

Ghanaians applaud government's response to COVID-19 but urge greater emergency preparedness

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 591 | Maame Akua Amoah Twum and Lionel Ossé

Summary

In Ghana, the first two cases of COVID-19 were confirmed on 12 March 2020 (Ministry of Health, 2020). As of 10 January 2023, the country had recorded 171,065 cases of COVID-19 with 1,461 deaths (World Health Organization, 2023).

In response to the pandemic, the government declared a ban on public gatherings (funerals, festivals, workshops, conferences, rallies, church activities, and schools); closed schools as well as land, sea, and air borders; and imposed a three-week partial lockdown on the capital city of Accra and its environs as well as Kumasi, the second-largest city in the country (Darkwah, 2021). The government also launched a mass vaccination campaign throughout the country that has resulted in 36% of the population being either fully or partially vaccinated as of early December 2022 (Our World in Data, 2022).

Pandemic-related restrictions led to economic slowdowns across the country. Many businesses shut down, and many people lost sources of income (Royal Society of Tropical Medicine & Hygiene, 2021; Aduhene & Osei-Assibey, 2021). Government measures to lessen the economic impacts of the pandemic included free/subsidised water and electricity supply; favourable loans to qualified micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises; and provision of free food and other necessities, in collaboration with religious organisations, to affected households in Accra and Kumasi during the partial lockdown (Dadzie & Raju, 2020).

Findings from the latest Afrobarometer survey show that a quarter of Ghanaians say that a household member lost a job or primary source of income due to the pandemic. A majority of citizens think that the government was unfair in its distribution of pandemic-related relief assistance and that at least some of the resources intended for the COVID-19 response were lost to corruption.

A majority of Ghanaians report having received the COVID-19 vaccine, but almost three in 10 say they are unlikely to get vaccinated.

Overall, citizens give the government positive ratings for its handling of the COVID-19 pandemic, but a majority say it should invest more resources in preparations for the next public health emergency.

Afrobarometer surveys

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan survey research network that provides reliable data on African experiences and evaluations of democracy, governance, and quality of life. Eight survey rounds in up to 39 countries have been completed since 1999. Round 9 surveys are being completed in early 2023. Afrobarometer's national partners conduct face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice.

The Afrobarometer team in Ghana, led by the Ghana Center for Democratic Development, interviewed a nationally representative sample of 2,400 adult Ghanaians in April 2022. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-2 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys were conducted in Ghana in 1999, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014, 2017, and 2019.

Key findings

■ Effects of the COVID-19 pandemic:

- About a quarter (26%) of Ghanaians say a member of their household lost a job, business, or primary source of income due to the pandemic, while 2% report that someone in their household became ill with COVID-19 or tested positive for the virus.

■ Attitudes toward vaccines:

- About six in 10 Ghanaians (59%) say they have received at least one dose of a vaccine against COVID-19.
- Almost three in 10 citizens (28%) say they are not likely to get vaccinated, including 23% who consider it "very unlikely."
- Citizens who say they are unlikely to get vaccinated cite a variety of reasons for their hesitancy, including that COVID-19 doesn't exist (23%) and that the vaccine is not safe (12%).
- More than four in 10 Ghanaians (42%) express little or no trust in the government to ensure the safety of COVID-19 vaccines.

■ Government response to COVID-19:

- Three-fourths (76%) of Ghanaians say the government has performed "fairly well" or "very well" in managing the response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Specifically, about six in 10 are satisfied with the government's efforts to ensure that health facilities are adequately resourced (61%) and to minimise disruptions to children's education (59%).
- But two-thirds (67%) say the distribution of relief assistance was handled unfairly, and more than seven in 10 (72%) believe that "some" or "a lot" of the resources intended for the COVID-19 response have been lost to corruption.
- Three-fourths (76%) of citizens approve of using the police or military to enforce public health mandates during a pandemic. A majority also consider it justified to postpone elections (55%), while half (50%) endorse censoring media reporting in response to a public health emergency.

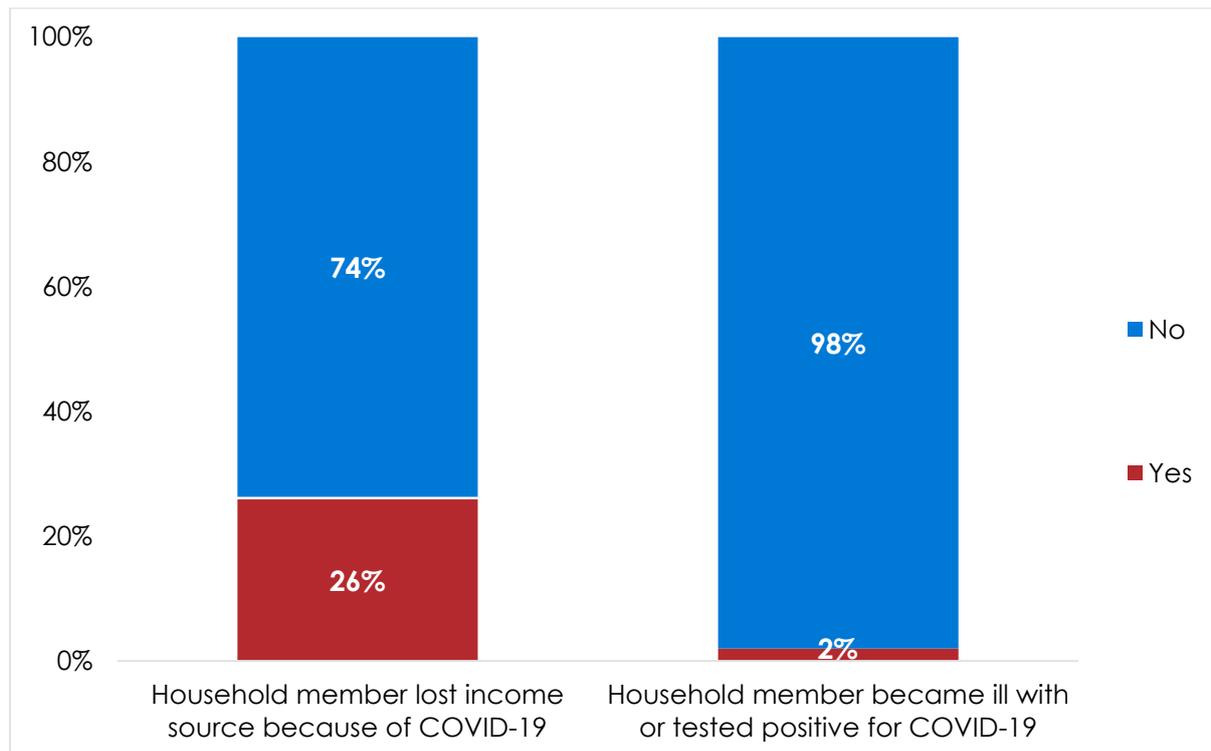
■ Looking ahead:

- More than four in 10 Ghanaians (42%) say the government is not prepared to deal with future public health emergencies.
- And almost two-thirds (64%) think the government needs to invest more in such preparations, even if it means fewer resources are available for other health services.

