



RELIGIOUS RADICALISM
AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM
IN ALBANIA

RELIGIOUS RADICALISM AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN ALBANIA

IDM, TIRANA 2015



Institute for Democracy and Mediation
Instituti për Demokraci dhe Ndërmjetësim

This publication is prepared in the framework of the Project “Preventing religious radicalism among youth” financially supported by the US Embassy in Tirana. The opinions, findings, conclusions and recommendations expressed in the study are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the US Department of State.

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AIC	Albanian Islamic Community
ALL	Albanian Lek
BIRN	Balkan Investigative Reporting Network
DOS	United States Department of State
EC	European Commission
EU	European Union
FFP	Fund for Peace
FH	Freedom House
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GRI	Government Restriction Index
IDM	Institute for Democracy and Mediation
IDRA	Institute for Development and Research Alternatives
INSTAT	Institute of Statistics
ISIS	Islamic State of Syria & Iraq
LSMS	Living Standards Measurement Survey
MES	Ministry of Education and Sports
MOI	Ministry of Interior
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
SCC	State Committee on Cults
SP	State Police
UNODC	United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime
USA	United States of America
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WB	World Bank
WGI	World Governance Indicators

GLOSSARY

Explanatory note: For some of the terms and concepts included in the Glossary there is no broadly accepted definition or a uniform usage of terms, which often creates room for misconceptions. For more details on this discourse please consult "Radicalization Processes Leading to Acts of Terrorism", a report of the European Commission (EC) Expert Group on Violent Radicalization (2008).

BEKTASHISM	Islamic Sufi order (tariqat) founded by Balim Sultan in the 13th century. After the ban of all Sufi orders in Turkey (1925) its headquarters moved to Albania.
GULENISM	Transnational religious and social movement led by Turkish Islamic scholar and preacher Fethullah Gülen, and usually referred to as "Hizmet" (service).
HAJJ	Pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca (Saudi Arabia) which every adult Muslim must make at least once in his / her lifetime. Hajj is one of the 5 duties incumbent on every Muslim: shahādah (Muslim profession of faith); ṣalāt (ritual prayer five times a day); zakāt (alms tax levied to benefit the poor and the needy); and ṣawm (fasting during the month of Ramadan).
HANAFI	One of the four (Hanbali, Maliki and Shafi'i) Sunni schools of Islamic law, founded by Abu Hanifa.
JIHAD	Religious duty of Muslims – "striving in the way of God" (Qur'an). Jihad is often used as "holy war" against unbelievers to spread Islam.
MADRASA	Islamic education institution
RADICALIZATION	Process of developing extremist ideologies and beliefs. Radicalization may be violent or non-violent.
RELIGIOUS RADICALIZATION	Process of developing extremist religious views and beliefs.
SALAFISM	Movement within Islam that takes its name from the term Salaf (predecessors/ancestors) with literalist, strict and puritanical approaches to Islam
SUFISM	The inner, mystical dimension of Islam; A practitioner of such tradition of Islam is referred to as Sufi.
SUNNI MUSLIM	Represent the largest branch of Islam (85-90% of world's Muslim population). The remaining part of the Muslim populations (10-15%) is Shi'a Muslim

**TAKFIRI /
TAKFIRISM**

Takfirism is the tendency, manifested among some Salafist-jihadist formations, to conflate the pronouncement of one's statements and actions as un-Islamic with the accusation of apostasy. A takfiri's mission is to re-create the Caliphate according to a literal interpretation of the Qur'an. At the base of Takfirism (al-manha al-takfiri) is the Arabic word takfir—pronouncing an action or an individual un-Islamic—from the root "kafir". Takfirism may be viewed as the ultimate expression of unconstrained Islamism.

TERRORISM

An intentional act which may seriously damage a country or an international organization, committed with the aim of seriously intimidating a population, unduly compelling a Government or an international organization to perform or abstain from performing any act, seriously destabilizing or destroying fundamental political, constitutional, economic or social structures by means of attacks upon a person's life, attacks upon the physical integrity of a person, kidnapping, hostage-taking, seizure of aircraft or ships, or the manufacture, possession or transport of weapons or explosives. (EU Framework Decision on Combating Terrorism: 2002)

UMMAH

Community of Muslim believers

**VIOLENT
EXTREMISM**

Process of taking radical (political, ideological or religious) views and putting them into violent action

**VIOLENT
RADICALISATION**

The process of embracing opinions, views and ideas which could lead to acts of terrorism (EC:2005 "Terrorist Recruitment: addressing the factors contributing to violent radicalization")

**WAHHABI /
WAHHABISM**

A religious movement of Sunni Islam variously described as "orthodox", "ultraconservative", "austere", "fundamentalist", or "puritanical".

1



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study has collected, generated, and analyzed data on the phenomenon of religious radicalization and violent extremism with the aim of informing policymaking and stakeholders involved in addressing this phenomenon and the challenges interrelated with it. The research methodology approaches the identification and comprehensive analysis of the context by employing a variety of sources to understand the extent and relevance of several factors that enable or fuel religious radicalization and forms of violent extremism. These factors and 'drivers' are often combined with one another and interact with the context through various forms. However, the list of drivers analyzed in this study is not exhaustive, because in different contexts and times the phenomenon of religious radicalization and violent extremism may be fueled by other factors. During the research period (September 2014 – May 2015), a wide range of official, academic and other reliable sources of data was examined. In addition, a considerable number of actors have been involved in the preparatory phase of the study as well as in the fieldwork to generate data and to conduct the survey and interviews with key informants and focus groups. The entire framework of the research methodology, the findings, the conclusions, and the recommendations drawn in this study have been subjected to validation process to ensure quality, objectivity, compliance with the Albanian context, and inclusive approach based on the data.

The IDM study finds that, while religious radicalization in Albania is in its early phase, lack of attention and inclusion in addressing 'push' or enabling factors may serve to aggravate the phenomenon. The study sheds light on the inactivity of most state institutions,

particularly those outside the security domain, and of non-state actors in addressing and preventing religious radicalization. The phenomenon of religious radicalization may be further developed due to the lack of contextual cooperation between non-security state authorities and leaders of religious communities on the prevention of the phenomenon. The religious radical groups' agenda may be facilitated and favored by the inexistence of civil society in remote rural areas creating a big gap with regard to "safeguarding" activities on religious radicalization and violent extremism. The broad support of the communities of religious believers to the liberal tradition of faith, religious institutions, and to the values of religious harmony should not serve as an excuse for state and non-state actors' inactivity. On the other hand, misinterpretation of the phenomenon and minimization of its relevance or its identification with consequences (mainly in the security aspect) lead to the wrong approach and eventual counter-productivity of the effects of institutional response. Religious radicalization (as a process) and violent extremism (as a result) are enabled, fueled and/or shaped by a rich array of factors and drivers, which operate in a particular country context at both macro (societal) and micro (individual / group) level. Some of the main findings of this research include:

SOCIAL-ECONOMIC DRIVERS

- a. Limited access to employment irrespective of good education may serve as a potential driver for radicalization. This sense of relative deprivation and frustrated expectations are experienced by almost half of respondents (49%).

- b. Deprivation of social-economic opportunities is accompanied with the sense of exclusion and discrimination. One out of two (51% of) respondents believes that his/her religious community is not sufficiently represented in politics and state institutions.

Suburban and rural areas show the most concerning indicators on social-economic drivers where groups most vulnerable to radicalization include poor people and families, jobless youth or young people, who believing that they are discriminated because of their faith.

POLITICAL DRIVERS

- a. Impossibility to influence or reform decision-making, which is considered unfair and corrupted, is a strong drive that may push involvement in violent extremism. Some 26% of respondents of this study believe that the political system in Albania is unfair and must be changed even with violence if needed. Also, 47% of respondents believe that the protection of the values and religious dignity by any means within and outside the country's borders is a duty for every believer.
- b. Violence, ill-treatment or prosecution from police or security forces can lead to desire for revenge and support to violent extremism groups. Some 30% of respondents in this study justify vengeance against state institutions in case the latter negate the human rights and liberties.

It is quite disturbing that young people of 18 to 30 years of age (not practicing religion) with incomplete education and unemployed are more inclined to support the use of violence. Guaranteeing of fundamental rights and freedoms and provision of effective opportunities to participate in local or central decision-making are conditions to and serve the enhancement of citizen-state relationship.

CULTURAL DRIVERS

- a. About 1/3 of respondents state that the traditions and dignity of their religious community is under siege and constant threat, whereas the West is seen as hostile to Islamic culture and states. According to the same percentage of interviewees, nowadays it is difficult to be a Muslim actively practicing religion in Albania.
- b. About 12% of the respondents believe that there are individuals who support violent extremism on religious grounds in the area they live.

The categories of citizens most exposed to religious manipulation on attacks against Islamic culture and faith include particularly males of the age group of 31-35 years old, with high school education, practitioners of religion, and who are unemployed.

SPECIFIC DRIVERS FOR ALBANIA

- a. About 28% of respondents appear tolerant to illegal religious objects (churches, mosques). This stance is quite disturbing considering that oftentimes these places have

been reportedly breeding religious extremism.

- b. Nearly 21% of respondents do not believe that the clerics of their community lack appropriate religious education. Due to their daily ties with the community of believers, it is critical that the clerics are educated and trained to persuasively contradict the ideologies of religious extremism groups and to adequately address the believers' concerns.

Based on the analysis of study's findings, the following recommendations elaborate on concrete measures and alternatives to support prevention and addressing of religious radicalization and violent extremism in Albania's context. While these recommendations are intended for three major stakeholders –state institutions, Albanian Islamic Community, and civil society– the study suggests that the responsibility for preventing and addressing religious radicalization and violent extremism must be considered as a broader societal responsibility. Some of the main recommendations of this study include:

- Address the phenomenon of religious radicalism and violent extremism beyond the security sector boundaries by actively involving state institutions and agencies operating in the areas of local governance, education, social affairs and youth, employment, anti-discrimination, etc., as well as other non-state actors, particularly the religious communities and the civil society. The actions and measures undertaken as a response by law enforcement

agencies must be combined with the option of rehabilitation or religious de-radicalization programs in cooperation with the religious communities and civil society.

- Consolidation of the theological level and education of imams, their training on religious radicalization and violent extremism, empowerment of the Council of Theologians and coordinated promotion of its activities with the clerics are some of the measures that improve the developments in the largest religious community in the country. The AIC must continue the efforts initiated in the course of addressing the cases of illegal mosques under an inclusive approach as an alternative to their isolation. It is essential that these efforts enjoy support of other societal actors.
- Civil society must contribute to objecting of ideologies and proactive agendas of radical religious groups by establishing forums in which active opinion makers, religious leaders and theologians take part. Alleviation of perceptions and effects of social exclusion and marginalization, particularly among young jobseekers, may be achieved by means of civil society's initiatives focusing on youth, women, and vulnerable communities. The civil society must engage not only in the identification but also in addressing cases of violation of human rights by state institutions.
- Finally, it is necessary to develop 'tension monitoring' programs and have them implemented

by multi-disciplinary teams with particular focus on the promotion of shared values, objection of extremist ideologies, building of civic and leadership capacities in religious and marginalized communities as well as enhancement of the role of their institutions. Special attention must also be paid to more specific programs that aim at preventing radicalization and at de-radicalizing at individual level. The programs with vulnerable or radicalized individuals must include various forms of mentoring and support, such as provision of safe spaces, psychological counseling, and encouragement of individuals to critical thinking.

The process of assimilation of findings and addressing the recommendations must be guided by an inclusive approach that reflects over the challenges beyond the security sector and strengthens the 'agents of change' at national and local level adjoining most vulnerable communities.

2



INTRODUCTION

A NATO member and EU candidate country, Albania is walking its road towards EU accession by addressing development challenges, strengthening the rule of law, contributing to enhanced regional cooperation in line with European values. Religious harmony has been broadly recognized as a core societal value in Albania where members of Muslim, Catholic, Orthodox and other religious communities have coexisted in peace. With a nearly 2.8 million population, the three largest religious communities in the country are Muslim (56.7%), Catholics (10%) and Orthodox (6.8%) according to the latest Census (2011)¹.

Over the past few years, particularly with the further escalation of the Syrian conflict, the public debate in Albania has been exposed to concepts such as religious radicalization and violent extremism (VE). Various national² or international media reports³ and research studies have confirmed presence of Albanian citizens in the Syrian conflict.⁴ Albania's response to such phenomenon has so far developed mostly through repressive measures with immediate impact outside national borders. Examples of such measures include amendments to the Criminal Code (2014) to allow for the prosecution of individuals participating in armed conflicts abroad, intensification of intelligence and police cooperation with law enforcement agencies in the region; prosecution of a number of individuals recruiting Albanian citizens to join the Syrian conflict etc. On the other hand, state actions so far lack a solid prevention-oriented perspective and approach within national borders. Reported cases of Albanian citizens joining armed conflicts abroad are consequences of a radicalization phenomenon that is taking place in the domestic milieu. They speak of attempts to manipulate with religion

and radicalize believers in the country with a direct influence on the religious communities and the society as a whole.

This research study of the Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM) has a primary focus precisely on this dimension of religious radicalization and violent extremism in Albania. It seeks to identify the root causes, key drivers and risks of potential religious violent extremism and radicalization. It aims to deliver on two fundamental aspects – generating evidence on the phenomenon and elaborating recommendations for prevention. The analysis is context-based and examines relevance, magnitude, inter/linkages and consequences of key drivers by looking at a number of “variables” and indicators such as economic, social, education, cultural, religious, community and state “presence”, etc. Based on this knowledge, IDM study elaborates on possible mechanisms of intervention by acknowledging the roles and responsibilities for state actors and religious communities as well as for other non-state actors, such as civil society, media and academia.

3



METHODOLOGY

The study is designed to bring evidence and data in the context of the policy discourse on religious radicalism and violent extremism in Albania. It applies a comprehensive methodology of gathering, generating (where missing) and analyzing data and evidence, examining the phenomenon in the Albanian context and exposing its features, evaluating its key drivers, the risks and implications associated with the phenomenon. The study looks at the response of the key stakeholders (state, religious communities, civil society, and other non-state actors), how it has developed so far and which direction it should take in the near future. Accordingly, the research has been conducted to respond to the following three key objectives:

- Map the phenomenon of religious radicalization and violent extremisms (VE) in Albania and expose its key features, extent and depth;
- Identify the key drivers and related factors feeding in or enabling (generate and sustain) such phenomenon and analyze risks and implications at societal level;
- Generate evidence-based alternatives for coordinated action between state and non-state actors aiming to prevent religious radicalization and violent extremism.

The study's approach to the analysis of religious radicalization and VE relies on a broadly accepted understanding that in order to comprehend this phenomenon the research must prioritize populations and geographical areas that appear to be particularly vulnerable to VE. Stakeholders and "players" affected by and/or with

influence in the target milieu are also investigated in this study.

GEOGRAPHICAL FOCUS

The research has used official information from law enforcement agencies in the country on potential or actual religious radical activity and media reports (especially on Albanian citizens participating in Syrian conflict) to define in general terms its geographical focus. Four pilot regions (Alb. qark) – Korça, Elbasan, Kukes and Diber – have been selected based on this information.⁵ Subsequent steps of the research's inception phase have defined more specific geographical areas within these qarks under investigation of this study. In accordance with the guidance provided through a theoretical framework of the phenomenon, review of contemporary literature and research methodologies, as well as based on official data and information from primary and secondary sources, a total of eight areas were selected as target zones. They are: Municipalities of Pogradec, Perrenjas, Librazhd, Cerrik, Bulqiza and Kukes, and the communes of Buçimas and Qender-Librazhd.⁶ This specific focus of the study is defined by taking into account the variety of social, economic, cultural and other variables and indicators that are deemed to be representative and also highly relevant for probing into assumptions on reported presence/absence of religious radical activity or VE.

POPULATION TARGET

The research focuses on specific strata of the population – namely youngsters and young families (individuals of

up to 45 years old) who represent a significant part of the overall population in Albania. Additionally, this group represents the most “targeted” age-group in relation to the religious radicalization and VE. Last but not least, as the research examines the role and inter-linkages of a broad range of socio-economic, cultural, political, religious and other variables within targeted geographical areas and population as a whole, the study has investigated more closely the dominant religious community in Albania—namely, the Muslim community.

METHOD

The defined context is investigated by looking at the sources and “push” factors leading to or enabling and fueling religious radicalism and violent extremism in Albania. A general framework of key drivers defined in three categories (socio-economic, political and cultural drivers)⁷ has been reviewed by this study and validated against the local context of Albania. As explained in Chapter 6 of this study, the validation process confirmed the relevance of the categories and of most of key drivers of this framework while it added a new category of “key drivers”, which are specific for the Albanian context.

The study draws conclusions on implications from various drivers and risks for VE and religious radicalization by exploring and evaluating the dynamics and correlations between drivers across the categories. The evaluation of each specific key driver is made through methodological triangulation based on a number of primary and secondary sources, including the review of literature and reports, analysis of legal and policy framework, official data on

socio-economic and other indicators, public perceptions, analysis of direct experience and insights of key informants and focus groups’ participants etc.

Qualitative research instruments were employed in this study to identify features of the phenomenon (Inception Phase), to understand the context and how the phenomenon is translated at local level (extent and depth), to probe into the roles of and expectations from key players as well as to investigate more in-depth findings of the quantitative instruments (see below). Some of these instruments and their respective timeline include:

- Desk research and analysis of sources (eight months)
- Interviews with fifteen key informants at Inception phase from central state agencies, religious institutions, experts and practitioners, investigative journalists etc. (one month)
- Twenty eight interviews with local stakeholders in eight target areas comprising representatives from state institutions, AIC and other stakeholders (two months)
- Four focus groups with a total of 40 participants from areas of Bulqiza, Cerrik, Librazhd (including Commune Qender Librazhd) and Pogradec (one month)

A quantitative research instrument (survey) was designed and implemented over a three-month period to identify perceptions and attitudes of citizens in the targeted areas. The survey was conducted with 800 respondents in eight areas

based on a sample with quota (100 respondents per area) which provides for a 3.45 confidence interval at a 95% confidence level.⁸ The sample for each area included citizens of 18-45 years of age, of whom 50% of the sample randomly selected citizens and the other 50% randomly selected Muslim believers interviewed nearby the premises of mosques.⁹

The questionnaire design underwent strict quality assurance procedures and at its final version included forty seven questions divided in three sections, as follows:

- Section one: Demography and specific questions on respondent's religious background (nine questions);
- Section Two: As the central part of the questionnaire, this section included a total of thirty four statements inter-related to the framework of key VE drivers (one to two "control statement used for each driver);
- Section three: Specific question on attitudes and perceptions on religion and religious VE in Albania (four questions).

A description of the survey instrument as well as detailed findings and methodology are provided in the Appendix section of this study.

4



LITERATURE REVIEW
ON RELIGIOUS
RADICALISM AND VE

4.1. CONCEPTS OF RADICALISM AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM

In the recent years, radicalism and violent extremism have become key words of research studies, media reports, and work of law enforcement agencies of the European countries. Irrespective of their severity and extent of threat to the national security of the countries and the region, a universally accepted definition of the concepts is still to be developed.¹⁰ Beyond the vacuity and confusion characterizing epistemological discourses and theoretical studies in this domain, the lack of specific definitions on these concepts is also linked to the practical problem of identifying and comprehending the posed threat and, therefore, on how to deal with it. Borum (2011) suggests that “governments and organizations responsible for national security should make a concerted effort to define ‘radicalism’ or ‘extremism’ primarily as it relates to strategic outcomes.” In the continuous discourses over terrorism, the terms ‘radical’ and ‘extremist’ are massively used and often interchanged. According to Sedgwick (2010), the term ‘radical’ has become “standard term used to describe what goes on before the bomb goes off.” On the other hand, the term ‘extreme’ in the conventional meaning refers to deviation from the norm, even though this is not enough to define a security threat.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word “extremist” is defined as “a person who holds extreme political or religious views, especially one who advocates illegal, violent, or other extreme action.”¹¹ One meaning of ‘radical’ is “representing or supporting an extreme section of a party”. In this sense, the term may be used as a synonym for ‘extremist,’

and as an antonym for ‘moderate.’ According to Sedgwick (2010), “radical” serves the useful purpose of indicating a relative position on a continuum of organized opinion. Yet, Sedgwick rightfully points out that by this definition it is difficult to differentiate or draw the line between the radical thinking and moderate thinking.¹²

“Radicalization” in the literature can have two types of meaning: narrow and broad. In the narrow meaning of the word, emphasis is put on the active pursuit or acceptance of the use of violence to attain the stated goal. In a broader sense of radicalization, emphasis is placed on the active pursuit or acceptance of far-reaching changes in society, which may or may not constitute a danger to democracy and may or may not involve the threat of or use of violence to attain the stated goals.¹³ Yet, ‘radicalization’ is, in most cases, mistaken for ‘terrorism’. Borum (2011) points out that most people who hold radical ideas do not engage in terrorism and many terrorists—even those who lay claim to a “cause”—are not deeply ideological and may not “radicalize” in any traditional sense. Therefore, narrow focus on the “ideological radicalization” bears the risk of leading to wrong conclusions qualifying radical stances as inherent indicators of terrorism. Radicalizing by developing or adopting extremist beliefs that justify violence is one possible pathway into terrorism involvement, but it is certainly not the only one.¹⁴ Radicalization and

recruitment to terrorism are not confined to one belief system or political persuasion and this is proven by different types of terrorism Europe has experienced in its history.¹⁵ The vast majority of Europeans, irrespective of belief, do not accept extremist ideologies. Even amongst the small number that do, only a few turn to terrorism.¹⁶ Results of surveys conducted by Gallup in 10 different countries show that about 7% of general population sympathize with extremist or 'radical' views, even though most of them do not commit to violence.¹⁷ According to the data analyzed by Atran (2010), a reliable predictor of whether or not someone involves in violent extremism is being a member of an action-oriented group of friends. Involvement in terrorist groups or activities is linked to a variety of reasons. Ideology and action are sometimes interlinked, but not always. It is necessary to understand the differences between radical views per se and violent actions.¹⁸

Various scholars have given different definitions to radicalization. Thus, according to McCauley and Moskalenko (2008) radicalization is "increasing extremity of beliefs, feelings, and behaviors in directions that increasingly justify intergroup violence and demand sacrifice in defense of the ingroup."¹⁹ According to Crosset and Spitaletta (2010), radicalization is "the process by which an individual, group, or mass of people undergo a transformation from participating in the political process via legal means to the use or support of violence for political purposes."²⁰ Wilner and Dubouloz, in a discussion of how homegrown extremism often follows a process of "transformative learning" suggest that "radicalization is a personal process

in which individuals adopt extreme political, social, and/or religious ideals and aspirations, and where the attainment of particular goals justifies the use of indiscriminate violence."²¹

Can all radicalizing processes and extremist beliefs be perceived as a threat to the security of a country or broader and, consequently, deserve the attention and intervention of law enforcement agencies? Is it necessary that institutional intervention be conditioned on the presence of violence revealed in the framework of extremist ideologies and what would be the relevance of these ideologies in the absence of violent actions?

Beyond interpretation of religious doctrines, it is important to bring out into the open the distinctions among radical extremist ideologies so they can be examined in light of what is known, and guide what needs to be known, about the evolution from radicalization to violent extremism.²² Thus, Jordan and Boix suggest several defining elements for Islamist ideologies that might pose a security concern, specifically those that are segregationist or anti-democracy, blame the West for all of Islam's problems, and may support (directly or indirectly) or condone acts of terrorism. According to Borum (2011), "this seems to be a reasonable starting point –at least for Western democratic countries." Yet, he adds that "an even more fundamental issue embedded, but often not discussed, in debate over 'where to draw the line,' is whether—and the extent to which—a distinction exists between the core doctrine of Islam and the interpretations and distortions of Islamic teachings by militant violent extremists."²³ Neuman (2010) states that extremism can be used to refer

to political ideologies that oppose a society's core values and principles. In the context of liberal democracies this could be applied to any ideology that advocates racial or religious supremacy and/or opposes the core principles of democracy and universal human rights. In addition, Neuman points out that the term can also be used to describe the methods through which political actors attempt to realize their aims, that is, by using means that 'show disregard for the life, liberty, and human rights of others.'²⁴ In order to point out the violent consequences of radicalization and differentiate from non-violent forms of radical thinking, some scholars prefer to use "violent radicalization".²⁵

considered a threat to the values of the country's religious harmony and a potential cause for social unrest." Yet, this threat is classified in the second level to the national security. This means that it is little likely to appear, but would have high consequences to the security.²⁹

In addition to the above definitions and others provided by various scholars for 'radicalization' and "violent extremism", similar definitions have also been drawn by law enforcement agencies of European states to facilitate their work in this direction. The Dutch Security Service (AIVD) defines radicalization as "Growing readiness to pursue and/or support—if necessary by undemocratic means—far-reaching changes in society that conflict with, or pose a threat to, the democratic order."²⁶ The Danish Intelligence Service (PET) focuses on "violent radicalization," defining it as "A process by which a person to an increasing extent accepts the use of undemocratic or violent means, including terrorism, in an attempt to reach a specific political/ideological objective."²⁷ The U.K.'s counterterrorism strategy refers to radicalization simply as "the process by which people come to support terrorism and violent extremism and, in some cases, then to join terrorist groups."²⁸

Regardless of the Albanian institutions' lack of a definition on the concept, "the increase of religious radicalization is

4.2. RADICALIZATION AS A PROCESS

Radicalization and violent extremism do not happen in a day. In the past, studies on terrorism tended predominantly to focus on the individual level, assuming that the aberrant behavior so prominently associated with the dramatic consequences of terrorism must reflect some mental or personality abnormality. This line of thinking prompted some clinical explanations for terrorism and a multitude of attempts to identify a unique terrorist profile.³⁰ Nowadays, such assumptions have been abandoned and terrorism is most usefully viewed not as a “condition,” but as a dynamic “process.”³¹ While literature recognizes the concept of ‘self-started or self-controlled radicalization’, which is linked with the personal will and selection of frequenting or refusing certain groups and milieus, most studies and official reports in this field consider radicalization as a continued process of interaction between an individual and external influences, such as propagators and recruiters, actions of public authorities as well as social, political, and economic situations.³²

Researchers and experts of law enforcement agencies of various countries have proposed at least five models according to which the process of radicalization may occur. These models are structured according to continuation of phases, events or issues that may help to understand how various people start to embrace extremist violent ideologies (radicalization), translate them (or not) into justifications or need to use violence and terror, and to choose (or not) to be involved in violent actions and activities performed to

serve these ideologies.³³ According to these models, radicalization may be seen as a “journey” or “psychological transformation” of an individual or group of people and not as a product of a unique decision taken at a certain moment.³⁴ It should be taken into account, however, that research and written studies to date over the process of radicalization are more conceptual rather than empirical.³⁵

One of the most known models of the radicalization process is the one provided by the Police Department of New York, also known as the model of jihadi-Salafi radicalization. According to this model, citizens of Western countries commit to jihadi-Salafi ideology through a process of four distinct phases, which are: 1) Pre-radicalization, which characterizes the period of an individual’s exposure to the jihadi-Salafi ideology; 2) Self-Identification, during which individuals begin to explore and embrace the Salafi line and associate themselves with like-minded individuals and adopt this ideology as their own; 3) Indoctrination is the phase in which an individual progressively intensifies his beliefs, wholly adopts jihadi-Salafi ideology and concludes that the conditions and circumstances exist where action is required to support and further the cause; 4) Jihadization, which is the final phase in which members of the cluster accept their individual duty to participate in jihad and to act on behalf of the cause.³⁶ Precht (2007) has proposed a similar model. According to him, the phases through which radicalization occurs include: 1) Pre-radicalization; 2) Conversion to and identification with radical

Islam; 3) Indoctrination and increased group bonding; and 4) Actual acts of terrorism or planned plots. Precht notes, however, that small group dynamics and identification are often powerful accelerants of commitment to extremist ideology.³⁷

Another model of radicalization as a process is the one proposed by Borum (2003), who describes it as a typical psychological “journey” through which individuals develop and adapt ideologies that justify violent extremism and terrorism.³⁸ According to him, this process goes through four phases. In the first phase, individuals frame the situation as being unsatisfying. Then, the individual starts comparing the situation in which he finds himself with the more favorable circumstances of other individuals/groups and considers this inequity as unfair and unlawful. Some people will blame another group of people for the illegal conditions of their group. This group of people has arrived at the third phase, which refers to holding another group of people responsible and ripping this group off any human values. In the final phase, negative stereotypes of the blamed people start to get shaped. This includes all group members. In this phase, violence is considered to be legitimate, because it is used against an evil group who is responsible for all perceived injustices.

The theory of membership in an extremist group is another model of radicalization as a process proposed by Viktorowicz (2004).³⁹ Although it does not mention at all the term ‘radicalization’ per se, this theory explains that an individual joins an extremist religious group by following a four-step process that involves: 1) cognitive opening, 2) religious seeking, 3) framing, and 4) socialization. The first step, cognitive opening, is

oftentimes a consequence of the crisis of self-identity resulting from some sort of disenfranchisement can leave the person open to new and possibly extremist ideas. The crisis may be triggered by events of various spheres of a person’s life, such as loss of job, experiences of discrimination or victimization. According to the author of this theory, crisis may also precipitate due to talks with member of an extremist religious group. In the second step, religious seeking, the person’s sensitivity is directed to religious faith. This religious seeking and sensitivity make this person inclined to consider world outlooks promoted by extremist groups. Through discourse and exploration of these outlooks, the individual arrives at the third phase– “framing”, during which the worldviews of the radical groups seem to match those of the person. If this is to happen, the radicalized individual must cherish some respect about the religious expertise of the persons promoting this outlook. In the final phase, socialization and membership, the individual joins the group officially, embraces their ideology, and adapts to the group identity. The group’s ideology and identity are maintained through continuous contacts with other group members and, at the same time, by leaving behind the past company. While face-to-face interactions are more powerful, socialization may also occur through the Internet, such as social networks or chat-rooms. In this phase, the group’s ideology has been assimilated and the individual’s identity is reformulated.

In contrast to the above models, which appear in a linear pathway and run through certain phases, Marc Sageman suggests that radicalization emerges from the interplay of four factors.⁴⁰ Three of these ‘prongs’ are considered to be cognitive, and the fourth one is

a situational factor. A cognitive factor that leads to radicalization is the sense of humiliation or moral outrage, which results from the perception of various events as moral violations. A concrete example to this is the reaction to the invasion of Iraq, which, according to intelligence agencies, is considered the “primary recruiting vehicle for violent Islamic extremists”.⁴¹ Another cognitive factor is the frame used to interpret the world. Such frame used by today’s extremists is the West’s “fight against Islam”. The third cognitive factor is the resonance with personal experiences. These experiences include moral violation of an individual, such as discrimination or unemployment. These three factors reinforce one another. Personal experiences of moral outrage make an individual sensitive to discrimination suffered by other people. All these together may strengthen the perception of a conspiracy of a global attack against Islam. In addition to the above factors, Sageman emphasizes that the interaction among people with

similar thinking is crucial for religious radicalization to occur as a process. He calls this group of like-minded people a ‘bunch of guys’ or ‘mobilization through networks’. This last factor serves to validate and reinforce the individual’s ideas and interpretations with other radicalized people.

Lastly, McCauley and Moskaleiko (2008) propose a broad model of key mechanisms of radicalization operating at individual, group, and mass-public levels, concluding that twelve are most prominent. In a nutshell, these mechanisms start with personal victimization, political grievance, etc., and are reinforced by joining a radical group—the slippery slope, and end with martyrdom, which is understood as testimony of the highest loyalty to the cause.⁴²

4.3. FUNDAMENTAL CAUSES OF RADICALIZATION

Literature elaborates a variety of theories that seek to explain the fundamental causes of radicalization. In their report, Crossett and Spitaletta (2010) enlist and summarize sixteen such theories. Borum’s analysis (2011) relies on only three different theories to explain the causes of radicalization, which are: the theory of social movement, social psychology, and conversion theory.

The social movement theory tries overall to explain the reasons of social mobilization, the forms in which it appears and the potential consequences that may come in the societal, cultural, political and economic sphere. According to this theory, ideologies may develop a life of their own that transcends the boundaries of any particular group.

Social psychology theory is primarily

concerned with relationships, influences, conflicts, and transactions among people, and particularly group behavior. Gordon Allport, one of its early pioneers, defined social psychology as “an attempt to understand and explain how the thought, feeling, and behavior of individuals, is influenced by the actual, imagined, or implied presence of others.” Unlike the first theory that has a broader dimension, the social psychology theory brings to the study of radicalization a deep and longstanding focus on intergroup conflict and dynamics. Some of the major contributions of this theory relate to the explanation of extreme attitudes cultivated in the group (“group polarization”), group decision making being often more biased and less rational than individual decision making, group perceptions being colored by group membership often called the “in-group/out-group bias”, groups’ power on internal norms and rules that control member behavior, people joining groups because of perceived incentives and rewards, and individuals feeling less responsible for “group” actions.

The third theory has focused somewhat less on the collective movement and more on the individual process of transforming beliefs and ideologies—often regarded as “conversion”. Conversion research is drawn largely from the disciplines of sociology and psychology of religion and has decades of research beneath it. Lewis Rambo (1993) has developed a seven-component model, which accounts for the fact that each phase or facet is cumulative and can recursively affect the others. The seven “stages” are

- i. Context: comprises the field of environmental factors—cultural, historical, political, social—operating throughout

the conversion process that may accelerate or impede its development;

- ii. Crisis: is a state of personal disequilibrium typically caused by personal or social disruption.
- iii. Quest: often precipitated by a crisis, is a process of seeking solutions or activities to restore equilibrium.
- iv. Encounter: marks the initial contact between a seeker (one engaged in a “quest”) and a spiritual option or proponent of that option.
- v. Interaction: describes the exchange between the seeker and the proponent to develop more information about or introduction to the spiritual option and to other proponents.
- vi. Commitment: involves two important elements, first a decision or series of decisions demonstrating investment or faithfulness to the religion; and second, a promised bond of membership or public statement of faith that solidifies the person’s status (or identity) as a part of the movement.
- vii. Consequences: are the effects of the actions, commitments, and decisions made in service of the belief. They are constantly monitored and evaluated.

Rambo suggests that during these processes, relationships, rituals, rhetoric, and roles interact and reinforce one another. The literature distinguishes between the pushing and pulling factors of radicalization with the aim of identifying various factors that interact in different situations

and the need to better understand their nature and importance. Thus, as an example, contact and association with a charismatic recruiter may influence an individual by pulling him to radicalization and violent extremism. Other factors, such as victimization and experience of violence, including the violence exercised by law enforcement agencies, may make a person vulnerable to “pulling” of violent extremism by pushing him to radicalization and violent acts.⁴³

In a nutshell, there are three main groups of researchers and explanations on factors that affect radicalization and violent extremism. The first group includes researchers that work within the tradition of the French Sociology. Among scholars of this group are Gilles Kepel, Fehrad Khosrokhavar and Oliver Roy, who, in their efforts to explain radicalization in Europe, focus broadly in Islamism as a political, social, and economic phenomenon. They emphasize that radicalization is not just an issue of response to political oppression and economic deprivation. According to them, radicalization happens as a consequence of an individual’s efforts to restore a lost identity in a perceived hostile and confusing world.⁴⁴ This fertile ground for radicalization is created by general social factors, such as globalization and weakening of traditional communities and identities. Other factors include socio-economic marginality, lack or poor education, lack of community solidarity, and societal pressure.⁴⁵ According to the French sociologists, a radical group seems to offer compensation for the sense of missing identity and community and may serve as a means to demand the right to dignity and self-determination – a ‘solution’ embraced by only a small majority of Muslims around the world.⁴⁶

The second group of researchers, who work on the theory of social movement, or ‘theory of network’, support their arguments on factors that appear at group level, such as dynamics and various interactions in social networks. According to these researchers, the essence of radicalization and violent extremism has to do with people you know and associate with – radical ideas are conveyed through social networks, and violent extremism rises among small groups in which connection, group pressure and indoctrination gradually shape an individual’s outlook of the world. As already mentioned above, one of the pioneers of this theory is Viktorowics, who considers radicalization as a process through which extremists views of group members or of an individual on how he sees the world start to coincide and match.⁴⁷ This is also known as ‘contouring’ of personal views in conformity with those of the group. The ‘network theory’ researchers, however, fail to provide empirical data and explain what makes some individuals vulnerable or resistant to violent radicalization in comparison to other people.

The third group of scholars tries to fill in this gap by examining practical case studies, which help to identify various factors that work at individual level. Such factors include the needs, motives, or specific tendencies of any person. While none of the current theories may give an explanation as to what makes some people more sensitive to/protected from radicalization than others, researchers of the third group have given valid empirical explanations on personal reasons of radicalization and violent extremism. Thus, some of the factors that run at individual level include: demand for respect, meaning, stability and societal status, underperformance in school, records

of petty crimes, silent but intensive religious belief, self-isolation and lack of trust in personal abilities to contribute to effective changes through legitimate ways, etc.⁴⁸

It should be pointed out that the above three groups of researchers have the merit of providing highly valid explanations on factors of radicalization, either at macro, medium or micro level. Precht rightfully states in his analysis that "in general, this phenomenon can be viewed as a sociological phenomenon where issues such as belonging, identity, group dynamics, and values are important elements in the transformation process." According to him, religion plays an important role, but for some it rather serves as a vehicle for fulfilling other goals. A common denominator seems to be that the involved persons are at a crossroad in their life and wanting a cause."⁴⁹

This research report of IDM suggests that radicalization should be seen as

a series of diverse processes through which individuals adopt beliefs that justify and propagate violence. It also endeavors to determine ways and how some people with radical views commit or not to violent extremism. This is not a simple task for a study, theory or single discipline. Any serious and useful effort should consider a variety of factors and mechanisms that run at macro (social, political, cultural, etc.), network/group, and micro (individual) level. Development is the right approach, as it sees radicalization as 'a product not of one-time decision, but the final result of a dialectic process that pushes an individual to commit to violence over time.'⁵⁰ It is important that we shape and possess a comprehensive understanding of how this process evolves in an individual as well as within and among various groups so that we are able to develop efficient policies and practices to diminish and prevent spread of radicalization and violent extremism.

4.4. TYPOLOGY OF RADICAL GROUPS

In addition to above, empiricists have contributed to a better understanding of various types of activists that make up radical groups and their different roles. Peter Nesser, one of the early and distinguished researchers with empirical approach to this area, states that socio-economic profiles of the members of these groups are diverse. Based on his work with case studies of a number of terrorist cells uncovered in Europe, Nesser has identified several types of personalities and roles within these groups. According to him, the leader is usually a charismatic and

idealist person, quite interested in politics and with an activist mindset. The protégé (follower) is a young, intelligent, and sometimes educated and well-mannered person, who excels in what he does, professionally, academically, and socially, who admires and looks up the group leader and shares with others his activist mindset. The misfit is someone who performs less well socially, and often has a troubled background as well as a criminal record of light crimes or drug abuse. The drifter is a person who joins a group through social links with

individuals who are directly or indirectly connected with the group. The reasons this person joins a group are diverse and include loyalty to friends, social group pressure, an accidental meeting with a charismatic recruiter, or desire for 'adventure'. There are various motives that have pushed the above people to join a group.⁵¹ According to Nesser, the leader is the key figure and the driving force behind recruitment and radicalization in Europe.⁵²

Likewise, Slooman and Tillie (2006) have provided other details on the profiles, roles, and motives of various members of radical groups. Based on information obtained from interviews on site, these researchers have identified three major paths to radicalization. Thus, certain individuals are radicalized as a result of their efforts to earn respect, stability, and meaning. These people are usually individuals who have performed poorly in schools and have been involved in minor misdemeanors. Belonging to a radical group offers them an inherent meaning and respect by the surrounding environment. To them, the dress and identification as Afghan mujahedeen are something special and are characterized by a subculture characterized by warrior language and war songs. The second motive behind radicalization results from a search of community with which to identify oneself. According to researchers, people who get radicalized for this reason are youth who initially were not sociable and feature a pious lifestyle and a silent but intensive religious belief. These people acquire a sense of social community and acceptance from socialization with a close-knit group of "brothers". Lastly, some people are radicalized because of perceptions of injustice to Muslims in various regions, such as Afghanistan, the Palestinian Territories, etc. It is usually these

people who lead the group from the social and intellectual aspect. The leaders are usually better educated, slightly older, more knowledgeable about religious texts, with good skills of Arabic language, and generally more confident in themselves than the other group members. Leaders are politically and ideologically conscious and they seem to determine the thinking of issues of religion, politics, and use of violence by other members of the group. They decide on what sources should be consulted for a more 'authoritarian' opinion on issues of religion and instruct members of the group to read selected materials that support a more orthodox and violent interpretation of Qur'an. Leaders spend a lot of time criticizing various non-violent interpretations of Qur'an. Unlike other group members, leaders are generally eloquent, coherent, and thoughtful in expressing their views.

Slooman and Tillie emphasize that, while radical group members may not have strong convictions and radical views, they are gradually separated from the society and are isolated within the group. They are often banned from mosques because of fear of spreading their extreme views and are increasingly reducing contacts with people who think differently. This isolation further reinforces their extreme views and the surrounding environment is increasingly seen as corrupt and hostile. According to these scholars, the youth are not radicalized because of imams, parents, internet search or due to their efforts to explore extremist materials and propaganda on their own. Radicalization occurs because of continued interaction with a person having influence over them, such as a charismatic leader, relative or trusted friend and because of increasing isolation from the other part of the society.⁵³

5



RESTORING RELIGION
AND COUNTERING
RADICALIZATION:
ALBANIA'S 25 YEARS

5.1. EMERGENCY NEEDS AND SPONTANEOUS RESPONSE TO UNEXPECTED CHALLENGES

Following a long period of state hostility towards religious communities under communist rule,⁵⁴ the early 1990s' challenge of restoring religious institutions and building communities of believers was immense. Not only the missing infrastructure and property disputes over existing one, but also lack of education institutions and religious personnel posed major difficulties in this path. Faced with severe economic problems and social challenges of the transition period, restoring the "religious believer" was a challenge in itself. On the other hand, already fragile efforts on democratization processes, institution building and rule of law immediately after the fall of communism were additionally hit by Albania's 1997 social unrest, which kept the state a weak player in helping to address religious institutions' challenges throughout the 1990s.

As the dominant religious community in the country, challenges and needs of the Albanian Islamic Community (AIC) were understandably huge. Consequently, many foreign organizations – religious and humanitarian foundations and other actors entered the "scene" in the early 1990s to help religious institutions restore their respective communities of believers, build infrastructure, or provide education for the new generation of religious clerics, mostly abroad. The Kosovo refugee (1998) crises gave an additional boost to the presence of religious foundations in the country among which some were

deemed to have ties with terrorist organizations.⁵⁵ As Albania was still struggling to overcome its "weak state" status, foreign religious organizations remained out of any monitoring or "vetting" process by state authorities and even less, by Albanian religious institutions "in-the-making".⁵⁶ In the subsequent years, AIC faced internal challenges including shortage of resources and "clashes" between the country's Hanafi tradition and Salafi ideologies that were brought by foreign religious foundations and Albanian youngsters (returnees) who were educated in countries like Saudi Arabia and Egypt.

While some minor and isolated events by mid 1990s were already signaling the influence coming from certain foreign religious centers (e.g. incidents in the Commune of Bradashesh in 1994, Commune of Voskopoja in 1996, and in Elbasan Islamic Community in 1997), the state authorities' response was rather weak. The Albanian Islamic Community banned the "El Faruk" school in Cerrik (1994) while continued to struggle with Salafi centers in Elbasan. The first signs of more attentive state approach and response, mostly owing to the cooperation with international partners, followed in the second half of the 1990s and culminated with the arrest of an Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ) cell and closure of a number of Islamic foundations operating in Albania. As the 9/11 terrorist attacks transformed entirely the issue of terrorism – from regional to a global threat – Albanian

state authorities to date have mostly approached the problem reactively rather than through preventive measures.

Accordingly, law enforcement agencies have been the main and only players on the side of state authorities to counter violent extremism (CVE) and religious radicalism over this period. Too little or almost no actions have been undertaken on the prevention side. Despite its great strides, the Albanian Islamic Community has reached only

to modest results in this regard. Civil society discourse and activity on challenges over radicalization or violent extremism based on religious ideologies have been an exception rather than a “conventional” focus. Overall, efforts by state and non-state actors have been a mere “marketing” of country’s religious harmony and far from a structured approach to understand and proactively support factors that enable this value.

5.2. RELIGIOUS RADICALISM IN ALBANIA: SETTINGS OF AN EARLY STAGE PHENOMENON

The value of religious harmony and coexistence has been long taken for granted in Albania. An inclusive and informed public discourse on the relations between the state, religious communities and the society as a whole, as well as on threats to religious coexistence in the country has almost never taken place. On the other hand, the over-medialization of cases of Albanian citizens’ involvement in the Syrian conflict risks harming this value if not accompanied with informed actions by all stakeholders. Most importantly, the religious harmony would be severely hit if religious radicalization or VE are “hidden” from the discourse and from the attention of key players or even worse, if they are identified with “passing symptoms” and dealt within a security perspective only.⁵⁷

While a general perception suggests that radicalization is an isolated

“episode” of Albanian citizens joining the Syrian conflict or limited to the activity of illegal mosques such as ones in Mezez and Tirana’s “Xhamia e Unazes”, the majority of well-informed interviewees (typically experts, practitioners and other representatives from law enforcement agencies, investigative media, academia and think tanks) suggest that religious VE and radicalism at the current stage may be categorized as an “early phase phenomenon”. Few of them argue that Albania is witnessing signs of takfirism while many AIC representatives tend to demote the importance or severity of the phenomenon in Albania. Nevertheless, despite the “early phase” of religious radicalization well informed respondents in the semi-structured interviews suggest that the analysis must also take into consideration the following elements:

1 First: Although Albania belongs to the Hanafi tradition of Islam, a significant part of AIC clerics in mosques come from more conservative schools.⁵⁸ Unlike the majority of these clerics, some have failed to comply with the Hanafi tradition of Islam, thus propagating a stricter tradition. AIC efforts to “align” them have been often undermined by an enduring hidden divergence within AIC.⁵⁹ Many key informants argue that such internal tensions may be used by radical groups to cause a rift among the ummah at local level.

2 Second, while Salafi/Wahhabism cannot be considered a mainstream movement in Albania, not least due to the lack of a theological leader, questioning the AIC authority may well lead to manipulation of the community of ummah. Some of this study’s key informants state that “the existence of illegal mosques and isolated cases of clerics within AIC propagating conservative Islam suggest that ‘questioning AIC authority’ is equipped at least with financial means to do so”. Many of Albanian returnees, who have studied and have been influenced by Salafi/Wahhabi ideologies, have benefited from the (financial) support of foreign religious foundations not only during their studies but also upon their return to Albania.⁶⁰

3 Third, interviews with key informants confirm the fact that conservative tradition of Islam does not enjoy broad support by the Muslim community of believers. However, isolating (especially by local clerics of) individuals who adhere to conservative tradition of Islam is counterproductive. This has often led to further radicalization of these individuals. Given the fact that they are part of the Muslim community visiting the same (legitimate) religious institutions, their isolation may often

results in tensions with more liberal members of the ummah or even with other religious communities.⁶¹

4 Fourth, while AIC claims full control over the religious education institutions (madrasas) and mosques under its authority, experts suggest that the question remains still open for religious facilities outside AIC authority. The lack of resources for AIC institutions in peripheral areas of the country may be used by radical groups to deploy their influence among the ummah, often through religious or vocational training courses.

5 Fifth, inactivity of state “non-security” institutions in cooperating more closely with AIC to address the various concerns of the Muslim community may serve to radical groups’ expansion at the expense of public trust in a “State-AIC” partnership or state’s “responsiveness” and “fairness” towards the largest religious community in the country. Some preconditions of such scenario are also confirmed by this study’s survey with citizens.

6 Last but not least important, the in-existent civil society (in remote areas) or lack of concrete actions on poverty, youth and community concerns has left behind a huge gap and created more space for (religious) radicalization. Even beyond these areas, civil society has never encouraged an open and evidence-based public discourse even on positive values and realities, such as the lack of public support to conservative Islam in the country. Other religious values or traditions have not been discussed and promoted, not least to address public misperceptions on specific behaviors and religious rituals (such as Hajj or other duties) which may fuel the rise of Islamophobia.

Considering the complexity of root causes, influencing developments and

drivers to religious radicalization and VE, addressing the phenomenon and its prevention calls for coordinated actions by a multiplicity of stakeholders.

However, the approach and actions (or lack thereof) of the key players over the past years in Albania do not reflect such understanding.

5.3. KEY PLAYERS' RESPONSE TO RELIGIOUS RADICALIZATION: INACTIVITY AMID CONFUSION?

Since the escalation of the Syrian conflict (2011-2012) international media has reported on foreign citizens joining the conflict. In November and December 2012, the media reported on the first victims from Albania fighting in Syria,⁶² while the number of such reports on Albanian victims or citizens joining the conflict has increased in the second half of 2013.⁶³ Nevertheless, almost all key societal stakeholders in the country – state institutions, AIC, civil society etc. – were initially caught unprepared by these developments and their dynamics. As greater sensitivity was subsequently developed, many of the key players often identified these developments with a strictly security or rule of law challenge, thus failing to develop a more proactive approach towards religious radicalization within a broader societal context.

STATE:

It is only in late 2013 and early 2014 that the public debate on this issue intensified and the actions of state (mostly security) authorities further evolved. In July 2014, the Albanian Parliament introduced amendments to the Criminal Code referring to acts

of involvement in military actions in a foreign country. As explained in a report of the Parliamentary Committee of National Security, the amendments aimed to address this concern and prevent further development of the phenomenon.⁶⁴ However, state response has been limited to law enforcement agencies mostly through retroactive and coercive measures. Other state institutions, which should have engaged in preventive measures, include ministries (e.g. Ministry of Education and Sports, Ministry of Social Welfare), state inspectorates and services (e.g. Education Inspectorate, National Employment Service etc.), local governments, regional education directorates and others. Several interviews with representatives of these institutions suggest that radicalism or violent extremism on religious grounds has not been in the focus of their work.⁶⁵

AIC (ALBANIAN ISLAMIC COMMUNITY):

Key informants in Tirana and experts interviewed by this study suggest that AIC, too, was caught unprepared, but mostly in terms of “how to react” given the fact that it was fully aware of

certain developments, such as illegal mosques. While AIC has been active in heralding messages discouraging Albanians' involvement in the Syrian conflict, the study's key informants suggest that this should have been accompanied with more vibrant actions. Such actions include not only closer work with state authorities and the ummah (within and outside formal AIC structures) but also explaining to Muslim believers why such developments and tendencies are not in line with the Hanafi tradition and values. Making full use of AIC's Council of Theologians to help imams at local level or encouraging successful clerics to share their experience with other peers and more broadly with the ummah are some of the "missed steps" suggested by experts. Additionally, as the Prosecution has initiated criminal prosecution against clerics of an illegal mosque, it remains unclear why AIC has not identified and reported such illegal institutions and activity within its own community earlier than 2014.⁶⁶ Furthermore, Article 3 point f) of the Agreement between the State and AIC stipulates that in such an event the latter should inform relevant state authorities.⁶⁷

STATE COMMITTEE ON CULTS (SCC):

According to the Agreement between the State and AIC, the State is represented by SCC in the relationship with the Albanian Islamic Community (Article 6). The Hanafi tradition of AIC is referred to in Article 2 of the Agreement while Article 3, point f) guarantees AIC actions against "deformations and extremist tendencies". SCC is, therefore, recognized to play an active role under this Agreement as a State representative to safeguard and develop relations between the State and AIC. However, some

key informants argue that SCC has failed in encouraging a proactive and cooperative approach between religious institutions and state authorities not only in the light of recent events (Albanian citizens joining the Syrian conflict) but also in view of other developments involving or impacting AIC (e.g. illegal mosques, education of clerics abroad). On the other hand, the majority of key informants emphasize that it is not only the sensitivity of such developments which require, above all, a more active AIC, but also SCC's lack of resources, capacities and even unclear mandate that limit this institution to mediate or to assume a proactive role.

CIVIL SOCIETY:

Civil society has been almost inexistent in encouraging or actually developing an informed discourse on the radicalization tendencies, Islamophobia and other religious developments in the country. "Digging deeper" in the broader context of issues related to violent extremism, religious radicalism and other disturbing tendencies (including cases of Albanians joining armed conflicts abroad), encouraging an evidence-based discourse on prevention needs and mechanisms has never reached civil society agenda in the past. As a predominantly donor-driven sector, civil society organizations and other independent research entities have only recently expressed interest and raised religious radicalization concerns with few donors.⁶⁸ Yet, except for a few initiatives, which have employed a cooperative approach with religious institutions on various relevant issues, other civil society attempts have targeted religious institutions and other players in this domain as a remote target audience.

The challenge of addressing religious radicalization and designing efficient CVE mechanisms requires the lead of specific institutions and openness on the side of certain other players. It undoubtedly urges for the active involvement of all societal actors embarking on informed discourse to reach at context-relevant alternatives and processes with sustained impact. Understanding the “vulnerable” areas – social, economic and the dynamics of other challenges at local level – is a first step to and key precondition for such informed discourse, for the mapping of relevant VE drivers and for the evaluation of their relevance and magnitude.

The following chapters of this study elaborate on the relevance and salience of key drivers for religious radicalization and VE in the eight targeted areas investigated by this project. In doing so, the research considers a number of relevant sources and data related to a rich array of variables and indicators gathered through qualitative analysis and quantitative research instruments as elaborated in the Methodology section.

6



ASSESSMENT
OF ENABLING
FACTORS FOR
RADICALIZATION
AND KEY DRIVERS
OF VIOLENT
EXTREMISM

This study investigates radicalization as a series of diverse processes through which individuals adopt beliefs that justify and propagate violence. VE Drivers are not limited to specific factors but they also include the social processes, personal relationships, and group dynamics that facilitate involvement in VE activities. Religious radicalization (as a process) and violent extremism (as a result) are enabled, fueled and/or shaped by a rich array of factors and drivers, which operate in a particular country context at both macro (societal) and micro (individual / group) level. Most commonly, the influence such factors generate is complex and interlinked, while the result does not always reach at VE levels despite the high potential to do so. Therefore, investigating the phenomenon in a given socio-economic and political environment and tracing its root causes and sources should take into consideration not simply individualized drivers and their salience but also the dynamics of interactions, how and why their influence is materialized into religious radicalism and VE in a specific context, as well as why the same or other push factors' interlinkages appear less threatening in a different region.

Such approach and understanding have guided the identification of a framework of violent extremism drivers, which serve the study to comprehend the phenomenon, particularly from a prevention-wise perspective. Based on the assumption that there can be no general (global) theory about why and how the turn to VE occurs, the study looks at the local context. Hence, a relevance-check of the identified VE drivers' framework was carried out in view of Albania's context and the overarching characteristics of the religious radicalization and VE phenomenon in the country

through validation processes and contextualization tools.

The study employs the framework of drivers developed by Guilain Denoeux and Lynn Carter (2009)⁶⁹ who identify three different categories of drivers of violent extremism: socioeconomic (six drivers), political (eleven drivers) and cultural (three drivers). As the authors suggest, "these drivers do not represent an exhaustive list, but the literature on VE reveals that they often play a prominent role". Additionally, the Guide to the Drivers of Violent Extremism suggests that VE must be seen in the context and, therefore, the Inception Phase of IDM's study went through a careful review of the framework of VE drivers.⁷⁰

As a result, the research disqualified three political drivers (out of eleven) which, according to the context analysis and insights of key informants (Inception Phase), were suggested as irrelevant for nowadays' Albania. These drivers, as described by G. Denoeux and L. Carter (2009) include:

1. Local Conflicts

Description: "Local conflicts of sufficient scale can create chaos, incapacitate government institutions, and result in a power vacuum to be exploited by VE organizations. VE groups will try to co-opt one side in a conflict and will try to impose their transnational.

2. State support

Description: "Host governments and foreign states—or groups/individuals within— have often supported VE movements, only to later lose control over them."

3. Discredited governments and missing or co-opted legal oppositions

Description: *When a regime is entirely discredited, and there is no viable opposition, those who wish to oppose the government and bring about reform will be pushed outside normal political channels and may support VE groups.*

For another two of political drivers category this study's Inception Phase concluded that there is no direct relevance for the country context (inward). However, the research established that some of the motives of religious radical activity (manifested through cases of Albanian citizens joining armed conflicts abroad) were linked with perceptions on these factors / drivers outside country's borders, as follow (G. Denoeux and L. Carter: 2009):

1. Foreign occupation

Description: *"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."*

2. Political and/or military encroachment

Description: *"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."*

Lastly, based on the findings of the inception phase investigating the overarching characteristics of religious radicalization phenomenon in Albania, the framework of drivers used by this study defined and incorporated a new (fourth) category of potential VE drivers, which are specific for the Albanian context. This category of drivers was introduced in order to probe into the findings of the Inception Phase, whereas a significant number of key informants reported fears over a degree of detachment and a certain gap between (legal) religious institutions and with their community of believers. This category of drivers is investigated in order to evaluate the degree to which various developments and concerns related to religious institutions' activity provide for an enabling environment for radicalization.

As a result this study's framework of religious radicalization & VE drivers is composed of four categories with a total of twenty one drivers, as shown in the following table.

Table 1: Matrix of VE drivers

SOCIO-ECONOMIC DRIVERS	
Perceptions of social exclusion & marginality	Social networks and group dynamics
Societal discrimination	Unmet social and economic needs
Frustrated expectations & relative deprivation	Greed or the proliferation of illegal economic activities

CULTURAL DRIVERS	
Islam under siege	"Proactive" religious agendas
Broader cultural threats	

POTENTIAL VE DRIVERS SPECIFIC FOR ALBANIA	
Tolerance of illegal religious institutions (legitimacy)	Level of preparedness of local clerics
Disputed authority of Albania's religious institutions	(Lack of) Influence of local clerics

POLITICAL DRIVERS	
Denial of political rights and civil liberties	Endemic corruption & impunity for well-connected elites
Harsh government repression & gross HR violations	Poorly governed or ungoverned areas
Foreign occupation	Intimidation or coercion by VE groups
Political and/or military encroachment	Perception that the int. system is fundamentally unfair & hostile to Muslim societies / peoples

(Source: Guilain Denoeux and Lynn Carter: 2009 and IDM: 2015)

As the subsequent sections elaborate on each category and drivers individually in view of significance, context, and degree of risk, their assessment relies

on methodological triangulation of sources and data, including:

- Context analysis and official data on the profile of target

- areas and resident population
- IDM survey with citizens and community of believers in the target areas⁷¹
- Validated information and findings generated through structured interviews and focus groups⁷²
- Review of literature, reports, legal and policy framework and other secondary sources

At least two sources of information are used to elaborate on a specific key driver, while the analysis on VE and religious radicalization explores the dynamics and correlations between drivers across the categories.

One of the sources and data IDM has generated to understand and/or evaluate each specific VE driver is the survey conducted in all eight areas with randomly selected citizens (50%

of the sample) and with members of the community of Muslim believers.⁷³ A brief description of the survey respondents' demography is provided below.⁷⁴

WHO ARE IDM SURVEY'S RESPONDENTS?

The majority of surveyed respondents are males (59%), while female are represented at 41% of the sample. With the exception of "18-25 years old" respondents, who represent 31% of the sample, the remaining age-groups stand at 15% to 20% level.

Almost half of respondents reported that have completed high school as the highest education level and another 29.29% university or post-graduate studies.

Figure 1. Age groups [Source: IDM survey 2015]

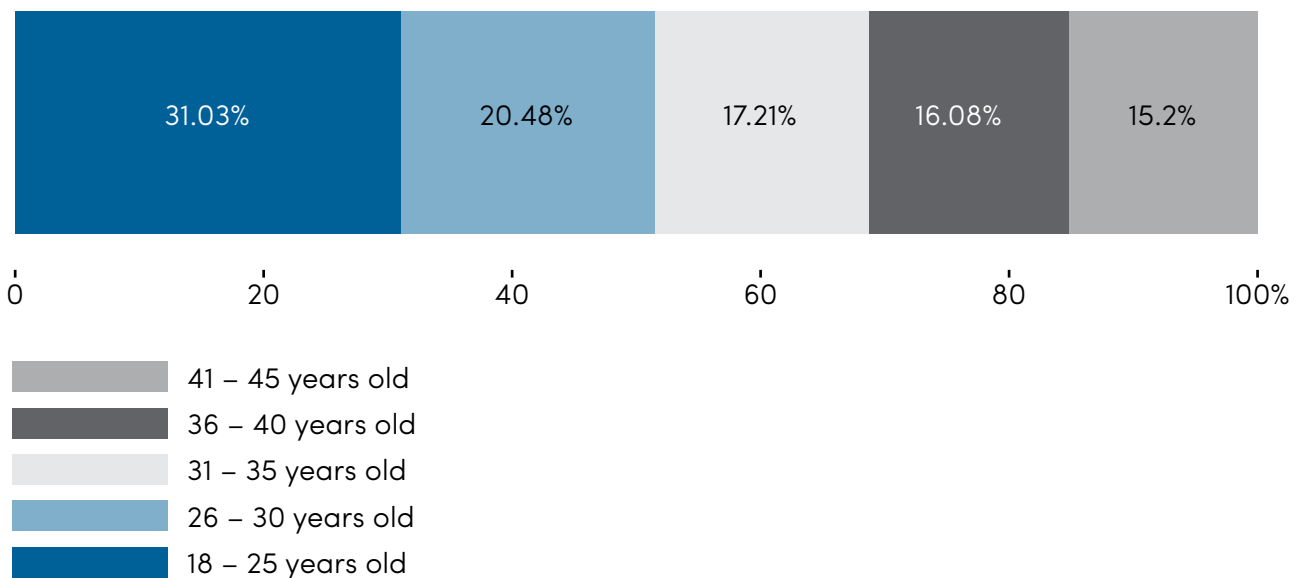
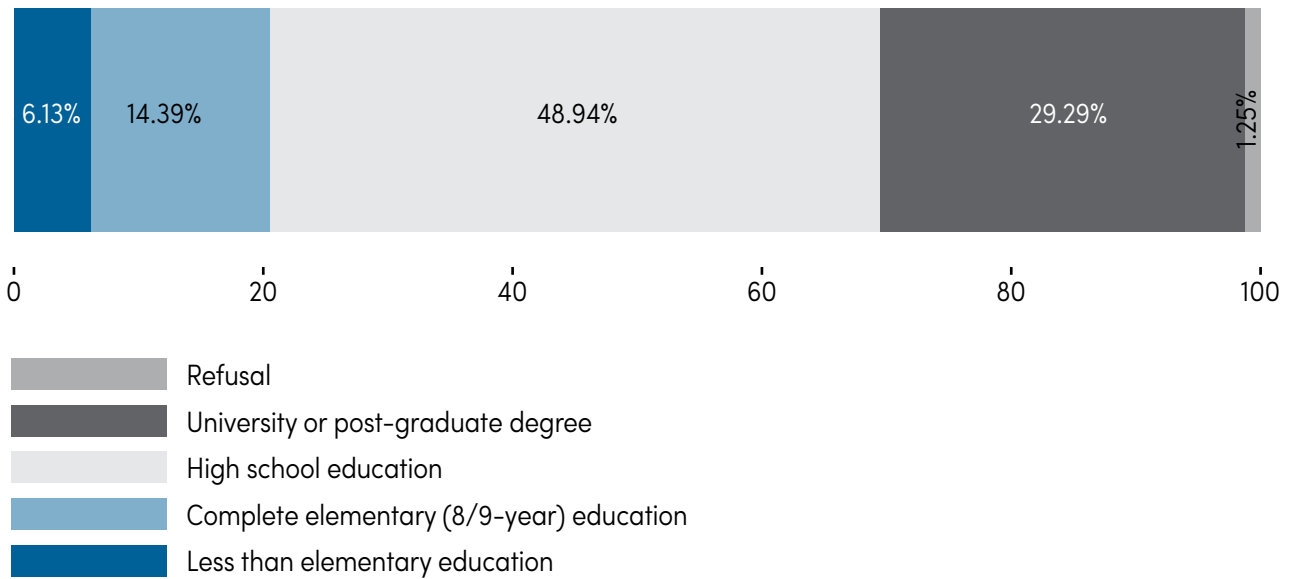


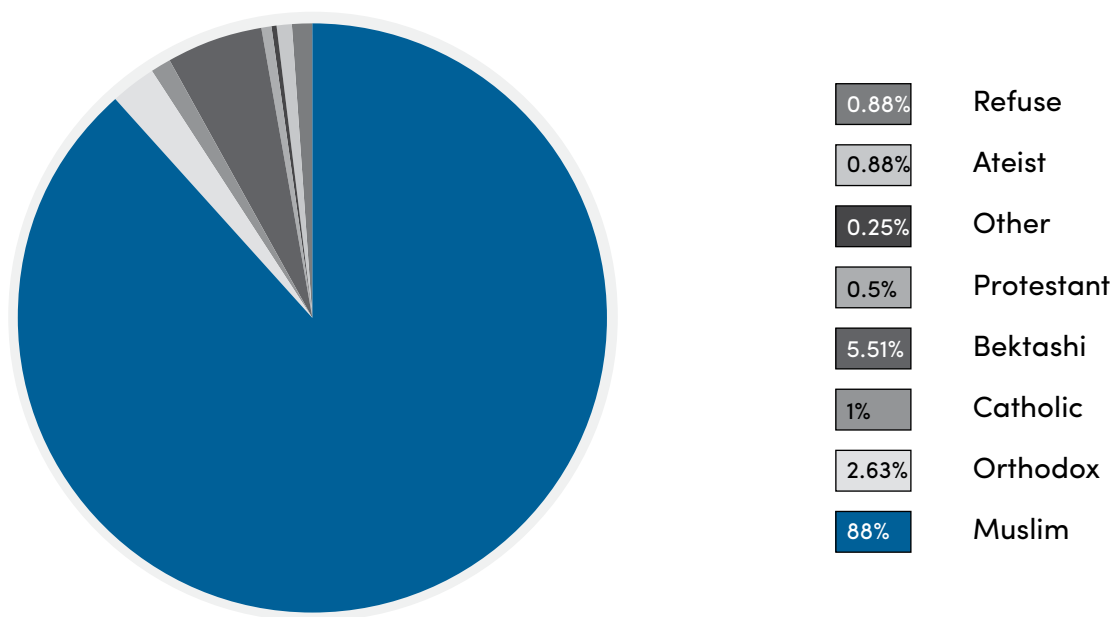
Figure 2. Education [Source: IDM survey 2015]



As the survey targeted members of the ummah at 50% and another 50% of the sample randomly selected citizens, the majority of respondents from the latter

category have reported to be Muslim. As a consequence, 88% of the total sample is composed of respondents of Muslim religious background.

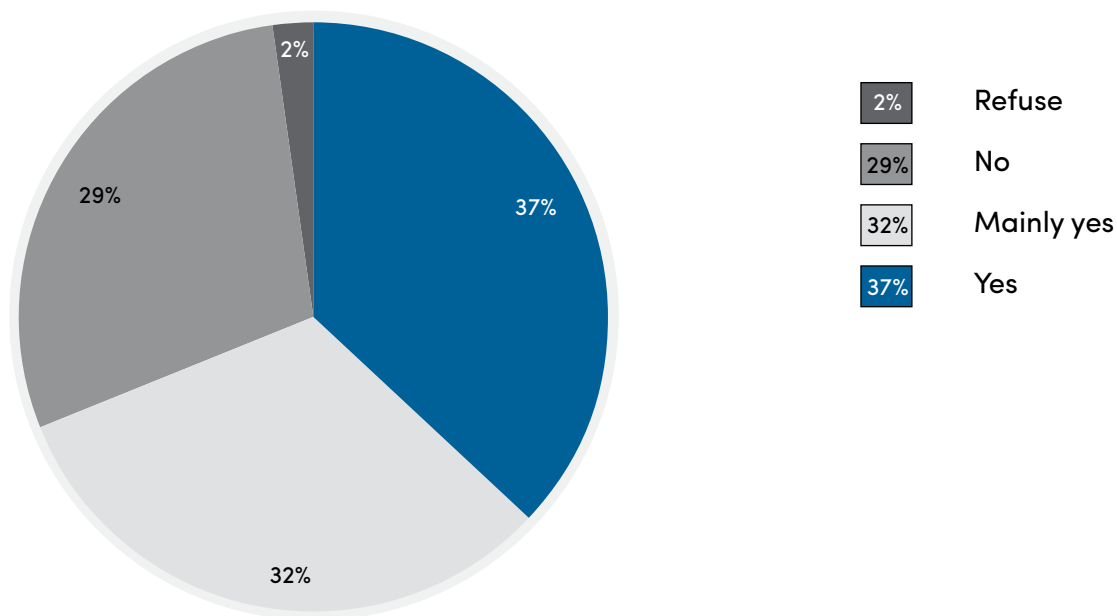
Figure 3. Religious background [Source: IDM survey 2015]



Asked whether their personal religious affiliation is the same as their parents' (both or at least one of them) 95% of respondents confirm this fact. Another 4% says their religious affiliation is different from their parents' and another 1% of respondents refuse or don't know.

Nevertheless, not all respondents are regularly practicing their faith. Asked whether they are "actively practicing their religion", 37% confirm "regular practice of all religious rituals and rules", 32% "practice the main religious rituals" and another 29% "do not practice religious rituals and rules". See Figure 4 below.

Figure 4. Practicing religion [Source: IDM survey 2015]



6.1. SOCIO-ECONOMIC DRIVERS

The chapter of literature review emphasized that various social processes are critical to the facilitation, prevention, or protection of individuals from recruitment by radical and violent extremist groups or their support by community. Such processes may be of a broad nature, such as fragmentation of society, marginalization of

certain groups, social discrimination, frustrations due to unmet expectations, deprivation of economic and social rights, blooming of illegal economic activities associated with greed for and acceptance of easy and illegal income.⁷⁵

From a narrower perspective, such

critical processes may include the dynamics developing within various social groups. During the fieldwork, all these socio-economic drivers have been taken into consideration in order to understand their significance and presence in the targeted areas as well as the threat they pose to these communities in terms of vulnerability to and support for radical religious groups and violent extremism.

With a population of about 2.8 million inhabitants, Albania presents diverse socio-economic indicators that significantly differ among various regions of the country. In particular,

the mountainous and rural areas mark the lowest figures of socio-economic development. Challenges related to social inclusion are intimately linked to Albania's longer-term economic and social development goals.⁷⁶ In year 2013, the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita was 471 thousand Albanian Lek (ALL). Expressed by the Purchasing Power Standard, it is one third of the average of GDP per capita of the European Union countries.⁷⁷ The overall unemployment rate in the country during 2014 was estimated to be around 17.9 % and 32.5 % among the youth (of 15-29 years of age).⁷⁸

Table 2. Category of socio-economic drivers

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

DRIVER	DESCRIPTION
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: Guilain Denoeux and Lynn Carter (2009) ⁷⁹

The following section reviews the findings obtained from primary and secondary sources on each of the above drivers.

6.1.1. 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.” ⁸⁰

According to the European Commission, 'social exclusion is a process whereby certain individuals are pushed to the edge of society and prevented from participating fully by virtue of their poverty or lack of basic competencies and lifelong learning opportunities, or as a result of discrimination.'⁸¹ The concept of social exclusion reflects the level of (un)met needs of individuals in the society. These needs are not only economic, but also social, cultural, and political.⁸² This concept shows how important it is to focus in the social exclusion in comparison to the sole concept of poverty, (which is one of its dimensions), also for the reason that social exclusion is stimulated by more factors.⁸³ With regard to poverty level in the country, the latest data have been obtained from the Living Standard Measurement Survey of 2012. According to the survey and in consideration of consumption estimates, 14.3% of the general population is considered poor and 2.3% extremely poor.⁸⁴ In this aspect, the poorest areas are the coastal and mountainous rural areas.⁸⁵ Social exclusion is also aggravated by problems related with the social protection of vulnerable groups, access to equal opportunities and protection from discriminatory acts. Statistical data on the living standards in Albania reveal social groups living in poverty and exposed to social exclusion. These groups include women and children, the elderly, disabled people, victims of human trafficking and domestic violence, and the marginalized minorities, such as Roma and Egyptians.⁸⁶ To alleviate social exclusion for these groups, cross-cutting state policies recapped in a national strategy on social inclusion and protection (2014-2020) are envisaged. The preparation of this strategy is under way.⁸⁷

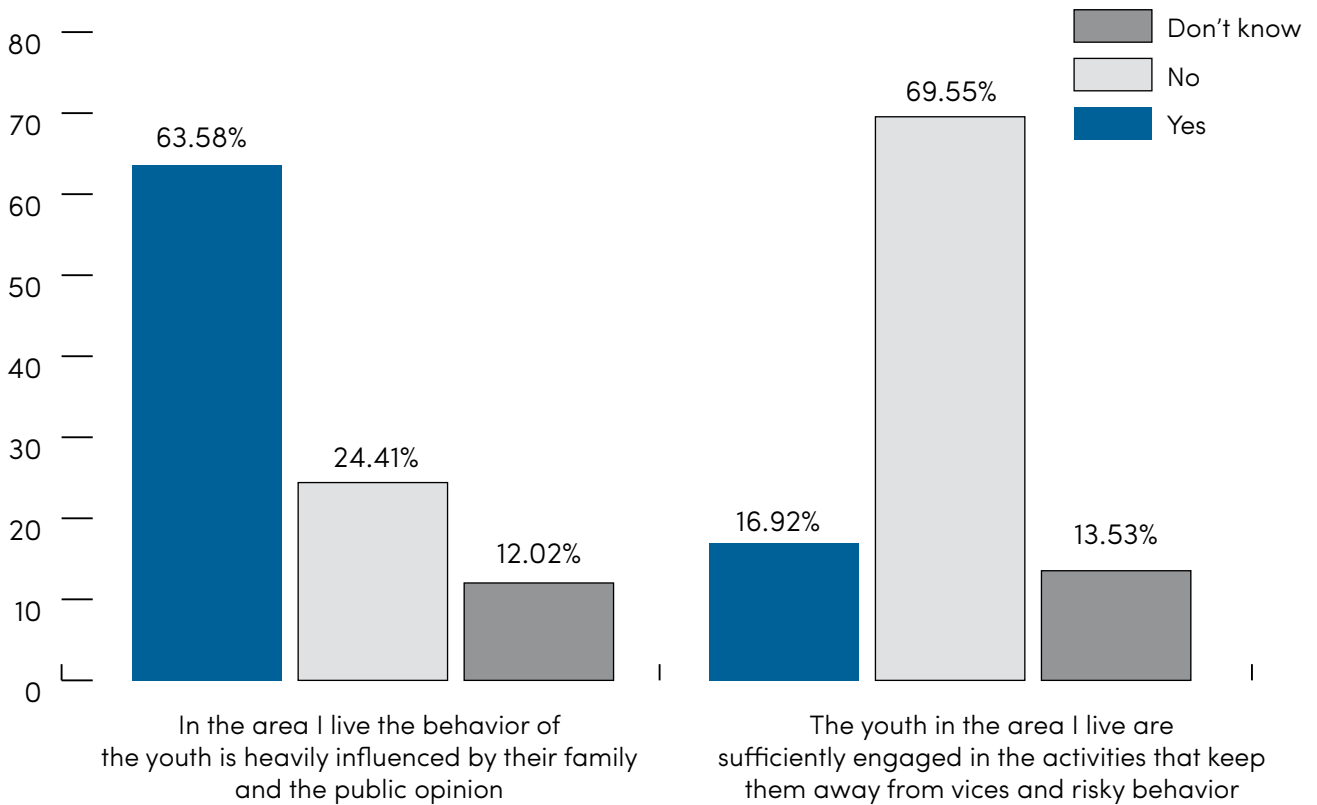
Unemployment is a powerful factor that reinforces the perceptions or experiences of social exclusion, because lack of sufficient revenues is not just the cause of living in poverty. It, indeed, brings about socio-psychological consequences reflected in the drop of socialization rate.⁸⁸ Thus, in early 2015, the number of people of 15-19 years of age in Albania was 690 thousand. About 63% of them live in urban areas and 37% in rural areas.⁸⁹ In total, 32.5% of the Albanian youth are jobless.⁹⁰ Youth groups most affected by unemployment are males (35.6%) who have completed the general secondary education (1 out of 4 or 24.3%).⁹¹

In addition to this overall frame that may create favorable conditions for radicalization and violent extremism activities, this study examines directly the citizens' personal perceptions on social exclusion. The following statements (control questions) were submitted to respondents, who are or are not members of religious communities in the targeted areas:

- a) *In the area I live the behavior of the youth is heavily influenced by their family and the public opinion.*
- b) *The youth in the area I live are sufficiently engaged in activities that keep them away from vices and risky behavior.*

The salience and relevance that this driver favors religious radicalization and violent extremism have been assessed on the "negative answers" to the two control questions: a) influence of youth by family and public opinion; and, b) involvement of youth in activities that keep them away from risky behavior. Figure 5 presents the survey findings on these drivers.

