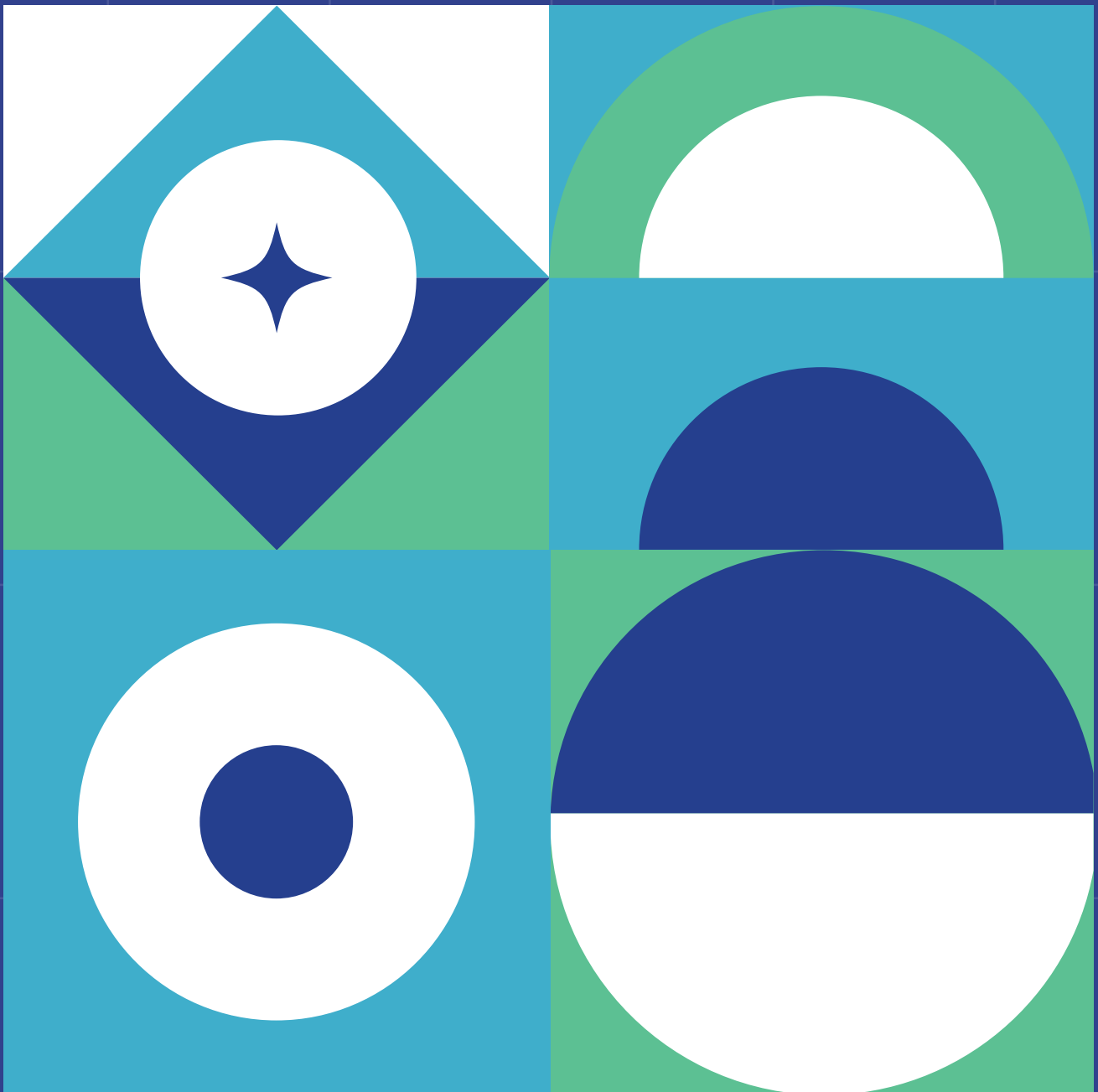# In the Eye of the Storm:

Perspectives on Crisis in North of Kosovo

In the Eye of the Storm: Perspectives on Crisis in North of Kosovo

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Executive summary

In the past year, a myriad of issues have captured public attention in Kosovo and Serbia. These include events unfolding in northern Kosovo, coupled with actions by the Government of Kosovo such as the heightened presence of Kosovo police special units, land expropriations and construction of police bases and checkpoints in the north. The heightened fear of potential intervention by both the Serbian Army and the Kosovo Security Forces stemmed largely from the fearmongering tactics employed by officials from both Kosovo and Serbia. This narrative, propagated by officials on both sides, exacerbated tensions and added to the overall sense of insecurity in the region, particularly in the aftermath of the armed attack in Banjska. Additionally, the stalemate in dialogue, with the European Union's role under scrutiny, alongside the formation of the Association of Serb majority Municipalities, and the ongoing emigration of Serbs and Albanians from Kosovo, have dominated discussions. Amidst these complexities, official statements from Belgrade and Pristina have often resorted to blame-shifting, each accusing the other of destabilization.

To understand how people perceive the crisis in the North, NSI and CBM partnered with UBO Consulting, a polling company headquartered in Pristina. The survey targeted residents of South and North Mitrovica, two cities separated by the Ibar River and predominantly inhabited by Albanians and Serbs respectively.

The results revealed entrenched ethnic divisions and contrasting perceptions regarding political developments in Northern Kosovo.

There is a significant disparity between Albanian and Serb perspectives regarding the Kosovo Government's actions in the North, with the majority of Albanian respondents supporting these actions while the majority of Serb respondents oppose them.

When it comes to the primary motives behind the actions of the Kosovo Government in the northern municipalities. Albanians predominantly see the establishment of Kosovo sovereignty and the fight against organized crime while upholding the rule of law as the main drivers, while Serbs overwhelmingly believe that increasing ethnic tensions and the closure of Serbian institutions are the primary motives.

The heightened Kosovo police presence in the North garners strong support from Albanians but faces significant opposition from Serbs, with only 1% expressing approval.

The survey revealed that among Albanians, significant majority perceive the increased Kosovo police presence in Northern Kosovo as enhancing their sense of safety; in contrast, no Serbs reported feeling safer.

Ethnicity did not significantly influence respondents' views on the potential intervention of the Serbian army and the Kosovo Security Force (KSF) in northern Kosovo, with 61% indicating skepticism about the Serbian army's intervention, and, similarly, there was a lack of consensus on the potential for KSF intervention.

There is a significant divide in support for the formation of the Association of Serb Majority Municipalities (ASM) between Albanians and Serbs, with minimal support from other ethnicities. Supporters of the ASM see it as a means to enhance stability, empower the Serbian community, improve security, and foster better relations between Belgrade and Pristina, while opponents express concerns about its potential harm to Kosovo, violation of sovereignty, legal conflicts, creation of a separate entity, and negative consequences for ethnic relations and the rights of Albanians within Kosovo.

The survey reveals varying intentions regarding relocation from Kosovo across different ethnic groups, with a notable proportion expressing plans to move out. Regarding past migration experiences, a considerable portion of respondents reported that both family members and friends had relocated from Kosovo within the past year.

Economic conditions emerged as the predominant factor for Albanians considering migration, alongside education and better business opportunities, while Serbs primarily cited ethnic tensions as the main driver, followed by political tensions and economic conditions to a lesser extent. When considering respondents' perspectives on the future state of interethnic relations in Kosovo over the next five years, a majority of Albanians expressed optimism, foreseeing improvement. In contrast, among Serbs, optimism was notably lower, with a substantial percentage of respondents believing relations would worsen.

Methodology

UBO Consulting was commissioned to conduct a survey from February 29th to March 7th, 2024, involving citizens aged 18 years and older from both North and South Mitrovica.

For this study, UBO Consulting utilized a quantitative data collection method through computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) and computer-assisted personal interviewing (CATI). The sample design included 460 respondents from South and North Mitrovica population in Kosovo, consisting of the following two sub-samples: 230 interviews were conducted with respondents from Northern Mitrovica, mostly through CAPI method; 230 interviews were conducted with respondents from Southern Mitrovica, mostly through CATI method.

The survey included a total of 460 respondents, with equal representation from Northern Mitrovica and Southern Mitrovica, each comprising 230 respondents. The gender distribution was nearly balanced, with 49 percent male, 51 percent female. Age groups were represented as follows: 17 percent were 18-25 years old, 29 percent were 26-35, 32 percent were 36-50, 18 percent were 50-64, and three percent were 65 or older. Education levels varied, with one percent having no formal education, five percent completing elementary school, 28 percent completing high school, 26 percent attending professional school, 31 percent attending university, eight percent pursuing master's studies, and 0.4 percent holding a Ph.D. Geographically, 65 percent of respondents lived in urban areas, while 32 percent were from rural areas. The ethnic distribution of respondents was as follows: Albanians comprised 57% (260), Serbians 38% (176), Roma 2% (9), Bosnians 1% (6), Ashkali 1% (4), Egyptians 1% (4), and Turkish 0.2% (1).

