

Gallup Pakistan Analysis of Punjab Development Statistics (50 Years) Recreation



PRESS RELEASE

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Punjab's Cinema Infrastructure Contracts by Nearly 88%: From 369 Cinemas in 1978 to 45 by 2020–21

Islamabad, May 20th, 2026

Cinema infrastructure in Punjab has undergone a profound long-term contraction, transforming from a widespread, high-capacity recreational system into a significantly reduced and more niche sector. Once a dominant form of public entertainment, the cinema industry has experienced sustained decline over five decades, interrupted only by a brief and limited recovery phase in recent years. Analysis of official administrative data reveals that both the number of cinemas and their seating capacity have fallen sharply, pointing to structural shifts in entertainment consumption, urban development patterns, and the broader cultural economy.

What is the Big Data Analysis Series by Gallup?

Gallup Pakistan's Big Data series was initiated by Bilal I. Gilani, Executive Director of Gallup Pakistan. As he explains: *"Pakistan does not suffer from a lack of data, but from limited accessibility and weak translation of numbers into understanding. Gallup Pakistan bridges this gap by analyzing large, often under-used datasets — from PSLM and Labour Force Surveys to Economic Surveys and National Census data — so these statistics can meaningfully inform policy and public discourse."*

What data points this current edition covers:

This edition is based on Table 19.1: Number of Cinemas and Seating Capacity of Cinemas, The Punjab, from the *Punjab Development Statistics for 50 Years (1972–2021)* report.

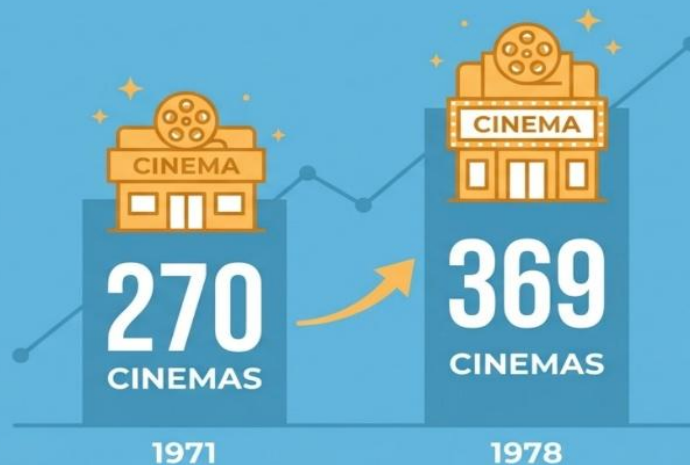
The dataset spans 1971 to 2020–21 and tracks:

- Total number of cinemas across Punjab
- Aggregate seating capacity of cinemas

Together, these indicators provide a long-term perspective on both the scale and accessibility of cinema as a recreational institution, allowing for an assessment of expansion, contraction, and structural transformation over time.

Punjab's Cinema Infrastructure Contracts by Nearly 88%: From 369 Cinemas in 1978 to 45 by 2020–21

Golden Era of Cinema: Expansion and Peak Capacity in the 1970s



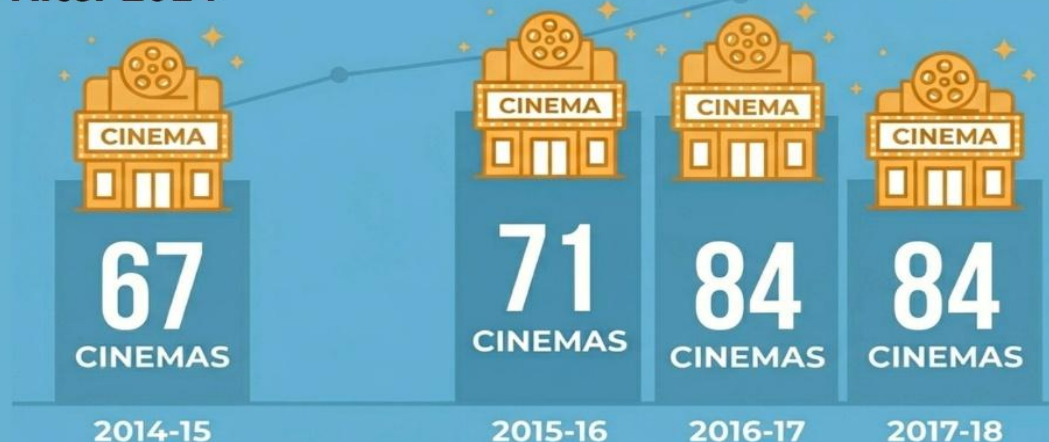
Punjab's cinema sector expanded steadily during the 1970s, with the number of cinemas rising from 270 in 1971 to 369 by 1978, marking the highest level recorded in the dataset. Seating capacity increased alongside this expansion, reaching 212,395 seats in 1978, indicating that growth was not only in the number of venues but also in their scale.

