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Sudanese approve of COVID-19 lockdown but critical of government's pandemic performance

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 506 | Simon Templer Kodiaga and Elmogiera Elawad

Summary

Shortly after Sudan recorded its first COVID-19 case on 13 March 2020, the government announced a raft of containment measures, including restrictions on visas and air travel and a lockdown closing schools and universities, shops, markets, restaurants, and other commercial activities (SUNA, 2020; Al-Ghad, 2020).

With more than half of the population living below the poverty line (World Bank, 2020), pandemic-related restrictions represented a significant threat to people's livelihoods and were not consistently followed (Assal, 2020; Anadolu Agency, 2021).

As of 6 February 2022, the country had reported 58,874 COVID-19 cases and 3,588 related deaths and had administered more than 3.7 million vaccine doses (World Health Organization, 2022).

According to findings from an Afrobarometer survey in early 2021, a majority of Sudanese considered lockdown restrictions necessary to limit the spread of COVID-19, in spite of the toll they took on the economy and people's livelihoods. Two out of three citizens say they found it difficult to comply with lockdown restrictions. A similar majority say the government is doing "fairly badly" or "very badly" in managing the response to the pandemic.

Few Sudanese trust their government to ensure that COVID-19 vaccines are safe, and only half say they are likely to try to get vaccinated.

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 8 surveys cover 34 countries. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice.

The Afrobarometer team in Sudan, led by Sudan Polling Statistics Center (SPSC), interviewed a nationally representative, random, stratified probability sample of 1,800 adults in February-April 2021. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-2.3 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys were conducted in Sudan in 2013, 2015, and 2018.

Key findings

- As of early 2021, seven in 10 Sudanese (71%) said they were "somewhat" or "very" well informed about the COVID-19 pandemic and efforts to combat it.
- One in 10 citizens (11%) said they or a member of their family became ill with COVID-19, and 21% reported losing a job, a business, or a primary source of income because of the pandemic.

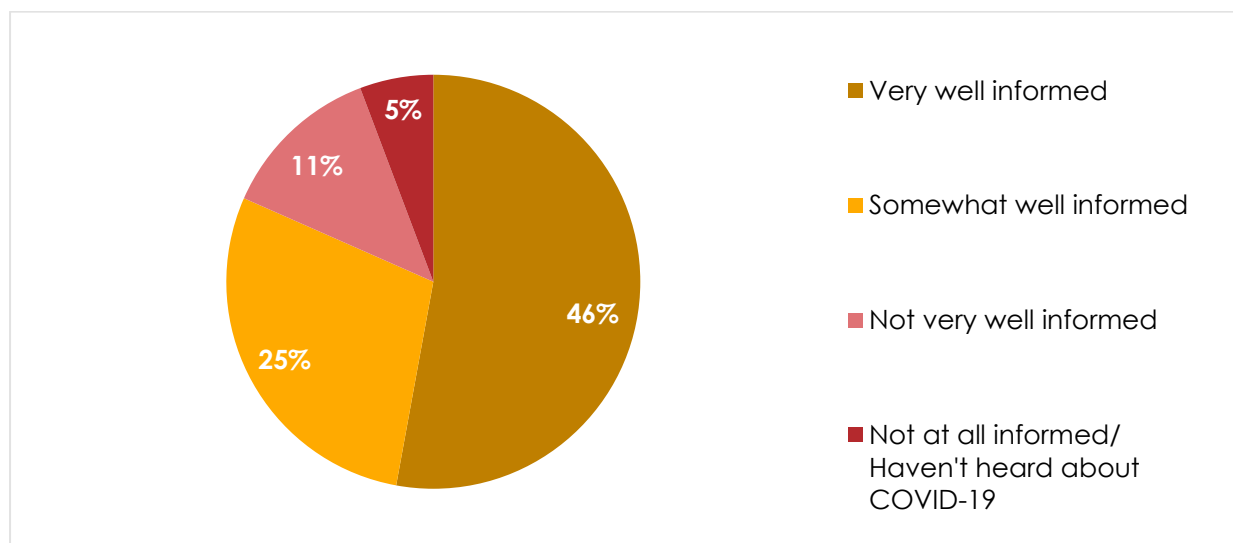
- More than three-fourths (78%) of Sudanese said lockdown restrictions were necessary, even though 66% said they found it difficult to comply with them.
 - A majority (59%) endorsed the closure of schools to limit the spread of the virus, but almost all (96%) said the schools should have reopened sooner.
- Two-thirds (65%) of Sudanese said the government was doing “fairly badly” or “very badly” in managing the response to the pandemic.
 - Majorities expressed little or no trust in government COVID-19 statistics (80%) and in the government’s ability to ensure that COVID-19 vaccines are safe (59%).
 - About three-fourths (73%) believed that “some” or “a lot” of the resources intended for the pandemic response were lost to government corruption.
 - Almost half (47%) said they were unlikely to try to get vaccinated.
- Almost nine in 10 citizens (86%) said they believe that prayer is more effective than a vaccine in preventing COVID-19 infection, including 67% who think prayer is “much more effective.”
- A majority (57%) of citizens said they were worried that Sudanese politicians might use the pandemic as an opportunity to increase their power and authority.
- Fewer than half (43%) said the government should invest more in preparing to respond to health emergencies like COVID-19 if it means fewer resources would be available for other health services.

Awareness

Seven out of 10 Sudanese (71%) said they are “somewhat” or “very” well informed about the COVID-19 pandemic and efforts to combat it (Figure 1).

