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Perceptions of Problems, Policies, and Politics of a Controversial Pacific State Mosque

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Walden University

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Frederick Michael Sahakian

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2018

Abstract

Perceptions of Problems, Policies, and Politics of a Controversial Pacific State Mosque

by

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MPA, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, 2001

BS, CUNY Baccalaureate for Unique and Interdisciplinary Studies, 1996

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Public Policy and Administration

Walden University

November 2018

Abstract

Despite the existence of land use and environmental protection policies designed to provide guidance on land development, some projects can still be contentious. As the number of Muslims and mosques in the United States are increasing, little is known about the problematic conditions that Muslims may experience when attempting to site a new mosque, community center, or cemetery. The purpose of this study was to develop a deeper understanding about the experiences and perceptions of those involved in the failed siting of a controversial mosque, community center, and cemetery project in a U.S. West Coast state. The multiple streams framework was used to examine the problem, politics, and policy streams that occurred throughout the case. The research question addressed the key elements that led to community protests and the ensuing state lawsuit. A qualitative case study design was used to analyze literature, news reports, government reports, and the loosely-structured interviews of 15 purposefully-selected community stakeholders. The interview data were coded and categorized for thematic analysis. Results indicated that navigating the politics stream was especially difficult for the mosque applicants because they did not anticipate much resistance and were unaware of community members' concerns about water table contamination. Implications for positive social change include providing policy makers with insight into conflict that may arise in the siting of a mosque, community center, or cemetery and potentially reducing conflict between Muslims and non-Muslims.

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my wife, Lyan Joy. Her love, intelligence, support, and faith encouraged me to keep moving forward. Thank you for never giving up on me, babe. We did it!

Additionally, this dissertation is dedicated to my mother and grandmother, both who left me too soon. Nivart Sahakian and Hortense Mardirossian immigrated to the United States to live the American dream. They gave me the gift of being a first-generation American—something I cherish every day.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

The Muslim population in the United States is increasing, yet little research has been conducted on the problematic conditions that Islamic communities may experience when attempting to build a new mosque, community center, or cemetery (Pew Research Center, 2012). In this study, I addressed the need for a deeper understanding of the experiences of Muslims, government officials, community members, and other stakeholders in the siting of controversial mosques. Despite the existence of land use and environmental protection policies designed to provide guidance on new development projects, there has been little research on the problems, policies, and politics surrounding the siting of a new mosque, community center, and cemetery, as well as why some communities have fiercely opposed new mosques.

The largest wave of Muslim immigrants arrived to the United States in the post-1965 Civil Rights era (Love, 2009). During this time, Muslims were welcomed and encouraged to maintain their Islamic identities (Love, 2009). Since the 1970s, several events, including the taking of U.S. hostages during the Iranian Revolution, the oil embargo of 1973, and the terror attacks of September 11, 2001, have led to a race-based narrative about Muslims in the United States (Croucher et al., 2013; Elver, 2012; Love, 2009; Simmons, 2008; Verinakis, 2007; Yukich, 2018). In the years since the September 11th terror attacks, the relationship between the mosque as a center for Islamic communities and American society has been framed negatively (Bagby, 2009; Bowe, 2013, 2017; Bowe & Makki, 2015; Croucher et al., 2013; Emerson, 2003; Freedom

House, 2005; Horowitz, 2006; Kushner, 2006; Pipes, 2003; Schwartz, 2002; Simmons, 2008; Spencer, 2005; Trump, 2015, 2017; Yukich, 2018). The negative narrative of Islam does not appear to be diminishing, and the construction of mosques in communities whose members have little understanding or tolerance of Muslims continues to be problematic (Bowe, 2017; Bowe & Makki, 2015). As the number of Muslims continues to increase in the United States as a result of migration and conversion, there will likely be an increase in the need for the construction of new mosques, community centers, and cemeteries. Because non-Muslim Americans may know little about Islam, there is a need for a deeper understanding of the needs of Muslims and the communities in which they wish to build mosques (Pew Research Center, 2010).

The divide between Muslims in the United States and non-Muslim Americans has shaped several public controversies regarding the siting of mosques (Bowe, 2013, 2017; Bowe & Makki, 2015). A recent court case about a controversial mosque, the *People's Coalition for Government Accountability vs. County of Santa Clara et al.* (2012), exemplified the difficulties that some Muslim Americans have experienced when trying to build a mosque, community center, or cemetery. Located in the San Francisco Bay Area, the South Valley Islamic Community (SVIC) is a nonprofit organization that serves the Muslim community of San Martin. In 2011, after many years of planning and membership growth, members of the SVIC submitted a proposal to the local government to build the Cordoba Center—a mosque, community center, and cemetery. The Cordoba Center, which was to be built on land that the organization purchased in 2008, was well

received by the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors, but a small group of citizens began to protest the mosque development.

The controversy surrounding development of the Cordoba Center served as the impetus for this study. This chapter includes discussions of the background and challenges of the Cordoba Center, the purpose of the study, the research question posed, and the conceptual framework. In addition, I will present the rationale for the design of the study, as well as the limitations and significance of this study, both for public policy and administration scholarship and positive social change implications.

Background of the Problem

In 2008, the SVIC membership purchased 15 acres of land on which to build a mosque, community center, and cemetery, and in 2011, the SVIC applied to begin construction. Some community members raised objections to the mosque, citing various concerns that included water drainage, increase in traffic, and that the mosque could be used as a terrorist training camp (Estabrook, 2012). Newspaper reports and video from public hearings documented various perceptions of the Cordoba Center from its inception. Complaints about the proposed Cordoba Center came primarily from two groups: the Gilroy-Morgan Hill Patriots ([GMHP] 2017) and the San Martin Neighborhood Alliance ([SMNA] n.d.).

Initial objections to the Cordoba Center included typical land development concerns about water drainage, increased automobile traffic, and the size of the building (Estabrook, 2012; KSBW News 8, 2012; Pew Research Center, 2010). Complaints became more substantial with concerns of contamination of well water by the shrouded

remains in the cemetery and allegations of government favoritism on behalf of the SVIC through the circumvention of land use laws. In addition, some of the most vocal opponents of the Cordoba Center were members of the GMHP who also made anti-Islamic comments, including allegations that the proposed mosque could be used as an Islamic terrorist training camp (Estabrook, 2012). In 2012 and 2013, the GMHP invited anti-Islamic speakers to community and club meetings. These speakers told audience members that violence is a characteristic of Islam, Islam cannot fit into Western culture, and that Islam is not a true religion (Friedman, 2012; Goldberg, 2013).

Court documents indicate that the proposed Cordoba Center was to include two buildings, each 5,000 square feet (The County of Santa Clara, 2012). Officials from Santa Clara County reviewed the application for the Cordoba Center and approved it at a reduced building size, which would not require an environmental impact review (EIR) under the California Environmental Quality Act ([CEQA] 1970). The SVIC appealed the decision and was denied. At the same time, community groups appealed the approval, but were also denied. A few months later, local community members formed the People's Coalition for Government Accountability (PCGA). PCGA sued SVIC through CEQA, a controversial environmental protection law, to stop the Cordoba Center.

The sole enforcement mechanism of CEQA is achieved through citizen-initiated lawsuits, and defending against them can cost a great deal of money (California Natural Resources Agency, 2016; T. Nelson, 2011). A powerful law designed to be accessible to all citizens, CEQA plays an important role in shaping communities in California by allowing the public to challenge land development project approvals by local

government. The law was originally focused on government-led projects, but *Friends of Mammoth et al. v. Board of Supervisors of Mono County* (1972) extended the reach of the law to include all land development in California.

The new scope of the law led to CEQA being described as time-consuming, not supportive of regional planning, expensive, full of contradictions, vague, and often used to stop development projects for non-environmental reasons (Amur, 2007; Barbour & Teitz, 2005; Diaz, 2012; Frick, 2014; Landis, Olshansky, & Huang, 1995; T. Nelson, 2011; Olshansky, 1996; Pinkerton, 1985; Shigley, 2010). Although procedures have been adjusted to improve CEQA, the literature shows that problems still persist, and the results have been mixed (Barbour & Teitz, 2005; T. Nelson, 2011; Olshansky, 1996; Pinkerton, 1985; Shigley, 2010). According to members from SVIC, the CEQA lawsuit was not being used to protect the environment, but for the purpose of preventing Muslims from building a mosque (The County of Santa Clara, 2012). Although Santa Clara County conducted its own environmental studies, the CEQA lawsuit argued that the county did not do enough testing.

Unable to finance a defense against the CEQA court case, the SVIC and PCGA came to a settlement that allowed SVIC to withdraw its application to build the Cordoba Center (*People's Coalition for Government Accountability vs. County of Santa Clara, et al.*, 2012). The settlement required SVIC to pay PCGA \$23,000 in legal costs, and the Cordoba Center process ended on November 5, 2013. Although members of the SVIC indicated that bigotry seemed to play a major role in the resistance to the Cordoba Center, members of the GMHP denied this claim (Estabrook, 2012; KSBW News 8, 2012; Pew

Research Center, 2010). To gain a deeper understanding about the Cordoba Center process and the perceptions of those involved, I used Kingdon's (2011) multiple streams framework (MSF) in this study.

Kingdon's (2011) MSF describes three essential elements needed for a problem to be solved and to appear on the agenda of decision makers: the problem, policy, and politics streams. Although the three streams are not dependent on each another, they must join at the right time to open a policy window and appear on the agenda (Kingdon, 2011). In this study, I used Kingdon's MSF to identify whether the SVIC addressed the three streams and, if so, how the SVIC attempted to navigate them and whether their actions ultimately led to the subsequent lawsuit that forced the withdrawal of the application for the Cordoba Center. Using the case study approach, I examined the steps and possible missteps taken by members of the SVIC and the perceptions of these actions by members of the SMNA, PCGA, local religious organizations, government officials, and other community stakeholders. This purposefully selected, bounded sample of individuals and organizations revealed problematic conditions that other Islamic communities may be able to mitigate when attempting to build a new mosque, community center, or cemetery.

Problem Statement

The problem addressed in this study was the need for a deeper understanding of the conditions that Islamic communities may experience when attempting to build a new mosque, community center, or cemetery. There is a lack of understanding about the experiences of Muslims, government officials, community members, and other stakeholders in the siting of controversial mosques. Despite the existence of land use and

environmental protection policies designed to provide guidance on new development, there is little research on the problems, policies, and politics surrounding the siting of a new mosque, community center, or cemetery and why some communities have fiercely opposed new mosques.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to learn about the experiences and perceptions of those involved in the potential siting of the Cordoba Center, a controversial mosque in San Martin, California. With this study, I attempted to develop a deeper understanding of why the Cordoba Center may not have been successful by collecting and analyzing all available sources of information, including literature, media reports, interviews, and government reports. I applied Kingdon's (2011) MSF to understand the perceptions and actions of members of the various groups involved in the Cordoba Center. Adhering to the case study method allowed me to develop a deeper understanding of how the SVIC identified the problem of needing a new prayer space; the steps it took to try to build a new mosque, community center, and cemetery; how it engaged with the community during the process; and why it had been unsuccessful up to that point. The results of this study also provided insight into the perceptions and actions of members from other groups involved in the case, including the GMHP, SMNA, PCGA, local religious organizations, and government representatives.

Research Question

The main research question was: What are the key elements that led to community protest and the ensuing CEQA lawsuit against the Cordoba Center?

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework for the Study

The theoretical framework is an important part of the research process because it provides the foundation for the study (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). Kingdon's (2011) work provided both the theoretical and the conceptual framework for this study and aided in allowing for a better understanding of the complexities of siting the Cordoba Center. Using the MSF to examine the Cordoba Center allowed me to critique the theory while examining what did and did not work well.

Kingdon (2011) proposed that the setting of agendas in government by internal and external actors can occur in many different ways in the form of coupling problems, policies, and politics. The setting of agendas in government allows problems to be addressed. For an item to appear on the agenda, the problem, policy, and politics streams must join at the right moment to take advantage of policy windows (Kingdon, 2011).

In this case study, the problem stream (as defined by Kingdon, 2011) was the need for a new mosque, community center, and cemetery. I examined the actions and perceptions of purposefully selected individuals to gain a deeper understanding of the circumstances behind the siting of the Cordoba Center. Identifying and analyzing the details of each stream and policy window provided insight into the challenges that communities may experience during the siting of a new mosque.

SVIC initiated the application process to build the Cordoba Center, which, although well received by local government, was met with resistance by some community members. Kingdon (2011) indicated that actors outside of the government, such as interest groups and policy entrepreneurs, can affect policy agendas by inserting

alternatives into the discussion (p. 48). When conducting case studies, the researcher can often identify individuals as policy entrepreneurs who move up an item on the agenda (Kingdon, 2011). Policy entrepreneurs invest their resources to push their agendas and ideas in many ways in hopes of future returns (Kingdon, 2011, p. 199). Conceptually framing this case study through the lens of MSF also aided me in understanding how policy entrepreneurs involved with the Cordoba Center coupled problems and solutions. Kingdon's MSF helped to frame the actions taken by stakeholders at different phases of the Cordoba Center application process, which helped me in understanding the challenges of siting the Cordoba Center. I will provide an in-depth discussion of MSF in Chapter 2.

Nature of the Study

To gain a deeper understanding of the Cordoba Center application, I conducted a case study. A case study was appropriate because this research design provides insight into and a detailed understanding of complex issues and allows for a broader appreciation of an issue (see Yin, 2014). Following a qualitative approach allowed me to focus on the people involved in the Cordoba Center approval process and use their words, rather than just numbers and statistics to measure perceptions (see Maxwell, 2012).

Maxwell (2012) indicated that quantitative researchers use variables as the primary way to view the world. Quantitative explanations are based on statistical relationships between different variables. The following characteristics of qualitative research allowed me to develop a deeper understanding of the complex nature and perceptions surrounding the Cordoba Center that a quantitative study might not have been able to:

- a focus on understanding events and participant actions during the events;
- provides flexibility during the study to allow the researcher to modify the study and pursue new discoveries;
- provides ability to develop causal explanations;
- generates findings that are understandable and credible to participants and others;
- attends to improving existing practices, programs, or policies; and
- engages in collaborative community-based research with study participants (Maxwell, 2012).

By conducting a case study and interviewing the people involved in the process of siting the Cordoba Center, the results of this study provided insight into a problem through a specific example. Data for this case study came from various sources, including interviews, scholarly literature, government reports, and news reports. This method of study allowed for the collection of data that provided insight into the actions and perceptions of individuals and organizations involved in the Cordoba Center.

Purposeful sampling yielded interview participants best qualified to understand the Cordoba Center application process from submission to withdrawal (see Creswell, 2013). I conducted interviews with stakeholders, coded their feedback, and then developed themes from those codes. The data were analyzed to gain a better understanding of the nature of the resistance to the Cordoba Center.

Assumptions

I made several assumptions in conducting this study. My key assumptions in this qualitative case study were that, regardless of their position on the matter, participants would be available to be interviewed and would be honest and forthcoming about the Cordoba Center case, their perceptions of the support for or objections to the project, and the use of CEQA as a means to stop the construction. These assumptions were necessary to advance the study to gain a deeper understanding of why Muslims may experience problematic conditions when attempting to site a new mosque, community center, or cemetery.

Creswell (2013) discussed philosophical assumptions that a researcher holds during a qualitative study. Two assumptions, ontology and epistemology, were an appropriate fit for this case study. The ontological assumption indicates that reality is subjective, as seen by the study participants (Creswell, 2007); therefore, the reasons why the development of the Cordoba Center had faced resistance was likely to vary between interview participants. The epistemological assumption allows the researcher to go into the field to work as closely as possible with participants (Creswell, 2007). To get to know the stakeholders and potential interview participants, I attended community meetings as a member of the public. Attendees who supported or opposed the Cordoba Center were open and eager to discuss their viewpoints with me. Spending time in the field allowed me to build trust with potential participants, which resulted in rich, detailed interview data that can be cited as evidence (see Creswell, 2013).

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this study was the application of Kingdon's (2011) MSF, delimited to actions of the SVIC during the application process for building the Cordoba Center from 2008 to 2013. I conducted examinations of records, news reports, and interviews using the MSF to gain a deeper understanding of the problems, policy, and politics involved in the case. Kingdon's MSF was selected as the conceptual and theoretical framework because it allowed me to critique the theory while examining what did and did not work well during the Cordoba Center application process.

The characteristics of qualitative methodologies include requiring smaller sample sizes than quantitative studies, as well as careful participant selection (Jensen, 2012). This study was an in-depth investigation into the Cordoba Center application process from the viewpoints of various stakeholders. Participants included members from the SVIC, PCGA, GMHP, SMNA, Santa Clara government officials, local religious leaders, and other community members.

In qualitative research, the researcher attempts to develop a study with rich, contextualized elements that may be generalizable to other contexts (Jensen, 2012). Doing so allows readers to determine if the study can be applied to their own setting. To improve this transferability, the researcher must consider how relevant a participant is to the study and make sure that questions are answered properly (Jensen, 2012).

