

Albania: COVID-19 and violent extremism –
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The first confirmed cases of COVID-19 in March 2020 prompted the government to quickly implement measures to prevent the spread of the virus. These measures have severely impacted the country's economy while successfully curtailing the spread of the virus.

Fear has grown that terrorists could use the crisis to launch attacks and advance their cause. Although this has been the case in countries [like Iraq and Syria](#), such fears are not substantiated in Albania. In fact, no successful terrorist attacks have taken place in the country. Still, this is not an indication that enabling space for extremist views is absent. Considering extremist groups have an ongoing need to remain relevant with current affairs and grievances, the strict lockdown measures have created ample opportunities for exploiting existing socio-economic and political drivers of radicalisation. Although the government has taken measures to alleviate the economic hardship inflicted by the lockdown, its overall impact has [far-reaching financial ramifications](#) for the country's economically vulnerable. Moreover, some people argue that the government's handling of the situation – particularly the extension of the state of emergency until June 23rd – has been too overbearing. A dozen citizens chose to [protest the lockdown](#) on Tirana's main square on May 7th, despite social distancing regulations.

Meanwhile, all religious communities have suspended their activities and moved their services online. This has led to some criticism, [especially among Muslims](#) that wanted to visit the mosque during the holy month of Ramadan. Though closing mosques is good for physical distancing, moving to online prayers creates a different security issue. With an increasing number of believers moving into the online space, it is becoming more difficult to control the message that is conveyed. While most Albanians follow the prayers of their local mosque or [popular KMSH imams](#), others could turn to foreign imams or stumble upon extremist networks.

Same as in the religious communities, the [social and academic lives of most Albanian youth have switched online](#). Parents may find it increasingly challenging to supervise their children's behaviour, including potential engagement with extremist content. Readily available click-bait and fake news, combined with low levels of media literacy, could be an increased danger that Albanian youth is exposed to extremist propaganda or persuasive recruiters. Therefore, it remains of utmost importance that counterterrorist efforts focus on narrowing the enabling space for online radicalisation.