

Public perception towards public safety, internal and external threats in Albania



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The data presented in the report derive from the Western Balkans Security Barometer (WBSB) survey. WBSB is a new regional initiative launched by KCSS in 2020, implemented in cooperation with the Belgrade Centre for Security Policy (BCSP) in Serbia and Center for the Study of Democracy and Governance (CSDG) in Albania, supported by the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). WBSB serves as an instrument to measure public perceptions in Albania, Kosovo and Serbia on different security-related issues. The findings demonstrate how citizens percept or are informed about the issues presented in this report. As such, the views presented in this report do not necessarily represent the views of the KCSS, BCSP, CSDG or NED.

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PUBLIC PERCEPTION TOWARDS PUBLIC SAFETY, INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL THREATS IN ALBANIA

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF PUBLIC SAFETY	3
PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF INTERNAL THREATS.....	9
PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF EXTERNAL THREATS	14
CONCLUSION	15



INTRODUCTION

The Center for the Study of Democracy and Governance (CSDG) has conducted the Albanian Security Barometer for the past two years (2019 and 2020) in an effort to measure public perception towards institutions and different security related issues. In its third edition, CSDG has joined the Western Balkans Security Barometer (WBSB) in its second edition to conduct an identical regional barometer in Albania, Kosovo and Serbia. This edition is different from the two previous barometers, because it has taken a regional dimension by measuring not only the perception of Albanian citizens towards their institutions and security issues, but also their perceptions on regional cooperation and specifically the relations between Albania, Kosovo, and Serbia. WBSB has an identical methodology in all three countries, and it also measured simultaneously the perceptions of the citizens of Kosovo and Serbia on the same issues. The results of the WBSB will be published in four different reports for each country. The first report was the Public Perception towards Security and Justice Institutions and Corruption Issues. This is the second report Public Safety and Internal and External Threats that includes only the data for Albania. In the upcoming period, two other reports are going to get published for Albania, including the Bilateral Relations, Cross-Border Cooperation and Identity Issues, and the European Integration and Regional Security. This report focused solely on public safety issues, internal threats and external threats that Albania is facing.

A multi-layered random sample of 1125 adults were used for this survey. Surveys were proportionally distributed among 61 municipalities of Albania, taking into consideration the rural/urban areas, gender and age quotas. The purpose of this multi-layered sampling approach was to achieve accurate geographic and demographic representation of Albania's adult population, while maintaining a sampling error lower than $\pm 2.9\%$ for the overall sample. A random sampling was used for this survey, for it ensures that each resident in Albania had an equal probability of being chosen for participating in the survey. This survey was conducted through face-to-face interviews. Before starting the field work, the interviewers were trained by the project management team. The field work for collecting the data was conducted on 10-20 September 2021. The answers of the interviewees were entered directly by the field researchers on smartphones and were transmitted instantly to the central server through a special, purpose-built software program by the project's IT specialist. The time and location of each interview was recorded automatically. At the end of the field work, a general quality control check of the interview data collected on the server was conducted.

The vast majority of Albanians do not believe that violent extremism is widespread and threatening to the public safety in the country. Less than one in five Albanians consider the violence on ethnic, religious or political background as an evident and threatening form of violent extremism.

Although they consider the returnees from Syria and Iraq as threats to national security, the majority of Albanians believe that state institutions should work to repatriate all

Albanians that are remaining in Syria, and also undertake rehabilitation/reintegration measures to returnees.

Albanians feel mostly safe in their country. Albanians consider brain drain,¹ poor public infrastructure, and air pollution as the biggest threats to their communities. In contrary, online violence,² migrants, and human trafficking are considered as the least threats to their communities.

Brain-drain, state capture,³ and unemployment are considered as the major internal national security threats to Albania. In contrary, natural disasters, fake-news, and COVID-19 pandemic are considered as the least significant national security threats to the country.

As regards to the external security threats to Albania, foreign espionage and climate change are considered the two major external threats to the national security of Albania. In contrary, foreign workforce in Albania and migrants are considered as the least significant external threats to the national security of the country.

This report is divided into three main parts. The following chapter provides the findings pertaining to the public perception of public safety issues; the subsequent chapter provides the findings pertaining to the internal security threats to Albania and the final chapter provides findings related to the external security threats to Albania. A conclusion that reflects upon the findings is also provided at the end of the report.

1 The concept of brain drain in the survey was referring to the migration of professionals/skilled workers, such as doctors, teachers, ITs etc., youth migration, migration of manufacturing workers and workers with lower education.

2 The concept of online violence that this survey refers is the use of online platforms and/or services to engage in activities that may result in physical and/or psychological violence, emotional self-harm or cause harm to another person.

3 The concept of state capture in the survey was referring to the political circumstances where the interests of citizens are subordinated to the private interests of individuals in power as well as their political and economic partners.



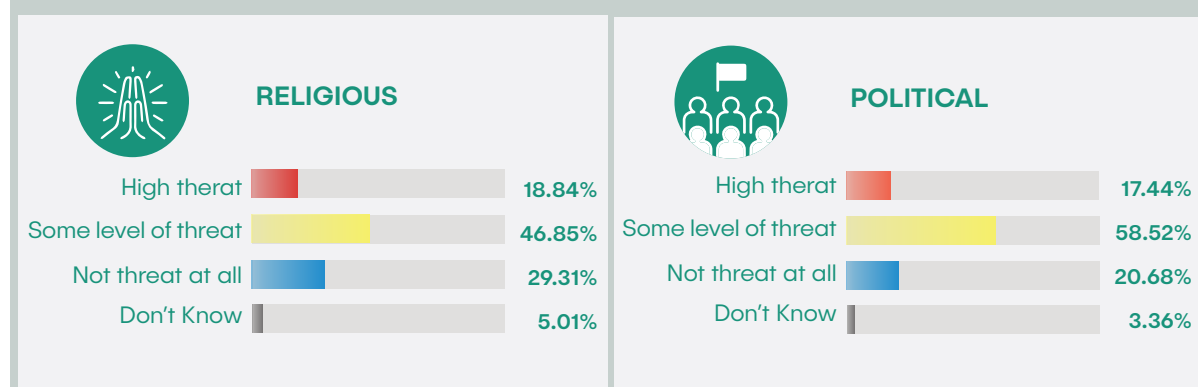
PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF PUBLIC SAFETY

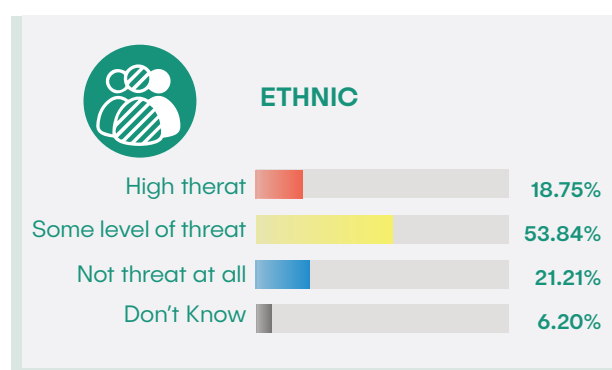
This section provides all the survey results related to the perception of responders towards public safety issues. The public safety issues that this report refers to include perceptions on violent extremism and its forms; perceptions on personal safety; perceptions on various threats such as usury, robberies, accidents, stray animals, violence in schools, murders, sexual harassments, domestic violence, illegal use of weapons, use of drugs, human trafficking, brain drain, poor infrastructure, construction safety, lack of public lighting, air pollution, poor public health, gang violence, bullying, presence of migrants, breach of online privacy, and online violence.

