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Tanzanians commend COVID-19 response but call for more investment in preparing for future health emergencies

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 762 | Thadeus Mboghoina, Jane Mpapalika, and Constantine George Simba

Summary

Tanzania experienced its first and most serious wave of COVID-19 from March to June 2020. The government's response to the pandemic included partial lockdowns of schools and international borders and the banning of mass gatherings except for worship (da Corta, et al. 2022; National Bureau of Statistics, 2020).

Toward the end of April 2020, then-President John Magufuli's government stopped publishing data on COVID-19 cases and deaths, citing suspicions of faulty testing kits and a lack of integrity in the testing process. In addition, sharing of real-time data was thought to cause public fear and panic. The government was initially hesitant to promote the uptake of COVID-19 vaccine, advocating instead for the use of traditional/herbal remedies such as steam therapy and dietary supplements. In June 2020, restrictions on schools, social events, bars, hotels, and other businesses were relaxed.

After President Samia Suluhu Hassan took office in March 2021, the government resumed publishing COVID-19 statistics and declared its commitment to a vaccination programme. As of 31 December 2023, the World Health Organization (2023) reported 43,223 cases of COVID-19 in Tanzania, with 846 deaths.

Like the rest of the world, Tanzania was affected socially and economically by the pandemic. Its gross domestic product growth rate shrank from 7% in 2019 to 4.8% in 2020 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2021a). The effects on employment were temporary, as labour force participation declined from 72% in January 2020 to 67% in February-March 2021 before bouncing back to 75% in April-May the same year (National Bureau of Statistics, 2021b).

Seeking financial assistance to support its COVID-19 Socioeconomic Response and Recovery Plan, the government secured a USD 567.25 million concessional loan from the International Monetary Fund to implement development projects in adversely affected sectors such as health, tourism, water, education, and social protection (Ministry of Finance and Planning, 2022).

A recent Afrobarometer survey reveals that about one in seven Tanzanian households report losing a primary source of income due to the pandemic. Only about three in 10 adults say they have been vaccinated against COVID-19, and willingness to get vaccinated is strongly associated with trust in the government to ensure vaccine safety. Tanzanians are generally satisfied with the government's response to COVID-19, but many also believe that corruption has led to the loss of public resources meant to address the pandemic.

While most Tanzanians are confident that their government will be well prepared to handle future health emergencies, a majority also say that greater investment in such preparations is needed.

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 Tanzania, led by REPOA, interviewed a nationally representative, random, stratified probability sample of 2,400 Tanzanian adults in September-October 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 Tanzania in 2001, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014, 2017, and 2021.

Key findings

Effects of COVID-19:

- About one in 50 Tanzanians (2%) say a family member fell ill with COVID-19 or tested positive for the virus.
- About one in seven (14%) say someone in their household lost a job, business, or primary source of income due to the pandemic.
- The economic effects of the pandemic are particularly pronounced in urban areas (23%) and among those with secondary (23%) or post-secondary (28%) education.

Attitudes toward COVID-19 vaccine:

- Three in 10 Tanzanians (30%) say they have received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine. The same proportion (31%) say they are unlikely to try to get vaccinated.
- Respondents who are hesitant to get vaccinated offer a variety of reasons, including distrust of the vaccine (27%) and a reliance on God's protection (17%).
- Citizens' willingness to get vaccinated is strongly associated with their trust in the government to ensure the safety of the COVID-19 vaccine.

Government response to COVID-19:

- An overwhelming majority (89%) of Tanzanians approve of the government's response to COVID-19.
- But a substantial minority believe that "a lot" (17%), "some" (18%), or "a little" (10%) of the resources available to combat the pandemic were lost due to corruption.
- A majority of Tanzanians endorse using the police or army to enforce public health measures (79%), postponing elections (68%), and censoring media reporting (60%) as justifiable measures during a public health emergency.

