

Nigerians divided on COVID-19 vaccines, united in calling for aid to vulnerable families

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 527 | Sunday Joseph Duntoye and Raphael Mbaegbu

Summary

The economic and social impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have not spared Nigeria. The country reported its first COVID-19 case in February 2020 (Federal Ministry of Health, 2020) and has subsequently suffered three distinct waves of infection, peaking in June 2020, January 2021, and August 2021 (Lain & Vishwanath, 2021).

Despite containment and public sensitisation measures coordinated by the Presidential Task Force on COVID-19, the virus spread throughout all 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory. The country had reported 256,573 confirmed cases and 3,144 deaths as of 20 June 2022, and had administered about 46.4 million vaccine doses to 27.4 million people (World Health Organization, 2022).

Following a full lockdown starting on 30 March 2020, Nigeria's economy has reopened gradually, with incremental reductions in restrictions on travel and public gatherings (International Monetary Fund, 2021). But the economic impact of COVID-19 has been severe in a country where only 4% of the poorest 40% of households had access to any form of social safety net program before the pandemic (World Bank, 2019). As Lain and Vishwanath (2021) reported, "in the later stages of the COVID-19 crisis, even though economic activities began to recover, inflation started to accelerate, eroding purchasing power, especially for food items that are crucial for consumption among the poor and vulnerable citizens."

A new Afrobarometer survey in Nigeria shows that more than one-fourth of Nigerian households lost a primary source of income due to the pandemic, while only about one in 10 received pandemic-related assistance from the government.

While a majority of Nigerians are satisfied with the government's overall handling of the pandemic, they are critical of the government's assistance efforts, and most believe that COVID-19 resources have been lost due to corruption.

A majority of Nigerians remain unvaccinated against COVID-19, and about one-third of all adults say they are unlikely to accept the vaccine.

Fewer than half of citizens think their government will be ready for future health emergencies, and a majority want the government to invest more in preparation for such crises, even at the cost of other health services.

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. Eight rounds of surveys have been completed in up to 39 countries since 1999. Round 9 surveys (2021/2022) are currently underway. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice.

The Afrobarometer team in Nigeria, led by NOIPolls, interviewed a nationally representative, random, stratified probability sample of 1,600 adult Nigerians between 5 and 31 March 2022.

A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-2.5 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. Previous standard surveys were conducted in Nigeria in 2000, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2013, 2015, 2017, and 2020.

Key findings

■ Effects of the COVID-19 pandemic:

- Three in 100 Nigerians (3%) say a member of their household became ill with COVID-19 or tested positive for the virus, while almost three in 10 (28%) say someone in their household lost a job, business, or primary source of income due to the pandemic.

■ Attitudes toward vaccines:

- Close to four in 10 Nigerians (37%) say they have been vaccinated against COVID-19.
- One-third of citizens say they are “somewhat unlikely” (10%) or “very unlikely” (22%) to try to get vaccinated.
- Citizens who say they are unlikely to get vaccinated cite a variety of reasons for their hesitancy, including that COVID-19 doesn't exist (29%), that COVID-19 is not serious or life-threatening (18%), and that they do not trust the vaccine or are worried about fake vaccines (14%).
- Fewer than half (47%) of Nigerians say they trust the government “somewhat” or “a lot” to ensure the safety of COVID-19 vaccines.

■ Government response to COVID-19:

- A majority (56%) of Nigerians say the government has done “fairly well” or “very well” in managing the response to the pandemic.
- But majorities also say they are dissatisfied with the government's efforts to provide assistance to vulnerable households (71%), to keep disruptions of children's education to a minimum (61%), and to ensure that health facilities are adequately resourced to deal with the pandemic (56%).
- Only 11% of Nigerians report that their household received COVID-19 relief assistance from the government, and a large majority (83%) say they believe that “some” or “a lot” of the resources intended for the COVID-19 response have been lost to corruption.
- Only half (50%) of Nigerians say the government is justified in using security forces to enforce public health mandates during a pandemic. Fewer consider it justified to postpone elections (43%) or censor media reporting (35%) in response to a public health emergency.

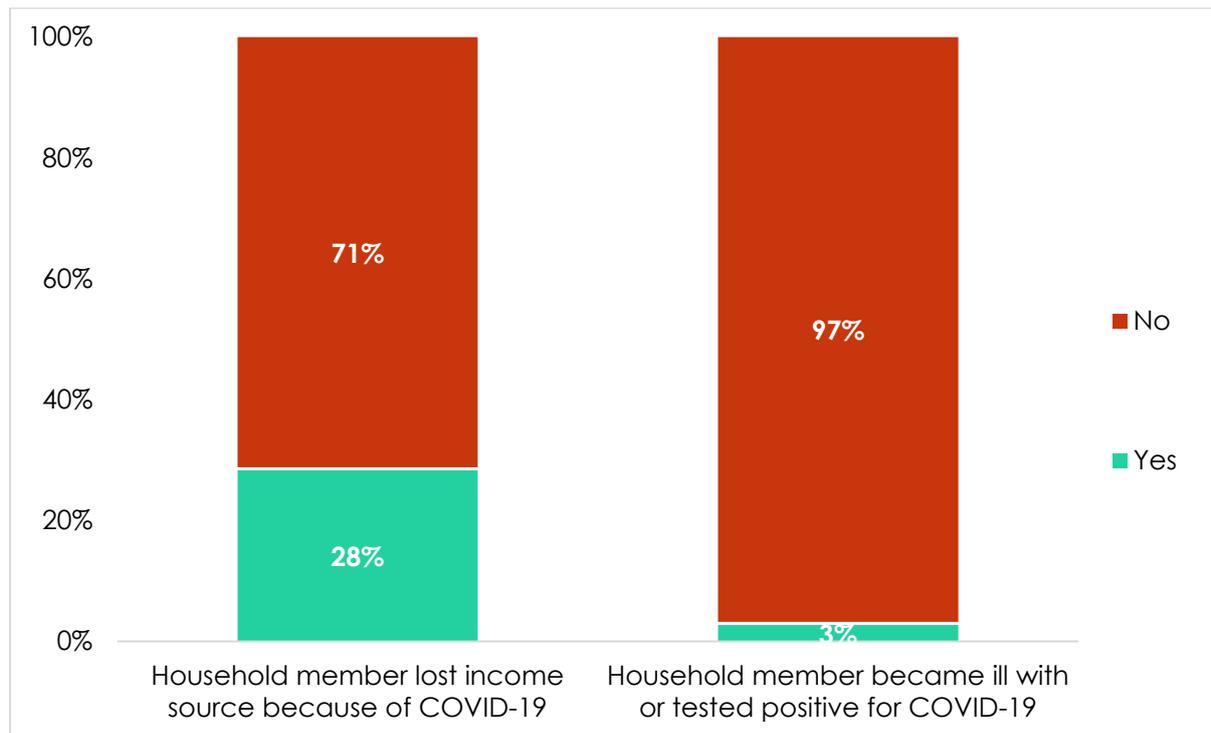
■ Looking ahead:

- Four in 10 Nigerians (41%) think their government will not be prepared to deal with future public health emergencies.
- Six in 10 Nigerians (61%) think the government needs to invest more in preparing for future public health crises, even if it means that fewer resources are available for other health services.

