



FIJIAN BUDGET VOICES

PUBLIC PRIORITIES FOR THE 2025–26 NATIONAL BUDGET

Empirical Survey by Dialogue Fiji on Citizens' Fiscal
Concerns and Recommendations

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Dialogue Fiji

Introduction

Fiji's coalition government will be unveiling its third national budget in June 2025, setting the fiscal direction for the 2025–26 fiscal year. The national budget is the principal instrument by which the Government allocates resources, shapes economic priorities and delivers public services—ranging from healthcare and education to infrastructure and social welfare. Decisions made in this budget will directly affect the daily lives of ordinary Fijians, influencing everything from the cost of living to access to essential services.

In many countries, structured public engagement on budget formulation remains limited, and Fiji has traditionally relied on internal government consultations and expert analysis to shape its fiscal plans. Yet, there is growing recognition that genuine participatory democracy demands a much broader evidence base—one that captures the lived experiences and preferences of citizens themselves. In this spirit, Dialogue Fiji, a civil-society organisation dedicated to strengthening democracy and citizen engagement, commissioned a nationwide online survey in April 2025. Respondents from all four divisions—Central, Western, Northern and Eastern—and from urban, peri-urban, rural and maritime-island settings shared their views on which areas should receive greater or reduced funding, and what single priority they believe would make the biggest impact in the coming budget cycle.

This empirical exercise is an effort to systematically solicit the opinions of ordinary citizens on budgetary matters. The survey has yielded rich insights into the issues that Fijians consider most pressing: the high cost of living and inflation, the state of public-service delivery, the condition of critical infrastructure, and the availability of healthcare and education services, among others. Crucially, the demographic profile of respondents—mirroring national distributions by division of residence, settlement type, age band, gender and main source of income—lends confidence that the findings can be generalised to the wider adult population.

For policymakers genuinely committed to “people-centred” budgeting, this research offers useful insights. Rather than relying solely on macroeconomic indicators, government officials can draw directly on the priorities voiced by citizens: clarifying whether, for example, reducing Value-Added Tax rates should take precedence over new capital works, or whether cuts to ministerial perks would garner public support. Such evidence can inform the allocation of appropriations in line ministries, guide the design of subsidy programmes and shape debates in Parliament. Moreover, by publicising these findings, Dialogue Fiji and its partners seek to create a feedback loop in which citizens see their input reflected in policy outcomes, thereby enhancing trust in public institutions and strengthening the social licence for fiscal reforms.

The importance of civil-society involvement in budgetary issues cannot be overstated. Organisations like Dialogue Fiji play a dual role: they both channel community voices into formal policy spaces and hold governments to account for meeting the needs they have identified. In an era of intensifying economic pressures—ranging from global inflationary trends to the ongoing recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic—governments must strike a delicate balance between fiscal prudence and social protection. Civil-society surveys provide a grounded barometer of

public sentiment, helping to ensure that austerity measures do not disproportionately harm marginalised groups and that revenue-raising measures are perceived as fair and transparent.

Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge the survey's limitations. Conducted online, the exercise likely under-represents those without reliable internet access—particularly in remote islands and very low-income households. The short field period and voluntary nature of participation may have skewed responses towards more civically engaged individuals. Language and format constraints, limited to English, could also have deterred non-English speakers. Despite these caveats, the alignment of the sample's demographic profile with official statistics on urban–rural residency, age structure, gender balance and employment status suggests that the results nonetheless provide a robust starting point for dialogue.

As Fiji prepares to finalise its 2025–26 budget, integrating the voices of ordinary citizens—captured in this survey—represents a vital step towards more inclusive, transparent and effective public finance management. For Dialogue Fiji and its partner organisations, the goal is clear: to ensure that budget decisions are not made in isolation but are firmly rooted in the priorities and lived realities of the people they affect. In doing so, the coalition government's next budget can not only chart a path towards economic stability but also reinforce democratic principles by demonstrating that public resources serve the collective will of the Fijian populace.

Methodology

Survey Administration

The national-budget priorities survey was conducted entirely online over a 3 week period, in April 2025. During this time, participants accessed the questionnaire via a web link distributed through social media channels, email lists and the organisation websites. All 367 valid responses were captured through the online platform; no paper or in-person interviews were used. The questionnaire comprised a mix of closed- and open-ended questions covering respondents' views on budget priorities and a standard set of demographic items.

Importance of the Research

In the absence of any prior, large-scale empirical exercise on national-budget preferences in Fiji, this survey fills a vital gap. Until now, policymakers have relied largely on anecdote, expert opinion or small-scale in-person consultations when gauging public sentiment on fiscal matters. By systematically capturing the voices of ordinary Fijians from every region, settlement type and socio-economic background, this research provides a snapshot of what citizens truly value in the National Budget. It thus creates a transparent evidence base, enabling decisions to be grounded in the lived realities of those most affected by government spending and taxation.

Sample Representativeness

Although the survey relied on voluntary online participation, the demographic profile of respondents closely mirrors key characteristics of Fiji's adult population:

- **Geographical spread:** 56.4 per cent from the Central Division, 31.6 per cent from the Western Division, 9.5 per cent from the Northern Division and 2.5 per cent from the Eastern Division.
- **Settlement type:** 57.8 per cent urban, 18.8 per cent peri-urban, 21.5 per cent rural and 1.9 per cent maritime-island residents.
- **Age distribution:** 31.9 per cent aged 35–44; 25.3 per cent aged 25–34; 20.4 per cent aged 45–54; 9.3 per cent aged 18–24; 8.7 per cent aged 55–64; and 4.4 per cent aged 65+.
- **Gender balance:** 53.4 per cent male, 45.8 per cent female and 0.8 per cent undisclosed.
- **Income sources:** 63.2 per cent paid employment; 17.4 per cent own business or farming; with the remainder on social welfare, remittances or other earnings.

These parallels with national statistics enhance confidence that findings can be meaningfully generalised across Fiji's adult population.

Usefulness to Policymakers

For policymakers genuinely committed to reflecting the people's voice, this survey offers actionable insights. The clear hierarchy of public concerns—ranging from cost-of-living relief to healthcare, infrastructure, education and governance reforms—provides a road map for budget allocation and policy design. Through integrating these empirically derived preferences, decision-makers can prioritise interventions that enjoy broad public support, reduce the risk of policy backlash and strengthen the social licence for fiscal reforms. Furthermore, this evidence base can

serve as a benchmark for future surveys, tracking shifts in public opinion over time and measuring the impact of budgetary decisions on citizen satisfaction.

Limitations

Despite its strengths, the online survey methodology carries several caveats:

1. **Digital divide:** Internet access (while relatively high) remains uneven, especially in remote islands and low-income households, which may under-represent marginalised communities.
2. **Self-selection bias:** Voluntary participation tends to attract those already interested in public affairs, potentially skewing results.
3. **Short field period:** The 11-day response window may have excluded individuals who were unavailable or unaware during that interval.
4. **Language and format:** Presented in English, the questionnaire may have been less accessible to those more comfortable in iTaukei or Hindi.
5. **Unweighted data:** No post-stratification weighting was applied; minor deviations (e.g. slight under-representation of the 65+ cohort) could influence aggregate results.

These limitations should be borne in mind when interpreting the survey's conclusions. Nonetheless, the breadth and depth of responses provide a robust foundation for understanding and responding to the budgetary priorities of ordinary Fijians.

Survey Demographics

A total of 367 individuals participated in the survey, providing a robust cross-section of Fiji’s adult population. Understanding who took part is vital for interpreting the subsequent findings. Below is an overview of the key demographic characteristics of the respondents.

	Percentage
Division of Residence	
Central	56.4%
Western	31.6%
Northern	9.5%
Eastern	2.5%
Live Overseas	
Settlement Typ	
Urban	57.8%
Peri-urban	18.8%
Rural	21.5%
Maritime Island	1.9%
Age Band	
18 – 24	9.3%
25 – 34	25.3%
35 – 44	31.9%
45 - 54	20.4%
55 - 64	8.7%
65+	4.4%
Gender	
Male	53.4%
Female	45.8%
Prefer not to say	0.8%
Main Source of Income	
Paid employment	63.2%
Own business or farming	17.4%
Social welfare	2.5%
Remittances	0.8%
Other	12.3%
Prefer not to say	7.9%

Table 1: Participant Demographics

Geographical Distribution

Respondents were drawn from all four divisions of Fiji, with the majority residing in the Central Division (56.4 per cent), reflecting its role as the administrative and population hub. The Western Division accounted for 31.6 per cent of participants, while the Northern and Eastern Divisions contributed 9.5 per cent and 2.5 per cent respectively. This geographic spread ensures that

perspectives from both urban centres and more remote regions are included, albeit with a smaller voice from the Eastern Division.

Settlement Type

Just over half of those surveyed (57.8 per cent) live in urban areas, closely matching the World Bank's 2023 figure of 58 per cent for Fiji's overall urban population. A further 18.8 per cent of the respondents reside in peri-urban zones—areas on the fringes of urban centres—while 21.5 per cent are based in rural villages. Maritime-island communities, often facing distinct logistical and infrastructural challenges, make up 1.9 per cent of respondents. This distribution broadly mirrors national settlement patterns, where a majority of Fijians live in or around urban hubs.

Age Profile

The working-age population is strongly represented. The largest age cohort (31.9 per cent) falls within the 35–44 bracket, closely followed by those aged 25–34 (25.3 per cent) and 45–54 (20.4 per cent). Young adults aged 18–24 constitute 9.3 per cent of the sample, while the 55–64 age band represents 8.7 per cent. Older adults (65 and over) account for 4.4 per cent. This composition indicates that mid-career professionals and parents of school-age children are well represented, with fewer responses from the youngest and oldest age groups.

Gender Composition

The survey achieved near gender parity. Males comprise 53.4 per cent of respondents and females 45.8 per cent, with 0.8 per cent choosing not to disclose their gender. This balance closely reflects Fiji's overall gender ratio and permits nuanced analysis of any gender-specific trends in budget priorities.

