

Brazilian Immigrants in South Florida

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Abstract

In this article, I discuss immigration trends from Brazil to the U.S. since the late 1990s with a focus on Brazilian immigration to South Florida. I discuss immigration status and causes, categories of admission and main areas of concentration. I analyze Brazilians' socioeconomic and cultural impact in South Florida and their reasons for leaving Brazil. While most articles tend to focus on Brazilian tourism in South Florida, we seldom find analyses focusing on immigration issues. This article partially fills this gap.

Introduction¹

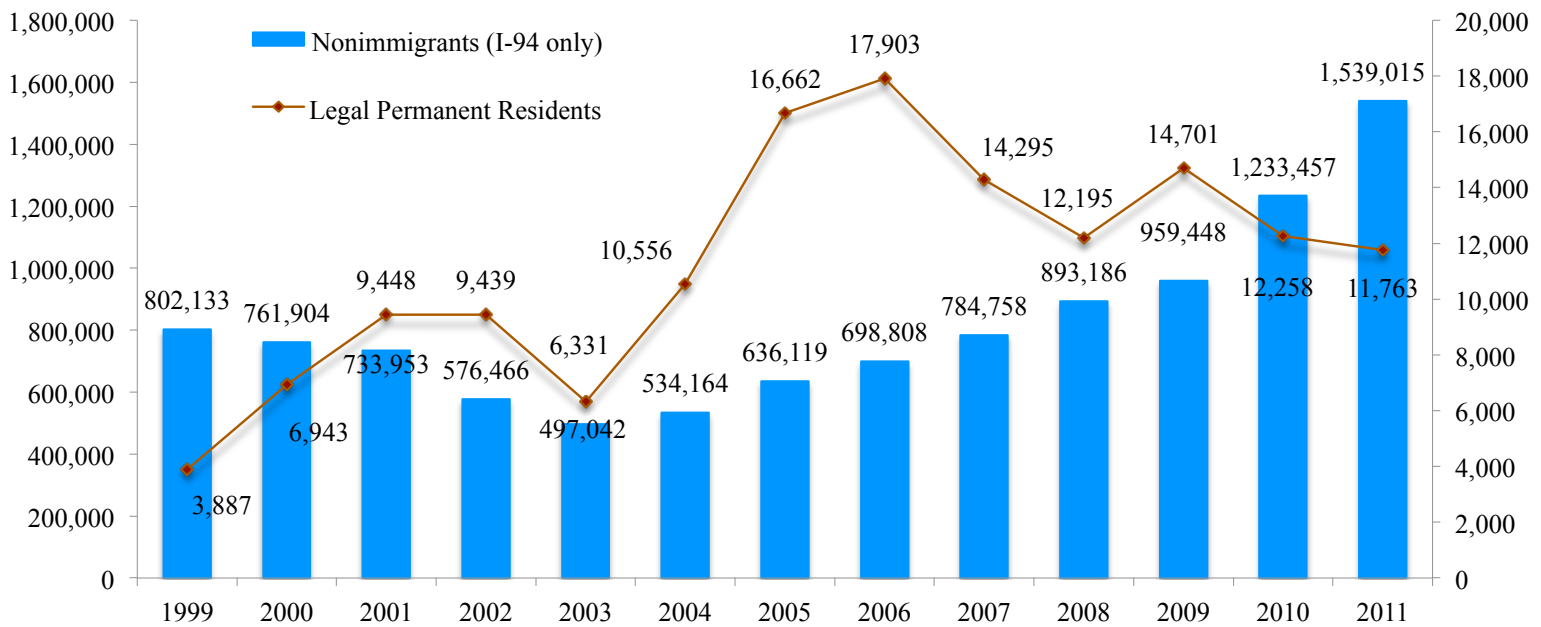
There is an estimate of 371,015 Brazilians currently living in the United States with 73,529 (about 20%) living in Florida.² Approximately 60% of Brazilians are located in South Florida; specifically in Broward, Miami-Dade and Palm Beach Counties, which have a Brazilian population of 18,786, 17,929 and 7,340 respectively.³ The aim of this article is to discuss important demographic, economic and cultural aspects of Brazilian immigration to South Florida. I argue that several factors have contributed to the dramatic increase of the Brazilian population of the area; these range from searching for jobs to escaping from inflation, violence and social instability in certain areas of Brazil. In South Florida, Brazilians have arguably found greater safety, jobs, business opportunities and cultural openness. Brazilian immigration has been beneficial for the State of Florida, boosting its economy with workers, consumers and investors. Culturally, Brazilians have introduced the Portuguese language, cuisine and music. However, Brazilians in South Florida face similar challenges as other immigrant groups, including the fact that a segment of the population lacks legal status in the U.S.

Brazilian Immigrants in the United States

Graph 1 illustrates the growth trends of Brazilian immigrants admitted as legal permanent

residents (line format). It can be noted that the admission numbers significantly increased from 1999 to 2001 and then decreased in 2002 and 2003, post 9/11. However, in 2003, the admission numbers raised dramatically, reaching a peak in 2006. After 2006, there was a sharp decline from 2006 to 2008. In 2009, admissions increased then slowly decreased again in 2010 and 2011. In comparison, the growth trends of nonimmigrant admissions of Brazilians (bar format) slowly decreased from 1999 to 2003, the opposite of permanent resident admission in 1999, 2000 and 2001. However, there was a consecutive increase from 2003 to 2011 when the number of nonimmigrant admissions reached its highest point. This steady rise shows a reflection of Brazil’s growing economy. There are more Brazilians on the I-94 admitted in the U.S. in 2011 than in the previous decade. As Graph 3 later illustrates, the majority of Brazilians admitted on I-94 are tourists.

