“The Real Issue Is…”: A Case Study of Anti-Muslim Mobilization in a Rural Great Plains Community

Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Master of Science in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

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2018

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Abstract

Recent studies by the Southern Poverty Law Center have noted a rise in organized anti-Muslim activism over the last three years. A number of these organized, violent mobilizations have occurred in nonmetropolitan areas. This is partially due to the fact that meatpacking facilities are increasingly located in small cities or rural areas in the Midwest or Great Plains and recruit Muslim African immigrant and refugee workers. This has resulted in a secondary migration of Muslims, particularly Somalis, to smaller meatpacking communities in the Midwest or Great Plains, creating new contexts for ethnic conflict. To date, rural hate groups, specifically these emergent anti-Muslim mobilizations, are not well understood. I seek to determine the justifications and mobilization strategies used in these anti-Muslim mobilizations. I undertake a case study of an anti-Muslim hate group in a small Great Plains community. My core research questions are: 1) How does this group justify their anti-Muslim activism?; and 2) What elements of the group's rhetoric seem to resonate with the local community? I utilize a social movements perspective to analyze transcripts from the hate group's public meetings, a public town hall meeting with a local refugee resettlement agency, and the content of the hate group's public Facebook page (454 group posts; 1,370 individual comments).
Acknowledgments

I would like to warmly thank my advisor, Dr. Cathy Rakowski, as well as my committee members Dr. Jill Clark and Dr. Linda Lobao for guiding and supporting me through my studies and research at the Ohio State University. I would also like to thank my graduate school comrades. Florence Becot, Anne Junod, and especially Paige Kelly have been sources of constant support, mentorship, and joy. Finally, I am eternally grateful to my spouse Josh for being a personal and professional support to me always.
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Chapter 1. Introduction

I. Study Background and Goals

According to the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), the number of anti-Muslim groups in the United States demonstrated a dramatic, 197% increase between 2015 and 2016. This increase continued into 2017, although at a less accelerated rate (Southern Poverty Law Center 2018). These rapidly multiplying anti-Muslim hate groups represent a relatively recent phenomenon in the United States, mostly arising after the terrorist attacks of 9/11. These groups seek to demonize the religion of Islam, its followers, and Muslim refugees, connecting Islam to terrorism and other undesirable cultural practices (Southern Poverty Law Center 2016).

Additionally, anti-Muslim sentiments have received an increasing amount of support in the contemporary political atmosphere. The spike in anti-Muslim hate groups has often been connected to Donald Trump’s campaign rhetoric and policies (Southern Poverty Law Center 2017a), as well as to post-9/11 associations of Islam with terrorism. Beyond Donald Trump, anti-Muslim discourse has been “mainstreamed” in both media and political discourse since 9/11 (Bridge Initiative Team 2015, 2017). Part of this mainstreaming effect is rooted in mainstream news organizations giving an increased amount of attention to then-fringe, anti-Muslim groups in the wake of 9/11. This increased and disproportionate attention allowed these anti-Muslim groups to identify potential organizational allies, spread their message, and gain support. The result has been that anti-Muslim organizations have become very densely networked with each other, forming inter-organizational networks of support and information sharing (Bail 2015).

While the SPLC notes that anti-Muslim hate groups have been increasing in number since 9/11, the SPLC data mostly captures groups that are more institutionalized, national-level
organizations. Their figures fail to capture all of the decentralized, grassroots groups that have 
 arisen in the U.S., opposing refugee resettlement on the local level (Southern Poverty Law 
 Center 2016). These more localized, anti-Muslim groups and mobilizations are located in rural 
 areas or smaller cities, scattered across the United States. Thus, they may not enjoy the same 
 access to political and institutional networks and resources as the better established anti-Muslim 
 groups located in urban centers and Washington D.C. (Southern Poverty Law Center 2016). 
 However, these less formalized anti-Muslim groups still have the ability to cause significant 
 harm and conflict.

A salient example of this sort of localized, anti-Muslim mobilization was the March 2016 
 events in Wichita, KS. This case consisted of a protest of a speaker at Wichita, KS’s Islamic 
 Center of Wichita. Protestors, who included members of a Kansas right-wing\(^1\) militia group, 
 planned via Facebook to enact an armed protest of a fundraiser held at the Islamic Center. The 
 protest was organized because the invited speaker was considered to be “radical” and to have ties 
 to Hamas. Out of concern for the safety of attendees of the fundraiser, the mosque cancelled the 
 event. Kansas’s Congressman at the time, Mike Pompeo, called for the cancellation of the 
 mosque’s fundraiser and failed to denounce the plans for armed protest. Instead, Pompeo argued 
 that it was insensitive to host a speaker who may have ties to Hamas, and tied his opinions to his 
 evangelical Christian faith (Potter 2016b, 2016a).

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\(^1\) This thesis utilizes a definition of “right-wing” that follows Blee and Creasap’s (2010) operationalization. 
 According to their definition, “rightist” is an umbrella category which includes both “right-wing” groups (who 
 espouse explicitly racialized goals and/or violence) and “conservative” groups (who claim to represent “traditional” 
 values and morals and do not rely upon violence as a primary tactic). These are the terms that will be used 
 throughout this thesis.
Another similar mobilization occurred in Irving, TX, a suburb of Dallas. In November 2015, roughly 12 armed protestors gathered outside Irving’s mosque (one of the largest mosques in America) to protest its existence. Individuals associated with this protest also publicized names and addresses of local Muslims and “Muslim sympathizers.” These events later inspired the Texas Rebel Knights of the Ku Klux Klan to also protest the Irving Mosque (Nelson 2016).

Some recent anti-Muslim mobilizations, however, have advanced beyond the armed protests and verbal harassment of Irving and Wichita to threats of violence, as seen in the case of Garden City, KS. In October 2016, a group of three men formed their own right-wing militia group, the “Crusaders.” The “Crusaders” developed a plot to bomb an apartment complex in Garden City, KS. These men chose this apartment complex because it housed local Muslim and Somali immigrant families that worked at the local meatpacking facilities. This apartment complex also contained a mosque used by these Muslim residents. In their correspondences and organizational materials, the “Crusaders” described Muslims as “cockroaches” that needed to be eradicated. Before the plot could be carried out, the men were arrested and their plans halted (Nading 2016; Pressler 2017).

Concurrently with these larger trends in political and media discourses and hate group formation, there have been shifts in immigration and migration patterns to nonmetropolitan areas. These shifting immigration patterns, which are bringing increasing number of Muslims to nonmetropolitan areas, such as Garden City, KS, are creating new stages in which religious conflicts may occur. One major driver of these changing migration and demographic patterns is the meatpacking industry. Labor recruitment strategies of meatpackers result in very diverse groups of people (African and Latino immigrants, urban migrants) coming to work at these
facilities, rapidly changing the demographics of certain rural areas (Miraftab 2016). While historically meatpackers relied on significant numbers of undocumented Latino immigrant workers, meatpackers have more recently begun to recruit and hire Somali immigrants and refugees as a documented, low-wage alternative. In some cases, this move to hire Somalis is the direct result of Latino workers being removed in immigration raids (Semple 2008). Regardless, this employer-driven labor recruitment preference results in Somalis migrating from more urban primary resettlement locations in the US, such as Minneapolis, MN, to small towns where the meatpacking facilities are located, such as Garden City, SD or Aberdeen, SD. This has resulted in a number of “Little Somalias” appearing in small towns across the Great Plains, a primary location of meatpacking facilities (Harlan 2016). Thus, the increase of grassroots, anti-Muslim mobilizations seems, at first glance, to be mirroring the increase in Muslim populations in certain nonmetropolitan areas, particularly the case of Garden City, KS. However, political discourses, media coverage, and even labor recruitment practices of meatpackers all play a role in driving these conflicts and demographic changes.

The recent proliferation of anti-Muslim hate groups and these examples of localized, anti-Muslim mobilization raise important questions. Why do these anti-Muslim groups arise? Do their ideas resonate with their local audience(s) and receive local support? How do those that participate in these mobilizations justify their actions and goals? My goal, in this thesis, is to begin to address these questions. In order to achieve this goal, I review both the rural sociological studies of meatpacking communities’ experience of immigration and ethnic conflict and the social movements literature on ethnic conflict, rightist mobilization, and framing. I use the insights of these two literatures to analyze a specific case of anti-Muslim mobilization and
answer the following research questions: 1) What are the main points of frame amplification? and 2) What are the main points of frame resonance? However, beyond addressing gaps in these literatures, I seek to answer a question about the social world, namely: What rhetoric or framing drives hundreds of individuals to attend public, anti-Muslim meetings and support a clearly anti-Muslim cause? It is this social puzzle of the public and sizeable support for anti-Muslim mobilizations and how anti-Muslim activists justify their clearly discriminatory efforts that is the central focus of this study.

To answer the two research questions stated above, I analyze transcripts of meetings held by the American Freedom Task Force of Anytown, SD (AFTF), an anti-Muslim hate group based in Anytown, SD. I also analyze the content of the AFTF’s public Facebook page, and a transcript of a non-AFTF meeting. I interpret the data using framing theory (Snow et al. 1986) to analyze the AFTF’s framing strategies, as well as the manner in which local Somalis and Muslims in general are framed as threats.

II. Limitations of Previous Sociological Research

Despite these critically important increases in anti-Muslim rhetoric and mobilization, sociologists in the United States have not yet begun to focus upon anti-Muslim mobilizations in social movements research, with the exception of Bail’s 2015 book Terrified: How Anti-Muslim Fringe Organizations Became Mainstream, which is a foundational, recent piece on the topic. Rather, the current social movements sociology research has focused primarily upon nativism.

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2 This is a pseudonym. Pseudonyms were used to protect the privacy of the community involved.
3 This is also a pseudonym.
4 Recent examples of work by European sociologists on the topic of anti-Muslim mobilizations include Joel Busher’s (2016) book, which discusses his ethnographic research with the English Defence League in the United Kingdom, and Avi Astor’s (2016) ethnographic work on anti-mosque mobilizations in Catalonia.
(Ebert and Okamoto 2015; Ward 2016), broader white supremacist mobilizations (Durso and Jacobs 2013), or more recently, ascendant conservative activist groups, such as the Tea Party (McVeigh et al. 2014; Skocpol and Williamson 2012). This leaves an important topical gap in the social movements literature, regarding the specifics of anti-Muslim mobilization.

There are also methodological limitations to the ways in which rightist social movements studies tend to study these types of mobilizations. While many recent studies have sought to utilize quantitative data to produce broadly generalizable results, this approach does not necessarily allow researchers to answer targeted questions about the “how” of these mobilizations. As discussed previously, anti-Muslim mobilizations, are organizing through more decentralized, online methods. This strategy is mirrored by right-wing extremist groups, who rely on “lone wolf” attacks and are loosely connected through the internet. These online organizations are much more difficult to measure and quantify than the brick-and-mortar right-wing chapters of the past (Blee and Yates 2015:133). Also, many of these quantitative studies have relied upon the SPLC hate map data to analyze the correlates of right-wing group mobilization. However, this data has limitations and gaps. The SPLC itself admits its inability to capture many smaller, emergent groups, particularly localized, grassroots anti-Muslim groups5 (2016). Blee (2017) argues that research methods, questions, and data need to adjust to the reality of right-wing mobilizations in order to better explain them.

Also, in quantitative studies, scholars have tended to emphasize easily quantifiable economic variables, such as income, poverty, and other measures of social deprivation. While these material factors can be important for rightist (and thus, anti-Muslim) mobilizations, these

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5 It took the SPLC nearly a year to identify Anytown, SD as a hotspot of anti-Muslim activity.
quantified variables are not able to clearly capture and communicate the justifications for or the concerns that draw individuals to participate in these mobilizations. Here is where qualitative research can make an invaluable contribution by directly capturing the cited motivations of anti-Muslim activists. Thus, in order to understand anti-Muslim mobilizations, qualitative case studies of these localized groups, using innovative data such as meeting transcripts and Facebook content, can be instructive to help build theory and extend social movements literature. This type of case study approach also allows mobilizations to be situated in a specific context, a richness that is very instructive and that may be sacrificed in national-level, quantitative analyses of right-wing mobilizations.

It is here, in the rich, qualitative, case study approach that the rural sociological literature is highly instructive. As stated earlier, Garden City, KS, a site of anti-Muslim mobilization, is a small meatpacking city. As will be discussed later, the case study site for this thesis, Anytown, SD, is also home to a meatpacking plant. These nonmetropolitan industry towns have been described as “new” immigrant destinations, and rural sociologists have been studying these places and their demographic change and conflict for over a decade (Barcus and Simmons 2013; Broadway 2007; Crowley and Ebert 2014; Crowley, Lichter, and Qian 2006; Lichter et al. 2010). Thus, rural sociologists have their finger on the pulse of emergent patterns of economic restructuring, demographic change, and ethnic conflict.

While rural sociology has taken important steps toward understanding demographic change and ethnic conflicts in rural areas, this body of work still has some key gaps. Namely, these studies have gravitated toward an individual or community level unit of analysis, focusing mostly on discriminatory individual attitudes or decreased social capital of immigrants and
refugees. One clear gap in this literature is a lack of focus upon hate groups or social movement organizations (SMOs) that arise in these “new” rural immigrant destinations, in response to demographic changes (Lichter and Brown 2011). Also, most rural sociological research has focused on hostile receptions of Latino populations in these new immigrant destinations. However, these immigrants tend to be Christians. Considering the current desire of meatpackers to pursue documented labor and the resulting emergence of a rural Somali population (Harlan 2016), a greater focus on religious differences and Islam in rural places is increasingly necessary in this literature. Also, immigrants and refugees have been discussed in a relatively undifferentiated manner in these community studies. However, “immigrant” and “refugee” are distinct statuses and their nuances need to be noted and analyzed.

Thus, there remain key gaps in both the social movements and rural sociological literatures that need to be addressed. In the social movements literature, an analysis of anti-Muslim mobilizations’ motivations and justifications for their mobilization is highly necessary. Based on the challenges related to using qualitative data to answer these questions, a qualitative approach is useful, as it allows for an in-depth analysis of ideological and cultural drivers of these conflicts, as well as their relation to context. While the rural sociological literature, on the other hand, is highly contextualized and concerned with ideological drivers of ethnic conflict in new immigrant destinations, these studies have not yet problematized religious differences, the Somali experience, or hate group mobilizations targeting immigrants and refugees in these contexts.

I intend to make contributions to both of these bodies of literature through the case study of the AFTF. To the social movements literature, this thesis intends to contribute an analysis of
anti-Muslim activism through a qualitative approach, which considers both context and justifications for mobilization, not merely quantifiable correlates. This thesis also aims to extend the rural sociological literature on ethnic conflict involving Latinos to the hostile reception of Somali immigrants and refugees in a “new” immigration context, highlighting the salience of religious differences. Also, I undertake an analysis of a hate group mobilization in a “new” immigration context, which is a unique contribution to the rural sociological literature. Thus, the case of Anytown, SD and the AFTF represents an intersection of both the social movements and rural sociological literatures and presents a unique opportunity to draw from the strengths of both literatures. Economic restructuring, Somali in-migration, community conflict, ethnic conflict, hate group mobilization, a nonmetropolitan location, and innovative forms of data all make Anytown and the AFTF a unique and instructive case for analysis.

III. Case Context

The case of Anytown, SD, which is the focus of this thesis, illustrates an interesting example of the intersection of grassroots anti-Muslim activism and discourse, as well as shifting rural immigration patterns and resulting ethnic conflict. The city of Anytown, SD comprises a micropolitan statistical area (U.S. Census Bureau 2006). Anytown’s total population was 26,091 as of the 2010 Census. At that time, Anytown’s population was 91.8 percent white, 3.6 percent Native American, 1.6 percent Hispanic or Latino, 1.3 percent Asian, and 0.7 percent black (U. S. Census Bureau 2010). While these figures predate the Somali in-migration to Anytown in 2015-16, they are still helpful for understanding the demographic composition of the city to which the Somali refugees and immigrants were arriving and the context which spawned the AFTF.
As mentioned previously, Anytown was also home to a meatpacking facility. In April 2016, Anytown, SD’s DemKota beef packing plant opened and expanded, creating a need for workers. In response to this need, a population of Somalis migrated to Anytown to take these jobs (Harlan 2016; Mondesir 2016). In response to the growing local Somali population, the South Dakota NGO that handles refugee resettlement, Lutheran Social Services (LSS), attempted to establish a direct refugee resettlement and outreach office. This office was intended to both support the local Somali population and eventually directly resettle refugees in Anytown to address DemKota’s labor needs and minimize the high turnover rates typically associated with meatpacking plants reliant on migrant labor (Harlan 2016). In support of LSS’s efforts, in April 2016, a “New Americans Task Force” was formed to facilitate refugee and immigrant outreach in Anytown. This effort was supported and spearheaded by local religious leaders and government officials (Mondesir 2016; Pharris 2016). While everything had seemed to be running smoothly, by September 2016, LSS’s plans to open an office in Anytown had stalled. In fact, LSS had no “plans in the foreseeable future to make it [Anytown] a direct resettlement site” (Grandstand 2016b). What changed between April and September 2016? The answer may lie in a grassroots mobilization that engendered local conflict and controversy surrounding refugees.

In August 2016, a public Facebook page for the “American Freedom Task Force of Anytown, SD” (AFTF) was created. The AFTF’s mission statement, according to their public Facebook page, proclaims a goal of “Providing educational forums and sharing of ideas to ensure the safety, economic future, and protect the constitutional freedoms of our community” (Americans First, Task Force 2018). While the AFTF has no physical, mailing address and no publicly available list of leaders or leadership structures, the group has been highly active in
Anytown, despite seeming to be housed completely on Facebook. As of March 2018, the AFTF’s public Facebook page has over 1,300 followers. They have also organized nine local, public meetings regarding refugee resettlement, ISIS, and Islam from August 2016 through December 2017. Invited “expert” speakers and local emcees run these meetings, which are sponsored and hosted by the AFTF. Attendance at these meetings has been sizeable, averaging between one and three hundred individuals6 (Grandstand 2016c). These meetings function as an interactive space for curious local community7 members to engage with self-titled “experts” on Islam and refugee resettlement and to voice their concerns about the Somali newcomers to Anytown.

These meetings also allow the AFTF to attempt to mobilize meeting attendees into a local, conservative activist force. This mobilization effort is facilitated by South Dakota legislators with anti-Muslim leanings who also attend and participate in these meetings, notifying attendees of anti-Muslim and anti-refugee legislation being discussed at the state capitol and offering political tips. These meetings have often become tense and hostile, with dissenting audience members being ejected and local reporters denied entrance (Grandstand 2016c). Local high school students have also protested against the AFTF and their invited speakers (AFTF Meeting, September 22, 2016). The AFTF complements these public meetings with an active Facebook presence, through which they prolifically “share” Islam or refugee-related news articles from Breitbart, WND.com, and other conservative or right-leaning news outlets. In addition, the AFTF Facebook page shares and negatively frames local news reports involving

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6 This attendance figure is based upon estimates reported by the local newspaper, crowds visible in videos of the meetings, and AFTF reports of the number of attendees, published on their Facebook page.
7 “Community” in this study is operationalized according to the minimalist tradition discussed by Liepins (2000). In this sense, “community” refers to a collectivity of people in a given locality. In this case, the locality is Anytown, SD.
local Somali residents as well as Anytown residents’ negative experiences with or opinions of Somalis and/or Muslims. The AFTF also uses their social media platform to release statements responding to protests of their events or negative media coverage. Thus, the Facebook page functions as both an online forum for reinforcing the collective identity of AFTF supporters and for facilitating AFTF outreach in the Anytown community. Aside from these social media dialogues, local print media and NPR have also covered the conflicts generated by the AFTF (Glass 2016; Grandstand 2016a, 2016c; Staff 2016). Finally, in 2017, the “Keep South Dakota Safe PAC,” also located in Anytown, was labeled an anti-Muslim hate group⁸ by the Southern Poverty Law Center (Southern Poverty Law Center 2017b).

The AFTF’s sole focus on Islam and the local Somali refugees is noteworthy, as there is also a sizeable⁹ and relatively prominent Asian Karen refugee population in Anytown, whose arrival pre-dates that of the Somalis. Anytown’s Karen population has dedicated interpreters in the local government, Karen services in local churches, and comprise a significant component of Anytown’s manufacturing and industrial workforce¹⁰ (Marvel 2017; Natalie-Lees 2011; Pharris 2015). This selective focus of the AFTF suggests there is a more nuanced framing strategy that is not merely tied to demographic change, but the specific Somali newcomers to Anytown. Thus, the case of the AFTF provides a rich, interesting opportunity to analyze a targeted anti-Muslim

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⁸ It is unclear if this is an attempt to label the AFTF (which does not have a physical address) a hate group, or if the SPLC is responding to the fact that the Keep South Dakota Safe PAC has donated funds to the AFTF to sponsor speakers and refreshments at meetings. However, the PAC and AFTF are distinct organizations (Holland and Lusk 2017). Also, on the SPLC website, the Keep South Dakota Safe PAC is erroneously listed as being located in Aberdeen, SC (Southern Poverty Law Center 2016). Based on content posted on their Facebook page, the AFTF understood the SPLC’s intention was to label the AFTF a hate group, and composed and submitted a letter to the editor of the local newspaper rejecting that label.

⁹ According to both the 2010 Census and 2016 ACS data, following Native American and Hispanic or Latino, Asian is the most sizeable non-white racial group in Anytown (U. S. Census Bureau 2010).

¹⁰ Molded Fiberglass, a manufacturing facility, is discussed as the main employer of Anytown’s Karen population in local news reports. Molded Fiberglass, on the AFTF page, is also noted as an employer of Somalis in Anytown.
SMO mobilization in a “new” rural immigration context. This case is not only intrinsically interesting, but is also able to contribute directly to both the social movements and rural sociological literatures.

IV. Overview of Chapters

This thesis is divided into five chapters, including this introductory chapter. In the following chapter, Chapter 2, I outline and critique theoretical frameworks that have commonly been used to explain ethnic conflicts and rightist SMO mobilization in the sociological literature. I also present the framing perspective from social movements theory and discuss its usefulness for analyzing the current case of the AFTF. Finally, I discuss the relevant empirical findings of the social movement and rural sociological literatures regarding motivations and justifications of right-wing mobilizations and ethnic conflicts in “new” immigration destinations. Finally, I present my research questions and expected relationships.

In Chapter 3, I present an overview of my data and methods. The data consist primarily of transcripts from the AFTF’s public meetings and the content of their public Facebook page, which includes both AFTF posts and individual user comments. My methods are qualitative, and the approach is a case study. The transcript and Facebook data have been coded in the NVivo software using concept and pattern coding methods (Saldana 2009) to distill themes and concepts from the data that are informed by the social movements framing perspective.

In Chapter 4, I present the results of my analysis with discussion of my findings as they relate to each research question. Chapter 4 first discusses the relevant results for the first research question related to frame amplification in light of the emergent themes of Muslim Incompatibility, Institutional Failure, and Citizen Mobilization that I identified during my NVivo
analysis. Facebook and meeting transcript data are analyzed and discussed separately. Next, the second research question related to frame resonance is addressed. For the second research question, the discussion and analysis of the Facebook and meeting data are conducted separately and in light of the same, emergent themes of Muslim Incompatibility, Institutional Failure, and Citizen Mobilization that I identified during my NVivo analysis.

In Chapter 5, I conclude the thesis with a summary of my findings and how they relate to previous literature reviewed in Chapter 2. I also discuss the implications and limitations of my findings and provide suggestions for future research on anti-Muslim activism.
Chapter 2. Literature Review

I. Chapter Overview

In this chapter, I discuss the theoretical perspectives and empirical findings that are relevant to my research in this thesis. I begin by discussing three distinct bodies of research that inform my approach to the case of the AFTF: 1) ethnic competition and rightist research in sociology, 2) framing research in social movements sociology, and 3) rural sociological research regarding community and ethnic conflicts in new immigration destinations. In each distinct discussion, I review the relevant theories and empirical findings and address their limitations. At the end of this chapter, I outline how I have synthesized elements of these literatures to create my study design and present my research questions and expected results, based on these bodies of literature.

