



Dispatch No. 755 | 8 January 2024

Zambians laud government's response to COVID-19 but believe resources lost to corruption

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 755 | Edward Chibwili

Summary

In Zambia, the first case of COVID-19 was confirmed on 18 March 2020. As of 24 December 2023, the country had recorded 349,304 cases of COVID-19 with 4,069 deaths (World Health Organization, 2023). In response to the pandemic, the government closed all schools and universities, restaurants (except on a take-away basis), nightclubs, cinemas, casinos, and gyms; limited public gatherings to fewer than 50 people; suspended international flights except to and from Lusaka; placed travellers entering the country under quarantine; and ordered mandatory mask-wearing in public (Southern Africa Trade Union Co-ordination Council, 2020; United Nations, 2020; United Nations Development Programme, 2020). The government also launched a mass vaccination campaign that resulted in 70% of eligible citizens being fully or partially vaccinated as of early November 2022 (U.S Mission Zambia, 2022).

Measures to contain the spread of COVID-19 weakened the Zambian economy, which was already in a delicate state before the pandemic. Job losses and economic contraction pushed the country into a deep recession in 2020 from which it rebounded in 2021 before slowing again due to the war in Ukraine (International Labour Organization, 2021; Chibwili, 2021; African Export-Import Bank, 2023). Government measures to lessen the economic impacts of the pandemic focused mainly on easing liquidity and providing tax relief for the mining sector, forgoing neighbouring countries' provision of support such as subsidised water and electricity supply, free food, and flexible loans for small businesses (United Nations Development Programme, 2020).

Findings from the latest Afrobarometer survey confirm the pandemic's economic impact, with more than a quarter of Zambians saying that a household member lost a job or primary source of income due to COVID-19.

Overall, most Zambians are satisfied with the government's response to the pandemic and report compliance with its vaccination campaign. However, they are less positive about the government's relief efforts, and many believe that COVID-19 resources were lost due to corruption.

Most Zambians believe that their government is adequately prepared for future health emergencies.

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. Nine rounds of surveys have been conducted in up to 42 countries since 1999. Round 9 surveys (2021/2023) cover 39 countries. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice.

The Afrobarometer team in Zambia, led by the Institute of Economic and Social Research (INESOR), a research wing of the University of Zambia, interviewed a nationally representative, random, stratified probability sample of 1,200 Zambian adults in August-September 2022. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-3 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys have been conducted in Zambia in 1999, 2003, 2005, 2009, 2013, 2014, 2017, and 2020.

Key findings

■ Effects of the COVID-19 pandemic:

- Three in 10 Zambians (30%) say a member of their household lost a job, business, or primary source of income due to the pandemic, while 9% report that someone in their household became ill with COVID-19 or tested positive for the virus.

■ Attitudes toward vaccines:

- Almost seven in 10 Zambians (69%) say they received at least one dose of a vaccine against COVID-19.
- Two in 10 citizens (22%) say they are not likely to try to get vaccinated, including 18% who consider it "very unlikely."
- Citizens who say they are unlikely to get vaccinated cite a variety of reasons for their hesitancy, including doubts about vaccine safety (19%), worries about getting a counterfeit vaccine (16%), and fear of bad side effects (13%).
- More than six in 10 Zambians (62%) say they trust the government "somewhat" (23%) or "a lot" (39%) to ensure the safety of COVID-19 vaccines.

■ Government response to COVID-19:

- Almost nine in 10 Zambians (87%) say the government has performed "fairly well" or "very well" in managing the response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Specifically, three-fourths are satisfied with the government's efforts to ensure that health facilities are adequately resourced (75%) and to minimise disruptions to children's education (75%).
- But about seven in 10 respondents (69%) believe that COVID-19 relief assistance was distributed unfairly, and 68% think "some" or "a lot" of the resources intended for the pandemic response were lost to corruption.
- Six in 10 citizens (60%) approve of using the police or military to enforce public health mandates during a pandemic. However, majorities consider it unjustified to postpone elections (61%) or to censor media reporting (56%) in response to a public health emergency.

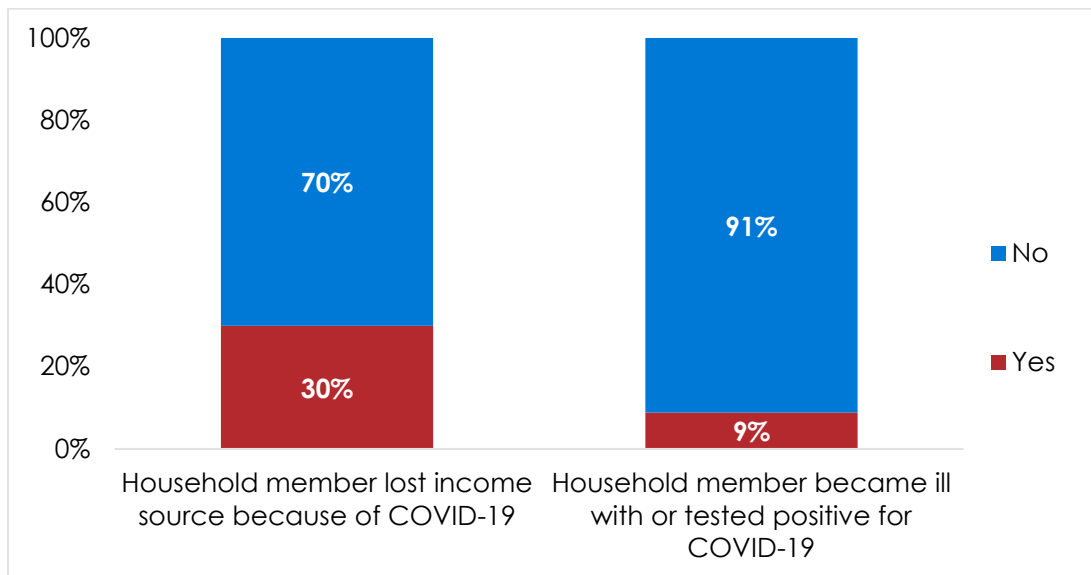
■ Looking ahead:

- Most Zambians (73%) believe that the government is prepared to deal with future public health emergencies.
- They are evenly divided on whether the government needs to invest more in preparations for future health emergencies if it means fewer resources are available for other health services.