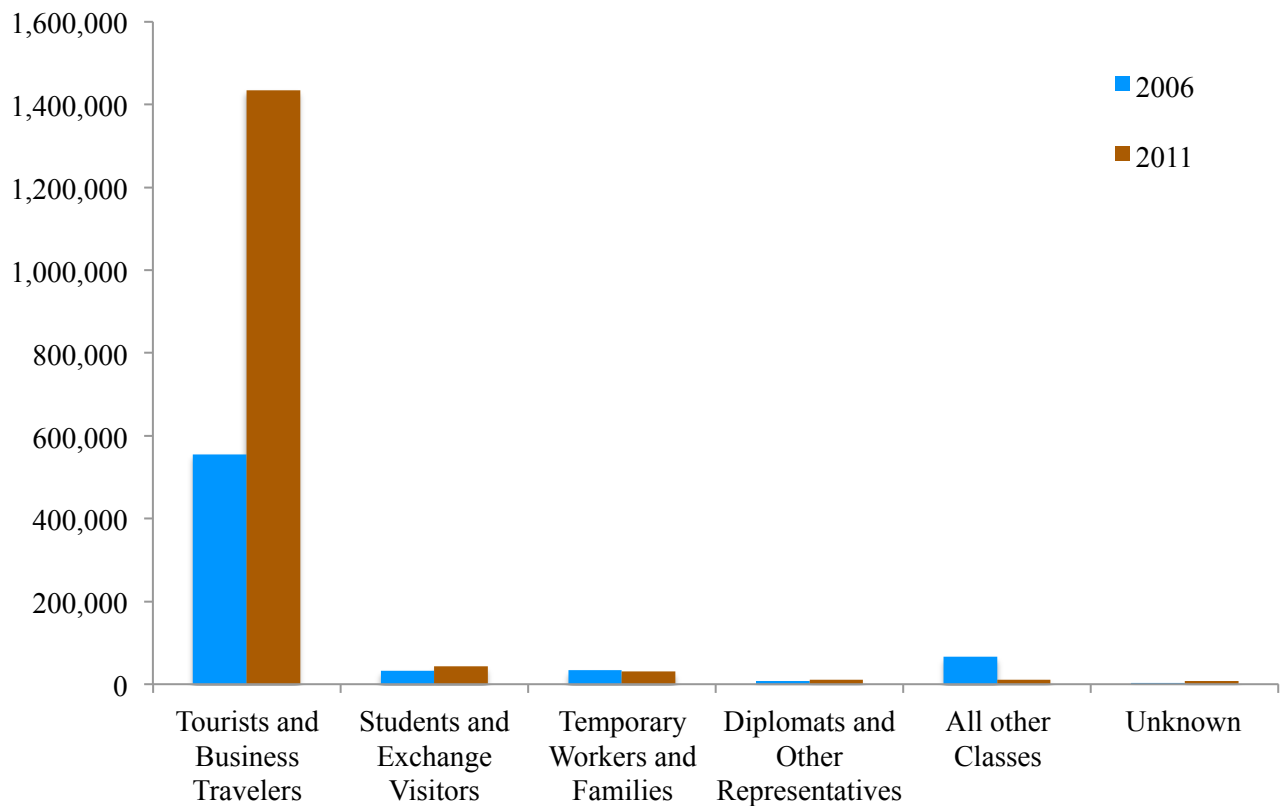
Graph 1. Immigrants Admitted as Permanent Residents and Nonimmigrant Admissions (1999-2011)



Sources: U.S. Department of Homeland Security 2009, *Yearbook of Immigration Statistics 2008*, Office of Immigration, 12 & 67; U.S. Department of Homeland Security 2012, *Yearbook of Immigration Statistics 2011*, Office of Immigration, 12 & 67.

Graph 2 illustrates the comparison of Brazilian immigrants admitted as legal permanent residents in the years 2000, 2006 and 2011. It can be noted that from 2000-2011 the number of refugees, asylees and immediate relatives of U.S. citizens increased. On the other hand, the numbers of those admitted with employment based preferences decreased.

Graph 2. Brazilian Immigrants Admitted as Legal Permanent Residents in 2000, 2006 and 2011 (in %)

