

The Colombian-origin Population of Florida (2007-2011)

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

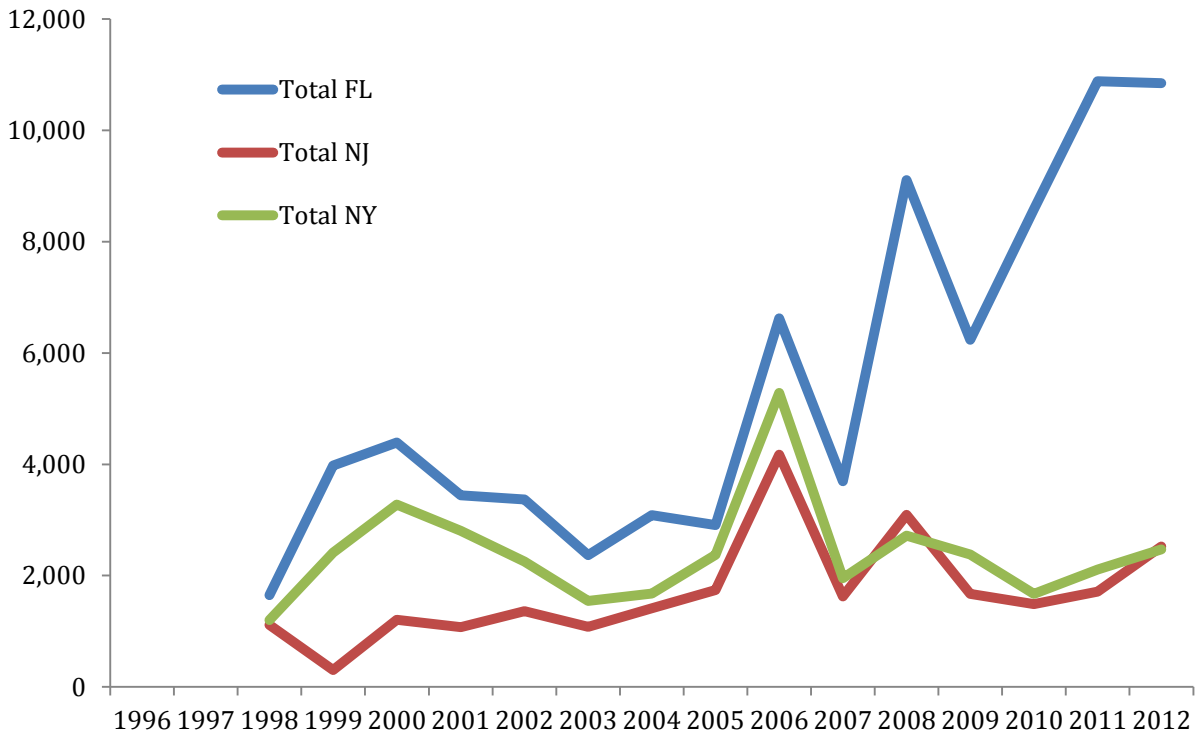
This paper describes the most important demographic and socioeconomic indicators for Colombians in Florida, Miami-Dade, and Broward counties between 2007 and 2011. From a comparative perspective and using statistical data from the Yearbook of Immigration (1996-2012) and the American Community Survey (2007-2011), I argue that Florida became the most important entry point for Colombians, exceeding the Greater New York area (the historical core for Colombians in the 1970s, 1980s, and early 1990s). The growing presence of Colombians between 2007 and 2011, however, contrasts with their economic conditions. These have been worsening, especially poverty and unemployment.

General trends of Colombians in Florida¹

One of the main cores for Colombian migration is South Florida. A description of demographic and socioeconomic indicators such as age, sex, employment, educational attainment, poverty, and income for the South Florida counties of Miami-Dade, Broward, Collier, Monroe and Palm Beach was originally intended. Unfortunately, ACS information for Collier, Monroe and Palm Beach was unavailable, limiting analysis to Miami-Dade and Broward counties. These counties, however, represent nearly two-thirds of the Colombian population living in Florida.

