

Angolans approve of government's pandemic response but say aid to households inadequate

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 595 | Tosin Salau and David Boio

Summary

Angola reported its first COVID-19 case on 21 March 2020, and has since recorded 105,095 cases and 1,930 deaths due to the virus (World Health Organization, 2023).

The government's efforts to contain the pandemic included restricting entry into Angola by people from countries with high rates of COVID-19 infection and declaring states of emergency and calamity with partial lockdowns. Security forces charged with enforcing lockdown restrictions were accused of numerous human rights abuses, including killings and arbitrary arrests (Human Rights Watch, 2020). The case of Silvio Dala, a young doctor who died in police custody after being stopped for not wearing a mask in his car, led to widespread protests against police violence (Hossi & Anderson, 2020).

To mitigate the pandemic's economic impacts, the government provided cash transfers, food, and health products for some households and capital and credit for businesses (UNCTAD, 2021). But critics complained about political partisanship and a lack of transparency in the distribution of government assistance (Amnesty International, 2020).

Angola was the first country in East and Southern Africa to receive COVID-19 vaccines through the COVAX initiative (IOL, 2021) and began rolling out a vaccination campaign in early March 2021. As of January 2023, more than 15 million Angolans (46% of the population) had received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine.

Findings from the latest Afrobarometer survey, in early 2022, show that one-fourth of households lost a primary source of income because of the pandemic, but only about half as many received relief assistance from the government.

Overall, a majority of Angolans approved of the government's handling of the pandemic, but many criticised its provision of relief assistance and said resources intended for the COVID-19 response were lost to corruption. Most respondents said they had received a COVID-19 vaccine or were likely to do so.

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 conducted since 1999. Round 9 surveys (2021/2023) are being completed. Afrobarometer's national partners conduct face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice.

The Afrobarometer team in Angola, led by Ovilongwa – Estudos de Opinião Pública, interviewed a nationally representative, random, stratified probability sample of 1,200 adult Angolans in February-March 2022. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a

margin of error of +/-3 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. A previous survey was conducted in Angola in 2019.

Key findings

■ Effects of the COVID-19 pandemic:

- As of February-March 2022, a quarter (25%) of Angolans said that a member of their household had lost a job, business, or primary source of income due to the pandemic, and 7% said a household member had become ill with COVID-19 or tested positive for the virus.

■ Attitudes toward vaccines:

- Almost nine in 10 (86%) Angolan adults said they had received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine. Only one in 20 (5%) said they were unlikely to try to get vaccinated.

■ Government response to COVID-19:

- Overall, almost two-thirds (64%) of Angolans said the government was doing “fairly well” or “very well” in managing the response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- But fewer than half were satisfied with the government's performance in ensuring that health facilities are adequately resourced (48%), in minimising disruptions to children's education (42%), and in providing relief assistance to vulnerable households (37%).
- Only 12% of respondents said their households received relief assistance from the government. Majorities said that the distribution of relief assistance was unfair (60%) and that “some” or “a lot” of the resources intended for the COVID-19 response were lost to corruption (53%).
- More than half (55%) of citizens considered it justified for the government to use the police or military to enforce public health mandates during a pandemic. But majorities rejected censoring the media (57%) and postponing elections (75%) as justified responses during a public health emergency.

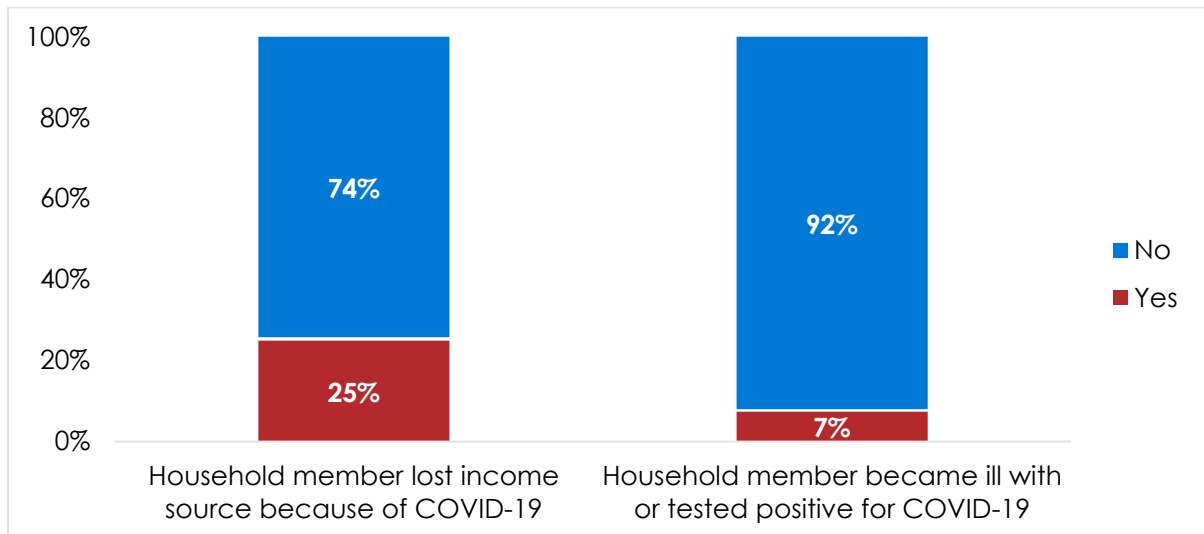
■ Looking ahead:

- More than four in 10 citizen (44%) said the government is not prepared to deal with future public health emergencies.
- Half (49%) of Angolans said 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

As of February-March 2022, 7% of Angolans said someone in their household had become ill with COVID-19 or tested positive for the virus, and 25% said a household member had lost a job, business, or primary source of income due to the pandemic (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Effects of COVID-19 | Angola | 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 have been more widely experienced in cities than in rural areas. Urbanites were roughly twice as likely as rural residents to report that a household member had lost an income source (29% vs. 17%) or become ill with or tested positive for COVID-19 (9% vs. 4%) (Figure 2).