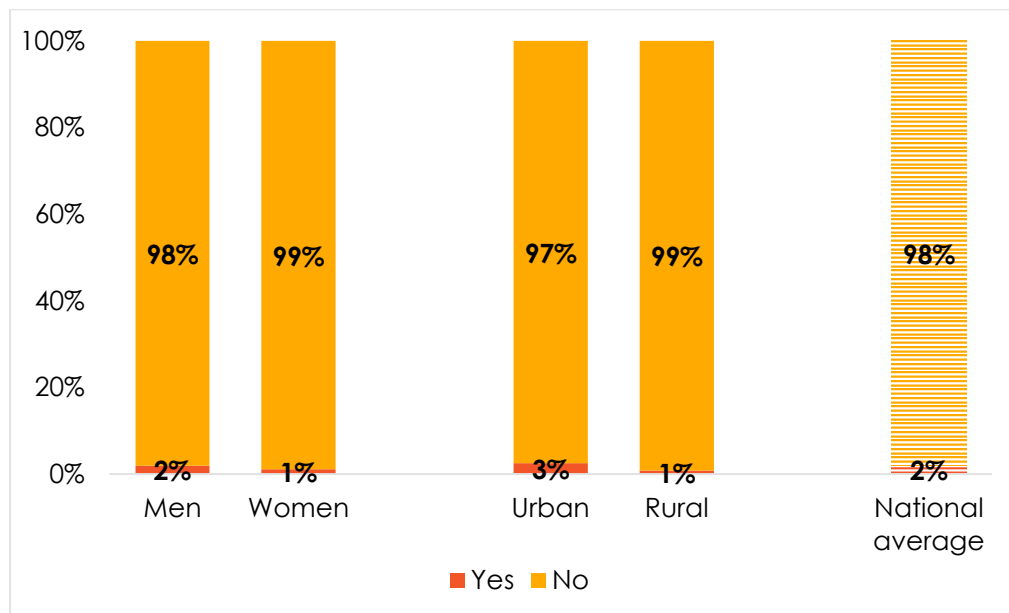
Looking ahead:

- Considering the COVID-19 experience, three-quarters (76%) of Tanzanians believe that the government is “somewhat” or “very” prepared to deal with future public health emergencies.
- However, most Tanzanians (75%) also say that more resources should be invested in preparations to respond to health emergencies even if that means fewer resources are available for other health services.

Effects of COVID-19

About one in 50 Tanzanians (2%) say they or a household member fell ill with COVID-19 or tested positive for the virus (Figure 1).