Research findings

The data shows a nuanced perception of the actions taken by the Kosovo Government, particularly under Prime Minister Albin Kurti, in the northern municipalities. Overall, the findings suggest that there is neither overwhelming support (35%) nor opposition (24%), with a significant portion of respondents opting for a neutral stance (37%).

1. How do you perceive the actions undetaken by the Kosovo Government, especially under the leadership of Prime Minister Albin Kurti, in the northern municipalities?

I support the actions	35%
Neutral	37%
I am against the actions	24%
I am not sure	4%
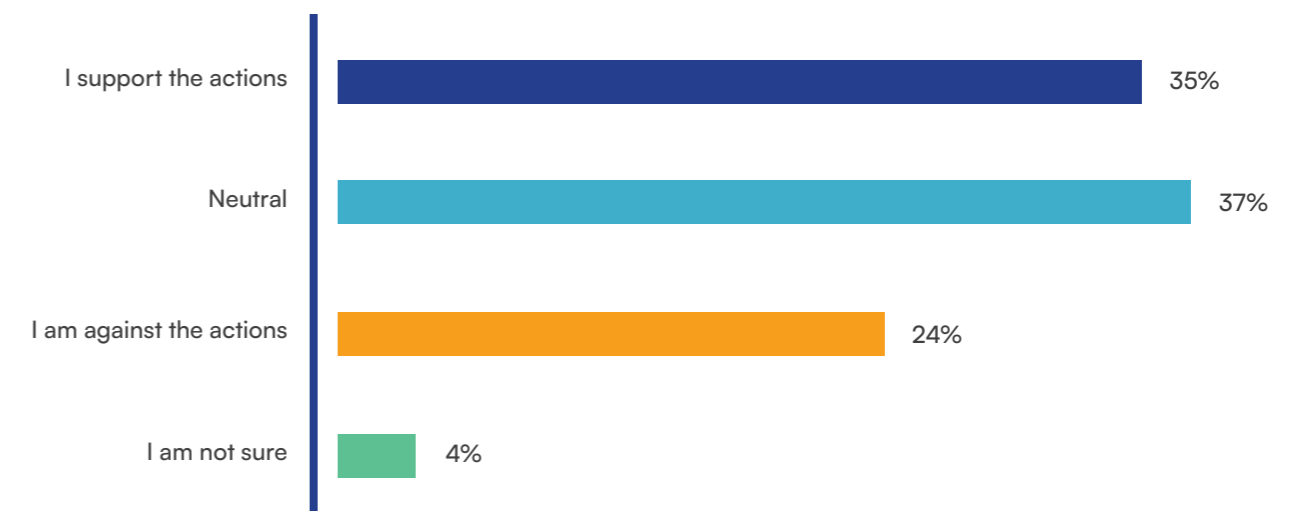
1. How do you perceive the actions undetaken by the Kosovo Government, especially under the leadership of Prime Minister Albin Kurti, in the northern municipalities?
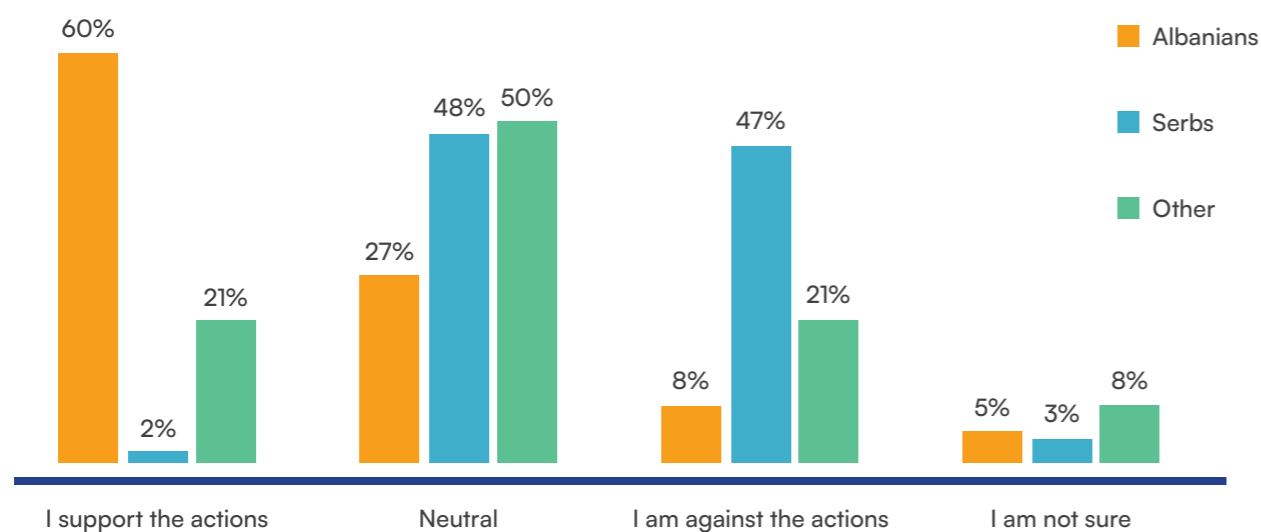

However, when examining responses based on ethnicity, a notable disparity emerges between Albanian and Serb perspectives. While 60% of Albanian respondents expressed support for the Government's actions in the North, only 2% of Serb respondents agreed. Conversely, 47% of Serb respondents expressed opposition to the actions, whereas only 8% of Albanians held a similar view.

Because opinions vary greatly based on ethnicity, the following results will be grouped by respondents' ethnic backgrounds.

2. In your opinion, what are the primary motives behind the actions of the Kosovo Government in the northern municipalities?
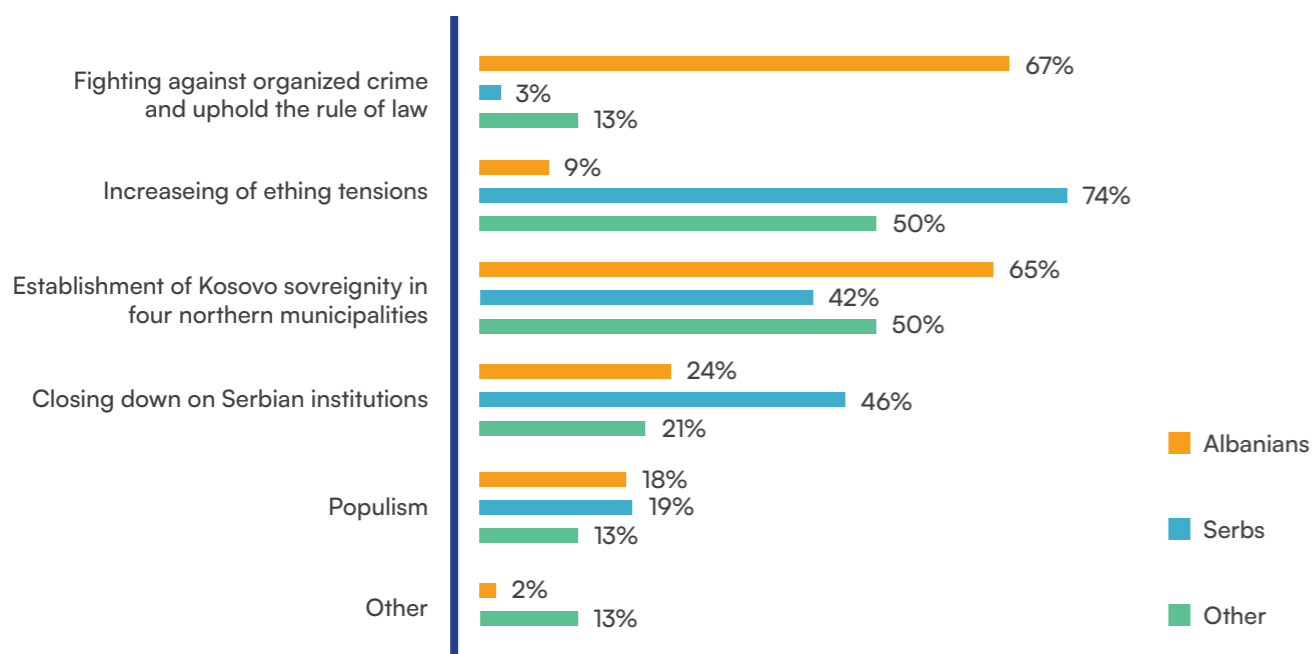

According to the survey, perceptions of the primary motives behind the actions of the Kosovo Government in the northern municipalities vary among different ethnic groups.