Main Source of Income

Income sources vary, reflecting diverse economic activities across Fiji. Paid employment is the primary livelihood for 63.2 per cent of respondents, indicating a predominance of salaried or wage-earning jobs. Entrepreneurs and farmers account for 17.4 per cent, underlining the continued importance of small business and agriculture in the economy. "Other" income sources comprise 12.3 per cent. Social welfare is the main support for 2.5 per cent, while 0.8 per cent rely chiefly on remittances. A further 7.9 per cent opted not to specify their main source of income.

Results

1.How Serious Are These Problems?

i. Cost of living & inflation

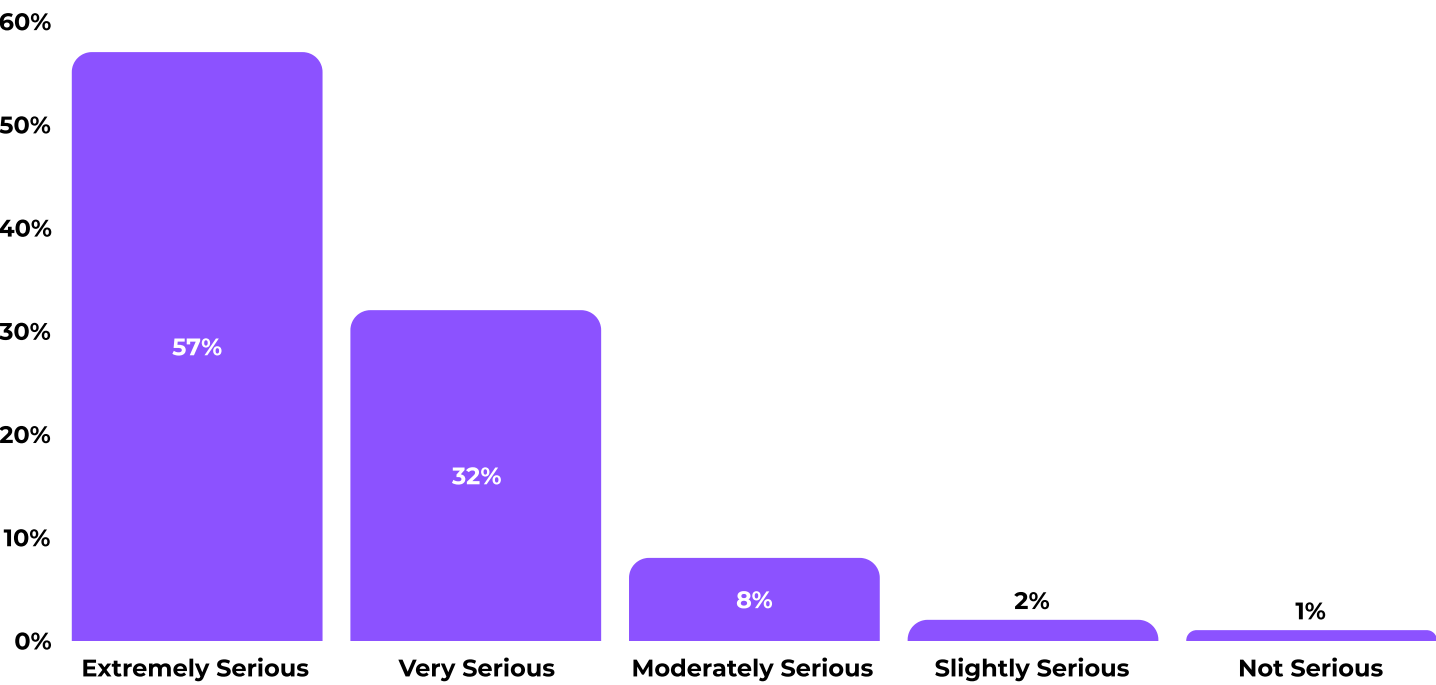


Figure 1: Cost of living & inflation

Figure 1 shows the percentage breakdown of respondents' perceptions regarding the seriousness of the **cost of living and inflation** issue. According to the table:

- **57%** of respondents consider it **"Extremely Serious"**.
- **32%** find it **"Very Serious"**.
- **8%** deem it **"Moderately Serious"**.
- **2%** regard it as **"Slightly Serious"**.
- Only **1%** of respondents think it is **"Not Serious"**.

The data strongly suggests that cost of living and inflation is a primary concern for Fijians. With 57% of respondents describing it as "Extremely Serious", it is evident that many people feel financially pressured due to the cost of living and inflationary trends. This is a significant concern, especially considering that the 32% who rated it as "Very Serious" further highlights the widespread nature of the issue. The fact that only 1% of the population perceives the issue as "Not Serious" indicates broad consensus that urgent government action is needed to tackle inflation.

To address these concerns, the government could focus on tax reductions (especially VAT), subsidies for essential goods, and policies that stabilise prices. Given the severity of the issue, it should be a top priority in the national budget, with targeted measures aimed at reducing the financial burden on households.

ii. Crime & personal security

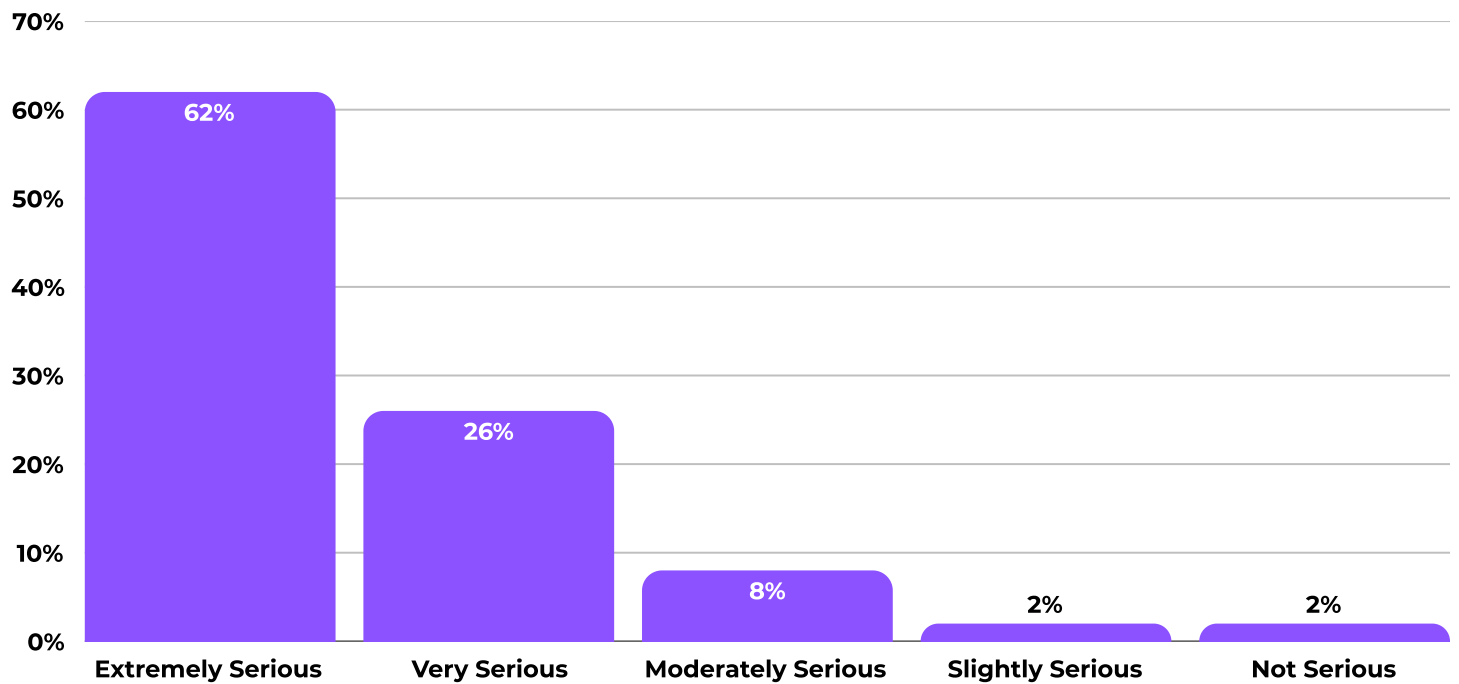


Figure 2: Crime & personal security

Figure 2 shows the percentage breakdown of how serious respondents consider **crime and personal security** issues. According to the data:

- **62%** of respondents consider it "**Extremely Serious**".
- **26%** think it is "**Very Serious**".
- **8%** view it as "**Moderately Serious**".
- **2%** categorise it as "**Slightly Serious**".
- **2%** think it is "**Not Serious**".

This demonstrates that a significant majority of respondents are highly concerned about issues related to crime and personal safety in Fiji.

The results highlight that crime and personal security is a major concern for the Fijian population. With 62% of respondents rating it as "Extremely Serious", it is clear that crime is perceived as a growing threat to personal well-being and safety. This concern is corroborated by 26% of respondents who consider it "Very Serious", reinforcing the urgency of addressing security issues. Only 2% of respondents do not see it as a serious concern, which indicates strong consensus across various demographics regarding the need for improved law enforcement and safety measures.