II. Theories of Ethnic Conflict

In this section, I will discuss the theoretical perspectives and empirical findings of past research related to ethnic conflict in social movements research. I begin by discussing ethnic competition and racial threat theories, as they are those most often used to explain rightist mobilizations. I then discuss findings from studies that apply these theoretical perspectives. Finally, I conclude by discussing the limitations of these approaches.

A. Theoretical Perspectives

The theoretical perspectives that have been most commonly utilized to explain ethnic conflict and hate group mobilization are ethnic competition (Blumer 1958; Bobo 1999; Olzak 1992) and racial threat (Blalock 1970) theories. The ethnic competition perspective predicts that as competition over resources between ethnic or racial groups intensifies, in-group and out-group
identities become more clearly defined, and conflict is more likely. Thus, conflicts are more likely in areas experiencing rapid desegregation and decreasing inequality between groups, resulting in new competition between groups that had previously overlapped in certain social spheres. Inter-group, ethnic conflicts have often been operationalized as economic conflicts through variables such as unemployment rates, economic restructuring, or median income. While this competition has often been understood as economic competition between groups for jobs, it has also been conceptualized as political competition over voting rights (Olzak 1992), and to a lesser extent, a more symbolic, cultural competition for perceived “social dominance” of one group over another (Blumer 1958; Bobo 1999). Racial threat theories understand a similar dynamic of threat and competition to be responsible for ethnic conflict and mobilization. However, threat theories place more emphasis on non-white population share in a specific area as being a key precipitator of ethnic conflict (Blalock 1970), rather than factors such as segregation, employment opportunities, and levels of intergroup inequality.

B. Empirical Applications and Findings

The theories of ethnic competition and racial threat reviewed above have been commonly used to explain right-wing group mobilizations, mostly in the form of quantitative analyses with an emphasis on economic conflicts. However, empirical tests of the economic components of these theories have had mixed results. Cunningham (2012) found empirical support for economic and employment-related dimensions of ethnic competition theory in his comparative analysis of Ku Klux Klan mobilization in 1960s Greensboro and Charlotte. However, economic variables such as unemployment have not often been significant in quantitative analyses, with more nuanced variables such as “economic restructuring” being salient (Van Dyke and Soule 2002).
As stated previously, demographic change is also a key component of both the ethnic competition and racial threat theoretical perspectives. In empirical applications of these theories, non-white population growth has been found to be the variable most consistently and significantly correlated with right-wing mobilizations (Beck 2000; Durso and Jacobs 2013; Ward 2016). This supports the racial threat theory assertions that growth in non-white population (or demographic change) are a major driver of ethnic conflicts (Blalock 1970).

This significance of demographic change and the lack of effect of certain economic variables has been replicated in studies of ethnic conflicts and nativist\textsuperscript{11} mobilizations in the United States. The relationship between nativist mobilizations (i.e. groups opposed to Latino immigration), and median income and manufacturing employment has been found to be positive and negative, respectively. Also, high levels of conservative voting and economic variables were not significant. This suggests that nativist organizations are more likely in more affluent, middle class areas, rather than poorer, working class areas (Ward 2016). In contrast, Ebert and Okamoto (2015) examined anti-immigrant activity (riots, meetings, lawsuits, immigration arrests, immigrant-targeted violence) in fifty-two metro areas in 2000, and concluded that anti-immigrant activities were more likely in places in which immigrants had a smaller population share and more conservative voters were present. Such environments were found to result in an ideological legitimation of anti-immigrant activity.

Qualitative studies of right-wing groups have largely replicated the findings of quantitative analyses and have tended to emphasize cultural or symbolic, not economic,

\textsuperscript{11}“Nativist” is defined here as an anti-immigrant group belonging to the “conservative” portion of the Blee and Creasap (2010) typology. In this sense, the Ku Klux Klan, while anti-immigrant, is considered a “right-wing” group, as it has explicitly racial and violent goals. “Nativist” groups are less focused on violence as a solution, and focus on values such as patriotism, and not race explicitly.
competition. For example, in one European study, anti-mosque protests in Catalonia have been most concentrated in working class neighborhoods. However, the cited motivations of the anti-mosque protesters are not rooted in economic competition, but rather the perception that in-migrating Muslim residents have degraded the quality of the neighborhood, were culturally incompatible, and represented a cultural invasion. These Catalonians also stated that they felt marginalized within their neighborhoods and the Muslim migrant influx served as an additional humiliation to their neighborhood (Astor 2016).

The findings have been quite similar in qualitative sociological studies of right-wing groups in the U.S. In the case of women participating in the Ku Klux Klan, participation was framed by the women as an almost religious “conversion.” These women recounted a keen sense of racial loyalty and spoke of their “burden” of having to share the racial “truth” with the world. In this case, racist participation is a highly ideological activity, based upon narratives of “racial understanding” and not material/economic factors (Blee 1996). A study of the motivations of participants in the Utah Minuteman Project (UMP), a right-wing militia group, had similar findings. In that case, “concerns around principles and practices—rather than the pocketbook—explain their recruitment.” Thus, participation in the UMP was conceptualized as a way to fight demographic and cultural change (Stewart, Morgan, and Bendall 2015:643).

These theories have also been used to explain the occurrence of hate crimes. However, empirical tests of these theories have yielded similarly mixed results regarding the economic aspect of ethnic competition. In some hate crime pieces, there is a positive relationship between levels of economic depression and hate crime rates (Grattet 2009). However, these studies are the exception, as economic variables are often not significant or significant in the opposite direction
predicted by ethnic competition and racial threat theories. Rather, shifting demographics and increases in the size of the non-white population are often the key correlates of hate crime occurrence, suggesting the role of symbolic or cultural threat in conflict (Adamczyk et al. 2014; Freilich et al. 2015; Green, Strolovitch, and Wong 1998; Lyons 2008; Stacey, Carbone-López, and Rosenfeld 2011). Other symbolic factors, such as empowerment of women and partisan national government, have also been found to be significant predictors of right-wing terrorism (Piazza 2017).

Based on the findings reviewed above, factors such as unemployment or poverty do not seem to clearly correlate with right-wing mobilizations. Rather, more abstract, cultural anxieties over demographic change and its perceived, accompanying cultural change seem more salient than economic deprivation or competition. Also, cross-sectional and longitudinal studies have demonstrated that immigration rates tend to have a low effect on native populations’ wages that belong to similar labor pools as immigrants, suggesting that anti-immigrant attitudes are not directly related to economic competition or job loss, but rather to symbolic competition or ideological biases (Butcher and Card 1991). Thus, the relative lack of a direct effect of quantified, economic variables, such as unemployment rates or poverty, upon right-wing mobilizations suggests that there is a constructed, symbolic conflict and/or competition inherent in these right-wing mobilizations. Thus, even if a right-wing group was to cite employment competition as a motivating factor, these mobilizing narratives of “job competition” may not be abstract and not based on the material reality of the local context. This is fundamentally different from the right-wing mobilizations and ethnic conflicts at the beginning of the 20th century, from which Olzak’s (1992) economically focused ethnic competition theory was developed.
C. Limitations of These Approaches

Overall, these findings suggest that non-white population growth and demographic change may be the most significant predictor of right-wing mobilizations, ethnic conflicts, and hate crime. These demographic change variables are often interpreted as representing a symbolic or cultural threat posed by an increasing minority population. However, despite economic variables’ lack of direct effect or effect in the opposite direction expected, most studies have continued to frame research questions and hypotheses to center around economic variables. However, the null findings summarized previously suggest a need to look beyond the economically-oriented aspects of the ethnic competition perspective. Thus, my thesis will attempt to disentangle the more the cultural and political aspects of a rightist mobilization.

Additionally, these mostly quantitative studies are not necessarily well positioned to answer more granular “how” or “why” questions of specific mobilizations. While ethnic competition theory does predict political and cultural conflicts, quantitative analyses are not necessarily well-positioned to speak to the underlying narratives or motivations that drive these conflicts and mobilizations. However, local mobilization strategies of right-wing and nativist groups (Ebert and Okamoto 2015; McVeigh and Sikkink 2005; Ward 2016) and their symbolic, cultural motivations (Stewart et al. 2015) have been noted as important gaps in this literature. Thus, my qualitative approach in this thesis is useful and timely, as it allows for an analysis of narratives of “why” and “how” a mobilization is taking place, rather than simply identifying its economic, demographic, and social correlates. This adds key insights to this literature.

Another clear limitation of this body of literature is its lack of substantive focus on anti-Muslim and anti-refugee mobilizations. Rather, the current research and application of ethnic
competition and racial threat theories focus primarily upon anti-Latino nativism (Ebert and Okamoto 2015; Ward 2016) and white supremacist groups (Durso and Jacobs 2013). Explicitly anti-Muslim or anti-refugee groups are underrepresented in sociological research and their discourses and mobilization strategies merit closer analysis.

III. Framing Perspective and Social Movements Research

In this thesis, I undertake an analysis of the cited motivations and justifications underlying the AFTF’s mobilization. Thus, it’s helpful to complement the racial threat and ethnic competition perspectives with an approach that problematizes discourse. The framing perspective from the social movements literature, particularly its concepts of frame amplification and articulation, is useful for such an analysis, as it provides a conceptual toolkit for analyzing discursive linkages between structural realities (i.e. economic, cultural, and demographic variables) and justifications for a rightist mobilization. In the following section, I outline the framing perspective from social movements theory and summarize findings from its application to right-wing research. I conclude this section by outlining the limitations of these applications.

A. Theoretical Perspective

While early social movements theory considered grievances and/or irrationality central to collective action (Kornhauser 1959; Smelser 1963), these social-psychological understandings of collective mobilizations eventually fell out of vogue. Social movements theory then moved toward a more structural understanding of mobilization, emphasizing the importance of resources (McCarthy and Zald 1977), political opportunity (McAdam 1982), or rational actions of participants (Olson 1965). However, Snow et al. (1986) sought to merge the previous social-psychological, grievance-based model with structural considerations to explain variation in
mobilization and movement outcomes using a symbolic interactionist perspective (Snow et al. 2014). Framing theory has been developed and elaborated, both theoretically (Benford and Snow 2000; Snow and Benford 1988; Snow, Soule, and Kriesi 2004; Snow, Tan, and Owens 2013) and empirically (see Snow et al. 2014 for a review) since its inception.

The framing perspective is fundamentally concerned with the development and evolution of an SMO’s “collective action frame,” which is an “action-oriented set of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate the activities and campaigns of a social movement organization.” The basic premise of the framing perspective is that successful mobilization varies according to the relevance of an SMO’s collective action frame to local context and structural conditions. Even if all the structural conditions are ripe for mobilization, a resonant frame is still crucial for successful movement mobilization (Benford and Snow 2000:614). Collective action frames are usually comprised of three different elements: diagnostic (identification of problems and causes), prognostic (proposed solutions and strategies to remedy problems), and motivational (motive and rationale for participation) (2000:614–17; Snow and Benford 1988). Frames must also have credibility and salience with their intended audience(s) to resonate and have mobilizing potential in a specific context. This also means frames often change over time, in order to keep in conversation with changes in local contexts, events, and opinion (2000:618–22), as well as engage “existing cultural values, beliefs, narratives, folk wisdom” (2000:624). Thus, “framing is a verb—it is something that actors (i.e., people) do” (Snow et al. 2014:38).

In order to produce these collective action frames, SMOs engage in a number of framing processes, in which discourse plays a key role (Benford and Snow 2000). “Discursive processes” consist of the spoken and written communications and discourse associated with SMO activities.
and outreach. The two discursive processes which generate a collective action frame are frame amplification and frame articulation. “Frame amplification” refers to an organization’s interpretation of concepts, events, or groups as posing a salient threat to values or beliefs, which validates and encourages participant mobilization. Frame amplification processes often involve stereotyping antagonists and emphasizing a threat to fundamental values, such as personal freedom or safety, as mobilization and resonance strategies (Snow et al. 1986:469–70). Frame amplification is considered especially important for mobilization and recruitment strategies of SMOs with stigmatized agendas, such as the AFTF. These SMOs need a creative frame amplification process that enables them to frame themselves as being fundamentally prosocial and supporting traditional values rather than a hateful agenda (Benford and Snow 2000:625). An SMOs frame amplification strategy builds directly into its frame articulation strategy, which is defined as follows:

“Frame articulation involves the connection and alignment of events and experiences so that they hang together in a relatively unified and compelling fashion. Slices of observed, experienced, and/or recorded "reality" are assembled, collated, and packaged. What gives the resultant collective action frame its novelty is not so much the originality or newness of its ideational elements, but the manner in which they are spliced together and articulated, such that a new angle of vision, vantage point, and/or interpretation is provided” (Benford and Snow 2000:623).

Benford and Snow (2000) note that these discursive processes of frame amplification and articulation have not been the subject of extensive research in the social movements literature. Discursive process analysis is described as highly time-consuming, as well as requiring access to printed group materials and discourse in a way that can require extensive fieldwork and observation. However, these articulation and amplification processes are critical in understanding a group’s collective action frame, as they allow SMOs to construct a narrative regarding local
and/or structural problems and present solutions that allow them to resonate and successfully mobilize within their contexts (2000:623–24). Thus, the framing perspective’s concepts of frame amplification and articulation provide an insightful complement to ethnic competition theory in analyzing rightist mobilizations. A framing analysis allows for an in-depth examination of the discursive processes used by the AFTF, through which they justify their discriminatory mobilization.

B. Right-Wing Applications of Framing

Contemporary research on right-wing groups has highlighted the importance of effective framing in right-wing mobilization. McVeigh and Sikkink (2005) have found that right-wing groups are more likely to be present in areas with high levels of segregation and non-white population growth, structural factors that would allow a racist frame to resonate with local individuals. McVeigh et al. (2004) also convincingly demonstrated in their study of the Ku Klux Klan in 1920s Indiana that the Klan’s economic and racial framing strategies were instrumental in creating counter-intuitive geographical and demographic voting patterns for Calvin Coolidge. McVeigh (2009) also found, regarding the historical influence of the Ku Klux Klan, that despite all of the economic and structural conditions being ripe for Klan recruitment, a resonant frame that was both a “prognosis” and “diagnosis” acted as a spark to ignite latent grievances into collective action (2009:140). Thus, while mostly limited to historical analyses of the Ku Klux Klan, these studies demonstrate the power of framing for right-wing mobilization.

C. Limitations

While frame analyses of right-wing groups provide a useful complement to rightist research, there are still gaps that remain. Most clearly, these types of analyses have mainly
focused upon the right-wing Ku Klux Klan. Also, right-wing frame analyses have not been micro-frame analyses, but rather a larger-N approach that does not dive deeply into one particular group in one particular location, but rather seeks to make a statewide or national-level generalization (McVeigh 2009; McVeigh et al. 2004; McVeigh and Sikkink 2005). While these studies all provide useful insights, their approaches need to be applied to other groups at different scales to generate a more nuanced understanding of the power of framing strategies.

D. “Conservative” SMOs and “Color-blindness”

In this section, I briefly discuss Blee and Creasap’s (2010) typology of “rightist” SMOs. I undertake this discussion to highlight the potential use of “color-blindness” (Bonilla-Silva 2014) or “color evasion” (Blee and Yates 2015) by SMOs such as the AFTF. While not directly related to framing theory, the concepts of “color-blindness”/“color evasion” and the “conservative” SMO are important for my analysis and discussion of the AFTF.

While the terms “rightist,” “right-wing,” and “conservative” have already been defined and used to refer to SMOs, a more in-depth discussion of these terms is useful here. Terms such as “hate,” “right-wing,” or “white supremacist” are often used interchangeably, which can obscure empirically and theoretically salient nuances between the group types. Blee and Creasap (2010) have noted the challenges of developing a typology of these types of movements and groups. In response to this challenge, they presented an overarching term of “rightist,” which includes a broad range of groups, such as the KKK, Neo-Nazis, the Tea Party, and anti-Muslim groups. They then suggest two sub-groups: “right-wing,” or “movements that focus directly on race/ethnicity and/or promote violence as a primary tactic or goal,”(i.e. the KKK and Neo-Nazis) and “conservative,” or “movements that support patriotism, free enterprise capitalism, and/or a
traditional moral order and for which violence is not a frequent tactic or goal” (i.e. the Tea Party and nativist organizations) (2010:270). These two classifications are not always mutually exclusive and groups can exhibit behaviors overlapping both categories. However, these two “ideal types” provide a consistent way in which to discuss these mobilizations.

Despite the tendency to view these conservative movements that focus on the protection of “traditional” and “American” values as less discriminatory than right-wing movements, Blee and Yates (2015) have argued that race and discrimination, implicitly or explicitly, likely play a role in these conservative movements. While open racism is still largely stigmatized, Blee and Yates have hypothesized that most conservative movements are hypothesized to engage in a sort of “color-blindness.” This would consist of an effort to “reinforce members’ associations of crime, poverty, and social dysfunction with racial minorities” via coded language of discrimination, rather than explicitly racialized language (2015:129).

One conservative movement that may engage in such “color-blindness” is the Tea Party. Recently, the Tea Party and its platform of fiscal conservatism has become an increasing point of interest in social movements research (Blee and Creasap 2010; Blee and Yates 2015; Hochschild 2016; McVeigh et al. 2014; Skocpol and Williamson 2012). Some scholars have connected the recent decrease in the number of nativist organizations with the rise of the Tea Party, an organization which may have allowed individuals to channel anti-immigrant sentiments into a “conservative” movement and cause (Skocpol and Williamson 2012). This is echoed in Hochschild’s (2016) finding that Louisiana Tea Party supporters tended to view refugees and immigrants as getting more than their fair share and as cutting ahead of native-born Americans who felt cheated of certain privileges to which they felt entitled. Other studies have found that
nativist groups and Tea Party organizations tend to emerge in similar (i.e. more affluent) contexts (McVeigh et al. 2014; Ward 2016), suggesting overlap between the two groups’ constituencies.

The extent to which “color evasion” (Frankenberg 1993) or “color blindness” (Bonilla-Silva 2014) is practiced by conservative movements such as the Tea Party is noted by Blee and Yates as a productive area for future research. Thus, while conservative movements may not explicitly call for racial violence, racialized and discriminatory undertones may be prevalent in their rhetoric and discourse. An examination of frame amplification strategies allows for an understanding of the extent to which the discourses of a group such as the AFTF engage in “color-blind” discrimination, as well as if the AFTF is actually a “conservative” SMO.

IV. Rural Sociology and Conflicts in New, Rural Immigrant Destinations

In this section, I provide an overview of empirical, rural sociological research related to economic restructuring and resulting shifts in immigration patterns to rural areas. I then discuss specific examples of ethnic conflicts in these “new” immigration destinations. These empirical insights provide a useful complement to the highly theoretical social movements literature, and provide close parallels to the demographic change and conflict occurring in Anytown, SD.

A. Empirical Findings

Since the 1970s, meatpacking plants have been increasingly relocating to rural areas, particularly in the Midwest, from their previous, more urban locations. This geographical shift has coincided with a decline in meatpackers’ cooperation with labor unions and a dramatic slashing of worker wages, instigating a demand for low-wage, unskilled labor. As a result, meatpackers heavily recruit in immigrant and refugee communities, as the type of work and low wages are considered largely unappealing to the local labor force, and refugees and immigrants
provide a low-wage, expendable alternative to local workers (Broadway 2007). These industrial relocation and labor recruitment strategies have sparked a recent ethnic diversification and “ethnic restructuring” of rural America, as immigrants and refugees move to these rural places to fill these jobs (Barcus and Simmons 2013). Some studies have suggested that meatpacking facilities are the chief employer of foreign-born residents in nonmetropolitan immigrant destinations, with almost half of these plants’ employees being foreign-born (Broadway 2007).

These shifts in the labor market have created a new immigration frontier and created new stages for ethnic competition and conflict. While other fields, such as public policy, have begun noting and documenting these changes in recent years (Miraftab 2016), rural sociology has spent more than a decade carefully following these trends of economic restructuring, the rise of rural immigration, and community responses, primarily in the form of community case studies.

While these industrial restructuring trends may create employment and opportunity for immigrants, employment in a low-wage meatpacking facility may not be long-term beneficial to the rural immigrant communities. These jobs are often dirty, extremely dangerous, physically degrading, and lack opportunities for upward mobility and promotion (Donato et al. 2007; Stanley 1992). However, some researchers have suggested that these economic and demographic shifts may be able to revive declining rural areas suffering from outmigration and disinvestment (Barcus and Simmons 2013; Dalla 2005).

In recent years, meatpackers, particularly in the United States, have again shifted their labor recruitment practices, creating not only an ethnic diversity in rural areas, but also a religious and racial diversity. In the past few decades, the U.S. meatpacking industry relied largely upon Latino immigrants (Broadway 2007). However, more recently, meatpackers have
been largely hiring Somali refugees and immigrants. In some instances, this decision has been a precaution, and in others, it has been the direct result of ICE raids of meatpacking facilities where undocumented, Latino immigrants were employed (Semple 2008). This recruitment of Somali workers has resulted in a religious diversification in rural areas, as well (Harlan 2016).

While limited in number, a few studies have examined the role religious differences play in these new rural destinations. Immigrant or refugee in-migrants who practiced the dominant religion of an area (i.e. Christianity) have been found to have a better chance of integrating into an extant Christian community. This allowed them to receive social support and easier access to resources and social connections. Muslim in-migrants, on the other hand, experienced more social exclusion due to a lack of a religious social network and the support it provides (Allen 2010; Shandy and Fennelly 2006).

Racial or ethnic differences, however, have been commonly analyzed in this body of research and have been found to be the sources of conflict and discrimination. Flora et al. (2000) found two ideologically distinct groups in the white community in a Midwestern meatpacking town experiencing Latino immigration. The two groups that emerged, the “Pluralists” and the “Legalists,” had fundamentally different valuations of the newcomers to their community. Each group prioritized either diversity and tolerance, or homogeneity and assimilation, respectively. Thus, each of these ideological orientations produced a different narrative regarding their ideal community, seeing immigrants as either contributors or detractors to that vision and causing conflict among the white population as well. In a California town, the dominant (and white) community narrative shaped social expectations for both immigrants and long-term Hispanic residents, with behaviors such as flying the Mexican flag and speaking Spanish at Anglo-
dominated city meetings being unofficially prohibited (Chávez 2005). Also, immigrants were often perceived as being bearers of crime and drugs, or irresponsible and uncooperative because of their low participation in predominantly white community events, events from which they feel informally excluded (Chávez 2005; Flora et al. 2000).

In other studies, findings have suggested that class plays a role in anti-immigrant attitudes in these new destination communities. One study of a rural meatpacking town in Minnesota found that the working-class whites who lived and worked in closest proximity to immigrants and refugees expressed the most prejudiced opinions, considering newcomers to be a pollution of the formerly pristine, ethnically homogenous community. In contrast, local officials were more affirming of diversity (Fennelly 2008). However, in a survey of Iowa and Maryland high school students, students from more established, wealthy families tended to be most strongly anti-immigrant. In contrast, lower income students who were less connected to the community and lived in closer proximity to immigrants were more accepting (Gimpel and Lay 2008).

Discrimination aside, rural communities can also face sincere logistical challenges to properly integrating newcomers, as these communities’ neglected infrastructure and population loss may prevent them from meeting the needs of not only new immigrants, but also the native population (Crowley and Ebert 2014; Donato et al. 2007). However, the economic stresses of a community due to immigration can be exaggerated or posed in a way that is discriminatory. In the case of Lewiston, Maine, the mayor publicly requested that the local Somali community communicate with other Somali communities across the U.S. and ask them to stop moving to Lewiston. According to the mayor, Lewiston was emotionally and economically exhausted by its Somali population. As American citizens, Somali immigrants have the legal right to move where
they choose and as refugees, Somali refugees in Lewiston are supported with federal funds, factors which may make the mayor’s request less about economics and more about thinly-veiled discrimination (Rabrenovic 2007).

To summarize, in most of these studies, predominantly white, rural communities have been most concerned with symbolic or cultural threats represented by demographic change, rather than economic competition. While some of these nativist attitudes are may be more explicit in working-class individuals, the specific grievances noted are not tied to economic competition or job loss, but rather the threat of cultural heterogeneity, growth in minority population share, and lack of immigrant assimilation.