Albanians predominantly view the establishment of Kosovo sovereignty in the four northern municipalities (65%) and fighting against organized crime while upholding the rule of law (67%) as the main drivers. Additionally, a notable portion perceive the closure of Serbian institutions (24%) and populist agenda (18%) as significant factors, while a smaller percentage attribute the actions to increasing ethnic tensions (9%).
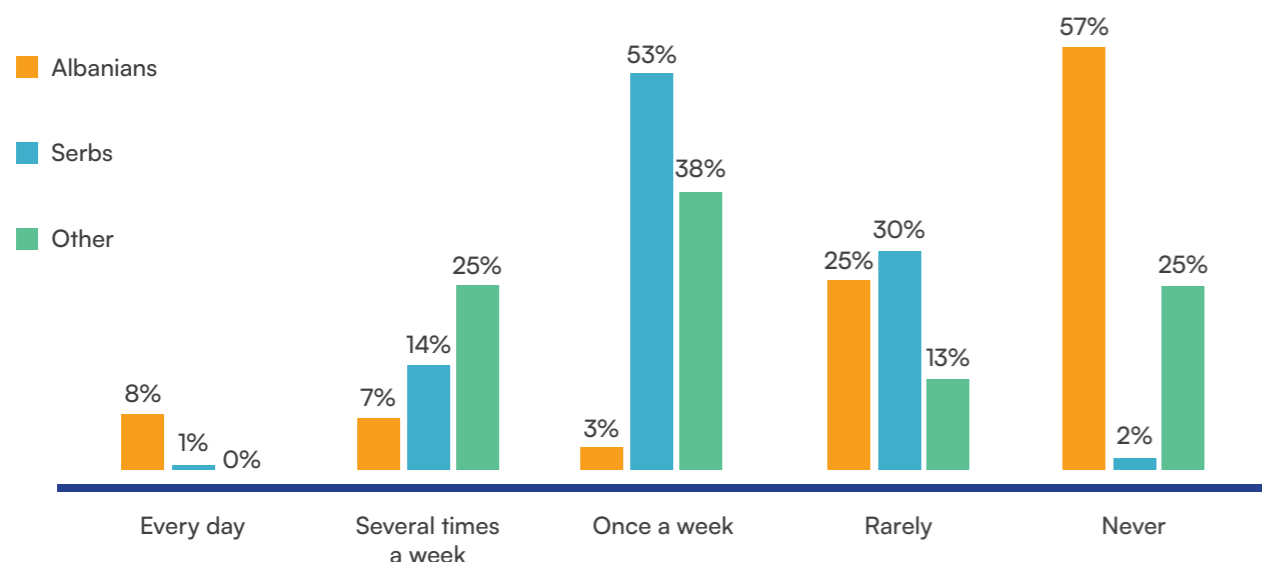
Conversely, Serbs overwhelmingly believe that increasing ethnic tensions (74%) and the closure of Serbian institutions (46%) are the primary motives. They also acknowledge the goal of establishing Kosovo sovereignty (42%), albeit to a lesser extent, along with populist influences (19%). In contrast, only a minority of Serbs see fighting organized crime and upholding the rule of law as a primary motive (3%)

3. Do you believe that the recent measures implemented by the Kosovo government have improved or worsened relations between Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo?
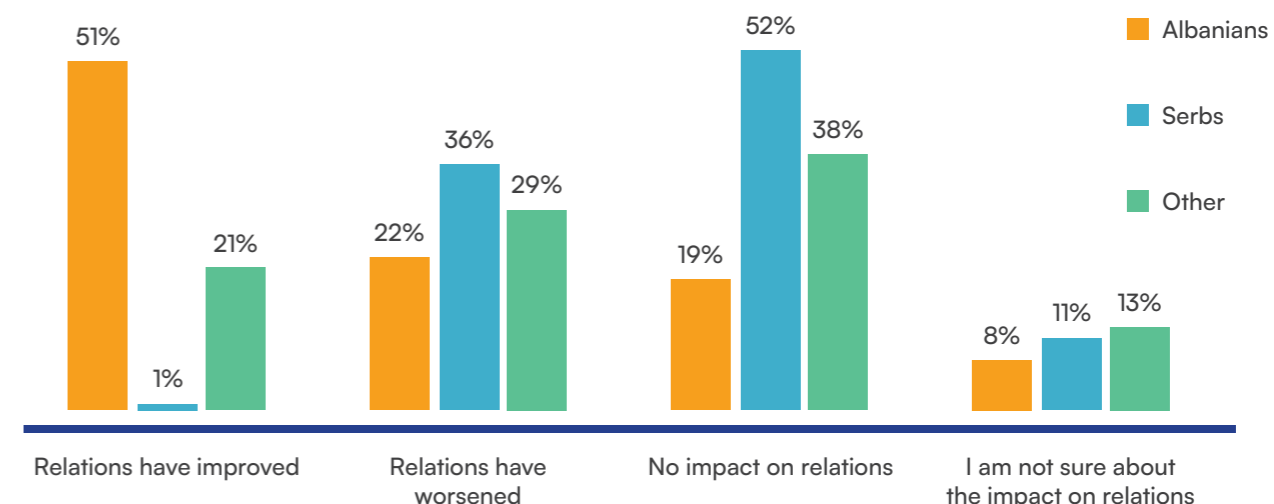
Respondents were asked whether they believe that the recent measures implemented by the Kosovo government have improved or worsened relations between Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo. Albanians are divided in their views, with a slight majority (51%) believing that the situation has improved. Conversely, a notable portion (22%) perceive that the measures have worsened relations, while a significant minority (19%) perceive no impact. On the other hand, the majority of Serbs (36%) perceive a worsening of relations following the implementation of these measures, with only a marginal percentage (1%) believing that the situation has improved. A substantial proportion (52%) perceive no impact, indicating a sense of neutrality, while a minority (11%) express uncertainty.

4. During the last few months, how often would you say you have had direct contact with members of the Albaian/Serbian community?

The survey looked at how often people from different ethnic backgrounds had direct contact with members of the Albanian and Serbian communities in the past months. For Albanians, most (57%) said they never had direct contact with Serbs, while 25% said it happened rarely. Only 8% reported daily contact. Among Serbs, a majority (53%) reported weekly contact with Albanians, with 30% saying it's rare and only 2% never having any contact. For other ethnicities, it varied, with 25% reporting no contact, 38% having weekly contact, and 13% having rare contact. Daily contact was rare for all groups.

The survey's findings suggest that the difference in reported levels of contact likely stems from the diverse makeup of certain neighborhoods in North Mitrovica. In North Mitrovica, where three multiethnic neighborhoods exist, many Serbs and Albanians live close to each other, leading to regular interactions between them. On the other hand, South Mitrovica has hardly any Serb residents, except for a local Serb priest and his family. This difference in local demographics explains why Serbs in North Mitrovica reported more contact with Albanians, while many Albanians reported minimal or no contact.

5. How has your contact with members of the Albanian/Serbian community changed over the past few months?
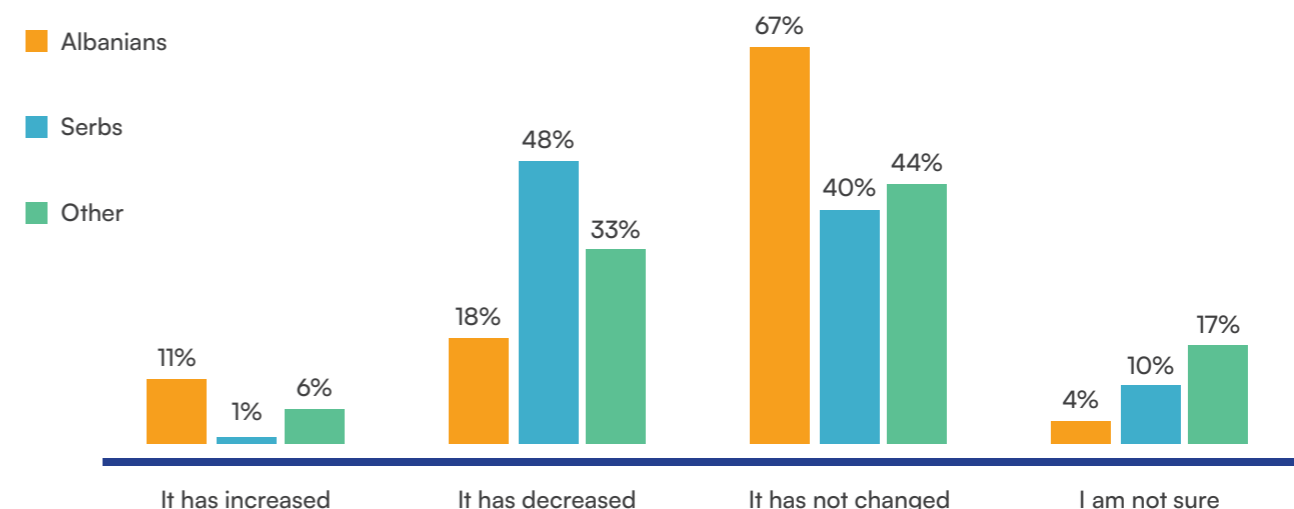
When asked how their contact with Albanian and Serbian communities changed in recent months, the majority of Albanians (67%) said it stayed the same, while 18% experienced a decrease and 11% saw an increase. Among Serbs, 48% reported a decrease, 40% said it stayed the same, and only 1% reported an increase. Other ethnicities mostly reported no change (44%), with 33% seeing a decrease and 6% an increase. These results show varied shifts in how people interact with different communities.