Effects of COVID-19

About a quarter (26%) of Ghanaians say a member of their household lost a job, business, or primary source of income due to the pandemic, and 2% report that someone in their household became ill with COVID-19 or tested positive for the virus (Figure 1).

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



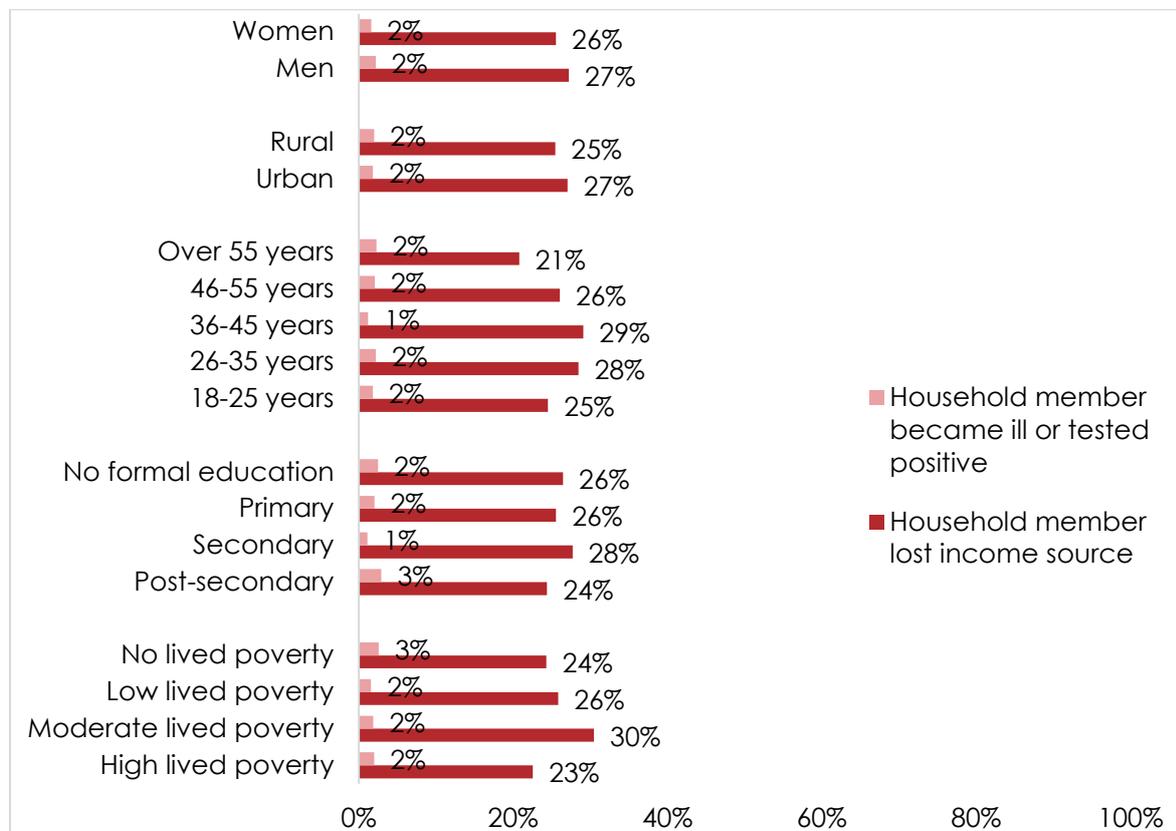
Respondents were asked: Please tell me whether you personally or any other member of your household have been affected in any of the following ways by the COVID-19 pandemic: Became ill with, or tested positive for, COVID-19? Temporarily or permanently lost a job, business, or primary source of income?

Loss of an income source was least common among older citizens (21%, vs. 25%-29% of younger adults) and those experiencing high lived poverty¹ (23%, vs. 30% of those experiencing moderate lived poverty) (Figure 2).

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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 demographic group | Ghana | 2022

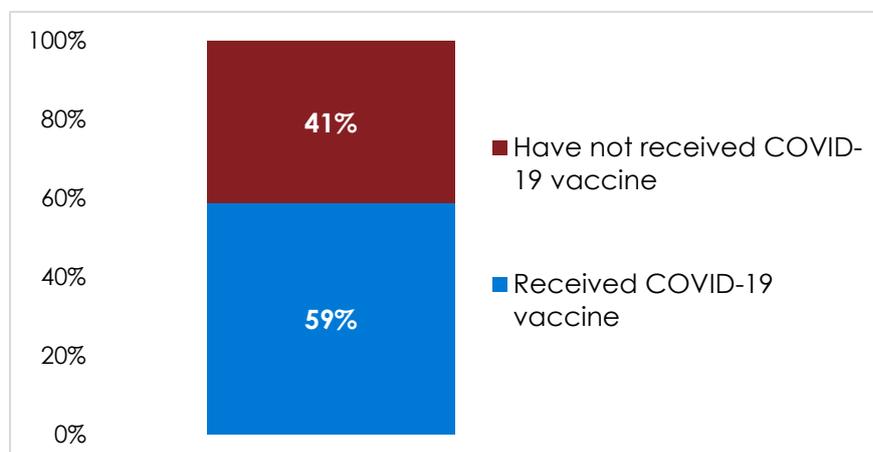


Respondents were asked: Please tell me if you personally or any other member of your household have been affected in any of the following ways by the COVID-19 pandemic: Became ill with COVID-19? Temporarily or permanently lost a job, business or primary source of income? (% who say "yes")

