

AfriForum members' opinion on COVID-19 vaccines and related matters

A report by AfriForum Research

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused a local and international health crisis during the past year. More than one million cases of COVID-19 have been recorded in the country, and official statistics indicate that at the end of January 2021, more than 33 000 COVID-19-related deaths had been recorded.¹

Several pharmaceutical companies have announced that they have developed effective vaccines, which offer people protection against the virus and which will play an important role in containing its spread.²

AfriForum wanted to obtain the opinions of its members on matters such as the vaccines available, fair access practices and the lockdown measures taken by the state. The objective of the survey was to use the input of its members to improve AfriForum's own COVID-19 strategy.

Some of the results obtained were the following:

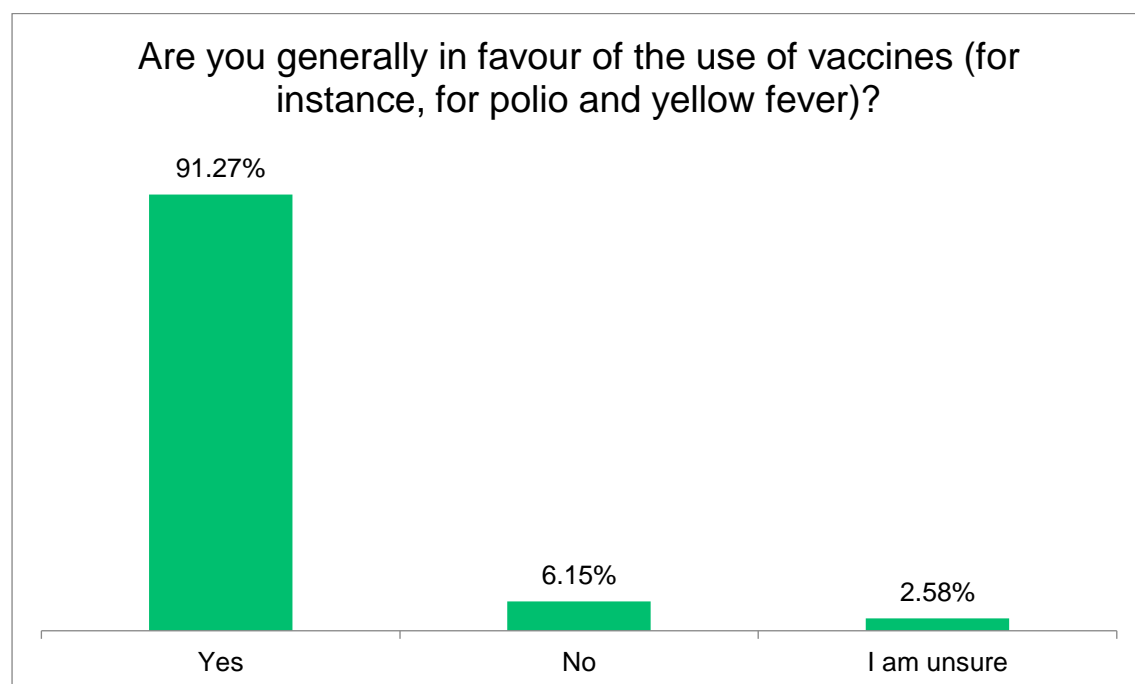


Figure 1: General view on the use of vaccines (n=504 respondents)

- 1 National Institute for communicable diseases. 2021. *Latest confirmed cases for COVID-19 in South Africa*. 29 January. Available at <https://www.nicd.ac.za/latest-confirmed-cases-of-covid-19-in-south-africa-29-jan-2021/>. Date accessed 7 April 2021.
- 2 *Ibid.*

A vaccine can be broadly described as a way to “train” someone’s immune system to recognise organisms invading the body and to eliminate these. Vaccination is one of the most important preventative measures to protect people against diseases such as measles, hepatitis B and yellow fever. It is important to vaccinate a significant segment of a population in order to obtain herd immunity within a geographical area to keep the spreading of the disease concerned in check.³ Although there is some resistance to the use of vaccines in some cases, the method has been used for over a century in numerous countries as an effective preventative measure against a wide range of diseases.

