

National Budget 2026–2027

Public Priorities Survey



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National Budget 2026–2027

Public Priorities Survey

Comprehensive Research Report

Findings from a National Survey of 1,266 Respondents
Conducted March–April 2026

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Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of a comprehensive national survey conducted by Dialogue Fiji between March and April 2026 to systematically determine the budget priorities of ordinary Fijians ahead of the 2026–2027 national budget cycle. The survey was administered across all four divisions of Fiji, reaching 1,266 respondents through a combination of enumerator-led field interviews and online participation.

The research was designed to generate credible, citizen-driven evidence that Dialogue Fiji could submit to the Ministry of Finance as part of an inclusive pre-budget consultation process. The survey instrument captured respondents' profiles, their perceptions of the most pressing national and household challenges, their specific budget priority preferences, and their broader confidence in the government's fiscal responsiveness to the needs of ordinary people.

Key Finding 1: Cost of Living is the Dominant National Concern

Nearly half of all respondents (49.2%, n=623) identified the cost of living as the single most important issue facing Fiji today — a margin more than double the next-ranked concern of crime and drugs (18.0%, n=228). This is not a marginal finding; it is an overwhelming, cross-cutting signal from Fijian communities.

Key Finding 2: Health is the Clear Budget Priority

Health emerged as the top national budget priority, selected in the Top-3 by 47.9% of respondents and as the single top priority by 21.3%. This finding is consistent across divisions, ethnicities, genders, and area types, making it one of the most robust results in the survey.

Key Finding 3: Citizens Lack Confidence in Fiscal Responsiveness

A majority of respondents (50.4%) believe that government spending does NOT currently reflect the needs of ordinary people. When combined with those who are 'Not sure' (26.8%), only 22.0% of Fijians feel that the budget is genuinely aligned with their needs. Nearly half (45.8%) express low or no confidence that the national budget will improve their lives.

Key Finding 4: Food Prices are the Defining Household Crisis

More than half of respondents (53.2%, n=674) identified food price increases as the biggest challenge currently affecting their household. The severity of this challenge is acute: 69.8% of respondents rated their household challenge as 'Severe' or 'Very Severe'.

The report proceeds in seven chapters: methodology; demographic and geographic profile of respondents; national issues and household pressures; budget priority findings; attitudes toward government spending; qualitative analysis of open-ended responses; and cross-demographic analysis. It concludes with detailed policy recommendations for each of the priority sectors identified by respondents.

1. Introduction and Context

1.1 Background

The national budget is the single most consequential annual policy document produced by any government. It embeds fiscal choices about who receives public resources, which services are expanded or contracted, and which communities are prioritised. In democratic societies, the legitimacy of those choices depends in large part on whether they reflect the actual needs and priorities of citizens, particularly those most vulnerable to economic hardship.

In Fiji, the pre-budget consultation process has historically been dominated by formal submissions from the private sector, industry associations, and statutory bodies. While these inputs are valuable, they tend to reflect the perspectives of organised and relatively well-resourced constituencies. The voices of ordinary households (especially those in rural communities, informal settlements, and low-income brackets) have rarely been captured in a systematic, statistically grounded way.

Dialogue Fiji, a non-partisan civil society organisation dedicated to strengthening democratic governance and public civic engagement in Fiji, commissioned this survey to address that gap. The survey was designed to produce a credible, nationally representative snapshot of citizen budget priorities that could be submitted to the Ministry of Finance as evidence-based input into the 2026–2027 budget process.

1.2 Purpose and Objectives

The survey had four primary objectives:

1. To identify what ordinary Fijians consider to be the most pressing national issues facing the country today.
2. To document the specific challenges that households are experiencing, and to assess the severity of those challenges.
3. To determine which areas of government expenditure Fijians prioritise most highly for the 2026–2027 national budget.
4. To measure public sentiment regarding the government's fiscal responsiveness, including confidence levels and perceptions of spending alignment with community needs.

1.3 Significance of the Research

The 2026–2027 budget will be presented in a context of significant economic pressure for Fijian households. With post pandemic growth slowing to under three percent, the economy faces structural risks flagged by the International Monetary Fund. Escalating global tensions and oil shocks threaten to directly amplify local inflation and acute cost of living stress. This survey captures the lived experience of that stress and translates it into actionable policy intelligence. The findings presented in this report are based on the responses of 1,266 individuals across Fiji's Central, Western, Northern, and Eastern Divisions, encompassing urban, peri-urban, rural, and informal settlement communities. The scale and geographic spread of the dataset make this one of the most comprehensive citizen budget priority surveys conducted in Fiji's civil society sector.

2. Methodology

2.1 Survey Instrument Design

The survey instrument ('Dialogue Fiji National Budget 2026–2027 Public Priorities Survey') was designed as a structured, enumerator or self administered questionnaire. It was organised into five thematic modules:

- Module A: Respondent Profile — capturing division, area type, gender, ethnicity, and age group.
- Module B: National Issues — identifying the single most important issue facing Fiji today.
- Module C: Household Pressures — documenting the most severe household challenge, its perceived severity, and a multi-select inventory of problems experienced in the past twelve months.
- Module D: National Budget Priorities — identifying the top three priority areas for the 2026–2027 budget, the single highest priority, government spending attitudes, and beneficiary preferences.
- Module E: Confidence and Qualitative Input — measuring budget confidence and capturing an open-ended response on the one problem the government should fix.

The instrument was designed to be completed in approximately five to ten minutes by an enumerator reading questions aloud to respondents, with response categories read out and marked by the enumerator or filled in by the respondents themselves. This format was chosen to maximise accessibility across literacy levels, particularly in rural and informal settlement areas.

2.2 Data Collection

Data were collected through two modalities:

- Enumerator-led field interviews: Conducted by Dialogue Fiji field staff and enumerators. Field data collection spanned Central, Western, Northern, and Eastern Divisions.
- Online survey: A self-administered digital version of the survey instrument was made available online, generating 138 responses (10.9% of the total sample).

Data entry from paper-based field instruments was consolidated into a single digital spreadsheet, which forms the basis for this analysis.

2.3 Sample Size and Distribution

The total sample of 1,266 respondents provides a statistically robust basis for analysis. At a 95% confidence level, this sample size corresponds to an approximate margin of error of $\pm 2.75\%$ for overall estimates, assuming a simple random sample. For sub-group analyses (by division, ethnicity, age, or area type), margins of error are higher due to smaller sample sizes, and findings should therefore be interpreted with appropriate caution.