Figure 1: COVID-19 infection | Tanzania | 2022

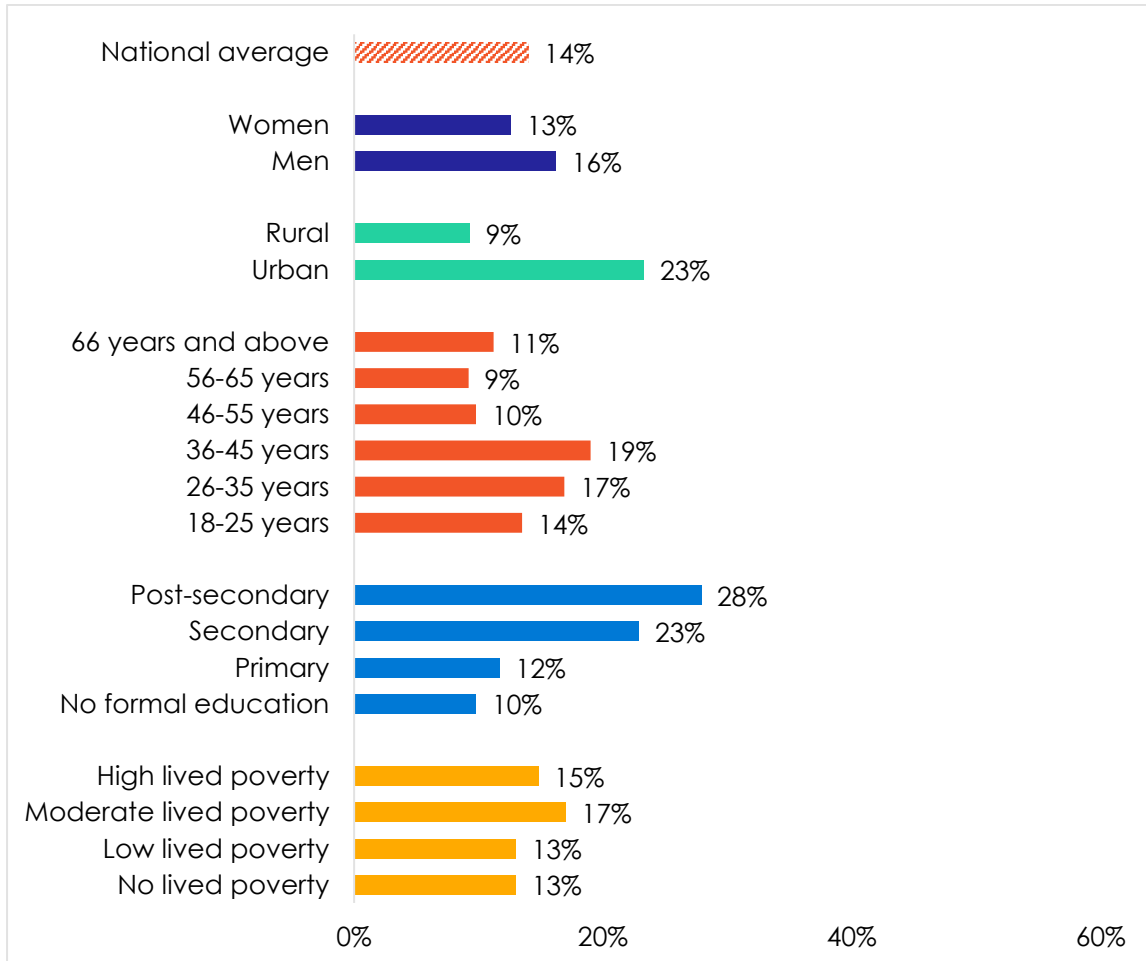


Respondents were asked: Please tell me whether you personally or any other member of your household have been affected in any of the following ways by the COVID-19 pandemic: Became ill with, or tested positive for, COVID-19?

About one in seven citizens (14%) say someone in their household lost a job, business, or primary source of income due to the pandemic (Figure 2). The economic effects of the pandemic are more pronounced in cities than in rural areas (23% vs. 9%). They are also far more common among citizens with secondary (23%) or post-secondary (28%) education than among those with primary schooling or less (10%-12%).

Young adults and youth (14%-19%) are more likely to report losing a major income source than their elders (9%-11%).

Figure 2: Lost primary income source due to COVID-19 | by demographic group
 | Tanzania | 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: Temporarily or permanently lost a job, business, or primary source of income?

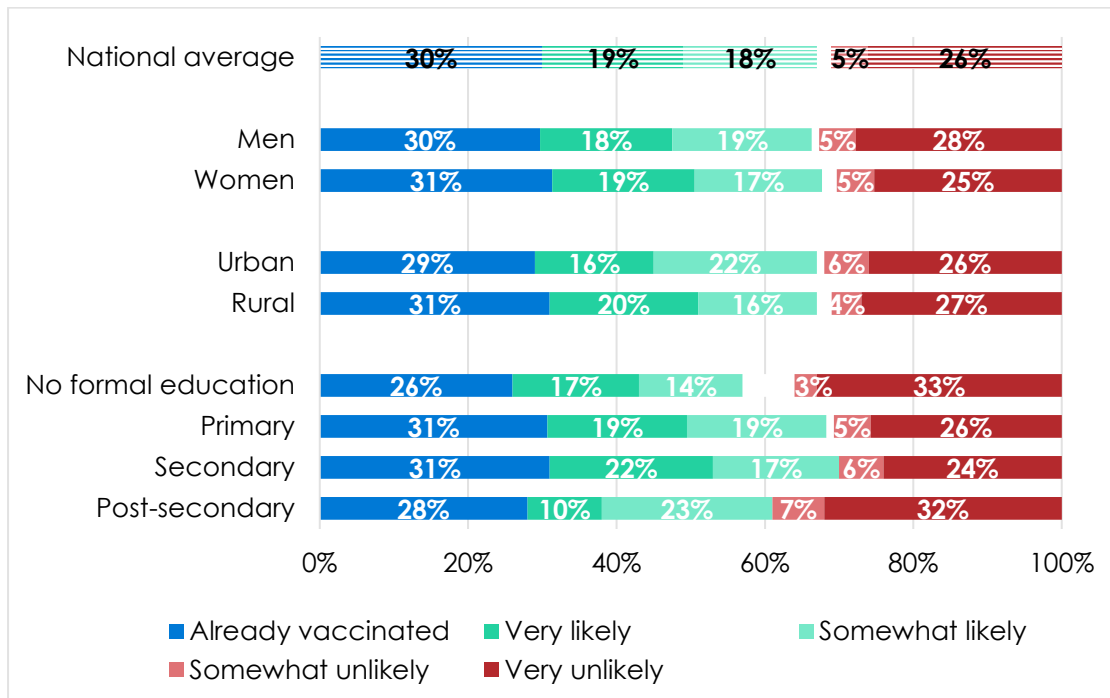
Attitudes toward vaccination

Three in 10 Tanzanians (30%) say they have received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine. Just as many say they are “very unlikely” (26%) or “somewhat unlikely” (5%) to get vaccinated, while 37% say that if vaccines are available, they are “somewhat” or “very” likely to try to get the shot (Figure 3).

