

GALLUP PAKISTAN DATA SYNTHESIS

Dowry in Pakistan

What public opinion data reveals about practice, attitudes, and social pressure

64%

**of married Pakistanis said
dowry was given or received at
their marriage**

Based on Gallup & Gilani Pakistan surveys and Gallup Pakistan archives, 2010–2024



Executive summary

Dowry is less openly defended than before, but remains deeply embedded in lived marriage experience.

64%

married adults report dowry at their own marriage

74%

women report dowry experience, compared with 55% of men

56%

in 2017 said a girl cannot marry without dowry

38%

in 2021 rejected giving/receiving dowry outright

Core reading

Dowry operates not only as an individual preference, but as a perceived social requirement. This helps explain why opposition can rise while the practice persists.

Policy implication

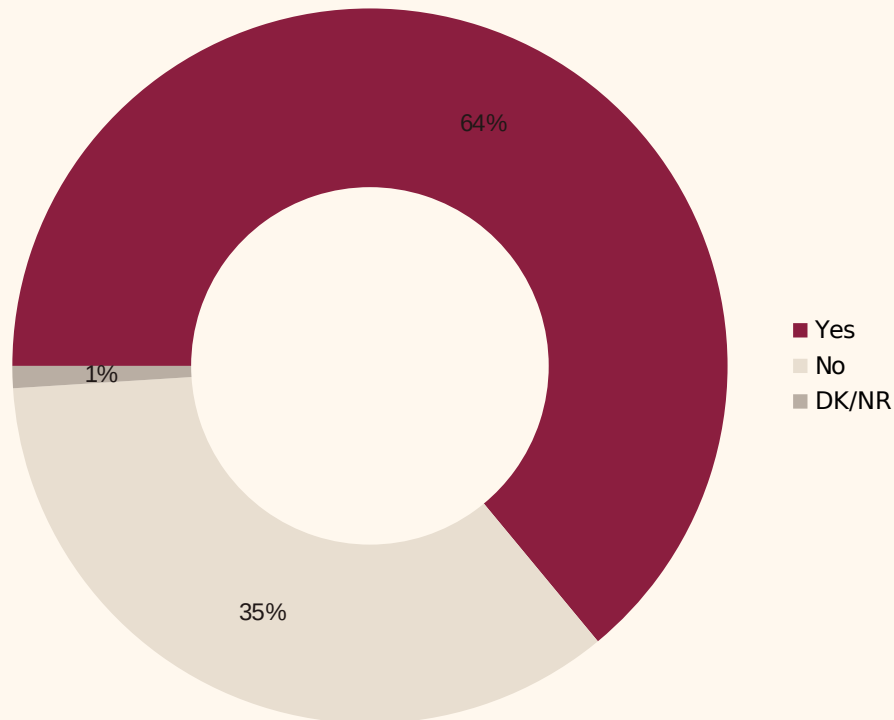
The data points toward social-norm change, marriage cost reduction, women's inheritance rights, and enforcement against coercive demands — rather than awareness campaigns alone.

- There is no meaningful rural-urban divide in 2024 practice: 65% rural vs 63% urban.
- The youngest married adults are not an exception: under-30s report the highest dowry experience at 68%.
- Attitudes softened sharply by 2021: only 20% said “yes” to giving/receiving dowry, but another 33% still said “somewhat.”

The latest finding: dowry remains majority experience

Among married Pakistanis, nearly two in three say dowry was part of their own marriage.

Did you receive or give dowry at the time of your marriage?



Question wording matters

The 2024 question combines giving and receiving dowry. It measures whether dowry was part of the marriage transaction — not whether it was demanded, voluntary, costly, or controlled by the bride.

Methodology

Nationally representative CATI survey of 548 married adults, urban and rural areas of all four provinces, conducted 28 June–10 July 2024; reported margin ± 2 –3 percentage points at 95% confidence.

Bottom line

The finding is best read as a prevalence indicator: dowry has touched most married households, even when many Pakistanis may now object to the custom.