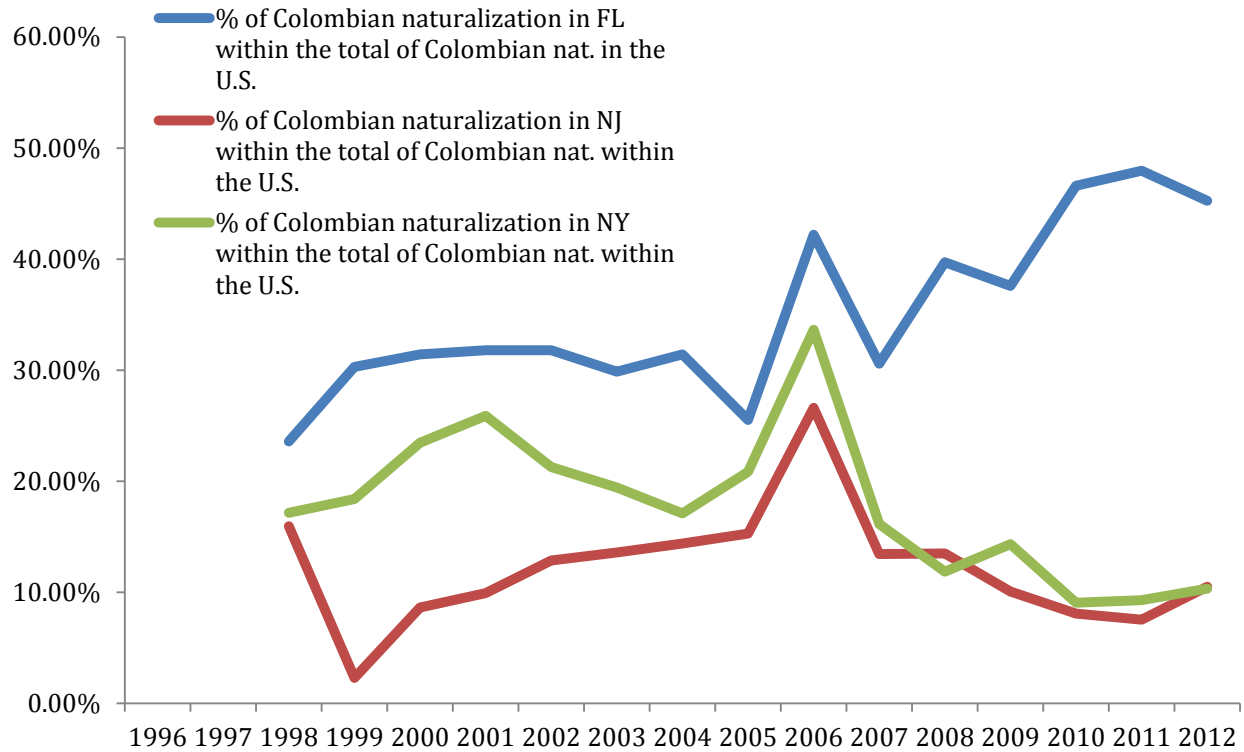
First, a comparison will be made between the main historical entry points for Colombian immigrants. Using information from the Yearbook of Immigration, I will show that, after registering a similar number of naturalizations in 1996, the gap between Florida and Greater New York area (New Jersey and New York) has increased, in favor of Florida. Then I will focus on socioeconomic and demographic indicators such as sex, education attainment, citizenship status, poverty, and unemployment in the three states selected.

Graph 1: Colombian Naturalizations in Florida, New York, and New Jersey, 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

Graph 2: % of Colombian Naturalizations in the Main Colombian-American Cores, 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

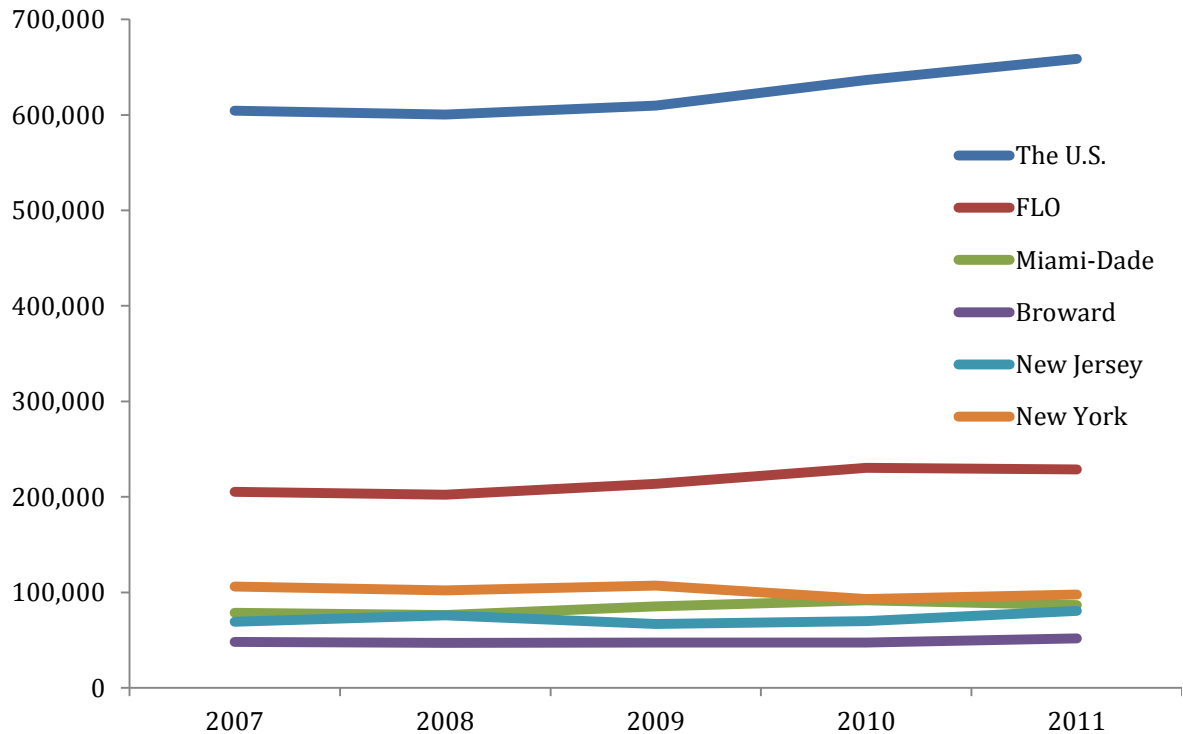
Contrasting the situation of Colombians in Florida and Greater New York (New Jersey and New York) can provide information about how, historically, Colombians have been populating specific areas. As naturalizations in Florida increased from 23 percent in 1998 to 45 percent in 2012, other states should have seen decreased numbers. That is exactly what happened in the Greater New York area, especially in the state of New York. In absolute terms, the number of naturalizations increased in all three states, but the growth rate was not the same. In 1998, there were 6,997 Colombian naturalizations in the U.S. Florida accounted for 1,650, New Jersey 1,116, and New York 1,201. During the period of analysis (1996-2012) neither New York nor New Jersey exceeded 3,200 Colombian naturalizations per year. In 2011 and 2012, Colombian

