A Comparative Study: The Socioeconomic Integration of Second-Generation MENA Immigrants

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Abstract: This paper addresses the socioeconomic status of second-generation Middle Eastern North African (MENA) immigrants in the United States. Measurements of educational attainment, salary income, employment status, and occupation are considered. Overall, second-generation MENA immigrants achieve higher levels of education and salary incomes than both non-MENA whites and blacks, but falter on employment outcomes as a whole. Particular ethnic groups, such as Iranians and Yemenis, have accomplished higher educational levels than both whites and blacks, yet unemployment rates are amongst the highest of all. Upward mobility from their first-generation parents is achieved as well. By ethnic group, Egyptian individuals prove to have outpaced their MENA peers on multiple measurements, however not on all. Several ethnic groups stand out in these measurements of socioeconomic status.

Introduction

Immigration from the Middle Eastern region to the United States has occurred in three waves over the past century (Foad, 2013b). The first wave arrived between the late 1800s and mid-1920s, during which predominantly Arab Christians from the Ottoman province of Syria (modern day Lebanon, Palestine, and Syria) came overseas to settle. The Johnson-Reed Immigration Act of 1924 effectively ended this first wave, severely restricting immigration from this part of the world. The second wave arose during the 1940s to 1960s due to growing political instability in the region, such as the Arab-Israeli War of 1948 and popular revolts in Egypt and Iraq. Many of the immigrants of this wave were better educated that the previous, which predominantly included established elites who had fled these countries experiencing upheaval. The third and final wave came after the passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, thereby removing many of the restrictive quota limitations of the 1924 immigration policy. This allowed for a massive immigration of Middle Easterners to the United States, which still continues to this day. Many of the newcomers of this third wave have similar education levels as the second wave, but are far greater in number and include a higher percentage of Muslims. In fact, "nearly 800,000 immigrants officially arrived to the U.S. from 1967 to 2003" (Foad, 2013b). Many of them have joined mainstream America by participating in the U.S. economy, voting in elections, and starting their own families.

While much research has focused on first-generation immigrants from the Middle East and their socioeconomic integration into American society, little attention has been dedicated to understanding the relative integration of their *descendants*. These descendants are categorized as second-generation immigrants. These are individuals born in the United States to at least one foreign-born parent, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Second-generation immigrants, of multiple ethnic backgrounds, have been studied through many lenses, whether that be social, political, or economic (Trejo & Duncan, 2015; Portes & Zhou, 1993; Tran & Valdez, 2017).

There are three important reasons as to why it is important to study this particular immigrant population in the first place. First, existing literature has primarily focused on first-generation MENA migrants integrating into European society; however, MENA migrants who come to the United States are very different (Foad, 2013a). The cost of immigrating to the U.S. is higher than that of Europe due to the long distance and lack of ethnic enclaves. Immigrants who expect high returns on their move usually decide to migrate, and thus, MENA migrants to the U.S. tend to be much better educated, earn higher incomes, and are more likely to permanently

reside in the U.S. (Foad, 2013a). It is expected that the children of first-generation MENA immigrants will follow in suit, regarding socioeconomic status. Second, the MENA immigrant community is a rapidly growing population. According to Foad (2013a), "the immigrant community from the MENA region in the U.S. had a seven-fold increase between 1970 and 2000, growing from fewer than 200,000 to over 1.5 million. Contrast this with the only three-fold increase in the general immigrant population over this period" (p. 5). MENA migrants also have higher fertility rates than the rest of the U.S. populace, which means that this immigrant population is expected to grow. And third, the general opinion of MENA immigrants by the rest of the U.S. population is overtly negative. In fact, the ratio of negative-to-positive opinions of Middle Eastern immigrants is about 2-to-1 among the American populace, according to a recent 2015 Pew Research Center report (Smith, 2017). Survey respondents were asked if Middle Eastern immigrants make mostly "a positive impact" on U.S. society. This negative-to-positive ratio was higher than that of immigrants from Latin America, Africa, Europe, and Asia. Furthermore, European and Asian immigrants had the exact opposite results, where positive feedback was greater than negative feedback. However, the survey found multiple MENA ethnic groups surpassing the rest of the U.S. population on median household incomes. Whether the second generation has made considerable strides is explored at length in this study. It is now more important than ever to determine if the descendants of MENA immigrants have adjusted socioeconomically into the U.S. economy.

This study specifically highlights the socioeconomic integration of individuals who were born in the United States to at least one foreign-born parent from the MENA region. Their socioeconomic integration is measured by the following variables: educational attainment, salary income, employment status, and occupation. This paper will address two of the questions proposed in Tran and Valdez's (2017) study on assessing Latino assimilation: First, how do these individuals fare in comparison to their native peers? Non-MENA majority whites and non-MENA minority blacks will be used as the reference groups for assessments of integration.

Second, do they outperform their parents? Since the Current Population Survey (CPS) does not contain data on the respondents' parents, my strategy is to compare second-generation MENA to their proxy first-generation parents, using the lagged birth cohort method. This comparison will determine the progression of the second generation, which was the same approach used in Tran and Valdez's (2017) research. This paper will also address a third question that was not explored in Trans and Valdez's (2017) study: Which second-generation ethnic groups stand out the most according to these four measures? The purpose of this assessment is to highlight differences in experiences among the second-generation MENA population.

