

Mbabane, Eswatini
5 August 2021

News release

Emaswati approve of government's COVID-19 response but are skeptical about vaccines

With the looming threat of a third wave of COVID-19 infections in Eswatini, the latest Afrobarometer survey shows that most citizens are satisfied with the government's overall management of the pandemic even though many found it difficult to comply with lockdown restrictions and most felt that the schools were closed for too long.

However, a majority of Emaswati believe that government assistance was distributed unfairly and that resources intended for the pandemic response were lost to government corruption.

A majority do not trust the government to ensure that COVID-19 vaccines are safe, and only about one-third say they are likely to try to get vaccinated. Almost half say they would choose prayer over a vaccine to prevent getting COVID-19.

Key findings

- Overall, most citizens are satisfied with the government's efforts to manage the COVID-19 response (83%) and keep the public informed (90%) (Figure 1).
 - However, only 38% say they trust official COVID-19 statistics, and more than three-fourths (77%) believe that "some" or "a lot" of the resources available for responding to the pandemic were lost to government corruption.
- Fewer than one-third (29%) of citizens say they trust the government to ensure the safety of any COVID-19 vaccine, and only a minority (37%) indicate that they are likely to try to get vaccinated (Figure 2).
- More than four in 10 emaswati (43%) believe that prayer is more effective than a vaccine would be in preventing COVID-19 infection (Figure 3).
- A majority of citizens say the government is justified in using measures that infringe on democratic freedoms during a public health emergency, such as censoring the media (52%), using security forces to enforce public health mandates (72%), and postponing elections or limiting political campaigns (63%) (Figure 4).
 - However, 47% of citizens say they are worried about politicians taking advantage of the pandemic to increase their power and authority (Figure 5).

Afrobarometer surveys

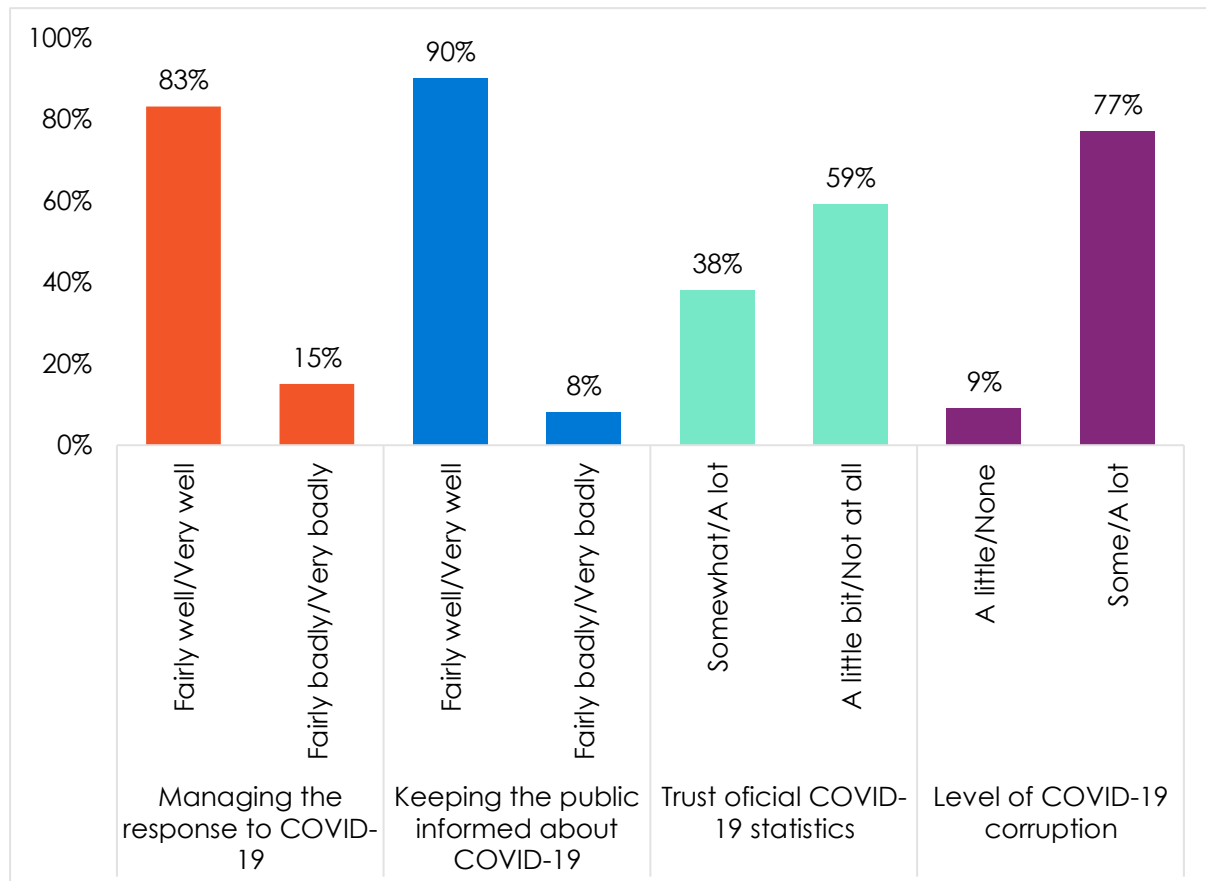
Afrobarometer is a pan-African, nonpartisan survey research network that provides reliable data on African experiences and evaluations of democracy, governance, and quality of life. Seven rounds of surveys were completed in up to 38 countries between 1999 and 2018. Round 8 surveys (2019/2021) cover 34 countries. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice.