Albanians feel mostly safe at their homes, neighborhoods, cities and country in general. Brain drain (38.79%), air pollution (31.74%) and poor public infrastructure (27.2%) are perceived as the biggest threats to their communities by responders. In contrary, online violence (6.22%), the presence of migrants (6.97%), and human trafficking (7.23%) are considered as the least threats to their communities.

The vast majority of Albanians do not believe that violent extremism is widespread and threatening to the public safety in the country. Less than one in five Albanians consider the violence on ethnic, religious or political background as an evident and high threatening form of violent extremism. The majority of Albanians consider that returnees from Syria and Iraq pose either some level of threat or high threat to national security. Nevertheless, the majority of Albanians also believe that state institutions should work to repatriate all Albanians that are remaining in Syria. Furthermore, most of Albanians also believe that state institutions should undertake rehabilitation/reintegration measures to returnees, rather than punitive measures.

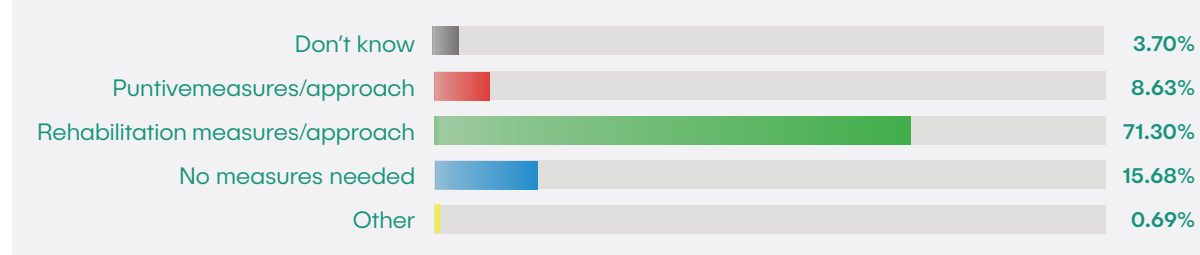
TABLE 1 IS VIOLENCE ON THE FOLLOWING GROUNDS AN EVIDENT AND THREATENING FORM OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM





Little less than half of responders (44.13%) hold a neutral position to the question whether the Albanian returnees that were combatants in Syria/Iraq pose a threat to the national security. A total of 37.92% of responders do not consider them as a threat at all, whereas 15.16% of responders think they pose high threat.

TABLE 2 WHICH APPROACH/MEASURE DO YOU THINK IS MOST APPROPRIATE FOR THE TREATMENT OF NON-COMBATIVE ADULT RETURNEES FROM WAR ZONES (E.G. IRAQ, SYRIA,)



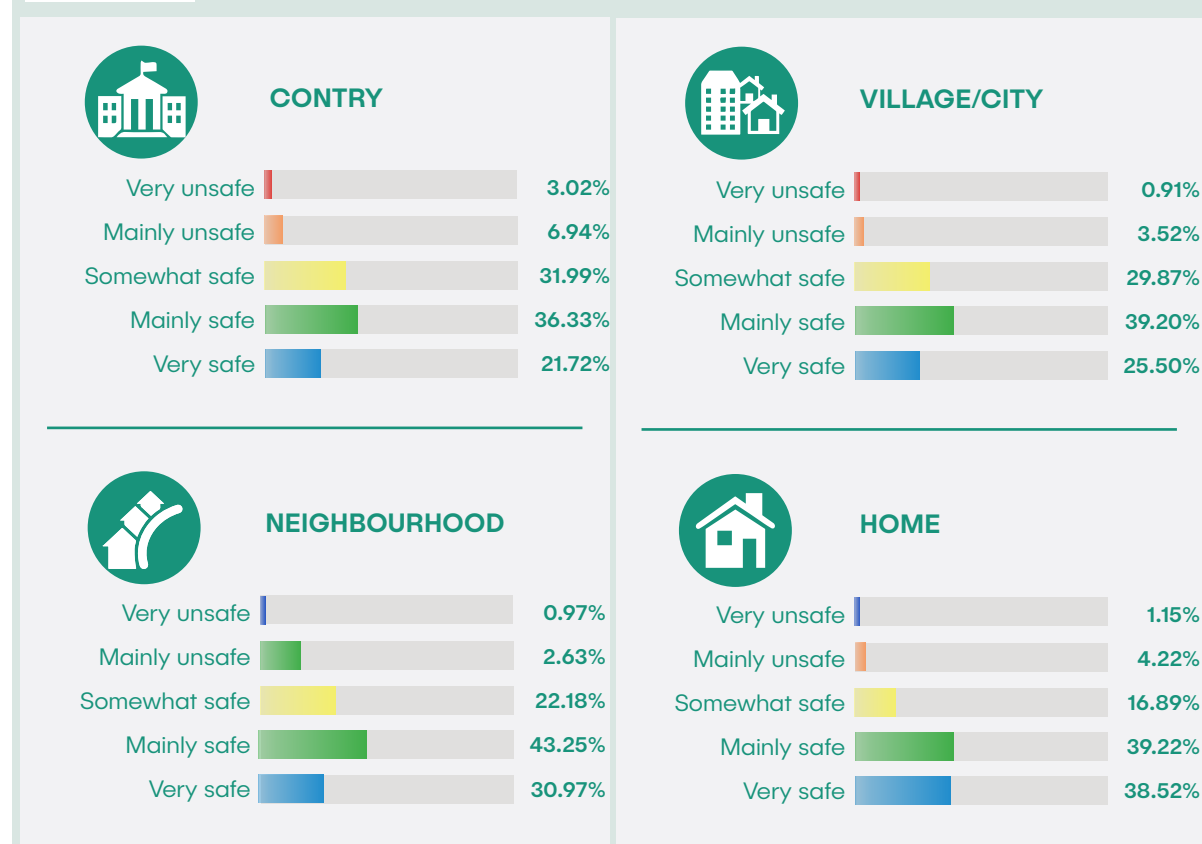
The significant majority of responders (71.30%) believe that the rehabilitation measures are the most appropriate approach for the treatment of non-combative adult returnees from Syria/Iraq.