Terminology

Please note that the term *integration*, and *not* assimilation, is being used in the context of this project, since assimilation implies a rejection of one's parent culture to completely adopt the host society's culture (Mata, 2014). The term integration does not assume cultural assimilation. According to *Merriam-Webster* (2019), integration is the "incorporation as *equals* into society or an organization of individuals of different groups (such as races)." There are many different ethnic groups that comprise the MENA immigrant population. Second-generation Algerians, Egyptians, Emirates, Iranians, Iraqis, Israelis/Palestinians, Jordanians, Kuwaitis, Lebanese, Libyans, Moroccans, Saudis, Sudanese, Syrians, and Yemenis are considered in this paper, due to the available data provided by the CPS. Economists have used the terms assimilation and integration interchangeably for evaluating how well second-generation immigrants have incorporated themselves into the U.S. economy, yet the term integration is used to avoid any cultural implications that are not explored in this study.

There are a few more terms to clarify that will be used frequently throughout this report. Based on the U.S. Census Bureau definition, immigrants of *the first generation* "refers to those who are foreign born. *The second generation* refers to those with at least one foreign-born parent. *The third-or-higher generation* includes those with two U.S. native parents" (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). Please note that second generation and third-or-higher generation

immigrants are all native-born. Foreign-born is defined as anyone who is not a U.S. citizen at birth, and native-born persons are anyone who is born in the United States, Puerto Rico, or a U.S. Island Area.

Assessment of Socioeconomic Integration

The essential question that arises when assessing one's socioeconomic integration is, who or what is the frame of reference? Nearly all assessments have a "rubric" or a grading system that follows a standard. Research exists on the question of second-generation integration into U.S. society, and many of these researchers have used the native U.S. population as the standard. Full socioeconomic integration of second-generation MENA immigrants will require those who have met the thresholds of average education level, salary income, and employment status of the native majority at the very least. In Tran and Valdez's (2017) publication, they consider second-generation Latino assimilation by comparing their education and occupation levels to three groups: non-Hispanic whites, non-Hispanic blacks, and Puerto Ricans. They named whites as the "native majority" and grouped blacks and Puerto Ricans as the "native minority." My research follows a very similar rubric, but leaves Puerto Ricans out of the assessment, where comparisons are made with *only* non-MENA native majority whites and non-MENA minority blacks. In accordance to Tran and Valdez's (2017) findings, whites are at the upper end of the socioeconomic status spectrum, while blacks are at the lower end. This is the rubric used by the publication in question, and their assessments of integration are explained next.

Since comparisons are being made with two reference groups, there are five possible assessments that can result. The first is if such persons outperform native whites on the three variables mentioned in the previous paragraph. These immigrants would have a *second-generation advantage* over the native majority. For a second-generation immigrant cohort to fully integrate into U.S. society in only one generation would be remarkable. As Tran and Valdez (2017) point out, "this is the most optimistic scenario, but it is also the most unrealistic, given the fact that it took about three generations for the offspring of European immigrants who arrived at the turn of the twentieth century to achieve parity

with the mainstream" (p. 162). The second scenario would be the second-generation achieving parity, but not outperforming the native majority, which would be categorized as *long-distance social mobility*. The third scenario would be deemed *short-distance social mobility*, in which second-generation MENA immigrants outperform the native minority but still have yet to catch up to the native majority. This suggests progress on behalf of the second generation, but this may require one or more generations to catch up to the native majority. The fourth possibility—*stagnation*—would involve the second generation achieving parity with the native minority. According to Tran and Valdez (2017), "[t]his is a situation where there is very little progress toward upward mobility among the second generation, especially considering the relatively low level of socioeconomic attainment among the minority groups and the large racial gap in attainment in the United States" (p. 162). And finally, there is *second-generation disadvantage,* which is when the second generation falls below the thresholds of the native minority.

Assessment of Socioeconomic Progression

This paper aims to provide a full picture of socioeconomic integration, examining the socioeconomic status of second-generation MENA immigrants on multiple fronts. Thus, another comparison with the parents of the second generation will be discussed. Variables of educational attainment and occupation are used to facilitate this comparison. This allows us to determine the intergenerational mobility of the second generation. Since the Current Population Survey does not contain data on the actual parents of each respondent, my strategy is to compare second-generation MENA individuals to their proxy first-generation parents, using the *lagged birth cohort method*. This is explained in further detail in the methodology section of the paper. Three possible scenarios can arise after comparisons are made. First, the second generation performs better than the first generation, resulting in *second-generation progress*. Second, the second generation achieves parity with their parents, which is deemed *second-generation stagnation*. This means that the mobility process is slightly delayed and may require an additional generation for progress to be achieved. Third, the second generation performs worse, which would be considered *second-generation decline*.

Assessment of Socioeconomic Distinction

Comparisons between second-generation MENA ethnic groups on the variables of educational attainment, salary income, employment status, and occupation are also made in this paper. The goal of this assessment is to seek out ethnic groups that stand out substantially from the rest of the second-generation MENA population. Such comparisons may reveal patterns in relative levels of socioeconomic integration in order to better understand the experiences of the adult children of MENA parents.

