Demographic Changes in the U.S. White Population: Implications for OMB Standards

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Representing Population Association of America (PAA) and Association of Population Centers (APC)
Today

1. Reiterate PAA and APC support for combined race/ethnicity question and inclusion of MENA category.

2. Focus on challenges to using revised standards.

   - Growth in MENA and Eastern European groups
   - Decline in western European groups

3. Discuss Implications of changes for OMB revisions
   - Comparability of combined question with historical data
   - Placement of and terminology for MENA category
   - Guidance and prompts for respondents

4. Share Recommendations
Goals of OMB Standards

Developed in 1977 and revised in 1997 to:

1. Provide **consistent** data on race and ethnicity throughout the Federal Government.

2. Ensure **comparability** of race and ethnicity across federal data sets.

3. Maximize **quality** of the data by requiring consistent methods for maintaining, collecting and representing data.
Changes in U.S. Racial/ethnic Groups

1. Origins of foreign-born 1960 vs. 2019
   - 1960: 85% western European and North American
   - 2019: only 10%; Asia (31%) and Latin America (50%)

2. Evidence of diversity within OMB categories
   - Hispanic (e.g., Alcántara et al. 2020; Fenelon et al. 2017);
   - Asian (e.g., Brown et al. 2016; Cook et al. 2017; Gee & Ponce 2010)
   - Black (e.g., Larimore et al. 2020; Hamilton & Green 2017)
   - Whites?
Evidence on Whites

1. Typically used in the aggregate to measure U.S. racial/ethnic disparities.

2. Heterogeneity among Whites rarely examined. Whites defined as:
   “…persons who trace their ancestries to any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa.”

3. 100+ White ancestries in U.S. Census
   – 1980: 55% of total U.S. population German, Irish, English
   – 2019: dropped to 23%
   – Immigration driving force of change
Origins of Non-Hispanic White Immigrants, 1960-2019

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Migration Policy Institute

- Western Europe: 58.2% in 1960, decreasing to 28.2% in 2019
- Eastern Europe: 20.4% in 2019
- MENA: 1.8% in 2019

Graph shows the percentage of non-Hispanic white immigrants from different regions over time.
OMB categories provide critical data on Whites

Current standards (ACS):

6. What is Person 1’s race?
Mark (X) one or more boxes AND print origins.
- White – Print, for example, German, Irish, English, Italian, Lebanese, Egyptian, etc.

13. What is this person’s ancestry or ethnic origin?
(For example: Italian, Jamaican, African Am., Cambodian, Cape Verdean, Norwegian, Dominican, French Canadian, Haitian, Korean, Lebanese, Polish, Nigerian, Mexican, Taiwanese, Ukrainian, and so on.)
Current standards capture White diversity

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Diversity among MENA immigrants by Arrival Cohort

Pre-1991

2001+
Diversity is Consequential

1. Health disparities
   - Poorer mental and physical health outcomes for MENA and eastern European Whites.

2. Poverty rates
   - Higher among MENA and eastern European Whites compared to Whites of western European origin.

3. OMB standards have provided consistent data to examine trends over time.
New Combined Question

1. “White” loses MENA prompts
2. “MENA” listed near bottom
Inconsistencies are Problematic

Comparability compromised:
What about persons of Arab ancestry who identify as white?
Recommendations

1. Proceed with development of MENA category.

2. Proceed with development of combined race and ethnicity question.

3. Ensure comparability in group identification.

4. Be consistent in guidance and prompts for respondents.
Reference articles


Thank you

Questions?

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