



Advison Lesotho



Dispatch No. 517 | 3 May 2022

Basotho embrace COVID-19 vaccination but find government assistance lacking

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 517 | Libuseng Malephane

Summary

On 13 May 2020, Lesotho became the last country in Africa to report its first case of COVID-19 – weeks after declaring a state of national emergency, closing its borders with South Africa and its schools, and going into the first of several lockdowns (Charumbira, 2020).

Two years later, Lesotho has recorded 32,968 cases and 697 deaths due to COVID-19, as well as 782,175 people who have received at least one dose of a vaccine against the virus (WHO, 2022).

The pandemic and lockdown restrictions impacted every sector of Lesotho's economy negatively (United Nations Development Programme, 2020). Border closures disrupted supply chains, and remittances dried up as Basotho employed in South Africa returned home when their workplaces shut down. The global economic slowdown reverberated in the textile manufacturing, diamond mining, transport, and logistics sectors.

Many households confronted food insecurity. In early 2021, as the country dealt with the impacts of disastrous rains and pandemic-related lockdowns, UNICEF reported that 766,000 Basotho – 38% of the population – needed humanitarian assistance, including 321,000 children.

The government introduced temporary relief measures to assist businesses through the Private Sector COVID-19 Relief Fund and vulnerable members of society through the Food Distribution Package Program (Government of Lesotho, 2021). Despite these efforts, frustrated street vendors, youth, garment industry workers, and others protested in the streets, and the police responded with teargas and rubber bullets. There were also reports of police brutality in the enforcement of lockdown restrictions (Monitor, 2020).

A new Afrobarometer survey in Lesotho shows that more than one in three citizens say their household lost a primary source of income because of the pandemic, and only about one in seven say they received pandemic-related assistance from the government.

Majorities are critical of the government's performance in providing assistance, minimising disruptions to children's education, and ensuring that health facilities are adequately resourced for the COVID-19 response. Most believe that "a lot" of the resources intended for the pandemic response were lost to corruption.

While a slim majority approve of the use of security forces to enforce public health mandates, only minorities support postponing elections or censoring media reporting because of a pandemic.

Most respondents report having been vaccinated against COVID-19, and fewer than one in 10 express a reluctance to accept the vaccine.

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 Lesotho, led by Advision Lesotho, interviewed a nationally representative, random, stratified probability sample of 1,200 adult Basotho 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. Previous standard surveys were conducted in Lesotho in 2000, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014, 2017, and 2020.

Key findings

- **Effects of the COVID-19 pandemic:**
 - About one in 10 Basotho (11%) say a member of their household became ill with COVID-19 or tested positive for the virus, while more than one-third (37%) say someone in their household lost a job, business, or primary source of income due to the pandemic.
- **Attitudes toward vaccines:**
 - More than four in five Basotho (83%) say they have been vaccinated against COVID-19.
 - About half of those who report not being vaccinated say they are “somewhat likely” or “very likely” to try to get vaccinated, while the other half – 8% of the adult population – say they probably won't.
 - Vaccine-hesitant respondents most commonly cite concerns that the vaccine may cause COVID-19 or negative side effects (24%) and that the vaccine was developed too quickly (16%).
 - Only about four in 10 Basotho say they trust the government “somewhat” (17%) or “a lot” (24%) to ensure the safety of COVID-19 vaccines.
- **Government response to COVID-19:**
 - Basotho are almost evenly split in their assessments of the government's overall performance in managing the response to the pandemic: 46% say it is doing “fairly well” or “very well,” while 50% say it is doing a poor job.
 - But large majorities are dissatisfied with the government's performance in minimising disruptions to children's education (76%), providing relief to vulnerable households (68%), and ensuring that health facilities are adequately resourced (64%).
 - About one in seven Basotho (15%) report that their household received pandemic-related assistance from the government. Only a minority (38%) say such assistance was distributed fairly, and fully three-quarters believe that “a lot” (64%) or “some” (12%) of the resources intended for the COVID-19 response have been lost to corruption.
 - More than half (52%) of Basotho approve of using the police or military to enforce public health mandates during a pandemic, but majorities disapprove

of censoring media reporting (76%) and postponing elections (57%) because of a public health crisis.

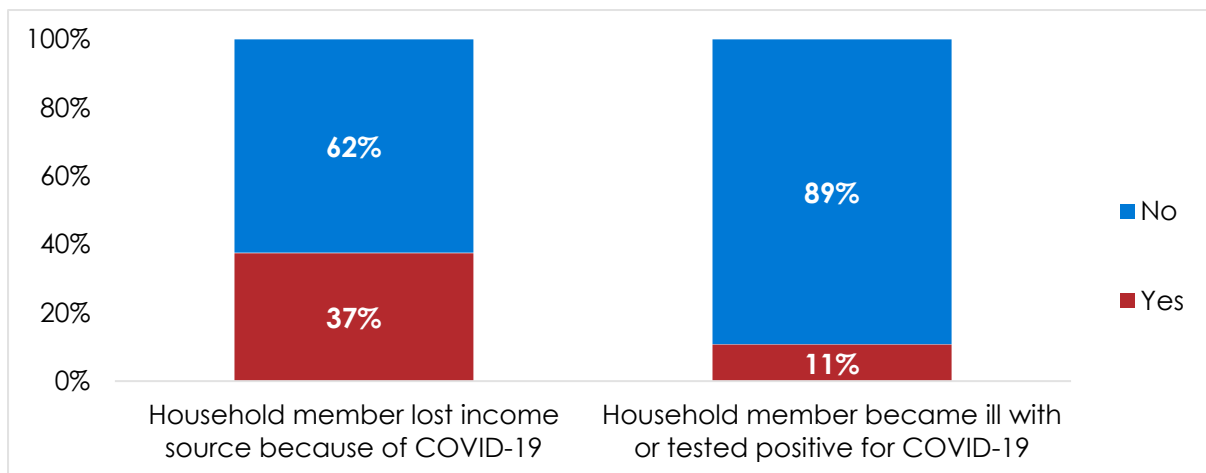
■ **Looking ahead:**

- Seven in 10 Basotho believe that the government will be “very unprepared” (62%) or “somewhat unprepared” (8%) to deal with future public health emergencies.
- A majority (60%) of citizens say 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 one in 10 Basotho (11%) say a member of their household became ill with or tested positive for COVID-19, while more than one-third (37%) say someone in their household lost a job, business, or primary source of income due to the pandemic (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Effects of the COVID-19 pandemic | Lesotho | 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?

