



Institute for Democracy and Mediation  
Instituti për Demokraci dhe Ndërmjetësim

The status of

# VIOLENT EXTREMISM

in Albania <sup>2021</sup>

A national assessment of drivers, forms and threats



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Tirana, March 2021

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U.S. EMBASSY  
Tirana, Albania



Institute for Democracy and Mediation  
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## List of acronyms

BiH	Bosnia and Herzegovina
BIRN	Balkan Investigative Report Network
CVE	Counter violent extremism
CVE Centre	National Co-ordination Centre for Countering Violent Extremism Albania
ERF	Extremism Research Forum
EU	European Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IDM	Institute for Democracy and Mediation
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INSTAT	National Institute of Statistics
KMSH	Albanian Muslim Community
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
P/CVE	Prevention and countering of violent extremism
PVE	Prevent violent extremism
SPAK	Special Anti-Corruption Structure
UK	United Kingdom
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
USA	United States of America
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VE	Violent extremism
VERLT	Violent extremism and radicalisation leading to terrorism
WB	Western Balkans



# 1. Executive summary

More than six years have passed since the departure of at least 144 Albanian citizens to Iraq and Syria. While the acute threat has been averted due to the strengthening of the legal framework, building of P/CVE capacities, and implementation of the National CVE Strategy and accompanying Action Plan, violent extremism remains present in Albania. Following a first baseline assessment in 2015 and a subsequent national assessment of drivers, forms, and threats of violent extremism in Albania conducted in 2018, this study assesses the state of affairs following six years of P/CVE actions, and the salience of drivers and other related factors that feed into or enable violent extremism. Substantial improvements in several of the measured drivers of violent extremism are observed, such as the respecting of citizens' rights and freedoms, institutions operating in an abuse-free manner, good job opportunities for well-educated Albanians, the number of people accepting illegal economic activity has decreased, and the support for whether to allow inciting of or engagement in armed conflicts abroad has decreased. Public awareness on the phenomenon of violent extremism, its risks and threats in general were strengthened over the past few years. The willingness among the Albanian population to take back Albanian citizens that have lived in conflict zones such as Syria also increased significantly – even if this would be in their own community.

However, the lack of socio-economic opportunities, the state of democracy, and the functioning of the rule of law, as well as perceptions of perceived marginalisation may leave some individuals vulnerable to violent extremism. Young, unemployed, or isolated individuals might be particularly susceptible to violent extremist groups. Albanians with low levels of education are more likely to accept illegal economic activity to make ends meet or to support violent means to achieve political change and protect their values, rights, or freedoms. Practising believers even more often – already see an opportunity for religion to address corruption and impunity, as they believe that countries with strong religious faith have less corrupt governments and Albania would have more justice if more people would join their religion.

Perceptions of societal discrimination towards an individual or community (or both) in a broad sense can be a driver of violent extremism. Although religious tolerance prevails inside Albania, 1 in 4 Albanian Muslims surveyed perceives law enforcement institutions to be harsher with practising Muslims. Compared to the 2018 study, people agree more often that the EU is unfair with Muslim-majority countries in the Balkans, or that the international system is fundamentally unfair and hostile to Muslim societies and peoples than in 2018. Similarly, almost 1 in 4 Albanians agrees that Islam in Albania is faced with foreign influences. In such background, it is easier for violent extremist groups to promote themselves as a righteous alternative to the perceived immoral or unjust governing elites.

While over the past few years, religious violent extremism has been a primary concern in Albania, the 2018 study 'Violent Extremism in Albania' (IDM, 2018), noted an increased potential for other types of extremism in the country. Indeed, this study confirms that Albanians are more concerned about political extremism than with religious or nationalist extremism. Albanians are more likely to report that political extremist groups or individuals (27.3%) are operating in their community than religious (12.1%) or nationalist (7.6%) extremist groups or individuals.

Considering the expected repatriation and reintegration of Albanian nationals from Syria, it remains important to continue efforts that prevent violent extremism by shrinking the enabling space in which such groups operate. The support of the general population and the receiving communities



in particular is instrumental for a sustainable resocialisation of the returnees. When it comes to an individual rejecting an extremist religious ideology, Albanians perceive not institutions, but the community, social circle, and adequate religious education as the main factors to make individuals reject extremist religious ideologies. In order to transform the present P/CVE strategy into a sustainable, inclusive and cross-sectoral framework for community resilience against all forms of violent extremism, the following priority actions are most pressing:

1. An action-based, tailored strategy is required in order to address context-specific issues for vulnerable communities, in lieu of an ideological-based strategy that focuses on religion only. A comprehensive P/CVE strategy should reflect all forms of violent extremism and should be guided on the principles of community resilience and inclusive dialogue.
2. Strengthening civic space in Albania is crucial in inciting citizens to participate in decision-making. Civic education initiatives, combined with the respective legislation amendments, are more likely to yield positive outcomes that lead to fostering accountability, while enabling marginalized communities to engage in a safe space, where they can address their frustrated expectations and discontent with the state of affairs.
3. A whole-of-government approach is required to enhance the legitimacy of central and local institutions, strengthening the rule of law and increasing efforts in impeding criminal and informal economy, as well as endemic corruption. Strengthening capacity-building of local government institutions, in particular is of utmost emergency, in order to sustainably improve their performance in service delivery.
4. Although religious tolerance is a fundamental value in the Albanian society, P/CVE stakeholders, educational institutions, and civil society should increase their efforts in addressing the root causes and effects of stereotypes, prejudice and societal discrimination based on ideological grounds. A strategic communication agenda is needed to cultivate a culture of respect for human rights that enables society to provide supportive social networks.
5. Empowering religious communities, by further including them in the prevention and reintegration strategies implemented by the CVE Centre and line ministries, is instrumental in facilitating the reintegration of returnees, by preparing and urging local clerics to assume an active role as religious re-educators. Increasing the credibility that religious communities hold, their ideas and values – require an assessment of institutional challenges that local religious authorities encounter, inhibiting them from playing a more significant role in prevention efforts.



## 2. Introduction

Six years have passed since the first assessment of violent extremism in Albania ‘Religious radicalism and violent extremism in Albania’<sup>1</sup> was conducted and three years after, IDM conducted the national assessment of drivers, forms and threats of ‘Violent Extremism in Albania’<sup>2</sup>. The 2015 baseline assessment examined religious radicalisation and violent extremism in the country to inform policy-makers and other relevant stakeholders on how to address the phenomenon. This study, which supported the drafting of the Albanian National Strategy on Countering Violent Extremism and accompanying Action Plan, helped develop an understanding of the relevant factors or ‘drivers’ that can lead to radicalisation and the level of support for religious violent extremism in Albania. The 2018 study – albeit still focusing on religious violent extremism – provided the P/CVE community and state institutions with a broader study, employed in 50 municipalities examining perceptions, attitudes, and first-hand experiences of Albanians in relation to the drivers of violent extremism.

Since then, many state and non-state actors have been engaged in the countering and prevention of violent extremism (P/CVE) in Albania through implementing legislative changes, referral mechanisms, capacity-building initiatives, awareness-raising campaigns, and grassroots-level projects that aim to build more community resilience. These initiatives are since 2017 coordinated by the Coordination Centre for Countering Violent Extremism, headed by the CVE Coordinator. While 144 Albanians joined insurgency groups in Syria and Iraq between 2012 and 2015<sup>3</sup>, the number of new foreign fighters leaving the country dropped to zero after 2015, not in the least because of the 2014 Penal Code amendments that criminalised “the involvement, organising the involvement, and calling for involvement in violent military operations in a foreign state”<sup>4</sup>, but also because of the government’s increased focus on P/CVE. In 2016, the Serious Crimes Court sentenced a recruiting ring of nine individuals to a total of 126 years’ imprisonment, with sentences varying from 7–18 years<sup>5</sup>. In 2018 and 2019, 28 investigations took place into allegations of terrorist activity, but none of them resulted in convictions<sup>6</sup>.

International donors have played an instrumental role in the implementation of the preventive measures set out in the CVE action plan. The United States of America, the European Union and its Member States, Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, several United Nations



- 1 Vurmo, G. (2015). *Religious Radicalism and Violent Extremism in Albania*. Tirana: Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM).
- 2 Vurmo, G., & Sulstarova, E. (2018). *Violent Extremism in Albania*. Tirana: Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM). Retrieved via <https://idmalbania.org/sq/study-violent-extremism-in-albania-november-2018/>
- 3 European Commission. (2018). *Albania Progress Report 2018*. p. 36. Retrieved via: <https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/20180417-albania-report.pdf>
- 4 Official Gazette of the Republic of Albania No. 132, Date. 19/08/2014
- 5 Erebara, G. (2016). *Albania Jails Nine Jihadi Recruiters*. *Balkan Insight*. Available via: <https://balkaninsight.com/2016/05/04/heavy-sentences-spelled-for-albania-jihadi-recruiters-05-04-2016/>
- 6 EC Report 2020 Albania (p. 45). Source: [https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/albania\\_report\\_2020.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/albania_report_2020.pdf)



agencies, and other international stakeholders have funded hundreds of projects engaging state institutions, civil society organisations, and religious communities – particularly the Albanian Muslim Community (KMSH). Their initiatives have helped prevent violent extremism, counter the effects of extremist narratives, develop capacities of front-liners, raise awareness, work with youth and women, develop cooperation models at the local level—such as the “school as community centre”—, promote religious tolerance, and so on.

As the implementation of the strategy progressed, a de-securitisation of the approach took place, due to which more emphasis is placed on the role of non-security institutions (education, local governments, employment agencies, etc.) at national and local level. Nevertheless, challenges and concerns of violent extremism remain, and require the continued effort not only by engaging stakeholders at the central level, located in Tirana, but also at the local level.<sup>7</sup>

As Albania is preparing for the rehabilitation and reintegration of 76 Albanian nationals from Syria<sup>8</sup> and P/CVE, stakeholders continue to implement various programs and actions to keep VERLT under control, there is a need to take stock of the current state of affairs. What are the main drivers leading to radicalisation in Albania? What are the main forms of violent extremism? What are potential threats to the security of the country and the proper reintegration of returnees? Whereas the 2015 and 2018 study on violent extremism focus on religious violent extremism, the present study looks at political, nationalist, and various types of religious extremism. Globally, there is a rise of populist and nationalist groups spreading right-wing and anti-Muslim narratives. Although Albania is the least affected of all western Balkan countries to far-right extremism<sup>9</sup>, it is possible that there are more radical extremist groups operating in Albania, which may turn violent in the future.

The aim of this study is to inform decision makers and improve the capacities of P/CVE stakeholders by offering a body of knowledge that will help shaping prevention policies, upcoming disengagement programs, and institutional measures and stakeholders’ capacities to rehabilitate and reintegrate returnees and other potential victims of violent extremism ideologies in the future. Ultimately, this will step up efforts, the sustainability of the impact of P/CVE actions and will contribute towards a better-informed public debate and narrowed pathways for VE ideologies to garner support or expand their base of followers.



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

8 81 as estimated by the Commission in the 2020 Progress report for Albania, minus 5 Albanian citizens repatriated in October 2020.

9 Rustemi, A. (2020). Far-Right Trends in South Eastern Europe: The Influences of Russia, Croatia, Serbia and Albania. Retrieved via: <https://hcss.nl/sites/default/files/files/reports/Far-Right%20Trends%20Report%20Final.pdf>



### 3. Methodology

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

In doing so, the study adopts a similar approach as the 2018 study 'Violent extremism in Albania' (IDM, 2018), which was rooted in the methodological approach of the first baseline assessment 'Religious radicalism and violent extremism in Albania'<sup>10</sup>. These studies are all based on the framework of socio-economic, political and cultural drivers to violent extremism as outlined by Denoeux and Carter (2009) in Guide to the Drivers of Violent Extremism. Similar to 2018, three political drivers - 'Local conflict', 'State support', and 'Discredited governments and missing or co-opted legal oppositions' - were excluded as they are not relevant to Albania.

Furthermore, some statements were excluded as they became obsolete due to legal amendments. Other statements were slightly adjusted to allow for other forms of violent extremism to be examined as well. In the 2018 study Violent Extremism in Albania where four Albania-specific drivers were identified on religious curricula, religious authority, disengagement, and rehabilitation and reintegration of Albanian nationals. In the current study, these issues are examined in light of the expected repatriation of Albanians from Syria, rather than drivers towards VERLT. This new section 'Reintegration and Prevention' explores citizens' perceptions on disengagement, their opinions about rehabilitation and reintegration, the credibility of the official religious communities, the readiness of clerics to provide religious education, and the role of state and non-state actors in reintegration and PVE. As a result, the present study's framework of violent extremism drivers and other factors under investigation is composed of three categories, with a total of seventeen VE drivers, as reported in Table 1.



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



*Table 1: Matrix of VE as in Denoeux and Carter, 2009; IDM, 2015, 2018*

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

To investigate the above framework, the study relied on a number of research instruments outlined below, including background research, review of secondary data, interviews, and a nationally representative survey. Different from the previous national assessment, this study employs a nationally representative sample in all 61 municipalities that generates concrete information and data for each of the drivers. A total of forty-three statements were designed in order to test the relevance and salience of the three categories of VE drivers and eleven statements and questions probing reintegration and prevention. The statements were designed taking into account the challenges of the Albanian context and the theoretical context of drivers as elaborated by Denoeux and Carter (2009). Accordingly, the analysis relies on a wealth of sources and data for a comprehensive analysis of the a) specific driver or factor level, b) category of driver or factor, and c) interplay between drivers of different categories and their interactions in the Albanian context.

### Research instruments

The study relies on primary and secondary research in order not only to map the current state of play of the VE phenomenon with up-to-date information, but also to track the progress made in recent years and the dynamics of the P/CVE discourse, course of actions, impact and results. A background analysis was performed to update the survey instrument, the methodological approach, and the local context of the existing drivers set out in the study to allow for a better analysis in the relevance of drivers and statements.

### Interviews

Ten semi-structured interviews with experts on radicalisation and/or violent extremism in Albania, P/CVE practitioners, religious representatives, and state institutions were conducted in



the inception phase and methodology validation. The survey instrument, scope of the research, design of control statements, and findings of the testing procedures were consulted with selected experts and religious community representatives in addition to internal consultations within the IDM research group composed of senior researchers working on the topic of violent extremism.

### National survey

Largely based on the 2018 survey, an updated questionnaire was developed by the IDM research team (see appendices), which went through a testing round in November 2020 and was later adopted by the research team, with no major changes. The survey consists of five sections: (1) demographics, (2) society and socio-economic factors, (3) religion and (inter)state or political factors, (4) practicing religion in Albania, and (5) rehabilitation, reintegration and prevention. In some cases, the statements belonging to the cultural drivers or the reintegration and prevention chapter were moved forward in the survey to prevent respondents from being biased in their answers due to other previously asked questions.

The IDM team prepared the logistics for conducting survey fieldwork with a nationally representative sample of 1,600 respondents in November 2020. The survey was conducted among the general population of age 18 years and above who were permanent residents of Albania at the time of the survey. The sampling frame was based upon the latest census data (2011) updated with information on population dynamics. The rate of emigration of Albanian citizens was calculated from a Quantitative Residence Coefficient based on both the census and the population size according to the civil registry 2019 (Albanian citizens) and their distribution among the different municipal units. Data from the civil registry 2019 were weighted by the Quantitative Residence Coefficients for each of the 61 municipalities, from which all of them were selected to obtain the best geographical coverage<sup>11</sup>.

#### Statistical error estimates are as follows:

- At the 95% confidence level, for a population size of 2,859,598, the confidence interval is  $\pm 2.4$ .
- At the 99% confidence level, for a population size of 2,859,598, the confidence interval is  $\pm 3.2$ .

The group of interviewers was trained in late November 2020 and the fieldwork for the national survey, consisting of paper-assisted face-to-face interviews, took place in December 2020. Strict criteria for the selection of interviewees within each municipality and the administrative units, and rigorous quality assurance mechanisms covering the survey fieldwork and administration of questionnaires, were applied throughout the process. Survey data were entered, cleaned, and processed in a database using SPSS software and analysis of the preliminary findings started in January 2021. The main survey data is reported with decimal places, whereas cross-tabulated survey data presented in this study is rounded to the nearest tenth. Due to rounding, percentages may not always appear to add up to 100%.



<sup>11</sup> Geographical distribution of the sample is available at the appendices' section.



## 4. Profile of survey respondents

Most research into religious radicalisation and violent extremism is guided by an expectation that a better understanding of these phenomena would allow for early warning, prevention, and more efficient responses against violent extremist groups and individuals. Indeed, the few studies carried out in Albania in the past few years on violent extremism, radicalisation, the foreign fighter phenomenon, media discourse on extremism, and related issues have significantly improved the understanding of Albanian P/CVE stakeholders. This has raised public awareness, strengthened resilience of religious communities, and empowered vulnerable groups with better skills and capacities to counter and prevent violent extremist ideas and actions.

The present study explores the perceptions and attitudes of Albanians towards all types of extremism, including religious, nationalist, and political violent extremism. Moreover, with the expected repatriation of Albanians from Syria, the study also assesses the collective stance towards repatriation, disengagement, and reintegration of Albanian citizens that have joined a foreign conflict.

### Demography of the sample

The survey was conducted among a nationally representative sample. From a gender perspective, the current resident population of Albania<sup>12</sup> comprises 1,420,613 men (49.9%) and 1,425,342 women (50.1%) currently living in Albania. Our sample, consisting of 1600 individuals living in Albania, comprises for 49.8% of men (N=797) and 49.9% of women (N=798), close to the overall gender composition of the Albanian population<sup>13</sup> (see Figure 1). Although not administered in the official statistics of Albania, this study also included the option 'other' for gender, taking into account non-binary Albanians. Considering only 5 respondents (0.3%) opted to identify as other, there are limitations to the generalisation of their answers. Therefore, their answers are only analysed separately when relevant to the statement or question.

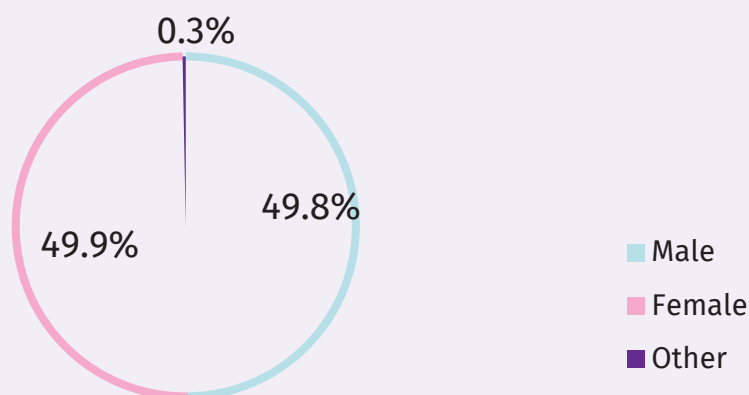


12 INSTAT. (2020). Population of Albania, 1 January 2020. See: <http://www.instat.gov.al/al/temat/treguesit-demografikë-dhe-socialë/popullsia/#tab3>

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



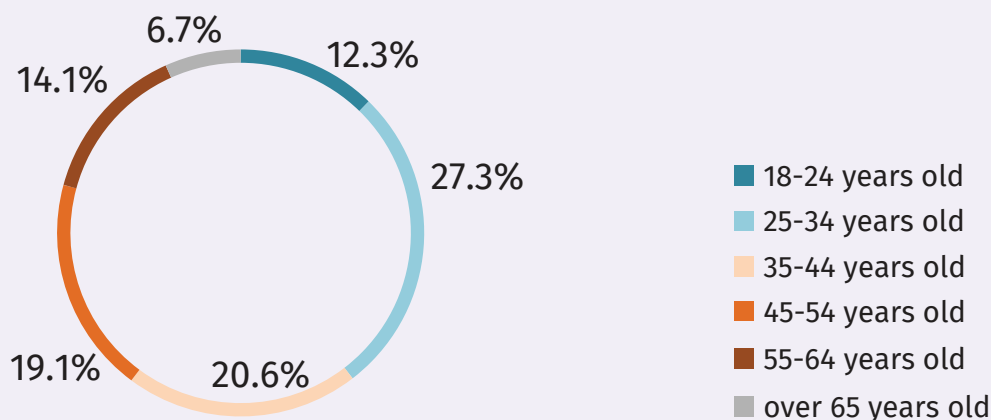
Figure 1: Gender composition of survey respondents (N=1600)



In targeting respondents for each municipality in the country, the survey closely observed the urban/rural ratio of habitation for that district, to stay closely to the estimated national ratio<sup>14</sup>. The urban: rural ratio of the sample of 1600 respondents is 59:41 with 938 respondents living in cities (58.6%) and 662 living in rural areas (41.4%).

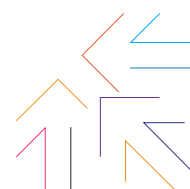
The survey observed only responses of the adult Albanian population, with 39.6% of the sample being younger than 45 years old: 12.3% of the respondents is 18 to 24 years old and 27.3% is 25 to 34 years old. More than half of the respondents are between 35 to 64 years old, whereas only 6.7% of the sample is over 65 years old (see also Figure 2).

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



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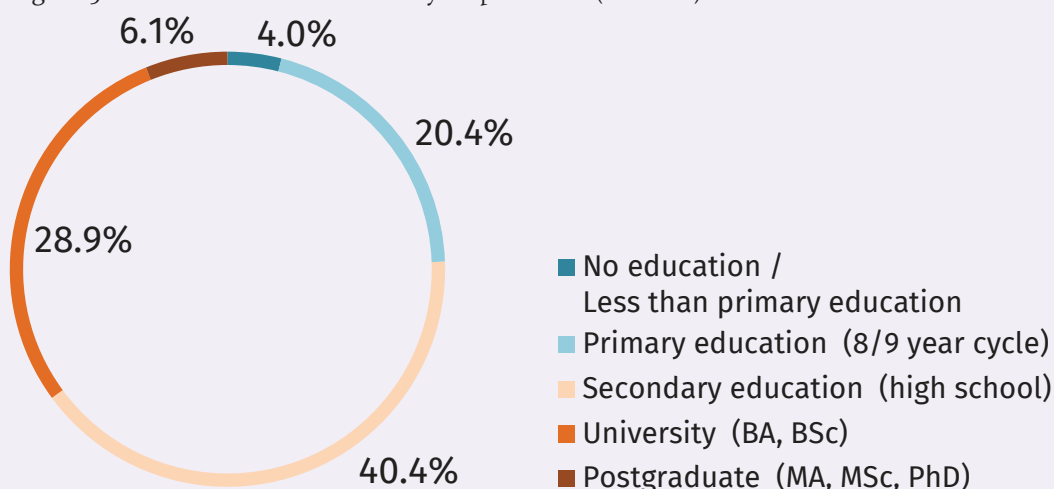
<sup>14</sup> According to the latest Census data, conducted in 2011, the urban : rural ratio was 54:64. However, the new territorial and administrative division of the country (in force since 2015) incorporated some rural areas within the new administrative borders of urban centres in the new municipalities. This, together with the continued urbanization of Albania, is the reason our sample intentionally observes a higher proportion of urban residents.



#### 4. PROFILE OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS

More than two-thirds of the respondents have completed their secondary education or a higher level of education (see Figure 3). 24.4% has completed primary education or less: 64 respondents (4.0%) are either without or have not completed the eight-year cycle of education, while 326 respondents (20.4%) completed their primary education. 647 respondents (40.4%) have completed secondary education, 462 (28.9%) hold a university-level degree (BA, BSc), and 97 respondents (6.1%) have completed postgraduate education (Master-level or higher).

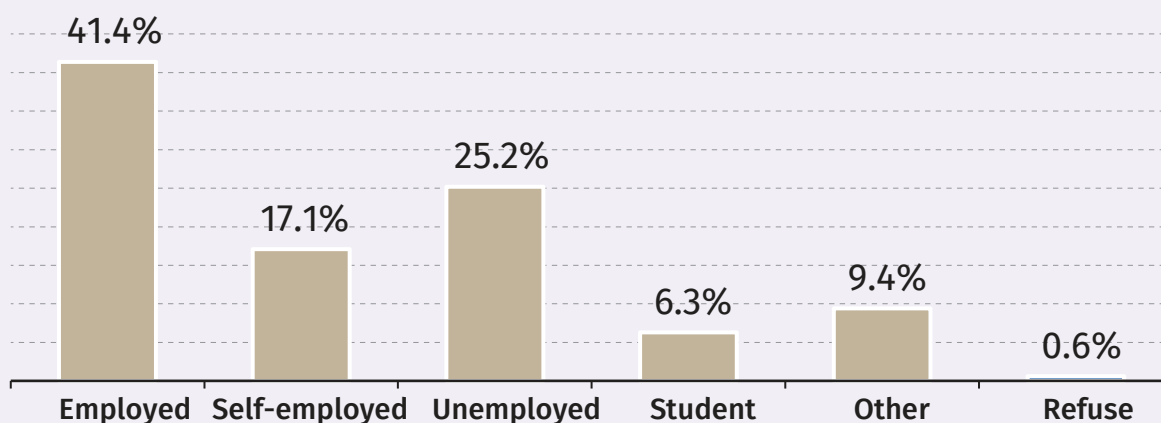
Figure 3: Level of education of survey respondents (N=1600)



The majority of the respondents are married (62.2%), whereas a quarter (24.6%) is single. 6.6% of the respondents indicated they are cohabitating, 35 respondents are divorced (2.2%), and 57 are widowed (3.6%). Twelve respondents (0.8%) refused to answer this question.

The respondents were asked to share their employment status. More than half of the respondents (58.5%) are an active part of the labour force, with 41.4% employed (on payroll) and 17.1% self-employed. Unemployed respondents compose a quarter of the sample (25.2%) and 6.3% of the respondents is a student. The remaining 9.4% respondents indicate an 'other' employment status, most of them pensioners and some homemakers. 0.6% of the respondents refused to answer this question.

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

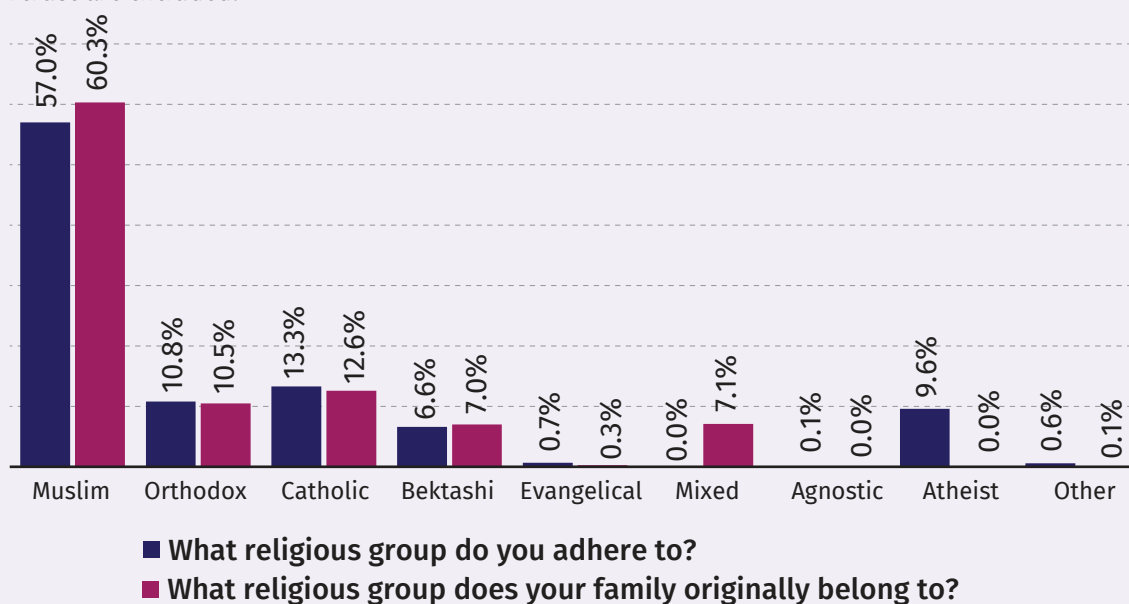


## Religious background and practices

Religious coexistence and tolerance are considered a fundamental value of Albanian society. Often considered the last beacon of religious tolerance in Europe, Albania is home to several traditional religious communities that have been established for many centuries, as well as faith communities that have been introduced more recently, in the past three decades. For the purpose of our research, we asked respondents about the religion of their families and their own religion. The religion of the family is especially useful to give context to perceptions of respondents that may have formed due to their family's historic religious affiliation. According to the latest official census in 2011, Sunni Muslims constitute 56.7% of the population; Roman Catholics 10%, Eastern Orthodox adherents 6.8%; members of the Bektashi Order 2.1%; and the Evangelical community 0.2%<sup>15</sup>. Approximately 2.5% of Albanians identify as Atheist, and there are a small number of Jehovah's Witnesses, followers of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), in addition to around 40 or 50 Jews living in Albania<sup>16</sup>.

Obtaining a representative sample of the largest group of believers, Sunni Muslim (in this study referred to as 'Muslim' as is common in Albania), 57.0% of the respondents identify as such (see Figure 5). 10.8% of the respondents is Orthodox, 13.3% Catholic, 9.6% Atheist, and 6.6% Bektashi. 0.7% of the sample identifies as Evangelical, 2 respondents are Agnostic, and 0.6% adhere to other religious denominations.

Figure 5: Religious affiliation of respondent (N=1600) and their family (N=1595). Don't know and refuse are excluded.



15 Representatives of all religious communities argue that the 2011 census presents an inaccurate picture of the religious demographics of Albania, not least because the question was optional. The census is available in Albanian and English at: [http://www.instat.gov.al/media/3058/main\\_results\\_\\_population\\_and\\_housing\\_census\\_2011.pdf](http://www.instat.gov.al/media/3058/main_results__population_and_housing_census_2011.pdf)

16 World Jewish Congress, Albania (Report), <http://www.worldjewishcongress.org/en/about/communities/AL>

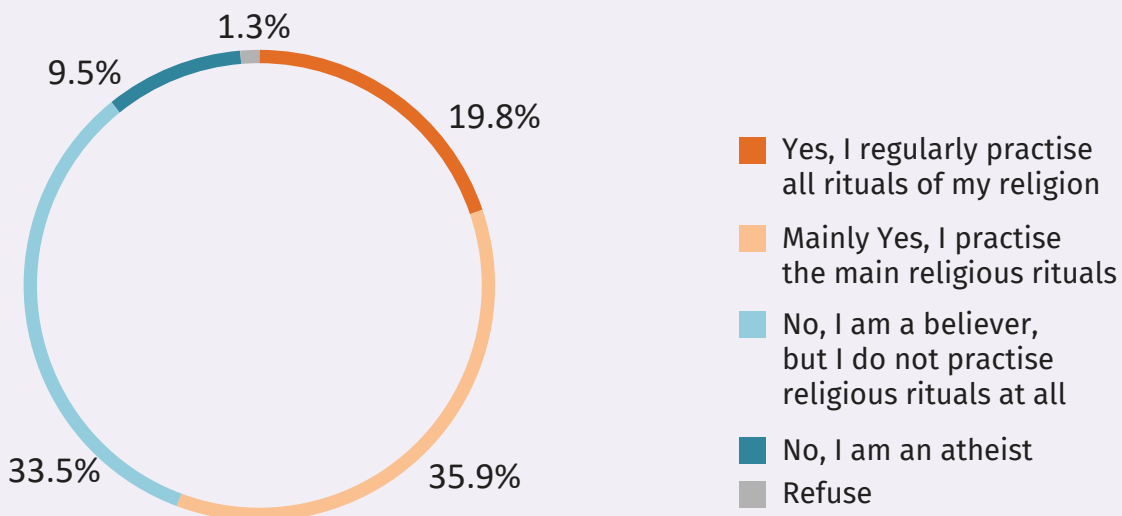


#### 4. PROFILE OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS

In our sample, 963 respondents (60.3%) declared that their family's religion is Sunni Islam. Similar to their personal religious affiliations, 168 respondents (10.5%) come from Orthodox Christian families and 201 respondents (12.6%) are from Catholic families. 112 respondents (7.0%) declared their family is Bektashi and 5 respondents (0.3%) are from Evangelical families. 7.1% of respondents comes from families with a mixed religious background, something that is quite common in Albania.

In order to assess the religiousness of respondents, two questions were included examining how strictly respondents practise their religious obligations (i.e. performing religious rituals, praying). Respondents were asked to choose an option on a scale that describes their religious practice: from believers that regularly practise all the rituals of their religion (regardless of the respondent's religious affiliation) to Atheists. Most respondents are moderately practising believers. 19.8% of respondents fulfil all religious obligations, 35.9% practise the main religious rituals during the course of a normal year, and 33.5% are believers but do not practise religious rituals at all. 9.5% of respondents do not practise religious rituals, because they are Atheist (see Figure 6).

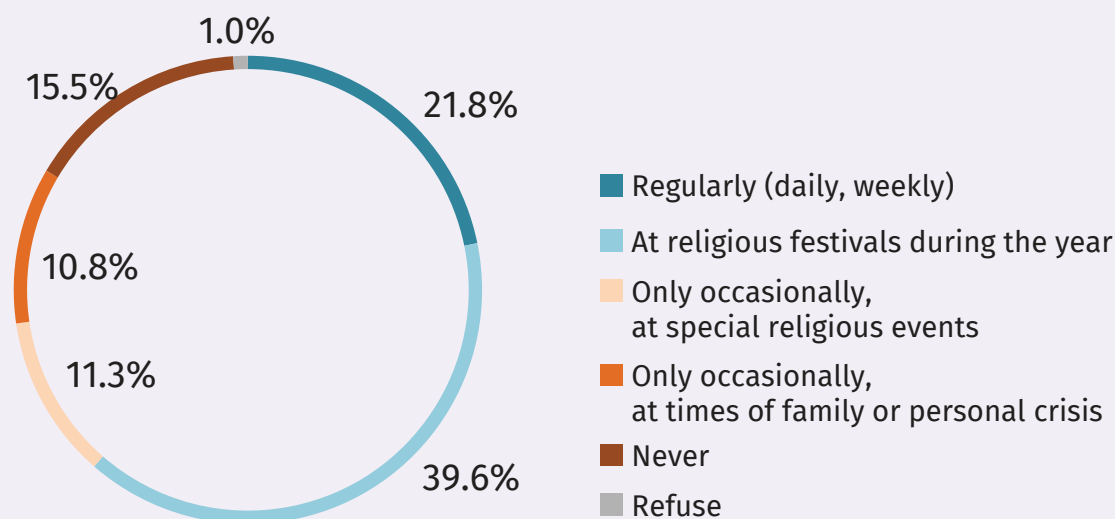
Figure 6: Practice of religious rituals among respondents (N=1600)



Prayer is probably the most individualised act in Abrahamic religions, and at the same time is a collective expression of piety, highly ritualised, with specialised clergy and rules to follow. Therefore, we put the following question to the respondents: "How often do you pray?" We provided an option indicating a committed believer who regularly prays every day or every week, two options for believers who pray during collective rituals, an indicator of weaker piety, an option for believers who largely lead a secular life and turn to religion in dire circumstances, and the options 'I never pray' or refuse.

