

# **ARAB POPULATION IN U.S. ALMOST DOUBLES, CENSUS SHOWS/ LIBERALIZED IMMIGRATION, MIDDLE EAST UNREST ARE CITED AS FACTORS**

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## **Body**

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The **Arab population** in the **United States** has nearly **doubled** in the past two decades, according to the **Census** Bureau's first report on the group.

Experts **cited liberalized U.S. immigration** laws and **unrest** in the **Middle East** as leading many people to come to America.

The bureau counted nearly 1.2 million Arabs in the **United States** in 2000, compared with 860,000 in 1990 and 610,000 in 1980. About 60 percent trace their ancestry to three countries: Lebanon, Syria and Egypt.

While earlier **Arab** immigrants came from countries with large Christian **populations**, newer arrivals come from heavily Muslim countries such as Iraq and Yemen.

"Immigrants from the **Arab** world come for the same reason all immigrants come - economic opportunity, opportunities to have an education, to develop a professional career," said Helen Samhan, executive director of the **Arab** American Institute Foundation, a research group.

Samhan said the lifting of **U.S. immigration** quotas in the 1960s opened the door to people from **Arab** countries. Many took advantage during the 1980s and 1990s, with a large number coming from nations such as Lebanon and Iraq, where there were wars.

**Almost** half of the Arabs in the **United States** live in five states - California (190,890), New York (120,370), Michigan (115,284), New Jersey (71,770) and Florida (77,461).

"It would be better to come to America than Europe or Canada," said Zak Trad, 33, of Anaheim, Calif., who came from Lebanon three years ago. "It's the largest **Arab** community not in an **Arab** country. I didn't think I would be a stranger here."

New York City, the first stop for millions of immigrants for more than a century, had the largest **Arab population** among **U.S.** cities, 69,985. The Detroit suburb of Dearborn, Mich., where many Arabs first settled to work in the automobile industry, was next at 29,181.

Sterling Heights, Mich., was the city with the largest percentage of **Arab-Americans**, 3.7 percent, followed by Jersey City, N.J., with 2.8 percent. Dearborn's **population** is about 30 percent **Arab**, but it was not ranked because the **Census** Bureau only counted cities with at least 100,000 residents; Dearborn has about 98,000.

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The **Census** Bureau asked those who received the long version of their questionnaire to list their ancestry. The form was sent to about one-sixth of all households.

**Arab**-Americans say their **population** is larger than that reported by the **Census** Bureau, but many are reluctant to fill out government forms because they came from countries with oppressive regimes.

The **census** report stops at 2000 so there is no data to measure the impact of the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. But tighter **immigration** procedures imposed after then have reduced the flow of Arabs to the **United States**.

The **Arab** American Institute Foundation said that just over 15,000 visas were issued to immigrants from **Arab** countries in 2002, compared with more than 21,000 in 2001.

"The fact that **immigration** procedures and visa applications have been so tightly screened is going to slow down the volume of new immigrants," Samhan said. "The scrutiny that will be placed on immigrants from **Arab** and Muslim countries is going to be even greater than other places."

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