Source: Gallup & Gilani Pakistan, “Press release 18 on Marriage and Social Behavior,” 16 Sep 2024.

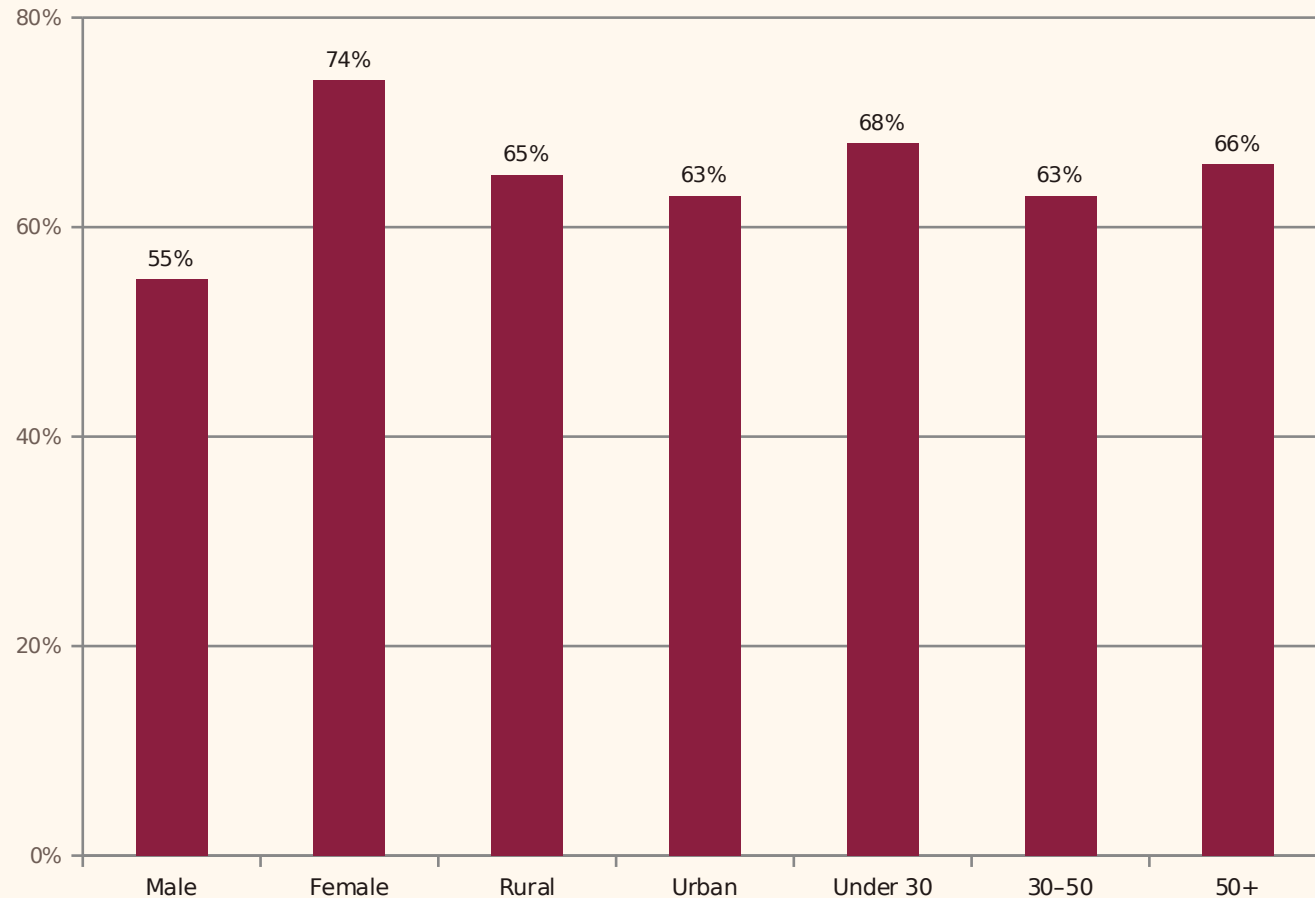
Question: “Did you receive or give dowry at the time of your marriage?”