In response to these concerns, the government could prioritise law enforcement funding, community policing programs, and security infrastructure to help combat rising crime rates. Strengthening public safety initiatives should be a key consideration in the upcoming national budget to ensure that Fijians feel secure in their communities.

iii. Proliferation of illicit drugs

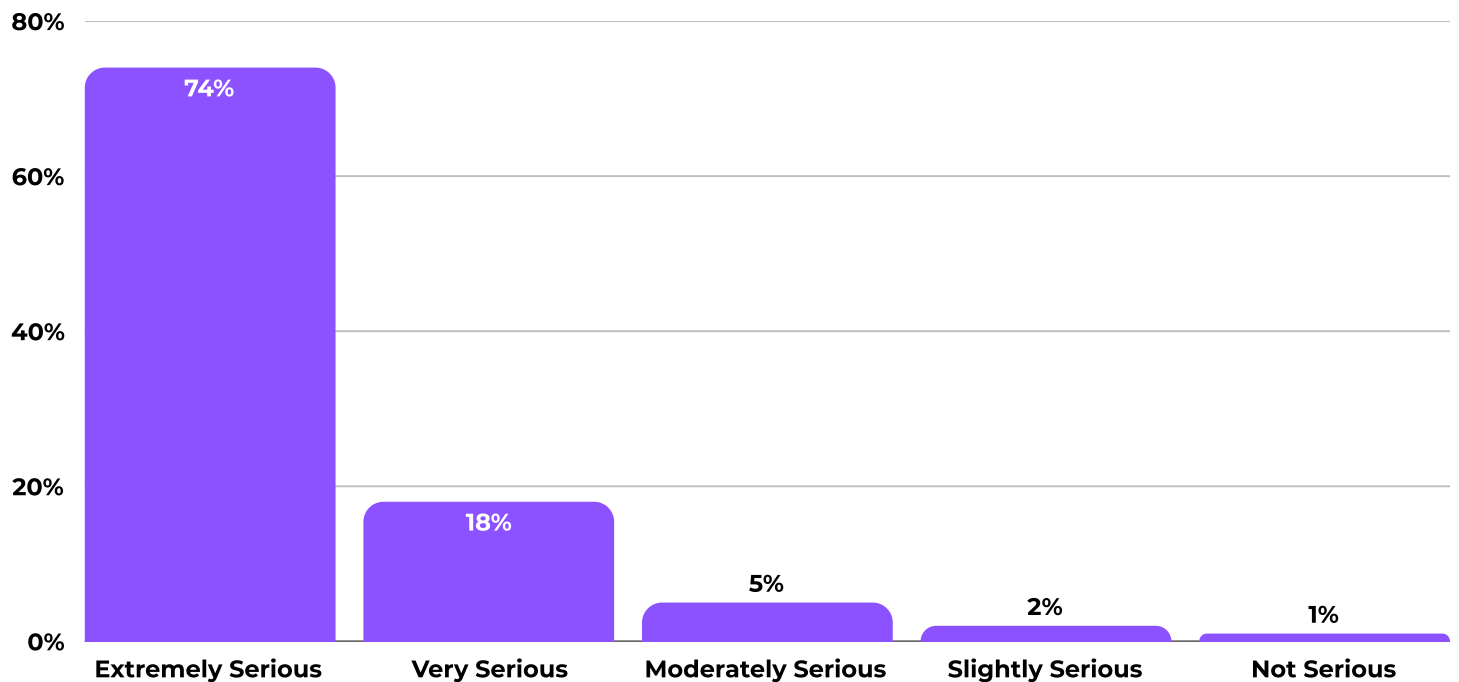


Figure 3: Proliferation of illicit drugs

Figure 3 presents the breakdown of how respondents perceive the seriousness of the proliferation of illicit drugs issue. According to the data:

- **74%** of respondents consider it **"Extremely Serious"**.
- **18%** think it is **"Very Serious"**.
- **5%** see it as **"Moderately Serious"**.
- **2%** view it as **"Slightly Serious"**.
- **1%** of respondents think it is **"Not Serious"**.

This shows that a vast majority of the population sees the spread of illicit drugs as a significant threat to society.

The results indicate that the proliferation of illicit drugs is seen as a critical issue in Fiji, with an overwhelming 74% of respondents rating it as "Extremely Serious". This highlights the widespread concern regarding the impact of drug abuse on public health, safety, and social stability. The high percentage of respondents perceiving this as "Very Serious" (18%) further supports the notion that illicit drug use and trafficking are major problems. Only a very small portion of the population (1%) perceives it as "Not Serious", which suggests that the issue resonates across different demographics.

In response to this concern, government policies could focus on tackling drug trafficking networks, improving rehabilitation programs for drug users, and enhancing public awareness campaigns about the dangers of drug abuse. Given the severity of the issue, it should be a key area for allocation in the national budget to combat the drug crisis effectively.

iv. Public-service delivery

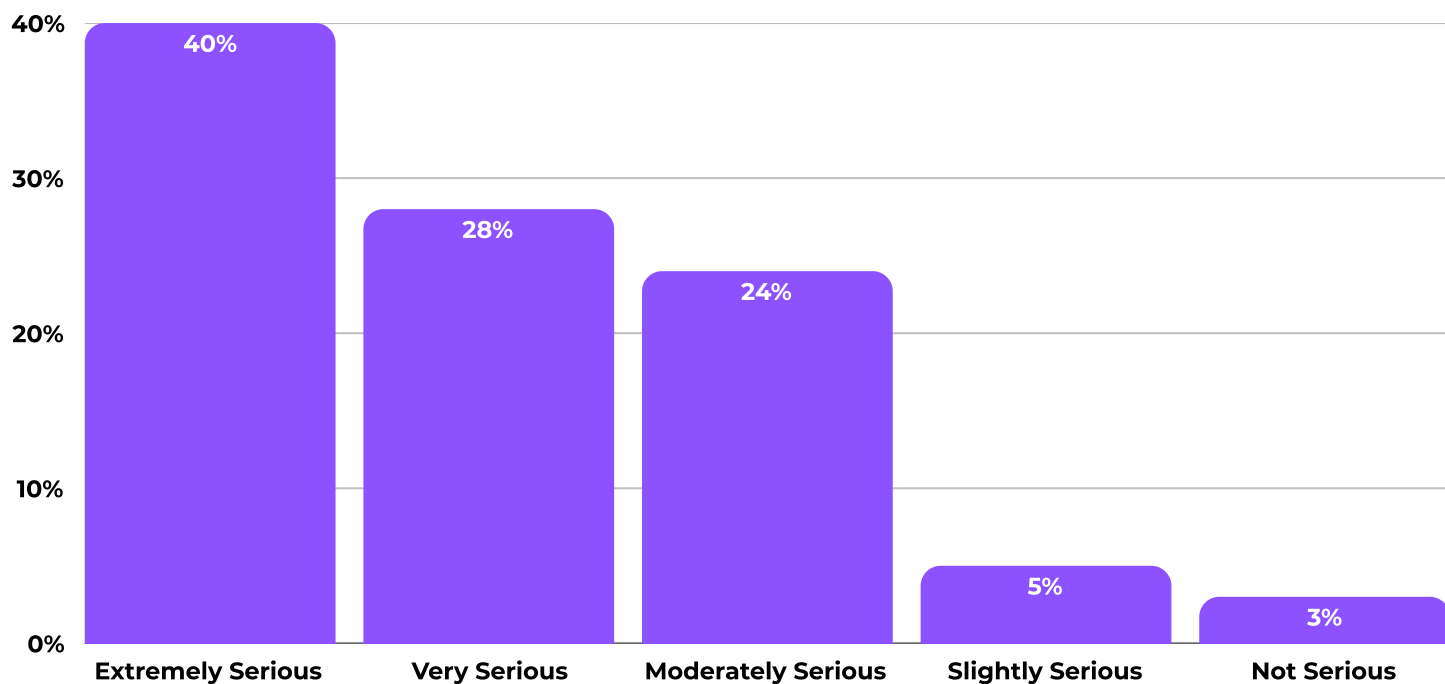


Figure 4: Public-service delivery

Figure 4 provides the breakdown of respondents' perceptions regarding the seriousness of **public-service delivery** issues. According to the data:

- **40%** of respondents view it as **"Extremely Serious"**.
- **28%** consider it **"Very Serious"**.
- **24%** see it as **"Moderately Serious"**.
- **5%** consider it **"Slightly Serious"**.
- **3%** think it is **"Not Serious"**.

These figures suggest a substantial portion of the population feels that the quality of public services needs improvement.

The results indicate that public-service delivery is a significant concern for the public, with 40% of respondents rating it as "Extremely Serious". This points to widespread dissatisfaction with the efficiency, accessibility, or quality of government services. Additionally, 28% of respondents believe it is "Very Serious", and 24% describe it as "Moderately Serious", signalling a strong perception of inadequacy in the public sector. Only 3% of respondents think it is "Not Serious", reflecting the public's call for more effective and responsive government services.

Addressing this concern should be a priority in the national budget, with a focus on improving the efficiency and accountability of public institutions. Investments in digitalisation, training of public servants, recruitment and promotion policies and procedures, and reforms to service delivery mechanisms can significantly enhance the public's access to essential services.

v. Supply shortages in public health facilities

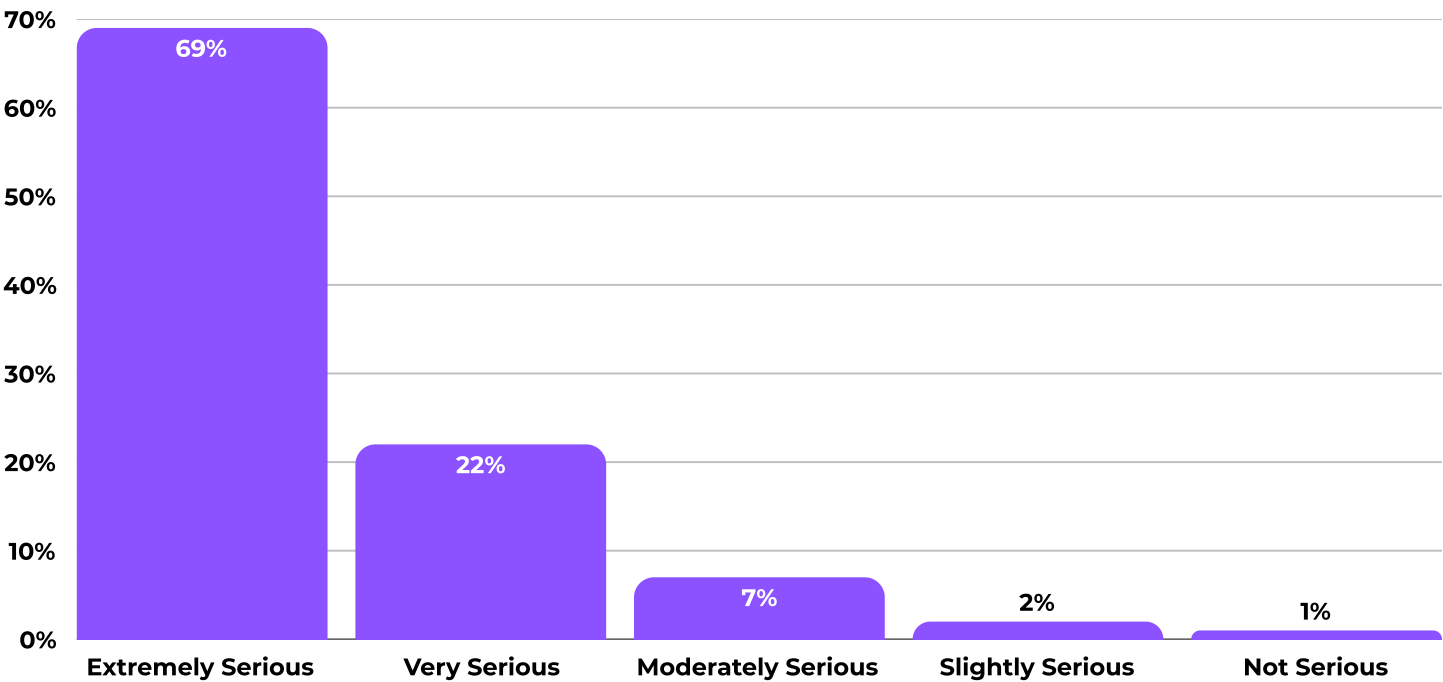


Figure 5: Supply shortages in public health facilities

Figure 5 shows how serious respondents perceive the issue of **supply shortages in public health facilities**. According to the table:

- **69%** of respondents consider it **"Extremely Serious"**.
- **22%** rate it as **"Very Serious"**.
- **7%** see it as **"Moderately Serious"**.
- **2%** categorise it as **"Slightly Serious"**.
- **1%** think it is **"Not Serious"**.