The majority of respondents (39.6%) pray only during religious festivals or rituals during the course of a normal year, while 21.8% prays on a regular basis (daily, weekly). The survey findings indicate that 22.1% of respondents pray occasionally, with 11.3% practicing prayer only at special religious events and 10.8% at times of family or personal crises. 15.5% of the respondents never pray, which is a significantly lower percentage compared to our previous survey in 2018, where 23.9% of the sample did not practice prayer at all.

Figure 7: Prayer practice among respondents (N=1448)



When looking at the frequency of prayer and the religious group respondents adhere to, the data indicates that out of the seven religious' groups, the respondents that are Evangelical demonstrate the highest frequency of prayer practicing, with 54.5 percent of them stating they pray regularly on a daily or weekly basis. Most Christians (51.4% Catholic; 44.8% Orthodox) surveyed indicate they tend to pray more often at religious festivals throughout the year, followed by the Bektashi with 42.9 percent. The largest religious group in Albania, the Muslims, display a similar level of attachment to religion as the Christians, with the majority of them (36.9%) practicing prayer only at religious festivals throughout the year and only 20.8 percent indicating they practice prayer regularly.

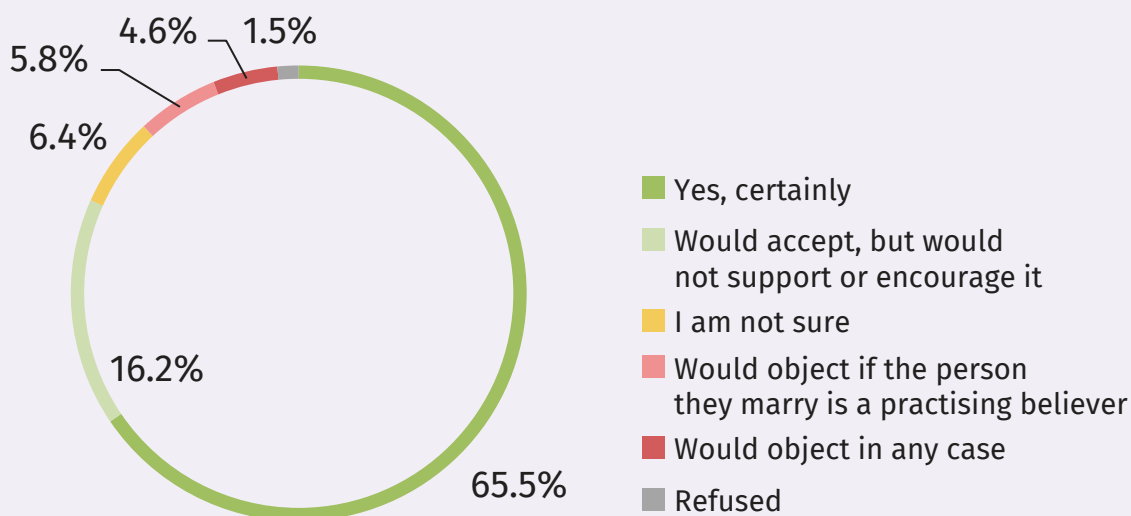
### Perceptions and experience of religious coexistence in Albania

With five official religious communities, Albania is considered a multi-religious society in which most people encounter individuals of different faiths during their daily activities. This does however not always mean that Albanians build meaningful relations with people of a different faith, particularly in a family environment. In an attempt to reduce the societal bias that prompts the respondents to answer positively if they were asked in general terms whether they approve of interreligious marriages or not, we asked the respondents if they would personally support a family member marrying a person belonging to another religion.

The majority of respondents (65.5%) said they would certainly support a family member (sibling or children) if they were to marry a person of another religious affiliation, while 16.2% would accept such a marriage, but not support or encourage it. 5.8% would object if the person they are to marry is a practicing believer and 4.6% would object in any case. 6.4% of respondents were unsure what their reaction would be in such a situation, while another 1.5% refused to provide an answer to this question (see Figure 8).



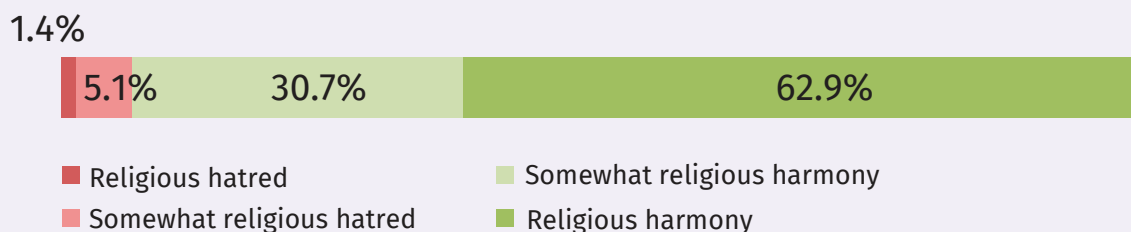
Figure 8: Respondents' support for the inter-religious marriage of a family member (N=1584)



Respondents in the 18-24 age group (80.4%), respondents with a postgraduate degree (80.2%), who are currently pursuing their studies (78.8%) and who are single (76.2%) displayed a significantly higher support towards inter-religious marriages within their families. A higher level of tolerance is also found among respondents whose families have a mixed religious background (82.1%) and respondents who are Bektashi (78.8%), Agnostic (100%) or Atheist (76.8%). Individuals who never pray (70.1%) are more inclined to be supportive of their siblings or children if they were to marry someone from a different religion.

Lastly, we explored the respondents' perceptions towards religious tolerance and peaceful coexistence, by asking them to indicate on a scale their answer to the following question: "In your opinion, is there religious hatred or harmony in Albania?" (See Figure 9). The overwhelming majority of respondents (93.6%) maintain that in Albania there is (somewhat) religious harmony. 30.7% say there is somewhat religious harmony and 62.9% of the respondents say that there is religious harmony. Very few (1.4%) selected religious hatred as their perception of the current situation, while 5.1% think that in Albania, there is somewhat religious hatred. Respondents from a mixed religious family background were less likely to perceive there is (somewhat) religious harmony in Albania (85.7%).

Figure 9: Respondents' opinions on religious tolerance in Albanian society (N=1592)





## 5. Drivers of violent extremism in Albania

### 5.1. Socio-economic drivers

This chapter explores the potential of socio-economic factors in creating an enabling environment where violent extremist narratives can resonate with the local population. Factors such as absolute and relative poverty, social fragmentation, social exclusion and discrimination, illegal economic activity, among others, are known to be associated with frustration with the economic and political system. Young unemployed isolated individuals from under-developed regions might especially be vulnerable to propaganda of extremist ideologies that advocate the use of violence for protesting against the existing order and for obtaining desired changes, as well as personal benefits.

Although Albania is considered an upper-middle-income country according to the World Bank, the GDP per capita in 2019 in Albania was only 14.5% of the EU average<sup>17</sup>. Moreover, Albanian household is more at-risk of poverty than most of its EU counterparts: in 2018, 23.4% of Albanian households was at risk of poverty, while the average in the EU 28 – including the UK – was 16.9%<sup>18</sup>. The geographically uneven development, which also exists inside the country, can leave communities in rural, peripheral, and undeveloped areas feel marginalised. The youth are over-represented in the unemployment statistics. In the third quarter of 2020, the official unemployment rate in Albania is 11.6%, while the official youth unemployment rate for the same period is 20.7%.<sup>19</sup>

In this study, several socio-economic factors or “drivers” have been considered to better understand their impact in the different regions of the country and the threat they may pose to society by providing conditions for the possible emergence of radical religious groups and violent extremism. The table below reports the identified drivers and their description.

*Table 2: Socio-economic drivers as in Denoeux and Carter, 2009; IDM, 2015, 2018*

<p><b>Perceptions of social exclusion and marginality</b></p>	<p>This perception may be particularly prevalent among peri-urban/slum youth and in environments where family structures have eroded, normal social controls no longer check behaviour, and youth have too much time on their hands, which may help them fall prey to dangerous behaviours and attitudes. In the aftermath of this sense of anomie and isolation, violent extremist groups may exploit this isolation by offering an escape, a sense of purpose and inclusion in a collective movement.</p>
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17 The GDP per capita in 2019 in Albania was \$5369, while the GDP per capita in the EU was \$37104 in the same year. See also: <https://countryeconomy.com/gdp/albania> and <https://tradingeconomics.com/european-union/gdp-per-capita>

18 INSTAT. (2019). Income and Living Conditions in Albania, 2017 – 2018. Available via: <http://www.instat.gov.al/media/6544/income-and-living-conditions-in-albania-2017-2018.pdf>

19 INSTAT. (2020). Quarterly Labour Force Survey, third quarter 2020. Available via: <http://www.instat.gov.al/media/7812/lfs-q3-2020.pdf>



<b>Social networks and group dynamics</b>	Social networks are an important factor in radicalization and recruitment. Individuals may drift into violent extremist groups with friends or as a result of the influence of relatives, neighbours or a charismatic local preacher.
<b>Societal discrimination</b>	Real or perceived discrimination towards an individual or community (or both) in a broad sense can be a driver for violent extremism. In places where Muslims are a small minority, socio-economic and/or political discrimination may be perceived as linked to disrespect for Islam and Muslims, provoking radicalization.
<b>Frustrated expectations and relative deprivation</b>	Relative deprivation and frustrated expectations are powerful drivers of violent extremist activity among youth. 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 that impedes access to jobs.
<b>Unmet social and economic needs</b>	Deprivation of socio-economic needs—especially when combined with other factors such as widespread corruption and lack of security and justice—may be a factor exploited by violent extremist groups, which may offer wages or services. It is not poverty, however, that elicits support for violent extremism, but the acute form of social exclusion by the government and society.
<b>Greed or the proliferation of illegal economic activities</b>	Violent extremist organizations' illegal activities offer lucrative economic opportunities for those who seek a ready income. Networks operating violent extremist and illegal economic activities have a mutually beneficial relationship—providing each other with revenue, experience in concealment, and ideology to legitimize illegal behaviour.

### 1. 'Perceptions of social exclusion & marginality' and

### 2. 'Social networks and group dynamics'

A perception of social exclusion may be particularly prevalent among peri-urban youth and in environments where family structures have eroded. In such environment, normal social controls no longer check behaviour and youth have too much time on their hands – which may help them fall prey to dangerous behaviours and attitudes. In the aftermath of this sense of anomie and isolation, violent extremist groups may exploit this isolation by offering an escape, a sense of purpose, and inclusion in a collective movement. Particularly this social network is an important factor in radicalisation and recruitment. In Albania, most of the people that joined insurgency groups in Iraq and Syria were from the same social circle. BIRN found that of the individuals leaving from villages near Pogradec, several men are relatives or friends who joined the radical network operating around a mosque in one of the villages<sup>20</sup>. The prevalence of extremist groups – whether political, nationalist, or religious – is an important part of this driver.



20 Bogdani, A. (2016). Fshatrat e xhihadit: Si u rekrutuan të rinjtë për të luftuar në Siri. Reporter.al, available online: <https://www.reporter.al/fshatrat-e-xhihadit-si-u-rekrutuan-te-rinjte-per-te-luftuarne-siri/>

**Statement in these drivers:**

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

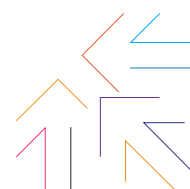
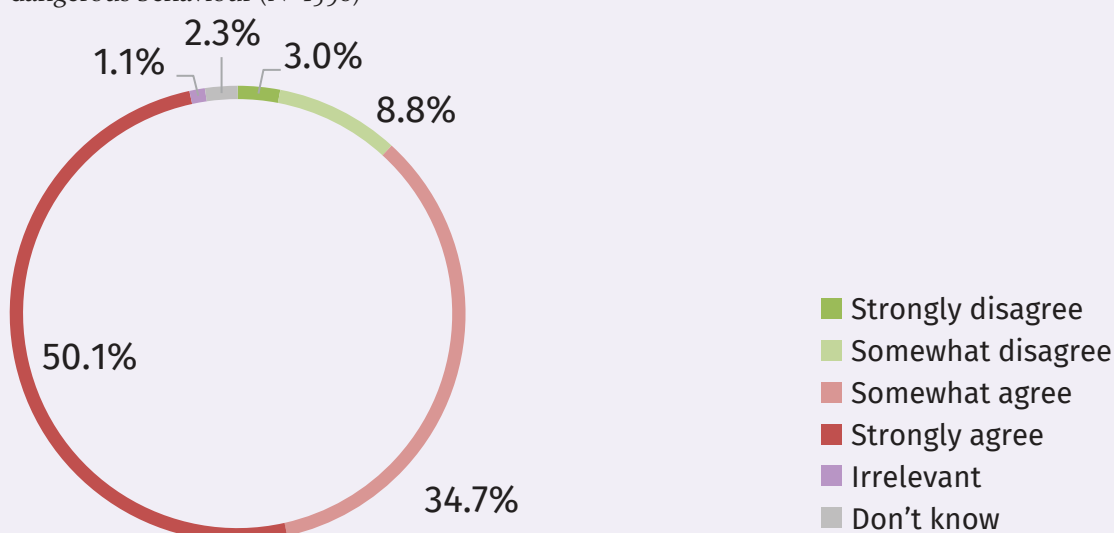
**Statement: In the area where I live many young people have fallen prey to gambling, alcohol, drugs or dangerous behaviour (violence, vandalism, etc.)**

Respondents were asked to rate their opinions using a 4-point scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4). An overwhelming majority (84.8% of respondents) agrees there are many young people in the area where they live, who have fallen prey to gambling, alcohol, drugs or dangerous behaviour, while 11.8% disagree. Compared to 2018, when 80.8% of respondents agreed, there is an increase of 4.0 p.p. in the proportion of respondents that agree with the statement.

Respondents over 65 years old (92%) were more likely to agree, as opposed to respondents in the 18-24 years old group (79%) who were less likely to agree. Respondents with up to primary education (91%) were more likely to agree, whereas students (78%) were less likely. The more frequently someone practices their religion or prays, the more likely they are to agree with the statement: 88% of survey respondents who regularly practice all rituals of their religion and 89% of the respondents who pray regularly indicated agreement or strong agreement with this statement.

Respondents residing in Vlorë, Fier, Dibër, Durrës and Tiranë were more likely to agree with the statement. In several small municipalities such as Cërrik, Fushë-Arrëz, Himarë, Mat, Vorë, Rrëshen, Klos, Kurbin, Memaliaj, Patos, and Pukë all respondents indicate that in the area where they live many young people have fallen prey to gambling, alcohol, drugs or other dangerous behaviour (violence, vandalism, etc.). In Mallakastër, Prenjas, and Gramsh all but one respondent said the same. Compared to the 2018 survey, an increase in support for the statement was particularly observed in cities with a high population density, such as Tirana, Durrës, and Fier. Similar to this year's survey, Elbasan, Lezhë, Kamëz and Kukës demonstrated a higher support for the statement in 2018 as well.

Figure 10: Support for the view that youth have fallen prey to gambling, alcohol, drugs and dangerous behaviour (N=1598)



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

27.3% of the respondents agree that in the areas where they live, there are individuals or groups that incite political extremism, while the majority (61.9%) disagrees and 10.9% are unsure or find the statement irrelevant. Respondents with a postgraduate degree (40%) are more likely to agree with this statement than less educated respondents. Self-employed (46%) respondents were more inclined to agree than students (37%). Respondents from the Bulqizë, Rrogozhinë, and Kamëz were more likely to agree with the statement. Similarly, respondents who regularly practiced all rituals of their religion were the most predisposed groups of believers to agree with the statement. The more frequently an individual prays, the more inclined they are to agree: 37% of respondents who pray regularly agree that there are individuals or groups in their areas inciting political extremism.

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

7.6% of the respondents agree or strongly agree that there are individuals or groups in the area where they live that incite nationalist extremism, while 79.6% disagreed and 12.9% either were unsure or found the statement irrelevant. No substantial differences were noted while analysing across demographics. Respondents from Kuçovë, Mat, Kurbin, and Pogradec<sup>21</sup> are more inclined to agree with the statement.

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

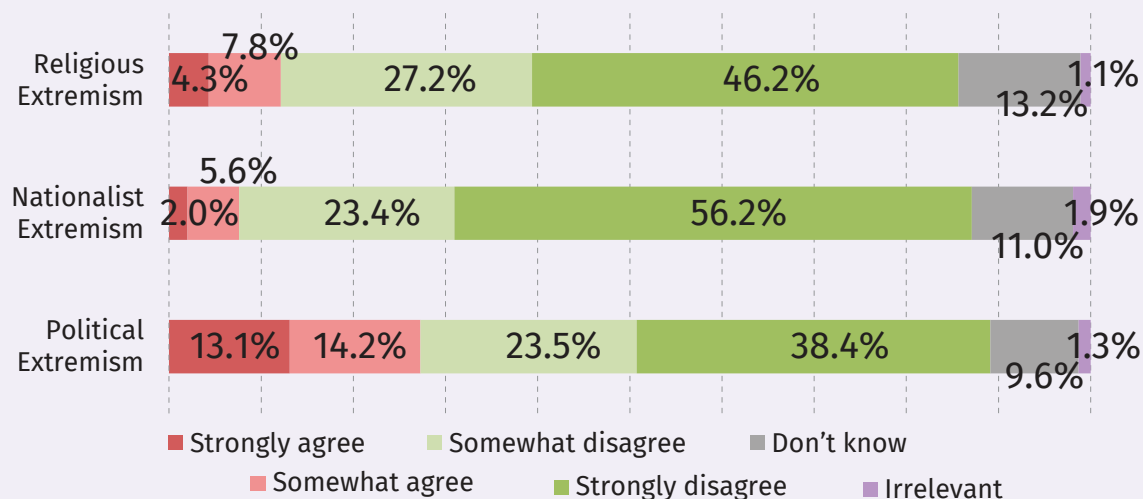
12.1% of the respondents agree or strongly agree that there are individuals or groups in the area where they live that incite religious extremism, while 73.4% disagree and 14.3% are unsure or do not find the statement relevant. Respondents were asked to specify their answer if they agreed that there is religious extremism in Albania<sup>22</sup>. Respondents who had obtained a postgraduate degree (18%) are more likely to agree with the statement compared to respondents who have completed the 8/9 year cycle of primary education (9%). Respondents who adhere to Catholicism (18%), who regularly practice all rituals of their religion (21%) and pray regularly (21%) were found to support this statement more than the average. Respondents residing in Rrogozhinë, Kamëz, Durrës, and Pogradec were more likely to agree with the statement. Compared to the 2018 list of municipalities where respondents reported more often that there are individuals or groups that incite religious extremism, Rrogozhinë and Pogradec were newly added.



- 21 All respondents from Dropull agreed with the statement, but this municipality only had 2 respondents
- 22 Respondents were asked to specify which religion these individuals or groups are affiliated with. Of the 141 respondents that provided specific answers, 38.9% said Jehovah's Witnesses. Islam is also frequently chosen (22.6%). The rest of the respondents associate religious extremism with individual radical behaviour (15%) and non-traditional religious beliefs (3.5%). Nine respondents have specified their answer as: "Islam in Syria," "ISIS" and "Syria".



Figure 11: There are individuals or groups that incite political (N=1598) / nationalist (N=1593) / religious extremism (N=1598)



With an increasingly alarming rate of reported criminal activity, unsurprisingly, the majority of respondents believe the Albanian youth have fallen prey to gambling, alcohol, drugs, or other dangerous behaviour. Compared to the 2018 findings, the support for this statement has increased slightly, particularly in municipalities with a high population density such as Tirana, Durrës and Fier. While erosion of family structures and the quest for identity play a significant role in determining their behaviour, empirical research suggests that young, unemployed people, who feel deprived of basic necessities or opportunities to develop a sense of purpose, are more likely to engage in destructive behaviour. In doing so, they seek to bring attention to their grievances<sup>23</sup>, suggesting the socio-economic situation of the individuals has severely deteriorated. Failure of the institutions to properly address their struggles creates an enabling environment for extremist groups to fill the gap.

Social networks are recognised as factors that contribute to facilitate the path towards radicalisation, as they can influence more isolated communities facing economic hardships, unemployment or underdevelopment. In the case of Albania, social networks have been fundamental in maintaining consistent attachment with the extremist ideology because of a gradually formed dependency, due to their role as service providers. However, the vast majority of Albanians deny the presence of individuals or groups in their communities who incite political, nationalist or religious extremism. The presence of active individuals or groups that incite political extremism (27.3%) is reportedly higher than the presence of religious extremist groups (12.1%), or nationalist extremists (7.6%). Similar to the other statements on whether there are violent extremist groups operating in the area where respondents live, less than 2% of respondents finds the statements irrelevant. As in 2018, Kamëz and Durrës are recurrently being reported to host individuals or groups that incite religious radicalism, while in Kamëz and Rrogozhinë individuals or groups inciting political extremism were mentioned more often. Respondents from Pogradec indicate

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23 Ikejiaku, B. (2009). "The Relationship between Poverty, Conflict and Development." *Journal of Sustainable Development*, vol. 2, no. 1, pp. 15-28. And Marke, D. (2007). *Will Africa Ever Be Able to Replicate Successful Economies?* Standard Times Press.



*the presence of groups that incite both religious and nationalist extremism in their area. This may signal that additional efforts are necessary in these municipalities to counter and prevent the influence of malicious groups or individuals.*

### 3. Societal discrimination

Albania is known for being a religiously tolerant society where people are free to choose what religion they adhere to. IDM (2018) found that 92.3 percent of respondents think that religious tolerance is a fundamental value in Albania<sup>24</sup>. Although the majority of Albanians is Sunni Muslim, the interpretation is often relaxed and only a small percentage of Albanians considers themselves a practicing believer. Moreover, the majority of respondents of that study denied that they, members of their families, or someone else in their local communities have been discriminated against on the basis of their religious beliefs<sup>25</sup>. Real or perceived discrimination towards an individual or community (or both) in a broad sense can be a driver for violent extremism. In order to probe perceptions on discrimination, we presented respondents with three statements, asking whether, and to what extent, they agree with them.

#### Statements in this driver:

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

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

Respondents were asked to rate whether they agree or not with the statement, on a 4-point scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4). 12% of the respondents agree or strongly agree with the statement, whereas 69.1% of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed. 13.1% of the respondents found the statement irrelevant and 5.8% did not know whether to agree with the statement or not. Compared to 2018, when 12.8% agreed with the statement, there is a small decrease of 0.8 p.p. in the proportion of respondents that agrees with the statement.

Respondents from Kukës, Pukë, Tropojë, Vau i Dejës, and Has were more inclined to agree with the statement. Respondents without an education or with less than primary education (27%) supported this statement more often. Muslim respondents (15%) are more likely to agree with the statement than Bektashi respondents (4%). Respondents who pray only occasionally, at times of family or personal crisis (19%) are more inclined to agree with the statement than those who never pray (8%).

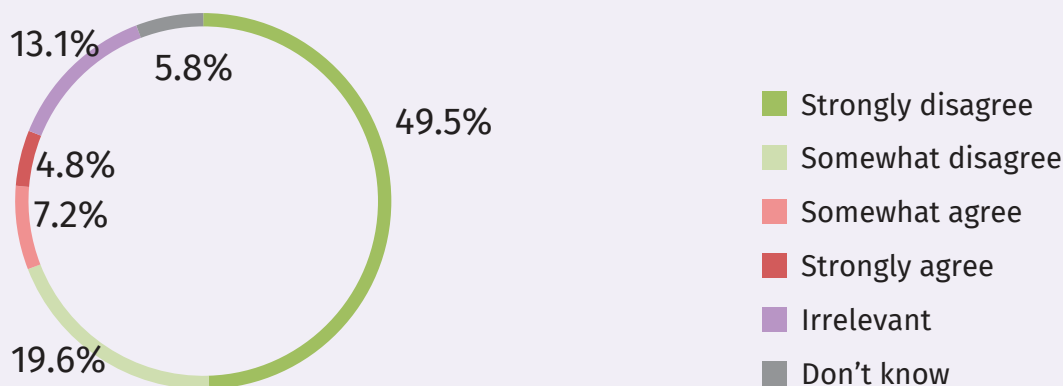


24 Vurmo, G., Sulstarova, E., Papa, A, Dhëmbo, E. and Jashari, D. (2018). Religious Tolerance in Albania. UNDP & Institute for Democracy and Mediation. Tirana.

25 *Ibid.*



Figure 12: People with the same religion benefit less from opportunities for economic and social development (N=1599)

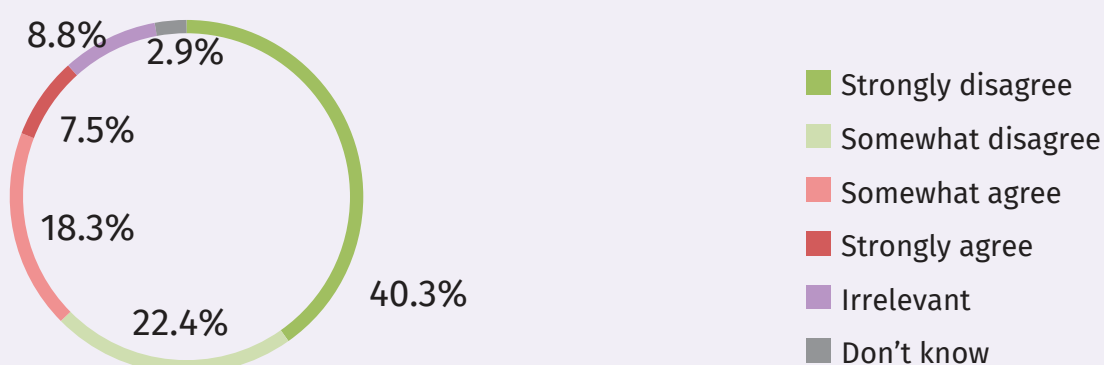


**Statement: The long beard (for men) or headscarf (for women) reveal that we are dealing with religious extremists**

When asked whether they agree or not with the statement, 1 in 4 respondents (25.8%) agree, whereas the majority of respondents (62.7%) somewhat disagree or strongly disagree. Compared to the 2018 survey when 30.5% agreed with the statement, there is a 4.7 p.p. decrease in the number of respondents who associate the long beard and headscarf with religious extremism. 8.8% of the respondents found the statement irrelevant and 2.9% did not know whether to agree or not with the statement.

Lesser educated respondents (34% of respondents with up to primary education) were more likely to agree with the statement than the more educated (12% of the Postgraduates). Unemployed respondents (30%) were more inclined to agree with the statement than the self-employed (20%). Agnostic (N=2; 100%), Evangelical (N=11; 46%), Orthodox (35%), and Catholic (35%) respondents were more likely to agree with the statement, while only 1 in 5 Muslim respondents agreed. The less frequently someone practices their religion (31% of respondents who identify as atheists), the more inclined they are to agree with the statement.

Figure 13: The long beard (for men) or headscarf (for women) reveal that we are dealing with religious extremists (N=1597)

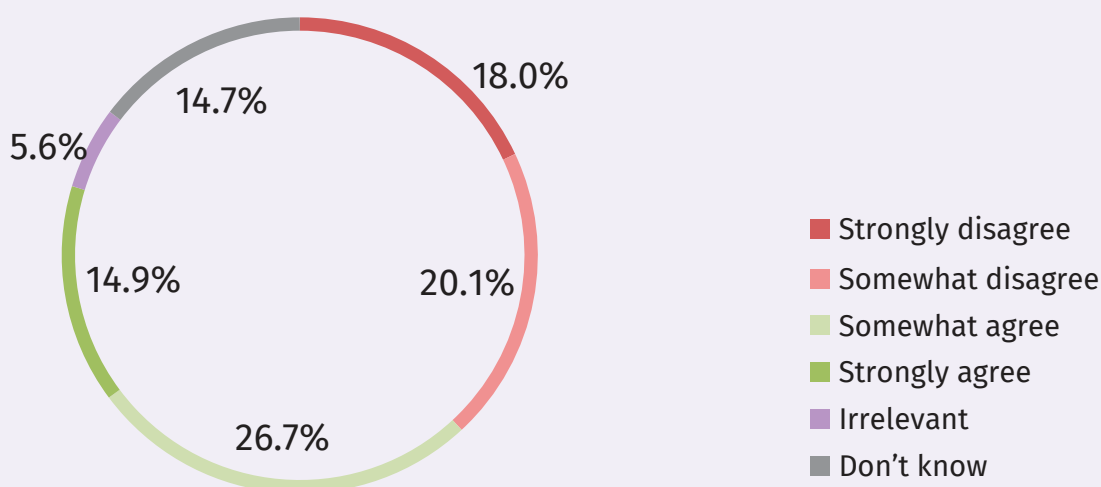


**Statement: The religious community I belong to is well-represented in politics and state institutions**

When asked whether they agree or not with the statement, 41.6% of respondents agree that the religious community they belong to is well-represented in politics and state institutions, while 38.1% disagree. 14.7% indicated they did not know whether to agree with the statement or not and 5.6% found the statement irrelevant – indicating that the religious affiliation of public officials is not a primary concern for them. Compared to 2018, when 30.0% agreed with the statement, there is an increase of 11.6 p.p. in the proportion of respondents that agree that the religious community they belong to is well-represented in politics and state institutions.

The perception that the religious community of the respondents is well-represented in politics and state institutions is less prevalent among respondents who have obtained a University degree (36%) than it is in respondents who have completed only their primary education (50%). Orthodox (52%), Catholic (46%), Bektashi (45%), and Muslim (42%) were more likely to agree with the statement. The more frequently an individual practises their religion (50% of practicing believers) the more inclined they are to agree with the statement.

Figure 14: The religious community I belong to is well-represented in politics and state institutions (N=1595)



*The majority of respondents do not think that religious beliefs stand behind societal discrimination in Albania, nor that appearance is an indication of an individual who holds extremist views. However, 38.1% of the survey respondents say their religion is not well-represented in politics. The more frequently a person practices their religion, the more inclined they are to indicate that the long beard or headscarf do not reveal that we are dealing with religious extremists and that the religious community they belong to is well-represented in politics and state institutions. Compared to the 2018 survey, there are less people who associate long beards and headscarves with religious extremism.*

*Although societal discrimination on the grounds of religious affiliation is not overtly visible as most Albanians remain tolerant of other religious groups, there are several factors indicating that there are causes of concern. At least 12% of the total survey respondents perceive economic and social discrimination due to their religious belonging. Moreover, one in four respondents associate wearing a beard or burqa with*



religious extremism. Finally, more than one in three respondents believe that their religious community is not well-represented in politics and state institutions. While these perceptions may not necessarily produce violent extremist narratives on its own, resentment from the perceived discrimination and the lack of fair representation in state institutions could be misused by violent extremist groups.

#### 4. Frustrated expectations & relative deprivation

Despite relative improvements in recent years, young people in Albania, including university graduates, continue to face many difficulties and deprivation, disappointing their expectations. A recent survey among Albanian youth found that 79% of students and high school graduates would like to migrate abroad, whereas 95% of the Albanian youth currently studying abroad indicate they do not wish to return<sup>26</sup>. The CESS study quotes socio-economic factors as the main driver behind the young people's desire to migrate abroad. These young, highly educated people may feel frustrated if they do not find jobs that fit their qualifications. Relative deprivation and frustrated expectations are powerful drivers of violent extremist activity among youth. 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 and/or recognise the nepotism that impedes access to jobs.

##### Statements in this driver:

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

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

57.9% of the respondents believes that in general, well-educated people in the area where they live have good job positions. 38.5% of the respondents disagree or strongly disagree with this statement. In comparison to 2018, when 24.1% agreed, there is a 33.8 p.p. increase in the proportion of respondents that agrees well-educated youth in the area where they live have good jobs.

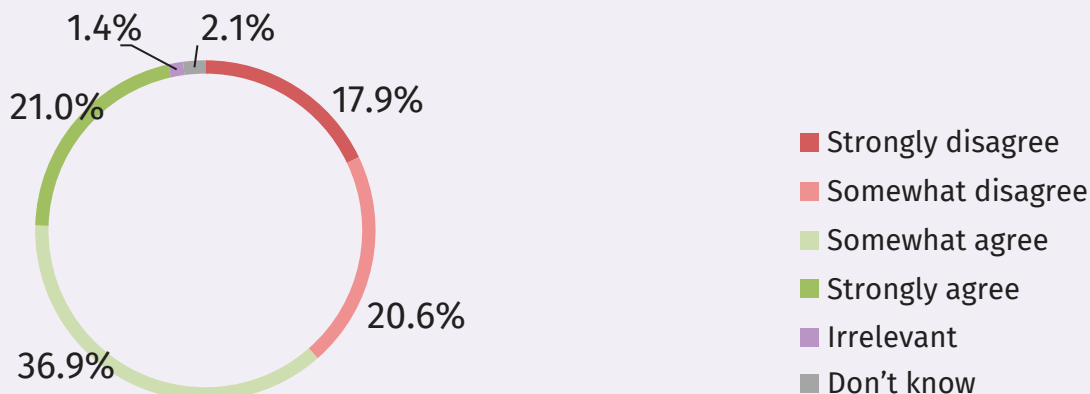
When checking across demographics, no substantial differences were found for gender and demographic representation. Respondents over 65 years old (62%) agreed more often with the statement, while respondents in the 55-64 age group (52%), those with up to primary education (52%), and unemployed respondents (53%) were less likely to agree with the statement. Moreover, the majority of respondents from Roskovec, Rrëshen, Selenicë, Rrogozhinë, Patos, Sarandë, Kurbin, Lushnjë, Tropojë, and Mat disagree with the statement, meaning that they do not think that well-educated people in the area where I live have good job positions.