In the AfriForum survey, respondents were first asked whether they were in favour of the use of vaccines for the prevention of diseases such as yellow fever. From Figure 1 it becomes clear that the vast majority of respondents (91,27%) is generally in favour of the use of vaccines. The subsequent question was then posed, focusing specifically on the COVID-19 vaccine.

The results show that the majority of respondents saying no to the vaccine do so because they do not trust the vaccine itself. The survey shows that the respondents are not in principle opposed to the idea of a COVID-19 vaccine or its potential effectiveness, but that there is a lack of trust in the products currently available.

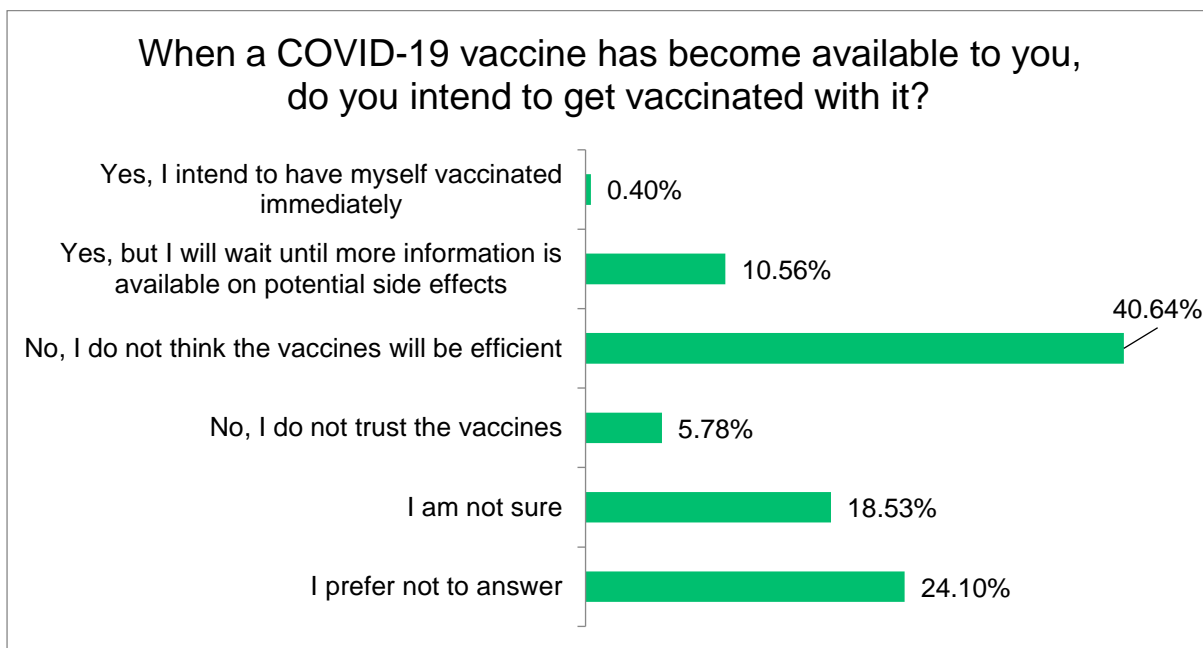


Figure 2: Respondents planning to be vaccinated against COVID-19 (n=502 respondents)

³ Sampson, S. & Boulanger, A. 2019. *Everything you need to know about vaccinations*. Healthline, 27 November. Available at <https://www.healthline.com/health/vaccinations>. Accessed 7 April 2021.

The questions below deal with the government's vaccination and distribution strategy. AfriForum's members were asked how the South African government's vaccination strategy compared to that of most other countries. Furthermore, members' opinions were sought on whether the government should look into alternative treatments and which institutions should play a primary role in the purchase, allocation and distribution of vaccines.