The majority of responders (67.32%) believe that state institutions should organize the return of Albanian citizens that are stuck in Syria. 22.52% of responders believe that state institutions should only organize the return of women and children, whereas 7.14% believe that state institutions should not return none of them.

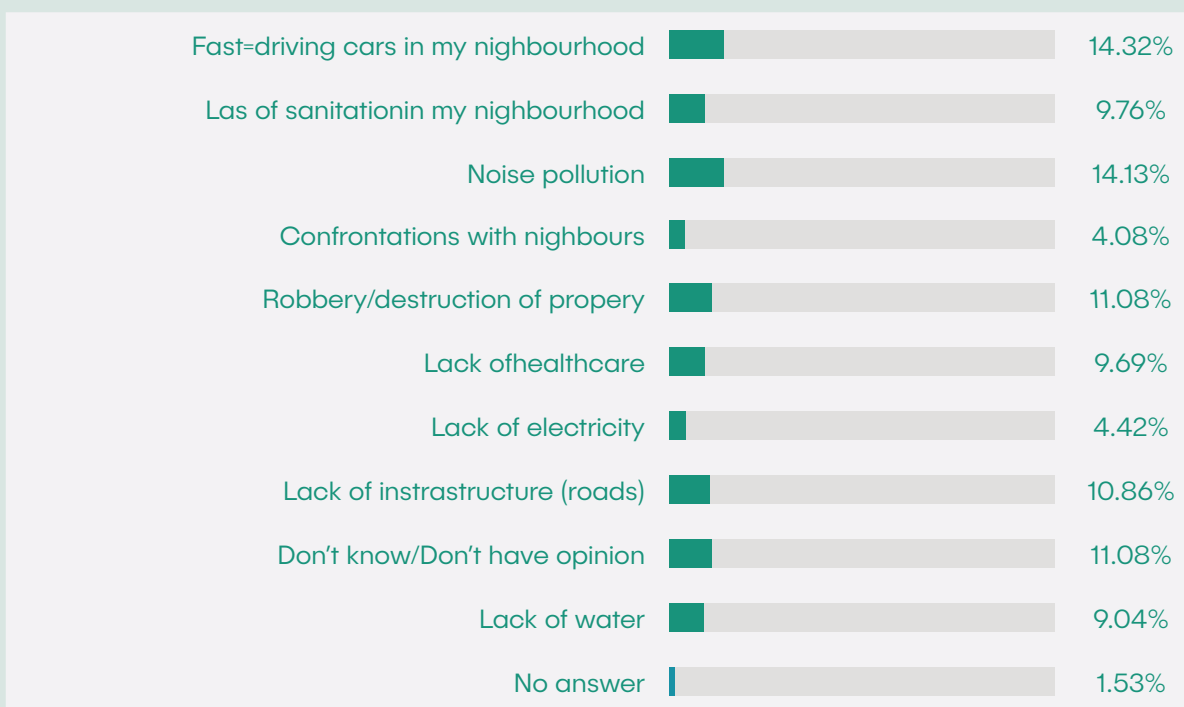
When asked whether they would let their children to associate with children who returned from Syria, responders were divided in their answers, as similar percentages of responders hold opposing views in this regard. A total of 48.83% said they would let their children to associate with children returnees, whereas 45.42% would not do so.

TABLE 3 WHY YOU WOULDN'T LET YOUR CHILD TO ASSOCIATE WITH CHILDREN RETURNEES

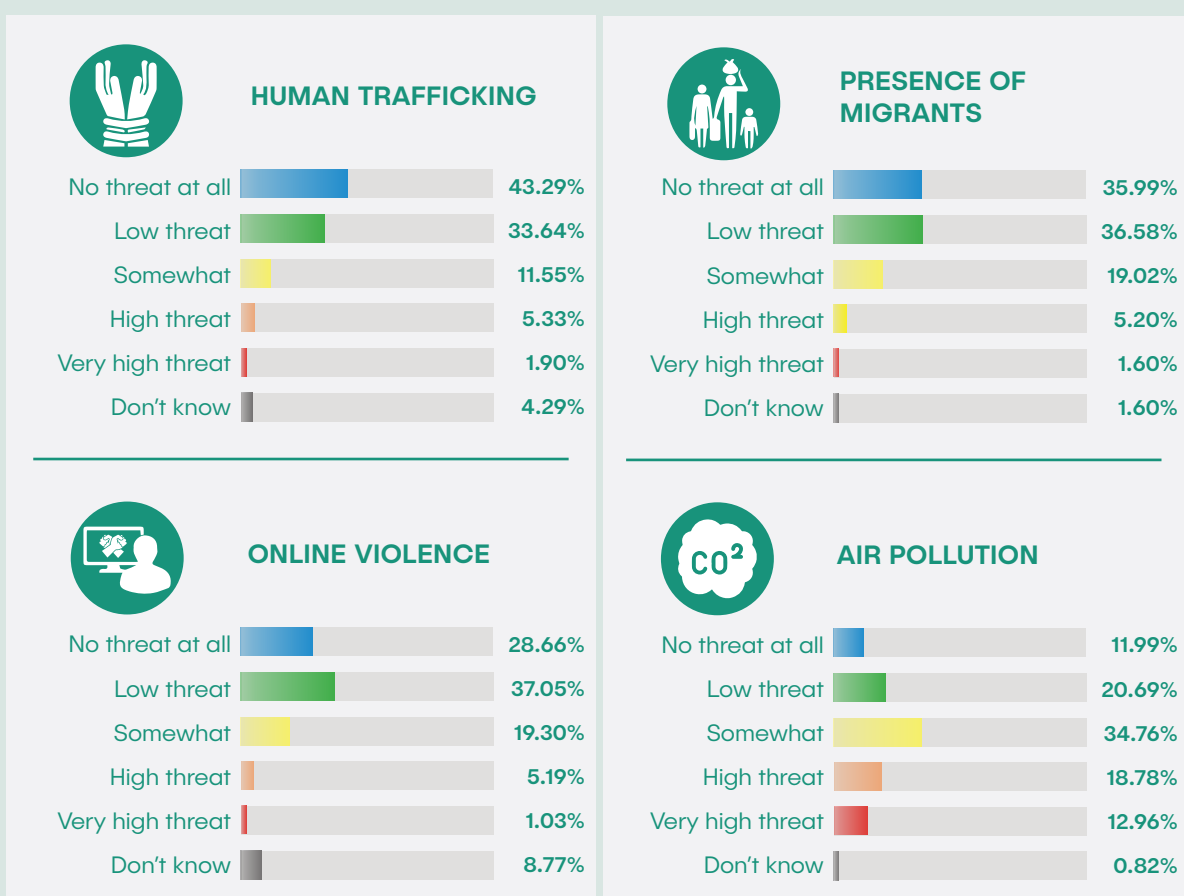
Të anketuarit renditën një sërë arsyes pse ata nuk do i lejonin fëmijët e tyre të shoqëroheshin me fëmijët e kthyer (shih grafikun nr. 3).

