

The Census Bureau Wants to Invent a New Racial Category

In a new proposed rule, the U.S. Census Bureau is recommending the creation of a new racial category: Middle Eastern-North African.

The proposal states:

Since the 1997 revision of federal race/ethnicity standards, much has been learned about their implementation. Over this same time span, the U.S. population has continued to become more racially and ethnically diverse. In accordance with good statistical practice, several federal agencies have conducted methodological research to better understand how use of the revised standards informs the quality of federal statistics on race and ethnicity.

In 2014, OMB formed the Working Group to exchange research findings, identify implementation issues and collaborate on a shared research agenda to improve federal data on race and ethnicity. The Working Group comprises representatives from 10 cabinet departments and three other agencies engaged in the collection or use of Federal race and ethnicity data.

Through its systematic review of the implementation of the 1997 revision and stakeholder feedback, the Working Group identified four particular areas where further revisions to the standards might improve the quality of race and ethnicity information collected and presented by Federal agencies. Specifically, these four areas were:

1. The use of separate questions versus a combined question to measure race and ethnicity and question phrasing as a solution to race/ethnicity question nonresponse

2. The classification of a Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) group and distinct reporting category
3. The description of the intended use of minimum reporting categories
4. The salience of terminology used for race and ethnicity classifications and other language in the standard.

The government watchdog group Judicial Watch has weighed in on the proposal, stating that it has “serious concerns about the proposal and submits that OMB should reject the Working Group’s proposal to establish a new pan-ethnic, pan-national classification for Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) as a distinct reporting category.” It continued, the “primary effect of systematic reliance on crude racial categories is to perpetuate misinformation and reinforce irrational beliefs and stereotypes about others.”

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“This new Middle Eastern racial category is a sop to Islamist activists seeking to gain political power and government benefits,” Judicial Watch President Tom Fitton said. “By adding ‘Middle Eastern’ to the already divisive government racial categories, Americans can expect all sorts of negative consequences, such as ‘civil rights lawsuits over criticism of Islam.” {eo}