



### The Housing Assistance Council (HAC)

is a national nonprofit organization that supports affordable housing efforts in rural areas of the United States. HAC provides loans, grants, training, technical assistance, and research and information services. HAC is an equal opportunity lender.

For more information about rural housing, visit HAC online.

[www.ruralhome.org](http://www.ruralhome.org)

## Housing in the Border Colonias

The border colonias region consists of the area within 150 miles of the U.S.-Mexico border, and is characterized by poor living conditions and lack of access to many vital services such as potable water, sewage, electricity, and decent housing. The colonias are found in southern portions of California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas.



### History

Border colonias developed mainly as the result of irresponsible land sale practices, in which parcels of land without adequate infrastructure access were sold to low-income individuals eager for homeownership. Development of colonias has recently slowed or stopped as states exercised the power to regulate the subdivision of land.

Another important element of colonia development is the system of contract-for-deed, under which a developer will maintain ownership of a property while the land purchaser makes payments. If the purchaser misses even one payment, the developer can foreclose, invoking the loss of all prior investment into the property.

### Population

The total population within the border colonias region is 5.6 million, making up 1.9% of the U.S. population. Of the region's total population, nearly one-third (1.7 million) live in small towns or other rural areas.

Hispanics make up a majority of the border population, at 61.8 percent, compared to a 15.1 percent Hispanic population across the U.S. as a whole. Approximately 14.7 percent of border rural residents were foreign-born, compared to 5.0 percent of rural residents across the nation overall.

Educational attainment within the border region is lower than the national average. Across the U.S. as a whole, 84.6 percent of adults are high-school graduates, whereas less than 75 percent of adults within the rural border region are high-school graduates.

The colonia region also contains a higher concentration of youth and elderly individuals than the U.S. overall.

### Economic Characteristics

Poverty and lack of economic opportunity characterize much of the border region. The region faces an overall poverty rate of 23.8 percent, and a rate of 20.7 percent in rural border communities.

Nationally, 13.5 percent of the overall population falls beneath the poverty level,



and 16.1 percent of the rural population is in poverty. Poverty is almost twice this level for Hispanics in the border region.

More than a quarter of border households make less than \$20,000 annually, while only 18.4 percent of households nationwide earn under that amount. Additionally, just over six percent of border households make more than \$100,000 a year, while 20.3 percent of households in the U.S. make over this amount.

Use of government income assistance is higher within the border region than across the U.S. as a whole. More than one-third of border residents receive Social Security payments, while 14.5 percent receive food stamps, and 5.6 percent receive Supplementary Security Income.

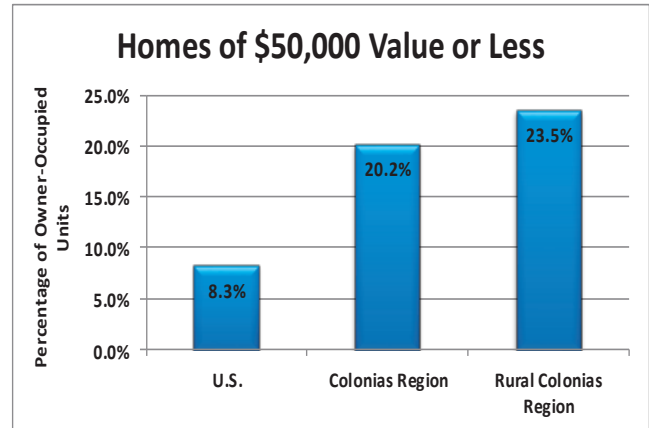
### Housing Characteristics

Homeownership rates in the border region are nearly identical to national rates, with 67.7 percent of occupied housing units in the border region being owner-occupied, and rates of 72.7 percent homeownership within border rural areas.

However, despite these rates of homeownership, the border region shows significant signs of housing distress. The home vacancy rates within the rural border area are at 12.0 percent overall, compared to an 8.4 percent national rate.

Housing prices also reflect a troubled housing environment. Nearly one-quarter of homes within the rural colonias region are valued at \$50,000 or less, compared to 8.3 percent of homes below this price nationwide.

Rates of cost burden are similar across the rural colonia region and rural America as a whole. In rural America 24.2 percent of owner-occupied housing units are cost burdened, while 23.0 percent of these units are cost burdened in the rural colonia area.

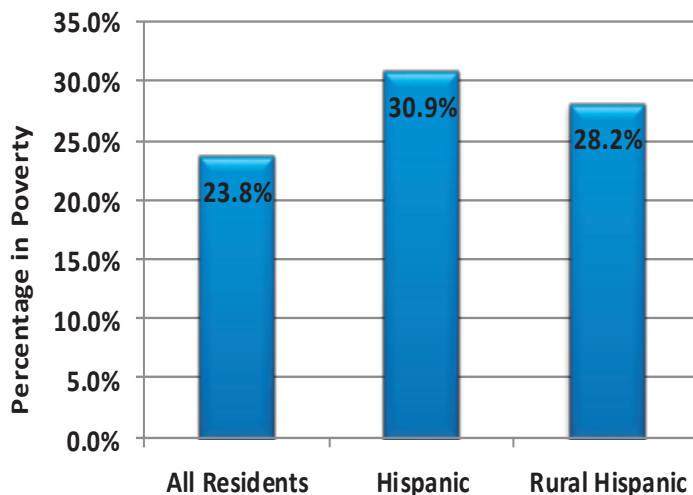


In the border region, over 19,000 units lack complete plumbing facilities and another 19,000 lack complete kitchen facilities, a higher proportion, comparatively, than units nationally. Housing in the border area is often located within flood plains or near desert streams, leading to problems of flooding and flooding-related health issues.

Housing units within the colonia region are much more likely to have been built post-1960 than housing units nationally. However, 19.2 percent of housing in rural border areas are mobile homes, compared to 14.4 percent of rural homes nationally.

Border region households experience crowding at higher rates than the rest of the nation. While 3.0 percent of homes are crowded nationwide, 4.9 percent of rural border housing units are crowded.

### Poverty Rate Within the Colonias Region



### Additional Information

For more information about the border colonias region, see *Taking Stock: Rural People, Poverty, and Housing at the Turn of the 21st Century* and Winter 2009-10 *Rural Voices* issue: *Building a Brighter Future in the Colonias* located at [www.ruralhome.org](http://www.ruralhome.org).

\*Information within this fact sheet comes from HAC tabulations of 2005-09 American Community Survey (ACS) data. This analysis reflects data from all census tracts within 150 miles of the U.S.– Mexico Border, which includes colonia communities in each state.