Limitations

The limitations of this study included the availability of study participants and mitigated bias. Given the daily schedules of individuals, it may have been difficult to

recruit participants for in-depth interviews. There was also a lack of willingness by some potential participants to be involved in the study due to concerns about my intentions. To meet scheduling requirements, I adjusted my own schedule, as needed, and whether the interview was face to face, via video chat, or by telephone. To build an interest in participation, I reached out to members of the SVIC, PCGA, GMHP, SMNA, Santa Clara government, and local religious organizations prior to the recruitment of participants to develop a rapport with their groups and the public. Other limitations included whether key members had died or left their respective organizations. If a key member was identified, I attempted to obtain contact information and reach out to that member.

In a qualitative study, the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2013). Through my training at Walden University, I was aware of my role as a student researcher and the need to minimize bias. There were three areas of potential bias that I strove to minimize, including political beliefs, being a non-Muslim Westerner, and having limited knowledge of Islam. The political viewpoints of the GMHP did not and do not align with my political beliefs. The GMHP was an important source of interviewees, and I took great care to diligently bracket my personal political biases while collecting the data. I maintained a reflexive posture throughout the interview process and have reported the different viewpoints as accurately as possible.

Finally, I am a non-Muslim American, and the United States has been in conflict with several Muslim-based nations. In addition, I was present during the attacks on the World Trade Center, working a few blocks away on September 11, 2001. I have mitigated this potential bias through self-education by reading the Qur'an and developing

a better understanding of Islamic beliefs and culture. I have identified no other potential ethical issues regarding my role as the researcher in this study.

Significance

Since the 1970s, the number of mosques in the United States has increased by 87% to meet the needs of a growing Muslim population (Hummel, 2012). If past trends are an indicator of future growth, Islam and the number of mosques in the United States will continue to increase. As those numbers increase, policy makers will require more information about how to address the siting of mosques and Islamic cemeteries. A review of public hearing testimony regarding the application for the Cordoba Center indicated there were public concerns and protests, and little is known about the problems that Muslim communities experience regarding this topic.

The results of this study have several positive social change implications. Upon final approval by Walden University, I intend to share the results at a public forum in the San Martin or Gilroy community. By informing the community and helping them to understand the nuanced perceptions of both Muslims and community members, Muslims may be able to site mosques with less resistance. Second, new information may allow decision makers to be more aware of the circumstances that can exist behind controversial mosques. This knowledge could shape better policies that reduce costs associated with the process of land development and litigation.

Summary

The number of Muslims in the United States is increasing, yet little research has been conducted on the problematic conditions that Islamic communities may experience

when attempting to build a new mosque, community center, or cemetery. The largest wave of Muslim immigrants arrived to the United States in the post-1965 Civil Rights era (Love, 2009). During this time, Muslims were welcomed and encouraged to maintain their Islamic identities (Love, 2009). This response soon changed in the 1970s after various events, including the taking of U.S. hostages during the Iranian Revolution, the oil embargo of 1973, and the terror attacks on September 11, 2001 (Elver, 2012; Love, 2009). These events and public opinions about Muslims have led to a difficult time period for some Muslims' attempts to build mosques in their communities.

In 2011, the SVIC applied to build an Islamic community center in San Martin, California. The Cordoba Center was to include a community center, mosque, and cemetery. The Cordoba Center was fiercely protested by the PCGA, an ad hoc community organization. By using CEQA, the PCGA was able to prevent the Cordoba Center from being built.

CEQA is a powerful and controversial law that is at the center of many land development projects throughout California and has been criticized for being open to abuse for non-environmental protection purposes (Amur, 2007; Barbour & Teitz, 2005; Diaz, 2012; Frick, 2014; Landis et al., 1995; T. Nelson, 2011; Olshansky, 1996; Pinkerton, 1985; Shigley, 2010). A CEQA lawsuit is often expensive and time-consuming to defend against. In 2013, the SVIC, unable to afford a defense against the CEQA lawsuit, withdrew its application to build the Cordoba Center.

To gain insight into the siting of controversial mosques, my intent was to use the theoretical and conceptual lens of Kingdon's (2011) MSF to explore the events involved

in the Cordoba Center application process. An examination of the literature and participant interviews provided a deeper understanding of this complex issue. Conducting a case study of the Cordoba Center while using the MSF helped me to answer the following research question: What are the key elements that led to community protest and the ensuing CEQA lawsuit against the Cordoba Center?

Chapter 2 will begin with a rich overview of the iterative keyword search process and an in-depth consideration of the theoretical and conceptual framework of multiple streams, Muslims in the United States, and CEQA. In the chapter, I will also provide a summary and analysis of previous literature, media reports, and government reports on the siting of the Cordoba Center. I will conclude with a summary of Chapter 2.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The number of Muslims living in the United States is increasing, yet little research has been conducted on the problematic conditions that Islamic communities may experience when they attempt to build a new mosque, community center, and cemetery (Pew Research Center, 2012). In this study, I addressed the need for a deeper understanding of the experiences of Muslims and other stakeholders in the siting of mosques. Despite the existence of land use and environmental protection policies designed to provide guidance on new development projects, there has been little research on the problems, policies, and politics surrounding the siting of a new mosque, community center, or cemetery.

In this study, I analyzed the experiences and perceptions of stakeholders in their pursuit of development of the Cordoba Center, a controversial mosque in San Martin, California, proposed by members of the SVIC. The results of this study provide a deeper understanding, through application of Kingdon's (2011) MSF, of why the Cordoba Center may have not been successful. My case study research explored how members from the SVIC identified the problem of needing a new prayer space, the steps the SVIC took to build a new mosque, and how the SVIC engaged with the community during the process.

In this chapter, I will examine the theoretical and research background of the study. I will begin with a summary of the iterative search for relevant journal articles, government reports, court documents, and media reports. The chapter will continue with

a discussion of the theoretical and conceptual framework used to provide a foundation for the study. I will explain how the framework has been used in the past and why it was appropriate for this study. Finally, I will present research relevant to the goals and potential contributions of the study, including research on Muslims in the United States, the SVIC, CEQA, and details about the Cordoba Center.

Literature Search Strategy

In this literature review, I will provide an integrated summary of the most relevant published scholarly research on the siting of controversial mosques as the process relates to public policy. No studies have been conducted that explored how or why the processes of siting of some mosques trigger a greater magnitude of community resistance than other mosques. This lack of research may mean that decision makers do not have sufficient information to make good policy decisions.

This literature review will include articles published in peer-reviewed journals from several fields of research, including law, planning, and social, environmental, and political sciences. Reports from governmental and nongovernmental organizations will also be cited. I will begin with a discussion of the process of using keywords to find peer-reviewed articles that incorporated all relevant perspectives of the problem statement. The databases, search engines, and keywords that I used to gather articles, reports, and other resources to conduct the research will be discussed.

The main purpose of using documents in a study is to support and build upon other sources of data (Yin, 2014). The databases I searched to locate and retrieve journal articles and other documents included Academic Search Complete, ABI/Inform

Complete, the dissertations and theses databases at Walden University, LexisNexis, Political Science Complete, EBSCO, Google Scholar, ProQuest, and Sage. The following websites yielded archival records, crime statistics, meeting minutes, videos, and information: Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), County of Santa Clara, SVIC, SMNA, and GMHP. Documents regarding the CEQA lawsuit were retrievable from the Santa Clara Superior Court. My document and literature review began in 2011 and was ongoing until I completed this study in November 2018. I continue to monitor data sources for any new information.

I started the research process by using the Academic Search Complete database with the option to search all databases enabled. Initially, I focused on gaining an understanding of the literature on Islam by using the following terms: *imam*, *mosque*, *Islam*, *Muslim*, and *Islamophobia*. These terms provided very broad results, including literature about Islamophobia occurring internationally.

Next, I added the following terms to narrow the scope: *September 11th*, *Islam* and *September 11th*, *Muslim*, *Islamophobia* and *September 11th*, *controversial* and *mosque*, and *NIMBY*. The results provided information on the growth of Islam in the United States through migration and conversion, experiences of Muslims after September 11th, and discussions about other controversial mosques in cities such as New York City and Murfreesboro, Tennessee. The search terms provided a foundation for a deeper investigation and showed patterns of relevancy in scholarly research.

I conducted further research on the Pew Research Center website to learn more about controversial mosques. The Pew Research Center website provided a detailed map

of mosques across the United States that experienced resistance to development. Objections to the mosques included concerns about traffic, privacy, lighting, property values, and fears about Islam. The Cordoba Center was of particular interest to me because it had passed environmental tests but was still experiencing community resistance (Pew Research Center, 2012).

Searching the Academic Search Complete database for the terms *land use*, *zoning laws*, and *land development* led to research that provided an understanding of land development. The results of these searches returned a broad scope of information about state and federal laws, including the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act ([RLUIPA] 2000) and the National Environmental Protection Act ([NEPA] 1970). Searching the term *National Environmental Policy Act* provided information on state-level equivalents of NEPA, referred to as *little NEPAs* (“CEQA at 40,” 2011). Adding *California* to the keyword search further narrowed the results, providing deeper insight into the political sensitivity of land use in California. To learn more about concerns regarding the siting of mosques in California, I researched the following terms: *CEQA* and *religious freedom*, *CEQA* and *mosque*, *land use* and *Islam*, *CEQA complaints*, and *CEQA reform*. Keywords with common CEQA themes included *fixing CEQA*, *CEQA compliance*, and *CEQA* and *good planning*.

To learn how other researchers used Kingdon’s (2011) MSF and to identify a gap in the literature to further justify this study, I searched using the following keywords and phrases: *Kingdon* and *multiple streams framework*, *Kingdon* and *Islam*, *multiple streams* and *Islam*, *multiple streams* and *culture*, and *multiple streams framework* and *mosque*. I

then used the same keywords to search the Thoreau and Political Science Complete databases. These searches led to the new keywords and phrases: *property rights* and *regional planning* and *sustainability*. The ABI/Inform Complete, the dissertations and theses databases at Walden University, LexisNexis, and Academic and Political Science Complete databases were also searched using combinations of these keywords.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Kingdon's MSF allows researchers to examine the problems, policy, and politics streams of a case study with a great deal of flexibility (Cairney & Jones, 2015).

Kingdon's (2011) framework stems from analysis of U.S. federal policies and describes three essential elements needed for a problem to be solved: the problem, policy, and politics streams. The MSF has been applied extensively and at various levels of government due to its universal elements. This flexibility has led to the MSF being used to build key areas of policy theory (Cairney & Jones, 2015).

Although criticism of the MSF includes its preference to view the streams as interdependent and its emphasis that the streams operate on mere chance (Howlett, McConnell, & Perl, 2014; Knaggård, 2015; Mucciaroni, 1992; Robinson & Eller, 2010), the MSF was suitable for studying the Cordoba Center case for several reasons. The MSF has been one of the main models of public policy research and has been extended to include a variety of scenarios in the United States and abroad (Zahariadis, 2014; Zahariadis & Allen, 1995), including transportation policy (Lindquist, 2006), environmental policy (Clark, 2004), health policy (Kusi-Ampofo, Church, Conteh, & Heinmiller, 2015; Sardell & Johnson, 1998), and food policy (Balarajan & Reich, 2016).

Various researchers have applied the MSF to local government agenda setting to identify the three streams and used the framework as an organizing and explanatory tool (Guldbrandsson & Fossum, 2009; Liu, Lindquist, Vedlitz, & Vincent, 2010). The authors of these studies concluded that, by being able to identify elements of the MSF, the public policy process may be improved through providing information to decision makers and policy entrepreneurs. Guldbrandsson and Fossum (2009) went even further by concluding that the speed of coupling the three streams may increase if the streams are easier to identify. To provide much-needed insight into the process of siting a controversial mosque, I applied Kingdon's (2011) MSF to the Cordoba Center application process on the local level to identify and analyze SVIC member activity within the three streams.

Although the problem, policy, and politics streams work independently, all three streams must join, in no particular linear order, to get the attention of decision makers and for agenda setting to take place (Kingdon, 2011). Also, all three streams must join at the right time to enter the policy window (Cairney & Jones, 2015; Kingdon, 2011). The problem stream represents the process of recognizing a problem that is perceived as important and requires government action (Kingdon, 2011). When a problem gets the attention of decision makers, the problem will appear on agendas that government officials and people outside of government can try to resolve (Cairney & Jones, 2015; Kingdon, 2011).

The policy or solution stream represents infinite proposals and alternatives that float around in a primordial soup, constantly changing and waiting to be joined with problems (Kingdon, 2011). Successful ideas are selected based on several criteria, such

as technical feasibility, shared community values, and budgets (Kingdon, 2011). In the politics stream, items such as elections, public mood, and interest group demands can determine if an agenda item rises or falls, and players must pay close attention to coalition building or pay a major price (Kingdon, 2011).

Policy windows are opportunities for advocates to persuade others of the importance of an issue (Kingdon, 2011). By joining together the three streams, advocates can get their projects or topics of interest onto the decision agenda and are able to use the open policy window to advance their cause (Kingdon, 2011). When a topic appears on the decision agenda, the topic is put under review for an imminent decision by decision makers. For a topic to be high on the decision agenda, it must have a solution attached to a problem and have support from the politics stream (Kingdon, 2011).

I also considered several other public policy theories for this study, but found them inappropriate. For example, the advocacy coalition theory (Jenkins-Smith, Nordstedt, Weible, & Sabatier, 2014), which uses groups of advocates as the unit to describe the public policy process, was not considered appropriate because initial clarifying research on the Cordoba Center lacked clarity about whether the members of at least one major group opposed the Cordoba Center. Also, the advocacy coalition theory does not sufficiently explain what coordinated efforts define an actual coalition (Fischer, Miller, & Sidney, 2006). Another theory that I considered was rational choice (Geddes, 1994). Rational choice was not chosen because it focuses on the self-interest of elected officials to carry out reforms. In this study, self-interests and reelection concerns were not the likely cause of the problem in siting the Cordoba Center because the Board of

Supervisors—the elected officials overseeing the Cordoba Center application—approved the Cordoba Center in opposition to very vocal community organizations (Geddes, 1994; Zahariadis & Allen, 1995).

Muslims in the United States

Muslims have a long history in the United States; they have migrated from various countries in waves (Elver, 2012). The first Muslim immigrant wave was composed of African Muslim slaves (Elver, 2012). The next wave came in the late 19th and early 20th century from Arabic-speaking parts of the Ottoman Empire; members of this wave attempted to integrate and assimilate (Elver, 2012). The third wave came after World War II, between 1947 and 1960, followed by the fourth and largest Muslim population influx, between 1965 and 2016 (Elver, 2012).

Prior to 1965, U.S. immigration policy favored European immigration based on a national origins quota (Elver, 2012). The post-1965 wave of Muslim immigrants entered into a post-Civil Rights movement United States (Love, 2009). This wave reflected new policies that favored family unification, certain occupations, and asylum for refugees (Elver, 2012).

During the post-1965 wave, non-Muslim Americans were open to immigrants maintaining their multiculturalism, religion, and heritage; the pressure to assimilate into American culture was less than it was on Muslims in previous waves (Elver, 2012). The post-1965 generation of immigrants built mosques and other places of worship (Elver, 2012). Although most non-Muslim Americans accepted immigrants' efforts to maintain their cultural traditions, some non-Muslim Americans still held ambiguous feelings about

immigrants (Love, 2009). Malcolm X and other Islamic spiritual leaders who were seen as radical during the Civil Rights era fueled the flames of skepticism toward Muslims but, for the most part, Islam and Muslims had low visibility in American culture at that time (Peña, 2009).

Three historic events that occurred since the 1970s heightened negative opinions about Islam: the Arab oil embargo; the Iranian Revolution and the taking of American hostages; and the terror attacks of September 11, 2001 (Simmons, 2008). These additional challenges encouraged the development of new American policies that created a racialized narrative about Middle Easterners, Arabs, and Muslims in response to so-called “rogue states,” such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, and Syria (Love, 2009). The decade after the terror attacks of September 11, 2001, posed many challenges for the American Muslim community. Although the events of September 11 were perceived as an attack by external forces (contrary to the attacks in Spain [2004] and London [2005], which were perceived as insiders’ jobs), they brought even greater difficulties and escalating complexities for Muslims in America (Peña, 2009; Yukich, 2018). The U.S. Department of Justice ([DOJ] 2010) reported that attacks and threats of violence against people who were or were perceived to be Muslim occurred within hours of the September 11 attacks. In addition, the FBI (2001) reported that, following the terror attacks in 2001, anti-Muslim crime incidents increased by 1,400%. Although anti-Muslim hate crimes have decreased since the 2001 spike, FBI data show that they have not returned to pre-September 11 levels (FBI, 2001; Yukich, 2018).

