

**Beyond “The Third Colombian Diaspora”:
Stabilization of U.S.-Bound Colombian Migration? (1996 – 2012)**

Diego Andrés Lugo

IMTP-Magazine on Migration Issues®
(Summer 2013)

Suggested citation: Lugo, Diego Andrés. “Beyond “The Third Colombian Diaspora”:
Stabilization of U.S.-Bound Colombian Migration? (1996 – 2012).” *IMTP-Magazine on Migration Issues*, (Summer
2013).

Abstract

This paper examines major migration trends from Colombia to the U.S. between 1996 and 2012, a period encompassing what is known as “the Third Colombian Diaspora or migratory wave”. Economics and political aspects related to state decline in Colombia, are key factors in understanding the migration of thousands of Colombians to the U.S. Produced and explained for the purpose of this analysis is immigration data on Florida and its main metropolitan areas: admissions, affirmative and defensive asylum seekers, and rate of naturalizations. I argue that after a critical moment, which saw an unusual increase in the number of migrants (1998-2004), there has been a process of stabilization in the migration from Colombia to the U.S. (2005 and 2012).

Historical Antecedents and the New Diaspora of the Late-1990s¹

On May 30th, 2013 the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) signaled intention to include Colombia and Latvia in its organization, and to do likewise with Costa Rica and Lithuania in 2015. OECD’s Secretary-General Angel Gurría referred to the issue as follows:

Today’s decision underscores the OECD’s commitment to further diversify its global membership and reinforces its role as a standard setter and “house of best practices”. Colombia and Latvia have made clear that membership is critical to their development and reform efforts. These countries will make a valuable contribution to enrich our collective experience and strengthen OECD as a source of effective and innovative public policies.²

The Rating Agency Fitch, with institutions such as the American State Department and the Inter-American Development Bank, likewise expressed commitment and satisfaction with the OECD decision to include Colombia on their list of privileged members.³

This scenario of sustained economic growth seemed unthinkable 14 years ago. The Colombian context changed dramatically between 1999 and 2002. In 1999, due to negative growth trends, the economy was facing its first economic recession in 50 years; the GDP dropped to -4.2 percent.⁴ Many factors contributed to this economic recession. At the beginning of the 1990s, structural reforms implemented in Colombia included several economic

experiments in its public finance, health and education systems. At the same time, the dismantling of the most powerful drug cartels in Colombian history (Medellin and Cali) occurred.

Between 1999 and 2003, Colombia also witnessed an unprecedented increase in both the guerrilla movement led by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia's (FARC) and the National Liberation Army's (ELN) military capabilities as well as the rise of paramilitary groups. The escalation of the armed conflict was due, among others, to the failure in the peace process negotiations between the FARC –the largest guerrilla group in Colombia– and former president Andres Pastrana's government in 2001, after two years of negotiations and concessions that included a demilitarized zone in Southern Colombia. In 2002, the political situation in Colombia could not be worse: several municipalities were in the middle of a strong conflict between three forces: leftist guerrilla groups especially the FARC and the ELN, rightist and counterinsurgent paramilitary groups under the umbrella of United Self-Defense Forces of Cordoba and Uraba – ACCU– (reorganized later in the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia, AUC) and state forces. For some authors, such a situation was a clear example of state decline in Latin America.⁵ And this chaotic landscape worsened as the dismantling of Medellin and Cali Cartels led to a reconfiguration of the drug industry in early-2000s under control of guerrilla and paramilitary groups as well as new drug cartels, such as the Cartel del Norte del Valle.

Our understanding of the outflow of Colombians to stable democracies, from the late 1990s to the mid-2000s, requires a better assessment of the role of internal political turmoil. The whole class spectrum of several regions -peasants, members of the lower middle class, as well as the financial elite- was affected by this political scenario. Massive assassinations,

disappearances, and population displacements, especially in the countryside, were the characteristic hallmark of paramilitary groups. Political and economic kidnappings as well as the attacks on entire towns were the seal of guerrilla groups. Selective killings and blackmail were common but not exclusive to urban criminal bands linked with both drug-warlords and illegal armed forces. Such unprecedented risk produced, over a relatively short time period, the largest displaced population in the world.

Migration, then, embodied a common national perception of insecurity. State inability to exert military control over territory was compounded by the fear of being victimized. In 2004, according to Human Rights Watch, 5 percent of the Colombian population was forced to leave their homes, mainly as a consequence of internal armed conflicts.⁶ In 2005, according to the Administrative National Department of Statistics, there were 3,331,107 Colombian residents living abroad, representing 9 percent of the total population.⁷

The situation, however, began to change between 2004 and 2005. This is when the policies of economic stabilization and military modernization, implemented by the former president Alvaro Uribe Velez, began to have an effect. Within a short period of time, despite being considered a key example of state in crisis, Colombia's internal situation improved. Guerrilla groups were weakened, contained within southern Colombian states (such as Cauca and Putumayo), and marginalized to specific border areas near Venezuela and Brazil. In 2006, under the controversial Law of Peace and Justice approved by Congress, paramilitary groups were dismantled and forced into a demobilization process. While disabling the drug cartels had been a long-term objective of U.S. policy in Colombia, the implementation of Uribe's *Democratic Security Policy*, could have produced a stronger surveillance and more direct

confrontation of cartel activities.⁸

Since 2002, continuing fiscal reforms have boosted economic growth in Colombia. These include restructuring macroeconomic elements of the public budget, the maintenance of an extremely low level of inflation (one of the lowest in Latin America in recent years, around 3 percent, and decreasing) as well as the neoliberal revisions introduced by both Presidents Alvaro Uribe (2002-2006; 2006-2010) and Juan Manuel Santos (2010-2014).⁹ Complementing other positive changes in macroeconomic conditions, this environment of reform has resulted in an unprecedented increase in direct (and portfolio) foreign investment. This renewed, invigorated landscape has encouraged public and private local investment, sustaining also an increase in household confidence and consumption.¹⁰

Beyond the “Third Colombian Diaspora”

In the late 1990s, a particularly toxic context produced a new wave of Colombian migration. This included the following, all interrelated: 1) an extensive, more profitable international drug industry, 2) the late 1990s Colombian economic recession and 3) a dangerously convulsive, violent political and military landscape. Elements of all class strata felt forced to leave the country. This is now referred to as “Third Colombian Diaspora”.¹¹

As economic and political conditions improved, it is plausible and logical that Colombian migration decreased. As I will show in the next pages, a pattern of systematic stabilization, even contraction, has been recorded. I focus on South Florida data during two crucial Colombian migratory periods: the political and economic crisis (1998-2004) and the sustained recovery (2005-2012).

During the late 1990s and early 2000s, several conditions provoked the emergence of a “Third Colombian Diaspora”: 1) the economic recession at the end of the 1990s¹²; 2) the evolution of Colombian-American relations that ended up in a maturation of the migration networks and relationships among these countries as Guarnizo and Diaz claim¹³; 3) a strong drug industry that propelled labor migration to the U.S., filling gaps in illegal criminal labor necessary for the commercial distribution of drugs¹⁴; 4) the intensification of the armed conflict in Colombia that produced a wave of asylum seekers.¹⁵

As stated earlier, a recent climate of investment, economic growth, political stability and reinforcement of democratic institutions¹⁶ may have diminished the flow of migrants to the U.S. after 2005. This economic and political upturn, interestingly enough, contrasts with the economic deceleration and financial crisis recorded in the U.S. between 2008 and 2011.

Even with a decrease (2006-2012) in the number of Colombians migrating to the U.S., Florida remained an important entry port for Colombian migrants. Language, culture, job accessibility, and previous networks determined selection of Florida as a highly preferable entry point¹⁷ As a result, Colombians have become one of the largest Hispanic groups in this part of the U.S.¹⁸

Statistical analysis describing such trends will use the following sources: the Department of Homeland Security’s Yearbook of Migration - to do a longitudinal research from 1996 to 2012, and The United States Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (ACS) - to conduct research about Colombians in Florida (in a state-oriented context) and South Florida (Miami-Dade and Broward counties, in a local-oriented context).

The Colombian Exodus: Economic and Political Aspects

A number of scholars have written about Colombian migration. In the following pages I will provide some ideas coming from particular streams: a state-centric approach,¹⁹ a demand-driven approach,²⁰ network-oriented,²¹ and transnational approaches.²²

From a transnational perspective, there are studies that highlight strong migration phenomena from Colombia to specific American cores, including New York Metropolitan Area in the 1970s and 1980s and South Florida in the 1990s and 2000s.²³ Informative data exists outlining strong exchange economic networks, political and professional organizations in New York in the 1980s²⁴ as well as economic transnational networks with Colombian regional roots in South Florida at the end of the 1990s and early 2000s.²⁵

According to Guarnizo and Diaz, three factors were associated with the reemergence of the Colombian-American transnational migration: “economic restructuring in Colombia, drug trafficking, and the cumulative effect of a migration process that started in the post-World War II period (1950s–1960s)”.²⁶ It makes sense not to include the political variables related to the intensified armed conflict, if we consider that such an escalation began in 1999.