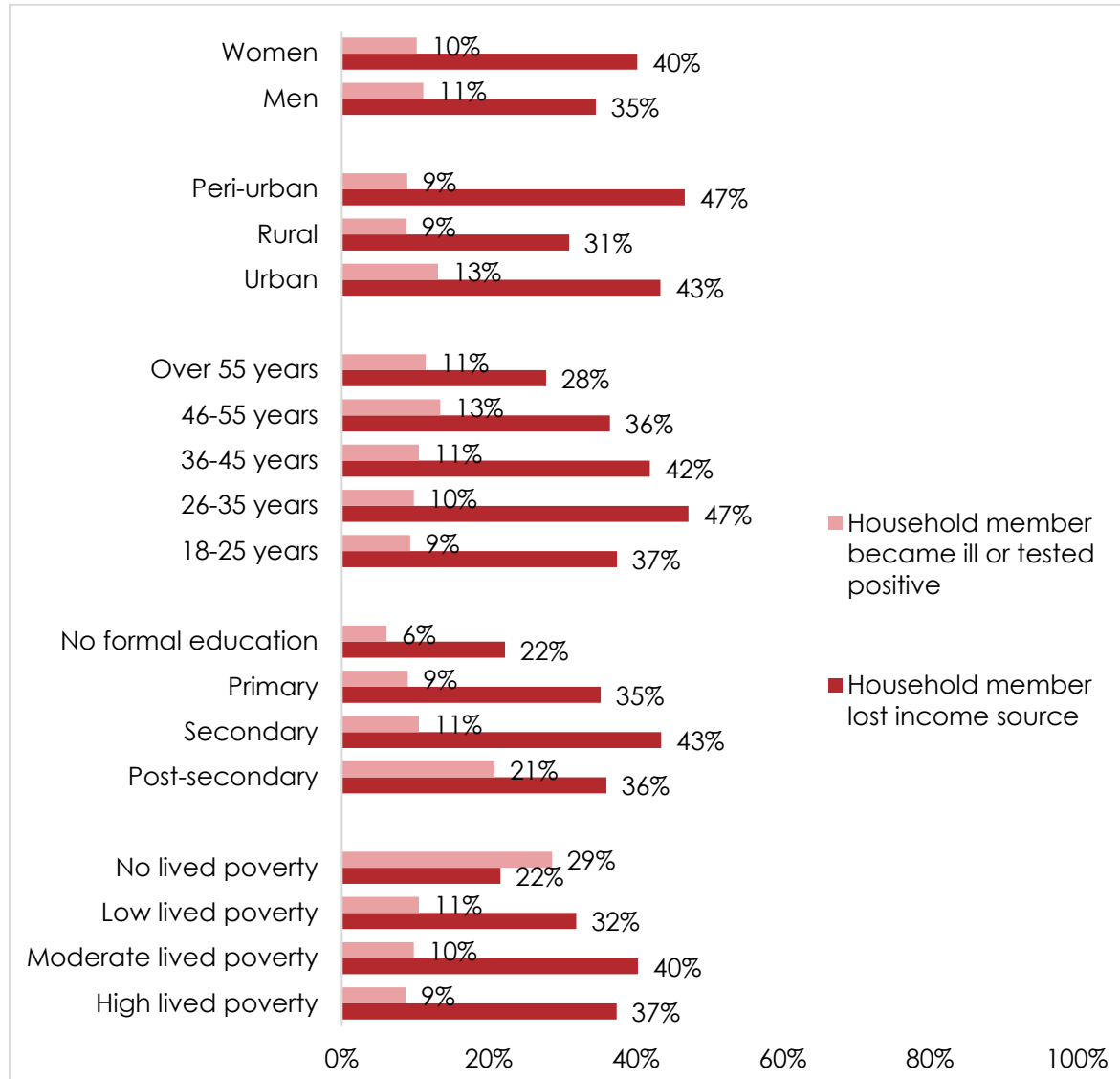
The effects of COVID-19 appear to be more widely experienced in cities and towns than in rural areas. Urbanites are significantly more likely than rural residents to report that a family member lost an income source (43% vs. 31%) and that someone in the household became ill with or tested positive for COVID-19 (13% vs. 9%) (Figure 2).

Reports of illness and/or positive COVID-19 tests increase in frequency with respondents' education level, ranging from 6% of those with no formal education to 21% of those with post-secondary qualifications, and are most common among economically well-off respondents (29% of those experiencing no lived poverty).¹

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).

Loss of an income source is least common among those with no formal education (22%, vs. 35%-43% of more educated respondents). But it is also more common among poorer citizens (37%-40% of those experiencing high or moderate lived poverty, compared to 22% of the wealthy).

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



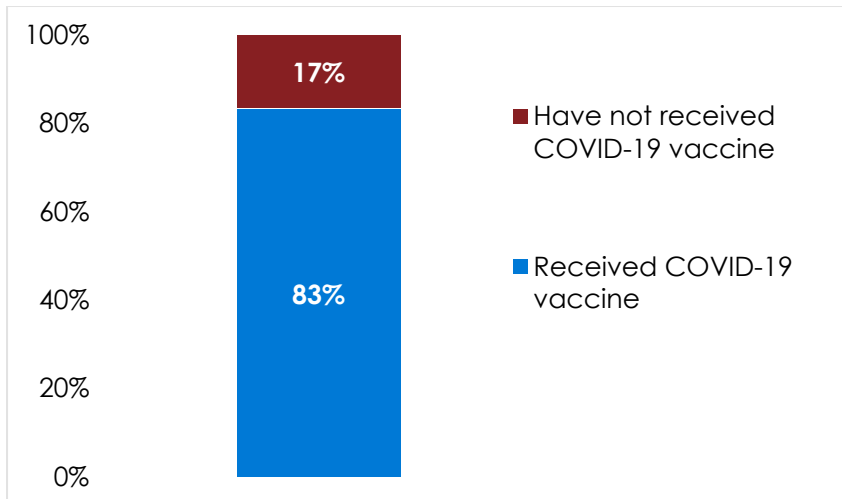
Respondents were asked: Please tell me if you personally or any other member of your household have been affected in any of the following ways by the COVID-19 pandemic: Became ill with COVID-19? Temporarily or permanently lost a job, business or primary source of income? (% who say "yes")

Attitudes toward vaccination

More than four in five respondents (83%) say they have been vaccinated against COVID-19 (Figure 3). This would translate to a significantly higher level of vaccination (about 1.1 million adults) than those reported by the government's COVID Citizen app (Government of Lesotho, 2022) and the WHO (790,480 and 782,175, respectively, including children). One possible reason for over-reporting vaccination in the survey could be reports that the government would deny health services to people who are not vaccinated against COVID-19 (Lesotho Red Cross Society, 2022).

