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KCSS
Kosovar Centre for Security Studies

National Endowment *for* Democracy
Supporting freedom around the world

KOSOVO SECURITY BAROMETER

SPECIAL EDITION: CITIZENS PERCEPTION AND COMMUNITY RESPONSE ON RETURNED FOREIGN FIGHTERS

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Perceptions presented in this report are a summary of information gathered from respondents and it only demonstrates how people percept institutions. It is in no way a conclusive assessment of the quality of the work of institutions subject to this study. It shall serve as an instrument to them for addressing potential shortcomings but also an indicator of the effectiveness of their communication with the people. The views presented in this report are perceptions of the respondents and do not necessarily represent the views of the Kosovar Centre for Security Studies.

Opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily represent the views of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED)

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KEY ABBREVIATIONS

BIK	Islamic Community in Kosovo
CVE	Countering Violent Extremism
FF	Foreign Fighters
GoK	Government of Kosovo
KCSS	Kosovar Center for Security Studies
KSB	Kosovo Security Barometer
VE	Violent Extremism

WHAT IS KOSOVO SECURITY BAROMETER?

The Kosovo Security Barometer (KSB) is a specific program developed in September 2012 by the Kosovar Centre for Security Studies (KCSS) .

Its primary focus is to measure public's trust toward security and justice institutions in Kosovo as well as to measures citizens' perception of the internal and external security threats to Kosovo.

The KSB is the first and the largest undertaking of this kind that is designed, implemented, and communicated by a local think-tank in Kosovo.

The KSB's uniqueness in Kosovo is its political neutrality. As an independent think-tank, KCSS has no political constraints in communicating any of the findings and messages of the survey.

The KSB is conducted through a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods that provide objective and credible results. Its data are collected through face-to-face interviews with randomly selected respondents conducted by KCSS field researchers in the entire territory of Kosovo.

The KSB questionnaire mostly consisted of closed-ended questions in the form of five-point Likert Scale, followed by several open-ended questions that allow respondents to provide their thoughts without predefined options. KCSS teams of 22 field researchers conducted the sampling, piloting, and the interviews. The national sample from which the research was drawn featured 1,125 households, following a representative sample of the population above 18 years old in Kosovo.

The ethnic breakdown of the interviewed respondents was: 90 percent K-Albanian, 7 percent K-Serbian, and 3 percent others (Turks, Bosnians, Roma, Ashkali, Egyptians, Gorans, Croats, and Montenegrins) mirroring Kosovo's ethnic make-up.

The sample frame was based upon telephone code areas, and, as such included the following 8 regions: Ferizaj, Gjakova, Gjilan, Mitrovica South, Mitrovica North, Peja, Prishtina and Prizren.

The first stage of geographical clustering was based on the 2012 Kosovo Census Report. The second stage involved clustering samples by municipal area with a stratified rural/urban sample as per the number of households. The last stage followed a random sampling method using the nearest 'birthday method.'

Random sampling ensures that each resident in Kosovo has an equal probability to be chosen for an interview. With the sample used for this study, the results of the survey reflect trends in attitudes and perceptions amongst the entire adult population of Kosovo in general. The margin of error is 3 percent with a confidence interval of 95 percent.

A pilot interview was conducted in mid-September 2017 to test the feasibility of the questionnaire prior to the commencement of fieldwork. The research team subsequently reported that the pilot interview was successful, and no problems were encountered with the pilot instrument. All interviews were completed from 5th until 11th of October 2017. Data processing and analysis has been completed using the SPSS software.

Perceptions presented in this report are a summary of information gathered from respondents and it demonstrates how people perceive Kosovo's institutions and other challenges in Kosovo.

KEY FINDINGS:

- This report finds that 75 percent of the respondents believe that violent extremism is a threat to Kosovo's national security.
- The trust in the main institutions (Government, Assembly, Courts, Persecution, and Kosovo Police) that are involved in the implementation of the National Strategy against Violent Extremism is very low compared to Kosovo Police, which is highlighted as one the most trusted institutions. The trust for BIK continues to decrease in comparison with the last two years.
- About half of the respondents see political extremism as a threat compared to 30 percent who saw ethnic violence as a potential escalation threat. Twenty-five percent of respondents consider that religiously-based violent extremism is a threat.
- Only 34 percent of respondents are committed to a national cause, while 15 percent of respondents are committed to a religious cause. However, this slightly varies across age groups. Data shows that younger respondents harbor more religious sentiments than the older generation. This finding is consistent with the previous KCSS report of 2015. Fifty-two percent of younger respondents (from 18-35 years old) would rather commit themselves to a religious cause than to a national cause compared to 72 percent of older respondents (above 35 years old) who would commit themselves to a national cause.
- KSB report finds that respondents in rural areas consider returned former fighters as a higher risk group compared to the respondents in urban areas.
- The results of the KSB 2017 show that women see returnees FF as a higher risk group in comparison to men. This finding is confirmed by the perceptions on the treatment of returned foreign fighters and their acceptance in community with 69 percent of women respondents claiming that they would not accept returned FF in their community compared to 53 percent of men respondents who stated the same.
- Data shows that 62 percent, or the majority of the respondents indicated that they would not accept returned former fighters in their neighborhood or their community while only 25 percent of respondents stated that they would accept returnees by pending state oversight.
- The majority of respondents or 49 percent consider that the returned foreign fighters should be reintegrated through programs (with law enforcement oversight). Twenty-seven percent of respondents believe that returned former fighters should

be arrested, while only 15 percent of respondents think that returnees should not be allowed to return to Kosovo.