However, in a further document, Guarnizo locates the political variable related to the “violences” (drug-oriented, criminal, and political violence as Guarnizo states) within a broader context of transnational migration. Among these features are: stigma of Colombians as drug dealers and criminals abroad, the reinvigorated speed and heterogeneity of the Colombian migration not only to the classical tri-state area and South Florida, but also to other U.S. states and countries, and the economic, sociocultural, and political transnational nature of the historical South-North Migration.²⁷

The economic side of Colombian migration is highly analyzed. It shows a trend that is similar for the majority of Latin American countries. North-south migration highlights people's expectations to obtain better jobs and improve their socio-economic conditions. This premise identifies neoclassical push-pull factors²⁸ or structural networks capable of relocating resources and people from one region or country to another.²⁹

In this sense, 2008 saw nearly 85.7 percent of Colombian migrants leave the country for labor and economic reasons.³⁰ This process implies an extensive transnational network of acquaintances, family members, and groups, based on regional and cultural affiliations that have opened their doors for a continuous outflow of Colombian migrants. Primary flow is toward North America (the U.S., Canada, and Mexico), Spain, United Kingdom, and Venezuela.³¹

Zamora, using a demand-driven approach, studies the characteristics of a segment of the Colombian labor force - high-skilled workers. These workers seek employment in the U.S according to their competitive qualifications and academic background. She highlights three main factors that determine the employability of immigrant Colombian labor in high-skilled sectors. These are certification within the American education system, proficiency in the English language, and ease in obtaining U.S. legal status.³²

Within a social network analysis, we find works developed by Casey³³ and Del Rio.³⁴ Casey, using a theoretical framework based on Putnam's definition of "bonding and bridging social capital"³⁵ as well as research highlighting differences between "thin and thick relations"³⁶, argues that trust and reciprocity were mostly specific within the Colombian community. However, according to Casey there is not enough consistent evidence of strong social capital between Colombians in South Florida.³⁷ This is a consequence of social factors developed in the

U.S. (drug stigma) and Colombia (where cultural factors that do not allow the consolidation of more comprehensive social capital network). Guarnizo, Sanchez, and Roach have also asserted that a similar situation exists for Colombians in California, where the stigma of drugs has propelled community dispersion in Los Angeles County.³⁸

Del Rio, in turn, explains the drain brain from Colombia, a developing country, to the U.S. In a context where scientific exchange occurs, the decision to leave one's country is not based just on economic factors, like salary. The possibility of working within a prestigious and widely developed scientific network; the greater level of productivity afforded by such an opportunity; and the number of important professional relationships the researcher can build in both the home and host country, are persuasive factors.³⁹

Advocating a more state-centric perspective for the Colombian case, Robertson⁴⁰, Collier and Gamarra⁴¹, as well as Collier⁴² support the idea of a country in crisis. For the Colombian case this has resulted in a loss of political and military state legitimacy. This perspective is one my central explanatory approaches. Collier and Gamarra's introduction to *The Colombian Diaspora in South Florida*, in discussing the political crisis, could not be more illustrative:

Colombia is in crisis. An ongoing undeclared Civil War, encompassing widespread guerilla and drug-related violence, combined with economic recession during the late-1990s, have brought turmoil to this South American state... Many Colombian peasants are fleeing rural areas, where fighting between guerillas, paramilitaries, and government forces is the most intense. Many of these rural residents are relocating to internal refugee camps or to the shantytowns surrounding Colombia's largest cities. Other Colombian peasants are escaping the instability by crossing international borders to become refugees in neighboring Venezuela, Ecuador, and Panama. Additionally, Colombians with financial means are migrating to other states, principally Costa Rica, Spain, and the United States. A significant number of Colombians, estimates ranging as high as 200,000 to 300,000, have migrated to the United States in just the past few years.⁴³

They also present this particular migratory phenomenon (to South Florida), as a

problematic process. Colombian immigrants either bring with them, or develop upon arrival, troubling social and political conflicts. There is a lack of political participation in both Colombian and American elections. In addition, Collier and Gamarra⁴⁴ cite the lack of social capital institutions and regressive labor conditions in Florida as factors that propel the fast return of Colombian to their country after living an unsatisfactory experience in Florida.

From the same perspective, Robertson argues that underlying the strong exodus of Colombians in the late 1990s and early 2000s, there was an environment of political instability and loss of democratic mechanisms. He uses a Hirschman's model to understand why Colombians remained or left their country. He argues that Colombians responded to the political crisis in four specific ways: with exit, with voice, with loyalty, and with neglect.⁴⁵

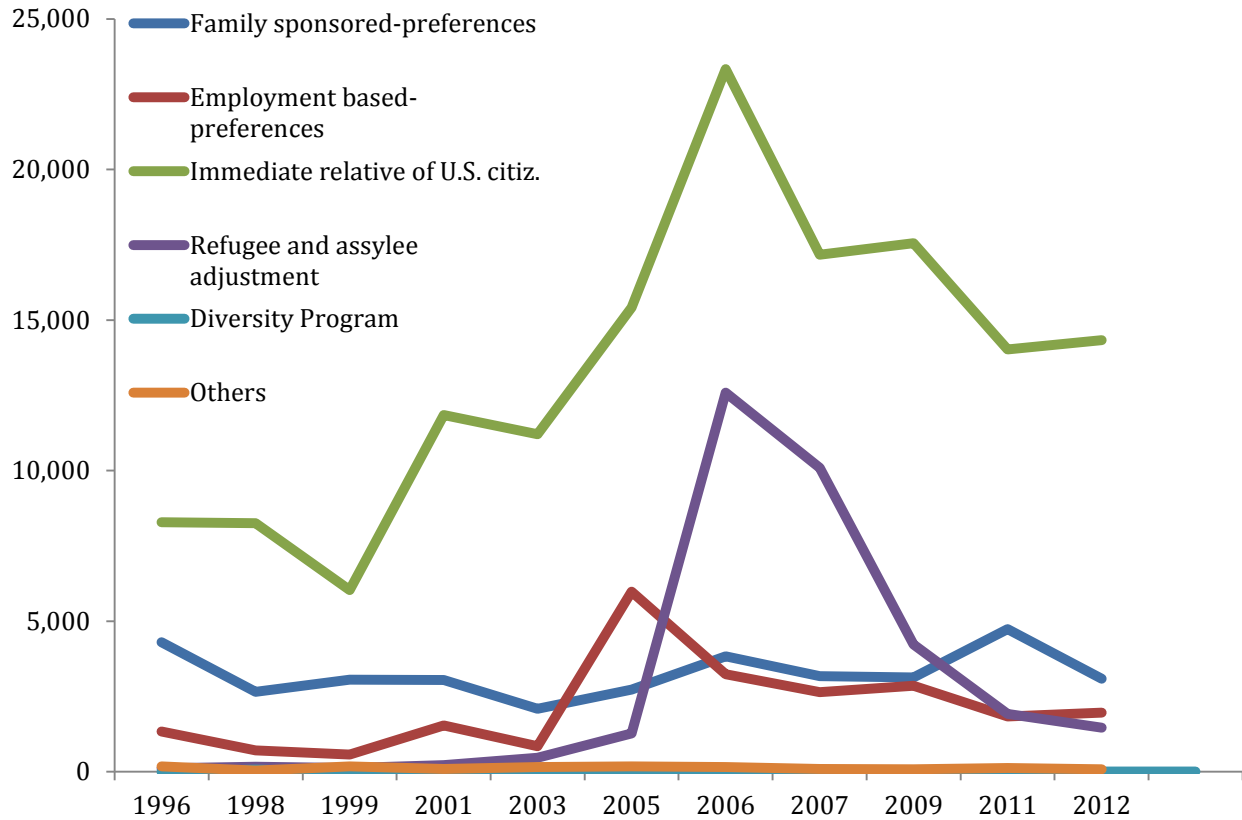
Being physically and financially capable of leaving the country "Colombians in the exit sample did not feel safe in the country nor did they feel that political leaders had taken sufficiently responsibility to maintain the extent of political and other freedoms".⁴⁶ Having previous links in the U.S. and with a decisive lack of faith in the institution's ability to recover from ineffectiveness, many Colombians simply left. U.S. Thus, migration represents a classic search for a better economic future and a more stable sociopolitical landscape.

North-South migration, before and after 1996, is important. The political crisis and the intensification of the armed conflict in Colombia are also related. Amid an initial scenario of political and economic turmoil (1998-2004) and a subsequent and systematic process of military and economic recovery (2005-2012), trends of migration have changed since 1996. This is the major argument I'll develop in the following pages.

Trends of the “Third Colombian Diaspora” to the U.S. and the Subsequent Process of Stabilization

According to the Yearbook of Immigration’s statistics, in 1996 the total of Colombians leaving their country or adjusting their status as immigrants in American territory was 14,283. 4,303 were admitted under the category of family-sponsored preferences (30.13 percent of the total of Colombian immigrants going to or living in the U.S.). 1,333 entered to the U.S. with an employment-sponsored preferences status (9.33 percent). The largest number of immigrants, 8,285 or 58.01 percent, entered as close relatives of U.S. citizens. In 1996, the number of Colombians emigrating as, or adjusting their status to refugees, was not significant. 116 persons, representing 0.81 percent, were recorded. Diversity programs and the category “Others” (67 and 179 persons or 0.47 percent and 1.25 percent) accounted for the remaining.

