VIOLENT EXTREMISM
in Albania

A national assessment of drivers, forms and threats

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List of acronyms

ALL	Albanian Lek
AMC	Albanian Muslim Community
BiH	Bosnia and Herzegovina
C/PVE	Countering / Prevention of violent extremism
CVE	Counter Violent Extremism
EC	European Commission
ERF	Extremism Research Forum
EU	European Union
FARC	Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia
FF	Foreign fighters
FGD	Focus group discussion
FH	Freedom House
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IDM	Institute for Democracy and Mediation
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INSTAT	National Institute of Statistics
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe
RSF	Reporters sans frontières (Reporters without borders)
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
US(A)	United States (of America)
VE	Violent extremism
WB	Western Balkans

1. Executive summary

The phenomenon of violent extremism (VE) remains present and potentially threatening in Albania despite the progress observed in implementation of the National Strategy and Action Plan against Violent Extremism (November 2015). The concerted actions carried out by state, religious, civil society and other players in the country have raised awareness on the risks and forms of VE and have reinforced alertness of religious communities and authorities. Albania has additionally strengthened the legal framework with restrictive mechanisms, and developed better capacities of central authorities and non-state stakeholders to respond to religious extremism. Nevertheless, the presence of religious extremist ideologies and individuals is confirmed by the present study. Specifically, one in ten Albanians confirm that in their area there are individuals who incite religious extremism, who support religious VE, or who pressurise religious believers into joining extremist causes. Moreover, the threat does not stem simply from the presence of such individuals but even more so from the possible consequences of their actions if Countering / Prevention of violent extremism (C/PVE) stakeholders in Albania fail to target the concerns of at-risk groups and address drivers of VE through a tailored approach.

Socio-economic, political and cultural drivers of VE remain largely pressing and conducive to extremist ideologies. The country's state of democracy and its current level of socio-economic development raise concerns that they, in combination with other factors, may threaten specific groups in society through the power of manipulation of extremist ideologies.

The presence of religious extremists and individuals who exert pressure on religious believers to join extremist causes is confirmed in municipalities that have previously been unknown as hotspots by the community of C/PVE stakeholders and practitioners in Albania. Practising members of religious communities are most exposed to threats and narratives associated with cultural drivers. Although the majority of Albanians do not recognise the issues that extremist narratives touch upon as relevant for their country, some may be justified by not a neglectable percentage of religious believers and respondents in their mid-30s to mid-40s.

Political drivers pose a potential risk in the Albanian context due to the widespread public disillusionment with governance and rule of law. The profiles most vulnerable to political drivers of violent extremism include the unemployed, men, poorly educated individuals, people from rural areas, and those up to 35 years of age. Issues such as corruption, impunity and a predominant belief that the political system is controlled by, and serves only, well-connected elites are factors that fuel strong and pervasive disenfranchisement among Albanians, regardless of their religiosity. Under such conditions, violent extremist ideologies may penetrate local communities, and their narrative may not necessarily be only religious. However, manipulation of concerns stemming from political drivers through the lenses of inflated religious sentiments and extremist narratives that build on closer realities of religious believers poses a threat for those believers. Cultural and political drivers might reinforce each other, making the community of religious believers a vulnerable target group for VE.

Under-developed areas and the outskirts of the main urban centres struggling to build cohesive communities are challenged most by socio-economic drivers. Together with concerns over the high level of informality, unemployment, poor public services

and youth disillusionment, such areas are at high risk from socio-economic drivers. Although this study shows that socio-economic issues alone are less likely to drive religious believers to violent extremism, socio-economic drivers could be an attractive narrative to tap into for non-religious violent extremism.

The study finds that Albanian stakeholders have overlooked the potential for non-religious extremism. Such potential is manifested through the relatively significant number of Albanians who would justify illegal means to deal with issues including their everyday survival, a political system currently perceived as unfair or serving only well-connected elites, and the denial of rights and freedoms by state institutions. Such findings create a concerning potential for anti-establishment, populist or other radical political alternatives to succeed in the Albanian context due to decades-long distrust and dashed hopes that governance and rule of law in Albania will deliver upon. The risk from such narratives is particularly high if extremist narratives relate to political and socio-economic drivers in tandem.

The above findings suggest that Albania must continue to work on PVE actions and build resilient communities against religious extremist ideologies, especially by making use of factors of resilience. The present study underlines the importance of cohesive communities, education, empowered women, religious tolerance, moderate tradition of practising faith, an informed and alert public that fights discrimination and prejudices as such factors. Albanians put emphasis on the role and capacities of religious authorities, state players, education system, media and civil society as key players to prevent religious extremism. Although fewer Albanians suggest youth and women as key PVE players at the community level, their standing should be raised as a priority as these groups embody both an opportunity and a challenge in the fight against VE. Women show a higher degree of resilience against extra-legal or violent actions but are also less articulated on sensitive issues, including denouncing of extremist individuals in their area of residence. Empowering more women will allow them to become more active PVE players, rather than be a passive resilient group.

Albania must move quickly from implementing its current model of C/PVE actions centring predominantly on religious VE towards a sustainable, inclusive and cross-sectoral framework for community resilience against all forms and ideologies of VE, whether religious or not. The most pressing priorities in this context include the following:

1. National decision makers should review the current C/PVE strategy and broaden the scope of its action plan to reflect all forms of violent extremism.

2. National authorities, civil society and other C/PVE stakeholders should increase their focus on community resilience. Local government units need to be assisted to tailor community resilience plans that articulate community concerns and rely on the involvement of public, civic and private stakeholders at the local level.

3. Sectoral strategies covering specific issues elaborated across all drivers of VE should integrate measures that address concerns, needs and priorities relevant for the prevention of violent extremism.

4. Prevention actions should be tailored to specific at-risk groups. Instead of working with an approach of 'one size fits all', prevention actions should reflect the vast diversity of at-risk groups and drivers. For example, believers are at risk from religious extremist narratives that aim to manipulate the various factors that make up the cultural and political drivers of VE. Religious believers show more resistance than do other groups to socio-economic drivers. Similarly, this

study shows that women reject extremist narratives that justify violence, but they must be empowered to be more vocal against other extremist narratives.

5. High risk geographical areas and neglected extremist narratives must be prioritised. The long-ignored potential for non-religious extremism requires urgent actions to restore trust in Albania's governance and rule of law, along with a more focused investigation and body of knowledge to develop longer term strategies against populist and other radical political alternatives.

6. Although religious tolerance is a well-founded value in Albanian society, it is important that acceptance and inclusion of practising believers continues to be promoted. Without this, believers might feel ignored and may become more susceptible to religious extremist narratives. Investing in the capacities of religious authorities and encouraging their openness, dialogue and actions would be an effective approach to prevent religious extremism as these authorities are largely trusted by Albanians.

7. The need to establish disengagement and reintegration programmes should no longer be ignored. The majority of Albanians support the return and reintegration of former fighters. However, the lack of an informed debate and concrete actions by C/PVE stakeholders contributes to general confusion on returnees and is a missed opportunity for their constructive reintegration.

8. A stronger voice should be given to community stakeholders and C/PVE capacities and means transferred to stakeholders at the local level to build alert and cohesive communities. Multi-player approaches and models should be encouraged that bring together and coordinate the actions of central and local governments, civil society, religious communities, media, academia, private sector and other stakeholders.

II. Introduction

Three years after the first assessment of the phenomenon of violent extremism (VE) in Albania (Religious radicalism and violent extremism in Albania, Institute for Democracy and Mediation, 2015), IDM has re-examined the state of affairs through a comprehensive assessment of drivers and other factors leading to, or enabling, violent extremism at the national level.

The present study arises within a context of higher sensitivity about VE, more active state and non-state players involved in countering and preventing VE (C/PVE) and highly alert religious communities. Similarly, the general public is more aware of the threats and risks, and the very existence, of religious extremism in Albania; albeit at a much lower intensity that in some neighbouring countries. Most importantly, the Albanian milieu of institutional and societal dealings in relation to the fight against religious extremism take place in a context that has embodied religious tolerance and coexistence as one of the most important societal values and civic traditions that enjoys almost unanimous support among Albanians.[1]

The Government of Albania adopted a National Strategy on the Fight against Violent Extremism and its Action Plan in November 2015.[2] A National Coordinator for Countering Violent Extremism was appointed the following year tasked with the duty to coordinate implementation of the national strategy. Almost two years later, the National CVE Coordinator Office was transformed into a well-resourced Coordination CVE Centre under the Prime Minister's office.[3]

Albanian C/PVE stakeholders have combined over the past several years the use of restrictive and preventive measures to counter the reach of VE groups and narratives, and prevent the flow of foreign fighters (FFs) from Albania. The number of new FFs from the country joining the conflict in Syria and Iraq dropped to zero at the end of 2015. Such a drastic reduction was a direct result of the Penal Code amendments (2014) criminalising acts of joining and recruiting for armed conflicts abroad. Between 2012 and 2015, approximately 144 Albanian citizens travelled to Syria and Iraq to join the armed conflicts there, while the European Commission (EC) country report 2018 notes that approximately 45 fighters have returned and 26 died, with 73 (includes 18 fighters and 55 family members) remaining in the field of war. In 2016, the Serious Crimes Court sentenced nine FF recruiters and collaborators to a total of 126 years imprisonment, with individual sentences varying from 7–18 years. Several operations have been carried out by law enforcement bodies and intelligence structures in cooperation with agencies from partnering countries. In 2017, five operations were conducted in which twelve suspects were arrested on charges of terrorism offences.[4]

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1. See Religious tolerance in Albania (IDM 2018, p. 4): "Albanians consider religious tolerance to be a fundamental value, one more deeply rooted in the Albanian tradition and its civic and moral values than experienced as a social practice, conviction or policy, that relies upon knowledge of different religions and acceptance of religious differences." Source: http://www.al.undp.org/content/dam/albania/docs/religious%20tolerance%20albania.pdf

2. Decision of the Council of Ministers no. 930, date 18 November 2015. See official gazette http://www.qbz.gov.al/botime/fletore_zyrtare/2015/PDF-2015/203-2015.pdf

3. Decision of the Council of Ministers no. 737, date 13 December 2017. Source: http://www.qbz.gov.al/Botime/Akteindividuale/Janar%202017/Fletore%20225/VKM%20nr.%20737,%20date%2013.12.2017.pdf

4. EC Report 2018 Albania (p. 36). Source: https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/

The past three years have been particularly intensive also from the perspective of preventive measures, guided by the National C/PVE Strategy and supported by a number of international donors from the United States of America (USA), European Union (EU) and its member states, Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), United Nations (UN) agencies and other international organisations. Religious communities, particularly the Albanian Muslim Community (AMC), and civil society actors have engaged in specific actions to prevent radicalisation, counter the effects of extremist narratives, develop capacities of front-liners, raise awareness, work with youth and women, develop cooperation models at the local level—such as the 'school as community centre'—, promote religious tolerance, and so on. The Muslim Community has continued to be one of the most active PVE religious stakeholders in the country, despite challenges from external pressure and an internal power struggle.[5] Another achievement of paramount importance represents the 'de-securitization' of the response from state authorities illustrated through the active involvement of state agencies outside the security spectrum of institutions in the prevention of VE. Namely, the general understanding among state institutions in 2014 and 2015 on the phenomena of VE and FFs is that these challenges call primarily for the involvement of security institutions. This understanding has changed drastically in the past few years, and the current approach places particular emphasis on the role of non-security institutions (education, local governments, employment agencies, etc.) at national and local levels. Nevertheless, challenges and concerns of religious extremism and violent extremism require C/PVE efforts to move from national (awareness) actions and Tirane-based players towards community level actions and engagement of stakeholders.[6]

The findings of the present study aim to improve the country's performance in countering and preventing violent extremism, religious or non-religious, build capacities of stakeholders nationally and, at the community level, strengthen understanding and knowledge of key players, helping policy and decision makers to embark on a framework of actions that rely on relevant and up-to-date evidence. Ultimately, this will step up efforts and the sustainability of the impact of C/PVE actions and contribute towards a more informed public debate and narrowed pathways for VE ideologies to garner support or expand their base of followers.

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files/20180417-albania-report.pdf

5. Extremism Research Forum (ERF) Albania report 2018, p. 12, argues that, 'The internal power struggle within AMC, which has further developed during 2017 as a result of an increased pressure from Turkey over so-called Gulenist structures in Albania, involves mostly clerics and has not reached significant numbers of religious believers.' Source: https://www.britishcouncil.al/sites/default/files/erf20albania20report202018.pdf

6. Considering that the Albanian extremism phenomenon is far less concerning than in neighbouring societies (e.g. Macedonia, Kosovo and BiH), the C/PVE measures at the local level should be streamlined in the context of community policing programmes (involving municipalities, schools, civil society, media, community leaders, religious groups) thus offering more space for local civic, non-state players and reducing reason for public misconceptions that extremism is linked exclusively to Islam and the AMC.' ERF Albania Report 2018 (p. 29).
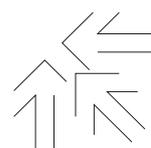
III. Methodology

The purpose of the present study is to generate context-relevant information and evidence on violent extremism in Albania. This includes the current state of affairs following almost four years of campaigning on C/PVE actions and the drivers and the related factors that feed into or enable VE. It aims to expose its key features of VE, its extent and depth, at-risk communities, areas and vulnerable groups, threats and other implications associated. The main objective of the research is to improve the country's performance, impact and capacities of C/PVE stakeholders through informed debate, evidence-based actions, enhanced understanding and knowledge of the main societal actors—state and non-state—, as well as the community of partners supporting Albania in this endeavour.

In doing so, the study is guided by the methodological approach of the first baseline assessment conducted by IDM in 2014 and 2015 on Religious radicalism and violent extremism in Albania,[7] but with a broader scope and significantly improved research instruments. Specifically, the research methodology of the present study allows for the examination of drivers related to religious and non-religious extremist ideologies at the national level.[8]

The framework of socio-economic, political and cultural VE drivers outlined by Denoeux and Carter (2009) in Guide to the Drivers of Violent Extremism was employed to examine the phenomena in this study. Three political drivers—Local conflict, State support, and Discredited governments and missing or co-opted legal oppositions—have been excluded due to lack of relevance of the context of Albania.[9] Furthermore, the present study has expanded the range of additional factors specific to Albania in the current context of C/PVE efforts when compared to the 2015 study. Accordingly, IDM has investigated in this research new issues related to reintegration of former FFs, disengagement and religious curricula, in addition to factors (in this study, classified under Religious authority) that were included in 2015.

As a result the present study's framework of violent extremism drivers and other factors under investigation is composed of four categories, with a total of seventeen VE drivers and seven Albania-specific issues, as reported in Table 1.

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7. IDM 2015 study available at http://idmalbania.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Religious-Radicalism-Albania-web-final.pdf

8. IDM 2015 study focused mostly on religious extremism and covered eight areas (municipalities) in Albania considered as VE hotspots based on interviews with key informants and media reporting on Albanian FFs.

9. The same approach as employed in the IDM 2015 study.

Table 1. Matrix of VE drivers and Albania-specific issues

SOCIO-ECONOMIC DRIVERS		CULTURAL DRIVERS	
Perceptions of social exclusion & marginality	Social networks and group dynamics	Islam under siege	"Proactive" religious agendas
Societal discrimination	Unmet social and economic needs	Broader cultural threats	
Frustrated expectations & relative deprivation	Greed or the proliferation of illegal economic activities		
ALBANIA-SPECIFIC ISSUES		POLITICAL DRIVERS	
Religious curricula	Disengagement	Denial of political rights and civil liberties	Endemic corruption and impunity for well-connected elites
Religious authority: 1. Attitudes towards illegal religious objects 2. (Un)Disputed (central) religious authority 3. Influential local religious clerics? 4. Local clerics with(out) adequate religious education	Reintegration of former FFs and returnees	Harsh government repression and gross HR violations	Poorly governed or ungoverned areas
		Intimidation or coercion by VE groups	Foreign occupation
		Perception that the int. system is fundamentally unfair and hostile to Muslim societies and peoples	Political or military encroachment, or both

Source: Denoeux and Carter, 2009; IDM, 2015, 2018

To investigate the above framework, the study relied on a number of research instruments outlined below, including background research, review of secondary data, focus group discussions (FGDs) and a national survey. A public survey represents a primary research instrument that generates concrete information and data for each of the VE drivers and other specific issues and factors describing the Albanian C/PVE reality and discourse at the moment. A total of fifty statements were designed in order to test the relevance and salience of the three categories of VE drivers, with an average of nearly three statements per VE driver, and another ten statements probing Albania-specific issues. The statements were designed in accordance with the objectives of the study, the (gaps and needs of) C/PVE practice in Albania and the theoretical context of VE drivers as elaborated by Denoeux and Carter (2009). Accordingly, the analysis relies on a wealth of sources and data for a comprehensive analysis of the a) specific driver or
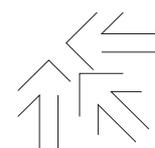
factor level, b) category of driver or factor, and c) interplay between drivers of different categories and their interactions in the Albanian context.

III.1. Research instruments

The present study relied upon primary and secondary research in order not only to map the current state of play of the VE phenomenon with up-to-date information, but also to track the progress made in recent years and the dynamics of the C/PVE discourse, course of actions, impact and results. The last of these allow for better examination of any transformation or weakening of the VE phenomenon.

III.1.1. Background analysis and review

The purpose of the background analysis and review of recent research into VE was two-fold. Firstly, it targeted the methodology design process, particularly the survey instrument and the overall methodological approach of this study. Secondly, through desk research an updated database of various indicators (social, economic, and political) was created to assist analysis of the VE drivers and context.

III.1.2. Interviews

A limited number of (ten) semi-structured interviews with experts, C/PVE practitioners, religious representatives and state institutions were conducted in the inception phase and methodology validation. The survey instrument (questionnaire), design of control statements and findings of the testing procedures were consulted with selected experts and religious community representatives in addition to internal consultations within the IDM research group composed of senior researchers into VE and security, social sciences, surveys and focus group implementation.

III.1.3. National survey

Based on the findings of the methodology validation phase and using IDM's 2015 study survey instrument as an initial basis, the research team developed a more comprehensive questionnaire. Preliminary testing of the questionnaire with 100 respondents took place in December 2017. Findings of the first piloting were used to improve the survey instrument and launch it for a second testing in two versions (January 2018; 50 respondents each), which differed in their rating scale for control statements. Based on the results of the second testing, the IDM research team prepared a final version (see appendices) of the questionnaire, which went through final testing in March 2018 and was adopted by the research team, with no major changes.

The questionnaire used for the present survey is composed of five sections. The first section comprises ten questions that gather demographic data on the respondents and details on their religious affiliation and level of religious practice. The second section focuses on their experiences and attitudes in relation to socio-economic factors and various issues of religion and society by asking three questions, with a total of 19 statements with which respondents are asked whether, and to what extent, they agree. The third section explores respondents' perceptions on the interplay of religion and political factors through three questions comprising 22 control statements. The fourth section investigates their perceptions and attitudes on religious practices in Albania,
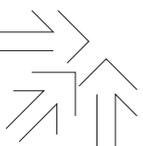
asking their level of agreement with thirteen statements in a single question. The final section explores, through seven questions, various issues related to prevention of violent extremism, reintegration, resilience factors, threats and other issues that help gain an understanding of the respondents' personal attitudes.

In March 2018, the IDM team prepared the logistics for conducting survey fieldwork with a nationally representative sample of 1,600 respondents. The survey was conducted among the general population among citizens of age 18 years and above who were permanent residents of Albania at the time of the survey. The sampling frame was based upon the latest census data (2011) updated with information on population dynamics. The rate of emigration of Albanian citizens was calculated from a Quantitative Residence Coefficient based upon both the census and the population size according to the civil registry 2015 (Albanian citizens) and their distribution among the different municipal units.[10] Data from the civil registry 2017 were weighted by the Quantitative Residence Coefficients for each of the 61 municipalities, from which 50 were selected, including the largest ones and replacing some smaller municipalities with others to obtain the best geographical coverage.[11]

> Statistical error estimates are as follows:
>
> *At the 95% confidence level, for a population size of 2,859,598, the confidence interval is ±2.4.*
>
> *At the 99% confidence level, for a population size of 2,859,598, the confidence interval is ±3.2.*

The group of interviewers was trained in late March 2018 and the fieldwork for the national survey took place in April and May 2018. Data were collected from face-to-face interviews. Strict criteria for the selection of interviewees within each municipality and the administrative units, and rigorous quality assurance mechanisms covering the survey fieldwork and administration of questionnaires, were applied throughout the process. Survey data were entered, cleaned and processed in a database using SPSS software and analysis of the preliminary findings started in June 2018.

Survey data presented in this study are rounded to the nearest tenth. Due to rounding, percentages may not always appear to add up to 100%.

III.1.4. Focus group discussions

Four FGDs were held in June and July 2018 upon completion of the survey fieldwork and analysis of preliminary findings on the perceptions, attitudes and experiences of a nationally representative sample (see below) in relation to the categories of VE drivers and other context-specific issues and factors as elaborated in the matrix (Table 1). In order to better understand some of the findings of the public survey and gain deeper insights into the attitudes among specific profiles of Albanian citizens, the following

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10. WM = NM_C2011 / NM_CR2015, where: WM is the Quantitative Residence Coefficient per each municipality; NM_C2011 is the number of Albanian residents in municipality based on the Census 2011; and NM_CR2015 is the number of Albanian citizens registered in each municipality based on the civil registry of Albanian citizens 2015.

11. For a full list of municipalities and their rural and urban distributions refer to the appendices.

FGDs were conducted:

1. FGD1: 25 June, with participants from various demographic groups (by area of residence, gender, age, employment, etc.) who had completed higher education (university and postgraduate studies).

2. FGD2: 26 June, with participants from various demographic groups (area of residence, gender, education, employment, etc.) of the age group 18–35 years.

3. FGD3: 27 June, with participants from various demographic groups (area of residence, gender, employment, etc.) who had completed primary education or had no education.

4. FGD4: 2 July, with participants from various demographic groups (area of residence, gender, employment, education, age, etc.) who practise their religion regularly.

The findings of the discussions were analysed and incorporated into the context and driver analysis of the study.

IV. Profile of survey respondents

Research into religious radicalisation and violent extremism is guided by an expectation that a better understanding of these phenomena would allow for early warning, prevention and more efficient responses against religiously motivated violence. Indeed, the few studies carried out in Albania in the past few years on violent extremism, radicalism, foreign fighters, media discourse on extremism and related issues have significantly improved the understanding of Albanian C/PVE stakeholders. This has raised public awareness, strengthened resilience of religious communities and empowered specific groups with better skills and capacities to counter and prevent the phenomenon. In addition to qualitative research instruments—e.g. semi-structured or structured interviews with key informants, FGDs, review of secondary data, background analysis—quantitative research tools are essential to map the spread of certain phenomenon. The IDM 2015 study of eight areas employed a targeted survey with actively practising religious believers and ordinary citizens to investigate the VE drivers and factors in a little aware public and institutional environment. The data and evidence generated through the baseline study helped shape the institutional response and actions of other non-state players in the fight against violent extremism.

In order to assess the impact of these actions over the past three years and to examine in-depth and in an inclusive way the threats and risks posed by the VE phenomenon, the present study examines it at the national level. As explained in the methodology, the survey was designed with a nationally representative sample of 1,600 respondents. The questionnaire investigates not only the perceptions, but also the first-hand experiences and attitudes of Albanians in relation to the categories of drivers, the specific issues describing the Albanian reality and the efforts to prevent violent extremism.

IV.1. Demography

The description of the survey sample offers important insights that help analysis and understanding of the perceptions and attitudes of the Albanians who were surveyed.[12] The sampling procedures allowed for a nationally representative sample. From a gender perspective, the current resident population in the country, as estimated for 1 January 2018, comprises a few more males (1,438,609; 50.1%) than females (1,431,715; 49.9%).[13] Our sample of 1,600 individuals comprised 823 men (51.4%; Figure 1) and 777 women (48.6%), very close to the overall gender composition of the population.

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12. Note: Survey data presented in this study are rounded to the nearest tenth. Due to rounding, percentages may not always appear to add up to 100%.

13. INSTAT. "Population of Albania, 1 January 2018". Available online: http://www.instat.gov.al/en/themes/demography-and-social-indicators/population/publication/2018/population-in-albania-1-january-2018/ (Accessed: 18.09.2018).

Figure 1. Gender composition of survey respondents (%; N = 1,600)

48.6
Female

51.4
Male
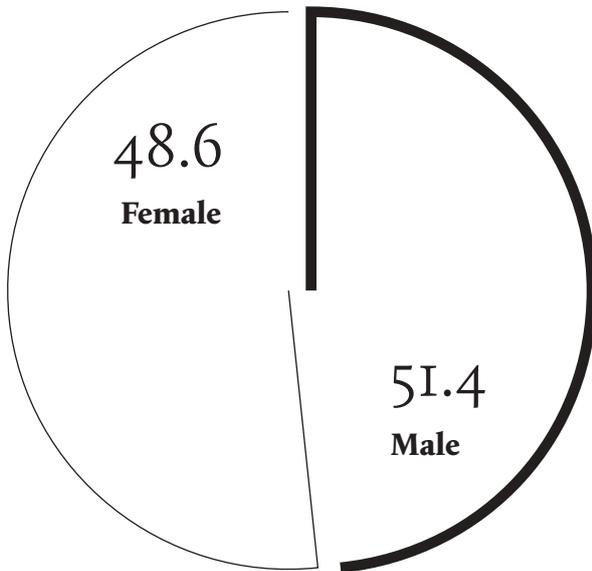
In targeting respondents for each municipality in the country, the survey observed closely the urban : rural ratio of habitation for that district. At the national level the urban : rural ratio (see Figure 2) resulting from our sample was 58:42 (928 respondents living in cities, and 672 living in rural areas), while according to the latest Population and Housing Census of Albania (2011) the ratio is 54:46.[14] The slight difference from the Census 2011 data was intentional and considers the new territorial and administrative division of the country (in force since 2015), which included some rural areas within the administrative borders of urban centres in the new municipalities.

Figure 2. Residence of survey respondents (%; N = 1,600)

42
Rural

58
Urban

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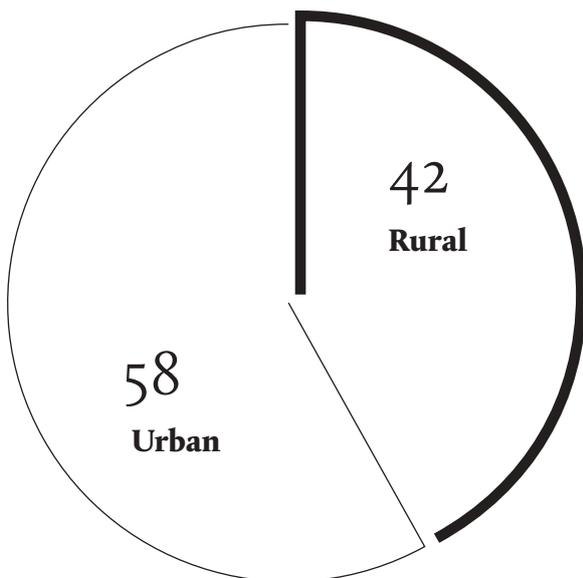
14. INSTAT. "Albania: Population and Housing Census 2011." Tirane, 2012, p. 10. Available online: http://www.instat.gov.al/media/3058/main_results__population_and_housing_census_2011.pdf

More than two-thirds of the respondents have completed secondary or higher level of education (Figure 3), with 22 percent having completed primary education or none: 59 respondents (3.7%) are either without or have not completed the eight-year cycle of education, 295 respondents (18.5%) have completed only the eight-year or nine-year primary education cycle, 658 respondents (41.2%) have completed secondary education, 498 respondents (31.2%) hold a university diploma and 86 respondents (5.4%) have completed postgraduate education (master or above).

Figure 3. Level of education of survey respondents (%; N = 1,600)
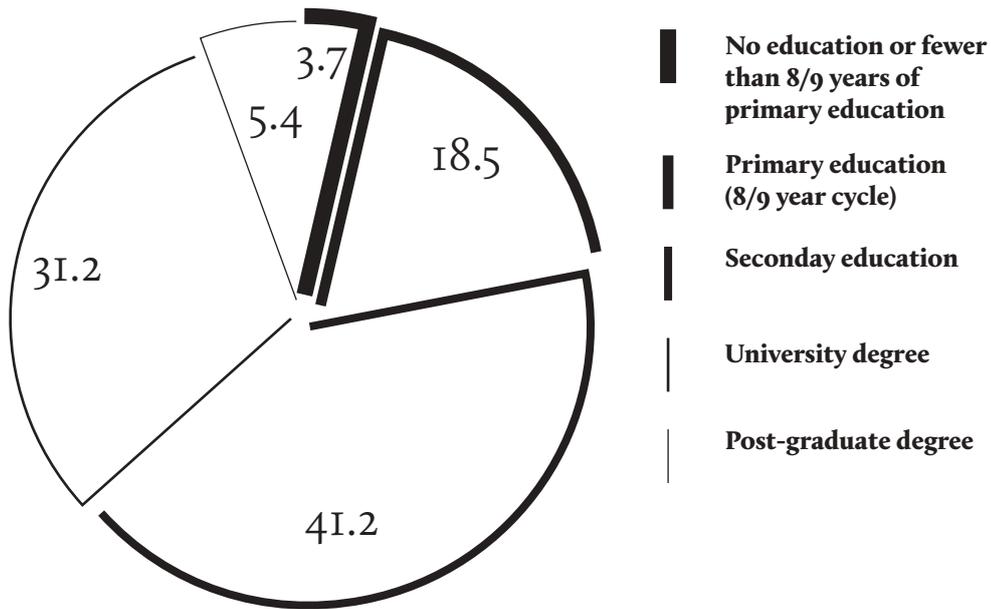
Figure 4 shows that nearly half of the survey respondents are younger than 35 years (20%, 18–25 years; 27.2%, 25–34 years), with progressively fewer in the older categories (18.6%, 35–44 years; 16.3%, 45–54 years; 12.5%, 55–64 years; 5.4%, 65 years and above).

Figure 4. Age of survey respondents (%; N = 1,600)
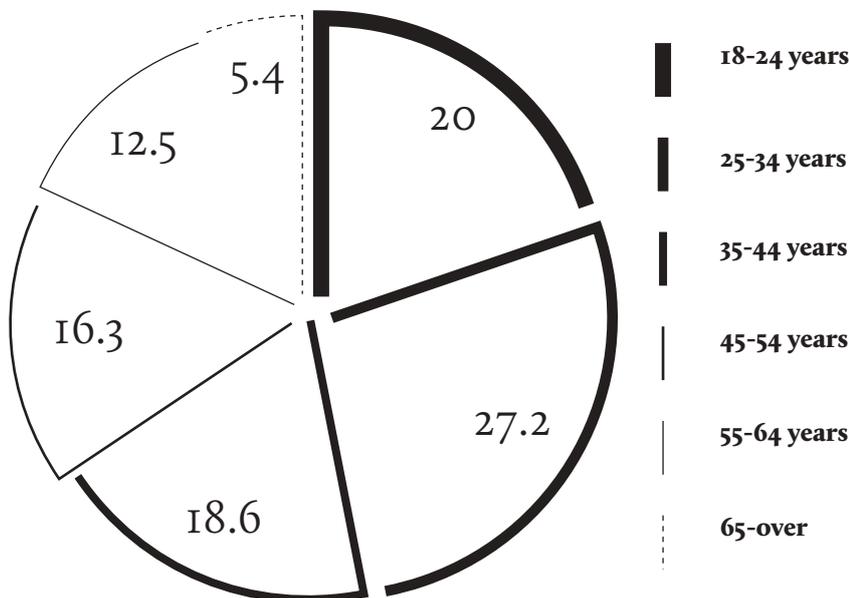
The majority of the respondents are married (61.1%; Figure 5), nearly double the number who are single (31%). Another 3.8 percent cohabit and the remainder are widowed (2.3%) or divorced (1.3%). Five respondents (0.3%) refused to answer this question.

Figure 5. Civil status of survey respondents (%; N = 1,597)
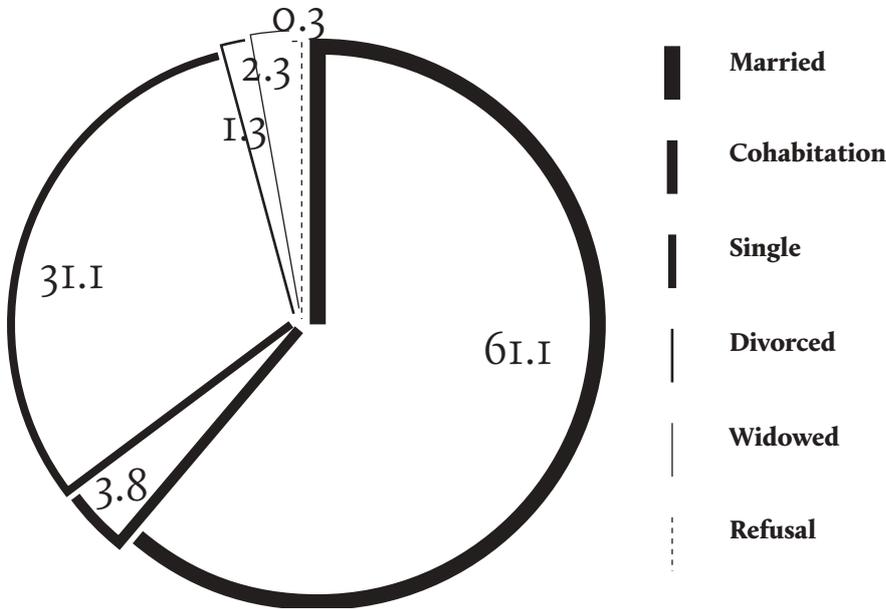
For the purposes of our research we gathered information on the employment status of respondents. Most (628; 39.3%) were wage-receiving employees (Figure 6), followed by unemployed (458; 28.6%), self-employed (233; 14.6%), students (147; 9.2%) and others, including predominantly pensioners (130; 8.1%). The proportion of the employed and self-employed respondents in the sample—53.9 percent—is close to the employment rate of 57.3 percent in the second half of the present year, 2018.[15]

Figure 6. Employment status of survey respondents (%; N = 1,599)

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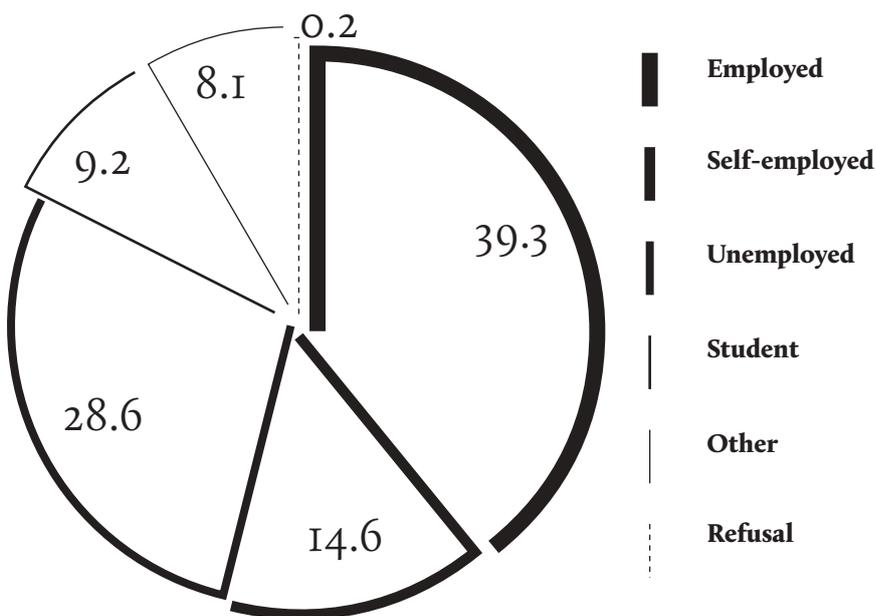
15.   Trading Economics: https://tradingeconomics.com/albania/employment-rate (Accessed 19.09.2018).

The distribution of personal monthly net income is shown in Figure 7, with 535 respondents (33.7%) without a monthly stipend, 261 earning up to 20,000 Albanian Lek (ALL)—close to the current minimum wage established by government—, 358 (22.5%) earning up to 40,000 ALL, 261 (16.4%) up to 60,000 ALL, 70 (4.4%) up to 100,000 ALL, and 15 respondents (0.9%) earning more than 100,000 ALL per month.[16]

Figure 7. Personal net monthly income of survey respondents (%; N = 1,589)

Without personal income

Up to 20,000 lekë

20,001-40,000 lekë

40,001-60,000 lekë

60,001-100,000 lekë

More than 100,000 lekë

Refusal
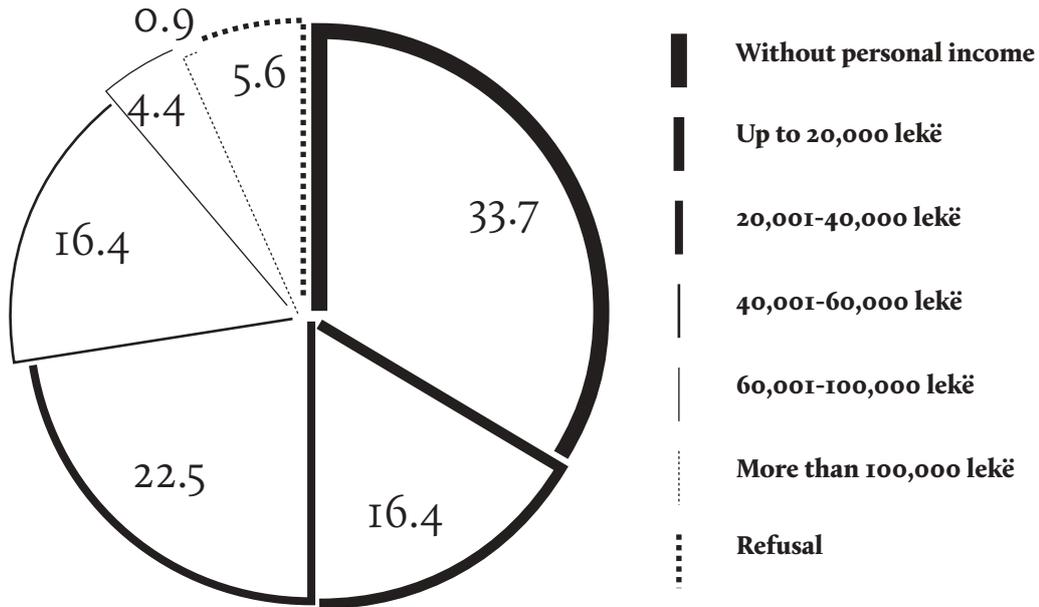
IV.2. Religious background and practices

In Albania, individuals can choose freely the religion they wish to believe in and the level of piety and personal involvement in religious communities. The country is home to traditional religious communities that have been established for many centuries, as well as faith communities that have been introduced more recently, in the past three decades. For the purpose of our research, we asked respondents about the religion of their families and their own religion. The religion of the family is especially useful for enabling the sample to be representative of the distribution of religious communities in the population of Albania. According to the census of year 2011, which included questions about religious identity, 56.7 percent declared themselves to be Sunni Muslims, 10 percent Catholic Christians, 6.8 percent Orthodox Christians, 2.1 percent Bektashi, 0.15 percent other Christian churches, 5.5 percent unspecified believers, and 2.5 percent atheists, while 13.8 percent did not declare their religion.

In our sample 987 respondents (61.7%) declared that their family religion is Islam (Figure 8), 182 respondents (11.4%) come from Orthodox Christian families, 175 respondents (10.9%) are of Catholic families, 130 respondents (8.1%) declared their family religion to be Bektashi, 16 respondents (1%) are from Protestant families and 87 respondents (5.4%), members of religiously mixed families.

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16. 1 USD = 108 ALL; 1 EUR = 126 ALL. Source: Bank of Albania https://www.bankofalbania.org/Markets/Official_exchange_rate/ (accessed September 2018).

Figure 8. Religious affiliation of respondents by origin (family) (%; N = 1,599)

Legend:
- ■ Muslim
- ▮ Orthodox Christian
- ▮ Catholic Christian
- | Bektashi
- | Protestant
- ┊ Mixed
- ┋ Other
- ▯ Don't know/Not sure
- ▮ Refusal

Values shown: 61.7, 11.4, 10.9, 8.1, 5.4, 1, 0.3, 0.3, 0.8
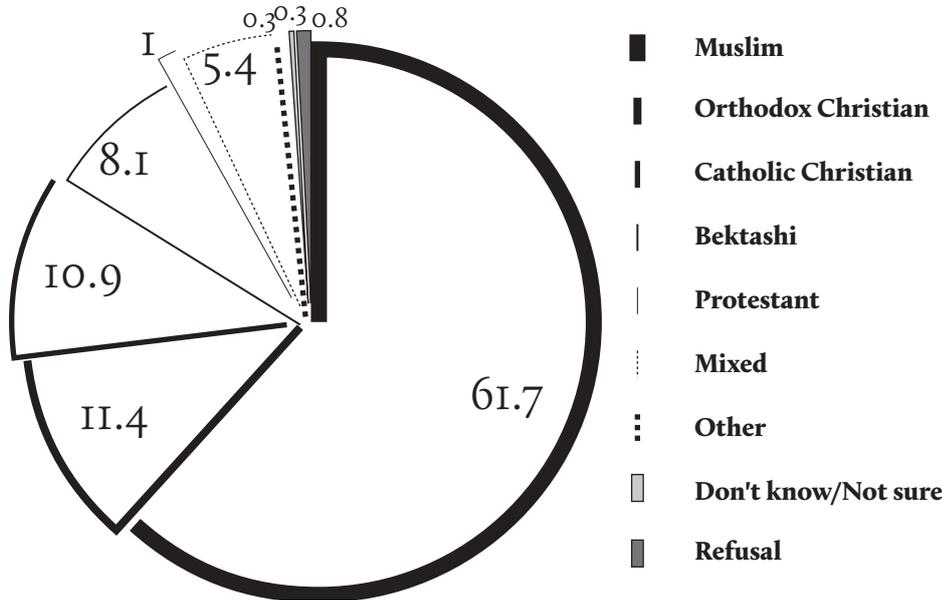
Most respondents in our sample (80.2%) declared that they belong to the same faith as their parents (Figure 9). Other responses to the question are as follows: 13.3 percent have chosen to identify themselves with the religion of one of the parents, while 5.4 percent declared that their religious identification is not the same as that of their parents.

