



HELSINKI COMMITTEE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IN SERBIA  
Helsinki Files No.35

**OPINION POLL CONDUCTED  
AMONG THE SANDŽAK YOUTH  
HOW SUSCEPTIBLE  
ARE THE YOUTH TO  
ISLAMIC EXTREMISM**

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**Opinion poll conducted among the Sandžak youth  
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Belgrade, May 2016.

Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia  
[www.helsinki.org.rs](http://www.helsinki.org.rs)

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ISBN 978-86-7208-205-0  
COBISS.SR-ID 225682700



Project "Reach Out Sandžak - II"

This publication is made possible by the support of the U.S. Department of State – Federal Assistance Award. The contents of this publication are the responsibility of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia and do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Government.

## INTRODUCTORY NOTES

The crucial question here is: Are the Muslim youth in Sandžak imbued with religious extremism or not? Hardly any interethnic and inter-religious incident has been registered in this part of the Republic of Serbia. On the other hand, fighters from Sandžak are being involved in the Iraqi and Syrian wars. Depending on the answer to the question above, the authorities could take appropriate actions aiming at young people in Sandžak. Both domestic and international stakeholders – and there are many of them, including the non-governmental sector – could develop plans and take a variety of concrete steps depending on the answer to this very question.

Fahrudin Kladničanin wrote about the influence of Wahhabi Islamic extremism on the youth in Sandžak: “Wahhabis are usually focused on recruiting young people 19 – 27 years old with little education, who are poor and often come from dysfunctional families. The youth are being indoctrinated in private places of worship (*masjids*), which are either rented or owned by Wahhabis, and in certain religious objects (mosques) whose imams support Wahhabi teaching, and prayers in these mosques are always led by Wahhabis. (Kladničanin, 2013: 130)

Marija Radoman analyzed the reasons driving young people in Serbia towards extremist ideologies. Two citations from an earlier research of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia will thus be mentioned:

„Regarding the period after 2000, surveys show that the family remains the mainstay of its young members, that young people’s life patterns lack individualization, and that they normatively accept the traditional sequence of events in a person’s life (i.e. completion of education, getting a job, entry into marriage and only then having children). What intrigues me is the sphere of influence between the respondents to this survey and their families. I tried all the time to keep a picture in my head of the families in which they grew up. I wanted to find out whether the respondents’ attitudes would reflect that background, which is hardly bright and optimistic, or whether the differences would be more than conspicuous.” (Radoman, 2011: 12).

Family is the primary mechanism by which extremism is interiorized. However, it is not a cause, given that the changes stemming from structural circumstances also occurred

within the family. Radoman wrote that “Today’s efforts to establish a stable democratic society in Serbia are being sabotaged, conditionally speaking, by the second generation of the nationalist current (i.e. by the circles close to the Serbian Orthodox Church, the remaining appointees of political parties who served the Milošević regime and members of Russophile conservative options, notably the Democratic Party of Serbia and New Serbia, but also the Serbian Progressive Party), as well as by the extreme right-wing reactionary Russophiles, i.e. the Serbian Radical Party. The efforts to establish a democracy are also hindered by the economic crisis.” (*Ibid*: 10)

The analysis is based on the survey the Helsinki Committee conducted with the youth in Sandžak in May 2016. The focus was on their attitude towards religious extremism, whereas the goal to contextualize the findings: to see how to recognize and understand Islamic extremism and what could be done – preventively and concretely – considering the factors that have influenced the Sandžak youth.

No doubt, interviewees’ attitudes towards extremism – or their everyday experience – differ from theoretical considerations of the phenomenon. The very notion of extremism is indisputable. In 2013 I wrote that mainstream social forces of individual societies were arbitrarily determining the notion of extremism. Official codification of political extremism and radicalism make it possible for governments and other political factors to place all those opposing the values such as equality, freedom, democracy, rule of law, etc. under control or control those advocating these values in the manner that contradicts a government’s interests. On the other hand, radicalism (or extremism) gauged by “political correctness” is being determined, as a rule, by the manner or scope in which a certain value is considered either unquestionable or unacceptable. And in all this, decision-makers and the majority of population need not see eye to eye. For instance, according to many opinion polls, the majority of Serbia’s population discriminates sexual minorities, national minorities, some religious minorities and, especially fenced off communities such as Roma. By the standards of political correctness decision-makers term such standards – notwithstanding its predominance – extremist and “expel” them from media space.

Extremism is deep-rooted in social structures. “The emergence of extreme right-wing and rightist ideology in Serbia derive from structural changes following on the disintegration of the socialist state. The 1990s wars, inspired by the idea of recomposition of

the Balkans - or the Greater Serbia idea - are only one of many ideological bases on which the right-wing thought still lives; and its basic characteristics are: ethnic homogenization, wish to have ethnic and state borders 'merged,' anticommunism and denial of antifascism, the growingly stronger traditionalism and authoritarianism, the Eastern Orthodoxy seen as superior to other religions and ethnic groups (especially Croats, Muslims and Albanians), resistance to multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism, and intolerance of 'new' (LGBT population) and traditional minorities (Roma)," writes Sonja Biserko in 2014.

To what extent is Islamic, religious extremism spread in Sandžak? In June 2015 in Novi Pazar Snežana Ilić quoted the ICG report "Serb Sandžak still Forgotten" saying that there were some 300 Wahhabis in Sandžak who were not exactly organized, that only some 50 of them were active, but the movement was spreading anyway. According to the said report, Wahhabism emerged in Sandžak in 1997, triggered off by an imam wanting his believers in a mosque to pray in a different way. The believers had opposed the imam and sent him away. However, over the past couple of years Wahhabis have better organized themselves in Sandžak, while getting more and more funds from abroad for their movement. Many of them were going to work in Vienna; apparently to be recruited in a way, since they dressed and behaved like true Wahhabis once back home.

Snežana Ilić believes that the highest authorities of the Islamic Community in Serbia have been using Wahhabis in several ways. For instance, they have been presenting themselves internationally as someone capable of controlling Bosniaks' religious radicalism by the principle of Islamic legitimacy. The message they have been putting across to Western diplomats and governments runs, "Give us a free hand, we must advocate Islamization of the society as that is the only way of keeping religious radicals under control."<sup>1</sup>

1 [http://www.slobodnaevropa.org/content/most\\_koliko\\_jak\\_vehabizam\\_bih/2139765.html](http://www.slobodnaevropa.org/content/most_koliko_jak_vehabizam_bih/2139765.html).

## **PLANNED SAMPLE, RESEARCH METHOD AND ANALYSES**

The survey questionnaire was developed by Izabela Kisić, Stefan Stefanović and Srđan Barišić. It combines open and closed questions. The closed questions had, quite appropriately, an “open” option for an answer. Had it been otherwise, the researchers would hardly recognize the true meaning of interviewees’ answers: they wouldn’t know what the latter had in mind when opting for some of alternatives, whether they really understood these alternatives or just “recognized” them, more or less. The open option in closed questions made the findings collected valid; in other words, it made them manifest of the phenomenon under research.

In the survey focusing the generation of younger adults I conducted for the Helsinki Committee in 1999 I almost entirely used the questions with open answers. This is how I explained the reason why (Ilić, 2000), “Open answers placed successively greatly reduce the possibility of conformist answers that are quite frequent when interviewees are either confused or afraid to provide information about the issues they consider delicate. Open answers are usually avoided for organizational and financial reasons: first, collection and classification of survey findings calls for qualified personnel and, second, such experts have to be paid adequately. But the advantages of open questions fully justify their use: such questions make it possible for interviewees to speak their minds – as they do not have to pick up one of the alternatives on the table – as well as to put into words all the associations and connotations they have when thinking about the problem under research.” Or to put it simply, the use of open questions results in new knowledge and does not boil down a survey to a simple check of existing assumptions. And this is especially important in researches of the topics the theoretical knowledge of which is not reliable and integrated, which is the case with the problem this paper discusses. Nonetheless, the open questions must not be idealized: the data thus collected are unavoidably scattered, whereas leaving more room to interviewees’ empty phraseology. On the other hand, while open questions make it harder to test existing assumptions, they do result in new knowledge and enable quality interpretation and analysis.

On the whole, the combination of open and closed questions used in this survey is acceptable: the answers are less scattered and, hence, more clearly analyzed. Every sociologist has a research style of his or her own. All that matters is that data collected are valid and descriptive of the phenomenon under research.

What about the manner in which the questions are formulated and the level of their aggressiveness in the combination used in this survey? Ever since Kinsey delicate subject are being researched, at least occasionally, by posing suggestive questions. Here the researchers opted for neutral questioning. Only interpretation of the findings and the possibilities for analysis the data collected provides can justify the choice they made.

