



5 Years After Muslim Ban, Middle Eastern and North African Americans Remain Hidden | Opinion

Neda Maghbouleh, University of British Columbia

Ariela Schachter, Washington University in St. Louis

René D. Flores, University of Chicago

Five years ago, President **Donald Trump was sued over the Muslim ban**, which prohibited immigration and travel to the United States from seven majority Muslim countries. Although it is impossible to know how many lives were thrown into disarray by the flick of President Donald Trump's pen, at least **41,000 people** were denied visas based solely on their nationality. An overwhelming majority—94 percent—were people from Iran, Syria and Yemen.

President **Joe Biden**, like other critics of the ban, **proclaimed** that those affected "were the first to feel Donald Trump's assault on Black and brown people." But since a **1944 lawsuit** in which a Arab Muslim man successfully argued that he was white in order to become a naturalized citizen, people from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA, which includes Iran, Syria and Yemen) have been counted as white in the U.S. As a result, and unlike other minorities, an estimated **3 million** MENA Americans do not have a box to mark their identities on the Census or most surveys. And when MENA Americans are masked under the white category, the everyday group- and individual-level inequalities they face are made invisible, making clear that adding a MENA box to the U.S. Census is long overdue.