Gradual Decline: Sustained Reduction Through the 1980s and 1990s



Following the late-1970s peak, the number of cinemas began to decline gradually. By 1990, the number had fallen to 340, and continued to decrease to 322 by 1994 and 296 by 1998. Seating capacity also declined over this period, falling from over 200,000 in the early 1980s to 176,494 by 1998.

Partial Revival: Limited Recovery After 2014



Cinema infrastructure shows signs of recovery beginning in 2014–15, when the number of cinemas increased to 67, followed by a further rise to 84 in both 2016–17 and 2017–18. Seating capacity during this period, however, remained significantly lower compared to earlier decades, reaching 24,050 in 2016–17 and 27,857 in 2018–19.

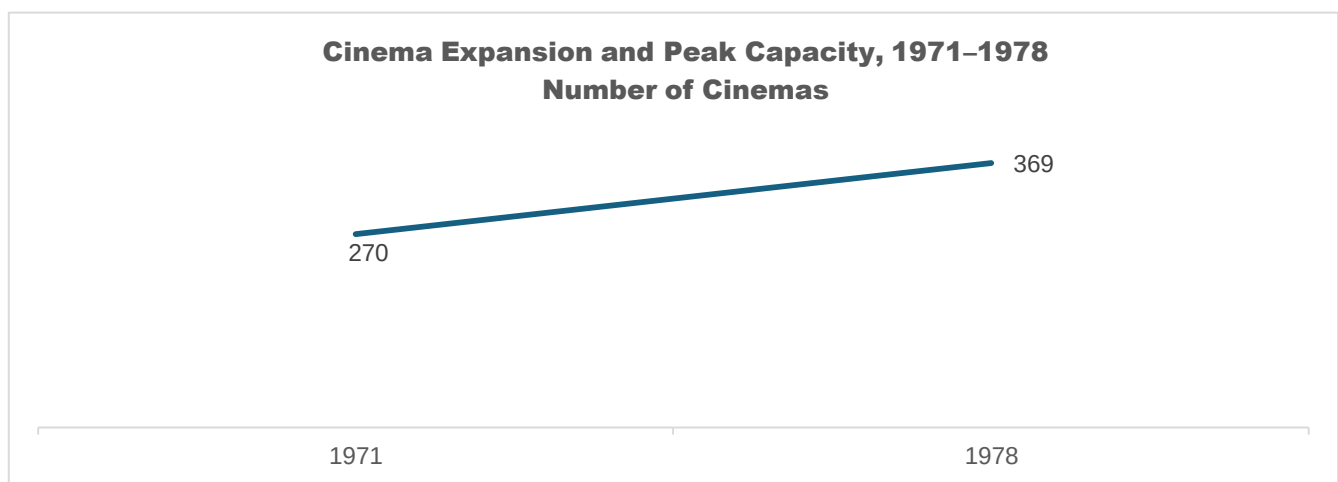
Key Findings:

1. The number of cinemas increased from 270 in 1971 to a peak of 369 in 1978, before entering a long-term decline.
2. By 2020–21, cinemas declined to 45, representing an 87.8% reduction from peak levels.
3. Seating capacity followed a similar pattern, rising to 212,395 in 1978 before declining to 20,755 in 2020–21.
4. The decline was gradual through the 1980s and 1990s, but accelerated in the late 1990s and early 2000s.
5. A temporary recovery between 2014–15 and 2017–18 increased cinemas to 84, but this was not sustained.
6. The long-term trend reflects a shift from large-scale, widely distributed cinema access to smaller and more limited infrastructure.

