

# Sri Lanka Opinion Tracker Survey

**2024-12**

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## Large majorities of Sri Lankan voters want the government to prioritize spending increases on health and education

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## **About the IHP Sri Lanka Opinion Tracker**

The Institute for Health Policy (IHP) conducts the SLOTS survey to track changes in health and social conditions, and public opinion in the country, on behalf of the Sri Lanka Health and Ageing Study (SLHAS) consortium of Sri Lankan academic and research institutions. IHP is solely responsible for commissioning and designing the survey, and it takes full responsibility for it. IHP is an independent, non-partisan research institution based in Colombo, Sri Lanka. The SLOTS lead investigator is Dr Ravi Rannan-Eliya of IHP, who was trained in public opinion polling at Harvard University, and who has conducted many opinion surveys over three decades.

SLOTS interviews representative samples of Sri Lankan adults every day by telephone to gather their current views and situation. All interviews include a core set of common questions, with additional rotating sets of other questions that examine issues of topical importance. Interviews are done daily by phone by IHP employees, with respondents recruited by a national field survey or by randomly dialling mobile phone numbers. SLOTS fieldwork since 2021 has been supported by a range of funders, who play no role in question design, data analysis, or reporting. SLOTS fieldwork since 2021 has been supported by a range of funders, who play no role in question design, data analysis, or reporting. Past funders have included the Neelan Tiruchelvam Trust, Asia Foundation, European Commission, UK National Institute for Health and Care Research, the Foundation Open Society Institute, and others. Current fieldwork is supported by funding from the Velux Stiftung foundation, New York University Abu Dhabi, and the IHP Public Interest Research Fund. The survey findings and IHP reporting do not necessarily reflect the views or positions of past and present funders. Interested parties can contact IHP for more detailed data and results.

SLOTS respondents consist of a mix of respondents reached by random digit dialling of mobile numbers, and others coming from a national panel of respondents who have agreed to be re-interviewed, and who were previously recruited using random selection. As with any survey, bias can arise from the sampling design and non-response, which means that respondents are not representative of the underlying population. To adjust for this, unless otherwise noted, all reported estimates and analyses use data that have been weighted to ensure that they are representative of the national adult population. This weighting process uses propensity weighting and iterative proportional fitting (raking) to match the national population according to age, gender, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic ranking, education, sector, and geographical location, and where appropriate by voting history. All survey results reflect the views of respondents only at the time the survey was fielded, as indicated in this report.

The survey has an omnibus design, and the Institute welcomes sponsorship to continue the survey, to add new questions, or to undertake tailored analyses of the data. Potential sponsors should contact the Institute for further details.

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# Large majorities of Sri Lankan voters want the government to prioritize spending increases on health and education

As Sri Lankans head to the polls, large majorities of voters want the government to increase spending on health and education according to the latest findings from the Sri Lanka Opinion Tracker Survey (SLOTS).

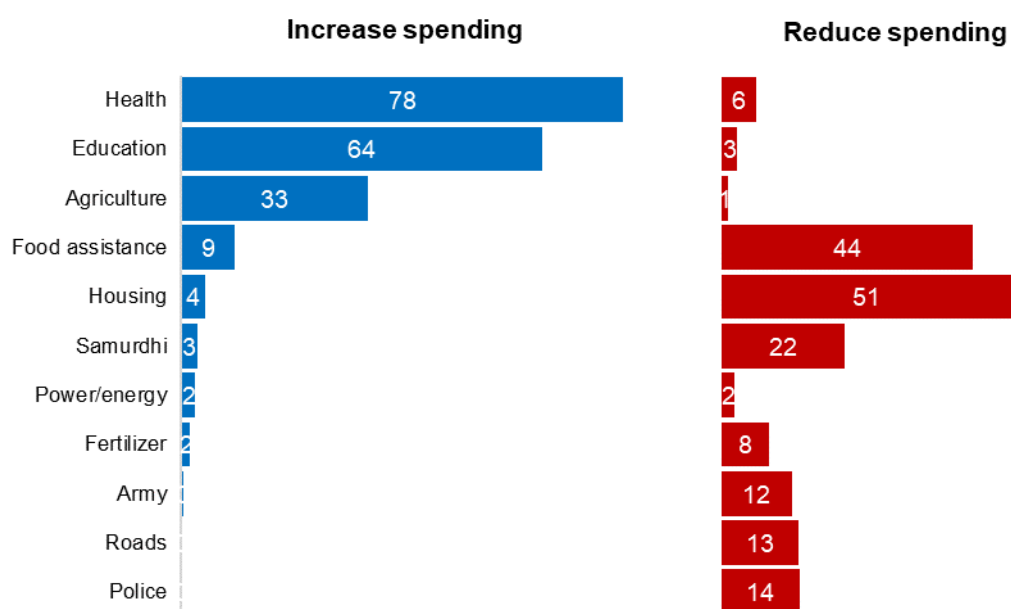
Since September 2022, as the economic crisis forced the government to rethink budget priorities, SLOTS has regularly asked survey respondents to identify their top two priorities for increasing government spending and their top two priorities for cutting government spending.