26 Centre for Economic and Social Studies-CESS. (2019). The actual and potential migration of students from Albania. A putative brain drain? Available via <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/albanien/17258.pdf>



Figure 15: In general, well-educated people in the area where I live have good job positions (N=1600)

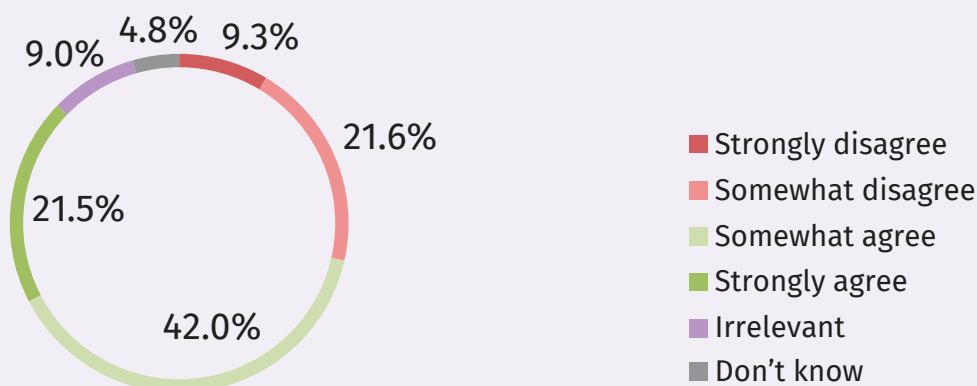


**Statement: The main source of income for youth in the area where I live is from individual law-abiding work**

Respondents were asked to rate their agreement with the statement on a 4-point scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4). The majority (63.5% of respondents) agrees with the statement, while 30.9% indicated disagreement. 9% of the respondents found the statement irrelevant and 4.8% did not know whether to agree with the statement or not. Compared to 2018, when 61.7% agreed, there has been a 1.8 p.p. increase in the proportion of respondents who agree with the statement.

Respondents over 65 years old (71%) are more inclined to agree with the statement. Respondents from Fier, Durrës, Kamëz, Krujë, Patos, Roskovec, Rrëshen, Rogozhinë, and Kurbin were less likely to agree. Respondents with a postgraduate degree (55%) are less likely to agree that the main source of income for youth in the area where they live is from individual law-abiding work.

Figure 16: The main source of income for youth in the area where I live is from individual law-abiding work (N=1599)



*Many young Albanians are considering moving abroad for better socio-economic opportunities. Particularly those with a good education are more likely to feel that they deserve better life outcomes than society is able to deliver. Although the majority of Albanians indicates that the main source of income for youth is from individual law-abiding work and that in general, well-educated people in the area where they live have good job positions, almost 1 in 3 Albanians confirm that a good education has not helped people in their area to find good employment and a similar proportion says that the main source of income for youth in the area where they live is from illegal work.*

*Even low levels of resentment, generated as a result of constantly frustrated expectations and grim economic prospects, is an important pull factor for violent extremist groups. The reason why people may be drawn towards these groups is because they perceive themselves as deserving more than what they have in terms of education and employment. This leaves many people, in particular young generations, in search of social connections that will help them fulfil their expectations or give them a new life purpose.*

## 5. Unmet social and economic needs

In many peripheral and under-developed regions, many people are dependent upon state welfare and economic assistance. Therefore, it is crucial for state institutions to work professionally with individuals and families in need, not just because of the poverty, but also because of the acute feelings of neglect and exclusion that prompt radicalism, extremism and violent behaviour. In developing countries such as Albania, the civil society sector builds partnerships with the state to provide relief, assistance and training to persons in need. Besides foreign humanitarian foundations and NGOs, foreign faith organisations have been active in the country, providing material help, health services, education and spiritual consolation to many such citizens. But sometimes – particularly in the 1990s – these organisations have been a cover for foreign religious extremists to spread their agenda and for turning Albania into an operational base for their activities in other countries. They had great impact in impoverished peripheral areas and recruited followers, mainly young men, who started to practise rituals that were unknown in Albanian traditional Islam. When links between international terrorism and some of these ‘charities’ were revealed, they were forced to terminate their activities in the country<sup>27</sup>.

The high levels of poverty and unemployment in peripheral and deprived areas, as well as poor social services, make local communities vulnerable to activities of groups with radical or extremist agendas: deprivation of socio-economic needs—especially when combined with other factors such as widespread corruption and lack of security and justice—may be a factor exploited by violent extremist groups, which may offer wages or services. It is not poverty, however, that elicits support for violent extremism, but the acute form of social exclusion by the government and society. To better understand this phenomenon, the respondents of this study were presented with three statements.

### Statements in this driver:

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



<sup>27</sup> Balkan Investigative Reporting Network. (2014). Zanafilla e islamit radikal në Shqipëri. Reporter.al, available online: <https://www.reporter.al/zanafilla-e-islamit-radikal-ne-shqiperi/>



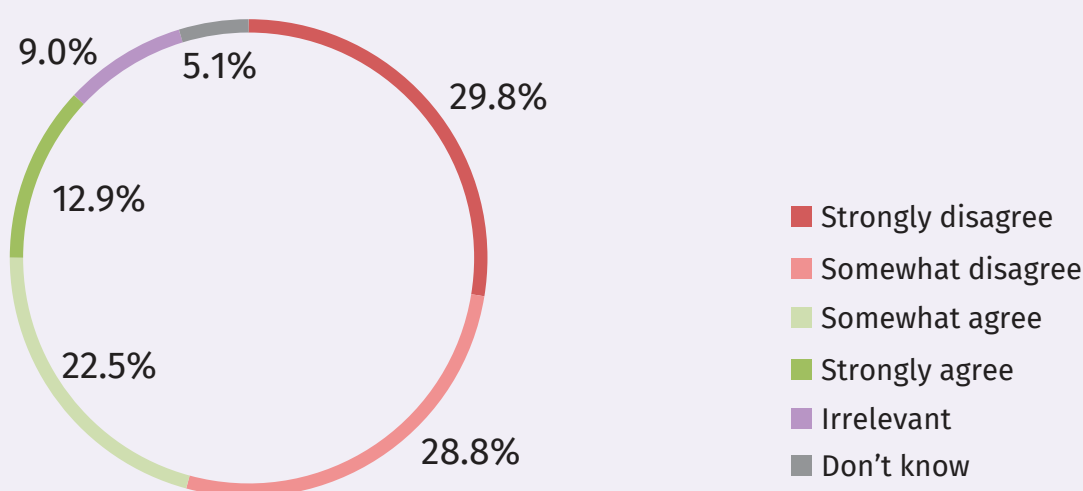
- In the area where I live there are many households or individuals that do not fulfil their basic needs
- In the area where I live there are religious groups that offer economic privileges or material gain to those who practise their religion

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

Respondents were asked to rate whether they agree or not with the statement, using a 4-point scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4). 35.4% of the respondents agree that state institutions in the area where they live operate in a professional and abuse-free manner, whereas more than half of the respondents (58.6%) disagree or strongly disagree with the statement. Compared to 2018, when 25.8% agreed with this statement, there is a 9.6 p.p. increase in the proportion of respondents agreeing that state institutions of social and economic assistance operate in a professional and abuse-free manner in the area where they live. 9% of the respondents found the statement irrelevant and 5.1% did not know whether to agree with the statement or not.

The majority of respondents over 65 years old (43%) and respondents without an education or less than primary education (40%) are more inclined to agree that in the area where they live, state institutions of social and economic assistance operate in a professional and abuse-free manner. Respondents living in Cërrik, Rogozhinë, Belsh, Vlorë, Maliq, Gjirokastër, and Kamëz were less likely to agree that in the area where they live, state institutions of social and economic assistance operate in a professional and abuse-free manner, whereas none of the respondents from Kurbin, Libohovë, Memaliaj and Rrëshen agreed with the statement.

Figure 17: In the area where I live, state institutions operate in a professional and abuse-free manner (N=1598)

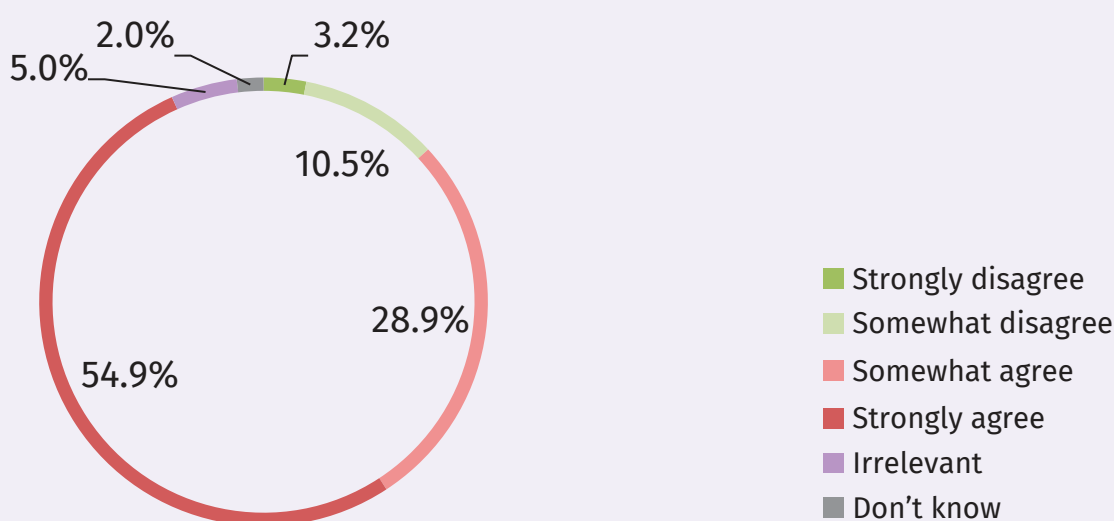


**Statement: In the area where I live, there are many households or individuals that do not fulfil their basic needs**

When asked whether they agree or not with the statement, the vast majority of the respondents (83.8%) indicated they agree that there are many households or individuals in their area, that do not fulfil their basic needs. 13.7% of the respondents disagree or strongly disagree with the statement. Compared to 2018, when 85.6% of the respondents agreed with the sentence, the proportion of respondents who believe that there are many households or individuals in their area that do not fulfil their basic needs has decreased by 1.8 p.p.

Respondents with a university degree (77%) were less likely to agree with the statement as opposed to respondents who have only completed their primary education (91%). All respondents from Dibër, Bulqizë, Librazhd, Mat, Peqin, Vorë, Prrenjas, Gramsh, Rrogozhinë, Sarandë, and Selenicë indicated there are many households or individuals in the area where they live that are unable to fulfil their basic needs. High scores in support of this statement were also noted in the municipalities of Fier, Kurbin, Maliq, Divjakë, Vau i Dejës and Cërrik.

Figure 18: In the area where I live, there are many households or individuals that do not fulfil their basic needs (N=1597)



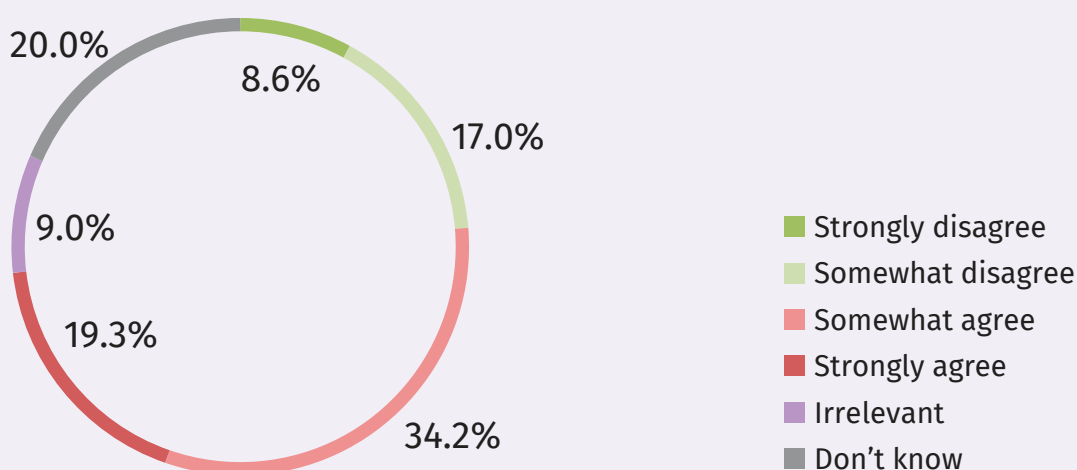
**Statement: In the area where I live, there are religious groups that offer economic privileges or material gain to those who practise their religion**

More than half of the respondents (53.5%) agree that there are religious groups that offer economic privileges or material gain to those who practise their religion in the area where they live, with 19.3% of strongly agreeing. 25.6% disagree with the statement and 20.0% was uncertain whether to agree or not. Only 9% of the respondents found the statement irrelevant. Compared to the 2018 survey, when 30.7% of respondents agreed with the statement, there is a considerable increase of 22.8 p.p. in the proportion of respondents who indicate that there are religious groups offering economic privileges or material gain to those who practice their religion.



Respondents in the age group 25 to 34 years old (57%), Catholics (59%), and Muslim respondents (57%) were more likely to agree with the statement. The more frequently a person practices their religion, the more inclined they were to agree (69% of those that practice all religious rituals and 69% of those who pray regularly). Respondents residing in Durrës, Fier, Dibër, Shkodër, Kurbin, and Shijak are more likely to agree that there are religious groups that offer economic privileges or material gain to those who practise their religion in the area where they live. High support for the statement was also found in Dropull, Libohovë, Mallakastër and Rrogozhinë, although the number of respondents in these municipalities was particularly low.

Figure 19: There are religious groups that offer economic privileges or material gain to those who practise (N=1591)



The vast majority of respondents confirm that in the areas where they live, there are many households or individuals that do not fulfil their basic needs, which, considering the economic impact of the earthquake and pandemic was to be expected. This is however no indication that people are more susceptible to violent extremism any more than the others, as poverty does not correlate with a tendency towards extremism. However, the inability to financially secure the livelihood can make someone vulnerable to violent extremist groups – whether political, nationalist, or religious – by creating a dependency on the material or economic benefits they provide. The proportion of respondents indicating there are religious groups that offer economic privileges or material gain to those who practise their religion in the area where they live, has increased significantly since 2018, with Durrës, Fier, Dibër, Shkodër, Kurbin, and Shijak having the highest proportion of reported cases. While this could be explained by religious leaders and clerics visiting areas affected by the earthquake and offering their support, it remains important to ensure that a long-term dependency is avoided.

The majority of Albanians do not perceive that state institutions of social and economic assistance operate in a professional and abuse-free manner in the area where they live. Communities and individuals become particularly vulnerable to violent extremist narratives when unmet financial needs are combined with dissatisfactory treatment of citizens by local government institutions. In Divjakë, Durrës, Fier, Kamëz, Kurbin, Lushnjë, Memaliaj, Rrëshen, Rrogozhinë, and Vlorë more than 85% of people indicates that many households do not fulfil basic needs and more than 75% says that local state institutions of

*social and economic assistance do not operate in a professional and abuse-free manner, which can lead to people in these municipalities feeling abandoned by the state and society*

## 6. Greed or the proliferation of illegal economic activities

Violent extremist organisations' illegal activities offer lucrative economic opportunities for those who seek a ready income. Networks operating violent extremist and illegal economic activities have a mutually beneficial relationship—providing each other with revenue, experience in concealment, and ideology to legitimize illegal behaviour. Prisons are a popular venue for violent extremist recruitment.

Although violent extremism and terrorism are classified as politically oriented crimes that do not take place in Albania, they are also closely related to other illegal activities that have economic aims. Terrorist organisations engage in illegal economic operations to finance their activities: they purchase arms, false documents and other logistics from traffickers, and launder money through channels also used by organised crime. As noted in the driver 'Unmet social and economic needs', some Islamic charities in the Balkans have acted in the past as cover organisations for terrorist activities, providing terrorists with fake documents produced on the black market and funding their trips in the region through bank transfers<sup>28</sup>. In order to explore whether the environment in Albania offers some space for the nexus of criminal activity and violent extremism, this study asked survey respondents to what extent they would be willing to go through illegal means to make ends meet.

### Statements in this driver:

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

### Statement: I would refuse a lawful job or economic earning that is not allowed by my religion

38.8% of the respondents indicated they would refuse a lawful job or economic earning if it was banned by their religion. Nearly half of the respondents (48.4%) indicated they disagree with the statement. Compared to the 2018 survey, when 33.1% of the survey respondents agreed with the statement, there is a 5.7% increase of respondents who would refuse a lawful job or economic earning if it goes against their religion.

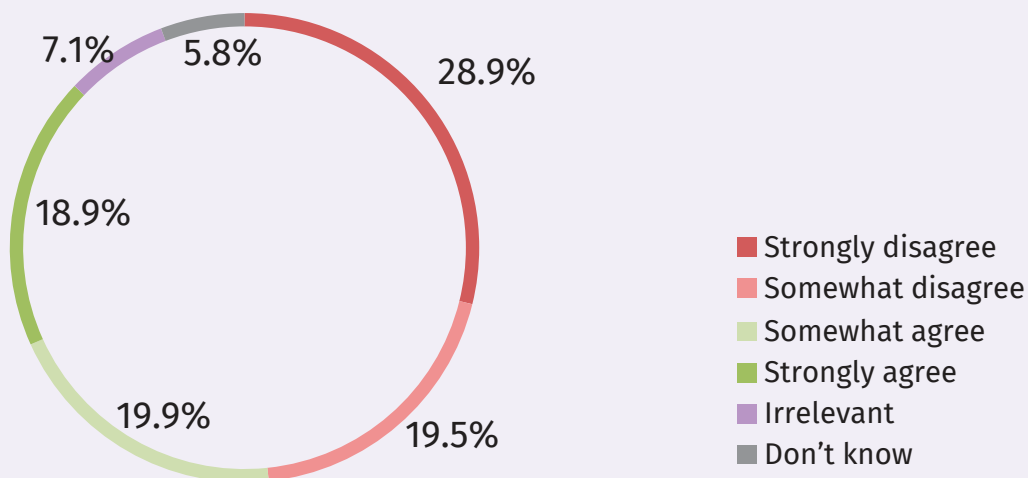
When checking across demographics, less educated respondents (52% of respondents with up to primary education) were more inclined to agree with the statement as opposed to the more educated (25% of respondents with a postgraduate degree). Students (30%) were less inclined to agree with the statement, while Catholic (60%) and Muslim (57%) respondents were more likely to agree. The lesser a person practices their religious rituals or prayer, the less inclined they are to agree with the statement: 57% of practicing believers (those that pray regularly and/or practice all rituals or their religion) were the most likely to agree with the statement.



<sup>28</sup> Zoto, E. (2013) Failure and Success of the Jihadi Information Operations on the Internet. Master thesis. Monterey (CA): Naval Postgraduate School.



Figure 20: would refuse a lawful job or economic earning that is not allowed by my religion (N=1597)



#### Statements:

**For the sake of everyday survival, I would justify every economic activity, including illegal ones**

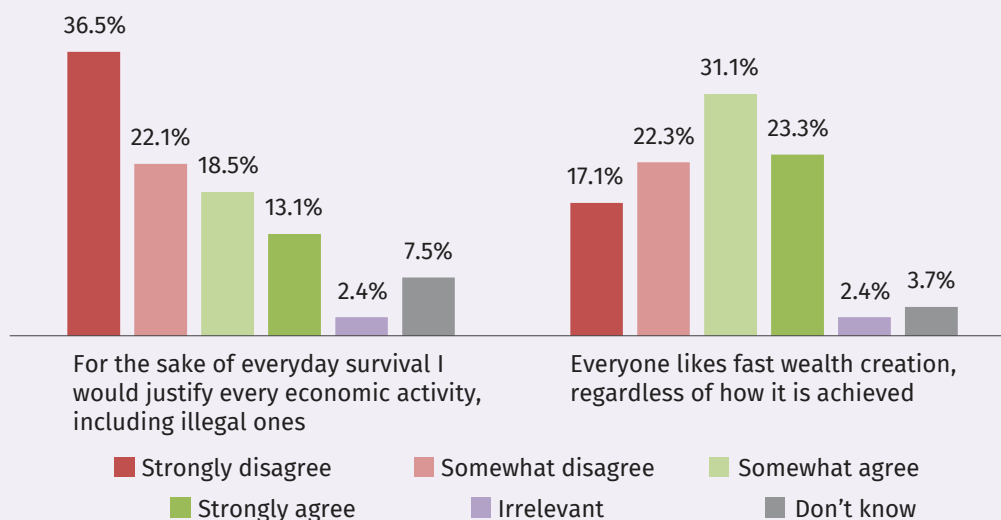
**Everyone likes fast wealth creation, regardless of how it is achieved**

54.4% of respondents agree that everyone likes fast wealth creation regardless of how it is achieved, 39.4% disagree and 6.1% of respondents is either unsure or finds the statement irrelevant. Compared to 2018, when 53.6% agreed with the statement, there is a small increase of 0.8 p.p. in the proportion of respondents that agrees with the statement. While more than half of the respondents agree that everyone likes fast wealth, only 31.6% of the respondents indicate they would justify every economic activity, including illegal ones for the sake of everyday survival, a decrease of 4.6 p.p. compared to 2018.

No substantial differences were noted in terms of the respondents' employment status, in reference to their responses to these questions. Demographic data analysis reveals that the majority of respondents who are more likely to agree justifying every economic activity, including illegal ones for the sake of everyday survival, have completed only their primary education (39%). However, the majority of respondents with a postgraduate degree (72%) indicated that everyone likes fast wealth creation, regardless of how it is achieved.



Figure 21: For everyday survival I would justify every economic activity (N=1596) & Everyone likes fast wealth creation (N=1589)



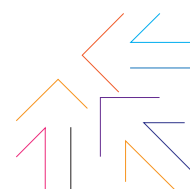
*Violent extremist groups and organised crime groups often make use of the same networks to carry out their illegal activities. When a population is more accepting of criminal activity to make ends meet, this could mean that there is a bigger enabling space for violent extremist groups to tap into this need. This study reveals that while more than half of Albanians agree that everyone likes fast wealth creation regardless of how it is achieved, only 31.6% of the respondents indicate they would justify every economic activity, including illegal ones for the sake of everyday survival.*

*Interestingly, half of Albanians do not perceive religion as restrictive if it comes to accepting a job or economic earning. Half of Albanians say that they would not refuse a lawful job that is not allowed by their religion, while the majority of practicing believers says that they would refuse a lawful job because of their religious values or norms. The less education an individual has, the more they were inclined towards greed-motivated behaviour, which is an indicator of individuals and communities who are prone to engage in criminal activity. The narrative of violent extremism may be particularly appealing to them due to promises of lucrative engagement and common areas of operation.*

### Socio-economic drivers – conclusion

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

Relative deprivation, perceived social exclusion, marginality, and societal discrimination of a certain group may enable the establishment of groups with political extremist agendas. This finding is supported by the results of 8 statements in this section which point towards a socio-economic environment that is deteriorating, while the situation was already troubling. More than 80% of



Albanians indicate that in the area where they live there are many households or individuals that do not fulfil their basic needs and that many young people have fallen prey to dangerous behaviour. When these unmet financial needs are combined with dissatisfactory treatment of citizens by local government institutions (both of which are becoming more salient due to the economic impact of the pandemic), it can create a feeling of discontent or even abandonment by state and society. In municipalities like Divjakë, Durrës, Fier, Kamëz, Kurbin, Lushnjë, Memaliaj, Rrëshen, Rogozhinë, and Vlorë, the majority of people indicates that many households do not fulfil basic needs and that local state institutions do not operate in a professional and abuse-free manner.

Although good education is not always a guarantee to get better opportunities, there is a significant increase in people indicating that in general, well-educated people in the area where they live have good job positions. Whereas in 2018 only 24.1% of Albanians said that well-educated people in the area where they live have good job positions, today 57.9% of Albanians says the same – meaning that according to the public's perception, education helps youth have better life outcomes. Despite improved opportunities for well-educated people, illegal economic activity is not shunned away from by a part of the Albanian population. According to half of the Albanian population – and even 72% of people with a postgraduate degree – everyone like fast wealth creation, regardless of how it is achieved. One in three Albanians – particularly those with low levels of education – is willing to go through illegal means to make ends meet and a similar proportion indicates that the main source of income for youth in the area where they live is not from individual law-abiding work. The less education an individual has, the more they were inclined towards greed-motivated behaviour, which is an indicator of individuals and communities who are prone to engage in criminal activity. The narrative of violent extremism may be particularly appealing to them due to promises of lucrative engagement and common areas of operation. In Fier, Durrës, Kamëz, Krujë, Patos, Skrapar, Roskovec, Rrëshen, Rogozhinë, Tepelenë, and Kurbin, people are more likely to say that the main source of income among youth is not through law-abiding work. When a community is more accepting of criminal activity to make ends meet, this could mean that there is a bigger enabling space for violent extremist groups to tap into this need – especially because the networks that operate illegal economic activities are often the same as those operating violent extremist groups.

While over the past few years, religious violent extremism has been a main concern in Albania, the 2018 study 'Violent Extremism in Albania' (IDM, 2018), noted an increased potential for other types of extremism in Albania. Indeed, this study confirms that the presence of active individuals or groups that incite political extremism (27.3%) is reported more frequently than the presence of religious extremist groups (12.1%), or nationalist extremists (7.6%). In Bulqizë, Rogozhinë, and Kamëz the large majority of people confirms the presence of individuals or groups that incite political extremism, while for religious extremism this is only the case in Rogozhinë and less so in Kamëz, Durrës, and Pogradec. This should serve as a signal to domestic P/CVE stakeholders and specifically the abovementioned municipalities that there is a need to expand the P/CVE initiatives to include political violence or political violent extremism.

However, this does not imply that religious extremism is any less concerning than it was in 2018. In fact, the proportion of respondents indicating there are religious groups that offer economic privileges or material gain to practicing believers has increased by 23 percentage points compared to 2018. In Durrës, Fier, Dibër, Shkodër, Kurbin, and Shijak, the presence of religious groups offering economic or material gain to practicing believers is the highest. Although the distribution of economic rewards is not necessarily an indication of groups that propagate religious (violent) extremist ideologies, the occurrence of offering economic privileges or material gain to people for practicing a certain belief is reminiscent to the early 1990s, when religious charities linked to extremist networks first started making their way into Albania. In order to prevent charities



connected to such networks from operating in Albania, strengthening of anti-terrorism financing and money laundering mechanisms is a crucial step in deterring the influence of these groups.

Perceptions of societal discrimination towards an individual or community (or both) in a broad sense can be a driver for violent extremism. Although societal discrimination on the grounds of religious affiliation is not overtly visible as most Albanians remain tolerant of other religious groups, there are several factors indicating that require attention of relevant stakeholders. 1 in 4 Albanians associate the long beard or headscarf with religious extremism, denoting a distorted perception of religion. 38.8% of Albanians would refuse a lawful job or economic earning that is not allowed by their religion. At least 12% of the Albanian population say that people with the same religious denomination benefit less from opportunities for economic and social development due to their religious belonging. 38.1% say the religious community they belong to is not sufficiently represented in politics. In each of these statements, people with low levels of education are more likely to agree. These findings suggest that although religious extremism is not as concerning as political extremism, the systematic marginalisation of a religious community – even if merely perceptive – generates discontent and produces an alienating environment for religious believers. In turn, the latter can be more susceptible to the influence of unofficial religious interpretations that incite religious hatred or may even urge them to get involved in criminal activities. To this purpose, it is important for the P/CVE stakeholders, educational and religious institutions to increase their efforts in addressing the root causes and effects of stereotypes, prejudice and societal discrimination based on religious grounds. Additionally, it remains important to continue promoting religious tolerance and foster interreligious dialogue – not only at the central level, but also in communities and aiming towards less educated, less engaged citizens.

## 5.2. Political drivers

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

The driver ‘perceptions that the international system is unfair and hostile to Muslim societies’ relates mostly to public perceptions and attitudes towards the West and the international system in general. The political drivers are assessed by this study not only through the lenses of the phenomenon of foreign fighters to Syria and Iraq and the attitudes of religious believers towards religious values and dignity, but also other types of violent extremism such as political and nationalist extremism (Table 3).

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

1	<b>Denial of political rights and civil liberties</b>	The lack of political rights and civil liberties, and closed, unresponsive political systems, can instill a belief that violence is the only means for political change. Civil liberties and political rights also may represent a critical—but not representative—link between economic development and vulnerability to violent extremism.
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2	<b>Harsh government repression and violations of human rights</b>	Cruel, degrading treatment (including torture) to an individual at the hands of the police or security forces can lead to a desire for revenge. The harsher and more widespread the brutality, the greater the spur to violent extremist activities and the more support violent extremism may garner from the local communities.
3	<b>Foreign occupation</b>	Countries subject to (perceived) foreign occupation are at risk of insurgency and rights abuses. Support for violent extremist activities may derive from individuals seeking to redeem disgrace to their person and their community.
4	<b>Political and/or military encroachment</b>	Large-scale political or military intrusion into internal affairs can act as a unifying element, with the community resorting to violence to redeem individual and collective honour. In communities with a historically high degree of autonomy and self-regulation, strong resistance is likely.
5	<b>Endemic corruption and impunity for well-connected elites</b>	This driver prompts civic disengagement and political apathy at the least and can foster a profound sense of moral outrage. The more corrupt the environment, the easier it is for violent extremist groups to establish themselves as a righteous alternative and to lash out at immoral governing elites.
6	<b>Poorly governed or ungoverned areas</b>	These areas are isolated, low population density regions that constitute safe havens where violent extremist organisations can establish themselves with little hindrance, and even garner support from communities ignored by the government.
7	<b>Intimidation or coercion by violent extremist groups</b>	Where governments cannot provide security and protection for its citizens, violent extremist groups use intimidation and coercion to force support for their movement.
8	<b>Perception that the international system is fundamentally unfair and hostile to Muslim societies and peoples</b>	Populations may accept violent extremist propaganda that the global political and economic system discriminates against the Muslim world, which can mesh with personal or communal feelings of discrimination.

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



*“One or several of these political drivers also may be closely intertwined with some of the social and economic drivers discussed earlier. For instance, corruption may sap state capacity by undermining the government’s ability to confront the social exclusion which, as discussed above, often fuels VE.”<sup>29</sup>*

It is therefore important to understand the broader political environment while analysing the salience of drivers in this category, as well as their interplay with other drivers and contextual factors that define the Albanian reality. Compared to the 2018 assessment of drivers, forms, and threats of violent extremism in Albania, the country’s democracy rating has not improved. On the contrary: Freedom House noted a decline in both the respecting of political rights and civil liberties between 2018 and 2020. Albania is still considered ‘partly free’, scoring 27/40 points for respecting political rights and 39/60 points for civil liberties<sup>30</sup>.

Moreover, the overall democracy rating declined from 48.21 to 47.02 (out of 100) in the same period, due to a decline in the Electoral Process rating and in the National Democratic Governance rating that measures the democratic character of the governmental system and the independence, effectiveness, and accountability of the legislative and executive<sup>31</sup>. Albanian citizens have a similar perspective: the majority of the Albanian population perceives the government as not transparent or accountable; trust in domestic institutions is low; petty and grand corruption are seen as widespread; and most Albanians think that they do not have sufficient opportunities to participate in the decision-making of public institutions<sup>32</sup>.

The lack of tangible results in Albania’s efforts to improve democratic governance and consolidation of the rule of law, led the EU to block the opening of accession talks three times between 2016 and 2020. Having received the green light in March 2020 to open accession talks, the country is now hoping to formally start its EU accession, provided it fulfils the 15 set conditions, including adopting an electoral reform, continues the implementation of the justice reform, ensures the functioning of the Constitutional Court and the High Court, and addresses corruption and organised crime<sup>33</sup>.

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



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

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

31 Vurmo, G. (2021). Nations in Transit 2020 report for Albania. Freedom House. Available via: <https://freedomhouse.org/country/albania/nations-transit/2020>

32 Vrugtman, L. and Dauti, M. (2021). Trust in Governance 2020 Opinion Poll. Institute for Democracy and Mediation. Available via: <https://idmalbania.org/trust-in-governance/>

33 See the European Council’s Conclusion of 24 March 2020 on enlargement and stabilisation and association process of the Republic of North Macedonia and the Republic of Albania. Available via: <https://Data.Consilium.Europa.Eu/Doc/Document/St-7002-2020-Init/en/pdf>



### 1. Denial of political rights and civil liberties

A lack of political rights and civil liberties, and closed, unresponsive political systems, can instill a belief that violence is the only means for political change. Civil liberties and political rights also may represent a critical — but not representative — link between economic development and vulnerability to violent extremism.