B. Limitations

While rural sociology has taken important steps toward understanding demographic change and ethnic conflicts in rural areas, there are still gaps in the literature. These studies mostly gravitate toward an individual or community level unit of analysis, focusing on discriminatory individual attitudes or decreased social capital of immigrants and refugees. While these are crucial insights, these studies have not examined examples of collective action, such as hate groups, that form in response to these demographic changes, a gap noted by Lichter and Brown (2011). Also, most research focuses on the receptions of Hispanic and Latino populations, who tend to be Christians. Considering the growing rural Somali population, a greater focus on religious differences or Islam in rural places is increasingly necessary. Also, immigrants and refugees are discussed in a relatively undifferentiated manner. “Immigrant” and “refugee” are distinct statuses, and both immigrants and refugees may face distinct types of stigmatization in the current political climate.
V. An Integrated, Synthetic Approach

In light of the previous review of the ethnic competition, framing, and rural sociological literatures, I will now describe the ways in which I use the key concepts from each of those bodies of literature to inform my approach to the AFTF.

As articulated previously, the ethnic competition and racial threat theories have important contributions for the current case. Ethnic competition theory in particular, provides three broad axes through which to analyze ethnic competition and rightist mobilization: economic, political, and cultural competition. However, in order to answer more micro-level questions, such as how a group, such as the AFTF, justifies a discriminatory mobilization, the ethnic competition theory needs to be used together with the framing approach. This analysis of frame amplification strategies of the AFTF highlights the key values and arguments used to justify an anti-Muslim mobilization. After discerning the AFTF’s frame amplification strategy and the larger narrative it has created through frame articulation, these results can then be interpreted in light of the three main axes of the ethnic competition theory: economic, political, and cultural competition.

Thus, through a framing analysis, ethnic competition theory can be tested and used to generalize the findings from the case of the AFTF. Previous social movements, right-wing, and rural sociological community studies provide key empirical insights into the types of values, conflicts, and discourses that may be expected in the context of Anytown and the AFTF. While ethnic competition theory, rightist SMO research, and rural sociological research do not directly address anti-Muslim activism, the collective insights from these bodies of work provide a rich pool of empirics and theory from which to generate research questions, hypotheses, and expected relationships for the current case of the AFTF, which are outlined below.
VI. Research Questions

The two core research questions that I address in this thesis are listed below, along with subsidiary questions:

1) What are the AFTF’s main points of frame amplification? In other words, how does the AFTF justify its mobilization?
   a. To what extent are these concerns related to economic, political, and/or cultural conflicts?
   b. To what extent does the AFTF fit into the model of a “right-wing” or “conservative” group?
      i. To what extent does the AFTF engage in “color-blind” discrimination?

Based on the previous review of literature and theory, as well as their own mission statement,\textsuperscript{12} the AFTF is expected to espouse an amalgam of economic and cultural concerns, with economic concerns hypothesized to not be related to employment competition (Astor 2016; Blee 1996; Stewart et al. 2015). Considering the public, open nature of the AFTF meetings, as well as meetings’ high attendance rates and the AFTF’s sizeable following on their public Facebook page, the AFTF is expected to fit the model of the “conservative” SMO. Thus, the AFTF is expected to engage in more coded discrimination and attempt to frame themselves as espousing traditional values, rather than clearly advocating for violence and racial goals (Blee and Yates 2015). However, due to the broader normalizing of Islamophobia in political and media discourse discussed in Chapter 1 (Bail 2015; Bridge Initiative Team 2015), as well as the

\textsuperscript{12} “Providing educational forums and sharing of ideas to ensure the safety, economic future, and protect the constitutional freedoms of our community.”
institutional affirmation of Islamophobia in the United States (Davis 2017; Specia 2017), the AFTF may exhibit some clear examples of discrimination. Also, based upon the language of their mission statement, the AFTF is hypothesized to amplify fundamental, pro-social values to attempt to mitigate the stigmatization of their anti-Muslim message and hate group label (Benford and Snow 2000).

2) Of the AFTF’s main points of frame amplification, which (if any) resonate with the meeting attendees and commenters on their Facebook page? Do the AFTF and those who attend their meetings and visit their Facebook page have divergent or convergent concerns?

Based on previous qualitative research in similar meatpacking and refugee/immigrant destination sites, local individual concerns are considered to center around symbolic and/or ideological concerns, such as assimilation, crime, and the danger of cultural heterogeneity (Chávez 2005; Fennelly 2008; Flora et al. 2000).
Chapter 3. Data and Methods

I. Chapter Overview

In this chapter, I outline and describe the data and methods I utilized in my analysis. In Part I, I describe the data sources and collection strategies I utilized. In Part II, I describe the methods of my analysis.

II. Data Sources and Collection

The data collection strategies for this study relied primarily on publicly available data. Due to time and funding constraints of a Master’s thesis project, as well as possible physical risks associated with direct participation in meetings of right-wing groups, publicly available data sources were used to answer the research questions. This is standard practice in qualitative research regarding right-wing groups, which relies upon public data sources such as webpage material, newspaper reports, or meeting transcripts (Blee and Creasap 2010). In the case of this thesis, there were two key sources of public information: video recordings of meetings posted on YouTube.com and the content of the AFTF’s Facebook page, including posts made by the AFTF and individual user comments. Each source of data will be discussed discretely below.

In the case of the AFTF and other primarily online SMOs, the roles of “leader” and “supporter” or “member” or SMO “participation” are not clearly defined (Bennett and Segerberg 2012; Earl 2007). In more traditional hate groups, such as the KKK, the group often has a physical address, a membership list, and holds private meetings. However, the AFTF does not have a physical address and or a membership roll beyond its list of followers on Facebook. Thus, because of the relatively unstructured nature of the AFTF, which is increasingly typical of the contemporary right-wing landscape (Blee 2017), attempting to conduct interviews with
“members” or “supporters” of the group, when such structured forms of support and participation don’t necessarily exist, becomes complicated.

A. Videos of Public Meetings

One key source of data for my analysis consists of the video recordings of seven of the nine AFTF meetings held between August 2016 and August 2017. These meetings were recorded and posted publicly on YouTube.com. Only seven of the nine meetings held by the AFTF between these dates were recorded and thus accessible online. Due to the densely networked nature of the broader anti-Muslim movement, of which the AFTF is part, the speakers at meetings not recorded still had their ideas cited and discussed by the speakers in the meetings which were recorded. Thus, while the data analyzed for this thesis do not represent a full sampling of the meetings, I am confident that the meetings sampled are representative of the AFTF’s broader messaging and framing strategies, particularly when the content of meetings is triangulated with an exhaustive analysis of the posts from the AFTF’s Facebook page.

Also, an eighth video was viewed and transcribed. This video was the recording of a public townhall meeting held by Lutheran Social Services (LSS) in Anytown in October 2016. The meeting was intended to gauge public opinion regarding refugee resettlement in Anytown and to address concerns of local residents. The audience questions and comments from this specific meeting were coded and analyzed as a complement to the community member comments in the AFTF meetings, as this LSS meeting is a more neutral, non-hate group meeting setting.13

13 However, it would be fallacious to assume that the LSS meeting was unaffected by the AFTF. Not only was the AFTF activity highly visible at the time of the LSS meeting, but in an AFTF public meeting two days before the LSS meeting, the speaker was advertising the LSS meeting and providing the attendees with tips and sample
The AFTF meetings were organized as a public presentation by one or more speakers, followed by audience questions and comments. Meetings usually featured several speakers who engaged with local audience members. Each meeting was approximately three hours long and was attended by between one to three hundred individuals (Grandstand 2016a). While AFTF leaders presumably organize the meetings, choose the speakers, and approve the speakers’ topics, the leaders of the AFTF never self-identify in the meetings, allowing the speaker(s) to act as the meeting emcee. In most cases, the meetings consist of a structured presentation by the invited speaker(s), followed by roughly an hour of audience comments and discussion. In and of itself, this intensive use of outside speakers by the AFTF is noteworthy. While beyond the scope of this thesis, this may represent a type of coping mechanism for a lack of local expertise, networking opportunities, or institutional support of the AFTF, more in keeping with social movement scholarship’s resource mobilization (McCarthy and Zald 1977) or political opportunity perspectives (Keck and Sikkink 1998; McAdam 1982). This reliance on outside information is replicated on the AFTF Facebook page, which mostly re-shares other organizations’ materials, interspersed with local news reports and narratives. Thus, the narrative and framing strategy created by the AFTF is the result of their synthesis of online materials from other organizations and the information provided by invited speakers.

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14 Speakers in these meetings range from reportedly “self-educated experts” on refugee resettlement, Anytown residents, residents of other regional meatpacking towns, “ethnic experts” (i.e. Arab Christians or former Arab Muslims who converted to Christianity. See Bail 2015), self-identified former CIA and FBI agents, researchers employed by conservative think tanks in Washington D.C., and a Senator who is a member of the South Dakota state legislature. Most speakers were not Anytown residents.
A number of steps were taken to prepare each video for analysis. First, each video was viewed once, with notes being taken on audience and speaker dynamics and the general meeting atmosphere. Next, each video was viewed two more times in order to transcribe it in full and to correct any transcription errors. In the entire transcription and analysis process, each video was viewed a minimum of three times. Also, the speakers and many audience members self-identify themselves in meeting videos. Despite the publicly available nature of the videos, all personal identifiers of speakers and audience members were removed to protect individual privacy.

B. AFTF Facebook Data

While the videos of AFTF public meetings provided clear examples of the organization’s discourse and mobilization strategies, public meetings were not the only means by which the AFTF attempted to engage the broader “Anytown community.” The AFTF was most active through its public Facebook page. Through this platform, the organization posted public statements, exchanged ideas, dialogued with supporters and opponents, and posted news articles and other anti-Muslim materials. Increased participation due to the online or social media connections of an SMO is well-attested in the online social movements literature (Bimber, Flanagin, and Stohl 2005; Earl 2015, 2016; Tufekci and Wilson 2012). Thus, the Facebook content provides a useful source of data for understanding in more depth the AFTF’s framing strategies and individual concerns beyond those expressed in public meetings.

A content analysis of the AFTF’s Facebook page provided a way to access the discourse and anti-Muslim sentiments of a large sample of individuals and the AFTF without conducting surveys or interviews. These types of website and social media content analyses, particularly for right-wing organizations, are increasingly being used for research (Caren, Jowers, and Gaby
2012; McNamee, Peterson, and Peña 2010; Wojcieszak 2010). For this thesis, all AFTF posts (n=454) from August 8, 2016 through December 22, 2017 were analyzed. Also analyzed were all public comments (n=1370) posted by individual Facebook users who interacted with the AFTF page. A total of 609 unique individual users posted comments on the AFTF Facebook page. While the names of all Facebook commenters were visible on the public AFTF page, in order to safeguard the privacy of these users, all personal identifiers were removed in the discussions in this thesis.

III. Methods

This study is an instrumental, single-case study that illustrates the framing strategies of a grassroots, anti-Muslim group. This case was chosen through a purposeful sampling approach, as it illustrates the intersection of shifting rural immigration patterns, demographic change, and right-wing mobilization (Creswell 2013). A case study approach is appropriate for this study, given the focus on explicit “how” and implicit “why” questions related to the AFTF’s mobilization. As Yin (2009) notes, case studies are especially useful for these types of questions.

In order to systematically analyze the data and answer the two research questions, a two-cycle coding method was applied to both the meeting transcript and Facebook content data. First, these data were imported into the NVivo qualitative data analysis software. In the analysis stage, the data were analyzed separately as four distinct sources: 1) Transcribed Speaker Data, 2) AFTF Facebook posts, 3) Transcribed audience comments, and 4) Individual Comments on the AFTF Facebook page. Data types 1 and 2 were used to answer the first research question, and types 3 and 4 were used to answer the second research question. The two research questions for this thesis and the types of data used to answer both questions are summarized in Table 1 below:
A two-cycle coding method was used to analyze each type of data. Concept coding was used as the first-cycle coding method (Saldana 2009). Concept coding is a coding method used to build upon theory and to illuminate more abstract ideas (i.e. concepts) within data. This method allows specific pieces of data to speak to broader social trends and constructs. In a concept coding analysis, larger portions of data are coded as “…a word or short phrase that symbolically represents a suggested meaning broader than a single item or action – a ‘bigger picture’ beyond the tangible and apparent” (Saldana 2009:119). In this particular study, my research questions were related to frame amplification. Thus, the data were coded, during the “first-cycle,” with “concepts” in NVivo. The use of concept coding made it possible to discern more abstract values and concepts underlying both the AFTF’s framing strategies and the points of resonance with Facebook commenters and meeting attendees.

The first-cycle coding method serves primarily as a way of assigning meanings to portions of the data. However, second-cycle coding involves a more synthetic engagement with the first-cycle codes and the data. The method used for the second-cycle coding was pattern coding (Saldana 2009). Pattern codes are a sort of “meta-code” and functions as “a way of
grouping those summaries [i.e. first-cycle codes] into a smaller number of categories, themes, or concepts” (Saldana 2009:236). Thus, in the second-cycle coding phase of analysis, the first-cycle concept codes were synthesized into thematic categories, based on their conceptual similarity, essentially “coding” the original concept codes into overarching themes. This two-cycle coding strategy was applied separately to each of the four sources of data summarized in Table 1. This resulted in each of the data sources having slightly different coding structures. This was done to allow nuances in each data source to be highlighted, rather than being constrained by the codes developed from a different data type. Despite this extra step, the concept and pattern codes for all the data sources were remarkably similar. While the concept codes for each data type varied slightly, the overarching themes and narratives that emerged from them were essentially the same. The three key themes that emerged from the pattern coding analysis were: “Muslim Incompatibility,” “Institutional Failure,” and “Citizen Mobilization.”

A. Analysis of Meeting Transcripts

For my analysis, I imported the transcript data into NVivo and utilized the two-cycle coding method described above. The speaker content was coded separately from the audience content, to allow the nuances of each of the data sources to emerge. In this way, the concept and pattern codes that emerged from the speaker content were not directly used to analyze the audience member content and vice versa. Rather, each data type was allowed to speak for itself, with a unique set of concept codes being developed specifically for each data type and its nuances. However, there was significant overlap between the speaker and audience member comments, resulting in the ability to discuss them under the same three thematic pattern codes.
In the case of the speaker content, the first-cycle coding yielded 94 unique concept codes. The concepts discussed in Chapter 4 were chosen for discussion based upon how often their related concept codes appeared in the data (frequency count), as well as how many transcripts in which they appeared. Non-verbal factors, such as loud, sustained audience applause and cheering (represented in the transcripts) were also taken into consideration when determining which concepts were important and needed to be discussed. A summary of the key concept codes, frequency counts, and pattern codes (i.e. themes) for the speaker portions of the transcripts is summarized in Table 2 below, with frequency counts in parentheses.

Table 2: Speaker Concept Codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Key Concept Codes (10+ attestations in 2+ transcripts)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Muslim Incompatibility</td>
<td>Islam as Inherently Violent (12); Islam as Illogical (12); Muslim Dishonesty (12); Muslims in Power (12); Refugees as Invaders (13); Islam as political (14); Furtive Communism (15); Muslims as Victims of Islam (18); Islam as Cruel (21); Islam as Unconstitutional (28); Muslims as Terrorists (32); Muslim Brutality (35); Red-Green Axis (52)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional Failure</td>
<td>Treason (10); Obama Favors Muslims (11); NGOs as Power Brokers (11); Civil Society Complicity (12); Refugees as Exploiters (14); Abuse of Power (18); Refugee Resettlement as Business (18); Democrat Lawlessness (22); Christian Complicity (26); Media Bias (31)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizen Mobilization</td>
<td>Persecution of Anti-Muslim Activists (13); Assimilation (16); Persecution of Christians (18); Awareness (18); Threat to White/Christian Children (24); Education (36); Activism (52)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When coding all data for this project, “refugee” and “Muslim” were coded distinctly, although the AFTF and their supporters conflated the two terms, with “refugee” and “Muslim” often being used interchangeably. However, for the sake of disentangling nuances in the data, the researcher made an effort to code explicit references to “refugee” and “Muslim” distinctly. However, in analyzing the data, the two terms were used interchangeably by the AFTF and meeting attendees. Thus, there is no clear distinction between “Muslim” and “refugee” made by the author in the analysis and discussion.
Table 3 illustrates the various credentials and organizational affiliations of the speakers at meetings. Emcees and individuals introducing the central speakers at meetings were also included in Table 3, as they were active participants in meetings and when organizationally affiliated, lent their organizational support to the AFTF’s mission in Anytown.

Table 3: Summary of Invited Speakers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker Type (Organizational Affiliation in Parentheses)</th>
<th>Number of Speaker(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Self-educated refugee resettlement expert” (none)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resident of MN meatpacking town (none)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinic worker in Minneapolis clinic (none)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anytown Residents (none)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Organization (The Straight Way of Grace Ministry, Truth in Love Project Ministry, Watchmen on the Wall [Family Research Council])</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy Analyst (Center for Security Policy)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author/Activist (none)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Senator (SD State Legislature)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The audience comments from the public meeting transcripts were analyzed using the same methods described above. The first-cycle concept coding yielded 48 unique concept codes. The same overarching themes were present in this data as well, but the concept codes were slightly different from those developed from the analysis of the speaker data. Because there was a smaller sample size of audience comments, the threshold of significance was lowered from ten or more attestations to eight or more attestations for this data only. The themes and key concept codes, with frequency counts, are summarized in Table 4 below.
Table 4: Audience Concept Codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Codes (Attested 8+ times)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Muslim Incompatibility (78)</td>
<td>Refugees as Exploiters of Social Safety Net (9); Muslims as Terrorists (11); Lack of assimilation (11); Refugee crime (15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional Failure (104)</td>
<td>Media Bias (8); Education (10); Christian Persecution (11); Political Incompetence (13); Christian Complicity (25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizen Mobilization (26)</td>
<td>Lack of Citizen Agency (9)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

B. Analysis of Facebook Content

In order to analyze the AFTF’s public Facebook page, NVivo’s NCapture tool was used to import all posts and comments from the page into the NVivo software. The Facebook data was also analyzed using the two-cycle coding method described previously. The posts made by the AFTF were coded separately from the individual user comments, to allow the nuances of each of the data sources to come forward. While the individual comments consisted of only text, they were relatively easily analyzed. However, the format of the AFTF posts posed more of a challenge.

While an invaluable source of data, the format of the AFTF Facebook posts required a creative use of NVivo for analysis. While some of the AFTF’s organizational posts would be prose statements of a paragraph or more that were easily coded, these posts were the minority. Most posts were reSHARES of news articles or other pages related to anti-Muslim activism. In many cases, these shared links would be captioned with a sentence or two or nothing at all. In these cases, the caption would be coded. However, if no caption was present, I would open the links that were shared and code the AFTF Facebook post in NVivo according to the title of the shared webpage or news article. In other situations, the shared item would not be a link or prose
statement, but rather a meme. In these cases, the images would be coded based on the text and/or image(s) comprising the meme. The first-cycle coding analysis resulted in 46 concept codes. The breakdown of the types of AFTF posts, sources of these shared posts, and key codes with frequency counts in parentheses are summarized below in Tables 5-7, respectively. As can be seen in Table 5, most of the AFTF’s posts were re-shared links, photos, or videos. Also, as can be seen in Table 6, the sources of these materials are highly partisan news sites, such as Breitbart.com and WorldNetDaily, as well as well-known anti-Muslim hate groups, such as Refugee Resettlement Watch, the Clarion Project, and ACT for America.

Table 5: Typology of AFTF Facebook Posts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of AFTF FB Post</th>
<th>Number of posts (total = 454)</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Events</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Advertisement for public meetings, posted videos of speakers, AFTF logos, fundraising posts, general outreach.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Links</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>Links to news articles, thought pieces, and other written materials or websites of other groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photos</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>Memes, photos.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Original prose statements by the AFTF with no attached media.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Videos</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>Shared videos from other groups.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6: Sources of AFTF's Shared Facebook Content

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Top Sources of Shared Content</th>
<th>Number of Times Shared by the AFTF</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mike Cernovich, Understanding the Threat</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACT for America, CreepingSharia.wordpress.com</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PragerU</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PamelaGeller.com</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarion Project</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fox News, Secure America Now</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JihadWatch.org</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6 continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>News Source</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Refugee Resettlement Watch</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WorldNetDaily (WND)</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breitbart News</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7: AFTF Facebook Post Concept Codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Codes (attested 10+ times)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Institutional Failure (118)</td>
<td>Refugee Resettlement as Fiscal Burden (11); Political Incompetence (11); Media Bias (20); Liberal irrationality (22); Muslim Favoritism (25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim Incompatibility (252)</td>
<td>Cultural Inferiority (11); Muslim Brotherhood (15); Muslim Brutality (18); Muslim Intolerance (18); Refugees as Social Disorder (22); Muslims as Sexual Predators (23); Truth not hate (26); All Muslims are Radical Muslims (30); Islam as Inherently Violent (35); Islamization (59)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizen Mobilization (48)</td>
<td>Citizen Activism (23)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the most part, Facebook comments made by individual users were more straightforward to analyze, as they consisted of text, rather than images and media. The first-cycle analysis of the individual Facebook comments yielded 48 unique concept codes. The key concept codes with frequency counts are summarized in Table 8 below. Of note is the significant number of comments critiquing the AFTF and its supporters. While this fourth thematic category does not directly relate to the research questions for this thesis and will not be discussed in depth, it is an interesting component of the data.

Table 8: Facebook Comment Concept Codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes (FB Commenters)</th>
<th>Codes (Attested 10+ times)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Muslim Incompatibility (218)</td>
<td>Muslim Brutality (11); Muslims as Sexual Predators (14); Muslim Intolerance (15); Islam as Inherently Violent (23); Refugees bring social disorganization (37); Islamization (52); Cultural inferiority (53)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 8 continued

| Institutional Failure (235) | Correct Immigration (10); Refugees as Fiscal Burden (13); Refugee Resettlement as Business (15); Political Incompetence (36); Media Bias (37); Liberal Irrationality (38); Muslim Favoritism (58) |
| Citizen Mobilization (143) | Violence Against Muslims (26); Citizen Activism (31); Defending Anti-Muslim Activism (39); Deport All Muslims (39) |
| Pushback against AFTF (150) | Peaceful Muslims (15); Affirming Diversity (16); Fact-checking (21); AFTF Divisiveness (36); Misframing (61) |

While the concept and pattern codes tracked relatively closely across all data sources, there was markedly more push-back against the AFTF in the Facebook comments than in any of the public meetings. As has been noted in research on online activism, this increased push-back on social media may be due to the ability to avoid face-to-face engagement and confrontation. Social media and online platforms significantly decrease both the economic, time, and emotional costs otherwise necessary for participating in or challenging an SMO’s agenda. Thus, online engagement lessens the risks associated with offline confrontations or participation (Bimber et al. 2005; Earl 2016). The tension and risk involved in confronting the AFTF and its supporters in an offline meeting context are visible in the loud, almost violent verbal altercations that took place in early meetings (Grandstand 2016c). Another observation to be made from the comparison of the Facebook and speaker data is that the AFTF, despite sharing from a wide range of online sources, has a highly targeted and honed message and set of values they amplify and threats they emphasize repeatedly. The AFTF, when in direct control of their messaging on Facebook, rather than secondarily through their invited speakers, has a quite succinct and consistent message that does not engage the same breadth of themes and ideas as the invited speakers.
Chapter 4. Results and Analysis

I. Chapter Overview

In this chapter, I will discuss the findings related to both of my central research questions: 1) What are the AFTF’s main points of frame amplification? 2) What are the main points of frame resonance with Facebook commenters and meeting attendees? In Part II of this chapter, I discuss the findings related to the first research question. In Part III, I present the findings related to the second research question. In the discussions of both research questions, I discuss the findings from the public meeting transcripts and Facebook content analyses separately, to allow the nuances of each type of data to be highlighted. In each discussion, I discuss the findings in light of the broader themes that emerged relatively uniformly across all forms of data: Muslim Incompatibility, Institutional Failure, and Citizen Mobilization. While this borders on redundancy at times, it allows for a more in-depth exploration of the nuances of each data source and reinforces the patterns found in the data. To help guide each discussion, I begin each discussion with a review the most frequently attested concept codes and provide a brief overview of how the narrative of each theme is constructed in each data source in light of these codes.

