Demographic Changes among U.S. Whites: Implications for Research and Policy

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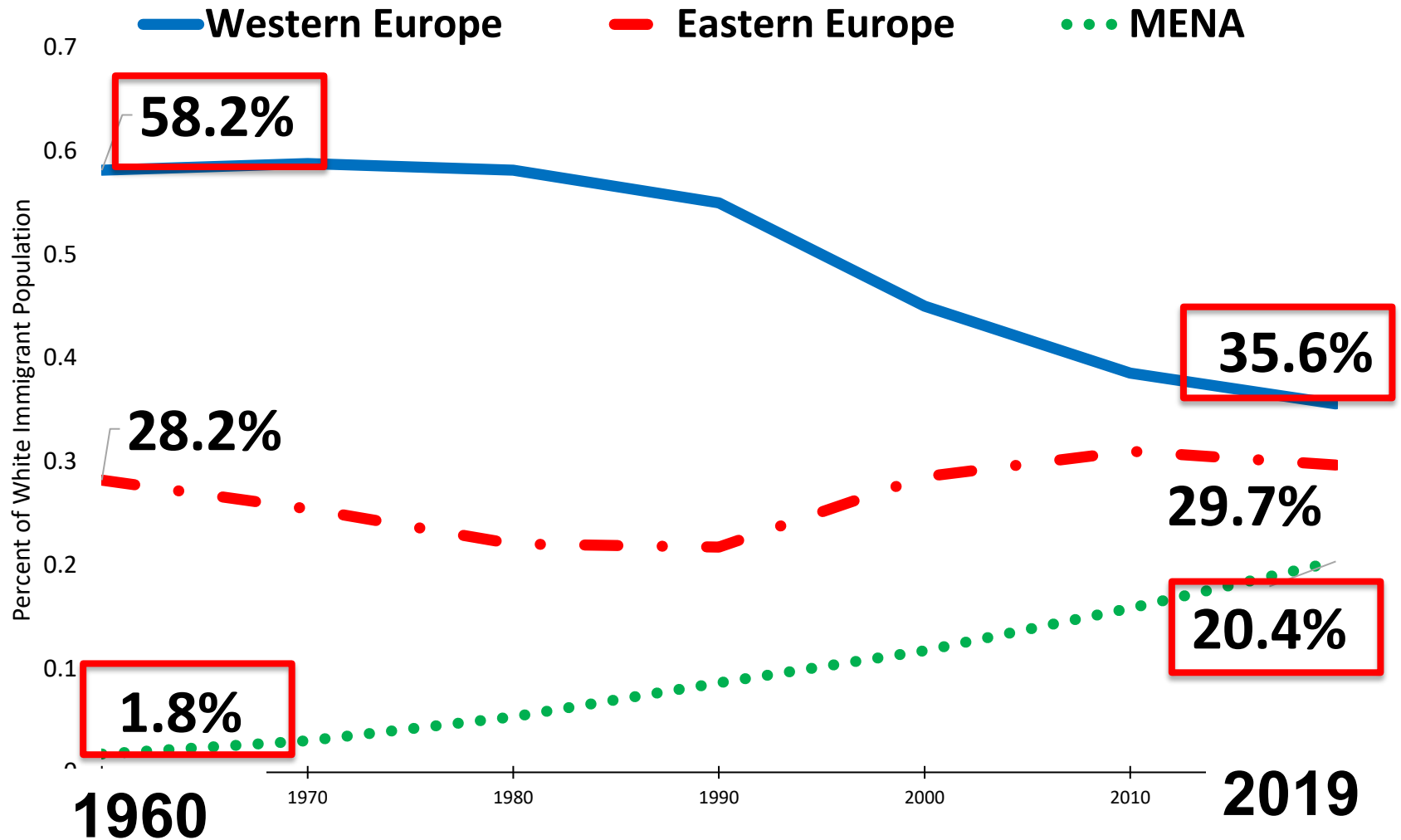Duke University

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Historical Construction of "Whites"

1. 1977 OMB standards created to enforce civil rights laws.

