
Facts about Arabs

BY MARVIN WINGFIELD

Who is an Arab?

“Arab” is a cultural and linguistic term. It refers to those who speak Arabic as their first language. Arabs are united by culture and by history. Arabs are not a race. Some have blue eyes and red hair; others are dark skinned; most are somewhere in between. Most Arabs are Muslims but there are also millions of Christian Arabs and thousands of Jewish Arabs, just as there are Muslim, Christian, and Jewish Americans.

What is the Arab World?

The Arab World consists of 22 countries in the Middle East and North Africa: Algeria, Bahrain, the Comoros Islands, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Libya, Morocco, Mauritania, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen. Iran and Turkey are not Arab countries and their primary languages are Farsi and Turkish respectively. Arab countries have a rich diversity of ethnic, linguistic, and religious communities. These include Kurds, Armenians, Berbers and others. There are over 200 million Arabs.

What is the Muslim World?

There are an estimated 1.2 billion Muslims in the world. The Organization of Islamic Countries has 55 member states. The ten countries with the largest Muslim population are: Indonesia (170.3 million), Pakistan (136 million), Bangladesh (106 million), India (103 million), Turkey (62.4 million), Iran (60.7 million), Egypt (53.7 million), Nigeria (47.7 million), and China (37.1 million). Of these countries only Egypt is an Arab country. Most Arabs are Muslims, but most Muslims are not Arabs.

Who is a Muslim?

A Muslim is a follower of Islam. [See article on this page. The American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee also has an information sheet on Islam.]

What is the Middle East?

The Middle East is a loose term, not always used to describe the same territory. It usually includes the Arab countries from Egypt east to the Persian Gulf, plus Israel and Iran. Turkey is sometimes considered part of the Middle East, sometimes part of Europe. Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh are usually described as South Asia.

Who are Arab Americans?

Arab Americans are Americans of Arab descent. There are Americans with roots in each Arab country, but most originate from Lebanon, Syria, and Palestine. There are also substantial communities from Egypt, Yemen and Iraq. The first immigrants arrived in the late 19th century. A second wave of immigration started after World War II, and still continues. The largest communities live in the Detroit area. ■

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