Attitudes toward vaccination

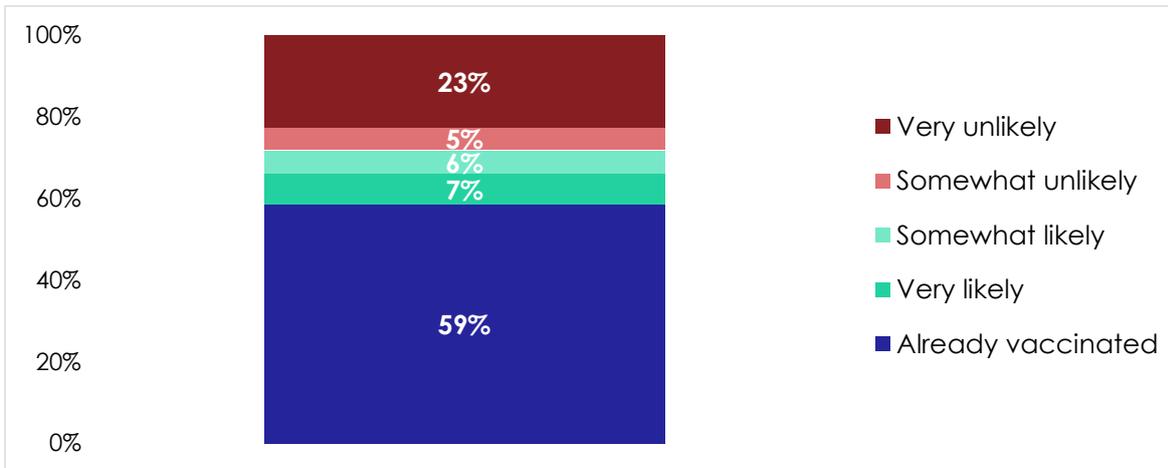
Almost six in 10 Ghanaians (59%) say they have received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine (Figure 3). But four in 10 (41%) have not received the shot, including almost three in 10 who say they are "very unlikely" (23%) or "somewhat unlikely" (5%) to try to get vaccinated. About one in eight describe themselves as "somewhat likely" (6%) or "very likely" (7%) to try to get vaccinated (Figure 4).

Figure 3: Received COVID-19 vaccine | Ghana | 2022



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

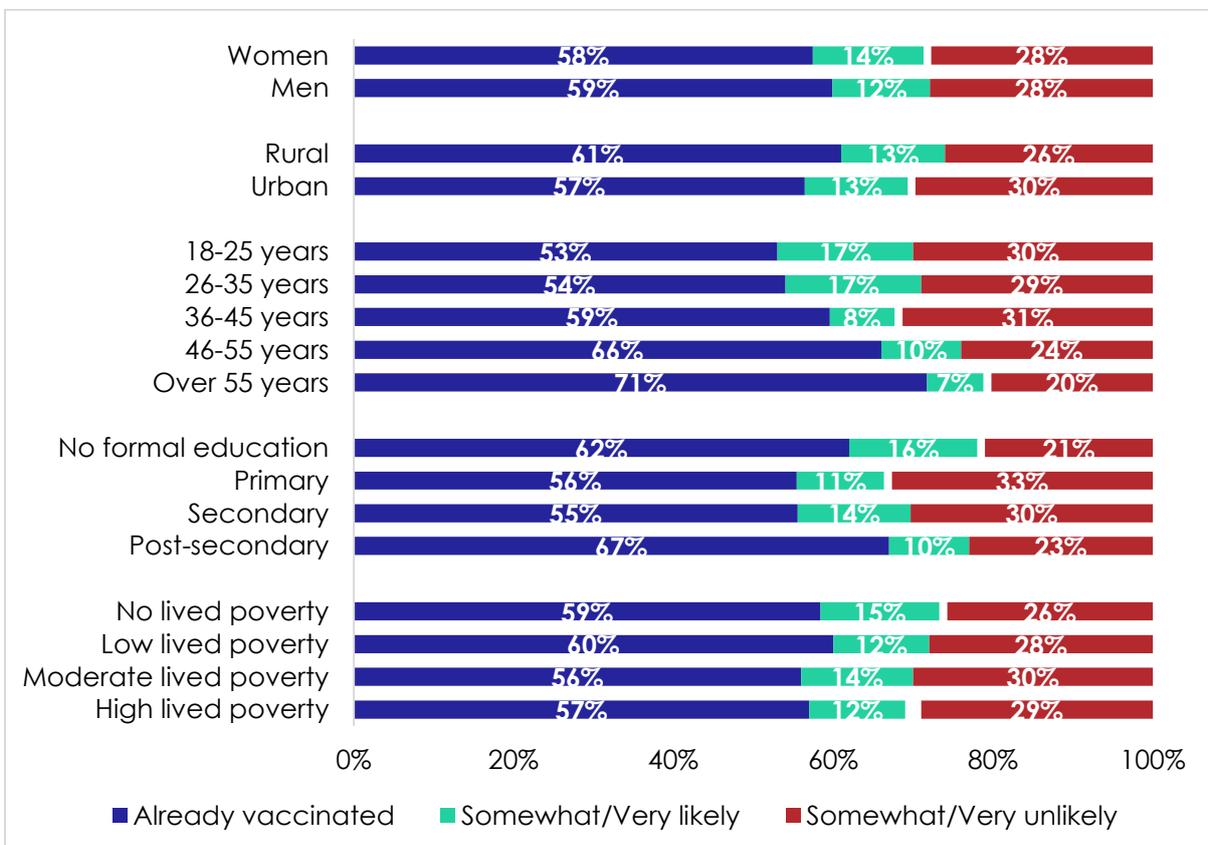
Figure 4: Likelihood of trying to get vaccinated | Ghana | 2022



Respondents were asked: Have you received a vaccination against COVID-19, either one or two doses? [If no:] If a vaccine for COVID-19 is available, how likely are you to try to get vaccinated?

Self-reported vaccination rates increase with citizens' age, ranging from 53% among 18- to 25-year-olds to 71% of those over age 55 (Figure 5). The most educated citizens (67%) are more likely to report having received the vaccine than those with less schooling (55%-62%).