The Afrobarometer team in Eswatini, led by ActivQuest, interviewed a nationally representative, random, stratified probability sample of 1,200 adult Emaswati in March-April 2021. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-3

percentage points at a 95% confidence level. Previous standard surveys were conducted in Eswatini in 2013, 2015, and 2018.

Charts

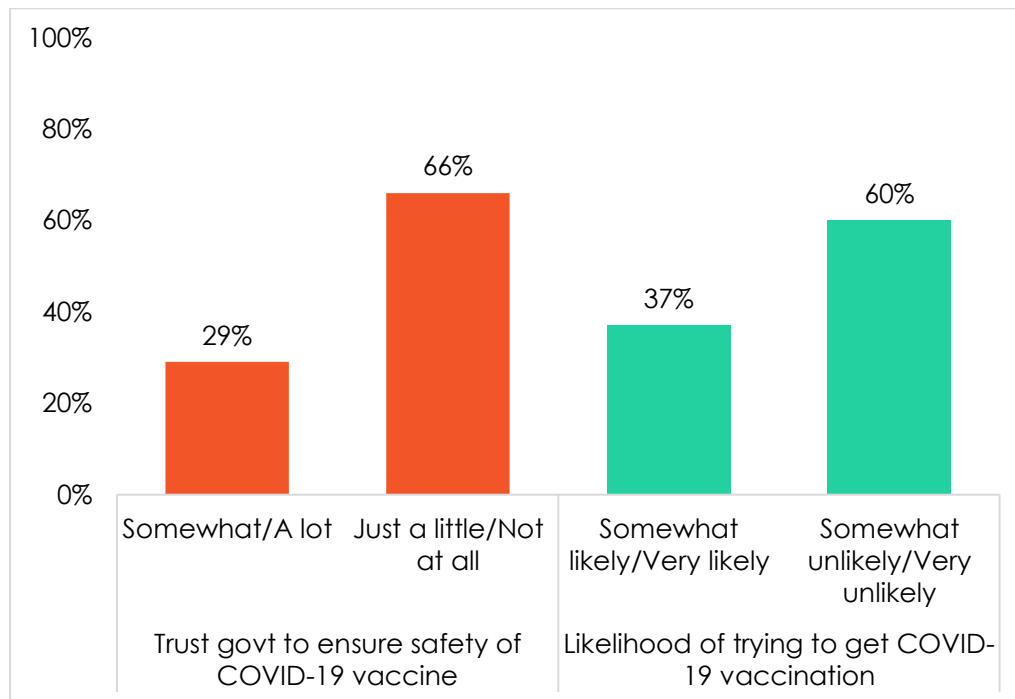
Figure 1: Assessment of government efforts during the pandemic | Eswatini | 2021



Respondents were asked:

How well or badly would you say the current government has handled the following matters since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, or haven't you heard enough to say: Managing the response to the COVID-19 pandemic? Keeping the public informed about COVID-19? How much do you trust the official statistics provided by government on the number of infections and deaths due to the COVID-19 pandemic? Considering all of the funds and resources that were available to the government for combatting and responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, how much do you think was lost or stolen due to corruption among government officials?

