imagine all the people: Brazilian immigrants in Boston

Large-scale migration from Brazil is a relatively recent phenomenon. Indeed, Brazil has historically been a host country for immigrants from many nations. From the early 19th century to the mid 20th century, German, Swiss, Italians, Spaniards, Poles, Czechs, Russians, Japanese and others joined the Portuguese in searching for new opportunities in Brazil.

After the military coup of 1964, thousands of Brazilians went into exile. Although most of these exiles returned to Brazil after the amnesty of 1979, the number of economic emigrants grew in the 1980’s. According to a Brazilian demographer, José Alberto Magno de Carvalho, Director of the Center of Development and Regional Planning at the Federal University of Minas Gerais, there were approximately one to 2.5 million Brazilians living outside Brazil by 1995.¹

The United States, Paraguay and Japan, are the main destinations for Brazilian immigrants.² According to the 2005-2007 American Community Survey³ (ACS), there are close to 343,000 Brazilians living in the United States representing 0.9 percent of the country’s foreign-born population of 37 million.⁴ During the early years, immigrants from Minas Gerais dominated the immigration flow to the U.S. Now, Goiás, Paraná and Santa Catarina have also become major immigrant exporting regions. Today, at least sixteen Brazilian states contribute to the migration stream.
The majority of Brazilian immigrants to the United States live in metropolitan regions. Massachusetts (23%) ranks first followed by Florida (20%). Other large concentrations of Brazilians include New Jersey (10.4%), California (8.7%) and New York (7.1%). Combined, these five states constitute 69 percent of the total foreign-born population from Brazil in the United States.

In 2007, almost 77,000 Brazilians resided in Massachusetts accounting for 8.4 percent of the State’s total immigrant population. This share is increasing rapidly and fuelled by the recent inflow of Brazilian immigrants. Between 2000 and 2003, Brazilians made up 9.1 percent of all new immigrants coming to Massachusetts. Massachusetts is now the primary U.S. destination for Brazilian immigrants (27%) followed by Florida (15%), California (10%) and New York (4%), which is reflected in the fact that Brazilians are now the fastest growing immigrant community in Massachusetts.

There are an estimated 6,822 Brazilian immigrants living in Boston. While we can look at the most recent ACS for estimating the total Brazilian population, the most reliable cross-tabular data for relatively small groups, such as the foreign-born communities in Boston is the 2000 Census. According to the 2000 Census, most Brazilians were male (53%), single (45%), and 50 percent of them were between the ages of 20 and 34 – a greater proportion of young adults than in the general population (33%). Fifteen percent of resident Brazilians were U.S. citizens by naturalization.

Source: ACS 2005-2007, BRA Research Division Analysis
Although many Brazilians living in Boston have not completed high school\(^1\), more than a quarter (28%) of Brazilian immigrants have received a high school diploma with no further schooling. Approximately 38% of Brazilian immigrants have attended college, with 24% having completed at least a bachelor’s degree, compared with 27% of the entire foreign-born population and 40% of the native-born. With respect to advanced degrees, only 6% of Brazilians living in Boston hold a graduate/professional degree or higher, compared with 12% of all foreign-born and 17% of the native-born.

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*Source: U.S. Census 2000, Public Use Microdata (PUM) 5% Sample, BRA Research Division*
occupations

Most Brazilians living in Boston are employed in the following occupations: services (42%), technical, sales and administrative support (19%), construction, extraction and transportation (13%), managerial and professional (14%) and production (6%).

Brazilians are over represented in service occupations compared to native (15%) and foreign-born (24%) populations. They are over represented in construction occupations relative to the native-born and foreign-born populations (8% and 10% respectively). And, they are over represented in the arts, design, entertainment, sports and media occupations (4%) relative to both the native (3.6%) and the foreign-born (2%). Brazilians are under represented in all other occupations. They are least represented in managerial and technical occupations.

A little over two-thirds of Brazilians in Boston are employed. The labor force participation rate of Brazilians is 75%, compared with 63% for the rest of the population. The unemployment rate among Brazilians is 3% compared to 7.2% citywide. This high rate of labor force participation and low unemployment rate is not uncommon among immigrants and reflects a common reason for immigrating, namely to secure income through employment.

The majority of Brazilians working in Boston (61%) work for a private for profit company. Another 5% work for a private not for profit organization.