Figure 5: Likelihood of trying to get vaccinated | by demographic group | Ghana | 2022



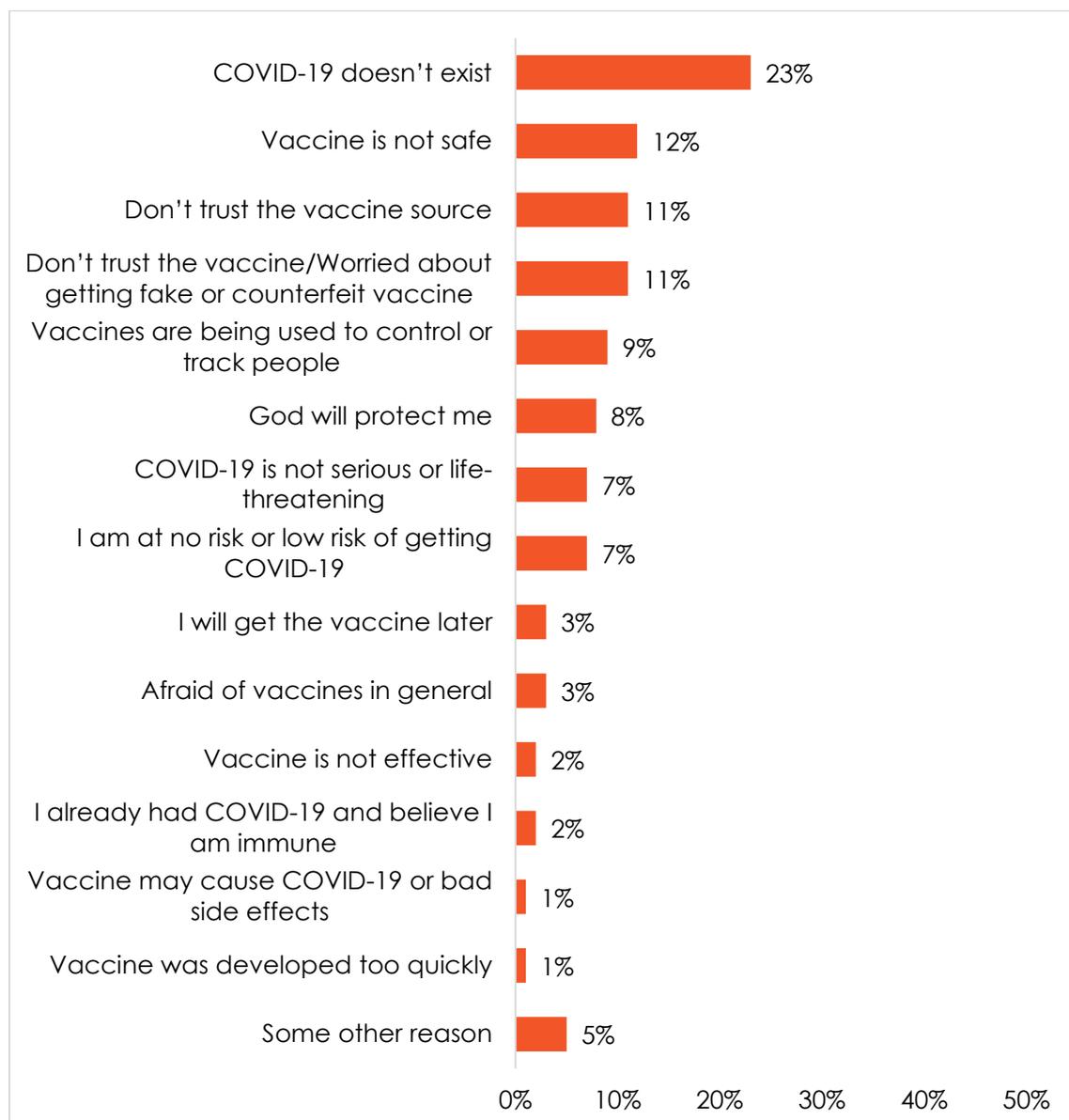
Respondents were asked: Have you received a vaccination against COVID-19, either one or two doses? [If no:] If a vaccine for COVID-19 is available, how likely are you to try to get vaccinated?

Rural dwellers (61%) and better-off citizens (59%-60%) are slightly more likely than urbanites (57%) and the poorest (56%-57%) to say they've received at least one dose of the vaccine.

Vaccine hesitancy is slightly higher among those with primary and secondary education (30%-33%), young adults (31%), urban dwellers (30%), and citizens experiencing moderate lived poverty (30%) than among those with no formal education (21%), the elderly (20%), rural dwellers (26%), and the economically best-off citizens (26%).

Among citizens who say they are unlikely to get vaccinated, the most frequently cited reasons for vaccine hesitancy are the belief that the COVID-19 virus doesn't exist (23%), doubts about vaccine safety (12%), mistrust of the source of the vaccine (11%), and worries about getting a fake or counterfeit vaccine (11%) (Figure 6). Others believe that the vaccines are being used to control or track people (9%), that God will protect them against COVID-19 (8%), or that they are at low or no risk of getting the COVID-19 virus (7%).

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

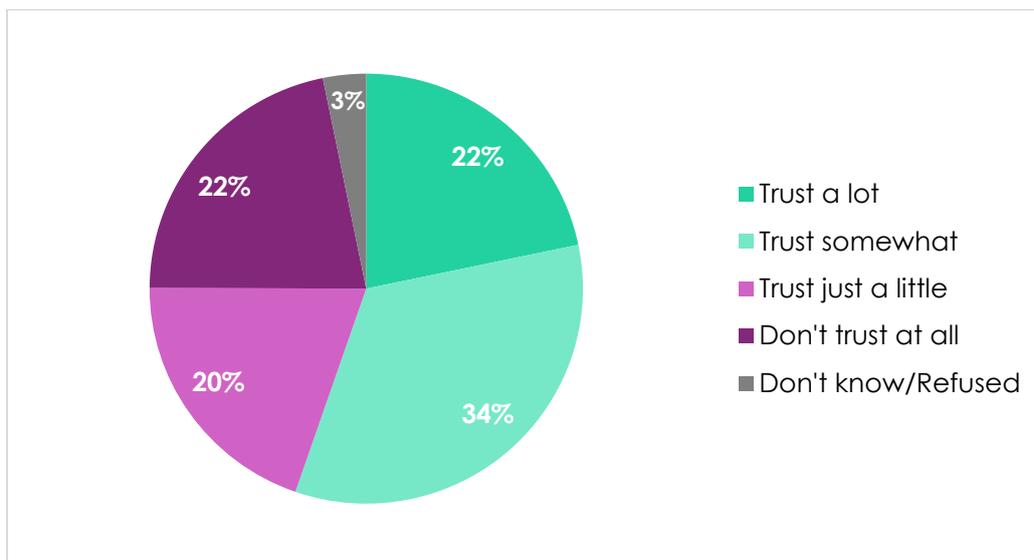


Respondents who say they are not likely to get vaccinated were asked: What is the main reason that you would be unlikely to get a COVID-19 vaccine?