Figure 9. Religious affiliation (personal vs. family) of respondents (%; N = 1,598)

Legend:
- ▮ Same religion as both parents
- ▮ Same religion as one of my parents
- ▮ Different religion from my parents
- | Don't know/refusal

Values shown: 80.2, 13.3, 5.4, 1.1
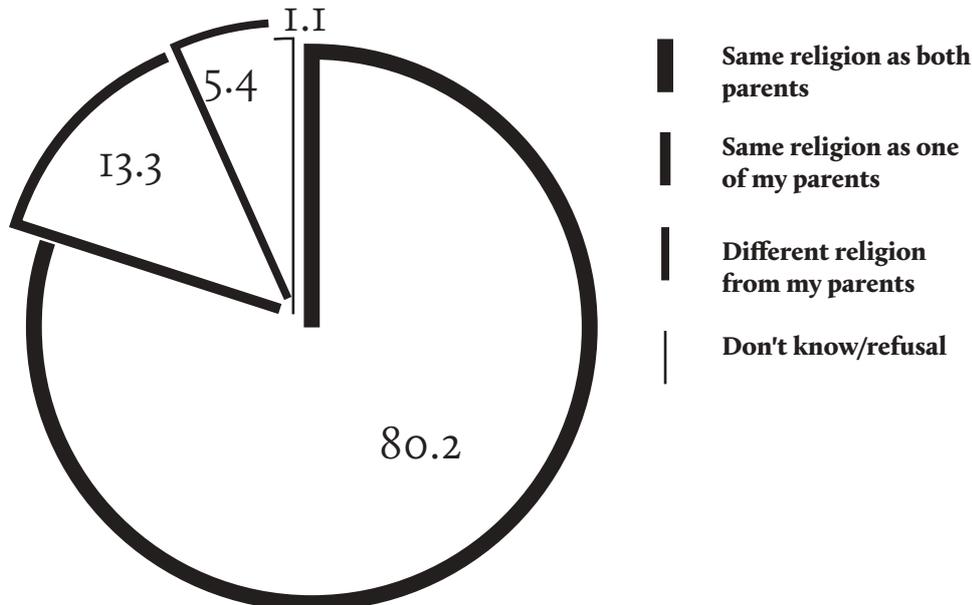
In order to assess their religiousness, the respondents were asked to choose an option on a scale that describes their religious practice: from a believer who regularly fulfils the requirements of their faith, through one who observes the main rituals and rules of the faith but who neglects the rest, the nominal non-practising believer, to the non-believer. Most respondents (41%) fall into the category of nominal believers who
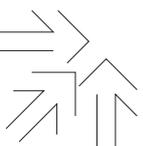
do not lead a particularly religious life (Figure 10). Another 31.8 percent are believers who practise the main rituals and rules of their religion and 19.2 percent declared themselves to regularly fulfil all religious rituals. The number of respondents who declared they are atheists was 103 (6.5%).

Figure 10. Practice of religious rituals among respondents (%; N = 1,595)
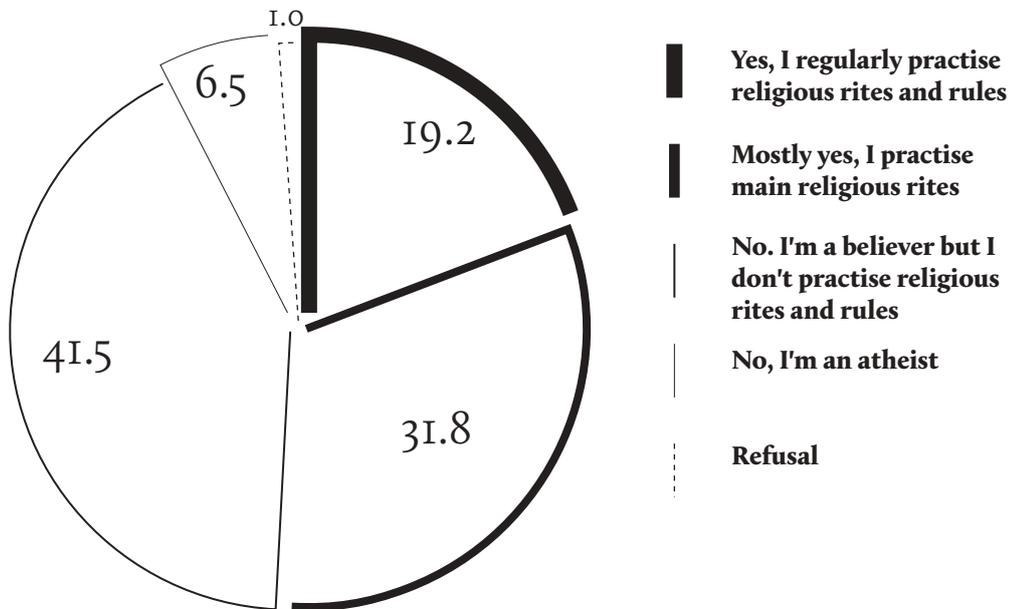
Another way to assess the religiousness of individuals is to ask about their piety, or devotion towards their religion. An indicator of piety is prayer, a communication that people attempt to establish with the deity or deities, or supernatural beings or forces. Prayer is probably the most individualised act in Abrahamic religions, and at the same time is a collective expression of piety, highly ritualised, with specialised clergy and rules to follow. Therefore, we put the following question to the respondents: "How often do you pray?" We provided an option indicating a committed believer who regularly prays every day or every week, two options for believers who pray during collective rituals, an indicator of weaker piety, an option for believers who largely lead a secular life and turn to religion in dire circumstances, perhaps as a last resort, an option for both those believers who do not pray or non-believers, as well as an option not to reveal this personal information.

The survey findings are that 23.9 percent of Albanians never pray (Figure 11), 23.3 percent pray occasionally, at special religious events, 21 percent pray regularly (daily or weekly), and 19.5 percent pray during religious feasts or rituals throughout the year. Ten percent of respondents pray only in times of personal or family crisis. Only 2.3 percent refused to answer the question.

Figure 11. Prayer practice among respondents (%; N = 1,448)

- **Regularly (every day/week)**
- **During religious feasts or rituals throughout the year**
- **Occasionally on special religious events**
- **In times of personal or family crises**
- **I never pray**
- **Refuse**
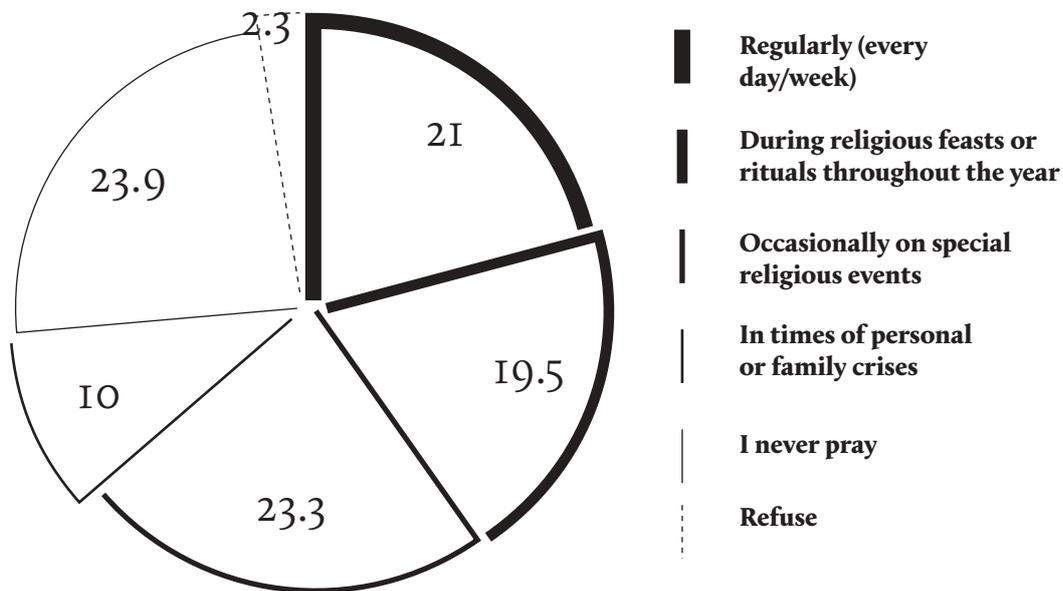
IV.3. Perceptions and experience of religious coexistence in Albania

Living in a multi-religious society, most Albanians come across people of different faiths during their everyday activities. Therefore, we investigated to what extent religious belonging affects the meaningful relations they build in their social circles. For the largest number of respondents (596; 37.6%) their social circles are composed of people of different religions (Figure 12), while another large group of respondents (335; 21.1%) report that their social circles are composed mostly of people belonging to different religions and atheists. Nevertheless, the social circles of 548 respondents (34.6%) are dominated by a single religion. The social circles of 21 respondents (1.3%) comprise mostly atheists, while 75 respondents (4.7%) either did not know, or had not thought about this issue previously. Nine respondents refused to answer the question.

Figure 12. Religious affiliation of respondents' social environment (%; N = 1,584)

- **Persons of the same religion as me**
- **Persons of different religions**
- **Atheists**
- **Mixed (atheists and believers of different religions)**
- **Don't know/never thought about it**
- **Refusal**
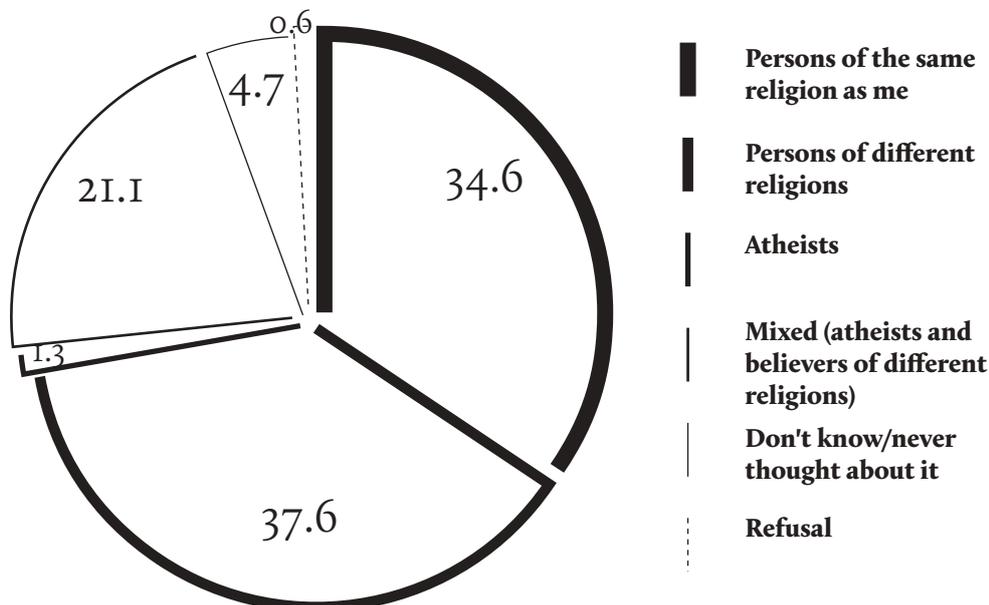
Religious tolerance and peaceful coexistence is a well-known feature of Albanian society, the existence of which is broadly supported and promoted. The interviewees were asked the following question: "In your opinion is there religious hatred or harmony in Albania?"

Being aware that the options 'hatred' and 'harmony' reflect intensely held beliefs, we provided a variable scale, with two additional options in-between that would nevertheless maintain the bipolarity of the answers along a negative–positive axis. The overwhelming majority of the national sample (995; 67%) responded that there is religious harmony in the country (Figure 13) with a further substantial number (383; 25.8%) selecting a slightly lower option. Very few (12; 0.8%) selected religious hatred as their perception of the current situation, while quite a few more (95; 6.4%) chose a situation that was less negative.

Figure 13. Respondents' opinions on religious tolerance in Albanian society (scale from 1, religious hatred, to 4, religious harmony. %; N = 1,485)
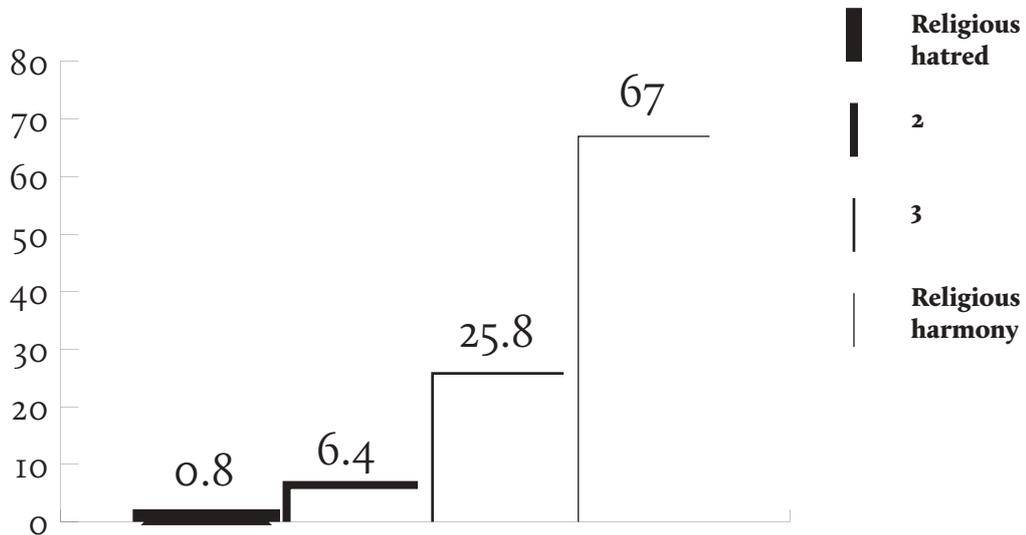
As noted above, the majority of Albanians identify themselves with the same religious affiliation as both their parents. Nevertheless, the survey examines whether there is religious tolerance and acceptance within the family if one of its members were to marry somebody from another religion.

The majority of Albanians surveyed (67.1%) would support a family member if they were to marry a person of another religious affiliation (Figure 14), while a much smaller proportion (13.5%) said they would accept—but not support or encourage—such a marriage. However, nearly ten percent would object to the marriage 'in any case' (4.7%) or if the other person were a practising believer (4.9%). A smaller proportion (135; 8.6%) were unsure what their reaction would be in such a situation, while another 19 (1.2%) refused to answer to the question.

Figure 14. Respondents' support for inter-religious marriage of a family member (%; N = 1,589)
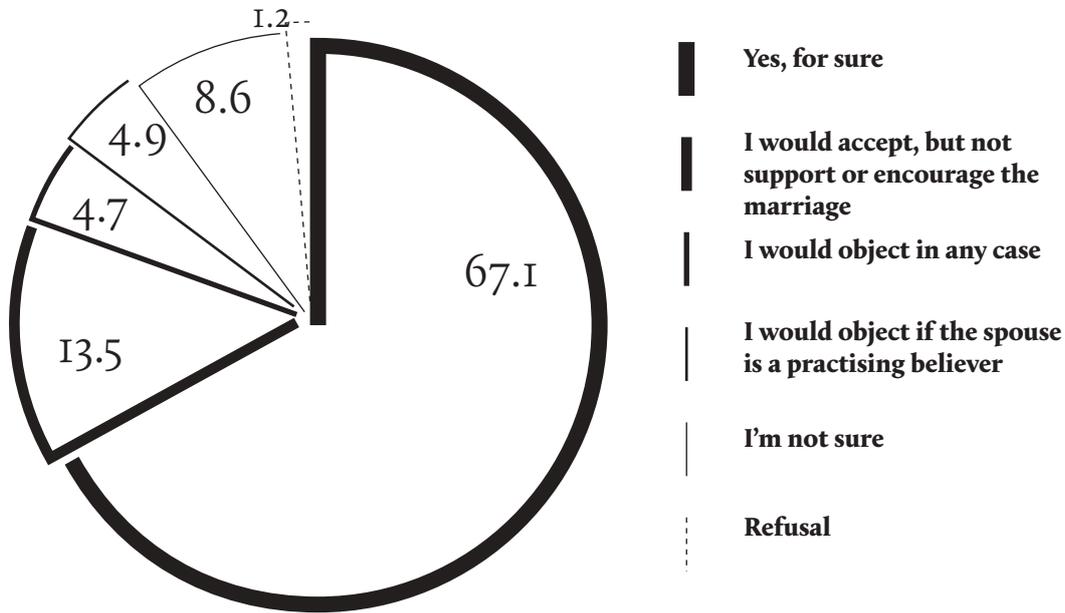
It is interesting to analyse the above findings from the perspective of religious practice: namely, whether there are differences in attitudes on inter-religious marriages among respondents who practise regularly religious rituals, those who practise the main rituals, and those who do not practise at all. As shown in Figure 15, unconditional support for such a marriage by a family member (brother or sister, or son or daughter) decreases progressively with increase in the frequency of respondents' religious practice, from the highest support (75.1%) by respondents who do not practise at all, to one-half (50.5%) of those who practise all religious rituals. There is a reversed trend of support for the second option—"Would accept but not encourage it"—, with the more religious respondents tending to choose this option than the less, or not at all, religious respondents. Those who practise all religious rituals have the highest percentage of "Would object in any case". Differences for the other options are within a three percent range for respondents according to their religious practice.

Figure 15. Support for inter-religious marriage of family members according to respondents' religious practice (%; N = 1584)
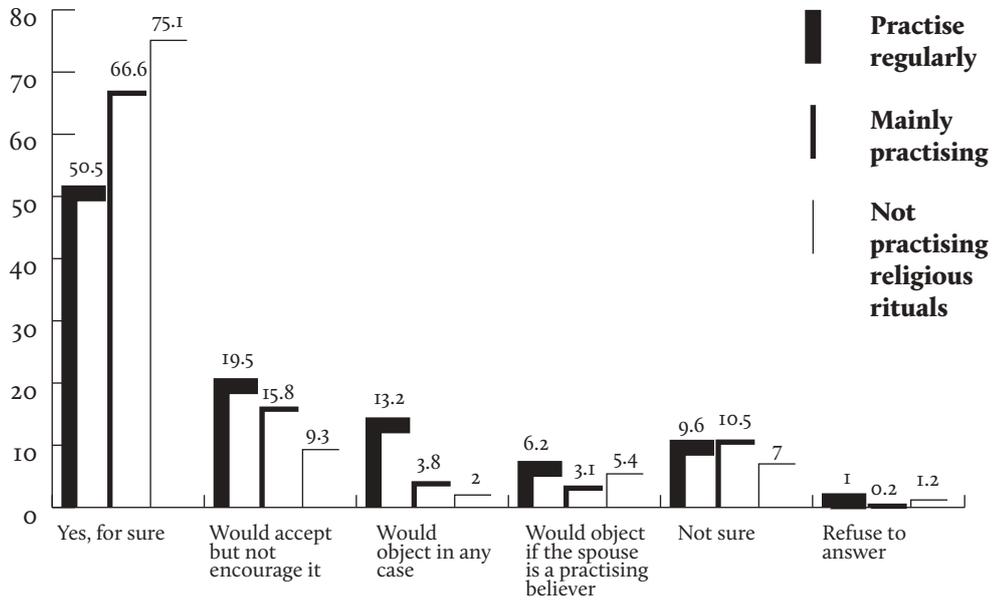
Education is another characteristic that shows differences among the profiles of respondents. Namely, the higher educated respondents had a higher percentage of "Yes, for sure" responses to inter-religious marriage of a family member (Figure 16).

Figure 16. Support for inter-religious marriage according to education level (%; N = 1585)
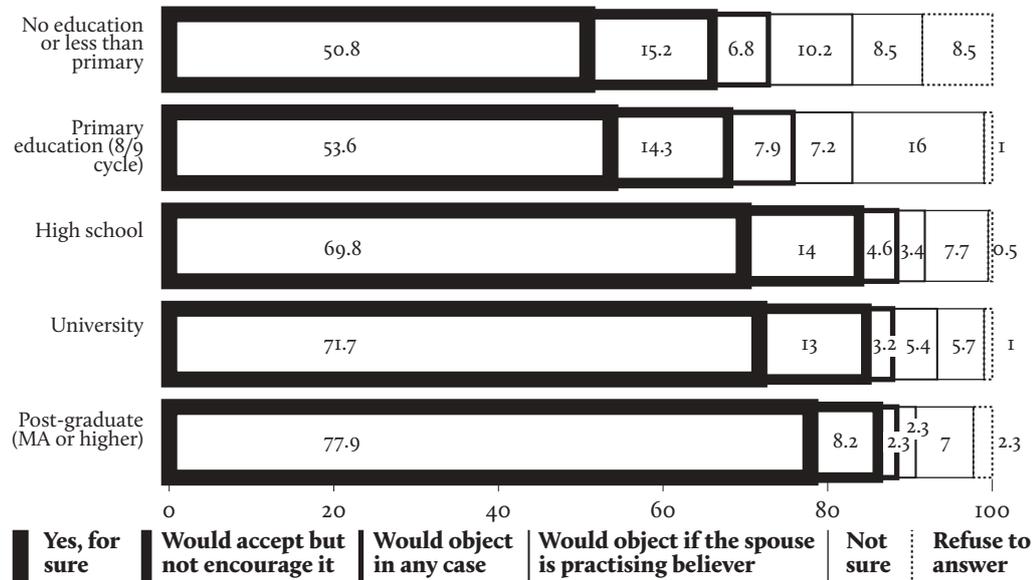
Respondents holding a university or a postgraduate degree (master or above) show a higher level of unconditional support and fewer "Would accept but not encourage it" responses than do other respondents. Those with no education or those who have completed up to primary education show a higher level of objection (object in any case,

or object if the spouse is a practising believer) than do other categories. Interestingly, respondents with secondary education are in the middle of the other categories though, overall, are closer to respondents with a university or higher level of education.

Age of respondent is another variable that shows significant differences between groups in the responses to the question: "Would you support a family member (brother or sister, or son or daughter) marrying a person of another religious belonging?" As shown in Figure 17, the younger the respondent the higher their support ("Yes, certainly") for inter-religious marriage. In contrast, the older the respondent, the higher the percentage of "Would accept but not encourage it" and "Not sure" responses.

Figure 17. Percentage support for inter-religious marriage, by age group (%; N = 1573)

| | Yes, for sure | Would accept but not encourage it | Would object in any case | Would object if the spouse is a practising believer | Not sure | Refuse to answer |
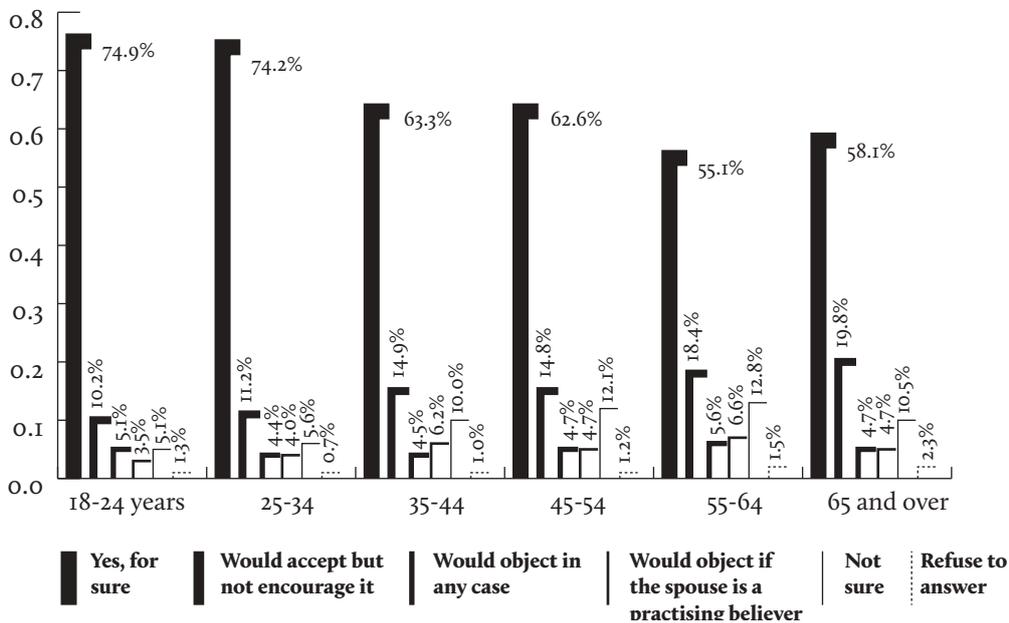
No significant differences are observed in relation to this question among respondents by area of residence, gender and employment status (with the exception of unemployed respondents who tend to be "Not sure" and with lower support for the "Yes, certainly" option compared to other categories), and other variables.

The study findings show that Albanians' personal stance on their openness to and acceptance of close inter-religious relations—marriage of their brothers and sisters, or daughters and sons, with people of other religious belonging—differs significantly across generations, among people of different education backgrounds and level of religiosity. Generally, religious persons, older generations and people with a lower education level seem to be more resistant to such relationships. Interestingly, gender, residence and financial and economic status are not indicators of the level of openness or resistance to this issue.

The present study continues in the following chapters with an investigation into the Albanians' attitudes and experiences on a number of issues, with the analysis including also differences among the opinions of respondents based up on their demographic characteristics.
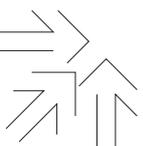
V. Drivers of violent extremism in Albania

V.1. Socio-economic drivers

This chapter investigates the impact of socio-economic drivers on the creation of favourable conditions for the spread of radical and extremist ideas. Factors such as absolute and relative poverty, social fragmentation, social exclusion and discrimination, illegal economic activity, among others, are known to be associated with frustration with the economic and political system. Young unemployed isolated individuals from under-developed regions might especially be vulnerable to propaganda of extremist ideologies that advocate the use of violence for protesting against the existing order and for obtaining desired changes, as well as personal benefits.

At the end of its first decade of transition, Albania was characterised as a peripheral society[17] and this, unfortunately, remains true for its present socio-economic situation. Albania is now an upper-middle-income country[18] but continues to hold a peripheral position in relation to the nearby developed economic area of the EU. In 2017, Albania's Gross Domestic Product per capita was estimated to be 4,543 USD,[19] equivalent to 12.4 percent of that of the EU average that year.[20] Socio-economic peripheries exist within the country as well, in terms of the geographically uneven development, with the huge share of investment concentrated in the centre, around the capital, while the rural and mountainous areas remain largely marginalised: in terms of vulnerable social strata, which are largely composed of people migrating from rural areas and to peripheries of cities, of unemployed people living on welfare, of pensioners who cannot afford the cost of medical treatment etc.; in terms of the thriving informal economy and illegal economic activities, which are conventionally situated in the shadow periphery of the formal economy. The youth, the most vital part of the population, are over-represented in the unemployment statistics. In the last quarter of 2017, youth unemployment was estimated to be 24.6 percent, compared to the overall level of 13.4 percent.[21]

In the present national study several socio-economic drivers have been taken into consideration in order to understand their impacts in the different regions of the country and the threat they may pose to society by providing conditions for the possible emergence of radical religious groups and violent extremism. Table 2 reports the identified drivers and their description (from Denoeux and Carter 2009).

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17. Fuga, Artan (2004) Shoqëria periferike. Tirane: Ora.
18. http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/albania/overview
19. https://countryeconomy.com/gdp/albania (Accessed on 25 July 2018).
20. https://tradingeconomics.com/european-union/gdp-per-capita (Accessed on 25 July 2018).
21. https://tradingeconomics.com/albania/youth-unemployment-rate; http://www.balkaneu.com/unemployment-in-albania-drops (Accessed on 25 July 2018).

Table 2. Socio-economic drivers of VE

DRIVER	DESCRIPTION
Perceptions of social exclusion & 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 behavior, and youth have too much time on their hands. A sense of anomie and isolation may result. VE 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 VE groups with friends or as a result of the influence of relatives, neighbors 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 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
Frustrated expectations & relative deprivation	Relative deprivation and frustrated expectations are powerful drivers of VE activity among youth given improvements in education, especially at the secondary and university levels. Youth with greater amounts of 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 impedes access to jobs. Young males may lack the economic resources to marry and are generally denied a voice in traditional societies.
Unmet social and economic needs	Deprivation of socioeconomic needs—especially when combined with other factors such as widespread corruption and lack of security and justice—may be a factor exploited by VE groups, which may offer wages or services. It is not poverty, however, but the acute form of social exclusion by the government and society that elicits support for VE
Greed or the proliferation of illegal economic activities	VE organizations' illegal activities offer lucrative economic opportunities for those who seek a ready income. Networks operating VE and illegal economic activities have a mutually beneficial relationship—providing each other with revenue, experience in concealment, and ideology to legitimize illegal behavior. Prisons are a popular venue for VE recruitment

Source: Denoeux and Carter (2009)[22]

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22. See Guilain Denoeux and Lynn Carter "Development Assistance and Counter Extremism: A Guide to Programming" (October 2009). Also, consult Guilain Denoeux and Lynn Carter "Guide to the Drivers of Violent Extremism" (February 2009).
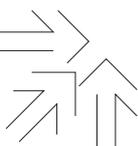
V.1.1. Social exclusion and marginality

> *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 behavior, and youth have too much time on their hands. A sense of anomie and isolation may result. VE groups may exploit this isolation by offering an escape, a sense of purpose and inclusion in a collective movement.*

The concept of social exclusion refers to the relegation of individuals to the margins of social, economic and cultural life because they are systematically denied access to rights, resources and opportunities. Excluded individuals and groups may be at disadvantage because of uneven distribution of material resources and cultural prestige in society, or they may be discriminated by other groups who block their access to material resources and the full enjoyment of their rights. The concept of social exclusion is broader than the concept of poverty, as it encompasses not only economic deprivation, but also unmet social, cultural and other needs. Besides the poor and the unemployed, other excluded groups in society might be women, children, older generations, ethnic, racial, religious and sexual minorities, immigrants, disabled people, prisoners, etc. Social exclusion is also based on people's perceptions of their relative standing in society in comparison to others and on socially constructed ideas about normalcy, equality, fairness and rights. People that are socially excluded feel isolated, alienated, angry and unimportant. Their responses to their perceived social exclusion might oscillate from apathy to embracement of radical and extremist ideas.

According to data from the World Bank 2016, 34 percent of the population of Albania live in poverty (on USD 2–5.50 per day).[23] The National Institute of Statistics (INSTAT) and the National Strategy for Social Protection 2015–2020 estimate that the poorest areas are the coastal and mountainous rural regions.[24] A major factor of social exclusion in the country remains the high unemployment rate, which affects young people. In examining perceptions of social exclusion, our national survey has focused on indicators related to the level of youth integration or exclusion from their communities. The assumption is that the structural changes of the last three decades in employment, urbanisation, migration, family composition, among others, have led to higher levels of individualisation and exclusion of youth from societal links.

To map the context of this driver in Albania, the present study gathers the perceptions of survey respondents and their experiences related to family, and social control, structures and youth behaviour in their local communities. While such information alone cannot help establish the relevance and threat of violent extremism, it helps in analysing the severity of the different socio-economic drivers and the concerns they create in combination with other drivers from this or other categories, which may be subsequently used by VE groups to disseminate extremist ideologies and build the base of supporters around them.

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23. World Bank. (2007) "Migration and Mobility." pp. 59–60. Available online: http://documents. worldbank.org/curated/en/445651508415857577/pdf/120539-replacement-PUBLIC.pdf (Accessed on 25 July, 2018).
24. Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth. "The National Strategy for Social Protection 2015–2020." p. 10.

The study asked respondents to what extent they agree with the following statements:

Statement 1: In the area where I live the family has less control or influence over the behaviour of young people.

Statement 2: In the area where I live the behaviour of young people is strongly influenced by the opinion of the community.

Statement 3: In the area where I live many young people have fallen prey to gambling, alcohol, drugs and dangerous behaviour (violence, vandalism, etc.).

Survey responses reveal that most respondents (56.7%) think that in their areas family has less control or influence over the behaviour of youth, but still the behaviour of youth remains largely influenced by the opinion of the local communities where they live (53.4% support for the second statement).

Figure 18. Respondents' opinions on family control or influence (N = 1,590), and community influence (N = 1,585), on youth behaviour (%)
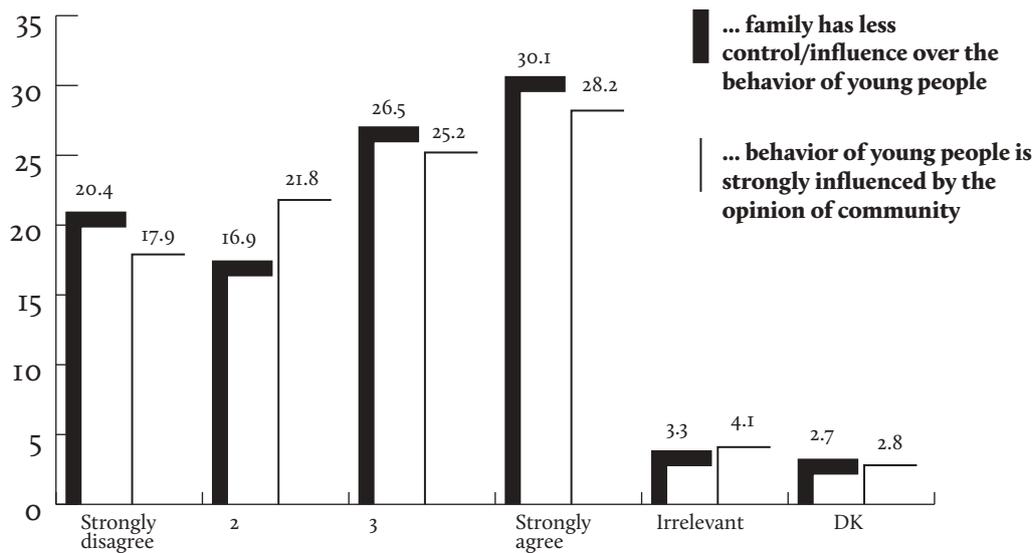
Although the family influence over the youth is curtailed, the social bonds that hold communities together continue to exert their pressure on the younger generations and this is a great asset for coordinated policies that target individuals with anti-social and violent behaviour. Participants in the focus group discussions with youngsters (FGD2), those with lower education (FGD3) and those who practise religion (FGD4) argued that there are several reasons why families now exert less control over the young, including working parents who spend more time than before outside the home to secure a living for their families, the lives of youth today are more dynamic, more exposed to social influences outside the family, including peer group and social media, and students living away from their families for long periods of time. On the other hand, several young participants in FGD2 linked the opinion of the local community with prejudice and stereotypes, especially those from the older generations (over 40 years old), who have difficulties in keeping up with the changes in culture and in values.

The perception that the family role has weakened is more consolidated among

respondents who are not particularly religious (60.1%) than among those who practise religious rituals either regularly (53.3%) or to a large extent (54.3%). The difference might be a reflection of the more traditional and family-oriented life-course of religious persons. Nevertheless, religious persons are aware of the diminished capacities of the family to control the lives of young people. A Muslim participant in FGD4 observed that: "From the viewpoint of religion, family cannot keep young people under control, but it can understand changes in a child's behaviour," which speaks of a more subtle relationship between parents and their children.

There is a positive relationship between age and agreement with Statement 1 that today's family has less control over the behaviour of youth, reflecting change in attitudes about the family across generations. A young participant in FGD2 said that: "Nowadays the role of family is more positive and democratic than during communism, because today the children have more options to choose, the father authority is absent because of emigration for work and there is a more egalitarian relationship between the parents."

The relationship between the level of education and the acceptance of the first statement is negative, with those with a low level of education supporting the statement well above the national average (56.8%), and those with a post-graduate degree being more divided (41.9% agree and 39.5% disagree).

More survey respondents from rural areas agree with Statement 2 than do those from urban areas (58.2% and 50%, respectively), perhaps reflecting the fact that villages are close-knit communities, more so than towns or neighbourhoods in big cities. There is a tremendous shift in perceptions between respondents that have not completed eight- or nine-year education and those that have done so. Among those completing secondary education, the level of agreement comes close to the national average, while opinions of post-graduates are more varied (38.4% disagree, 44.2% agree and 11.6% think that the statement is irrelevant).

With regard to Statement 3, most respondents demonstrate awareness of the many perils and vices that youth face in their communities. An overwhelming majority (80.8%) believe that many young people fall prey to gambling, alcohol and drugs, or have anti-social behaviour, and commit acts such as vandalism.

Figure 19. Support for the view that youth have fallen prey to gambling, alcohol, drugs and dangerous behaviour (%; N = 1,592)
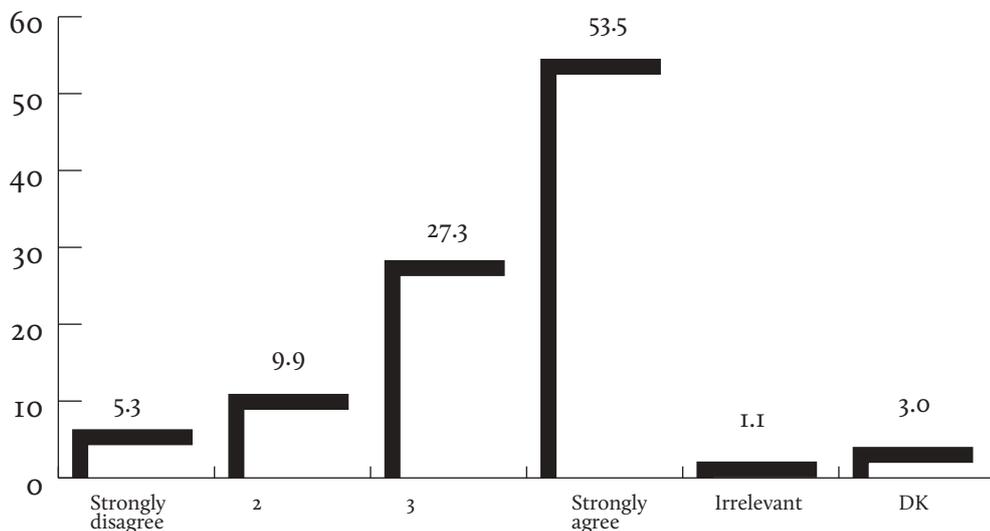
The level of agreement with the statement is persistent among both more and less religious respondents, different age cohorts, respondents from rural and urban areas, males and females, those that have completed at least basic education up to post-graduates, as well as those that are employed, unemployed or students. Respondents in the following eleven municipalities agree with Statement 3 at a level above the national average (where 80.8% agree or strongly agree): Elbasan (99%), Lezhe (97%), Kamez and Kukes (each 93%), Kurbin (88.5%), Pogradec and Korce (each 86%), Kruje (85%), Durres (84%), Fier (83%), and Tirane (82%). Percentages above the national average are reported also in municipalities with a sample of 10–20 respondents: Cerrik, Mirdite, Belsh, Mat and Gramsh (each 100%), Librazhd (94%), Bilisht, Peqin, Prrenjas and Mallakaster (each 93%), Bulqize (88%) and Vore (87%).

The findings on driver of social exclusion reveal that there is a widespread perception of a weakening in family ties in Albania, though the opinion of the local community is still relevant in the lives of individuals. Access to education and the spread of urbanisation are associated with more individualised life-worlds, which, in combination with other drivers, may make young and unemployed people susceptible to VE. Religious respondents are more supportive of family values, but, on the other hand, one disturbing phenomenon is the spread of vice and anti-social behaviour among young people in urban peripheries and under-developed municipalities. While religion can have an inhibitory influence in this regard, unruly social behaviour of young people can be channelled towards violence in cases of indoctrination by extremist groups.

V.1.2. Social networks and group dynamics

> *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.*

A broad consensus exists among scholars about the importance of family and social relations in the radicalisation of young persons and for introducing them to extremist violence. Radical ideas are conveyed by networks of blood relatives, kin and peers in small social groups. Marc Sageman, an expert on terrorism, points out that interaction among people of the same opinion is essential for radicalisation to occur and friendship and kinship are crucial in the process.[25] Media reports in Albania have confirmed the existence of family and social ties among extremist religious believers who have been involved in violent activities in Syria and Iraq. These relations existed prior to recruitment and were reshaped during the radicalisation process. For instance, Balkan Investigative Report Network has found that 24 people, including women and children, from a cluster of three villages near Pogradec, have joined jihadist fighters in Syria. Several young males from this group are relatives or friends who joined the radical network built around a mosque in one of the villages.[26] Another channel of radicalisation and recruitment for extremist groups is social media on the Internet.[27]

25. Sageman, M. (2004) Understanding Terror Network. Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press.

26. Bogdani, A. (2016) Fshatrat e xhihadit: Si u rekrutuan të rinjtë për të luftuar në Siri. Reporter.al, available online: https://www.reporter.al/fshatrat-e-xhihadit-si-u-rekrutuan-te-rinjte-per-te-luftuar-ne-siri/ (accessed on 26 July, 2018).

27. Qafmolla, R. et al. (2017) Xhihadistët nga Ballkani 'të lirë' në internet. Reporter.al, available online:

This study gathers the perceptions of survey respondents on the path to becoming a religious believer, to better understand the local context. While this information alone is not indicative for mapping religious radicalism or extremism, the study subsequently examines whether the respondents confirm the presence in the areas where they live of individuals or groups that incite religious extremism. Accordingly, the following four control statements serve to analyse this driver:

Statement 1:	For the majority of believers I know family has been the main drive for practising religion.
Statement 2:	The majority of the people I know have grown to be believers outside of their social circle.
Statement 3:	Individuals or groups that incite Christian extremism operate in the area where I live.
Statement 4:	Individuals or groups that incite Islamic extremism operate in the area where I live.

The perception of the majority of respondents (53.5%) is that family is the main vehicle for the transmission of religious beliefs. Religion is part of the cultural 'givens' in which the individuals socialise, along with language and ethnicity. Although a change in religious belief, such as becoming atheist or converting to another religion, is always a possibility, the general tendency is for individuals to become affiliated or practise the religion that is transmitted from their families. Of this study's respondents 93.5 percent confirmed the same religious affiliation as their parents (both parents, 80.2%; one parent, 13.3%).

Respondents seem divided over the statement that, "The majority of the people I know have grown to be believers outside of their social circle," with 41.7 percent agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement, and 43.6 percent strongly disagreeing or disagreeing, while 14.7 percent either do not know or consider it irrelevant (Figure 20). Overall, family prevails over social circle as the main drive or push for religious believers practising religion.

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https://www.reporter.al/xhihadistet-nga-ballkani-te-lire-ne-internet/ (accessed on 26 July, 2018); Fazliu, H. (2017) Xhihadistët e burgosur në Maqedoni përpiqen të rekrutojnë online, Reporter. al, available online: https://www.reporter.al/xhihadistet-e-burgosur-ne-maqedoni-perpiqen-te-rekrutojne-online/ (accessed on 26 July, 2018).