Negative attitudes toward Muslims have continued to increase due to a variety of factors, including the continued turmoil in the Middle East, backlash from September 11, President Trump having signed Executive Order 13769 to block immigration from seven Muslim-majority countries, and President Trump having suggested that the names of Muslims entering the United States be added to a registry (Bagby, 2009; Belt, 2016; Bowe, 2013, 2017; Bowe & Makki, 2015; Croucher et al., 2013; Frick, 2014; Goldberg, 2013; Hacking, 2010; Haddad, 2007; Hummel, 2012; Johnston, 2016; Leonard, 2005; Love, 2009; Mazrui, 2004; Peña, 2009; Pew Research Center, 2010; Politico, 2007; Razack, 2005; Shaver, Troughton, Sibley, & Bulbulia, 2016; Trump, 2015, 2017; Yukich, 2018). This increased scrutiny has also extended to those with refugee status, as evident in the 2004 Iraq war, which propelled a massive flood of refugees into the Middle East (Elver, 2012). Although some Iraqis were given political refugee status in the United States, their allegiance was questioned, and some non-Muslim Americans, including the media, wondered if they posed a threat to U.S. national security (Elver, 2012).

The lack of a clear spiritual or political leader in the Islamic community has created uncertainty regarding who is entitled to serve as the spokesperson for American Muslims, thus adding to the rising prejudice towards American Muslims (Croucher et al., 2013; Peña, 2009). Although mosques have imams to lead congregations, imams do not seem to represent the same sole source of guidance and representation as do the leaders (e.g., a pope, bishops, or rabbis) of other faiths. This disparity creates concerns among some non-Muslim Americans because they do not know who the spokesperson or representative is for Muslim communities (Peña, 2009).

As the number of Muslims has increased in the United States, so have the number of mosques (Hummel, 2012; Pew Research Center, n.d.). Since the 1970s, the number of mosques in the United States has grown by 87% (Hummel, 2012). Between 2000 and 2010, 897 new mosques were established to reach a total of 2,106 mosques (Pew Research Center, n.d.). If past trends are an indicator of future growth, Islam and the number of mosques in the United States will continue to increase.

Since the terror attacks of September 11, 2011, there have been several public controversies regarding the construction of mosques in the United States (Bowe, 2013, 2017). In addition to the controversy of Park 51 (the Ground Zero mosque), there have been more than 50 other controversial mosques across the country (Bowe, 2013; KSBW News 8, 2012). Although Muslims make up 1% of the American population, between 2001 and 2011, 14% of land use investigations conducted by the DOJ (2011) involved mosques or Muslim schools. In addition, trends suggested that anti-Muslim bias in zoning was on the rise (DOJ, 2011). Mosque opponents have voiced a variety of concerns about the siting of mosques in their communities, including those surrounding environmental and quality of life issues (KSBW News 8, 2012). More controversial objections have engaged fear-mongering by claiming that Islam is an ideology that preaches violence and is not a true religion (Friedman, 2012; Goldberg, 2013).

South Valley Islamic Community

The SVIC is a 501(c)3 public charity with a mission of helping people learn about Islam. The organization is active in the religious, educational, and social aspects of the Muslim community in Santa Clara County, California (SVIC, n.d.). Established in 1999,

SVIC originally began as a collaboration of a small group of people who had to drive to mosques outside of their community for congregational prayers and other religious functions. To attend Friday afternoon prayers, members had to drive 25 minutes north during heavy traffic to San Jose (The County of Santa Clara, 2012). This trek posed a problem for the group, so they worked with the South Bay Islamic Association, a larger Islamic organization, and rented an office space in that community, allowing them to hold prayers closer to home. Over the next few years, the group outgrew the office space. In 2001, the organization began religious services in a converted barn with limited space (Estabrook, 2012). In 2006, the SVIC started putting together plans for building the Cordoba Center, an Islamic center, which included a mosque, community center, and cemetery (Estabrook, 2012).

In 2011, after many years of planning and membership growth, the SVIC submitted a proposal to the local government to build the Cordoba Center. The Cordoba Center, which would be built on land that the organization purchased in 2008, was well received by the local board of supervisors, but a small group of citizens began to protest the mosque development (Estabrook, 2012; Fehely, 2016). Initial complaints included typical land development concerns, such as traffic and sewage draining, but the loudest objectors were protesters who suggested the proposed mosque would be used as an Islamic terrorist training camp and that Islam was not a true religion, but an ideology (Friedman, 2012; Goldberg, 2013). During this time, self-described experts on Islam spoke in the community and stated that Islam is a violent religion (Goldberg, 2013).

The County of Santa Clara Board of Supervisors approved the Cordoba Center after the planning commission indicated that the project plans passed land use tests (Estabrook, 2012). The PCGA then filed a lawsuit against SVIC and the Santa Clara Board of Supervisors using CEQA. Scholars have raised concerns about the challenges that Muslims are experiencing when they attempt to build a mosque, but the literature does not provide a deep understanding into the problems, actions, or perceptions (Bagby, 2009, 2011; Bowe, 2013; Bowe & Makki, 2015; Hummel, 2012; Peña, 2009). In this case study, I focused on the Cordoba Center to gain the much-needed, deeper understanding of the problem.

California Environmental Quality Act

In 1969, the United States experienced an oil spill off the coast of Santa Barbara, California. The disaster was the worst spill in history at that time. The spill leaked 3 million gallons of crude oil into the ocean, resulting in the deaths of thousands of birds, fish, and sea mammals (“CEQA at 40,” 2011). At about the same time, national awareness of the need to protect the environment was at a heightened state, and Congress was preparing to respond with legislation that would eventually be NEPA (1970). While NEPA focused on the preparation of environmental reviews of federal projects, California enacted CEQA (1970) to provide state and local decision makers with the best available information available regarding any environmental impacts posed by land development projects. CEQA has become the premiere environmental protection law in California (“CEQA at 40,” 2011; Henry, 2000). The foundation of CEQA is built upon three purposes: to inform public decision makers of any environmental impacts of a

project, to identify and implement feasible alternatives to mitigate any impacts, and to promote public participation in the environmental review of the project (Henry, 2000).

To meet its founding purposes, CEQA guidelines were established by the State of California Governor's Office of Planning and Research (2016). These guidelines provide criteria and procedures for evaluating a project. The guidelines are as follows:

1. Determine if a project is subject to review or is exempt.
2. Conduct an initial study to determine environmental impact.
3. Prepare an EIR if a project will have a significant impact.

Although CEQA is a law about process, it has been controversial throughout its history. CEQA has been described as time-consuming, expensive, full of contradictions, vague, and often used to stop the development of projects for non-environmental reasons (Amur, 2007; Barbour & Teitz, 2005; Diaz, 2012; Frick, 2014; Landis et al., 1995; T. Nelson, 2011; Olshansky, 1996; Pinkerton, 1985; Shigley, 2010). Citizens can launch legal challenges in court using the single enforcement mechanism of CEQA, which may provide opportunities to abuse the law for reasons other than environmental protection. Several studies have documented legal actions used to stop controversial development in neighborhoods (Amur, 2007; Curtin, 2004; Frick, 2014; Landis et al., 1995; Lefcoe, 2006; T. Nelson, 2011; Shigley, 2010).

A study conducted in the San Francisco Bay Area, where San Martin is located, examined fierce opposition to the Plan Bay Area land use project (Frick, 2014). Plan Bay Area was a regional effort to develop a holistic approach to plan for regional sustainability and affordable housing. Interviews with Tea Party activists resistant to the

plan revealed fears of the redistribution of wealth from residents of suburban areas to central cities and that regional agencies had financial incentives to side with developers, environmentalists, and social justice groups (Frick, 2014, p. 3). Tea Party and property rights groups used CEQA to file a lawsuit to stop the proposed development plans. The groups argued that the plans violated CEQA and disagreed with the requirements to address climate change, transport plans, and land use plans (Frick, 2014, p. 4). Proponents of the Plan Bay Area project reported that the opposition purposely spread misinformation and fear (Frick, 2014, p. 5).

In the case of the Cordoba Center, although Santa Clara County conducted its own environmental studies, the PCGA filed a lawsuit arguing that the county and SVIC did not prepare an EIR. Unable to finance a court case, the SVIC and PCGA came to an agreement that allowed SVIC to withdraw its application for the Cordoba Center, but also required the SVIC to pay PCGA \$23,000 in legal costs (*People's Coalition for Government Accountability vs. County of Santa Clara, et al.*, 2012). Once both parties agreed to the terms of the lawsuit and the courts accepted the agreement, the SVIC withdrew its application for the Cordoba Center; the project officially ended on November 5, 2013 (*People's Coalition for Government Accountability vs. County of Santa Clara, et al.*, 2012).

Summary

In Chapter 2, I examined literature from various sources, including scholarly literature, media reports, and government reports. The literature identified a gap in understanding the experiences of Muslims by government officials, community members,

and other stakeholders in the siting of controversial mosques. Since the 1970s, the racialized narrative about Muslims in the United States has increased. The construction of mosques in communities that have little understanding or tolerance of Muslims continues to be problematic. Although Islam is a growing religion in the United States, there has been little research on the problems, policies, and politics surrounding the siting of a new mosque, community center, and cemetery and why some communities have fiercely opposed new mosques.

In 2008, the SVIC purchased 15 acres of land in San Martin, California, to build the Cordoba Center—a mosque, community center, and cemetery. A large movement then mobilized against the mosque. Local government approved the Cordoba Center; however, a few local citizens groups opposed the Cordoba Center. The PCGA, a group opposed to the Cordoba Center, sued to stop the Center using CEQA, a California environmental protection law. In this study, I addressed the need for a deeper understanding of the experiences of Muslims, government officials, community members, and other stakeholders in the siting of controversial mosques. No scholars have studied the Cordoba Center, and using the MSF provided clarity into whether ignorance of the streams contributed to a situation that has been stereotyped as Islamophobia.

Researchers use MSF to examine the problems, policy, and politics streams of a case. The use of MSF has been extensive in the literature. Scholars have used the MSF to examine a variety of public policy issues that have included matters of public health, transportation, food, and the environment. The MSF has also been used to help build key areas of policy theory. Through in-depth interviews with various stakeholders, my intent

was to examine the problems, policies, and politics streams of siting the Cordoba Center and learn why the SVIC experienced a great deal of resistance.

In Chapter 3, I will discuss the study methodology, which includes the research design and the role of the researcher. The data collection and analysis plan will be presented. In addition, an approach to the ethical considerations needed to protect participants from any type of risk as a result of the research will be offered.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to document the experiences and perceptions of those involved in the siting of the Cordoba Center, a controversial mosque, cemetery, and community center in San Martin, California. I used Kingdon's (2001) MSF as the conceptual and analytical model to reconstruct the unfolding of the policy process. Data were analyzed to test whether the theory of MSF explains why siting the Cordoba Center was not successful. A qualitative case study provides insight into and a detailed understanding of complex issues and allows for a broader appreciation of an issue (Yin, 2014). Conducting a case study allowed me to explore how members of the SVIC identified the problem of needing a new prayer space, the steps they took to build a new mosque, and how they engaged with the community during the process. An instrumental case study, as outlined by Yin (2011), allows the study to be applicable to similar situations, so the results of this study will provide insight into the possible challenges that Muslims in the United States may experience when planning to build an Islamic center.

In this chapter, I will examine the research methodology used for this study. I will begin with a discussion of the research design and rationale for using a case study, followed by the role of the researcher, and methodology. The Methods section will include information about data collection, participant recruitment, data analysis, and ethical considerations. The chapter will conclude with issues of trustworthiness and a summary of the chapter.

Research Design and Rationale

The main research question was: What are the key elements that led to community protest and ensuing CEQA lawsuit against the Cordoba Center? Islam is a religion with growing numbers of members in the United States, yet little research has been conducted on the problematic conditions that Islamic communities may experience when attempting to build a new mosque, community center, or cemetery (Pew Research Center, 2012). In this study, I addressed the need for a deeper understanding of the experiences of Muslims, government officials, community members, and other stakeholders in the siting of controversial mosques. Despite the existence of land use and environmental protection policies designed to provide guidance on new development projects, there has been little research on the problems, policies, and politics surrounding the siting of a new mosque, community center, or cemetery, as well as why some communities have fiercely opposed new mosques.

As I discussed in Chapter 2, Kingdon's (2011) MSF consists of three essential elements needed for a problem to be solved: the problem, policy, and politics streams. For a problem or idea to be addressed and solved, all three independent streams must join at some point (Kingdon, 2011). Each of these streams can be a catalyst or restriction (Kingdon, 2011); therefore, a case study can provide insight into the events and interactions that occurred in the three streams.

Although various quantitative and qualitative methods could have been employed in this study, I did not choose a quantitative study because closed-ended questions would not have provided details beneficial to identifying the key elements that led to community

protest and ensuing CEQA lawsuit against the Cordoba Center. The delicate and complex nature of the events, participants, and politics surrounding the siting of the Cordoba Center required a detailed understanding that is best provided through a qualitative study (see Creswell, 2013). A qualitative method empowers individuals to share their stories, which provides an understanding of the research participants' experiences (Creswell, 2013).

A case study was appropriate for this research because applying this design helped me to understand complex social phenomena; afforded the use of multiple sources of data, such as interviews and documents; and allowed me to examine organizational processes and neighborhood changes (see Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2014). By using a case study to examine the Cordoba Center application process in the context of the MSF (Kingdon, 2011), the findings provided insight into the experiences and the activities that took place. The Cordoba Center application process involved several groups of participants, and the groups had varying viewpoints as to what led to community protest and the ensuing CEQA lawsuit. I used the case study methodology (see Stake, 1995) to examine this complex phenomenon and help develop a rich narrative of people's lives under real-world conditions (see Yin, 2011).

I considered the phenomenological and grounded theory approaches but deemed them not the best fit. Although the phenomenological approach focuses on the experiences and perceptions of study participants (Creswell, 2007), it would likely not have yielded a deeper understanding of the key elements that led to community protest and the ensuing CEQA lawsuit against the Cordoba Center. Because it is intended to

construct theory, a grounded theory approach would not have been appropriate for collecting and synthesizing primary data on participants' personal experiences of the policy process (see Creswell, 2007).

Role of the Researcher

My role as the researcher involved developing the research question, interviewing study participants, reviewing documents, and interpreting the collected data. As the main instrument of data collection and analysis in this qualitative case study, I recognized that bias can be a concern (see Creswell, 2013). In Chapter 1, I identified three areas of potential bias. First, some of the identified study participants were members of the GMHP, a politically conservative group of citizens. My personal political beliefs are liberal and did not align with some of their political beliefs. I minimized bias by collecting the data and reporting the different viewpoints as accurately as possible.

Second, my initial research showed that some members of the GMHP had made anti-Islamic remarks in public forums. I have no objections to Islam and mitigated this bias by not proselytizing any political or religious viewpoints. Third, I am a non-Muslim American and, during my lifetime, the United States has been in conflict with several Muslim-based nations. I was present during the attacks on the World Trade Center, working a few blocks away on September 11, 2001.

I have mitigated these potential biases through self-education and by reading the Qur'an, *An Introduction to Islam*, and *The Qur'an and Sayings of the Prophet Muhammad*. Reading these texts enabled me to have a better understanding of Islamic beliefs and culture, which assisted me during interviews with Muslims and non-Muslims.

I lived 2 hours away from San Martin, the proposed location of the Cordoba Center, and attended various meetings as a citizen. Participants at these meetings were cordial and willing to share their viewpoints with me. I also subscribed to several electronic newsletters and developed contacts in the Muslim community to keep apprised of issues concerning Muslim Americans. These steps, along with learning about the immigration history of Muslims, as discussed in Chapter 2, allowed me to develop a deeper cultural understanding of Muslim Americans.

Methodology

In this study, I addressed the need for a deeper understanding of the experiences of Muslims, government officials, community members, and other stakeholders in the siting of controversial mosques. The focus of this case study, the Cordoba Center, was identified as one of 53 controversial mosque development projects in the United States (Pew Research Center, 2012). Case study evidence can come from several sources, including the review of documents and interviews (Yin, 2014). These two sources of information fit the need for a deeper understanding of a phenomenon in this study. In Chapter 2, I provided an in-depth review of the relevant journal articles, media reports, court records, and government reports used for this study. To learn about the experiences of those involved in the siting of the controversial mosque in San Martin, California, I also interviewed Muslims, government officials, community members, and other stakeholders.

Participant Selection

In qualitative research, purposeful sampling is used to select individuals who will provide the most relevant and plentiful understanding of the research problem of the study (Tracy, 2013; Yin, 2011). In qualitative research, sample sizes are smaller than those found in quantitative studies (Tracy, 2013, Yin, 2011). In qualitative research, there is no formula to determine sample size; instead, saturation is used to identify when no new themes emerge from interviews data (Tracy, 2013, Yin, 2011).

Prior to the commencement of the study, I attended several meetings in the community as a member of the public. During these meetings, I identified at least one person from several groups whom I invited to participate in this case study. I also identified other potential participants by scanning media reports and public meeting minutes.