Before analyzing the findings, I need to say a word or two about the sample. The area the survey covers includes municipalities of Novi Pazar, Turin, Sjenica and Prijepolje. High school students were questioned while at their classes, whereas adults in their homes. The researchers wanted the sample to mirror the structure of population according to the latest census by its major social and demographic characteristics. And they wanted to have equal number of male and female interviewees. But many of male ones refused to partake because some questions were about the Islamic State. And it was sometimes hard to make young people from rural areas of these municipalities answer the questions.

And how does the structure of the sample applied reflect the above-mentioned characteristics?

Out of total number of interviewees, 200 are high school students 18-19 years of age. The rest are also younger people, which is quite understandable considering the purpose of the research - except for 7 older ones, all of them are 20-32 years old. Male interviewees make up 52 percent and female 48. Fourteen percent of them live in the country. And only logically, just 10 percent are married,<sup>2</sup> 2% are divorced, 1% are widowed, and only two persons live in partnerships; only 15% have jobs, whereas 1% are farmers; the rest are unemployed or still studying; 37% have finished elementary school (including those still in high schools), 42% high schools, 2% higher schools and 16% are university graduates; 2% have master degrees; 88% are Muslims, 10% Orthodox and 1% - atheists.

2 All percentages are presented in round numbers for the sake of clarity.

The latest statistics of /un/employment confirm the researchers' assumptions about economic status of young residents of Sandžak: 3% of interviewees said they could afford food but not clothing; 38% said they could afford food and clothing but not things such as TV sets or fridges; as many as 32% could afford cars, including 21% who could buy whatever they wished to. The information obtained is almost stunning: judging by replies, young citizens of Sandžak are much better off than most of their peers in Serbia.

## **ISOLATION AND PASSIVITY OF THE SANDŽAK YOUTH**

When asked, “What is, in your opinion, the biggest problem of your community?” the interviewees provided a three-figure number of utterly scattered answers. The only answer given more frequently was one indicating to unemployment (frequency - 30%), while the frequency of the answers saying “poverty” and “water supply” was hardly bigger than 1%. Violence, crime, bad governance, minority rights, etc, actually all the answers characteristic of this type of surveys, was hardly an answer provided in this one. Even 30% of interviewees identifying unemployment as the biggest problem are much less than the expected percentage of the future unemployed young people. What is most obvious also is the absence of any contextual social consciousness.

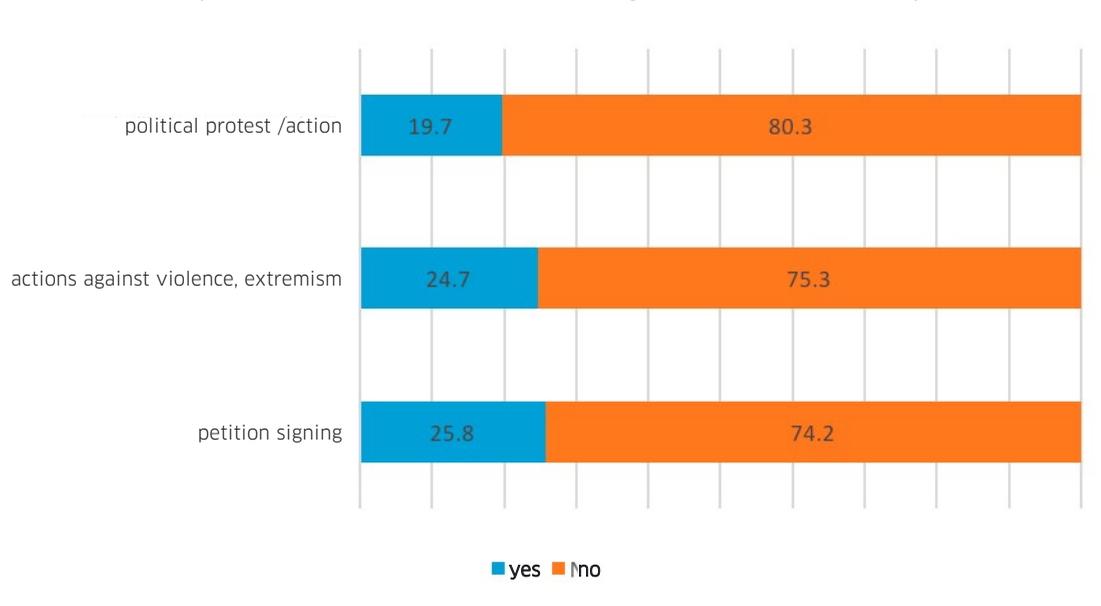
However, the findings in the second series of the answers to the same question are somewhat different. Unemployment is the biggest problem to 40% of interviewees, while corruption, partisan disputes, “people’s mentality” and lack of drinking water to 4%. Posing open questions with several answer options proved to be fully justified: interviewees actually spoke out their subconscious views. This finding is more significant in practical than methodological sense: it indicates that the Sandžak youth are mature enough to realize what pressing social problems are but up to now no one has asked them to have their say - and young people, therefore, had not identified them. When asked, “Who do you think is responsible for solving these problems?” most of them said either “the state” or “Serbia” (almost 41%), or local self-government (9%). Other answers were so dispersed that the frequency of each was below 1%; no interviewee seemed to be aware of the possibility of civil activism.

Six percent of interviewees did respond to the question, “Would you say you could personally help solving some of the problems of your community?” As for those who did, 42% said they thought they could make a change, whereas 58% provided answers so dispersed that each had the frequency smaller than 1%. This includes answers such as “no interested in,” “impossible to,” “not in the position to,” “not a party members,” etc. Those thinking otherwise provided answers such as “It all depends on the change of the regime,” or “Anyone who really wants to do something, can.” The answers above indicate

that they are “politically illiterate” – and such “illiteracy” could be explained by the factors that have influenced their growing up and living conditions.

And the above can be additionally verified by the answers to the following two questions: asked “Have you, over the past year, taken part in actions such as petitioning, campaigning against violence or political protests?” with two options for answers, as many as 22% of interviewees said they had signed a petition, 20% had actively participated in campaigns against violence and extremism, and 16% in political protests.<sup>3</sup>

Have you taken part in the following action in the past year:

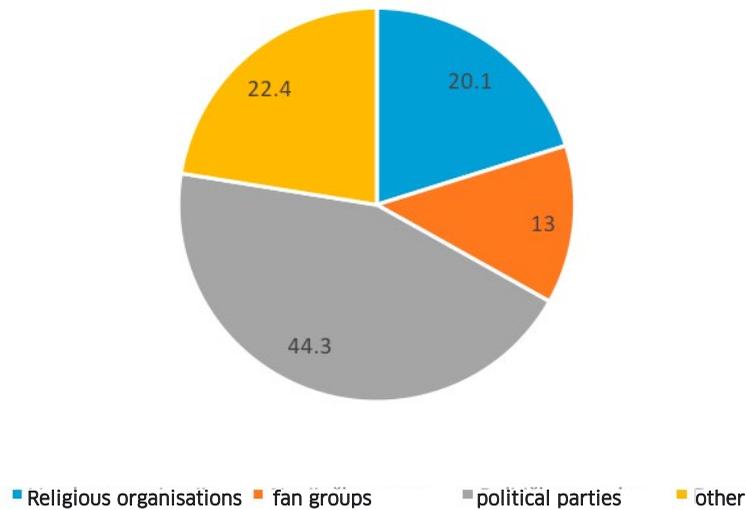


<sup>3</sup> The difference between those presented in the graph and in the text is deliberate; namely, the graph shows the percentage of interviewees who answered the question and is more interpretive, though not fully conclusive. .

When asked about activism in religious organizations, football fan groups and political parties, 23% of interviewees said they were in political parties, 13% in fan groups (here the percentage should be doubled, to put it roughly, considering the gender-balanced structure of interviewees), while 10% were active in religious organizations.<sup>4</sup>

How to explain the findings as such? First of all, it must be said that the researchers were right to ask separately about the possibility for activism and actual activism. Thus the last two questions actually test interviewees' trust in interviewers and their

Do you actively participate in the activities  
of any of the following organisations:



4 Ibid.

sincerity. Three fifths of them (58%) take their activism could hardly change anything in their community; and this percentage is close to that “socially inactive” in the total sample (therefore, one should take into account the information related to the entire sample, rather than only graphs illustrative only of answers to individual questions). Many interviewees are socially active, this way or another.