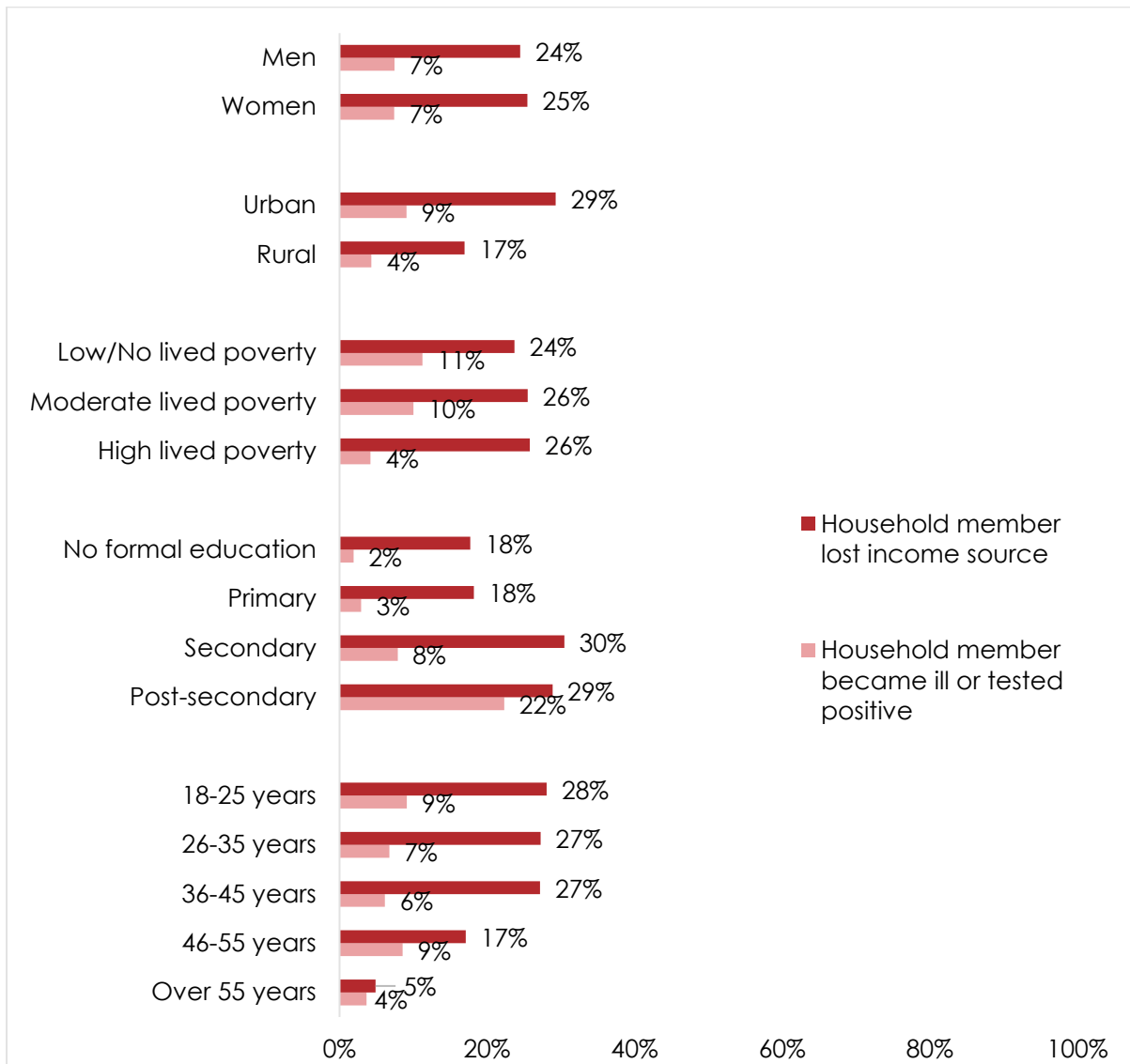
The frequency of both income loss and COVID-19 infection increased sharply with respondents' level of education. While only 2% of those with no formal education reported illness or a positive COVID-19 test, 11 times as many (22%) of those with post-secondary qualifications did. And 29%-30% of respondents with secondary or post-secondary education reported the loss of a major income source, compared to 18% of those with primary schooling or less.

Reported COVID-19 cases in the household were also more common among those experiencing moderate, low, or no lived poverty (10%-11%) than among those with high lived poverty (4%).¹

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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 | Angola | 2022



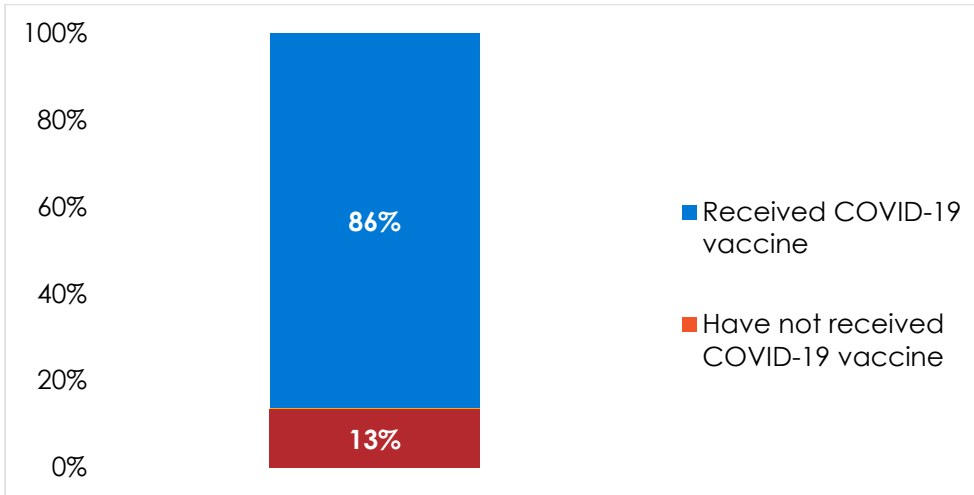
Respondents were asked: Please tell me if you personally or any other member of your household have been affected in any of the following ways by the COVID-19 pandemic: Became ill with COVID-19? Temporarily or permanently lost a job, business or primary source of income? (% who say "yes")