During 2024, the top priorities for Sri Lankans for increased government spending have consistently been health (78%) and education (64%). These were also the only areas where spending increases were supported by majorities of Sri Lankans, with support cutting across all demographics. Agriculture was the next highest priority for increased spending (33%) followed by food assistance (9%), housing (4%), and Samurdhi/Aswesuma (3%).

Not surprisingly, SLOTS respondents have been more reluctant to identify priorities for cutting spending, and only one spending category obtained majority support for spending reductions, which was housing at 51%. When asked what they would prioritize for spending cuts if government lacks funds, the highest ranked items were housing (51%) and food assistance (44%), followed by Samurdhi/Aswesuma (22%), the police (14%), roads (13%), and the military (12%).

## Priorities to increase or decrease government spending (%), Jan.–Aug. 2024

% who think \_\_\_\_\_ is one of the top two priorities for increasing or cutting government spending



Institute for Health Policy Sri Lanka Opinion Tracker Survey (SLOTS)

Estimates based on 2,320 interviews conducted by SLOTS from Jan. 1, 2024–Aug. 31, 2024, with estimates adjusted for gender, age, ethnicity, education, sector, province, and socioeconomic status. Samurdhi refers to both Samurdhi and Aswesuma. “Don’t know” and “Refused” responses are excluded from the calculations. Complete responses were 2,320 for the question on increased spending, and 1,300 for that on spending cuts.

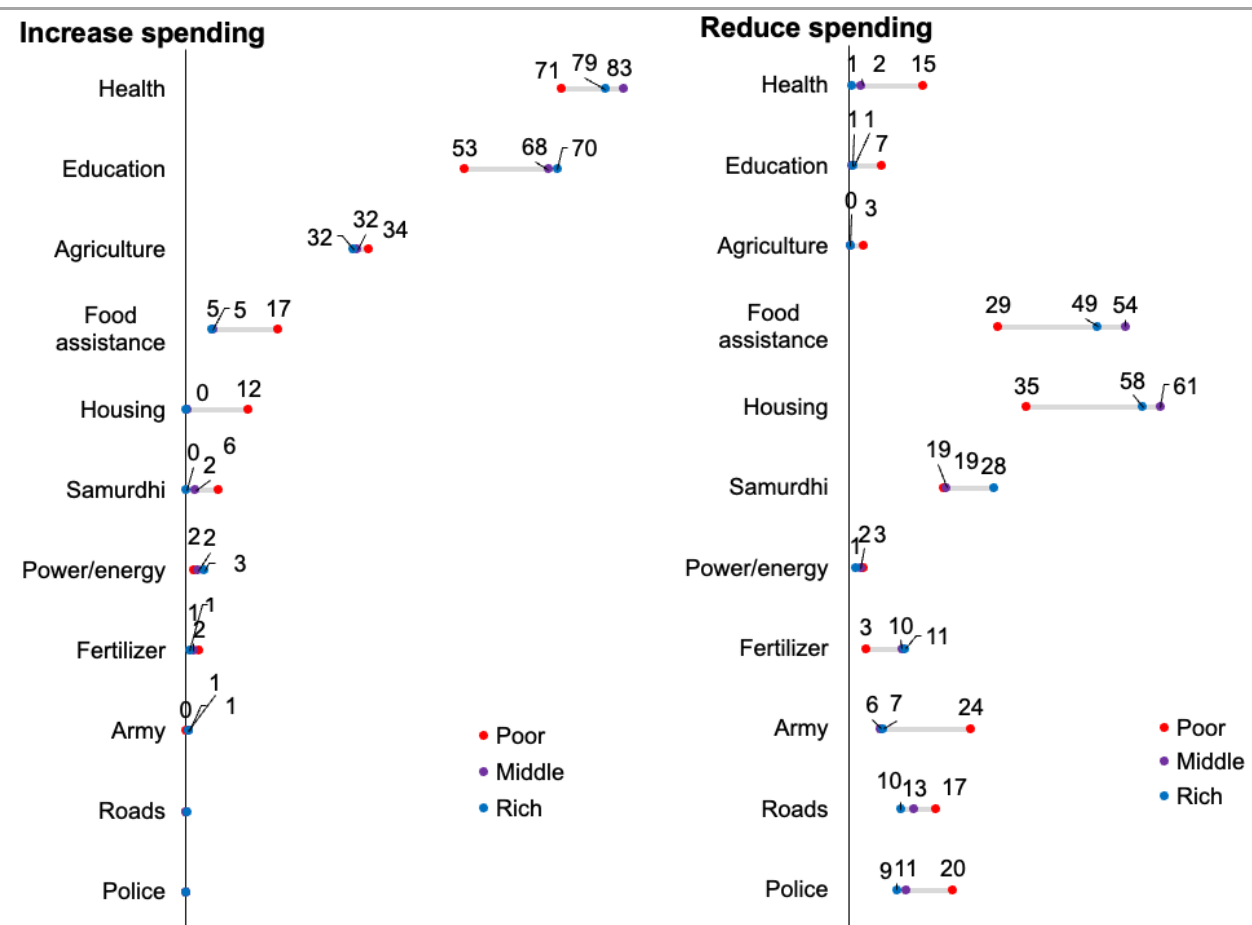
Support for increasing government spending on health and education was widespread and cut across all demographics. Both poor and better-off Sri Lankans rank health (71% vs. 79%) as their top priority for increased spending. The better-off were more likely to prioritize education (70% vs. 53%), but both the poor and the rich agreed on the need to increase spending in these two areas. There were few differences on this by age, but the youth (18–29 years) were more likely to prioritize education spending compared to older adults (60+).