Dowry in Pakistan | Data report

Who reports dowry in 2024?

Differences exist, but the practice is widespread across gender, residence, and age.

Share saying “Yes” by group



Largest gap: gender

Women report dowry experience 19 points more often than men (74% vs 55%). This may reflect memory, role in the transaction, or how respondents interpret “received/gave”.

Urban/rural difference is tiny

The 2024 finding is not simply a rural story. Rural residents are only 2 points higher than urban residents.

No sign of generational exit

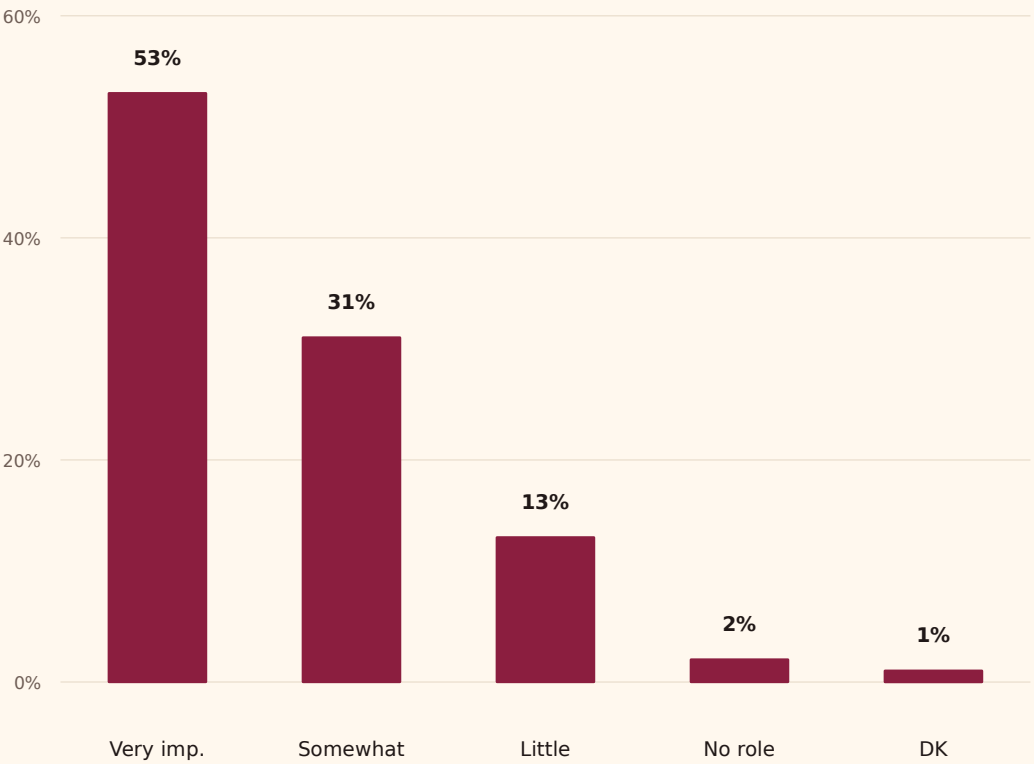
Under-30 married adults are the highest group at 68%, although they form a smaller share of all married adults.

Source: Gallup & Gilani Pakistan, 16 Sep 2024. Group values from published press release charts.