Figure 5. Social exclusion and marginality [Source: IDM survey 2015]



Most respondents, about 64%, believe that the youth in the areas that they live are heavily influenced by their family or public opinion. According to their perceptions, the social controls to check their behavior are present in the community. In all surveyed areas, about 24% of the respondents think that the youth conduct is not influenced or controlled by family pressure and public opinion. In terms of specific geographic areas, the highest number of respondents who believe that the local youth are not influenced by their families and surrounding community is registered in Cerrik (55%). In contrast, the lowest number of respondents that share the same opinion is noted in Bulqiza, where only 10% believe that the family and surrounding community do not have or have very little influence

over the youth in their area.

As shown in Figure 5, an overwhelming majority of respondents, 70%, believe that the youth in the areas they live are sufficiently engaged in activities that keep them away from vices and risky behavior. Only 17% of the interviewees believe the contrary. These results are very disturbing in terms of the considerable time available to the youth and the potential exposure to vices and risky behaviors, including recruitment from radical and violent extremism groups. The rural area of the Commune of Qender-Librashd has the highest number of respondents with 79% of which deny any involvement of the youth in useful activities. When compared with the other target areas, the highest number of respondents (23%) who think that the youth use most of their time in useful activities is noted in Cerrik and Librazhd.

The perception that the youth conduct is not influenced or controlled by family pressure and public opinion (24%) is more solid among these respondents: males (26%), 36–40 years old (28.13%), with 9-year or less education (28.7%). In terms of employment status, this perception is stronger among unemployed people (27.4%). Respondents who practice only the major religious rules and rituals (27.7%) seem to be more inclined to believe the lack of influence of family and public opinion on youth behavior.

In terms of the second control question on this driver, the people prone to believe that the youth in their area are not sufficiently engaged in activities that keep them away from vices and risky behavior are: females (69.7% of them), age groups 36–40 year old (76.6%), people who have completed high school education (72%), and unemployed (72.9%). People who practice regularly religious rituals (77.5%) tend to believe that the youth

are not sufficiently engaged in useful activities.

Most key informants interviewed in the eight targeted areas have confirmed the role and possibility of incitement of radicalization and violent extremism as a result of the perceptions of social exclusion and marginality among the youth. According to them, important factors of radicalization include low economic and deficient educational level, rural and mainly suburban areas, unemployment, and lack of involvement in useful activities and low expectations for the future. In several cases, these factors are combined with the propaganda of the radical groups and the urge of youth for adventure.⁹² Individual and focused group interviews in some areas reveal a high and disturbing rate of consumption of alcohol and cannabis among the youth.

6.1.2. 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.”⁹³

Many studies and media reports have shed light over the existence and importance of social and family relations among the people involved in radicalization and violent extremism processes. According to scholars of the social movement theory and network theory, radicalization and violent extremism basically relate to people we know, radical ideas are conveyed by means of social media,

and elements of violence appear within small social groups. Ties, group pressure and indoctrination gradually change the individual’s worldview.⁹⁴ Sageman (2004, 2007) points out that interaction among people of the same opinion is essential for radicalization to occur. He calls this group of people with shared ideas “a bunch of guys” and the process itself “mobilization through networks.”⁹⁵ Thus, the dynamics

within the social groups serves to validate and reinforce with other radicalized people the individual's ideas and interpretations. On the other hand, media reports in Albania have confirmed the presence of social and family ties among radicalized people and who have been involved in violent extremist activities in Syria and Iraq. These relations may have existed prior to recruitment as they may have also shaped during the propaganda and radicalization process. Reports of the Balkan Investigative Report Network (BIRN) have found out that social ties between recruited and radicalized people and recruiters have existed or been created during excursions organized by the recruiters or during religious preaching.⁹⁶ In few cases, acquaintances have been made possible through social media on the Internet or within the community of immigrants outside the country.⁹⁷ In addition, ties of family, clan, and in-laws have taken place in some cases.⁹⁸ Family ties have existed even among

people who have left Albania to join formations of Al-Nusra and ISIS. Highly concerning have been the cases of transfer of spouses and children to Syria by those who have joined the conflict.

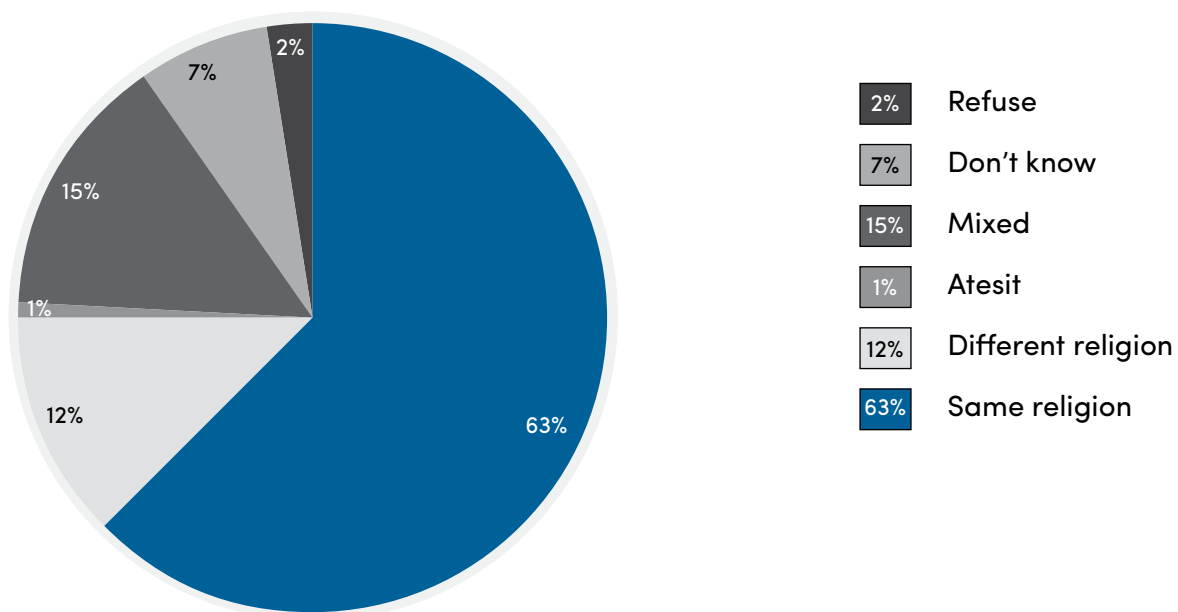
In consideration of the above information, the radicalizing role and potential of the social networks and group dynamics have been tested by collecting and analyzing respondents' perceptions of this driver, where most of them declare that the religious affiliation of their social network is similar to his/hers (of the respondent).

Thus, the following statements (control questions) were submitted to the respondents who are or are not members of the religious communities in the targeted areas:

- a) *The majority of the people I know have grown to be believers out of their social circle.*

Figure 6. Religious affiliation of the social circle [Source: IDM survey 2015]

To which religious denomination does the majority of your social circle belong, if any?



b) Individuals/groups that incite Christian/Islamic radicalism operate in the area I live.

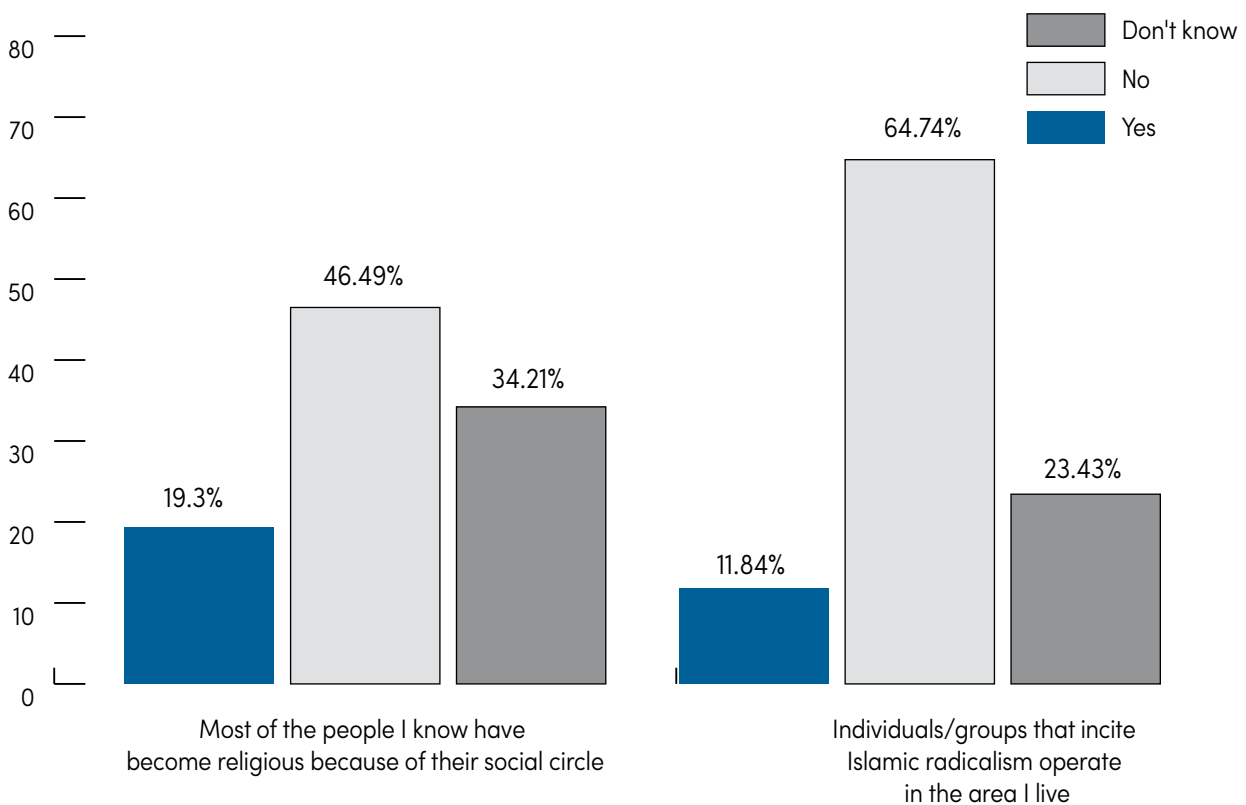
The salience and relevance that this driver favors religious radicalization and violent extremism have been assessed on the basis of “negative answers” to the two control questions: a) the majority of the people I know have grown to be believers out of their social circle; and b) individuals/groups that incite Christian/Islamic radicalism operate in the area I live.

Most respondents (46.5%) do not think that the people they know have become religious believers because of their social network. The second largest share of respondents (34.2%)

state that there is no information about the factors that have pushed their acquaintances to become religious, whether of individual nature or encouraged by friends and relatives or else. In addition, 19.3% of the respondents have admitted that the people they know have become believers because of their friends. In terms of specific geographic areas, the largest number of respondents confirming this statement is in Kukes (36.6%) and in Pogradec (25.5%). On the other hand, the lowest number of ‘positive responses’ to this question is noted in Cerrik (8%).

Figure 7 presents the survey findings on the second statement (existence of groups).

Figure 7. Social networks and group dynamics [Source: IDM survey 2015]



As shown in Figure 7, the majority of respondents (62% and 65%) deny the presence of radical religious individuals or groups in their communities. The presence of individuals or groups in the community inciting Christian or Islamic radicalization is admitted respectively by 9% and 12% of the respondents. In terms of specific geographic areas, the highest number of respondents who believe that there are individuals or groups inciting Christian radicalism in their area is in Librazhd, both in town (18.2%) and in the Commune of Qender-Librazhd (15.3%). The largest number of people who believe that there are individuals or groups inciting Islamic radicalism in their area is in Bulqiza (21%).

The perception that the people I know have grown to be believers out of their social circle (19.3%) is stronger among: females (25% of them), people of age groups of 31–35 years old (23.5%) and those with university or post-university education (25.2%). In terms of employment status, employed people (18.7%) tend to believe in the faith start out of the social circles. This perception is stronger among respondents who do not practice religion at all (23.3%).

With regard to the second control question on this driver, the people most inclined to believe that there are individuals/groups that incite Christian radicalism in their area are: males (9.4% of them), age groups of 36–40 years old (12.5%), people with 9-year or less education (13%), employed (11.3%). The respondents most inclined to believe that there are individuals/groups that incite Islamic radicalism in their area are: males (12.4% of them), people of age group of 18–25 years old (15%), respondents with 9 or fewer years of education (14.7%), unemployed (13.7%). This belief prevails among people who do not practice religious rules and rituals (18%).

Key informants interviewed in the targeted areas have explained the role of social circles and group dynamics relative to indoctrination, recruitment and radicalization of the youth. According to them, people involved in groups with radical religious opinions are not sociable, but are isolated within their group, who oftentimes choose boycott, including the economic one, (such as refuse to purchase products from the business of a traditional Muslim). The meetings of the members of these groups are carried out in a mosque or outside it. Within these groups, two or three individuals with greater influence and broader internal or external links are distinguished from others. New members to the group are recruited through close or family links. Interviewees state that recruitment may have also been carried out through the Internet (by means of social media, such as Facebook). According to the respondents, group dynamics bring in more indoctrination of the members and go as far as acceptance of strict and extremist interpretation of Islam by the entire family. In some cases, the family's relations with their clan are disrupted.¹⁰⁰

6.1.3. 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 a small minority, socio-economic and/or political discrimination may be perceived as linked to disrespect for Islam and Muslims, provoking radicalization.”¹⁰¹

Since about 20% of the respondents of the Census 2011 refused to answer to the optional question on their religious affiliation, the estimations on the size of religious communities in the country cannot be completely accurate. Yet, according to the Census 2011, the Sunni Muslims in Albania make up about 57% of the entire population.¹⁰² Regardless of the dominance of this religious community, one cannot rule out the possibility that individuals or groups of this religious denomination perceive or really experience various forms of discrimination by virtue of their religious identity.

Indeed, during 2014, the Commissioner for the Protection from Discrimination examined 5 discrimination cases (3 complaints and 2 issues) initiated basically on grounds of religious belief. According to the Commissioner, in one case there was discrimination based on religion.¹⁰³ In another case, two officers of RENEA Swat Police were allegedly fired for being practicing believers of the Islamic faith.¹⁰⁴ However, in a meeting with the General Director of the State Police, the Mufti of Tirana denied allegations that the dismissal of the two police officers was an act of discrimination on religious grounds.¹⁰⁵

In addition to the description above, the radicalizing role and potential of the social discrimination on religious grounds was validated by collecting and analyzing the respondents' perceptions on this driver. Thus, the respondents, who have been or have not been members of the religious communities in the targeted areas,

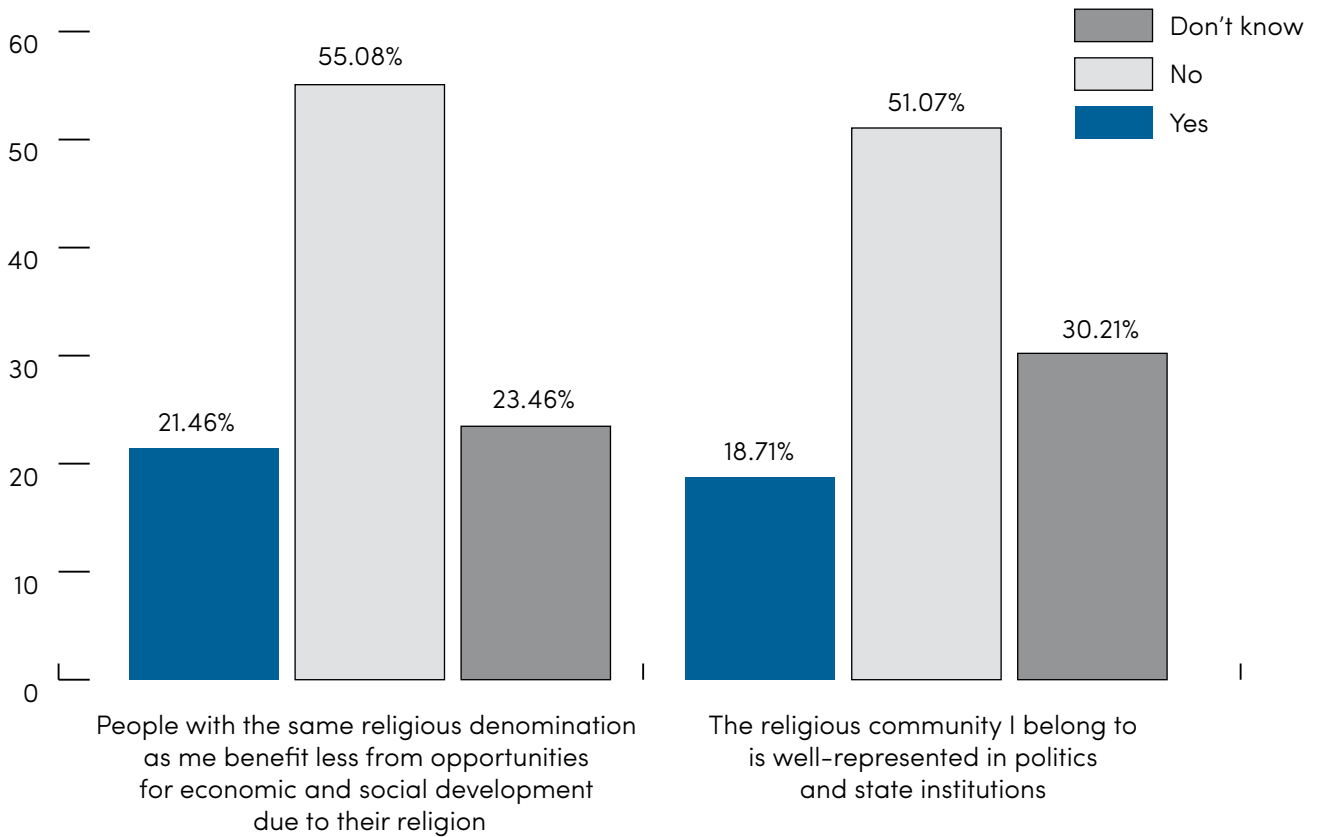
were presented with the following statements (control questions):

- a) *People with the same religious denomination as me benefit less from opportunities for economic and social development due to their religious belonging.*
- b) *The religious community I belong to is well-represented in politics and state institutions.*

The salience and relevance that this driver favors religious radicalization and violent extremism have been assessed on the basis of a 'positive answer' for the first statement a) People with the same religious denomination as me benefit less from opportunities for economic and social development due to their religious belonging, and of a 'negative answer' given to the second control question (b) The religious community I belong to is well-represented in politics and state institutions. Figure 8 presents survey findings.

The majority of respondents (55.1%) do not believe that people are discriminated in the economic and social aspect because of their religious faith. Yet, 21.5% perceive socio-economic forms of discrimination on religious grounds. The largest number of respondents that perceive such forms of discrimination against people with the same faith as theirs is registered in Buçimas (39.4%) and Cerrik (39%). The lowest number of perceptions on socio-economic discrimination because of religious faith is noted in Librazhd

Figure 8. Perceptions of social discrimination on religious grounds [Source: IDM survey 2015]



(4%) and in the Commune of Qender-Librazhd (11.2%).

Unlike the relatively low rate of perceptions on socio-economic discrimination because of religion, most interviewees believe that people are discriminated politically because of their religion. One in two people believes that the people having the same religion as theirs are not well-represented in politics and state institutions (51%). When drawing a comparison among all targeted areas, the highest perception of political discrimination (under representation in institutions) because of religion is reported in the Commune of Qender Librazhd (67.4%) and Librazhd (62.5%). It is interesting to note that these very two areas have marked the lowest

rates of perception of socio-economic discrimination and the highest figures of perceived political discrimination (under representation) because of religious belief.

The perception that “People with the same religious denomination as me benefit less from opportunities for economic and social development due to their religious belonging” (21.5%) is stronger among: males (26.5% of them), people of age group 31-35 years old (27%) and those with high school education (22.1%). In terms of employment status, the unemployed people (25.6%) are more inclined to perceive forms of socio-economic discrimination on religious background. This perception is stronger among the respondents who are regular

practitioners of religious rituals (36%).

With regard to the second control question on this driver, the people most inclined to believe that “the religious community they belong to is not well-represented in politics and state institutions” (51%) are: males (56.3% of them), age groups of 31-35 years old (57.7%), people with 9 or fewer years of education (55.3%), and the unemployed (58.3%). Perceptions on political discrimination (insufficient representation) because of religion are more present among respondents who are regular practitioners of the religious rituals (62%).

Some of the key informants interviewed in the targeted areas have confirmed the role of the (experienced or perceived) social, economic, and political discrimination because of the religious identity as a potential driver to radicalization and violent extremism. The key informants rationalize that some of the believers come from very remote and undeveloped areas of the country. Sometimes they feel inferior to town believers who are generally better educated and communicative. The low level of economic and social development of these areas and the sense of inequality and inferiority of the people coming from these areas makes them susceptible to manipulation

and vulnerable to radicalization. Inadequate or deficient representation in media is perceived as another form of social discrimination towards Muslim believers. Examples of deficient media coverage or no reporting at all include various cases perceived as ‘injustice’ to Muslim believers (such as the claim of RENEA Swat police officers for dismissal from job because of their religious faith). Specifically, one interviewee stated that social discrimination because of religion is also expressed in the form of ‘fanatic/ radical’ disputes within the same faith and geographic zone. This means that in certain areas where believers tend to be more fanatic, it is possible that various viewpoints are expressed more radically. In addition, forms of discriminations are also reported against those who have returned from the Syrian conflict. The returnees are facing social discrimination (prejudices, ‘finger pointing at them’ in the community), and economic discrimination (failure to find a job or employment conditioned to “shaving of beard” or “change of clothing style”). According to one of the interviewees, who quotes one of the returnees, prejudices, discrimination and the experienced pressure (contempt and the feeling of being under surveillance) make the life of these people quite difficult here.¹⁰⁶

6.1.4. 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 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.”¹⁰⁷

During year 2014, about 32.5% of the young people of 15–29 years of age were jobless.¹⁰⁸ According to the official statistics, the group most affected by unemployment includes the males of this age group. It is estimated that at least one in three males (35.6%) of this age group does not have a job. When compared with a year before, the rate of unemployment among the youth of this age group has increased by 6%. At the same time, 47,860 people of 20–34 years of age have been registered as jobseekers.¹⁰⁹ In terms of educational level of jobless people, in year 2014, about 57 thousand people that have completed high school education are registered as jobseekers. In the meantime, 8,143 people who have completed university education have also registered as jobseekers.¹¹⁰

Interesting data on education, employment and expectations of Albanian youth have been generated by a national study, “Albanian Youth 2011”.¹¹¹ According to this study, which is based on a national survey with 1,200 interviewees of 16–27 years of age, it results that:

- Regional distribution of unemployment among the youth is uniform. Employment of the youth is higher in Tirana, Durrës and other urban areas and the lowest rate of employment is in rural areas of the country. In urban areas, employment rate is 37–38%, whereas in rural ones it is 32%.
- Albanian youth are not very optimistic with regard to their opportunities for employment in the future. About 30.7% of the respondents do not believe they will soon find a job. Male respondents (50.1%) are more pessimistic in this respect.

- Youth in rural areas seem less optimistic to find a job when compared with their peers in the urban areas. The hopes for finding a job diminish with age. In addition, people who have a post-university degree have a lower expectation than the respondents having a university degree.
- Of the respondents already having a job, only a small number of them have a diploma related to the job they do. When asked if they work in the profession they graduated in, 36% of the respondents at the national level provided negative answers. The opportunities to do a job complying with their diploma are fewer in rural areas than in urban ones (26.9% in rural areas and 38.3% in urban areas).
- The respondents believe more in connections and friends that might help them in finding a job, followed by professional capacities, education and political connections. The appreciation of friends and political connections gets higher as the respondents grow older, while their belief in professional capacities and education level gets lower.

The above description reflects the situation of deprivation and frustrated expectations of the Albanian youth. The radicalizing role and potential of deprivation and frustration among the youth was validated in this study by collecting and analyzing the perceptions of the respondents regarding these factors. Thus, the respondents who have been or have

not been members of the religious communities in the targeted areas were presented with the following statements (control questions):

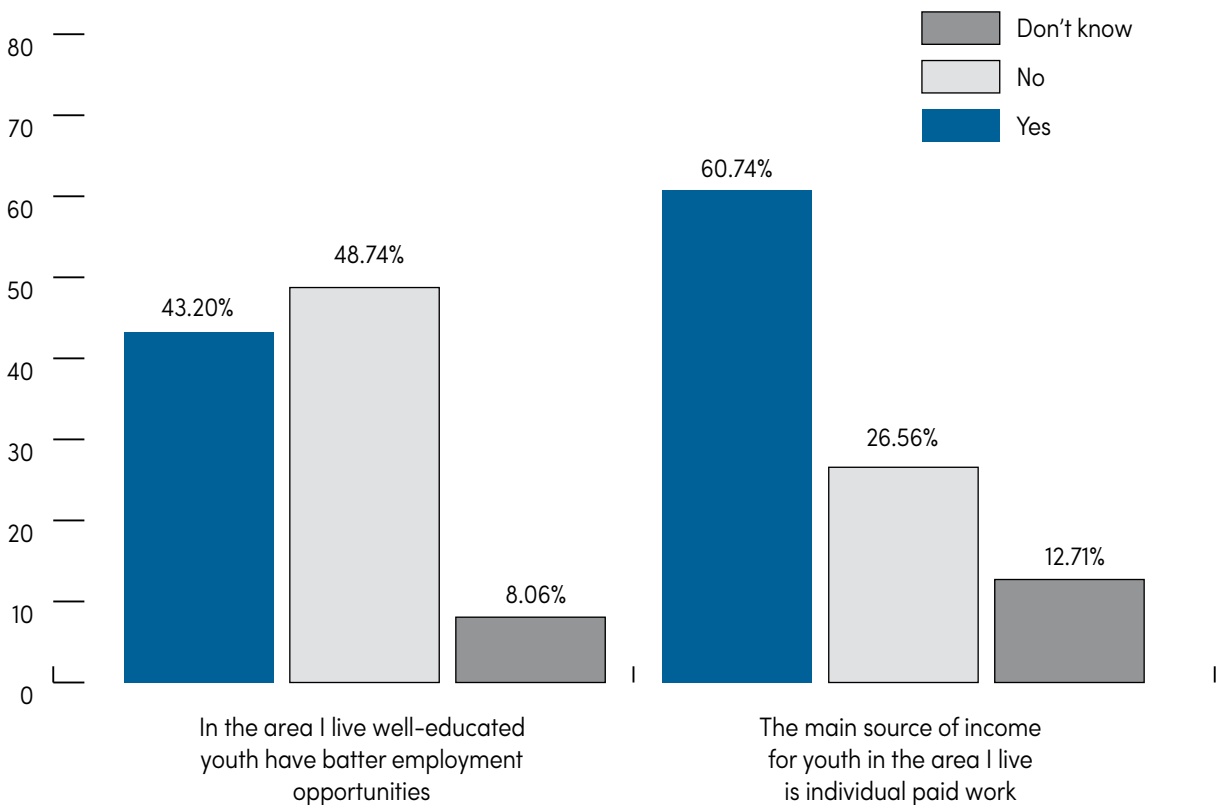
- a) *In the area I live well-educated youth have better employment opportunities.*
- b) *The main source of income for youth in the area I live is individual paid work.*

The relevance and possibility that this driver can favor radicalization and violent extremism have been validated on the basis of 'negative answers' for the above two statements, which test: a) the perceptions on frustrated expectations of employment of well-educated young people; and, b) perceptions of relative deprivations of

the youth. Figure 9 presents the survey findings with regard to this driver.

Most respondents (49%) do not believe that well-educated young people in their area have better employment opportunities. While a relatively small share of respondents (43%) believe the opposite. In this respect, there exist significant differences in the perceptions of the respondents from various areas. Thus, 84% of the respondents in the Commune of Qender Librazhd think that well-educated youth in their area do not have better employment opportunities. Lower perceptions on frustrated expectations for employment of well-educated young people are noted in Kukes (33%) and Perrenjas (35%).

Figure 9. Frustrated expectations and relative deprivation [Source: IDM survey 2015]



The majority of interviewees (61%) state that the main source of income for the youth of their area is individual paid work, and 27% of the respondents do not believe that the main income of the youth is generated from their individual work. The largest number of respondents perceiving relative deprivation among the youth in their area is noted in the Commune of Qender Librazhd and in the town of Librazhd. Accordingly, 45% of the respondents in the Commune of Qender Librazhd and 38% of the respondents in Librazhd do not think that the individual paid work is the main source of income for the young people. The lowest level of perception on relative deprivation is marked in Perrenjas, where 95% of the respondents believe that individual paid work is the main source of income for the youth of this area.

The perception that “In the area I live well-educated youth do not have better employment opportunities” (49%) is stronger among: female respondents (50% of them), people of age group of 41–45 years old (59%) and those that have completed mandatory education (56%). In terms of employment status, the unemployed people (54%) are more inclined to perceive frustrated expectations for employment of the well-educated youth in their areas. This perception is stronger among respondents who do not practice religion (53%).

With regard to the second control question on this driver, the people

most inclined to believe that ‘The main source of income for youth in the area I live is not individual paid work.’ (27%) are: females (29% of them), respondents of age group 36–40 years old (33%), those that have completed high school education (27%), and unemployed people (32%). Perceptions of relative deprivation among the youth are more obvious among respondents who are not regular practitioners of religious rules and rituals (31%).

The interviews with key informants in targeted areas report that the high level of education combined with a high rate of employment lead to discouragement and frustration among the youth who find nothing to work for in Albania. An example to this is the town of Kukes, which has a high rate of university-educated people (14.12% compared with the national rate of 11.8%). Yet, at the same time, this town has a high rate of unemployment of the youth (75% compared with the 53% of the overall country rate).¹¹² According to the respondents, this situation brings about the youth’s emigration or involvement in risky activities as a consequence of influence, propaganda or pursuit of adventure. Such situations are experienced not only by well-educated youth but also by those who have returned from immigration and do not have a job or sustainable engagement in their area. Furthermore, the interviewees recommend addressing the issue of high unemployment among the youth and strengthening the vocational education.

6.1.5. 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.”¹¹³

During the last years of the communist regime and start of democratic processes, Albania has been described as the poorest country in Europe. The dire economic crisis and high rate of unemployment reflect the effects of an extreme decision for self-isolation.¹¹⁴ On the other hand, the institutions of the new political system were very weak to handle situations of economic emergency. The inability to attract Western aid and financing to the levels required for a normal transition made the Albanian authorities to “take a chance” on investments and funding from Islamic organizations and countries.¹¹⁵ In such situation and in a country where freedom of belief was restored after its prohibition by law in 1967, a number of Islamic non-governmental organizations were introduced for the first time through their representations in Tirana and other areas of Albania.¹¹⁶

In year 1997, the number of Islamic organizations in Albania reached 95.¹¹⁷ While some organizations undertook humanitarian activity, some other acted disguised under ‘Charitable NGOs’ taking advantage of the deficiency of law enforcement agencies. ‘Charitable foundations operating in Albania, such as the International Islamic Relief Agency, Al-Haramain Foundation, Taibah International, Global Relief Fund, Benevolence International Foundation and Revival Islamic Society, were suspected of connections with terrorist organizations, such as the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, Algerian Islamic Armed Group, GIA, and Al-Qaeda.¹¹⁸ Their representatives, introduced here as ‘investors’ and were granted Albanian citizenship without any

particular identity verification.¹¹⁹

Taking advantage of the overall poverty and the country’s shortage of qualified religious leaders, these organizations took up an active role in ‘reviving Islam’ through a tradition quite unknown to most Muslims of Albania. They were introduced in the community by means of funding scholarships on Islamic studies for young people, construction of mosques, and economic aid for poor households, etc.¹²⁰ A common feature of these communities was the high rate of unemployment and poverty. In exchange of entitlement to economic aid for poor households and communities, residents were asked to embrace and follow the organizations’ religious stance.¹²¹ Such cases were identified in Perrenjas, Peshkopi, and the area of Qafe-Thana.¹²²

The above summarized history sheds light on the grave social-economic situation and conditions of certain areas in the country. It is this very high rate of poverty and unemployment in these areas that makes them vulnerable and attractive to activities of the organizations that used to operate at large in the absence of state institutions’ oversight and control. To better understand the current concept from the public experience and perception, the respondents in the eight targeted areas were presented with the following statements (control questions):

- a) *In the area I live state institutions of social and economic assistance operate in a professional and abuse-free manner.*

b) *In the area I live households/ individuals with economic distress fulfill their basic needs.*

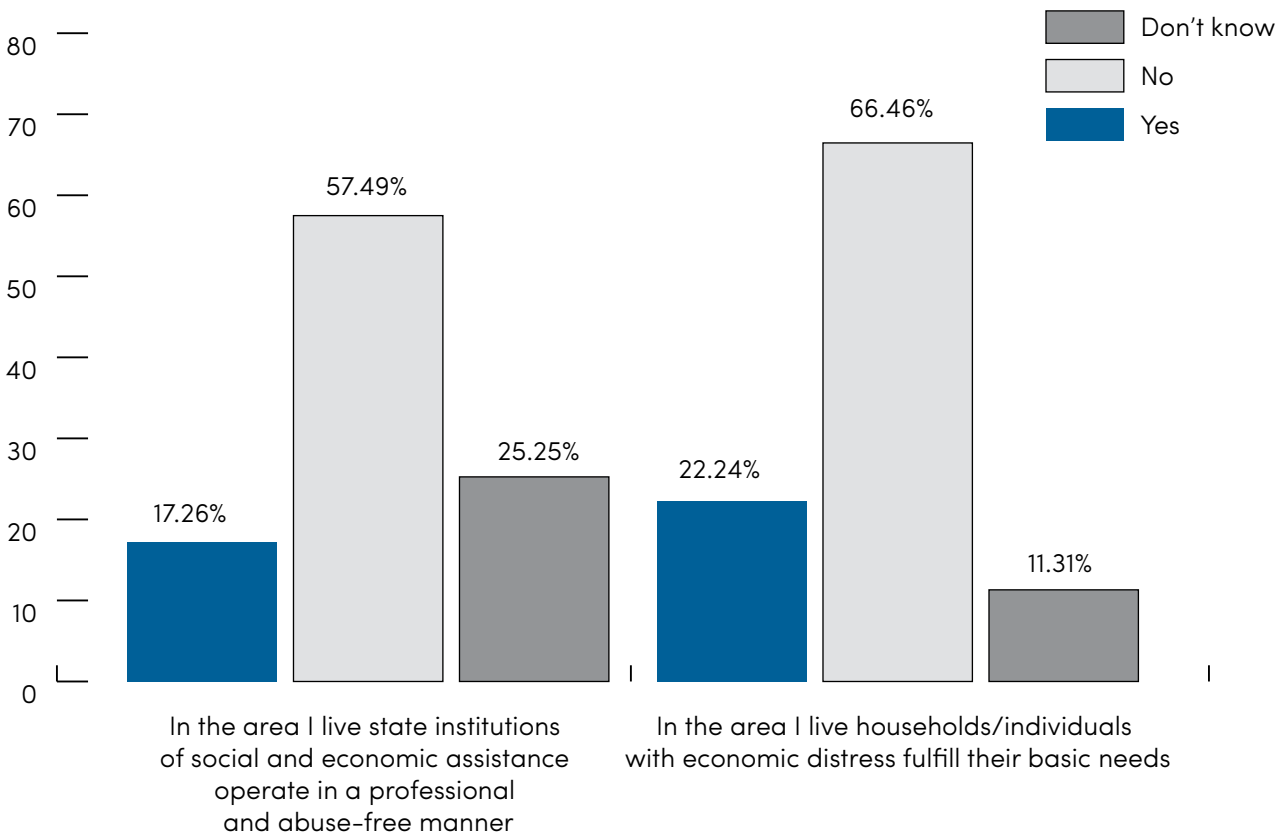
The relevance and possibility that this driver can favor radicalization and violent extremism have been validated on the basis of 'negative answers' for the above two control questions that help to reveal: a) perceptions of social exclusions by inefficient and corrupt institutions; and (b) perceptions of unmet basic needs and vulnerability. Figure 10 presents the survey findings with regard to this driver.

Most respondents (57%) do not think that state institutions of economic and

social assistance work in a professional, impartial and abuse-free manner and 17% think the contrary. These perceptions are more accentuated in the Commune of Qender-Librazhd (75%) and in the Municipality of Librazhd (68%). This perception is weaker in Buçimas (45%), even though it should be pointed out that the number of respondents who stated that they did not know is the highest among all other areas (34%).

When asked whether needy individuals or households can meet their basic living needs, most respondents of this study answered negatively (66%). This perception is more widespread in the Commune of Qender-Librazhd (83%) and in the Municipality of Librazhd

Figure 10. Unmet social and economic needs [Source: IDM survey 2015]



(74%). It is, however, less spread (even though prevailing) in Perrenjas (53%).

The perception that state institutions of social and economic assistance do not operate in a professional and abuse-free manner" (57%) is stronger among: male respondents (61% of them), people of age group of 31-35 years old (63%), those who have completed high school education (62%) unemployed respondents (61%). In addition, this perception is stronger among respondents who are regular practitioners of religious rules and rituals (66% of them).

With regard to the second control question on this driver, the people most inclined to believe that 'households/ individuals with economic distress do not fulfill their basic needs' (66%) are: males (72% of them), people of age group of 41-45 years old (74%), respondents with 9 or fewer years of education (76%), unemployed people (75%). This perception is more accentuated among respondents who are regular practitioners of religious rituals (72%).

The interviews with key informants in the targeted areas, including officials of economic assistance and welfare

service, report that several households in targeted areas live in conditions of extreme poverty. Many other households rely on the main income source coming from their members in immigration (remittances). Employment opportunities are quite limited because of small administration and scarce private entrepreneurs. In addition, local government units offer minimal opportunities for vocational education. Thus, the youth in Kukes go to Kosovo to attend vocational training courses on vocations such as mechanics, hotel management, or computer science. The interviewees also stated that weak economy has made few recruited and radicalized people to fall 'prey' to manipulations. According to an interviewed journalist, experienced in the investigation and reporting of cases of radicalized people joining the Syrian conflict, some of them have been employed in private businesses or in mosques where radical Islam was preached. Another interviewee explained how employment has served to establish contacts and proceed with propaganda by gradually producing radicalization in the employed and indoctrinated person.

6.1.6. 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." ¹²³

As already elaborated earlier in this study, in the early 1990s a number of Islamic non-governmental organizations that came to Albania conducted various activities, such as construction of mosques, provision of scholarship funding, and financial assistance to distressed families, distribution of free medicines and religious books, and investments in construction and banking system. In a country torn by poverty, unemployment, and lack of Western loans and funds to assist in the smooth transition to democracy, representatives and activities of these organizations were permitted, even welcomed. According to Zoto (2013), NGOs known worldwide for their connections with terrorism, operating in the Balkans, provided terrorists with fake documents produced in the black markets or by corrupt state officials. They also funded terrorists' trips in the region through bank transfers.¹²⁴ Thus, the presence of these organizations brought in not only quick income and easily attainable aid for distressed households but also benefits for these organizations. Upon completion of actions undertaken by the Albanian authorities during 2001-2005 for closing down many of these non-governmental organizations, deportation of foreign citizens, and seizure of assets of their private businesses, it is estimated that the value of the frozen assets is as much as 20 million US dollars.¹²⁵

The literature elaborates the relationship between involvement in previous criminal activities and involvement in radical and violent extremism groups. In several cases, embracing intolerant and violent views may become a means of justifying (to oneself as well as to others) continued involvement in criminal activities. Conversely, turning to a particularly strict interpretation of Islam may be

viewed as a way to 'make up' for a life of crime, 'redeem oneself in the eyes of God'.¹²⁶ Prisons constitute another intersection between criminality and radicalization/violent extremism. There is significant empirical evidence pointing to the role which prisons have played as incubators for Salafi Jihadism. Inhuman and degrading treatment in prisons may facilitate radicalization and recruitment by violent extremism groups.¹²⁷

In order to understand whether such circumstances are relevant and whether criminality-violent extremism interaction poses potential threat to Albania, the following information obtained from the survey, interviews and focus group discussions conducted in the framework of this study were used and analyzed.

The respondents were presented with the following statements (control questions) in order to solicit their perceptions on greed and tolerance to quick wealth-creation.:

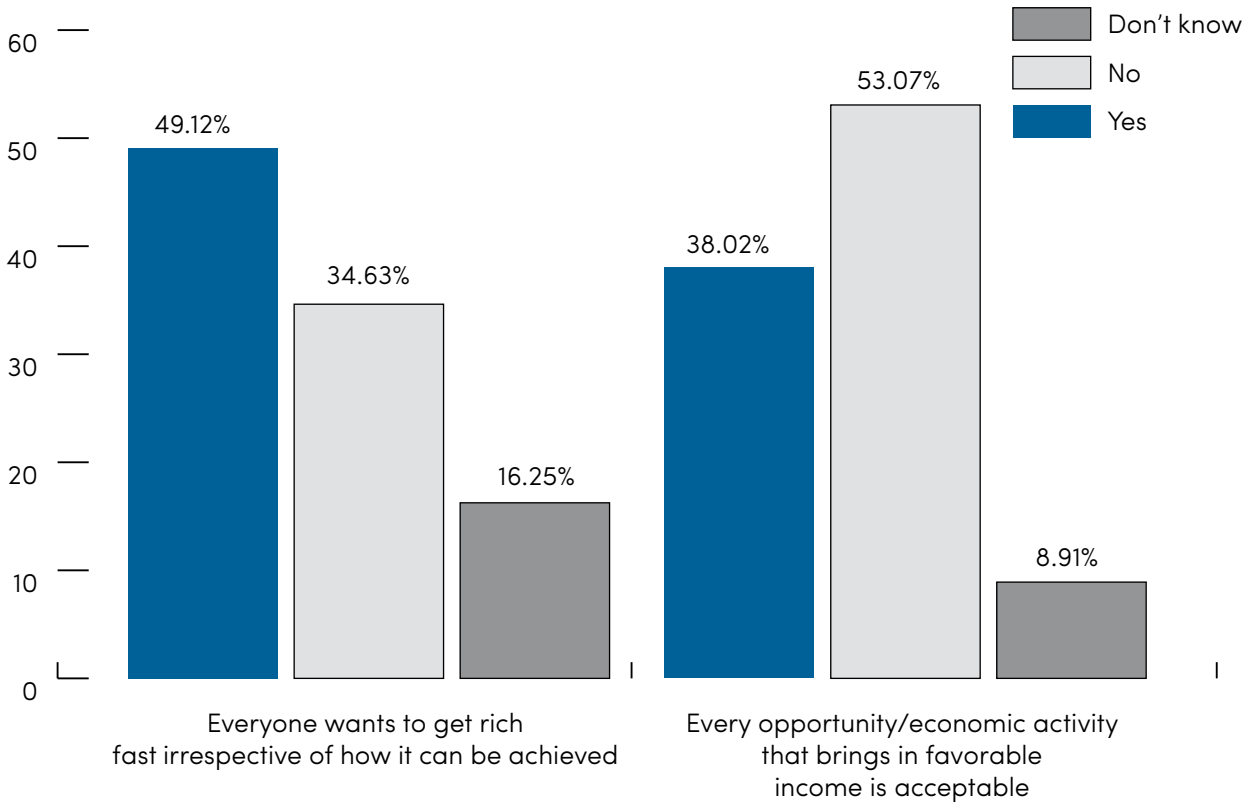
- a) *Everyone likes fast wealth-creation regardless of how.*
- b) *Every opportunity/economic activity that brings in favorable income is acceptable.*

Figure 11 presents the survey findings with regard to this driver.

Most respondents state that "fast wealth-creation regardless of how" is accepted by all (49%). The largest number of respondents who believe in the overall greed for fast wealth-creation is in Cerrik (62%) and Kukes (61%). The smallest number of those who share the same perception is in Pogradec (30%).

Unlike in the first question, which is general, most respondents answered

Figure 11. Greed for wealth creation [Source: IDM survey 2015]



negatively to the more direct question, whether it is acceptable to them to engage in any profitable activity (53%). Yet, 38% declare that any activity or opportunity that brings in favorable good income is acceptable to them. When facing this question, the number of undecided respondents is halved to the favor of a negative response. The largest number of respondents being receptive to any activity or opportunity that brings in good income is noted in the Commune of Buçimas (one in two respondents or 51%) and the smallest number is identified in Perrenjas (28%).

The perception that “everyone likes fast wealth-creation regardless of how” (49%) is stronger among these respondents: males and females equally (49%), people of age group of 18-25 years old (59%) with

university education (54%). In terms of employment status, this perception is stronger among unemployed people (53%). Respondents who do not practice religious rituals and rules (61%) are more inclined to believe that everyone wants to get rich fast irrespective of how it can be achieved.

With regard to the second control question on this driver, ‘acceptance of opportunity/economic activity that brings in favorable income’, this perception is more accentuated among these respondents: males(41% of them), people of age group 18-25 years old(45%), people who have completed 9 or fewer years of education (40%), and unemployed (41%). The respondents who do not practice religious rituals (71%) are more inclined to answer positively to this question.

In general, key informants of this study have not identified any connection between the people engaged in past criminal activities, for profit or not, and those people involved in radical groups and those departing to the Syrian conflict. Many of them have explained that the distress for income or the greed for quick wealth-creation may stimulate emigration to European Union countries or even involvement in gainful criminal activities, but not necessarily going to Syria as a foreign fighter. Furthermore, according to them, there is no evidence to indicate that these radicalized people have joined the conflict as mercenaries. While funding sources of trips to Syria for these people is yet

unclear, according to BIRN reporters, it results that the financial burden was shared between imams and their followers who believed that funding a fighter was similar to the funder's having made the jihad sacrifice himself. Through this theory, many Albanian jihadists became funders for others by paying for their ticket or the 'zakat' for war.¹²⁸ Only one of the interviewees in this study thought that many of the departed jihadists had legal and societal problems in the past. According to him, criminal records included offenses such as production and sale of narcotics, theft, etc.

6.2. POLITICAL DRIVERS

The framework of VE drivers developed by Denoeux G. and Carter L. (2009) draws on a context of countries and regions (Middle East and North Africa – MENA, and South Asia), which are significantly different from Albania or the Western Balkan region, particularly from the perspective of political indicators. Currently a NATO member and also an EU candidate country, Albania has made great strides to develop democratic institutions and processes, governance and rule of law. Nevertheless, Albania and other Western Balkan countries are still facing challenges to achieve the status of "consolidated democracies" according to many global assessments.

Freedom House's "Freedom in the World" Report considers Albania and few other Western Balkan countries as partly free.¹²⁹ Another Freedom House (FH) resource, "Nations in Transit",

describes Albania as a "transitional government or hybrid regime".¹³⁰ Further, the Worldwide Governance Indicators 2013 reports that, except for the 'regulatory quality' indicator where Albania is outperforming countries in the Western Balkan region, on many of the remaining indicators Albania is lagging behind the region.¹³¹

Despite the contextual differences between the western Balkans and other regions on which Denoeux G. and Carter L. draw, political drivers of violent extremism and religious radicalization remain highly relevant for 'partly free' and/or 'hybrid regimes' (FH). However, the differences and other political and cultural variables impose the need for an attentive validation of VE political drivers in the case of Albania. As explained above, IDM Study has excluded three political drivers from Denoeux G. and Carter L.

matrix (Local conflicts, State support, and Discredited governments and missing or co-opted legal oppositions), while it keeps investigating from an outward perception perspective for another two (Foreign occupation and

Political and/or military encroachment) despite the questionable relevance related to Albania's context. Accordingly, the study investigates on the following political drivers.

Table 3. Category of political drivers

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.

DRIVER	DESCRIPTION
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: Guilain Denoeux and Lynn Carter (2009)

The subsequent part of this section elaborates on the findings for each of the drivers based on various primary and secondary sources.

6.2.1. 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.

FH’s “Freedom in the World” measures three categories of political rights (Electoral Process; Political Pluralism and Participation; Functioning of

Government) and another four of civil liberties (Freedom of Expression and Belief; Associational and Organizational Rights; Rule of Law; Personal Autonomy

and Individual Rights).¹³² According to this source, Albania maintains the same status in 2015 across the subcategories of political rights and civil liberties.¹³³ Electoral process and Functioning of Government (political rights) and Rule of Law and Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights (civil liberties) appear to be Albania's underperforming subcategories over the past few years. Although the country does not suffer complete lack of rights and liberties (overall rating – 'partly free'), public trust in political parties and some state institutions (e.g. judiciary) is at record low level.¹³⁴ Implementation and enforcement in practice of a generally advanced legal framework in this regard is often referred to as a concern. The European Commission's (EC) Progress Report (2014) suggests that "although Albania has ratified most international human rights conventions, further action is needed to ensure their implementation".¹³⁵ Nevertheless, in relation to religious freedom Albania gets praise by many of the above referred sources.¹³⁶

Against this broad outline that may create space for radical and VE activity, IDM study explores perceptions of citizens – members and non-members of religious communities in the target areas. IDM survey asked respondents whether they agree with the following two statements (control-questions):

- a) *In general, citizens' rights and civil liberties are respected by state institutions; and*
- b) *The political system in Albania is unfair and has to be changed even with violence if needed*

The relevance and potential of this driver to create space for religious radicalization and violent extremism

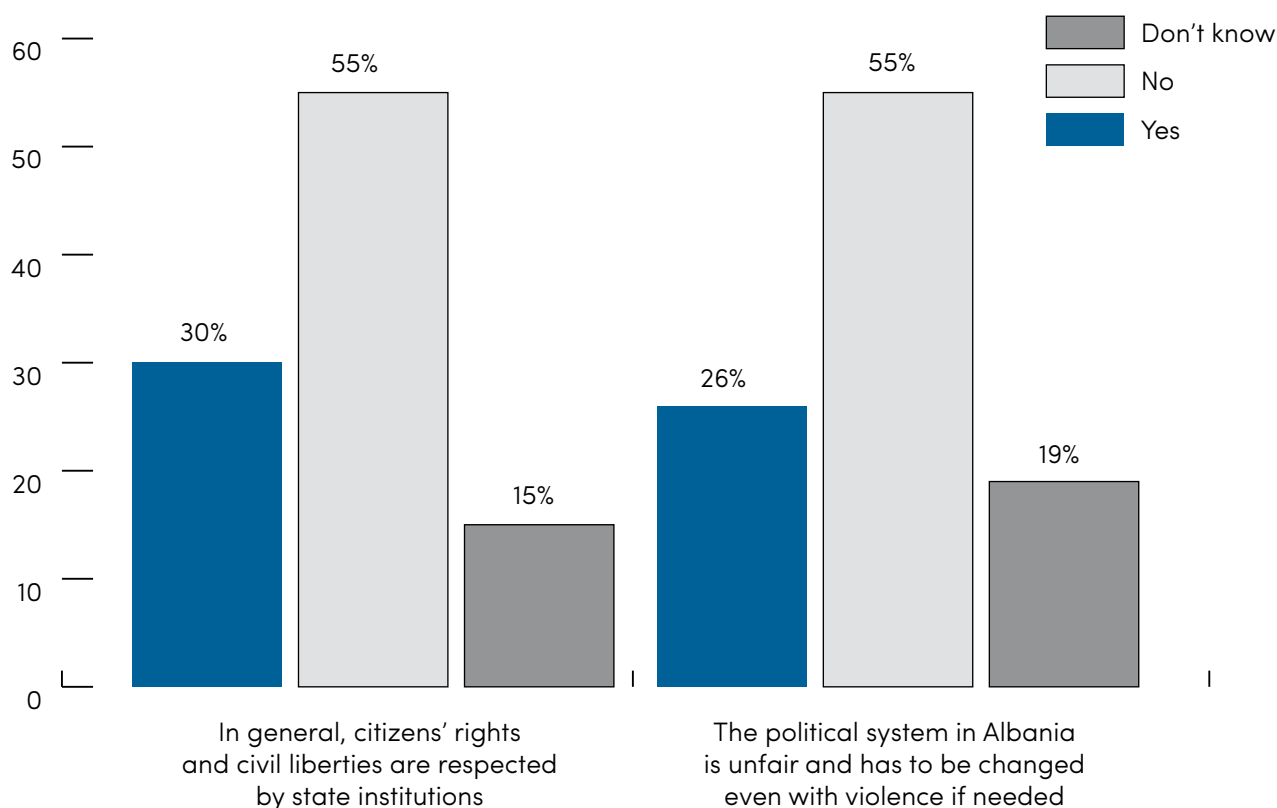
is assessed on the basis of "negative responses" on the first 'control-question' (denial of citizens' rights and civil liberties) and affirmative standpoint on the second one (use of force to change the political system). Figure 12 presents findings of the survey in this regard.

The majority of respondents, 55%, believe that state institutions do not show respect for citizens' rights and civil liberties. Such perception is mostly present among survey respondents from rural areas – Communes of Qender-Librazhd (76%) and Buçimas (60%) – and broadly shared across demographic categories. Less than a third of respondents (30%) from all eight target areas believe that state institutions do respect rights and liberties, whereas Kukes and Cerrik respondents show higher percentage of this viewpoint (43% each).

As shown in Figure 12, a quarter of survey's respondents (26%) believe that "the political system in Albania is unfair and must change even with violence if needed". This view is more present in the areas of Kukes (44%) and Commune of Buçimas (32%). On the other hand, the majority of respondents who do not agree with this statement come from the areas of Cerrik (74%), Commune Qender-Librazhd (72%), and Librazhd (60%).

The general demography of survey respondents, who believe that "the political system in Albania is unfair and must change even with violence if needed" (26%), reflects the demographic characteristics of the majority of respondents (young, males, unemployed, high school education). However, this is not indicative to draw conclusions on the characteristics of a "typical respondent", as findings might be skewed as a result of a quota (non-probability) sampling applied. To

Figure 12. Denial of rights and liberties vs. use of force to change political system
 [Source: IDM survey 2015]



better picture such trends we explore on the specific weight that each of the demography categories bares and compare within and in between subgroups/categories.

Specifically, the view that “the political system in Albania is unfair and must change even with violence if needed” is more present among male respondents (30.9% of all male respondents). Looking at the age-groups of respondents who confirm this statement, this view is more represented among respondents of the young age: “18-25 years” (34.7% of all respondents of this age) and “26 – 30 years” (26.4%). The education background of respondents show that those who view the “political system

as unfair (and must change even with violence if needed)” stand higher among respondents with university degree (29.6% of all respondents from this category) and those with up to nine years of education (28.2%). Unemployed respondents, too, are inclined to share this view, as 28.4% of all unemployed respondents agree that the political system in Albania is unfair and must change even with violence.

The data analysis shows interesting trends when the percentage of those who say that “the political system in Albania is unfair and must change even with violence if needed” (26%) is analyzed within categories of respondents who “practice all religious rituals”, “practice the main ones only”

or who “do not practice religion at all”. Specifically, this view is more represented within the category of interviewees who are not practicing religious rituals and rules at all (37.7% of survey’s respondents who do not practice religious rituals).

The study’s fieldwork – interviews with key players at local level in all eight target areas – did not report salience of this driver or high relevance for enabling religious radicalization, although certain cases of unfair treatment of Muslim believers, especially by security institutions, are reported by some of them. However, some Tirana-based key informants, mostly experts and practitioners interviewed during the study’s inception phase, suggested that perceived ‘denial of political rights and civil liberties’ may

impact the behavior of individuals or isolated groups of religious citizens. Such a scenario may not be excluded given the IDM survey results according to which 22.5% of all respondents practicing religious rituals and 20.2% of those who practice only the main rituals share the view that the political system is unfair and must change even with violence.

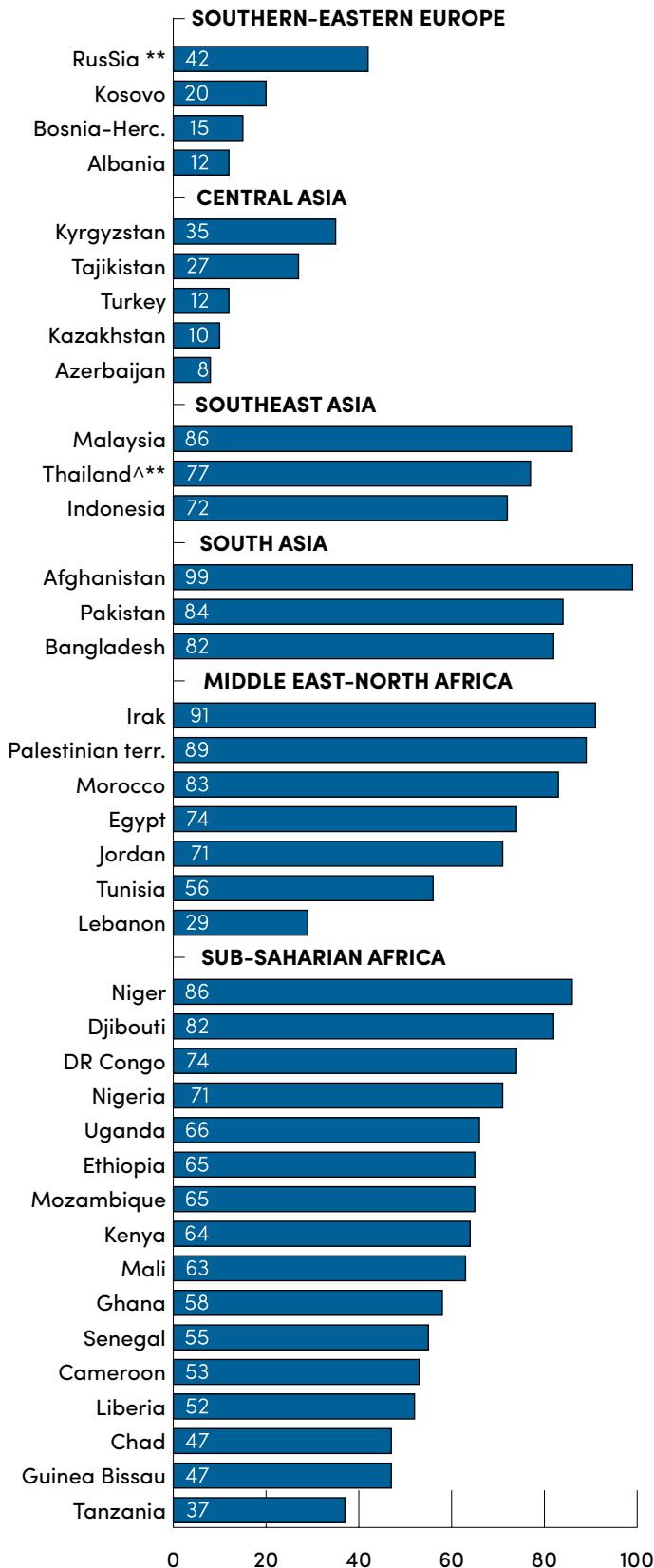
6.2.2. HARSH GOVERNMENT REPRESSION & GROSS VIOLATIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS

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.

Strengthening the protection of human rights and anti-discrimination policies is one of the five European Commission’s priorities on which Albania must show progress in order to open EU accession negotiations. As a response to this priority, the National Mechanism for the Prevention of Torture at the Ombudsman’s Office has been actively monitoring the situation in prisons and detention centers. While the Albania’s Constitution and laws prohibit cruel,

inhuman or degrading treatment and punishment, U.S. Department of State’s “2013 Human Rights Report for Albania” reports on ill-treatment of suspects and detainees by police and prison guards.¹³⁷ However, despite cases of human rights violation reported sporadically by civil society organizations and the media over the past few years, Albania is not currently a “hotspot” of harsh government repression or gross violations of human rights.

Figure 13. Percentage of Muslims who favor making sharia the official law in their country
[Source: Pew Research Center 2013]



An IDM Assessment Report on Police Integrity and Corruption (2014) found that, although the use of excessive violence by police does not happen very often according to majority of the public,¹³⁸ the tolerant attitude of police officers towards this act is highly disturbing.¹³⁹ On the other hand, the EC Progress Report 2014 suggests that follow-up actions to Ombudsman’s recommendations need to be further strengthened.¹⁴⁰

Against this background, IDM study analyzes different sources and data regarding this driver and its possible impact on generating VE activities specifically among members of the dominant religious community (Muslim believers).

A number of this study’s key informants during the inception phase suggested that harsh response and violations from police authorities may shrink not only public trust in this institution but also in the system of state rules and laws. As the description of this driver suggests that “justice is a critical value in Islam”, the study looks at a general attitude among respondents regarding the religious rules as compared to state rules, and also at their standpoint in a situation when state institutions deprive them of their rights and liberties. Specifically, IDM survey’s “control-statements” (on which respondents are asked whether they agree or not) for this driver are:

- a) *Religious rules are fairer than state rules.*
- b) *People have the right to avenge when state institutions negate their rights and liberties.*

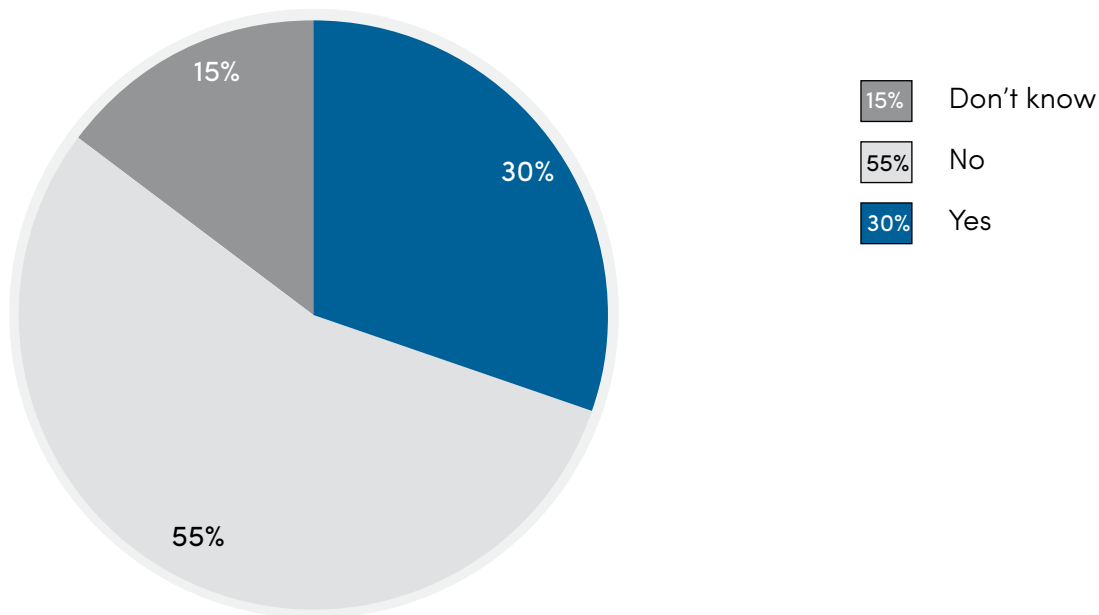
Some 66% of respondents believe that “religious rules are fairer than state rules”, 17% disagree with this statement and another 17% do not have an opinion. Nevertheless, this finding describes a general characteristic of religious respondents (69% of IDM survey sample is composed of respondents practicing all religious rituals or at least the main ones) who believe in the “divine nature of God”. Accordingly, it does not necessarily suggest readiness for or support to replace state rules with religious ones (e.g. Sharia law for the Muslim community).

On the other hand, a Pew Research Center’s study (2013) found that Albania’s Muslim community shows least support to making Sharia the official law in the country, as compared to other countries in the southeastern Europe.¹⁴¹ See Figure 13

The subsequent “statement” which IDM survey asked respondents may indicate of the potential for VE or other radical acts by individuals as a response to violation of human rights by state institutions.

Figure 14. Revenge against institutions [Source: IDM survey 2015]

People have the right to avenge when state institutions negate their rights and liberties



Although the majority of respondents (55%) do not support ‘avenge’, another 30% do favor such reaction when state institutions negate their rights and liberties. The majority of this category

of respondents is identified in Bulqiza. Specifically, 55% of respondents from this area believe that people have the right to avenge when state institutions negate their rights and liberties. The

least support for “avenge” is identified in Cerrik, whereas 85% of respondents from this municipality do not agree with the statement and only 12% agree (another 3% don not know).

Further demography analysis of the group of 30% of respondents who favor “avenge” shows that this view is more present among male respondents, representing 34.5% of all male interviewees, respondents of “18-25 years old” (36.4% of all respondents of this age), and respondents with up to nine years of education (31.5%) and high school education (31.1%), and unemployed respondents (30.6%).¹⁴²

In view of “practicing religion”, respondents who “favor avenge when state institutions negate their rights” (30%) stand at comparable percentages across all three categories. Specifically, this view is shared by 33.3% of respondents who do not practice religion, 30.2% of those who practice the main rituals and by 28.5% of survey’s respondents who are actively practicing religious rules and rituals.

This study’s fieldwork, specifically the semi-structured interviews, reveals differences but also shared perspectives between non-state key informants and those coming from state institutions. Although in general all informants agree that “harsh government repression and gross violations of human rights” do not represent a recurring episode in Albania, concerns are raised with regard to the approach and actions of the state in the recent cases of Islamic radical activity in the country. Namely, as confirmed by numerous semi-structured interviews, key informants from non-security state agencies at central or local government level did not report on any activity of their institution to address religious radicalization in Albania. The

message conveyed by many of the key informants is that “if repressive measures are the primary and the sole response to such activity, this may lead to counterproductive effects”. These key informants also report on negative effects from police investigation and surveillance techniques applied in the context of suspected Islamic radical activities, which create a feeling of repression and human rights violation among the ummah. “Instead, police, and other state institutions in particular, should cooperate with the religious institutions and their communities to better understand what the pressing needs and concerns of their members are.”¹⁴³

Such deficiencies in the state actors’ approach are recognized to a certain extent also by some of the key informants from law enforcement agencies. They suggest that “prevention of religious radicalization and VE must take place much earlier and should be guided by other (non-security) institutions”.¹⁴⁴

6.2.3. “FOREIGN OCCUPATION” AND “POLITICAL/MILITARY ENCROACHMENT” DRIVERS

Foreign occupation driver: 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 driver: 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.

“Foreign occupation” and “Political and / or military encroachment” drivers do not describe Albania’s current reality. Nevertheless, this study’s inception phase concluded that the Albanian context and target population of this study must be examined with regard to both drivers from the perspective of mapping perceptions on and eventual support to the phenomenon of religious manipulation of Albanian citizens to join as foreign fighters (FFs) in the Syrian conflict.

Although official information from the Ministry of Interior (Mol) or Albanian State Police on the exact number of Albanian citizens involved in this conflict is missing, latest estimates suggest this number to be between 90 and 148 persons.¹⁴⁵ It is estimated that at least 13 Albanian citizens have traveled to Syria with their families between 2012 and 2015.¹⁴⁶

In July 2014, Albania introduced amendments to the Criminal Code related to participation (including organizing or call for participation) in military actions in a foreign country.¹⁴⁷ Many of this study’s key informants reported that some of the Albanian citizens involved in the Syrian conflict returned in the country before the entry

into force of these amendments to avoid legal consequences and eventual charges.¹⁴⁸ In March 2014, the Albanian State Police arrested a group of nine Islamic radicals on charges of recruiting fighters to join the Syrian conflict and inciting terrorism. Since February 2015, their case is being reviewed by the Court of Serious Crimes in Tirana.

As the media has been regularly reporting on the issue of foreign fighters and the response of state institutions in Albania or on similar developments in the neighboring countries such as Kosovo (including the protests of prosecuted groups’ supporters), the Albanian Islamic Community has instructed local clerics to work closely with the ummah in order to tackle religious radicalization.¹⁴⁹ However, many of this study’s key informants suggest that AIC efforts in this regard should be further reinforced. Additionally, lack of action from other state institutions outside the framework of law enforcement agencies has shaped an approach of “dealing with consequences of a strictly security problem”. This study’s key informants argue that “such an approach is not sustainable as it leaves outside the focus important elements – the root causes and the need for prevention

which must be tackled in close cooperation with religious institutions and relevant state agencies outside the security apparatus".¹⁵⁰

In order to map perceptions of the public and the dominant religious community (Muslim) in the target areas in relation to these drivers (Foreign occupation and Political / military encroachment) the study has asked respondent whether they agree with the following two control statements:

- a) *Albanian military missions in Afghanistan and Iraq are an insult to Muslims.*
- b) *It is the duty of every believer to protect the values and religious dignity by any means within and outside the country's borders.*

The rationale behind such choice is to confront two interlinked "arguments" often used by Islamic radical groups and/or individuals in Albania as

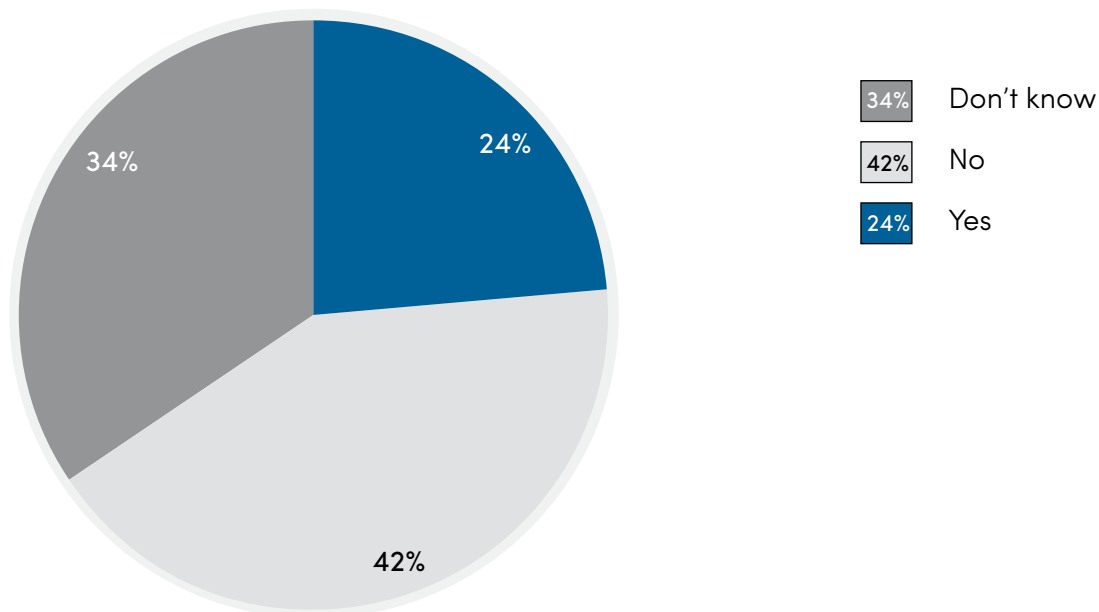
reported by the majority of this study's key informants. Namely, while they encourage Muslim believers to redeem dignity of their religious community within and outside country's borders, on the other hand, they consider Albania's military missions in Muslim countries a disgrace and an insult to Muslims.

As shown in Figure 15, 24% of respondents consider Albania's military missions to Afghanistan and Iraq an insult to Muslims. This view is most present in two, geographically very close, areas of the study – Pogradec (39%) and Buçimas (36%) – while respondents from the Commune of Qender-Librazhd have the lowest percentage. Namely, only 8% of respondents from this commune believe that these missions are an insult to Muslims.