- The data showed that districts such as Prishtina, Mitrovica, Peja, Gjakova, Ferizaj and North Mitrovica resulted in being more are more reluctant to accept the returned former fighters in their communities. Respondents from Gjilan and Prizren are somewhat more open to accept these individuals into their community.

INTRODUCTION

Over the last three years violent extremism has dominated the public discourse, with a special focus on threats and treatment of the returned former fighters (FF) from the formerly IS-controlled areas. The re-integration of the returned FF and their families poses the main challenge for the state institutions in Kosovo and in almost all the countries that have been challenged by this phenomenon. According to law enforcement records, to date about 120 Kosovo citizens who participated in the war in Syria and Iraq or lived in the affected areas, including 7 women, returned to Kosovo. The majority of those that returned to Kosovo have gone through the justice system, some of them are detained, and others are still on ongoing trial procedures. Yet, with many about to complete their prison sentences, others living in isolation and surveillance, and some expected to return in the months ahead, Kosovo's society and its institutions are struggling to strike a balance between the responsibility to address this challenge and punitive measures that would rid Kosovo of radicalization and violent extremism.

The National Strategy on Prevention Violent extremism and radicalization leading to terrorism 2015-2020, outlines that the main focus shall remain at identified persons or groups potentially vulnerable to violent extremists ideologies, with the purpose of reintegrating them into the society. According to the Strategy, reintegration of potentially radicalized persons or at the stage of radicalization should be an inclusive and specific process. Further, the Malta Principles for Reintegrating Returning Foreign Terrorist Fighters highlights that effective assessments should be done, in order to design programs with individuals in mind whether they serve FTFs returnees, their families or vulnerable individuals.[1] Given the importance of reintegration and the crucial role of the community in the process of rehabilitating the foreign fighters, the main aim of this report is to shed light on how the reintegration process is

1 National Strategy on Prevention Violent Extremism and radicalization leading to http://www.kryeministri-ks.net/repository/docs/STRATEGY_parandalim_-_ENG.pdf

perceived by the general population of Kosovo, what are the main thoughts and beliefs of Kosovo citizens regarding violent extremism and how should the former foreign fighters be treated by the society at large.

The Kosovo Security Barometer (KSB) on community response towards returnees is largely based on views collected through close-ended questions that measured citizens' opinion on the matter. In addition, through the open-ended question, the respondents were asked to describe briefly the main risks and threats that Kosovo citizens face. The threats most frequently highlighted by respondents through open questions were those related to existing critical socio-economic situation, political polarization, tensions between Kosovo and Serbia, ordinary crime, violent extremism and environmental hazards.[2] This report finds that the majority of respondents consider returned FF a risk to the national security, and this is confirmed also in their attitudes and willingness to accept in their communities the returned foreign fighters. The majority of respondents stated that they would not accept them back into the community. In the other hand, citizens' perceptions positively regard the provision of treatment for returned FF with the majority of respondents in support of state-sponsored programs for returnees. This finding is consistent throughout Kosovo, with the exception of Gjakova where a higher portion of respondents claim that returnees should be imprisoned.

Th report is divided in three parts. The first part of the report consists of a general description of public perception on violent extremism based on the 2017 data-gathering efforts. This is categorized on ethnically-motivated threats, religiously-based violent extremism and politically-motivated violent extremism. In addition, the report analyzes respondents' attitude toward national and religious causes.

The second and the main part of the report represents the respondents' perceptions of the returned former fighters. It assesses threat and risks, community willingness to accept them back where they live and general perceptions regarding the treatment of the returned former fighters.

The findings of this report are categorized based on the following characteristics of the respondents: residential area (rural/urban), community where they live, gender and age. Lastly, the third part of the report analyzes trust toward the government, assembly, courts, Prosecutor's office and Kosovo Police, all key stakeholders in the implementation of Kosovo's Strategy on Countering Violent Extremism. The report also summarizes the trust as it trends over the years of the Islamic Community of Kosovo, known as BIK.

2 Vrajolli. M "Kosovo security Barometer- Seventh Edition" 2017 http://www.qkss.org/repository/docs/KOSOVO_SECURITY_BAROMETER_7__ENGLISH_FINAL_891249.pdf

1. CITIZENS PERCEPTIONS ON THREATS POSED BY ETHNIC, POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUSLY MOTIVATED VIOLENT EXTREMISM

Since this report aims to detail citizens' perceptions about violent extremism, it is necessary to define what the general public perceives as violent extremism in Kosovo. According to the general public perceptions, violent extremism is not limited only to former fighters phenomena but includes political and ethnical motivated incidents as well.

In a series of close-ended questions, respondents were asked to answer what they thought are the main threats posed to Kosovo's national security. As shown in the graph below, the majority of respondents, or 74 percent of those surveyed, violent extremism as a real threat. This report suggests that violent extremism in Kosovo has manifested itself in other forms as well, such as ethnically- and politically-motivated violent extremism not only religious motivated.