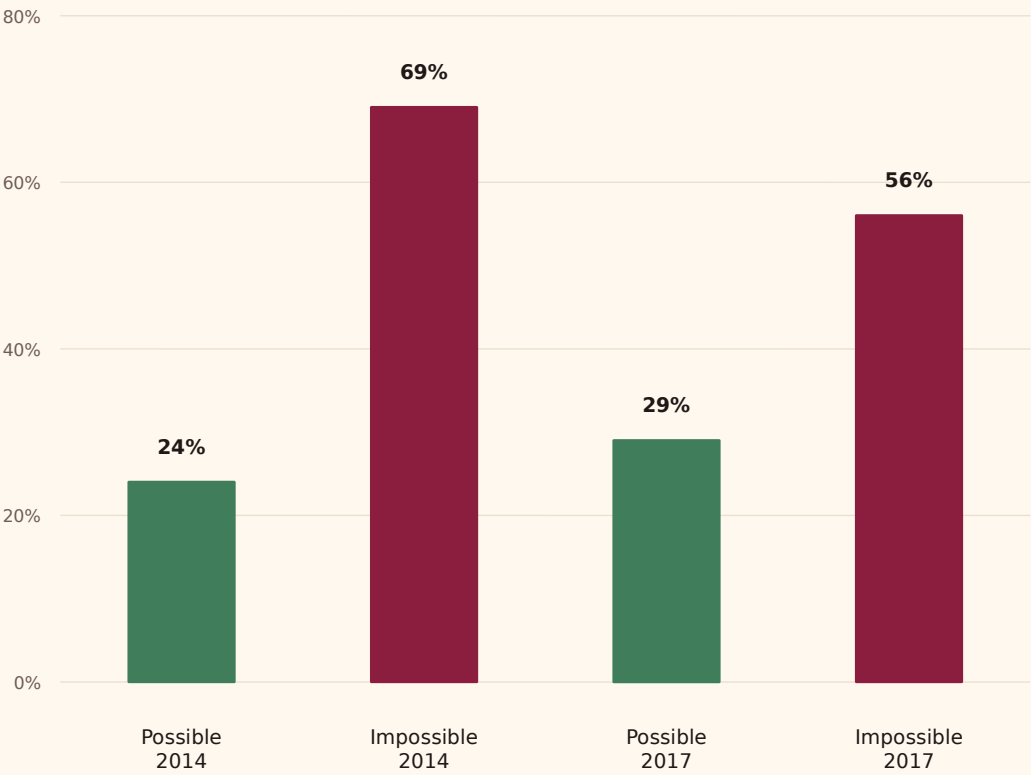
Dowry as a perceived social requirement

Earlier Gallup Pakistan polling suggests the burden is sustained by expectations, not only preference.

How important a part does dowry play in society? (2014)



Possible for a girl to marry without dowry?