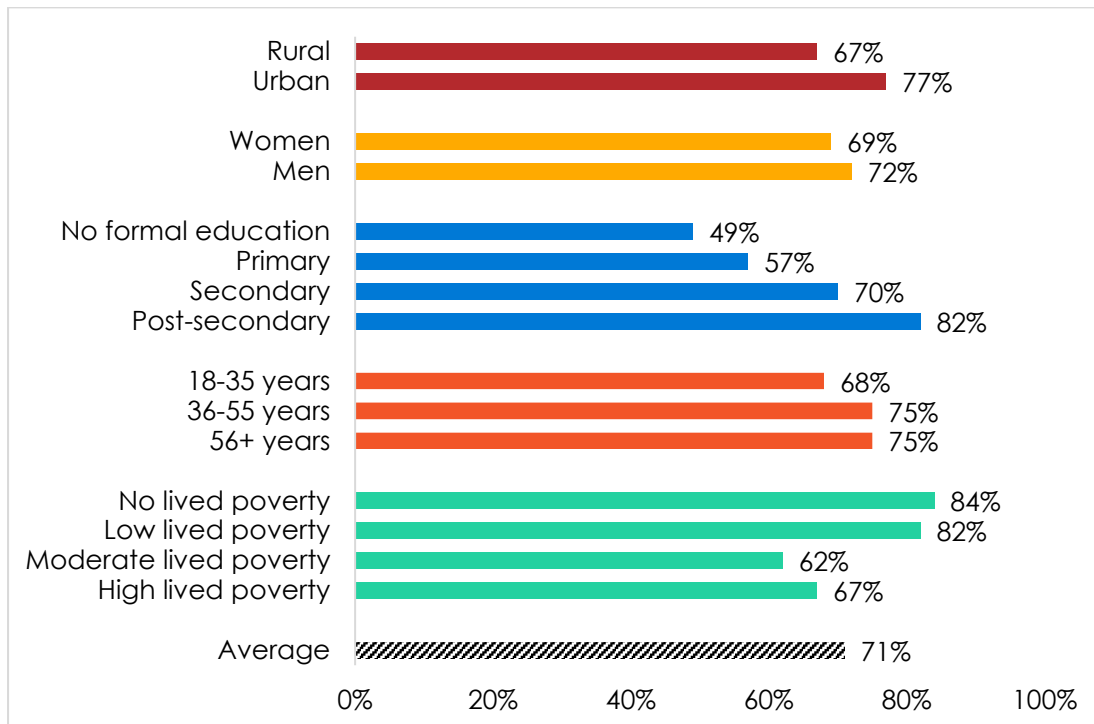
More educated and economically better-off citizens were more likely to be informed than less educated and poorer respondents (Figure 2).

Figure 1: Awareness of COVID-19 | Sudan | 2021



Respondents were asked: How well informed would you say you are about the coronavirus, or the COVID-19 pandemic, and efforts to combat it?

Figure 2: Awareness of COVID-19 | by socio-demographic group | Sudan | 2021



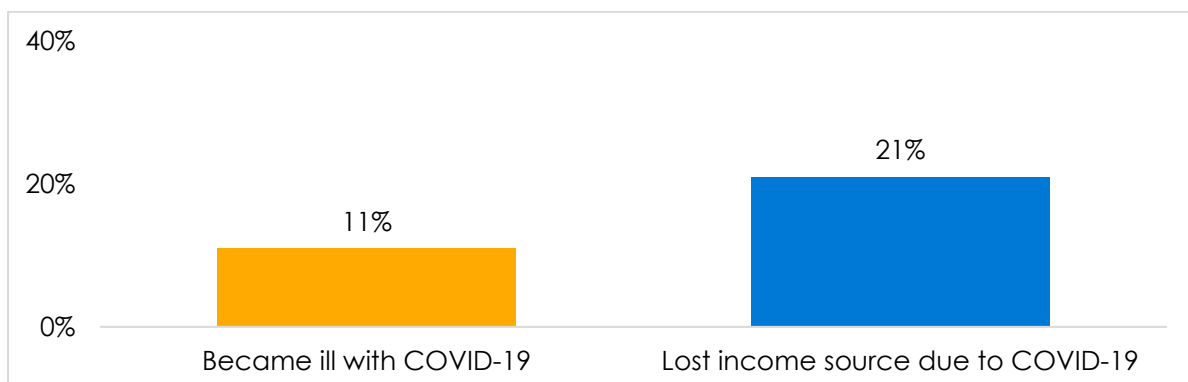
Respondents were asked: How well informed would you say you are about the coronavirus, or the COVID-19 pandemic, and efforts to combat it? (% who say "somewhat" or "very" well informed)

Impact

One in 10 citizens (11%) said they or a member of their family became ill with COVID-19, and twice as many (21%) said they lost a job, a business, or a primary source of income because of the pandemic (Figure 3).