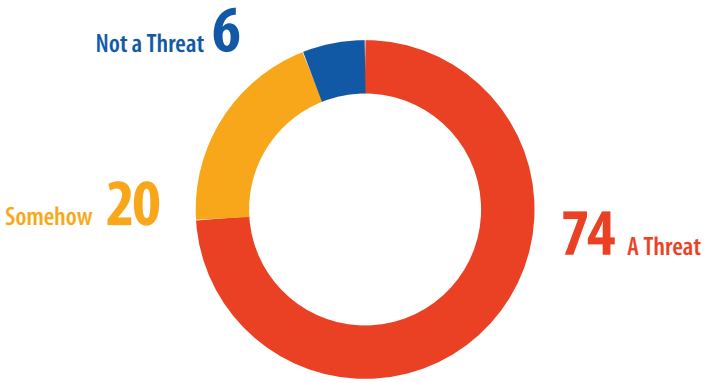

Figure 1: General Perception on Violent Extremism 2017

Around 50 percent of respondents assessed that political extremism is a threat, while 30 percent of respondents stated that violence on national/ethnic grounds poses a threat. Generally,

respondents see religious violence as a lesser risk compared to the latter two. For instance, about 25 percent of the respondents viewed religious-based violence as a risk, while 28 percent considered this phenomenon as a medium type risk. The remaining 44 percent did not consider religious-based violence as dangerous. This finding concurs with the number of threat incidents that have occurred in Kosovo. According to the KCSS Risk Assessment Report, of the 73 recorded threat incidents in KCSS' database, the majority or close to 62 percent have been political, while some 36 percent have been religious in nature.[3] The assessment also indicates that the rate of incidents that occurred among all the registered threats (threats that went beyond verbal warnings or the ones that were not foiled by authorities) were much higher among politically-motivated threats than the religious ones.[4] Of these 4 religiously-motivated incidents that resulted in death, none of them were domestic in scope as they did not take place in Kosovo. Statistically speaking, the number of casualties, both in terms of deaths or injuries, remains insignificant. When examining the average number of casualties against the total number of threats, it becomes evident that there was 1 death and 1 injury in a scope of seven years.[5]

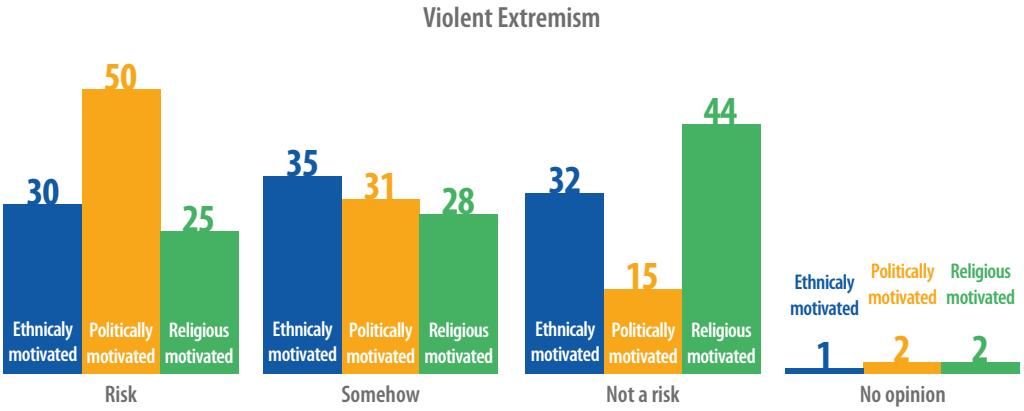

Figure 2: Citizen Perceptions on different forms of violent extremism such as: ethnic, political and religious based

3 Kursani.Sh "Kosovo Risk assessment report since independence - February 2008 - June 2017" Kosovar Center for Security Studies, 2017 http://www.qkss.org/repository/docs/KS-RiskAssessment-eng_201377.pdf

4 Kursani.Sh "Kosovo Risk assessment report since independence - February 2008 - June 2017" Kosovar Center for Security Studies, 2017 http://www.qkss.org/repository/docs/KS-RiskAssessment-eng_201377.pdf

5 Kursani.Sh "Kosovo Risk assessment report since independence - February 2008 - June 2017" Kosovar Center for Security Studies, 2017 http://www.qkss.org/repository/docs/KS-RiskAssessment-eng_201377.pdf

In the KSB 2017 respondents were asked about their sentiments toward the nation and the religion. For instance, 49 percent of respondents have committed themselves equally to national and religious causes, as a proxy to measure their loyalty to their national and religious identity. Only 34 percent of respondents committed themselves to a national cause while 15 percent of respondents were committed to a religious cause. However, this slightly varies when we categorize the respondents' answers by age. Younger respondents have more religious sentiments than the older ones, a finding that consistently holds since 2015. The report finds that 52 percent of younger respondents (from 18-35 years old) would rather commit themselves to a religious cause than to a national cause, compared to 72 percent of older respondents (above 35 years old) who would commit themselves to a national cause. There could be many explanatory factors why younger respondents may feel closer to religiously affiliated causes, including the lack of an obvious national cause that could act as a mobilizing factor. The older respondents, on the other hand, have lived through a period of Kosovo's history that mobilized them in their commitment for freedom and nation-building. The younger population of Kosovo is void of that experience and emotions.