**Statements in this driver:**

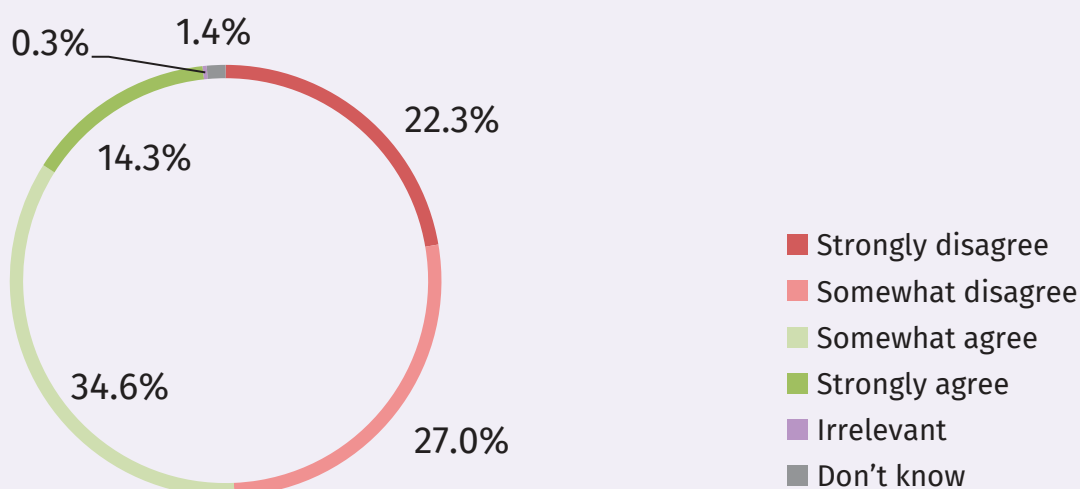
- In general, citizens’ rights and freedoms are respected by state institutions
- The political system in Albania is unfair and has to be changed even with violence if needed

**Statement: In general, citizens’ rights and freedoms are respected by state institutions**

Respondents were asked to rate whether they agree or not with the statement on a 4-point scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4). Almost half of the respondents (48.9%) agree with the statement, while 49.3% indicated to disagree with the statement. When checking across demographics, no substantial differences were found for gender, age, employment status, or geographical representation (urban/rural). Respondents with a post-university degree (57%) were more likely to agree with the statement. Practising believers – meaning respondents that pray regularly and/or practise all the rituals of their religion – were less likely to agree that citizens’ rights and freedoms are generally respected by state institutions (44% for both groups).

In the survey of 2018, the question was posed slightly different, as: “In general, citizens’ rights and civil liberties are respected by state institutions”. We adjusted ‘civil liberties’ to ‘freedoms’ to make the question easier to understand for respondents. That year, 35.7% of the respondents agreed with the statement; meaning that there was an increase of 13.2 p.p. in the support for this statement between 2018 and 2021.

Figure 22: Citizens’ rights and freedoms are respected by state institutions (N=1599)



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

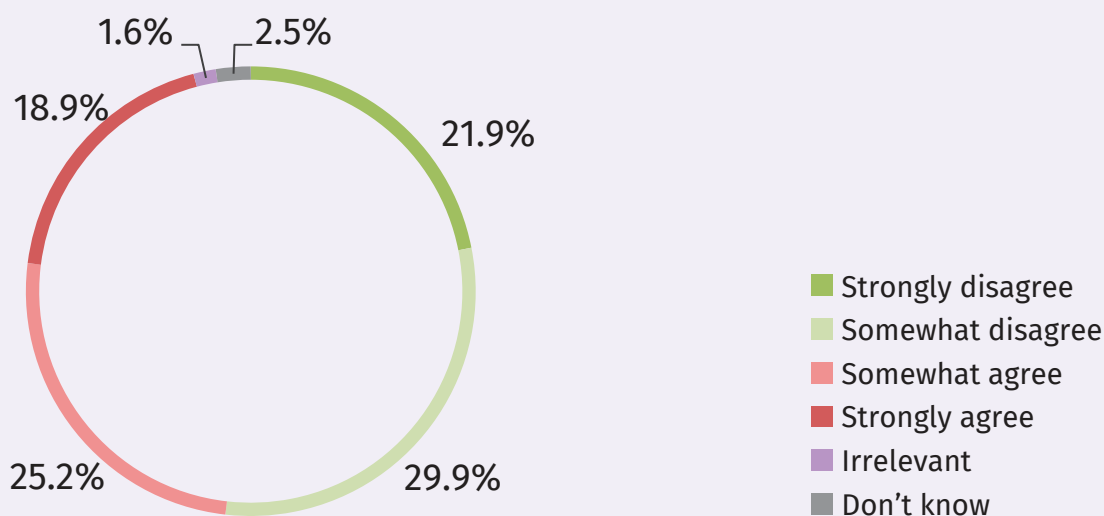
44.1% of the respondents agree with the statement, while more than half of the respondents (51.8%) disagree. Compared to 2018, when 47.7% somewhat agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, there is a decrease of 3.6 p.p. in the proportion of respondents that agree that the political system in Albania is unfair and has to be changed even with violence if needed.

When checking across demographics, no substantial differences were found for gender.

Respondents in the age group 18-24 years old (53%), with up to primary education (50%), or students (55%) were more likely to agree with the statement, while respondents in the age group 65 and older (40%), with a post graduate degree (40%), or from rural areas (38%) were less likely to agree.

People that practise all rituals of their religion (37%) or pray regularly (37%) were less likely to agree that the political system in Albania is unfair and has to be changed even with violence if needed, while respondents who do not actively practise religion (53%) were more likely to agree.

Figure 23: The political system in Albania is unfair and has to be changed even with violence if needed (N=1600)



*Unresponsive political systems or a lack of political rights and civil liberties can instil a belief among citizens that violence is the only means for political change. This study shows that half of Albanians do not think that generally, citizens' rights and freedoms are respected by state institutions and that 44% of Albanians believe that the political system in Albania is unfair and has to be changed even with violence if needed. Indeed, the answers to these statements are a bit more positive than they were in 2018. Still, 18.9% of Albanians would fully support violent means to achieve political change. Similar to the 2018 survey, no religious motivations are observed behind these perceptions: neither religious group scores high on both statements. Actually, Albanians that pray regularly or that practise all rituals of their religion are less likely to agree that the political system in Albania is unfair and has to be changed even with violence if needed than those that do not actively practise the rituals of their religion.*



*Considering that at the same time, 42% of Albanians state to be concerned about political extremism, which is more than any other type of extremism (see the section on cultural drivers), and 27% of Albanians confirm the presence of political extremist individuals or groups in the area where they live (see the socio-economic drivers), the perception among citizens that there is a lack of political rights and civil liberties should not be taken lightly. If some Albanians are willing to use violence for political change, these people could be more prone to political violent extremist narratives.*

## 2. Harsh government repression and gross violations of human rights

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

### Statements in this driver:

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

### **Statement: Law enforcement institutions (police, prosecution, courts) are harsher with practising Muslims**

Respondents were asked to rate whether they agree or not with the statement on a 4-point scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4). 22.7% of the respondents agree with the statement, while the majority of respondents (59.5%) somewhat disagree or strongly disagree. Compared to 2018, when 13.2% somewhat agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, there is an increase of 9.5 p.p. in the proportion of respondents that perceives law enforcement institutions to be harsher with practising Muslims.

When checking across demographics, no substantial differences were found for gender, employment status, or geographical representation (urban/rural). Respondents in the age group over 65 years old (33%), respondents with primary education (29%) or respondents with up to primary education (30%) were more likely to agree with the statement, while respondents with a university degree (19%) or a post-graduate degree were less likely (12%) to agree with the statement.

1 in 4 respondents that identifies as Muslim or comes from a Muslim family agree that law enforcement institutions are harsher with practising Muslims, which is the national average. Practising believers – respondents that pray regularly (18%) and/or practice all the rituals of their religion (19%) – agree less often with the statement than non-practising believers or non-believers.

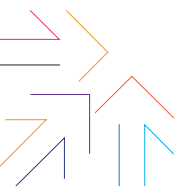
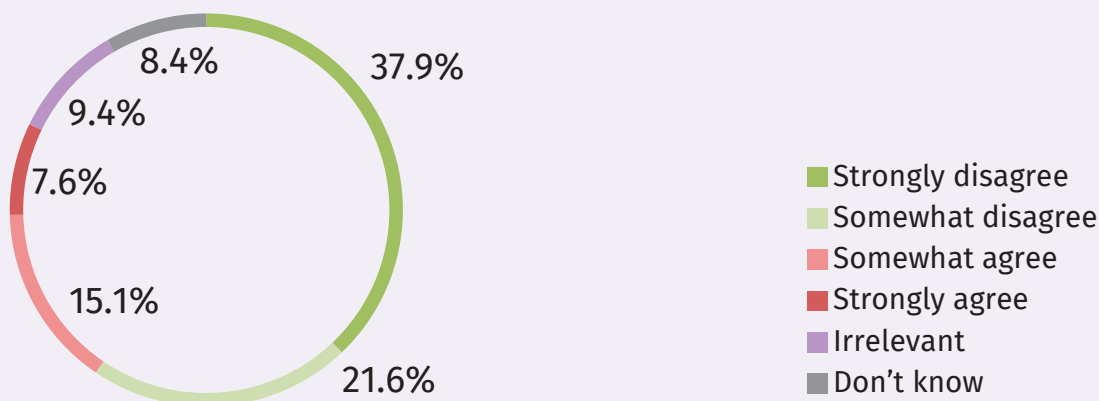




Figure 24: Law enforcement institutions are harsher with practising Muslims (N=1599)

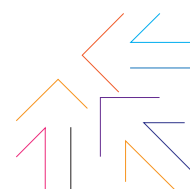
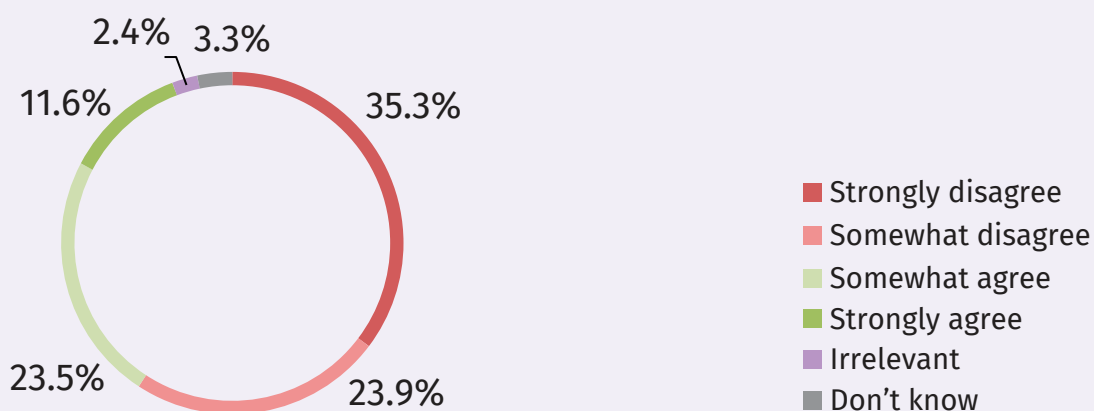


**Statement: People have the right to take the law into their own hands when their rights and freedoms are denied by state institutions**

Respondents were asked to rate whether they agree or not with the statement on a 4-point scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4). 35.1% of the respondents agree with the statement, while 59.2% of the respondents disagree. Compared to 2018, when 35.8% somewhat agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, there is no substantial change in the proportion of respondents that believes people have the right to take the law into their own hands when their rights and freedoms are denied by state institutions.

When checking across demographics, no substantial differences were found for gender or employment status. Respondents with lower levels of education were more likely to agree (30% and 29%), while respondents in the age group 35 to 44 years old (29%), with a post-graduate degree (25%), or respondents residing in rural areas (28%) were less likely to agree with the statement. Respondents that pray regularly (29%) and practise all religious rituals (29%) agree less often with the statement, while respondents that pray occasionally and believers that practise not all religious rituals were more likely to agree.

Figure 25: People have the right to take the law into their own hands when their rights and freedoms are denied (N=1596)



*Despite concerns about the rule of law in Albania, government repression and gross violation of human rights are not observed in Albania. However, with almost every Albanian citizen having a family member or close friend living in a Western (European, USA) country, Albanians maintain their eyes on standards in Western democracies. According to the survey results, almost 1 in 5 Albanians perceives law enforcement institutions to be harsher with practising Muslims. Compared to the 2018 survey, this is an increase of almost 10 p.p.*

*Though Muslim believers do not substantially agree more often with the statement, 1 in 4 Muslim Albanians perceives law enforcement institutions to be harsher with practising Muslims. This should not be underestimated, as unfair treatment at the hands of the police or security forces can be used as a narrative by violent extremist groups. With justice being a critical value in Islam, religious violent extremist propaganda could claim that Muslims in Albania are treated unfairly and that this group can offer a change from such an environment or suggest that there is a need for revenge. The latter option would be especially worrying because even though the proportion of Albanians strongly agreeing with the statement ‘People have the right to take the law into their own hands when their rights and freedoms are denied by state institutions’ has decreased between 2018 and 2021, the overall agreement with the statement remains at 35.1%. Practising believers show less support for both statements in this driver.*

### 3. Foreign occupation

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

#### Statements in this driver:

- Inciting of or engagement in armed conflicts abroad must be allowed
- Albania’s contribution to military missions in Afghanistan and Iraq were an insult to Muslims

#### **Statement: Inciting of or engagement in armed conflicts abroad must be allowed**

Respondents were asked to rate whether they agree or not with the statement on a 4-point scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4)<sup>34</sup>. 16.3% of the respondents agree with the statement, while the large majority, 76%, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree. Compared to 2018, when 21.0% somewhat agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, there is a decrease



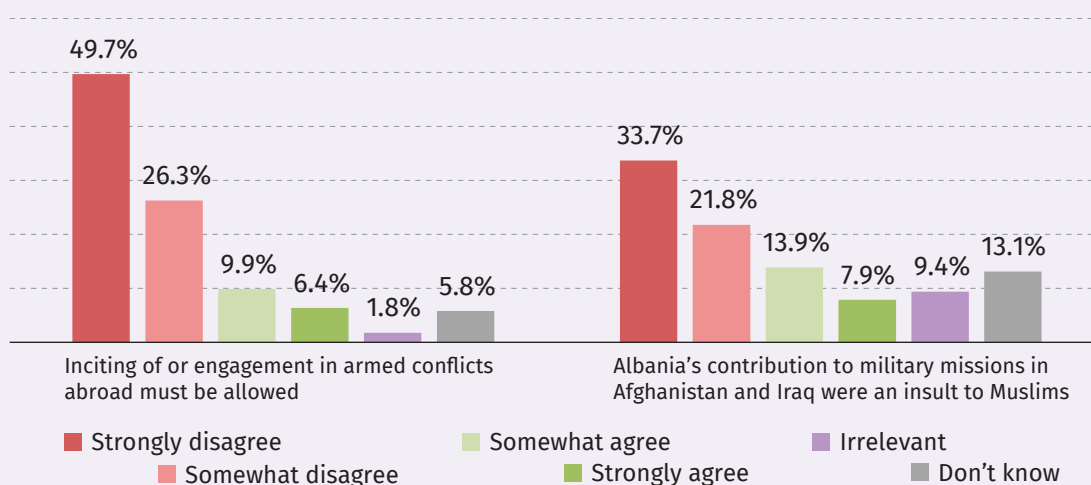
34 The statement is actually posed as “Inciting of or engagement in armed conflicts abroad must not be allowed’, however, to make comparing the two statements in this driver easier, the formulation of the statement has been made positive and the answer categories were reversed. In 2018, the statement was reported as posed in the survey.



of 4.6 p.p. in the proportion of respondents that believes inciting of or engagement in armed conflicts abroad must be allowed.

When checking across demographics, no substantial differences were found for gender, age, education, employment status, or geographical representation.

Figure 26: 'Inciting or engagement in armed conflicts' (N=1599) & 'Military missions in Afghanistan/Iraq insult to Muslims' (N=1598)

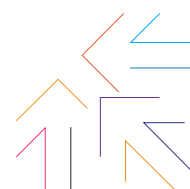


### Statement: Albania's contribution to military missions in Afghanistan and Iraq were an insult to Muslims

21.8% of the respondents agree with the statement, while the 55.5% of the respondents somewhat disagree or strongly disagree. 9.4% indicated that the statement is irrelevant and 13.1% does not know whether to agree or disagree with the statement. Compared to 2018, when 13.0% somewhat agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, there is an increase of 8.8 p.p. in the proportion of respondents that believes Albania's contribution to military missions in Afghanistan and Iraq were an insult to Muslims.

When checking across demographics, no substantial differences were found for gender, age, employment status, or geographical representation. Respondents with up to primary education (38%) or primary education (27%) were more likely to agree with the statement, while respondents with a university degree (16%) or a PhD (19%) were less likely to agree with the statement.

Respondents that are practising believers were less likely to agree with the statement that Albania's contribution to military missions in Afghanistan and Iraq were an insult to Muslims than respondents with less strict religiousness. Respondents indicating that they practise all rituals of their religion (16%) and respondents that pray regularly (16%) agree less often with the statement, while respondents praying only occasionally, at special religious events (31%) or occasionally, in family or personal crisis (33%) agreed more often with the statement.



Countries subject to foreign occupation – even when this is only perceived occupation according to specific groups – are more at risk of violent extremist groups operating in the countries, insurgencies and rights abuses. Even though foreign occupation is not directly relevant to the Albanian context, the study shows that there is some support for this driver among the Albanian population. While the large majority of Albanians perceives that inciting of or engagement in armed conflicts abroad should be illegal, as is the case in Albania, 16.3% believe inciting of or engagement in armed conflicts abroad must be allowed. Compared to 2018, this is a small improvement.

Similarly, while most Albanians would not agree that the country's contribution to military missions in Afghanistan and Iraq were an insult to Muslims, still 21.8% feel as if it was an insult to Muslim populations. People with a stricter religiousness were less likely to agree than respondents with less strict religiousness. The fact that there was an increase of 8.8 p.p. compared to the 2018 report, as well as the increased support for the driver 'Perception that the international system is fundamentally unfair and hostile to Muslim societies and peoples' in the same period, signals that there is a growing perception that Muslim populations are not treated fairly or equally to non-Muslim societies and peoples.

#### 4. Political and/or military encroachment

In this driver, we assess to what extent possible extremist narratives can build support through a perceived need to redeem religious dignity or ideology more broadly. Political or military intrusion into internal affairs can act as a unifying element, with the community resorting to violence to protect individual and collective honour. In communities with a historically high degree of autonomy, self-regulation, and self-reliance, strong resistance against intrusion is likelier.

##### Statements in this driver:

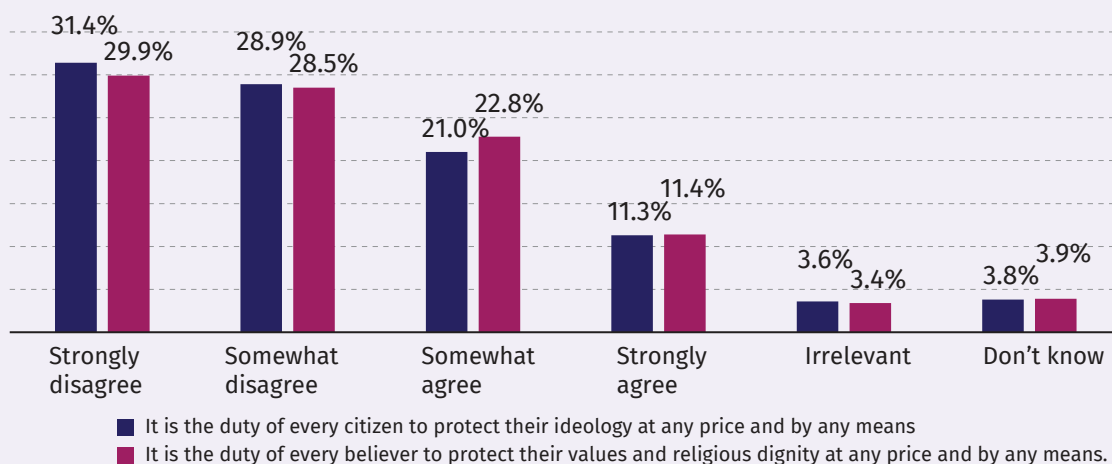
- It is the duty of every citizen to protect their ideology at any price and by any means
- It is the duty of every believer to protect their values and religious dignity at any price and by any means

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

32.3% of the respondents agree with the statement, while the majority, 60.3% of the respondents, disagree. When checking across demographics, no substantial differences were found for gender, age, or employment status. Respondents with up to primary education (43%) and respondents residing in urban areas (37%) were more likely to agree, while respondents with a university (28%) or a post-graduate degree (27%), and respondents from rural areas (26%) were less likely to agree.



Figure 27: Duty to protect ideology (N=1597) vs. Duty to protect religion (N=1598)



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

34.2% of the respondents somewhat agree or strongly agree to the statement, while 58.4% disagree. Compared to the 2018 survey, when 40.6% of the respondents agreed, there is a decrease of 6.4 p.p. in the proportion of respondents that agree that it is the duty of every believer to protect their values and religious dignity at any price and by any means.

When checking across demographics, no substantial differences were found for gender or geographical representation. Respondents with up to primary education were more likely to agree (53%), while respondents with a university (30%) or post-graduate degree (22%) were less likely to agree. Respondents over 65 years old (40%) were more likely to agree with the statement 'It is the duty of every believer to protect their values and religious dignity at any price and by any means', while respondent in the age group 18 to 24 years old (28%) and students (21%) were less likely to agree. Respondents that indicate to regularly practise all religious rituals agree more often (41%) than respondents that do not practice the religious rituals (22%) or never pray (15%).

*Considering Albania is not suffering from direct military and/or political encroachment, it is unsurprising that the majority of Albanians does not support the statements in this driver. Even more so, the support for the driver has decreased compared to 2018. Still, approximately 1 in 3 Albanians agree that it is the duty of every citizen to protect their ideology and the duty of every believer to protect their religious values and dignity at any price and by any means. For both statements, people with low levels of education were more likely to agree, while people with high levels of education were less likely to agree. People that indicate to regularly practise all religious rituals and pray (both regularly or occasionally) agreed more often with the statement. This means that there is some possibility for violent extremist groups to build support should there be a perceived need to redeem religious dignity or ideology more broadly.*



## 5. Endemic corruption and impunity for well-connected elites

Like for most Western Balkan states, endemic corruption and impunity for well-connected political and economic elites have been a persistent challenge in Albania. In 2018, the European Commission's Enlargement Strategy for the Western Balkans for the first time referred to 'clear elements of state capture' when defining challenges to the rule of law in countries in the region, including Albania.<sup>35</sup> According to Transparency International, chains of loyalty and mutual benefits cause officials to abuse their office for private interests through undue influence on the judiciary and tailor-made laws. In the meantime, ordinary citizens pay for this through loss of livelihood, poor public services, limited opportunities, and by losing trust in democracy<sup>36</sup>. The continued issues with corruption and organised crime prompted the establishment of specialised anti-corruption bodies (SPAK and the Anti-Corruption and Organised Crime Courts) as a part of the Justice Reform<sup>37</sup>. Although these bodies are expected to significantly strengthen the overall capacity to investigate and prosecute corruption, they have only recently become operational and thus lack a track record of prosecuting high-level cases.

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

### Statements in this driver:

- Countries with strong religious faith have less corrupt governments
- Albania would have more justice if more people would join my religion

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

Respondents were asked to indicate whether they agree or not with the statement on a 4-point scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4). 38.3% of the respondents agree with the statement, while 42.3% of the respondents disagree. 10.2% indicated that the statement is irrelevant and 9.2% does not know whether to agree or disagree with the statement. Compared to 2018, when 31.4% somewhat agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, there is an increase of 6.9 p.p. in the proportion of respondents that agree that countries with strong religious faith have less corrupt governments.

When checking across demographics, no substantial differences were found for gender



35 European Commission COM. (2018). A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans. p. 3. Available via: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/communication-credible-enlargement-perspective-western-balkans\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/communication-credible-enlargement-perspective-western-balkans_en.pdf)

36 Zúñiga, N. (2020) Examining State Capture: Undue Influence on Law-Making and the Judiciary in the Western Balkans and Turkey. Transparency International. Available via: [https://images.transparencycdn.org/images/2020\\_Report\\_ExaminingStateCapture\\_English.pdf](https://images.transparencycdn.org/images/2020_Report_ExaminingStateCapture_English.pdf)

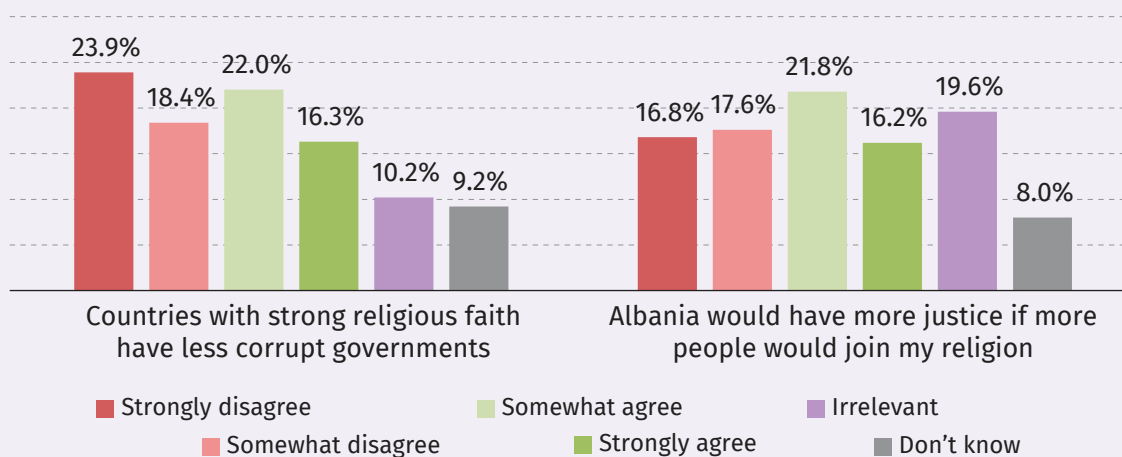
37 European Commission COM. (2020). Albania 2020 Report. Available via: [https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/albania\\_report\\_2020.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/albania_report_2020.pdf)



or geographical representation. Respondents over 65 years old (53%), with up to primary education (55%) were more likely to agree with the statement, while students (31%) and respondents with secondary education (31%) were less likely to agree.

Respondents that practise all religious rituals (55%) and regularly pray (55%) were more likely to agree to the statement, while respondents that do not practise any religious rituals (24%) or that never pray (23%) were less likely to agree.

Figure 28: 'Strong religious faith less corrupt' (N=1599) & 'More justice if people join my religion' (N=1598)



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

38.0% of the respondents agree with the statement, while 34.4% of the respondents disagree. One in five respondents (19.6%) indicated that to them, the statement is irrelevant. Compared to 2018, when 35.5% somewhat agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, there is an increase of 2.5 p.p. in the proportion of respondents that believes Albania would have more justice if more people would join their religion. Similarly, in 2018, 22.5% of the respondents also indicated that this statement is not relevant according to them.

When checking across demographics, no substantial differences were found for gender, or geographical representation. Respondents in the age group 25 to 34 years old (43%) and up to primary education (44%) were more likely to agree with the statement, while students (31%) were less likely to agree.

Respondents that practise all religious rites (46%) and those that regularly pray (47%) were more likely to agree to the statement, while respondents that do not practise any religious rites (20%) or that never pray (23%) were less likely to agree.

*Corruption, state capture, and impunity for well-connected political and economic elites continues to be a problem in Albania. This driver examines to what extent faith is seen as having a positive influence on governance and justice. Although a considerable proportion of Albanians found the statements irrelevant for Albania, the general support for the statements in this driver is at approximately 38%. In other words, almost 4 in 10 Albanians see an opportunity for religion to mitigate corruption and*



*impunity. For both statements, the support is larger than in 2018, signalling an increase in perceived impunity and corruption.*

*Considering the low trust in governance in Albania, there is a real potential for Albanian citizens to become apathetic towards politics. Half of Albanians that are practicing believers (people that pray regularly and/or practise all religious rituals) agree that countries with strong religious faith have less corrupt governments and that Albania would have more justice if more people would join their religion. This means that there is an increased opportunity for religious violent extremist groups to establish themselves as a righteous alternative to the perceived immoral or unjust governing elites.*

## 6. Poorly governed or ungoverned areas

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

### Statements in this driver:

- Religious activities should not be overseen by the state
- In the area where I live the ‘state as law enforcement authority’ is present more than the ‘state as provider of public services for citizens’
- The presence of the “state” as a law enforcer and provider of public services is lower in the countryside than in the cities.

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

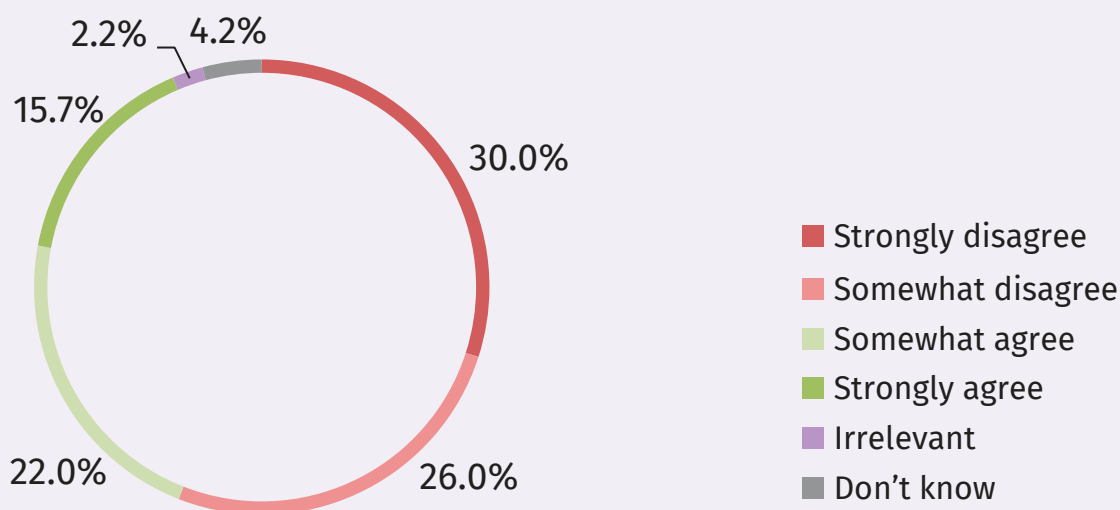
Respondents were asked to indicate whether they agree or not with the statement on a 4-point scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4). 37.7% of the respondents agree with the statement, while the majority, 56.0% of the respondents disagree. Compared to 2018, when 45.1% somewhat agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, there is a decrease of 7.4 p.p. in the proportion of respondents that agree that religious activities should not be overseen by the state.

When checking across demographics, no substantial differences were found for gender, employment status, or geographical representation. Respondents over 65 years old were less likely (32%) to agree with the statement, while respondents with primary education (45%) were more likely to agree. Respondents that indicate to regularly practise all religious rituals (43%) or most religious rituals (42%) were more likely to agree to the statement than respondents that do not practise the rituals of a religion (25%) and respondents that never pray (22%).





Figure 29: Religious activities should not be overseen by the state (N=1595)



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

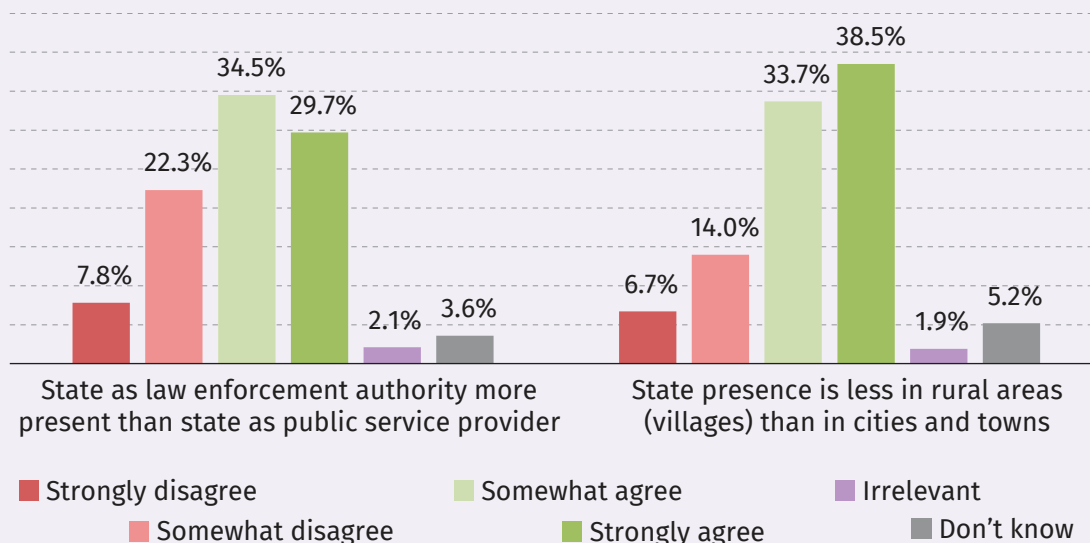
64.2% of the respondents agree with the statement, while 30.1% disagree. Compared to 2018, when 70.2% of the respondents somewhat agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, there is 6 p.p. decrease in the support for the statement. Particularly the proportion of respondents that strongly agreed with this statement decreased significantly, from 44.8% in 2018 to 29.7% in 2021 (-15.1 p.p.).

When checking across demographics, no substantial differences were found for gender, age, or religious affiliation. Students (73%) agree more often with the statement, while respondents with up to primary education (58%) or residing in rural areas (58%) were less likely to agree with the statement. Respondents that indicate they practise all the religious rituals of their religion (73%) or pray regularly (73%) were more likely to agree with the statement.

Respondents living in Cërrik, Elbasan, Kamëz, Kolonjë, Kurbin, Rrëshen, Rogozhinë, and Skrapar were more likely to agree with the statement. Many municipalities that had the majority of respondents report in 2018 that the state was more operating as a law enforcement in the area where they live, have significantly improved in 2021. These municipalities include: Belsh, Dibër, Gramsh, Has, Kavajë, Klos, Kukës, Lezhë, Librazhd, Mat, Mirditë, Peqin, Prrenjas, Tropojë, Ura Vajgurore, and Vau i Dejes.



Figure 30: 'State is law enforcement or service provider' (N=1593) & 'State presence less in rural areas' (N=1596)



**Statement: The presence of the "state" as a law enforcer and provider of public services is lower in the countryside than in the cities**

72.2% of the respondents somewhat agree or strongly agree with the statement, while 20.7% disagreed. Compared to 2018, when 74.5% of the respondents somewhat agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, there is no substantial increase in the support for the statement. However, the proportion of respondents that strongly agreed with this statement decreased significantly, from 54.2% in 2018 to 38.5% in 2021 (-15.7 p.p.).