This view has more supporters among "religiously active" respondents. Some 34.3% of all respondents that regularly practice religion agree with this statement. The remaining

Figure 15. Attitudes towards military missions [[Source: IDM survey 2015]]

Albanian military missions in Afghanistan and Iraq are an insult to Muslims

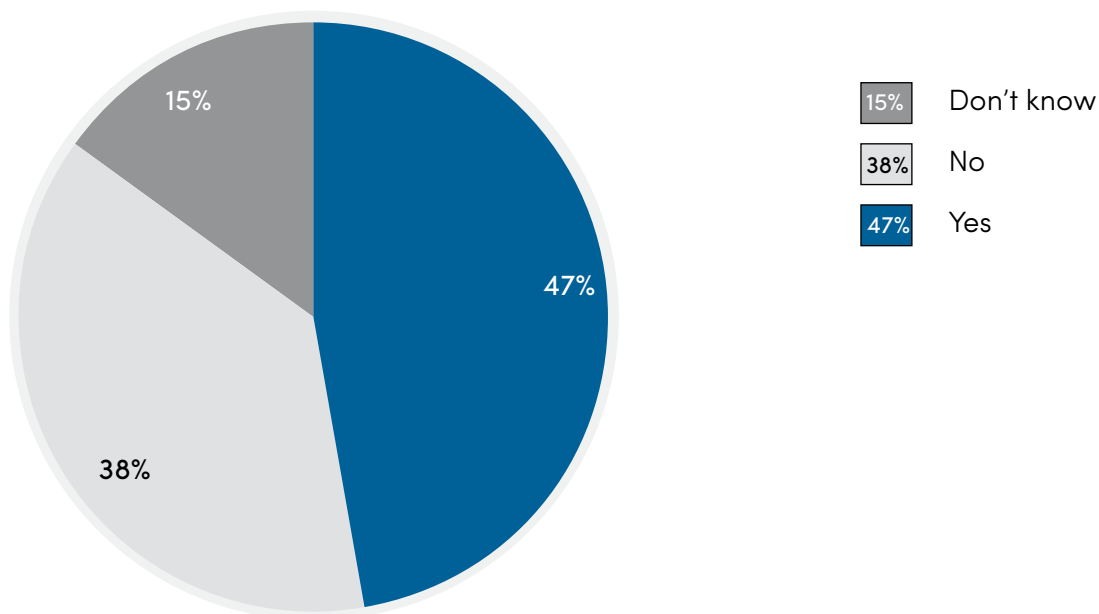


demography characteristics of this group (who consider Albania's missions in these countries to be an insult to Muslims) include: 27.3% of survey's male respondents (19.2% of female respondents of the survey); higher percentages within age groups of "26-30 years" (30%) and "31-35 years" old (27.7%). These respondents stand at approximately equal percentages (between 22% and 25%) within each of other demography categories, i.e., education (basic, high school, and university) or employment status.

In relation to the second control statement for these drivers, almost half of respondents (47%) believe that 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 16. Protecting religious values and dignity [Source: IDM survey 2015]

"Believers" must protect religious values and dignity by any means within and outside Albania's borders



This view is broadly shared among respondents in the areas of Bulqiza (78% of respondents from this area) and Perrenjas (62%). The analysis of demographic characteristics of these respondents, as compared to the overall sample within each demography feature, shows that the majority of them are male respondents (52% of all male interviewees); the

group comes from larger percentages of "31-35 years" (53.7%) and "26-30 years" (50.3%) categories of the survey. Also, more than half of all respondent who have completed high school (52%) and nearly 50% of all employed respondents agree with this statement. Lastly, this view is supported by 59% of respondents actively practicing religion, 43.3% of those who are mostly religious,

and 38.4% of non-religious respondents (don't practice at all religious rules/rituals).

In consideration of these data and regardless of the cases of Albanian citizens' involvement in the Syrian conflict, many key informants argue that violence is not supported among Albania's ummah. Focus group discussions with Muslim believers that practice religion suggest that the statement posed by IDM survey ("It is the duty of every believer to protect the values and religious dignity by any means within and outside the country's borders") might have been

misunderstood and responses of the majority of Muslim believers probably do not refer to 'violence'.

"Islam rejects violence. IDM survey showed that support to 'changing the political system with violence' comes from people who do not practice religion at all. They don't know what Islam is about or they have been manipulated."¹⁵¹

The Pew Research Center's report "The World's Muslims: Religion, Politics and Society" suggests that Albania's Muslims strongly reject violence in the name of Islam.¹⁵²

6.2.4. 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.

Pervasive corruption undermines state capacity, and facilitates the emergence of "ungoverned", "under-governed", "misgoverned", or "poorly governed" spaces, which, in turn, may provide opportunities for VE groups.¹⁵³ Corruption and impunity represent some of the most pressing concerns for many years in Albania. The EC Progress Report for Albania (2014) notes that "corruption is prevalent in many areas, including the judiciary and law enforcement, and remains a particularly serious problem".¹⁵⁴ In fact, fighting corruption and further strengthening a track record of investigations, prosecutions and convictions in corruption cases, especially at high level represent one of the five key priorities for Albania to

open EU accession negotiations.

The latest Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index 2014 (CPI) ranks Albania in the 110th position from 176 states included. Despite the improvement from 2013 (ranking the 133rd), Albania still remains the most corrupt country in the Western Balkans region along with Kosovo, both sharing the same score of 33 points.¹⁵⁵ Furthermore, 'legitimacy of the state' is Albania's second worst performing indicator with a 6.5 score (immediately after the "human flight" with 6.9) of the recent "Fragile State Index 2014" which suggests that corruption and lack of representativeness significantly hamper the social contract.¹⁵⁶

Many initiatives to encourage citizens

reporting corruption have been undertaken in the recent years by governmental and other non-state actors in Albania.¹⁵⁷ However, with a judiciary which is considered the most corrupt and least trusted state institution by Albanian citizens at large, the public is skeptical of results.

Numerous reports and assessments conclude that with such a widespread phenomenon and the constantly failing state actions to enable sustained results of the public trust in institutions and more broadly, in the efforts to tackle these concerns is at record level. A recent study of the Institute for Development and Research Alternatives (IDRA) 2015 suggests that 96% of surveyed citizens consider impunity

to be quite widespread phenomenon: “According to citizens, the law is applied unevenly for them (ordinary citizens) compared to a person holding power” which means that citizens are more likely to be punished for the same violations as compared to persons holding power.¹⁵⁸ The figures 17 and 18 below present these differences as perceived by surveyed citizens in the framework of IDRA’s “Impunity – Perceptions and Experience of Albanian citizens 2014 – 2015”.

Figure 17. ‘Personal impunity’ perception [Source: IDRA 2015]
Perception over Personal Impunity

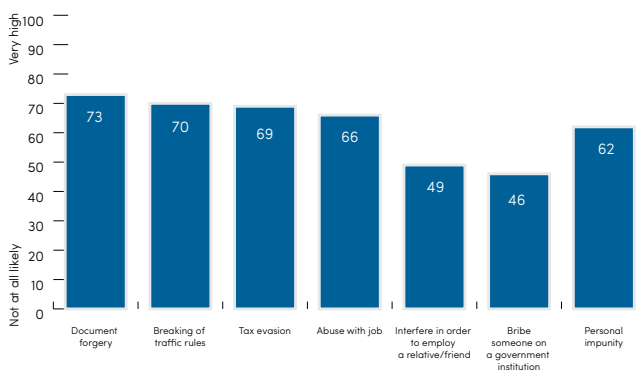
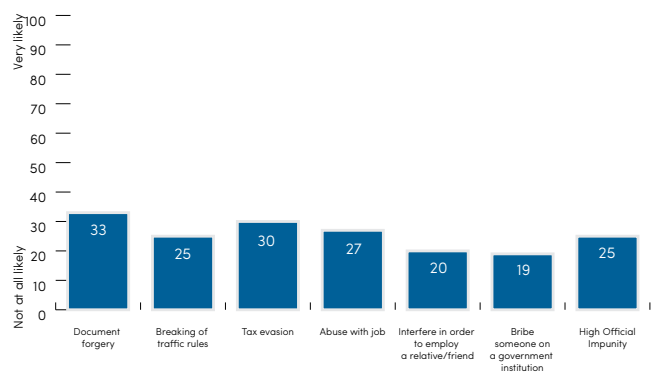


Figure 18. Perception on ‘high officials’ impunity’ [Source: IDRA 2015]
Perception over High Official Impunity



Despite signs of civic awakening to hold governments accountable and responsive to citizens’ priorities, Albania still remains a fairly “difficult milieu” to prompt for activism.¹⁵⁹ The broad distrust towards political parties and key institutions, such as the judiciary, create a vicious circle of societal apathy and disbelief that citizens’ activism can bring change to fight corruption and impunity. However, given the strong secular tradition of the country,

public perceptions on governance or corruption do not necessarily link up with religious values. Attitudes of the dominant (Muslim) religious community in the country on faith and morality are different from those in other societies.¹⁶⁰

In order to test such assumptions in a more recent context of developments, and also to analyze the potential carried by this driver for violent extremism in the country, IDM study

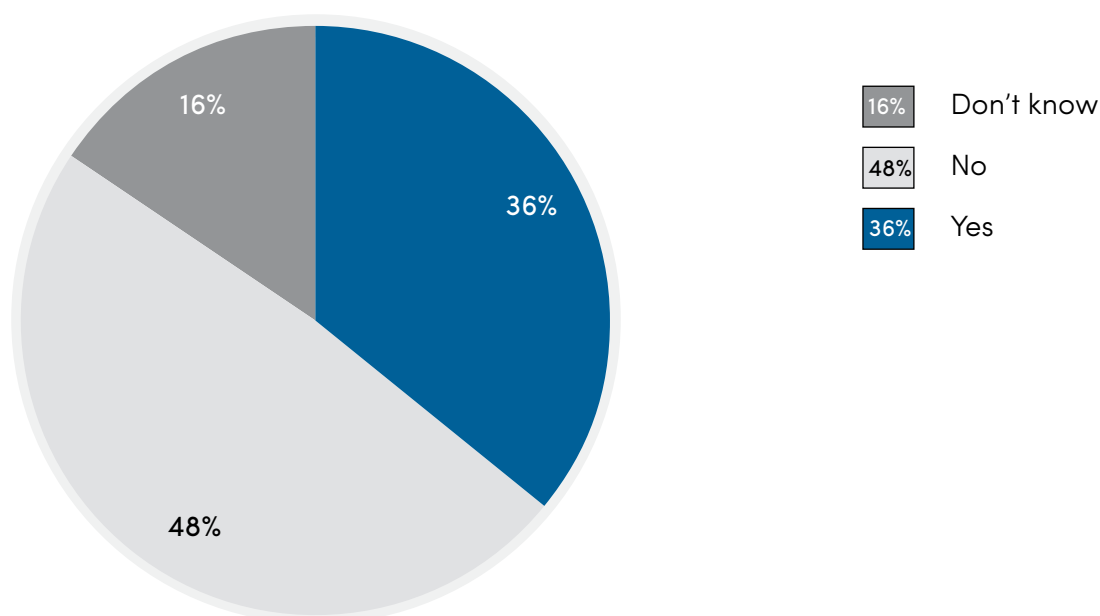
poses two control-statements:

- a) *States with strong religious faith have less corrupted governments.*
- b) *There can be more justice in Albania if people would have the same religious belief as me.*

IDM survey confirms the assumption that the majority of respondents do not correlate good or corrupt governance with religion.

Figure 19. Religious belief and corruption [Source: IDM survey 2015]

States with strong religious faith have less corrupted governments



This tendency is present across all target areas except Perrenjas and Bulqiza. Specifically, 58% of respondents in Perrenjas and 48% in Bulqiza agree with this statement, while 29% and 37% respectively disagree. This statement has more supporters among female respondents and youngsters of 18-25 years of age.

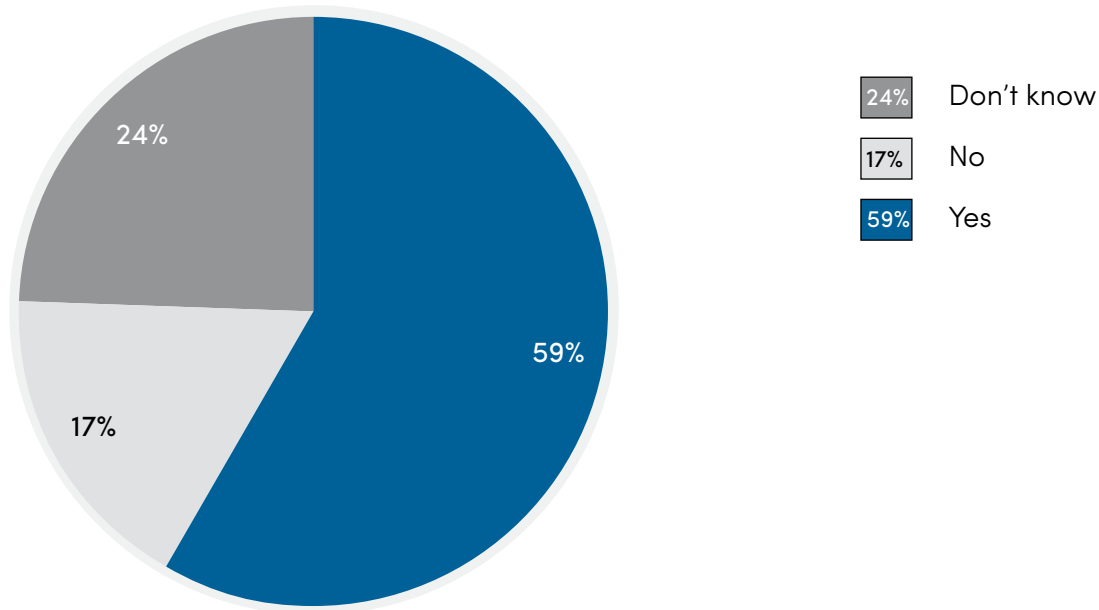
On the other hand, disagreement with this statement is seen among male respondents, in the category of unemployed respondents, and interviewees who have completed

primary and secondary education. More than half (52.9%) of respondents of 41-45 years of age and 52.5% of respondents of 31-35 years of age disagree as well. Furthermore, 65% of all surveyed respondents who declare that they practice regularly religion do not believe that "states with strong religious faith have less corrupted governments".

Unlike 'governance and religion' respondents tend to correlate values when asked about 'justice and (own) religion'.

Figure 20. Religious belief and justice [Source: IDM survey 2015]

There can be more justice in Albania if people would have the same religious belief as me



More than half (between 52% to 65%) of respondents in seven out of eight target areas agree with this statement, while this majority is less than half only in Librazhd. Some 46% agree, 31% disagree and another 23% don't know.

Looking at the demography of respondents who believe that "more justice is linked to their religion" the study finds that this perception is more present among male respondents (65.2% of all male interviewees), those who regularly practice religious rituals (85.4%) and among the category of 31-35 years age group (67.9%). Nearly 60% of employed and unemployed respondents and 63% of all respondents

with high school education share the same view.¹⁶¹

Qualitative instruments of the IDM study, focus group discussions and interviews with key informants do not suggest a direct link in the context of this driver. A few of them point out that this is not to be excluded as an 'argument' that VE groups might use/ have used. "Nevertheless, corruption and impunity of corrupt elites in the minds of religious believers is more linked with the implementation of the rule of law and the secular state rather than with the religious discourse".¹⁶²

6.2.5. 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.

Albania has improved its ranking in the FFP's "Fragile States Index" and its score from 65.2 point in 2013 to 63.6 points in 2014.¹⁶³ Yet, it still falls under the 'Warning' tier of countries, eight positions and one tier behind the Western Balkans frontrunner – Montenegro (with a 55.7 score, at 'Less stable' tier).¹⁶⁴ The combination of weak governance with widespread corruption (and local conflicts) provides a fertile ground for the rise of alternative power centers and violent extremism.¹⁶⁵ As G. Denoeux and L. Carter explain, this driver is interrelated with pervasive corruption, which undermines state capacity, strength and presence of state institutions. The authors suggest that peri-urban slums, border regions, places mired in violent conflict or criminality, and remote, isolated, or desert regions with low population density, where presence or effectiveness of state institutions is limited, carry a potential to serve as a safe haven for VE groups. Albania's rural and remote areas display particular interest for the analysis in this regard due to limited presence of state agencies.¹⁶⁶ Poor coverage of population in these areas with services provided by the state (healthcare, education and other social services) may serve to radicalization and / or used by VE groups.¹⁶⁷

Another appearance of 'poorly governed areas' relates to the law enforcement institutions with 'community policing' being far from a sustained and functional practice that relies on the partnership between police, local governments and communities of citizens.¹⁶⁸ Such low presence of these agencies has

provided for a safe haven for illegal activity, specifically for the cultivation of cannabis in rural areas.

"In spite of police's significant achievements in the fight against this crime in Lazarat¹⁶⁹ and other rural areas, the fact that this illegal activity has flourished for many years may raise reasonable doubts that even religious VE activity may have developed. On the other hand, sometimes religion, as shown in the case of Muslim families practicing their faith, can help the State to strengthen its authority in such areas".¹⁷⁰

Indeed, G. Denoeux and L. Carter (2009) suggest that the contribution of ungoverned or poorly governed spaces to VE should not be overstated. Instead of generalizations about the salience of this variable alone, studies should pay particular attention to how the presence of ungoverned spaces interacts with other variables to create vulnerability to VE.

IDM study poses two control statements to identify public perceptions in the target areas in relation to (1) presence of state and (2) respondents' attitudes towards the role of the state in monitoring religious activities. These two control statements are:

- a) *The force of the "state" is lower in the rural areas as compared to urban areas.*
- b) *Religious activities should be free and not monitored by the state.*

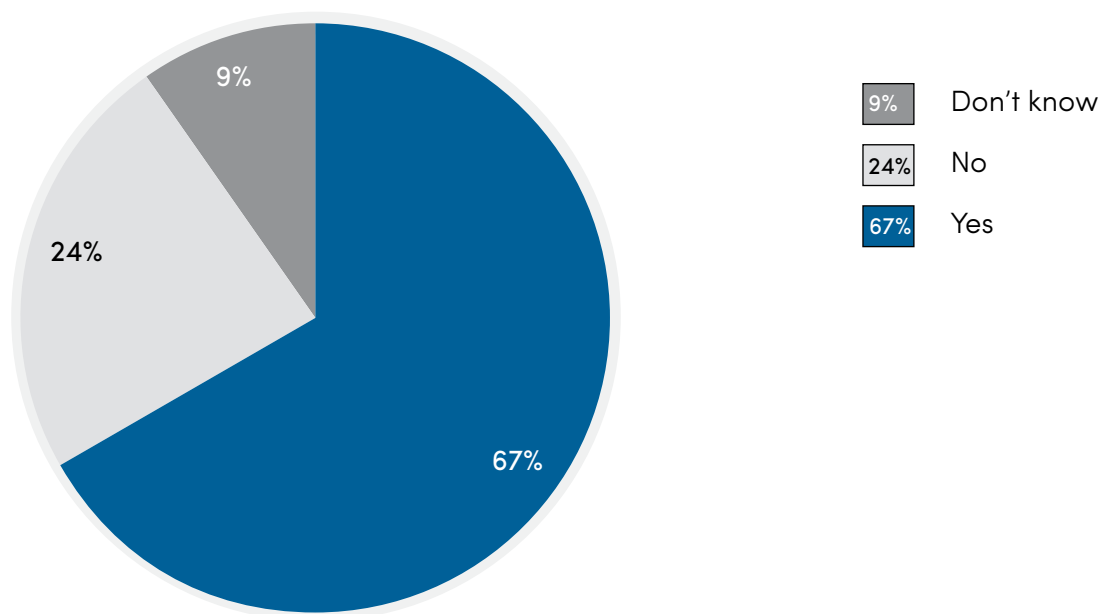
Some 54% of IDM survey's respondents believe that the state's force is less present (lower) in rural areas. Solid majorities in Cerrik (80%), Kukes (66%) and the Commune of Qender-Librazhd (64%) and Librazhd (51%) share this view. In Perrenjas, 45% of respondents do not have an opinion and 40% agree. Respondents from Pogradec and the Commune of Buçimas are divided, albeit the majority of them share this view, with 38% and 45% respectively. The overall analysis of answers within various sub-categories of the

demography confirms dominance of agreement with the statement.

On the other hand, respondents' answers are more conspicuous when asked about the monitoring role of the state over religious activities. Thus, 67% of respondents agree that religious activities should be free and not monitored by the state.

Figure 21. Monitoring of religious activities [Source: IDM survey 2015]

Religious activities should be free and not monitored by the state.



Over 60% of respondents in all areas, except Bulqiza, agree with the statement, whereas Perrenjas respondents agree almost massively (92%). The majority of Bulqiza respondents (60%) disagree with this statement and only a third of them (32%) endorse the statement.

In view of the demographic categories,

responses show high level of uniformity across all variables – categories of education, gender, employment status and age groups. Thus, firm majorities of 60% to 75% of all respondents within each of these sub-categories agree that “religious activities should be free and not monitored by the state”. This view is also supported among

respondents who practice all, practice the main religious rituals or who do not practice at all religion, although this support has a downward tendency from 76% of those who regularly practice religion, to 67% of 'mainly religious' respondents and 56% of those who do not practice religious rituals and rules at all.

Few participants in focus group discussions suggested that the statement seems to be problematic, because the first part asks whether religious activities should be free and the second part refers to the monitoring role of the state.¹⁷¹ The majority of focus group participants and many key informants at local level and in Tirana agree that monitoring of religious activities should take place to ensure

compliance with the Albanian tradition of Islam.

"Although this does not exclude law enforcement agencies, cooperation and continuous exchange especially with the spectrum of state institutions outside the security sector would place the monitoring of religious activities in a far better milieu".¹⁷² Police surveillance and monitoring of religious activities in the mosques by other security agencies is reportedly counterproductive, according to key informants.¹⁷³

Therefore, as the nature of this driver suggests, prevention must also follow the logic of the activation of this driver – conditional upon other factors / variables and roles of state and non-state stakeholders to address effects.

6.2.6. 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.

Although there are no cases of reported intimidation and/or coercion to recruit members by VE groups or individuals, this driver is analyzed by IDM study with a twofold purpose:¹⁷⁴ firstly, to map the existence of groups or individuals who support religious violent extremism and, thus, potentially resort to using intimidation or coercion on religious grounds; and, secondly, to explore other 'tools' such groups or individuals may use in order to exert pressure on citizens to expand their influence. The rationale behind such choice is that,

as G. Denoeux and L. 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".¹⁷⁵

This study's inception phase was introduced to two different positions among key informants as regards the instruments and means that have been used by religious VE groups

to manipulate and recruit believers (including their motivation) who have eventually joined the Syrian conflict as foreign fighters or to garner support for such cause. The first position suggests financial and economic gains (as a motivation by FFs and) as an instrument or means on the side of recruiters. Such view comes mostly from representatives of state institutions who did not report any experience or role in addressing religious radicalization, i.e. ministries of education, social affairs, local government issues or inspectorates and other agencies under their authority. According to the second group of key informants – experts and practitioners who report interest and experience in the phenomenon as a result of their professional engagement (as part of security institutions, AIC or other organizations) – suggest the misinterpretation of religious dogma (by recruiters) and ‘religious ignorance’ (of manipulated individuals) as the main instrument.¹⁷⁶ Almost identical division was identified also during the study’s field work at local level throughout several interviews with key informants from state institutions, AIC and other non-state actors whereas more informed stakeholders suggest that media has played the main role in creating such perception among the public, including the perceptions of representatives of state institutions outside the security sector.¹⁷⁷

Indeed, as a largely cash-based economy with widespread informal employment and grey economy¹⁷⁸ Albania does provide conditions for the use of such means by VE groups. Despite improvements in the legislation to fight financing of terrorism, various international reports suggest that money laundering and terrorism financing remain significant threats in the country.¹⁷⁹ On the other hand, investigative media reports

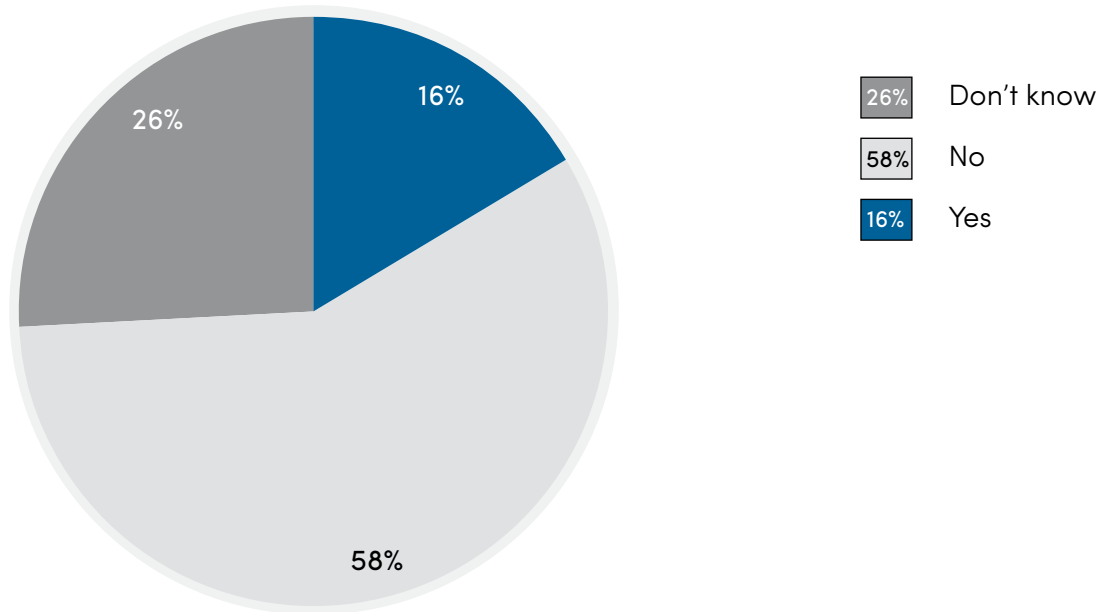
argue that in the case of prosecuted FFs recruiters, the Prosecution has established the mechanism of some small cash payments albeit it suggests that religious propaganda (and not economic gains) has been the main motivation of Albanian FFs.¹⁸⁰ Although these cash payments have been used to cover travel expenses, few key informants do not rule out that through a kind of ‘hawala system’¹⁸¹ they may have served also to ‘motivate’ recruiters, as it has been the case in some other countries.¹⁸²

IDM survey asks respondents specifically about the existence of individuals who support violent extremism on religious grounds in the target areas. An additional question is asked to identify perceptions on believers conveying religious messages. Namely, the survey asks respondents whether they agree with the statement “It is the duty of every believer to convey God’s Message to whom has not yet accepted it”. 64% of all respondents agree with the statement as opposed to 22% of do not. This trend is present across of target areas except Librazhd whereas the majority (44%) disagrees with the statement and 39% agree. The statement is supported by over 50% of respondents across demographic categories (gender, education, age-group, employment status etc.) except respondents who are not practicing at all religious rituals in which case level of support falls at 42% (and 34.2% disagree).

A group of 16% of respondents do confirm the existence of individuals who support religious violent extremism in the target areas. Another 58% disagree with this control-statement posed by IDM survey – There are individuals that support violent extremism on religious grounds in the area I live.

Figure 22. Individuals supporting violent extremism [Source: IDM survey 2015]

There are individuals who support violent extremism on religious grounds in the area I live



Respondents from Perrenjas and Kukes report least percentage of agreement with the statement – only 3% and 7% respectively, report that there are individuals who support religious violent extremism in these areas. On the other hand, 30% of respondents from commune Qender-Librazhd agree that there are individuals who support religious VE in their area (another 36% disagree and 34% do not know). Cerrik respondents come second, with 27% of them reporting existence of such individuals (46% disagree).

An average of 10% to 20% of respondents within most of the demographic categories does report such individuals – gender (15.7% female and 16.9% of male respondents), employment status (15.4% employed and 19.6% of unemployed respondents), age (17.5% of “18-25 years”, 16.6% of “26-30 years”, 11.7% of “31-35 years”, and 15% of “36-40 years” respondents),

education (15.2% of respondents with “high school” and 15.4% of respondents with “university education”), and respondents who practice religion (10% of respondents who practice regularly and 15.4% of respondents who practice the main religious rituals).

There are only three demography sub-categories who agree with this statement (and hence report existence of individuals who support religious violent extremism) beyond this average. Namely this includes 21.5% of all respondents with “up to 9 year education”, 21.7% of “41-45 years old” respondents, and 24.9% of all respondents who do not practice at all religious rituals.

Findings of IDM survey on the existence of individuals who support violent extremism on religious grounds were confirmed in many of the focus group discussions (May 2015) while this fact

was also anticipated in a number of structured interviews conducted with key informants from the capital and in the eight target areas. However, although many of the key informants suggest that such individuals are a very isolated minority as compared to the overall number of religious believers,

it is difficult to establish through this question an estimate on the number of individuals who support violent extremism on religious grounds.

6.2.7. PERCEPTION THAT THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM IS FUNDAMENTALLY UNFAIR AND HOSTILE TO MUSLIM SOCIETIES/ PEOPLES

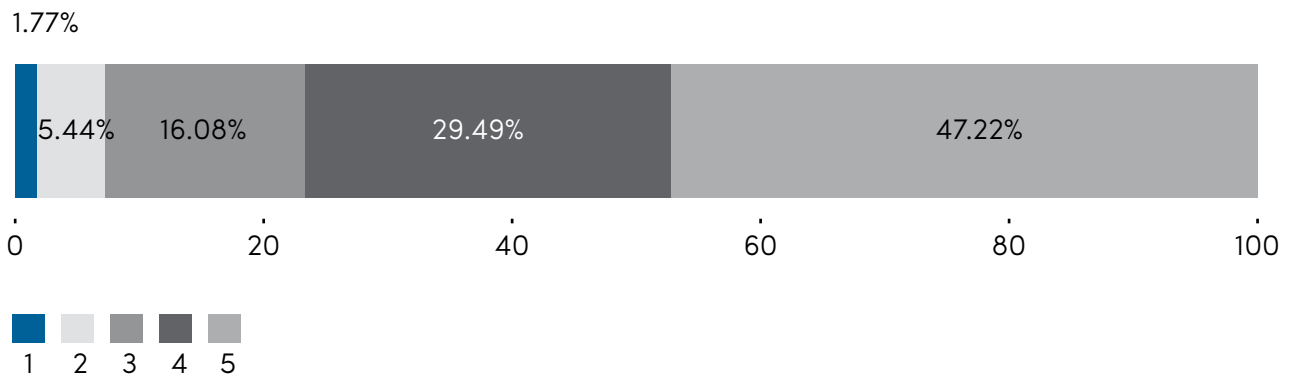
Populations may accept violent extremism propaganda that the global political and economic system discriminates against the Muslim world, which can mesh with personal or communal feelings of discrimination.

Albania is broadly promoted as the country of religious harmony whereas Muslims, Christians and people of other religious communities coexist in peace. Nevertheless, as findings of IDM survey show in relation to many of the control-statements under various categories of VE drivers, the largest religious community in the country (Muslims) faces significant challenges

and concerns. Additionally, asked to evaluate whether "in Albania there is 'religious hatred' (1) or 'religious harmony' (5)" in a scale from 1 to 5, the average score is 4.1 although 'religious harmony' (score 5) is the answer reported by most respondents (47.2% of them).

Figure 23. Albania – Religious hatred or harmony? [Source: IDM survey 2015]

In Albania there exists mostly 'Religious hatred' (1) - 'Religious harmony' (5)



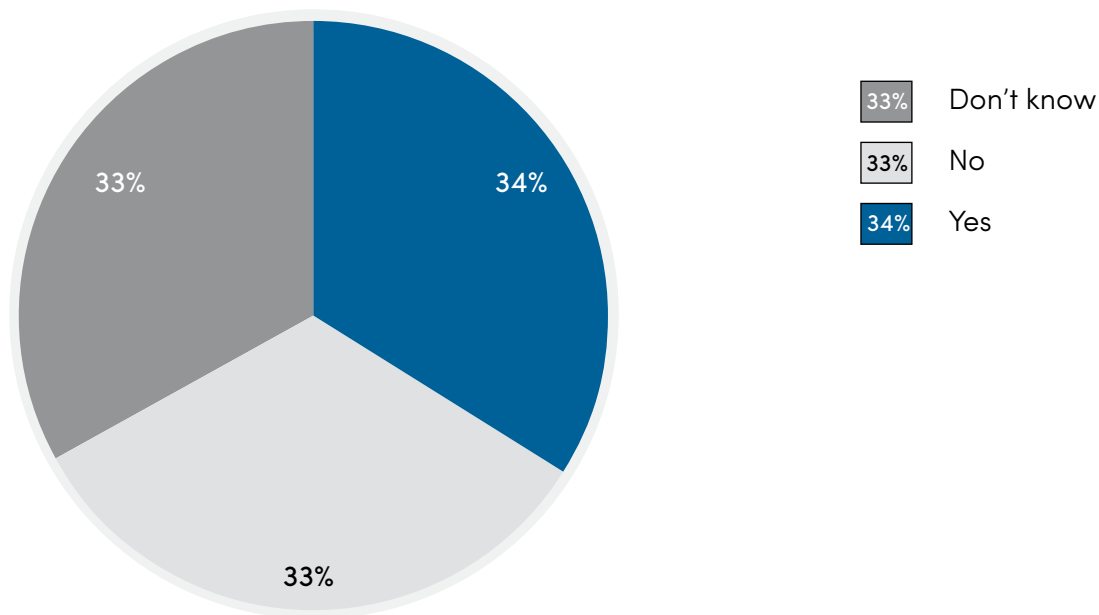
A perception of discrimination especially against the Muslim believers who are regularly practicing religion was often reported in the focus group discussions and also in some of the interviews with AIC religious clerics at local level.¹⁸³ The qualitative instruments of IDM Study (interviews and focus groups) have attempted to discuss this driver with Muslim clerics or members of the ummah. However, given the largely pro-West orientation of Albanians in general, it was difficult

to elaborate with key informants on arguments that “international system is unfair to the Muslim world”.¹⁸⁴

As a country with a dominant Muslim population, IDM Study looks at this driver by asking survey respondents whether they agree with the following statement – The West is hostile and constantly attacks Islamic states and cultures.¹⁸⁵

Figure 24. The West and Islam [Source: IDM survey 2015]

The West is hostile and constantly attacks Islamic states & cultures.



Survey respondents are divided on this statement, as shown in Figure 24. 34% of interviewees do believe that the “west is hostile and constantly attacks Islamic cultures and states”. Such divided perceptions are present also among respondents within the majority the target areas, with few exceptions. Namely, only in Bulqiza there is a large majority of 47% of respondents who agree with the statement. On the other

hand, this view is least present among Cerrik respondents – 24% of them agree, and 45% do not perceive the West as hostile to or attacking Islamic states and cultures.

Weighting this percentage of respondents who see the West as hostile and attacking within each demography category, IDM analysis reveals symptomatic findings. Namely,

from a gender perspective – 27.2% of all female respondents and 38.2% of all male respondents share this view. Also, 31% – 33% of all respondents from each age group from 18 to 35 years of age agree with the statement, while this percentage reaches 38.1% of respondents of “36–40 years old” and 35.5% of respondents between 41 and 45 years old. There are no major discrepancies in the percentage within education groups whereas support for the statement varies from 32.5% of all respondents with university background, 34.5% of respondents with high school education and 36% of those who have completed up to 9 years

education. Also, 34.2% of unemployed respondents and 36.2% of those employed agree that the West is hostile to and attacking Islamic states/cultures.

The only significant differences within respondents’ demographic sub-categories are noted in relation to “practicing religion” element. Almost half of respondents who regularly practice religious rituals and rules (49.3%) agree with this statement. Surveyed respondents who practice only the main religious rituals show a lower percentage – 28.8% of them. Lastly, only 20.5% of all respondents who do not practice at all religion agree with the statement.

6.3. CULTURAL DRIVERS

The list of drivers ranked in this study is not exhaustive. However, in the reviewed literature these drivers are distinguished for their key role in ‘enabling’ violent extremism. The more of them are present in a milieu, the more possible it becomes for radicalization and violent extremism to develop there. Furthermore, these drivers oftentimes overlap and reinforce one another. For example, the ‘Islam under siege’ driver, described below as a cultural driver, is closely linked with the political perceptions that the international system is unfair and discriminatory against Islamic countries and believers and that Muslim people in certain areas in conflict are being oppressed.¹⁸⁶ The perception of a vital threat to the Islam culture may reinforce the conviction that the West is hostile to Muslim countries and that their people are unjustly suffering from

the social discrimination and constant devaluation of Islamic culture and values.

Guilain Denoeux and Lynn Carter (2009) find out three types of cultural drivers, which include: a) perceptions of unfair continued attacks of the Western countries against Muslim culture and countries; b) perceptions of invasion and assimilation of traditional culture of a country from foreign modernist influences; and, c) proactive efforts of radical groups to impose and spread their strict version and subculture of Islam over other traditions and cultures. To understand their salience and role in Albania, these drivers have been examined herein based on the information obtained from interviews with key informants, from surveys conducted in eight target areas, and from focus groups.

Table 4. Category of cultural drivers

DRIVER	DESCRIPTION
Islam under siege	<p>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.</p> <p>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".</p>
Broader cultural threats	<p>The population may perceive a broader cultural threat – to traditions, customs, values, and sense of collective or individual honor and dignity</p>
"Proactive" religious agendas	<p>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.</p>

Source: Guilain Denoeux and Lynn Carter (2009)

6.3.1. 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 politicized and emotional images of fellow Muslims suffering in other countries. This overlaps and reinforces one of the political drivers, namely "Perception that the international system is fundamentally unfair & hostile to Muslim societies / peoples." 187

This cultural driver is linked with the perceptions of a continued attack on Islam and Muslims by the West and the United States of America in particular as well as with the feeling of humiliation, marginalization, and submission of Muslim people. The sense of an existential threat to Islam is connected with the belief that the oppression and injustices to the Muslims

are part of the current international system. Empirical studies have shown that the perceptions of injustice to Islam interact closely with the possibility to support or get involved in violent extremist activities.¹⁸⁸

However, according to the perceptions of some people, this threat may come from within, i.e., from the Muslim believers themselves who

have “deviated from the right path (e.g., believing in a sect) or who have “betrayed” by joining with the West. This driver may sometimes be stronger than the socio-economic drivers and this can be clearly seen in the sense of solidarity with the Muslims of other countries who are being oppressed, according to foreign fighters’ perceptions. Furthermore, according to foreign fighters, the protection of ‘Muslim brothers’ is a religious duty. A very strict interpretation of the religious dogma makes radical group members argue with their own family members, who are considered as ‘non-Muslim’ or ‘not pious’. Lastly, it should be considered that this driver is not created in vacuum. Shaping such perceptions in a person depends on the preaching skills and duration of indoctrination conducted by a charismatic preacher as well as by certain circumstances that make a vulnerable person exposed to radicalization and violent extremism.

Two self-proclaimed imams and their five supporters were arrested on charges of “Recruitment of persons for committing acts with terrorist purposes or financing of terrorism”, “Incitement, public call and propaganda for committing crimes with terrorist purposes”, and “Inciting hate or disputes on the grounds of race, ethnicity, religion or sexual orientation”, stipulated by Articles 231, 232/a. and 265 of the Criminal Code. According to the Prosecutor’s Office, imams were arrested on charges that through religious propaganda they inspired over 70 Albanians, followers of the Takfirist line of Islam to join in the conflict. According to media reports, the ummah in the mosques of Unaza e Re and Mezez in Tirana were called upon for Jihad and were told that participation in the conflict would grant them ‘the heaven’ in the after-world. Those who were ready to join

the conflict were provided financial and logistic support.

The radicalized people ready to join or already in the conflict believed that fighting by the self-declared Islamic State (ISIS) was for the protection of ‘Muslim brothers’, who were suffering and were being oppressed unjustly. As already discussed above, the sense of continued attacks on Islam promotes and facilitates extreme decision-making, such as involvement in armed conflicts for the protection of and solidarization with Muslims, who are perceived to be suffering from injustices and attacks.

According to interviewed Muslim clerics, radicalization occurs because of misinterpretation and misunderstanding of religious dogma. Religious texts (Qur’an and Hadiths) are misinterpreted by self-proclaimed imams, who aim to manipulate and indoctrinate others. Clerics interviewed by IDM stated that self-proclaimed imams and other people had tried to preach or had preached in their mosques. “The language they used was stuffed with hatred for other religions and countries, and the ummah was preached of international injustice to Muslims in other countries of the world. In addition, they appealed against democracy, because, according to them, it was God, not humans, in control of everything.”¹⁸⁹ In some cases, local leaders of the mosques admit to have banished and forbidden their return to preach to the ummah of their mosques. On the other hand, interviewees state that very young people, with poor secular education and shallow knowledge of Islam, misunderstand parts of the religious doctrine and fall easy prey to manipulation.

Interviewees of this study explain that the language used by the takfirist believers is very hard-hitting against other religions and to imams themselves as well as other Muslim believers who observe and practice traditional Islam. Some of the interviewees admit to have been named 'munafiqs' (hypocrites) or even 'kafir' (faithless/disbeliever) by followers of these lines. In such cases, these hardliners categorically refuse to discuss their views with other imams of believers. Imams are not considered true Muslims and the Albanian Islamic Community is considered a 'traitor' and collaborator with the politics and Western countries. However, the interviewees deny of any occurrence of physical conflicts between them because of differences of religious views.

The overwhelming majority of the respondents, either from the Islamic clergy or representatives of the institutions and state officials, have expressed their dissatisfaction with the media coverage and treatment of these cases. According to them, the main goal of the media is "to sell the news", not to inform by professional standards and educate the public on the phenomenon. According to the respondents, the media in Albania is perceived by the believers as 'Islamophobic', 'irrational', 'discriminatory', and 'adding fuel to the fire' by taking over a negative role in the stimulation of prejudices and hatred. Media reporting of these topics leads to prejudices against Muslims and labeled as terrorists. According to the interviewed clerics, media reporting presents Islam as connected with terrorism. Furthermore, some of them declare that several cases of injustices to Muslims have not been reported sufficiently or at all in the country's television.

To assess the presence of perceptions on attacks against Islam in the country, this section analyzes the answers of the respondents in eight targeted areas with regard to two 'control questions', as follows:

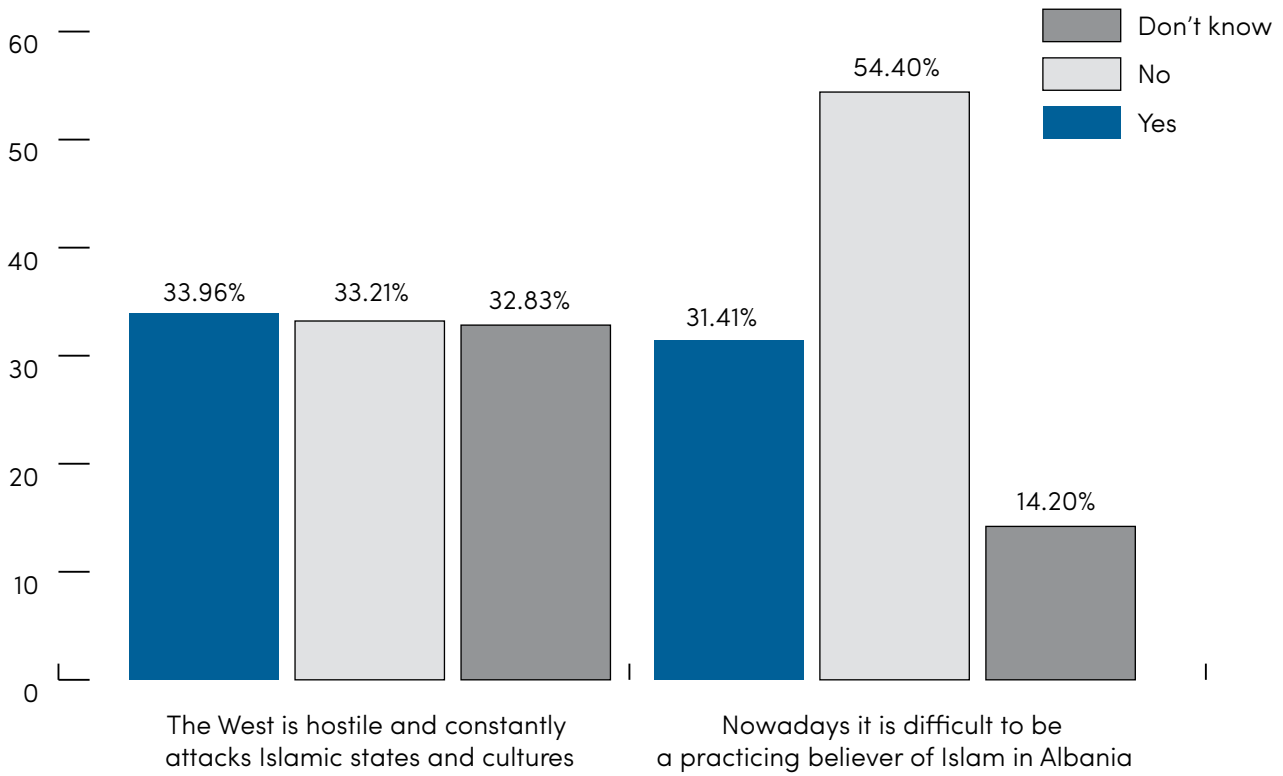
- a) *The West is hostile and constantly attacks Islamic states and cultures.*
- b) *Nowadays it is difficult to be a practicing believer of Islam in Albania.*

The possibility that these perceptions favor or stimulate religious radicalization and violent extremism is assessed on the basis of 'positive answers' for the above two control questions that seek to point out: a) the sense that Islamic countries and culture are unfairly attacked by the West; and, b) perceptions of difficulty to practice Islamic faith freely. Figure 25 presents the survey findings with regard to this driver.

One out of three respondents believes that "The West is hostile and constantly attacks Islamic states and cultures" (34%). An opposing view is expressed by every second respondent (33%), while every third interviewee was indecisive (33%). In concrete figures, out of a total of 792 people who have accepted to answer to this question, 269 of them believe that the Islamic countries and culture are under attack by the West. The greatest number of respondents who believe that the Islamic countries and culture are under continued attack by the West is in Bulqiza (47%) and in the Commune of Qender-Librazhd (43%), whereas the smallest number of respondents who share this view is in Cerrik (24%).

Most respondents (54%) are of the opinion that it is not difficult to be a

Figure 25. Perception of Islam under siege [Source: IDM survey 2015]



practicing believer of the Islamic faith in Albania. Some 31% of the respondents believe that nowadays it is difficult to be a practicing believer of Islam in Albania.¹⁹⁰ The largest number of respondents giving a “positive answer” is noted in Bulqiza (48%) and the smallest number of those with this same view is found in Librazhd (17%).

The perception that “The West is hostile and constantly attacks Islamic states and cultures” (34%) is stronger among: male respondents (38% of them), people of age group 36–40 years old (38%) and those with 9 or fewer years of education (36%). In terms of employment status, this perception is stronger among employed people (36%). Respondents who practice

religion regularly (49%) tend to believe that the Western countries are hostile and attack the Islamic countries and cultures constantly.

With regard to the second control question on this driver, the feeling that ‘nowadays it is difficult to be a Muslim actively practicing religion in Albania’ (32%) is more accentuated among: male respondents (37% of them), people of age group of 31–35 years old (42%), people who have completed high school education (34%), and the unemployed (33%). Respondents who practice religious rituals regularly (51%) are more inclined to answer positively to this question.

6.3.2. BROADER CULTURAL THREATS

“The population may perceive a broader cultural threat – to traditions, customs, values, and sense of collective or individual honor and dignity.”¹⁹¹

While the belief that Islam is under attack represents the most significant cultural driver of violent extremism in countries with predominantly Muslim populations, broader perceptions of grave threats to customs and values – and to the sense of personal and collective honor associated with those values – can play a decisive role as well.¹⁹² In such instances, what is involved is not so much the defense of religion per se, but the effort to affirm broader cultural boundaries (many of which are intertwined with religion, can be expressed in a religious idiom, or can be defended through means for which religion can provide a justification). The cultural threat is perceived in the form of ‘stain’, assimilation and loss of local culture into foreign, modern and Western influences. Centuries-old tribal code of honor is being threatened by external encroachment. The very desire to protect a ‘status quo’ that is being upset triggers violence, as deeply conservative individuals and communities turn into “reactionary radicals. According to Denoeux and Carter (2009), their ability of mobilization stems from the very traditions, which are embedded in networks of social relations and lines of communication that facilitate mobilization.

Respondents in this study have mentioned several cultural threats, including: a) threats sensed by traditional Muslim believers from influences and spread of radical Islam lines; reciprocally, followers of these radical lines consider traditional believers in Albania as ‘not true

Muslims’ and collaborators of Western countries and cultures; b) households following strict interpretations and radical lines prohibit their young females to attend school since an early age.

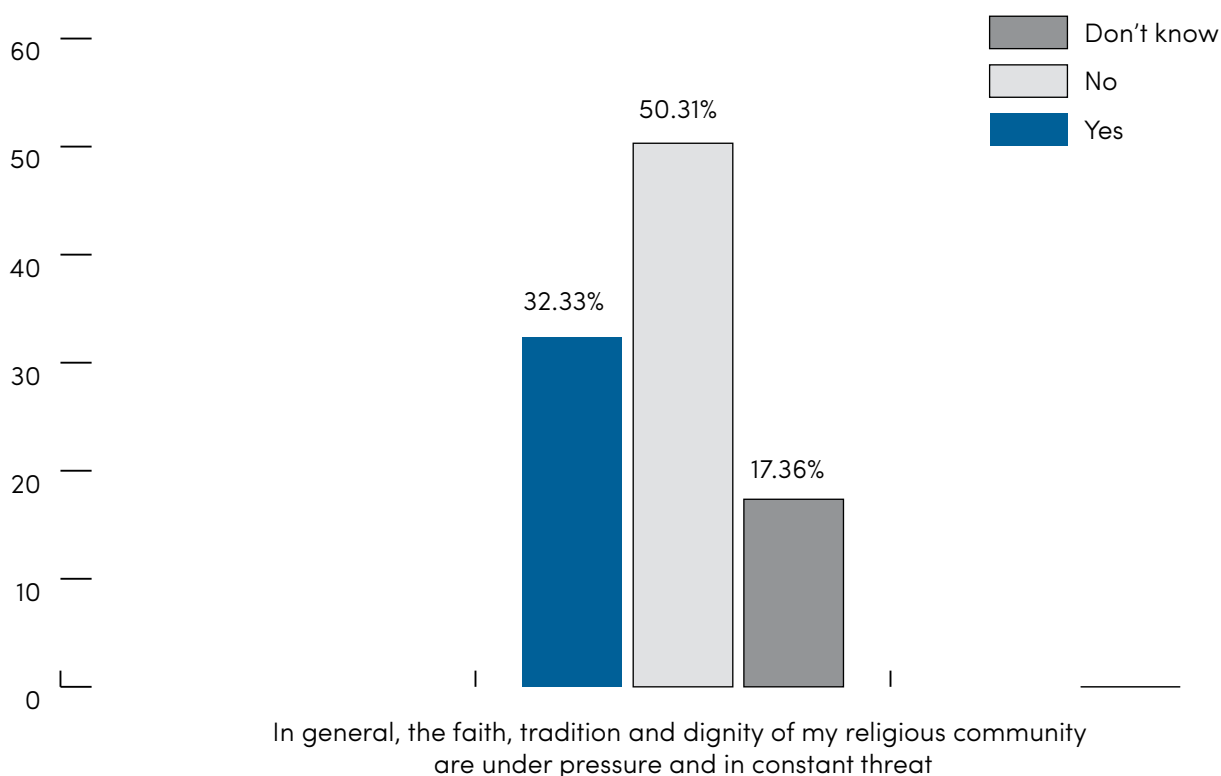
The presence and scale of perceptions on threats to culture and traditions are measured by means of the survey in the eight targeted areas. To this end, the respondents were asked the following control question:

In general, the faith, tradition and dignity of my religious community are under pressure and in constant threat.

The possibility that this perception favors or stimulates religious radicalization and violent extremism is assessed on the basis of ‘positive answer’ for the above control question that seeks to reveal the respondents’ opinion that the culture and traditions of their religious community are under threat. As already explained above, empirical studies have proven that such feeling provokes mobilization of conservative individuals and communities that may react radically to protect the “status quo”. The Figure 26 below presents the survey findings with regard to this driver.

About 32% of the respondents have the feeling that the faith, traditions and dignity of their religious community is under constant threat. Most respondents, or one in two of them (50%), do not share this opinion. In terms of specific areas, the perceptions of threats to culture and traditions of religious local communities are most spread in the Commune of Qender-

Figure 26. Broader cultural threats [Source: IDM survey 2015]



Librazhd (47% of the respondents) and in Bulqiza (46%). The lowest rate of spread of this perception is noted in Kukes, where 24% of the respondents believe in the feeling of threat to the culture and traditions of their religious community.

The perception that “In general, the faith, tradition and dignity of my religious community are under pressure and in constant threat” (32%)

is stronger among: male respondents (36% of them), people of age group 31-35 years old (37%) and those who have completed high school education (38%). In terms of employment status, this perception is stronger among employed people (35%). Respondents who practice religious rules and rituals regularly (51%) are more inclined to believe that the faith, traditions, and dignity of their community is generally under constant threat.

6.3.3. “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.”¹⁹³

The appearance of radical religious lines in Albania is tied to the presence, after collapse of communism, of several Arabian-Islamic organizations suspected of links or connected with terrorism and to Albanian students' return to Albania after having completed studies funded by these organizations. Interviewees explain that some of these students may have contacted with or influenced by people who are known of their radical religious views that justify violent extremism. Introduction and spread of these lines was favored by the shortage caused by and during the communist period with regard to religious preaching and qualified Muslim clerics.

According to interviewed theologians, the traditional Islam regards religion as a pact between man and God, and, therefore, as a spiritual space. In this belief, the force and coercion have no room in religion. The Qur'an repeatedly states that there is no coercion in faith and that all people are free to practice whichever religion they wish. Since the time of Prophet Mohammed, peace and tolerance have found place among various religious groups by respecting differences in faith.¹⁹⁴ Contrary to this, the ideology of radical groups builds on the concept of political constraint of religious belief by refusing to allow differences in faith. Furthermore, they justify used violence through tafirism, which means declaring as 'kafir' (disbeliever, non-Muslim) the heads of the Islamic states considered as not sufficiently believers. This concept is refused by Muslims and traditional groups of Islam, as it is considered being a deviation from the doctrine.¹⁹⁵

To impose their belief on each and every one, Muslim or non-Muslim, extremist ideologies arbitrarily refer to religious writings by ignoring the Islamic fundamental principle of tolerance. A

number of theologians from various countries have argued that the flowery language, invocation of God and the Qur'an, calls for application of Shariah, and readiness for martyrdom only aim to misguide the youth with "foolish dreams".¹⁹⁶

Extremist groups refuse any chance of compromise, insisting in their own way and no other. Radical individuals and groups that have become extremist militants state death penalty for anyone who thinks differently and declare war and seek to overthrow government that they consider illegitimate to God. These hardliners believe they have a mission and a message to spread. To this end, they infiltrate in mosques, religious community centers and charity organizations where by means of their ideas and methods they indoctrinate people inclined to believe.¹⁹⁷ Interviewees have stated that such tactics have been used in mosques of several targeted areas of this study. Using manipulations and finances, they impose their views over socio-economically weak communities. The essence of their manipulation stands in the misinterpretation of religious scripts and creation of belief among their followers for winning over 'paradise' through Jihad.

The possibility and threat of radical individuals/groups taking up a 'proactive' religious agenda in Albania is assessed by analyzing the data obtained from the survey conducted in the eight targeted areas of the study. For this purpose, respondents were presented the following statements (control questions):

- a) *Religious preaching in Albania ought to be more liberal and adapt to modern tendencies;*
- b) *There are individuals that support violent extremism on*

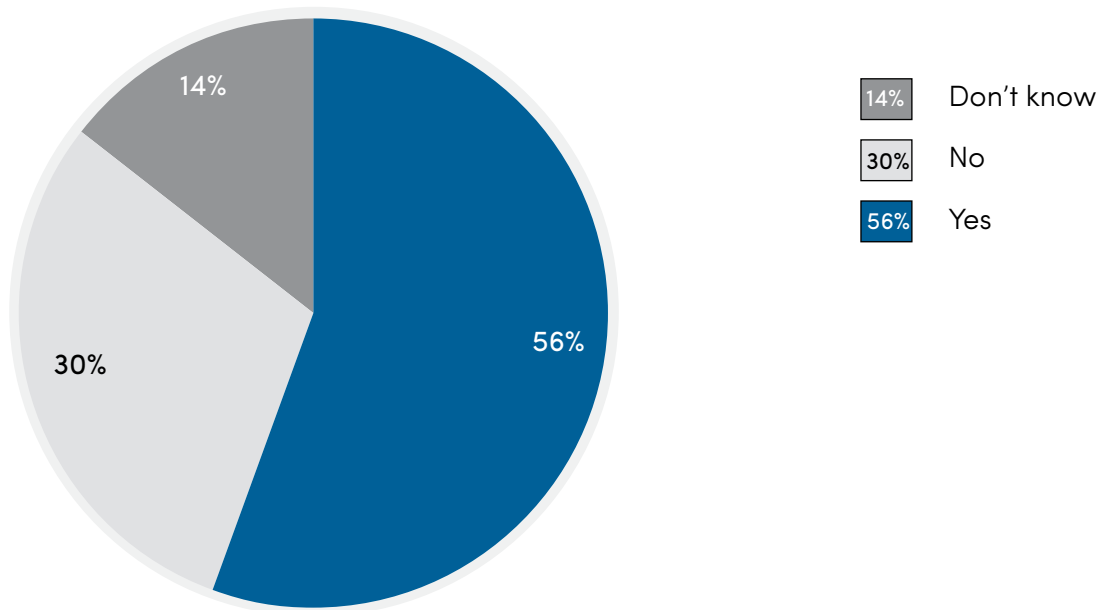
*religious grounds in the area I live.*¹⁹⁸

A favorable ground for undertaking a 'proactive' religious agenda by radical individuals and groups is assessed on the basis of 'negative answers' to the first control question, which seeks to identify the

'conservative attitudes to liberal forms of religious preaching', and positive answers for the second statement, which consists in the 'presence of individuals/groups that support violent extremism on religious grounds in the community'.

Figure 27. Liberal religious preaching [Source: IDM survey 2015]

Religious preaching ought to be more liberal



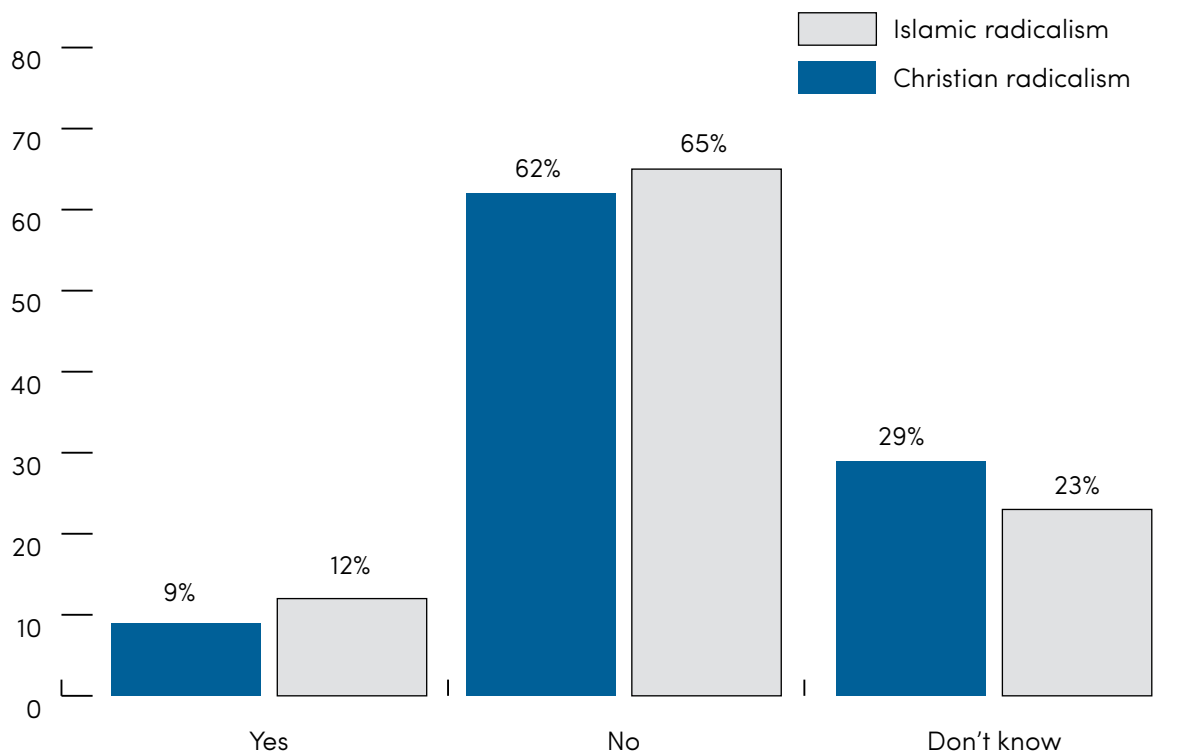
Most respondents have admitted that 'religious preaching in Albania ought to be more liberal and adapt to modern tendencies' (56%). However, 30% of the respondents were against more liberal preaching and adapted to modern tendencies. The largest number of respondents who object to more liberal religious preaching adapted to modern tendencies is noted in Cerrik (46%), whereas the smallest number is in Librazhd (23%).

As shown in Figure 28, most respondents

(62%-65%) deny of the presence of radical religious individuals and groups in their communities. Only 9% and 12% admit the presence of individuals or groups inciting Christian and Islamic radicalism respectively. At the same time, the number of people who negate the presence of individuals or groups of Islamic radicalism is higher than those respondents who deny the presence of groups with Christian radicalizing agenda. When drawing a comparison among all surveyed areas, the highest number of people who believe that in their area there are individuals or groups inciting Christian

Figure 28. Islamic / Christian radicalism [Source: IDM 2015 Survey]

Individuals/groups that incite Christian/Islamic radicalism operate in the area I live



radicalism is in the area of Librazhd, both in town (18.2%) and in the Commune of Qender-Librazhd (15.3%). The largest number of interviewees believing that there are individuals and groups inciting Islamic radicalism is in Bulqiza (21%).

The demography of respondents who are more inclined to object to the idea of 'religious preaching in Albania being more liberal and adapted to modern tendencies' (30%) is as follows: most of them are males (34%), people of age group of 31-35 years old (37%) and those with high school education (33%). In terms of employment status, this perception is stronger among employed people (32%). Respondents who practice religious rituals and rules *54%) are more likely to disagree with the idea of religious preaching being more liberal and adapted to modern tendencies in Albania.

With regard to the second control

question on this driver, the people most inclined to believe that in their community there are certain individuals or groups inciting Christian radicalism are: males (9.4% of them), age group of 36-40 years old (12.5%), persons with 9 or fewer years of education (13%), employed (11.3%). The respondents most inclined to believe that in their community there are certain individuals or groups that incite Islamic radicalism are: males (12.4% of them), people of age group 18-25 years old (15%), respondents with 9 years or less education (14.7%), unemployed (13.7%). This belief prevails among people who do not practice religious rules and rituals (18%).

6.4. POTENTIAL VE DRIVERS SPECIFIC FOR ALBANIA

IDM study approaches the assessment of VE drivers and enabling factors for religious radicalization in Albania through context-pertinent methodological framework and contemporary literature. As elaborated in the Methodology of this study, IDM has validated the assessment framework against the Albanian context in order to ensure relevance of methodological instruments and quality of their implementation. Furthermore, Guilain Denoeux and Lynn Carter (2009) suggest that the framework of drivers and respective categories are not exhaustive and cannot reflect the features of every societal milieu.

In this regard, this study's chapter "Restoring religion and countering radicalization: Albania's 25 years" presents the main features of Albania's journey of building the community of believers over the past two and a half decades. A number of challenges, shortcoming and concerns are elaborated therein albeit with limited database of sources.

Key informants of this study during the inception phase have raised various assumptions and assertions related to the potential impact that certain (past/current) developments may have on VE and religious radicalization in Albania. The inception phase of the study confirmed relevance of these features and developments typical for Albania and the potential impact they may have in the context of VE and religious radicalization. However, assessing

their actual impact on the Albanian context called for evidence and data which IDM study undertook to generate through the survey and through qualitative instruments in the target areas – interviews with key informants and focus groups.

Accordingly, a new category of potential VE drivers was elaborated with four potential factors that may enable religious VE and radicalization. IDM research probes into each of these drivers with qualitative and quantitative research instruments. The table below offers a description while the subsequent sections elaborate on findings for each of them.

Table 5. Potential VE drivers specific for Albania

DRIVER	DESCRIPTION
Tolerance of illegal religious institutions (legitimacy)	<p>Attitudes towards religious institutions (or cult objects such as mosques, churches etc.) operating outside the authority of official religious institutions and not regulated by respective legislation (State Agreement).</p> <p>The analysis elaborates on implications of “tolerance towards illegal religious institutions” in the context of religious radicalization and VE.</p>
Disputed authority of Albania’s religious institutions (central level)	<p>Seeks to investigate the existence and degree of the reported gap between religious authorities and clerics at central (national) level and communities of believers, as well as hidden internal disputes or clashes involving clerics of various ranks (how they translate, if at all, among communities of believers).</p> <p>The analysis elaborates on implications of “disputed authority” in the context of religious radicalization and VE.</p>
(Lack of) Influence of local clerics	<p>The role of local clerics is particularly important for the prevention of religious radicalization and VE. They are in permanent day to day contact with members of the religious community. Furthermore, they (should) represent a focal point to mediate contacts and address concerns of believers in cooperation with other stakeholders.</p> <p>The analysis elaborates on implications of this factor in the context of religious radicalization and VE.</p>
Level of preparedness of local clerics	<p>Responding to radical religious dogma / ideologies and forms of religious VE requires a good level of theological background and education of clerics, particularly those in permanent contacts with the community of believers.</p> <p>The analysis elaborates on implications of “preparedness of local clerics” and their performance in the context of religious radicalization and VE.</p>

Source: *Institute for Democracy and Mediation – IDM (2015)*

6.4.1. TOLERANCE OF ILLEGAL RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS

Attitudes towards religious institutions (or cult objects such as mosques, churches etc.) operating outside the authority of official religious institutions and not regulated by respective legislation (State Agreement).

Informal areas and illegal buildings or other construction works have accompanied the discourse and reality of Albania's post-communist period over the past 25 years. Legalization of such informal areas and illegal (mostly residential) buildings has been an issue around which political parties in the country have developed electoral promises and attracted votes, particularly in the outskirts of urban areas.

However, it is only in the recent years that the public debate was "informed" of so-called illegal religious objects which have been built by individuals and groups of believers most often with foreign financial resources. Additionally, another circumstance that has indirectly influenced in this direction is also the long quest of restitution or compensation for cult objects (mosques, churches and tekkes) that have been confiscated or destroyed by the communist regime between 1967 and 1990. The Albanian Islamic Community as the largest community in the country is most affected by this phenomenon, although similar cases are reported also in relation to other communities.¹⁹⁹

Many of the media reports in the last three years have often referred to illegal mosques as a source of religious extremism. The same perception was encountered by IDM Study's filed work particularly in interviews with key informants from state institutions at local level who did not report any activity or interest by the respective

institution in addressing religious radicalization and VE concerns (e.g. local governments, social services or education inspectorates). Furthermore, many of them blame the AIC's lack of actions against such mosques and inactivity of security and other institutions to prohibit them.²⁰⁰

Nevertheless, while it is important to underline that most often such illegal religious objects did not (and some still don't) recognize the authority of the Albanian Islamic Community, the main concern of the latter relates to the believers who frequent these objects.

"Banning these mosques and prosecuting their clerics is the easiest task. However, one should also ask – what have we done or achieved with that? It would only make things worse because the ummah in these illegal institutions would turn completely against AIC, our clerics and the state, or even against our Muslim believers in the legal system of mosques. We do not want that; instead, we want these communities of believers, albeit small, to integrate with the majority of Albanian ummah."²⁰¹

As the Government of Albania has raised public awareness and state agencies have taken concrete steps to fight illegal construction phenomenon over the past year or so, IDM study looks at this factor by mapping the level of tolerance of survey respondents towards illegal religious objects. Namely, IDM survey asks respondents whether they agree with the following

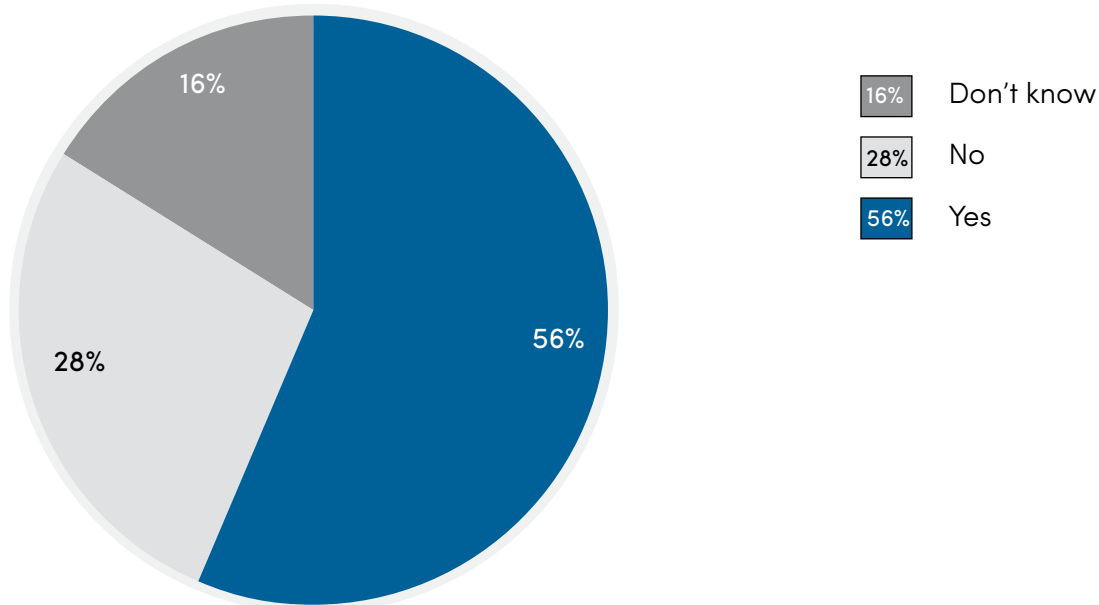
(control) statement:

Religious objects (churches, mosques etc.) built without the permission of the

respective religious communities should be forbidden.

Figure 29. Tolerance of illegal religious objects [Source: IDM survey 2015]

Religious objects (churches, mosques etc.) built without the permission of the respective religious communities should be forbidden



More than 50% of respondents in each target area agree with this statement except for Pogradec respondents – the majority of them (38%) disagree and 33% agree. The largest majority of such support to the statement is identified in Cerrik – 75% of surveyed respondents believe that religious objects (churches, mosques etc.) built without the permission of the respective religious communities should be forbidden.

This view is shared by more than 50% of respondents across all demography sub/categories.²⁰² Generally, this statement is supported by 60% to 70% of the following demography sub/categories – female respondents (60.4% of them), age-groups of “36–40 years” (66.7%) and “41–45 years

old” (71.7%), 60.3% of unemployed respondents and 60.4% of respondents with completed secondary education (high school).

Most importantly, there are no major differences in the support to this statement within the three sub-categories of “practicing religion” feature. Namely this view is endorsed by 56.4% of respondents who practice regularly religion, 57.1% of those who practice the main rituals and 56.1% of respondents who do not practice at all religion. Respondents who do not practice religion show the highest percentage (30.7%) of disagreement with the statement.²⁰³ Other sub-categories of respondents where the percentage of disagreement with the

statement is above the average of 28% of the general sample include – male respondents (32.1%), age groups of “26–30 years” (32.9%) and “31–35 years” (32.1%), and respondents with a maximum of 9 year education completed (29.6%).

Many participants of the focus group discussions conducted under this study explain the “tolerance” towards illegal cult objects precisely with the fact that “these objects are visited by believers

practicing their faith and therefore the state and AIC should find alternatives to integrate them.” Few of them however are at odds regarding the clerics of these illegal objects – “prosecution of these illegal clerics who practice conservative Islam should come as a last option. AIC must develop communication channels and means to de-radicalize them.”²⁰⁴

6.4.2. DISPUTED AUTHORITY OF ALBANIA’S RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS AT CENTRAL LEVEL

Seeks to investigate the existence and degree of the reported gap between religious authorities and clerics at central (national) level and communities of believers, as well as hidden internal disputes or clashes involving clerics of various ranks (how they translate, if at all, among communities of believers).

Many of the key informants during the inception phase of this study raised concerns over the continuous hidden divergences within AIC and its possible implications in the context of religious radicalization and VE in the country. The divergences, allegedly stemming from the diversity of theological education of clerics in different foreign countries, are reported to center on control and influence over ranks within AIC institution. While such hidden internal divergences are denied (or their importance is underrated) by AIC officials in Tirana, local AIC clerics in some of the target areas confirm these concerns.²⁰⁵ Additionally, the hidden divergences are reported also by other Tirana-based key informants from non-religious institutions who report interest and experience in the discourse on religious communities in the country.

Without any prejudice to the content of these internal disputes, the inception phase of this study suggests that it is important to establish their relevance, extent and their potential to generate a gap between religious authorities (high rank clerics) and communities of believers or lead to disputed authority of religious institutions which may be used by VE groups to garner support.²⁰⁶

Some key informants in Tirana and in few target areas of the study suggest that these divergences have produced negative consequences within AIC in the past. “The today’s illegal mosques are a testimony to this example, whereas divergences between different factions have led to groups of clerics disputing the authority of AIC”.²⁰⁷ However, other key informants argue that internal divergences are certainly a potential factor that may enable conditions for

VE groups but effects are not translated among members of the ummah. "These divergences are often limited to internal organization and structures of AIC".²⁰⁸

In order to examine allegations and often conflicting positions of key informants on whether internal divergences have translated among the ummah, IDM survey looks at the support that central AIC authority enjoys among respondents and especially among the community of Muslim believers in the target areas. As explained in the Methodology section of this Study, the survey sample was designed to target 50% Muslim believers who practice religion and the remaining 50% randomly selected citizens in the target areas. However, given the dominance of Muslim community in these areas the overall sample is largely composed of

respondents who report this religious affiliation.

