sample agreed that some members of the political elite have connections with criminals and that they serve each other's interests. Conversely, 16.3% of the respondents disagreed with the statement, 9.7% of the respondents found the statement irrelevant or said they did not know.



Figure 55. Some members of the political elite have connections with criminals and serve each other's interests (N=1600)

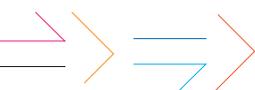
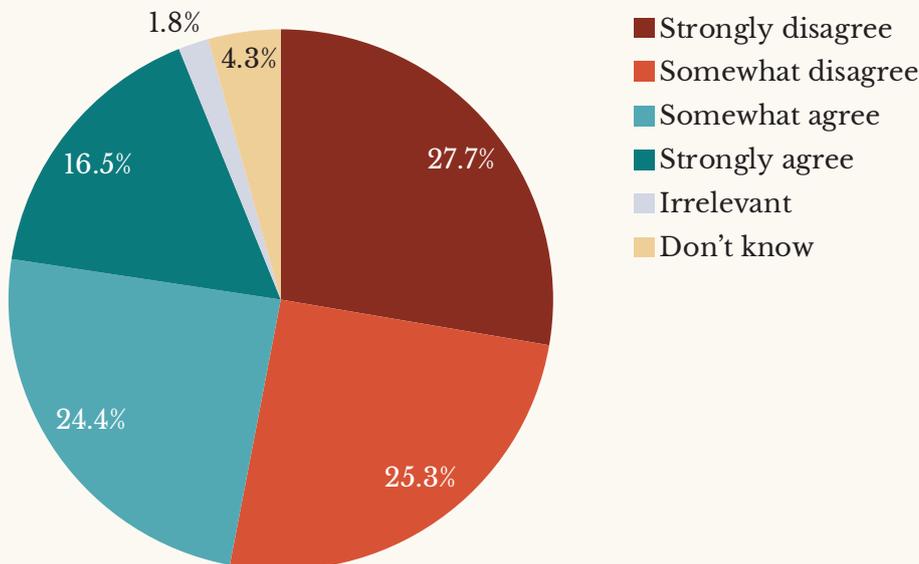


Supporters of the PD Reestablishment Group (95%), those who do not support any party (81%), and supporters of the Democratic Party (80%) were most likely to agree that some members of the political elite have connections with criminals.

Statement: The impunity of people with high-ranking positions in Albania is increasingly coming to an end.

40.9% of the respondents believed that the impunity of people with high-ranking positions in Albania is increasingly coming to an end, whereas more than half of the sample (53%) disagreed. 6.1% of the respondents found the statement irrelevant or responded with 'don't know'.

Figure 56. The impunity of people with high-ranking positions in Albania is increasingly coming to an end (N=1600)

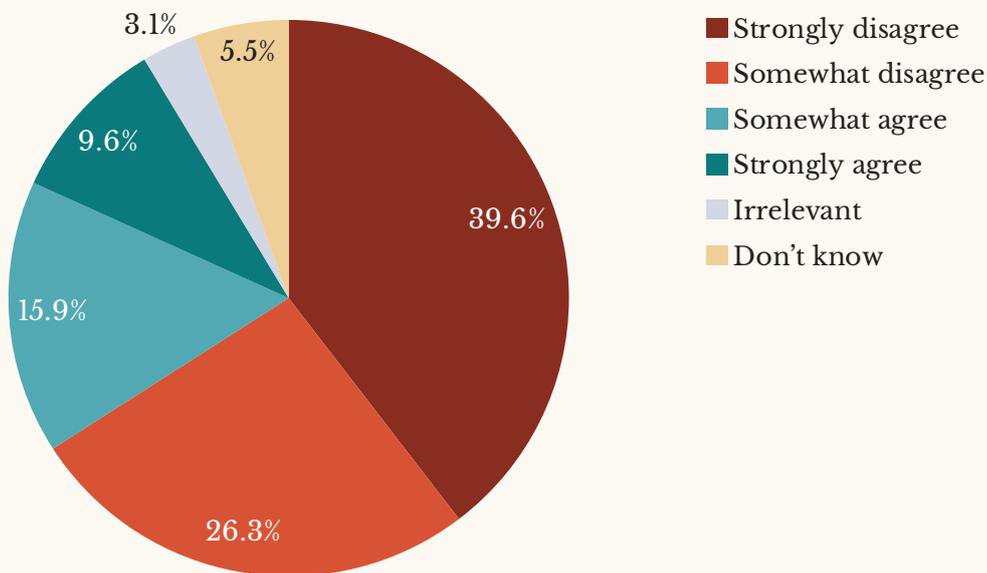


Respondents with only primary education (48%), and supporters of the Socialist Party (62%) were most likely to agree that the impunity of people with high-ranking positions in Albania is increasingly coming to an end.

Statement: The political opposition in Albania offers alternatives and hope for better governance.

A quarter of the sample (25.5%) believed that the political opposition in Albania offers alternatives and hope for better governance. Conversely, 65.9% of respondents disagreed with the statement.

Figure 57. The political opposition in Albania offers alternatives and hope for better governance (N=1600)



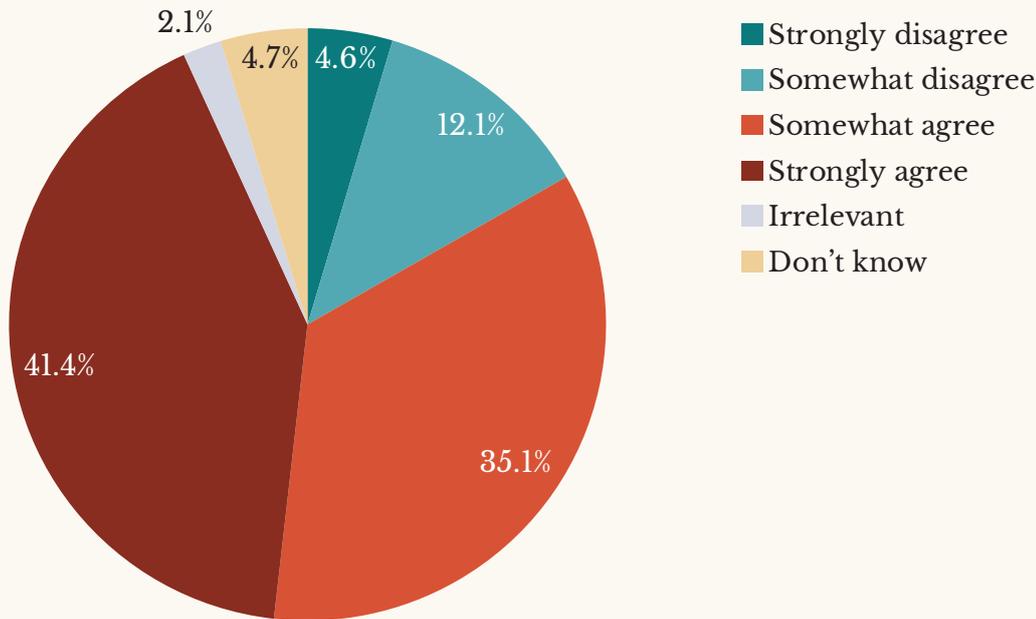
When checking across demographics, respondents over 65 years old (33%) and those with less than primary education (46%) were found to be more likely to agree that the political opposition in Albania offers alternatives and hope for better governance. This view was also generally shared by supporters of the PD Reestablishment Group (40%) and Freedom Party (35%).