Another factor that may cause younger population to lean on religion might be their social exclusion a lack of a bond with the state and lack of access to opportunities. This can be seen when analyzing the staggering employment statistics from the Kosovo Statistic Agency that show that 66% of young people are unemployed. [6]

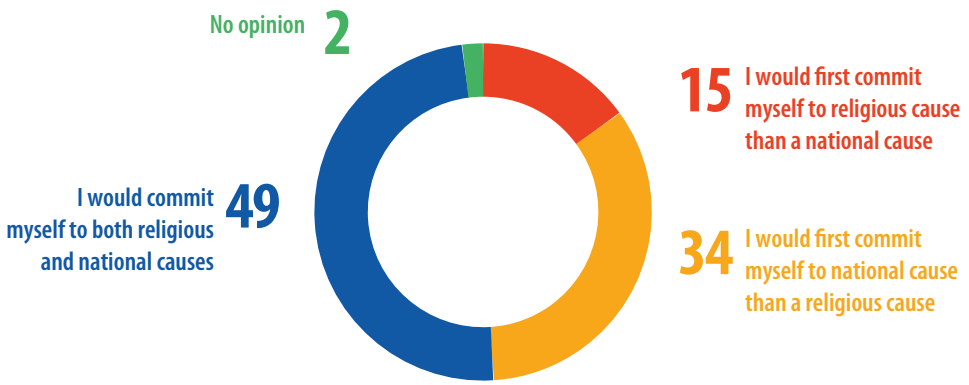

Figure 3: Citizens Perceptions on their sentiments towards nation and religion

6 Kosovo Agency Statistics 2016: http://ask.rks-gov.net/media/2488/afp-tm2-2016.pdf, pg.25

2. GENERAL PERCEPTIONS ON RISKS POSED BY THE RETURNED FOREIGN FIGHTERS IN KOSOVO

The KSB measured also the risks posed by the returned foreign fighters in Kosovo, referring mainly to those who came back from the conflict in Syria and Iraq. According to the data collected, the general perceptions of citizens are that these individuals are a risk for the security in Kosovo. Specifically, 70 percent of the respondents stated that these individuals represent a risk for national security, 12 percent added that there is less risk from these individuals, while only 13 percent of the respondents ruled out any risk posed by the returnees.

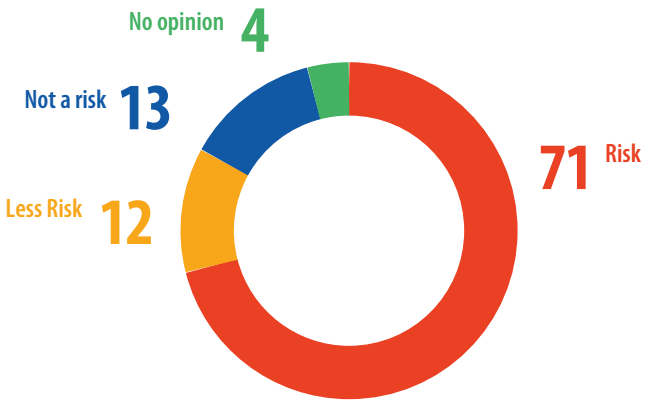

Figure 4: General perceptions regarding the returned foreign fighters as a risk for security

Furthermore, the perception of security risks posed by returned foreign fighters is remarkably constant across regions, gender divide and rural/urban areas. Based on the perspectives of Kosovo municipalities, 66 percent of higher viewed these individuals as a direct threat to their security, with the exception of respondents from Gjilan, where only 54 percent believed that the foreign fighters were a danger. For instance, around 84 percent of respondents from

Gjakova stated that these individuals pose a risk and around 75 percent of respondents from Prishtina believe that returnees are a threat to national security. Gender-based public perceptions show some variance with the absolute majority of women concerned over the risk to security posed by the returned foreign fighters in comparison to 61 percent of men who share those assessments. Twenty percent of the men respondents stated that returned FFs do not pose any risk for Kosovo compared to only 7 percent of women respondents who held the same views. Women consider that returned foreign fighters intend to recruit other young people and some believe that the foreign fighters were part of the conflict and as such they need to be treated before reentering the society. Women perceptions toward violent extremism are shaped mostly by the media because compared to men they do not have access to communal meetings.