Doubts about vaccine safety can be a major hurdle for government efforts to vaccinate the population. While a majority (56%) of Ghanaians say they trust the government “somewhat” (22%) or “a lot” (34%) to ensure the safety of COVID-19 vaccines, more than four in 10 (42%) express “just a little” trust (20%) or no trust at all (22%) (Figure 7).

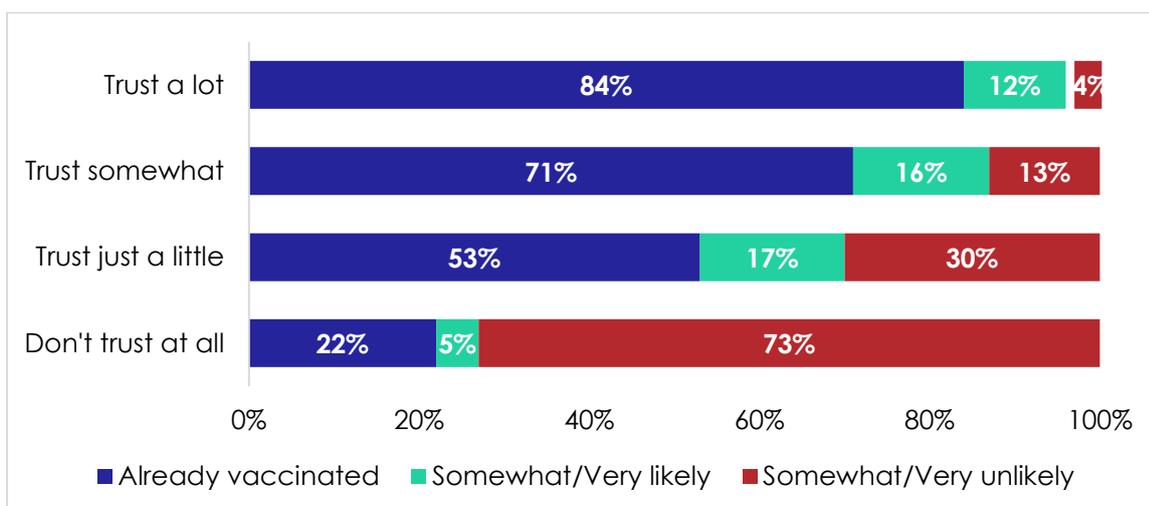
Citizens' willingness to get vaccinated against COVID-19 is strongly correlated with their trust in the government's ability to ensure the safety of the vaccine. Citizens who trust the government “a lot” to ensure vaccine safety are about four times as likely to be vaccinated as those who express no trust at all (84% vs. 22%). Vaccine hesitancy is 18 times more common among the “no trust” group (73%) than the “trust a lot” group (4%) (Figure 8).

Figure 7: Trust government to ensure vaccine safety | Ghana | 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 Ghanaian citizens is safe before it is used in this country?

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



Respondents were asked:

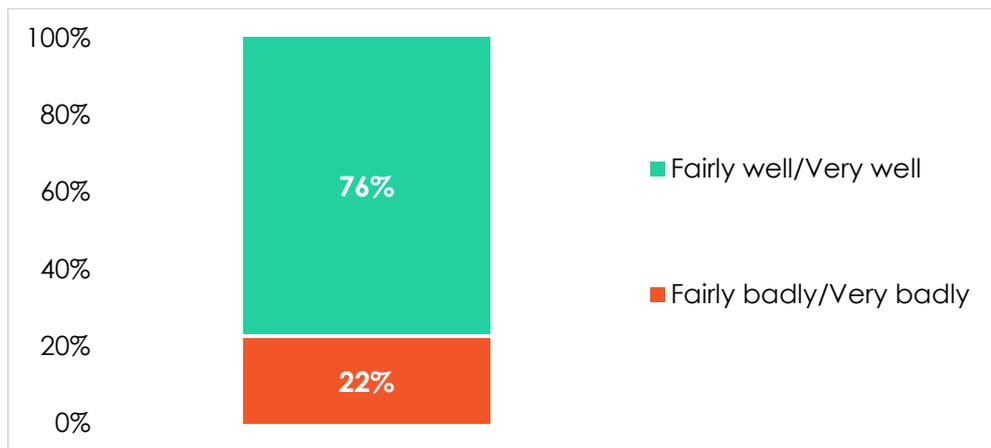
If a vaccine for COVID-19 is available, how likely are you to try to get vaccinated?
 How much do you trust the government to ensure that any vaccine for COVID-19 that is developed or offered to Ghanaian citizens is safe before it is used in this country?

Government response to COVID-19

More than three-fourths (76%) of Ghanaians describe the government's overall performance in managing the response to the COVID-19 pandemic as "fairly" or "very" good, while 22% say it has done a poor job (Figure 9).