Graph 1: Colombian Immigrants Admitted by Selected Class of Admission in the U.S., 1996-2012



Sources: Immigration and Naturalization Service (1997-2001), *Yearbook of Immigration Statistics*; U.S. Department of Homeland Security (2002-2013), *Yearbook of Immigration Statistics*, Legal Permanent Residents: Table 9

New arrivals and adjustments continued to rise through 1999 (the year of the largest drop in Colombian economic activity). In 2006, the number of immigrants reached a historical peak, 43,151 persons. Close relatives of U.S. citizens, including new arrivals and adjustments, accounted for 23,330 persons or 54.07 percent. There was also a spike (probably as a phenomenon of adjustment rather than new applications) in asylum seekers and refugees - 12,591 persons or 29.18 percent.

Thus, the number of immigrants reached a peak of 43,151 persons and then it begins a descendent pathway, in some categories, below to the figures recorded in 1996. Such historical

trends in Colombia lead me to consider a three-pronged analysis.

First, one must acknowledge the transnational movement of migrants, from south to north, in search of better economic conditions. Included here are U.S. conditions that were not the best for best low-skilled workers.⁴⁷ Between 1996 and 2004, such arguments (though flawed) were logically plausible. After this period, U.S. migration reforms hampered the entry of low-skilled labor from many poor and developing countries. Another particular difficulty for Colombians was how to legitimize their status as lawful permanent residents in American territory. The U.S. government never allowed inclusion of a legal clause that recognized Colombian emigrants as victims of a Colombian armed conflict. Nor was there implementation of a more comprehensive political asylum strategy. Thus:

Colombians never received the blanket Temporary Protected Status (TPS) offered to other Latin American migrant groups from war-torn countries. The failure to receive TPS can be traced to two factors: (1) President Pastrana initially characterized the late 1990's "brain drain" as being for economic reasons, and (2) a strong lobbying effort of the U.S. government for Colombian TPS was never mounted.⁴⁸

Secondly, one must consider the violent and often unmanageable nature of the political conflict in Colombia. There were many victims of massive or selective killings, kidnappings, extortions, blackmail or "vacunas", as well as human trafficking and domestic violence in areas of armed conflict. As Collier and Gamarra remind us "Colombia [was] in crisis".⁴⁹ The only reasonable outlet for many Colombians was to leave the country.

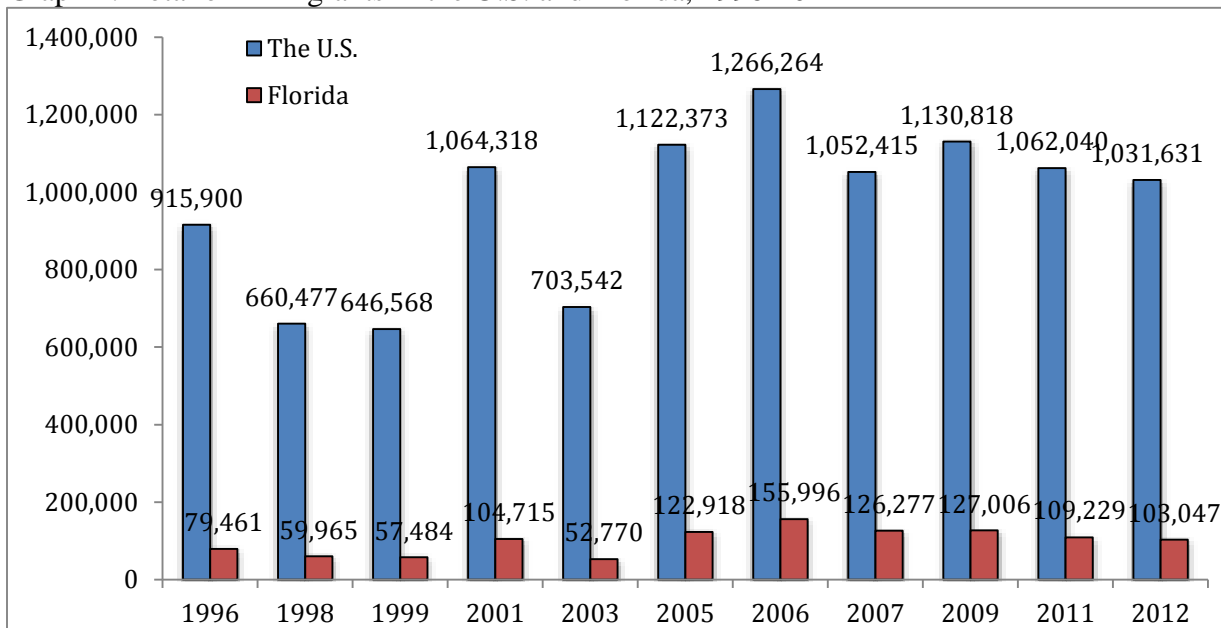
The third prong in this analysis addresses the conditions of the labor market in the U.S., as it relates to the consequent global crisis. As Collier claims, many Colombians fled the country in the search of the American dream. But, in the case of Florida, what they found was an extremely hard environment and a systematic decrease in their living conditions, compared to

their situation in Colombia. As Collier states:

Colombia is an extremely class conscious country—so much so that an informal class or economic strata rating scale of one to six, with six being highest, is used by Colombians. Focus group participants reported an average drop of almost two social strata on the Colombian informal scale after their arrival in South Florida (see Table 2)—a situation leading to extreme social tension in Colombian households... Of all the variables supporting why Colombians are returning to their home country, their inability to reestablish a stable environment, combined with a loss of social class, was found to be among the strongest factors in explaining the return migration.⁵⁰

The world financial crisis, the economic contraction of the U.S. recorded in 2008, and new obstacles to migrant population, seem sound explanations for the U.S.-bound migration decline from Colombia. The same problem has been recorded with migrants returning to Colombia from Spain amid a contraction of the GDP for several quarters and a pronounced rise of the unemployment rate. In 2009, according to El Pais, the number of Colombians coming from Spain increased to 100 persons per month. Reasons for this increase “range from the economic crisis affecting much of Europe, to the "getting better" living conditions offered by the Colombian government”.⁵¹

Graph 2: Total of Immigrants in the U.S. and Florida, 1996-2012

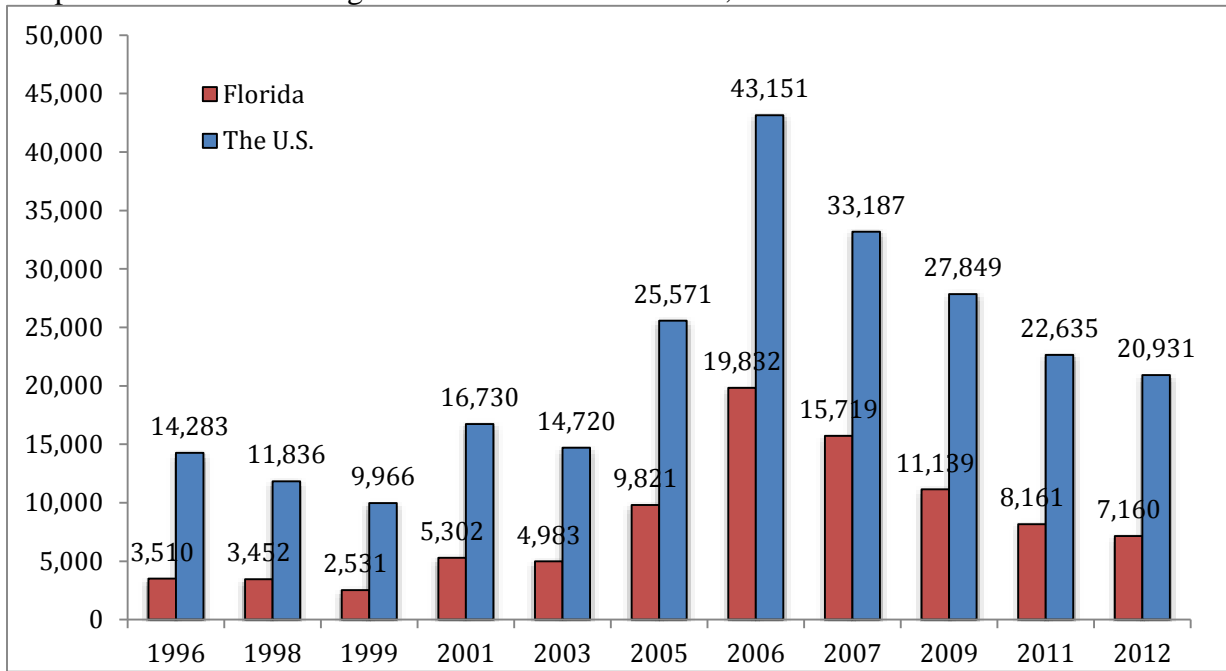


Sources: Immigration and Naturalization Service (1997-2001), *Statistical Yearbook of the Immigration and Naturalization Service*, Tables 16 and 17; Department of Homeland Security (2003-2013), *Yearbook of Immigration Statistics*, Legal Permanent Residents: Supplemental Table 1

According to the Homeland Security’s Yearbook of Immigration, general migration to the U.S. (not only Colombian), has been concentrated in particular states: California, New York, New Jersey, Florida, Texas, and Illinois. Overall migrant reception even though is high in all these states, has decreased from 68.1 percent in 1996 to 61.4 percent in 2012.