II. Research Question #1

In order to answer this question, repeated above, seven transcribed meetings and 454 AFTF Facebook posts were coded and analyzed in the NVivo qualitative data analysis software using a two-cycle coding method. Both types of data (i.e. meeting transcripts and Facebook content) will be discussed distinctly in this section. These data were analyzed using a concept coding method to expose the key values being cited by the AFTF as justifications for this anti-Muslim mobilization. This analysis also allowed me to determine if those cited values address
economic, political, or cultural concerns, which are the fundamental causes of ethnic conflict predicted by ethnic competition theoretical perspectives.

Three major themes emerged from the second-cycle, pattern coding analysis of both the transcript and Facebook data: 1) Muslim Incompatibility, 2) Institutional Failure, and 3) Citizen Mobilization. These three themes are indicative of the AFTF’s frame articulation strategy, through which slices of reality, news, and veiled religious discrimination are blended to create an overarching, tripartite narrative. This framing narrative identifies local and national problems (Muslim Incompatibility), the culprits responsible (Institutional Failure), and solutions (Citizen Mobilization). Overall, I found that political and cultural (not economic or employment) competition are the core concerns of the AFTF. Thus, values such as political participation, religious freedom, assimilation, and the protection of the Constitution are amplified by the AFTF and cited as pro-social justifications for anti-Muslim activism. In this way, both the speakers invited by the AFTF to lead public meetings and the AFTF itself (through Facebook posts) amplify these fundamental values and frame themselves as guardians of Constitutional freedom rather than perpetuators of hate and discrimination.

In what follows, I first review the most salient excerpts from the transcribed speaker discourse from the public AFTF meetings. This is followed by my analysis of the AFTF’s Facebook posts. These two sources of data are most relevant for answering the first research question: What are the main points of the AFTF’s frame amplification? Finally, I present a synthesis of my findings for the first research question, in which I relate my findings to relevant literature, which was reviewed in Chapter 2.
A. Findings from Public Meeting Transcript Analysis

In the discussion that follows, I outline, describe, and discuss each of the three key themes that emerged from the NVivo analysis of the AFTF public meeting transcripts (n=7). These three themes are: Muslim Incompatibility, Institutional Failure, and Citizen Mobilization. The following discussion only analyzes the discourse of the speakers at the AFTF public meetings. Audience comments at the meetings will be discussed later in this chapter, in the discussion of research question #2. The following discussion of speaker discourse includes key quotes from the transcripts, all of which are presented verbatim, including grammatical errors. Arabic terms are represented in italics.

1. Muslim Incompatibility

One fundamental argument made by the invited speakers at the AFTF public meetings was that Islam and, by extension, all practicing Muslims, were inherently incompatible with “American values and culture.” As a result, the speakers argued that all Muslim refugees and immigrants should be viewed with suspicion and be denied admission to the United States. Here, the main values being amplified are “traditional” American values, such as constitutional freedoms, personal safety, individual rights, and patriotism. The key concept codes and their frequency counts for this theme are summarized below in Table 9.

Table 9: Speakers - Muslim Incompatibility

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Concept Codes (10+ attestations in 2+ transcripts)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Islam as Inherently Violent (12); Islam as Illogical (12); Muslim Dishonesty (12); Muslims in Power (12); Refugees as Invaders (13); Islam as political (14); Furtive Communism (15); Muslims as Victims of Islam (18); Islam as Cruel (21); Islam as Unconstitutional (28); Muslims as Terrorists (32); Muslim Brutality (35); Red-Green Axis (52)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
These narratives of Muslim incompatibility were highly complex and nuanced. As can be seen in the most prevalent codes, listed in Table 9, the invited speakers are primarily concerned with ideological elements of Islam. Islam was presented by these speakers as a belief system that is not only rife with internal contradictions but also inherently violent and cruel. Thus, the speakers argued, any “true” follower of such an ideology must, by default, also be cruel and violent. These arguments often involved a selective citation of verses from the Qur’an that were interpreted to mandate Muslims to engage in terrorism, murder, rape, deceit, and violence. Practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM) and stoning were often cited by the speakers as a normative part of Muslim religious observance. Thus, Muslims were cast as both victims and perpetrators of a violent religion. There was also a not-so-subtle argument about the cultural inferiority of Muslims and Islam woven into these discussions, as Islam and its adherents were described in terms that casts them as backward, barbaric, and dangerous.

Also, Islam was described as more of a political system than a religious system by these speakers. The speakers argued that Islam is not merely a set of personal, religious beliefs, but also contains a mandate for theocracy, i.e. to develop and enforce political laws based on Islam and the Qur’an. Islam, they argued, mandates that all Muslims must work to overthrow non-Muslim governments and implement Islamic law. The speakers concluded that these “political” and theocratic designs disqualified Islam and Muslims from protection under the First Amendment. Thus, Islam was framed as a subversive and treasonous political ideology that poses a direct threat to the Constitution and the United States.\(^\text{16}\) Thus, the speakers expressed an inherent distrust of all Muslims in positions of power, as well as Muslim refugees and

\(^{16}\) This concept is discussed by speakers and the broader anti-Muslim movement as the “Enemy Threat Doctrine.”
immigrants, as these individuals were considered part of an explicit Muslim plot to dismantle the United States government and install Islamic Law in place of the Constitution. This Islamic plot was found by the speakers to be paralleled or supported by an organized Communist effort to overthrow the United States government. This perceived partnership between Muslim and Communist interests to subvert the U.S. Constitution was referred to as the “Red-Green Axis,” and will be discussed in more length below. Thus, the perceived incompatibility of Muslims with “American culture,” was rooted in political and ideological conflicts.

Complete and total assimilation was repeatedly championed as a solution to this perceived incompatibility. However, no speaker clearly articulated what a satisfactory level of assimilation should look like. Implicitly, it seemed to require a wholesale repudiation of Islam and perhaps conversion to Christianity. As one speaker stated: “So why not we minister to the 10 million who we got right now and lead them to Christ, and after we got rid of all those who are in America…all of them became a Christian, we bring another 10 million?” (AFTF meeting, October 20, 2016).

The mildest arguments (relatively speaking) for Muslim incompatibility were expressed through assertions of refugee cultural inferiority (especially a lack of personal hygiene) or lack of human capital. These assertions were connected to refugees’ origins in less-developed, Muslim majority nations. As part of this cultural inferiority argument, Islam was portrayed as an inherently cruel, intolerant, and violent religion, painting Muslims as undesirable, dangerous, and backward. The speakers also maintained that all practicing Muslims were, by default, extremists and terrorists. There were only two categories of people, according to the speakers: Muslims or non-Muslims. A “moderate Muslim” was considered to be a non-Qur’an-believing person who
does not qualify as a “real” Muslim. While nearly all of the speakers made this argument, a pastor and “ethnic expert”\(^{17}\) articulated it most clearly:

Now, are there moderate Muslims? Again, technically you can make the argument, there’s an individual who is a Muslim who is trying to be moderate. They don’t wanna follow the “hardcore” teachings of Islam. Okay, but here’s what you’re gonna learn. The Qur’an has a term for them. The Qur’an has a term for me. I am an apostate, right? I have left Islam. All of you in this room are unbelievers, you’re *kafir*. The term means “filth.” So the *kafir* are unbelievers. But now what happens to a Muslim who doesn’t apostate, but he’s an unbeliever—meaning, he’s questioning. The Qur’an has a term for that. They’re called hypocrites. So the Qur’an calls them hypocrites. And if they don’t repent of their hypocrisy, guess what? They become an unbeliever, which means they become an apostate, and then they can be killed. We’ll see the punishment there. So again, no—yes, technically, but there is no such thing as a moderate Islam (AFTF Meeting, August 9, 2017).

Similarly, most of the speakers cited verses of the Qur’an in order to present their arguments of Islam’s incompatibility with “Western civilization” as “truth” and rooted in “fact.” For example, all instances of radical Islamic terrorism or even petty crime committed by a Muslim were related back to verses of the Qur’an\(^{18}\) and/or stories of Mohammed. This was used as evidence that violent, criminal actions were simply the religiously motivated acts of a devout Muslim who was following the dictates of the violent ideology of Islam. At times, Allah was described as being equivalent to or “buddies” with Satan. This was demonstrated in the following call-and-response between a speaker and the audience:

Speaker: …who is Allah?

Audience: Satan!

Speaker: Come on, guys. Who’s Allah?

\(^{17}\) “Ethnic experts,” following Bail 2015, are Arab Christians or converts from Islam to Christianity who participate in the anti-Muslim movement.

\(^{18}\) In many cases, the Qur’an passages cited in the AFTF meetings were taken from translations of the original Arabic done by one of the invited speakers. The speakers considered other translations of the Qur’an too “whitewashed” (AFTF Meeting, August 9, 2017).
Audience: (louder) Satan! (AFTF Meeting, October 18, 2016)

In another case, this same speaker, an “ethnic expert” and Baptist pastor discussed Mohammed and Allah as currently burning in Hell, to the audible delight of the audience:

One of the great things what Mohammed tells the Muslim. It is lawful to lie in 3 cases. I said, “What!? It’s lawful to lie in 3 cases!? What’s goin’ on here?” Yeah! “A man to his wife, that she will be pleased. At the time of war, you lie to the enemies, because war is deception. Or to make peace between Muslim believers.” But the Bible said, “Thou shall not lie.” And also—that is obviously a 10 commandment—and also in Revelation 21:8, my favorite song.

(begins singing, with fist bumps, to tune of “Frere Jacques”)

Revelation
Revelation
Twenty-one eight
Twenty-one eight
Liars go to hell
Liars go to hell
Burn, burn, burn
Burn burn burn.

(audience laughs and applauds)

Mohammed is in hell burning, because Revelation 21:8 is true! Even his Allah will burn in Hell, because they’re both deceivers! (AFTF Meeting, October 18, 2016)

This line of reasoning casted Muslims, particularly Muslim men, as violent, dishonest devil-worshippers who commit atrocities as shows of faith and would burn in hell with Allah and Mohammed. A graphic example of this speaker’s interpretation of the teachings of Islam are shown below:

Because in Islam, it’s okay to kill children, it’s okay to kill women, it’s okay to rape women, it’s okay to rape children. Rape children in Islam? Yeah! Where do you learn that? From Mohammed himself, the prophet of Allah! Do you know why women in Islam cover themselves with hijab? It’s not because Islam is a moral religion. It is to protect themselves! From whom? From the Muslim men! Why? Because if I’m a Muslim man, 15 years, 20 years from now, at the most, and I walk outside in the streets, and I see any of you ladies without hijab, which mean you’re an infidel, and me and my buddy we can
go to capture you and take you in my car, we can rape you in the car or we can take you in my home and rape you in my home. (AFTF Meeting, October 20, 2016)

Thus, the speaker, in telling this tale, amplified the value of sexual consent, respect for women, and the protection of children from sexual abuse. However, he simultaneously presents Muslim men as being, by definition, sexual predators who violate these values due to their religious beliefs.

Additionally, Muslims were cast as illiterate, uninformed, and ignorant of the teachings of the Qur’an and Mohammed. The speakers argued that these “ignorant” Muslims were not “real” Muslims, but rather simply unaware of what their religion requires of them. This framing of Muslims as illiterate and ignorant seemed to be another version of a cultural inferiority argument. Thus, not only do Muslims follow a violent ideology, but they are too “stupid” to know better, as shown below in an excerpt from a speaker-led closing prayer:

Let’s pray. Father God, we give thanks to you. Because you love us so much...Muslims do not know these facts. Muslims do not believe in this truth. They actually believe that Jesus never died on the cross. He is not the Son of God. And that is the great deception from the bottom of Hell by Allah-Satan, who does not want to see one Muslim to get saved! Allah is the best deceiver. He wants to see all Muslims to burn in Hell with all those who already died and Mohammed. I pray, Lord Jesus, that your people here tonight will not be as stupid as the rest of the Muslims who died and those who are still alive today in the world, that we claim to be a Christian, simply because we’re just good Baptists or good Catholic or good Methodist, or some church we go to. (AFTF Meeting, October 20, 2016)

Beyond the recurring cultural themes of Muslim criminality, sexual predation, and cultural inferiority, the most complex and abstract narratives of Muslim incompatibility centered upon the perceived legal and political incompatibility of Islam’s teachings with the Constitution. This argument amplified fundamental values of freedom of religion, constitutional freedom, and patriotism while making a grave claim about the lack of rights of Muslim Americans,
immigrants, and refugees in America. In a dynamic exchange with the audience, one speaker articulated the legal incompatibility argument as follows:

Speaker: If Islam clearly teaches that you cannot leave the religion without punishment of death, then does Islam believe in freedom of religion?

Audience: No.

Speaker: No, right? Impossible, right? Therefore, can Islam be protected under the First Amendment?

Audience: No!

Speaker: No. So what do we do? What do we do? Because we have Muslim groups who are willing to sue and probably get judgments in courts today, because if we say anything about Islam or Sharia Law, or if we even dare to try to outlaw Sharia Law, they’re going to file a lawsuit, which they have many times, and the courts have agreed with them. That’s a violation of the First Amendment. We have a big problem. And every Western society has a big problem. Europe, Canada, Australia, the U.S., we have a big problem. . . This is also, not just a spiritual matter or ideology matter, it’s a legal matter. And the widely accepted teachings of Islam are antithetical to our Constitution. So I go back to what I said at the beginning. Why are we on the defensive? Why are we sitting here trying to make excuses for our Constitution? Why are we feeling guilty that we’re trying to defend our freedom and our Constitution? Let me say it this way. I believe that to be an American and come to this nation and become a citizen, is not a right. It’s a privilege.

Audience: Yes! (loud audience applause) (AFTF Meeting, August 9, 2017)

In their legal incompatibility arguments, the speakers clearly connected Islam to performing jihad and implementing and living by Sharia, which would undermine and subvert the Constitution. The speakers argued that obviously Muslims believe and accept the teachings of the Qur’an. In that case, Muslims must consider the Qur’an to be their ultimate legal authority. As a result, Muslims who adhere to Islamic law must not consider themselves to be beholden to the secular, Judeo-Christian values embedded in the U.S. Constitution. Following this reasoning,

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19 A fight or struggle against the enemies of Islam.
the speakers argued that it was impossible for Muslims to truly affirm the Constitution or take the Oath of Allegiance during the naturalization process, as Muslims are beholden to a hostile, subversive, and incompatible theocratic, Islamic law. Thus, the speakers argued that the practice of Islam is essentially equivalent to treason. As a result, Muslim immigrants or refugees in America were denounced by the speakers for wearing traditional clothing, speaking Arabic, or continuing to practice Islam. This perceived reluctance to fully “assimilate” to “American culture” was cited as proof of Muslims’ ultimate goal of cultural jihad. The speakers also argued that since Islam is equivalent to treason, Muslims, such as Minnesota Representative Keith Ellison, should be ineligible to hold political office and are likely working with the Muslim Brotherhood\textsuperscript{20} to overthrow the American political system and implement Sharia. The Explanatory Memorandum\textsuperscript{21} was repeatedly cited as proof of an insidious, Muslim plot to overthrow “Western civilization.” Even individual mosques were found to be training centers for jihad. In the words of one speaker, an analyst for a conservative think tank in D.C.:

How do they [the Muslim Brotherhood] organize [in America]? Well, they’re using mosques and Islamic Centers, which by the way, are not Muslim churches. They are, according to Mohammed, they are command and control centers for jihad. That’s what mosques are. Yes, they do pray there sometimes. They also do weddings and funerals and training and teaching and recruiting and fundraising for jihad. (AFTF Meeting, April 6, 2017)

\textsuperscript{20} “The Muslim Brotherhood,” as used by these speakers, is a sort of catch-all phrase for an abstract, amorphous, international radical terrorist network that is considered by the speakers to be working through all Muslim organizations (CAIR, mosques, Muslim student groups, etc.) in the United States and across the globe. Speakers’ operationalization does not necessarily reflect or engage with the reality of the Muslim Brotherhood as a Sunni Islamist transnational political organization and social movement, centered mainly in the Arab world.

\textsuperscript{21} The Explanatory Memorandum is a document entered into evidence in The Holy Land Foundation Trial. This trial began in 2008 and accused individual members of various U.S. Muslim organizations of funding overseas terrorist groups such as Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood. The trial was halted in 2009, but is a common conservative, anti-Muslim talking point that claims to prove the existence of a global Muslim plot to overthrow the United States from within, through non-profit groups such as CAIR (Center for American-Islamic Relations) and ICNA (Islamic Circle of North America) (Bail 2015).
The speakers were able to identify the Muslim Brotherhood to be facilitating *jihad* through nearly every scale of society, from the OIC (Organization of Islamic Cooperation) in the UN to Muslim non-profit organizations in the United States, Muslim political representatives in Congress, all the way down to local mosques, imams, and Halal meat certification entities. However, the speakers also noted that the Muslim Brotherhood was not working alone in their efforts to overthrow the U.S. government. The speakers found the Muslim Brotherhood to be part of the “Red-Green Axis.” This refers to a concerted effort by “Communist” groups (Red) and the Muslim Brotherhood (Green) to subvert the U.S.’s political system and stage a revolution. As one speaker elaborated:

> What is coming? Let me summarize, the groups that are coming together. The Anarchists, that is the Saul Alinsky types, acolytes, Communists, Leftists, the Black Lives Matter movement, and then the global *jihad* movement led by the Muslim Brotherhood and the USCMO in America. What do they have in common? It is a willingness to embrace U.S.[‘s] enemies, use violence, disrupt political events, assault—I mean actually assault, injure, even kill, police on our streets. Again, they’re taking aim at law and order, the system. Our republic is the target. It’s not just the Republican party or a particular President, Donald J. Trump. They are the focus, perhaps, of a lot of the action, but they are not the ultimate target. Our system is. (AFTF Meeting, April 6, 2017)

This Red-Green Axis theory is a foundational component of the Anti-Muslim movement in the U.S., and many of its key proponents, such as Frank Gaffney, have applied Cold War era theories of Communist infiltration to studies of *jihad*. According to this theory, almost every political group and institution in America has been infiltrated by Muslim Brotherhood and Communist operatives, from the Democratic party, labor unions, Muslim non-profits, to the Black Lives Matter movement and interfaith dialogue movements in local churches. This Red-Green Axis theory, while focused primarily on the anarchic plans of Muslims, also includes
political elements, as it considers liberal politicians to be complicit or active participants in this
effort to overthrow the U.S. government.

2. Institutional Failure

Another narrative furthered by speakers was that U.S. institutions had utterly failed to
protect “real Americans.” While the speakers found Muslim incompatibility to be a pressing
concern, without the sweeping failure of “Western” and “American” institutions to protect white,
Christian interests, Muslim incompatibility would not be such a grave threat. Thus, the speakers
argued that politicians, Christian leaders, NGOs, the UN, and even the local school board and
law enforcement have become complicit in the erosion and eventual destruction of “American
culture,” “traditional values,” and freedom. These political and social institutions were found to
be corrupt, profit-driven, and inherently biased against Christians. Thus, the speakers amplified
and affirmed the value of these political and religious institutions, while simultaneously arguing
that they have been used to endanger the American people through Muslim refugee resettlement.
The key codes and their frequency counts for this theme are summarized below, in Table 10.

Table 10: Speakers - Institutional Failure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Concept Codes (10+ attestations in 2+ transcripts)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Treason (10); Obama Favors Muslims (11); NGOs as Power Brokers (11); Civil Society Complicity (12); Refugees as Exploiters (14); Abuse of Power (18); Refugee Resettlement as Business (18); Democrat Lawlessness (22); Christian Complicity (26); Media Bias (31)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While the speakers described some institutions, such as certain Christian churches, to be
“ignorant” of the Muslim threat, Christian participation in interfaith dialogue initiatives was seen
as a direct threat to “American culture.” The speakers specifically attacked Democratic
politicians, such as former President Obama, for their perceived favoritism of Muslims over all other faiths. This “favoritism” was described as illegal, treasonous, and an abuse of power, as the speakers argued Muslims were allowed to practice Sharia Law and did not have to abide by “American law” like everyone else. The speakers also indicted NGOs associated with refugee resettlement, local governments who support refugee resettlement, and churches who engage in refugee outreach as active participants in the Red-Green Axis. Also, the media received a significant amount of criticism. The speakers cast all types of media as the dishonest tool used by these corrupt institutions to promote a narrative of political correctness and “peaceful Islam.”

While these narratives included economic components, economic concerns did not focus on employment competition, as ethnic competition theories would predict. At no point did any of the speakers cite employment competition as a salient concern. Interestingly, economic framing was explicitly discussed by one speaker from a Minnesota meatpacking town as a way that anti-Muslim activists could avoid being labeled as racists:

What I really like to focus on is money, because with all the talk about being an “Islamophobe” or a racist or a bigot, as long as you talk about one color, you’ll never have a problem. What’s the color?

Audience: Green! (AFTF Meeting, September 22, 2016)

Also, the privatized nature of South Dakota’s refugee resettlement program was a key point of contention.22 This a particular focus in the earliest meetings, as it coincided with local interest in making Anytown a primary refugee resettlement site. This critique of privatization was surprising, considering the AFTF’s affirmation of other conservative talking points. The

22 Refugee resettlement in some states, such as SD, is primarily managed by NGOs, such as Lutheran Social Services (LSS). In this case, the NGO serves as a private contractor and works directly with the federal government to resettle a specific number of refugees in specific cities in a specific state, using federal funds.
speakers found privatized refugee resettlement to be a form of “Taxation without Representation,” in which greedy NGOs spent citizen-sourced, federal tax dollars without accountability. Privatized refugee resettlement was presented as a subversion of democratic norms, with citizens being unable to control how their tax dollars were spent by an organization that only wanted to make money and bring dangerous refugees to their community. As one speaker, a self-educated “expert” on refugee resettlement, stated:

   Now remember, these are non-elected officials. You didn’t elect them. They are a non-profit organization. They spend your money, and you have no recourse to how your money is spent. You didn’t elect ‘em, but yet you’re digging into your pocket, and you’re handing money out to something you had no idea is even happening. (AFTF Meeting, September 22, 2016)

Additionally, speakers criticized refugee access to social safety net programs, such as SNAP and Section 8 housing vouchers. Refugee use of these programs was framed as an abuse of programs intended for deserving, “real” Americans. Speakers argued that tax dollars should not be used to support programs for refugees they considered to be undeserving, entitled, and lazy. Thus, it was this federal use of tax dollars to fund privatized refugee resettlement and redistributive social safety net programs for refugees that stirred the most economically-driven resentment and justification for anti-Muslim mobilization, not employment competition.

Overall, the speakers concluded that politicians had failed the American people, especially Christians. After Donald Trump’s election as President, the speakers expressed slightly more optimism regarding the power of politics to protect Christians from the “Enemy Threat.” However, the political arena remained a key locus of conflict and competition for the speakers. Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama received significant amounts of attention and were described as fundamental champions of the infiltration of Muslim Brotherhood operatives and
terrorist sympathizers into American politics. The speakers also described the Democratic party as full of terrorists and Communists working to abolish the First Amendment, persecute Christians, and create a one-party state through immigration and refugee resettlement. The speakers considered Donald Trump and his Travel Ban and Border Wall the last chance to save the U.S. from undergoing a demographic revolution at the hands of corrupt Democrats.