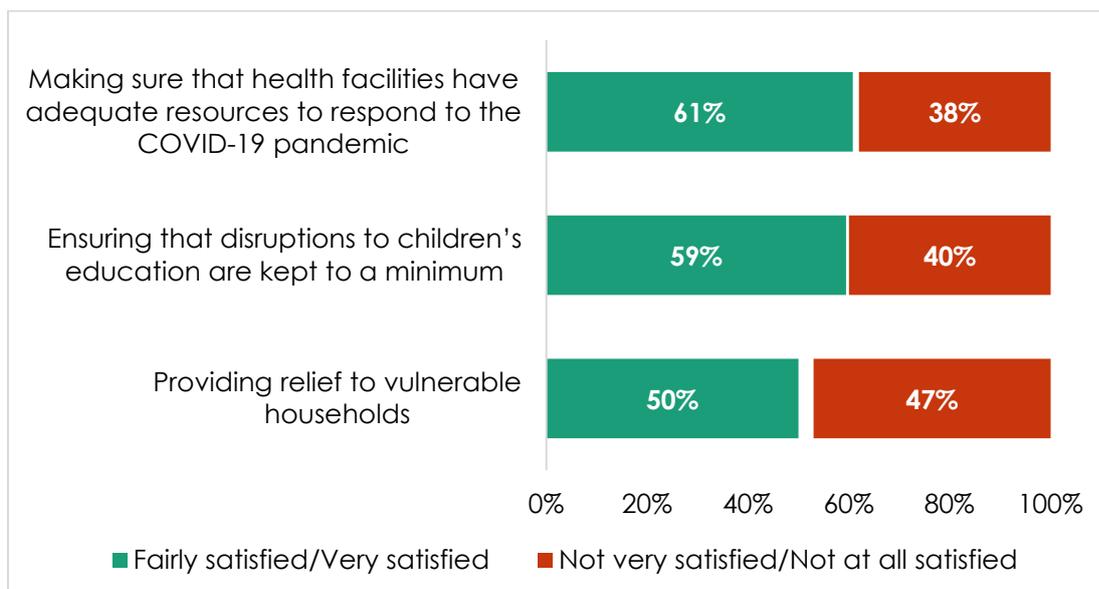
Regarding specific aspects of the COVID-19 response, majorities say they are "fairly satisfied" or "very satisfied" with the government's efforts to ensure that health facilities are adequately resourced to deal with the pandemic (61%) and to ensure that disruptions of children's education are held to a minimum (59%) (Figure 10). Half (50%) express satisfaction with the government's provision of relief assistance to vulnerable households, but almost as many (47%) see those efforts as inadequate.

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



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

Figure 10: Satisfaction with government's response to specific aspects of the pandemic | Ghana | 2022



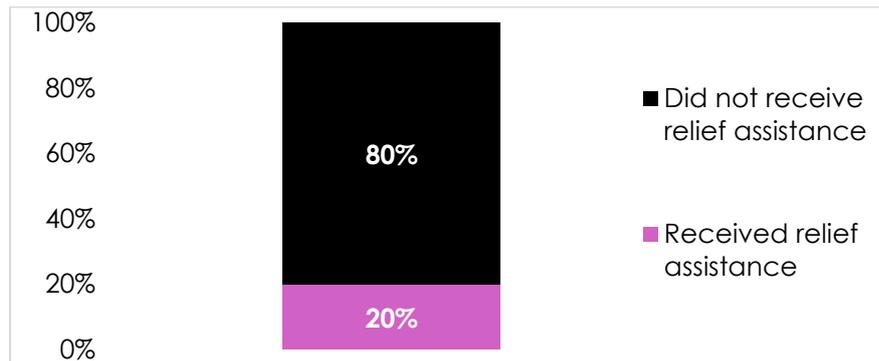
Respondents were asked: How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the government's response to COVID-19 in the following areas?

COVID-19 relief assistance

Only two in 10 Ghanaians (20%) report that their household received COVID-19 relief assistance from the government, while 80% say they did not (Figure 11).

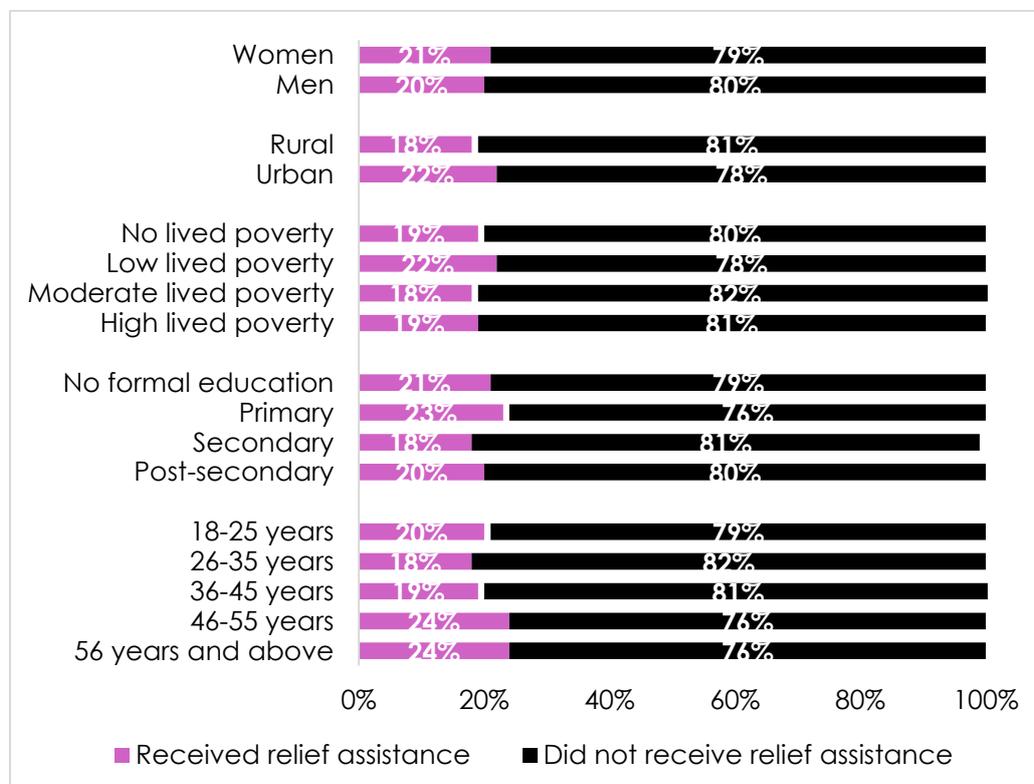
Urban households were somewhat more likely to benefit from government assistance than those in rural areas (22% vs. 18%), as were older folks (24% of those aged 46 and above) compared to younger adults (18%-20%) (Figure 12).

Figure 11: Access to COVID-19 relief assistance | Ghana | 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?