This indicates that the majority of Fijians perceive shortages of supplies in public healthcare as a critical problem.

The results clearly demonstrate that supply shortages in public health facilities are a major concern for Fijians. With 69% of respondents considering it "Extremely Serious", this points to widespread frustration with the lack of essential medical supplies, which directly impacts the quality of healthcare services. Furthermore, 22% of respondents view the issue as "Very Serious", emphasising the urgent need for government intervention to address these shortages. Only 1% of the respondents perceive this issue as "Not Serious", suggesting that the public generally agrees on the severity of this problem.

Addressing supply shortages in public health facilities should be a top priority in the national budget, with investments directed towards improving supply chains, increasing the procurement of essential medicines, and ensuring better stock management in healthcare facilities. Additionally, a stronger focus on healthcare infrastructure would contribute to more sustainable solutions.

vi. Condition of critical infrastructure (roads, bridges, drainage, hospitals)

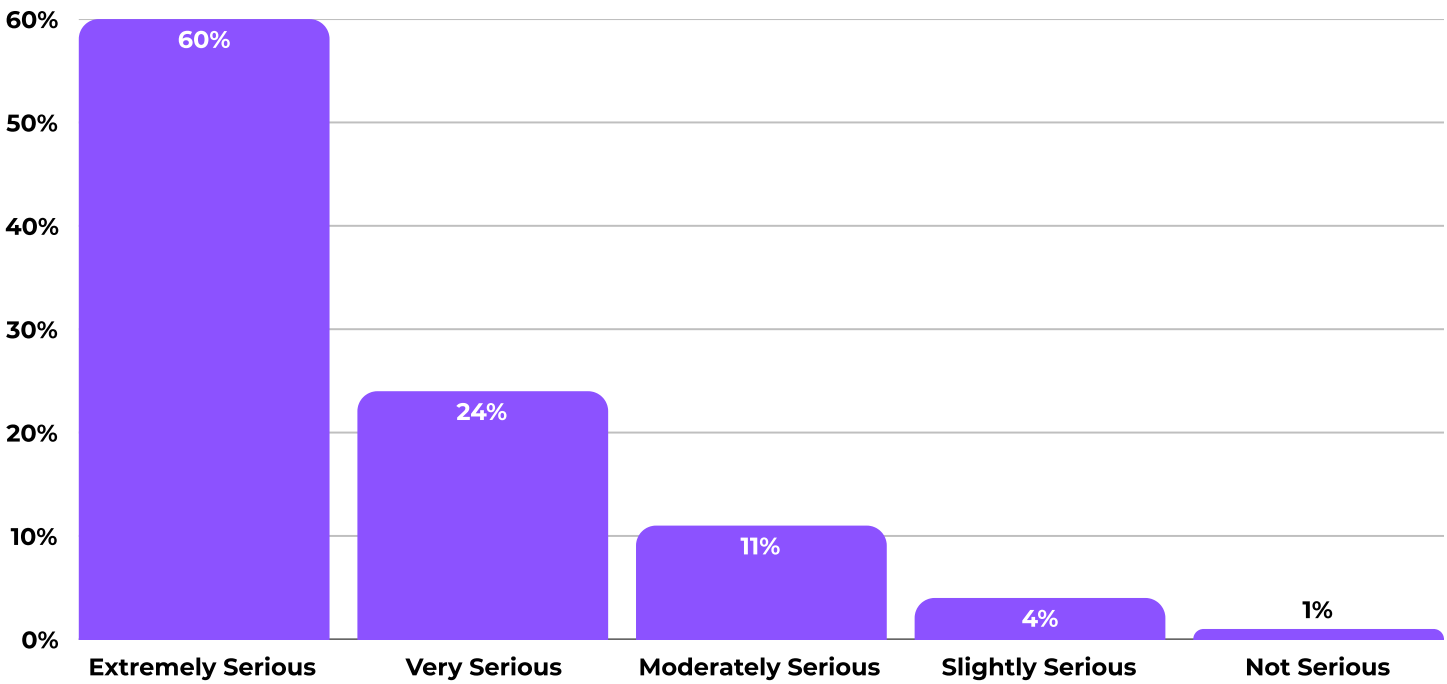


Figure 6: Condition of critical infrastructure

Figure 6 shows the breakdown of how serious respondents consider the **condition of critical infrastructure** (including roads, bridges, drainage, and hospitals). According to the data:

- **60%** of respondents consider it **"Extremely Serious"**.
- **24%** view it as **"Very Serious"**.
- **11%** rate it as **"Moderately Serious"**.
- **4%** think it is **"Slightly Serious"**.
- **1%** of respondents consider it **"Not Serious"**.

This demonstrates that a large portion of the population sees the state of critical infrastructure as a pressing issue.

The issue of critical infrastructure is seen as a top priority by the majority of respondents, with 60% rating it as "Extremely Serious". This reflects widespread concern about the poor condition of essential infrastructure, such as roads, bridges, and public healthcare facilities, which directly impacts people's daily lives and safety. An additional 24% of respondents consider the issue "Very Serious", indicating that improvements to infrastructure are urgently needed. Only 1% of respondents think the condition of infrastructure is "Not Serious", suggesting a broad consensus on the need for significant investment in this area.

To address these concerns, the government should prioritise infrastructure maintenance and development, particularly in areas most affected by neglect. Funding should be directed towards repairing and upgrading roads, improving hospital infrastructure, and enhancing drainage systems to reduce the risks of flooding. Allocating resources in the national budget to these areas will help boost public satisfaction and improve overall living conditions.

vii. Lack of Access to clean, reliable water

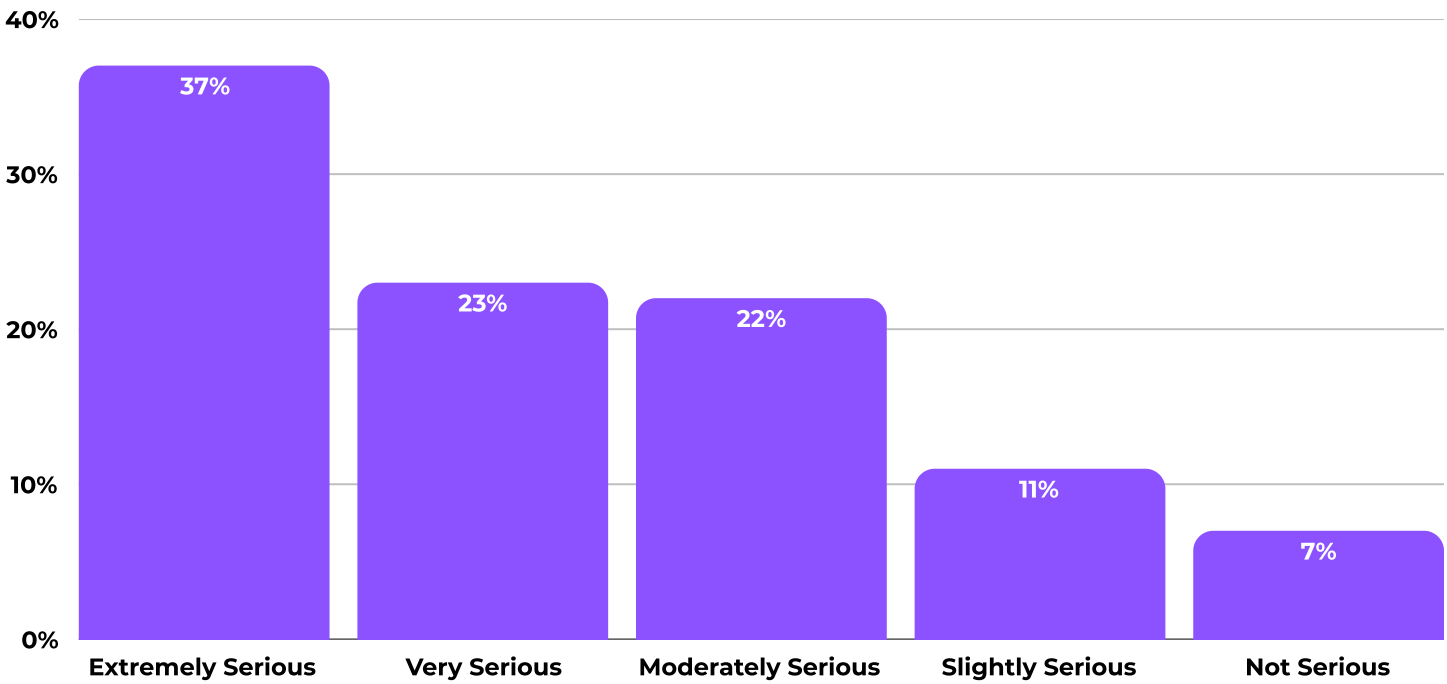


Figure 7: Lack of Access to clean, reliable water

Figure 7 shows the breakdown of how respondents perceive the seriousness of **lack of access to clean, reliable water**. According to the data:

- **37%** of respondents consider it **"Extremely Serious"**.
- **23%** think it is **"Very Serious"**.
- **22%** rate it as **"Moderately Serious"**.
- **11%** categorise it as **"Slightly Serious"**.
- **7%** believe it is **"Not Serious"**.

