

Middle Eastern or North African in U.S. Government Surveys

A Preview of MENA Demographics

BY ANDREW C. FORRESTER

The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) seeks to update race and ethnicity statistics in the United States through a proposed revision to the existing 1997 standards.¹ The most consequential update is the proposed creation of a new Middle Eastern or North African (MENA) category, while other updates would combine race and ethnicity into a single question and require additional detail in race reporting. The stated goal is to represent the diverse American population and simplify self-reporting on federal surveys and forms. These statistical standards are crucial as they govern civil rights enforcement, federal funding allocation, program eligibility, and statistical reporting.

This brief approximates responses to the proposed MENA question, as well as the creation of a new Hispanic or Latino race category, using ancestry and country of origin responses from the American Community Survey (ACS). I find a total MENA population of 3.8 million in 2021—about 1 percent

of the total U.S. population. The MENA population is most demographically similar to the Non-Hispanic White and Asian populations in terms of age, earnings, education, and occupation. Specifically, the MENA population is more highly educated and has higher earnings than Non-Hispanic Whites, but lower levels of education and earnings than the Asian population. (This brief uppercases races and ethnicities to be consistent with U.S. government stylistic guidelines.)

BACKGROUND

Statistics on race and ethnicity in the United States represent the self-identified background of respondents to censuses and surveys according to standard categories determined by the OMB with assistance from the U.S. Census Bureau. Current race and ethnicity definitions were set in a two-question format in 1997 by the OMB through its Statistical Policy Directive No. 15: Standards for Maintaining,



ANDREW C. FORRESTER is an adjunct scholar at the Cato Institute.

Collecting, and Presenting Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity (SPD 15).² The OMB recently proposed substantial revisions to the 1997 standards for collecting and presenting federal data related to race and ethnicity. The proposed revisions consist of three primary changes to data collection:³

1. Collapse race and ethnicity into a single query that adds Hispanic or Latino origin as a separate race category.
2. Introduce a separate race category for those of Middle Eastern or North African (MENA) descent.
3. Obtain by default more detailed racial breakouts within the updated racial categories.

While the current standards allow a wide range of race and ethnicity combinations, including multiple racial identities, there is a debate among experts as to whether the current standards require updating. The OMB asserts that the existing standards need revision due to significant demographic shifts in the American population since 1997. These changes include the growing population of individuals who identify as multi-racial, shifts in the overall demographic landscape, and the addition of new national-origin groups through immigration over the past several decades.⁴ Similarly, civil rights groups argue for expanding the scope of data collected on race and ethnicity to ensure compliance with civil rights laws and to prevent discriminatory practices. They believe more comprehensive data collection is necessary to address disparities and provide equitable treatment.⁵

Some critics contend that updating the racial standards in government surveys is unnecessary from a methodological standpoint and may decrease data quality. They argue that broadening the categories could lead to confusion and inaccurate reporting, particularly for the White and Hispanic or Latino groups.⁶ Opponents also express concerns that the changes may have cultural and legal implications, potentially creating divisions and conflicts.⁷ There are apprehensions that the new standards may extend beyond statistical purposes and be utilized to allocate federal program eligibility based on the interests of specific groups rather than objective criteria.⁸ Although the OMB states that the standards “are not to be used for determining the eligibility of population groups for participation in Federal programs,” there is mixed historical evidence that the data are used in practice for rewarding government grants and other benefits.⁹

An uncontested demographic change over the past two decades is that the population identifying as multiracial increased dramatically since 2010, according to the 2020 enumeration. In particular, the share of people identifying as “Some Other Race” in combination with another race increased by 733 percent since 2010.¹⁰ Considering the breadth of the White category, which includes those with MENA ancestry, the population identifying as both White and Some Other Race increased by over 1,000 percent over the same time frame. In comparison, the share of the Hispanic or Latino population identifying as White alone decreased by 53 percent over the decade.¹¹ An issue with these comparisons is that it’s unclear whether this shift results from changes in demographics or data processing. For the 2020 census, the Census Bureau implemented various improvements to the design and coding of the race and ethnicity questions in the census questionnaire.¹² Therefore, whether the new statistical standards will reflect these demographic changes is uncertain without further data from the 2020 enumeration.

There has been no attempt to model how the proposed changes will manifest in the data. Effectively weighing the benefits and costs of adopting the new statistical standards for race and ethnicity requires a counterfactual to quantify how the new standard might affect the demographic landscape of the U.S. population. This brief will jointly evaluate the addition of Hispanic or Latino as a separate race category and the creation of a separate race category for those of MENA descent by applying these new proposed standards to existing public-use data from the ACS.¹³ Since the MENA population is not officially recorded in the ACS, information on respondents’ ancestry and birthplace provides a useful proxy for the likely MENA population present in the ACS. The resulting data provide a useful counterfactual demographic profile of the United States if the OMB’s revisions to race and ethnicity were implemented. I was not able to implement the third proposed change—more detailed racial breakouts within the updated racial categories—but the elevation of Hispanic or Latino to a new race category and the creation of the MENA race category are the most consequential changes that could also affect each other, while more detailed racial breakdowns in each racial category shouldn’t affect the topline results.

Current and Historical Statistical Standards

Since the 1970s, federal statistical standards in the United States have included race and ethnicity information. In 1977, the OMB introduced Statistical Policy Directive No. 15, which established the initial standardized approach to categorizing race and ethnicity.¹⁴ The aim was to create a minimum set of designations that would facilitate data reporting for civil rights compliance, program administration, grant-making, and tabulating statistical data.¹⁵

An important issue with any categorization of race and ethnicity is that the definitions themselves “are sociopolitical constructs and are not an attempt to define race and ethnicity biologically or genetically” and are inherently “dynamic and fluid.”¹⁶ As such, the original OMB classifications aimed to develop a minimum set of categories that could be consistently used across different data sources such as the decennial census, surveys, and federal forms. These categories needed to be broad enough to allow respondents to accurately report their racial and ethnic identity in a way that could be reaggreated into the minimum set of standardized groups.

Box 1 shows the original 1977 race and ethnicity category designations.¹⁷ The OMB subsequently revised the designations to form the current standards in the 1997 SPD 15, which follows an expanded two-question format.¹⁸ The updated proposed minimum categories combine two ethnic and five racial categories.¹⁹

In addition to the minimum categories, respondents to the census and many other federal surveys such as the ACS are also asked about their country of origin and ancestry. For example, the 2020 census questionnaire allowed respondents to write in their self-identified origin. In the context of MENA, one may mark “White” and report their origin and ancestry as Egyptian. Since the Census Bureau has not yet released decennial data for these self-reported ancestries, evaluating the introduction of a MENA category requires additional information to develop a counterfactual MENA population to compare with the existing standards.