But who and what influence their social activism/passivity, its type and intensity? In search for these channels, the researchers asked, “Should you have to make a major decision (such as, say, on moving to another town/country) whom would you inform first?” In other words, they wanted to know who the figures important to young residents of Sandžak were. The answers clearly indicated that most important to the young were their parents and siblings or emotional partners (mother – 61%, father – 29%; spouses/boyfriends/girlfriends – 12%; both parents – 10%; siblings – 5%). Only 0.5% would have consulted a church dignitary and 3% someone else. In brief, families are those that shape young people’s minds and make the context of their thinking.

Interviewees were asked to gauge – on the scale 1-4 – their confidence in their families, friends, church dignitaries, neighbors, teachers, people of the same religion, people of some other religion, the police, politicians, the army, the media, NGOs, judiciary, local self-government, people from different countries in Europe, and people from different non-European countries.

Eighty-eight percent trust their family members the most, 25% their friends, 11% church dignitaries, 3.5% their neighbors, 5% their teachers, 9.5% the people of same religion, 6% the people of some other religion, 5% the police, 2% politicians, 8% the army, 0.3% the media, 2% NGOs, 2% judiciary, 5% local self-government, and 3% the people from different countries in Europe and different non-European countries. These findings are interesting in many ways. The frequencies of the answers about the people/institutions the interviewees trust not at all would be superfluous – the findings are more than consistent.

More than poor trust in the media, politicians, the police, judiciary and local self-government testify of the interviewees’ real consciousness: these are all institutions not in the citizens’ service in Serbia. Somewhat bigger trust placed in the army is the more so interesting since the survey was conducted five months after the “helicopter” affair. Little

trust in NGOs should be considered an alarm signal. Leaning on family members exclusively testifies of intense social “dedifferentiation” in Sandžak (and most probably in the entire Serbia). Namely, against chaotic social background, social organization is being re-structured at lower levels: when everything else becomes instable and unpredictable, all that remains in one’s family.

Comparing the percentage of interviewees active in political parties with those trusting not politicians at all leads one to one conclusion only: the youth in Sandžak, like their peers all over Serbia, are politically active just to manage to get some good jobs. While in the communist era political activism used to be a precondition to managerial posts, it has now become the precondition for getting any job whatsoever in the public sector.

Distrust in one’s neighbors is practically alarming, especially in the society in which people consider only members of their families and partners as “theirs.” It indicates that the time has come when “everyone is at war with everyone else” in the ruthless struggle to survive. And only one-fourth of the interviewees trust their friends.

Answers about trusting Muslims and people of other religions differ little from the above. It should be noted that inter-ethnic or inter-religious incidents are not characteristic of Sandžak though violence is.

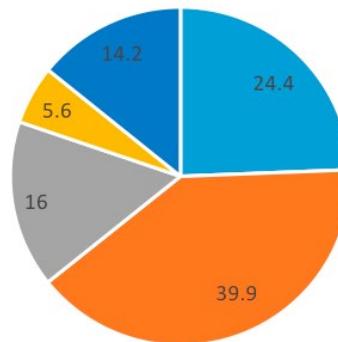
Eleven percent of interviewees trusting religious dignitaries not only indicates the direction of further analysis but also calls for interpretation of young Sandžak residents’ religiousness.

## PIETY OF THE INTERVIEWEES

The analysis will focus only on the findings of the answers by those who actually provided them. Just a few refused to answer this question – about 5% of the total sample.

Speaking of the answers to the question, “Which of the answers below best reflects your opinion about the role of a religious community?” the findings were as follows:

Influence of the religious community in the local surroundings

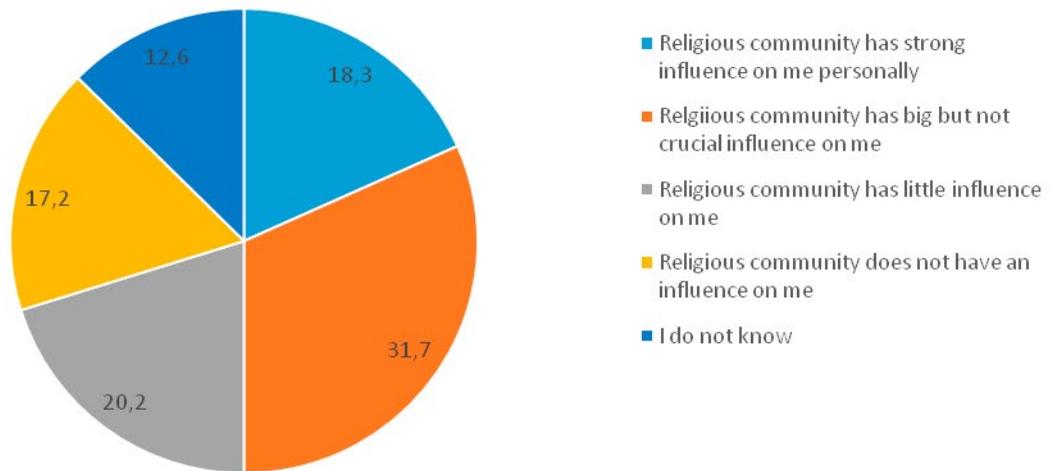


- Religious community has strong influence on my local community
- The influence of a religious community on my local community is strong but not crucial
- Religious community has only little influence on my local community
- Religious community does not have any influence in my local community
- I do not know

Twenty-four percent of interviewees said the influence of a religious community on their surroundings was extremely big, whereas 24% replied ‘big’ though not decisive.

The graph below shows their answers about their own piety:

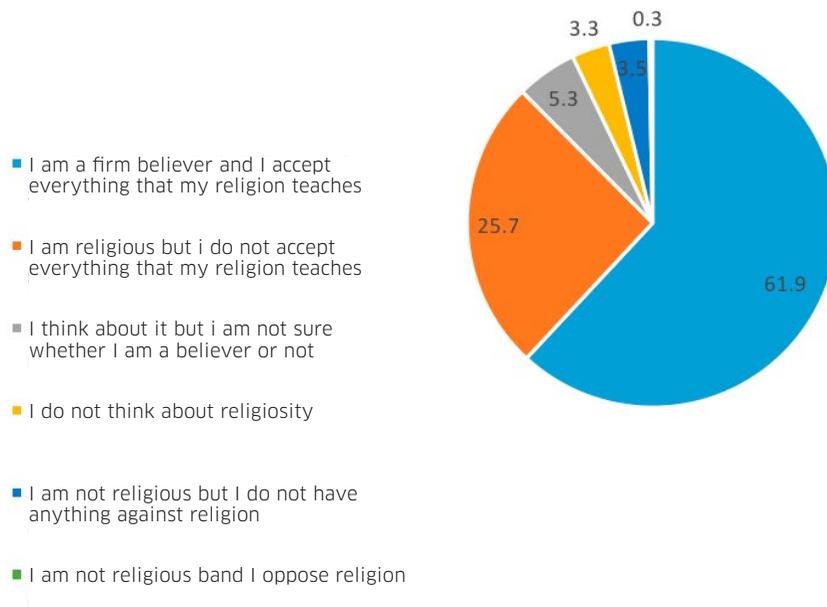
### Influence of a religious community on the respondents:



So, 18% said there were under strong religious influence and another 32% under big but not decisive.

The following were the findings of their answers to the question with these options to tick off: 1. I am a true believer and follow all the teachings of my religion; 2. I am religious but do not follow all the teachings; 3. I am still considering religion and am still not quite sure if I am a believer or not; 4. I don't even think about religion; 5. I am not religious but have nothing against religion; 6. I am not religious and strongly oppose religion:

Which of the following describes you best:

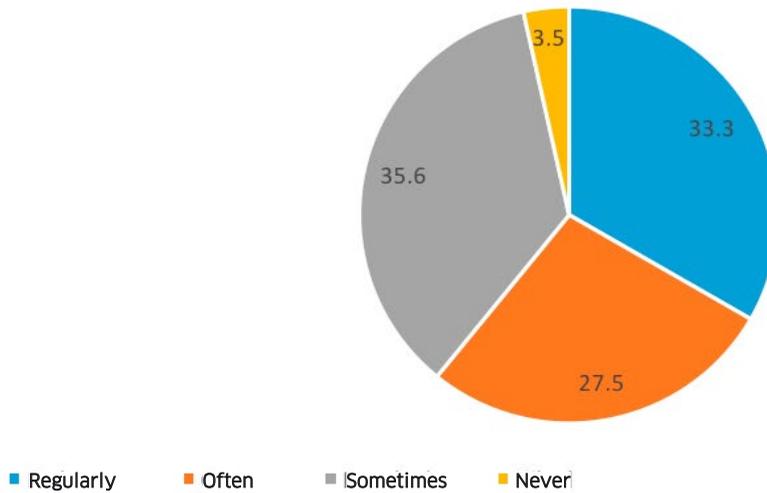


As many as 61% claimed they were true believers and accept all the teachings. Another 25.5% saying they were believers but do not accept all the teachings should be added to this.