6. How do you perceive the increased presence of Kosovo police, especially the special units and the construction of police bases in the North of Kosovo?
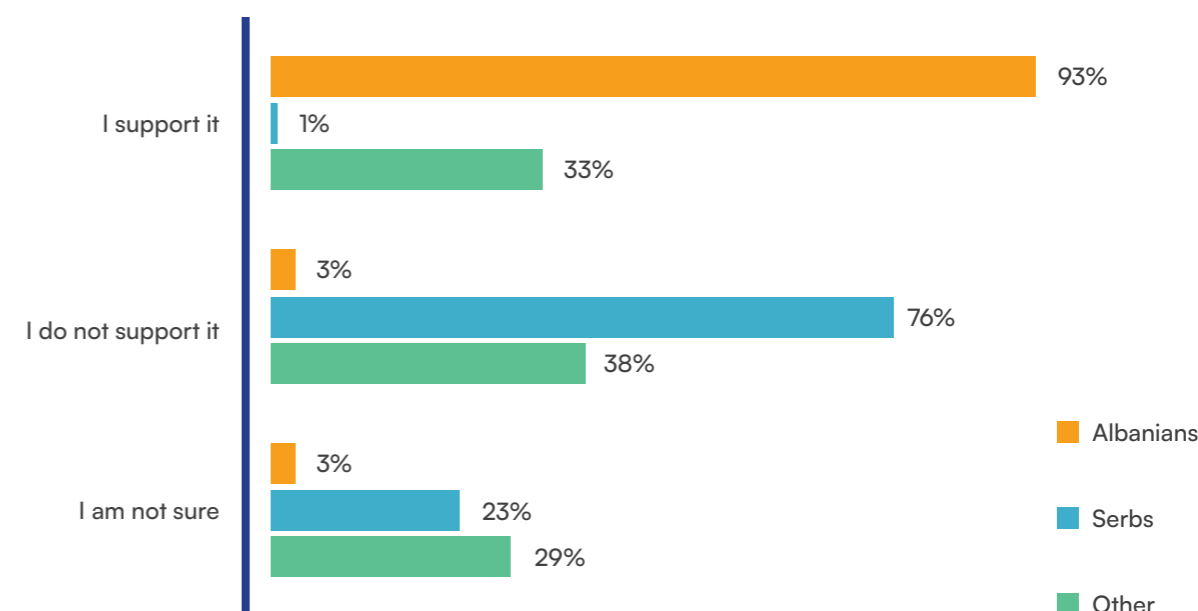
When considering the increased presence of Kosovo police, particularly the special units and construction of police bases in the North of Kosovo, the survey results highlight notable differences in perception across ethnic groups. Specifically, a significant majority of Albanians (93%) expressed support for this development, indicating strong backing within this community. Conversely, a mere 1% of Serb respondents expressed support, with a substantial majority (76%) indicating their opposition. Among other ethnicities, 33% voiced support, 38% did not support, and 29% were unsure about the increased police presence.

7. Do you think that this presence increases or decreases the feeling of security in Northern Kosovo and Kosovo in genera?

Legend:
- Albanians
- Serbs
- Other

Data:
- It increases the feeling of security: Albanians 85%, Other 33%
- It decreases the feeling of security: Albanians 4%, Serbs 35%, Other 4%
- It has no effect on the feeling of security: Albanians 2%, Serbs 9%
- I am not sure: Albanians 9%, Serbs 57%, Other 63%
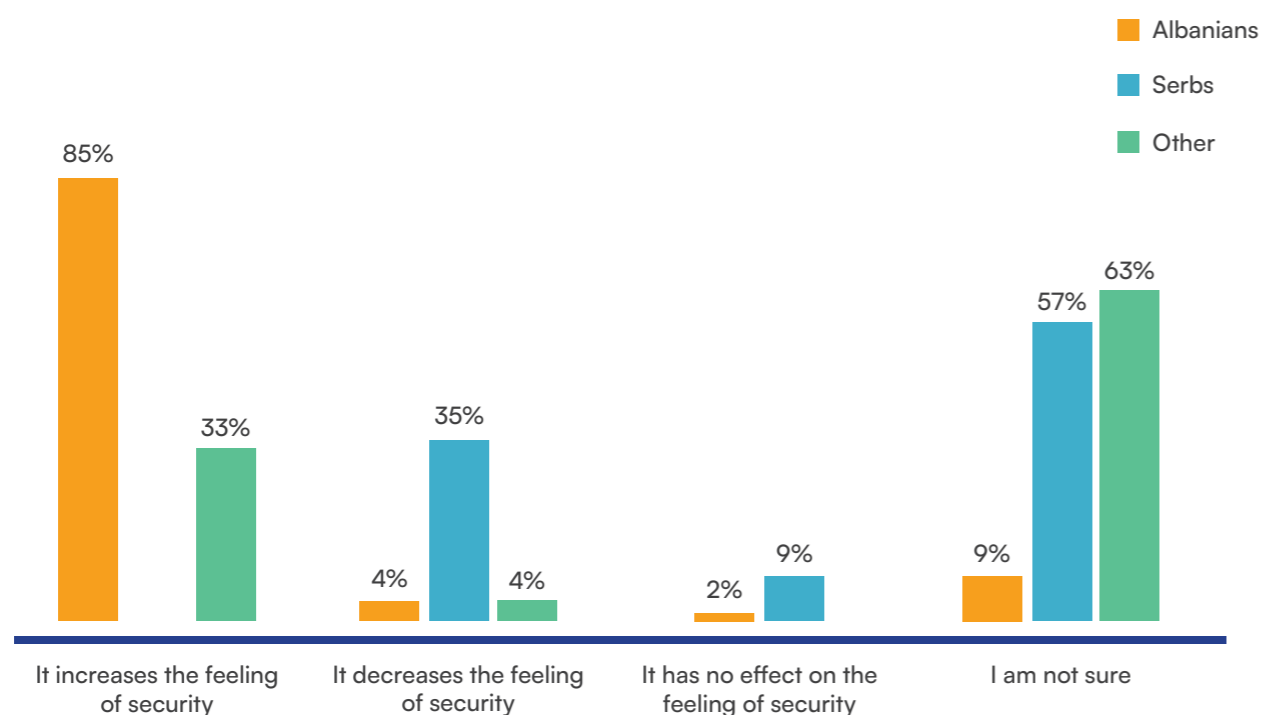
The survey asked how people feel about the increased Kosovo police presence in Northern Kosovo and overall. Among Albanians, 85% think it makes them feel safer, while only 4% feel less secure. On the other hand, no Serbs said it makes them feel safer, with 35% feeling less secure. For others, 33% feel safer, 4% feel less secure, and 63% are unsure about its impact. When citizens were asked to elaborate their answers, those who supported the increased presence of the police provided several perspectives. They emphasized feeling safer in their communities due to the heightened security measures. Many highlighted the necessity of the police presence in combating criminal activities and protecting the country from threats. Some citizens noted improvements such as increased freedom of movement and a reduction in criminal behavior, attributing these positive changes to the effectiveness of law enforcement efforts. Moreover, citizens acknowledged the role of the police in safeguarding the community and preventing illegal activities such as crime and smuggling. They also reported fewer negative events, indicating an overall improvement in security conditions. Additionally, citizens expressed

appreciation for the inclusive nature of police efforts, recognizing their importance in ensuring the safety of all citizens, regardless of ethnicity. [1]