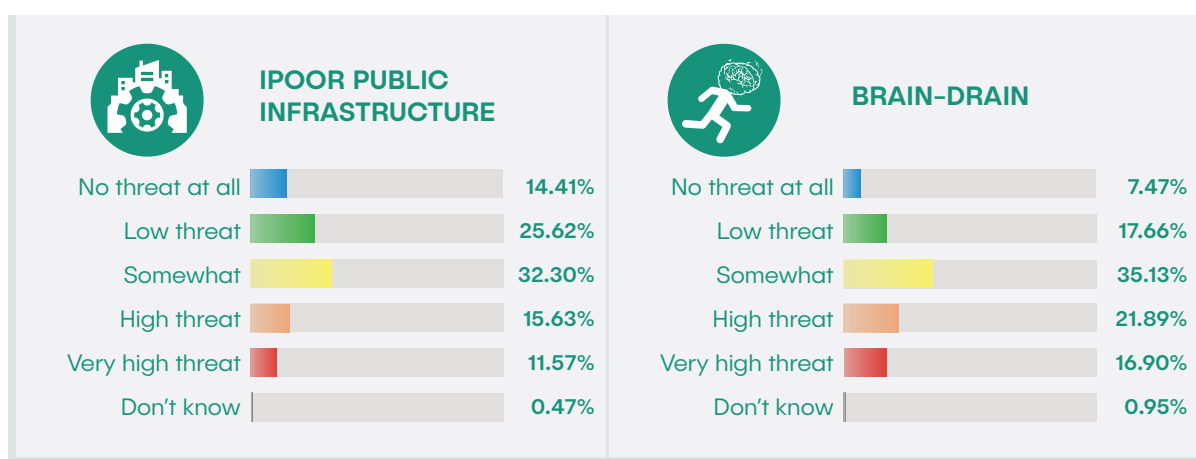
TABLE 4 PLEASE RATE TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU FEEL SAFE AT YOUR

The significant majority of responders feel either mainly safe or very safe at their home, neighborhood, village/city, and in their country (see graph no. 4).

TABLE 5 WHAT IS THE MAIN SAFETY THREAT THAT YOU FACE THE MOST IN YOUR IMMEDIATE COMMUNITY

Responders were asked what they perceived to be their main safety threats to their immediate communities (see graph no. 5).

TABLE 6 TO WHAT EXTENT DO THE FOLLOWING ASPECTS THREATEN YOUR COMMUNITY



Responders were asked to what extent they perceived their communities to be threatened by a list of potential challenges (see graph no. 6).

Brain drain is considered as the highest threat to responders' communities; air pollution as the second highest threat; whereas the poor infrastructure, such as roads, electricity, etc., is considered as the third highest threat to responders' communities. Online violence is considered as the lowest threat to responders' communities; the presence of migrants is considered as the second lowest threat; whereas the human trafficking is considered as the third lowest threat to responders' communities.

The majority of citizens (52.76%) consider usury either as a low threat to their community or no threat at all.

The majority of citizens (65.2%) consider house / apartment robberies as either a low threat to their community or no threat at all.

42.15% of responders consider traffic accidents either as a low threat to their community or no threat at all.

The majority of citizens (62.69%) consider stray animals either as a low threat to their community or no threat at all.

The significant majority of citizens (70.97%) consider violence in schools either as a low threat to their community or no threat at all.

The majority of citizens (73.28%) consider murders either as a low threat to their community or no threat at all.

The significant majority of citizens (71.12%) consider sexual harassments either as a low threat to their community or no threat at all. No differences were noted among male and female responders.

The majority of citizens (62.81%) consider domestic violence either as a low threat to their community or no threat at all. No differences were noted among male and female responders.

The significant majority of citizens (62.88%) consider the illegal use of weapons either as a low threat to their community or no threat at all.

Less than half of responders (46.66%) consider the use of drugs either as a low threat

to their community or no threat at all.

The significant majority of citizens (75.59%) consider the lack of construction safety either as a low threat to their community or no threat at all.

Little more than half of responders (51.86%) consider the lack of public lighting either as a low threat to their community or no threat at all. Responders in rural areas (26.1%) are more likely to consider the lack of public lighting as a threat to their community than those in urban areas (17.3%).

Less than half of responders (44.21%) consider the poor public health either as a low threat to their community or no threat at all.

The majority of responders (67.66%) consider the gang violence either as a low threat to their community or no threat at all.

The majority of responders (63.41%) consider bullying (harassment at work, school, etc.) either as a low threat to their community or no threat at all.

The majority of responders (62.92%) consider the breach of privacy online by state or non-state actors either as a low threat to their community or no threat at all.

Responders were asked whether they feel safe while using the internet. The majority of responders (60.07%) feel safe while using the internet.

Responders were also asked whether security was a relevant issues discussed during the election campaign. The results indicate that responders have conflicting perceptions in this regard. 45.25% of responders think security was a relevant issue discussed during the election campaign, whereas 42.99% of responders think the opposite.

When asked how they expect the overall security situation of Albania in the next year, half of responders (49.97%) expect it to be the same. 38.10% expect it to improve, whereas 10.51% expect it to worsen.

This section provided the survey results pertaining to the public safety issues in Albania. The following chapter provides the survey results for the public perception of internal threats in the country.