Figure 20. Respondents' opinions on family (N = 1,590) and social circle (N = 1,587) as main drivers for practising religion (%)
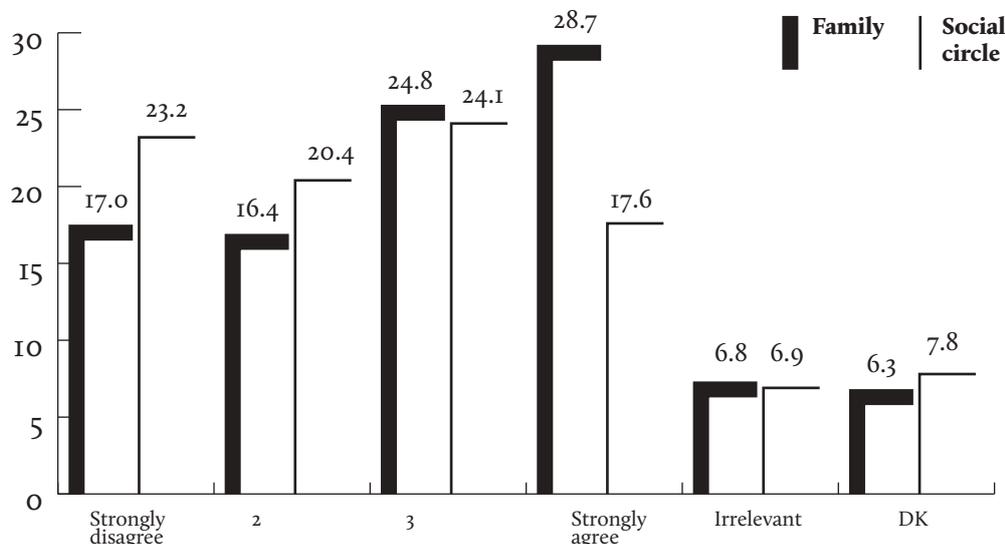
In our national sample, those who regularly practise religious rules and rituals tend to agree most with the religious influence of the family (58.4%). Young respondents, from 18 to 24 years of age, tend to agree less (44.7%), and this is consistent with the more open attitudes that the younger generation might hold towards religious belonging, while in the age cohorts 55–64 years and above the level of agreement is well above the national percentage (66.7% and 69.8%, respectively), reflecting a more traditional outlook. Education progression from the 8 or 9 level to university graduation shows less agreement with the statement, though it remains the option of the majority in each sub-category.

In relation to the second statement (social circle as the main push), respondents who practise the main, or all, rules and rituals of their religion tend to disagree more with the statement (47.9% and 47.3%, respectively) than do those who are more secular (39.8%), with their level of agreement at a similar percentage (41% to 43%). The age cohorts from 45 years and above in general support the influence of social circle for the religiosity of the individuals, while the age cohorts from 18–44 years have a tendency to disagree more than agree with this statement. The majority of unemployed tend to disagree with the role of social circle in the religiosity of individuals. Differences in opinions within other demographic categories are in smaller percentages.

Interviews from focus groups support the survey findings that family is the most important institution of socialisation and transmission of values and beliefs. However, in early youth, the influence of friends who introduce them to religious faith and rituals is more important. Informants interviewed pointed to cases where adolescents and young adults have chosen to practise religious rites contrary to the wishes of their secular parents, or have chosen to believe in a religion different from that of their parents. Young people are attracted also by social and cultural activities organised by religious organisations. An educated informant (FGD1) chose to follow an evangelical church because she liked the "artistic and cultural activities, which brought up religious matters in a nice form." Religious organisations organise social and cultural activities for young people and present them as morally formative events that keep youth away from temptations. Because parents have lost some of their capability to control the everyday lives of children, they sometimes appreciate this aspect of religious activities.

A Muslim informant (FGD3) revealed that he initially expressed his disapproval when he learnt that his daughter was frequenting a church together with her friends. But later on he reasoned that it was better for her daughter to spend time in the church rather than frequenting night clubs, so he gave his approval.

The majority of respondents are unaware of the existence of religious extremism in their areas. Respondents were asked whether and to what extent they agree with the statements 3 and 4 above, namely:

Individuals/groups that incite Christian extremism operate in the area where I live.

Individuals/groups that incite Islamic extremism operate in the area where I live.

The figures are similar for both these types of extremism: at the national level 10.8 percent either agree or strongly agree that Christian extremist groups operate in their area, while 12.3 percent acknowledge this for Islamic groups. On the other hand, 69.1 percent either disagree or strongly disagree that Christian extremism is present in their area, while 67.3 percent does not think that Islamic extremist groups operate in their community.

Figure 21. Percentage of respondents claiming the presence in their area of individuals or groups that incite Christian (N = 1,587) or Islamic (N = 1,590) extremism
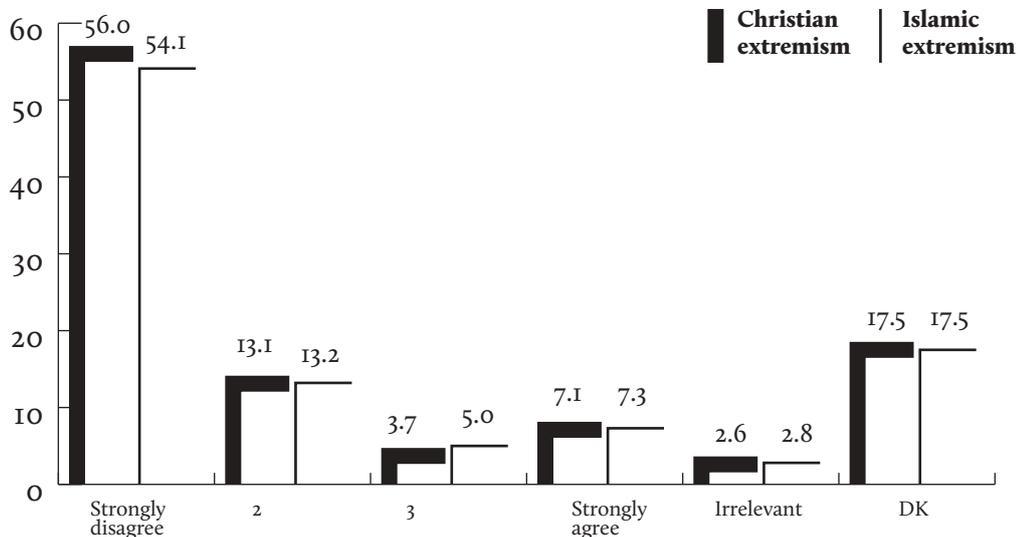
More respondents who practise religious rituals disagree with Statement 3 (71.5–73%) than do those who do not practise at all (66%). This trend is also observed for Islamic extremism, with a level of agreement that is nearly identical (12–13%). The general tendency is for more educated respondents to show a higher level of agreement, higher percentages of "do not know" and lower percentages of disagreement to the statements about Christian or Islamic extremist individuals or groups. A high percentage of urban dwellers (19.6% and 19.3%) and of females (20.8% and 20.7%) chose the option "do not know" for the two statements about religious extremism.

Perceptions of Christian extremism are at higher level than the national average

for respondents in the following municipalities: Kruje (53%), Elbasan (39.5%), Shijak (35%), Durres (29%), Kavaje, Maliq and Vlore (13% each), and Tirane (11%). In a few municipalities with a sample size of less than 20 respondents a higher percentage of Christian extremism than the national average was reported: Vore (20%), Mallakaster (14%), Bilisht (14%) and Mat (13%). Meanwhile, perceptions of Islamic extremism were reported significantly by respondents in the following municipalities: Kruje (56%), Elbasan (48%), Shijak (35%), Durres (25%), Kamez (17%), Korce (16%) and Tirane (15%). High percentages for the presence of Islamic extremism were found in smaller municipalities (sample size, 10–19 respondents) such as Bilisht (21%), Vore (20%), Sarande (20%), Rrogozhine (15%) and Gramsh (15%).

Some focus group participants tend to link religious radicalism or extremism with rigorous practice or changes in behaviour and appearance, and not necessarily with violence. A disturbing phenomenon for them is the relative isolation of radical believers from the community, and their closed mind attitudes to ideas that differ from, or contradict, their beliefs. As one young interviewee (FGD2) put it, "I don't think these people are extremists, but it is not normal to be so closed to others' views and so stubborn in defending your ideas." Another interviewee (FGD4), a Muslim who practises rites, said that "Extremism may appear when an individual believes emotionally, without the use of logic. Religion is like a medicine one takes from a pharmacist, every person should be given the medicine he or she needs."

The findings on social network driver confirm that the family remains the main vehicle for the transmission of religious beliefs and views on the world to young people. The majority of respondents in the sample give less credit to the social circle for spreading religious views, but from the FGD with young and religious participants it became apparent that peer groups and friends play a greater role in this regard. Although the majority of respondents do not think that religious extremists groups operate in their area, in certain municipalities, such as Kruje, Elbasan, Shijak, Durres, Bilisht, Kamez, Korce, Tirane, Vore, there are strong opinions on the existence of religious extremist groups. Nevertheless, the range of answers to the last two statements above and their comparison with the responses to other control statements (see below), show that more probing is needed into the ways people from different socio-economic backgrounds, age groups and education level conceptualise religious extremism.

V.1.3. 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 in a small minority, socio-economic or political discrimination, or both, may be perceived as linked to disrespect for Islam and Muslims, provoking radicalisation.*

A general atmosphere of religious tolerance has existed for centuries in Albania and is confirmed by recent studies such as *Religious tolerance in Albania* (IDM 2018). As reported in the sections above fewer than one percent of the respondents in the present study consider that there is a high level of religious hatred in Albania. IDM (2018) found that 92.3 percent of respondents think that religious tolerance is a fundamental value in Albania. Moreover, the majority of respondents denied that they, members of their families or someone else in their local communities have been discriminated against on

the basis of their religious beliefs.[28] The International Religious Freedom Report for the year 2017 published by the US State Department states that freedom of religion exists in Albania and notes the non-existence of discrimination for any particular religious community.[29]

In order to probe perceptions on discrimination, we presented to respondents in the national survey the following statements, asking whether, and to what extent, they agree with them:

Statement 1: People with the same religious denomination as me benefit less from opportunities for economic and social development due to their religious belonging.

Statement 2: The beard (for men) or headscarf/burka (for women) reveal that we are dealing with religious extremists.

Statement 3: The religious community I belong to is well-represented in politics and state institutions.

The salience and relevance that this driver has for favouring radicalisation and violent extremism were assessed on the basis of a positive answer to the first two statements and a negative answer to the third one. While the first and the third statements offer a perspective on real or perceived discrimination, (positive responses to) the second statement relates more to societal discrimination and prejudices.

The majority of respondents (68.9%) do not think that religious beliefs stand behind societal discrimination in Albania. Only 12.8 percent agree or strongly agree with the first statement, while 18.3 percent think that it is irrelevant or do not have an answer to it. Among respondents who regularly practise religious rituals there is a higher level of agreement with the statement (17.8%) but, on the other hand, the percentage of those within this category who do not agree with the statement is 70.7 percent, slightly higher than the national average. Respondents not practising religious rituals tend not to agree with the statement (9.4%). More educated respondents are less inclined to believe that there is a religious basis to the societal discrimination, and the percentage of those who think that the statement is irrelevant increases with level of education. More respondents (20%) who have not completed eight- or nine-year education, or have no education at all, agree with the statement. Interestingly, areas with a percentage higher than the national average are under-developed areas (Bilisht, Bulqize, Diber, Kruje, Gramsh, Has, Kukes, Librazhd, Mallakaster, Patos, Prrenjas, Roskovec, Rrogozhine, Tepelene and Tropoje), but also a few municipalities that are close to or part of developed areas such as Elbasan, Fier, Kamez, Pogradec and Shijak.

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28. UNDP & Institute for Democracy and Mediation (2018) "Religious Tolerance in Albania." Tirane, p. 45–51.

29. "Albania 2017 International Religious Freedom Report." Available online: https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/281118.pdf (accessed on 27 July, 2018).
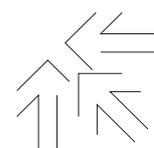
Figure 22. Percentage of respondents who feel they benefit less from socio-economic development opportunities due to religious affiliation (N= 1,593)
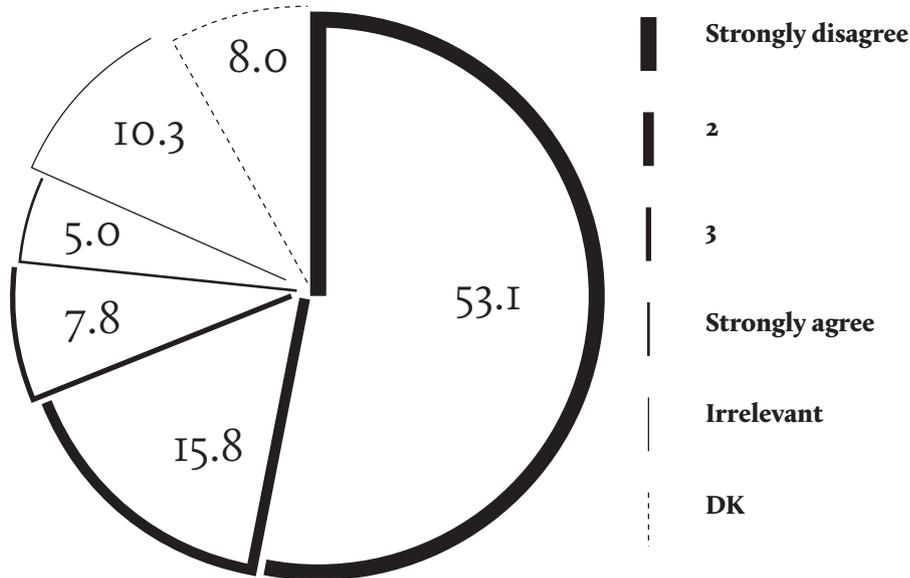
Visible signs of religiosity, such as headscarves and burkas worn by women and beards worn by men, are issues of contention in the public sphere. Persons who are not very religious might associate headscarves and beards with religious fundamentalism and extremism. The present study tested this hypothesis through the nationally representative sample. Just over half the respondents (55.9%) do not think there is any association between men wearing beards and women wearing headscarves on the one hand, and religious extremism on the other. But, a substantial minority (30.5%) agree or strongly agree with the statement. Apparently, Albanian society is not immune to misconceptions related to religion. Moreover, "the majority of Albanians lead a secular life; they have little information on or knowledge of religion and reject religious considerations to shape or condition their way of life".[30]

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30. See "Religious tolerance in Albania" IDM 2018, p. 7. Source: http://www.al.undp.org/content/dam/albania/docs/religious%20tolerance%20albania.pdf

Figure 23. Percentage of respondents thinking that a beard, burka and headscarf are a sign of religious extremism (N = 1,592)

Strongly disagree

2

3

Strongly agree

Irrelevant

DK
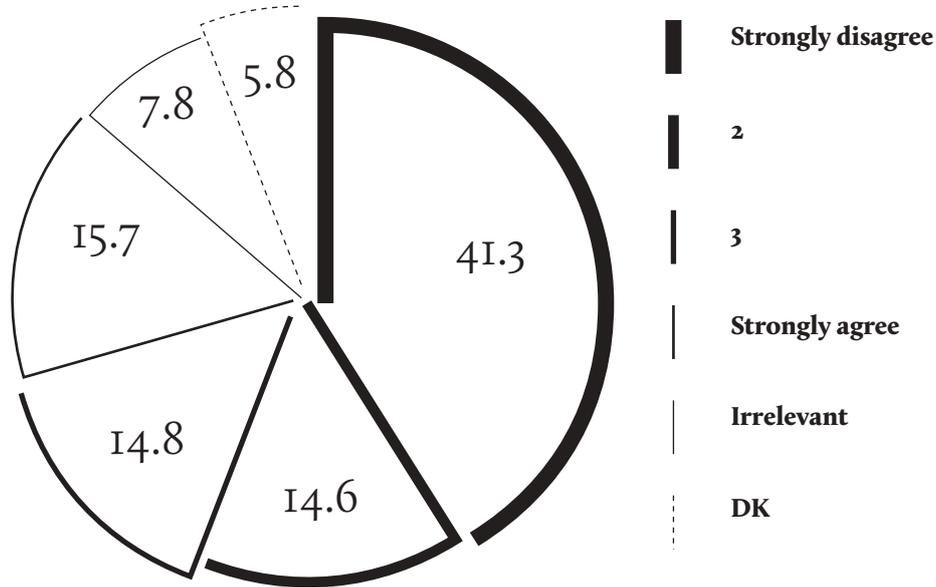
As expected, respondents who practise religious rituals are more familiar with religious customs (including dress codes) and more inclined to disagree (63.2%) with Statement 2 than are those that do not practise religion at all (51.4%). An association between headscarves and beards with religious extremism is higher in urban areas than in rural areas (respectively, 36.1% and 22.7%), and is higher among employed (34%) and self-employed (34.5%) respondents than among those who are unemployed (23.2%). When we consider the responses through the prism of the level of education of respondents, there is a significant shift in the percentage from the sub-category of those who have not finished the basic eight- or nine-year cycle and those who have done so. In the first sub-category, the 'agree or disagree' percentages are the lowest and the highest, respectively, compared to other levels of education, at 11.9 percent and 69.5 percent. In the second sub-category they are respectively 26.4 percent and 55.3 percent, while the percentages of irrelevant and "do not know" answers are almost the same as in the first sub-category, implying that more respondents in the second sub-category associate headscarves and beards with religious extremism. The tendency among those with upper levels of education is for agreement with the statement. This is puzzling if one expects that progress in education is negatively correlated with level of prejudice against outwardly religious persons. A possible explanation might be that because headscarves and beards are associated with pre-modern, rural and traditional way of life, educated persons tend to look down on them as aberrations from current normality, perhaps leading some to perceive women wearing headscarves and men carrying beards as religious extremists. Some participants in FGD2 with youngsters thought that the wearing of beard, burka, headscarf or ankle-length trousers for men are all signs of extremism, while other disagreed.

Concerning the third control statement, it is assumed that if discriminatory policies are followed against a particular religious community, the latter will be less represented in political offices and in public institutions. Regardless of whether such discriminatory politics exist in reality, the discourse of religious radical groups maintains that the existing social and political order is biased against their religious community. Religiously extremist individuals or groups advocate the use of violent means to overthrow the existing order, because according to them it does not give due representation to their religious community.

The responses to the statement "The religious community I belong to is well-represented in politics and state institutions" are divided, with no clear majority for either agree or disagree, at 30 percent and 37.7 percent respectively, while 24.7 percent did not know and 7.6 percent thought the statement to be irrelevant.

Figure 24. Opinions on whether there is a good level of religious representation in politics and state institutions (%; N = 1,587)
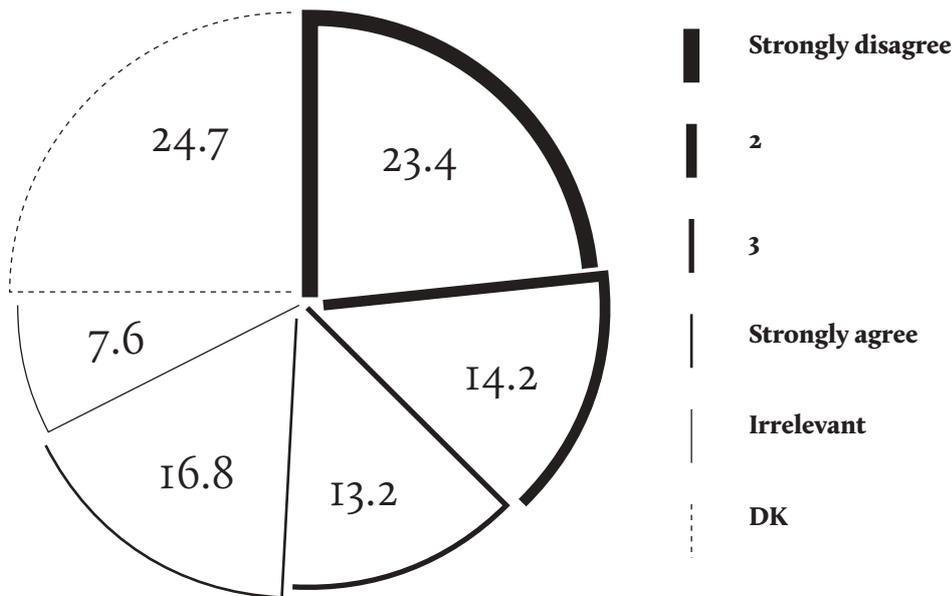
No significant differences were observed within different demographic categories, apart from among those with different levels of practice of religious rituals. The majority of respondents who regularly practise religious rituals tend to agree with the statement (41.9% agree; 38.3% disagree), while the majority of those who practise the main religious rituals and those who do not practise them at all do not agree with the statement (44.8% and 33.1%, respectively), i.e. they think that their religious group is under-represented in politics and state institutions. However, in all three sub-categories the "do not know" and "irrelevant" percentages are substantial, and are higher still among the less religious sub-categories. It is obvious that for many not-so-religious respondents an adequate political representation of religious communities is not an issue for which they have previously given any thought. From the focus group interviews with Muslim believers (FGD4) there was no expression of concern about the representation of Muslims in politics and state institutions.

Overall, the present study confirms that religious tolerance is real in Albania and a fundamental value of Albanian society. The majority of respondents think that religious belonging is not a basis for societal discrimination. Nevertheless, respondents seem divided over the statement: "The religious community I belong to is well-represented in politics and state institutions", with respondents that are more attached to religious identities more likely to agree with the statement. From FGDs with Muslim believers no particular dissatisfaction with representation in state institutions and politics was reported. A substantial part of the sample, more than 30 percent of respondents, perceive outward expressions of Islam, such as veil head-covering by women and beards on men, as signifiers of religious extremism. Within this minority, educated persons and urbanites are more likely to associate these appearances with extremist world views.

V.1.4. Frustrated expectations and relative deprivation

Relative deprivation and frustrated expectations are powerful drivers of VE activity among youth given improvements in education, especially at the secondary and university levels. Youth with greater amounts of 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 recognise the nepotism impedes access to jobs. Young males may lack the economic resources to marry and are generally denied a voice in traditional societies.

Despite relative improvements in recent years, young people in Albania, including university graduates, continue to face many difficulties and deprivation, disappointing their expectations. An INSTAT and United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) study published in 2015 and based on data of the 2011 national census and on surveys conducted in following years takes into consideration various aspects of the life of persons from the age of 15–29 years. Based upon the level of consumption of material goods, 15 percent of this group are considered to be poor. The situation with regard to education has improved much in Albania, with many more university graduates than previously: for the age cohort 25–29 years, in 2011, there were 23.5 percent graduates, a remarkable rise compared to only 7.5 percent in 2001. Long-term unemployment (> 12 months) in 2011 was 63.1 percent among young persons and 53.9 percent among university graduates. Despite the rise in the level of education, many young people are over-represented in the figures of unemployment compared to the overall population: in the period 2011–2014 the ratio of employment : population fell from 68.2 percent to 62.7 percent, but the level among young people fell from 42.8 percent to 28.2 percent. Most young people are employed in agriculture and it is estimated that 33.5 percent of young university graduates are overqualified for the job they perform. These figures show the incompatibility between the education system and the economy in the country, including the socio-economic opportunities offered therein.[31]

Young and highly educated people may feel frustrated if they do not find jobs that fit their qualifications. Frustration may lead to expression of grievances with the socio-economic and political system and to radicalisation. The radicalising role and the potential of frustration among youth was examined in the present study by analysing the perceptions of respondents about the compatibility of education and employment, job satisfaction and legal earning. Survey respondents were provided with the following statements:

> Statement 1:   Well-educated job seekers should accept job positions for which they are overqualified.
>
> Statement 2:   In the area where I live well-educated youth have good job positions.
>
> Statement 3:   The main source of income for youth in the area where I live is from individual law-abiding work.

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31.   INSTAT, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation & UNFPA (2015) Të rinjtë në Shqipëri: Sfidat në kohët që ndryshojnë. Tirane.

The possibility that this driver can create an environment misused by extremist ideologies was validated on the basis of negative answers for the above statements, which test the perceptions on frustrated expectations of employment for well-educated young people, perceptions of relative deprivation of the youth, and the extent to which youth abide by rules and social norms.

The majority (68.2%) of respondents agree with the first statement. The older the respondent, the more they thought that well-educated job seekers should accept job positions for which they are overqualified. Those that have completed the eight- or nine-year basic cycle of education or secondary education are also more likely to endorse the statement (72.1% for both sub-categories) than university graduates (63.5%) and postgraduates (58.1%).

Figure 25. Responses to the statement that overqualified job-seekers should accept lower job positions (%; N = 1,586)
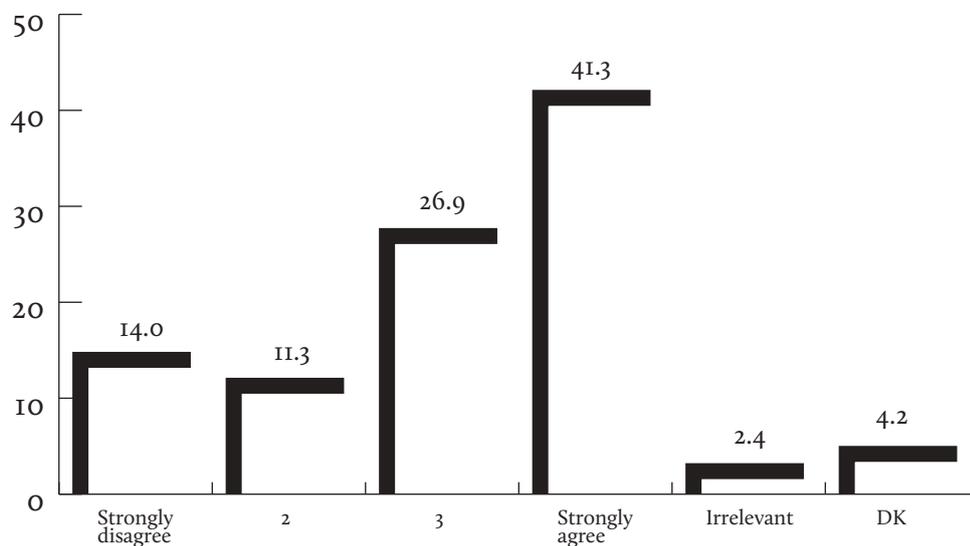
Many university graduates find it difficult to find jobs and build careers in their localities, choosing to migrate to the capital or abroad. The predominant perception of respondents (67.6%) in our survey is that educated young people in their regions do not have good jobs. This perception is stronger in the sub-category of those respondents who practise religious rituals (71.7%), among respondents from rural areas (72.2%), men (71%) and in the categories of those who have completed the basic eight- or nine-year cycle of education (71%) or secondary education (71%), among the unemployed (73.5%) and 'other' (dominated by retired respondents, 76.7%). The higher the age of the respondent the more likely they are to disagree with the statement that educated young people in their region have obtained good job positions.
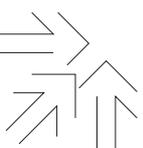
Figure 26. Responses to the statement that well-educated youth have good jobs (%; N = 1,591)
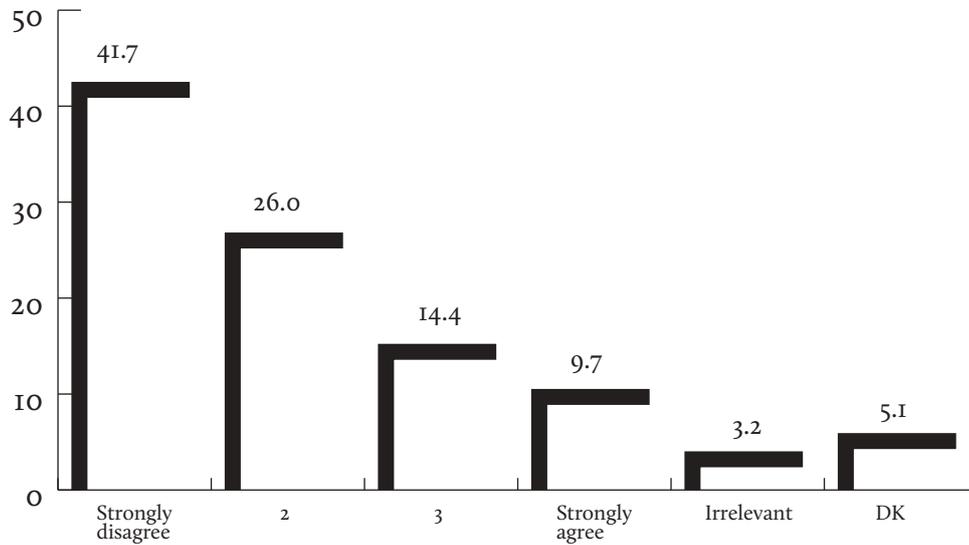
In regions experiencing socio-economic deprivation and youth unemployment there is a danger that youngsters will engage in illegal activities to provide for themselves or their families. If this phenomenon becomes widespread in peripheral localities it may cause a shift in community values, resulting in greater tolerance of deviance and criminality. A sub-culture that tolerates criminal activity breeds extremism and violence. The majority of respondents (61.7%) believe that the main income for youth in their area is from an honest or law-abiding job (Figure 27).

Figure 27. Responses to the statement that the main source of income for youth is from individual law-abiding work (%; N = 1,588)
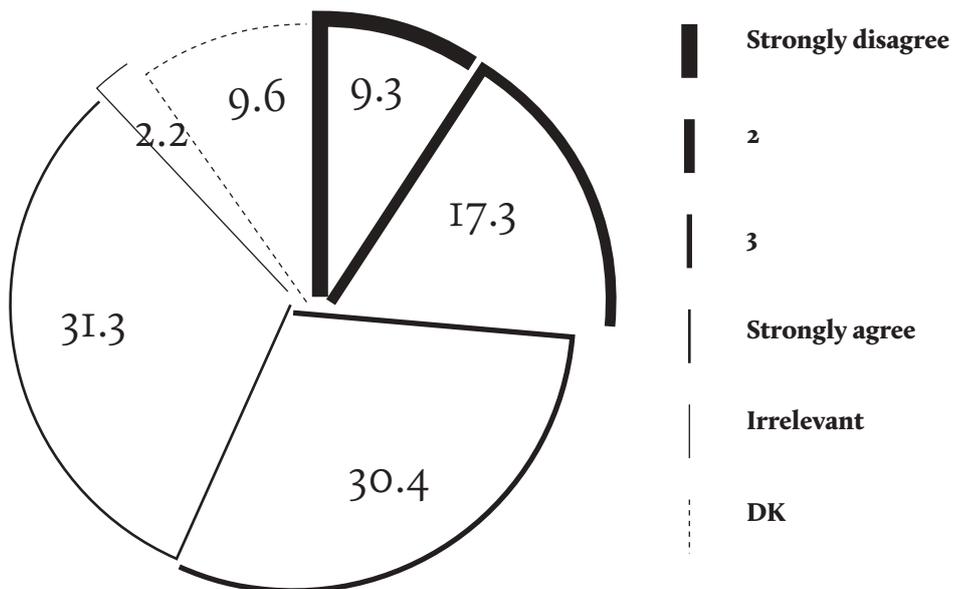
Those who practise regularly religious rituals show a higher level of agreement with the statement than those who are more secular (68.8% and 58.4%, respectively). This trend is observed among respondents from rural areas and also among those with lower levels of education (high school or less). Focus group interviewees reported cases of unemployed youngsters living in luxury beyond their means because of illegal activities such as gambling or selling drugs (FGD1–4). Participants in an FGD with Muslim believers stated that religious youngsters are less likely to engage in illegal activity (FGD4).

The reason that relative deprivation and frustrated expectations are seen as a driver towards VE is that persons frustrated by unfulfilled expectations and who have experienced various forms of social deprivation may become attracted to religious extremist ideologies, because these provide them with promises of salvation and with convenient scapegoats. The responses to the control statements confirm that there is a widespread perception that well-educated persons are unable to find jobs that fit with their qualifications. Such disparity between education and employment might be a source of frustration for many young people. However, according to the analysis of the answers given by the respondents, religion can block the departure from frustration towards extremism. Whereas in our national sample religious persons showed stronger disagreement than the national average with the statement "In the area where I live well-educated youth have good job positions," they are more likely to accept job positions for which they are overqualified. Disagreement with the second statement is stronger in rural areas, among men, those with less education and the unemployed. Again, the religious are more likely to refrain from illegal activities than are secular people. Respondents inhabiting rural areas and those with lower levels of education are more in agreement with the statement that the main source of income of youth in the area they live is from law-abiding work.

V.1.5. Unmet social and economic needs

> *Deprivation of socio-economic needs—especially when combined with other factors such as widespread corruption and lack of security and justice—may be a factor exploited by VE groups, which may offer wages or services. It is not poverty, however, that elicits support for VE but rather the acute form of social exclusion by government and society.*

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, the civil society sector builds partnerships with the state to provide relief, assistance and training to persons in need. Besides foreign humanitarian foundations and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), foreign faith organisations have been active in the country, providing material help, health services, education and spiritual consolation to many such citizens. But sometimes religious humanitarian organisations have been a cover for foreign religious extremists to spread their agenda and for turning Albania into an operational base for their activities in other countries. In the 1990s, profiting from the dire socio-economic situation in the country and by deficiencies in law enforcement agencies, many religious 'charities' started spreading religious extremist ideas among the population. They were introduced into local communities

by means of funding scholarships for young people, construction of mosques and charity for poor households. They had great impact in impoverished peripheral areas and recruited followers, mainly young men, who started to practise rituals that were unknown in Albanian traditional Islam. When links between international terrorism and some of these 'charities' were revealed, they were forced to terminate their activities in the country.[32]

The high levels of poverty and unemployment in peripheral and deprived areas, as well as poor social services, make local communities vulnerable to activities of these groups. To better understand this phenomenon, the respondents of this study were presented with the following statements:

Statement 1:	In the area where I live state institutions of social and economic assistance operate in a professional and abuse-free manner.
Statement 2:	In the area where I live there are households and individuals that do not fulfil their basic needs.
Statement 3:	In the area where I live there are religious groups that offer economic privileges or material gain to those who practise their religion.

The relevance of this driver was validated on the basis of negative answers for the first statement and positive answers for the other two statements. Unprofessionalism and abuse by state institutions of social and economic assistance can cause perceptions of social exclusion. The second statement concerns the perception of unmet basic needs, and the third examines the presence of religious groups that exploit socio-economic vulnerability.

The majority of respondents (64.2%) do not agree with the first statement, though more religious respondents tend to show a higher level of agreement with the statement than those who are less religious (32.4% vs. 22.8%), and urban dwellers agree more than do respondents from rural areas (28.3% vs. 22.5%). Unemployed respondents and students, social categories that often deal with social assistance institutions, are particularly in disagreement with the statement. Participants in focus groups point out that, because of deficiencies and corruption in the state institutions of economic assistance, many poor families in their area do not benefit from social support schemes (FGD1, FGD3).

Concerning the second statement, the majority of respondents (85.6%) think that in their communities there are households and individuals that do not meet their basic needs. Respondents older than 65 years, a vulnerable section of the population, show the highest level of agreement with the statement, at 94.2 percent.

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32. Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (2014) Zanafilla e islamit radikal në Shqipëri. Reporter.al, available online: https://www.reporter.al/zanafilla-e-islamit-radikal-ne-shqiperi/ (accessed on 30 July, 2018).

Figure 28. Percentage support for the statement that state institutions of social and economic assistance operate in a professional and abuse-free manner (N = 1,590) and that there are households and individuals that do not fulfil their basic needs (N = 1,589)

Legend:
▌ ... state institutions of social and economic assistance operate in a professional and abuse-free manner

▏ ... there are households/individuals that do not fulfill their basic needs
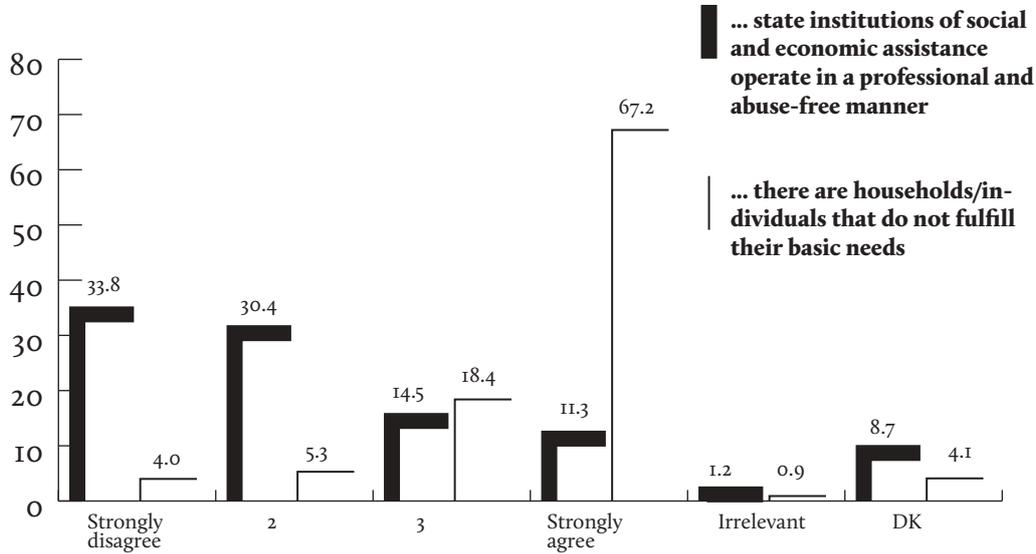
Radical and extremist religious groups are known to recruit followers in economically deprived areas, or from vulnerable groups in other areas, by providing young people with promises of material or other gains. As our findings demonstrate, a considerable number of individuals and families in Albania struggle to make ends meet. In some cases, people from the community come to the rescue by providing them with basic material needs such as food, shelter or clothing for the children. However, this does not provide a structural and sustainable solution. A prominent role is played by dozens of charities who fill this gap, a number of whom have a specific religious outlook. Their assistance comes in different forms, including socio-economic support, health and other services to people in need. This legitimises them in the communities in which they operate, making it easier for them to use their position as a tool to convince people to join a religious organisation.

Survey respondents (30.7%) confirm cases of religious groups that offer privileges or material benefits to those individuals who practise religious rituals. The proportion of those who disagree with the statement is 39 percent, while 28 percent did not know.
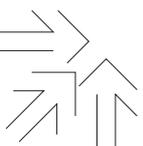
Figure 29. Percentage support for the statement that there are religious groups that offer economic privileges or material gain to those who practise their religion (N = 1,592)
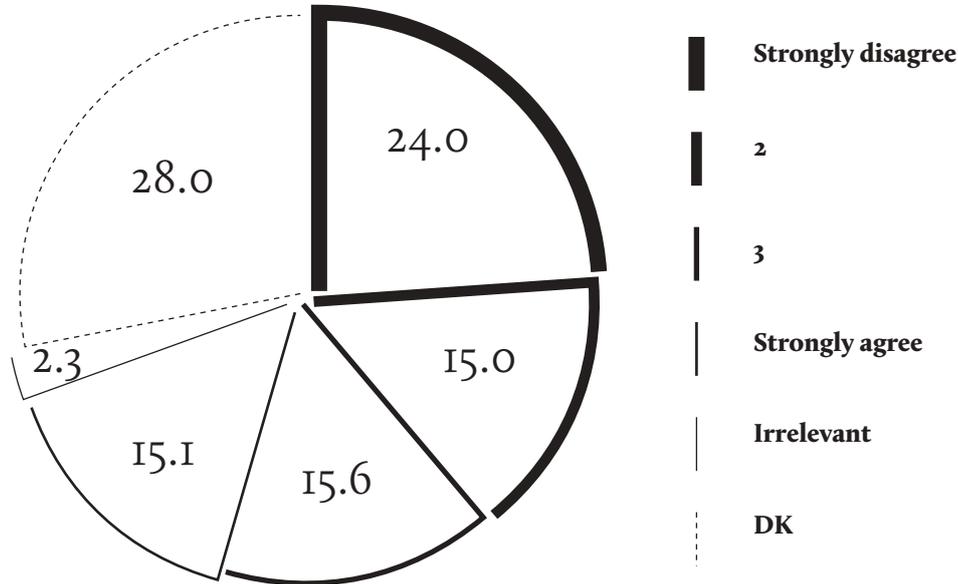
Fewer respondents who regularly follow religious rules 'did not know' (the majority either agreed 42.2% or disagreed 35.3% with the statement) compared to those who practise the main rules and those who lead a secular life. From the perspective of education, those with less than eight- or nine-year, or no, education showed the highest percentage that disagreed and the least that agreed. Interestingly, all education categories reported a similar level of 'do not know' answers (27–31%). FGD participants reported several cases of religiously based charities targeting individuals under their care (such as orphaned children in Tirane and Gjirokaster) to bring converts into their religion (FGD2). The presence of such groups is confirmed by higher percentages (than the national average) of survey respondents agreeing with the statement in the municipalities of Kurbin (69%), Lezhe (53%), Elbasan (52%), Kruje (51.5%), Kavaje (43.5%), Gjirokaster (43%), Vlore (42%), Durres (36%), Shijak (35%), Maliq (35%), Korce (33%), Bilisht (33%) and Diber (32%). High percentages are observed also in smaller municipalities such as Kucove (61%), Vore (43%), Roskovec (41%), Puke (40%), Ura Vajgurore (40%) and Vau i Dejes (39%).

Analysis of this driver—'Unmet social and economic needs'—gives us a picture of deprivation in the different regions across the country. The dominant perception is that there are deficiencies and corruption in the state services of social and economic assistance that are to support people in need. Particularly vulnerable categories include the unemployed, pensioners and students. Religious, as well as secular charities run projects aiming to ameliorate the lives of residents in communities in these areas. There is a substantial percentage of 30.7 in the national sample that confirm the existence of religious groups in their areas that offer economic privileges to those who practise their religion. Higher percentages than the national average of the existence of these groups are reported in the following municipalities: Kurbin (69%), Kucove (61%), Lezhe (53%), Elbasan (52%), Kruje (51.5%), Kavaje (43.5%), Vore (43%), Gjirokaster (43%), Vlore (42%), Roskovec (41%), Puke (40%), Ura Vajgurore (40%), Vau i Dejes (39%), Durres (36%), Shijak (35%), Maliq (35%), Korce (33%), Bilisht (33%) and Diber (32%). In such cases there is the possibility of the spread of foreign religious influences and the infiltration of fundamentalist and extremist ideologies among the Albanian religious believers.

V.1.6. Greed and proliferation of illegal economic activities

VE organisations' illegal activities offer lucrative economic opportunities for those who seek a ready income. Networks operating VE and illegal economic activities have a mutually beneficial relationship—providing each other with revenue, experience in concealment, and ideology to legitimise illegal behaviour. Prisons are a popular venue for VE 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 organisations 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 organised crime. Noted terrorist organisations, such as FARC in Columbia and Abu Sayyaf in the Philippines, have undertaken illegal economic operations in drug trafficking and kidnap ransom and recruit new members by promising that they will become rich.[33] As noted above, some Islamic charities in the Balkans have acted in the past as cover organisations for terrorist activities, providing terrorists with fake documents produced on the black market and funding their trips in the region through bank transfers.[34] When these NGOs were closed down by Albanian authorities in the early 2000s, the values of their frozen assets was estimated to be as much as 20 million USD.[35]

In order to explore whether the environment in Albania offers some space for the nexus of criminal activity and violent extremism this study asked survey respondents to what extent they agree with the following statements:

Statement 1:	I would refuse a lawful job or economic earning that is not allowed by my religion.
Statement 2:	For the sake of everyday survival I would justify every economic activity, including illegal ones.
Statement 3:	Everyone likes fast wealth creation, regardless of how.