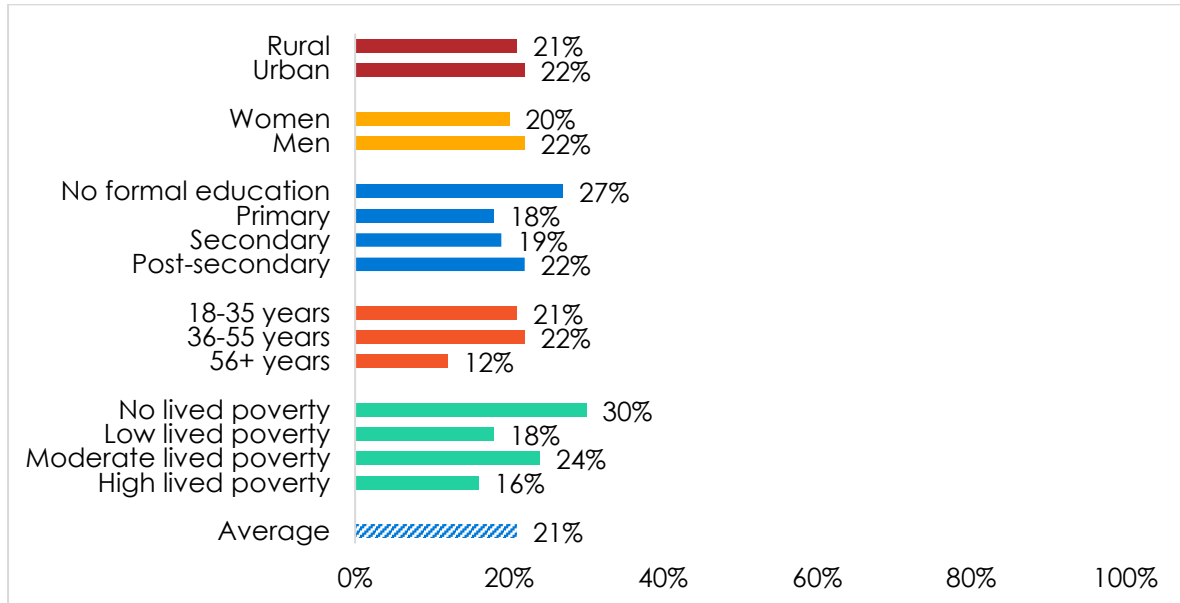
Loss of income during the pandemic was about equally common in rural and urban areas but struck citizens with no formal education particularly hard (27%). Economically better-off respondents were also more likely to report losing an income source (30%) than their less-wealthy counterparts (Figure 4).

Figure 3: Impacts of the pandemic | Sudan | 2021



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?

Figure 4: Lost income due to the pandemic | by socio-demographic group | Sudan | 2021



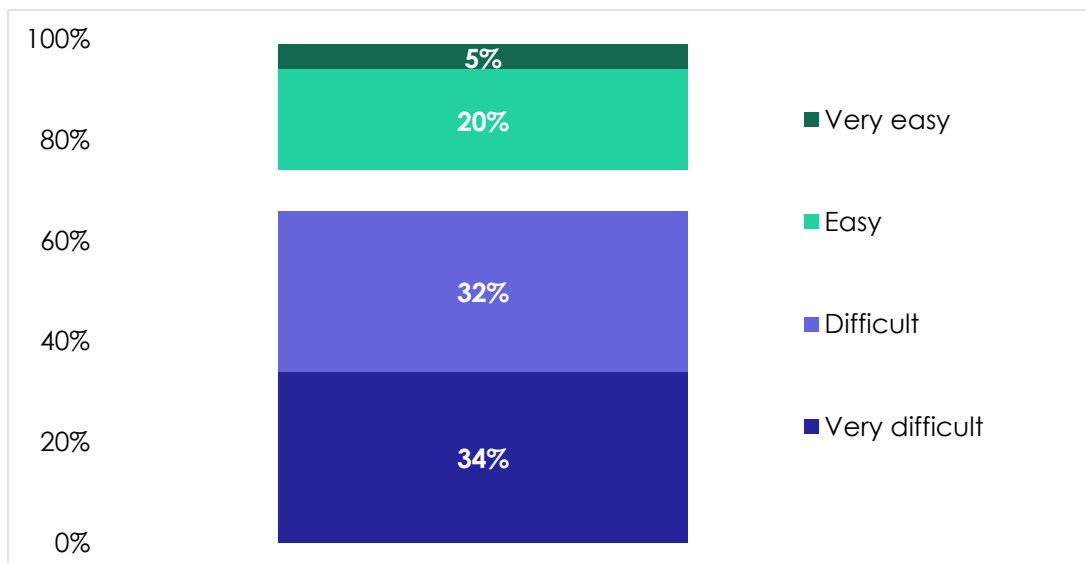
Respondents were asked: Please tell me if you personally or any other member of your household have been affected in any of the following ways by the COVID-19 pandemic: Temporarily or permanently lost a job, business, or primary source of income? (% “yes”)

Lockdowns and school closures

Two out of three Sudanese (66%) said they found it “difficult” or “very difficult” to comply with lockdown restrictions imposed by the government to limit the spread of COVID-19 (Figure 5).

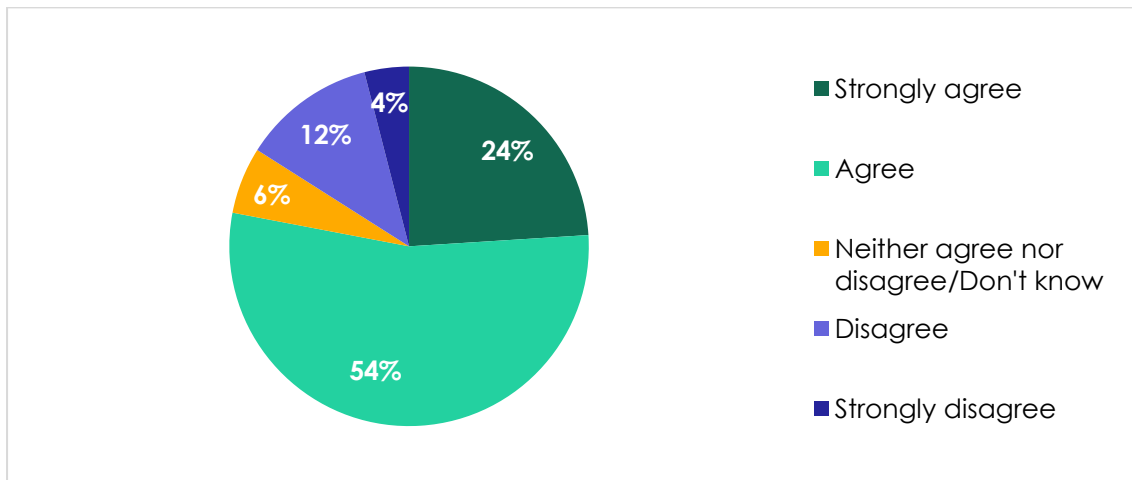
Even so, more than three-fourths (78%) said the lockdown was necessary, in spite of the toll it took on the economy and people’s livelihoods (Figure 6).

