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Issue Brief
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Middle Eastern Americans and Social Welfare

Keywords:

Middle Eastern Americans, Arab Americans, Social Welfare, Education, Refugees, Poverty, Immigration

Key Points:

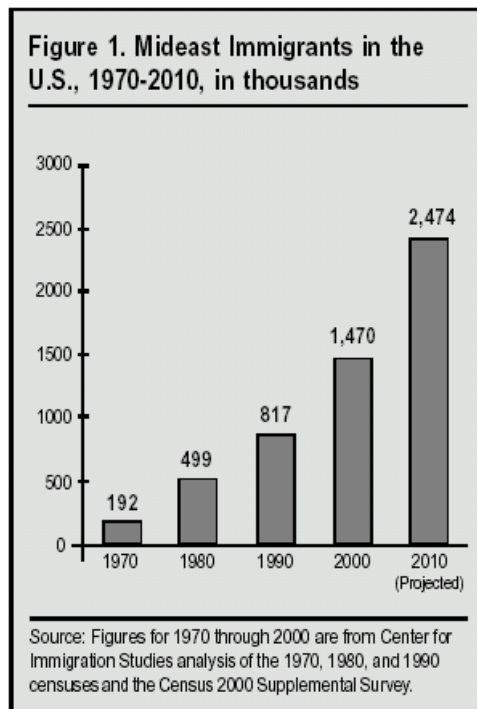
- Immigration from the Middle East has increased significantly in recent years. While the number of immigrants from all countries tripled from 1970 to 2000, the number of immigrants coming from the Middle East increased sevenfold.
- From 2010-2014 Middle Eastern immigrants ranked third among the fastest growing immigrant groups in America.
- Middle Eastern immigrants are likely to be more educated than the average American.
- On average have a median income higher than the average American population, but also a higher poverty rate.

Background:

People of Middle Eastern descent include those of Arab ancestry, some countries in the Caucus region, and North Africa. The vast majority of these people are of Arab or Jewish descent, and for this brief we will be focusing on those of Arab descent, which the U.S.

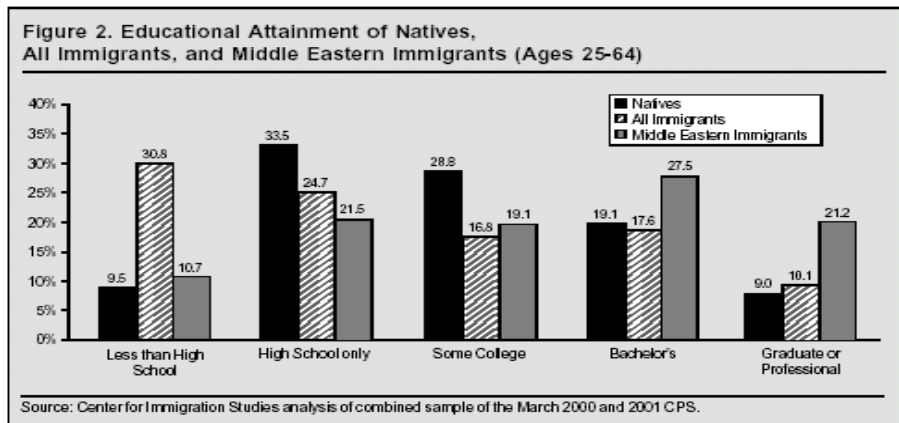
Census Bureau defines as people of Algerian, Bahraini, Egyptian, Emirati, Iraqi, Jordanian, Kuwaiti, Lebanese, Libyan, Moroccan, Omani, Palestinian, Qatari, Saudi Arabian, Syrian, Tunisian, and Yemeni descent. (Asi, 2013) While the 2010 US Census gives an Arab American population of about 1.8 million, the Arab American institute, which has been designated by the US Census Bureau as the only Census information center for data on Arab-Americans, believes that that number dramatically undercounts the population and claims an Arab American population of 3.7 million in the United States. The institute believes that this is due to the fact that there is no separate ethnic category for Arab Americans on the U.S. Census and calls for this category to be added to the 2020 census. (Arab American Institute, 2015)