According to the responses from the national sample, 33.1 percent agree with the first statement and 51.2 percent disagree with it, Thus, the majority would not refuse a particular legal job that is not allowed by their religion. The perceptions of the religious respondents are diametrically opposed to the secular ones on this matter: of those who regularly practise religious rituals, 53.7 percent answered in the affirmative and 31.7 percent disagreed. A trend similar to the national sample is observed among

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33. O'Brien, M. (2012) "Fluctuations Between Crime and Terror: The Case of Abu Sayyaf's Kidnapping Activities." Terrorism and Political Violence, 24: 320–336; Picarelli, J. T. (2012) "Osama bin Korleone? Vito the Jackal? Framing Threat Convergence Through an Examination of Transnational Organized Crime and International Terrorism", Terrorism and Political Violence, 24: 180–198.

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

35. Kullolli, A. (2009) Proselytization in Albania by Middle Eastern Islamic organizations. Monterey (CA): Naval Postgraduate School, p. 61.

respondents who practise the main religious rituals (36.7% agree; 49.4% disagree) or who do not practise at all (22.7% agree; 59.2% disagree). Respondents older than 65 years are more in agreement with the statement (39.5%) than those between 25 and 34 years, who have the lowest level of agreement (29.2%) across the different age cohorts.

Figure 30. Percentage support for the statement that the respondent would refuse a lawful job or economic earning that is not allowed by their religion (N = 1,580)
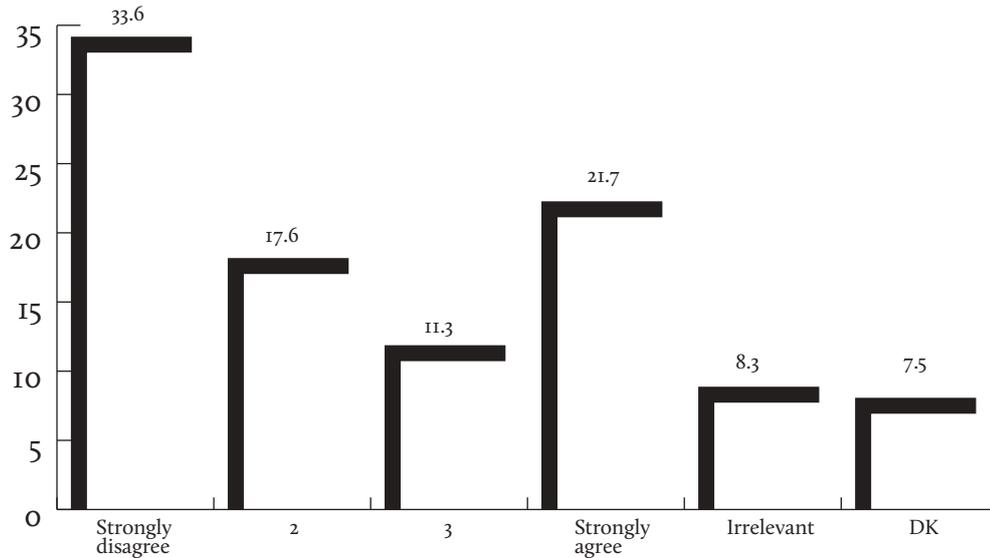
The majority of respondents (56.7%) would not undertake any economic activity that might be illegal for the sake of everyday survival, while 36.2 percent agreed or expressed full support for the statement. Non-religious respondents were somewhat more likely to accept illegal activity for everyday survival than religious respondents (38% vs. 34.5%). Respondents between the ages of 18 and 34 years are more likely to answer in the affirmative than older respondents, although in every age cohort the majority disagreed with the statement. Males agreed more than females (40.2% and 31.9%, respectively). More agreement with the statement is observed among respondents that have completed the eight- or nine-year cycle of education, and the secondary cycle, in contrast with university graduates and post- graduates. Students and unemployed respondents were more likely to agree with the statement (40.7% and 40.9%, respectively) than were the employed, self-employed and pensioners.

Whereas the first two statements are aimed at a personal level—asking the respondents whether they would choose everyday survival over their values and norms—the third statement is aimed at a more general level. Hence, the answers to the statement: 'Attaining fast wealth—regardless of the means—is something that everyone would like,' stand in sharp contrast to those given to the personal statements. Slightly more than half of respondents (53.7%) agreed that everyone would like to attain wealth quickly, regardless of the means.

Figure 31. Percentage support for the statement that the respondent would justify every economic activity, including illegal ones (N = 1,588) and that everyone likes fast wealth creation, regardless of how (N = 1,589)
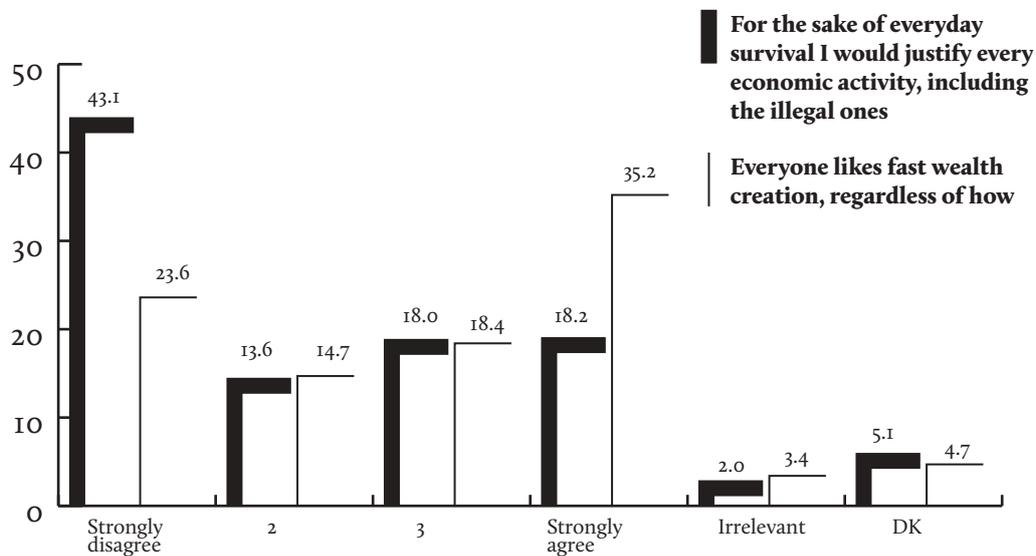
The level of religiosity of respondents with regard to Statement 3 is correlated negatively with the predominance of the answers: an increase in the practise of religious rituals with a decrease in the percentage of agreement (and higher percentage of disagreement with the statement). Respondents that have completed the eight- or nine-year cycle of education, and secondary education, are more likely to agree with the statement (55.8% and 55.6%, respectively) than those who have completed university or postgraduate studies (51.3% and 48.8%, respectively). By far, women tend to disagree with men when it comes to the statement "For the sake of everyday survival I would justify every economic activity, including the illegal ones". 61% of women oppose this attitude while only 32% of them tend to agree. This ratio stands at 53% (disagree) to 40% (agree) for male respondents. One young interviewee in FGD2 pointed out that: "Those who engage in illegal activities have a thin moral foundation and a much restricted worldview; therefore they are more easily disposed to influences by radical groups."

In general, the majority of respondents have a secular attitude towards employment: they would not refuse a legal job offered to them based on religious considerations. Most religious people who regularly practise religious rituals are more likely to refuse a legal job position if they know that accepting it would go against their religious beliefs, thus limiting their chances of material amelioration. Young people between the ages of 25 and 34 years are more pragmatic than older generations, as they would not reject a job position out of religious considerations. Also, young people are more represented among those respondents who agree with Statement 2: "For the sake of everyday survival I would justify every economic activity, including illegal ones". This fact alone should be a great concern for society, even though the majority of the sample do not agree with the statement. Women show higher resistance to such attitude than men. Also, substantial agreement with the statement is observed among students and the unemployed. Religious respondents are more likely to disagree with the statement, as well as with the next statement: "Everyone like fast wealth creation, regardless of how". Higher levels of education are associated with a reduced level of agreement with the statement. Radical or extremist religious groups that promise material benefits to their followers are more likely to recruit among young people that want to become wealthy and who do not have a sound religious foundation.

V.1.7. Conclusions on socio-economic drivers

Socio-economic VE drivers are threatening for Albania, a developing country on the periphery of the EU. Albanians are experiencing a weakening of family ties and of social circles. Unruly and anti-social behaviour of youth is perceived to be strong in the following municipalities: Elbasan, Lezhe, Kamez, Kukes, Kurbin, Pogradec, Korce, Kruje, Durres, Fier and Tirane. Religious families are more supportive of family values and to some extent may inhibit the anti-social behaviour of youth. Although religious identities are mostly transmitted through family to adolescents and young adults, peer groups and friends play a significant role in inducement to a religious world view.

The disparity between education level and employment opportunities is a source of frustration for many young people, who, despite their qualifications, often cannot find an adequate job. To some extent, religion can help prevent a deviation from frustration towards extremism: our analysis demonstrated that religious persons are more likely than the national average to accept job positions for which they are overqualified. A perception that young and well-educated people do not have good job positions is stronger in rural areas than urban areas, and among men, those with less education and the unemployed.

Religious respondents are more likely to refuse a legal job position if their faith demands it. Young people between the ages of 25 and 34 years are more pragmatic than the older generations, as they would not reject a job position out of religious considerations. Young people are also more likely to justify any economic activity, even illegal, for the sake of survival. Women show higher resilience on this issue as they oppose to illegal economic activities for the sake of survival in higher percentages than men. Religious respondents are more likely to disagree with such an attitude, reconfirming that religiosity may help prevent socio-economic factors from becoming a drive towards religious extremism. However, this may not always be the case if socio-economic concerns are manipulated through the lens of religious discrimination. Radical or extremist religious groups that promise material benefits to their followers are more likely to recruit among young people that are guided by greed. On the other hand, perceptions that religious extremism, Christian or Islamic, exist in areas such as Kruje, Elbasan, Shijak, Durres, Bilisht, Kamez should be taken seriously by stakeholders—whether state or non-state—involved in the prevention of violent extremism.

Religious tolerance is real in Albania and is a fundamental value of Albanian society. The majority of respondents think that religious belonging is not a basis for societal discrimination. Nevertheless, beneath the surface there are factors that should be considered with caution. For example, for a third of the national sample of respondents, a headscarf (for women) and beards (for men) are signs of religious extremism. Such misconceptions may give rise to societal prejudices and discrimination, which may in turn serve as push factors for VE. Meanwhile, some religious respondents have a concern for a more just representation of their respective religious groups in politics and state institutions.

The dominant perception about deficiencies and corruptions in the state services of social and economic assistance is especially strong among the unemployed, pensioners and students. Religious groups that operate in deprived areas may somehow alleviate the situation for people in need, but a substantial proportion (30.7%) of the national sample perceives that the aid they give is conditioned upon the practise of religious rites by the receiving party. Higher percentages than the national average on the existence of these religious groups are reported in the municipalities of Kurbin, Kucove,

Lezhe, Elbasan, Kruje, Kavaje, Vore, Gjirokaster, Vlore, Roskovec, Puke, Ura Vajgurore, Vau i Dejes, Durres, Shijak, Maliq, Korce, Bilisht and Diber. These percentages, whether of a perception or (if confirmed) of the reality, need to be tackled by relevant authorities to portray, among others, the very spirit of religious coexistence and tolerance as a fundamental value of Albanian society.

V.2. Political drivers

The majority of political drivers of VE relate to the state of democracy, governance and functioning of the rule of law in a country, with the exception of three drivers in the context of Albania: 'Foreign occupation' and 'Political/Military encroachment' do not describe the country's current reality, while 'Perceptions that the international system is unfair and hostile to Muslim societies' relate mostly to public perceptions and attitudes towards the West and the international system in general. Nevertheless, they are assessed by this study through the lenses of the phenomenon of foreign fighters and the attitudes of religious believers towards religious values and dignity (Table 3).

Table 3. Political drivers of VE

DRIVER	DESCRIPTION
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 VE.
Harsh government repression & gross violations of human rights	Justice is a critical value in Islam. 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 VE activities and the more support VE may garner from the local communities.
Foreign occupation	Countries subject to foreign military occupation are at risk of insurgency and rights abuses. Support for VE 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 honor. In communities with a historically high degree of autonomy and self-regulation, strong resistance is likely.
Endemic corruption & 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 VE 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 VE organizations can establish themselves with little hindrance, and even garner support from communities ignored by the government. It should be understood that VE groups might gravitate toward 'states of limited strength'—as opposed to failed or even failing states—where they can have the infrastructure necessary to develop their network and carry out operations.
Intimidation or coercion by VE groups	Where governments cannot provide security and protection for its citizens, VE groups use intimidation and coercion to force support for their movement.
Perception that the international system is fundamentally unfair & hostile to Muslim societies / peoples	Populations may accept VE propaganda that the global political and economic system discriminates against the Muslim world, which can mesh with personal or communal feelings of discrimination.

Source: Denoeux and Carter (2009)

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.[36]*

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 and the country's efforts to consolidate the rule of law. Albania's democracy rating has not changed in the three years since the first assessment of VE in Albania (IDM 2015). According to the Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index Albania is still considered a hybrid regime.[37] The country is hoping to open accession negotiations with the EU in the second half of 2019, subject to progress in consolidation of the rule of law and areas of specific interest, such as judiciary, anticorruption, the fight against organised crime, human rights, and public administration, among others.[38] EU accession is a strategic objective for the country and the accession process is the most comprehensive

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36. See G. Denoeux and L. Carter (2009) "Guide to the drivers of violent extremism." p. 27. Source: https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/Pnadt978.pdf

37. Albania's score improved from 5.91 in 2016 to 5.98 in 2017. Source: Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index 2017: https://infographics.economist.com/2018/DemocracyIndex/

38. See Council conclusions on Enlargement and Stabilisation and Association Process (26 June 2018). Source: http://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/35863/st10555-en18.pdf
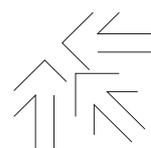
democratisation and development platform the country has undergone.[39] Over the past few years Albania has adopted and started implementation of one of the most important reforms in the judiciary, aiming to increase independence and to end the impunity of high-level corruption. This reform, and especially the vetting of judges and prosecutors, enjoys broad support by the public despite a minor decline in public trust in the results of the reform caused by delays in the vetting process and in the establishment of new anti-corruption judicial bodies.[40]

Nations in transit (Freedom House 2018) reports a small improvement in the country's democracy score, from 4.14 in 2017 to 4.11 in 2018.[41] The fight against corruption, according to this report, represents the worst performing area, with a score of 5.25 since 2013. The Freedom in the World: Albania report (Freedom House 2018) suggests that the country remains 'partly free' and that corruption and organised crime remain serious problems despite recent government efforts to address them, and the intermingling of powerful business, political and media interests inhibits the development of truly independent news outlets.[42]

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, last but not least, 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 upon various primary and secondary sources.

V.2.1. Denial of political rights and civil liberties

> *The lack of political rights and civil liberties, and closed, unresponsive political systems, can instil a belief that violence is the only means of bringing about political change. Civil liberties and political rights also may be a critical link between economic development and vulnerability to VE.*

The Freedom in the World report (Freedom House 2018) suggests that civil liberties and political rights are respected in Albania. Indeed, the country is confidently advancing towards a consolidated rule of law. However, Albania still finds itself with a hybrid regime, which affects the implementation of laws and enforcement in practice of European standards embodied in the legal system. Furthermore, the intermingling of powerful business and political interests are often in conflict with public interest

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39. Albanian citizens show the second highest level of support for EU membership in the WB region with 83% of them considering it to be a good thing for the country according to "Balkan Public Barometer 2018" of the Regional Cooperation Council. Source: https://www.rcc.int/seeds/results/2/balkan-public-barometer

40. Although public expectation about the positive impact of the implementation of the Justice Reform remains quite high, such expectations have experienced a decline from 71% in 2016 when the reform was adopted to 66% in 2017. See IDM "2017 Trust in Governance" report (p. 25). Source: http://idmalbania.org/trust-governance-opinion-poll-2017/

41. See Freedom House "Nations in transit 2018" Albania. Source: https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/NiT2018_Albania_0.pdf/

42. See Freedom House "Freedom in the World" Albania 2018 report. Source: https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2018/albania

and even distort public informing as powerful economic actors have some ability to shape the political sphere through their media holdings.[43] Albania finds itself at the bottom of the Media Literacy Index 2018 along with Macedonia and Turkey, making them the top three countries in Europe most susceptible to fake news owing to their highly controlled media,[44] low educational levels and low levels of trust in society.[45] Such concerns and the persisting public distrust in Albanian state institutions show a potentially 'friendly environment' for attitudes and perceptions that see little hope from a selectively or seemingly responsive political system.

There are two statements in the national survey through which this study examines the denial of political rights and civil liberties as a driver to violent extremism. Namely, the survey asked to what extent did the following statements reflect the attitude of the respondent:

Statement 1. In general, citizens' rights and civil liberties are respected by state institutions.

Statement 2. The political system in Albania is unfair and has to be changed even with violence if needed.

The potential of this driver to create space for VE is examined through the assessment of public perceptions that strongly disagree with the first statement and those that strongly agree with the second.

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43. See Freedom House "Freedom in the World" Albania 2018 report. Source: https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2018/albania

44. According to the "Media Ownership Monitor Albania" the Albanian media market is controlled by a small number of powerful owners with strong political ties. Due to the pressure coming from media owners with political and economic interests, many Albanian journalists resort to self-censorship. About the project: http://albania.mom-rsf.org/en/. See also "A Family Affair—The myth of media pluralism in Albania Media Ownership Monitor presented by Reporters sans frontières and Balkan Investigative Reporting Network Albania". Source: https://rsf.org/en/news/family-affair-myth-media-pluralism-albania-media-ownership-monitor-presented-rsf-and-birn-albania

45. See "2018 Media Literacy index", Open Society Institute Bulgaria. Source: http://osi.bg/downloads/File/2018/MediaLiteracyIndex2018_publishENG.pdf

Figure 32. Support for the view that civil rights and liberties are respected, and that the political system is unfair and needs to change, even through the use of force (%; N = 1,583)
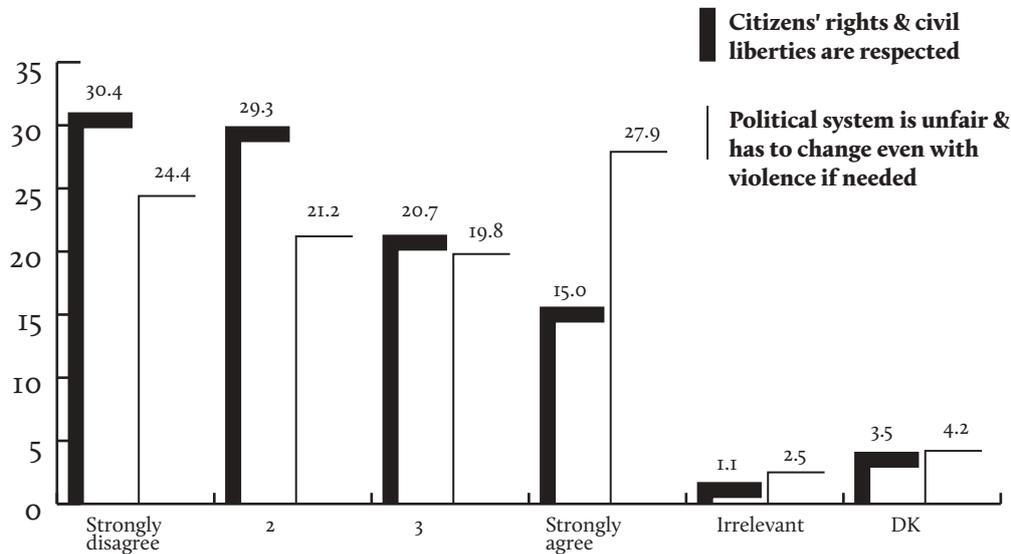
As shown in Figure 32, most respondents (59.7%) disagreed with the statement that state institutions generally respect citizens' rights and civil liberties, and only 15 percent fully agreed. Given the high level of public distrust in state institutions that has characterised Albania for many years during the transition, such a finding comes as no surprise.

Looking at the demography of respondents who tend to disagree (1, strongly disagree and 2, disagree) with the statement regarding citizens' rights and civil liberties, for some categories there are no significant differences between responses from rural and urban areas, or level of religiousness. The same holds true for the educational background of respondents with the exception of those with less than eight- or nine-year education, or no education at all, and those with a postgraduate degree. There were fewer respondents in these groups at the ends of the spectrum who disagreed less with the statement than did other categories (45% and average of 61%, respectively).

Unemployed and self-employed respondents also showed more disagreement with the statement (65%) than did those from other employment categories (55%). Meanwhile, 62.1 percent of men disagreed with the first statement as opposed to 57.3 percent of women.

A similar percentage of respondents strongly disagreed with the first statement (30.4%) and strongly agreed with the second statement (27.9%).[46] However, 47.7 percent agreed or strongly agreed with the latter statement. Participants in all four FGDs organised in this study were at odds when discussing this finding. While the majority showed understanding towards participants who perceive the political system as unfair due to weaknesses in the rule of law, corruption and the practice of law implementation, they rejected attitudes in support of the use of violence.

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46. IDM 2015 data showed that 26% of respondents agreed with this statement in the eight target areas which were investigated by the study "Religious radicalism and violent extremism in Albania" (IDM, 2015 p. 67).

> *The political system in Albania is equally unfair for everyone, regardless of religious background. But this has to change only through democratic means.*
>
> **Participant at FGD with 18–35 year-olds (26 June 2018)**

Some focus group participants raised concerns over whether respondents fully understood the meaning of political system, which, depending on their profile (e.g. level of education), may be confused, perhaps linked with political party—the least trusted institution in Albania for years. To better understand such attitudes the study explores the profile of respondents who tend to agree with the statement that The political system in Albania is unfair and has to be changed even with violence if needed. Analysis of the demography of survey respondents who affirm (3, agree; 4, strongly agree) the statement shows that respondents who do not practise religion tend to agree only slightly (3%) more than those who practise religious rituals, close to the national average (approximately 48% of both those who agree and those who strongly agree).

More significant percentage differences are observed among other demographic characteristics, such as age, gender, area of residence, and employment. There are more respondents who agree with the statement among 55–64 year-olds (55%) and 18–35 year-olds (48%), respondents from rural areas (53%) than among urban (43.8%) and male (50.9%) respondents, while only 44 percent of women agreed. More self-employed and unemployed respondents agreed (53%) than those with another employment status (42–48%). Lastly, more respondents who had completed high-school, lower school or who had no education at all agreed (on average by 8–10%) than those with a university or postgraduate degree.

More than 50 percent of respondents strongly agreed with the second statement in the following municipalities: Lezhe (86.1%), Maliq (65.2%), Kurbin (61.5%), and Elbasan (60.5%). High percentages were observed also in some other municipalities: Peqin (66.7%), Gramsh (53.3%), Bilisht (50%) and Prrenjas (50%), though the sample size for those municipalities was relatively small (10–20 respondents each).

Respondents in some other municipalities showed stronger support (agree and strongly agree combined) for this statement than the national average, including Belsh (72.7%), Kamza (64%), Kukes (67%), Tropoje (55%) and Pogradec (50%). However, there were only eleven respondents each from Belsh and Tropoje.

Overall, there are some grounds for concern over the potential for "Denial of political rights and civil liberties" as a driver towards VE. Although Albanians are, in general, very sceptical of judiciary institutions and look forward to the results of the vetting process with high hopes for the rule of law, it is still concerning that 27.9 percent of them strongly agreed that "The political system is unfair and has to change even with violence if needed". As the above analysis shows, there are no religious motivations behind these perceptions, but rather broad public distrust and disillusionment due to a long history of a culture of impunity, corruption and selective justice. This attitude is present more among people with lower education, males, and rural areas respondents, self-employed or unemployed, those who do not practise religion at all and those of 55–64 years or 18–35 years. Furthermore, a significant majority of respondents supported this statement in the municipalities of Lezhe, Maliq, Kurbin, Elbasan, Kamza, Kukes and Pogradec, but also in other municipalities such as Peqin, Gramsh, Bilisht, Prrenjas, Belsh and Tropoje, though the sample sizes were small.

V.2.2. 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 VE activities and the more support VE may garner from the local communities.*

Reinforcing protection of human rights is one of the key priorities for Albania's EU accession process. The EC Report 2018 finds that the legal and policy frameworks are broadly in line with European standards. However, the enforcement in practice of the legislation and European standards often raises issues of concern. The US State Department's Human Rights Report for Albania (2017) refers to cases of police abuse and violence in prison.[47] The National preventive mechanism has regularly monitored the performance of institutions through inspections of law enforcement agencies, especially the State Police. During 2017, a total of 29 complaints of violence in police facilities and penitentiary institutions were processed, while the Ombudsman launched criminal proceedings against one State Police officer on grounds of torture.

Intelligence and State Police have been particularly active in the fight against VE over the past few years. Five operations were carried out in 2017 with twelve persons arrested on charges of terrorism offences. In 2016, four citizens were arrested in a coordinated regional counter-terrorism operation, which disrupted a potential attack in Shkoder during the Albania–Israel football match. Some Muslim associations have expressed dismay at the targeting of Muslim believers by police, allegedly without strong evidence.[48]

The present study sought to assess the relevance of the driver 'Harsh government repression and gross violations of human rights' in the Albanian context through four statements that gather respondents' perceptions on possible abuses by law enforcement agencies on religious grounds, and their attitudes towards Sharia Law and responses to denial of human rights and liberties by state institutions. Specifically, the survey asked: To what extent do the following statements reflect your attitude?:

Statement 1.	Law enforcement institutions (police, prosecution, courts) are harsher with practising Muslims.
Statement 2.	Law enforcement institutions (police, prosecution, courts) are harsher with practising Christians.
Statement 3.	Sharia Law must be allowed for Muslim believers.
Statement 4.	People have the right to take the law into their own hands when their rights and freedoms are denied by state institutions.

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47. See Human Rights Report, Albania 2017. Source: https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/277377.pdf

48. See Statement of the Albanian Muslim Forum available at http://www.fmsh-al.org/al/arkivi/izrael.html

The public debate in 2016 commented broadly on the court case of nine alleged recruiters. The sentences given to a group of non-recognised imams who recruited Albanian foreign fighters is considered exceptionally harsh in the light of similar cases in neighbouring countries.[49] More recently, concerns over discrimination and Islamophobia have been debated despite the fact that such instances remain limited.[50] In this context, the first two statements above aim to map public perceptions over possible abusive behaviour by law enforcement agencies, specifically towards practising religious believers (Muslims and Christians).

As shown in Figure 33, the percentage of respondents who strongly agree with these statements is quite small, but with a clear difference between the first (towards Muslims) and second statement (towards Christians). Namely 6.4 percent of respondents strongly agreed that "Law enforcement institutions (police, prosecution, courts) are harsher with practising Muslims", double the proportion who strongly believe this for Christians (3.1%).

Figure 33. Views on law enforcement institutions' behaviour towards Muslims versus Christians (%; N = 1,582)
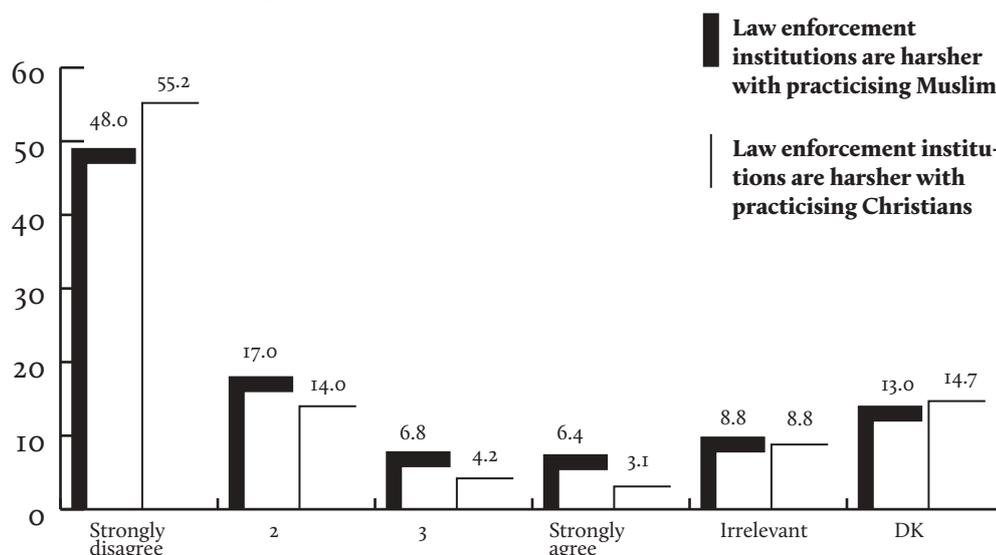
For both statements, analysis of the demography of the respondents shows that these views are present more commonly among believers who practise religion, respondents with a postgraduate degree, and those residing in urban areas. Such findings coincide to a certain extent with the demographics of respondents who tend to identify societal discrimination on religious grounds. Namely, Religious tolerance in Albania (IDM 2018) reports that nearly eleven percent of Albanians have witnessed at least once in their communities religious discrimination or exclusion of people due to their religious affiliation, with the majority women, living in urban areas and have completed undergraduate or postgraduate education.[51]

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49. See OraNews (May 2016) "The sentence of 'jihadists', Zhilla: The harshest in the region." Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L7iceHUCpyY

50. See Vurmo Gj. "WB Extremism Research Forum—Albania Report 2018." British Council, April 2018. Source: https://www.britishcouncil.al/sites/default/files/erf20albania20report202018.pdf p. 18.

51. See "Religious tolerance in Albania" (p. 7), IDM 2018. Source: http://www.al.undp.org/content/dam/albania/docs/religious%20tolerance%20albania.pdf

Perceptions that law enforcement agencies are harsher with practising Muslim believers are present in larger percentages (combining those who strongly agree and agree) than the national average in the municipalities of Kukes (37%), Vlore (31%), Kruje (28%), Durres (22%), Gjirokaster (19%), Kamez (20%) and Korce (19%).[52]

With regard to Statement 3—Sharia Law must be allowed for Muslim believers—the majority of respondents disagreed with it (30%, strongly disagree; 11.2%, disagree; combined, 41.2%), with only 15.7 percent strongly agreeing and 11.3 percent agreeing (combined total of 27%). Another 28.1 percent had no opinion and 3.7 percent consider the statement as irrelevant (a relatively large combined group of 31.8%). The Pew Research Center reported in 2013 that twelve percent of Muslim Albanians favour making Sharia the official law of the country. The difference could be explained by the fact that IDM study's statement asked (a national sample of) respondents to allow Sharia Law for a specific group, not suggesting the possibility of making Sharia the official law for the country.

Figure 34. Respondents' opinions on the view that Sharia Law should be allowed for Muslim believers (%; N = 1,582)
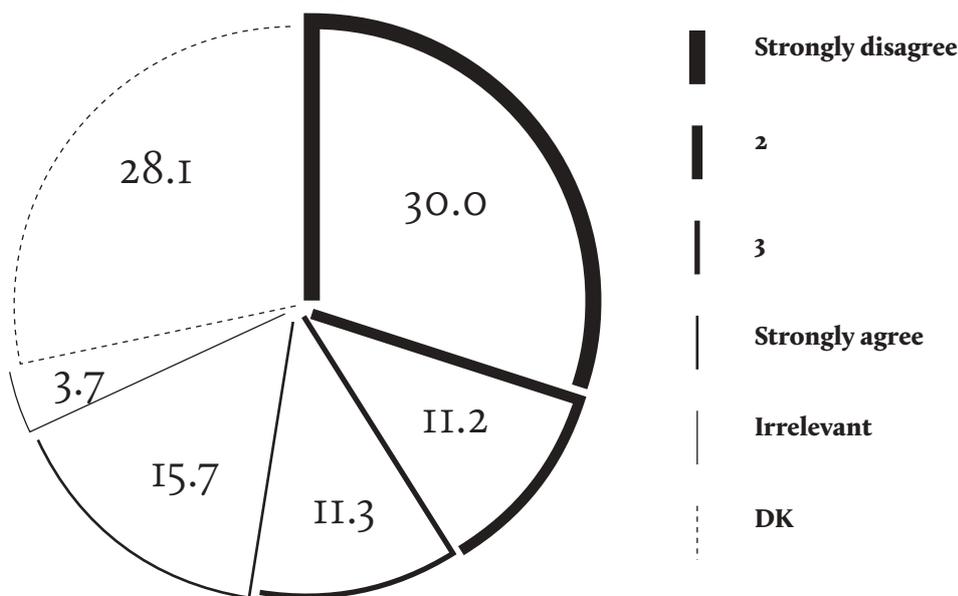
Not surprisingly, the vast majority of respondents who favoured the statement (strongly agree and agree) is composed of people who practise regularly religious rituals (45.7%), with lower proportions among those who practise less regularly (25.1%) or do not practise at all (20.5%). More than half of respondents above 65 years of age disagreed with the statement. This statement gained stronger support among respondents from rural areas while with increasing educational level the level of support steadily decreased, from 34 percent among respondents with fewer than eight or nine years or no education at all to nearly 21 percent among those with a postgraduate degree.

Combined support (4, strongly agree; 3, agree) for the use of Sharia Law for Muslim

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52. Relatively high percentages of perceptions confirming harsher treatment for practising Muslim believers are found also in some smaller municipalities (with a rather small sample in the survey) such as Tropoje, Tepelene, Mallakaster and Bilisht. Due to low percentages of respondents who perceive "harsher treatment for practising Christian believers" it is difficult to analyse trends within municipalities.

believers is higher in the municipalities of Kruje (50%), Fier (44%), Kurbin (40%), Lezhe (40%), Maliq (39%), Durres (37%), Vlore (36%), Elbasan (31%), Korce (29%), Pogradec (29%), Shijak (25%) and Berat (24%).[53]

Less than one fifth (18.9%) of the survey sample strongly agreed with Statement 4—People have the right to take the law into their own hands when their rights and freedoms are denied by state institutions.

Figure 35. Respondents' opinions on the view that people have the right to take law into their own hands when their rights and freedom are denied (%; N = 1,586)
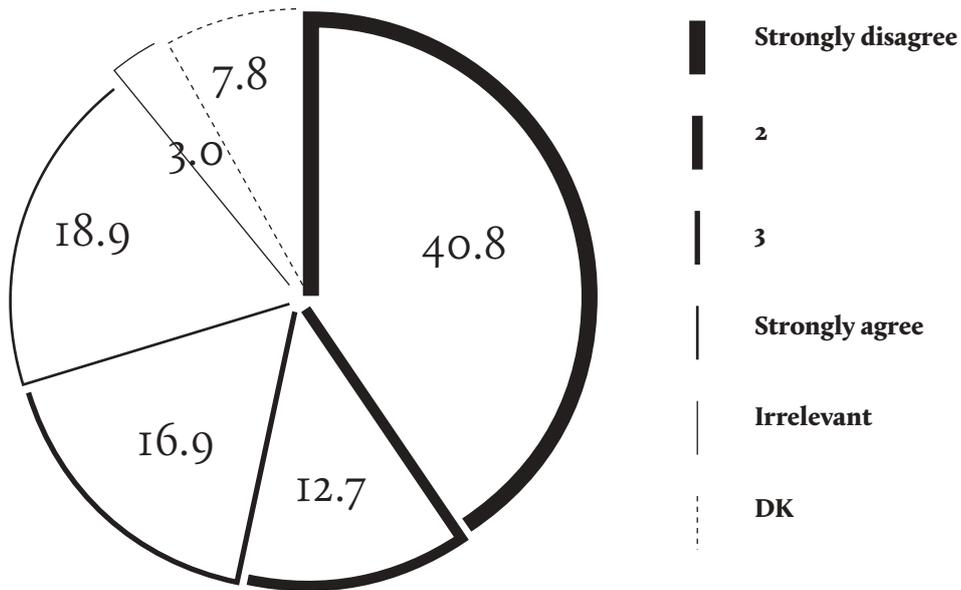
Although more than half of survey respondents (53.5%) do not see this as an option, nearly 36 percent did support such an approach in response to state institutions denying citizens their rights and liberties. Ironically, despite concerns over the consolidation of the rule of law and well-functioning of democratic institutions, public attitudes see taking the law into one's own hands as opposed to following democratic means as unjustifiable. Support for the statement needs to be carefully analysed from the perspective of the potential for the support of VE ideologies (religious and non-religious). For this reason, the present study looked at the profile of respondents who favoured such an approach and the areas where such attitudes are present at higher levels than elsewhere.

The profiles of respondents who support (3, agree and 4, strongly agree) Statement 4 are similar to those of respondents in favour of Statement 3 (on Sharia law). Namely, 46.1 percent of respondents who regularly practise religious rituals are in favour, with an identical percentage against; 40.7 percent of rural respondents are in favour, compared to 32.1 percent in urban areas; there is a higher level of support (46–47%) for the statement among respondents who have completed primary education (8 or 9 years) or less or no education than among those with a higher level of education (37%, high school diploma; 28%, university degree; 25%, postgraduate degree). Unemployed

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53. Between 30% and 50% of respondents in the municipalities of Roskovec, Bilisht, Mirdite, Tropoje and Skrapar also supported this statement. However, the survey sample covering these areas is less than 20 respondents per municipality.

respondents provide the highest level of support, with 45.5 percent agreeing or strongly agreeing, compared to 27 percent among employed respondents. Nearly 40 percent of respondents of age 25–34 years and 38 percent of those of age 55–64 years provided a higher level of support than did those among other age groups.

Geographically, there were high levels of support for Statement 4 in the municipalities of Lezhe (87%), Librazhd (71%), Kurbin (61.5%), Kamez (57%), Kavaje (57%), Elbasan (49%), Diber (44%), Maliq (43%), Berat (38%), Gjirokaster (38%) and Kruje (37.5%). Interestingly, all respondents in Cerrik and Prrenjas were in favour for this option, as were 90% of respondents in Mirdite, Belsh, Klos, Gramsh and Bulqize, though caution has to be exercised here because of the relatively small sample sizes (< 20).[54]

As a NATO member and EU candidate country hoping to start accession negotiations next year, Albania's efforts to consolidate the rule of law and democratic standards are closely monitored by various national and supranational stakeholders. Despite concerns in this area, government repression and gross violation of human rights are not observed in Albania. Nevertheless, Albanians maintain their eyes on standards in Western democracies. Almost three decades since the fall of the dictatorship, disillusionment and lack of trust in the functioning of the rule of law continues to drive Albanians to flee the country. Although abusive behaviour by law enforcement institutions on religious ground is not reported, perceptions of respondents practising religion, especially well-educated and urban respondents, do point to its existence, albeit at very low percentages. Almost one-third of respondents from the municipalities of Kukes, Vlore, and Kruje believe that law enforcement institutions are harsher with practising Muslims. Such perceptions should not be underestimated, despite the low percentages of respondents who strongly agree with the statement. Finally, much more room for concern is observed in relation to Statement 4— People have the right to take the law into their own hands when their rights and freedoms are denied by state institutions. Almost 19 percent of respondents strongly agreed with the statement, particularly those who regularly practise religious rituals, those in the age group 25–35 years, those from rural areas, the unemployed, and those with a low level or no education at all. More than half of respondents, in decreasing order of level of support, in Lezhe, Librazhd, Kurbin, Kamez and Kavaje agreed with the statement along with all those in Cerrik and Prrenjas.

V.2.3. Foreign occupation and Political/Military encroachment

Foreign occupation—*Countries subject to foreign military occupation are at risk of insurgency and rights abuses. Support for VE activities may derive from individuals seeking to redeem disgrace to their person and their community.*

Political/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.*

The drivers Foreign occupation and Political/ military encroachment do not describe the current reality of Albania. Religious radicalism and violent extremism in Albania (IDM 2015) investigated these drivers in eight target areas from the perspective of prevention of the phenomenon of foreign fighters. Following amendments made in 2014 to the Penal Code that criminalised acts of joining and recruiting for armed

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54. Other municipalities with small samples (10–20 respondents per municipality) but with high percentages of support include Mat (73%), Peqin (60%) and Rrogozhine (54%).

conflicts abroad and adoption of the National C/PVE Strategy and action plan (2015), Albanian state and non-state stakeholders engaged in more de-securitized actions to prevent VE and FFs' recruitment. C/PVE stakeholders have been particularly active to raise awareness and prevent VE. This has yielded positive results, as no Albanian citizen has been reported to join conflicts in Syria and Iraq since late 2015. However, sporadic cases of (unsuccessful) attempts by individuals have been observed in the past two years.[55] The process of disrupting factors that enable manipulation of religious believers through narratives on violence, and building resilient communities, continues.

To examines these drivers the present study's national survey asked respondents the following question: To what extent do you agree with the following statements:

Foreign occupation

Statement 1:   Inciting of or engagement in armed conflicts abroad must not be allowed.

Statement 2:   Albanian military missions in Afghanistan and Iraq are an insult to Muslims.

Political/Military encroachment

Statement 3:   It is the duty of every believer to protect the values and religious dignity at any price and by any means.

In 2015, IDM assessed the second and third statement in its study on religious radicalism and violent extremism in Albania (2015).[56] The present study adds a further statement (Statement 1) that allows assessment of the level of public support for the 2014 Penal Code amendments. As in the 2015 study, the last two statements aim to confront two interlinked arguments often used by extremists and recruiters who encourage Muslim believers to redeem the dignity of their religious community, while disseminating the narrative that Albania's military missions in Muslim countries are an insult to Islam.

V.2.3.a. Foreign occupation driver

Comparative analysis of the two control statements for the first driver (Foreign occupation) aim to identify discrepancies in public perceptions between citizens' support for official military missions Albania has contributed to in Muslim or Islamic countries and their level of disagreement with forbidding citizens to participate at their own will and through VE recruitment networks in armed conflicts abroad.

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55. Such cases were reported to the research team by stakeholders close to religious communities, including a case that was prevented through the mediation of IDM members in March 2018.

56. IDM 2015 study asked respondents whether or not they agree with the statement: "It is the duty of every believer to protect the values and religious dignity by any means within and outside the country's borders".