Statement: Governing actors in Albania misuse state institutions and resources for narrow political interests.

The majority of the respondents, 76.5%, believed that governing actors in Albania misuse state institutions and resources for narrow political interests, while a mere 16.7% of respondents disagreed and 6.8% found the statement irrelevant or were unsure about it.



Figure 58. Governing actors in Albania misuse state institutions and resources for narrow political interests (N=1600)

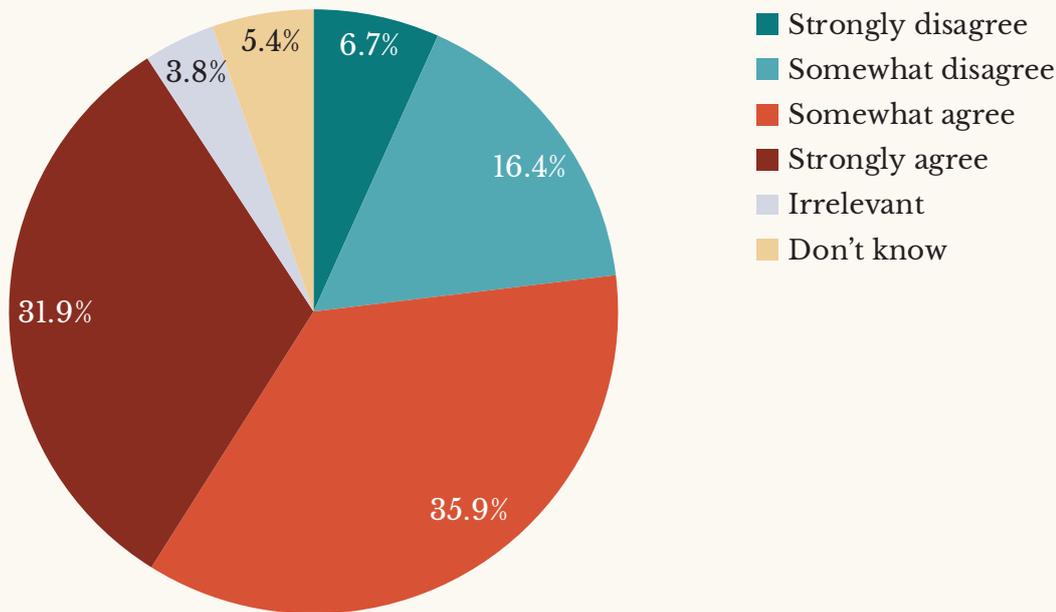


Those who are supporters of the PD Reestablishment Group (93%), the Democratic Party (86%), or do not support any party at all (84%), were most inclined to agree that governing actors in Albania misuse state institutions and resources for narrow political interests. This view was typically shared by unemployed respondents (84%) and students (82%).

Statement: In the area where I live, nepotism is making it difficult to find good job opportunities.

Respondents were asked to rate whether they agree or not with the statement, using a 4-point scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4). A significant majority (68%) either somewhat agreed (35.9%) or strongly agreed (31.9%) that nepotism is an issue in securing good jobs in the area where they live. Meanwhile, 23% of participants either somewhat disagreed (16.4%) or strongly disagreed (6.7%) with the statement. A smaller percentage, 3.8% found the statement irrelevant to their circumstances, and 5.4% were unsure, responding with 'don't know'.

Figure 59. In the area where I live, nepotism is making it difficult to find good job opportunities (N=1600)



When checking across demographics, political supporters of the PD Reestablishment Group (85%), Freedom Party (79%), and those who do not support any political groups (73%) were more likely to agree with the statement.

The survey findings on political extremism reveal that citizens are just as concerned by political extremism (43.4%) as they were in the 2021 survey, with a very slight increase of 1.4 p.p. Although there has been a significant decrease in perceived incitement to political extremism, with 16.3% of respondents reporting incitement in their areas – a drop from 2021 of 11 p.p. – concerns about negative campaigning, voter inducement and political coercion persisted among the respondents. Notably, a significant proportion of respondents associated political extremism with actions that undermine electoral integrity and those that foster a polarized or oppressive political environment.

Moreover, the survey reflects a concerning consensus on the misuse of state institutions and resources for narrow political interests, with a total of 76.5% acknowledging this malpractice. Additionally, around 68% of respondents believed that nepotism makes it difficult for them to find job opportunities and that voting for the governing party as mandatory for job retention in the public administration, highlighting an increased marginalization of opposition supporters or those feeling unrepresented in Albania's political spectrum. The reported lack of political alternatives, characterized by power centralization within the governing party, alongside internal conflicts within opposition parties, points to a polarized society.

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Presence in Albania has made several recommendations recently to enhance electoral integrity,⁸² emphasizing the importance of conducting a prompt and comprehensive inquiry into serious allegations of electoral misconduct, including vote-buying, exerting pressure on voters and exploiting state resources for electoral advantages. Additionally, the OSCE underscored the necessity of implementing procedural measures to guarantee voting secrecy, thereby preventing practices such as voter intimidation, group voting and proxy voting. Such measures aim to raise public awareness about these detrimental practices and ensure a fair electoral process – which is imperative in light of this survey's findings.



82 OSCE, OSCE Presence stresses need for progress in electoral reform in Albania during special meeting of International Election Working Group, 7 December 2023, <https://www.osce.org/presence-in-albania/560058>.



Emerging trends related to political extremism include the normalization of negative campaigning, the entrenchment of voter inducement practices and the perpetuation of a political culture that tolerates or even encourages violence and coercion. These practices not only threaten the integrity of the electoral process but also exacerbate societal divisions and undermine democracy and citizens trust in democratic institutions.

The findings indicate that issues which are likely to exacerbate individual propensity towards violent extremism include explicit incitement to violence by politicians and verbal or physical altercations due to political affiliation. Additionally, entrenched connections between some political elites and criminal networks, disillusionment with the political opposition's ability to offer viable governance solutions may further contribute to a conducive environment for the propagation of VE. To counter these issues, there is an urgent need to address the underlying tensions and conflicts between political party members who are either involved as targets or contributors to the escalation of violence. Enhancing their capacity to manage conflicts and engage in de-escalation practices is essential for fostering a more peaceful and constructive political environment.

Supporters of the Democratic Party (DP) and PD Reestablishment Group were more likely to agree with statements regarding the incitement of political extremism, mandatory voting for the governing party to keep one's job and the connection between political elites and criminal networks. Their heightened awareness and acknowledgement of these issues may indicate both a greater exposure to and risk of being influenced by entities who incite political extremism among the opposition factions. These insights highlight the need for concerted efforts to address the root causes of political polarization, to ensure the integrity of electoral processes and to foster an inclusive and positive political discourse.