Figure 5: Difficulty of complying with lockdown | Sudan | 2021



Respondents were asked: How easy or difficult was it for you and your household to comply with the lockdown or curfew restrictions imposed by the government?

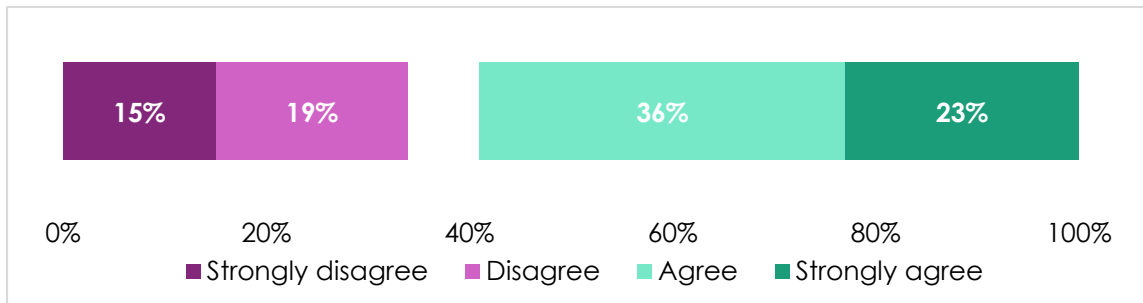
Figure 6: Support for lockdown | Sudan | 2021



Respondents were asked: Please tell me whether you agree or disagree with the following statement: Even if the lockdown or curfew had negative impacts on the economy and people's livelihoods, it was necessary to limit the spread of COVID-19?

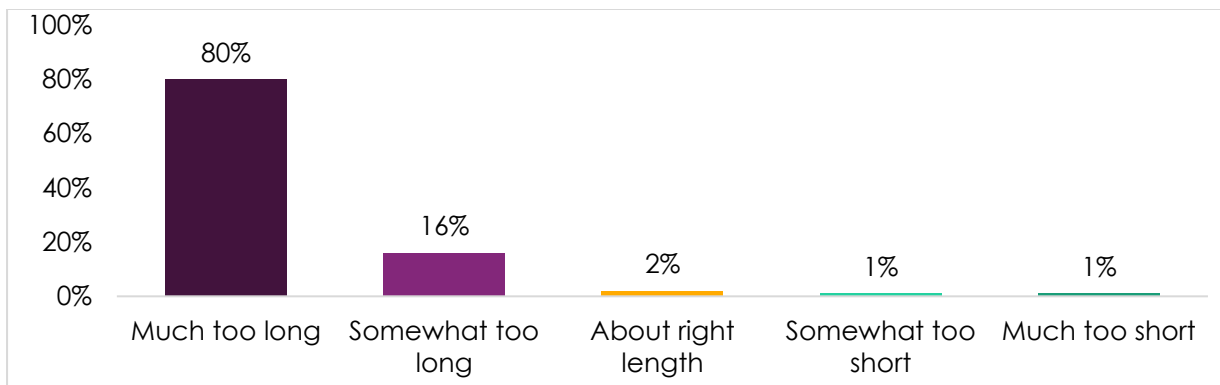
A majority (59%) of citizens endorsed the closure of schools to limit the spread (Figure 7). But almost unanimously (96%), they said the schools should have reopened sooner (Figure 8).

Figure 7: Support for school closures | Sudan | 2021



Respondents were asked: Did you support or oppose the government's decision to close schools in an effort to limit the spread of COVID-19?

Figure 8: Length of school closures | Sudan | 2021



Respondents were asked: In your opinion, was the period during which schools were closed too long or too short?