Effects of COVID-19

About three in 100 Nigerians (3%) say a member of their household became ill with or tested positive for COVID-19, while close to three in 10 (28%) say someone in their household lost a job, business, or primary source of income due to the pandemic (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Effects of COVID-19 | Nigeria | 2022



Respondents were asked: Please tell me whether you personally or any other member of your household have been affected in any of the following ways by the COVID-19 pandemic: Became ill with, or tested positive for, COVID-19? Temporarily or permanently lost a job, business, or primary source of income?

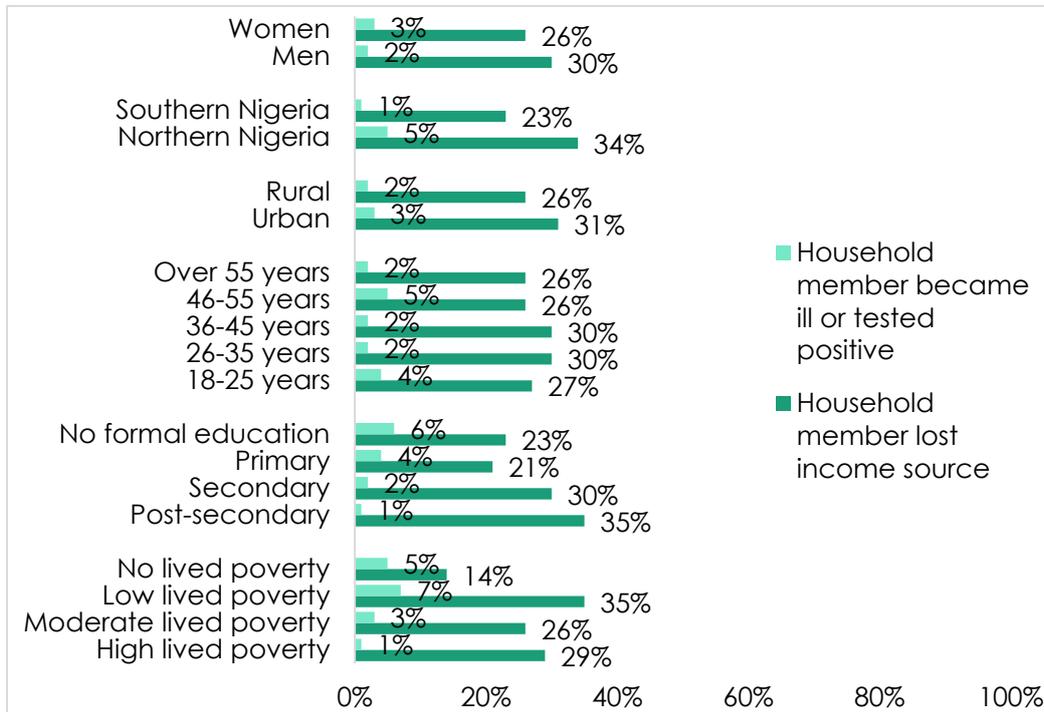
The effects of COVID-19 appear to be more widely experienced in Northern Nigeria than Southern Nigeria: 34% vs. 23% lost an income source, and 5% vs. 1% became ill or tested positive. Urbanites are more likely than rural residents to report that a family member lost an income source (31% vs. 26%) (Figure 2).

Reports of illness and/or positive COVID-19 tests decrease with respondents' educational level, ranging from 6% of those with no formal education to 1% of those with post-secondary qualifications, and are most common among economically better-off respondents (5%-7%).¹

Loss of an income source is least common among those with a primary education (21%) or no formal education (23%), compared to 30%-35% of more educated respondents. But the wealthiest citizens are also least likely to report losing a primary income source (14%).

¹ Afrobarometer's Lived Poverty Index (LPI) measures respondents' levels of material deprivation by asking how often they or their families went without basic necessities (enough food, enough water, medical care, enough cooking fuel, and a cash income) during the preceding year. For more on lived poverty, see Mattes (2020).

Figure 2: Effects of COVID-19 | by socio-demographic group | Nigeria | 2022

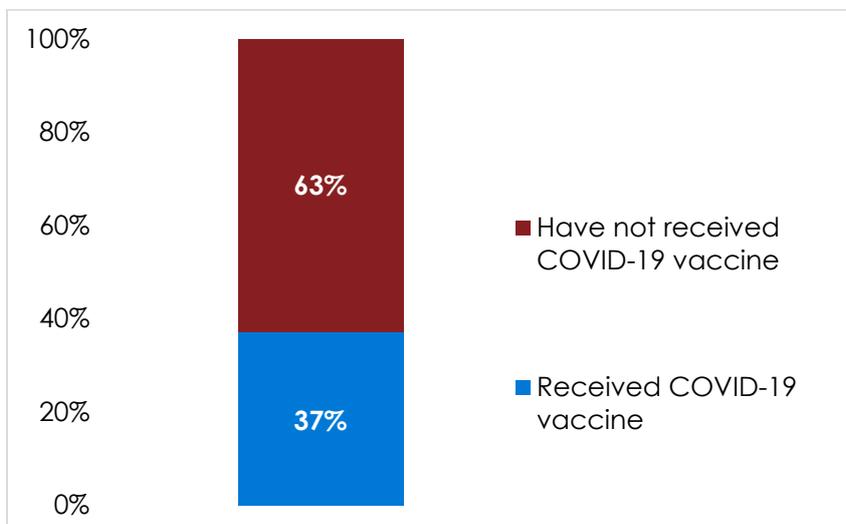


Respondents were asked: Please tell me if you personally or any other member of your household have been affected in any of the following ways by the COVID-19 pandemic: Became ill with COVID-19? Temporarily or permanently lost a job, business or primary source of income? (% who say “yes”)

