

## Issue Brief: Arab Americans and the LGBT Community

### **Key Words**

Arab Americans, LGBT, post 9/11, religion, ethnoracial pentagon, United States Census

### **Description**

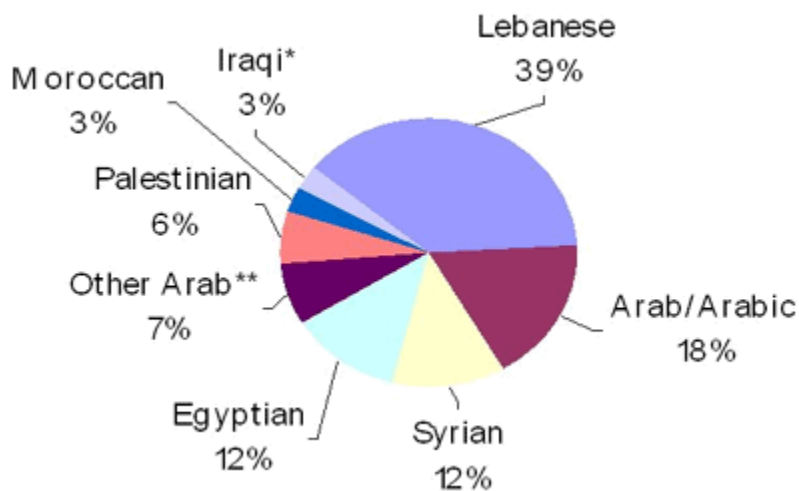
The issue brief discusses the way in which LGBT Arab Americans face discrimination within the Arab American and LGBT communities. It highlights the marginalization of the Muslim immigrants of the LGBT Arab American population affected by post 9/11 racism and homophobia.

### **Key Points**

- While Arab Americans are classified as Whites in the United States Census, Arab Americans, particularly toward the Arab American Muslim population, encounter racism on a level with those classified as ‘people of color.’
- Post 9/11 American attitudes fueled such racism toward Arab American Muslims, especially those originally from Pakistan and the Middle East.
- Arab Americans who also identify as LGBT face hostile post 9/11 attitudes within and outside the LGBT community.
- Not only do LGBT Arab Americans face hostility regarding post 9/11 attitudes but also face discrimination, harassment and homophobia from the Arab American community as well as heteronormative society.
- Thus LGBT Arab Americans face the ‘double closet’ effect.

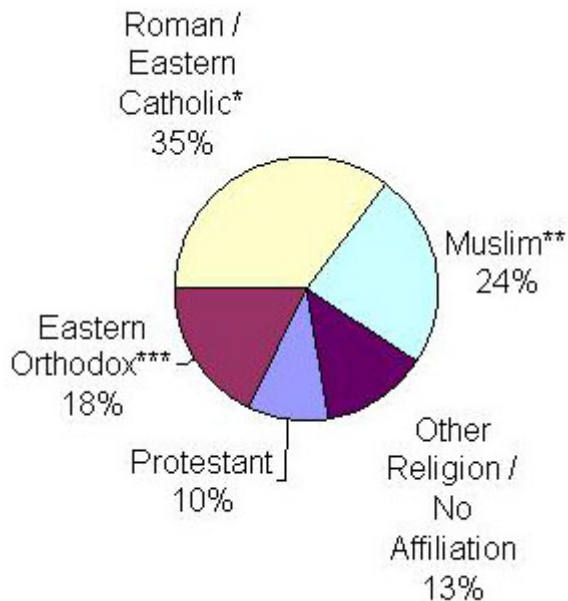
### Issue Brief

According to the 2000 United States Census, Arab Americans consist of less than 1 percent of the population and appears to be distributed equally across the United States. The Arab American population consists of 22 Arab countries including but not limited to Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco, Yemen, Tunisia and Palestine according to the Arab American Institute.



Arab Americans are classified as Whites in the United States Census. While Arab Americans have fought for a separate category, such a category has not been represented in the United States Census. The dimensionality of the Arab American population is thus disregarded. The ethnoracial pentagon epitomizes this disparity since Arab Americans are not represented under any of five ethnoracial categories. Classification as White by the United States Census and completely left out of the ethnoracial pentagon represents how misplaced the Arab American population is in the United States; consequently leaving them vulnerable to all forms of discrimination. The racism that had erupted post 9/11 highlights the marginalization of the Arab American population. Certain members of the Arab American population, particularly Arab American Muslims, especially those originally from Pakistan and the Middle East, encounter

racism even though they are classified as Whites. Arab American Institute reported that the majority of the Arab American population has religious affiliations to Christianity. However, Arab American Muslims make up a considerable amount of the population of Arab Americans with twenty four percent.