These views differ little by gender, urban-rural location, or education level, although vaccine hesitancy is somewhat above average among both the most and least educated respondents (32%-33%).

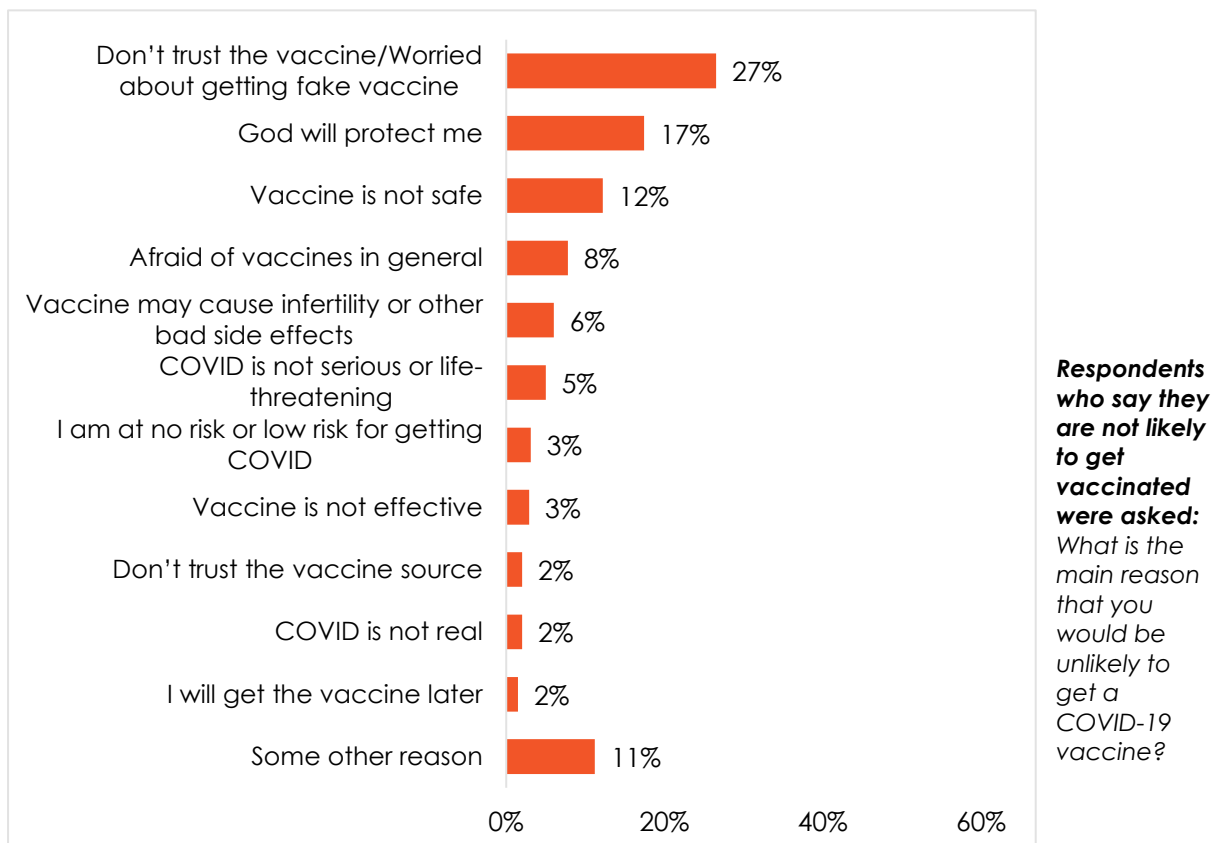
Tanzanians who say they are unlikely to get vaccinated offer a variety of reasons for their hesitancy (Figure 4). Most frequently they cite a lack of trust in the vaccines or fear of getting a counterfeit vaccine (27%), followed by a reliance on God's protection (17%), concern that the COVID-19 vaccine is not safe (12%), and fear of vaccines in general (8%). Other reasons include a fear that the vaccine might cause infertility or other negative side effects (6%) and the perception that COVID-19 is not life-threatening (5%).