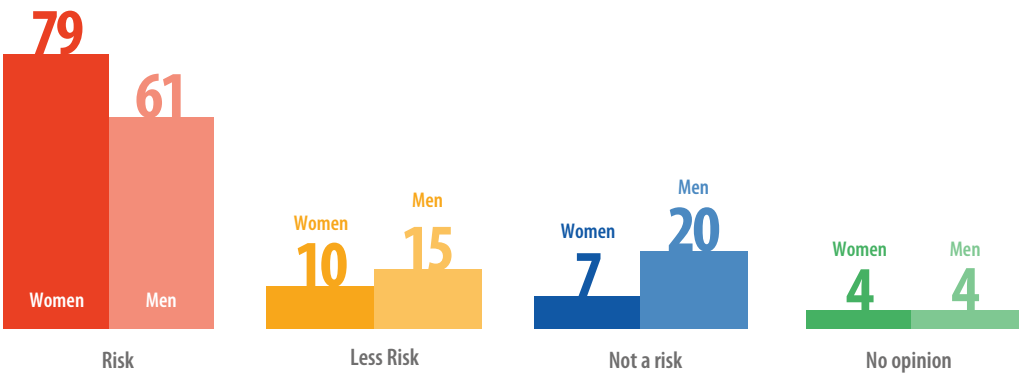

Figure 5: Gender Perception towards returned FFs as a security risk

Another interesting insight offered by this edition of KSB on the risks posed by returned foreign fighters, is based on the rural and urban attitudes. The results in this case show that up to 73 percent of respondents from rural areas considers the returned FFs as a real danger to security compare to 68 percent of respondents that reside in urban area. Fourteen percent of respondents from urban areas stated that the returned FFs do not pose any security risk to Kosovo compare to 12 percent of respondents that reside in rural areas.

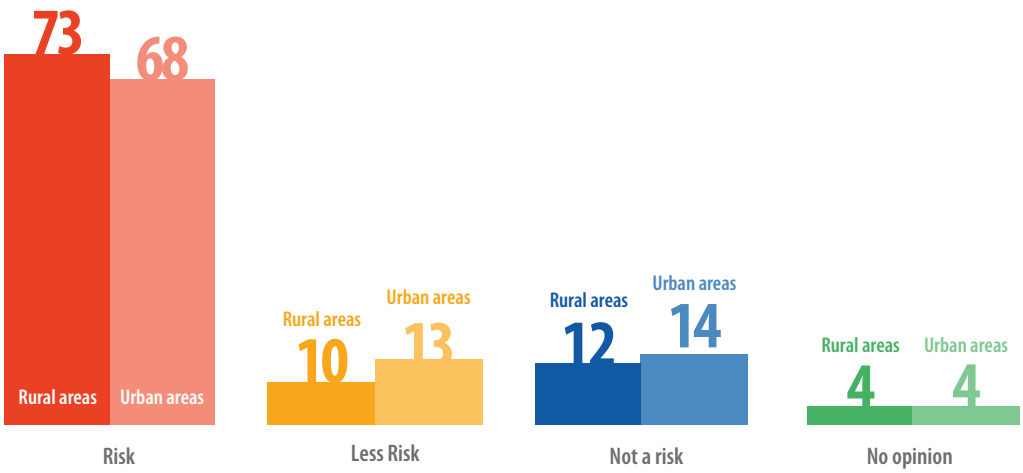

Figure 6: Citizen Perception towards rural/urban areas regarding the returnees FFs as a risk for security

3. COMMUNITY RESPONSES TO RETURNED FORMER FIGHTERS

In addition to measuring the threat posed by foreign fighters, the KCSS has measured the community's perceptions on how state authorities should treat Kosovo's returned FF. The rationale to measure this indicator stems from our view of the integral role that communities play in the prevention of violent extremism but also in reintegration processes.

The results of the KSB 2017 show that there is a lack of readiness from Kosovo citizens to accept these returned individuals and to reintegrate them in their local community. Respectively, 62 percent of the respondents said that they would not accept them in their neighborhood or community. Yet, some 25 percent of respondents stated that they would accept them in their community under the condition that they are placed on law enforcement oversight. Eleven percent of the respondents said that they do not have a problem at all with their presence in their communities.

There are various reasons that could explain the citizens' negative attitude toward these individuals. Some of them are related to the affiliation of these individuals with atrocities committed by IS in the Syria and Iraq and the negative reporting that Kosovo has received from the international media as a fertile recruiting ground for IS, raising fears that such threats would taint Kosovo's image abroad and further complicate its complex international standing. Likewise, many who joined foreign conflicts have already regretted the decision to do so.

The data collected shows that one of the crucial challenges of the reintegration process of foreign fighters is to raise awareness about the importance and the responsibility of Kosovo's society and institutions to assist in the rehabilitation of the foreign fighters. Most communities in Kosovo have expressed their readiness for the new programs of integration of foreign fighters and to support state institutions in the rehabilitation programs but a large part of the communities in the border with Macedonia have been stigmatized, as a result of the large media coverage of these municipalities.[7] One of the main article was in May 2016 from the New York Times magazine that was presenting the way how Kosovo is turning "Into fertile

7 Gazeta Tribuna "Ilazi-Kacaniku nuk eshte vater e xhihadisteve", 19 February 2016 http://gazetatribuna.com/lajme/ilazi-kacaniku-nuk-eshte-vater-e-xhihadisteve/

ground for ISIS".[8] The large international media attention to the phenomena of violent extremism has been superficial in providing a full picture of the situation on the ground, and it has managed to polarize the society.[9]

This is especially crucial given that currently the authorities have not given any attention to returnees or to the reintegration and rehabilitation programs. The lack of a proactive approach by the state toward the reintegration of the foreign fighters may also be seen as a contributing factor to the negative perceptions of citizens towards returnees.