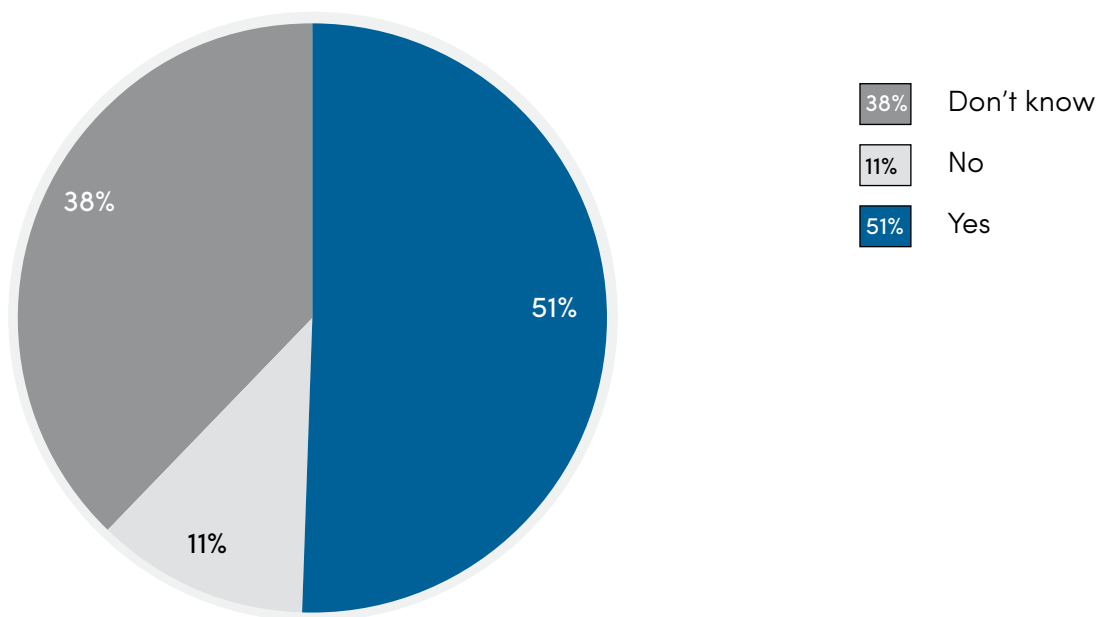
Specifically, 88% of respondents who answered the control-statement for this VE driver (see below) report "Muslim" as their religious denomination, 5.5% of Bektashi, 2.6% orthodox, 1% catholic, and the remaining respondents report other or no religious affiliation. Accordingly, given the large percentage the findings may be indicative to the AIC.

The control-statement that IDM survey asks respondents whether they agree in order to examine this driver reads:

*The positions /stance of the Chair of my religious community (in Tirana) enjoy full support of believers in the area I live.*²⁰⁹

Figure 30. Support to leaders of religious communities [Source: IDM survey 2015]

Positions / stance of the Chair of my religious community (in Tirana) enjoy full support of believers



11% of respondents believe that the Chair of their respective religious community does not enjoy the support of religious believers. The percentage of respondents who share the same view is below this average in Perrenjas (3%), Kukes (8%) and commune of Buçimas (9%). On the other hand, the largest number of respondents who believe that the chair of their respective religious community enjoys full support by believers is identified in Librazhd (66%).

The demography analysis of respondents who do not believe the chair of their religious community enjoys support by local believers shows minor discrepancies within different demography sub-categories. Namely, between 8% and 12% of respondents within most of the sub-categories of respondents' demography (e.g. gender, employment status, education and age-groups) share this view. Only few exceptions which break away from this average trend are noted as follows: 16% of 26-30 years old respondents, 16% of those 36-40 years old and 14% of respondents who do not practice at all religion believe that local believers do not support the positions or stance of the Chair of their respective religious community.

Greater discrepancies within demographic sub/categories are

observed in relation to the support of this statement. Namely, for most of (gender, education, age-groups, employment status and 'religion practicing') subcategories, the percentage of respondents supporting the statement is lower than 50% of all respondents in the respective subcategory. However, few of demographic subcategories note an exception whereas the support to this statement represents a significant weight within them, as follows – 56% of all male respondents, 64.5% of all '41 – 45 years old' interviewees, 62.2% of respondents with up to nine years education and 52.3% of those with secondary education completed, 55% of unemployed, 58.8% of those regularly practicing religion and 54.2% of respondents who practice only the main religious rituals.

As the analysis in the subsequent section shows, similar tendencies are observed also in relation to local clerics and their influence among religious believers as perceived by respondents. Furthermore, while few participants in the focus group discussions acknowledged the existence of divergences between local clerics and AIC authorities at central level, focus groups did not confirm that such divergences have translated among the ummah.

6.4.3. (LACK OF) INFLUENCE OF LOCAL CLERICS

The role of local clerics is particularly important for the prevention of religious radicalization and VE. They are in permanent day to day contact with members of the religious community. Furthermore, they (should) represent a focal point to mediate contacts and address concerns of believers in cooperation with other stakeholders.

The Civil Society Index for Albania (2010) suggests that the majority of

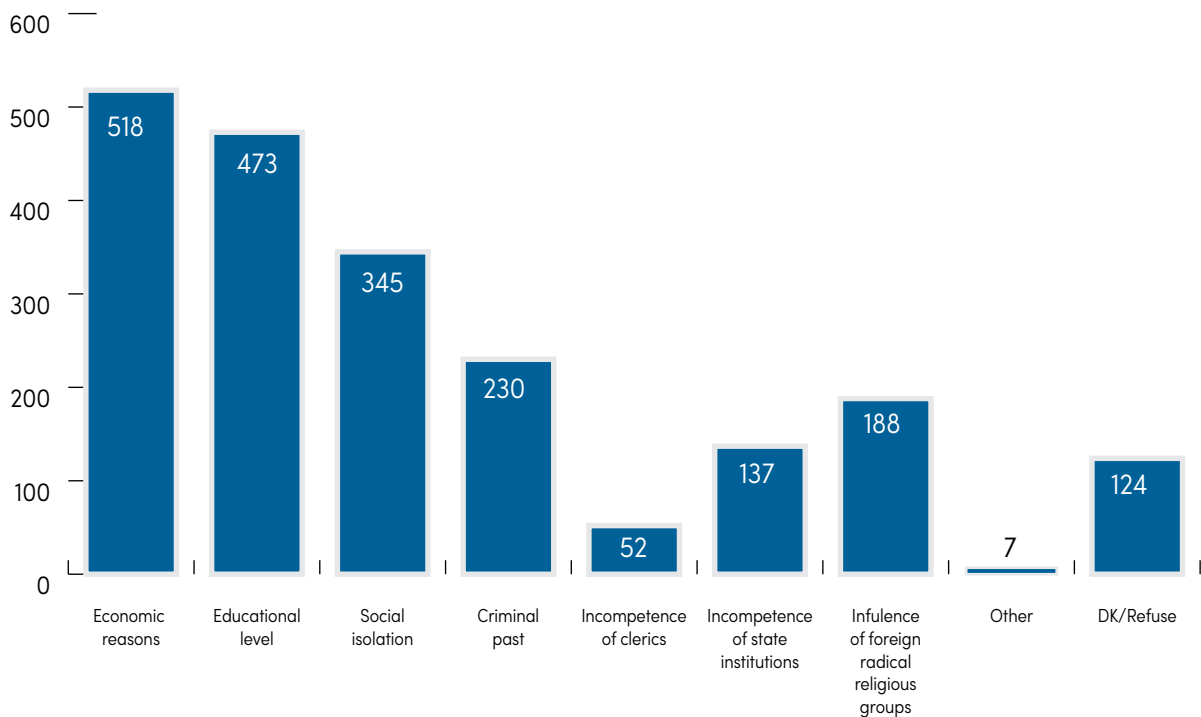
Albanians (59.1%) do not consider themselves a religious person.²¹⁰

Although there are no official data on the percentage of citizens who regularly practice their faith in religious institutions (mosques, churches) various surveys report that this is a fairly small community. Local clerics play an important role in developing and expanding their religious communities. In order to be successful in this regard and also influential among the believers, many of this study's key informants argue that the profile of local clerics must combine skills stemming from solid religious education, communication, trust and openness. Such skills and the level of influence among religious communities are essential, amongst other, to ensure also an active role of local clerics in responding to and preventing religious deviances.

Generally, AIC clerics at local level argue that 'religious ignorance', low level of education and isolation are the main reason why VE groups have succeeded to manipulate citizens in the country and recruit them as foreign fighters abroad. Although local clerics do not rule out economic reasons (or promises for better life) the majority of them believe that these are not a dominant factor.

However, the surveyed citizens present generally the same "three main reasons" but in reverse order. Such perception is explained by many clerics, experts and other key informants with the influence of the media which has failed to provide 'comprehensive and informed insights' on the phenomenon to the general public.²¹¹

Figure 31. Main reasons of recruitment in VE groups
 [Source: IDM survey 2015]



Nevertheless, this suggests that there is still much room for improvement not only for building resilient religious communities but also for strengthening ties and communication between clerics and their communities. "This should develop also in direction to the cooperation with state institutions which often do not show appropriate understanding towards concerns of the ummah".²¹²

Many of key informants and focus groups' participants at local level report that the actions of security institutions may be counterproductive – "they may be perceived as 'harassment' by members of the ummah".²¹³ In fact, for the first time in 2013, the Pew Research Center's Government Restrictions Index (GRI) reports of 'limited harassment or intimidation of religious groups by any level of government' or of events of "physical violence".²¹⁴

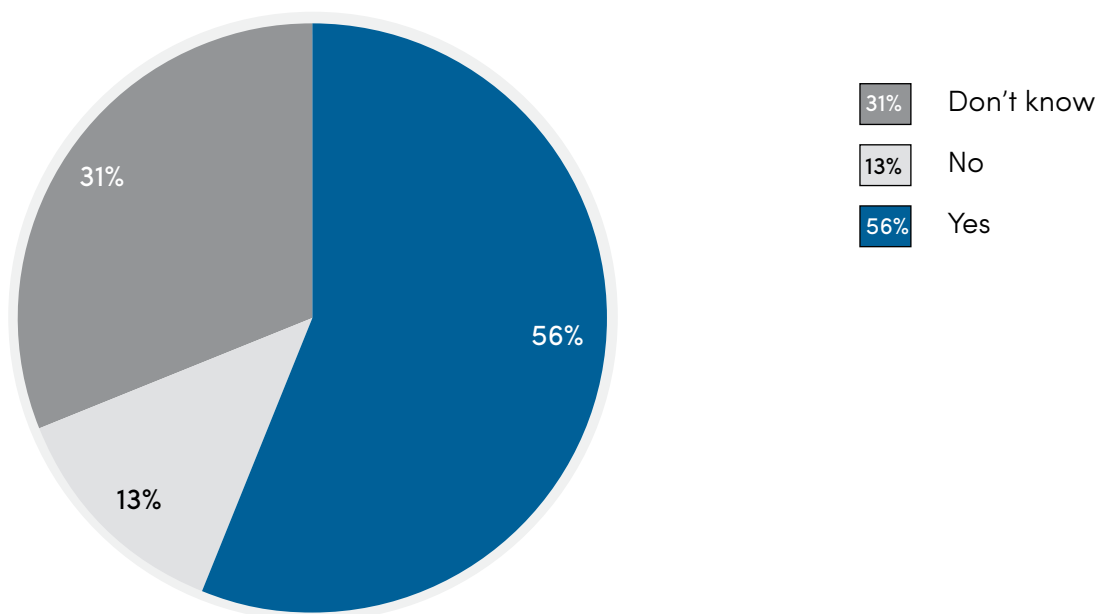
AIC key informants at local level suggest that there is a need for

trainings of imams especially on how to deal with religious deviances. "Youngsters nowadays have access to different sources of online information but not all of these sources provide appropriate religious insights. Imams must therefore develop skills to work with youngsters and vulnerable groups, but also to exchange more often with institutions at local level, schools, local governments etc. The closer an imam is with the problems and concerns of the ummah, the more influential he is perceived by believers and by other stakeholders in the local community".²¹⁵

To probe into the perceptions of citizens from this perspective, IDM Survey asks respondents whether they agree with the following statement – The clerics in the area I live have a large influence on their respective believers.²¹⁶

Figure 32. Influence of local clerics [Source: IDM survey 2015]

The clerics in the area I live have a large influence on their respective believers



More than half (56%) of respondents believe that local clerics have a large influence on their respective community of believers, while 13% hold the opposite. Generally, this trend is present in all target areas, except Pogradec where only 31% of respondents believe on the influence of local clerics, 30% do not and another 39% have no opinion on this issue. A significant percentage (24%) of respondents in commune of Buçimas does not see their local cleric as influential among the religious community, as opposed 53% who do.

The demography analysis of respondents' answers shows correlations within categories. Namely, the perception that "local cleric are influential among believers" grows as the age of respondents is older – from 49% at "18-25 years old", to 50.3% of "26-30 years old", 57.3% among "31-35 years old", 65.9% among "36-40 years old" to a maximum of 68.3% of respondents within "41-45 years old" category.

A correlation is present also when analyzing the weight of this perception within education groups – the more

years of education completed reported, the lower the percentage of respondents who see local clerics as influential among believers (66.9% of respondents with up to nine years education, 62.2% with high school education to a mere 39.9% of respondents with university or postgraduate studies completed).

Local clerics are perceived influential especially among religious respondents (73%) or mostly religious (56.3%), while respondents who do not practice religion at all show much lower percentage – only 38% of them believe that local clerics are influential.

The latter subcategory (non-religious) shows also the highest percentage (18%) of disagreement with the statement. Also, 16% of respondents with post/university studies, 16.6% of all respondents between 26-30 years old and 15% of 36-40 years old do not see local clerics as influential among believers.

6.4.4. LEVEL OF PREPAREDNESS OF LOCAL CLERICS

"The response to radical religious ideologies and various forms of violent extremism requires good education and theological formation of the clerics, particularly those who are in constant relations with their communities of believers."

Religious communities have a key role in the prevention of source factors and risks from radicalization and violent extremism on religious background by promoting the instillation of an appropriate model of preaching

the religion and by avoiding any opportunity of misuse of its preaching. Facing the threat of indoctrination and recruitment of members of ummah at local level by groups with radical religious agenda necessitates that

religious leaders are sufficiently well-read in terms of secular education and have good theological edification to persuasively object to the religious radical dogma and ideologies.

According to the regulation of the Albanian Islamic Community, the muftis, who pursue and oversee the religious activity in the mosques within the jurisdiction of their authority and instruct imams to perform religious rituals inside the mosques, must have completed a theological university or the madrasa and a secular university. In consideration of their leading role and responsibilities, in addition to good education, the muftis are required to have a professional experience of at least five years in the AIC structures.²¹⁷ Besides muftis, imams have quite an important role to play in the daily relations with the believers in any mosque. Yet, unlike muftis, the (religious and secular) educational and professional criteria for appointment of imams are not very strict and clear.

According to the respondents, imams' education is one of the challenges confronting AIS in Albania today. The educational level and the specific theological edification of imams are considered deficient, particularly of those serving in rural areas of the country. Basically, imams are self-taught, have attended professional courses and trainings or have completed the madrasa education. A limited number of imams have completed the secular university education. Taking into account the low salaries of clerics, it is necessary that AIS provide free professional training courses to imams and organize symposiums on current issues of radicalization and violent extremism. The head institution needs to issue circulars and instructions and encourage local clerics to address these

issues with their ummah. Furthermore, it is suggested that AIC officials, clerics, and theologians draft religious 'fatwas' (opinion). On the other hand, specific training to imams to give them the necessary capabilities so as they can provide grounded and persuasive discourse to radical religious groups' ideologies would enhance their impact among the community and would prevent religious manipulation of members of their ummah.

Various challenges were also identified in interviews in the field. The first challenge is related with the fact that some mosques, usually those in remote rural areas, are currently short of imams and services are being provided to local believers by clerics of surrounding areas. Another concern expressed by interviewees relates to the need to regularly control and assess the work of local clerics with the aim of preventing negative cases of imams' direct or indirect involvement of in radical groups and violent extremism.

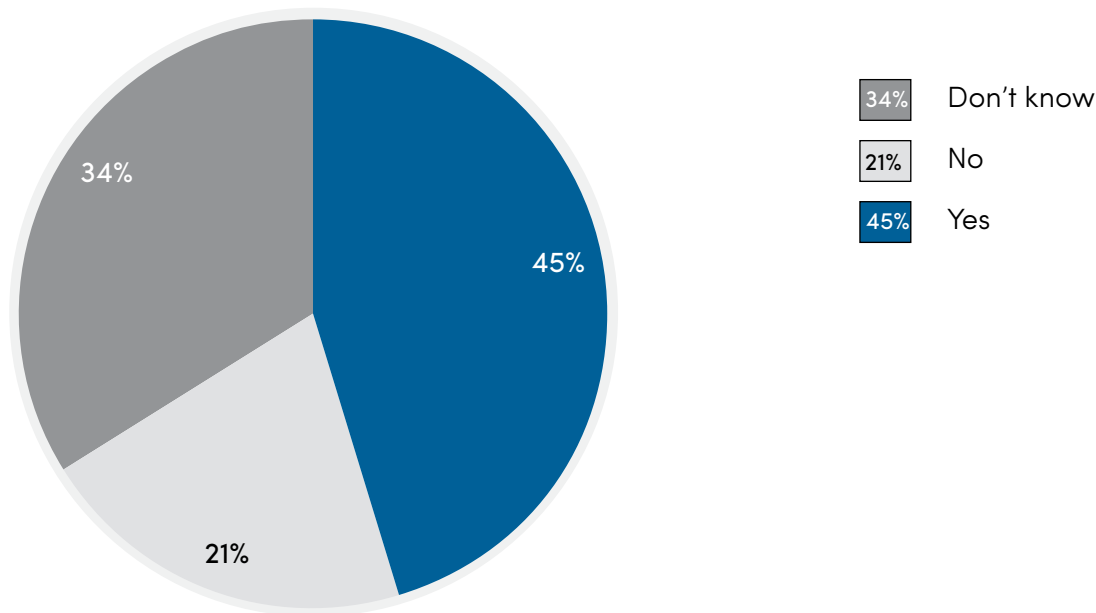
The importance of "clerics' education" is examined by analyzing the data obtained from the survey conducted in eight targeted areas, specifically through respondents' answers to the following statement (control question):

In my religious community there are clerics without the appropriate religious education.

A favorable milieu for radical individuals and groups is assessed on the basis of 'positive answers' to this statement. The Figure 33 presents the survey's findings on this potential driver.

Figure 33. Clerics' religious education [Source: IDM survey 2015]

In my religious community there are clerics without the appropriate religious education



Most respondents believe that the clerics in their community do not have the appropriate religious education/training (45%). On the other hand, 34% of the interviewees declare that they do not have information on the religious education/training of clerics in their area. Only 21% of the respondents believe that the clerics in their religious community have the sufficient education and training. Among targeted areas, the largest number of respondents who believe that the clerics in their religious community do not have the appropriate education is noted in Perrenjas (68.7%) and the smallest number is found in the Commune of Buçimas (23%).

The demography of respondents who are more inclined to believe that the clerics in their religious community do not have religious education/training (45.5%) is as follows: most of them are females (56%), people of age group 18-25 years old (55%) and those who

have completed university education (55.6%). In terms of employment status, this perception is stronger among employed people (46%). Respondents who practice only the major religious rituals and rules (56.2%) are more likely to share the same perception.

These data from the analysis of respondents' answers on local clerics' education reflect at a considerable scale the concerns raised in the interviews and discussions with focus groups. This is particularly important for young believers, taking into consideration that Albania has a young population, a good part of which may use more alternative online sources for religious information and knowledge. A more complete profile of local clerics in terms religious training and skills to establish close links with the ummah is essential to minimize religious manipulation.

7



CONCLUSIONS

Radicalization on religious grounds is examined in this study as a series of diverse processes through which individuals adopt beliefs that justify and propagate violence. VE drivers are not limited to specific factors, but they also include the drivers, and group dynamics that facilitate involvement in VE activities.

The IDM study finds that, while religious radicalization in Albania is in its early phase, lack of attention and inclusion in addressing 'push' or enabling factors may serve to aggravate the phenomenon. Beyond the general resonance of 'religious harmony' on one hand, or over-mediatization of 'Albanian jihadists' fighting in Syria on the other, many key informants of this study oppose to the idea that few forms of religious radicalization and violent extremism (such as construction and operation of illegal mosques and Albanian citizens as foreign fighters in the Syrian conflict) are sporadic and isolated cases. While in general there is hesitation to openly discuss about issues of religious context, the study states that the reticence over the existing problems may facilitate and favor the agenda of certain radical religious groups that breed violence. Specifically, experts and key informants of this study place emphasis on the examination of various divergences within Albanian Islamic Community. These divergences create space for action for groups with religious radical agenda, even though they have not translated into believers' perception, as revealed by the IDM survey. Improvement of capacities and education of local clerics, uninterrupted communication with the community of believers and young people in particular as well as strengthening of cooperation with local clerics and other stakeholders are similarly important. On the other hand, the AIC's financial constraints, as reflected in the low

salaries of the clerics or in the shortage of clerics in some mosques, mainly in remote rural areas, are troublesome, because the lack of effective control of AIC over some objects of cult may create space of religious radicalization. Religious or vocational courses are some of the methods employed by radical groups to introduce and deploy their influence among the ummah of these mosques. Other extreme forms of refraction of these spaces include the open questioning of the AIC authority and illegal mosques. Addressing these challenges must be guided by the need to avoid division among the ummah.

The study sheds light on the inactivity of most state institutions, particularly those outside the security domain, and of non-state actors in addressing and preventing religious radicalization. The phenomenon of religious radicalization may be further developed due to the lack of substantive cooperation between non-security state authorities and leaders of religious communities on the prevention of the phenomenon. In addition, the religious radical groups' agenda may be facilitated and favored by the inexistence of civil society in remote rural areas creating a big gap with regard to "safeguarding" activities on religious radicalization and violent extremism. These activities include encouragement of participation and qualification of young people, programs for poverty alleviation, involvement in discourses over the human values and rights, and awareness campaigns against discrimination and Islamophobia.

Religious radicalization (as a process) and violent extremism (as a result) are enabled, fueled and/or shaped by a rich array of factors and drivers, which operate in a particular country context at both macro (societal) and micro (individual / group) level. However,

the presence and interaction of these factors do not always produce forms of violent extremism, irrespective of their potential. While participation of Albanian citizens in foreign conflicts is so far reported as the only form of violent extremism of religious background, the study reveals the existence of several preconditions that may potentially be taken advantage of for religious manipulation. The broad support of the communities of religious believers to the liberal tradition of faith, religious institutions, and to the values of religious harmony should not serve as an excuse for state and non-state actors' inactivity. On the other hand, misinterpretation of the phenomenon and minimization of its relevance or its identification with consequences (mainly in the security aspect) lead to the wrong approach and eventual counter-productivity of the effects of institutional response.

To this end, the IDM study pays particular attention to the 'machinery' of the phenomenon, and not simply its 'output'. This approach seeks to acquire comprehensive understanding of the environment as well as social, economic, cultural, political, and other factors in order to draw conclusions and recommendations that provide sustainable solutions for addressing the sources and causes that enable or fuel religious radicalization and violent extremism. In this context, the study has examined the full context at national level and in target areas as well as the salience, manner of interaction, and radicalization potential of various drivers.

SOCIAL- ECONOMIC DRIVERS

Certain communities in Albania, mainly in undeveloped rural areas in peripheries of urban areas, are neglected by the state and deprived of various social-economic opportunities. Strong perceptions of social exclusions and marginality include:

- a) Lack of involvement of youth of these areas in activities that keep them out of the reach of vices and dangerous conduct. About 70% of the respondents state that the youth of their community have too much time on their hand and are not engaged in helpful activities.
- b) Limited access to employment irrespective of good education may serve as a potential driver for radicalization. This sense of relative deprivation and frustrated expectations are experienced by almost half of respondents (49%).
- c) Unmet social and economic needs of certain individuals or groups constitute another driver that pushes or encourages radicalization. Separated from or combined with the above factors, this form of deprivation makes poor individuals/families vulnerable and responsive to services and alternatives offered by radical groups to meet their basic needs.
- d) Deprivation of social-economic opportunities is accompanied with the sense of exclusion and discrimination. One out of two

(51% of) respondents believes that his/her religious community is not sufficiently represented in politics and state institutions.

Mitigation of the above factors' effects constitutes a challenge for the state and non-state stakeholders at both central and local levels. Suburban and rural areas show the most concerning indicators on all four drivers highlighted above. Individuals and groups most vulnerable to radicalization include poor people and families, jobless youth or young people uninvolved in productive activities. People in such conditions, believing that they are discriminated because of their faith, are most exposed to the influence of radical religious groups.

POLITICAL DRIVERS

Certain areas with specific political contexts may be more inclined than others to produce religious radicalization and violent extremism. Data obtained from fieldwork suggest that the following drivers call for particular attention:

- a) Impossibility to influence or reform decision-making, which is considered unfair and corrupted, is a strong drive that may push involvement in violent extremism. Namely, 55% of respondents believe that, overall, their rights and liberties are not respected by state institutions, whereas 26% of respondents of this study believe that the political system in Albania is unfair and must change even with violence if needed.
- b) Isolated, low population density regions ignored by the government constitute safe havens where VE organizations can establish themselves. About 54% of the respondents think that the 'strength' of the state is weaker in rural areas than in towns.
- c) 47% of the respondents believe that the protection of the values and religious dignity by any means within and outside the country's borders is the duty of every believer.
- d) Violence, ill-treatment or victimizing from police or security forces can lead to desire for revenge and support for violent extremism groups. 30% of the respondents in this study justify avenge against state institutions in case the latter negate the human rights and liberties.

Individuals or groups of people most vulnerable to violent extremism activities are the ones that live in areas 'neglected' by the government and without effective opportunity to influence or reform decision-making in their community. The risk of involvement in VE activities against state institutions and their officials (such as police officers) is higher among individuals that have been subjected to abuse and gross violation of their rights by law enforcement agencies. It is quite concerning that young people of 18 to 30 years of age (not practicing religion) with deficient education and unemployed are more inclined to support the use of violence. Guaranteeing of fundamental rights and freedoms and provision of effective opportunities to participate in local or central decision-making are conditions to and serve the enhancement of

citizen-state relationship. Likewise, it is indispensable that education institutions, religious communities, civil society, and other stakeholders play a more active role.

CULTURAL DRIVERS

There is a strong correlation between violent extremism and perceptions of threat to the culture of a country or attacks against Islamic tradition and faith by Western countries. Highlighted drivers in this context include the following:

- a) About 1/3 of respondents state that the traditions and dignity of their religious community is under siege and constant threat, whereas the West is seen as hostile to Islamic culture and states. According to the same percentage of interviewees, nowadays it is difficult to be a Muslim actively practicing religion in Albania.
- b) About 12% of the respondents believe that there are individuals or groups in their community who incite Islamic radicalism.

The categories of citizens most exposed to religious manipulation and supportive of radical groups' propaganda on attacks against Islamic culture and faith include particularly males of the age group of 31-35 years old, with high school education, practitioners of religion, and who are unemployed. Objection to the 'victimizing narrative' of tradition, faith, and dignity of a religious community necessitates that credible figures of this community and their representatives

at local level work closely with the ummah and consider de-radicalization programs. In addition, the state institutions' approach must shift to inclusion (within state actors) and to partnership with religious communities and civil society to aim prevention. The identification of individuals or groups suspected of spurring religious radicalization and violent extremism is a duty of the law enforcement agencies and must be performed diligently. Yet, prevention of this phenomenon constitutes a challenge to other societal actors, above all.

SPECIFIC DRIVERS FOR ALBANIA

In addition to the above driver, the inception phase of the research was introduced to several drivers that are specific for Albania and that the experts and key informants considered being potentially influential to the phenomenon of religious radicalization. Irrespective of the elaborated relevance, the research and fieldwork did not confirm concrete influence for some of them. On the other hand, for some other specific drivers that facilitate religious radicalization and violent extremism, the main findings include:

- a. About 28% of the respondents show their tolerance to illegal religious objects (churches, mosques). This stance is quite disturbing considering that oftentimes these places have been reportedly breeding religious extremism. In addition, experts suggest that the measures against these facilities

must be guided by the need to avoid radicalization and division among believers.

- b. Nearly 21% of the respondents do not think that the clergy of their community lacks appropriate religious education. Due to their daily ties with the community of believers, it is critical that the clerics are educated and trained to persuasively contradict the ideologies of religious extremism groups and to adequately address the believers' concerns.

illegal religious objects (a specific driver for Albania).

In light of the findings and above conclusions, the following section of the IDM study provides several recommendations for key stakeholders with particular focus in the prevention of the phenomenon and its consequences.

As the largest religious community in the country, the major challenges in this context are confronting AIC and local clerics, who are responsible for protecting the ummah from dangerous religious influence. The concerns identified within the Muslim community may be addressed concurrently by the AIC internal structures and in cooperation with other relevant actors.

In general, various drivers interact with and strengthen one another increasing the risk of support to or involvement in religious extremism activities. Therefore, the perceptions of social exclusion and marginality are usually combined with the perceptions of social exclusion on religious grounds and with situations of relative deprivation and frustrated expectations. In addition, social-economic drivers, such as social exclusion, are combined with political drivers (like poorly governed areas) and with cultural drivers that help promote proactive religious agendas of radical groups by offering services, financial opportunities, and employment. The political drivers, such as perceptions that West is hostile and attacks Islam, are accompanied in practice with the tendency of some people to object to the prohibition of

8



RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the analysis of the findings, the study's recommendations elaborate on concrete measures and alternatives to support prevention and addressing of religious radicalization and violent extremism in Albania's context. These proposals are not exhaustive and seek to address the problems identified in the four categories of religious radicalization and violent extremism drivers: social-economic, political, cultural, and other factors specific for Albania. While these recommendations are intended for three major stakeholders –state institutions,

Albanian Islamic Community, and civil society– the study suggests that the responsibility for preventing and addressing religious radicalization and violent extremism must be considered as a broader societal responsibility. Therefore, the process of assimilation of findings and implementation of recommendations must be guided by an inclusive approach that reflects over the challenges affecting the phenomenon and that strengthens the 'agents of change' at national level and particularly at local level, adjoining most vulnerable communities.

8.1. STATE INSTITUTIONS

Albania's National Security document considers the increase of religious radicalization to be a threat to the values of the country's religious harmony and a potential cause for social unrest. Maintaining social cohesion and religious harmony is of primary importance and calls for undertaking a series of supportive measures in order to enhance cooperation with religious communities, design informed policies, and take legal, institutional, social-economic, etc., measures, including public awareness to prevent and combat religious radicalization. In this regard, special attention must be paid to the youth and marginalized communities not only in rural areas but also in the suburban developed locations. The approach of state institutions must not be limited to reactive criminal. The prevention of this phenomenon is closely linked with an inclusive approach and measures that reflect the nature and dynamics of drivers that push religious radicalization and violent

extremism in vulnerable localities and local population. In this context, the study finds that it is essentially important for state institutions to embark on the following measures:

- Address the phenomenon of religious radicalism and violent extremism beyond the security sector boundaries by actively involving state institutions and agencies operating in the areas of local governance, education, social affairs and youth, employment, anti-discrimination, etc., as well as other non-state actors and, above all, the religious communities and the civil society. The design of preventive programs and involvement of influential stakeholders must be associated with a more active role of the state institution, particularly of those at local level. The increase of capacities and resources

for the State Committee on Cults must go along with the specification of its competences and with the establishment of mechanisms that ensure constant cooperation with the religious communities. Other forms include joint initiatives with independent institutions (Ombudsman, Commissioner for the Protection from Discrimination, etc.) and with non-state actors in order to prevent the phenomenon and to ensure timely response to prejudices of religious background not only among citizens but also among representatives of the state institution and administration.

- Mitigation of forms of relative deprivation and frustrated expectations, particularly among the youth in suburban and rural areas, requires provision of additional opportunities for vocational training and development of skills demanded by employers and the establishment, expansion, and improvement of mechanisms that seek to facilitate the transition from school to job. To this end, state institution must cooperate with civil society organizations to disseminate information on opportunities for requalification training, scholarships, employment, and funding sources for community projects, to support and promote businesses that hire young people, and to support young entrepreneurs through schemes of small grants and micro credits.
- The actions and measures undertaken as a response by

law enforcement agencies must be combined with the option of rehabilitation or religious de-radicalization programs in cooperation with the religious communities and civil society. The proactive investigation of cases of religious radicalization and violent extremism must also include elements that offer an opportunity to understand the phenomenon from the religious viewpoint and operation of such groups as well as to divide the roles among individuals who are instigators, helpers, supporters, manipulated, etc.

- Use of violence, victimization and ill treatment of citizens by police or security forces can lead to desire for revenge against them and support for violent extremism groups. Therefore, it is necessary that the staff of law enforcement agencies receive adequate training on how to respect fundamental human rights and freedoms and to prevent such situations. At the same time, citizens must be informed of their rights by means of civil awareness programs and community policing must be promoted.
- The scope of work of the Ministry of Education and Sports (MES), the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth and their regional and local agencies must include addressing religious radicalization and violent extremism in cooperation with the local government units, religious communities, civil society, and other stakeholders, such as private sector, media, etc. In addition to the activity

of the State Inspectorate of Education as a monitoring and quality control mechanism, MES must promote critical thinking in the curricula of primary and high school education and train teachers on this phenomenon. The collaboration must reach out to the requalification

and training programs coordinated with the Ministry of Social Welfare and the National Employment Service by undertaking awareness initiatives to fight discrimination and to prevent radicalization among the youth.

8.2. RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS

The Albanian Islamic Community has the responsibility to identify, object on religious arguments, and report to the state authorities the centers of radical Islamic ideologies that fuel violent extremism on religious grounds. Cooperation with the State Committee on Cults and other institutions, particularly at local level, will strengthen its influence among the ummah. Other recommendations and concrete measures intended for AIC which may also apply to other religious communities in the country, include the following:

- With regard to the objection of ideologies and perceptions of West's attacks on Islam and Muslims, AIC must encourage informed and diverse discourses about Muslim societies in the modern world. In addition, it must support community voices that refuse the "victimizing narrative" used by radical religious groups. It must offer more information on and address instances that may provoke perception of lack of respect of and insult to Islam. In cooperation with the nonprofit organizations and media, it

must disseminate information on "success stories" of Muslim believers in Albania or Western countries.

- AIC must take measures to consolidate the theological education of imams, particularly of those in remote rural areas. In addition, clerics must be trained on radicalization phenomenon, violent extremism, and contrasting religious arguments, and must be instructed on how to address these issues with their ummah. Empowerment of the Council of Theologians and coordinated promotion of its activities with the clerics would considerably improve the believers' religious knowledge. AIC must continue the efforts initiated in the course of addressing the cases of illegal mosques, as options of their isolation or confrontation. It is essential that these efforts enjoy support of other societal actors.

8.3. CIVIL SOCIETY

Civil society has been almost inexistent in encouraging or actually developing an informed discourse on religious radicalization tendencies, Islamophobia and other religious developments in the country. In general, the public discourse on this phenomenon has been superficial and has ignored many important aspects of its prevention. The lack of civil society in remote areas has left behind a huge gap in addressing this phenomenon and other social issues in these communities.

The proposals intended for civil society's role regarding awareness on and prevention of religious radicalization and violent extremism must be also assessed by other actors, who cooperate with or support civil society activity, such as state institutions, media, donors, private sector, etc.

- Alleviation of perceptions and effects of social exclusion and marginality, particularly among young jobseekers, may be achieved by means of civil society's initiatives focusing on youth, women, and vulnerable communities by voicing their concerns and by addressing the challenges confronting them. Programs on promotion of employment and gender equality; awareness against discrimination; voluntarism; advocacy of youth issues; civic participation and activism; involvement in policymaking; and promotion of forums of discourses on religion, society, state, and democracy values constitute some of the initiatives that demand involvement of

religious communities and concrete actions on the part of state actors.

- Nonprofit organizations must run and expand their social programs (such as vocational and qualification courses) in undeveloped rural areas and in peripheral areas of urban centers as an option to individuals and households that find it difficult or impossible to meet their basic needs. With regard to addressing concerns over denial of political rights, civil society actors must engage in the representation of interests and elaboration of challenges of the vulnerable communities. Constant monitoring in cooperation with the media must not be limited to the identification of cases of abuse. Rather, it must incorporate their commitment to exert pressure on state institutions to address and prevent them.
- Civil society must object to the ideologies and proactive agendas of radical religious groups by establishing forums in which active opinion makers, religious leaders and theologians take part. Their messages against radical ideologies must go viral in social networks, radio, TVs, and school programs. In addition, civil society must promote public information on religious radicalization processes, their causes and consequences. Last but not least, promotion of studies, support to research

and continuous monitoring to ensure an updated database on the phenomenon and its trends would serve policymakers to

develop relevant policies as well as religious communities and other societal actors.

8.4. TENSION MONITORING” PROGRAMS AND MULTI-DISCIPLINARY TEAMS

Religious radicalization and violent extremism are complex and multi-dimensional phenomena and, thus, require a multi-disciplinary response. There is no single theory or explanation on the reasons behind radicalization and violent extremism. Likewise, there isn't one single solution or responsible stakeholder alone to prevent the phenomenon in its entire complexity. Strict and efficient application or programs intended to prevent radicalization requires cooperation and coordination of efforts among responsible actors, including state institution at central and local level, official leaders of religious communities, theologians and clerics, and civil society representatives.

This study recommends the development of 'tension monitoring' programs as a prevention option that should incorporate promotion of shared values, objection of extremist ideologies, building of civic and leadership capacities in religious and marginalized communities as well as enhancement of the role of institutions within these communities. In addition, these programs must encourage critical thinking to counter radical ideologies and those that support violent extremism. They must be implemented by multi-disciplinary teams expanding

on local communities and other milieus, such as schools, social services, and reeducation facilities. Also, it is necessary to promote moderate voices and success stories coming from religious communities, where multi-disciplinary teams, religious clerics in particular, must provide the appropriate rationale that persuasively contradicts the claims of radical recruiters and extremists.

Special attention must also be paid to more specific programs that aim at preventing radicalization and de-radicalization at individual level. Identification of individuals vulnerable to radicalization or involved in violent extremism is an issue that requires information and adequate preparation of people who can detect certain elements of radical and extreme beliefs or leaning among their relatives, students, or beneficiaries of other social and economic services. First line actors, such as relatives, teachers, social workers, etc., need to be able to understand the risk coming from religious radicalization and violent extremism as well as the drivers that facilitate their rise. Programs for vulnerable or radicalized individuals must include various forms of mentoring and support, such as provision of safe spaces, psychological

counseling, and encouragement of individuals to critical and independent thinking and their positive engagement. It is indispensable that these individuals develop self-reflection and critical thinking over extreme ideologies that may attract them. Counter-messaging and contestation of radical religious stories and propaganda must be backed by means of reliable and authoritative opinions from the religious viewpoint. Such programs must be developed upon an assessment of specific needs to guarantee fundamental rights and freedoms as well as the confidentiality of personal data in particular.

9



APPENDIXES

9.1. ISLAM MISINTERPRETED - HOW RELIGIOUS MANIPULATION WORKS?

Ermir Gjinishi, Theologian

Every trace of human history speaks of its relation with the Divinity. Irrespective of the form, Divinity has accompanied the man along all phases since his existence. Manipulation of Divinity is similarly old. It is a process and a product of deformed relationship a human being establishes with the faith. However, regardless of the time and shape it appears in, religious manipulation is a result of misinterpretation or misunderstanding. Intentional or not, it has a fundamental and primary impact on the formation of a (religious) individual's personality and conduct. Extended over time and spread everywhere, this phenomenon is becoming troublesome because of the negative internal impact that it creates in a believer. This starts to appear visibly in his relationship with the others, initially with the believers, family, and then with the community at large.

Irrespective of the similar result created by the religious manipulation, be it radicalism or extremism, there are various circumstances and conditions that stimulate its rise. Depending on the area or country, they may be political, social, religious, cultural, etc. Yet, its goal is obviously the same. Protagonists' involvement to disguise the phenomenon as an internal theological development that seeks to preserve religion from deviations and its return to origin is unsuccessful. During the entire history, these developments have stated political goals, the throne to power.²¹⁸ In Albania, this phenomenon is partly home-grown and partly imported. Radicalism is home-grown from religious preaching and extremism is imported from various

religious doctrines and experiences abroad, even though their spread is limited.

Religious manipulation starts with radicalism and, unless addressed adequately, degenerates to violent extremism. It is a process that triggers the creation of its mindsets, groups, followers, and sympathizers. By means of religious misinterpretation of issues related with the faith, it misuses theological arguments (from Qur'an and prophetic traditions), deforms their classification and standards (in the legislation, fikh [full comprehension]), creates or borrows causes, and offers resolutions by blaming the believers for failure to act. It takes a shape gradually by stimulating extreme views.

The manipulation of issues of faith inevitably leads to the creation of doctrines. These doctrines take advantage of certain circumstances and are then conveyed in the form of a cause to believers, who, in most cases, are the most misused part. A community of indoctrinated believers can be easily used in manipulated causes. This is the trajectory of manipulation and the results that this process leads to:

Manipulation / Doctrine / Cause

Indoctrination / Action / Movement

In all cases, the phenomenon has produced violence, terror, and armed conflicts. Nowadays, a new phase of religious extremism with two major features, model and expansion, is observed:

- 1- As a model, it is transforming from “cause / human resources / recruitment organizations” to “doctrine / indoctrination / personal initiative”.
- 2- As an expansion, from “local / national” to “regional / international”.

This transformation is a result of changes to the reference – from cause to doctrine.

Which religious teachings are used for the believers’ manipulation and radicalization?

The Islamic faith relies on two sources: Qur’an and prophetic tradition. In regard to the themes, these sources are divided in three parts: rituals (adoration), rules (Shariah), and manner of their implementation. All religious rules are sanctioned and exhaustively elaborated by expert scholars. There are four juridical schools that summarize all rules and laws of faith, terminology, methodology, and principles used in their standardization and classification. The entire Islamic law (Shariah) has five goals:

- 1- Protection of human life
- 2- Protection of religion
- 3- Protection of the mind
- 4- Protection of property
- 5- Protection of honor

Any doctrine or action in the name of religion that conflicts with any of the above five goals is categorized as non-Islamic.

Radicalism, extremism, and takfirism are views outside this definition. They

use unaccepted methodologies, out of standards in the classification of notions and statuses, to serve their goals. Therefore, they appear as doctrines and separate trends. Manipulation starts with terminology, continues with classification, and then with legitimacy (allowed or prohibited), and ends with judgment.

Extremism, as a theological definition, means going beyond the borderline. Religious extremism is prohibited regardless of its identity and faith. This prohibition is clearly stated: “O People of the Scripture (Christians and Hebrews), do not commit excess in your religion.”²¹⁹ This prohibition, intended to the followers of the Scriptures (Christians and Jews) applies to Muslims in reliance of the prophetic definition: “Beware against exaggerating in your religion, for those before you were destroyed because of their exaggeration in religion.”²²⁰

There are two reasons behind the creation of extremism as a mindset:

- 1- Failure to understand the verses in the holy scriptures, refusal of context, and lack of scientific theological reference;
- 2- Takfirism and permitting of legally unjustified murder for all those who do not commit to their doctrine.

As a doctrine, Takfirism²²¹ means accusation to followers of Abrahamic faiths (Muslims, Christians, and Hebrews) of apostasy²²² and obligation for murdering them by self-judgment. Muslims are considered so when they do not commit to the Takfirist doctrine, whereas the Christians and Hebrews because of their faith.

Qur’anic texts refuse this categorization.

“And do not argue with the People of the Scripture except in a way that is best...”²²³ Islam categorically forbids its believers to use violence, to coerce anyone to adopt or practice Islamic doctrines or to accomplish political goals: “There shall be no compulsion in [acceptance of] the religion.”²²⁴ Religious tolerance is not an issue of personal choice, but a religious obligation stipulated in the Qur’an. “For you is your religion, and for me is my religion.”²²⁵ To refuse this relationship means to deny Qur’anic texts. The prophetic practice prohibits hurting Abrahamic believers: “Who hurts any believer of holy books (Christians, Hebrews) should know that he has hurt me.”²²⁶ The Qur’an appreciates the reality of change and diversity in humanity. It gives the impression that diversity is part of the divine plan, recognizing the variety of religious laws and beliefs, as can be clearly understood in this Qur’anic sentence: “To each of you We prescribed a law and a method. Had Allah willed, He would have made you one nation [united in religion]...”²²⁷

Religion forbids any violence on religious grounds. If Islam had legitimized the murder of non-Muslims because of faith, how can one explain the existence of non-Muslims in Muslim countries for more than 1,400 years since the birth of Islam? The oldest Christian communities in the world are to be found in Arab countries. Abrahamic religions (Christians and Hebrews) have a special status guaranteed to them, where their religion, cult facilities and their canonical laws are respected.

JIHAD

Jihad is one of the most manipulated notions of the Takfivist movement.

What we are currently seeing in Syria and Iraq is terrorism organized by criminal bands that have no relation whatsoever with Jihad and which is a result of religious manipulation. The participation of individuals from various countries of the world in these cohorts of fighters reveals the scale of spread of manipulation. Here are some brief details to understand the distinction.

Linguistically and religiously, Jihad means “efforts” and “endeavor”.²²⁸ The same root serves to “Ijtihad”, which implies efforts of Islamic intellectuals and scholars to come to a legal valid religious opinion about a new problem. The term ‘Jihad’ is wrongly translated as holy war. This translation is a deformation of the true meaning of this word and a source of misunderstanding. Islam does not glorify Jihad as holy. Indeed, Jihad is practiced in the conditions of self-defense and does not imply a war for the interest of one religion against another. Therefore, it is a mandatory solution imposed in extreme conditions when there is no other way out. For this reason, Qur’an states: “while it is hateful to you.”²²⁹

There are few verses in the Qur’an that allow participation in an armed war and they all have a very specific nature: threat to sovereignty, self-defense from territorial aggression and from evident persecution that aims renunciation of faith.

Jihad is not conditioned only to reasons that justify it, but also to how it should develop, because, according to Islam, “the end does not justify the means.” Rules are compelling and clearly-cut. A war cannot start until all other peaceful means to stop aggression and persecution have been fully employed. Jihad is not declared by individuals, whoever they are, but by legal state authorities after the necessary

consultations have been carried out. The legal authorities include governments and war is declared on states and not on individuals. A war is made under the flag of a legitimate Muslim country, not under the flag of a self-declared person. A war is waged between military structures. It does not pose threat to others but only to participants in the aggressor army, which can be differentiated from the uniform. Violence should only be used against the enemy army and in the battlefield. No civilians, churches, synagogues, properties, or assets are to be harmed or damaged. Plunders and damages are prohibited. Captured and wounded army people are not executed but treated humanely according to relevant status. It is forbidden to use violent means, such as explosions, kidnapping and hostage, blackmail, and any other illegal form of violence that is used as a means to attain religious or political ends. Unless called upon by local populations in the conditions of inability to face the enemy, foreign fighters are not allowed to participate.

“BOMB MAN” – the kamikaze (who is proclaimed a “martyr” – shehid)

This term is another typical deformation of the notion. In no circumstance whatsoever, suicide or self-judgement is categorized as martyrdom. Suicide is prohibited (haram) and is one of the unforgivable sins. Assassination of innocents and upon self-judgement is also unforgivable. Qur’an is clear in these prohibitions when it states: “Whoever kills a soul, it is as if he had slain mankind entirely. And whoever saves one, it is as if he had saved mankind entirely.”

HIZBISM, PARTISANSHIP – Blind Follow of Few Hodjas (Imams) and Accusing Others of Disbelief

Because of extremism in understanding and practicing religion, followers of these doctrines do not enjoy appreciation and support of Muslim scholars and thinkers. They have been at the core of purely theological criticism by theologians. A Qur’anic standard (“surah”²³⁰) can be employed in case of divergences on understanding holy texts. Scientific discussions, dialogue and discourse are instruments legitimized by religion in case of disagreements.

Doctrinal people’s failure to confine to Qur’anic standard leads to extremism within the kind – labeling their critics as hypocrites, people who have betrayed the religious ideal. As a consequence of this stance, doctrinal people appeal to their believers to forsake certain books, theologians, imams, and scholars. Marginalization and ‘brainwash’ of the ummah are their only way to secure followers that follow them blindly. Followers of these doctrines refuse other believers that think otherwise in religious discourses but they find it easier to implant their views among people who lack knowledge or are prohibited to research other basic sources. Of course, unable to cope with true religious views, their ideologists aim at superiority over others by bestowing upon themselves unmerited titles, such as thinkers, religious princes, and even caliph.

PARTICIPATION IN VOTING

The religiously unjustified tendency to refuse believers’ participation in the social, institutional and cultural daily life, marginality, and their separation and isolation from society culminates

with the refusal of the political system and governance instruments. Prohibition of participation in voting on grounds of governing under the laws of Allah is a misinterpretation of religion.

This attitude is a doorway and a jumping board to another manipulated concept, by means of which the political end is laid bare: Insurgency to authority is an obligation (wajib). This attitude is rejected by all scholars. Besides religious obligations, a believer has daily life's demands similar to those of the rest of the society. Therefore, choosing favorable party programs is a direct contribution to the improvement of the quality of life.

One of the distinguished scholars, former Mufti of Saudi Arabia, Abdul Aziz Ibn Baz was asked in a fatwa²³¹: Is the preachers' (imams and theologians) appeal to overthrow a government by violence in a Muslim society where Sharia provisions are not applied the path to Allah?

He answered: "It is an obligation to come to faith, with advice and good instructions, refusing the change by violence, because it, otherwise, opens the door of evil to the Muslims. We should call to the faith of Allah with wisdom, good words, and valuable advice; advise power holders as best as possible, counsel other officials, the public at large, and guide them to the good."

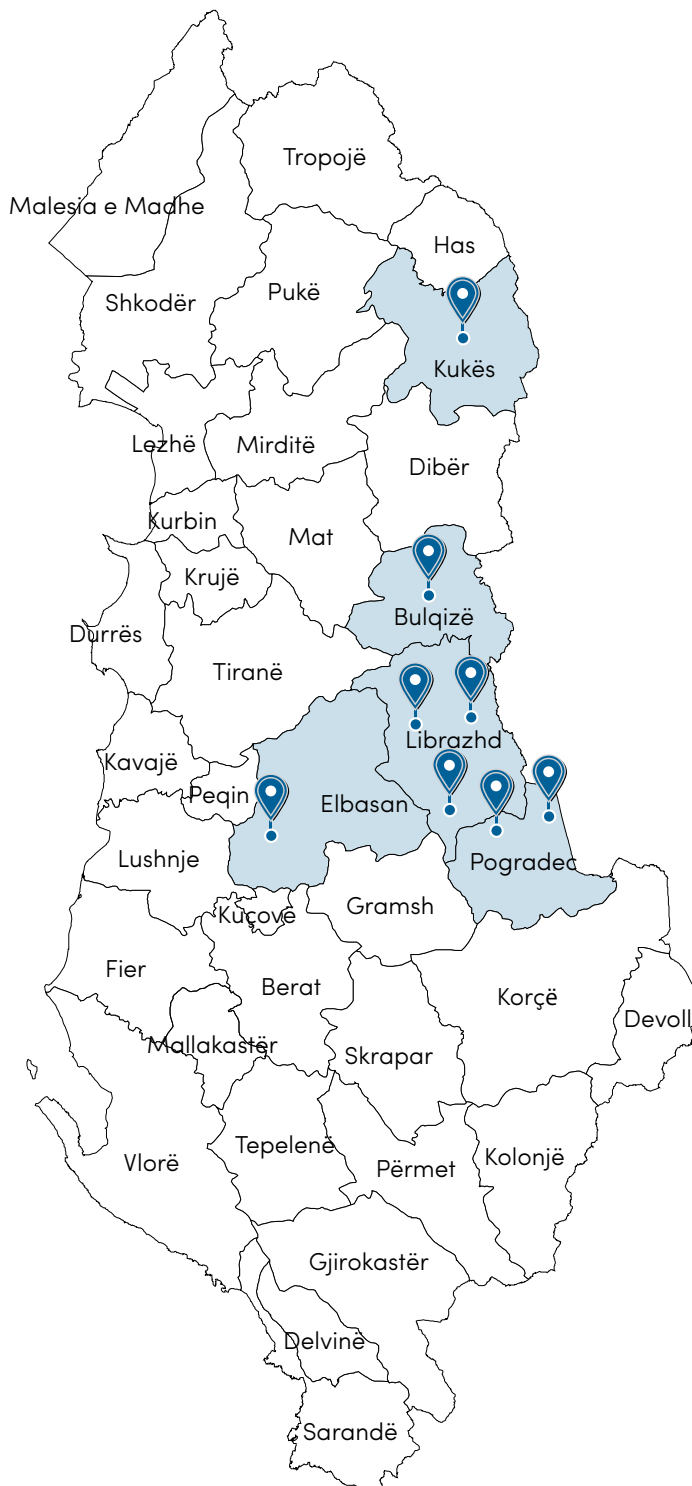
All manipulated views seek to discriminate –declare as disbeliever all those who refuse these doctrines, classify them as renouncers of religion, and judge and condemn them with death.

The today's Syrian reality is a true reflection of extremism that has engaged indoctrinated people from other countries. It is a practical

argument of their doctrine and their vision of how all indoctrinated people see the world. Therefore, these doctrines and trends are classified by all scholars as offshoots that do not belong to the Muslim religious community.

Exclusion of others different from you is to disavow the divine, natural, and essential diversity of the very existence. This diversity that incorporates cultures, civilizations, religions, and societies is inheritable and not an innovation. It is the simplicity of existence and respect is its spiritual dimension. This is the very message conveyed by the Qur'anic verse: "Cooperate on the basis of mutual respect and devotion."

9.2. DEMOGRAPHY AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROFILE OF TARGET AREAS



In order to embark on a comprehensive understanding of the religious radicalization and VE this research has prioritized not only target groups (see Methodology) but also its geographical focus by identifying specific areas within the target qarks (regions) which appear to be particularly vulnerable to religious VE. While the initial focus of the research was on rural and peripheral areas of four qarks the inception phase of the research suggested broadening of this target by involving also urban areas. The reason for this was the fact that the exposure to religious radicalization & VE of the community of believers and group dynamics are not isolated in rural areas. As a consequence, eight specific areas – local government units²³² – were identified within the target regions as follows: Commune of Buçimas and Municipality of Pogradec (Korça qark); Municipality of Perrenjas, Municipality of Librazhd, Commune of Qender-Librazhd and Municipality of Cerrik (Elbasan qark), Municipality of Bulqiza (Dibra qark); and Municipality of Kukës²³³ (Kukes qark).

The subsequent sections elaborate on the main variables and indicators through presenting a socio-economic profile of each area and a comparative analysis on differences and similarities among them.

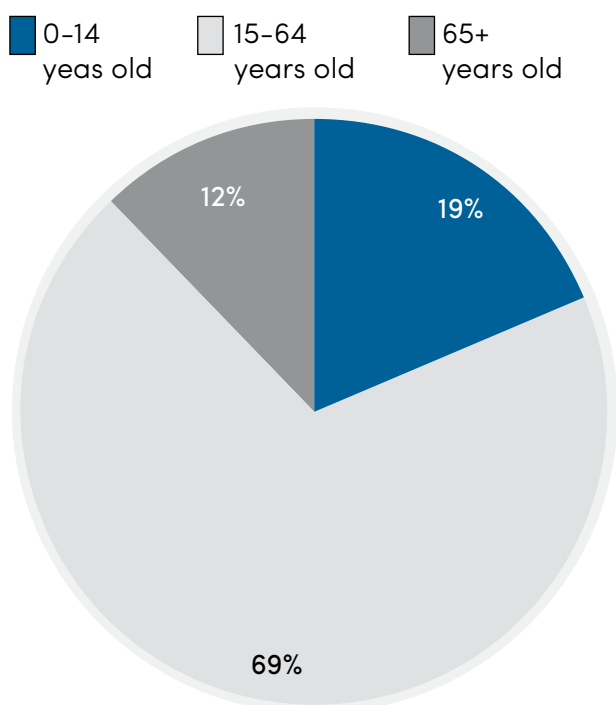
9.2.1. MUNICIPALITY OF POGRADEC

Table 1. Summary data for the Municipality of Pogradec

Region	Korçë
District	Pogradec
Density (population/km ²)	8615.82
Population	20,848
<i>Males</i>	10,425
<i>Females</i>	10,423
Total dependency ratio (%)	44
Illiteracy rate (%)	1.7
Unemployment (%)	35.40
Youth unemployment (%)	65.40

Source: Population and Housing Census (2011)

Figure 1. Age structure (%)



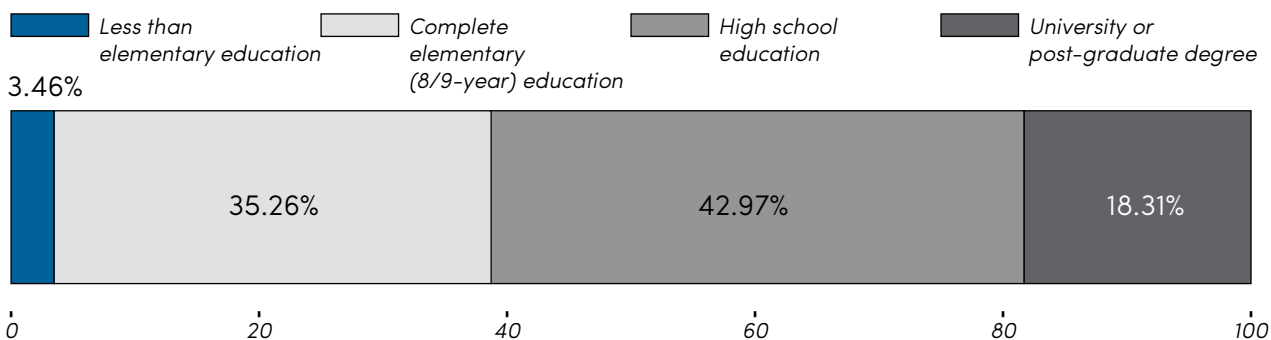
[Source: Population and Housing Census, 2011]

DEMOGRAPHY

The municipality of Pogradec has a population of 20,848 inhabitants or 9.5% of the total population of Korça region. Pogradec is the second most populated town of the region, after Korça. The data indicate that in the last decade the demographic situation in Pogradec has reflected the similar overall trend of population decline observed at the national level (Population and Housing Census, 2011). In 2011, the residential population experienced a decrease by 12.26% as compared with 2001. Yet, this decrease is lower than the regional population decline (by 17%). The average density is 8615.82 inhabitants per km², a figure much higher than the national rate of 97.4 inhabitants per km².

In general, the gender composition in Pogradec is balanced, where 50% of the residents are males and 50% are females. Age structure is composed by 18.8% of children, 6% of the age-group of 15-64 years old, and 11.98% of elderly. This age distribution reflects

Figure 2. Level of Education (%)



[Source: Population and Housing Census, 2011]

the national parameters. The total dependency ratio²³⁴ is 44%, where the largest relative share is taken up by the young-age dependency ratio. Thus, out of every 100 potentially working-age residents in the Municipality of Pogradec 44 residents are not in working age. The data on marital status show that largest part of the population (56%) is married; 38% is single, and 9% is divorced. From the ethnical-cultural viewpoint²³⁵, the majority or 85.26% of the residents are Albanian. The Greek minority is the largest with about 0.87%, followed by Aromanians (0.30%) and Macedonians (0.20%). Roma and Egyptian communities make up 0.95% of the population.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS

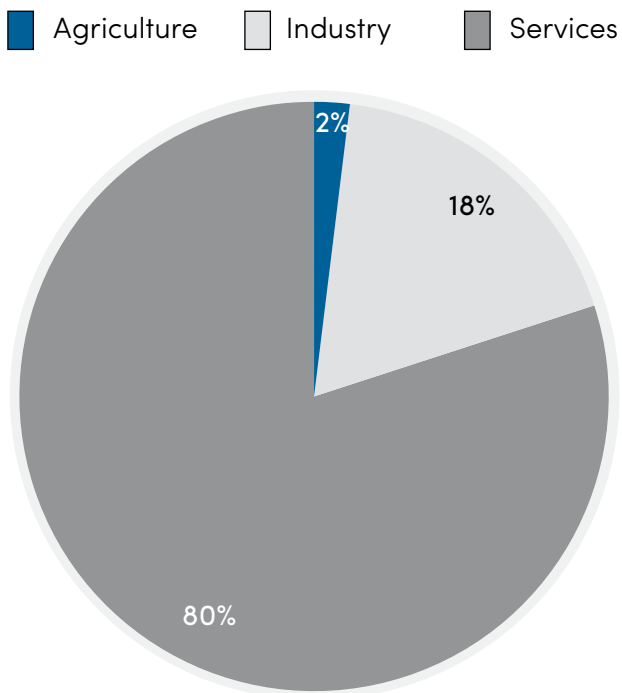
On average, the residents of Pogradec have a higher educational attainment level than the residents of Korça region and the national level. The average number of schooling years for a Pogradec resident is 11.24. In addition, the population’s educational structure reveals that most residents (61%) have completed at least high school education. Also, 18% of the total population has completed university education (this number being 6% higher than the national value). Only 1.7%

of the population can be considered illiterate (Census, 2011). Pogradec has six 9-year schools and three high schools, with 167 and 97 teachers, respectively (Ministry of Education and Sport, 2015).

In total, Pogradec has 6,042 households with an average household size of 3.45 individuals. 21% of households are female-headed households. According to the latest Census (2011), the main source of income for households is paid work or self-employment (in 53.39% of the cases) and pensions (in 35.36% of the cases). Religion-wise²³⁶, the majority (or 56%) of the population is Muslim, 20% is Christian Orthodox, 1.40% Christian Catholic, and 1.10% is Bektashi.

Pogradec’s economy relies predominantly on trade and services; these are the sectors that employ the largest number of people. About 80% of the employed people work in the service sector. The share of employment in the sectors of industry and agriculture is 18% and 2%, respectively. In total, 64% of the employed have paid work, and 36% are self-employed. The analysis of employment rate by gender reveals that male employment rate is higher (about 43%) as compared with female employment rate (about

Figure 3. Employment by branch of economy (%)



[Source: Population and Housing Census, 2011]

30%). Regardless of this, female employment rate is higher than the national rate (25.5%). As a reflection of the educational attainment of the population, 49% of the employed have high school education and 35% university level education. In 2011, the working-age population in the Municipality of Pogradec was 14,440 inhabitants. In addition, the Census revealed that the unemployment rate was 35.4%, and that unemployment was particularly concerning among the youth; 65.40% of Pogradec youth stated that they were jobless. The values of these indicators are higher than the respective national rates of 29.3% and 52.90%.

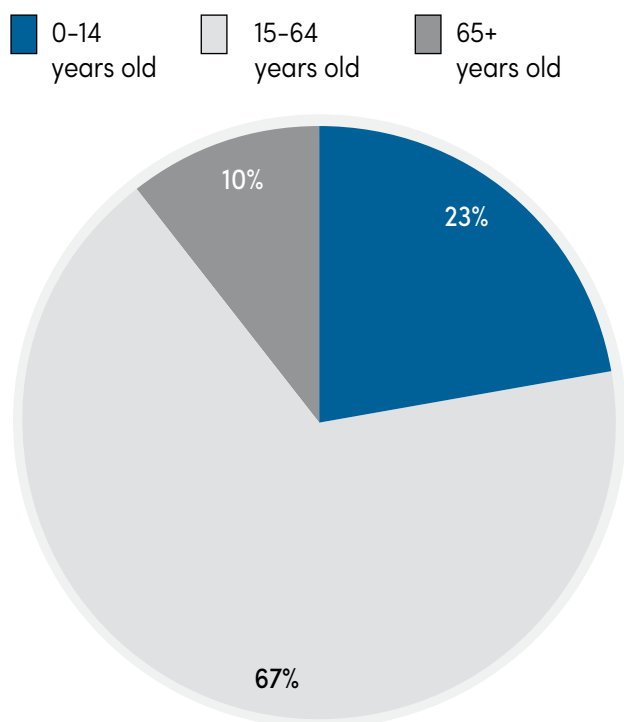
9.2.2. COMMUNE OF BUÇIMAS

Table 2. Summary data for the Commune of Buçimas

Region	Korçë
District	Pogradec
Density (population/km ²)	328.63
Population	15,687
<i>Males</i>	8,033
<i>Females</i>	7,654
Total dependency ratio (%)	48.68
Illiteracy rate (%)	3
Unemployment (%)	54.70
Youth unemployment (%)	78.80

Source: Population and Housing Census (2011)

Figure 4. Age structure (%)



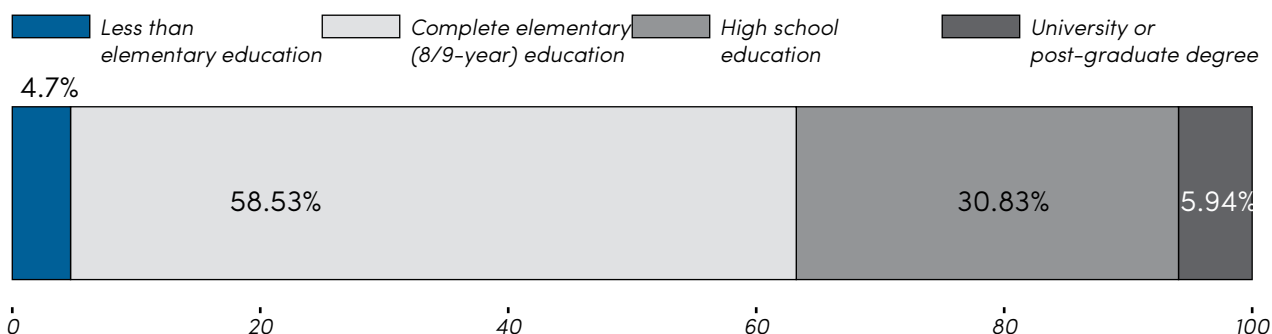
[Source: Population and Housing Census, 2011]

DEMOGRAPHY

The Commune of Buçimas is the biggest commune in Korça region, with a population of 15,687 inhabitants. From a demographic perspective, according to Census 2011, while the population in Albania and in other local government units (LGUs) of the region has declined, an increasing trend during 1989-2011 is observable for Buçimas. Residential population has increased by 34.58% from 1989 to 2011. In addition, from 2001 to 2011 the population has increased by 17.75%, even though a slightly decreasing tendency compared with year 2001 is observable. The average density of 328.63 inhabitants per km² is, however, higher than the national rate of 97.4 inhabitants per km².

In terms of gender distribution, 51.2% of the inhabitants are males and 48.7% are females. In general, the age structure of Buçimas presents similar features to the national age structure but the share of children is relatively higher: 23% of the residents are children,

Figure 5. Level of Education (%)



[Source: Population and Housing Census, 2011]

67% belong to the age group 15–64 years old and 11% are elderly people. The total dependency ratio is 0.49 or 49%. Thus, for every two potentially economically active residents in Buçimas, 1 resident is not in working age. With regard to marital status, 54% of the inhabitants are married and 40% are unmarried. Likewise, the number of divorces is quite low when compared with the national rate; only 3% of the inhabitants are divorced. In terms of the ethnic composition of Buçimas, the self-declaration on ethnic-cultural belonging in 2011 showed that the overwhelming part of the population is Albanian (86.67%). In a descending order, the rest of the population is: 0.47% Egyptian, 0.13% Aromanian, and 0.07% Greek.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS

The data on educational attainment indicate that the Buçimas residents have, on average, a low educational level. About 59% of the population has completed elementary (8/9-year) education and less than one third of the population has completed high school education. Only about 6% of the population has completed university education and 3% of the population is

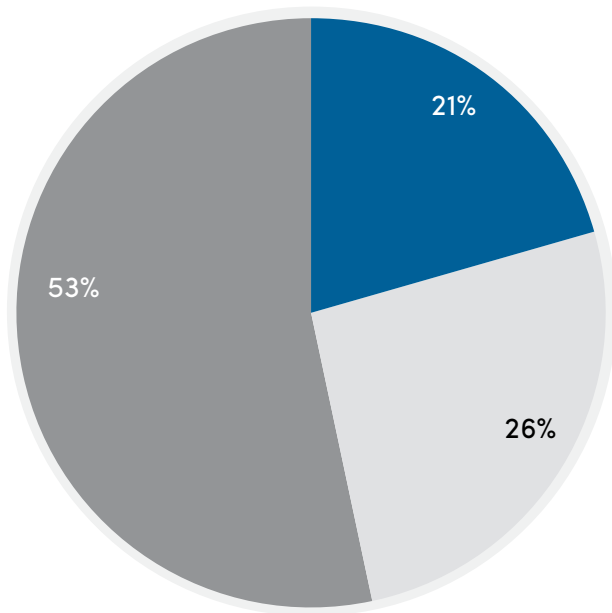
illiterate; this rate is slightly higher than the national average rate of illiteracy (2.8%).

The Commune of Buçimas has a total of 3,803 households with an average size of 4.12 individuals. Gender-wise, about 15% are female-headed households. Low living standards are discernable in this commune, since paid work or self-employment is the main source of income for households only in 49% of the cases. Pensions (in 28% of the cases), social assistance and benefits (in 22% of the cases) and remittances (in 12% of the cases) constitute an important share of sources of revenues for households (Census 2011). Similarly, as a non-monetary indicator of the low living standards, only one in two households in Buçimas have running water system inside their dwelling units. In addition, only 8% of households possess at least one computer, of which about 3% have access to internet. In terms of religious background, 76.80% of the population is Muslim. In a descending order, 2% are identified as Christian Orthodox, 0.6% as Christian Catholic, and 0.2% as Bektashi.

The working-age population in the Commune of Buçimas is 10,551 inhabitants. However, a considerable part of the potential labor force is

Figure 6. Employment by branch of economy (%)

■ Agriculture □ Industry ■ Services



[Source: Population and Housing Census, 2011]

still unexploited. Census 2011 results show that more than every second Buçimas inhabitant is jobless (with an unemployment rate of 54.70%). The problem of youth unemployment is acute: 78.8% of the youth of 15-30 years of age are jobless. Employment rates lean on males whereas only 8.64% of females are employed as compared with 27.1% of males. About 37% of employed people have primary education, whereas about 44% have high school education. In terms of economic activities in Buçimas, more than half of employed people are working in the service sector (about 53%). Meanwhile, other employees are shared between the sector of industry and agriculture by 26% and 21%, respectively. Regarding employment status, some 54.50% of inhabitants have paid work, and 45.50% are self-employed.

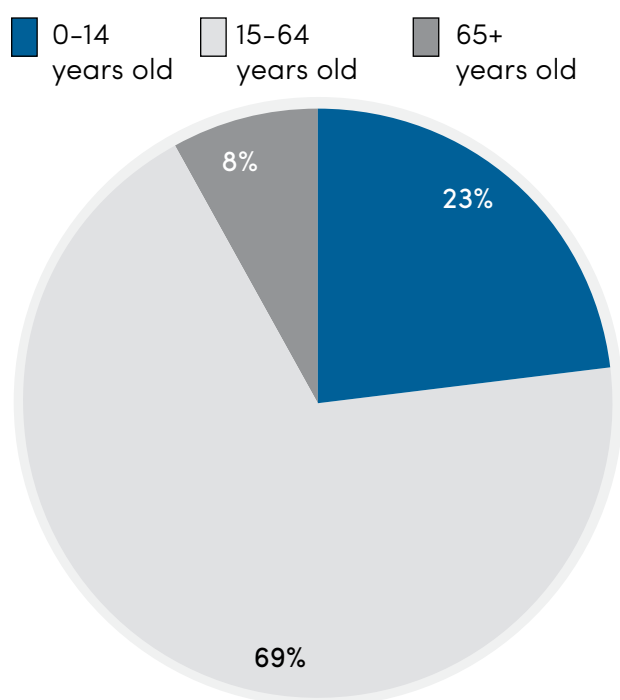
9.2.3. MUNICIPALITY OF LIBRAZH D

Table 3. Summary data for the Municipality Librazhd

Region	Elbasan
District	Librazhd
Density (population/km ²)	3777.87
Population	6,937
<i>Males</i>	3,445
<i>Females</i>	3,492
Total dependency ratio (%)	45
Illiteracy rate (%)	1.7
Unemployment (%)	32.20
Youth unemployment (%)	70

Source: Population and Housing Census (2011)

Figure 7. Age structure (%)



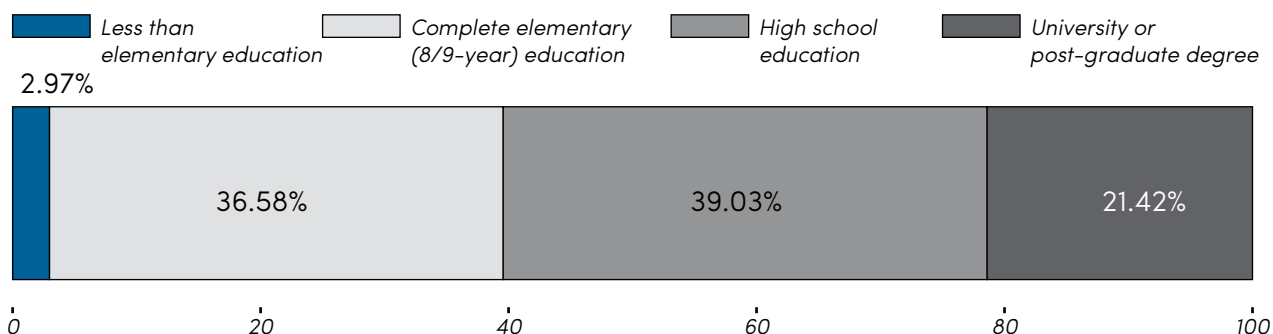
[Source: Population and Housing Census, 2011]

DEMOGRAPHY

The Municipality of Librazhd has a population of 6,937 inhabitants. The data show that the population growth of 38.24% observed during the period 1989 - 2001, turned into a decline by 3.87% when analyzing the period 2001 - 2011. Yet, from a demographic perspective, this negative increase is small when comparing it with the population decline at the regional level (18%) and the national drop (8.8%). In addition, the town of Librazhd has a higher population density than the national average (3777.87).