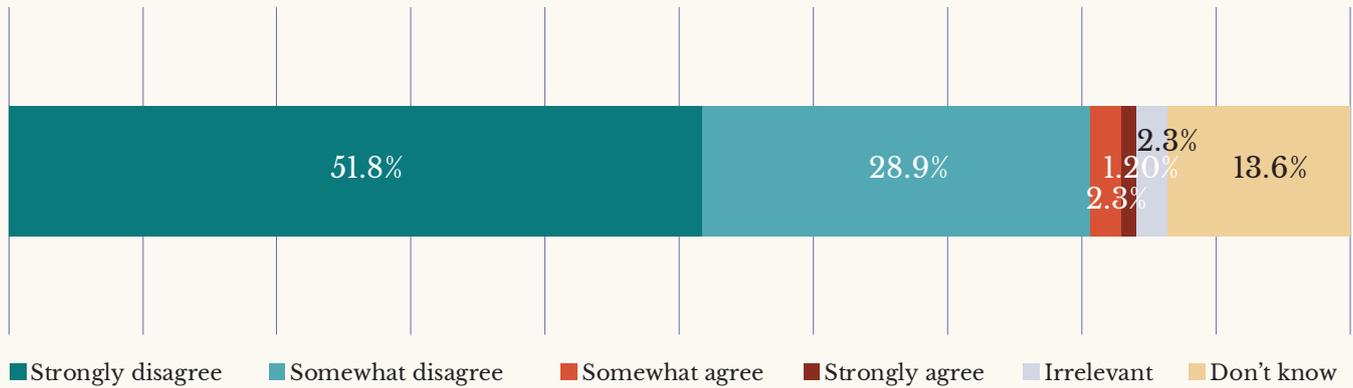
Ethno-nationalist extremism and broader social observations

Statement: There are individuals or groups in the area where I live that incite ethno-nationalist extremism.

Respondents were asked to rate whether they agree or not with the statement, using a 4-point scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4). Only 3.5% of the respondents agreed that there are individuals or groups in the area where they live that incite ethno-nationalist extremism, while 80.7% disagreed and 15.9% either were unsure or found the statement irrelevant. Compared to the 2021 national assessment, this represents a 4.1 p.p. decrease in respondents recognizing the presence of individuals or groups that incite ethno-nationalist extremism in their areas.



Figure 60. There are individuals or groups in the area where I live that incite ethno-nationalist extremism (N=1600)



When checking across demographics, no significant differences are noted between the variables.

Respondents who noted there are individuals or groups in the area where they live that incite ethno-nationalist extremism, were asked to describe the extremist behaviours, actions or attitudes they have witnessed. Out of 42 responses, seven answers were deemed invalid.

When asked about specific ethno-nationalist behaviours, actions or attitudes, discrimination was the most frequently reported category, with 11 respondents noting various forms of discrimination, including racial, ethnic or national discrimination. Five respondents witnessed hate speech, derogatory language or incitement of hatred against particular ethnic groups, whereas two respondents reported incidents where individuals were denied basic rights and services, which they attributed to ethnic background.

Five respondents felt that an escalation in the Kosovo–Serbia conflict might potentially fuel or exacerbate extremist attitudes or behaviours along ethnic or nationalistic lines. In addition, one respondent reported attitudes related to the unification of Kosovo and Albania as a form of ethno-nationalist extremism.

Four respondents noted incidents of nationalism, which could imply extreme patriotic sentiments, potentially leading to exclusion of or hostility towards other ethnic groups. Three respondents reported witnessing acts of violence that were specifically motivated by the ethnic belonging of the victims. At least one respondent said they had witnessed a death threat specifically due to someone's ethnic background. Another respondent observed psychological violence, which may include harassment or intimidation, based on ethnic belonging.

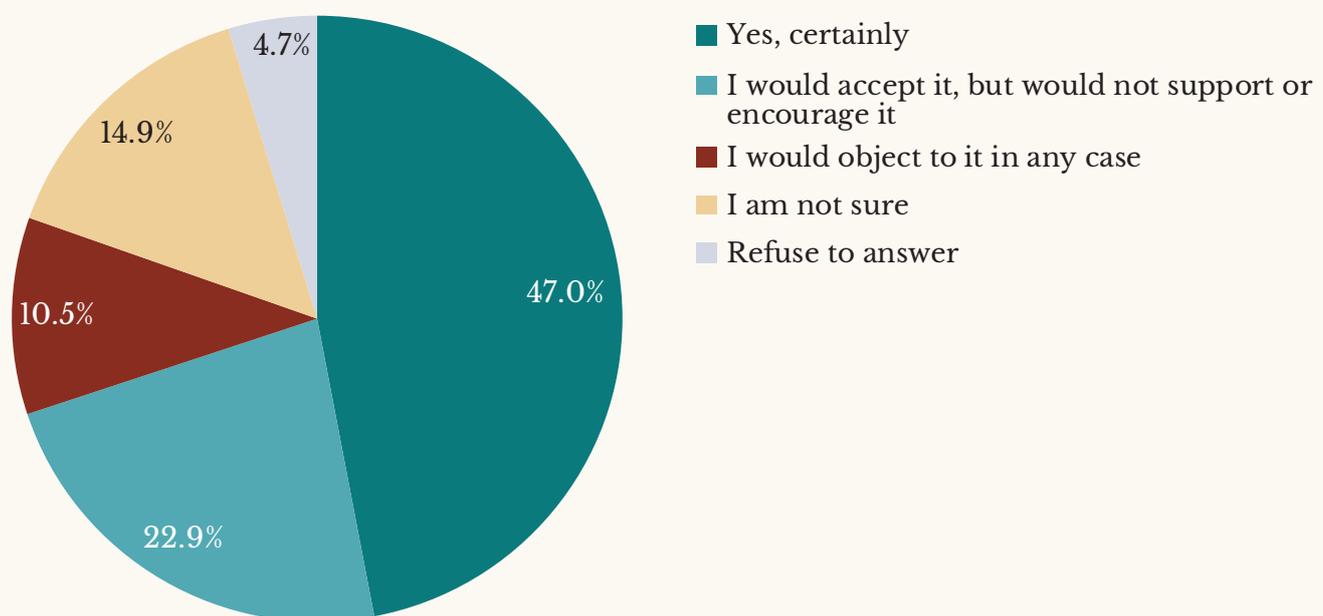
Six respondents preferred not to specify which national minority/ies were subjected to negative behaviours in the area where they live. When it comes to which national and ethnic minorities are the most exposed to discriminatory tendencies, three respondents noted Roma and Egyptians were targets of discrimination. Two respondents noted discriminatory tendencies or hate speech targeted against Greeks. Similarly, two respondents observed discriminatory behaviours or hate speech targeting Serbs and two other respondents against Macedonians. One respondent witnessed hate speech targeted at Bulgarians.



Statement: Would you personally support a family member (siblings/children) if they were to marry a person belonging to another ethnicity?

When asked whether they would personally support a family member (siblings/children) if they were to marry a person belonging to another ethnicity, less than half of the sample agreed that they would support them, with 47% responding with 'yes'. 22.9% of the respondents said they would accept the marriage but would not support or encourage it. Only 10.5% would object in any case if a family member was to marry a person belonging to another ethnicity, and 14.9% were not sure how they would feel in such circumstances. 4.7% of the respondents refused to answer.