One should bear in mind that 88% were Muslims, 10% Orthodox and 1% atheists. The fact that they would be considered separately or that the Orthodox would be included as well will not reduce the clarity of the analysis.

Further on, the interviewees were asked, “How often do you profess? (*Muslims – how often do you pray? Christians – how often do you go to the church?*). Thirty-three percent were worshipping regularly, 27% often and 36% occasionally. The Sandžak Muslim youth turned to be strongly religious at the level of praying; the same applied to the Orthodox.

How often do you practice your faith



When asked, “How often do you bow to Allah/do you attend Sunday liturgy/mass regularly?) 36% replied “regularly” and another 28% said “occasionally.” Institutional religiosity is somewhat weaker than ritual.

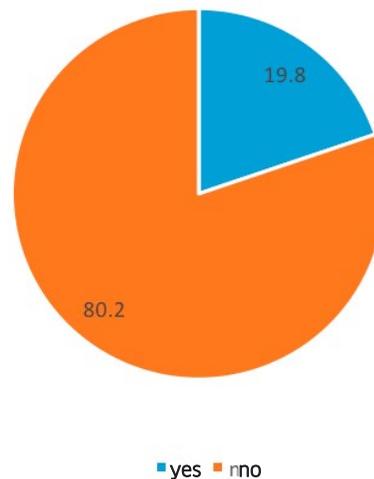
Thirty-three percent are praying regularly, 52 occasionally and 10 only exceptionally. The findings of this control question visibly correspond to the answers to the one about professing one’s religion. Answers provided to the question, “Do you fast?” showed that 73% are fasting regularly and 22% occasionally: the correspondence being once again rather high, no matter whether interviewees were Muslims or Orthodox, and the percentage of those not practicing any religious customs very small. Religious self-identification of the interviewees was once again testified. Asked about reading religious literature/press 23% said they did regularly, 50% occasionally and another 12% here and there only. And then asked what kind of literature they were reading, 12% replied “Koran,” while the rest quoted various Islamic and Orthodox theologians and writers. Their answers indicated that they were reading religious literature, both Islamic and Orthodox, chaotically, without a plan.

The next question better touched on the main subject of the research – “Is defending one’s religion by the use of violence justified?”

Even as many as one-fifth of the interviewees said it was. Though their explanations were dispersed some of them are quite interesting: “If it needs, we shall defend it with our lives,” “Fight fire with fire,” “When it comes to having to defend something one cannot refer to violence of those defending it,” “Allah is one and only,” “You can if there is no other choice,” etc. Their arguments are obviously at the level of everyday consciousness and tell of the absence of their theological education.

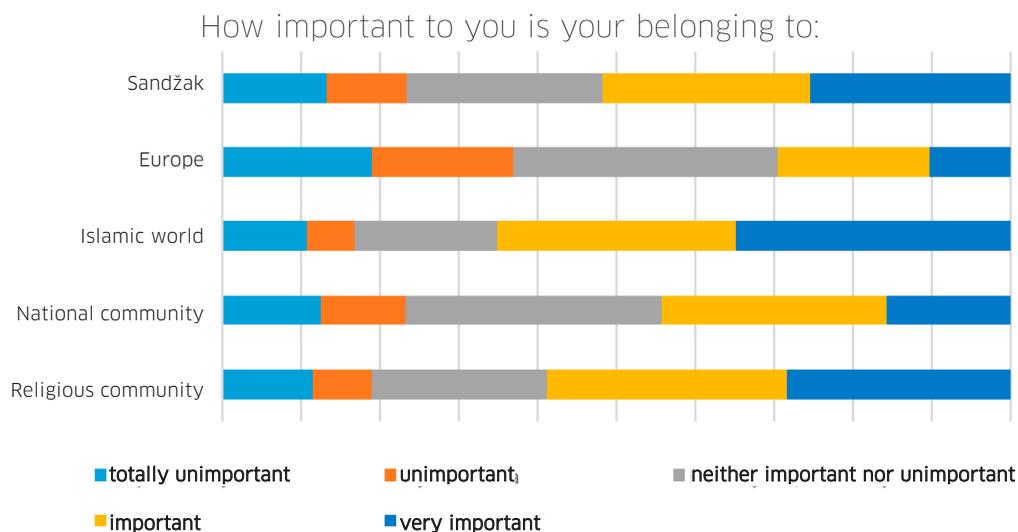
The answers “no” include the following: “There are many other ways,” “Islam is the religion of peace,” “Islam implies no violence, it professes love,” etc. There is no need here to compare the contents of Koran with the interviewees’ empirical consciousness.

Is it justifiable to defend one’s faith with violence?



The next question was psychologically well positioned: asked, “Whom would you turn to if in trouble?” 20% named their families, 12% their fathers and 10% mothers. Only 4% would ask a friend for help, some 3% the police and authorities, and only 1% would pray to Allah/God. Their complete trust in their families is once again evident – which can only partially be explained by their age.

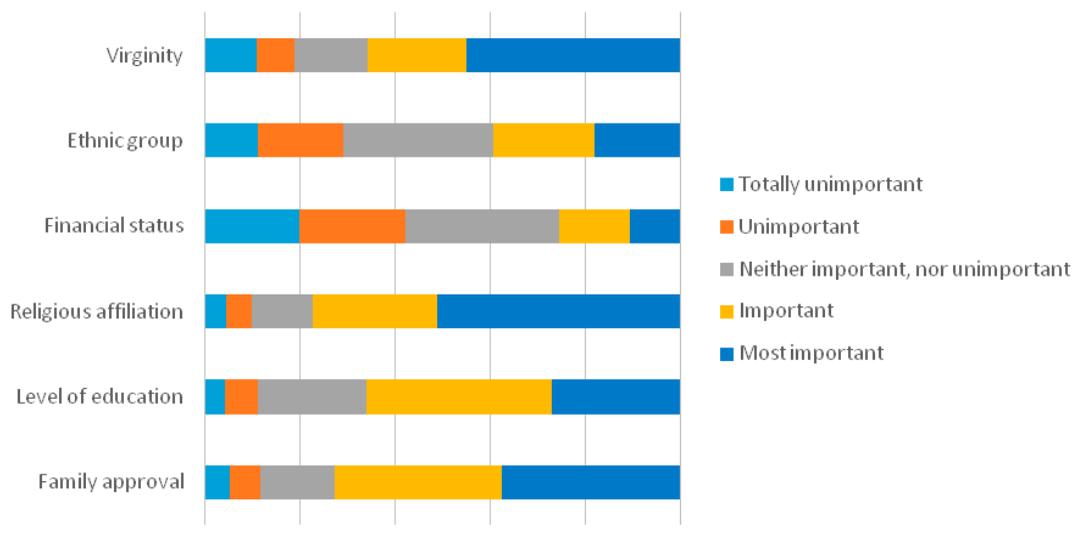
The following graph shows their answers to the question, “How important to you is your belonging to a religious community/ethnic community/Islamic Community/Islamic world/Europe/Sandžak?”



Being a part of a religious community is most important to 57%; an ethnic community to 44%; Islamic world to 64%; Europe to 28%; Sandžak to 50%. Bosniak interviewees self-identify themselves with Islam more than with ethnicity. The percentage of those saying that Islamic world has nothing to do with their identities corresponds to the percentage of Orthodox Christian interviewees. In other words, young Muslims in Sandžak more or less identify themselves with the Islamic world. And every action taken in this direction must be carefully planned in this context.