When checking across demographics, no substantial differences were found for gender, age, employment status, or religious affiliation. Respondents with up to primary education (63%) or residing in rural areas (66%) were less likely to agree with the statement, while in 2018 people residing in rural areas were more likely to agree. Respondents that indicate they practise all the religious rituals of their religion (71%) or pray regularly (81%) were more likely to agree with the statement.

*The salience of the driver 'Poorly governed or ungoverned areas' with regard to violent extremism is disputable. On the one hand, it is true that suspicious religious charities and organisations have (ab) used the lack of public services in remote areas to target youngsters and citizens facing socio-economic challenges. This was also signalled by some of the respondents in the present study. Yet, this misuse has not led to considerable support for (violent) extremist groups in these isolated areas in Albania.*

*Over the past few years, the Albanian government has taken steps to improve public service delivery in both urban and rural areas. At the same time, with many Albanians looking at the standard of service delivery in other European countries, quality rather than mere existence of public services is becoming increasingly important. This makes it unsurprising that the majority of Albanians agree that the state as law enforcement authority is more present than the 'state as provider of public services for citizens', and*

*an even larger proportion agrees that the presence of the "state" as a law enforcer and service provider is lower in the countryside than in cities. Compared to 2018, the proportion of Albanians that strongly agree with the statements has decreased substantially and the proportion of Albanians residing in rural areas agree less often that state presence is lower in the countryside than in cities. This might signal that the efforts of the Albanian government are yielding some results.*

*Albanians living in rural areas were less likely to agree with both statements, although still the majority agrees. People living in Cërrik, Dropull, Elbasan, Gramsh, Këlcyrë, Kolonjë, Lezhë, Rrëshen, Rogozhinë, Skrapar, and Tropojë, were more likely to agree that the 'state as law enforcement authority' is present more than the 'state as provider of public services for citizens' in the area where they live and rural areas more generally. As frequent practicing believers – regardless of which political affiliation they have – are more likely to agree with the statements in the driver, there may be more enabling space for violent extremist groups using religious narratives to support their cause in poorly governed areas.*

## 7. Intimidation or coercion by violent extremist groups

Where governments cannot provide security and protection for its citizens, violent extremist groups use intimidation and coercion to force support for their movement. Although this driver does not describe the Albanian reality, hidden forms of coercion or even peer pressure that might cause one to adhere to, or tolerate, radical or violent extremist ideologies. As elaborated for the socio-economic driver 'unmet social and economic needs', more than half of respondents agree that in their communities there are religious groups that offer economic privileges or material gain to those who practise their religion – with 19.3 percent of them even strongly agreeing.

To assess this driver in the Albanian context, the present survey sought to gather the first-hand experience of respondents in order to establish whether they have observed radical individuals pressuring people to join their cause and believers' attitude towards religious extremists in their community.

### Statements in this driver:

- A true believer should not denounce members of their own community who hold religious extremist views
- There are radical individuals in the area where I live that pressure people to join groups promoting political/nationalist/religious extremism.

### Statement: A true believer should not denounce members of their own community who hold religious extremist views

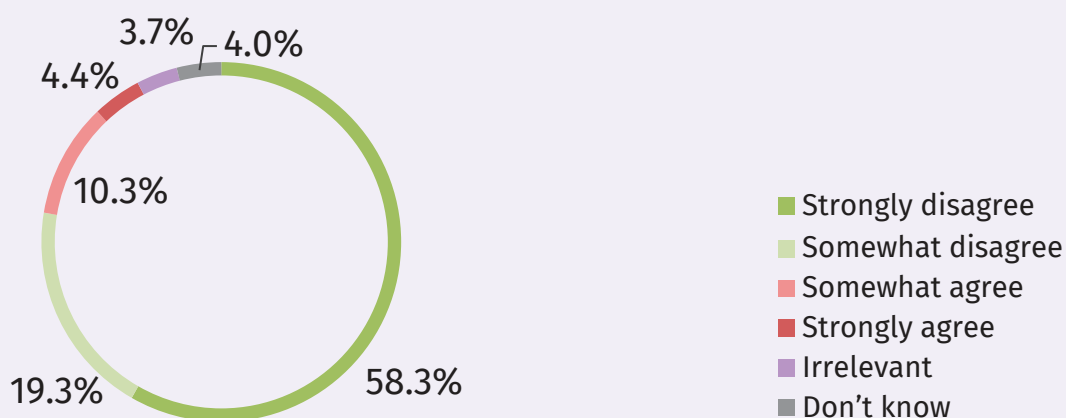
Respondents were asked to indicate whether they agree or not with the statement on a 4-point scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4). 14.7% of the respondents agree with the statement, while 77.6% of the respondents disagree; meaning that the majority thinks that a true believer should denounce members of their own community who hold religious extremist views. Compared to 2018, when 13.7% of the respondents somewhat agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, the proportion of respondents that thinks a true believer should not denounce members of their own community who hold religious extremist views did not increase substantially (1 p.p.).

When checking across demographics, no substantial differences were found for gender,



age, employment sector, or geographical representation. Respondents with up to primary education (25%) were more likely to agree with the statement. Interestingly, while in the 2018 survey practicing believers were less likely to denounce members of their own community who hold religious extremist views, now practicing believers are more likely to do so. Respondents that pray regularly (11%) or practise all rituals of their religion (11%) agree less often with the statement than respondents that pray occasionally.

Figure 31: True believer should not denounce members of own community with extremist views (N=1587)

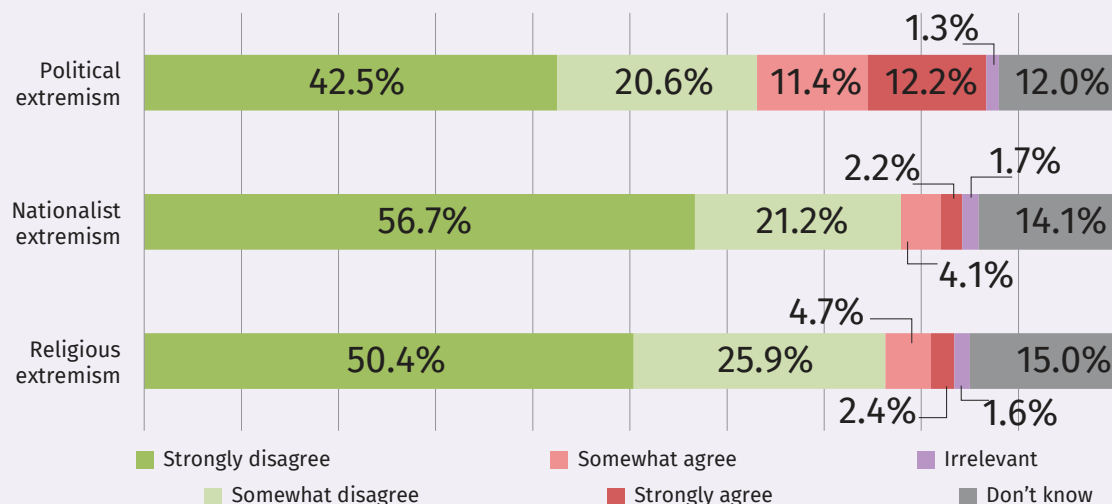


**Statement: There are radical individuals in the area where I live that pressure people to join groups promoting political/nationalist/religious extremism.**

Respondents were asked to indicate whether they agree or not with the statements on a 4-point scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4). For the statement on whether there are radical individuals that pressure people to join groups promoting political extremism in the area where they live, 23.6% of the respondents agree: 11.4% somewhat agree and 12.2% strongly agree, while the majority disagrees (63.1%) and 12.0% is unsure. Differences across demographics such as gender, education, geographical representation, or religious affiliation were insignificant. Respondents under 44 years old (24.9%, 26.4%, 26.1%) and those residing in urban areas (25%) were more likely to indicate that there are radical individuals pressuring people to join political extremist groups, while respondents over 64 years old (18%) or people residing in rural areas (22%) were less likely to agree. Respondents residing in Bulqizë, Durrës, Kamëz, Kavajë, Këlcyrë, Libohovë, Pukë, and Shijak were more likely to indicate that there are radical individuals that pressure people to join groups promoting political extremism in the area where they live.

For the same statement, but focusing on radicals pressuring people to join groups promoting nationalist extremism, 6.3% of the respondents agree: 4.1% said that they somewhat agree and 2.3% strongly agree. Differences across demographics such as gender, age, education, or geographical representation were insignificant. Respondents in Berat, Mat, Memaliaj, Pogradec, Shijak, Tepelenë, Ura Vajgurore, and Vau i Dejës were more likely to agree that there are individuals pressuring people to join nationalist extremist groups in the area where they live, but in these municipalities the number of respondents is low.

Figure 32: Radical individuals with political/nationalist/religious extremist views (N1=1595; N2=1595; N3=1591)



For religious extremism, considered as the main type of extremism that poses a security threat in Albania by both national and international stakeholders<sup>38</sup>, only 7.1% of the respondents agree with the statement ‘There are radical individuals in the area where I live that pressure people to join groups promoting religious extremism’<sup>39</sup>, while 76.3% disagree and 15.0% is unsure. Compared to 2018, when 11.5% of the respondents agreed with the statement, there is a decrease of 4.4 p.p. in the proportion of respondents indicating that there are radical individuals that pressure people to join religious extremist groups.

Differences across demographics such as gender, age, education, or geographical representation were insignificant. Understandably, respondents that are more engaged with religion also encounter more often radical individuals that pressure people to join groups promoting religious extremism. Respondents that indicate that they pray regularly (10%) or at all religious festivals during the year (9%), as well as respondents that celebrate all (10%) or most religious rituals (9%) were more likely to agree that ‘there are radical individuals that pressure people to join religious extremist groups in the area where I live’ than respondents that demonstrate less religiousness.

8% of the respondents residing in urban areas agreed with the statement, while 6% of those residing in rural areas agrees. Respondents residing in Cërrik, Kamëz, Kuçovë, Maliq, Pogradec,



38 Vrugtman, L. (2021). The status of (preventing and countering) violent extremism in Albania. Institute for Democracy and Mediation. Available via: <https://idmalbania.org/pcve-albania-paper/>

39 Respondents were asked to specify which religion these groups or individuals adhere to. Some respondents noted “Muslim” (Sunni Islam), “Jehovah’s Witness”, or “different religious groups”. Others note that there are people operating in their community that are funded from abroad, that there are individuals/groups looking for poor people to exploit and/or radicalise, or that they see individuals with a misinterpretation of faith in their community.



Rrogozhinë, Shkodër, Tirana, and Ura Vajgurore were more likely to indicate that there are radical individuals that pressure people to join groups promoting religious extremism in the area where they live. In 2018, more respondents confirmed (agreed or strongly agreed) such pressure on religious believers in the municipalities of Durrës, Elbasan, Kamëz, Kavajë, Krujë, Shijak, Tiranë, Vlorë, and Vorë.

*Intimidation or coercion by violent extremist groups does not seem to be a prevalent problem in Albania. The majority of Albanians say that there are no radical individuals pressuring people to join extremist groups in their community. Almost 1 in 4 Albanians (particularly young people) indicates that there are radical individuals pressuring people to join political extremist groups in the area where they live, while only few Albanians say that there are individuals operating in their community that pressure people to join nationalist or religious extremist groups. Similar to the other statements on whether there are violent extremist groups operating in the area where respondents live, less than 2% of respondents finds the statements irrelevant. Interestingly, the concern people express about different types of extremism – mostly about political extremism, less about religious or nationalist extremism – is compatible with the relative proportion of respondents that reports such groups are operating in their community.*

*Compared to the 2018 study, the proportion of Albanians reporting that ‘there are radical individuals pressuring people to join groups promoting religious extremism in the area where they live’ has decreased substantially. Moreover, the large majority of the Albanians thinks that a true believer should denounce members of their own community who hold religious extremist views. Interestingly, while in the 2018 survey practicing believers were less likely to denounce members of their own community who hold religious extremist views, now practicing believers are more likely to do so. This means that the increased focus on religious harmony and dialogue, not only by the religious leaders taking part in the Interreligious Council of Albania but also by local clerics, has had a positive impact of believers’ tolerance of extremist views. Community leaders – whether religious, political, or societal – have an imperative role in the mitigation of influence violent extremist individuals and groups. Encouraging people to speak up when someone has ideas that could pose a threat to security helps keep the community safe, because when radical, violent ideologies are not accepted among community members, the enabling space of VE groups shrinks.*

## 8. Perception that the international system is fundamentally unfair and hostile to Muslim societies and peoples

The Albanian population is overwhelmingly pro-European and pro-American. According to the Eurobarometers conducted in 2017/2018<sup>40</sup>, more than 75% of Albanians said that they trust the European Union and according to the Gallup International poll 72% of Albanians have a positive outlook on the US and its leadership<sup>41</sup>. However, the bumpy road towards EU-accession, during which the bloc postponed the opening of accession negotiations three times, and the continued



40 See the fact sheets of Eurobarometer 87 until 90. Source: <https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/General/index>

41 Zivanovic, M. (2018). Kosovo Leads World in Cheering for Trump, Poll Shows. Balkan Insight. Available via: <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/kosovo-shows-highest-support-for-us-leadership-in-europe-poll-01-18-2018>



attacks towards the EU from Albanian political elites have caused the approval rates for the EU to drop. The latest Eurobarometer of summer 2020 show a decrease to 62% of the EU's approval rate<sup>42</sup>, a trend that is also visible in the annual Trust in Governance Opinion Poll conducted by the Institute of Democracy and Mediation<sup>43</sup>.

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

#### Statements in this driver:

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

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

Respondents were asked to indicate whether they agree or not with the statement 'on a 4-point scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4). 26.2% of the respondents somewhat agree or strongly agree with the statement, while 51.2% of the respondents disagree. 14.9% of the respondents was not sure whether to agree or disagree. Compared to 2018, when 18.5% somewhat agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, there is an increase of 7.7 p.p. in the proportion of respondents that agree that global political and economic structures (e.g. UN, IMF) are an invention of the West to rule Muslim countries.

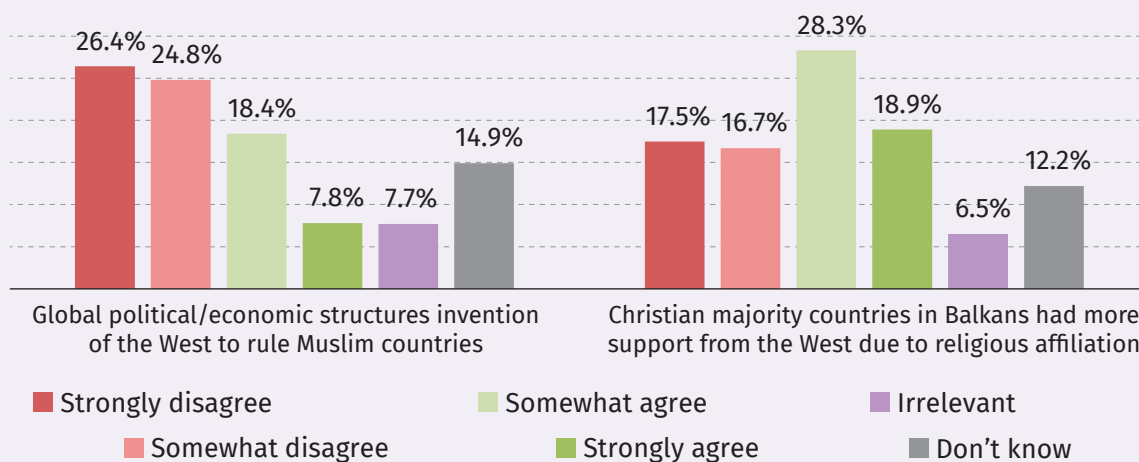
When checking across demographics, no substantial differences were found for gender, education, religious affiliation, or religiousness. Respondents over 65 years old (31%), students (33%), and respondents living in urban areas (28%) were more likely to agree with the statement, while respondents living in rural areas (23%) were less likely to agree.

42 Eurobarometer 93. Source: <https://ec.europa.eu/comfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/General/index>

43 Vrugtman, L. and Dauti, M. (2021). Trust in Governance 2020 Opinion Poll. Institute for Democracy and Mediation. Available via: <https://idmalbania.org/trust-in-governance/>



Figure 33: ‘Global structures invented to rule Muslim countries’ (N=1600) & ‘Christian countries more support from West’ (N=1594)



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

47.2% of the respondents somewhat agree or strongly agree with the statement, while 34.2% of the respondents disagree. 12.2% does not know whether to agree or disagree. Compared to 2018, when 34.5% somewhat agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, there is an increase of 12.7 p.p. in the proportion of respondents that agree that countries with a Christian majority population in the Balkans have had more support from the West precisely due to their religious affiliation.

When checking across demographics, no substantial differences were found for gender, education, or employment status. Respondents over 65 years old (58%), between 45 and 54 years old (53%) or residing in urban areas (50%) were more likely to agree with the statement, while respondents in the age group ‘35-44 years old’ (38%) or residing in rural areas (44%) were less likely to agree. Christian respondents (Orthodox, Catholic) were less likely to agree than Muslim respondents.

**Statement: EU has been unfair with countries in the Balkans with a considerable Muslim population (Albania, Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia)**

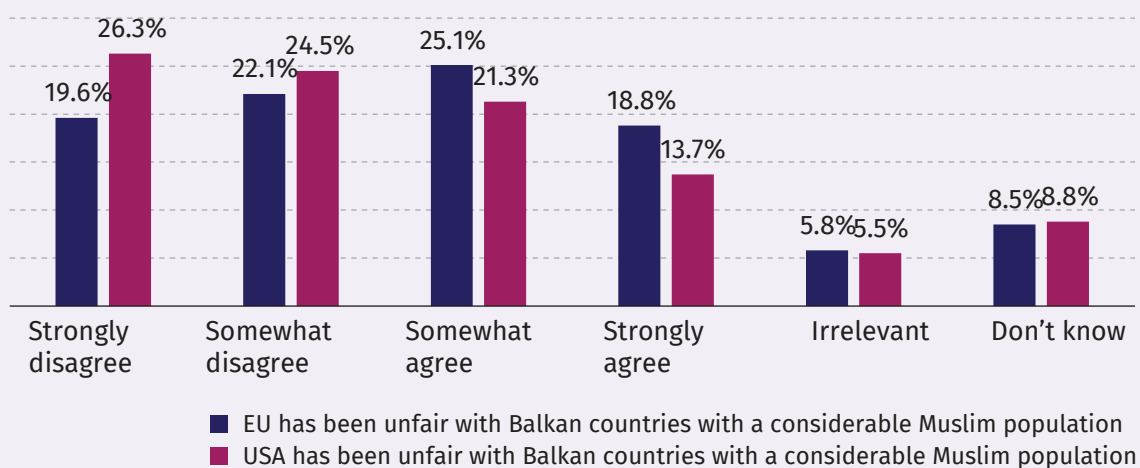
43.9% of the respondents agree with the statement, while 41.7% of the respondents disagree. Compared to 2018, when 27.7% agreed with the statement, there is an increase of 16.2 p.p. in the proportion of respondents that agree that the EU has been unfair with countries in the Balkans with a considerable Muslim population.

When checking across demographics, no substantial differences were found for employment status, or geographical representation. 47% of the female respondents agree with the statement, compared to 42% of the male respondents. Respondents in the age group 25-34 years old (37%) or with up to primary education (38%) were less likely to agree with the statement, while respondents between 18 and 24 years old (49%) and respondents with a PhD



(68%) were more likely to do so. Respondents that practise all rituals of their religion (51%) and respondents that pray regularly (51%) were more likely to agree. Similar to the previous statement, Christian respondents were less likely to agree that the EU has been unfair with countries in the Balkans with a considerable Muslim population.

Figure 34: 'EU unfair with Muslim-majority countries' (N=1599) vs. 'USA unfair with Muslim-majority countries' (N=1600)



**Statement: USA has been unfair with countries in the Balkans with a considerable Muslim population (Albania, Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia)**

Respondents were asked to indicate whether they agree or not with the statement on a 4-point scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4). 35.0% of the respondents agree with the statement, while 50.8% of the respondents disagree. Compared to 2018, when 21.6% somewhat agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, there is an increase of 13.4 p.p. in the proportion of respondents that agree that the USA has been unfair with countries in the Balkans with a considerable Muslim population.

When checking across demographics, no substantial differences were found for gender, education, geographical representation, or religiousness. Respondents over 65 years old (40%) and unemployed respondents (40%) were more likely to agree with the statement, while respondents in the age group '18-24 years old' (28%) were less likely to agree. Respondents that identify as Muslim (40%) were more likely to agree that USA has been unfair with countries in the Balkans with a considerable Muslim population, while Orthodox (24%) and Bektashi (28%) respondents were less likely to do so.

*Although Albanians are overwhelmingly pro-European and pro-American, the slow Euro-Atlantic integration has affected Albanians' approval of the EU. Compared to the previous national assessment of drivers of violent extremism (IDM, 2018), the support for all of the statements in this driver has increased. 19% of Albanians strongly agree that the EU has been unfair with countries in the Balkans with a*



*considerable Muslim population and that countries with a Christian majority population in the Balkans have had more support from the West precisely due to their religious affiliation. The support for the statement “USA has been unfair with countries in the Balkans with a considerable Muslim population”, on the other hand, is much less. It is quite likely that this perception, besides being fuelled by the sluggish EU accession of Albania, Kosovo, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, stems from the public discourse around the recent postponement of opening accession negotiations.*

*When a part of the population feels treated unequally – whether it is true or just perception – this could be exploited by extremist groups looking to promote themselves as a righteous or “more just” alternative. Similar to 2018, the perception that the US is unfair towards Muslim countries and societies is less common than the West and/or global structures being unfair towards Muslims, meaning that possible VE narratives around the EU’s unfairness in the Balkan context holds a higher risk than narratives in a global context or those against the USA.*

### Political drivers – conclusion

Out of eight drivers analysed in the category of political drivers to violent extremism, three drivers seem particularly relevant in the Albanian context: (1) Denial of political rights and civil liberties, (5) Endemic corruption and impunity for well-connected elites, and in some communities, (6) Poorly governed or ungoverned areas. These drivers are supported by approximately half of respondents and more often than not by younger people with low levels of education. While some drivers are seen as more salient compared to 2018, such as the drivers ‘Endemic corruption and impunity for well-connected elites’ and ‘The perception that that the international system is fundamentally unfair and hostile to Muslim societies and peoples’, other drivers show improvement, such as the driver ‘Poorly and ungoverned areas’, for which the proportion of Albanians strongly agreeing with statements decreased with up to 15 p.p.

Over the past few years, the Albanian government has taken steps to improve public service delivery in both urban and rural areas. Although most Albanians still agree that the “state as law enforcement authority” is more present than the “state as provider of public services for citizens”, and an even larger proportion agree that the presence of the “state” as a law enforcer and service provider is lower in the countryside than in cities, an improvement is observed compared to the 2018 report. Another improvement is observed in the respecting of citizens’ rights and freedoms. Despite the restrictions implemented because of the pandemic almost half of Albanians agree that in general, citizens’ rights and freedoms are respected by state institutions, which is +13.2 p.p. compared to 2018.

While these are very positive developments with regards to shrinking the enabling space for violent extremism, the findings show that not everyone feels like they are treated the same or that they are not benefitting equally. Generally, Albanians are overwhelmingly pro-European and pro-American. Yet, a public discourse blaming the EU for being unfair with Muslim countries in its enlargement process has affected citizens’ perceptions on the international community and the West. Compared to the 2018 national assessment of drivers of violent extremism, the support for all of the statements in this driver has increased. Almost one in five Albanians strongly agree that the EU has been unfair with countries in the Balkans with a considerable Muslim population and that countries with a Christian majority population in the Balkans have had more support from the West precisely due to their religious affiliation. Similar to the previous national assessment, the perception that the US is unfair towards Muslim countries and societies is less common than the West and/or global structures being unfair towards Muslims, meaning that possible VE narratives around the EU’s unfairness in the Balkan context holds a higher risk than narratives in a global context or those against the USA.



Moreover, there is an increase in the proportion of Albanians that perceives law enforcement institutions to be harsher with practising Muslims. 1 in 5 Albanians – and 1 in 4 Albanian Muslims – perceives law enforcement institutions to be harsher with practising Muslims. In such background, it is easier for violent extremist groups to promote themselves as a righteous alternative to the perceived immoral or unjust governing elites. Almost 4 in 10 Albanians – and practicing believers even more often – already see an opportunity for religion to address endemic corruption and impunity for well-connected elite, as they believe that countries with strong religious faith have less corrupt governments and Albania would have more justice if more people would join their religion.

Drivers like political encroachment or harsh government repression are not directly relevant to the Albanian context, but could be perceived as such by certain groups or communities. Approximately one in three Albanians think it is the duty of every citizen to protect their ideology and the duty of every believer to protect their religious values and dignity at any price and by any means. In both cases, people with low levels of education agreed more often. A similar trend is seen when asking whether people would go through violent means to achieve political change. 44.1% of the Albanian population perceive that the political system in Albania as unfair and has to be changed even with violence if needed and 35.1% say that people have the right to take the law into their own hands when their rights and freedoms are denied by state institutions. Again, people with low levels of education agree more often, signalling that they might be more prone to using undemocratic means to protect their values, rights, or freedoms. Hence, there is a need to inform people with low levels of education about existing opportunities for political participation and citizen engagement.

Although practicing believers – meaning people that pray frequently and practise all the rituals of their religion – are more likely to agree with several statements within the political drivers, they are less likely to agree that people should resort to violence to achieve this change. For all statements mentioned in the previous paragraph, such as the need to change the political system through violent means, taking rights into one's own hands, and protecting one's religion at any price and by any means, practicing believers are less likely to agree. Moreover, practising believers are also more likely to say that a true believer should denounce members of their own community who hold religious extremist views – while in 2018 they were less likely to do so. This could be a result of influences from religious leaders and clerics preaching moderate interpretations of faith in Albania.

In conclusion, given the challenges of the rule of law and democratic governance in Albania, violent extremist ideologies may materialise, but they may not necessarily be religiously motivated. The presence of religious extremists and individuals who exert pressure on religious believers to join extremist causes has been confirmed by 7% of Albanians, particularly in the municipalities of Cërrik, Kamëz, Kuçovë, Maliq, Pogradec, Rogozhinë, Shkodër, Tirana, and Ura Vajgurore. However, a larger issue seems to be the presence of individuals pressuring people to join political extremist groups. Almost 1 in 4 Albanians confirms their presence, particularly in Bulqizë, Durrës, Kamëz, Kavajë, Këlcyrë, Libohovë, Pukë, and Shijak. That, together with 44% of Albanians agreeing that the political system in Albania is unfair and has to be changed even with violence if needed, signals that a next security threat may come from politically motivated violent extremist groups, rather than religious violent extremist groups.

### 5.3. Cultural drivers

At the crossroads between West and East, the Western Balkans has become a patchwork of ethnic and religious groups, each adapting their faith to the local traditions and context. As the bridge between Western societies and the more traditional “Eastern” Orthodox and Islamic traditional cultures, religion in Albania is constantly faced with influences from either side. Religious persons, despite being rooted in local communities, often consider themselves to be part of a larger community of believers and share concerns of fellow believers elsewhere.



The sense of belonging with a regional or even global religious community has been a major driver for people to join foreign conflicts in the name of protecting fellow believers. It has driven foreign fighters to Afghanistan in the 1980s, to Bosnia and Herzegovina in the 1990s, and to Syria and Ukraine in the 2010s. Although most Muslim communities in the Balkans have few transnational links and do not adhere to a vision of a ‘universalist’ Islam: “The recourse to the Umma as a form of political identity has been sporadic rather than systematic and has never translated into an ideological programme”<sup>44</sup>, some were encouraged to join the conflict in Syria for that reason, among other things.

By portraying itself as the reincarnation of the ideal of a world caliphate, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria turned into a pole of attraction for many radicalised Muslims from all over the world who believe that a global jihad against the West is taking place. Therefore, we included in the present survey a section on cultural drivers in order to assess the perceptions of respondents on possible threats to their identities and ways of life. The questions are based on the study by Denoux and Carter (2009), who emphasised three types of cultural drivers relevant to the phenomenon of religious-based violent extremism, as follows: (1) perceptions of unfair continued attacks by Western countries against Muslim culture and countries, (2) perceptions of invasion and assimilation of the traditional culture of a country by foreign modernist influences, and (3) proactive efforts of radical groups to impose and spread a strict version of Islam over other traditions and cultures<sup>45</sup>.

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

<b>Religion under siege</b>	A strong correlation exists between the success of violent extremist groups 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.
<b>Broader cultural threats</b>	The population may perceive a broader cultural threat – to traditions, customs, values, and sense of collective / individual honour and dignity.
<b>“Proactive” religious agendas</b>	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 violent extremism.



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

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



## I. Religion under siege

This cultural driver is related to perceptions that Islam and Muslims are under attack from external influences seeking to subdue and humiliate Islam. Muslim-majority societies are continuously exposed towards extremist propaganda, that proclaims Perceptions about a continued Western conspiracy against Islam and Muslim societies are widespread in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region because of several factors, such as the past experiences of colonialism, the Israeli–Palestine conflict, and the failure of Arab secular and nationalist regimes to realise economic and social development of their countries.

A strong correlation exists between the success of Islamist violent extremist groups and the perception that the West is attacking Islam and Muslims. Individuals who experience repression and humiliation in their daily life may be more susceptible to highly politicised and emotional images of fellow Muslims suffering in other countries. The 2015 baseline assessment of violent extremism in Albania conducted by IDM reported cases of self-proclaimed imams preaching hatred against other Albanian Muslims, calling them hypocrites or even kafir (disbeliever) and accusing them of being collaborators with the West’s politics against Islam<sup>46</sup>. Since then, the influence of these self-proclaimed Imams has been mitigated due to the KMSH’s efforts to acquire all illegal and unregistered mosques, the issuing of directives for imams and the increased opportunities for acquiring religious education and training in Albania. Although the situation is improved, it is still important to continue monitoring the perceptions of the Albanian population with regards to these propaganda narratives.

### Statements in this driver:

- The West is hostile and constantly attacking Islamic states and culture
- Nowadays it is difficult to be a practising Muslim believer in Albania
- Nowadays it is difficult to be a practising Christian believer in Albania

### Statement: The West is hostile and constantly attacking Islamic states and culture

Respondents were asked to rate whether they agree or not with the statement on a 4-point scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4). 39.4% of the respondents agree with the statement, while 45% disagree, and 15.7% is unsure whether to agree or not or finds the statement irrelevant. Compared to the results of the 2018 survey, when 25.6% of the respondents agreed with the statements, there is an increase of 13.8 p.p. in the proportion of respondents agreeing with the statement.

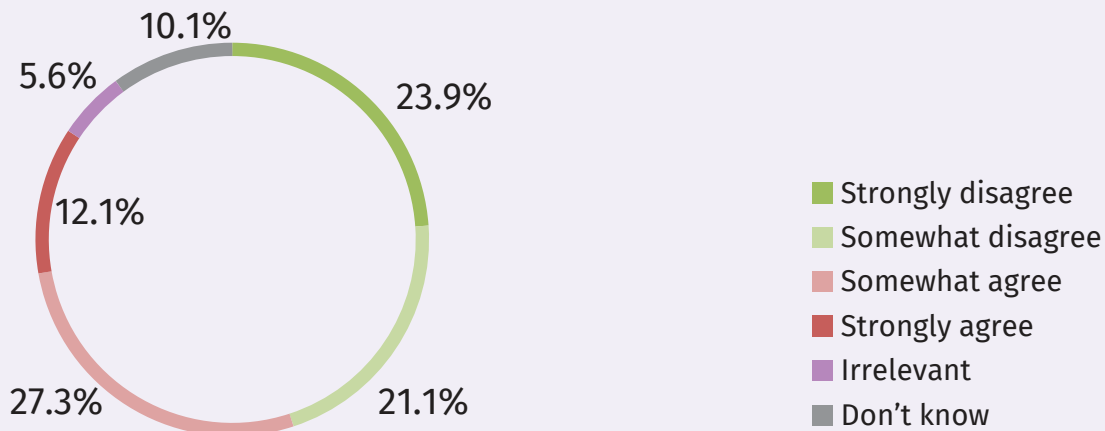
Respondents over 64 years old (47%), with a post-graduate degree (51%), students (48%), and those residing in urban areas (43%) were more likely to agree with the statement, while respondents residing in rural areas (34%) were less likely to agree. Non-practising believers (people that only practise religious rituals at special events and pray only at time of crisis) were less likely to agree with the statement (both 34%), than practising believers or respondents that do not believe.



46 See IDM (2015) “Religious Radicalism and Violent Extremism in Albania.” Tirana. pp. 89–90.



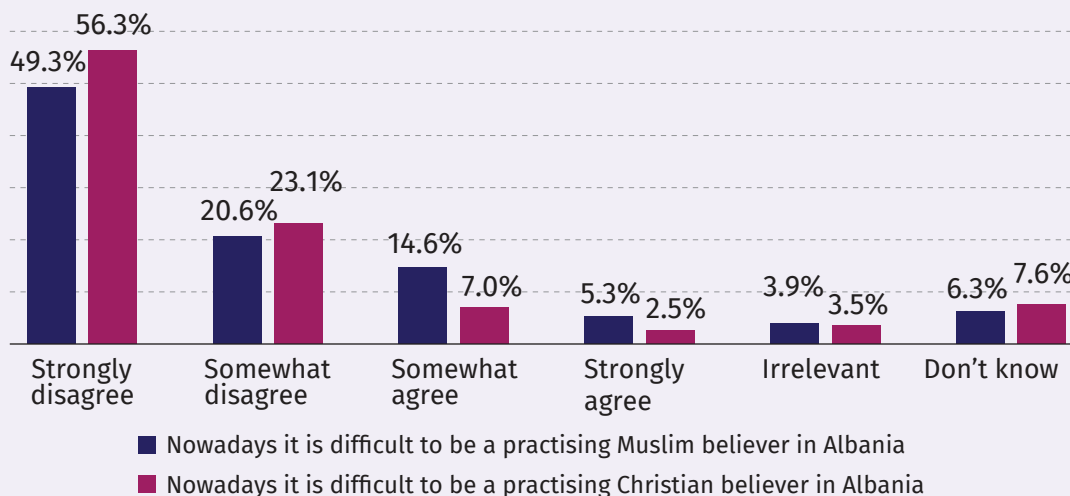
Figure 35. Respondents' opinions on whether the West is hostile and constantly attacking Islamic states and culture (N=1600)



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

Respondents were asked to rate what extent they agree or disagree with the statement. 19.9% agree that it is difficult to be a practising Muslim believer in Albania, while the majority (69.9%) disagrees. Compared to the results of the 2018 study, when 10.3% of the respondents agreed, the proportion of respondents that agrees with the statement has increased by 9.6 p.p. When checking across demographics, no substantial differences were found for gender, age, religious affiliations, or religiousness. Respondents with primary education (25%) and students (26%) were more likely to agree with the statement.