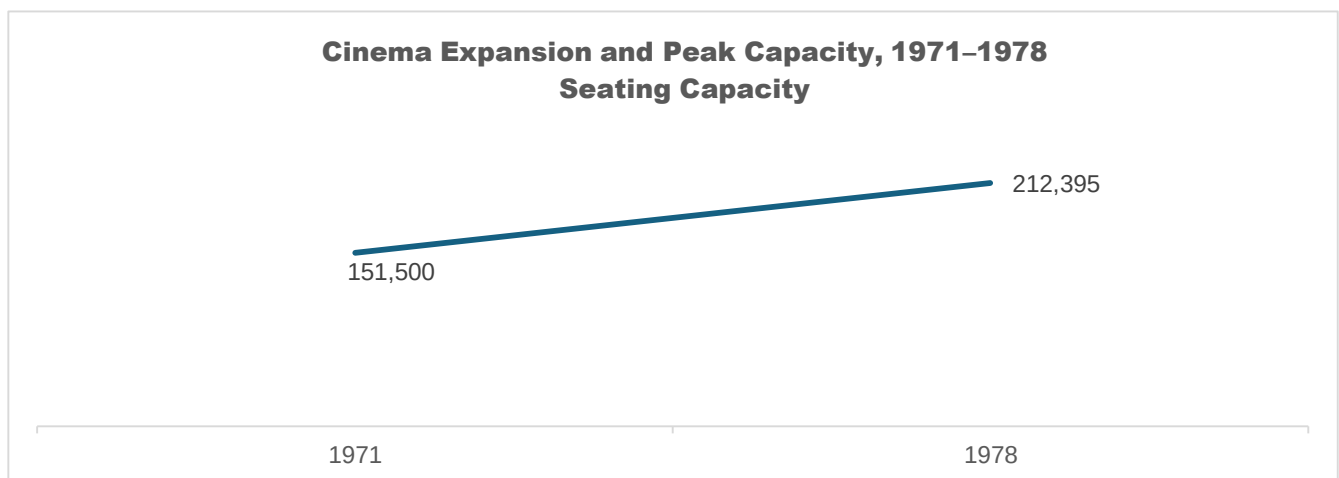
1. Golden Era of Cinema: Expansion and Peak Capacity in the 1970s

Punjab's cinema sector expanded steadily during the 1970s, with the number of cinemas rising from 270 in 1971 to 369 by 1978, marking the highest level recorded in the dataset. Seating capacity increased alongside this expansion, reaching 212,395 seats in 1978, indicating that growth was not only in the number of venues but also in their scale.

The alignment between rising cinema numbers and increasing seating capacity suggests that cinemas during this period were designed to accommodate large audiences, reflecting strong and widespread demand. The scale of infrastructure indicates that cinema functioned as a major and accessible form of public recreation across the province.



Source: Bureau of Statistics, Planning & Development Board, Government of the Punjab — Punjab Development Statistics for 50 Years (1972–2021).