2. **Whites** became default reference category:
    - Predominantly western European
    - Arrived in U.S. under more welcoming policies
    - Occupied highest rung on stratification ladder

3. Practice of using Whites in the aggregate persists, despite massive changes in the White population.

Today's Context

1. Growing diversity *among* Whites.

2. 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 population German, Irish, English
    - **2019**: dropped to 23%
    - **Immigration** driving force of change

Origins of Non-Hispanic White Immigrants, 1960-2019

Western Europe — Eastern Europe ···· MENA

Percent of White Immigrant Population

58.2%

35.6%

28.2%

29.7%

1.8%

20.4%

1960

2019

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.)
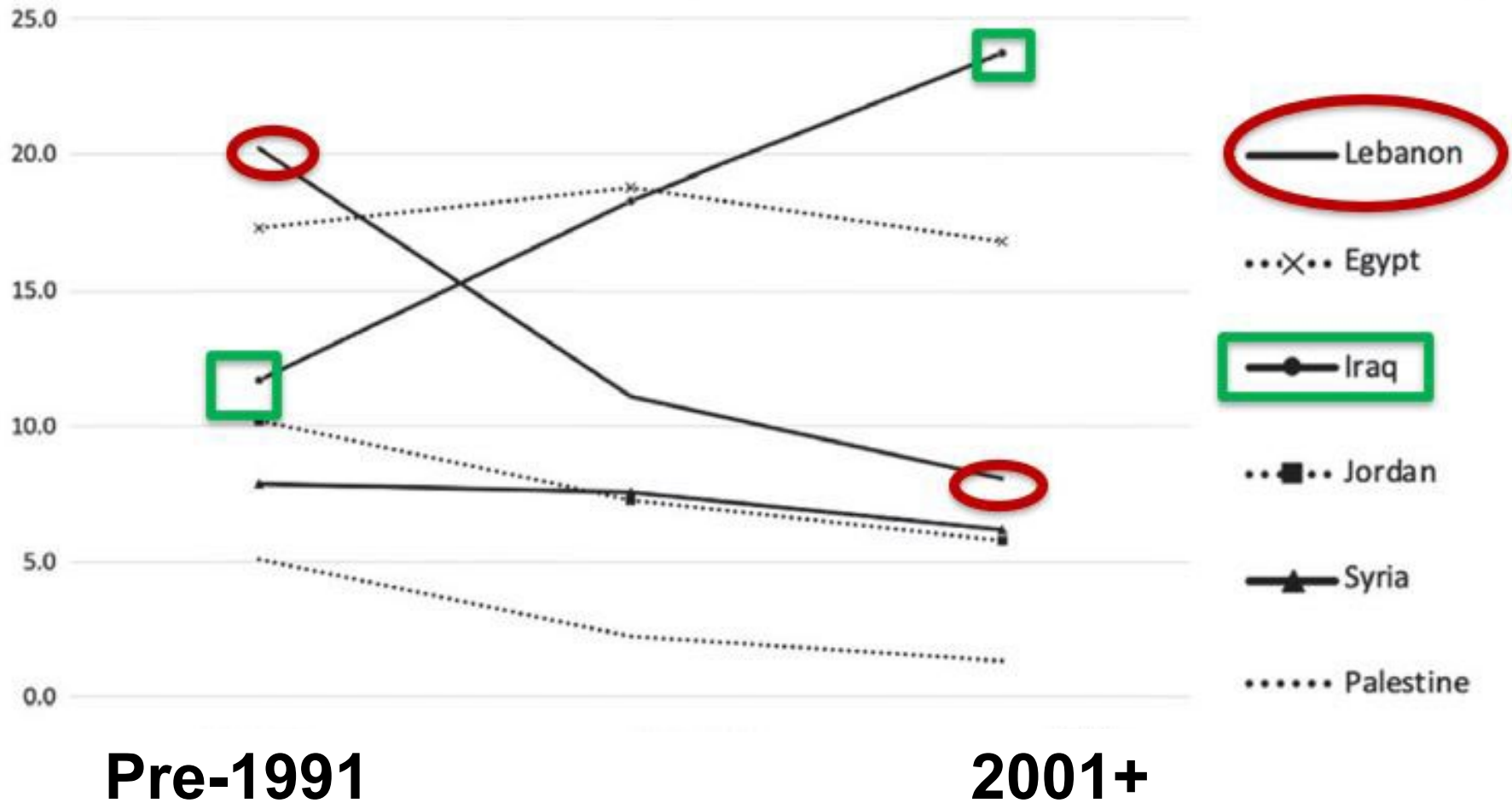
Current standards capture White diversity

MENA

- Aden
- Algeria
- Bahrain
- **Egypt**
- **Iran**
- **Iraq**
- Jordan
- Kuwait
- **Lebanon**
- Libya
- Morocco
- Oman
- Palestine
- Qatar
- Saudi Arabia
- **Syria**
- **Turkey**
- Tunisia
- United Arab Emirates
- Yemen

Eastern Europe

- Belarus
- **Boznia**
- Chechoslavakia
- **Hungary**
- Latavia
- Lithuania
- **Poland**
- **Romania**
- **Russia**
- **Ukraine**
- Other FSU

Origins of MENA immigrants over time

Pre-1991   2001+

Challenges of New Combined Question

What is your race or ethnicity?
Select all that apply AND enter additional details in the spaces below. Note, you may report more than one group.

