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# On Blasphemy: Immigrant Muslim Leaders in America

Angela Ewing  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

Angela D. Ewing

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Walden University  
2019

Abstract

On Blasphemy: Immigrant Muslim Leaders in America

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MMAS, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 2004

MBA, City University, 1999

BS, Missouri State University, 1987

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Public Policy and Administration

Walden University

May 2019

## Abstract

Some Muslim immigrants in the United States have difficulty reconciling American free speech rights with the blasphemy component of Islamic law, which often requires death for those who criticize Islam. Little academic literature addresses reconciliation of Islamic beliefs with the Constitutional right to free speech or information on Muslim political participation regarding free speech. Using policy feedback theory as the foundation, the purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the experiences of Muslim immigrants who practice Islam in a free speech society. Data were collected from a sample of 10 immigrant Muslim imams, scholars, and community leaders in Virginia regarding blasphemy laws, and examination of their acculturation experiences and political participation in the United States where insults against religion are protected. Interview transcripts were coded using attribute, anchor, descriptive, and in vivo codes and then subjected to thematic analysis. Findings indicate that participants shared diverse experiences, but most believed that education and dialogue are the best solutions to blasphemy. Some would accept certain blasphemy restrictions, but others opposed any punishment. All were happy with life in America and had little interest in influencing free speech policies, unless free speech were at risk. Then, some would lobby as groups against free speech restrictions, supporting the policy feedback theory. Findings influence positive social change by encouraging dialogue with Muslims, discouraging anti-Muslim immigration policies and Sharia bans, and reducing fears of Muslim immigrants imposing strict blasphemy punishments. Policymakers, the public, and Muslims would benefit from the reduced Islamophobia.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

### **Background**

Controversy lingers among scholars, politicians, and others regarding Muslims entering the United States and purportedly attempting to import strict versions of Sharia (i.e., Islamic) law. The literature revealed that interpretations of Sharia within the communities of Muslim scholars, lawmakers, and ordinary citizens across the globe are wide and varied, sometimes contentious. Some Muslim-majority countries such as Pakistan have harsh laws dealing with blasphemy, including the death penalty (see Pakistan Penal Code, 1860). The Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamic organizations are heavily scrutinized and accused of attempting to slowly change America's legal system to more closely mirror strict Sharia codes (Lebl, 2013). Therefore, I conducted this study to help answer this question: Should Americans fear the possibility of Muslim immigrant community leaders attempting to limit the free speech rights granted by the U.S. Constitution's First Amendment to punish perpetrators of hate speech against Islam and Muslims? Little research offers insights on Muslim immigrants' views of blasphemy and blasphemy policies or how their acculturation experiences in America's free speech society influence their views.

According to Farivar (2018), the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) says a hate crime is "a traditional offense like murder, arson or vandalism with an added element of bias" (para. 7). The FBI investigates and collects data on hate crime and defines it as "a criminal offense against a person or property motivated in whole or in part by an offender's bias against a race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, ethnicity,

gender or gender identity” (Farivar, 2018, para. 7). In contrast, hate speech is not a punishable offense in the United States. Unlike many other countries, hate speech is protected under the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution unless it evolves into a hate crime (Farivar, 2018, para. 7–8).

Hate speech or blasphemy against Muslims and Islam is a highly controversial and sensitive subject, particularly among Muslims around the world. In traditional Islamic jurisprudence, blasphemy performed by a Muslim is apostasy and is considered a capital offense punishable by death (Durie, 2012). For the non-Muslim, blasphemy is not apostasy; however, if he or she is living under Islamic rule, the death penalty applies (Durie, 2012). Using the Quran (i.e., the Islamic holy book) and the Sunna (i.e., actions and words of the Islamic Prophet Muhammad) as sources, Sharia law provides guidance on religion, politics, business, economics, banking, and so on (Karseboom, 2012).

Some countries, both Muslim-majority and Western, have blasphemy laws in place. For example, Pakistan’s Penal Code 295-C (1860, see Appendix B) states:

Use of derogatory remarks, etc., in respect of the Holy Prophet: Whoever by words, either spoken or written, or by visible representation or by any imputation, innuendo, or insinuation, directly or indirectly, defiles the sacred name of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) shall be punished with death, or imprisonment for life, and shall also be liable to fine.

At odds with such blasphemy laws, the United States enjoys freedom of speech under the auspices of the First Amendment of the Constitution. The First Amendment (n.d.) states:

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.

### **Blasphemy Laws and Cases Around the World**

In 2017, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom claimed that 71 of the world's 195 countries have blasphemy laws; the punishments vary from fines to imprisonment and the death penalty (Fiss & Kestenbaum, July 2017). Most of the 71 countries are Muslim-majority. As previously mentioned, Muslim scholars and countries' lawmakers disagree on the issue of blasphemy, especially against Islam. Following are examples of blasphemy laws and cases around the world.

**Middle East and North Africa.** According to the Pew Research Center, laws against blasphemy are quite common in North Africa and the Middle East with 18 of the 20 nations in that region treating insults to Islam as a criminal offense (The Week, 2018). Apostasy (i.e., renouncing a religion) is also criminalized in 14 countries in the region (The Week, 2018). A 2016 study by the *Freedom of Thought* report found that 43 countries allow a prison term for blasphemy, while Afghanistan, Iran, Nigeria, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Somalia mete out punishment by death (International Humanist and Ethical Union, 2016). In Saudi Arabia, Raif Badawi, a human rights activist, allegedly insulted Islam in blog posts by criticizing the religious police and extreme Wahabi ideology in 2013 (Hopper, 2018). According to Hopper, his punishment was 1,000 lashes, of which the first 50 lashes were administered in 2015. Further beatings have been

delayed due to his poor health, but he continues to face more public flogging and remains imprisoned (Hopper, 2018).

Citing Pakistan and Egypt, *The Independent* says blasphemy laws can also be misused to oppress populations, especially minority groups, and can provide religious extremists with motivation to fuel hate (Kelly, 2018). Pakistan's new prime minister, Imran Khan, promised in 2018 to renew an effort to impose global blasphemy laws through the United Nations (UN). The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) attempted to pass several such resolutions through the UN but failed in 2011 (The Week, 2018).

Muslim villagers in Pakistan accused Asia Bibi, a Christian farm laborer, of insulting the Prophet Muhammad in an argument over sharing a cup of water; she spent over 8 years in prison on death row, but was acquitted and released by Pakistani courts in 2018 (Sherwood, 2018). The supreme court found no evidence to support the blasphemy charge (Sherwood, 2018). Asia Bibi's family claimed they were being targeted by Islamic extremists who were going house-to-house with Bibi's family photographs to try to find them and impose their own strict punishment for her alleged crime (Sherwood, 2018). Bibi's family members had been in hiding since her acquittal until they were able to apply for asylum and leave the country (Sherwood, 2018).

**Americas and Asia-Pacific.** The Americas are not immune to having blasphemy laws. According to the Pew Research Center, one third of the Americas continue to have blasphemy laws as well as almost a quarter of countries in the Asia-Pacific region



(Theodorou, 2016). A Christian governor in Indonesia was sentenced to 2 years in prison in 2017 after allegedly insulting Islam during a campaign speech (The Week, 2018).

**Africa.** Sub-Saharan Africa maintains the fewest restrictions on insults to religion. Sudan, Somalia, Nigeria, and Senegal (four of the region's 48 nations) outlaw blasphemy. However, this does not account for informal Sharia law operating at local levels. Moreover, the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU) report claimed that Nigeria and Somalia can still carry the death penalty (The Week, 2018).

**Europe.** Several European countries maintain blasphemy laws. England and Wales abolished blasphemy laws in 2008, but Scotland and Northern Ireland continue to sustain the laws (The Week, 2018). Other countries in the region (e.g., Ireland, Poland, Greece, Italy, and Russia) can criminally charge blasphemers, but constitutional guarantees of freedom of expression make such prosecutions nearly impossible (The Week, 2018).

Greece and Denmark have had their share of issues concerning blasphemy. Greek police arrested the blogger, Philippos Loizos, in 2012 for creating a Facebook page that depicted a highly respected Greek Orthodox monk with his face replaced by a baked pasta dish, a pun on the monk's surname (The Week, 2018). Loizos was convicted of blasphemy and given a 10-month suspended prison sentence later overturned on appeal (The Week, 2018). Danish prosecutors used an 1866 prohibition against insulting religion in 2017 to charge a man accused of burning a Quran and posting the video online; this was the first use of this law since 1971 (The Week, 2018). Danish lawmakers repealed the 334-year-old blasphemy law in 2018 that forbids public insults of a religion,

even though 66% of Danes wanted to maintain the ban on the books (The Week, 2018).

In 2005, Muslims around the world protested the depiction of the Prophet Muhammed as a cartoon in a Danish newspaper (Kelly, 2018). A tragic consequence 10 years later was the murder of the staff of the satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* in Paris by Islamic extremists (Kelly, 2018).

### **Center for Security Policy: Muslim Influence on Free Speech Policies**

**Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).** The OIC is the second largest international organization in the world, behind only the UN (Weiss, 2015). It is the largest Islamic organization in the world, claiming to represent 1.5 billion Muslims and comprised of 56 UN Member States and the Palestinian Authority (Weiss, 2015). The OIC is based in Saudi Arabia, which is its largest financial backer and influencer; Pakistan, Iran, and Turkey are also powerful states within the OIC (Weiss, 2015). The OIC Member States vote together as a bloc in the UN, which is comprised of 193 Member States total (Weiss, 2015). The OIC also heavily influences the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC). Most people have never heard of the OIC, yet it may be the most powerful voting bloc in the UN (Weiss, 2015).

Since 1999, the OIC has been attempting to internationally outlaw all criticism of Sharia, Islam, Islamic theocracies, and Muslims by repeatedly introducing resolutions to the UN that would criminalize defamation of religions (Weiss, 2015). UN resolutions are not considered binding law, but repeated passage means that the resolution could be considered “customary international law;” when this occurs, nations that are not signatories may be pressured to adhere to it (Weiss, 2015, p. 21). The most notable effort

was UNHRC Resolution 16/18 (see Appendix C), “To Combat Intolerance Based on Religion or Belief.” The OIC is vocal in its objective to combat defamation of Islam. In response to this, Weiss (2015) argued that free speech is a human right, and human rights should only be granted to people, not religions, ideas, and policies. Therefore, Weiss concludes that religions, ideas and policies should not be given legal protection from criticism.

In 2011, the UNHRC adopted by consensus Resolution 16/18 (Weiss, 2015). The UNHRC adopted follow-up resolutions annually including Resolution 31/26 in 2016 (Weiss, 2015). This included positive references to the Rabat Plan of Action, which provides practical legal and policy guidance to States on implementing Article 20(2) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR; Weiss, 2015). Article 20(2) obliges States Parties to the ICCPR to prohibit “any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to hostility, discrimination or violence” (Weiss, 2015, p. 30). To achieve this, the resolution outlined an eight-point action plan for States to:

1. Create collaborative networks to build mutual understanding, promote dialogue and inspire constructive action in various fields;
2. Create a mechanism within governments to identify and address potential areas of tension between members of different religious communities, and assist with conflict prevention and mediation;
3. Train government officials in effective outreach strategies;

4. Encourage efforts of leaders to discuss within their communities the causes of discrimination, and evolve strategies to counter them;
5. Speak out against intolerance, including advocacy of religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence;
6. Adopt measures to criminalise incitement to imminent violence based on religion or belief;
7. Combat denigration and negative religious stereotyping of persons, as well as incitement to religious hatred, including through education and awareness-building; and
8. Recognize that the open, constructive and respectful debate of ideas plays a positive role in combating religious hatred, incitement and violence. (Article 19, 2016, pp. 1–2).

The UNHRC implemented a rule stating that no one may “judge or evaluate” any religion at the UNHRC (Weiss, 2015, p. 25). In response, the IHEU voiced concerns regarding violence against women in Muslim-majority countries, honor killings, stoning for adultery, female genital mutilation, and forced marriages of young girls (Weiss, 2015). The UNHRC told the IHEU that such practices are allowed under Sharia; therefore, the UNHRC is unable to address them because doing so would be judging or evaluating a religion, even though the IHEU never mentioned Sharia or Islam (Weiss, 2015).

**Sharia Law in America.** According to the Center for Security Policy (2014), there is a growing presence of Sharia in America. About 1%–2% of the American

population is Muslim, and this number is growing. There is an increasing influx of Muslim refugees, and state and local governments have almost no input on where and how those refugees will be settled (Center for Security Policy, 2014). The Muslim Brotherhood and its formal counterpart, the OIC, pursue this settlement process by encouraging and supporting the establishment of such Muslim communities in non-Islamic societies (Center for Security Policy, 2014).

The Center for Security Policy (2014) claims there is a steady expansion of the use of Sharia in United States court decisions, conflicting with state public policy and the Constitution. The Center identified 146 cases involving Sharia from 32 states and federal courts. The court upheld the use of Sharia in 27 of those 146 cases (Center for Security Policy, 2014). This means that statistically, 1 out of 5 American judges do not reject foreign law that violates federal and state public policy (Center for Security Policy, 2014).

## Chapter Preview

In this introductory chapter, I will present the aim of the research and the gap in the literature that was filled by interviewing immigrant Muslim imams, scholars, and/or community leaders in America on the topics of blasphemy and acculturation. The significance of this research to policymakers, scholars, and others interested in Muslim immigration, immigration policy, and Muslim integration will be provided within the context of Muslims' views of blasphemy laws and American First Amendment free speech rights. In the summary of literature, I will outline key studies in this field, followed by a description of the problem statement, purpose, and research questions. The last portion of the chapter will include the two theories on which this research was based, the nature of the study, assumptions, scope and delimitations, and limitations.

My aim was to fill a gap in understanding of what Muslim immigrants in America who are also imams (i.e., religious leaders), scholars, and/or community leaders think about blasphemy and blasphemy laws and whether the United States must be concerned about the possibility of Muslim constituents forming coalitions or participating in other ways politically to advance the passage of blasphemy laws. I accomplished this by comparing the perceptions of blasphemy and blasphemy laws of first- and second-generation Muslim immigrants who were also imams, scholars, and/or community leaders. Addressing the opinions of this population on blasphemy and blasphemy laws contributes to the literature on Muslim acculturation in societies that are not Muslim majority, such as the United States. It also informs policymakers on how their Muslim constituents who are leaders in their religious communities respond to First Amendment

freedom of speech rights. Finally, immigration scholars and policymakers can use the findings of this study to help make decisions regarding the legal entry of persons from Muslim-majority countries into the United States.

The phenomenon of interest was the experience of being a Muslim immigrant in America who is also an imam, scholar, and/or community leader and functioning in a non-Muslim society where freedom of speech is a constitutional right. Islamic law, or Sharia, calls for punishment for blasphemy, often by death. Obtaining the views of blasphemy and blasphemy laws from Muslim immigrants in America who are also imams, scholars, and/or community leaders addresses the problem of Americans lacking an understanding of what this cultural subgroup really believes about free speech and to what extent living in the United States impacts Muslim views of blasphemy and blasphemy laws.

The results of this study will help inform American policymakers, immigration scholars, and the public on what Muslim immigrants who are imams, scholars, and/or community leaders think about free speech. Findings revealed how their views impacted their acculturation experiences in the United States, and how their acculturation experiences impacted their views of free speech. Finally, results may inform the same stakeholders about this specific group of constituents' inclinations to participate politically with issues dealing with free speech in America.

### **Problem Statement**

The social problem of Islamophobia (i.e., the fear of Islam and Muslims) in the United States is a debate among scholars, politicians, and citizens, especially after an

incident occurs such as 9/11 or other terrorist attacks attributed to Muslims. The Institute for Social Policy and Understanding (ISPU) featured the first national American Islamophobia Index in 2018 (Mogahed & Chouhoud, 2018). ISPU's Islamophobia Index:

...measures the endorsement of anti-Muslim stereotypes (violent, misogynist), perceptions of Muslim aggression toward the United States, degree of Muslim dehumanization (less civilized), and perceptions of Muslim collective blame (partially responsible for violence), all of which are linked to public support for discriminatory policies targeting Muslims. (p. 19)

ISPU results indicated that white evangelical respondents had the highest percentages of net agreement with negative statements about Muslims. For example, 23% of white evangelicals said most Muslims living in the United States are more prone to violence; 23% said Muslims are hostile to the United States. The Islamophobia Index ranges from a minimum of 0 to a maximum of 100. The white evangelicals' Islamophobia Index was 40, higher than all others surveyed (e.g., Muslim, 17; Jewish, 22; Catholic, 22; Protestant, 31; general public, 24; Mogahed & Chouhoud, 2018, p. 19).

Estimates reveal that about 90% of the global Muslim population adhere to the Sunni sect, while up to 10% adhere to the Shia and other sects (Ibn Nazib al-Misri, 1994). The four Sunni Muslim schools of Sharia law, Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i, and Hanbali, are identical in about 75% of their legal conclusions, while the rest may be traced to differences in understanding of the primary texts (Ibn Naqib al-Misri, 1994). Ibn Naqi al-Misri's (1994) book, *Reliance of the Traveller*, is one of the most reliable works in



Shafi'i jurisprudence, a school with fewer scholarly differences on rulings than others.

Ibn Naqi al-Misri's summary of apostasy from Islam and blasphemy includes:

- “Leaving Islam is the ugliest form of unbelief (kufr) and the worst. It may come about through sarcasm...” (p. 595).
- “When a person who has reached puberty and is sane voluntarily apostatizes from Islam, he deserves to be killed” (p. 595).
- “Among the things that entail apostasy from Islam (may Allah protect us from them) are: ...to revile Allah or His messenger (Allah bless him and give him peace)” (pp. 596–597).

Pakistan is an example of a country with one of the harshest penal codes for blasphemy (Pakistan Penal Code, 1860). Pakistan is also a key player in the OIC, wishing to internationally criminalize blasphemy (Weiss, 2015). The Pakistan Penal Code lists the following offenses related to religion (see Appendix B):

- “295-A. Deliberate and malicious acts intended to outrage religious feelings of any class by insulting its religion or religious beliefs: Whoever, with deliberate and malicious intention of outraging the ‘religious feelings of any class of the citizens of Pakistan, by words, either spoken or written, or by visible representations insults the religion or the religious beliefs of that class, shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to ten years, or with fine, or with both” (p. 18).
- “295-B. Defiling, etc., of Holy Quran: Whoever willfully defiles, damages or desecrates a copy of the Holy Quran or of an extract therefrom or uses it in

any derogatory manner or for any unlawful purpose shall be punishable with imprisonment for life” (p. 18).

- “295-C. Use of derogatory remarks, etc., in respect of the Holy Prophet: Whoever by words, either spoken or written, or by visible representation or by any imputation, innuendo, or insinuation, directly or indirectly, defiles the sacred name of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) shall be punished with death, or imprisonment for life, and shall also be liable to fine” (p. 18).

Scholars have little data to help understand the impact of religious practices on Muslim immigrants’ adaptation patterns in America, which makes an understanding of their assimilation challenging (Bulut & Ebaugh, 2014). Members of a host culture that feel threatened often believe that immigrants, such as Muslims, deliberately rebuff assimilation (Croucher, 2016). However, insufficient data exist on what Muslims really think (Rane et al., 2011). Polls have been conducted on Muslim Americans’ views of Sharia law, but results differ widely depending upon the source (Rane et al., 2011). Furthermore, none of the surveys specifically asked for Muslim immigrants’ views on blasphemy, and none were aimed at Muslim immigrants in America who are imams, scholars, and/or community leaders.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative, existential, phenomenological study was to understand the perceptions of immigrant Muslims in America who are imams, scholars, and/or community leaders regarding blasphemy and blasphemy laws. Furthermore, the

results of this study will help illuminate their political participation inclinations and activities regarding free speech and blasphemy against Islam. The intent of the study was to inform the policy feedback theory and the acculturation theory and provide useful insights about immigrant Muslims in America who are imams, scholars, and/or community leaders to inform the American public, immigration scholars, and policymakers.

In this study, first- and second-generation Muslim immigrants who are imams, scholars, and/or community leaders provided their perspectives of blasphemy and blasphemy policies. They also provided their views of how their opinions have been shaped by their acculturation experiences in the United States and vice versa. The answers to the research questions will help address the concern held by some American lawmakers and some members of the public that Muslim immigrants who are imams, scholars, and/or community leaders will attempt to change American free speech policies to mirror strict Sharia punishment for blasphemy. Muslim immigrants' loyalty to American free speech policies, even in cases of blasphemy against Islam, was also addressed by this study. Finally, the inquiry provided information on whether participants from certain countries shared similar beliefs, and how this may impact American immigration debates and policy.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided this study to address the previously-mentioned issues and concerns of the American public and policymakers:

Research Question 1: What are the perceptions of Muslim first- and second-generation immigrant imams, scholars, and/or community leaders in America on blasphemy and blasphemy policies?

Research Question 2: What political actions have they taken and plan to take regarding blasphemy policies, such as letters to the editor, correspondence with political officials, voting, and joining interest groups?

Research Question 3: How do their religious views of blasphemy impact their acculturation experience and vice versa?

Research Question 4: What patterns exist between participants' Muslim sects and their views of blasphemy?

Research Question 5: What connections exist between their countries of origin and their views of free speech and blasphemy? In other words, do Muslims from certain countries share similar beliefs about blasphemy?

### **Theoretical Framework for the Study**

#### **Policy Feedback Theory**

Schattschneider (1935) wrote that policy significantly shapes group mobilization, and policy researchers over the last 20 years have extended these claims (Hacker & Pierson, 2014). The impact of existing policies on policy development and politics over time is referred to as policy feedback (Pierson, 1993). Most theories of the policy process analyze policy generation; however, policy development occurs within an environment that is influenced by policies that already exist (Pierson, 1993). In this study, I used the policy feedback theory as a framework by asking Muslim immigrants who are imams,

scholars, and/or community leaders what their views of free speech policies are in the United States and whether they are inclined to become politically active on this topic to either help sustain American freedom of speech or curtail it.

The research streams and feedback mechanisms of this theory presented by Beland (2010) and Mettler and SoRelle (2014) provided the framework for addressing the second research question about Muslim American political motivations regarding free speech policies. I followed Mettler and SoRelle's future research recommendations and built upon policy feedback theory. For example, one recommendation that I addressed with this study was extending policy feedback research beyond social welfare provisions and programs and studying how a different type of policy (e.g., First Amendment) shapes the attitudes and political behaviors of Muslim immigrants in America. I also investigated how the study participants felt about mobilizing as a group or groups to support or challenge freedom of speech policies because they may perceive that the policies are not aligned with their Islamic beliefs.

Policy feedback theory may also supplement inquiries of the policy process by stressing how previously created policies impact the likelihood and content of upcoming policy development. Beland (2010) identified the roles of six policy feedback research streams. Each stream stresses the effect of standing policies on new policy development and politics, and they emphasize six issues (Beland, 2010). Acknowledging Beland's work, Mettler and SoRelle (2014) identified four major streams of policy feedback inquiry. Some areas have attracted more followers than others, but they all possess considerable potential for future work. For this study, I focused on the power of groups

stream proposed by Mettler and SoRelle. Public policies can shape what types of groups develop and which fail to unite (Mettler & SoRelle, 2014). Research Question 2 specifically related to policy feedback.

### **Acculturation Theory**

Acculturation theory refers to the adaptation of a minority culture blending with and adapting to a majority culture; Berry, a psychologist, has been the leading acculturation theorist for the last 35 years (Kelly, 2016; Ward & Kus, 2012). Berry's earliest work on acculturation focused on the assimilation and integration of Australian aboriginals (Ward & Kus, 2012). In the acculturation strategy model, Berry (1997) offered four ways in which individuals may reconcile their original culture with the new society's dominant culture: separation, assimilation, marginalization, and integration (Ward & Kus, 2012). In this study, I drew on acculturation theory by exploring the views of Muslim immigrants in America who are imams, scholars, and/or community leaders on blasphemy and how their views of American free speech impact their acculturation experience and vice versa because they are living in a non-Muslim-majority country.

Of the five research questions I developed for this study, two related to Muslim acculturation in the United States and the impact of their views of free speech on their integration experiences. If the Muslim immigrants are closely connected with their new American culture, then it is likely that they would have higher levels of well-being about American society including embracing laws governing free speech (Berry, 2011). In Chapter 2, I will provide further detail on these two theories and the interview questions supporting the research questions and the theoretical framework.

### **Nature of the Study and Methodology**

This study was based on a qualitative method with an existential, phenomenological approach. The meaning of adhering to a religious belief system that punishes blasphemy and how that impacts life as a Muslim immigrant in America can best be determined by a qualitative, phenomenological approach, which aims to explore the human experience (see Rudestam & Newton, 2015). The design was inductive and provided a more holistic view of the phenomenon with thick, rich descriptions. With this discovery approach, I attempted to describe and elucidate the meanings of human experience to get to the essential nature of the idea of blasphemy as perceived by immigrant Muslim leaders in America (see Rudestam & Newton, 2015). In an existential, phenomenological design, the researcher is interested in the uniqueness of individuals and how they give meaning to similar life events (see Rudestam & Newton, 2015).

I conducted in-depth interviews of 10 immigrant Muslim imams, scholars, and/or community leaders in northern Virginia on the topics of blasphemy and acculturation experiences. I transcribed the interviews and coded the transcripts using attribute, anchor, descriptive, and in vivo coding methods, then developed themes from the codes that answered the five research questions.

### **Definitions**

The following terms are used throughout this study:

*Acculturation*: “A process that entails contact between two cultural groups, which results in numerous cultural changes in both parties” (Berry, 2001, p. 616).

*Assimilation*: Individuals who reject their original culture and accept the dominant culture are assimilating (Ward & Kus, 2012).

*Blasphemy*: The act of expressing abusive, profane, or insulting language against something divine or religion (Iffatkhalid & Munawar, 2015).

*Blasphemy laws*: Laws that criminalize blasphemy, defamation of religion, harming of religious feelings, and so on (Library of Congress, 2017, p. 1).

*Integration*: When an immigrant adapts to the dominant culture while maintaining their original culture, they are integrating (Kunst & Sam, 2013).

*Public policy*: “Any decision or action by a governmental authority that results in the allocation of something that is valued” (Danziger & Smith, 2016, p. 234).

*Sharia or Islamic law*: Sharia, meaning “path” in Arabic, is the religious law forming part of the Islamic tradition is Sharia law, which is derived particularly from the Islamic holy book (i.e., the Quran) and the Sunna or Hadith (i.e., sayings and traditions of the Prophet Muhammad; Council on Foreign Relations, 2014 ).

### **Assumptions**

I made the following assumptions in this study:

- The research participants would meet the inclusion/exclusion criteria.

Screening was judicious, but there is a chance that participants were not truthful or accurate with some of their responses, which may impact the validity of the results.



- Interviewees were willing to participate and answer questions honestly. Sufficiently qualified participants who truthfully and comprehensively answered the interview questions were the nexus of this qualitative study.
- The interview process, field notes, and reflexive journaling would provide sufficient data to answer the research questions. If this had not been true, I would have had to modify the interview protocol or consider additional sources of data to help answer the questions.
- The sample size of 10 would be sufficient to reach saturation and to develop scholarly findings and conclusions. If this had not been true, I would have had to increase the sample size, contact participants outside of this geographical area, and/or expand the demographic.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

One concern in the United States is that an increasing number of immigrant Muslim imams, scholars, and community leaders will collectively advocate for the imposition of the blasphemy component of Sharia law in the United States, curtailing fundamental constitutional free speech rights to stop insults against Islam and Muslims. With this study, I aimed to explore what immigrant Muslim imams, scholars, and community leaders think about blasphemy policies and to what extent they may or may not participate politically to voice their choices regarding free speech legislation. The extant literature includes a plethora of studies about Muslims' views of Sharia law, but it focuses mainly on Muslims in countries other than the United States, and the specific issue of blasphemy is generally not addressed. Furthermore, research on the links

between Muslims' religious patterns and their overall adaptation to American life is relatively nonexistent (Bulut & Ebaugh, 2014). I chose this focus on the views of immigrant Muslim imams, scholars, and community leaders on blasphemy laws in the United States and their political participation inclinations on this issue because the findings would inform American policymakers on their Muslim constituency's beliefs on freedom of speech and inform immigration policymakers on potential patterns of beliefs linked (or not) to certain Muslim-majority countries.

Regarding the policy feedback theory, Beland (2010) and Mettler and SoRelle (2014) identified a total of 10 policy feedback research streams. Most streams of inquiry were beyond the scope of this study because this inquiry focused on the power of groups (see Mettler & SoRelle, 2014). Beland offered the six streams of state building, interest group formation, lock-in effects, the relationship between public and private policies, the interaction between policy feedback and electoral behavior, and the role of ideational and symbolic policy legacies. The three remaining streams offered by Mettler and SoRelle were meaning of citizenship, form of governance, and political agendas and definition of policy problems.

According to acculturation theory, the strategies or acculturation attitudes of immigrants are separation, assimilation, marginalization, and integration (Ward & Kus, 2012). The results of this study shed light on which strategy immigrant Muslim imams, scholars, and/or community leaders favored, based on their views of blasphemy laws in the United States. In this study, I did not address the other side of acculturation theory, which includes the strategies of the host society to include immigrants: the melting pot,

segregation, exclusion, and multiculturalism (see Ward & Kus, 2012). I did not interview members of the host society to attempt to establish what the views are on the dominant society's inclusion of immigrants.