This shows that a significant portion of the population is concerned about the availability and reliability of clean water.

The issue of lack of access to clean, reliable water is of considerable concern, with 37% of respondents rating it as "Extremely Serious". This indicates that access to clean water is perceived as a critical challenge for many Fijians, particularly in rural and underserved areas. Additionally, 23% of respondents deem it "Very Serious," further underscoring the importance of addressing water access in Fiji. Although 7% of respondents view the issue as "Not Serious," the majority believe that the government needs to take immediate action to ensure reliable and clean water sources for all Fijians.

To tackle this issue, the government could focus on water infrastructure development, repairing and maintaining existing water supply systems, and investing in new technologies to ensure that all communities have access to safe and clean drinking water. Addressing this concern in the national budget will be essential for improving public health and living standards.

viii. Governance & transparency

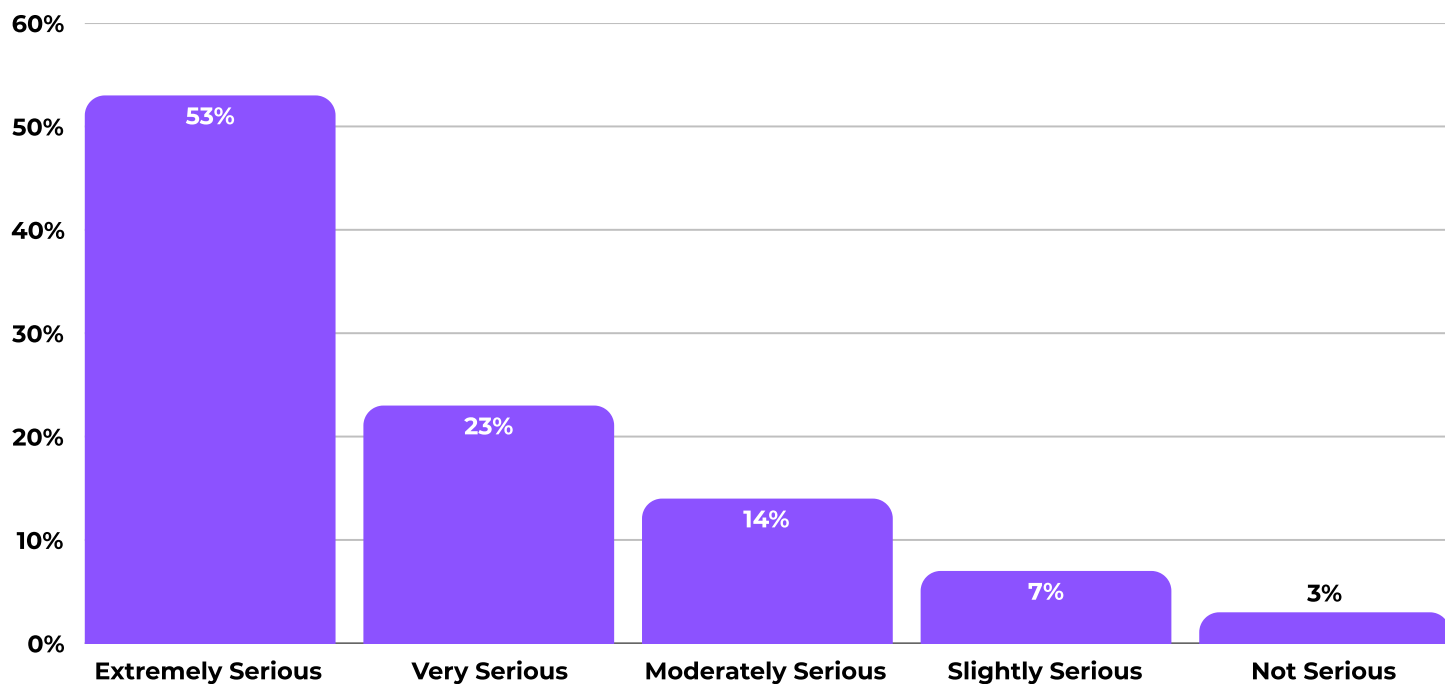


Figure 8: Governance & transparency

Figure 8 shows the breakdown of how serious respondents consider **governance and transparency** issues. According to the data:

- **53%** of respondents consider it "**Extremely Serious**".
- **23%** view it as "**Very Serious**".
- **14%** rate it as "**Moderately Serious**".
- **7%** consider it "**Slightly Serious**".
- **3%** think it is "**Not Serious**".

This indicates a strong public perception that governance and transparency are significant areas requiring reform.

The results clearly show that governance and transparency are seen as critical issues by a majority of respondents, with 53% rating them as "Extremely Serious". This highlights widespread concern over the functioning of public institutions and the need for greater transparency in decision-making processes. The 23% of respondents who consider it "Very Serious" further underline the public demand for better governance practices. Only 3% of respondents think it is "Not Serious", suggesting broad consensus that governance reforms should be a priority for the government.

Addressing this concern should involve enhancing accountability mechanisms, improving public sector transparency, and ensuring citizen participation in governance processes. Allocating resources in the national budget for strengthening institutions and implementing anti-corruption measures would be crucial steps toward improving governance and transparency in Fiji.

ix. Size & cost of Cabinet/Parliament

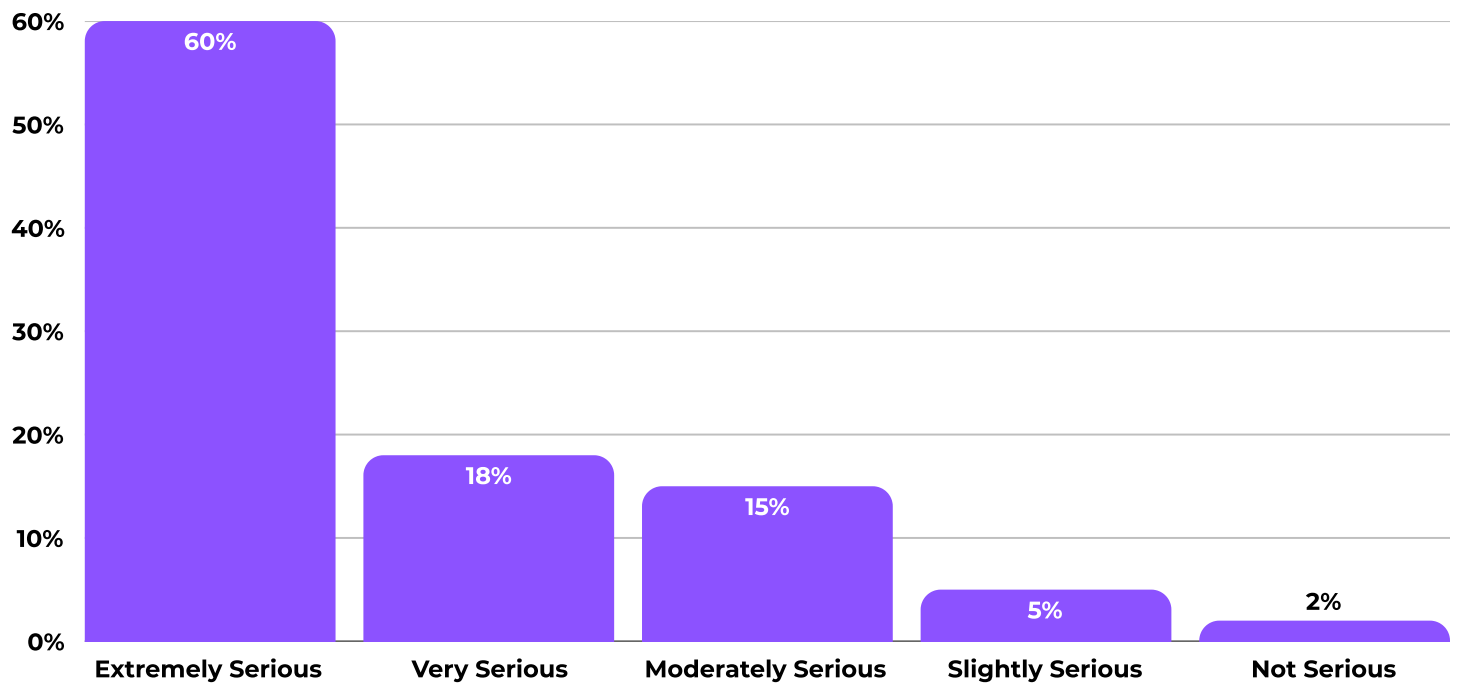


Figure 9: Size & cost of Cabinet/Parliament

Figure 9 shows the breakdown of how serious respondents perceive the issue of the **size and cost of Cabinet/Parliament**. According to the data:

- **60%** of respondents consider it **"Extremely Serious"**.
- **18%** think it is **"Very Serious"**.
- **15%** rate it as **"Moderately Serious"**.
- **5%** view it as **"Slightly Serious"**.
- **2%** think it is **"Not Serious"**.

This indicates that a significant portion of the population is deeply concerned about the financial implications of the current structure and cost of Cabinet and Parliament.

The issue of size and cost of Cabinet/Parliament resonates strongly with the public, with 60% of respondents describing it as "Extremely Serious". This demonstrates widespread concern over the efficiency and financial burden of maintaining a large Cabinet and Parliament. The 18% who view it as "Very Serious" further underscores the need for reform in the political system. Only a small fraction of respondents (2%) see it as "Not Serious", suggesting a broad consensus for reducing the size of the Cabinet and Parliament to cut costs.

To address these concerns, the government could consider streamlining the Cabinet by reducing the number of ministers and support staff, which would save public funds. Furthermore, enhancing the accountability of government expenditures and focusing on more efficient governance models could alleviate public dissatisfaction with the size and cost of the Cabinet. This issue should be prioritised in the national budget to ensure fiscal responsibility and strengthen public trust in political institutions.