Figure 36. Respondents' opinions on Statement 1 (N =1,581) and Statement 2 (N =1,580) concerning views on the driver 'Foreign occupation' (%)
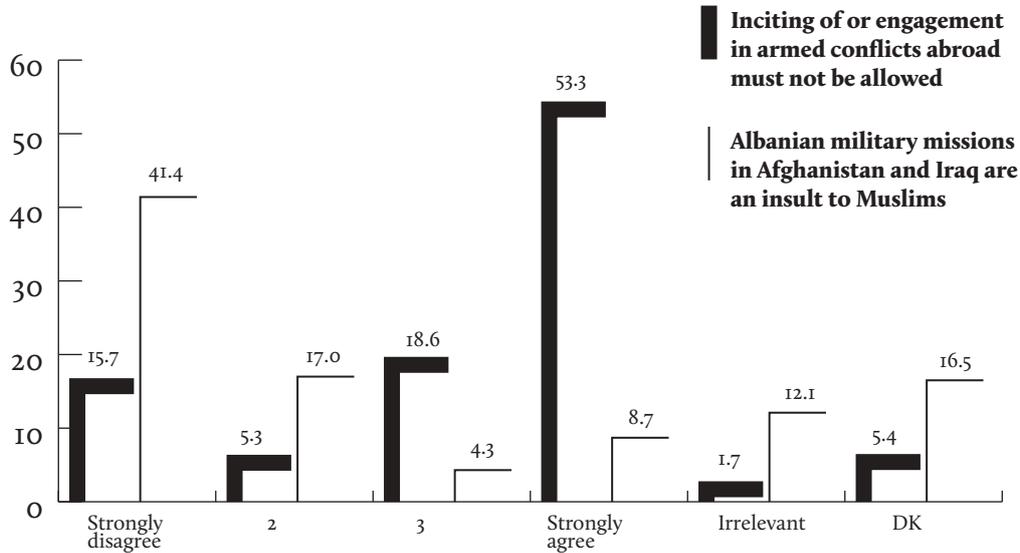
As shown in Figure 36, the majority of Albanians (71.9%) agree that Inciting of or engagement in armed conflicts abroad must not be allowed, with 15.7 percent of respondents strongly disagreeing with the statement. On the other hand, 58.4 percent of respondents do not see Albanian military missions in Afghanistan and Iraq as an insult to Muslims, as opposed to thirteen percent who do.

There are seven percent more Albanians who disagree with Statement 1 than agree with Statement 2. The FGDs offered various explanations for this difference, often bringing the example of the crisis and war in Kosovo in the 1990s and other conflicts aimed at advancing the situation for Albanians in the neighbouring countries (Macedonia, southern Serbia). In fact, the difference between the first and the second statement is that, unlike the first, the latter has a religious aspect, suggesting that practising religious believers would dominate a group that sees military missions as an insult (Statement 2) but not necessarily a group that opposes the ban to participate in armed conflicts abroad (Statement 1).

However, there is no evidence in the demographic analysis of respondents selection of the respective options to support such a claim. The majority of respondents who disagreed with the first statement and who agreed with the second one are respondents who practise regularly or are mainly practising religious rituals, while those who do not practise religion at all disagreed with Statement 1 and agreed with Statement 2 to a lesser degree. Of respondents who regularly practise religious rituals 31 percent disagreed with the first statement in contrast to only 19 percent of those who do not practise at all. No significant differences are observed within other demographic categories (age, gender, employment, etc.), with the exception of education, where 42 percent of respondents with less than eight or nine years, or no, education and 26 percent those who had completed eight or nine years of education disagreed. Among respondents who had completed high school 21 percent disagreed, and those with higher education had even lower percentages (17%, university; 12%, postgraduate).

Small differences are observed among respondents by their religious practice. Specifically, 16.8 percent of respondents who regularly practise religious rituals and 13.5 percent of those who mainly practise agreed that Albanian military missions in

Afghanistan and Iraq are an insult to Muslims. Of those who do not practise at all 11.4 percent have this opinion. No significant differences were observed among respondents according to other demographic categories (age, employment status, education, gender[57] and so on).

V.2.3.b. Political / Military encroachment driver

As explained at the beginning of this section, Political/Military encroachment does not describe the reality of Albania. However, IDM 2015 and the present study investigated public perceptions, especially those of religious believers, with the purpose of assessing whether and to what extent possible violent narratives can build support through a perceived need to redeem religious dignity.

As shown in Figure 37, 21.8 percent of respondents strongly agreed with the statement that It is the duty of every believer to protect the values and religious dignity at any price and by any means.[58]

Figure 37. Respondents' perceptions of a duty to protect religious values & dignity at any price and by any means (%; N = 1,584)
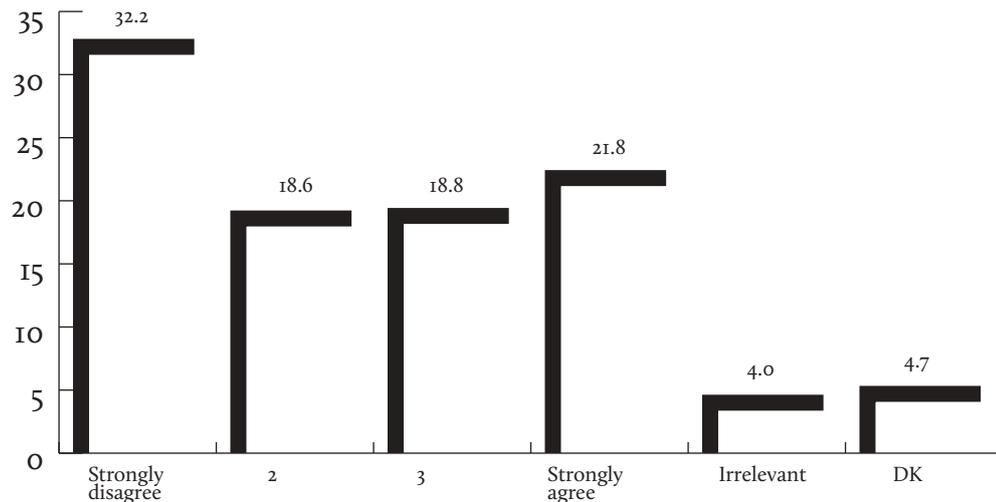
Almost half of all respondents who practise religion regularly (49%) or practise the main rituals (50%) endorsed the statement (strongly agree and agree) as opposed to 30 percent of non-practising respondents. Among respondents from rural areas 48 percent agreed, along with 51 percent of those who had completed eight- or nine-year education and 49 percent of those with less than eight or nine years, or no, education at all. Slightly more than half (52%) of unemployed respondents strongly agreed or agreed with Statement 3, while among other employment groups the level ranged from 32 percent to maximum a 42 percent. There were no significant differences in the level of support among different age groups and between the genders.

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57. While cumulative percentages on agree and disagree are quite similar between men and women, the latter have a slightly higher percentage (by nearly 5%) of don't know responses. This is observed also in other statements.

58. Although the statement does not specifically articulate 'violent means' the Albanian expression 'at any price and by any means' does not exclude that.

Although neither of the two drivers describes the Albanian reality, the above analysis reveals some grounds for concern with regard to a potential threat from violent narratives spreading disinformation and possibly inciting feelings of endangered religious dignity and values. Religious believers are obviously at higher risk given their attitude to disagree with the first statement—'Inciting of or engagement in armed conflicts abroad must not be allowed'—and tendency to endorse the remaining two—'Albanian military missions in Afghanistan and Iraq are an insult to Muslims', and 'It is the duty of every believer to protect the values and religious dignity at any price and by any means'. The last two statements are related closely to some of the cultural drivers, for which sentiments of religious believers are subtle and more receptive to certain narratives. The education background of respondents is another important factor that might indicate at-risk communities. Namely, respondents who have completed eight- or nine-year-education, or less, including no education at all, tend to support views that oppose the ban for inciting and participating in armed conflicts, that consider military missions as an insult to Muslims and that religious values and dignity must be protected at any price and by any mean. Respondents from rural areas and the unemployed also tend to agree, at higher levels, with the last statement.

V.2.4. 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 VE groups to establish themselves as a righteous alternative and to lash out at immoral governing elites.*

Endemic corruption and impunity for well-connected political and economic elites have been Albania's most important challenge over many years. The European Commission's Enlargement Strategy for the Western Balkans for the first time refers to 'clear elements of state capture' when defining challenges to the rule of law in countries in the region, including Albania:

> *Today, the countries show clear elements of state capture, including links with organised crime and corruption at all levels of government and administration, as well as a strong entanglement of public and private interests. All this feeds a sentiment of impunity and inequality.*

> **European Commission, February 2018**[59]

The fight against corruption has been one of Albania's worst performing characteristics in the past ten years according to FH's Nations in Transit report.[60] Meanwhile, the country's score worsened in 2017 according to Transparency International's Corruption

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59. "A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans." European Commission COM(2018) 65 final, p. 3. Source: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/communication-credible-enlargement-perspective-western-balkans_en.pdf

60. See Nations in Transit 2018, Albania. Source: https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/NiT2018_Albania_0.pdf

Perception Index, from 39 in 2016 to 38 in 2017.[61] The EC country report for Albania (2018) notes that 'corruption remains prevalent in many areas and continues to be a serious problem'.[62] The fight against corruption and impunity remains a key priority and condition for Albania's EU accession negotiations. The European Council's conclusions (June 2018) state that 'Albania needs to intensify its efforts in all these areas and ensure that further tangible results are achieved also in the fight against corruption at a high level, as well as in dismantling organised criminal networks'.[63] Conditional upon progress in the judicial reform and fight against corruption the country may launch accession negotiations with the EU by the end of 2019.

Given such a background, the reality of disengagement and political apathy in Albania over many years is unsurprising. The ongoing judicial reform and the first recent results in removing judges and prosecutors who are corrupt and linked with criminal networks represent the only hope for Albanians to restore their trust in institutions and the rule of law.[64] Such hope, as much as the level of disillusionment so far, are broadly shared by Albanians regardless of their social, economic or other status. IDM (2015) notes that 'Given the strong secular tradition of the country, public perceptions on governance or corruption do not necessarily link with religious values.' In fact, a recent study on religious tolerance in Albania (2018) shows that for nearly 70 percent of citizens leading a moral life is more important than what kind of religion one belongs too: 'Surprisingly, this finding applies to practitioners as well; the majority of religious believers who declared that they pray regularly or at religious festivities also believed that morality existed outside of religion'.[65] The present study poses two statements for the driver Endemic corruption and impunity for well-connected elites, as follows:

Statement 1:	Countries with strong religious faith have less corrupt governments.
Statement 2:	Albania would have more justice if more people would join my religion.

The perceptions of respondents on the two statements are shown in Figure 38, which indicates that justice rather than less corruption is perceived as more strongly linked with religion. However, respondents appear similarly divided among 'Yes', 'No', 'Irrelevant' and 'Don't know' in the two cases. A significant percentage of respondents considered each statement irrelevant (Statement 1, 18%; Statement 2, 22.5%) while 15 percent (on corruption) and eleven percent (justice) did not express an opinion, between them representing an average of nearly one-third of Albanians.

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61. See Corruption Perception Index 2017, Transparency International. Source: https://www.transparency.org/news/feature/corruption_perceptions_index_2017#table

62. See EC's "Albania 2018 Report" p. 6. Source: https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/20180417-albania-report.pdf

63. See Council of the EU, Conclusions on Enlargement and the SAP (Albania). Source: http://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/35863/st10555-en18.pdf

64. Balkan Insight, 25 July 2018 "Vetting Process Leaves Albanian Courts Unable to Work". Source: http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/vetting-process-leaves-albanian-courts-unable-to-work-07-18-2018

65. See Vurmo Gj. et al "Religious Tolerance in Albania" (IDM 2018). p. 63. Source: http://www.al.undp.org/content/albania/en/home/library/poverty/religious-tolerance-in-albania.html

Figure 38. Respondents' opinions on Statement 1 (N =1,570) and Statement 2 (N =1,579) concerning views on the driver 'Endemic corruption and impunity for well-connected elites' (%)

Countries with strong religious faith have less corrupt governments

Albania would have more justice if more people would join my religion
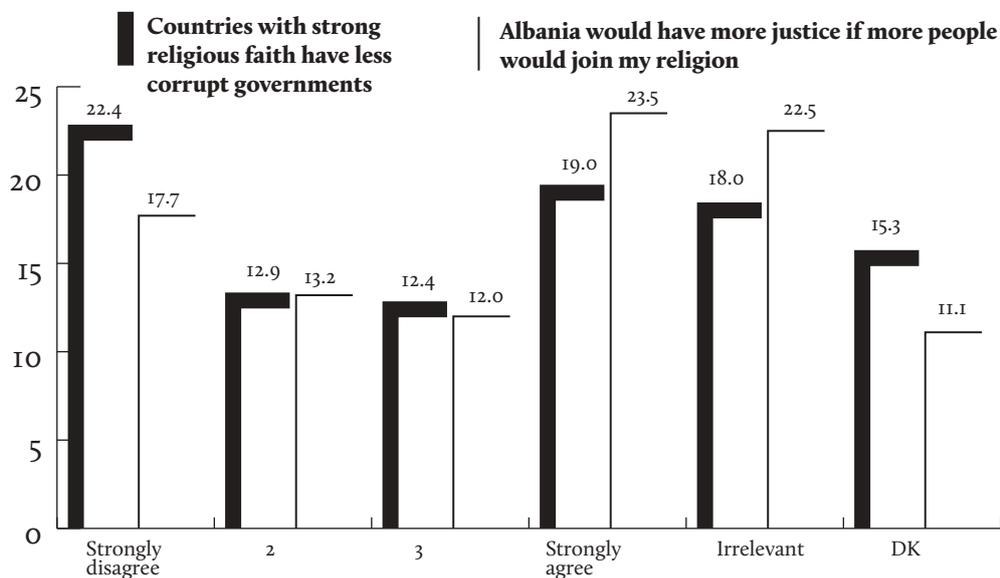
The majority of respondents (23.5%) believe that Albania would have more justice if more people would join my religion. On the other hand, a majority of respondents (22.4%) strongly disagreed with the first statement. Although the differences are quite small, in general there are more Albanians who endorse the second statement (35.5%) than the first one (31.4%).

Predictably, the more religious the respondent, the higher the level of support for both statements, with 54.5 percent of respondents who practise regularly religious rituals agreeing with the first statement and 65.5 percent strongly agreeing or agreeing with the second statement. The level of agreement falls to around one-fifth among respondents who do not practise at all religious rituals. Women and respondents from urban areas also show higher levels of agreement with both statements compared to men and rural respondents. However, the percentage of women who agree with the first statement is lower than the percentage who disagree. The same pattern is observed among urban respondents for the first statement too. Respondents who had completed eight- or nine-year education seem to believe more in a link between religiosity and lack of corruption in society (Statement 1), but also in a link between religiosity and justice in Albania (Statement 2). It is interesting to note for the first statement that the lower the level of education of the respondents the higher the percentage of 'Don't know' answers. However, such a pattern is not present for Statement 2.

Lastly, respondents of age 35–44 years have the highest percentage of strongly agree and agree with the statement Countries with strong religious faith have less corrupt governments. The same age group (35–44 years), as well as respondents of 55–64 years, also had a higher level of agreement with Statement 2.

Albania's performance in the fight against corruption and impunity for political, economic and other well-connected elites is considered the Achilles' heel for the rule of law in the country, and particularly for the citizens' trust in the governance system, state institutions and political engagement. As the background analysis for this driver elaborates, the performance indicators in this context have traditionally been the worst over the past nearly three decades, despite improvements over the years. Although the survey data

*analysis understandably shows greater sensitivities among religious believers when it comes to religiosity and the odds for less corruption governance and more justice in Albania, more than half of Albanians either do not trust or consider irrelevant such a paradigm. Corrupt elites and impunity are a long debated dimension of Albania's democracy. The public distrust, civic disengagement, political apathy and disillusionment is broadly shared among Albanians regardless of their religious background or religiosity level, and the root causes and factors, as well as the solution to these challenges, go well beyond religion.
In fact, Albania's religious institutions are the most trusted domestic institutions in the country—76 percent of Albanians trust them, and consider the courts and political parties as the most corrupt institutions.[66] Accordingly, it is highly unlikely that religious extremist ideologies would succeed in expanding their support base and establish themselves as a righteous alternative against immoral governing elites. In fact, greater levels of risk stem from populist and extremist political ideologies rather than from religious VE narratives.*

V.2.5. Poorly governed or ungoverned areas

> *These areas are isolated, low population density regions that constitute safe havens where VE organisations can establish themselves with little hindrance, and even garner support from communities ignored by the government. It should be understood that VE groups might gravitate toward 'states of limited strength'—as opposed to failed or even failing states—where they can have the infrastructure necessary to develop their network and carry out operations.*

Data on foreign fighters from Albania and the disrupted network of the nine recruiters sentenced by the Court of Serious Crimes in 2016 support the rationale of this driver, but only to a certain extent. While many of the foreign fighters and the convicted recruiters originate from more distant areas (rural areas of Librazhd, Pogradec, Diber, etc.) they were residing and operating also in the outskirts of main urban centres such as the capital Tirane.

Another issue that was particularly present in poorly governed and remote areas in Albania was that of widespread planting of cannabis. Over the past three years, major police operations against well-organised criminal networks in the country, often in cooperation with law enforcement agencies in EU countries, have been carried out. Given the high pressure coming from the EU and other western partners to fight organised crime, improving public services seems to have become overshadowed. While isolated areas that are poorly governed or ungoverned are not an issue in Albania, the present study tries to examine the relevance and extent of the dominance of the 'state as a law enforcement authority' versus the 'state as a service provider' in the Albanians' perceptions. The purpose of this choice is to examine the risks from possible VE narratives but also the room for VE 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.

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66. See Trust in Governance 2017, (IDM March 2018) p. 5. Source: http://idmalbania.org/findings-opinion-poll-trust-governance-2017-presented-tirana/

Accordingly, the survey asked respondents to what extent they agreed with the following statements:

> Statement 1: Religious activities should not be monitored by the state.
>
> Statement 2: In the area where I live the 'state as a law enforcement authority' is present more than the 'state as a provider of public services for citizens'.
>
> Statement 3: State presence as law enforcement authority and as provider of public services is less in rural areas (villages) than in cities and towns.

Respondents are at odds with the first statement. Slightly more respondents strongly disagreed (28%) than strongly agreed that the state should not monitor religious activities (27%), and slightly more agreed or strongly agreed (45%) than disagreed or strongly disagreed (43%). Around nine percent of respondents did not have an opinion on the statement and another three percent thought it irrelevant. More respondents who practise religion, 18–35 years old and respondents over 65 years, living in urban areas and the unemployed agreed with the statement than did other groups.

Figure 39. Respondents' opinions on whether religious activities should not be monitored by the state (%; N = 1,576)
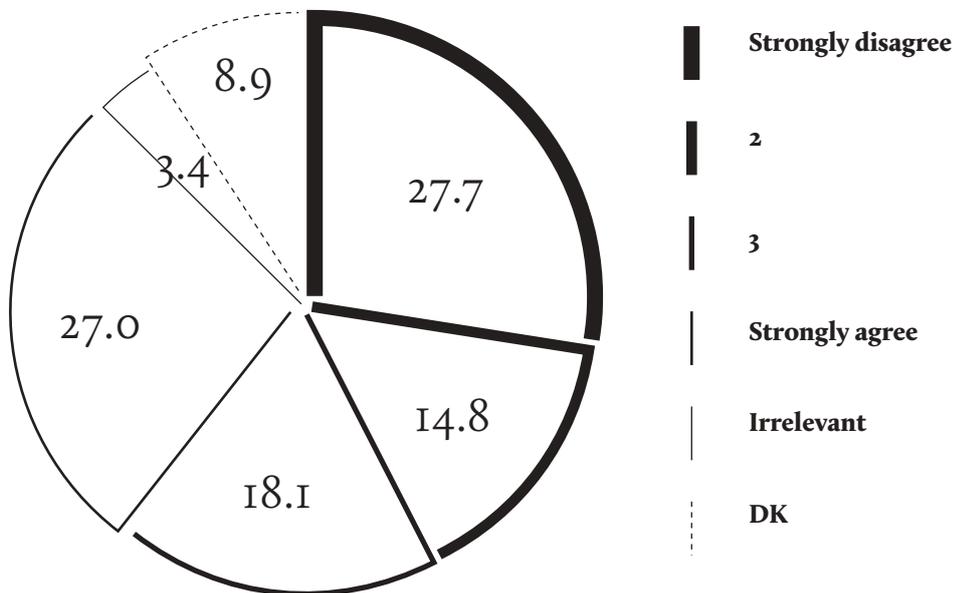
Although the survey did not provide conclusive answers, the focus groups did provide a better insight into the monitoring of religious activities in Albania. Focus group participants were generally in favour of closer monitoring of religious activities in the country, though they were at odds as to who should be tasked with this duty. Defining religious activities was another topic that sparked debate among focus group participants. Many raised concerns over training, summer camps, cultural and other recreational activities organised by religious organisations[67] targeting youngsters

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67. Focus group participants often referred to Jehovah Witnesses in addition to other religious charities,
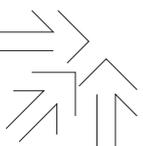
starting from a very young age (13–14 years old) and that they serve as an entry point to religion.[68] On the other hand, a religious community official claimed that: "While official religious authorities take full responsibility for their own activities, we don't have all the information about activities organised by religious charities and other organisations." The general understanding among FG participants was that the monitoring of activities of religious charities and organisations should be carried out primarily through the registered religious authorities as they have more solid capacities at their disposal than state authorities to monitor the quality of religious activities. On the other hand, some participants at the FGD with religious believers raised concerns over the monitoring by security institutions and police.

The presence of the state as a law enforcement authority overshadowing its function as a provider of public services was confirmed by a large majority (nearly 70%) of respondents.[69] No significant differences among different groups in the level of agreement with the statement were observed with the exception of the unemployed and respondents from rural areas among whom there was a higher percentage of support than among other sub-categories.

Figure 40. Respondents' opinions on the presence of the state as a 'law enforcement authority' rather than 'as a provider of public services' (%; N = 1,581)
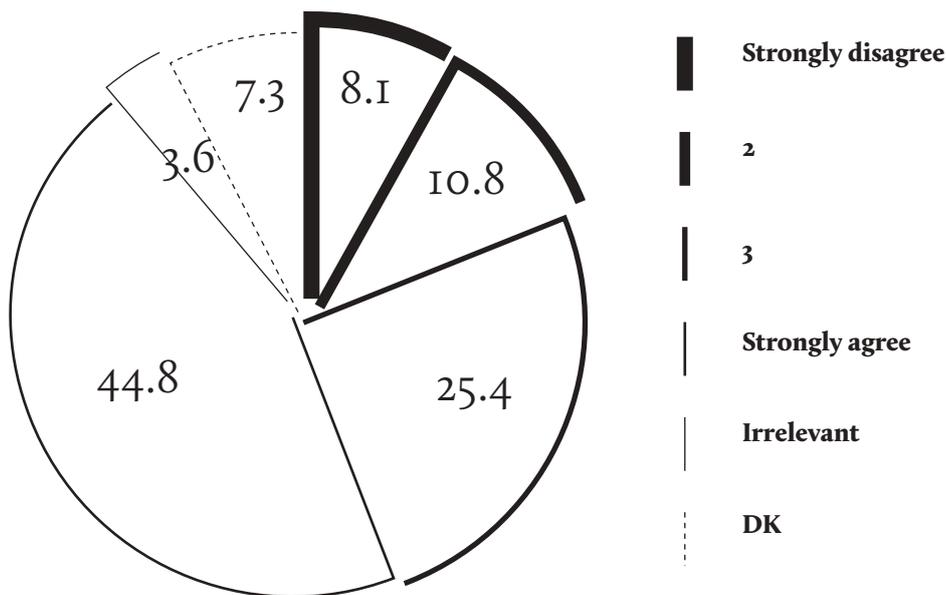
An even higher percentage of respondents observed the state as much less present in rural areas than in cities and towns (Statement 3).


Christian or Muslim.

68. This information was confirmed by participants at two FGDs: with religious practitioners (2 July 2018) and young participants (26 June 2018).

69. Such a perception is present in the vast majority of small to medium size municipalities while larger local government units are below the national average.

Figure 41. Respondents' opinions on the presence of the state in rural areas compared with towns and cities (%; N = 1,579)
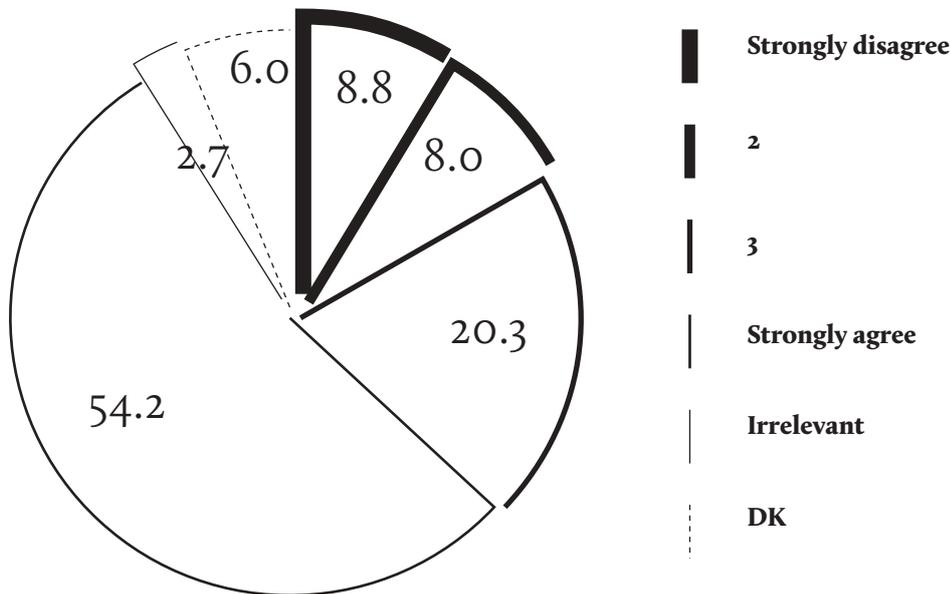
As with the case for Statement 2, the respondents showing a higher level of agreement were those from rural areas and the unemployed while differences across the other demographic categories (gender, religious practice, age, education, etc.) were insignificant.

The salience of the driver 'Poorly governed or ungoverned areas' with regard to religious extremism and VE is blurred. One the hand it is true that suspicious religious charities and organisations have used in the past the lack of public services in remote areas to target youngsters and citizens facing socio-economic challenges. Respondents in the present study drew attention to the need for monitoring religious activities involving youngsters, especially when organised by charities outside the authority of official religious communities. While Albania has in recent years taken steps to improve public services, it is important to underline that quality, rather than mere existence, of public services is becoming increasingly important. Quality education for youngsters is an issue of greater concern in rural areas and certainly for citizens facing economic challenges, which all together sharpen existing inequalities and create conditions to inherit them through the younger generations (from families with low income, rural areas, etc.). State institutions, mostly in the security sector, monitor religious activities, especially those of the Islamic community and organisations. Focus group religious believers themselves welcome monitoring that would improve the quality of services, performance and religious information provided by relevant bodies. Against such a need, surveillance and monitoring by security institutions with no efforts by other (non-security) state players to respond to religious believers' concerns would only sharpen perceptions of discrimination. This explains to a certain extent the resistance of the survey's respondents who practise religion to agree with state monitoring of religious activities.
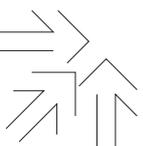
V.2.6. Intimidation or coercion by VE groups

Where governments cannot provide security and protection for its citizens, VE groups use intimidation and coercion to force support for their movement.

The driver of intimidation or coercion by VE groups does not describe the Albanian reality. The experience of the last few years of recruitment of foreign fighters in the country shows that the process has been secretive but, nonetheless, not coercive. However, it is not open intimidation but rather hidden forms of coercion or even peer pressure that might cause one to adhere to, or tolerate, radical or VE ideologies in the context of closed or isolated communities. Additionally, Denoeux and Carter (2009) suggest, "A degree of pressure can go hand in hand with the delivery of certain services, the provision of economic spoils or employment opportunities, and/or the ability to secure a measure of legitimacy by identifying oneself with popular causes."[70] As elaborated for the categories of socio-economic drivers (unmet social and economic needs), approximately 15 percent of survey respondents strongly agreed that in their communities there are religious groups that offer economic benefits and privileges for their members who practise religion.

To assess this driver in the Albanian context, the present survey sought to gather the first-hand experience of respondents in order to establish whether they have observed: (1) religious extremists in their community, and (2) pressure on religious believers to join VE causes. Finally, the survey examines whether and to what extent a 'culture of silence' prevails among religious believers.

Accordingly, the survey asked respondents to what extent they agree with the following statements:

Statement 1:	There are individuals supporting VE on religious grounds in the area where I live.
Statement 2:	In the area where I live there are radical believers who pressurise religious believers to join extremist causes.
Statement 3:	A true believer should not denounce members of their own community who hold religious extremist views.

More than half of respondents strongly disagreed with the above statements, while 7–8 percent strongly agreed (Figure 42).

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70. Guilain Denoeux and Lynn Carter "Development Assistance and Counter-Extremism: A Guide to Programming." (October 2009), p. 28.

Figure 42. Percentage of strong agreement and strong disagreement among respondents on statements 1–3 of the driver of intimidation or coercion by VE groups
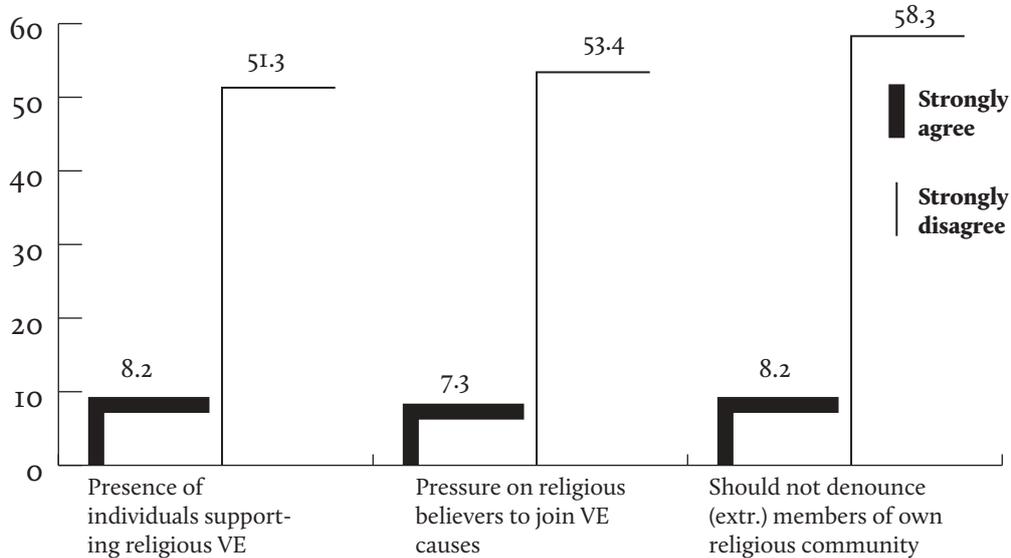
Nearly 65 percent of respondents would not confirm the presence of individuals supporting religious VE in their communities, while 14.2 percent agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, while another nearly 19 percent did not have an opinion on this (Figure 43).

Figure 43. Respondents' opinions on the presence of individuals who support religious VE in their community (%; N = 1,580)
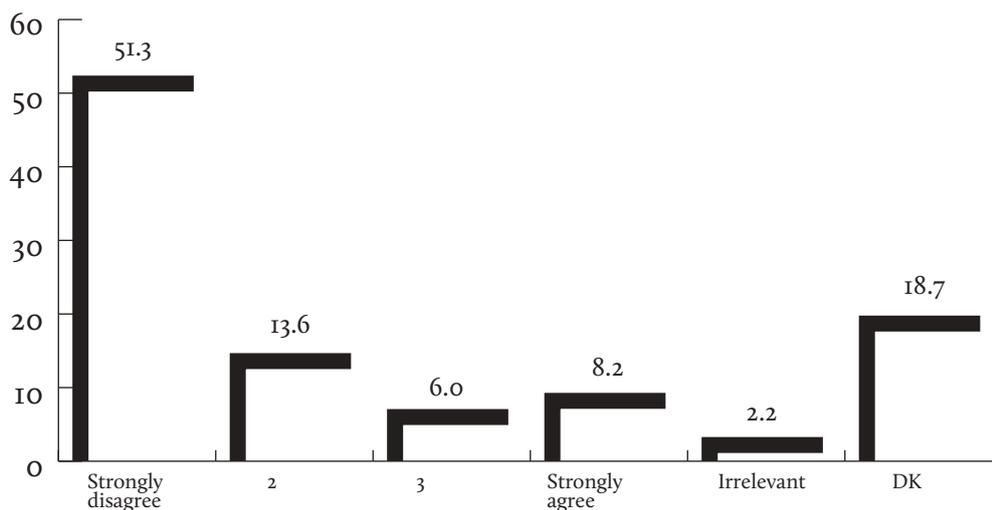
Regardless of whether and to what extent respondents practise religious rituals, they still report the not inconsiderable presence (14%) of individuals who support religious VE in their community in identical proportions, indicating some level of awareness among Albanians. However, the more respondents practise religion the more they strongly disagree or disagree with the statement. No significant differences in the percentage of strongly disagree or agree responses were found among the different age groups. However, the level of strongly disagree or disagree increased with increasing

age of respondents (from 59% for 18–24 year-olds, to 77% for those older than 65 years). More respondents from rural areas, men, those with eight or nine years of education or less and unemployed respondents disagreed with the statement than did others.

The presence of more such individuals (agree and strongly agree) was reported by respondents in the municipalities of Elbasan (38%), Shijak (35%), Kamez (34%), Vlore (31%), Kavaje (22%), Pogradec (22%), Durres (19%) and Tirane (16%).[71]

Without any prejudice to the presence or not of individuals who support VE on religious grounds, fewer respondents (11.5%) thought that radical believers exert pressure on their peers to join extremist causes.

Figure 44. Respondents' opinions on the presence of pressure on religious believers to join extremist causes (%; N = 1,580)
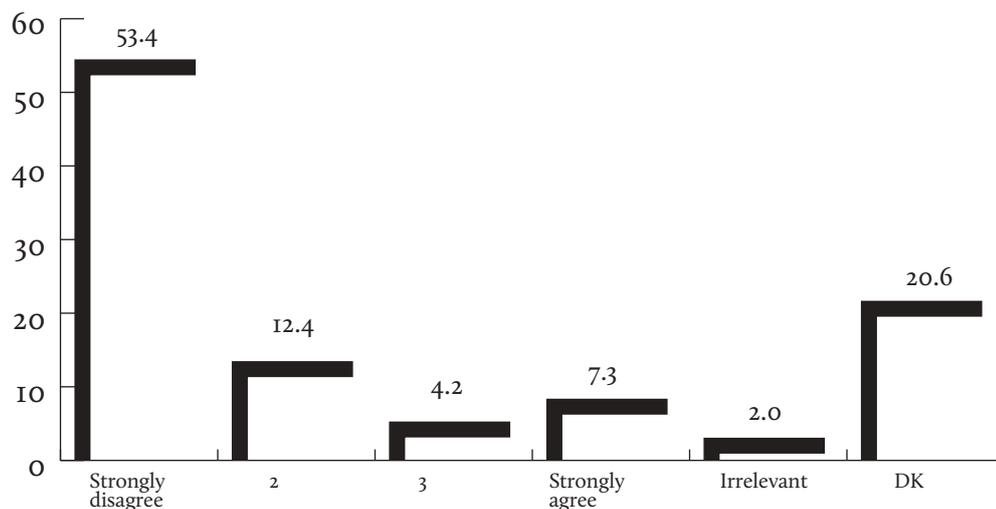
Respondents from rural areas, men, those with eight or nine years of education or less, practising religion, and unemployed respondents tended to disagree more with the statement than did others.

More respondents confirmed (agreed or strongly agreed) such pressure on religious believers in the municipalities of Shijak (40%), Vore (36%), Elbasan (36%), Vlore (34%), Kruje (29%), Durres (24%), Kavaje (22%), Kamez (16%) and Tirane (12%).

Lastly, more than 70 percent of respondents did not agree with Statement 3 as opposed to nearly thirteen percent who agreed that, as a true believer, one should not denounce members holding extremist views in their own religious community. Interestingly, the percentage of 'don't know' answers was only ten percent compared with nearly 20 percent for the first two statements.

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71. High presence is confirmed also in other municipalities with a sample of fewer than 20 respondents per municipality, such as Klos (50%), Selenice (33%) or Vore (36%).

Figure 45. Respondents' opinions on the readiness of true believers to denounce members with religious extremist views (%; N = 1,582)
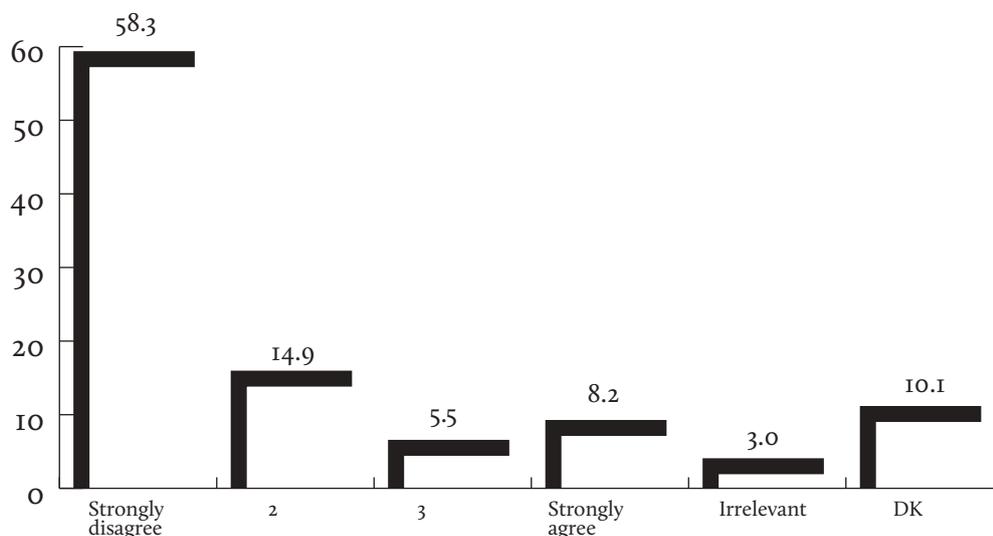
There was a higher percentage of strongly agree and agree answers from respondents who practise regularly religious rituals, those of age 35–44 years, with a postgraduate degree, self-employed or unemployed. These groups appear to think that members of their own religious community should not be denounced when they hold religious extremist views. For other demographic categories (gender, residence) the differences are insignificant.

Analysis of the 'societal discrimination' driver (socio-economic driver V.1.3) found that nearly 30 percent of Albanians tend to consider a beard (for men) and headscarf/burqa (for women) as a sign of extremism. Such a finding would cast serious doubts over the relevance of the percentage of Albanians who confirm the presence of religious extremists (Statement 1) and pressure on religious believers (Statement 2). However, the demography of respondents confirming this presence differs from that of respondents who state that a beard or headscarf indicates religious extremism. The presence of religious extremists (Statement 1) is confirmed equally by respondents who practise religion or do not practise at all, while pressure on religious believers (Statement 2) is confirmed mostly by respondents who do not know or do not embrace religious practice.

Analysis of possible 'Intimidation or coercion by VE groups' as a driver raises serious issues with regard to the presence of extremist individuals and attempts to pressure religious believers as witnessed by respondents who are aware of and apply regularly religious practice. The presence of both drivers (individuals and pressure) is at a higher level than the national average in the municipalities of Shijak, Vore, Elbasan, Vlore, Kruje, Durres, Kavaje, Kamez and Tirane. However, it is important to note that, with the exception of Elbasan and Tirane, the other municipalities have not been targeted through PVE actions in a structured way either by state or civil society initiatives in the past three years. Addressing such concerns over the presence of extremist individuals and pressure on religious believers will not be easy and should not be carried out without a leading role of official religious authorities. This is due to the fact that the majority of those who believe that extremist members of religious communities should not be denounced are religious believers regularly practising religious rituals. Official religious authorities are not only a reliable entry point to reach out to these religious believers, but also most capable to counter the influence and pressure through religious argument.

V.2.7. Perception that the international system is unfair and hostile to Muslim societies

Populations may accept VE propaganda that the global political and economic system discriminates against the Muslim world, which can mesh with personal or communal feelings of discrimination.

Over the past two years, Albania's judicial reform, pushed strongly by the EU and the USA, has been constantly attacked by well-connected political, economic and media elites who feel threatened by it. Nevertheless, Albanians' positive attitude towards 'internationals' remains broadly unaffected. Albania is one of the most pro-American countries in the world,[72] and Albanians consider the EU, along with UN and NATO to be the most trusted supranational institution.[73] In fact, Albanians' trust and approval rating of these institutions stands far higher than their trust in any national institution.

Religious tolerance in Albania is considered by more than 90 percent of its citizens as a core societal value deeply rooted in the country's tradition and civic values.[74] 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, possible religious extremist narratives portraying the international system and the West as an enemy of the Muslim world may be a powerful pull factor. 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.

> The survey asked respondents to what extent they agree with the following statements:
>
> Statement 1: Global political and economic structures (e.g. UN, IMF) are an invention of the West to rule Muslim countries.
>
> Statement 2: Countries with a Christian majority population in the Balkans have had more support from the West precisely because of their religious affiliation.
>
> Statement 3: The EU has been unfair to countries in the Balkans with a considerable Muslim population (Albania), (BiH), (Kosovo), (Macedonia).
>
> Statement 4: USA has been unfair to countries in the Balkans with a considerable Muslim population (Albania, BiH, Kosovo, Macedonia)

While Albanians tend to disagree with 'global conspiracy ideas', they seem less sceptical about local ones.

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72. According to a 2018 Gallup International poll, the US garnered majority approval in just three countries or areas in Europe in 2017: Kosovo, which leads the region and the world in approval of US leadership; Albania, which ranks second worldwide; and Poland. See Balkan Insight "Kosovo Leads World in Cheering for Trump, Poll Shows." 18 January 2018. Source: http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/kosovo-shows-highest-support-for-us-leadership-in-europe-poll-01-18-2018

73. See "Trust in Governance 2017." IDM March 2018, p. 5. Source: http://idmalbania.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/IDM-OpinionPoll-2017-EN-web.pdf

74. See Vurmo Gj. at al. "Religious tolerance in Albania" (2018). Source: http://www.al.undp.org/content/albania/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/2018/04/25/undp-albania-study-on-religious-tolerance-reveals-that-religious-tolerance-is-broadly-valued-and-supported-by-albanian-citizens.html

Figure 46. Percentage of strong agreement and strong disagreement among respondents on Statement 1 and Statement 2 of the driver "Perception that the international system is unfair and hostile to Muslim societies"
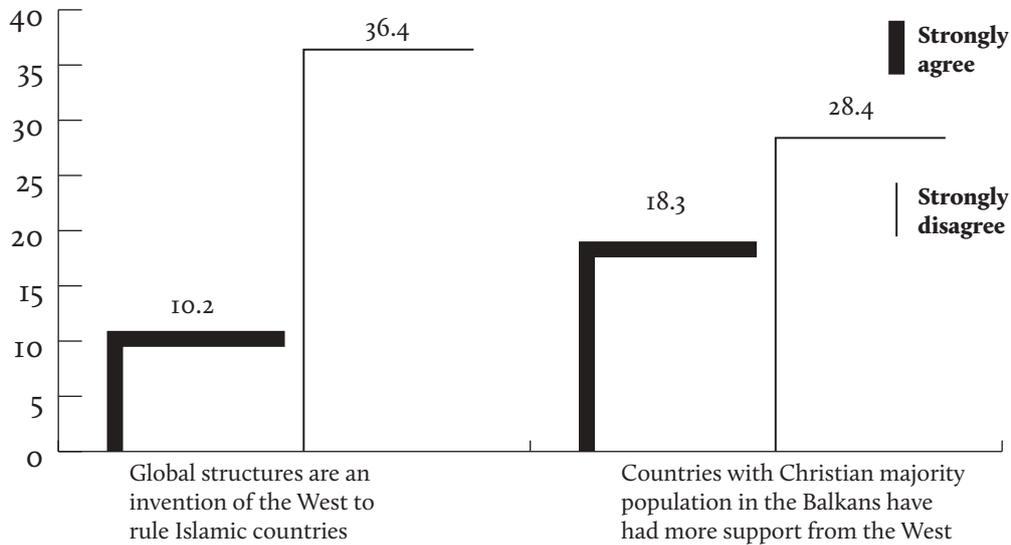
Only one in ten respondents strongly agrees that global structures are an invention of the West to rule Muslim countries. This figure is almost double that of the percentage supposing preferential treatment by the West of Balkan countries with a Christian majority.