Post 9/11 racism had a detrimental effect on Arab Americans who also identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. Within the LGBT community, racism has played a role in separating marginalized groups from the mainstream LGBT community. Gay in society is viewed as a Western phenomenon amongst white gay men. As a result of racist attitudes, people of color are associated as being close to nature and cannot be homosexual, because homosexuality within heteronormative society is unnatural. Thus those who are part of a marginalized group have a difficult time being a part of the LGBT community for their perceived race does not match their prescribed sexuality. After 9/11 the LGBT community particularly shunned Arab Americans for being Muslim by not providing them with certain services or support.

There is no demographic of the LGBT Arab American population within the United States. This is partially due to the fact that there is no census of LGBT Americans within the United States. However, there is a census of same sex couples within the United States but the number of partners may not be accurate since many are not willing to disclose their sexual preferences. Therefore, the demographic of same sex couples is not representative of all same sex couples or LGBT individuals within the United States.

State	Total population	Married couples	Unmarried couples	Same-sex couples	% same-sex couples	Male couples	% male couples	Female couples	% female couples	People part of same-sex couples	% of people
Alabama	4,447,100	908,918	58,537	8,109	0.84%	3,980	0.41%	4,129	0.43%	16,218	0.36%
Alaska	626,932	116,318	16,568	1,180	0.89%	483	0.36%	697	0.52%	2,380	0.38%
Arizona	5,130,632	988,303	118,198	12,332	1.12%	6,278	0.57%	6,054	0.55%	24,684	0.48%
Arkansas	2,673,400	568,401	40,543	4,423	0.73%	2,176	0.36%	2,247	0.37%	8,848	0.33%
California	33,871,648	5,877,084	683,516	92,138	1.40%	49,614	0.76%	42,524	0.65%	184,276	0.54%
Colorado	4,301,261	858,671	91,224	10,045	1.06%	4,640	0.46%	5,405	0.57%	20,090	0.47%
Connecticut	3,405,565	676,487	68,873	7,366	0.99%	3,559	0.48%	3,827	0.51%	14,772	0.43%
Delaware	783,600	153,136	18,298	1,868	1.09%	979	0.57%	889	0.52%	3,736	0.48%
District of Columbia	672,059	56,831	14,886	3,878	5.14%	2,893	3.77%	985	1.38%	7,356	1.29%
Florida	15,982,378	3,192,266	369,622	41,048	1.15%	22,988	0.65%	18,060	0.51%	82,096	0.51%
Georgia	8,188,453	1,548,800	145,743	19,288	1.14%	10,251	0.60%	9,037	0.53%	38,576	0.47%
Hawaii	1,211,537	216,077	23,516	2,389	1.00%	1,234	0.52%	1,155	0.48%	4,779	0.39%
Idaho	1,293,953	276,511	22,664	1,873	0.63%	902	0.30%	971	0.32%	3,746	0.29%
Illinois	12,419,293	2,353,892	219,546	22,887	0.89%	12,155	0.47%	10,732	0.42%	45,774	0.37%
Indiana	6,080,485	1,251,458	124,851	10,219	0.74%	5,054	0.37%	5,165	0.38%	20,438	0.34%
Iowa	2,926,324	633,254	56,822	3,696	0.54%	1,789	0.26%	1,909	0.28%	7,396	0.25%
Kansas	2,688,418	567,924	42,299	3,973	0.65%	1,888	0.31%	2,085	0.34%	7,948	0.30%
Kentucky	4,041,769	857,944	71,266	7,114	0.77%	3,310	0.36%	3,804	0.41%	14,228	0.35%
Louisiana	4,468,976	809,498	83,563	8,808	0.99%	4,180	0.47%	4,628	0.52%	17,616	0.39%
Maine	1,274,923	272,152	37,881	3,394	1.09%	1,493	0.48%	1,901	0.61%	6,788	0.53%
Maryland	5,298,486	994,549	110,335	11,243	1.02%	5,230	0.47%	6,013	0.54%	22,488	0.42%
Massachusetts	6,349,097	1,197,917	130,919	17,099	1.29%	7,943	0.60%	9,156	0.69%	34,198	0.54%
Michigan	9,938,444	1,947,710	202,220	15,368	0.71%	7,293	0.34%	8,075	0.38%	30,736	0.31%
Minnesota	4,919,479	1,018,245	100,358	9,147	0.82%	4,290	0.38%	4,857	0.43%	18,294	0.37%
Mississippi	2,844,658	520,844	46,738	4,774	0.84%	2,251	0.40%	2,523	0.44%	9,548	0.34%
Missouri	5,595,211	1,140,866	111,010	9,428	0.75%	4,684	0.37%	4,744	0.38%	18,856	0.34%
Montana	902,195	192,087	17,941	1,218	0.58%	564	0.26%	664	0.32%	2,436	0.27%
Nebraska	1,711,263	360,996	29,537	2,332	0.60%	1,112	0.28%	1,220	0.31%	4,664	0.27%
Nevada	1,998,257	373,201	53,902	4,973	1.16%	2,739	0.64%	2,234	0.52%	9,946	0.50%
New Hampshire	1,235,786	262,438	32,560	2,703	0.92%	1,156	0.39%	1,547	0.52%	5,406	0.44%
New Jersey	8,414,350	1,638,322	151,318	16,604	0.93%	8,257	0.46%	8,347	0.47%	33,208	0.39%
New Mexico	1,819,046	341,818	43,542	4,496	1.17%	1,901	0.49%	2,595	0.67%	8,992	0.49%
New York	18,978,457	3,289,514	377,556	46,460	1.27%	24,494	0.67%	21,966	0.60%	92,980	0.49%
North Carolina	8,049,313	1,645,346	143,660	16,196	0.91%	7,849	0.44%	8,349	0.47%	32,396	0.40%

