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How do Albanians feel about corruption and serious organised crime (SOC) in 2022?¹

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Summary

This note summarises Albanians' attitudes towards corruption and serious organised crime (SOC) based on a nationally representative survey of 3,003 people conducted between 15 January and 27 February 2022. All Albanians over the age of 18 were eligible to participate in the survey. All interviews were conducted at the household level, face to face, and in Albanian.

This briefing note identifies key patterns and variations in public opinion in order to inform policymakers and lay the foundation for the forthcoming Working Paper on the impact of anti-corruption and anti-SOC messaging.

- 1 For the full research paper, see Cheeseman, N. & Peiffer, C. (2022). *Can Messaging Help Us to Fight SOC and Corruption in Albania?* SOC ACE Research Paper No. 2. Birmingham, UK: University of Birmingham.
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- 4 We are grateful to the FCDO-Albania programme team for working with us on the design of this research, and to the team at IDRA for working with us to conduct the fieldwork. We also thank Niheer Dasandi and Heather Marquette for reviewing previous drafts and providing helpful feedback.



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Key policy-relevant findings

- Albanians believe that corruption and SOC are widespread and represent a major challenge facing the country, and that they have either remained unchanged or become worse in the last five years.
- Partisan (party political) identity heavily shapes these perceptions: supporters of the ruling party believe that corruption and SOC are less prevalent and are more positive about the government's performance.
- There is strong popular support for political action to deal with these issues, but Albanians are sceptical about the government's efforts to do so, with most believing that its efforts have not been effective.
- Experiences of corruption vary considerably: younger Albanians, men, and those in urban areas are more likely to experience corruption and SOC.
- There is some evidence of 'patrimonial' and 'permissive' attitudes towards corruption and SOC. Indeed, 33.71% of respondents agreed that 'sometimes money from organised crime can help the community', while 23.7% agreed that 'sometimes it is ok for government employees to use their position to benefit their community'. These attitudes are likely to impede effective programming in this area.
- Perhaps partly as a result of such attitudes, as well as the risks involved, only a minority of Albanians say that they would report SOC and corruption if they witnessed or experienced it.
- The idea that SOC can have positive impacts is most prevalent among younger Albanians, those with lower educational attainment, rural residents, and those who do not support the ruling party.

1. How do Albanians feel about corruption and SOC?

On the basis of the survey, Albanians believe that corruption is widespread and is a major challenge facing the country; 83.2% of respondents believe that corruption is extremely or very widespread, and 75.6% hold the same view about SOC; and 71.0% of respondents believe that corruption is a very serious problem (the highest category), and an almost identical proportion – 70.9% – say the same about SOC, even though this question asked them to focus on the impact 'in your town or village'. This suggests that while on average Albanians believe that corruption is more widespread than SOC, a marked majority view these as equally significant problems.

This finding is perhaps surprising given that far fewer Albanians believe that they have been personally affected by SOC (16.8% of respondents) as opposed to witnessing an instance of corruption (58.8%) in the past five years. One possible interpretation of these findings is that many respondents believe that corruption and SOC are connected, and are part of a broader set of problems facing the country, so that a vast majority of citizens see SOC as a serious issue even though it has not affected them personally.

On the whole, Albanians believe that corruption and SOC has stayed the same or become worse in the last five years. Almost a majority (47.6%) of respondents believe that corruption has increased ('increased a little' or has 'increased a lot') and only 24.3% see any positive improvement. Similarly, 48.7% believe that organised crime had increased ('increased a little' or has 'increased a lot'), with only 24.6% saying that it had declined.

In line with these findings, there is strong popular support for political action to deal with these issues. Almost all respondents said that it was extremely or very important to them that the government tries to combat organised crime (97.6%) and corruption (97.7%). However,

Albanians are sceptical about the government's efforts to do so. The most common answer respondents gave when asked about efforts to combat corruption over the past five years was that they have been 'not at all' successful (41.2%). The same is true in relation to SOC (39.1%).