Transferability or generalizability is not the goal of qualitative research; rather, developing descriptive, context-relevant statements is (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Detailed, rich descriptions from the interview data provide readers with as much information as possible if they intend to make comparisons to other contexts (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In this study, I also maintained an audit trail showing evidence of how the raw data were reduced, analyzed, and synthesized.

### **Limitations**

Data collected from a small sample size may not be representative of the entire population of immigrant Muslim imams, scholars, and/or community leaders. Qualitative research is inherently subjective and difficult to replicate, so researcher bias must be mitigated (Patton, 2015). Furthermore, results cannot be easily verified because they are based primarily on individual narratives from interview transcripts.

My role as the researcher in this study was as an observer as I conducted in-depth, one-on-one interviews with immigrant Muslim imams, scholars, and community leaders. Being divorced from an Iraqi Muslim first-generation immigrant, I was highly aware of my personal biases regarding Muslims. I provide additional details on how I managed my biases in Chapter 3.

### **Significance**

The results of this study impact positive social change by providing information for state and federal policymakers and the public. The findings will help inform immigration policy decisions regarding how America chooses to select and welcome newcomers from Muslim-majority nations and incorporate them into our society. The results can also be used to inform acculturation debates regarding the extent to which Muslim immigrants embrace American laws and values such as free speech. Finally, the findings of this study inform the public and policymakers alike on the views of this political constituency and either confirm or refute American fears of Muslim immigrants in America who are also imams, scholars, and/or community leaders demanding accommodation of blasphemy laws. Accepting the host society's legal system is a sign of an immigrant's integration. The results of this study provide a new understanding of Muslim immigrants in America who are also imams, scholars, and/or community leaders; how their views of blasphemy are impacted by their acculturation experiences and vice versa; and what their political participation inclinations are regarding free speech policies.

The findings of this study may generate positive social change for American policymakers and the public through civic engagement, and because free speech accommodations for Muslims and immigration from Muslim-majority countries are debated in the United States, policies and laws may change. Understanding the community of Muslim immigrants will either substantiate or refute such concerns. In

summary, this study will impact social change in the areas of policies dealing with free speech, acculturation, and immigration.

### **Summary**

Islamophobia is rampant in America, and it is reflected in current anti-Sharia policies recently introduced in state and federal legislatures (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2018). With this qualitative study, I attempted to help answer the research questions by obtaining interview data from immigrant Muslims in America who are imams, scholars, and/or community leaders regarding their views of blasphemy, blasphemy laws, and their political participation. The findings of the study were framed by the policy feedback theory and the acculturation theory and can be used to help policymakers with debates on immigration, acculturation, and free speech policies. The Muslim constituency is growing, and they are an important political segment of the United States. In Chapter 2, I will provide a comprehensive review of the literature on topics related to the research questions.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### **Introduction**

I designed this study to explore the lived experiences of first- or second-generation immigrant, Muslim imams, scholars, and community leaders in America and how their views of blasphemy against Islam and American free speech policies impact their acculturation in the United States. I also explored participants' political participation activities regarding free speech issues interviewing them to obtain their perceptions of blasphemy against Islam, policies regarding free speech as impacted by their acculturation experience in this country, and their political participation activities on these topics. In the literature review, I will:

- Provide background information on the following:
  - Islamophobia in the United States,
  - The definition of blasphemy and what it means to Muslims,
  - Blasphemy laws and their impact around the world,
  - Muslim immigration patterns in the United States, and
  - American Muslim political views and voting patterns.
- Synthesize previous studies on acculturation theory and how they inform the issue of how Muslims integrate into American society, particularly in terms of their acceptance, over time, of American laws regarding freedom of speech.
- Synthesize previous research on policy feedback theory and how it informs the issue of how Muslim Americans respond to freedom of speech laws.
- Discuss research on the methodology employed in this study.

### **Problem and Purpose**

The social problem of *Islamophobia*, or the fear of Islam and Muslims, in the United States is a popular contemporary debate among scholars, politicians, and ordinary citizens, especially in the wake of the 9/11 and other terrorist attacks committed in the name of Islam. About half of U.S. citizens believe that some U.S. Muslims are anti-American (Lipka, 2017). In Sharia, blasphemy refers to apostasy, cursing, or slandering Allah (God) or the Prophet Muhammad (Iffatkhaldid & Munawar, 2015). Most Islamic legal scholars agree that blasphemy against Islam is punishable by death (Iffatkhaldid & Munawar, 2015).

One concern in the United States is that an increasing number of Muslim immigrants and imams will collectively advocate for blasphemy policies in the United States, where freedom of speech and expression are fundamental constitutional rights. Immigration scholars have focused little attention on Muslims' religious patterns and the potential linkage to their adaptation to American life until recently; little data exists regarding this relationship between religion and integration (Bulut & Ebaugh, 2014). According to Croucher (2016), host citizens that feel threatened are more likely to think that immigrants, such as Muslims, are not interested in assimilating. In the last 15 years, public discourse has highlighted issues concerning Muslims and Islam, but many of the issues are unsubstantiated; in fact, little data exist that sheds light on what Muslims truly think (Rane, Nathie, Isakhan, & Abdalla, 2011). In 2015, however, results of one poll revealed that 51% of Muslims in America believed that they should have the choice of being governed by Sharia (Center for Security Policy, 2015). It is unclear what Muslim

immigrants in America who are also imams, scholars, and community leaders really think about blasphemy and blasphemy laws.

Some of the most influential research on immigrant integration in Europe devotes attention to the issues regarding Muslim practices; however, these studies focus mainly on citizenship structures rather than religion as a core dimension of integration (Gorski & Altinordu, 2008). Studies on multiculturalism have extensively addressed the problems faced by democracies due to religious minority practices, concentrating on issues such as arranged marriage, polygamy, sex segregation, female genital mutilation, and veiling (Gorski & Altinordu, 2008). However, this extant literature usually incorporates religious practices under the category of cultural differences, ignoring the implications of these conflicts for secularism.

Recent studies have attempted to fill the gap on religion in immigrant integration, focusing on how national secularist ideologies resulted in different integration experiences for Muslim immigrants across Europe. Fetzer and Soper (2005) explored how structures of church-state relations influenced the degree of religious accommodation for Muslims in Britain, France, and Germany. Koopmans, Statham, Giugni, and Passy (2005) discovered that from 1992 to 1998, most immigrant demands in Britain, France, and the Netherlands used a religious—mostly Muslim—frame of identity. Their analysis also indicated that Muslim groups in these three nations had important differences in the types of demands made (Koopmans et al., 2005).

Another aspect of research on Muslim immigrants emphasizes the transformation of Muslim religiosity resulting from their experiences of living as religious minority



groups in the West. Roy (2004) argued that the result has been an increase of an individualized and globalized Islam separated from national cultures. Cesari (2004) also claimed that the experience of living in the West has led to the individualization of Muslim religiosity. My aim with this study was to help fill this gap by exploring the role of Islam in the integration of Muslim immigrants in the United States, especially regarding the issue of blasphemy and free speech.

The purpose of this qualitative, existential, phenomenological study was to understand the perceptions of Muslim immigrants in America who are also imams, scholars, and community leaders regarding blasphemy and blasphemy laws. Furthermore, the results of this study helped illuminate Muslim immigrant inclinations toward political participation regarding freedom of speech and blasphemy against Islam. Studying the views of Muslims immigrants in America who are imams, scholars, and community leaders on blasphemy and blasphemy laws may provide a better understanding of the extent to which they are acculturated in American society, including embracing American laws. The research questions were:

Research Question 1: What are the perceptions of Muslim first- and second-generation immigrant imams, scholars, and/or community leaders in America on blasphemy and blasphemy policies?

Research Question 2: What political actions have they taken and plan to take regarding blasphemy policies, such as letters to the editor, correspondence with political officials, voting, and joining interest groups?

Research Question 3: How do their religious views of blasphemy impact their acculturation experience and vice versa?

Research Question 4: What patterns exist between participants' Muslim sects and their views of blasphemy?

Research Question 5: What connections exist between their countries of origin and their views of free speech and blasphemy? In other words, do Muslims from certain countries share similar beliefs about blasphemy?

### **Synopsis of Current Literature**

The following are summaries of selected articles related to blasphemy, blasphemy law, and Muslim integration in American society:

- Iffatkhaliq and Munawar (2015) believed that Sharia law requires death for blasphemy, according to Section 295-C of the Pakistan Penal Code (1860). Under this system, anyone who defames the Prophet Muhammad, or the religion of Islam would be subject to death (Pakistan Penal Code, 1860).
- Bulut and Ebaugh (2014) pointed out that immigration scholars have, until recently, focused little on Muslims' religious patterns and the links to their integration in the United States. A good understanding of Muslim integration in America is hindered because Muslims are generally categorized without regard to their religious differences.
- Berry (2001) said that positive acculturation occurs when differing groups interact (i.e., minority and majority) and when their cultures blend (Kelly, 2016).

- Malik (2004) wrote that Muslims are integrating, not assimilating, in host societies. Assimilation means the cultural and structural merger of ethnic or religious categories (Malik, 2004). Although they may do some things together and some things separately, this is integration without assimilation. Muslims are steadily integrating into societies despite the Islamophobia of many nativist Westerns, according to Malik. Malik believed that most Muslims are not interested in assimilating into Western societies.
- In 2007, the Pew Research Center conducted its first nationwide-survey of Muslim Americans. Most responded as being middle class, happy, assimilated, and holding moderate views, in contrast with those in Europe.
- According to the Pew Research Center, America has experienced a growing share of Muslim and Hindu immigrants (Pew Research Center, 2013). From 1992 to 2012, the United States admitted an estimated 1.7 million Muslim immigrants, compared to 12.7 million Christian immigrants in the same two decades (Pew Research Center, 2013). Unauthorized immigrants were overwhelmingly Christian (83%; Pew Research Center, 2013).
- Poushter (2017) wrote that Americans are equally divided on whether they believe Muslims in the U.S. desire assimilation.

### **Chapter Preview**

This chapter will begin with a discussion on the policy feedback and acculturation theories, continuing with a review of research on Islamophobia, blasphemy and blasphemy laws, Muslim American political views, integration and immigration patterns,

and the research method of phenomenology. The theories that this study was based on were policy feedback and acculturation. Policy feedback is a high-profile concept in policy analysis and political science; policy feedback refers to how policies affect politics over time (Mettler & SoRelle, 2014). Policy feedback theory has enjoyed a rapid expansion of scholarship in the last 2 decades. Acculturation theory refers to the adaptation of a minority culture blending with and adapting to a majority culture (Berry, 2009).

Muslims are an increasing percentage of the immigrants to the United States, and many Americans express various forms of Islamophobia. Failing to trust Muslims, denigrating their religion and cultures, and discriminating against them are a few of the ways that some Americans voice their negative opinions and fear toward Muslims and Islam. Some fear that Muslim immigrants intend to attempt to change American policy so that it more closely aligns with a strict form of Sharia law, to include severely curtailing freedom of speech rights especially when dealing with matters of blasphemous offenses committed against Islam. However, most Muslims who immigrate to the United States integrate very well and are loyal to the American way of life.

Blasphemy, or defamation of religion, is highly controversial especially among Muslims. Some Muslim scholars and Muslim-majority governments such as Pakistan and Saudi Arabia believe that individuals who blaspheme against Islam are subject to harsh penalties, including death. Others do not believe the Muslim holy book (i.e., the Quran) condones punishment for blasphemy. The U.S. Constitution's First Amendment explicitly protects freedom of speech rights, even if the speech is offensive to some. Research

indicates that blasphemy laws around the world are alive and well, but harm rather than help societies.

Little research exists on what Muslims, particularly American Muslims, really think about issues such as blasphemy and blasphemy laws, or how their acculturation experiences impacted their views regarding the compatibility of Islam with the democracy in which they live. One master's degree student investigated three main themes crucial to the role of American imams: (a) the key duties and responsibilities of the American imams, (b) qualifications required for an imam, and (c) challenges facing imams in the United States (Abuelezz, 2011). While comprehensive, the study did not address political issues nor acculturation experiences.

Phenomenology was the selected qualitative research method, because my goal was to obtain lived acculturation experiences of immigrant Muslims in America who are imams, scholars, and/or community leaders regarding their views of blasphemy and free speech policies. This research helps to inform and provide a deeper understanding of acculturation theory and policy feedback theory through the lens of the Muslim leader's experience in America and his or her perceptions of freedom of speech rights and legislation.

### **Databases, Search Engines, and Key Search Terms**

The following search engines and databases were used: Academic Search Complete, Arts & Humanities Citation Index, Communication & Mass Media Complete, Complementary Index, CQ Researcher, EBSCO Host, Education Source, Expanded Academic ASAP, Google, Google Scholar, Homeland Security Digital Library, InfoTrac,

International Security and Counterterrorism Reference Center, JSTOR, LegalTrac, LexisNexus Academic, Medline, Opposing Viewpoints in Context, Political Science Complete, Project MUSE, ProQuest Ebook Central, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses A&I, PsycINFO, SAGE Journals, SAGE Stats, Scholar Works, Social Sciences Citation Index, SocINDEX, Supplemental Index, Taylor and Francis Online, and Ulrich's Periodicals Directory. I researched the following topics for the years 2012-2017: acculturation theory, blasphemy and blasphemy law, First Amendment, freedom of speech, integration and assimilation, Islamophobia, Muslim immigration, Muslim surveys, policy feedback theory, and Sharia law.

Keywords used in the search included: *acculturation theory, attitudes and Muslims, clerics, cultural assimilation, blasphemy, blasphemy law, First Amendment, freedom of religion, freedom of speech, Hadith, hate speech, human rights, imams, immigrants, immigration/migration, immigration theory, Islamophobia, integration, Muslim accommodation, Muhammad, Muslim imams, Muslim surveys, Pakistan, policy feedback theory, political imams, prejudice, Quran, radical Islam, Sharia/Islamic law, and U.S. blasphemy laws*. Relevant research older than 5 years was used, especially seminal works and surveys in the areas of blasphemy law, Sharia, support for extremism since 9/11, and immigration/integration.

### **Challenges**

Little research exists regarding immigrant Muslim imams', scholars', and community leaders' views of their acculturation experiences in America and their political views. Limited survey data does exist which provides insights into their views

on certain political and social issues such as abortion and gay marriage. The aim of this study was to fill this gap by researching immigrant Muslim imams', scholars', and community leaders' acculturation experiences in America and how those experiences influence their perceptions of blasphemy and blasphemy laws, and to what extent they participate in the political process regarding the issue of free speech.

### **Theoretical Foundation**

#### **Policy Feedback Theory**

**Introduction.** According to Danziger and Smith (2016), "A public policy is any decision or action by a governmental authority that results in the allocation of something that is valued" (p. 234). This study focused on the American policy of freedom of speech addressed in the First Amendment of the Constitution. Policymaking is comprised of several stages. Of interest is the final stage of the process, evaluation. Evaluation should answer the critical question, what impact did the policy have? Questions about the effect of a policy could be addressed by policymakers, interest groups, the public at large, and political opponents (Danziger & Smith, 2016).

**Political participation.** Political participation refers to all political actions by groups and individuals; the objective of most political participation is to influence the activities or selection of political leaders (Danziger & Smith, 2016).

**Individual political actions.** Danziger and Smith (2016) classified the modes of conventional and less conventional individual political action. Examples of political action modes include apathy, voting, political engagement, leadership, single-issue activism, foot soldier, one-time extremism, extremist activism, and revolutionary

(Danziger & Smith, 2016). Foot soldiers, single-issue activists, extremist-activists, and political leaders comprise the category of political activists, which generally interest people more than the other modes (Danziger & Smith, 2016). Foot soldiers connect the masses to the government by communicating with citizens to promote an issue or a political leader, volunteering in a campaign, or attending rallies. Single-issue activists do not normally participate very actively, but they mobilize into action when an issue emerges of high interest to them. Extremist-activists engage in extensive, unconventional political activities in hopes of realizing their vision of an ideal outcome that is considerably unlike the prevailing. Political leaders may use their significant power for commendable purposes, to implement shameful policies, or they may achieve nothing (Danziger & Smith, 2016).

***Group political actions.*** A political interest group has a common interest that it pursues as a political objective and attempts to influence the allocation of public values (Danziger & Smith, 2016). One taxonomy identifies four types of interest groups: associational, institutional, nonassociational, and anomic (Danziger & Smith, 2016). Associational interest groups are organized to further members' political objectives. Institutional groups attempt to achieve goals not related to the political system, but they also pursue political objectives. Nonassociational groups are groups of individuals who do not routinely associate with permanent organizational entities, but they share an interest regarding specific issues and become politically active. Anomic interest groups are short-lived, spontaneous combinations of individuals who share a political concern (Danziger & Smith, 2016).



**Religion.** Religion can significantly influence individual and group political beliefs and activities. Some people believe that they must correct secular societal failures and promote certain religious opinions on so-called unacceptable public policies. An example is Muslim citizens in European countries attempting to influence free speech laws with Islamic beliefs that blasphemy against Islam should be punished by the courts. Many individuals are so disappointed with the circumstances within their society that they use their religion as a framework of actions and beliefs to change the conditions. Some religions such as Islam do not distinguish between religious and public life, so it is natural that religious values have precedence over public policies (Danziger & Smith, 2016).

**Origin of policy feedback theory.** Schattschneider (1935) said, “New policies create new politics;” the importance of Schattschneider’s reflection about 85 years ago has only increased with the huge growth of the activist state (Hacker & Pierson, 2014, p.644). Schattschneider stressed that policy deeply shapes group mobilization, and policy researchers over the last 2 decades have extended these claims (Hacker & Pierson, 2014). Policy feedback refers to the impact of existing policies on policy development and politics over time (Pierson, 1993). Most theories of the policy process analyze how policies are generated. However, policy development happens within an environment that is influenced by policies that are already in place. Policies can affect the political participation of certain groups and shape the goals that they wish to achieve, and they may provide incentives for other interest groups to form (Mettler & SoRelle, 2014). Policy feedback theory helps scholars evaluate how policies impact key areas of

governance. Examples are whether the policies encourage or deter civic engagement, whether they promote the creation of powerful interest groups, and how they impact institutional governance (Mettler & SoRelle, 2014).

The policy feedback concept is new to scholarly literature, but the idea that public policies can mold political behavior has a long history (Beland, 2010; Mettler & SoRelle, 2014). Several historical institutionalist scholars wrote about policy feedback in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and subsequent research continued to grow especially within the last decade (Beland, 2010; Mettler & SoRelle, 2014). In the 1980s, Skocpol and colleagues demonstrated that the character of public policies shapes myriad political forces, from the organization and mobilization of groups to the formation of political identities to the strategies of political actors (Hacker & Pierson, 2014). Skocpol (1992) coined the term “policy feedback” in *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States*. Skocpol proposed that policies developed may reshape both state capacities and the political goals of social groups, thereby affecting politics later. For example, Skocpol said that Civil War veterans receiving pensions were inspired to protect their financial benefit, an example of positive feedback. In the late 19th century, the pensions grew to quite high levels which generated negative feedback, as well. Policymakers began to link them with corruption, which reduced their willingness to endorse other social provisions in the early twentieth century (Skocpol, 1992).

Pierson (1993) took the new policy feedback theory to its next developmental stage by promulgating a conceptual framework that would enable researchers to advance

hypotheses. Pierson posited that existing policies can shape political behaviors of government officials, interest groups, and the public through two primary means. First are interpretive effects, as policies act as information sources and impact political learning and attitudes. Second are resource effects which provide means and incentives for political participation (Pierson, 1993). Pierson's ideas helped promote research efforts which fostered improved identification of the systems at work, as well as the conditions under which feedback might be likely to transpire and with what outcomes (Mettler & SoRelle, 2014).

**Theoretical propositions and assumptions.** Analyses based on policy feedback theory may shed light on the effect of policies on democracy and help expose what could otherwise become unintended results of policies. Policy feedback theory may also supplement inquiries of the policy process by stressing how previously created policies impact the likelihood and content of upcoming policy development. Although the theory is still being developed, it has great potential for scholars, policymakers and the public (Mettler & SoRelle, 2014).

Beland (2010) identified the roles of six policy feedback research streams. Each stream stresses the effect of standing policies on new policy development and politics, and they emphasize six issues: state building, interest group formation, lock-in effects, the relationship between public and private policies, the interaction between policy feedback and electoral behavior, and, finally, the role of ideational and symbolic policy legacies (Beland, 2010). Though the first three components of the policy feedback

literature are associated, the three more recent research streams have developed independently (Beland, 2010).

Acknowledging Beland's (2010) work, Mettler and SoRelle (2014) identified four major streams of policy feedback inquiry: meaning of citizenship, form of governance, power of groups, and political agendas and definition of policy problems. Some areas have attracted more followers than others, but they all possess considerable potential for future work. For this study, the power of groups stream proposed by Mettler and SoRelle was of interest. Scholars usually analyze how organized groups influence policy outcomes, but sufficient evidence indicates that the relationship often works in reverse as well. Public policies alone can also shape what types of groups develop and which fail to unite (Mettler & SoRelle, 2014).

Building on Pierson's (1993) delineation of resource and interpretive effects, Mettler (2002) offered a model of how features of policies affect civic engagement among mass publics. Of interest to this study was the component of interpretive effects. Interpretive effects of policies may be fostered through the impact of resources or through features of policy design and implementation (Mettler & SoRelle, 2014). These may communicate about government or people's relationships to it, or the status of other citizens; responses may then shape people's participation (Mettler & SoRelle, 2014). Actual policy decisions alone can affect citizens' sense of political worth, depending on whether their preferred policy outcome succeeds. Interpretive effects can give individuals powerful motivations or disincentives for political engagement.

**How the theory has been applied.** The relationship between public opinion and policy is complex; most empirical research indicates that public opinion affects policy and that opinions count (Krishen, Raschke, Kachroo, Mejza, & Khan, 2014). Traditional approaches to assessing the influence of public opinion on policy are usually focused on conducting public opinion surveys on politics (Krishen et al., 2014). This study helps answer the question whether immigrant Muslim imams/scholars/community leaders in America, who have a significant influence on their Muslim communities nationwide, agree with passing anti-Sharia laws (of which blasphemy is a component). Following are examples of the application of the policy feedback theory.

***Power of groups stream: Christian activism.*** Djupe and Conger (2012) wrote that scholars have ignored key issues regarding interest groups in a democracy. The power of groups is one of the streams of policy feedback theory as outlined by Mettler and SoRelle (2014). Existing research on citizen political participation indicates that organizations play a minor role, that they simply promote political engagement for members and those who support their positions. Djupe and Conger explored how interest groups impact political participation using a multilevel design with survey data and observations of Christian Rights activism in the United States. They argued that interest group activism would have a pluralist effect on citizen participation such as grass-roots lobbying (Djupe & Conger, 2012). Results suggested that high levels of interest group activity impact participation and mobilization trends, creating countermobilization (Djupe & Conger, 2012). One aim of the current study was to explore to what extent immigrant Muslim

imams, scholars, and/or community leaders participate in interest groups, and if free speech was one of their agenda items.

***Meaning of citizenship stream: Oklahoma banning Sharia law.*** Oklahoma presented a ballot question to its voters regarding the amendment of the state constitution to ban Sharia law in the courts; with 70% of the vote, State Question 755 passed (Huq, 2011). Polls of Americans about Muslims in the United States generally indicate that negative views are more common. This example shows that as a form of policy feedback, organized public pressure can result in legislative hearings, executive decisions, or new statutory and constitutional provisions such as Oklahoma's State Question 755 (Huq, 2011).

**Rationale for theory selection and relationship to current study.** Policy feedback theory is relatively new and has significant potential for future research, yet it also already has a solid foundation for application. This theory's research streams and feedback mechanisms presented by Beland (2010), Mettler and SoRelle (2014) provided the framework for exploring the second research question about Muslim American political motivations regarding free speech policies. The current inquiry contributed to Mettler and SoRelle's future research recommendations and built upon policy feedback theory. For example, one recommendation that this study addressed is extending the policy feedback research beyond social welfare provisions and programs and studying how a different type of policy (e.g., First Amendment) shapes the attitudes and political behaviors of immigrant Muslim imams, scholars, and community leaders in America. During the interviews, I asked how the study participants felt about mobilizing as a group

to support or challenge free speech policies, because they may perceive that the policies are not aligned with their Islamic beliefs.

### **Acculturation Theory**

**Origin of theory.** Cultural anthropologists and sociologists have described the processes of ethnic meetings of people groups as “assimilation” and “acculturation” (Gordon, 1964, p. 61). In the mid–1930’s, a Subcommittee on Acculturation appointed by the Social Science Research Council provided an authoritative definition of acculturation to chart the dimensions of this field of study. The committee professed that acculturation “comprehends those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns of either or both groups” (Gordon, 1964, p. 61).

Two early influential sociologists, Park and Burgess, defined assimilation as “a process of interpretation and fusion in which persons and groups acquire the memories, sentiments, and attitudes of other persons or groups, and, by sharing their experience and history, are incorporated with them in a common cultural life” (Gordon, 1964, p. 62). Acculturation is included in this definition. Assimilation is the final perfect product as social contact initiates interaction. Several subsequent theorists such as Berry, Fichter, Rose, and Cuber addressed assimilation and acculturation, and ideas of what makes an immigrant assimilated (Gordon, 1964). Gordon (1964) suggested seven sub processes that take occur in immigrant assimilation experiences. One sub process of interest in this paper is the absence of power and value conflict, which was termed civic assimilation (Gordon, 1964, p. 71). This means that the immigrant group does not raise demands

concerning the host public's civic life with any issues involving value and power conflict with the host people (Gordon, 1964).

Acculturation theory refers to the adaptation of a minority culture blending with and adapting to a majority culture; Berry, a psychologist, has established himself as the leading acculturation theorist since the 1980's (Kelly, 2016; Ward & Kus, 2012). Historically, acculturation studies focused on the individual perspective, almost ignoring the group factors. According to Berry (2001), acculturation is "a process that entails contact between two cultural groups, which results in numerous cultural changes in both parties" (p. 616). Berry's earliest work on acculturation focused on the assimilation and integration of Australian aboriginals (Ward & Kus, 2012). By 1974, Berry started developing questions about the retention of cultural identity and positive intergroup relations, and to identify patterns of relationships in plural societies that included integration, assimilation, rejection/segregation, and marginality/deculturation (Ward & Kus, 2012). The model was refined, eventually replacing deculturation with marginalization, and separation replacing rejection.

Berry (2001) observed that positive acculturation occurs when differing groups (e.g., minority and majority) interact and when their cultures become blended. Higher levels of well-being occur when minority groups are closely connected within their culture and connected with the majority culture (Berry, 2011). Croucher (2016) is developing a similar theory that suggests that "when members of the host culture feel threatened they are more likely to believe immigrants (in this case Muslims) do not want to assimilate" (p. 46). This study explored how Muslim imams/scholars/community



leaders who are also first- or second-generation immigrants in America adapted to living in the United States, which is not a Muslim-majority nation, especially in terms of free speech policies and blasphemy against Islam.

**Theoretical propositions and assumptions.** Berry's (2009) position was that when researching acculturation, one should use methods from both the cultural and natural traditions. Berry argued that replacing the natural sciences positivist traditions with social constructionist concepts would be a step backwards in the aim to understand acculturation. Berry believed that these approaches should not be replaced with the more recent interpretive approaches; rather, both approaches should be used. In acculturation psychology, people who share a cultural heritage or who settle into a common society do not necessarily have similar acculturation experiences (Berry, 2009). Immense individual differences exist across persons who share societies and cultures; researchers must understand the key features of cultural groups prior to contact with each other (Berry, 2009).

In Berry's (1997) acculturation strategy model, Berry pointed out four ways in which individuals may reconcile one's original culture with the dominant culture of his or her new society. The strategies or acculturation attitudes are separation, assimilation, marginalization, and integration (Ward & Kus, 2012). When immigrants choose to maintain their original culture while refusing the dominant host culture, they are separating. Individuals who reject their original culture and accept the dominant culture are assimilating. Marginalization occurs when the immigrant gives up his or her heritage culture but does not accept the new dominant culture. When an immigrant adapts to the

dominant culture while maintaining his original culture, he or she is integrating (Kunst & Sam, 2013). Research shows integration is the preferred acculturation strategy based on attitudes, but less likely on self-reported behaviors, even though the behaviors are better predictors of adaptive results (Ward & Kus, 2012).

Most immigrants pursue integration rather than separation, assimilation or marginalization (Berry, 2009; Ward, 2013). Integration is helpful to psychological well-being and intercultural relationships and dialogue, but mutual accommodation is required for it to be successful (Berry, 2009). Berry's acculturation model assumes that both contact-participation and maintenance contribute to adaptation and produce the most promising results (Ward, 2013). Inconsistencies and conflicts among myriad acculturation preferences are not uncommon problems for immigrants. For example, when immigrants refuse to accept the host society's main ideology, or when immigrant children reject the acculturation strategy imposed upon them by their parents, acculturative stress occurs (Kunst & Sam, 2013).

Berry distinguished these four acculturation attitudes arising from two acculturation dimensions concerning cultural maintenance and cultural contact, which create the foundation for the four acculturation dimensions (Ward & Kus, 2012). Another way to describe the two dimensions is "maintenance of heritage culture and identity" and "relationships sought among groups" respectively (Berry, 2009, p. 366). The acculturation dimensions are mostly situated within the realm of attitudes described as "relative preferences" (Ward & Kus, 2012, p. 473).