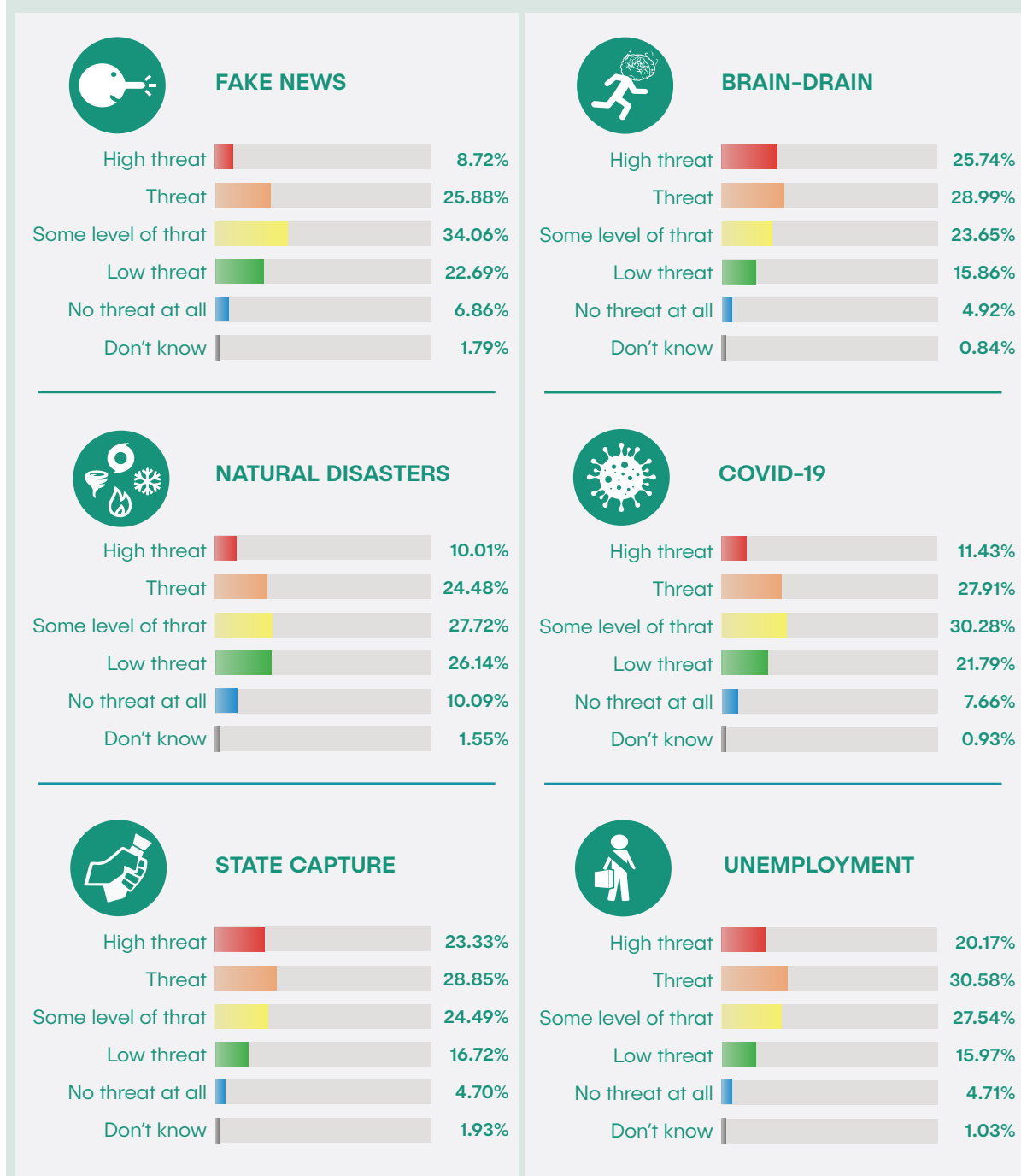
PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF INTERNAL THREATS

This section provides all the survey results related to the public perception of internal threats. The internal threats that this report refers to include corruption, organized crime, illegal firearms trafficking, drug trafficking, unemployment, state capture, COVID-19 pandemic, political clashes, terrorism, natural disasters, brain drain, economic crisis deriving from COVID-19 pandemic, fake news, cybercrime ⁴. This section has also explored responders' views on vaccination, and their perceptions on the management of the vaccination process and the COVID-19 pandemic by the state institutions.

Brain drain (54.73%), state capture (52.18%), and unemployment (50.75%) are considered as the major internal threats to the national security of Albania. In contrary, natural disasters (34.49%), fake-news (34.6%), and COVID-19 pandemic (39.34%) are considered as the least significant threats to the national security of the country (see graph no. 7).

The majority of Albanians are vaccinated against COVID-19 pandemic, for which Pfizer is the most trusted COVID-19 vaccine in Albania. Those who are not yet vaccinated, haven't done so, chiefly due to the lack of trust in any of the COVID-19 vaccines, due to their belief in natural immunity post-infection, and the lack of trust in the available vaccines in Albania. The majority of Albanians believe that state institutions have successfully managed the vaccination process. Albanians believe that the State Police and the Government are the two institutions who have managed most successfully the COVID-19 pandemic. In contrary, the President and the Assembly are the institutions which are perceived as the least successful at managing the COVID-19 pandemic.

⁴Cybercrimes include common cyber security threats like social engineering, software vulnerability and network attacks. However, it also involves criminal acts like social media accounts hacking, harassment and extortion, revenge pornography, money laundering, and more.

TABLE 7 HOW DO YOU RATE THESE INTERNAL THREATS TO NATIONAL SECURITY

40.15% of responders consider corruption either as a threat or high threat to national security.

Less than half of responders (43.44%) consider organized crime either as a threat or high threat to national security.

Less than half of responders (44.86%) consider illegal firearms trafficking either as a threat or high threat to national security.

Half of responders (50.21%) consider drug trafficking either as a threat or high threat to national security.

40.93% of responders consider political clashes either as a threat or high threat to national security.

Responders who have voted for the Socialist Party are less likely (32.83%) to perceive political clashes as a threat to national security than responders who have not voted for the Socialist Party (45.82%).