Attitudes toward vaccination

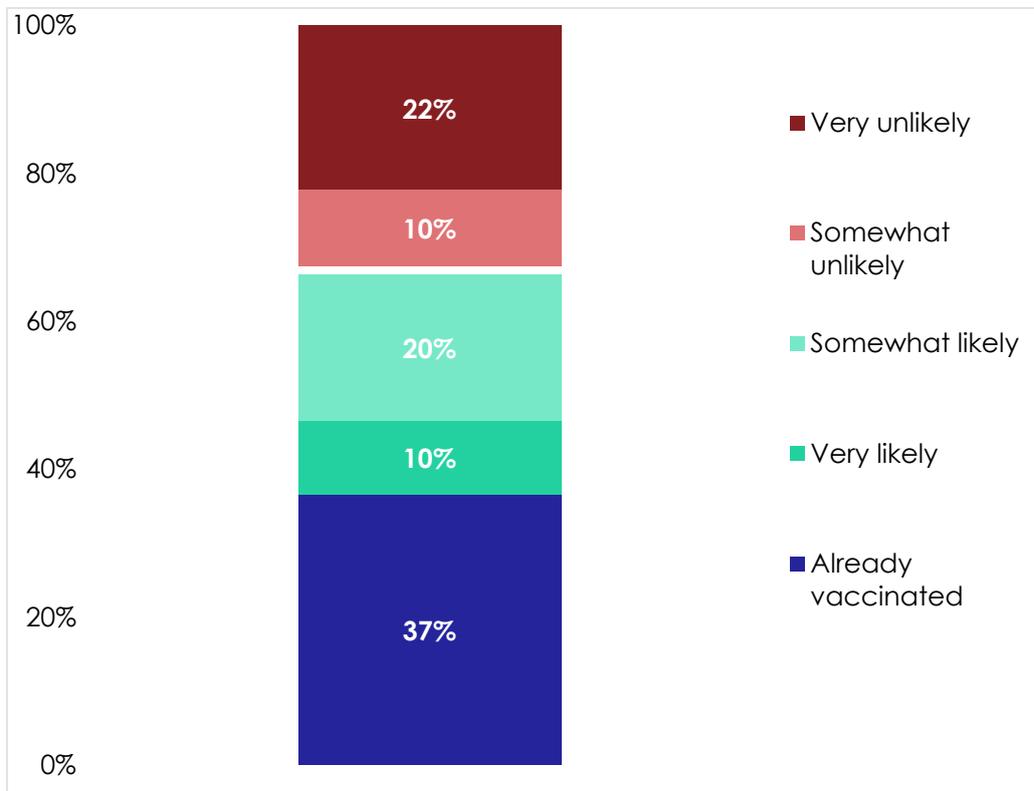
Close to four in 10 (37%) Nigerians say they have been vaccinated against COVID-19 (Figure 3). Almost two-thirds (63%) say they have not received the shot, including 32% who say they are “very unlikely” or “somewhat unlikely” to try to get vaccinated and 30% who say they are “very” or “somewhat” likely to do so (Figure 4).

Figure 3: COVID-19 vaccination status | Nigeria | 2022



Respondents were asked: Have you received a vaccination against COVID-19, either one or two doses?

Figure 4: Likelihood of trying to get COVID-19 vaccination | Nigeria | 2022



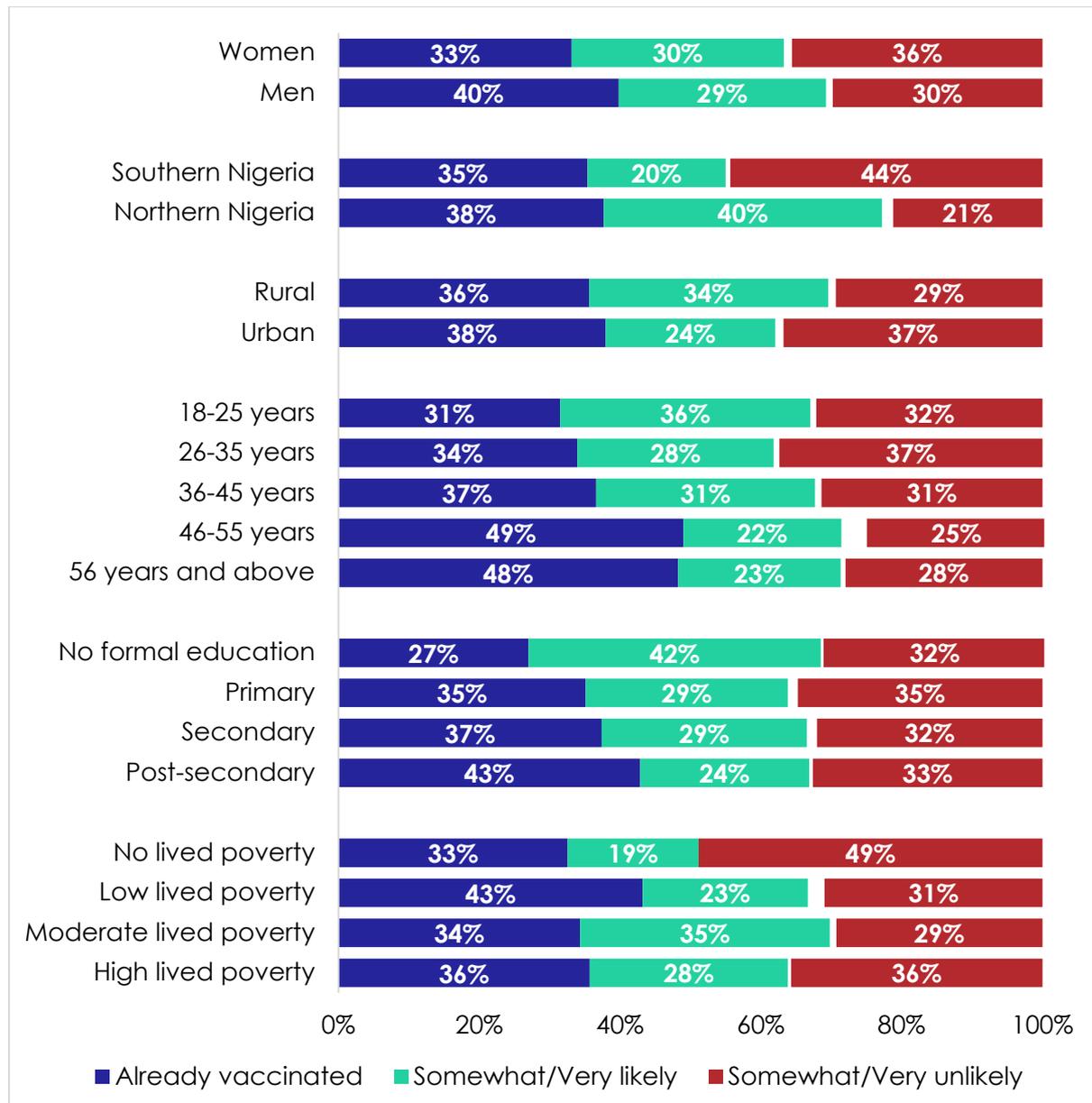
Respondents who have not been vaccinated against COVID-19 were asked: *If a vaccine for COVID-19 is available, how likely are you to try to get vaccinated?*

