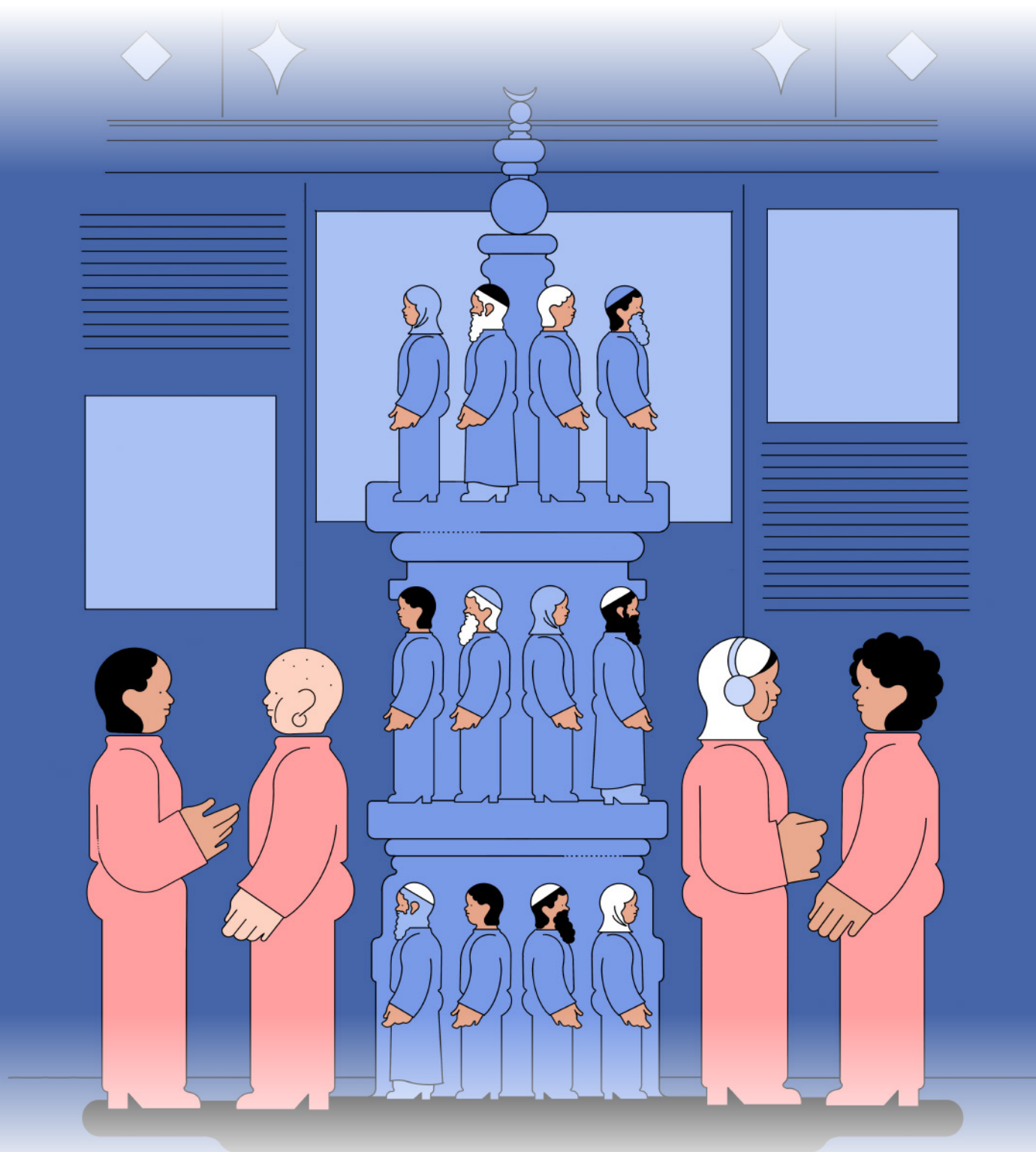


ISLAMOPHOBIA IN THE MEDIA,

2017-2021

SUMMARY





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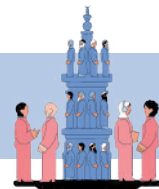
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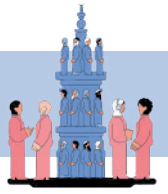
PRESENTATION

This report covers the first five years of the Observatory of Islamophobia in the Media in Spain (2017-2021). Based on the premise that Islamophobia exists in our society in all spheres, including the media, and that it is necessary to identify, analyse and expose it in order to contribute to its eradication, a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the work carried out during this period is presented.

In order to identify and analyse Islamophobia in the media, news about general perceptions and myths surrounding the concepts of Islam or Muslim in Europe was analysed. For this purpose, several media outlets were selected following guidelines intended to be broad and varied, in order to have as accurate a view as possible of the material from which the data has been extracted¹. Criteria of representativeness, ideological coverage, business model or social action, dissemination channels and geographical presence were used to select the media to be analysed. The practical factor of the number of newspapers that could be accessed within the project's budget was taken into account, without losing sight of the aim of maximising both their quantity and their social and ideological representativeness.