naturalizations in Florida, however, reached 11,000, a historical peak.

Graphs 1 and 2 show that, after starting within a similar range in 1998 (1,615 in Florida, 1,116 in New Jersey, and 1,201 in New York), 2012 naturalizations in Florida are five times the number registered in New Jersey and New York.

Graph 2 illustrates how, after 2006, such a gap increases over time. South Florida seemed to have been a place where Colombians established themselves more easily than in other parts of the U.S. There, an economic and political diaspora, as well as the feeling of a quick, desperate and inconclusive exit likely reinforced transnational networks. Thus, between 1996 and 2012, South Florida became the main pole for both the arrival and naturalization of Colombians.

Graph 3: Colombians in The U.S., FLO, NY, and NJ, 2007-2011



Source: United States Census Bureau (2008-2012), *American Community Survey 1-year: S0201 Geography-Florida, S0201 Geography-Miami-Dade County, and S0201 Geography-Broward County*

In 2007, there were 604,527 Colombians in American territory (using the ACS information). Four years later they were 658,667. Florida accounted for 205,152 persons in 2007. In 2011, that figure increased to 228,619 or 34 percent of the U.S. Colombian population. Also of interest were the large increases of Colombian naturalizations. There in 1998, Florida represented 23 percent of total U.S. Colombian naturalizations. This jumped to 48 percent in 2011 (45 percent in 2012),

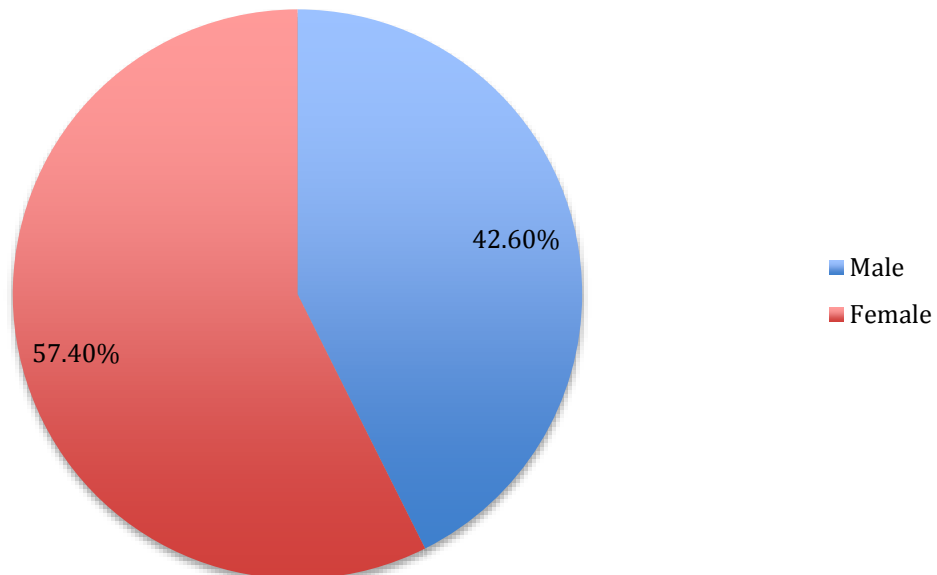
In 2007, Miami-Dade recorded a figure of 78,755. In 2011, that figure rose to 86,565. During the same period, Broward County, with 48,022, represented approximately 8 percent of the U.S. Colombian population (and 23.4 percent of Colombians living in Florida). In 2011, the Colombians in Broward County had increased to 51,617. The ACS data has shown the importance of Florida, especially South Florida for Colombians (not only for immigrants). While rates increased in some years, the evidence from the ACS data is not conclusive that there was a trade-off between the South Florida and Greater New York populations. This is for two reasons. First, analysis of Colombians in both South Florida and Greater New York, began relatively recently, in 2007 (2005 in the case of Broward County). Second, the historical U.S. proportionate share of Colombians living in New York and New Jersey has fluctuated. After analyzing the data, I can find a relevant (absolute or relative) decrease of Colombians in New York, correlated to an increase of Colombians in Florida, in just two periods: 2007 - 2008 and 2009 - 2010.

