

Survey of Arab and Muslim Populations in Wisconsin

Prepared by Meredith Gillespie Dr. Enaya Hammad Othman

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Executive Summary

The following is a survey on the Arab population and immigration patterns in the United States based on immigration patterns. The beginning of this survey is dedicated to general immigration patterns to the United States during the 20th century and after 2001. The second portion of the survey is dedicated to the Arab population in Wisconsin, specifically in Milwaukee county.

Information from this survey points to several difficulties in gathering reliable, expansive demographic information on the Arab population specifically on a state-wide basis. Firstly, the American Census does not provide a category for individuals to identify as “Arab” or “Middle Eastern,” which largely inhibits researchers from gathering information on where Arabs are living, how many Arab citizens and residents there are in the United States and in specific states such as Wisconsin, and information surrounding demographic markers (socioeconomic class, education, professions, etc.). However, some non-profit organizations provide this information which helps subsidize the lack of nationally-provided information. Additionally, context can be found within immigration data provided by the Department of Homeland Security, which shows immigration patterns from Arab states and where they were resettled.

Nationwide Immigration Patterns between 1960-2017

General Findings

Immigration from the MENA region to the United States has been occurring since the late 1800s but has increased in recent decades driven by political and civil unrest in certain areas of the Arab and Muslim world. “In 2016, nearly 1.2 million immigrants from the MENA region lived

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in the United States.”¹ The patterns of immigration from the MENA region to the U.S. can be defined in three waves. The first wave was between the late 1800s to the mid-1920s, where the majority of immigrants from this region originated from Syria, what is now modern-day Syria, Lebanon, and Israel, fleeing war within the Ottoman empire.² The second wave of immigration was triggered by the Arab-Israeli War and uprisings in Egypt from 1948 to the mid-1950s. The most substantial wave, however, is the modern wave of immigration that continues to today. This started in the 1980s, triggered by a number of historical and political events, including but not limited to: the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990), the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988), the Gulf War (1990-1991) the First and Second Intifadas in Palestine (1987-1993 and 2000-2005), and the Iraq War (2003-2011). The chart below gives an introductory look into immigration patterns of major Arab states to the United States between 1960 and 2017.³ Together, these waves of immigration have created a substantial Arab population in the United States; many immigrants, many second and third generation. According to the Arab American Institute, there are currently over 2 million individuals living in the United States that identify as “Arab” as of 2018; however, this number is also estimated to be as high as 3.5 million⁴

Below is a chart outlining the overall trends of Arab-American immigration by state; many of which, as explained, were motivated by violent conflict in the third wave of immigration. The

¹ Cumoletti, Jeanne Batalova Mattea, and Jeanne Batalova. "Middle Eastern and North African Immigrants in the United States." Migration Policy Institute. May 03, 2019.

<https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/middle-eastern-and-north-african-immigrants-united-states>.

² Cumoletti, Jeanne Batalova Mattea, and Jeanne Batalova. "Middle Eastern and North African Immigrants in the United States." Migration Policy Institute. May 03, 2019.

<https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/middle-eastern-and-north-african-immigrants-united-states>.

³ "Countries of Birth for U.S. Immigrants, 1960-Present." Migration Policy Institute. January 16, 2019. Accessed June 03, 2019. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/charts/immigrants-countries-birth-over-time>.

