



Miami-Dade County is the largest County in the southeastern United States and the ninth largest in the nation by population (per US Census Bureau Annual Population Estimates – July 1, 2009). Miami-Dade County is often referred to as the “Gateway to Latin America and the Caribbean.” The County’s population is estimated to be 2,462,182. Population figures used are from the Florida Estimates of Population (April 1, 2009) prepared by the Bureau of Economic and Business Research, College of Business Administration at the University of Florida and are certified by the Governor of Florida. The population density is 5,830 people per square mile within the urban area.

The racial makeup of the County is 62 percent Hispanic, 18 percent white, 18 percent black, two percent other races. Approximately one half of the people living in Miami-Dade County in 2004 were foreign born. Among County residents, 29.3 percent speak English, 62.4 percent speak Spanish, 4.9 percent speak Creole, and 3.4 percent speak other languages. The per capita income in the County is \$23,846 and the median family income is \$51,730. Of the County’s total population, 13.2 percent of the families live below the poverty line.

Approximately 418 square miles (excludes Bay and Coastal Water) of the County are within the urban development boundary while the total County land area currently covers a total of 2,431 square miles (1,946 square miles of land and 485 square miles of water) and is bound by Biscayne Bay and the Atlantic Ocean to the east, Everglades National Park to the west, the Florida Keys to the south, and Broward County to the north. Miami-Dade County is the only metropolitan area in the United States that borders two national parks: Biscayne National Park and Everglades National Park.

The Greater Miami area is the center for international commerce in the southeastern United States and its proximity to the Caribbean, Mexico, and Central and South America makes it a natural center of trade to and from North America. In addition, the international background of many of its residents is an essential labor force characteristic for multi-national companies which must operate across language and cultural differences.

The County had the highest concentration of international bank agencies on the east coast south of New York City, with a total of 28 foreign chartered banks and over \$14 billion on deposit as of September 30, 2009, according to the Florida Department of Financial Services, Office of Financial Regulations. According to the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta, as of September 30, 2009, there were eight Edge Act Banks throughout the United States; five of those institutions were located in the County with over \$11.015 billion on deposit. Edge Act Banks are federally chartered organizations offering a wide range of banking services, but limited to international transactions only. The favorable geographic location of the County, a well-trained labor force and the favorable transportation infrastructure have allowed the economic base of the County to expand by attracting many national and international firms doing business in Latin America.



The Greater Miami area is also the leading center for tourism in the state. Miami ranks second behind Orlando as a destination for non-residential air travelers according to the Florida Division of Tourism of the Department of Commerce. It is also the principal port of entry in the State for international air travelers. During 2009, 69.5 percent of international air travelers entering the State arrived through Miami International Airport, according to statistics compiled by the U.S. Department of Transportation.

The County’s economy has been transitioning from mixed service and industrial in the 1970’s to one dominated by services in the late 1990’s primarily due to the expansion in international trade, the tourism industry, and health services. Wholesale trade and retail trade have and are projected to become stronger economic forces in the local economy. This reflects the County’s position as a wholesale center in Southeast Florida, which is serving a large international market. The tourism industry remains one of the largest sectors in the local economy.



About Our Government

This section is provided as background, to establish a common understanding of our local history and to set the backdrop for the data we collected and the plan we developed. The County has operated since 1957 under a unique metropolitan system of government known as a “two-tier federation.” This was made possible when Florida voters approved a constitutional amendment in 1956 that allowed the people of the County to enact a home rule charter. At that time, the electors of Miami-Dade County were granted the power to revise and amend the Charter from time to time by countywide vote. The most recent amendment was in January 2008. The County has home rule powers, subject only to the limitations of the Constitution and general laws of the State.

The County has, in effect, a County government with certain powers effective throughout the entire County, including 35 municipalities located within the County, and a municipal government for the unincorporated area of the County. Unlike a consolidated city-county, where the city and County governments merge into a single entity, these two entities remain separate. Instead there are two “tiers,” or levels, of government: city and County. The County can take over particular activities of a city’s operations if the services fall below minimum standards set by the Board of County Commissioners (Board) of Miami-Dade County or with the consent of the governing body of a particular city. Of the County’s total population, approximately 1.074 million or 43.6 percent live in the unincorporated area, the majority of which is heavily urbanized. For residents living in the Unincorporated Municipal Service Area (UMSA), the County fills the role of both tiers of government. Residents within UMSA pay a property tax for municipal-type services provided by the County such as police, parks, public works, and zoning. Residents of municipalities do not pay UMSA tax. There are currently 35 municipalities in the County, the City of Miami being the largest and the Town of Cutler Bay being the most recently incorporated.

An amendment to the Miami-Dade County Charter, approved on January 23, 2007, created a Strong Mayor form of government, with further charter amendments approved on November 4, 2008. The Mayor is elected countywide to serve a four-year term. The Mayor, who is not a member of the Board, serves as the elected executive or administrative head of County government. In this role, the Mayor is responsible for the management of all administrative departments and for carrying out policies adopted by the Commission. The Mayor has, within ten days of final adoption by the Board, veto authority over any legislative, quasi-judicial, zoning, and master plan or land use decision of the Board, including the budget or any particular component, and the right to appoint the County Manager and all department directors unless disapproved by a two-thirds majority of those Commissioners then in office at the next regularly scheduled meeting. The Mayor is limited to two four-year terms in office.



The Board is the legislative body, consisting of 13 members elected from single-member districts. Members are elected to serve four-year terms (with no term limits) and elections of the membership are staggered. The full Board chooses a Chairperson, who presides over the Board, as well as appoints the members of its legislative committees. The Board has a wide array of powers to enact legislation, create departments, and regulate businesses operating within the County. It also has the power to override the Mayor’s veto with a two-thirds vote.

Florida’s Constitution provides for five elected officials to oversee executive and administrative functions for each County: Sheriff, Supervisor of Elections, Tax Collector, Property Appraiser, and Clerk. Through the Home Rule Charter, the first three of these offices were reorganized and became subordinate County Departments. The most visible distinction between Miami-Dade and other Florida counties is the title of its law enforcement agency. It is the only County in Florida that does not have an elected sheriff, or an agency titled “Sheriff’s Office.” Instead, the equivalent agency is known as the Miami-Dade Police Department and its chief executive is known as the Director of the Miami-Dade Police Department.

On January 29, 2008, a charter amendment was approved to make the Property Appraiser an elected position. November 4, 2008 was the first election for a Property Appraiser in Miami Dade County. The Clerk of the Board is a separate, duly elected constitutional officer as mandated by Article V, Section 16 of the Constitution of the State of Florida. The Clerk is elected to a four-year term by the electorate of Miami-Dade County. In this capacity, the Clerk serves as the Clerk of the Board of County Commissioners, County Recorder, County Auditor, custodian of all County funds, and custodian of all records filed with the Court.

