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# 7 People Left Loving County, Texas Last Year

That was almost 11% of the entire population (\*Includes Fun Facts!)



Located in the heart of the Permian Basin, there are only three industries in Loving County: ranching, oil and gas, and politics. Map by Shutterstock. Photo by [Polina Portnaya](#) on [Unsplash](#).





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There also seems to be some disagreement regarding how many counties there are in the U.S. I'm looking at a Google page right now. One entry says there are 3,006, one says 3,071, and another says 3,143.

In all fairness, there could be some confusion. After all, there are boroughs (New York) and parishes (Louisiana). Alaska has census areas, cities, and boroughs. Baltimore (city) and St. Louis (city) are kind of like counties. Virginia has 41 cities that are independent of counties. Delaware has only three counties, and Rhode Island and Connecticut don't have any.

But once again, Texas has to have the most. Yes-siree, count 'em, 254 of 'em.

However, it doesn't contain the largest county by land size.

That honor goes to San Bernardino County, California. California also claims the most populous county (Los Angeles) with nearly ten million residents.

The smallest county is Kalawao County, Hawaii. On the north side of Molokai, it was the area that held the former "leper" colony (now known as Hansen's disease). But no new residents can move there. That also makes it one of the least-populated counties in the country, with just 90 residents. Once those leave or die, the population will decline to 0.

### **Loving County, Texas**

Some things in Texas aren't so big. Why does Loving County even exist? According to the U.S. Census Bureau, with a population of 57, it is the least populous in the lower 48. In the 2020 census, the count was 64. So the seven that left in 2021 represented 11% of the population! There are just 0.1 people per square mile in the county.

Even smaller is the county seat of Mentone, which is Loving's only town. It has grown from 19 people in 2010 to 29 in 2019. Things must be getting a little congested there.

Does having two jurisdictions for 57 people make sense? Why don't they merge with an adjacent county?



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as a county in 1931.



Pumpjacks are often used to replace oil derricks when the easy-to-get-to oil has been tapped out. They can produce residual oil for years from the same hole—photo by [pan demin](#) on Shutterstock.

Located in West Texas, Loving County is bordered by two New Mexico counties on the North and the Pecos River on the West. The Texas counties of Winkler, Ward, and Reeves lie to the East and South.

Here are some other fun facts about Loving County!

- The median household income was \$83,750 in 2020, up from \$40,000 in 2000. This speaks of how vital the reopening of oil and gas drilling in the Permian Basin has been to the residents' pocketbooks.
- Loving has so little vegetation that it takes 120 acres to support one cow.



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- They last voted for a Democratic presidential candidate (LBJ, of course) in 1964.
- The economy comprises oil and gas drilling, ranching, and county services (which include elected representatives).
- The county is 94.7% white.
- Internet saturation: 100% (where available!)
- Percentage who have a bachelor's degree or higher (persons over 25): 0.

## Politics

What's to do but bicker about politics, and the clans that have run this unfortunate county for decades?

*"Voter turnout is always a hundred percent, sometimes more."* ~McKinley Hopper, former justice of the peace for the county.

Sounds a bit like Chicago to me.

But in Texas, because of the domicile law, people who don't live or work in a county can still vote there if they own a piece of land.

Three prominent families compose most of the population: the Hoppers, the Creagers, and the Joneses. Competition for elected positions among them is said to be fierce.

For instance, a few years ago, Don Creager was the county judge, his brother Royce a county commissioner, his step-daughter the postmaster, and his son-in-law was the sheriff and the tax assessor.

## Little Earthquakes

What's got the county shaking these days, of all things, is earthquakes.

There were 209 that measured a magnitude of 3.0 or higher in 2021, according to the Bureau of Economic Geology at the University of Texas at Austin. The largest, a 4.9 magnitude tremor, was recorded in March 2020.



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which frees the flow of oil. But with every barrel of oil comes three to six barrels of salty, polluted water.

What do they do with it? Drill another well and inject it into the porous rock formations deep underground. This puts pressure on the fault lines, causing seismic activity.

Most of the quakes have occurred in the more populous Midland/Odessa area but are also centered in Loving County. For example, in 2021, 53 earthquakes were centered around Mentone in one seven-day period.

But it's a love-hate relationship. About 30% of Midland's workers are employed directly by the energy and mining industries. The population in the area is booming, and for the most part, people don't want to bite the hand that feeds them. Oil and gas prices tumbled in 2020 (remember gas at \$1.99/gallon?), making for a horrible year in the area. But then, they're used to boom and bust cycles in this part of the country.

### In the End

Will Loving County's population wither away to nothing? Of course, it could happen during the next bust cycle. But as long as there is oil and gas to be produced, people will be needed. And as long as there are power grabs to be had, there will at least be The Hoppers, The Creagers, and The Joneses.

### Sources:

- \* [nationalatlas.gov](https://nationalatlas.gov)
- \* [gisgeography.com](https://gisgeography.com)
- \* U.S. Census Bureau-Quick Facts-Loving County, Texas
- \* "Not-So-Loving-County" by Pamela Colloff in *Texas Monthly*
- \* "Earthquakes in Texas Doubled in 2021. Scientists cite years of oil companies injecting sludge water underground" by Erin Douglas in the *Texas Tribune*
- \* "More Than 50 Quakes Last Week in Far West Texas" in the *Midland (TX) Reporter-Tribune*





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114





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