There were clear differences by income level in how Sri Lankans viewed food assistance and Samurdhi/Aswesuma. Increasing spending on food assistance was a higher priority for poor Sri Lankans (17%) than for the better-off (5%). Similarly, one-fourth of the poor (29%) prioritized it for reductions in spending while half of the better-off (49%) support reduced spending. There were similar preferences over Samurdhi/Aswesuma, with the poor much more likely to prioritize it for increases in spending and the better-off much more likely to prioritize it for spending cuts.

There was no support for prioritizing the army or the police for spending increases, and one in eight Sri Lankans prioritize either for reducing spending. However, poor Sri Lankans were more likely to cite the army or police as a priority for cutting spending.

### Priorities to increase or reduce government spending by socioeconomic status (%), Jan.– Aug. 2024

% who think \_\_\_\_ is one of the top two priorities for increasing or cutting government spending

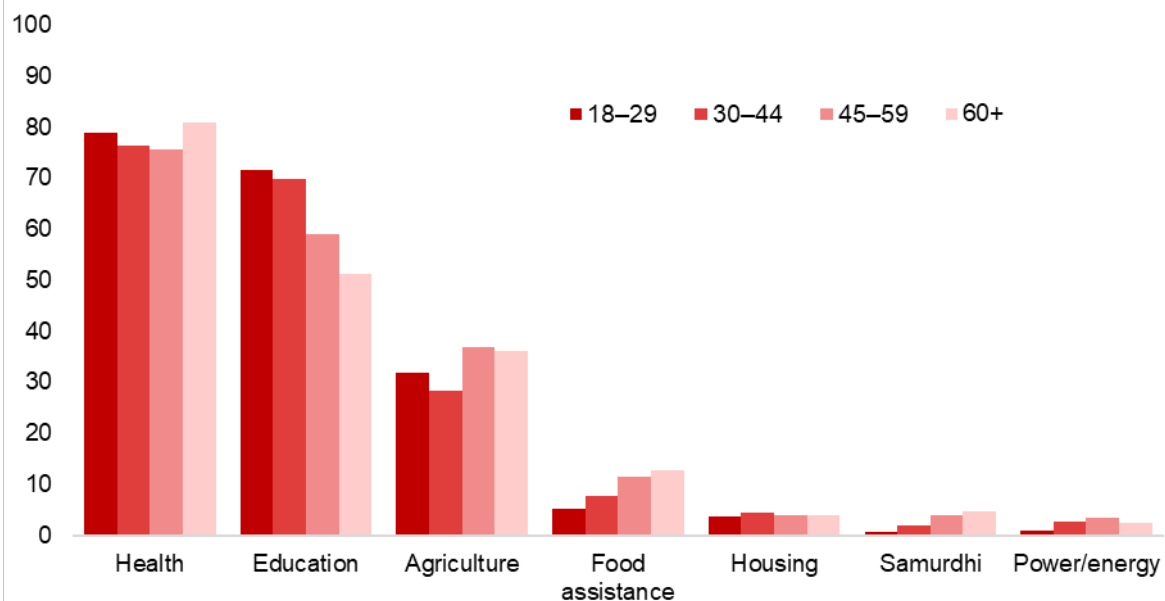


Institute for Health Policy Sri Lanka Opinion Tracker Survey (SLOTS)