Perhaps as a result of this scepticism, and the fact that there may be personal risks involved, Albanians are cautious about reporting instances of corruption and SOC. Only a minority of respondents – 45.9% – said they were likely ('very likely' or 'likely') to report SOC if they became aware that someone was involved in it (Figure 1). A similar percentage – 46.1% – agreed ('agree' or 'strongly agree') that they would *'report a case of corruption even if I would have to spend a day in court to give evidence'*.

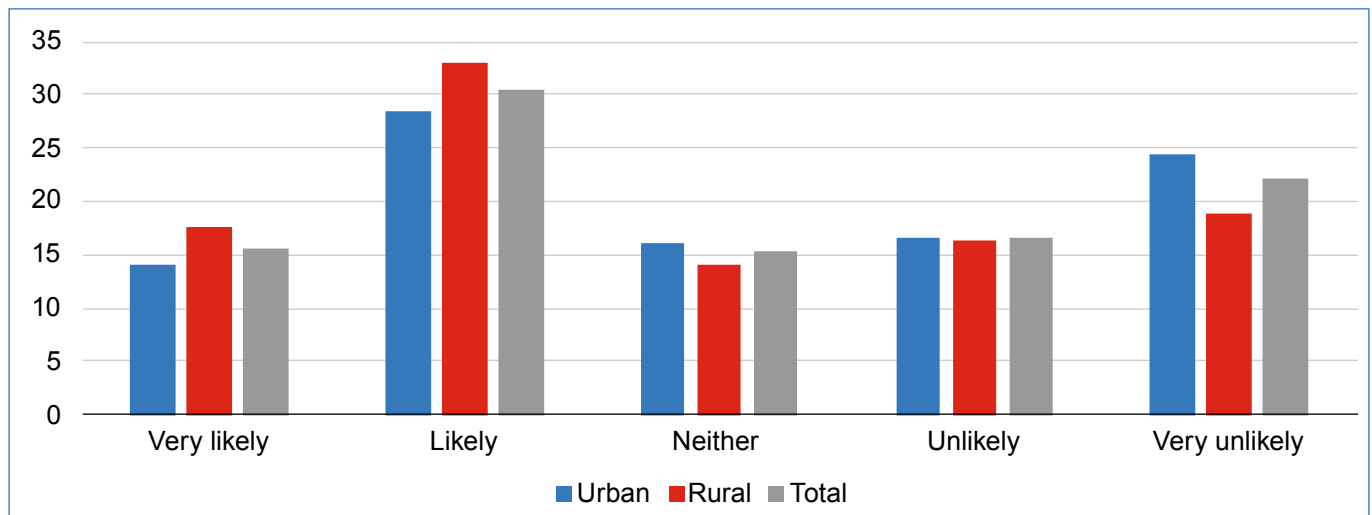
Even more concerning is the fact that the survey responses reveal considerable evidence of what we might think of as 'patrimonial' beliefs, which tolerate forms of illegality on the basis that they can be good for the community or the individual who is involved on SOC or corruption. This is particularly true in relation to SOC, where 33.71% of respondents agreed ('strongly agree' or 'agree') that 'most organised crime is bad, but sometimes money from organised crime can help the community', and only 25.1% strongly disagreed with this statement. Similarly, 23.7% agreed that

'most corruption is bad, but sometimes it is ok for government employees to use their position to benefit their community'.

It is important to note the large difference in the answers to questions about corruption and SOC on this issue. While the responses are worrying in both cases, Albanians are far more tolerant of SOC than of corruption. Indeed, the most common answer with reference to corruption (41.6%) was strong disagreement with the idea that corruption could be 'ok'. This may have been related to the slightly different wording used in the two questions, with the corruption question asking whether it was 'ok', i.e. acceptable, while the SOC question simply asked whether it could have positive benefits. Nonetheless, it will be important to conduct further research to ascertain exactly what benefits Albanians believe that SOC generates, and the conditions under which this may be seen to legitimise organised crime.

