

# Brazilians flock to Miami, but how many is anyone's guess

By MARILYN BOWDEN

That more and more Brazilians are flocking to Miami is unquestionable—but how many now make their home here is anybody's guess.

According to the US Census Bureau's 2010 American Community Survey, 10,283 Brazilians live in Miami-Dade at least

part of the year. That survey counts 61,233 Brazilians across Florida and 322,080 in the US.

For the purposes of this survey, the bureau considers a resident anyone who lives at the same address for at least two consecutive months. It counts only those who were at home when a surveyor called.

Experts say that these figures are, to say the least, conservative.

"There are different, contested figures for the Brazilian population in the US, mainly because at least three-quarters is estimated to be undocumented," said Alan Marcus, assistant professor in the Department of Geography and Environmental Planning at Towson

University in Baltimore and a specialist in Brazilian immigration patterns.

While the 2009 US Census estimated 44,536 Brazilians lived in Florida, he said, "data for the same year from embassies and consulates across the US compiled by the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs lists 150,018 just in Miami, "so right there, there is a conflict."

Thomas D. Boswell, professor in the Department of Geography & Regional Studies at the University of Miami, said the true figure probably lies somewhere between US and Brazilian estimates.

Dr. Marcus said Homeland Security reports that illegal Brazilians apprehended from 2003-2006 showed the second-largest increase in undocumented groups nationwide, after Indians.

Before the September 2001 terrorist attacks, he said, undocumented Brazilians working in Miami could come and go fairly easily to visit family at home, but "9-11 impacted that transnational flow dramatically. The Bush immigration policy may have inadvertently increased illegal migration, because now their loved ones will come here to stay."

Because even those who are legally in the country are apprehensive about having the right paperwork and answering questions, Dr. Marcus said, US Census figures are unreliable. "The true number may be increased by at least tenfold."

Mariana Ribeiro, an associate with law firm Gunster, said that last year the US Department of State reported an unprecedented increase in visa demand at US Consulates in Brazil.

"More than 1.2 million Brazilians visited the US in 2010, contributing nearly \$6 billion to the US economy," she said. "By 2016, the US could host a record

2.8 million Brazilian visitors."

While many are tourists, Ms. Ribeiro said, "many Brazilians are coming here in order to transact business. Business activities include starting up a new business, expanding and investing in already existing businesses and investing in real estate, among others."

A hot topic at immigration conferences, she said, is the misuse of tourist visas for business purposes.

As is true of most South American immigrants, Dr. Boswell said, most Brazilians in the US tend to have a fairly high socio-economic status.

"One reason is that you can't float on a raft to get to Miami from South America," he said. "Those who come to the US have considerable social or human capital."

One interesting trend, Dr. Boswell said, is the practice of some Brazilians and others to send their children to high schools in Miami during the summer vacation, which, for those south of the equator, comes during the US school year.

"Though some go to private schools," he said, "often the intention is having their kids going for free to schools where they can learn English."

There's an increasing number of lower-middle class Brazilians moving to the US, Dr. Marcus said, but the reasons are not always economic.

"Traditionally, economic reasons are attached to migration flows," he said, "but my research has shown there are also frequently non-economic reasons, especially for women.

"For example, they may be unhappy professionally. They may want to escape."

Dr. Marcus found those who migrated for financial reasons or out of curiosity are the most likely to return to Brazil.



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"By 2016, the US could host a record 2.8 million Brazilian visitors," said attorney Mariana Ribeiro, and many now come to do business.