☐ **WHITE** – *Provide details below.*

☐ German   ☐ Irish   ☐ English
☐ Italian   ☐ Polish   ☐ French
Enter, for example, Scottish, Norwegian, Dutch, etc.

☐ **HISPANIC OR LATINO** – *Provide details below.*
☐ Mexican or Mexican American   ☐ Puerto Rican   ☐ Cuban
☐ Salvadoran   ☐ Dominican   ☐ Colombian
Enter, for example, Guatemalan, Spaniard, Ecuadorian, etc.

☐ **BLACK OR AFRICAN AMERICAN** – *Provide details below.*
☐ African American   ☐ Jamaican   ☐ Haitian
☐ Nigerian   ☐ Ethiopian   ☐ Somali
Enter, for example, Ghanaian, South African, Barbadian, etc.

☐ **ASIAN** – *Provide details below.*
☐ Chinese   ☐ Filipino   ☐ Asian Indian
☐ Vietnamese   ☐ Korean   ☐ Japanese
Enter, for example, Pakistani, Cambodian, Hmong, etc.

☐ **AMERICAN INDIAN OR ALASKA NATIVE** – *Enter, for example, Navajo Nation, Blackfeet Tribe, Mayan, Aztec, Native Village of Barrow Inupiat Tribal Government, Tlingit, etc.*

☐ **MIDDLE EASTERN OR NORTH AFRICAN** – *Provide details below.*
☐ Lebanese   ☐ Iranian   ☐ Egyptian
☐ Syrian   ☐ Moroccan   ☐ Israeli
Enter, for example, Algerian, Iraqi, Kurdish, etc.

☐ **NATIVE HAWAIIAN OR PACIFIC ISLANDER** – *Provide details below.*
☐ Native Hawaiian   ☐ Samoan   ☐ Chamorro
☐ Tongan   ☐ Fijian   ☐ Marshallese
Enter, for example, Palauan, Tahitian, Chuukese, etc.

What is your race or ethnicity?
Select all that apply AND enter additional details in the spaces below. Note, you may report more than one group.

☐ **WHITE** – *Provide details below.*

☐ German   ☐ Irish   ☐ English
☐ Italian   ☐ Polish   ☐ French
Enter, for example, Scottish, Norwegian, Dutch, etc.

☐ **MIDDLE EASTERN OR NORTH AFRICAN** – *Provide details below.*
☐ Lebanese   ☐ Iranian   ☐ Egyptian
☐ Syrian   ☐ Moroccan   ☐ Israeli
Enter, for example, Algerian, Iraqi, Kurdish, etc.

1. **"White" loses MENA prompts**
2. **"MENA" listed near bottom**

Inconsistencies are Problematic

CURRENT

> **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.* ↗
>
> [   ]

COMBINED

> **What is your race or ethnicity?**
> *Select all that apply* **AND** *enter additional details in the spaces below. Note, you may report more than one group.*
>
> ☐ **WHITE** – *Provide details below.*
>
> ☐ German   ☐ Irish   ☐ English
> ☐ Italian   ☐ Polish   ☐ French
> *Enter, for example, Scottish, Norwegian, Dutch, etc.*
>
> [   ]

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

Recommendations for OMB

1. Proceed with MENA category and combined race/ethnicity question.

2. Ensure comparability in group identification.

3. Be consistent in guidance and prompts for respondents.

4. Provide better training and more guidelines for data users.

Recommendations for Researchers

1. Acknowledge diversity among Whites.

2. Understand that the aggregate category may:
   a. Obscure needs of white ethnic groups;
   b. Provide inaccurate estimates of racial/ethnic inequalities.

3. When possible, examine differences by:
   a. Nativity
   b. Arrival year for foreign-born
   c. Region or country of birth
   d. Parental nativity and/or country of birth

Thank you

Questions?

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EXTRA SLIDE

Changes in Size of U.S. White Population

—— All Whites   – – Non-Hispanic Whites

83.2%

80.3%

79.6%

75.6%

75.1%

72.4%

69.1%

62.6%

63.8%

58.7%

90.0%

80.0%

70.0%

60.0%

50.0%

1980   1990   2000   2010   **2020**