Prior Research on the MENA Population

Existing research focuses primarily on the foreign-born MENA population in the United States. A 2015 report by

Box 1

Historical, current, and proposed standardized race and ethnicity definitions in U.S. government surveys

1977

Race

American Indian or Alaskan Native

Asian or Pacific Islander

Black

White

Ethnicity

Hispanic origin

Not of Hispanic origin

1997

Ethnicity

Hispanic or Latino

Not Hispanic or Latino

Race

American Indian or Alaskan Native

Asian

Black or African American

Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander

White

Proposed New Definitions

Race or Ethnicity

White

Hispanic or Latino

Black or African American

Asian

American Indian or Alaska Native

Middle Eastern or North African

Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

Source: Office of Management and Budget.

the Migration Policy Institute highlights key socioeconomic statistics of the foreign-born MENA population using data from the 2013 ACS.²⁰ The report shows that the MENA population exhibits higher education levels than the foreign-born population as a whole and the

native-born population. Many individuals within the MENA population have obtained at least a bachelor's degree or higher educational qualifications. Regarding occupational patterns, the report indicates that the foreign-born MENA population is disproportionately represented in management, business, the sciences, the arts, and sales occupations. This finding suggests a tendency toward employment in professional and managerial roles within various sectors. A more recent 2019 report by the Partnership for a New American Economy using data from the 2015 ACS expands this research and corroborates the high educational attainment and occupational tendencies

of the MENA population.²¹

Overall, existing research highlights the strong educational profile of the MENA population in the United States and their concentration in professional occupations. Such findings contribute to our understanding of the socioeconomic characteristics and contributions of the MENA population within the larger context of immigration and the U.S. labor market. However, these studies consider only the foreign-born MENA population. The subsequent empirical work in this brief expands the analysis to include a broader measure of the entire MENA population in the United States.

Table 1
Selected demographic characteristics by proposed race and ethnicity

	Middle Eastern or North African		Population minus Middle Eastern or North African					
			White		Black or African American		American Indian or Alaska Native	
			Estimate	MOE	Estimate	MOE	Estimate	MOE
Total population	3,806,903	+/- 68,795	189,496,600	+/- 86,077	39,203,032	+/- 95,465	1,754,133	+/- 21,099
Sex								
Universe: Total population								
Male	1,976,637	+/- 34,797	94,020,818	+/- 49,641	18,828,798	+/- 52,717	870,577	+/- 13,313
Female	1,830,266	+/- 41,718	95,475,782	+/- 56,686	20,374,234	+/- 61,454	883,556	+/- 14,696
Age								
Universe: Total population								
Under 5 years	210,498	+/- 11,447	8,582,386	+/- 15,759	2,306,838	+/- 28,507	99,321	+/- 4,629
5-9 years	243,242	+/- 13,384	9,365,343	+/- 52,848	2,517,815	+/- 36,744	126,596	+/- 7,138
10-14 years	248,860	+/- 14,388	10,219,636	+/- 56,620	2,838,310	+/- 37,021	137,513	+/- 7,122
15-19 years	226,483	+/- 12,170	10,698,922	+/- 31,567	2,805,587	+/- 27,068	147,121	+/- 5,954
20-24 years	230,581	+/- 10,508	10,930,660	+/- 30,036	2,834,894	+/- 32,484	135,895	+/- 5,293
25-29 years	275,947	+/- 13,720	11,419,281	+/- 24,774	2,925,669	+/- 27,231	121,011	+/- 5,074
30-34 years	322,532	+/- 13,600	12,066,836	+/- 23,786	2,975,054	+/- 26,562	128,616	+/- 6,569
35-39 years	336,066	+/- 14,278	12,015,821	+/- 61,590	2,709,548	+/- 36,265	115,890	+/- 6,776
40-44 years	292,666	+/- 12,473	11,502,643	+/- 54,993	2,620,752	+/- 35,692	116,318	+/- 5,577
45-49 years	258,254	+/- 12,495	10,883,375	+/- 20,290	2,352,681	+/- 22,554	99,940	+/- 5,235
50-54 years	229,763	+/- 8,594	12,505,018	+/- 19,511	2,440,070	+/- 24,115	104,420	+/- 5,866
55-59 years	225,739	+/- 8,673	13,536,227	+/- 60,916	2,375,474	+/- 22,438	107,072	+/- 4,927
60-64 years	215,503	+/- 9,263	14,723,029	+/- 60,751	2,404,651	+/- 24,234	103,329	+/- 4,752
65-69 years	176,233	+/- 8,241	12,914,816	+/- 53,805	1,901,622	+/- 21,773	80,224	+/- 4,611
70-74 years	133,138	+/- 7,550	11,433,035	+/- 52,919	1,407,539	+/- 18,397	57,429	+/- 3,689
75-79 years	81,329	+/- 6,675	7,402,266	+/- 40,619	824,908	+/- 13,650	35,840	+/- 2,680
80-84 years	49,888	+/- 3,780	4,750,246	+/- 36,833	500,701	+/- 12,115	21,227	+/- 2,120
85 years and over	50,181	+/- 4,432	4,547,060	+/- 35,125	460,919	+/- 12,901	16,371	+/- 1,851
Median age	37.00	+/- 0.41	44.00	+/- 0.41	35.00	+/- 0.41	34.00	+/- 0.41
Educational attainment								
Universe: Population ages 25 and over	2,647,239	+/- 44,349	139,699,653	+/- 63,554	25,899,588	+/- 59,546	1,107,687	+/- 13,881
Less than 9th grade	153,251	+/- 10,384	2,477,538	+/- 32,918	889,841	+/- 23,924	48,371	+/- 3,877
9th to 12th grade, no diploma	100,367	+/- 6,879	5,769,148	+/- 51,704	2,202,234	+/- 36,428	116,927	+/- 5,546
High school graduate (incl. equivalency)	448,405	+/- 14,985	36,778,836	+/- 123,222	8,081,769	+/- 60,015	379,540	+/- 10,804
Some college, no degree	337,388	+/- 11,756	27,642,927	+/- 102,545	5,989,569	+/- 58,605	280,637	+/- 9,736
Associate's degree	198,517	+/- 10,294	13,064,731	+/- 59,729	2,300,888	+/- 35,057	100,346	+/- 5,561
Bachelor's degree	753,557	+/- 19,399	32,885,048	+/- 108,964	3,907,379	+/- 43,307	117,208	+/- 4,635
Graduate or professional degree	655,754	+/- 19,758	21,081,425	+/- 111,769	2,527,908	+/- 39,010	64,658	+/- 4,456
Place of birth and citizenship status								
Universe: Total population	3,806,903	+/- 68,795	189,496,600	+/- 86,077	39,203,032	+/- 95,465	1,754,133	+/- 21,099
Native	1,593,452	+/- 41,068	183,691,099	+/- 101,565	35,328,945	+/- 103,528	1,734,283	+/- 21,247
Foreign-born	2,213,451	+/- 49,093	5,805,501	+/- 62,260	3,874,087	+/- 65,545	19,850	+/- 2,982
Naturalized U.S. citizen	1,505,919	+/- 33,883	3,792,425	+/- 46,755	2,428,342	+/- 43,058	10,943	+/- 1,716
Not a U.S. citizen	707,532	+/- 31,169	2,013,076	+/- 36,154	1,445,745	+/- 41,678	8,907	+/- 2,022
English-language ability								
Universe: Population ages 5 and over								
Does not speak English	66,991	+/- 6,791	126,863	+/- 7,982	69,316	+/- 7,805	1,963	+/- 518
Yes, speaks English	3,529,414	+/- 61,396	180,787,351	+/- 127,817	36,826,878	+/- 118,649	1,652,849	+/- 24,517
Only English	1,160,442	+/- 28,830	173,121,500	+/- 107,646	33,711,426	+/- 105,974	1,324,859	+/- 20,647
Very well	1,597,743	+/- 48,858	5,744,505	+/- 59,301	2,209,306	+/- 45,208	263,827	+/- 12,233
Well	526,160	+/- 19,284	1,289,081	+/- 29,764	650,403	+/- 25,411	50,252	+/- 4,652
Not very well	245,069	+/- 13,392	632,265	+/- 18,631	255,743	+/- 12,558	13,911	+/- 1,872