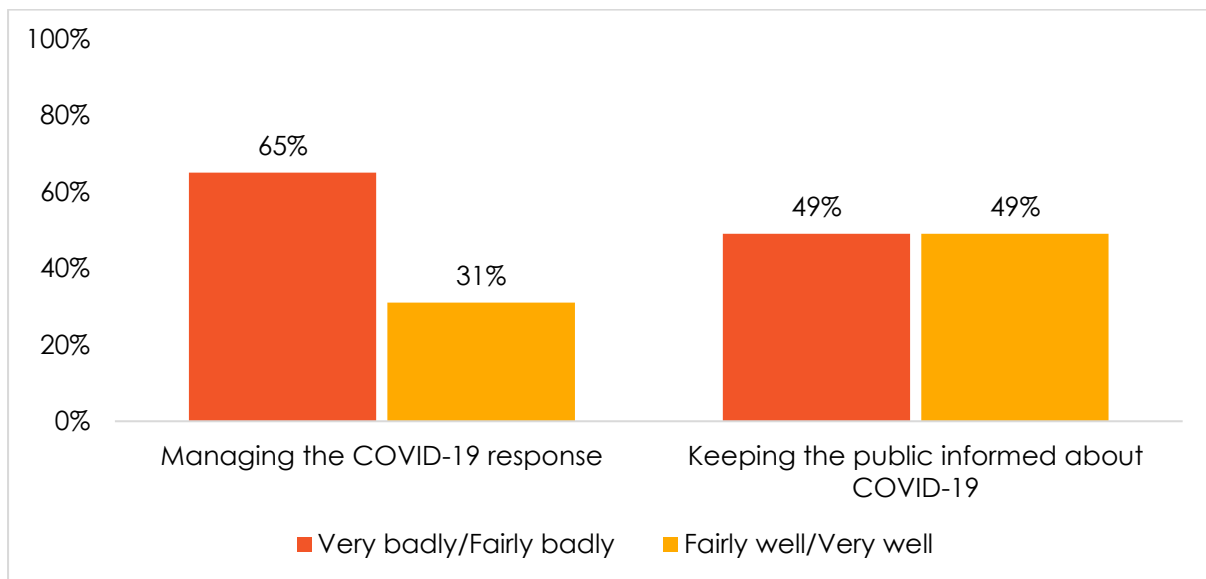
Government performance

Two-thirds (65%) of Sudanese said the government was doing “fairly badly” or “very badly” in managing the response to the pandemic. Only half (49%) said the government had done a good job of keeping the public informed about COVID-19 (Figure 9).

Eight in 10 citizens (80%) said they put little trust in government statistics on the number of infections and deaths due to COVID-19 (Figure 10).

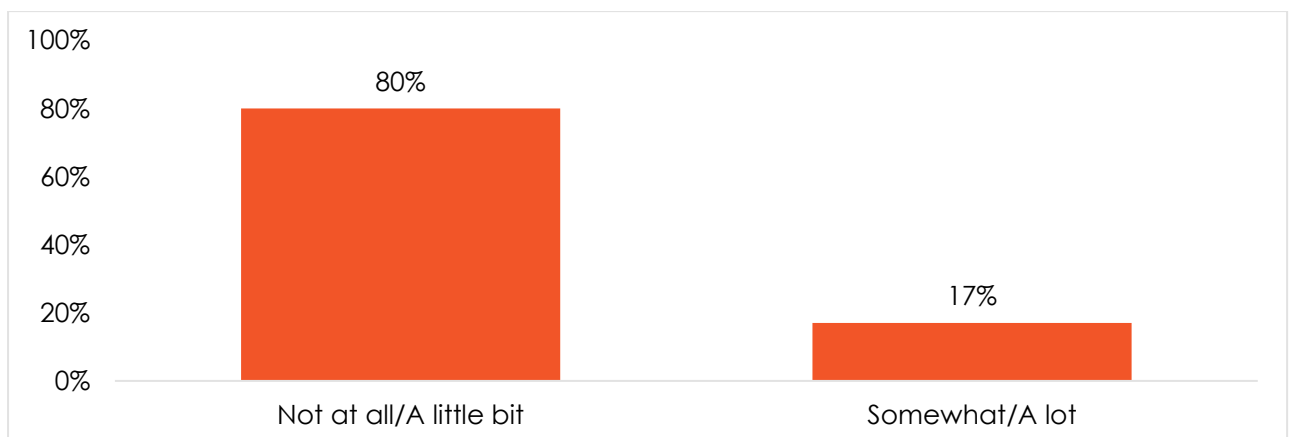
And almost three-fourths (73%) thought that “some” or “a lot” of the resources available for the pandemic response were lost to government corruption (Figure 11).

Figure 9: Assessment of government performance during the pandemic | Sudan | 2021



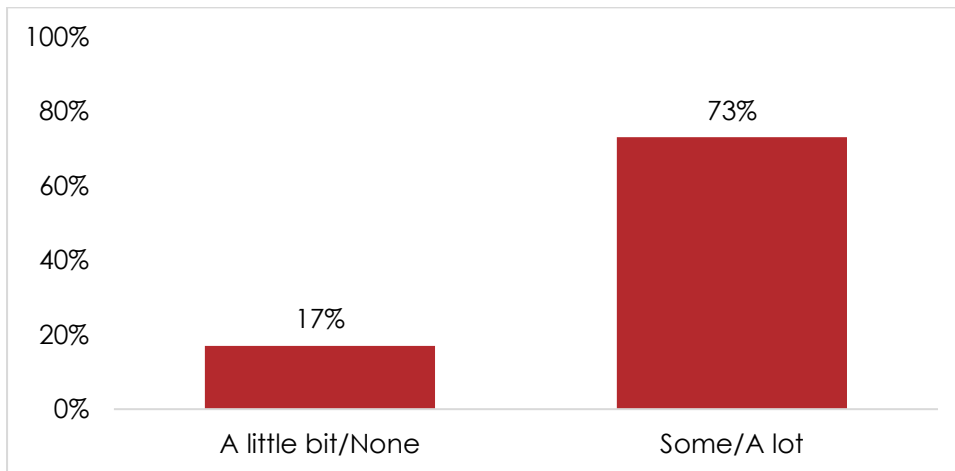
Respondents were asked: How well or badly would you say the current government has handled the following matters since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, or haven't you heard enough to say: Managing the response to the COVID-19 pandemic? Keeping the public informed about COVID-19?

Figure 10: Trust in COVID-19 statistics | Sudan | 2021



Respondents were asked: How much do you trust the official statistics provided by government on the number of infections and deaths due to the COVID-19 pandemic?

Figure 11: Perceived corruption in pandemic response | Sudan | 2021



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 among government officials?