Effects of COVID-19

Three in 10 Zambians (30%) say a member of their household lost a job, business, or primary source of income due to the pandemic, and 9% 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 | Zambia | 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?

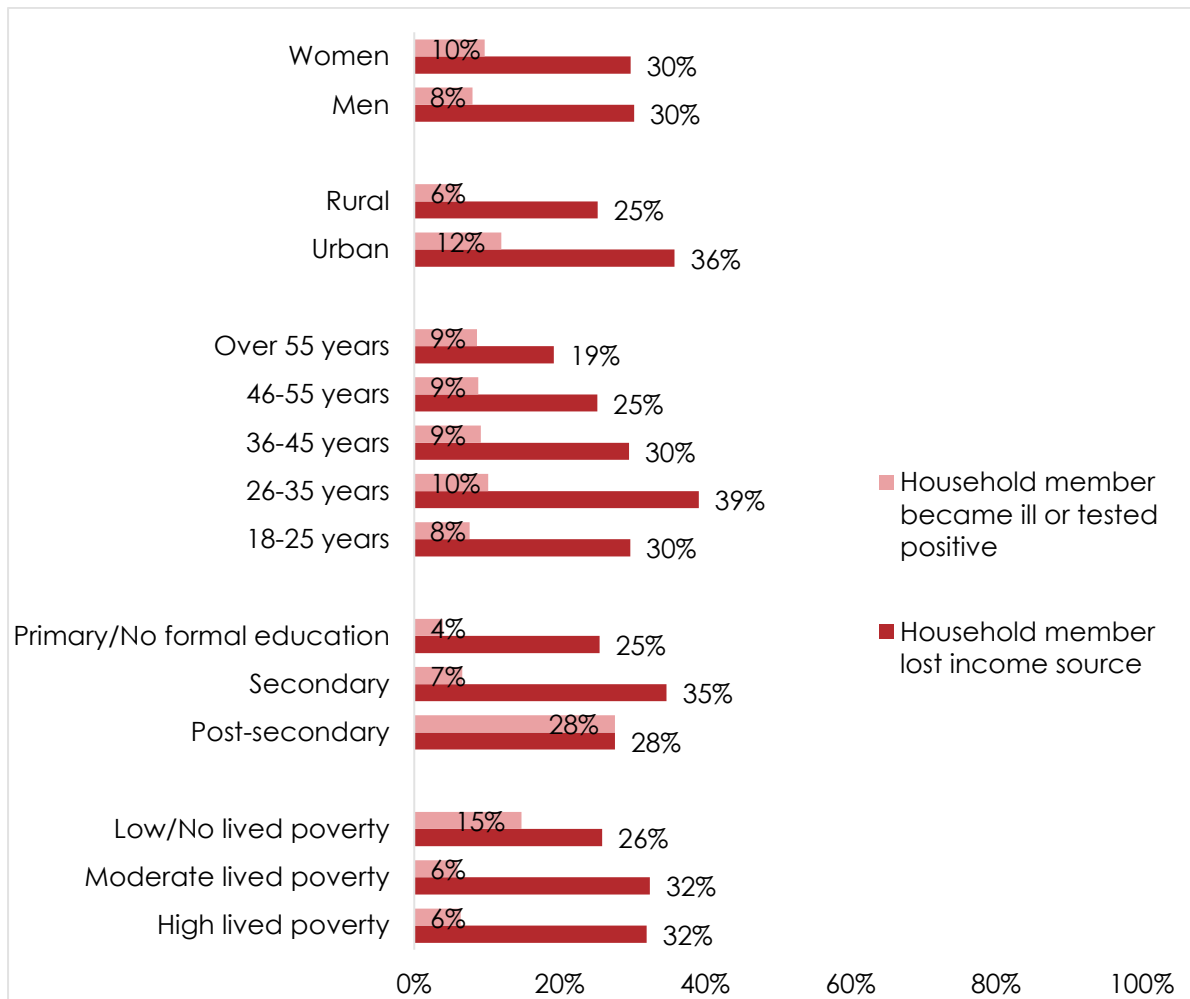
The effects of COVID-19 appear to have been more widely experienced in cities than in rural areas. Urban residents are twice as likely as their rural counterparts to report having tested positive or fallen ill from COVID-19 (12% vs. 6%), and are also more likely to say that a household member temporarily or permanently lost a primary source of income (36% vs. 25%) (Figure 2).

Illness and/or positive COVID-19 tests were far more common among the most educated respondents, ranging from 4% of those with primary or no formal education to 28% of those with post-secondary qualifications. Loss of an income source was also somewhat less common among less educated respondents (25%) than among those with more schooling (28%-35%).

Illness and/or positive COVID-19 tests were also more common among economically better-off citizens (15%) than among those experiencing moderate or high lived poverty (6%).¹ But the loss of income sources was less common among economically better-off citizens (26%) than among poorer respondents (32%).

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 and Patel (2022).

Figure 2: Effects of COVID-19 | by demographic group | Zambia | 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