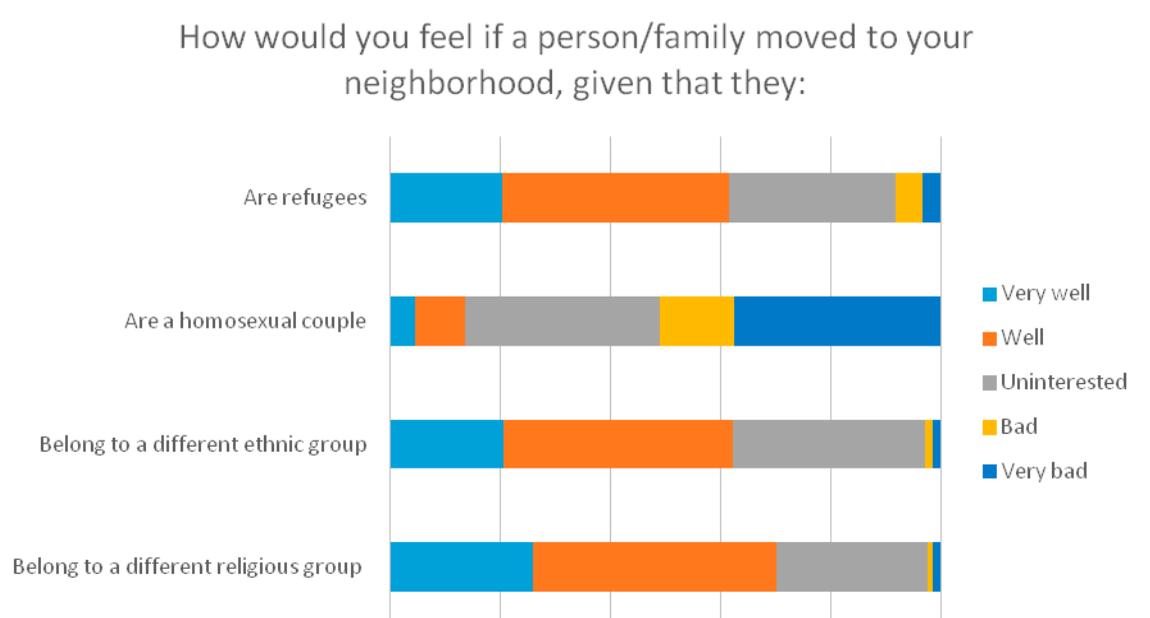
The following answers were given to the question, “How much it matters to you that your family approves of your partner/education/religious beliefs/financial status/ethnicity/virginity?”

When choosing a partner, how important it is



Family's approval of one's partner is quite unimportant to 5%; education to 4%; what religion one's partner is of no significance to 4.5%, whereas his/her financial status to 20% and ethnicity and virginity to 11% each. Interestingly, there is just a tiny difference between boys' and girls' answers when it comes to virginity – which is of no importance to 9% of the interviewed boys and to 13% of the girls. No doubt, young women in Sandžak are deeply conservative; a girl's virginity is most important to 50% of boys, and important to another 18%; as for girls the percentages are 39 and 24 respectively. And they are conservatives by other indicators as well. Being well-off is not only assumed as a precondition to successful partnership in the poor country but also an indicator of a value system. The importance attached to religious and ethnic affiliation needs to be further commented on.

The researchers used one of the items of the Bogardus scale of social distance by asking, “What would you say if a person or a family of other religion/ethnicity/sexual affiliation, a homosexual couple/refugee settles in your neighborhood?” The graph below presents the findings:



Having a person or a family of other religion in the neighborhood would resent only 1.5%; the same percentage applies to newcomers of other ethnicity; 3% would not approve of refugees, and as many as 37% of a homosexual couple. I believe these findings are correct but do not take them valid. Twenty years ago only S. Cvejić and I proved that the Boradus scale could not be applied in this regions – it breaks not the barrier of conformism (Ilić, Cvejić, 1997). I believe that the frequency of denial of Others/Different is much higher than the one of those findings.

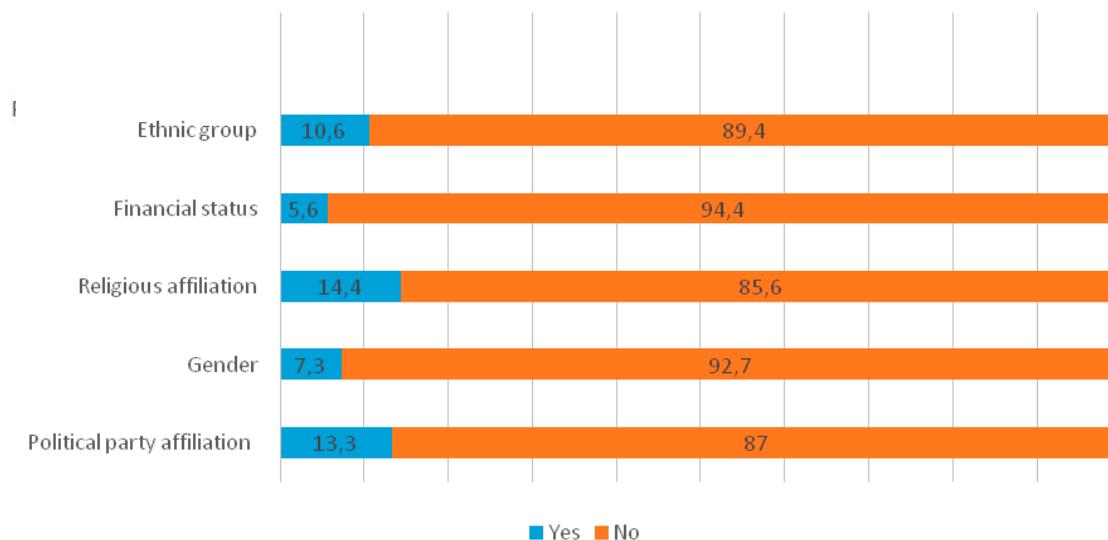
The researchers asked the interviewees to what extent would they agree with the following stands: "Everyone has the right to profess his/her religion as long it this threatens not the people in his/her surroundings;" "A women must cover herself;" "Freedom implies the freedom of expression whether or not what is said insults one's religious group;" "Violence is justified when used to defend one's beliefs;" "Gender equality is good in a marriage but it is much better when the husband has the last say." The questions were asked in a form of the Lickard scale. I am myself avoiding such questions but admit that some were well-formulated. Here are some of the findings testifying of discrimination.

The right to profess one's religion but not at the detriment of the people around him/her - both Islam and Christianity preach - is largely approved of; only 4% deny it more or less. Less than 20% are against women having to cover themselves (here one should take into consideration that there were 10% of Christians in the sample), 39% agree and another 40% "neither agree nor disagree." As for the latter, one should assume with good reason that they also take covered women a must - which was not identified since the question had been posed as an item of the Lickard scale that breaks not the barrier of conformism. The stance about the freedom of expression - a test of tolerance - is fully approved by 17%, plus 15% of those who approve. Hence, the great majority disagrees with it. It is not allowed either by the provisions of the Criminal Code. This means not that most of the interviewees are religiously intolerant; the finding just shows that they are not exactly liberal about different, insulting views. Justification of violence in the defense of one's beliefs additionally tests the findings of the previous question about violence and one's religion. Namely, four fifths of interviewees said they were against the use of violence in the defense of one's religion. Now the findings are more nuanced but not in contradiction with preceding ones: 9% fully approve, another 8% do approve, 19% neither approve nor disapprove, 35% disapprove, while 29% disapprove strongly. Given the said limitations of the Lickard scale, it can be rightfully claimed that about one-fifth of interviewees advocate violence.

Gender equality in a marriage but the last say invested in the husband is strongly opposed by 14% and opposed by another 19%. Less than 20% opposing covered women as a must testifies that patriarchalism and masculinism are more frequent than the wish not to have one's women exposed to the eyes of other men. A conclusion that one-fifth of the interviewees are fundamentalists, and one-third patriarchal would be rush. And yet, coefficient of correlation between answers to these two questions is 0.34.

The interviewees were asked if they had ever seen themselves discriminated against because of: party membership, gender; financial status; religion; ethnicity.

### Did you ever feel discriminated against because of:



Thirteen percent of the interviewees said they had felt themselves discriminated because of party affiliation; 7% because of their gender; 6% on the account of their financial status; 11% because of their ethnicity, and 14% for their religious beliefs. What is interesting is how they explained their feelings.

Those discriminated for party membership accused their principles, schoolmates, public facilities denying them internship, local self-governments, members of the same party, professors, the opposing party on daily basis given that its activists have better access to jobs, etc.

The discriminated against on the account of their gender named their former employers, pals, co-workers, the society as a whole (where men are considered superior to women), and the like. This percentage, however, is small when compared with the omnipresent discrimination and patriarchy: speaking of which, we shall recall that 14% of the interviewees had strongly disagreed with the stance about the gender equality in a marriage but a husband having the last say, whereas another 19% had been against it.

Gender inequality had been acceptable to three-thirds of the interviewees. And the stance about mandatory coverage for women had been opposed by less than 20% (including 10% of Christians in the sample). The Sandžak youth are by far less aware of sexual/gender discrimination than prone to articulating discriminatory stances.

More of them felt discriminated against because of their beliefs than ethnicity. Speaking of the former feeling they accused girls of some other religion, schoolmates, the state of Serbia, governmental institutions, citizens of Kragujevac (“The town I live in, where citizens are spreading hatred for Islam”), the internet, neighbors, the Orthodox, etc.