In 2007, for example, there were 106,183 Colombians living in New York, or 17.56 percent of Colombians in the U.S. In 2010, there were 92,949 or 14.60 percent of the U.S. total. In 2011, however, Colombians living in New York, in ratio to Colombians living in the U.S., proportionately increases. In 2007, there were 205,153 Colombians living in Florida,

representing 33.94 percent of Colombians living in the U.S. In 2010, there were 230,498, meaning, 36.21 percent of the total. But in 2011, both the number of Colombians living in Florida and its proportionate total of all U.S. Colombians decreases. Again, these figures should be analyzed carefully keeping in mind they are representative of only a four-year trend. Such a short period signifies neither reliably stable nor conclusive historical trends.

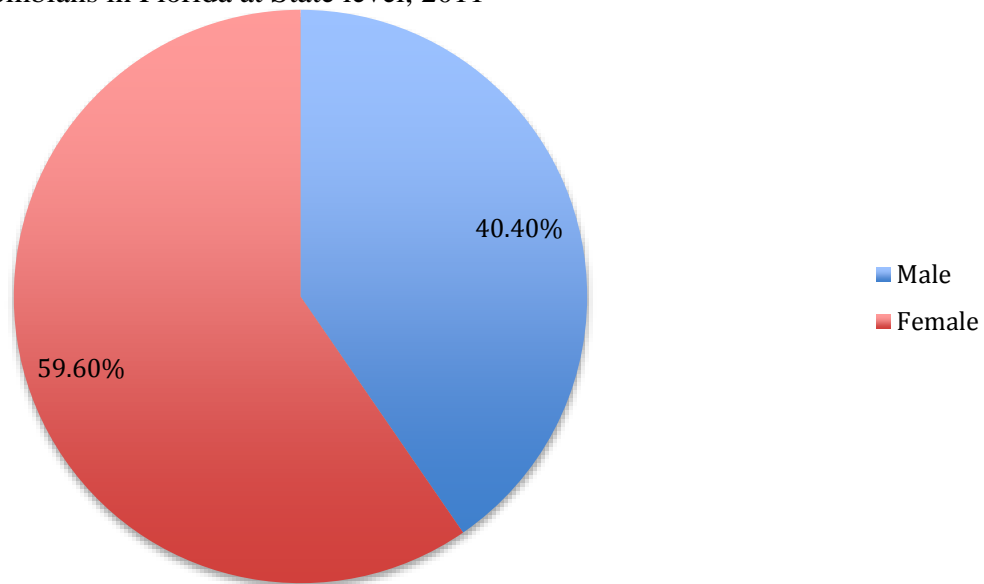
When assessing Colombian presence in the U.S., including Florida, of particular interest is the remarkable number of women. This is not only higher, but is increasing faster than numbers for men. Thus, there is a broadening in the gap between Colombian men and women in Miami-Dade, and Broward counties.

Graph 4: Colombians in Florida at State level, 2007



Source: United States Census Bureau (2008-2012), *American Community Survey 1-year: S0201 Geography-Florida, S0201 Geography-Miami-Dade County, and S0201 Geography-Broward County*

Graph 5: Colombians in Florida at State level, 2011



Source: United States Census Bureau (2008-2012), *American Community Survey 1-year: S0201 Geography-Florida, S0201 Geography-Miami-Dade County, and S0201 Geography-Broward County*