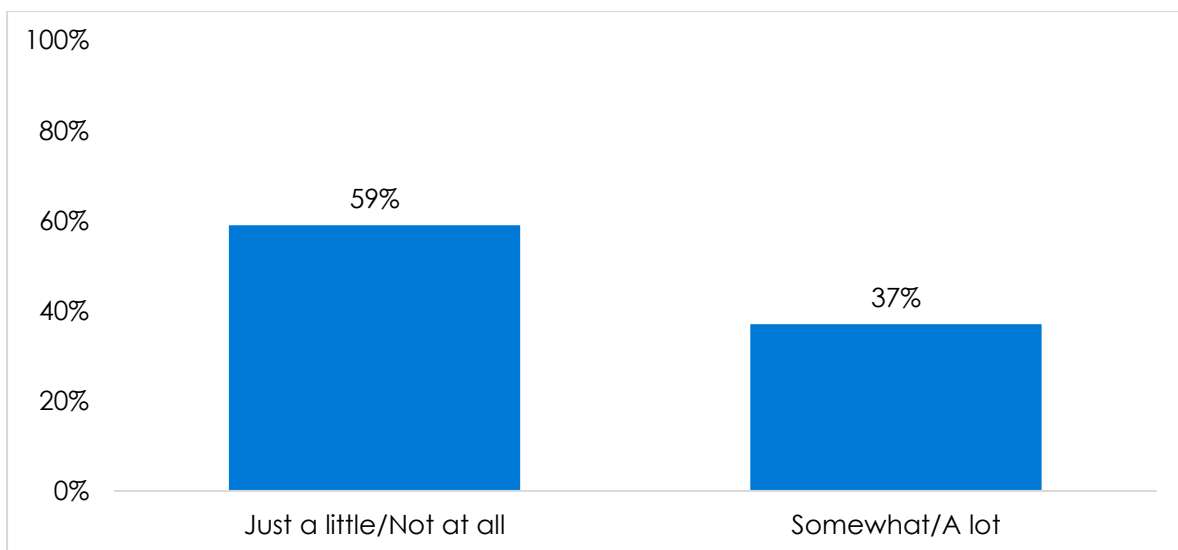
Vaccines

Six in 10 Sudanese (59%) said they trust the government “just a little” or “not at all” to ensure that any COVID-19 vaccine is safe before it is used in the country (Figure 12).

About half (51%) said they were “somewhat likely” or “very likely” to try to get vaccinated, while 47% considered this unlikely (Figure 13).

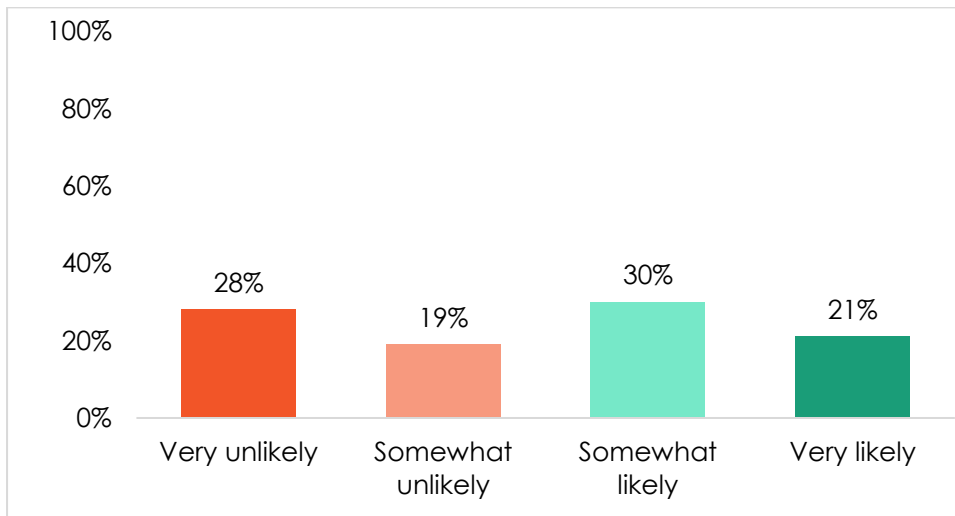
The survey also shows that almost nine in 10 citizens (86%) believe that prayer is more effective than a vaccine in preventing COVID-19 infection, including 67% who think prayer is “much more effective” (Figure 14).

Figure 12: Trust government to ensure vaccine is safe? | Sudan | 2021



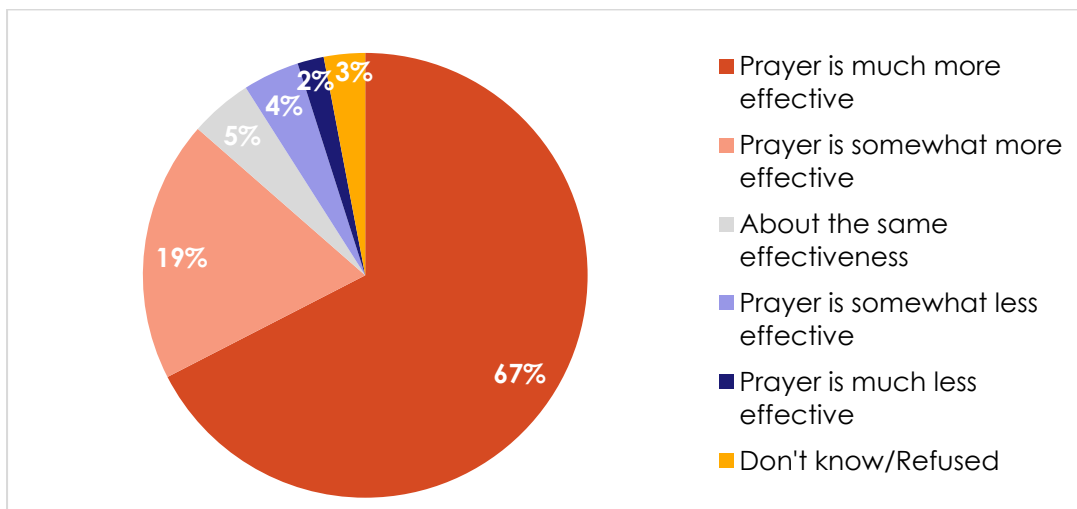
Respondents were asked: How much do you trust the government to ensure that any vaccine for COVID-19 that is developed or offered to Sudanese citizens is safe before it is used in this country?

