

Issue brief: Arab Americans and language policy.

Key words (4-6)

Official Language policy, Arab American, English, immigration, Language discrimination,

Description (2 sentences)

This brief describes the contemporary state of language policy in the US focusing on Arab Americans role in American language policy. Also it serves to show education rates and levels of discrimination on Arab Americans.

Key points (4-6)

- ✓ There is no official language for America. However there are groups fighting for English to be legally official.
- ✓ Many public schools have special programs for children to learn English as a second language.
- ✓ Arab Americans have a large educated population and is a part of the higher position work force.
- ✓ Despite their effective integration Arab Americans still face discrimination especially in a post 911 America.

Issue brief

In the US the most popular languages spoken in 2000 were English at 82% and 11% spoke Spanish. However English is not legally the official national language of America. But for a person to become a “naturalized” citizen, meaning not born in America or by American parents, he/she must be able to read, write, and speak English clearly, unless one has been in the states for more than 20 years. Although U.S. government has still not recognized an official national language today many see English as synonymous with America. This is due to the U.S.’s strong historical ties with England.

In early American history there wasn’t much demand for public services in other languages. Early on the overwhelming amount of English settlers quickly established English as the dominant language. English seemed to trump all other languages despite the efforts of Ben Franklin and other advocates to have German street signs and German newspapers. The use of English was, to some extent not politically motivated rather a byproduct based on the majority of early settlers being British. But centuries later the oversights to include other languages have paradoxically become a source of discrimination as well as a vehicle for collective action.

Today the U.S. has made efforts to teach non-English speaking students in public schools through a program called E.L.L. “English language learners” are taught English while learning other subjects, as to remain competitive in America’s public schools. But this service is highly contested. Some say the program actually hinders student’s ability to learn. While others say it is necessary for success. One advocate

against a linguistically diverse America is “English first.” It is a non-profit geared toward making English the official language of the nation. It enthusiastically lobbies against bilingual education, yet its mission statement points out the importance of each child learning English. Despite the controversy over bilingual education, many Americans and American immigrants never learn English. In fact one in five people speak something other than English in the house. Middle eastern Americans are no exception yet they seem to be a unique case in bilingual education and success in America.

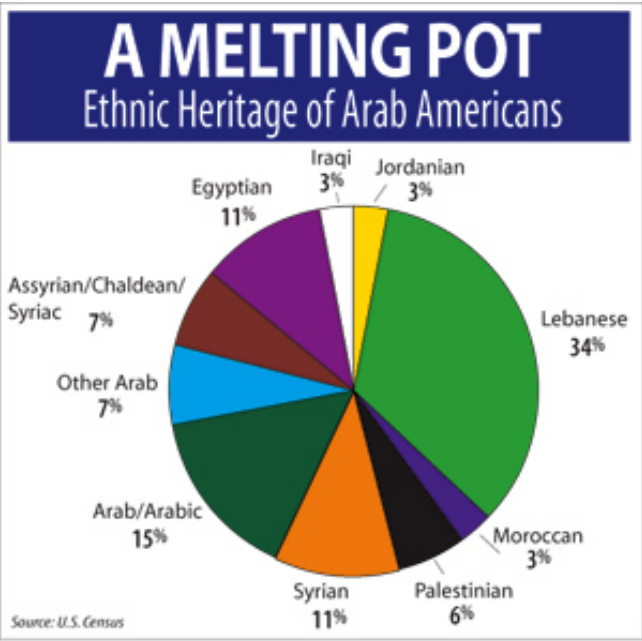
As early as the 15th century Spanish settlers were bringing Middle Eastern slaves to the new world. Later between 1880 and 1925 Middle Eastern immigration soared. In that time some 95,000 came from Syria. Congress passed several immigration laws in 1917, 1921, and 1924 in an effort to stop them and many other immigrants from coming so rapidly. Between 1990-1996 Arab immigration peaked with over 300,000 immigrants in just that 6 years.