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

This brief uses data from the most recent 2021 ACS public-use microdata sample (PUMS) produced by the Census Bureau and disseminated by the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS) database.²² The ACS, a large-scale survey designed to replace the long-form decennial census, collects a wide range of information on respondents' demographic, economic, and housing characteristics, sampling around 3 million respondents on a rolling basis each year. The ACS also includes detailed demographic information on race, ethnicity, and ancestry that can be used to measure the potential

MENA population.

While the ACS already has detailed information on race and respondents of Hispanic or Latino origin, additional information is needed to delineate respondents with a MENA background. Combining the responses to ancestry and birthplace questions provides a proxy for respondents likely to self-identify as MENA in the proposed race and ethnicity question revision. Respondents in the ACS microdata are classified as MENA if they either report ancestry from the MENA countries or were born in a MENA country. Research by the Migration Policy Institute uses a similar method to describe the MENA diaspora, defined

Table 1 (continued)

Selected demographic characteristics by proposed race and ethnicity

	Population minus Middle Eastern or North African									
	Asian		Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander		Some other race		Two or more races		Hispanic or Latino	
	Estimate	MOE	Estimate	MOE	Estimate	MOE	Estimate	MOE	Estimate	MOE
Total population	18,657,738	+/- 54,431	546,170	+/- 16,172	1,826,436	+/- 49,403	14,155,773	+/- 108,327	62,446,960	+/- 15,763
Sex										
Universe: Total population										
Male	8,902,468	+/- 33,900	273,938	+/- 11,386	926,020	+/- 27,955	6,969,534	+/- 60,626	31,588,932	+/- 27,155
Female	9,755,270	+/- 32,691	272,232	+/- 9,097	900,416	+/- 30,714	7,186,239	+/- 67,702	30,858,028	+/- 26,864
Age										
Universe: Total population										
Under 5 years	878,152	+/- 12,847	32,920	+/- 3,481	161,343	+/- 11,222	1,492,468	+/- 28,565	4,819,395	+/- 16,454
5-9 years	983,959	+/- 19,751	34,870	+/- 3,653	161,201	+/- 9,966	1,491,154	+/- 30,729	5,085,742	+/- 42,450
10-14 years	1,057,518	+/- 16,884	38,454	+/- 3,618	158,529	+/- 11,261	1,497,555	+/- 30,941	5,657,895	+/- 44,997
15-19 years	1,069,310	+/- 17,182	40,699	+/- 3,971	144,014	+/- 9,784	1,266,986	+/- 22,569	5,354,189	+/- 26,923
20-24 years	1,128,994	+/- 17,080	42,744	+/- 3,687	110,678	+/- 8,168	1,030,545	+/- 25,127	4,958,030	+/- 24,354
25-29 years	1,365,470	+/- 13,941	40,257	+/- 3,980	115,325	+/- 8,210	1,018,771	+/- 23,876	4,773,290	+/- 26,378
30-34 years	1,604,342	+/- 15,729	45,175	+/- 4,967	133,510	+/- 9,426	980,775	+/- 21,705	4,738,131	+/- 21,880
35-39 years	1,619,905	+/- 23,015	42,351	+/- 4,641	135,972	+/- 9,024	871,632	+/- 24,270	4,603,669	+/- 45,453
40-44 years	1,489,668	+/- 25,325	42,390	+/- 4,706	140,405	+/- 9,176	811,637	+/- 24,353	4,426,322	+/- 39,028
45-49 years	1,407,278	+/- 13,443	33,099	+/- 3,827	108,184	+/- 7,108	668,374	+/- 16,601	3,965,368	+/- 18,751
50-54 years	1,272,394	+/- 12,099	30,856	+/- 4,092	104,515	+/- 6,909	644,008	+/- 16,293	3,531,449	+/- 21,336
55-59 years	1,139,082	+/- 17,454	29,063	+/- 3,216	97,049	+/- 6,423	623,027	+/- 15,261	3,014,370	+/- 25,226
60-64 years	1,006,744	+/- 18,412	32,397	+/- 3,559	87,595	+/- 6,121	592,463	+/- 15,322	2,484,424	+/- 27,410
65-69 years	901,311	+/- 15,056	20,021	+/- 2,749	67,864	+/- 6,127	446,066	+/- 12,893	1,862,322	+/- 21,851
70-74 years	714,243	+/- 13,162	18,930	+/- 3,292	46,676	+/- 5,213	328,321	+/- 10,199	1,307,054	+/- 20,501
75-79 years	462,946	+/- 10,049	13,165	+/- 2,622	27,307	+/- 2,999	191,507	+/- 7,704	849,952	+/- 15,177
80-84 years	293,854	+/- 8,894	5,567	+/- 1,717	14,514	+/- 2,523	113,727	+/- 6,644	522,290	+/- 12,333
85 years and over	262,568	+/- 8,901	3,212	+/- 1,068	11,755	+/- 2,352	86,757	+/- 5,469	493,068	+/- 13,149