2.Budget Priorities

i. Top Three Budget Priorities

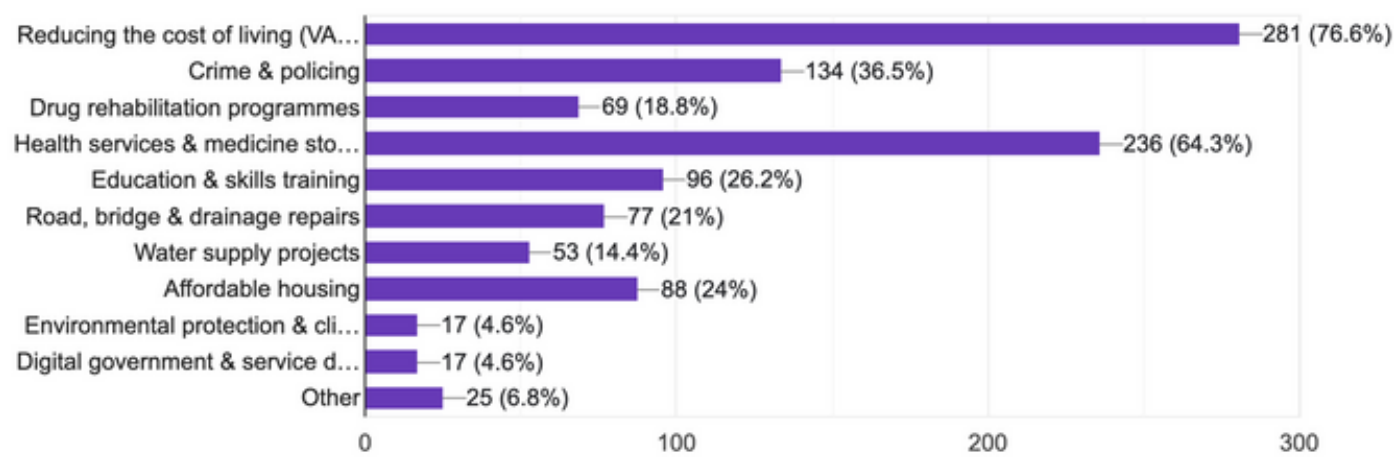


Figure 10: Top Three Priorities

Figure 10 presents the **Top Three Areas** that respondents believe should receive more funding in the upcoming national budget. The areas that received the most support include:

- **Reducing the Cost of Living (VAT reductions and subsidies):** This was by far the most prioritised area, selected by **76.6%** of respondents, indicating a strong public desire for measures to alleviate inflation and make essential goods more affordable.
- **Crime and Policing:** **36.95%** of respondents selected this area, underlining the public’s concern with law enforcement and safety.
- **Health Services & Medicine Stocks:** **64.3%** of respondents identified this as a key priority, highlighting the importance of better healthcare infrastructure and availability of medicines.
- **Education & Skills Training:** **28.2%** of respondents indicated this area as a priority, suggesting that investing in skills development and education should also be a focus.
- **Road, Bridge, & Drainage Repairs:** **21%** of respondents emphasised the need to improve essential infrastructure.
- **Affordable Housing:** **24%** of respondents called for increased funding for housing projects.
- **Drug Rehabilitation Programmes:** **18.8%** of respondents supported more funding for rehabilitation services to address substance abuse.

The results from the survey reveal that reducing the cost of living is by far the most urgent issue, with a resounding 76.6% of respondents prioritising it. The majority of respondents clearly view inflation, particularly the rising cost of essentials, as the most pressing concern, signalling that the government should focus on reducing VAT to make daily necessities more affordable. Crime and policing, with 36.95% of respondents advocating for increased funding, underscores a growing desire for improved public safety and more effective law enforcement. This suggests that security is a major concern for Fijians, especially in light of rising crime.

Health services & medicine stocks also received strong support, with 64.3% of respondents selecting it as a priority. This reflects a widespread recognition of the need for better healthcare infrastructure, including ensuring that essential medical supplies are available and accessible to the public. Furthermore, education and skills training were identified by 28.2% of respondents,

highlighting the importance of workforce development and long-term investment in human capital.

Affordable housing and drug rehabilitation programmes also emerged as significant priorities, demonstrating the public's concerns about social well-being. Affordable housing, chosen by 24% of respondents, reflects a growing need for accessible and reasonably priced housing, particularly in urban areas where rising housing costs have made it difficult for many families to secure suitable homes. These findings suggest that the government must invest in housing projects that offer safe and affordable living spaces for low- and middle-income Fijians.

Drug rehabilitation programmes were selected by 18.8% of respondents, highlighting the significant issue of substance abuse in Fiji. Respondents clearly recognise the need for more resources to support rehabilitation efforts for those struggling with addiction. Such programmes are essential not only for the well-being of individuals affected but also for the broader health and safety of communities, as substance abuse can lead to increased crime and public health challenges.

ii. Top Budget Priority

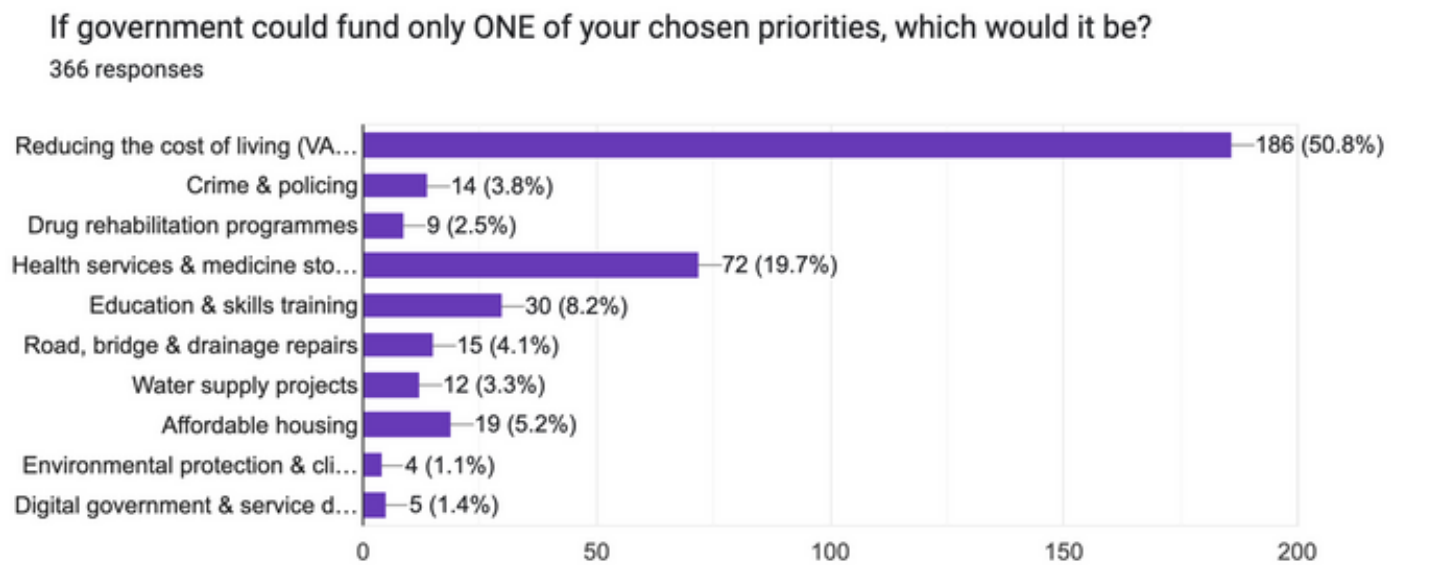


Figure 11: Top Priority

Figure 11 presents the results for the question: "If government could fund only ONE of your chosen priorities, which would it be?" Based on 365 responses, the results show the following top choices:

- **Reducing the Cost of Living (VAT reductions and subsidies):** 50.8% of respondents chose this as their **top priority**.
- **Health Services & Medicine Stocks:** 19.75% of respondents selected this as their most important area.
- **Crime & Policing:** 3.8% of respondents indicated this as their top priority.
- **Education & Skills Training:** 8.2% of respondents chose this as the most important.
- **Road, Bridge & Drainage Repairs:** 4.1% of respondents selected this area.
- **Water Supply Projects:** 3.3% of respondents ranked it as the highest priority.
- **Affordable Housing:** 3.3% of respondents also identified this area as their top priority.

- **Environmental Protection & Development: 1.1%** of respondents selected it.
- **Digital Government & Services: 1.4%** of respondents identified this as their main focus.

The results are quite telling in terms of public priorities. Reducing the cost of living, with 50.8% of respondents selecting it as their top priority, clearly reflects the ongoing concern about inflation and the rising prices of essential goods. This aligns with the earlier graph where the cost of living was identified as the most pressing issue. The strong preference for VAT cuts highlights a widespread desire for immediate financial relief to alleviate the economic strain on families.

Health services and medicine stocks received 19.75% of the vote, making it the second most important priority. This indicates that, while the cost of living is the immediate concern, access to healthcare and availability of medicines remain critical issues for the population. Other areas, such as crime and policing (3.8%) and education and skills training (8.2%), received lower but still significant support, emphasising public concern for safety and the need to invest in human capital.

Given that reducing the cost of living is overwhelmingly seen as the most urgent priority, it should be a central focus of the government's fiscal policies in the upcoming budget. This includes targeted subsidies, tax relief, and measures aimed at lowering the cost of essential services. Meanwhile, investment in healthcare should also remain a priority, especially in addressing the ongoing shortages of medical supplies and improving public health infrastructure.

iii. How should the government pay for additional spending?