Unfortunately, there is no known "established" rubric available from economic research for making this particular assessment. This is simply made based on observations from CPS data. The motivation behind making this assessment is solely for the purpose of highlighting differences that may arise between second-generation ethnic groups. Understanding the socioeconomic differences between ethnic groups will help give us a clearer picture of their socioeconomic integration into U.S. society. There are numerous cultural and religious distinctions that exist amongst the MENA immigrant population, regardless of generation. Whether those distinctions translate socioeconomically has yet to be explored extensively in academic research.

Methodology

a. Data Sources

The increasing diversity of experiences among the second-generation MENA population is the starting point of this project (Bozorgmehr et al., 2010; Nigem, 1986). Due to the increasing number of MENA arrivals during the post-1965 wave, the diversity of the MENA immigrant population has increased substantially. According to the Migration Policy Institute, "Post-1965 arrivals consisted of a wider mix of people seeking family unification, education and employment opportunities, and safety from war and persecution" (Cumoletti & Batalova, 2018). The focus of this research is to examine the children of these arrivals who came shortly after the 1965 policy change.

To capture this diversity, the Annual Social and Economic Supplement to the Current Population Survey (CPS ASEC) is used as the data source (Flood et al., 2018). This is a nationally representative survey that includes a diverse sample of MENA immigrants, both foreign and native born. A dataset of second-generation MENA who were born in the United States were pooled over a span of six years, 2011-2017. However, only the years 2011, 2013, 2015, and 2017 were included to avoid any non-overlapping results of survey respondents. This is because the survey design adopts a 4-8-4 sampling scheme, in which households are included in the survey for the first four consecutive months and excluded for the next eight months, before returning for the last four consecutive months. Other economists have applied the same strategy as well (Tran & Valdez, 2017). Cross-tabulation results were created using an online, public-use analysis program that compiles U.S. Census data. This program is called the Survey and Documentation Analysis (SDA) program and was developed by UC Berkeley. The analysis capabilities of this program go beyond cross-tabulation alone. For more information, please refer to the Appendix section.

A note on CPS ASEC: This survey is administered by the Census Bureau through both in-person and telephone interviews every month to monitor basic trends in the population. It uses a probability sample of about 60,000 occupied households from all 50 states and the District of Columbia. There are some strengths and weaknesses of the CPS ASEC supplement. One strength is that it is currently the only data source that provides nationally representative samples of second-generation adults in the United States. Another strength is that it contains adequate sample sizes for a majority of the second-generation ethnic groups that are considered in this paper. Yet, there are some weaknesses as well.

First, not all of the ethnic groups from the MENA region are included in the birthplace variable of the CPS ASEC supplement. The U.S. Census Bureau held a forum in 2015 to define the countries included under the MENA category for data collection, and not every single country of birth is listed in the CPS (Buchanan et al., 2016). Second, some second-generation, and even first-generation, ethnic groups have very small populations in the U.S., which may present a potential limitation in the significance of the results. Nonetheless, this research attempts to analyze the socioeconomic integration of a sample of U.S. citizens that has not been explored through

multiple lenses before. Third, CPS ASEC data cannot address social mechanisms and processes that underlie patterns of assimilation or inequality. Fourth, the CPS ASEC does not contain information about parental educational or socioeconomic backgrounds, so my assessment of intergenerational mobility is indirect. This complication is avoided by using the lagged birth cohort method (Tran & Valdez, 2017), a technique that allows me to indirectly compare outcomes of second-generation respondents with a cohort of first-generation individuals who are most likely their proxy parents. Essentially, the lagged birth cohort method assumes that the duration of one immigrant generation is about 25 years. Using this method, a second-generation MENA age cohort of 25 to 64-year-olds is compared to a first-generation MENA cohort of 50 to 89-year-olds. This is the approach that economists Tran and Valdez (2017) used to assess second generation Latino assimilation.

b. Different Dimensions of Socioeconomic Integration
Four variables are measured: educational attainment, wage and salary income, employment status, and occupation type.

i. Educational Attainment: EDUC[1] indicates respondents' educational attainment, as measured by the highest year of school or degree completed. Average years of education are computed for the following groups: (1) Second-Generation MENA by Ethnic Group, (2) Second-Generation MENA U.S. Citizens, (3) Third Generation+ non-MENA Whites, (4) Third Generation+ non-MENA Blacks, (5) First-Generation MENA by Ethnic Group, and (6) First-Generation MENA Foreign Born.

ii. Wage and Salary Income: INCWAGE indicates each respondent's total pre-tax wage and salary income in U.S. dollars—that is, money received as an employee—for the previous calendar year. Average salary incomes are computed for the following groups: (1) Second-Generation MENA by Ethnic Group, (2) Second-Generation MENA U.S. Citizens, (3) Third-Generation+

non-MENA Whites, and (4) Third-Generation+ non-MENA Blacks.