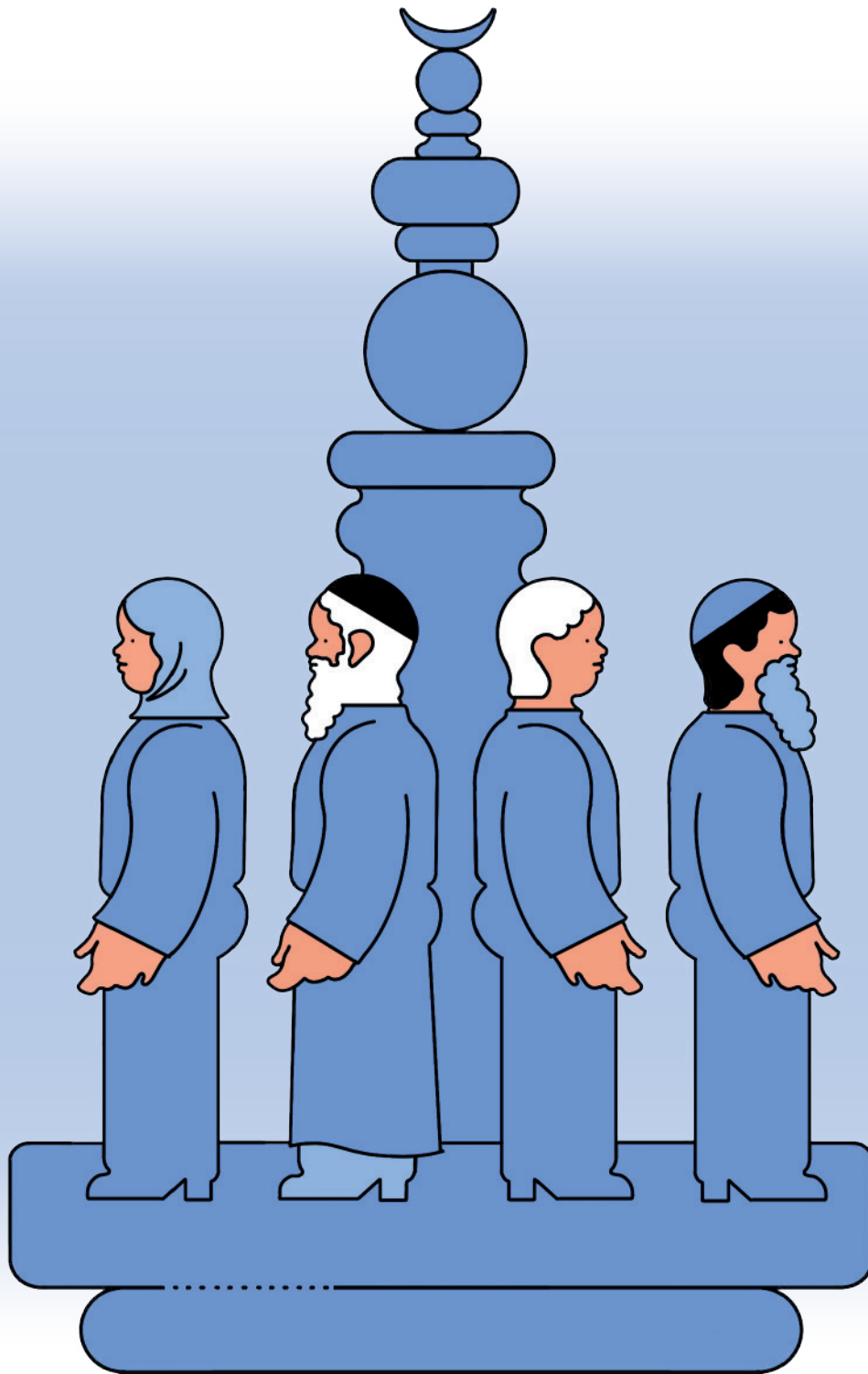
Therefore, in this diachronic survey of information on the Muslim community in Spain and Europe, a rigorous criterion of media selection and a work dynamic were established. It should be noted that as the news items related to the task of identifying Islamophobia were tested and surveyed, the initial screening and criteria were adapted in line with the needs identified in the paper and the functioning of the media initially chosen. The versatility of the approach used for this paper has allowed for a better analysis, as the media, the way they operate and the audience are constantly evolving. This has meant more work was undertaken to identify new needs and justify each adaptation.

¹ For more detailed information, see the methodology section.



In addition to criteria and work processes for media selection and news screening, an analysis was carried out using a methodology established by specialists in the field in a specific and cross-sectoral manner, and both quantitative and qualitative analyses were undertaken. The quantitative analysis was complemented with a qualitative analysis based on the critical analysis of discourse as a suitable technique to reveal the meaning contained in news broadcast and consumed socially and how those meanings are rooted and reinforced through the use of language. Discourse serves to reproduce the domination or abuse of power and as a social traffic light of Islamophobia. The classification carried out was essential in order to convey and depict in graphs what was detected, and to be able to establish the different levels of Islamophobia that have been detected in the news items analysed.

The aim of this paper is to identify the use of generalisations, stereotypical views, linkages and interpretative patterns, as well as the tone of these that shape the discourse surrounding Islamophobia, and which allows us to delve deeper into related linguistic and semantic issues.



1. INTRODUCTION TO THE TOPIC OF INTEREST

1.1. ISLAMOPHOBIA: DEFINING A PROBLEMATIC TERM

For the Council of Europe, Islamophobia is: “the fear of or prejudiced viewpoint towards Islam, Muslims and matters pertaining to them. Whether it takes the shape of daily forms of racism and discrimination or more violent forms, Islamophobia is a violation of human rights and a threat to social cohesion.”²

The definition of Islamophobia has not been and is not without debate. Authors have differed widely in defining the phenomenon, and indeed the term itself. Moreover, certain institutions such as the European Commission also prefer to call it ‘anti-Muslim hatred’. Others in the academic and social world opt for ‘anti-Muslim racism’, and so on. But there are also those who deny its existence and believe that this issue is nothing more than a vague entelechy to avoid criticism of Islam.

One of the main points of disagreement among theorists is why Islamophobia occurs: Skin colour, origin, or religion? Or a mixture of all three? This dilemma has led to a diversification of opinions, giving rise to two main currents in the **perception of Islamophobia: those who see it as a form of religious intolerance and those who interpret it as a manifestation of cultural racism**. Moreover, in many cases proponents of the former go beyond religion and consider Islam to be a political-military ideology opposed to the West³.

This debate has engendered additional complexity in discussing this phenomenon. Discrimination based on religion is intertwined with prejudices related to ethnicity and class, creating an ambiguous terrain. This complexity in dealing with the phenomenon has intensified in recent decades, with the arrival of migrants and refugees in Europe, many of whom are Muslim, resulting in a deepening perception of Islam as something foreign.

It is also increasingly common for authors, when defining Islamophobia, to consider the gender dimension, putting the focus on what is known as gendered Islamophobia. For **Itzea Goikolea Amian, gendered Islamophobia is “a term that refers to xenophobic and Islamophobic attitudes that are also mixed with sexist and misogynistic discourse and that oppress, discriminate and target Muslim women twice as much as Muslim men”⁴**. This Islamophobic discourse is disguised as a desire for liberation, as it persists in viewing Muslim women as oppressed victims, subject to male control and in need of rescue, a mentality inherited from colonialism.

² Ramberg, I., 2004, as cited in Rojo, P. & Vidal, L. et al (2018) *Informe 2017. Una realidad incontestable: Islamofobia en los Medios*. Observatory of Islamophobia in the Media.

³ Rojo, P. & Vidal, L. et al (2018) *Informe 2017. Una realidad incontestable: Islamofobia en los Medios*. Observatory of Islamophobia in the Media.

⁴ Goikolea, I. (2013) *Conversas al islam: agencia, piedad y feminismo*. Píkara.



What is clear is that Islamophobia is not simply a theoretical concept discussed in different studies. Rather, it is a reality that has concrete consequences in the daily lives of people who are Muslim or perceived to be Muslim. Such discrimination manifests itself in barriers to accessing housing, limitations in finding work, as well as being victims of hate crimes because of their religious status.