Source: U.S. Census 2000, Public Use Microdata (PUM) 5% Sample, BRA Research
More than 16% of Brazilians are self-employed, a rate almost three times that of other foreign-born and more than double that of the native-born population.

Share of Self Employed Workers

Source: U.S. Census 2000, Public Use Microdata (PUM) 5% Sample, BRA
More than 342,732 Brazilians live in the U.S.

Main destinations for Brazilian immigrants:
- U.S.
- Paraguay
- Japan

Major Brazilian emigrant regions:
- Minas Gerais
- Goias
- Parana
- Santa Catarina

6,822 Brazilians in Boston

occupations
- 13% construction, extraction, and transportation
- 43% services
- 15% managerial and professional
- 19% technical, sales and administrative support
- 6% production
- 4% arts, design and media

contributing
- $132 million annual spending
- $157 million to the gross state product
- $38 million in state and federal taxes
- 1,733 direct and indirect jobs for the local economy

entrepreneurship
- annual sales
- $40 million

business ownership
- 150 small businesses

homebuying
- Brazilians bought 3 out of 10 homes sold to immigrants in Massachusetts
June 2009

Brazilians as a Percentage of Foreign-Born by Census Tract

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Caucasian</th>
<th>African-American</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>Pacific Islander</th>
<th>American Indian/Alaskan Native</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0.1 - 1</td>
<td>1.1 - 5</td>
<td>5.1 - 10</td>
<td>10.1 - 21.6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Summary File 3.
Brazilian immigrants further contribute to the local economy through their labor as well as through their spending. For example, for every 10 homes sold to immigrants in Massachusetts in 2005, three were purchased by Brazilians making them the largest home buying group, second only to the Chinese.\(^\text{18}\)

The total value of their contributions is estimated using a regional economic model (REMI) that calculates the value of goods and services consumed on each dollar spent. Brazilians spend, from their after tax earnings, nearly $32 million in Boston, annually.\(^\text{19}\) These annual expenditures generate a regional product of $33 million in local spending and $36 million in State and Federal taxes.\(^\text{20}\) This expenditure in turn, generates 1,080 indirect jobs in the local economy.\(^\text{21}\)

Beyond the contributions Brazilian-born immigrants living in Boston make to the local economy, they continue to play a vital role in the economy of their home country by sending back remittances of $0.4 billion each year. This breaks down to an average of approximately $342 per month sent back by each Brazilian household.\(^\text{22}\) This trend is also witnessed throughout the U.S. and beyond, with Brazilians living abroad contributing more than $4.25 billion, or 0.4% of GDP, to Brazil’s economy 2006.\(^\text{23}\)
standard of living

Only 20.6 percent of Brazilians have achieved a middle class standard of living compared to 38% of Boston’s native-born population and 25% of all foreign-born.24

A combination of factors may contribute to Brazilians poor standing. In part, this may reflect the effect of the barriers to opportunity that non-recognition of foreign qualifications presents to Brazilian workers. There is a high rate of low educational levels and English proficiency among Brazilians. For example, while 45% of Boston’s adult foreign-born population either lacks a high school diploma or has limited English-speaking skills, an already high proportion, rates among adult Brazilians living in Boston are substantially higher at 59.3%.25

civic engagement

Brazilians further contribute to the city’s economic and social life through their civic participation. Grassroots organizations such as the Brazilian Women’s Group and the Brazilian Immigrant Center are very active and have celebrated their tenth anniversaries this year.

In addition, Brazilian press and media are establishing a permanent presence in the U.S. In the metropolitan Boston area, Brazilians produce fourteen newspapers with a weekly distribution of 20,000 issues and nine monthly magazines with a distribution of 12,000. They also support two of the largest Brazilian television networks transmitting directly from Brazil on a daily basis.27

Distribution of Education and English Proficiency26 in the Brazilian Population (25+)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education/English Proficiency</th>
<th># of Brazilian</th>
<th>% Brazilian</th>
<th>% Foreign-Born</th>
<th>% Native-Born</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack H.S. Diploma &amp; English Proficient</td>
<td>417</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
<td>16.9%</td>
<td>14.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack H.S. Diploma &amp; Limited English Proficiency</td>
<td>793</td>
<td>23.4%</td>
<td>17.2%</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have H.S. Diploma &amp; Limited English Proficiency</td>
<td>801</td>
<td>23.6%</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack H.S. Diploma or Limited English Proficiency</td>
<td>2,011</td>
<td>59.3%</td>
<td>45.4%</td>
<td>16.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: U.S. Census 2000, Public Use Microdata (PUM) 5% Sample, BRA Research Division Analysis
end notes
The Brazilian Geography and Statistics Institute registered the statistical “absence” of 1,379,928 Brazilians between the ages of 20 and 44 from the 1991 Brazilian Census, a fact which can only be explained by emigration. Brazilian Geography and Statistics Institute (IBGE) (2000).