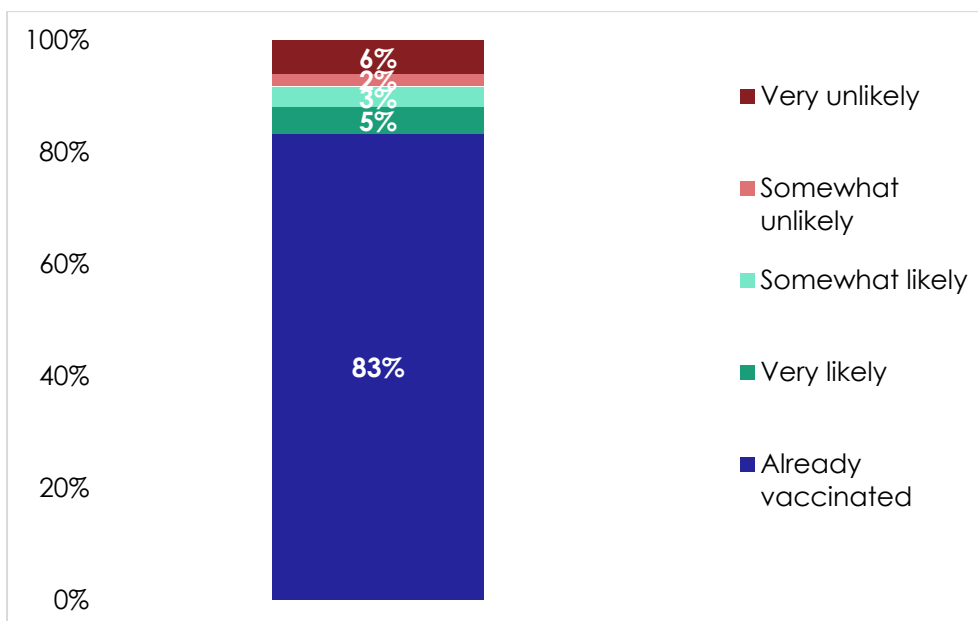
Almost two in 10 (17%) say they have not received the shot, including 8% who say they are “very unlikely” or “somewhat unlikely” to try to get vaccinated and 8% who say they are “very” or “somewhat” likely to do so (Figure 4).

Figure 3: Received COVID-19 vaccines | Lesotho | 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 | Lesotho | 2021



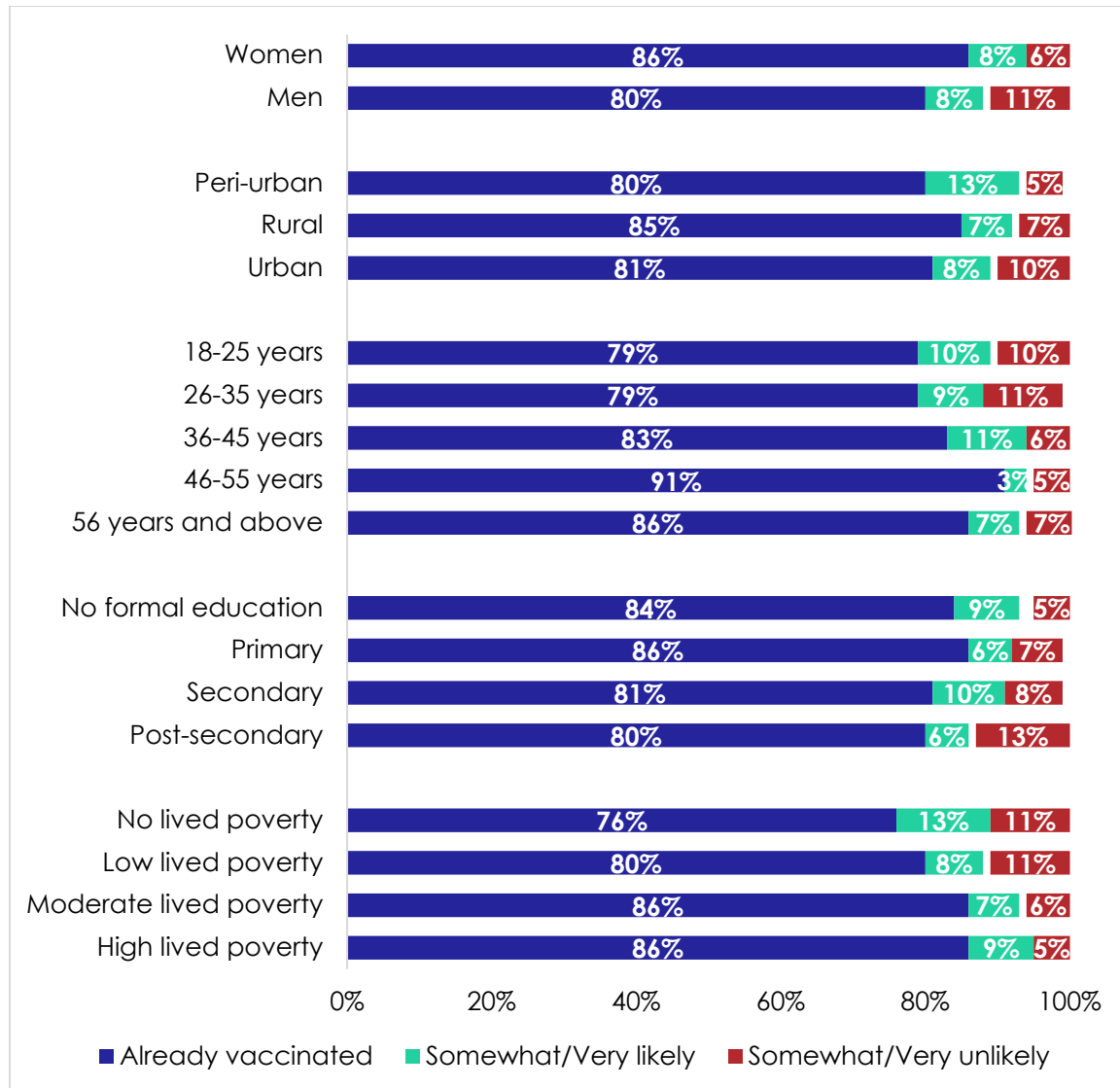
Respondents who have not yet been vaccinated against COVID-19 were asked: If a vaccine for COVID-19 is available, how likely are you to try to get vaccinated?