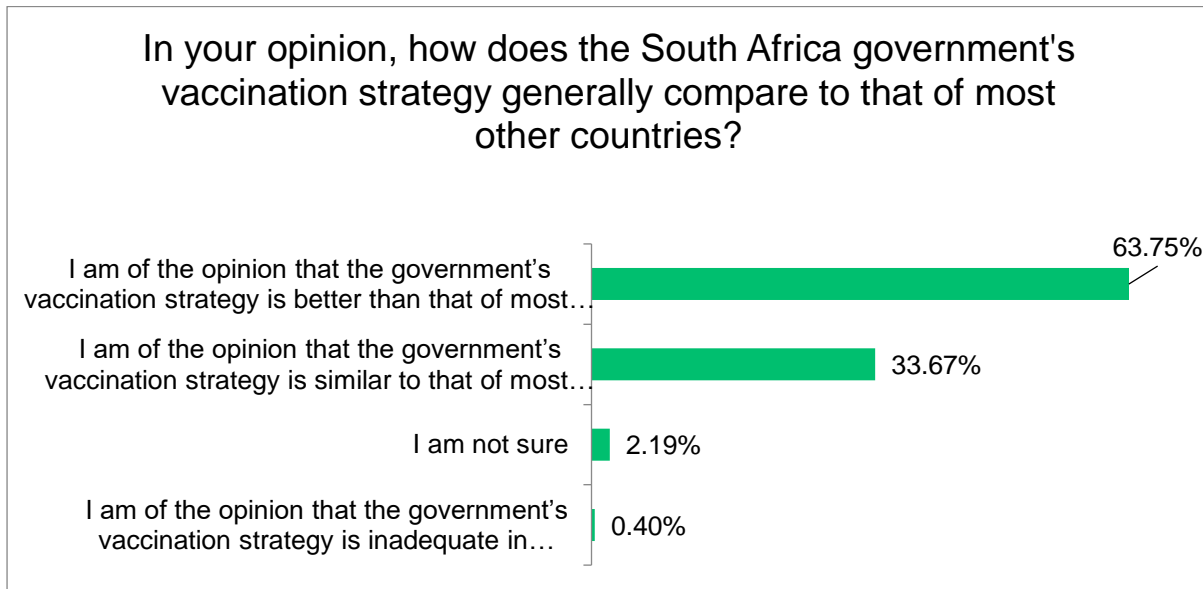


Figure 3: General view of South Africa's vaccination strategy (n=502 respondents)