Vaccination rates increase with respondents' education level, ranging from 27% of those with no formal schooling to 43% of those with post-secondary qualifications. Men (40%) and Northern Nigerians (38%) are somewhat more likely to say they are vaccinated than women (33%) and Southerners (35%). Citizens over age 45 (48%-49%) report higher vaccination rates than 18- to 45-year-olds (31%-37%) (Figure 5).

Vaccine hesitancy is particularly high among women (36% not likely to vaccinate), urban residents (37%), Southern Nigerians (44%), and citizens experiencing no lived poverty (49%).

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Figure 5: Likelihood of trying to get vaccinated | by socio-demographic group
 | Nigeria | 2022



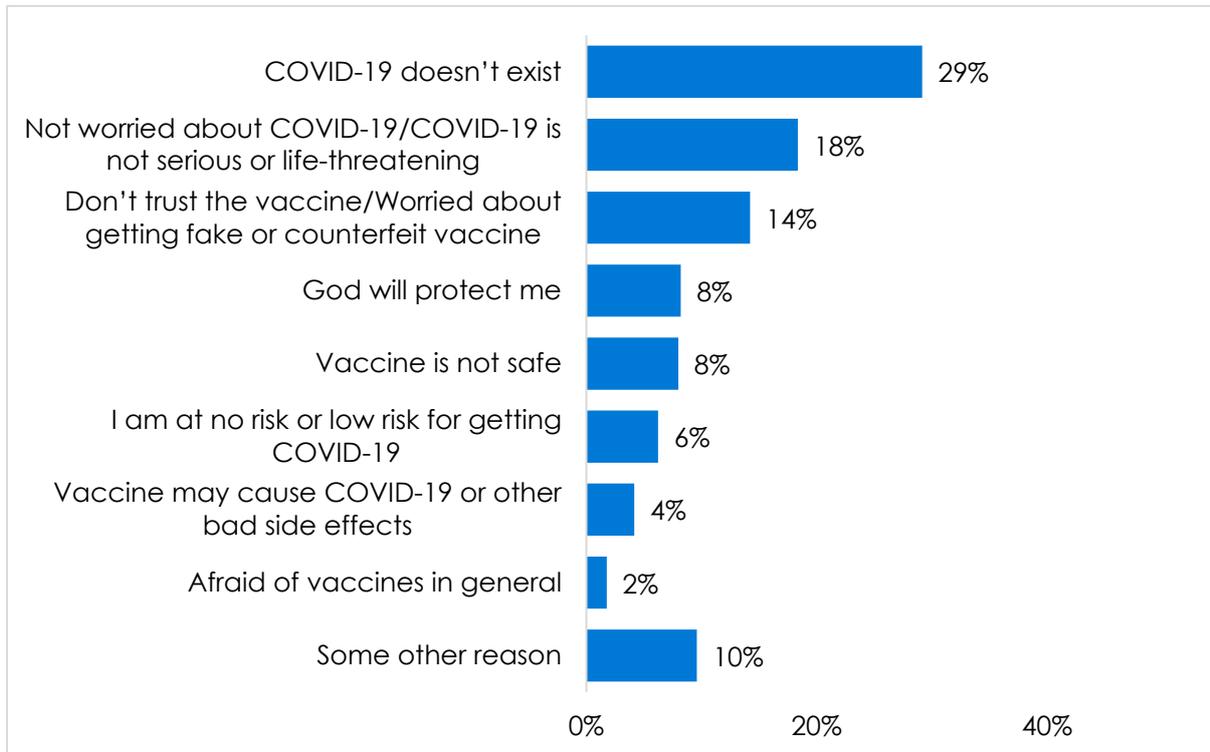
Respondents who have not been vaccinated against COVID-19 were asked: *If a vaccine for COVID-19 is available, how likely are you to try to get vaccinated?*

Citizens who say they are unlikely to get vaccinated cite a variety of reasons for their hesitancy. Almost three in 10 (29%) say they do not believe that COVID-19 exists, while about one in five (18%) think COVID-19 is not a serious or life-threatening disease (Figure 6).

About one in seven (14%) don't trust the vaccine or worry about getting a fake or counterfeit vaccine.

Others believe that God will protect them against COVID-19 (8%), that the vaccine is not safe (8%), that they are at low or no risk of contracting COVID-19 (6%), and that the vaccine may cause COVID-19 or other bad side effects (4%).

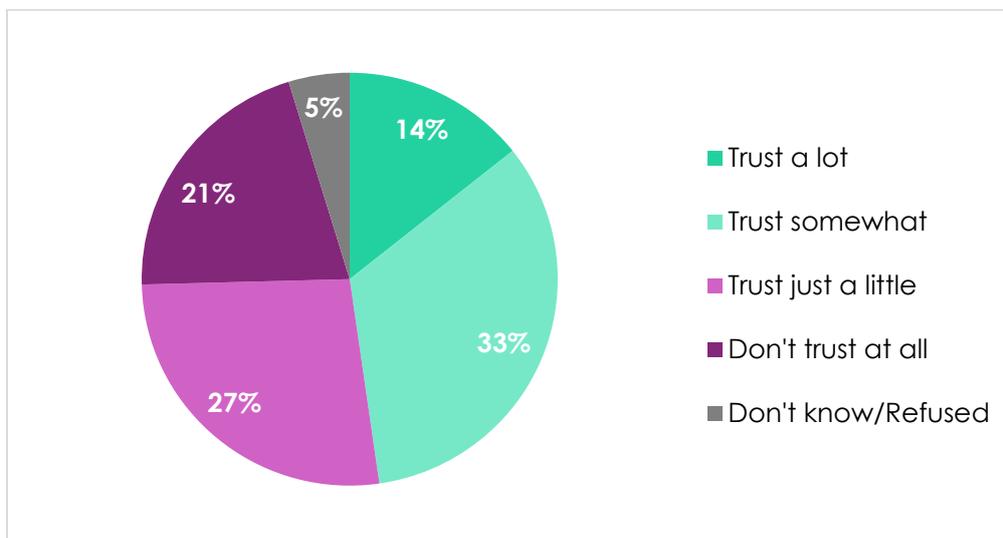
Figure 6: Main reason for vaccine hesitancy | Nigeria | 2022