As shown in Figure 47, more than half of Albanians tend to strongly disagree or disagree with the first statement while nearly one-third do not have an opinion or consider the statement irrelevant.

Figure 47. Percentage of respondents' opinions on global structures being an invention of the West to dominate Muslim countries (%; N = 1,579)
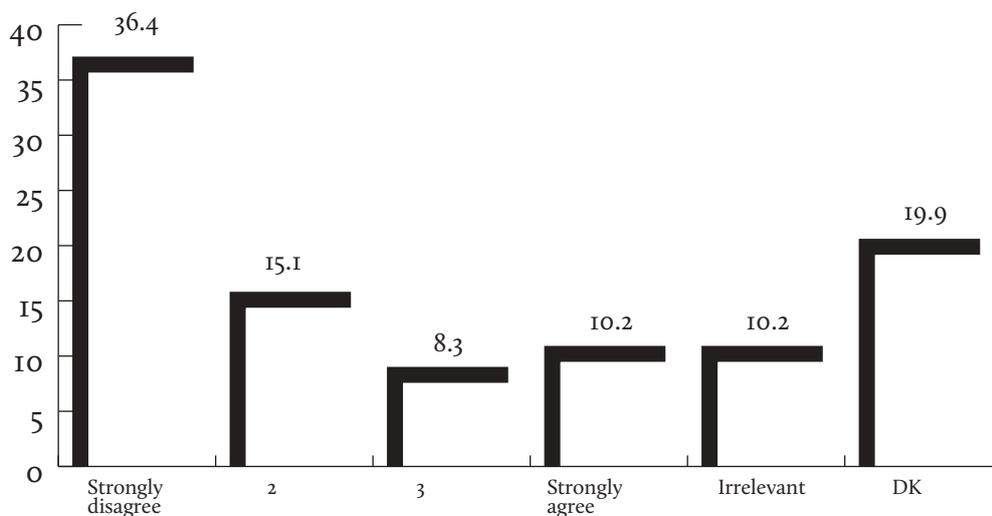
Further analysis reveals that, in general, the main differences among the demographics of the different sub-categories of respondents are in the 'don't know' responses. The only significant difference is between respondents who practise religious rituals and

those who do not. Although the two groups disagreed at a similar level (51–52%), those who practise religion agreed more (21–24%) than those who do not practise at all (15%). Those of age 18–24 years, or from rural areas, women, unemployed, who had completed eight- or nine-year level education or less, or had no education at all, had higher percentages of 'don't know' responses. Differences among the sub-categories who agreed with this statement are less than five percent.

On the other hand, more than one-third of respondents (34.5%) agreed with Statement 2: Countries with Christian majority population in the Balkans have had more support from the West precisely due to their religious affiliation. The percentage of respondents who disagreed with this statement was 41.7 percent, less than the 51.5 percent for the first statement, concerning the West and global structures.

Figure 48. Percentage of respondents' opinions on Christian majority Balkan countries receiving more support from the West because their religious affiliation (%; N = 1,584)
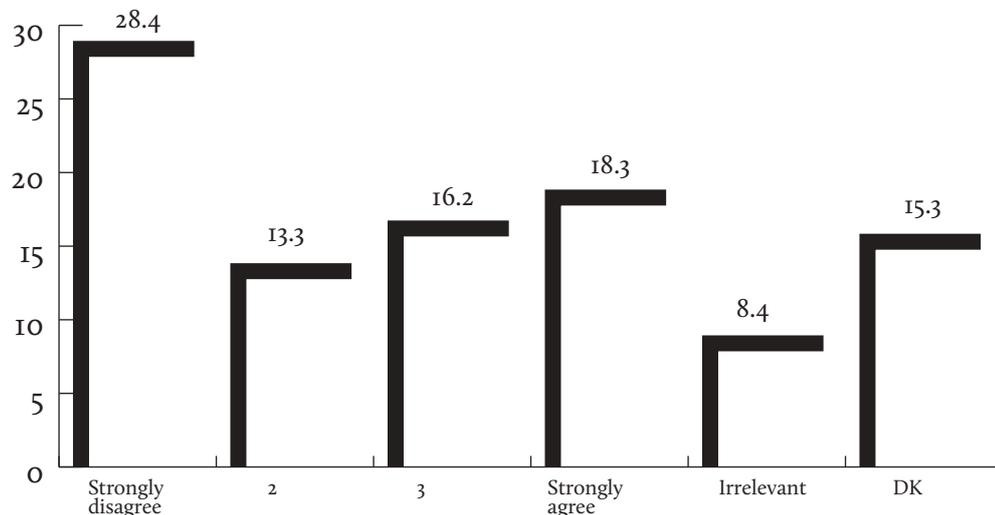
Of those who practise their religion's main rituals 40 percent agreed with the statement, five percent more than those who practise regularly and nine percent more than those who do not practise at all. Other categories with a high level of endorsement for this statement include those older than 65 years, men, self-employed and respondents with less than eight or nine years, or no, education at all. While men and women disagree at similar percentages, women respondents show lower percentage of agree (30%) with this statement than men (39%). This is owed to the fact that there are more women respondents who answer "don't know" than male respondents.

Public perception in Albania identifies the West with the EU, its member states and the USA. Traditionally, the Albanians have idealised the democracies of the US and EU countries and their support for both the EU and the US remains quite high. Although the EU and its main member states have played quite an active role in the region over the past decade, particularly in motivating countries to overcome bilateral disputes and develop friendly relations, the Albanians still seem more supportive of the US, not least due to its role during the bloody 1990s.

Figure 49 is illustrative in this context. There are more Albanians who strongly disagree with Statement 4—that the USA has been unfair with countries in the Balkans with

considerable Muslim population (Albania, Kosovo, BiH, Macedonia)—than strongly disagree with the statement that the EU has been unfair.

Figure 49. Percentage of respondents who strongly agree and strongly disagree about unfairness in the Balkans from the EU and the USA (%)
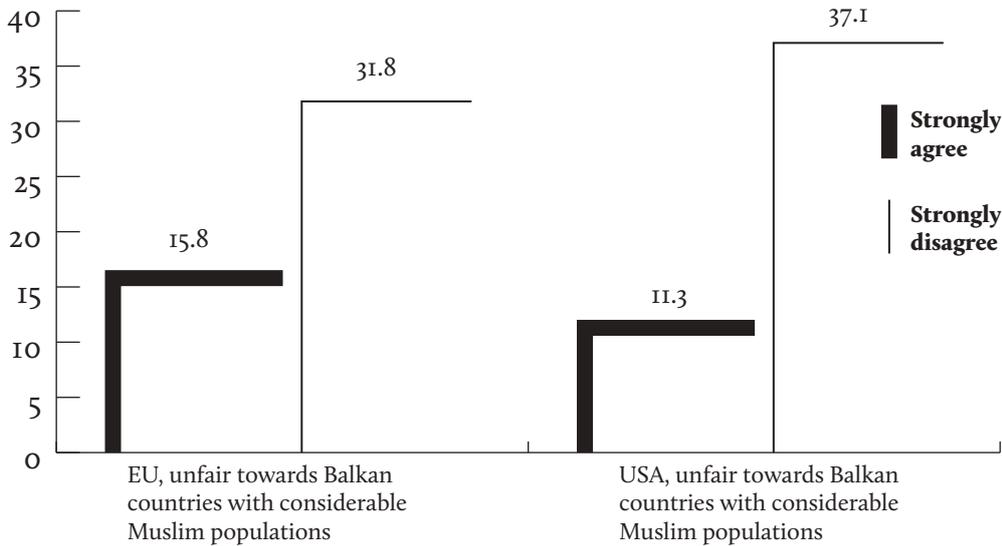
Combined, nearly 28 percent of respondents endorsed Statement 3 (Figure 50) while around 50 percent disagreed with it, 8.3 percent considered it irrelevant and another 14.4 percent had no opinion.

Figure 50. Respondents' perceptions that the EU is unfair with Balkan countries with a considerable Muslim population (%; N = 1,586)
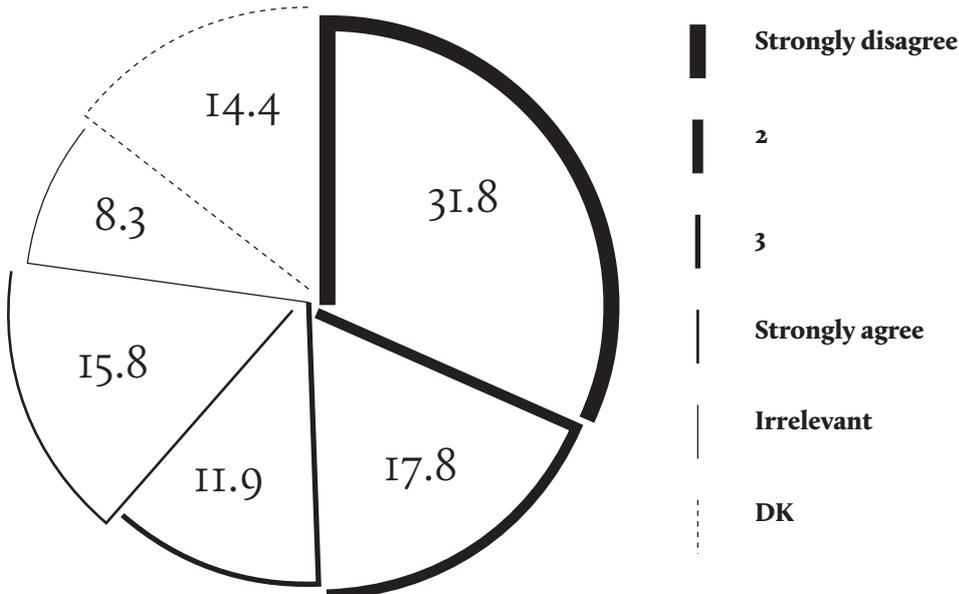
Respondents practising religion (regularly or main rituals), youngsters (18–24 years), and respondents with less than eight or nine years of education, or no education at all, agreed more with this statement than did those from other sub-categories.

The percentage of respondents who disagreed that there was unfair treatment was higher in the case of Statement 4—The USA has been unfair with countries in the Balkans with considerable Muslim population (Albania, Kosovo, BiH, Macedonia)—than for Statement 3 (EU): nearly 56 percent of respondents disagreed, while 21.6 percent agreed with the statement.

Figure 51. Respondents' perceptions that the US is unfair with Balkan countries with a considerable Muslim population (%; N = 1,587)
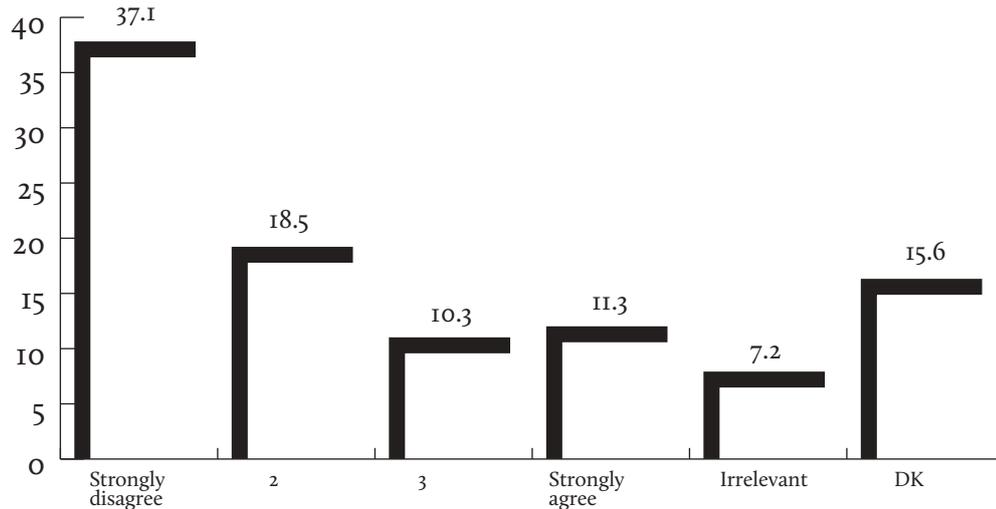
In contrast to the level of perceived unfairness of the EU, respondents who practise regularly religious rituals had the highest percentage of strongly disagree or disagree (58%) when asked about US unfairness, with the level among those who do not practise at all at 56 percent. Respondents who practise main religious rituals tend to endorse the statement, as well as respondents over 65 years of age, from rural areas and those with less than eight or nine years of education, or no education at all.

Between ten percent and 18 percent of Albanians strongly agree with control statements of the survey probing into the driver of 'Perceptions that the international system is unfair and hostile to Muslim societies'. The tendency to endorse such perceptions becomes stronger when respondents are asked about the regional context (Balkans) rather than a global one (Statement 1) and also more towards the EU than the US. Respondents from rural areas, not practising regularly religious rituals and those with less than eight or nine years of education are more inclined to perceive the West as unfair. Possible VE narratives around the EU's unfairness in a Balkan context holds a higher risk than narratives in a global context or those against US.

V.2.8. Conclusions on political drivers

Out of eight drivers analysed in the category of political VE drivers, six appear threatening in the Albanian context.[75] Four political VE drivers place in a particularly risky position the community of active religious believers: (1) Harsh government repression and gross violations of human rights; (2) Foreign occupation; (3)

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75. Although there are issues of concern for the other two drivers, the analysis considers them as low-risk threats for violent extremism.

Intimidation or coercion by VE groups; and (4) Perception that the international system is unfair and hostile to Muslim societies. Two other drivers from this category pose a risk in the national context: (1) Denial of political rights and civil liberties; and (2) Endemic corruption and impunity for well-connected elites. The threat associated with political drivers stems, in most cases, from non-religious arguments. As the analysis shows, broad public distrust and disillusionment due to a long culture of impunity, corruption and selective justice fuels radical attitudes among Albanians regardless of their religiosity.

The profile analysis of respondents who show highly concerning attitudes on political drivers finds that most commonly they are from rural areas, with low educational background (primary, less than 8 or 9 years of education, or no education), men, unemployed, and up to 35 years old. Some control statements with particular focus on religious sensitive issues (e.g. discrimination) often tend to be supported also by other categories of respondents, such as those 35–44 years of age or older than 55 years, those with higher education and self-employed. Interestingly, there are no significant differences between men and women on many of the political drivers with two exceptions. Firstly, more women than men reject the change of the political system with violence. However, they show similar support with men for the option of taking the law in their hand when state institutions deny rights and freedom. The second difference in the perceptions and attitudes of men and women stands in the fact that more women opt for a 'don't know' response on a number of sensitive statements such as –presence of individuals inciting or supporting religious extremism in their area; the West is hostile and attacks Islamic countries; the religious community they belong is adequately represented in state institutions and so on.

Given the challenges of the rule of law and democratic governance in Albania, VE ideologies may materialize, but may not necessarily be religious. The presence of religious extremists and individuals who exert pressure on religious believers to join extremist causes has been confirmed in the municipalities of Shijak, Vore, Elbasan, Vlore, Kruje, Durres, Kavaje, Kamez and Tirane. In many of these areas (but also in other municipalities such as Lezhe, Kukes, Kurbin, Prrenjas, Peqin, Pogradec, Bilisht, Librazhd) the study has identified significant percentages of respondents who show problematic attitudes and a tendency to support both religious and non-religious VE narratives.

Political drivers pose significant threats, particularly in relation to risks stemming from non-religious VE ideologies such as populist and other extremist politics. Although it is unlikely that religious extremist ideologies and groups would succeed in expanding their base of supporters through narratives building only on political drivers, their combination with religious narratives, such as perception of discrimination or exclusion and ill-treatment due to religious belongingness, might put at risk certain categories of religious believers.

V.3. Cultural drivers

In secular societies of Western Europe, where religion has lost much of its impact in the lives of individuals, we observe the trend of 'culturalising religion', by which is meant a decision by states to uphold certain religious norms and symbols (such as the crucifix) in the public sphere in the name of protecting the national culture or the culture of the majority in society.[76] The outlook of Islamic extremist groups centres on the perceptions of 'Islam under siege', or on perceptions of discrimination of Muslims in European countries. It is obvious that religious persons, despite being rooted in local communities, consider themselves to be part of a larger community of believers and share concerns of fellow believers elsewhere. Generally speaking, the supranational religious identification of the Muslims in the Balkans is rather weak, related more to the different experiences of nation-building, modernisation and secularism that have gone on in the nation-states, during both communism and the transition. After the collapse of communism, Muslim communities in the Balkans were largely transformed, in multiple ways, and have renegotiated their institutional places in their own states. Their representations of Islam are plural and show influences from local and national traditions, Europeanization processes, as well as global currents. Muslim communities in the Balkans have few transnational links, mostly determined by a common ethnicity or nationality and they do not adhere to a vision of a 'universalist' Islam: "The recourse to the Umma as a form of political identity has been sporadic rather than systematic and has never translated into an ideological programme."[77]

Nevertheless in a global world, supranational cultural identities can be appealing to individuals regardless of the local and national context. According to Roy (2013),[78] within major world religions there are fundamentalist and radical movements that aim to break religion away from its cultural roots, formatting it as 'pure religion', and then to proselytise people, both in their original culture and in foreign cultures. In other words, fundamentalism is a deculturalised and deterritorialised form of religion that is suited to globalisation. By portraying itself as the reincarnation of the ideal of a world caliphate, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria turned into a pole of attraction for many radicalised Muslims from all over the world who believe that a global jihad against the West is taking place. Therefore, we included in the present survey a section on cultural drivers in order to assess the perceptions of respondents on possible threats to their identities and ways of life. The questions are based on the study by Denoux and Carter (2009), who emphasised three types of cultural drivers relevant to the phenomenon of religious-based VE, as follows: (1) perceptions of unfair continued attacks by Western countries against Muslim culture and countries, (2) perceptions of invasion and assimilation of the traditional culture of a country by foreign modernist influences, and (3) proactive efforts of radical groups to impose and spread a strict version of Islam over other traditions and cultures.[79]

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76. Joppke, C. (2018) "Culturalizing Religion in Western Europe: Patterns and Puzzles." Social Compass, vol. 65, issue 2, pp. 234–246.

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

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

79. 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 of VE

DRIVER	DESCRIPTION
Islam under siege	A strong correlation exists between VE success and the perception 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. N.B. This overlaps and reinforces one of the political drivers, namely "Perception that the international system is fundamentally unfair & hostile to Muslim societies / peoples".
Broader cultural threats	The population may perceive a broader cultural threat – to traditions, customs, values, and sense of collective or individual honor and dignity
'Proactive' religious agendas	Groups promoting these agenda 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.

Source: Denoeux and Carter (2009)

V.3.1. Perceptions of Islam under siege

> *A strong correlation exists between VE success and the perception the West is attacking Islam and Muslims. Individuals who experience repression and humiliation in their daily life may be more susceptible to highly politicised and emotional images of fellow Muslims suffering in other countries.*

This cultural driver is related to perceptions that Islam and Muslims are under attack from the West. Due to conflicts where Muslims are involved—in Palestine, Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere—extremist conspiracy theories proclaim that the Western powers are seeking to subdue and humiliate Islam itself. These perceptions about a continued Western conspiracy against Islam and Muslim societies are widespread in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region because of several factors, such as the past experiences of colonialism, the Israeli–Palestine conflict and the failure of Arab secular and nationalist regimes to realise economic and social development of their countries. Dictatorships and autocratic regimes in the MENA region diffuse the perceptions of Muslims under Western attack in order to relieve their responsibility and blame the outsiders for the social grievances and in order to build legitimacy.[80] According to some fundamentalist and jihadist currents, Islam is threatened not only by the West, but also by fellow Muslims who have abandoned the faith and are acting

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80. Gray, M. (2011) "Political Culture, Political Dynamics, and Conspiracism in the Arab Middle East", in Graf, A, S. Fathi and L. Paul (eds.), Orientalism and Conspiracy: Politics and Conspiracy Theories in the Islamic World, London and New York, I. B. Tauris. pp. 105–127.
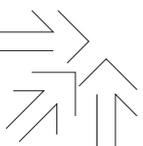
as agents of the West in Islamic societies. Long-term indoctrination to such ideas may result in extremist behaviour, such as joining jihadist fighters in zones of conflict.

IDM's study on violent extremism (2015) reported cases of self-proclaimed imams preaching hatred against other Albanian Muslims, calling them hypocrites or even kafir (disbeliever) and accusing them of being collaborators with the West's politics against Islam. They preach hatred against other religions, as well as against democracy, because in their view it creates the illusion that human beings are in control of politics, while it is God who decides everything.[81] In the current study we presented to the national sample of respondents three statements in order to assess the relevance of sentiments of 'Islam under siege', as follows:

> Statement 1: The West is hostile and constantly attacking Islamic states and culture.
>
> Statement 2: Nowadays, it is difficult to be a practising Muslim in Albania.
>
> Statement 3: Nowadays, it is difficult to be a practising Christian in Albania.

A positive answer to each of the first two statements may be regarded as supporting the idea that Albanians perceive the West as an aggressor against Islamic culture, and that the model of secular society in Albania discriminates against devoted religious believers who are practising their faith.

Figure 52. Respondents' opinions on whether the West is hostile and attacking Islamic states and culture (%; N = 1,585)
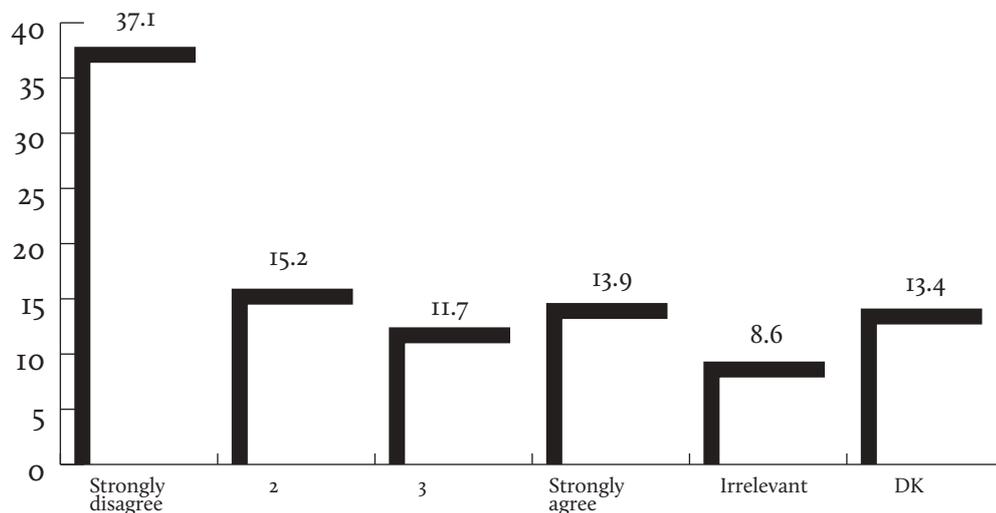
Although the majority of respondents did not agree with Statement 1, 25.6 percent nevertheless agreed or strongly agreed that Islamic states and culture are under attack from the West. Demographic analysis of responses shows no significant variation in the percentage of respondents who agreed with the statement. A difference is observed, however, in the percentage of respondent who disagreed with it, specifically respondents older than 55 years, urban respondents, those who had completed

81. IDM (2015) "Religious Radicalism and Violent Extremism in Albania." Tirane. pp. 89–90.

high school education only, and those with employment status of 'other' (mostly pensioners). Differences among other demographic categories were smaller than five percent. Agreement with the statement above the national average was found for the following municipalities: Kavaje (61%), Shijak (40%), Kamez (34%), Kukes (33%), Gjirokaster (33%), Tirane (31%), Divjake (30%) and Durres (27%).

For the majority of respondents, to be a religious believer in Albania is not difficult. Despite the small percentages, there is a distinction between responses concerning Muslim and Christian believers practising their faith, with 10.3 percent of respondents agreeing with Statement 2 and only five percent with Statement 3.

Figure 53. Respondents' opinions (%) on whether in Albania it is difficult to be a practising Muslim (N = 1,583) or Christian (N = 1,581)
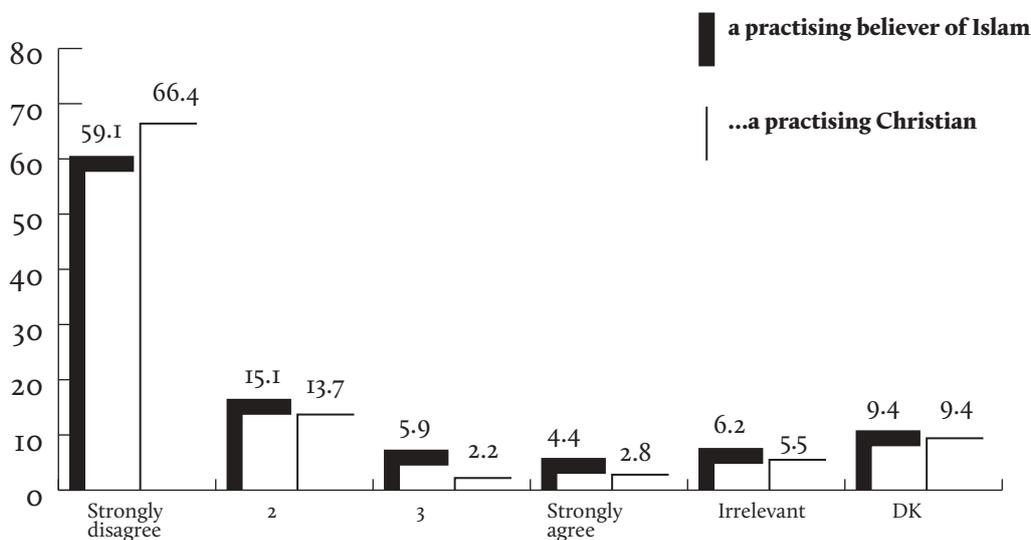
Given the small percentages of 'strongly agree' or 'agree' responses to either statement, the differences across various demographic categories are minor. Comparatively, it seems that to be a practising Muslim in Albania is perceived to be more difficult than to be a practising Christian. From the focus group interviews with religious believers it was revealed that Muslim women experience more difficulties in everyday life. IDM's study on religious tolerance (2018) reports cases of discrimination or social exclusion of Muslims practising their faith but at low percentages,[82] coinciding with the few respondents in the present study who agreed that currently in Albania it is difficult to be a practising believer.

The responses to the statements on the driver 'Islam under siege' show that religious identification in Albania, including with Islam, is not linked to hostility against the West. Most believers do not perceive it difficult to practise their religion, though sporadic cases of religious discrimination have been reported. Nevertheless, nearly a quarter of survey respondents agreed that the West is constantly attacking Islam. This attitude is stronger than the national average of 25.6 percent especially in the municipalities of Kavaje (61%), Shijak (40%), Kamez (34%), Kukes (33%), Gjirokaster (33%) and Tirane (31%).

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82. IDM (2018) "Religious Tolerance in Albania." p. 7: "About eleven percent say that they have witnessed at least once an occasion of religious discrimination or exclusion in their communities." Source: http://idmalbania.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Religious-tolerance-in-albania.pdf

V.3.2. Broader cultural threats

The population may perceive a broader cultural threat—to traditions, customs, values, and sense of collective or individual honour and dignity

A cultural threat is perceived in the form of the fading of 'authentic' traditions and the erosion of group solidarity under cultural influences that come from outside. The revival of religion in post-communist Albania was accompanied by an inrush of foreign missionaries and religious foundations who strived to convert the 'atheist' Albanians to the 'true' religion, or to teach them the correct version of the respective religion. Since 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. Albanian Muslims in particular felt pressure on the one hand to conform to strict observations of certain Islamic rituals and dress, as demanded by foreign missionaries, and, on the other, to preserve the 'native' Islamic tradition. In the 1990s, more than 90 percent of the AMC budget came from external sources, mainly aid from Islamic organisations, which often insisted on teaching local believers 'pure' Islam, free from 'polluters'. The response of AMC was to search for an Albanian or Balkan specific Islamic 'tradition' that was in harmony with national identity, religious tolerance, modernisation, democracy and European integration. As the then vice-head of AMC put it: We do not need others to teach us faith... We need assistance for our own tradition of faith.[83] At the local community level, often the feeling of a cultural threat is expressed in the discourse of preserving local religious tradition and tolerance against influences of fundamentalist forms of Islam. For instance, according to one ethnographic study in the city of Shkodra local Muslims referred to their religiousness as a "calm" one, by which they named pragmatic and negotiated everyday approaches to religion, while they called "fanatical" and "unpleasant" those locally inauthentic manifestations of faith, which they identified as "Arab" Islam.[84]

In the current study, in order to measure perceptions on threats to traditional ways of practising Islam in Albania, survey respondents were presented with the following control statements:

|	
Statement 1:	Muslim believers in Albania are faced with foreign influences of conservative Islam.
Statement 2:	Traditional Islam in Albania is continuously attacked by extremist groups in the country.
Statement 3:	Traditional Islam in Albania is continuously attacked by extremist groups outside the country.
Statement 4:	The faith, traditions and dignity of my religious community in general is under constant pressure and threat.

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83. Elbasani, A. (2016) "State-organized Religion and Muslims' Commitment to Democracy in Albania." Europe-Asia Studies, vol. 68, issue 2, p. 262.

84. Tošić, J. (2015) "The Loudspeaker of Faith in the 'Calm' City", in Elbasani, A. and O. Roy (eds.) The Revival of Islam in the Balkans: From Identity to Religiosity, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan. pp. 95–97.

Survey respondents seem to be divided in their opinions on the first statement, with 38.2 percent either agreeing or strongly agreeing that Muslim believers in Albania face foreign influences of conservative Islam, with 33.2 percent either disagreeing or strongly disagreeing and 25 percent not knowing how to respond.

Figure 54. Respondents' opinions on whether Muslim believers in Albania are faced with foreign influences of conservative Islam (%; N = 1,576)
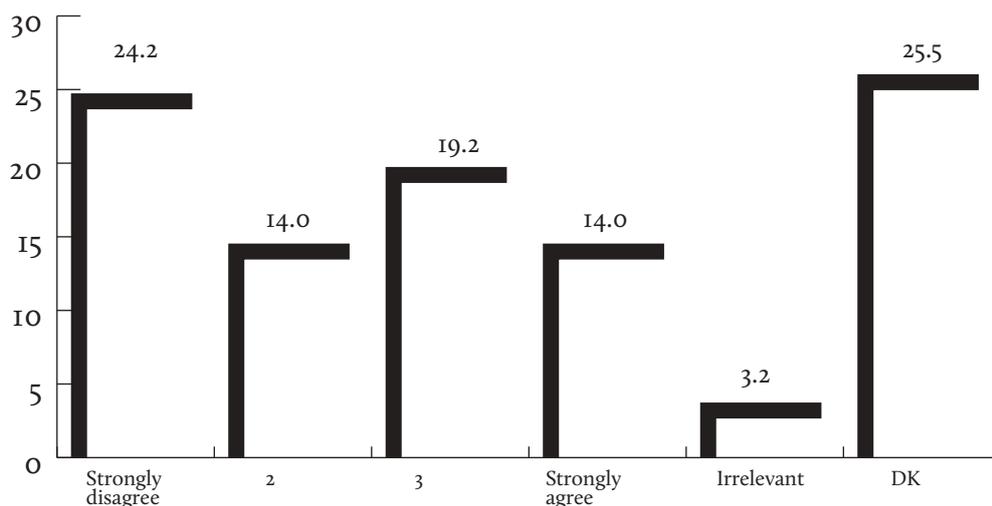

More religious persons disagreed more with this statement than less religious and more secular respondents. Although at similar or slightly smaller percentages than the national average the perceptions of respondents practising all or main religious rituals is particularly important given that they are in day-to-day contact with members of religious communities and with possible influences. The presence of such influences is confirmed by 28 percent of respondents regularly practising and 36 percent practising the main rituals. On the other hand, 49 percent and 39 percent of these respondents, respectively, took the opposite view.

An increase in level of education is positively correlated with increase in the level of agreement with the statement, meaning that the more educated confirm at higher percentages foreign religious influences upon Albanian Muslims. When the answers are analysed by situation of employment, the highest level of agreement (37.1%) was found among the self-employed, and the highest level of disagreement (41.2%) among the unemployed.

The majority of respondents did not agree that traditional Islam in Albania is continuously under attack from domestic or foreign religious extremist groups. However, nearly a quarter of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed with these statements. Thus, 26.7 percent confirmed attacks by extremist groups abroad and 23.3 percent, attacks by in-country extremist groups.

Figure 55. Respondents' opinions (%) on whether traditional Islam in Albania is continuously attacked by extremist groups in the country (N = 1,575) and from outside the country (N = 1,574)
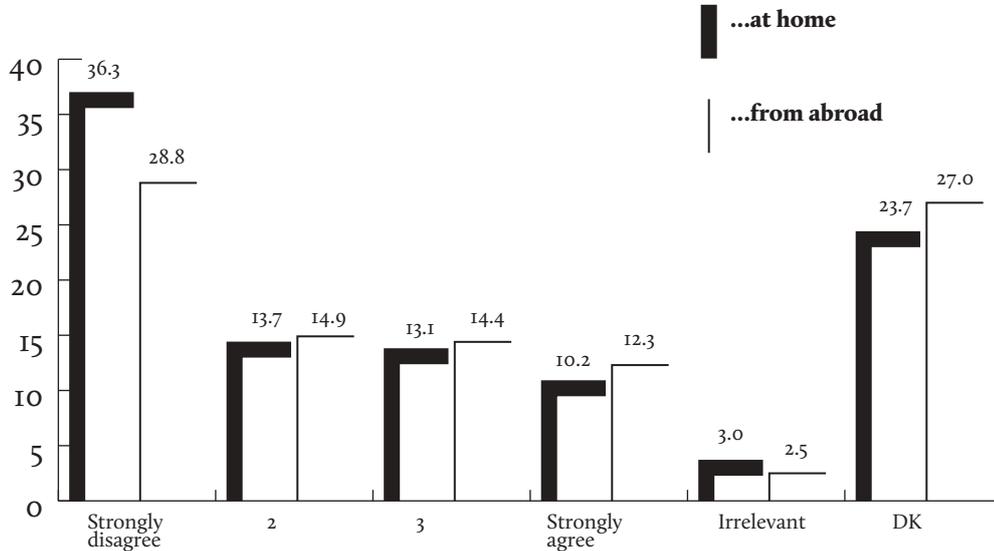

Minor differences are observed between the levels of agreement and disagreement according to the religious practice of survey respondents on either statement, with the exception of the level of disagreement on the second statement (influence from abroad) for which respondents who practise all religious rituals tend to disagree at a higher percentage than those who do not practise regularly or do not practise at all.

A higher level of agreement with statements 2 and 3 is shown by respondents from urban areas than from rural areas, males rather than females, more educated than less educated, self-employed and students. In one focus group interview (FGD4) one Muslim believer blamed different religious currents coming from Turkey and Middle East for the contradictions that Albanian Muslims have with one another: "Each of these currents came here with a sense of superiority towards other currents. They removed our traditions and put other rituals in their place, rituals which we now understand to be wrong."

Twenty percent of the respondents felt that the faith, traditions and dignity of their religious community is under constant pressure and threat, though the vast majority—62.1 percent—do not share this opinion. The perception of a threat against the religious community is stronger among respondents who regularly practise religious rules and rituals (25.6%) and among respondents of age 35–44 years (24.4%).
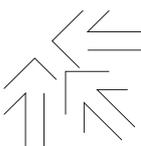
Figure 56. Respondents' opinions on the view that the faith, traditions and dignity of their religious community is under constant pressure and threat (%; N = 1,575)
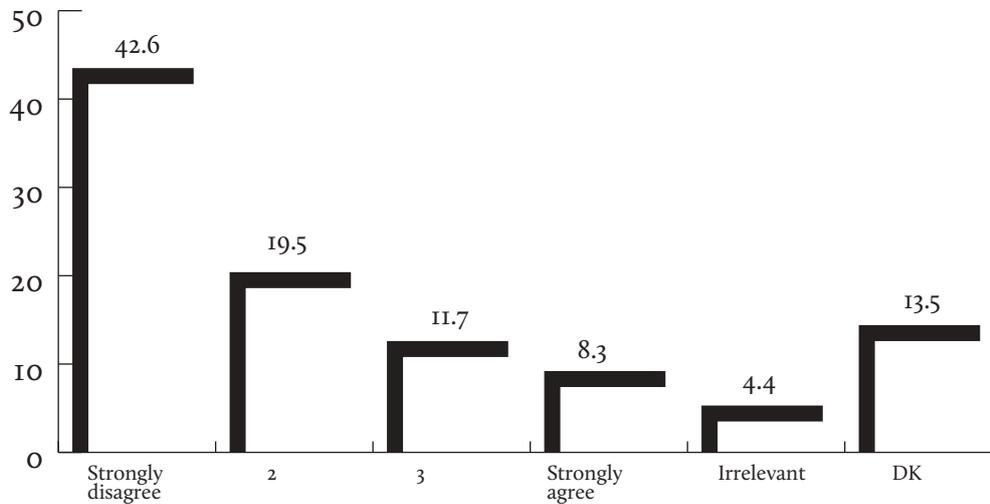
At a general level, the majority of Albanians do not perceive broader cultural threats or attacks against the religions that are practised in the country. This does not mean that they are unaware of the existence of negative influences from the outside on the Islamic faith in particular. Especially among those respondents who regularly practise religious rites and rules, there are opinions that their religion, as practised traditionally, is under attack from extremist groups inside and outside the country. Additionally, two out of ten Albanians believe that the faith, tradition and dignity of their religious community are under constant pressure and threat. Such a view is present more among believers practising regularly religious rituals.

V.3.3. "Proactive" religious agendas

Groups promoting these agenda 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.

When speaking of the relationship between religion and culture in modernity, Roy (2015) makes the distinction between two positions: accommodationism and fundamentalism. Accommodationist religious groups consider that religion is embedded in a culture and that a shared culture is a prerequisite for the existence of a religion. For the accommodationist, the believer of one religion can share a common culture with a non-believer and the believers of other religions. The fundamentalist position seeks a separation of religion from culture. In fact, a fundamentalist version of a given religion turns against the surrounding culture, which is now considered not simply as secular, but as pagan. There are no longer any intermediate variations between a believer and a non-believer. While it is possible to speak from an accommodationist point of view of agonistic, secular or cultural Christians or Muslims, there cannot be agonistic, secular or cultural Pentecostalists, Salafists or Jehovah's Witnesses. The fundamentalists are attempting religious purity, meaning a version of religion stripped of cultural traits, i.e. deculturalised, and consequently composed of

a set of basic rules and rituals that must be valid in every culture and every situation. Thus, the fundamentalist interpretation of a religion means one made exportable in a global and deterritorialised world. The deculturalisation of religion puts a barrier between the believer and the non-believer. In the eyes of the fundamentalist believer, those nominal followers or secular people who still identity themselves with a given religion are in fact non-believers or pagans; to the non-believer, the believer appears fanatical.[85]

In a study of Islamic currents in Albania, Endresen (2015) argues that the labels accommodationist and fundamentalist apply more or less to traditional vs. Salafist forms of Islam. Traditionalists present themselves as patriotic, pro-Western and supporters of European integration. They associate Islam with modernity and emphasise its compatibility with democracy and European values. The Salafist currently takes its legitimacy from the knowledge of authentic Islamic texts and argues that Muslims should follow the rules written in the sacred scriptures and not social mores and cultural tradition. The Salafists take inspiration from Saudi imams that favour a strict following of the Islamic tenets. Although the Salafists instruct the believers to obey the state and its laws and supports the traditional family values, they are against liberal values, laicism and individual freedoms, seeing them as Western inventions that are foreign to the Islamic faith. The Salafists see the Albanian culture not as anti-Islamic, but as a valuable asset, yet frozen in conservative and patriarchal values. They put emphasis on individual salvation through strict observation of religiosity in everyday behaviour, such as prayer, controlling food intake and wearing the right clothes. They are keen to distinguish themselves from certain practices of "traditionalists", such as relaxed attitude to religious rituals, worshiping the graves of Sufi masters and Bektashi holy men, the use of haram food, etc.[86]

Although Salafism should not be equated with extremist behaviour and violence, it is obvious that indoctrination into a rigid version of faith that detaches the believer from the surrounding culture and society may lead individuals and groups towards religious extremism. The possibility and threat of radical individuals and groups taking up a proactive religious agenda in Albania is assessed in the present study by presenting to the national sample of respondents a set of statements, as follows:

Statement 1:	Religious preaching in Albania should adapt to the modern and Western tendencies of the country.
Statement 2:	In Albania there are well-organised groups that propagate extremist interpretations of the Islamic faith.
Statement 3:	In Albania there are well-organised groups that propagate extremist interpretations of the Christian faith.

Although disagreeing with the first statement doesn't necessarily mean favourable grounds for extremist religious agenda per se, strong disagreement is indicative of a rather conservative religious community. On the other hand, positive responses to the

85. Roy, O. (2013) Holy Ignorance: When Religion and Culture Part Ways. Oxford: Oxford University Press. pp. 7–8.
86. Endresen, C. (2015) "Faith, Fatherland or Both? Accommodationist and Neo-Fundamentalist Islamic Discourses in Albania", in in Elbasani, A. and O. Roy (eds.) The Revival of Islam in the Balkans: From Identity to Religiosity, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan. pp. 222–241.

second and third statements are open confirmations of the presence of groups that support VE on religious grounds.

Nearly half of respondents (48.2%) agreed with the statement that religious preaching should adapt to the inclination towards the West of Albanian culture and society. However, nearly one third of respondents disagreed (13%) or strongly disagreed (18.2%) with this statement, meaning that they do not think that religious preaching in Albania should adapt to the modern and Western tendencies of the country.