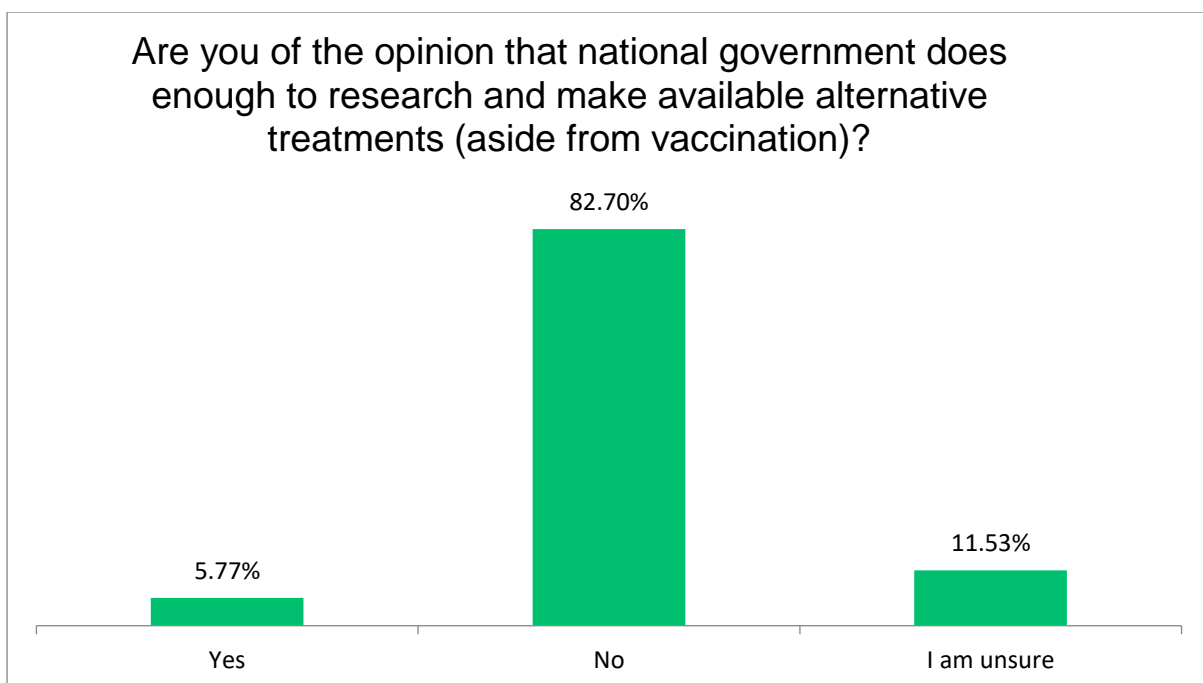


Figure 4: View on researching alternative treatments (n=502 respondents)

According to data available from the *Council on Foreign Relations*, 200 million vaccination doses against COVID-19 have been administered worldwide as of February 2021. Countries such as Israel and the United Arab Emirates keep up a fast pace with their various vaccination procedures. Although such a rapid process of administering vaccines is a positive development, most countries experience difficulties in vaccinating a significant segment of their populations. In (among others) China, the UK and US vaccines have been cleared for use as an emergency measure.⁴

Figure 3 shows that the majority of respondents (63,75%) is of the opinion that the vaccination strategy of the South African government is not on par with international standards. What is remarkable about this finding is the fact that according to the abovementioned international data, most other countries do not surpass the level of roll-out by the South African government by being quicker or better in comparison. In addition, altogether 86,37% of respondents are of the opinion that the South African government's attempts to get COVID-19 vaccines to the hotspots on time are not efficient at all. Furthermore, 80,12% of respondents indicate that the private health sector should play a primary role in the purchase and distribution of vaccines.

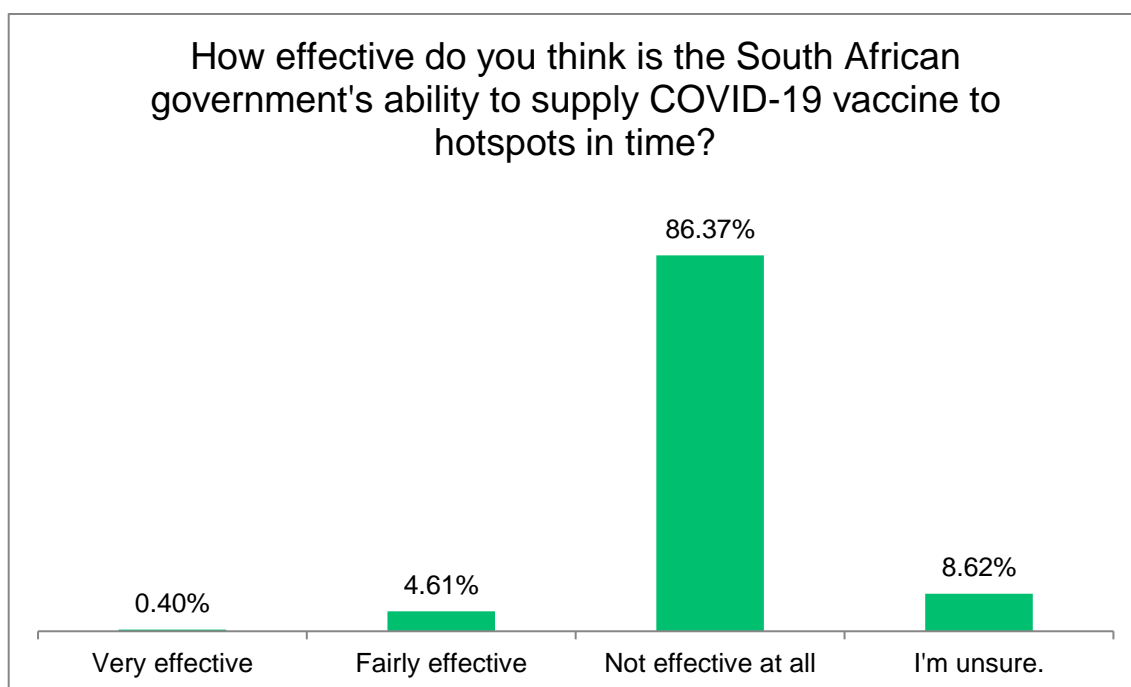


Figure 5: View on supply to hotspots (n=499 respondents)