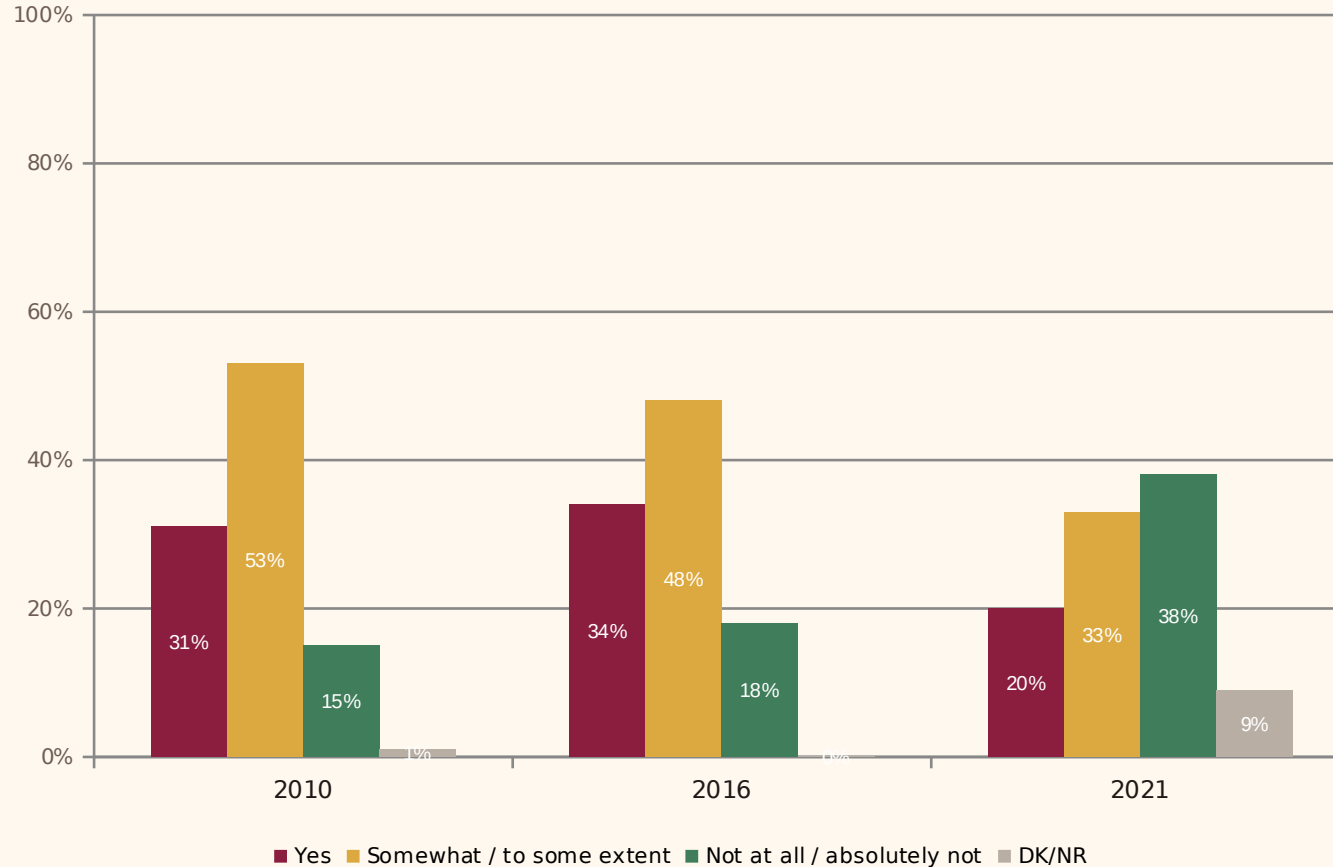
In 2014, 84% said dowry was either very or somewhat important in society. By 2017, “impossible without dowry” fell from 69% to 56% — but remained a majority view.

Sources: Gallup Pakistan / Gilani Research Foundation press releases, 23 Jan 2014 and 17 Jan 2017.

Stated willingness has softened

The most visible shift is not the disappearance of dowry, but a decline in explicit endorsement.

If given a chance, would you like to give/take dowry at your children's wedding?



2010-2016: little movement

The broad pro-dowry share stayed very high: 84% in 2010 and 82% in 2016 when “yes” and “to some extent” are combined.

2021: stronger refusal

By 2021, 38% said “absolutely not,” more than double the 2016 “not at all” share.