2.4 Limitations

Several methodological limitations should be noted when interpreting the findings:

- Sampling frame: The survey did not use a formal random sampling frame. Enumerators used purposive and convenience sampling within their assigned areas. As a result, the sample may over-represent communities with easier access to Dialogue Fiji's enumerator networks.
- Eastern Division under-representation: Only 13 respondents (1.0%) were from the Eastern Division. This reflects the geographic and logistical challenges of reaching maritime island communities and means that findings cannot be reliably disaggregated for this division.
- Self-selection bias (online): Online respondents may differ systematically from in-person respondents in terms of digital access, literacy, and socio-economic profile.
- Social desirability: As with all survey research, some degree of response bias toward socially acceptable answers cannot be excluded.

Despite these limitations, the scale of the survey and the consistency of findings across sub-groups provide strong grounds for confidence in the major conclusions.

2.5 On the Treatment of Cost of Living in the Survey Design

The survey instrument intentionally did not include “cost of living” as a standalone option within the national budget priority question. This was a deliberate methodological decision. Budget priorities were structured as sectors of government expenditure (e.g. health, education, infrastructure), whereas cost of living is a cross-cutting economic outcome influenced by multiple policy levers, including taxation, wages, subsidies, and market regulation. Including it as a direct option alongside sectoral categories would have risked conceptual inconsistency and disproportionate response concentration.

However, the findings clearly demonstrate that cost of living is the dominant concern shaping both national issue perceptions and household experiences. Its strong presence across quantitative and qualitative responses indicates that citizens expect the national budget to deliver tangible relief from rising prices and declining purchasing power. Future iterations of this survey will incorporate a dedicated measure to capture cost of living explicitly as a budget outcome priority, ensuring a more complete alignment between citizen expectations and fiscal policy framing.

3. Demographic and Geographic Profile of Respondents

3.1 Geographic Distribution

The survey achieved broad coverage across three of Fiji's four administrative divisions. The Central Division, which encompasses the capital Suva and surrounding areas, provided the largest share of respondents, reflecting its population size.

Division	Respondents	% of Total
Central	556	43.9%
Western	398	31.4%
Northern	298	23.5%
Eastern	13	1.0%
Outside Fiji	1	0.1%
TOTAL	1,266	100.0%

3.2 Area Type

Respondents were fairly evenly distributed across urban and non-urban settlement types, with urban town/city respondents comprising the largest group. The inclusion of a meaningful proportion of rural village (27.6%), peri-urban (19.5%), and informal settlement (9.1%) respondents is a significant strength of the dataset, as these communities are frequently underrepresented in civic surveys.

Area Type	Respondents	% of Total
Urban Town/City	533	42.1%
Rural Village	350	27.6%
Peri-urban Area	246	19.4%
Informal Settlement	115	9.1%
Other / Unspecified	22	1.7%
TOTAL	1,266	100.0%

3.3 Gender

Female respondents comprised a slight majority of the sample. This reflects the participation pattern observed in this survey and may be influenced by the timing, location, and mode of data collection.

Gender	Respondents	% of Total
Female	691	54.6%
Male	508	40.1%
Prefer not to say	46	3.6%
Not recorded	21	1.7%
TOTAL	1,266	100.0%

3.4 Ethnicity

The two largest ethnic communities in Fiji, iTaukei and Indo-Fijian, are both strongly represented in the sample. However, Indo-Fijians are somewhat overrepresented, driven in part by differences in questionnaire return rates. While the dataset still allows for meaningful cross-ethnic comparisons, this imbalance should be taken into account when interpreting findings at the national level.

Ethnicity	Respondents	% of Total
Indo-Fijian	580	45.8%
iTaukei	565	44.6%
Other	59	4.7%
Rotuman	37	2.9%
Not recorded	25	2.0%
TOTAL	1,266	100.0%

3.5 Age Group

The survey skewed toward working-age adults, with the 25–44 age cohort comprising 46.8% of all respondents. Young adults aged 18–24 represented 21.1% of the sample — a significant proportion reflecting Fiji's relatively young population structure. Older cohorts (55+) were somewhat underrepresented at 14.4% combined.

Age Group	Respondents	% of Total
18–24	267	21.1%
25–34	318	25.1%
35–44	274	21.6%
45–54	216	17.1%
55–64	129	10.2%
65+	53	4.2%
Below 18 / Not recorded	9	0.7%
TOTAL	1,266	100.0%

1,266

Total Respondents

4

Divisions Covered

54.6%

Female Respondents

44.6%

iTaukei

45.8%

Indo-Fijian

27.6%

Rural Village

4. National Issues: What Is Fiji's Biggest Problem?

4.1 Perceptions of the Most Important National Issue

Respondents were asked to identify the single most important issue facing Fiji today from a list of twelve categories (with an 'Other' option). The results are unambiguous: the cost of living dominates the national consciousness by a substantial margin.

Figure 1: Most Important Issue Facing Fiji Today (n=1,266)

Cost of living	623 (49.2%)
Crime / drugs	228 (18.0%)
Unemployment / lack of jobs	122 (9.6%)
Governance / corruption	50 (3.9%)
Poverty / inequality	48 (3.8%)
Health services	42 (3.3%)
Roads and infrastructure	34 (2.7%)
Education costs / quality	32 (2.5%)
Housing affordability	25 (2.0%)
Water supply	20 (1.6%)
Climate change / disasters	23 (1.8%)
Agriculture support	18 (1.4%)

The cost of living was selected by 49.2% of respondents — nearly one in two Fijians. This result reflects a near-consensus national diagnosis: the primary economic problem facing the country is the erosion of household purchasing power. The gap between this and the second-ranked concern (crime and drugs, 18.0%) is striking: cost of living commands more than two and a half times the response rate of the next-ranked issue.

Crime and drugs ranked second at 18.0%, signalling that law and order has become a major community concern alongside economic pressures. The survey evidence suggests that many respondents see these two issues as connected — qualitative responses frequently reference drug-related unemployment and economic marginalisation as drivers of crime. Unemployment and lack of jobs ranked third (9.6%), completing a triad of economic and social stressors.