The ACS is a yearly survey conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau intended to allow communities to see how they are changing in the years between decennial censuses. The ACS is based on a sample of the population. While the data in this document are reported as specific numbers and percentages, all results from the ACS are subject to sampling error. The data in this report are from the 2005-2007 ACS 3 year averages. These data are the combination of 3 distinct years which reduces the level of sampling error. For more information on the ACS, please see: http://www.census.gov/acs/www/index.html


Brazilian population estimates vary widely. For example, the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs estimated that in 2001 there were between 800,000 and 1.1 million Brazilians living in the United States. Cited in Margolis, Maxine L. (2005). Involving the Brazilian Diaspora in Brazilian Studies: Brazilian Immigration to the United States. Department of Anthropology, University of Florida.

The ACS’s American Fact Finder website reports that there are an estimated 6,731 Brazilians in Boston. However, the American Fact Finder website reports a total population for Boston that is lower than the currently accepted population total for the city (600,980 compared to 608,352 respectively). We adjusted the total number of immigrants in each group in order to account for lower total number of Bostonians estimated by the ACS. For more information on American Fact Finder please see: http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html?_lang=en

As mentioned earlier, ACS data is subject to sampling error. While our adjusted estimate using the 2005-2007 ACS for foreign-born Brazilians in Boston is 6,822, the margin of error for this statistic at the 90% confidence interval is ± 2,071. Meaning, the actual population size of Brazilians in Boston is likely to be between 4,751 and 8,893. Throughout this report we will report the adjusted population estimate provided by the 2005-2007 ACS for foreign-born Brazilians in Boston. These population counts are estimates, however.

Cross-tabulations of the ACS from relatively small groups can lead to making generalizations about subsections of a group from a very small sample and may not be reliable. As a result, in this report we will use 2000 Census data for all cross-tabulations of the Brazilian community, while using the 2005-2007 adjusted ACS estimate to express the total population.

The proportion of Brazilians with less than a high school education (34%), is equal to that of the foreign-born population and much greater than the native-born (16%). U.S. Census Bureau, 2000.

Defined as the share of the working-age population that is either currently employed or seeking work. U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2005).

These unemployment data are from the 2000 Census. It should be noted that unemployment rates are subjected to a much greater level of fluctuation, varying from quarter to quarter, than all of the other demographic data in this report.

There is no agreement among researchers regarding the reasons for variations in the self-employment rates among different immigrant groups. Reasons cited include human and financial capital of individual immigrants, high rates of solidarity and social capital in some immigrant communities, as well as the opportunity structure encountered by immigrant entrepreneurs. Lima, A. (1997) Brazilian Businesses in Greater Boston. Boston: Consulate General of Brazil (Boston)

Brazilian-owned businesses generate $0.426 million in State income taxes, $0.025 million in State sales taxes paid, and $1.5 million in Federal income taxes. BRA Research Division. (2009). Regional Economic Model, Inc. REMI calculations.

A family income four times the poverty line is used as a proxy for the middle-class standard of living. The actual income needed to achieve this standard depends on the number of people in the family. For a two person family the income would be at least $44,856 which is at the 43rd percentile of all families. Massachusetts Institute for a New Commonwealth. (2005). The Changing Face of Massachusetts.

The Limited English Proficient includes immigrant adults who do not speak English at all or who do not speak it well. The English Proficient includes immigrant adults who speak only English, speak it very well or speak it well. In MassINC’s The Changing Face of Massachusetts report, the authors used these same definitions, but labeled the two categories language challenge and no language challenge, respectively.


Remittances are another way Brazilians have an economic impact, and in this case, on the Brazilian economy. In 2004, Boston’s Brazilians sent back to Brazil $10.9 million in remittances. Worldwide, in 1995, Brazil received a total of $2.5 billion in remittances. International Monetary Fund. (2000). Balance of Payments Statistics Yearbook.


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26 Ibid