Figure 57. Respondents' views that religious preaching in Albania should adapt to the modern and Western tendencies of the country (%; N = 1,569)
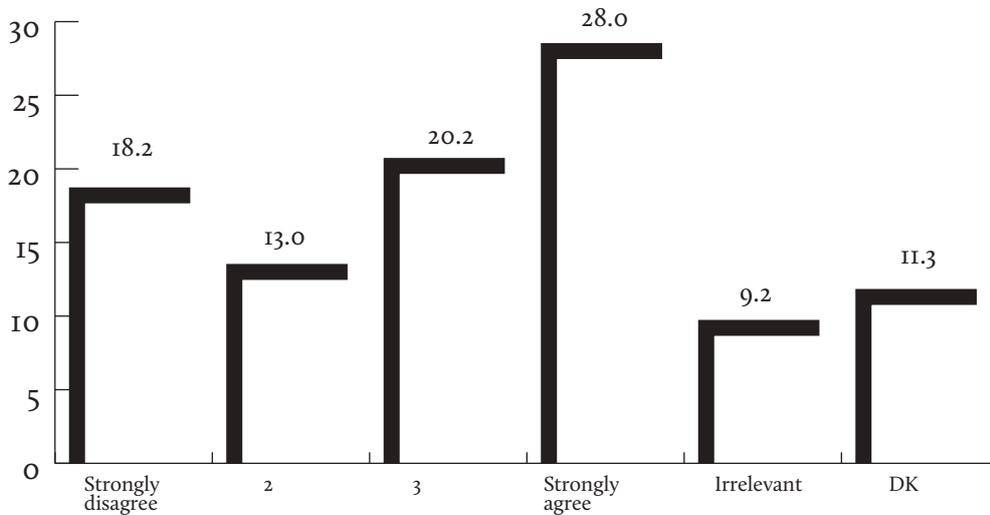
As expected, religious respondents showed a higher level of disagreement (37.9%) with the statement than did more secular respondents who do not practise religious rituals (25.1%). However, the prevalent opinion among respondents practising all religious rituals (45%) or main religious rituals (46%) was in agreement with the statement. During focus groups interviews some Muslim believers said that there are limits to the adaptation of Islam with Western trends. For instance, preaching in mosques should be carried out in Arabic and not in any other language. One Muslim said that it made no sense to speak of adaptation of Islam to the West, because Islam is a universal religion and is compatible with any culture. Therefore, "Unless the principles of the religion are violated, we should experience Islam according to our traditions and culture and not necessarily adapted to Western tendencies." However, another Muslim (in FGD4) acknowledged that, "Islam in Albania is changing, is taking a Western approach, and its religious practices are not harmed."

Less educated respondents who have not completed the eight- or nine-year cycle of basic education were more inclined to disagree than to agree with the statement (44.1% vs. 35.6%), an exception to the general trend in all other educational sub-categories. This result might be explained by a more liberal approach taken to religion on the part of more educated persons.

The majority of respondents either do not agree with the existence of religious extremists groups, or do not know about this phenomenon. Among respondents, 26 percent acknowledged the existence of Islamic extremist groups and 18.8 percent the presence of Christian extremist groups. However, the percentage who refuted the presence of Christian groups with an extremist agenda is somewhat higher than those who refuted the presence of Islamic extremist groups (46.9% and 42.2%, respectively).

Figure 58. Respondents' opinions on the presence in Albania of Muslim groups (N = 1,567) or Christian groups (N = 1,575) propagating extremist interpretations of religion (%)
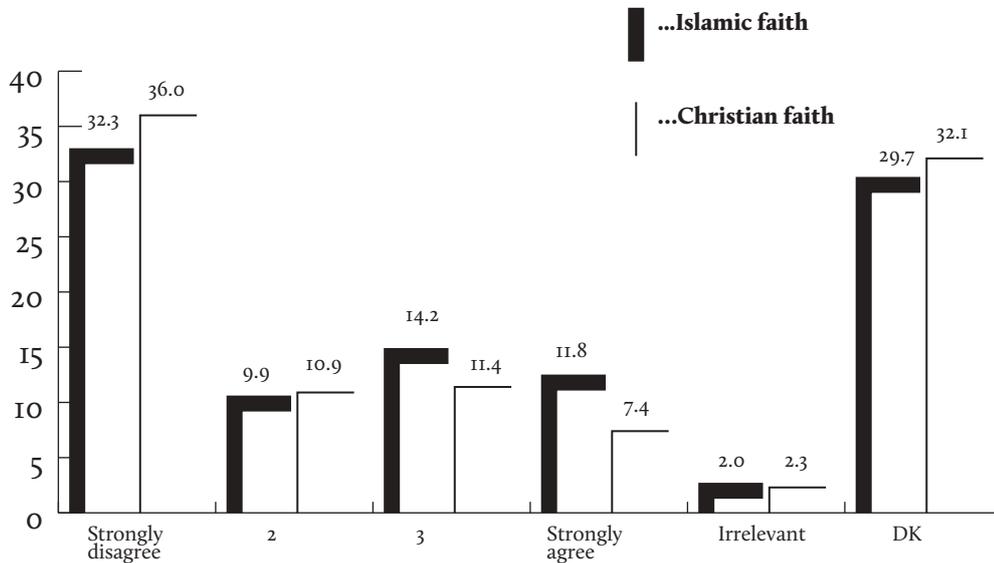
Respondents who practise religious rituals show higher levels of both agreement and disagreement with both questions than do respondents that have a more relaxed attitude towards religion. Respondents living in urban areas show more agreement than those living in rural areas. Men tend to agree more than females about the presence of Islamic groups with an extremist agenda (28.7% and 23.2%, respectively), while for Christian groups there is little difference between the opinions of the two genders. Respondents with the lowest education level are more inclined to disagree with both statements (67.8% for the second statement and 66.7% for the third), while the percentage is much lower for respondents who have completed eight- or nine-year education (43.4% for Statement 2 and 46.1% for Statement 3), indicating that the latter group agrees more with the existence of religious groups that follow extremist interpretations. Another interesting finding is that among respondents who have finished post-university education, "do not know" dominates responses to both statements (39.3% and 41.7%), while the agree and disagree camps are similar (27.4% and 27.4%, respectively, for the second statement and 21.4% and 28.6% for the third).

During one focus group interviews (FGD3), when asked about religious extremists one Muslim believer said that: They act within the mosques, they are radicals who speak loudly and even shout [to convince others] in the name of God. But, in our religion, the one who shouts unnecessarily does not belong in our religion. This distinction should be made by our religious institutions, because this is an internal issue. When one goes to extremes within the mosque—speaking of violence and killing, something that goes against our religion—he does not belong to us and we should distance ourselves from him. During interviews both believers and others expressed the concern that ex-fighters who have returned from the war in Syria might be extremists, though the interviewees agreed that they should be given the chance to disengage and reintegrate, and that state security institutions should work closely with religious ones and the community to achieve this (FGD1–4).

The majority of respondents seemed to favour an accommodationist approach to religion, because they consider it as part of a living Albanian culture that is undergoing a process of Westernisation (or Europeanization). Many perceive it as natural that religious preaching in

the country should follow the same trend, to some extent. More educated respondents are in favour of this trend than are the less educated. Most respondents either do not agree or do not know about the existence of organised groups that propagate extremist interpretation of either Christian or Islamic faith. However, such propaganda is confirmed by a non-neglectable percentage of respondents (nearly 19% for Christian faith and 26% for Islam faith).

V.3.4. Conclusions on cultural drivers

Although cultural drivers seem irrelevant for the majority of Albanians and for a broadly secular society that truly honours the value of religious tolerance, radical or extremist religious propaganda was confirmed by nearly a quarter of our survey respondents. The risks from such propaganda, targeting especially religious believers, should not be neglected. VE ideologies may penetrate particularly among those young or early-stage believers who think that their religion is under attack from the West and feel that their religious dignity and traditions are under constant threat by modernisation, Westernisation and secularisation. The majority of religious believers, whether practising regularly or infrequently, show a high degree of resilience. However, some concerns and 'at-risk groups', which may be exploited by extremists, were observed in our sample: 25 percent of those who regularly practise religious rituals and nearly 25 percent of respondents in age group 35–44 years have the perception that their religious community, tradition and dignity is under constant threat. Almost a quarter of survey respondents agreed that the West is constantly attacking Islam. Such an attitude is pronounced in the municipalities of Kavaje, Shijak, Kamez, Kukes, Gjirokaster and Tirane.

The findings concerning cultural drivers pose important challenges for Albanian religious leaders and representatives to cultivate believers in the spirit of Albanian societal values and local traditions of practising religion. Such a task requires sound capacities of religious communities and support from societal actors, and the challenge becomes even more important in the context of influences and pressure coming from more conservative ideologies. Namely, 38.2 percent of respondents perceive that Islam in Albania is facing foreign influences from conservative Islam, while around a quarter of the national sample has the impression that traditional Islam is continuously attacked by extremist groups from inside and outside the country. Although the dominant perception suggests that religious believers do not generally experience difficulties, one in ten Albanians believe that nowadays in Albania it is difficult to be a practising believer of Islam (with 5% believing this for believers practising the Christian faith). Addressing such a perception requires more than counter-narratives: it requires action, support and engagement from all societal players.

V.4. Albania-specific issues

Religious radicalism and violent extremism in Albania (IDM 2015) elaborates a number of Albania-specific factors that have it seems facilitated an enabling environment for FF recruitment. The internal power struggle within the Muslim Community of Albania, operation of illegal mosques, and concerns over capacities and authority of religious clerics were analysed in detail based on the perceptions and attitudes of survey respondents, and contribution from focus groups participants and interviewees.

Over the past three years, AMC and state authorities have taken a number of measures to address the issue of illegal mosques. The Community itself has invested efforts

to improve capacities of religious clerics though concerns in this regard still persist. Meanwhile, religious institutions have seen a tremendous increase in public trust, from 44 percent of Albanians in 2014, to 76 percent a year ago (2017).[87] Furthermore, religious institutions top the list of the most trusted national institutions in Albania and only nine percent below the most trusted institutions, such as the EU and UN. This change is largely due to the openness of religious communities, their proactive engagement in the fight against VE, and, without doubt, the presence of a highly sensitive public that respects the value of religious tolerance in a country. As the largest religious community in Albania, AMC must be particularly credited for this accomplishment. Challenges for AMC still persist as in recent years its central level authority has been disputed by external factors[88] and continues to be questioned by people linked with the formerly known 'illegal mosques'[89] while the topic of Gulenists vs. Erdoganists has at times occupied the public debate, too.[90]

The reintegration of former FFs and disengagement from VE religious ideologies represents another topic of great interest among C/PVE stakeholders in the country. Albania has yet to establish reintegration and disengagement programmes, while C/PVE practitioners call for a realistic approach in this context.

The present study has revisited the factors analysed in the IDM (2015) assessment and added specific research questions related to the current C/PVE discourse as presented above. The primary purpose of this section is to offer empirical evidence on issues of interest for C/PVE stakeholders in order to enable more realistic public and policy debate, as well as more impacting and sustainable PVE measures. The study elaborates further the issues that fall under religious authority, given their potential to impact the resilience of communities against VE pressure and ideologies.

V.4.1. Religious authority

Clerics and official representatives of religious communities have a key role to play in the fight against extremism and efforts to build the resilience of local communities against forms and ideologies of VE. Trust of religious believers and support from all community players are essential for the role of these representatives to be effective. There are a number of factors conditioning the relationships among religious clerics, communities of believers and the broader local communities in general. Although the list is not exhaustive, this study revisits the set of factors investigated by IDM (2015), and which together centre on the viability of religious authority: how religious clerics are perceived by their members, the clerics' level of preparedness, and the legitimacy of and disputes over religious authority.

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87. See "Trust in Governance 2017" (IDM 2018). Source: http://idmalbania.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/IDM-OpinionPoll-2017-EN-web.pdf

88. See "Erdogan steps up pressure on Albania's PM Edi Rama to get rid of all Gülen assets in the country" (http://balkanspost.com/article/79/erdogan-g%C3%BClen-albania); Voice of America VoA "Turkey on Diplomatic Push to Close Schools Linked to Influential Cleric" (https://www.voanews.com/a/turkey-erdogan-gulen-schools/4010073.html); Balkaninsight "Turkey Presses Albania To Extradite Key 'Gulenist' Suspect" (http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/albania-to-face-turkish-request-to-extradite-gulen-supporter-10-13-2017)

89. See "Imam A. Aliu compares the Chair of AMC to Caushescu" (Nov. 2017). Source: http://gazetaimpakt.com/imam-armand-aliu-krahason-kryetarin-e-kmsh-se-nikolla-causheskun/

90. See JavaNews "L. vangjeli: Erdogan has saved Albania from the great danger of Gulenist threat" (April 2018). Source: http://www.javanews.al/lorenc-vangjeli-erdogan-e-ka-shpetuar-shqiperine-nga-rreziku-madh-levizjes-gyleniste/

Survey respondents were asked to what extent they agree with the following statements:

Statement 1:   Religious objects (churches, mosques, etc.) built without the permission of the respective religious community should be banned.

Statement 2:   The positions or stance of the chair of my religious community (in Tirane) enjoy the full support of believers in the area in which I live.

Statement 3:   Religious clerics in the area where I live have a large influence over their respective believers.

Statement 4:   In my religious community there are clerics without adequate religious education.

V.4.1.a. Attitudes towards illegal religious objects

The state's agreements with each of the religious communities in Albania that define the relations between the parties have been particularly helpful in the past few years in the context of public awareness regarding VE. The majority of Albanians tend to support a legally regulated status of religious objects such as church and mosques. The consequences of such objects being operated at will without adequate, or any, control by recognised authorities have enabled the network of self-proclaimed imams to radicalize and recruit Albanian citizens as FFs. Such consequences, and the recent sentence imposed on the group of nine recruiters, have likely strengthened public awareness and their attitude to reject illegal religious institutions.

Figure 59. Respondents' attitudes towards banning of illegal religious objects (%; N = 1,580)
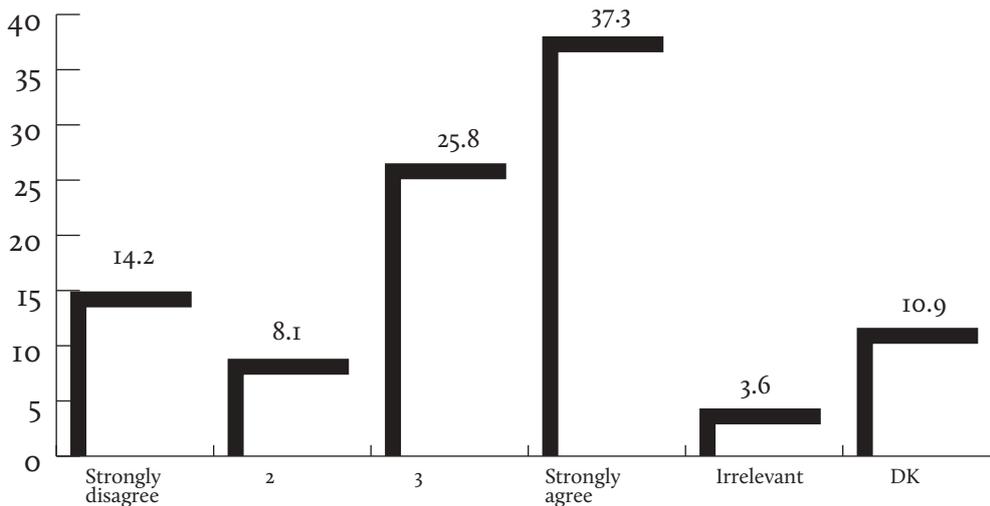
Among the survey respondents, 63 percent endorsed Statement 1, while less than one out of five disagreed. Such an attitude is present across all demographic categories with a large majority, ranging from 50–70 percent. Additionally, a near-identical percentage (64%) among respondents with varying religious practises was found in support of a ban of illegal religious objects.
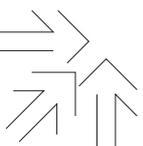
V.4.1.b. Undisputed central religious authority

A study carried out by IDM in2017, reported that two-third of Albanians trust religious institutions. The present study confirms the common trust in religious authorities, albeit in smaller numbers (55%).

Fewer than seven percent of this study's respondents strongly disagreed with the statement that The positions or stance of the chair of my religious community (in Tirane) enjoy full support of believers in the area in which I live. As shown in Figure 60, one-quarter of respondents did not have a definite opinion.

Figure 60. Respondents' attitudes on whether the positions or stance of the chair of their religious community enjoy full support of believers (%; N = 1,577)
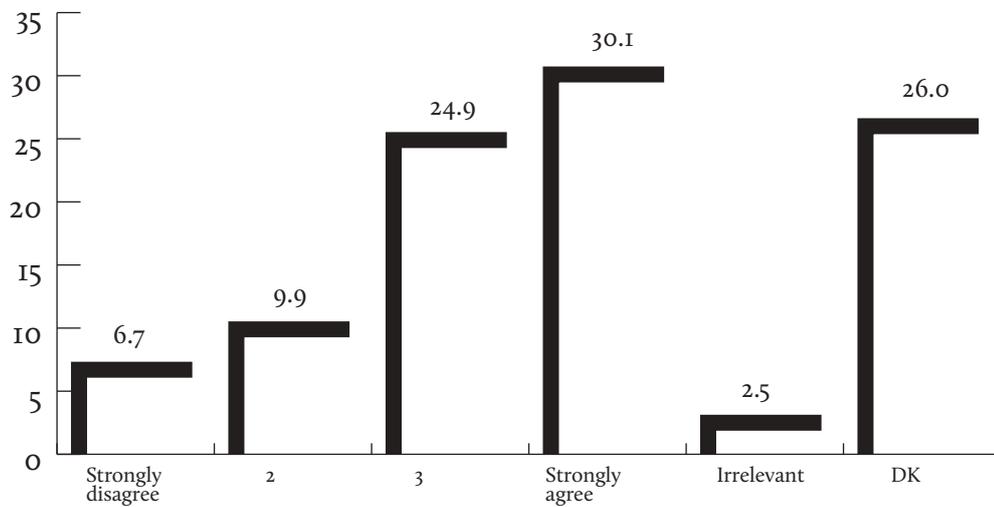
Understandably, active religious believers show higher levels of support for this statement with fewer than half of respondents who do not practise religious rituals agreeing (44%). Interestingly, the older the respondent, the stronger their tendency to agree that the positions or stance of the chair of their religious community enjoy the full support of believers in their area. More respondents from rural areas agreed (59%) with the statement than did those from urban areas (52%), while those with a postgraduate degree had the lowest level of agreement (39%).

V.4.1.c. Influential local religious clerics?

Whereas more than half of Albanians tend to support their national level religious clerics, fewer think that local clerics have sufficient influence in local communities (43.3%). The percentage of respondents who disagreed increased from 17 percent for national level clerics to nearly 26 percent for local religious leaders for Statement 3—Religious clerics in the area where I live have a large influence on their respective believers.

Figure 61. Respondents' attitudes on whether local clerics are influential (%; N = 1,579)
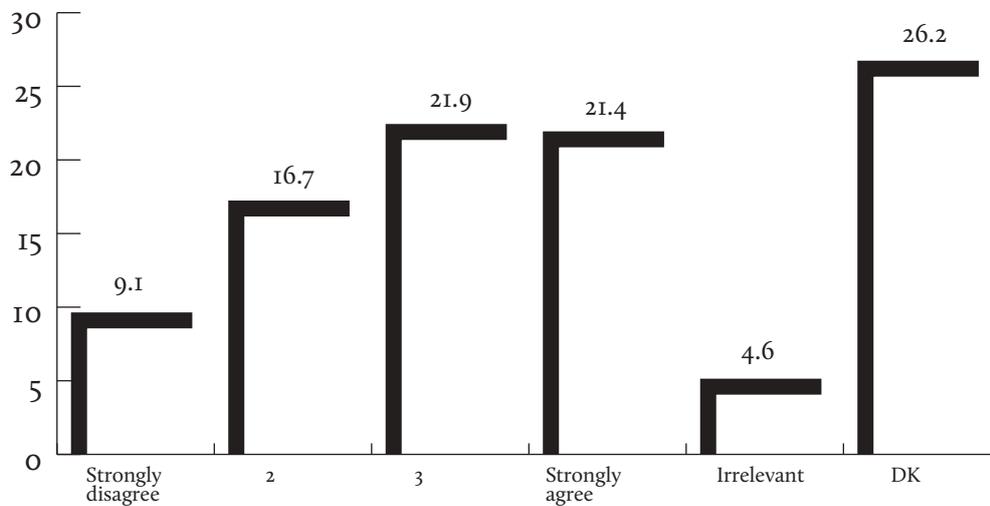
Although respondents practising religious rituals tend to agree more with this statement than those who do not practise at all, the tendency is weaker than the level of support for central level religious leaders. That is, 69 percent of respondents who regularly practise religion and 47 percent of those who practise the main religious rituals tend to agree that local religious clerics have a large influence on their respective believers (compared with 67% and 65%, respectively, for clerics at the national level).

When examining the demographics of the survey respondents such as urban or rural, and age, a similar trend for Statement 2 is observed for Statement 3. People from rural areas tend to agree or strongly agree more than do those in urban areas and the older the respondent, the more they agree. Lastly, less support is present among respondents with a postgraduate (32%) and university degree (37%).

V.4.1.d. Local clerics without adequate religious education

Almost a quarter of respondents (24%) believe that there are religious clerics without adequate religious education. However, more than one-third (34%) consider this untrue, while the majority (40%) do not have an opinion.

Figure 62. Respondents' attitudes on whether clerics have adequate religious education (%; N = 1,577)
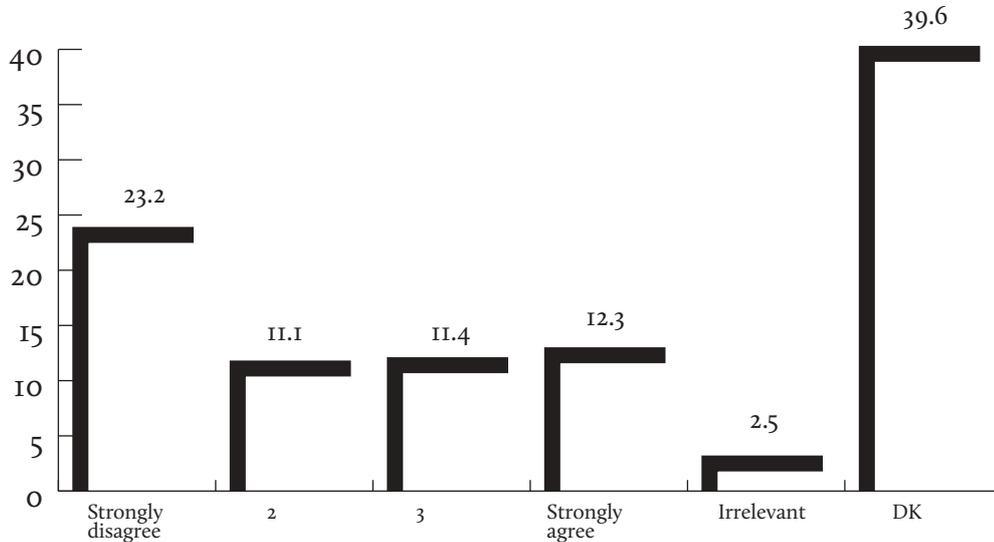
Almost identical percentages of respondents who practise either all or the main rituals or who do not practise religion agreed with the statement (22–25%). One-half (51%) of those who practise regularly and 36 percent of those who practise the main rituals disagreed, while only 26 percent of those who do not practise at all hold this view. The highest percentages of 'do not know' responses were observed among respondents who practise the main rituals (41%) and those who do not practise at all (46%). A correlation between age and level of disagreement is observed for this statement. However, no major differences appear with regard to 'strongly agree' or 'agree' answers from respondents of different age groups (21–26%).

Respondents with higher levels of education had a higher percentage of 'do not know' answers (47%, university degree; 60%, postgraduate) and smaller levels of agreement (22%, university degree; 15%, postgraduate) or disagreement (28%, university degree; 23%, postgraduate). Half (51%) of respondents with fewer than eight or nine years of, or no, education disagreed with the statement.

Albanians show massive support for religious tolerance as a traditional value in Albanian society and consider religious institutions as the most trusted national institutions. The role of the state and, particularly, that of religious representatives are very important for religious diversity, a culture of peaceful coexistence and interreligious dialogue in a society that seems to be less religious than neighbouring countries. The majority of Albanians show a higher level of trust in the articulations of religious authority, from top down, though they are more sceptical of the capabilities of religious authority and its influence at the local level. Figure 63 shows a reduced trend in religious authority from national to local clerics, while the Albanians' support to measures that reinforce official religious authority (by banning illegal religious institutions) stands undoubtedly much higher. Despite the significant impact and positive results in building capacities and raising public awareness on VE, religious institutions have a long way to go to improve their capacities and strengthen their role at the local level. Religious clerics at this level—their influence and capacities—are of paramount importance for building resilient communities and countering illegitimate religious influence and authority that may seek to build a basis of support for extremist religious ideologies.

Figure 63. Percentage of respondents who confirm presence of illegal religious objects, support to leaders of religious community, perceived influence and capabilities of local clerics (statements 1–4)
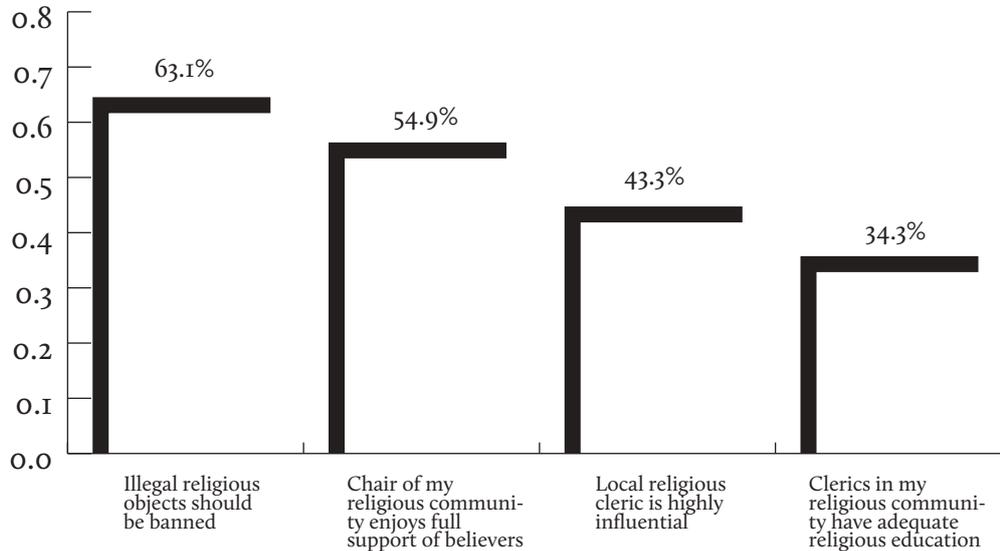
V.4.2. Strengthening religious tolerance—More or less religious knowledge?

A curriculum on religious knowledge was announced by the Government of Albania more than two years ago as an instrument to strengthen religious tolerance and prevent religious extremism. Public discourse has often touched upon this instrument and religious communities have cautiously welcomed it. Respondents in the IDM (2015) study on Religious tolerance in Albania raised concerns over the practical implementation of the initiative, and over the capacities of teachers.[91] Similar concerns were raised also by the present study's focus group participants with a university or postgraduate education.[92] However, survey respondents of this study seem generally positive about religious curricula as a measure that would reinforce religious tolerance. Thus, 32.1 percent of respondents strongly agreed that religious curricula would strengthen religious tolerance.

Question: *What is your personal stance on the following statement—Religious knowledge as an optional curriculum in schools would reinforce religious tolerance in Albania?*

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91. See page 71 of the study at http://www.al.undp.org/content/dam/albania/docs/religious%20 tolerance%20albania.pdf.

92. FG discussion held on 25 June 2018.

Figure 64. Respondents' opinions on whether religious knowledge as an optional curriculum in schools would reinforce religious tolerance in Albania (%; N = 1,577)
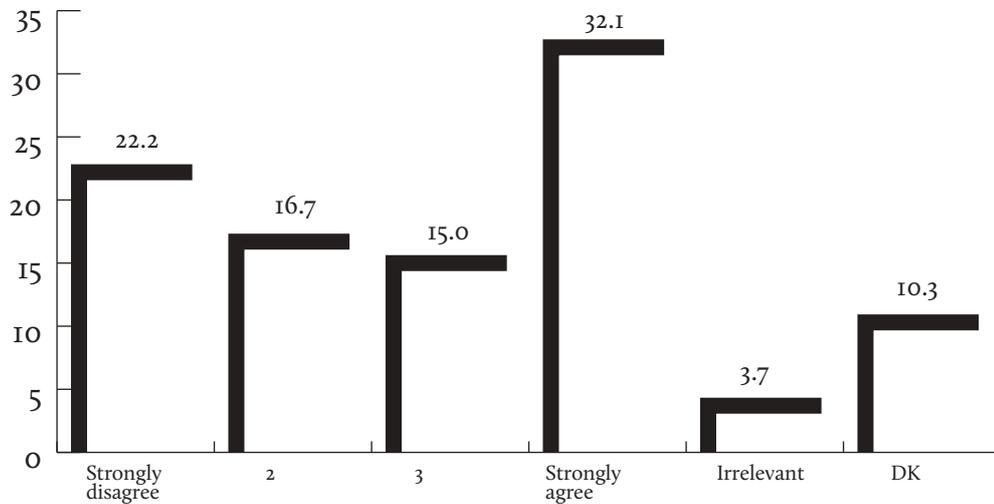
In all, 47 percent of survey respondents favoured (strongly agreed or agreed with) this statement, while nearly 39 percent disagreed. More respondents who regularly practise religious rituals agreed (64%) than did those who practise less often (48%) or do not practise at all (40%). Also, the higher the education level, the lower the approval rating for this statement. Lastly, nearly 50 percent of respondents from rural areas agreed with it, as opposed to 45 percent of those from urban areas. The reasons for such cautious support may lie in the fact that Albanians consider religious tolerance an already well-established tradition and societal value. Hence, as noted by the IDM study Religious tolerance in Albania (2018) Albanians see the foundations of religious tolerance as deeply rooted in the national traditions rather than in religious arguments. Additionally, this finding suggests that Albanians see limits to the impact of religious knowledge: whereas this may be a helpful factor for communities of religious believers, the impact of more religious knowledge may not necessarily impact perceptions in a broadly non-religious society.

V.4.3. Disengagement

Contemporary studies consider violent radicalisation as a continuing and gradual process of interaction between an individual and external factors, such as extremist ideas, close-knit groups isolated from the wider society, charismatic preachers and recruiters. Such external influences interact with the mind-set of certain individuals that is shaped by the influences of family background, experience of deprivation, awareness of injustice in the world, knowledge of the corruption of the political elite, incapability of integration into society, discrimination of co-religionists elsewhere, among other things. In this line of investigation, the individual trajectories are linked to social context via radical networks and milieus that serve as 'micro-mobilisation settings'.[93] Thus, there is a dialectic relationship between ideological affinity with religious fundamentalism and extremist ideas on the one hand and personal bonds formed in radical groups and networks on the other. An individual may be introduced to radical and extremist views through relatives, friends and mentor figures who

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93. Stefan Malthaner (2017) "Radicalization: The Evolution of an Analytical Paradigm", European Journal of Sociology, vol. 58 (3), p. 376.
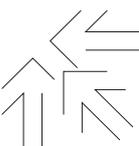
already uphold them. Furthermore, internalisation of extremist views sustains his or her affiliation with radical groups and networks, while relative isolation from society at large reinforces the in-group beliefs and determination. Supported by the radical group and by a newly found identity, radicalised individuals may participate in low-risk activism in social movements that, with time, pave the way to high-risk actions that may include violence and terrorism. Emotional pull and the Albanians' code of honour seems to play a role, too.[94]

Disengagement from violent extremist ideologies is one of the most debated issues among scholars and practitioners of C/PVE efforts globally. Albania's National C/PVE Strategy and action plan refers to measures aimed at rehabilitation (and reintegration) of VE offenders. C/PVE practitioners in Albania and representatives of religious communities have often raised the need for designing adequate disengagement or de-radicalisation programmes. The challenges to establish such programmes remain manifold and include not only concerns over a legal gap to balance repressive measures with those aiming at rehabilitation (of offenders) and prevention (for potential offenders), but also lack of clarity in terms of radicalism, extremism and violent extremism. Meanwhile, public perceptions fail to make a clear distinction between terms such as radical and violent and extremist ideologies.

The present study employs the term disengagement (as opposed to de-radicalisation) and focuses on differences in public perceptions vis-à-vis radical ideologies and radicalised religious believers on the one hand, and extremist ideologies and violent extremists on the other. Accordingly, the national survey asked respondents whether, and to what extent, they agree with the following two statements:

Statement 1:	It is impossible to disengage radicalised religious believers from radical religious ideologies.
Statement 2:	It is impossible to disengage violent extremists from extremist religious ideologies.

As Figure 65 shows, Albanians remain generally sceptical of disengagement by either religious radicals or violent extremists. Nearly half agreed with each statement.

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94. Jamie Barlett & Carl Miller, "The Edge of Violence...", pp. 13–17.

Figure 65. Percentage of respondents' opinions on the possibility of disengaging radicals (N = 1,579) and violent extremists (N = 1,577)

...radicalised belivers from radical religious ideologies

...violent extremists from extremist religious ideologies
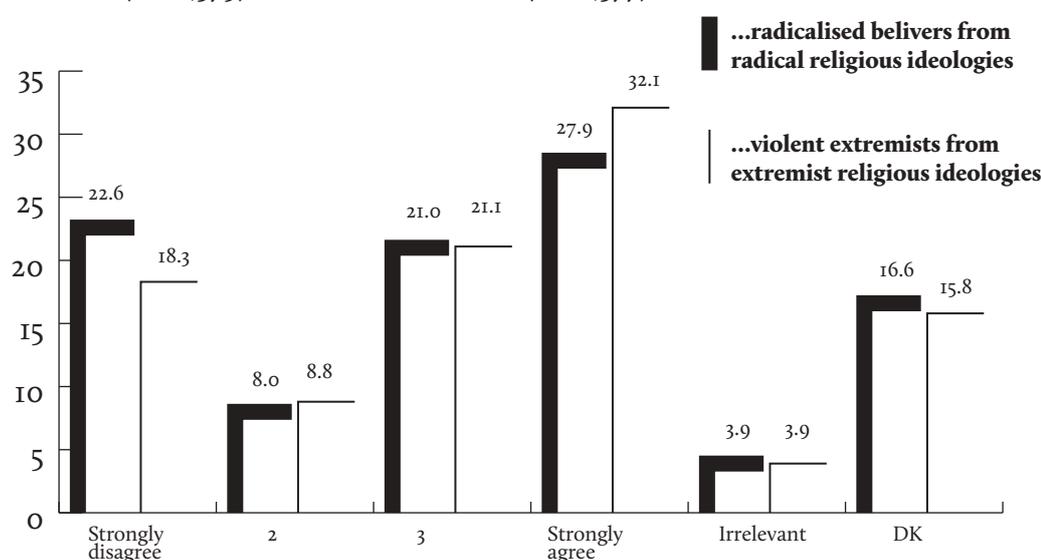
Demographic analysis of the responses reveals few significant differences in attitudes among respondents, with some exceptions. Respondents of age 35–44 years were more likely to disagree with Statement 1 than were other age groups. Respondents from urban areas and respondents that have completed a postgraduate degree also disagree more with the statement. There were more respondents who practise regularly religious rituals that disagreed with the statement (36.7%) than those who practise infrequently (31.5%), or those who do not practise at all (27.8%). The last of these had a higher percentage of 'do not know' responses. Among all three categories of respondents (practise religious rituals regularly, infrequently or not at all) there was a higher percentage who agreed with the statement (46.7%, 50.2% and 49.7%, respectively) than disagreed with it.

More uniformity among responses from different demographic categories was observed for the second statement (differences < 5%) with the exception of respondents with less than eight or nine years of, or no, education at all, who returned more 'do not know' responses (22%) at the expense of fewer agreements with the statement (42.4%) compared to responses from people with other categories of education (from 47–56%). Interestingly, the gap between respondents who agreed and those who disagreed is much wider by religious practice than with the first statement. Namely, across all three categories (practise religious rituals regularly, infrequently or not at all) there were higher percentages of respondents who agreed with the statement (52.3%, 55.9% and 52.3%, respectively) than there were those who did not (30.3%, 26.8% and 26%, respectively).

Apparently, disengagement from radical or VE ideology is little discussed in Albania's public debate to allow for informed perceptions or attitudes among the public. In fact, an adequate debate on disengagement in Albania is failing to develop also from the community of C/PVE practitioners and other stakeholders. The above results show a general public who tends to be distrustful about chances for disengagement from radical or extremist religious ideologies. Respondents who are more familiar with religious practices and, as a consequence with the process of becoming a religious believer, seem to share the same opinions as the general public. Nevertheless, they are less pessimistic about the disengagement of radicalised believers than they are for violent extremists.

Disengagement from radical and VE ideologies is an ongoing debate in many countries. A number of best practices and well-established experiences are observed worldwide, including in EU countries, about programmes for disengagement from VE ideologies, both religious and non-religious. It is time Albania launched a structured debate and concrete measures to support the creation of disengagement programmes, not only for religious extremist ideologies, but also for other ideologies and forms of violent extremism, especially among youngsters.[95]

V.4.4. Reintegration of former fighters and returnees

Respondents were asked about possible measures that deal with the consequences of VE in Albania. Specifically they were asked about the reintegration of former foreign fighters and other returnees.

Statement:	The return of Albanian citizens who have been an active part of the conflict in Syria presents a threat to society

Nearly 48 percent of Albanians perceive as a threat to society the return of Albanian citizens who have been an active part of the conflict in Syria. Meanwhile, 36.2 percent hold the opposite view, while 5.2 percent consider it irrelevant and another 10.8 percent do not know.

Figure 66. Respondents' opinions on whether returning FFs are a threat to society (%; N = 1,576)
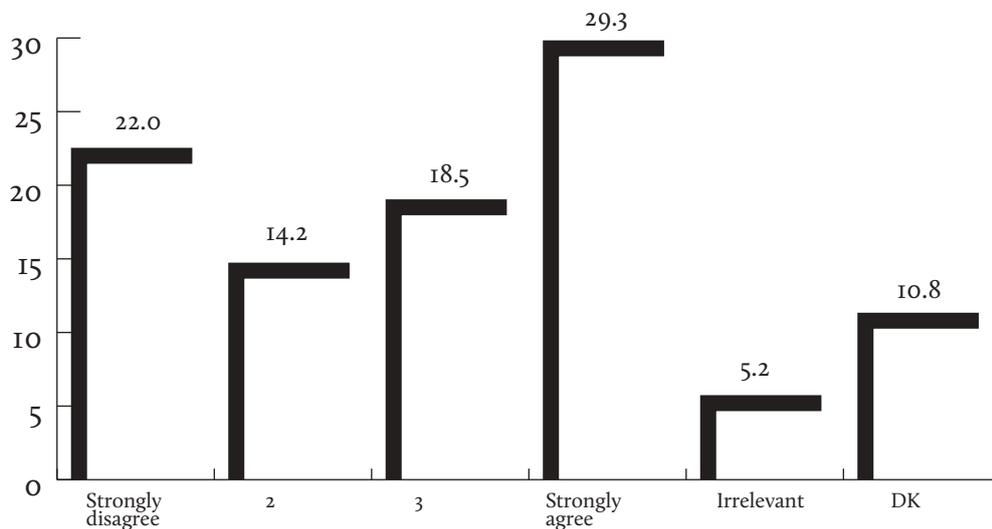
A higher percentage of respondents strongly agreed with the statement (29.3%) than strongly disagreed with it (22%). Major differences in the responses to this question are observed across various demographic categories. The majority of respondents who

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95. The media has reported cases of violence among youngsters that have resulted in tragic deaths. See media report on Durres murder (March 2018) http://www.faktor.al/2018/03/02/durres-vritet-me-thike-ne-zemer-16-vjecari-anxhelo-gjokazaj/ and the most recent case in Mamurras http://www.tiranapost.al/mbreme-u-vra-thike-14-vjecari-ne-mengjes-nje-tjeter-vrasje-ne-mamurras/ (September 2018).

practise regularly religious rituals disagreed with the statement (46.4%) as opposed to only 40.1 percent who agreed. There were fewer respondents who practise the main rituals or do not practise at all who disagreed (37.3% and 31.9%, respectively) and higher percentages that agreed (47.2% and 51.5%, respectively).

Similar percentages of support and disagreement are observed in relation to the next statement of the survey: State agencies should reintegrate only Albanian citizens who have lived in conflict zones abroad but have not committed crimes.

Among survey respondents 36 percent did not support such a differentiated approach in relation to the reintegration of former FFs. Interestingly, this is a similar percentage to those who agreed with the previous statement, that returning foreign fighters pose a threat to the society. This coincidence is observed for the contrary opinion as well. Namely 49.2 percent of respondents agreed that Albania should integrate only citizens who have lived in conflict zones but have not committed crimes, one percent more than the proportion of respondents who saw returning FFs as a threat to society in the previous statement (48%).

Figure 67. Respondents' opinions on whether only those Albanians who have lived in conflict zones but have not committed crimes should be reintegrated (%; N = 1,574)
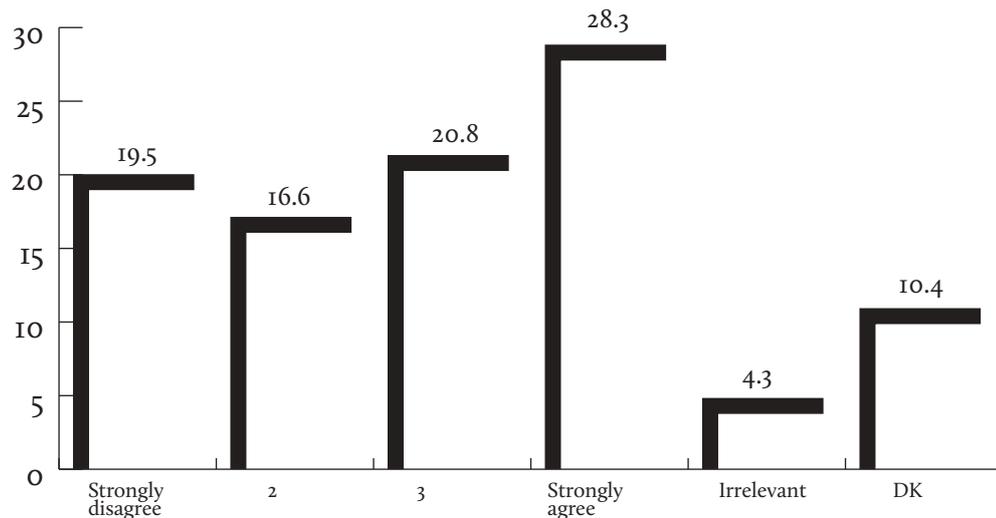
However, Albanians seem to disagree less when asked about the engagement of state agencies to help the return and reintegration of all Albanian citizens engaged in conflicts abroad. According to official sources, nearly half of Albanian citizens who left the country and entered the Syrian conflict between 2012 and 2015 are still in the conflict zones. Namely, 18 Albanian FFs and 55 family members still remain in Syria and Iraq, while 45 citizens have returned and 26 have died in the past few years.[96] Albanian state institutions are currently working with partner countries to ensure the return of Albanian FFs and their family members from conflict zones. Such endeavours seem to have significant public support according to the respondents in the present study though nearly half of them (48%) perceive returning FFs as a threat to society.