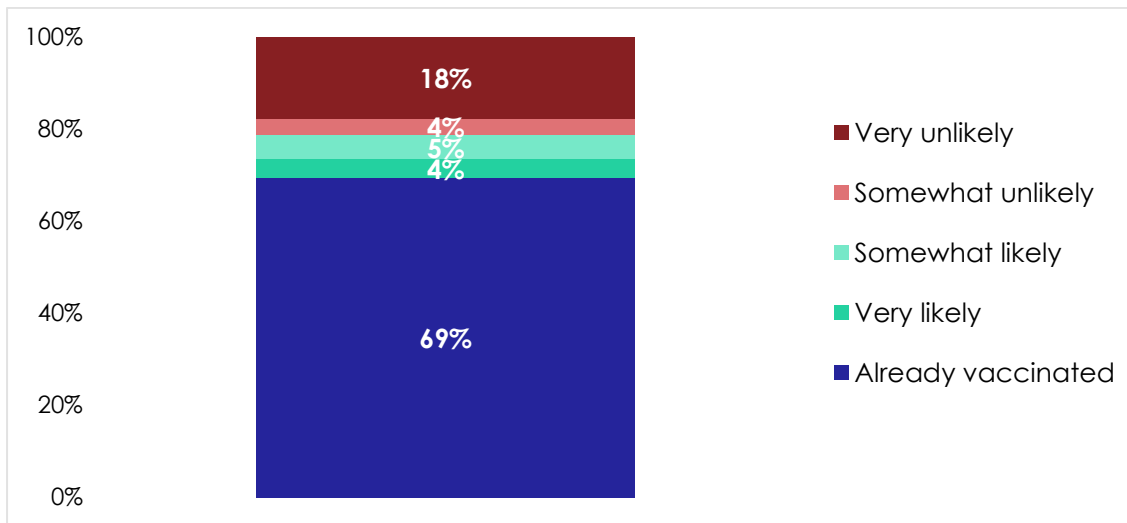
Almost seven in 10 Zambians (69%) say they received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine (Figure 3). But three in 10 (31%) did not receive the shot, including two in 10 who say they are “very unlikely” (18%) or “somewhat unlikely” (4%) to try to get vaccinated. About one in 10 describe themselves as “somewhat likely” (5%) or “very likely” (4%) to try to get vaccinated.

Vaccination rates are higher among women (74%) and rural residents (71%) than among men (65%) and urban residents (67%) (Figure 4). Citizens over age 45 (75%-79%) are more likely than those aged 18-45 (62%-71%) to be vaccinated.

Highly educated citizens (71%-72%) are also more likely than their less educated counterparts (66%) to have received the vaccine, while the poorest respondents (74%) are more likely to have done so than better-off respondents (68%-69%).

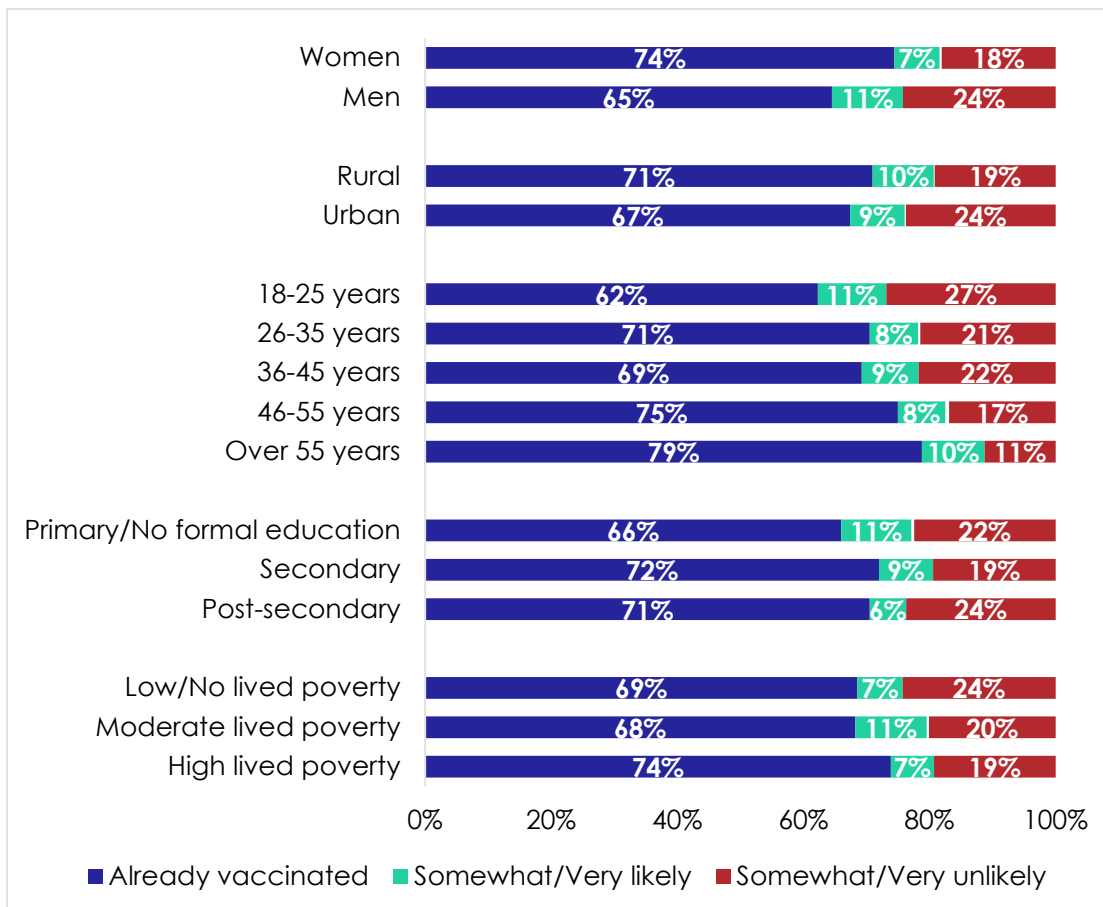
Vaccine hesitancy is relatively high among men (24% not likely to get vaccinated), urbanites (24%), those aged 18-25 (27%), and economically well-off citizens (24%).

Figure 3: Likelihood of trying to get vaccinated | Zambia | 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?