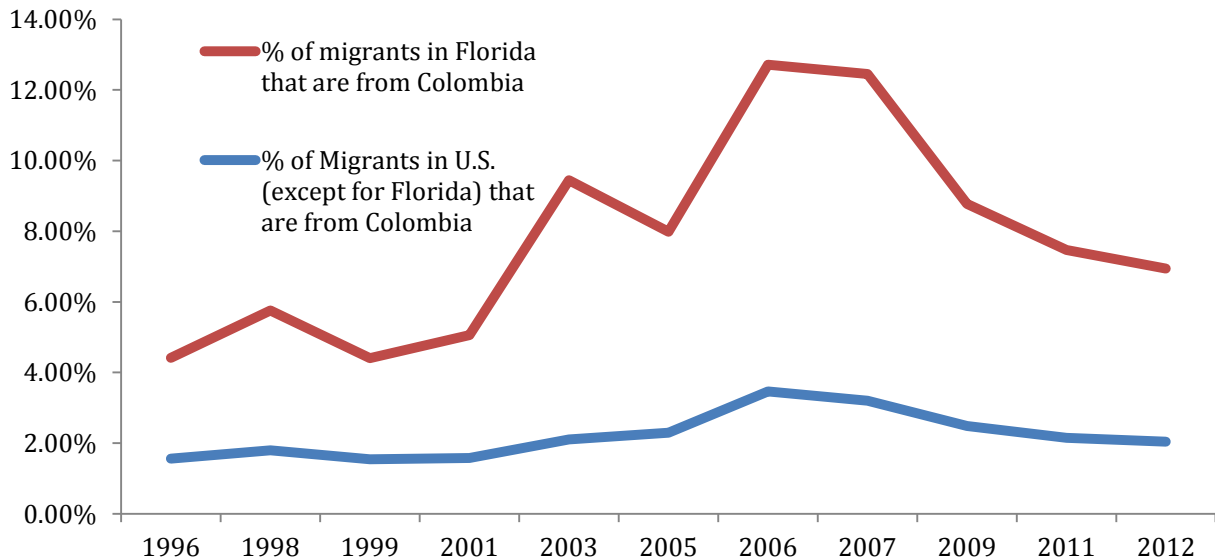
The case of Florida is interesting because it reflects not only predominance during all the 16 years but also a growing or at least a stable trend. In 1996 the percentage of people trying to get a lawful permanent status in the U.S. residing in Florida was around 8.6 percent. In 2001, it was 9.84 percent and in 2007 it was 12 percent. In 2012, it drops again to 10 percent.

Graph 3: Colombian Immigrants in the U.S. and Florida, 1996-2012



Sources: Immigration and Naturalization Service (1997-2001), *Statistical Yearbook of the Immigration and Naturalization Service*, Tables 16 and 17; Department of Homeland Security (2003-2013), *Yearbook of Immigration Statistics*, Legal Permanent Residents: Supplemental Table 1

Graph 4: % of Migrants from Colombia in Florida and the U.S., 1996-2012



Sources: Immigration and Naturalization Service (1997-2001), *Statistical Yearbook of the Immigration and Naturalization Service*, Tables 16 and 17; Department of Homeland Security (2003-2013), *Yearbook of Immigration Statistics*, Legal Permanent Residents: Supplemental Table 1

Consistent with the information provided in graphs 2, 3, and 4, we can see results in both total and Colombian U.S. migration trends. Total migrant (including Colombians) averages in the last 8 years (2005-2012) are higher than averages recorded between 1996 and 2004. Exceptions occur in 2002 and 2003, when there was a significant contraction in the number of immigrants lawfully admitted, a consequence of the 9-11 attacks. The records, as an average estimation, reflect a growing tendency. If the Colombian case is separately analyzed, however, this tendency is different.

Between 1996 and 2006, the percentage of Colombian migrants compared to the total of migrant population in the U.S. showed positive growth in both the U.S. and Florida. In 1996, 1.56 of the total of U.S. and 4.42 percent of Florida migrants were Colombians. By 2003, in the middle of the Colombian crisis and in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks in the U.S., the percentage of Colombians in both the U.S. and Florida increased to 2.09 percent and 9.44 percent, respectively. In 2006, at the peak of Colombian migration, the U.S. percentages reached a historical 16 year ceiling, 3.41 percent overall and 12.71 percent in Florida. Since 2006 there has been a drop. By 2012 figures dropped to 2 percent in the U.S. and 6.95 percent in Florida.

Between 1996 and 2006, the percentage of Colombian migrants compared to the total of migrant population in the U.S. showed a positive, meaning, growing tendency in both the U.S. and Florida. In 1996 1.56 percent and 4.42 percent of the total of migrants in the U.S. (1.56 percent) and Florida (4.42 percent) were Colombians. In 2003, in the middle of the Colombian violence-related crisis and in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks in the U.S., the percentage of Colombian in both the U.S. and Florida increased to 2.09 percent and 9.44 percent respectively. In 2006, in the peak of the Colombian migration to the U.S., the percentage of Colombian

migrants also reached its historical ceiling (at least in the last 16 years), recording 3.41 percent and 12.71 percent for the total of migrants in the U.S. and Florida respectively. Since 2006 there has also been a drop in the percentage of Colombians as a share of the total number of immigrants and in 2012 the figure dropped to 2 and 6.95 percent in the U.S. and Florida respectively.

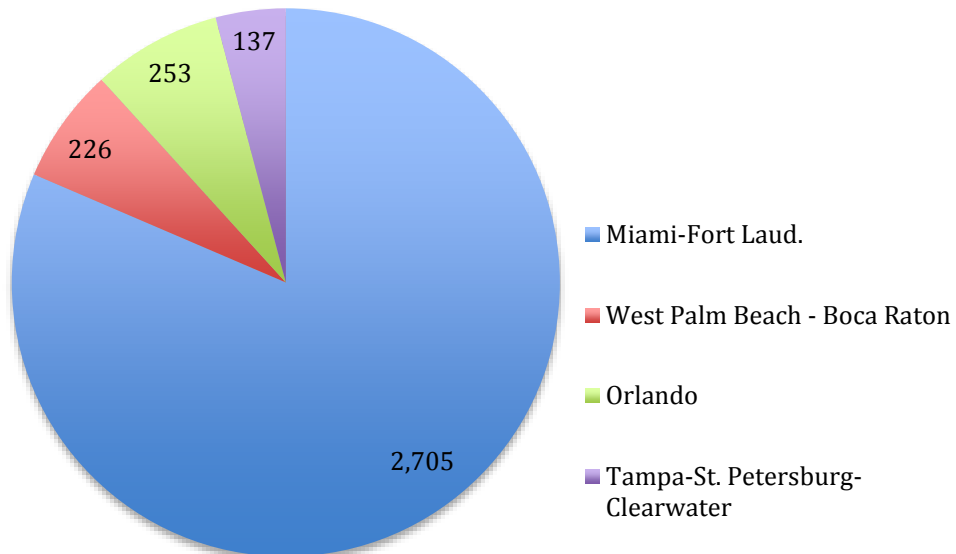
The Yearbook of Migration data reflects Colombian migration had been concentrated in two important cores: the tri-state Metropolitan Area of New York (made up by the states of New Jersey, New York, and Connecticut) and Florida (especially South Florida). It is interesting that the increase during the 1990s and 2000s showed a greater proportion of Colombians attempting to migrate to Florida, with fewer people were interested in Greater New York and other areas. In 1996, 24.57 percent of Colombian migrants chose Florida as their intended state of residence. This number increased to 33.85 percent in 2003. In 2006, 19,832 out of 43,151, or 45.96 percent, of total Colombian migrants, chose Florida as their intended state of residence. In 2012 the percentage of Colombian immigrants looking to Florida as their state of residence was around 34 percent. But in Florida, this migration has been localized to Miami-Dade and Broward counties.

The situation, however, cannot be generalized to all Florida and even to all South Florida. If we analyze the situation of the main receptors in Florida we can find that this migration has been extremely focalized into Miami-Dade and Broward counties.