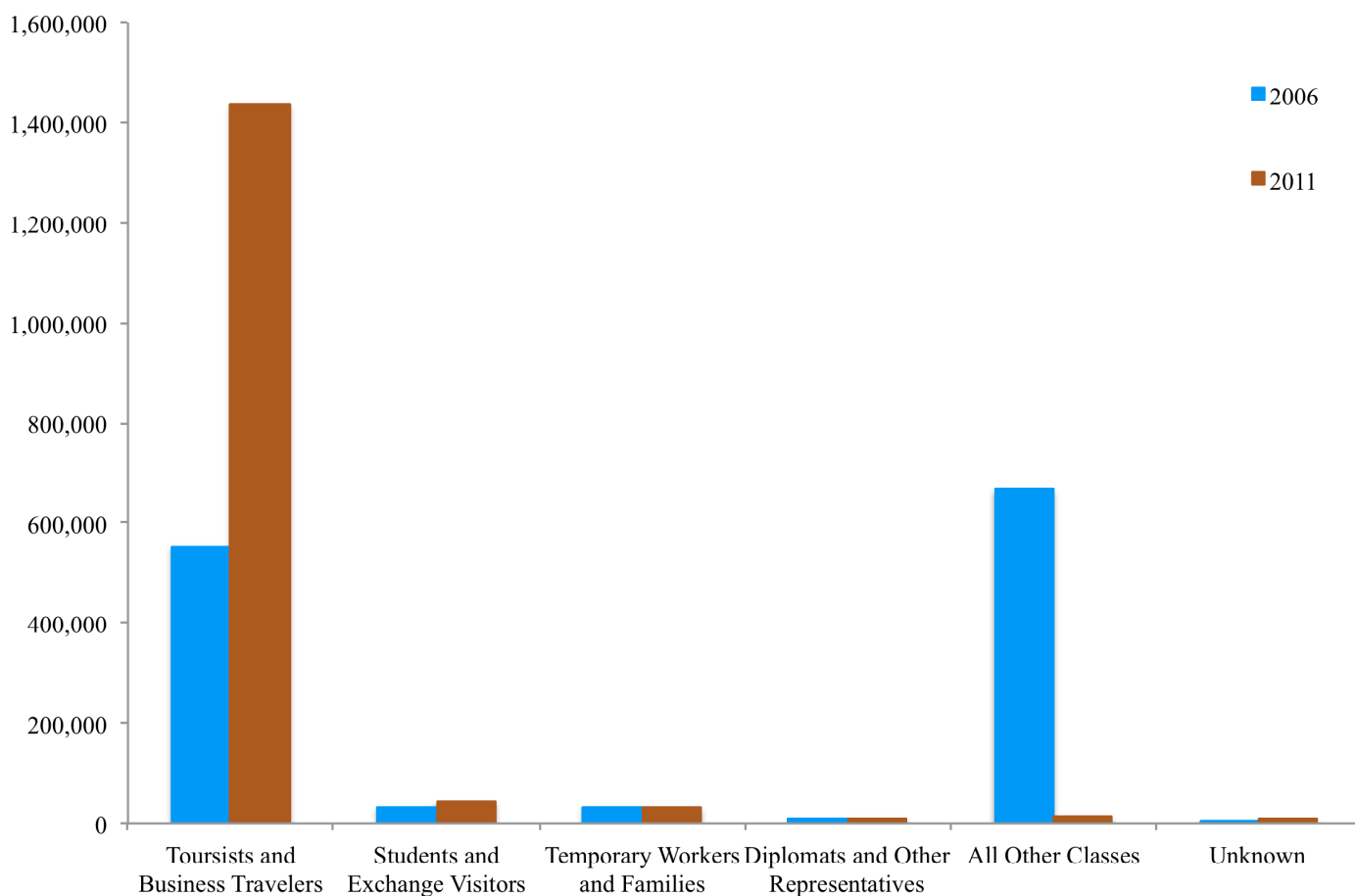


Sources: U.S. Department of Homeland Security 2002, *Yearbook of Immigration Statistics 2000*, Office of Immigration, 47, U.S. Department of Homeland Security 2007, *Yearbook of Immigration Statistics 2006*, Office of Immigration, 27 and U.S. Department of Homeland Security 2012, *Yearbook of Immigration Statistics 2011*, Office of Immigration, 27.

Graph 3 illustrates the comparison of Brazilians admitted as nonimmigrants in the years 2006 and 2011. It can be noted that the numbers of tourists and business travelers more than

doubled in the five year period. The number of students and exchange visitors, diplomats and other representatives also increased.

Graph 3. Nonimmigrant Admissions (I-94) in 2006 and 2011 (in %)