Estimates based on 2,320 interviews conducted by SLOTS from Jan. 1, 2024–Aug. 31, 2024, with estimates adjusted for gender, age, ethnicity, education, sector, province, and socioeconomic status. “Poor”, “Middle”, and “Rich” refer to the poorest one third, middle third, and richest third of the population in terms of overall affluence. Samurdhi refers to both Samurdhi and Aswesuma. “Don’t know” and “Refused” responses are excluded from the calculations. Complete responses were 2,320 for the question on increased spending, and 1,300 for that on spending cuts.

## Priorities to increase government spending by age group (%), Jan.–Aug. 2024

% who think \_\_\_\_\_ is one of the top two priorities for increasing government spending



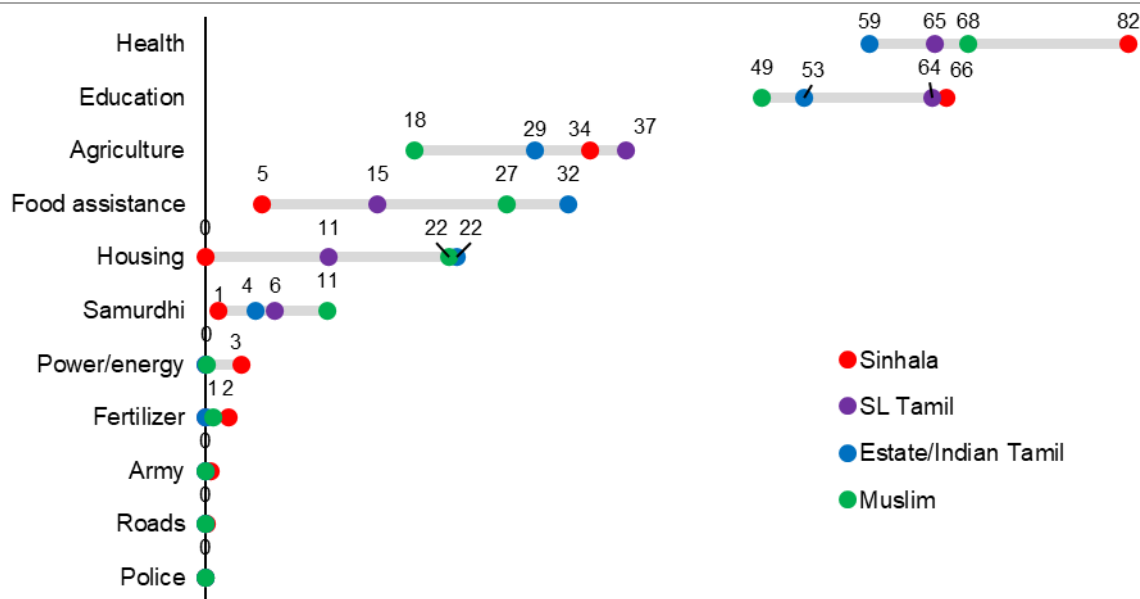
Institute for Health Policy Sri Lanka Opinion Tracker Survey (SLOTS)

Estimates based on 2,320 interviews conducted by SLOTS from Jan. 1, 2024–Aug. 31, 2024, with estimates adjusted for gender, age, ethnicity, education, sector, province, and socioeconomic status. Samurdhi refers to both Samurdhi and Aswesuma. “Don’t know” and “Refused” responses are excluded from the calculations.