Religious institutions were also strongly chastised by the speakers. Churches and Christian religious organizations were particularly chided for supporting refugee resettlement and “bringing ISIS to America” (AFTF Meeting, October 18, 2016). This allowed the speakers to amplify Christian values, yet criticize Christian institutions. LSS, for example, is a nominally Lutheran non-profit organization. Their refugee resettlement activity was attributed by the speakers to a greed for federal funds. Moreover, Democrat and liberal Christians were painted as unbelievers who should be cast out of the church. Also, interfaith dialogue initiatives were cited as evidence of the failure of religious institutions to resist infiltration by the Muslim Brotherhood, mostly due to the ignorance of Christian leaders. As one speaker stated:

Why do you think there is this interfaith dialogue movement? That’s not willy-nilly, that didn’t just kinda happen, because, you know, kumbaya and more marshmallows please. No! That is happening because the Muslim Brotherhood is leading that movement in order to target one of the key pillars of American society, and those are our faith leaders. In particular, the leaders of Christian congregations, like priests and ministers, but also Jewish rabbis. That’s who’s being targeted. They’re being roped into this, as Amy was telling you, they’re being dragged in, because they really—number one, they don’t understand their own faith and how to defend it, number two, they don’t understand what it means to be an American, which we just described, and number three, they haven’t a bloody clue what Islam is. (AFTF Meeting, April 6, 2017)

Perhaps the most maligned institutions were educational institutions and mass media. The speakers considered local, national, and global media to be biased in favor of Muslims and against Christians, with even Fox News being problematically liberal. The media’s greatest
transgression was its perpetuation of the “lie” of the existence of moderate Muslims and the peacefulness of Islam. Also, the speakers argued that educational institutions, from local public high schools to the more abstract “academia,” had all been infiltrated by Communist professors and Muslim Brotherhood student organizations, who were working to brainwash American youth and support the Red-Green Axis. This perceived indoctrination took the form of everything from discussing Islam in religion classes to trying to convert unsuspecting high school students to Islam by having them write the *Shahada*\(^{23}\) as part of a calligraphy lesson. In several meetings, local high school students protested the speakers and the AFTF, outside and inside the meeting venues. In earlier meetings, protest and dissent expressed within the meeting resulted in highly tense confrontations, with older audience members threatening and screaming at dissenting high school students, and often forcibly removing them from the venue. In all cases, the speakers used these student protests as illustrations of the success of youth indoctrination through education.

3. *Citizen Mobilization*

A narrative of citizen mobilization was the third major theme of the invited speaker content. In these discussions, the speakers presented non-Muslims around the globe as being trapped in an ideological, existential struggle for survival. This existential crisis was framed as the logical result of Muslim incompatibility with “Western civilization” and the failure of “Western” institutions to protect its citizens from the “Enemy Threat.” According to the speakers, in order to combat institutional failures and Muslim incompatibility, local citizens need to mobilize and fight to protect their freedoms and culture. One speaker compared anti-Muslim activism to military service, and another speaker presented anti-Muslim activism in similarly dire

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\(^{23}\) An Islamic creed which states belief in Allah and the affirmation of Mohammed as his Prophet.
terms: “We fight to live free of Islamic law, and to live free as individuals under our Constitution and the Judeo-Christian principles that underlie it, as well as our Declaration [of Independence] and other foundational documents” (AFTF Meeting, August 9, 2017). The most frequently attested concept codes for this theme are listed in Table 11 below.

Table 11: Speakers - Citizen Mobilization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Concept Codes (10+ attestations in 2+ transcripts)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Persecution of Anti-Muslim Activists (13); Assimilation (16); Persecution of Christians (18); Awareness (18); Threat to White/Christian Children (24); Education (36); Activism (52);</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to the invited speakers, both “America” and Anytown have become a contested place. Seemingly minor events, such as menu changes at the local middle school, were interpreted as proof that local public schools had been conquered by Muslim interests and were embarking upon a dark road of religious intolerance and persecution of local Christians. The speakers argued that only fierce anti-Muslim activism, beginning at the local level in Anytown, could preserve freedoms for future generations. The terms in which the speakers communicate this danger to future generations is quite vivid and graphic:

I can’t promise you very much, folks, but I can promise you two things. If you do nothing, if you take a holiday, your children are eventually going to live in slavery in this land. That is inevitable. (AFTF Meeting, May 25, 2017)

They [Muslims] will never call for peace! Which means then they will be killing your grandchildren in this country. Not your great-great grandchildren, grandchildren. Third generation from now. That’s 30 years, at the most, from now. (AFTF Meeting, October 20, 2016)
This emphasis on the need to protect assumedly white, Christian children from violent African or Arab Muslims is a powerful framing strategy, as it amplifies fundamental values of protecting children, while making implicit assumptions about the religious and racial identities of those most likely to victimize children.

According to the speakers, only individual citizen mobilizations can save the U.S. from revolution and the next generation of Christians from religious persecution. The suggested efforts included supporting anti-Muslim political candidates, lobbying to change local school curricula, being active citizen journalists, and building networks with other anti-Muslim activists in South Dakota. Educating local communities as to the “truth” and “dangers” of Islam through public meetings was also crucial. One speaker suggested lobbying to prevent the construction of affordable housing units in Anytown. This affordable housing scarcity would make moving to Anytown less appealing for poor refugees and their families. Despite the high stakes the speakers outlined, they avoided direct calls for violence. Rather, the speakers emphasize the need to enact change through conventional means, such as voting for anti-Muslim candidates, becoming an anti-Muslim citizen journalist, and involving youth in the anti-Muslim cause:

Encourage both civic, meaning city council and different elected groups, plus also your faith leaders, to stand up for constitutional principles…And then, of course, support political candidates at every level: library board, school board, on up to the federal, you know, congressional level. Support those candidates whose views reflect your own on key issues. And then make sure you get out and vote, and take somebody with you, especially somebody younger. Get the young people out there…More writing, more broadcasting, more radio, more TV, more publication in op-eds and so forth. That’s what has to oppose it. A free citizenry exercising the right of free speech. The answer to all this leftist or liberal or anti-constitutional speech is pro-constitutional speech. That’s the answer. (AFTF Meeting, April 6, 2017)

Thus, while still propagating an inherently discriminatory message, the speakers chose to amplify values of civic participation, framing themselves as politically engaged defenders of
basic American principles, rather than a “hate group.” The speakers consider themselves underdogs, fighting for freedom and justice. This inspirational self-conception as a protector of oppressed Christians against the “Enemy Threat” is well articulated in the following statement, made by a sympathetic South Dakota State Senator who has attended multiple AFTF meetings:

When I brought in pieces of legislation, the entire crowd was the other side. It was the Muslim Brotherhood in conjunction with the here in So—here in [Anytown], it’s the Chamber of Commerce, it’s the [Anytown] Development Corporation, it’s the mayor, it’s the special interests that are controlling our politics. We need to show up. They brought busload after busload of people, and they filled the committee hall, and it scared people, good people, people that didn’t run to solve this problem. They ran because they believed in good government, how to keep taxes low and how to fight this little battle in smaller government. They weren’t quite prepared to have a fight on this level. That’s what we’re bringing in speakers like this. That’s why I’m so proud of you guys for showing up. The people that are putting this on [the AFTF] have taken a major risk. It’s boldness. This is what movies are written about, are people that stand up and start taking their country back, right? (AFTF Meeting, August 9, 2017)

4. Summary of Transcript Analysis and General Observations Regarding Invited Speakers

To summarize, the main points of frame amplification for the speakers included personal safety, Constitutional freedom of religion, sexual consent, the protection of children, patriotism, affirmation of political and religious participation, and civic involvement. The speakers’ justification for their anti-Muslim activism hinged upon a framing strategy that appealed to these fundamental, pro-social values. By framing themselves as defenders of values such as religious freedom and Muslims as natural enemies of such values, the speakers considered their activism acceptable and self-justifying. Thus, the speakers’ frame articulation strategies create a narrative in which an urgent social problem (“Muslim Incompatibility”) has a clear cause (“Institutional Failure), and only one solution (“Citizen Mobilization”).

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24 The legislation being referenced here is Senate Concurrent Resolution 15, which opposes Muslim refugee resettlement, can be read at [http://sdlegislature.gov/Legislative_Session/Bills/Bill.aspx?Bill=SCR15&Session=2017](http://sdlegislature.gov/Legislative_Session/Bills/Bill.aspx?Bill=SCR15&Session=2017).
In the earliest recorded public meetings, held in August and September 2016, the discourse centers around refugees and refugee resettlement. It is in these meetings that the speakers place the most emphasis on economic concerns, primarily the use of taxpayer dollars to fund refugee resettlement and refugee uses of social safety net programs, such as SNAP and Section 8. However, in October 2016, after it became clear that Anytown was no longer being considered as a primary refugee resettlement site, the tone and topical focus of the AFTF meetings shifted. Thus, it seems that as the imminent danger of becoming a primary refugee resettlement site abated, the AFTF adjusted their frame, increasingly emphasizing the threat of Islam specifically, with refugees and refugee resettlement becoming a more secondary concern. This shift to a focus on Islam, specifically the “Muslim Brotherhood Conspiracy,” has been sustained through all subsequent meetings.

Most recently, AFTF meetings (unrecorded) have been explicitly targeted toward mobilizing AFTF’s local supporters into a local, conservative activist force. This has taken the form of having anti-Muslim state Senators speak in the meetings as well as explicitly bringing in professional activist organizers of groups such as the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR)\(^{25}\) as speakers. Thus, the trajectory of the AFTF as an organization seems to be an evolution from a grassroots Facebook group that sprung up to advocate against local refugee resettlement to a more established anti-Muslim activist organization. This has been facilitated by support from state legislators, as well as building networks with more formalized and well-

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\(^{25}\) FAIR’s website describes the organization as one that is explicitly concerned with decreasing the number of legal immigrants admitted into the United States each year, fighting amnesty, and supporting national security. Broadly, immigrants are understood by FAIR to be a burden on the United States’ resources and economy. Refugee resettlement, while not a main focus of FAIR, is also mentioned as an undesirable financial burden on the American economy.
established anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant organizations (such as those to which the invited
speakers belong), lending the AFTF connections to external resources and anti-Muslim expertise.

B. Findings from Facebook Content Analysis

In the discussion that follows, I outline, describe, and discuss each of the three key
themes that emerged from the NVivo analysis of the AFTF’s organizational Facebook posts
(n=454).26 These three themes are the same as discussed previously in Part A: Muslim
Incompatibility, Institutional Failure, and Citizen Mobilization. The underlying concept codes
closely mirror the findings from the previous discussion, but have important nuances. The
following discussion only analyzes the organizational posts of the AFTF. Individual user
comments will be discussed later in this chapter, in the discussion of research question #2 in Part
III. The following discussion of organizational Facebook posts includes key quotes, all of which
are presented verbatim, including grammatical and spelling errors.

1. Muslim Incompatibility

Similar to my findings in my analysis of the meeting transcripts, the AFTF Facebook
posts also conceptualized Muslim incompatibility with “American society” as rooted in two key
issues: cultural inferiority and the inherently subversive, political tendencies of Islam. On the
AFTF Facebook page, the majority of the posts addressed this theme of Muslim incompatibility.
The most frequently attested concept codes related to this theme are summarized in Table 12.

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26 The reader may refer to Tables 4 and 5 in Chapter 3 to review the types of posts, as well as the organizational
sources of the videos, links, and news articles the AFTF most frequently re-shared.
Table 12: AFTF - Muslim Incompatibility

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes (attested 10+ times)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Inferiority (11); Muslim Brotherhood (15); Muslim Brutality (18); Muslim Intolerance (18); Refugees as Social Disorder (22); Muslims as Sexual Predators (23); Truth not hate (26); All Muslims are Radical Muslims (30); Islam as Inherently Violent (35); Islamization (59)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Re-shared news articles (n=198) accounted for nearly half of the AFTF’s Facebook posts. Of those news reports, articles dealing with Islamic terrorist attacks, sexual deviance, and “Islamization” were the most frequently attested, respectively. As noted previously, Facebook does not allow for the creation of a smooth narrative in the same way that may be possible in a presentation by a speaker in a meeting context. Rather, the AFTF’s Facebook framing strategy relied upon the strategic re-sharing of specific news items and links to certain types of web pages. This created a de facto narrative through daily shares of links and news posts. Based on the codes summarized in Table 12, it is clear what the key messages of that narrative are.

Through the AFTF’s Facebook posts, Muslims were portrayed as sexual predators and terrorists. They were also presented as culturally inferior (i.e. dirty, uncultured) and the bringers of social disorder. Groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood were repeatedly identified as being dangerous and furthering an intolerant cultural jihad against “the West.” This narrative was provided some semblance of credibility by the AFTF’s selective re-sharing of news reports and “facts.”

Cultural inferiority narratives regarding Muslim refugees, as articulated by the AFTF, were mostly centered around ill health, anti-science beliefs, mistreatment of women (i.e. domestic violence, FGM), and social disorganization, particularly violent crime. In some posts, these undesirable social attributes were explicitly connected to the practice of Islam and to Muslims’ supposed refusal to assimilate into “American culture.” In other posts, Muslim
refugees, particularly Somalis, are portrayed as having low IQs, being uneducated, and engaging in aberrant behaviors. For example, two of the most popular posts from the AFTF’s Facebook page were photos purportedly taken in the Anytown area and depicted local Somalis. One photo was taken at a local gas station, where the two black individuals pictured seemed to be kneeling beside their vehicle and praying. The AFTF captioned the photo with “Not sure if they are praying for cheap gas or what?!” The other example was another photo purportedly taken in the Anytown Wal-Mart. In this case, the photo’s caption claimed to document an instance of public defecation by a Somali woman who was in the store. This photo was captioned with “This is at the Walmart in Anytown, SD. Someone witnessed a Somali lady defecating in the aisle of the women’s department.” The Wal-Mart photo was, by far, the most popular item ever posted by the AFTF. Both of these photos are clear instances in which local Somalis are portrayed as culturally inferior. This is clearly a powerful frame amplification strategy through which the AFTF bolsters its claims of Muslim incompatibility by presenting photographic evidence that supports their arguments. As stated in another AFTF post: “not all religions and not all cultures are equal.”

The AFTF Facebook posts also presented two tropes to affirm the incompatibility of Muslim refugees with American “culture”: “Muslim Refugee Male as Sexual Predator” and “Muslim Refugee Male as Terrorist.” These tropes were constructed through the sharing of selective news reports and links via the AFTF Facebook page. A substantial number of AFTF Facebook posts were shared new reports of cases of child molestation and/or sexual assault in

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27 “Popularity” was determined by the number of likes, shares, and comments posted on these posts.
28 Individuals claiming to be Wal-Mart employees disputed this account on Facebook.
which the offender (if pictured and/or named) was a black male with an Arabic name, sometimes accompanied by a headline explicitly identifying him as a Muslim. A number of these posts were focused upon one case in Anytown in which a Somali refugee man attempted to solicit sex from a mentally disabled woman. The Somali man was arrested, tried, and convicted, but the AFTF and other right-wing media outlets that picked up the story repeatedly criticized the local news media for purportedly concealing the perpetrator’s refugee status and Muslim faith, both factors which were considered causes of the assault. In other instances, AFTF posts explicitly related sexual offenses, particularly those in which minors are victims, as directly attributable to the offender’s Muslim faith, as seen in the post below:

In the Muslim faith a Muslim man can marry a child as young as 1 year old and have sexual intimacy with this child. Consummating the marriage by 9…The dowry is given to the family in exchange for the woman (who becomes his slave) and for the purchase of the private parts of the woman, to use her as a toy.

By repeatedly sharing these types of news articles, the AFTF produced an echo chamber in which cases of sexual violence became matter-of-factly connected to the perpetrator’s refugee status and/or Muslim faith. While the AFTF may not have explicitly stated that they consider all black Muslim men to be sexual predators, by sharing such a high volume of posts and news reports that consistently connect blackness, refugee status, and Muslim faith to sexual assault, such a clearly discriminatory conclusion was implicit.

A similar process was utilized in constructing the “Muslim as Terrorist” trope. The AFTF Facebook posts presented Islam as an inherently violent religion that preaches intolerance and requires that its adherents become terrorists. A large sub-group of the AFTF’s posts consisted of shared news reports of radical Islamic terrorist attacks or crimes that pictured black individuals with Arabic names as the perpetrators, sometimes explicitly identified as a Muslim and/or
refugee. In other instances, the AFTF took a more nuanced approach, asking in a caption of a re-share of one such news article, “Do we want this here? Religion of peace is a pleasant fiction. Study the religion for yourselves.” This both implicitly and explicitly reinforced the connection between African Muslim refugee men and violent behaviors, a narrative with implicitly discriminatory racial and religious overtones.

However, posts regarding “Islamization” were the most common in this narrative. “Islamization,” as articulated by the AFTF, references the idea that Muslim refugees and immigrants aren’t simply refugees or immigrants. Instead, they comprise an invading, Islamic army, ready to begin cultural *jihad*. These discussions relied upon frequent re-shares of news coverage of European cases of migrant crime and terrorist attacks. A particular point of fascination in the Islamization narrative was the “no-go zones” in France, Germany, and Sweden. The existence of prayer rooms in workplaces or observation of Muslim holidays by churches or governments was interpreted as proof of the success of this cultural *jihad* against the “West.” Some of these AFTF posts paralleled the core arguments of the speakers: Muslims are unable to legally be U.S. citizens and Islam is treason. This is made explicit in the following post:

> Can a Muslim be a good American? This question was forwarded to a friend who worked in Saudi Arabia for 20 years. The following is his reply:

1. Theologically - no, because his allegiance is to Allah.

2. Religiously - no, because no other religion is accepted by His Allah except Islam (Qur'an 2:256).

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29 Areas in Muslim majority neighborhoods in which it is argued that Sharia is widely enacted by the resident Muslim population and were European police are too afraid to enter to enforce “Western” law, due to the violence of the Muslim residents and their refusal to assimilate to the norms and laws of their host country. Somali neighborhoods in Minneapolis-St. Paul are also discussed as “no-go zones” by the AFTF and invited speakers.
3. Scripturally - no, because his allegiance is to the five Pillars of Islam and the Qur'an.

4. Geographically - no, because his allegiance is to Mecca, to which he turns in prayer five times a day.

5. Socially - no, because his allegiance to Islam forbids him to make friends with Christians or Jews.

6. Politically - no, because he must submit to the mullahs (spiritual leaders) who teach the annihilation of Israel and the destruction of America, the great Satan.

7. Domestically - no, because he is instructed to marry four Women and beat his wife when she disobeys him (Qur'an 4:34).

8. Intellectually - no, because he cannot accept the American Constitution since it is based on Biblical principles and he believes the Bible to be corrupt.

9. Morally - no, because Islam specifically teaches to overtly lie and deceive non-followers, in a practice called taqiyya.

10. Philosophically - no, because Islam, Muhammad, and the Qur'an does not allow freedom of religion and expression. Democracy and Islam cannot co-exist! Every Muslim government is either dictatorial or autocratic.

11. Spiritually - no, because when we declare 'one nation under God,' we are referring to the God of Christianity- God Almighty, not Allah.

12. Nutritionally - no, because common foods and diet of majority of Americans and Canadiens, contains food against the teachings of Islam.

13. Culturally - no, because common Western clothing styles and traditions, women driving cars, some animals (dogs), women in pubic w/o the presence of a man, use of alcohol, homosexuality, all are not permitted by the Muslim tradition, while sexual aggression in public, public stoning and humiliation, arranged marriages, interfamilial marriage, and child marriage even with girls as young as 6 years old, including full sexual relations, are also endorsed and accepted in the Muslim tradition.

14. Medically - no, because they have very limited sense of safety regarding medical practices, diseases and protection from spreading diseases, and the Islamic tradition performs brutal procedures on young pubescent girls, known as female genital mutilation (FGM).

15. Vocationally - no, because there are very few who are functionally educated primarily because education is not a value that is highly respected in the Muslim tradition, and
even the education of females is prohibited. The few contributing in productive labor to society, as a Muslim each is called to obligatory prayers 5x a day. This practice is disruptive and unprofitable for American and Canadian companies.

16. Financially - no, because 80-90% of American and Canadian Muslims are dependent on welfare, sometimes even fraudulently, draining the system with as many as one man having 4 wives and 18 dependent children in one household. This exploitation of the welfare system is a common practice in the Muslim tradition known as jizya, which is part of entitlement compensation, paid by the non-Muslim, to the Muslim.

THEREFORE, after much education, study and deliberation, perhaps we should be very suspicious of ALL MUSLIMS in this country. They obviously cannot be both 'good' Muslims and good Americans/Canadians; they cannot and will not integrate into the great melting pot of America.

The religious war is bigger than we know or understand. Muslims everywhere have said they will destroy us from within.

As can be seen in the above post, the AFTF, as an organization, appealed to key, pro-social values assumed to be widely held in American society, and framed Islam as a direct threat to those values. Based on the arguments outlined and values amplified above, anyone who values hard work, LGBTQ rights, freedom of religion, education, democracy, monogamy, and honesty should, by default, be opposed to Muslim refugee resettlement and immigration to the United States. This idea was also manifest in the following excerpt from a letter to the editor of the local newspaper, the Anytown American News. This letter was composed by the AFTF in response to their being labeled a hate group by the SPLC. A photo of this letter was posted on the AFTF Facebook page after it was submitted to the local newspaper:

We are an organization dedicated to preserving the American way of life and our rights and freedoms guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution. We believe the enforcement of our laws and protection Constitutional rights. We believe in immigration of people who are properly vetted, willing to assimilate into our society, willing to learn the English language, willing to live under our laws and pay their own way, just as our ancestors did. They should be free to practice their religion so long as it does not violate our Constitution and our laws. We welcome and encourage all who would do so.
We suggest to you that the real haters are those who want to bring in refugees who have not been properly vetted, who do not want to assimilate into our society, who preach hatred of Jews and Christians, whose religion teaches it is their obligation to convert or kill those who do not believe what they believe, who want to replace the Constitution with their law, who abuse women and minorities, and continue to live as they did in their home countries.

Christianity teaches us to love one another and not to hate. It does not teach us to be foolish and not stand up for our way of life. There are, however religions that teach hatred. We encourage you study other religions before you decide who the haters are.

We believe in paying our own way. We are not subsidized by the government as at least some opposition is. We try to help people help themselves rather than march them to the government for financial assistance. We believe the people should decide if the taxpayers should be supporting refugees through direct grants and welfare. We believe communities should decide if refugees are to be invited into their communities rather than a small group of activists and politicians.

We leave it to you. Who are the real patriots and who are the real haters?

In this letter, the AFTF amplifies values of religious freedom, gender equality, citizen’s rights, and patriotism to justify their anti-Muslim activism. They conceptualize themselves as “real patriots” protecting their community and nation from a toxic, violent, and intolerant ideology. In the words of another AFTF post: “It’s not Islamophobia if they’re actually attempting to end your civilization and replace it with sharia barbarism.”

Due to the way in which “Muslim” and “refugee” have been conflated by the AFTF, as well as their complex framing strategies, groups protesting the AFTF, such as the local High School Democrats group, have faced rhetorical challenges when opposing the AFTF. In one such case, the Anytown High School Democrats created a Facebook event to organize a protest of an AFTF meeting. In response, the AFTF posted the following statement:

It has come to our attention that the Brown County Democrats\textsuperscript{30} are planning to protest

\textsuperscript{30} This is an error, as the High School Democrats and Brown County Democrats are distinct groups, and the public Facebook event to protest the meeting was posted by the Anytown High School Democrats.
our event with Clare Lopez on April 6. They are protesting on the reasons of the speaker being "anti-immigrant" and a "fear monger". To set the record straight. Clare is not anti-immigrant and this group is not anti-immigrant. We believe in legal immigrants! There is a difference between immigrants, illegal immigrants, and refugees. If you want to come to our country we are happy to accept you as long as you are coming here legally and willing to assimilate to our way of life and not expect a free ride. This is not fear mongering. Clare is simply educating the people!!!

This statement illustrates the flexibility of the AFTF’s frame, which allows them to dodge charges of anti-immigrant rhetoric, as the term “immigrant” is rarely used in their meetings and Facebook posts. Rather, “Muslim” and “refugee” are the dominant terms. By discussing “immigrants” primarily in the context of historical European immigration (i.e. the ancestors of meeting attendees and speakers), “immigrant” has a relatively positive connotation in the AFTF context. However, based on the AFTF’s framing strategies, “refugee” connotes the practice of Islam, dependence on the social safety net, cultural inferiority, and cultural jihad. Also, due to the fact that the AFTF utilizes verses from the Qur’an, “ethnic expert” testimony, and news reports in their frame articulation process, charges of “fear-mongering” require a sophisticated understanding of the way in which the AFTF manipulates “facts” and selectively interprets the Qur’an. This demonstrates the relative sophistication of the AFTF’s frame articulation and amplification strategies. The AFTF posts argue multiple times that it is not a hate group, but rather a group that affirms truth, education, freedom, and the value of weighing all perspectives:

Don't they care about their own community's safety or their own, because this will effect us all? Why are these stories, that are 100% factually, tied to Islam and terrorism ignored or neglected in our national and regional media? Why do some people immediately label any inquiry such as these HATE, instead of addressing the questions?