Some of the answers about ethnically-based discrimination were: the state of Serbia, governmental institutions (for being a Bosniak), the Ministry of Education and the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences for having obstructed publication of Bosniak history textbooks for months, some teachers, the staff of the Technical Faculty in Belgrade, and the like. Regardless of whether or not they had been really discriminated in real life, one should bear in mind the fact that the feeling of being discriminated against is strengthened by a real cause as assessed by theoreticians of ethnic competition and ethnic segregation (Hechter, 1978; Belanger, 1991); actually, the feeling of discrimination is a powder keg just waiting for a spark.

## THE SANDŽAK YOUTH, SECURITY AND ISIS

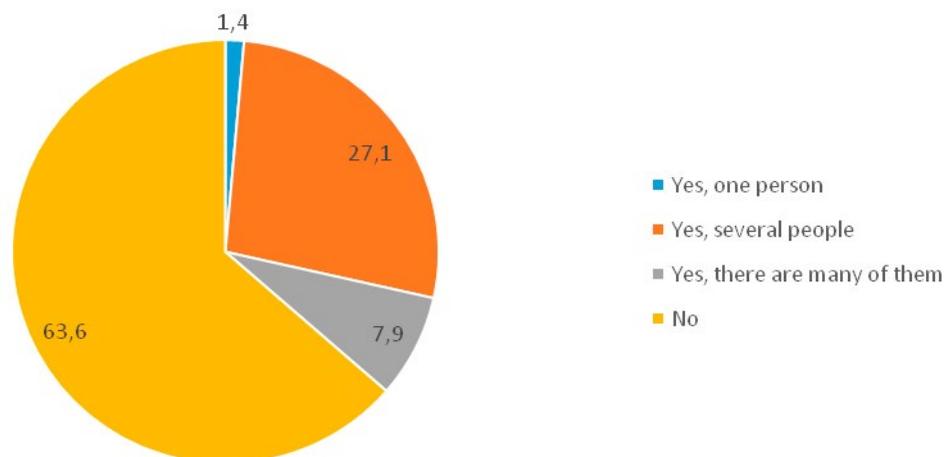
With good reason, the researchers started interviewing about this crucial subject by posing more general and less delicate questions. Asked, “How would you describe the security situation in your town?” 95% said it was very bad, 30% called it bad, 36% - good, and 7% - very good. The rest could not assess the situation of the town they were living in. And then, their answers to the question, “What is the biggest security problem in your town?” were completely scattered: only 4% named traffic and 3.5% bribe and corruption. The question itself was properly worded: though incapable of articulating security problems, 31% provided good contextual answers, and just 3.5% said there were no security problems at all. At the level of individual consciousness they are aware of them but cannot articulate them as general notions. The findings indicate that such problems are there but those directly affected do know how to identify them but not how to ascribe them to notions or express their feeling about them.

Asked “Is there a threat of terrorism in Serbia?” 24% replied affirmatively, while 75% negatively. Only 45% of the interviewees answered the question “Why do you think there is?” calling for their explanation. None of total 305 answers appeared with the frequency bigger than 0.3%. They do hear of terrorism but are not capacitated and socialized for thinking about it or articulating a socially and/or politically crystallized stance about it. Some of their answers refer to Wahhabis but also the claims about “peaceful residents” of Sandžak or “terrorism being foreign to true Muslims.”

The findings showed that to them extremism was a complex, multidimensional and contextualized notion. When asked, “What is extremism in your opinion?” only 20% did provide an answer. This can be partially explained by their inadequate understanding of the notion itself, though more ascribed to their anxieties and conformism. The question thus worded was not piercing enough. Their answers included terms such as violence, intolerance or disrespect for law; imposing a religion with the use of force, violent behavior, something bad and the like were less frequent. To put it simply, the question itself “did not work.” The next one, “Are there individuals or groups with extremist stances in your community?” offered the choices: yes, one person; yes, several people; yes, there

are many of them; and, no. About two-thirds of the interviewees answered it, as presented in the graph below.

### Are there individuals or groups with extremist stances in your community?

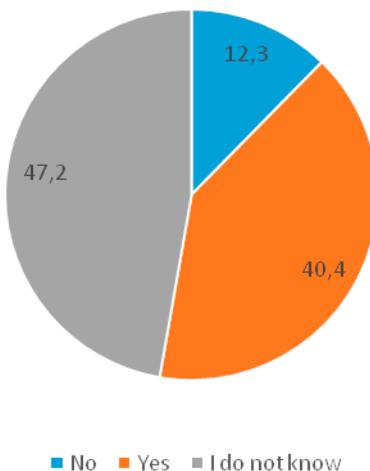


Out of 35% practically everyone knows more than one person as such. Ninety-one percent answered the question, "If there are, do they propagate their extremist stands?" Compared with the answers to the previous question, obviously some 70% did not want to say anything to this more concrete one. This is testified by the graph below:

It is clear that they were avoiding talking about the subject. The total of 235 interviewees said they did know extremists; however, only 97% confirmed that these people were propagating extremism. Extremists can only be identified by their concrete acts or, more frequently, by extremist stands they express. The difference shown in absolute numbers is telling of their evasiveness to discuss extremism.

The researchers then asked them about the manner in which extremists were propagating their goals. The answers they got included social networks, web portals, and religious facilities, in the community, in schools or in some other way. How does this operate?

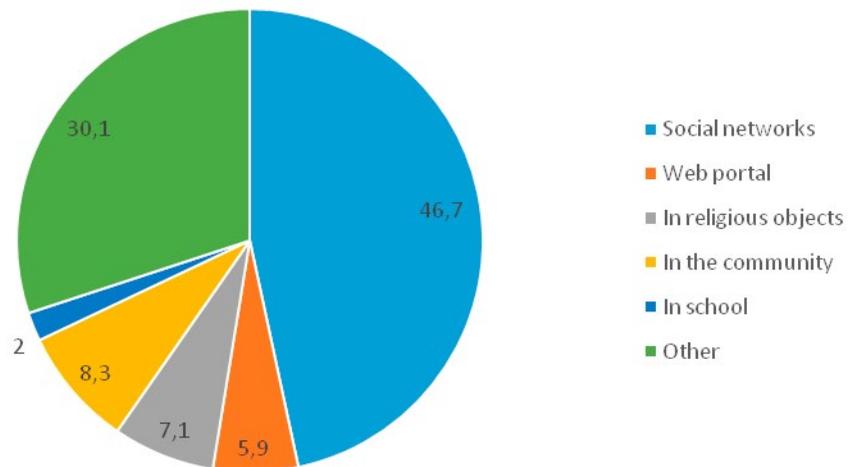
If there are, do these people propagate their extremist stands to others?



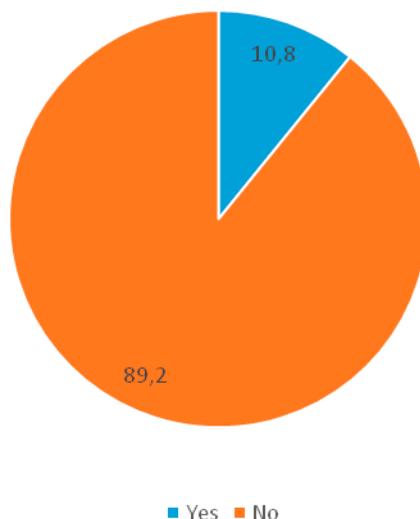
The findings above are significant - methodologically and practically. They involve 62% of the interviewees, actually those who did reply. The total number of interviewees aware of extremist propaganda is bigger - first it grew from 97 to 235, and now jumped to 409. The youth in Sandžak are well informed about religious extremism but hesitate to speak about it. Looking at the frequencies, one can see the predominance of social networks and internet but of religious facilities and the community too, the difference between the two being insignificant.

Their answers to the question, “**Why would you say they are expressing their extremist stands?**” were completely dispersed – none of them appeared with the frequency higher than 1%. One can assume with good reason that either conformism or fear prevented them from answering the question posed in a noninvasive and neutral form (*Cf.* Kinsey, 1948; Kinsey, 1953).

### How do they propagate their goals?



The question **“Would you say it is justified to go to some other country for a war?”** called for a dichotomous answer – yes or no.