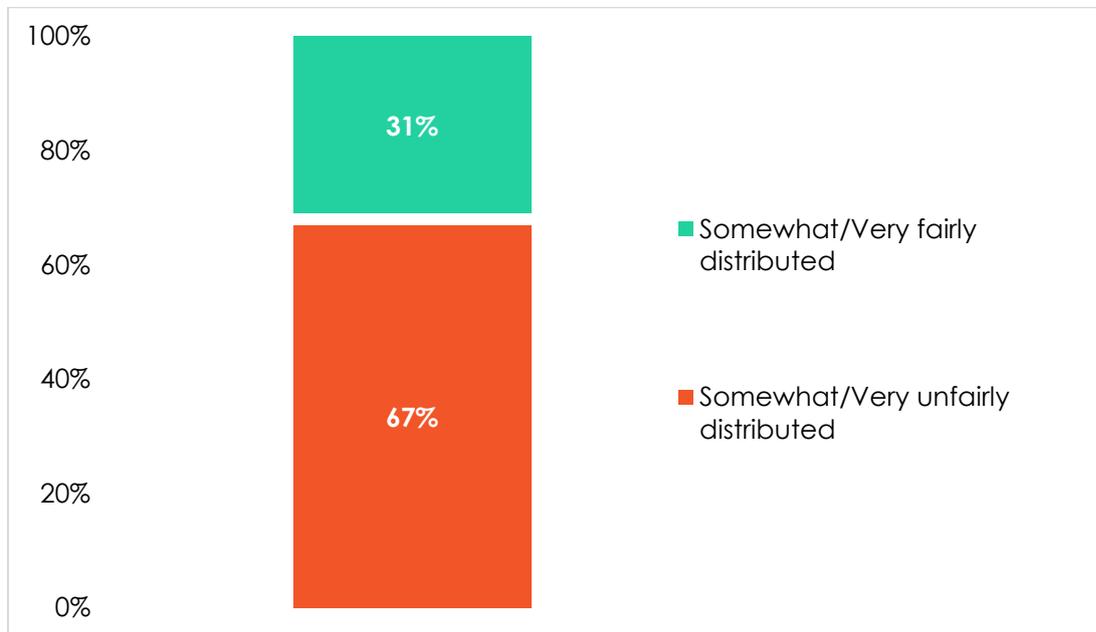
Figure 12: Access to COVID-19 relief assistance | by demographic group | Ghana | 2022



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?

Only three in 10 citizens (31%) say that COVID-19 relief was distributed “somewhat fairly” or “very fairly,” while more than two-thirds (67%) say the distribution was unfair (Figure 13).

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

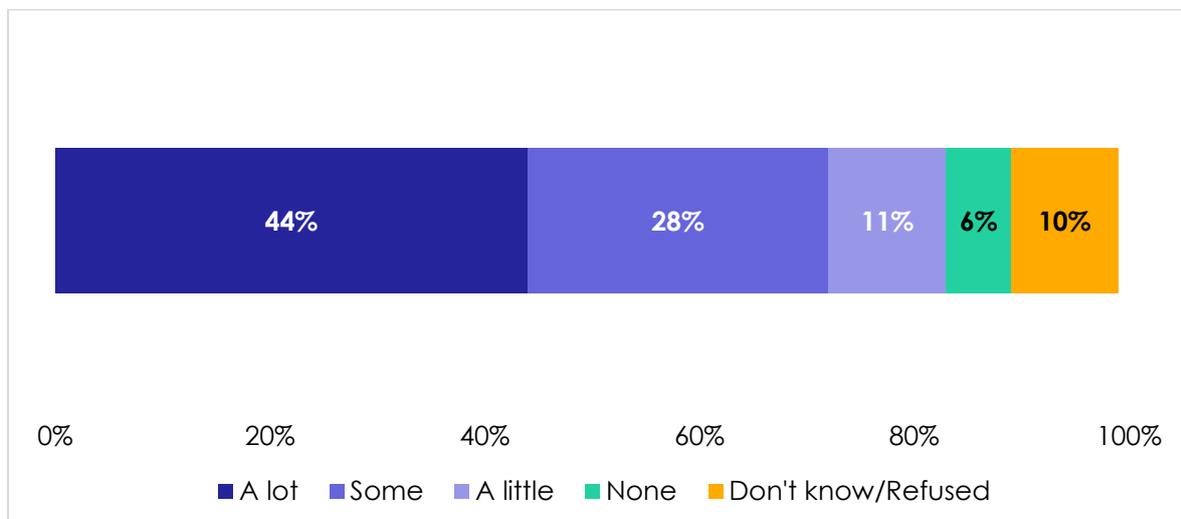


Respondents were asked: Do you think that the distribution of government support to people during the COVID-19 pandemic, for example through food packages or cash payments, has been fair or unfair?

Corruption related to COVID-19

In addition to expressing significant dissatisfaction with the fairness of government relief assistance, more than seven in 10 Ghanaians (72%) say they believe that “some” or “a lot” of the resources intended for the COVID-19 response have been lost to corruption (Figure 14). Only 6% think that none of these resources have been embezzled.

Figure 14: Perceived COVID-19 related corruption | Ghana | 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?

