



COVID-19 vaccination faces big challenges in Brazil

by Andrew Thompson

Canning House Associate Fellow

What happened?

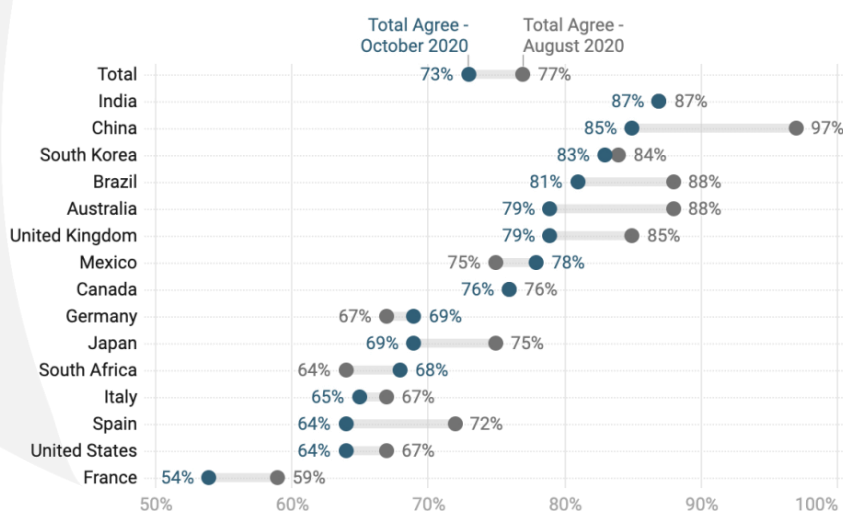
Brazil will most probably start its anti-coronavirus vaccination campaign in January or February, health minister Eduardo Pazuello said on 9 December.

The details

Brazil desperately needs a successful COVID-19 vaccination campaign. With 212mn inhabitants it is the most populous country in Latin America. The right-wing government of president Jair Bolsonaro has consistently failed to contain the coronavirus, being reluctant to impose quarantine and other measures. As a result, Brazil has the world's second greatest number of deaths from the virus. As of 9 December, the death count stood at 178,995, below the United States (289,373) and above India (141,772). On humanitarian grounds alone reducing mortality should be a top priority. It is also critical to getting the economy growing again and to the outcome of the 2022 presidential elections. The outlines of a plan are emerging.

Pazuello says that by the first half of 2021 Brazil will have received 100mn doses of the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine, and that local manufacturing under licence will deliver 160mn more in the second half. There is also an agreement to purchase 70mn doses of the Pfizer/BioNTec vaccine. A four-stage

If a vaccine for COVID-19 were available, I would get it



Base: 18,526 online adults aged 16-74 across 15 countries
 Chart: Ipsos • Source: Global Advisor • Get the data • Created with Datawrapper

national immunisation programme has been proposed. In the first stage priority will be given to vulnerable indigenous communities, health workers, and those aged 75 years and older. In the second stage those aged 60 to 74 will be vaccinated. The third stage will target those with prior health conditions, and the fourth will cover teachers, security personnel, prison staff and inmates.

There are, however, massive challenges to overcome. The proposed four stage immunisation campaign would cover only 109.5mn people, less than half the total population. There are likely to be delays in bringing manufacturing plants up to speed and in distribution. [Political disagreements](#) mean coordination may be difficult. Sao Paulo governor Joao Doria, a potential rival to Bolsonaro in the 2022 presidential race, says immunisation in his state will start earlier, in January, using 46mn doses of the Chinese-made Sinovac vaccines. Doria adds “we are not going to bury more Brazilians just to wait, when we could be saving more than 60,000 lives as of January.”

Worse, Bolsonaro has flirted with anti-vaxxer sentiment, saying in late November that he personally would not take the vaccine. He also said he would not be held responsible for any “secondary effects” of the vaccines, particularly those made in China. A [survey by Ipsos](#) suggests the proportion of Brazilians prepared to take the vaccine fell from 88% in August to 81% in October (average acceptance for 15 countries dropped from 77% to 73%).

What does it mean?

The availability of coronavirus vaccines is undoubtedly positive for Brazil but falls well short of being a “silver bullet”. Immunisation will take more than a year, and the government may struggle to reach more than half the population.

About the Author

Andrew Thompson

La Rambla Research Ltd.

As well as being a Canning House Associate Fellow, Andrew is a former foreign correspondent (Buenos Aires, Mexico City, Rio de Janeiro) and a broadcaster for the BBC’s Latin American Service. Working through La Rambla Research Ltd., he writes about economics, political risk, and business in Latin America.



These stories are also available on Andrew’s blog site, [La Rambla Research](#).