Governance and corruption (3.9%) and poverty and inequality (3.8%) ranked fourth and fifth, indicating latent but significant concern about systemic issues underlying the economic hardship. Health services ranked sixth (3.3%), below what might be expected given its strong showing as a budget priority, suggesting that respondents distinguish between their experience of poor services and what they see as a national 'issue' framing.

4.2 Divisional Variation in National Issue Perceptions

Cost of living is the dominant concern across all three major divisions, but its relative intensity and the secondary issues that emerge differ meaningfully by geography:

- In the Central Division, cost of living (50.7%) and crime/drugs (17.8%) dominate, consistent with the urban concentration of this division and the visibility of urban crime.
- In the Western Division, cost of living (50.5%) and crime/drugs (19.3%) lead, with somewhat higher concern about unemployment (8.8%) — reflecting the economic challenges in the cane belt and tourism-dependent communities.
- In the Northern Division, cost of living (45.6%) also dominates. Concerns about crimes and drugs (17.0%) and unemployment/lack of jobs (13.1.0%) are also more prominent here.

4.3 Urban-Rural Dimension

The prioritisation of cost of living is remarkably consistent across area types: it leads in urban town/city areas (52.5%), peri-urban areas (50.4%), rural villages (44.0%), and informal settlements (50.4%). However, secondary issues differ by setting:











- Urban respondents are more likely to cite crime/drugs (21.4% in urban town/city) than rural respondents (15.7% in rural villages).
- Rural village respondents show higher rates of concern about agriculture support (3.7%) and water supply (2.3%), reflecting supply-side access issues more characteristic of non-urban communities.
- Informal settlement respondents show elevated concern about housing affordability (1.7%) and unemployment (9.6%), consistent with the precarious economic situation of these communities.

5. Household Pressures and Economic Stress

5.1 Biggest Household Challenge

When asked to identify the single biggest challenge affecting their household right now, respondents confirmed the dominance of food price increases at a rate that is difficult to overstate. More than half of all respondents — 53.2% (n=674) — identified food price increases as their primary household challenge.

Figure 2: Biggest Challenge Affecting Your Household (n=1,266)

Food price increases		674 (53.3%)
Low income / unemployment		161 (12.7%)
Housing costs / rent		111 (8.8%)
Crime or safety concerns		96 (7.6%)
Utilities (water/electricity)		58 (4.6%)
Transport		47 (3.7%)
Health costs		51 (4.0%)
Education		35 (2.8%)
Climate / disaster impacts		27 (2.1%)
Other		8 (0.6%)

The concentration of responses on food price increases — with 53.3% — is extraordinary. In survey research, it is rare for any single response option to command an absolute majority when respondents have access to nine alternatives. This finding suggests that the experience of food price stress is not merely widespread but near-universal among surveyed Fijians in its daily salience.

Low income and unemployment (12.7%) ranked second, followed by crime or safety concerns (7.6%) and housing costs or rent (8.8%) in fourth position. Together, the top four challenges account for 82.0% of all responses, indicating a tight cluster of interconnected economic and social pressures.

5.2 Severity of Household Challenges

The severity dimension amplifies the urgency of these findings. Respondents who identified a household challenge were asked to rate its severity:

Severity Level	Respondents	% of Total
Very Severe	339	26.8%
Severe	545	43.1%
Moderate	324	25.6%
Not Severe	50	3.9%
Not recorded	8	0.6%

A combined 69.8% of respondents rated their household challenge as 'Severe' or 'Very Severe'. Less than 4% reported their challenge as 'Not Severe'. This is a community under acute stress. The proportion reporting 'Very Severe' challenges (26.8%) is particularly alarming, indicating that for more than one in four Fijian households surveyed, the pressures they are experiencing represent a crisis-level condition, not a manageable inconvenience.

Severity is not uniformly distributed. Informal settlement respondents show the highest proportion of 'Severe' responses (53.0%), while rural village respondents display the highest combined 'Severe' or 'Very Severe' rate (70.5%), reflecting the compounded vulnerability of communities with limited service access and restricted income-earning opportunities. Urban respondents, despite facing high food and housing costs, show a broader severity distribution — including a higher share of 'Not Severe' responses (5.4%) — likely reflecting somewhat greater income diversity and service access.

5.3 Multi-Problem Experience in the Past Twelve Months

Respondents were also asked — in a multi-select question — which of eight specific problems they had experienced in their household in the past twelve months. The results paint a picture of pervasive, multi-dimensional hardship:

Problem Experienced	Mentions	% of Respondents
Difficulty paying for food and basic items	631	49.8%
Poor road conditions	486	38.4%
Crime or insecurity	410	32.4%
Water supply interruptions	373	29.5%
Job loss or reduced income	350	27.6%
Difficulty accessing health services	293	23.1%
Climate or disaster damage	242	19.1%
Education costs pressure	204	16.1%
None of the above	74	5.8%

Almost half of all respondents (49.8%) reported difficulty paying for food and basic items in the preceding twelve months — a finding that directly corroborates the 'food price increases' household challenge result. Strikingly, only 5.8% of respondents indicated 'None of the above', meaning that the overwhelming majority of Fijian households surveyed experienced at least one of the listed problems in the past year. Many experienced several simultaneously.

Poor road conditions (38.4%), crime or insecurity (32.4%), and water supply interruptions (31.8%) all exceeded 30%, indicating structural service delivery failures affecting large segments of the population. Job loss or reduced income (27.6%) and difficulty accessing health services (23.1%) complete a picture of multi-layered vulnerability affecting the majority of Fijian households.

6. National Budget Priorities

6.1 Top Three Priority Areas

Respondents were asked to select the THREE areas they believe the government should prioritise most in the 2026–2027 national budget. The total mention count therefore exceeds the number of respondents. The results present a clear and compelling hierarchy:

Figure 3: Priority Areas in Top-3 Selections (n=1,262 respondents, multiple choices)

Health	604 (47.9%)
Crime & drug prevention	484 (38.4%)
Roads / infrastructure	377 (29.9%)
Education	361 (28.6%)
Jobs creation	335 (26.5%)
Social welfare / poverty	324 (25.7%)
Housing	219 (17.4%)
Youth development	197 (15.6%)
Support for small businesses	191 (15.1%)
Agriculture	187 (14.8%)
Water and sanitation	210 (16.6%)
Climate resilience	116 (9.2%)
Public transport	105 (8.3%)
Municipal services	63 (5.0%)

Health dominates the budget priority landscape. It was included in the Top-3 selections of 47.9% of respondents — nearly one in two Fijians — making it by far the most frequently nominated budget priority. Crime and drug prevention ranked a strong second (38.3%), followed by roads and infrastructure (29.9%), education (28.6%), and jobs creation (26.6%).