When asked to elaborate their answers regarding the negative perspectives towards police presence, citizens expressed a range of concerns. Some highlighted a lack of trust in the Kosovo police, citing instances where they felt the police had not acted in accordance with their expectations. Others stated that they did not recognize the authority of the Kosovo police, expressing skepticism about their legitimacy. Additionally, some individuals mentioned feeling a sense of insecurity due to the increased police presence, believing it to be a contributing factor to heightened tensions within the community. Ethnic tension was also a prevalent concern, with some citizens fearing that the presence of the police could exacerbate existing divisions. Furthermore, a negative attitude towards the police presence was noted by some respondents, indicating a general disapproval or skepticism regarding their role in maintaining security. Concerns about unrest and escalation of the situation were raised, with citizens fearing that the increased police presence could lead to further instability. Moreover, there were apprehensions about incitement against certain ethnic groups, particularly Serbs, due to the perceived bias or actions of the police. [2]

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1. "Their presence increases security", "Protect the country from criminal groups", "The freedom of movement has increased" "Police protects the people", "Criminal groups have withdrawn from the area", "Criminals do not operate freely"

"Every person who wishes to live in a country must abide by the rules", "Everything is proceeding according to the rules", "It stops crime and smuggling", "The circulation is better and we are safer", "The Kurti government must coordinate prudently with the USA and then act decisively without changing its position", "The reason for continuing to live in the North of Mitrovica is precisely the presence of the police", "If we set them free, who knows what kind of riot they will start", "The security of the citizens of South Mitrovica has been increased", "The Serbian people living in the north of Kosovo feel liberated from criminal groups", "Serbs are safer than us", "Their mission is to increase security in the country", "They prevent bad things from happening", "We are safer than we were", "We have full confidence in the Kosovo Police", "Works for all citizens regardless of their ethnicity", "Serbs are the ones who present more violence to the police", "When Serbs want to cause trouble, they find ways"

2. "Lack of trust", "I do not recognize the Kosovo police", "It creates a feeling of insecurity", "Their presence increases ethnic tension", "Negative attitude", "They are not working in accordance with the law", "It brings unrest among the people because they are illegitimate", "It instills fear in the community", "Serbs are becoming even more angry", "The situation has been tense recently", "Their presence is illegitimate"

8. If there are no improvements in the dialogue, do you believe there is a possibility of the Serbian army intervening in Kosovo?
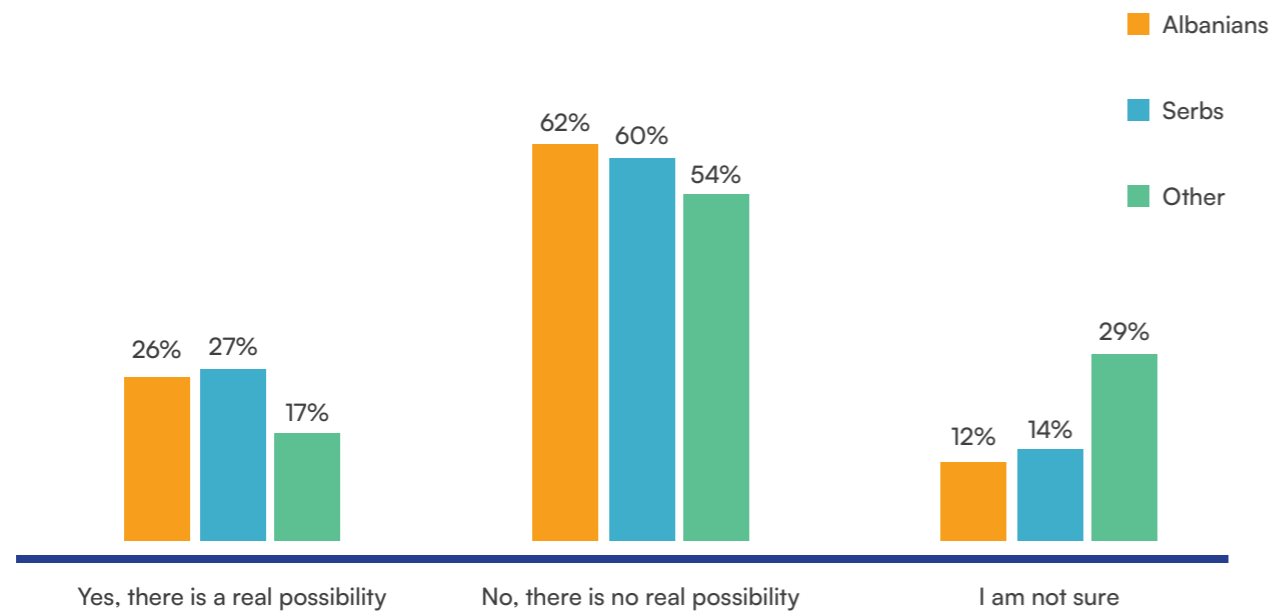

The only two questions where ethnicity didn't significantly influence respondents' views were about the potential intervention of the Serbian army and the Kosovo Security Force (KSF) in Kosovo. Results indicate that a significant portion of respondents do not perceive the Serbian army's intervention as likely in the absence of improvements in the dialogue (61%), and 26 percent of respondents stated that this is a real possibility.

9. If there are no improvements in the dialogue, do you believe there is a possibility for the Kosovo Security Force (KSF) to intervene in the North?
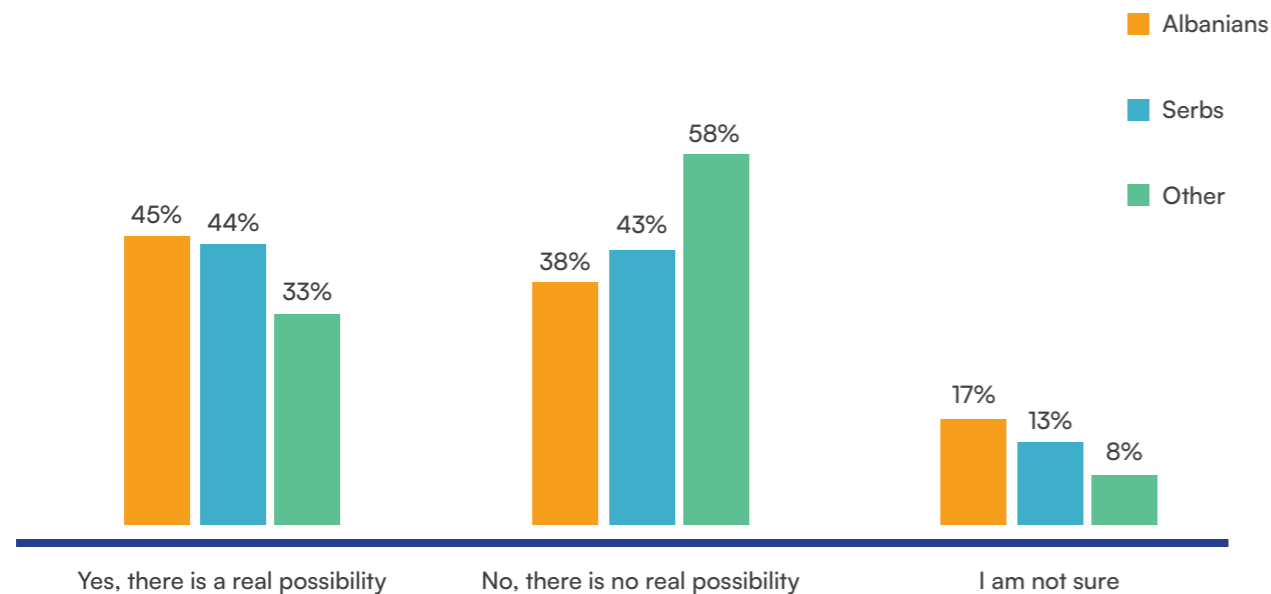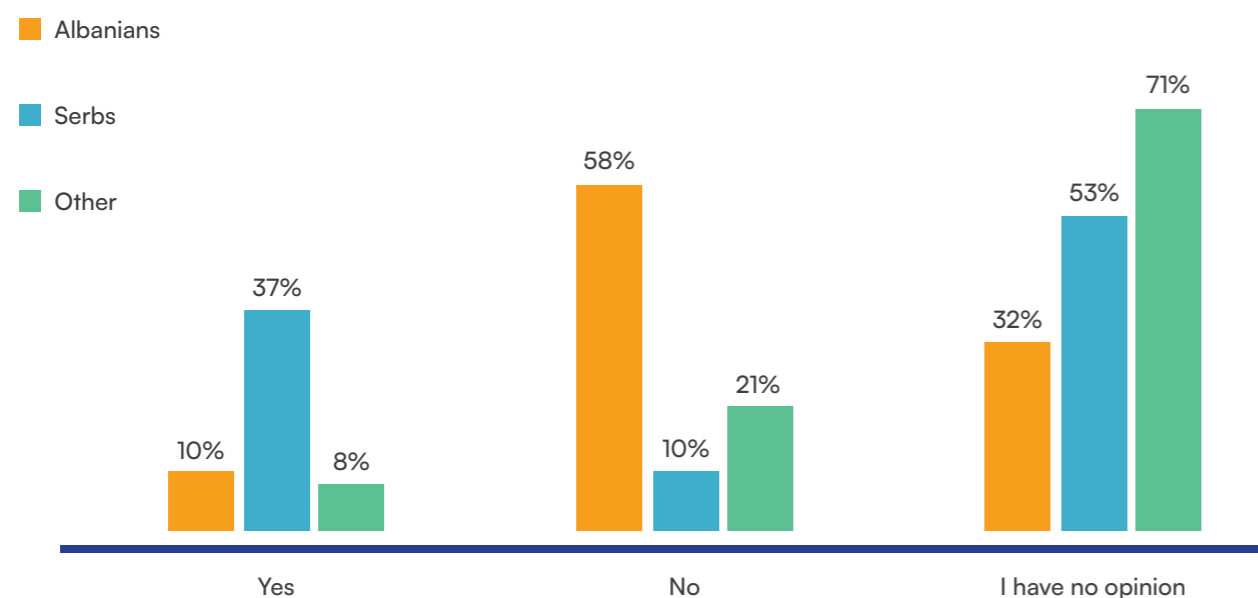

