Las Colonias: Life Along the Texas-Mexico Border

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Community Development
Counties with Colonias in Texas

“Colonia”
Spanish term for a community or neighborhood

Counties with highest concentration of colonias
- El Paso
- Maverick
- Webb
- Starr
- Hidalgo
- Cameron

Poverty in the Colonias

Near-Poverty and Below-Poverty Rates

- **Border Colonias**: 19.4% (42.0% Poverty Rate, 17.0% Near-Poverty Rate)
- **Texas**: 10.9% (17.0% Poverty Rate, 14.3% Near-Poverty Rate)
- **United States**: 9.2% (14.3% Poverty Rate, 9.2% Near-Poverty Rate)

*Source: Census Bureau's 2011 American Community Survey*
Infrastructure Progress in Texas Colonias*

Source: Colonias Initiative Program, Office of the Texas Secretary of State, 2010

NOTE: This chart represents data only for six counties: Cameron, El Paso, Hidalgo, Maverick, Starr and Webb Counties.
Infrastructure: Potable Water

Percentage of colonias in which all lots have potable water, by county

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Do have access</th>
<th>Do not have access</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cameron</td>
<td>84.1%</td>
<td>14.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Paso</td>
<td>81.5%</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hidalgo</td>
<td>98.6%</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maverick</td>
<td>97.3%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Starr</td>
<td>87.1%</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Webb</td>
<td>51.7%</td>
<td>48.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Colonias Initiative Program, Office of the Texas Secretary of State, 2010
*not shown are colonias in which access to potable water is unknown*
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. These filters can purify 2.5 liters of water each hour, making it 99.9% clean and 100% drinkable.

Juan Galvan, Project Coordinator in the Texas A&M Colonias Program -Laredo, and Jordana Barton, Senior Advisor in Community Development at the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas, display a Texas A&M Proyecto de Agua ceramic water filter.
The Model Subdivision Rules: 
**Negative Consequences**

- The increased price of lots leading to unsafe and substandard housing

- Legal subdivisions with homes not able to connect to infrastructure

- Increased financial burden on already financially strapped residents to bring their homes up to code and pay fees for noncompliance
In the colonias, the typical homeownership process begins with a family purchasing land and then building their house incrementally with their own money.

It is common for the housing structure to start as a RV/trailer home or a 1- or 2-room house and later have additions made from wood and/or cinder blocks.
Las Lomas, a colonia in Starr County, where one can see a high quality typical middle class home on a cement foundation next to the resident’s salvage yard business (left). Across the dirt road (right) is Fina’s Stand, a resident-owned snack stand in front of the resident’s home.
Growing Need for Affordable Housing

- The need for safe, affordable housing currently exceeds the capacity of housing organizations to build due primarily 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)**
Education in the Colonias

Educational Attainment Population 25 Years and Older

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Border Colonias</th>
<th>Texas</th>
<th>United States</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than HS diploma</td>
<td>54.8%</td>
<td>19.6%</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS diploma</td>
<td>23.4%</td>
<td>25.7%</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>16.4%</td>
<td>28.7%</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College degree or higher</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>26.1%</td>
<td>28.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOURCE: Census Bureau's 2011 American Community Survey
Pharr-San Juan-Alamo ISD: An Asset-Based Approach

PSJA ISD Superintendent of Schools Dr. Daniel P. King walks the PSJA ISD neighborhoods with staff from Aida C. Escobar Elementary to recover dropouts and non-completers during the district's annual Countdown to Zero Dropout Recovery Walk.

Photo credit: PSJA ISD

PSJA ISD parents take the parent volunteer oath during the district's festivities for National Parent Engagement Day last November.

Photo credit: PSJA ISD

PSJA Thomas Jefferson T-STEM Early College HS student receives his Associate's Degree from South Texas College two weeks prior to his high school graduation.

Photo credit: PSJA ISD
ARISE’s PTA Comunitario (Community PTA)

Lourdes Flores, Executive Director of ARISE, facilitating the PTA Comunitario at their monthly meeting.

Photo credit: ARISE

Members of the PTA Comunitario present the goals and recommendations for their organization.

Photo credit: ARISE
Income in the Colonias

Median Household Income

- United States: $52,762
- Texas: $50,920
- Border Colonias: $28,958

SOURCE: Census Bureau's 2011 American Community Survey
Employment in the Colonias

**Employment Status for Population 16 Years and Older**

- **Employed**
  - Border Colonias: 50.4%
  - Texas: 60.2%
  - United States: 58.8%

- **Unemployed**
  - Border Colonias: 6.3%
  - Texas: 7.2%
  - United States: 8.6%

- **Not in Labor Force**
  - Border Colonias: 43.2%
  - Texas: 34.5%
  - United States: 35.2%

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

Photo credit: Accion Texas, Inc.

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Colonia Resident Entrepreneurship

At AYUDA in colonia San Elizario, El Paso County. In the forefront is a planter the colonia residents make from tires that are routinely dumped near San Elizario. From left: Olivia Figeroa, AYUDA; Elvira Valles, Accion Texas; Edith Lopez Estrada, FRB Dallas; Jordana Barton, FRB Dallas; Raquel Marquez, UTSA

Photo credit: Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas

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

Photo credit: Accion Texas, Inc.
Eagle Ford Shale:  
A Source of Economic Opportunities

Photo credit: Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas.
Building and Protecting Assets: Deep South Texas Financial Literacy Alliance
Promising Practices

1. Facilitate resident-led efforts to improve their communities.

2. Take an integrated approach instead of addressing issues in silos.

3. Take an asset-based approach, building upon people's and communities' assets rather than a deficiency-based approach.

4. Create and support more opportunities for residents to be owners of production and capital in the formal economy.
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