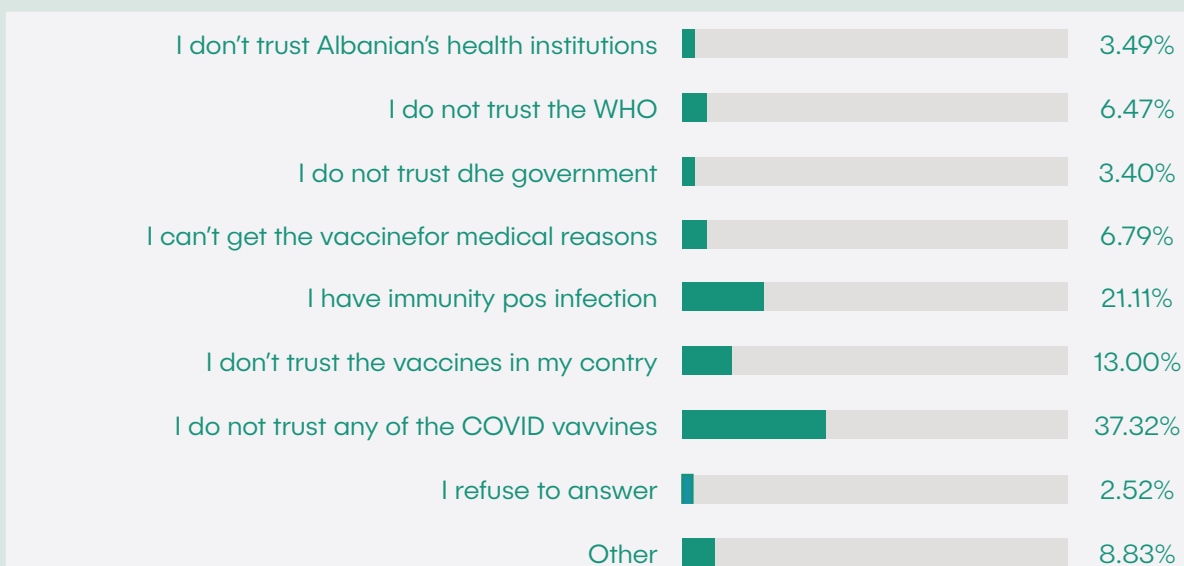
Less than half of responders (45.01%) consider violent extremism / terrorism either as a threat or high threat to national security. Responders from urban areas (48.5%) are more likely to see violent extremism / terrorism as a threat or high threat to national security than responders from rural areas (37%).

Half of responders (49.71%) consider economic crisis deriving by the COVID-19 situation either as a threat or high threat to national security.

39.08% of responders consider the level of cybercrime either as a threat or high threat to national security. Responders from urban areas (43.2%) are more likely to consider the level of cybercrime as threat or high threat than responders from rural areas (29.6%).

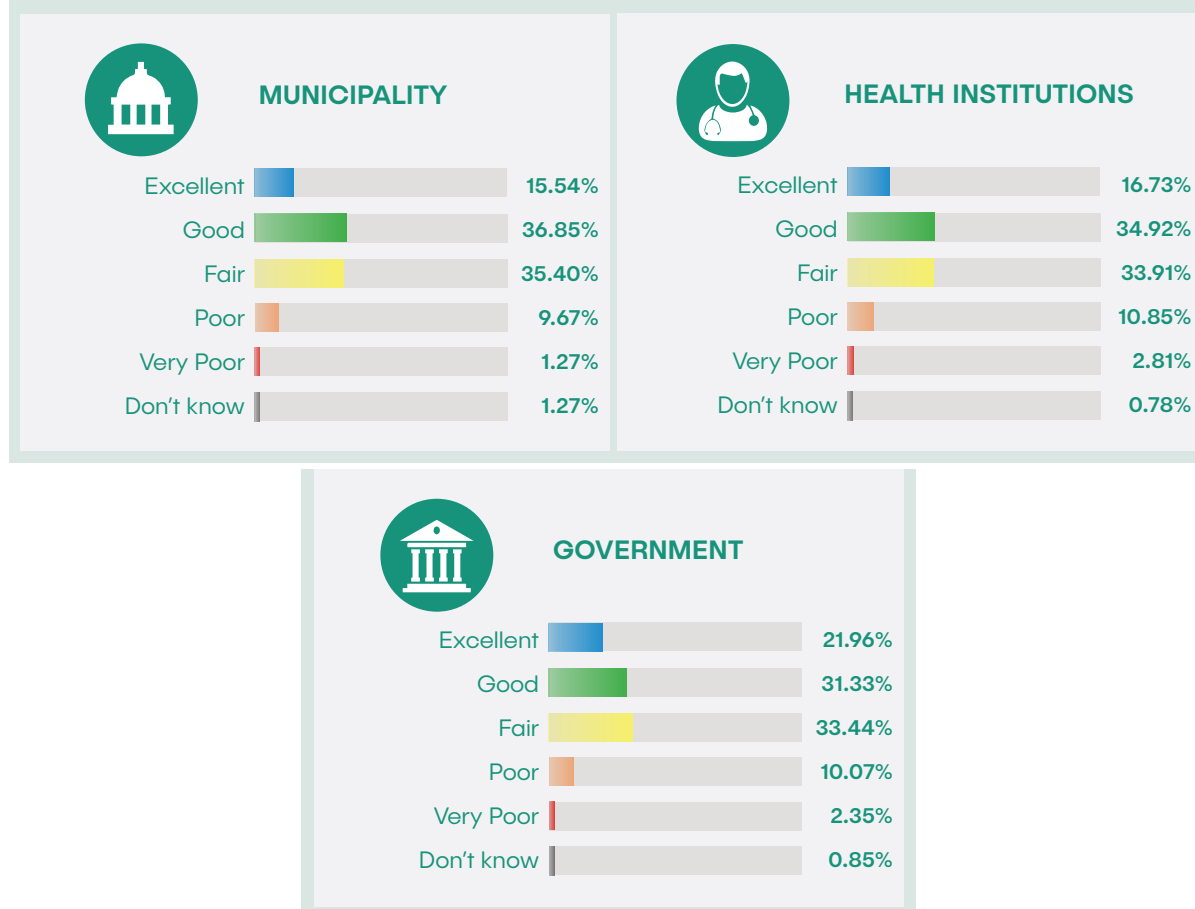
In terms of vaccination, the majority of responders (52.32%) have been vaccinated against COVID-19 pandemic, and another 21.55% are planning to get vaccinated. One in four responders (25.21%) refuse to get vaccinated. Responders who have voted for the Socialist Party (64.43%) are more vaccinated than responders who have not voted for the Socialist Party (45.02%). A larger difference is noted on age-groups, as older people (73.8%) are more vaccinated than young people (35.7%).