Respondents who say they are not likely to get vaccinated were asked: What is the main reason that you would be unlikely to get a COVID-19 vaccine?

One hurdle for efforts to vaccinate the population may be doubts about the government's ability to ensure the safety of COVID-19 vaccines. Fewer than half (47%) of Nigerians say they trust the government "somewhat" (33%) or "a lot" (14%) to ensure vaccine safety, while a similar proportion (48%) express "just a little" trust (27%) and "no trust at all" (21%) (Figure 7).

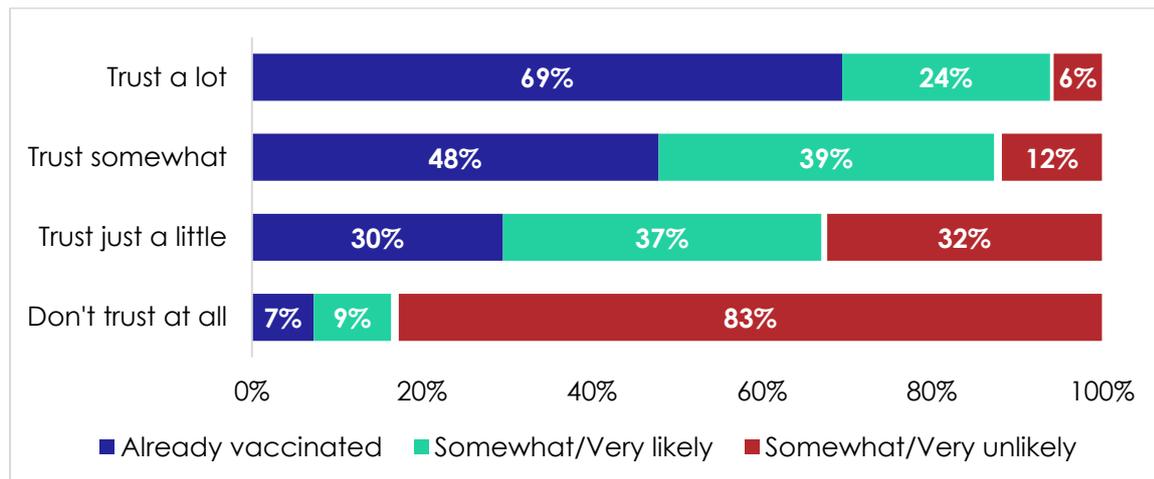
Figure 7: Trust government to ensure vaccine safety? | Nigeria | 2022



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

The willingness of citizens to get vaccinated against COVID-19 is correlated with their trust in the government's ability to ensure the safety of the vaccine. Citizens who trust the government "a lot" to ensure vaccine safety are far more likely to already be vaccinated than those who express no trust (69% vs. 7%). And vaccine hesitancy is far more common among the "no trust" group (83%) compared to the "trust a lot" group (6%) (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Likelihood of trying to get vaccinated | by trust in government to ensure vaccine safety | Nigeria | 2022



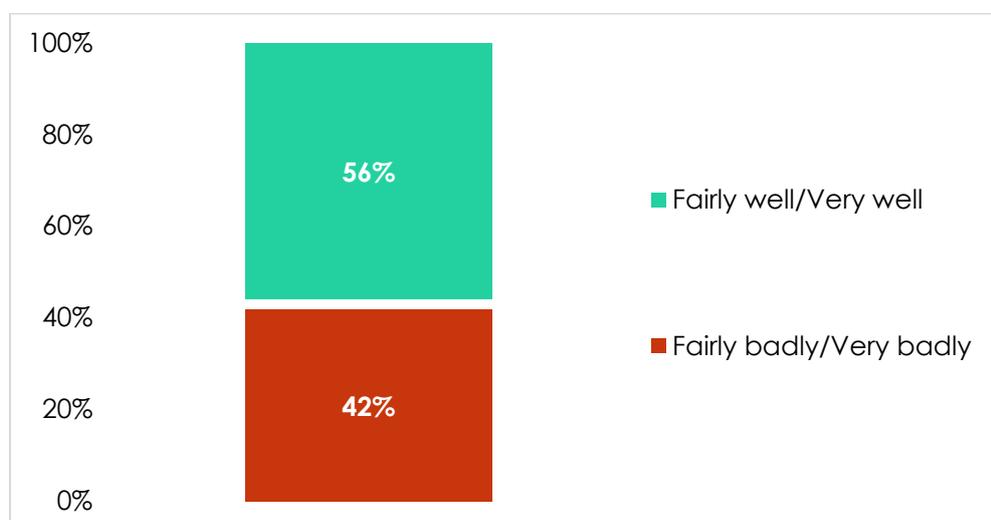
Respondents were asked:

*If a vaccine for COVID-19 is available, how likely are you to try to get vaccinated?
 How much do you trust the government to ensure that any vaccine for COVID-19 that is developed or offered to Nigerian citizens is safe before it is used in this country?*

Government response to COVID-19

Nigerians are more positive than negative in their assessments of the government's overall performance in managing the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. A majority (56%) say the government has done "fairly well" or "very well," while 42% say it has done a poor job (Figure 9).