In another post, Muslims are cast as the only true “hate” group in the contemporary moment:

The only ones who are spreading hate are the ones in this video that are chanting they will not stop until the world is governed by Islam, and the ones who are chanting they want jihad.
Through these posts, the AFTF seeks to present an argument that, by definition, Muslims are incompatible with U.S. law and “American culture,” and anti-Muslim activism is a commendable and patriotic activity. The following AFTF post, claiming to be a shared letter from a local supporter, clearly relates anti-Muslim activism to Christian moral imperatives:

I have an issue with being told by a retired pastor who was at the Thursday night meeting, that the people who were in attendance were not following the great commandment, "Love thy neighbor". How can she say that, does she in her own righteous mind believe she is a Christian by saying that? I love my neighbor, my community, my state and my country and I am trying to protect that from people who hate us, who want us dead. Maybe she can sponsor a family on her own dime and see how that goes, better yet, how about helping the poor and needy right here in our own country?

Thus, fundamental concerns such as loving and wanting to protect one’s neighbor and community are amplified to justify anti-Muslim activism. In this way, a clearly anti-Muslim, anti-religious freedom message is justified using values of religious freedom and love of neighbor, reversing and re-framing the retired pastor’s criticism of the AFTF and its supporters.

2. Institutional Failure

Similar to the speaker discussions, the AFTF posts argued that institutions, mostly political institutions, have failed to safeguard basic constitutional rights and “Western civilization.” These posts perpetuated the idea that the media and liberal politicians inherently favor Muslims over Christians. This perceived Muslim favoritism, according to the AFTF posts, has resulted in a lack of reporting of Muslim crime, as well as the oppression of Christians. The AFTF posts were also concerned with the financial burden placed on the federal government and tax payers by refugee resettlement. The key concept codes are summarized below in Table 13.
Overall, criticisms of liberal politicians and media were the most prevalent in the AFTF Facebook posts comprising this narrative. Liberal politicians were considered complicit in or intentionally driving Muslim immigration and refugee resettlement to the “West” through negligent “open border” policies. AFTF posts described Liberal media sources and politicians as being blinded by the ideology of “political correctness,” which led them to preach tolerance of Islam, thus directly endangering the lives of non-Muslims across the globe. The AFTF also indicted the media for concealing the true dangers posed by Islam and Muslims (i.e. failing to report crimes committed by Muslims and/or refugees). Media is referred to in posts as “one of our great manipulators” that engages in intentional “Media Islamic jihad desensitization.” This is also seen in the text below, which captioned a shared news report of a terrorist attack in Europe:

This attack is sad. However, what is equally as sad is the grave narrative: Islam is a religion of peace, will continue to be sold to the public, as the blood of the Islamic terrorist victims still wets the ground!

The Facebook posts also highlighted a perception that American political institutions had failed to privilege and serve “real Americans” (i.e. white, Christians). In educational institutions, Muslims were thought to receive special privileges, such as prayer rooms, not afforded to Christian students. The AFTF emphasized public schools and educational institutions as untrustworthy and serving Muslim interests. Unlike the speakers, the AFTF Facebook posts did not clearly indict religious institutions, with the exception of a handful of posts criticizing LSS for being involved in refugee resettlement work.
Also, AFTF posts argued that law enforcement did not hold Muslims to the same standards of law as everyone else, but allowed them to self-govern using Sharia. In addition, the American court system and law enforcement agencies were seen to not sufficiently punish Muslim and refugee offenders. AFTF posts argued that refugee offenders should be instantly deported, along with their families, for any offense.

3. *Citizen Mobilization*

While this category was the most weakly attested in the AFTF posts, there were still some calls for citizen mobilization. Mostly, the AFTF posts in this category focused on facilitating citizen activism by sharing online petitions, phone numbers for local officials, and election dates. Additionally, the AFTF’s Facebook platform was utilized as a medium through which the AFTF could engage with the local Anytown community through posts and facilitate citizen journalism. As this thematic category was the least robust, Table 14 features a single concept code.

Table 14: AFTF - Citizen Mobilization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code (attested 10+ times)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Citizen Activism (23)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Primarily, posts within this thematic category of “Citizen Mobilization” focused upon diffusing political information, through Facebook’s social media networks, to the Anytown community. In some posts, the AFTF utilized its Facebook platform to rapidly and easily share information about anti-refugee and anti-Muslim policies being crafted at the state and national levels. The AFTF also posted contact information for local, state, and national political offices.
on their Facebook page. The AFTF encouraged their followers on Facebook to both re-share this contact information through their own social networks on Facebook and to reach out to these representatives directly. Sometimes the AFTF would even post a sample script for such calls. Also, the AFTF used Facebook to advertise their own meetings. The AFTF also used Facebook to circulate online petitions opposing refugee resettlement in Anytown, endorse certain political candidates, and publicize the dates of local city council elections.

However, there was another, more novel way in which the AFTF utilized their Facebook page. This was as a conduit for citizen journalism. The AFTF presented its Facebook page as a medium through which Anytown residents could circumvent biased and untrustworthy local media and law enforcement and share their anti-Muslim and anti-refugee perspectives. This strategy utilized AFTF’s sizeable network of followers to reach a wide audience with re-shared tales of refugee crime, perceived inappropriate behavior, or other concerns. The AFTF solicited such information repeatedly in their Facebook posts, as seen in the following post:

We encourage everyone to share their experiences whether it's something that has happened directly to you or something you have witnessed. We need to show everyone what we are bringing into our community. Please share everything on this page!!!

In another example, the AFTF called upon local residents to attend a public court hearing for a local Somali refugee, reportedly at the request of an Anytown resident involved in the case:

Come show your support!!!

Please share!!!

Reminder: Tomorrow morning is court for Mr [redacted] at 9:30 am at magistrate court. This is the same man who talked about alcohol and drugs to minor children while attempting to grab one, the same man who has talked about wanting virgins at a local bar, and also attempted to enter a vehicle with a woman and her children. We NEED to convey the message to HIM and our JUDICIAL system that this type of behavior endangering our women and children will not be tolerated. WE THE PEOPLE need to
stand our ground and protect each other. Let's fill this court room tomorrow to send the message NOW.

As discussed previously in “institutional failure” and obliquely referenced in the post above, American courts and law enforcement were accused of not sufficiently punishing Muslim and refugee offenders. Thus, the AFTF sought to directly publicize refugee offenses and bypass local law enforcement and media by soliciting anecdotes from its supporters via Facebook. In this way, the AFTF worked both to enable citizen journalism and to circumvent local media and law enforcement attempts to conceal refugee crime, through posts such as: “Have you personally seen groups labelled ‘refugee’ people manipulating our systems?”

The AFTF’s Facebook page provided an innovative way for the group to affirm and amplify values of civic participation in re-sharing anti-Muslim narratives. Due to the perceived biases of the local media, the AFTF framed these re-shares of local anti-refugee animus as a democratic and inclusive form of journalism, which does not marginalize anti-Muslim voices and addresses urgent local concerns, unlike the local media. Thus, the AFTF was able to frame itself as a pro-social, civically engaged organization working to share the “truth” and protect the local community. In the words of an AFTF post: “Concerned citizens, make your voice be heard. Speak out, while you still can!”

4. **Summary of Facebook Content Analysis**

To summarize, the AFTF’s Facebook posts were largely concerned with perceived Muslim cultural incompatibility with “American culture” and “Western” values and the shortcomings of the media and political institutions. Through the strategic sharing of news articles, videos, and photos, the AFTF posts presented a narrative in which liberal politicians and the media work together to give special privileges to Muslims in the United States and enable
Muslim refugee resettlement. By selectively sharing news articles and the anti-Muslim/refugee anecdotes of local residents, the AFTF posts depicted Muslims (especially male, African refugees) as being inherently prone to socially deviant behaviors, violent crime, sexual violence, and terrorism. Also, Muslims are systematically portrayed as perpetrators of a surreptitious “cultural jihad” that intends to subvert “Western” norms and install Islamic law and cultural practices in their stead, paralleling speaker arguments of the Red-Green Axis and the “Enemy Threat.” These posts often contain terse framing, such as “America’s future could be this,” “Our future hangs by a thread,” or “Islam plays civilizational war while we play civilizational nice.”

Additionally, the use of Facebook presented unique constraints and opportunities for the AFTF. While it is much more difficult to create a synthetic, well-integrated narrative through Facebook posts, the AFTF still used social media in powerful ways. Most notable was the use of Facebook as a tool with which to construct tropes regarding the presumed sexual aggression and violent tendencies of African, Muslim, refugee men. This was primarily accomplished through a high volume of shared (and often un-captioned) news articles with headlines and mugshots implicitly connecting African, Muslim refugee men with violent and sexual crimes. While the AFTF primarily relies on highly partisan and anti-Muslim sources for their news reports and “facts,” the preponderance of the AFTF posts are still formatted and presented as “news articles” (n=198). This seeming rootedness in “facts” led the AFTF to claim a veneer of credibility for their anti-Muslim message. This appeal to “facts” and “truth” was a recurring theme in the AFTF’s Facebook posts, as they sought to legitimate their activity and counter local opposition.
C. Synthesis of Findings Related to RQ #1

Now that I have reviewed the findings from both sets of data, transcript and Facebook, I will now answer the first research question: 1) What are the AFTF’s main points of frame amplification? In other words, broadly speaking, how did the AFTF justify its anti-Muslim mobilization? The bulk of the answer to these questions lies in the thematic narratives of “Muslim Incompatibility.”

Overall, in keeping with the expected relationships outlined in Chapter 2, the AFTF amplifies fundamentally pro-social values to justify their anti-Muslim mobilization. Education, religious freedom, constitutional rights, fiscal responsibility, personal safety, and civic engagement are the foundational values amplified in their framing strategy. Through the invited speakers who lead their public meetings and their Facebook posts, the AFTF’s frame articulation strategy weaves a narrative in which Anytown is a microcosm the global, ideological, and political struggle for supremacy between Muslims and Christian, “Western civilization.” It is through amplifying fundamental values, such as freedom and safety, and linking local Somalis and refugees more broadly to a larger cultural and religious conflict that expressions of discrimination became legitimized. Thus, anti-Muslim activism in Anytown was framed as a defense of key values, such as freedom, and a necessary, laudable response to Muslim refugee resettlement and the accompanying “Enemy Threat.”

I also found that the AFTF’s cited justifications for this anti-Muslim mobilization were most explicitly cultural and political, with economic aspects being less important. This finding confirms some predictions of ethnic competition perspectives (Bobo 1999; Olzak 1992), which predicts that economic, cultural, and/or political competition will trigger ethnic conflict. In the
case of the AFTF, I find clear evidence for cultural and political conflict. However, economic forms of competition are not central to the AFTF’s framing strategies and do not include employment competition, contrary to what ethnic competition theory would predict. The clearest examples of economic competition were expressions of bitterness that refugees were able to benefit from the social safety net and receive public assistance. Also, privatized refugee resettlement was considered “Taxation without Representation,” with its privatized nature serving to minimize citizen control over community development decisions, in this case, which religious groups were encouraged to migrate to Anytown. The few, sporadic posts related to economic concerns were clustered in the earlier months of the AFTF’s Facebook timeline, and focused upon taxpayer funding of refugee resettlement and refugee uses of social safety net benefits. At no point did the AFTF Facebook posts or speakers at meetings reference employment competition between locals and Somalis at the meatpacking facility as a cause for the AFTF mobilization. Rather, economic concerns seem to be rooted in cultural and political anxiety, with both privatized refugee resettlement and refugee use of social safety net programs being seen in a negative light because they are used to benefit Muslim refugees, who were considered to be dangerous and undeserving of such social supports. Both the speakers and the AFTF Facebook posts considered Muslims and Muslim refugees to have an unfair advantage over Christian Americans. This finding mirrors Hochschild’s (2016) discussion of the bitterness of Louisiana Tea Party supporters toward those who are perceived to “cut” in line, such as refugees and undocumented immigrants, and receive special, unmerited social privileges.

My findings also supported Blee and Yates’ (2015) hypothesis that “conservative” SMOs would attempt to pursue discriminatory goals through “color-blind” rhetoric (Bonilla-Silva
After a thorough analysis of both invited speaker content and the AFTF Facebook posts, the AFTF never advocates for violence and claims to uphold traditional values. This clearly places the AFTF in the “conservative” area of the rightist SMO typology (Blee and Creasap 2010). Yet while the AFTF claimed to simply defend the Constitution, religious freedom, and the education of the public, they engaged in blatant forms of “color-blind” discrimination. The clearest examples of these occurred on Facebook. While the invited speakers clearly connected the practice of Islam with terrorism, treason, and sexual predation, these arguments were explicit. On Facebook, however, the AFTF, through its selective sharing of links and news posts, even when no captions were added, implicitly connected African, Muslim, refugee men to terrorism, violence, and sexual assault. In captions such as “Do we want this here?” (discussed previously) the meaning of “this” is never clearly stated, but is implied: black, Muslim refugee men who, by default, are more violent and sexually deviant. The combination of these insidious and discriminatory narratives with the AFTF’s frame amplification strategy that presents the group as defenders of safety, Constitutional freedoms, and public empowerment is a clever, powerful, and dangerous combination.

Another interesting finding, in both speaker and Facebook content, was the way in which the terms “immigrant” and “refugee” were discussed and framed. “Immigrant” tended to refer to undocumented Latino as well as historic European immigrants. “Refugee” is often conflated with “Muslim,” with both terms used interchangeably to refer to Muslim refugees from the Middle East and Africa. “Refugee” is used as a pejorative, with refugees being argued to not have an entrepreneurial spirit, a desire to work, or intentions to “assimilate” into American society. “Immigrants,” however, are framed as hardworking, more submissive, willing to assimilate, and
thus more desirable. “Illegal immigration” is not a focus in Facebook or meeting contexts. The emphasis on these “traditional” values and the need for full assimilation replicates the Flora et al.’s (2000) discussion of “Legalists.” While their study was conducted in a community experiencing Latino in-migration, the “Legalists” of Industria with their affirmation of white, Christian values and the need for all newcomers to totally adopt those values closely mirrors the framing strategies and calls for assimilation of the AFTF’s Facebook posts and invited speakers.

While the speakers at public meetings were more concerned with larger scale political conspiracies, such as the Red-Green Axis, and attempts at pseudo-academic political theorizing, the AFTF Facebook posts used a different strategy. The AFTF’s Facebook strategy was to share a large number of “facts” in order to present their anti-Muslim narratives as rooted in “truth.” Nearly half of the AFTF’s online posts are re-shared news articles (n=198). Thus, while the values being amplified by the speakers at the public meetings and in the AFTF’s online posts were very similar (i.e. patriotism, freedom, personal safety, institutional corruption), there were slight nuances in scale of focus and the complexity of the arguments being made (i.e. less synthesis on Facebook and a constant stream of anti-Muslim news posts, videos, and links).

In conclusion, the AFTF attempts to explain away accusations of hate-mongering and discrimination by amplifying values such as constitutional freedoms, national security, concern for their children, fiscal responsibility, and patriotism to justify their mobilization. The invited speakers further amplify values of patriotism and Christian conservatism by beginning nearly every meeting with a speaker-led, audience recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance. Most meetings also begin with a prayer led by a local pastor or the speaker. Both Facebook posts and the speakers claimed that the AFTF was merely trying to educate the Anytown community about the
threats it faced from its Somali newcomers as well as trying to preserve Constitutional freedoms of the Anytown community and the United States through traditional and non-violent channels of civic engagement. Thus, in what seems pure irony, through complex narratives of “Muslim Incompatibility” and “Institutional Failure,” the AFTF justifies its explicitly anti-Muslim “Citizen Mobilization” as a defense of religious freedom and the Constitution.

III. Research Question #2

In this section, I will discuss the audience comments from the AFTF public meetings and the LSS town hall, as well as the AFTF Facebook page in order to answer the second research question: What elements of the AFTF’s framing strategy resonated most with the local audience? In other words, did the AFTF and local meeting attendees and Facebook commenters have convergent or divergent concerns? In order to allow the nuances of the individual comments to come forward, I separately coded both the audience comments from the meeting transcripts and the individual Facebook comments. This resulted in two distinct coding structures for each data source, parallel to the analytic strategy I used to answer my first research question. The full coding structures were presented in Chapter 3.

Despite each having their own distinct coding structure, overall, the comments made in the meetings and online by individual commenters on the AFTF Facebook page match the three broad themes discussed previously in the context of the first research question: Muslim Incompatibility, Institutional Failure, and Citizen Mobilization. However, both the individuals commenting on Facebook and speaking up in local meetings are clearly more concerned with local problems in the Anytown community, as opposed to more abstract concepts, such as the Red-Green Axis or “Islamization” discussed by the meeting speakers and AFTF posts. In the
analysis that follows, I first discuss the audience comments from public meeting transcripts, then the individual Facebook user comments.

A. Findings from Meeting Transcripts

In the discussion that follows, I outline, describe, and discuss each of the three key themes that emerged from the NVivo analysis of the audience comments from the AFTF public meeting transcripts and one transcript from a Lutheran Social Services (LSS) public meeting held in Anytown regarding refugee resettlement (n=8). The LSS meeting transcript was included in the analysis and discussion of this research question to offer a complementary perspective, outside of the context of AFTF meetings, of local concerns regarding refugees and refugee resettlement in Anytown. In addition, one relevant local letter to the editor from the local newspaper is included in the analysis below. I order my discussion of the findings through three themes: Muslim Incompatibility, Institutional Failure, and Citizen Mobilization. The following transcript discussion only analyzes the discourse of the audience members at the AFTF public meetings. The following discussion of audience comments includes key quotes from the transcripts, all of which are presented verbatim, including grammatical errors.

1. Muslim Incompatibility

Audience members also considered Muslim refugees to be incompatible with both the local Anytown community and “American culture” and political institutions. Thus, many comments made it clear that Muslims and Muslim refugees were not welcome in Anytown. Local Somali refugees were considered to be a burden on local financial resources, as audience members found them to be lazy and content to survive on “welfare.” Commenting audience members framed their anti-Muslim sentiments not as bigotry, but rather a pragmatic
understanding of the “truth” that Muslims did not belong in the United States. In these audience narratives of incompatibility, refugees (who were assumed to be Muslim) were cast as terrorists and criminals. Also, Muslim refugees were accused of not being willing to assimilate into “American culture.” Instead, the audience members were convinced Muslim refugees wanted to take control of Anytown and the U.S. and implement their own culture and laws. These anxieties regarding a perceived loss of cultural control in the Anytown context, as well as the perceived violent tendencies of refugees created an incredibly emotional atmosphere during the audience comment portions of all public meetings. The most frequently attested concept codes from my NVivo analysis are summarized below in Table 15.

Table 15: Audience - Muslim Incompatibility

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes (Attested 8+ times)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Refugees as Exploiters of Social Safety Net (9); Muslims as Terrorists (11); Lack of assimilation (11); Refugee crime (15)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Audience members were primarily concerned with the assumed Muslim faith of local Somali refugees. Repeatedly, audience members expressed an intense distrust of Islam and Muslims and communicated anxiety over the fact that “these people” were able to enter and live in Anytown. There was an explicit assumption that each Muslim was a potential terrorist and that Islam is an inherently violent and dangerous religion. While audience members did not explicitly cite theories such as the “Red-Green Axis” or “Enemy Threat” in their comments, the concerns they expressed reflect the core components of those theories articulated by the invited speakers and AFTF posts: Islam is inherently dangerous and thus Muslims are not welcome in Anytown.
or in the United States. A clear example of this reasoning is articulated in the exchange below, from the LSS town hall meeting:

Audience Member 1: I don’t know if I’m speaking for most folks here or not, but I think the biggest concern is—is Islam. And I believe that’s the biggest concern. It isn’t that we’re a bunch of racists, you know, anti-refugee folks...Now, I feel that the issue comes down to that there is definitely a certain percentage of refugees that are coming in, and they are Muslims, and that religion is completely hateful of Christians (crosstalk). They want to see us dead!

Audience: Yes! Yes!

Audience Member 2: Yes, they do!

Audience Member 1: Now, now, we can’t say that they hate America, because they’re coming here. They love it here. But when you stand up and you say I’m an American and I’m a Christian, they hate you. So the issue is that religion. Now, we’ve got all these different programs for security, programs for money, programs to help them get jobs and get drivers’ licenses and all that. But the real issue is their heart issue. The real issue is that they are Muslim. The real issue is that they’re not Christians. So my question is, is LSS doing anything to evangelize those Muslims? To bring them to salvation? (LSS Meeting, October 25, 2016)

This exchange made it extremely clear that the fundamental concern regarding refugee resettlement and the Somali population in Anytown is their connections to Islam. In the above exchange, Muslims were considered inherently incompatible with “American values,” and stating such a thing was simply “truth,” not “racism.” The audience member also seemed to suggest that the only way in which Muslim refugee resettlement could be made acceptable would be to intentionally convert Muslims to Christianity.

Audience members in other meetings were clearly operating under the assumption that local Somali refugees and Muslims were violent and tended toward deviant, criminal behavior. In that same LSS meeting, another audience member referenced his anxiety regarding “…all kinds of atrocities related to migrant and/or refugee situations, sexual assaults, rapes, violence,
murder” in Europe and considered the local Somali refugee population poised to enact similar social ills in Anytown. One audience member went so far as to describe refugee resettlement as a direct “risk of American lives.” In an AFTF meeting, an audience member stood up and read a list of recent crimes (specifically violent crime and sexual assaults) purportedly committed by Somalis in South Dakota, to use “facts” to support the narrative that Muslim, refugee men were inherently violent and sexually aggressive. In an AFTF public meeting, an audience member, in dialogue with a speaker, not only assumed that Somali refugees were more likely to commit crime, but that such crime would be particular to their Somali identity:

“Can you tell us what kinda crime we should be watching out for? What kind of crime comes with the Somalian refugees?” (AFTF Meeting, September 22, 2016)

While the statement quoted above demonstrates a connection between crime and refugees, it also implies that Somalis are inherently prone to certain types of criminal behavior. This statement bespeaks an underlying assumption that the black, Muslim Somalis are culturally and morally inferior to the white, Christian residents of Anytown. This is further demonstrated by audience members’ preoccupation with sharing stories of local Somalis’ perceived lack of hygiene, aggression, and tendency to commit crime. As will be discussed later, these stories are sometimes used to argue that Somalis in Anytown do not wish to assimilate into “American culture” and are trying to seize control of Anytown.

While the speakers went to great lengths, in some cases, to argue for Islam’s legal incompatibility with United States law, the audience members were not as concerned with making nuanced legal arguments against Islam. Rather, they focused upon specific instances of refugee crime or a perceived lack of assimilation, rather than a grand theory of “cultural jihad,” such as the Red-Green Axis. However, one exception to this is the widespread belief among the
audience members that all Muslims affirm and desire to implement Sharia law in the United States, as seen in this comment from the LSS town hall meeting:

It’s not about higher power, it’s a political system! They’re anti-Constitutional. They believe in something that does not fit in America! Sharia and the U.S. Constitution! (audience applause) (LSS Meeting, October 25, 2016)

In other instances, such as demonstrated in an excerpt from a letter to the editor in the local newspaper, acceptance of newcomers (described as “immigrants” in this case) is predicated upon their total acceptance of the “customs” of the communities into which they enter:

How are these uneducated immigrants enriching our communities? Communities are enriched if they embrace our customs, habits and etiquette and not by trying to force their culture on us. Immigrants are welcome, my father was an immigrant, but there are some that do not want to assimilate but rather demand that we accept their culture as evidenced in Dearborn, Mich. (Famias 2017)

Thus, not only were Somalis in Anytown perceived to be morally inferior, violent, and undesirable, but audience members worried that Somalis and Muslim refugees in general were seeking to “force their culture” on Anytown residents. Also, Islam was considered to be a subversive and hostile ideology, making it impossible to assimilate Muslims into American society as long as they continue to practice Islam. Thus, the audience members argued that Muslims were not welcome in the U.S., and if Muslim Somalis moved into Anytown, local residents had every right to be concerned and speak out against their presence.

2. Institutional Failure

As in the AFTF Facebook posts and speaker content, audience members at meetings also argued that local institutions, both political and religious, had failed to protect them and serve their interests. According to the audience members, the incompetence of political leaders and even Christian religious institutions had allowed and encouraged Somali migration to Anytown,
as well as Muslim refugee resettlement in the U.S. Audience members argued that this institutional incompetence had resulted in a cultural crisis in which Muslims were poised to take control of the Anytown community and the United States government. Audience members also maligned the media (print, television) and educational institutions. Audience members argued that education and the media were used to “brainwash” the United States’ public to accept Islam as a religion of peace and support Muslim refugee resettlement. The most frequently attested concept codes for this thematic discussion are summarized in Table 16 below.