Attitudes toward vaccination

Almost nine in 10 (86%) Angolan adults said they had received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine (Figure 3). More than half of the remaining respondents said they were "somewhat likely" (4%) or "very likely" (4%) to try to get vaccinated, while only one in 20 said they were "very unlikely" (3%) or "somewhat unlikely" (2%) to do so (Figure 4).

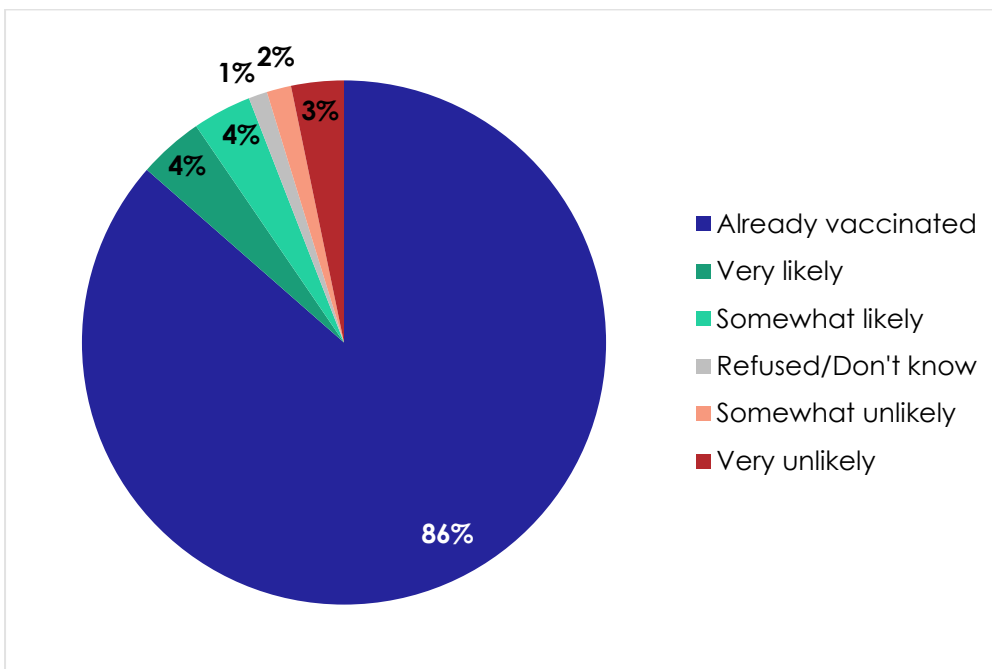
High self-reported vaccination rates reflect Angola's hard-nosed vaccination campaign, which made vaccination mandatory for adults and conditioned entry to workplaces and other public establishments on proof of vaccination (Xinhuanet, 2021) while perhaps also making unvaccinated adults disinclined to admit their status.