Vaccination rates are higher among women (86%) and rural residents (85%) than among men (80%) and urbanites (81%) (Figure 5). Citizens over age 45 (86%-91%) report somewhat higher vaccination rates than 18- to 35-year-olds (79%).

Poor citizens (86%) have higher rates of self-reported vaccination rates than their better-off counterparts (76%-80%).

While relatively few citizens say they are unlikely to try to get vaccinated, vaccine hesitancy is somewhat above average among men (11%), the most educated citizens (13%), economically better-off citizens (11%), young adults (10%-11%), and urban citizens (10%).

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

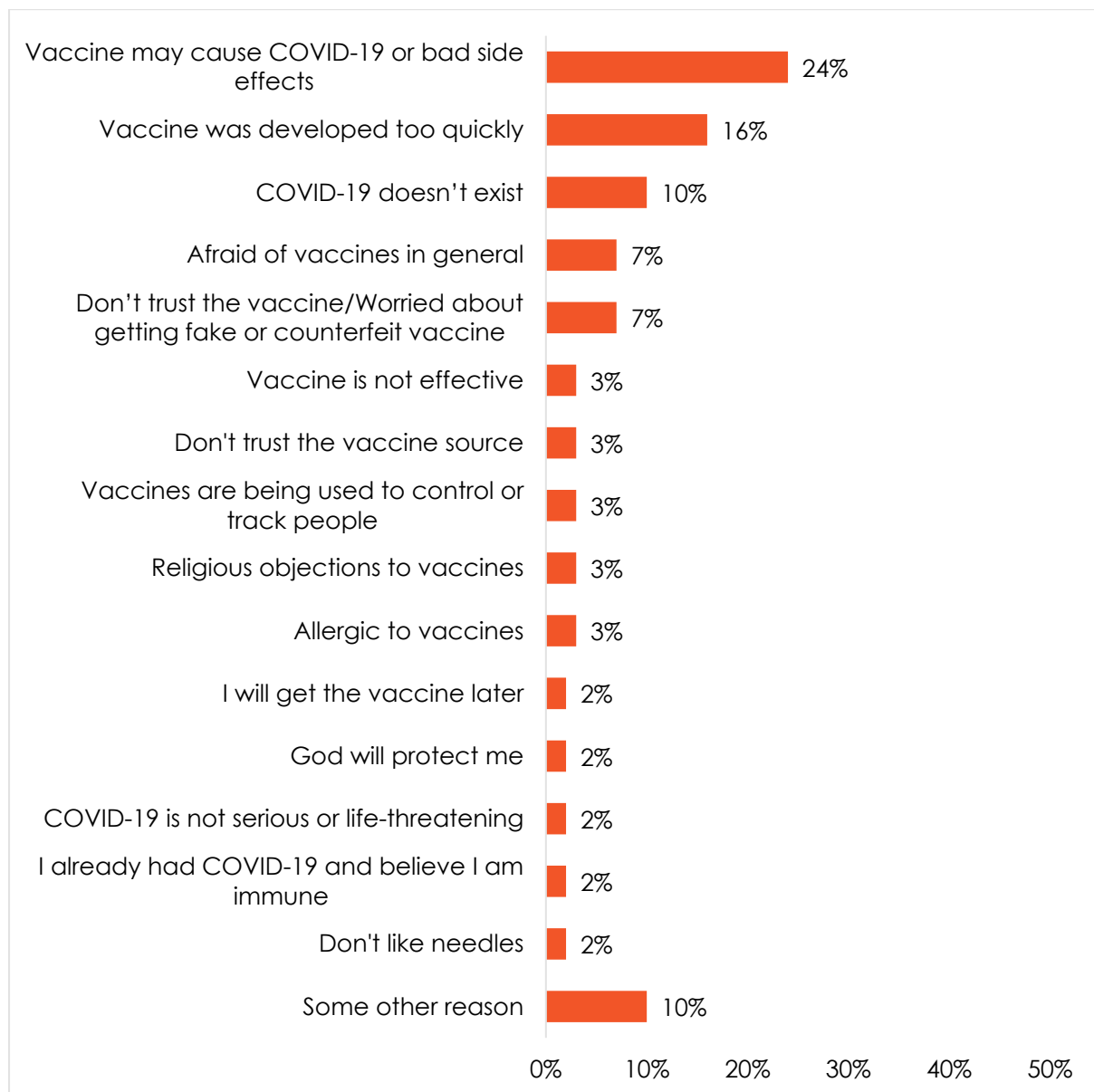


Respondents were asked: *If a vaccine for COVID-19 is available, how likely are you to try to get vaccinated?*

Citizens who say they are unlikely to get vaccinated cite a variety of reasons for their resistance, most commonly concerns that the vaccine may cause COVID-19 or negative side effects (24%) and that the vaccine was developed too quickly (16%) (Figure 6).

One in 10 (10%) don't believe that COVID-19 exists. Others say that they are afraid of vaccines in general (7%) or that they don't trust the vaccine or are worried about getting a counterfeit vaccine (7%).

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

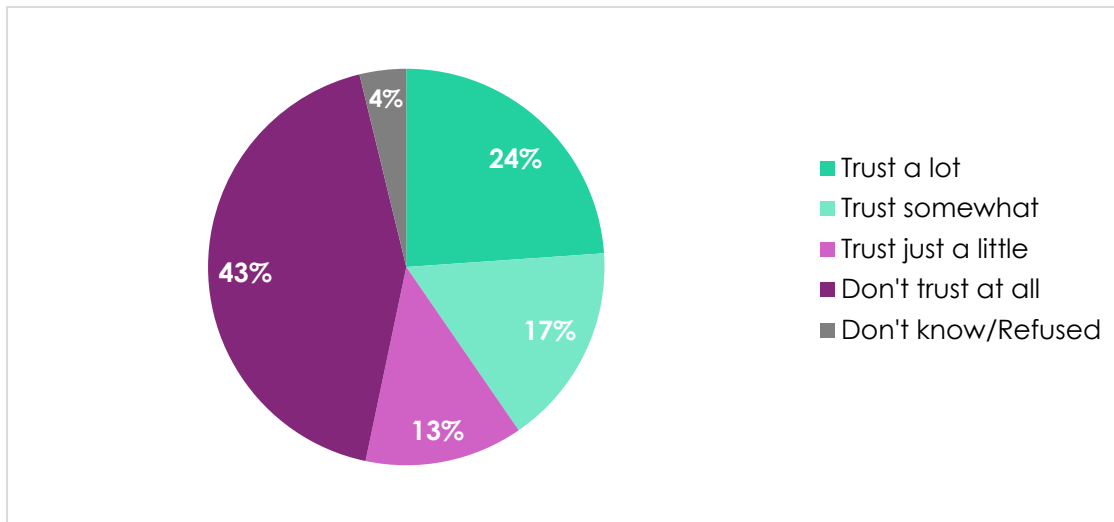


Respondents who say they are not likely to get vaccinated were asked: What is the main reason that you would be unlikely to get a COVID-19 vaccine? (Respondents who say they have been vaccinated or are likely to get vaccinated are excluded.)