Figure 2: Attitudes toward COVID-19 vaccines | Eswatini | 2021



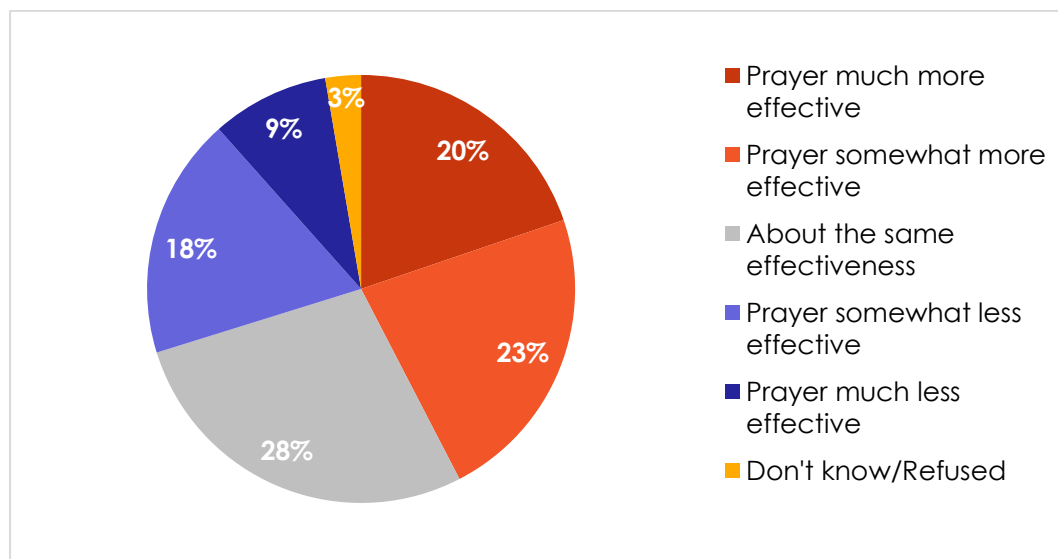
Respondents were asked:

How much do you trust the government to ensure that any vaccine for COVID-19 that is developed or offered to Swati citizens is safe before it is used in this country?

If a vaccine for COVID-19 becomes available and the government says it is safe, how likely are you to try to get vaccinated?

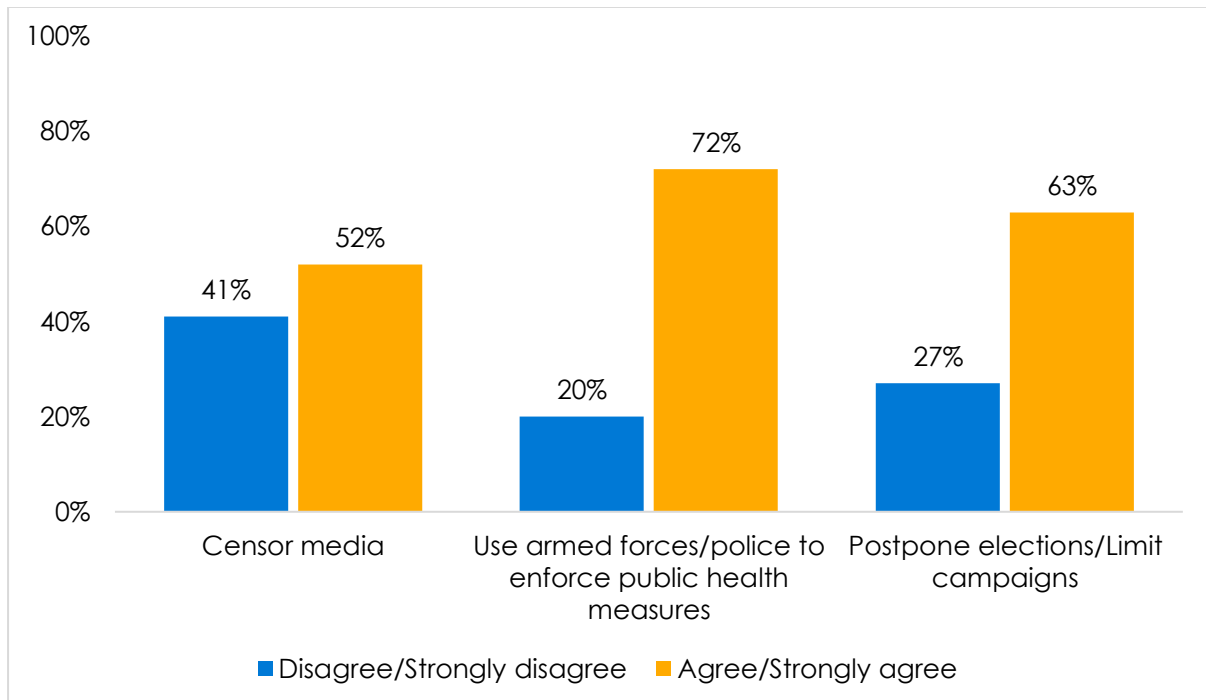
Figure 3: Prayer vs. vaccine: Which is more effective against COVID-19?