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

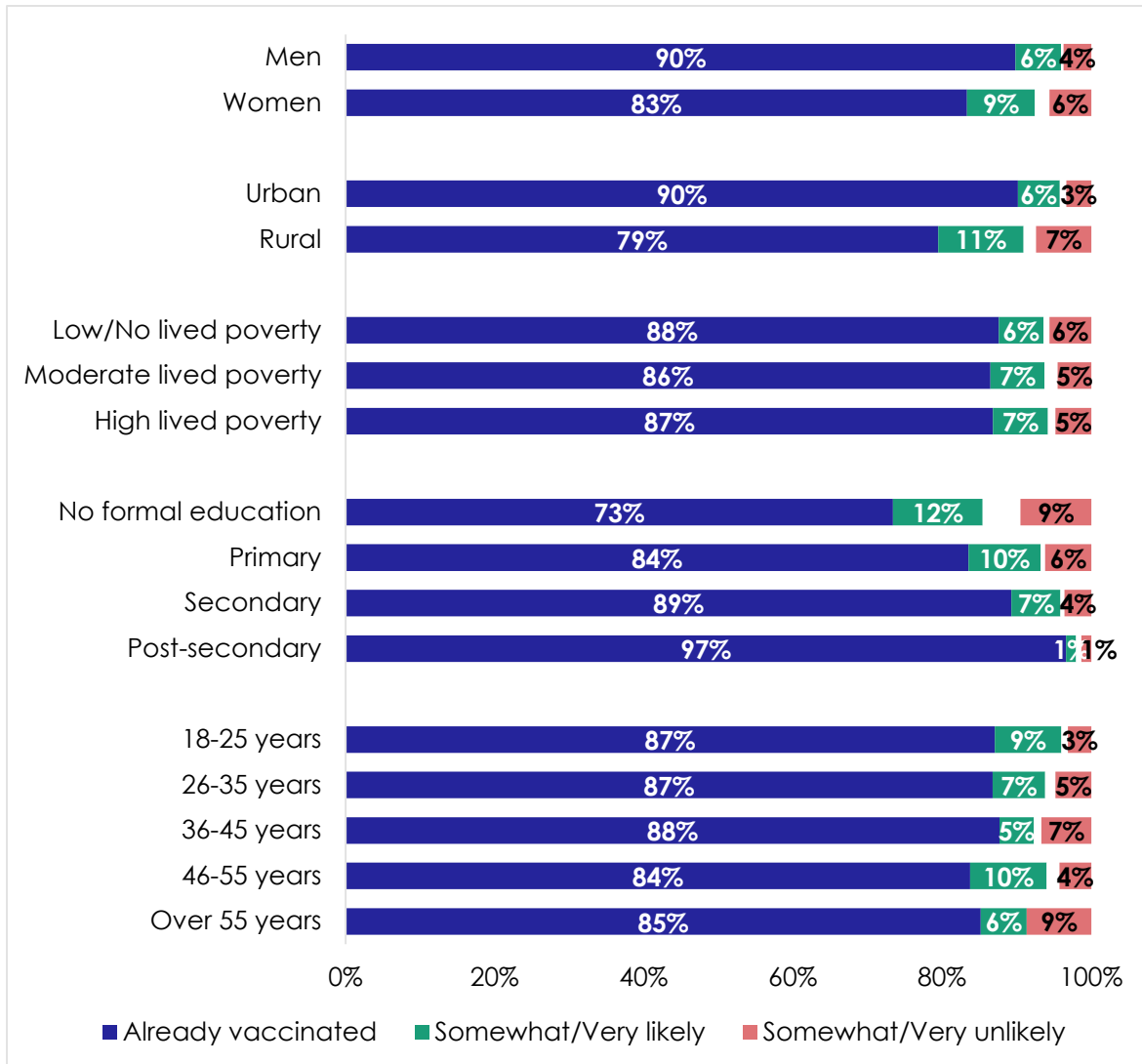


Respondents who had not been vaccinated against COVID-19 were asked: If a vaccine for COVID-19 is available, how likely are you to try to get vaccinated?

Self-reported vaccination rates were higher among men (90%) and urban residents (90%) than among women (83%) and rural residents (79%) (Figure 5). They increased steeply with respondents' education levels, ranging from 73% of those with no formal schooling to 97% of those with post-secondary education.

Vaccine hesitancy (somewhat/very unlikely to try to get vaccinated) was fairly low across key demographic groups, peaking at 9% among respondents over age 55 and those with no formal education.

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



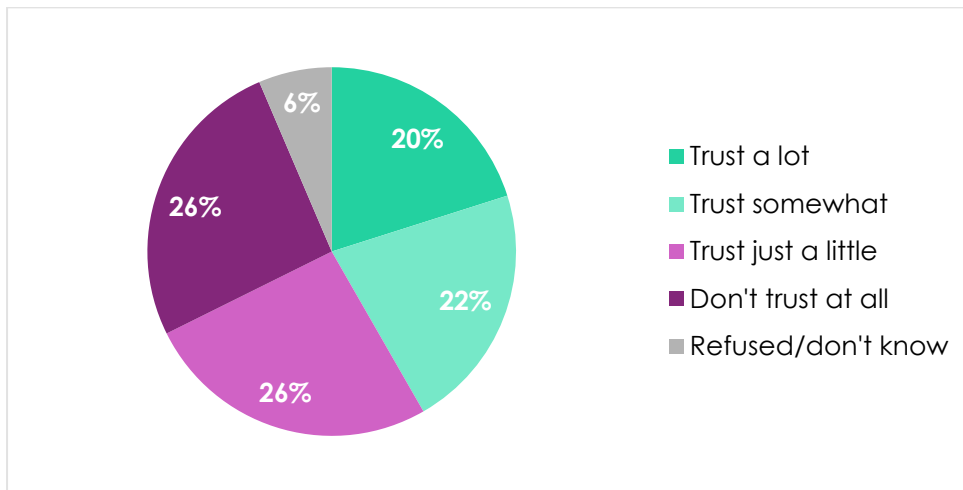
Respondents were asked: *If a vaccine for COVID-19 is available, how likely are you to try to get vaccinated?*

Among citizens who said they were unlikely to get vaccinated, the most commonly cited reason was the belief that COVID-19 is not real.

Even though an overwhelming majority of Angolan adults said they had received a COVID-19 vaccination, fewer than half (42%) said they trust the government “somewhat” or “a lot” to ensure the safety of COVID-19 vaccines, while more expressed “just a little” trust (26%) or no trust at all (26%) (Figure 6).

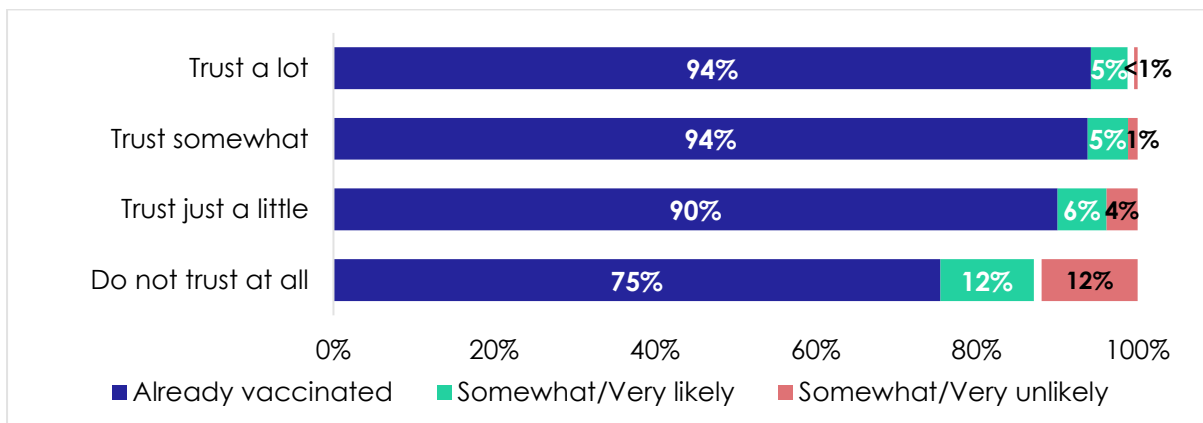
Citizens' willingness to get vaccinated against COVID-19 is correlated with their trust in the government's ability to ensure the safety of the vaccine. Among those who said they trust the government “somewhat” or “a lot,” 94% said they had received the vaccine, compared to 75% of those who said they don't trust the government at all (Figure 7).