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



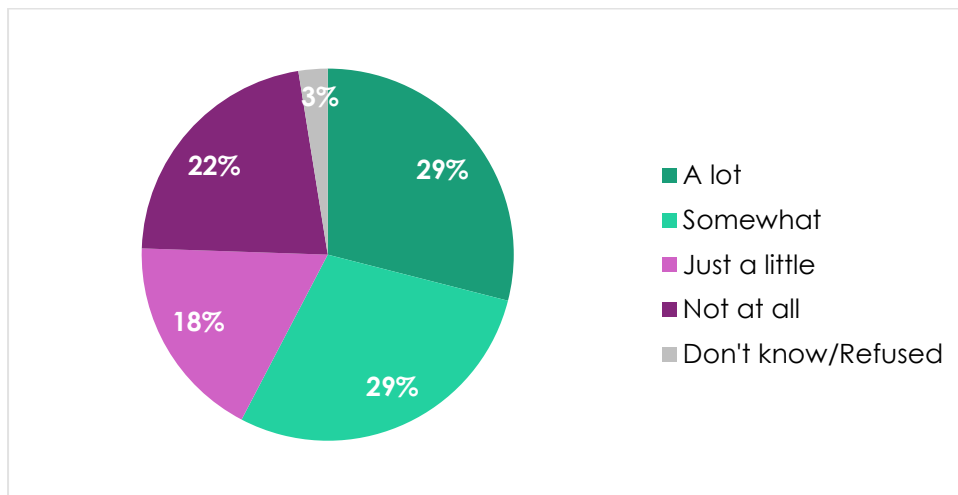
Respondents were asked: Have you received a vaccination against COVID-19, either one or two doses? [If no:] If a vaccine for COVID-19 is available, how likely are you to try to get vaccinated?

Figure 4: Main reasons for reluctance to get vaccinated | Tanzania | 2022



More than half (58%) of Tanzanians say they trust their government “somewhat” or a “lot” to ensure the safety of any COVID-19 vaccine offered to citizens. However, a substantial minority express little trust (18%) or no trust at all (22%) in the government’s ability to ensure vaccine safety (Figure 5).

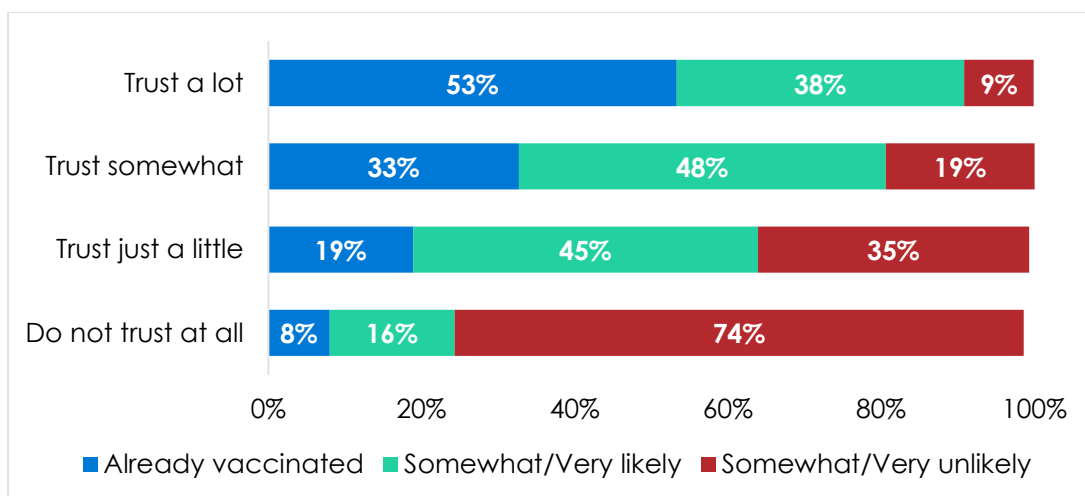
Figure 5: Trust government to ensure safety of COVID-19 vaccine? | Tanzania | 2022



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

Trust in the government to ensure the safety of COVID-19 vaccines is strongly associated with Tanzanians’ willingness to get vaccinated (Figure 6). Among those who express “a lot” of trust in the government, nine in 10 are either vaccinated (53%) or willing to get vaccinated (38%). In contrast, three-quarters (74%) of those who don’t trust the government “at all” say they are unlikely to get vaccinated.

Figure 6: Likelihood of trying to get vaccinated | by trust in government to ensure vaccine safety | Tanzania | 2022



Respondents were asked:

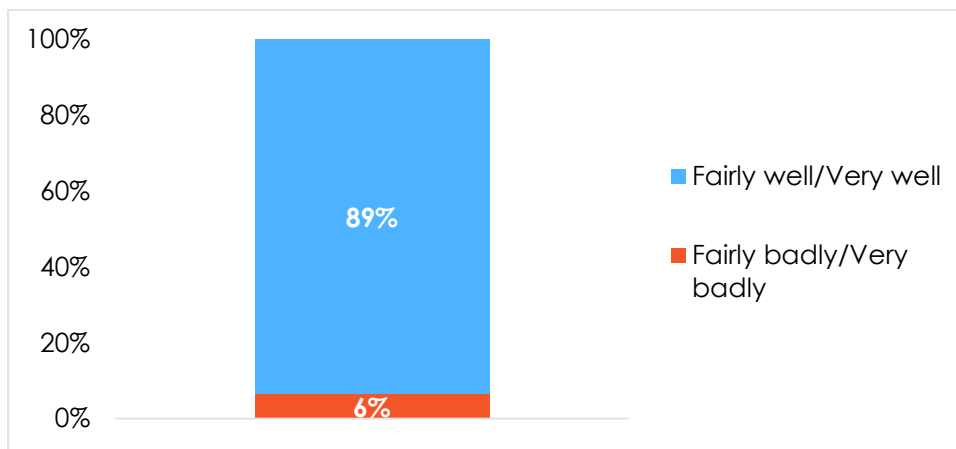
If a vaccine for COVID-19 is available, how likely are you to try to get vaccinated?
 How much do you trust the government to ensure that any vaccine for COVID-19 that is developed or offered to Tanzanian citizens is safe before it is used in this country?

Government response to COVID-19

An overwhelming majority (89%) of Tanzanians say the government has managed the response to COVID-19 “fairly well” or “very well” (Figure 7).

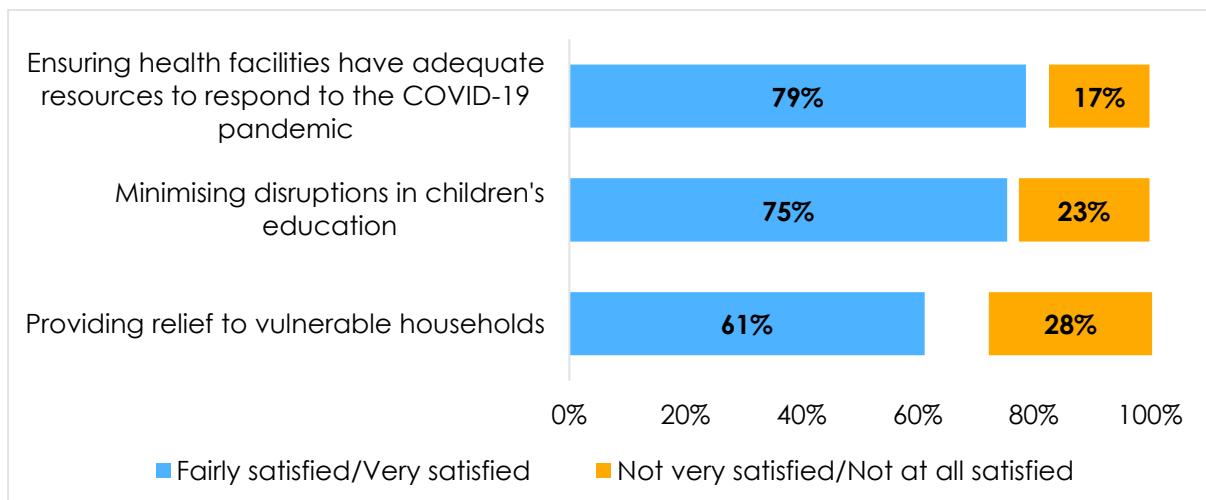
Regarding specific aspects of the response, most citizens are satisfied with the government's efforts to ensure that health facilities have adequate resources (79%) and to minimise disruptions to children's education (75%) (Figure 8). Somewhat fewer, but still a solid majority (61%), pronounce themselves satisfied with the government's provision of relief to vulnerable households during the pandemic.

Figure 7: Government response to COVID-19 | Tanzania | 2022



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

Figure 8: Satisfaction with aspects of government's response to COVID-19 | Tanzania | 2022