At the beginning of January 2021, the Minister of Health, Dr Zweli Mkhize, stated that his department (the national Department of Health) envisages having the majority of the

⁴ Felter, C. 2021. *A guide to global COVID-19 vaccine efforts*. Council on Foreign Relations. 1 March. Available at <https://www.cfr.org/background/guide-global-covid-19-vaccine-efforts/>. Accessed 7 April 2021.

population (67%) vaccinated by the end of 2021. Keeping this statement in mind, AfriForum members were asked how worried they were that they would not receive the vaccine timeously. More than a quarter of respondents (nearly 30%) replied that they did worry about this, and 61,16% indicated that they were not worried about this.

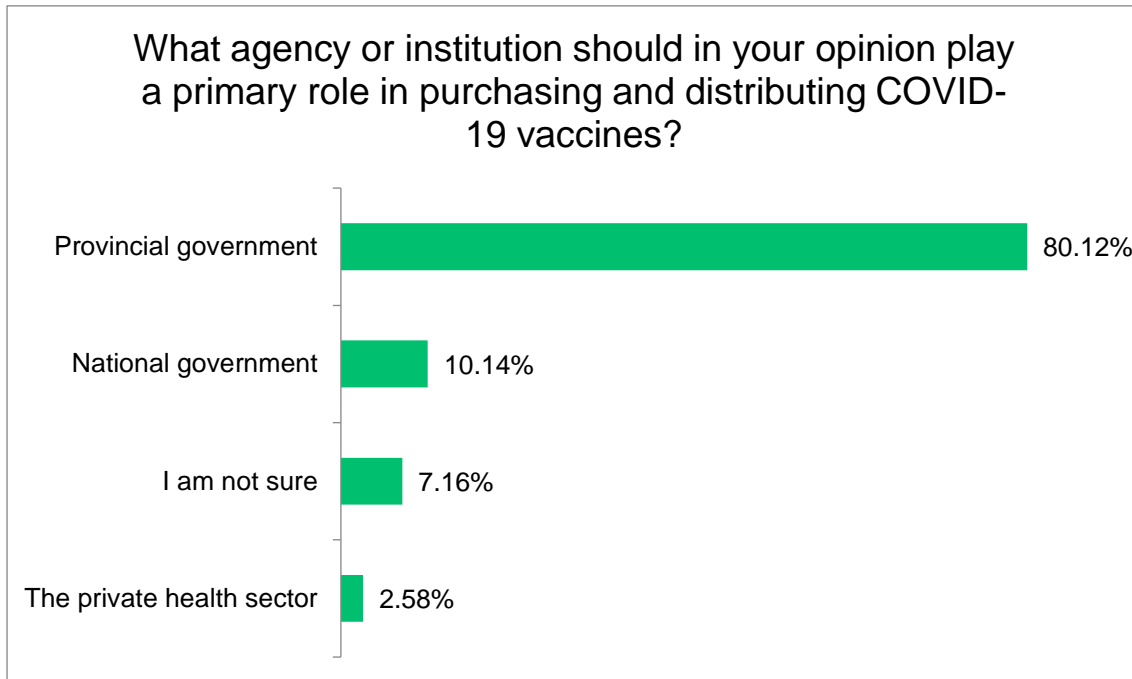


Figure 6: General view on purchasing and distributing COVID-19 vaccines (n=503 respondents)