My original plan was to invite 10 to 12 people who were involved in the Cordoba Center between 2008 and 2013 to participate in the study. Ten participants would set a reasonable, justifiable minimum that would likely lead to saturation (see Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006; Tracy, 2013). If 10 to 12 interviews did not provide saturation, I planned to continue to conduct interviews up to a maximum of 15 participants. In conducting this study, I sought to include members of the SVIC, GMHP, SMNA, PCGA, and other stakeholders. I also strove to conduct interviews with government representatives of the Santa Clara Board of Supervisors and the Department of Planning and Development.

As the study commenced, I slightly adjusted participant selection from the original plan. After confirming participation with nine people who were directly involved

in siting the Cordoba Center, other potential participants were identified through snowball selection based on the recommendations of interviewees. This new cohort included community members who were not directly involved in the process, but had valuable knowledge and were eager to share their thoughts and experiences with me. These participants gained their knowledge about the Cordoba Center project during or after the application process with Santa Clara County through local organizations, family, friends, and/or media reports. I achieved data saturation with this purposefully selected, bounded sample of 15 individuals and no further adjustments or interviews were necessary.

I e-mailed and telephoned potential study candidates, and if they expressed interest, I (at their choice) e-mailed or surface-mailed the Call for Participants flyer and the informed consent statement to them. Interviews were conducted face to face whenever possible and audio-recorded for transcription purposes. As an alternative to face-to-face interviews, telephone or video-teleconferencing interviews were offered at the preference and schedule of the participants.

Data Collection

As the key instrument of data collection in qualitative research, the researcher can use various methods to collect data (Creswell, 2013). Yin (2014) discussed six of the most common methods: interviews, documentation, archival records, participant observation, direct observation, and physical artifacts. None of these sources of data have an advantage over the others; a good case study incorporates various multiple sources

(Yin, 2014). I followed this recommendation and collected data from a variety of sources, but primarily through documentation and interviews.

Yin (2014) stated that interviews provide an important source of case study evidence. As explained earlier in this chapter, prior to any interviews being conducted, I had each voluntary participant complete an informed consent statement and any other documentation deemed necessary by the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB). Upon receiving IRB approval (Approval No. 06-14-17-0048293), I began to schedule in-depth interviews with participants. The loosely structured interviews (see Appendix A) allowed participants to provide details of their experiences and perceptions of siting the Cordoba Center. I anticipated that each interview would take approximately one hour at a location of the interviewee's choosing. I planned to conduct interviews in spring 2017, with in-person interviews likely being held in public settings, such as a private meeting room at a local public library. If an in-person interview was not possible, at the interviewee's choice, I used the telephone or video teleconferencing to conduct the interview.

As previously stated, interviews were audio-recorded, and I took handwritten notes, as needed. I used two transcription services to transcribe audio recordings and notes, and these data will be secured for 5 years after completion of the study. The transcription services were required to complete a confidentiality agreement prior to the start of any work. The goal of conducting interviews in a qualitative case study is to collect rich data through open-ended questions and conversation, during which participants can share their experiences (Yin, 2014). For purposes of triangulation and

trustworthiness, I asked participants to review a copy of their interview transcript to allow them to revisit their comments and to provide any necessary revisions.

Data Analysis

Data analysis in a qualitative research endeavor involves preparing and then coding collected information into themes or patterns, interpreting the data to develop generalizations, and then presenting the data using narratives, tables, and figures (Creswell, 2013). Maxwell (2012) stated that coding represents the main categorizing strategy in qualitative research. The preliminary codes that were used for this study and incorporated into the interview probes as appropriate are as follows: assimilation, burial, CEQA, cemetery, collaboration, community, cooperation, environment, EIR, favoritism, flooding, groundwater, honesty, immigration, Islam, Islamophobia, land purchase, mosque fit, policy stream, politics stream, prejudice, problem stream, procedure, process, refugees, religion, terrorism, and traffic. Examples of expected themes were as follows: favoritism, environmental protection, racism, Sharia law, urbanization, and official process not followed.

In-vivo coding was conducted to identify additional patterns and themes resulting from interviews and my field notes. I used MAXQDA 2018 qualitative data analysis software to assist me in transcribing, coding, and categorizing the audio, video, and text files. I used inductive data analysis to build patterns, categories, and themes about the participants' meanings.

Issues of Trustworthiness

To document the validity or accuracy of studies, Creswell (2013) suggested that researchers use validation strategies. Creswell identified eight strategies that enable researchers and participants to measure the accuracy of the study findings. The following strategies are the ones identified by Creswell (2013): “prolonged engagement and persistent observation in the field; triangulation; peer review; negative case analysis; clarifying researcher bias; member checking; rich, thick descriptions; and, external audits” (p. 208).

I spent time in the field by attending various meetings about the Cordoba Center as a member of the public since 2012 and reviewed data for 5 years. I minimized researcher bias by reading the Qur’an and studying Islamic texts to better understand Islam. I used member checking and rich, thick descriptions. Conducting member checking allowed participants to provide feedback on the interpretations and findings of the study. Rich, thick descriptions allow readers of the completed study to make decisions about transferability (Creswell, 2013, p. 209). Using these strategies constitutes triangulation and helped build trust with study participants.

I used journaling and a reflexive approach to strengthen the objectivity of the study. Due to the political nature of this case study, I was open to what the participants reported and made sure that the participants were not simply telling me what I wanted to hear (Watt, 2007; Yin, 2014). Self-reflection through journaling yielded better interview results by enabling me to make sure that my questions did not influence the participants, and that their answers did not influence my questions (Watt, 2007; Yin, 2014).

Ethical Considerations

As a case study researcher, I strove for the highest ethical standards and, to ensure that my conduct or conclusions were not influenced, I explained and mitigated any biases (Maxwell, 2012; Yin, 2014). One of the key elements of ethical research is to protect participants from any type of risk as a result of the research. To reduce risks, researchers must be highly cognizant of protecting anonymity, maintaining confidentiality, and obtaining consent from participants prior to the commencement of the study. I explained the research study and procedures to each potential participant and included a description of the study, the length of the study, perceived risks, confidentiality methods, and the use of audio recording equipment during interviews. As voluntary participants, interviewees were informed that they could cancel their participation in the study at any time during the research with no fear of repercussions. Prior to the interview, I gave each potential participant a copy of the informed consent statement and answered any questions that arose. Upon agreeing to join the study, I signed and then asked the participant to sign two copies of the form. One signed copy was returned to the participant. This form and other study documents were submitted to the IRB for approval prior to commencing with the study. The identity of all participants remained confidential because each participant was referred to during the study and is referred to in this report by a pseudonym.

Data collected for this study will be stored electronically within a password-protected folder on my personal computer. The data will be saved separately from other study files on two flash storage devices, one being used as primary storage and the other as a duplicate backup. The flash drives will be stored in a locked safe in my personal

residence for 5 years, after which they will be destroyed. Access to and dissemination of the data will require a request in writing and verification of the intended use. I did not expect any of the participants to experience adverse effects during the study, nor do I foresee any causes of concern regarding confidentiality.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to learn about the experiences and perceptions of those involved in the siting of the Cordoba Center, a controversial mosque in San Martin, California. In this chapter, I discussed the methodology, design rationale, data collection, and analysis plan. I used the case study methodology to collect data through document reviews and interviews in which I posed open-ended questions. This method allowed me to collect rich data and gain a deeper understanding of the case through the experiences of the participants.

In preparing to conduct this study, I intended to interview a minimum of 10 and a maximum of 15 participants. Participants sought included members from county government, SVIC, GMHP, SMNA, PCGA, and other stakeholders. I attended several community meetings regarding the Cordoba Center as a member of the public and established contacts with potential suitable participants who were open and eager to speak with me regarding the case.

Included in this chapter was a discussion of the ethical considerations needed to protect participants from any type of risk as a result of the research. As the primary source of data collection and analysis, I was aware that bias was a concern. I reduced bias

by reporting the data as accurately as possible. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and then coded in-vivo to identify patterns and themes.

In Chapter 4, I will discuss the recruitment process and provide participant demographic information. Also, the data analysis steps will be discussed, including the coding and thematic analysis process. I will also discuss the findings and results of participant interviews.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the attempted siting of the Cordoba Center from 2008 and 2013. In order to gain a deeper understanding of why the siting was not successful, I conducted a case study using data from a review of the literature and participant interviews. I used Kingdon's (2011) MSF (discussed further in Chapter 5) to understand the perceptions and actions of members of different groups involved in the Cordoba Center to answer the following research question: What are the key elements that led to community protest and the ensuing CEQA lawsuit against the Cordoba Center?

The data that I collected through participant interviews, scholarly articles, and reviews of government reports and media reports highlighted the need for a better understanding of the challenges that Muslims may experience when attempting to build a new mosque, community center, and/or cemetery. The data also provided insight into conflicts and their causes that can arise between groups in the community and between the same groups and government officials. This chapter will include a description of the recruitment process, research setting, participants' demographics and characteristics, steps taken during data collection and analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, participant quotes, study results, and a summary.

I used Kingdon's (2011) MSF as the theoretical and conceptual frameworks for this study to understand the complexities of siting the Cordoba Center. Kingdon proposed that agenda setting in government occurs by joining the problems, policies, and politics

streams. Internal and external actors get involved in the streams to solve problems through government (Kingdon, 2011). Actors try to join the streams to advance their causes on the government agenda, where decisions take place (Kingdon, 2011). Using a qualitative case study approach and conducting participant interviews helped me to understand the complex issues that existed when the SVIC attempted to build the Cordoba Center.

Since the time this study was approved, I continued to review the major literature and discovered Howlett, McConnell, and Perl's (2014) five-stream confluence model (FSCM). In order to study the policy-making process that exists beyond the agenda-setting process, Howlett et al.'s FSCM adds two new streams to the MSF: the process and program streams. The discovery of these two new streams merited a discussion in this study.

Howlett et al.'s (2014) process stream is similar to Kingdon's policy window, the point at which the problem, policy, and politics streams merge. Now merged as the process stream, Howlett et al.'s (2014) FSCM considers this point to be a critical juncture and the introduction of the formal agenda. As the process stream continues, it then goes through several stages that provide an opportunity for deliberation and determine if the policy advances or retreats. The policy then goes through the policy formulation and decision-making stages. If the policy requires implementation, the policy then goes through the policy implementation stage, followed by the policy evaluation stage. During the implementation stage, stakeholders work together on the fifth stream, the program

stream, to establish or modify programs. Once the programs have been in place for a time, they are then reviewed at the policy evaluation stage.

In this case study, I focused on trying to understand why the SVIC was unable to build the Cordoba Center. I advanced my understanding by conducting a literature review and participant interviews. While CEQA provides guidelines for environmental protection and is enforced through citizen-initiated lawsuits, there is no actual program to evaluate. For these reasons, I did not perceive FSCM as fitting into this case study. A better fit may be to use the new streams to examine CEQA legislation. A policy evaluation of CEQA could shed light on this under-studied legislation and the challenges that some nonprofits, particularly houses of worship, may experience when defending against a CEQA lawsuit.

In this study, I matched themes directly to problems, policy, and politics that are in the later stages of the policy-making process. Doing so extended Kingdon's (2011) MSF and helped clarify what worked well and the missteps made during the siting of the Cordoba Center. Using this extended MSF model to look at events beyond the agenda setting phase also provided a deeper understanding of the challenges that Muslims may experience when attempting to build a mosque, community center, or cemetery.

Recruitment

The recruitment process incorporated the use of a variety of methods. I attended several community meetings concerning the Cordoba Center as a member of the public. At these meetings, I met six people who expressed interest in participating in this study. After receiving IRB approval, I reached out to these individuals to schedule interviews.

Some of these participants also provided referrals to other potential interviewees. I also posted recruitment messages on the websites for Facebook, Craigslist, *Gilroy Dispatch*, Meetup, and *Morgan Hill Times*. I used contact information found in the public documents to call and e-mail potential participants. I also sent invitation flyers to potential participants via the U.S. Postal Service.

I recruited a total of 15 participants for this study. Referrals from the cohort of six people I met attending community meetings and who agreed to participate in the study yielded three additional participants who wanted to join the study. Online postings yielded two participants, and e-mails yielded four participants. I received no responses to telephone calls or letters sent out via the U.S. Postal Service.

As potential participants expressed interest, I scheduled an initial telephone call with each person to determine their eligibility to participate in the study. During each call, I introduced myself and explained the nature and purpose of the study and answered any questions the individuals had. I also informed each potential participant of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence and that I would provide a transcribed copy of the study interview for their review.

I did not coerce potential participants or promise any type of payment or award for their participation. All questions from potential participants were addressed prior to them giving their informed consent. Each participant was provided with a signed copy of their informed consent form and a Call for Participants flyer. The signed consent form directed participants to contact my chairperson, the IRB, or me if they had any questions

or concerns. To date, participants have not raised any concerns about the study or their participation.

Setting

Data collection from participants occurred in late June and early July 2017. I provided interviewees with several options from which to choose to participate in the study, including telephone, a face-to-face meeting, or through video chat. Face-to-face meetings were offered at a location of the participant's choosing or in a rented conference room. The conference room was located in a neutral building situated near the proposed location of the Cordoba Center. My preferred plan was to conduct face-to-face interviews to allow for the capture of interview dynamics, such as participant facial expressions, but I only conducted one interview face to face in a conference room; all other interviews were conducted via telephone. While conducting telephone interviews afforded flexibility in scheduling with the participants, this method of interviewing limited my ability to take notes on their body language while we spoke. In addition, two participants whose interviews were conducted while they were at home or work experienced minor distractions, such as their dog barking or their work telephone ringing.

Demographics

I collected demographic and background information from each participant at the start of their interview. The population of San Martin is approximately 7,200 people. The community is predominately Hispanic, White, and Asian. Less than 1% of the city (< 50) identified as Black or African American in the 2010 U.S. Census (Mackun & Wilson, 2011).

Included in Table 1 are the aggregate data of participants' age, race, political affiliation, religion, education, marital status, employment status, and mosque stance. As shown in Table 1, there was a nearly even divide between the number of men and women in the study. All of the participants had earned a college degree, and most participants (60%) supported the Cordoba Center.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Demographic variable	Participants	
	<i>n</i>	%
Gender		
Male	7	47
Female	8	53
Age (years)		
18–24	1	7
25–34	2	13
35–44	1	7
45–54	3	20
55–64	3	20
65–74	2	13
75 +	2	13
Undisclosed	1	7
Race/ethnicity		
Hispanic	1	7
Other	3	20
Other–Sikh	1	7
Other–South Asian	1	7
Undisclosed	1	7
White	8	53
Political affiliation		
Democrat	7	47
Green	1	7
None	3	20
Republican	3	20
Undisclosed	1	7
Religion		
Agnostic	1	7
Christian	2	13
Jewish	1	7
Muslim	4	27
None	3	20
Other/Protestant Church of England	1	7

(table continues)

Demographic variable	Participants	
	<i>n</i>	%
Other/Episcopalian	1	7
Other/Sikh	1	7
Other/Spiritual	1	7
Education (highest degree earned)		
Associate's	2	13
Bachelor's	3	20
Graduate or professional	10	67
Marital Status		
Divorced	2	13
Married	10	67
Single	3	20
Employment status		
Employed	6	40
Homemaker	1	7
Out of work/not looking for work	1	7
Retired	4	27
Self-employed	3	20
Mosque stance		
Neutral	1	7
Oppose	5	33
Support	9	60

Note. N = 15.

Data Collection

The sources of data for this study were loosely structured interviews with 15 purposefully selected participants, public testimony from community meetings, petitions, court records, letters printed in local newspapers, and my field notes. All 15 interviews took place between June 23, 2017, and July 25, 2017. I collected interview data from participants who were directly involved in the attempted siting of the Cordoba Center or were community stakeholders. The interviews were guided by my use of loosely structured interview questions (Appendix A) and, if needed, clarifying and probing questions posed to develop rich, detailed data.

After each participant provided a signed consent form, I scheduled an interview with them at a location of their choosing. Only one participant elected to be interviewed

face to face; the remaining 14 participants chose to speak over the telephone. The face-to-face interview was conducted in a rented conference room in a building neutral to both the participant and me, located 7 miles down the road from the proposed location of the Cordoba Center. During the scheduling of the interview, I advised each participant that I would be digitally recording and transcribing the interview and making the transcript available for their review. The interviews lasted between 30 minutes and 120 minutes, plus the time required to review interview protocols.

At the beginning of each interview, I welcomed and thanked the participant for their input. I confirmed that the participant had ample time for the interview and reviewed the interview protocol, including that they could withdraw from the interview or study at any time without any consequences. I asked each participant if there were any questions. None of the participants had questions at this point in the process. When I was ready to begin the interview, I announced that the digital recording of the conversation had begun. I then proceeded to announce the date and time of the interview and reviewed the purpose of the interview. The remainder of the interview was guided by loosely structured interview questions (see Appendix A). I took field notes during each interview and noted demeanor, focus level, and body language. When possible, I asked follow-up questions, as needed, during the interview to gain a deeper understanding of the case and the participants. At the end of the interview, I thanked the participant and ended the recording. I reiterated that the recording would be transcribed and that each participant's transcript would be provided for their review.