Figure 13: Likelihood of trying to get vaccinated | Sudan | 2021



Respondents were asked: *If a vaccine for COVID-19 becomes available and the government says it is safe, how likely are you to try to get vaccinated?*

Figure 14: Prayer vs. vaccines: Which is more effective against COVID-19? | Sudan | 2021



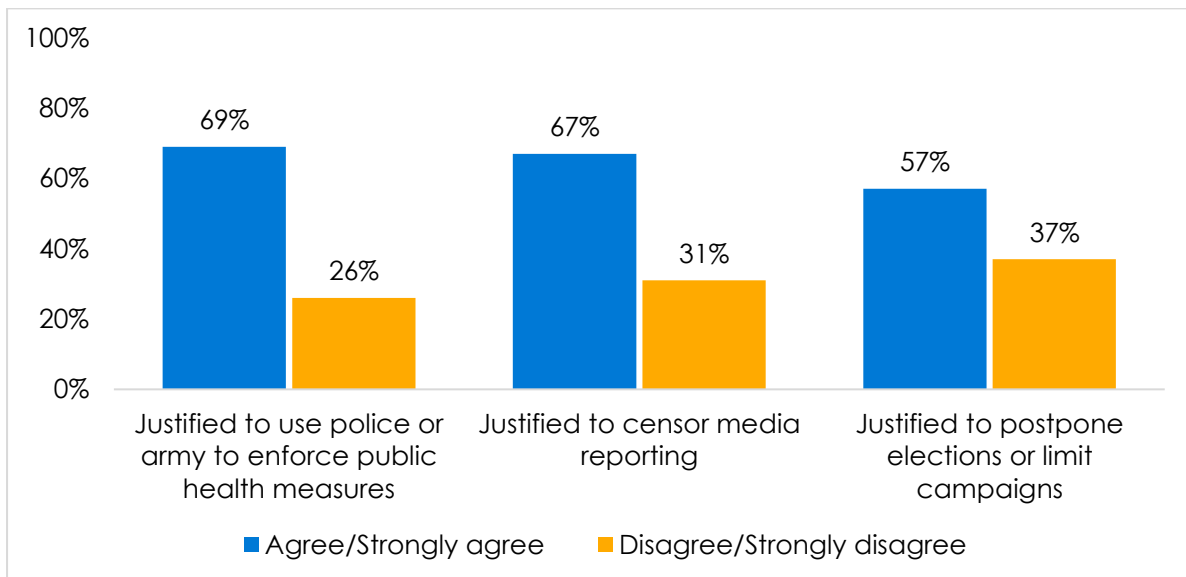
Respondents were asked: *Some people think that prayer is an effective way to alter events in the world. Others put more faith in science to solve problems. Some people believe in both. What about you? Do you think that prayer is more effective or less effective than a vaccine would be in preventing COVID-19 infection?*

Restricting freedoms and democracy?

Majorities of Sudanese "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that in times of a health emergency like the COVID-19 pandemic, it is justified for the government to use the police or armed forces to enforce public health measures (69%), to censor media reporting (67%), and to postpone elections or limit political campaigning (57%) (Figure 15).

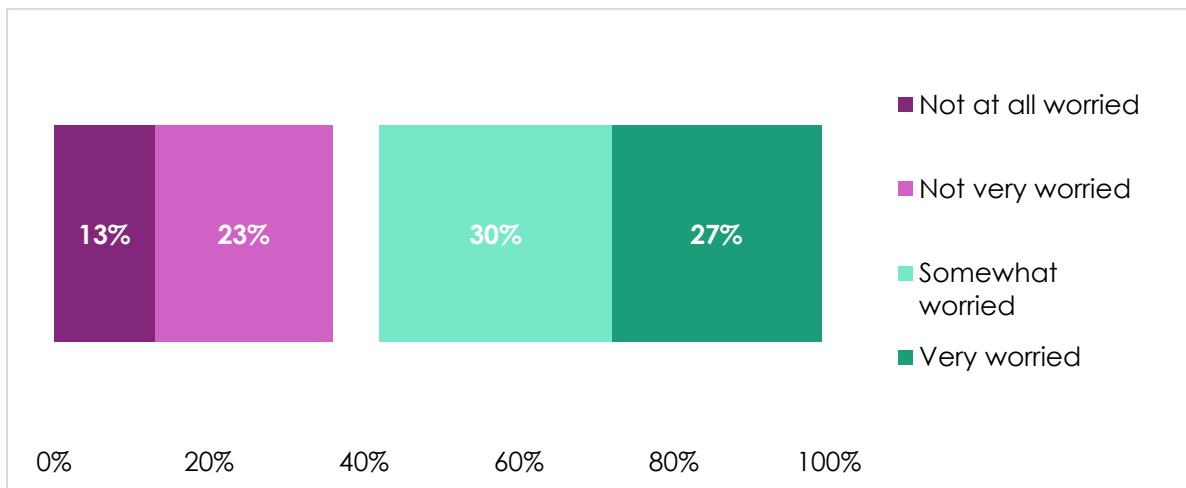
A majority (57%) also said they were "somewhat worried" or "very worried" that Sudanese politicians might use the pandemic as an opportunity to increase their power and authority (Figure 16).