The gender ratio is 98.7, whereby 49.6% of the population is composed by males and 50.3% by females. While age distribution reflects national parameters, the elderly population is at a relatively lower percentage: 23% of the population are children, 69% belong to the potential labor force age group (15 -64 years old), and about 8% are elderly. Consequently, the total

Figure 8. Level of Education (%)



[Source: Population and Housing Census, 2011]

dependency ratio is 45%, where the largest specific share is taken up by the young-age dependency ratio. In addition, by national parameters, the population division by marital status shows that most people are married (52%), 42% are unmarried, and 8% are divorced. In terms of ethnical background, 87.91% of the population is Albanian. In descending order, 0.20% is Aromanian, 0.16% Macedonian, 0.12% is Greek, and 0.03% belongs to the Egyptian community.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS

Librazhd residents have, on average, a higher educational attainment level than the national level. The average number of schooling years is 11.7. The majority of population (60%) has completed high school education and 21.24% possess a university diploma. Only 1.7% of the population is illiterate. The municipality of Librazhd has two 9-year schools with a teaching staff of 73 teachers and one high school with 33 teachers (Ministry of Education and Sport, 2015).

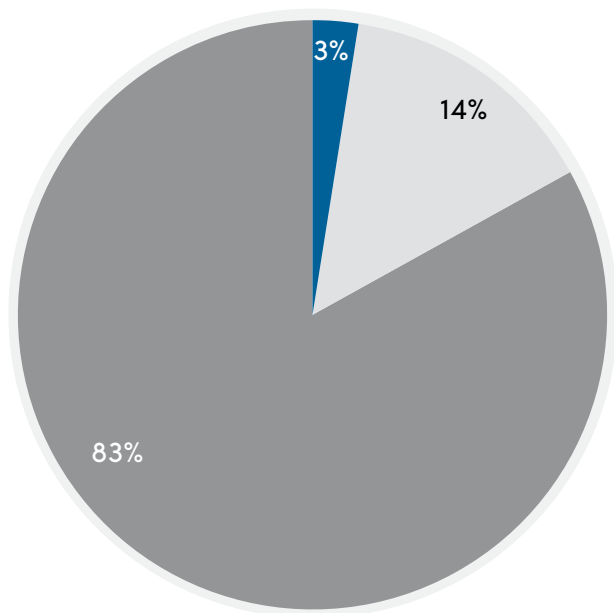
In total, 1,843 households in Librazhd state that the main source of income is paid work or self-employment (in

67.61% of the cases), and pensions (in 24.63% of the cases). The average household size is 3.76 and 11.2% households are female-headed. In terms of religious affiliation, a little more than half (52%) of the Librazhd population is affiliated with the Islamic religion. The rest, 2.1% are Christian Orthodox, 0.6% are Bektashi and 0.3% are Catholic.

Services constitute the dominating employment sector for the population of Librazhd; about 83% of the employed work in this sector. Some 14% are employed in the industry sector. Due to urbanization, only 3% are employed in agriculture. Some 66.10% of the employed people have paid work, and 33.90% are self-employed. The working-age population is 4,784 inhabitants. Total unemployment rate is 32.20%, whereas youth unemployment is twice as higher, and notes stressful figures: about 70% of the youth are unemployed (Census, 2011). Employment rate leans slightly on men, since employment rate for females is 40.27% as compared with 46.2% male employment rate. In addition, about 46% of employed have high school education and 39% have university education.

Figure 9. Employment by branch of economy (%)

■ Agriculture □ Industry ■ Services



[Source: Population and Housing Census, 2011]

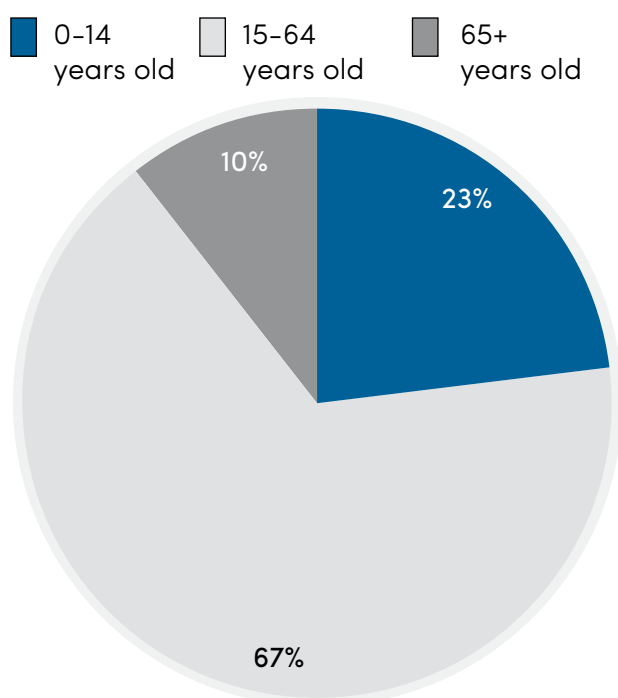
9.2.4. COMMUNE OF QENDER

Table 4. Summary data for the Commune of Qender

Region	Elbasan
District	Librazhd
Density (population/km2)	43.29
Population	8,551
<i>Males</i>	4,351
<i>Females</i>	4,200
Total dependency ratio (%)	50.44
Illiteracy rate (%)	4.30
Unemployment (%)	18.50
Youth unemployment (%)	39

Source: Population and Housing Census (2011)

Figure 10. Age structure (%)



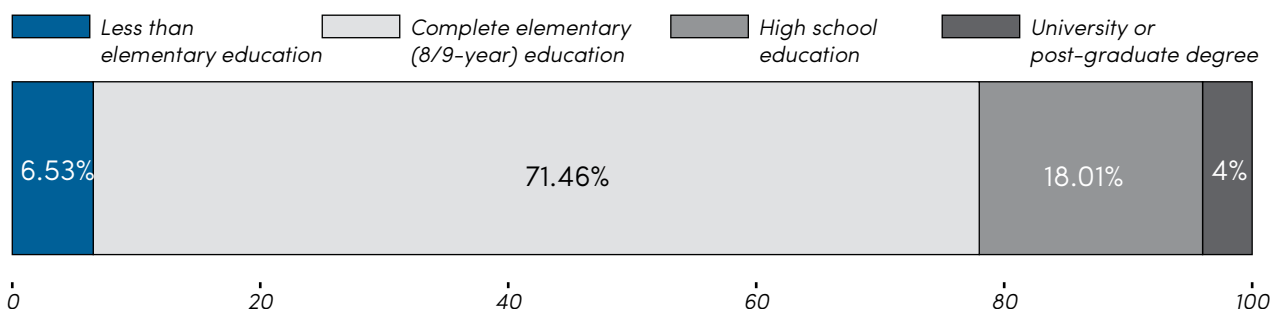
[Source: Population and Housing Census, 2011]

DEMOGRAPHY

The Commune of Qender has a residential population of 8,551 inhabitants. From the demographic perspective, between the years 1989 - 2011, a constant trend of population decline is identifiable. In concrete figures, from 1989 to 2011, the population in Qender dropped by 33.20%, along with a negative increase of 26.13% from 2001 to 2011 (Census, 2011). Consequently, in 2011, average density of population was 43.29 inhabitants per km.

The data on gender distribution show that 51% of inhabitants are males and 49% are females. In terms of age structure, 23% of the population are children, 65% belong to the working-age group (15 -64 years old) and 11% are elderly people. Consequently, total dependency ratio is 50.44%. In the Commune of Qender, the majority of population or about 48% are married, 46% are unmarried and only 3% are divorced. From the ethnic-cultural perspective, 96.04% are Albanian,

Figure 11. Level of Education (%)



[Source: Population and Housing Census, 2011]

whereas 0.05% belong to the Roma community.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS

The data on educational attainment level reveal that the residents of the Commune of Qender have, on average, a low educational level. The average number of schooling years is 8.89. In absolute terms, 368 inhabitants, or 4.30% of the population is illiterate; the rate is higher than the national average. The majority of the population has completed elementary education (about 72%); whereas about 22% of the population has completed at least high school education. Only 4% have completed university education. Based on the data of the Ministry of Education and Sports (MAS, 2015), the Commune of Qender has twelve 9-year schools with a teaching staff of 87 individuals. In addition, only 10 teachers instruct in the only high school of this commune.

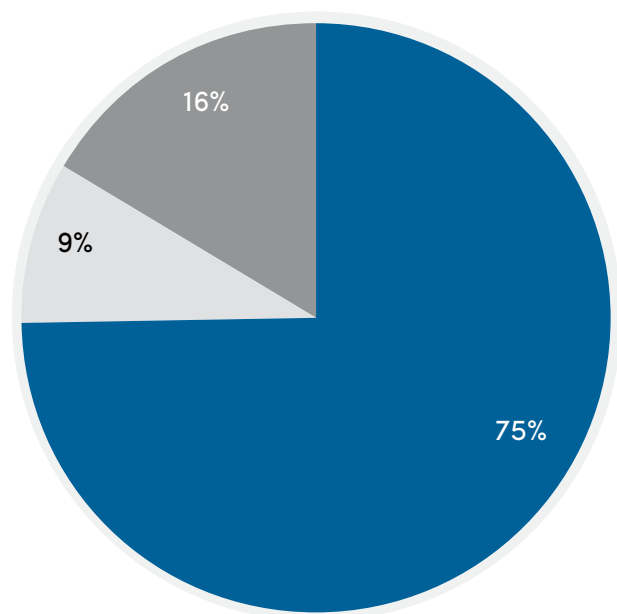
The economic data present a low living profile of the households in the Commune of Qender. Thus, 1,863 residential households' important sources of income include paid work or self-employment (in 54.97% of the cases), pensions (in 33.92% of the cases) and economic assistance (in 18% of the cases). In addition, remittances

take up an important share of the sources of household income (in 15.62% of the cases). The data on living conditions show that only one out of ten households has running water supply. In the meantime, 4% of the household have access to computer and 1% has access to internet (Census, 2011). A feature of rural areas, the average household size is 5 individuals; 9.6% of households are female-headed. In terms of religious affiliation, the overwhelming part or 89.90% of the population of the commune are Muslim and 0.10% are Christian Orthodox.

The Commune of Qender is a rural area with an agrarian economic structure; agriculture is the main sector of economy. Consequently, about 75% of the employed people are engaged in agricultural activities. Other major economic activities, second to agriculture, include services (about 16% of employed people work in the service sector), followed by industry (9%). As a consequence of this local economic structuring, only 20% of the employed people have paid work, whereas 80% are self-employed. The working age population in the Commune of Qender is 5,684 inhabitants. The unemployment rate (18.50%) is below the national average

Figure 12. Employment by branch of economy (%)

■ Agriculture ■ Industry ■ Services



(of 29.30%), most probably covered by the agricultural sector. In addition, youth unemployment, even though below the national average rate, is higher than the total rate marking a value of 39%. The employment rate leans on men, and only one out of every three women is employed, compared with the half of men (52.9%). As a reflection of the overall educational level of the population, about 72.10% of the employed people have primary education and 20.49% have high school education. Only 5.90% of the employed people have university level education.

[Source: Population and Housing Census, 2011]

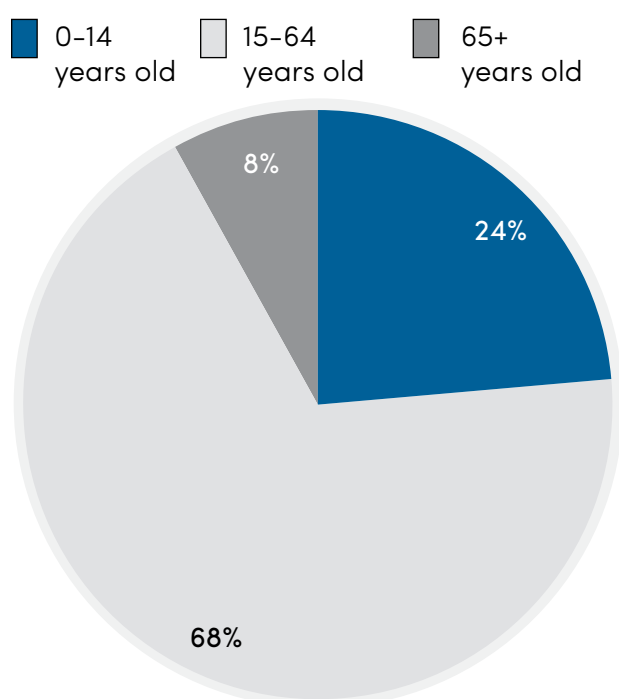
9.2.5. MUNICIPALITY OF PERRENJAS

Table 5. Summary data for the Municipality Perrenjas

Region	Elbasan
District	Librazhd
Density (population/km ²)	453.19
Population	5,847
<i>Males</i>	2,911
<i>Females</i>	2,936
Total dependency ratio (%)	46
Illiteracy rate (%)	1.7
Unemployment (%)	45.90
Youth unemployment (%)	65.90

Source: Population and Housing Census (2011)

Figure 13. Age structure (%)



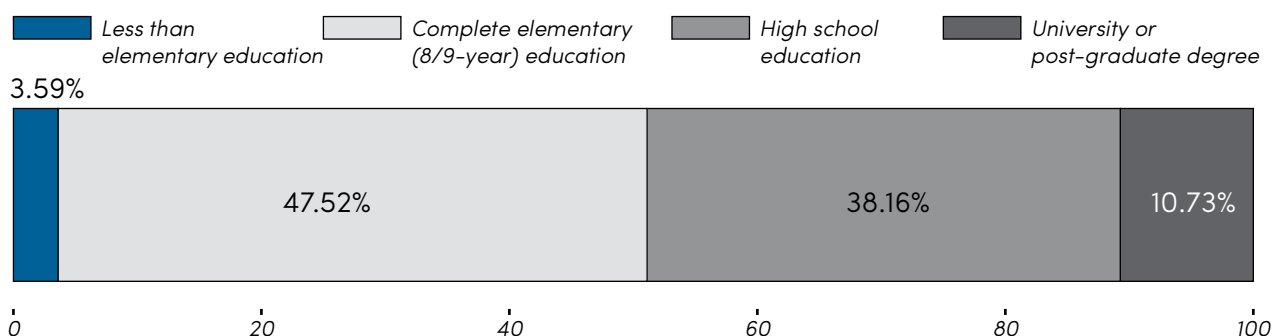
[Source: Population and Housing Census, 2011]

DEMOGRAPHY

5,847 inhabitants live in the Municipality of Perrenjas. The Census data (2011) show that during the last decade, the demographic situation in Perrenjas tends to reflect the overall trend of population decline noticed at national scale. In 2011, the residential population experienced a drop by 11.98% compared with 2001, even though this drop is below the rate of 18% of the population decrease at regional level. The average density is 453.19 inhabitants per km², a figure higher than the national rate of 97.4 inhabitants per km².

In total, the gender composition in Perrenjas is balanced, where about 50% of inhabitants are males and 50% females. The age structure is composed of 23.70% children, 68.31% working age population (15-64 years old) and 8.02% elderly. This age distribution is slightly younger than the age structure of the national level. The total dependency

Figure 14. Level of Education (%)



[Source: Population and Housing Census, 2011]

ratio is 46% and the largest relative share or about 35% is taken by the young-age dependency ratio. Consequently, for every 100 working-age inhabitants in the Municipality of Perrenjas there are 46 non-working age people (Census, 2011). The data on marital status show that more than half of the population is married (52.2%), and 43% is unmarried. From the ethnic-cultural perspective, the overwhelming part or 90.46% of inhabitants are Albanian. The Aromanian minority is the largest (0.15%), followed by Macedonians (0.12%).

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS

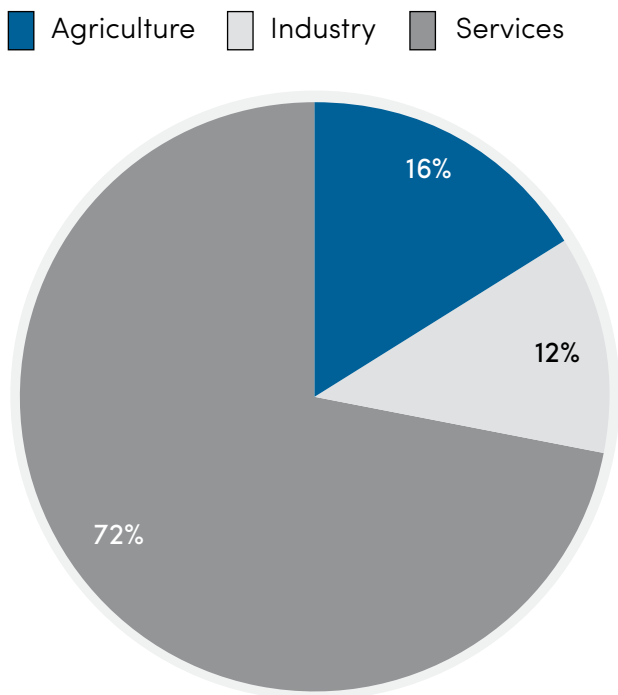
On average, the inhabitants of Perrenjas have a slightly higher educational attainment level than the level of the region of Elbasan: the average number of schooling years is 10.72. In addition, the population's education structure shows that one in two residents (about 49%) has at least completed high school education. Likewise, about 11% of the overall population has completed university studies (with 1% below the national average rate). Some 1.7% of the population or about 100 inhabitants

may be considered illiterate (Census, 2011). Other education indicators show that Perrenjas has three 9-year schools and one high school, in which 56 and 24 teachers instruct, accordingly (Ministry of Education and Sport, 2015).

In total, Perrenjas has 1,482 households and an average household size of 3.94 individuals. Also, 24.3% of households are female-headed. According to Census (2011), the main source of income for households is paid work or self-employment (in 46.12% of the cases) and pensions (in 26.42% of the cases). In 17% of the cases, economic assistance is the main source of income. Remittances are the main source of income in 4% of the cases – twice as low as the national average. In terms of religious affiliation, the majority or 72.50% of the population belong to the Muslim religion, 1.69% to the Christian Orthodox, 1% to the Bektashi religion and 0.4% to the Christian Catholic.

The economy of Perrenjas relies basically on the service sector, which employs the highest number of the residents or about 72%. The employment share of agriculture and industry is approximately 16% and 12%, respectively. Some 53% of the employed people have paid work, and 47% are

Figure 15. Employment by branch of economy (%)



[Source: Population and Housing Census, 2011]

self-employed. In 2011, the working age population in the Municipality of Perrenjas was 3,994 inhabitants. The analysis of the employment rate by gender reveals that employment rate is higher among men (about 33%), when compared with women (about 26%), even though women's employment figures are similar that of the national scale (25.5%). A reflection of the educational level of the population, 46% of the employed people have high school education and 26% have university education. The unemployment rate, according to Census 2011, was 45.90%, and it is particularly problematic among the youth (65.90%).

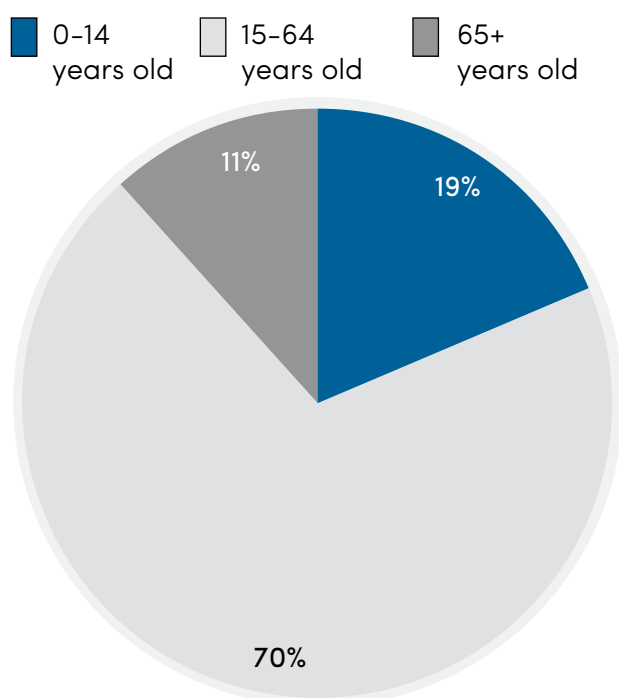
9.2.6. MUNICIPALITY OF CERRIK

Table 6. Summary data for the municipality Cerrik

Region	Elbasan
District	Elbasan
Density (population/km ²)	610.35
Population	6,695
<i>Males</i>	3314
<i>Females</i>	3381
Total dependency ratio (%)	43.30
Illiteracy rate (%)	4.40
Unemployment (%)	49.40
Youth unemployment (%)	72.50

Source: Population and Housing Census (2011)

Figure 16. Age structure (%)



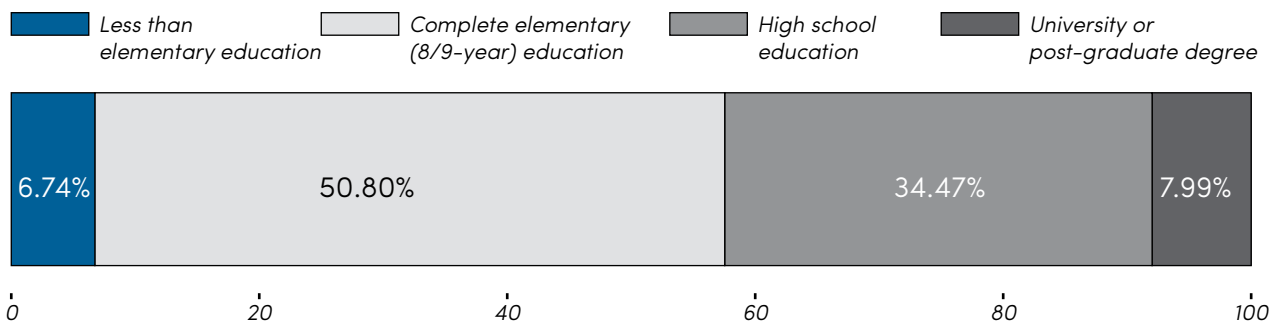
[Source: Population and Housing Census, 2011]

DEMOGRAPHY

Municipality of Cerrik has 6,695 inhabitants. The data show that from the demographic viewpoint, the town of Cerrik shows trends of population decrease. An overall view of the change of population number from 1989 reveals that in 2011 the town's population had dropped by 28.82% when compared with 2001 and by 36.16% when examining the period 1989-2011. This depopulation is more accentuated than the population decrease at regional level (18%) and the national shrink (by 8.8%). However, the average density of the population is 610.35 inhabitants per km², a figure higher the average national rate.

With regard to gender composition, 49% of inhabitants in Cerrik are males and 51% females. The age structure is composed by 70% of the population in working age (age groups of 15-64 years old), followed by 19% children and 11% elderly people. Consequently, the total dependency ratio is 43%, where

Figure 17. Level of Education (%)



[Source: Population and Housing Census, 2011]

for every 100 working-age inhabitants of Cerrik there are 43 non-working-age inhabitants. The data on the marital status of the population reveal that more than half of the population are married (about 52%), 40% are unmarried and 16% are divorced. From the ethnic-cultural perspective, most residents are Albanian (88.50%), 0.55% belong to the Egyptian community and 0.04% are Aromanian.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS

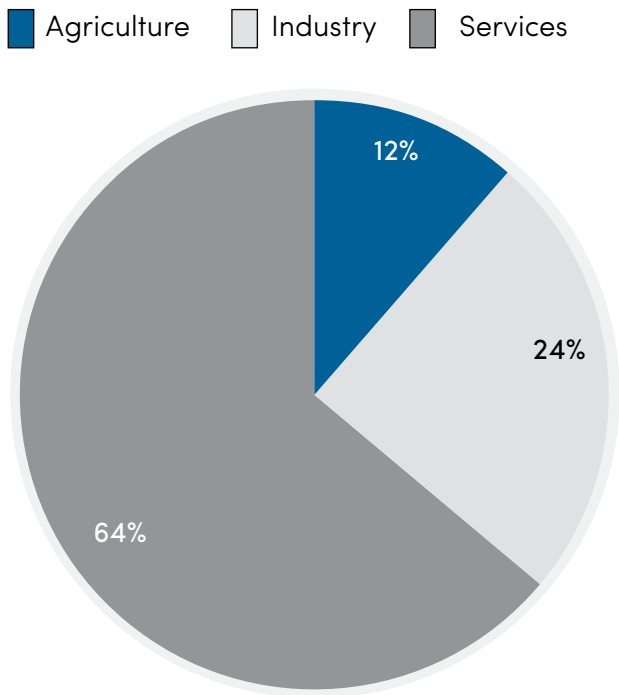
The residents of Cerrik have, on average, a lower educational attainment level than the national rate. The average number of education years is 9.78 years. Half of the population of Cerrik have completed primary education (about 50.80%) and a little more than one third have completed high school education. About 8% of the population has university degree (4 % less than the national rate). Some 294 inhabitants in absolute terms or about 4.4% are illiterate (Census, 2011). The data provided by the Ministry of Education and Sport (2015) indicate that the municipality has three 9-year schools and one high school. A total of 62

teachers instruct at the 9-year schools, whereas the teaching staff of the high school is composed of 20 instructors.

Cerrik has 1,924 households. The main source of income for the average household is paid work or self-employment (in 36.17% of the cases) and pensions in 38.62% of the cases. Yet, economic assistance takes up an important share of the sources of income for households (in 16.94% of the cases). The average household size is 4.23 individuals and about one third of the households are female-headed. In terms of religious affiliation, the majority or 64.20% of the population of Cerrik belong to the Muslim religion. In addition, 3.60% belong to the Christian Orthodox, 2.20% are Catholics and 2.60% are Bektashi.

The working age population in the Municipality of Cerrik is 4,671 inhabitants. The Census results (2011) show that every second Cerrik inhabitant is jobless (the unemployment rate is 49.40%), whereas youth unemployment reaches alarming figures (72.50%). Likewise, employment rate favors men in particular, with 17.02% of women being employed, when compared with 26.5% of the men. About 46.97% of the employed people

Figure 18. Employment by branch of economy (%)



have high school education and 22% have completed university education. Most of the employed people (about 64%) are hired in the service sector. The other figures of employment are shared between industry and agriculture by 24% and 12%, respectively. Some 57.90% of the employed people have paid work and 42.10% are self-employed.

[Source: Population and Housing Census, 2011]

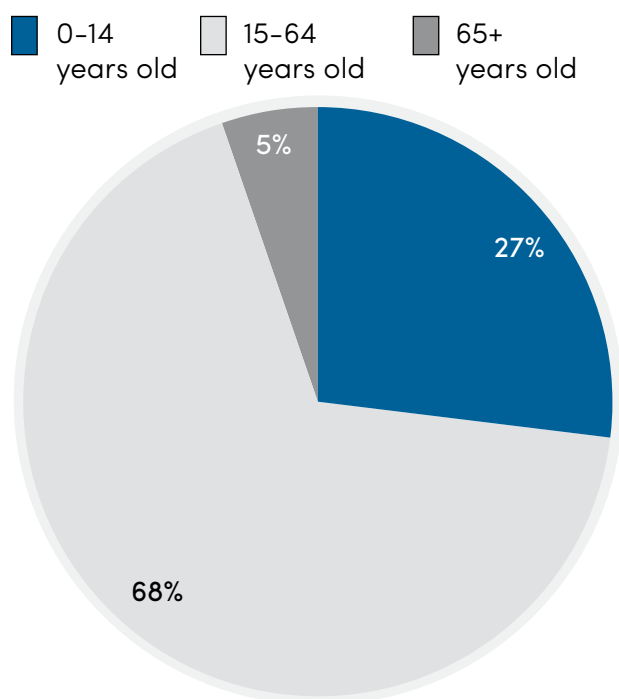
9.2.7. MUNICIPALITY OF BULQIZA

Table 7. Summary data for the Municipality of Bulqiza

Region	Dibër
District	Bulqizë
Density (population/km ²)	200.99
Population	8,177
<i>Males</i>	4,125
<i>Females</i>	4,052
Total dependency ratio (%)	48
Illiteracy rate (%)	1.6
Unemployment (%)	46
Youth unemployment (%)	80.10

Source: Population and Housing Census (2011)

Figure 19. Age structure (%)



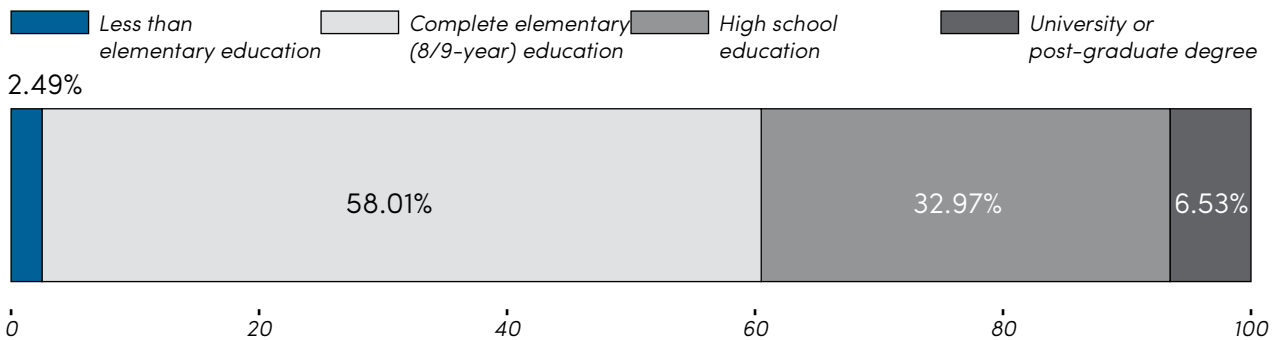
[Source: Population and Housing Census, 2011]

DEMOGRAPHY

The Municipality of Bulqiza has 8,177 inhabitants. Comparative demographic data analysis show an increasing trend of population decline. Thus, the relatively small depopulation noticed from 1989 to 2011 (6.14%) is accompanied with a drop by 21.78% during 2001-2011. Yet, this figure is lower than the population decrease at regional level (28%). Bulqiza is the third most populated town of the Dibra region.

Gender distribution is balanced, where 50.4% of inhabitants are males and 49.5% are females. Also, 68% of the population is of potentially working age (15-64 years old), followed 27% children and only 5% are elderly people. This specific age structure highlights the relatively young population of Bulqiza. As a result, the total dependency ratio of 48% is largely attributed to the highest percentage of the youth (young-age dependency ratio is

Figure 20. Level of Education (%)



[Source: Population and Housing Census, 2011]

40.24). In addition, due to the young age, the population has almost an equal share of married and unmarried people: 48% are married and 47% are unmarried. In addition, 5% of inhabitants are divorced. From the ethnic-cultural viewpoint, in Bulqiza, about 89% of inhabitants are Albanian, 0.20% Aromanian, 0.16% Macedonian, and 0.01% belong to the Egyptian community.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS

About 58% of the Bulqiza population has completed elementary (8/9-year) education and 40% has completed high school education. About 7% of them possess a university diploma. The 2011 Census showed that 1.6% of the population or about 130 inhabitants in absolute terms are illiterate. Bulqiza has two 9-year schools with a pedagogical staff of 67 teachers and one high school with 26 teachers.

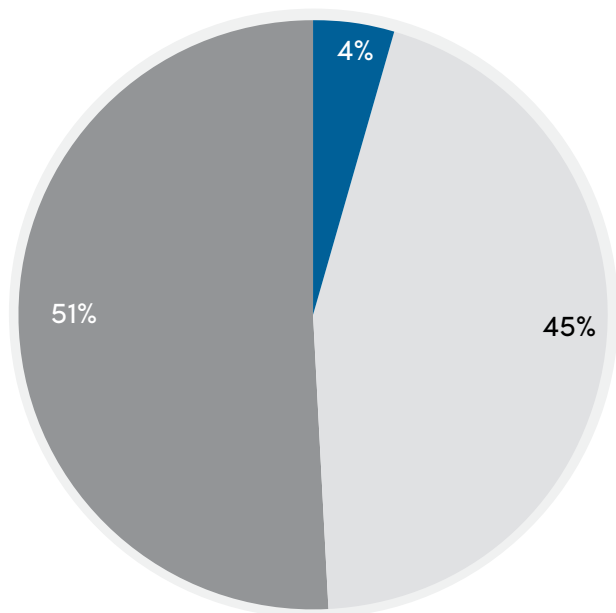
Bulqiza has a total of 1,922 households. The average household size is 4.25 members. Two out of ten households are female-headed. The main source of income for the households is paid work or self-employment (in 55.17% of the cases) and pensions (in 30.27% of the cases). In addition, economic

assistance takes up an important part of the sources of household income (in 24.23% of the cases). In terms of religious affiliation, the majority or 71.20% of the population of Bulqiza belong to the Muslim religion, 0.3% is Christian Orthodox, 0.2% is Catholic and 13.70% are Bektashi.

The working age population in Bulqiza is 5,524 inhabitants. Irrespective of this, a large share of the working-age population is jobless. The results of 2011 Census show that the unemployment rate is 46%, whereas youth unemployment has reached disturbing figures: 80.10% of the youth in Bulqiza stated that they were unemployed. Employment leans on men, since only 19.62% of women are employed, as compared with 36.9% of men. In terms of educational level, about 45.72% of the employed people have high school education and 18% with university education. A little more than half of the employed people are working in the service sector (about 51%). The other part of the employed people (about 45%) is engaged in the industry sector. Only 4% of the employed people in Bulqiza are engaged in agricultural activities. In total, 76.30% are employed in paid work, whereas 23.70% are self-employed.

Figure 21. Employment by branch of economy (%)

■ Agriculture □ Industry ■ Services



[Source: Population and Housing Census, 2011]

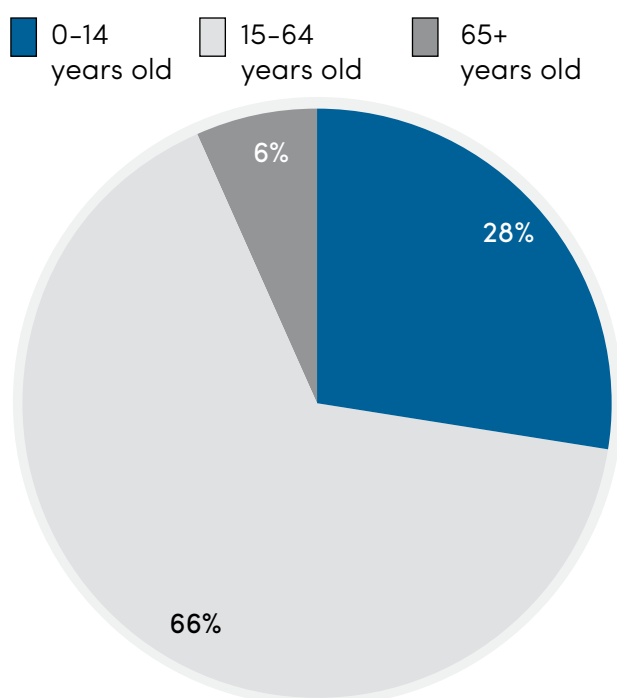
9.2.8. MUNICIPALITY OF KUKES

Table 8. Summary data for the Municipality of Kukës

Region	Kukës
District	Kukës
Density (population/km ²)	1221.56
Population	16,719
<i>Males</i>	8,385
<i>Females</i>	8,334
Total dependency ratio (%)	52
Illiteracy rate (%)	1.6
Unemployment (%)	42.50
Youth unemployment (%)	74.50

Source: Population and Housing Census (2011)

Figure 22. Age structure (%)



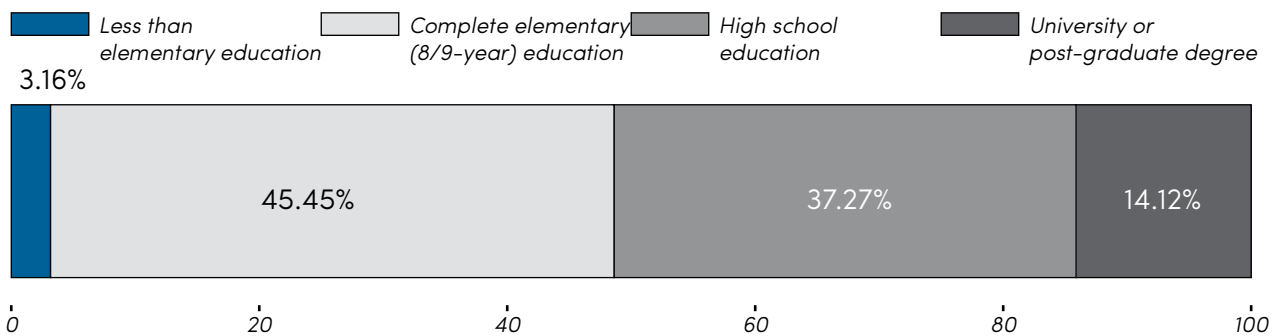
[Source: Population and Housing Census, 2011]

DEMOGRAPHY

The Municipality of Kukës has a total population of 16,719 inhabitants. Average density is 1221.56 inhabitants per km². From the demographic viewpoint, the negative increasing trend at regional level is more accentuated in the remote regions in the north (where population shrinkage for Kukës was 23% in 2011), even though the town of Kukës is not affected by this general trend. Thus, from 1989 to 2011, the population increased by only 0.99%, while from 2001 to 2011 it dropped by 2.55%. This tendency is mainly attributed to a combination of internal migration along with natural increase and external migration.

Gender-wise, the numbers are shared almost equally (50.1% males and 49.8% females). In terms of age structure, 66% of the population is part of the working-age group (15 -64 years old), 28% of the population are children and only 6% are the elderly people.

Figure 23. Level of Education (%)



[Source: Population and Housing Census, 2011]

Consequently, total dependency ratio is 52%, where the young-age dependency rate occupies a large share (41.85%). One can notice that due to the young age of the population, Kukes has more unmarried than married people. Thus, 49% of inhabitants are unmarried, 46% are married and 4% are divorced. From the ethnic-cultural viewpoint, the overwhelming majority are Albanian (85.79%), 0.02% is Aromanian and 0.02% belong to the Egyptian community.

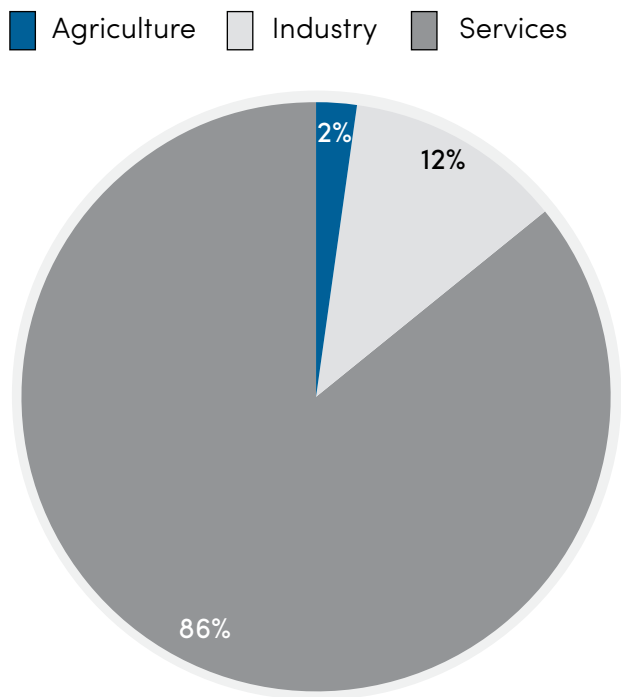
SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS

On average, Kukes inhabitants have a higher educational attainment level than the national average. The average number of schooling years is 11.35. A little more than half of the population (about 51%) has completed at least high school education, of which 14% possess a university diploma. Nearly 45% of the general population has completed the basic (read: primary and elementary) education. Some 268 inhabitants (or 1.6% of the population) are illiterate. This rate is below the national one of 2.80%. The Municipality of Kukes has six 9-year schools with a staff of 165 teachers and two high schools (of which one is a unified high school) with a total of 70 teachers.

A total of 4,071 households live in Kukes. Due to the high birth rate, the average size household size is 4.6 individuals. Some 9% of households are female-headed. The main source of income for the households in the town is paid work or self-employment (in 55.12% of the cases). Yet, a considerable large share of households is included in the welfare scheme (in 34.86% of the cases). In terms of religious affiliation, the majority or 86.40% of the population belong to the Muslim religion. Only 0.40% is Catholic (as per the Census of 2011).

The working age population in the town of Kukes is 11,021 inhabitants. Irrespective of this, due to closedown of mines and economic enterprises, a considerable part of the labor force is jobless. Unemployment is more accentuated in this area when compared with other regions of Albania. According to Census (2011) the unemployment rate is 42.50%, and, similar to other local government units, youth unemployment is at alarming rate. In Kukes, youth unemployment is 74.50%. The major employing sector is the service sector. An overwhelming majority (about 86%) is working in this sector. In addition, 12% of the employed people are engaged in the industry sector and only 2% are employed

Figure 24. Employment by branch of economy (%)



in agriculture. In total, 76.30% have paid work, whereas 23.70% are self-employed. The data on employment by gender indicate that 21.80% of women are employed, when compared with 33.5% of men. Likewise, employment division by education shows that 46.80% of the employed people have high school education and 36.90% have university education.

[Source: Population and Housing Census, 2011]

9.2.9. A COMPARATIVE OVERVIEW

DEMOGRAPHIC INDICATORS

- During 2001–2011, the trend of population decline is present in all of the analyzed LGUs, with the exception of the Commune of Buçimas, where population has increased by almost 18% in 2011 when compared with 2001.
- Gender distribution is generally balanced.
- The data on age structure tend to highlight the young age of the population, particularly in the municipalities of Kukes, Bulqiza and in the Commune of Qender. This fact is consequently reflected in the relatively larger specific weights of young-age dependency ratios.

Table 9. LGUs by population in descending order

LGU	Residential population	Working-age population
Municipality of Pogradec	20,848	14,440
Municipality of Kukes	16,719	11,021
Commune of Buçimas	15,687	10,551
Commune of Qender	8,551	5,684
Municipality of Bulqiza	8,177	5,524
Municipality of Librazhd	6,937	4,784
Municipality of Cerrik	6,695	4,671
Municipality of Perrenjas	5,847	3,994

Source: Population and Housing Census (2011)

Figure 25. Change of population (%) in 2001–2011

[Source: Population and Housing Census, 2011]

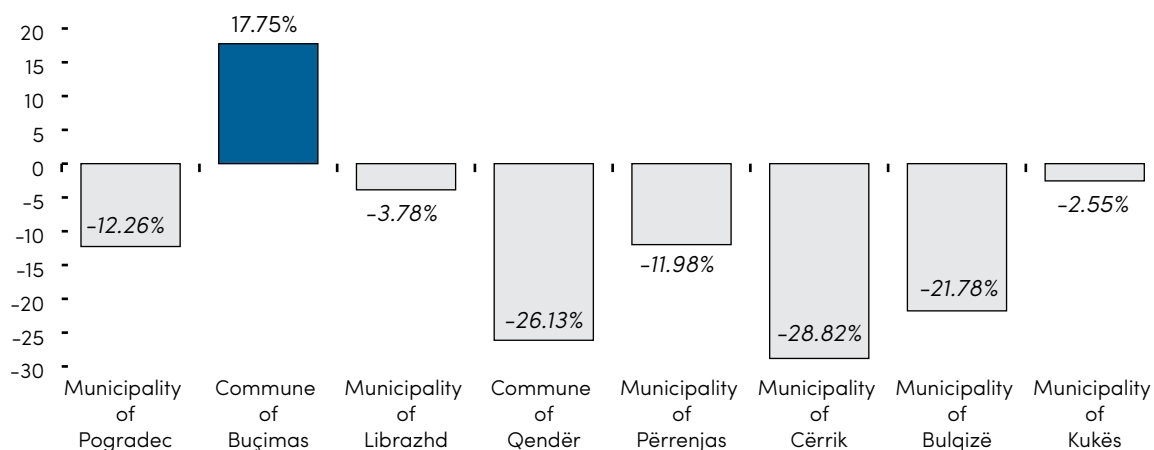
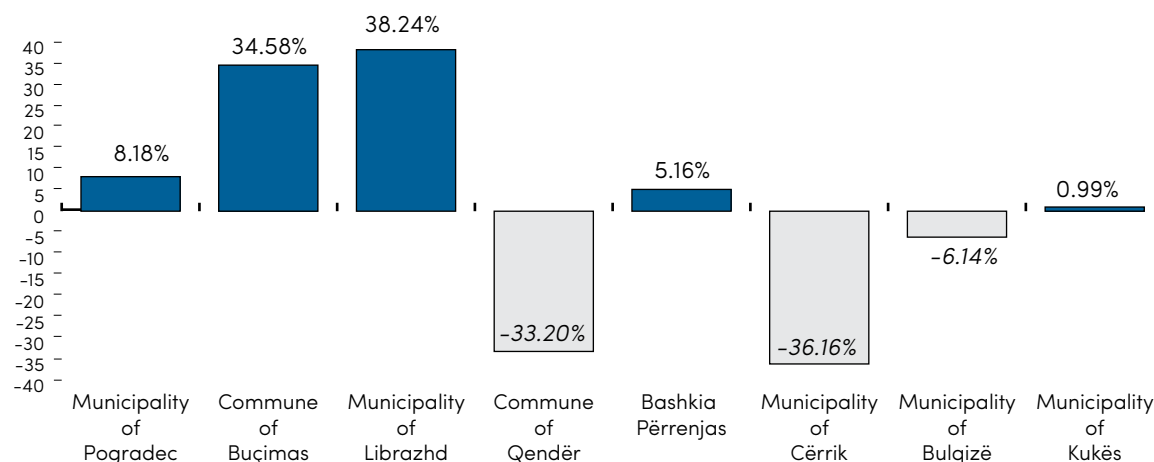


Figure 26. Change of population (%) 1989–2011

[Source: Population and Housing Census, 2011]

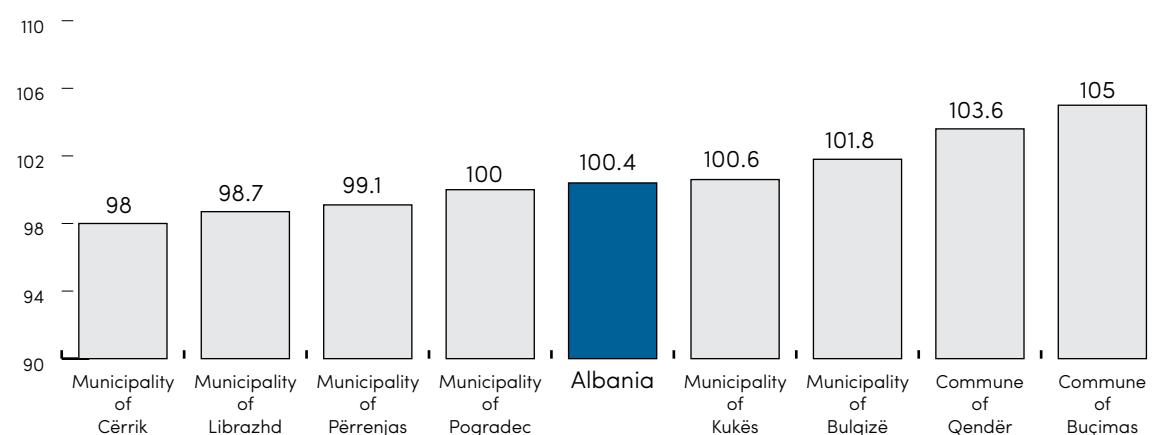


The analysis of the demographic trends shows that, along national indicators, population decline has affected all analyzed LGUs with the exception of the Commune of Buçimas in the Korça region. In this commune, population has increased by 17.75% in 2011 when compared with 2001, and the increasing trend has kept pace over the period of 1989–2011. In addition, the municipalities of Librazhd and Kukës show a trend of population shrinkage at relatively lower rates than their respective regions, suggesting that the

natural increase and internal migration from rural to urban areas have made up for the external migration that has characterized the Albanian society. On the other hand, depopulation is more sizeable in the Municipality of Cërrik and the Commune of Qendër with a negative increase of 28.82% and 26.13%, respectively. This drop is three times as high when compared with the national rate (8.8%) and higher than the drop in the Elbasan region (18%), revealing the migratory movements of the population in these areas.

Figure 27. Gender Ratio

[Source: Population and Housing Census, 2011]



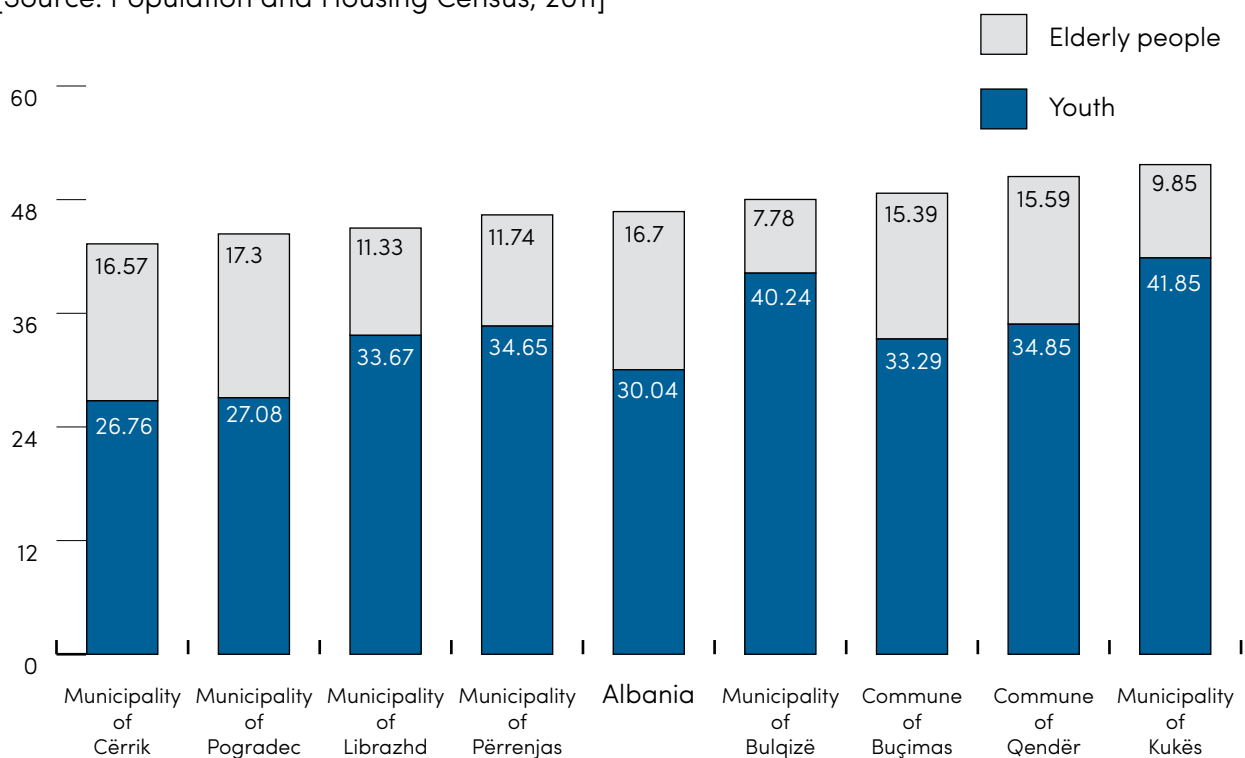
In terms of age structure of the population, the gender ratio (read: number of men per 100 women) is slightly different. In the municipalities of Librazhd and Cerrik, the gender ratio shows a small shortage of men (respectively, 98.7 men per 100 women and 98 men per 100 women). In perspective, this indicator of gender distribution is lower than the rate of 101.2 for the Elbasan region. This is most probably attributed to the phenomenon of the external migration as a selective process linked with gender. On the other hand, the communes of Buçimas and Qender have the highest gender

ratios among the analyzed local government units.

Albania has a low total dependency ratio of about 47%. Only the Commune of Qender and Municipality of Kukës present higher dependency ratios (of 50.44% and 51.70%, respectively), which are attributed mostly to the young-age dependency ratios. Municipality of Cerrik has the lowest dependency ratio. When examining the specific ratios, Bulqiza and Kukës stand out for high young-age dependency ratios and low old-age dependency ratios.

Figure. 28. Dependency Ratio

[Source: Population and Housing Census, 2011]

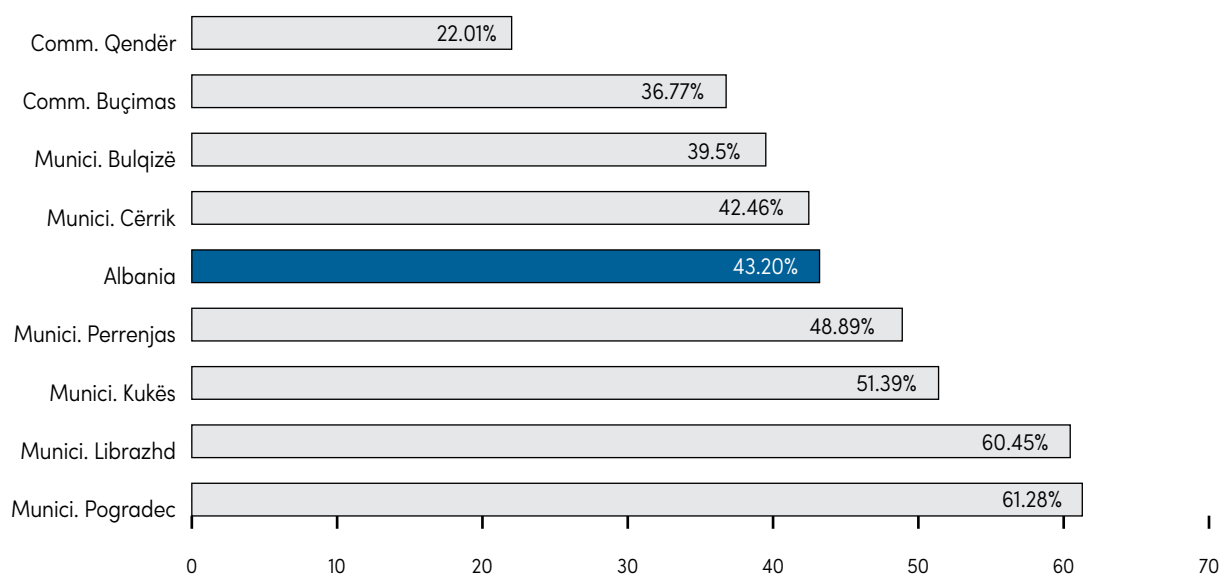


SOCIO-ECONOMIC INDICATORS

- In general, communes have a lower educational attainment level than municipalities. Qender and Buçimas are the LGUs with lowest educational level of their residents. An exception to the above taxonomy is the Municipality of Cërrik, which has the highest illiteracy rate.
- The major local economic sector employing the largest number of people is the sector of services. An exception to this is the Commune of Qender where the agrarian economy structure is predominant.
- With the exception of the Commune of Qender owing to its agricultural orientation, all LGUs' unemployment rate is higher than the national average rate. The Commune of Buçimas has the highest unemployment rate (of 54.70%). Unemployment is particularly problematic among young age groups.
- Data on monetary (main sources of income) and non-monetary indicators of living standards (conditions of dwelling units) show that the living standards are particularly worsened in Buçimas and Qender. Likewise, the Municipality of Kukës has a considerable number of households on economic assistance.

Figure 29. High school completion rate

[Source: Population and Housing Census, 2011; author's calculations]



With the regard to educational attainment level, data show that the majority of the population has completed at least the basic level (read: primary and elementary (8/9-year) education) education. The figures on high school education are different when comparing among LGUs. Thus, the communes of Qender and Buçimas and the Municipality of Bulqiza have the lowest educational attainment and the municipalities of Pogradec, Librazhd, Kukes and Perrenjas have the highest educational attainment even when comparing with the national average rate. In the Commune of Qender, only 22% of the general population has completed at least the high school education. This tendency might reveal that 'poor' education is a feature of rural areas, and is also an indication of the well-educated people's inclination to move

to urban centers with potentially better employment opportunities.

Similarly, when compared with the national rate of illiteracy (2.80%), the gap is more obvious in rural areas than in urban centers. The interval varies from 1.60% in Kukes and Bulqiza to 4.40% in Cerrik. In this context, Cerrik is the only exception where illiteracy rate is 4.40%. An analysis of absolute figures reveals that the greatest number of illiterate people is in the Commune of Buçimas (470 inhabitants²³⁷) and in the Commune of Qender (368 inhabitants). The Municipality of Cerrik has 294 inhabitants who declared to be illiterate, whereas the Municipality of Perrenjas has the lowest number of illiterate individuals (100 inhabitants).

Figure 30. Illiteracy rate (%) in 2011
[Source: Population and Housing Census, 2011]

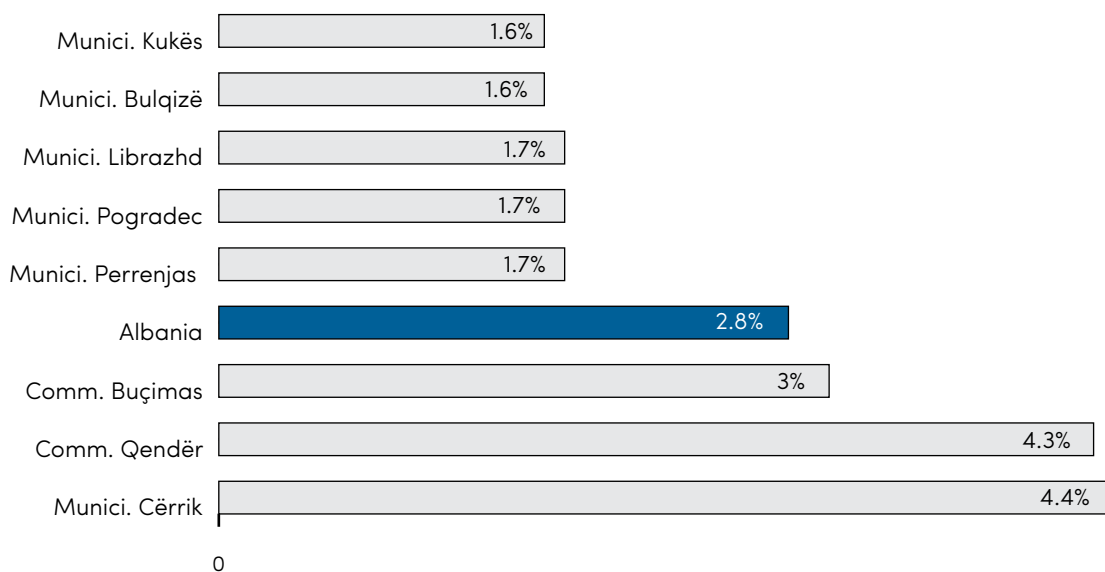
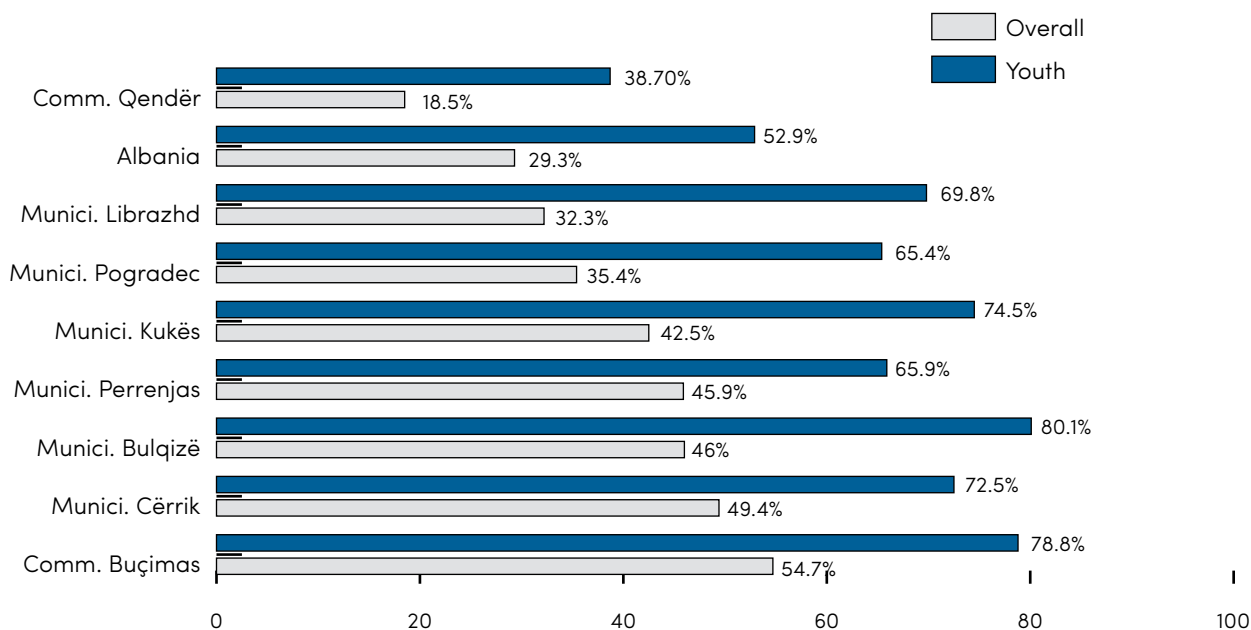


Figure 31. Rate of Unemployment rate (%)
 [Source: Population and Housing Census, 2011]

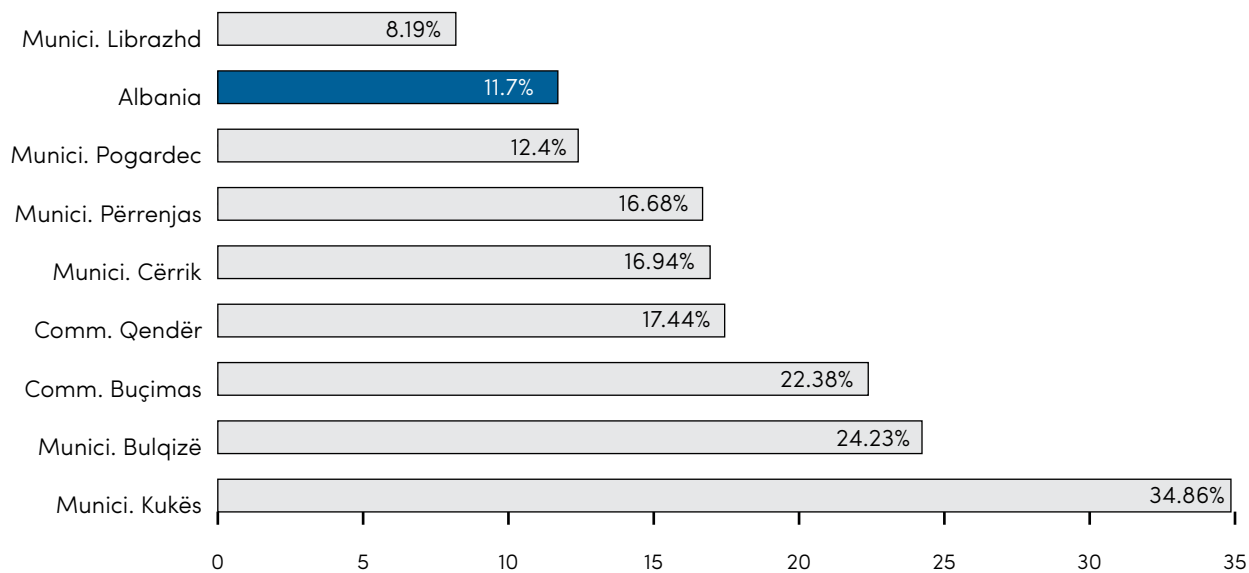


The analysis of the data on labor market and number of employed people of 15 years of age and older by economic activity shows that the service sector is the prevailing sector attracting the largest number of the labor force (from 53% in Buçimas to 86% in Kukës). In the Commune of Qender of the Elbasan region, agriculture is the major economic activity (75%). In Cerrik and Bulqiza, however, industry plays an important role in working-age population employment. Due to its basically agrarian structure, the Commune of Qender has the lowest unemployment rate among the analyzed LGUs. Most people are employed in agriculture. On the other hand, all other LGUs have a higher unemployment rates than the national average and regional rate. In Cerrik and Buçimas, one in two inhabitants is jobless. Only in Kukës, the unemployment rate is lower than the regional rate (51.3%).

An inherent feature of the labor market is the high unemployment rate among

the youth, varying from 35.20% to 80.10%. This problem is particularly concerning in Bulqiza, where about 80% of the youth were jobless in 2011. The data of Census 2011 show a gap in terms of gender unemployment. Overall, unemployment is higher among women, with the exception of Kukës and Qender. The data on living conditions show that, while the Commune of Qender has the relatively lowest unemployment rate, the average residential households do not enjoy a satisfactory living standard. Most probably, this is due to the fact that self-employment in agriculture, especially in rural areas inflates employment data but is not reflected in the incomes of households engaged in agricultural activities. Only one out of ten households in Qender has running water in their household. A considerable number of households in Kukës, Bulqiza and Buçimas are included in the social assistance scheme.

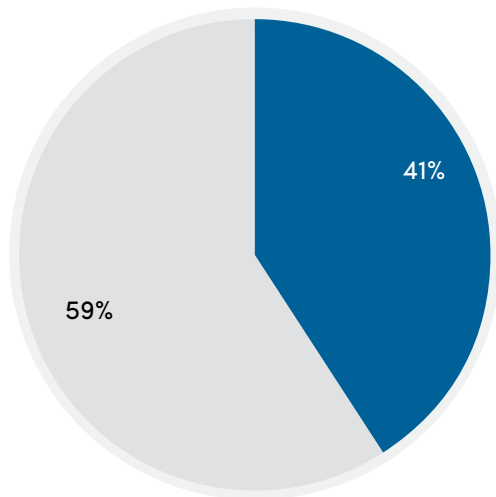
Figure 32. Source of income of households: social assistance and benefits (%)
[Source: Population and Housing Census, 2011]



9.3. DETAILED SURVEY FINDINGS

CUMULATIVE

Figure 1. Gender
N=795



Male Female

Figure 2. Age structure (in %)
N=796

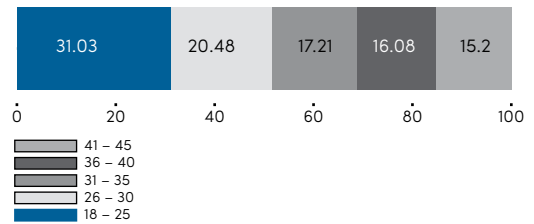


Figure 3. Education (in %)
N=799

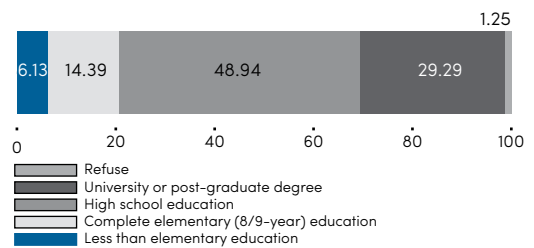
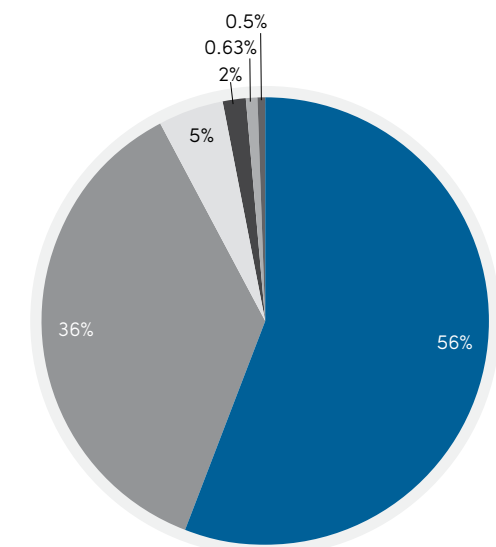


Figure 4. Civil status (in %)
N=800



Married Cohabiting Unmarried
Divorced Widowed Refuse

Figure 5. Employment status (in %)
N=796

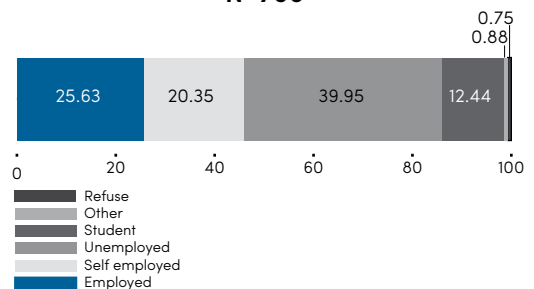


Figure 6. Religious affiliation (in %)
N=799

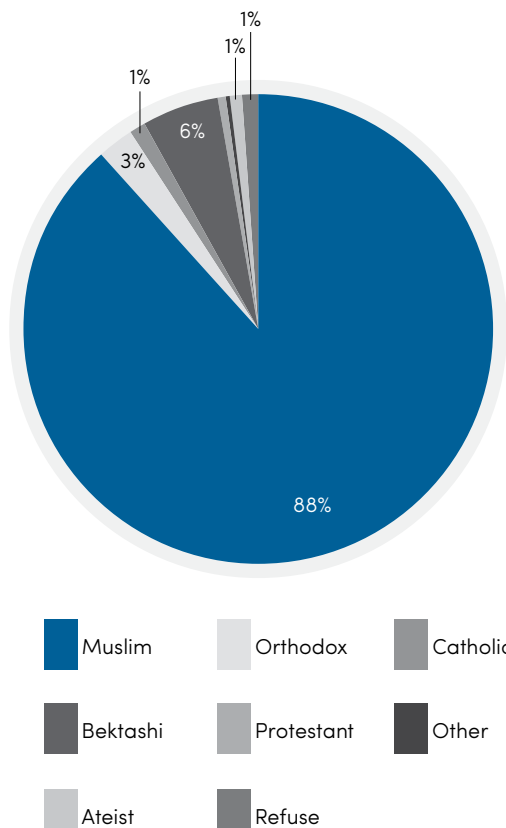


Figure 7. Your religion is similar to your parents (in %)
N=791

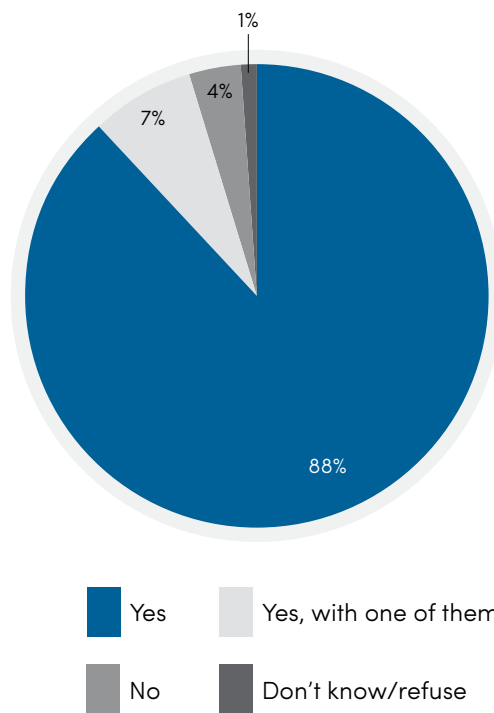


Figure 8. Are you actively practicing your religion? (in %)
N=790

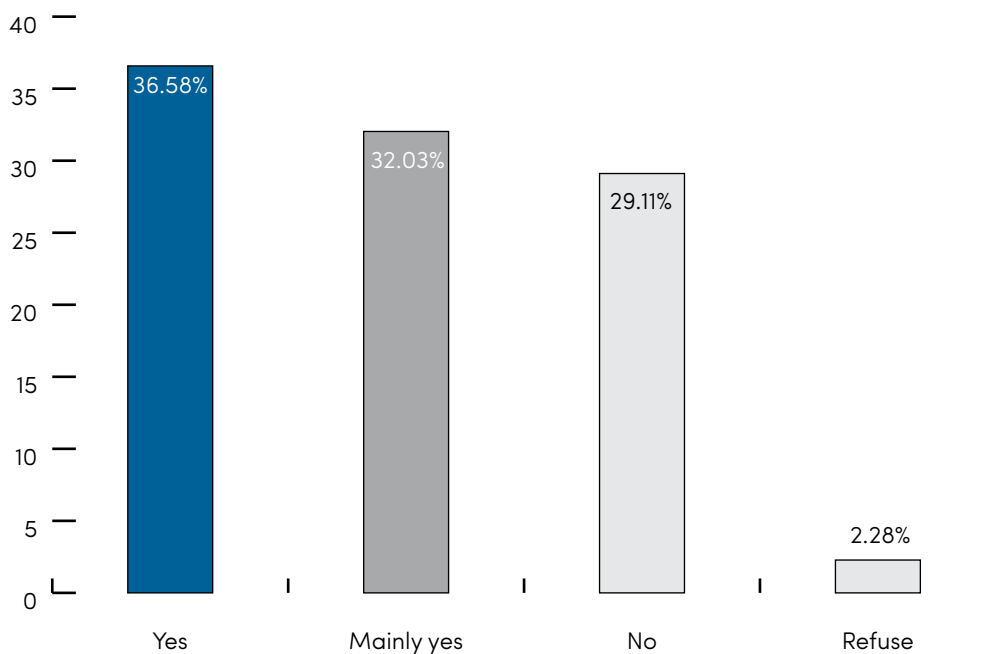


Figure 9. Do you agree with the following statements?