Table 16: Audience - Institutional Failure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes (Attested 8+ times)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Media Bias (8); Education (10); Christian Persecution (11); Political Incompetence (13); Christian Complicity (25)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The most pointed and consistent audience resentment was directed toward Christian religious institutions, particularly mainline protestant churches and organizations. Audience members accused these Christian organizations of intentionally supporting Muslim refugee resettlement despite the clear evidence of the harms Somali and/or Muslim refugees would bring to the Anytown community. Some audience members stated that they felt betrayed by their pastors and fellow parishioners and were made to feel unwelcome and shamed in their congregations for their anti-Muslim and anti-refugee views. Most of these criticisms focused on mainline Protestant churches and clergy, as well as Lutheran Social Services (LSS), a nominally Lutheran organization. Audience members argued that most local pastors support refugee resettlement and view refugee outreach as part of the Christian mission. However, audience members considered these types of Christian, pro-refugee activism to be highly inappropriate,
given the presumed violence and hostility of local Muslim refugees. As one audience member at the LSS meeting stated:

So we’re conditioned, and our religion and our faith has conditioned us to be embracing of our neighbors. We wanna do that! But what happens when the neighbor that you want to embrace, doesn’t want to embrace you? And that’s what we’re faced with. That’s the disconnect and the dissonance, and many of us, especially the liberals, they don’t know how to reconcile those two things. “I wanna help this person, but this person wants to hurt me. So I have to make a choice, but I don’t know how.” So we have to make it for them. I’m done with that. (LSS Meeting, October 25, 2016)

Audience members, particularly at the LSS townhall meeting, also expressed concern that LSS and other local religious groups were only assisting local refugees out of greed. Thus, audience members argued that these religious organizations, particularly LSS, were only motivated by their ability to access and spend federal dollars as private refugee resettlement subcontractors for the federal government. Thus, audience members stated that LSS was motivated only by profit margins and not by concerns for the well-being of the communities that would be negatively impacted by arriving Somali refugees. To audience members, this represented a type of religious treason. Audience members directed a significant amount of frustration toward LSS, particularly in the LSS townhall meeting and argued that that LSS should be responsible for any damages or crimes committed by local refugees to whom the LSS offered social supports. The following excerpt from the tense and hostile LSS townhall meeting clearly demonstrates local audience members’ concerns regarding LSS and their involvement in providing services to local Somali refugees:

Audience Member 1: I’m just wondering if the refugees are brought in and our community changes for the not-so-good, are you going to be here to clean up the mess? Number two, Lutheran Social Services, and I’d really like an honest answer, are you doing it for a humanitarian act? Or greed?

Audience: Amen! Amen!
Audience Member 2: Yay!

LSS Official: It’s—it’s just humanitarian—

Audience: No! No! (crosstalk)

Audience Member 3: It’s money! (crosstalk) It’s money! (LSS Meeting, October 25, 2016)

While LSS does directly resettle refugees at two sites in South Dakota, none of the Somali refugees in Anytown were directly settled in the city by LSS. Instead, these refugees had been directly resettled in other cities and migrated to Anytown to work at the meatpacking plant. Once these refugees arrived in Anytown, LSS provided financial support to these refugees. In the LSS meeting, audience members suggested that (even though LSS wasn’t directly bringing Somali refugees to Anytown) LSS should stop providing social supports to refugees, as this may serve as a deterrent for other refugees considering moving to Anytown.

As relates to religious institutions, there was a tension in audience comments. On the one hand, as discussed above, audience members said that they felt marginalized by their own churches and religious organizations for their anti-Muslim and anti-refugee views. However, in other instances, audience members argued that all Christians were marginalized and oppressed in the United States and unable to practice their faith to the same extent that Muslims were able. The two exchanges below from the LSS meeting (October 25, 2016) illustrate this point quite clearly:

**Exchange 1:**

Audience Member 1: My second question. If you are indeed Lutheran Social Services, why did this meeting not start with a prayer? (audience applause).

LSS Official: (unintelligible) I mean, that’s—
Audience Member 1: Can you get to start any—when they have the Task Force that’s here trying to promote the immigrants which are coming, which I appreciate (crosstalk). None of them start with a prayer. And they don’t (crosstalk). But you know what, this is a Christian nation! They don’t mind taking the U.S. dollar that says “In God We Trust.” It was God’s moral values that created the country they all want to come to. So if God is so bad, why are you afraid to say a prayer?

Audience Member 2: They’re taking God out of everything!

Exchange 2:

Audience Member 1: You guys do not understand what’s happening in this world. And my perception of what goes on, we as Christians, we cannot offend the Muslims, so we have to do what they want. Something happened during the parade. I wasn’t there. The lady said, “All the little kids sittin’ down there, and this guy came and almost knocked a guy off his chair to give this little 2-year-old a brownie on this old meat plate, plastic thing.” She said, “I grabbed the brownie right away, ‘cuz we didn’t know what was in it, for one thing.” And so she said, “I saw a cop,” so she said, “I said, what’s going on here? They’re handing—he’s handing this brownie to this little child, 2 years old.” Well, the cop says, “Well, what do you mean?” She said, “Well, that—like, the guy over there.” “Well, what do you mean, what guy?” She said, “That Muslim.” “Oh, you’re one of those guys.” That’s the answer we are getting from different organizations. Does anybody know what happened out in St. Cloud at the Catholic hospital? They had to take all their crosses out of the hospital, ‘cuz the Muslims were going in and breaking them. So I am—everybody here, put your cross necklaces on and wear your cross—

Audience Member 2: Amen!! Amen!! (audience applause)

Audience Member 1: (crosstalk) proud of who you are as Christians!

In both exchanges summarized above, audience members clearly stated that Christians are marginalized and shamed by “organizations” for their faith, while Muslims are free to oppress Christians and freely practice their religion without shame or limitations. In the second exchange, the audience member recounted a story to illustrate the ways in which Anytown residents are shamed for having anti-Muslim viewpoints by law enforcement and “other organizations.” This audience member implied that local Christians are being shamed, even by law enforcement, for wanting to protect their children from Somali Muslim predators. Meeting
attendees often expressed feelings of powerlessness and alienation because their anti-Muslim and anti-refugee warnings were not being taken seriously by local officials.

Audience members also expressed considerable dissatisfaction with local educational institutions. Audience members argued that local public schools were being utilized to brainwash area youth into politically correct, pro-Islam points of view. The previously discussed protests of AFTF meetings by the Anytown High School Democrats group was interpreted by both speakers and audience members as evidence of the success of this indoctrination effort. In other situations, high school students who attended the first two meetings and verbally disagreed with the speakers were booed and sanctioned by older audience members. In one meeting, the dissenting high school students were forced to leave by a group of older, male audience members who accused the students of disrespect and inappropriate behavior and suggested that they “shut up” and “learn” the “truth” from the speakers. Also, audience members at AFTF meetings, as demonstrated in the following quote, argued that Muslims are afforded an unfair amount of freedom to practice their religion in public schools:

You have no voice. They have prayer rooms. You’re not allowed to pray as a Christian. They have prayer rooms. The men wash themselves in bathrooms, in public bathrooms and the kids have no say. It is not good! Do it now before it gets into your schools! (AFTF Meeting, August 9, 2017)

A similar concern was verbalized by an individual at another AFTF meeting. In this case, the audience member argued that the local middle school’s menu had been edited to appease local Muslim desires and was a sign of worse things to come in Anytown:

Just one little thing that kind of bothered me a little bit. I noticed on the [Anytown] Public School lunch menu, it’s vegetarian beans. And I said to one of the middle school principals, “What is this ‘vegetarian beans?’ What happened to ham and beans?” And he kind of laughed. And it’s just a little thing, but to me, it’s an example of where we’re headed. (AFTF Meeting, August 9, 2017)
In other situations, locals expressed their discontent with the perceived lack of local media, government, and law enforcement protection of their community from Somalis. As demonstrated in the following exchange between an audience member and a speaker at an AFTF meeting, audience members did not consider themselves to be protected by local law enforcement or represented by the local media. Instead, they argued that local free speech had been suspended in the name of unfairly protecting violent, dangerous Somali refugees:

Audience Member 1: (very angry, yelling) The city of [Anytown] has had many, many things happen with these people, and everybody has been told to shut up. They’re not allowed to tell anybody about it. You guys have no idea what’s happened in this community. We have one neighborhood that has been terrorized for 3 years—

Speaker: Right.

Audience Member 1: The cops won’t report it, the paper won’t report it, people have been told they’ll lose their job if they say anything. These people are not peaceful. You just don’t know about it, because nobody will tell you. (AFTF Meeting, August 9, 2017)

Also, because of the perceived lack of action of local leaders, such as the city council and mayor, to speak out against the Somalis in Anytown, audience members feared that they were in danger of becoming the minority in their community and no longer being the dominant social or cultural group. Audience members argued that they had been betrayed by their local elected officials, as well as by their religious leaders, neither of whom truly had their best interests at heart. If they did, audience members argued, these leaders would not be so accepting of the idea of Muslim Somalis residing in Anytown and upsetting the local status quo. As stated by one audience member:

I’m worried that we’re soon gonna be like that city in Michigan that’s already run by Muslims. The [Anytown] Area Diversity Coalition has already got the police, a lot of the police, and I think 90% of the pastors already agreeing with them about that we should have more immigrants and refugees. (AFTF Meeting, April 6, 2017)
Audience members also expressed the belief that local organizations were offering special benefits, such as Section 8 or SNAP, to Muslims refugees that were not available to local homeless and veterans who were more deserving. There was a general consensus that social support programs offered to refugee families in Anytown were unnecessary and a crutch that kept refugee families from becoming self-sufficient. In earlier meetings focused on refugee resettlement, audience members were very concerned that having any LSS office in Anytown would serve to “draw” refugees looking to abuse “the system.” As seen in the following list of five comments made by different audience members in various public meetings, refugees are considered undeserving of any assistance, with social safety net programs being falsely perceived as a zero-sum game:

We talked about this welfare. If you go to the city of [Anytown] website, under services, they have a whole section there on immigrants and refugees, here are services available for you. On the city of [Anytown] website. They don’t have anything like that for veterans, but they do for refugees coming in. (AFTF Meeting, September 22, 2016)

Why—those people come here, they get jobs, they get housing, they get food. They get all this stuff. We got people in this town who can’t get a job and a place to live. (LSS Meeting, October 25, 2016)

And the New Americans Task Force, talk about—have different entities—talk about helping these people get their kids to school. I have kids, I have to get my own kids to school. We shouldn’t have to help them get their kids to school. (AFTF Meeting, August 11, 2016)

Wouldn’t it be nice if our veterans and our Senior Citizens got the benefit these people got? (AFTF Meeting, August 11, 2016)

When you look at the high unemployment rates in the United States, in Minnesota, in South Dakota, people that have given up looking for work—and I don’t see any association, any program, any organization going out and going to these places where people aren’t employed, saying, “Hey, we have jobs in South Dakota. We’ll help you pay for housing, we’ll help you pay for transportation, we’ll help you get home, we’ll help you with this.” They’re not funding those other people, and that is my issue with this
refugee settlement program is we’re not helping real American citizens—people that are citizens that are unemployed. We are not helping veterans that have come back from war. And that is my big beef with this refugee settlement program, and that is why I constantly am on the case of our Senators and Congressmen, both at the state and the national level. And that is the problem that I have with it, because we’re not giving funds and benefits, the cash benefits and helping other people. We could truck in a bunch of people from other countries—or other states that are citizens that are living in poverty and help them that way, and that upsets me that we’re not doing that. (AFTF Meeting, August 11, 2016)

These economic injustice narratives of refugees stealing public assistance funds and institutional support from the poor, veterans, and homeless are unique to the audience comments. However, notably, no audience members stated that they were personally in competition with refugees for employment. In this case, framing refugees as benefits and job opportunities from vulnerable, deserving “citizens” further served to portray refugees as undesirable.

3. Citizen Mobilization

The thematic category of “Citizen Mobilization” was the least robustly attested in the audience comments. In contrast to the speakers and the AFTF Facebook posts, audience members did not clearly articulate plans or strategies for citizen mobilization as anti-Muslim activists. Instead, audience comments communicated a general sense of hopelessness and powerlessness, as audience members were unable to control the demographic profile of their community and were afraid of losing local social dominance. As a result, many audience members expressed their frustrations to the invited speakers at the AFTF meetings and explicitly asked the speakers for guidance and tips as to how to combat Muslim refugee resettlement and the unwelcome demographic changes in the Anytown community. The most frequently attested concept code for this thematic category are summarized in Table 17 below.
Table 17: Audience - Citizen Mobilization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes (Attested 8+ times)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Citizen Agency (9)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While the previous discussions clearly demonstrate that meeting attendees considered their institutions to have failed them and found their “culture” to be under attack, the audience comments lack a clear understanding of what the appropriate citizen response should look like. Because the Somalis living in Anytown are secondary migrants, not directly resettled there by LSS, this Somali migration is not controlled by any public or private organization. Thus, there is no clear way for the audience members to regulate the demographic composition of their community, as would potentially be the case in a direct refugee resettlement site in which refugee arrivals are controlled by an organization. In most meetings, audience members simply asked speakers for advice and directions as to how to reduce local demographic change, Somali in-migration, and fight the “Muslim agenda” in the Anytown.

4. Summary of Transcript Analysis

Overall, the audience comments at the various public meetings were mostly concerned with the perceived incompatibility of Islam and Muslims with American political institutions and social norms. Refugee crime, abuses of the social safety net, the complex role of Christian institutions, and perceived political failures were prevalent themes in this source of data, but these themes all derived their significance from their connections to Islam in audience discourse. For example, Christian institutions were maligned for their perceived care for Muslims. The same held true for local politicians and organizations, which were criticized for their support of refugee and immigrant outreach programs. Thus, other concerns were incidental to the larger,
overarching concern: Islam. To repeat the words of an audience member discussed above: “The real issue is that they are Muslim. The real issue is that they’re not Christians.”

B. Facebook Data

In the discussion that follows, I outline, describe, and discuss each of the three key themes that emerged from the NVivo analysis of the individual user comments posted to the AFTF public Facebook page. As with the three other sources of data, the three themes identified in this analysis were: Muslim Incompatibility, Institutional Failure, and Citizen Mobilization. The following discussion only analyzes the comments of individuals seeming to support or approving of the AFTF’s message and inflammatory online posts. As mentioned previously in Chapter 3, a significant number of Facebook comments were posted by individuals opposing the AFTF and fact-checking AFTF posts. However, those comments are not discussed below, as they do not directly address concerns of frame resonance, which comprises the second research question. The following discussion of Facebook comments includes quotes, all of which are presented verbatim, including grammatical and spelling errors.

1. Muslim Incompatibility

In their narratives of Muslim incompatibility, the individual Facebook comments told a slightly different story than the audience comments. While some of the same concerns regarding social disorder, violence, crime, and “Islamization” (or assimilation) were voiced in Facebook comments, the relative weight of those comments was different. Online, there more of a concern with the cultural inferiority of Muslim refugees and Somalis. Thus, online comments were primarily focused upon framing Muslims and Somalis as being culturally inferior and otherwise undesirable. However, concerns about social control and cultural conflict were also frequently
referenced. Thus, Facebook comments primarily found Muslims and Muslim refugees to be socially inferior and wishing to impose their culture on the rest of the non-Muslim world. The most frequently attested concept codes with frequency counts are summarized in Table 18.

Table 18: Facebook Commenters - Muslim Incompatibility

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes (Attested 10+ times)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Muslim Brutality (11); Muslims as Sexual Predators (14); Muslim Intolerance (15); Islam as Inherently Violent (23); Refugees bring social disorganization (37); Islamization (52); Cultural inferiority (53)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One point of focus among Facebook commenters was the “Muslim as Sexual Predator” trope. Comments, such as the one below, demonstrated concern that Islam endorses pedophilia and other forms of sexual assault and predation:

The point is Muslims believe that a child at the age of 9 is an adult. They believe that it is ok to marry and have sex with a 9 year old CHILD. That is their way of life. It may be ok in their country but it is not ok in America!!!!

In other comments, individuals were clearly fixated on the idea that Muslim refugees are inherently culturally inferior, undesirable, and degrade the quality of life in places to which they migrate. It is important to state here that all of the AFTF’s posts referencing Muslims or Islam were negative. Nearly all shared news posts were related to cases of FGM, sexual assault, violent crime, or terrorism committed by primarily African, Muslim, refugee men. The goal of these posts can be assumed to provoke strongly negative responses. The following six comments are graphic depictions of responses to such posts:

Turning this country into the unsanitary shithole they fled.

They serve no purpose here and have nothing to offer. Everywhere they are there is nothing but trouble and serious crimes.
…Uncivilized. Inbred. Savages.

…Why do taxpayers have to continue to support this waste of life? When you bring the 3rd world into our country, you get 3rd world uncivilized behavior. Duh!

When you assist in the mass resettlement of 3rd world country barbarians, settle them en masse in small rural towns, your town will begin to experience barbaric crimes from 3rd world refugees. But it's okay because the meat packing plant makes more money by hiring low skilled barbarians. The American citizens already there who are harmed by these 21st century slaves are "collateral damage".

…This is the reason why locals including me don't want the refugees here. They bring trouble and they either don't want to assimilate to our culture and laws or don't know how to. We like [Anytown] the way it is. We don't like drive by shootings and rapes and violence.

Also of note are the terms used in these comments to refer to refugees, Muslims, and Somalis in these comments. Rather than referring to them as human beings, the terms “barbarians,” “savages,” “inbred,” and “waste of life” were employed. The often-graphic degradation of the humanity of local refugees is exacerbated in the comments listed below, which were posted under the Wal-Mart public defecation photo:

Send those nasty fucks home

She's apparently not potty trained she belongs in a barn

I believe it , they are filthy ppl , they wipe with their damn hands and eat spaghetti out of the same damn bowl . Even if it's set up they still disgusting

They have no respect for anyone. A Somalian Untermensch raped and beat a woman half to death in Mapelton ND. Just study what is going on in Dearborn Michigan and then one can clearly see their blueprint for America. I live here in Fargo ND and its starting to look like a movie set for the filming of Planet of the Apes.

These animals are worthless ship the ass back to shitville where they came from

This a a Muslim practice I have seen other video footage of it. Not sure why they do it in public?? They will also do it in swimming pools because of the un modest clothing at pools. They know if they defecate in the pool everyone will be disgusted and leave.
Oh it's true. A few work at the bobcat plant in gwinner and they can't get them to use the restrooms. Urinate on the walls or wherever they are and shit anywhere too. 3rd world not willing to assimilate and LSS does shit to help, they just collect the $$$.

It is important to keep in mind that the credibility of this photo was disputed by individuals claiming to be Wal-Mart employees. However, even without proof of the veracity of this incident, the nature of these comments, and the statements such as “even if it’s set up they still disgusting,” demonstrate that commenters already considered Muslims and Somalis to be, at the very least, culturally inferior, and at worst, sub-human. References to a “Somalian Untermensch,” “these animals,” and Somali neighborhoods looking like the “Planet of the Apes” film set all have clearly racial connotations and are explicitly discriminatory. Thus, even without solid evidence that connected this incident to a Somali woman, commenters were eager to construct and spread a dehumanizing narrative that casted Muslims and Somalis as sub-human, dirty, and undesirable. The posting of this photo demonstrated a clever strategy by the AFTF, given the responses. The organization didn’t even need to add a discriminatory caption to the photo to elicit discriminatory comments in which commenters made the picture’s implicit message explicit.

As noted previously, a key focus of the Facebook commenters was “Islamization.” Commenters described Islam as an “evil” ideology that mandates rape, murder, and cultural domination. This explicit connection of Islam and Muslims with violence, terrorism, and the overthrow of the U.S. government mirrors key aspects of the AFTF Facebook posts, speaker content, and also audience comments. The following comments are clear examples of these conceptions of Islam and Muslims as inherently violent and dangerous:

Coming soon to America! Be prepared and understand how these people feel. Keep
letting them in. Wake the hell up, they have no hearts or compassion for anything American! They aren't gonna spare your life or your families lives just because you felt sorry for them, your dead too!

They are evil and dangerous. Their beliefs are evil it's so scary and others need to wake up to this!

…They want control. They want to change and destroy…I am not going to accept anyone from any race, religion, belief, or culture who want to change and convert and destroy America.

I am getting so tired of people thinking Christians are horrible people because we don't want people who are in opposition to Christianity to be welcomed here with open arms…The religion of Islam hates Christians. That's what it teaches and stands for. That doesn't mean all of them are bad or are violent and hateful, but it does create a fear that means we do not want them to overtake our nation.

When was the last time you saw a Christian kill someone because they didn't believe in the same God?? Or thought it was ok to rape someone because their religion says it's ok??

islam is evil
moslems are demons
allah is satan

All Muslims want to take over the world. To say they don't is a lie.

Here, the commenters parrot key elements of the Islamization posts of the AFTF, as well as the incompatibility narrative of the speakers. While there is no clear reference to the Red-Green Axis theory, there is an implicit acceptance of the idea that Islam preaches the domination of all cultures and religions, and all Muslims are plotting to “take over” the United States. In other cases, commenters seem to believe that Islam mandates its adherents to rape and murder. All of these ideas are represented in the AFTF’s discourse and represent areas of frame resonance.
2. **Institutional Failure**

Facebook commenters were also concerned with the perceived shortcomings of American institutions to protect and elevate the status of “real Americans.” While themes such as Muslim favoritism, media bias, political incompetence, and the fiscal aspect of refugee resettlement have already been discussed in depth in previous analyses, the idea of “correct” immigration was a significant concern to online commenters. “Correct” immigration was equated with historical, European immigration to the United States, and was set up in opposition and contrast to the “incorrect” migration of Muslim refugees to the United States. The most frequently attested concept codes underlying this thematic discussion are summarized in Table 19 below.

Table 19: Facebook Commenters - Institutional Failure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes (Attested 10+ times)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Correct Immigration (10); Refugees as Fiscal Burden (13); Refugee Resettlement as Business (15); Political Incompetence (36); Media Bias (37); Liberal Irrationality (38); Muslim Favoritism (58)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Above all, commenters argued that American institutions disproportionately grant Muslims special and undeserved privileges. These perceived special privileges take multiple forms. Some commenters stated that refugees were unjustly benefitting from social safety net programs, with commenters conceptualizing these benefits as a zero-sum conflict between refugees and the U.S.’s poor, as seen in the following two comments:

Our vets and elderly cannot get any help from the government and yet [Anytown] wants to bring in refugees with tax payers money. They do not want to live within the law but are the first to call discrimination. Soon we will be the minority. Charity begins at home helping ourselves first.

These are NOT refugees, these are invaders using our kindness as a trojan horse. We
have our own problems. There are 70,000 homeless veterans in the US. There are 20,000 homeless children in the US. We need to worry about our own before bringing in more people. Especially when these sick fuckers don't want to become Americans but want to undermine our Constitution and way of life.

Similar to findings discussed previously, other commenters argued that Muslim refugees were exempt from requirements for the separation of church and state, allowing Muslims more religious freedom than Christians. Both comments shown below seem to demonstrate anxiety that American Christians are being oppressed:

I would love my kids to go to a Christian school but in order for that to happen I have to pay for it. The same should go for Muslims. If you want Muslim kids to go to a Muslim school then the parents need to pay for it. NOT the state!!!

Why should America provide state funded Muslim schools and teachers, halal meat, sharia law etc???. This is AMERICA!!! If you want that then go back to the country you came from. We shouldn't have to accomdate to you. You moved here so you need to assimilate into our culture.

In other cases, such as in the comments below, refugee resettlement agencies were cast as greedy and intentionally bringing violent refugees to Anytown in order to make a profit, while not having to bear the social consequences of their actions:

…they profit from the damage they're doing. In a perfect world the rape and murder victims would be them and their families.