I began to achieve data saturation upon completion of 10 interviews. I continued the interview process until I had interviewed 15 participants. Interviews went according to plan, and there were no unusual circumstances or deviations from the proposed plan.

After each interview was completed, I listened to each recording for quality and to determine if any follow-up questions were required. I also took additional research notes. I sent each recording to a transcriber who had already signed a confidentiality agreement. Upon receiving the completed transcript, I personally reviewed it and compared it to the audio recording. Each transcription was corrected as needed. I prepared a summary of each interview that included demographic information of each participant as well as their experiences and thoughts regarding the siting of the Cordoba Center. The transcript and summary were sent to each respective participant for review. Only two participants requested changes to their summary. My field notes also provided observations and insights during interviews.

I submitted a Freedom of Information Act request to Santa Clara County regarding the Cordoba Center. The documents returned by the county included public testimony, petitions, and letters regarding the siting of the Cordoba Center. Public testimony from community meetings was also retrieved from online video (The County of Santa Clara, 2012). Letters to the editor published in various local newspapers were located and retrieved through Internet searches and within county records. I also obtained court records by visiting Santa Clara Superior Court.

Data Analysis

I used MAXQDA 2018 to code and develop themes from interview transcripts, memos, field notes, court records, public testimony, video, and audio. I reviewed and coded all of the documents line by line. Video and audio were also coded using MAXQDA 2018.

The data analysis process consisted of two cycles. In the first cycle, I summarized data segments and included attribute, simultaneous, and descriptive coding. During the second cycle, I performed pattern coding to group the data into fewer categories and develop themes (I will discuss pattern coding, categories, and themes in the Results section of this chapter). Attribute coding was used to capture demographic information about the study participants. Attribute coding is suitable for nearly all qualitative studies, especially those that have multiple participants and forms of data (Saldaña, 2016). Simultaneous coding was used when data had multiple meanings, and descriptive coding was used to develop a categorized inventory of the data (see Saldaña, 2016).

As mentioned in Chapter 3, I used the following preliminary codes: assimilation, burial, CEQA, cemetery, collaboration, community, cooperation, environment, EIR, favoritism, flooding, groundwater, honesty, immigration, Islam, Islamophobia, land purchase, mosque fit, policy stream, politics stream, prejudice, problem stream, procedure, process, refugees, religion, terrorism, and traffic. After I finished coding the data, I reviewed all of the codes and their corresponding data. I merged any similar codes into a single code and then developed themes from these final codes (see Appendix B). All data were incorporated into the analysis, and there were no discrepant cases.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

In Chapter 3, I discussed my plans to address the accuracy of this study. Prior to commencing this study, I attended several community meetings as a member of the public and built relationships with representatives of different organizations and government agencies. During recruitment, I answered any questions potential participants asked me about the study. During interviews, I used journaling and a reflexive approach to make sure I was open to what each participant reported.

To further develop trustworthiness, I made sure to accurately record perceptions by repeatedly listening to the audio recording of each interview and confirming its accuracy in the corresponding participant transcript. As I reviewed a transcript, I also checked my coding for accuracy and clarity. I merged codes that were identical or very similar. I prepared a summary of each interview and used member checking to improve accuracy by sending each participant a copy of his or her interview transcript and summary for review.

I used a collection of rich, thick descriptions from a wide range of participants to support trustworthiness. Diversity in the participant demographics may help readers determine if the study findings can be transferred to other settings (Creswell, 2007). Using multiple approaches and sources to corroborate evidence constituted triangulation.

Findings

The purpose of this study was to develop a deeper understanding about the challenges and perceptions of the siting of the Cordoba Center. A purposefully selected, bounded sample of individuals was interviewed, and public documents and media reports

were reviewed. Kingdon's (2011) MSF was used to understand the perceptions and actions of members of different groups involved in the siting of the Cordoba Center, especially as they related to the problem, politics, and policy streams. I used a thematic analysis to trace how the SVIC successfully navigated the problem and policy streams, and the missteps made in the politics stream, all of which I will discuss in greater detail in Chapter 5.

In Chapter 3, I discussed that the expected themes were favoritism, environmental protection, racism, Sharia law, urbanization, and official process not followed. Although these concepts did appear in some form during the analysis, the final six themes were as follows: CEQA, Muslims are viewed as outsiders who do not assimilate and pose a threat, water, lack of control, agitators, and politics stream. The themes and summaries, representative of the participant interviews, are presented in Table 2.

Santa Clara County was swift in responding to my Freedom of Information Act request regarding the Cordoba Center process. The documents I received included copies of the application forms submitted by the SVIC to Santa Clara County requesting permission to build the Cordoba Center. I was also provided with copies of letters submitted to the county during the public comment portion of the planning process. A review of the documents revealed that the majority of the letters against the mosque consisted of multiple copies of a single form letter. The form letter was against the mosque on the basis that the Cordoba Center violated zoning rules and local use requirements.

Table 2

Summary of Themes and Codes of Participant Interviews

Theme	Code summary
CEQA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CEQA was used by the PCGA to prevent the siting of the Cordoba Center • Negative comments about CEQA • Positive comments about CEQA • CEQA can be abused for non-environmental reasons • CEQA allows a petitioner to remain somewhat anonymous, making it difficult to defend against
Muslims are viewed as outsiders who do not assimilate and pose a threat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concern that there are only a few Muslims in San Martin, so the Cordoba Center is not serving the community and will bring in outsiders • Comments that Islam is a threat to the United States • SVIC referred to as a “special interest group” • Cordoba Center seen as a regional mosque that will bring in outsiders
Water	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Residents are scared that the water will be polluted from the cemetery bodies because Muslims do not use coffins • Concern that the Cordoba Center will use up all of the well water
Lack of control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community complaints that officials waived codes, are not following zoning laws, and giving special treatment to SVIC • Community concerns over failed percolation tests • Santa Clara County has not provided evidence that the Cordoba Center septic system can accommodate the suggested number of congregants • Complaints that the public was not allowed to speak at public hearings
Agitators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The actual supporters and members of the PCGA was unclear • Members of the GMHP and PCGA were spreading misinformation and other information that made Muslims look ominous • Small, vocal group, possibly outsiders and are using the same exact form letter to oppose the Cordoba Center.
Politics stream	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Misinformation that the Cordoba Center is a regional mosque • SVIC perceived as bullying its way into the community and getting special treatment by the government • Most public comment letters are opposed to the Cordoba Center and are the same exact form letter • SVIC appealed its own approved mosque • Forced SVIC to be reactive and defensive instead of being able to control the public dialogue

The results of participant interviews are presented below and categorized by theme. Each section contains a summary of the theme and a figure of codes to illustrate

how the theme was derived. Select quotes are also offered to provide a deeper understanding of participant perceptions.

CEQA

The participants in this study who understood CEQA generally believed that it could be used as a tactic to deliberately draw out the approval process to bleed an organization of funding. Participants with professional CEQA experience indicated that while CEQA gives the public a voice, it is not easy for just anyone to understand, and defending against it can be a bureaucratic process. The application process to build the Cordoba Center was handled by SVIC members from a variety of professional backgrounds, but there was no lead attorney who specialized in land development cases. Data indicated that if the SVIC were to go through the process again, the group would hire an attorney immediately. The consolidation of themes and comments that yielded the overall theme of CEQA is represented in Figure 1.

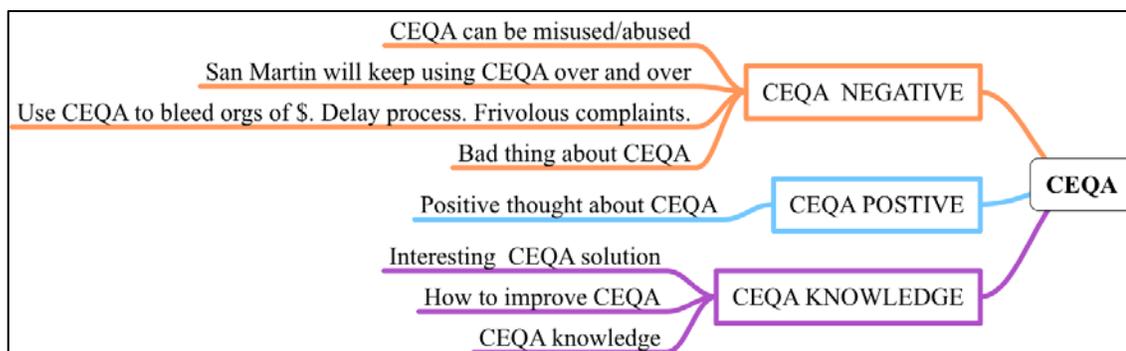


Figure 1. Derivation of the theme of CEQA.

Amber, a young woman, supported the new mosque. She attends prayers services in the current SVIC barn. Amber shared her thoughts about why opponents used CEQA to stop the Cordoba Center:

CEQA would be another loophole to go through that would take some time. I really think it was a way for the PCGA/GMHP to, especially with our funding, we are not a large community, so, to drain us of our funding. Because the longer the whole process is drawn out, the costlier it becomes.

Felix, a middle-aged man who was opposed to the Cordoba Center, has lived 3 miles from the proposed site of the Cordoba Center for 18 years and prefers communities with open spaces. He described CEQA as 90% good and 10% bad because, while it controls how tall a city can build, it can also be misused and overly bureaucratic. He believes that San Martin residents are going to keep suing the SVIC to stop the Cordoba Center from being constructed.

Muslims are Viewed as Outsiders Who do not Assimilate and Pose a Threat

Study participants heard, experienced, read, or actually made comments against Muslims or Islam, including that Islam was a threat to San Martin and the United States. Some of the participants who identified themselves as Muslim indicated that their first experience of being treated as a community outsider was when they attended public hearings regarding the siting of the Cordoba Center. Muslims who participated in public hearings were asked if they were members of the Muslim Brotherhood. They were also told by some opponents to “watch your back” as they left hearings. Some opponents to the mosque had concerns that the mosque and cemetery would bring a large number of

outsiders into the community on a regular basis, the mosque would not serve local interests, and the Cordoba Center application should be denied. In addition, some participants who opposed the Cordoba Center expressed frustration that Muslims who immigrated to the United States did not assimilate into American culture. The consolidation of themes and comments that yielded overall theme of Muslims are viewed as outsiders who do not assimilate and pose a threat is represented in Figure 2.

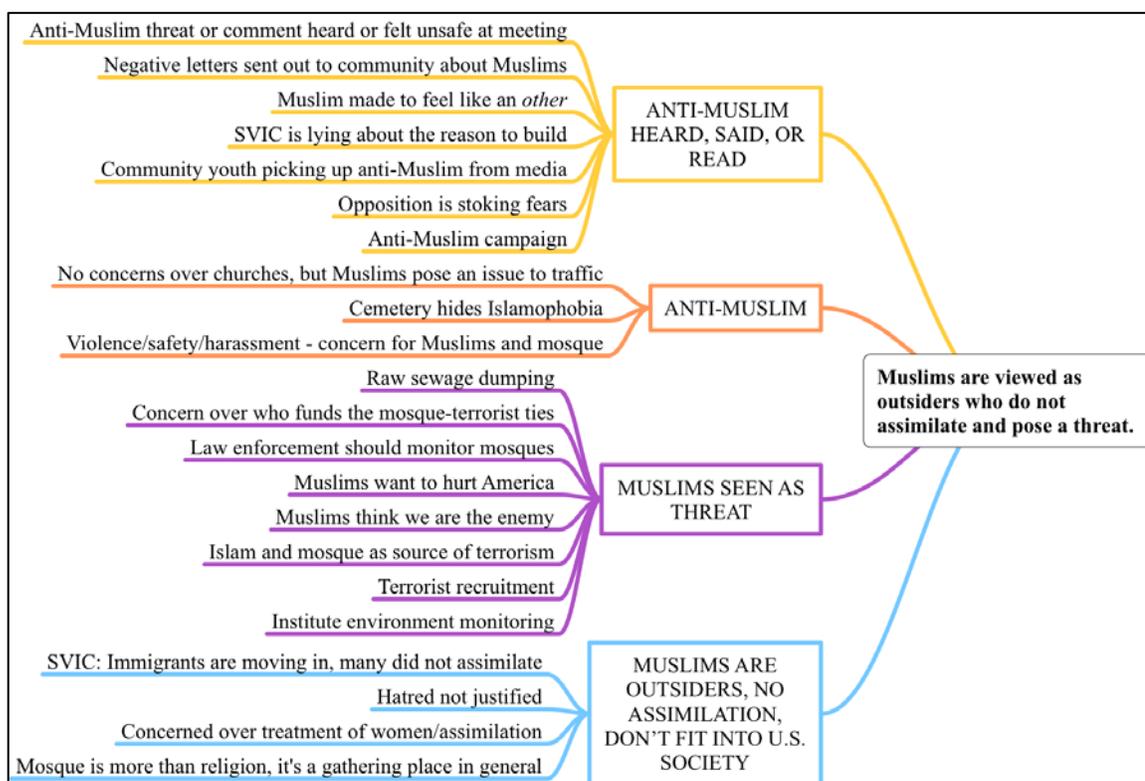


Figure 2. Derivation of the theme of Muslims are viewed as outsiders who do not assimilate and pose a threat.

Emily, a woman, supported the mosque. She shared her thoughts about the tactics and comments made by some of the opponents of the Cordoba Center. Some opponents made public statements that framed Muslims as outsiders and a threat to the community.

She recalled hearing these opponents say that the SVIC was going to use the Cordoba Center as a terrorist training camp.

John, an opponent of the mosque, believed that the proposed Cordoba Center would be used as a brainwashing terrorist recruitment center and would dump raw sewage into the water system. According to his own research, a poll he read indicated that Muslims hate America because the Qur'an considers Americans to be infidels and the enemy of Islam. While discussing the approval of Cordoba Center by the Board of Supervisors, John detailed his thoughts:

SVIC violated several zoning laws and were colluding with the Board of Supervisors. San Martin residents want to have a say because the Board of Supervisors is not enforcing zoning laws at all. The rules were not applied fairly because they only enforce the law when it suits them and let people break the law when it doesn't.

Sam was a supporter of the mosque and first learned about protests against the Cordoba Center through local newspapers. Sam recalled what he described as inappropriate comments about the Cordoba Center and the SVIC:

I read some accounts that people made some veiled references to religion and foreigners and that kind of thing. But I think most of that was sub-rosa, you know? Say it to each other, but they wouldn't publicize that because it didn't look good.

Water

Protecting the well water appears to be a main concern of the community. Due to perchlorate contamination of the water table by a local factory in 2003, San Martin residents and livestock relied upon bottled drinking water for a decade. Although most of the well water in the community was determined drinkable in 2013, participants frequently raised concerns during interviews about the possibility of well water contamination due to the human remains in the cemetery. It seems that opponents could not conclusively prove that human remains could contaminate the water and, at the same time, supporters could not conclusively prove that human remains were harmless. The consolidation of themes and comments that yielded the overall theme of water is represented in Figure 3.

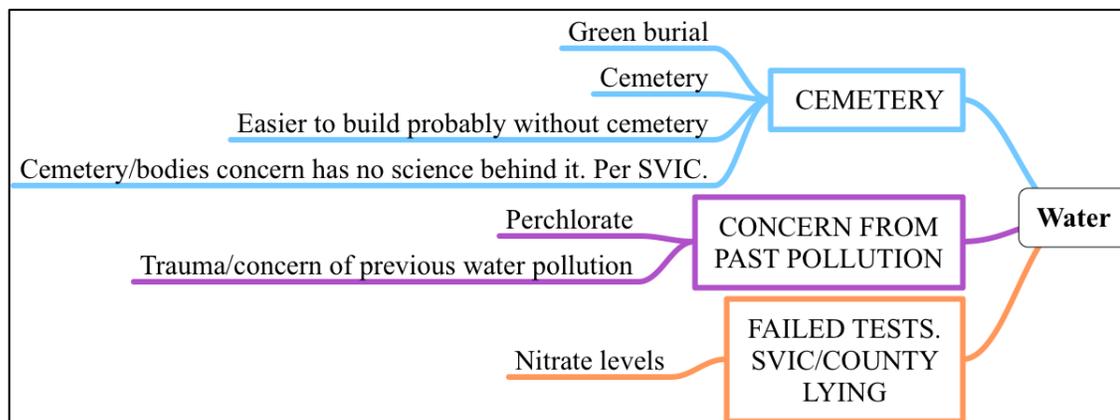


Figure 3. Derivation of the theme of water.

Nora, a woman, was opposed to the Cordoba Center. She emphasized community concerns regarding protecting the drinking water from contamination from the decomposition of human remains in the proposed cemetery. She believed that the SVIC was lying about the Cordoba Center having a green cemetery and shared her concerns:

There are studies that show that decaying bodies can leak bacteria into the wells.

There was a perchlorate scare few years back and perchlorate leaked into the ground and it got into over 100-something wells in San Martin. People in San Martin had been on bottled water for years. Some of them are still on bottled water. But the Muslims, the South Valley Islamic Community, wanted everyone to think they were doing a green burial, but they weren't.