These two basic issues are usually approached from the viewpoint of the non-dominant immigrant group. Nevertheless, the dominant or host group plays a powerful role in influencing the way in which minority immigrant groups would relate (Berry, 2016). The views of the larger society are in terms of expectations of how all groups should interact. These views fall into the categories of the melting pot, segregation, exclusion, and multiculturalism. When the dominant group demands assimilation, this is the melting pot. Segregation occurs when the dominant group forces the minority group to separate. When the dominant group imposes marginalization, this is called exclusion. Finally, multiculturalism refers to the wide acceptance of both diversity maintenance and equitable participation in the host society (Berry, 2016). A key barrier to a Muslim immigrant's successful acculturation experience is potentially facing all four of these dominant group reactions, depending upon where the immigrant settled in the United States. The United States prides itself on being multicultural at the national level, but at the individual level, views of how to incorporate immigrants varies widely, confusing some newcomers.

Berry's early theorizing was an advance over the models that viewed acculturation as simply relinquishing identification with one's original culture and accepting traits, values, attitudes and behaviors of the dominant society (Ward & Kus, 2012). Although Berry's theory remains popular and supported by empirical evidence, it has been noted that researchers have not been precise in their operationalization of his two dimensions (Ward & Kus, 2012). Matsudaira's (2006) review of acculturation measures, for example, which identified 51 acculturation scales between 1978 and 2004,

cited only one instrument that captured the essence of Berry's dimensions: Kosic's (2002) Scale of Acculturation Strategies and Maintenance of Original Culture and Relationships with Host Group subscales.

**How the theory has been applied.** Acculturation research is rapidly growing. According to Ward and Kus (2012), integrated immigrants experience better social functioning than their marginalized peers and greater life satisfaction than their separated and marginalized counterparts. Ward and Kus agreed with Berry, Kim, and Boski (1988) that to advance acculturation theory and research, researchers must agree upon which operationalization of acculturation is used, which characteristic of adaptation is examined, and in which culture immigrants have settled.

Although Berry's acculturation model can be applied to a larger society or an immigrant group, immigrants' attitudes rather than the larger society tend to be the focus (Kunst & Sam, 2013). Stating four hypotheses, Kunst and Sam (2013) explored whether expectations of acculturation are linked to ethnic minority acculturation strategy preferences. They sampled over 800 members of Muslim communities in Western Europe who experienced strong assimilation expectations from their host cultures, because Muslims have been described as unwilling to integrate to their new countries (Kunst & Sam, 2013). Twenty-one items assessed participants' preferences of acculturation strategies. The findings suggested that perceived acculturation expectations can impact minorities' selection of an acculturation strategy (Kunst & Sam, 2013). The results also indicated that expectations contradicting newcomers' personal acculturation

preferences may result in higher stress levels and lower feelings of adaptation (Kunst & Sam, 2013).

An individual immigrant may prefer to integrate while his or her peers may prefer separation. As a result, the immigrant wishing to integrate may experience rejection from his or her own peers for over-integration. In the West, Muslims face a significant degree of public pressure to assimilate and high levels of religious stigma (Holtz, Dahinden, & Wagner, 2013). Kunst and Sam (2013) suggested that the effect of assimilation expectations seemed to be limited while separation expectation from their ethnic peers played a significant role. Kunst and Sam believed that this might be due to participants feeling more committed to their peer ethnic group and less committed to their dominant host culture. Religious and ethnic minorities tend to reconcile their heritage culture with the national culture. Kunst and Sam posited that political programs that aim at improving the relations among ethnic groups should emphasize intercultural dialog on all sides.

Ward (2013) examined Muslim immigrant youths' acculturation experiences in New Zealand. This approach increased the validity of acculturation research because it examined the lived experiences from the immigrant's perspective. Using thematic analysis of interviews of Muslim immigrant youths, Ward's findings suggested that some immigrants behave differently with family and friends than with members of the dominant culture. Ward called this *blending* and *alternating* cultures.

**Rationale for theory selection and relationship to current study.** The current study drew on acculturation theory by exploring the extent to which Muslim imams, scholars, and community leaders who were first- or second-generation immigrants

experienced acculturation in the United States, and how their experiences impacted their views of American free speech policies. It also helps inform acculturation theory by exploring whether the policies have affected their ability to integrate because of a perceived mismatch between their Islamic views of punishment for blasphemy and American freedom of speech values. Little is understood about how integration is experienced by immigrants, how it evolves over time, and what the fundamental aspects of integration are (Ward, 2013). Using Berry's (2016) acculturation model including four immigrant strategies of separation, assimilation, marginalization, and integration, I explored and compared acculturation experiences among Muslim imams/scholars/community leaders who are first- or second-generation immigrants in America, specifically, the impact of those experiences on their views of blasphemy policies, and the impact of their views of blasphemy on their acculturation experiences.

### **Islamophobia**

Islam is the world's fastest-growing major religion and the second-largest; the number of Muslims will likely surpass the number of Christians by the end of the 21st century (Lipka, 2017). Islamophobia is the belief that Islam is monolithic, static, hostile, and inferior. These perceptions help generate views that discrimination against Muslims is justified. American Islamophobia was one of the reasons for conducting this study; the findings would either help support or refute American fears of Muslims.

### **Muslim American Demographics**

According to the Pew Research Center in 2015, about 3.3 million Muslims were living in the United States, or about one percent of the population (Lipka, 2017).

Approximately 0.9% of U.S. adults identified as being Muslim, and 63% of American Muslims were immigrants (Lipka, 2017). Pew projected that Muslims will comprise 2.1% of the American population by 2050 (Lipka, 2017).

The imam plays a central role in the life of Muslims; he is highly respected for his knowledge of the ways of Islam. Any knowledgeable Muslim can be an imam if the community grants him the position; imams do not obtain their legitimacy from any centralized spiritual authority (Al-Krenawi, 2016). The roles of the imam include leading prayers and providing aid and advice to the Muslim community; they must lead lives that other Muslims can try to emulate (Al-Krenawi, 2016).

America's mushrooming Muslim population faces a not-so-new challenge of a shortage of imams or Muslim clerics. Of the estimated 2,500 mosques in the United States, over half lack a full-time imam (Jacobs, 2017). According to Bagby (2003), only 33% of American mosques have paid full-time imams. Some mosques rely on volunteers to act as imams, while others simply go without direction. Local imams fear violence against Muslims and do not want to act as imams. Bringing imams from overseas is difficult due to problems with obtaining visas. Some Muslims believe that the imam shortage is dangerous; they think that some mosque members with no imam to guide them could turn to more nefarious sources with radical consequences, and that Trump's travel ban against Muslim-majority countries was part of the problem (Jacobs, 2017). Furthermore, more U.S. Muslims, many of whom were born in America, want imams trained in U.S. ways and culture (Jacobs, 2017).

The Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) reported that only 44% of American imams were salaried and full-time; the remainder were volunteer imams (Burnett, 2013). Four out of five imams in America were born and educated outside the United States, mostly in Egypt, Saudi Arabia and India (Burnett, 2013). Interestingly, research on Islam in America still generally uses the mosque as an entry point to the Muslim community, even though over 80% of Muslims do not regularly attend mosque (Zaman, 2008).

### **Prejudice Against Muslims**

Prejudice against Muslims in the West often occurs due to disagreement with the accommodation of Islam (van der Noll & Saroglou, 2014). Disfavor towards Islam may also result from a loathing of religion and a desire for a stronger separation between state and religion (van der Noll & Saroglou, 2014). Bulut (2016) offered that being willing to have personal relationships or contact with Muslims generally leads to higher tolerance levels, which Bulut dubbed as the contact hypothesis. Bulut hypothesized the following: (a) Americans who think immigrants are a threat to traditional American values are more likely to be intolerant towards Muslims, (b) Americans who think that foreigners who come to live in America should reject their homeland norms and become like other Americans are more likely to be intolerant towards Muslims, and (c) Americans who think that the American way of life is superior to any other are more likely to be prejudiced against Muslims. Using data from the Religion and Diversity Survey in September 2002 and February 2003 and implementing the ordinary least squares regression model, Bulut sampled 2,910 adults using a random digit dialing procedure.



The response rate was 43.6% with a final sample size of 2,585. The findings suggested that a key slice of the sample was prejudiced against Muslims; however, it also showed that fundamental Muslim rights were respected (Bulut, 2016).

Prejudice against Muslims is related to a nativist attitude and more precisely to an anti-immigrant predisposition. Nativist attitudes are an important underpinning of restrictive immigration policies and can be the basis for the justification of immigrant mistreatment while being considered fair (Bulut, 2016). Bulut (2016) believed that the results supported the contact hypothesis, that simply getting to know members of a different group would reduce prejudice. Similarly, Croucher (2016) began developing a theory that suggests that “when members of the host culture feel threatened they are more likely to believe immigrants (in this case Muslims) do not want to assimilate” (Croucher, 2016, p. 46). Croucher’s data from France, Germany and the United Kingdom also indicate key relationships among intergroup contact and symbolic and realistic threat.

Sides and Gross (2013) measured stereotypes of Muslims and found that prejudice against Muslims is alive and well. In 2017, the Pew Research Center conducted a survey asking Americans to rate members of nine religious groups on a “feeling thermometer” from 0–100, where 0 reflects the coldest, most negative rating. Overall, Americans gave Muslims an average rating of 48 degrees, like atheists (with a score of 50), which improved from the 2014 rating of 40 (Lipka, 2017). According to a February 2017 survey, most Americans (about 55%) did not see extensive support for extremism among Muslims in America (Lipka, 2017). Twenty-four percent said there was a fair

amount of support for extremism among U.S. Muslims, while 11% said there was a great deal of support (Lipka, 2017).

The American Muslim population is heterogenous, yet they are also racialized, despite that Muslims are not a *race* (Considine, 2017). This means that they are viewed as a potentially threatening *other* based on their racial features (Considine, 2017). Given this, American Muslims are identified via skin color and through perceived cultural structures such as religious symbols (e.g., a head scarf or a beard; Considine, 2017). Racism emerges to cast Muslims as threats who must be dealt with through racial profiling, violence, and coercion (Considine, 2017). American Muslims can be profiled simultaneously in terms of race and religion. Many Islamophobic debates stem from a religious basis, but we should not ignore the role that race plays. In the American context, Muslim identity seems to be weighted with racial meaning (Considine, 2017).

**Norway, Sweden, United States, and the United Kingdom.** Strabac, Aalberg and Valenta (2014) studied immigrants and Muslims in Norway, Sweden, the United States, and the United Kingdom. The researchers noted that in previous studies, certain findings suggested that Muslim immigrants are more exposed to prejudice, while other studies did not reveal this evidence (Strabac et al., 2014). Since the tragic events of 9/11 and 7/7/06, Islamophobia increased in the United States and in the United Kingdom, but attitudes towards Muslims in both countries were better (Strabac et al., 2014). According to Strabac et al., having prejudiced attitudes towards Muslim immigrants is irrational. Only a miniscule number of Muslim immigrants are extremists; education and knowledge can help reduce the ignorance of Islamophobia (Strabac et al., 2014).

The aim of the study was to analyze differences in negative attitudes towards Muslim immigrants and immigrants in general, and to shed light on whether there are significant differences among Western countries (Strabac et al., 2014). Using a large-panel assembly approach, the authors conducted a web survey in 2009 in four countries: The United States, the United Kingdom, Sweden, and Norway. The total sample size was 4,000, or 1,000 per country. The researchers took as a starting point a large panel of participants who had agreed to participate in Internet surveys (Strabac et al., 2014). The researchers discovered that older participants held more negative perceptions of Muslims in all countries. Females held somewhat more positive views, especially in the United States; educated people also held more positive attitudes (Strabac et al., 2014). Anti-Muslim attitudes were lower in the United States and the United Kingdom (Strabac et al., 2014). The authors thought that one reason could be due to current pressures of being politically correct. Or, the United States might have been overshadowed by the economy in 2009 and by the influx of Mexican immigrants. Strabac et al. concluded that open hostility towards Muslims has not become socially acceptable.

**American views.** According to Read (2008), polls indicated that four out of ten Americans had an unfavorable view of Islam, five out of ten believed Islam is more likely than other religions to encourage violence, 6 out of 10 believed Islam is very different from their own religion, and seven out of ten admitted they knew very little about Islam. Americans ranked Muslims second only to atheists as a group that does not share their vision of American society. Read (2008) concluded that many Americans are convinced Muslim Americans pose a threat to American society. Two common assumptions spark

these fears: (a) only one type of Islam and one type of Muslim exist, both characterized by violence and anti-democratic inclinations; and (b) being Muslim is more important than living in a secular democracy (Read, 2008).

These assumptions, however, are rejected by studies on Muslim Americans. The Georgetown University Muslims in the American Public Square project included interviews with 3,267 Muslim Americans in 2001 and 2004 and the Pew Research Center interviewed 1,050 Muslim Americans in 2007. The results suggested that Muslim Americans are well-integrated, diverse, and mostly mainstream in their behaviors, values and attitudes (Read, 2008). The notion that Muslims place their identity over their other interests has been projected onto the group rather than coming from the beliefs of the group itself (Read, 2008). On the other hand, in September 2012, Muslim Americans in Dearborn, Michigan, rallied to protest the *Innocence of Muslims* YouTube film. The group advocated for blasphemy laws in the United States and sought an international law banning anti-Muhammad speech (Warren, 2012).

***Anti-Sharia bills under Trump.*** During American President Donald Trump's first year in office in 2017, 18 states introduced a total of 23 new bills attempting to prohibit the practice of Sharia law in American courts; this brought the total number of similar legislative efforts since 2010 to 217 in 43 states (Pilkington, 2017). Of the 23 bills introduced to state legislatures in 2017, two became law (Arkansas and Texas), and all but one of the bills were introduced by Republicans (Pilkington, 2017). When Trump was a presidential candidate in 2016, he wanted to ban all Muslims from entering the United States; after taking office, he succeeded in implementing a travel ban on several Muslim-

majority countries (Pilkington, 2017). Most anti-Sharia bills do not refer specifically to Sharia law or Islam; doing so would invite scrutiny on the grounds of religious discrimination. Instead, the bills refer to foreign laws being forbidden in American jurisdictions (Pilkington, 2017).

***Trump's anti-Muslim rhetoric.*** American President Donald Trump has been accused repeatedly of anti-Muslim rhetoric both before and after he was elected. On September 30, 2015, Trump promised to remove all Syrian refugees from the United States, most of whom were Muslim, because they might be affiliated with the Islamic State or be part of a secret army (Johnson & Hauslohner, 2017). On November 20 of that same year, he said he was open to the idea of creating a database of all Muslims in America. On December 7, 2015, Trump's campaign issued a statement saying, "Donald J. Trump is calling for a total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States until our country's representatives can figure out what is going on" (Johnson & Hauslohner, 2017, para. 14). Within a week of becoming president, Trump signed an executive order banning Syrian refugees and citizens of seven Muslim-majority countries from entering the United States for 90 days. Rudolph W. Giuliani, a close adviser to the president said, "So when [Trump] first announced it, he said, 'Muslim ban.' He called me up. He said, 'Put a commission together. Show me the right way to do it legally'." (Johnson & Hauslohner, 2017).

When questioned about Muslim immigration, Trump said, "This all happened because, frankly, there's no assimilation. They are not assimilating . . . They want to go by Sharia law. They want Sharia law. They don't want the laws that we have. They want

Sharia law” (Johnson & Hauslohner, 2017, para. 22). The current study includes an interview question about this quote to help inform the questions regarding acculturation and blasphemy laws.

***Quran burning in America.*** In April 2012, Pastor Terry Jones in Gainesville, Florida, burned copies of the Quran outside his Dove World Outreach Center to protest the religion of Islam. He and his small group of congregants also burned an image depicting the Prophet Muhammad, causing global outrage (Sheridan, 2012). This example of blasphemy against Islam was brought up by several participants during the interviews.

**Mitigating Islamophobia.** Bulut (2016) offered that personal relationships and encounters with Muslims help shape attitudes towards Muslims, an example of contact hypothesis (Bulut, 2016). Without personal contact with American Muslims, the fear of Islamic terrorism tends to increase (Bulut, 2016). Bulut used data from the September 2002 and February 2003 Religion and Diversity Surveys and executed the ordinary least squares regression model.

Bulut (2016) used a random digit dialing procedure and had a final sample size of 2,585 adults; the response rate was 43.6%. Bulut found that a key slice of the sample was prejudiced against Muslims. However, Bulut also discovered that respect for Muslims’ fundamental rights prevailed. Bulut determined that prejudice against Muslims was tied to an anti-immigrant bias and to nativist attitudes. Such attitudes are a significant factor of restrictive immigration policy preferences and can serve as justification for mistreatment of immigrants but label it as fair (Lippard, 2016).

McCauley (2013) noted that reducing prejudice against Muslims will not significantly impact radicalization. Three popular explanations of Muslim radicalization are political alienation of Muslims in Western countries, grievances related to U.S. foreign policy, and radical Islam (McCauley, 2013). McCauley studied polling data and found that that 99 out of 100 Muslims with extreme opinions never engaged in extreme action (McCauley, 2013).

Abdelkader (2014) wrote that counter speech is preferable to government oppression of harmful expression in the form of blasphemy laws. Abdelkader noted persistent Islamophobia in the United States and presented poll data to help support his claim. Despite a lack of evidence, groups in America continue to believe Sharia law is a national threat. Abdelkader suggested that Muslim responses to intolerance are most influential when they involve interfaith encounters and dialogue to enhance intercultural understanding. In communities that are inherently bigoted, however, counter speech is not as effective (Abdelkader, 2014). This study provides further insights on Muslim views of harmful expression against Islam.

### **Blasphemy, Blasphemy Laws and Freedom of Speech**

Blasphemy is the act of expressing abusive, profane or insulting language against something divine or religion (Iffatkhaliid & Munawar, 2015). According to Muslim scholars, blasphemy harms the religious feelings of others and injures the peace and harmony in a society (Iffatkhaliid & Munawar, 2015). Scholars disagree on punishment for blasphemy, however. Some think that the Quran specifies the death penalty for blasphemy (Iffatkhaliid & Munawar, 2015). Others believe that although blasphemy is

mentioned in the Muslim holy books as an extremely offensive act, there is no earthly punishment; instead, Allah will mete out punishment in the afterlife (Bhat, 2014).

### **Sharia Law**

According to most Muslim-majority countries, Sharia calls for blasphemy to be punished by death; blasphemy merits the death penalty under Section 295-C of the Pakistan Penal Code, for example (Pakistan Penal Code, 1860). Under this system, anyone who defames the Prophet Muhammad or the religion of Islam in general would be subject to death. Again, however, although blasphemy is considered extremely offensive in Islam whether committed by a Muslim or non-Muslim, the Quran does not explicitly prescribe a direct penalty (Bhat, 2014).

Sharia law is based on the Quran, the Hadith (practices and teachings of Muhammad) and the Sunna (verbally transmitted teachings of Muhammad and his companions). The development of the Quran and the Hadith occurred years after the death of the Prophet Muhammad. Islam has formulated a comprehensive legal system over the centuries. Despite all its achievements, however, conflicts remain between Islamic tradition and human rights, which are almost impossible to compromise based on international standards of human rights – including free speech according to the United Nation’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Ahmari-Moghaddam, 2012).

Most of the human rights-related documents that have been produced by Arab literature attempt to link the rights in the UDHR to Islamic texts, mainly the Quran (Ahmari-Moghaddam, 2012). For example, Sultan Hussein Tabendeh, an influential Islamic scholar, affirmed that present-day human rights doctrines simply replicate 1,400-



year-old Islamic ideas (Ahmari-Moghaddam, 2012). Others strongly believe that there is an ominous need to rejuvenate Sharia law's application to better comply with international human rights standards, including free speech. The traditional understanding of Sharia law does not embrace the notion of human rights because this concept is not at the center of Islamic justice; rather, submission to God and duty are the emphases. Of course, much of this discussion depends upon how one interprets what human rights are.

### **Islam and Democracy**

Scholars disagree about whether ordinary Muslims' views discourage democratic values and attitudes such as free speech (Tessler, 2002). Using the World Values Survey data from Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, and Algeria, Tessler (2002) assessed the influence of Islamic orientations on perceptions of democracy. The results suggested that strong Islamic sentiments do not significantly discourage support for democracy.

### **Muslim Views of Blasphemy**

Iffatkhaldid and Munawar (2015) had strong sentiments about blasphemy from a Muslim point of view. According to Iffatkhaldid and Munawar, the holy Quran and the Sunna (i.e., practices and teachings of the Prophet Muhammad) forbid Muslims to blaspheme; blasphemers, whether Muslim or not, must be punished by death as an example to others. Muslims have a duty to fight against those who make derogatory remarks about the Prophet Muhammad, which creates unrest among the Muslim community; vulgar language against the Prophet Muhammad hurts Muslim sentiments (Iffatkhaldid & Munawar, 2015). As Muslims are forbidden from condemning others' beliefs, they expect others to also respect Islamic values (Iffatkhaldid & Munawar, 2015).

Interestingly, no evidence exists that suggests that the holy Quran prescribes manmade punishment for blasphemy, but most Muslim-majority nations include punishment for this so-called “crime” in their Sharia legal systems.

Most Muslims believe that Sharia law is the revealed word of God rather than manmade, and it has only one true understanding (Pew Research Center, 2013). A Muslim’s religious commitment is closely linked to his views about Sharia law. According to the Pew Research Center, many Muslims believe Sharia should be the supreme law in their country, but they disagree on its specific application for certain crimes such as adultery, theft, and apostasy (Pew Research Center, 2013). Of those surveyed, 99% of Afghans, 84% of Pakistanis, and 91% of Iraqis favored making Sharia their legal code (Pew Research Center, 2013). About 40% of Muslims surveyed in the Middle East and North Africa believed that Sharia law should apply to all citizens (Pew Research Center, 2013). About 89% of Muslim participants in Pakistan and 86% in Egypt believed that stoning for adultery is appropriate (Pew Research Center, 2013). Regarding the killing of apostates, 86% of Egyptian Muslim participants and 82% of Jordanian participants agreed with this punishment (Pew Research Center, 2013).

**Organization of Islamic Cooperation.** During the past 15 years, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) has been attempting to convince the United Nations (UN) that there should be international laws against defamation of religions (Leo, Gaer, & Cassidy, 2011; Rehman & Berry, 2012). Although religious persecution and discrimination are real global problems, the OIC-sponsored resolutions (see Appendix C) on defamation against religions provide justification for countries to restrict

freedom of expression. Furthermore, the resolutions give worldwide legitimacy for nations to continue to enforce existing laws that punish blasphemy, which often results in uncivilized human rights violations (Leo et al., 2011; Rehman & Berry, 2012). These resolutions stray from universal human rights standards by seeking to protect religious interpretations and institutions, not individuals. Since 2008, UN support for these resolutions has been diminishing. According to Rehman and Berry (2012), “The imposition of the death penalty for certain blasphemy offenses not only violates human rights law, but is also a breach of Sharia” (p. 41). One of my interview questions sought opinions on the OIC’s attempts at passing international blasphemy laws.

**Danish cartoon controversy.** An infamous case of blasphemy against Islam occurred in September 2005. The *Jyllands-Posten*, a Danish newspaper, published work from Danish cartoonists that negatively portrayed the Prophet Muhammad. One cartoon depicted Muhammad as dressed like a terrorist with a turban containing a bomb and a lit fuse. Another was of Muhammad on a cloud in heaven complaining that paradise had run out of virgins (Priestley, 2006). The event soon became a worldwide controversy (Priestley, 2006). Muslim groups filed a complaint with the Danish police against the newspaper, claiming the *Jyllands-Posten* had violated Denmark’s so-called blasphemy law. The investigating prosecutor found no criminal offense had been committed; the decision was upheld on appeal (Priestley, 2006). Some places banned the cartoons. The Sarawak Tribune in Malaysia was shut down for publishing them. In most places where the cartoons were published, however, the cartoons were legal and did not break any

blasphemy laws (Priestley, 2006). In my study, I used example during the interviews to help explain blasphemy in a real-world scenario.

In January 2015, two Muslim brothers attacked the offices of the satirical magazine, *Charlie Hebdo*, in Paris. They murdered the cartoonists, staff, and one Muslim police officer to avenge for the magazine's publication of defamatory cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad (Rose & Matters, 2017). *Charlie Hebdo* first published a special edition featuring the Danish cartoons in 2006 and faced legal action from Islamic organizations; judges acquitted the editor, citing that the cartoons did not incite religious hatred (Rose & Matters, 2017). The League of Judicial Defence of Muslims tried to sue *Charlie Hebdo* for blasphemy in 2014, but the case was dropped (Rose & Matters, 2017). With a lack of recourse through the legal system, it appeared that the *Charlie Hebdo* attackers chose to avenge perceived blasphemy against their religion in a violent manner (Rose & Matters, 2017). Participants often referred to this case during my study.

***The Innocence of Muslims* video.** In late 2012, a mob attacked the U.S. embassy in Cairo in response to an Egyptian-American Copt uploading an anti-Muhammad video (*The Innocence of Muslims*) to YouTube (Totten, 2013). Shortly thereafter, the presidents of Yemen and Egypt went to the United Nations to demand that blasphemy be outlawed globally (Totten, 2013). Saudi Arabia supported the notion of an international censorship body to eliminate blasphemy online (Totten, 2013). Islamic leaders condemned the blasphemy as "Islamophobia," while many Western governments agreed that they had the right to be upset (Totten, 2013). Ten thousand Muslims protested Google's London offices for failing to censor *The Innocence of Muslims*. Sheikh Faiz al-Aqtab Siddiqui

spoke at a rally there and said, “Terrorism is not just people who kill human bodies, but who kill human feelings as well” (Totten, 2013, p. 28).

### **Global Blasphemy Laws**

Pakistan’s blasphemy laws (see Appendix B) are among the strictest in the world. Hundreds of citizens have been accused of and imprisoned for blasphemy against Islam. Although Pakistani law carries the death penalty for blasphemy against Islam, as of this writing, no one has yet been executed by the legal system.

Theodorou (2016) with the Pew Research Center published figures pertaining to which countries had laws or policies penalizing blasphemy as of 2014. According to the study, about 26% of the world’s nations had blasphemy policies; the legal punishments varied from fines to death. The laws restricting blasphemy were more prevalent in North Africa and the Middle East, where 18 of 20 countries criminalized blasphemy (Theodorou, 2016). In 2014, Pakistan was one of 12 of the 50 countries in the Asia-Pacific region that had blasphemy laws (Theodorou, 2016). A New Zealander and two Burmese men in Burma were convicted of blasphemy after using an advertisement portraying Buddha with headphones to promote a bar; the men were sentenced to two and a half years in prison (Theodorou, 2016). Blasphemy laws were less prevalent in sub-Saharan Africa (four of 48 countries); blasphemy laws were found in seven out of 45 European nations (16%) (Theodorou, 2016). In the Americas, 10 out of 35 countries had blasphemy laws, including the Bahamas, where the publication or sale of blasphemous material can be punished with up to two years imprisonment (Theodorou, 2016). The United States does not have any federal blasphemy laws, but as of 2014, several United

States – including Massachusetts and Michigan – still had blasphemy laws on the books (Theodorou, 2016). However, the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution would very likely motivate a court to ban the enforcement of any such law (Theodorou, 2016).

### **American Freedom of Speech**

Many historical American jurisdictions carried the death penalty for blasphemy on the books. The New York case in 1952 of *Joseph Burstyn, Inc. v. Wilson* effectively ended United States blasphemy laws, establishing that they were unconstitutional under the guarantee of freedom of speech under the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution (Priestley, 2006). The Constitution's First Amendment (Freedom of religion, speech, press, assembly, and petition) was passed by Congress on September 25, 1789, and ratified on December 15, 1791. It states:

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances. (Stone & Volokh, n.d.)

Of interest to the current study is the freedom of speech and the press clause of the First Amendment. What do scholars and legal professionals claim it means today? Individuals may not be jailed, fined, or held liable based on what they write or say except in extraordinary circumstances. The Supreme Court interpreted *speech* and *press* as not only talking, writing, and printing, but also broadcasting, using the Internet, and other forms of expression (Stone & Volokh, 2016, para. 3). The freedom of speech also applies to symbolic expression, such as displaying and burning flags, wearing armbands, burning

crosses, and so on. Three circumstances, however, can compel the government to restrict speech under a less demanding standard. Of interest here is what the Supreme Court has termed “fighting words” and “hate speech” (Stone & Volokh, 2016). In-person insults that will likely result in an immediate physical altercation are punishable, but this does not include political statements that offend others and coax them to violence (Stone & Volokh, 2016). Blasphemy is protected by the First Amendment. However, American courts have not always protected free expression. In the 19th century, for example, courts enforced punishment for blasphemy. In the 1920s, the Supreme Court began to interpret the First Amendment more broadly; this trend increased in the 1960s. Today, the First Amendment offers stronger legal protection than ever before in American history (Stone & Volokh, 2016).

Totten (2013) believed that it is impossible to compromise America’s First Amendment. For example, Christians and other faith groups in America are scorned daily without anyone seriously calling for restrictions on speech (Totten, 2013). According to Totten, if offensive speech is not protected, free speech becomes irrelevant (Totten, 2013). In contrast, in Muslim-majority countries, restrictions on free speech are pervasive, denigrate freedom, and cause torment to millions of people (Totten, 2013).