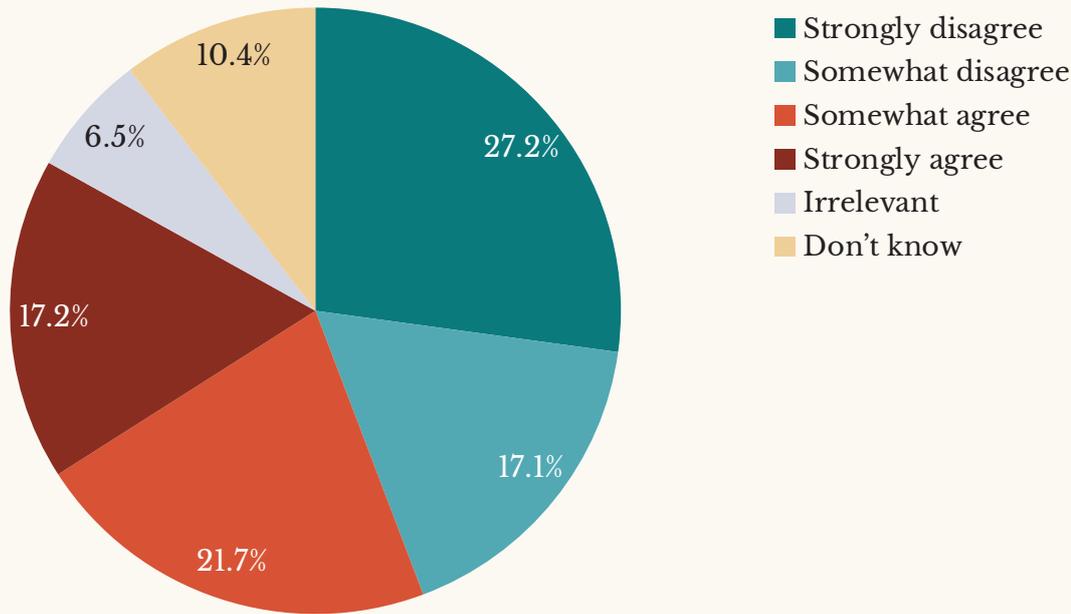
Figure 61. Proportion of respondents supporting a family member if they were to marry a person belonging to another ethnicity (N=1600)



Statement: There is a big conspiracy to depopulate Albania and replace its citizens with foreign immigrants.

Respondents were asked to rate whether they agree or not with the statement on a 4-point scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4). 38.9% agreed with the statement, whereas 44.3% disagreed. 10.4% of the sample said they did not know and 6.5% of the respondents found the statement irrelevant.

Figure 62. There is a big conspiracy to depopulate Albania and replace its citizens with foreign immigrants (N=1600)



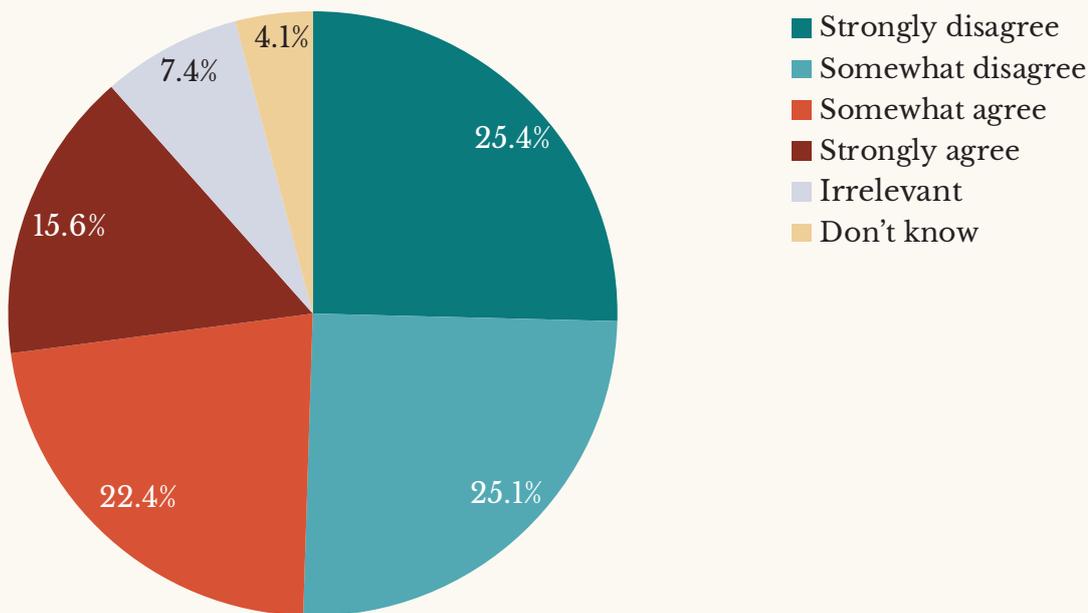
When checking across demographics, respondents over 65 years old (46%), Bektashis (47%), those who regularly practice all the rituals of their religion (50%) and those who pray regularly (53%) were more likely to agree with the statement. The perception that there is a big conspiracy to depopulate Albania and replace its citizens with foreign immigrants was commonly expressed by supporters of the Freedom Party (79%), PD Reestablishment Group (78%) and the Democratic Party (56%).

Statement: Albanians should not mix with other races.

38% of the respondents agreed that Albanians should not mix with other races. Half of the sample (50.5%) disagreed with the statement. 7.5% of the respondents found the statement irrelevant whereas 4.1% did not know.



Figure 63. Albanians should not mix with other races (N=1600)

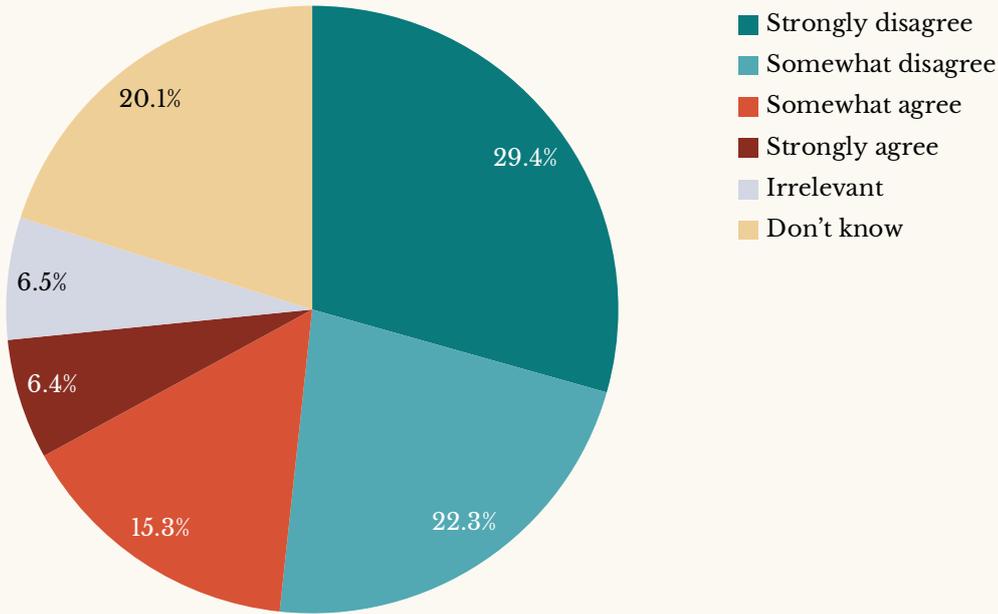


Respondents over 65 years old (47%), those who aged between 55 and 64 (46%), and respondents who identify as Bektashi (49%) or Catholic (43%) were more likely to agree that Albanians should not mix with other races. This perception was commonly expressed by respondents who have completed up to secondary education (44%) and those who are unemployed (44%). Political supporters of the Democratic Party (56%), Freedom party (50%) and PD Reestablishment Group (45%) were also likely to agree with the statement. Among practicing believers, those who regularly practice all the rituals of their religion (48%) and those who practice the main religious rituals (46%) were more likely to agree.