The top five priorities attract a substantial plurality of mentions, while the remaining nine options each attract between 5% and 17% of respondents. This distribution suggests that while there is strong consensus on the leading priorities, there is genuine diversity of concern across the broader range of public services.

6.2 Single Top Priority

When asked to identify the ONE area that should be the absolute top priority, the health sector consolidated its lead with 21.3% of respondents selecting it as their single highest priority. This confirms that health is not merely frequently mentioned but deeply prioritised.

Priority Area	Respondents	% of Total
Health	269	21.3%
Crime & drug prevention	212	16.8%
Social welfare / poverty	126	10.0%
Education	111	8.8%
Jobs creation	121	9.6%
Roads / infrastructure	79	6.3%
Housing	74	5.9%
Agriculture	67	5.3%
Water and sanitation	59	4.7%
Support for small businesses	48	3.8%
Youth development	41	3.2%
Climate resilience	23	1.8%
Public transport	18	1.4%
Municipal services	14	1.1%

Health leads as the single top priority at 21.3%, with crime and drug prevention second (16.8%). The top two priorities together account for 38.1% of all single-priority selections, suggesting that about two in every five Fijians sees either health or crime/drugs as the most urgent budget issue. Social welfare/poverty (10.0%), jobs creation (9.6%), and education (8.8%) form a secondary cluster, each attracting roughly one in ten respondents.

6.3 Budget Priorities by Division

Examining top single-priority selections by division reveals both the dominance of health's leadership and meaningful regional variations:

Priority	Central	Western	Northern	Eastern
Health	26.3%	19.6%	14.4%	15.4%
Crime & drug prevention	20.9%	11.8%	15.8%	7.7%
Social welfare / poverty	10.3%	9.8%	9.7%	7.7%
Jobs creation	10.1%	10.1%	8.1%	7.7%
Education	9.2%	7.8%	9.7%	15.4%
Roads / infrastructure	3.1%	10.3%	6.7%	7.7%
Agriculture	2.7%	6.0%	9.1%	7.7%

Several important divisional patterns emerge from this analysis:

- Health is the clear top priority in the Central Division (26.3%) but registers considerably lower in the Northern Division (14.4%), where agriculture (9.1%) and education (9.7%) play more prominent roles relative to other divisions.
- Crime and drug prevention commands its highest priority rating in the Central Division (21.0%), consistent with the urban concentration of drug-related crime that is frequently reported in Suva and surrounding areas.

- Roads and infrastructure is a significantly higher priority in the Western Division (10.3%) than in other divisions, likely reflecting the condition of rural roads in the cane belt and the importance of connectivity for agricultural communities.
- Agriculture is substantially more prominent as a priority in the Northern Division (9.4%) — more than three times its Central Division rate — reflecting the agricultural character of Vanua Levu and the dependence of many Northern communities on farming and sugarcane.

6.4 Budget Priorities by Ethnicity

Cross-ethnic analysis reveals both shared priorities and some meaningful differences in emphasis:

Priority	iTaukei	Indo-Fijian	Rotuman	Other
Health	17.9%	24.3%	21.6%	20.3%
Crime & drug prevention	18.6%	15.5%	21.6%	13.6%
Social welfare / poverty	6.0%	14.1%	7.1%	8.5%
Jobs creation	8.0%	11.2%	5.4%	11.9%
Agriculture	7.4%	4.0%	0.0%	1.7%
Education	10.6%	8.1%	13.5%	8.5%

Health is the top priority for Indo-Fijian respondents (24.3%), Rotuman respondents (21.6%), and 'Other' ethnicities (20.3%). For iTaukei respondents, health (17.9%) and crime/drug prevention (18.8%) are virtually tied. Social welfare and poverty support is considerably more prominent as a top priority among Indo-Fijian respondents (14.1%) than among iTaukei respondents (6.0%), which may reflect differences in the socioeconomic profile of the respective survey sub-samples as well as differential impacts of the cost-of-living crisis. Agriculture features more strongly as a priority for iTaukei respondents (7.4%) than for Indo-Fijian respondents (4.0%), consistent with the different land tenure systems and agricultural economies of these communities.

6.5 Budget Priorities by Gender

Broad consistency in priority rankings is observed across genders, with health leading for both female (20.0%) and male (22.5%) respondents. Female respondents show a slightly higher propensity to prioritise social welfare/poverty (9.0%) and housing (5.8%), while male respondents lean modestly more toward crime/drug prevention (14.4%) and agriculture (6.1%). These differences, while present, are not dramatic and do not fundamentally alter the priority ordering.

6.6 Budget Priorities by Age

Age-based analysis reveals a generational gradient in budget priorities:

- Younger respondents (18–24) show the highest rate of prioritising youth development (6.0%) — consistent with their life-stage interests — and education (15.3%), reflecting proximity to the education system.
- Crime and drug prevention is selected as the top priority by 22.5% of 18–24 year olds when combining 'Crime drug prevention' and 'Crime and drug prevention' categories, the highest among any age group, potentially

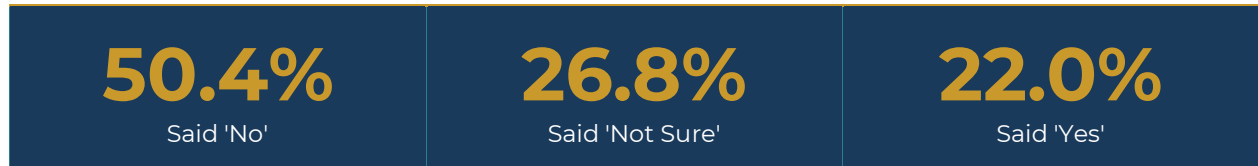
reflecting this cohort's direct experience of drug and crime pressures in their communities.