Figure 6: Trust government to ensure vaccine safety | Angola | 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 Angola citizens is safe before it is used in this country?

Figure 7: Likelihood of trying to get vaccinated | by trust in government to ensure vaccine safety | Angola | 2022



Respondents were asked:

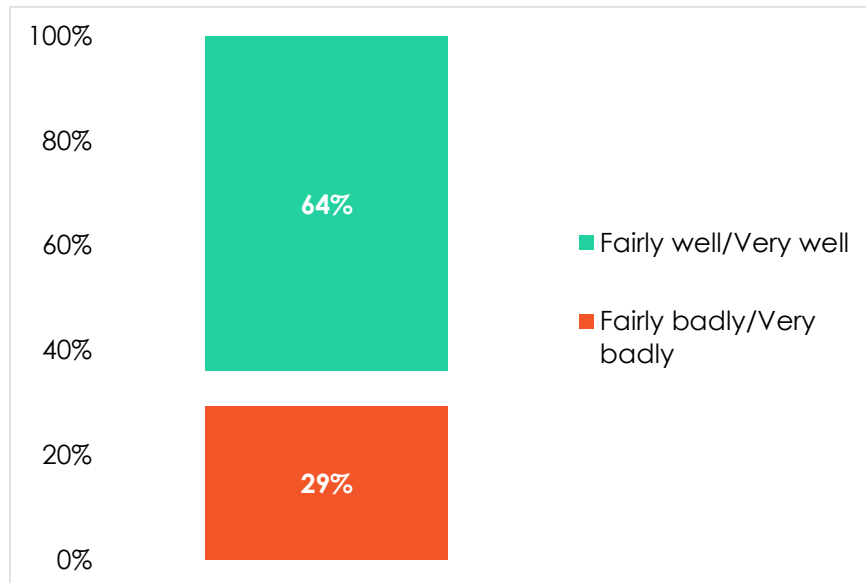
If a vaccine for COVID-19 is available, how likely are you to try to get vaccinated?
 How much do you trust the government to ensure that any vaccine for COVID-19 that is developed or offered to Angolan citizens is safe before it is used in this country?

Government response to COVID-19

While trust in the government's ability to ensure vaccine safety was relatively weak, almost two-thirds (64%) of Angolans described the government overall performance in managing the response to the COVID-19 pandemic as "fairly" or "very" good, while 29% said it is doing a poor job (Figure 8).

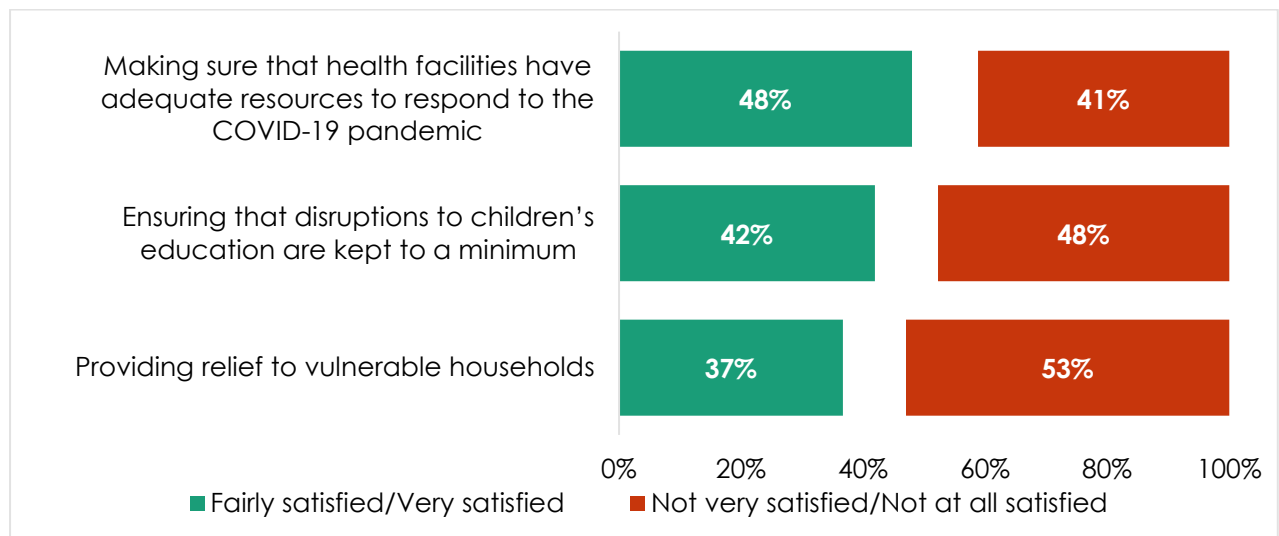
On specific aspects of the COVID-19 response, however, assessments were considerably more critical (Figure 9). Fewer than half (48%) said they were "fairly satisfied" or "very satisfied" with the government's efforts to ensure that health facilities are adequately resourced to deal with the pandemic, and only 42% praised the government's effectiveness in keeping disruptions of children's education to a minimum. A majority (53%) said they were "not very satisfied" or "not at all satisfied" with the government's provision of relief assistance to vulnerable households.