iii. Employment Status: EMPSTAT indicates whether persons were part of the labor force—working or seeking work—and, if so, whether they were currently unemployed. Unemployment and employment rates are calculated for the following groups: (1) Second-Generation MENA by Ethnic Group, (2) Second-Generation MENA U.S. Citizens, (3) Third-Generation+ non-MENA Whites, and (4) Third-Generation+ non-MENA Blacks. The unemployment rate is defined as the percentage of individuals who are unemployed in the labor force. The labor force is defined as the combined total of unemployed and employed persons. The unemployment rate is calculated by dividing the number of persons unemployed by the number of persons in the labor force and multiplying by 100. On the contrary, the employment rate is defined as the percentage of individuals who are employed in the labor force. This percentage is calculated by dividing the total number of individuals employed by the total number of persons both in and *not in* the labor force, and then multiplying by 100.

iv. Occupation: OCC reports the respondent's primary occupation. Respondents who held more than one job were asked to report the job at which they worked the largest number of hours. For persons who were employed at the time of the survey, OCC refers to the job worked during the preceding week; unemployed persons and those not currently in the labor force were to give their most recent occupation. Percentage of individuals in *Professional/Managerial Level Occupations* and *Low-Level Service Occupations* are calculated for the following groups: (1) Second-Generation MENA by Ethnic Group, (2) Second-Generation MENA U.S. Citizens, (3) First-Generation MENA by Ethnic Group, and (4) First-Generation MENA Foreign Born. In the context of this study, *Professional/Managerial Level Occupations* include Chief Executives, Managers, Math/Computer Science, Engineers, Legal Professions, Education, and Healthcare.

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[1] Variable abbreviation used by CPS ASEC

Low-Level Service Occupations include Personal Service, Construction, Mechanics & Repair, Production, and Transportation.

Note: Please refer to the Appendix for elaboration on tables and calculations. Averages were calculated based on cross-tabulation results from the SDA program.

c. Explanation of Measurements for Comparison

i. All four variables are measured for second-generation MENA immigrants, aged 25-64. The reasoning behind observing an adult cohort until age 64 is because the official retirement age is 65 in the United States.

ii. In regards to first-generation MENA immigrants, only the variables of educational attainment and occupation are used for comparison with the second generation. Salary incomes tend to vary over time, and observing an age cohort that falls above the retirement age may skew the employment status results. Occupations, however, are still considered for purposes of assessing intergenerational mobility, since first generation MENA respondents who are not in the labor force can list their previously held occupation. Economists have used both educational attainment and occupational status of first- and second-generation immigrants to make this assessment (Tran & Valdez, 2017; Bozorgmehr et al., 2010). Some have even suggested that the CPS provide supplemental data on family background of each respondent. According to Duncan and Trejo (2015), "The supplementary survey should also collect information on the family background of each respondent (e.g., the educational attainment, *occupational status*, income, and social status of their parents and siblings). This would allow for estimates of intergenerational socioeconomic mobility…" (p. 129).

iii. Occupational clusters were chosen according to Foad's (2013b) study, "Waves on Immigration from the Middle East." He investigated the occupational clustering of several major immigrant groups in the United States, using

first-generation MENA immigrants as the main comparison with other groups. Many of the same occupational clusters are used in this paper. Please note that Foad only used percentages of individuals in each occupational category to make comparisons.

Results

1. Assessment of Socioeconomic Integration

We begin with descriptive results on educational attainment, salary/wage income, and employment status of second-generation MENA immigrants. As an entire group, the average years of education is 16, the average salary income is $54,175.01, the average unemployment rate is 7.5%, and the employment rate is 72.5%. On variables of educational attainment and salary income, second-generation MENA immigrants surpass both non-MENA majority whites and non-MENA minority blacks (Table 1). However, the unemployment rates and employment rates do not follow a similar pattern. Second-generation MENA immigrants have lower unemployment rates than blacks but higher than whites. Their employment rates outpace blacks but not whites. In other words, this places them in the hierarchy between blacks and whites regarding employment status in the United States.

Table 1: Socioeconomic Attainment by Generation

Ethnic Groups	Years of Education	Wage and Salary Income	Unemployment Rate	Employment Rate
Second-generation				
MENA U.S. Citizens	16	$54,175.01	7.5%	72.5%
Third-and-higher generation				
Native white	14	$44,941.27	4.9%	79.2%
Native black	13	$30,300.19	10.5%	67.2%

Source: Pooled CPS 2011, 2013. 2015, 2017
Note: Averages are displayed

By ethnic group (Table 2), second-generation socioeconomic integration varies by variable. Second-generation Egyptians, Iranians, Israeli/Palestinians, Lebanese, Libyans, Moroccans, Saudis, and Yemenis all have higher years of education than non-MENA whites. Emirates and Syrians achieve parity with whites. Algerians, Iraqis, and Jordanians do not outperform whites but do achieve parity with blacks, and Sudanese fall below blacks on this measurement. For salary income, second-generation Egyptians, Emirates, Iranians, Israelis/Palestinians,