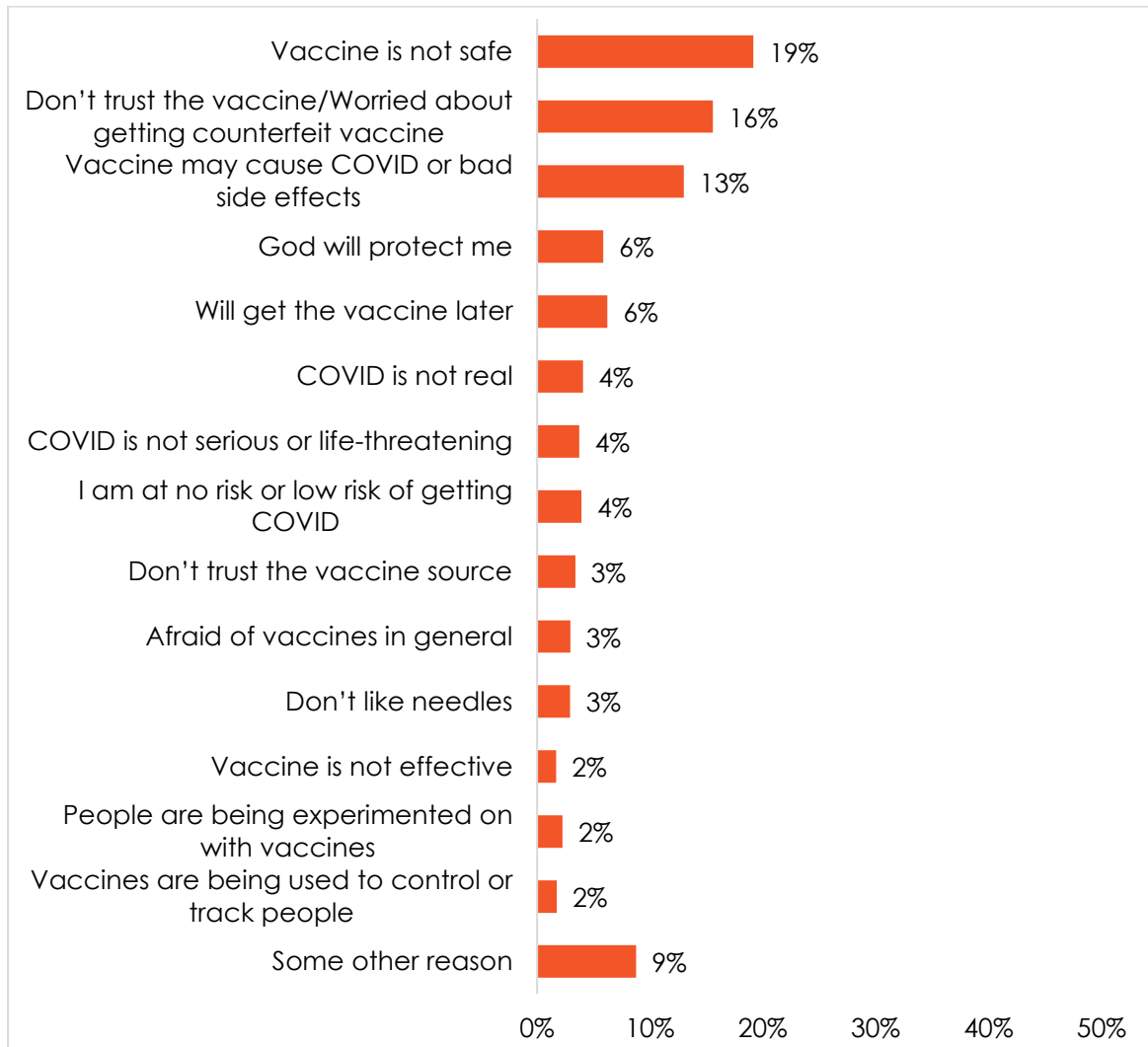
Figure 4: Likelihood of trying to get vaccinated | by demographic group | Zambia | 2022



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?

Among citizens who say they are unlikely to get vaccinated, the most frequently cited reasons for vaccine hesitancy are doubts about vaccine safety (19%), worries about getting a fake or counterfeit vaccine (16%), and the fear that the vaccine may cause COVID-19 or bad side effects (13%) (Figure 5). Others believe that God will protect them against COVID-19 (6%) or say that they will get vaccinated later (6%).

Figure 5: Main reason for vaccine hesitancy | Zambia | 2022

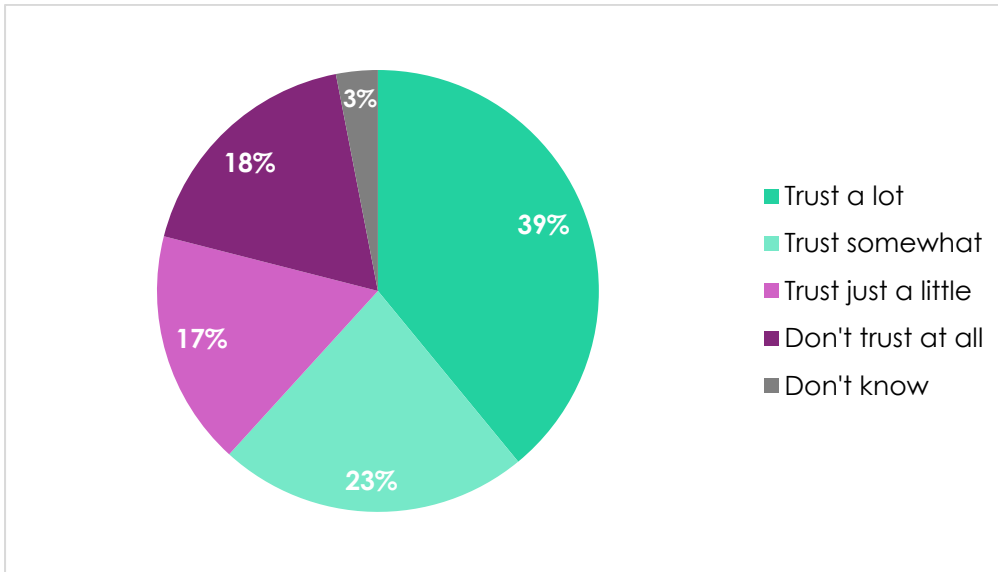


Respondents who say they are not likely to get vaccinated were asked: What is the main reason that you would be unlikely to get a COVID-19 vaccine?

Doubts about vaccine safety can be a major impediment for government efforts to vaccinate the population. While a majority (62%) of Zambians say they trust the government “somewhat” (23%) or “a lot” (39%) to ensure the safety of COVID-19 vaccines, more than one-third (35%) express “just a little” trust (17%) or no trust at all (18%) (Figure 6).

