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# Population Phenomenon

By Steve H. Murdock

**W**hile urban centers such as Houston, Dallas, Austin and San Antonio account for a majority of the state's numerical population growth, it is important to realize there are areas of Texas growing even more rapidly. These areas are becoming major urban conglomerations with a growing share of the state's goods and services market, including real estate. Among the growth corridors is one in South Texas, which includes Brownsville-Harlingen-San Benito, Laredo and McAllen-Edinburg-Mission.

The three South Texas metropolitan areas and their connecting counties now represent a major portion of the state's population. According to U.S. Census Bureau estimates, Laredo's July 1, 1997, population was more than 183,200; Brownsville-Harlingen-San Benito was 320,800; and McAllen-Edinburg-Mission was nearly 511,000. If the Starr and Zapata counties populations, which separate Laredo from the other two areas, are included, the combined area had an estimated 1997 population of almost 1,081,800. This population was slightly larger than the Austin-San Marcos area.

South Texas also is showing phenomenal growth rates. According to census estimates, in percentage terms Laredo was the fastest-growing Texas metropolitan area from 1990 to 1997, recording a 37.5 percent increase (nearly 50,000 persons); McAllen-Edinburg-Mission was second with a 33.2 percent increase (almost 127,400); and Brownsville-Harlingen-San Benito was the fourth fastest growing with an increase of 23.3 percent (nearly 60,700). Only Austin-San Marcos, which increased by 26.7 percent (some 224,800), recorded similar growth. Together these three areas grew more than 238,000 in seven years; equivalent to 9.7 percent of the state's total growth during that period.

## Home to One in Ten New Texans

**These areas accounted** for 4.5 percent of the state's 1990 population. In conjunction with Starr and Zapata counties, the total area increased by 30.9 percent from 1990 to 1997. The total population increase of nearly 255,100 or 10.4 percent

of Texas' total 1990-97 increase. The area has received one of every ten new Texans in the 1990s.

Equally important is the anticipated continuation of growth. According to projections from the Texas State Data Center in the Department of Rural Sociology at Texas A&M University, if the 1990-96 change rates continue, the total area (including Starr and Zapata counties) will have a population of more than 1.7 million by 2010 and nearly 3.5 million by 2030. This is a 1990-2030 growth rate of more than 323 percent. During the

same time, Texas is projected to increase roughly 99 percent as a whole. If this occurs, by 2030 South Texas will have approximately 10 percent of the state's estimated population of 33.8 million.

Although Texas State Data Center officials believe long-run growth will be more modest, the area will still likely increase by more than 221 percent from 1990 to 2030. If this happens, South Texas will have nearly 2.7 million persons by 2030, 8 percent of the state's total population.



*In percentage terms, Laredo was the fastest-growing Texas metropolitan area from 1990 to 1997 with a 37.5 percent increase.*

## A 391 Percent Population Increase

Component metropolitan areas in the region also could be independent growth centers. Under the projection that assumes levels of migration similar to 1990-96, Laredo would increase to nearly 655,000 persons by 2030, a growth rate of 391 percent since 1990; Brownsville would have nearly 785,000 (a 202 percent increase); and McAllen-Edinburg-Mission would increase 397 percent to 1.9 million.

Under a variety of circumstances, these areas are likely to represent expanding markets for goods and services, but a couple of caveats must be noted. Growth through domestic migration is the key to most rapid-expansion markets. When the total 1990-97 population growth in this area (including Starr and Zapata counties) is examined, only 6.6 percent of the area's growth resulted from domestic immigration, 59.8 percent was from natural increase and 33.6 percent from international immigration. Thus, this area's domestic migration rate was roughly one-third of that for the state while its international immigration rate was roughly one-third higher. Natural increase was only slightly more than the 56 percent for the state.



Nearly 2.7 million will call South Texas home by 2030.

If this growth mixture continues, these real estate markets are likely to be based largely on indigenous population growth rather than rapid expansion through migration. Coupled with economic data for the area which show generally limited income levels, area real estate specialists should plan carefully to address market growth. If income levels increase

significantly in the future, this area will represent one of the most rapidly expanding markets in Texas and the nation. ☐

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