**Current American views of free speech.** The Cato Institute administered the 2017 Free Speech and Tolerance Survey to 2,547 Americans over the age of 18 (Ekins, 2017). Fifty-three percent of Americans said that employers should not discipline their employees for posting controversial or offensive opinions on social media accounts; 46% thought businesses should (Ekins, 2017, p. 60). Seventy-one percent believed that

political correctness has done more to silence important discussions our society should have (Ekins, 2017). Twenty-eight percent believed that political correctness has done more to help people avoid offending others (Ekins, 2017). Fifty-eight percent of Americans believed the political climate today prevents them from saying things they believe – a personal consequence (Ekins, 2017). A small majority of Democrats (53%) felt no need to self-censor; strong majorities of Republicans (73%) and independents (58%) said they keep some political beliefs to themselves (Ekins, 2017). Fifty-nine percent of Americans thought people should be allowed to express unpopular opinions in public, even those deeply offensive to other people; 40% thought the government should prevent hate speech in public (Ekins, 2017). An overwhelming majority (79%) agreed that it is morally unacceptable to engage in hate speech against religious or racial groups (Ekins, 2017). The public appears to distinguish between allowing offensive speech and endorsing it (Ekins, 2017, p.1). Eighty-two percent agreed that it would be difficult to ban hate speech because people cannot agree what speech is hateful and offensive (Ekins, 2017, p. 2).

**Study on American and Canadian views on blasphemy.** The following statement was offered to 4,000 participants in Canada and the United States: “Newspaper stories or cartoons that mock or denigrate [Mohammad/the Star of David/Jesus/religious symbols] should be banned” (Wright, Johnston, Citrin, & Soroka, 2017, p. 119). Responses were recorded on a 5-point scale from agree strongly to disagree strongly (Wright et al., 2017, p. 119). The participants’ willingness to suppress mocking of



religious figures was startling. Participants in the United States were more likely to accept censorship than reject it.

**Sharia law and the U.S. Constitution.** In the fall of 2010, 70% of Oklahoma voters approved the “Save Our State” amendment to the state constitution rendering Sharia law invalid in Oklahoma courts (Lemons & Chambers-Letson, 2014). The amendment states, “Specifically, the courts shall not look at international law or Sharia law” in making decisions (Lemons & Chambers-Letson, 2014, p. 1049). According to Lemons and Chambers-Letson (2014), the Oklahoma statute is telling of a wider concern in America that the Constitution is vulnerable to infiltrations of tenets of Sharia law.

In March 2011, Pete King (R-NY), then the chairman of the Homeland Security Committee, convened hearings titled, “The Extent of Radicalization among American Muslims” in the United States House of Representatives (Lemons & Chambers-Letson, 2014, p. 1052). King said the hearings were held due to concerns about Islamic terrorism on American soil. Proponents of the hearings claimed that they were protecting the Constitution from Sharia law, whereas critics argued the hearings were a forum for racism and religious discrimination (Lemons & Chambers-Letson, 2014). The King hearings were theatrical in nature with emotional testimonies. King and his allies hoped to bolster Islamophobic fears of a Muslim invasion. Conservatives argued that Sharia law was a threat to the constitutional order of the United States. The hearings turned into a discussion about the rule of law and how its structure allows subordination and exclusion of minorities (Lemons & Chambers-Letson, 2014). Minnesota Congressman and Democrat Keith Ellison, an African-American Muslim, claimed that the King hearings

resembled the confinement of Japanese Americans during World War II. Proponents of the hearings argued that they were not aiming at Islam or Muslims, but national security threats posed by acts inspired by religious fundamentalism and the incursion of American law by fundamentalist legal traditions such as Sharia (Lemons & Chambers-Letson, 2014).

**Debunking the fear of Sharia law overtaking the United States Constitution.**

The Center for American Progress published an article written by Ali and Duss (2011) attempting to debunk fears that Sharia law would overtake American law. In 2010–2011, conservative analysts identified Sharia law as an increasing threat to America, claiming that the slow, yet steady adoption of Sharia doctrines is a method that extremists are using to convert the United States into an Islamic state. Several politicians agreed with this interpretation and 13 states considered adopting legislation forbidding Sharia. For example, a bill in the Tennessee State Senate would make adherence to Sharia punishable by 15 years in jail. Former Speaker of the House of Representatives Newt Gingrich called for “a federal law that says Sharia law cannot be recognized by any court in the United States” (Ali & Duss, 2011, p. 1).

Ali and Duss (2011) purported that Sharia law is not static, and that it is intended for personal religious observance, not national laws. They added that even if the most dangerous interpretation of Sharia law were accurate, no evidence exists that proposes that the American legal system is at risk of implementing any Sharia tenets (Ali & Duss, 2011). Ali and Duss believe that Muslim scholars agree on certain core values of Sharia which are ethical and theological, not political. These core values are in alignment with

those of America, according to Ali and Duss. Muslims consider an understanding of Sharia to be binding if it protects life, property, family, faith, and intellect (Ali & Duss, 2011). Muslim tradition accepts differences of opinion which is why Sharia has survived for hundreds of years as an ongoing series of discourses (Ali & Duss, 2011). The current study obtained the opinions of participants on the possibility of implementing Sharia-like blasphemy laws in the United States.

**Recent American legislative actions.** House Resolution 349 (H. Res. 349), “Calling for the global repeal of blasphemy, heresy, and apostasy laws” was introduced in May 2017 make ending blasphemy punishment a key part of bi- and multilateral relationship building around the world and urges countries to amend or repeal their blasphemy laws (H. Res. 2017-2018). This bill was also introduced in 2015 as H.R. 290. In April 2017, Senate Resolution 118 (S. Res. 118) was submitted in the Senate, considered, and agreed to without amendment and with a preamble by unanimous consent (U.S. Congress, 2017–2018). The title of S. Res. 118 is, “A resolution condemning hate crime and any other form of racism, religious or ethnic bias, discrimination, incitement to violence, or animus targeting a minority in the United States” (U.S. Congress, 2017–2018). Senate Resolution 118 encourages the following:

- 1) The Department of Justice (DOJ) and other federal agencies to work to improve the reporting of hate crimes, and to emphasize the importance of the agencies’ collection and reporting of data pursuant to federal law; and
- 2) The development of an interagency task force led by the Attorney General to collaborate on the development of effective strategies and

efforts to detect and deter hate crime in order to protect minority communities. (paras. 5–6)

### **Muslim-American Political Views and Political Participation Patterns**

Some question whether it is religiously legitimate for Muslims to be politically active in a non-Islamic government system such as that of the United States (Mazrui, 1999). Jasser (2007) pointed out that imam in Arabic means teacher, not leader. According to Wehr (1980), the Arabic word imam means to lead the way or to lead in prayer. The imam, according to Jasser (2007), is supposed to be a spiritual leader and not be contaminated with the affairs of this world. A spiritual teacher does not seek answers in the courtroom, but rather instructs in principle and humility (Jasser, 2007).

Georgetown University's Imam Yahya Hendi is politically active and connected with national leaders. He also serves as a member and the spokesperson of the Islamic Jurisprudence Council of North America. In June 2008, he called on Muslims to take President Obama seriously and begin a dialogue with the West. Imam Hendi urged the United States Administration to unite for peace in the Middle East and prayed that Obama would stand for the rights of the Palestinians to have their own state ("Imam Yahya Hendi and President Obama," 2011). Imam Hendi has also met with leaders of Norway and Bahrain, talking about pluralism and diversity in America, women's rights in the Muslim world, and the importance of cross-cultural dialogue ("Imam Yahya Hendi and President Obama," 2011).

Imam Mohamed Magid, executive director of the All Dulles Area Muslim Society, was asked to deliver the Islamic call to prayer at an interfaith religious service

for President Donald Trump; instead, he recited two verses from the Quran that contained political messages (Burke, 2017). The officials at the Washington National Cathedral had allegedly been approved; other faith groups such as the Episcopalians had also been disparaged for praying with Trump (Burke, 2017). The political messages dealt with the divisive political climate and respecting diversity. Magid led ISNA from 2010–2014, he routinely makes the list of the world’s 500 most influential Muslims (Burke, 2017).

Muslims are the fastest growing religious minority in the United States Islamic movements are often viewed as non-compatible with Western ideals of freedom and democracy (Gorski & Altinordu, 2008). Patterson, Gasim, and Choi (2011) sought to illuminate the political behavior of Muslim Americans and the impact that political and religious attitudes had on this behavior. In the fall of 2006, data were collected via surveys in over 70 mosques across the United States. With a sample of 894 individuals, the participation rate was just under 25% (Patterson, Gasim and Choi, 2011). The survey included a long list of questions about their political behavior and attitudes. Many Muslims preferred Bush (a Republican) in 2000, and a significant number switched to Kerry (a Democrat) in 2004 (Patterson et al., 2011). The results indicated that most Muslim Americans cared more about pro-Muslim foreign policy than social conservatism. Most Muslim Americans did not support the Iraq war, and this seemed to be one of the most important political issues for them. They are also much more likely to self-identify as Democrats (Patterson et al., 2011).

The Pew Research Center (2017) estimated that about 3.45 million people of all ages in the United States are Muslim. In 2016, about 57% of all U.S. Muslims said they

were certain that they were currently registered to vote; overall, 44% of American Muslims said they voted in the 2016 election, including 54% of U.S.-born Muslims and 37% of those born outside (Pew Research Center, 2017). Muslims who voted in the 2016 presidential election overwhelmingly said they voted for Hillary Clinton over Donald Trump (78% vs. 8%; Pew Research Center, 2017).

Jackson's (1999) view is that Muslims must come to terms with the fact the United States will not likely impose stoning or flogging as penalties for blasphemy or adultery, as does Sharia law. Rather, a better approach for Muslims would be to take advantage of the opportunities afforded to them by the U.S. Constitution. For example, the U.S. government cannot force a Muslim to deny his faith or right to pray, or to eat pork or drink alcohol. It cannot deny Muslims the right to build mosques or to hold public office, and it cannot deny them the right to speak out against public officials and policies (Jackson, 1999).

### **Muslim Political Parties and Organizations**

The United States Council of Muslim Organizations (USCMO) was established in 2015 with the following vision:

. . . America's Muslims will be socially successful in direct proportion to how well we do three things: Streamline "all-way" communication between and among our local and national organizations, build a laser-focused, consensus-based national vision, and cooperate in mobilizing the Muslim populations of our local communities and that of our fellow Americans for the good of all. (2017, para. 1).

A concern at the time of their inception was that the USCMO would be a political party that aimed to create a Muslim voting bloc for the 2016 election (Investor's Business Daily, 2014). Several of the founding organizations are questionable, such as the Council on American Islamic Relations, or CAIR. CAIR has been accused by the FBI as having ties to the terrorist group Hamas (Investor's Business Daily, 2014). After 9/11, the FBI confiscated hundreds of pages of CAIR's founding archives in an American Muslim Brotherhood member's home in the suburbs of Washington, DC. The documents outlined the Brotherhood's aim to subversively infiltrate the American legal system with Sharia law. Since then, the FBI has refused to do outreach with CAIR's chief, Awad, due to his connections with Hamas, another terrorist organization. Finally, not just any Muslim can join USCMO. He must complete a four-page application, pass a Muslim Brotherhood review, and pay \$1,000 or \$3,500 per year, depending upon the choice of membership (Investor's Business Daily, 2014). During the interviews with my participants, I asked them to explain their political participation activities with interest groups who have free speech as an agenda item.

## **Muslim Immigration and Integration**

### **Demographics and Statistics**

In 2015, there were approximately 3.3 million Muslims in the U.S., or about 1% of the U.S. population (Lipka, 2017). A 2014 Pew Research Center survey found that 0.9% of U.S. adults identified as Muslims (Lipka, 2017). A 2011 survey of Muslim Americans found that most U.S. Muslims (63%) were immigrants (Lipka, 2017). Projections estimate that Muslims will account for about 2.1% of the U.S. population by

the year 2050 (Lipka, 2017). The Muslim share of immigrants granted permanent residency status increased from about 5% in 1992 to approximately 10% in 2012, representing about 100,000 immigrants in that year (Lipka, 2017).

Christians comprise half or 49% of the world's international migrants; Muslims are the second largest group at 27% (Pew Research Center, 2012, para. 3). Jews had the highest level of migration across international borders – about 1/4 of Jews alive today left their birth country and live elsewhere; Muslims are at about 4% of migrants (Pew Research Center, 2012, paras. 4–5). North America and Europe received over half of the world's newcomers (Pew Research Center, 2012). The United States only ranks as the seventh destination for Muslim migrants, behind Saudi Arabia, Russia, Germany, France, Jordan and Pakistan migrants (Pew Research Center, 2012, para. 19). The world's largest share of Muslim migrants is Palestinian in origin followed by Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India (Pew Research Center, 2012). The share of Muslim and Hindu immigrants is growing, however. From 1992 to 2012, the United States admitted an estimated 1.7 million Muslim immigrants compared to 12.7 million Christian immigrants in the same period (Pew Research Center, 2013, para. 18). Unauthorized immigrants are overwhelmingly Christian at 83% (Pew Research Center, 2013, para. 18).

Nearly 58% of U.S. Muslim adults are first-generation immigrants; of this group, 35% come from South Asia, especially Pakistan (Pew Research Center, 2017). Eighty-two percent of U.S. Muslims are American citizens (Pew Research Center, 2017). Pew Research Center estimates that there are currently 3.45 million Muslims in the U.S., including 2.15 million adults and 1.35 million children (Pew Research Center, 2017).



Muslims account for roughly 1.1% of the total U.S. population (including both adults and children), as well as approximately 0.9% of the U.S. adult population (Pew Research Center, 2017). The U.S. Census Bureau does not ask about religion, so it is difficult to accurately assess the figures. Muslims born outside the United States are more likely than U.S.-born Muslims to identify as Sunni (61% vs. 47%; Pew Research Center, 2017). Muslim Americans tend to be fluent in English, politically aware, and well educated. Muslim Americans do not practice Islam the same way. There are myriad denominations and sects, and conflict about theology and interpretations (Pew Research Center, 2017).

**Do Muslims want to assimilate?** Americans are equally divided on whether they believe Muslims in America desire to assimilate (Poushter, 2017). In 2007, the Pew Research Center conducted the first nationwide-survey of Muslim Americans; results suggested that Muslims are assimilated, happy, and have moderate views compared with European Muslims (Pew Research Center, 2011). Muslim Americans overwhelmingly embrace both the “Muslim” and “American” parts of their identity (Pew Research Center, 2011). For instance, the clear majority of U.S. Muslims say they are proud to be American (92%), while nearly all say they are proud to be Muslim (97%) (Pew Research Center, 2017). Indeed, about 9 in 10 (89%) say they are proud to be *both* Muslim and American (Pew Research Center, 2017).

Muslim Americans also see themselves as integrated into American society in other important ways. Four in five said they were satisfied with the way things were going in their lives in America, and 6 in 10 said they had a lot in common with most

Americans. In addition, a declining share of U.S. Muslims said that “all” or “most” of their close friends are also Muslim (Pew Research Center, 2017).

According to Berry (2011), higher levels of well-being occur when minority groups are closely connected within their culture while also connected with the majority culture. Recently, the United States has experienced significant transformations to accommodate people groups who were previously marginalized (Haddad & Harb, 2014). In the past, American Muslims took pride in isolating themselves from American society. In 2007, 47% of American Muslims claimed that their allegiance to Islam was higher than their allegiance to America and to citizenship (Haddad & Harb, 2014). Ten years after the events of 9/11, however, America’s Muslims are working hard to enter the mainstream of their host country.

**Muslim assimilation experiences.** Fifty-six percent of Muslim Americans say most Muslims who come to the United States wish to adapt to the American culture; only 33% of the public agrees (Pew Research Center, 2011). Although studies reveal most Muslim Americans reject violence and extremism, 15% of the public believes there is a high level of support for extremism, and 25% see a fair amount of support (Pew Research Center, 2011). Following are examples of Muslim immigrant experiences.

***Turkish Muslim immigrant experiences in the United States.*** Immigration scholars have, until recently, almost ignored any potential relationships between Muslims’ religious patterns and their integration in America (Bulut & Ebaugh, 2014). Muslim Americans are typically categorized without regard to their religious, cultural and ethnic differences, preventing a better understanding of Muslim assimilation. Bulut and

Ebaugh (2014) aimed to illuminate such differences by examining the experiences of American Turkish immigrants.

According to Bulut and Ebaugh (2014), the assimilation process has several dimensions. For example, the literature supports the significance of religion in supporting immigrants' integration into a new society; many immigrants become more religious after arrival in the United States because they are free to do so (Bulut & Ebaugh, 2014). However, the literature is lacking on the connection between Muslim religiosity and their assimilation experiences in the United States. A vast number of studies does exist that indicate the significance of mosques in preserving American Muslims' religious identity (Bulut & Ebaugh, 2014). In expanding the research, Bulut and Ebaugh, therefore, recommended to researchers to not use mosque attendance as a measure of Muslim religiosity.

Bulut and Ebaugh (2014) conducted in-depth interviews using purposeful snowball sampling, asking questions dealing with the religious practices scale (e.g., prayers, wearing of the headscarf, eating halal or legal food, the use of alcohol, hajj or pilgrimage, and fasting). The researchers interviewed 40 Turkish Muslims in Houston, Texas, half of which were practicing Muslims, the other half were non-practicing. The results indicated that the practicing Turkish Muslims were more likely to experience better adaptation to American life, and they reported a higher language acquisition. Nonpracticing Turks more than their practicing peers would socialize outside of their Turkish Muslim circles (Bulut & Ebaugh, 2014). Typical responses were their appreciation for religious freedom in America and respect for others (Bulut & Ebaugh,

2014). Practicing Turkish Muslims tended to isolate themselves within their social networks. Bulut and Ebaugh concluded that individuals who were more assimilated tended to expand their friendships more outside of their Turkish Muslim groups.

*Australian Muslim experiences.* According to Rane et al. (2011), much of the discourse in the public and in the media regarding Islam and Muslims is often unsubstantiated. Insufficient data exist on what Muslims believe. In 2009, these researchers surveyed Muslims in Australia (Rane et al., 2011). The findings contradicted many assumptions about their views on social and political issues. Australian Muslims tended to highly value their country's social and political institutions, but they did not trust the mass media and other institutions; they were also very concerned about problems in the Middle East (Rane et al., 2011).

*Senegalese Muslim experiences.* Kane (2011) studied Senegalese integration in New York City and discovered that they were living vibrant lives. Many of the Senegalese Muslim immigrants were Sufis and undocumented males. Sufi imams often moved between the United States and Senegal. Kane found that generally, Senegalese wished to incorporate into the American way of life while sustaining their culture. Most males were cab drivers, vendors, and hair braiders, sending money to their wives in Senegal. Kane also discovered that Americans typically accepted the Senegalese Muslims well.

*Muslim integration in Europe.* There are a considerable number of Muslim immigrants in European societies and they are viewed as less integrated than those in the United States (Marsh, 2012). Marsh (2012) offered two hypotheses regarding Muslim

integration in Europe: (a) the greater their social exclusion, the more likely that the Muslim minority will continue to have values that are more like those of Muslims in Muslim-majority societies than to the values of the non-Muslim majority in their own society; and (b) when Muslims' tolerance is reciprocated by the majority population, when there is more social inclusion of Muslims by the non-Muslim majority, Muslims' values are hypothesized to be more like those of the non-Muslim majority in their own society than to the values of Muslims in Muslim-majority Islamic societies.

Marsh's (2012) data originated from the 1999–2001 World Values Survey (WVS); the surveys were typically conducted in 68 countries, but the WVS added 13 to total 81. Israel lacked some data, so Marsh used data from 80 countries; the United States was not included in the study. The survey was conducted with face-to-face and structured questionnaires. Examples of questions asked were, how important is God in your life? Do you find that you get comfort and strength from religion? Do you believe in heaven and hell? The survey used the 9-item Religious Values Index, a highly reliable index; an 8-item Family Values Index, and a 6-item Gender Values index. The findings suggested that Muslims are more traditional in these values, but they do vary. The 2000 World Values Survey confirmed the proposition that value assimilation occurs when Muslims are a minority living in a non-Muslim majority society. Furthermore, societies with less social exclusion show a stronger tendency to assimilation in the values of Muslims toward those of the non-Muslim majority (Marsh, 2012). An aim of the current study was to explore whether a pattern exists between an immigrant Muslim imam's/scholar's/community leader's views of blasphemy and his/her country of origin.

### **Multiculturalism, Assimilation, and Integration**

Asking about preferences on multicultural policies has not been the focus of prior research (Wright, Johnston, Citrin, & Soroka, 2017). Researchers know little about American citizens' reactions to Muslim demands for accommodation, an issue exacerbated by immigration. The problem results from the increasing number of – and growing public anxiety toward – Muslim immigrants (Wright et al., 2017). One policy concern dealing with freedom of speech and religion is the demand to protect Islamic symbols and prophets from public mockery. Accommodating the demands to shield the Prophet Muhammad from public satire conflicts with the principles of freedom of speech and the press (Wright et al., 2017). Such demands are likely to be viewed as a threat to the majority's core values in the United States; Muslims already tend to be disproportionately associated with security threats (Wright et al., 2017). Americans embrace diversity but expect immigrants to assimilate into a common culture; the reluctance to embrace the dominant political values is not accepted (Wright et al., 2017).

According to Malik (2004), Muslims are integrating into host societies instead of assimilating. Assimilation is the cultural merger of ethnic or religious categories (Malik, 2004). Immigrants who integrate without assimilating do some things with people outside of their group and do some things separately (Malik, 2004). Pluralism occurs when relationships among groups are integrated but not assimilated (Malik, 2004). Malik stated that Muslims are integrating into their new countries despite Western Islamophobia. Most Muslims socialize regularly with other Muslims. Islam is not just a faith but an ummah (i.e., community) that is not secular (Malik, 2004). Malik posited that most Muslims are

not interested in assimilating into Western cultures, which goes against the assimilationist pull of the host societies.

Multiculturalism and its recent applications to American politics and policy is a controversial concept. Multiculturalism is a social reality of diverse, coexisting cultures, builds on ideas of cultural pluralism and cosmopolitanism, and is based on respect for cultural diversity and individual ethnic identity (Bass, 2008). The idea of multiculturalism rejects the strict assimilation norm, and the notion of equality for all groups. Multiculturalism emerged as a policy-oriented concept in late twentieth century. America had no official national policy on multiculturalism, but it adopted its principles in the early 1970s as an alternative to assimilation. Bloemraad and Wright (2014) suggested that multicultural policies have some modest positive effects on integration for first-generation immigrants but little effect on second-generation immigrants.

### **Canada and Quebec's Immigration Policies**

Canada is very multicultural. Both Canada and Quebec stress pluralism and minority protection (McAndrew & Bakhshaei, 2012). Canada's federal policy is one of multiculturalism, whereas Quebec's is one of diversity. In Quebec, French is the official language and they have a bilingual labor market. Religious diversity is not as well tolerated there as elsewhere in Canada. North African Muslim immigrants experience the highest levels of integration because most are already French speaking. There is an anti-Muslim wave in Quebec, and a high unemployment for them there. Quebec residents fear giving Muslims excessive religious accommodation.

## **Multiculturalism and Political Engagement**

Impassioned debates exist over whether policies such as multiculturalism help or hamper immigrants' political engagement with their new host nation (Wright & Bloemraad, 2012). Wright and Bloemraad (2012) empirically assessed this controversy from the immigrant's perspective. They asked how citizenship and multicultural policies influenced immigrants' socio-political engagement with their host nation in three realms: political inclusion, social inclusion, and political engagement (Wright & Bloemraad, 2012). Wright and Bloemraad used cross-national and single-country surveys and found that multiculturalism did not hamper immigrants' engagement with government and society; in fact, it seemed to enhance it. Therefore, according to Wright and Bloemraad, the notion that multiculturalism hinders immigrants' socio-political integration is largely without merit.

### **Phenomenology as a Research Method**

This study addressed Muslim constituents' opinions of free speech and free speech policy using textual analysis to identify clusters or segments of sentiment in response to the First Amendment of the Constitution, with a focus on how their acculturation experiences in the United States impacted their views of blasphemy and blasphemy laws. The method was an interpretive qualitative data analysis of interviews of immigrant Muslim imams, scholars, and/or community leaders using an existential phenomenological approach.

Qualitative data analysis (QDA) focuses on a holistic, interpretive approach which means that the nature of every being of the social world depends solely on



individuals' subjective understanding of it (Chowdhury, 2014). QDA refers to a range of processes whereby the researcher transforms the collected data into an understanding or interpretation of the people being investigated. Critics argue that QDA is imprecise, must use a small sample size, and is not a valid representation of the larger population.

Researcher bias must be dealt with, and there is often confusion on the analysis process regarding sifting, sorting and coding of the data. Interviews are the typical data collection method; the risk with interviews is establishing validity and reliability. Critics claim that coding is the most complex aspect of qualitative research. QDA advocates, on the other hand, claim the advantages of obtaining participant authenticity, robustness of textual data, and the overall capacity of qualitative research. QDA generates rich, detailed data through a rigorous research process. It is generally accepted that QDA does not provide generalization; the researcher sees things from the perspectives of human actors.

The notion of phenomenology was birthed from the research of philosophers such as Brentano, Hegel and Kant, whose works inspired Husserl (1859–1939) to develop phenomenology in the 20th century. Since then, the phenomenological approach has become a credible method for studying consciousness (Matua & van der Wal, 2015). Phenomenology still influences scholars in the arts, human sciences and humanities. Phenomenological inquiry begins by asking, what is the nature or meaning of this phenomenon? It then aims to understand the phenomenon from the viewpoint of those who experienced it firsthand. The phenomenological approach has morphed from emphasizing only Husserl's "pure description" to emphasizing the interpretation of experience as promoted by Heidegger (1889–1976; Matua & van der Wal, 2015, p. 24).

It is difficult to interpret Husserl's and Heidegger's philosophical views (Dowling & Cooney, 2012). Many methods exist for carrying out a phenomenological study; it depends on the nature of the research question. Furthermore, researchers must determine whether to use descriptive or interpretive approaches, because they are significantly different. Descriptive phenomenology requires an exploration, analysis and description of a phenomenon while maintaining richness, but without considering the participants' political, cultural or social circumstances. Researchers must suspend their presumptions which is termed phenomenological epoche, or bracketing; bracketing means the researcher ignores all knowledge about a phenomenon so that he or she may understand the key pieces (van der Noll & Saroglou, 2014).

On the other hand, the interpretive phenomenology approach (IPA) means the researcher aims to gain a deeper understanding of an experience; the study becomes hermeneutic when the method is interpretive. Interpretive phenomenology emphasizes the psychological implications of the participants' speech, and the method is grounded in Heidegger's work (van der Noll & Saroglou, 2014). Interpretive phenomenological research produces a robust interpretation of the meanings of a phenomenon as it is experienced firsthand. It focuses on a deeper understanding of the experience accounting for various contexts of the participants, and there is no bracketing or suspension of the researcher's preconceived beliefs; instead, the researcher's preunderstandings are part of the research findings, because interpretation is inevitable. IPA allows for openness, empathy, and reflexivity. The goal of IPA is to go into someone else's world and learn

understandings therein, producing a deeper understanding of the phenomenon (van der Noll & Saroglou, 2014).

The key advantage of phenomenology is its capacity to account for internal subjective experiences. Phenomenology is not inductive. Purposeful sampling and interviews are usually used for data collection, rather than relying on empirical evidence or logical argument. Data analysis is often a systematic thematic analysis.

Phenomenological psychiatry has never been interested in issues about reliability.

Existential phenomenology is the most common basis for phenomenological research, a human science method (Willis, Sullivan-Bolyai, Kanfl, & Cohen, 2016). Husserl focused on the world of lived experience. The product is a phenomenological description of the essence of the lived experience with lifeworld themes which are then coded and grouped into themes. Qualitative descriptive research does not require bracketing, but reflexivity must be addressed as other researchers will review the work. In qualitative descriptive research, one may begin with a theory to guide the collection and analysis of data but must not force data to fit a framework. Findings from descriptive phenomenological studies provide an exhaustive discovery of the lived experience.

Kierkegaard and Nietzsche developed the existential concept (Hoffman, 2011). Phenomenology and existentialism are frequently clustered together because of the common emphasis on experience. Phenomenology focuses on an individual's subjective experience. Personal and cultural aspects always impact the development of that meaning. The researcher must establish rapport with the participants and ensure the interview transcripts do not read like a police interrogation. Importantly, opinions are not

considered to be a lived experience. The current study aimed to obtain participants' opinions of blasphemy and blasphemy laws, and to what extent their acculturation experiences in the United States impacted their views and vice versa.

### **Summary**

Blasphemy against Islam is a highly controversial topic, especially for Muslims. Most Muslims in countries such as Pakistan and Iraq believe that Sharia should be the supreme law, which includes blasphemy laws to safeguard against the defamation of their religion. Americans, on the other hand, cling tightly to the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution which calls for freedom of speech and expression. Surveys exist of Muslim views of Sharia law in general, but the literature does not go deeper and provide data on how immigrant Muslim imams, scholars, and/or community leaders feel about blasphemy and blasphemy legislation in the United States. The current study sought to fill a gap in the literature by exploring these perceptions of blasphemy laws and free speech in America. Furthermore, the literature did not illuminate how the Muslim acculturation experience in the United States impacts their views of blasphemy and blasphemy laws. Finally, prior research provided data on Muslim voting patterns, but lacked depth regarding Muslim political participation activities dealing with free speech issues in America.

The current study addressed these gaps in the literature to provide the American public and policymakers with a better understanding of Muslim imams' views of blasphemy, how their acculturation experiences in the United States impacted their views of free speech and vice versa, and their inclination to engage in political participation

regarding blasphemy against Islam and free speech issues. The findings are intended to either help prove or disprove American fears that Muslim immigrants wish to curtail American free speech rights and policies.