In terms of tackling this permissive attitude, the survey data offers some evidence of where efforts should be focused. As we explore in greater detail below, the idea that SOC can have positive impacts was most prevalent among younger Albanians, those with lower educational attainment, rural residents, and those that who do not support the ruling party (Socialist Party, PS) – albeit that most of these variations were modest.

Figure 1. If you became aware of someone who you suspected was involved in organised crime would you be likely to report it?



2. How do attitudes to SOC and corruption vary according to age, gender, locality and political identity?

Attitudes towards the prevalence of corruption in Albania are fairly uniform across most demographic categories. The proportion of men and women saying that corruption is not very widespread is equally low at 3.5% and 4.1%, respectively; and 38.2% of women and 42% of men agree that it is extremely common. There is a little more variation by age, with 45.2% of younger Albanian (18–25 years) believing that corruption is extremely common, compared to 39.7% of 36–45-year-olds, but these differences are not dramatic.

Interestingly, this is also true when we look at the differences between urban and rural areas. We sometimes expect to see significant variation here because location can determine how often individuals come into contact with the state and are asked for bribes. However, almost exactly the same proportion of respondents in rural and urban areas said that corruption was not very prevalent (3.9% and 3.7%, respectively), and the gap between the two groups is only 4% in relation to perceptions that corruption is extremely widespread (38.4% in urban areas, 42.4% in rural areas).

The one area of marked difference is political identity. As one would expect, those who support the ruling PS party are much less likely to think that the country is corrupt, with only 24.6% of PS supporters believing that corruption is extremely prevalent compared to 48.8% of those who do not support the PS. This is likely to be both because PS respondents are more likely to believe the government's narrative regarding its anti-corruption efforts, and because individuals are usually less willing to criticise and/or sanction their own party/leader.

This broad pattern is repeated in relation to how serious people believe the problem of corruption to be. Some 70.9% of women and 70.4% of men view corruption as very serious – the highest category. Similarly, there is almost no difference between urban and rural citizens (71.6% and 69.5% respectively). Again, PS supporters are more likely to downplay the severity of corruption, with 13.6% saying it is 'not very' common, compared to 1.5% of non-PS supporters.

We start to see a wide range of differences when it comes to perceptions of government performance on corruption in the last five years. In line with the above discussion, PS supporters are far less likely to be critical of the government's efforts, with 58.5% of non-PS supporters saying that the government has had no success in dealing with corruption compared to 15.2% of PS supporters. There is also a gendered difference, with men more likely to think that the government's efforts have achieved no success (46.2%) than women (39.8%).

The same pattern holds in relation to SOC. Almost the same proportion of women (32.7%) and men (32.1%) said that SOC was extremely widespread, and there is even less difference between age groups than was the case for perceptions of corruption. Again, there is a marked difference depending on political identity. In this case, only 19.6% of PS supporters see SOC as extremely common, compared to 39.2% of non-PS supporters. There are again small age-related variations, with those over 66 years (the oldest category), slightly more likely to see corruption as serious (76.0%, compared to an average of around 70% in other age groups).