TABLE 8 IF YOU DO NOT WANT TO GET VACCINATED, WHAT IS THE MAIN REASON

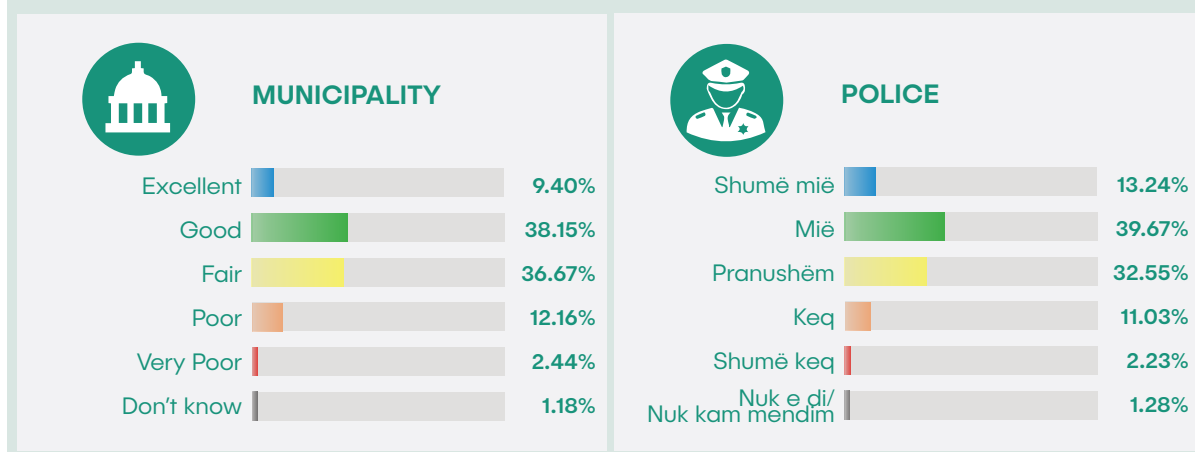


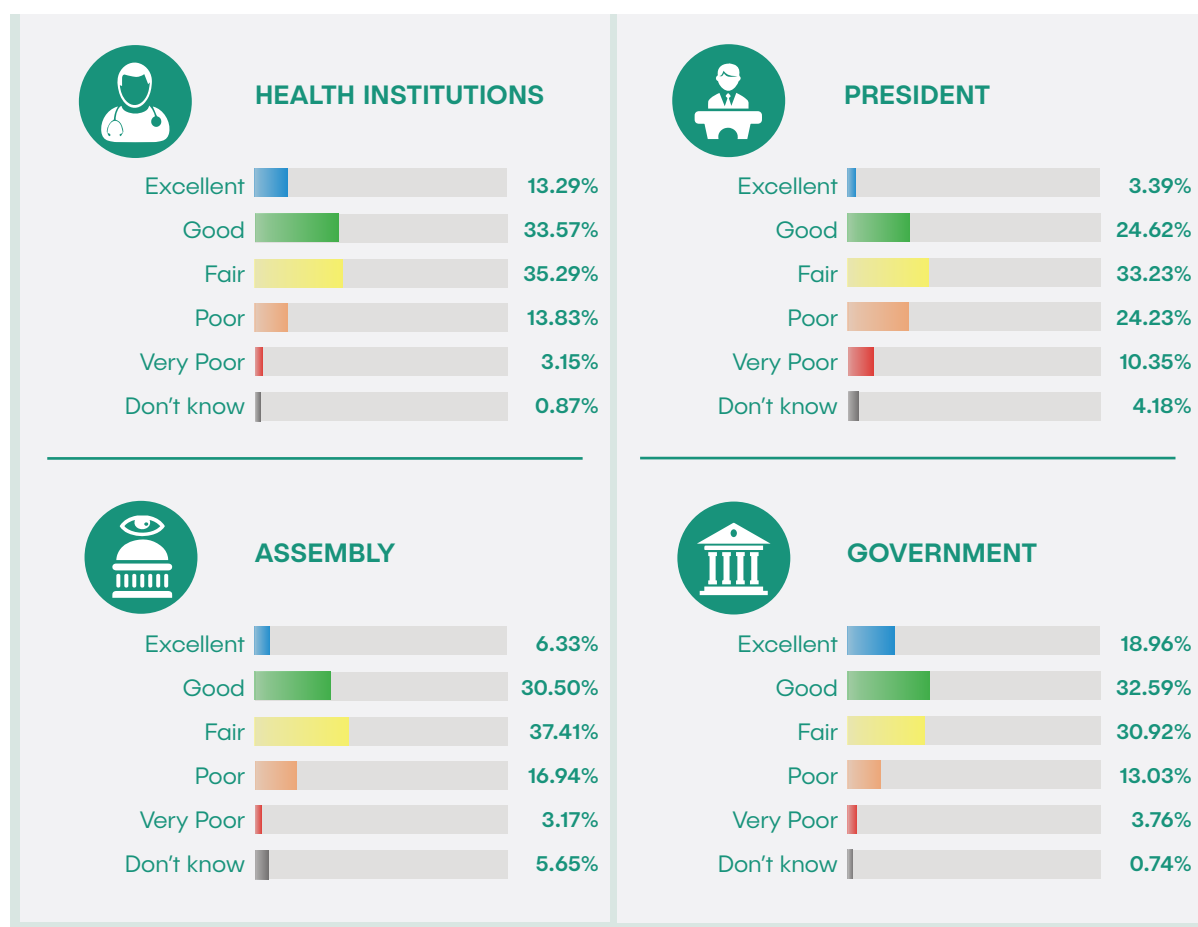
Responders were asked about reasons why they did not want to get vaccinated (see graph no. 8).

Responders were also asked about their vaccine preferences. Pfizer is the most trusted COVID-19 vaccine in Albania. Half of responders (49.55%) have either received or prefer to receive the Pfizer vaccine. Sinovac (25.78%) is the second most trusted vaccine; and the third (15.84%) is AstraZeneca.

TABLE 9 HOW HAVE HAVE THE FOLLOWING INSTITUTIONS MANAGED THE VACCINATION PROCESS

More than half of responders assess the management of the vaccination process by the Government / Ministry of Health and Social Protection; public health institutions and the municipalities / neighbourhood medical centers as good or excellent (see graph no. 9).

TABLE 10 HOW HAVE THE FOLLOWING INSTITUTIONS MANAGED THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC



Responders were also asked how they considered several state institutions to have managed the COVID-19 pandemic (see graph no. 10).

While this section provided the survey results pertaining to the perceived internal threats to Albania, the following section presents the findings on perceived external threats to the country.