Immigration Rates



As the figure above shows, immigration from the Middle East to the United States has grown considerably in recent years. While in 1970 less than 200,000 non-Jewish Middle Easterners lived in the United States, by 2000 there had been a 650% increase to 1.5 million according to US Census numbers. Immigration rates for Middle Easterners have increased sevenfold from 1970 to 2000, and in 2013 Middle Eastern immigrants made up 2.5% of the country's 41.3 million immigrants. Between 2010 and 2014 Middle Easterners have been the third fastest-growing immigrant group in America after Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. (Camarota, 2002)

Education and Socioeconomic Status

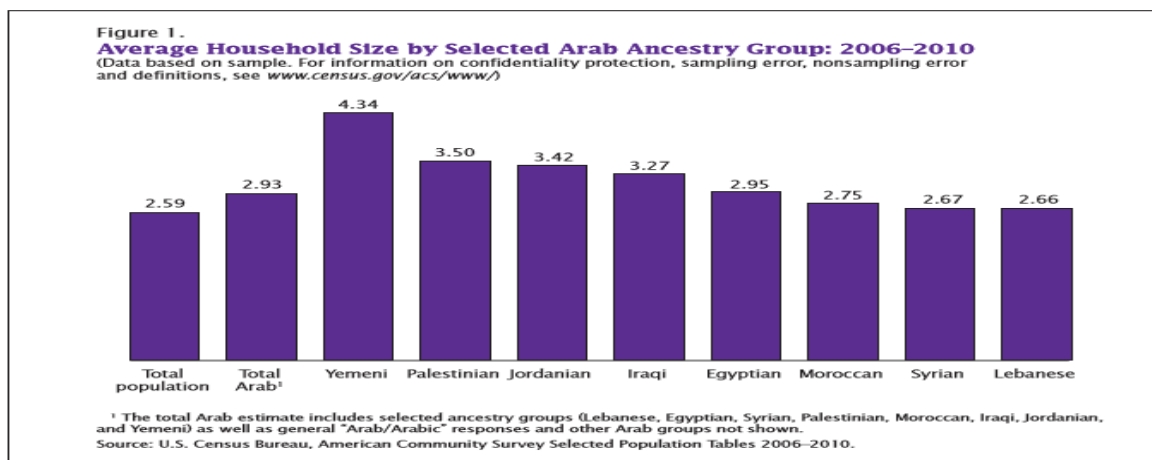


89% of Arab Americans have a high school diploma, and 45% of Arab Americans have a bachelor's degree or higher, which is considerably higher than the 27% of all Americans. 18% of Arab Americans have post graduate degrees, which is almost twice the average American rate of 10%. Median household income for Arab Americans is \$56,331, which is nearly 10% higher than the median of all US households. While mean individual income for Arab Americans is 27% higher than the national average, nearly 13.7% live

below the poverty line. (Arab American Institute, 2011). Nearly a quarter utilize some form of welfare, rates that are also higher than the national average and a surprising statistic given the education and income levels for this group as a whole. (Camarota, 2002).

Some believe part of this may be due to the number of refugees in the Arab American community who may have a harder time adjusting to their new environment due to cultural and language barriers, but comparing the poverty rates of Arab Americans coming to the United States as refugees to rates for the non-refugee population shows that there is not much of a difference between the two groups. (Camarota, 2002)

Another contributing factor could be that Arab American families tend to have more children than the average American family and may need welfare to sustain the larger number of people in a household. While education and income rates tend to be higher for Arab Americans than for Americans in general, within the Arab American community this also varies greatly depending on which country in the Middle East a person traces their ancestry from.



Conclusion

While the Arab American community seems to be doing fairly well compared to other minority groups, especially in the categories of income and education levels, there are definite areas in need of improvement, particularly the surprisingly high poverty rate. The addition of an Arab-American category on the 2020 U.S. Census would go a long way towards gathering more complete data about the community to further assess its needs. It would increase services available to the community in areas such as education, health, employment, and voting rights more effectively than the current system that does not allow for the Arab-American community to be separated from the White category as a whole.

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