Figure 36: Nowadays, it is difficult to be a Muslim believer (N=1600) vs. Christian believer (N=1598) in Albania



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

For this statement, only 9.5% of the respondents indicated that they agree, while the overwhelming majority of the respondents (79.4%) somewhat disagree or strongly disagree. In comparison with the 2018 results, when 5.0% agreed to the statement, a 4.5 p.p. increase is noted in the proportion of respondents agreeing it is difficult to be a practising Christian believer in Albania.

When checking across demographics, no substantial differences were found for gender, age, employment status, religious affiliations, or religiousness. Respondents with up to primary education (14%) or with primary education (12%) were more likely to agree with the statement. Practising believers (respondents who pray regularly or practise all religious rituals) were less likely to agree with the statement (both 6%) than respondents that practise occasionally.

*People who feel repressed or marginalised can be more susceptible for violent extremist propaganda that claims the Western powers are seeking to subdue and humiliate Islam. Although the hate speech propagated by radical self-proclaimed imams as noted in the 2015 study on violent extremism is not prevalent today, it is important to continue monitoring whether Albanians of a certain religion feel marginalised. The responses to the statements in the driver 'Religion under siege' show that while the majority of Albanians do not perceive it difficult to be a practising believer in Albania, one in four Albanians does perceive that the West is hostile towards Islamic states and cultures.*

*The proportion of Albanians that shares this perception has increased by 13.8 p.p. since 2018. Coupling this finding with the increased perception that the international system is fundamentally unfair and hostile to Muslim societies and peoples (as seen in the political drivers) the findings suggest that the delayed integration in the EU may prompt Albanian citizens to reflect on what distinguishes them from their European counterparts. Internalised stigma due to religious affiliation heightens the probability of these individuals to become susceptible to radical religious propaganda. Consequently, future informing and awareness raising effort should target not only practicing believers, but the general population at large to fight both perceptions of discrimination and Islamophobia.*

## 2. Broader cultural threats

A cultural threat is perceived in the form of the fading of 'authentic' traditions and the erosion of group solidarity under cultural influences that come from outside. The revival of religion in post-communist Albania was accompanied by an inrush of foreign missionaries and religious foundations who strived to convert the 'theist' Albanians to the 'true' religion, or to teach them the correct version of the respective religion. Since the early 1990s, concerns were expressed in Albania about the introduction of religious teachings and norms that were foreign to the religious traditions in the country. In order to measure the public perceptions on threats to traditional ways of practising Islam or other religious denominations in Albania, survey respondents were presented with two statements. Furthermore, Albanians were asked what types of extremism in their perception are a main threat in the country.



**Statements in this driver:**

- Muslim believers in Albania are faced with foreign influences of conservative Islam
- The faith, traditions and dignity of my religious community in general is under constant pressure and threat
- To what extent are you concerned about political/nationalist/religious extremism in Albania?<sup>47</sup>

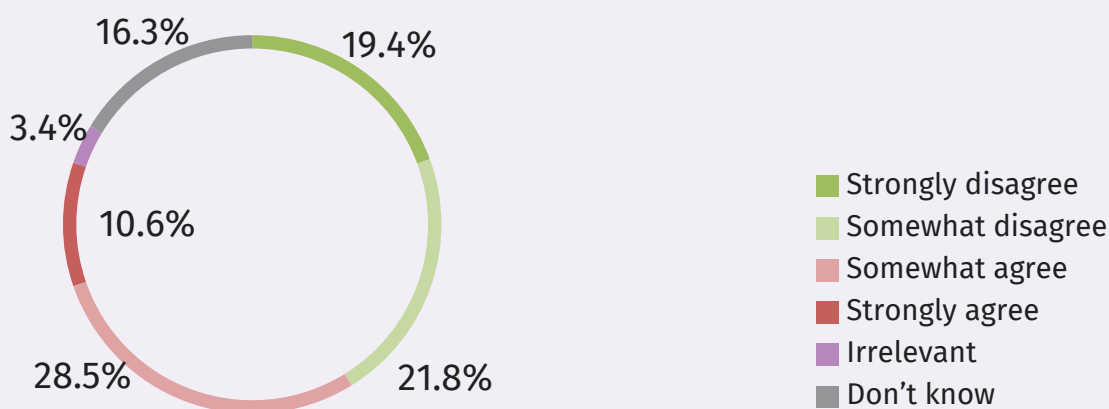
**Statement: Muslim believers in Albania are faced with foreign influences of conservative Islam**

Respondents were asked to rate their agreement through a 4-point scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4). 39.1% of respondents agree with the statement, while 41.2% disagree and 16.3% said they didn't know whether to agree or disagree. Compared to 2018, when 33.2% of the respondents agreed, there is a 2.9 p.p. increase in the proportion of respondents agreeing to the statement.

When checking across demographics, no substantial differences were found for gender, age, or employment status. Respondents with a post-graduate degree (30%) and with up to primary education (33%) were the least likely to agree with the statement, while respondents with primary education (46%) were more likely to agree. 41% of respondents living in urban areas and 36% of respondents living in rural areas agree.

Muslim believers (38%) agree less often with the statement than respondents with a different religious affiliation. Practicing believers – regardless of which religion they practise – were more likely to agree with the statement. 42% of respondents that practises all religious rituals agree with the statement, while 39% of non-practicing believers and 28% of the respondents who did not practice religion because they are not religious agree that Muslim believers in Albania are faced with foreign influences of conservative Islam.

Figure 37. Muslim believers in Albania are faced with foreign influences of conservative Islam (N=1594)



47 Please refer to section 3 in the questionnaire (Annex VIII.2) for this question. The findings relevant to this question are presented in the cultural drivers' section, given the context of the question.



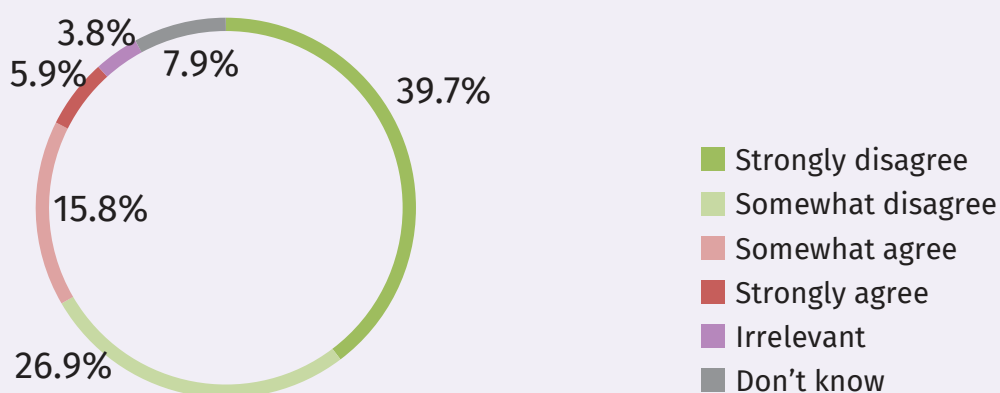


**Statement: The faith, traditions and dignity of my religious community in general is under constant pressure and threat**

Respondents were asked to rate whether ‘The faith, traditions and dignity of my religious community in general is under constant pressure and threat’ on a 4-point scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4). 21.7% of respondents agree with the statement, while 66.6% disagreed. Compared to 2018, when 20.0% of the respondents agreed, there is no substantial difference in the proportion of respondents agreeing to the statement.

When checking across demographics, no substantial differences were found for gender, age, employment status, or geographical representation. Respondents with a post-graduate degree (16%) and with up to primary education (16%) were the least likely to agree with the statement, while respondents with primary education (30%) were more likely to agree. Muslim believers (26%) agree more often with the statement than respondents with a different religious affiliation. Respondents that practise religion occasionally (both praying and practicing religious rituals) were more likely to agree that the faith, traditions and dignity of their religious community in general is under constant pressure and threat than respondents that do not practise at all or practise frequently.

Figure 38: Faith, traditions and dignity of my religious community is under constant pressure and threat (N=1595)



**Statement: To what extent are you concerned about political/ nationalist/ religious extremism in Albania?**

Respondents were asked to indicate to what extent they are concerned about political, nationalist and religious extremism in Albania on a 4-point scale from not at all concerned (1) to very concerned (4). Respondents were most likely to be concerned about political extremism: 42.0% of the respondents indicating that they are concerned (22.4%) or very concerned (19.6%). This is followed by religious extremism, which is concerning according to 31.8% of the respondents, while only 16.7% of the respondents say that they are concerned or very concerned about nationalist extremism.

When checking across demographics, no substantial differences were found for employment status or geographical representation. Respondents over 65 years old (47%), with a university degree (47%), or with a post-graduate degree (46%) were more likely to be concerned or very

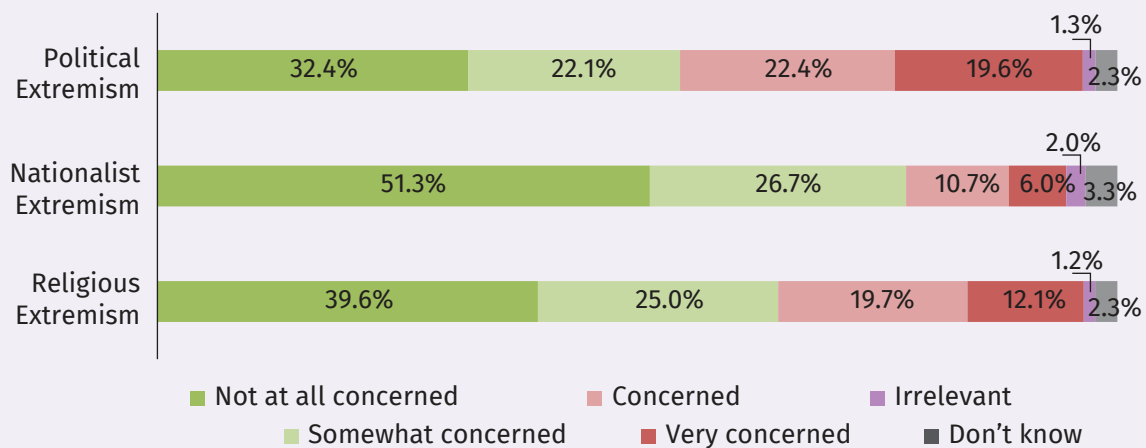


concerned about political violent extremism. Respondents in Bulqizë, Kamëz, Kuçovë, Kurbin, Maliq, Rrëshen, Tiranë, and Ura Vajgurore were more likely to be concerned about political extremism.

For nationalist violent extremism (average: 16.7%), respondents in the age group 25 to 34 years old (15%) or with a post-graduate degree (8%) were less likely to be concerned or very concerned. Respondents in Kavajë, Kuçovë, Kurbin, Mat, Rrëshen, Shijak, and Vau i Dejës were more often concerned about nationalist extremism than respondents residing in other municipalities.

29% of male respondents and 35% of female respondents are concerned or very concerned about religious extremism. Respondents in the age group 25 to 34 years old (28%) were less likely to be concerned or very concerned about religious violent extremism. Respondents that practise religion – regardless of which religion – more frequently (pray regularly, practise all or most rituals) were more likely to be concerned or very concerned about religious extremism. Respondents in Bulqizë, Lezhë, Memaliaj, Rrëshen, and Rrogzhinë were more often concerned about religious extremism.

Figure 39: To what extent are you concerned about extremism in Albania? (N1=1600; N2=1594); N=1593)



When the influence of foreign religious groups becomes so strong that the local tradition and culture erodes, this can create the perception of a broader cultural threat among the population. Indeed, 21.7% of Albanians perceive that the traditions and dignity of their religious community in general is under constant pressure and threat. Muslim believers (26%) and believers that practise religion occasionally (both praying and practicing religious rituals) were more likely to agree with the statement. Furthermore, 39.1% of the Albanian population perceives that Muslim believers in Albania are faced with foreign influences of conservative Islam. Although the support for these statements has not increased since 2018, it is important that the foreign influence in domestic religious affairs and on Albanian believers continues to be monitored.

Considering the focus of P/CVE stakeholders on religious violent extremism as a security threat, it is interesting that a larger proportion of the Albanian population is concerned about political extremism

(42%) than religious extremism (38%) – particularly people residing in Bulqizë, Kamëz, Kuçovë, Kurbin, Maliq, and Tiranë. These findings suggest the current systems for dialogue are inadequate or inaccessible to the wider population. Approaches focused on promoting dialogue and fostering accountability would enable lesser vulnerable individuals to engage in a safe space, not only to address their concerns against others, but also to reflect on principled identity-building. This would enable these individuals to acknowledge their transformative potential and take on a more active role in society, by acting as mediators and reducing the influence of malicious cultural threats, while safeguarding traditional customs and values. Building on national values, such as religious harmony, inclusive dialogue would allow for the integration of non-mainstream stances to be discussed in a productive manner.

### 3. “Proactive” religious agendas

When speaking of the relationship between religion and culture in modern religious groups, Roy (2013) makes the distinction between two positions: accommodationist groups and fundamentalist groups<sup>48</sup>. Accommodationist religious groups consider that religion is embedded in a culture and that a shared culture is a prerequisite for the existence of a religion. This means that a believer of one religion can share a common culture with a non-believer and the believers of other religions. The fundamentalist position, on the other hand, seeks a separation of religion from culture.

When extremist or radical groups promote their own – fundamentalist – position of Islam or other faiths on local populations, it weakens traditional and more moderate and tolerant religious structures and practices. Indoctrination into such a rigid version of faith detaches the believer from the surrounding culture and society may lead individuals and groups towards religious extremism. The possibility and threat of radical individuals and groups taking up a proactive religious agenda in Albania is measured through two statements. The first statement assesses to what extent Albanians consider the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq as the true representative of Islam, while the second statement evaluates whether well-organised groups that propagate extremist interpretations of different faiths are operating in Albania.

#### Statements in this driver:

- The Islamic State in Syria was the true representative of Islam.
- In Albania there are well-organised groups that propagate extremist interpretations of Islam/ Orthodox/ Catholic/ Bektashi/ Evangelical/ or other faith.

#### **Statement: The Islamic State in Syria was the true representative of Islam.**

Respondents were asked to share their opinion whether ‘The Islamic State in Syria was the true representative of Islam’ to which 12.3% of respondents agree with the statement, 70.0% disagree, and 13.5% was unsure whether to agree or disagree.

When checking across demographics, no substantial differences were found for gender, age, or employment status. Respondents with up to primary education (22%), primary education

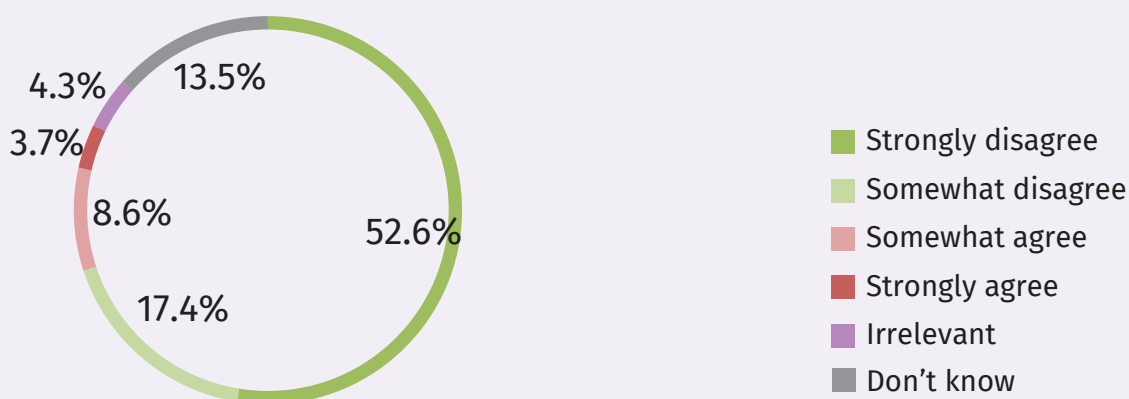


48 Roy, O. (2013) Holy Ignorance: When Religion and Culture Part Ways. Oxford: Oxford University Press.



(16%), and those living in urban areas (14%) were slightly more likely to agree with the statement than respondents living in rural areas (10%) or with higher levels of education (BA: 9%, post-graduate: 7%). 13% of Muslim respondents agree with the statement. Practising respondents – regardless of which religion they adhere to – were less likely to agree with the statement (practise all rituals and pray regularly, 9%) than believers that practise occasionally, or non-believers.

Figure 40: The Islamic State in Syria was the true representative of Islam (N=1596)



**Statement: In Albania there are well-organised groups that propagate extremist interpretations of Islam**

Respondents were asked to rate on a 4-point scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4). 38.0% of respondents agree with the statement, 41.3% disagree, and 19.4% is not sure. Compared to the 2018 study, when 26.0% of the respondents agreed with the statement, there is an increase of 12.0 p.p. in the proportion of respondents reporting the presence of well-organised groups that propagate extremist interpretations of Islam. When checking across demographics, no substantial differences were found for gender, age, education, employment status, or geographical representation. 34% of Muslim respondents agree. Respondents who pray regularly (43%) or practise all the rituals of their religion (44%) were more likely to agree with the statement than believers who do not practise religious rituals (33%) and people who pray only at times of crisis (31%).

**Statement: In Albania there are well-organised groups that propagate extremist interpretations of Orthodox faith.**

When asked whether there are well-organised groups that propagate extremist interpretations of Orthodox faith in Albania, 17.3% of respondents agree with the statement, 54.2% disagree, and 27.2% is unsure. When checking across demographics, no substantial differences were found for gender, age, employment status, or geographical representation. Respondents with up to primary education (23%) or primary education (19%) were more likely to agree with the statement than respondents with a postgraduate degree (8%). 12% of Orthodox respondents agree. Respondents who practice their religion occasionally (20%) or only pray at times of crisis



(23%) agree more often to the statement than respondents who pray regularly (9%) and practise all rituals of their religion (9%).

**Statement: In Albania there are well-organised groups that propagate extremist interpretations of Catholic faith.**

19.7% of respondents agree that there are well-organised groups that propagate extremist interpretations of Catholic faith in Albania while 53.6% disagree and 25.5% was unsure. When checking across demographics, no substantial differences were found for gender, age, or education. Self-employed respondents (25%) and those living in urban areas (22%) were more likely to agree with the statement, while respondents from the rural areas (16%) were less likely to agree. 24% of Catholic respondents agree. People who pray occasionally at special religious events (25%) were more likely to agree that there are well-organised groups that propagate extremist interpretations of Catholic faith than those who do not regularly practise the rituals of their religion (15%) or never pray (12%).

**Statement: In Albania there are well-organised groups that propagate extremist interpretations of Bektashi faith.**

When asked to rate whether they strongly disagree (1) or strongly agree (4) with the statement, 13.2% of respondents agree with the statement, while 56.2% of them disagree and 29.7% stated they didn't know whether to agree or disagree. When checking across demographics, no substantial differences were found for gender, age, or employment status. Respondents with up to primary education (22%) or living in urban areas (15%) were more likely to agree with the statement than people with a postgraduate degree (6%) or living in rural areas (11%). 10% of Bektashi respondents agree. Respondents who pray occasionally at special events (21%) or at times of crisis (20%) were more likely to agree, while respondents that practice the rituals of their religion regularly (7%) or prayed regularly (7%) were less likely to agree with the statement.

**Statement: In Albania there are well-organised groups that propagate extremist interpretations of Evangelical Christian faith.**

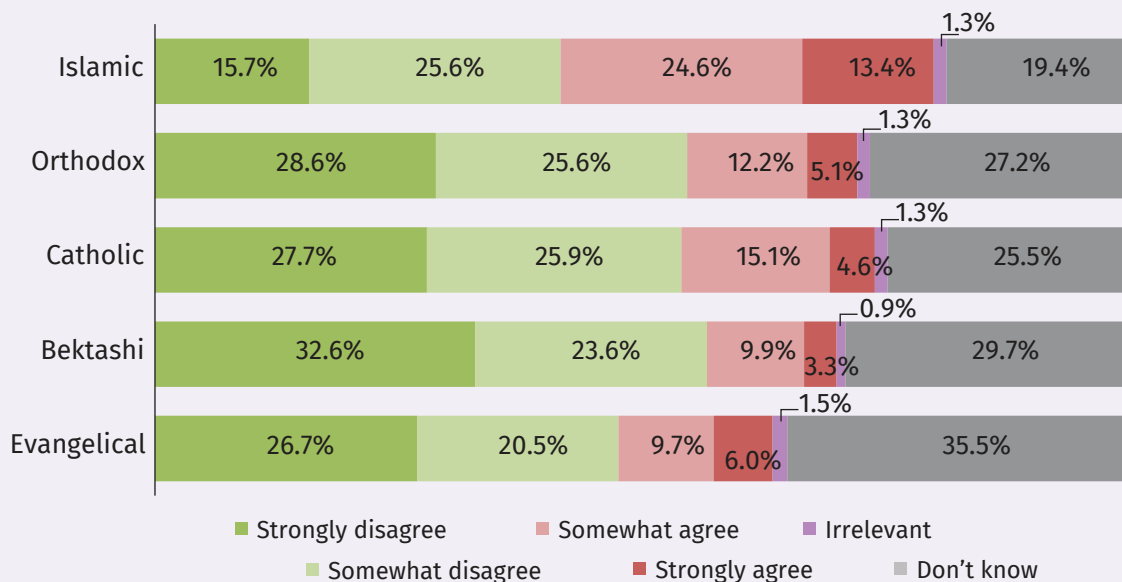
Only 15.7% of respondents agree that there are well-organised groups that propagate extremist interpretations of Evangelical Christian faith in Albania, while 47.2% disagree and 35.5% stated they didn't know whether to agree or disagree. Respondents aged over 64 years old (22%), students (21%), and those living in urban areas (19%) were more likely to agree with the statement, to respondents living in the rural areas (11%) agree less often. None of the 11 Evangelical respondents agreed with the statement. Respondents who pray occasionally at special events (25%) or at times of crisis (21%) were more likely to agree, while respondents that practice the rituals of their religion regularly (8%) or prayed regularly (8%) were less likely to agree with the statement.

**Statement: In Albania there are well-organised groups that propagate extremist interpretations of 'other' faith.**

Respondents were asked whether in Albania there are well-organised groups that propagate extremist interpretations of other faiths. Out of the 78 respondents in total who chose to specify their answer, 65 mentioned Jehovah's Witnesses.



Figure 41: There are well-organised groups propagating extremist interpretations of ... faith (N1=1597; N2=1593; N3=1591; N4=1597; N5=1587)



When extremist or radical religious groups promote their own fundamentalist interpretation of faith, the traditional and more moderate religious structures are weakened. The possibility and threat of radical individuals and groups taking up a proactive religious agenda in Albania were measured by assessing the support for the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria as the true representative of Islam and the existence of well-organised groups that propagate extremist interpretations of different faiths are operating in Albania.

12% of Albanians – particularly people with low levels of education or living in urban areas – agree that the Islamic State in Syria was the true representative of Islam. Practising believers were less likely to agree with the statement than believers that practise occasionally, or non-believers. Interestingly, the perceived prevalence of religious violent extremist groups operating in Albania is much higher than their actual reported presence. 38.0% of Albanians says that there are well-organised groups that propagate extremist interpretations of Islam in Albania and between 10% and 20% of Albanians believes that there are well-organised groups that propagate extremist interpretations of Orthodox, Catholic, Bektashi, or Evangelical faith in Albania. It is important to note that an extremist interpretation of faith does not necessarily imply the presence of violent extremism. At the same time, the results in the ‘Social networks and group dynamics’ driver show that only 12.1% of the respondents report that religious violent extremist groups are operating in their community.

People were generally less inclined to denounce groups propagating extremist interpretations of the same religion they adhere to, which may indicate that religious extremism is more easily perceived by believers of other denominations. At the same time, active practicing believers were more likely to indicate that there are well-organised groups that propagate extremist interpretations of Islam (43%) in Albania, while at the same time they were the least likely to indicate that there are well-organised groups that propagate extremist interpretations of the Bektashi (7%), Orthodox (9%) or the Evangelical Christian (8%) faith. The findings under this driver denote the need to promote dialogue, as a means of building resilience on the basis of Albanian religious values and traditions. To this purpose, religious authorities have a crucial role to play in dispelling the fundamentalist influence from the Albanian religious narrative.

## Cultural drivers – conclusion

While the majority of respondents do not perceive any hostile stances towards Islam, the proportion of Albanians agreeing (39.4%) that the West is hostile and constantly attacking Islamic states and culture has substantially increased by 13.8 p.p. compared to the 2018 survey. More importantly, almost half of Muslim Albanians agreed to this statement. Furthermore, the proportion of Albanians who believe that it is difficult to be a practicing Muslim or Christian believer nowadays has increased. 19.9% Albanians think that it is difficult to be a practicing Muslim believer in Albania today, while 9.5% says the same about being a practicing Christian believer. Albanians adhering to the respective religions do not perceive more or less difficulty than the average Albanian, but it is still problematic that 1 in 5 Muslim Albanians perceives limitations in their religious practice.

With regards to the presence and perceived threat of violent extremist groups in Albania, the majority of Albanians is not worried about violent extremism. The main concern for Albanians is political extremism, followed by religious and nationalist extremism. Older Albanians are more often concerned about extremism – whether political, nationalist, or religious – than younger Albanians. 31.8% of the Albanian population is concerned about religious extremism, with Muslim Albanians being the least likely to be worried. Practicing believers – regardless of which religion – were more likely to be concerned about religious extremism. When cross-examining this with the actual types of religious extremist groups operating in Albania, 38% of Albanians say that in Albania there are well-organised groups that propagate extremist interpretations of Islam, while between 10-20% of Albanians believe that there are well-organised groups that propagate extremist interpretations of Orthodox, Catholic, Bektashi, or Evangelical faith. 4% of respondents specifically mentioned Jehovah's Witnesses when asked whether there are other types of religious groups operating in Albania, a perception that may have been affected by news outlets connecting the suicide of a mother and daughter in Tirana with Jehovah's Witnesses – despite the group denying their involvement<sup>49</sup>.

With 34% of Muslim believers themselves indicating the presence of groups propagating extremist interpretations, Islamic fundamentalism is the most concerning, which suggests the need for an increased role of religious authorities. According to 39.1% of Albanians, Muslim believers in Albania are faced with foreign influences of conservative Islam. Practicing believers – regardless of their religious affiliation – were more likely to agree that Muslim believers are experiencing foreign influence. Although Muslim Albanians were less likely to agree to the statement, 1 in 4 does perceive that the faith, traditions and dignity of their religious community in general is under constant pressure and threat. 12% of Albanians and 13% of Muslim Albanians agree that “the Islamic State in Syria was the true representative of Islam” – with people with low levels of education more likely to agree.

Inadequate spaces to engage in constructive dialogue have fostered the propagation of fundamentalist religious interpretations. The above findings suggest the need to continue monitoring the foreign influence in domestic religious affairs and on Albanian believers. A whole-of-society approach is required to build a safe space for inclusive dialogue which enables individuals to undertake their civic duties in a responsible and informed manner. In turn, this would enable



49 Nase, P. and Maçi, M. (2020). They left the food, sacrificed themselves for resurrection mother and daughter, the testimony of the sister from the hospital. Shqiptarja.al. Available via: <https://shqiptarja.com/lajm/detaje-tronditese-nga-veteflijimi-anisa-josifi-prej-kohesh-mbahej-e-pajete-ne-banese-e-motra-se-keni-idene-cfare-kaluam-ne-per-te-fituar-ringjalljen>



marginalized communities to engage in a cohesive dialogue, where they can address their concerns, while fostering accountability. Building on national values, such as religious harmony, inclusive dialogue would allow for non-mainstream stances to undergo the societal filters of Albanian society - the latter, counterbalancing any foreign influences that would seek to interfere with its identity. Religious authorities in particular, would have a crucial role to play in this regard.





## 6. Reintegration and prevention

Like most European countries, Albania is facing the return of its foreign fighters and their families who have joined insurgent groups in Iraq and Syria. Although the timeframe and scope of the repatriation and reintegration of Albanian nationals remains uncertain, it is likely that Albania will see its nationals returning from Syria in the near future. Besides the logistical challenges of repatriation and rehabilitation, the bigger challenge of reintegrating these families is awaiting Albania. Moreover, state institutions have the responsibility to ensure that the returning foreign fighters and their families are not posing a security threat to Albanian society.

The rehabilitation and reintegration of Albanian nationals requires a whole-of-society approach that includes local and central state institutions, frontline responders such as psycho-sociological services, schools, and police, as well as the receiving community. To prevent the potential security threat from spreading in the community, multi-actor strategies are needed to gradually address the wider social, economic and cultural context that breeds extremist and violent behaviour, especially among the youth. Strategies for the sustainable rehabilitation of returnees and prevention must combine initiatives from all levels of society to shrink the enabling space in which violent extremist groups can operate. Therefore, it is important to know what the perception is of the Albanian population on the repatriation and reintegration of returning Albanian nationals.

This chapter evaluates the support among the Albanian population for repatriation and reintegration of foreign fighters and their families, as well as the support among Albanians for their municipality to host returning families. What follows is an analysis of public perceptions on the role of religious authority, public institutions, and other relevant stakeholders to take back returnees. Then, in order to get a better understanding of the potential for resocialisation of foreign fighters among the Albania population, Albanians are asked whether they believe that radicalised religious believers or terrorist offenders can disengage from their ideologies. Lastly, the chapter explores what role state and non-state actors should play in the prevention of violent extremism according to the Albanian population by identifying enablers and resilience factors.

### 1. Disengagement of radicals and terrorist offenders

Members of violent extremist groups are often subjected to heavy indoctrination, which prompts them to develop a polarised worldview and their place in it. A socially marginalised environment often reinforces the extremist ideologies they have adopted — hindering disengagement and precipitating re-recruitment. This section explores to what extent the Albanian population believes that radical religious believers and terrorist offenders can be disengaged, specifically making the distinction between foreign fighters and their families.

#### Statements in this section:

- It is impossible for radicalised religious believers to break away from radical religious ideologies
- It is impossible for terrorist offenders to break away from their extremist ideologies



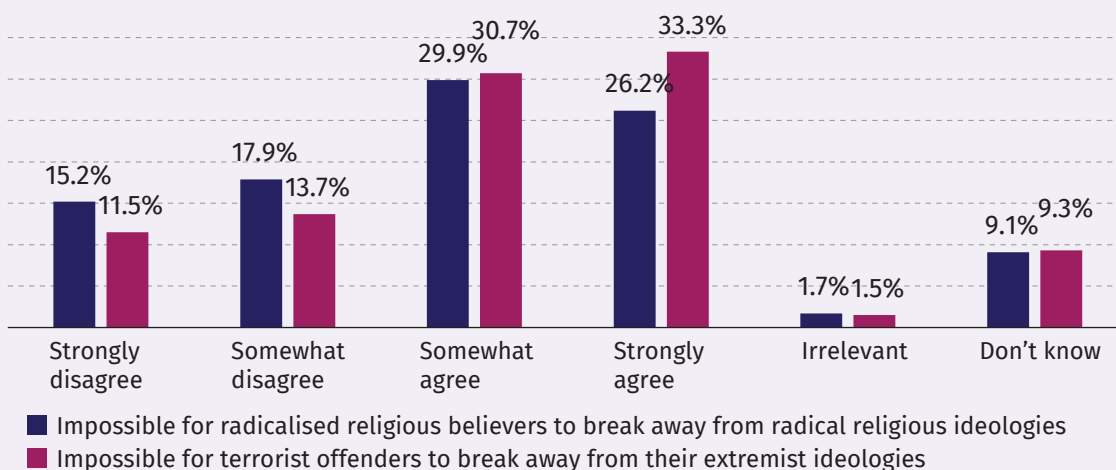
**Statement: It is impossible for radicalised religious believers to break away from radical religious ideologies**

Respondents were asked to rate whether they agree or not with the statement on a 4-point scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4). More than half of the respondents (56.1%) agree with the statement, while 25.2% disagree, meaning that 1 in 4 Albanians thinks that it is possible for radicalised religious believers to break away from radical religious ideologies. 1.7% of the survey respondents found the question irrelevant, whereas 9.1% of them did not know.

Respondents over 65 years old (68%), with up to primary education (80%), living in urban areas (64%), were more likely to agree with the statement, while respondents in the age group 18-24 (51%), students (52%), unemployed respondents (53%), and people residing in rural areas (45%) were less likely to agree. Moreover, respondents that pray regularly (51%) and practise all religious rituals (51%) agree with the statement less often, meaning that respondents more religiousness do see an opportunity for radicalised religious believers to break away from radical religious ideologies.

Compared to 2018, 48.9% of the respondents agreed that it is impossible for radicalised religious believers to disengage from radical religious ideologies, meaning that the proportion of respondents agreeing with this statement increased with 7.2 p.p.

Figure 42: ‘Can radicalised religious believers break away?’ (N=1594) vs. ‘Can terrorist offenders break away?’ (N=1596)



**Statement: It is impossible for terrorist offenders to break away from their extremist ideologies**

Respondents were asked whether they agree or not with the statement on a 4-point scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4). 64% of the respondents agree that it is impossible for terrorist offenders to break away from extremist ideologies, while 11.5% disagree. 1.5% of the survey respondents found the question irrelevant, whereas 9.3% of them did not know.