North Dakota	642,200	137,433	11,379	703	0.47%	360	0.24%	343	0.23%	1,406	0.22%
Ohio	11,353,140	2,285,798	229,089	18,937	0.75%	9,266	0.37%	9,671	0.38%	37,874	0.33%
Oklahoma	3,450,654	717,811	53,307	5,763	0.75%	2,811	0.36%	2,952	0.38%	11,526	0.33%
Oregon	3,421,399	692,532	84,634	8,932	1.15%	3,846	0.40%	5,086	0.65%	17,884	0.52%
Pennsylvania	12,281,054	2,467,673	237,622	21,166	0.78%	10,462	0.39%	10,674	0.39%	42,332	0.34%
Puerto Rico	3,808,610	662,804	40,238	6,818	0.94%	3,122	0.43%	3,696	0.51%	13,636	0.36%
Rhode Island	1,048,319	196,757	23,180	2,471	1.12%	1,172	0.53%	1,299	0.59%	4,942	0.47%
South Carolina	4,012,012	783,142	70,422	7,809	0.89%	3,561	0.42%	4,048	0.47%	15,218	0.38%
South Dakota	754,844	157,391	13,891	826	0.48%	389	0.23%	437	0.26%	1,652	0.22%
Tennessee	5,669,283	1,173,960	93,948	10,189	0.80%	5,090	0.40%	5,099	0.40%	20,378	0.36%
Texas	20,851,820	3,989,741	327,246	42,912	0.99%	21,740	0.50%	21,172	0.49%	85,824	0.41%
Utah	2,233,169	442,931	24,104	3,370	0.72%	1,665	0.36%	1,705	0.37%	6,740	0.30%
Vermont	608,827	126,413	18,079	1,933	1.34%	762	0.53%	1,171	0.81%	3,866	0.63%
Virginia	7,078,515	1,426,044	126,365	13,802	0.89%	7,053	0.45%	6,749	0.43%	27,604	0.39%
Washington	5,894,121	1,181,995	139,469	15,900	1.20%	7,662	0.58%	8,248	0.62%	31,800	0.54%
West Virginia	1,808,344	397,499	34,755	2,916	0.67%	1,494	0.35%	1,422	0.33%	5,832	0.32%
Wisconsin	5,363,675	1,108,597	117,967	8,232	0.67%	3,862	0.31%	4,370	0.36%	16,464	0.31%
Wyoming	493,782	106,179	10,381	807	0.69%	412	0.35%	395	0.34%	1,614	0.33%
<b>TOTAL U.S.</b>	<b>285,230,516</b>	<b>55,176,036</b>	<b>5,516,006</b>	<b>601,209</b>	<b>0.99%</b>	<b>304,148</b>	<b>0.50%</b>	<b>297,061</b>	<b>0.49%</b>	<b>1,202,418</b>	<b>0.42%</b>

Within the Arab American population, LGBT Arab Americans faced homophobic attitudes from their family and friends as a result of Arab culture and/or religion. LGBT Arab Americans reported that their families had dismissed their sexuality as lesbian, gay or bisexual because they believed that it was the influence of Western lifestyle. Consequently, LGBT Arab Americans “must deal with jokes, harassment, discrimination, and sometimes, the threat of being attacked and beaten — even by their own families.”<sup>1</sup>

In *Enemy at Home*, Dinesh D’Souza describes attitudes of certain Muslims toward homosexuality. D’Souza states that “the Koran describes homosexuals as ‘people of the wrath of Allah,’” and most Muslims find the notion of legitimizing what they perceive as sinful conduct to be disgusting and unspeakable.”<sup>2</sup> However, in *Que(e)rying Religion*, Shahid Dossani states that “the roots of gay intolerance seem to be more sociological and cultural than religious.”<sup>3</sup> Dossani claims that the Koran mentions homosexuality only five times through the book and that within those references there isn’t as much fear and hatred of homosexuality than most people believe.