One hurdle for efforts to vaccinate the population may be doubts about the government's ability to ensure the safety of COVID-19 vaccines. Only about four in 10 Basotho say they trust the government "somewhat" (17%) or "a lot" (24%) to ensure vaccine safety, while a majority express "just a little" trust (13%) or no trust at all (43%) (Figure 7).

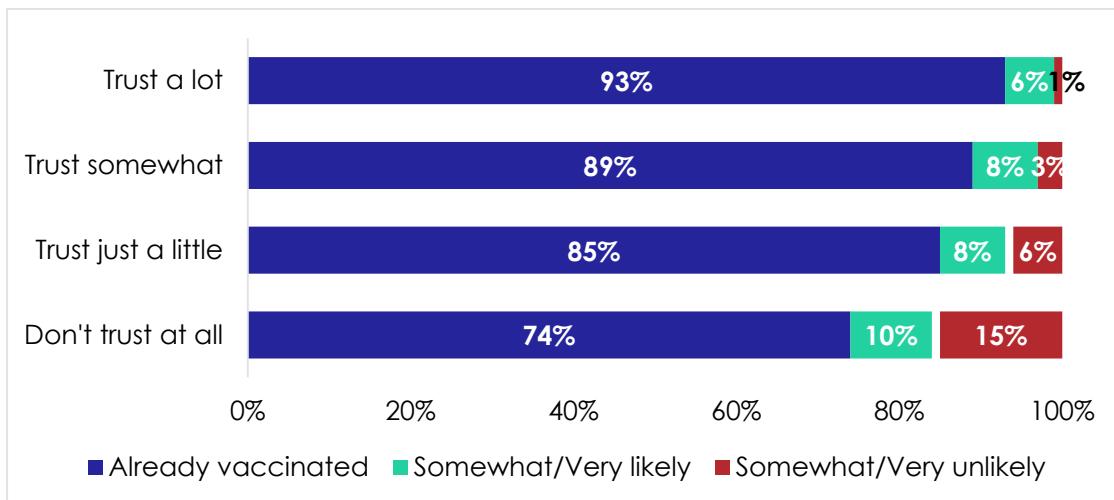
Citizens' willingness to get vaccinated against COVID-19 is correlated with their trust in the government's ability to ensure the safety of the vaccine. Citizens who trust the government "a lot" to ensure vaccine safety are more likely to already be vaccinated than those who express no trust (93% vs. 74%). And vaccine hesitancy is more common among the "no trust" group (15%) compared to the "trust a lot" group (1%) (Figure 8).

Figure 7: Trust government to ensure vaccine safety | Lesotho | 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 Lesotho 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 | Lesotho | 2021



Respondents were asked:

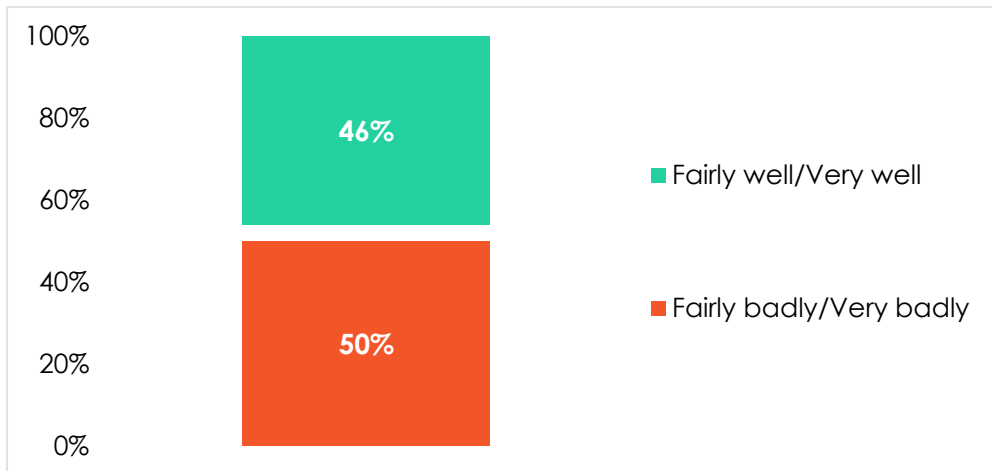
If a vaccine for COVID-19 is available, how likely are you to try to get vaccinated?
 How much do you trust the government to ensure that any vaccine for COVID-19 that is developed or offered to Lesotho citizens is safe before it is used in this country?

Government response to COVID-19

Basotho are almost evenly split in their assessments of the government's overall performance in managing the response to the COVID-19 pandemic: 46% say it is doing "fairly well" or "very well," while 50% say it is doing a poor job (Figure 9).