- Older respondents (55+) show the highest rate of prioritising social welfare/poverty — 30.2% for the 65+ cohort — consistent with dependency on pension and welfare support and the heightened vulnerability of elderly Fijians to cost-of-living pressures.
- Agriculture rises steadily in priority with age, reflecting the rural and agricultural livelihoods more common among older Fijians.

7. Attitudes Toward Government Spending

7.1 Does Government Spending Reflect the Needs of Ordinary People?

One of the most politically significant questions in the survey asked whether respondents believed government spending currently reflects the needs of ordinary people. The results represent a clear statement of public dissatisfaction:



A majority — 50.4% (n=638) — explicitly stated that government spending does NOT reflect the needs of ordinary people. When combined with those who responded 'Not Sure' (26.8%), fully 77.2% of respondents either reject or are unable to affirm that the budget is responsive to their community's needs. Only 22.0% (n=279) expressed confidence that government spending is currently aligned with what ordinary Fijians need.

This is a fundamental finding for the national budget consultation process. It suggests a significant disconnect in the minds of citizens between the stated aims of government spending and its perceived impact on their daily lives.

7.2 Attitudes by Ethnicity

iTaukei respondents show a slightly more positive assessment of government spending alignment (25.0% 'Yes') than Indo-Fijian respondents (18.6% 'Yes'), though both communities are dominated by 'No' responses. The proportion of iTaukei respondents who are 'Not Sure' (29.9%) is higher than for Indo-Fijian respondents (24.7%), suggesting a degree of ambivalence among some iTaukei respondents that may reflect trust in the government combined with uncertainty about how spending decisions translate to community outcomes.

Ethnicity	Yes	No	Not Sure
iTaukei	25.0%	44.8%	29.9%
Indo-Fijian	18.6%	56.0%	24.7%
Rotuman	24.3%	59.5%	16.2%
Other	25.4%	42.4%	30.5%

7.3 Who Should Benefit Most from Government Spending?

Respondents were asked which group should benefit most from government spending. The results reveal a fundamental commitment to universalism in the Fijian civic imagination:

Beneficiary Group	Respondents	% of Total
Everyone equally	728	57.5%
Low-income households	287	22.7%
Rural communities	100	7.9%
Youth and job seekers	69	5.5%

Beneficiary Group	Respondents	% of Total
Farmers	53	4.2%
Small businesses	20	1.6%
Not recorded	9	0.7%

A strong majority (57.5%) of respondents believes that government spending should benefit everyone equally. This finding transcends ethnic, divisional, and age group divisions — universalism commands plurality or majority support across all demographic sub-groups. The second most common preference — low-income households (22.7%) — is consistent with the survey's broader finding of acute financial stress among low-income earners.

The strong preference for universalism does not contradict the finding that 50.4% of respondents believe current spending is not meeting the needs of ordinary people. Rather, it reflects a normative aspiration: Fijians want spending to be fair and broad-based, but they do not feel that it currently is.

7.4 Confidence in the Budget's Ability to Improve Lives

Respondents were asked to rate their overall confidence that the national budget will improve people's lives:

Confidence Level	Respondents	% of Total
Very Confident	248	19.6%
Somewhat Confident	411	32.5%
Not Very Confident	365	28.8%
Not Confident at All	215	17.0%
Not recorded	27	2.1%

The confidence picture is mixed but leans negative. A combined 45.8% of respondents express low or no confidence that the budget will improve their lives. Only 19.6% are 'Very Confident'. The largest single group is 'Somewhat Confident' (32.5%), suggesting a holding pattern — conditional hope, tempered by experience.

Confidence levels vary meaningfully by division. The Northern Division records the highest combined share of respondents who are 'Somewhat Confident' or 'Very Confident' (56.0%), indicating comparatively stronger optimism about the budget's potential impact. In contrast, the Eastern Division stands out for its markedly high level of pessimism, with 38.5% of respondents reporting being 'Not Confident at All'. The Western (19.6%) and Northern (16.4%) divisions also show notable levels of low confidence, while the Central Division records the lowest rate of 'Not Confident at All' responses (14.9%), suggesting relatively less extreme dissatisfaction despite broader concerns.

8. Qualitative Analysis: 'One Problem to Fix'

8.1 Overview

Question 14 of the survey asked respondents: 'If the government could fix ONE problem in the next budget, what should it be?' A total of 1,188 respondents provided a substantive answer to this open-ended question, generating a rich qualitative dataset that complements and deepens the quantitative findings.

The responses were analysed using a thematic categorisation framework, grouping responses by primary subject matter. Where a response clearly addressed multiple themes, it was assigned to the dominant theme based on primacy of mention. The categorisation reveals a consistent and emphatic priority hierarchy:

Theme Category	Approximate Mentions	% of Responses
Cost of living / Food prices / Wages / VAT	~339	27.5%
Health / Healthcare systems	~134	10.9%
Crime / Drugs / Law enforcement	~132	10.7%
Roads / Infrastructure / Transport	~130	10.6%
Employment / Job creation	~79	6.4%
Social welfare / Poverty alleviation	~59	4.8%
Education / Schools / Teachers	~39	3.2%
Water supply / Sanitation	~32	2.6%
Housing affordability	~29	2.4%
Agriculture / Farmers	~26	2.1%
Youth development	~23	1.9%
Corruption / Governance / Transparency	~10	0.8%
Climate / Environment	~7	0.6%
Electricity	~6	0.5%
Other / Mixed / Unclassified	~186	15.1%

8.2 Cost of Living, Food Prices, and Wages

The dominant theme by a significant margin is the cluster of cost of living, food prices, and wages — appearing in approximately 27.5% of all substantive responses. This thematic dominance reinforces the quantitative findings from the closed questions. The qualitative responses provide texture and emotional weight to the statistical findings.

Many respondents articulated the same core argument: that the minimum wage has not kept pace with food and utility prices, creating a structural affordability gap for working households. Representative responses include demands to 'increase the minimum wage rate to match expenses', 'reduce VAT on essential food items', 'balance the cost of living with the wages', and 'reduce food prices to a reasonable level so that low income earners can afford their daily expenses'.

The specificity of these responses is notable: many respondents do not simply name 'cost of living' generically but identify particular mechanisms — VAT reduction,

minimum wage increases, fuel subsidy, targeted subsidies for essential foods — suggesting a degree of policy awareness and sophistication among ordinary Fijians that is often underestimated in formal policy processes.