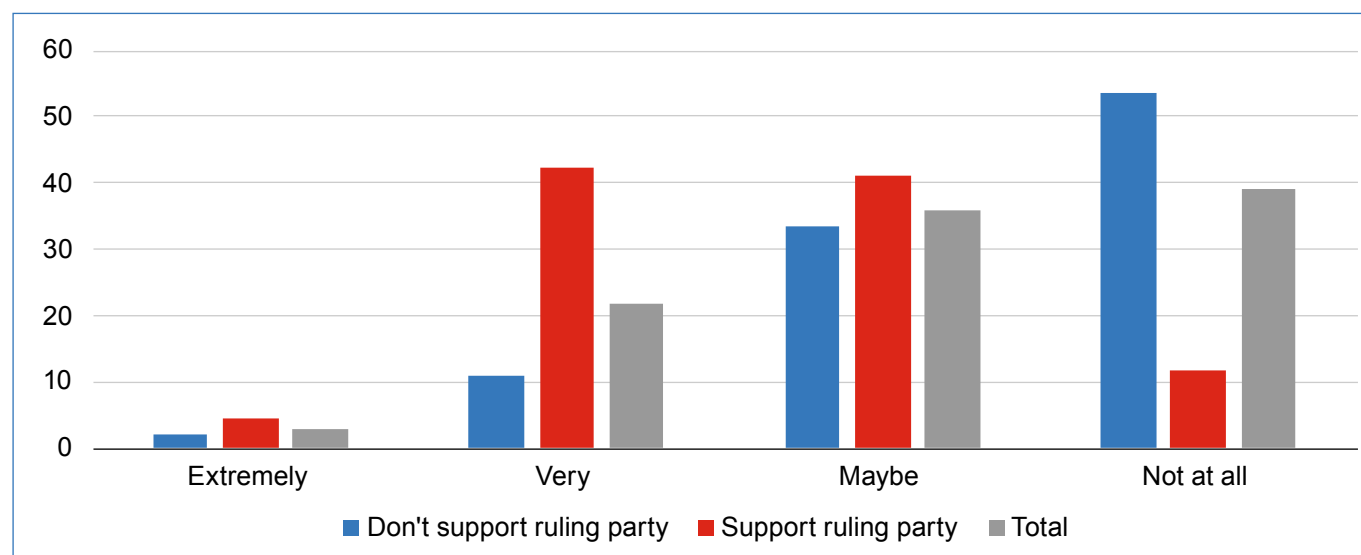
Rather than asking about how serious the problem of organised crime was nationally, we asked individuals to focus on their own town or village. This generated some interesting responses. Women are more likely to see SOC as a very serious problem (46.1% as compared to 40.7% among men), and those aged between 18 and 25 are considerably less likely to view it as very serious (37.4%) compared to those aged over 66 (54.7%). Young men are therefore least likely to think that SOC poses a very serious problem.

Interestingly, education levels do not seem to influence responses here, but as one would expect, urbanites (40.2%) are much more likely to think SOC is an issue in their area than rural residents (35.3%). In line with previous results, PS supporters are less likely to view SOC as a serious problem (32.2%) compared to 49.4% among non-PS supporters.

Finally, when it comes to perceptions of government efforts to combat organised crime over the last five years, men are again more

likely to be sceptical (41.7% saying there has been 'no success at all', as compared to 36.6% of women). There is very little difference in relation to educational level and the urban/rural divide, but those aged 18–25 are less sceptical than those aged over 66 (45.4% saying there has been no success compared to 35.0%). Political identity is again the most significant area of variation (Figure 2), with 53.6% of non-PS supporters seeing no progress at all compared to 11.9% of PS supporters.

Figure 2. How succesful has the government been at combatting SOC in the last five years?