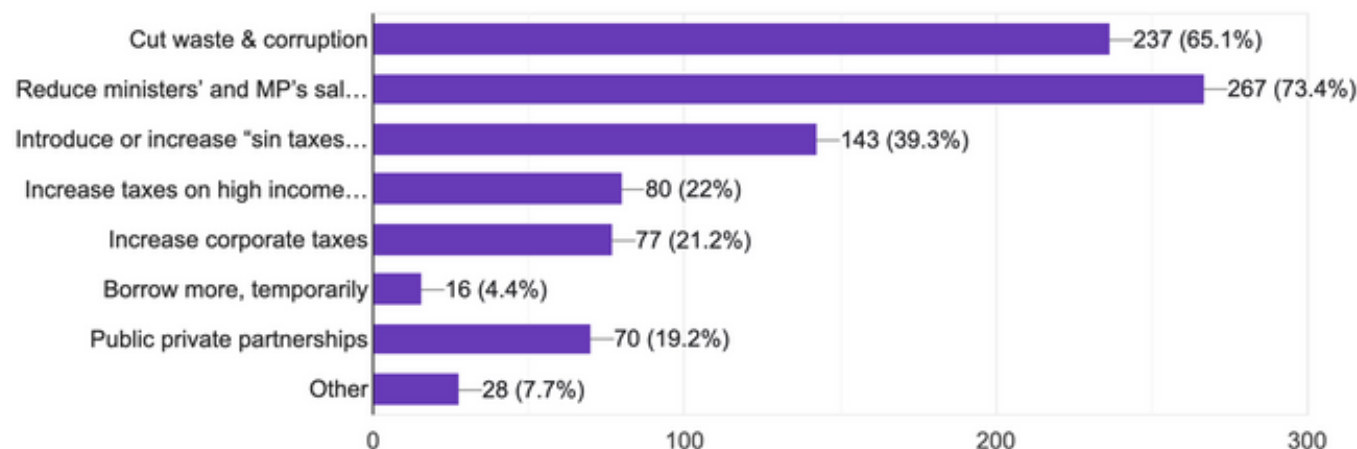


Figure 12: How should the government pay for additional spending?

Figure 12 shows the responses to the question: **"How should the government pay for additional spending?"** The results are based on 364 responses and reveal the following top priorities:

- **Cut waste & corruption: 65.1%** of respondents selected this as their preferred method of funding additional spending.
- **Reduce ministers' and MPs' salaries: 73.4%** of respondents believe this is a crucial step in securing additional funding for government projects.
- **Introduce or increase "sin taxes": 39.3%** of respondents support this approach, suggesting that taxes on harmful goods such as tobacco and alcohol should be raised.
- **Increase taxes on high income: 22%** of respondents selected this as a potential method for generating additional revenue.

- **Increase corporate taxes: 21.2%** of respondents believe that corporate taxes should be increased to fund public spending.
- **Borrow more, temporarily: 4.4%** of respondents suggested that borrowing should be used as a temporary measure.
- **Public-private partnerships: 19.2%** of respondents proposed leveraging private sector investments in public projects.
- **Other: 7.7%** of respondents offered alternative suggestions.

The results reflect a strong preference for fiscal responsibility and reducing inefficiencies within the government. A significant 65.1% of respondents believe that cutting waste and corruption is the most effective way to fund additional spending. This suggests a desire for the government to improve transparency and ensure that public funds are used efficiently, rather than resorting to increasing taxes or borrowing.

Another notable finding is the public demand for a reduction in ministers' and MPs' salaries, with 73.4% supporting this measure. This indicates widespread frustration with the perceived high cost of government officials, suggesting that many Fijians believe that politicians should lead by example in terms of fiscal austerity. Meanwhile, 39.3% support introducing or increasing "sin taxes", which would target goods deemed harmful to public health, such as tobacco, alcohol, and sugary drinks. This approach aligns with public health goals while also generating additional revenue.

Other methods, such as increasing taxes on high-income earners (22%) and corporate taxes (21.2%), were less popular but still represented a significant portion of respondents who are advocating for income tax reforms. The relatively low support for borrowing more or relying on public-private partnerships suggests that the public is cautious about increasing national debt and would prefer that the government focus on internal efficiencies and fairness in revenue collection.

In conclusion, the data clearly indicates that fiscal discipline, reducing waste, and cutting down on government perks should be the main strategies for funding additional government spending, with some support for raising targeted taxes, especially on harmful products. These preferences should guide government policymakers in considering budgetary reforms that prioritise efficiency and fairness while ensuring that public services can be adequately funded.

iv. To keep the budget balanced, which of the following could receive less funding?

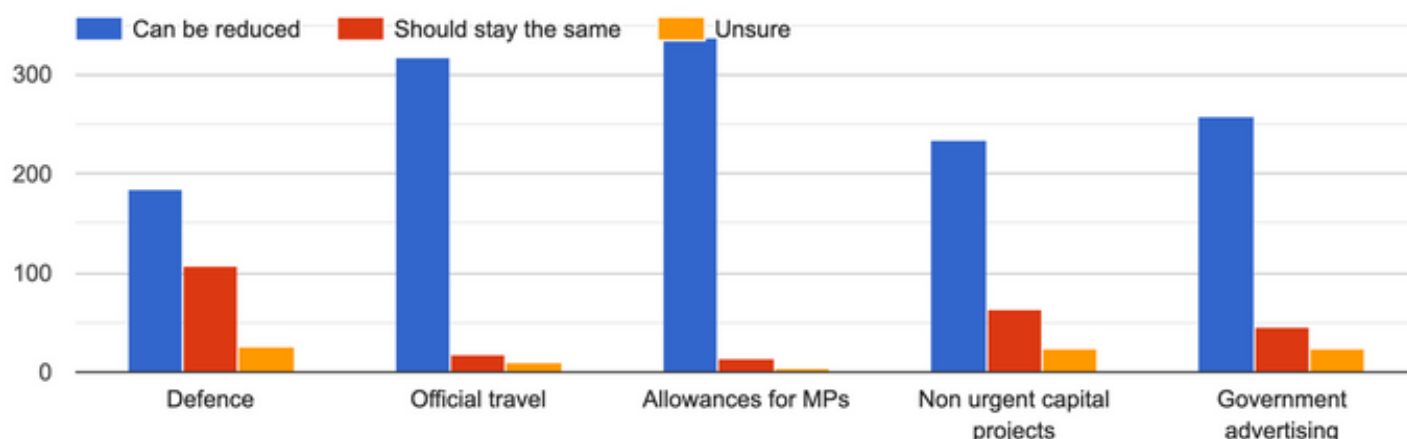


Figure 13: Areas for Budget Cuts

Figure 13 shows the responses to the question: **"To keep the budget balanced, which of the following could receive less funding?"** The graph presents responses across several categories, with the following color-coded choices:

- **Blue** represents responses indicating areas that **"Can be reduced"**.
- **Red** represents responses indicating areas that **"Should stay the same"**.
- **Orange** represents responses indicating areas that are **"Unsure"**.

The categories considered for budget cuts are:

- **Defence**
- **Official Travel**
- **Allowances for MPs**
- **Non-Urgent Capital Projects**
- **Government Advertising**

The results of this survey clearly highlight public dissatisfaction with certain areas of government expenditure. Allowances for MPs received the highest proportion of "Can be reduced" responses (over 300 respondents), indicating a strong public sentiment that the perks and allowances given to elected officials should be reduced. This likely reflects concerns about the perceived high costs associated with political figures, particularly in light of economic challenges faced by ordinary citizens.

Government advertising also saw significant support for funding reduction, with a high number of respondents indicating that it could be reduced, aligning with earlier preferences for fiscal discipline and reduced wasteful government spending. On the other hand, defence and official travel had a lower proportion of respondents suggesting cuts, with many indicating that these areas "Should stay the same", showing that there is some public recognition of the importance of maintaining a certain level of expenditure on national security and government operations.

The relatively low number of "Unsure" responses across all categories suggests that the public is fairly confident in their opinions about where cuts could be made, with a clear preference for reducing spending on politicians' salaries, perks and allowances and government promotional activities. This data reflects public demand for greater fiscal accountability, where government expenditures are scrutinised, and areas that are perceived as non-essential or excessive are targeted for cuts. These results should inform the government's approach to budgeting by focusing on reducing waste and ensuring that public funds are allocated to areas that directly benefit the citizens.

3. Open Feedback

i. What is the single biggest change you want to see in the 2025/26 National Budget?

The responses to the open-ended question about the single biggest change desired in the 2025/26 National Budget provide clear insights into public priorities. Below is a thematic breakdown of the key areas raised by respondents.

1. Cost of Living and VAT Reduction

A significant portion of responses (over 50%) expressed concerns about the cost of living. Many respondents mentioned the need for reduction in VAT (Value Added Tax), with numerous requests for it to be lowered to 9%, as well as calls for food price reductions. The desire to see a reduction in VAT reflects the widespread burden of rising costs for everyday essentials. The high cost of living is seen as a pressing issue that directly impacts families' ability to meet basic needs. A focus on reducing VAT on essential goods such as food, essentials, and basic services is a recurring theme, reflecting the public's expectation that the government will make these adjustments to improve living standards.

2. Health and Social Welfare

Another common request is to increase the health budget. Respondents frequently mentioned the need for better health services, particularly in hospitals and medical supplies. Many suggested allocating more resources to health infrastructure, including the renovation of hospitals, better stock management, and improved healthcare services. This demand is coupled with requests for higher welfare benefits for senior citizens and low-income families. A significant number of people also advocated for improved welfare assistance, with many calling for more support for vulnerable groups such as the elderly, single parents, and those living with disabilities.

3. Improvement in Public Infrastructure

The condition of public infrastructure, including roads, drainage systems, and housing, was highlighted in several responses. There was a clear demand for the repair of roads, including in rural areas and the maritime islands. Some respondents requested affordable housing solutions, and others highlighted the importance of improving basic services such as water supply. Investment in infrastructure was seen as crucial not just for improving living standards but also for fostering economic growth. Infrastructure upgrades were also linked to climate change resilience, with calls to invest in sustainable infrastructure.

4. Government Efficiency and Accountability

A significant portion of the responses also focused on the need for better governance and transparency. Respondents frequently called for reductions in MPs' and ministers' salaries and allowances. There were also suggestions for reducing the size of Cabinet, reducing government travel expenditures, and cutting wasteful spending. Many respondents expressed frustration with nepotism and called for greater accountability in the allocation and use of public funds. These calls reflect public disillusionment with current government practices and a desire for more efficient governance that prioritises the people's needs.

5. Support for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs)

Another frequent theme was the need for support for SMEs, with respondents suggesting measures to help micro and small businesses grow. These suggestions included tax breaks for small businesses and greater government assistance for resource owners. Respondents also advocated for subsidies and grants to help young people and entrepreneurs, particularly in the agriculture and retail sectors, to start their businesses. This reflects a desire for policies that empower local entrepreneurship and foster job creation.

6. Employment and Wage Increases

There were numerous calls for higher wages to address the challenges of low-income earners, with many respondents highlighting the need for an increase in the minimum wage. The issue of youth unemployment was also raised, with calls for more job creation and greater opportunities for recent graduates. Several respondents pointed out that while some groups were receiving social assistance, there was still a significant gap in earnings between public sector workers (such as teachers and health workers) and other workers, suggesting a need for more equitable wage distribution.