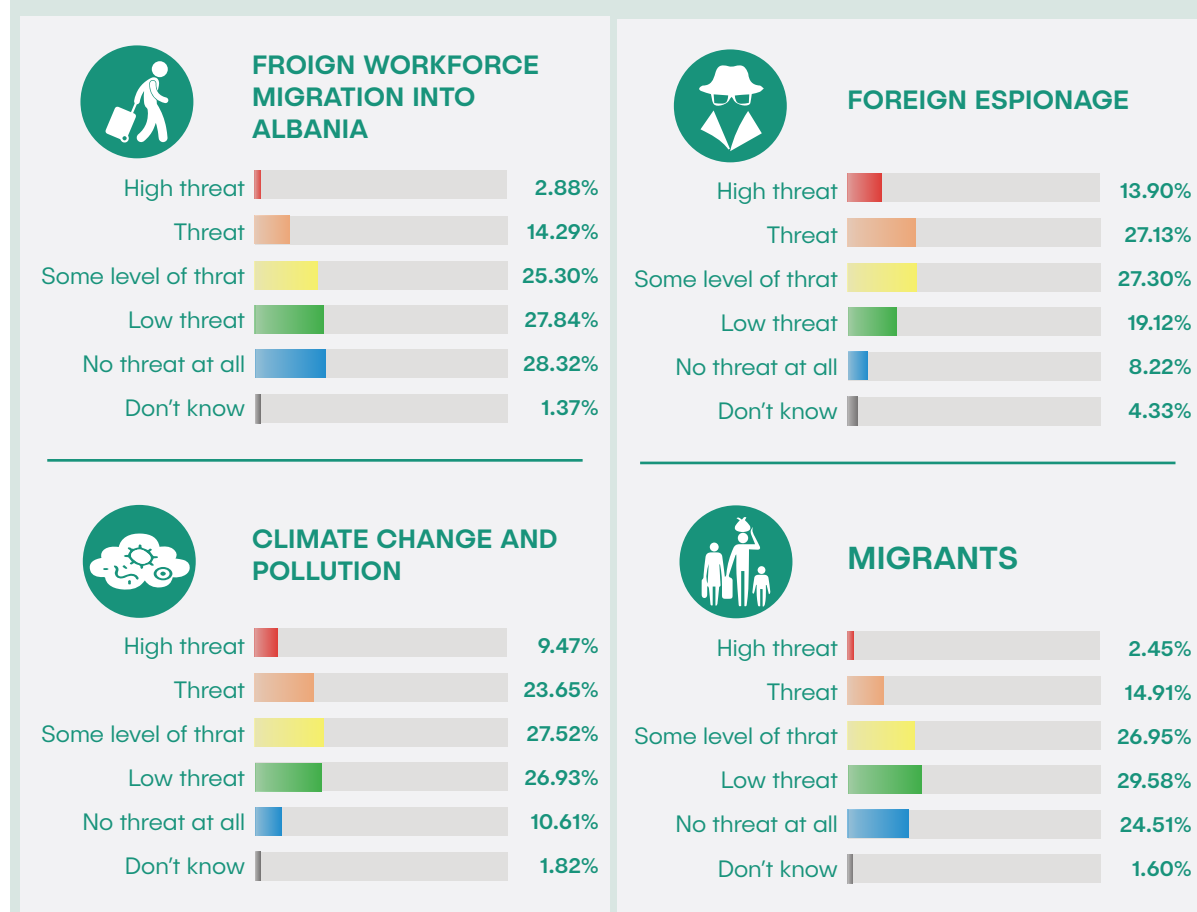


PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF EXTERNAL THREATS

Responders were asked to provide their perceptions with regards to the external threats to Albania. The external threats that this report refers to include the perceived threats of migrants, climate change and air pollution, foreign espionage, and the foreign workforce migration into Albania.

Foreign espionage (41.03%) and climate change (33.12%) are considered the major external national security threats to Albania. In contrary, foreign workforce in Albania (17.17%) and migrants (17.36%) are considered as the least significant external threats to the national security of the country (see graph no. 11).

TABLE 11 HOW DO YOU RATE THE FOLLOWING EXTERNAL THREATS TO NATIONAL SECURITY



This section presented the citizens perceptions about external threats in the country. This was the third and last section of this report. The following conclusion reflects upon the survey results.



CONCLUSION

This report was prepared with the aim of examining the attitudes of Albanian citizens towards public safety issues, internal and external threats.

The data indicate that Albanians feel mostly safe in their country. There are only few issues that are perceived as threats to public safety, such as brain drain, poor public infrastructure, and air pollution. As regards to the internal threats to national security, the majority of Albanians believe that all the issues included in the survey pose at least some level of threat to national security, especially brain drain, state capture, and unemployment. The concern from the large migration from Albania is also noted in the report by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), which ranks Albania as the fourth country in the world for the highest emigration of highly skilled people to work. The OECD report covers the years 2000 – 2016, nevertheless, similar trends can be currently noticed.

It is an interesting finding that although Albania suffered from both a devastating earthquake in 2020 and COVID-19 pandemic, Albanians perceive natural disasters and COVID-19 pandemic, along with fake-news, as the least significant national security threats to the country. One way to look at this is that the government and other relevant actors have successfully managed the earthquake and pandemic issues.

As many other countries, Albania witnessed the manifestation of violent extremism in the early 2010s, when dozens of “foreign terrorist fighters” and their families travelled to join the conflict in Syria and Iraq. Furthermore, there have also been sporadic cases of political or ethnic violent extremism in the country. Regardless of this, the vast majority of Albanians do not believe that violent extremism, in any forms, is widespread and threatening to the public safety in the country. Less than one in five Albanians consider the violence on ethnic, religious or political background as an evident and threatening form of violent extremism. This public perception is in line with other findings from the most recent research studies in the country, which suggest that the phenomenon of religious violent extremism in the country has been significantly decreased as a result of all the state and non-state efforts to address the phenomenon.

Similar to the situation around the world, Albania has been dealing with the threat of COVID-19 pandemic since the early months of 2020. Albania has taken several efforts to address the pandemic, among which is securing the COVID-19 vaccines, which provide a certain amount of protection against this pandemic. However, the conspiracy theories around the potential side-effects and “hidden plans” were quickly spread worldwide against the vaccines, and Albania was not immune to such discourse. Regardless of the conspiracy theories, this survey indicates that the majority of Albanians have either received or plan to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. Again, this may be as a result of a good communication strategy of the governance. This view is also enforced by another finding that indicates that the majority of Albanians believe

that state institutions have successfully managed the vaccination process, and believe that all state institutions have at least fairly managed the COVID-19 pandemic.

Regardless of several humanitarian crisis emerging from Middle East or Asia, and large flows of asylum-seekers and migrants from these regions towards Europe, where Albania is often a transitory route or a temporary destination (such as Afghan refugees), Albanians do not consider migrants as security threats to their country. Besides the migrants, even the foreign workforce is considered as the least significant external threats to the national security of the country.

Foreign espionage and climate change/air pollution are considered as the two major external threats to the national security of Albania. The perceived threat of foreign espionage may result from a few stories that were published in the media of Russian and Iranian intelligence agents operating in Albania. As regards to climate change and air pollution, this is mainly perceived as a threat in urban areas, such as Tirana, where the population density and the boom in construction have further worsened the air pollution.

Security is a fundamental function of the state and one of the defining aspects of any democratic and law-based society. At the individual and community levels, a variety of security concerns shape people's perceptions and influence their everyday decision making. Similarly, international events and issues that affect security influence national policies and decision-making. In a democratic system that builds on free elections and delegation of decision-making powers from citizens to public officials, soliciting and reflecting on the attitudes and opinions of citizens is a necessity, both for the design of security policies and for the assessment of their implementation and effectiveness.

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