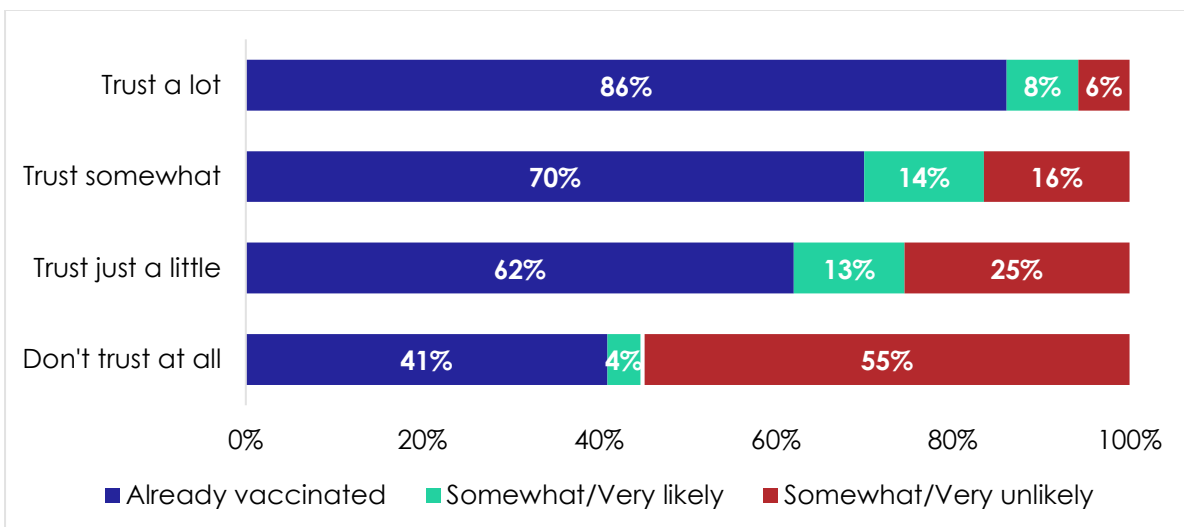
Citizens' willingness to get vaccinated against COVID-19 is strongly correlated with their trust in the government's ability to ensure the safety of the vaccine (Figure 7). Citizens who trust the government “a lot” to ensure vaccine safety are more than twice as likely to be vaccinated as those who express no trust at all (86% vs. 41%). Vaccine hesitancy is nine times more common among the “no trust” group (56%) compared to the “trust a lot” group (6%).

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

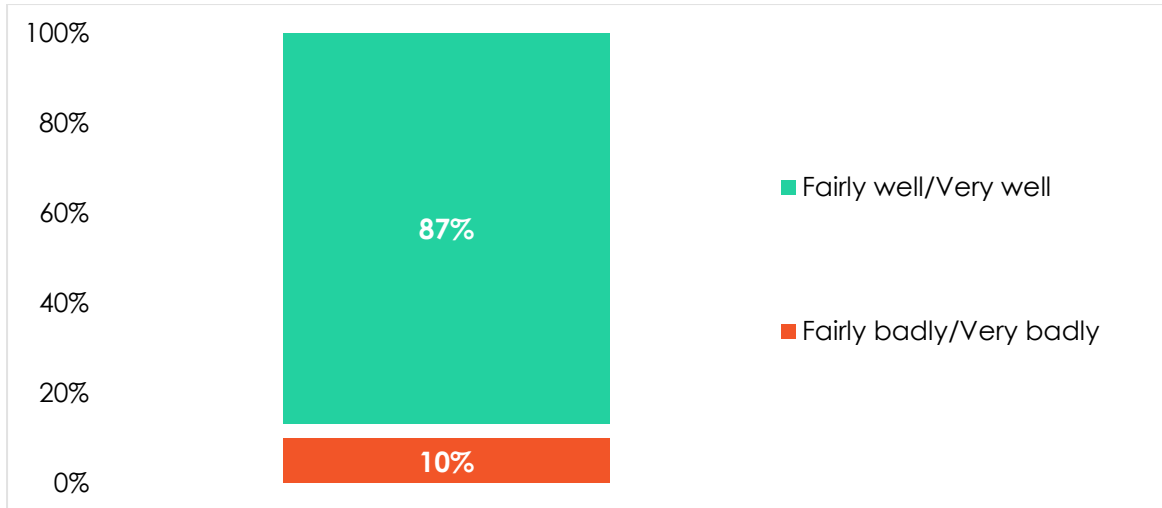
Government response to COVID-19

Almost nine in 10 Zambians (87%) describe the government's overall performance in managing the response to the COVID-19 pandemic as "fairly" or "very" good, while only 10% say it has done a poor job (Figure 8).

On specific aspects of the COVID-19 response, large majorities say they are "fairly satisfied" or "very satisfied" with the government's efforts to ensure that health facilities are adequately