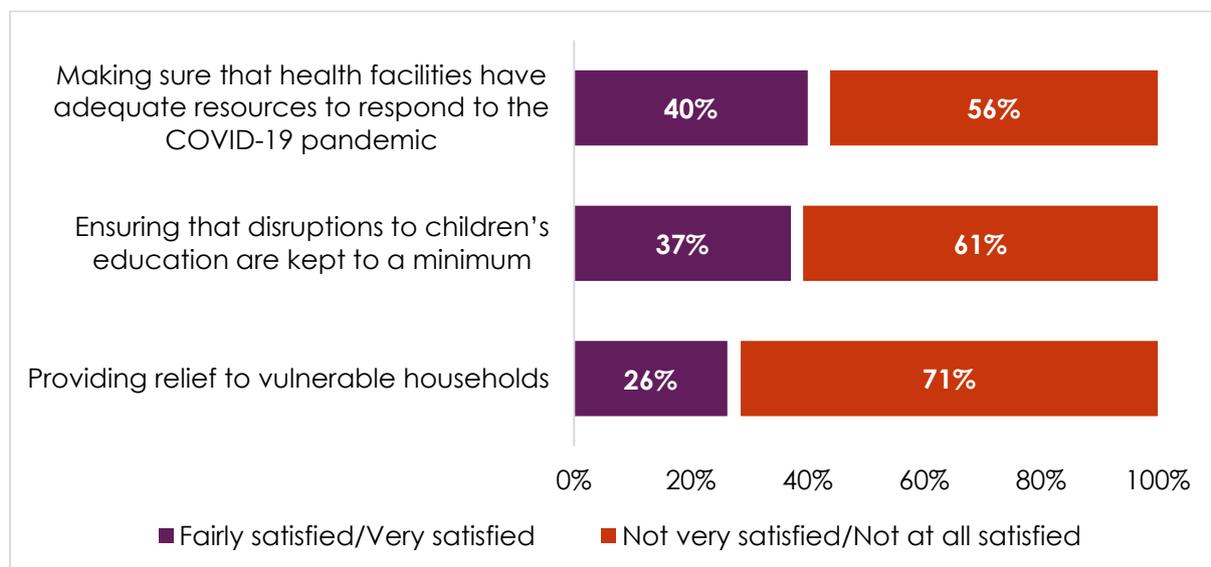
Figure 9: Government response to COVID-19 | Nigeria | 2022



Respondents were asked: *How well or badly would you say the current government has managed the response to the COVID-19 pandemic?*

On specific aspects of the COVID-19 response, popular ratings are more negative (Figure 10). Majorities say they are “not very satisfied” or “not at all satisfied” with the government’s efforts to provide relief assistance to vulnerable households (71%), to ensure that disruptions of children’s education are held to a minimum (61%), and to ensure that health facilities are adequately resourced to deal with the pandemic (56%).

Figure 10: Satisfaction with government’s response to COVID-19 | Nigeria | 2022



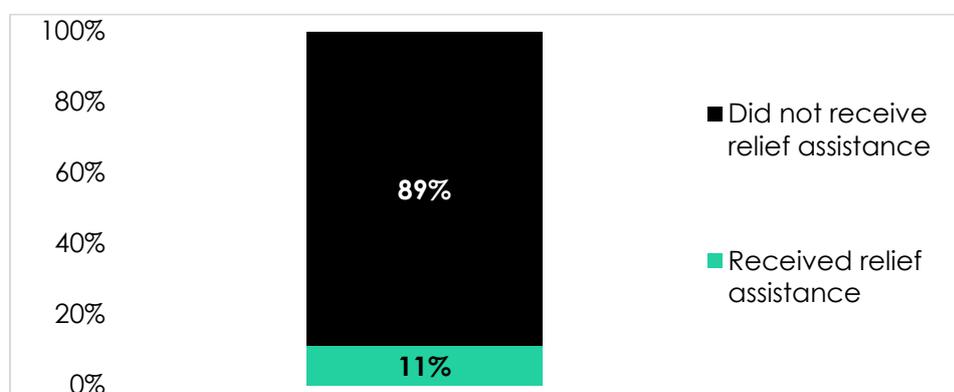
Respondents were asked: How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the government's response to COVID-19 in the following areas?

COVID-19 relief assistance

Only one in nine Nigerians (11%) say their household received COVID-19 relief assistance from the government, while 89% say they did not (Figure 11).

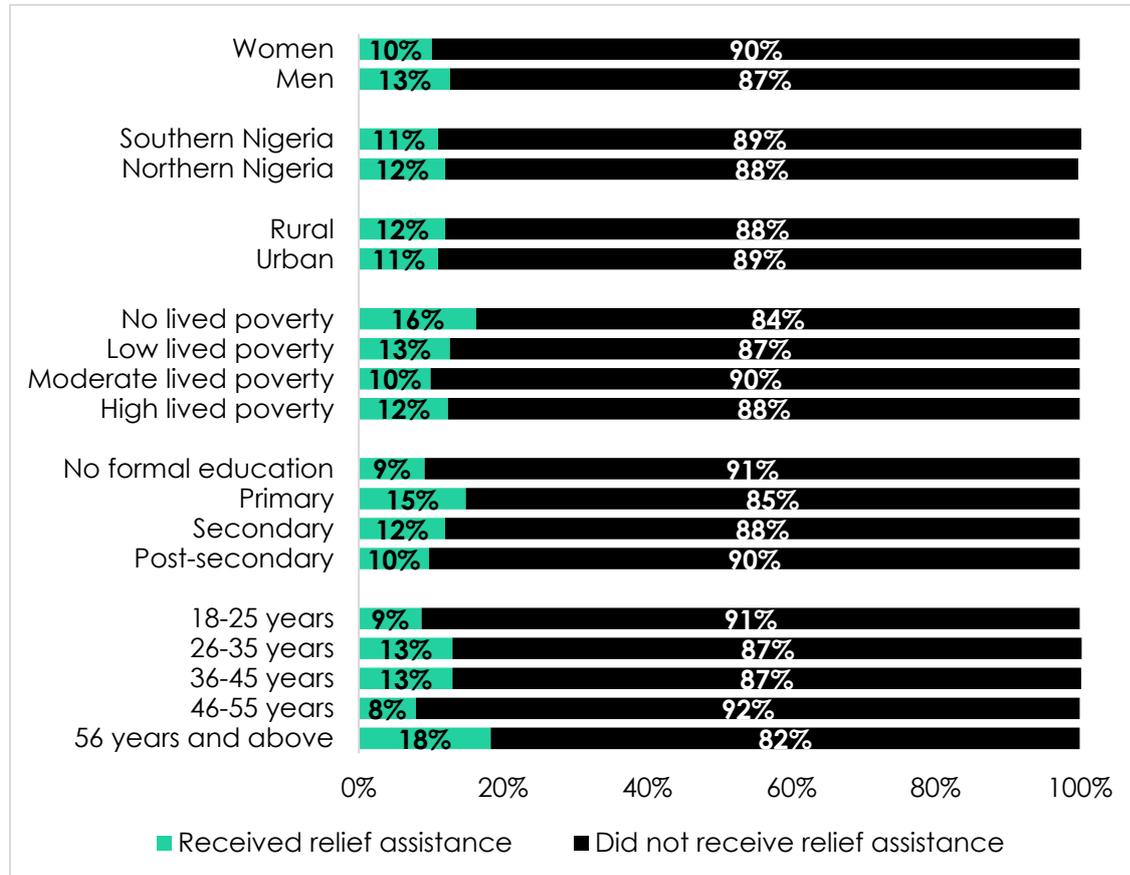
Households in the Southern and Northern regions of Nigeria were about equally likely to receive assistance from the government, as were households in rural and urban areas (Figure 12). Wealthy households (16%) were somewhat more likely to benefit from assistance than other economic categories (10%-13%). And older citizens (18% of those aged 56 and older) report aid to their households more frequently than younger respondents (8%-13%).