The numbers

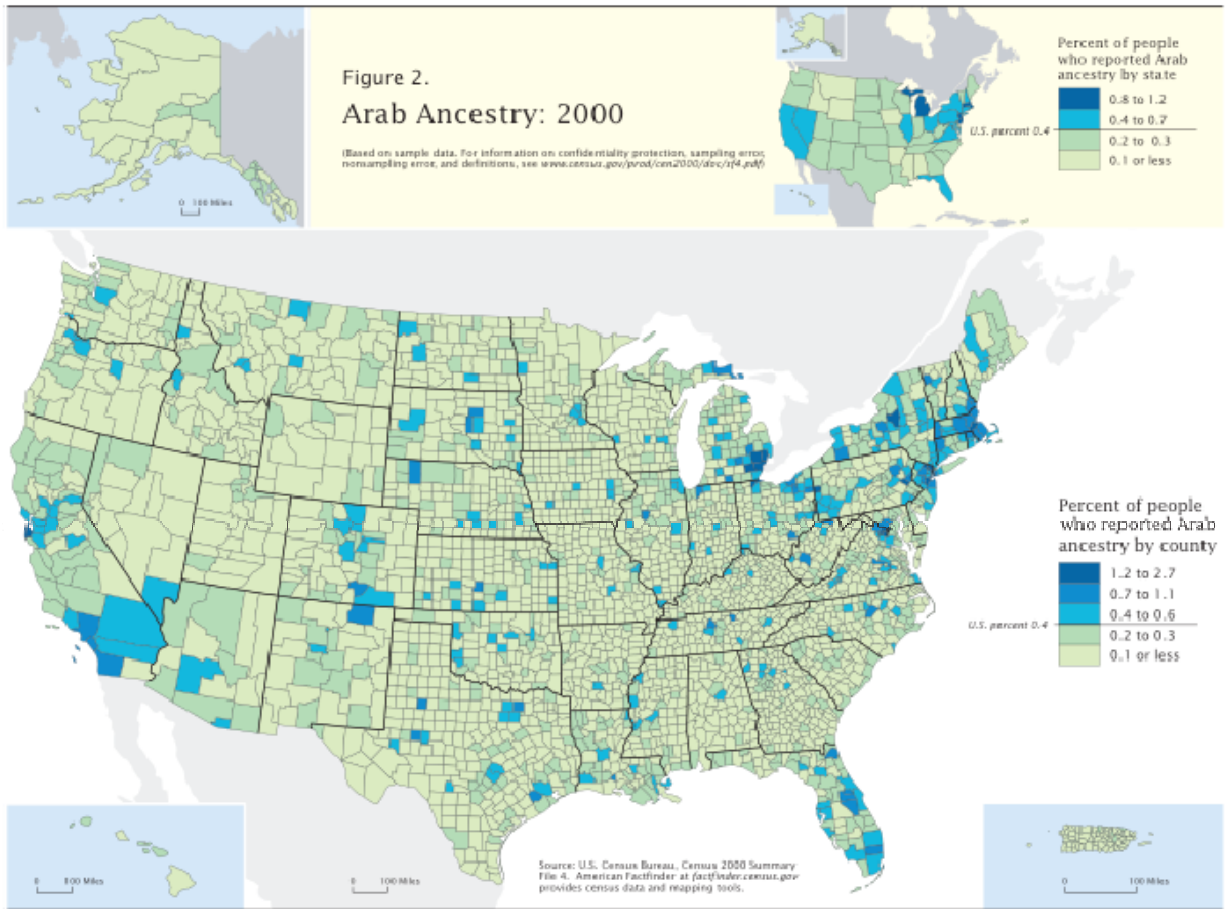
In 2000 the census reported that 1.25 million Middle Eastern Americans lived in America. Of this group they reported low unemployment rates and high education status. Four out of ten Arab-Americans have bachelor degrees or higher. 17% of Arab Americans have post-graduate degrees and that number continues to rise. About 615,000 Arab-Americans speak Arabic and about 125,000 of them are children. However a soaring 88% of Arab Americans speak English well. This shows that Arab Americans are willing and able to learn English and while preserving their cultural language. Arabic is the seventh most popular language spoken by American children. The Detroit area is the largest concentration of Arab Americans. Some of which know French as well as Arabic. This is because the French colonized some of the Middle Eastern nations.

The truth about discrimination

Statistical data shows that since the 9/11 attack discrimination against Arab Americans has been increasing. Not only violent crimes and hateful discrimination but language discrimination as well occurred all over the country. People lost jobs or were segregated from organizations, schools, and institutions for being Middle Eastern and not speaking English very well. It’s interesting that Arabic’s are discriminated against aggressively because of their perceived ties to 9/11 yet they are among the most educated peoples in America.



http://www.adcnj.us/Arab_Americans/by_the_numbers_arab_american_bu.htm



US census bureau. factfinder.census.gov

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