Figure 15: Restrict freedoms during health emergency? | Sudan | 2021



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?

Figure 16: Worried about politicians' intentions to use pandemic as opportunity to increase power? | Sudan | 2021



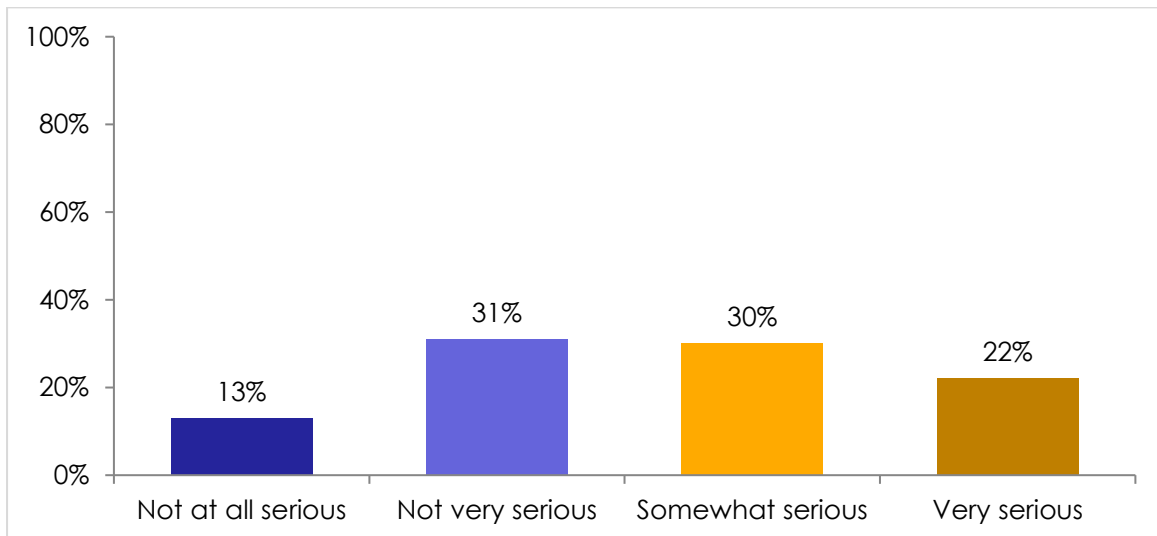
Respondents were asked: How worried are you, if at all, that the following things are taking place or might take place in Sudan: Politicians are using the pandemic as an opportunity to increase their power and authority?

Looking ahead

More than half (52%) of citizens expected that the pandemic would be "somewhat serious" or "very serious" in Sudan in the next six months (Figure 17).

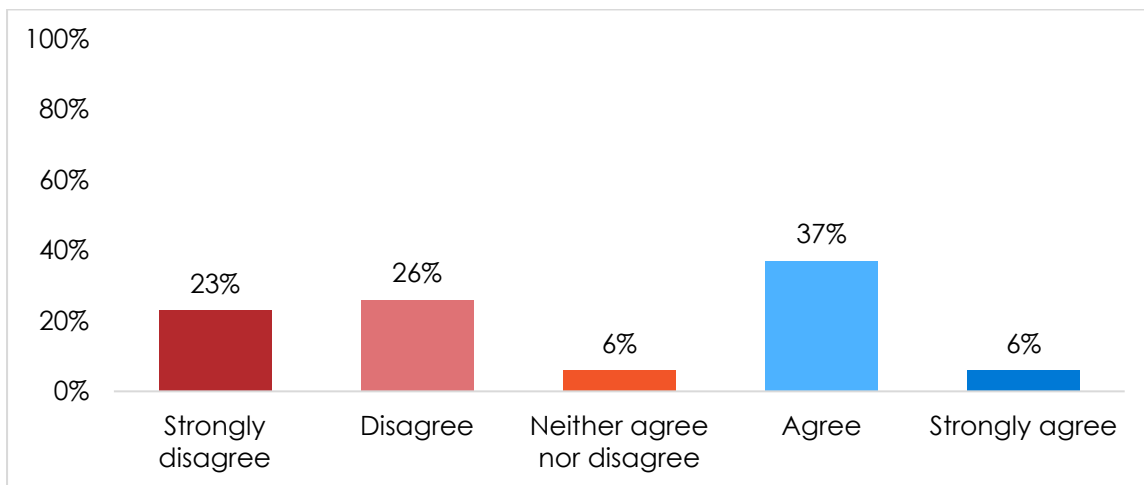
But fewer than half (43%) said the government should invest more in preparing to respond to health emergencies like COVID-19 if it means that fewer resources would be available for other health services (Figure 18).

Figure 17: Future impacts of COVID-19 | Sudan | 2021



Respondents were asked: Looking ahead, how serious of a problem do you think the COVID-19 pandemic will be for Sudan over the next six months?

Figure 18: Invest more in preparing for future health emergencies? | Sudan | 2021



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

As of early 2021, a majority of Sudanese disapproved of the government's performance in managing the response to the COVID-19 pandemic and worried that politicians might use the pandemic as an opportunity to increase their power.

Few Sudanese trusted their government to ensure that COVID-19 vaccines are safe, and only half said they were likely to try to get vaccinated. Most believed that prayer is more effective than a vaccine in preventing the spread of COVID-19.

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Simon Templer Kodiaga is Afrobarometer communications coordinator for East Africa, based at the Institute for Development Studies, University of Nairobi, Kenya. Email: skodiaga@afrobarometr.org.

Elmogiera Elawad is director of Sudan Polling and Statistics Center. Email: info@sudanpolling.org.

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