1.2. ISLAMOPHOBIA IN THE MEDIA

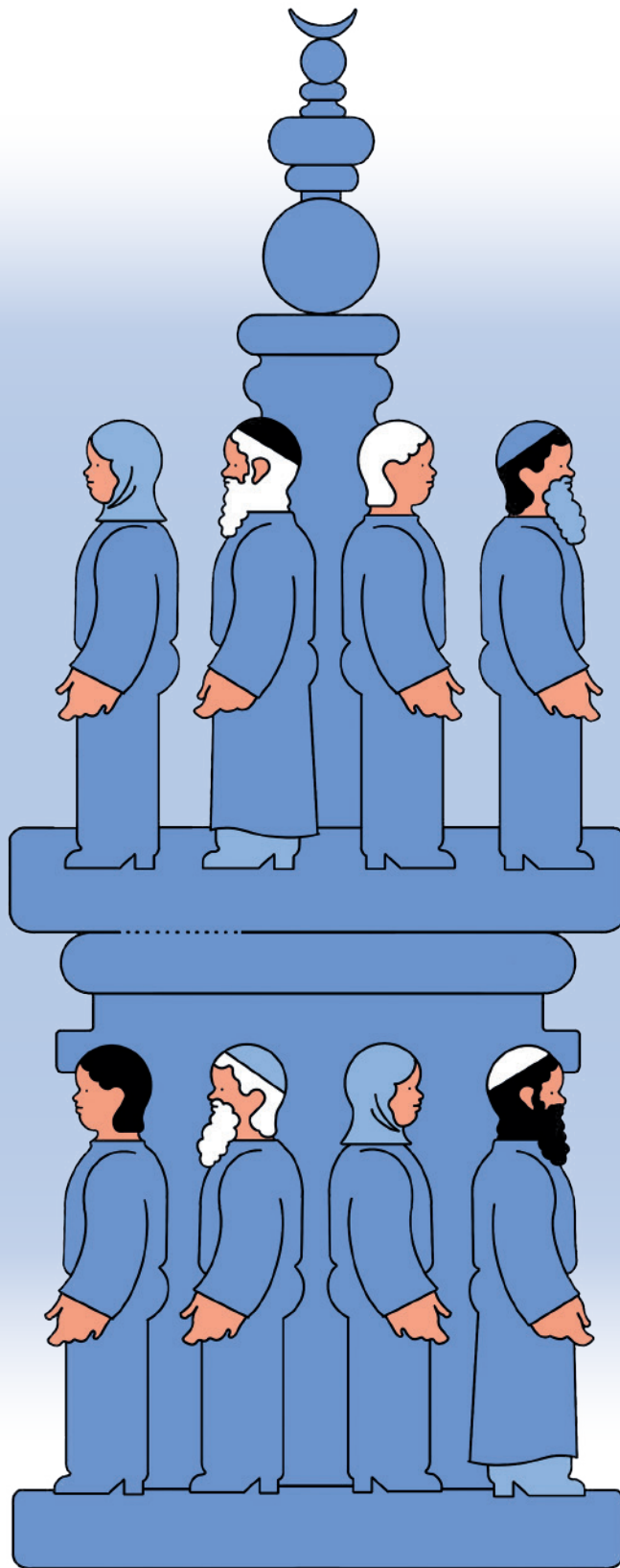
The poor media treatment of Muslim people is an issue that is increasingly in the spotlight. In recent years, there has been an increase in the number of associations, platforms and projects dedicated to studying and analysing the image of Muslims in the Spanish media. Among others, the reports produced by the Observatory of Islamophobia in the Media stand out. The analysis which has been carried out since 2017 on the representation of Muslims in Spanish print media comes to several recurrent conclusions: the tendency to associate Islam with negative aspects, particularly terrorism; the continued perception of Islam as foreign, which leads to the perpetuation of stereotypes; the constant and often negative attention given to the wearing of head coverings in the news; and the notable absence of Muslim voices in the media.

Also noteworthy is the analysis carried out by the *MAGIC project*⁵ (*Muslim women and Communities Against Gender Islamophobia in Society*) which studied the image of Muslim women in the Spanish and Belgian media between May 2021 and July 2022. Some of the findings of this study were the absence of female voices in general and Muslim women in particular; and the news stories in which Muslim women appear are few and still mostly negative. Although the veil issue has lost momentum, Muslim women are portrayed only occupying the role of believers and the percentage of Islamophobic sources is still considerable.

In conclusion, news of a negative nature continues to predominate, mostly Islamophobic news that does not include the voices of Muslim people, who should be the protagonists in the issues that affect them. This only adds to the poor image of Islam as a religion and Muslims as a community, making them targets for the spread of Islamophobic hatred.

⁵ Al Fanar Foundation. (2023). *Mapping Muslim Women Voices and Gendered Islamophobia and Stereotypes in the Spanish media*. MAGIC Country Report Spain.

With this in mind, it is of great importance to highlight the ongoing need to critically examine how Islam and Muslims are portrayed in the media and their impact on public perception. This is the main focus of this report, as well as the work of the Observatory of Islamophobia in the Media.



2. METHODOLOGY

The selection of media for this report is based on principles of representativeness, coverage of the ideological spectrum, business models, dissemination channels and geographical presence. The number of newspapers selected was adapted to the project budget in order to maximise the number of newspapers and their representativeness.

In order to be able to analyse a greater range of media, it was decided to perform an annual analysis of two newspapers (*El País* and *La Razón*) that cover two different political spectrums and a significant part of the audience. From this backbone, a structure was established with different means to test the levels of Islamophobia. In the odd-numbered years, the same newspapers as in the first year (2017) are maintained, i.e. *El País* and *La Razón*, plus *20 minutos* (free newspaper), *eldiario.es* (exclusively digital newspaper), *El Mundo* (as another of the large national newspapers in the middle of the political spectrum of *El País* and *La Razón*), and *La Vanguardia* (leading newspaper in Catalonia) were also analysed.

In the second year (2018), in addition to the duo, the two most important news agencies in Spain were analysed: *EFE* and *Europapress*, as news agencies are an important source of information for newspapers of all kinds, but especially for local newspapers.

In 2019, the original newspapers were returned to, but it was decided not to include *20 minutos* as its sample was numerically irrelevant in 2017, as most news on Islam is covered by agencies.

In the fourth year (2020), it was decided to analyse local media to support the analysis of *El País* and *La Razón*. For this purpose, *El Faro de Ceuta* and *El Segre de Girona* were selected for monitoring.

In 2021, we returned to the newspapers analysed in 2017, but with the exception of *La Vanguardia*, like with *20 minutos* in 2019. The reason is very similar: the Catalan newspaper does not often write news articles about the European Muslim community signed by journalists of the editorial staff, resorting mainly to agencies, so they are mostly fall outside of the study's aim.

For the qualitative analysis, the newspapers *El Español* and *Público* were specifically monitored, as it was felt that this would broaden the range of media profiles covered in this report.



2.1. CRITERIA FOR CLASSIFYING NEWS: TRAFFIC LIGHTS

In order to show in a graphic and intuitive way the different levels of Islamophobia detected in the news, the image of the Islamophobia traffic light was created, where the degrees of anti-Muslim racism registered in each text are categorised into three levels, with the following categories:

Red (active Islamophobia): news items in which Islamophobic ideas appear unquestionably in the headline/subheadline and/or in the text and image. The colour red would be assigned to texts that align with one or more of the 8 indicators of the report "Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All"⁶ (based on the effect of the article).