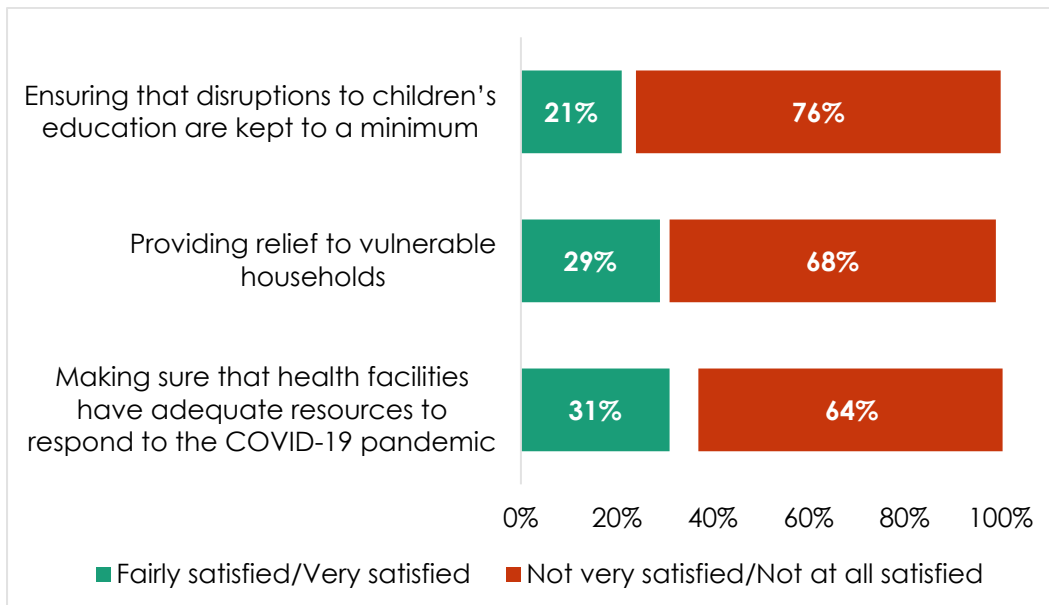
On specific aspects of the COVID-19 response, the ratings are more negative (Figure 10). Majorities say they are "not very satisfied" or "not at all satisfied" with the government's efforts to ensure that disruptions of children's education are held to a minimum (76%), to provide relief assistance to vulnerable households (68%), and to ensure that health facilities are adequately resourced to deal with the pandemic (64%).

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



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

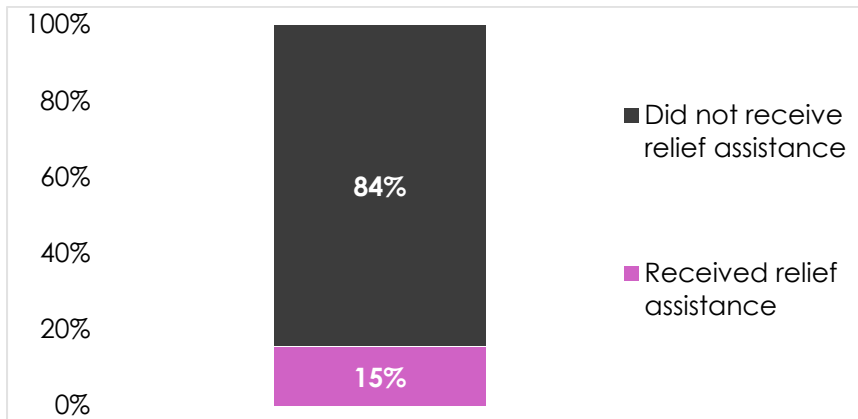
COVID-19 relief assistance

About one in seven Basotho (15%) report that their household received COVID-19 relief assistance from the government, while 84% say they did not (Figure 11).

Rural and peri-urban households were somewhat more likely to benefit from government assistance than those in urban areas (18%-20% vs. 11%) (Figure 12). Respondents with no formal education (22%) or primary schooling (19%) are more likely to report having received assistance than their more educated counterparts (7%-12%), while households at different levels of lived poverty were about equally likely to receive assistance.

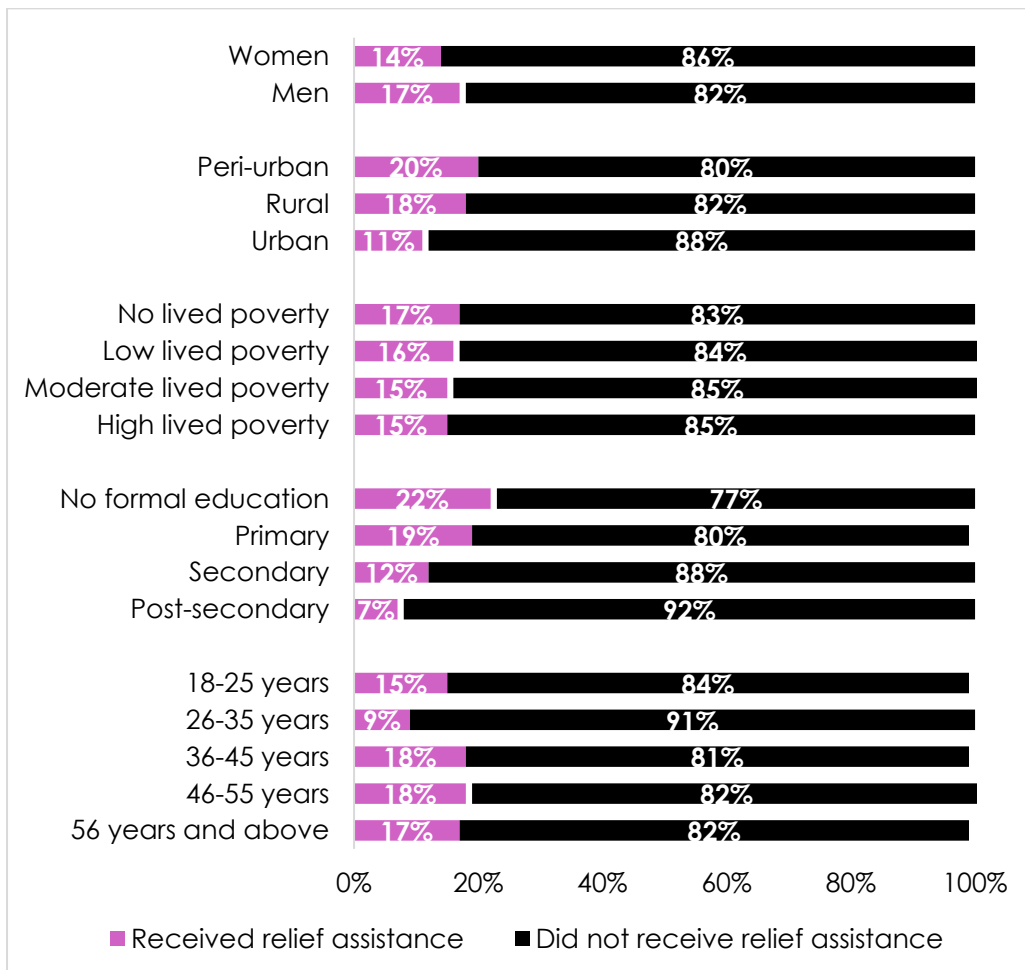
While almost four in 10 respondents (38%) say that COVID-19 relief was distributed "somewhat fairly" or "very fairly," more than half (55%) say the distribution was unfair (Figure 13).