The proportion of lawful residents in Florida, especially in Miami-Dade and Broward counties is still high. This needs examination. As the Yearbook of Immigration data shows, both the total of immigrants and the Colombian immigrants established in Florida increases in two periods: 1999-2001 and 2003-2007. Though after 2007 (2009 in the case of the total immigrant

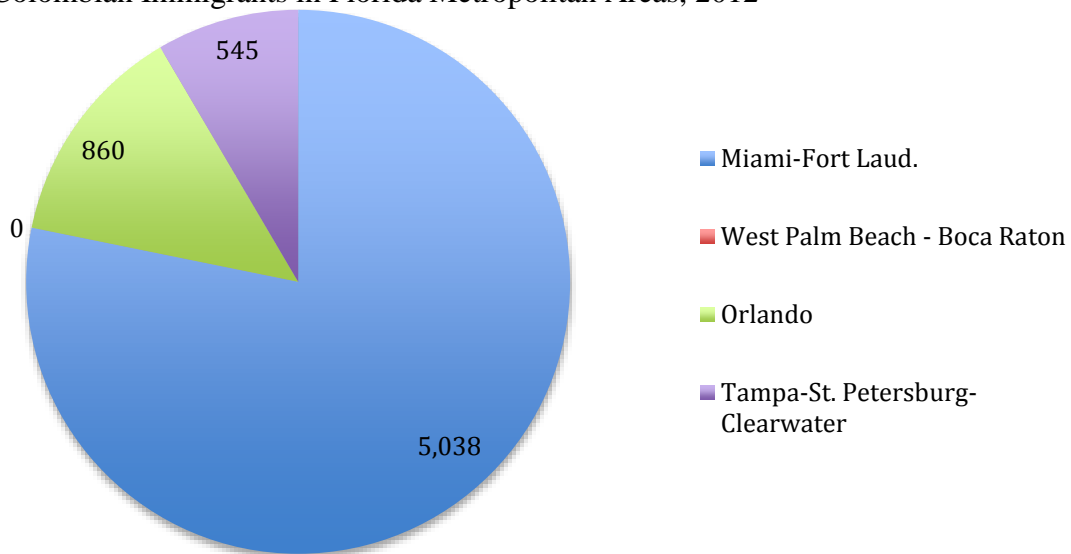
numbers in Florida) there was a systematic drop, Florida remains as one of the three biggest recipients of immigrants in the U.S.

Graph 5: Colombian Immigrants in Florida Metropolitan Areas, 1996



Sources: Immigration and Naturalization Service (1997-2001), *Statistical Yearbook of the Immigration and Naturalization Service*, Tables 18 and 19; Department of Homeland Security (2003-2013), *Yearbook of Immigration Statistics*, Legal Permanent Residents: Supplemental Table 2

Graph 6: Colombian Immigrants in Florida Metropolitan Areas, 2012

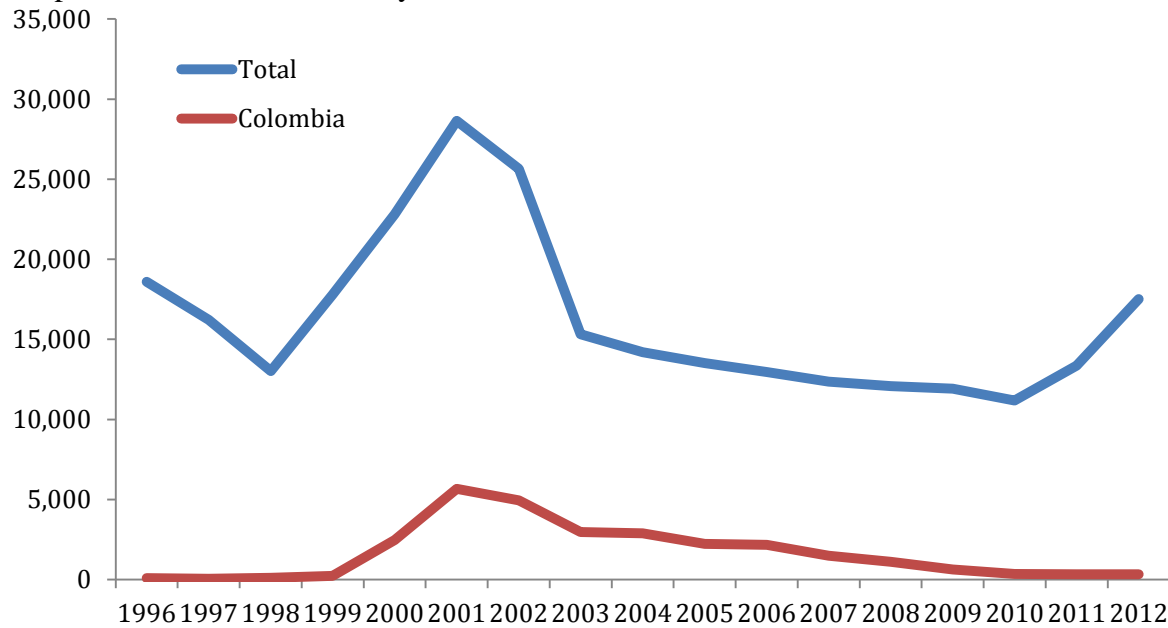


Sources: Immigration and Naturalization Service (1997-2001), *Statistical Yearbook of the Immigration and Naturalization Service*, Tables 18 and 19; Department of Homeland Security (2003-2013), *Yearbook of Immigration*, Legal Permanent Residents: Supplemental Table 2⁵²

As graphs 5 and 6 for 1996-2012 reflect, Colombians living as lawful permanent residents in the Miami-Fort Lauderdale Metropolitan Area comprise the largest proportion within Florida. The Colombian population residing in the Miami-Fort Lauderdale Metropolitan Area has stabilized, accounting for between 70-76 percent of the total share of Colombians in Florida. In 1996, share of the total was 76 percent. Only In 2003 (probably as a result of the 9-11 migratory restrictions) and 2007 share was below 70 percent; in 2012, it was 70.4 percent. These numbers reflect utilization of previous transnational networks in Miami and Fort Lauderdale, central to the decision of many Colombians to temporarily or permanently leave their country.

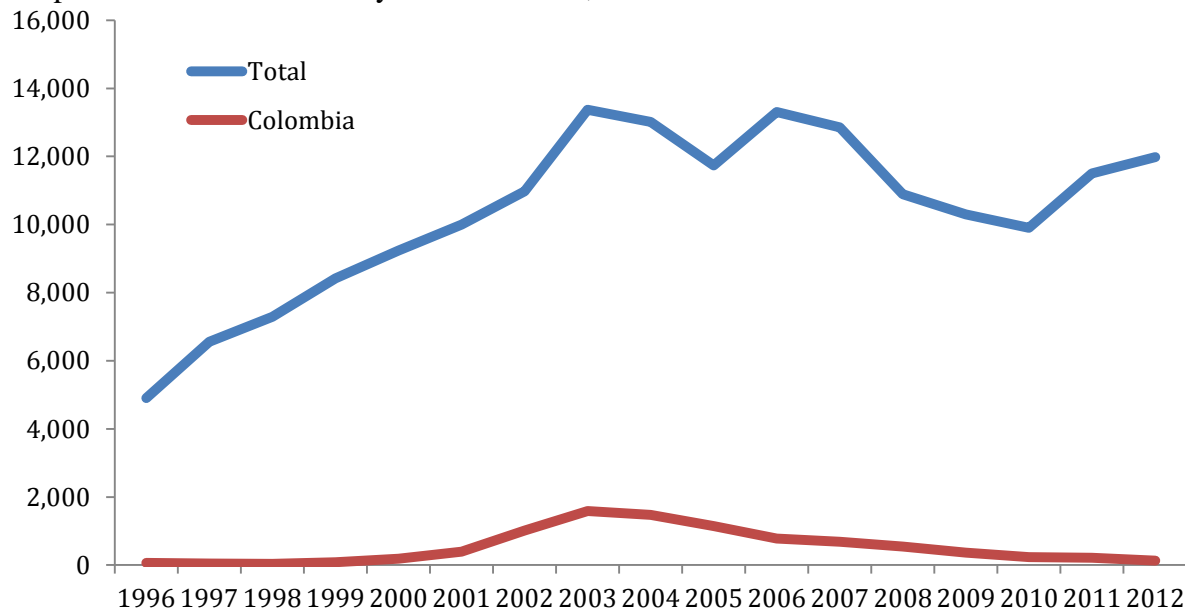
Political Migration and Stabilization of Colombian Asylees in the U.S., 1996-2012

Graph 7: Total Affirmative Asylees in the U.S., 1996-2012



Sources: U.S. Department of Homeland Security 2006 and 2013, *Yearbook of Immigration Statistics*, Refugees and Asylees: Table 17

Graph 8: Total Defensive Asylees in the U.S., 1996-2012



Sources: U.S. Department of Homeland Security 2006 and 2013, *Yearbook of Immigration Statistics, Refugees and Asylees*: Table 19

Graphs 7 and 8, related to asylum requests, support one of the main arguments of this document - The “Third Colombian Diaspora” is directly related to the political conditions and the intensification of the armed conflict recorded between the 1998 and 2003.⁵³ Three ideas are relevant about it: first, There is an escalation in requests for defensive, but especially for affirmative, asylum in the aftermath of failed peace negotiations between the Andres Pastrana government and FARC guerrillas. In 1999, there is a sudden and dramatic rise in affirmative asylum requests. This is a likely consequence of extensive armed conflict. Especially apparent is the revitalized scope and impact of the guerrillas (FARC and ELN): political and economic kidnappings, attacks of towns, drug- and criminal violence, extortions to families, landowners, politicians, journalists, and soldiers.⁵⁴

Increases in guerrilla actions are related to their ability to move across the demilitarized

zone in several Colombian states, due to a military amnesty conceded by Pastrana's government. Thus, an escalation of guerrilla actions was recorded beginning the day of the initiation of peace process negotiations in El Caguan (Southern Colombian states of Meta and Caquetá).