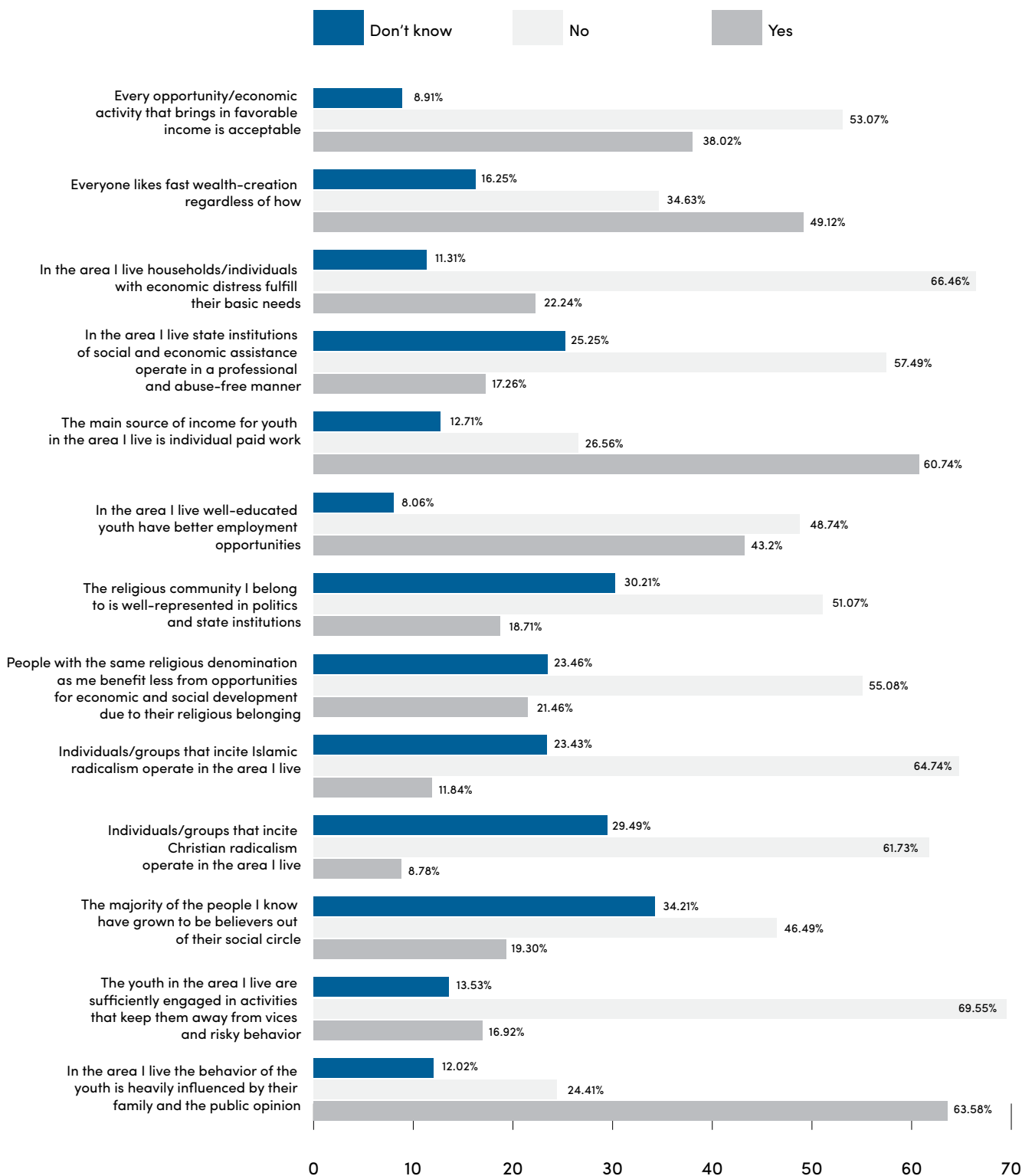


Figure 10. Do you agree with the following statements? (Continued)

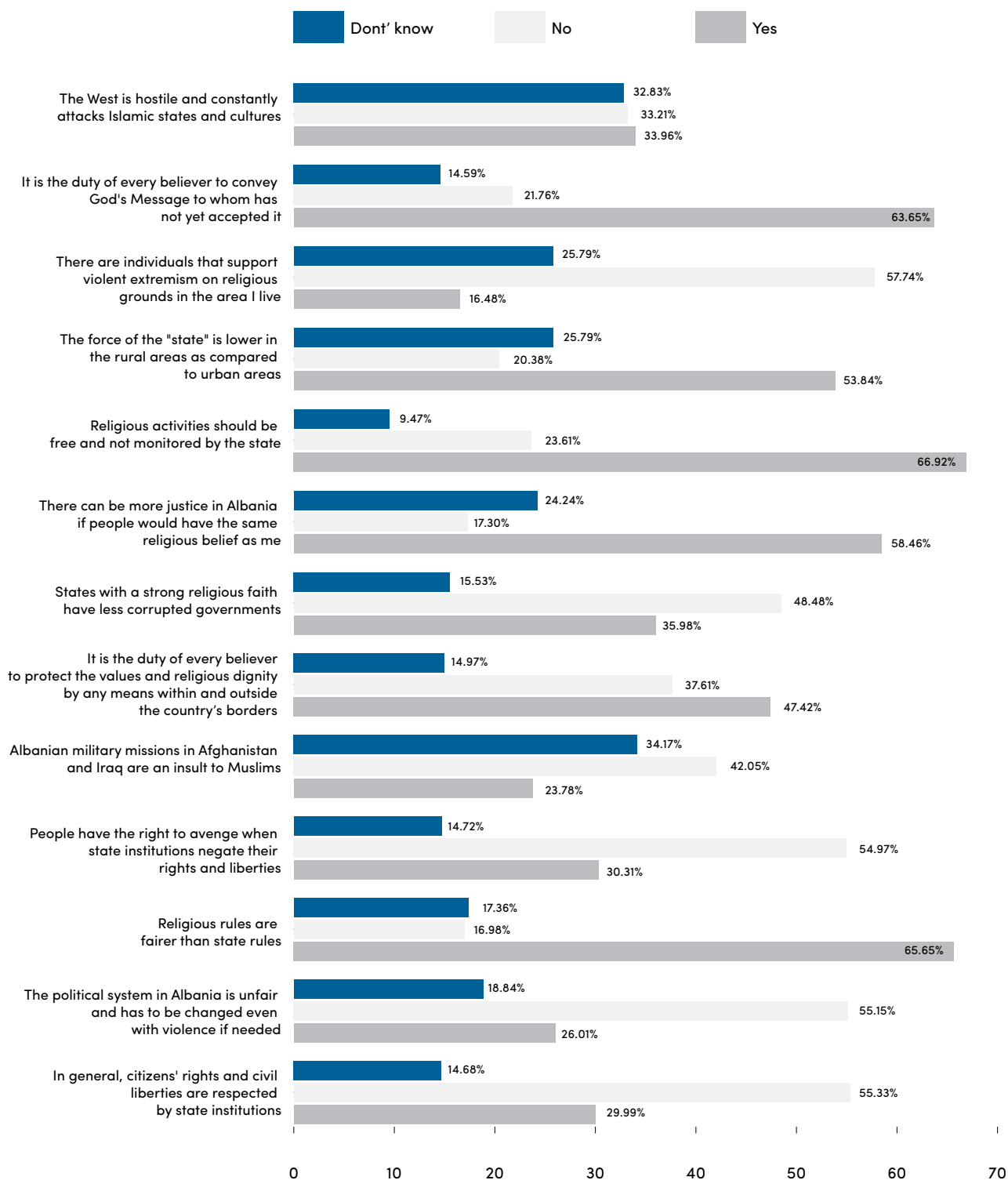


Figure 11. Do you agree with the following statements? (Continued)

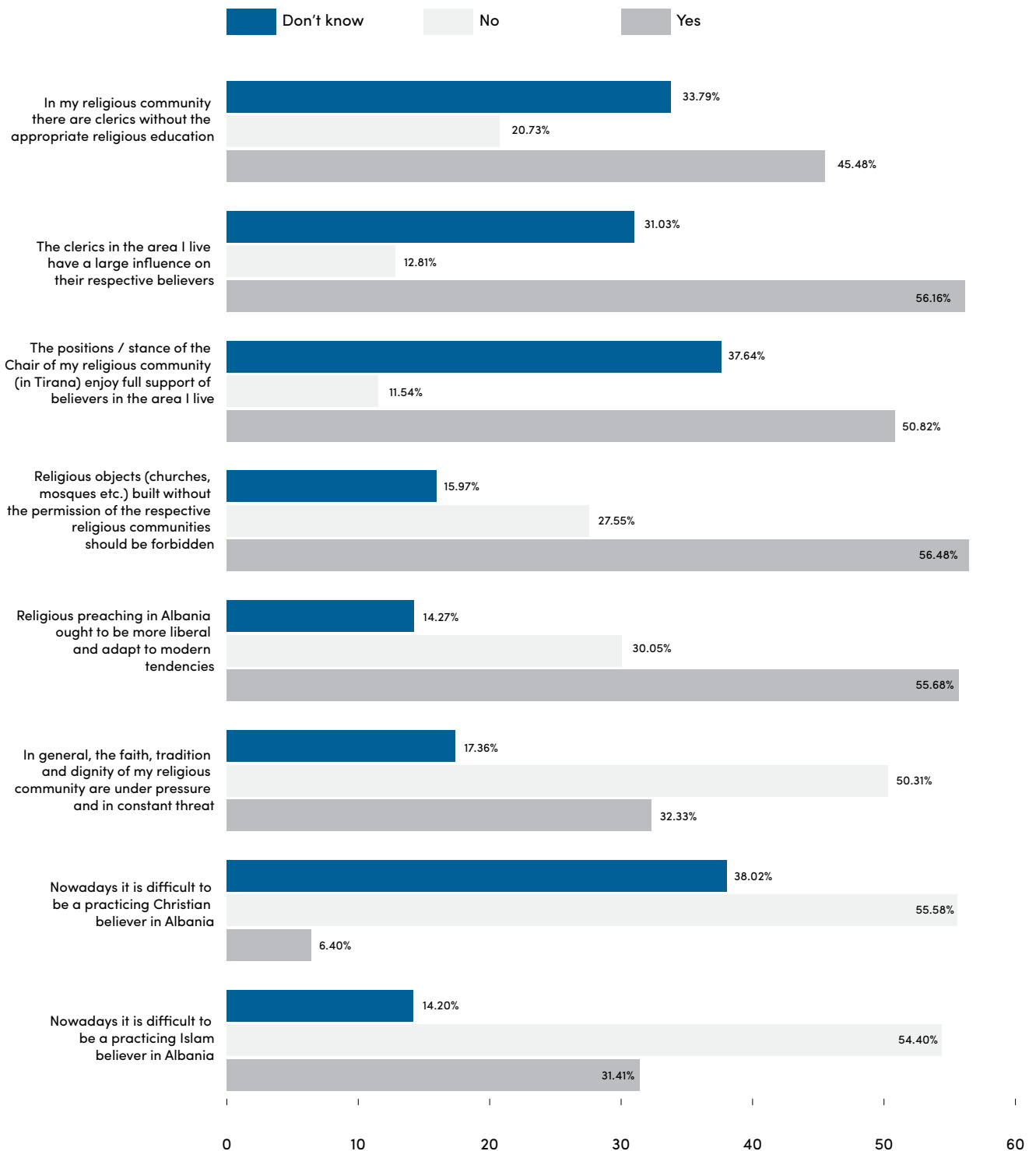


Figure 12. To which religious denomination does the majority of your social circle belong, if any? (in %)
N=792

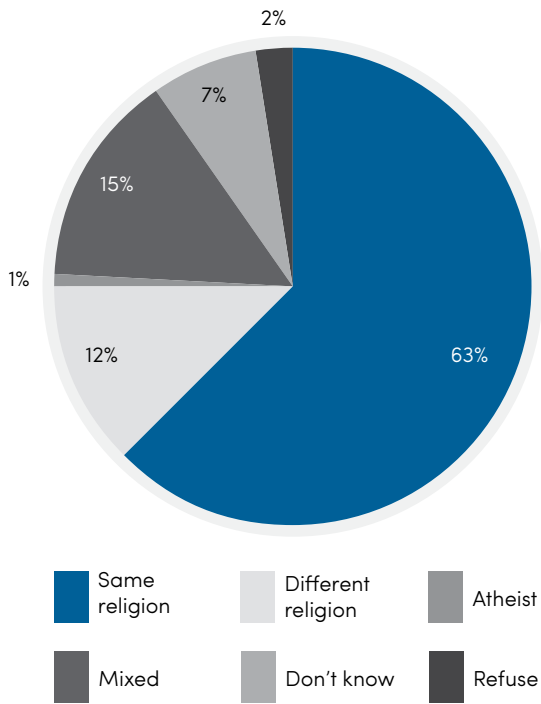


Figure 13. Please evaluate using a scale of 1 to 5 where "1 = religious hatred" and "5=religious harmony" (in %)
N=790

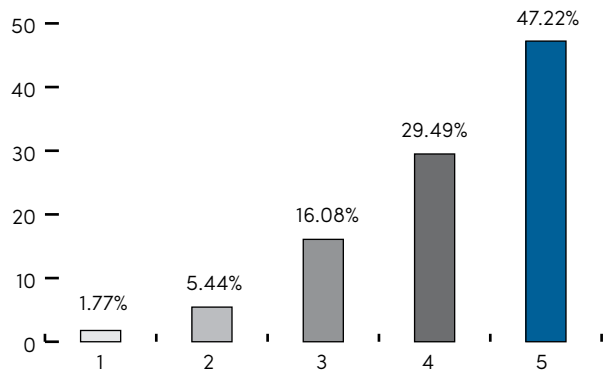


Figure 14. Would you personally support the marriage of a family member (your siblings or children) with an individual belonging to a different religious denomination? (in %)
N=796

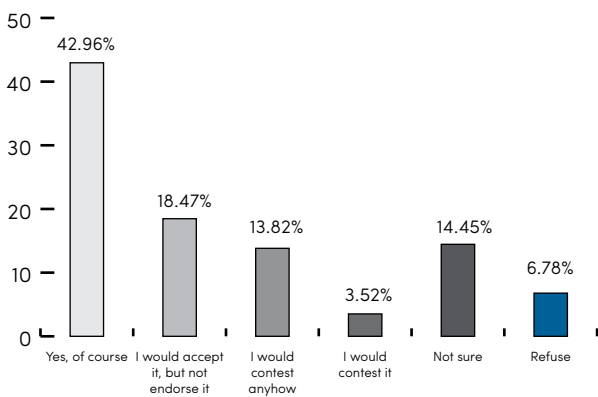
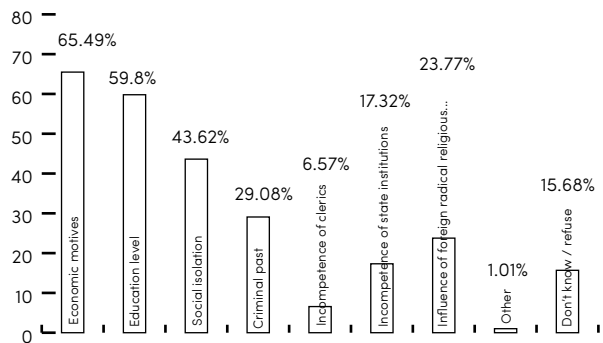


Figure 15. Three main causes that generate or drive religious radicalism in Albania (in %)
N=791



COMMUNE OF BUÇIMAS

Figure 16. Gender
N=100

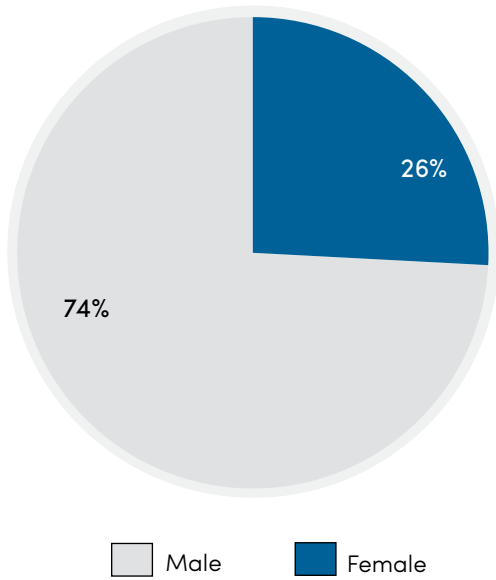


Figure 17. Age structure (in %)
N=100

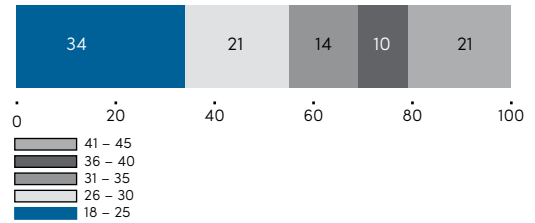


Figure 19. Civil status
N=100

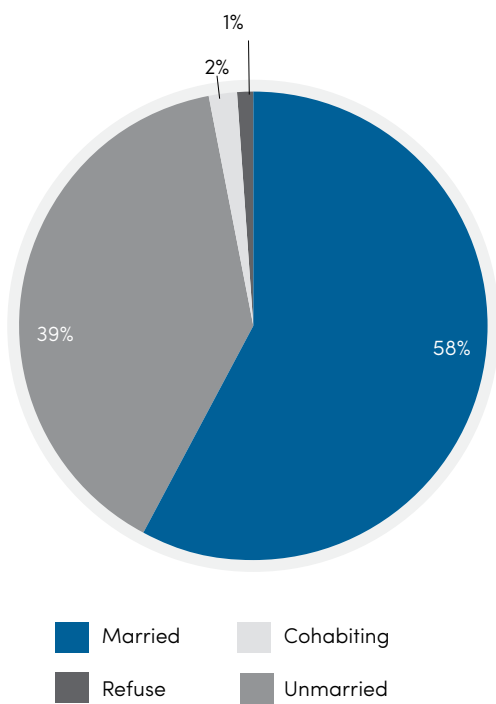


Figure 18. Education (in %)
N=100

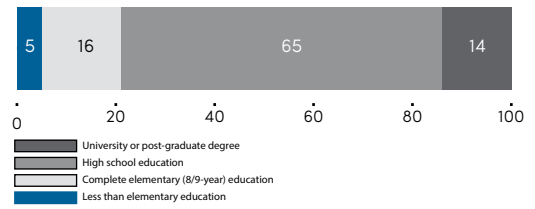


Figure 20. Employment status (in %)
N=100

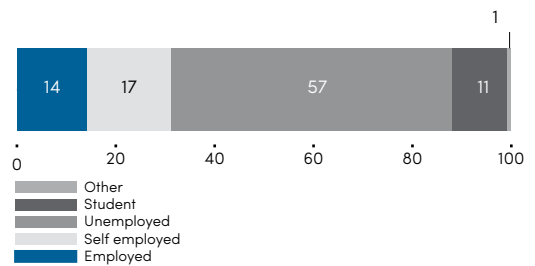


Figure 21. Religious affiliation (in %)
N=100

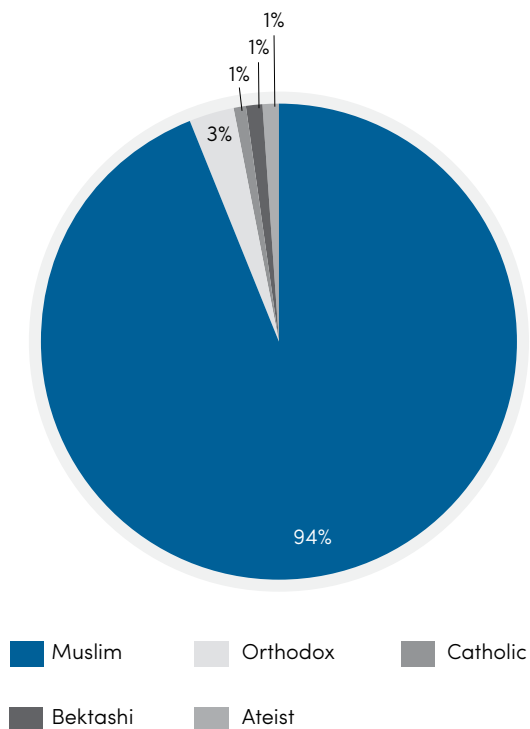


Figure 22. Your religion is similar to your parents (in %)
N=99

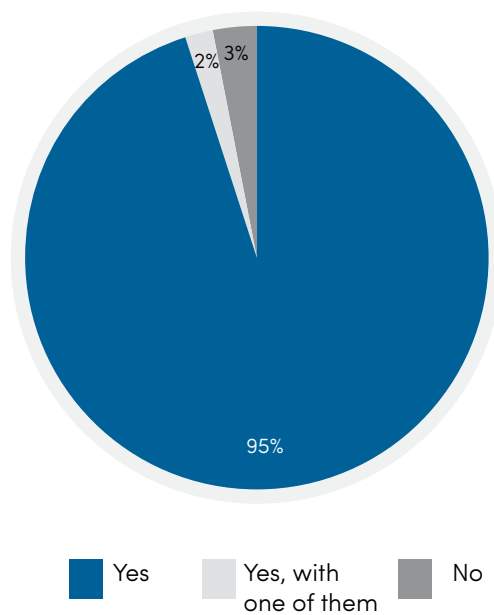


Figure 23. Are you actively practicing your religion? (in %)
N=99

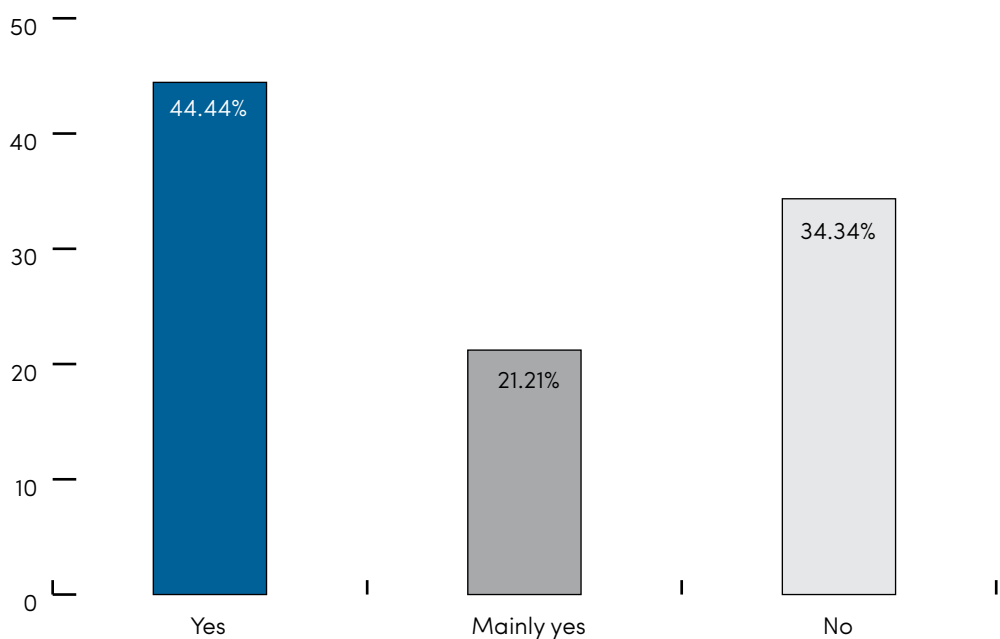


Figure 24. Do you agree with the following statements?

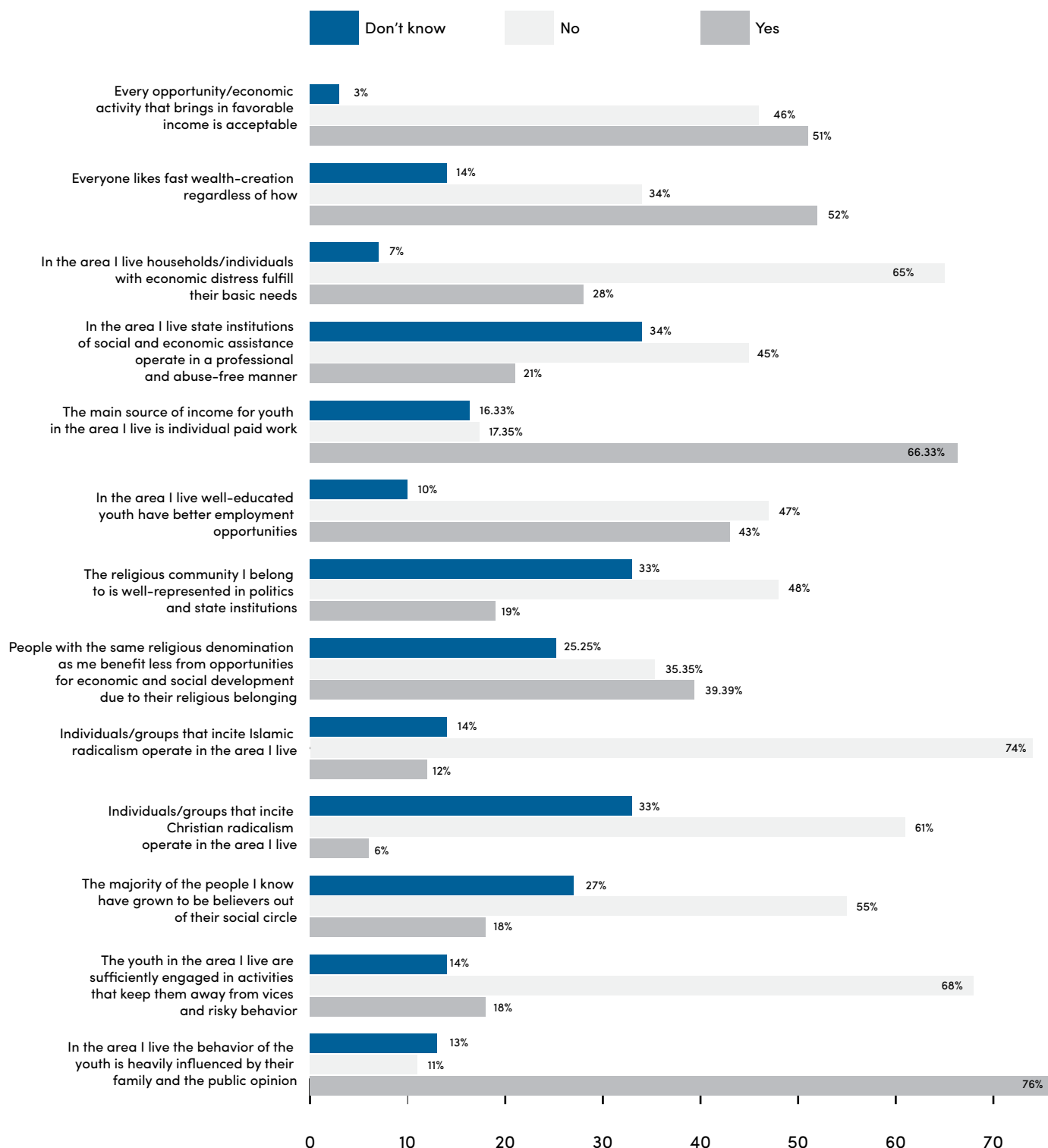


Figure 25. Do you agree with the following statements? (Continued)

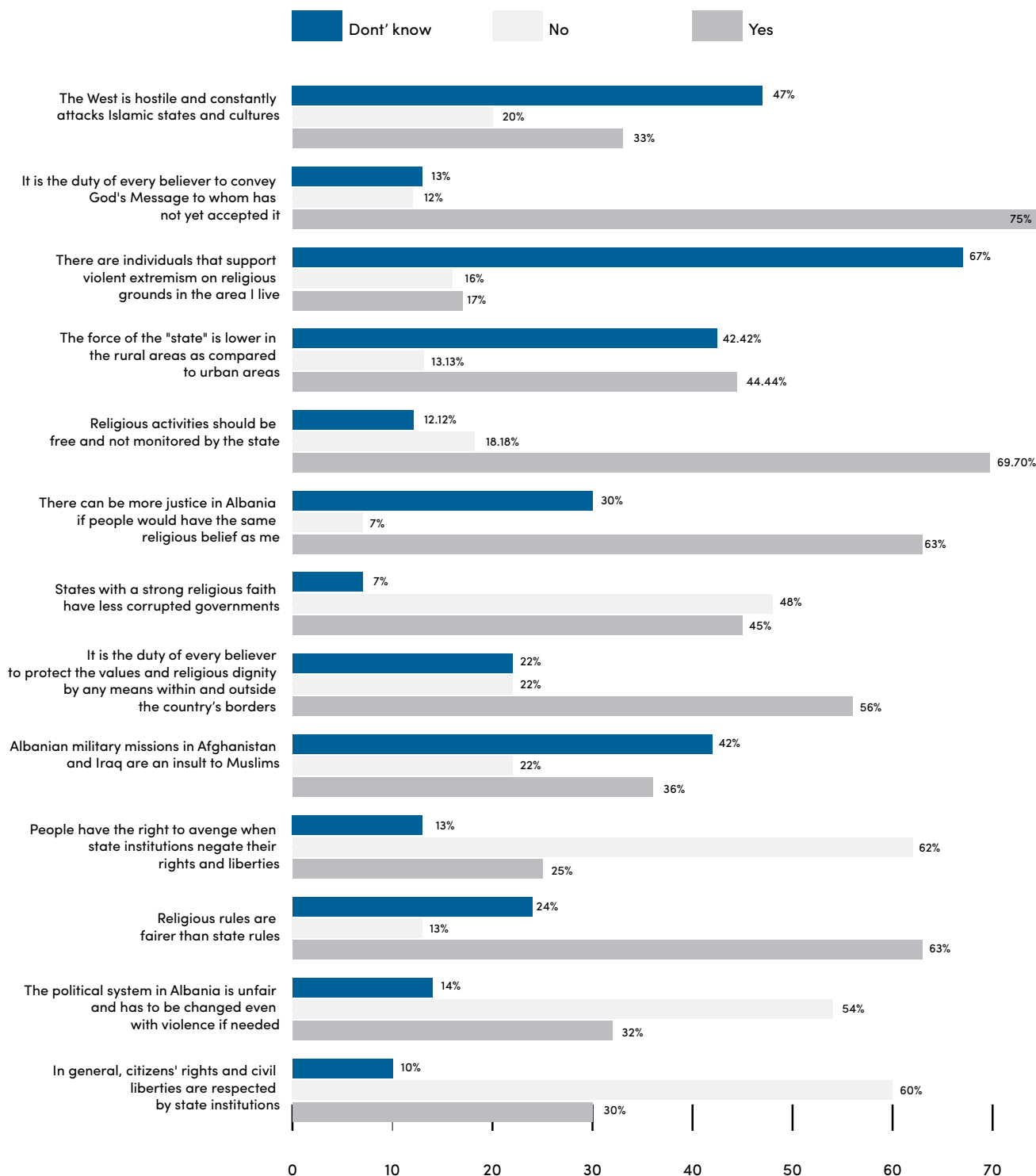


Figure 26. Do you agree with the following statements? (Continued)

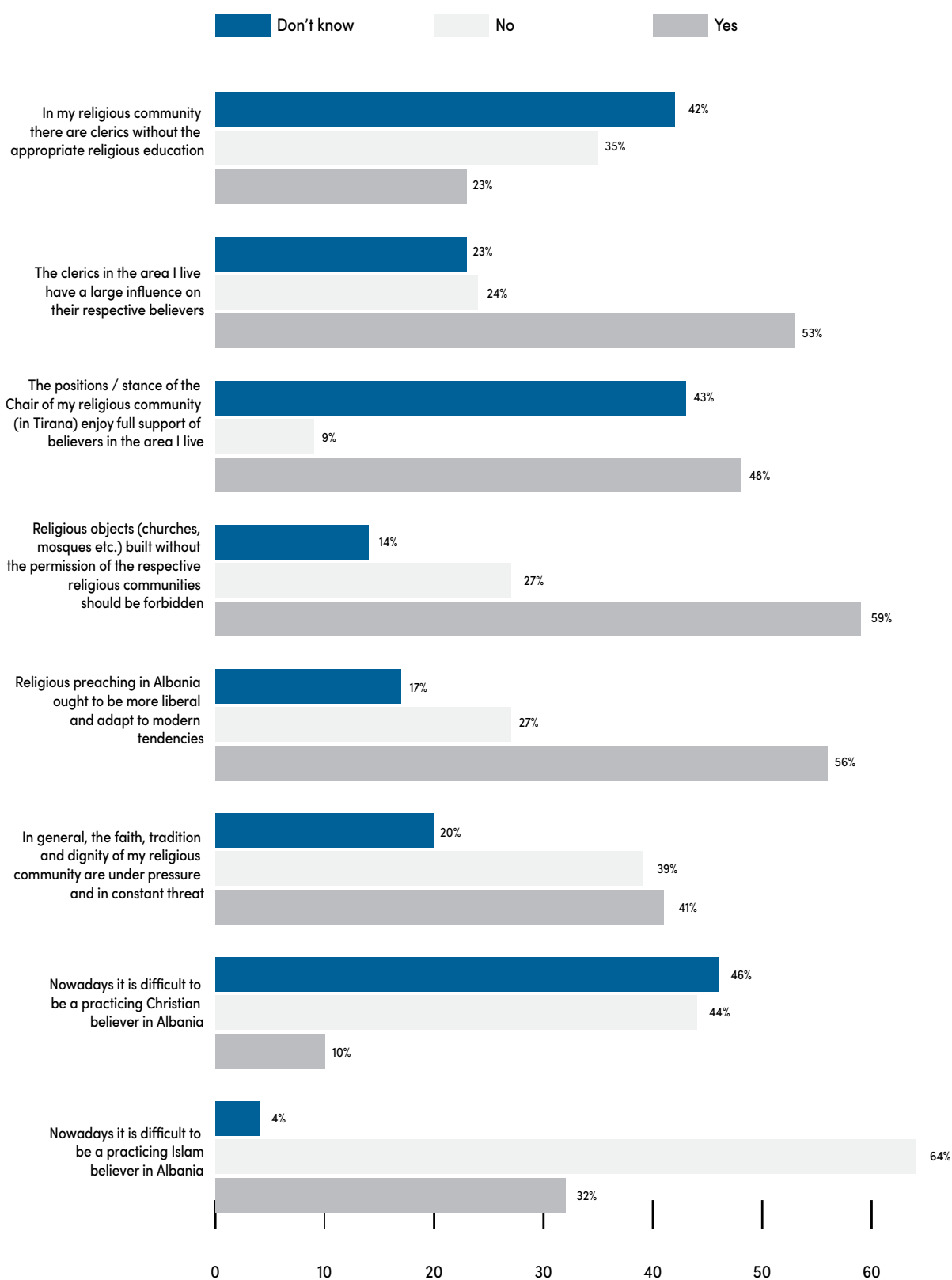


Figure 27. To which religious denomination does the majority of your social circle belong, if any? (in %)
N=100

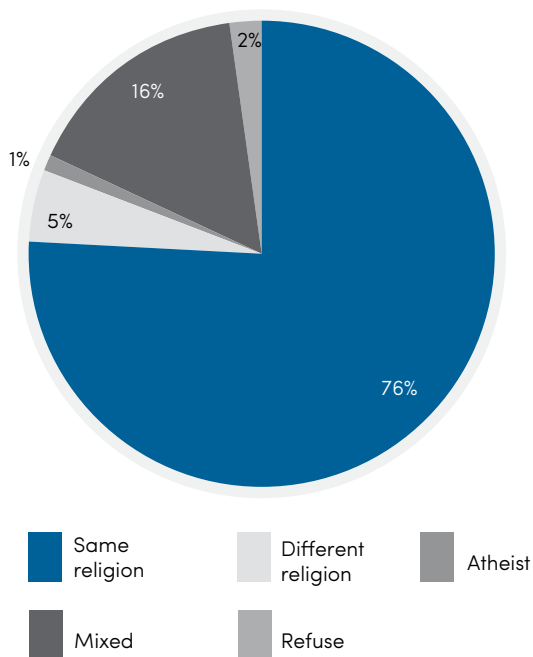


Figure 28. Please evaluate using a scale of 1 to 5 where "1 = religious hatred" and "5=religious harmony" (in %)
N=100

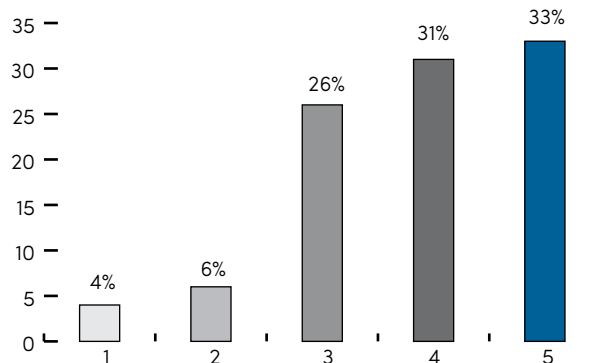


Figure 29. Would you personally support the marriage of a family member (your siblings or children) with an individual belonging to a different religious denomination? (in %)
N=100

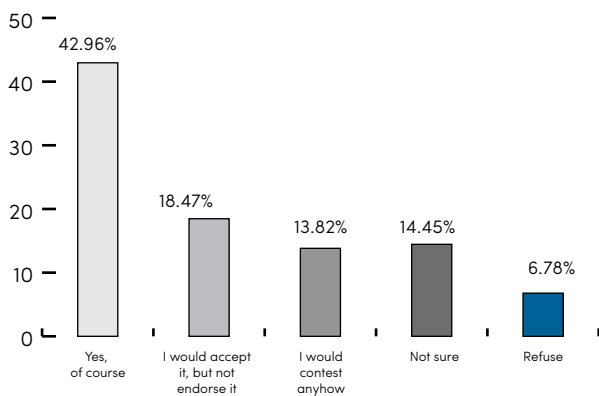


Figure 30. Three main causes that generate or drive religious radicalism in Albania (in %)
N=99

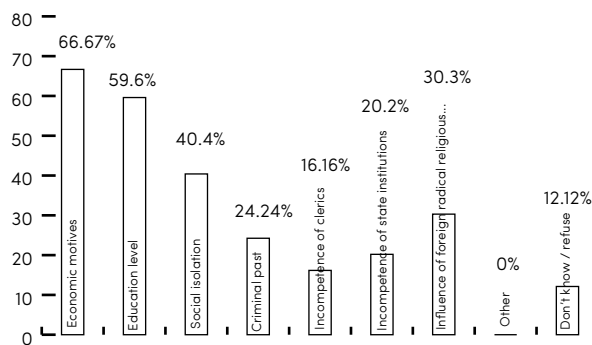


Figure 31. Gender
N=100

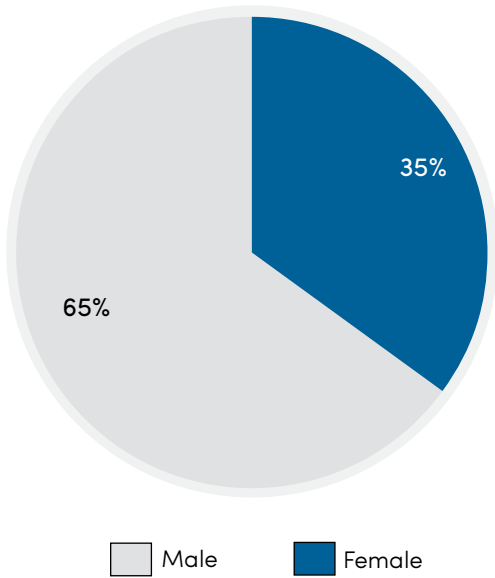


Figure 32. Age structure (in %)
N=99

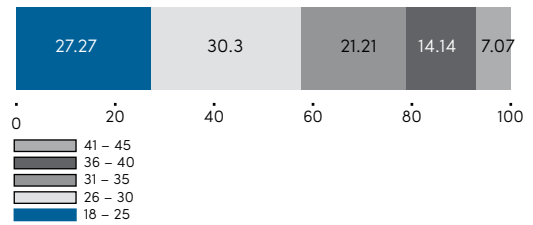


Figure 33. Education (in %)
N=100

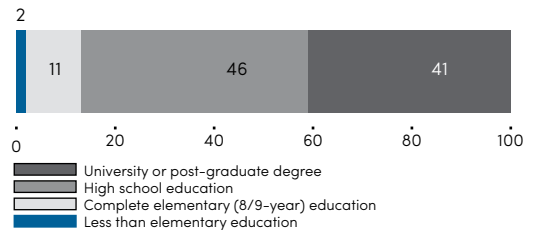


Figure 34. Civil status
N=100

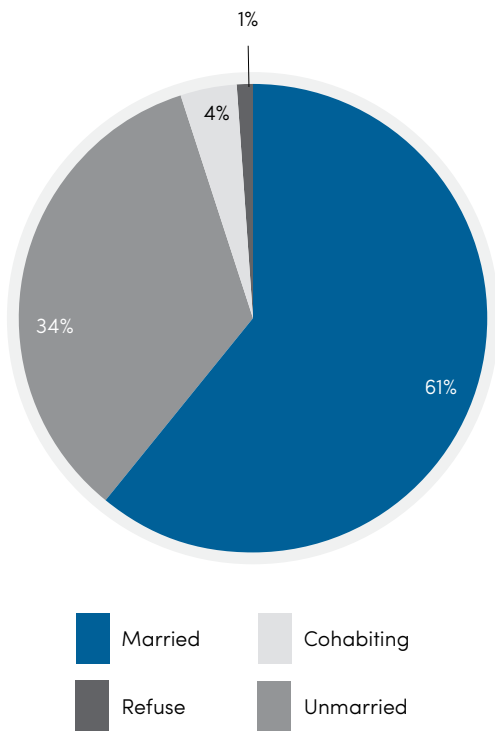


Figure 35. Employment status (in %)
N=100

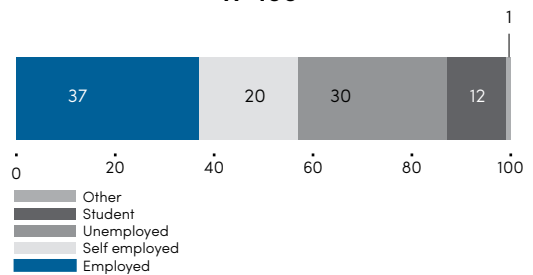


Figure 36. Religious affiliation (in %)
N=100

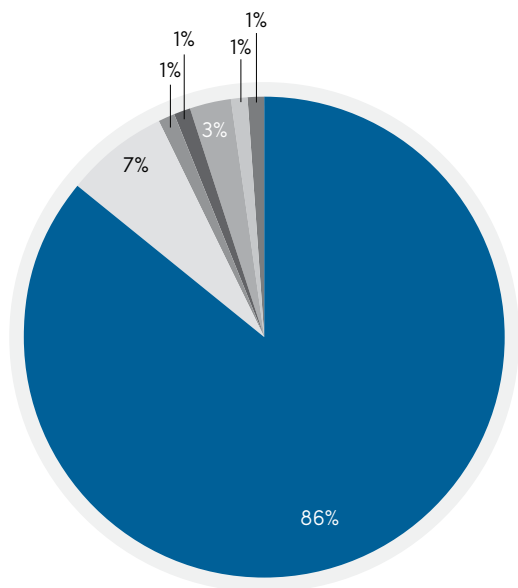


Figure 37. Your religion is similar to your parents (in %)
N=99

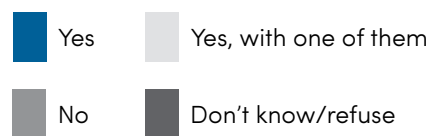
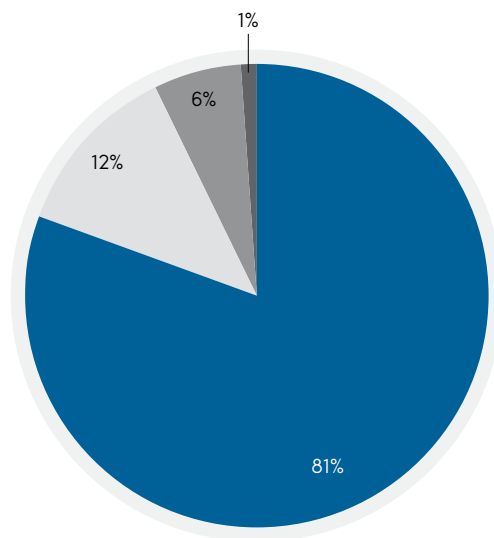


Figure 38. Are you actively practicing your religion? (in %)
N=100

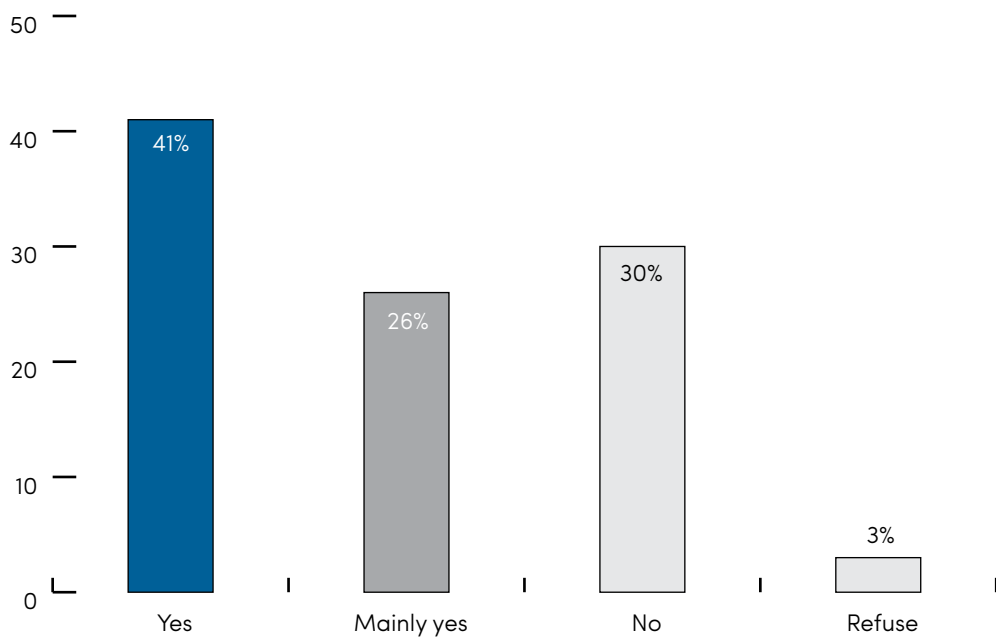


Figure 39. Do you agree with the following statements?

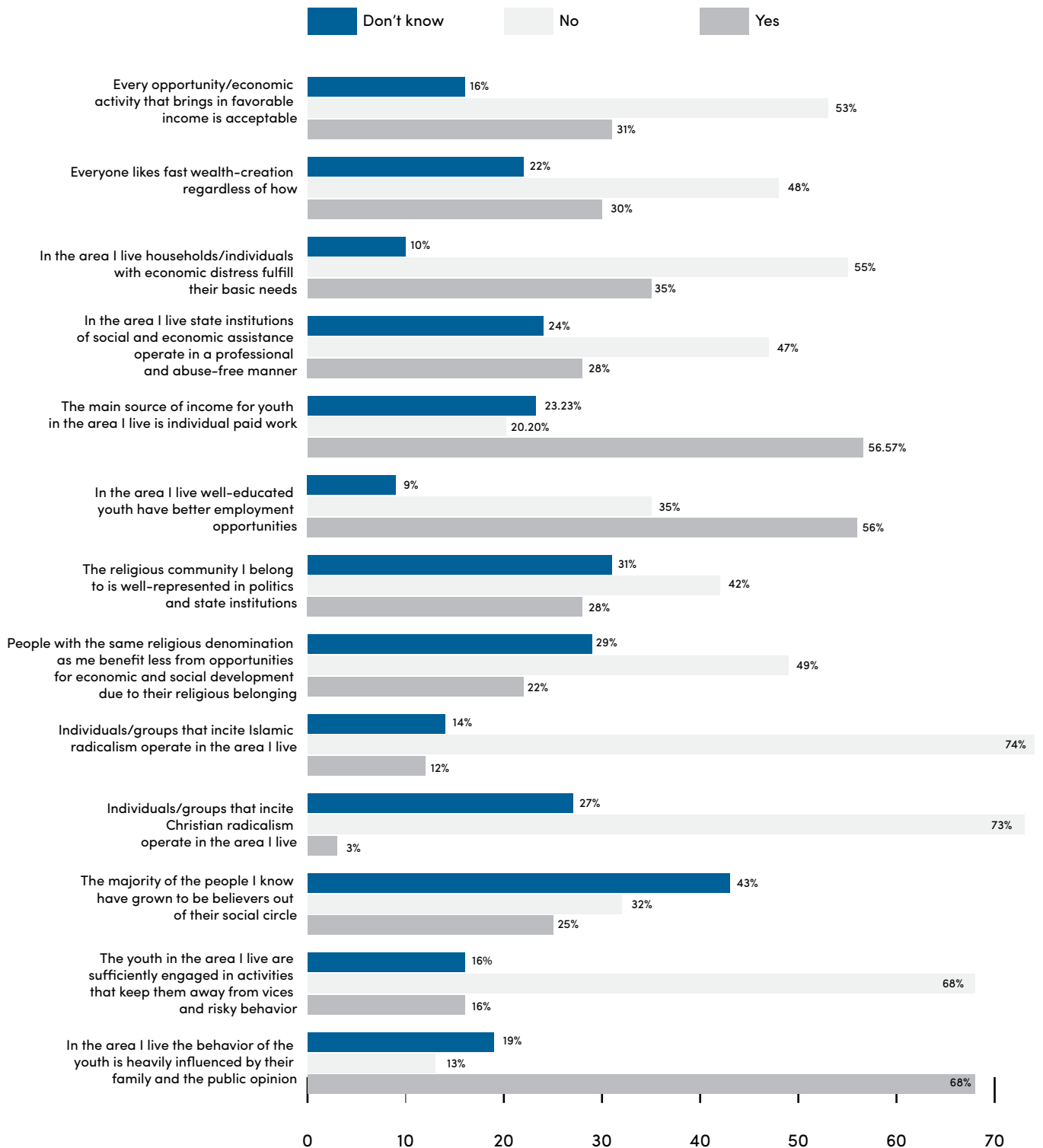


Figure 40. Do you agree with the following statements? (Continued)

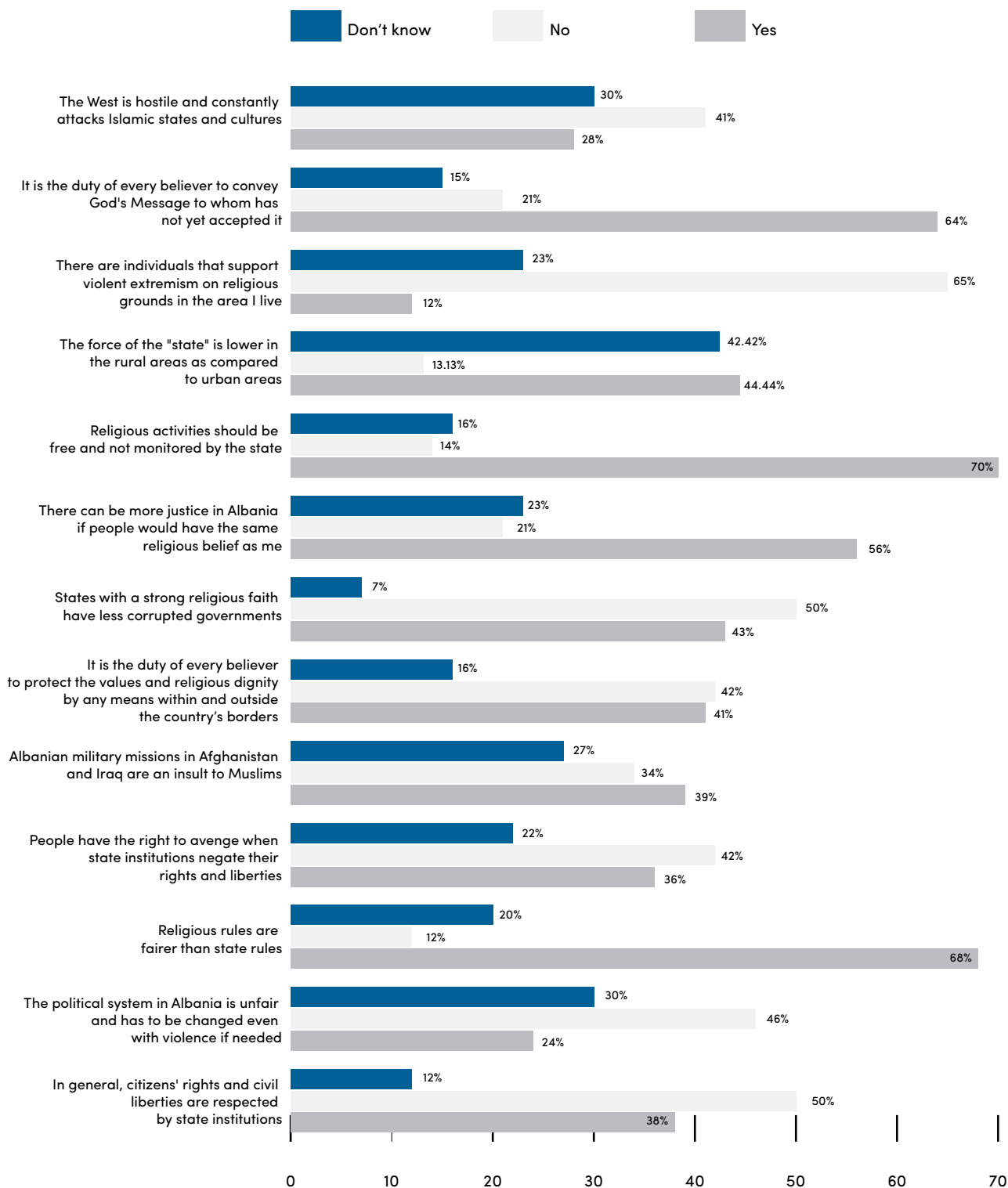


Figure 41. Do you agree with the following statements? (Continued)

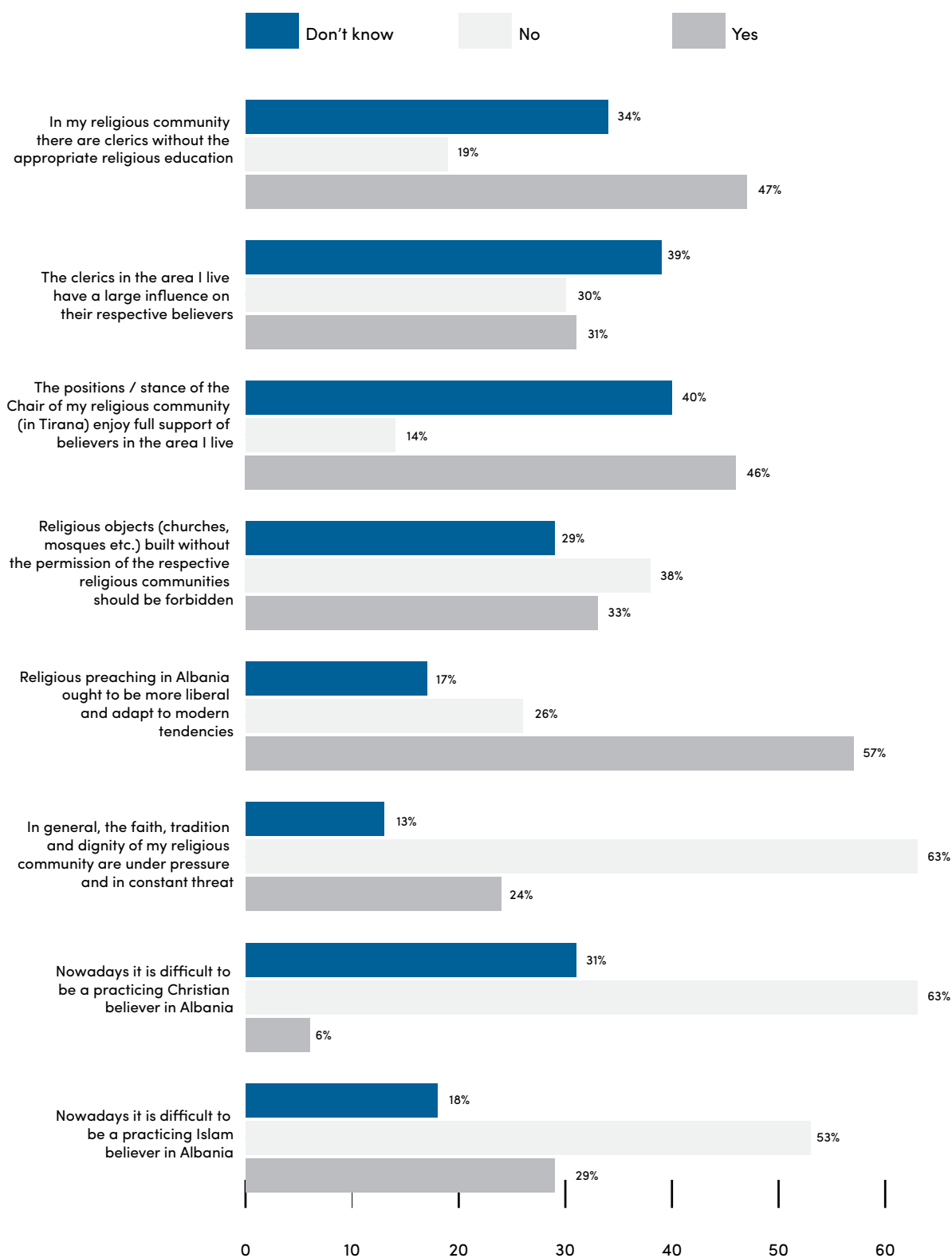


Figure 42. To which religious denomination does the majority of your social circle belong, if any? (in %)

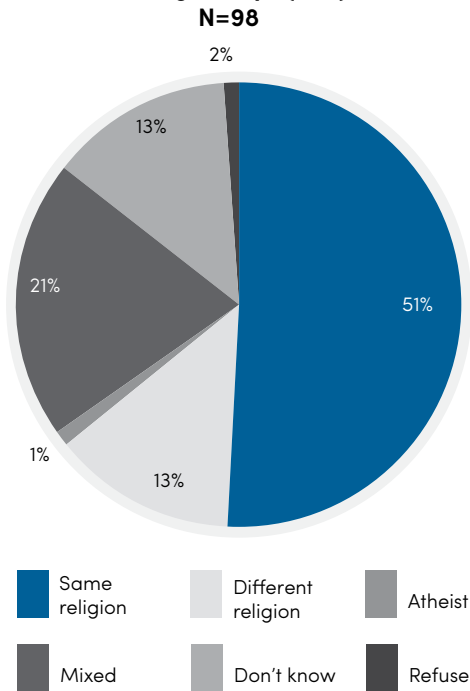


Figure 43. Please evaluate using a scale of 1 to 5 where "1 = religious hatred" and "5=religious harmony" (in %)

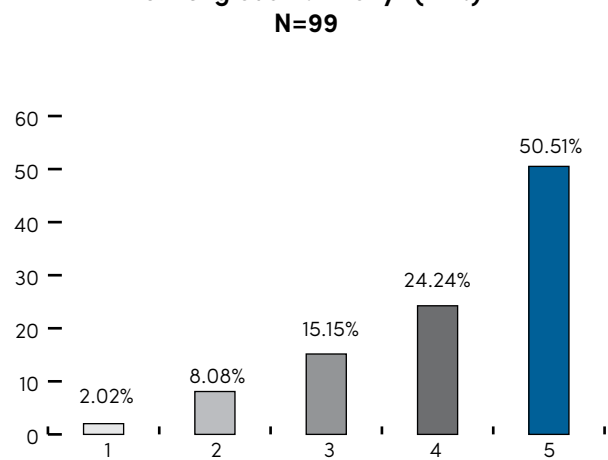


Figure 44. Would you personally support the marriage of a family member (your siblings or children) with an individual belonging to a different religious denomination? (in %)

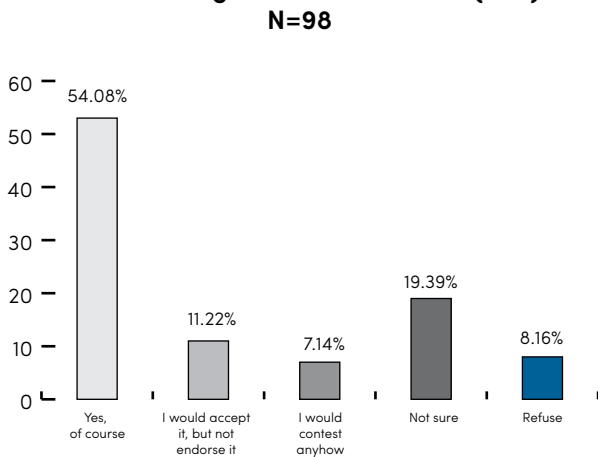
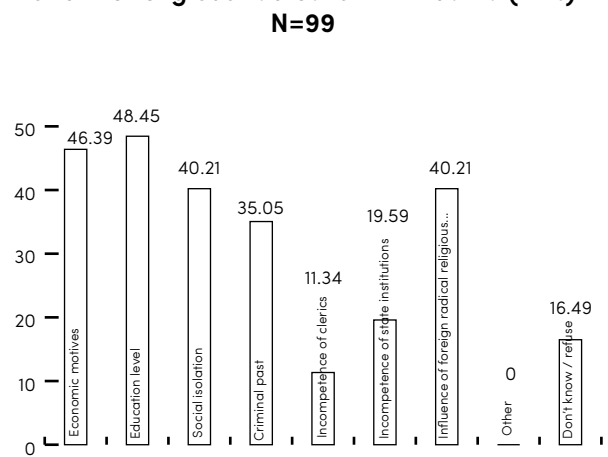


Figure 45. Three main causes that generate or drive religious radicalism in Albania (in %)



MUNICIPALITY OF PËRRENJAS

Figure 46. Gender
N=100

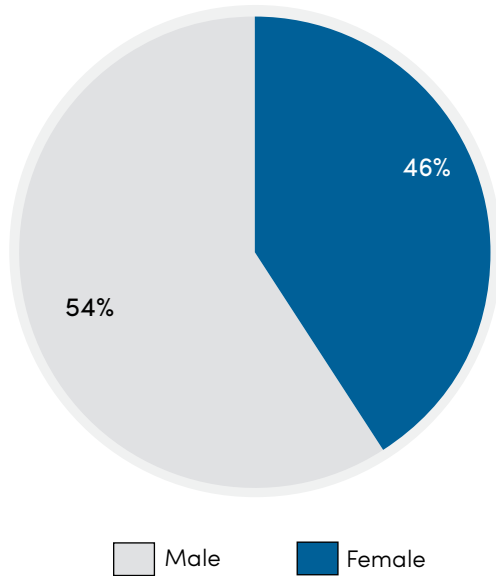


Figure 47. Age structure (in %)
N=99

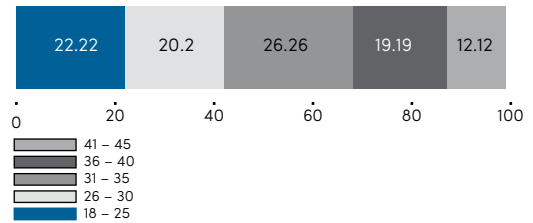


Figure 48. Education (in %)
N=100

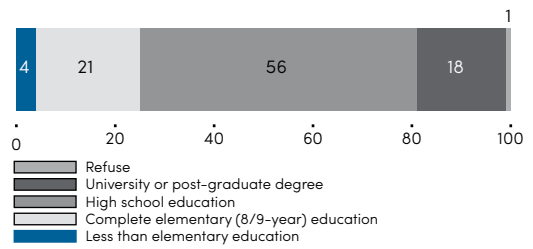


Figure 49. Civil status
N=100

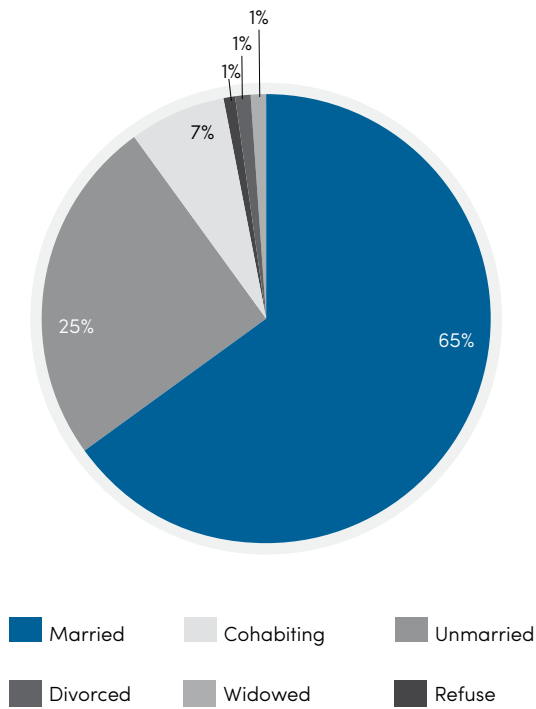


Figure 50. Employment status (in %)
N=100

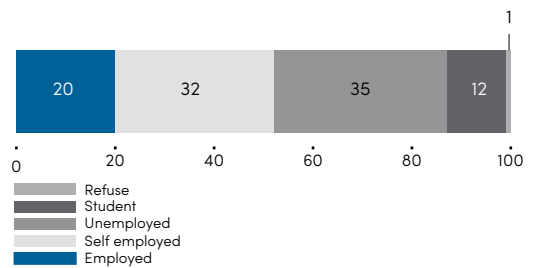


Figure 51. Religious affiliation (in %)
N=100

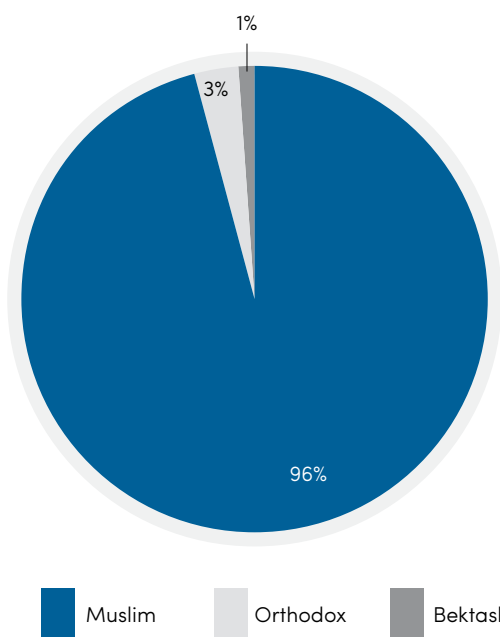


Figure 52. Your religion is similar to your parents (in %)
N=100

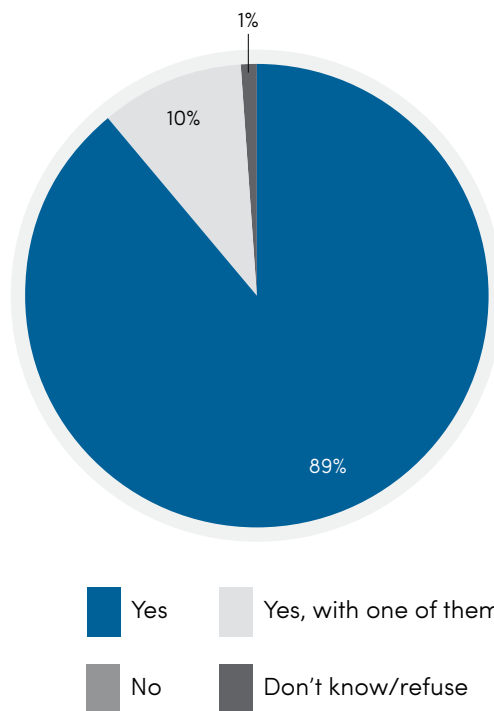


Figure 53. Are you actively practicing your religion? (in %)
N=99

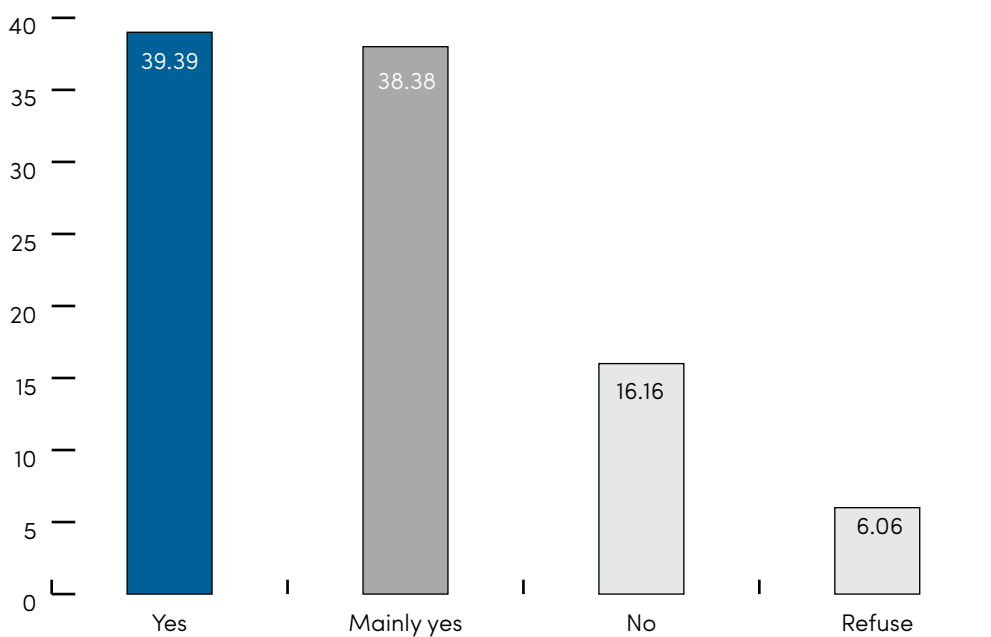


Figure 54. Do you agree with the following statements?