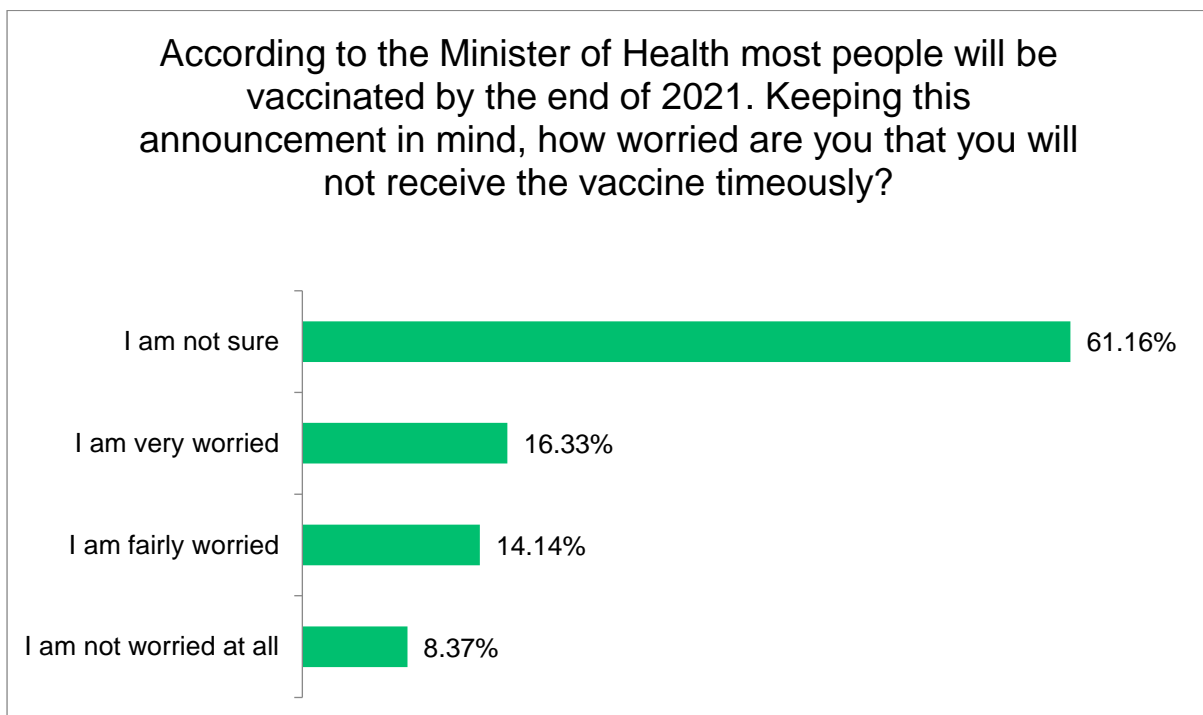


Figure 7: Worry about timeous administering of vaccine according to the government's pledge on vaccination roll-out (n=502 respondents)