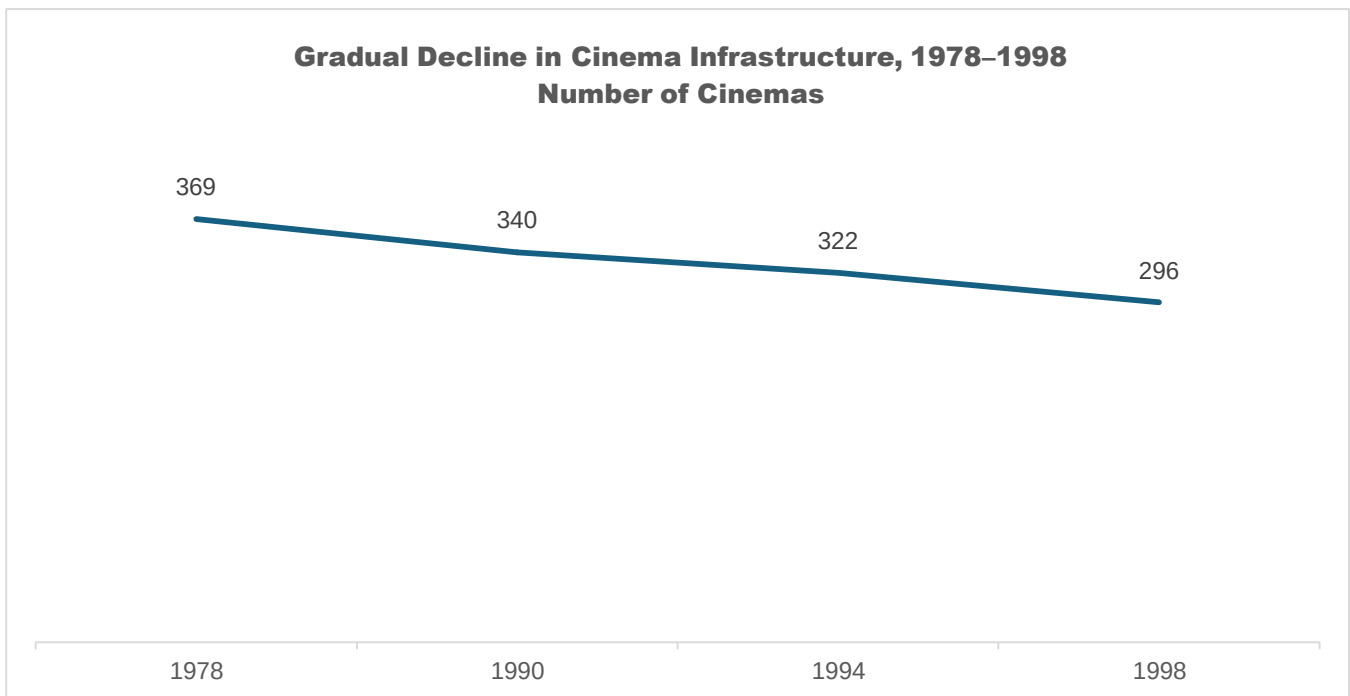


Source: Bureau of Statistics, Planning & Development Board, Government of the Punjab — Punjab Development Statistics for 50 Years (1972–2021).

2. Gradual Decline: Sustained Reduction Through the 1980s and 1990s

Following the late-1970s peak, the number of cinemas began to decline gradually. By 1990, the number had fallen to 340, and continued to decrease to 322 by 1994 and 296 by 1998. Seating capacity also declined over this period, falling from over 200,000 in the early 1980s to 176,494 by 1998.

This phase is characterized by a steady but consistent contraction rather than a sudden drop. The parallel decline in both the number of cinemas and seating capacity indicates that closures were accompanied by a reduction in overall audience capacity, pointing toward weakening demand or changing patterns of use.