Amber (passive Islamophobia): news that is not explicitly Islamophobic but encourages an Islamophobic interpretation. This category is particularly important as it is more difficult for the reader to detect, meaning that they may have a lower critical predisposition towards content that might not appear to be harmful.

Indicators for amber:

- Islam with a capital letter
- Lack of context of the news, event, fact or phenomenon
- Inclusion of information not relevant to the news item with stigmatising potential (in the body of the news item)
- Factual errors
- Poor or biased use of figures
- Poor choice of images accompanying the article
- Considering normality as exceptionality
- Orientalism
- Stereotypical voices / absence of relevant voices

Green (non-Islamophobic): news covering Islam without Islamophobic content.

⁶ The Runnymede Trust (1997). *Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All*. https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/61488f992b58e687f1108c7c/617bfd6cf1456219c2c4bc5c_islamophobia.pdf

2.2. QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

For the qualitative analysis, the variables listed in table 1 were taken into account.

TABLE 1 VARIABLES USED FOR QUALITATIVE NEWS ANALYSIS

WHO? Who is behind the media? Editorial analysis of the six print media outlets	Structure of the newspaper
	Print run
	Territory in which it is published
	Participating organisations and companies
	Who is the target audience of the newspaper?
	Who writes for this newspaper? Who provides them with information? (journalists, newspaper staff, news agencies, etc.)
	What is the political leaning of the newspaper's editor?
	How are issues related to immigration/Muslims/interculturality/coexistence/terrorism reflected in the editorial line?
HOW? Contextualisation of the news item and news monitoring Tone of the article	What is the general tone of the article? What is its discursive logic? (e.g. negative "clash of civilisations"; them against us; Manichean and binary view; or positive e.g. attempts to promote a discourse of coexistence; starts from a critical perspective).
	How are the people who are the subjects of the article described? (e.g. Is their origin emphasised? Is their clothing, physical aspects, etc., emphasised?)
	Are stereotypes used? Does the article tend to generalise? Does it use euphemisms and/or metaphors?
	What is the emotional effect of its headline? Sensationalist/Fearful/Degrading/... or Positive/Inclusive/Critical/..



WHAT?

Elements included in the article whose use needs to be analysed

1. **Headline of the article**

2. **Use of figures**

- Is the source cited when journalists give figures? If so, where do they come from?
- In the context of the article, what descriptive role do the figures play? What are they trying to prove?
- Is there an attempt to contextualise/discuss or relativise the figures?

3. **Use of images**

- Does the image describe and/or is it appropriate to help understand the information?
- What or who is in these images: women/men/children?
- How is the subject represented in the image?

4. **Use of language**

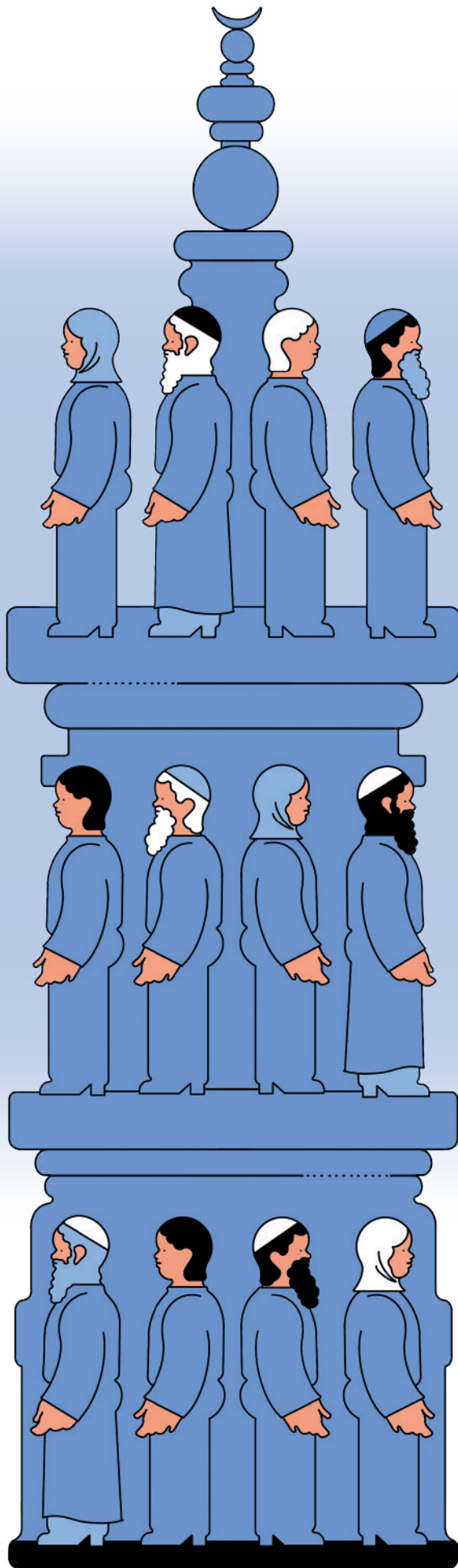
- What lexical field is used?
- Is terminology used correctly and appropriately?
- What kind of euphemisms are used in the article?
- What metaphors are used?

5. **Effects of language**

- What is the literal meaning of the word and/or expression that is problematic?
- Does this word or expression have positive or negative connotations?
- To what extent does the word/expression correspond to what happens on the ground?
- Is this word/expression "loaded"? To what extent does this word/expression move us away from neutrality?
- Does this word/expression help to understand the information in context?

6. **Voices**

- Who is given a voice in the article?
- Which sources appear in the news: representatives of state institutions; experts, ordinary Muslims, radicalised people; Muslim sources (Are they representative? Are they balanced? Are they related to the subject of the article?)



3. DATA ON ISLAMOPHOBIA IN THE SPANISH PRESS: A PERSISTENT ISSUE

3.1. THE ISLAMOPHOBIA TRAFFIC LIGHT

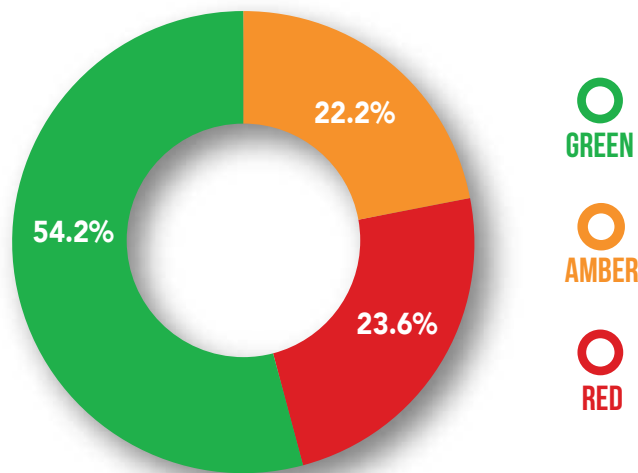
In total, 6 279 pieces of content were analysed between 2017 and 2021. The newspapers with the greatest weight were the two that were tracked over the entire five year period, *El País* (1 728 articles) and *La Razón* (1 545).