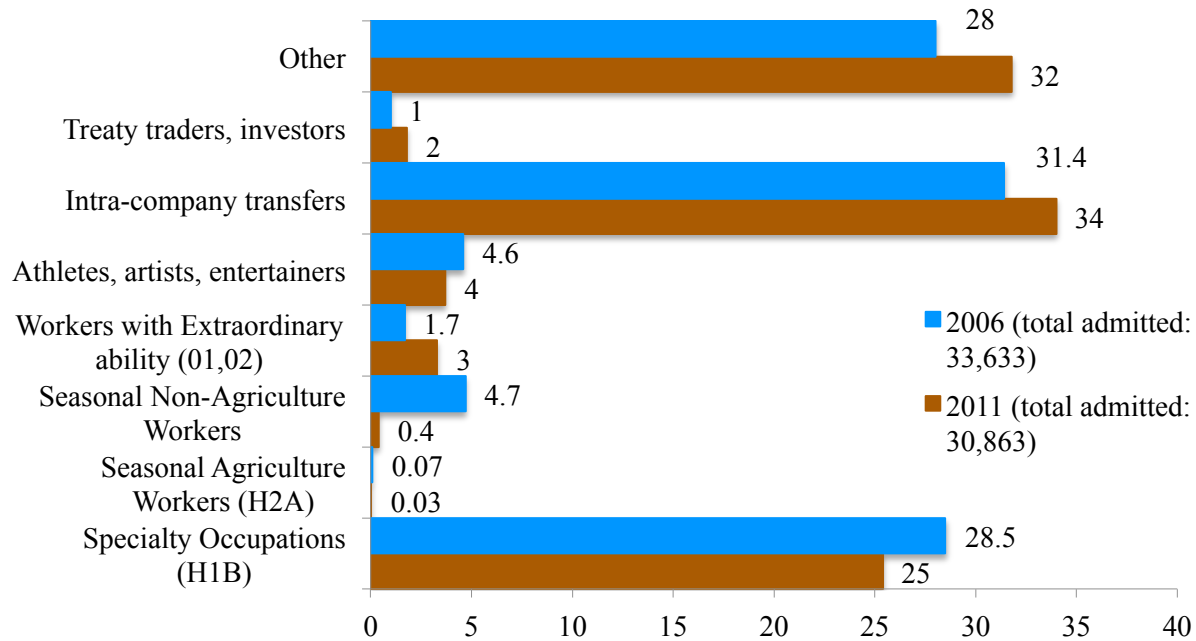


Sources: U.S. Department of Homeland Security 2007, *Yearbook of Immigration Statistics 2006*, Office of Immigration, 77 and U.S. Department of Homeland Security 2012, *Yearbook of Immigration Statistics 2011*, Office of Immigration, 76.

Graph 4 illustrates the breakdown of the number of temporary workers admitted in 2006 and 2011. In both years, the majority of temporary workers were intra-company transfers, nonimmigrants admitted under the group classified as “other” and workers in specialty occupations. The number of “seasonal non-agricultural workers” and “workers with

extraordinary abilities” also experienced an increase between 2006 and 2011.

Graph 4. Brazilian Temporary Workers (I-94) Admitted in 2006 and 2011 (in %)

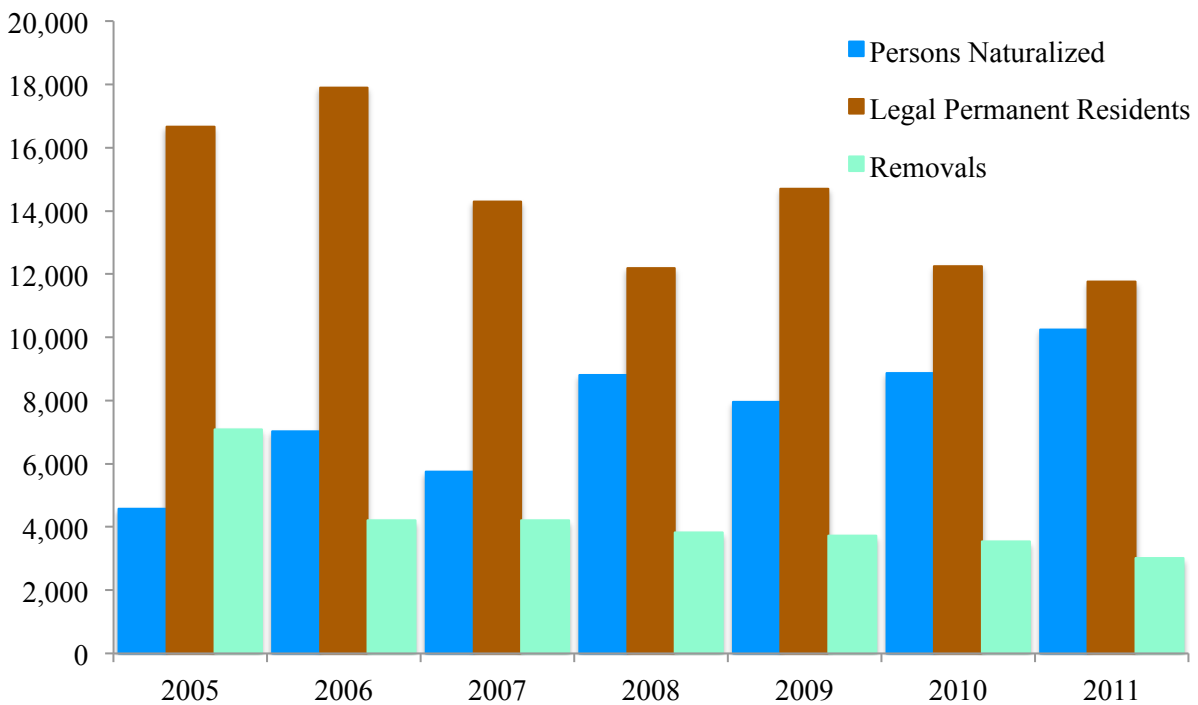


Sources: U.S. Department of Homeland Security 2007, *Yearbook of Immigration Statistics 2006*, Office of Immigration 85, and U.S. Department of Homeland Security 2012, *Yearbook of Immigration Statistics 2011*, Office of Immigration 84.