Median age	38.00	+/- 0.41	34.00	+/- 1.24	32.00	+/- 0.41	26.00	+/- 0.41	30.00	+/- 0.41
Educational attainment										
Universe: Population ages 25 and over	13,539,805	+/- 30,939	356,483	+/- 10,989	1,090,671	+/- 26,902	7,377,065	+/- 66,296	36,571,709	+/- 32,310
Less than 9th grade	1,032,028	+/- 24,057	20,654	+/- 2,930	59,247	+/- 5,379	177,265	+/- 8,988	5,985,179	+/- 54,760
9th to 12th grade, no diploma	611,571	+/- 17,571	21,126	+/- 2,956	60,029	+/- 6,080	409,913	+/- 16,432	4,097,497	+/- 49,603
High school graduate (incl. equivalency)	1,890,232	+/- 33,057	127,743	+/- 6,808	227,624	+/- 12,760	1,755,972	+/- 32,178	10,264,095	+/- 67,055
Some college, no degree	1,440,892	+/- 23,810	87,827	+/- 7,270	205,535	+/- 11,032	1,684,540	+/- 31,705	6,393,883	+/- 59,749
Associate's degree	878,220	+/- 17,739	33,101	+/- 4,075	98,094	+/- 6,767	744,351	+/- 19,177	2,608,197	+/- 37,655
Bachelor's degree	4,158,695	+/- 40,655	45,602	+/- 5,016	259,447	+/- 10,570	1,616,719	+/- 28,891	4,819,249	+/- 53,316
Graduate or professional degree	3,528,167	+/- 38,608	20,430	+/- 2,806	180,695	+/- 10,072	988,305	+/- 21,026	2,403,609	+/- 42,458
Place of birth and citizenship status										
Universe: Total population	18,657,738	+/- 54,431	546,170	+/- 16,172	1,826,436	+/- 49,403	14,155,773	+/- 108,327	62,446,960	+/- 15,763
Native	6,544,288	+/- 48,578	412,253	+/- 14,594	1,514,573	+/- 43,852	13,223,315	+/- 103,709	42,561,847	+/- 101,119
Foreign-born	12,113,450	+/- 47,788	133,917	+/- 9,373	311,863	+/- 15,601	932,458	+/- 29,305	19,885,113	+/- 101,344
Naturalized U.S. citizen	7,510,153	+/- 50,730	56,117	+/- 5,499	158,332	+/- 11,945	529,920	+/- 19,159	8,128,402	+/- 63,969
Not a U.S. citizen	4,603,297	+/- 50,520	77,800	+/- 8,289	153,531	+/- 11,354	402,538	+/- 19,170	11,756,711	+/- 104,765
English-language ability										
Universe: Population ages 5 and over										
Does not speak English	558,262	+/- 17,279	3,881	+/- 1,412	11,382	+/- 2,319	25,374	+/- 5,602	3,126,067	+/- 56,268
Yes, speaks English	17,221,324	+/- 89,394	509,369	+/- 18,419	1,653,711	+/- 43,069	12,637,931	+/- 95,347	54,501,498	+/- 198,442
Only English	4,875,319	+/- 53,244	302,711	+/- 14,103	1,312,068	+/- 39,758	11,454,402	+/- 90,329	18,331,683	+/- 134,808
Very well	7,378,693	+/- 52,124	145,956	+/- 10,058	235,537	+/- 14,045	893,051	+/- 27,580	23,346,229	+/- 111,763
Well	3,164,163	+/- 37,667	41,946	+/- 5,411	69,444	+/- 6,878	192,111	+/- 9,446	7,013,159	+/- 69,442
Not very well	1,803,149	+/- 31,949	18,756	+/- 3,153	36,662	+/- 5,447	98,367	+/- 9,039	5,810,427	+/- 62,395

Source: Author's calculations using the 2021 American Community Survey from Ruggles et al. (2023).

Note: MOE = Margin of Error.

as those who “self-identify as having ancestry ties to a specific country of origin.”²³ This classification is best suited to describe the likely MENA population universe, as the respondents share a connection to the region either by ancestral origin or birthplace. Table A1 contains the detailed ancestry and birthplace codes used to construct the MENA category.²⁴

Using the wealth of socioeconomic information in the ACS, the resulting data provide age, sex, employment status, income, and educational attainment, among other things. Applying the new MENA category and integrating the Hispanic or Latino origin information creates a useful

counterfactual demographic composition, as suggested by the OMB proposal. Each tabulation is weighted using either person or household weights, as noted in each table header, and represents selected statistics from the official Data Profile tables published by the Census Bureau. The Data Profile tables summarize commonly requested socioeconomic indicators from the ACS.²⁵ Margins of error (MOEs) for each estimate represent sampling variability and reliability for a 90 percent confidence interval. These are computed using the successive difference replication (SDR) method. A larger margin of error relative to the estimate indicates a lower reliability for that estimate.²⁶