Figure 8: Government response to COVID-19 | Angola | 2022



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

Figure 9: Satisfaction with government's response to COVID-19 | Angola | 2021



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

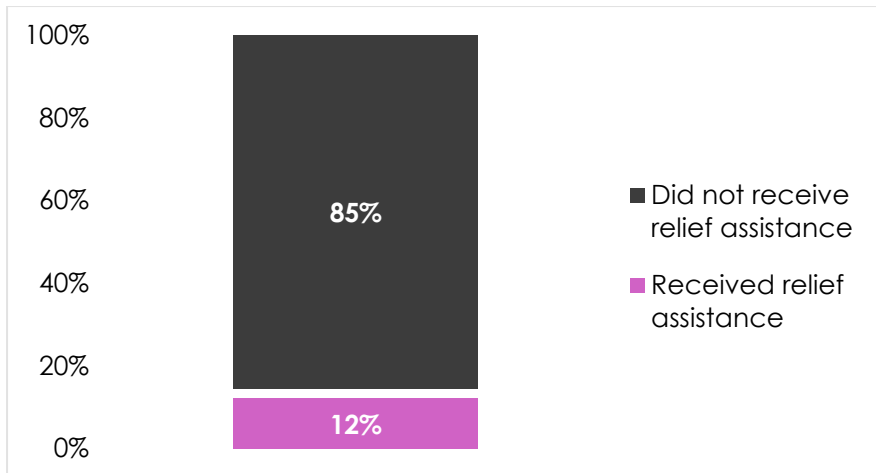
COVID-19 relief assistance

About one in eight Angolans (12%) reported that their households received COVID-19 relief assistance from the government, while 85% said they did not (Figure 10).

Rural households were twice as likely to benefit from government assistance as those in urban areas (18% vs. 9%) (Figure 11). Respondents with no formal education (17%) were more likely to report having received assistance than their more educated counterparts (9% -13%), but citizens' level of lived poverty made no difference.

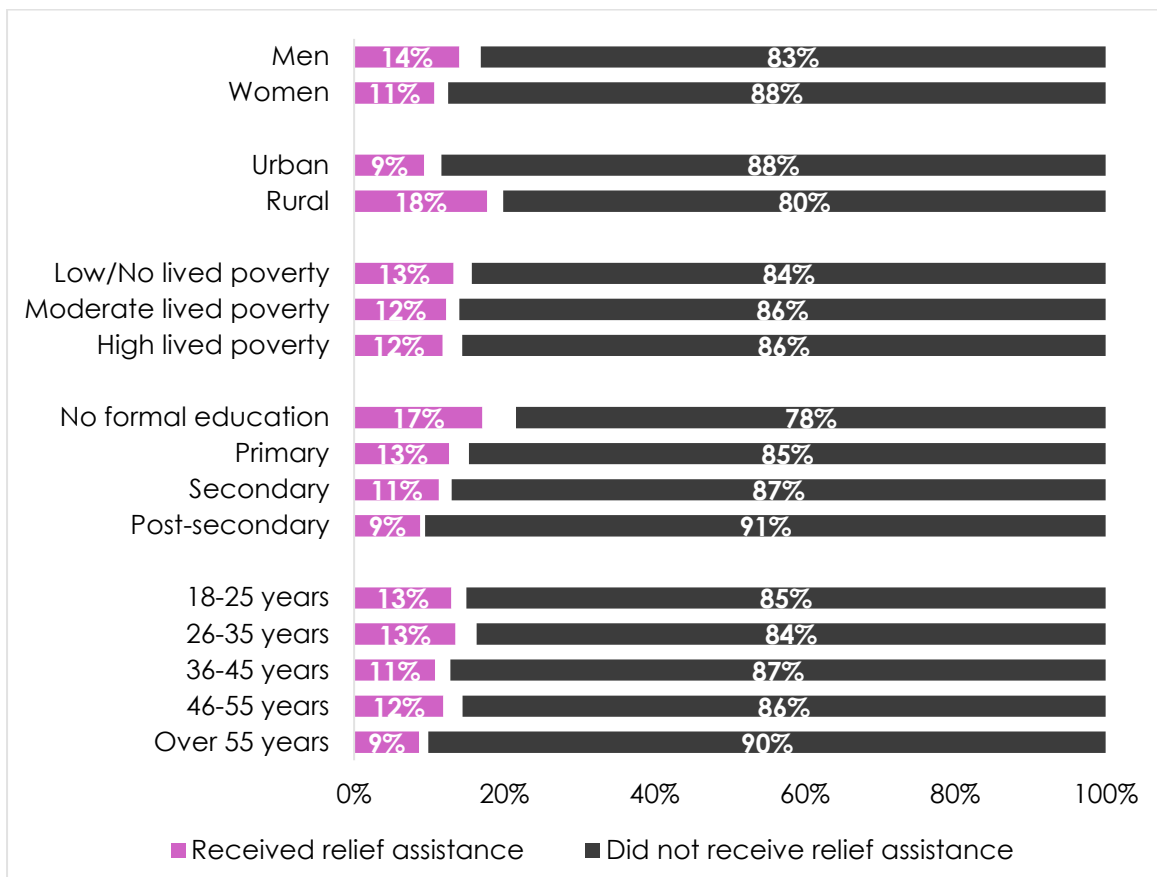
Six in 10 citizens (60%) said that COVID-19 relief was distributed "somewhat unfairly" or "very unfairly," echoing reports that some aid was distributed along political party lines (Amnesty International, 2020). Only 26% described the distribution as fair (Figure 12).

