



Assembly Bill 2763 MENA Inclusion Act



SUMMARY

AB 2763—the Middle East or North African Inclusion (MENA) Act—will require all California entities that collect demographic or ancestry data to include a “Middle Eastern or North African” category.*

BACKGROUND

According to 2020 estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau, approximately 740,219 individuals in California identify as Middle Eastern or North African. Currently, the State of California refers to the recommended standards provided by the Office of Management and Budget in the Federal Government. These standards place populations who identify as MENA within the “White” category, which is defined as “individuals from Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa.”

ISSUE

Individuals with roots in the MENA region have numerous and varied ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds, which renders “White” aggregated demographic data collection in California entirely inadequate in capturing the unique experiences that each group faces, from health issues to socioeconomic outcomes. This prevents state agencies and the Legislature from making informed decisions about how and where to deploy resources for MENA populations.

For instance, emerging research into disparate health outcomes for MENA groups—see works published in *SSM – Population Health* (2020), *BMC Public Health* (2021), and *PLoS One* (2022)—demonstrates clear use cases for disaggregated MENA data in healthcare.

Establishing a MENA category will allow for thorough investigation and informed analysis of trends beyond health, extending to education, employment, housing, and civil rights. It will also provide long overdue representation and recognition of California’s extensive and vibrant MENA communities.

THE BILL

AB 2763 will require a MENA category to be included in all future collections of demographic data concerning ethnic, racial, or ancestral background by California state departments, commissions, and agencies, encompassing the following identities:

- Middle Eastern: Afghan, Bahraini, Emirati, Iranian, Iraqi, Israeli, Jordanian, Kuwaiti, Lebanese, Omani, Palestinian, Qatari, Saudi Arabian, Syrian, Turkish, and Yemeni.
- North African: Algerian, Djiboutian, Egyptian, Libyan, Mauritanian, Moroccan, Sudanese, and Tunisian.
- Transnational Middle Eastern and North African: Amazigh or Berber, Armenian, Assyrian, Chaldean, Circassian, Kurdish

Additionally, the bill will require the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation to include these categories for the purposes of voluntary self-identification by individuals admitted, in custody, released, and paroled.

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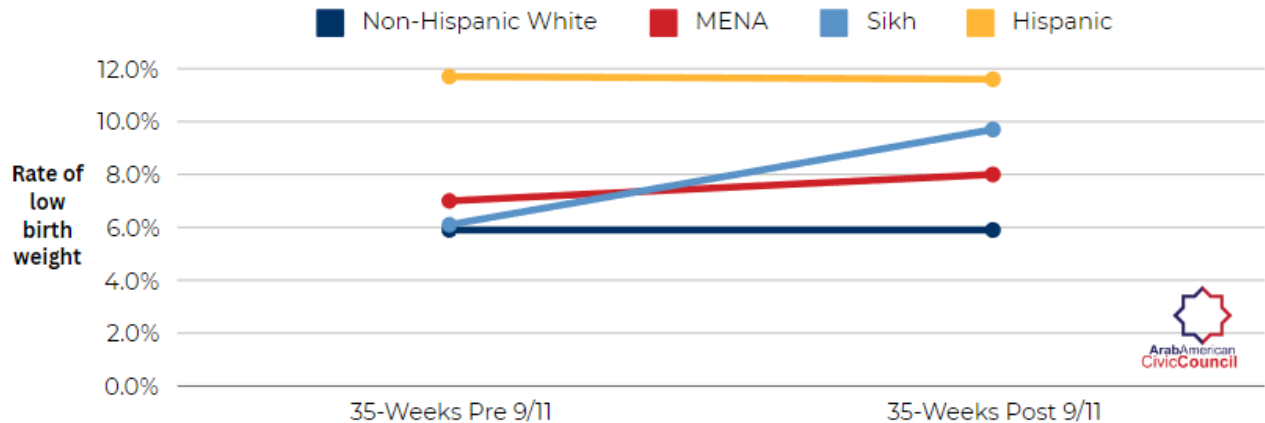
*The MENA category defined by AB 2763 combines both the US Census Bureau’s recommendations for a MENA designation and the University of California’s SWANA category. The University of California system uses SWANA (Southwest Asian, North African) to encompass nationalities and identities often neglected in the US Census Bureau’s recommendations.

WHAT UNIQUE CHALLENGES DO CALIFORNIANS OF MENA ORIGIN FACE?

After years of research and labor, studies show that MENA Californians face unique challenges different from non-Hispanic Whites.

A 2020 STUDY TOOK DATA FROM THE CALIFORNIA VITAL STATISTICS RECORDS AND MEASURED BIRTH WEIGHT RATES OF 14,227 MENA-NAMED MOTHERS FROM THE 37 WEEKS BEFORE 9/11 AND THE 37 WEEKS AFTER 9/11. **THE STUDY FOUND:**

Stress during 9/11 resulted in a spike in low birth weight rates for MENA and Sikh babies, which was not seen for other ethno-racial groups. **Rates for low birth weight increased by 3% in the 37 weeks after September 11, 2011.** Similar results were seen for Sikh populations, who are misperceived to be Muslim-adjacent.



BAKHTIARI E. HEALTH EFFECTS OF MUSLIM RACIALIZATION: EVIDENCE FROM BIRTH OUTCOMES IN CALIFORNIA BEFORE AND AFTER SEPTEMBER 11, 2001. SSM POPUL HEALTH. 2020 NOV 25;12:100703. DOI: 10.1016/J.SSMPH.2020.100703. PMID: 33313375; PMCID: PMC7721634.

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STATE
LEGISLATURE
TO ADD A
MENA
CATEGORY IN
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