Statement: In the area where I live, belonging to a minority group brings numerous social and economic benefits.

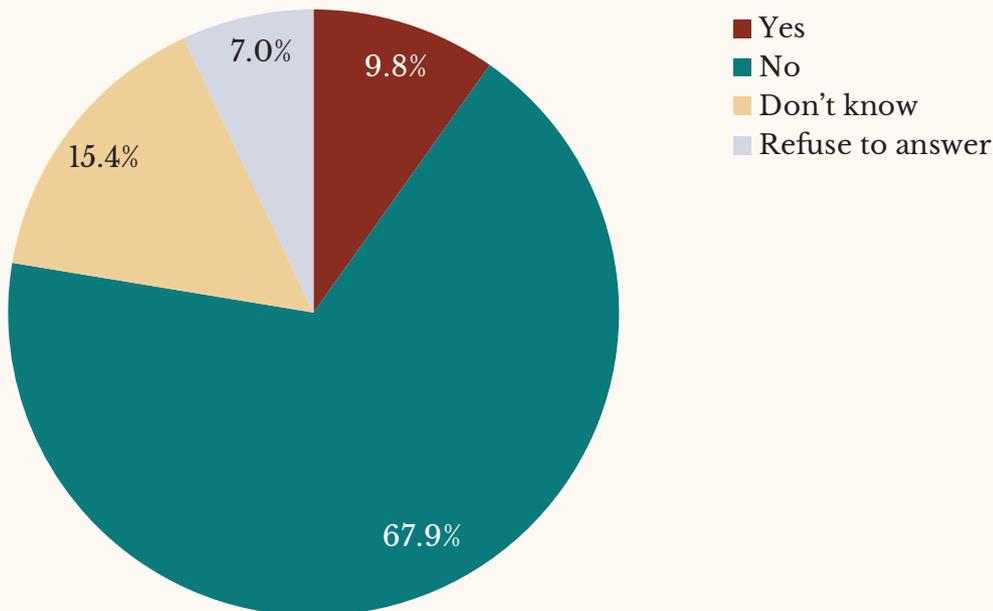
According to 21.7% of the respondents, belonging to a minority group brings numerous social and economic benefits in the area where they live. About half of the sample (51.7%) indicated they somewhat disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. 20.1% of the respondents said they did not know, and a further 6.5% of the sample found the statement irrelevant. No substantial differences were found when checking across demographics.

Figure 64. In the area where I live, belonging to a minority group brings numerous social and economic benefits (N-1600)



When asked whether they had observed any overt discrimination or hate speech against individuals in the past year, a small portion of the sample, 9.8%, affirmed they had. The majority of respondents, accounting for 67.9%, said they had not witnessed such incidents within the last 12 months. A segment of the sample (15.4%) was unsure, while 7% chose not to respond to the question.

Figure 65. Open forms of discrimination or hate speech against an individual (N=1600)



Respondents who answered 'yes' in the preceding question, were further asked to specify which social group the discriminatory acts were directed towards. Out of the overall sample, 140 respondents answered this question. Among 83 valid responses, Roma/Egyptians were the most frequently cited community (29 respondents), followed by opposition parties and their supporters (16 respondents) and Muslims (11 respondents). 54 respondents preferred not to specify the social/ethnic group.

While discrimination often goes unreported, recent amendments to the Law on Protection from Discrimination entail specific protections from multiple, intersecting and structural forms of discrimination, hate speech, segregation and sexual harassment.⁸³ The US Department of State's 2022 country report on human rights practices in Albania underscores allegations of discrimination targeting members of the Romani and Balkan-Egyptian communities in Albania, 'including in housing, employment, health care, and education. As of August, the commissioner for protection from discrimination received 17 complaints of discrimination on grounds of race and ethnicity, ruling in favour of the complainant in five cases'.⁸⁴ Fewer complaints had been filed from persons belonging to the Macedonian minority.⁸⁵

Shedding light on the various forms of discrimination, the majority of respondents had provided some context to their answers, as detailed in the table below:

Table 8. Forms of discrimination witnessed (N=114)

Forms of discrimination	
Discrimination and hate speech due to political affiliation	30
Discrimination due to ethnic belonging	39
Discrimination and hate speech due to religious belief	19
Verbal violence	4
Discrimination due to socio-economic status	9
Discrimination due to sexual orientation	6
Gender-based discrimination	2
Verbal violence due to socio-economic status	2
Ageism	3
TOTAL	114

The most frequently reported form of discrimination was ethnic belonging, with 39 instances. This is followed by discrimination and hate speech due to political affiliation, with 30

83 Republic Of Albania Assembly Law No. 10 221, Dated 04.02.2010 On Protection Against Discrimination, available at <https://www.kmd.al/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/LMD-i-perditesuar-1.pdf>

84 US Department of State, 2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Albania, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/albania/>

85 Council of Europe, Fifth Opinion on Albania, 6 June 2023, <https://rm.coe.int/5th-op-albania-en/1680acf90e>



occurrences. Discrimination and hate speech due to religious belief were noted 19 times. Discrimination due to socio-economic status and discrimination due to sexual orientation were reported nine and six times, respectively. Gender-based discrimination, ageism, and verbal violence due to socio-economic status are the least reported, with two, three and two reports respectively.

Survey questions addressing ethno-nationalist extremism in Albania point to a relatively low propensity, with only 3.5% of respondents recognizing its presence in their areas. This indicates a decline from previous assessments, despite growing concerns over ethno-nationalism in Albania. A few reported incidents of nationalism, ethnic violence and discrimination suggest some underlying tensions.

Specifically, sporadic episodes of discrimination, hate speech and acts of violence motivated by ethnicity, including threats and psychological violence, highlight persistent ethnic prejudices. State and non-state actors should enhance reporting of discrimination cases, to enable continuous monitoring of the situation among different minority and marginalized groups. Often a precursor to or component of ethno-nationalism or far-right politics, patterns of discrimination must be analyzed and used to empower the targeted groups through tailored interventions.

The anticipation of regional conflicts exacerbating these issues points to the presence of volatile regional dynamics that could fuel extremism. However, concerns extend beyond ethnic tensions to societal issues such as mixed views on inter-ethnic marriages, suggesting a divided stance on ethnic integration. A considerable portion of respondents subscribe to conspiracy theories about depopulation and replacement with foreign immigrants, reflecting xenophobia and mistrust. Given the growing number of immigrants to Albania, these findings raise important challenges for the future.

The demographic data indicates that respondents over 65 years old, adherents of Bektashism, supporters of political parties such as the Democratic Party, Freedom Party and PD Reestablishment Group, as well as the unemployed and individuals who have completed only secondary school education, are more inclined towards exclusionary and conspiratorial attitudes.