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96. European Commission. "Albania 2018 report". p. 36. Source: https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/20180417-albania-report.pdf

Figure 68. Respondents' opinions on whether the state institutions must work to return and reintegrate Albanian citizens engaged in conflicts abroad (%; N = 1,575)
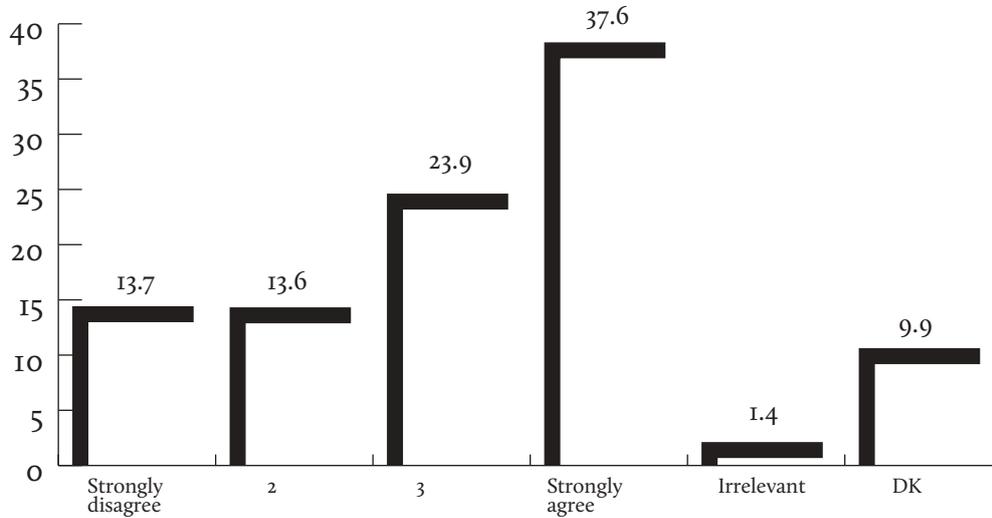
Among respondents, 61.5 percent either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: State institutions must work to return and reintegrate Albanian citizens engaged in conflicts abroad, while less than half this figure (27%) took the opposite view. A higher proportion of respondents practising religion regularly (70%) or mainly (62%) showed support for this statement than did those who do not practise at all (58%). Also, support among respondents with less than eight or nine years of, or no, education at all was even less (42%), while for other categories of respondents the level of agreement was from 60–63.5 percent.

The majority of Albanians have no doubt that state institutions must put efforts into returning and reintegrating nationals engaged in conflicts abroad, though nearly one-half perceived FFs and returnees as a threat to society. In line with the prevalent perceptions on disengagement, nearly half of Albanians believe that state institutions should integrate only FFs and returnees who have not engaged in violence. Respondents who practise religious rituals showed a higher level of support for reintegration. Accordingly, reintegration programmes in Albania have a generally positive support from the public, albeit with a lack of informed debate among C/PVE practitioners.
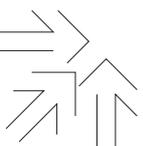
VI. Prevention of violent extremism in Albania—Perceptions, practice and reality

Albania is noted for its tradition of religious tolerance, and religiously motivated violent acts have been virtually absent from the country. Nevertheless, the peaceful coexistence of religious communities in Albania does not mean that religious radicalism and extremism is totally absent.[97] Radicalisation is a truly multi-dimensional phenomenon that emerges from interaction of radical ideologies with social dynamics and is shaped by larger structural factors. A key lesson learnt throughout IDM's nearly four year (2014–2018) engagement in investigating trends, design approaches and implementing of C/PVE platforms is that prevention is a multi-stakeholder and continuous process that needs to gather efforts at the community level. Multi-actor strategies are needed to gradually address the wider social, economic and cultural context that breeds extremist and violent behaviour, especially among the youth. Prevention should combine initiatives from grass-roots communities, local government, public institutions, religious communities, media, civil society organisations and other societal actors.

The present study asked survey respondents a series of questions to gather their viewpoints on the prevention of violent extremism in Albania, upon the resilience factors and who the most important players are with specific roles in prevention of VE. In order to better understand their attitudes towards these questions, respondents were asked to list the three most important factors that enable or encourage religious radicalisation of citizens in Albania.

Table 5 reports the top three factors listed by survey respondents, including poor educational background (67%), economic reasons (61.6%) and poor religious knowledge (40.7%). This finding indicates that the vast majority of Albanians perceive a lack of knowledge—whether educational background or religious information—as the most important enabler of an individual's path towards religious radicalisation. While economic reasons is the second most frequent factor listed by Albanians, survey respondents also emphasised the role of social isolation (36.2%) and the influence of foreign religious radical groups (27%).

Table 5. Respondents' opinions on the main factors that enable or encourage individuals' religious radicalisation

Factor	No. of responses	Percentage of cases
Low education background	1,030	67.0
Economic reasons	947	61.6
Poor religious knowledge	626	40.7
Social isolation	557	36.2

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97. For a recent study on religious tolerance in Albania see "Religious Tolerance in Albania." Tirane, UNDP & IDM, 2018.

Influence of foreign religious radical groups	415	27.0
Criminal past	365	23.7
Incapable state institutions	285	18.5
Incapable religious clerics	230	15.0

Note: This is a multiple response question. Percentages do not add up to 100%. Number of cases = 4,455. Number of responses = 1,538.

Interestingly, while Albanians pointed to 'Incapable religious clerics' the least, this is a credible factor that might contribute to an individual's path of radicalisation, and they most frequently suggest religious stakeholders (institutions or local clerics) as the most important players to prevent the spread of religious extremism in Albania. The main three actors most frequently suggested by the surveyed Albanians (Table 6) include senior leaders of religious communities (41%), the media (37.3%) and local religious clerics (33%). This group of actors is closely followed by central government (26%) and civil society (25.8%).

Question: *In your opinion, who are the three most important actors to prevent the spread of religious extremism in Albania?*

Table 6. Respondents' opinions on the most important actors to prevent the spread of religious extremism in Albania

Actor	No. of responses	Percentage of cases
Senior leaders of religious communities	635	41.0
Media	578	37.3
Local clerics	511	33.0
Central government	403	26.0
Civil society	400	25.8
Social welfare services	370	23.9
Law enforcement institutions	368	23.8
Religious believers	357	23.1
Schools	339	21.9
Local government	336	21.7
Youngsters	196	12.7
Women	56	3.6
Other	13	0.8

Note: This is a multiple response question. Percentages do not add up to 100%. Number of cases = 4,562. Number of responses = 1,548.

The five actors most frequently listed by the Albanians reflect well the reality of awareness raising and VE prevention in the country over the past three years, most often articulated by religious representatives, media outlets (through reporting), central government and civil society. This also explains the often articulated call by C/PVE
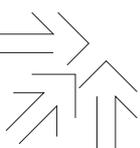
practitioners and experts in Albania that it is high time to move from the national (Tirane-based) level, with centrally driven actions, towards the community level and community-driven measures. Such a shift and the actions to be carried out at this level should involve all local stakeholders, particularly those at the bottom of Table 6—youngsters, women, local government, schools and the broader community of religious believers—along with civil society, religious institutions, media, social welfare service and other central government agencies at local and regional levels. In this context, law enforcement institutions have a good role to play, but as the ranking in Table 6 suggests, their preventative role must come in partnership with local players.

Finally, the present study asked survey respondents about so-called resilience factors. As reported in Table 7 the main factors making individuals resilient to extremist ideologies are interrelated with radicalisation factors as perceived by the majority of Albanians (see above).

Question: *In your opinion, which are the three main factors that make individuals reject religious extremist ideologies?*

Table 7. VE resilience factors

Factor	No. of responses	Percentage of cases
Albanians' culture and tradition of religious tolerance	515	44.8
Close societal relationships, family and community's influence	506	44.0
Education	447	38.9
Good financial and economic situation	311	27.0
State (institutions, reforms, actions)	126	11.0
Fear of consequences	118	10.3
Preparedness of religious clerics	88	7.7
Media	75	6.5
Atheism or religious indifference	59	5.1
Awareness and correct information	53	4.6

Note: This is a multiple response question. Percentages do not add up to 100. Total number of cases = 2,298. Total number of responses = 1,150.

The majority of respondents in the present study believe that societal factors such as norms, intra-community relationships and traditions can have as strong of an influence as resilience factors against VE ideologies. Education (quality, critical thinking) follow in the list as a third factor that can undermine the reach and influence of religious extremists. Although economic reasons are listed as the second most frequently reported factor that enables or encourages individuals' religious radicalisation, a good financial and economic situation for the Albanians as a resilience factor comes fourth (27%) and well ahead of the role of the state institutions (11%). Religious considerations—be it in the form of influence of official religious clerics or the perceived religious indifference—are less frequently reported by survey respondents.

Unlike the perspective of 'dealing with the consequences' through disengagement and reintegration, which seem little known to the public and little treated by C/PVE practitioners, Albanians seem generally more aware and informed about the prevention of violent extremism, factors that lead to radicalisation, resilience factors and players that should assume greater roles. Namely, although economic reasons are still seen as an important factor, the majority of this study's respondents emphasise poor education and poor religious knowledge as an enabler of radicalisation, along with social isolation and foreign radical religious influences. Religious institutions are perceived as the most important player when it comes to prevention of religious extremism. Respondents most frequently list also media, state institutions and civil society PVE stakeholders. Community-level stakeholders—such as local governments, women and youth—seem to have not reached the wider public as a PVE player, reflecting to a large extent also the typology of PVE actions carried out so far, mostly driven by Tirane-based players, state or non-state. Lastly, resilience factors are identified in the societal milieu by the majority of Albanians, including factors such as the tradition of religious tolerance, close community and family ties, which still exert pressure and influence. Again, education and good economic conditions are believed to strengthen resilience from extremist ideologies. Surprisingly, religion-related factors are less frequently reported as resilient. A possible explanation may be that Albanians see limits to the role of religious institutions and knowledge in a predominantly non-religious society. That is to say, whereas adequate capacities of clerics and good religious information may be seen as key (resilience factor) for the communities of religious believers, this may not always be the case for the wider society. Nevertheless, this does not mean that preparedness of religious clerics is less important given the fact that poor religious knowledge is considered a key enabler of radicalisation.

VII. Conclusions and recommendations

VII.1. What drives violent extremism in Albania?

Disillusionment, poor governance and weak rule of law, lack of socio-economic opportunities and marginalisation, are some of the structural factors considered to be conducive to violent extremism according to the UN Secretary-General Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, which was presented to the UN General Assembly in January 2016. The UN plan and the recent global practice of PVE actions also refer to individual factors and processes that play a key role in transforming grievances into violent extremist action, such as individual backgrounds and motivations, collective grievances and victimisation, distortion and misuse of beliefs or leadership and social networks.[98]

The present study finds that Albania's state of democracy and current level of socio-economic development raise concerns and challenges that, in combination with other factors, may threaten specific groups in society through the power of manipulation of extremist ideologies. Violent extremism is enabled, fuelled and shaped by a rich array of factors and drivers, which operate in a particular country context at both the macro (societal) and micro (individual or group) level.[99] A combination of structural and individual factors and other country-specific variables, such as the role of local clerics and their capabilities, generates a variety of pathways and individual processes of radicalisation. This study has evaluated the potential and salience of socio-economic, political and cultural VE drivers and their interplay within and across categories, as well as with other context-specific issues describing or challenging the Albanian current reality.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC DRIVERS – Albania offers an enabling environment for extremist ideologies and VE groups to penetrate local communities and recruit followers. This is particularly true for under-developed areas and the outskirts of the main urban centres where Albanians from different parts of the country have settled over the past quarter of a century. In these areas, lack of cohesive communities is a factor that allows youth, and also individuals facing severe socio-economic concerns, to fall prey to gambling, drugs and dangerous behavior, and so on. Combined with informality, unemployment, poor public services and disillusionment of youngsters, these societal issues represent some of the most common features of areas in Albania where VE groups may encounter a more enabling environment. Socio-economic drivers especially threaten marginalised groups such as the unemployed or youth, who face real or perceived exclusion from economic development opportunities. Religious extremism narratives are less likely to produce VE forms based only on socio-economic drivers. The present study finds that the religiosity of individuals and the existence of a sound family tradition of practising faith, may be associated with higher resilience against the influence of some socio-economic drivers of VE. Similarly, they may lower the chances of embracing religious extremist ideologies that stand in contrast to

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98. Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism: Report of the Secretary-General, A/70/674 (December 24, 2015). Source: http://undocs.org/en/A/70/674

99. See "Religious radicalism and violent extremism in Albania" (IDM 2015, pp. 110–111).

the values of the religious individual's immediate environment: family, social circle and community. Such values pose a barrier for religious extremists to plant seeds of ideologies that confront Albania's (liberal) tradition of practising faith, culture of tolerance and coexistence embodied deeply in the societal dealings and interactions over the centuries.

As in many other countries, radical or extremist religious groups that promise material benefits to their followers are more likely to recruit among young people that are guided by greed. The existence of individuals or groups who incite religious extremism is confirmed by larger percentages than the national average especially in the municipalities of Kruje, Elbasan, Shijak, Durres, Bilisht and Kamez.

In Albania, socio-economic drivers raise some concerns as a potential threat for violent extremism. However, they are unlikely to create a support base for VE ideologies and produce acts of violent extremism without other factors at play.

POLITICAL DRIVERS – This category of VE drivers appears more threatening than the socio-economic drivers, particularly due to the widespread public disillusionment with governance and the judiciary. Similarly, despite being a minority opinion among Albanians, there is perceived discrimination on religious grounds articulated more strongly by practising believers than non-religious Albanians. Corruption, impunity and a dominant belief that the political system is controlled by, and serves only, well-connected elites, are what fuel strong and pervasive disenfranchisement among Albanians regardless of their religiosity. The majority of Albanians, particularly those that are not religious, do not report religious discrimination or ill-treatment due to religious background of citizens by state institutions. Given the challenges to the rule of law and democratic governance in Albania, VE ideologies may penetrate local communities, and their narrative may not necessarily be only religious. The presence of religious extremists and individuals who exert pressure on religious believers to join extremist causes has been confirmed, especially in the municipalities of Shijak, Vore, Elbasan, Vlore, Kruje, Durres, Kavaje and Kamez. In many of these areas, and in other municipalities such as Lezhe, Kukes, Kurbin, Prrenjas, Peqin, Pogradec, Bilisht and Librazhd, the study identified significant percentages of respondents, both religious and non-religious, who show a tendency to favour radical actions or other extremist narratives.

Albanians tend to disagree with global conspiracy ideas such as the narrative that international structures (UN, IMF) are an invention of the West to rule Islamic countries. However, they seem less sceptical about more regional bias, for example that Christian majority countries in the Balkans may enjoy more support from the West than Muslim majority countries. Although these are not predominant attitudes among Albanians, including religious respondents, such perceptions are present more among practising believers. This suggests that VE narratives on global discrimination and threats are less likely to resonate among Albanian religious believers than those that build upon closer realities in the Balkans. There are nearly twice as many Albanians (13%) who believe that law enforcement institutions are harsher with practising Muslims than with practising Christians (7%). More than one-third of Albanians would justify taking the law into their own hands if their rights and freedom were to be denied by state institutions. All survey respondents in Cerrik and Prrenjas, and more than half of respondents in Lezhe, Librazhd, Kurbin, Kamez and Kavaje, supported this statement. The profiles of respondents who show highly concerning attitudes to political drivers most commonly are from rural areas, with lower educational

background (primary or less), men, unemployed and up to 35 years of age. Analysis of political VE drivers shows a fertile ground for non-religious political narratives (e.g. populist or anti-establishment), which may take advantage of the widespread public disenfranchisement and distrust in a governance system perceived to serve only well-connected elites. A combination of VE narratives stemming from political drivers and those that manipulate religious sentiments or inflate perceptions of exclusion, discrimination and ill-treatment due to religious belongingness poses greater threats for religious believers.

CULTURAL DRIVERS – This category of drivers raises concerns for the community of religious believers. Although the majority of Albanians do not recognise the issues that extremist narratives touch upon as relevant for Albania, some may be justified by not a neglectable percentage of religious believers and respondents in their mid-30s to mid-40s. Perceptions that "The West is constantly attacking Islam" are present at high levels in the municipalities of Kavaje (61%), Shijak (40%) and Kamez (34%). Furthermore, one out of five Albanians believe that their faith and religious dignity are under constant pressure and threat. Combining these results with political drivers, such as perceived discrimination or ill-treatment by law enforcement agencies, shows that they can reinforce each other, making the community of religious believers a vulnerable target for VE. Possible synergies between cultural and socio-economic drivers may also lead to radicalisation. This study shows, that categories such as youngsters and members of economically struggling households could be vulnerable to VE, especially when are new to a religion or come from a less religious family. These people are unable to contextualise the claims of religious VE groups, for example because they are less informed and lack a solid tradition of practising faith.

CONTEXT SPECIFIC ISSUES – Albanians are not particularly religious in practice. They show massive support for interfaith tolerance as a societal value and religious coexistence as an established tradition among Albanians. This study confirms the incredible support for religious tolerance, as fewer than one percent of Albanians describe their country today as dominated by religious hatred. Religious institutions are the most trusted national institutions according to the Albanian public. The majority express higher levels of trust in the articulation of religious authority from top–down, though they exhibit more sceptical perceptions of the capabilities and influence of local clerics.

The general public is little informed about issues related to disengagement and reintegration of former extremists, foreign fighters or radicalised persons. The majority of Albanians seem pessimistic about disengagement from radical or extremist religious ideologies, while nearly half consider returnees a threat to society. Nevertheless, the majority believe that state institutions must work to return and reintegrate Albanian citizens engaged in conflicts abroad. The lack of an informed debate among C/PVE practitioners and lack of concrete actions for disengagement and reintegration programmes in the country keeps the public uninformed and often at odds. This is not the case when it comes to general factors, players and measures for preventing violent extremism. The majority of Albanians consider poor education and lack of religious knowledge as two of the main factors enabling radicalisation, along with economic issues. They are informed of PVE players and identify resilience factors in the societal milieu, such as religious tolerance, education and tradition of faith.

RESILIENCE FACTORS – While this study has set out a number of drivers that facilitate VE in the Albanian context, it has also pointed to some factors that create resilience and may counter the effects and risks stemming from various driver categories. First, alert and connected communities are more likely to counteract socio-economic drivers. A family tradition of practising faith and religiosity may also appear as a resilience factor vis-à-vis some negative effects of the socio-economic environment. Second, education appears to be one of the key resilient factors behind political drivers. Third, more open communities that fight back against prejudices and are less affected by misconceptions as regards the practising of religion represent another opportunity for strengthening resilience against political drivers, but also for cultural drivers, of VE. In building such communities not only state institutions and religious actors, but also civil society, the education system and media need to play a key role. Although the public perceptions do not link strongly youngsters and women with the role of an important PVE player at the community level, this should become increasingly a priority in Albania.

For most of the issues analysed in the present study, no major differences were observed between the attitudes and perceptions of men and women, with a few exceptions. Firstly, women tend to show higher resistance than men towards attitudes justifying violence or other illegal actions, while more women than men reject illegal activity for the sake of everyday survival. Also, fewer women support the use of violence to change a political system that is perceived as unfair. Secondly, on a number of sensitive statements (e.g. the West is attacking Islamic countries, presence of VE individuals or groups in their area) more women than men respond with "don't know". Such a finding suggests that the role of women in this context embodies an opportunity and a challenge at the same time. On the one hand they show a higher degree of resilience to violent extremism, but on the other they tend to refrain from commenting on sensitive issues, including the denouncement of extremist individuals in their areas.

VII.2. Extent of religious extremism in Albania

The findings of the present study suggest that the phenomenon of religious extremism is isolated in Albania though still present and potentially threatening. Specifically, one in ten Albanians confirm the presence of extremist individuals in the area in which they live who incite Christian or Islamic extremism, who support religious VE, or who pressurise religious believers into joining extremist causes.

Figure 69. Respondents' opinions on the presence of religious extremist individuals in Albania (%)
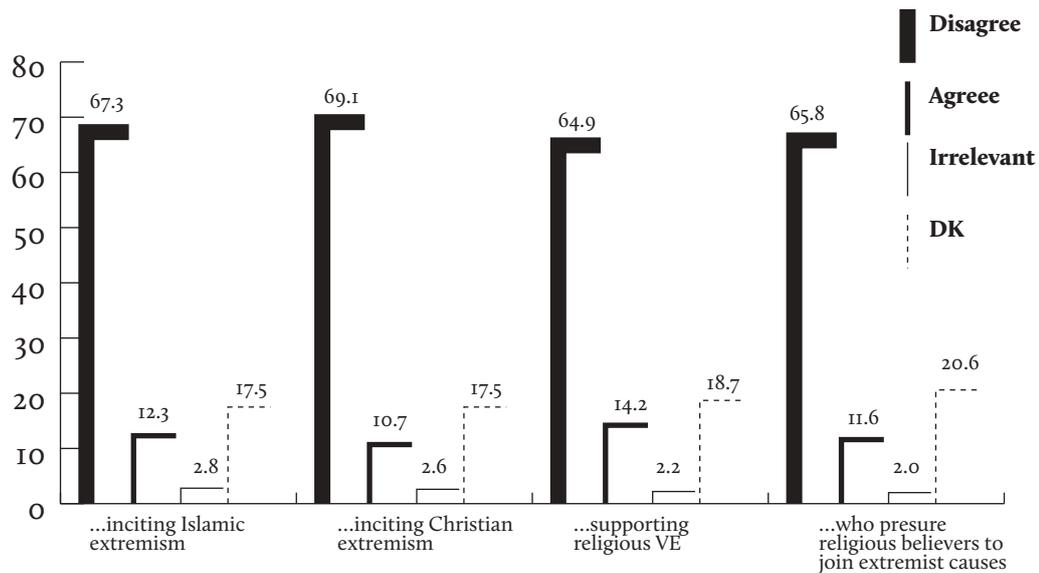
The presence of such individuals is confirmed by approximately similar percentages of Albanians who practise regularly all religious rituals, who practise the main religious rituals and those who do not practise at all. Apparently, vigorous actions and efforts carried out by Albanian C/PVE stakeholders over the past three years have diminished the spread of the phenomenon and some of the forms in which it has been manifested, such as FFs. However, the depth and potential to resurface is still present as the drivers to religious VE still present a threat in some of the areas of the country, while the narratives that would inspire such a phenomenon seem to float between the radical and extremist storylines.

VII.3. Religiosity, religious extremism and the potential for non-religious extremism

Albanians in general lead a secular life and have little information on religions. Only about two in ten Albanians practise regularly all religious rituals and pray regularly every day or week. Generally, religious affiliation is not important for establishing closer relationships. However, nearly one in ten Albanians would object to inter-religious marriage of a family member. Over the past several years, the discourse and actions of many institutional stakeholders, practitioners and researchers have tackled primarily religious extremism by focusing especially on religious misinterpretation or religious extremist ideologies. With too little action and focus on other forms of, or non-religious, ideologies that may potentially inspire violent extremism, sometimes public

perceptions wrongfully identify religiosity as a risk or sign of extremism. The fact that nearly 30 percent of Albanians believe that a beard or a headscarf are signs identifying religious extremists is a primary example.

This study sheds light on the overlooked potential of non-religious violent extremism. Albania faces an even greater challenge in this context. The potential for anti-establishment and populist narratives that may motivate the eruption of such non-religious extremism relies largely upon the socio-economic, and especially the political, drivers. Between one-third and one-half of Albanians would justify actions that transcend the limits of the law. Nearly half perceive that the political system in the country is unfair and must change, even with the use of violence if necessary. More than one-third would justify taking the law into their own hands when their rights and freedoms are denied by the state. A similar proportion would justify any economic activity, even illegal, for the sake of everyday survival. These data speak of the potential for anti-establishment, populist or other political radical narratives to succeed in the Albanian context due to decades-long distrust and dashed hopes that governance and rule of law in Albania will deliver upon. As illustrated in Figure 70, the premises of non-religious extremism have a much higher potential than the confirmed presence of religious extremist elements in today's Albania.

Figure 70. Confirmed presence of religious VE and the potential for non-religious extremist narratives (%)

Legend:
- Potential for non-religious VE
- Presence of religious VE

Political system unfair and must change even with violence if needed, 47.7

Confirm presence of individuals inciting religious extremism (Islamic 12.3% & Christian 10.7%), average 11.5

Confirm presence of individuals who presure religious believers to join extremist causes 11.6

Confirm presence of individuals supporting religious VE, 14.2

People have the right to take law in their hands when rights & freedom are denied by institutions, 35.8

Justify any activity, even illegal for the sake of everyday survival, 36.2

VII.4. The way forward

Over the past three years, Albania has performed well in countering and preventing violent extremism on religious grounds and the spread of extremist narratives at a local and a national level. The sudden departure of more than one hundred Albanians called for a swift response by the authorities. In 2014, a national C/PVE action plan was drafted and implemented that initiated coordinated efforts by state institutions at the central level, religious communities and civil society. Yet, religious extremism remains a phenomenon in the country that poses a potential threat, especially as more concrete

PVE actions are yet to take place at the local level. The present study offers important insights for a better understanding of the drivers of violent extremism, context-specific factors, and at-risk communities, players and factors that may, potentially, transform into strong instruments to boost community resilience against violent extremism.

One in ten Albanians have reported the presence of individuals or groups supporting or inciting religious extremism in their area. According to this study, the most threatening VE drivers that may be used by religious extremists to radicalise believers are those that resonate with religious discrimination, exclusion, prejudices or other narratives that contrast with values of religious freedom, coexistence, equality and inclusiveness. Religious extremist narratives may find more space for promoting their agenda through a combination of political and cultural drivers. Manipulating religious sentiments of religious believers through socio-economic drivers only is less likely to succeed, though it should not be excluded in a societal milieu perceived by some religious believers as discriminating against them.

This study finds that Albania has overlooked the potential for non-religious extremism in the country and has focused mostly on religious extremism. Nearly one third of Albanians would justify illegal means for everyday survival. A similar number would justify taking the law into their hands when rights and freedom are denied by state institutions. Nearly half of Albanians (47.7%) would justify violent means to change a political system that is currently perceived as unfair and serving only well-connected elites. Considering the discontent of many Albanians, anti-establishment, radical or other populist groups may find a breeding ground for their extremist narratives in the population, regardless of their religiosity, and particularly if they manage to relate to political and socio-economic drivers.

Although the following list of recommended priority actions is not exhaustive, it includes the most pressing needs to transform the present C/PVE platform of action centring on religious violent extremism in the country into a sustainable, inclusive and cross-sectoral framework for community resilience against forms and ideologies of violent extremism, whether religious or non-religious:

1. National decision makers should review the current C/PVE strategy and broaden the scope of its action plan to reflect all forms of violent extremism.

2. National authorities, civil society and other C/PVE stakeholders should increase their focus on community resilience. Local government units need to be assisted to tailor community resilience plans that articulate community concerns and rely on the involvement of public, civic and private stakeholders at the local level.

3. Sectoral strategies covering specific issues elaborated across all drivers of VE should integrate measures that address concerns, needs and priorities relevant for the prevention of violent extremism.

4. Prevention actions should be tailored to specific at-risk groups. Instead of working with an approach of 'one size fits all', prevention actions should reflect the vast diversity of at-risk groups and drivers. For example, believers are at risk from religious extremist narratives that aim to manipulate the various factors that make up the cultural and political drivers of VE. Religious believers show more resistance than do other groups to socio-economic drivers. Similarly, this study shows that women reject extremist narratives that justify violence, but they must be empowered to be more vocal against other extremist narratives.

5. High risk geographical areas and neglected extremist narratives must be

prioritised. The long-ignored potential for non-religious extremism requires urgent actions to restore trust in Albania's governance and rule of law, along with a more focused investigation and body of knowledge to develop longer term strategies against populist and other radical political alternatives.

6. Although religious tolerance is a well-founded value in Albanian society, it is important that acceptance and inclusion of practising believers continues to be promoted. Without this, believers might feel ignored and may become more susceptible to religious extremist narratives. Investing in the capacities of religious authorities and encouraging their openness, dialogue and actions would be an effective approach to prevent religious extremism as these authorities are largely trusted by Albanians.

7. The need to establish disengagement and reintegration programmes should no longer be ignored. The majority of Albanians support the return and reintegration of former fighters. However, the lack of an informed debate and concrete actions by C/PVE stakeholders contribute to general confusion on returnees and are a missed opportunity for their constructive reintegration.

8. A stronger voice should be given to community stakeholders and C/PVE capacities and means transferred to stakeholders at the local level to build alert and cohesive communities. Multi-player approaches and models should be encouraged that bring together and coordinate the actions of central and local governments, civil society, religious communities, media, academia, private sector and other stakeholders.

VIII. Appendices

VIII.1. Distribution of survey sample
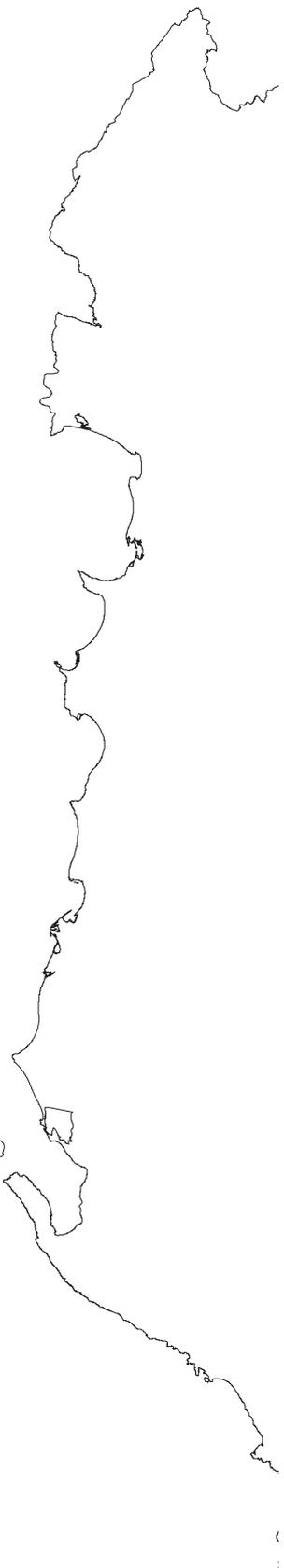
County	Municipality	Number of respondents
Berat	Berat	37
	Kucove	18
	Skrapar	10
	Ura Vajgurore	15
Diber	Bulqize	17
	Diber	34
	Klos	10
	Mat	15
Durres	Durres	102
	Kruje	34
	Shijak	20
Elbasan	Belsh	11
	Cerrik	16
	Elbasan	81
	Gramsh	13
	Librazhd	18
	Peqin	15
	Prrenjas	14
Fier	Divjake	20
	Fier	69
	Lushnje	47
	Mallakaster	15
	Patos	13
	Roskovec	12
Gjirokaster	Gjirokaster	21
	Tepelene	10
Korce	Devoll	15
	Korce	49
	Maliq	23
	Pogradec	36
Kukes	Has	10
	Kukes	27
	Tropoje	11

Lezhe	Kurbin	26
	Lezhe	38
	Mirdite	12
Shkoder	Malesi e Madhe	17
	Puke	10
	Shkoder	77
	Vau i Dejes	18
Tirane	Kamez	61
	Kavaje	23
	Rrogozhine	13
	Tirane	332
	Vore	15
Vlore	Finiq	6
	Konispol	5
	Sarande	12
	Selenice	10
	Vlore	67
12 counties	50 municipalities	Total, 1,600
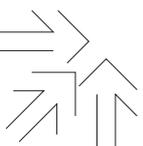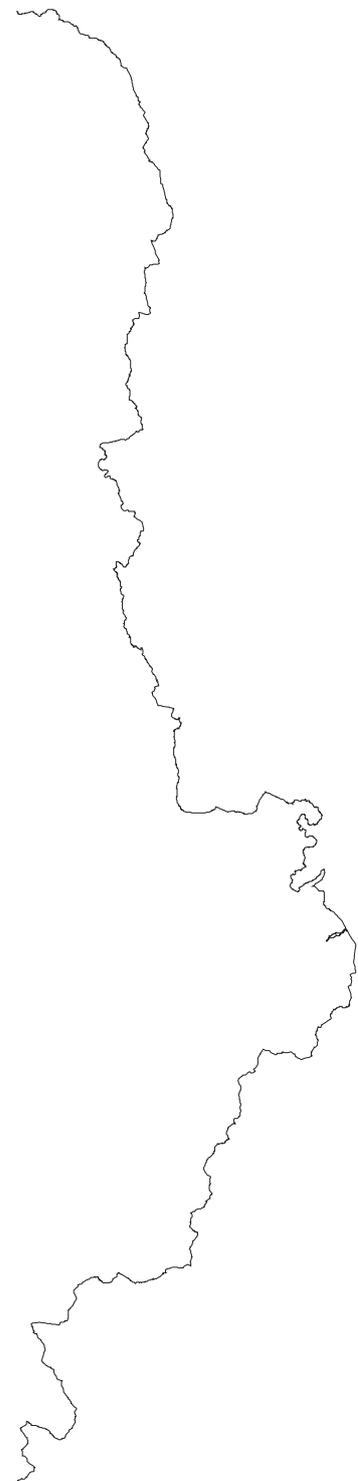
VIII.2. Survey questionnaire

Institute for Democracy and Mediation
Instituti për Demokraci dhe Ndërmjetësim

Institute for Democracy and Mediation

Questionnaire

With support from the US Embassy in Albania, the Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM) is conducting research into religious communities and society in Albania. In this framework, we are implementing this questionnaire with randomly selected citizens. The aim of the survey is to examine surveyed citizens' perceptions and attitudes on faith, relationships within and among various religious communities, and the attitudes of society and institutions towards them.

The study findings will inform policymaking in the country on how to promote religious harmony as a value of Albanian society and to prevent various factors and trends that threaten religious coexistence. There are no direct material benefits to individuals participating in this research.

You can decide not to participate in the interview, or you can tell me that you prefer not to answer a specific question, and I will skip the question. There is no need to answer any question that makes you feel uncomfortable and you should keep in mind that there is no correct or incorrect answer. If you like, you can finish the interview at any time and this will not affect your relationship with IDM or with the project funders.

We guarantee that all the information provided in completing this questionnaire will be kept private and confidential. The only persons who will have access to this information are the researchers for the study. When we present the results of the study, we will not connect your name or personal data with anything that you have said.

If you have any questions about the research, or if problems arise, you may contact IDM at: info@idmalbania.org or tel. 04 24 00 241.

For Interviewer: Enter interview data

Interviewer	Interview No.	Municipality	City/Town	Village

SECTION 1: DEMOGRAPHY

Gender

Male	1
Female	2

Age_____(in years)

What is the highest level of education you have completed?

No education/Less than primary (8- or 9-year cycle)	1
Primary education (8- or 9-year cycle)	2
Secondary education	3
University (BA, BSc)	4
Postgraduate (MA, MSc, PhD)	5
Refused	99

Civil status

Married	1
Cohabitating	2
Single	3
Divorced	4
Widowed	5
Refused	99

Are you currently employed?

Employed	1
Self-employed	2
Unemployed	3
Student	4
Other (specify_____)	5
Refused	99

What is your individual monthly income (net)?

No personal income	1
Up to 20,000 ALL	2
20,001–40,000 ALL	3
40,001–60,000 ALL	4
60,001–100,000 ALL	5
>100,000 ALL	6
Refused	99

What is your family of origin's religious belonging?

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

Do you as an individual belong to the same religion as your family of origin?

Yes, both parents belong to the same religion as mine	1
Yes, one parent	2
No	3
Don't know / refused	99

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 GO TO SECTION 2	4
Refused	99

How often 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)	Refused (99)

SECTION 2: RELIGION, SOCIETY AND SOCIAL-ECONOMIC FACTORS

Considering the community where you live, 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
In the area where I live the family has less control or influence over the behaviour of young people	1	2	3	4	88	99
In the area where I live the behaviour of young people is strongly influenced by the opinion of the community	1	2	3	4	88	99
In the area where I live many young people have fallen prey to gambling, alcohol, drugs or dangerous behaviour (violence, vandalism, etc.)	1	2	3	4	88	99
For the majority of believers I know family has been the main drive for practising religion	1	2	3	4	88	99
The majority of people I know have grown to be believers outside of their social circle	1	2	3	4	88	99
Individuals or groups that incite Christian extremism operate in the area where I live	1	2	3	4	88	99
Individuals or groups that incite Islamic extremism operate in the area where I live	1	2	3	4	88	99

Based on 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			Strongly agree	Irrelevant	Don't know
People with the same religious denomination as me benefit less from opportunities for economic and social development due to our religious belonging	1	2	3	4	88	99
The beard (for men) or headscarf/ burka (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

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
Well-educated job seekers should accept job positions for which they are overqualified	1	2	3	4	88	99
In the area where I live well-educated youth 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
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
In the area were I live there are households or individuals that do not fulfil their basic needs	1	2	3	4	88	99
In the area where I live there are religious groups that offer economic privileges or material gain to those who practise their religion	1	2	3	4	88	99
I would refuse a lawful job or economic earning that is not allowed by my religion	1	2	3	4	88	99
For the sake of everyday survival I would justify every economic activity, including illegal ones	1	2	3	4	88	99
Everyone likes fast wealth creation, regardless of how	1	2	3	4	88	99
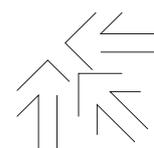
SECTION 3: RELIGION AND (INTER)STATE/POLITICAL FACTORS

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

Statement	Strongly disagree			Strongly agree	Irrelevant	Don't know
In general, citizens' rights and civil liberties are respected by state institutions	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
Law enforcement institutions (police, prosecution, courts) are harsher with practising Muslims	1	2	3	4	88	99
Law enforcement institutions (police, prosecution, courts) are harsher with practising Christians	1	2	3	4	88	99
Sharia law must be allowed for Muslim believers in Albania	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

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 in armed conflicts abroad must not be allowed	1	2	3	4	88	99
Albanian military missions in Afghanistan and Iraq are an insult to Muslims	1	2	3	4	88	99
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
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 monitored by the state	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
State presence as law enforcement authority and as provider of public services is less in rural areas (villages) than in cities and towns	1	2	3	4	88	99
There are individuals supporting VE on religious grounds in the area where I live	1	2	3	4	88	99
In the area where I live there are radical believers who pressurise religious believers to join extremist causes	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

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 West is hostile and constantly attacking Islamic states and culture	1	2	3	4	88	99
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
EU has been unfair with countries in the Balkans with a considerable Muslim population (Albania, Kosovo, BiH, Macedonia)	1	2	3	4	88	99
USA has been unfair with countries in the Balkans with a considerable Muslim population (Albania, Kosovo, BiH, Macedonia)	1	2	3	4	88	99
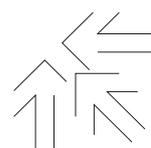
SECTION 4: PRACTICING RELIGION IN ALBANIA

Based on your experience and/or perception, 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 practising Muslim	1	2	3	4	88	99
Nowadays it is difficult to be a practising Christian 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
Traditional Islam in Albania is continuously attacked by extremist groups in the country	1	2	3	4	88	99
Traditional Islam in Albania is continuously attacked by extremist groups outside the country	1	2	3	4	88	99
Religious preaching in Albania should adapt to the modern and Western tendencies of the country	1	2	3	4	88	99
In Albania there are well-organised groups that propagate extremist interpretations of the Islamic faith	1	2	3	4	88	99
In Albania there are well-organised groups that propagate extremist interpretations of the Christian faith	1	2	3	4	88	99
Religious objects (churches, mosques, etc.) built without the permission of the respective religious community should be banned	1	2	3	4	88	99
The positions or stance of the chair of my religious community (in Tirane) 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
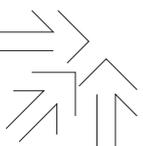
SECTION 5. REINTEGRATION AND PREVENTION

What is your personal attitude towards the following statements? Please use a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree).

Statement	Strongly disagree			Strongly agree	Irrelevant	Don't know
It is impossible to disengage radicalised religious believers from radical religious ideologies	1	2	3	4	88	99
It is impossible to disengage violent extremists from extremist religious ideologies	1	2	3	4	88	99
The return of Albanian citizens who have been an active part of the conflict in Syria represents a threat to society	1	2	3	4	88	99
State agencies should reintegrate only Albanian citizens who have lived in conflict zones abroad but have not committed crimes	1	2	3	4	88	99
State institutions must work to return and reintegrate Albanian citizens engaged in conflicts abroad	1	2	3	4	88	99
Religious knowledge, as an optional curriculum in schools, would reinforce religious tolerance in Albania	1	2	3	4	88	99

What is the religious belonging of most of your social circle?

Same faith as mine	1
Different faith	2
Atheist	3
Mixed (atheists and believers of various religions)	4
Don't know, never thought about it	5
Refused	99

In your opinion is there religious hatred or harmony in Albania?

Please use a scale of 1 to 4, where 1 is Religious hatred and 4 is Religious harmony

Religious hatred			Religious harmony
1	2	3	4
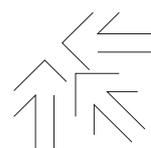
Would you personally support a family member (siblings/children) marrying a person belonging to another religion?

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 practising believer	4
I am not sure	5
Refused	99

In your opinion what are the three main factors that lead to or incite religious radicalisation among individuals in Albania?

Economic (e.g. unemployment, poverty, etc.)	1
Poor education	2
Social exclusion	3
Criminal past (people with criminal records)	4
Incapability of clerics	5
Incapability of state agencies	6
Influence of foreign groups of religious radicals	7
Poor religious knowledge	8
Other (specify:_____)	9
Don't know / Refused	99

In your opinion what are the three main factors that make individuals reject extremist religious ideologies?

_____

_____

_____

In your opinion who are the three most important actors to prevent dissemination of religious extremism in Albania?

Local government	1
Social welfare service	2
Local clerics	3
Senior leaders of religious communities	4
Law enforcement agencies (police, prosecution, courts)	5
Central government (government, ministries)	6
Media	7
Civil society	8
Women	9

Youth	10
Schools	11
Believers	12
Other (specify:_____)	13
Don't know / Refused	99

Thank you

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