The main indicator of the results is presented using the Islamophobia traffic light described in the previous chapter. **In the five-year period of analysis, almost half of the articles (45.8%) on the Muslim community in Spain and Europe contained Islamophobic language or were Islamophobic in concept or message.**

One positive takeaway from this picture is that in the first year of analysis Islamophobia was at 62%⁷, while in the last year it was at 46%⁸. From there, as can be seen in graph 2, the levels of Islamophobia remained the same or even increased, as in the case of *El Mundo*.

This is a systemic and deeply rooted phenomenon not only in the media but in society as a whole, which normalises aggressive or discriminatory writings against Muslims.

GRAPH 1. ASSESSMENT OF PUBLICATIONS



⁷ Rojo, P. & Vidal, L. et al (2018) *Informe 2017. Una realidad incontestable: Islamofobia en los Medios*. Observatory of Islamophobia in the Media.

⁸ Rojo, P. & Vidal, L. (2019) Report 2018. *Un cambio a nuestro alcance: islamofobia en los medios*. Observatory of Islamophobia in the Media. Page 15.

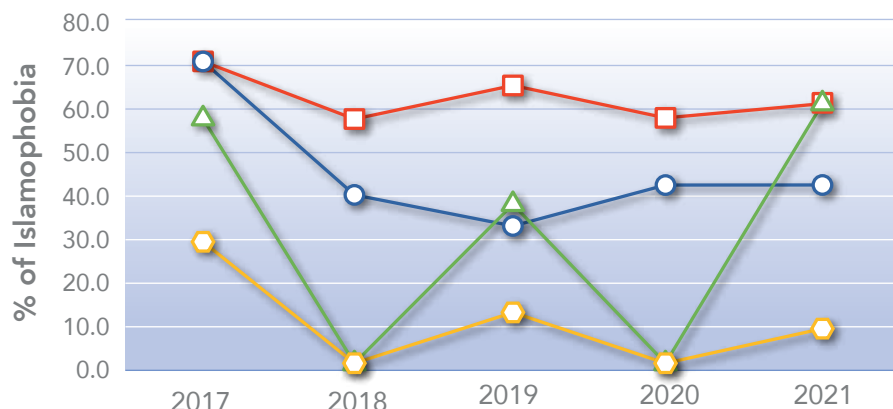


3.2. NEWSPAPER BY NEWSPAPER DATA

The overview of the sum of the five years shows a big difference between the newspaper with the most Islamophobia, which was *La Razón* (61.7% red and amber); and the one with the least, *El Faro de Ceuta* , which was less than 10%. The more than 20-point difference between the two newspapers that were followed regularly over the last five years (*La Razón* and *El País*) can be seen in the red indicator, in which the former newspaper accumulated more than twice as many 'red' designations as the latter. (See graph 3).

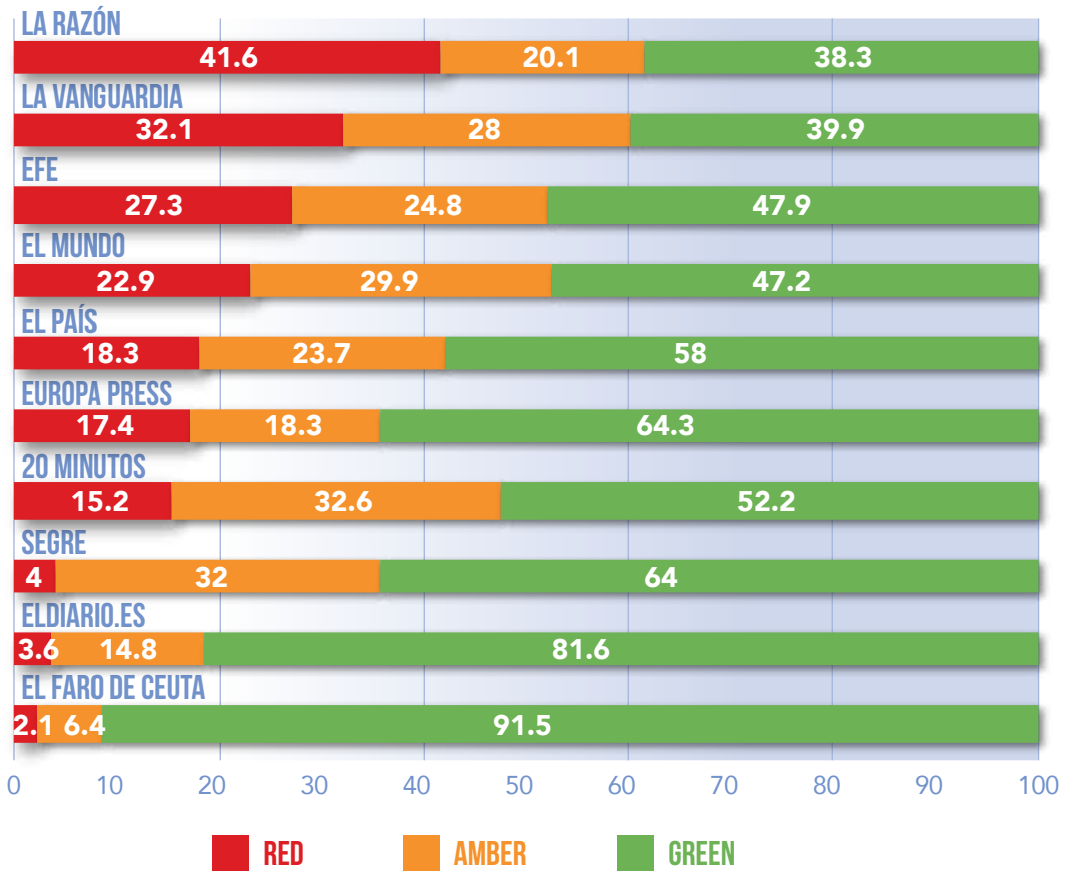
Interesting is also the comparison between the two news agencies, *EFE* and *Europa Press*, which had clearly differentiated markers. While *EFE* exceeded 50% in the percentage of Islamophobic articles (52.1% red and amber), almost 65% of *Europa Press* articles were classified as green, in the average of all media. As shown in the section on local media, Segre was also below average in the proportion of Islamophobic news.