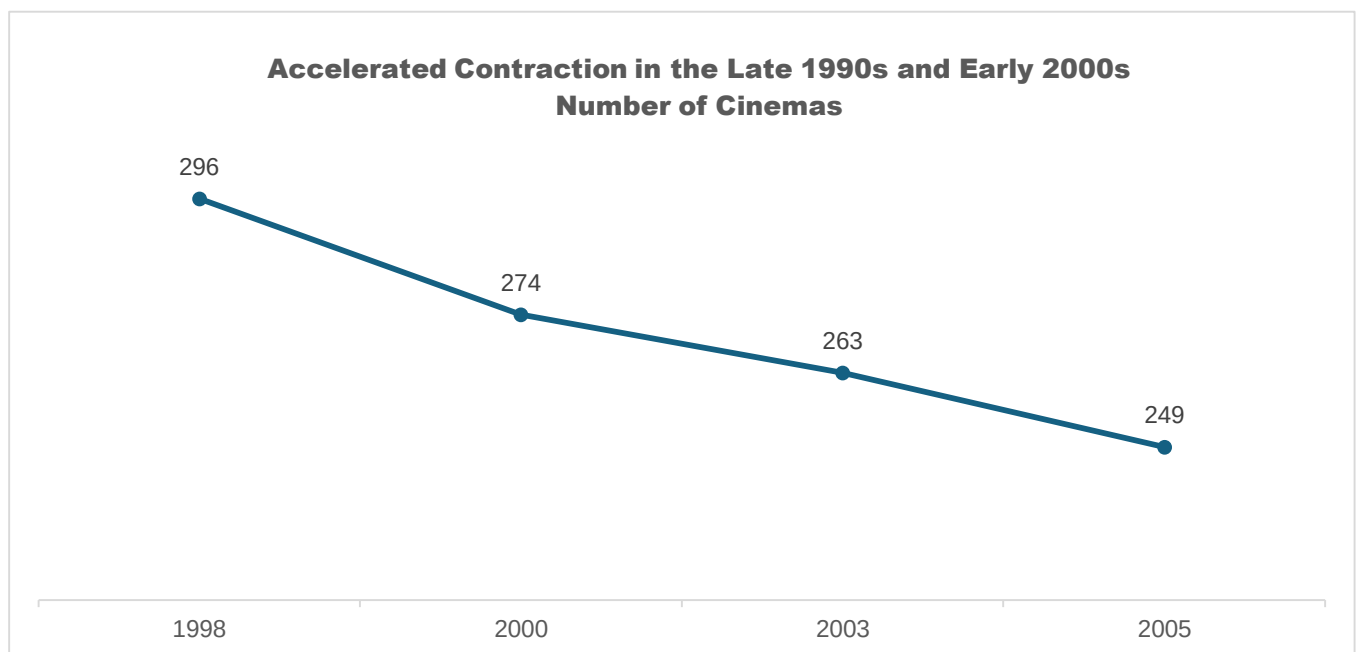


Source: Bureau of Statistics, Planning & Development Board, Government of the Punjab — Punjab Development Statistics for 50 Years (1972–2021).

3. Accelerated Contraction: Sharp Decline in the Late 1990s and Early 2000s

The decline became more pronounced after the late 1990s. By 2005, the number of cinemas had reduced further to 249, while seating capacity declined to 145,445. Compared to earlier decades, this period shows a faster rate of reduction in both indicators.

The sharper contraction suggests a structural shift in the viability of cinema infrastructure. The simultaneous decline in both the number of cinemas and their seating capacity indicates that the sector was not only shrinking in size but also losing its ability to sustain large-scale audience engagement.



Source: Bureau of Statistics, Planning & Development Board, Government of the Punjab — Punjab Development Statistics for 50 Years (1972–2021).

4. Discontinuity in Data: Absence of Recorded Cinema Infrastructure (2006–2013)

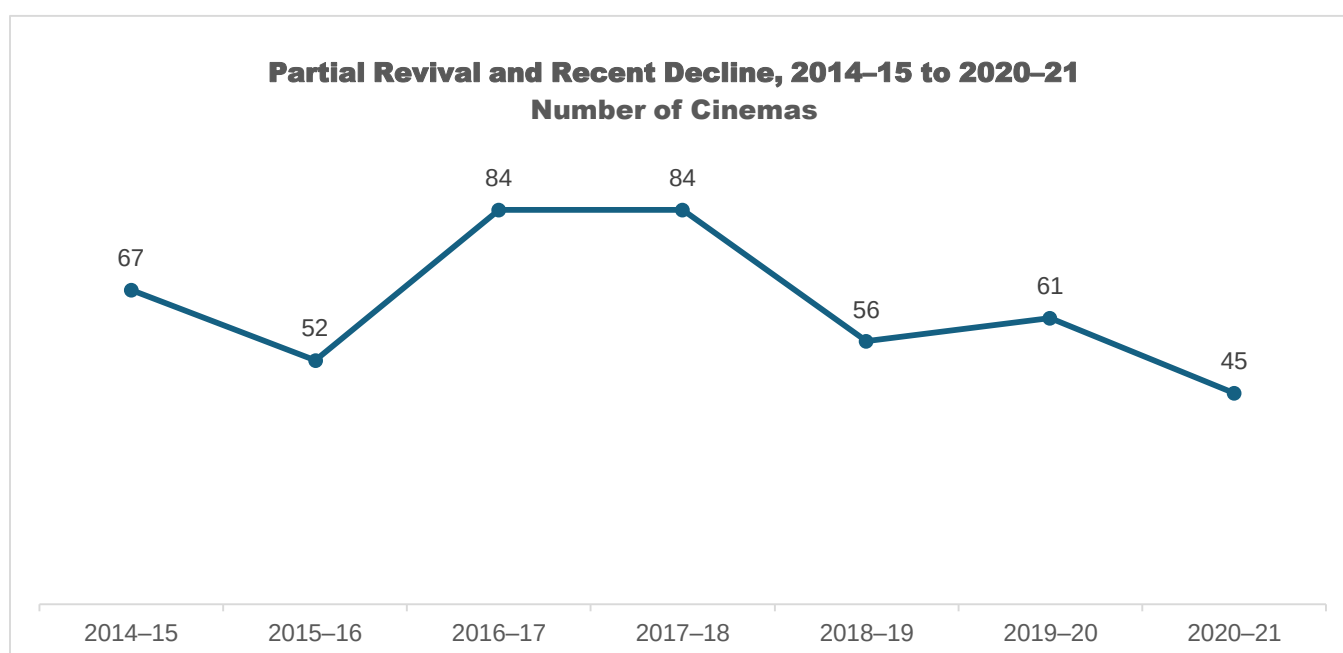
The dataset shows a complete absence of reported data between 2006–07 and 2013–14, indicating a period where cinema infrastructure was either significantly reduced or not formally recorded. This gap represents a critical break in the continuity of the series.