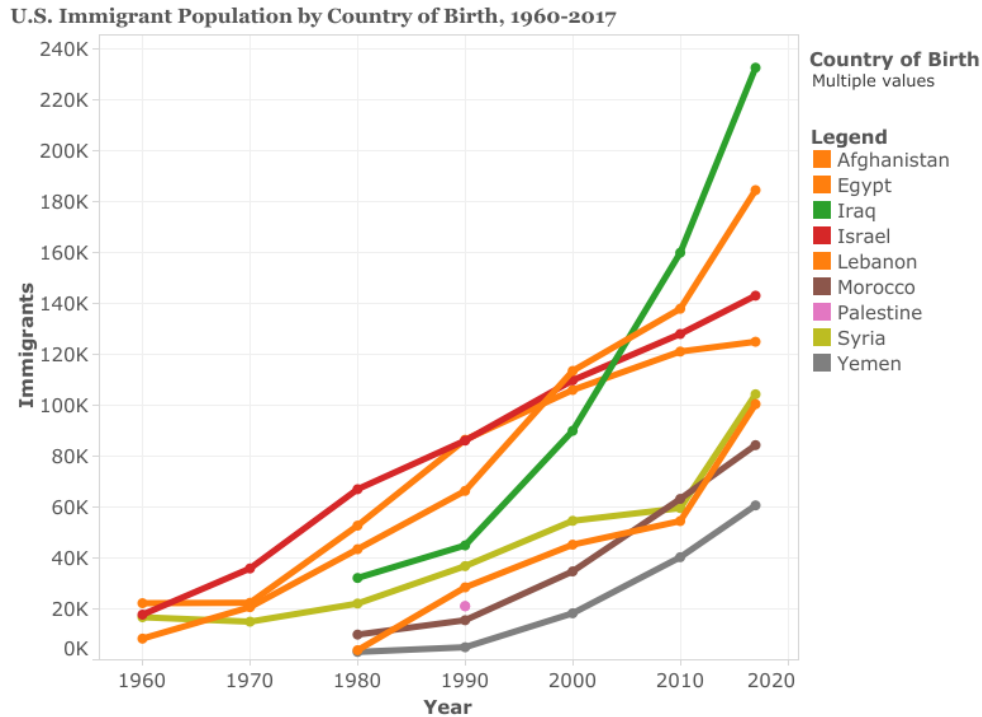
⁴ "Demographics." Arab American Institute. 2018. <https://www.aaiusa.org/demographics>.

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significant violent conflicts that lead to this immigration wave are explained more at length below, as well.



*In the above chart, based off of the final statistic mark for 2017, the top orange line represents Egypt; the middle orange line represents Lebanon; bottom orange line represents Afghanistan.

Lebanese Civil War and Related Conflicts (1975-1990, 2006-2007)

The Civil War in Lebanon forced hundred of thousands of civilians to flee to other countries for stability and safety. The majority of the civilians that escaped were granted asylum or refugee status in the United States, Canada, Australia, and Brazil.⁵ According to the Centre Catholique d'Information, about 800,000 families were displaced during this time.⁶

⁵ Kalia, Kirin. "Crisis in Lebanon Displaces Lebanese, Foreign Workers, and Refugees." Migration Policy Institute. April 08, 2019. Accessed June 03, 2019.

<https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/crisis-lebanon-displaces-lebanese-foreign-workers-and-refugees>.

⁶ Ibid.

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Similarly, Lebanon experienced high levels of civilian casualties and subsequent immigration as a result of fighting between Israel and Hezbollah forces in July of 2006.⁷

Though Lebanon has experienced significant violence over the past 40-50 years, many of the immigrants escaping Lebanon at this time fled mostly to neighboring Gulf States and European countries. A smaller majority fled to the United States and Canada; immigration data, particularly around the 2006 conflict, proves that the United States maintained a stable level of immigrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers during this time, despite the disproportionate violence in Yemen. However, as the Arab American Institute reports in 2018, 25% of the Arab population in the United States identifies as Lebanese, noting that this wave created a substantial population in the United States.⁸

Gulf War (1990-1991)

The Gulf War of 1990-1991 was catalyzed by Iraq's invasion and subsequent annexation of Kuwait, a decision motivated by oil prices and production. In retaliation, an American-led coalition of 35 states by coalition forces from 35 nations led by the United States against Iraq in response to Iraq's invasion and annexation of Kuwait arising from oil pricing and production disputes.⁹ According to the U.S. Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services, over 49,000 Iraqi individuals immigrated to the United States between 1989-2001 after the end of the Gulf and Iraq Wars.¹⁰ Between 2008 and 2017, the Arab American Institute estimates that another

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ "Demographics." Arab American Institute. 2018. <https://www.aaiusa.org/demographics>.

