Las Colonias in the 21st Century: Progress Along the Texas-Mexico Border

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What is a Colonia?

In Spanish, the term "colonia" means a community or neighborhood.

The Texas Office of the Secretary of State defines a colonia as a residential area along the Texas-Mexico border that may lack necessities such as potable water, sewer systems, electricity, paved roads and safe housing.
Counties with Colonias in Texas

- Shaded counties are home to colonias.
- Notice the concentration along the border.
- The six counties with highest concentration of colonias are labeled.

Infrastructure Improving in Border Colonias

**TEXAS COLONIA CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM**

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<thead>
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<th></th>
<th>Green</th>
<th>Yellow</th>
<th>Red</th>
<th>Unknown</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Drinkable water</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wastewater disposal</td>
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<td>Legal plats</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<td>Paved roads</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<td>Adequate drainage</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<td>Solid waste disposal</td>
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Source: Office of the Secretary of State
Infrastructure: Potable Water

• 51.7% of colonias in Webb County do not have access to potable water.

• Texas A&M Colonias Program works with colonia residents on water filtration through ceramic filters made out of clay and saw dust.

• Filters can purify 2.5 liters of water each hour, making it 99.9% clean and 100% drinkable.

Juan Galvan of the Laredo Texas A&M Colonias Program with a Texas A&M Proyecto de Agua ceramic water filter.
Homeownership in the Colonias

According to the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs Contract for Deed Prevalence Project (2012):

- The homeownership rate in Texas colonias is 77 percent, above the state average of 64.8 percent.

- Contract for Deed purchases still common and interest rates range from 15-18 percent, preventing colonia homeownership in many cases from serving as an asset building tool.

- Only 11.7 percent used a bank or credit union to finance their purchase.

A sign advertising lots for sale in Hidalgo County.
Photo credit: Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas
Legislation: The Model Subdivision Rules

- Increased price of lots leading to unsafe and substandard housing

- Legal subdivisions with homes not able to connect to infrastructure

- Increased financial burden on residents to bring their homes up to code and pay fees for noncompliance
Housing Today: Hybrid & Mixed Quality

A home on a cement foundation in Valle Hermosa, Starr County.

An example of a hybrid home in Hidalgo County: An RV or mobile home with a wooden or cinder block structure attached.

TDHCA Bootstrap Program home, completed by AYUDA, in El Paso, Texas.
Home in colonia in Cameron County where resident is truck driver.

Photo credit: Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas

A hybrid home in a Hidalgo County Colonia.
Photo credit: Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas
Demand for Affordable Housing Exceeds Supply

• Need for safe and affordable housing currently exceeds the capacity of housing organizations due to a lack of capital.

• Community Housing Development Organizations serving the colonias:
  – Lower Valley Housing Corporation (El Paso County)
  – AYUDA (El Paso County)
  – Community Dev. Corp. of Brownsville (Cameron County)
  – Proyecto Azteca (Hidalgo County)
  – El Paso Collaborative (El Paso County),
  – Architectural Charities of Texas (Cameron County)
  – Habitat for Humanity-Laredo (Webb County)

Residents working on a Lower Valley Housing Corp. home in El Paso County. Neighbors help each other build 65% of their homes.
Poverty & Near-Poverty Rates
Colonias vs. County Populations

SOURCE: Census Bureau, 2011 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.
Educational Attainment
Population 25 Years and Older

SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, 2011 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

NOTE: HS diploma includes equivalency
Employment Status
Population 16 Years and Older

Source: Census Bureau’s 2011 American Community Survey
The Informal Economy: Pulgas

Photo credits: Accion Texas, Inc.
Colonia Resident Entrepreneurship

Research team with Olivia Figeroa of AYUDA in San Elizario, El Paso County and an example of a planter the colonia residents make from tires that are routinely dumped near the community.

Leticia Jones in the kitchen of her restaurant, Leticia’s Comida Casera, in Garciasville, Starr County.

Photo credit: Accion Texas, Inc.
Lourdes Flores, executive director of ARISE, facilitating their monthly meeting.

Photo credit: ARISE

Members present their goals and recommendations for ARISE at a meeting.

Photo credit: ARISE
PSJA ISD parents take the parent volunteer oath during the district's festivities for National Parent Engagement Day November 2013.

PSJA ISD Superintendent Dr. Daniel P. King walks nearby neighborhoods with staff from Aida C. Escobar Elementary during the district's annual Countdown to Zero Dropout Recovery Walk.

Thomas Jefferson T-STEM Early College HS student receives his associate’s from South Texas College two weeks prior to his HS graduation.
You’re invited to a conference!

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