Figure 11: Access to COVID-19 relief assistance | Nigeria | 2022



Respondents were asked: Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, have you or your household received any assistance from government, like food, cash payments, relief from bill payments, or other assistance that you were not normally receiving before the pandemic?

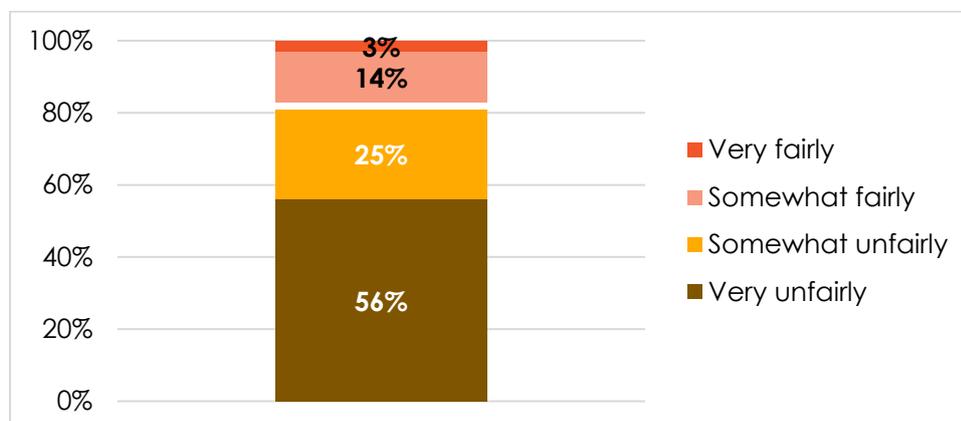
Figure 12: Access to COVID-19 relief assistance | by socio-demographic group
 | Nigeria | 2022



Respondents were asked: Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, have you or your household received any assistance from government, like food, cash payments, relief from bill payments, or other assistance that you were not normally receiving before the pandemic?

Overwhelmingly, Nigerians say COVID-19 relief was distributed “very unfairly” (56%) or “somewhat unfairly” (25%) (Figure 13).

Figure 13: Was COVID-19 relief assistance distributed fairly? | Nigeria | 2022

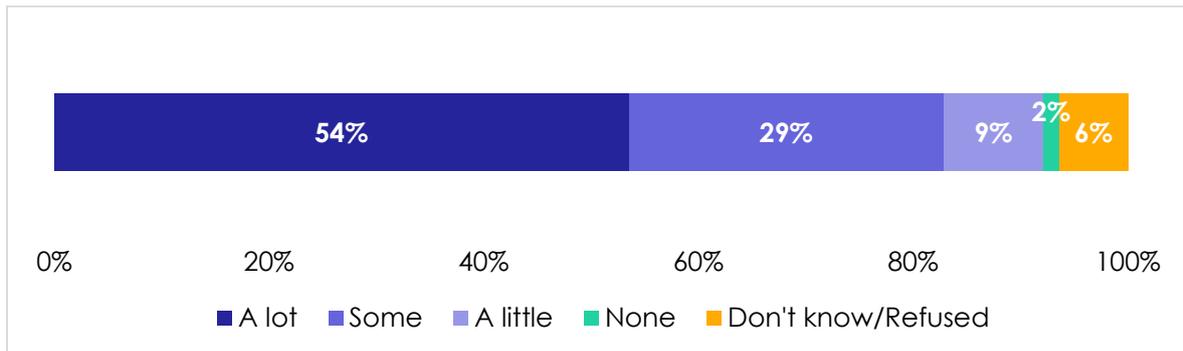


Respondents were asked: Do you think that the distribution of government support to people during the COVID-19 pandemic, for example through food packages or cash payments, has been fair or unfair?

Corruption related to COVID-19

Aside from seeing the distribution of government relief assistance as unfair, most Nigerians say that “a little” (9%), “some” (29%), or “a lot” (54%) of the resources intended for the COVID-19 response have been lost to corruption. Only 2% think that none of these resources have been embezzled (Figure 14).

Figure 14: Perceived COVID-19-related corruption | Nigeria | 2022



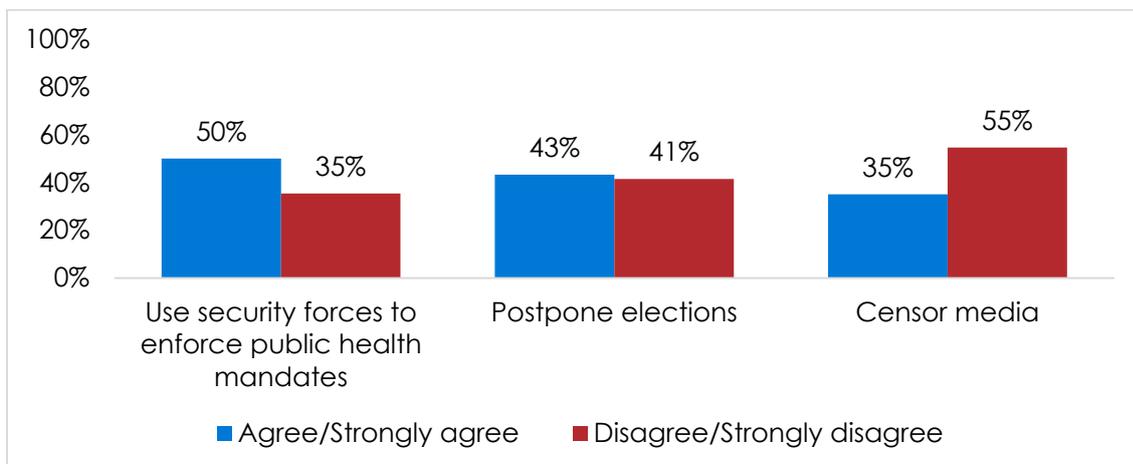
Respondents were asked: Considering all of the funds and resources that were available to the government for combating and responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, how much do you think was lost or stolen due to corruption?