Graph 5 shows the numbers of Brazilians naturalized as American citizens, immigrants admitted as permanent residents and removals in the years 2005 to 2011. Contrary to a general trend indicating an increase in deportation in the U.S. over the last decade, the number of removals decreased in the case of Brazil from 2005 to 2011. As it has been noted, calculating the deportation rate gives us a better idea of the actual trend in deportations.⁴ The rate can be calculated as the proportion of number of deportations over the number of immigrants admitted.⁵ In the case of Brazil, the highest deportation rate was in 2005 (removals represented 43% of admissions), but this dropped to 25% in 2011. Although much lower than in 2005, the rate is still relatively high because, numerically, we are saying that the percentage of Brazilians deported in

2011 represents 25% of those who were admitted as permanent residents. The graph also shows that the numbers of persons naturalized increased along the years for the most part. The number of immigrants admitted as permanent residents reached its highest point in 2006 and has decreased since then without following a regular pattern. The year 2005 had the lowest number of persons naturalized, the highest number of removals and the second highest number of permanent residents. On the other hand, 2011 had the highest number of persons naturalized and the lowest number of removals.

Graph 5. Brazilians Naturalized as American Citizens, Immigrants Admitted as Permanent Residents and Removals (2005-2011)

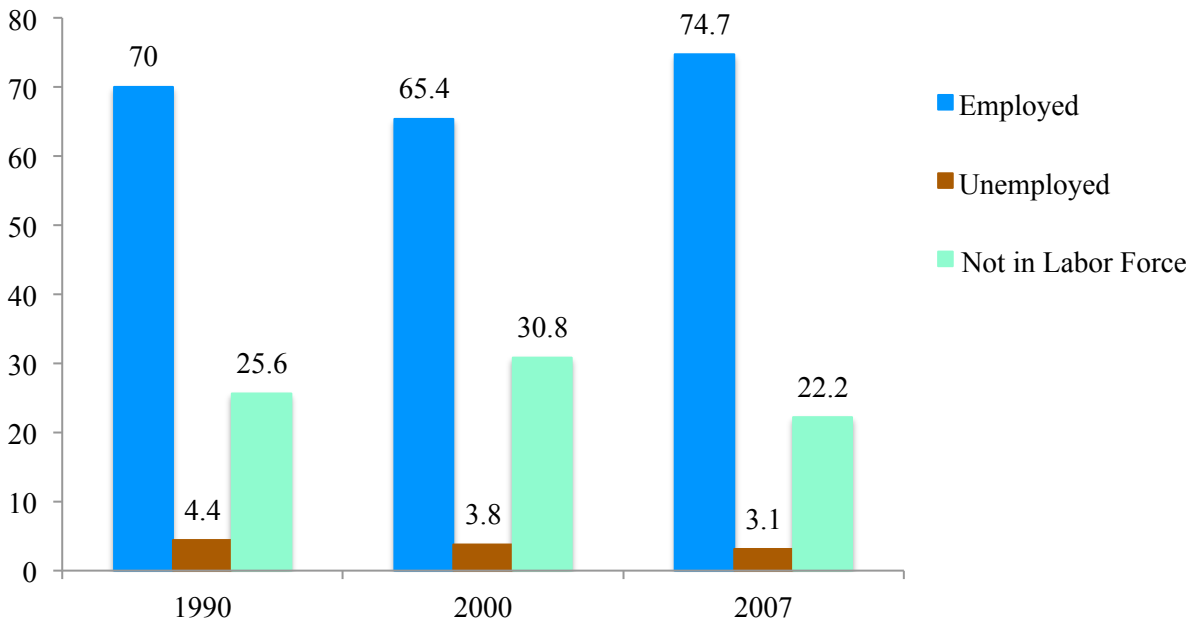


Sources: U.S. Department of Homeland Security 2012, *Yearbook of Immigration Statistics 2011*, Office of Immigration, 12, 53, 106, 109 and 112.

Graph 6 illustrates the employment status of Brazilians in the United States in the years of 1990, 2000 and 2007. The numbers of Brazilians employed was significantly higher than the

numbers of Brazilians unemployed in all three years, which demonstrates that the majority of Brazilian immigrants found work in the U.S. Compared to other race-ethnic groups, Brazilians have the highest employment rate in the U.S.⁶

Graph 6. Employment Status of Brazilians in the United States in Selected Years (in %)



Sources: Laird W. Bergad 2010, “Brazilians in the United States 1980-2007,” *Center for Latin America, Caribbean & Latino Studies*, (see endnote 2).

Many Brazilians migrate to the U.S. to work the same job they would work in Brazil, but for a higher salary. Despite the economic growth of the country, Brazil still faces problems of income distribution, and most of the wealth is concentrated among the elites, who represent 5%-10% of the population. Low salaries prevail in Brazil in almost any occupational category.⁷