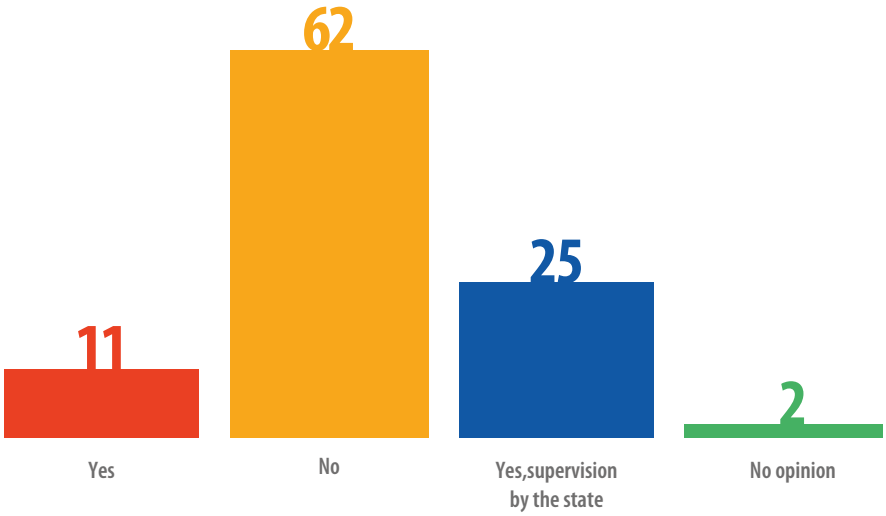

Figure 7: General Perceptions: Community response to accept returnees' former fighters

Here, too, we analyzed perceptions of the respondents based on the regions where they came from. The data showed that municipalities such as Prishtina, Mitrovica, Peja, Gjakova, Ferizaj and North Mitrovica are more reluctant to reintegrate the returned former fighters into their communities, while respondents from Gjilan and Prizren are somewhat more open to accept these individuals in their community.

8 New York Times "How Kosovo Was Turned Into Fertile Ground for ISIS" 21 May 2016 https://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/22/world/europe/how-the-saudis-turned-kosovo-into-fertile-ground-for-isis.html

9 Augestad Knudsen.R " Radicalization and foreign fighters in the Kosovo context: An analysis of international media coverage of the phenomena" Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI) 2017, pg. 9-11

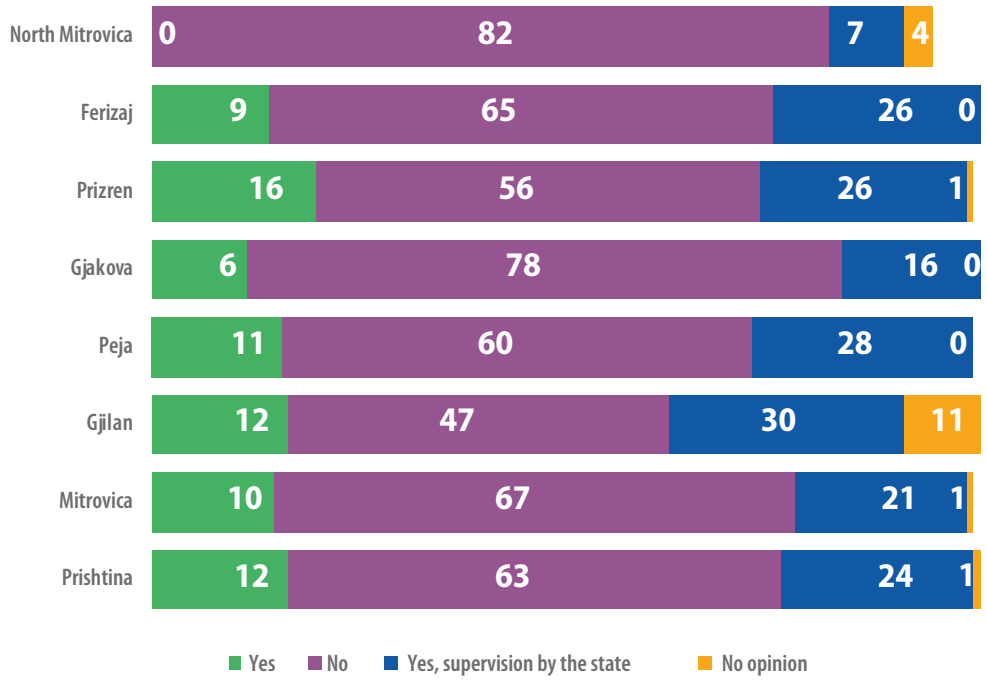

Figure 8: Region Perceptions to accept returnees foreign fighters

Likewise, from a gender perspective, only 7 percent of women respondents stated that they would have no problem accepting returnees in their community in comparison with 17 percent of men respondents who stated the same. This finding points out to the centrality of women's participation in the prevention and reintegration programs. Women may have developed this uncompromised resistance mainly because currently are not included in any P/CVE programs, despite all stakeholders acknowledging that they have a central role in countering violent extremism and curbing radicalization. For example, mothers can be powerful change agents as they are in the frontline of identifying individuals at risk.