Table 2
Selected socioeconomic characteristics

	Population minus Middle Eastern or North African							
	Middle Eastern or North African		White		Black or African American		American Indian or Alaska Native	
	Estimate	MOE	Estimate	MOE	Estimate	MOE	Estimate	MOE
Employment status								
Universe: Civilian noninstitutional population ages 16 and over								
Population ages 16 and over	3,061,411	+/- 52,506	159,244,985	+/- 68,622	30,988,101	+/- 63,920	1,363,176	+/- 14,303
Total civilian noninstitutional population ages 16 and over	3,041,172	+/- 52,898	156,652,312	+/- 68,168	29,774,175	+/- 62,357	1,312,600	+/- 14,454
Employed	1,801,174	+/- 34,940	92,213,769	+/- 111,405	17,082,778	+/- 76,578	655,035	+/- 12,517
Unemployed	173,471	+/- 10,555	4,799,679	+/- 45,845	2,011,275	+/- 36,222	81,934	+/- 5,918
Unemployment rate	8.78%	+/- 0.49%	4.95%	+/- 0.05%	10.53%	+/- 0.19%	11.12%	+/- 0.79%
Not in the labor force	1,066,527	+/- 25,229	59,638,864	+/- 85,914	10,680,122	+/- 58,531	575,631	+/- 13,755
Household income								
Universe: Households								
Less than \$10,000	115,007	+/- 7,260	4,021,268	+/- 44,789	1,770,761	+/- 27,709	68,618	+/- 4,209
\$10,000 to \$14,999	56,507	+/- 5,308	2,718,273	+/- 36,013	963,479	+/- 22,509	38,622	+/- 3,298
\$15,000 to \$24,999	112,350	+/- 7,911	5,778,575	+/- 48,976	1,636,372	+/- 25,375	70,941	+/- 5,022
\$25,000 to \$34,999	103,043	+/- 7,157	5,946,141	+/- 51,780	1,561,508	+/- 31,067	55,252	+/- 3,552
\$35,000 to \$49,999	135,706	+/- 7,984	8,918,360	+/- 51,553	2,032,159	+/- 31,361	72,751	+/- 4,177
\$50,000 to \$74,999	205,086	+/- 11,269	13,782,690	+/- 80,541	2,527,010	+/- 34,866	94,931	+/- 5,011
\$75,000 to \$99,999	154,633	+/- 8,591	10,641,067	+/- 57,954	1,599,704	+/- 31,356	61,435	+/- 4,083
\$100,000 to \$149,999	219,866	+/- 9,931	13,738,875	+/- 71,536	1,648,582	+/- 29,191	63,239	+/- 4,232
\$150,000 to \$199,999	123,609	+/- 7,425	6,750,888	+/- 46,419	673,384	+/- 15,630	24,256	+/- 2,632
\$200,000 or more	220,179	+/- 10,048	8,614,017	+/- 52,291	572,269	+/- 17,223	20,663	+/- 2,796
Median	\$74,000.00	+/- \$1,570.25	\$73,000.00	+/- \$165.29	\$45,300.00	+/- \$413.22	\$44,800.00	+/- \$1,280.99
Mean	\$114,838.94	+/- \$2,350.20	\$101,824.90	+/- \$225.93	\$64,145.75	+/- \$373.22	\$63,259.40	+/- \$1,626.48
Family income								
Universe: Families								
Less than \$10,000	46,288	+/- 4,757	1,097,674	+/- 21,953	648,774	+/- 20,749	27,025	+/- 2,713
\$10,000 to \$14,999	24,217	+/- 3,217	669,243	+/- 16,018	324,818	+/- 14,561	16,840	+/- 2,327
\$15,000 to \$24,999	67,135	+/- 5,749	1,774,510	+/- 25,494	714,294	+/- 17,968	32,916	+/- 3,104
\$25,000 to \$34,999	60,957	+/- 5,478	2,411,644	+/- 33,643	784,767	+/- 20,794	29,474	+/- 2,875
\$35,000 to \$49,999	92,918	+/- 7,146	4,379,829	+/- 40,876	1,098,055	+/- 24,467	45,112	+/- 3,348
\$50,000 to \$74,999	133,568	+/- 9,017	8,103,916	+/- 54,743	1,477,386	+/- 24,985	61,472	+/- 3,497
\$75,000 to \$99,999	109,229	+/- 7,624	7,385,006	+/- 51,075	1,077,435	+/- 21,897	45,867	+/- 3,330
\$100,000 to \$149,999	169,808	+/- 9,015	10,609,150	+/- 54,830	1,230,716	+/- 25,533	49,400	+/- 3,728
\$150,000 to \$199,999	99,967	+/- 6,656	5,514,675	+/- 45,465	532,646	+/- 15,078	19,567	+/- 2,518
\$200,000 or more	184,009	+/- 8,713	7,241,048	+/- 43,499	472,286	+/- 15,250	17,371	+/- 2,452
Median	\$90,000.00	+/- \$2,479.34	\$95,000.00	+/- \$206.61	\$59,300.00	+/- \$578.51	\$57,700.00	+/- \$2,066.12
Mean	\$132,280.02	+/- \$3,009.46	\$125,401.97	+/- \$273.89	\$78,471.89	+/- \$557.51	\$76,129.10	+/- \$2,213.45
Occupation								
Universe: Employed civilian noninstitutional population ages 16 plus								
Management, business, science, and arts occupations	971,275	+/- 23,007	43,248,418	+/- 135,030	5,765,623	+/- 55,540	208,781	+/- 6,758
Service occupations	208,008	+/- 10,808	12,225,762	+/- 77,759	3,774,113	+/- 49,372	144,313	+/- 5,866
Sales and office occupations	355,956	+/- 16,145	18,809,042	+/- 85,226	3,632,560	+/- 45,083	130,438	+/- 5,801
Natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations	77,691	+/- 7,299	7,455,547	+/- 53,763	783,073	+/- 18,488	73,742	+/- 4,557
Production, transportation, and material-moving occupations	188,244	+/- 11,277	10,475,000	+/- 68,284	3,127,409	+/- 40,296	97,761	+/- 5,822
Poverty								
Universe: Individuals for whom poverty status is determined								
Below 50% of poverty level	300,723	+/- 22,390	8,566,497	+/- 100,640	4,023,180	+/- 85,441	225,781	+/- 13,935
50 to 99% of poverty level	337,032	+/- 25,058	8,845,522	+/- 96,009	4,080,326	+/- 78,000	206,595	+/- 12,221
100 to 149% of poverty level	315,647	+/- 23,810	11,322,755	+/- 121,620	4,183,970	+/- 82,563	201,300	+/- 14,269
150 to 199% of poverty level	289,726	+/- 22,422	12,433,628	+/- 129,211	3,656,276	+/- 73,436	165,697	+/- 10,988
200% of poverty level and over	2,520,044	+/- 53,739	144,276,380	+/- 258,200	21,622,979	+/- 136,081	879,923	+/- 16,859

RESULTS

The 2021 ACS shows a total of 3.8 million people with either a Middle Eastern or North African ancestry or birthplace—around 1 percent of the U.S. population.²⁷ Table 1 shows general social and demographic data for the MENA population, and for the other race and ethnicity categories adjusted by subtracting respondents classified as MENA in 2021. These data include age, educational attainment, nativity and citizenship status, and English-language ability, among others. Economic characteristics such as employment status and income are shown in Table 2. Each table shows the estimate and its margin of error.

Total Population, Sex, and Age

The MENA population leans slightly toward men, with around 150,000 more men than women. The sex ratio between men and women is 1.08 men per woman, compared to a ratio of 0.98 men per woman nationally.