Table 2: Socioeconomic Attainment by Ethnic Group

Ethnic Groups	Years of Education	Wage and Salary Income	Unemployment Rate	Employment Rate
Second-generation				
Algerian	13	$38,740.12	0.0%	40.1%
Egyptian	19	$56,748.74	6.4%	84.6%
Emirate	14	$52,803.92	0.0%	84.4%
Iranian	17	$61,314.55	11.8%	74.6%
Iraqi	13	$32,874.57	19.9%	54.4%
Israeli/Palestinian	16	$67,986.89	0.0%	74.2%
Jordanian	13	$45,104.44	0.0%	74.4%
Kuwaiti*	N/A	$4,762.50	0.0%	0.0%
Lebanese	16	$63,066.64	6.1%	81.1%
Libyan	16	$99,299.60	0.0%	100.0%
Moroccan	15	$69,886.82	1.5%	91.5%
Saudi Arabian	16	$48,810.87	1.9%	88.1%
Sudanese	12	$52,038.80	7.2%	77.0%
Syrian	14	$40,129.36	0.2%	85.1%
Yemeni	15	$25,525.59	16.6%	42.0%
Third-and-higher generation				
Native white	14	$44,941.27	4.9%	79.2%
Native black	13	$30,300.19	10.5%	67.2%

Source: Pooled CPS 2011, 2013. 2015, 2017
Note: Averages are displayed; Percentages do not add up to 100% due to retirees and persons serving in the military.
*No data is available on educational attainment; Number of persons surveyed for employment status is extremely low

Jordanians, Lebanese, Libyans, Moroccans, Saudis, and Sudanese outperform whites. Algerians, Iraqis, and Syrians have higher salaries than blacks but not whites, and Kuwaitis and Yemenis have lower salaries than blacks. Thus, high educational outcomes of particular groups, such as second-generation Yemenis, do not necessarily translate into higher incomes.

In terms of employment status, second-generation Algerians, Emirates, Israeli/Palestinians, Jordanians, Kuwaitis, Libyans, Moroccans, Saudis, and Syrians all have unemployment rates lower than whites. Egyptian, Lebanese, and Sudanese all have unemployment rates higher than whites but lower than blacks. Iranians, Iraqis, and Yemenis all have unemployment rates greater than blacks. Please note that very few second-generation Kuwaitis were surveyed, according to separate data collected by the researcher.

2. Assessment of Socioeconomic Progression

Table 3 below provides a very simplified summary of the educational attainment and occupational clustering of both first- and second-generation MENA immigrants. As shown, second-generation MENA have achieved a greater number of years

of education, in addition to a shift in occupational percentages. A greater percentage of the second-generation MENA workforce has coalesced into professional/managerial positions and less so for low-level service positions.

Table 3: Socioeconomic Attainment by Generation

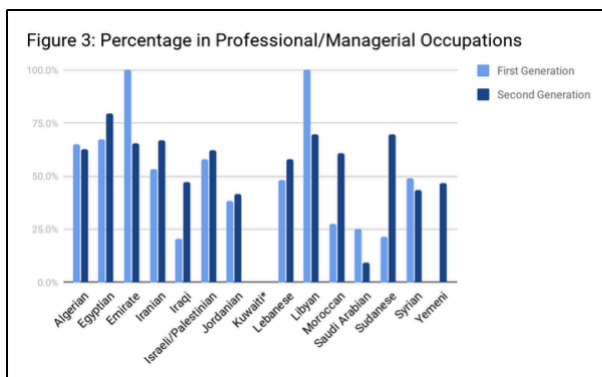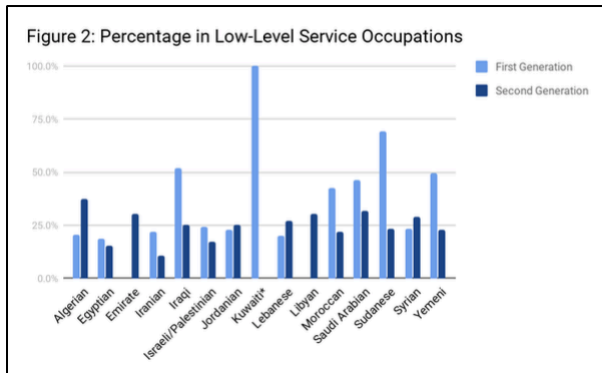| Ethnic Groups	Years of Education	Low-Level Service	Professional/ Managerial
Second-generation			
MENA U.S. Citizens	16	22.1%	58.9%
First generation			
MENA Foreign Born	14	26.6%	49.0%

Source: Pooled CPS 2011, 2013. 2015, 2017
Note: Averages are displayed; Not all percentages add up to 100%

Figures 1, 2, and 3 on the following pages all display the intergenerational mobility of second-generation MENA immigrants by ethnic group, in regards to educational attainment and occupations.[2] On educational attainment, second-generation Egyptian, Iranian, Iraqi, Israeli/Palestinian, Jordanian, Lebanese, Moroccan, Saudi, and Yemeni populations outperform their first-generation proxy parents. Sudanese and Syrian perform the same as their parents, and Algerian, Emirate, and Libyan underperform the first generation. Second generation Egyptian, Iranian, Iraqi, Israeli/Palestinian, Jordanian, Lebanese, Moroccan, Sudanese, and Yemeni all gravitate to professional/managerial occupations in greater percentages and less towards low-level service occupations. For Algerian, Emirate, Libyan, Saudi, and Syrian, the contrary is true. Detailed statistics of these bar charts pictured on the next page are located in the Appendix section.