The absence of data suggests that the sector may have reached its lowest point during this period, with limited operational cinemas and reduced institutional tracking. This phase highlights the depth of decline, distinguishing it from earlier periods where the contraction was gradual but still measurable.

5. Partial Revival: Limited Recovery After 2014

Cinema infrastructure shows signs of recovery beginning in 2014–15, when the number of cinemas increased to 67, followed by a further rise to 84 in both 2016–17 and 2017–18. Seating capacity during this period, however, remained significantly lower compared to earlier decades, reaching 24,050 in 2016–17 and 27,857 in 2018–19.

This indicates that while the number of cinemas increased, the scale of infrastructure did not return to previous levels. The recovery appears limited in both magnitude and duration. By 2020–21, the number of cinemas declined again to 45, with seating capacity at 20,755, confirming that the revival was not sustained.

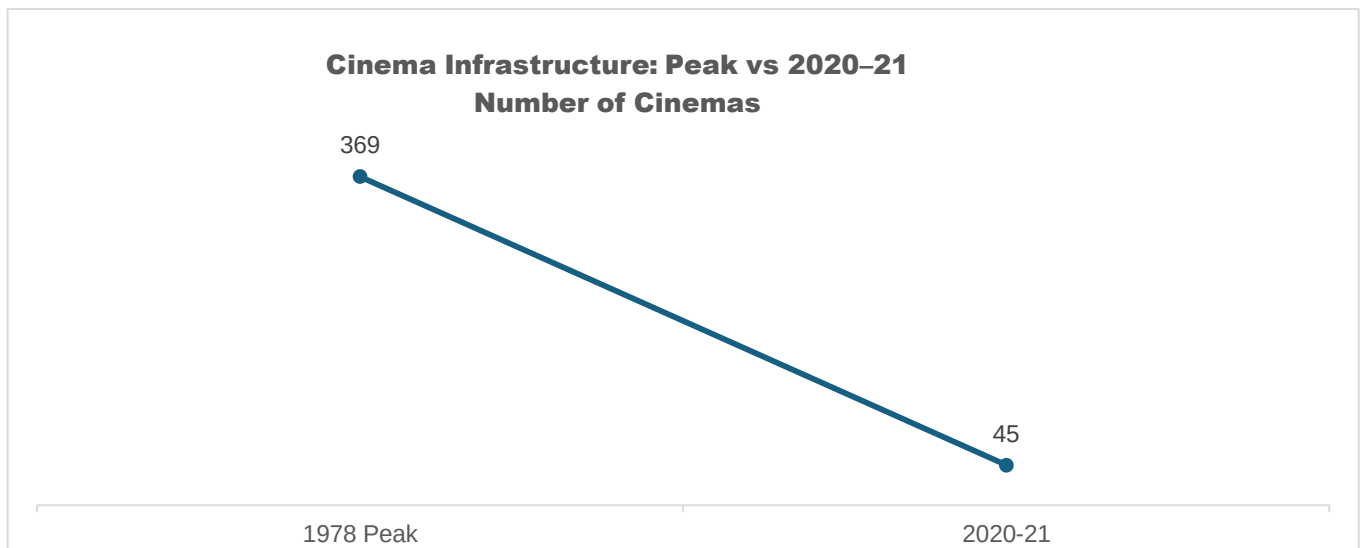


Source: Bureau of Statistics, Planning & Development Board, Government of the Punjab — Punjab Development Statistics for 50 Years (1972–2021).