Tim, a man who supported the mosque, described concerns over contamination from the cemetery as hearsay and a fear tactic used by opponents. He indicated that opponents did not provide any evidence that the cemetery could contaminate the community groundwater. Tim challenged the notion that human remains could contaminate groundwater by comparing it to the existence of septic systems throughout the community:

Just about every house in San Martin that has a water well also has a septic system. And that's where the solids settle down over time, all diluted and what not, and then the liquid part of it is just pumped out of it and pushed into the trenches. Those trenches percolate into the ground, and then they are fixed with the groundwater, eventually.

Bob was opposed to the Cordoba Center. He shared that his primary concern was the safety of the water supply in San Martin. He described the possible contamination from the cemetery as a serious issue for the San Martin community because the residents rely on well water. In addition, the large size of the Cordoba Center and increase in the number of people in the area could deplete water reserves. Bob shared his concerns:

Our aquifers are not very deep, and if contamination reaches those [aquifers], then that's a concern. It is not only the contamination from things like bodies being put in the ground. There is also the problem of density of the people.

Mia was a supporter of the Cordoba Center and was active in community. She was familiar with varying viewpoints about the Cordoba Center. She explained that San Martin residents purposefully do not want to develop San Martin into a city like Morgan Hill and Gilroy, which are on either side of them. She indicated that those who live in San Martin have genuine concerns about water distribution and the ability of the small-town community to support the physicality of the Cordoba Center.

Lack of Control

According to residents, San Martin was designated as a rural community and that is why they moved into the area. Participant interviews revealed that growth and rule changes over time seem to have contradicted this designation. This disparity has caused those who want open spaces in San Martin to feel ignored by the Board of Supervisors and the SVIC; they believe that they do not have much control in shaping their community. The consolidation of themes and comments that yielded the overall theme of lack of control is represented in Figure 4.

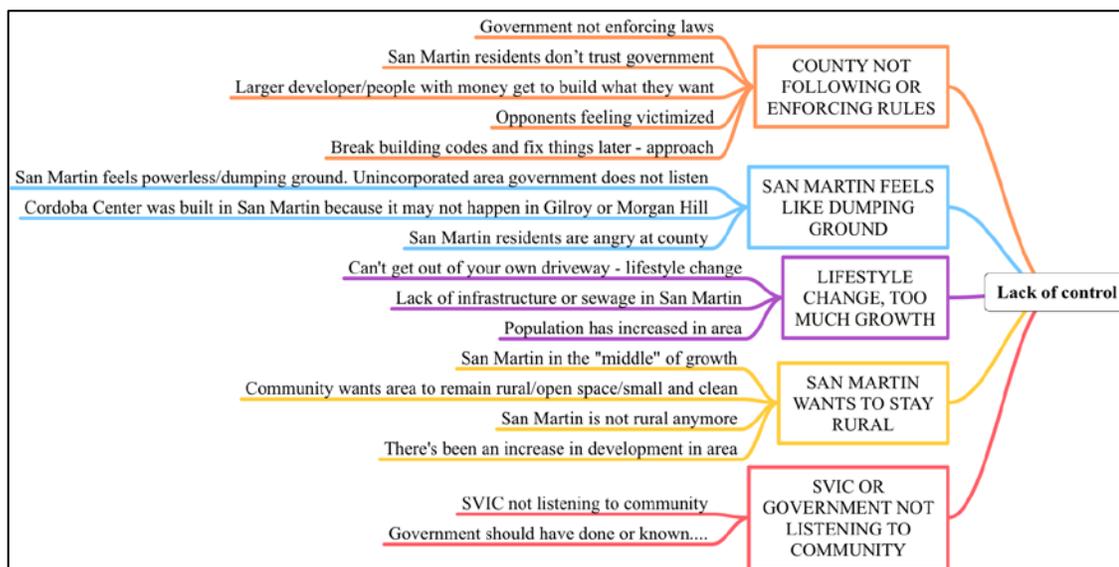


Figure 4. Derivation of the theme of lack of control.

Kara supported the new Cordoba Center. She has lived near the proposed location of the Cordoba Center for 28 years. She believed that the San Martin community may feel as though they have no control over their growth and that there was already too much commercialization in the area. Kara believed that opponents may be very resistant to the Cordoba Center because it is a large facility and could perhaps take away from the rural feel of San Martin.

Dawn, a woman who opposed the Cordoba Center, was a long-time resident of San Martin and believed that residents have no voice because they are an unincorporated area of the county. She believed that San Martin was supposed to be a rural community, but politicians were being encouraged and bought off by land developers to construct more buildings in the area. Dawn shared her concerns: “San Martin is not really rural anymore. When my grandmother moved here 40 years ago, there really were two-lane country roads that you could bike down. It’s no longer that way. I don’t describe it as rural.”

Agitators

The coding of participant interviews also revealed the theme of agitators.

Agitators became a theme because agitators took specific malicious actions against the siting of the Cordoba Center that other opponents did not. For example, agitators engaged in a door-knocking campaign and used misinformation to portray Islam and Muslims as ominous. In addition, the GMHP invited guest lecturers to their meeting to discuss the threat of Islam. Although agitators were a small group, they were the loudest and most organized in their efforts. In addition, according to participants, the SMNA and SVIC did have some level of direct communication about the project throughout the process, but agitators created a wedge between the two groups. The agitators appeared to have been affiliated with the PCGA.

Petitioners in a CEQA court case can use an ad hoc name (e.g., PCGA) and provide anonymity to people who initiate the lawsuit. Because of this anonymity, my research revealed the names of only two people associated with the PCGA. I telephoned, surface-mailed letters, and sent e-mails to the two individuals identified in public documents, but I received no response. Participant Tim believed the PCGA was the amalgamation of conservative political ideologies and conservative Christian ideologies, the objective of which was to prevent Muslims from moving into the neighborhood. Tim believed the agitators were from the GMHP and people with conservative evangelical Christian backgrounds. The consolidation of themes and comments that yielded the overall theme of agitators is represented in Figure 5.

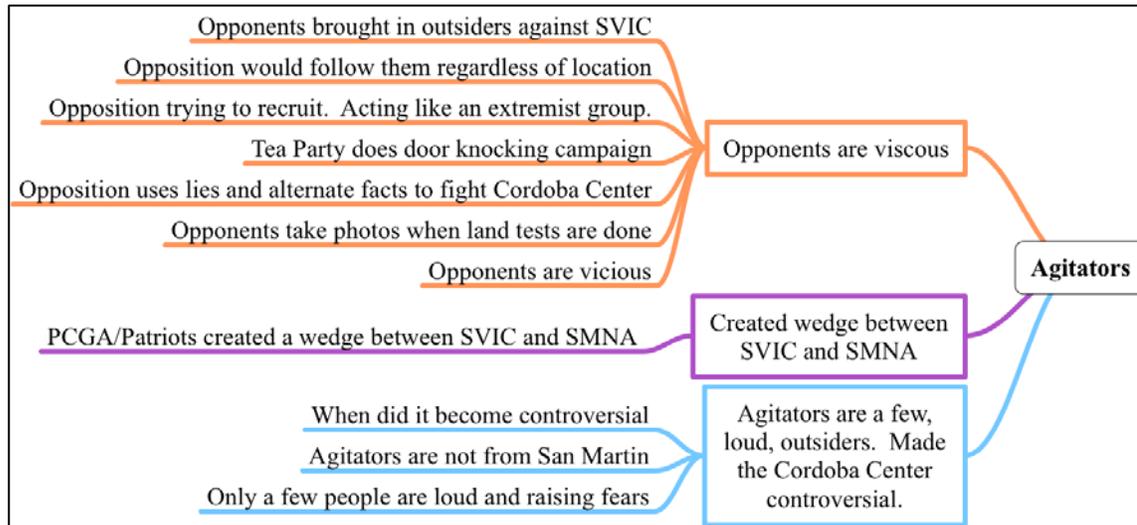


Figure 5. Derivation of the theme of agitators.

Emma, a Muslim woman, regularly attended services in the current SVIC barn. She described how opponents invited agitators into the community to scare the community about Muslims and spread misinformation. She also described the anti-Islamic attitudes she endured while testifying at a community hearing regarding the proposed Cordoba Center:

A mosque opponent speaking at a microphone during the public hearing directed a question at me: “Is she even *from* here?” I just heckled him right back and said, “Yes, rented in Santa Clara county for 20 years and lived in California all my life.” The same mosque opponent then asked, “I’d like to ask the lady who spoke before me, is she part of the Muslim Brotherhood?” I just responded, “Do I look like a brother to you?” I guess that was when the Muslim Brotherhood group was being accused of terrorism over in Egypt. A lot of the opponents stood up and just said they don’t want Muslims in San Martin.

Politics Stream

When considering Kingdon's (2011) three streams relative to siting of the mosque, the politics stream appears to be the most prevalent stream that challenged the building of the Cordoba Center. The problem and policy streams were not especially prominent. The SVIC was able to identify the need to build a new mosque, community center, and cemetery in order to reduce travel time to prayer service and build a suitable house of worship. Participant interviews indicated that the SVIC was also able to successfully navigate the application process for the Cordoba Center.

The politics stream was prominent because the SVIC did not anticipate any resistance to the Cordoba Center or community concerns about the well water. The resistance by outside agitators was especially unexpected by the SVIC. Outside agitators engaged in an anti-Islamic misinformation campaign to stoke fears about Muslims coming into San Martin. SVIC had difficulty recovering from the negative campaigning by the opposition and regularly defended itself against the misinformation spread by the agitators.

According to participants who opposed the Cordoba Center, the size of the buildings and the cemetery component were major concerns that were never resolved. Opponents indicated that the building sizes were too large for San Martin and that the SVIC had not sufficiently explained how they would prevent the possible contamination of the water table from the human remains in the cemetery. The consolidation of themes and comments that yielded the overall theme of politics stream is represented in Figure 6.

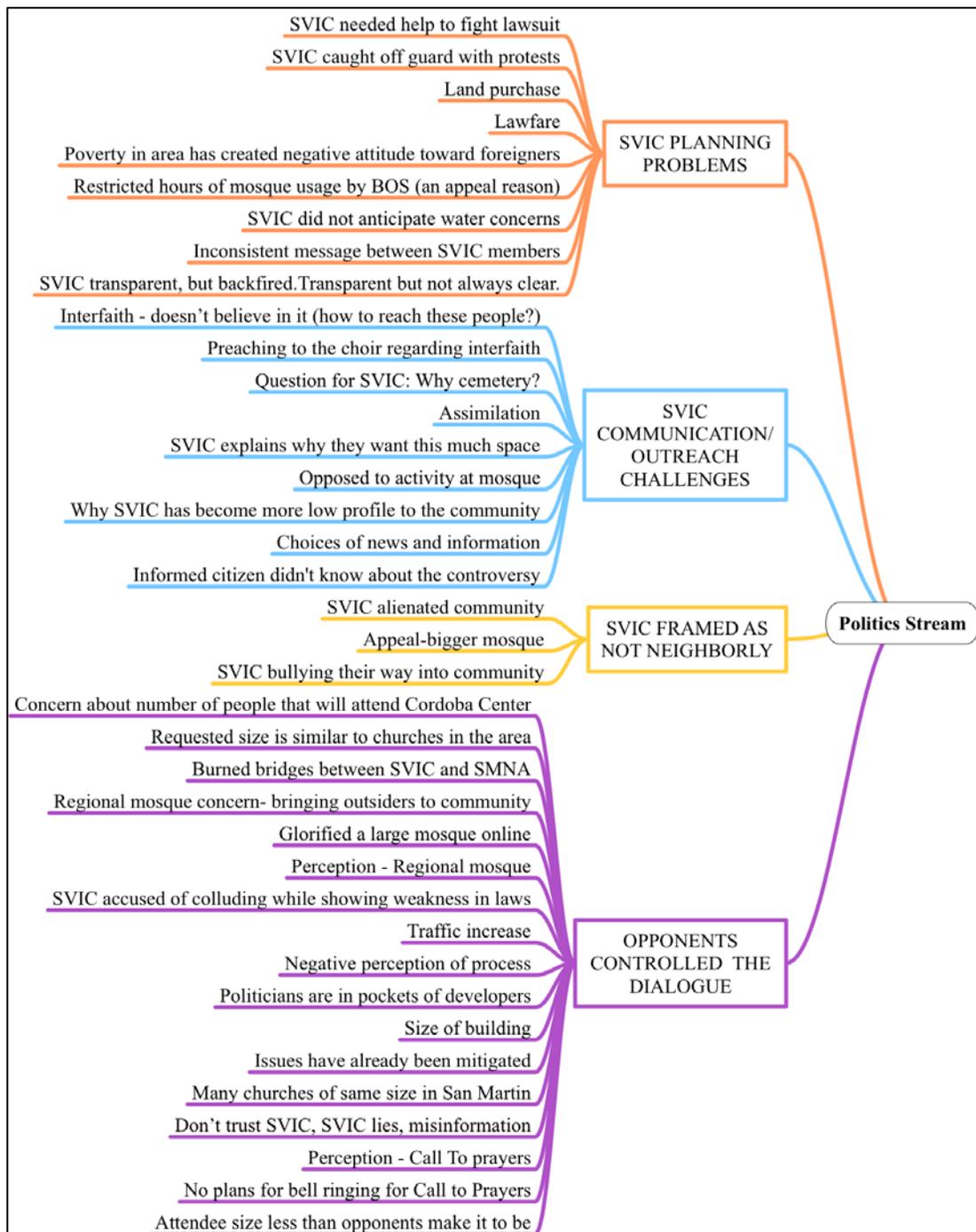


Figure 6. Derivation of the theme of politics stream.

In the participant interviews, supporters and opponents often referred to the Cordoba Center as a “regional mosque.” Supporters used the term *regional* to represent having an open-door policy that would allow Muslims driving through the area to stop at the Cordoba Center for prayer at any time. Opponents interpreted regional to mean that Muslims from as far as more than 70 miles away would regularly attend services at the Cordoba Center, which would bring Muslims into the community and increase traffic dramatically. Referring to the mosque as regional and the expected 300-person capacity of the mosque provided an argument for opponents to suggest that thousands of additional people would be traveling in and out of the community each day.

Tim said he found himself repeatedly defending against the same community concerns about the Cordoba Center: its size, water consumption, water contamination, increased traffic, and noise. Tim provided an example of the repeated debates he had with opponents:

A retired couple once approached me at one of the public meetings and asked why SVIC needed a 10,000 square foot mosque for 300 people: “Why is it such a big place, 10,000 square feet? My goodness, for just 300 people.” I asked how many people were in their household. She said it was just the two of them. I asked how big their house was. She said that it was very modest, about a 2,500 square foot, three-bedroom house. I said, “Can you imagine two people taking up 2,500 square feet? She said, “Oh, well, they are different. We have a dining room. We have a bedroom. We have different uses for different areas.” I said, “What do you think about the parishioners that are going to a church? Do they not use bathroom

facilities? Do they not have a dining hall? Do they not have a prayer worship hall? Do they not have room for an elevator, for offices, for janitorial, for storage?”

Alex, a man who was active in the community, expressed no opposition or support about the Cordoba Center. He discussed concerns about a growing trend in Santa Clara County among nonprofit organizations. In recent years, according to Alex, some nonprofits, such as houses of worship, have purchased land in Santa Clara County without doing their due diligence up front. Due diligence could include putting contingencies into a land purchase contract or researching the area.

Karen supported the new mosque and considered herself very active in the community. She had not heard anything about the Cordoba Center until she read an article in the local newspaper. Although the articles were informative, she recalled reading letters expressing concerns about water and traffic, but did not recall reading anything in support of the Cordoba Center.

Alan, a man, was a supporter of the mosque. He believed that the SVIC should have spent more time building bridges in the community and should have started this process many years ago. He believed that by building these bridges, more supporters would speak up and any misinformation against the SVIC would be diluted. He shared his thoughts:

It takes years to do that, but when you're going through the planning process, you go knock on doors, people are gonna spit at you and call you names and smash the doors on you. There's only so much that they can do. Hatred doesn't really last that long.

The debate surrounding the Cordoba Center has been contentious since the start of the application process. In this case study, I examined the Cordoba Center process to gain a much-needed, deeper understanding of the problem. Community stakeholder perceptions revealed that the SVIC overlooked the need to research the political climate of San Martin prior to applying for the Cordoba Center. Applying to build the Cordoba Center before engaging and understanding the local politics of San Martin was premature and started a chain reaction of resistance to the project.

Interview participants who lived in or near San Martin and were opposed to the Cordoba Center spoke passionately about the reasons they moved to the area, which included wide open spaces, low population density, and a small-town lifestyle. San Martin residents, unbeknownst to SVIC, were also still recovering from the trauma of groundwater contamination. Opponents believed that introducing a large building and cemetery could pollute the groundwater again. These opponents also believed that the SVIC was changing the culture of San Martin and that the SVIC did not care. Opponents then complained to local officials about the project, but believed that they were ignored and lacked any type of control in the situation.