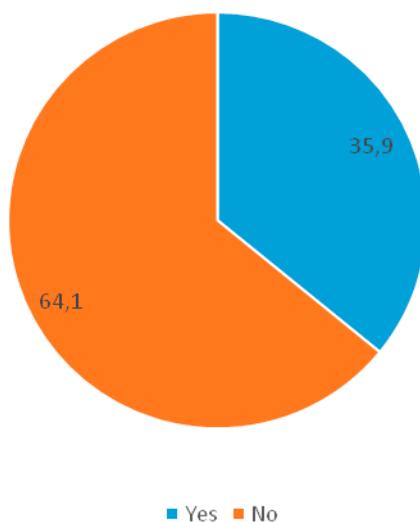
It remained unanswered by 7% of the interviewees, whereas 9.5% replied affirmatively. The latter provided answers such as “Yes, if the goal is to defend the innocent;” “Yes, if it defends the teachings of Allah;” “Yes, if your religion has been threatened;” “Yes, if you are defending your faith and rights, and saving your people;” “Yes, if you are defending innocent Muslims and warring in the name of justice and truth;” “Yes, if you are helping your Muslim brothers,” etc.

Some said that Islam forbids war; however much more interesting are the answers given by the minority justifying going abroad to wage a religious war. Here two summarized arguments prevail: protection (real or alleged) of threatened Muslims and exercise of the rights. The first thesis is common to every accelerating political mobilization: it is important to see why it is that the notion about endangered Muslims in the regions afflicted by wars is rather spread among the Sandžak youth. Another major element is the perception of rights: insignificant number of the interviewees take that Muslims’ rights in the countries in war are threatened. It does not matter much at this point whether this view is wrong or based on facts. But it does matter that it is taken by not at all insignificant

percentage of the interviewees, which means that some of them could actually follow it in real life.

Scattered answers to the question, “Why would you say the people from Sandžak are going abroad to wage wars?” testify of confusion in their heads. Some – just a few of them actually – mentioned religious reason. Twenty-eight percent shunned answering to the question, “Do you know what ISIS is?” As for those who answered it, 36% said they did know, and 64% they did not.

Do you know what is ISIL?

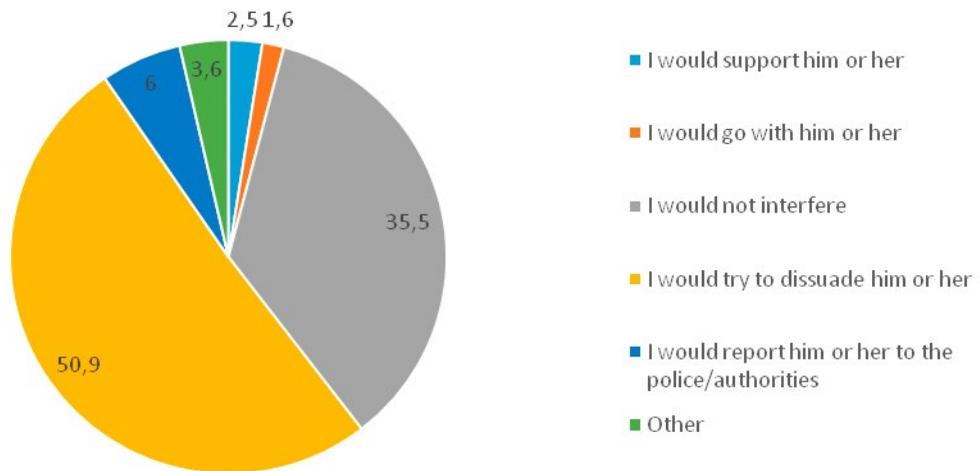


Nineteen percent (or 9% less than those refusing to answer the previous question) avoided answering the question, **“If yes, do you know what they are fighting for?”** Obviously, many young people of Sandžak do not want to discuss Islamic extremism and allow successive questions – even when not exactly well-formulated – break the barrier of their conformism. Though scattered their answers are both indicative and evasive. To the next one, **“Would you call their struggle justified?”** 3% replied affirmatively and 30.5% negatively; the rest claimed they had no opinion about or were not interested in it. Those justifying ISIS cause explained it among other things with “Allah is one and only;” “They are fighting those eager to destroy Islam;” “They are fighting the evil;” “They are defending their people and religion;” “You would also defend your home and family, wouldn’t you?” etc.

It should be noted that overt supporters of ISIL do not quote Muslims’ jeopardized rights in their justifications but only threatened Muslims and Islam as such. Their argumentation is radical: the ISIL struggle equals the struggle for survival. The key question here is how come that such consciousness can persist in the situation of at least minimal media freedoms in Serbia, access to the internet and other sources of information. But one should remember that the young interviewees are socially almost completely isolated, and that most of them trust no one – their neighbors, friends, governmental or religious authorities – but members of their families. And there is no institutional or social support mechanism to alleviate their feeling of ‘loneliness.’ As they have no confidence in institutions, even the network of closer social relations is to them an outside, non-interiorized factor.

The question “**How would you react should you learn that someone close to you wants to go to the Middle East front?**” offered the following choices: “I would support him;” “I would join him;” “I would not interfere;” and “I would report him to the police/authorities.”

How would you react should you learn that someone close to you wants to go to the Middle East front?



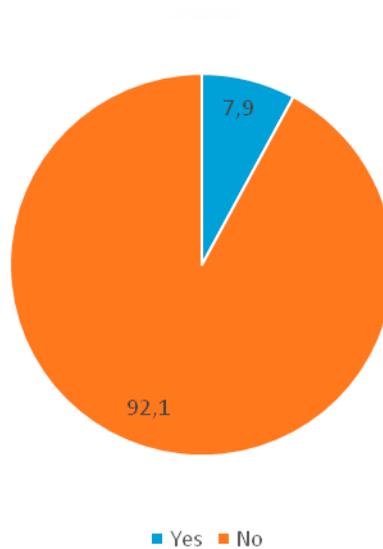
Their answers from which just a few abstained are interesting in many ways. More than one-half of them would try to talk out a friend or cousin of joining the war; 6% would report him to the authorities; more than one-third would not meddle; 2.5% would support him, and 10 interviewees (1.6%) would join ISIL too. If the last answer is seen as genuine, it follows that most of them have no one close who is old enough to join the army, which means that none of his/her peers are close to him/her. On the other hand, considering the earlier findings, it is quite certain that many of those claiming not to meddle do support ISIL.

The researchers posed scores of questions about the knowledge of websites calling the Sandžak youth to join ISIL. Less than 2% said they knew about such sites. The following two paragraphs are quoted from the researchers' notes.

“Out of 12 interviewees knowing about websites just a few provided some answers about the names of these sites. One named ‘The Darker,’ another YouTube while the rest named all social networks. They learned about these sites at Facebook and internet. Asked about the number of visits to these sites and the trust they placed in their contents, 7 said they visited them rarely while 5 claimed never to have visited any. Only 2 interviewees believe in the information provided, the rest do not.

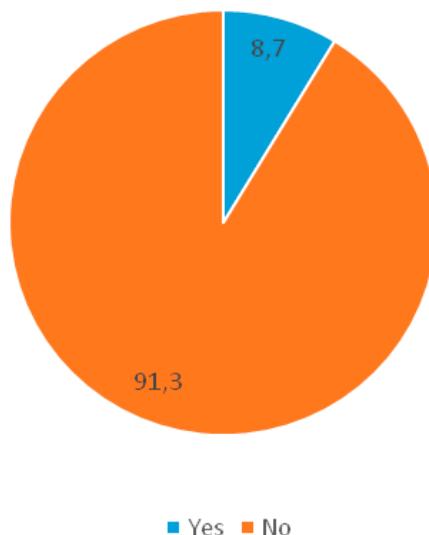
“Only 10 learned about groups at social networks calling people to join ISIL, and just 2 out of them named these groups - ‘Terrorism’ and ‘Islamic State.’ Situation is about the same with their answers about persons mobilizing for ISIL: out of 13, 6 answered the question about who these persons were. Two said there are more of them, 2 - their fellow citizens and acquaintances, one claimed no knowledge about such persons’ identities, and one that he knew one person but that person had been killed in battle. In brief, if their answers are taken as genuine, only 2% trust the websites mobilizing for ISIL.”

The following answers were given to the **question about knowing or not groups or organizations propagating extremist stands:**



Asked to identify these groups, 6 interviewees (1%) quoted Furkan, 5 - ISIL, 4 - Wahhabis, while the rest of the answers appeared only once each (such as fanatics outside the Islamic community, radicals, Serbian Orthodox Church, all religious communities, etc.) Answers such as "I know they exist because I was told so, but having no Facebook profile I don't know exactly" or "There are many of them at YouTube channels" are also interesting. If the interviewees are to be believed, ISIL has been recruiting supporters via internet; this could be true considering the Sandžak youth's isolation and trust in their families only.