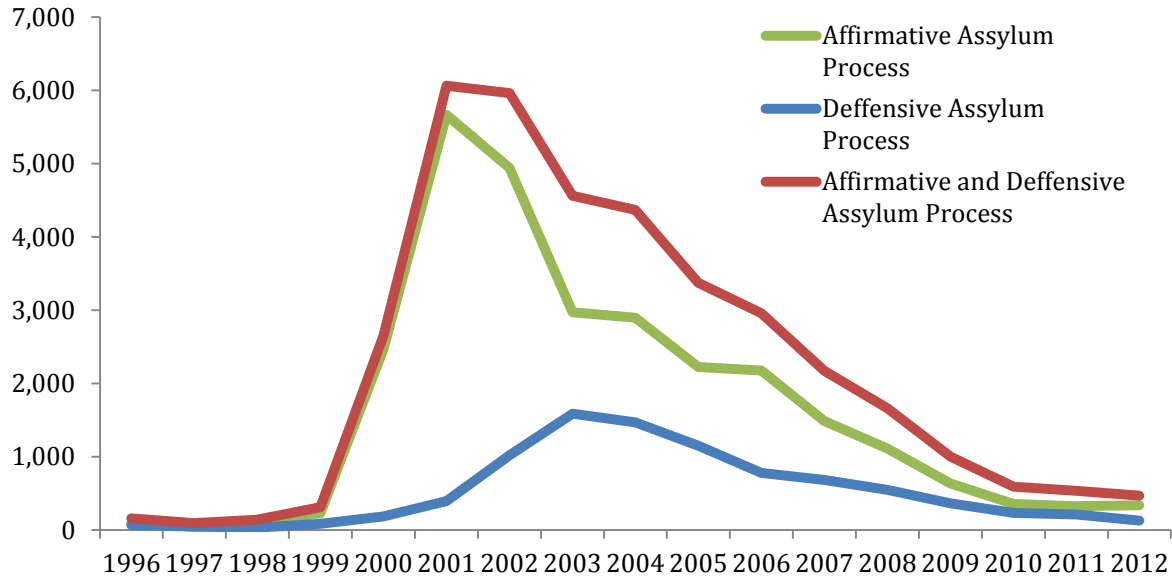
This political context coincides with the economic crisis recorded in 1999.⁵⁵ In 1999, the unemployment rate in the seven biggest Colombian metropolitan areas was 20.4 percent. The national GDP dropped 4.2 percent in the third quarter of 2000, the unemployment rate reached a peak of 20.5 percent; in 2001, unemployment was 16.8 percent and the economic growth rate was 2.9 percent; in 2001, the economic growth rate decreased again to 1.4 percent and the unemployment rate was 16.8 percent.⁵⁶

As the peak in the number of affirmative and defensive asylum requests was reached, so was the intensification of paramilitary actions, and the escalation of guerrilla-military-paramilitary counter-reactions.⁵⁷ Colombia is well known as a country plagued by guerrilla and drug-related violence, but paramilitary or counter-guerrilla violence is not as well recognized.

The second argument that I will defend is that the number of affirmative and defensive asylum requests reached their peak, when the intensification of the conflict and the confrontations between guerrilla, paramilitary, urban-criminal, drug and state forces reached their highest point. Between 1999 and 2001, the number of massive killings and kidnappings increased like never before, being the massive killings associated with paramilitary actions and kidnappings with guerrilla actions.⁵⁸ There is a clear connection between the escalation of the bloodiest and most extensive ways of violence in urban and rural Colombia and the unusual increase in defensive and affirmative asylum requests to the U.S. What is also interesting is that the increase in the asylum requests in American territory between 1999-2002 is due mainly to the

Colombian requests for asylum.

Graph 9: Affirmative and Defensive Asylum Processes from Colombia to the U.S., 1996-2012



Sources: U.S. Department of Homeland Security 2006 and 2013, *Yearbook of Immigration Statistics, Refugees and Asylees*: Tables 17 and 19

Third, when new political and military policies were implemented under the government of Alvaro Uribe (2002-2006; 2006-2010), the requests for affirmative and defensive asylum dropped systematically. This decrease has been maintained under the current Juan Manuel Santos' presidency (2010-2014), even though at a lower speed.

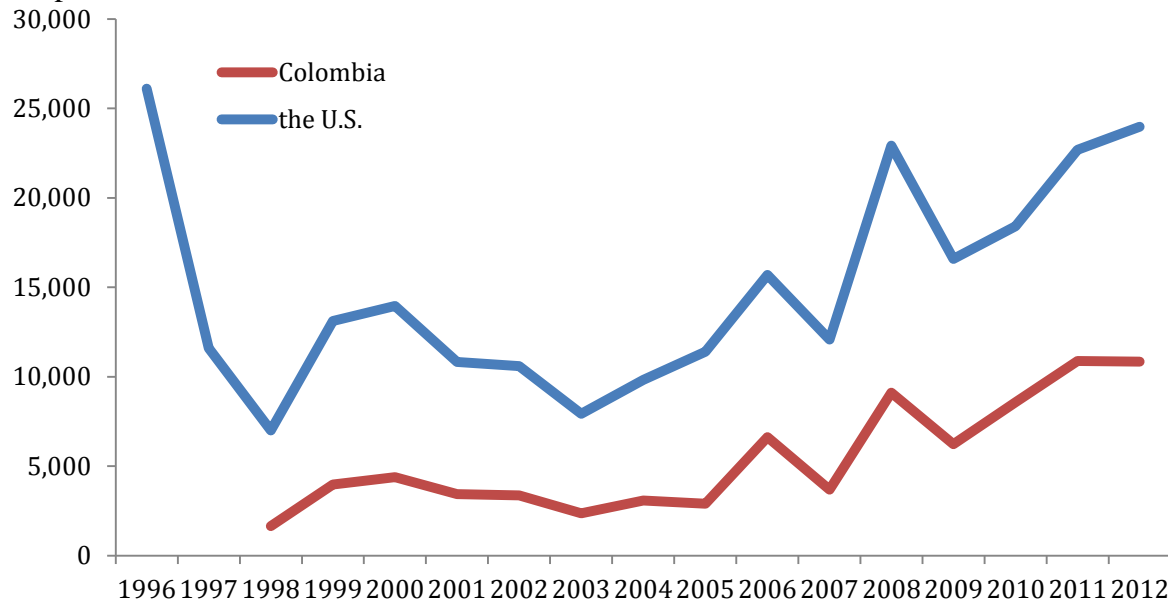
Clearly, migration trends have political roots. In 1996, the number of affirmative and defensive Colombian asylum seekers was 161, or 0.41 percent of total U.S. asylum seekers (18,594). In 2001, an explosion of affirmative and defensive Colombian asylum requests was recorded, reaching a peak of 6,062. This figure represented 15.71 percent of the total of U.S. asylum seekers (38,641). In 2002, though the total number of Colombian requests decreased to 5,961, their percentage increased, reaching 16.28 percent of the total of U.S. asylum seekers. There has been a systematic decrease in the number of Colombian asylum seekers in the last two

years (2012-2014), even though, recent guerilla attacks by FARC and ELN countered by the strong efforts of FARC and current president Juan Manuel Santos to negotiate another peace process, could increase asylum requests. Thus, 2012 saw a decrease in Colombian numbers to 471, or 1.60 percent of total U.S. asylum seekers (29,484). If the rate of political asylum within the total of Colombian migrants is analyzed, the findings are more conclusive. In 1996, the percentage of migrants that were seeking political asylum was 1.13 percent (161 out of 14,283 Colombian migrants). In 2000, a still low 3.17 percent of migrants sought political asylum (316 out of 9,966 Colombian migrants). In 2001, however, the percentage of Colombians seeking political asylum soars to 36.23 percent of the total, or 6,062 out of 25,571 migrants. With the exception of 2002 political asylum seeker numbers have declined. In 2012, 471 out of 20,931, or 2 percent of Colombian migrants were considered political refugees.