7. Conclusions and recommendations

The 2024 national assessment of violent extremism drivers, forms and threats presents a crucial update in Albania's fight against violent extremism, enriched by an in-depth exploration of perceptions of political extremism and other emerging threats. Building on this expanded scope, the report offers actionable insights and recommendations to enhance Albania's preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) measures. The assessment seeks to inform and complement the efforts of the Albanian government and P/CVE stakeholders, to enhance resilience against the broad spectrum of violent extremism and ensure a proactive and adaptable response to protect Albanian society and its democratic values.

As Albania nears a decade of implementing P/CVE strategies, it is evident that considerable progress has been made in tackling religious extremism, yet the evolving nature of violent extremism presents continuous challenges. Delving into the main forms and drivers of violent extremism, this report has been structured into three main chapters which analyze citizens' perceptions through the lens of the socio-economic, political and cultural drivers used in previous national assessments, as well as a series of new questions aimed at exploring emerging threats.

Concerns over political extremism prevail over concerns about ethno-nationalist and religious extremism, with 43.4% respondents acknowledging it as a national issue. Notably, reported behaviours identified as political extremism included negative campaigning, voter inducement and interpersonal violence due to political affiliation, reflecting a tense and polarized political atmosphere. In contrast, concerns about religious extremism (30.6%) and ethno-nationalism (27%) are lower than in previous years, though respondents have witnessed sporadic cases of discrimination, hate speech and religious intolerance, which indicate various forms of societal marginalization.

A significant portion of young people feel disconnected from society and prone to dangerous behaviour, a condition that can heighten the appeal of violent extremist groups offering a sense of purpose. When asked about the presence of individuals or groups inciting extremism in the area where they live, 16.3% of respondents acknowledged the existence of entities promoting political extremism. Meanwhile, only 3.5% reported cases of ethno-nationalism, and 6.6% identified entities encouraging religious extremism in their area. Despite a slight overall decrease in reported violent extremism, there is notable scepticism towards the educational system's ability to meet job market demands. A concerning minority of Albanians show a readiness to engage in illegal activities for financial gain, driven by economic desperation. Additionally, nearly half of the respondents recognized the phenomenon of religious organizations providing material incentives for participation, pointing to the potential exploitation of socio-economic vulnerabilities by certain groups.

The survey reveals a considerable divide among Albanians concerning respect for citizens' rights and freedoms by state institutions, with nearly half feeling that they are respected. Nearly half of the respondents viewed the political system as unfair and supported the idea of enacting change through violence if necessary. The support for this statement remains stable, indicating polarization over political rights, civil liberties and the effectiveness of Albania's political system. Additionally, about one in four Albanians saw law enforcement institutions as disproportionately harsh towards practicing Muslims, and there is a rising belief in the right to vigilante justice when state institutions fail to uphold rights and freedoms. This points to a growing sentiment in favour of taking action against perceived injustices, underscoring the importance of equitable treatment by law enforcement and upholding human rights to prevent radicalization and foster community trust in state institutions.



Further findings indicate that a majority of Albanians oppose civilian engagement in foreign armed conflicts, with declining support for such activities as well as a significant majority who disagree with the view that Albania's military contributions abroad insult Muslims. However, there has been a decrease in belief that religion has a role in achieving greater justice and correlating it with less government corruption. Additionally, a significant distrust in government integrity and connections between political elites and criminals is evident, with limited optimism towards the political opposition offering viable alternatives. This scepticism extends to the international scene, with a quarter of respondents viewing global political and economic structures as Western tools for dominance over Muslim countries, and over one-third who saw the EU and USA as biased towards certain Balkan countries based on religious affiliation and geopolitical interests. These sentiments reflect the challenges Albania faces in its political systems and law enforcement, highlighting the need for more transparent, equitable approaches to governance and international engagement to address these pervasive concerns.

In Albania, there was a broad consensus among the population that practicing as a Muslim or Christian is largely unproblematic, reflecting an improvement in freedom of religious practice since 2021. Challenges persist for a minority, with 11.6% of Muslim and 7.1% of Christian practitioners acknowledging difficulties, though these figures represent decreases of 8.3 and 2.4 p.p. respectively, from the previous survey. The perception that there are foreign conservative Islamic influences on Muslim believers in the country has decreased by 14.3 p.p., yet 24.8% of respondents continued to feel this. A majority (71.7%) feel their religious community's faith, traditions and dignity are secure, despite a slight decrease of 6.8 p.p. since the last survey. While 64.7% of Albanians expressed no concern over religious extremism, 30.6% remain concerned, showing a minimal decrease of 1.2 p.p. from 2021. Moreover, 79.9% rejected the notion that their area has individuals or groups inciting religious extremism, a decrease of 5.5 p.p., leaving 6.6% in agreement. The main behaviours, actions and attitudes that were perceived by respondents as extremist or driving extremism included religious intolerance, Islamophobia and the effects of global conflicts, emphasizing the need for dialogue based on shared national and religious values. The data indicates progress yet underscores continuing challenges with foreign religious influences, religious marginalization and extremism, and highlights the vital role of religious authorities and inclusive dialogue in fostering social cohesion and countering fundamentalist influences.

The newly added section on political drivers of violent extremism and other emerging threats in Albania reveals significant concerns among the populace. There is a clear consensus on how VE is defined and the severity of its consequences, encompassing not only threats to individual lives and national security but also to social cohesion and state functionality. An increased awareness and concern for political and ethno-nationalist extremism among the population suggests rising apprehension towards these forms of extremism, reflecting broader regional tensions and potentially increased exposure.

The findings suggest that, although perceived incitement to political extremism appears to be decreasing, issues like negative campaigning, voter inducement and political coercion continue to be widespread. A significant majority reported the misuse of state resources for political gain and saw employment in public administration as contingent upon support for the governing party. Other risk factors for exacerbating VE include explicit incitement to violence by politicians and disillusionment with the political opposition, underscoring the need to mitigate political polarization, ensure electoral integrity and promote inclusive political discourse.

The survey findings also hint at growing concerns over national identity, which is often a precursor or contributing factor to VE ideologies. The findings reveal growing worries among respondents regarding national identity, with 38.9% believing in the existence of a conspiracy to replace Albanian citizens with foreign immigrants, while a similar proportion (38%) oppose racial mixing. However, about one in five respondents have witnessed social and economic benefits for minority groups in their area. These findings suggest that the emerging threats



Albania will face are likely to relate to issues of demographic change, racial integration and minority rights, suggesting a considerable proportion of the population harbour apprehensions about ethnic diversity and its potential impact on Albania's social fabric.