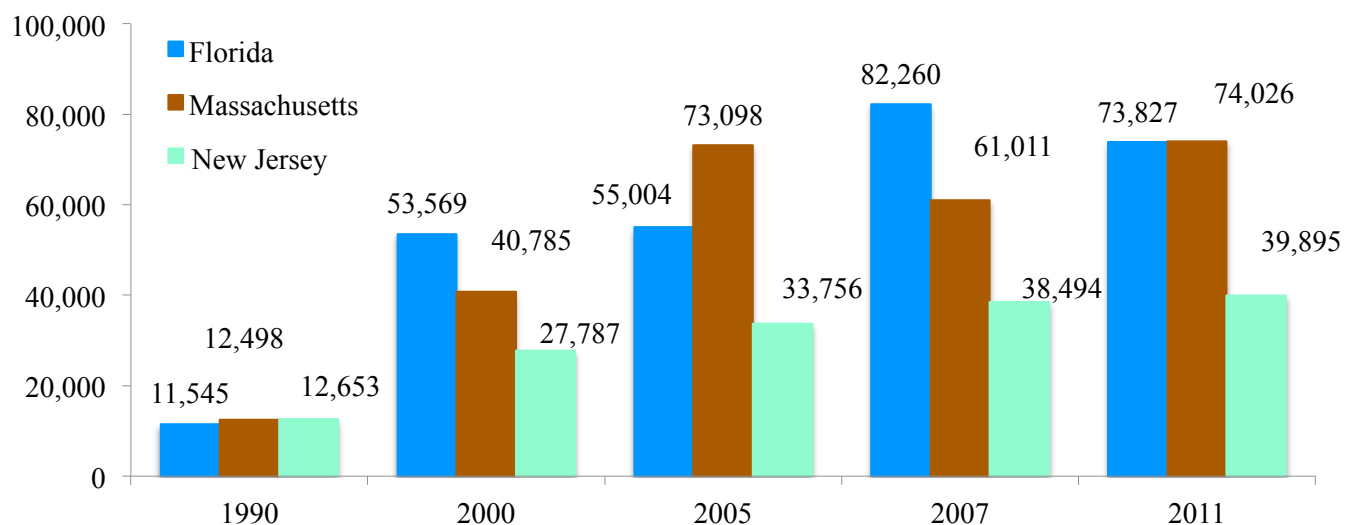
Brazilian Immigrants in Florida

The data collection presented below is only an estimate of the real number of Brazilian immigrants in Florida and the United States. Many Brazilians who are currently residing in

Florida are classified as illegal. Official data exists as a formality,⁸ but the numbers are inaccurate because they fail to capture illegal migrants who did not participate in the census.⁹

Graph 7 illustrates the top three cities in the U.S. with the most Brazilian residents. The overall number of Brazilians in the country increased in the studied timespan. Florida and Massachusetts have been the main destinations for Brazilians over the years. In 1990, FL, MA and NJ had relatively the same number of Brazilian migrants. In 2000, FL became the main destination. While MA was the main destination in 2005, FL surpassed the east coast state in 2007, and became relatively close to it in 2011.

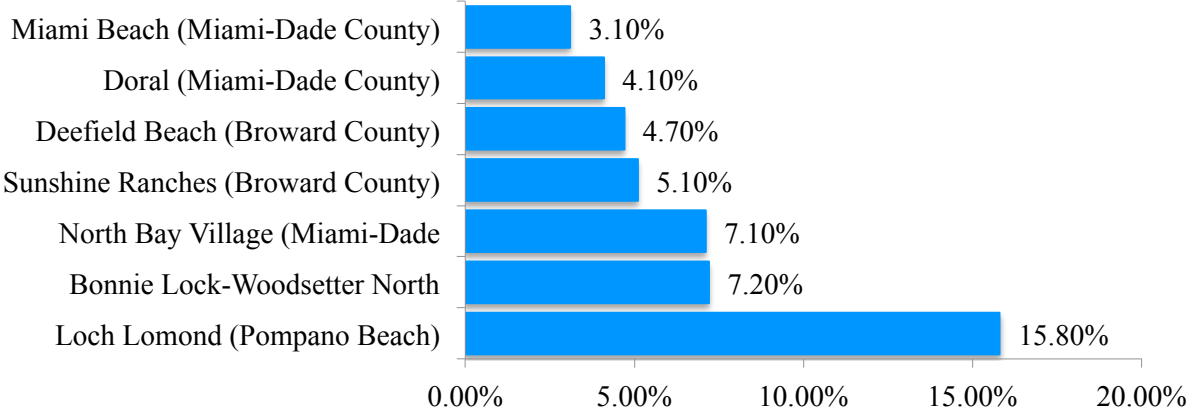
Graph 7. Distribution of Brazilian Population in the United States in Selected Years (in %)



Sources: 1990 and 2000 (Laird W. Bergad 2010), “Brazilians in the United States 1980-2007,” *Center for Latin America, Caribbean & Latino Studies*, (see endnote 2); 2005, 2007 and 2011. U.S. Bureau of the Census, American Community Survey, 2006-2010 estimate, selected population tables.

Graph 8 illustrates the top seven Florida cities, also named in the top 22 cities nationwide, with the most residents born in Brazil. The city with the largest Brazilian population is Loch Lomond (also known as Pompano Beach).