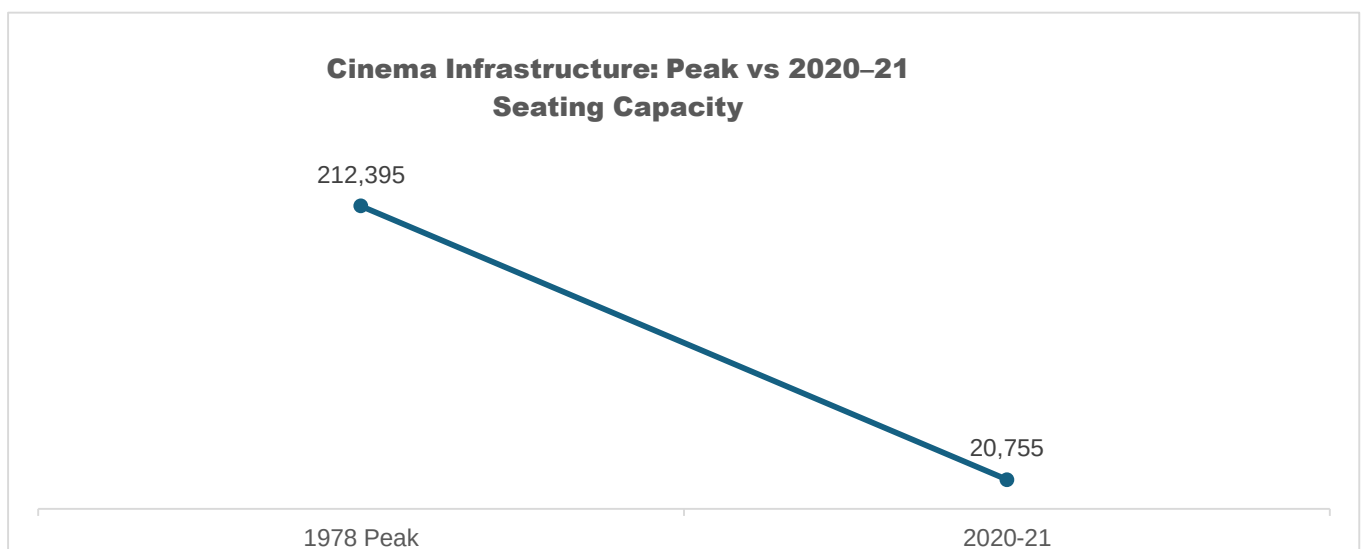
6. Structural Shift: From High-Capacity Infrastructure to Reduced Scale

Over the full period, the cinema sector in Punjab has shifted from a high-capacity system to a much smaller-scale structure. The decline from 369 cinemas and over 212,000 seats in 1978 to 45 cinemas and 20,755 seats in 2020–21 reflects a significant contraction in both availability and capacity.

The consistent alignment between the decline in cinema numbers and seating capacity indicates that the reduction has been systemic rather than isolated. The sector now operates at a fraction of its historical scale, reflecting a fundamental change in the structure of recreational infrastructure.



Source: Bureau of Statistics, Planning & Development Board, Government of the Punjab — Punjab Development Statistics for 50 Years (1972–2021).



Source: Bureau of Statistics, Planning & Development Board, Government of the Punjab — Punjab Development Statistics for 50 Years (1972–2021).



Wish to Contribute to Gallup Big Data Analysis?

Gallup Pakistan is looking for collaboration with researchers to expand the Big Data Analysis project. If you have any ideas, please write to Bilal I Gilani, Project Director, Big Data Analysis at Gallup Pakistan.

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