Illustrative Qualitative Response

"If the Fiji Government could fix one problem in the next budget, it should be the high cost of living. Many families struggle with rising prices of food, electricity, and transport. Reducing taxes on basic goods and supporting local production would make daily life more affordable and improve overall wellbeing." — Survey Respondent

8.3 Health and Healthcare

Healthcare themes account for approximately 10.9% of responses, with respondents focusing not merely on budget allocation in the abstract but on specific, concrete failures: insufficient medicines in hospital pharmacies, inadequate facilities at Colonial War Memorial (CWM) Hospital, poor nurse-to-patient ratios, lack of rural health centres, excessive privatisation concerns, and the need to make health services free or more affordable.

The qualitative responses reveal a healthcare system that respondents experience as understocked, understaffed, and insufficiently accessible — particularly for rural communities and lower-income households who cannot afford private alternatives. Several respondents specifically called for the upgrading of CWM Hospital as a flagship facility.

8.4 Crime, Drugs, and Law Enforcement

Approximately 10.7% of responses focused on crime, drugs, and law enforcement — a theme that cuts across demographics and geographies. Several respondents explicitly connected drug use to unemployment and poverty, framing it as a consequence of economic marginalisation rather than purely a law enforcement problem. A recurring theme is the call for both prevention (community programs, youth engagement, drug awareness) and enforcement (heavier sentences, better policing, border security to prevent drug importation).

Several respondents expressed particular concern about the youth dimension of drug abuse, referencing idle young people turning to drugs in the absence of employment or structured activities. This creates an important policy link between crime/drugs, youth development, and job creation priorities.

8.5 Roads and Infrastructure

Roads and infrastructure feature prominently in the open-ended responses (approximately 10.6%), with respondents specifically naming deteriorating road conditions, lack of overtaking lanes, bridge deficiencies, drainage problems, and traffic congestion — particularly along the Suva-Nausori corridor. Rural road conditions are a particular concern, with Northern Division respondents specifically citing roads as critical for agricultural access and daily connectivity.

8.6 Employment, Wages, and Small Business

Employment-related themes account for approximately 6.4% of direct mentions, though the boundary between employment and cost-of-living themes is permeable — many respondents who identify wages as the core problem are effectively making an employment argument. Several respondents specifically identified the challenge

of young graduates finding employment, with calls for job creation programmes targeted at college leavers and youth.

Small business support features in several responses, with respondents calling for more accessible grants, reduced tax burdens, and streamlined business registration processes to enable self-employment as an alternative to formal employment.

8.7 Notable Qualitative Themes Beyond the Core Priorities

Beyond the dominant themes, several recurring qualitative sub-themes deserve specific mention:

- Nurse/civil servant pay: Multiple respondents specifically called for pay increases for nurses, teachers, and other public servants — sometimes with personal accounts of working overtime without compensation.
- Social welfare expansion: Repeated calls for social welfare allowances to begin at age 60 (rather than the current threshold), and for welfare coverage to extend to unemployed working-age adults.
- TSLS (Tertiary Scholarships and Loans Scheme): Several respondents called for the reform or expansion of TSLS, particularly for students from low-income backgrounds and for equal treatment across institutions.
- Sugarcane farmer payments: Specific calls from Northern Division respondents for timely payment of sugarcane farmers, reflecting the cash flow pressures on agricultural households.
- Transparency and governance: A cluster of respondents explicitly called for reduced ministerial salaries, greater transparency in budget allocation, and accountability in how funds are spent.
- HIV/AIDS and public health: Several respondents flagged HIV prevalence as a specific public health crisis requiring dedicated budget attention.

9. Cross-Demographic Analysis and Synthesis

9.1 The Five Tier Priority Architecture

Synthesising the quantitative and qualitative findings, the survey reveals a five-tier architecture of citizen budget priorities for Fiji 2026–2027:

Tier	Priority Areas	Basis
Tier 1 — Dominant	Health	Top-3: 47.9%; Single top: 21.3%
Tier 2 — Strong	Crime & drug prevention	Top-3: 38.3%; Single top: 16.8%
Tier 3 — Significant	Roads/Infrastructure; Education; Jobs creation; Social welfare/Poverty	Top-3: 25–30% each
Tier 4 — Notable	Housing; Water & sanitation; Youth development; Small business; Agriculture	Top-3: 14–18% each
Tier 5 — Present	Climate resilience; Public transport; Municipal services	Top-3: <10% each

9.2 Convergent Evidence

Across every analytical dimension — divisional, ethnic, gender, age, area type, and qualitative — the survey findings demonstrate remarkable convergence on a small number of core conclusions:

- Cost of living is the defining crisis of 2026 for ordinary Fijians. It shapes perceptions of national problems, dominates household challenge narratives, and drives wage and food price policy demands in open-ended responses.
- Health is the leading sectoral budget priority, but it is not the primary policy concern overall. That position is clearly occupied by the cost-of-living crisis, which dominates national issue perceptions and household experiences. Within this context, health emerges as the most urgent area for government spending
- Crime and drugs represent a second-order priority of near-comparable urgency, particularly in urban and Central Division contexts, and are frequently linked to unemployment and economic marginalisation.
- Rural communities carry disproportionate burdens: poor roads, water supply failures, agricultural income uncertainty, and limited health access combine to create a rural vulnerability profile that demands specific budget attention.
- Trust is low. The majority of Fijians do not believe that current government spending reflects their needs, and nearly half lack confidence that the 2026–2027 budget will improve their lives.

9.3 Points of Divergence

While convergence dominates, several points of meaningful divergence are worth noting for policy design:

- Agriculture is a Tier 3 priority in the Northern Division but a Tier 4–5 priority nationally, reflecting the geographic specificity of agricultural policy needs.

- Youth development resonates most among younger respondents (18–24) and is frequently linked to crime prevention in qualitative responses — suggesting a youth-employment-crime nexus that requires integrated policy responses.
- Social welfare/poverty is a higher priority among Indo-Fijian respondents and older respondents (65+) than among other demographic groups, reflecting different economic profiles and vulnerability patterns.
- Women show modestly higher concern for social welfare, housing, and health compared to men, consistent with women's caregiving roles and the feminisation of poverty in Fijian households.