Community protests escalated as outside agitators began to promote their political beliefs that Muslims were a threat to the San Martin community. They started an anti-Islamic campaign and attempted to stoke fears about Muslims coming into San Martin. The campaign included bringing in speakers who condemned Islam and conducting a door-knocking campaign to discuss the threats of Muslims.

By not investing resources into understanding the political landscape of San Martin, an unforeseen chain of events took place from which the SVIC could not recover, including the CEQA lawsuit that put a halt to the project. In the end, community relations have been hurt between the SVIC and their opponents, misinformation about Muslims has been spread in San Martin, and the SVIC has spent \$3 million throughout the process and have yet to break ground on the Cordoba Center.

Summary

In chapter 4, I presented the steps taken during the data collection and analysis process. I conducted loosely structured interviews with 15 people who represented various community stakeholders, including those were involved in the siting of the Cordoba Center. The results of the study addressed the main research question of identifying the key elements that led to community protests and the ensuing CEQA lawsuit against the Cordoba Center.

Data from news reports, government reports, and participant interviews of community stakeholders were used; there were no discrepant cases. A preliminary list of codes and themes emerged, and was used and added to, merged, and changed, as needed, throughout the coding and analysis process. The thematic analysis provided a deeper understanding of the complexities of siting the Cordoba center.

Analysis of collected data indicates that the SVIC took missteps in the process of siting the Cordoba Center, primarily in the politics stream. The SVIC did not anticipate any resistance to the project and quickly found itself on the defensive. The SVIC had not

prepared itself with a strategy to combat opposition, and opponents launched various vicious campaigns to discredit the SVIC and vilify Muslims.

In Chapter 5, I will begin with a discussion about why the study was conducted and then summarize the findings. I will compare the study finding to the peer-reviewed literature discussed in Chapter 2 and connect the finding to the multiple streams framework. Also, I will address the potential implications for positive social change, recommendations for action steps based on the results, and suggestions for future research.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

Since the 1970s, the number of mosques in the United States has increased by 87% to accommodate the growing Muslim population (Hummel, 2012). At the same time, several events around the world led Americans to frame Islamic communities negatively and, in some cases, to engage in anti-Islamic activities/ such as hate crimes and fighting the siting of mosques (FBI, 2001; Yukich, 2018). The anti-Muslim narrative does not appear to be diminishing and some Islamic communities are facing increased scrutiny in the siting of mosques—the Cordoba Center is one such example. In San Martin, California, the SVIC put forth plans to the local planning commission to build the Cordoba Center mosque, community center, and cemetery. The planning process was filled with loud protests against the Cordoba Center for a variety of reasons, including concerns about environmental pollution and that the mosque could be used to recruit terrorists.

The Cordoba Center was approved by county government officials, but a CEQA lawsuit was filed against the SVIC to halt construction. Unable to fund a defense, the SVIC was forced to withdraw its application. The purpose of this case study was to learn about the attempted siting of the Cordoba Center from 2008 and 2013 to gain a deeper understanding of why the effort was not successful.

Using a qualitative approach, I was able to understand the events and actions of the siting of the Cordoba Center with words rather than just numbers. The qualitative approach provided the needed flexibility to examine the complex events and participant

actions taken during the siting of the Cordoba Center. Conducting a qualitative study also helped me facilitate community-based research in order to develop causal explanations and findings that are understandable to others. As a case study, using loosely structured interviews with purposefully selected individuals provided a detailed understanding of this complex issue. These details and findings can be used to improve existing policies and practices.

The findings of this study are the result of my examination of public documents and having conducted participant interviews. I developed themes by listening to coded participant interviews several times. Using the lens of Kingdon's (2011) MSF, I was able to identify steps and possible missteps by the SVIC during its attempt to build the Cordoba Center. The following six themes emerged from the study:

- CEQA;
- Muslims are viewed as outsiders who do not assimilate and pose a threat;
- water;
- lack of control;
- agitators; and
- politics.

Interpretation of Findings

As I discussed in Chapter 2, Kingdon's (2011) framework explained that, for an issue to move up on an agenda, a policy window must be opened. The policy window is opened when various stakeholders and policy entrepreneurs engage in the problem, policy, and politics streams. In the end, the streams must join in order to move the issue

up the agenda. In the case of the Cordoba Center, the streams must join so that construction can begin.

Multiple Streams Framework

Problem stream. The SVIC identified their problem as the need for a prayer and meeting space. During public hearings and participant interviews, SVIC members indicated that their congregation had outgrown the barn they had been using as a prayer space. Given the high level of traffic congestion in the area, SVIC members described traveling for Friday afternoon prayers as a burden for Muslims in the area. To find a more suitable and permanent prayer space, SVIC members held fundraisers and mortgaged their personal property to purchase land in San Martin. They then proceeded to work with the local government to begin the process of building the Cordoba Center. Study participants familiar with the Cordoba Center clearly understood that the problem the SVIC was trying to resolve was the lack of a permanent place of worship. This clear understanding of the problem among study participants appears to indicate that the SVIC was able to communicate its problem to a wide audience.

Policy stream. Participant interviews and a review of public documents indicated that SVIC properly followed land development rules set forth by the local government. According to the SVIC, the rules and process were clear and applied fairly to them. Based on a review of the data, SVIC was very diligent in the policy stream and, at one point in the process, the SVIC had to address a transgression by a lower level government employee. The employee, sympathetic to the opponents of the Cordoba Center, was from the Environmental Health Department. In preparing a staff report, the employee did not

follow proper protocol and instead copied text with very stringent recommendations from a previous PCGA complaint. By doing so, the employee attempted to misrepresent the text as official county policy and was trying to establish strict conditions for establishing the proposed cemetery. The SVIC recognized the text from a former PCGA complaint and protested. County administrators quickly responded and removed the text from the staff report.

As the application for the Cordoba Center moved through the land development process, major policy problems were brought to the attention of county administrators. According to participant interviews, cemetery regulations in Santa Clara County were developed in the 1940s, a time when the county was mostly undeveloped land. The regulations required that a notice be physically posted every 300 feet within a 1-mile radius around a proposed cemetery. This regulation meant that the SVIC would have to post 50,000–70,000 notices throughout the area. The burden imposed by this regulation was an unforeseen problem because no new cemeteries had been proposed in the area for several decades. The county determined that the regulations were outdated and required modification.

At the same time, Santa Clara County discovered that its land use policies required updating because the policies did not fully comply with RLUIPA. The need to modernize existing legislation was an unexpected result of the Cordoba Center application. Although the CEQA lawsuit was the primary factor that forced SVIC to withdraw its application, the county continued to make needed changes to the legislation even after this point. Santa Clara County spent about 7 months updating cemetery policies

and another several years complying with RLUIPA. Although unintentional and indirect, the SVIC acted as policy entrepreneurs in the policy stream by investing their resources to push their agenda. As unintended policy entrepreneurs, the SVIC push provided a deeper insight into the land development process in Santa Clara and established a more solid foundation for other organizations to build a house of worship or cemetery in San Martin.

Politics stream. The findings of this case study lead me to understand that most of the missteps by the SVIC seem to have taken place in the politics stream. According to participant interviews, the SVIC lacked an understanding of the history and political climate of San Martin. This lack of understanding suggests that the SVIC was not aware of the public mood. The deficits of SVIC in this stream were within these areas of concern:

- lack of legal counsel,
- land purchase,
- history of water pollution in San Martin, and
- Islamophobia.

Lack of legal counsel. The lack of legal counsel may have hindered the SVIC from moving forward easily through the application process. In addition, a knowledgeable attorney may have helped SVIC avoid the CEQA lawsuit. According to interview participants, in an effort to avoid the rigid environmental impact reviews required by CEQA, the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors approved the Cordoba Center at a reduced size and limited hours of operation. SVIC initially agreed to the

conditions, but later appealed the changes. During public hearings, a member of the Board of Supervisors mentioned that the SVIC could apply to extend the Cordoba Center at a future time. This comment opened the door for the CEQA lawsuit. According to CEQA, any possible plans to expand a project must be mitigated at the present time. Interview participants believed that hiring an attorney from the inception of the Cordoba Center application may have avoided these types of issues.

Land purchase. According to participant interviews, SVIC purchased the land for the Cordoba Center outright, with no contract contingencies in place. Supporters and opponents expressed that the Cordoba Center could have already been built somewhere else had the SVIC not been restricted to building in San Martin. Participants familiar with the SVIC process indicated that the SVIC had not conducted any research about the community prior to purchasing the land because they did not expect resistance to the Cordoba Center and they did not know about the previous water table contamination.

History of water pollution in San Martin. San Martin residents lack a municipal water supply system and rely on well water for drinking, sanitation, livestock, and agriculture. In 2003, a factory producing road flares contaminated the water table with perchlorates. From 2003 until 2013, San Martin residents and livestock could not drink the well water and relied upon bottled drinking water. In 2013, most of the well water was cleared for consumption by local authorities, but the pollution appears to have left a mark in the minds of the community. Although supporters believed that Muslim burials were safe, several opponents of the Cordoba Center expressed concern that the shrouded

human remains in the proposed cemetery could pollute the water; ultimately, neither side of the cemetery debate provided evidence to support their claims.

Islamophobia. Islamophobic activities can be grouped into six clusters: attacks on persons, attacks on property, intimidation, institutional, public domain, and government action (Sayyid, 2014). A review of the literature and participant interviews revealed the existence or suggestion of intimidation by opponents, attempts to influence the public domain, and government action. There was no evidence of any type attack or that Muslims were treated less favorably in an institutional setting.

Although Muslims in America have been encountering increased Islamophobia since September 11, 2001, through criticism, prejudice, and xenophobia, participant interviews with SVIC members surprisingly indicated that they did not anticipate intimidation by protests, anti-Islamic comments, or threats of violence from any opponents (see Bowe & Makki, 2015; Hummel, 2012; Peña, 2009). The GMHP and PCGA led a door-knocking campaign, which deliberately spread misinformation, and engaged in fear-mongering and emotional manipulation. In addition, the GMHP brought speakers into the community who spoke on the evils of Islam. The speakers suggested that Islam was an ideology and not a religion, presumably in an attempt to delegitimize Islam as a religion so that Muslims lose protection under the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.

SVIC appears to have always been in a reactive instead of a proactive role in the politics stream. SVIC members said that they did not expect anti-Muslim sentiments during the process because they had been living, working, and praying in the area for

decades and were never made to feel like outsiders. They were shocked by the magnitude of mobilization and intimidation by the GMHP and the PCGA. In fact, some opponents held such a high level of disdain and mistrust toward Muslims that they even suggested government action against the mosque in the forms of increased surveillance and treating Muslims less favorably. The high number of active opponents suggests that the SVIC was unprepared for any opposition, especially from outside agitators, such as the GMHP.

A possible lack of Muslim visibility and community engagement on a wide scale may have also contributed to non-Muslims feeling outraged by the concept and size of the Cordoba Center in their open-space community. As the process for the Cordoba Center continued, even timid opponents, such as the San Martin Neighborhood Alliance, started to feel ignored by the SVIC, later saying during participant interviews that the SVIC had burned bridges with the community. The memberships of the GMHP and the PCGA eventually became compounded, making it difficult to distinguish between the members of each organization and identify the funding stream for the CEQA lawsuit. The GMHP and the PCGA were the lead policy entrepreneurs throughout the politics stream and used their resources to further their own agenda to stop the siting of the Cordoba Center. Although the SVIC had various supporters in the community, they were not as vocal or active as the memberships of the GMHP and PCGA. Ultimately, the PCGA used CEQA to prevent the siting of the Cordoba Center.

CEQA

While CEQA has been the subject of criticism for several decades, policy researchers have given it little attention. My review of the literature showed that most

complaints about CEQA focused on how it impedes revenues in the private sector, especially during economic downturns in California (Barbour & Teitz, 2005; Olshansky, 1996; Shigley, 2010). The results of this case study lead me to understand that CEQA can also have negative effects on the development of nonprofit organizations, such as houses of worship. In addition, because nonprofits may have less cash flow than private companies, CEQA lawsuits may discourage nonprofit organizations from building in California.

Complaints about CEQA share a common theme that CEQA does not encourage effective regional planning. CEQA assigns policy decisions to local governing bodies, which may have varying environmental protection values. As a result, CEQA has been described as costly, vague, dynamic, and confusing, as the following examples show:

- The original intention of CEQA was to protect the physical environment (i.e., air, land, and water); however, it has been expanded by the courts to remedy urban decay and other social justice issues (Amur, 2007; Curtin, 2005).
- Economically and politically motivated plaintiffs can take advantage of the broad rules of CEQA (Diaz, 2012; Frick, 2014).
- It can be difficult to prepare for CEQA because CEQA has been applied inconsistently across different jurisdictions (Bilir, 2012).
- CEQA is not helpful with long-range planning because it focuses on project-by-project analysis (Little Hoover Commission, 2005; Olshansky, 1996).
- CEQA lawsuits have been used to stop projects during midconstruction (Amur, 2007; Curtin, 2005).

- Developers often try to create defensible “bulletproof” documents in the possible event that a CEQA lawsuit could be filed with the courts. They do so by including extra details in the EIR. Costs associated with this task are paid by the project applicant and the agencies involved (R. L. Nelson, 2012).
- According to the Legislative Analyst’s Office ([LAO] 1997), mitigating environmental impacts can be ineffective, unreasonable, or cost-prohibitive.

In this case study, a CEQA lawsuit filed by the PCGA served to stop the siting of the Cordoba Center. The PCGA was an ad hoc organization whose membership included people from the GMHP, a politically conservative organization. I reached out to the PCGA to learn more about their perceptions and reasons for filing the CEQA lawsuit. I surface-mailed letters, made telephone calls, sent e-mails, and posted messages on social media to reported members of the PCGA, but no one responded to my requests to participate in the study. Through participant interviews, I was made aware that the possible leader of the PCGA had passed away within the past few years. Members of the GMHP and PCGA conducted door-knocking campaigns, spread negative information about Muslims, invited speakers into the community who condemned Islam, and had members who openly made anti-Islamic speakers welcome at their meetings. A third group opposed to the Cordoba Center, the SMNA, did not participate in the CEQA lawsuit or in anti-Islamic activities, and focused its debate on environmental concerns. The crossover membership between the GMHP and the PCGA and their anti-Islamic actions suggest that the CEQA lawsuit by PCGA was more politically motivated rather than focused on protecting the environment.

Limitations

There were several limitations in this study. I conducted this study 4 years after the SVIC withdrew its application, which meant that a few participants had difficulty remembering some details about the events that occurred between 2008 and 2013. I was also unable to interview several key people who may have had valuable insight into the challenges of siting the Cordoba Center, including former SVIC members who did not wish to participate in the study, an identified leader of the PCGA who had passed away, and elected officials who did not respond to my requests for an interview. While African Americans make up approximately 17% of the Muslims in America, there are fewer than 50 African Americans in San Martin, making up less than 1% of the population. This statistic may explain the unintentional absence of African Americans in the study.

Recommendations

Understanding the events surrounding the siting of a controversial mosque provides much-needed information to help Muslims, policy makers, and communities address the needs of a growing Islamic population in the United States. In this case study, I explored the perceptions of various community members and the events that led to a CEQA lawsuit to stop the siting of a controversial mosque. Results of participant interviews and the review of public documents and media reports helped shape several recommendations. Several interview participants provided suggestions for alleviating concerns about the Cordoba Center, but depending on the concern being addressed by the participant (size, location, water use), the recommendations sometimes contradicted each other. For example, to improve the transparency of the events that take place at the

Cordoba Center, some participants suggested that the facility be designed as an open space, visible from the road with no obstructions. Contrary to this recommendation, in order for the Cordoba Center to fit into the esthetics of the community, other participants suggested that trees and shrubbery be used to minimize the perceived size of the Cordoba Center from the street level. These contradictions provide insight into the magnitude of complexity regarding the siting of the Cordoba Center.

Although the following recommendations are the result of studying the efforts to build a mosque, community center, and cemetery, they may prove helpful to other religious groups (controversial or not) when attempting to build a house of worship. Non-Muslim groups may benefit from understanding the history, culture, and political climate of a community in which they want to build a house of worship. The benefits of researching a potential site may include mitigating costly law suits and negative media attention.

Recommendations for Islamic Communities

In this case study, I showed that, given the complexity of siting a mosque, Islamic groups should not attempt to move forward in the development process without first understanding the political climate of the community in which they wish to build a mosque, community center, or mosque. Exploring the political climate may save Islamic groups money and time, as well as mitigate negative press. The following assessment questions are offered as a springboard to assist Muslims in determining if a specific community is amenable to the siting of a new mosque, community center, or cemetery:

- When was the last time a house of worship was built in the area?

