

TURKISH REFUGEES IN BRAZIL AFTER THE 2016 TURKEY COUP ATTEMPT

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Abstract: Population geography is a subdiscipline of Geography devoted to the study of one of the aspects of geographic space, which is population flows. The flow of refugees is a topic of interest. In 2016, Turkey underwent a coup attempt which resulted in the deaths of hundreds of people and increased internal political tension. This study aimed to verify whether Turkey's internal circumstances impacted the number of Turkish refugee requests in Brazil and if so, to describe these refugees' general profile and their spatial distribution, without risking their safety. We used data provided by the International Migration Observatory, which is linked to the Brazilian Ministry of Justice. The analyses were performed using descriptive and geospatial statistics and showed a considerable increase in the number of Turkish refugees in Brazil from 2016, as well as their concentration in the richest state of the federation. We believe these results provide relevant information to improve the Brazilian system of recognition and reception of refugees.

Keywords: Refugees; Turkey; Brazil; Coup d'état.

REFUGIADOS TURCOS NO BRASIL APÓS A TENTATIVA DE GOLPE NA TURQUIA EM 2016

Resumo: A Geografia da População é uma subárea da Geografia que se dedica, entre outras temáticas, ao estudo de um dos aspectos do espaço geográfico, os fluxos populacionais. Um fluxo que chama a atenção dos estudos geográficos é o de refugiados. A Turquia passou por uma tentativa de golpe de Estado em 2016, o que resultou na morte de centenas de pessoas e no aumento da tensão política interna. O objetivo deste estudo foi verificar se essa situação interna da Turquia teve impacto no número de solicitações de refúgio de turcos no Brasil e descrever a distribuição espacial no país. Para tanto, foram usados dados disponibilizados pelo Observatório das Migrações Internacionais. As análises foram realizadas por meio de estatísticas descritivas e geoespaciais e demonstraram um aumento considerável do número de refugiados de origem turca no Brasil a partir de 2016, bem como sua

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concentração no estado mais rico da federação. Acreditamos que tais resultados sejam informações relevantes para uma melhoria no sistema brasileiro de reconhecimento e acolhida de refugiados.

Palavras-chave: Refugiados, Turquia, Brasil, Golpe de Estado.

Introduction

Population geography is a subdiscipline of Geography devoted to the study of one of the aspects of geographic space, which is population flows (BAILEY, 2005). Since the technical-scientific revolution (1950 – 1970), the flow of international migrants has intensified due to the advances in transport and communications, drawing the attention of Geography researchers in the subject. The flow of refugees is another topic of interest. Despite using the same migration technical structures, it differs in its causes and conditions of mobility.

According to international definitions, refugees are those who flee political, religious and other persecutions (IOM, 2009). Brazil is a signatory of international treaties that provide for the reception of refugees; the country has legal and governmental structures to acknowledge refugee status, despite their quality and effectiveness. In 2016, Turkey underwent an attempted coup d'état, which resulted in the deaths of hundreds of people and increased internal political tension (KALIN, 2016). This situation may affect the population movement, mainly of refugees. In this study, we set out to verify whether such internal event resonates in Brazil, which is very distant, from a geographic perspective.

We aimed to verify if there is a temporal relationship between this internal situation in Turkey and the increase in the number of asylum requests from Turks in Brazil; if so, to describe the spatial distribution of these refugees in the country as well as their general profile, without risking their security. For this purpose, we used data made available by the Observatory on International Migration, linked to the Brazilian Ministry of Justice.

The coup attempt: a brief context

On July 15, 2016, the world was startled by the news about what was happening in Turkey. An attempted coup was underway, with all the scenes that have marked this kind of event in different parts of the world, regardless of the

time: tanks on the streets, television networks invaded, guns hot, and deaths. Threats to Turkish institutions came not only from those who sparked the movement but also from the government, which resisted the attempt and reacted with a counter-coup. This destabilized the country just as much as the original movement could have, had it been successful. According to Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018, p. 95 and 96),

Erdogan (*Turkey president*) responded to the coup by declaring a state of emergency and launching a massive wave of repression that included a purge of some 100.000 public officials, the closure of several newspapers, and more than 50.000 arrests, including hundreds of judges and prosecutors, 144 journalists, and even two members of the constitutional Court. Erdogan also used the coup attempt as a window of opportunity to make the case for sweeping new executive powers.