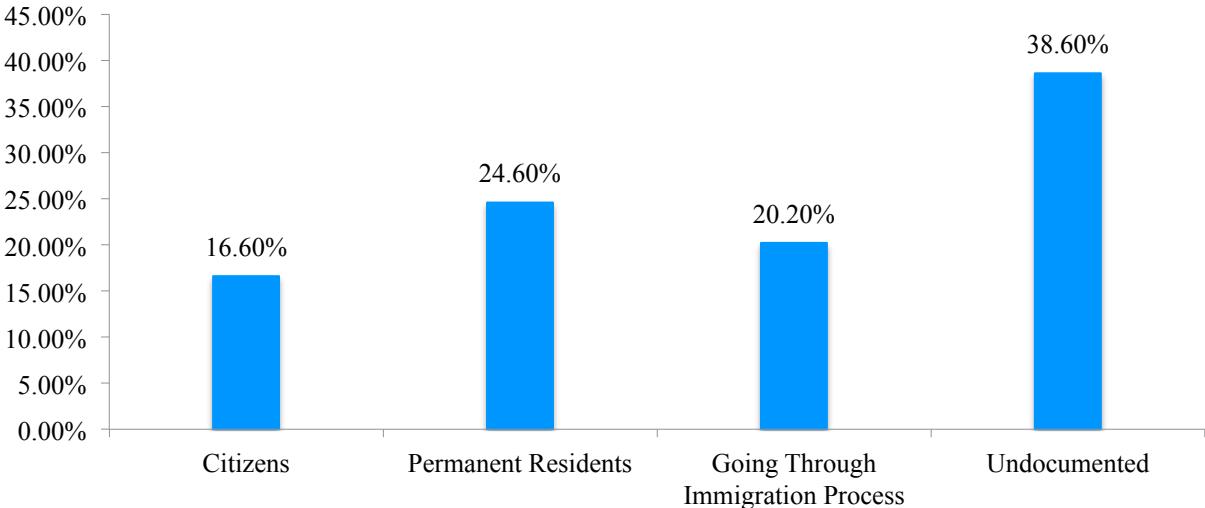
Graph 8. Top 7 Florida Cities with the Greatest Native-Born Brazilian Population (2010)



Sources: “Top 101 Cities With the Most Residents Born in Brazil (Population 500+),” Citytoplists.¹⁰

In order to narrow down the profile of Brazilian migrants in Broward County, Graph 9 presents data from interviews conducted by Miller Strategies. Of the 1,000 Brazilian migrants interviewed living in Broward County, the majority is undocumented.

Graph 9. Brazilians in Broward County (2011)



Sources: “Pesquisa Revela Perfil dos Brasileiros dos Condados de Broward e Palm Beach,” Linha Aberta.¹¹

Despite ongoing issues of illegality, several changes have occurred over the years of Brazilian immigration to the United States, including Brazilians' demographic profile, projects of return, and methods of entry. For instance, middle class Brazilians and the elites are moving to South Florida with money to spend and invest. Generally, new incoming Brazilian migrants are people with money searching for a better quality of life.¹² Wealthy Brazilians who wish to have the legal right to reside in the U.S. also have the option to invest an amount of \$500,000 to \$1 million in a U.S. business in order to obtain a visa.¹³

Students have also opened a new gate to immigration. As previously noted in Graph 3, the numbers of students and exchange visitors in the U.S. has increased. Highly educated Brazilian immigrants compose a large part of the immigrant population and many Brazilians aspire to acquire college degrees in the United States.¹⁴ In the years 2009 and 2010, there were 8,786 Brazilian students in the U.S., which is the most of any South American country.¹⁵ According to the International Students and Scholars office at the University of Miami, it is estimated that an average of 56 undergraduate Brazilian students enroll every fall semester.¹⁶ Brazilian undergraduate students come from one of the top 6 countries represented at the University falling behind Colombia, India, Saudi Arabia, Venezuela and China.¹⁷ Moving to South Florida with a student visa opens many gates for young adults to seek permanent residency or citizenship.

Why Brazilians Leave Brazil

Inflation

One of the biggest problems with Brazil is that prices are too high and it is therefore cheaper to live in America. For instance, a condominium that costs \$300,000 to \$400,000 in

Miami would cost \$600,000 to \$700,000 in Brazil.¹⁸ In addition, Brazil's "high-end real estate is around \$1,000 per square foot, while in Miami, you can find high-end oceanfront property... for only \$500 per square foot."¹⁹ Cars also have a significant difference in price, according to an article from Forbes magazine:

One might think that paying \$80,000 for a Jeep Grand Cherokee means it comes with wings and gold plated rims. But in Brazil, it comes standard. The 2013 Jeep Grande Cherokee cost Brazilians a stellar R\$179,000, or roughly \$89,500. Import duties and other taxes make it so that the Brazilian buying a muscular Jeep Cherokee could have bought three of them if they were living in Miami. In the U.S., the 2013 Jeep Grand Cherokee will run you about \$28,000. That's nearly half the median American income, but \$89,500 is light years away from median Brazilian incomes.²⁰

Due to the high cost of living in Brazil, prices are better in South Florida for Brazilians to shop, and this leads to a more convenient and comfortable lifestyle.

Safety

Safety is another increasing issue in Brazil, especially in the bigger cities. Many immigrants that reside in Florida are from Sao Paulo, Brazil, which is one of the biggest and most unsafe cities in the world.²¹ An average of 13 homicides are recorded in Sao Paulo every day.²² However, Sao Paulo is not the only dangerous city in Brazil. Rio de Janeiro and Recife, among others, are also high on the list.²³ In 2011, it was reported by the Brazilian police that the murder rate in Brazil was four times higher than the murder rate in the U.S.²⁴ People in Brazil are

often advised to “dress down” while walking on the streets and to be careful showing expensive and flashy accessories to avoid getting robbed.²⁵ Living with fear of being mugged, robbed or assaulted is what many Brazilian migrants are currently running from.