10. Policy Recommendations

Based on the comprehensive survey findings, Dialogue Fiji makes the following evidence-based recommendations for the 2026–2027 national budget. These recommendations are grounded in the expressed priorities of 1,266 Fijian citizens and are presented in order of the priority hierarchy identified by respondents.

10.1 Priority 1: Health — Urgent Systemic Investment

The survey identifies health as a top budget priority for Fijian citizens. The qualitative evidence suggests the concern is not merely about budget quantum but about the quality, accessibility, and reliability of health services.

- Increase the health sector budget allocation to a minimum 15% of total expenditure, with specific ring-fencing for capital infrastructure at divisional and sub-divisional hospitals.
- Prioritise the refurbishment and re-equipment of Colonial War Memorial (CWM) Hospital, which featured prominently in qualitative responses as an under-resourced flagship facility.
- Address pharmaceutical stock-out issues at public hospital pharmacies, which were specifically mentioned by respondents as a barrier to effective care.
- Expand rural health centre capacity, including mobile health services for remote communities, to address the geographic access barrier identified by rural respondents.
- Review and improve nursing staff pay scales and overtime compensation, to address retention and burnout concerns raised by multiple respondents.
- Ring-fence funding for HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment programmes, including community awareness and treatment support.

10.2 Priority 2: Cost of Living — Fiscal Measures for Household Relief

While 'cost of living' is not a conventional budget category, the survey evidence is unambiguous that Fijian households are in acute financial distress and are looking to the budget for relief. Specific, targeted fiscal measures should be the response.

- Beyond the current 22 zero-rated items, add locally produced proteins (eggs and fresh milk) and sanitary products to the list of 0% VAT goods.
- Review and increase the national minimum wage to better reflect the actual cost of living, with a commitment to annual reviews tied to CPI movements.
- Introduce targeted food voucher or subsidy programmes for households in the lowest income quintile, modelled on programmes that have been implemented in comparable Pacific island economies.
- Review fuel taxation and subsidy arrangements for public transport operators to limit the pass-through of fuel costs to consumers through bus fare increases.
- Reduce or exempt fuel levies on agriculture and fishing activities to support primary production and reduce food cost inflationary pressures.

10.3 Priority 3: Crime and Drug Prevention — Integrated Social Investment

The survey evidence strongly suggests that crime and drug prevention is perceived as a systemic social problem requiring both enforcement and social investment, not merely policing. Budget responses should reflect this dual character.

- Increase funding for the Fiji Police Force, with specific allocation for community policing programmes and rural patrol capacity.
- Increase border security resources to address drug importation, which respondents specifically identified as a source of the domestic drug problem.
- Fund a national drug awareness and prevention programme targeting schools, youth groups, and community organisations.
- Invest in drug rehabilitation facilities and programmes, recognising rehabilitation as a cost-effective complement to enforcement.
- Fund community-based youth engagement programmes in high-crime areas, recognising the survey evidence that links youth idleness, unemployment, and crime.

10.4 Priority 4: Roads and Infrastructure — Connectivity as an Economic Enabler

Poor road conditions are the second most widely experienced household problem in the past twelve months (38.4%) and are a top priority in the Western and Northern divisions. Road investment is both a welfare priority and an economic productivity enabler for agricultural and rural communities.

- Increase the roads and infrastructure capital budget, with specific priority for rural and agricultural access roads in the Western and Northern divisions.
- Establish a dedicated maintenance fund for existing road assets, recognising that deferred maintenance is the most common driver of road deterioration and the source of the specific complaints raised by survey respondents.
- Prioritise bridge maintenance and replacement, particularly in low-lying and flood-prone rural areas.
- Address the Suva-Nausori corridor congestion through investment in road widening, signalling, and public transport alternatives, consistent with the specific concerns raised in qualitative responses.

10.5 Priority 5: Social Welfare — Expansion and Adequacy

Social welfare and poverty support is the third-ranked single top priority among respondents and commands particularly high support among older Fijians, Indo-Fijian respondents, and low-income households. The qualitative evidence suggests that current welfare payments are perceived as insufficient.

- Review and increase the value of all social welfare allowances (elderly, disability, food voucher) to ensure they reflect current food and living costs.
- Lower the eligibility age for the elderly welfare allowance to 60, consistent with multiple qualitative responses calling for this change.
- Extend welfare coverage to include unemployed working-age adults who are actively seeking employment but lack income, as specifically requested by respondents.

- Implement targeted school grant increases and consider providing free school lunches for children from low-income families, consistent with qualitative suggestions.

10.6 Priority 6: Jobs Creation and Small Business Support

Employment and jobs creation represent Tier 3 priorities, with particular salience among younger respondents and communities affected by structural unemployment. The qualitative evidence links job creation directly to cost of living, crime reduction, and youth wellbeing.

- Increase allocation to MSME (Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise) development programmes, including simplified grant schemes accessible to informal economy operators.
- Fund apprenticeship and vocational skills training programmes in partnership with industry, particularly for school leavers and young people without formal qualifications.
- Review TSLS Schemes to ensure equitable access for students from low-income backgrounds across all accredited tertiary institutions.
- Provide specific incentives for businesses that employ young Fijians, including payroll tax relief or targeted subsidies for new entrants to the labour market.

10.7 Priority 7: Agriculture — Productive Sector Investment

Agriculture is a Tier 4 priority nationally but rises to Tier 2 in the Northern Division. For a significant proportion of Fijian households, agricultural income is the primary livelihood. Budget investment in agriculture has both welfare and food security dimensions.

- Increase agricultural subsidies and input support (fertiliser, seeds, machinery), particularly for smallholder farmers and subsistence producers.
- Ensure timely payment of the sugarcane crop price to farmers, which was specifically raised as an issue by Northern Division respondents.
- Fund agricultural extension services to improve productivity and climate resilience on smallholder farms.
- Invest in rural market and supply chain infrastructure to reduce post-harvest losses and improve farmer income.
- Introduce a targeted support scheme to subsidise land lease renewal premiums for agricultural leases, particularly for smallholder and active farmers. Eligibility should be based on clear criteria, including demonstrated active agricultural use of the land, income thresholds to prioritise low- and middle-income farmers, and a minimum lease size or production level to ensure productive utilisation. This would reduce barriers to lease renewal, support continuity of farming operations, and strengthen long-term agricultural productivity.
- Strengthen government efforts to negotiate and expand export markets for Fijian agricultural products, including through bilateral and regional trade agreements, certification support (e.g. biosecurity and quality standards), and targeted assistance for export-ready producers. Improving access to reliable overseas markets will increase farmer incomes, reduce dependence on volatile domestic demand, and support long-term sector growth.