GRAPH 2. EVOLUTION OF ISLAMOPHOBIA IN PUBLICATIONS BY NEWSPAPER ANALYSED



	EL PAÍS	LA RAZÓN	EL MUNDO	DIARIO.ES
2017	69.9	69.4	56.9	28.9
2018	38.7	57.1	0.0	0.0
2019	33.1	64.5	37.8	12.0
2020	41.7	56.9	0.0	0.0
2021	41.8	60.6	60.7	8.5

GRAPH 3. EVALUATION OF PUBLICATIONS BY MEDIA

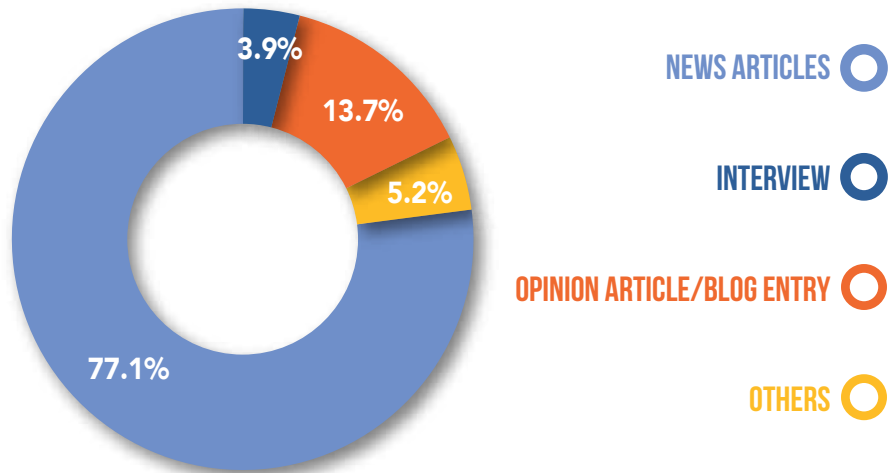


3.3. TYPOLOGY: TONE AND IMAGE

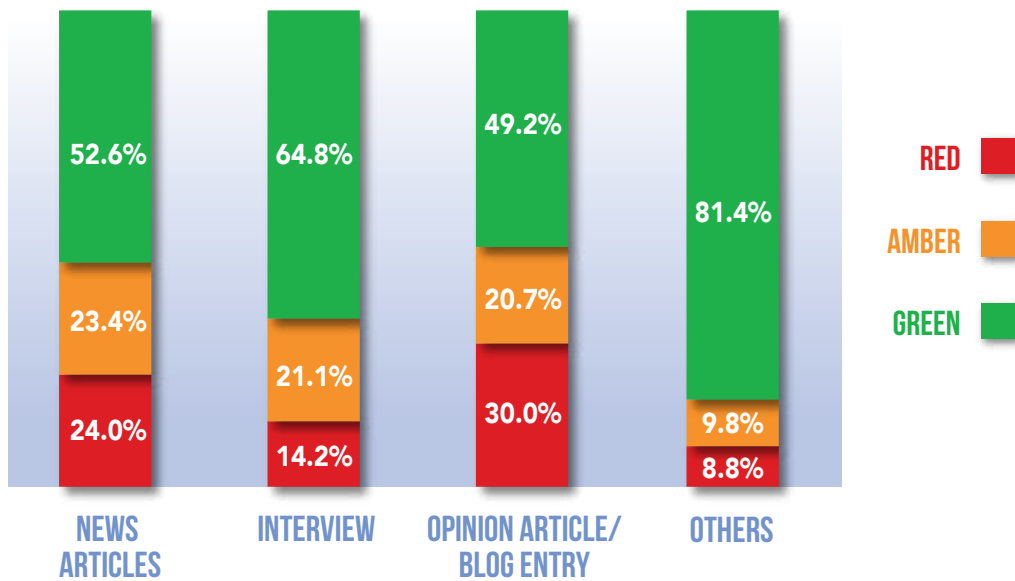
As for the type of article and its Islamophobic content, graph 5 shows that interviews are the type of publication with the highest percentage in green, with 64.8%. This reinforces the logic that the closer the journalist is to the protagonists and sources, the better he or she writes about a subject for which it is essential to give a voice to the protagonists, Muslim people in this case. A surprising observation is that a similar percentage of Islamophobia was found in news articles (47% red and amber) and opinion articles (50.7% red and amber). However, where there was a difference is in the level of Islamophobia, with 30% of opinion columns being blatantly Islamophobic (red traffic light), while in news reports the split between red (24%) and amber (23.4%) was more even.



GRAPH 4. DISTRIBUTION OF PUBLICATIONS BY TYPE OF PUBLICATION

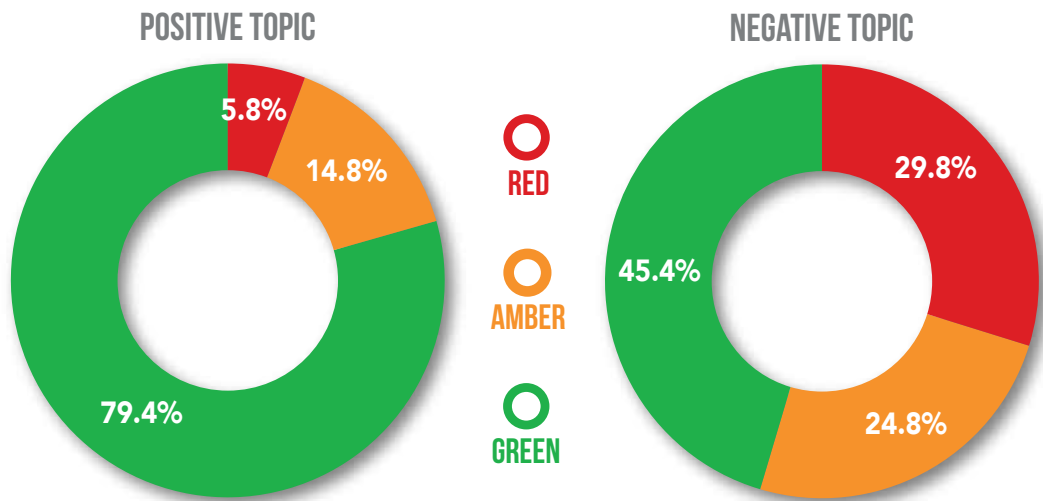


GRAPH 5. ISLAMOPHOBIA RATING BY TYPE OF PUBLICATION



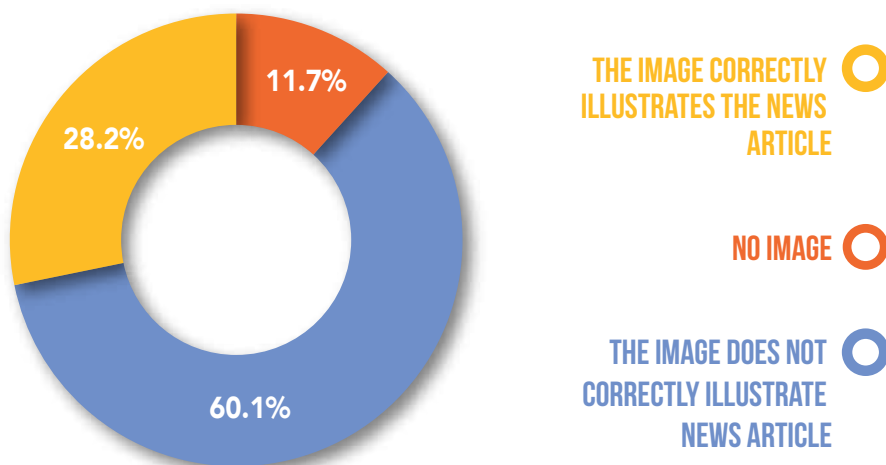
Another important aspect is the evaluation of the articles according to their tone. When the article referred to a positive topic, as was the case in only 25.7% of the total cases analysed, they displayed less Islamophobia (79.5% without Islamophobia). Whereas when the topic was negative (74.3% of the total number of cases) more than half of the articles (54.6% red and amber) displayed Islamophobia.