We do not intend to discuss this event in detail here; to do so we would need a perspective view that only time can provide, which would be a task more suitable for historians than for geographers. However, to better understand it, it is worth mentioning that the coup was an insurrection movement on the part of the Turkish Armed Forces, and according to Jacoby (2020), it was the outcome of at least four elements combined: part of the military wing's desire to ensure the continuity of its political influence in the country; the relationship and division between the Armed Forces and Islam, the Turkish military elite's financial and economic interests, and lastly, the increase in power of the President and his party posed a threat to laicism, which marked the foundation of the modern Republic of Turkey. We recommend reading this author and others' work for a deeper understanding of the topic.

This work aims to verify if this event affected one of the aspects that characterize geographic space, identified by Santos (1996) as a set of fixed and flows. In this case, the objective was to verify if there was a temporal relationship between the stated events and the number of asylum requests by Turkish refugees in Brazil. Hence, to verify if it affected the flows. If confirmed, this relationship it will indicate how internal events can reverberate to foreign policy, influence the movement of people demanding public policies, and the level of preparedness of countries located far away.

Turks in Brazil

Historically, Turkey as an independent country, is not amongst the main home countries of foreigners who came to Brazil. This is due to its constitution as an independent nation only in the 1920s, among other reasons. The 2010 Brazilian Census data indicates that 362 people born in Turkey lived in Brazil in that year. Table 1 illustrates the distribution of these Turks according to the year in which they took up residence in Brazil.

Years when they took up residence in Brasil	Frequency	Percent	Valid percentage	Accumulated percentage
1925	38	10,4	10,4	10,4
1930	7	1,9	1,9	12,3
1935	4	1,1	1,1	13,4
1937	10	2,8	2,8	16,2
1954	20	5,6	5,6	21,8
1955	21	5,8	5,8	27,6
1957	99	27,4	27,4	55,0
1960	10	2,9	2,9	57,9
1970	5	1,4	1,4	59,3
1972	16	4,5	4,5	63,8
1980	11	3,1	3,1	66,9
1985	12	3,4	3,4	70,3
1990	10	2,6	2,6	72,9
1992	10	2,8	2,8	75,7
2004	19	5,2	5,2	81,0
2007	10	2,8	2,8	83,8
2008	19	5,4	5,4	89,2
2009	10	2,7	2,7	91,9
2010	29	8,1	8,1	100,0
Total	362	100,0	100,0	

TABLE 1 – Foreigners born in Turkey living in Brazil in 2010, per year in which they took up residence.

Source: IBGE, 2010.

As we can see, the number is relatively small. This may indicate a possible low entry of Turks into Brazil, in addition to the fact that many of those who had come long ago have already passed away. However, it is emblematic that out of the 362 Turks who lived in Brazil in 2010, only 87 entered the country in the last ten years, thus an average of approximately nine entries per year. This data, when compared to the number of asylum requests from Turks in Brazil as of 2016, further highlights the relative importance of the number of requests for refuge.

Turkish immigration to Brazil, although small in volume, is symbolically representative. Historically, many foreigners from the Middle East who lived in Brazil were generically and derogatorily referred to as Turks. This has even been noted in a novel by Jorge Amado (1992), one of the main names of Brazilian literature. His work *The discovery of America by the Turks* portrays the arrival of immigrants from the Middle East to Brazil who were called Turks, even though the characters were from other countries in the region. It is difficult to determine the exact origin of this derogatory generalization. Yet, in addition to prejudice and ignorance toward the different, for a long time (in any case until 1925), nearly that entire region was under the domain of the Ottoman Empire – in Portuguese also known as Ottoman Turkish Empire. This could justify, at least in the early twentieth century, this association between the Turkish nationality and the other ethnic groups of the region³. Even so, regardless of its volume, the entry of Turks into Brazil has been very symbolic.

However, the purpose of this article is to analyze those Turks who came to Brazil and applied for the recognition of their refugee status, and not those who came as immigrants. To this point, our data analyses will indicate whether there has been an increase in this figure after the events of 2016 in Turkey.

When analyzing the most recent data on Turks in Brazil, it is important to consider the influence of the Gülen movement. This religious movement was the target of persecution by the Turkish government after the attempted coup. According to Dumovich (2019), the movement combines two religious' precepts – “good deeds” and “emigration” – as a way of propagating the Islamic faith as responsible for an internationalization of this Turkish version of how to experience faith. The movement is led by Fethullah Gülen, who lives exiled in the United States, and is considered a terrorist by the Turkish government. The movement also reached Latin America and was responsible for attracting some Turkish families to Latin American countries. This happened mainly after the persecution of the movement by the Turkish government as a reaction to the attempted coup in 2016 and should be considered when analyzing data on the requests by Turkish refugees in Brazil.