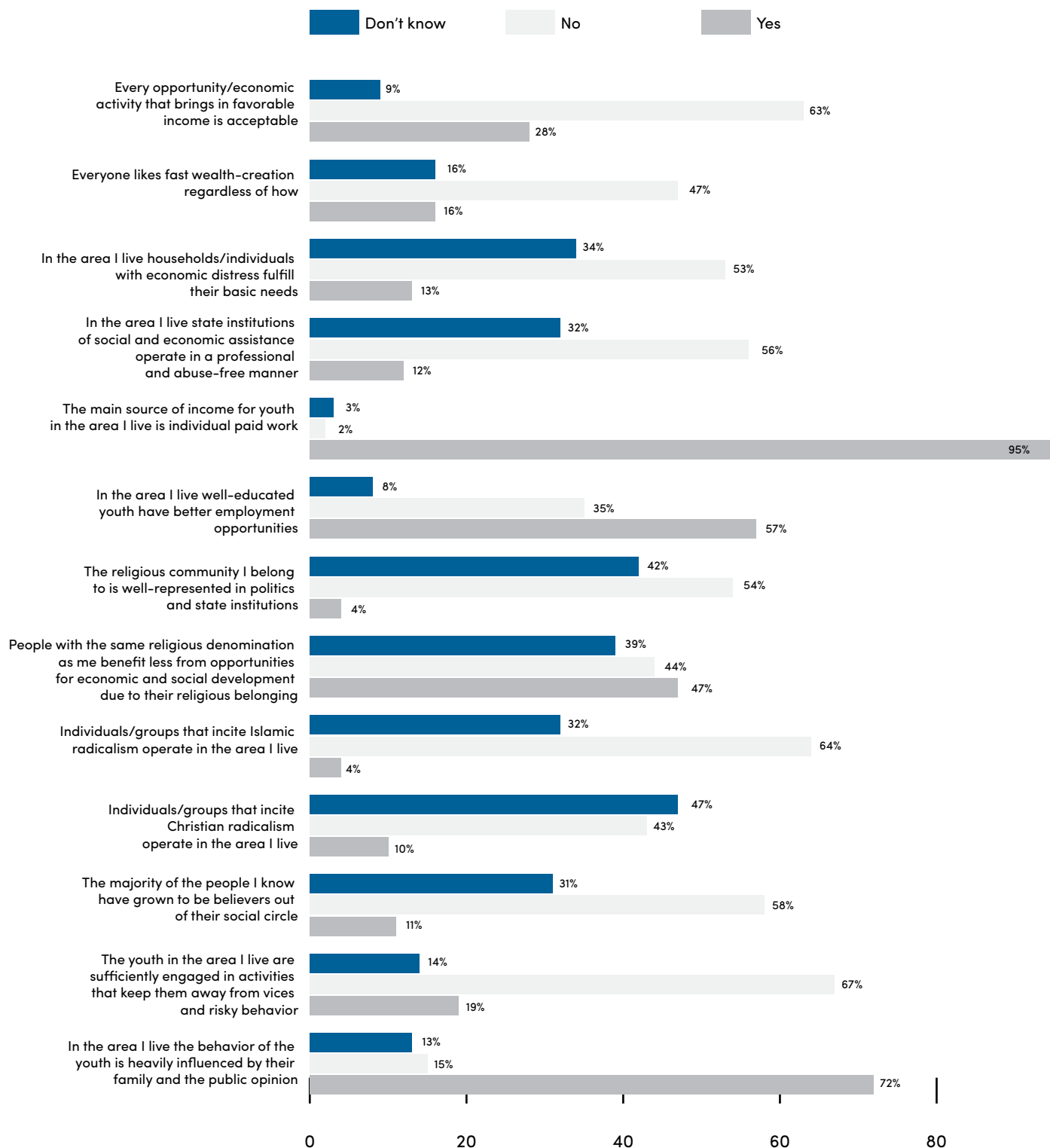


Figure 55. Do you agree with the following statements? (Continued)

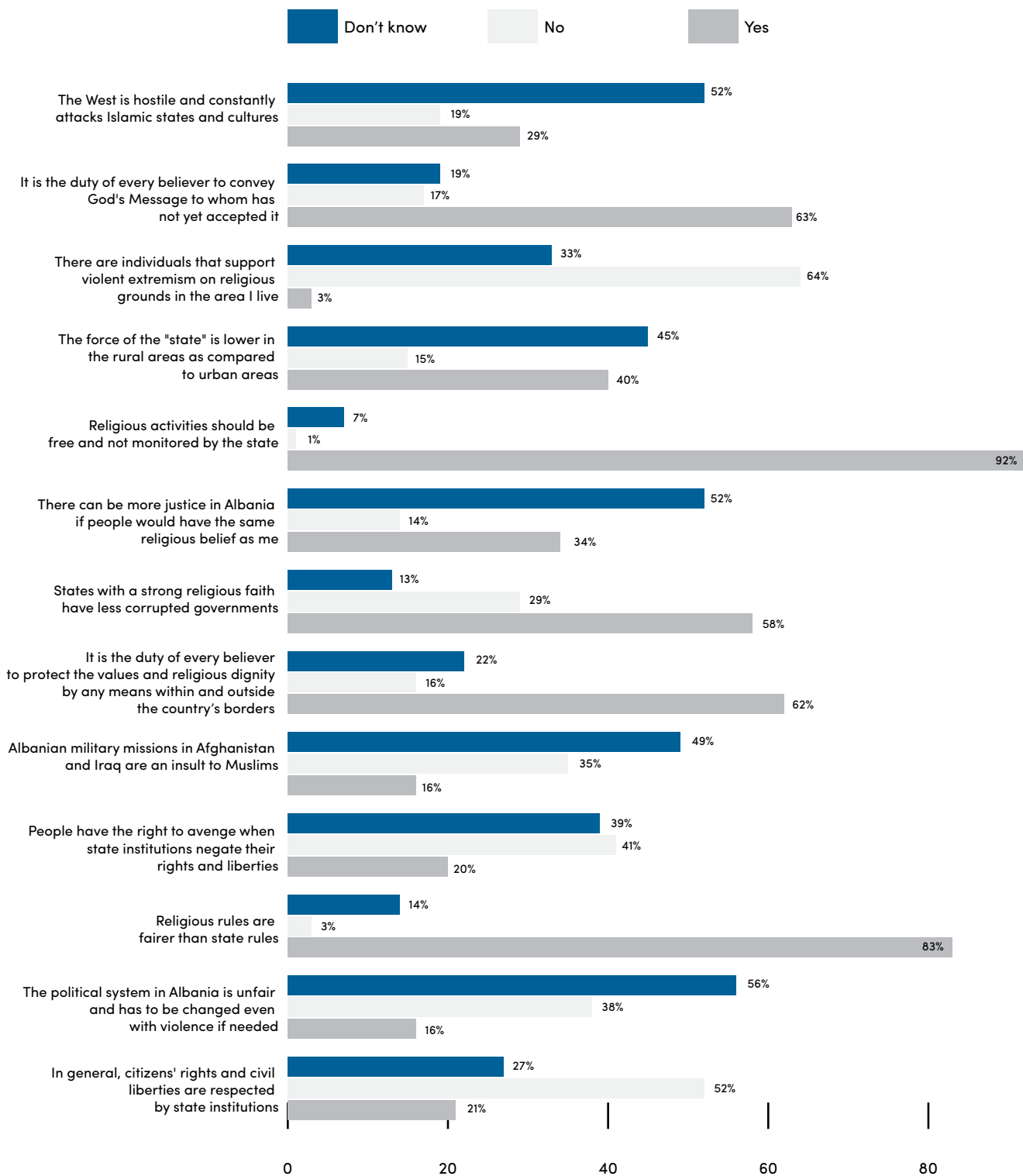


Figure 56. Do you agree with the following statements? (Continued)

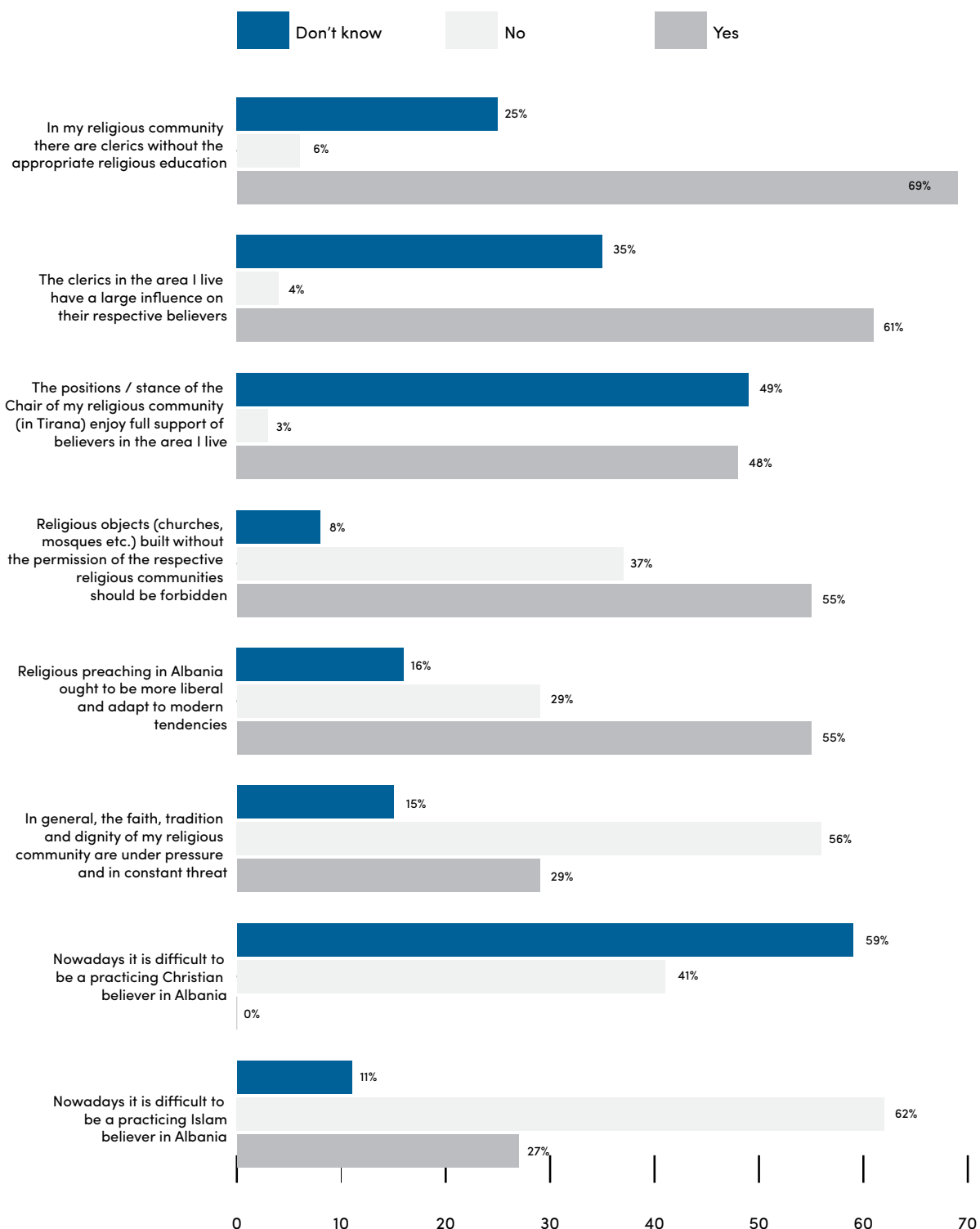


Figure 57. To which religious denomination does the majority of your social circle belong, if any? (in %)
N=99

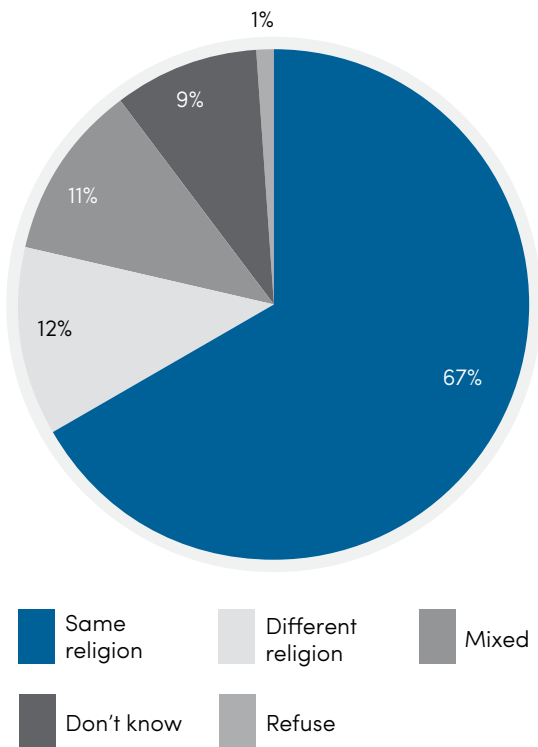


Figure 58. Please evaluate using a scale of 1 to 5 where "1 = religious hatred" and "5=religious harmony" (in %)
N=100

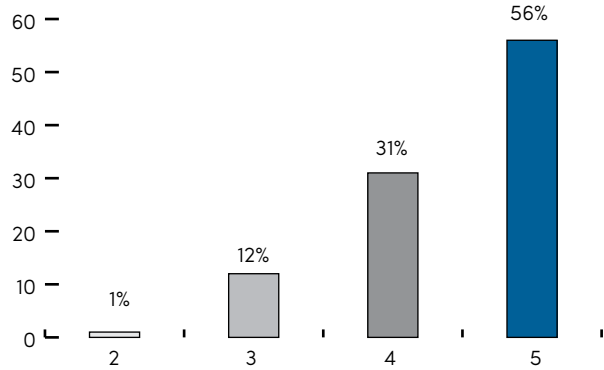


Figure 59. Would you personally support the marriage of a family member (your siblings or children) with an individual belonging to a different religious denomination? (in %)
N=100

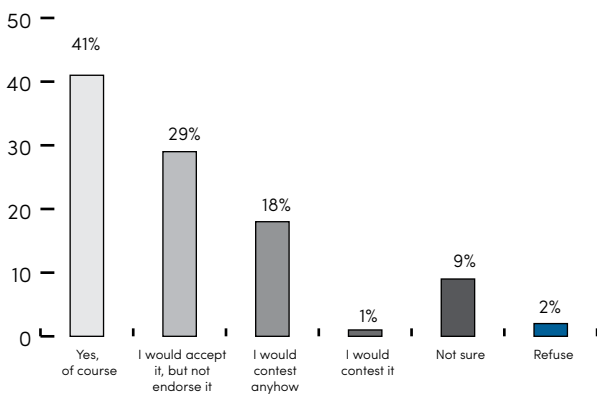


Figure 60. Three main causes that generate or drive religious radicalism in Albania (in %)
N=100

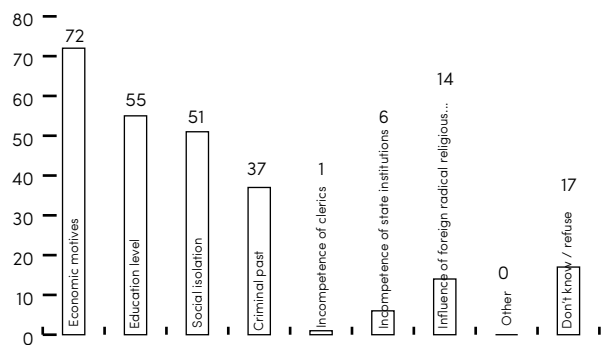


Figure 61. Gender
N=99

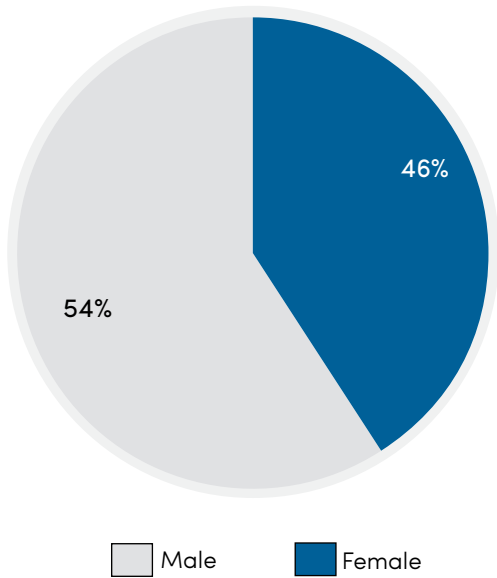


Figure 62. Age structure (in %)
N=99

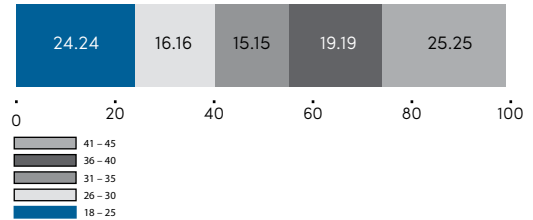


Figure 63. Education (in %)
N=100

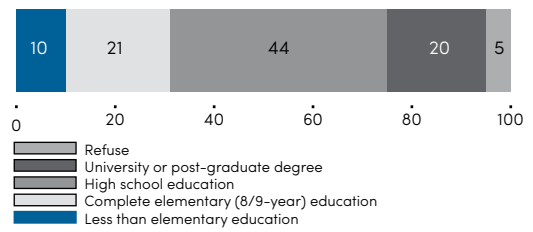


Figure 64. Civil status
N=100

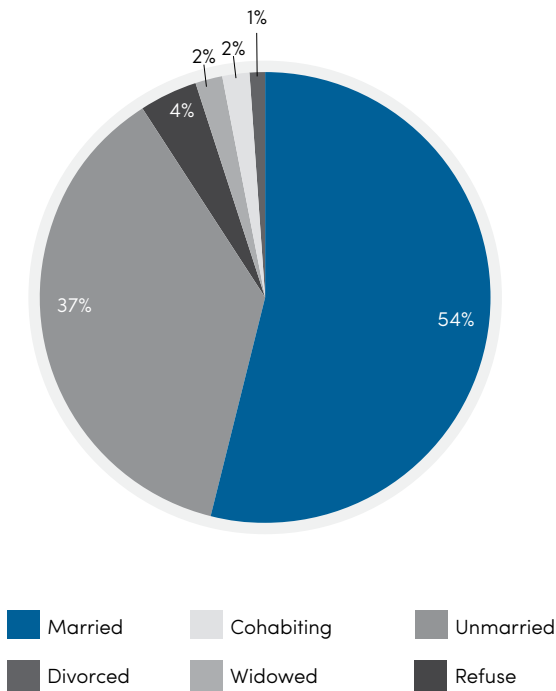


Figure 65. Employment status (in %)
N=98

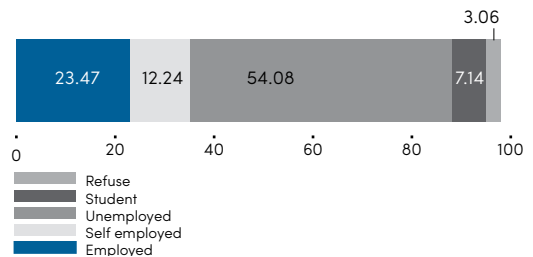


Figure 66. Religious affiliation (in %)
N=100

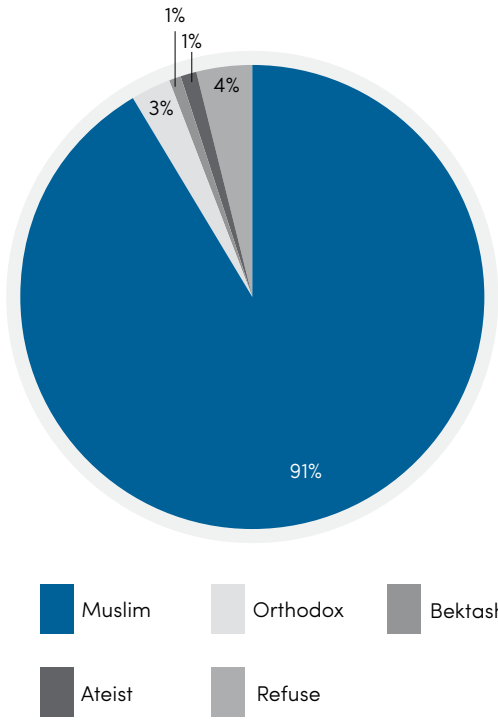


Figure 67. Your religion is similar to your parents (in %)
N=98

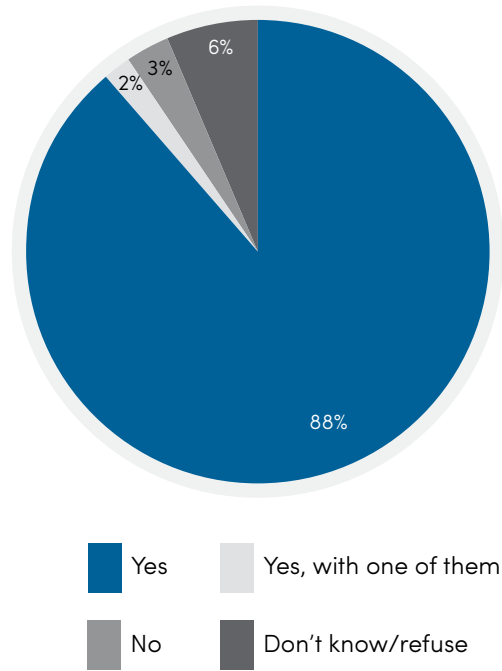


Figure 68. Are you actively practicing your religion? (in %)
N=97

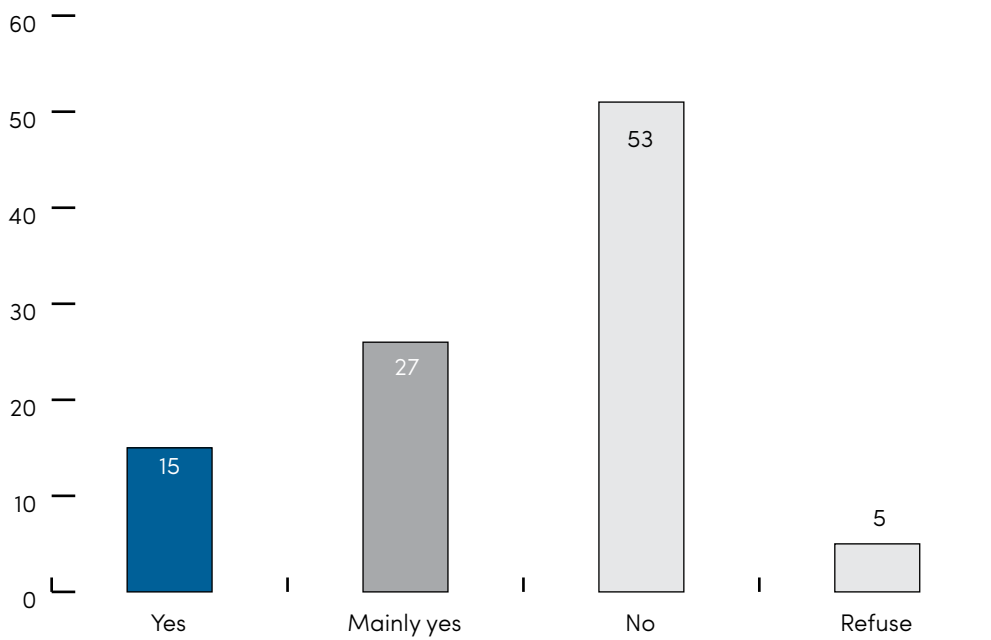


Figure 69. Do you agree with the following statements?

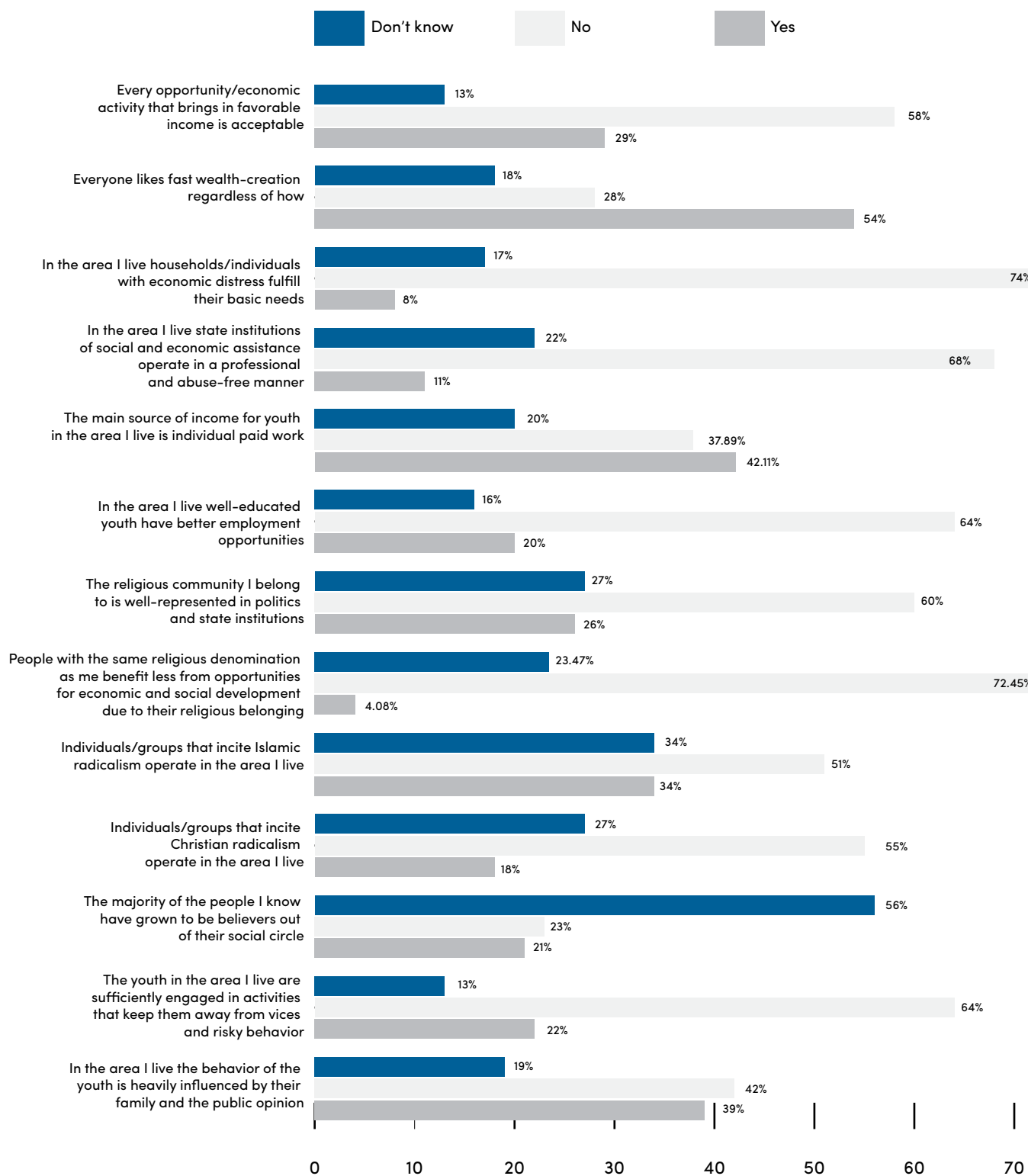


Figure 70. Do you agree with the following statements? (Continued)

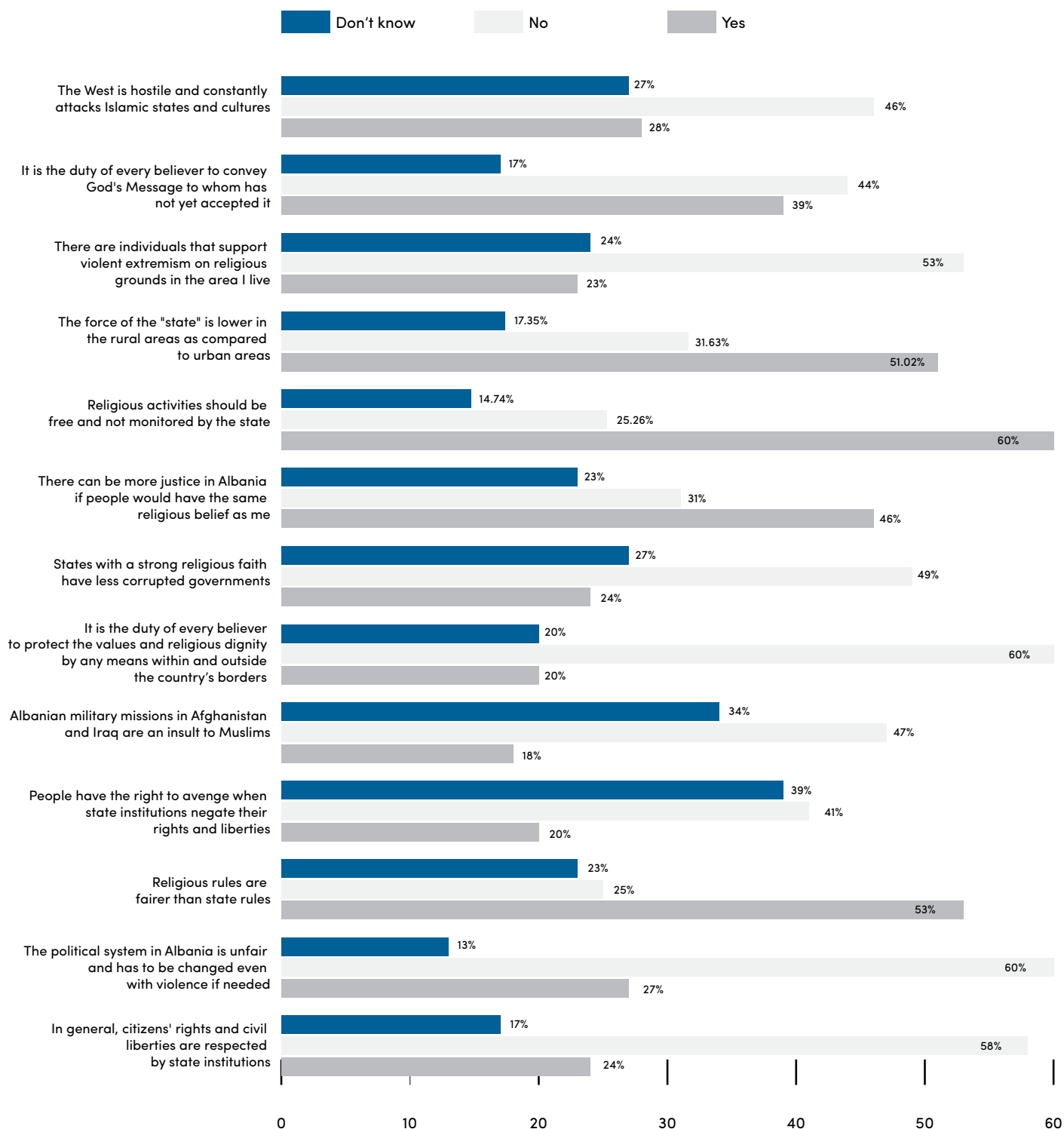


Figure 71. Do you agree with the following statements? (Continued)

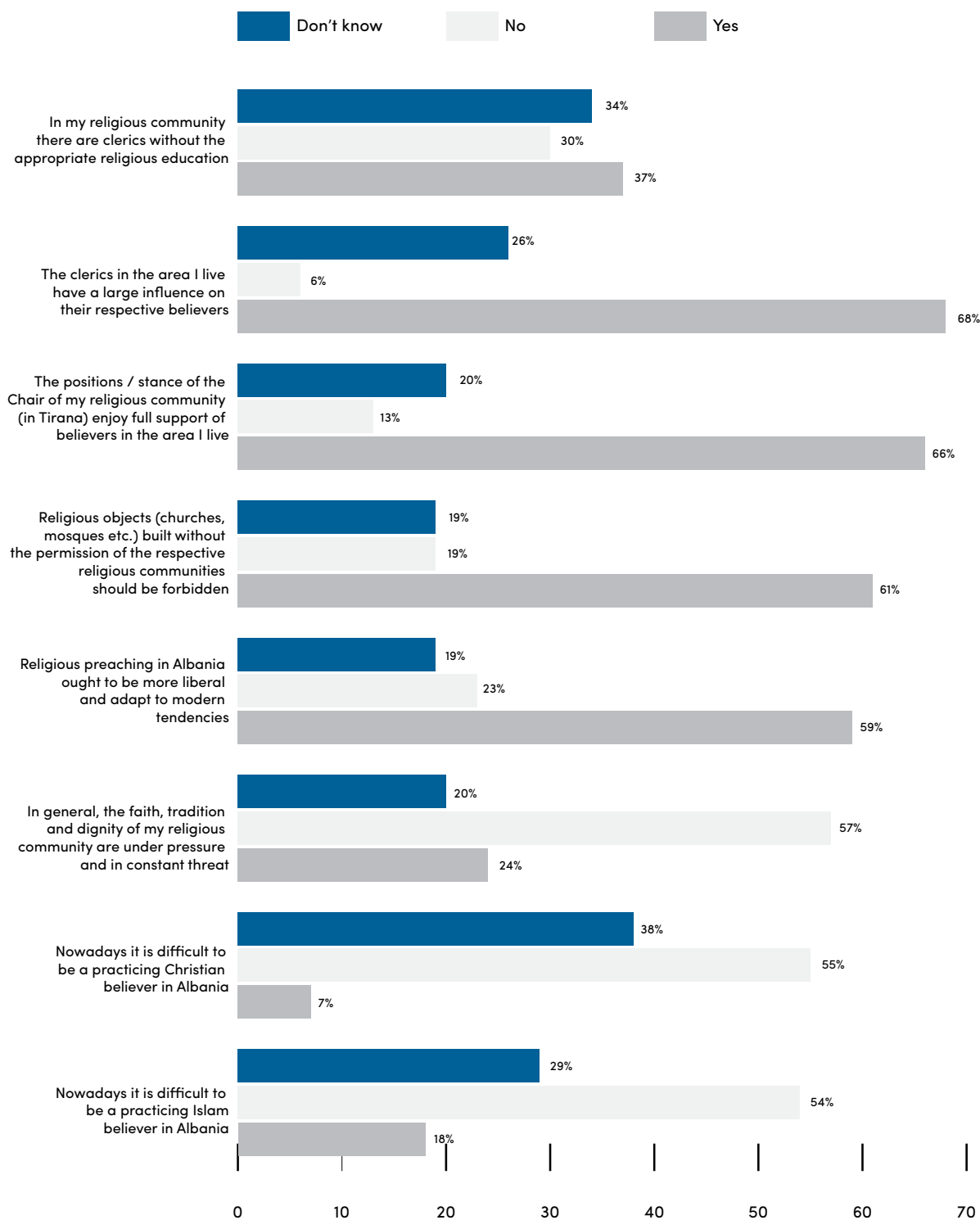


Figure 72. To which religious denomination does the majority of your social circle belong, if any? (in %)
N=98

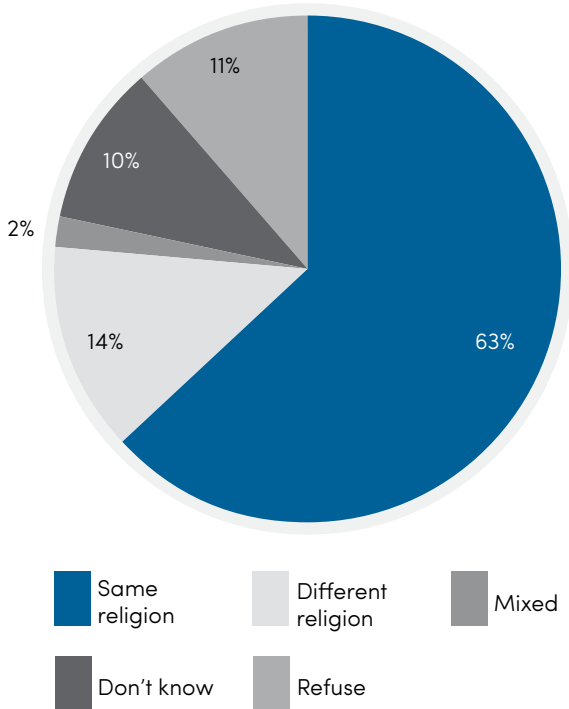


Figure 73. Please evaluate using a scale of 1 to 5 where "1 = religious hatred" and "5=religious harmony" (in %)
N=97

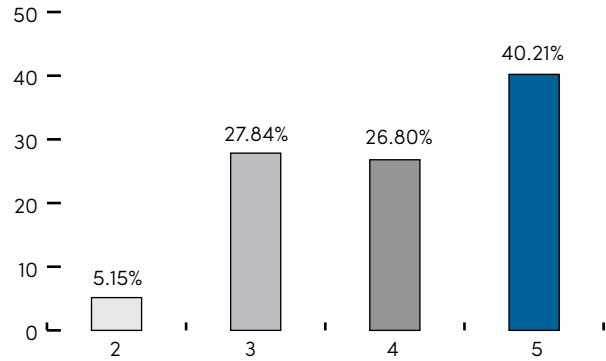


Figure 74. Would you personally support the marriage of a family member (your siblings or children) with an individual belonging to a different religious denomination? (in %)
N=99

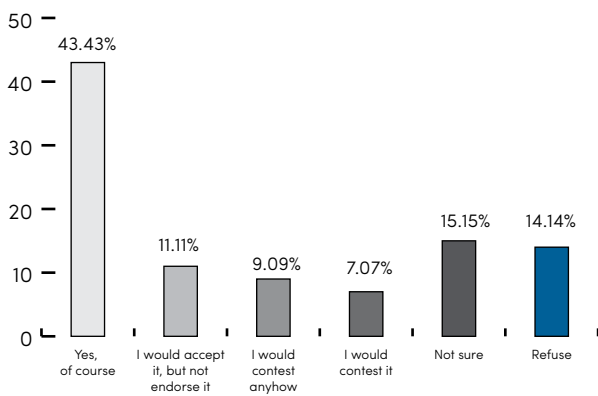


Figure 75. Three main causes that generate or drive religious radicalism in Albania (in %)
N=98

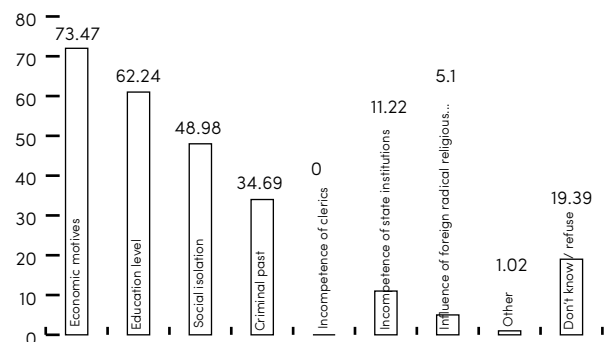


Figure 76. Gender
N=96

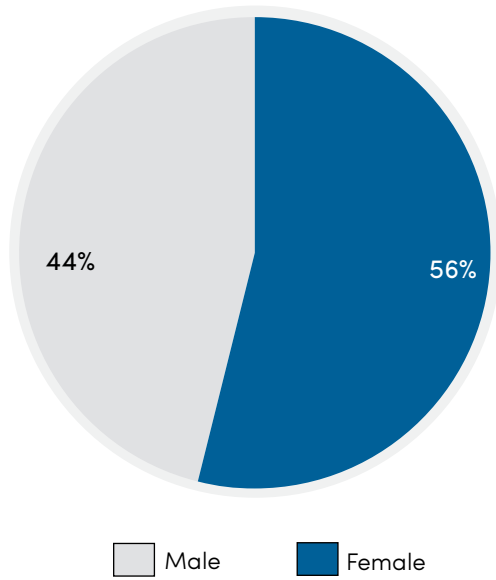


Figure 77. Age structure (in %)
N=98

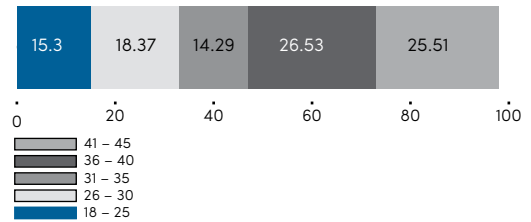


Figure 78. Education (in %)
N=97

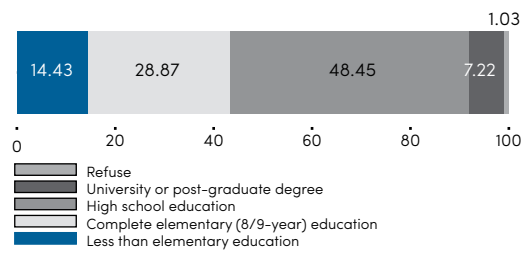


Figure 79. Civil status
N=98

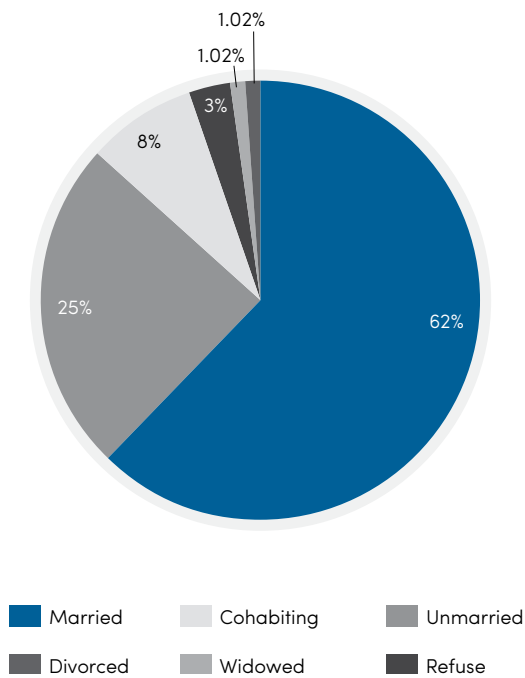


Figure 80. Employment status (in %)
N=98

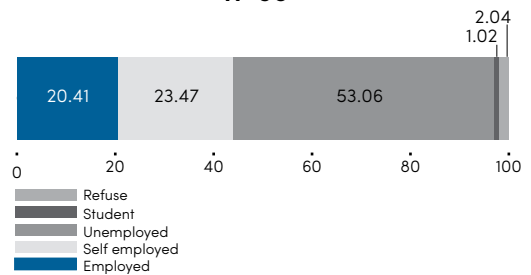


Figure 81. Religious affiliation (in %)
N=98

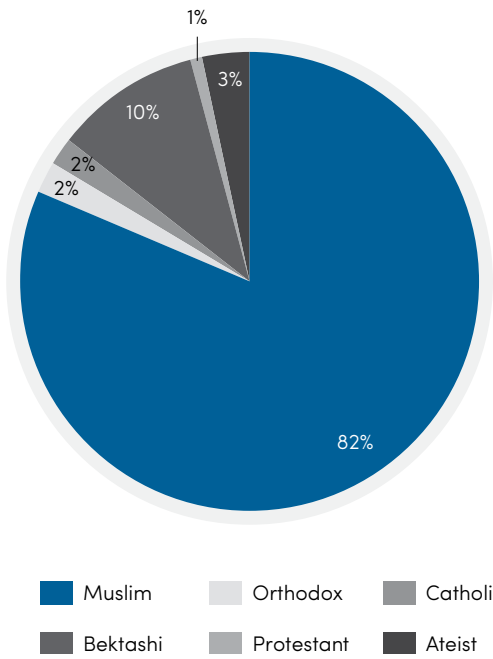


Figure 82. Your religion is similar to your parents (in %)
N=95

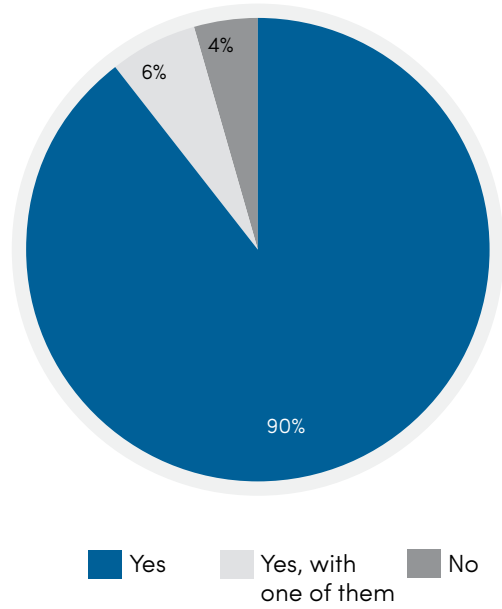


Figure 83. Are you actively practicing your religion? (in %)
N=95

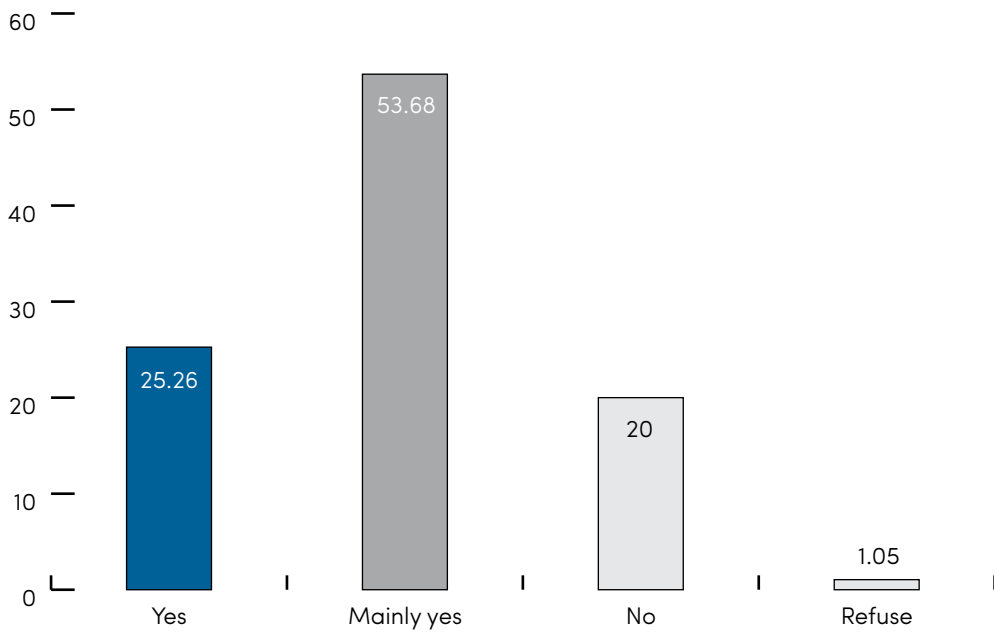


Figure 84. Do you agree with the following statements?

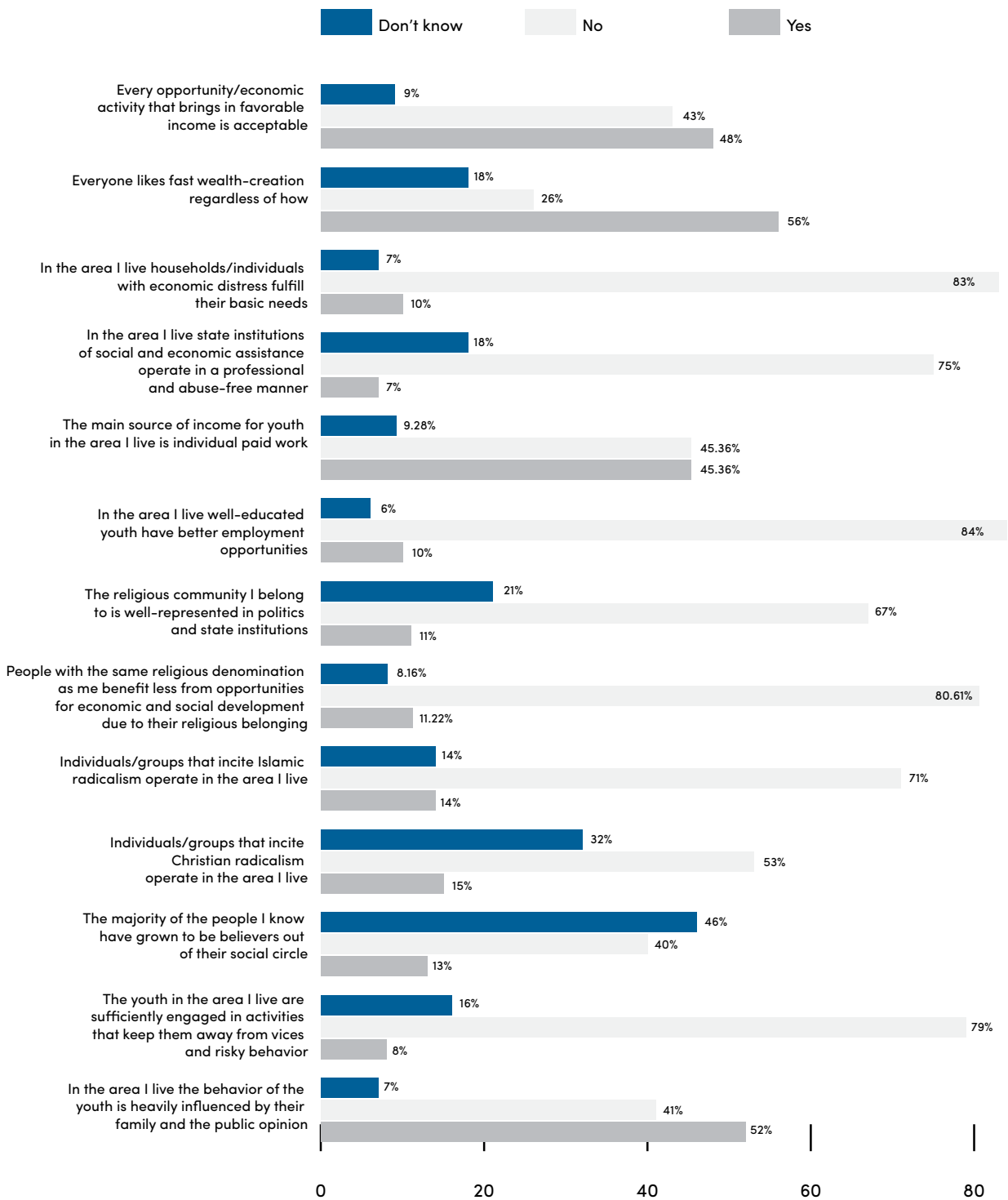


Figure 85. Do you agree with the following statements? (Continued)

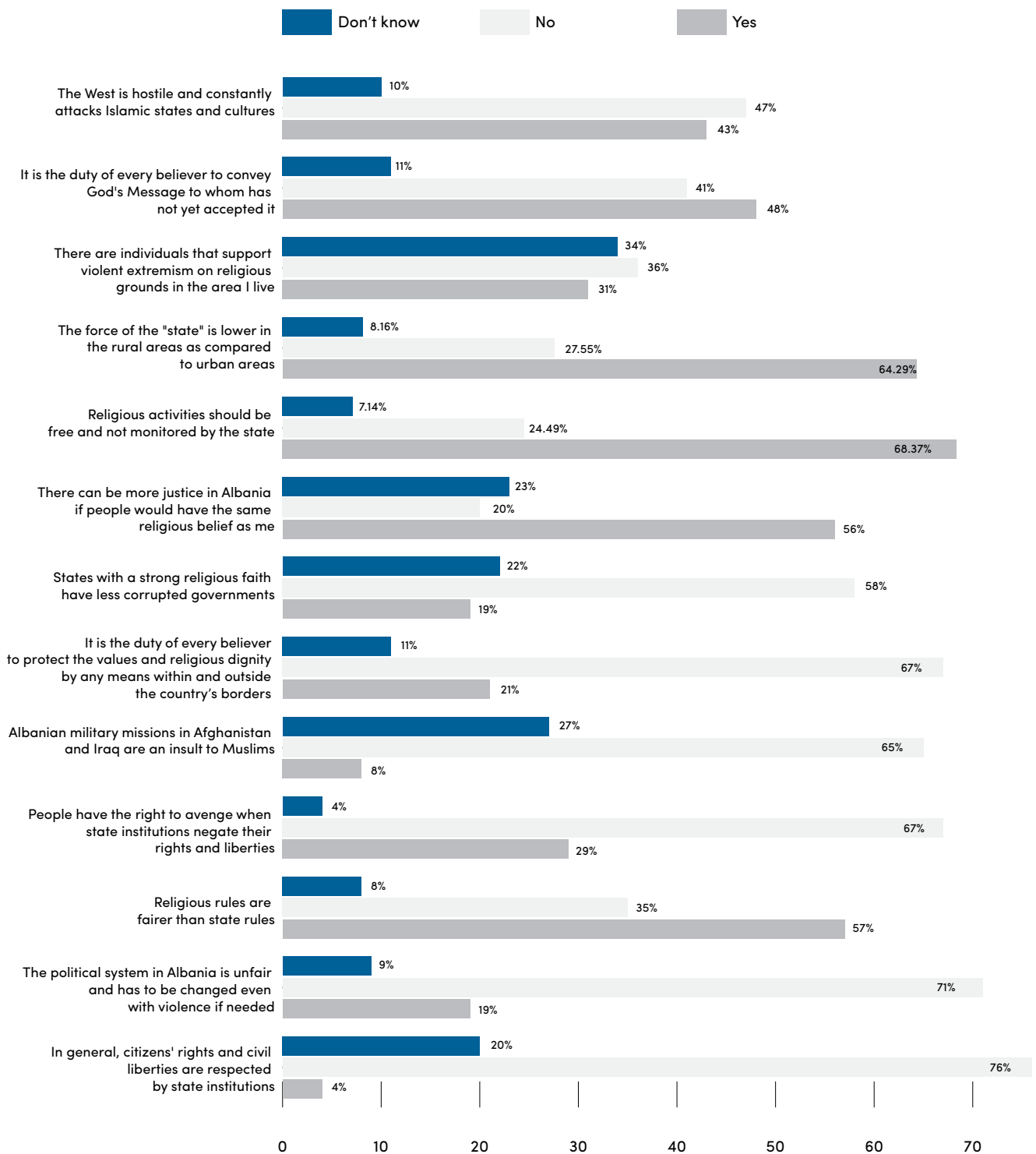


Figure 86. Do you agree with the following statements? (Continued)

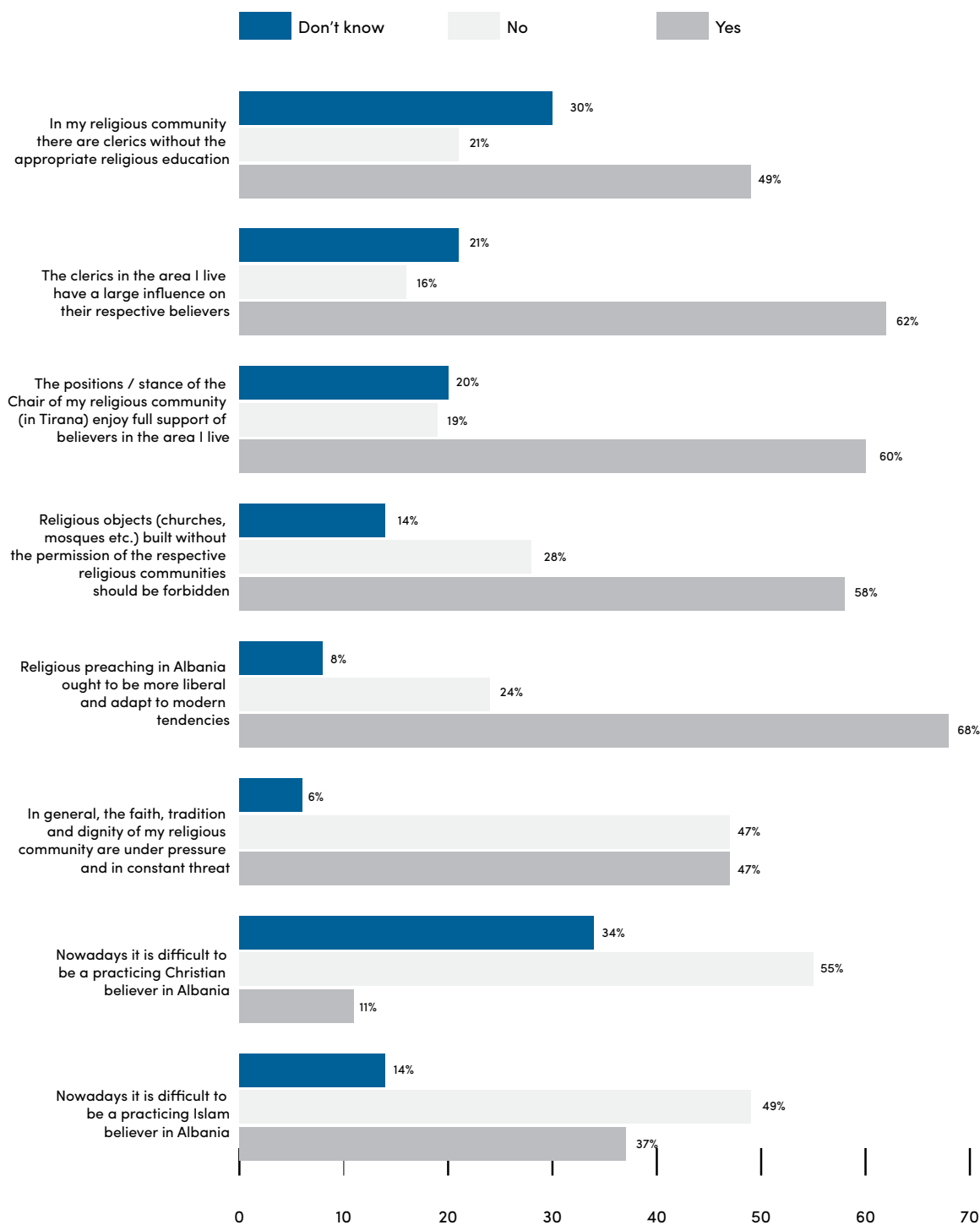


Figure 87. To which religious denomination does the majority of your social circle belong, if any? (in %)
N=98

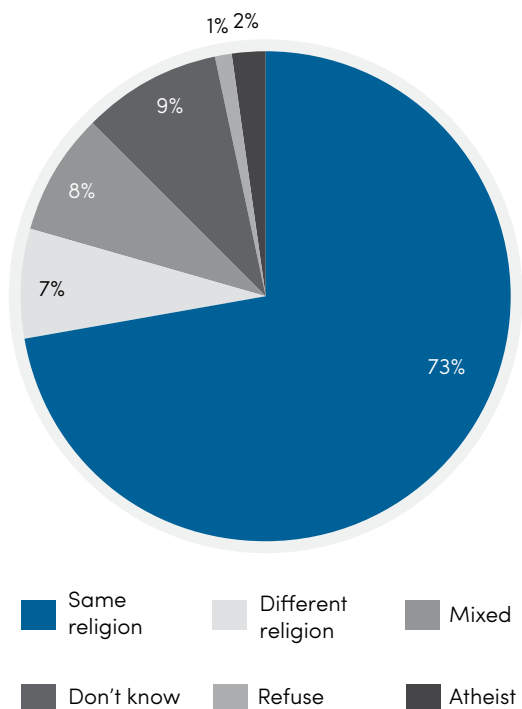


Figure 88. Please evaluate using a scale of 1 to 5 where "1 = religious hatred" and "5=religious harmony" (in %)
N=95

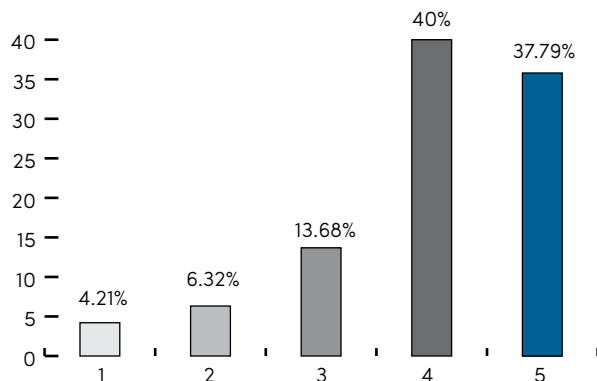


Figure 89. Would you personally support the marriage of a family member (your siblings or children) with an individual belonging to a different religious denomination? (in %)
N=98

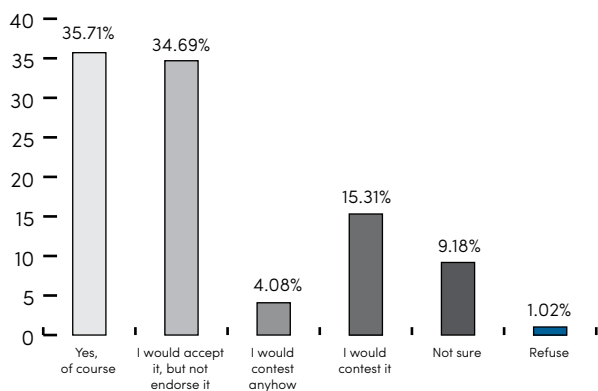


Figure 90. Three main causes that generate or drive religious radicalism in Albania (in %)
N=99

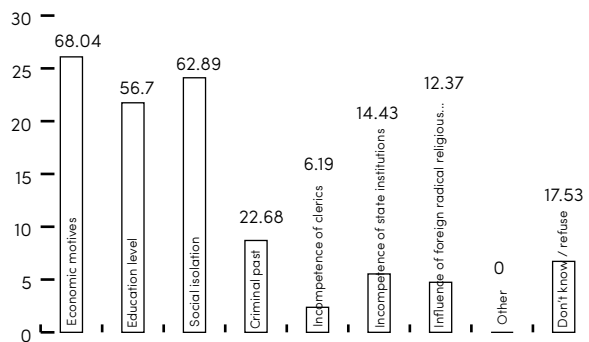


Figure 91. Gender
N=100

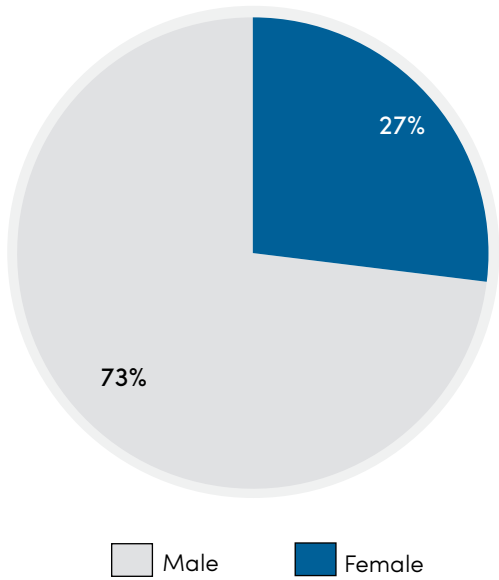


Figure 92. Age structure (in %)
N=100

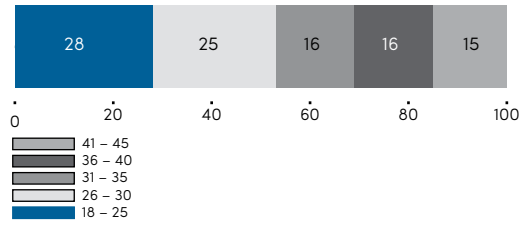


Figure 94. Civil status
N=100

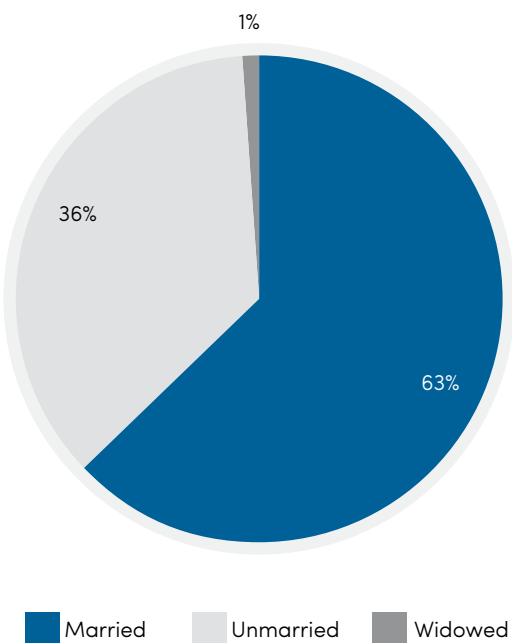


Figure 93. Education (in %)
N=100

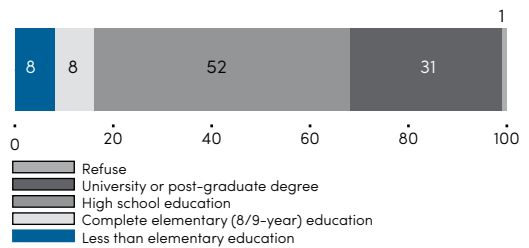


Figure 95. Employment status (in %)
N=99

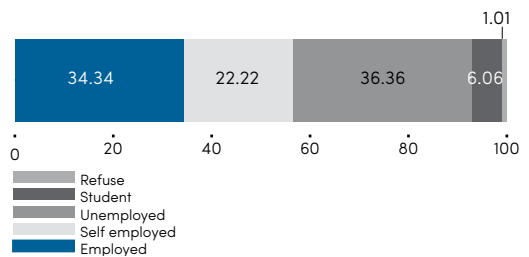


Figure 96. Religious affiliation (in %)
N=100

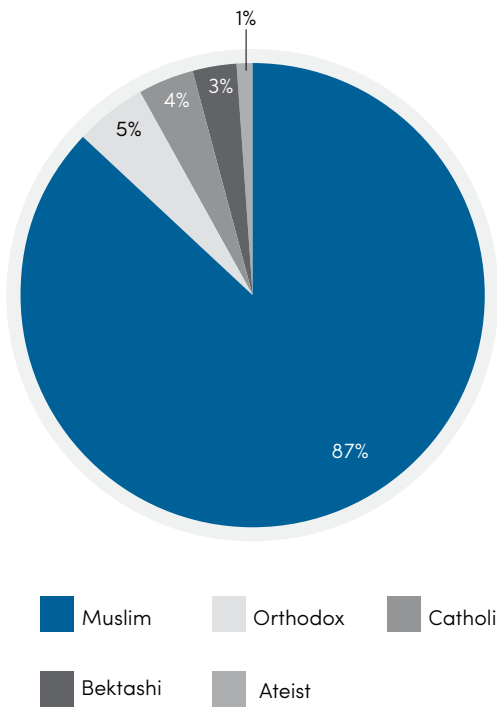


Figure 97. Your religion is similar to your parents (in %)
N=98

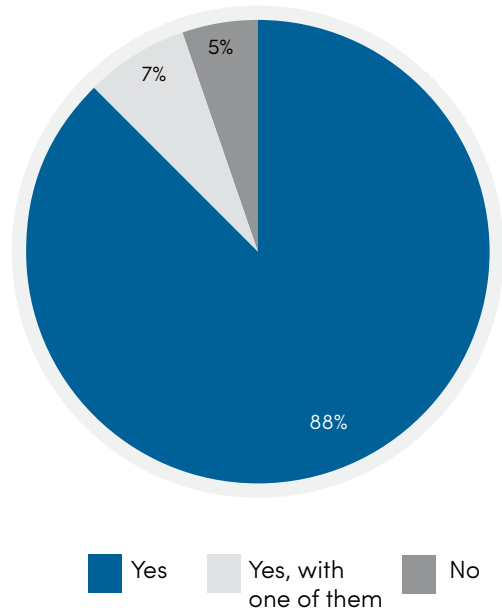


Figure 98. Are you actively practicing your religion? (in %)
N=97

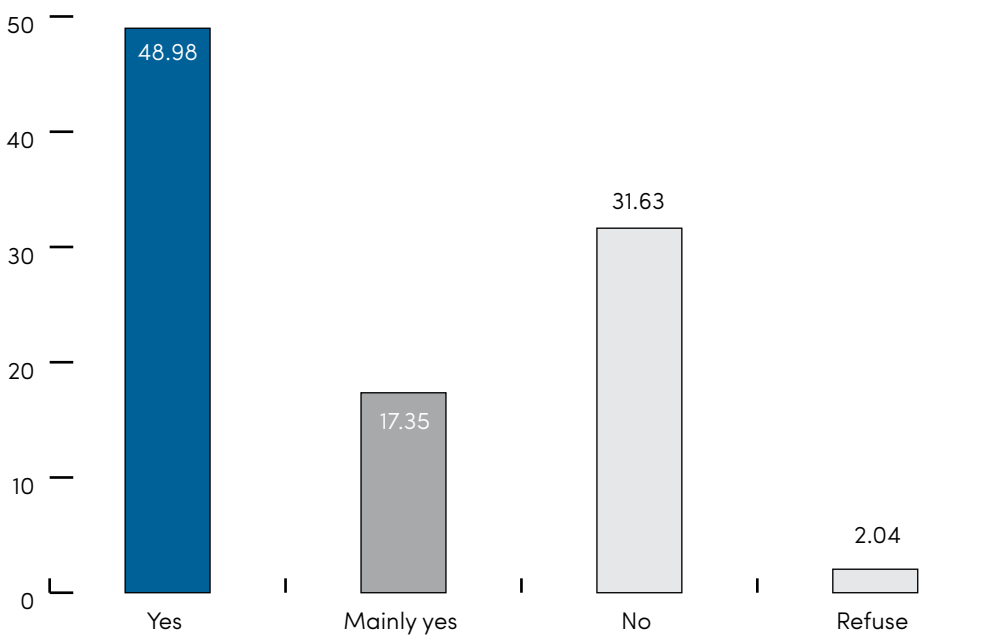


Figure 99. Do you agree with the following statements?