The data indicates a lack of consensus among respondents, with a significant portion perceiving a real possibility of Kosovo Security Force (KSF) intervention in the absence of improvements in dialogue (44%), followed by 41 percent of respondents who believe there is no real possibility for KSF to intervene in the North.

10. How do you percieve the role of the European Union (EU) in the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina?
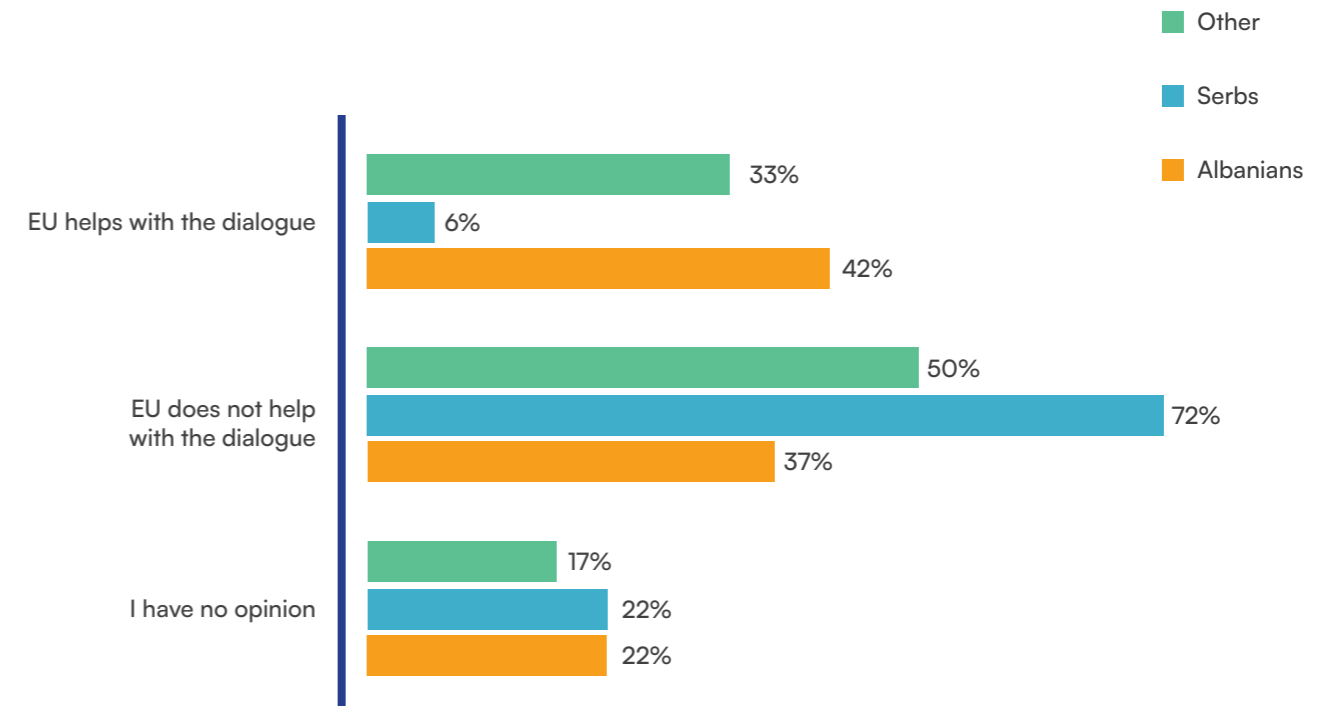
The survey inquired about perceptions regarding the role of the European Union (EU) in the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina. The responses reveal varied perspectives across different ethnic groups. Among Albanians, 42% believe that the EU helps with the dialogue, while 37% think otherwise. Conversely, among Serbs, a significant majority (72%) feel that the EU does not help with the dialogue, with only 6% holding a positive view. For other ethnicities, 33% perceive the EU as helpful, while 50% believe it does not contribute to the dialogue.

11. Do you support the formation of the ASM?

Legend:
- Albanians (orange)
- Serbs (blue)
- Other (green)

Yes: Albanians 10%, Serbs 37%, Other 8%
No: Albanians 58%, Serbs 10%, Other 21%
I have no opinion: Albanians 32%, Serbs 53%, Other 71%

Respondents against the formation of the Association of Serb Majority Municipalities (ASM) expressed various concerns, encapsulated in their statements. They believe the ASM could be harmful for Kosovo and see no need for its establishment. Some worry that it will not bring about any meaningful change and could violate the sovereignty of the state. Others argue that it goes against the constitution and laws of Kosovo and creates a separate entity within the country. Additionally, critics fear that the ASM may pose challenges for the future and could lead to negative consequences. Some express concerns about the potential ethnic-based nature of the association. Moreover, opponents raise issues regarding the impact on the situation of Albanians in Kosovo and the risk of their departure. They also question the necessity for Serbian municipalities, advocating for equal rights and integration within a sovereign state. Overall, these statements reflect apprehensions about the potential implications of the ASM and its compatibility with the existing legal framework and principles of governance in Kosovo. [4]

The survey asked about support for the formation of the Association of Serb Majority Municipalities. Among Albanians, only 10% expressed support for the association, while a majority (58%) opposed it. Conversely, among Serbs, 37% supported its formation, while 10% opposed it. For respondents from other ethnicities, support was minimal (8%), with a notable majority (71%) expressing no opinion.

Citizens were asked to elaborate on their support for the formation of the Association of Serb Majority Municipalities (ASM).

Respondents supporting the formation of the Association of Serb Majority Municipalities (ASM) highlighted various reasons for their approval. They believe the ASM would bring stability to the region, give more power to the Serbian community, and improve security for them. They also think it would make life better for minorities and help improve relations between Belgrade and Pristina. Supporters see the ASM as a way to govern themselves better, boost the economy, and make life easier for everyone. Overall, they believe the ASM would meet community needs and make the region better. [3]

3.   "It will bring stability to the region", "Greater autonomy for the Serbian community", "Increasing security for the Serbian community", "Better life for the minorities", "Stabilization of relations between Belgrade and Pristina", "Greater possibility of self-governance", "It will contribute to economic development", "It will ensure greater independence in decision-making", "A better situation for the citizens", "Because of the calmness that it would create", "Because relations between Belgrade and Pristina will be formalized", "Because it ensures greater independence for the Serbian community", "It will ensure greater independence for the Serbian community", "It will contribute to the development of urban and rural planning", "More cooperation, tolerance", "To make the life of the citizens easier"