³ Besides, many ethnic minorities were constitutionally obligated to assume the nationality of national states in the Middle East, such as Turkey itself.

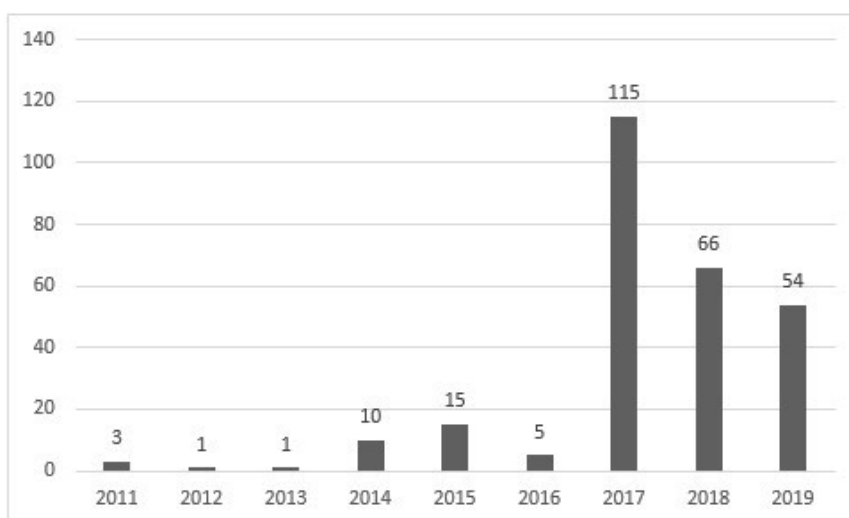
Methodology

To verify the temporal relationship between Turkish refugee requests in Brazil and the events connected to the attempted coup and its developments in Turkey in 2016, we analyzed the evolution of Turkish refugee requests in Brazil for a period of nine years, from 2011 to 2019. For this analysis, we used secondary data provided by the Observatory of International Migration, an entity that has partnered with the Ministry of Justice of Brazil and discloses information from the STI-MAR database (International Traffic System - Alerts and Restrictions Module), under the responsibility of the Federal Police.

Due to its methodological characteristics, this is an exploratory, documentary and quantitative research, which seeks to expose relevant aspects of social reality through a targeted data analysis. Data analysis was based on the use of descriptive statistics tools and treatment of spatial data to allow a geographically relevant presentation of the information.

Data presentation and analysis

The first aspect we sought to analyze was whether there was a temporal relationship between the number of asylum requests in Brazil and the events that occurred in Turkey. The temporal distribution of Turkish refugees' requests in Brazil is illustrated in Graph 1:



GRAPH 1 – Number of Turkish asylum seekers in Brazil.

Source: STI-MAR, Observatory of International Migration, 2019.

From the graph, it is clear that something strongly influenced the number of Turks' asylum applications in Brazil in 2017. The number of requests in that year was twenty-three times higher than the previous year, soaring from only five requests (close to the average of previous years) to 115 requests in 2017. In the following years, 2018 and 2019, the figure remained high when compared to the years before 2016, but showed a downward trend, with 66 requests in 2018 and 54 through September 2019.

Despite the expressiveness of the data, it is necessary to conduct a more detailed analysis. As we stated earlier, the data refer to the year of application for registration, which is not necessarily the same as when the refugee entered Brazil, as shown in Table 2.

		Year of registration				Total
		2016	2017	2018	2019	
Year of entry	2000	0	1	0	0	1
	2008	0	1	0	0	1
	2010	0	1	0	0	1
	2011	0	1	2	1	4
	2013	0	4	1	1	6
	2014	0	3	1	2	6
	2015	0	13	1	5	19
	2016	5	34	3	2	44
	2017	0	57	7	3	67
	2018	0	0	50	16	66
	2019	0	0	0	24	24
Total		5	115	65	54	239

TABLE 2 – Year of registration and entry of Turkish asylum seekers in Brazil - 2016 to 2019.

Source: STI-MAR, Observatory of International Migration, 2019.