In this chapter, I covered the two theories on which this research will be based: policy feedback and acculturation. The current study should help inform both theories and link them together through an inquiry on immigrant Muslim imams', scholars, and/or community leaders' political inclinations on free speech and how their integration experiences impacted those views and vice versa. I then covered a plethora of background material on Islamophobia, blasphemy, Muslim voting patterns and political participation, and Muslim integration experiences in the United States. The chapter concluded with a discussion on qualitative phenomenology as the selected research method. In Chapter 3, I will address the research design.

## Chapter 3: Research Method

### **Introduction**

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to understand immigrant Muslim imams, scholars, and/or community leaders in America and their perceptions of blasphemy and free speech policies. Furthermore, the results of this study will help illuminate their inclinations toward political participation regarding freedom of speech and blasphemy against Islam. Analyzing and comparing views of this group also provides a better understanding of the extent to which they are assimilated into American culture, including their acceptance of First Amendment rights of free speech.

#### **Chapter Preview**

In this qualitative study, I used an existential, phenomenological approach with interpretive data analysis. Through snowballing, a purposeful sample of 10 first- and second-generation Muslim legal immigrant imams, scholars, and/or community leaders were recruited via mosques and referrals in northern Virginia. Participants who were willing and who met the inclusion criteria completed the demographics survey and the informed consent form. I conducted 90-minute to 4.5-hour-long interviews in private settings. Participants had the chance to review their transcripts and provide feedback and/or corrections; they also had the chance to review the findings and final report. Transcript checks, triangulation, persistent observation, rich descriptions, and peer debriefers enhanced research validity. Throughout the process, peer data analysis review, a component of dialogic engagement, helped me ensure that I was making sense of and

formatively incorporating participants' feedback (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Data sources included interview transcripts, field notes, and reflexive journaling. The data sources were analyzed into codes and themes. Finally, I met Institutional Review Board (IRB) ethical standards by obtaining informed consent from each participant and providing participants with the opportunity to review transcripts and findings.

## **Research Design and Rationale**

### **Research Questions**

Most Muslims are aware of the blasphemy component of their religion but differ in opinion on its application. The research questions were:

Research Question 1: What are the perceptions of Muslim first- and second-generation immigrant imams, scholars, and/or community leaders in America on blasphemy and blasphemy policies?

Research Question 2: What political actions have they taken and plan to take regarding blasphemy policies, such as letters to the editor, correspondence with political officials, voting, and joining interest groups?

Research Question 3: How do their religious views of blasphemy impact their acculturation experience and vice versa?

Research Question 4: What patterns exist between participants' Muslim sects and their views of blasphemy?

Research Question 5: What connections exist between their countries of origin and their views of free speech and blasphemy? In other words, do Muslims from certain countries share similar beliefs about blasphemy?

### **Central Phenomena of the Study and the Selected Research Tradition**

In this study, I employed a qualitative method with an existential, phenomenological approach and an interpretive data analysis. The phenomenon of interest was the experience of being an immigrant Muslim imam, scholar, and/or community leader in the United States where freedom of speech is a constitutional right, but the individual follows a faith system that generally includes strict codes against blasphemy. The essence of the phenomenon was the shared experience of being a Muslim immigrant in America and an imam, scholar, and/or community leader. Obtaining the views of blasphemy and blasphemy laws from this group addressed the problem of Americans lacking an understanding of what this cultural subgroup really believes about freedom of speech and expression and to what extent living in the United States changes Muslim immigrants' views of blasphemy.

The meaning of living with a faith system that punishes blasphemy and how that impacts life as a Muslim immigrant religious leader in America can best be determined by a qualitative, phenomenological approach, which aims to explore the human experience. The design provided a more holistic view of the phenomenon with thick, rich descriptions. Using this discovery approach, I attempted to describe and elucidate the meanings of human experience to get to the essential nature of the idea of blasphemy as perceived by Muslim immigrants in America who are also imams, scholars, and/or community leaders (see Rudestam & Newton, 2015). In an existential, phenomenological design, the researcher is interested in the uniqueness of individuals and how they give meaning to similar life events (Rudestam & Newton, 2015).



The problem statement, purpose, and research questions aligned with the methodology for several reasons. First, this inquiry was exploratory in nature; the aim was to obtain subjective information on the human experience from a specific selection of individuals, which is a qualitative, existential, phenomenological approach. Second, the purposeful snowball criterion sampling method ensured that I would obtain data from only immigrant Muslims who met the criteria for the research questions. Finally, the collection and analysis of data (interviews and coding/theming of transcripts) ensured I obtained a thick, rich description of the phenomenon, also qualifying this as a qualitative, existential, phenomenological study.

### **Role of the Researcher and Researcher Bias**

My role as the researcher was as an observer because I conducted one-on-one interviews with Muslim immigrants who were also imams, scholars, and/or community leaders. I recruited my participants by using my access to a local mosque, asking Muslim friends for referrals, and asking for referrals to other mosques in the area. None of my relationships with participants were supervisory or instructor-related; nor did I have any power over the participants in any other capacity. I carefully managed my personal biases during the interviews and data analysis process. I am divorced from a first-generation Iraqi Muslim immigrant, and several of my friends are also Muslim and from the Middle East and North Africa. However, our relationships are open, honest, and cordial; my ex-husband and my friends know about my deep interest in Middle Eastern and Islamic issues.

As the researcher, I am the research instrument and must avoid researcher bias (see Cope, 2014). According to Morse (2015), two types of researcher bias exist: the “pink elephant” bias, which is the tendency for the researcher to see what is anticipated; and value-laden bias, when the researcher expects a situation to have certain characteristics which may be unfairly emphasized in the data during the analysis. I do not agree with the concept of bracketing, or suspending my preconceptions and biases, because this is nearly impossible to accomplish (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Instead, I recognize that the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of my Muslim immigrant friends do impact my views on acculturation in the United States and on free speech policies in general. I am aware of some of my biases. To mitigate researcher bias, I used triangulation by using interview transcripts, reflexive journaling, and other interview notes. Reflexivity is the awareness that the researcher’s values and background can affect the research process (Cope, 2014). Through persistent observation, I built trust with my participants to foster rich, detailed responses (see Cope, 2014). Persistent observation is the researcher’s attention to the emotions of the participant, which provides depth to the study (Cope, 2014). I also incorporated transcript checking by offering participants the opportunity to review their transcripts and findings for accuracy. Finally, I had peer debriefers as part of my dialogic engagement (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The de-briefers were friends who challenged me and provided constructive criticism of my work. One holds a PhD and one is pursuing a PhD.

Trustworthiness, respect, caring, and responsibility are four ethical values that underpinned my research behavior. I acted with integrity, honesty, transparency, and

credibility while conducting this study. I was loyal to my participants in terms of maintaining their privacy, and I kept my promises to them with the delivery of products for review. Regarding respect, I treated my interviewees with an air of openness and tolerance, good manners, consideration, and courtesy. I also expressed gratitude and compassion. Finally, I followed the rules set by Walden, including the Institutional Review Board's guidelines. I thought before acting and responding and was consistent with my interviewees.

## **Methodology**

### **Participant Selection Logic**

It is difficult to count the number of Muslims in the United States, but an estimate puts the number of Muslim adults at about 2.15 million (Pew Research Center, 2017). Of this group of Muslim adults, about 58% are first-generation immigrants, or approximately 1.25 million (Pew Research Center, 2017). It is also difficult to ascertain the number of imams in America. Estimates indicate that 2,100 to 2,500 mosques exist in the United States, and only 33%–44% of them are staffed with a full-time, paid imam (Associated Press, 2013). Furthermore, about 85% of full-time, paid imams in the United States are foreign-born (Associated Press, 2013).

The sample was homogeneous, meaning the participants share the Muslim faith, are Islamic leaders, and are first- or second-generation immigrants. I used purposeful snowball sampling with inclusion and exclusion criteria and semi structured interviews of Muslim first- and second-generation immigrant imams, scholars, and/or community leaders in northern Virginia. My aim was to obtain information-rich cases; I obtained my

sample from several mosques and referrals from friends. Interviews occurred at agreed-upon locations such as mosques, private homes, and coffee shops. One was conducted via Skype. Before beginning each interview, I ensured that each participant met the inclusion criteria set forth and signed the informed consent form.

Purposeful sampling aims to capture the diversity within a population and snowball sampling is one available strategy for achieving this. Qualitative purposeful sampling emphasizes an in-depth understanding of specific cases that are of central importance to the purpose of the research (Patton, 2015). The snowball sampling strategy is an approach for locating information-rich participants through referrals. However, this strategy is subject to bias. For example, people tend to associate with others who share the sample selection criteria, which could negatively impact correlations found later in the study; care must be taken when conducting purposeful snowball sampling (Patton, 2015). Purposeful snowball sampling was a good method for this study, because it was otherwise difficult to find participants who met the study criteria.

Ten interviews sufficed for a relatively homogenous sample such as this (Baker, Edwards, & Doidge, 2012; Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). I had limited time and funding, so I set my sampling target at 10 participants who are first- or second-generation immigrant Muslims in America and imams, scholars, and/or community leaders. (Mason, 2010). Small samples that are providing truly in-depth information have provided many important breakthroughs of phenomena (Patton, 2015). The meaningfulness, validity, and insights gleaned from qualitative inquiry have more to do with the information richness of the cases selected than with the sample size (Patton, 2015). Data saturation occurred as

common themes began to emerge regarding views of blasphemy, blasphemy laws, and political participation. (Baker et al., 2012). The sample for this study included participants from a variety of countries and Islamic sects to discover whether common themes emerged based on country of origin, addressing the fourth and fifth research questions (Guest et al., 2006).

**Inclusion criteria.** Individuals under consideration for the sample were included if they:

- Were Muslim (any sect).
- Were first- or second-generation immigrants in America.
- Were imams, scholars, and/or community leaders.
- Were in the United States legally.
- Were at least 18 years old.
- Had a sufficient command of the English language.

**Exclusion criteria.** Individuals under consideration for the sample were excluded if they:

- Were not currently Muslim.
- Were not first- or second-generation immigrants.
- Were not imams, scholars, and/or community leaders.
- Were not in the United States legally.
- Were under the age of 18.
- Did not have a sufficient command of the English language.

The individuals I sought to sample were not part of a vulnerable population. Further, the exclusion criteria were simply to ensure the research questions were addressed and would not stigmatize those who were excluded. The language issue was a criterion, because it was too expensive to hire translators for the interviews.

### **Instrumentation**

Data collection instruments included interview transcripts from each participant, my reflexive journal, and my field notes. In-depth semi structured qualitative interviewing, one of the key naturalistic research methods, was the primary source of data for this study for several reasons. In-depth interviewing was the preferred method for exploring sensitive and personal issues such as the phenomena of interest in this study: Muslim acculturation in the United States, their views of free speech, and their subsequent political participation (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Interviews usually focus on the research questions to learn how people understand their world (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Direct quotations are a basic source of raw data in qualitative studies (Patton, 2015).

Responsive interviewing, a specific type of qualitative interviewing, emphasizes flexibility and encourages the interviewer to modify questions in response to what is being learned, and to use open-ended questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Responsive interviewing often brings out surprising candor, provides rich, thick descriptions of lived experiences, and is respectful and ethical (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). This method encourages building a relationship between the interviewer and the participant.

The philosophy of this research method was naturalist, or more specifically, interpretive constructionism. Under this paradigm, because meaning is always interpreted

and contextual, the fact that interviewers reach different conclusions is not a problem; generalizability is not the goal; understanding the voices and interpretations of the interviewees is (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). According to post positivism and naturalist perspectives, total neutrality is not possible, and a single reality is not shared by everyone (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Qualitative interviewing was the right instrument for these research questions for several reasons. I sought nuances and causations from the Muslim participants when inquiring about their acculturation experiences and the impact on their views of free speech. Very little, if any, research provides an American Muslim perspective on this phenomenon or on Muslims' inclinations to be politically active regarding free speech policies; fresh views on these matters are needed. The interview process allowed me to dig into several layers as they emerge, and to help explain the unexpected (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Frequent reflexive journaling injected my understanding of my perspectives into the results; the perspective that I as the researcher brought to this qualitative inquiry was part of the context for the findings and added credibility and value to the research (Patton, 2015). Finally, descriptive field notes complemented the interview transcript; the field notes are dated and provide information such as where the interview took place, what the setting was like, what social interactions occurred, and my reactions and feelings about the experience (Patton, 2015).

**Interview guide.** Using the interview guide approach, I specified in advance the issues and topics to be covered and I decided the sequence and wording of the questions during each interview. This approach gave me the freedom to ask probing questions to

further illuminate certain subjects and to establish a conversational style with my interviewees. This study was also cultural in nature; the interview guide helped me ensure that interviewing individuals who spoke different languages and came from different countries would be systematic and comprehensive while allowing individual experiences to emerge (Patton, 2015).

**Establishing reliability.** To strengthen the reliability of my interview protocol, I must improve the quality of data received from the interviews. I adopted a four-phased process to Interview Protocol Refinement very similar to that offered by Castillo-Montoya (2016), comprised of:

- Phase 1: Aligning interview questions with research questions.
- Phase 2: Constructing an inquiry-based conversation.
- Phase 3: Receiving feedback on interview protocols.
- Phase 4: Practicing the interview protocol with two friends.

The first phase focused on the alignment between interview questions and research questions. Alignment of the interview questions with the research questions improved the usefulness of the interview questions throughout the research process while eliminating unnecessary questions (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). As a researcher, I had to remember that the goal of in-depth interviewing is not to answer questions, but to understand lived experiences (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). An interview matrix helped me with this alignment. Phase 2 involved my creating an inquiry-based conversation with the following: (a) interview questions written differently from the research questions, (b) a framework using ordinary conversation, (c) a diversity of questions, and (d) a script with



potential follow-up questions (Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Phase 3 entailed receiving feedback on the interview protocol to improve its reliability and as a research instrument. I obtained this feedback from my dissertation committee and other colleagues. During Phase 4, I practiced my interview protocol with friends and incorporated applicable feedback.

### **Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection**

I was acquainted with the board of directors of a large local mosque, who agreed to help me obtain participants. Using referrals from friends and the mosques on the Internet, I recruited additional participants in northern Virginia. I sent each participant an invitation and a screening questionnaire (see Appendix A). When it has been established that a participant met the criteria and was willing to be interviewed, we mutually determined a date, place, and time for the interview, and I ensured they signed the informed consent.

I used two recording devices for redundancy, and I took field notes. The data were collected from the interview transcripts, my field notes and my reflexive journal. I transcribed the interviews myself. I conducted interviews from July–October of 2018. Interviews lasted from 90 minutes to over 4 hours each. At the end of each interview, I de-briefed the participant. I informed them that the results may be published and presented for public consumption, and that I would give them the chance to review their transcripts and the findings. I reminded them that I would not use their names, and I left them my contact information if they had anything further to discuss. Two peer de-briefers supported me with technical recommendations and reducing bias.

**Interview questions.** Table 1 provides the interview questions and their alignment with the research questions. I generated the questions without using other instruments in the literature, because none were found that address the research questions in this study. Furthermore, one characteristic of qualitative research is the use of researcher-generated instruments with open-ended questions rather than relying on instruments designed by other researchers (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Researchers have asked Muslims questions pertaining to their feelings as immigrants, but the questions do not ask about how their views of blasphemy impacted their acculturation and vice versa. Muslims have been surveyed about Sharia law, but again, questions about blasphemy were omitted. Finally, survey questions exist about Muslims' political views and voting patterns, but they are not specifically related to free speech policies.

Table 1

*Interview Protocol Matrix*

	RQ 1	RQ 2	RQ 3	RQ 4	RQ 5
<b>Background:</b> First- or second-generation immigrant and country of origin, Muslim sect	X			X	X
<b>Interview Question 1:</b> What do you think about blasphemy against Islam? <b>Follow-up:</b> Do you think blasphemy is a crime to be punished by law or otherwise? How and why specifically? <b>Follow-up:</b> How would you explain blasphemy against Islam to American Muslims? Do you feel free to discuss this issue in the United States?	X			X	X
<b>Interview Question 2:</b> What do you think about American free speech and First Amendment rights as related to insults against Islam? <b>Follow-up:</b> Please compare your home country's environment regarding blasphemy and blasphemy laws with the United States. What are your opinions? <b>Follow-up:</b> If you were living in a Muslim-majority country now, would your views of blasphemy be different?	X		X	X	X

<b>Interview Question 3:</b> Do you feel that your views of blasphemy against Islam make it harder for you to "fit in" with American society? <b>Follow-up:</b> How do American free speech policies and American culture affect your opinions about blasphemy against Islam? Explain.			X	X	X
<b>Interview Question 4:</b> Have you joined, or would you consider joining, political interest groups such as CAIR or USCMO? Why? <b>Follow-up:</b> Tell me about your other political participation dealing with free speech issues.	X	X			
<b>Interview Question 5:</b> On December 7, 2015, Trump's campaign issued this statement about Muslim immigration: "This all happened because, frankly, there's no assimilation. They are not assimilating . . . They want to go by sharia law. They want sharia law. They don't want the laws that we have. They want sharia law." Explain what you think about this. Do you agree or disagree, especially regarding blasphemy against Islam?	X		X	X	X
<b>Interview Question 6:</b> What do you think about the following American political actions: (a) In 2010, Oklahoma passed State Question 755 amending the state's constitution, banning Sharia law in the courts there; a Federal judge overturned it in 2011; (b) Almost half of American states have implemented or introduced laws banning the practice of foreign laws; some specifically ban the practice of Islamic law, such as Oregon; (c) In 2016, candidate Trump wanted to ban all Muslims from entering the United States.	X				
<b>Interview Question 7:</b> What do you think about Pakistan's blasphemy laws and why?	X				
<b>Interview Question 8:</b> What do you think about the Organization for Islamic Cooperation's attempts, through the UN, to pass a global blasphemy law?	X				

**Data analysis plan.** Selection of codes was based on answers to the research questions, concepts frequently raised by interviewees, and notable quotes. Each code was defined. After sorting, summarizing, and weighing narratives and codes, sufficient information was available to generate descriptions that answered the research questions.

I performed two cycles of coding; the numbers of codes and themes generated are in Table 3. I used attribute and anchor coding for the first cycle, and descriptive and in vivo coding for the second cycle. Attribute codes describe the demographic categories of the participants and are necessary to answer Research Questions 4 and 5. Examples are MUSLIM SECT and GENERATION. Anchor codes reflect key concepts derived from

the interview questions and the research questions; an example is LAWS IN PAKISTAN for Research Question 1. Descriptive and in vivo codes must align with the anchor codes to ensure relevant data are answering the research questions. Descriptive codes summarize key passages of interview text (Saldana, 2016). In vivo codes come directly from the statements of the participants in the study (Saldana, 2016). The aim was not to generate a theory, but to analyze the themes and their interrelationships and propose key assertions. I used Atlas.ti8 software to assist me with sorting codes.

*Manner of treatment of discrepant cases.* Discrepant cases imply those that do not fit a pattern of the researcher's understanding of the data, which is ironic in qualitative research because a core value of qualitative inquiry is to understand the individual's unique experiences and to accept variations among participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In this study, what may be considered outliers were viewed as additional instructional points, not discrepant cases. Therefore, such outliers were not treated differently than the other data.

## **Trustworthiness**

### **Credibility**

Credibility is directly related to the research design, instruments, and data, and seeks to attend to the complexities presented during the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Creswell (2000) recommended qualitative researchers use several validity strategies. Five strategies helped establish credibility in the current study. First, I presented a thick, rich description of participants' acculturation experiences as related to their views of free speech and vice versa, and their associated political participation inclinations. Second,

triangulation incorporated interview transcripts, reflexive journaling and field notes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Third, I used persistent observation to build trust with the interviewees to generate detailed responses. I spent sufficient time with participants to check for distortions and explore their experiences in detail. Fourth, transcript checking helped ensure participants were satisfied with the accuracy of their transcripts; they also had the chance to review the findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Finally, peer de-briefers helped me by reviewing my work and sharing ideas.

### **Transferability**

Generalizability is not the goal of qualitative research; rather, developing descriptive, context-relevant statements is (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Detailed, rich descriptions from the interview data provided readers with as much information as possible if they intend to make comparisons to other contexts (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I also maintained an audit trail showing evidence of how the raw data were reduced, analyzed, and synthesized.

### **Dependability**

Dependability refers to the consistency and stability of the data; a solid research design is key in achieving dependability (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Triangulation addressed this criterion. Furthermore, interview transcript data provided detailed descriptions that answered the research questions, as opposed to the quantitative method of relying on vague and anonymous survey responses.

**Confirmability**

The fourth element of trustworthiness that must be addressed is confirmability. Confirmability means that researchers realize they are not totally objective, so biases must be addressed (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Triangulation and reflexivity enhanced confirmability.

**Ethical Procedures**

I required each participant to sign an informed consent which included a privacy statement. Recruitment materials included a written invitation and a screening questionnaire (see Appendix A). Recruitment materials and conversations made it clear to the potential interviewees that participation was voluntary and that their identities would remain confidential, but not anonymous. A debriefing form was provided at the end of the interview. I knew their names as I established rapport with them during the interviews, so confidentiality and privacy were key. Furthermore, knowing their names was necessary for me to contact them after the interviews for transcript checks. I assigned pseudonyms to them in my records.

IRB approval was obtained prior to conducting recruitment activities (IRB Approval # 05-29-18-0641638, expires on May 28th, 2019). Research data will be stored on my personal computer and Dropbox, both password protected, for 5 years then destroyed. I followed the guidelines of Walden University's IRB to include obtaining informed consent. Participants had at least 1 week to review the informed consent and ask me questions before the interview was scheduled. Before I began the interview, I

gave them additional time, if necessary, to review and sign the informed consent, and they received a copy. All documents were in English.

Religion is a deeply personal issue. I was extremely careful with my body language and choice of words to maintain neutrality and obtain their trust, and not be insensitive to the participant. Otherwise, I could be facing a participant who is openly hostile or dishonest. Under no circumstances did I force an interviewee to respond; this process was optional for each of them.

Developing trust with each of my interviewees was crucial to mitigate this potential psychological risk. Most of my mitigation actions took place during the interview. I had to demonstrate that I was serious, respectful, a good listener, and nonjudgmental with my words and body language. My follow-up and probing questions were likewise. I selected interview sites that provided the participants with privacy and comfort. I ensured I obtain informed consent, explained the reason for the research, and revealed how I intended to let them review their transcripts and findings. Only interviewees who expressed an interest in transcript checks and reviewing the findings were contacted again.

I did not experience any economic, relationship, physical, or reputational risks to the participants, nor do I experience conflict of interest. The participants will benefit equally from this research, because the interviewing methods, follow-up procedures and analysis will be consistent and transparent. They may also benefit psychologically by sharing their stories.

### **Summary**

This study was based on an existential phenomenological approach using an interpretive data analysis method. Through snowballing, a purposeful sample of 10 first- and second-generation immigrant Muslims who were imams, scholars, and/or community leaders were recruited via several mosques and other referrals in the northern Virginia area. Willing participants who met the inclusion criteria completed the informed consent. Interviews were conducted in comfortable, private settings, for 90 minutes to almost 5 hours. Interviewees had the opportunity to review their transcripts and the final results of the research. Validity was enhanced through transcript checks, triangulation, persistent observation, rich descriptions, and peer de-briefers. I used peer de-briefers to help validate my coding and theming. Data sources included interview transcripts, field notes, and reflexive journaling. The data sources were coded then analyzed into themes, prior to writing narratives that included quotes from the participants to help solidify key assertions. Ethical standards were maintained throughout the entire research process. In Chapter 4, I will provide the analysis and findings from the interviews, field notes, and reflexive journaling.



## Chapter 4: Results

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative, existential, phenomenological study was to understand the perceptions of Muslim immigrant imams, scholars, and community leaders living in America on the topics of blasphemy and blasphemy laws. In this study, I also highlighted the participants' political participation inclinations and activities regarding free speech and blasphemy against Islam and how their views of free speech impacted their acculturation in American society. Insights from the participants in this study can be used to inform the American public, media, immigration scholars, students, think tanks, policymakers, Muslims, and non-Muslims. Components of the policy feedback theory (Mettler & SoRelle, 2014) and acculturation theory (Berry, 1997) were applied to this study as the framework.

I recruited first- and second-generation Muslim immigrants living in America who are imams, scholars, and/or community leaders to provide their perspectives of blasphemy and blasphemy legislation. They also provided their views of how their opinions have been shaped by their acculturation experiences in the United States. The research questions that guided the study were:

Research Question 1: What are the perceptions of Muslim first- and second-generation immigrant imams, scholars, and/or community leaders on blasphemy and blasphemy policies?

Research Question 2: What political actions have they taken and plan to take regarding blasphemy policies, such as letters to the editor, correspondence with political officials, voting, and joining interest groups?

Research Question 3: How do their religious views of blasphemy impact their acculturation experience and vice versa?

Research Question 4: What patterns exist between participants' Muslim sects and their views of blasphemy?

Research Question 5: What connections exist between their countries of origin and their views of free speech and blasphemy? In other words, do Muslims from certain countries share similar beliefs about blasphemy?

I will first present the demographics of the participants, as required by Research Questions 4 and 5. Then, I will discuss the data collection techniques using interviews and field notes, followed by data analysis with codes and themes. The chapter will also include a description of evidence of trustworthiness in which credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability will be addressed. In the results section, I will provide the findings by research question, including the interview questions, themes, and quotes to provide rich, thick data. Finally, the summary will include a consolidation of the results before transitioning to Chapter 5.

### Setting and Demographics

Regarding setting, I did not identify any personal or organizational conditions that would have influenced participants or their experiences at the time of this study, which in turn, may have influenced my interpretation of the results. I interviewed 10 Muslim individuals in the northern Virginia area who were first- or second-generation immigrants and imams, scholars, or community leaders. Relevant demographics were used as attribute codes (see Table 2).

Table 2

#### *Attribute Codes*

Attribute Code	# of Participants
SECT: Sunni	7
SECT: Shia	2
SECT: Ahmadi	1
GENERATION: 1 <sup>st</sup> -Generation	9
GENERATION: 2 <sup>nd</sup> -Generation	1
COUNTRY: India	1
COUNTRY: Iran	1
COUNTRY: Iraq	1
COUNTRY: Pakistan/Canada	1
COUNTRY: Saudi Arabia	1
COUNTRY: Sudan	1
COUNTRY: Turkey	4
IDENTITY: Imam	4
IDENTITY: Scholar	3
IDENTITY: Imam & Scholar	2
IDENTITY: Muslim	1

### **Data Collection**

I conducted in-depth interviews with the 10 participants on the topics of blasphemy and acculturation in the United States. One-time interviews took place from July 2018 through October 2018 in northern Virginia. Six interviews took place in mosques, one occurred in a private residence, two in coffee shops, and one via Skype. My original intent was to conduct face-to-face interviews, but one participant preferred to conduct the interview via Skype, so we did. I did not record the video of the interview, but I did record the audio and transcribed it into a Word document. One participant included a witness during the interview to comply with his tradition of not speaking with a female in a room alone. Several other participants allowed me to interview them with no one else present in the room. The duration of each interview ranged from 90 minutes to 4.5 hours. I used two recording devices to record the interviews. Upon completion of the interviews, I added field notes capturing the environment of the interview, the participant's personality, explanatory notes, and my overall impressions of the experience with the participant. I then transcribed each interview from the recording devices to Word documents for coding purposes.

Recruiting participants that met the study's requirements was more difficult than anticipated. I contacted over 35 potential participants over the course of 5 months with the intent of interviewing 12. After interviewing 10, however, I reached saturation and received permission from Walden University to reduce my sample size to that number. Many potential recruits did not respond to my e-mails or phone calls after repeated attempts to contact them. Several rejected my request for an interview for various

reasons. One potential recruit was not comfortable discussing the topic of blasphemy and cancelled his interview. Another potential recruit was willing to be interviewed but did not wish to sign the informed consent, so he was not included in this study. Several imams responded but said they were too busy. Some phone numbers and addresses were outdated, while other potential recruits did not meet my study requirements.

I did expand my inclusion criteria. I determined that the participants did not have to be American citizens; they were able to adequately answer the interview questions dealing with voting decisions regardless of their citizenship status. Therefore, I interviewed participants who were American citizens, Green Card holders, and visa holders.

### **Data Analysis**

I performed two cycles of coding; the numbers of codes and themes generated are in Table 3. I used attribute and anchor coding for the first cycle, and descriptive and in vivo coding for the second cycle. Attribute codes (see Table 2) were necessary to answer Research Questions 4 and 5 because they provide the demographic information required. Examples are MUSLIM SECT and GENERATION. Anchor codes reflect key concepts derived from the interview questions and the research questions; an example is LAWS IN PAKISTAN for Research Question 1. Descriptive and in vivo codes must align with the anchor codes to ensure relevant data are answering the research questions. Descriptive codes summarize key passages of interview text. In vivo codes come directly from the statements of the participants in the study.