7. Climate Change and Sustainable Development

A few respondents highlighted the importance of addressing climate change through sustainable development initiatives. Suggestions included investing in renewable energy sources like solar panels and windmills, promoting afforestation to reduce carbon emissions, and investing in climate-smart agriculture. This reflects a growing recognition of the importance of sustainable policies to protect the environment while fostering economic growth.

ii. Any specific suggestions on cutting waste or raising revenue?

The responses to the open-ended question about the suggestions on cutting waste or raising revenue desired in the 2025/26 National Budget provide clear insights into what the public perceive need to be done to keep the budget deficit manageable. Below is a thematic breakdown of the key areas raised by respondents.

Key Themes and Suggestions

Reduction of Ministerial and MP Costs

A large portion of the responses focuses on reducing Ministers' salaries and allowances, with many respondents suggesting a cut in the size of the Cabinet and the number of Ministers. Some responses also advocated for reducing MPs' salaries and cutting travel and other allowances for both MPs and government officials, emphasising that their perks should be scaled back to match the economic realities faced by ordinary Fijians. Suggestions included specific cuts, such as reducing the Cabinet salary by 50%, reducing overseas trips, and ensuring that government officials travel economy class. This reflects widespread public sentiment that government officials should lead by example, showing fiscal responsibility.

Government Spending and Waste Reduction

Several responses pointed to wasteful government spending, particularly in areas like official travel, ceremonies, unnecessary workshops, public consultations with very low number of attendees, and government vehicles. Some suggested that the government should reduce the number of government vehicles or use less expensive vehicles, noting that high-end vehicles like *Toyota Prados* were unnecessary. There were also calls for streamlining government services, including reducing the size of the civil service and auditing government ministries to eliminate redundancy. Respondents also suggested cutting waste by reducing unnecessary allowances and overseas trips and by focusing on more efficient government operations.

Increasing Revenue through Taxation and Economic Reforms

Respondents offered a variety of ideas for raising revenue. Among these, the most frequent suggestion was to increase taxes on luxury goods and sin taxes (e.g., on alcohol, tobacco, and sugary drinks). Some also proposed taxing non-essential disposable items and introducing or raising environmental taxes, such as a carbon tax or taxes on single-use plastics. Additionally, there were calls for a higher corporate tax rate, particularly targeting large corporations, while others suggested a progressive tax system for high-income earners. A few respondents also proposed tax incentives for local businesses, particularly small and medium enterprises (SMEs), to promote economic growth and job creation.

Promoting Local Industries and Agriculture

Many respondents highlighted the importance of boosting local agriculture as a means of raising revenue and reducing the need for imports. They suggested that the government should invest more in agriculture, provide incentives for farmers, and promote local food production to reduce dependence on imported goods. Agriculture-focused revenue generation was viewed as a long-term strategy for reducing the cost of living and building a more sustainable economy. A few responses specifically mentioned boosting exports of local products like Yaqona (Kava), Dalo, and Tavioka.

Public Accountability and Transparency

There was strong support for increasing government accountability. Several responses recommended regular audits of government spending, performance evaluations for civil servants, reducing size of the civil service, and better monitoring of public funds. Ensuring that public money is used effectively was a key theme, with some suggesting digitalisation of government services to improve transparency and reduce waste. Respondents also suggested implementing better procurement policies to avoid corruption and ensure value for money.

General Economic Reforms and Efficiency

A number of suggestions focused on promoting efficiency in government departments, with ideas such as streamlining ministries and eliminating redundant roles. Some respondents emphasised the importance of simplifying tax collection and making the public sector more efficient to drive economic growth. Additionally, there were ideas for encouraging innovation and entrepreneurship, such as offering incentives for startups, and supporting small businesses. Many suggested that the government should focus on growing the local economy and creating jobs to increase revenue while reducing reliance on external debt or aid.

Environmental and Social Sustainability

Some responses included suggestions for environmentally sustainable revenue-generation strategies. Ideas included introducing taxes on carbon emissions, increasing recycling programs, and promoting sustainable farming practices. Other responses called for investing in renewable energy and clean technologies to support long-term growth and reduce costs associated with environmental damage.

The public responses indicate a strong desire for fiscal responsibility, with a focus on cutting government waste, particularly in the areas of ministerial salaries, unnecessary travel, and government perks. There is also significant support for raising revenue through tax reforms, particularly targeting luxury goods, sin taxes, and high-income earners. The public shows a clear preference for investing in local agriculture and boosting local industries as a means of creating long-term economic growth, alongside the improvement of government efficiency through better accountability and transparency. These insights should guide the government's budgetary decisions in the upcoming 2025/26 National Budget to ensure equitable, sustainable, and efficient spending.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings of Dialogue Fiji's nationwide survey provide a compelling evidence base for the 2025–26 National Budget. Across all regions, settlement types and age groups, ordinary Fijians voiced a clear set of priorities and proposed concrete measures to address them. In particular, the cost of living and inflation emerged as the most pressing concern, with 57 per cent of respondents rating it “Extremely Serious” and 76.6 per cent nominating reducing living costs (through VAT cuts and targeted subsidies) as one of their top three budgetary priorities . At the same time, health services and medicine stocks (64.3 per cent), crime and policing (36.9 per cent) and infrastructure repairs (21 per cent) also commanded significant support as areas in need of increased funding.

These emphases reflect everyday hardships faced by Fijians: rising prices undermine household budgets, shortages in medical supplies compromise care, and deteriorating roads and public facilities frustrate commerce and connectivity. The survey further revealed that Fijians expect the Government to demonstrate fiscal responsibility by cutting waste and corruption (65.1 per cent) and reducing ministers' and MPs' salaries and allowances (73.4 per cent) before resorting to tax hikes or additional borrowing. Suggestions to introduce or increase sin taxes (39.3 per cent), raise taxes on high incomes (22 per cent) and boost corporate taxes (21.2 per cent) point to a willingness to share the burden equitably, provided that revenue measures are targeted and fair .

On the basis of these insights, the following recommendations are proposed for consideration in the 2025–26 National Budget:

1. **Prioritise Cost-of-Living Relief**

- **VAT and Subsidies:** Reduce VAT to at least 10 per cent, and expand targeted subsidy programmes for low- and middle-income households.
- **Price Stabilisation:** Establish a temporary Price Monitoring Unit to track wholesale and retail margins on staples and intervene if prices do not reflect reduced VAT.

2. **Strengthen Healthcare Provision**

- **Supply Chain Investment:** Allocate additional funds to bulk-purchase essential drugs and improve logistical capacity, thereby eliminating recurrent stock-outs.
- **Primary-Care Expansion:** Expand funding for rural and maritime clinic staffing and telehealth infrastructure to address geographic disparities in service delivery.
- **Facilities Development:** Build a new divisional hospital for the Central Division given the deplorable state of the main divisional hospital in the central division, CWM, which currently serves more than a third of Fiji's entire population.

3. **Invest in Critical Infrastructure**

- **Roads and Drainage:** Direct capital expenditure (increase allocations) towards repairing and upgrading roads
- **Water and Sanitation:** Increase allocations for upgrade and maintenance of water-supply pipelines and borehole maintenance to ensure reliable access to clean water, particularly in the Greater Suva area (which faces capacity issues) and on maritime islands where residents face acute logistical challenges .

4. **Enhance Public Safety and Social Support**

- **Policing and Community Programmes:** Boost funding to increase capacity of the Fiji Police Force, for effective crime investigation and prosecution, capacity development of police officers, and for community policing initiatives and local crime-prevention partnerships, reflecting the 36.9 per cent of respondents who prioritised crime and personal security.
 - **Drug Rehabilitation:** Allocate ring-fenced resources for expanding rehabilitation centres and prevention education, in response to 74 per cent viewing illicit drugs as “Extremely Serious.”
5. **Improve Governance and Accountability**
- **Cabinet Streamlining:** Reduce the number of ministers and assistant ministers and implement a 15–20 per cent cut in MPs’ salaries, perks and allowances and travel budget allocations to model fiscal discipline.
 - **Procurement Reform:** Mandate e-procurement for all capital projects above a defined threshold and conduct biannual audits to identify and eliminate wasteful or corrupt practices.
6. **Adopt Targeted Revenue Measures and Taxation Reforms**
- **Environmental Levies:** Implement/Increase the quantum of an environmental levy on single-use plastics, tourism activities and extractive activities like bottled water production.
 - **Progressive Taxation:** Review the personal income-tax schedule to introduce higher marginal rates on top earners and index brackets to inflation, thereby safeguarding the purchasing power of lower-income groups.
 - **Remove import duties and VAT on personal imports:** Revert to the previous regime of zero duties and VAT on personal imports up to the value of FJ\$2000 to enable the integration of ordinary Fijians in the international online shopping market, and cease the protection of big businesses (brick and mortar stores)
7. **Support Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs)**
- **Tax Incentives and Grants:** Provide a stepped reduction in corporate tax for SMEs on turnover below a specified threshold and establish a matching-grant fund for start-up training and capital equipment, recognising the 17.4 per cent of respondents engaged in own business or farming.
 - **Export Facilitation:** Create a streamlined “one-stop” export approval process and subsidise certification costs for producers of kava, dalo and other traditional commodities.
8. **Embed Participatory Budgeting**
- **Feedback Mechanisms:** Institutionalise a mid-year online budget review survey and regional town-hall forums to track citizen satisfaction and adapt allocations in real time, exploring partnerships with CSOs and media to facilitate this.
 - **Transparency Portal:** Develop an interactive public dashboard showing budget outturns by sector and locality, enabling ordinary Fijians to monitor how funds are spent.

Integrating these recommendations will ensure that the 2025–26 National Budget can deliver tangible relief on the cost of living, bolster essential services and infrastructure, and reinforce public trust through demonstrable accountability. Crucially, a participatory approach—anchored in the empirical findings of this survey—will ensure that the budget reflects not only macroeconomic imperatives but also the everyday priorities of Fijians across all walks of life.

In conclusion, a budget that responds directly to the voices of ordinary citizens will strengthen Fiji’s social fabric, support sustainable development and uphold the democratic principle that public resources exist to serve the public good.