⁹ Atkinson, Rick. "Chronology." PBS. 1993. Accessed June 03, 2019. <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/gulf/cron/>.

¹⁰ Data Access and Dissemination Systems (DADS). "American FactFinder." American FactFinder. October 05, 2010. <https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/index.xhtml>.

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75,000 individuals from Iraq immigrated to the United States, some as refugees, some pursuing other paths of immigration.¹¹ As of 2018, the Iraqi community made up about 6% of the total Arab population in the United States.¹²

Palestine: The First Intifada, 1987-1993 and the Second Intifada, 2000-2005

Civil unrest and violent conflict with the state of Israel has forced millions of Palestinians out of their homeland since the mid-20th century. The Palestinian population has always represented a large portion of the global refugee population, with over half of the Palestinian population still displaced. In 2007, approximately 7 million Palestinians were living globally as refugees and another 450,000 were internally displaced, making up over 70% of their total population.¹³ Though the Palestinian population has gone through a major global diaspora over the past 50 years, they still only make up 6% of the total Arab population in the United States.¹⁴

Iraq War: 2003-2011

The Iraq War displaced millions of individuals between 2003-2011. In 2007, the United States, along with the United Nations, developed a plan to resettle thousands of Iraqi refugees in the United States.¹⁵ Beginning in 2008 there was a significant jump of recorded refugee arrivals; between 2010-2013 there was a decrease in total arrivals which reversed in 2014. Overall, the United States only took a fraction of referred Iraq refugees. Since 2007, 203,321 Iraqi nationals

¹¹ "Demographics." Arab American Institute. 2018. <https://www.aaiusa.org/demographics>.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ "Brief History of the Palestinian Refugee & Internally Displaced Persons Issue." American Muslims for Palestine. <https://www.ampalestine.org/palestine-101/key-topics/refugees/brief-history-of-palestinian-refugee-internally-displaced-persons>.

¹⁴ "Demographics." Arab American Institute. 2018. <https://www.aaiusa.org/demographics>.

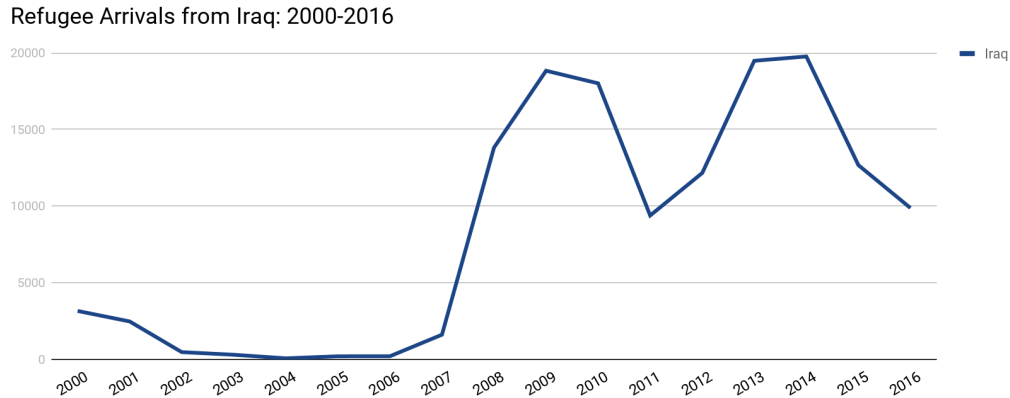
¹⁵ Lischer, Sarah Kenyon. "Security and Displacement in Iraq: Responding to the Forced Migration Crisis." *International Security* 33, no. 2 (2008): 95-119. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40207133>.

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have been referred but only 84,902 have arrived in the US.¹⁶ Data is shown below for refugee arrivals from Iraq to the United States between 2000-2016.