There are notable differences in spending priorities among different ethnic groups. Sinhala adults are more likely than other ethnic groups to prioritize health (82%) and education (66%). Meanwhile, Estate/Indian Tamil and Muslim adults tend to prioritize food assistance (Estate 32%, Muslim 27%) and housing (Estate 22%, Muslim 22%) than others.

## Priorities to increase government spending by ethnicity (%), Jan.–Aug. 2024

% who think \_\_\_\_\_ is one of the top two priorities for increasing government spending



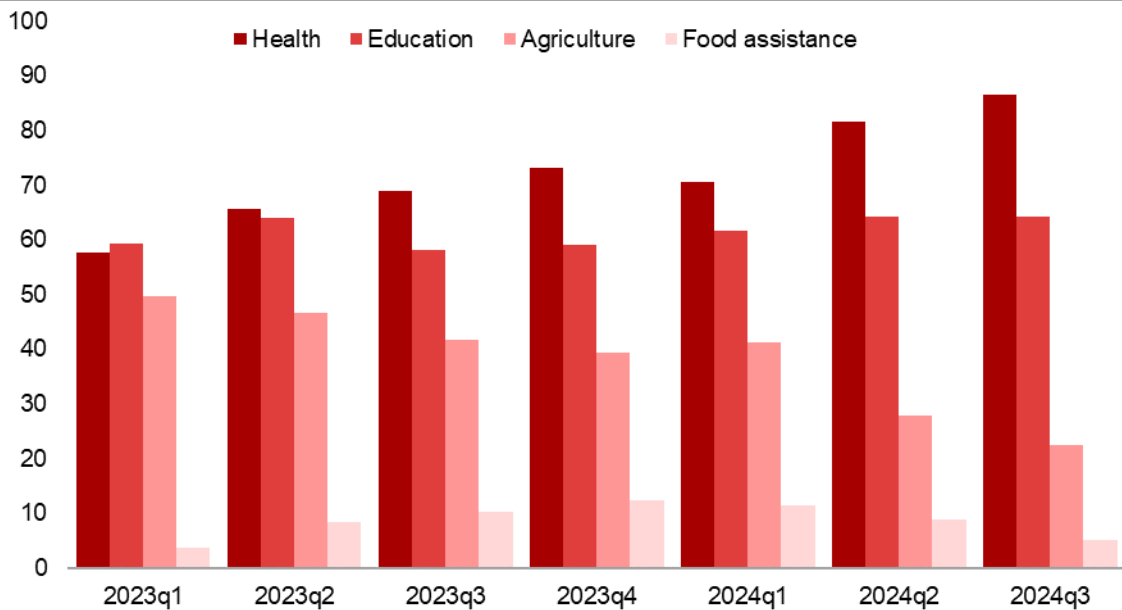
Institute for Health Policy Sri Lanka Opinion Tracker Survey (SLOTS)

Estimates based on 2,320 interviews conducted by SLOTS from Jan. 1, 2024–Aug. 31, 2024, with estimates adjusted for gender, age, ethnicity, education, sector, province, and socioeconomic status. Samurdhi refers to both Samurdhi and Aswesuma. “Don’t know” and “Refused” responses are excluded from the calculations.

Although health and education have consistently remained the top two spending priorities, the percentage of people prioritizing increased spending on health has steadily increased from 58% in 2023Q1, reaching 87% in 2024Q3. This may reflect the worsening impact of shortages of medicines and staffing in the government health sector, combined with the increasing difficulties most Sri Lankans face in paying for private health care as real incomes have fallen. Meanwhile, support for spending increases on agriculture has declined.

### Growing support for increasing health spending (%), 2023 Q1 –2024 Q3

% who think \_\_\_\_\_ is one of the top two priorities for increasing government spending



Institute for Health Policy Sri Lanka Opinion Tracker Survey (SLOTS)

Estimates are based on 7,863 interviews conducted by SLOTS from Jan. 1, 2023–Aug. 31, 2024, with estimates adjusted for gender, age, ethnicity, education, sector, province, and socioeconomic status. “Don’t know” and “Refused” responses are excluded from the calculations.

### Methodology

SLOTS combines data from a national sample of adults (ages 18 and over) reached by random digit dialling of mobile numbers, and others coming from a national panel of respondents who were previously recruited through random selection. All estimates are weighted to be representative of the national population, including characteristics such as age, gender, province, sector, socioeconomic status, ethnicity and education.