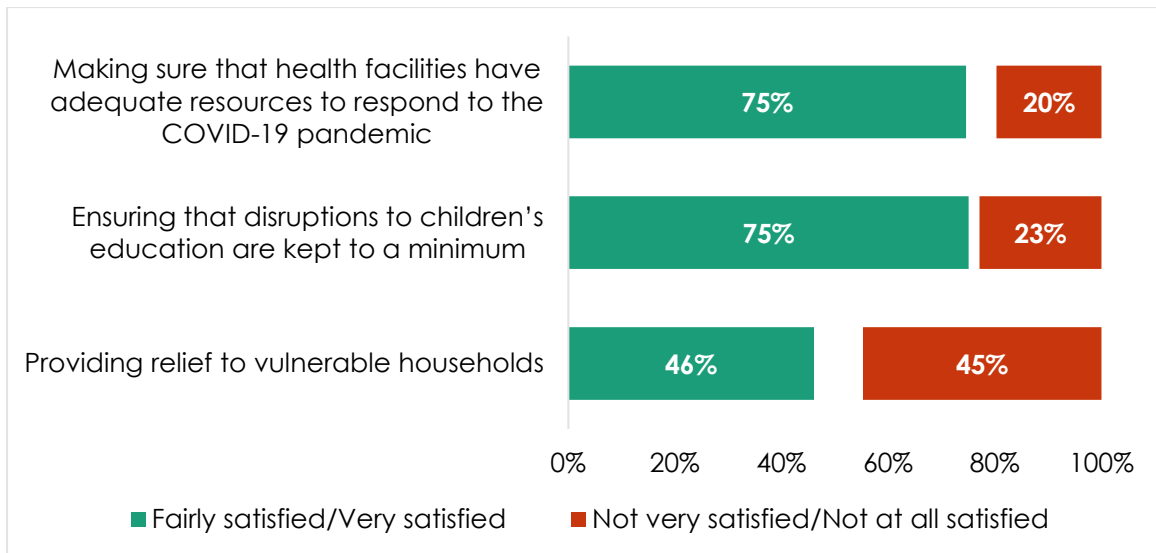
resourced to deal with the pandemic (75%) and to ensure that disruptions of children's education are held to a minimum (75%) (Figure 9). But fewer than half (46%) express satisfaction with the government's provision of relief assistance to vulnerable households.

Figure 8: Government response to COVID-19 | Zambia | 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 specific aspects of the pandemic | Zambia | 2022



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

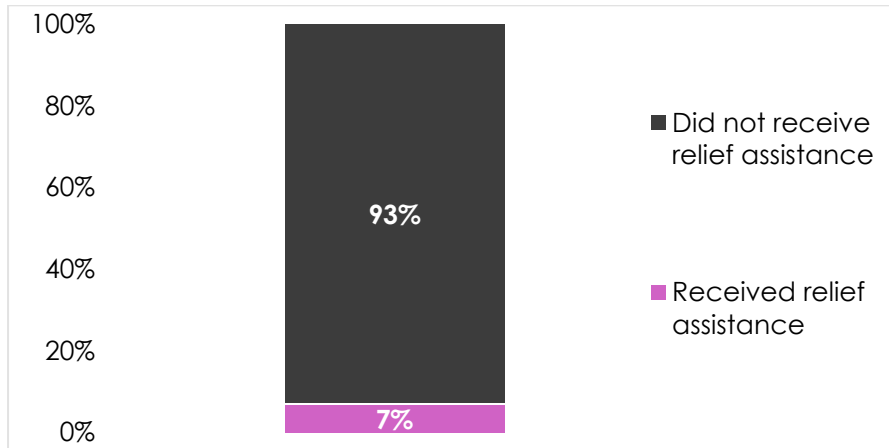
COVID-19 relief assistance

Fewer than one in 10 Zambians (7%) report that their household received COVID-19 relief assistance from the government, while 93% say they did not (Figure 10).

Women were somewhat more likely to benefit from government assistance than men (9% vs. 5%), as were older folks (12% of those aged 56 and above) compared to younger adults (4%-9%) (Figure 11).

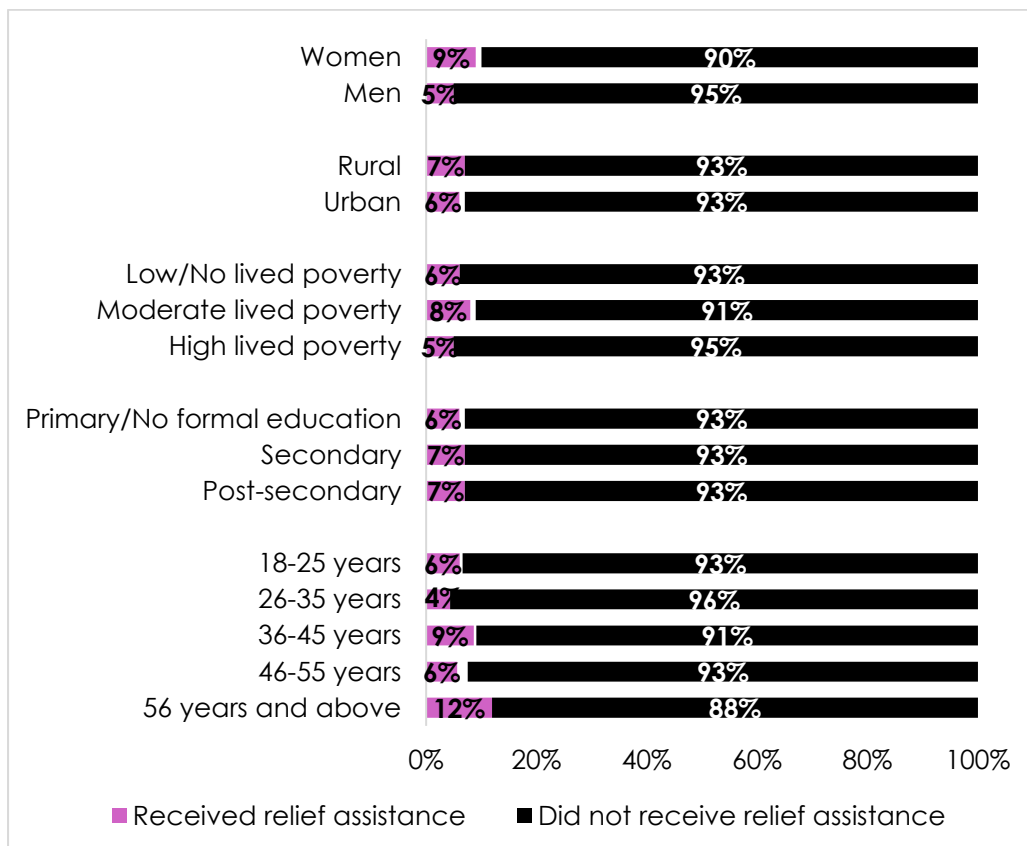
Only 17% of respondents say that COVID-19 relief was distributed “somewhat fairly” or “very fairly,” while more than two-thirds (69%) say the distribution was unfair (Figure 12).

