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Commentary

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U.S. census bureau watching Arab-Americans

Washington, DC, Jul. 30 (UPI) -- The U.S. Census Bureau has given the Department of Homeland Security detailed demographic data on Arab-Americans, New York Times said Friday.

The tabulations were produced in August 2002 and December 2003.

One piece of datum provides ZIP-code-level breakdowns of Arab-American populations, sorted by country of origin. The categories provided are Egyptian, Iraqi, Jordanian, Lebanese, Moroccan, Palestinian, Syrian and two general categories, "Arab/Arabic" and "Other Arab."

Though legal, civil libertarians and some Arab-American groups liken it to the Census Bureau's compilation of similar information about Japanese-Americans during World War II.

Many of those Japanese-Americans were later incarcerated.

James Zogby, president of the Arab American Institute, said the data sharing is particularly troubling at a time when the Census Bureau is struggling to build trust within Arab-American communities.

"As this gets out, any effort to encourage people to full compliance with the census is down the tubes," Zogby said. "How can you get people to comply when they believe that by complying they put at risk their personal and family security?"

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