Individuals with a MENA background are relatively young compared to the general population. The working-age (ages 20–64) MENA population represents 62.7 percent of the total MENA population, compared to 57.8 percent of the White population and 58.3 percent nationwide. Compared to other race and ethnicity categories, the working-age MENA population aligns more closely with

Table 2 (continued)
Selected socioeconomic characteristics

	Population minus Middle Eastern or North African									
	Asian		Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander		Some other race		Two or more races		Hispanic or Latino	
	Estimate	MOE	Estimate	MOE	Estimate	MOE	Estimate	MOE	Estimate	MOE
Employment status										
Universe: Civilian noninstitutional population ages 16 and over										
Population ages 16 and over	15,541,987	+/- 38,497	431,924	+/- 13,035	1,310,392	+/- 33,389	9,403,251	+/- 78,505	45,767,770	+/- 29,155
Total civilian noninstitutional population ages 16 and over	15,450,004	+/- 37,878	418,090	+/- 12,588	1,290,421	+/- 33,187	9,238,788	+/- 78,043	45,041,438	+/- 31,507
Employed	9,612,890	+/- 44,208	242,778	+/- 10,223	799,649	+/- 24,425	5,705,319	+/- 60,715	28,370,642	+/- 75,402
Unemployed	594,570	+/- 15,505	23,239	+/- 3,274	61,765	+/- 4,820	490,002	+/- 13,860	2,279,302	+/- 32,519
Unemployment rate	5.82%	+/- 0.15%	8.74%	+/- 1.24%	7.17%	+/- 0.55%	7.91%	+/- 0.23%	7.44%	+/- 0.11%
Not in the labor force	5,242,544	+/- 38,531	152,073	+/- 8,349	429,007	+/- 16,112	3,043,467	+/- 41,498	14,391,494	+/- 66,557
Household income										
Universe: Households										
Less than \$10,000	377,146	+/- 11,154	13,507	+/- 2,414	53,464	+/- 4,961	309,144	+/- 11,218	1,270,843	+/- 24,103
\$10,000 to \$14,999	168,839	+/- 9,374	4,296	+/- 1,568	21,792	+/- 3,149	186,448	+/- 9,468	760,669	+/- 21,110
\$15,000 to \$24,999	332,742	+/- 12,244	9,967	+/- 2,329	37,321	+/- 4,152	358,781	+/- 13,893	1,564,762	+/- 22,257
\$25,000 to \$34,999	308,831	+/- 11,068	10,097	+/- 2,163	41,732	+/- 4,075	335,783	+/- 12,950	1,697,986	+/- 32,088
\$35,000 to \$49,999	480,630	+/- 14,230	15,243	+/- 2,461	67,707	+/- 6,452	480,361	+/- 14,038	2,440,675	+/- 30,829
\$50,000 to \$74,999	808,763	+/- 17,372	29,839	+/- 3,718	98,073	+/- 6,582	719,288	+/- 20,936	3,475,352	+/- 39,217
\$75,000 to \$99,999	716,166	+/- 15,266	22,715	+/- 3,228	67,359	+/- 4,146	544,195	+/- 17,155	2,376,799	+/- 31,645
\$100,000 to \$149,999	1,149,713	+/- 22,658	25,667	+/- 2,923	87,753	+/- 5,850	649,966	+/- 15,016	2,630,377	+/- 30,906
\$150,000 to \$199,999	727,106	+/- 15,710	14,927	+/- 3,132	48,504	+/- 4,883	318,254	+/- 10,099	1,058,067	+/- 21,632
\$200,000 or more	1,278,674	+/- 19,862	10,550	+/- 2,191	58,037	+/- 4,780	383,464	+/- 13,026	984,257	+/- 18,421
Median	\$99,000.00	+/- \$826.45	\$70,600.00	+/- \$3,347.11	\$66,000.00	+/- \$2,090.91	\$65,000.00	+/- \$619.83	\$59,000.00	+/- \$371.90
Mean	\$134,428.84	+/- \$1,052.69	\$88,666.40	+/- \$4,963.89	\$95,786.88	+/- \$3,274.75	\$91,705.05	+/- \$1,031.66	\$77,790.56	+/- \$349.49
Family income										
Universe: Families										
Less than \$10,000	133,725	+/- 6,799	6,393	+/- 1,628	15,434	+/- 2,978	99,876	+/- 8,371	584,596	+/- 16,048
\$10,000 to \$14,999	66,703	+/- 4,728	1,433	+/- 967	6,501	+/- 1,704	54,383	+/- 4,267	344,952	+/- 14,300
\$15,000 to \$24,999	190,348	+/- 8,300	4,048	+/- 1,205	14,546	+/- 2,672	142,828	+/- 8,076	925,617	+/- 18,557
\$25,000 to \$34,999	190,365	+/- 8,387	6,092	+/- 1,921	19,658	+/- 3,055	149,805	+/- 9,136	1,100,936	+/- 28,568
\$35,000 to \$49,999	315,454	+/- 12,374	9,184	+/- 1,966	37,003	+/- 4,971	248,459	+/- 11,017	1,625,321	+/- 25,962
\$50,000 to \$74,999	539,350	+/- 12,370	20,989	+/- 3,412	61,060	+/- 5,043	415,732	+/- 14,607	2,403,233	+/- 35,292
\$75,000 to \$99,999	519,757	+/- 11,831	17,467	+/- 2,880	46,632	+/- 3,658	356,114	+/- 11,467	1,767,572	+/- 29,776
\$100,000 to \$149,999	882,032	+/- 18,926	20,288	+/- 3,061	68,230	+/- 5,321	474,426	+/- 14,878	2,050,589	+/- 29,042
\$150,000 to \$199,999	593,779	+/- 14,419	12,482	+/- 2,808	38,982	+/- 4,478	246,339	+/- 8,967	842,258	+/- 19,466
\$200,000 or more	1,087,082	+/- 18,460	9,287	+/- 2,096	47,560	+/- 4,428	309,539	+/- 10,724	801,229	+/- 16,738
Median	\$114,100.00	+/- \$950.41	\$80,200.00	+/- \$6,776.86	\$86,700.00	+/- \$3,677.69	\$83,380.00	+/- \$1,239.67	\$66,000.00	+/- \$458.68
Mean	\$152,388.47	+/- \$1,316.44	\$102,265.10	+/- \$6,497.28	\$116,101.97	+/- \$4,080.99	\$111,501.30	+/- \$1,487.99	\$85,860.47	+/- \$469.10
Occupation										
Universe: Employed civilian noninstitutional population ages 16 plus										
Management, business, science, and arts occupations	5,559,686	+/- 41,239	71,866	+/- 5,997	362,157	+/- 12,082	2,390,075	+/- 39,471	7,539,942	+/- 75,853
Service occupations	1,383,987	+/- 22,251	49,837	+/- 4,061	135,718	+/- 10,044	1,005,721	+/- 21,907	6,246,522	+/- 52,028
Sales and office occupations	1,495,592	+/- 24,334	57,275	+/- 5,632	146,788	+/- 9,443	1,160,964	+/- 24,990	5,555,865	+/- 51,134
Natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations	243,919	+/- 10,166	19,620	+/- 2,639	55,461	+/- 3,971	421,369	+/- 13,181	4,191,013	+/- 46,899
Production, transportation, and material-moving occupations	929,706	+/- 19,427	44,180	+/- 5,124	99,525	+/- 7,327	727,190	+/- 18,015	4,837,300	+/- 54,688
Poverty										
Universe: Individuals for whom poverty status is determined										
Below 50% of poverty level	930,096	+/- 28,301	40,784	+/- 5,232	142,435	+/- 13,192	953,754	+/- 24,914	4,959,115	+/- 79,408
50 to 99% of poverty level	876,188	+/- 29,287	47,400	+/- 7,746	122,925	+/- 14,699	977,958	+/- 31,073	5,831,873	+/- 102,014
100 to 149% of poverty level	1,082,430	+/- 36,175	50,210	+/- 9,059	140,850	+/- 13,905	1,111,200	+/- 38,082	7,136,004	+/- 109,034
150 to 199% of poverty level	1,067,229	+/- 38,158	57,324	+/- 9,177	141,490	+/- 13,965	1,094,678	+/- 36,583	6,946,816	+/- 104,536
200% of poverty level and over	14,394,156	+/- 71,842	333,614	+/- 15,889	1,237,263	+/- 36,637	9,749,632	+/- 97,603	36,563,739	+/- 183,342