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



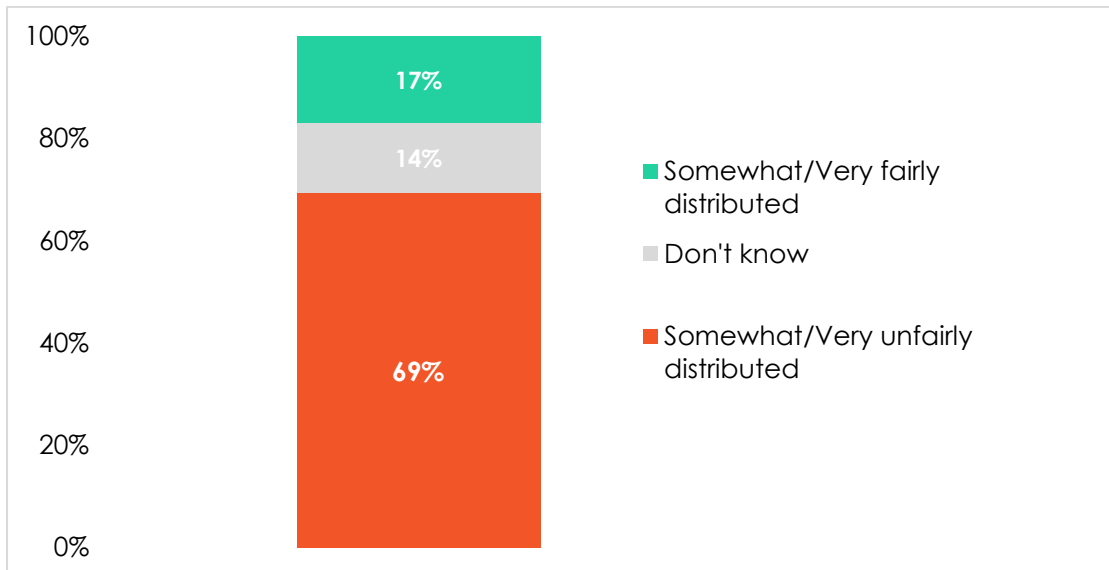
Respondents were asked: Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, have you or your household received any assistance from government, like food, cash payments, relief from bill payments, or other assistance that you were not normally receiving before the pandemic?

Figure 11: Access to COVID-19 relief assistance | by demographic group | Zambia | 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? | Zambia | 2022

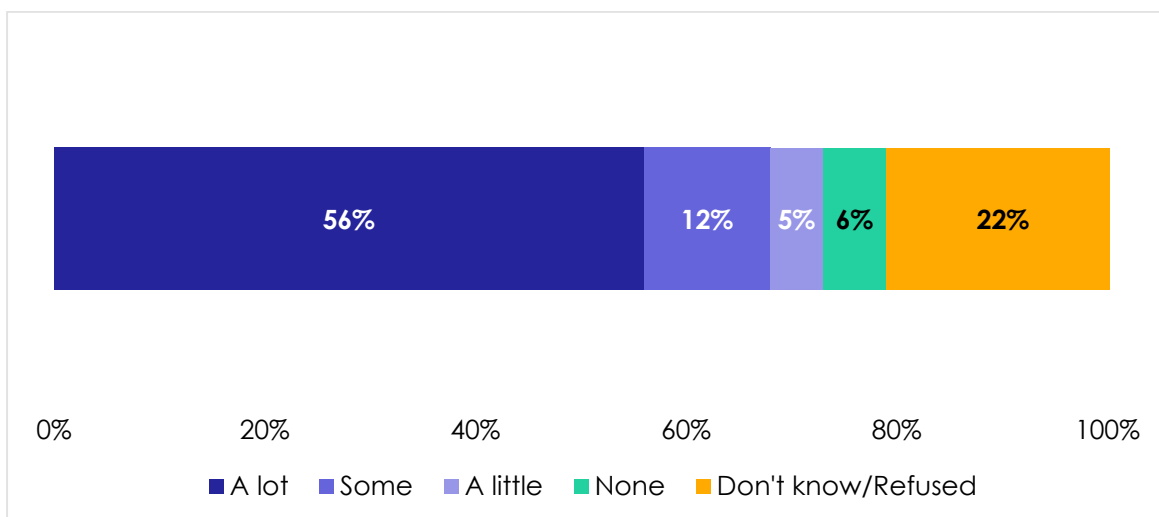


Respondents were asked: Do you think that the distribution of government support to people during the COVID-19 pandemic, for example through food packages or cash payments, has been fair or unfair?

Corruption related to COVID-19

In addition to expressing significant dissatisfaction with the fairness of government relief assistance, almost seven in 10 Zambians (68%) say they believe that “some” (12%) or “a lot” (56%) of the resources intended for the COVID-19 response were lost to corruption (Figure 13). Only 6% think that none of these resources were misappropriated.