Figure 1: Years of Education by Immigrant Generation

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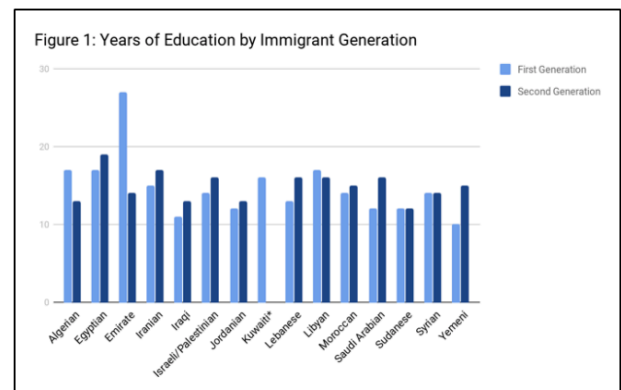
[2] Data is limited for particular groups, such as Kuwaiti, Emirate, and Libyan groups.

Figure 2: Percentage in Low-Level Service Occupations

Figure 3: Percentage in Professional/Managerial Occupations

Table 4: Socioeconomic Attainment by Ethnic Group

Ethnic Groups	Years of Education	Wage and Salary Income	Unemployment Rate	Low-Level Service	Professional/ Managerial
Second-generation					
Algerian	13	$38,740.12	0.0%	37.6%	62.5%
Egyptian	19	$56,748.74	6.4%	15.2%	79.6%
Emirate	14	$52,803.92	0.0%	30.6%	65.7%
Iranian	17	$61,314.55	11.8%	10.8%	67.1%
Iraqi	13	$32,874.57	19.9%	25.4%	47.1%
Israeli/ Palestinian	16	$67,986.89	0.0%	17.1%	62.4%
Jordanian	13	$45,104.44	0.0%	25.4%	41.6%
Kuwaiti*	N/A	$4,762.50	0.0%	N/A	N/A
Lebanese	16	$63,066.64	6.1%	27.1%	58.1%
Libyan	16	$99,299.60	0.0%	30.3%	69.7%
Moroccan	15	$69,886.82	1.5%	22.2%	61.0%
Saudi Arabian	16	$48,810.87	1.9%	31.6%	9.5%
Sudanese	12	$52,038.80	7.2%	23.2%	69.8%
Syrian	14	$40,129.36	0.2%	29.0%	43.3%
Yemeni	15	$25,525.59	16.6%	23.1%	46.9%

Source: Pooled CPS 2011, 2013. 2015, 2017
Note: Averages are displayed
*No data is available on educational attainment; Number of persons surveyed for employment status is extremely low.

3. Assessment of Socioeconomic Distinction

Across the four variables measured for the second-generation MENA population, there is a lot of variability in results. No single ethnic group stands out the most on *all* four variables; however, individually by particular variables, distinction is still demonstrated by some. Concerning educational attainment *and* percentage of individuals in professional/managerial positions, second-generation Egyptians stand out the most, where they have an average of 19 years of education and 79.6% of persons in high-skill level occupations. Iranians have the lowest percentage of persons in low-skill occupations. On measures of average salary income, Libyans have the highest at $99,299.60. There is a six-way tie for first place in regards to unemployment rates. Algerians, Emirates, Israelis/Palestinians, Jordanians, and Libyans all have unemployment rates of 0%. Out of these groups, Libyans have an employment rate of 100%. For further information on employment status, please refer to Table 2. Please note that some of these significant results are due to low sample sizes. Sample sizes of ethnic groups are located in the appendix section.

Discussion and Conclusion

Understanding the socioeconomic integration of second-generation MENA immigrants has been explored through multiple lenses in this paper, and assessments are made based on comparative data, hence the title of this research. Three questions were to be answered by the end of this paper, and those three questions were as follows: (1) How do these U.S. citizens fare in comparison to their native peers?; (2) Do they perform better than their parents?; and (3) Which second generation ethnic groups stand out the most, according to these four variables?

On the first question of socioeconomic integration, the second-generation MENA population as a whole has achieved *second-generation advantage* on measurements of educational attainment and salary income. Their level of education is between a bachelor's degree and a master's degree, whereas the educational level of non-MENA majority whites falls between a high school diploma and a bachelor's degree. This is considered to be the highest benchmark for this particular assessment. Even the salary incomes of second-generation MENA immigrants are around 20% higher than whites. The significance of this reality is that what was achieved in one generation by MENA immigrants was achieved by three *or more* generations of non-MENA whites

and blacks. To put this in context, the findings of Tran and Valdez (2017) concluded *second-generation disadvantage* for Mexicans and Puerto Ricans, whereas other Latinos achieved parity with native whites. Thus, second-generation MENA immigrants demonstrate very striking results compared to their Latino counterparts.