Limit democratic freedoms during a pandemic?

Globally, reactions to lockdowns and other pandemic-related restrictions have ranged from acceptance to street demonstrations, highlighting different views on the extent to which citizens should forfeit certain freedoms, even temporarily, to protect public health.

In Nigeria, only half (50%) of citizens “agree” or “strongly agree” that it is justified for the government to use the armed forces or the police to enforce public health mandates during an emergency, while a substantial minority (35%) disagree (Figure 15).

Figure 15: Limit democratic freedoms during a public health emergency? | Nigeria | 2022



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 restrictions on public gatherings or wearing face masks? Postponing elections?

Even fewer (43%) consider it justifiable to postpone elections during a public health emergency. And more than half (55%) would object to censoring media reporting during a pandemic.

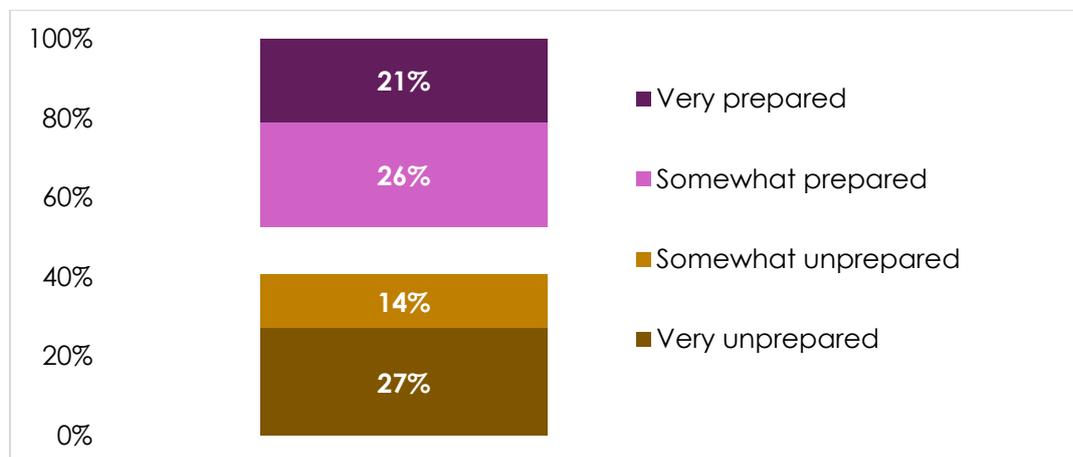
Looking ahead

After experiencing the COVID-19 pandemic, how prepared will Nigeria's government be to deal with future public health emergencies?

Fewer than half (47%) of Nigerians believe the government will be ready, while 41% think it will be "somewhat unprepared" (14%) or "very unprepared" (27%) for the next health crisis (Figure 16).

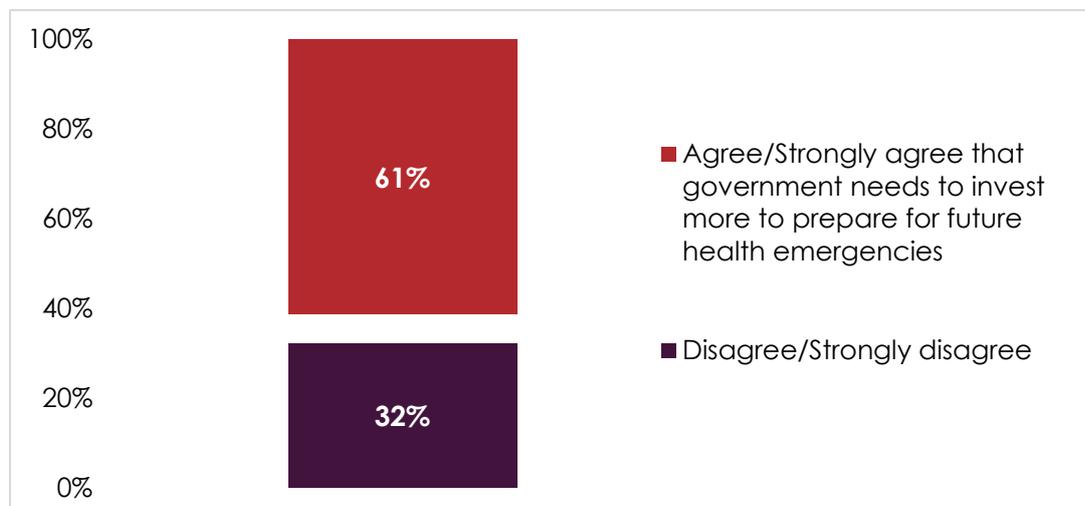
By a 2-to-1 margin (61% to 32%), citizens say the government needs to invest more in preparing for future public health emergencies, even if it means that fewer resources are available for other health services (Figure 17).

Figure 16: Preparedness for future health emergencies? | Nigeria | 2022



Respondents were asked: After experiencing the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria, how prepared or unprepared do you think the government will be to deal with future public health emergencies?

Figure 17: Invest more to prepare for future health emergencies? | Nigeria | 2022



Respondents were asked: Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Our government needs to invest more of our health resources in special preparations to respond to health emergencies like COVID-19, even if it means fewer resources are available for other health services?

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a major impact on Nigerian families by weakening the country's already embattled economy.

While a majority of citizens are satisfied with the government's overall handling of the pandemic, they are critical of the government's efforts to provide pandemic-related assistance, and most believe that resources meant for fighting the pandemic were lost due to corruption.

A majority of Nigerians remain unvaccinated against COVID-19. Fewer than half trust the government to ensure that the vaccines are safe, but many vaccine-hesitant citizens also doubt that COVID-19 exists or represents a serious threat.

These findings point to opportunities for government action when it comes to assistance, public sensitisation on COVID-19 and vaccines, and citizens' call for greater investment in preparations for future health emergencies.

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