Figure 13: Perceived pandemic-related corruption | Zambia | 2022



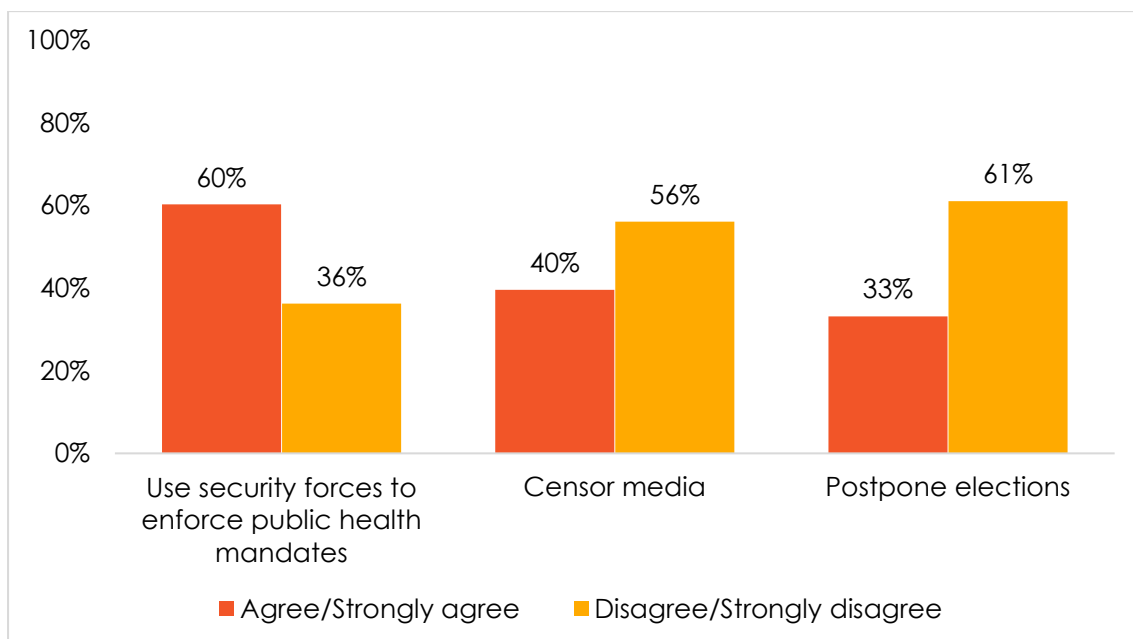
Respondents were asked: Considering all of the funds and resources that were available to the government for combating and responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, how much do you think was lost or stolen due to corruption?

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 Zambia, more than half (60%) 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 14). But only four in 10 citizens (40%) would accept censorship of the media in response to a public health emergency, and even fewer (33%) would support postponing elections.

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

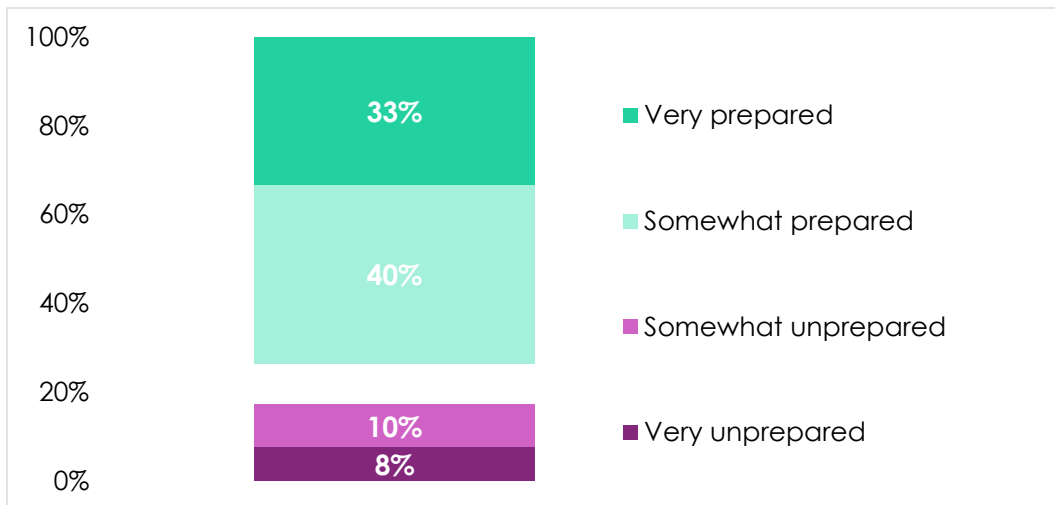
Looking ahead

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

Almost three-fourths (73%) of Zambians think their government will be “somewhat prepared” or “very prepared” for the next public health crisis, while only 18% believe the government will not be ready (Figure 15).

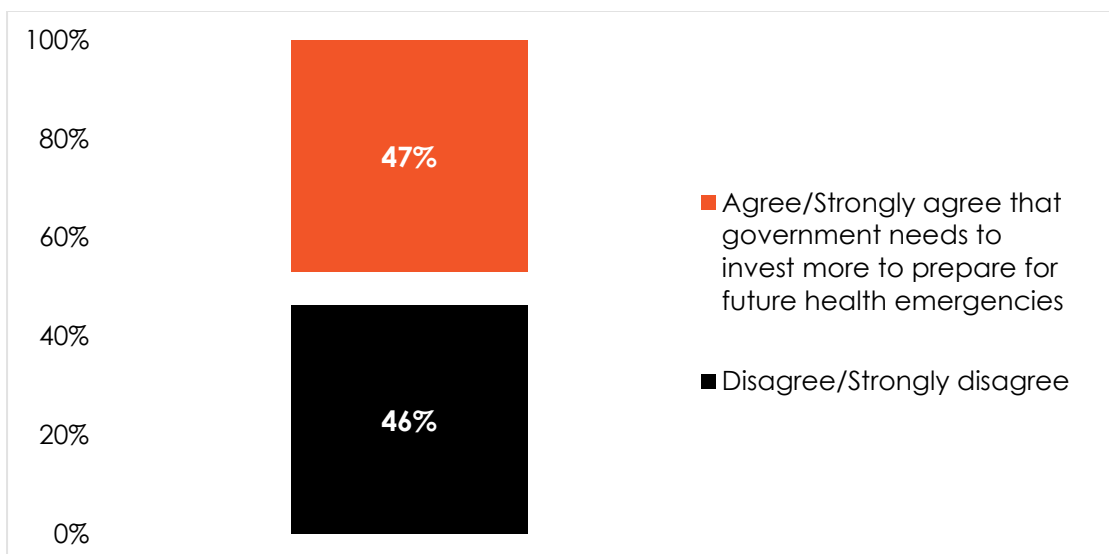
But citizens are evenly divided on whether more funding for such preparations is needed: 47% say the government needs to invest more in preparing for future public health emergencies, even if it means that fewer resources are available for other health services, while 46% disagree (Figure 16).

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



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

Zambians are generally satisfied with the way their government has handled the COVID-19 pandemic, trust their leaders to ensure the safety of vaccines, and think they will be prepared for the next public health crisis.

The major exception concerns the government's support to vulnerable households. Many Zambians believe that resources intended to respond to the pandemic were lost to corruption, and they express dissatisfaction with the way relief assistance was distributed.

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