4.   "It is harmful for Kosovo" "I do not support it" "There is no need" "It will not lead to any change" "Violates the sovereignty of the state" "Not with executive powers" "It is against the constitution and laws of Kosovo" "It creates Serbia within Kosovo" "It doesn't make any changes" "It poses challenges for the future" "No answer" "There should be no association" "There should be no Serbian municipalities, only Kosovar municipalities" "They have already received a lot from us" "Although they are separated, I do not support them" "Because it worsens the situation in Kosovo" "It is an ethnically based association" "It will be like in Presheva" "Negative consequences for the future" "No association is required in Kosovo" "Not logical" "Nothing concrete brings good" "Serbian institutions and groups will be formed to oppose Albanians" "The Bosniakization of Kosovo takes place" "The situation of Albanians worsens and there is a risk of their departure" "There is no Albanian land for Serbs" "There is no other choice" "They become stronger if the association is established" "They will always beg for more" "To be done as it was before" "To be like any other city" "To some extent" "We don't have land to give" "We must all integrate to have equal rights" "We must be a sovereign state and the law must function" "We shouldn't allow it" "We shouldn't be obligated to fulfill anyone's wishes"

## 12. Do you plan to move out of Kosovo in the near future?
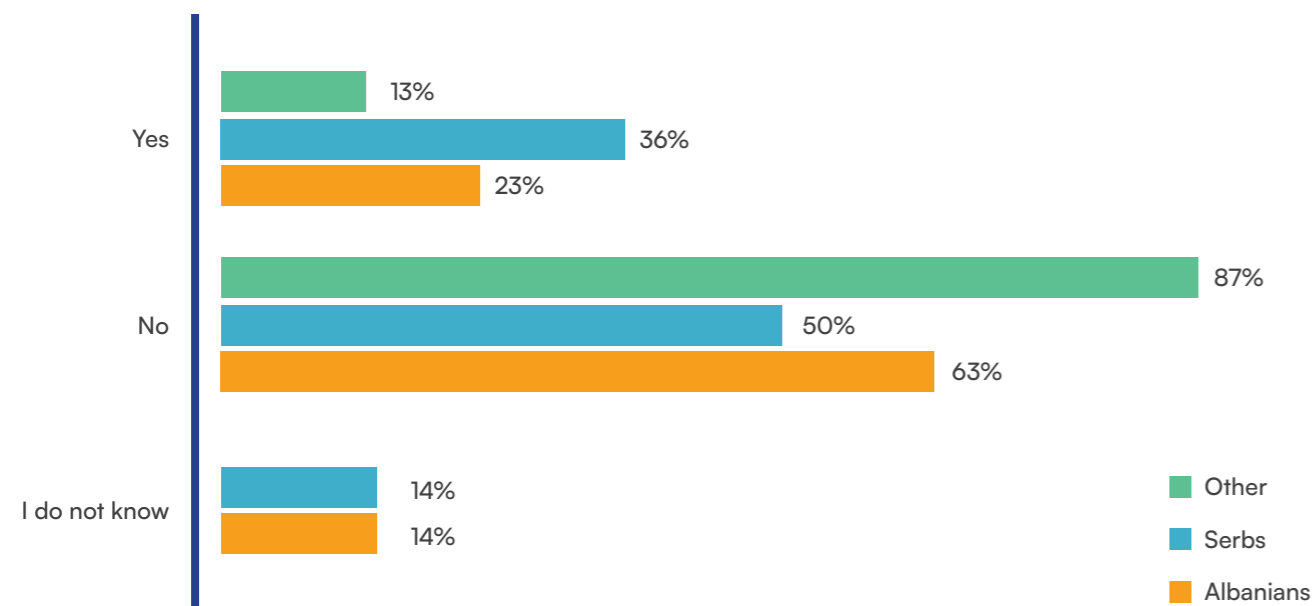
The survey asked respondents if they intended to relocate from Kosovo in the near future. Results showed varying intentions across different ethnic groups. A notable portion of respondents, 23% among Albanians and 36% among Serbs, expressed plans to move out, while 13% of respondents from other ethnicities shared the same sentiment. Conversely, a majority of respondents, 63% among Albanians, 50% among Serbs, and 88% among other ethnicities, stated they had no intention of leaving Kosovo. A smaller percentage, 14% among Albanians, 14% among Serbs, and none among other ethnicities, indicated uncertainty about their future plans.

13. Have any of your family members moved out of Kosovo in the last year?
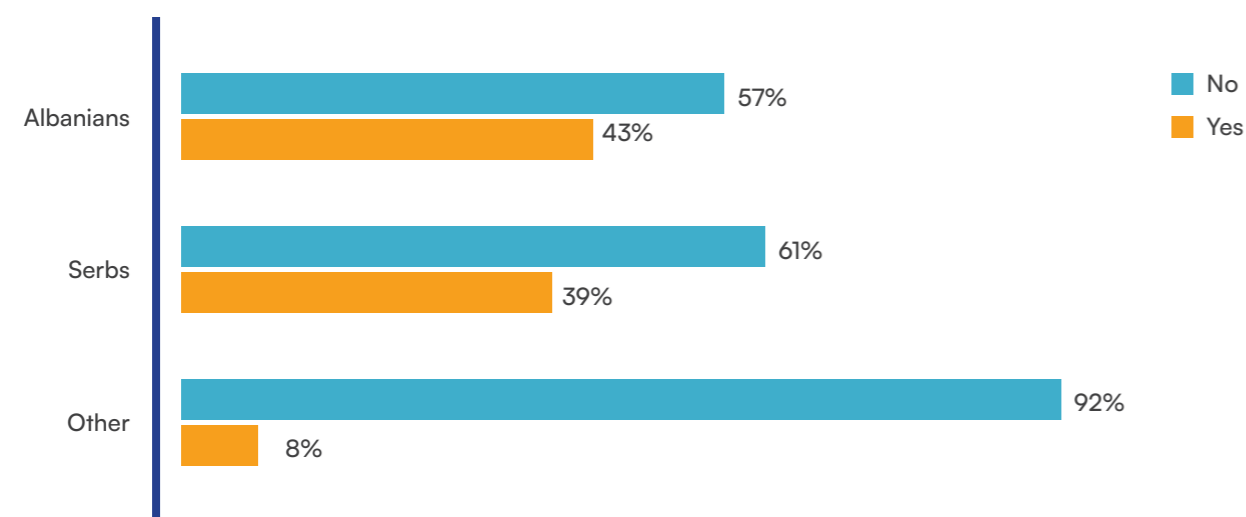

The survey inquired about whether any family members of the respondents had moved out of Kosovo in the past year. Among respondents, 43% of Albanians, 39% of Serbs, and 8% of other ethnicities reported that at least one family member had moved away.

14. Have any of your friends moved out of Kosovo in the last year?
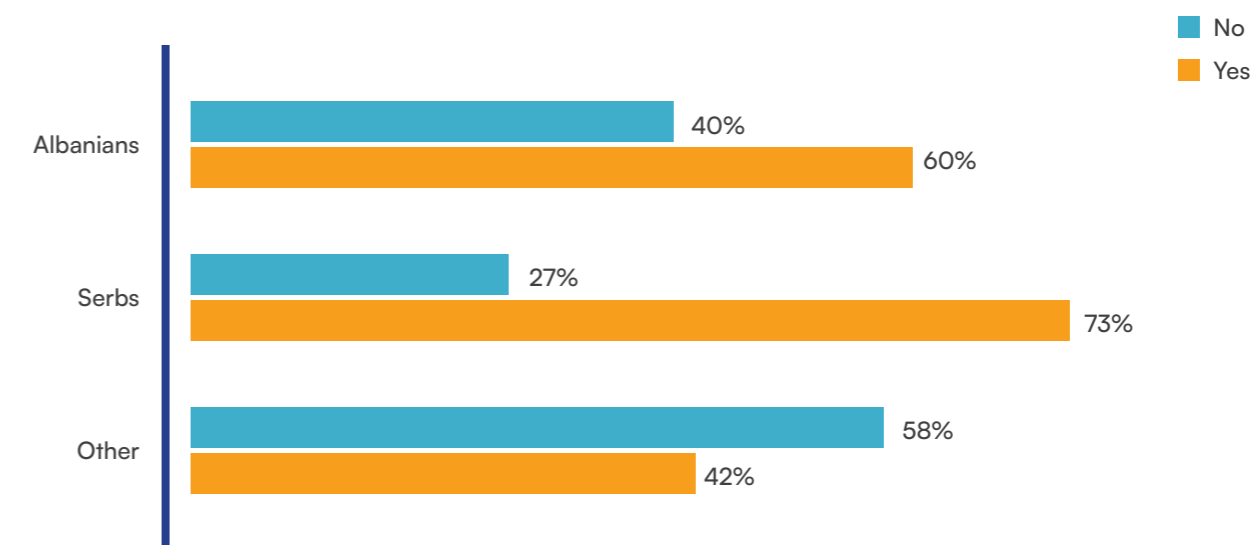
The survey investigated whether respondents had friends who relocated from Kosovo in the past year. Among respondents, 60% of Albanians, 73% of Serbs, and 42% of other ethnicities reported that at least one friend had moved away.