Immigration Overview in Wisconsin¹⁷

Wisconsin has a relatively low immigrant population in general terms. About 5% of Wisconsin residents are immigrants (278,981 in 2015), and about 6% of residents are native-born U.S. citizens with at least one immigrant parent (379,613 in 2016). Immigrants from the Middle East and North Africa region (henceforth referred to as the MENA region) do not make up the majority of the immigrant population in Wisconsin-- in fact, they are not even within the top 5 racial and ethnic groups that make up the Wisconsin immigrant population. The top countries of origin for immigrants are Mexico (31.6 percent of immigrants), India (8.1 percent), Laos (6.6 percent), Thailand (3.7 percent), and China (3.5 percent).

Because the United States Census does not recognize “Middle Eastern” or “Arab” as an official racial or ethnic classification, it is difficult to track how many individuals from the Middle East

¹⁶ Tarabya, J (August 20, 2013). "Iraq's refugees: reborn in the USA". Al Jazeera.

¹⁷ "Immigrants in Wisconsin." American Immigration Council. May 09, 2018. Accessed June 03, 2019. <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/immigrants-in-wisconsin>.

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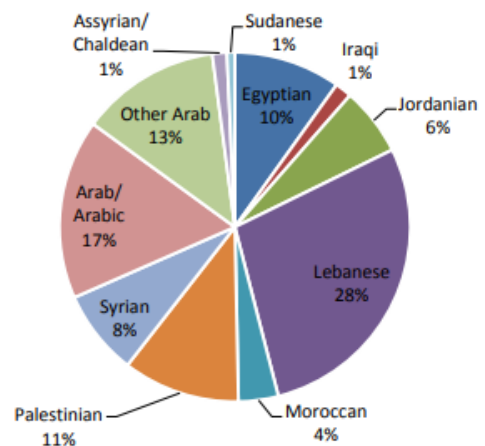
are living in Wisconsin. The most specific data is provided by the Department of Homeland Security and other non-profit or research agencies that track immigration from these regions. Because many Arab or Middle Eastern people living in Wisconsin are not immigrants, it is difficult to track the total population of residents, citizens, and immigrants. Additionally, the United States Census does not provide information based on religion, which also complicated tracking how many Muslim individuals live in Wisconsin. This is further complicated by the difficulty for mosques to count their entire congregation and by the fact that there are many Muslims that do not attend services at mosques regularly. Thus, it is easiest to look at information provided about Arab and Muslim immigrants to help contextualize the greater population in Wisconsin.

Refugee Resettlement

Between 2002 and 2016, 13,671 refugees resettled in Wisconsin, records from the U.S. Department of State show. That number places Wisconsin 24th in a ranking of 54 U.S. states and territories.¹⁸ The vast majority of these refugees are settled in Milwaukee; between 2002 and 2016, 8,772 of the 13,671 refugees that settled in Wisconsin were settled in Milwaukee county. Refugees coming into Wisconsin come from all over the world. The majority, however, particularly in the past 5 years, have been from Myanmar (5,265 between 2002-2016). The second-largest population is from Laos with 3,340, followed by Somalia with 1,352 and Iraq with 1,219.

Though over 15,000 refugees from Syria were resettled in

¹⁸ "Immigrants in Wisconsin." American Immigration Council. May 09, 2017. <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/immigrants-in-wi>



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the U.S. in 2016 alone, the overall percentage of Syrians

coming to Milwaukee is quite small.¹⁹ Only 119 Syrians

settled in Wisconsin between 2002 and 2016.²⁰ The

Palestinian population in Wisconsin grew

substantially in the late 20th century, however, a minimal number of Palestinians have been resettled in Wisconsin after 2001. The Arab American Institute estimates that there are about

10,800 Arab Americans living in Wisconsin as of 2018. The chart to the right shows the

breakdown of the Wisconsin Arab population by national origin.²¹

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ "Wisconsin" Arab American Institute Foundation. 2011. <https://www.aaiusa.org/demographics>.

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