<sup>1</sup> "The double closet." *Metro Times*. Web. 01 Dec. 2009. <<http://metrotimes.com/editorial/story.asp?id=9169>>.

<sup>2</sup> D’Souza, Dinesh. “A World Without Patriarchy” in *The Enemy at Home*. New York: The Double Day, 2007. P 159

<sup>3</sup> Dossani, Shahid. “Being Muslim and Gay” in *Que(e)rying Religion*. New York: The Continuum, 1997. P 236-237

Homophobic attitudes toward LGBT Muslims is associated with the belief that homosexuality is the end of the family and notions of morality. Non procreative sex outside of marriage is the source of condemnation of homosexuality. Dossani claims that “Muslim religious leaders tend to give disproportionate attention to the ‘sinfulness’ of physical pleasure. Physical pleasure as such is not condemned in Islam but disproportionate self indulgence is.”<sup>4</sup>

Within the United States, 73 percent of the most religious Muslims, which represents 23 percent of Muslims, believe that homosexuality should be discouraged. Sixty-six percent of Muslim Americans who have medium levels of religious commitment, which represents 50 percent of Muslim Americans, discourage homosexuality. Those who have low religious commitment, which constitute 25 percent of Muslim Americans, 47 percent believe that homosexuality should be accepted. Statistics also show that “both native-born Muslims and foreign-born Muslims express similar levels of disapproval of homosexuality.”<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> "Muslim Americans: Middle Class and Mostly Mainstream: Report Summary -." *Pew Research Center for the People & the Press*. Web. 01 Dec. 2009. <<http://people-press.org/report/329/muslim-americans-middle-class-and-mostly-mainstream>>. P 45

Homosexuality Should Be...			
	Discour- aged %	Accep- ted %	Neither/ Both/DK %
All U.S. Muslims	61	27	12=100
18-29	57	32	11=100
30-39	58	26	16=100
40-54	69	26	5=100
55+	59	22	19=100
Conservative	69	23	8=100
Moderate	60	27	13=100
Liberal	54	38	8=100
<i>Religious commitment</i>			
High	73	16	11=100
Medium	66	21	13=100
Low	43	47	10=100
<i>Self/Parents from</i>			
Arab region	67	21	12=100
Pakistan	65	28	7=100
Other South Asia	70	25	5=100
U.S. general public*	38	51	11=100
Question: Which comes closer to your view? Homosexuality is a way of life that should be accepted by society (OR) homosexuality is a way of life that should be discouraged by society.			
*September, 2006 Pew Research Center for the People & the Press national survey.			

People of color have experienced a more intense marginalization due to their race as well as being lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. Shunned by the LGBT community as well as their family and friends, LGBT Arab Americans experienced the double closet effect: dealing with both racist and homophobic attitudes within the United States.

### Works Cited

Dossani, Shahid. "Being Muslim and Gay" in *Que(e)rying Religion*. New York: The Continuum, 1997.

D'Souza, Dinesh. "A World Without Patriarchy" in *The Enemy at Home*. New York: The

Double Day, 2007.

"Muslim Americans: Middle Class and Mostly Mainstream: Report Summary -." *Pew Research Center for the People & the Press*. Web. 01 Dec. 2009. <<http://people-press.org/report/329/muslim-americans-middle-class-and-mostly-mainstream>>.

"The double closet." *Metro Times*. Web. 01 Dec. 2009.

<<http://metrotimes.com/editorial/story.asp?id=9169>>.

### General References

United States Census Bureau

<http://www.census.gov/>

The Arab American Institute

<http://www.aaiusa.org/>

BBC News

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/1405460.stm>

Behind the Mask

<http://www.mask.org.za/article.php?cat=&id=738>

"The Invisible American Half: Arab American(1) Hybridity and Feminist Discourses in the 1990s"

<http://www.haussite.net/haus.0/SCRIPT/txt2001/01/hatem.HTML>

Gay Demographics

[http://www.gaydemographics.org/USA/2000\\_Census\\_Total.htm](http://www.gaydemographics.org/USA/2000_Census_Total.htm)