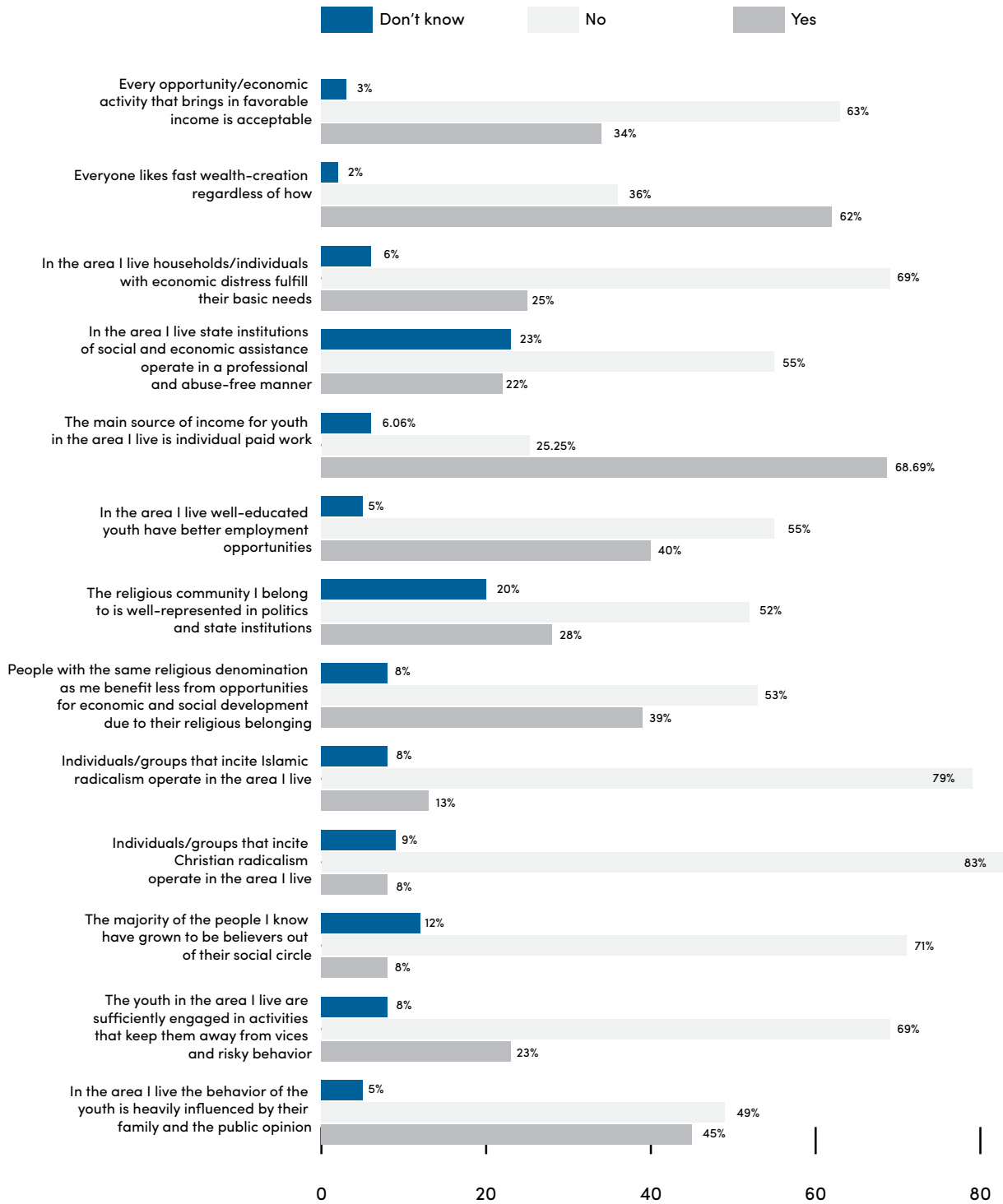


Figure 100. Do you agree with the following statements? (Continued)

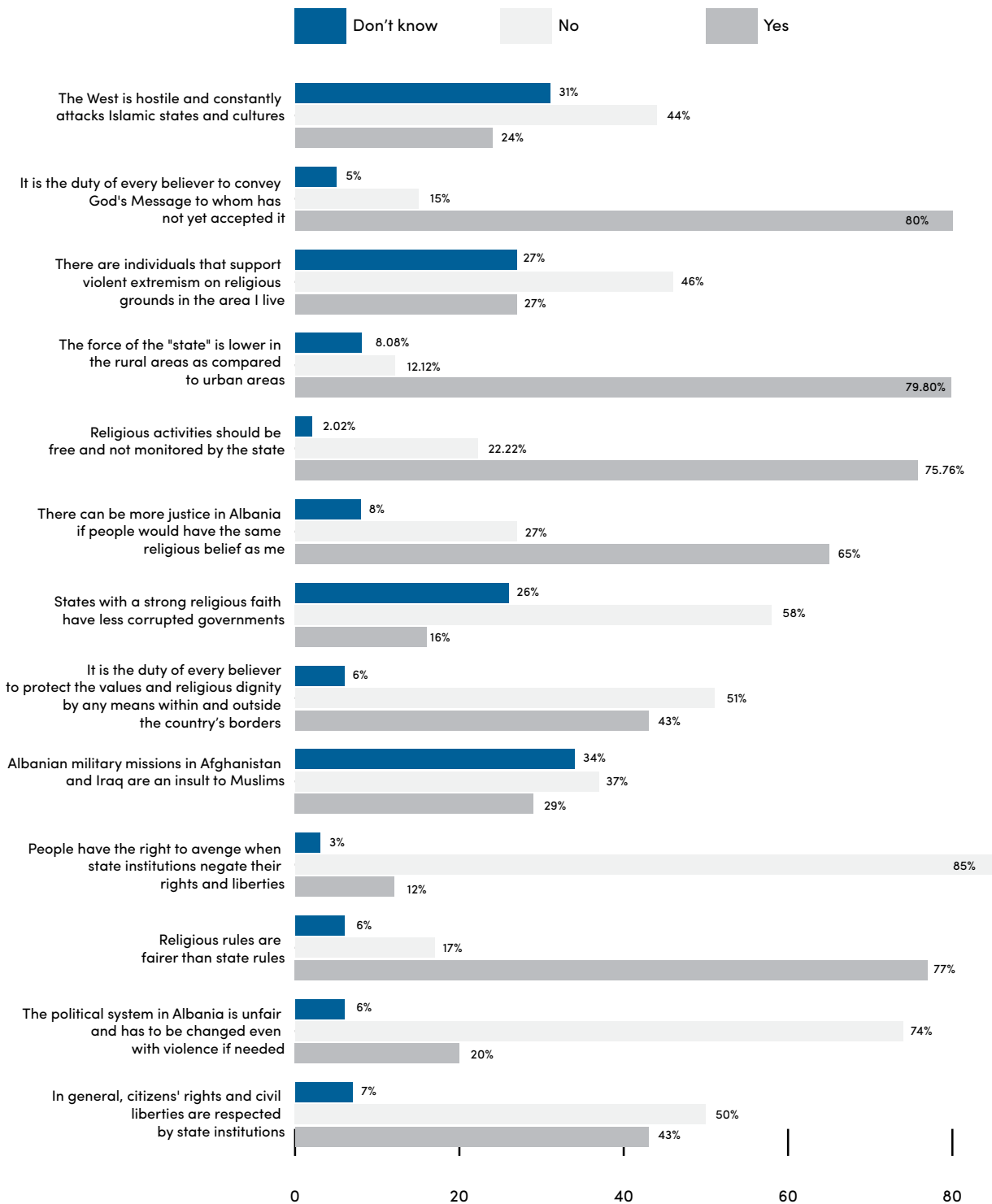


Figure 101. Do you agree with the following statements? (Continued)

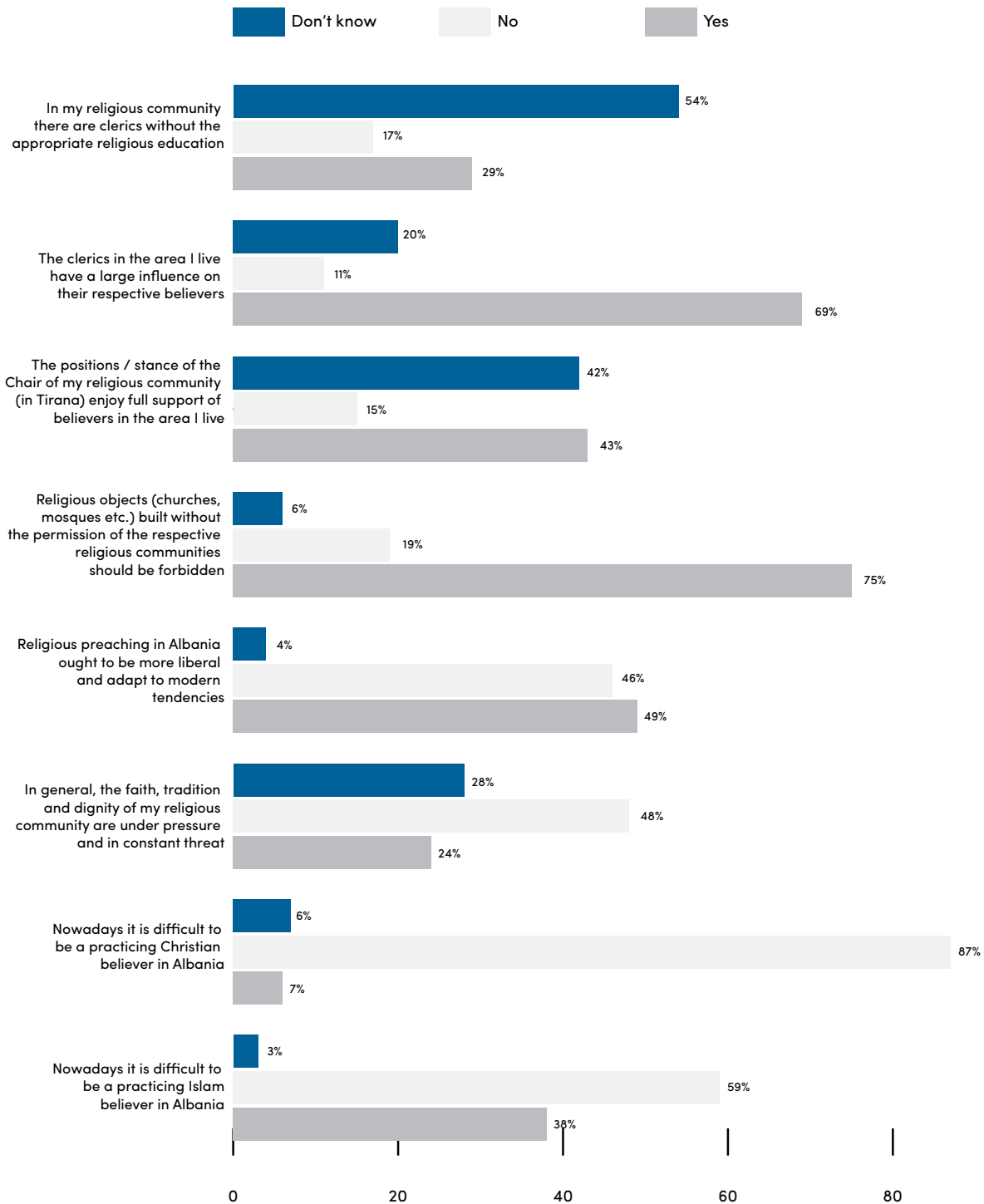


Figure 102. To which religious denomination does the majority of your social circle belong, if any? (in %) N=99

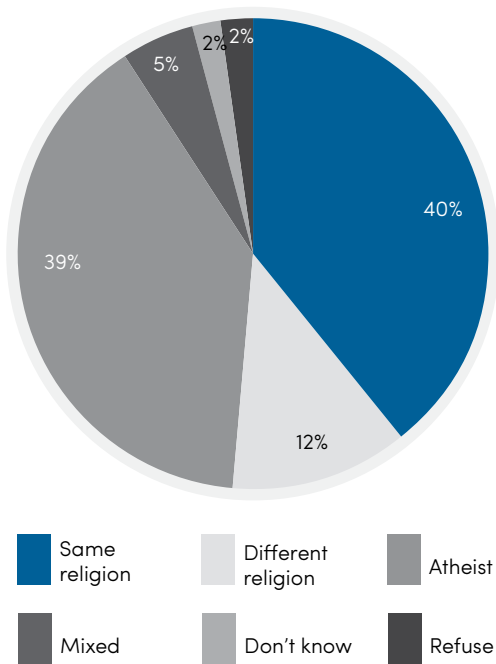


Figure 103. Please evaluate using a scale of 1 to 5 where "1 = religious hatred" and "5=religious harmony" (in %) N=98

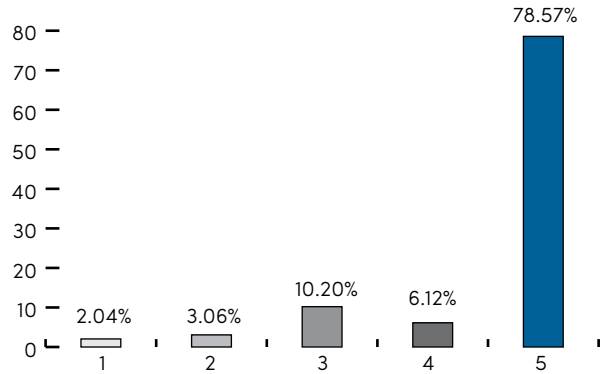


Figure 104. Would you personally support the marriage of a family member (your siblings or children) with an individual belonging to a different religious denomination? (in %) N=100

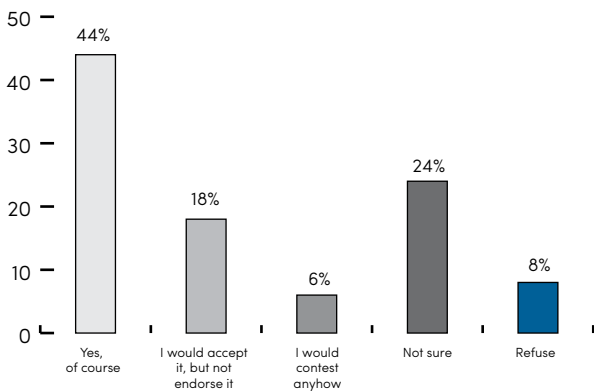
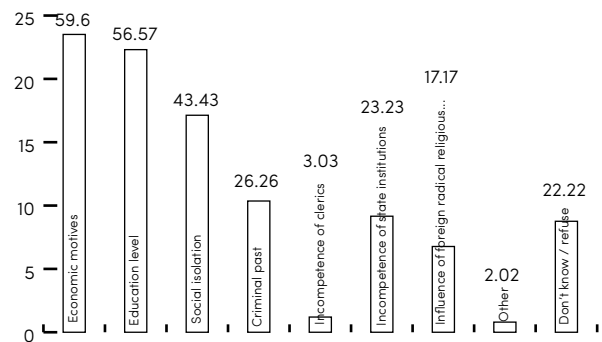


Figure 105. Three main causes that generate or drive religious radicalism in Albania (in %) N=99



MUNICIPALITY OF BULQIZË

Figure 106. Gender
N=100

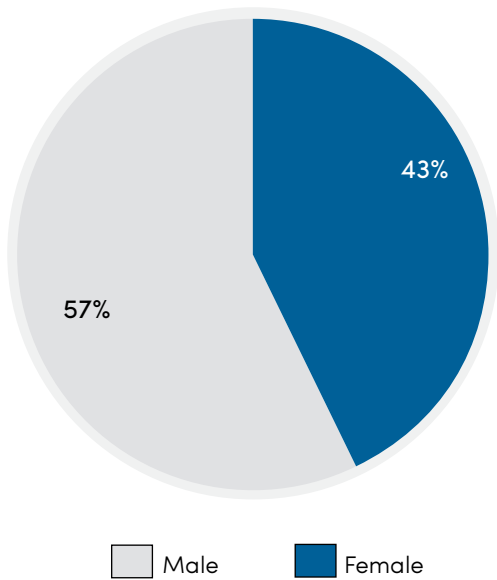


Figure 107. Age structure (in %)
N=100

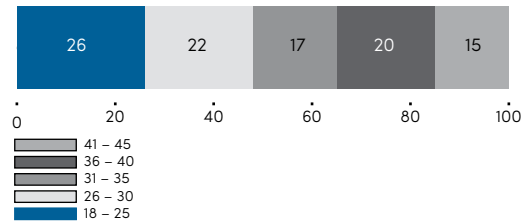


Figure 109. Civil status
N=100

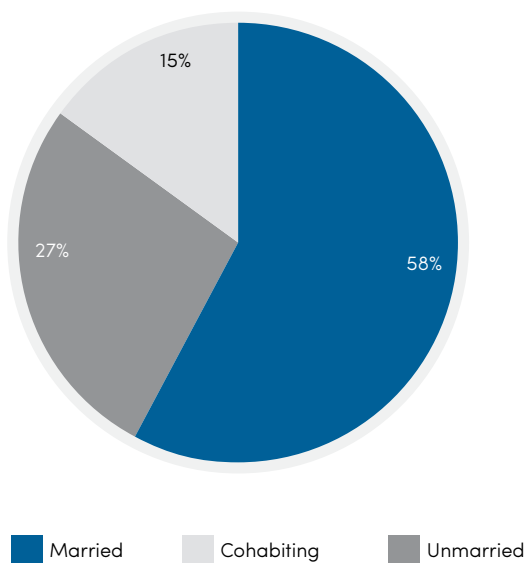


Figure 108. Education (in %)
N=100

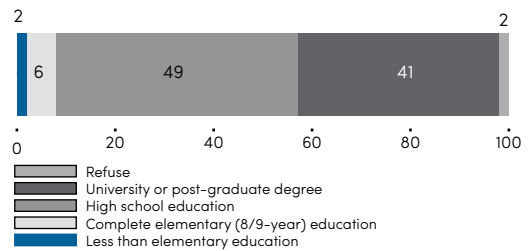


Figure 110. Employment status (in %)
N=100

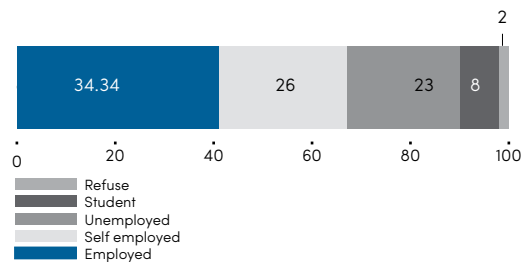


Figure 111. Religious affiliation (in %)
N=100

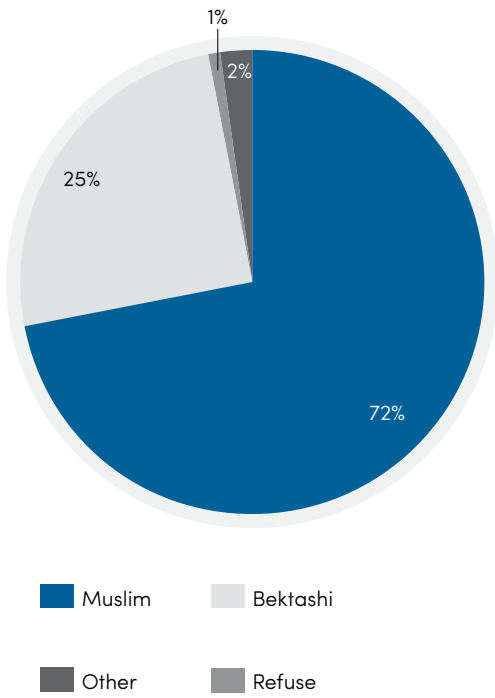


Figure 112. Your religion is similar to your parents (in %)
N=100

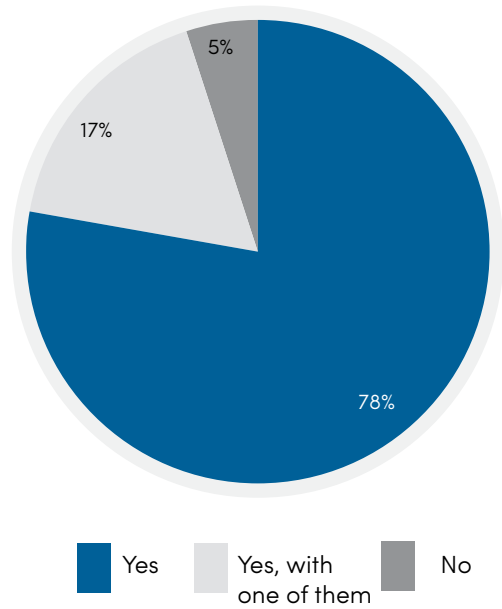


Figure 113. Are you actively practicing your religion? (in %)
N=100

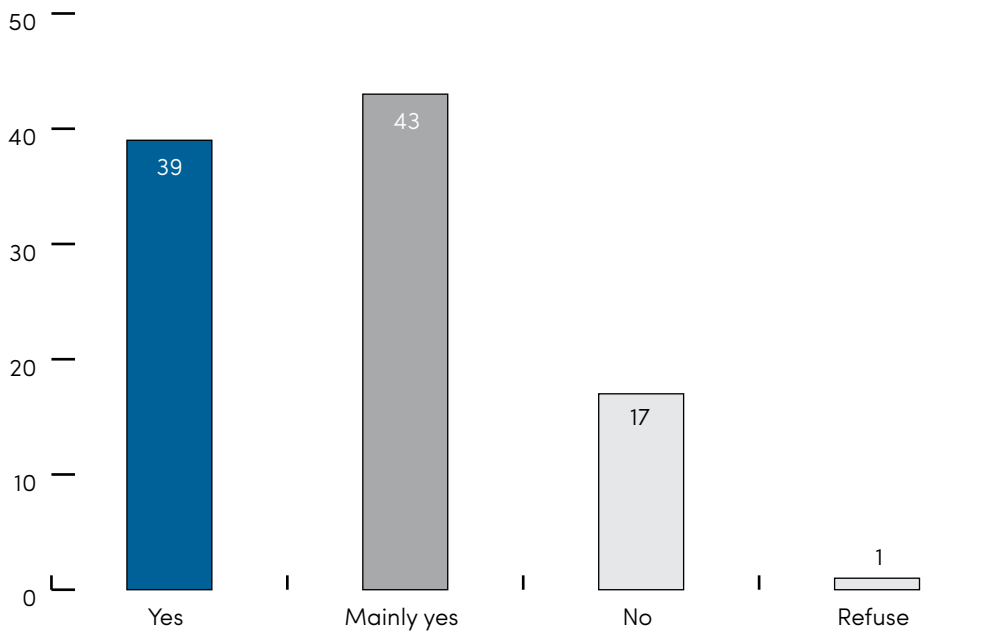


Figure 114. Do you agree with the following statements?

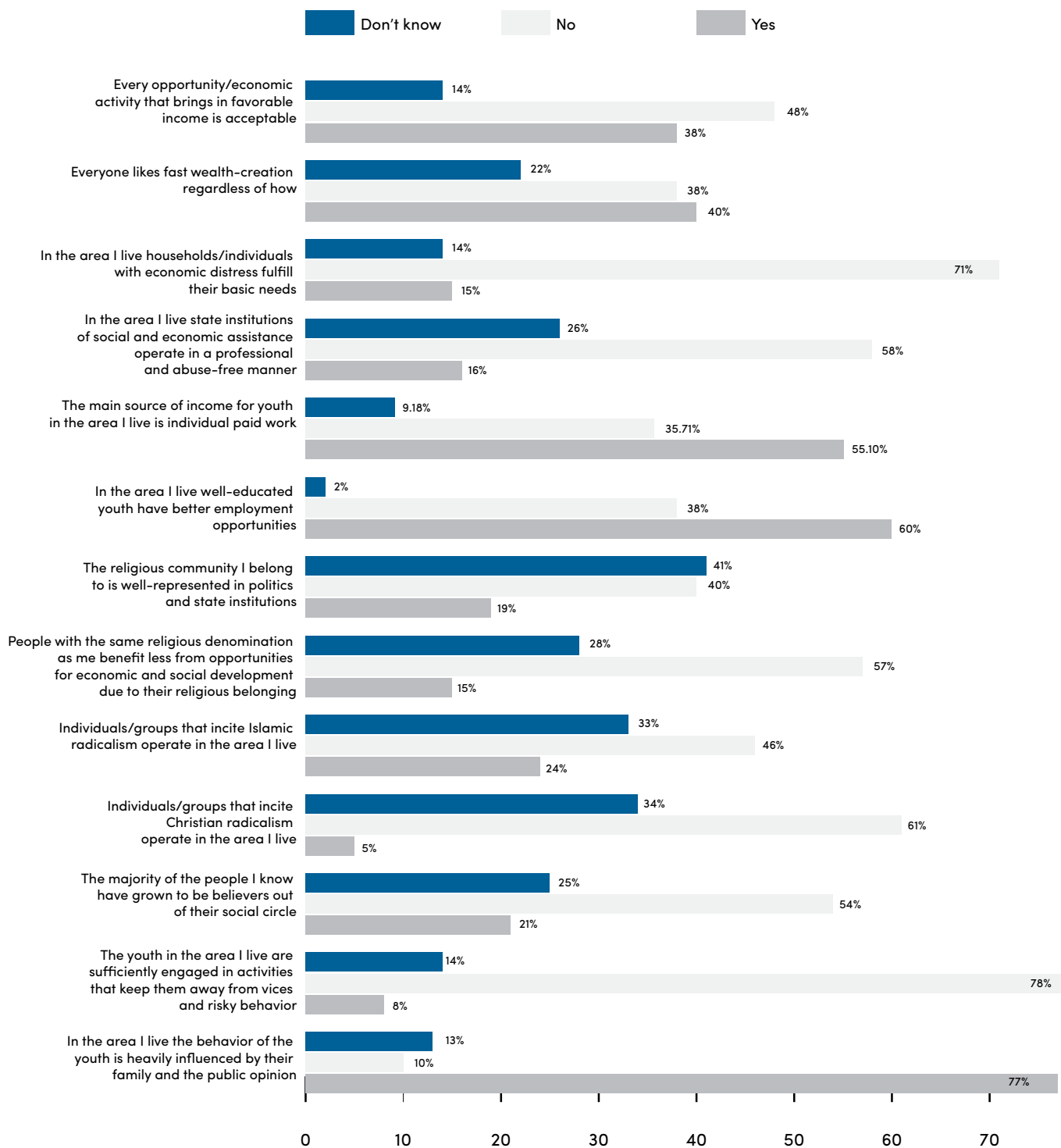


Figure 115. Do you agree with the following statements? (Continued)

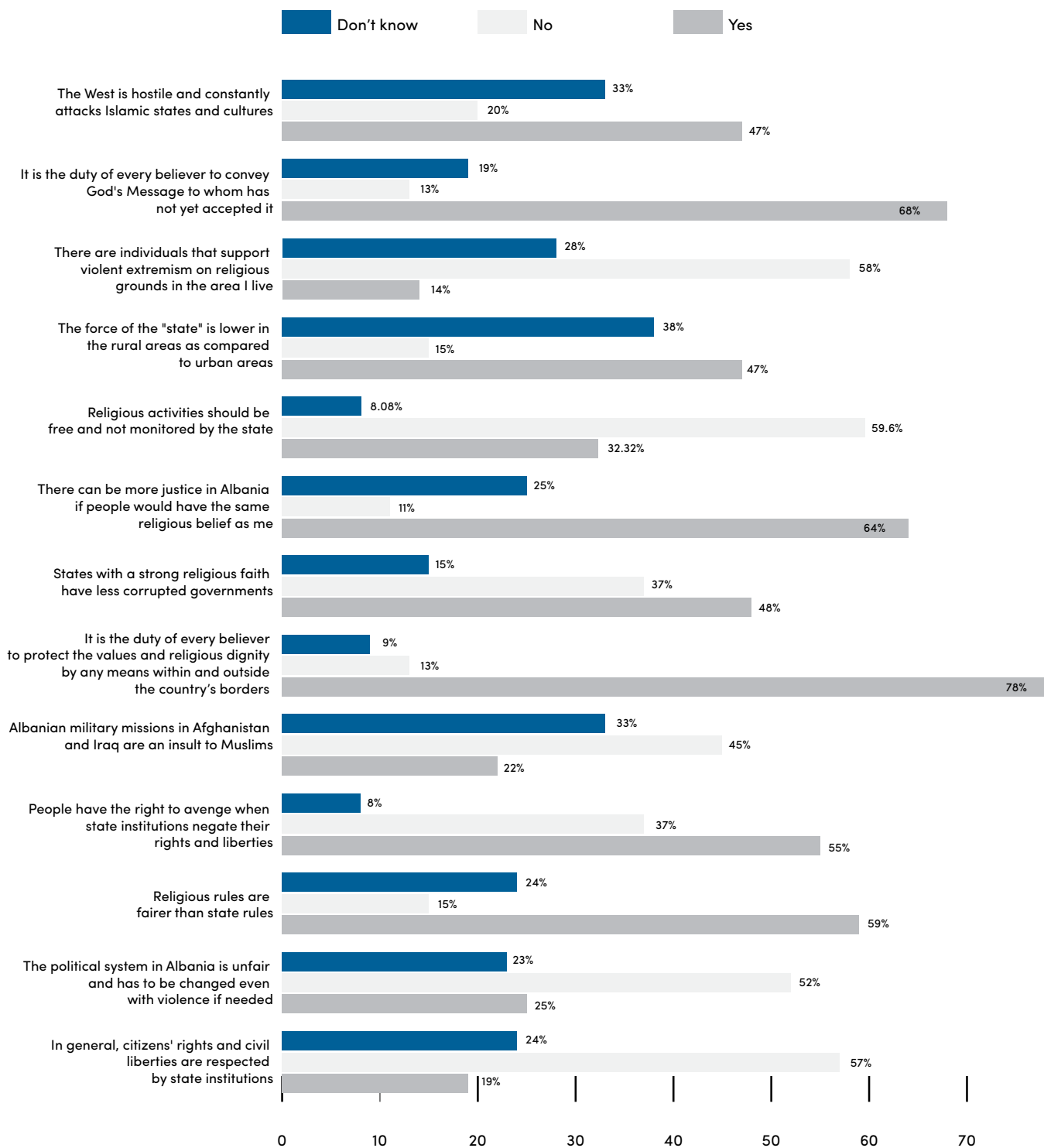


Figure 116. Do you agree with the following statements? (Continued)

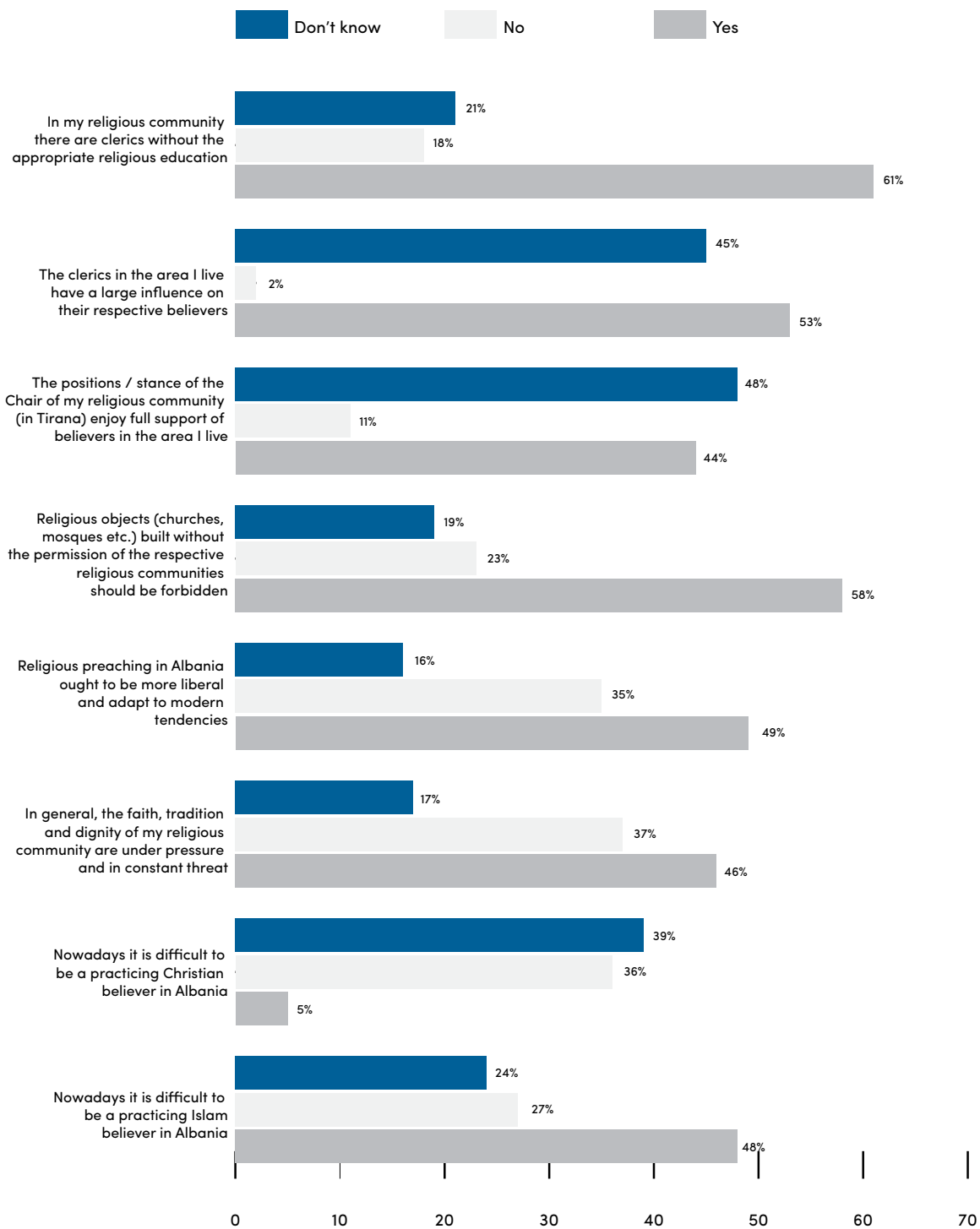


Figure 117. To which religious denomination does the majority of your social circle belong, if any? (in %)
N=99

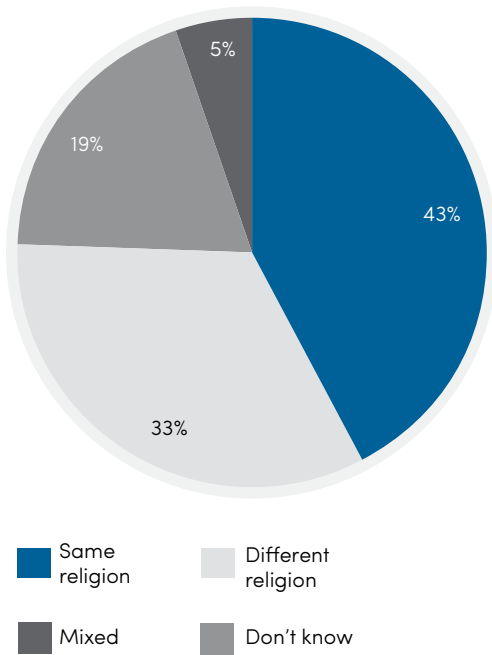


Figure 118. Please evaluate using a scale of 1 to 5 where "1 = religious hatred" and "5=religious harmony" (in %)
N=99

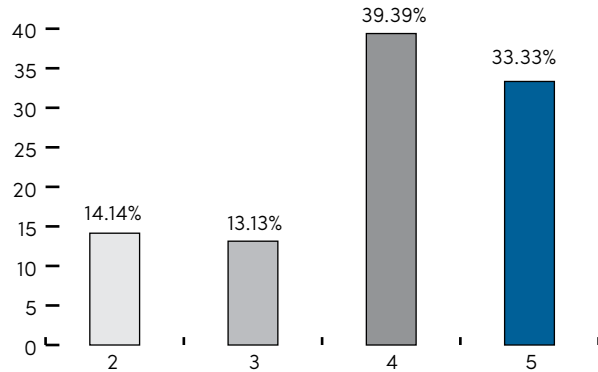


Figure 119. Would you personally support the marriage of a family member (your siblings or children) with an individual belonging to a different religious denomination? (in %)
N=100

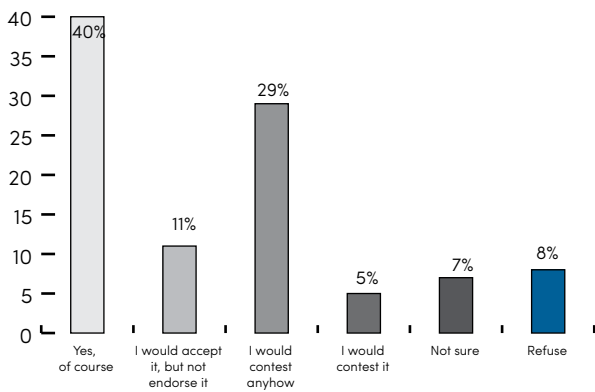
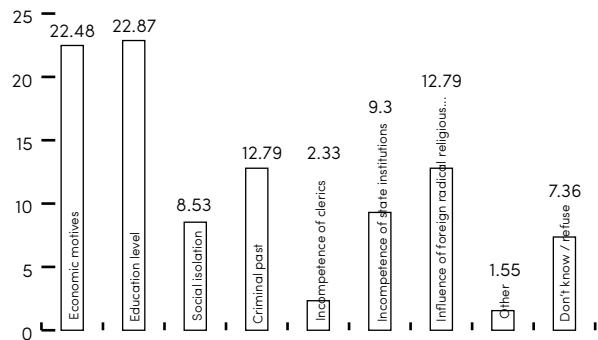


Figure 120. Three main causes that generate or drive religious radicalism in Albania (in %)
N=100



MUNICIPALITY OF KUKËS

Figure 121. Gender
N=100

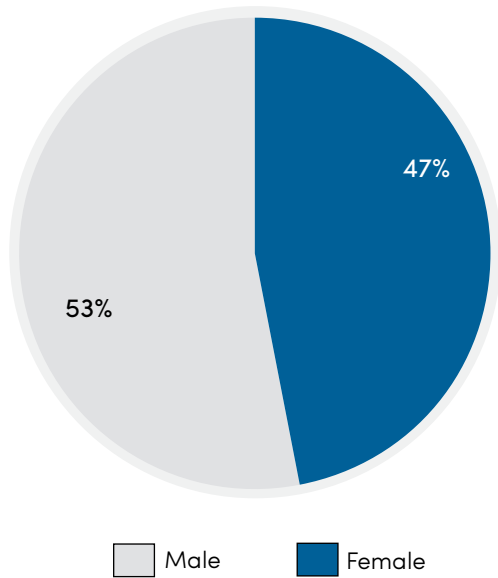


Figure 122. Age structure (in %)
N=101

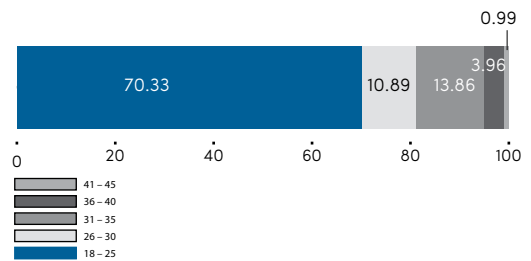


Figure 123. Education (in %)
N=102

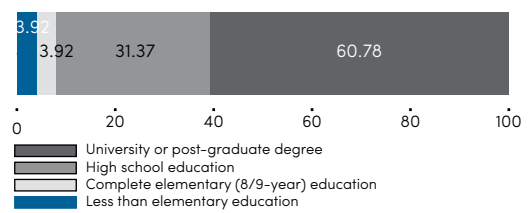


Figure 124. Civil status
N=102

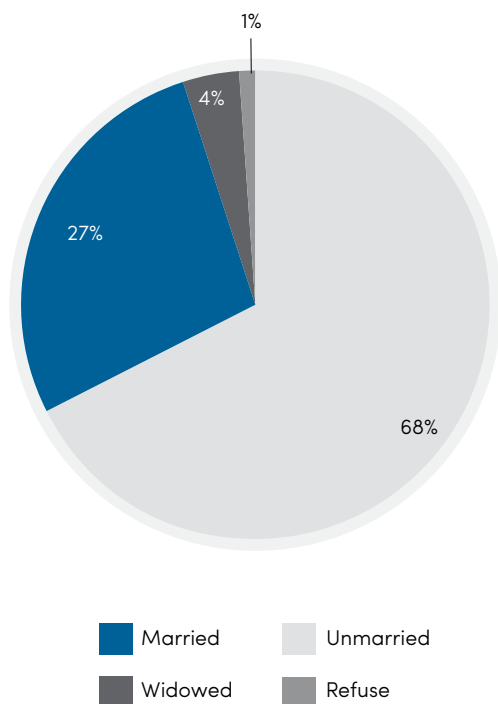


Figure 125. Employment status (in %)
N=101

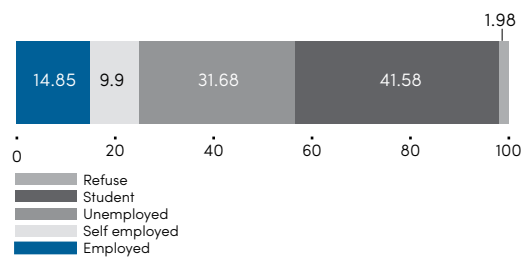


Figure 126. Religious affiliation (in %)
N=101

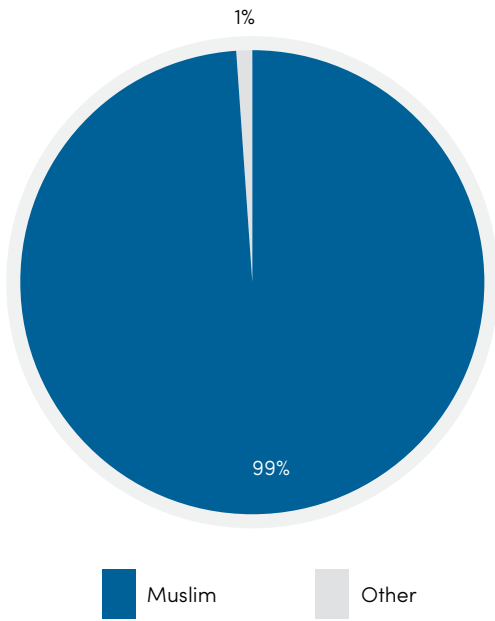


Figure 127. Your religion is similar to your parents (in %)
N=102

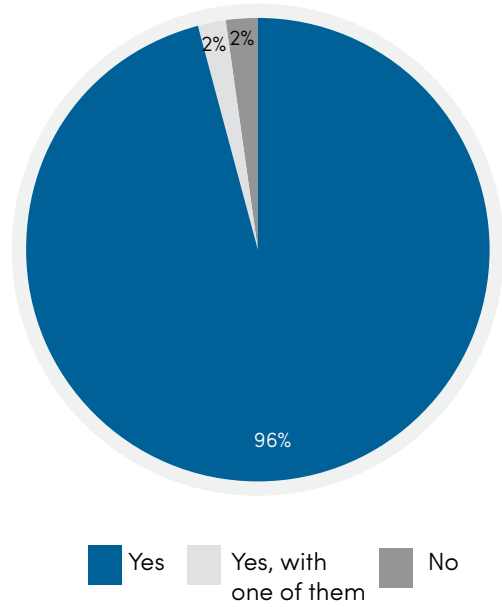


Figure 128. Are you actively practicing your religion? (in %)
N=102

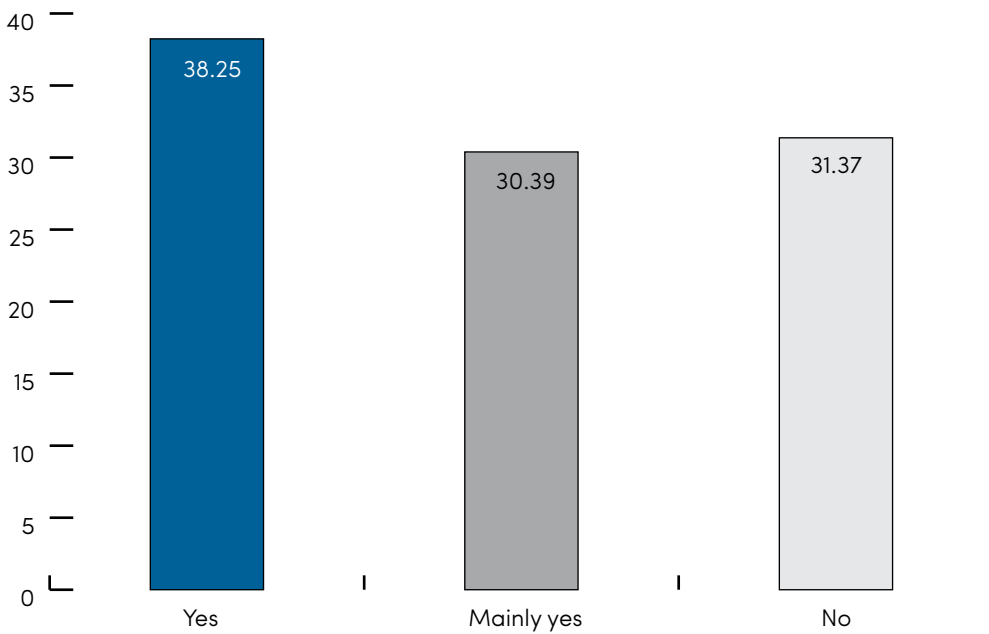


Figure 129. Do you agree with the following statements?

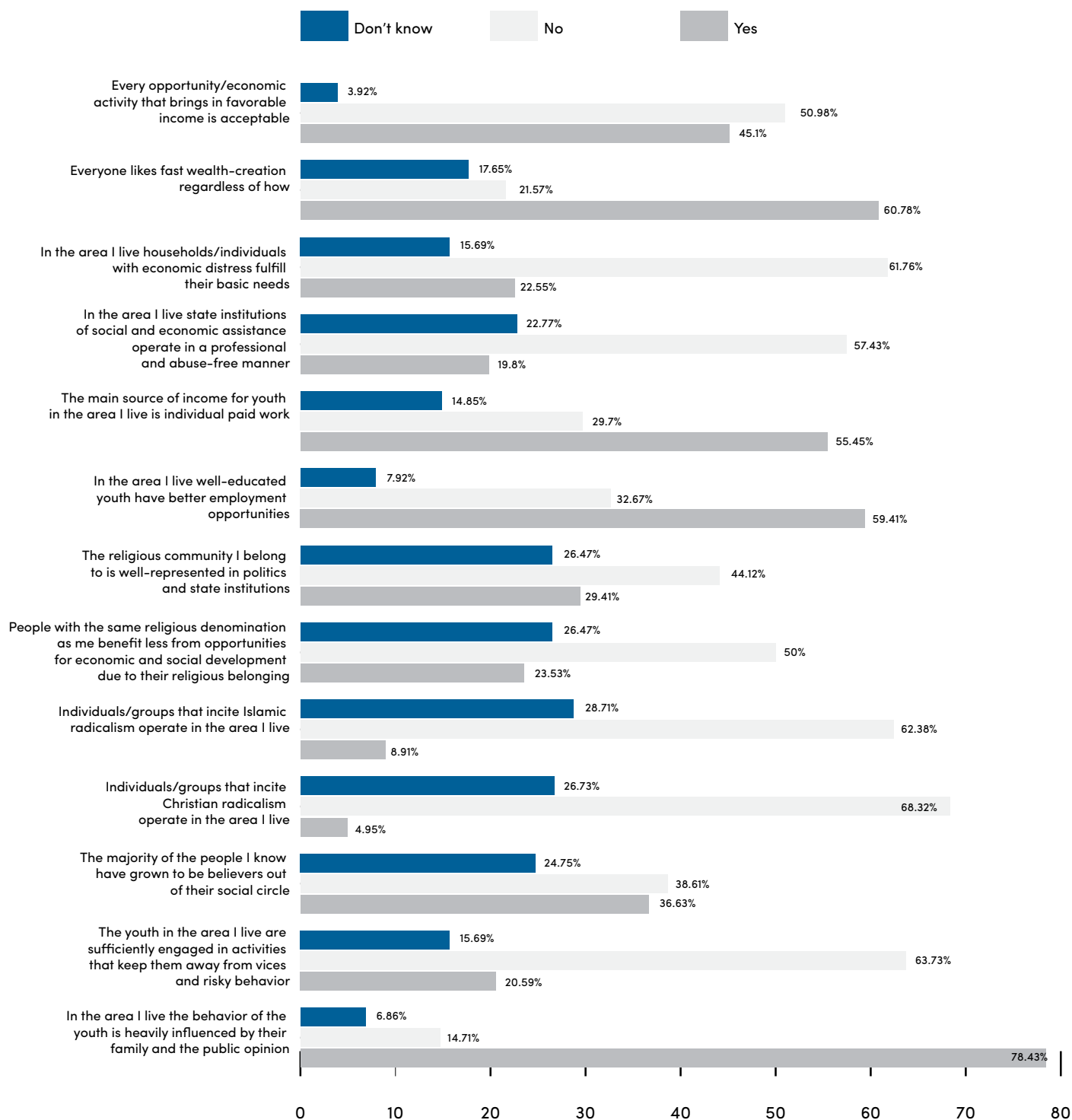


Figure 130. Do you agree with the following statements? (Continued)

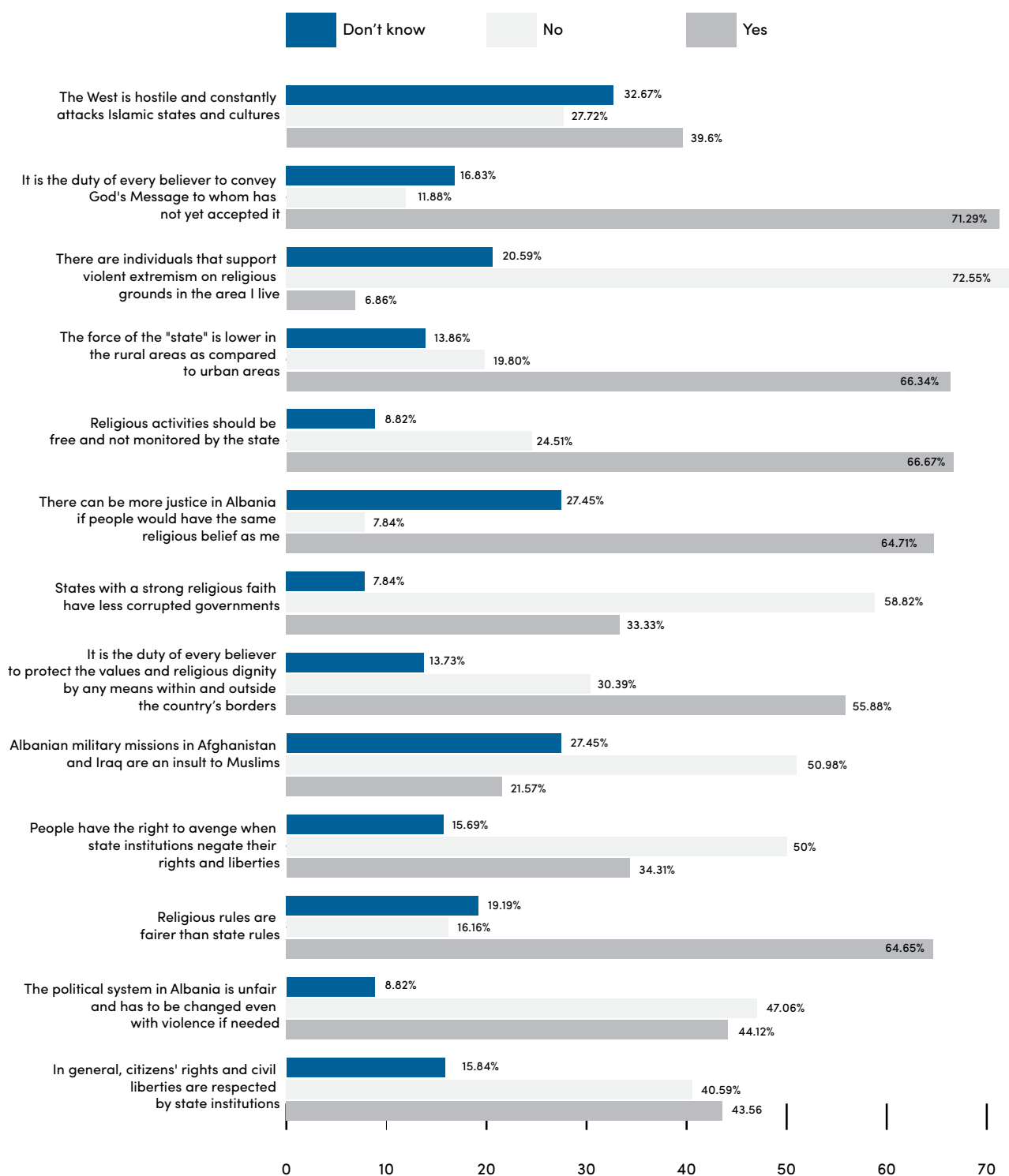


Figure 131. Do you agree with the following statements? (Continued)

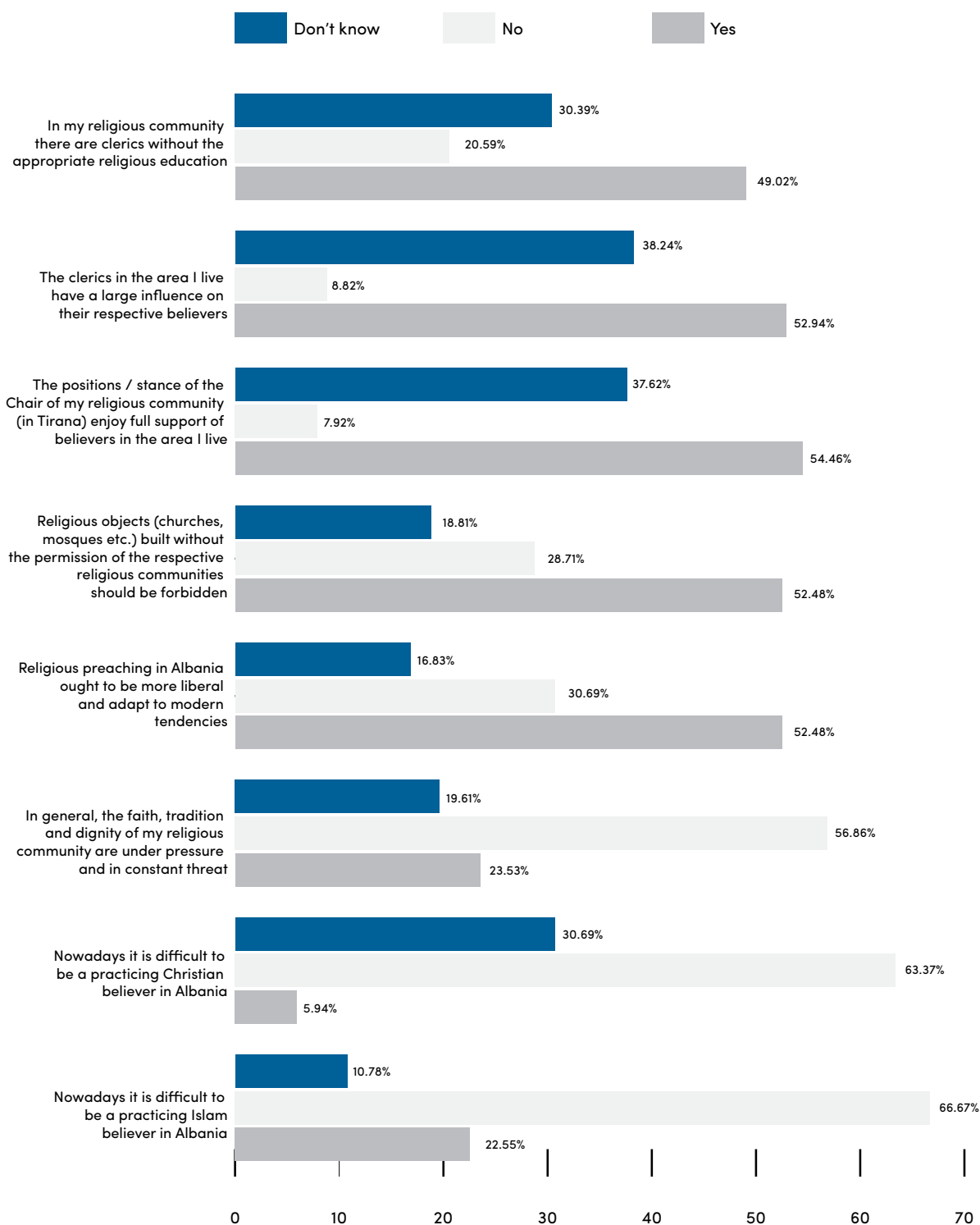


Figure 132. To which religious denomination does the majority of your social circle belong, if any? (in %)
N=101

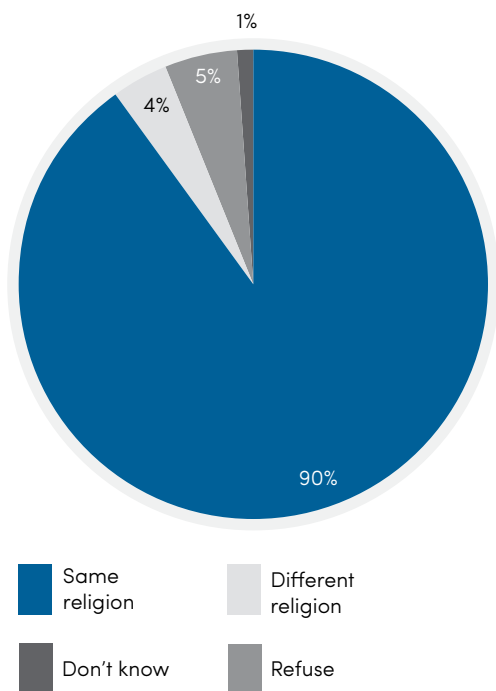


Figure 133. Please evaluate using a scale of 1 to 5 where "1 = religious hatred" and "5=religious harmony" (in %)
N=102

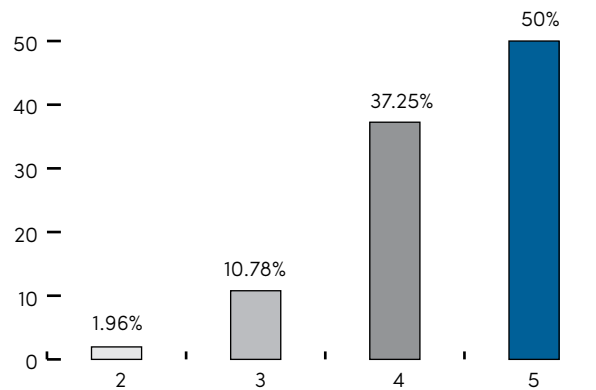


Figure 134. Would you personally support the marriage of a family member (your siblings or children) with an individual belonging to a different religious denomination? (in %)
N=101

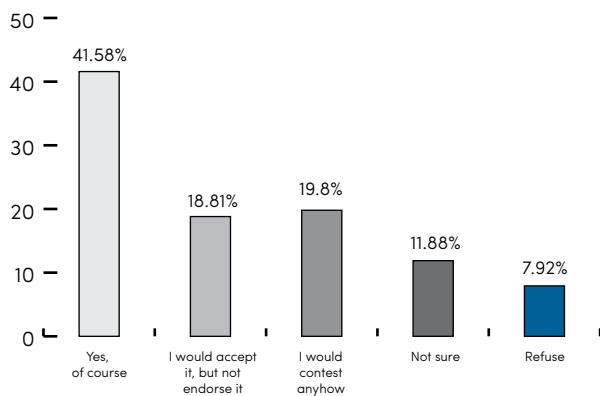
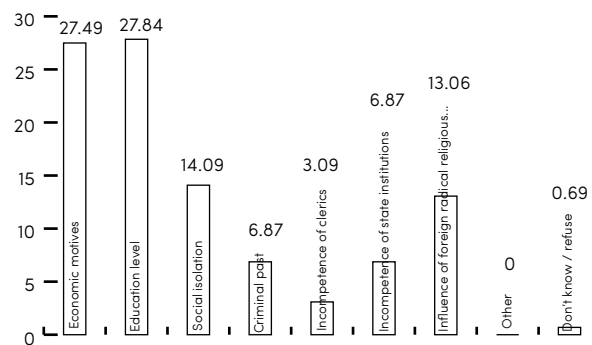


Figure 135. Three main causes that generate or drive religious radicalism in Albania (in %)
N=102





QUESTIONNAIRE

In the framework of a research project on religious communities and Albanian society, the Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM) is conducting a survey with religious believers (belonging to various religious denominations) and non-believers. The aim of this survey is to analyze the perceptions and attitudes of respondents with regard to religion, relationships within and between different religious communities along with attitudes of society and institutions towards them. The survey targets youth and young households and therefore IDM is surveying individuals until 45 years old.

The data from this survey will offer useful information for promoting religious harmony as a value of Albanian society and preventing various tendencies that might imperil religious cohabitation.

IDM guarantees the anonymity of the participants and the use of data exclusively for research purposes.

Thank you for your collaboration!

I. SECTION 1

1. RESIDENCE:

Village/City: _____ Commune/
Municipality: _____ District: _____

2. GENDER:

Male	1
Female	2

3. WHAT IS YOUR AGE?

18 – 25 years old	1
26 – 30 years old	2
31 – 35 years old	3
36 – 40 years old	4
41 – 45 years old	5

4. WHAT IS THE HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION YOU HAVE SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETED?

Less than Lower Secondary (8/9 years)	1
Lower Secondary	2
High School	3
University or post-graduate degree	4
Refuse	99

5. MARITAL STATUS:

Married	1
Cohabiting	2
Single	3
Divorced	4
Widowed	5
Refuse	99

6. EMPLOYMENT STATUS:

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

7. WHAT IS YOUR RELIGIOUS BELIEF?

Muslim	1
Orthodox	2
Catholic	3
Bektashi	4
Protestant	5
Other (Specify: _____)	6
Atheist [GO TO SESSION II]	7
Refuse	99

8. IS YOUR RELIGIOUS BELIEF THE SAME AS YOUR PARENTS' ONE?

Yes, both my parents	1
Yes, with one of them	2
No	3
Don't know/Refuse	99

9. ARE YOU ACTIVELY PRACTICING YOUR RELIGION?

YES – I regularly practice religious rituals and rules	1
Mainly YES – I follow the main religious rituals	2
NO – I am a believer but I do not practice religious rituals and rules	3
Refuse	99

II. SECTION 2

10. DO YOU AGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS?

Statement	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW
In the area I live the behavior of the youth is heavily influenced by their family and the public opinion.	1	2	99
The youth in the area I live are sufficiently engaged in activities that keep them away from vices and risky behavior.	1	2	99
The majority of the people I know have grown to be believers out of their social circle.	1	2	99
Individuals/groups that incite Christian radicalism operate in the area I live.	1	2	99
Individuals/groups that incite Islamic radicalism operate in the area I live.	1	2	99
People with the same religious denomination as me benefit less from opportunities for economic and social development due to their religious belonging.	1	2	99
The religious community I belong to is well-represented in politics and state institutions.	1	2	99
In the area I live well-educated youth have better employment opportunities.	1	2	99
The main source of income for youth in the area I live is individual paid work.	1	2	99

Statement	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW
In the area I live state institutions of social and economic assistance operate in a professional and abuse-free manner.	1	2	99
In the area I live households/individuals with economic distress fulfill their basic needs.	1	2	99
Everyone likes fast wealth-creation regardless of how.	1	2	99
Every opportunity/economic activity that brings in favorable income is acceptable.	1	2	99
In general, citizens' rights and civil liberties are respected by state institutions.	1	2	99
The political system in Albania is unfair and has to be changed even with violence if needed.	1	2	99
Religious rules are fairer than state rules.	1	2	99
People have the right to avenge when state institutions negate their rights and liberties.	1	2	99
Albanian military missions in Afghanistan and Iraq are an insult to Muslims.	1	2	99
It is the duty of every believer to protect the values and religious dignity by any means within and outside the country's borders.	1	2	99
States with a strong religious faith have less corrupted governments.	1	2	99
There can be more justice in Albania if people would have the same religious belief as me.	1	2	99
Religious activities should be free and not monitored by the state.	1	2	99
The force of the "state" is lower in the rural areas as compared to urban areas.	1	2	99
There are individuals that support violent extremism on religious grounds in the area I live.	1	2	99
It is the duty of every believer to convey God's Message to whom has not yet accepted it.	1	2	99
The West is hostile and constantly attacks Islamic states and cultures.	1	2	99
Nowadays it is difficult to be a practicing believer of Islam in Albania.	1	2	99
Nowadays it is difficult to be a practicing Christian believer in Albania.	1	2	99
In general, the faith, tradition and dignity of my religious community are under pressure and in constant threat.	1	2	99

Statement	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW
Religious preaching in Albania ought to be more liberal and adapt to modern tendencies.	1	2	99
Religious objects (churches, mosques etc.) built without the permission of the respective religious communities should be forbidden.	1	2	99
The positions / stance of the Chair of my religious community (in Tirana) enjoy full support of believers in the area I live.	1	2	99
The clerics in the area I live have a large influence on their respective believers.	1	2	99
In my religious community there are clerics without the appropriate religious education.	1	2	99

III. SECTION 3

11. TO WHICH RELIGIOUS DENOMINATION DOES THE MAJORITY OF YOUR SOCIAL CIRCLE BELONG, IF ANY?

People with the same religious denomination as me	1
People with different religious denominations	2
Atheists	3
Mixed (atheists and of different religious denominations)	4
Don't know, never thought of it	5
Refuse	99

12. IN YOUR OPINION, IN ALBANIA THERE EXISTS MOSTLY:

PLEASE EVALUATE USING A SCALE OF 1 TO 5 WHERE "1 = RELIGIOUS HATRED" AND "5=RELIGIOUS HARMONY"

Religious hatred	1	2	3	4	5	Religious harmony
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13. WOULD YOU PERSONALLY SUPPORT THE MARRIAGE OF A FAMILY MEMBER (YOUR SIBLINGS OR CHILDREN) WITH AN INDIVIDUAL BELONGING TO A DIFFERENT RELIGIOUS DENOMINATION?

Yes, of course	1
I would accept it, but not endorse it	2
I would contest anyhow	3
I would contest it in the case the other person is actively practicing religion	4
Not sure	5
Refuse	99

14. IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT ARE THE THREE MAIN CAUSES THAT GENERATE OR DRIVE RELIGIOUS RADICALISM AMONG INDIVIDUALS IN ALBANIA?

Economic motives (eg. Unemployment, poverty etc.)	1
Education level	2
Social isolation	3
Criminal past (people with criminal records)	4
Incompetence of clerics	5
Incompetence of state institutions	6
Influence of foreign radical religious groups	7
Other (Specify:_____)	8
Don't know/refuse	99



ENDNOTES

1. Source: INSTAT (www.instat.gov.al). A significant number of respondents refused to answer to Census 2011 question on religious background, thus leading to various religious communities contesting the data. The Bektashi community accounts for nearly 2.1%.
2. Several investigative reports on this phenomenon have been published by "Reporter.al" (See for example <http://www.reporter.al/rruga-e-myslimaneve-shqiptare-drejt-xihadit-ne-siri/>) and "Balkan Insight" (see <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/albanian-islamists-smuggled-italy-s-lady-jihad-to-syria>).
3. See for instance a recent article "Balkan fighters abroad: Holy warriors" of The Economist (August 2014). Source: <http://www.economist.com/blogs/easternapproaches/2014/08/balkan-fighters-abroad>
4. See Combating Terrorism Center (CTC) report "Foreign fighters from the western Balkans in Syria" (June 2014). Source: <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/foreign-fighters-from-the-western-balkans-in-syria>
5. While other areas are also reported to be problematic, the IDM study focuses on regions where presumably radical activity is less controlled, i.e. underdeveloped periphery and bordering areas.
6. As of the second half of 2015, a new administrative and territorial division of Albania composed of 61 municipalities in 12 regions (qark) is replacing the previous administrative map consisting of (308) communes and (65) municipalities. The study defines its geographical target based on the existing administrative division (communes and municipalities), unconditioned by the fact that current official data and information on various variables and characteristics of the areas are based on the previous administrative division.
7. See Guide to the Drivers of violent Extremism (February 2009); Development Assistance and Counter-Extremism: A Guide to Programming (October 2009).
8. The total resident population of all eight areas is approximately 90.000 inhabitants as per 2011 Census of Population (INSTAT).
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57. The majority of representatives from state institutions at central level and in all eight target areas did not show sufficient level of information on the phenomenon other than awareness from media reporting. Key informants from state security institutions (police, Intelligence) and other law enforcement agencies were the only representatives who provided very solid information on the phenomenon in the semi-structured interviews.
58. Representatives of Albanian Islamic Community suggests that currently clerics come from Arabic and Turkish schools, while there are also a significant number of clerics with no formal religious education (autodidacts).
59. A number of interviewees close to AIC and other key informants, such as experts and investigative reporters, have underlined these divergences. Many of them report on a struggle over power (and other issues of concern) within AIC, whereas alleged Gulenist groups, according to key informants, have control over AIC higher ranks.
60. This is confirmed by a number of well-informed respondents, coming mostly from law enforcement agencies, investigative media but also AIC members. In order to reach at more members, such groups often provide support for employment and startups for their members.
61. Such cases are confirmed by former and current representatives of AIC, various experts and representatives of the State Police and Intelligence interviewed during the inception phase.
62. See for instance the daily Shqiptarja.com (<http://www.shqiptarja.com/aktualitet/2731/nga-tirana-n--siri-vdes-kund-r-assad-e--ma-dua-trupin-e-djalit-134753.html>). Various Islamic social media and forums in late 2012 have also reported for another victim from Albania (Ermal Xhelo from Vlora).
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66. In a media interview, AIC Head (Skender Brucaj) suggested that upon his election as chairman (in March 2014) AIC has established a working group to identify illegal mosques. Source: Daily "Mapo" dated 17 March 2014 <http://mapo.al/2014/03/17/kreu-myslimaneve-projekti-per-te-vene-nen-kontroll-xhamite-ilegale/>.
67. Agreement approved by the Parliament of Albania; Law No. 10056, dated 22.01.2009. Such agreements are also adopted for other religious communities in Albania. Legislation on religions in Albania after the year 1990 is available at SCC's website <http://www.kshk.gov.al/legjislacioni-per-fene-pas-vitit-1990/>.
68. Interviews with representatives of donor organizations supporting civil society in Albania
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71. Section 2 of the questionnaire includes a total of 34 statements, which represent "control questions" for the 21 drivers. One to two such control-statements are used for each specific driver.
72. Interviews conducted during the inception phase (Tirana-based key informants) and field work (interviews with key informants in all eight target areas). Interviews with focus groups were conducted upon completion of the survey.
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142. Although the number of student respondents who favor avenger is small (33), in terms of this demography analysis this group stands at 33.3% of all respondents who report to be students.
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Syria are under surveillance by security institutions. Interviews with Tirana-based key informants

149. Interviews with AIC representatives in Tirana and at local level
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154. EC Progress Report for Albania (2014) pp. 2. Source: http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2014/20141008-albania-progress-report_en.pdf
155. Transparency International, CPI 2014 Report. Source <https://www.transparency.org/cpi2014/results>.
156. Fund for Peace – FFP, "Fragile States Index 2014". Source: <http://fsi.fundforpeace.org/rankings-2014>. For description of indicators please visit <http://fsi.fundforpeace.org/indicators>.
157. Generally, these initiatives use modern ICT tools like Stop Corruption (<http://www.stopkorrupsionit.al/>), the Digital Commissariat android app (<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.komisariati.dixhital.al&hl=en>), while many state institutions have an online page where citizens can denounce corruption in the judiciary, executive branch and other agencies.
158. IDRA "IMPUNITY – Perceptions and experience of Albanian citizens (2014 – 2015)". Source: http://www.idra.al/files/reports/impunity_2014/fact_sheet_en.pdf.
159. IDM's Civil Society Index for Albania (2010) suggests that civic engagement is one of the main concerns for civil society in the country (defined as "the arena, outside of the family, the state, and the market, which is created by individual and collective actions, organizations and institutions to advance shared interests"). Source: <http://idmalbania.org/?p=3519>.
160. Albania (45%) and Kazakhstan (41%) are the only two countries where fewer than half of Muslims link morality to faith in God, according to Pew Research Center "The World's Muslims: Religion, Politics and Society" (2013).
161. In general, this view is shared by more than 50% of respondents within each demography sub-category, except for female respondents (48% of them agree) and respondents who do not practice at all religion (only 34.9% of them agree).
162. Focus group discussions (May 2015)
163. The Fragile States Index, produced by The Fund for Peace (FFP), is a critical tool in highlighting not only the normal pressures that all states experience, but also in identifying when those pressures are pushing a state towards the brink of failure.
164. Fund for Peace – FFP "Fragile States Index 2014". Source: <http://fsi.fundforpeace.org/rankings-2014> and <http://fsi.fundforpeace.org/rankings-2013-sortable>.
165. See Angel Rabasa "Radical Islam in East Africa" page 7. Santa Monica, CA:

RAND Corporation, 2009. http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2009/RAND_MG782.pdf

166. UNODC's "Corruption in Albania: Bribery as Experienced by the Population" (2011) reports that bribery, especially for healthcare services, is more present in rural areas and citizens from these areas show a higher percentage of 'acceptance of bribe as a common practice' (p. 54). However, the report suggests that the lowest prevalence rate of bribery is registered in distant mountainous areas. Source: http://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/statistics/corruption/Albania_corruption_report_2011_web_small.pdf.
167. EC Progress Report for Albania 2014 (p. 59) suggests that "further work is needed to ensure access to good and safe quality healthcare for the most vulnerable groups, especially in rural areas".
168. Interview with key informants (Tirana) during the inception phase of the study
169. Lazarat, a village in the southern Albania, was believed to be Europe's biggest illegal producer of marijuana with an estimated 900 tons of cannabis annually, worth EUR 4.5 billion. In June 2014, the Albanian State Police undertook the largest operation to put the village under control. Local and international media have broadly covered the operation (see <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-27945950>).
170. Interview with key informants from the media sector. The example refers to the forty Muslim families practicing religion in Lazarat that have refused to 'cultivate cannabis' as a source of income. The Chairman of AIC has praised this example in a visit to Lazarat in August 2014. Source: <http://www.kmsh.al/al/2014/08/kryetari-i-kmsh-se-skender-brucaj-takim-me-besimtaret-e-lazaratit/>.
171. Focus group discussions, May 2015
172. Interview with key informant, November 2014
173. "VE groups may interpret such activity as oppression of the ummah and encourage isolation of individual believers", Interviews with key informants, January 2015.
174. Interviews with key informants and focus groups have not reported specific cases of coercion or intimidation to join VE groups. Although the existence of religious radicals or violent extremists is not questioned many of the key informants suggest that recruitment is carried out through different means, not necessarily by using coercion or intimidation.
175. Guilain Denoeux and Lynn Carter "Development Assistance and Counter-Extremism: A Guide to Programming (October 2009), pp. 28.
176. Interviews with key informants during the Inception Phase
177. Interviews with key informants in Tirana and local level
178. "Progress towards meeting the economic criteria for EU accession: the EU Commission's 2014 assessments" European Economy, Occasional Papers 205 | December 2014, pp 8 and 12. Source: http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/publications/occasional_paper/2014/pdf/ocp205_en.pdf
179. US Department of State's "Money Laundering and Financial Crimes" Report for Albania in 2014, pp 19-20. Source: <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/222700.pdf>. see also EC Progress report for Albania 2014 pp 23-24 and pp 54.

180. A. Bogdani, F. Veizaj "Misteri i financimit të xhihadistëve shqiptarë" (Eng. The Mystery of Financing Albanian Jihadists), 17 December 2014. Source: <http://www.reporter.al/misteri-financimit-te-xhihadisteve-shqiptare>
181. Through the hawala system it is difficult to trace payments. Panagiotis Liargovas & Spyridon Repousis (2011) argue that hawala or underground banking has been used for years by Albanian migrants in Greece. See Panagiotis Liargovas, Spyridon Repousis, (2011), "Underground banking or hawala and Greece-Albania remittance corridor", *Journal of Money Laundering Control*, Vol. 14 Iss: 4 pp. 313 – 323.
182. Interview with key informant, referring to a Spanish media report suggesting that small businesses and other ISIS sympathizers use 'hawala' system to secretly transfer money to terrorists. See José María Irujo "Network of 250 Spanish butchers and phone shops funding jihadists in Syria", *El Pais* 6 February 2015. Source: http://elpais.com/m/elpais/2015/02/02/inenglish/1422892172_955064.html
183. See more detailed information on IDM survey findings in the subsequent section "Cultural VE drivers".
184. Focus group discussions and interviews with AIC clerics and believers at local level have reported in this regard only general considerations on state response to VE through security measures and few cases of alleged discrimination.
185. This driver is closely connected to "Islam under siege" VE driver under the category of Cultural drivers. Hence this is one of the two control-statements that is used by IDM survey to evaluate this driver as well.
186. Guilain Denoeux and Lynn Carter "Development Assistance and Counter Extremism: A Guide to Programming" (October 2009).
187. Ibid.
188. Christine Fair and Bryan Shepherd, "Research Note: Who Supports Terrorism? Insights from Fourteen Muslim Countries," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 29, No. 2, December/January 2006.
189. Interviews with AIC clergy at local level
190. This percentage is considerably higher than that of the respondents who believe that nowadays it is difficult to be a Christian believer practicing Christian religion" – with only 6% more of the respondents. Source: IDM Survey 2015. For more details, see the data on the survey (provided in the Section of Appendices).
191. Guilain Denoeux and Lynn Carter "Development Assistance and Counter Extremism: A Guide to Programming" (October 2009).
192. Ibid.
193. Guilain Denoeux and Lynn Carter "Development Assistance and Counter Extremism: A Guide to Programming" (October 2009).
194. Interview with key informants of this study
195. <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e2319>
196. <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/globe-debate/another-battle-with-islams-true-believers/article20802390/>
197. Interviews with key informants.

198. This control question was used to also assess one of the socio-economic drivers (mentioned above). The analysis refers to "Islamic radicalism" due to the religious dominance of this community. Irrespective of this, the IDM survey asked respondent on "Christian radicalism" as well and the data on this question are given in this section.
199. Albanian media has reported similar cases (e.g. Permet).
200. Albanian legislation outlines clear rules and procedures for building religious objects (churches, mosques etc.) whereas both, state institutions including the State Committees of Cults and recognized religious communities respectively are directly involved in such procedures.
201. Interviews with AIC clerics at local level and other AIC representatives. Many other experts interviewed by this study agree with such approach and recognize value in AIC efforts in this regard, as well as the understanding of state institutions which have carried out concrete actions against illegal (non-religious) buildings over the past year or so.
202. The only exception is noted among respondents of "26-30 years old" where such support stands at 49%, which is still fairly close to the average of 56% of all surveyed respondents.
203. 25% of "mainly religious" respondents and 28% of respondents who practice regularly religious rituals disagree.
204. Focus groups discussions, May 2015.
205. A number of issues are reported to be the center of these divergences such as representativeness at AIC higher ranks, empowerment of local clerics, nurturing of the Albanian tradition of Islam and diminishing foreign influences etc.
206. A local AIC cleric suggests that the close and continuous contacts with believers are essential and the choices of AIC must enjoy ummah support. "Imams are appointed by the AIC in Tirana, but it is much more important that they are accepted by the ummah".
207. Interviews with key informants
208. Interview with key informants
209. As the survey sample includes also respondents randomly selected in the target areas, the question is neutral from the religious community point of view.
210. Only 33.3% consider themselves so and another 7.6% report to be atheists. According to the same Study, the highest level of tolerance for people of a different religion (90.4%) would accept to having neighbors of a different religious affiliation). Civil Society Index (CSI) for Albania, IDM 2010 pp.24 and 38 (CIVICUS 2nd wave of CSI). Source: http://www.civicus.org/images/stories/csi/csi_phase2/csi%20albania%20acr_eng.pdf
211. Interviews with key informants in Tirana and in target areas.
212. Interviews with key informants
213. Focus group discussions
214. Government Restrictions Index (GRI) and Social Hostilities Index (SHI), Pew Research Center 2013. See GRI.Q.11 (harassment or intimidation of religious

groups by any level of government) on pp. 11, GRI.Q.12 (national government display hostility involving physical violence toward minority or non-approved religious groups) on pp. 12 and GRI.Q.19 (Did any level of government use force toward religious groups that resulted in individuals being killed, physically abused, imprisoned, detained or displaced from their homes, or having their personal or religious properties damaged or destroyed?) on pp. 20. Source: <http://www.pewforum.org/files/2015/02/Restrictions2015-results-by-country.pdf>. Nevertheless, Pew Research Center notes that “the study also does not attempt to determine whether particular restrictions are justified or unjustified”. See Preface of the study at <http://www.pewforum.org/2011/08/09/rising-restrictions-on-religion-preface/>.

215. Interviews with key informants.
216. 88.3% of respondents who answered this question are Muslims, 5.5% Bektashi, 2.6% Orthodox and 1% Catholics (less than 3% report other or no religious affiliation).
217. <http://www.kmsh.al/al/komuniteti-mysliman-i-shqjperise/myftinite/>
218. The first extremist movement was Al- Khawarij in 7th century. Nowadays, Islamic jihad, Al-Qaeda, Boko Haram, ISIS, etc., have similar features and goal: religious manipulation and use of violence to get to power.
219. Qur’an 4:171
220. Hadith, transmitted by Imam Ahmed.
221. Takfir, kufer, kafir, words from the same root, meaning unbeliever, denier of faith
222. Faith-abandoner, faith-renouncer
223. Qur’an, Al-Ankabut; 46
224. Qur’an, Al Baqarah; 256
225. Qur’an, Al Kafirun; 6
226. Hadith, prophetic statements
227. Qur’an, Al Maidah; 48
228. Al Mawrid, Dictionary of Arabic
229. Qur’an, Al Bekare; 216-217.
230. Consultation with experts based on religious and logical discourses
231. Religious stance based on Shariah laws <http://www.binbaz.org.sa/>
232. The areas of the local government units are referred to on the basis of the previous administrative and territorial division of the country.
233. Kukes was suggested as a “control-zone” for the research, given the fact that the inception phase did not confirm serious elements of violent extremism.
234. The total dependency ratio refers to the number of children aged 0 to 14 years plus the number of persons aged 65 years or over per 100 persons aged 15 to 64 years. According to the Census (2011), Albania’s total dependency ratio is 47% - a low rate for the European context.
235. In this section and therein, it should be considered that these data only offer

an illustrative overview of the ethnic composition of the LGUs. The data are not exhaustive due to the high item non-response rate (14%) for this question in the Census 2011.

236. The same assessment on ethnic-cultural indicators applies here. Item non-response rate for this question was 13.8% in the Census of 2011.
237. Source: Census (2011), Authors' calculation



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ISBN 978-9928-4123-5-5



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