Figure 10: Access to COVID-19 relief assistance | Angola | 2022



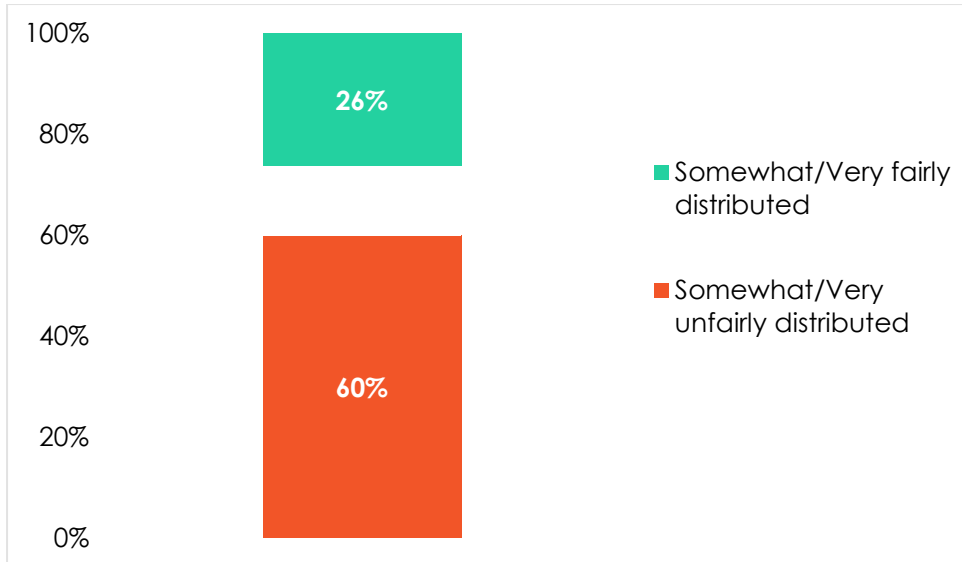
Respondents were asked: Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, have you or your household received any assistance from government, like food, cash payments, relief from bill payments, or other assistance that you were not normally receiving before the pandemic?

Figure 11: Access to COVID-19 relief assistance | by demographic group | Angola | 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: Was COVID-19 relief assistance distributed fairly? | Angola | 2022

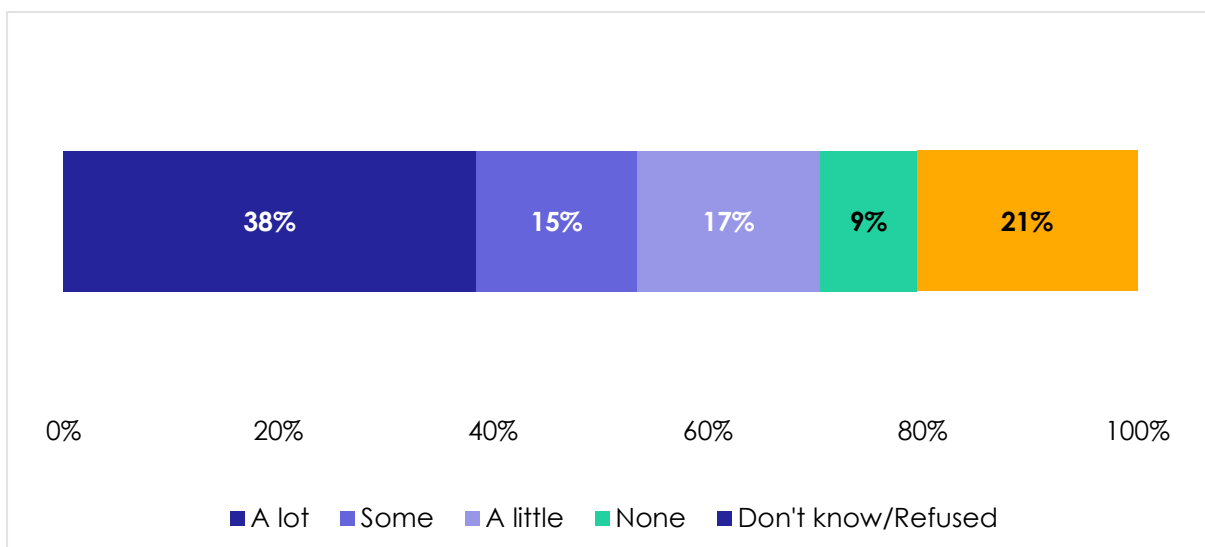


Respondents were asked: Do you think that the distribution of government support to people during the COVID-19 pandemic, for example through food packages or cash payments, has been fair or unfair?

Corruption related to COVID-19

In addition to expressing dissatisfaction with the fairness of government relief assistance, more than half (53%) of Angolans said they believe that “some” or “a lot” of the resources intended for the COVID-19 response were lost to corruption. Only about one in 10 (9%) thought that none of these resources were embezzled (Figure 13).

Figure 13: Perceived COVID-19 related corruption | Angola | 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?