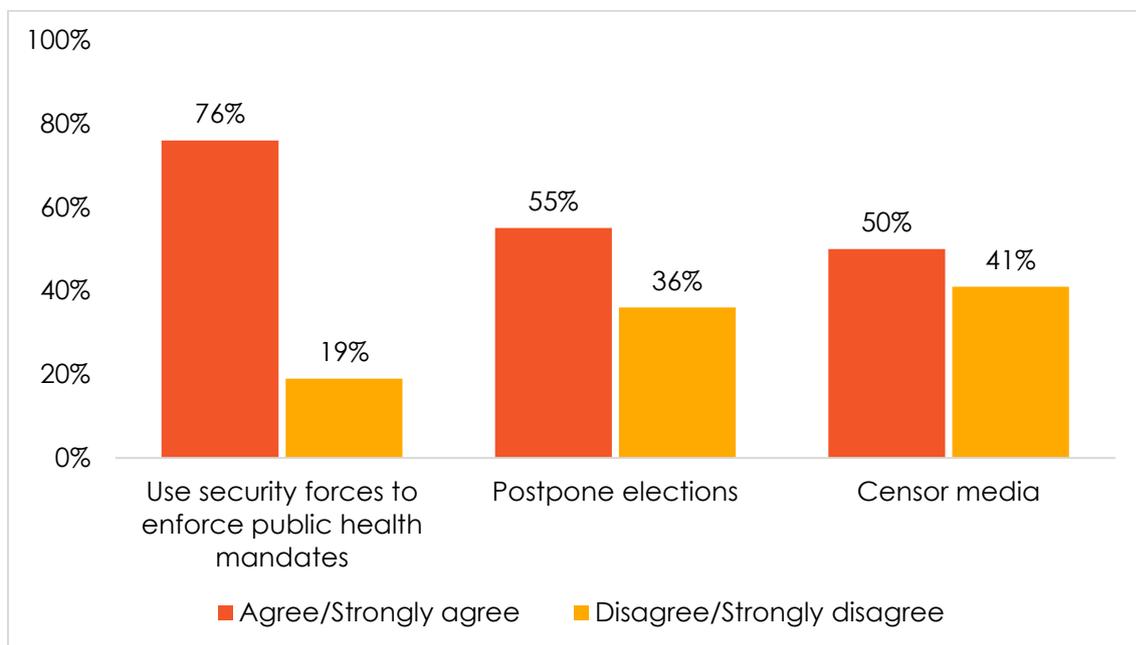
Limit democratic freedoms during a pandemic?

Lockdowns and other pandemic-related restrictions in some countries have raised questions about the extent to which citizens are willing to forego certain freedoms, even temporarily, to protect public health.

In Ghana, more than three-fourths (76%) 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 like the pandemic (Figure 15). A majority also consider it appropriate to postpone elections (55%), while half (50%) would accept censorship of media reporting during a pandemic.

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

| Ghana | 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?

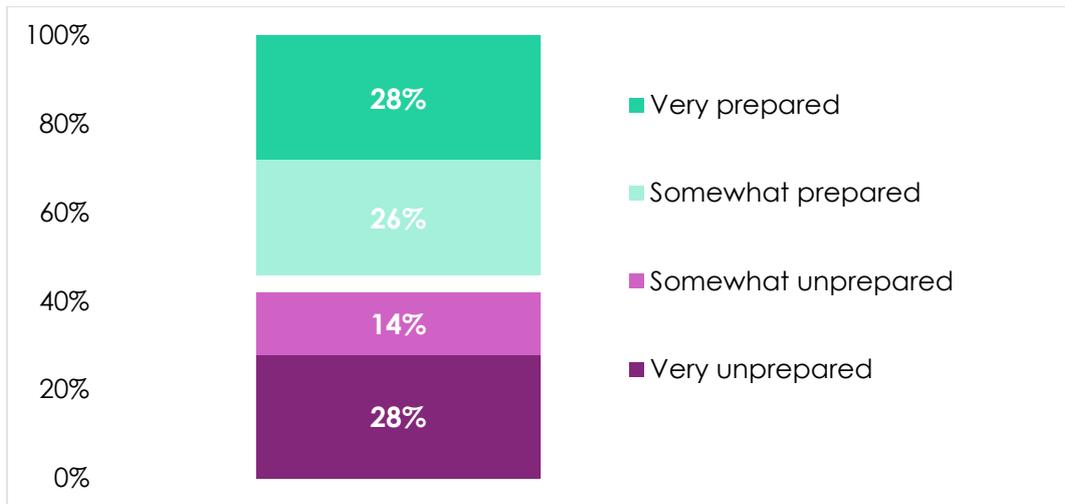
Looking ahead

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

About four in 10 Ghanaians (42%) think their government will not be prepared, including 28% who think it will be "very unprepared" (Figure 16). However, a majority (54%) believe the government will be ready for the next public health crisis.

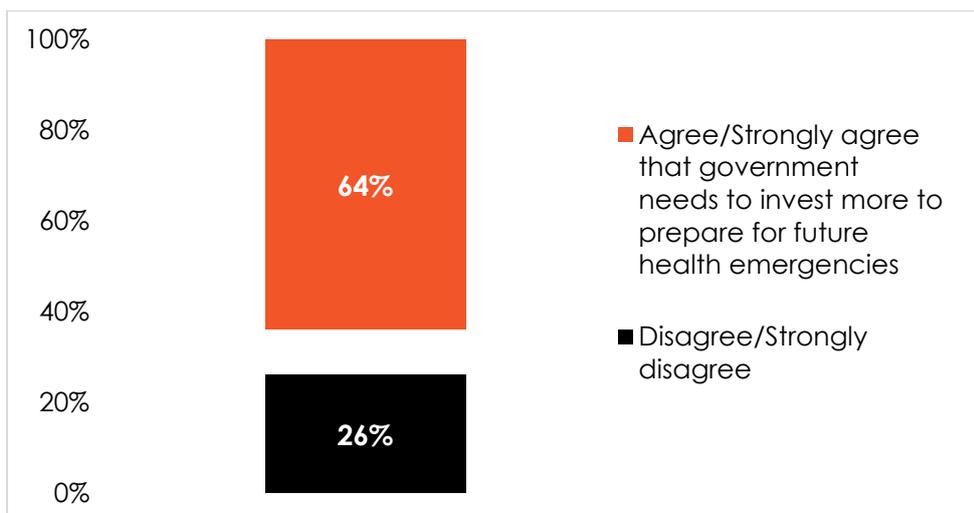
In line with these concerns, more than six in 10 Ghanaians (64%) "agree" or "strongly agree" that the government needs to invest more in preparing for future public health emergencies, even if it means that fewer resources are available for other health services (Figure 17).

Figure 16: Preparedness for future health emergencies | Ghana | 2022



Respondents were asked: After experiencing the COVID-19 pandemic in Ghana, 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? | Ghana | 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

Ghanaian citizens are generally satisfied with the way their government has handled the COVID-19 pandemic. However, survey findings highlight widespread perceptions that pandemic-related relief assistance was inadequate, distributed unfairly, and likely limited because of corruption. And a majority of citizens want the government to invest more in preparations for future public health emergencies, even if that means less funding for other health services.

A substantial minority of Ghanaian citizens remain vaccine-hesitant, suggesting that more community outreach may be needed if the government wants to vaccinate most or all of the population.

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