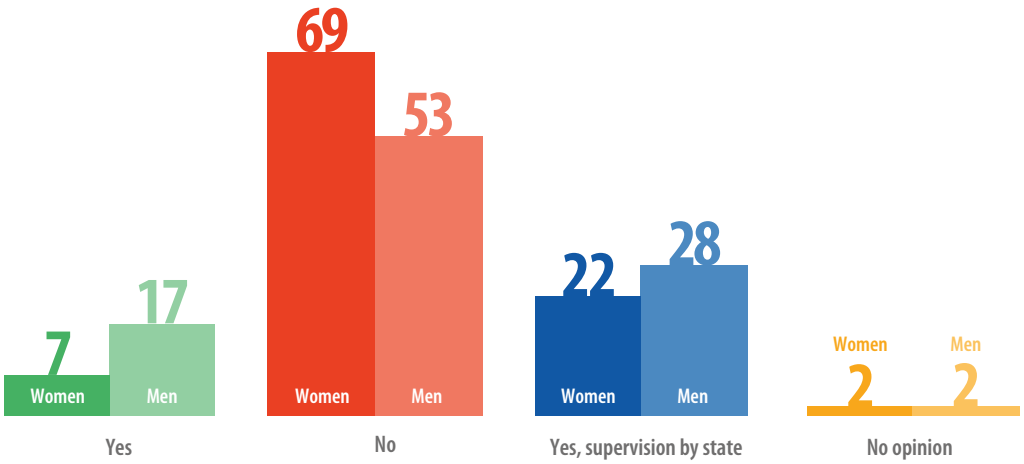

Figure 9: Gender based response to accept returnees former fighters

The report analyzed the community response regarding the treatment of the returned foreign fighters also based on the age of the respondents. The results showed there are no major differences in opinions between the younger and older respondents. Yet, those younger than 35 years-old were slightly more reluctant to accept these individuals in their community.

3.1 "Hard" or "soft" approaches?

Aside from measuring the citizens' views regarding the treatment of foreign fighters by the state institutions and the society at large, the report also measured which are the most adequate institutional measures to deal with the returned foreign fighters.

The figure below shows that majority of respondents, or 49 percent, consider that the returned foreign fighters should be reintegrated through state-sponsored programs, 27 percent of respondents believe that the returned former fighters should be arrested, while 15 percent of respondents think that returnees should not be allowed to enter Kosovo. Similar findings hold true across regions. For instance, all regions or more than 50 percent of respondents stated that the returnees should undergo treatment or reintegration programs, with the exception of Gjakova, which seems harbors the highest belief that returnees should be imprisoned.

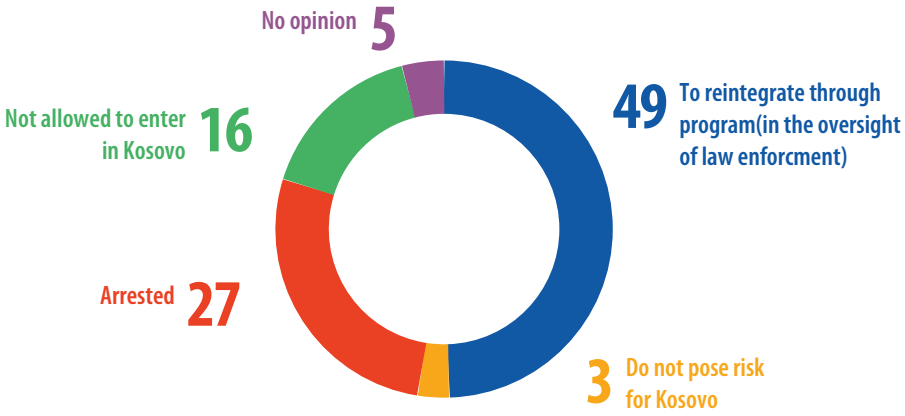

Figure 10: General Perceptions regarding the treatment of the returnees foreign fighters

Similar patterns were noticed in the urban and rural divide. Around 46 percent of the respondents from rural areas stated that these individuals should go through reintegration programs in comparison to 53 percent residing in urban areas. Around 30 percent of the respondents from rural areas stated that these individuals should be imprisoned compared to 24 percent of the urban ones.

Rural Areas

46%

of respondents consider that FFs, should be part of the reintegration programs

Urban Areas

53%

of respondents consider that FFs, should be part of the reintegration

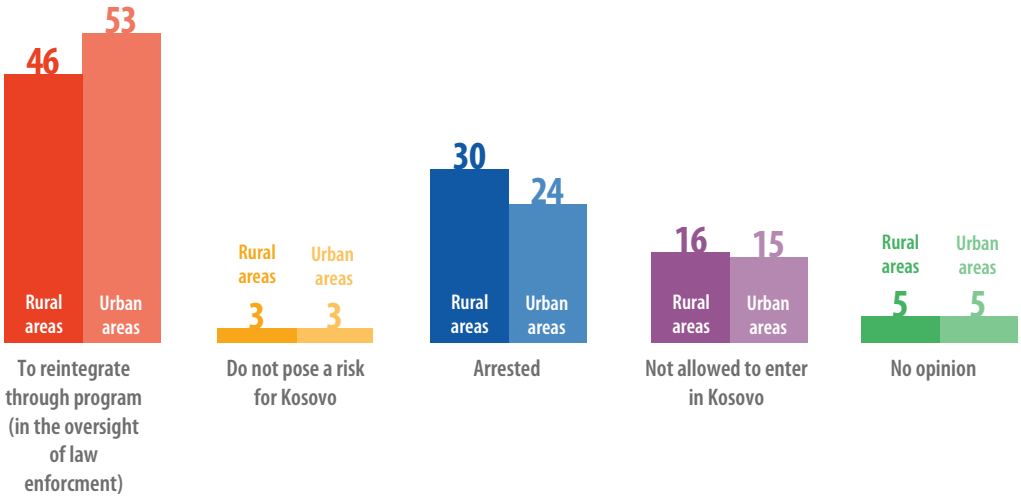

Figure 11: Rural/Urban Areas perception towards treatment of returned former fighters in Kosovo