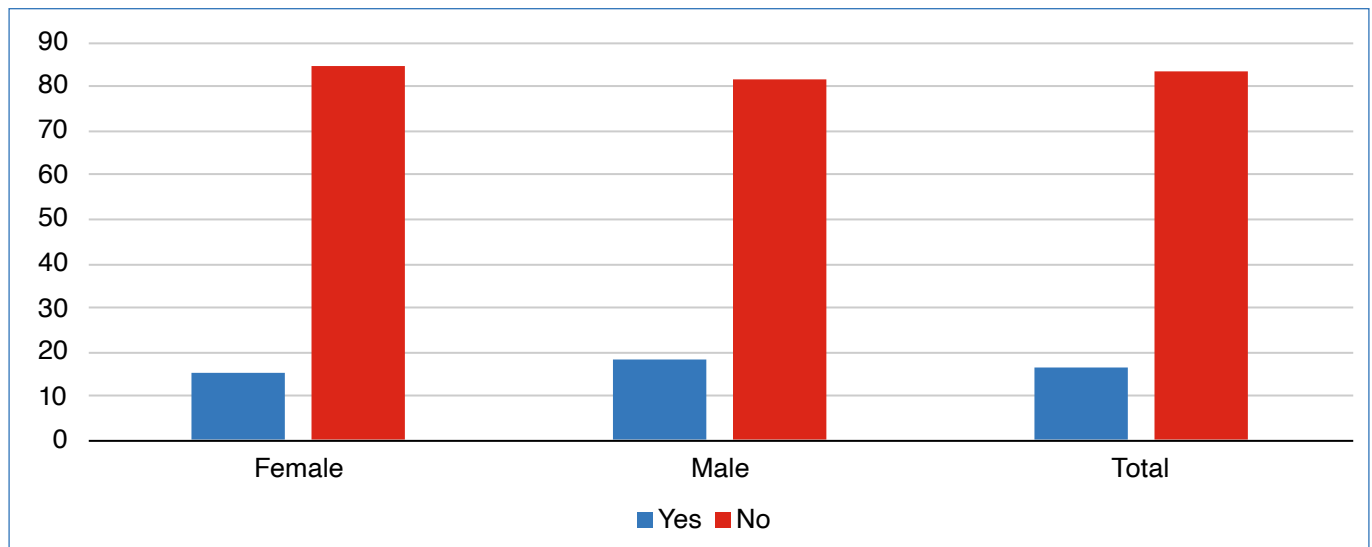
3. How do experiences of corruption and SOC vary?

Experiences of corruption vary considerably both across the country and between different demographic groups. Younger Albanians are more likely to experience corruption (45.5% of 18–25-year-olds as compared to 32% of those over 66), as are men (43.7% compared to 38.7% of women). As one would expect, those living in urban areas are slightly more likely to have experienced corruption than those in rural ones (43.3% compared to 38.4%). Political identity again appears to be the most significant factor, with only 29.8% of PS supporters saying they have witnessed corruption compared to 47.5% of non-PS supporters. Of course, this finding may be less a reflection of the distribution of corruption and more the desire of PS supporters to

downplay issues or of opposition supporters being inclined to exaggerate issues that might cast the government in a bad light.

A similar pattern holds for SOC. Men are more likely than women to say they have been affected (18.4% compared to 15.3%), and urbanites are a little more likely to answer ‘yes’ than those in rural areas (17.8% and 15.4% respectively), although these differences are small and there is no obvious age-related variation. This may reflect the fact that a wide range of individuals feel that they are personally affected by SOC even if they have not directly experienced it, while our question about experience of corruption asked about whether respondents had ‘personally witnessed’ it, which is more likely to pick up variations in how frequently individuals come into contact with state officials and businesses. PS supporters are again much less likely to say that they have been impacted by SOC, at just 9.5% as compared to 20.7% of non-PS supporters.

Figure 3. In the past 5 years, have you personally been affected by organised crime?