| Eswatini | 2021



Respondents were asked: *Some people think that prayer is an effective way to alter events in the world. Others put more faith in science to solve problems. Some people believe in both. What about you? Do you think that prayer is more effective or less effective than a vaccine would be in preventing COVID-19 infection?*

Figure 4: Restrict freedoms during health emergency? | Eswatini | 2021



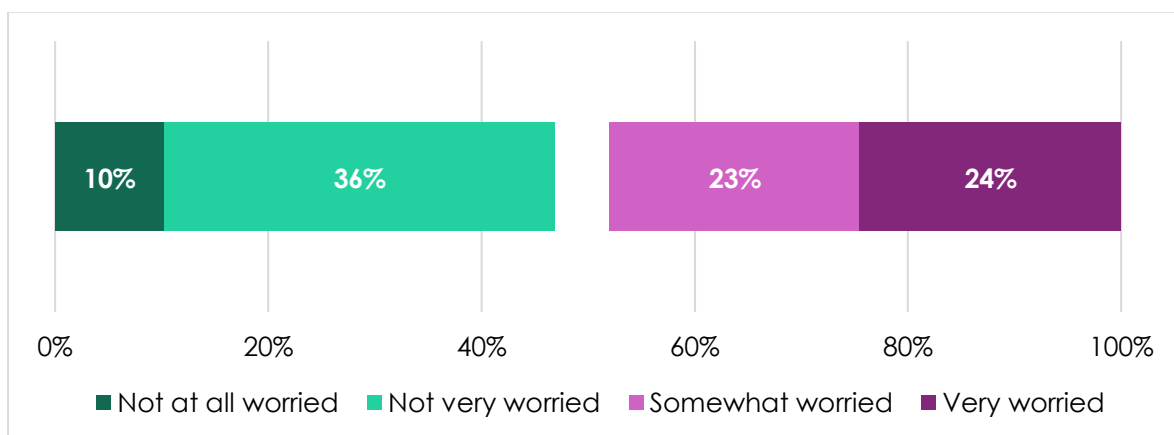
Respondents were asked: When the country is facing a public health emergency like the COVID-19 pandemic, do you agree or disagree that it is justified for the government to temporarily limit democracy or democratic freedoms by taking the following measures:

Censoring media reporting?

Using the police and security forces to enforce public health mandates like lockdown orders, mask requirements, or restrictions on public gatherings?

Postponing elections or limiting political campaigning?

Figure 5: Worried about politicians' intentions? | Eswatini | 2020



Respondents were asked: In some countries, people have been worried that governments and politicians are trying to take advantage of the COVID-19 pandemic to increase their wealth or power, or to permanently restrict freedoms or political competition. What about you? How worried are you, if at all, that the following things are taking place or might take place in Eswatini: Politicians are using the pandemic as an opportunity to increase their power and authority?

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