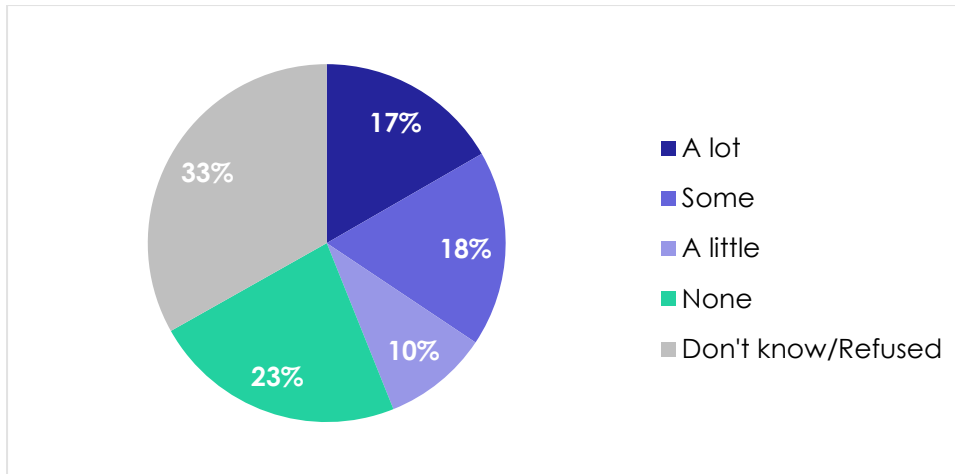


Respondents were asked: How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the government's response to COVID-19 in the following areas?

While most Tanzanians approve of the government's response to COVID-19, a sizeable number believe that “a lot” (17%), “some” (18%), or “a little” (10%) of the resources available

to combat the pandemic were lost due to corruption (Figure 9). Only 23% of citizens think that no COVID-19 resources were stolen, while 33% say they “don't know.”

Figure 9: Perceived pandemic-related corruption | Tanzania | 2022



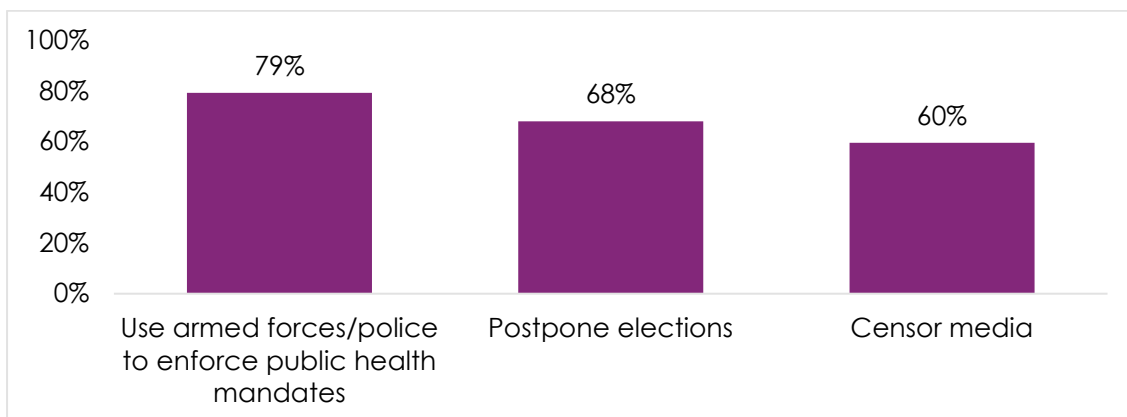
Respondents were asked: Considering all of the funds and resources that were available to the government for combating and responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, how much do you think was lost or stolen due to corruption?

Sacrificing democratic freedoms to safeguard public health

Many countries imposed more severe restrictions than Tanzania during the pandemic, such as country-wide lockdowns or curfews, raising the question of the extent to which individuals are willing to sacrifice some of their democratic freedoms to safeguard public health.

In Tanzania, eight in 10 citizens (79%) say the use of the police or army to enforce public health measures is justified during a public health emergency like the pandemic (Figure 10). Solid majorities also endorse postponing elections (68%) and censoring media reporting (60%) as justifiable responses during a public health crisis.

Figure 10: Limit democratic freedoms during a public health emergency? | Tanzania | 2022