However, their employment status does not follow the same positive trend, where unemployment rates are greater than whites but less than blacks. Thus, *short-distance social mobility* has been achieved for this group altogether. The cause for this discrepancy is unknown, yet one could speculate the influence of discrimination and/or political biases that exist in American society, which have been explored by sociological researchers in the past. In Awad's (2010) study from the University of Texas-Austin, the aim was to determine "the impact of acculturation, ethnic identity and religious affiliation on perceived discrimination for persons of Arab and Middle Eastern descent" (p. 1). The results of this study indicated that Arab/Middle Eastern Americans who reported lower levels of "dominant society immersion," which is code for assimilation, tended to report higher levels of discrimination. Another study by Eshghavi (2017) demonstrates the impact of political attitudes on the personal experiences of Iranian-Americans both in public and private settings. Whether discrimination is a factor in the employment outcomes of second-generation MENA immigrants has yet to be explored in academic research, but the discrepancy does beg the question of why.

By individual ethnic group, second-generation Egyptians, Iranians, Israeli/Palestinians, Lebanese, Libyans, Moroccans, and Saudis all have *second-generation advantage* on measures of education and salary income. Algerians and Iraqis fall under the *short-distance social mobility* category for the same two measurements. Sudanese fall below blacks on education in particular, which places them in the *second-generation disadvantage* category. Kuwaitis and Yemenis fall below blacks in terms of income, thus placing them in the same category as Sudanese. What is most intriguing about the results, however, is the fact that second-generation Iranians and Yemenis have higher educational attainment levels than both whites and blacks, yet they have higher

unemployment rates than both of those groups. Unemployment rates for Iranians and Yemenis are 11.8% and 16.6% respectively, higher than the 10.5% unemployment rate for blacks. A similar pattern holds true for Egyptians, where the unemployment rate (6.4%) is higher than whites (4.9%), regardless of the fact that their educational levels and incomes surpass them substantially. The cause for this paradox needs to be explored in future research by ethnic group as well, along with individual case studies that shed light on the personal experiences of second-generation MENA Americans.

Intergenerational mobility of the second generation was also explored in the context of educational and occupational variables. Overall, *second-generation progress* is achieved, where on average second-generation MENA individuals obtain 16 years of education compared to 14 years of their first-generation counterparts. A similar pattern of progress is demonstrated where 58.9% of second-generation MENA immigrants are, or have been, in professional and/or managerial positions. Close to half (49%) of first-generation MENA immigrants have the same professions. One can also observe a decrease in percentage of MENA immigrants having low-skill occupations from one generation to the next. All of these results point in a positive direction, suggesting that the descendants of MENA immigrants who came to the United States have been on an upward trajectory. Similar results were found in the Tran and Valdez (2017) publication regarding second-generation Latinos. However, there is still evidence of *second-generation decline* for Algerians, Emirates, and Libyans on measurements of education and occupational status.

Finally, socioeconomic distinction cannot be properly assessed for one particular ethnic group, since there is significant variability in the data across the outcome variables. However, second-generation Egyptians stand out as having the highest education levels and greatest percentage of individuals in professional/managerial occupations out of any other group. Further analysis needs to be dedicated to answering why second-generation Egyptian immigrants surpass all of their MENA peers on these two variables in particular. Future research studies may be required to answer the question of which second-generation ethnic groups perform the best *in*

relation to their parents. This leads to our discussion on some of the limitations in this paper. Two major limitations for analysis point to (1) ethnic attrition and (2) lacking and/or missing data from the sample in question.

Subjective measures of ethnic/racial identification may have played a role in determining the results of this research, since survey respondents with multiple identities have the discretion to reveal their ethnic identity or parental heritage as they wish. Some may even be reluctant to participate in such surveys given their fears of governmental and/or legal action from the U.S. federal government (Awad, 2010). Economists, such as Duncan and Trejo (2015), call this potential limitation "ethnic attrition." Factors of intermarriage, religious identity, ethnic identity, upbringing, and social class can have an impact on what respondents choose to reveal to surveyors of CPS. For particularly large ethnic groups, such as Egyptian, Iranian, Iraqi, Israeli/Palestinian, and Sudanese populations, ethnic attrition does not have the potential to construe the results. However, for much smaller populations, this factor can play a greater role. In addition, missing or lacking data, especially for second-generation Kuwaitis, can tamper with proper assessments of socioeconomic integration. It is suggested that this research be expanded upon at a later date, which would include a larger sample, assuming the second-generation MENA population will grow in population and diversity.

Nonetheless, insight on the socioeconomic integration of this immigrant population is very limited, and such research can produce a prospective outlook on future generations of MENA immigrants. Along with many other immigrant populations, as suggested by Tran and Valdez's (2017) work on second-generation Latino assimilation in the aftermath of the 2008 recession, second-generation MENA immigrants have demonstrated positive results. Yet, relatively negative employment outcomes encourage further investigation into the motivations and causes behind these findings.