Figure 11: Pandemic-related relief assistance | Lesotho | 2022



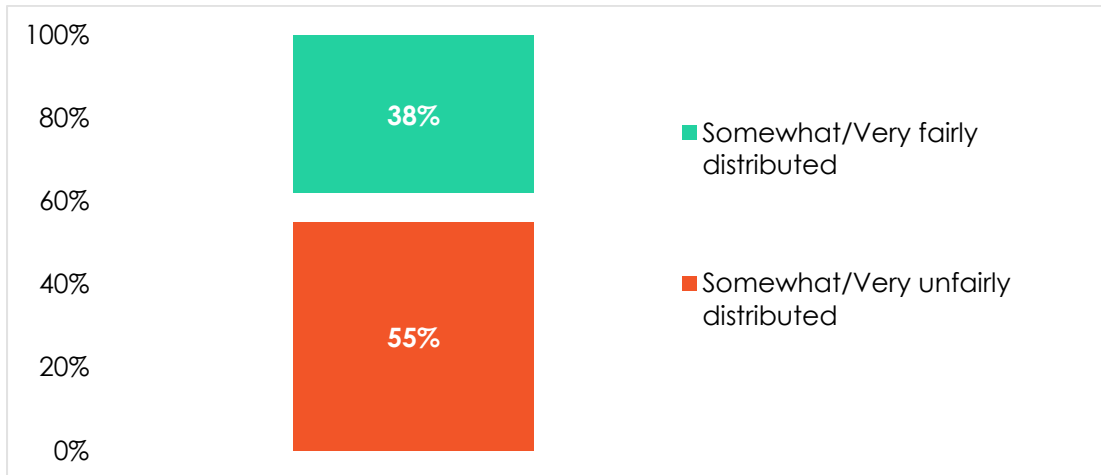
Respondents were asked: Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, have you or your household received any assistance from government, like food, cash payments, relief from bill payments, or other assistance that you were not normally receiving before the pandemic?

Figure 12: Pandemic-related relief assistance | by socio-demographic group | Lesotho | 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 13: Was COVID-19 relief assistance distributed fairly? | Lesotho | 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?

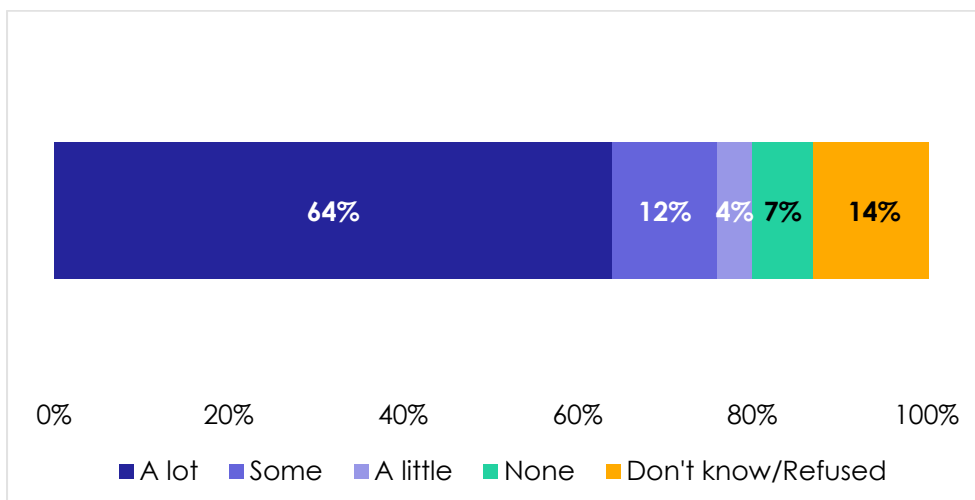
Corruption related to COVID-19

In addition to some dissatisfaction with the fairness of government relief assistance, many Basotho say they believe that “a little” (4%), “some” (12%), or “a lot” (64%) of the resources intended for the COVID-19 response have been lost to corruption. Only 7% think that none of these resources have been embezzled (Figure 14).

The government's response to the pandemic is spearheaded by the National COVID-19 Secretariat (NACOSEC), which replaced the inter-ministerial National Emergency Command Centre (NECC) amid controversy over the spending of funds earmarked for the pandemic response (Kabi, 2020).

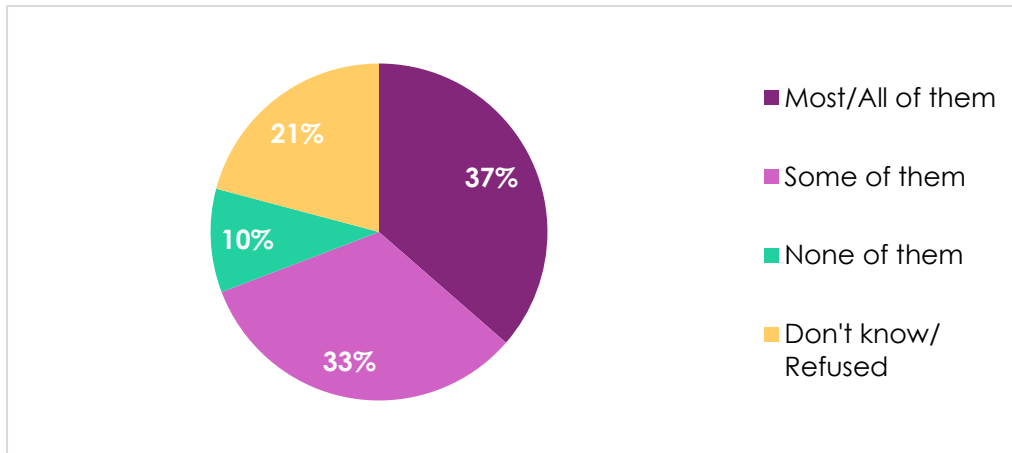
Asked about corruption among NACOSEC officials, 37% of respondents say that “most” or “all” are corrupt, and 33% say that “some” are involved in corruption. Only 10% think that the agency is entirely free of corruption (Figure 15).

Figure 14: Perceived pandemic-related corruption | Lesotho | 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?