15. If the answer is yes, what do you think was the reason for their decision to move out of Kosovo?
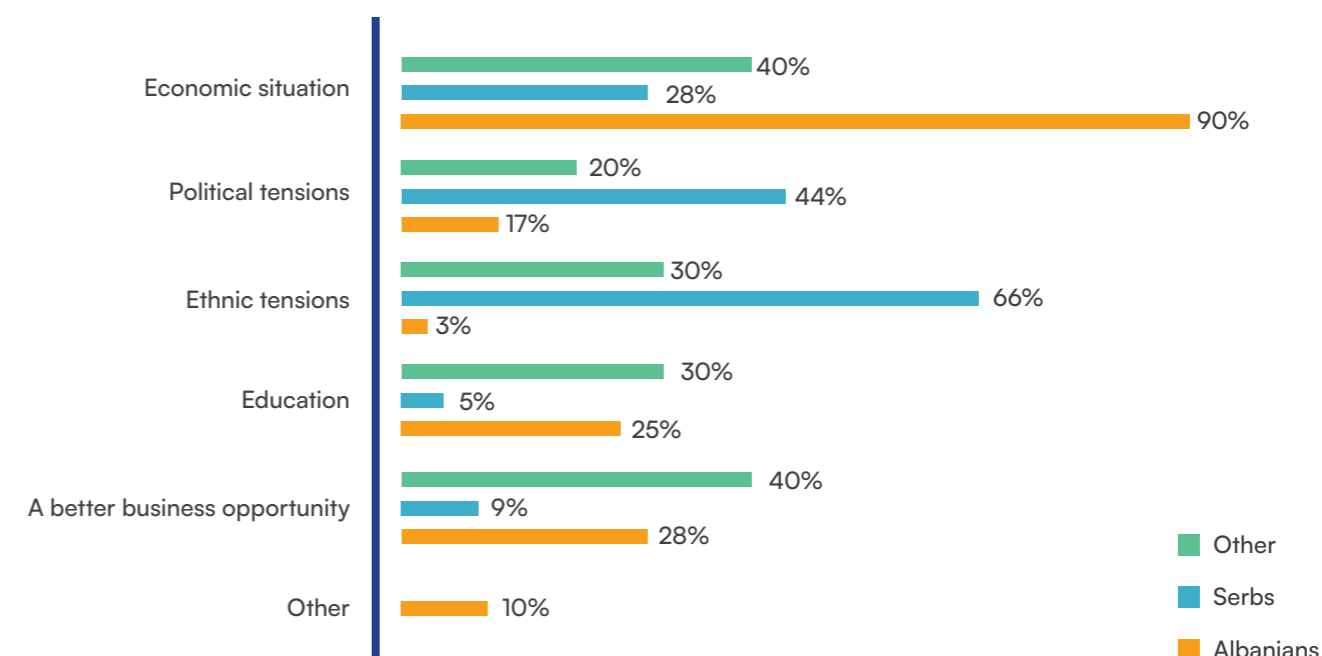
The primary reasons for migration from Kosovo varied between Albanians and Serbs, with notable distinctions in their main motives. For Albanians, economic conditions emerged as the predominant factor, with a significant 90% citing it as the primary reason for migration. Additionally, education and the pursuit of better business opportunities were highlighted, with 25% and 28% respectively. Conversely, Serbs identified ethnic tensions as the primary driver for migration, with a striking 66% indicating it as the main reason. Political tensions were particularly salient for Serbs, with 44% identifying them as a significant factor influencing migration decisions. Economic conditions also played a role, though to a lesser extent compared to Albanians, with 28% citing it as a motive.

16. How do you see the state of interethnic relations in Kosovo in the next 5 years?

Legend:
- Albanians
- Serbs
- Other

	Much improved than today	Improved	Unchanged	Worse than today
Albanians	23%	46%	23%	7%
Serbs	2%	7%	38%	46%
Other	21%	13%	58%	8%

The survey asked respondents about their outlook on the state of interethnic relations in Kosovo over the next five years. Among Albanians, 23% believed that relations would be much improved compared to today, while 46% anticipated improvement. Conversely, 7% foresaw relations worsening, with 1% believing they would be much worse. Among Serbs, only 2% expected much improvement, and 7% anticipated improvement, while a significant 46% believed relations would deteriorate, and 7% thought they would be much worse. Among other ethnicities, 21% of respondents expected much improvement, with 13% anticipating improvement.

Conclusion

Research findings indicate significant polarization and opposing views among members of the Serbian and Albanian communities and emphasize the importance of media in addressing these phenomena. Media have the power to mediate between different perceptions and present diverse perspectives. By providing access to information and attitudes that may be contrary to current beliefs or perceptions, media can contribute to understanding different positions and perspectives.

Access to information from various sources can help people perceive the complexity of issues and understand the reasons and motivations of other communities. The media must be objective, balanced, and provide space for different perspectives, rather than encouraging polarization or favoring only one side.

Considering the low perception of security and lack of trust in the police, the Government of Kosovo needs to take steps towards the reintegration of the Serbian community, with a special emphasis on the police. This can be a crucial step in building trust between different ethnic groups and enhancing security for all citizens of Kosovo.
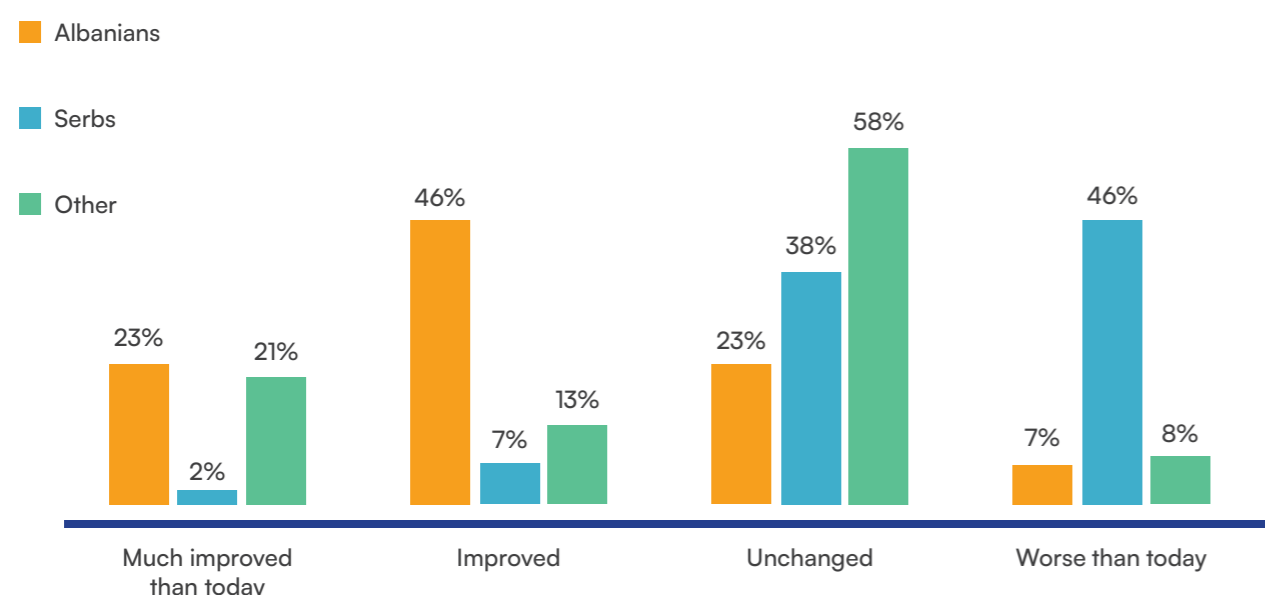
One of the key aspects of this process is engaging in dialogue with former Serbian members of the Kosovo police about the possibility of their return. This could provide an opportunity to address existing obstacles and challenges, as well as to identify necessary support measures to ensure their successful reintegration.

Additionally, it is important to ensure that the Serbian community is adequately represented in police structures to guarantee their security and sense of belonging.

Research findings on public opinion clearly indicate a serious problem of population migration from Kosovo, with significant differences observed in the main motives between the Albanian and Serbian communities. For Albanians, economic opportunities stand out as the dominant factor. In contrast, for Serbs, ethnic and political tensions are recognized as the main factor influencing migration decisions.

Based on these findings, we recommend that all relevant stakeholders take the issue of migration from Kosovo seriously and particularly consider the different motives driving migration between the Albanian and Serbian communities. To address this problem, it is necessary to develop targeted interventions that will address the specific needs and concerns of both communities, including measures to improve economic opportunities, reduce ethnic tensions, and enhance political stability.