Respondents over 65 years old (72%), with up to primary education (72%), living in urban areas (64%), were more likely to agree with the statement, while students (58%), unemployed

respondents (60%), and people residing in rural areas (56%) were less likely to agree. Respondents that pray occasionally or practise the main rituals of their religion are more likely to agree with the statement, although differences are small.

*Adopting a whole-of-society approach is critical in improving the chances of radicalised religious believers and terrorist offenders to disengage from their ideologies. The above results suggest that the ideological re-education of returnees in Albania would encounter the general public's distrust, which could lead to stigmatisation. Although 1 in 4 Albanians sees an opportunity for radicalised religious believers to break away from their radical religious ideology, only 11.5% of Albanians would trust a terrorist offender to break away from their extremist ideology. As the Albanian legal framework stipulates severe penalties — in certain cases, even lifelong sentences for individuals engaged in terrorist activities, disengagement efforts should concentrate primarily on penitentiary institutions.*

*In order to facilitate returnees' efforts to reintegrate in society, the community of P/CVE practitioners and other stakeholders must encourage a constructive debate that helps society develop a more optimistic perception of their chances for disengagement. At the same time, a nurturing environment should be built that encourages returnees to develop respect for diversity and tolerance, as well as helping them develop a renewed sense of belonging over the course of time. Considering the increased likelihood of practising believers (regardless of which religious affiliation) and Muslim Albanians believing that radical believers and terrorist offenders can disengage from their ideology, these groups as well as religious communities could play a role in connecting the receiving community with the returning families.*

## 2. Citizens' perception on repatriation, reintegration and rehabilitation

The public perception with regards to the repatriation and reintegration of Albanian citizens engaged in conflicts abroad are a topic of great interest among domestic and international P/CVE stakeholders, as the Albanian population plays an instrumental role in the resocialisation of the returning families. With the purpose of assessing the possible measures that guide the actions of state and non-state actors in dealing with returnees, respondents were asked about their perception on the reintegration of former foreign fighters and other Albanians, and the role of institutions in this process.

### Statements/questions in this section:

- State agencies should reintegrate only Albanian citizens who have lived in conflict zones abroad but have not committed crimes
- State institutions must work to repatriate and reintegrate all Albanian citizens engaged in conflicts abroad
- I would not mind it if my municipality would host returning families from Syria in my community
- To what extent should the following actors have a role in the rehabilitation and reintegration of returnees from Syria?

### Statement: State agencies should reintegrate only Albanian citizens who have lived in conflict zones abroad but have not committed crimes

Respondents were asked to rate whether they agree or not with the statement on a 4-point scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4). The majority of respondents (63.3%) agree



with the statement ‘State agencies should reintegrate only Albanian citizens who have lived in conflict zones abroad but have not committed crimes’, while 30.4 disagree. Compared to 2018, when 49.1% of the respondents agreed, this is an increase of 14.2 p.p.

When checking across demographics, no substantial differences are found across gender or employment status. Respondents over 55 years old (both age groups: 69%), with up to primary education (75%), or residing in urban areas (69%) are more likely to agree with the statement than respondents with a university degree (59%) or living in rural areas (56%). Non-practising believers (60%) and respondents that never pray (55%) are less likely to agree that state agencies should reintegrate only Albanian citizens who have lived in conflict zones abroad but have not committed crimes.

Figure 43: State agencies reintegrating all Albanians (N=1,596) vs. only Albanian citizens who have not committed crimes (N=1596)



**Statement: State institutions must work to repatriate and reintegrate all Albanian citizens engaged in conflicts abroad**

More than half of the respondents (52.3%) agree that state institutions must work to repatriate and reintegrate all Albanian citizens engaged in conflicts abroad, while 40.9% disagree. Compared to the 2018 report, when 61.5% agreed with the statement ‘State institutions must work to return and reintegrate Albanian citizens engaged in conflicts abroad’<sup>50</sup> this is a decrease of 9.2 p.p.

When checking across demographics, no substantial differences were found for gender,



50 Note that the word “all” is included in the statement used in this year’s survey, to make the difference between the two statements in this section clearer.

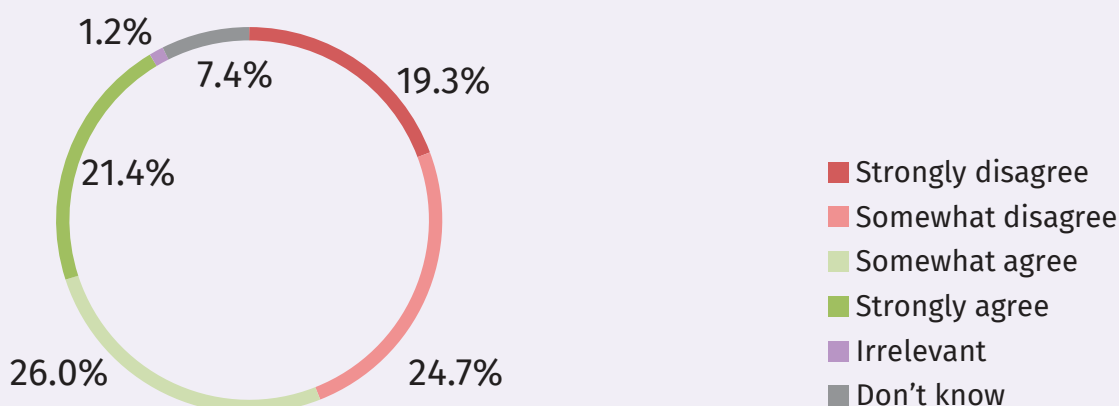


employment status, or geographic representation. Respondents with a postgraduate degree (68%) agree more often with the statement, while respondents in the age group 18 to 24 years old (46%) with up to primary education (44%), or students (45%) were less likely to agree. Respondents that do not practise any religious rituals (43%) or that only pray at times of a family or personal crisis (47%) are less likely to agree that state institutions must work to repatriate and reintegrate all Albanian citizens engaged in conflicts abroad.

**Statement: I would not mind it, if my municipality would host returning families from Syria in my community.**

Respondents were asked to rate whether they agree or not with the statement on a 4-point scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4). Respondents were divided on their opinion, with a slight majority (47.4%) agreeing or strongly agreeing as opposed to 44% of the respondents disagreeing. Male respondents (50%), respondents with a postgraduate degree (58%) or living in urban areas (50%) were more likely to agree with the statement, while female respondents (45%), respondents between 45 and 54 years old (41%) or living in rural areas (44%) were less likely to agree. Respondents that pray regularly (55%) or practise all rituals of their religion (55%) are more likely to accept returning families from Syria in their community.

Figure 44: Acceptance of hosting returning families from Syria in respondents' community (N=1589)



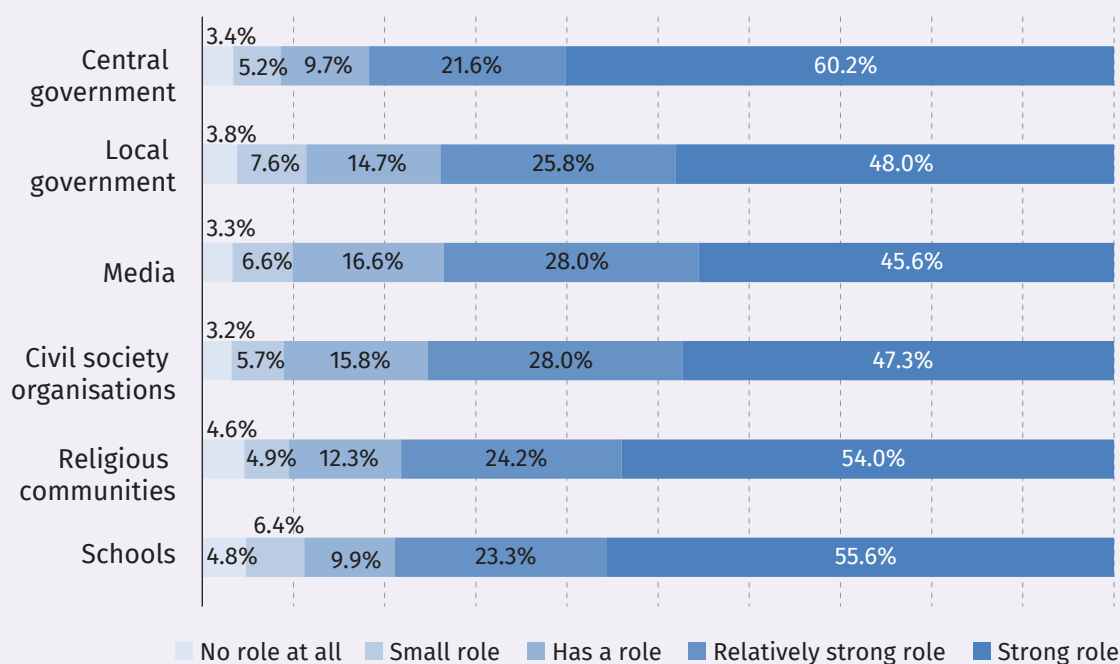
**Question: To what extent should the following actors have a role in the rehabilitation and reintegration of returnees from Syria?**

Considering the respondents' attitudes towards the reintegration of former foreign fighters and other returnees, it is interesting to analyse what role they assign to state and non-state actors in the process of reintegration. Therefore, respondents were asked to rate 'To what extent should the following actors have a role in the rehabilitation and reintegration of returnees from Syria?' on a 5-point scale from no role at all (1) to a strong role (5).



All of the mentioned state and non-state institutions were perceived as having a (relatively) strong role to play in the rehabilitation and reintegration of returnees from Syria, according to respondents. 81.8% of respondents attribute a (relatively) strong role to the central government. The second-most important role is attributed to schools (78.9%) while religious communities (78.2%) come third. 75.3% of the respondents attribute a relatively strong or a strong role to civil society organisations, followed by the local government to which 73.8% of the sample attributes an important role. Among the listed options, media is perceived as having the smallest role in the process of reintegration and rehabilitation. However, at least 6.5% of the sample chose to specify the most influential actor in the rehabilitation and reintegration of returnees from Syria. 3.9% says that the family plays an instrumental role in the rehabilitation and reintegration of returnees, while 1.3% notes an important role is played by the entire community. 4 respondents specifically mention the role the justice system has and 13 respondents noted that all the institutions combined have a very important role to play to ensure the rehabilitation and reintegration of returnees from Syria.

Figure 45: The role of state and non-state actors in the rehabilitation and reintegration of returnees from Syria



According to most Albanians, central government, schools, religious communities, and local government have the most important role to play when it comes to rehabilitating and reintegrating returnees from conflict zones. However, the support of the receiving community is equally important for the successful reintegration of returnees from Syria. Although the majority of the Albanian population believes that state agencies should reintegrate only Albanian citizens who have lived in conflict zones abroad but have not committed crimes, only 1 in 2 Albanians supports repatriating and reintegrating all Albanian citizens engaged in conflicts abroad (meaning also those that have committed crimes). Moreover, when

such returning families would have to be hosted in their own community, only 47% of Albanians would not mind it. Older Albanians, people with up to primary education, and those living in urban areas are more likely to support the reintegration of Albanians that have not committed crimes, while people with a postgraduate degree were more likely to support the repatriation and reintegration of foreign fighters as well.

The discrepancy between the level of acceptance of returning Albanians from Syria and the importance of society's approval of these individuals in Albanian society signals a need for a comprehensive communication strategy that informs all stakeholders on the steps they need to undertake to help returnees overcome practical and security-related barriers. If returnees are welcomed into a community that provides them with supportive social networks, opportunities for employment and to develop healthy coping strategies for trauma, the probability of successful rehabilitation is greatly increased. The findings suggest they would find a more welcoming environment among Albanians that pray regularly or that practise all rituals of their religion, people with a post-graduate degree, and Albanians living in urban areas who are more accepting, when it comes to hosting returning families in their own communities.

### 3. Religious authorities and preparedness of religious institutions to take back returnees

The role of religious clerics in the community and their religious formation are instrumental in helping former members of extremist groups to develop critical thinking skills, in order to understand the manipulation process and disengage from it. The level of trust and support religious communities enjoy is determinant not only in assessing their role in the reintegration of returnees, but also in identifying any potential patterns of disapproval against the official stances of respective religious communities or hotspots of disputed authority.

#### Statements in this section:

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

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

Respondents were asked to rate whether they agree or not with the statement on a 4-point scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4). The majority of respondents, 58.2%, agree, while 15.2% of them disagree. 3.3% said that they found the statement irrelevant and 23.1% didn't know whether to agree or disagree. Compared to 2018, when 55.0% agreed with the statement, there is an increase of 3.2 p.p. in the proportion of respondents that agree that the positions or stances of the chair of their religious community (in Tirana) enjoy full support of the believers in the area where they live.

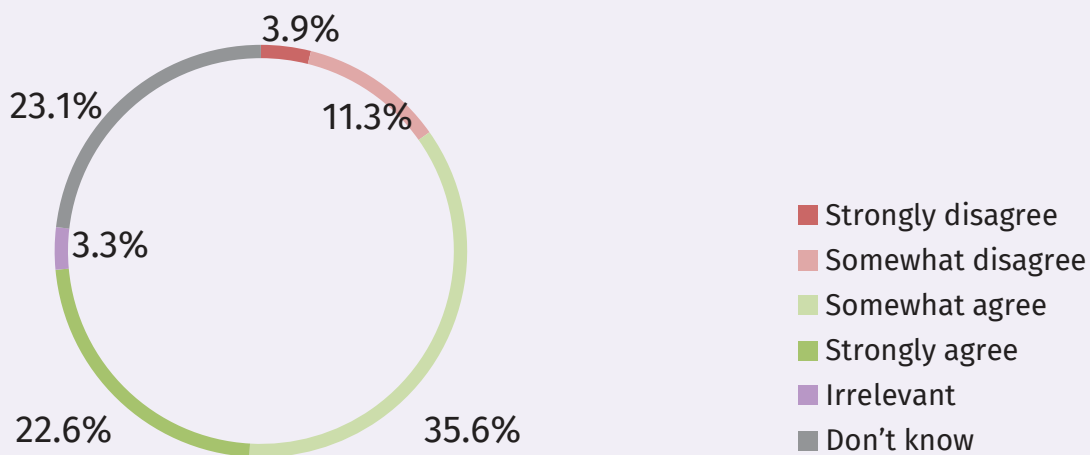
When checking across demographics, no substantial differences were found for gender or geographic representation. Respondents aged 18 to 24 years old (50%), 25 to 34 years old (54%), respondents with a university degree (51%) and students (52%) were less likely to agree with the statement, while respondents of over 65 years old (72%), were more likely to agree. The



statement found the least support in Devoll, Bulqizë, Mallakastër, Patos, Mat, Sarandë, Dibër, Roskovec, and Ura Vajgurore.

Orthodox (72%), Catholic (66%), and Bektashi (65%) respondents agree with the statement more often than respondents with a different religious affiliation. Practicing believers (respondents that practise all religious rituals or pray regularly) were more likely to agree with the statement than those who practice their religion less frequently.

Figure 46: The positions or stance of the chair of my religious community (in Tirana) enjoy full support of the believers in the area where I live (N=1586)



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

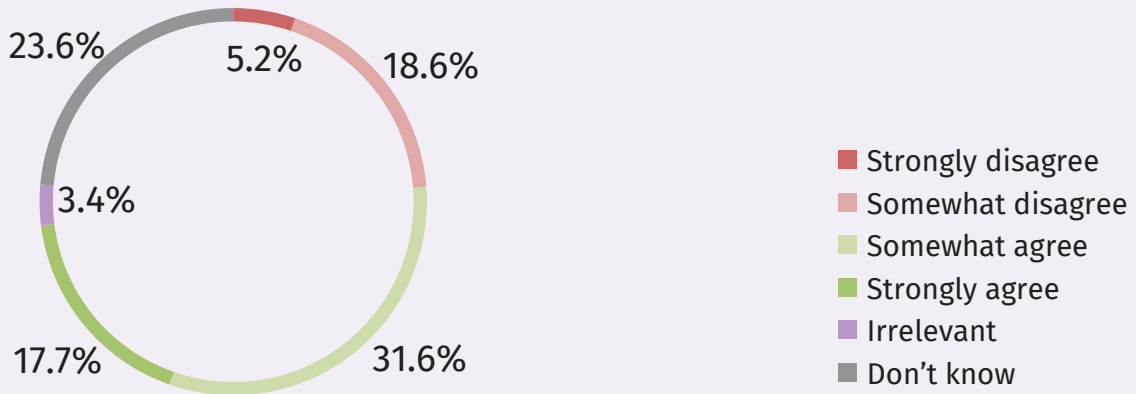
When asked to rate on a 4-point scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4) whether 'Religious clerics in the area where they live have a large influence on their respective believers', 49.3% of the respondents agree with the statement, while 23.8% disagreed. 1 in 4 respondents was not sure whether to agree or not. Compared to 2018, when 43.3% of respondents agreed with the statement, there is an increase of 6.0 p.p. in the proportion of respondents that agree with the statement.

When checking across demographics, no differences were found for gender. Respondents aged 45-54 years old (54%), with primary education (60%), or living in urban areas (51%) were more inclined to agree with the statement, while respondents aged 18 to 24 years old (42%), 25 to 34 years old (46%), respondents living in rural areas (47%), and respondents with a university degree (40%) were less likely to do so. Respondents in Bulqizë, Mallakastër, Maliq, Shijak, Devoll, Sarandë, Gjirokastër, Patos, Vlorë, were less likely to agree with the statement.

Muslim (49%) and Bektashi (48%) respondents were less likely to agree that religious clerics in the area where they live have a large influence on their respective believers, while practicing believers (respondents that pray regularly and/or practise all rituals of their religion) were more likely to agree (73% and 72% respectively).



Figure 47: Religious clerics in the area where I live have a large influence on their respective believers (N=1579)

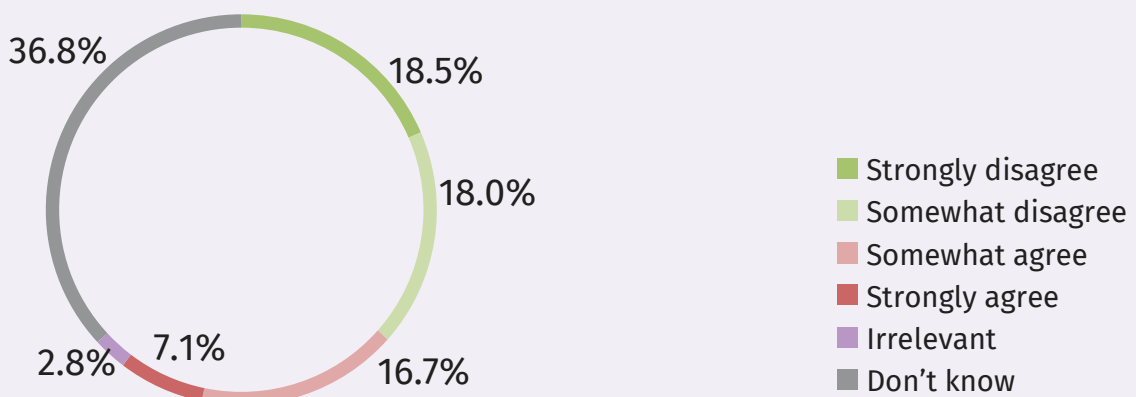


**Statement: In my religious community there are clerics without adequate religious education.**

Respondents were asked to rate their support towards the statement through a 4-point scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4). 23.8% of respondents agree with the statement, while 36.5% disagree. A substantial proportion of respondents, 36.8%, didn't know whether to agree or disagree. Compared to 2018, when 23.7% of the respondents agreed with the statement and 39.6% answered they do not know whether in their religious community there are clerics without adequate religious education, the answers have not changed substantially.

When checking across demographics, no substantial differences were found for age, employment status, geographic representation, or religiousness. 26% of male respondents and 21% of female respondents agreed with the statement. Respondents with a post-graduate degree (39%), and Muslim respondents (26%) were more likely to agree with the statement, while Bektashi (15%) and Orthodox (19%) respondents were less likely to agree.

Figure 48: In my religious community there are clerics without adequate education (N=1591)

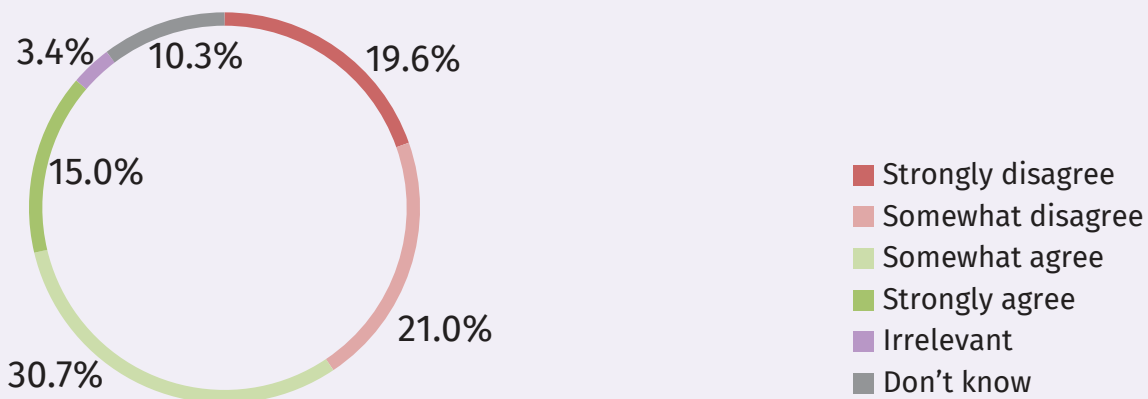


**Statement: People have the right to follow non-official religious interpretations if they do not agree with the interpretation of their official religious communities.**

Respondents were asked to rate whether they agree or not with the statement on a 4-point scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4). 45.7% of respondents agree that people have the right to follow non-official religious interpretations if they do not agree with the interpretation of their official religious community, while 40.6% of the respondents disagreed. 10.3% of the respondents did not know whether to agree or not with the statement and 3.4% found the statement irrelevant.

When checking across demographics, no substantial differences were found for age or religious affiliation. 48% of male respondents and 44% of female respondents agree with the statement. Respondents with primary education (51%), residing in rural areas (49%), or were more likely to agree with the statement, while respondents living in urban areas (43%), and those that are self-employed (39%) were less likely to agree. Practicing believers (respondents that pray regularly and/or practise all rituals of their religion) were less likely to agree that people have the right to follow non-official religious interpretations if they do not agree with the interpretation of their official religious communities (both 41%).

Figure 49: People have the right to follow non-official religious interpretations (N=1595)



*The findings under this section indicate there is fertile ground for the development of reintegration and prevention programmes that envision a bigger role for Albanian religious clerics. Practicing believers constitute the majority of survey respondents who agree that the chair of their religious community enjoys full support among local believers (58%), and that religious clerics in their community have a large influence on their audience (49%). Similarly, as in 2018, Albanians perceive local religious clerics as somewhat less influential than the chairs of the religious communities in Tirana, denoting the need to strengthen the role of religious institutions at the local level still persists.*

*The first step towards empowering religious institutions is through education. Clerics without adequate religious education (even if this is only in the perception of believers) can undermine the credibility of their respective religious community and potentially increase the acceptance of non-official religious communities, their ideas and their values. One in four Albanians, particularly those with a postgraduate degree, believes that within their religious community there are clerics without adequate religious*

education. One in four practicing believers has that opinion as well. This should prompt all stakeholders to introspectively reflect on the state of religious education in Albania, with the aim of assessing whether religious education in Albania fully meets the needs of the community of believers, religious clerics and teachers. In addition, increased transparency in regards to the educational background of religious clerics would significantly improve the public's perceptions and contribute in trust-building between the religious authority and believers.

Ultimately, it is the responsibility of the entire community to prevent individuals from following religious interpretations deviating from the official stances of their religious communities. 45.7% of Albanians agree that people have the right to follow non-official religious interpretations if they do not agree with the interpretation of their official religious communities. Particularly Albanians that could be seen as "vulnerable" (low levels of education, residing in rural areas) were more likely to agree, while practising believers agree less often. Considering the many different influences in religious affairs from outside the country – not in the least because many clerics received their education abroad – it is not surprising that there is such a large acceptance for following unofficial religious interpretations. However, when the narrative is not monitored by a central and recognised authority, it could be that more radical and intolerant interpretations of faith spread in the country. These interpretations could leave people less connected with their physical surroundings, with Albanians of different faith, or even with Albania's tolerant environment altogether. Therefore, it is important that official religious communities remain tolerant towards other interpretations of the same faith, that they are inclusive towards other ideas, and that they ensure that all believers are represented within their religious community.

For the reintegration of returnees for Syria more specifically, it will be imperative for local religious clerics to reach out to returnees and their families. Through increased contact and counselling, clerics can invite families of former extremist back into the official Muslim communities. To this purpose, central and local religious clerics should work on enhancing information exchange with other stakeholders and contribute in awareness-raising towards building a cohesive community.

#### 4. Prevention of violent extremism

The present study asked survey respondents a series of questions to gather their viewpoints on the prevention of violent extremism in Albania, upon enabling or resilience factors and who the most important players are with specific roles in prevention of violent extremism.

##### **Statements/ questions in this section:**

- In your opinion what are the three main factors that lead to or incite religious radicalisation among individuals in Albania?
- In your opinion, who are the three most important actors to prevent the spread of religious extremism in Albania?
- In your opinion, what are the three main factors that make individuals reject extremist religious ideologies?



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

Respondents were asked to indicate what they perceive as the three main factors that lead to or encourage religious radicalisation among individuals in Albania. Table 5 reports the frequency with which respondents chose these enabling factors. Economic factors – such as unemployment and poverty – was the most-opted enabling factor (66%), followed by poor education (54.2%), social exclusion (36.8%), the influence of foreign groups of religious radicals (35.5%), and poor religious knowledge (31.7%). More than a quarter of respondents considers a criminal past (people with criminal records) as potential enablers of an individual's path towards religious radicalisation. The incapability of state agencies (23.3%) and clerics (13.6%) are perceived less often as the most important enablers for religious violent extremism. Interestingly, when checking for religiousness, respondents that are practising believers (people that regularly practice all rituals of their religion and/or pray regularly) regard the lack of economic means and poor religious knowledge as the most important factors.

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

Factor	No. of responses	Percentage of cases
Economic (e.g. unemployment, poverty, etc.)	1048	65.5%
Poor education	861	53.8%
Social exclusion	585	36.6%
Influence of foreign groups of religious radicals	564	35.3%
Poor religious knowledge	503	31.4%
Criminal past (people with criminal record)	423	26.4%
Incapability of state agencies	372	23.3%
Incapability of clerics	218	13.6%

*Note: This is a multiple response question. Percentages do not add up to 100%. Number of cases = 4579. Number of responses = 1548.*

In 2018, the most-opted enablers were a low education background (67.0%), economic reasons (61.6%), and poor religious knowledge (40.7%) as the main enablers for religious violent extremism. Compared to the findings of that survey, the proportion of Albanians who perceive the influence of foreign religious radical groups as an important factor has increased with 8.3 p.p., while poor education is listed less frequently in the current survey.

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

When asked who are the most important actors in preventing the spread of religious extremism in Albania, respondents consider the central government (44.5%), senior leaders of religious communities (38.7%), and schools (29.5%) as the three most important actors in curbing the spread of religious extremism. Media is perceived as an influential actor by

26.7% of the respondents, while about a quarter of the respondents, attribute importance to local clerics, law enforcement agencies (police, prosecution, courts), or civil society. Local government (21.5%), social welfare services (20.2%), and religious believers (14.2) are perceived less often as the main actors in preventing the spread of religious extremism in Albania. 1.1% of respondents opted to specify a different actor, which according to 12 respondents is the family (see Table 6).

7% of female respondents and 5% of male respondents believe that women are one of three most important actors to prevent the spread of religious extremism in Albania. Respondents with lower levels of education are more inclined to ascribe an important role to schools in preventing the spread of religious extremism. Similarly, respondents that practise all rituals of their religion and pray regularly or at least during all religious festivals in the course of a normal year are more likely to perceive local clerics and senior leaders of religious communities as the most important actors to prevent the spread of religious extremism in Albania.

*Table 6: The most important actors to prevent the spread of religious extremism in Albania*

<b>Actor</b>	<b>No. of responses</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Central government (government, ministries)	701	44.5%
Senior leaders of religious communities	609	38.7%
Schools	464	29.5%
Media	421	26.7%
Local clerics	395	25.1%
Law enforcement agencies (police, prosecution, courts)	395	25.1%
Civil society	383	24.3%
Local government	338	21.5%
Social welfare service	318	20.2%
Believers	225	14.3%
Youth	199	12.6%
Women	95	6.0%
Other	17	1.1%
Don't know / Refuse	46	2.9%

*Note: This is a multiple response question. Percentages do not add up to 100%. Number of cases = 4606. Number of responses = 1600.*

In 2018, senior leaders of religious communities, the media, and local clerics were considered the three most important actors in preventing the spread of religious extremism in Albania. This means that the importance of the media and local clerics – in the perception of the respondents – has decreased, while central government and schools have taken a more prominent role. Moreover, compared to the 2018 results, women are perceived to play a more



prominent role in curbing the spread of religious extremism in Albania; whereas in 2018 3.6% of respondents chose women as a main actor, in 2021 6.0% of respondents sees women as instrumental in preventing religious extremism in Albania.

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

Finally, the study asked survey respondents about resilience factors that could be useful in the rehabilitation and reintegration of returning Albanians from Syria. Respondents were asked to list three main factors, which according to them, make individuals reject extremist religious ideologies. The responses were grouped into nine major categories, with the most-frequent answers being related to family ties, support from an individuals' family in the disengagement process, as well as the community. The majority of the respondents perceive knowledge—whether educational background or correct religious information—as important factors that can undermine the reach and influence of religious extremists. Although the majority of respondents viewed economic reasons as the most frequently reported factor that enables individuals' religious radicalisation, a good financial and economic situation for Albanians as a resilience factor is ranked in the fourth position (27%). While in 2018, the top resilience factor for the majority of respondents was the Albanian culture and tradition of religious tolerance, in 2021, this factor is significantly less reported in 2021 (9%).

*Table 7: Violent extremism resilience factors*

Factor	No. of responses	Percentage of cases
Close societal relationships, family and community's influence	993	68%
Education	669	46%
Adequate religious information and education	519	35%
Good financial and economic situation	396	27%
Fear of consequences	303	21%
State (institutions, reforms, actions)	215	15%
Albanian culture and tradition of religious tolerance	129	9%
Atheism or religious indifference	111	8%
Media	84	6%

*Note: This is a multiple response question. Percentages do not add up to 100. Total number of cases = 3419. Total number of responses = 1467.*

*In the next few years, Albania is facing the return of Albanian nationals from Syria. Besides the practical challenge, a main issue for the Albanian government is to ensure that these returnees will not pose a security threat in the future. Building community resilience and shrinking the enabling space in which violent extremist groups can operate are therefore important objectives in the receiving communities. Preventing violent extremist narratives from spreading in the community requires a multi-stakeholder engagement of state and non-state actors at the central and the local level.*

*In this section, Albanians were asked what – in their opinion – are main factors that lead to or incite religious radicalisation among individuals in Albania. The three most-often cited factors that lead to religious extremism according to the Albanian population are economic factors (e.g. unemployment, poverty, etc.), poor education and social exclusion. Combined with the findings from the socio-economic, political and cultural drivers, the public opinion's perceptions call for an action-based, tailored strategy to address context-specific issues for vulnerable communities, in lieu of an ideological-based strategy that focuses on religion only. A comprehensive P/CVE strategy should reflect all forms of violent extremism and should be guided on the principles of community resilience and inclusive dialogue.*

*The influence of foreign groups of religious radicals and poor religious knowledge are also ranked among the top five factors that incite religious extremism this year. Senior leaders of religious communities are generally perceived as having a more influential role in prevention than local clerics, reiterating once again the need to empower local religious authorities, as noted in the preceding section. 35% of the survey respondents mentioned adequate religious information and education among the resilience factors, whereas Albanian culture and tradition of religious tolerance was ranked among the lesser factors that make individuals reject extremist religious ideologies. These findings point towards the need to conduct an assessment of social and institutional challenges that local religious authorities encounter, inhibiting them from playing a more significant role in prevention efforts.*

*When asked who the three most-important actors are in preventing the spread of religious extremism in Albania, Albanian citizens mention the central government; senior leaders of religious communities; and schools. Practicing believers are more likely to perceive local clerics and senior leaders of religious communities as the most important actors to prevent the spread of religious extremism in Albania. However, when it comes to an individual rejecting an extremist religious ideology, Albanians perceive not institutions, but the community and social circle as a main factor. Close societal relationships, family and community's influence; education; and adequate religious information and education are seen as the main factors that make individuals reject extremist religious ideologies. These findings re-confirm that in order to disengage and re-socialise former extremists, a multi-stakeholder approach is required, consisting of state actors, non-state actors and community members.*



## 7. Conclusions and recommendations

### What drives violent extremism in Albania?

In the search for explanations as to why individuals join violent extremist groups, researchers and practitioners alike often refer to a mix of root causes, structural factor, and underlying conditions. Broader socio-economic and political factors such as unmet social and economic needs, frustrated expectations, and insufficient independence, effectiveness, and accountability of the legislative and executive branches are often mentioned to a lesser extent<sup>51</sup>. Following a first baseline assessment in 2015 and a subsequent national assessment of drivers, forms, and threats of violent extremism in Albania conducted in 2018, this study assesses the state of affairs following six years of P/CVE actions, and the salience of drivers and other related factors that feed into or enable violent extremism. It aims to expose its key features of violent extremism, its extent and depth, at-risk communities, areas and vulnerable groups, threats and other implications associated to improve P/CVE capacities and the impact of PVE initiatives in Albania. Although this study is not exhaustive in all of the drivers towards violent extremism, particularly those at the individual level, it does set out seventeen drivers grouped in three categories that were considered relevant to the Albanian context.