Recommendations

Prioritizing the following steps is imperative in creating the cross-sectoral approach required to tackle drivers of violent extremism and emerging threats in Albania:

- ⇒ Enhancing social cohesion and resilience within communities by supporting and implementing community-based programmes that actively engage diverse groups, including youths, women and marginalized populations, to mitigate societal discrimination. By supporting such initiatives, P/CVE stakeholders will be contributing to strengthening social bonds, which, in turn renders the community less susceptible to the allure of extremist ideologies.
- ⇒ Enhancing accountability mechanisms is essential in combating corruption and addressing the misuse of state resources. Such practices often lead to grievances among marginalized groups, creating an environment where extremist ideologies can flourish. By bolstering accountability measures like transparency and oversight, the government can rebuild trust and legitimacy, ultimately diminishing the extremist narratives that thrive on these grievances.
- ⇒ To address the root causes of political disillusionment, it is crucial to promote civic engagement. By fostering a culture of civic responsibility and active participation in democratic processes, with a focus on educating and empowering the Albanian electorate, non-state actors (such as civil society organizations and influential community leaders) may be better equipped to carry out innovative civic education initiatives. These initiatives should aim to guide various target groups towards greater participation and away from political polarization. This includes providing voter education to help individuals, in particular the elderly and the youth — to critically evaluate political messages, thereby enhancing resilience against the divisive effects of negative campaigning.
- ⇒ There is a need to continuously monitor public perceptions of the forms of violent extremism and emerging threats, and to adapt P/CVE interventions accordingly. This will ensure that interventions remain responsive to the evolving threat landscape, ultimately enhancing community resilience and stability.
- ⇒ Inclusive dialogue is imperative to combat religious extremism and discrimination against religion, with the ultimate goal of advancing Albania's social cohesion. This entails empowering religious communities to engage practitioners and the broader community to promote understanding, mitigate foreign influences in religious affairs and counter extremist narratives and discrimination. By fostering dialogue rooted in shared national values and traditions, Albania can cultivate an environment of tolerance, respect and resilience to divisive ideologies, thereby strengthening its social fabric and promoting religious harmony.



8. Annexes

8.1 Distribution of survey sample

County	Sample size per county		
	Male	Female	Total
Berat	32	33	65
Dibër	32	30	62
Durrës	85	83	168
Elbasan	72	74	146
Fier	78	79	157
Gjirokastrë	15	16	31
Korçë	55	57	112
Kukës	21	20	41
Lezhë	32	34	66
Shkodër	53	57	110
Tiranë	264	272	536
Vlorë	53	53	106
Total	792	808	1,600



8.2 Survey questionnaire



Institute
for Democracy
and Mediation

PUBLIC OPINION SURVEY

on the status of violent extremism in Albania

The Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM) with the support of the US Embassy in Albania is conducting a research on the presence of violent extremism in Albania, within which this survey is being conducted with randomly selected citizens. We would like to ask you some questions about your thoughts on socio-economic, political and cultural factors that may affect the vulnerability of your community to violent or radical ideologies.

You may choose not to participate in the survey, or you may let me know that you prefer not to answer a specific question and I will skip that question.

We guarantee that all the information provided while completing this questionnaire will be confidential, guaranteeing your privacy.

FOR THE INTERVIEWER: Enter the interview data

Interviewer's name	Interview nr.	Municipality	Administrative Unit

SECTION 1. SOCIO-ECONOMIC FACTORS

1. To what extent do you agree with the following statement? *Please use a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree)*

STATEMENT	Strongly disagree	Some-what disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	Irrelevant	Don't know
In general, well-educated people in the area where I live have good job positions.	1	2	3	4	88	99
The main source of income for youth in the area where I live is from individual law-abiding work.	1	2	3	4	88	99



STATEMENT	Strongly disagree	Some-what disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	Irrelevant	Don't know
In the area where I live, nepotism is making it difficult to find good job opportunities.	1	2	3	4	88	99
In the area where I live, state institutions of social and economic assistance operate in a professional and abuse-free manner.	1	2	3	4	88	99
Many young people have fallen prey to vices (gambling, alcohol, drugs, etc.) and/or dangerous behavior (violence, vandalism, etc.) in the area where I live.	1	2	3	4	88	99
For a better living, I would justify any type of economic activity, even illegal.	1	2	3	4	88	99
Fast wealth creation is not wrong, regardless of how it is achieved.	1	2	3	4	88	99

2. In your opinion, can the following actions be described as violent extremism? Please rate on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1= NEVER and 5= ALWAYS.

STATEMENT	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	Don't know
Attending a peaceful protest for political, religious or ideological reasons	1	2	3	4	5	99
Making derogatory remarks about someone for political, religious or ideological reasons	1	2	3	4	5	99
Involvement in a criminal act for political, religious or ideological reasons	1	2	3	4	5	99



STATEMENT	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	Don't know
Sharing or liking content promoting the usage of violence for political, religious or ideological reasons	1	2	3	4	5	99
Verbally assaulting someone for political, religious or ideological reasons	1	2	3	4	5	99
Physically threatening an individual or a large number of people for political, religious or ideological reasons	1	2	3	4	5	99

3. To what extent are you concerned about “.....” in Albania? Please use a scale from 1 (not concerned at all) to 4 (very concerned).

	Not at all concerned	Not very concerned	Slightly concerned	Very concerned	Irrelevant	Don't know
Political extremism (the spread of radical ideas by individuals or groups willing to use violence or other illegal means to achieve their political goals)	1	2	3	4	88	99
Ethno-nationalist extremism (the spread of radical ideas by individuals or groups willing to use violence or other illegal means to promote the interests of their ethnic group.)	1	2	3	4	88	99
Religious extremism (the spread of radical ideas by individuals or groups who believe in the supremacy of their religion and are willing to use violence or other illegal means to achieve their religious goals)	1	2	3	4	88	99



4. Which of the following consequences of violent extremism is the most concerning in the case of Albania:

It threatens the lives of citizens	1
It violates national security	2
It violates the rights and freedoms of citizens	3
Politically motivated violence	4
It damages the economy	5
It incites hatred and mistrust in society	6
It harms the image of Albania	7
It harms Albania's relations with neighboring countries	8
Violent extremism is not a concern	9
Other (please specify: _____)	10
Don't know	88
Refuse to answer	99

5. There are individuals or groups in the area where I live that incite "....." Please use a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree).

	Strongly disagree			Strongly agree	Irrelevant	Don't know
Political extremism	1	2	3	4	88	99
Ethno-nationalist extremism	1	2	3	4	88	99
Religious extremism	1	2	3	4	88	99

5.1 If you chose (Agree-3; or Strongly agree-4) for each of the forms of extremism, please specify what kind of extremist behaviors, actions or attitudes you have witnessed in the area where you live.