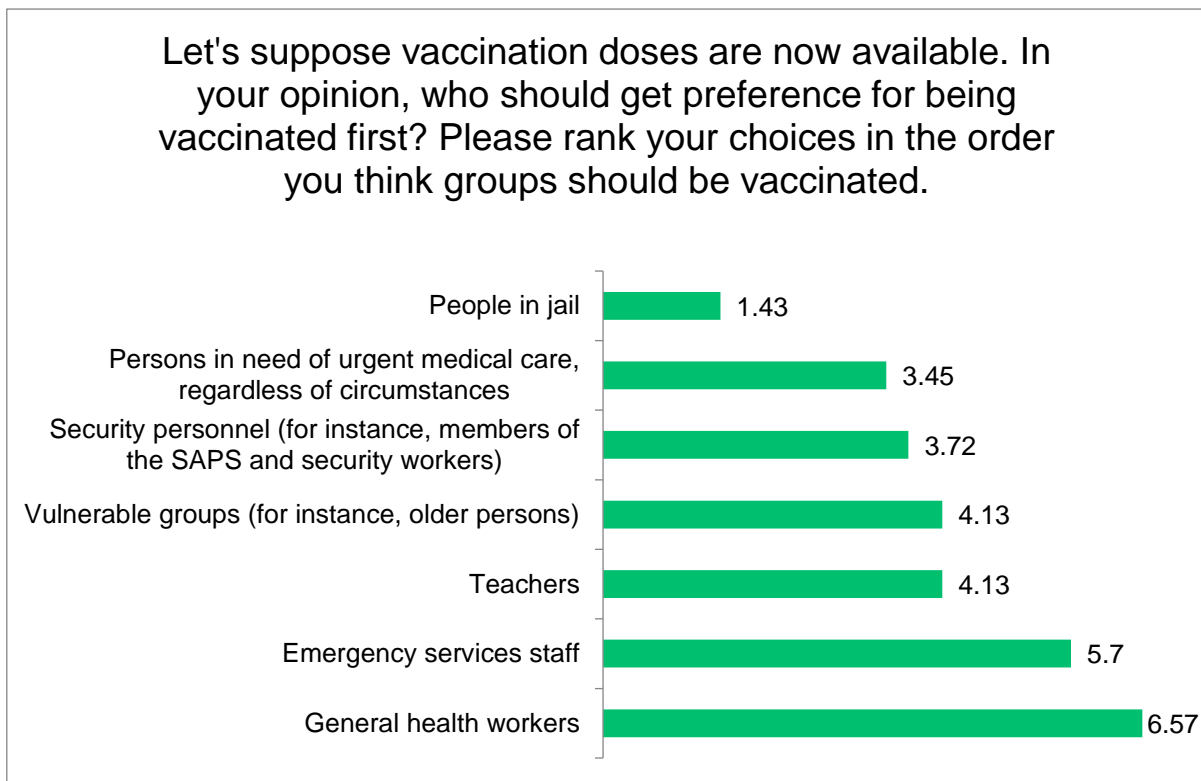


Figure 8: List showing preference of groups for allocation of vaccines (n=482 respondents)

South Africa received its first batch of vaccines at the beginning of February, namely the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine. It was reported in the media that health workers would be the first group of persons to be vaccinated.⁵ In respect of the question illustrated in Figure 8, the respondents could rank the groups in order of those whom they thought should have preference in being vaccinated first. The opinion of members broadly agreed with parts of the roll-out strategy as set out by the government, for instance in the choice that health workers should be given preference, with a score of 6,57 allotted to this choice.

According to the survey, people in jail came last on the preference list, with a score of 1,43. The results do not indicate that people in jail, being ranked last, do not count at all, but it does show, based on the members' choice of preferential groups, that other options were deemed more important.

5 Discovery Medical Aid. 2021. Understanding SA's vaccine rollout plan: Where do you fit into #VaccineRolloutStrategySA? March. Available at <https://www.discovery.co.za/corporate/covid-19-understanding-sa-vaccine-rollout-plan>. Accessed 7 April 2021.

Conclusion

The results of the survey indicate that a significant percentage of respondents is of the opinion that the purchase and distribution of COVID-19 vaccines should rather be left to the private health sector instead of to the state health sector, which indicates a lack of trust in public institutions. This is not surprising in the light of the poor reputation and performance of these institutions in respect of general service delivery.

At the same time it becomes clear that the vast majority of respondents is not opposed to the use of vaccines in principle, but does not intend to be vaccinated with the COVID-19 vaccine because they do not trust these vaccines. The reasons for this lack of trust in the vaccines are not known. The response should probably also be judged against the moment in time when the survey was conducted as well as the fact that instances of non-transparent actions occurred in respect of the purchase and distribution of COVID-19 vaccines.

A tendency of antagonistic views on lockdown measures can also be deduced from the survey.

Methodology

- The survey was conducted between 18 January and 1 February 2021. Data collection took place by way of telephone interviews (computer-assisted telephone interviewing – CATI). This survey instrument makes use of qualitative research methods and produces descriptive statistics.
- Approximately 500 members participated in the survey, of whom 56,36% were male and 43,64% female. The respondents belong to the age groups from 21 years of age to 70 and over. Regarding their living circumstances, the majority of respondents live together with two or more persons, and 88,42% are members of a medical aid scheme or are in possession of a hospital plan.
- Respondents who lost a loved one through COVID-19 and who indicated they would like to talk about their feelings were given the option of trauma counselling.
- Not all findings of the study or responses from respondents have been published in this study report. Some of the findings of the survey are exclusively for AfriForum's internal organisational use.
- A random sample was taken from all AfriForum's members. It should thus be noted that the results of the study cannot be generalised to the broader South African

population. The findings represent the views of members of AfriForum and not of Afrikaners in general. The lack of external validity should thus be kept in mind when interpreting the findings of this survey.

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