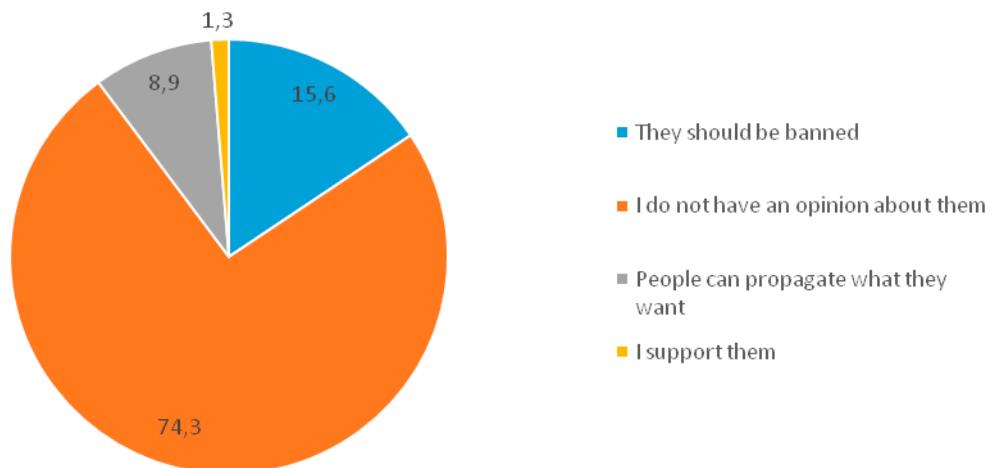
The following graph shows their answers to the **question about knowing or not religious groups or organizations fighting against extremist stands.**



Asked specifically about these organizations, they pointed to religious communities (church, mosque), effendis advocating peace, hodjas, imam, Islamic community, NGO “Lighthouse”, Wahhabi movement, most NGOs, etc.

Then, for the sake of further research of the subject, the interviewees were asked, “Do you know about religious groups/organizations the Islamic Community of Serbia and the Islamic Community in Serbia recognize not?” Less than 54% quoted “Midway,” “Furkan,” “Wahhabis,” “Ehli sunit vel djemat”, “Paradjemati”, “Ryaset”, etc. And the following graph shows their answers to the question about their attitude towards these groups.

What is your attitude about groups that are not recognized by the Islamic Community in Serbia and the Islamic Community of Serbia?



This is not only about acceptance of religious tolerance and the right to religious organization outside “traditional” (privileged) religious community the state of Serbia recognizes; considering the character of some of these groups, the answers are indicative of the extent of the interviewees’ true proneness to Islamic extremism.

## CONCLUSION

The most important finding is that a part – and not an insignificant part – of the Sandžak youth are potentially or even actually open to Islamic extremism. As many as one-fifth of them take defending their religion with violence justified. It needs not reminding that every socially spread violence is justified, as a rule, with “defense.” One out of ten interviewees claims going abroad to defend Islam justified.

Now let’s examine in more detail those advocating extremism. One-fifth of them said it was justified to use violence in the defense of their religion. This sample was almost gender balanced – 64% boys and 36% girls. Most of them, 21% have finished elementary schools, while 19% secondary schools. Twelve percent providing affirmative answers have graduated from universities; 21% unmarried interviewees support violence and 11% those who are married. Unemployment has no influence on their attitude towards religiously justified violence but financial status does: out of those capable not even of affording their food, 25% justify violence; and out of those who can afford to buy food but not clothes, this percentage is 28 when compared with 20% in the entire sample.

The situation is about the same when analyzing their answers to the question about going to another country to fight wars. Sixty-eight percent of boys and 32% girls replied affirmatively. But, by the criterion of education, the difference is not exactly big. Here those married make up just 3%, out of 10% of the married in the entire sample. Secondary school students – the youngest interviewees – are overrepresented (13%) which is a rather significant indicator. Financial status has nothing to do with their affirmative answers to this question.

The Islam youth in Sandžak see themselves more as Muslims than Bosniaks. The findings confirmed this. This is how Sonja Biserko explains it: “The significance Bosniaks attach to the Islamic Community reflects their need for a religion that ensures strengthening of their identity and contributes to social integration. Their need for a stronger identity is an understandable reaction to years of discrimination and social ‘invisibility,’ the police terror, abductions and liquidations during the Bosnian war. The Islamic Community is also a crucial identity matrix for the Bosniak community in the absence of other

institutions. This is why it has been targeted by Belgrade and its 'services' who were after destabilizing it thoroughly" (Biserko, 2010:8).

Most of the Sandžak youth seeing themselves more as Muslims than Bosniaks correspond to how young people from other parts of Serbia see them. When Marija Radoman conducted a survey with young people from Belgrade, Novi Sad, Kruševac, Zrenjanin, Niš and Novi Pazar on traditionalism, homophobia and ethnic stereotypes Bosniaks 'scored better' than Muslims. "It is obvious that Albanians are considered the biggest enemies of the nation (21.2%), then come Croats (15%), Roma (12.3%) and Americans (9.8%)...It should be noted that Bosniaks were not identified as such as it was expected considering the strong campaigning against Sandžak. But this can be explained by the name of their nation - young interviewees have not been used yet to the name of the Muslim minority and, therefore, often do not recognize Bosniaks as Muslims. As for Muslims, they are seen as 'enemies' as in the rubric 'someone else' their most frequent answer was 'Muslims.'" (Radoman, 2011:44).

The Sandžak youth are almost totally impregnated with Islamism but, at the same time, largely isolated and atomized. As they trusted no friends or their neighbors, it was obvious that they hardly made close friends with anyone. Admir Veljović of the Office for the Youth in Prijepolje properly identified the problem at the meeting the Helsinki Committee organized, saying, "Our office is established to provide some services to the young. It answers their needs and develops programs for them. What we are actually doing is providing support mechanism. A young man setting himself towards an abyss was the actual state of affairs at the beginning. But all these small processes we have launched are meant to take strong hold of that young man and make him believe there are chances for him and there are good reasons why he should develop himself in his own community. So, we are working for that one man, so to speak, to stop him in his tracks and tell him that his course is right here" (Veljović, 2010:63). Ivan Kuzminović told the meeting that structural factors in the rest of Serbia were very similar to those in action in Sandžak. "According to the last survey conducted by our colleagues from the Belgrade Faculty of Economy, two-thirds of Serbia's youth face the same problems as you over here, and that's inadequate educational system, unemployment ...and they all want to leave

Serbia. That has been a trend over the past 20 years when some 100-150,000 young people, the best and the brightest, left the country” (Kuzminović, 2010:68).

There are several levels to the approach to the problem of acknowledging Islamic extremism the research has proved as close to a part of the Sandžak youth. One of them implies involvement of the youth themselves, as they are and as they could be; another involves participation of the civil sector; and, the third would be a structural approach calling for large scale governmental planning.

Speaking of the first, Jelena Veljić once suggested some solutions. “My point is as follows: practically whenever we want to cope with a problem we want to have some governmental structure involved; this could function perfectly, but sometimes and more often than not, it is not so. When we need to deal with something want to join a NGO, we want to establish a student or youth organization, and then look for donors who would financially assist us, and then have to adjust our program to their requirements just not to be eliminated, etc. But for the sake of all of us living better we have to focus on some small issues too some people would see as unusual or irrelevant, the issues that cannot change much, that are far from being some national plans or solutions at national level, but issues that help improve living conditions of the people in our community no matter how few they are and may bear fruit financially one fine day; but they will surely pay off in improving our lives and teaching us something, getting us some new experience we would have lacked otherwise,” she said (Veljić, 2010:67-68).

She not only suggested self-organization but also pointed out the inherent limitations of another approach: the bigger role of the civil society in combating Islamic extremism in Sandžak. Donor organizations have their requirements; if they think, contrary to factual state of affairs, that there is no Islamic extremism in Sandžak or that its influence is minimal, any attempt at convincing them to the contrary by facing them with facts could – though need not – be in vain. International organizations are already dealing with plenty of problems in other parts of Europe and beyond; it is only logical that they would try not to add more to their list until – or unless – these other problems escalate.

The third approach – governmental planning of Sandžak’s development – is unrealistic. Except for Belgrade and Novi Sad, the seats of central and regional administration, Serbia is neglected. This applies to Sandžak, the same as to South, East and West Serbia.

Regimes are “afraid” only of centers where resources capable of undermining them are concentrated. Their relatively lasting policy of making alliances with ethnic minority leaders may not be likeable but is understandable from this perspective. The fact that such policy sweeps real problems under the carpet and prevents not them from escalating under some different – though not impossible – circumstances is another story.

To end with, a word or two about possible actions of the civil society. The Sandžak youth mostly trust no one but members of their families: they have no trust in politicians, in religious dignitaries, in their neighbors of the same ethnic origin and religion, in their peers. So, systematic, “family-oriented” activities could be the best course of action in the future.

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