But partial acceptance remains

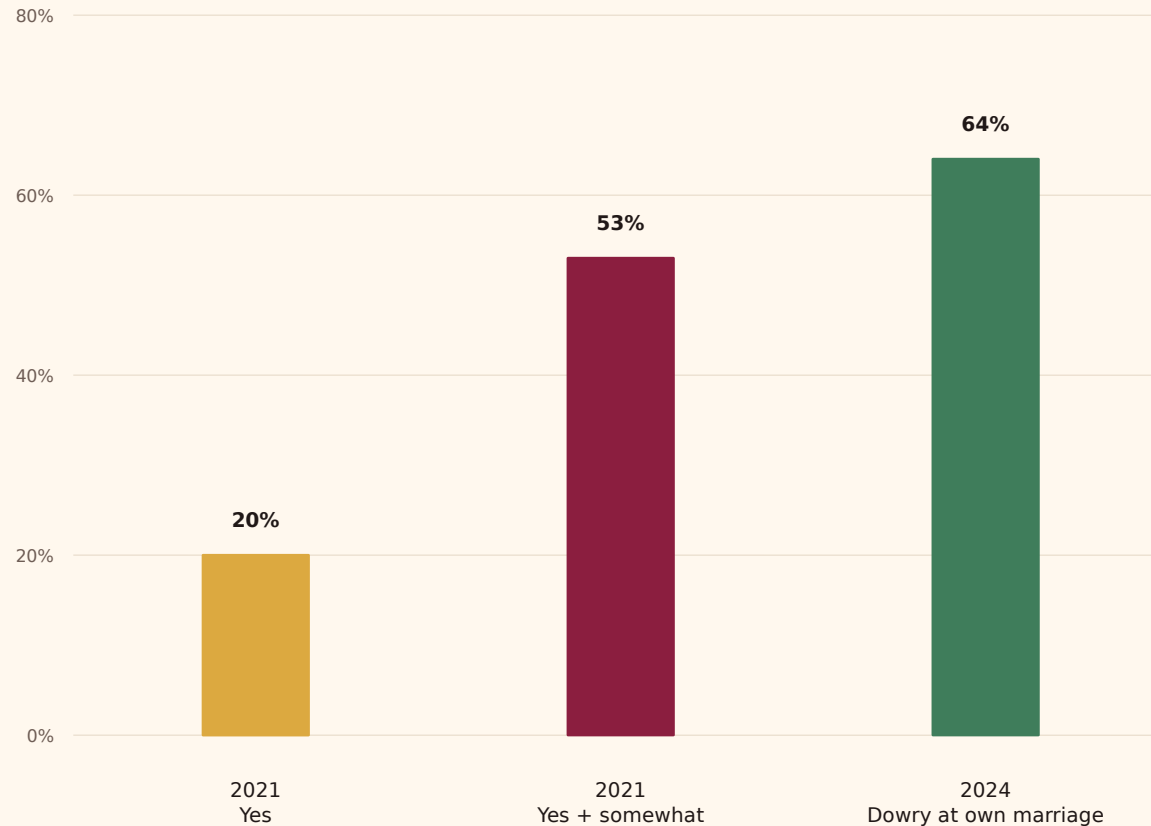
A third still said they would “somewhat” like to give or receive dowry. This is where social pressure lives.

Sources: Gallup Pakistan History Project press release, 31 Jan 2017; Gallup & Gilani Pakistan press release, 16 Feb 2021.

The central paradox: approval falls, experience remains high

Pakistanis may be more uncomfortable with dowry, but families still encounter it in marriage.

Attitudes vs lived practice



Interpretation

- A “not fully approved” custom can remain durable if families see it as necessary for marriageability.
- Social expectations can convert private disagreement into public compliance.
- The burden likely sits at the intersection of reputation, gender norms, and marriage-market competition.