Source: Author's calculations using the 2021 American Community Survey from Ruggles et al. (2023).
Note: MOE = Margin of Error.

Black and Asian populations, with respective working-age populations of 60.3 and 64.5 percent. The median age for the MENA population is 37 years, aligning closely with the Asian population at 38 years. Comparatively, the White population is older, with a median age of 44 years, and the Hispanic or Latino population is much younger, with a median age of 30.

Educational Attainment

The MENA resident population has a very high level of educational attainment compared to the U.S. population as a whole. About 53.2 percent of the MENA population ages 25 and over holds a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 35 percent nationwide. Compared to other race categories, the MENA population has higher educational attainment than the White population at 38.6 percent and just below the Asian population at 56.8 percent.

Nativity

MENA immigrants were 4.9 percent of the total foreign-born population in 2021, with a total of 2.2 million MENA immigrants. About 58.1 percent of the MENA population residing in the United States were foreign-born. MENA immigrants are more likely to be naturalized citizens than the overall foreign-born population. Nearly 70 percent of MENA immigrants were naturalized citizens, compared to 53 percent of the total foreign-born population.

Employment and Labor Force

In 2021, around 2 million MENA individuals were engaged in the civilian labor force (ages 16 and over). Their labor-force participation rate is 65 percent, slightly above the national rate of 64 percent, while their unemployment rate was relatively high (8.8 percent) compared to the nationwide unemployment rate of 6.7 percent.

METHODOLOGICAL APPENDIX

The data used in this brief are sourced from the 2021 ACS 1-year estimates published by the Integrated Public Use

MENA employment was concentrated in management, business, science, and arts occupations, with around 54 percent of employed workers ages 16 and over. In comparison, the share of Whites and Asians in the same occupations was 47 percent and 58 percent, respectively.

Income and Poverty

MENA households had relatively high incomes in 2021. The median income of MENA households is \$74,000 and the average is \$115,000. The MENA household income is higher than that of White households, which have a median income of \$73,000 and a mean income of about \$102,000. Similarly, median and mean household income for Asians was \$99,000 and about \$134,000, respectively.

The poverty rate for the MENA population was around 17 percent, 4 percent higher than the nationwide poverty rate of 12.9 percent.

CONCLUSION

Using ancestry and birthplace to estimate the likely MENA population shows a total of around 3.8 million MENA residents in the United States in 2021. Over half of the MENA population is foreign-born; most are naturalized citizens. MENA labor-force participation, educational attainment, and earnings often exceed the nationwide population average. In other words, the MENA population boasts strong economic and educational standing, higher than that of White Americans and below that of Asian Americans.

Data presented in this brief provide a first empirical estimation of the MENA population as proposed by the OMB and are based on a broad, diasporic interpretation of the potential MENA population. The data are especially valuable for policymakers and researchers to determine how the OMB proposal might appear in the data and whether they accurately reflect the diversity of the American public.

Microdata Series (IPUMS) database. The microdata were tabulated for each population universe using the person

weights for person-level statistics and the household weights for household-level statistics.

Margins of error are calculated using the successive difference replication (SDR) method per Census Bureau guidance.²⁸ The variance estimates from the SDR method are computed by taking the sum of squared differences between a replicate estimate and the full-sample-weighted estimate.

Letting x_0 denote the full-sample estimate and x_r ($r = 1, \dots, 80$) denote the replicate estimate for each replication, the variance of the full-sample estimate is as follows:

$$var(x_0) = \frac{4}{80} \sum_{r=1}^{80} (x_r - x_0)^2.$$

Each replicate estimate x_r creates a replicate data set by applying randomization techniques to the original ACS public-use sample that account for the survey's complex design. Each replicate data set represents a plausible alternative version of the original or subset while preserving its design features and sampling characteristics. The variance of the full-sample statistic can then be estimated by taking the difference between each replicate subsample and the full-sample estimate for each replication.

The margin of error for each estimate, assuming a 90 percent confidence level, is therefore

$$MOE(x_0) = 1.645 \times \sqrt{var(x_0)}.$$

Table A1

Ancestry and birthplace classification codes

Panel A: MENA ancestry codes

ANCESTR1 Code	Ancestry	ANCESTR1 Code	Ancestry
400	Algerian	431	Armenian
402	Egyptian	434	Turkish
404	Libyan	435	Yemeni
406	Moroccan	436	Omani
407	Ifni	437	Muscat
408	Tunisian	438	Trucial Oman
411	North African	439	Qatar
412	Alhucemas	442	Kurdish
413	Berber	444	Kuria Muria Islander
414	Rio de Oro	465	Palestinian
415	Bahraini	466	Gazan
416	Iranian	467	West Bank
417	Iraqi	470	South Yemeni
419	Israeli	471	Aden
421	Jordanian	480	United Arab Emirates
423	Kuwaiti	482	Assyrian/Chaldean/Syriac
425	Lebanese	490	Middle Eastern
427	Saudi Arabian	495	Arab
429	Syrian	496	Other Arab

Table A1 (continued)