<p>Political extremism:</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Ethno-nationalist extremism: _____</p> <p>-----</p>



Religious extremism: _____

6. In your experience, to what extent do you agree with the following statements? Please use a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree)

STATEMENT	Strongly disagree	Some-what disagree	Some-what agree	Strongly agree	Irrelevant	Don't know
In the area where I live there are religious groups that offer economic privileges or material gain to those who practice their religion.	1	2	3	4	88	99
People with the same religious denomination as I benefit less from opportunities for economic and social development due to our religious belonging.	1	2	3	4	88	99
The long beard (for men) or headscarf (for women) reveal that we are dealing with religious extremists.	1	2	3	4	88	99
The religious community I belong to is well-represented in politics and state institutions	1	2	3	4	88	99

SECTION 2. RELIGION AND (INTER)STATE OR POLITICAL FACTORS

7. To what extent do the following statements reflect your perceptions? Please use a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree)

STATEMENT	Strongly disagree	Some-what disagree	Some-what agree	Strongly agree	Irrelevant	Don't know
In general, citizens' rights and freedoms are respected by state institutions.	1	2	3	4	88	99
In the area where I live the 'state as law enforcement authority' is present more than the 'state as provider of public services for citizens'	1	2	3	4	88	99



STATEMENT	Strongly disagree				Strongly agree	Irrelevant	Don't know
The impunity of people with high-ranking positions in Albania is increasingly coming to an end.	1	2	3	4		88	99
The political system in Albania is unfair and has to be changed even with violence if needed.	1	2	3	4		88	99
The political opposition in Albania offers alternatives and hope for more good governance.	1	2	3	4		88	99
Some members of the political elite have connections with criminals and serve each other's interests.	1	2	3	4		88	99
Governing actors in Albania misuse state institutions and resources for narrow political interests.	1	2	3	4		88	99
People have the right to take the law into their own hands when their rights and freedoms are denied by state institutions.	1	2	3	4		88	99
Law enforcement institutions (police, prosecution, courts) are harsher with practicing Muslims	1	2	3	4		88	99

8. To what extent do you agree with the following statements? Please use a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree)

STATEMENT	Strongly disagree				Strongly agree	Irrelevant	Don't know
Inciting of or engagement of civilians in armed conflicts abroad must not be allowed.	1	2	3	4		88	99
Albania's contribution to military missions in Afghanistan and Iraq were an insult to Muslims.	1	2	3	4		88	99
It is the duty of every citizen to protect their ideology at any price and by any means.	1	2	3	4		88	99



STATEMENT	Strongly disagree				Strongly agree	Irrelevant	Don't know
It is the duty of every believer to protect their values and religious dignity at any price and by any means.	1	2	3	4	88	99	
A true believer should not denounce members of their own community who hold religious extremist views.	1	2	3	4	88	99	
Countries with strong religious faith have less corrupt governments.	1	2	3	4	88	99	
Albania would have more justice if more people would join my religion.	1	2	3	4	88	99	
Religious activities should not be overseen by the state.	1	2	3	4	88	99	

9. To what extent do you agree with the following statements? *Please use a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree)*

STATEMENT	Strongly disagree				Strongly agree	Irrelevant	Don't know
Global political and economic structures (e.g. UN, IMF) are an invention of the West to rule Muslim countries.	1	2	3	4	88	99	
Countries with a Christian majority population in the Balkans have had more support from the West precisely due to their religious affiliation.	1	2	3	4	88	99	
The European Union has been unfair with countries in the Balkans with a considerable Muslim population (Albania, Kosovo, BiH, North Macedonia).	1	2	3	4	88	99	
USA has been unfair with countries in the Balkans with a considerable Muslim population (Albania, Kosovo, BiH, North Macedonia).	1	2	3	4	88	99	



SECTION 3. CULTURAL FACTORS

10. Would you personally support a family member (siblings/children) if they were to marry a person belonging to another religion?

Yes, certainly	1
I would accept it, but would not support or encourage it	2
I would object to it in any case	3
I would object to it if the person they are to marry is a practicing believer	4
I am not sure	5
Refuse to answer	99

11. Would you personally support a family member (siblings/children) if they were to marry a person belonging to another ethnicity?

Yes, certainly	1
I would accept it, but would not support or encourage it	2
I would object to it in any case	3
I am not sure	4
Refuse to answer	99

12. To what extent do you agree with the following statements? Please use a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree)

STATEMENT	Strongly disagree				Strongly agree	Irrelevant	Don't know
Nowadays it is difficult to be a practicing Muslim believer in Albania.	1	2	3	4	88	99	
Nowadays it is difficult to be a practicing Christian believer in Albania.	1	2	3	4	88	99	
Muslim believers in Albania are faced with foreign influences of conservative Islam.	1	2	3	4	88	99	
The faith, traditions and dignity of my religious community in general is under constant pressure and threat.	1	2	3	4	88	99	



13. To what extent do you agree with the following statements? Please use a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree)

STATEMENT	Strongly disagree			Strongly agree	Irrelevant	Don't know
The positions or stance of the chair of my religious community (in Tirana) enjoy full support of believers in the area where I live.	1	2	3	4	88	99
Religious clerics in the area where I live have a large influence on their respective believers.	1	2	3	4	88	99
In my religious community there are clerics without adequate religious education.	1	2	3	4	88	99
People have the right to follow religious interpretations that do not align with the official religious community.	1	2	3	4	88	99



SECTION 4. OTHER FACTORS

14. Please read the following statements and state to what extent do you agree with the following. Please use a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree)

STATEMENT	Strongly disagree				Strongly agree	Irrelevant	Don't know
There is a big conspiracy to depopulate Albania and replace its citizens with foreign immigrants.	1	2	3	4	88	99	
Albanians should not mix with other races.	1	2	3	4	88	99	
In the area where I live, belonging to a minority group brings numerous social and economic benefits.	1	2	3	4	88	99	
In the area where I live, voting for the governing party is mandatory to keep one's job in the public administration.	1	2	3	4	88	99	
In the area where I live, there are politicians who explicitly call for violence against political opponents.	1	2	3	4	88	99	

15. During the last 12 months, have you witnessed any open form of discrimination or hate speech against an individual?

Yes PROCEED TO QUESTION 15.1	1
No PROCEED TO THE NEXT SECTION	2
Don't know PROCEED TO THE NEXT SECTION	3
Refuse to answer PROCEED TO THE NEXT SECTION	99

15.1 If you answered "yes", please specify towards which social group such discriminatory acts were directed?



SECTION 5. DEMOGRAPHY

16. Note the gender of the respondent:

Mashkull	1
Femër	2
Tjetër	3

17. Age _____ (in years)

18. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

No education / Less than primary education	1
Primary education (8/9 year cycle)	2
Secondary education (high school)	3
University (BA, BSc)	4
Postgraduate(MA, MSc, PhD)	5
Refuse to answer	99

19. Are you a supporter of any political group?

No, I am not a supporter.	1
Yes (Socialist Party)	2
Yes (Democratic Party)	3
Yes (PD Reestablishment Group)	4
Yes (Freedom Party)	5
Yes (Other) Specify _____	6
Refuse	99

20. Employment status

Employed	1
Self-employed	2
Unemployed	3
Student	4
Other _____	5
Refuse	99



21. What religious group does your family originally belong to?

Muslim	1
Orthodox	2
Catholic	3
Bektashi	4
Evangelical	5
Mixed	6
Other_____	7
Don't know/ Not sure	88
Refuse	99

22. What religious group do you adhere to?

Muslim	1
Orthodox	2
Catholic	3
Bektashi	4
Evangelical	5
Agnostic	6
Atheist	7
Other_____	8
Refuse	99

23. Do you consider yourself a person who actively practises religion?

YES, I regularly practise all rituals of my religion	1
Mainly YES, I practise the main religious rituals	2
NO, I am a believer, but I do not practise religious rituals at all	3
NO, I am an atheist	4
Other (please specify:_____)	5
Refuse	99

24. How often do you pray?

Regularly (daily, weekly)	1
At religious festivals during the course of a normal year	2
Only occasionally, at special religious events	3
Only occasionally, at times of family or personal crisis	4
Never	5
Refuse	99