10.8 Priority 8: Water and Sanitation

Water supply interruptions were experienced by 31.8% of respondents in the past twelve months, making this a structural service delivery failure affecting approximately one in three Fijian households. This priority ranks fifth nationally in the single top-priority question.

- Increase capital investment in Water Authority of Fiji (WAF) infrastructure, particularly for aging pipe networks in urban and peri-urban areas.
- Prioritise rural and remote community water supply programmes, including borehole drilling and water tank provision.
- Establish a dedicated water interruption response fund to address emergency repair and maintenance needs.

10.9 Priority 9: Fiscal Discipline — Reducing Operational Expenditure

The analysis of recent budgets indicates a significant expansion in operating expenditure, which has increasingly absorbed the majority of Government revenue. This trend has reduced the fiscal space available for productive capital investment and has contributed to rising deficits and debt levels. There is a growing concern about inefficiencies in public spending and the perceived imbalance between administrative costs and tangible service delivery. A deliberate and strategic effort to contain and rationalise operational expenditure is therefore necessary to restore fiscal sustainability and improve the quality of public spending.

- Undertake a comprehensive expenditure review across all ministries and agencies to identify inefficiencies, duplication of functions, and non-essential spending.
- Implement a gradual containment strategy for the public sector wage bill, including a review of staffing structures, allowances, and overtime practices.
- Rationalise subsidies and transfers to ensure they are well-targeted, time-bound, and aligned with clearly defined policy outcomes.
- Introduce performance-based budgeting frameworks to link operational spending with measurable service delivery outcomes.
- Strengthen procurement systems and financial oversight mechanisms to reduce waste, leakage, and cost overruns in government operations.
- Limit the creation of new administrative units and prioritise consolidation and efficiency within existing institutional structures.
- Establish medium-term expenditure ceilings for operating costs to ensure fiscal discipline and protect allocations for capital investment.

11. Conclusions

This survey represents one of the most extensive citizen budget priority consultation exercises conducted in Fiji's civil society sector. The voices of 1,266 Fijians, drawn from all four divisions, urban and rural communities, both major ethnic groups, and a broad range of ages and livelihoods, have produced a dataset of remarkable clarity and coherence.

The central finding is unambiguous: ordinary Fijians are experiencing acute economic stress, centred on the cost of living, and they want the national budget to respond with concrete, measurable relief. Within this broader economic reality, health emerges as the leading sectoral budget priority. This reflects not only a fundamental expectation tied to the right to healthcare, but also a lived experience of a system that is widely perceived as under-resourced and struggling to meet public needs.

The survey also offers important insight into the current relationship between government and citizens. A majority of respondents do not believe that government spending reflects the needs of ordinary people, and nearly half express low or no confidence that the budget will improve their lives. These are not the views of a disengaged public. They reflect a population that is attentive, aware, and increasingly sceptical, with clear expectations of what government intervention should achieve.

The 2026–2027 national budget offers the government an opportunity to close the gap between citizen expectations and fiscal reality. The evidence from this survey identifies the specific policy areas where that investment would have the greatest impact on the greatest number of Fijian households. Dialogue Fiji urges the Ministry of Finance to give this citizen evidence the weight it deserves in the budget formulation process.

Appendix A: Survey Instrument Summary

The following provides a summary overview of the survey instrument structure. The full instrument ('Dialogue Fiji National Budget 2026–2027 Public Priorities Survey') is available from Dialogue Fiji upon request.

Module	Questions	Content
A — Respondent Profile	Q1–Q5	Division, Area Type, Gender, Ethnicity, Age Group
B — National Issues	Q6	Most important issue facing Fiji today (single select, 13 options)
C — Household Pressures	Q8–Q10	Biggest household challenge; severity; 12-month problems (multi-select)
D — Budget Priorities	Q9–Q13	Top-3 budget priorities; single top priority; spending reflection; beneficiary group
E — Final Questions	Q14–Q15	Open-ended 'one problem to fix'; confidence level

Appendix B: Summary Data Tables

B.1 National Issue Rankings — Full Results

Issue	Count	%
Cost of living	623	49.2%
Crime / drugs	228	18.0%
Unemployment / lack of jobs	122	9.6%
Governance/Corruption	50	3.9%
Poverty / inequality	48	3.8%
Health services	42	3.3%
Roads and infrastructure	34	2.7%
Education costs / quality	32	2.5%
Housing affordability	25	2.0%
Climate change / disasters	23	1.8%
Water supply	20	1.6%
Agriculture support	18	1.4%
Other / Not specified	1	0.1%

B.2 Budget Priority Rankings — Top-3 Full Results

Priority Area	Top-3 Mentions	% of Respondents
Health	604	47.9%
Crime & drug prevention (combined)	483	38.3%
Roads / infrastructure	377	29.9%
Education	361	28.6%

Priority Area	Top-3 Mentions	% of Respondents
Jobs creation (combined)	335	26.5%
Social welfare / poverty (combined)	324	25.7%
Water and sanitation (combined)	210	16.6%
Housing	219	17.4%
Youth development	197	15.6%
Support for small businesses	191	15.1%
Agriculture	187	14.8%
Climate resilience / disaster preparedness	116	9.2%
Public transport	105	8.3%
Municipal services	63	5.0%

B.3 Household Problems Experienced (Past 12 Months)

Problem	Mentions	% of Respondents
Difficulty paying for food and basic items	631	49.8%
Poor road conditions	486	38.4%
Crime or insecurity	410	32.4%
Water supply interruptions	373	29.5%
Job loss or reduced income	350	27.6%
Difficulty accessing health services	293	23.1%
Climate or disaster damage	242	19.1%
Education costs pressure	204	16.1%
None of the above	74	5.8%

Appendix C: Research Team and Acknowledgements

This survey was commissioned and conducted by Dialogue Fiji. The organisation acknowledges with gratitude the contribution of all field enumerators who administered the survey across Fiji's divisions, and of the 1,266 citizens who took the time to share their views.

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