In the previous studies of 2015 and 2018, certain municipalities showed significantly more support for selected statements in the socio-economic, political, and cultural drivers than the national average. These so-called “hot-spots” were not observed in the current study: only municipalities with a small number of respondents scored higher than the national average on more than half of the selected statements<sup>52</sup>. In the socio-economic drivers, substantial improvements were noted for well-educated people having good job positions, local state institutions operating in a professional and abuse-free manner, and the number of people accepting illegal economic activity. Less people perceive a long beard or headscarf as a sign of extremism and more people feel that their religious community is well-represented in politics and state institutions. Similarly, the political drivers show that more people perceive that citizens’ rights and freedoms are respected by state institutions, that the state is taking on a stronger role in providing public services than in 2018, and the support for allowing inciting of or engagement in armed conflicts abroad has decreased. The willingness among the Albanian population to take back Albanian citizens that have lived in conflict zones such as Syria increased significantly – even if this would be in their own community. At the same time, Albanians seem to be more aware of the challenges ahead. More people recognise the foreign influences on religious communities and understand that disengagement of former extremists or returnees will be difficult. On the other hand, the lack of socio-economic opportunities, the state of democracy, and the functioning of the rule of law, as well as perceptions of perceived marginalisation may threaten specific groups in society through the power of manipulation of extremist ideologies. The



51 Denoeux, G. and Carter, L. (2009). Guide to the Drivers of Violent Extremism. USAID. Available via: [https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf\\_docs/Pnadt978.pdf](https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/Pnadt978.pdf)

52 Pukë, Fushë-Arrëz, Patos, Vau i Dejës, and Mat scored high on at least half of the statements, while Memaliaj, Kukës, Kurbin, Gjirokastrë, and Mallakastër scored higher for 7 out of 19 statements.





most important findings in the socio-economic, political, and cultural drivers and their salience in the Albanian context is further described in this section.

**Socio-economic drivers** – Factors such as absolute and relative poverty, social fragmentation, social exclusion, discrimination, and illegal economic activity are known to be associated with frustration with the economic and political system. More than 80% of Albanians indicate that in the area where they live there are many households or individuals that do not fulfil their basic needs and that many young people have fallen prey to dangerous behaviour. When these unmet needs are combined with dissatisfactory treatment of citizens by government institutions (both of which are becoming more salient due to the pandemic), it can create a feeling of discontent with state and society. Young, unemployed, or isolated individuals might especially be vulnerable to propaganda of extremist ideologies that advocate the use of violence for protesting against the existing order and for obtaining desired changes, as well as for personal benefits. According to half of the Albanian population, everyone like fast wealth creation regardless of how it is achieved. One in three Albanians – particularly those with low levels of education – is willing to go through illegal means to make ends meet and a similar proportion indicates that the main source of income for youth in the area where they live is not from individual law-abiding work. The narrative of violent extremism may be particularly appealing to them due to promises of lucrative engagement and common areas of operation.

Perceptions of societal discrimination towards an individual or community (or both) in a broad sense can be a driver for violent extremism. Although societal discrimination on the grounds of religious affiliation is not overtly visible as most Albanians remain tolerant of other religious groups, there are several factors indicating that require attention of relevant stakeholders. 1 in 4 Albanians associate the long beard or headscarf with religious extremism, denoting a distorted perception of religion. 38.8% of Albanians would refuse a lawful job or economic earning that is not allowed by their religion. At least 12% of the Albanian population says that people with the same religious denomination benefit less from opportunities for economic and social development due to their religious belonging. 38.1% says the religious community they belong to is not sufficiently represented in politics. Meanwhile, there is a significant increase observed of religious groups that offer economic privileges or material gain to those who practise their religion compared to 2018.

**Political drivers** – Political drivers are related to the actual and the perceived state of democracy, governance and functioning of the rule of law in a country. Although it has been thirty years since the fall of communism, Albania is still far from a consolidated democracy. Over the past five years, the independence, effectiveness, and accountability of the legislative and executive branches has not improved, which is affecting citizens' trust in governance and the rule of law. While some drivers are seen as less alarming than in 2018, such as the driver 'Poorly and ungoverned areas', for which the proportion of Albanians strongly agreeing with statements decreased with up to 15 p.p., most drivers are seen as more relevant than in 2018. Endemic corruption and impunity for well-connected elites, as well as the perception that the international system is fundamentally unfair and hostile to Muslim societies and peoples, have gained substantial support among all Albanians.

Some of the drivers that may not be a pressing issue according to most Albanians, could be to certain groups, such as people living in isolated areas, practicing believers, or Albanians adhering a certain religious group. 44.1% of the Albanian population perceives that the political system in Albania as unfair and has to be changed even with violence if needed and 35.1% says that people have the right to take the law into their own hands when their rights and freedoms are denied by state institutions. Again, people with low levels of education agree more often, signalling that they



might be more prone to using undemocratic means to protect their values, rights, or freedoms. 1 in 5 Albanians – and 1 in 4 Albanian Muslims – perceives law enforcement institutions to be harsher with practising Muslims. In such background, it is easier for violent extremist groups to promote themselves as a righteous alternative to the perceived immoral or unjust governing elites. Almost 4 in 10 Albanians – and practicing believers even more often – already see an opportunity for religion to address endemic corruption and impunity for well-connected elite, as they believe that countries with strong religious faith have less corrupt governments and Albania would have more justice if more people would join their religion. Practicing believers are less likely to agree that people should resort to violence to achieve this change and are also more likely than others to say that a true believer should denounce members of their own community who holds religious extremist views.

**Cultural drivers** – The perception of a possible threat on people’s identities and their way of life can be an important driver to violent extremism, as was the case with the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. The most important prerequisite in order for people to be susceptible for this type of propaganda, is that they feel more of a sense of belonging with a regional or even global religious community than with the local population or culture. While the majority of respondents do not perceive any hostile stances towards Islam, the proportion of Albanians agreeing that the West is hostile and constantly attacking Islamic states and culture has increased compared to the 2018 survey. According to 39.1% of Albanians, Muslim believers in Albania are faced with foreign influences of conservative Islam. Practicing believers – regardless of their religious affiliation – were more likely to agree that Muslim believers are experiencing foreign influence. Although Muslim Albanians were less likely to agree to the statement, 1 in 4 does perceive that the faith, traditions and dignity of their religious community in general is under constant pressure and threat. It is important to note that an extremist interpretation of faith does not necessarily imply the presence of violent extremism.

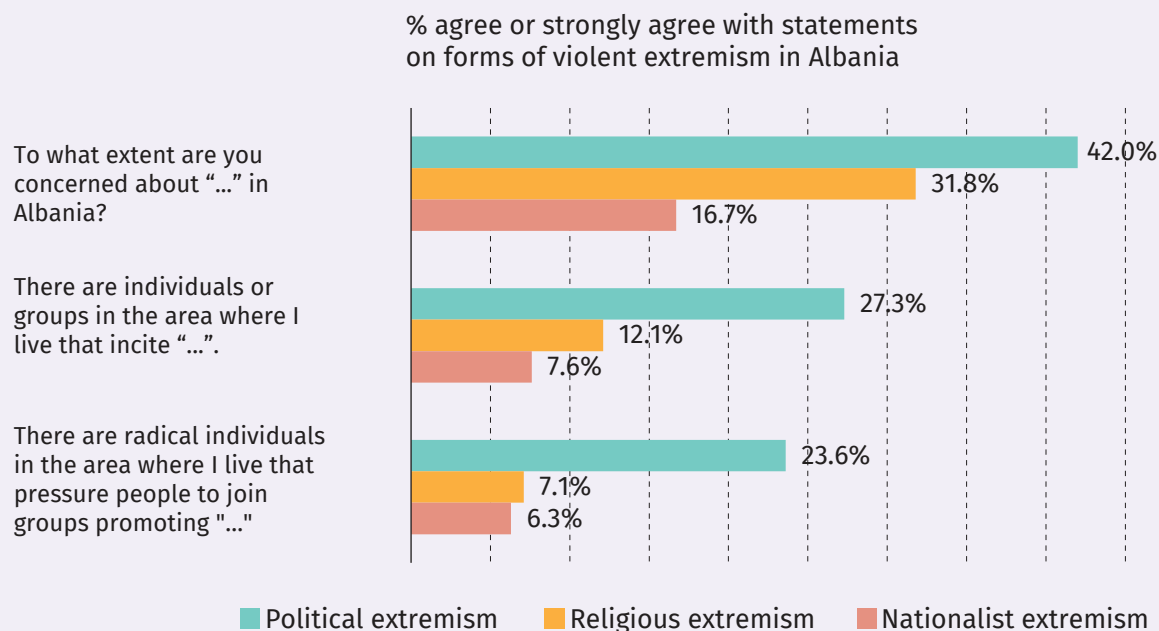
Furthermore, the proportion of Albanians who believe that it is difficult to be a practicing Muslim or Christian believer has increased as well: 20% Albanians think that is difficult to be a practicing Muslim believer in Albania today, while 10% says the same about being a practicing Christian believer. 12% of Albanians and 13% of Muslim Albanians agree that “the Islamic State in Syria was the true representative of Islam” – with people with low levels of education more likely to agree. These findings suggest the need to continue monitoring the foreign influence in domestic religious affairs, while continuing to inclusive dialogue. Building on national values such as religious tolerance, this dialogue would allow for non-mainstream stances not to be alienated – counterbalancing any foreign influences that would seek to interfere with its identity. Religious authorities in particular, would have a crucial role to play in this regard.

### Presence of extremism in Albania

While over the past few years, religious violent extremism has been a primary concern in Albania, the 2018 study ‘Violent Extremism in Albania’ (IDM, 2018), noted an increased potential for other types of extremism in Albania. Indeed, this study confirms that while most Albanians are not concerned or very concerned about violent extremism in Albania, they are most frequently concerned about political extremism than about religious or nationalist extremism (see Figure 50). Older Albanians are more often concerned about extremism – whether political, nationalist, or religious – than younger Albanians. Practicing believers – regardless of which religion – were more likely to be concerned or very concerned about religious extremism. When asked about types of religious extremist groups people believe are operating in Albania, 38% of Albanians says that there are well-organised groups that propagate extremist interpretations of Islam in Albania, while between 10-20% of Albanians believe that there are well-organised groups that propagate extremist interpretations of Orthodox, Catholic, Bektashi, or Evangelical faith in Albania.



Figure 50: The concern for and perceived presence of, political, religious, and nationalist violent extremism



When cross-examining this with whether Albanians actually observe (violent) extremist groups or individuals in their own community, the vast majority of Albanians denies the presence of such individuals or groups. The presence of individuals or groups that incite political extremism (27.3%) is reported more frequently than the presence of individuals or groups inciting religious extremism (12.1%) or nationalist extremism (7.6%). In Bulqizë, Rogozhinë, and Kamëz the large majority of people confirms the presence of individuals or groups that incite political extremism, while for religious extremism this is only the case in Rogozhinë and less so in Kamëz, Durrës, and Pogradec. Similarly, the presence of radical individuals that pressure people to join groups promoting political extremism has been confirmed by 23.6% of people, particularly in Bulqizë, Durrës, Kamëz, Kavajë, Këlcyrë, Libohovë, Pukë, and Shijak. 7.1% of Albanians confirms the presence of radical individuals pressuring people to join groups promoting religious extremism, particularly in the municipalities of Cërrik, Kamëz, Kuçovë, Maliq, Pogradec, Rogozhinë, Shkodër, Tirana, and Ura Vajgurore. 6.3% of Albanians confirms the presence of people pressuring others to join nationalist extremist groups. While overall, these findings highlight that a next security threat may come from politically motivated violent extremist groups, rather than religiously motivated ones, they should also signal a need for P/CVE stakeholders to engage in the abovementioned municipalities to counter the spread of violent extremist groups or individuals.

### Rehabilitation and reintegration of Albanians from Syria

Over the next few years, Albania is facing the rehabilitation and reintegration of its nationals from Syria. Although the exact timeframe is still uncertain, government institutions and civil society organisations with the help of the international community have started the preparations for a whole-of-society rehabilitation and reintegration strategy. The support of the general population



and the receiving communities in particular is instrumental for a sustainable resocialisation of the returnees. The current study reveals that the majority of Albanians would support the reintegration of Albanian citizens who have lived in conflict zones abroad but have not committed crimes and half of Albanians even supports repatriating and reintegrating all Albanian citizens engaged in conflicts abroad. Moreover, when such returning families would have to be hosted in their own community, 47% of Albanians would not mind it. Particularly practicing believers, as well as Muslims, men, people with a post-graduate degree, and Albanians living in urban areas are more accepting of hosting returning families from Syria.

Although Albanians seem generally accepting of the repatriation and reintegration of returning nationals, they are more sceptical of the abilities of radical religious believers and terrorist offenders to disengage from their extremist ideology. Interestingly, when it comes to an individual rejecting an extremist religious ideology, Albanians perceive not institutions, but the community and social circle as a main factor. Close societal relationships, family and community's influence; education; and adequate religious information/ education are seen as the main factors make individuals reject extremist religious ideologies. These findings re-confirm that in order to de-radicalise and re-socialise former extremists, a multi-stakeholder approach is required, consisting of state actors, non-state actors and community members.

The central government, schools, religious communities, and local government are seen as having the most important role to play when it comes to rehabilitating and reintegrating returnees from conflict zones. The level of trust and support for religious communities at the central and the local level is instrumental in assessing their role in the reintegration of returnees, but also in identifying any potential patterns of disapproval against the official stances of respective religious communities or hotspots of disputed authority. To this end, perceptions of badly educated clerics can undermine the credibility of this religious community and potentially increase the acceptance of non-official religious communities. The majority of Muslim Albanians agreed that the chair of their religious community enjoys full support among local believers, while half of Albanians said that religious clerics in the area where they live have a large influence on their respective believers. People in Devoll, Bulqizë, Mallakastër, Patos, Mat, Sarandë, and Finiq were less likely to agree to both statements, indicating that the level of support for, and influence of, the official religious communities might be less in these municipalities.

With 1 in 4 Albanians agreeing that within their religious community there are clerics without adequate religious education, it should not come as a surprise that almost half of Albanians believes that people the right to follow non-official religious interpretations if they do not agree with the interpretation of their official religious communities. Particularly Albanians that could be seen as "vulnerable" (with low levels of education, residing in rural areas) were more likely to agree, while practicing believers were less likely to agree. Considering the foreign influences in religious affairs it is not surprising that there is such a large acceptance for following unofficial religious interpretations. However, when the narrative is not monitored by a central and recognised authority, it could be that more radical and intolerant interpretations of faith spread in the country. Therefore, it is important that outside interference is moderate and official religious communities remain tolerant towards other interpretations of the same faith, ensuring that all believers are represented within their religious community.



## The way forward

A follow-up of the 2018 study, the findings of the present survey confirm once more that Albania has thus far overlooked the potential for non-religious extremism in the country while primarily focusing on religious extremism. While several drivers to violent extremism have seen improvements, the lack of socio-economic opportunities, the state of democracy, and the functioning of the rule of law, as well as perceptions of perceived marginalisation may leave some individuals vulnerable to violent extremism. Considering the expected repatriation of Albanian nationals from Syria and their reintegration into Albanian society, it remains important to continue efforts that prevent violent extremism by shrinking the enabling space in which such groups operate. Although the following list of recommended priority actions is not exhaustive, it includes the most pressing needs to transform the present P/CVE platform of action centring on religious violent extremism in the country into a sustainable, inclusive and cross-sectoral framework for community resilience against forms and ideologies of violent extremism, whether political, religious or nationalist:

1. An action-based, tailored strategy is required in order to address context-specific issues for vulnerable communities, in lieu of an ideological-based strategy that focuses on religion only. A comprehensive P/CVE strategy should reflect all forms of violent extremism and should be guided on the principles of community resilience and inclusive dialogue.
2. A whole-of-government approach is required to enhance the legitimacy of central and local institutions, strengthening the rule of law and increasing efforts in impeding criminal and informal economy, as well as endemic corruption. Strengthening capacity-building of local government institutions, in particular is of utmost emergency, in order to sustainably improve their performance in service delivery.
3. Although religious tolerance is a fundamental value in Albanian society, P/CVE stakeholders, educational institutions, and civil society should increase their efforts in addressing the root causes and effects of stereotypes, prejudice and societal discrimination based on ideological grounds. A strategic communication agenda is needed to cultivate a culture of respect for human rights that enables society to provide supportive social networks.
4. Strengthening civic space in Albania is crucial in inciting citizens to participate in decision-making. Civic education initiatives, combined with the respective legislation amendments, are more likely to yield positive outcomes that lead to fostering accountability, while enabling marginalized communities to engage in a safe space, where they can address their frustrated expectations and discontent with the state of affairs.
5. Increased investments in capacity building – targeted in particular at the Albanian youth are mandatory in order to curb inequality and loss of hope.
6. Empowering religious communities, by further including them in the prevention and reintegration strategies implemented by the CVE Centre and line ministries is instrumental in facilitating the reintegration of radicalised religious believers and terrorist offenders in society, by preparing and urging local clerics to assume an active role as religious re-educators. Increasing the credibility religious communities hold, their ideas and values – require an assessment of institutional challenges that local religious authorities encounter, inhibiting them from playing a more significant role in prevention efforts.



## 8. Appendices

### 8.I. Distribution of survey sample

County	Sample size per county		
	Men	Women	Total
Berat	38	42	80
Dibër	38	38	76
Durrës	78	78	156
Elbasan	85	83	168
Fier	90	86	176
Gjirokastrë	20	18	38
Korçë	62	62	124
Kukës	23	22	45
Lezhë	38	38	76
Shkodër	62	60	122
Tiranë	214	225	439
Vlorë	53	47	100
Total	801	799	1600



## 8.2. Survey questionnaire



### SURVEY

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

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

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

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

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

#### For Interviewer: Enter interview data

Interviewer	Interview no.	Municipality	City	Village



## SECTION I: DEMOGRAPHY

## 1. NOTE THE GENDER OF THE RESPONDENT:

Male	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
Female	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
Other	<input type="checkbox"/> 3

## 2. Age \_\_\_\_\_ (in years)

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

No education / Less than primary education	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
Primary education (8/9 year cycle)	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
Secondary education (high school)	<input type="checkbox"/> 3
University (BA, BSc)	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
Postgraduate (MA, MSc, PhD)	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
Refuse	<input type="checkbox"/> 99

## 4. Civil status

Married	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
Cohabiting (unmarried)	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
Single	<input type="checkbox"/> 3
Divorced	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
Widowed	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
Refuse	<input type="checkbox"/> 99

## 5. Employment status

Employed	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
Self-employed	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
Unemployed	<input type="checkbox"/> 3

Student	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
Other _____	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
Refuse	<input type="checkbox"/> 99

## 6. What religious group does your family originally belong to?

Muslim	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
Orthodox	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
Catholic	<input type="checkbox"/> 3
Bektashi	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
Evangelical	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
Mixed	<input type="checkbox"/> 6
Other _____	<input type="checkbox"/> 7
Don't know/ Not sure	<input type="checkbox"/> 88
Refuse	<input type="checkbox"/> 99

## 7. What religious group do you adhere to?

Muslim	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
Orthodox	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
Catholic	<input type="checkbox"/> 3
Bektashi	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
Evangelical	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
Agnostic	<input type="checkbox"/> 6
Atheist	<input type="checkbox"/> 7
Other _____	<input type="checkbox"/> 8
Refuse	<input type="checkbox"/> 99



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

Yes, I regularly practise all rituals of my religion	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
Mainly Yes, I practise the main religious rituals	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
No, I am a believer, but I do not practise religious rituals at all	<input type="checkbox"/> 3
No, I am an atheist (GO TO SECTION 2)	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
Refuse	<input type="checkbox"/> 99

**9. How often you pray:**

Regularly (daily, weekly) (1)	At religious festivals during the course of a normal year (2)	Only occasionally, at special religious events (3)	Only occasionally, at times of family or personal crisis (4)	Never (5)	Refuse (99)
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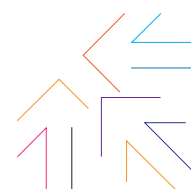
**SECTION 2: SOCIETY AND SOCIAL-ECONOMIC FACTORS****10. Considering the community where you live, to what extent do you agree with the following statement? Please use a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree)**

STATEMENT	Strongly disagree			Strongly agree	Irrelevant	Don't know
In the area where I live many young people have fallen prey to gambling, alcohol, drugs or dangerous behaviour (violence, vandalism, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 88	<input type="checkbox"/> 99

**11. To what extent are you concerned about “.....” in Albania?**

Please use a scale from 1 (not at all concerned) to 4 (very concerned)

	Not at all concerned			Very concerned	Irrelevant	Don't know
Political extremism	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 88	<input type="checkbox"/> 99
Nationalist extremism	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 88	<input type="checkbox"/> 99
Religious extremism	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 88	<input type="checkbox"/> 99



**12. There are individuals or groups in the area where I live that incite “.....”.**

Please use a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree)

	Strongly disagree			Strongly agree	Irrelevant	Don't know
Political extremism	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 88	<input type="checkbox"/> 99
Nationalist extremism	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 88	<input type="checkbox"/> 99
Religious extremism (specify)	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 88	<input type="checkbox"/> 99

12d. \*If you chose (Agree-3; or Strongly agree-4) for religious extremism, please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

**13. Based on your experience, to what extent do you agree with the following statements?**

Please use a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree)

STATEMENT	Strongly disagree			Strongly agree	Irrelevant	Don't know
People with the same religious denomination as me benefit less from opportunities for economic and social development due to our religious belonging	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 88	<input type="checkbox"/> 99
The long beard (for men) or headscarf (for women) reveal that we are dealing with religious extremists	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 88	<input type="checkbox"/> 99
The religious community I belong to is well-represented in politics and state institutions	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 88	<input type="checkbox"/> 99

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

STATEMENT	Strongly disagree			Strongly agree	Irrelevant	Don't know
In general, well- educated people in the area where I live have good job positions	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 88	<input type="checkbox"/> 99



The main source of income for youth in the area where I live is from individual law-abiding work	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 88	<input type="checkbox"/> 99
In the area where I live, state institutions of social and economic assistance operate in a professional and abuse-free manner	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 88	<input type="checkbox"/> 99
In the area where I live there are many households or individuals that do not fulfil their basic needs	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 88	<input type="checkbox"/> 99
In the area where I live there are religious groups that offer economic privileges or material gain to those who practise their religion	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 88	<input type="checkbox"/> 99
I would refuse a lawful job or economic earning that is NOT allowed by my religion	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 88	<input type="checkbox"/> 99
For the sake of everyday survival I would justify every economic activity, including illegal ones	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 88	<input type="checkbox"/> 99
Everyone likes fast wealth creation, regardless of how it is achieved	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 88	<input type="checkbox"/> 99

### SECTION 3: RELIGION AND (INTER)STATE OR POLITICAL FACTORS

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

STATEMENT	Strongly disagree			Strongly agree	Irrelevant	Don't know
In general, citizens' rights and freedoms are respected by state institutions	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 88	<input type="checkbox"/> 99



The political system in Albania is unfair and has to be changed even with violence if needed	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 88	<input type="checkbox"/> 99
Law enforcement institutions (police, prosecution, courts) are harsher with practising Muslims	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 88	<input type="checkbox"/> 99
People have the right to take the law into their own hands when their rights and freedoms are denied by state institutions	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 88	<input type="checkbox"/> 99

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

STATEMENT	Strongly disagree			Strongly agree	Irrelevant	Don't know
Inciting of or engagement in armed conflicts abroad must not be allowed	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 88	<input type="checkbox"/> 99
Albania's contribution to military missions in Afghanistan and Iraq were an insult to Muslims	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 88	<input type="checkbox"/> 99
It is the duty of every citizen to protect their ideology at any price and by any means	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 88	<input type="checkbox"/> 99
It is the duty of every believer to protect their values and religious dignity at any price and by any means	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 88	<input type="checkbox"/> 99
Countries with strong religious faith have less corrupt governments	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 88	<input type="checkbox"/> 99
Albania would have more justice if more people would join my religion	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 88	<input type="checkbox"/> 99
Religious activities should not be overseen by the state	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 88	<input type="checkbox"/> 99



In the area where I live the 'state as law enforcement authority' is present more than the 'state as provider of public services for citizens'	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 88	<input type="checkbox"/> 99
State presence as law enforcement authority and as provider of public services is less in rural areas (villages) than in cities and towns	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 88	<input type="checkbox"/> 99
A true believer should not denounce members of their own community who hold religious extremist views	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 88	<input type="checkbox"/> 99

**17. There are radical individuals in the area where I live that pressure people to join groups promoting ".....".** Please use a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree).

	Strongly disagree			Strongly agree	Irrelevant	Don't know
Political extremism	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 88	<input type="checkbox"/> 99
Nationalist extremism	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 88	<input type="checkbox"/> 99
Religious extremism (specify)	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 88	<input type="checkbox"/> 99

17d. \*If you chose (Agree-3; or Strongly agree-4) for religious extremism, please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

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

STATEMENT	Strongly disagree			Strongly agree	Irrelevant	Don't know
The West is hostile and constantly attacking Islamic states and culture	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 88	<input type="checkbox"/> 99
Global political and economic structures (e.g. UN, IMF) are an invention of the West to rule Muslim countries	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 88	<input type="checkbox"/> 99



Countries with a Christian majority population in the Balkans have had more support from the West precisely due to their religious affiliation	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 88	<input type="checkbox"/> 99
EU has been unfair with countries in the Balkans with a considerable Muslim population (Albania, Kosovo, BiH, North Macedonia)	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 88	<input type="checkbox"/> 99
USA has been unfair with countries in the Balkans with a considerable Muslim population (Albania, Kosovo, BiH, North Macedonia)	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 88	<input type="checkbox"/> 99

## SECTION 4: PRACTICING RELIGION IN ALBANIA

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

STATEMENT	Strongly disagree			Strongly agree	Irrelevant	Don't know
Nowadays it is difficult to be a practising Muslim believer in Albania	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 88	<input type="checkbox"/> 99
Nowadays it is difficult to be a practising Christian believer in Albania	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 88	<input type="checkbox"/> 99
Muslim believers in Albania are faced with foreign influences of conservative Islam	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 88	<input type="checkbox"/> 99



The faith, traditions and dignity of my religious community in general is under constant pressure and threat	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 88	<input type="checkbox"/> 99
The Islamic State in Syria and Iraq was the true representative of Islam	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 88	<input type="checkbox"/> 99

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

STATEMENT	Strongly disagree			Strongly agree	Irrelevant	Don't know
The positions or stance of the chair of my religious community (in Tirana) enjoy full support of believers in the area where I live	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 88	<input type="checkbox"/> 99
Religious clerics in the area where I live have a large influence on their respective believers	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 88	<input type="checkbox"/> 99
In my religious community there are clerics without adequate religious education	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 88	<input type="checkbox"/> 99
People have the right to follow religious interpretations that do not align with the official religious community.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 88	<input type="checkbox"/> 99
In Albania there are well-organised groups that propagate extremist interpretations of the Islamic faith	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 88	<input type="checkbox"/> 99
In Albania there are well-organised groups that propagate extremist interpretations of Orthodox faith	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 88	<input type="checkbox"/> 99



In Albania there are well-organised groups that propagate extremist interpretations of Catholic faith	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 88	<input type="checkbox"/> 99
In Albania there are well-organised groups that propagate extremist interpretations of Bektashi faith	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 88	<input type="checkbox"/> 99
In Albania there are well-organised groups that propagate extremist interpretations of Evangelical Christian faith	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 88	<input type="checkbox"/> 99
In Albania there are well-organised groups that propagate extremist interpretations of other religious denominations (specify:....)	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 88	<input type="checkbox"/> 99

## SECTION 5. REHABILITATION, REINTEGRATION AND PREVENTION

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

STATEMENT	Strongly disagree			Strongly agree	Irrelevant	Don't know
It is impossible for radicalised religious believers to break away from radical religious ideologies	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 88	<input type="checkbox"/> 99
It is impossible for terrorist offenders to break away from their extremist ideologies	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 88	<input type="checkbox"/> 99
State agencies should reintegrate only Albanian citizens who have lived in conflict zones abroad but have not committed crimes	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 88	<input type="checkbox"/> 99





State institutions must work to repatriate and reintegrate all Albanian citizens engaged in conflicts abroad	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 88	<input type="checkbox"/> 99
I would not mind it, if my municipality would host returning families from Syria in my community.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 88	<input type="checkbox"/> 99

**22. In your opinion is there religious hatred or harmony in Albania?** Please use a scale of 1 to 4, where 1 is Religious hatred and 4 is Religious harmony

Religious hatred			Religious harmony
<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4

**23. Would you personally support a family member (siblings/children) marrying a person belonging to another religion?**

Yes, certainly	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
I would accept it, but would not support or encourage it	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
I would object to it in any case	<input type="checkbox"/> 3
I would object to it if the person they are to marry is a practising believer	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
I am not sure	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
Refused	<input type="checkbox"/> 99

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

Economic (e.g. unemployment, poverty, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
Poor education	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
Social exclusion	<input type="checkbox"/> 3
Criminal past (people with criminal records)	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
Incapability of clerics	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
Incapability of state agencies	<input type="checkbox"/> 6
Influence of foreign groups of religious radicals	<input type="checkbox"/> 7



Poor religious knowledge	<input type="checkbox"/> 8
Other (specify: .....)	<input type="checkbox"/> 9
Don't know / Refuse	<input type="checkbox"/> 99

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

- a. \_\_\_\_\_
- b. \_\_\_\_\_
- c. \_\_\_\_\_

**26. To what extent should the following actors have a role in the rehabilitation and reintegration of returnees from Syria? (1 - no role at all, 5 - a strong role)**

	No role at all				Strong role
Central government	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
Local government	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
Media	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
Civil society organisations	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
Religious communities	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
Schools	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
Other (specify: .....)	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5

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

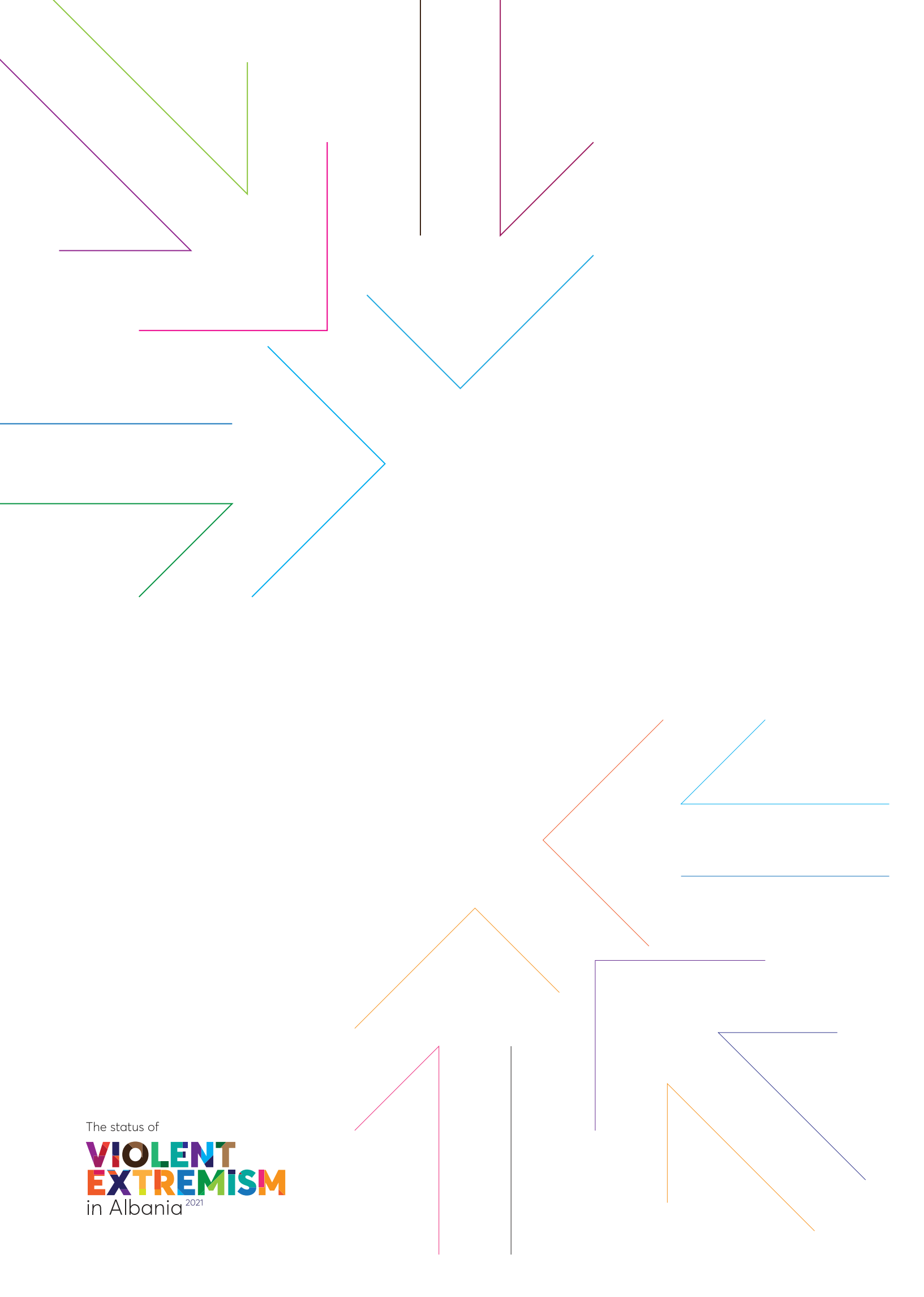
Local government	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
Social welfare service	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
Local clerics	<input type="checkbox"/> 3
Senior leaders of religious communities	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
Law enforcement agencies (police, prosecution, courts)	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
Central government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



Youth	<input type="checkbox"/> 10
Schools	<input type="checkbox"/> 11
Believers	<input type="checkbox"/> 12
Other (specify: .....)	<input type="checkbox"/> 13
Don't know / Refuse	<input type="checkbox"/> 99

THANK YOU!





The status of  
**VIOLENT  
EXTREMISM**  
in Albania <sup>2021</sup>