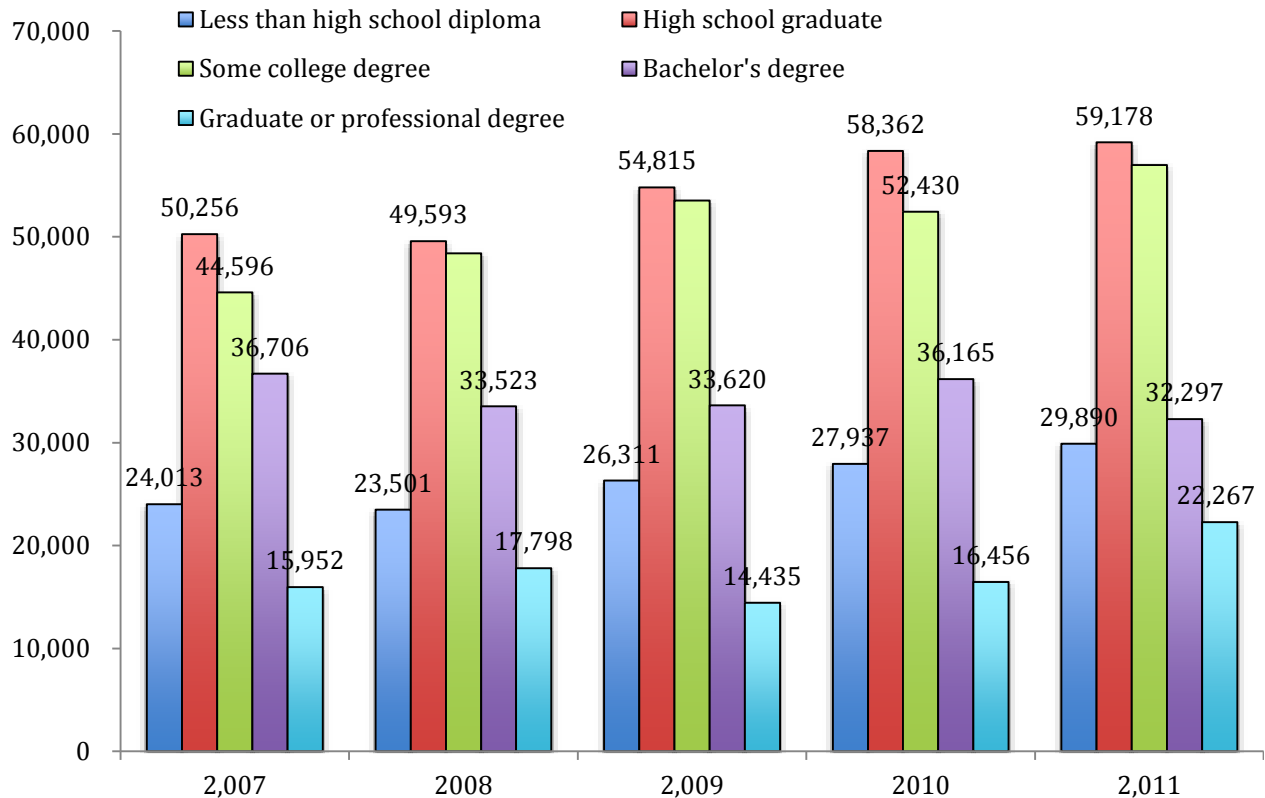
In 2007, the proportion of men to women in Florida was 42.60 percent to 56.40 percent. By 2011, the gap had widened, reaching 40 percent men to 60 percent women. The same trend is found in the analysis of Miami-Dade and Broward counties. Miami-Dade records 41.80 percent men to 58.20 percent women in 2007, and 40 percent to 60 percent in 2011. Broward County records 44.30 men to 55.70 percent women in 2007, and 40.8 percent to 59.2 percent in 2011.

Table 1: Educational Attainment in Florida, Miami-Dade, and Broward Counties, 2007-2011

Florida					
Category/Year	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
25 and over	171,523	172,798	182,717	191,350	200,602
Less than high school	14.00%	13.60%	14.40%	14.60%	14.90%
High school graduate	29.30%	28.70%	30.00%	30.50%	29.50%
Some college degree	26.00%	28.00%	29.30%	27.40%	28.40%
Bachelor's degree	21.40%	19.40%	18.40%	18.90%	16.10%
Graduate or professional degree	9.30%	10.30%	7.90%	8.60%	11.10%
Miami-Dade					
Category/Year	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
25 and over	65,499	67,871	77,316	77,654	77,316
Less than high school	14.90%	13.80%	14.50%	16.60%	16.20%
High school graduate	26.50%	28.50%	31.00%	30.90%	29.40%
Some college degree	26.40%	24.20%	28.10%	25.80%	23.40%
Bachelor's degree	22.70%	22.20%	19.70%	19.70%	17.30%
Graduate or professional degree	9.50%	11.30%	6.70%	7.00%	13.60%
Broward					
Category/Year	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
25 and over	39,208	38,651	40,085	39,726	43,126
Less than high school	13.20%	12.10%	11.40%	11.70%	13.00%
High school graduate	28.50%	27.80%	28.60%	28.10%	28.40%
Some college degree	25.50%	26.40%	28.70%	28.10%	27.10%
Bachelor's degree	22.20%	22.60%	21.10%	20.70%	19.60%
Graduate or professional degree	10.70%	11.10%	10.20%	11.30%	11.90%