GRAPH 6. RATING OF PUBLICATIONS ACCORDING TO TONE



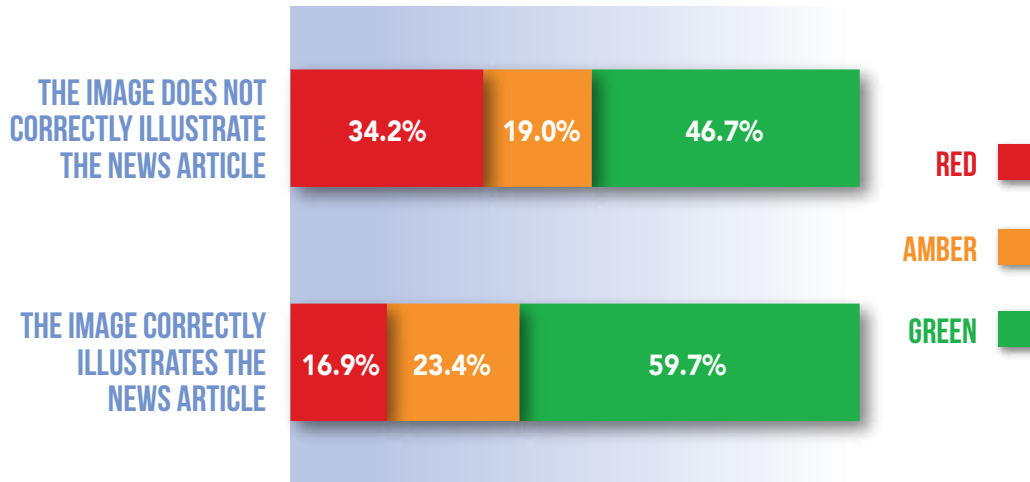
Another issue analysed was the images accompanying the publications. In a world where images increasingly take centre stage, it was found that 60.1% of publications were accompanied by an image that was relevant to or accurately illustrated their content (see graph 7). When the image correctly illustrated the main content, 59.7% of the content appears green in the traffic light system (see graph 8), whereas, if the image did not correctly illustrate the main content, the texts tended to have a green percentage thirteen points lower (46.7%).

GRAPH 7. DISTRIBUTION OF PUBLICATIONS ACCORDING TO IMAGES IN THE PUBLICATION



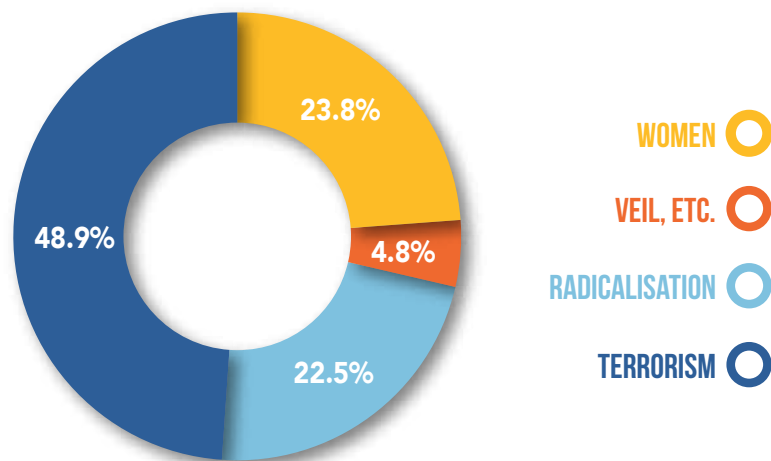


GRAPH 8. RATING OF PUBLICATIONS BY TYPE OF IMAGE



When the publications are sorted according to subject matter (see graph 9), **almost 80% of those that talk about the Muslim community in Spain and Europe use texts linked to terrorism or violent radicalisation.**

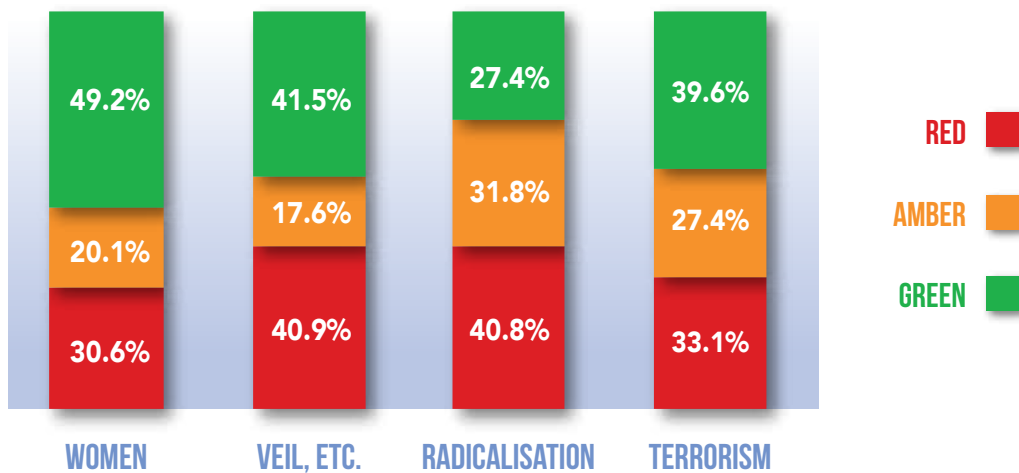
GRAPH 9. PUBLICATIONS BY SUBJECT MATTER*



* NOTE: A PUBLICATION MAY INCLUDE MORE THAN ONE SUBJECT

Publications on radicalisation were well above average on the Islamophobia scale, with 72.6% of publications classified as red and amber (see Graph 10).