Ancestry and birthplace classification codes**Panel B: MENA country codes**

BPLD Code	Country	BPLD Code	Country
52000	Afghanistan	54700	Middle East, n.s.
60011	Algeria	60014	Morocco
54220	Asian Turkey	60019	North Africa, n.s.
53000	Bahrain	60010	Northern Africa
53100	Cyprus	53800	Oman
60012	Egypt/United Arab Rep.	53420	Palestine
54210	European Turkey	54600	Persian Gulf States, n.s.
53410	Gaza Strip	53900	Qatar
52200	Iran	54000	Saudi Arabia
53200	Iraq	60015	Sudan
53300	Iraq/Saudi Arabia	54100	Syria
53440	Israel	60016	Tunisia
53400	Israel/Palestine	54200	Turkey
53500	Jordan	54300	United Arab Emirates
53600	Kuwait	53430	West Bank
53700	Lebanon	60017	Western Sahara
60013	Libya	54400	Yemen Arab Republic (North)
53210	Mesopotamia	54500	Yemen, PDR (South)

Source: Author's calculations using the 2021 American Community Survey from Ruggles et al. (2023).

NOTES

1. Office of Management and Budget, "Initial Proposals for Updating OMB's Race and Ethnicity Statistical Standards," 88 Fed. Reg. 5375 (January 27, 2023).

2. Office of Management and Budget, "Revisions to the Standards for the Classification of Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity," 62 Fed. Reg. 58782 (October 30, 1997).

3. Office of Management and Budget, "Initial Proposals for Updating OMB's Race and Ethnicity Statistical Standards," 88 Fed. Reg. 5375 (January 27, 2023).

4. Office of Management and Budget, "Initial Proposals for Updating OMB's Race and Ethnicity Statistical Standards," 88 Fed. Reg. 5375 (January 27, 2023).

5. The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, Comments on Initial Proposals for Updating OMB's Race and Ethnicity Statistical Standards, letter to Administrator [Richard L.] Revesz, April 27, 2023.

6. The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, Comments on Initial Proposals for Updating OMB's Race and Ethnicity Statistical Standards, letter to Administrator [Richard L.] Revesz, April 27, 2023.

7. John F. Early, "Biden's OMB Plans to Divide America Into More Racial Groups," *Wall Street Journal*, April 7, 2023.

8. John F. Early, "Biden's OMB Plans to Divide America Into More Racial Groups," *Wall Street Journal*, April 7, 2023; David E. Bernstein, comment on Initial Proposals for Updating OMB's Race and Ethnicity Statistical Standards, Regulations.gov, March 14, 2023; and David E. Bernstein, *Classified: The Untold Story of Racial Classification in America* (New York: Post Hill Press, 2022).

9. Office of Management and Budget, "Initial Proposals for Updating OMB's Race and Ethnicity Statistical Standards," 88 Fed. Reg. 5375 (January 27, 2023); and David E. Bernstein,

Classified: The Untold Story of Racial Classification in America (New York: Post Hill Press, 2022).

10. Nicholas Jones et al., “2020 Census Illuminates Racial and Ethnic Composition of the Country,” Census Bureau, August 12, 2021.

11. Nicholas Jones et al., “2020 Census Illuminates Racial and Ethnic Composition of the Country,” Census Bureau, August 12, 2021.

12. Nicholas Jones et al., “2020 Census Illuminates Racial and Ethnic Composition of the Country,” Census Bureau, August 12, 2021; and Rachel Marks and Merarys Rios-Vargas, “Improvements to the 2020 Census Race and Hispanic Origin Question Designs, Data Processing, and Coding Procedures,” *Random Samplings* (blog), Census Bureau, August 3, 2021.

13. The third suggestion is untestable because the OMB did not release specific race subgroups. Further, the proposed groups, such as “Descendants of American Slaves,” cannot be identified in the ACS.

14. Office of Management and Budget, “Directive No. 15: Race and Ethnic Standards for Federal Statistics and Administrative Reporting,” 1977.

15. Office of Management and Budget, “Directive No. 15: Race and Ethnic Standards for Federal Statistics and Administrative Reporting,” 1977, p. 38.

16. Office of Management and Budget, “Initial Proposals for Updating OMB’s Race and Ethnicity Statistical Standards,” 88 Fed. Reg. 5375 (January 27, 2023).

17. Office of Management and Budget, “Directive No. 15: Race and Ethnic Standards for Federal Statistics and Administrative Reporting,” 1977.

18. Office of Management and Budget, “Revisions to the Standards for the Classification of Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity,” 62 Fed. Reg. 58782 (October 30, 1997).

19. Office of Management and Budget, “Initial Proposals for Updating OMB’s Race and Ethnicity Statistical Standards,”

88 Fed. Reg. 5375 (January 27, 2023).

20. Jie Zong and Jeanne Batalova, “Middle Eastern and North African Immigrants in the United States,” Migration Policy Institute, June 3, 2015.

21. New American Economy, *Power of the Purse: Middle-Easterners and North Africans in America* (New York: New American Economy, 2019).

22. Steven Ruggles et al., *IPUMS USA: Version 13.0* (Minneapolis, MN: IPUMS, 2023).

23. Jie Zong and Jeanne Batalova, “Middle Eastern and North African Immigrants in the United States,” Migration Policy Institute, June 3, 2015.

24. It is important to note that many countries of origin and ancestries are grouped into broader areas. For example, some ancestries are reported broadly as North African or Middle Eastern. Since the objective is to measure the characteristics of the broader MENA population, individual country distinctions are not a concern; however, the aggregations present a limitation to more granular analyses.

25. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, Data Profiles, “2017–2021 ACS 5-Year Data Profile.”

26. Census Bureau, “Understanding and Using the American Community Survey Public Use Microdata Sample Files,” February 2021.

27. This total compares favorably to estimates of the MENA diaspora produced in 2015 by the Migration Policy Institute, which found a MENA population of 2.03 million using data from the 2013 ACS. This implies annual growth of around 8 percent from 2013 to 2021, which aligns with the same report’s finding of a 6 percent annual growth rate shown in the foreign-born MENA population; see Jie Zong and Jeanne Batalova, “Middle Eastern and North African Immigrants in the United States,” Migration Policy Institute, June 3, 2015.

28. Census Bureau, “Understanding and Using the American Community Survey Public Use Microdata Sample Files,” February 2021, pp. 17–18.



The views expressed in this paper are those of the author(s) and should not be attributed to the Cato Institute, its trustees, its Sponsors, or any other person or organization. Nothing in this paper should be construed as an attempt to aid or hinder the passage of any bill before Congress. Copyright © 2023 Cato Institute. This work by the Cato Institute is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.