Table 3

*Summary of Numbers of Codes and Themes*

RQ	# of Anchor Codes	# of Descriptive/In Vivo Codes	# of Themes
1	8	87	14
2	2	13	3
3	2	13	3
4	1	3	1
5	1	7	1

Using an Excel spreadsheet and Atlas.ti8 software, I developed attribute codes to capture the demographics required by the research questions. Then I determined anchor codes for each research question to help ensure I only captured pertinent information from the transcripts. While analyzing each transcript, I created descriptive and in vivo codes and aligned them to the appropriate anchor codes as applicable. An example of an anchor code was LAWS IN PAKISTAN. Descriptive codes are not always recommended by Saldana especially for interview transcripts, because meaning can get lost in the researcher's translation (Saldana, p. 78). For this reason, I used descriptions, but my codes were usually longer than one word in length and my notes on the meaning of the codes were thorough. I do not believe that a descriptive code must be one word to be effective in the analysis. According to Saldana, descriptive coding "leads primarily to a categorized inventory...of the data's contents," which is what I was trying to accomplish (p. 104). Because of the risk of using descriptive codes with interview transcripts, I combined this method with in vivo codes (see Saldana, 2016, p. 105) to ensure I captured the essence of what participants were saying. Examples of descriptive codes supporting

the anchor code LAWS IN PAKISTAN include ABUSE OF LAWS, AHMADIYYA PERSECUTION, CONSOLIDATE AND REFORM, CULTURE, HARSH PENALTIES, OPPOSES LAWS, POLITICAL ISLAM, and UNFAMILIAR. Finally, I analyzed the codes for each research question and generated 22 themes (see Table 4). I did not identify any discrepant cases.

Table 4

*Summary of Themes*

RQ	Theme
1	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) According to Islam, blasphemy is insulting and hurtful.</li> <li>2) Interpretations of Sharia Law and Islam vary widely.</li> <li>3) The 1st Amendment is good, but not perfect.</li> <li>4) Most participants are unclear on America's allowance for blasphemy under the 1st Amendment.</li> <li>5) Punishment for blasphemy may occur in a wide variety of ways from none to jail time.</li> <li>6) Pakistani blasphemy laws are generally harsh.</li> <li>7) Muslims are not familiar with Pakistani blasphemy laws.</li> <li>8) Muslims view the OIC efforts on a wide scale from support to opposition.</li> <li>9) Muslims are not familiar with the OIC and its blasphemy law efforts.</li> <li>10) Muslims have a wide variety of opinions on how to respond to blasphemy, from ignoring it to requesting repentance.</li> <li>11) Islamic teachings of the Prophet Muhammad should guide Muslims' response to blasphemy.</li> <li>12) Dialogue and education are the best ways to minimize blasphemy.</li> <li>13) Many Muslims are not well educated in Islam to respond properly to blasphemy.</li> <li>14) Muslims differ in their views of Sharia Law in America, but most do not think it is necessary.</li> </ol>
2	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Blasphemy might influence a voting preference, but likely not.</li> <li>2) No interest in mixing politics with religion in the USA.</li> <li>3) Some lobbying and political activity is ok, if it benefits the country, not just one community.</li> </ol>
3	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Most home countries do not tolerate blasphemy.</li> <li>2) Most enjoy the freedoms of America and had no issues with acculturation.</li> <li>3) Some views of blasphemy softened after living in the US, others remained static.</li> </ol>
4	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) No notable patterns among the sects.</li> </ol>
5	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) No notable patterns among countries of origin.</li> </ol>



Table 5 includes an excerpt of codes with supporting quotes from the transcripts, justifying the selection of the codes. For example, the anchor code FREE SPEECH IN THE USA has an associated descriptive code of UNCLEAR ON AMERICAN FREE SPEECH. Following this code are four examples of quotes provided by Participants C, J, and B exclaiming how they were not clear on American First Amendment free speech rights.

Table 5

*A Sample of Notable Quotes*

RQ	Anchor Code	Descriptive Code	Notable Quote	Participant
1	FREE SPEECH IN USA	UNCLEAR ON AMERICAN FREE SPEECH	When told that the US does not generally punish for blasphemy: "Oh, I didn't know that. I didn't know that."	C
			"Oh, I didn't know that."	J
			"But with your sentence you can start a war."	C
			"But here I don't know how they punish..."	B
	INTERPRETATION OF SHARIA AND ISLAM	INTERPRETATION	"It is the other interpretation of Islam. That is problematic."	A
			"What you mean by Sharia?"	D
			"We get our interpretation of the Quran who claimed to be a prophet of God who claimed God speaks with him."	F
			"I think it depends on how we understand Sharia law. I guess some people perception of Sharia law is whole different code of law and rules then here and it's totally different than United States law is for me as a Muslim person Sharia means the way basically path way basically the path that goes to water."	H
	MUSLIM RESPONSE	DIALOGUE & EDUCATION	"If somebody says something negative against the person of the holy Prophet, then we will show them look, what YOU know about Prophet Muhammad is wrong. We'll show you the real Prophet Muhammad from the Quran and from the Islamic sources. And he's the man once you get to know you will fall in love with."	F
			"But if you have the power to make changes, go ahead and make changes. You can make changes through writing, through educating. You can make changes there's so many ways to make changes, but don't sit there and complain about it."	I
	OIC	HYPOCRITES	"It's hypocritical. It's hypocritical, I mean, look at what they are doing themselves in their own countries. In Pakistan, they persecute Christians, but they expect Christian countries to respect them? Look at Saudi Arabia; They are the biggest human rights violators in the world: in the world "	F
	SHARIA IN AMERICA	UNEDUCATED MUSLIMS	"Are there Muslims there [in Oklahoma] that want Sharia law? I mean it's absurd it's very funny and silly."	A
	PUNISHMENT	JAIL TIME - ONE YEAR	"I don't make it I don't know maybe it's just a criminalization maybe jailing them I don't know maybe maybe maybe one year minimum jailing them."	B
		OPPOSES ANY PUNISHMENT	"Well if someone does blasphemy against Islam For example the media the newspaper I don't think they need to be punished I mean whether it's in the United States or or in Pakistan or in any other country."	H
			"I do not agree that like look I'm I'm very against the Wahabbi thinking and what I've seen in some of those countries is the hegemony of some of the Wahabbi oriented thinking which is going forward. "	J

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

I am presenting a thick, rich description of participants' views of blasphemy and how their views impacted their acculturation experiences, and their associated political participation inclinations. To address credibility, triangulation incorporated 10 interview transcripts, reflexive journaling, and field notes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I used persistent observation to build trust with the interviewees to generate detailed responses. I spent sufficient time with participants to check for distortions and explored their experiences in sufficient detail. Transcript checking gave participants the opportunity to ensure they were satisfied with the accuracy of the data, and they also had the chance to review the findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I e-mailed the transcripts and audio files to each participant, and received written acknowledgement from 5 of the 10 interviewees. Two peer de-briefers reviewed my work and shared ideas, which helped reduce my biases. One de-briefer earned his PhD with a mixed-methods dissertation, and the other de-briefer is a Walden University PhD candidate who is ahead of me in his qualitative methods dissertation journey. The peer de-briefers reviewed my initial proposed codes and provided excellent feedback that enhanced the codes and subsequently improved the themes that answered the research questions.

Regarding transferability, generalizability is not the goal of qualitative research; rather, developing descriptive, context-relevant statements is (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Detailed, rich descriptions from the interview data provides readers with as much information as possible in the event they wish to make comparisons to other contexts (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I maintained an audit trail showing evidence of how the raw data

were collected, reduced, analyzed, and synthesized. The audit trail consists of paper and electronic copies of the interview transcripts, list of participants, potential recruits and pseudonyms, field notes, journal, the coding workbook in Excel, and coding work in Atlas.ti8.

Dependability refers to the consistency and stability of the data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Triangulation (transcripts, journaling and field notes) addressed dependability. Furthermore, interview transcript data provided detailed descriptions answering the research questions.

The fourth component of trustworthiness is confirmability. Confirmability means that researchers realize they are not totally objective, so biases were addressed in my field notes and journal and were carefully considered during the coding process (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Triangulation (e.g., transcripts, journaling and field notes) also enhanced confirmability.

## **Results**

### **Research Question 1**

What are the perceptions of Muslim first- and second-generation immigrant imams, scholars, and/or community leaders in America on blasphemy and blasphemy policies?

The following interview questions align with Research Question 1:

- What do you think about blasphemy against Islam?
- Do you think blasphemy is a crime to be punished by law or otherwise? How and why specifically?

- How would you explain blasphemy against Islam to American Muslims?
- Do you feel free to discuss this issue in the United States?
- What do you think about American free speech and First Amendment rights as related to insults against Islam?
- Please compare your home country's environment regarding blasphemy and blasphemy laws with the United States. What are your opinions?
- If you were living in a Muslim-majority country now, would your views of blasphemy be different?
- Have you joined, or would you consider joining, political interest groups such as CAIR or USCMO? Why?
- Tell me about your other political participation dealing with free speech issues. (e.g., voted for candidates that believe in criminalizing blasphemy; being an activist against blasphemy; writing political leaders; associating with other activist organizations who include free speech on their agenda)
- On December 7, 2015, Trump's campaign issued this statement about Muslim immigration: "This all happened because, frankly, there's no assimilation. They are not assimilating . . . They want to go by Sharia law. They want Sharia law. They don't want the laws that we have. They want Sharia law." Explain what you think about this. Do you agree or disagree, especially regarding blasphemy against Islam?
- What do you think about the following American political actions:
  - (a) In 2010, Oklahoma passed State Question 755 amending the state's

constitution, banning Sharia law in the courts there; a Federal judge overturned it in 2011.

(b) Almost half of American states have implemented or introduced laws banning the practice of foreign laws; some specifically ban the practice of Sharia law, such as Oregon.

(c) In 2016, candidate Trump wanted to ban all Muslims from entering the United States.

- What do you think about Pakistan's blasphemy law and why?
- What do you think about the Organization of Islamic Cooperation's attempts, through the United Nations, to pass a global blasphemy law?

The following themes were derived from the anchor, descriptive, and in vivo codes to answer Research Question 1.

**Theme 1.** According to Islam, blasphemy is insulting and hurtful. As expected, most participants agreed that blasphemy against Islam deeply hurts the feelings of Muslims. Most also agreed that insulting any religion, not only Islam, is wrong, and should be avoided. Participant F said:

Mockery, for example. Saying Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) [Peace Be Upon Him] is not a prophet is not blasphemy; it is an opinion. But the moment you start drawing his pictures as cartoons the Dutch – the French Charlie Hebdo – the caricature they published was a man from Middle Eastern background with a beard wearing a turban and a bomb in that turban. That was them portraying

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH); that by no means is any decent criticism of Islam or the religion of Islam.

Participant E asked, “What is blasphemy against Islam? I think [*sic*] is not the correct word. It should be blasphemy against a religion, any religion, is not good. Blasphemy is disrespecting religion in any cases. Is [*sic*] not good.” Some said that the Quran does not specify a punishment for blasphemy, but blasphemy is still wrong. Participant G opined, “Nothing in the Quran says to punish for insulting a faith, although it is disrespectful to do so, harming the feelings of others.”

**Theme 2.** Interpretations of Sharia law and Islam vary widely. The topic of how Muslims and non-Muslims interpret Islam and Sharia law appeared 30 times in the interview transcripts. Several participants made it clear that Islam and Sharia law are interpreted differently even within the Muslim community. Furthermore, Sharia law has evolved over the centuries after the death of the Prophet Muhammad. Sharia law is comprised of four distinct schools of thought. Although the participants agreed on what the schools of thought are, they did not agree with the laws themselves, especially regarding blasphemy. Some claimed that Islamic jurisprudence must be vastly reformed to meet the needs of the 21st century. Others opined that what nations such as Saudi Arabia and Pakistan claim is Sharia, is in fact, not the true Sharia.

Participant A shared:

More than the Umayyads, the dynasty, 2 or 3 hundred years they ruled. Their interpretation of Islam became Salafi, and it spread, and they interpreted it differently. Muslims today, unfortunately, live with this identity problem. In the

21st century, they want to live Islam, but what they think what is the true Islam, they think it is the 1st century Islam. So, they go back to that and they read those books and they say, ‘What is the traditional Islam?’ Original, there is no such thing. What did Muslims do for those 200 years? Different interpretations. So, this group of traditionalists say [*sic*], “Let’s go back to the 1st century of Islam.” What did they find? They found all kinds of things.

Participant F said, “Because the Sharia of Muhammad (PBUH) was not the Sharia of the mullah.” Participant G added, “Most Muslims are not interested in attempting to implement strict Sharia law in the United States. And again, true Islamic law is not what most people picture: cutting off hands, stoning adulterers, killing blasphemers, etc.”

Participant I referred to ignorance saying, “Like I told you...to ignorance. I hate to use that word, but not having enough knowledge about the other side.”

Uneducated Muslims was a popular subject among many participants. Muslims, according to them, should act as ambassadors for the religion of Islam. By interpreting Islam incorrectly and behaving in negative ways, they are demonstrating their lack of knowledge about their own faith system. This is a problem within the Muslim community, especially in Muslim-majority countries like Pakistan.

On Pakistan, Participant F said:

And they’re still following this distorted version of Prophet’s image which is being painted by these mullahs, these hardliners, these types. And this is really sad, it pains me, to see my religion hijacked.... The issue with these people is that they are taking verses out of the context.

Participant I admitted to having little knowledge of the details of Islam with, “I don’t know the details of the religion sometimes.” Participant C addressed the lack of education in the Muslim community with, “Ignorance. Ignorance is [*sic*] big problem.” Perhaps surprisingly, several participants expressed that American laws align well with the true intent of Sharia law, and thus they are happy in the United States. Participant A claimed that this statement would be radical: “I believe the United States Constitution is the best Sharia law of the land. I believe it reflects the true nature of Sharia.” Participant B believes that most American laws align with Sharia. Participant B provided an example:

That’s also Sharia law... They allow United States to perform the Nikah [Muslim marriage] like marriage, right? We perform. After that we just write down and we send the paper. And the same day when we send they [*sic*] going to record from the same day that we perform. The marriage, that’s also Sharia law.

Participant H agreed with Participants A and B, saying:

Muslims who were born here, were live [*sic*] here for a long time, are educated. Those people are of the opinion that in most of the cases, Islamic laws and the laws of the United States do not contradict each other, because it’s about protection of rights and protecting against bad things.

Countries that do have blasphemy laws, however, should be obeyed, according to some participants. It is up to the government to develop and enforce the laws, however. Participants agreed that average Muslim citizens do not have the right to take matters into their own hands and punish blasphemers; it is a matter for the government.



Participant B expressed his opinion about following the country's rules, even if they seem harsh:

Rules do not accept that. You cannot...it's just in any country, they can, you know, punish. But not the people, not you and me. We cannot do anything. Maybe I won't like that person, but I won't do anything. It's not in my hand anything [*sic*]. But I'm saying it's those kind of people, that when they go to the Islamic country, I don't think they will be safe. Because people, if they know them, they will give them some punishment. The people themselves, not the government. Yeah, in the street. And look at Jakarta, what happened. People how they raise [*sic*] up. And they had problems because of what that person has done was completely wrong. But why, you know? You know, people, they are idiots.

Along the same lines of governmental authority, Participant D said:

It is not the imam of the masjid [mosque] or the imam of the mosque or any religious group who are going to deal with that matter. It is the government issue, the authority. And they are the only one who can inflict any punishment, whether it is monetary punishment, or physical, or sending him to jail. It is the government who can do that. Individuals or civil organizations are not addressed [*sic*] to deal with these kind [*sic*] of things.

One participant reminded me that the Christian Bible calls for punishment for blasphemy, but Islam does not – even if a government does. He was illustrating how Christianity calls for harsher punishments than Islam in some cases. Participant F exclaimed, “And the Bible describes the punishment for blasphemy. I don't agree with it,

simply because my religion says that there is no earthly punishment for that. So, there are many ways that government can try to control this issue.”

**Theme 3.** The First Amendment is good, but not perfect. Participants provided a range of opinions on America’s First Amendment rights of free speech. Most believe it is sufficient, but when they found out during the interview that the First Amendment protects blasphemy, some were surprised. Most participants believe in the Constitution overall, but some would be happy to see blasphemy prohibited or regulated somehow.

Participant F’s view of the First Amendment: “Where does the First Amendment go then? So, it tells us. If you are living here in the West, living here in the United States of America, that even the free speech has a certain limit.” But Participant F also remarked, “Well, blasphemy is something which is correctly protected by the First Amendment, First Amendment being freedom of speech.” When asked about committing blasphemy in the United States, Participant C conceded, “Easy to do it here; no punishment here.”

**Theme 4.** Most participants are unclear on America’s allowance for blasphemy under the First Amendment. Several were stunned to discover during the interview that though insulting, blasphemy is protected by the First Amendment. Participant B, with a surprised tone of voice, asked, “But here I don’t know how they punish if someone comes and says some blasphemy about Jesus or about [*sic*] I don’t know how they would punish him?” When told that the United States does not punish for blasphemy, Participant C replied, “There is no punishment here? Oh, I didn’t know that. I didn’t know that. . .But with your sentence you can start a war.”

**Theme 5.** Punishment for blasphemy may occur in a wide variety of ways from none to jail time. This theme had the most interesting and surprising responses from the 10 participants. Most agreed that only the authorities can punish for blasphemy, even if it simply means disrupting a protest against Islam. Interestingly, many also agreed that Islam teaches that there is no earthly punishment for blasphemy. It is insulting and hurtful, but the blasphemer will be punished in the afterlife by Allah (i.e., God).

Some oppose any form of punishment for blasphemy. For example, Participant J said:

I do not agree. Look, I'm very against the Wahabi thinking and what I've seen in some of those countries is the hegemony of some of the Wahabi-oriented thinking which is going forward. And I, yeah, I hope it is not happening in this country. I hope Saudi is not able to fund some of these opportunities. Taliban, in Saudi, and in some countries, they were funding Salafists before; I hope they're not doing it now.

The Wahabi thinking that Participant J referred to is the Saudi Arabian strict interpretation of Islam, where blasphemy is punishable by death. Participant G claimed that trying to place laws to restrict such things as speech, even insults against religions, only oppresses societies; such laws do not create freedom. He continued by saying countries such as Saudi Arabia and Pakistan are highly oppressive and are not following the true intent of Islam, regarding them as hypocritical.

Others believe that jail time is appropriate for blasphemers. Answering the question about whether death is an appropriate penalty for blasphemy, Participant D said,

“No, I don’t condone that. Maybe jail time.” None of the participants agreed with death or life imprisonment as punishments for blasphemy.

The remainder fell somewhere between the two extremes from requiring community service to repentance to a short time in jail. When asked how he envisions blasphemy being punished in the United States, Participant B said, “I don’t know. Maybe it’s just a [*sic*] criminalization, maybe jailing them, I don’t know. Maybe 1 year minimum jailing them.” Participant B explained further saying:

Against Prophet or against the God [*sic*], you know, those things should be punished. But if the people – you know, if it’s against me, it’s no problem. I am just human, it’s OK. But not about the Prophet or about the God or any prophets. I don’t say only Mohammed. Not Mohammed only. Jesus, Moses any...

Participant D believes that blasphemy is not punishable unless the blasphemer garners popular support of others and divides the Muslim community. If that happens, he or she deserves some form of punishment. Participant D explained:

...I believe that as an individual, he should not be punished as long as he’s not mobilizing people to rally behind him to divide the community. If he keeps it for himself alone, he should be allowed to live his life and leave it between him and the Creator. That’s what I believe before I came here, and I still believe that.

Participant D felt strongly that a Muslim blasphemer must be given the chance to sincerely repent of his or her sin before punishment is meted out. And then, it is up to the individual judge’s discretion. Participant C thinks that community service to educate a blasphemer is the best form of punishment, offering:

Maybe police is [*sic*] good. Policemen, yeah, stopping people. But again, you know for example, send him to institution or some community services – Muslim good family, for example. To stay with them, work with them, do something. Something with them. Punishment, right? Something for them to get information about Islam, Muslims. Maybe that kind of soft punishment.

**Theme 6.** Pakistani blasphemy laws are generally harsh. Most participants agreed that many of the Pakistani blasphemy laws are too harsh. However, opinions varied widely. After reviewing the laws, Participant B opined:

One year in prison or fine or both. Three years in prison, 2 years in prison. That's right. They cannot injure or defile places of worship; be very careful – this should be higher even. The last one – after 2 years – this should be 5 years. You cannot injure or defile places of the worship. Or some people they go and burn. That's wrong, completely wrong, whether they are Muslim or Christian or they are Buddhist. Whatever they are, leave their religion for themselves, but don't do this. After 10 years. Oh, my goodness. This is too harsh. Oh, my goodness, in prison for life. Oh, my goodness. I don't know, this is like this is not my country, and I don't know. Some stuff I agree, some stuff I don't. It's too harsh. And it's something too harsh but it's their country, I don't know. Pakistan, I don't know.

Participant C thinks that the laws are appropriate for Pakistan but not the United States and said, “I agree with them, yeah. Most of them, we don't need them in United States that much. We don't need [*sic*]. But there has to be a punishment, maybe all of

them in one sentence is enough.” Participant C concluded that Pakistan has too many blasphemy laws and that they should be consolidated into one law that is reasonable.

Participant F had much to say about the harshness of Pakistan’s blasphemy laws, claiming:

My issue with blasphemy law in Pakistan is that Number One, they are on the extreme side of severity. They say that this is a capital punishment, like the book of Leviticus. Number Two, they’re saying this is Islamic. That’s where I have an issue with. It is not Islamic. There is not a single Islamic source that can say that blasphemy is a crime, punishable by man, let alone, death being its punishment. So that’s my problem with them, there. That Number One, you have punishment prescribed for a crime that even God does not hold punishable on Earth. It is something that God says, “I’ll take care of it when you come to me.” Not on the Earth, right? And you are trying to take that in your own hands as individuals. Number Two, you’re wrongly prescribing it to the religion of Islam.

According to Participant A, Pakistan is a prime example of the abuse of Islam in government. Participant A exclaimed:

Oh, so there are different – there is not just one defiling the Quran, in prison for life. Wow. Wow. So, if somebody burns a Quran, they’re going to be in prison for life. And as far as I know, it’s an Islamist government – its name is the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. So, this is the problem with some Muslim countries. Political Islam is very popular; it’s growing unfortunately.

Adding to the problem of political Islam in Pakistan and elsewhere, Participant H said:

What I think is that still this is very much politicized part of Islam religion. What I mean by that is, because the religion or the faith has been seen really integral part of the authority. So, if you say anything against authority, so they have laws to punish people who goes against that, and I don't think that this is the way it is supposed to be, needs to be.

**Theme 7.** Muslims are not familiar with Pakistani blasphemy laws. Many participants were shocked when they read the Pakistani blasphemy laws I provided them. Several told me that I had taught them something important. One was saddened to see the Pakistani persecution of the Ahmadiyya community. Pakistani law punishes Ahmadi Muslims if they claim to be Muslim, as they are considered heretics within the Muslim community. After becoming familiar with Pakistani blasphemy laws, most participants said that Pakistan is an example of how Islam is politicized in a very negative manner.

**Theme 8.** Muslims view the OIC efforts on a wide scale from support to opposition. Responses varied on the question of the OIC attempting to, through the UN, pass a global blasphemy law. Some supported the idea, others believe it is hypocritical. Yet others think such a resolution would be useful, but it would have to be carefully written. None had a solution for how it would be enforced. The popular subject of political Islam emerged again while discussing the OIC. Several participants claimed that what the OIC is attempting to do is another example of countries politicizing Islam.

Participant F opposes the idea of such a resolution being drafted by Pakistan and Saudi Arabia and exclaimed with disdain:

It's hypocritical. It's hypocritical. I mean, look at what they are doing themselves in their own countries. In Pakistan, they persecute Christians, but they expect Christian countries to respect them? Look at Saudi Arabia; they are the biggest human rights violators in the world— in the world.

Participant J similarly exclaimed:

Saudi or Pakistan or Iran wants to bring it to the world, I'm happy. But the thing is, honestly, this gets political, because the Saudis doing this and Pakistan is doing all of these things, and at the same time, they are claiming to bring this? You have to be a little suspicious. But again, they are claiming it. It's worth a study, it's worth to read the law...as much as I don't like some of the stuff that Saudi does, if this is something serious and if this is something that like a just law that is able to protect some of these [*sic*]...I would be happy to support it.

Participant H agreed to an extent and said:

If you make it that global blasphemy law that could easily used [*sic*] and abused in different ways in different countries as in the case of Pakistan that could easily be used and abused. And I don't think that is the right thing to do but raising more awareness.

Participant B would agree with the OIC's efforts but only with caveats, explaining:

Any religion would be OK but not only Islam; Islam, then the real intention is something else. But if they say for everyone, then they generalize. You don't just



put specific people in that case. I don't know. I'm not going to say anything about it. But I don't know. But even who listen [*sic*], you know? Like nobody listens to the UN. Nobody. Who listens to the United Nations?

Participant C was adamant in supporting the resolution and said, "Oh, that's very good. I agree with them yes, yes. Blasphemy and hate: Both have to be by law, yeah, yeah."

**Theme 9.** Muslims are not familiar with the OIC and its blasphemy law efforts. I was surprised that most participants were not familiar with the OIC nor their efforts to pass a United Nations resolution that would internationally criminalize blasphemy. What strikes me about this is the failure of many in the Muslim community to fight against such cases due to a lack of awareness.

**Theme 10.** Muslims have a wide variety of opinions on how to respond to blasphemy, from ignoring it to requesting repentance. Dialogue and education by far outweighed other responses. The participants felt strongly that the best response to blasphemy is dialogue and education. Some participants would suggest writing professional news articles to refute blasphemous claims against Islam in the media. Others participate in interfaith dialogue events in northern Virginia to raise awareness about Islam and to increase tolerance and acceptance among faith groups. Still others claimed that face-to-face dialogue and other forms of education, in a civil manner, are the best ways to respond to blasphemy. Participant C simply replied, "It is an educational problem for the community." When asked how to talk to a fellow Muslim who is hurt by blasphemy, Participant D said:

If he is capable of defending Islam, he knows what he is saying, he can substantiate that the Quran or from the tradition of the Prophet or from others religious sources, I will encourage him to do that...I wish I would be able to talk to them and ask them why. And sure, if they're honest, they are wrong whatever they have in mind they are acting this. And what they heard, what they saw, these people who are not aware or not qualified to say anything about Islam, and they believe it. So, I would try to intervene this group that was protesting, if they're willing to listen. I will tell them, ask them, "What point are you talking about in the religion of Islam?" If they told me, I'm good. In the Quran, the culture of Islam is based on the Hadiths or practices. I don't think there's anything which will actually make people to protest or say anything against Islam, so I will try my best to explain that to them.

Talking about the Danish cartoon controversy and how to respond, Participant E offered:

Let's talk. Maybe he never heard anything about Prophet Mohammed or Jesus and nothing, you know, he just draws a cartoon. We shouldn't be worried about just Islam, but all religion [*sic*]...There's a life after this life. There is a continuation after this life. We all have to work together. We have to love each other, we have to help each other. We have a lot of commonalities. We can come and sit down and common things, you know.

Participant G agreed and said, "Education and dialogue are the best ways to deal with blasphemy." Participant H hopes that the authorities would get involved if blasphemy evolved into serious hate speech. Participant H replied:

Well, I guess my first reaction would be try to talk to them in a civilized way.

Probably I would go ahead and report them, because that is so much hurtful. Well, at least if that goes into hate speech, police would take them in custody.

Participant J would use the opportunity of blasphemy to teach others about the peaceful nature of Islam and the founding Prophet Muhammad. His response was:

Back with the cartoons went out. So, it was a very difficult time, but the conversation was not about how we can punish them, conversation was about how we can highlight the beautiful character of the prophets. Because if we do so, no one is going to be able to hate such a personality. Because if you are able to highlight the Prophet that I as a Muslim love, I do not see any person not loving this personality.

Retaliation for blasphemy being un-Islamic was a popular response. Uneducated Muslims retaliate; educated ones do not. Participant A said:

We do not go after who said what, we just ignore it in the best way to deal with it, is to follow the character of the Prophet. If he sees ignorance, he says “peace” and goes on. There is a very well-known verse in the Quran when they see an ignorant they say “peace” and then they leave... What did he [the Prophet Muhammad] do when they personally insulted him? Forget about the verbal insults that attacked? What did he do? He ignored them. He forgave them. This is our Prophet. And you claim to be his followers, we need to punish people because they insult our Prophet?

Participant H, referring to famous blasphemers such as the Danish cartoon authors, agreed with:

You know, but in the meantime, that does not give the right to people go and try to destroy their buildings or go after people...those people who claim that they are Muslims, they have no right going after and doing all that terrible stuff. As much as I disagree with the publishers of those cartoons and with the deaths in France and Denmark, that does not give a right to anyone to go after that.

When discussing Muslims in America who wish to retaliate against blasphemers, Participant I said:

You are the one living here; he decided to come here; he decided to become a citizen. How are you going— you need to realize that there are certain people here whose views you are not going to be able to change, no matter what. So, if you're going to live under that mentality of being so sensitive to everything that is being said, then it's going to be very hard for you to survive here. But if you have the power to make changes, go ahead and make changes. You can make changes through writing, through educating. You can make changes. There's so many ways to make changes, but don't sit there and complain about it.... I know it's disrespectful; but then again, if you go back and you say these are only a minority there not the majority of people, so you are going to realize that we have minority. Everywhere in the world you have this minority. If you want to run away from the United States and you say they're ugly people and they're disrespectful, you're

going to run away from all over the world. Wherever you go, you're going to have closed minded people, because that's how they thrive.