4. How do people respond to corruption and SOC?

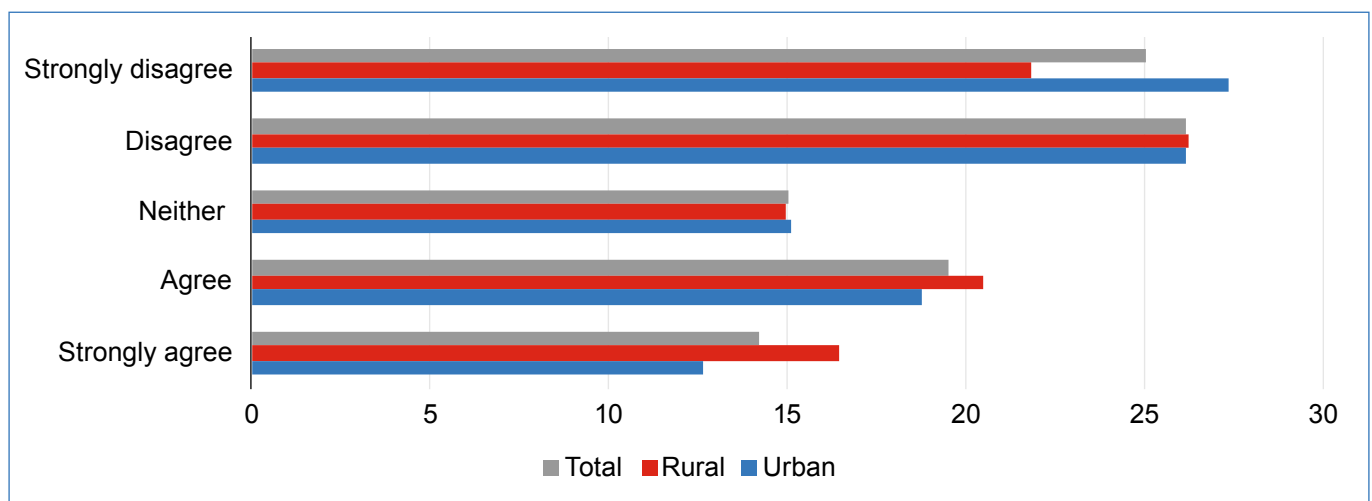
Although the vast majority of Albanians say that corruption and SOC are serious problems, there is also a tendency to see some positive consequences to these processes. This is most clearly the case with SOC, where 31.3% of urbanites and 37.0% of rural citizens agree ('agree' or 'strongly agree') that 'sometimes money from organised crime can help the community'. There is no significant variation between women and men in response to this question, but younger citizens seem to have slightly more positive attitudes towards the impact of SOC than older ones (16.7% of 18–25-year-olds 'strongly agree', compared to 13.1% of those over the age of 66). Similarly, positive attitudes towards the impacts of SOC fall with the level education (17.9% of those with only primary education 'strongly agree', compared to 10.9% of postgraduates). Finally, those who do not support the ruling PS are more likely to strongly agree than those who do (15.4% and 11.8%, respectively), perhaps because there is a perception that SOC redistributes wealth and hence can benefit those not connected to the ruling party.

The situation is rather different when it comes to corruption. Here there is no significant difference along age or along partisan lines, which is surprising as intuitively we would have expected

opposition supporters to feel that they are likely to benefit less from corrupt activities. The main variations in this case are in terms of gender, with men more likely to strongly agree that 'it is ok for government employees to use their position to benefit their community' (11.4% compared to 7.5% of women), and education, with those who have only primary education (14.29%) more likely to hold this view than postgraduates (6.8%). Those in rural areas are also more likely to strongly agree than urbanites (12.2% compared to 7.3%). The fact that rural respondents are more permissive with respect to both SOC and corruption perhaps reflects a greater reliance on, and hence tolerance of, more traditional forms of economic and political organisation in rural areas.

When it comes to the question of reporting SOC if one becomes aware of an individual involved in organised crime, there are no significant gender or age variations. Those in rural areas appear to be slightly more willing to report it than those in urban ones (17.7% compared to 14%), perhaps because SOC is rarer in these areas and so is less normalised. There is some evidence that better educated Albanians are more likely to report SOC (17.7% of postgraduates compared to 11.5% of those with only primary education). Finally, ruling PS supporters say they are considerably more willing (20.1%) to report individuals than non-SP supporters (13.1%), perhaps because they have more confidence that something positive will be done about it with their party in power.

Figure 4. How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statement:
Most organised crime is bad, but sometimes money from organised crime can help the community.



The Serious Organised Crime & Anti-Corruption Evidence (SOC ACE) research programme aims to help 'unlock the black box of political will' for tackling serious organised crime, illicit finance and transnational corruption through research that informs politically feasible, technically sound interventions and strategies. Funded by the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO), SOC ACE is a new component in the Anti-Corruption Evidence (ACE) research programme, alongside Global Integrity ACE and SOAS ACE. SOC ACE is managed by the University of Birmingham, working in collaboration with a number of leading research organisations and through consultation and engagement with key stakeholders.

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