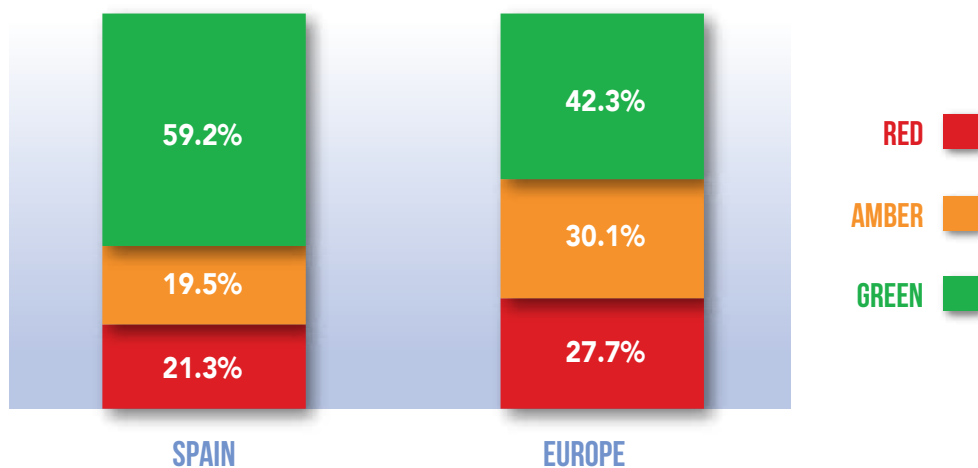
GRAPH 10. EVALUATION OF PUBLICATIONS BY SUBJECT MATTER



3.4. LOCAL IS KEY

The title of the 2020 report from the Observatory of Islamophobia in the Media alluded to the topic of local media, and the analysis of two local newspapers (*El Faro de Ceuta* and *Segre de Girona*) was enlightening: local journalism is closely linked to a better coverage of the Muslim reality. In the content analysed between 2017 and 2021, the two newspapers had a percentage of articles free of Islamophobia well above the average, which is 54% in the overall sample. Proximity to the news, therefore, was confirmed as a positive aspect and this was also evident in another piece of data collected, namely: publications about European Muslims were 17 points more Islamophobic (57.8%) than those about communities in Spain (40.8%), as shown in graph 11.

GRAPH 11. RATING OF NEWS PUBLICATIONS IN SPAIN AND EUROPE



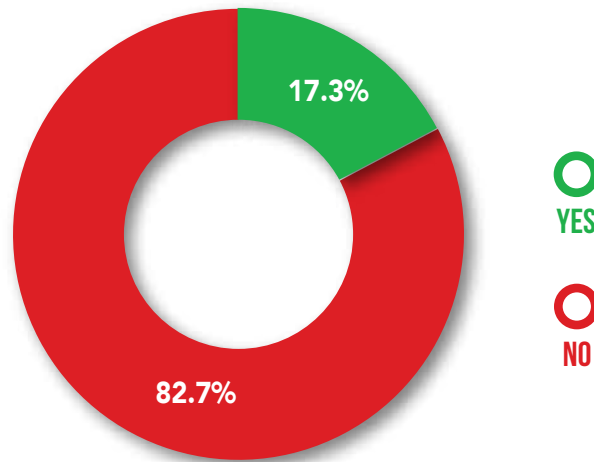


Regarding the topics covered by the news, topics such as Muslim women in Spain had correct coverage rates (53.7%), while when the news about Muslim women was located in Europe, in only 39.7% of cases was it reported without Islamophobia. The same occurred with terrorism, while in Europe 36.7% of the news reports incurred Islamophobia, the percentage in Spain was 31.2%.

3.5. ORIGIN OF SOURCES

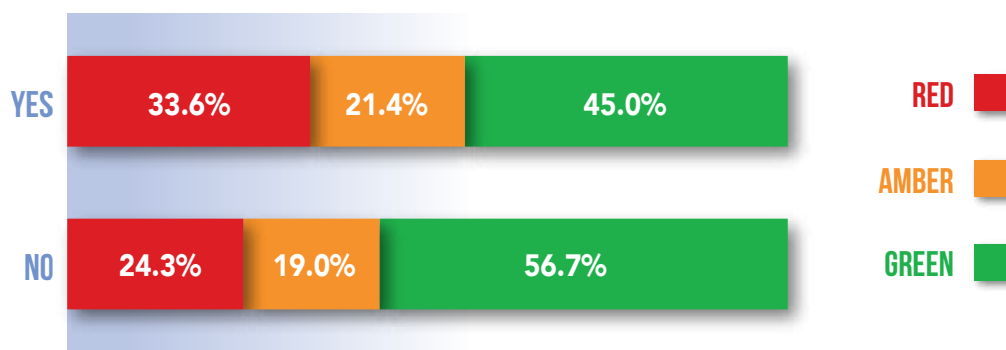
One of the most striking statistics was the count made in 2021 of the number of Muslim sources who collaborated with journalists when writing their articles. Bear in mind that the statistics only cover news about Muslim people in Spain and Europe. Only 17.3% of the published news items quote Muslim sources (see graph 12).

GRAPH 12. ARE MUSLIM SOURCES USED IN THE PUBLICATION?



According to the data, if the main source used for the news item contains Islamophobic expressions, this influences the journalist to write in an Islamophobic way in a higher percentage of cases (55%).

GRAPH 13. IS THE SOURCE OF THE ARTICLE ISLAMOPHOBIC?



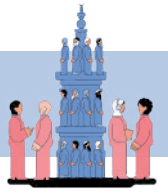
CONCLUSIONS

After analysing 6 279 articles from various Spanish media outlets over five years (2017-2021), it can be seen that Islamophobia continues to exist, as almost half of the articles (45.8%) that discuss the Muslim community in Spain and Europe contained Islamophobic language. However, it is worth noting that this figure is decreasing, as at the beginning of this research (2017) it was 62%. Even so, it can be observed that after this initial decline, the levels of Islamophobia in most of the media remain stable.

This paper establishes that the tone of the articles in which Muslim people are mentioned was mostly negative. However, when the article dealt with a positive topic (25.7% of cases) the news featured less Islamophobia (79.5%). Along the same lines, 79.4% of the information about the Muslim community was related to terrorism or violent radicalisation. There was also a poor use of terminology specific to the Islamic faith. Another important aspect was the absence of Muslim voices in articles about them. Only in 17.3% of the pieces in the sample can Muslim sources be heard talking about their own reality, and agency news was also used without a critical approach to the content. Therefore, it would be necessary for the media to become aware, in addition to a deontological review (ethics and rigour), of the impact on readers and on the media and social ecosystem of the sustained supply of negative news about the Muslim community.

Finally, it is worth noting the frequent simplifying generalisation of the situation and context of Muslim people and the Islamic religion. It was observed that Islam tended to be presented as a single, homogenous entity, ignoring its diversity and the individuality of each of the members of this religion.

In this sense, it is essential to build bridges of trust between journalists and the Muslim community that pave the way for a respectful and faithful journalistic approach to the words of the people who are questioned by the media, who should represent the diversity of the Muslim population in Spain.



RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Avoid sensationalism and generalisations.** This is the main source of Islamophobia, through which an entire community is demonised for the actions of specific individuals.
- **Expand and deepen contacts with Muslim sources.** Experiencing reality first-hand and building trust will result in better, more constructive, balanced and inclusive journalism.
- **Discuss more diverse and positive issues.** A pluralistic approach, not only focusing on the religious side, would reflect the variety of profiles within Muslim communities.
- **Make correct use of terminology, figures and data.** The use of specialised glossaries will help to eliminate inappropriate references, which can lead to misunderstanding and mistrust.
- **Comply with the profession's code of ethics** and check sources, including news agencies, as they may contain possible biases.
- **Give voice to the diversity of Muslim women.** We must avoid generalising negative experiences of individual women as if this were the reality of all Muslim women.