**Theme 11.** Muslims differ in their views of Sharia law in America, but most do not think it is necessary. Interpretation of Sharia law and Islam, the “true” Sharia, and being educated about Sharia and Islam were the top codes that helped generate this theme. Interpretation of Sharia law and Islam was discussed earlier in this paper. It is a major problem within the Muslim community as well as for non-Muslims. Muslims do not demonstrate the true Islam and instead exhibit poor behaviors in the name of religion. Non-Muslims have biased views of Islam and Sharia law based mainly on what they see in the media.

Pondering non-Muslim attitudes about Islam, Participant A said:

...already have fear because they don't know what Sharia is, what Islam is. This triggers some fear points and people react to that.... I mean they're scared, they have a fear. It's amazing. I mean, this is sad. First, you think they're violent enough to ask for this [Americans fearing Muslims wanting harsh Sharia law in the US]. Second, they don't know what Sharia is. Thirdly, there are different interpretations of Sharia.

Participant G claimed that most Muslims are not interested in attempting to implement strict Sharia law in the United States. True Islamic law is not what most people picture: cutting off hands, stoning adulterers, killing blasphemers, etc. Participant H maintained a similar view, claiming:

I think it depends on how we understand Sharia law. I guess some people's perception of Sharia law is whole different code of law and rules than here, and it's totally different than United States law is. For me as a Muslim person, Sharia means the way, basically pathway, basically the path that goes to water.

Participant J clarified the flexibility of Sharia law and explained:

I think you know what the problem is. Honestly, the people misunderstood what the Sharia law is. Sharia law is as changeable as any other system of law. It is just one system of law. It has its stable component, and it has its changeable component. So, it's changing. It's exactly like the U.S. Constitution which there are parts which everyone thinks, 'this is stable,' and there are parts which [*sic*] people go vote and change it.

## **Research Question 2**

What political actions have they taken and plan to take regarding blasphemy policies, such as letters to the editor, correspondence with political officials, voting, and joining interest groups? The following interview questions align with this research question:

- Have you joined, or would you consider joining, political interest groups such as CAIR or USCMO? Why?
- Tell me about your other political participation dealing with free speech issues. (e.g., voted for candidates that believe in criminalizing blasphemy, being an activist against blasphemy, writing political leaders, and/or

associating with other activist organizations who include free speech on their agenda)

The following themes were derived from the anchor, descriptive and in vivo codes to answer Research Question 2:

**Theme 1.** Blasphemy might influence a voting preference, but likely not. Most participants claimed that blasphemy would not solely influence their voting decisions in the United States. They view political candidates as a “package deal” and look for common values that would best serve the community. Most did prefer candidates who are tolerant and do not express negativity toward Islam or Muslims.

Participant B prefers candidates who seem to be good people and said:

I will like, I will just look at whoever I like and I will vote for them. For example, we have the chairman here in... And I really like that guy. He's very, very nice and we have a very good relation. He comes here sometimes even. And he's, you know, I think he's very helpful. I always try to work with, vote for him. Wherever he is, I told him I will vote for him. I really admire you, you are a good person. He's a good person and he's a Republican, but I don't care if he's a Republican or Democrat. I don't go with the parties, I go with the people. The person, maybe he's a Republican party. If he's a good person, I don't care. It depends on the people.

Participant C is interested in voting for a candidate who supports social peace. “Now I'm not saying that is he Muslim or is he Christian or Jew. No, just about the social peace. How is he. Tolerant. Justice, for example.” However, when asked about supporting a

candidate who would try to pass a blasphemy law in the United States, Participant C said, “Yes. I can say that, yes, yes.”

Participant E also said that a blasphemy platform would not influence a vote: I think not really overall. She’s [referring to a hypothetical female political candidate] helpful to the community, human community. If she was helpful for all the humans, she is helpful to all the country values. If she is helpful to the entire law system of the country I think that’s more important. [Asked about blasphemy being a game changer] I don’t think so, I don’t think that would be a big game changer.

**Theme 2.** No interest in mixing politics with religion in the United States.

Participant C believes that religion is a personal matter, and that it does not belong in politics. He said:

I don’t consider joining those political groups, but I’m joining already some – there is [sic] Council of Virginia Muslim Organizations, I’m joining it. Or something, some other, for example, interfaith groups, I’m joining it. Or, for example, Jammot [sic] Muslim-Jewish. Politic [sic] never– you don’t get to benefit from any– never any kind of religion. For example, political Islam is just bringing calamity for Muslims. Political Islam [sic] everywhere, even if they [sic] winning the elections, just bringing problems, disasters.

On the topic of CAIR and others, Participant H exclaimed:

No, no. I see them now, I see them especially because you mention CAIR, I see them dealing with too much in politics: Trying to be seen or trying to make noise



about the rights of Muslims and going in, talking to politicians. That's not my thing...that doesn't mean well. And I guess in some cases they are doing a good job, but most of the cases, it's too political for me.

When asked about interest in political activity, Participant I said, "Oh, no, not really, not really."

Participant A feels uncomfortable being involved with politics, because he doesn't think that institutions that he may be interested in are mature. He said:

But I don't feel that there is a group that I can identify myself with and say, "Okay, this understanding of politics is my understanding." I don't feel comfortable joining anything political right now. Because I don't see it – even leadership, there are some Muslim leaders in Congress like Keith, but I don't know if he's starting a group, or if he has a group of Muslims as a society. We don't have mature institutions.

On the topic of CAIR, Participant H admires the organization, but does not wish to join, because he is a religious leader, not a political person. He explained:

CAIR, they are lawyers. It's all lawyers. And they will try to, you know, just help you and with no money, even free. If the people they don't have money they cannot, they will help you for free. No, but I'm not joining because I am not in that field.

**Theme 3.** Some lobbying and political activity is ok, if it benefits the country, not just one community. A participant that is with the Ahmadiyya community explained that his Muslim sect actively lobbies with Congress and some in his community work in

political positions, but it is always with the thought of benefiting the country, not only the Muslim community. He exclaimed:

So, this is the part where I'm saying the government should be involved, through the legislative process. And this is where we are actually actively involved. We do go and meet the Congressmen and Senators on almost regular basis, and we tell them that look, there are certain laws that should be brought into the United States, you know, the legislature, that protect not just us, but protect everyone. So, when I say the governments need to get involved, this is what I mean.

He continued by explaining:

Because I am in the Ahmadiyya Muslim community, we have our own system. We do not become part of other political organizations. As an individual, I may, or may not, it's up to the individual to decide. But as a representative of the Ahmadiyya Muslim community, I would not.

### **Research Question 3**

How do their religious views of blasphemy impact their acculturation experience and vice versa? The following interview questions align with this research question:

- What do you think about American free speech and First Amendment rights as related to insults against Islam?
- Please compare your home country's environment regarding blasphemy and blasphemy laws with the United States. What are your opinions?
- If you were living in a Muslim-majority country now, would your views of blasphemy be different?

- Do you feel that your views of blasphemy against Islam make it harder for you to fit in with American society?
- How do American free speech policies and American culture affect your opinions about blasphemy against Islam? Explain.
- On December 7, 2015, Trump’s campaign issued this statement about Muslim immigration: “This all happened because, frankly, there’s no assimilation. They are not assimilating . . . They want to go by Sharia law. They want Sharia law. They don’t want the laws that we have. They want Sharia law.” Explain what you think about this. Do you agree or disagree, especially regarding blasphemy against Islam?

The following themes were derived from the anchor, descriptive and in vivo codes to answer Research Question 3:

**Theme 1.** Most home countries do not tolerate blasphemy. Almost all participants claimed that their home countries do not have the freedom of speech like America does. Many of them, in fact, do not tolerate blasphemy, especially against Islam, and some punish for it. An Iranian participant spent years studying Sharia law in Iran and explained that many Iranian scholars are considering moving certain crimes from the law of “hudud” to the law of “ta’zir.” The crime of blasphemy is being considered for moving to “ta’zir.” He isn’t sure what the current punishment is in Iran for this crime. In the “hudud” system, the punishments for crimes are fixed by the legal system. Punishments in the “ta’zir” system, however, are more fluid, because individual judges may make different decisions. He said:

And none of them – and again, I don't know about the law – I think in the law, it is still punishable by death, but there are many different discussions in [*sic*] the high-ranking scholars of Islamic seminary in Qom...it's not punishable. It's not "hadd" meaning that you have to go by the context. It is in the hand of the judge. And if it's in the hand of the judge, it's going to be easy to deal with it, and judge has the power to navigate around. But when it's like in the law, it's clear, and you can't do anything about it.

Another participant also spent a great deal of time in Iran, and said:

Laws in Iran – some of the scholars say you must go to jail, some say must have some other kind of a punishment. They are different. The scholars in Islam are the final authorities and there are many different scholars who have to see...So, if someone disrespects Allah or the Prophet Mohammed or the imams or other apostles, scholars, they're going to react, they're going to say something.

When asked what would happen to an Iranian author who publishes something offensive about Islam in Iran, he explained:

It is run by a group of scholars. They might put him in jail for a few months, because there's a common mentality. All of them, they believe it – they believe in one thing: You are not allowed to disrespect. So, this is the common [*sic*] – the bad - for this. Everybody understands that is a very common thing. So, they might punish him. They might give him jail time for a few months, few weeks, ask for some penalty. It depends on what kind of wording...what kind of– what I have seen in my life 20 years, I didn't see anything big really. Because nobody's going

to disrespect, you know, the Prophet Mohammed, or they were raised that way and they understand. Like in America nobody's going to disrespect your neighbor, because why should I do this?

The participant from Saudi Arabia had a similar view as the Iranians. The Saudi government does not tolerate blasphemy against Islam, but most Saudis are Muslims and have no desire to insult their religion. Four participants are Turkish. They have been in the United States for many years and are not familiar with the specifics of current Turkish laws on blasphemy, but most did believe that blasphemers in Turkey would be punished either by the government or by the citizens. One did not think Turkey has a blasphemy law.

One Turkish participant was frustrated with political Islamists in Turkey, saying: The political Islamists, they will say the leader has protection, but the Prophet does not [referring to being victims of blasphemy]. This is how they get the popular vote. On the paper, there is not [meaning no blasphemy laws]. Things are changing now. I don't know – I don't keep up with what's changing in Turkey now. It is becoming more and more authoritarian regime in Turkey with Islamists...At least the Muslim community in the United States trained themselves over the years how to respond to hate crime or attack, even physical attack, how to respond.

Another Turkish participant believes that Turkey has strict blasphemy laws, saying:

Yeah, in Turkey, yes, yes. Strict, [*sic*] are more strict, you know. Cannot do it, people you know [*sic*]... Yeah, yes, yes, you know. I don't know the punishment there. It is jail, it is jail. Court and jail. But how I don't know exactly, couple months. I don't know the long people are kept in jail. On my own I just know there is jail.

One Turkish participant said that both the Turkish government and citizens might punish a blasphemer. He explained:

He or she would receive lots of death threats. Most possibly, he or she would close their Twitter accounts, their social media accounts, because of the threats. And I think individuals would file a complaint against them. Yeah, in a court of law, they would find something. There is not a law in Turkey.

The Sudanese participant did not specify Sudanese laws, but he did share a story of a man in the past who seriously insulted the religion of Islam and garnered a large group of supporters. The government gave him much time to repent, and he refused. Subsequently, he was executed by hanging. The participant mentioned:

Well, in Sudan, it's not allowed to attack the faith of any individual or groups as a faith...we are not allowed. If you have anything to say about it, it is not your duty as an individual to change it by force. You may talk to the guy who's doing it or the group who is practicing it, but you cannot go beyond that...

**Theme 2.** Most enjoy the freedoms of America and had no issues with acculturation. Participant A exclaimed, "I feel the most freest [*sic*] person. One of the most beautiful thing [*sic*] of this land." Continuing with his joyful attitude about living in

the United States, he said, “It makes it easier for me to fit in because I’m going to tell you something very radical. I believe the United States Constitution is the best Sharia law of the land.”

Although opining that American freedoms are not perfect, when asked how he feels about his acculturation in this country, Participant B declared, “Yeah, you can say, there is actually no problem.” Participant G feels extremely comfortable and happy in the United States and feels free to discuss blasphemy and any other issues here; he completely agrees with the U.S. Constitution.

Participant C explained that he has lived in American communities with educated and open-minded people, and this made his integration easier. He said:

Well, I think it depends on which community you live in. For me, at least, that was the case. And even within the community that I lived in Northern Virginia which is diverse, and people are open to talk and everything, you know the blasphemy thing did not come up as a topic most of the time. Even though it was in the news – *Charlie Hebdo* happened and everything. But among U.S. it didn’t come to the surface as a topic. And I guess now I’m good.

A couple of participants were impressed with Americans who supported Muslims, such as after 9/11 and the Florida Quran burning incident by the Christian pastor.

Participant C recalled, “And some of our neighbors coming to U.S. and telling us, ‘you are good, we are with you. We are not with them.’” Participant E remembered:

They just came to me and I came to them, even though I don’t shake hand [*sic*] with them. Some of them, they just hold my hand, and some of them, they just

talked to me and they were telling me, “We want to tell you: This is not to U.S.– this is [*sic*] the political things.”

During Trump’s Muslim ban, Participant H recalled:

Airports protested against this. And when I saw – even though most of those people, many of those people were not Muslims – and that also opened my eyes as well. That there are people who care about their rights, and other people’s rights.

Participant J conceded that dealing with blasphemy in an open society like America is challenging. He said:

No, no. Not because since I believe that it’s not punishable. If I believe it should be punishable, probably I didn’t have my right to say it out loud. What would be the line between, like hate speech and practicing my own freedom of First Amendment? It has always been my own question and still struggling. You don’t want to hurt other people, but you don’t want to limit the freedom of other people. It’s hard. It’s really hard.

**Theme 3.** Some views of blasphemy softened after living in the United States, others remained static. Participant A admitted that his views of blasphemy were harsher before coming to the United States, saying:

If I was [*sic*] raised in Turkey and didn’t come to America, I would probably be more conservative or close-minded, and that’s my honest answer. Because I have friends that never left Turkey, and I communicate with them socially, and I see how they approach things way different than I. I feel sad for them. So definitely,



if I was raised in a majority Muslim country, especially a country governed by political Islam, I would be more conservative. Not violent. Yes, it's the psychology of the majority versus the minority.

The Iraqi participant conceded that his views of blasphemy would have been more conservative had he remained in Iraq. However, he took time to deeply research Islam, and his conservative views about blasphemy eased. Participant H changed his views a little more drastically than other participants. He said:

Well, definitely, definitely. I think before coming to the United States, even as someone who is educated in Islam, my opinion about anything insulting against Islam, against the Prophet, and maybe my reaction to those people would be – I would say – I don't think I would go into any physical retaliation for that sort of thing, but it will be like, whenever I see that person, I would yell and say all of the bad words..." How could you do this?" You know, rather than listening him or her out [*sic*]. Just react. I'm gonna [*sic*] use the word violently, but in a more word base [*sic*], not physical violence.

Other participants claimed that their views of blasphemy, good or bad, did not change after living in the United States for a period. Participant H, for example, said:

Will be the same. I won't change with the wind. We won't change. Same thing. You know, I always – you know, I am who I am. if I am wrong, I will change myself. If I'm not wrong, then I will be who I am.

Participant F, after much research on Sharia law before entering the United States, had no problems with American freedoms. He said:

Obviously, you cannot expect a child to have a concept of blasphemy. So, when I was a child, I was not sure what blasphemy was, I didn't even know the word existed. It was only when I migrated from [Country] and came to [Country] and certain things started to happen at the world stage and then certain things were in the media constantly and how certain people in [Country] were reacting. That's when I started to realize what this thing is. This phenomenon called blasphemy. So, I looked into my religion for answers. And the answer I found was very simple: And that's the answer I have given you, that there is no earthly punishment for blasphemy whatsoever.

#### **Research Question 4**

What patterns exist between participants' Muslim sects and their views of blasphemy? This research question was addressed by all the interview questions. The following theme was derived from the anchor, descriptive and in vivo codes to answer Research Question 4.

*Theme 1.* No notable patterns among the sects. I interviewed seven Sunni Muslims, two Shia Muslims, and one Ahmadi Muslim. Several participants conceded that Sharia law has several schools of thought. However, I detected no patterns regarding the treatment of blasphemy among the participants, based on sect. Atlas.ti8 confirmed this. I used the tool to query participants' views of punishment for blasphemy, for example, expecting the Sunnis to share a view, the Shias another, and so on. The transcripts demonstrated that with this sample of participants, no pattern could be established based on sect for this topic. Each participant had unique opinions.

**Research Question 5**

What connections exist between their countries of origin and their views of free speech and blasphemy? In other words, do Muslims from certain countries share similar beliefs about blasphemy? This research question was addressed by all the interview questions. The following theme was derived from the anchor, descriptive and in vivo codes to answer Research Question 5.

*Theme 1.* No notable patterns among countries of origin. I interviewed four Muslims from Turkey, one from Saudi Arabia, one from Iran, one from India, one from Iraq, one from Pakistan/Canada, and one from Sudan. As with the case with Research Question 4, I detected no patterns regarding the treatment of blasphemy among the participants, based on country of origin. Atlas.ti8 confirmed this. I used the tool to query participants' views of punishment for blasphemy again. I expected the Turkish participants to share a view. I thought the Sudanese, Saudi, Pakistani/Canadian and Iranian participants would hold harsher views. None of my expectations were realized. The results demonstrated that I have a bias of assuming Muslims from certain countries hold certain views of Islam and Sharia law. Based on this small sample, I was wrong. The transcripts demonstrated that with this sample of participants, no pattern could be established based on country of origin for this topic. Each participant had unique opinions.

## Summary

### Research Question 1

The first research question is the most significant in this study. What are the perceptions of Muslim first- and second-generation immigrants living in America who are imams, scholars, and/or community leaders on blasphemy and blasphemy policies? I derived 14 themes from the codes for this research question. For ease of understanding and synthesis, I grouped similar themes for a total of four categories that directly related to the research question in Table 6. Refer to Table 6 for a summary of participants' opinions on these four categories regarding Research Question 1.

Table 6

*Research Question 1 Summary of Responses*

RQ1. What are the perceptions of Muslim first- and second-generation immigrants living in America who are imams, scholars, and/or community leaders on blasphemy and blasphemy policies?	
Punishment for blasphemy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· According to Quran, no earthly punishment - in the hands of God</li> <li>· No death penalty</li> <li>· Punish in other countries, but not America</li> <li>· Community service with Muslims</li> <li>· Don't punish; educate and conduct dialogue</li> <li>· Small fine and/or short jail time</li> <li>· Uproar and violent response to Charlie Hebdo cartoons was un-Islamic</li> <li>· In many countries, if the government does not punish for blasphemy, the people will; it is up to the government, not the people or religious leaders</li> </ul>
Trump and Muslims	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Respect the President, but he is ignorant and disappointing</li> <li>· Muslims come to the US to flee harsh conditions in other countries</li> <li>· Immigration screening should be solely based on national security, not religion</li> </ul>
Pakistani blasphemy laws	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Most participants unfamiliar with these laws</li> <li>· Pakistan practices political Islam for control</li> <li>· Death is not appropriate for blasphemy</li> <li>· Agree with some components of the law, but not all</li> <li>· Disagree with all of Pakistan's blasphemy laws, should abolish</li> <li>· Laws are un-Islamic and too harsh</li> </ul>
OIC's efforts to criminalize blasphemy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Most were not familiar with the OIC</li> <li>· Some support OIC resolutions on blasphemy, but with caveats</li> <li>· Do not know how OIC resolution would be enforced</li> <li>· Disagree with OIC's effort to internationally criminalize blasphemy</li> <li>· UN has no power, anyway</li> <li>· Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, leading the resolutions, are hypocrites</li> <li>· Would be willing to review draft resolutions before offering opinions</li> </ul>

***Punishment for blasphemy.*** Several of the participants were well-versed in Islamic teachings and held strong views about their religion. All of them agreed that blasphemy against Islam or any religion is hurtful, insulting, and harmful. The participants who were well-educated in Islamic jurisprudence agreed that Islam calls for no earthly punishment for blasphemy. The other participants had differing opinions. Some thought that some form of punishment (but not death) in other countries is appropriate, because the cultures need it to maintain control and harmony. A small

minority of participants thought that the United States should punish for blasphemy, but not harshly. All participants agreed that education and dialogue are the best responses to blasphemy against Islam or any religion. Of the 10 participants, one was a second-generation immigrant, the other nine were first-generation immigrants. I found no patterns in their responses that could be explained by their status. The participants who self-identified as scholars had much more to say about what Islam and Sharia law teach and mean; they educated me on the schools of jurisprudence and how blasphemy is handled in various countries by different schools of thought. The participants who did not self-identify as scholars seemed to have slightly more conservative views in some cases, and they were more concerned about the spiritual side of Islam, not the political side. Almost all participants were surprised that the United States does not have blasphemy laws, but they also admitted that they rarely face this problem here.

All participants came from countries with situations and laws that are harsher for blasphemers than the United States. Most of them became less conservative after living in the United States, accepting American laws and traditions. Some had the same beliefs about blasphemy, but still accept the American legal system. All of them recognized that they may lobby politicians at any time to attempt to make changes, but few were interested.

***President Trump.*** Although all participants expressed respect for the President, almost all of them were extremely disappointed in his anti-Islamic remarks and Muslim ban policy, claiming he was ignorant. One participant called him “an idiot.” Most participants said that the United States government must carefully screen immigrants for

security issues, not religious. Some expressed that most Muslims that immigrate to the United States come for the freedoms, not to try to implement harsh Sharia law.

***Pakistani blasphemy laws.*** Only one participant was familiar with this. The others were shocked when they read the laws and associated punishments. Some said that Pakistan and other Muslim-majority countries are, unfortunately, practicing political Islam to control their people, which is not the true intent of Islam or Sharia. It is not what the Prophet Muhammad envisioned for his followers. Opinions on the law varied, but none of the participants agreed with death as a punishment. Most believed the punishments are too harsh. Several reiterated that Islam calls for no earthly punishment for blasphemy, and that Pakistan's laws are un-Islamic.

***Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).*** Most participants were not familiar with this organization, nor its efforts to internationally criminalize blasphemy. Some would support such a resolution, but only with caveats – and they did not know how it would be enforced. One had no faith in the United Nations, anyway, and said that it doesn't matter what they pass. Several were appalled that Pakistan and Saudi Arabia were leading the effort – countries with the worst human rights abuses. The same participants who disagreed with any punishment for blasphemy also disagreed with the OIC's efforts. Two said that they would have to scrutinize the draft resolution before making an opinion.

## Research Question 2

What political actions have they taken and plan to take regarding blasphemy policies, such as letters to the editor, correspondence with political officials, voting, and joining interest groups? This research question explored participants' inclinations to participate politically through voting, joining interest groups, and so on. I derived 14 themes from the codes for this research question. For ease of understanding and synthesis, I grouped similar themes for a total of three categories that directly related to the research question in Table 7. Refer to Table 7 for a summary of participants' opinions on these three categories regarding Research Question 2.

Table 7

### *Research Question 2 Summary of Responses*

RQ2. What political actions have they taken and plan to take regarding blasphemy policies, such as letters to the editor, correspondence with political officials, voting, and joining interest groups?	
Political Activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Voting is primary political activity</li> <li>· Prefer candidates who align with their overall views for society and are not anti-Islam/anti-Muslim</li> <li>· Blasphemy alone would most likely not influence a vote, but it could</li> </ul>
Joining Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· None join political groups - they are religious leaders</li> <li>· Some agree with groups such as CAIR, but do not join</li> <li>· Some support congregation members that lobby Congress on matters of general interest to the community at large, not only Muslims</li> <li>· Some join Muslim religious groups and inter-faith groups</li> </ul>
Sharia Law in the US	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Political Islam and harsh versions of Sharia law are unacceptable</li> <li>· True Sharia law is congruent with US laws</li> <li>· Sharia as practiced in Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Iran are un-Islamic</li> </ul>

Opinions on this varied, as well. Most participants mentioned political Islam, and how negative it is. They were not interested in an extreme version of Sharia law being implemented in the United States. Many believed that the true Sharia law is congruent



with American laws, and that Muslim-majority countries' legal systems such as Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Iran are un-Islamic.

Most participants were not interested in political activities except for voting. A few are members of Islamic organizations and interfaith groups. Some did support certain candidates that visited their mosques, and others lobbied for common interests, but none of the participants would vote for a candidate simply because he or she would promise to try to pass legislation criminalizing blasphemy. One said it might influence his decision, but the consensus was that they voted based on many issues, and how they believed the candidates would benefit the community. Most did mention, however, that they would not vote for candidates who were obviously anti-Muslim. They preferred tolerant, open-minded politicians.

One participant agreed with what CAIR does but would not join CAIR or other political lobbying groups; he believed that as a religious leader, he was supposed to remain outside of politics, except for voting. His concern was to lead his flock in religious matters. Another participant said that his community actively lobbied Congress, but only on matters of general interest, not only for Muslims.

### **Research Question 3**

How do their religious views of blasphemy impact their acculturation experience and vice versa? The purpose of the third research question was to explore how participants' experiences with adjusting to American life were impacted by American free speech rights and Islamic penalties for blasphemy. I derived 14 themes from the codes for this research question. For ease of understanding and synthesis, I grouped

similar themes for a total of two categories that directly related to the research question in Table 8. Refer to Table 8 for a summary of participants' opinions on these two categories regarding Research Question 3.

Table 8

*Research Question 3 Summary of Responses*

RQ3. How do their religious views of blasphemy impact their acculturation experience and vice versa?	
Living in the U.S.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· All participants expressed joy and gratitude for the privilege of living in the U.S.</li> <li>· All acculturated very well in the U.S., even with the differences in free speech rights</li> <li>· Muslims must abide by the laws of the land in which they live</li> </ul>
First Amendment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Had more conservative views of blasphemy before moving to the US, but accepted First Amendment rights</li> <li>· Some did not fully understand that blasphemy in America is protected to an extent</li> <li>· Some countries need blasphemy laws to control the population, but not the U.S.</li> <li>· Sharia Law is aligned with the U.S. Constitution</li> <li>· Views of blasphemy did not change with living in the U.S.</li> <li>· Do not experience blasphemy in the U.S.</li> </ul>

All participants expressed joy and gratitude for the privilege of living in the United States. Most had more conservative views of blasphemy while in their home countries, but adopted the American First Amendment free speech rights, even though they were not fully aware of what this meant. They all seemed to be enjoying positive experiences in this country. One participant made it clear that his views of blasphemy will not change. He accepts American free speech and the idea of dialogue and education, but I also had the impression that he accepts the punishments that his home country metes out for blasphemy. Several participants said that they assimilated very well in this country, even given the difference in free speech rights between America and their home country, because after studying Islam, they discovered that blasphemy is not punishable

on earth. Most participants emphasized that Muslims are obligated to follow the laws of the land in which they live, especially if they voluntarily relocate.

#### **Research Question 4**

What patterns exist between participants' Muslim sects and their views of blasphemy? No notable patterns among the sects. I interviewed seven Sunni Muslims, two Shia Muslims, and one Ahmadi Muslim. Several participants conceded that Sharia law has several schools of thought. However, I detected no patterns regarding the treatment of blasphemy among the participants, based on sect. Atlas.ti8 confirmed this. I used the tool to query participants' views of punishment for blasphemy, for example, expecting the Sunnis to share a view, the Shias another, and so on. The transcripts demonstrated that with this sample of participants, no pattern could be established based on sect for this topic. Each participant had unique opinions.

#### **Research Question 5**

What connections exist between their countries of origin and their views of free speech and blasphemy? In other words, do Muslims from certain countries share similar beliefs about blasphemy? No notable patterns among countries of origin. I interviewed four Muslims from Turkey, one from Saudi Arabia, one from Iran, one from India, one from Iraq, one from Pakistan/Canada, and one from Sudan. As with the case with Research Question 4, I detected no patterns regarding the treatment of blasphemy among the participants, based on country of origin. Atlas.ti8 confirmed this. I used the tool to query participants' views of punishment for blasphemy again. I expected the Turkish participants to share a view. I thought the Sudanese, Saudi, Pakistani/Canadian and

Iranian participants would hold harsher views. None of my expectations were realized.

The results demonstrated that I have a bias of assuming Muslims from certain countries hold certain views of Islam and Sharia law. Based on this small sample, I was wrong. The transcripts demonstrated that with this sample of participants, no pattern could be established based on country of origin for this topic. Each participant had unique opinions. In Chapter 5, I will discuss the implications of these findings.

## Chapter 5: Implications and Conclusion

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative, existential, phenomenological study was to understand the perceptions of immigrant (i.e., first- and second-generation) Muslim imams, scholars, and/or community leaders living in America on the topics of blasphemy and blasphemy laws. The results of this study also highlighted participants' political participation inclinations and activities regarding free speech and blasphemy against Islam and how their views of free speech impacted their acculturation in American society. Insights from interviewing the 10 participants can be used to help inform the American public, media, immigration scholars, students, think tanks, policymakers, Muslims, and non-Muslims in addressing Islamophobia.

I conducted in-depth, face-to-face interviews with the participants and asked for their thoughts and experiences regarding blasphemy and how they reconciled strict Islamic codes with American First Amendment free speech rights. Components of the policy feedback theory (Mettler & SoRelle, 2014) and acculturation theory (Berry, 1997) were applied. This final chapter includes a summary of key findings categorized by research question. The interpretation of the findings is presented in the context of the policy feedback and acculturation theories. A discussion of the limitations of the study are followed by recommendations for future research. The research implications end the study.