## Appendix: Composition of samples

### Composition of samples for Jan.–Aug. 2024

% who think \_\_\_\_\_ is one of the top two priorities for increasing/cutting government spending

		Increase spending			Reduce spending		
		Unweighted	Weighted	%	Unweighted	Weighted	%
<b>Total</b>		2,320	2,320	100.0	1,300	1,300	100.0
<b>Sex</b>	Male	1,167	1,068	46.1	678	580	44.6
	Female	1,153	1,252	53.9	622	720	55.4
<b>Age (years)</b>	18–29	238	484	20.9	121	270	20.8
	30–44	658	764	32.9	373	430	33.1
	45–59	670	583	25.1	375	328	25.2
	60+	754	489	21.1	431	273	21.0
<b>Ethnicity</b>	Sinhala	1,917	1,744	75.2	977	966	74.3
	SL Tamil	248	270	11.6	208	153	11.7
	Estate Tamil	33	89	3.8	25	54	4.1
	Muslim	108	212	9.1	80	125	9.7
	Other	14	5	0.2	10	2	0.1
<b>Province</b>	WP	608	638	27.5	322	353	27.2
	CP	279	287	12.4	156	177	13.6
	SP	358	283	12.2	199	167	12.9
	NP	157	133	5.7	130	75	5.8
	EP	126	205	8.8	92	119	9.1
	NWP	229	225	9.7	117	102	7.9
	NCP	153	159	6.9	83	89	6.9
	Uva	154	150	6.5	80	84	6.4
	Sab	256	241	10.4	121	135	10.3
<b>Sector</b>	Urban	738	454	19.6	412	247	19.0
	Rural	1,582	1,866	80.4	888	1,053	81.0
<b>SES Tertile</b>	Poor	543	793	34.2	351	438	33.7
	Middle	859	836	36.0	481	484	37.2
	Better off	918	692	29.8	468	378	29.1

Note: Weighted columns refer to composition of sample after weighting. Non-responses due to refusals and 'don't knows' are excluded. Non-responses were 3% for the question asking about spending increases, and 45% for the question asking about spending cuts. SES Tertiles refer to the poorest 33%, middle 33%, and richest 33% of the adult population as assessed using an index of assets and other characteristics, which is calibrated to the national population in each month. Rural sector includes respondents living in the estate sector.

## Composition of samples, first quarter of 2023 to fourth quarter of 2023

% who think \_\_\_\_\_ is one of the top two priorities for increasing government spending

		2023q1			2023q2			2023q3			2023q4		
		Unweighted	Weighted	%	Unweighted	Weighted	%	Unweighted	Weighted	%	Unweighted	Weighted	%
<b>Total</b>		1,538	1,538	100.0	1,384	1,384	100.0	1,237	1,237	100.0	1,384	1,384	100.0
<b>Sex</b>	Male	764	729	47.4	729	626	45.2	622	566	45.7	686	671	48.5
	Female	774	809	52.6	655	758	54.8	615	671	54.3	698	713	51.5
<b>Age (years)</b>	18–29	243	353	22.9	129	289	20.9	121	261	21.1	126	285	20.6
	30–44	372	479	31.1	388	440	31.8	335	388	31.4	366	446	32.3
	45–59	396	391	25.4	386	361	26.1	399	328	26.5	386	361	26.1
	60+	527	315	20.5	481	293	21.2	382	260	21.0	506	292	21.1
<b>Ethnicity</b>	Sinhala	1,072	1,161	75.5	1,150	1,055	76.2	954	946	76.4	1,077	1,029	74.3
	SL Tamil	290	172	11.2	149	153	11.0	184	145	11.7	194	163	11.8
	Estate Tamil	38	61	3.9	19	54	3.9	19	47	3.8	23	55	4.0
	Muslim	123	136	8.9	56	118	8.5	73	93	7.5	78	129	9.3
	Other	15	7	0.5	10	4	0.3	7	7	0.5	12	8	0.6
<b>Province</b>	WP	339	421	27.4	350	381	27.5	312	336	27.2	319	398	28.7
	CP	214	203	13.2	179	182	13.1	157	156	12.6	188	188	13.6
	SP	187	185	12.0	232	179	12.9	149	147	11.9	200	179	12.9
	NP	178	88	5.7	75	70	5.1	108	72	5.8	122	81	5.9
	EP	142	133	8.6	77	122	8.8	80	89	7.2	86	114	8.2
	NWP	128	168	10.9	127	162	11.7	117	144	11.7	136	125	9.1
	NCP	111	102	6.7	84	80	5.8	92	85	6.8	104	95	6.9
	Uva	97	93	6.0	96	90	6.5	88	80	6.4	87	88	6.4
	Sab	142	145	9.5	164	119	8.6	134	128	10.4	142	116	8.4
<b>Sector</b>	Urban	488	293	19.1	389	256	18.5	443	232	18.8	463	286	20.7
	Rural	1,050	1,245	80.9	995	1,128	81.5	794	1,005	81.2	921	1,098	79.3
<b>SES Tertile</b>	Poor	528	524	34.1	410	474	34.2	371	425	34.4	440	474	34.3
	Middle	487	523	34.0	456	472	34.1	384	394	31.9	418	468	33.8
	Better off	523	492	32.0	518	438	31.7	482	418	33.8	526	442	32.0