Figure 15: Perceived corruption in NACOSEC | Lesotho | 2022



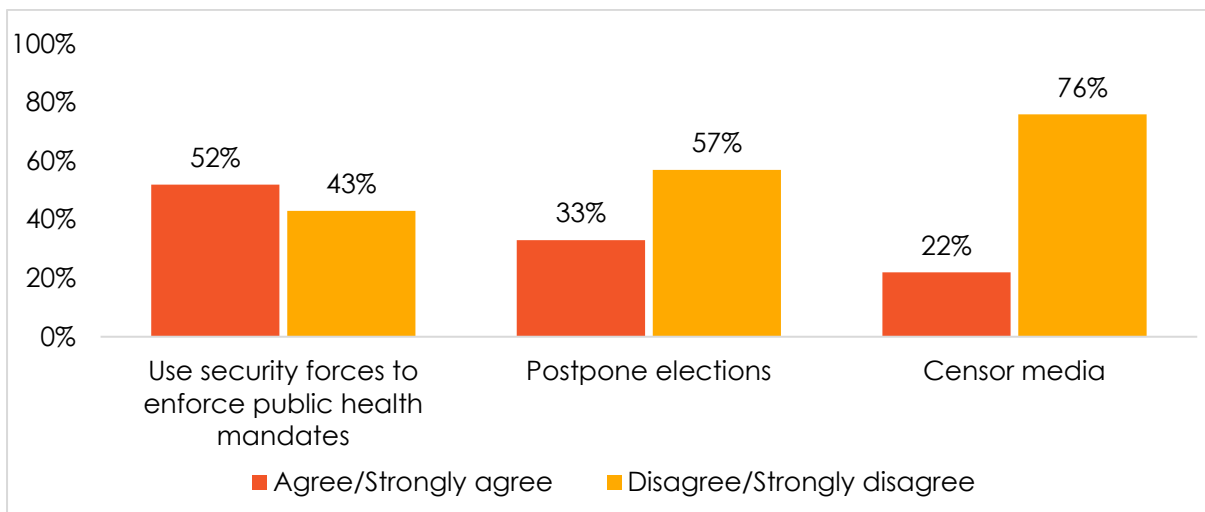
Respondents were asked: How many of the following people do you think are involved in corruption, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: Officials of the National COVID-19 Secretariat, or NACOSEC?

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 Lesotho, more than half (52%) 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, but a substantial minority (43%) disagree (Figure 16).

Figure 16: Limit democratic freedoms during a public health emergency?
 | Lesotho | 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?

Only one-third (33%) of citizens consider it justifiable to postpone elections during a public health emergency, vs. 57% would oppose such a move. And fully three-fourths (76%) would object to censoring media reporting during a pandemic.

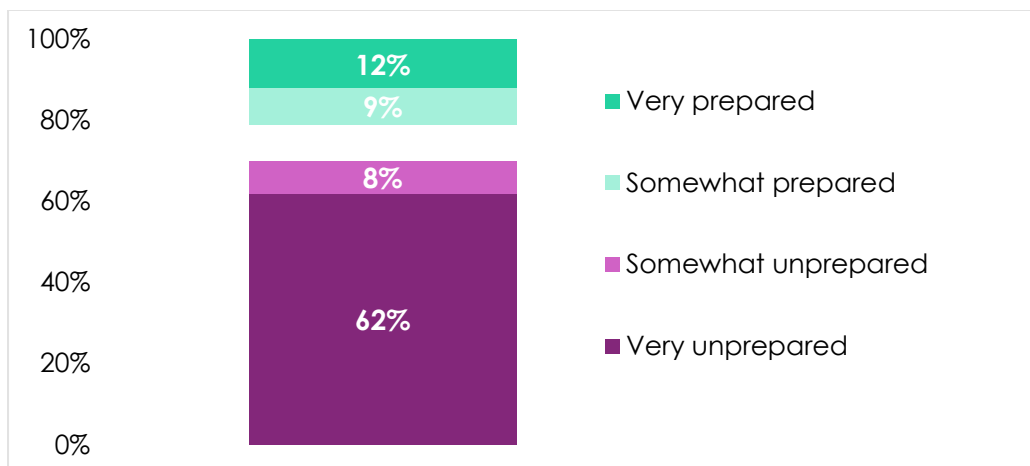
Looking ahead

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

Seven in 10 Basotho (70%) think their government will not be prepared, including 62% who think it will be “very unprepared” (Figure 17). Only one in five (21%) believe the government will be ready for the next public health crisis.

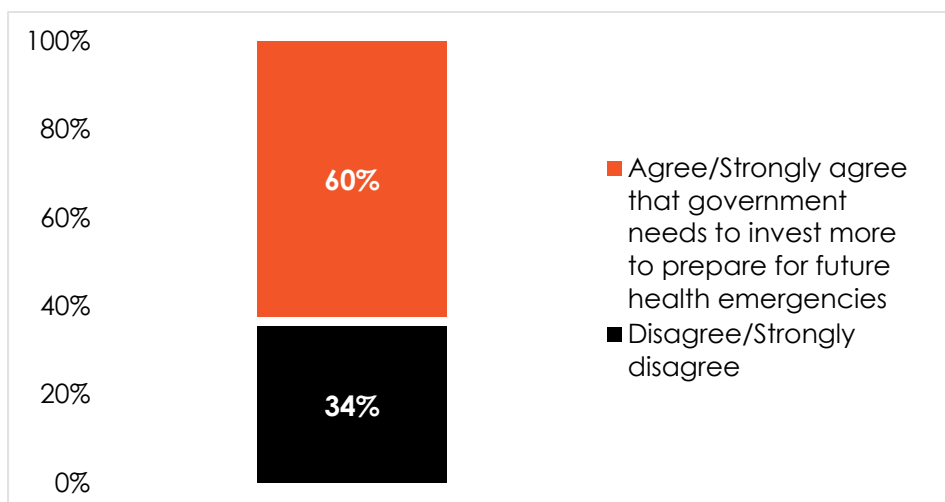
In line with these concerns, six in 10 Namibians (60%) “agree” or “strongly agree” that the government needs to invest more in preparing for future public health emergencies, even if it means that fewer resources are available for other health services (Figure 18).

Figure 17: Preparedness for future health emergencies | Lesotho | 2022



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

Figure 18: Invest more to prepare for future health emergencies? | Lesotho | 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

Few Basotho express opposition to being vaccinated against COVID-19 – a success for government efforts to protect the population.

But our findings also confirm that many Basotho suffered economic losses due to the COVID-19 pandemic and that relatively few benefited from relief assistance. Combined with high levels of perceived corruption in the management of COVID-19 funds, this experience probably contributes to citizens' fairly poor ratings of the government's performance during the pandemic.

These results point to a need to be better prepared for these kinds of emergencies in the future – a priority for citizens even if the necessary funds have to come from other health services.

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Libuseng Malephane is the Afrobarometer national investigator in Lesotho, based at Advision Lesotho. Email: libusengmalephane@gmail.com.

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