Useful analytic frame

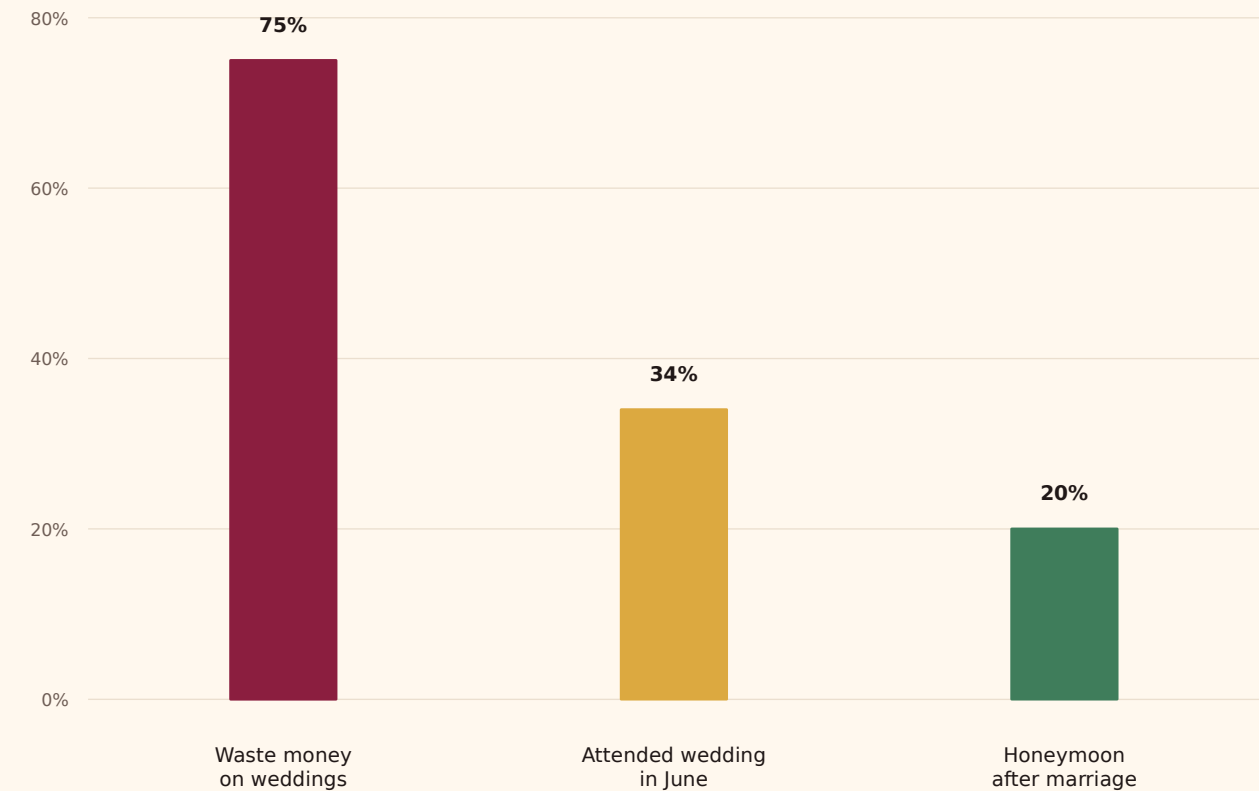
Treat dowry as a social norm problem: people may dislike the practice, but comply because they believe others expect it.

Sources: Gallup & Gilani Pakistan, 16 Feb 2021 and 16 Sep 2024.

Dowry sits inside a broader marriage-cost culture

Gallup Pakistan's 2024 marriage series shows public discomfort with wedding spending.

Related wedding findings from 2024 marriage series



Why this matters

Dowry is often discussed separately from wedding expenses, but public opinion suggests Pakistanis see marriage ceremonies as financially excessive. Cost reduction and norm change reinforce each other.

Sources: Gallup & Gilani Pakistan marriage series, Sep 2024: Press Release 22, 23 and 24.

What the data suggests for reform

The evidence points to four levers: norms, affordability, law, and measurement.

01

Norms

Make refusal socially safe: frame anti-dowry behavior as respectable, not deviant.

02

Affordability

Lower the expected cost of marriage ceremonies and gift exchange.

03

Rights & law

Strengthen enforcement against coercive demands and link the issue to women's inheritance/property rights.

04

Measurement

Track amounts, voluntary vs demanded transfers, and who controls assets after marriage.

Practical conclusion: the numbers do not support treating dowry as a marginal or declining-only issue. They support treating it as a resilient social norm under pressure.

Methodology notes and source trail

Use the data carefully: several questions measure different dimensions of the dowry system.

Topic	Year	Measure	Key values
Dowry at own marriage	2024	Married adults; CATI; n=548	Yes 64%; No 35%; DK/NR 1%
Demographic profile	2024	Same survey	Female 74%; male 55%; rural 65%; urban 63%; under 30 68%
Importance / necessity	2014	National survey; n=2,604	Very/somewhat important 84%; impossible without dowry 69%
Possibility without dowry	2017	National survey	Possible 29%; impossible 56%; DK/NR 15%
Willingness to give/take	2010/2016/2021	National surveys; 2021 n=1,080	Yes+somewhat: 84%, 82%, 53%

Caveats

The 2024 measure does not separate giving from receiving, or voluntary gifts from demanded transfers. Comparisons across years should be interpreted as directional because wording and response categories vary.

Source URLs used

gallup.com.pk/wp/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/16.09.2024.Daily-poll-English.pdf
gallup.com.pk/bb_old_site/Polls/230114.pdf
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