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Appendix

Table 5: Estimated Population of Ethnic Groups by Immigrant Generation

Ethnic Groups	Sample Numbers	Estimated Population	Percent
Second-generation			
Algerian	17	31,111	2.1%
Egyptian	83	121,178	8.2%
Emirate	44	70,666	4.8%
Iranian	148	306,125	20.7%
Iraqi	50	127,382	8.6%
Israeli/Palestinian	128	255,547	17.3%
Jordanian	39	77,087	5.2%
Kuwaiti	3	6,558	0.4%
Lebanese	94	183,829	12.4%
Libyan	3	6,095	0.4%
Moroccan	19	35,516	2.4%
Saudi Arabian	20	36,304	2.5%
Sudanese	60	100,731	6.8%
Syrian	30	67,856	4.6%
Yemeni	21	50,616	3.4%
Total	759	1,476,601	~100%
Third-and-higher generation			
Native white	244,209	399,860,671	85.6%
Native black	40,091	67,281,244	14.4%
Total	284,300	467,141,915	100%

Source: Pooled CPS 2011, 2013. 2015, 2017

Table 6: Estimated Population of Ethnic Groups by Immigrant Generation

Ethnic Groups	Sample Number	Estimated Population	Percent
First-generation			
Algerian	12	19,700	1.0%
Egyptian	108	217,565	10.8%
Emirate	1	295	0.01%
Iranian	361	830,880	41.2%
Iraqi	121	291,835	14.5%
Israeli/Palestinian	41	99,134	4.9%
Jordanian	46	104,652	5.2%
Kuwaiti	1	2,012	0.1%
Lebanese	88	197,299	9.8%
Libyan	4	7,055	0.3%
Moroccan	26	49,456	2.5%
Saudi Arabian	7	14,352	0.7%
Sudanese	20	27,668	1.4%
Syrian	55	119,369	5.9%
Yemeni	17	35,042	1.7%
Total	908	2,016,315	~100%

Source: Pooled CPS 2011, 2013. 2015, 2017

Note: Sample numbers for interested groups vary by the four measurements used in this paper. Such information can be accessed in the spreadsheets below.

Link to Spreadsheets

A. Second Generation MENA: https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1mX-KdBx8Jlz2ksRXDIT23F86Yz8zd2JRp9Xw21ED-Xs/edit?usp=sharing

B. First Generation MENA: https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1GNyfen-ciVU4ybaIIlrLKWmleFKLxLrVVZfK0mzaViE/edit?usp=sharing

C. Third Generation + non-MENA U.S. Population: https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1fCCRT_sJ3B6Tx5Oap0zrME8PjOgJXnVJTIJ1myK3CDI/edit?usp=sharing

Explanation of Calculations

Please refer to the Google spreadsheet links above for tables and display of calculations.

Example: Average Educational Attainment of Second-Generation MENA by Ethnic Group

1. Tables were divided into six categories: "High School or Less," "High School Diploma or Equivalent," "Bachelor's Degree," "Master's Degree," "Professional School Degree," and "Doctorate Degree." The following number of years were assigned to each category: 0-11, 12, 16, 18, 21-22, 25-29. Midpoints were calculated for each range.

2. Using cross-tabulation results from CPS data, two tables are produced representing Second-Generation MENA by Ethnic Group. Father and mother's birthplace is represented in the two tables.

3. Average years of education for each ethnic group are calculated as follows:
   a. Percentages in each cell are multiplied by the midpoint of each range represented in the columns above that cell. (For columns with no ranges, no midpoint is calculated.)
   b. Next, the addition of those products are then divided by 100.

4. Since there are two tables, one representing father's birthplace and one representing mother's birthplace, one single table is created to compile the average years of education by ethnic group

for both tables. This is for the sake of simplicity when making comparisons.

5. An average of those values are calculated from the two tables, resulting in one value that represents each second-generation MENA ethnic group.

Example: Average Wage and Salary Income of Second-Generation MENA by Ethnic Group

1. Tables were divided into seven categories, which were $0-9525, $9526-38700, $38701-82500, $82501-157500, $157501-200000, $200001-500000, and $500000+. These categories were chosen based on the official 2018 Federal Income Tax Brackets. In the case of the $500000+ category, I apply a range of $500001-1000000 in order to facilitate calculations. However, it is important to also note that this particular income tax bracket applies to individuals who make any income above $500,000.

2. Steps 2-5 above; however, using salary incomes, not years of education.

Example: Employment Status of Second-Generation MENA by Ethnic Group

1. Tables were divided into five categories: "Armed Forces," "Employed," "Unemployed," "Not in Labor Force," and "Retired."

2. Unemployment and Employment rates were calculated for each ethnic group based on weighted N values provided in the tables.

3. Steps 4 & 5 above; however, using unemployment and employment rates, not years of education.

Example: Occupations of Second Generation MENA by Ethnic Group

1. Tables were divided into fourteen categories, which were represented by occupational clusters that cover a multitude of professions: "Chief Executives," "Managers," "Math/Computer Science," "Engineers," "Legal Professions," "Education," "Media, Artists, and Athletes," "Healthcare," "Personal Service," "Sales," "Construction," "Mechanics & Repair," "Production," and "Transportation."

2. Percentage of persons in professional/managerial positions and low-level service occupations were calculated for each ethnic group based on weighted N values provided in the tables.

3. Steps 4 & 5; however, using occupation percentages, not years of education.