Colombian Naturalizations in the U.S. and Florida: Historical Trends

Colombian naturalizations reflect positive advances in obtaining lawful U.S. citizenship. Excluding the periods 1996-1999 and 2001-2003 (aftermath of 9-11 attacks), this is confirmed by American Community Survey data on Colombian legalization status in Florida, something that I will explore in another paper.⁵⁹

Graph 10: Colombian Naturalizations in the U.S. and FLO, 1996-2012



Sources: Immigration and Naturalization Service (1997-2001), *Statistical Yearbook of the Immigration and Naturalization Service*, Tables 49, 50, and 51; Department of Homeland Security (2002-2012), *Yearbook of Immigration Statistics*, Naturalizations: Supplemental Table 1

Between 1996 and 2011, there is not only a growing (or at least, stable) trend of naturalizations within Florida. There is greater proportion of Colombian naturalizations compared to those lawfully acquired by citizens of other countries. Colombians –now American citizens- naturalized in Florida has also been growing. In Florida, this proportionate increase should allow access to a greater role and more visibility in social and political issues. Some scholars, however, have rejected this assumption. They argue that Colombian immigrants are too fragmented by class, region, and mistrust. These are the consequence of their U.S. stigma as drug dealers and criminals⁶⁰ and Colombian cultural, class, and regional differences. They lack strong sociocultural and political ties or social capital networks. This has affected their ability to unite as a communal cohesive actor toward achieving common goals. According to Guarnizo and

Diaz, the greater number and proportion of Colombians has not changed a situation in which stigmas, fragmentation brought from the home country, and rivalries in the new one weigh more than the increasing numbers.⁶¹

All the previous data, especially the information related to political migration reinforces a state-oriented argument focused on political crisis and a loss of administrative and military means to exert legitimate violence and control. In turn, the gradual economic and military recovery, between 2005 and 2012 forces us to expand our argument in order to include economic perspectives that explain the stabilization of the Colombian migration to the U.S. after 2005.

Conclusion

From 1999 to 2006, there was a sustained increase in Colombian migratory flow to the U.S. including new arrivals and adjustments. This is succeeded by a systematic decrease in migrants between 2006 and 2012. In 1999, as a consequence of the economic crisis there were 9,966 migrants. In 2000, this number upsurged to 14,427 migrants. In 2006, the migration reached its historical peak with 43,144 new arrivals and adjustments. In 2007 the figure decreased to 33,187, in 2012 there was a further decline to 20,931. While rapid increase in 2000 had economic and political reasons, the historical peak in 2006 is mainly political. Overall systematic decrease, 1996-2012, had political and socioeconomic origins in both Colombia and the U.S.

Endnotes

¹ I wrote this paper with the assistance of Dr. Margarita Rodriguez in her Migration and Development course at the University of Miami.

² Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. *Global OECD Boosted by Decision to Open Membership Talks with Colombia and Latvia with More to Follow*, (2013). Retrieved from: <http://www.oecd.org/newsroom/global-oecd-boosted-by-decision-to-open-membership-talks-with-colombia-and-latvia-with-more-to-follow.htm>

³ Fitch Ratings. *Colombia's Entry into OECD Could Advance Economic Reform*, (2013). Retrieved from: http://www.fitchratings.com/gws/en/fitchwire/fitchwirearticle/Colombia's-Entry-into?pr_id=792813

⁴ Banco de la Republica. *Tasas de Empleo y Desempleo - Porcentaje de Fuerza de Trabajo*, (2012). Retrieved from: <http://www.banrep.gov.co/tasas-empleo-desempleo>; Arango, L. E. and Posada, C. E. "El Desempleo en Colombia". *Borradores de Economia* 002495, (2001): 4.

⁵ Gonzalez, F. and Rettberg, A. "Rethinking state Fragility in Colombia". *Revista de Estudios Sociales*, (2010): 181-184; Reyes, A. *Guerreros y Campesinos: El Despojo de la Tierra en Colombia*, (2009); Gutierrez, F. "Crime, [Counter] Insurgency and the Privatization of Security – the Case of Medellín, Colombia". *Environment and Urbanization* 16: 17, (2004): 15-30; Richani, N. *Systems of Violence: The Political Economy of War and Peace in Colombia*, (2002); Richani, N. "Multinational Corporations, Rentier Capitalism, and the War System in Colombia". *Latin American Politics & Society*, Volume 47, Number 3, (2005): 113-144; Holmes, J., et. al., "Drugs, Violence, and Development in Colombia: A Department-Level Analysis". *Latin American Politics and Society* Volume 48, Issue 3, (2006): 157-184; Eaton, K. "The Downside of Decentralization: Armed Clientelism in Colombia". *Security Studies*, Volume 15, Issue 4, (2010): 533 – 562.

⁶ Human Rights Watch. *Colombia: Displaced and Discarded - The Plight of Internally Displaced Persons in Bogotá and Cartagena* October, Vol. 17, No. 4(B), (2005): 5; Roberts, E. "Colombia Vive Atroz Crisis de Refugiados". *El Nuevo Herald*, February 4th, 2004. According also to both La Agencia Social para la Accion Social y la Cooperacion Internacional and the Internal Displacement Monitoring Center, IDMC during 2000-2009, 3.303.979 persons abandoned their homes as a consequence of the different kinds of violences that have hit the country in the last five decades. To see Internal Displacement Monitoring Center. *Improved Government Response yet to Have Impact for IDPs*, (2011): 4. Retrieved from: [http://www.internal-displacement.org/8025708F004BE3B1/%28httpInfoFiles%29/4C851081FBE3FB10C1257975005E685E/\\$file/colombia-overview-Dect2011.pdf](http://www.internal-displacement.org/8025708F004BE3B1/%28httpInfoFiles%29/4C851081FBE3FB10C1257975005E685E/$file/colombia-overview-Dect2011.pdf)

⁷ Departamento Nacional de Estadística (DANE). *Censo General 2005*. (2005). Retrieved from: https://www.dane.gov.co/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=307&Itemid=124

⁸ The above does not mean that these military and institutional anti-drug policies were successful. The rise of criminal bands (Bacrim, in Spanish) and new cartels such as El Cartel of Norte del Valle as leaders in the production and distribution of drugs along with guerrilla and paramilitary groups, reflects how inoperative and regressive these policies have been not only for the dismantling of an entire industry but also for the development of a country such as Colombia.

⁹ Some analysts refer to a positive macroeconomic impact of labor, trade, and other policies see, for example, Loboguerrero, A. M. *Economic Reforms in Colombia*, (2008); Clavijo, S. *Social Security Reforms in Colombia: Striking Demographic and Fiscal Balances*, (2009).

¹⁰ Loboguerrero, A. M. *Economic Reforms in Colombia...* (2008): 128-129.

¹¹ According to several authors Colombia at the end of the 1990s and early 2000s witnessed a new migration wave, known as the "Third Colombian Diaspora". The first one was recorded during the period known as La Violencia in the 1950s. This wave continued after the end of La Violencia and lasted until the late-1970s. The second one began in the late-1970s and continued until the mid-1990s. The third one, the focus of this document, began in the late 1990s until the mid-2000s. Collier, M. and Gamarra, E. *The Colombian Diaspora in South Florida – The Colombian Diaspora Project*, (2003): 5; Collier, M. *Colombian Migration to South Florida: A Most Unwelcome Reception* (Working Paper No. 9), (2004): 2; Robertson, H. *Exit, Voice, and*

Loyalty: Responses to the Political Crisis and State Decline in Colombia, MA thesis, Florida International University, (2002): 41-45; Guarnizo, L. E. “El Estado y la Migración Global Colombiana”. *Migracion y Desarrollo*, No. 6, (2006): 83; Guarnizo, L. E. and Diaz, M. “Transnational Migration: a View from Colombia”. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* - Volume 22, Number 2, (March, 1999): 397-421.

¹² Banco de la Republica. *Tasas de Empleo y Desempleo - Porcentaje de Fuerza de Trabajo*. (2012). Retrieved from: <http://www.banrep.gov.co/tasas-empleo-desempleo>; Vono de Vilhena, D. *Panorama Migratorio en Colombia a Partir de las Estadísticas Locales*, (2010).

¹³ Guarnizo, L. E. and Diaz, M. “Transnational Migration: a View from Colombia”. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* - Volume 22 Number 2 (March, 1999): 402.

¹⁴ Ibid, 402-403, 408; Sassen-Koob, S. “Formal and Informal Associations: Dominicans and Colombians in New York”. *International Migration Review*, Vol. 13, No. 2, Special Issue: International Migration in Latin America, (1979): 325; Guarnizo, L. E., Sanchez, A. I., and Roach, E. “Mistrust, Fragmented Solidarity, and Transnational Migration: Colombians in New York and Los Angeles”. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, (1999): 373; Collier, M. *Colombian Migration to South Florida: A Most Unwelcome...* (2003): 4; International Organization for Migrations. *Perfil Migratorio de Colombia*, (2010).

¹⁵ Robertson, H. *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to the Political Crisis and State Decline in Colombia*, MA thesis, Florida International University, (2002); Franco, N. *The Colombian Migration to South Florida: Expectations and Experiences*. MA thesis, Florida International University, (2002). Collier, M. and Gamarra, E. *The Colombian Diaspora in South Florida – The Colombian Diaspora Project*. (2003); Collier, M. *Colombian Migration to South Florida: A Most Unwelcome Reception...*; Vono de Vilhena, D. *Panorama Migratorio en Colombia...*; Pew Hispanic Center. *Hispanics of Colombian Origin in the United States*, 2009, (2011): 1.

¹⁶ Clavijo, S. *Social Security Reforms in Colombia. Striking Demographic and Fiscal Balances*; (2009): 21; Financial Times. *New Colombia – Special Report*, (2013); Banco Bilbao Vizcaya Argentaria. *Economic Outlook Colombia – First Quarter 2013*, 22 P, (2013): 1.