4. PUBLIC'S TRUST TOWARD THE MAIN INSTITUTIONS INVOLVED IN IMPLEMENTATION OF THE KOSOVO'S STRATEGY ON VIOLENT EXTREMISM

The KSB survey measured general perception of citizens' trust on key security and justice institutions that are responsible for the implementation of the National Strategy against Violent Extremism. The report also includes the annual trends of citizens' trust toward the Islamic Association of Kosovo, the main official authority of Muslim followers in Kosovo. Only 14 percent and 12 percent of the respondents trust the Government and the Assembly of Kosovo respectively. Some 66 percent of respondents do not trust the Assembly of Kosovo.[10]

Citizens hold similar views toward the justice system with only 29 percent of citizens placing trust in the Prosecution, while 25 of the respondents trusting the courts.

In the other hand, Kosovo Police is the most trusted institution with 61 percent of respondents expressing trust in Kosovo Police. For more details on this see the last edition of KSB. KSB[11].

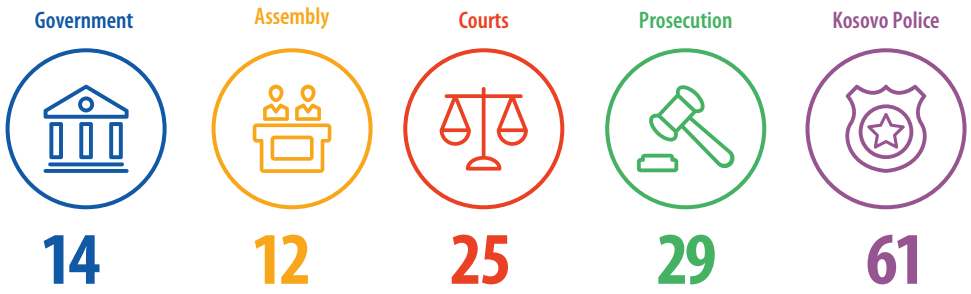

Figure 12: Public trust towards main institutions involved in implementation of the Kosovo's Strategy on violent extremism

10 Vrajolli. M "Kosovo security Barometer- Seventh Edition" 2017 http://www.qkss.org/repository/docs/KOSOVO_SECURITY_BAROMETER_7__ENGLISH_FINAL_891249.pdf

11 Vrajolli. M "Kosovo security Barometer- Seventh Edition" 2017 http://www.qkss.org/repository/docs/KOSOVO_SECURITY_BAROMETER_7__ENGLISH_FINAL_891249.pdf

This report also analyzed the citizens' trust toward other institutions, especially the Islamic Community in Kosovo. The Islamic Community in Kosovo, as the main authority of the Muslim practitioners, plays an important role in the re-integration programs of returnees outside and inside the prisons of Kosovo. Therefore, it is imperative to analyze how Kosovo's citizens view this institution. This report finds that the trust toward the Islamic Community in Kosovo (BIK) is higher than on the Government and, Assembly and justice system. However, this year marks another low in the trust toward BIK as it continues to decrease in comparison with the last two years.[12] As seen in the following graph, in 2015 citizens' perceptions of BIK stood at 59 percent while in 2016 it was 46 percent. In 2017, only 40 percent of respondents said they trust BIK. It is important that BIK proactively works towards the improvement of its image and addresses its shortcomings to regain the trust of Kosovo citizens.

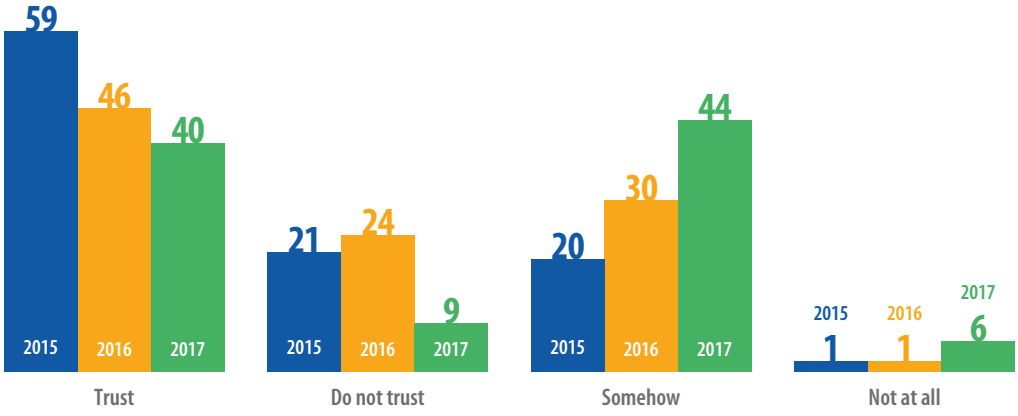

Figure 13: Trends by year: trust towards Islamic Community in Kosovo

12 KCSS, Kosovo Security Barometer Public perceptions on violent extremism 2015-2016

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