- What do people in the surrounding area think about Muslims?
- When was the last time a cemetery was built in the area and are the laws in compliance with local and federal requirements?
- Have there been any traumatic events in the community that may interfere with the proposed mosque, community center, or cemetery? For example, in New York City, although Muslims has been praying in a low-key storefront a few blocks from the World Trade Center for many years, the proposal to build a mosque in the same location was seen as disrespectful and attracted protesters.
- In San Martin, a community that lived through the ordeal of polluted drinking water for 10 years, a proposed Islamic cemetery stoked concerns about water safety again.
- Who could be opposed to a mosque, community center, or cemetery and what would be their legitimate reasons?
- Who could be the possible agitators, locally and from the outside? What type of additional problems could agitators amplify? Civil rights violations? National attention? Negative public opinion?
- Can our Islamic community financially, legally, and emotionally commit to a long-term battle with agitators, if the need does arise?
- If we proceed, who will be the face and voice for the organization?
- How do we market ourselves? How do we lobby the public and decision makers for support? How long do we do so?

Asking these questions does not mean halting the idea of moving forward if they cannot be answered satisfactorily; rather, being aware of the political considerations can help organizations to better plan how to move forward.

In order to answer some of these questions, Islamic communities will need the support of professionals with legal and political prowess. Attorneys can research local laws to make sure they are compliant with federal regulations. Determining the status of compliance can save a great deal of time and money for Islamic groups. If the laws are up to date, legal staff may also help reduce the likelihood of future CEQA litigation by reviewing paperwork and monitoring environmental safety tests.

Recommendations for Policy Makers

Muslims are the second largest religious minority in the United States and it is expected that by 2050, they will surpass the Jewish community and become the largest (Pew Research Center, 2015). In order to meet the growing need of Islamic prayer space, policy makers must be proactive and take steps to meet the needs of this small, but growing population. Policy makers should examine their current cemetery policies to make sure they meet modern public notification standards. They should also examine local land use laws to determine if they conform to RLUIPA.

CEQA continues to be controversial in California and requires a closer examination to make sure it is not used for purposes other than protecting the environment. Policy makers should reexamine CEQA and its lack of petitioner transparency. Under CEQA, people with ulterior motives can create ad hoc organizations and file a lawsuit using the pretense of a genuine desire to protect the environment. This

flexibility actually hides funding sources, which, if more visible, could reveal the true motives behind a CEQA lawsuit. Improved transparency could prevent CEQA from being used to violate religious civil rights.

Recommendations for Future Studies

In this case study, I interviewed participants several years after the Cordoba Center was stopped from being built. Future researchers may wish to replicate this study but follow a mosque application as it unfolds. Doing so could allow a researcher to observe events directly and build trust with a wider range of participants.

Future studies can also build upon the questions offered earlier in this section. The questions can be used to design an assessment tool to help determine the likelihood of a mosque being built. Participant interviews indicated that there was a trend among nonprofits in the San Martin area to purchase land in the area without conducting research. It is unclear if other nonprofits are encountering difficulties similar to those experienced by the SVIC. Future studies could provide a deeper understanding of why nonprofits take a riskier approach when purchasing land and whether this approach is successful.

Future research could also explore similar case studies of other successful or unsuccessful mosques and Islamic community centers. The third component of this study, the cemetery, also offers an opportunity for future research. An examination of non-Christian cemeteries, such as those developed by members of Buddhist or Sikh groups, may offer insight into whether other groups are also having difficulty siting cemeteries.

Further evaluation of CEQA could provide examples of how well or poorly the policy serves religious and nonprofit organizations. A review of the literature showed that most evaluations of CEQA are quantitative and focus mainly on private, for-profit development. If CEQA is shown to be harmful to the development of nonprofit organizations, it may encourage policy makers to rethink the law.

African Americans have two distinctions in the Muslim American community: they make up 17% of the Muslim American community, and are 90% of the converts to Islam (Peña, 2009; Simmons, 2008). In this case study, there were no African American participants, likely because the study took place in San Martin, California—a community with fewer than 50 African Americans. In a future study, researchers might want to consider a location with more African Americans in the community to collect richer, more culturally diverse data.

Social Change Implication

The number of mosques since the 1970s has increased by 87% to meet the needs of a growing Muslim population in the United States (Hummel, 2012). During the same time, several political, economic, and terror events around the globe have fueled Islamophobia, the unfounded hostility and dislike toward Muslims (Conway, 1997). Policy makers have the power to potentially address social problems such as Islamophobia in the United States and protect the rights of Muslim Americans. As a social problem, little is known about the possibly deceptive ways people may use CEQA to violate the civil rights of Muslims. The findings in this study are intended to fill this gap in the literature by introducing an example of how CEQA was used for reasons other

than environmental protection. In this case study, there is information for policy makers who may receive applications for the siting of a mosque in their community. I hope it will encourage them to review their current religious land use and cemetery policies to ensure that they meet local, state, and federal requirements and avoid unnecessary bottlenecks and litigation. In addition, this study yielded insight into what worked well and the missteps taken by those who applied to build a mosque. This information can be valuable to others who are planning to build a mosque, community center, and cemetery.

Conclusion

Since the tragedy of September 11th, Muslims in America (and those who are perceived to be Muslim) have been singled out for heinous treatment. This increase in Islamophobia has been linked to a variety of causes, such as media stereotypes, the role that U.S. Muslims play in their relationship with non-Muslims, and domestic and foreign policy (Bowe, 2017; Johnston, 2016; Peña, 2009; Rauf, 2016). For instance, President Trump's administration has put Muslims in a more negative spotlight with its anti-Muslim rhetoric and policies of "extreme vetting" and restriction on immigration from some Muslim-majority countries, known as the "Muslim Ban" (Bowe, 2017; Yukich, 2018). In addition, there are at least 37 groups in the United States focused on promoting prejudice against Islam and Muslims (see Appendix C). These organizations earned \$119 million in total revenue between 2008 and 2011 (Saylor, 2014). In 2011 and 2012, they introduced 78 pieces of legislation, designed to vilify Islam, to the legislatures of 29 states and Congress (Saylor, 2014).

Although efforts have been made to bridge the gap between Muslims and non-Muslims, the past few years have been difficult for many Muslims in America, with surveys showing that Americans continue to view Muslims more negatively than all other religions (Pew Research Center, 2014; Wormald, 2014; Yukich, 2018). Less than 2% of the U.S. population is Muslim; therefore, most Americans have little contact with them. In comparison to other religions in the United States, although the U.S. Catholic Church lost 3 million adherents between 2000 and 2010, Catholicism still represented 19% of the total U.S. population (Association of Religion Data Archives, 2010). This limited interaction, joined with the constant negative spotlight on Islam, has made some Americans anxious about having Muslim neighbors (Bowe, 2017). Because these problems continue to exist among a growing Muslim population in the United States, they may play a role in the difficulties of siting controversial mosques (Bagby, 2009; Johnston, 2016).

The SVIC has spent \$3 million in its attempt to build the Cordoba Center, yet no ground has been broken for the new mosque. The primary public policy issue in this case study was that CEQA can be used to stop land development projects for reasons other than protecting the environment—which is the main purpose of CEQA. As a “blunt instrument” with the power to stop development projects of any size (LAO, 1997, p. 17), CEQA has vast negative social change implications (Frick, 2014). While it may be unintended, this case study showed that CEQA can be used to cloak discrimination using the illusion of social justice and environmental protection, and it is negatively affecting social freedom of religious expression.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

Date and Time of Interview: _____

Interview Location: _____

Interviewee Name and Title: _____

Interviewee Organization: _____

Interviewer: Frederick Sahakian

Brief Study Description: The purpose of this study is to gather narratives from those involved in Cordoba Center from 2008 and 2013 in an effort to answer the central research question: What are the key elements which led to community protest and ensuing CEQA lawsuit against the Cordoba Center?

Interviewee Demographics

1. Gender:
 - a. Female
 - b. Male
 - c. Other _____
2. Age:
 - a. 18–24
 - b. 25–34
 - c. 35–44
 - d. 45–54
 - e. 55–64
 - f. 65–74

- g. 75 years or older
3. Ethnicity:
- a. White
 - b. Hispanic or Latino
 - c. Black or African American
 - d. Native American or American Indian
 - e. Asian / Pacific Islander
 - f. Other _____
4. Political affiliation:
- a. Constitution party
 - b. Democratic party
 - c. Green party
 - d. Libertarian party
 - e. Republican party
 - f. Other _____
5. Religion:
- a. Agnostic
 - b. Atheist
 - c. Buddhist
 - d. Christian
 - e. Hindu
 - f. Jewish

- g. Muslim
 - h. Other _____
6. Education:
- a. Less than high school
 - b. High school graduate (includes equivalency)
 - c. Some college, no degree
 - d. Trade/technical/vocational training
 - e. Associate's degree
 - f. Bachelor's degree
 - g. Graduate or professional degree
 - h. Ph.D.
7. Marital status:
- a. Single, never married
 - b. Married or domestic partnership
 - c. Widowed
 - d. Divorced
 - e. Separated
8. Employment status:
- a. Employed for wages
 - b. Self-employed
 - c. Out of work and looking for work
 - d. Out of work but not currently looking for work

- e. A homemaker
- f. A student
- g. Military
- h. Retired
- i. Unable to work

Interviewee Identification

1. What are your affiliations with the Cordoba Center? [Are you a resident of the area, a member of the SVIC, PCGA, Board of Supervisors, etc.] What is your primary affiliation?
2. How long have you been part of [affiliation]?
3. What was your role with [affiliation]?
4. When did you first learn about the Cordoba Center?
5. What did you understand to be the purpose of building the Cordoba Center?

Viewpoints

1. Who were the main supporters of building the Cordoba Center? Who are the main opponents?
2. What arguments do supporters and opponents state for and against building the Cordoba Center? What do you think about their claims? (Do you agree/disagree? Do you think they truly believe those claims?)
3. Do you/your organization support or oppose building the Cordoba Center? Why?

4. How do you think the general public feels about the Cordoba Center? Are they mostly supportive, mostly against, indifferent?

Problems

1. What do you know about the SVIC? Who are the members? What are their goals?
2. Why is the SVIC building the Cordoba Center?
3. What do you know about PCGA? Who are the members? What are their goals?
4. Do you/your organization have any relationship with SVIC or PCGA?
5. In general, what were some of the biggest problems/challenges with building the Cordoba Center? The mosque, the community center, or the cemetery? Or something else?

Policy

1. What do you know about the development process in Santa Clara? What do you think about it? What was your role during the Cordoba Center application process?
2. Do you think the process was clear and applied fairly?
3. What went well and didn't go well in the process?
4. How has the local government been involved in this process?
5. How well do you think the government is managing this process?
6. Do you think the laws and policies to manage this process are fair and sufficient?

7. Did SVIC understand and follow the policies?

Politics

1. What is the community in San Martin like?
2. What is the political mood in San Martin when this process started and how has it changed?
3. How would you describe public sentiment about Muslims in the San Martin and surrounding communities? Do you think that was a contributing factor?
4. How has the process of building the Cordoba Center impacted the local community?
5. Why is building the Cordoba Center controversial?
6. What are the key elements that led to community protest against the Cordoba Center?
7. Why did the PCGA sue the SVIC under CEQA? Why do you think a CEQA lawsuit was filed against the SVIC?
8. Did political ideologies play a role in the siting of Cordoba Center? What about religious ideologies? How so? What else played a role?
9. What, if anything, do you think the applicants (SVIC) did right or wrong? What, if anything, do you think the opposition did right or wrong?
10. How do you think supporters can make a stronger case? How do you think opponents can make a stronger case?

Other

1. What is an alternative to building the Cordoba Center in San Martin? (Build elsewhere, build something else, etc.?)
2. Do you have any other thoughts, comments, or perspectives that you would like to share?

Appendix B: List of Themes and Codes

Theme	Codes
CEQA	Use CEQA to bleed organizations of money and delay the process. San Martin will keep using CEQA over and over. Positive thought about CEQA. Negative comments about CEQA. How to improve CEQA. Interesting CEQA solution mentioned. Participant has CEQA knowledge. CEQA can be misused/abused.
AGITATORS	When did it become controversial? Agitators are not from San Martin. Tea Party does door knocking campaign against Cordoba Center. PCGA/Patriots created a wedge between SVIC and SMNA. Opposition uses lies and alternate facts to fight Cordoba Center. Opposition trying to recruit. Acting like an extremist group. Opposition would follow SVIC regardless of proposed Cordoba Center location. Opponents take photos when land tests are conducted. Opponents brought in outsiders against SVIC. Only a few people are loud and stoking fears. Opponents are vicious.
WATER	Trauma/concern of previous water pollution. Easier to build probably without cemetery. Cemetery and water contamination concerns. Per SVIC, cemetery/body concern has no science behind it. Green burial and water contamination concern. Nitrate levels and water contamination concern. Perchlorate and water contamination concern.
LACK OF CONTROL	Opponents feeling victimized. Government should have done or known better regarding some of their decisions. Residents don't trust the government. SVIC is not listening to the community. There's been an increase in development in the area. Government not enforcing laws. Population has increased in area. San Martin is not rural anymore. San Martin people are angry at county. San Martin in the "middle" of growth. Larger developers/people with money get to build what they want. Lack of infrastructure or sewage in San Martin is a concern. Community wants area to remain rural/open space/small and clean San Martin feels they are powerless/dumping ground because they are an unincorporated area. Can't get out of your own driveway - lifestyle change Built in San Martin because it may not happen in Gilroy or Morgan Hill. Break building code laws and fix things later approach.

(table continues)

Theme	Codes
MUSLIMS ARE VIEWED AS OUTSIDERS WHO DO NOT ASSIMILATE AND POSE A THREAT	<p>No concerns over churches, but Muslims pose an issue to traffic. SVIC: Immigrants are moving in, many did not assimilate. SVIC is lying about the reason to build=Terrorism. Concerned over treatment of women and lack of assimilation. Community youth picking up anti-Muslim from media. Violence/safety/harassment-concern for Muslims and mosque. Hatred not justified. Muslim made to feel like an “other”. Opposition is stoking fears. Law enforcement should monitor mosques= terrorism. Negative letters sent out to community about Muslims=terrorism. Muslims want to hurt America= terrorism. Muslims think Americans are the enemy= terrorism. Concern over who funds the mosque= terrorism. Islam and mosque as source of terrorism= terrorism. Mosque is more than religion, it’s a gathering place in general. Raw sewage dumping= terrorism. Cordoba Center will be used to recruit terrorists. Cemetery hides Islamophobia. Institute environment monitoring= terrorism. Anti-Muslim campaign by opponents. Anti-Muslim threat or comment heard or felt unsafe at a meeting.</p>
POLITICS STREAM	<p>Concerns about traffic increase. Opposed to activity at mosque. Worked well Issues have already been mitigated Restricted hours of mosque usage by BOS (an appeal reason) SVIC needed help to fight lawsuit. SVIC transparent but backfired. Transparent but not always clear. Requested size is similar to churches in the area Question for SVIC: Why cemetery? Lawfare Why SVIC has become more low profile to the community Preaching to the choir regarding interfaith Interfaith – doesn’t believe in it (how to reach these people?) Size of building Poverty in area has created negative attitude toward foreigners. Many churches of same size in San Martin Assimilation Land purchase Burned bridges between SVIC and SMNA Attendee size less than opponents make it to be Concern about number of people that will attend Cordoba Center. Informed citizen didn’t know about the controversy. Inconsistent message between SVIC members.</p>

(table continues)

Theme	Codes
POLITICS STREAM	<p>Glorified a large mosque online.</p> <p>Opponents don't trust SVIC. SVIC lies and spreads misinformation.</p> <p>Choices of news and information.</p> <p>Appeal of a bigger mosque.</p> <p>Regional mosque concern- bringing outsiders to community.</p> <p>SVIC alienated community.</p> <p>SVIC caught off guard with protests.</p> <p>Negative perception of process.</p> <p>Politicians are in pockets of developers.</p> <p>SVIC explains why they want this amount of space</p> <p>SVIC accused of colluding while showing weakness in laws.</p> <p>SVIC did not anticipate water concerns.</p> <p>SVIC bullying their way into community.</p> <p>No plans for bell ringing for Call to Prayers.</p> <p>Perception - Call to prayers.</p> <p>Perception - Regional mosque.</p>

Appendix C: List of Groups in the United States Focused on Promoting Prejudice

Against Islam and Muslims

ACT! For America
American Freedom Defense Initiative
American Freedom Law Center
American Public Policy Alliance
American-Islamic Forum for Democracy
Americans Against Hate
Atlas Shrugs
Bare Naked Islam
Bay People
Center for Security Policy
Center for the Study of Political Islam
Christian Action Network
Citizens for National Security
Concerned American Citizens
Concerned Citizens for the First Amendment
Counter Terrorism Operations Center
David Horowitz Freedom Center
Debbieshussel.com
Dove World Outreach Center
Florida Family Association
Former Muslims United
Forum for Middle East Understanding
Gates of Vienna
Investigative Project on Terrorism
Jihad Watch
Middle East Forum
Middle East Media Research Institute
Militant Islam Monitor
SAE Productions
Society of Americans for National Existence
Stop the Islamization of Nations
Strategic Engagement Group
Tennessee Freedom Coalition
The Clarion Fund
The Shoebat Foundation
The United West
The Virginia Anti-Shariah Taskforce