Note: Weighted columns refer to composition of sample after weighting. Non-responses due to refusals and 'don't knows' are excluded. Non-responses were 2%, 1%, 2% and 2% for the question asking about spending increases in 2023q1, 2023q2, 2023q3 and 2023q4 respectively. SES Tertiles refer to the poorest 33%, middle 33%, and richest 33% of the adult population as assessed using an index of assets and other characteristics, which is calibrated to the national population in each month. Rural sector includes respondents living in the estate sector.

## Composition of samples, first quarter of 2024 to third quarter of 2024

% who think \_\_\_\_\_ is one of the top two priorities for increasing government spending

		2024q1			2024q2			2024q3		
		Unweighted	Weighted	%	Unweighted	Weighted	%	Unweighted	Weighted	%
<b>Total</b>		1,099	1,099	100.0	791	791	100.0	430	430	100.0
<b>Sex</b>	Male	552	491	44.7	389	383	48.5	226	193	45.0
	Female	547	608	55.3	402	408	51.5	204	237	55.0
<b>Age (years)</b>	18–29	104	222	20.2	84	169	21.3	50	91	21.1
	30–44	311	354	32.2	241	266	33.6	106	148	34.4
	45–59	330	290	26.4	204	186	23.6	136	101	23.5
	60+	354	232	21.1	262	170	21.5	138	90	21.0
<b>Ethnicity</b>	Sinhala	900	824	75.0	692	612	77.4	325	321	74.7
	SL Tamil	114	129	11.7	61	90	11.4	73	50	11.7
	Estate Tamil	16	46	4.2	13	32	4.0	4	16	3.8
	Muslim	61	97	8.9	20	54	6.9	27	41	9.6
	Other	8	3	0.3	5	3	0.4	1	1	0.2
<b>Province</b>	WP	292	298	27.1	213	219	27.7	103	125	29.0
	CP	145	112	10.2	85	107	13.5	49	57	13.2
	SP	157	138	12.6	135	91	11.5	66	55	12.9
	NP	74	63	5.8	41	46	5.9	42	25	5.8
	EP	66	97	8.8	35	56	7.1	25	39	9.1
	NWP	106	131	11.9	90	79	9.9	33	28	6.5
	NCP	75	75	6.8	51	56	7.0	27	30	6.9
	Uva	69	71	6.5	51	52	6.6	34	27	6.3
	Sab	115	115	10.4	90	84	10.6	51	45	10.4
<b>Sector</b>	Urban	353	203	18.4	241	148	18.6	144	89	20.8
	Rural	746	896	81.6	550	643	81.4	286	341	79.2
<b>SES Tertile</b>	Poor	261	374	34.1	173	260	32.9	109	148	34.3
	Middle	378	401	36.5	320	291	36.8	161	141	32.8
	Better off	460	324	29.5	298	240	30.3	160	141	32.9

Note: Weighted columns refer to composition of sample after weighting. Non-responses due to refusals and 'don't knows' are excluded. Non-responses were 2%, 3% and 3% for the question asking about spending increases in 2024q1, 2024q2 and 2024q3 respectively. SES Tertiles refer to the poorest 33%, middle 33%, and richest 33% of the adult population as assessed using an index of assets and other characteristics, which is calibrated to the national population in each month. Rural sector includes respondents living in the estate sector.