Source: United States Census Bureau (2008-2012), *American Community Survey 1-year: S0201 Geography-Florida, S0201 Geography-Miami-Dade County, and S0201 Geography-Broward County*

Graph 6: School Enrollment for Colombians in Florida, 2007-2011

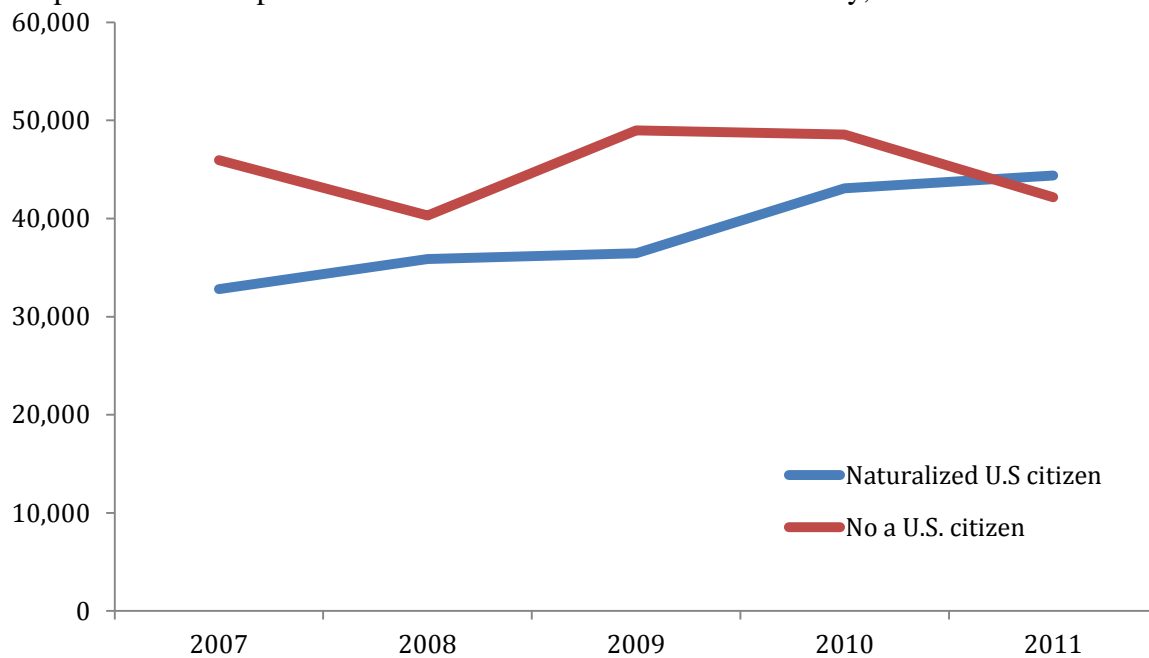


Source: United States Census Bureau (2008-2012), *American Community Survey 1-year: S0201* Geography-Florida

As Table 1 shows, school enrollment for Colombians maintained a similar trend in all Florida, and in particular Miami Dade and Broward counties, in several aspects. First, there was a sustained percentage increase in the proportion of Colombians with a graduate or professional degree in all three geographic surveys. In 2007, there was a 9.3, 9.5, and 10.7 percentage of Colombians with graduate or professional degrees in Florida, Miami-Dade, and Broward counties. In 2011, this figure increased in these three areas to 11.1, 13.6, and 11.9 percent. There was also a sustained percentage decrease in the proportion of Colombians with a bachelor degree. This was offset by the higher proportion of Colombians with graduate or professional degrees. With the exception of Miami-Dade County, the proportion of Colombians without high

school degree or with just a high school degree, remained stable. While there were no significant changes in the lower education groups (without or just with a high school degree) there was a professionalization in the proportion of Colombians who had access to bachelor and graduate degrees. While Colombians with the lower education levels retained their status and representativeness, Colombians with higher education status improved their condition.