### **Summary of Key Findings**

#### **Research Question 1**

What are the perceptions of Muslim first- and second-generation immigrant imams, scholars, and/or community leaders in America on blasphemy and blasphemy policies? The purpose of this question was to explore participants' views of blasphemy and blasphemy laws/policies. Findings were derived from the themes generated by the codes and quotes.

**On blasphemy.** All participants agreed that blasphemy against any religion, not only Islam, is hurtful, insulting, harmful, and unnecessary. Hate speech against a religious icon, persona, holy book, and/or deity seemed to be more serious than nonreligious hate speech. For Muslims, this is a serious matter. Most of the participants never experienced hate speech against Muslims or Islam in the United States, but most were aware of the famous incidents that took place in Holland and elsewhere. One recalled the Quran-burning incident by a Christian pastor in Florida. The participants were adamant that Islam teaches respect for others, regardless of religious background. All participants made it very clear that blasphemy against any religion is harmful and hurtful, but retaliation (e.g., murdering the perpetrators in cold blood) in response to blasphemy against Islam or any religion is unacceptable and un-Islamic.

**On blasphemy policies.** Most participants were not aware that American First Amendment free speech rights protects hate speech but not hate crimes. Some were surprised and continued to believe that America does punish hate speech, while this fact did not bother others. Most came from countries that have blasphemy laws but are enforced in different ways. All participants expressed joy and gratitude for living in the United States and accept the Constitution. Most pointed out that Muslims who emigrate

to other countries are required to abide by the laws of the land. Muslims who come to the United States, for example, with the purpose of attempting to infiltrate American laws with strict Sharia codes, are not true Muslims and do not understand Islam correctly. One offered that the U.S. Constitution is the perfect example of the true Sharia law, incorporating human rights.

Several participants stated strongly that the Quran, Islam's holy book, has no earthly punishment for blasphemy and that the Prophet Muhammad taught his followers to educate blasphemers rather than retaliate; if this did not work, walk away in peace and with respect. In other words, according to Islam, blasphemers are not to be punished. Other participants, however, believed that blasphemers should be punished, but opinions varied on specifics. Some believed that community service with Muslims would help educate blasphemers; others thought that a fine and/or 30 days in jail would suffice. All participants agreed that education and dialogue is the best response to blasphemy.

On Pakistan's blasphemy laws, only one participant was familiar with them. The others were shocked when they read the laws and associated punishments. Some said that this is an unfortunate example of political Islam to control the population, which was not the true intent of the Prophet Muhammad. Opinions on the law varied, but none of the participants agreed with death as a punishment. Most believed the punishments are too harsh. Several reiterated that Islam calls for no earthly punishment for blasphemy and that Pakistan's laws are un-Islamic.

Most participants were not familiar with the OIC or its efforts to internationally criminalize blasphemy. Some would support such a resolution, but only with caveats –



and they did not know how it would be enforced. One had no faith in the UN, claiming that the organization is ineffective. Several pointed out that Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, leaders of the blasphemy resolutions, have the worst human rights abuses and are hypocrites.

### **Research Question 2**

What political actions have they taken and plan to take regarding blasphemy policies, such as letters to the editor, correspondence with political officials, voting, and joining interest groups? The purpose of this question was to explore to what extent participants involved themselves with political activity regarding free speech and blasphemy issues. Findings were derived from the themes generated by the codes and quotes.

Most participants voted or would vote, and they preferred candidates with platforms that aligned with their overall views of society and are not anti-Muslim. Candidates who include restricting speech and punishing blasphemers, for example, might win more Muslim votes, but not necessarily. Most participants claimed that much more is at stake when deciding for whom to vote than simply one issue of free speech. One said that it would influence his vote because he would like to see hate speech punished in some way. Three other participants would vote against any candidate who attempts to limit free speech because that would be un-Constitutional and un-Islamic. Most participants pointed out that strict Sharia law and political Islam as seen in countries like Pakistan and Saudi Arabia are un-Islamic and not suited for American life.

None of the participants seemed personally interested in joining political interest groups, although some allowed candidates to visit their mosques to speak. Most claimed that their job is spiritual, not political. One said that his community had many members with jobs in politics, but he was personally not interested. Further, his community does lobby with Congress but on issues that benefit Americans, not only Muslims. Some are members of Islamic groups that are not necessarily political in nature but may wield some influence. Several were adamant in their lack of interest in anything but voting. One said that he agreed with the efforts of the CAIR, but because he is a religious leader, he did not feel it was his place to join such a group.

Participants were not interested in an extreme version of Sharia law being implemented in the United States and claimed that most Muslim immigrants agree. Most were not aware of specific anti-Sharia and anti-foreign law legislation in many American states. Some laughed and could not understand why Americans fear Sharia law in the United States, saying that this is not necessary and will never happen. Others thought that the protection is a good thing for the states, while other participants pointed out that groups are creating fear among the public by claiming that Muslims are actively attempting to change American laws into strict Sharia laws. Most thought that if Muslims wish to use Sharia law for family matters, such as divorce, custody, marriage, and burial, they should be allowed to do so. However, most of these laws already align with the American system.

On blasphemy policies in the United States, participants were divided. Some said that free speech must be protected. Others said it would be “nice” if America could stop

blasphemy but not in a harsh manner such as long jail terms or death. Education and dialogue seemed to be the preferred methods for responding to blasphemy.

### **Research Question 3**

How do their religious views of blasphemy impact their acculturation experience and vice versa? The purpose of this question was to explore the experiences of participants as they adjusted to living in the United States, and how free speech impacted their adjustment, given they follow a faith system that often punishes for blasphemy. Findings were derived from the themes generated by the codes and quotes.

All participants expressed joy and gratitude for the privilege of living in the United States. Most had more conservative views of blasphemy while in their home countries but adopted the American First Amendment free speech rights, even though they were not fully aware of what this meant. They all seemed to be enjoying positive experiences in this country. One participant made it clear that his views of blasphemy will not change. He accepts American free speech and the idea of dialogue and education, but I also had the impression that he accepts the punishments that his home country metes out for blasphemy. Several participants said that they assimilated very well in this country, even given the difference in free speech rights between America and their home country because after studying Islam, they discovered that blasphemy is not punishable on earth. Most participants emphasized that Muslims are obligated to follow the laws of the land in which they live, especially if they voluntarily relocate. Several made it clear that most Muslims that immigrate to the United States do so to pursue a better life economically, educationally, politically, and even religiously. They come for the

freedoms that Americans enjoy in the United States, not to import the strict versions of Sharia law that they leave behind in their home countries.

#### **Research Question 4**

What patterns exist between participants' Muslim sects and their views of blasphemy? The aim of this research question was to explore possible similarities in views on blasphemy among the participants, based on sect. Findings were derived from the themes generated by the codes and quotes.

I found no notable patterns among the sects regarding views of blasphemy. I interviewed seven Sunni Muslims, two Shia Muslims, and one Ahmadi Muslim. Several participants conceded that Sharia law has several schools of thought. However, I detected no patterns regarding the treatment of blasphemy among the participants, based on sect. Each participant had unique opinions.

#### **Research Question 5**

What connections exist between their countries of origin and their views of free speech and blasphemy? In other words, do Muslims from certain countries share similar beliefs about blasphemy? The purpose of this question was to ascertain whether similarities in beliefs about free speech/blasphemy existed among participants based on their countries of origin. Findings were derived from the themes generated by the codes and quotes.

I found no notable patterns among countries of origin. I interviewed four Muslims from Turkey, one from Saudi Arabia, one from Iran, one from India, one from Iraq, one from Pakistan/Canada, and one from Sudan. As with the case with Research Question 4, I

detected no patterns regarding the treatment of blasphemy among the participants, based on country of origin. I expected the Turkish participants to share a view. I thought the Sudanese, Saudi, Pakistani/Canadian, and Iranian participants would hold harsher views. None of my expectations were realized. The results demonstrated that I have a bias of assuming Muslims from certain countries hold certain views of Islam and Sharia law. Based on this small sample, I was wrong. The data from the transcripts revealed that with this sample of participants, no pattern could be established based on country of origin for this topic. Each participant had unique opinions.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

#### **Policy Feedback Theory**

Like Bulut and Ebaugh (2014), Rane et al. (2011) opined that given the prominent issues concerning Muslims in the media, little data exist on what Muslims really believe. This study informed the policy feedback theory by asking Muslim immigrants who are imams, scholars, and/or community leaders, what their views of free speech policies are in the United States, and whether they are inclined to become politically active on this topic to either help sustain American freedom of speech or curtail it. Furthermore, one recommendation that this study addressed was extending the policy feedback research beyond social welfare provisions and programs and studying how a different type of policy (e.g., First Amendment) shapes the attitudes and political behaviors of Muslim immigrants in America.

**Power of groups.** The power of groups stream proposed by Mettler and SoRelle (2014) was of interest. Public policies can shape what types of groups develop and which

fail to unite (Mettler & SoRelle, 2014). I investigated how the study participants felt about mobilizing as a group or groups to support or challenge freedom of speech policies, because they may perceive that the policies are not aligned with their Islamic beliefs. Scholars usually analyze how organized groups influence policy outcomes, but sufficient evidence indicates that the relationship often works in reverse as well. Public policies alone can also shape what types of groups develop and which fail to unite (Mettler & SoRelle, 2014).

Djupe and Conger (2012) wrote that scholars have ignored key issues regarding interest groups in a democracy. Existing research on citizen political participation indicates that organizations play a minor role, that they simply promote political engagement for members and those who support their positions. Djupe and Conger explored how interest groups impact political participation using a multilevel design with survey data and observations of Christian Right activism in the United States. They argued that interest group activism would have a pluralist effect on citizen participation such as grass-roots lobbying (Djupe & Conger, 2012). Results suggested that high levels of interest group activity impact participation and mobilization trends, creating countermobilization (Djupe & Conger, 2012).

This study supports both claims, but in an unexpected way. The 10 participants were proud to live in the United States and accepted the Constitution. Many claimed that the Constitution is the perfect Sharia law. Most did acknowledge that blasphemy is considered a punishable crime by most schools of Islamic jurisprudence, but not one participant expressed an interest in participating in a political group that would lobby

against American free speech rights. Several inferred that they would lobby against anything that would restrict free speech rights, but are not actively pursuing such activity.

Several participants were not clear on how American laws protect hate speech and seemed disappointed upon learning that hate speech is not a crime here, but did not seem emotional about it, nor did they indicate an interest in forming groups or otherwise lobbying the government to restrict free speech. They have seen how blasphemy laws in their home countries and in Pakistan oppress societies; they preferred living in the United States where society is not perfect, but having freedoms, even free speech, are tantamount to successful and happy lives.

However, if such laws were placed on the ballots, some would vote in favor of them with the understanding that such issues must be voted on by the citizens, not imposed by certain religious or other groups. Voting for candidates who are tolerant and participating in Islamic and inter-faith civic organizations was a common response. Finally, the imams and scholars generally felt that mobilizing politically is not their place; leading their flocks spiritually to the true spirit of Islam is. They saw almost no issues with aligning their Islamic beliefs with the American democratic system, and said that regardless, Muslim immigrants are required to abide by the laws of the land, not impose their home country's laws.

As a form of policy feedback, organized public pressure can lead to legislative hearings, executive decisions, or new statutory and constitutional provisions such as Oklahoma's State Question 755 (Huq, 2011). Several participants disagreed with American states' anti-foreign laws, banning the use of Sharia (for example) in state

courts. They claimed that such laws are not necessary, because strict forms of Sharia law will never be imposed in the United States. American fears of Muslims and Sharia is the nexus of these laws. Others agreed with the state bans, citing that there are Islamic and other groups that are trying to impose Sharia laws in the American system, and they should be stopped.

**Interpretive effects.** Pierson (1993) posited that existing policies can shape political behaviors of government officials, interest groups, and the public through two primary means. First are interpretive effects, as policies act as information sources and impact political learning and attitudes. Second are resource effects which provide means and incentives for political participation (Pierson, 1993). Pierson's ideas helped promote research efforts which fostered improved identification of the systems at work, as well as the conditions under which feedback might be likely to transpire and with what outcomes (Mettler & SoRelle, 2014).

Of interest to this study was the component of interpretive effects. Interpretive effects of policies may be fostered through the impact of resources or through features of policy design and implementation. Any of these may communicate to people about government or their relationships to it or the status of other citizens; the ensuing responses may then shape people's participation (Mettler & SoRelle, 2014). Actual policy decisions alone can affect citizens' sense of political worth, depending on whether their preferred policy outcome succeeds. Interpretive effects can give individuals powerful motivations or disincentives for political engagement.



This study supports this claim. As mentioned earlier, the participants varied on their views of the freedoms afforded by the First Amendment. Some think no changes are required and fully support it, because free speech, even hate speech, is a basic human right. Others interpreted it incorrectly to mean that blasphemy is punishable in America, and were disappointed to learn that this is not the case. They do not spend much time thinking about blasphemy during their daily lives but would not oppose blasphemy legislation if written in a way that requires people to respect one another, but not be enforced with unreasonable punishment.

**Religion.** Religion can significantly influence individual and group political beliefs and activities. Some people believe that they must correct secular societal failures and promote certain religious opinions on so-called unacceptable public policies. Many individuals are so disappointed with the circumstances within their society that they use their religion as a framework of actions and beliefs to change the conditions. Some religions such as Islam do not distinguish between religious and public life, so it is natural that religious values have precedence over public policies (Danziger & Smith, 2016).

This study does not support this claim. The participants in the current study live in the United States and clearly understand that they live in a democratic society where Muslims are a religious minority. They did not agree with everything related to the First Amendment, but they also did not agree amongst themselves on what Islam says about blasphemy. Among the group that I interviewed, I did not see evidence of their religion significantly influencing them in political activities.

### **Acculturation Theory**

This research drew on Berry's acculturation theory by exploring the extent to which immigrant Muslim imams, scholars, and/or community leaders accept or reject American free speech policies. If the Muslim immigrants are closely connected with their new American culture, then it is likely that they would have higher levels of well-being about American society including embracing laws governing free speech (see Berry, 2011). According to acculturation theory, the strategies or acculturation attitudes of immigrants are separation, assimilation, marginalization, and integration (Ward & Kus, 2012). This study shed light on which strategy immigrant Muslim imams, scholars, and/or community leaders favored, based on their views of blasphemy laws in the United States.

In acculturation psychology, people who share a cultural heritage or who settle into a common society do not necessarily have similar acculturation experiences (Berry, 2009). Immense individual differences exist across persons who share societies and cultures; researchers must understand the key features of cultural groups prior to contact with each other (Berry, 2009). Croucher (2016) is developing a similar theory that suggests that "when members of the host culture feel threatened they are more likely to believe immigrants (in this case Muslims) do not want to assimilate" (p. 46).

Research shows integration is the preferred acculturation strategy based on attitudes (Ward & Kus, 2012). Most immigrants pursue integration rather than separation, assimilation or marginalization (Berry, 2009; Ward, 2013). Integration is helpful to psychological well-being and intercultural relationships and dialogue, but mutual

accommodation is required for it to be successful (Berry, 2009). For example, when immigrants don't accept the main ideology of their host society, acculturative stress occurs (Kunst & Sam, 2013).

Asking questions about blasphemy of Muslim leaders in America gives an admittedly narrow view of acculturation experiences. However, based on my field notes and the interviews, I conclude that none of the participants experienced separation, marginalization, or assimilation. Rather, they all seemed to be integrating into American culture. Integration occurs when an immigrant adapts to the dominant culture while maintaining his original culture (Kunst & Sam, 2013). The participants, regardless of Muslim sect, immigration status, or country of origin, are maintaining their cultures and religious beliefs, but also adopting American culture and accepting American laws, such as the First Amendment. They were all happy to be living in the United States and experienced no problems with integration (i.e., acculturative stress). Two admitted that their views of blasphemy softened after living in the United States for a period.

The findings also support Gordon's (1964) claim that civic assimilation occurs when an immigrant group does not raise demands concerning the host public's civic life with any issues involving value and power conflict with the host people. The participants know that any issues they have with American laws must be brought forth and voted on. The participants appreciated the American democratic system and respected it.

The study supports Malik's (2004) claim that instead of assimilating, Muslims are integrating into host societies. Although they may do some things together and some things separately, this is integration without assimilation. Muslims are steadily integrating

into societies despite the Islamophobia of many nativist Westerners. Assimilation to Western societies has never been an appealing idea to most Muslims (Malik, 2004).

In 2007, the Pew Research Center conducted its first nationwide-survey of Muslim Americans (Pew Research Center, 2011). Most were found to be middle class, happy, assimilated, and holding moderate views, compared with those in Europe. The current study including interviews of 10 immigrant imams, scholars, and/or community leaders in the United States supports the results of this survey.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Potential limitations to trustworthiness noted in Chapter 1 were: (a) data collected from a small sample size may not be representative of the population of immigrant Muslim imams, scholars, and/or community leaders; (b) qualitative research is inherently subjective and difficult to replicate, so researcher bias must be mitigated; and (c) results cannot be easily verified, because they are based primarily on individual narratives from interview transcripts. It is important to reiterate that small sample sizes and subjectivity are valid and common limitations in qualitative research. My mitigation strategies follow.

I carefully managed my personal biases during the interviews and data analysis process. I am divorced from a first-generation Iraqi Muslim immigrant, and several of my friends are also Muslim and from the Middle East and North Africa. However, our relationships are open, honest and cordial; my ex-husband and my friends know about my deep interest in Middle Eastern and Islamic issues. After each interview, I noted my personal biases that emerged due to my contact with other Muslims in my life. I did hear

responses from my participants that mirrored what I had heard from my ex-husband and others, but I recognized this, and annotated it accordingly.

I do not agree with the concept of bracketing or suspending my preconceptions and biases; this is nearly impossible to accomplish (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I used triangulation by using interview transcripts, reflexive journaling and field notes. Reflexivity is the awareness that my values and background can affect the research process (see Cope, 2014). Through persistent observation, I built trust with my participants to foster rich, detailed response (see Cope, 2014). Persistent observation is the researcher's attention to the emotions of the participant, which provides depth to the study (Cope, 2014). I also incorporated transcript checking. Finally, I used two peer de-briefers to help me with dialogic engagement. The peer de-briefers either hold or will hold PhDs and provided me with support, encouragement, and unbiased feedback on my work throughout the process.

### **Recommendations**

Further research is recommended to enhance the findings of this study. Researchers may expand the sample size and demographics to find out how Muslims in America view blasphemy, blasphemy policies, and political participation. Perhaps combine surveys with interview data. Obtain participants in America who are imams, scholars, community leaders, and "ordinary Muslims." Study Muslims who are not first- or second-generation immigrants. Analyze the views of Muslims from certain countries to seek similarities. Expand the topic from blasphemy to other policy areas that may conflict with Sharia law such as divorce, marriage, adultery, theft, and burial laws. The

bottom line is, researchers may use myriad ways to discover what Muslims in America think about Sharia law and its use in the United States.

Regarding Muslim acculturation in America, researchers may do the same by expanding the sample size and demographics and modifying the survey and interview questions to find out how Muslims integrate here. For example, policymakers may wish to know further information on how Muslims view other components of Sharia law and how they reconcile those views with associated American laws, especially in family law. Very few American surveys and interviews focus on Muslim viewpoints, so any research would likely be useful.

### **Implications**

Though this study has limitations, implications for positive social change did emerge, particularly for American policymakers, immigration and religious scholars, and the public. Islamophobia is a problem in America. Politicians, scholars, students, and ordinary citizens debate the usefulness of Muslim immigrants, with many rejecting them altogether, and hoping to ban them completely. The findings of this study, based on policy feedback and acculturation theory, indicate that immigrant Muslims in America who are also imams, scholars, and community leaders are here to live better lives, not to attempt to impose strict versions of Sharia law. The participants had different views of blasphemy policies and punishment, but most are teaching their Muslim congregations that responding to hate speech against Islam is best with education and dialogue, not retaliation. They believe in the U.S. Constitution, but are disappointed with President Trump's attempt to ban Muslim immigration. They also have different views of the

OIC's efforts to internationally criminalize blasphemy, but are not interested in mobilizing to restrict First Amendment free speech rights. The participants seemed well integrated in American life and happy here.

### **Conclusion**

Politicians, scholars, students, and citizens should note that although this study included only 10 participants, they were leaders in their Islamic communities and have great influence on fellow Muslims. There is always a possibility that participants will not be honest with their interview answers, but I did not sense this issue. After conducting in-depth interviews with them on the topics of blasphemy and acculturation, it became clear that immigrant Muslims are no different than other immigrant groups. There is no "one size fits all," even within the Muslim community. The United States is a nation of immigrants from countries with policies and traditions in direct opposition to those of America. This study showed, however, that immigrant leaders in the Muslim community in America enjoy living here, respect American laws, and wish to integrate. They fled oppressive societies and sought freedom and happiness in the United States. Judging immigrant Muslims by the acts of a few who are violent only promotes fear which is unfounded. Statistics and interviews simply do not support the notion that Muslim immigrants wish to promote strict Sharia law in the United States and curtail free speech rights.

Every participant in this study was passionate about discussion the religion of Islam and Sharia, not just blasphemy. It became quickly apparent that they were concerned with the negative stereotypes of Islam in the United States, and they wanted to

leverage their interviews as another mechanism for “getting the word out” about the positive sides of Islam. All of them passionately opined that blasphemy is hurtful and disrespectful against any religion, not only Islam. Furthermore, every participant either mentioned or discussed in depth the fact that many interpretations of Islam exist and debates about Sharia continue, even within the scholarly community.

Based on the results of this study, therefore, I conclude that most immigrant Muslim imams, scholars, and community leaders in America are unlikely to try to restrict free speech rights to mirror strict versions of Sharia law. The First Amendment is not at risk from this group, and they are teaching their congregations and constituents to respond to blasphemy in a civil manner and to use the American democratic processes to address grievances. I also conclude that most immigrant Muslims should always be welcomed but screened for security purposes, like other immigrant groups. They are usually fleeing oppressive societies and seeking a better life in the United States. Given these factors, Americans should consider that immigration policies restricting Muslims, or any other immigrant group based solely on religious affiliation, are unnecessary and more importantly, unconstitutional. Finally, banning Sharia is not necessary; rather, it fuels Islamophobia.



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## Appendix A: Screening Interview Questionnaire

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail Address: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Are you a Muslim religious leader, teacher, or scholar?      YES      NO

2. Are you a:

a. First-generation immigrant

b. Second-generation immigrant

c. None of the above

3. Which Muslim sect do you identify with?

Shia      Sunni      Wahabi      Sufi      Salafi      Ahmadi

Other \_\_\_\_\_

4. What, other than the United States, is your country of origin?

\_\_\_\_\_

5. Are you over 18 years of age?      YES      NO

6. Are you in the United States legally?      YES      NO

7. Do you feel comfortable reading and speaking the English language?

YES      NO

*If interested in this research, please complete this form and return to Ms. Angela Ewing at XXXXX*

## Appendix B: Pakistani Penal Code on Religious Offenses

PPC	Description	Penalty
§ 298	Uttering of any word or making any sound or making any gesture or placing of any object in the sight with the deliberate intention of wounding the religious feelings of any person.	1 year imprisonment, or fine, or both
§ 298A	Use of derogatory remarks etc., in respect of holy personages. 1980	3 years imprisonment, or fine, or both
§ 298B	(Ahmadi blasphemy law) Misuse of epithets, descriptions and titles etc., reserved for certain holy personages or places, by Ahmadis. 26 April 1984	3 years imprisonment and fine
§ 298C	(Ahmadi blasphemy law) Aka Ordinance XX: If a Muslim, or preaching or propagating his faith, or "in any manner whatsoever" outraging the religious feelings of Muslims, or posing himself as a Muslim. 26 April 1984	3 years imprisonment and fine
§ 295	Injuring or defiling places of worship, with intent to insult the religion of any class	Up to 2 years imprisonment or fine, or both
§ 295A	Deliberate and malicious acts intended to outrage religious feelings of any class by insulting its religion or religious beliefs. 1927	Up to 10 years imprisonment, or fine, or both
§ 295B	Defiling, etc., of Quran. 1982	Imprisonment for life
§ 295C	Use of derogatory remarks, spoken, written, directly or indirectly, etc. defiles the name of Muhammad 1986	Mandatory Death and fine (Feb. 1990)  Trial must take place in a Court of Session with a Muslim judge presiding.

## Appendix C: UN Human Rights Council Resolution 16/18

12 April 2011

The Human Rights Council,

Reaffirming the commitment made by all States under the Charter of the United Nations to promote and encourage universal respect for and observance of all human rights and fundamental freedoms without distinction as to, inter alia, religion or belief,

Reaffirming also the obligation of States to prohibit discrimination on the basis of religion or belief and to implement measures to guarantee the equal and effective protection of the law,

Reaffirming further that the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights provides, inter alia, that everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion or belief, which shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching,

Reaffirming the positive role that the exercise of the right to freedom of opinion and expression and the full respect for the freedom to seek, receive and impart information can play in strengthening democracy and combating religious intolerance,

Deeply concerned about incidents of intolerance, discrimination and violence against persons based on their religion or belief in all regions of the world,  
Deploring any advocacy of discrimination or violence on the basis of religion or belief,

Strongly deploring all acts of violence against persons on the basis of their religion or belief, as well as any such acts directed against their homes, businesses, properties, schools, cultural centres or places of worship,

Concerned about actions that willfully exploit tensions or target individuals on the basis of their religion or belief,

Noting with deep concern the instances of intolerance, discrimination and acts of violence in many parts of the world, including cases motivated by discrimination against persons belonging to religious minorities, in addition to the negative projection of the followers of religions and the enforcement of measures that specifically discriminate against persons on the basis of religion or belief,

Recognizing the valuable contribution of people of all religions or beliefs to humanity and the contribution that dialogue among religious groups can make towards an

improved awareness and understanding of the common values shared by all humankind,

Recognizing also that working together to enhance implementation of existing legal regimes that protect individuals against discrimination and hate crimes, increase interfaith and intercultural efforts, and to expand human rights education are important first steps in combating incidents of intolerance, discrimination and violence against individuals on the basis of religion or belief,

1. Expresses deep concern at the continued serious instances of derogatory stereotyping, negative profiling and stigmatization of persons based on their religion or belief, as well as programmes and agendas pursued by extremist organizations and groups aimed at creating and perpetuating negative stereotypes about religious groups, in particular when condoned by Governments;
2. Expresses its concern that incidents of religious intolerance, discrimination and related violence, as well as of negative stereotyping of individuals on the basis of religion or belief, continue to rise around the world, and condemns, in this context, any advocacy of religious hatred against individuals that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence, and urges States to take effective measures, as set forth in the present resolution, consistent with their obligations under international human rights law, to address and combat such incidents;
3. Condemns any advocacy of religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence, whether it involves the use of print, audio-visual or electronic media or any other means;
4. Recognizes that the open public debate of ideas, as well as interfaith and intercultural dialogue, at the local, national and international levels can be among the best protections against religious intolerance and can play a positive role in strengthening democracy and combating religious hatred, and convinced that a continuing dialogue on these issues can help overcome existing misperceptions;
5. Notes the speech given by Secretary-General of the Organization of the Islamic Conference at the fifteenth session of the Human Rights Council, and draws on his call on States to take the following actions to foster a domestic environment of religious tolerance, peace and respect, by:
  - (a) Encouraging the creation of collaborative networks to build mutual understanding, promoting dialogue and inspiring constructive action towards shared policy goals and the pursuit of tangible outcomes, such as servicing projects in the fields of education, health, conflict prevention, employment, integration and media education;
  - (b) Creating an appropriate mechanism within Governments to, inter alia, identify and address potential areas of tension between members of different religious

- communities, and assisting with conflict prevention and mediation;
- (c) Encouraging training of Government officials in effective outreach strategies;
- (d) Encouraging the efforts of leaders to discuss within their communities the causes of discrimination, and evolving strategies to counter these causes;
- (e) Speaking out against intolerance, including advocacy of religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence;
- (f) Adopting measures to criminalize incitement to imminent violence based on religion or belief;
- (g) Understanding the need to combat denigration and negative religious stereotyping of persons, as well as incitement to religious hatred, by strategizing and harmonizing actions at the local, national, regional and international levels through, inter alia, education and awareness-building;
- (h) Recognizing that the open, constructive and respectful debate of ideas, as well as interfaith and intercultural dialogue at the local, national and international levels, can play a positive role in combating religious hatred, incitement and violence;

6. Calls upon all States:

- (a) To take effective measures to ensure that public functionaries in the conduct of their public duties do not discriminate against an individual on the basis of religion or belief;
- (b) To foster religious freedom and pluralism by promoting the ability of members of all religious communities to manifest their religion, and to contribute openly and on an equal footing to society;
- (c) To encourage the representation and meaningful participation of individuals, irrespective of their religion, in all sectors of society;
- (d) To make a strong effort to counter religious profiling, which is understood to be the invidious use of religion as a criterion in conducting questionings, searches and other law enforcement investigative procedures;

7. Encourages States to consider providing updates on efforts made in this regard as part of ongoing reporting to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights;

8. Calls upon States to adopt measures and policies to promote the full respect for and protection of places of worship and religious sites, cemeteries and shrines, and to take measures in cases where they are vulnerable to vandalism or destruction;

9. Calls for strengthened international efforts to foster a global dialogue for the promotion of a culture of tolerance and peace at all levels, based on respect for human rights and diversity of religions and beliefs, and decides to convene a panel discussion

on this issue at its seventeenth session, within existing resources.

46th meeting

24 March 2011

[Adopted without a vote.]