Why Brazilians Migrate to South Florida

Affordability and Cultural Proximity

In addition to having better prices in real estate, electronics and other durables, South Florida’s diverse and friendly feel, makes Brazilians feel as though they are at home. As noticed by Bryn E. Haffemeister (2005), “Miami has the highest proportion of foreign born residents of any major metropolitan area in the United States.”²⁶ The city and most of South Florida are not only places where immigrants can comfortably adjust to American culture, but also where Americans comfortably adjust to immigrant cultures. Miami, Haffemeister notes, is one of the few cities in the U.S. where Americans will engage in “reverse acculturation” and make an effort to embrace immigrants from diverse cultures, which also shows “an important symbol in the shift in power relations” that is not seen elsewhere.²⁷ South Florida stands out from the rest of the country because of the strong Latin impact. Brazilians tend not to feel discriminated against coming from Latin America, and they mesh with other Hispanic groups of immigrants.²⁸ Other places such as Deerfield Beach and Pompano are considered home for Brazilians. There, one can find Brazilian restaurants, bars and shops...every aspect of Brazilian culture.²⁹ According to residents from those areas, “Brazil is the country of the sun, and Florida is the state of the sun.”³⁰

Organizations and Resources

There are several organizations in South Florida that facilitate Brazilians' lives abroad and promote their culture in America. For instance, Brazilians residing in South Florida have access to FloridaBrasil.com, a website with a complete list of services of Brazilian products and resources in Florida³¹ including Brazilian stores, doctors, dentists, mechanics, courses, realtors, restaurants, translators, newspapers, insurance, churches... among many other services. The website was created by Brazilians in Florida with the purpose of facilitating the search for Brazilian products and services within a community. Having access to Brazilian items makes migrants feel closer to their roots.

Another important aspect to highlight is the existence of the Cultural Center Brazil-USA, which is an organization created to bring Brazilian and American cultures closer together in Miami-Dade and Broward Counties.³² The purpose of this Cultural Center is to introduce Portuguese language to the community, organize Brazilian festivities and create scholarship funds for Brazilian students at Miami-Dade College.³³ The Brazilian Cultural center is important for the Brazilian community, for it brings Brazilians closer and provides them with benefits while living in the U.S. In 2003, the volunteers of the Cultural Center also established the first bilingual and bicultural program in the public school system at the Ada Merritt School in Miami where students learn subjects in English and Portuguese. This is a powerful tool that helps maintain the national roots of Brazilian students, while at the same time promoting the Portuguese language and Brazilian culture among students of diverse nationalities.³⁴

Brazilians Economic and Cultural Impact on South Florida

The increasing establishment of Brazilian businesses in South Florida has brought a need for a business exchange forum between Brazilian and U.S. firms.³⁵ The Brazilian-American Chamber of Commerce of Florida exists in order to advance business relations between Florida and Brazil and increase trade and investments between the countries.³⁶ Members of the Chamber are always informed of political, social, economic and technological developments that may affect trade and investments in both countries.³⁷ The existence of this Chamber highlights the importance of Brazilian business in South Florida.

Brazilians also have helped improve South Florida's real estate in the past couple of years. According to data provided by Florida Realtors 2012, buyers from Brazil were 9% among all foreign buyers. About 61% of Brazilian buyers purchased condominiums, and 21% chose detached single-family homes. Furthermore, 59% of Brazilian buyers purchased homes located in central city/urban areas. Also, Brazilians tended to purchase higher priced homes in the range of \$200,000- \$299,000 above the overall Florida international median price of \$194,700. About 78% of Brazilian buyers paid in cash, and 19% were able to obtain U.S. mortgages. About 42% of homes were for vacation, while 15% of homes were purchased solely for rental/investment purposes.³⁸ According to this data, it can be argued that Brazilians helped boost the real estate market in South Florida with the amount of real estate purchased in the last couple of years.

South Floridians also have become increasingly interested in learning Portuguese due to the high volume of Brazilian immigrants and tourists. Hence, there is a high demand for employees to learn Portuguese, especially in businesses involving Brazil and Florida.³⁹ Learning Portuguese helps people in South Florida to understand and relate to Brazilians better.⁴⁰ In addition, Brazil's influence on South Florida will keep on increasing since events such as the

2014 FIFA World Cup and the 2016 Summer Olympics will be taking place in Brazil. Many people want to learn Portuguese to travel to Brazil for those events.⁴¹ Furthermore, Brazilians add to the state of Florida their culture, food, music and spirit. The presence of Brazil is evident around South Florida. For instance, in steak houses, malls, bars, clubs...⁴²

Conclusion

The purpose of this article was to shed light on Brazilian immigration to South Florida and its implications. I analyzed Brazilian immigrants in the U.S. before focusing on South Florida, in order to determine their immigration trends throughout the years. I argued that their migration to South Florida is explained by several factors ranging from job search to escaping from inflation, violence, and the search for a better quality of life. Brazilian immigrants have been beneficial to the development of South Florida with the introduction of the Portuguese language and economic opportunities.

Endnotes

¹ I started my research for this paper during my International Migration and Development class, Fall 2012. I appreciate Dr. Margarita Rodriguez's research guidance and feedback on previous drafts.

² U.S. Bureau of the Census, American Community Survey, 2011 estimate, selected population tables.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Rodriguez, Margarita. "Uneven Development: The logics of Fractured Transnationalism." In Alejandro Portes and Patricia Fernandez-Kelly. *Long-Distance Development*. New York: Sage Foundation, (2013). Even though this comparison is numerical ("because sociologically the numbers are not necessarily coming from the same universe of people" (ibid)), it provides a sense of proportion.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Bergad, Laird. "Brazilians in the United States 1980-2007." *Center for Latin America, Caribbean & Latino Studies*. Retrieved from:
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