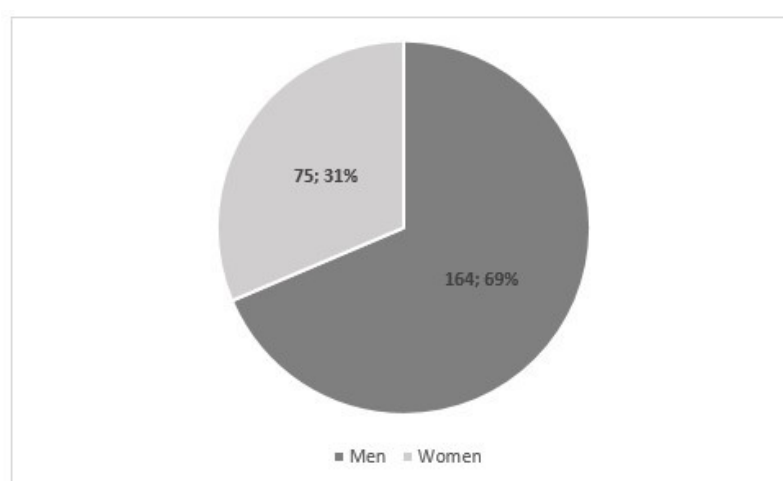
The table was constructed by cross-referencing the data from the year of entry and the year the request for recognition of refugee status was made. At least 19 asylum seekers after 2016 entered Brazil before that year. This raises different hypotheses. One of the strongest ones would be that Turkey's political instability as of 2016 created an acceptable justification for some residents in Brazil to solve any outstanding migratory issues faster via recognition of refugee status. Another interesting aspect is that 34 out of the 115 requests registered in 2017, i.e., almost 30%, were from Turks who entered Brazil in 2016, whereas 54 entered the country in the same year as the asylum application. Such

data strengthens the temporal proximity between the entry into Brazil, the asylum application, and the events that shook Turkish institutions in 2016.

Although the attempted coup occurred in July 2016, its effects – primarily resulting from the government's counter-coup movement – were felt in the following months and years, which may explain the increase in refugee requests from Turks in Brazil, especially as of 2017.

The analysis of Graph 1 and Table 2 confirms a temporal relationship between the increased number of Turks' asylum applications in Brazil and the events in Turkey. However, based on the data alone, it is not possible to state that it is a causal relationship. For that, we would need more detailed figures on the reasons behind the requests. This information is not publicly available, and its disclosure could risk the security of refugees and threaten compliance to established international conventions on the subject.

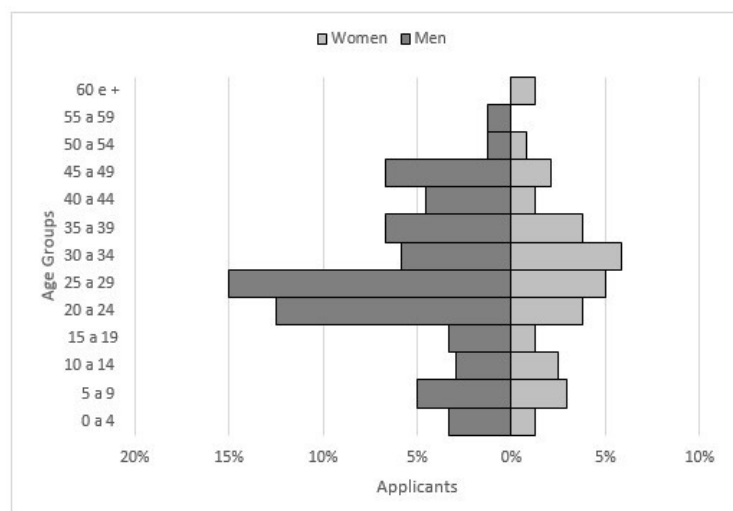
Another relevant aspect is the general profile of asylum seekers. We know from world data that the majority of refugee applicants are men; hence, a higher ratio of male refugee applications over female ones is expected. In the case of Turks in Brazil, however, we noticed an over-representation of male applicants, as seen in Graph 2. This ratio is much higher than the observed for the total number of male refugees in the world, which was 51% in 2019 (UNHCR, 2019). This male over-representation is a relevant aspect that deserves to be better studied, in relation to both its causes and its consequences.



GRAPH 2 – Distribution, by sex, of Turkish asylum seekers in Brazil from 2016 to 2019.

Source: STI-MAR, Observatory of International Migration, 2019.

Age was another element considered in the construction of this general profile. Graph 3 illustrates the age groups of asylum seekers; to construct it, we used the age provided by them on the year of application.



GRAPH 3 – Age distribution of Turkish asylum seekers in Brazil from 2016 to 2019.

