

Chapter 6

The Invisible MENA Population in Dearborn, Michigan: Diversity–Blind Police Traffic and Arrest Data

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ABSTRACT

Dearborn, MI is the enclave of Arab Americans in the United States. Arabs migrated to Dearborn, MI, many as refugees of war, seeking prosperity. The Arab American experience is invisible because this population is classified as “White” according to the U.S. Census. However, many Arab Americans do not identify as “White.” Therefore, interpretations using “White” statistics may be flawed. It is imperative that the Office of Management and Budget include a Middle Eastern North African (MENA) category to separate the “White” data and disaggregate MENA data. The Obama and Biden Administrations have submitted proposals on collecting MENA population data. It is unknown if the 2030 U.S. Census will include MENA categories. Law enforcement and other organizations can incorporate both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods to capture MENA population statistics and their lived experiences. Until then, the MENA population and their needs will remain invisible to the general population and justice may be elusive.

The history of Dearborn, MI leadership includes mayors and police chiefs with staunch segregationist views and attitudes resulting in strained relationships between the Dearborn’s MENA community and the Dearborn Police Department. That type

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of leadership in Dearborn resulted in incidences of discrimination, and harassment of MENA residents and students in school, hostile work environment of officers in the Dearborn Police Department, and lawsuits of MENA residents against the Dearborn Police Department. Microdata of the MENA population is lacking which leads to the assumptions that information on this subject is under reported. The absence of this data has serious implications regarding building trust, transparency of law enforcement activity, understanding the social determinants of crime or criminal behavior, access to community resources, and allowing law enforcement agencies to fully serve every community. The availability and accuracy of MENA data in the Dearborn Police Department, the limitations in the existing Dearborn Police Department data, and quality improvement opportunities are the focus of this chapter.

Dearborn and Dearborn Heights, MI, boasts of having the largest and most diverse Arab community in the US (Leech, 2017). Wayne County, MI, where Dearborn and Dearborn Heights are located rank second in the U.S. behind California (Harjanto & Batalova, 2022). Self-reported data show persons of Arab ancestry in Dearborn as 44.3% of the Dearborn population and 27.6% of the Dearborn Heights population (Statistical Atlas, n.d.). Microdata such as this is only a fraction of the data made available publicly (Ekhatior-Mobayode & Hoogeveen, 2022). Census data on the MENA population in Dearborn is lacking because the federal government classifies MENA as White (Maghboulen, et al., 2022). It is unclear if the 2030 Census will or will not revise race and ethnicity standards to include this as a distinct population in the survey (Dameka Reese, Assistant Division Chief of Data Collection for the America Community Survey, Census Bureau, personal communication, December 14, 2022).

Microdata dealing with ethnicity and the MENA population is not collected by the Dearborn Police Department (Ronald Haddad, Police Chief, personal communication, March 20, 2021; Issa Shahim, Police Chief, personal communication, February 22, 2022) for traffic and arrest violations. Dearborn's city administration currently lacks direction regarding the measurement of the MENA population. In 2014, the Department of Justice updated its Guidance for Federal Law Enforcement Agencies Regarding the Use of Race, Ethnicity, Gender, National Origin, Religion, Sexual Orientation, or Gender Identity, but it does not apply to law enforcement agencies (United States Department of Justice, 2023). Specifically,

In making routine or spontaneous law enforcement decisions, such as ordinary traffic stops, Federal law enforcement officers may not use race, ethnicity, gender, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, or gender identity to any degree, except that officers may rely on the listed characteristics in a specific suspect description. This prohibition applies even where the use of a listed characteristic might otherwise be lawful (p.4)

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