Graph 7: Citizenship Status of Colombians in Miami-Dade County, 2007-2011



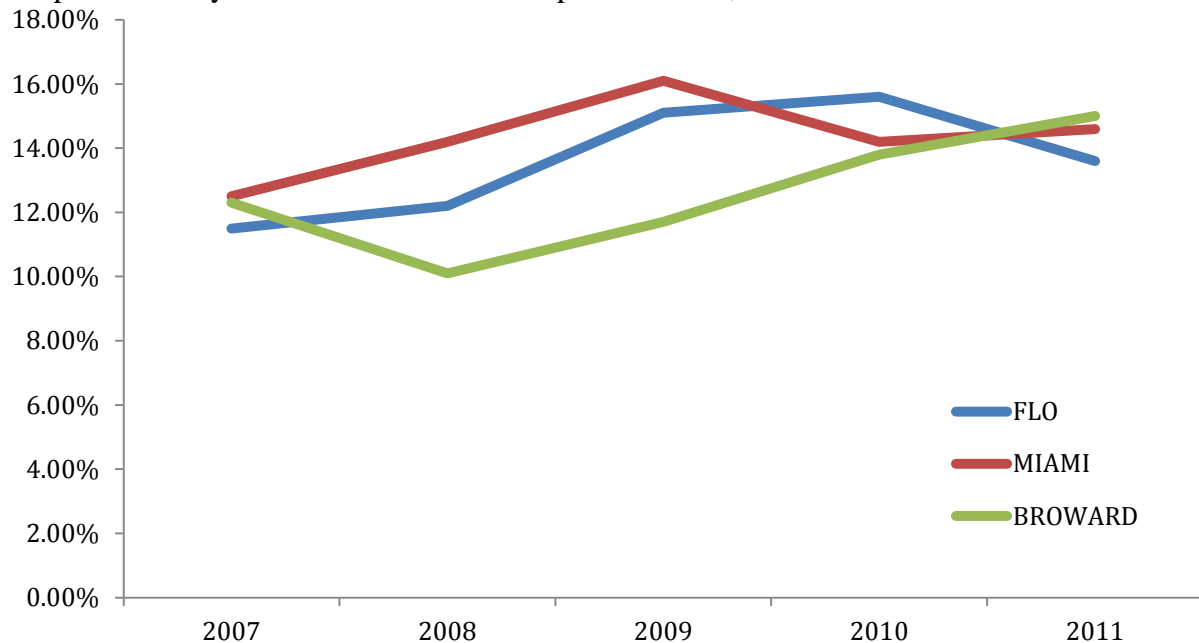
Source: United States Census Bureau (2008-2012), *American Community Survey 1-year: S0201 Geography-Miami-Dade County*

The trend toward naturalization is even more interesting. In Miami-Dade in 2011, for the first time, the number of Colombian naturalizations (new American citizens) surpassed the number of Colombians who were not. In 2007, there were 32,804 naturalized Colombians in contrast to 45,951 who were not. By 2011, there were 44,388 naturalized Colombians, while the number of those who were not was 42,177. Florida state levels initially show a similar decrease.

But over the years, the gap between naturalized and non- naturalized Colombians tended to disappear. In 2007, 86,439 of Florida's Colombians were naturalized while 118,714 were not. But by 2011, from a previous gap of 32,275 persons, the difference in number was minimal: 113,647 naturalized, 114,972 who were not. In Broward, though the difference was greater than statewide, numbers have also been decreasing over time.

All these figures could reflect a higher interest in, and a greater effort by, the Colombian population to be fully integrated into American life via legalization of their status. Even though figures show how fast the process of naturalization has been for Colombians immigrants, the population has kept its halo of illegality. This stereotype persists in not only the general American, but also the Colombian community.

Graph 8: Poverty Rates for Colombian People in Florida, 2007-2011



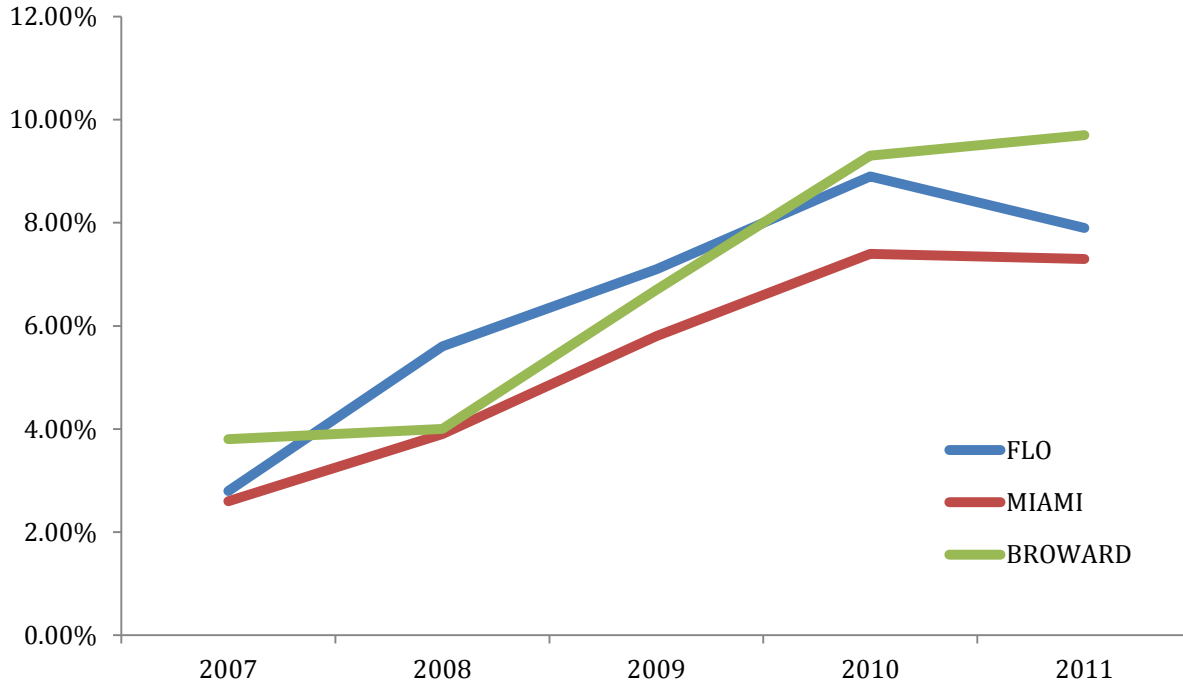
Source: United States Census Bureau (2008-2012), *American Community Survey 1-year: S0201 Geography-Florida, S0201 Geography-Miami-Dade County, and S0201 Geography-Broward County*