Well I think the Lutheran Social Services and other so-called "Christian" "charities" who make massive amounts of money while hiding most of the process from taxpayers, should be ashamed. This has nothing to do with racism, but it's the favorite weapon to shut up and intimidate by both the Left and Islamists. Our freedoms are not important to those who profit (VOLAGS) and are in on the scam, such as the Chamber of Commerce for cheap labor and Democrats for voters.

In the case of the latter comment, “Christian charities” were attacked for acting as private contractors for the privatized federal refugee resettlement program, enacting demographic and religious change on communities such as Anytown.
The local news media, as well as law enforcement, were seen by Facebook commenters to be working together to hide the “truth” of the extent of refugee criminal activity, in a concentrated effort to falsely present refugees as valuable members of Anytown’s community. The comments below demonstrate clear examples of the perceived biases of the media and law enforcement, both local and national:

Extremely scary when we expect our newspaper to report all news that concerns the safety of Americans. If it had been the publisher or editors family that had been assaulted, I wonder if the truth or more information would have been reported then? Why are they trying to protect people that aren't even US citizens?

I heard that cases involving refugees are purposefully being withheld from the community, so that we don't become anxious about the refugees being in our communities. What I heard was that only about 1/3 of the crime committed by refugees is reported. This coverup needs to stop.

If it would've been a white guy it would've been all over the news. But we can't hurt anyone's feelings since the POS rapist was a Somali because that would be racist. So sick of the liberal media and political correctness.

There is coverage but lists him as a citizen. No mention of refugee status. If this had happened with a citizen, it would have been IMMEDIATE front page news. Pathetic.

Thus, commenters echoed key elements of the AFTF’s frame amplification and articulation strategies, about how institutions have betrayed their core constituents and focus on profit or the desire to be politically correct. As a result, the commenters asserted that white, Christian “citizens” were left without protection and vulnerable to violent Muslim refugees, while local leaders and organizations looked the other way.

3. Citizen Mobilization

Similar to the audience comments, Facebook commenters also did not seem to have a clear conception of what form an appropriate citizen response to the “Enemy Threat” should take. Rather, commenters, like meeting attendees, seemed frustrated with their perceived lack of
agency and loss of privilege in their society and in the Anytown community, and were in search of guidance and an outlet for their frustrations and feelings of inefficacy. However, there was a unique pattern in the Facebook comments, not found in any other data sources. While the AFTF’s Facebook posts, invited speakers, and audience members were careful to say that they did not condone violence against or hate of Muslims, online commenters did not have the same qualms about discussing violence as a solution. Also, in contrast to the comments made by audience members at meetings, Facebook commenters did not clearly solicit advice from the AFTF or other commenters as to how to engage in activism to address their grievances.

Another interesting set of comments, while not discussed in this thesis, were those that opposed the AFTF. In these comments, individuals accused the AFTF and its supporters of being divisive, dishonest, and misrepresenting Muslims and refugees as terrorists and social deviants. These comments affirmed the value of diversity and defended Islam. These commenters relied on facts, data, and news reports to support their arguments, much like the AFTF and its supporters. However, both sides’ “facts” and “data” were sourced from different organizations and media outlets, particularly highlighting the partisan nature of the AFTF’s preferred sources. The most frequently attested codes for the “Citizen Mobilization” thematic discussion are summarized below in Table 20.

Table 20: Facebook Commenters - Citizen Mobilization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes (Attested 10+ times)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Violence Against Muslims (26); Citizen Activism (31); Defending Anti-Muslim Activism (39); Deport All Muslims (39)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Commenters utilized Facebook to amplify values of truth-telling, education, and the need to gather and make decisions based upon the “facts” presented by the AFTF through its posts and invited speakers. Thus, many Facebook commenters justified their anti-Muslim views as being rooted in “truth” and not unfair or discriminatory in any way. This reflects the content of both the invited speakers and the AFTF posts. This narrative of pursuing the truth through facts and research was used by many Facebook users to justify their support of the AFTF’s mission and message, as demonstrated in the following six comments:

Anyone that was at the last meeting can tell you it was peaceful. The speaker went out and talked with the protestors, invited them in and encouraged them to ask questions. They did and he answered. It was all very respectful and peaceful. It was very informative and I thank this group for being truth bearers.

Those who won't look at the truth are like sheep led to the slaughter.

This was awesome, very informative, this guy got all his info from documents created by the Muslims, it was all facts with resources. You all should have been there, if you are not part of the solution you are part of the problem.

Nothing at all... what's wrong with going and listening to a persons experiences and hearing about what they went through... people do it all the time whether it's about a disability, adversity, work related, or whatever... but because this guy was a former Muslim turned Christian he is not labeled a hate group and the people that want to listen to what he has to say or experienced are racist???? I don't understand that!!! It's just not right....

I haven't fully recovered from your last meeting,, what a blessing to have you Patriots of the Republic providing accurate information,, God Bless you and the USA

This group has the same rights as you do to voice their opinions and concerns. So if you think reporting them is going to do any good you're wrong. You have nothing to go off of. Just because you don't like something doesn't mean that everyone else has to feel the same way as you. No one is making you read what is posted on this page. You chose to do that yourself. Wanting to have a page like this shut down is like trying to take someone's 1st amendment right away. Good luck with that!

The commenters also emphasized the value of having allies in political positions of
power, such as elected representatives. In this sense, the AFTF’s emphasis on offline activism, voting, and even protest seemed to have resonated with the commenters, as seen in the three selected comments below:

Time to storm offices of Mayors, Police Chiefs, city councilors, Sheriffs and demand they stop these dangerous diversity games at expense of American people. We could offer them a class to help them understand what is REALLY happening during this social experimentation throughout America.

The traitor politicians need to be replaced with patriots. Current elected officials should have demonstrators at their offices and at their homes if they don't start defending Americans and American culture.

Come on people open your eyes if you are lulled into this, when you wake up you will be living a nightmare, and you will not like the outcome‼️

In an interesting and perhaps not surprising divergence from the public meeting contexts, some Facebook commenters suggested violence as an appropriate response to reports of Muslims committing crimes or the Wal-Mart defecation photo. While the AFTF, invited speakers, and most meeting attendees made concentrated efforts to self-present as logical and reasoned truth-seekers, not hate-mongers condoning violence, individual commenters on the AFTF webpage often did not demonstrate the same scruples. Facebook comments represent the only type of data used for this study in which violence against Muslims is explicitly proposed or condoned.31 Some of these violent comments were posted in response to AFTF shares of news articles reporting sexual assault or FGM committed by Muslim and/or refugee men. However, comments such as “one way tickets to hell is what they need” and “then starve!” were posted in response to a shared news article reporting upon Muslim women who requested a Halal food stamp program.

31 The one exception to this is a discussion of the Crusades undertaken by a speaker in an AFTF public meeting. In this discussion, he states that the killing of Muslim women and children during the Crusaders was both necessary and admirable, as it was part of an effort to keep Muslims from conquering Christian Europe.
in Minnesota. Thus, even less incendiary posts can elicit disproportionately vengeful comments. Examples of extreme reactions, including suggestions of violence or deportation are demonstrated in the following ten comments:

- Shoot this trash before they shoot you
- Prison I'd too good for these people. Send them back minus their hands.
- cut their penis off and make them eat them
- Another case for high velocity lead poisoning....
- If this is true, they should take him coyote hunting!( GUT SHOOT THIS FUCKER AND LET THE COYOTES DO THE REST!
- Your brother obama is not our president, get the fuck out of America.
- Can not coexist with people trying to kill us. Deport them all.
- Send them home now before they hurt or kill anyone else!!
- They do not belong on American Soil.
- Time to start relieving America of these no good Islamic asses!
- In some situations, the comments were not simply suggesting violence against the individual accused of the crime or other incident referenced in the post. Instead, the comments have been expanded to the entire ethnic, religious, and/or refugee group of the individual being discussed in the post(s). Thus, the point made by the AFTF that Muslim refugee resettlement and immigration to the United States should be slowed or halted clearly resonated with these commenters, as does the idea that Muslims are inherently dangerous and violent. However, the commenters have taken the message to the next level and begun to call for deportation or direct violence against Muslims. While AFTF posts and the invited speakers clearly state that Muslims are incompatible with “American culture” and should not be admitted to the country, they never
explicitly state that Muslims should be forcibly removed from the U.S. simply because of their faith. However, such a step could easily be implied from their discourse. At the very least, it seems that the Facebook commenters have reached such a conclusion in interacting with the AFTF’s Facebook materials.

4. Summary of Facebook Comment Analysis

Overall, the Facebook commenters were primarily concerned with issues of “Muslim incompatibility” and “Institutional failure.” Discussions of Muslim incompatibility were focused upon the perceived threats of “Islamization,” social disorganization, and violence that commenters inherently associated with Muslim refugees and immigrants. Commenters also argued that these Muslim refugees and immigrants were culturally inferior and undeserving of acceptance into the Anytown community or even the United States, for their cultural and religious practices.

In the discussion of the shortcoming of American institutions, commenters stated that Muslims were unfairly protected and favored by inept and/or malevolent liberal politicians. These politicians, according to commenters, used the media to spread lies about Muslims and to unfairly neglect and even persecute Christians in the U.S. Thus, Muslim refugees were seen to be part of a business venture by refugee resettlement organizations and the government, which was conducted at the expense of individual taxpayers.

Finally, commenters exhibited relatively clear ideas of what “Citizen Mobilization” should look like. Primarily, they were concerned with explicitly defending their anti-Muslim views as “truth” and based in “facts.” In other instances, political engagement and activism were
suggested as solutions. However, commenters also clearly called for violence against and deportation of Muslim immigrants and refugees, primarily for their religious beliefs.

C. Synthesis of Findings Related to RQ #2

In light of the previous discussion of the findings from my analysis of the audience and Facebook comments, I will now answer the second core research question of this thesis. This second research question asks what are the main points of frame resonance between the AFTF and its audience, with “audience” being understood as those attending public meetings and commenting on Facebook. The key components of the AFTF’s framing strategy that seem to resonate most strongly with the AFTF’s audience are tied to notions of cultural inferiority, the assumed violence and subversive political agenda of Islam and Muslims, as well as a widespread institutional failure to specially protect “Christian” and “American” cultures. These audience comments tended to focus on the perceived threat of Muslim refugees “taking over” Anytown with the support of local and national political and religious institutions. Individuals also linked the perceived failures of local Somalis to wholly “assimilate” to “American culture” to the speaker and AFTF narratives of “Islamization” and “Enemy Threat.”

In these comments, individuals clearly conceptualized Anytown as harmonious, homogenous, and crime-free before the Somalis arrived. This mirrors the findings of Fennelly (2008), whose research in a small meatpacking town also revealed that locals found diverse refugee and immigrant meatpacking laborers to be a pollutant of the local community, which they considered to have been homogenous and peaceful prior to their arrival. Also, the significant concern with Muslim assimilation and the need to maintain white, Christian dominance in Anytown and the U.S. closely replicates Flora et al.’s (2000) discussion of the
“Legalists” in Industria who had similar concerns about Latino immigrants not adopting local norms.
The points of emphasis of meeting attendees and online supporters were highly congruent, with a few minor exceptions. Particularly, audience comments in the meetings had a much less clear idea of what the appropriate “Citizen Mobilization” should look like. On Facebook, however, commenters expressed disorganized and sometimes violent solutions to the “problem” of refugees in Anytown. Notably, economic concerns were not a primary focus of the local audience members and commenters. However, when mentioned, such concerns focused upon perceived refugee abuses of the social safety net, with no individual referencing any competition for local employment. Rather, primary concerns centered around refugee cultural inferiority, refugee crime, and a perceived decline in Christian hegemony in the U.S. Also, my analysis revealed a general sense of frustration with the demographic changes occurring in Anytown and the inability of local residents to stop these changes in their community.

Also, Anytown residents commenting on Facebook in both the meetings and on Facebook clearly sought to frame their cultural anxieties as non-racist and rooted in “facts” to justify their anti-Muslim viewpoints and dislike for local Somalis. Thus, the AFTF with its intensive use of “expert” speakers in meetings and “facts” on its Facebook page provided an ideal justification for these local residents’ anti-Muslim viewpoints and anxieties regarding Anytown’s Somali population. As a result of the AFTF’s frame amplification and articulation processes, the locals that supported the AFTF and did not want Somalis in Anytown were able to adopt the AFTF’s frame and claim that they were not racists seeking to deny a whole religious group constitutional freedoms. Instead, locals were able to argue that they were simply defending their community and their children from a violent, toxic, and treasonous ideology and its adherents. Such a clear association of Somali Muslims and Muslims more broadly with social
disorder, cultural inferiority, violence, and treason goes beyond the slightly more “color-blind” arguments of the speakers or AFTF Facebook posts, as commenters in online and offline forums dehumanized and directly described Somalis and Muslims as dirty, violent, and inferior, and deserving of violence or deportation. Thus, Anytown residents seem eager for a frame such as the AFTF’s to justify their latent anxieties regarding the Somali newcomers to Anytown, with the AFTF’s frame exhibiting a high amount of resonance.
Chapter 5. Conclusions

In this chapter, I will discuss the general conclusions of the thesis. In Part I, I review my two core research questions and the answers to those research questions, based on the results of my analysis as discussed in Chapter 4. In Part II of this chapter, I discuss the specific contributions my research makes to the theories and literatures reviewed in Chapter 2. In Part III, I note the limitations of my research and suggest ways in which future research could address these limitations.

I. General Conclusions

The overarching goal in conducting this research was to answer a broad question about the social world. That question is: How do individuals and organizations justify participation in public shows of Islamophobia, such as hate group mobilizations? As discussed in Chapter 1, the case of the AFTF in Anytown, SD, with its large following on Facebook and well-attended public meetings, provided a unique opportunity to examine the justifications and motivations cited by anti-Muslim activists.

In this thesis, I analyzed the case of the AFTF through two core research questions:

1) What are the AFTF’s main points of frame amplification?

2) What are the main points of frame resonance as reflected in Facebook videos and postings by commenters and meeting attendees?

These questions were rooted in framing theory from the social movements literature which provided a conceptual toolkit for analyzing specific values and motivations cited by anti-Muslim activists. The empirical findings from social movements and rural sociological literatures
provided crucial insights as I formulated expected the relationships and findings that were discussed in Chapter 2.

In response to the first research question, I found (as discussed in Chapter 4) that the frame amplification strategies of the AFTF focused primarily on cultural and political factors. Contrary to the central predictions of Olzak’s ethnic competition theory (1992), employment competition for local jobs was not cited as a motivation for this anti-Muslim mobilization. Instead, the use of federal dollars to fund social safety net programs and privatized refugee resettlement programs were the economic concerns raised at meetings and on Facebook. The core justifications for the AFTF’s mobilization were the perceived cultural and political threats posed by Somalis and Muslims. The centrality of political competition in precipitating ethnic conflict is predicted by Olzak’s (1992) theory. However, cultural competition is predicted by other ethnic competition theoretical perspectives more focused on “social dominance” and “group position” (Bobo 1999). My findings replicate those of other nativist and right-wing studies in which concerns over demographic, cultural, and political change were the main drivers of right-wing mobilizations or ethnic conflicts (Astor 2016; Busher 2016; Stewart et al. 2015).

In the AFTF’s online posts and through the discourse of their invited speakers, the values and norms cited by them as most in need of protection were personal safety, patriotism, and constitutional freedoms. Through a careful strategy of framing Muslims and local Somalis as threats to these key values, the AFTF used their Facebook posts and invited speakers to cast Muslims as an existential threat to what they argued were “fundamentally American” cultural and political values. In this way, the AFTF created a way for their supporters to participate in a “patriotic” and “conservative” mobilization that did not advocate explicitly for violence and
claimed to defend “traditional American” values. However, these efforts at mobilization engaged in clear instances of ostensibly “color-blind” discrimination in which Muslims and Muslim refugees were matter-of-factly connected to behaviors and beliefs that were dangerous, subversive, and undesirable. Such an implicit connection of a minority group with deviance and violence is a classic example of “color-blind” racism. This also supports hypotheses that suggest conservative SMOs have racial goals, while they may communicate these goals more subtly than right-wing SMOs (Blee and Creasap 2010; Blee and Yates 2015; Bonilla-Silva 2014).

Through its frame amplification strategies, the AFTF presented itself as a bastion of traditional family values and patriotism when, in reality, it championed oppression and ethnocentrism. This manipulation of reality to present the AFTF in a positive light was achieved through a combination of their amplification of fundamental, pro-social values and the production of a grand narrative of Muslim incompatibility, institutional failure, and the resulting need for citizen mobilization. Additionally, the AFTF exhibited a clear engagement with local events through social media-enabled “citizen journalism,” as seen in their posts that re-shared local individuals’ negative experiences with refugees and photos and statements from supporters. In this way, the AFTF exhibited a high degree of frame flexibility, which allowed them to custom-tailor their message to incorporate local concerns, thereby increasing their resonance. This strategy was greatly facilitated by the AFTF’s use of Facebook, which decreased the resources needed to connect with supporters and others in the broader Anytown area, allowing inflammatory, anti-Muslim content to be rapidly diffused through online, personal networks.

In response to my second research question, my analysis revealed that the themes of the AFTF’s frame were highly resonant with their local supporters. The concerns of meeting
attendees and Facebook commenters also centered on cultural and political factors rather than on economic competition. Audience members described feeling isolated and marginalized in their community and stated that Somalis received special benefits and were unfairly protected by local government, media, and non-profit organizations. During meetings, audience members expressed feelings of frustration and powerlessness as they were unable to prevent undesired demographic change from occurring in the Anytown community. They complained that local, state, and national political institutions failed to protect their “Western” Christian interests from dangerous and undesirable African Muslim refugees and immigrants.

While my analysis provides a starting point for the study of communities facing similar anti-Muslim or anti-refugee mobilizations, it also demonstrates the complexity of these types of mobilizations. An organized and well-networked SMO such as the AFTF, especially when supported by hundreds of local community members, is an intimidating force to oppose. Interestingly, despite the fact that the AFTF appeared in response to refugee resettlement discussions taking place in Anytown in 2016, the AFTF did not dissolve after those discussions ended. Instead, it continued to gain followers and publicity. As a result, the AFTF exhibited high frame flexibility and responsiveness, suggesting that it will not be dissolving anytime soon. This is notable considering the lack of local institutional support for the AFTF along with protests against their speakers and meetings that have been organized by local high school students.

It is important to acknowledge that some concepts articulated in this thesis, such as the Red-Green Axis, are not only the focus of fringe hate groups such as the AFTF, but are also reflected in the Tweets sent by President Trump and memos composed by NSC staffers (Davis 2017; Specia 2017). Thus, while my research has just begun to approach the framing strategies
used by anti-Muslim hate groups, it clearly shows that organized and institutionalized Islamophobia has become an urgent social problem. Considering the ways in which anti-Muslim groups such as the AFTF are rapidly multiplying and the nature of the arguments made by the AFTF speakers (i.e. depriving Muslims of Constitutional rights)--in conjunction with the affirmation of such views in the Oval Office and NSC--critical human rights and legal battles may lie ahead in the United States. Thus, sociologists and policy makers need to be aware, engaged, and ready for whatever comes next.

II. Contributions

The clearest contribution of my research is its empirical focus on anti-Muslim and anti-refugee activism in the United States. Previous studies of rightist, nativist groups focused almost entirely on immigration status, with refugee status not a primary focus. Also, my analysis revealed that the terms “refugee” and “Muslim” were often conflated, making “refugee” a pejorative term in certain contexts. In addition, my study foregrounds and illustrates the use of coded, implicitly discriminatory discourse in conservative SMOs, as discussed in Chapter 2. According to Blee and Yates (2015) this is an understudied issue in the rightist social movement literature. The AFTF engages in both coded racial and religious discrimination by both implicitly and explicitly associating Muslims with a whole range of social problems and dangers. This thesis also makes a contribution through my finding that the AFTF’s mobilization is not driven by employment or economic competition, but rather places most emphasis on religious differences. The core economic concerns in this case were focused on resentment of refugee access to federally funded social safety net programs. This finding complements the results of other studies that have found that nativist and “Tea Party” conservative groups tend to mobilize
in more affluent areas and are concerned with redistributive policies, rather than employment

Also, my research builds upon and extends social movements framing theory through an
in-depth analysis of the discursive and frame amplification processes used by a particular SMO.
These are theoretical topics which remain understudied due to the time intensive nature of the
collection of discursive, qualitative data necessary for such research (Benford and Snow 2000).
My work furthers the application of framing theory by examining micro-level framing strategies
of a particular rightist movement, especially as relates to the framing of local events by the
AFTF and its followers and supporters. This is an empirical gap noted by McVeigh and Sikkink
(2005) and Ebert and Okamoto (2015). My study also extends right-wing framing research
(McVeigh 2009; McVeigh et al. 2004; Stewart et al. 2015). The application of framing theory
employed in this research allowed elucidation of the discursive processes that connect
demographic change and collective action outcomes, thereby providing a nuanced test of the
different elements of various ethnic competition theoretical perspectives (Bobo 1999; Olzak
1992) through a frame analysis.

Empirically, my research also contributes to the rural sociological literature regarding
shifting rural immigration patterns and the contemporary “ethnic restructuring” of rural areas in
the Midwest and Great Plains (Barcus and Simmons 2013). While this literature tends to focus
on discriminatory individual attitudes and community conflicts, it lacks a clear treatment of anti-
immigrant collective action and SMO activity. Thus, one contribution of my research is that it
complements these studies that explore negative receptions and perceptions of immigrants in
rural meat processing cities with an in-depth analysis of an SMO that emerged in one of these
contexts (Fennelly 2008; Flora et al. 2000; Shandy and Fennelly 2006). I also explicitly utilized social movements’ framing and ethnic competition theories to enhance the transferability of my results. Furthermore, this study provides recognition of the Somali Muslim population in rural places, as well as the nuances in rhetoric surrounding immigrant and refugee populations in these places. This thesis replicates key findings from other research into the problems associated with decreased social capital among Muslim newcomers (Cadge et al. 2013; Shandy and Fennelly 2006), as well as clear instances of cultural discrimination against newcomers (Fennelly 2008).

This study documents how AFTF and its supporters also amplify values of assimilation and traditional expressions of patriotism, very similar to the anti-immigrant narratives Flora et al. (2000) found in a Midwestern, Latino immigrant context. However, my research adds a necessary nuance to this work by emphasizing the importance of religious discrimination and the presence of Somalis in nontraditional immigrant and refugee destinations.

III. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This thesis has the clear limitations of a single case study tied to a specific location. However, the intensive use of outside speakers by the AFTF as well as the densely networked nature of anti-Muslim organizations more broadly (Bail 2015) enabled this single case study analysis to have a potentially broader generalizability. Because the AFTF utilizes outside speakers from other anti-Muslim organizations and primarily sourced their own Facebook content from other anti-Muslim and conservative sites, both the meetings and the AFTF Facebook page served as a type of “echo chamber.” Thus, because of the AFTF’s dense connections to and reliance on information from other organizations in other geographic settings, this case study of the AFTF facilitates generalizations beyond the specific site of Anytown, SD.
A final potential limitation could be this thesis’ lack of key informant or in-depth interviews. Such data may have facilitated a deeper understanding of the motivations of individual supporters of the AFTF who attended the public meetings and/or commented on Facebook. This could have allowed for a more robust discussion of and answer to my second research question regarding frame resonance. However, as discussed in Chapter 3, obtaining such information comes with physical risks as well as logistical challenges, and was not undertaken for this thesis.

Based on the limitations discussed above, productive areas for future research would include a comparative case approach, as well as the incorporation of in-depth interviews. A comparative case analysis of anti-Muslim SMOs would allow for more attention to variations in local contexts, success of mobilizations, and the varying frames used by such groups. This would increase the generalizability of findings and allow for a more robust examination of consistency and variation across anti-Muslim SMOs. The use of in-depth interviews would allow for leaders and participants in anti-Muslim SMOs to tell their stories and provide more nuanced and detailed accounts of their justifications for participation in this type of mobilization. This approach would provide more depth than can be gleaned from comments made in public meetings and on Facebook.

In conclusion, anti-Muslim mobilizations and SMOs represent an emergent social phenomenon. Considering the discriminatory rhetoric and policy championed by these groups, sociologists have an important role to play by conducting research that can be used by policymakers to combat these organized forms of discrimination as well as to protect the constitutional rights of Muslims living in the U.S.
Bibliography