¹⁷ Collier, M. and Gamarra, E. *The Colombian Diaspora in South Florida...* (2003); Collier, M. *Colombian Migration to South Florida...*, (2004): 4-7.

¹⁸ Woods, C. “U.S. Colombians Seek more Political Clout”. *The Miami Herald*, (September 23rd, 2007); Guarnizo, L. E. “El Estado y la Migración Global Colombiana”, (2006); Pew Hispanic Center. *Hispanics of Colombian Origin in the United States*, 2009, (2011): 1..

¹⁹ Robertson, H. *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to the Political Crisis...* (2002); Franco, N. *The Colombian Migration to South Florida: Expectations and Experiences*. MA thesis, Florida International University, (2002). Collier, M. and Gamarra, E. *The Colombian Diaspora in South Florida – The Colombian Diaspora Project*. 19 P, (2003); Collier, M. *Colombian Migration to South Florida: A Most Unwelcome Reception...*; Micolta, A. and Escobar, M. C. “Familias de Cali con Inmigrantes Internacionales: el Antes y el Ahora”. *Sociedad y Economía # 17*, (2010): 69-87.

²⁰ Zamora, E. A. “Conquistando el Sueño Americano. Trayectorias Laborales de Exito Profesional”. *Sociedad y Economía # 17*, (2010): 115-139; Vono de Vilhena, D. *Panorama Migratorio en Colombia...*, (2010); International Organization for Migrations. *Perfil Migratorio de Colombia*, (2010).

²¹ Casey, C. *The Colombian Migration to South Florida: the Effect of Social Capital on the Formation of the Immigrant Communities*, MA thesis, Florida International University. (2002); Del Rio Duque, M. L. “Un Analisis de la Fuga de Cerebros desde la Teoria de las Redes Sociales”. *Sociedad y Economía # 17*, (2010): 89-113.

²² Sassen-Koob, S. “Formal and Informal Associations...”, (1979): 314-332; Guarnizo, L. E., Sanchez, A. I., and Roach, E. “Mistrust, Fragmented Solidarity, and Transnational Migration...”, (1999): 367-396; Guarnizo, L. E. “El Estado y la Migración Global Colombiana...”, (2006): 79-101; Guarnizo, L. E. and Diaz, M. “Transnational Migration: a View from Colombia”..., (1999): 397-421.

²³ Sassen-Koob, S. “Formal and Informal Associations...”, (1979): 316-320; Guarnizo, L. E., Sanchez, A. I., and Roach, E. “Mistrust, Fragmented Solidarity, and Transnational Migration...”, (1999): 377.

-
- ²⁴ Guarnizo, L. E., Sanchez, A. I., and Roach, E. “Mistrust, Fragmented Solidarity, and Transnational Migration...”, (1999): 377.
- ²⁵ Collier, M. *Colombian Migration to South Florida: A Most Unwelcome Reception*, (2004): 14
- ²⁶ Guarnizo, L. E. and Diaz, M. “Transnational Migration: a View from Colombia, (1999): 402.
- ²⁷ Guarnizo, L. E. “El Estado y la Migración Global Colombiana”..., (2005): 87-89.
- ²⁸ Micolta, A. and Escobar, M. C. “Familias de Cali con Inmigrantes Internacionales...”, (2010): 73.
- ²⁹ Massey S., Douglas. Alarcon, Rafael, Durand, Jorge, and Gonzalez, Humberto. *Return to Aztlan: The Social Process of International Migration from Western Mexico*, (1987); International Organization for Migrations. *Perfil Migratorio...* (2010): 5.
- ³⁰ International Organization for Migrations. *Perfil Migratorio...* (2010): 54-55.
- ³¹ Vono de Vilhena, D. *Panorama Migratorio en Colombia...*, (2010); International Organization for Migrations. *Perfil Migratorio...* (2010): 42-43.
- ³² Zamora, E. A. “Conquistando el Sueño Americano...”, (2010): 135-138.
- ³³ Casey, C. *The Colombian Migration to South Florida...*, (2002): 1-6, 59-82.
- ³⁴ Del Rio Duque, M. L. “Un Analisis de la Fuga de Cerebros desde la Teoria de las Redes Sociales...”, (2010): 89-113.
- ³⁵ Putnam, R. *Bowling Alone. The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, (2000): 22; Casey, C. *The Colombian Migration to South Florida...*, (2002): 22-23
- ³⁶ Casey, C. *The Colombian Migration to South Florida...*, (2002): 24; See also Jensen, L. and Portes, A. “The Enclave and the Entrants: Patterns of Ethnic Enterprise in Miami Before and After Mariel”. *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 57, No. 3 (Jun., 1992): 411-414; Portes, A. and Stepick, A. *City on the Edge: the Transformation of Miami*, (1993); Sudarsky, J. *Colombia's Social Capital. The National Measurement with The Barcas*, (1998).
- ³⁷ Casey, C. *The Colombian Migration to South Florida...*, (2002): 115.
- ³⁸ Guarnizo, L. E., Sanchez, A. I., and Roach, E. “Mistrust, Fragmented Solidarity, and Transnational Migration...”, (1999): 373, 388.
- ³⁹ Del Rio Duque, M. L. “Un Analisis de la Fuga de Cerebros desde la Teoria de las Redes Sociales”..., (2010): 111-112.
- ⁴⁰ Robertson, H. *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to the Political Crisis...* (2002): 1-36.
- ⁴¹ Collier, M. and Gamarra, E. *The Colombian Diaspora in South Florida...* (2003).
- ⁴² Collier, M. *Colombian Migration to South Florida...* (2004).
- ⁴³ Collier, M. and Gamarra, E. *The Colombian Diaspora in South Florida...* (2003): 1.
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 12-15.
- ⁴⁵ Robertson, H. *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to the Political Crisis...* (2002): 170.
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 174.
- ⁴⁷ Collier, M. *Colombian Migration to South Florida...* (2004): 13-16.
- ⁴⁸ The TPS was neglected in 2002 and again in 2003. *Ibid*, 13. See also: The Miami Herald. “Colombians Push for Immigration Reprieve”, (February 5th, 2001); The U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants. *USCR Calls State Department's Blocking of TPS for Colombians a Callous, Politically Motivated Action that Contravenes Intent of TPS Statute*, (2003). Retrieved from: <http://reliefweb.int/report/colombia/uscr-calls-state-departments-blocking-tps-colombians-callous-politically-motivated>; Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada. *Recent Trends in Colombian Asylum Claims in the United States, USA39103*, (2002). Retrieved from: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/3df4bec224.html>
- ⁴⁹ Collier, M. and Gamarra, E. *The Colombian Diaspora in South Florida...* (2003): 1.
- ⁵⁰ Collier, M. *Colombian Migration to South Florida...* (2004): 14-15.
- ⁵¹ Author's translation; This is the original fragment: “Los motivos son diversos. Van desde la crisis económica que afecta a buena parte de Europa, hasta las “cada vez mejores” condiciones de vida que ofrece el gobierno colombiano”. *El Pais*. “Cerca de 100 Migrantes Regresan cada Mes de España a Colombia”, (Aug 25th, 2009). Retrieved from:

<http://historico.elpais.com.co/paisonline/notas/Agosto252009/retorno.html>.

⁵² No information available for Colombians in West Palm Beach – Boca Raton 2012

⁵³ Brinkley-Rogers, P. “Colombian Exiles Face Uncertain U.S. Future”. *The Miami Herald*, (June 6th, 2001); Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada. *Recent Trends in Colombian Asylum Claims...* (2002).

⁵⁴ Roberts, E. “Colombia Vive Atroz Crisis de Refugiados”. *El Nuevo Herald*, February 4th, 2004; El Nuevo Herald. “En Aumento las Solicitudes de Asilo Político en EU”, April 6th, (2002).

⁵⁵ Chardy, A. “Colombian Travelers Asking to Stay in U.S.”. *The Miami Herald*, (March 30th, 2001); CNN. (2002). CNN. “Violence, Economy Force Colombians to Migrate”. *CNN News*, (August 20th, 2002).

Chardy, A. “Colombians Seek Extended Stay in U.S.”. *The Miami Herald*, October 19th, (2000).

⁵⁶ Kalmanovitz, S. *Recesion y Recuperacion de la Economia Colombiana*, (2004): 104.

⁵⁷ Smith, D. “Victims in Drug War Fighting Deportation”. *Fort Worth-Star Telegram*, (March 4th, 2004).

⁵⁸ Miller, C. “Colombia’s Fugitives From Woe”. *Los Angeles Times*, (March 31st, 2001).

⁵⁹ I will delve more deeply into the American Community Survey when I explain the situation of Colombians in South Florida in a second article published in the same magazine: www.trendsandperspectives.com

⁶⁰ Guarnizo, L. E. and Diaz, M. “Transnational Migration: a View from Colombia, (1999): 402.

⁶¹ Guarnizo, L. E. and Diaz, M. “Transnational Migration: a View from Colombia, (1999): 402; See also about social capital in the Colombian community in the U.S. and Florida: Nino, P. “Colombian Expatriates Going to Polls”. *The Miami Herald*, (March 10th, 2002).