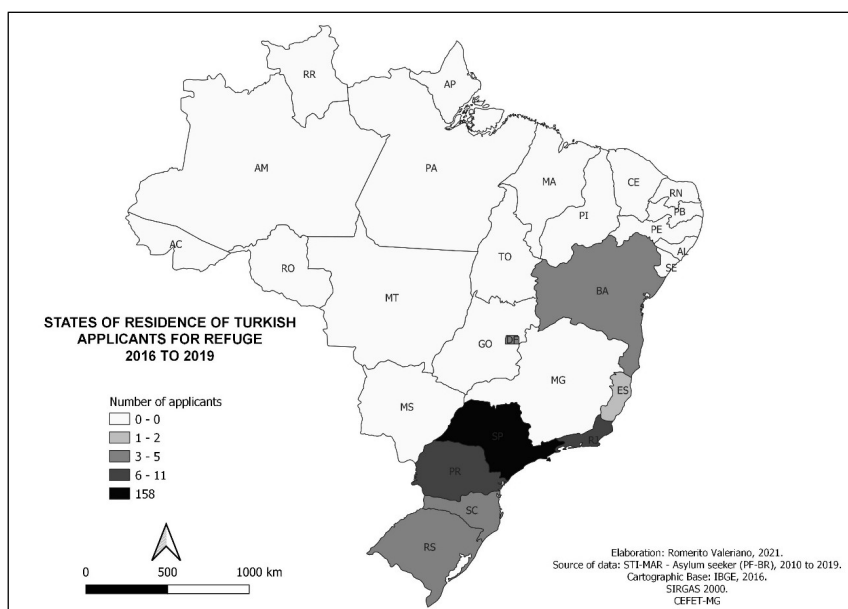
Source: STI-MAR, Observatory of International Migration, 2019.

We are dealing with a population of working age and predominantly male. The most notable age groups are between 20 and 49 years old, with ages between 20 and 29 years old in a higher proportion. This indicates that the applicants came to Brazil at working age and required labor allocation upon arrival, which poses a challenge, considering Brazil began to experience an acceleration of its unemployment rates in this period.

In addition to analyzing how many asylum seekers there are and their general profile, we also analyzed their location. We used the data of the federal state of residence declared by the applicant, which allowed us to create a map. Map 1 illustrates the spatial distribution of Turkish asylum seekers in Brazil when they registered their request.

The map indicates a spatial concentration of Turks who sought refuge in Brazil during the studied period. One-third of applicants did not declare their location or did not have the federal unit of residence registered in the database, which hindered our analysis. However, we concluded that the state of São Paulo stands out considerably, concentrating 66% of the applicants. The non-disclosure of their location is understandable, considering it is sensitive information for people in a refugee situation. Nonetheless, we wonder why some have

informed and others have not, or some have disclosed data and others have not. Regardless of this aspect, the map analysis portrays that asylum seekers were concentrated in the wealthiest regions of Brazil, Southeast and South, with only a few exceptions in Bahia (Northeast) and the Federal District (Midwest).



MAP 1 – Spatial distribution of Turkish asylum seekers in Brazil from 2016 to 2019.
Source: STI-MAR, Observatory of International Migration, 2019.

The temporal analysis of Turkish asylum applications in Brazil, made up of their general profile and spatial distribution, forms an interesting portrait of this small flow of refugees. This helps to understand a little more about the geographical population connections between these two countries, which are so far apart in geographic space, but that can get closer through population flows.

Some initial considerations

We chose to call this “conclusion” as *initial considerations*, because we believe that this is what this paper represents: an approximation of the data on a small part of the Turks in Brazil. It is the onset of a still lengthy research path.

We conducted the analyses by using descriptive and geospatial statistics. The results demonstrated a considerable increase in the number of asylum requests from Turkish refugees in Brazil as of 2016. We also found they were concentrated in the richest state of the federation. This confirms the preliminary hypothesis of a temporal relationship between the number of asylum re-

quests and the events surrounding the attempted coup in Turkey in 2016. These results also confirm aspects raised by other researchers, such as Dumovich (2019), who reports the effect of the Gülen movement persecution on the arrival of Turkish families to Brazil, after the attempted coup. Our findings highlight the international effects of an internal crisis and are relevant to improve the Brazilian system of recognition and reception of refugees.

This situation also confirms the world's interconnectivity, meaning that one cannot say that problems are exclusive to the countries where they occur. The dynamics of population mobility can bring seemingly distant events closer in geographical space. This is a call for more effective public policies to create a more robust structure to monitor these international geopolitical events and to prepare internal structures to respond to their effects on a national scale.

The present work did not intend to overstep the limits of an exploratory analysis, but to indicate issues that require more in-depth studies that can contribute to our reflection and discussion on Population Geography.

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