Poverty levels and rates of unemployment are two of the most important situation indicators for Colombians in America. Rates of poverty for individuals and families, as well as unemployment, have increased systematically. This has occurred in the three geographic study areas, except for Miami-Dade in some years.

The difficulty of obtaining a legal status to apply for jobs, and the economic and financial crisis of 2008, have had a negative impact. Thus structural conditions, such as labor market pressures or the existence of an economic crisis, are felt more harshly by Colombians, especially poor people. Individual poverty tends to be higher than that one recorded on a family level, given that families tend to share incomes and financial burdens. Considering the length of this study (four years), there has been a rapid increase in both individual and family poverty indicators. From 2007 to 2011, Florida, Miami-Dade and Broward counties have seen a rise in the numbers

of Colombians in poverty. Levels have increased from an average of 12 percent to 14.5 percent in only four years.

Graph 9: Unemployment Rate for Colombians in Florida, 2007 - 2011



Source: United States Census Bureau (2008-2012), *American Community Survey 1-year: S0201 Geography-Florida, S0201 Geography-Miami-Dade County, and S0201 Geography-Broward County*

These percentages could corroborate one of Collier’s hypotheses. This asserts that Colombian immigrants, after a period of disillusionment, have often quickly returned to Colombia, given the persistent inability to access appropriately a primary job in the American labor market. There would again be difficulty in achieving better socioeconomic conditions in the U.S.² negatively reinforced once the variable of unemployment is introduced.

In the present study, the rise in poverty numbers coincided with an almost tripled unemployment rate. In 2007, an average 3 percent unemployment affected all three areas. That figure rose to 8.3 percent in 2011. This could reflect the vulnerability of a population with a low

level of social capital amid two adverse contexts. First, the U.S. presented a new and extremely competitive environment, probably very different than the one many of them had known in Colombia. Second, Florida had enacted a tougher legal and social system against immigrants. This is a state that already approved a law to stop the entrance of illegal labor force (the “SB 2040” Law was passed in Florida on May 3rd, 2011).³ And there was another precedent as well. The U.S. government had neglected the recognition of Temporary Protected Status to thousands of political asylum seekers coming from Colombia. Presidents Pastrana (at the beginning of his administration), Clinton, and Bush supported, or at least, promoted this strategy in their respective administrations, making difficult for Colombian population the attainment of a proper job and a legal status that allow them to improve their living conditions.⁴

Conclusions

According to the data provided by the Department of Homeland Security and the United States Census Bureau’s *American Community Survey*, in this period (1996-2012) South Florida strengthened as a transnational social field. There is also evidence that could be analyzed in future research. This could show us how renewed interest in South Florida as a place for arrivals, naturalizations, and the establishment of Colombians in the long term has been even greater than the one recorded in the New York Metropolitan Area. Despite the troubling indicators, such as worsening poverty and unemployment, South Florida continues to be a main entry and consolidation point for Colombians.

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 Collier, M. Colombian Migration to South Florida: A Most Unwelcome Reception (Working Paper No. 9), (2004): 13-15

³ Banco Bilbao Vizcaya Argentaria (BBVA). *Migration Outlook: Mexico*, (2011): 2

⁴ The U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants. *USCR Calls State Department's Blocking of TPS for...* (2003); The Miami Herald. "Colombians Push for Immigration Reprieve", (February 5th, 2001).