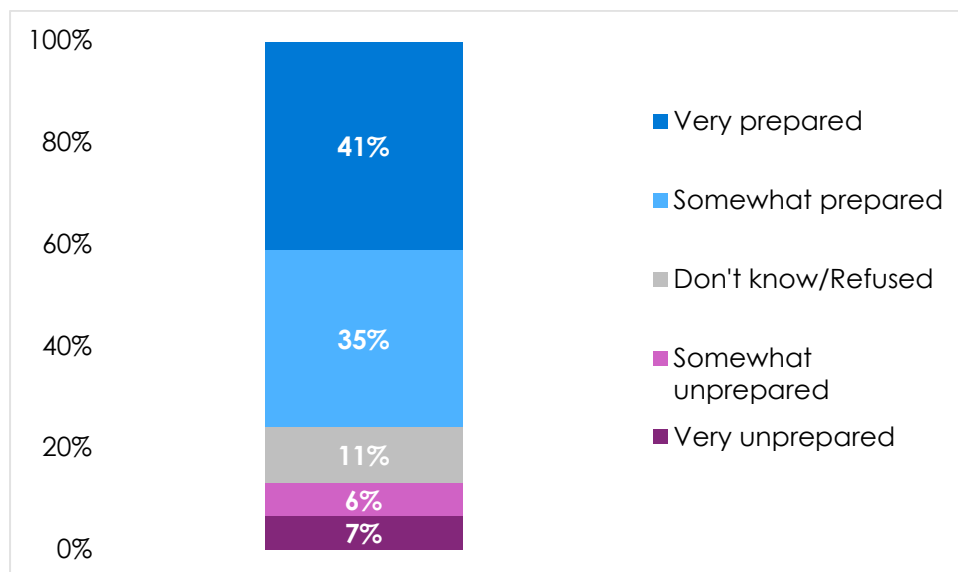
Respondents were asked: When the country is facing a public health emergency like the COVID-19 pandemic, do you agree or disagree that it is justified for the government to temporarily limit democracy or democratic freedoms by taking the following measures: Censoring media reporting? Using the police and security forces to enforce public health mandates like restrictions on public gatherings or wearing face masks? Postponing elections?

Preparedness for future public health emergencies

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed significant weaknesses in global health and social systems. Considering the COVID-19 experience, three-quarters (76%) of Tanzanians think their government will be “somewhat” or “very” prepared to deal with future public health emergencies (Figure 11).

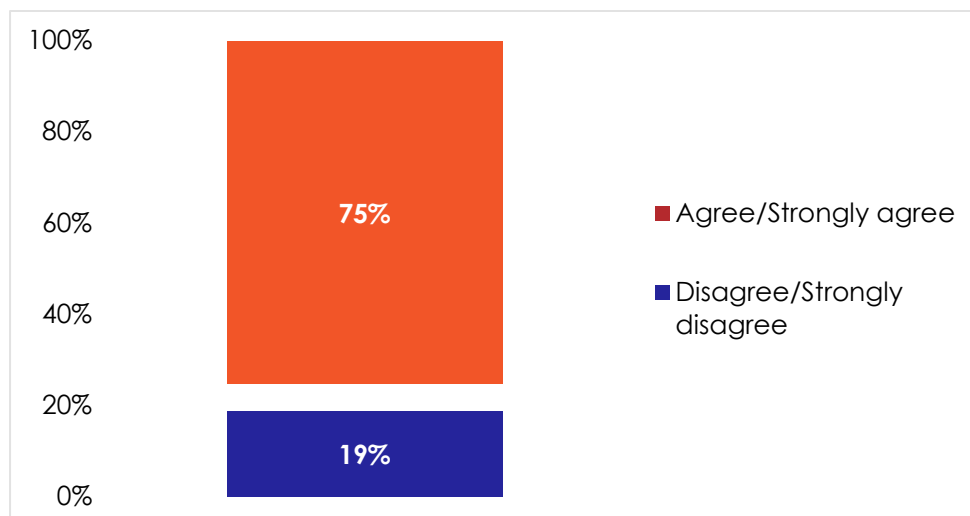
But despite their confidence in the government's readiness, most Tanzanians (75%) say that more resources should be invested in preparations to respond to health emergencies, even if that means fewer resources are available for other health services (Figure 12).

Figure 11: Preparedness for future health emergencies | Tanzania | 2022



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

Figure 12: Invest more to prepare for future health emergencies? | Tanzania | 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

Like other parts of the world, Tanzania was not spared the adverse health and economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The loss of jobs or other income sources was particularly common among urban residents and more educated citizens.

A majority of Tanzanians say they have received the COVID-19 vaccine or are likely to do so, though a substantial minority remain vaccine-hesitant, a stance that is strongly associated with a lack of trust in the government's ability to ensure vaccine safety.

Tanzanians are generally happy with the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and confident that the country will be well prepared to confront future public health crises. In fact, most citizens are even ready to sacrifice some of their democratic freedoms, at least temporarily, to safeguard public health. However, many Tanzanians also believe that corruption has led to the misuse of public funds intended for combating the effects of the pandemic, and most favour investing more in preparations for potential health emergencies to come.

Do your own analysis of Afrobarometer data – on any question, for any country and survey round. It's easy and free at www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis.

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Afrobarometer, a nonprofit corporation with headquarters in Ghana, is a pan-African, non-partisan research network. Regional coordination of national partners in about 35 countries is provided by the Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana), the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) in South Africa, and the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Nairobi in Kenya. Michigan State University (MSU) and the University of Cape Town (UCT) provide technical support to the network.

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