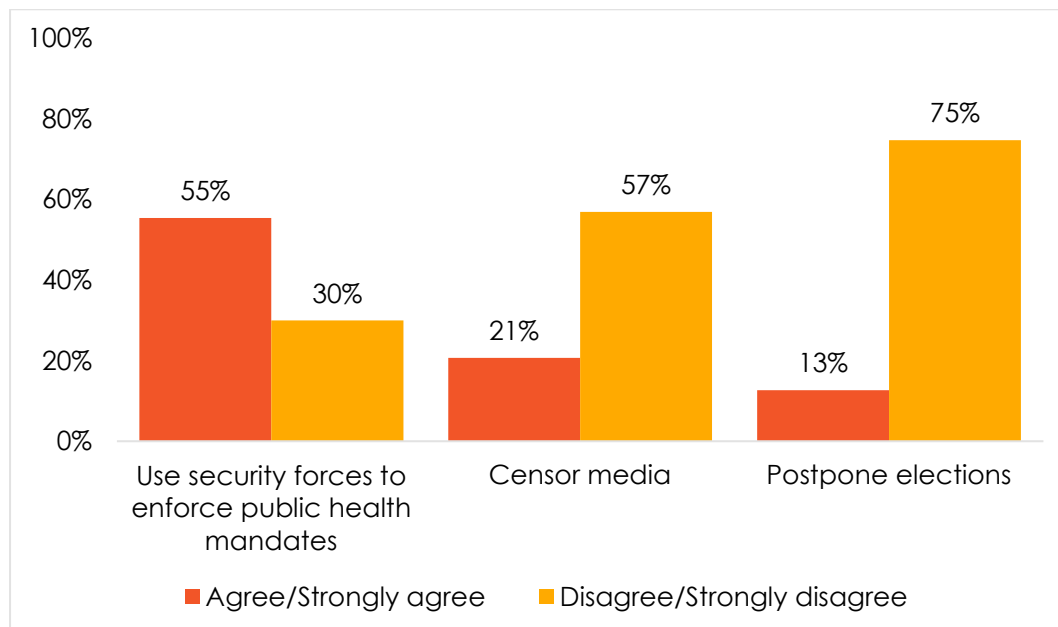
Lockdowns and other pandemic-related restrictions in some countries have raised questions about the extent to which citizens are willing to forego certain freedoms, even temporarily, to protect public health.

In Angola, more than half (55%) of citizens “agreed” or “strongly agreed” 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 14).

But only small minorities considered it acceptable to censor media reporting (21%) or postpone elections (13%) in response to a public health emergency.

Figure 14: Limit democratic freedoms during a public health emergency?

| Angola | 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?

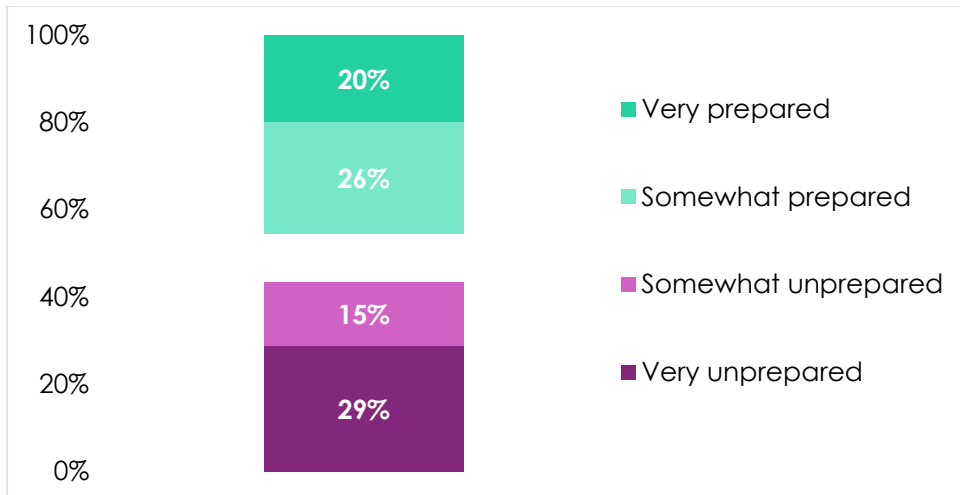
Looking ahead

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

Angolans offered mixed views on their government's preparedness (Figure 15). Almost half (46%) were optimistic that their government will be prepared for the next public health crisis, but nearly as many (44%) disagreed.

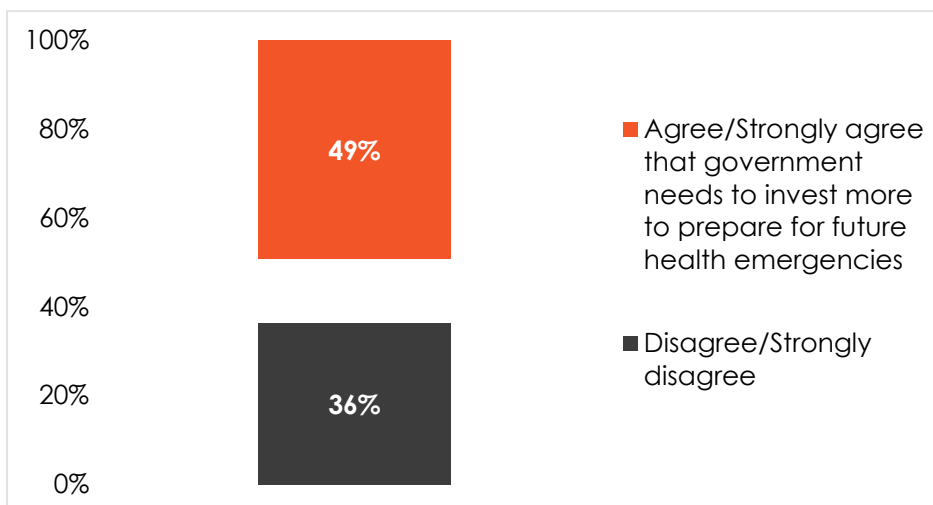
In line with these mixed views, half (49%) of Angolans “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that the government needs to invest more in preparing for future public health emergencies, even if it means that fewer resources are available for other health services (Figure 16).

Figure 15: Preparedness for future health emergencies | Angola | 2022



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

Figure 16: Invest more to prepare for future health emergencies? | Angola | 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

Overall, Angolans pronounce themselves satisfied with their government's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic and express little resistance to being vaccinated. But their responses also point to areas for improvement, most prominently the provision of assistance to vulnerable households. A majority of citizens also believe that corruption reduced the resources available to address the pandemic and that the government needs to invest more in preparations for the next public health emergency.

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