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Gauging the Media Discourse and the Roots of Islamophobia Awareness in Spain

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Abstract: This article analyses the media discourse about Islamophobia in Spain. Specifically, an overview of all the appearances of the term in four Spanish newspapers (*ABC*, *El Mundo*, *El País*, and *La Vanguardia*) is provided with the aim of finding out when the term was first used and became standard language. The study also demonstrates the links with the public interest and identifies the ideological and terminological attitudes in the discourse of each newspaper. The corpus includes 1475 news articles since the first reference (in 1987) to the term Islamophobia and May 2022, which were quantitatively examined in two steps. While the first was manual and served to document the historical background, the second allowed us to monitor the media content by means of Sketch Engine. Furthermore, the searches for the term "islamofobia" in Google Trends from Spain were also reviewed. The main findings show that both terrorist attacks in Western countries and the controversies surrounding freedom of speech are key to the emergence and normalisation of the concept, particularly since 2015. However, the interest of each newspaper differs, with *El País* covering the topic most frequently. This left-wing newspaper offers some notable variations in terminology as well. While the three right-wing newspapers consistently relate Islamophobia to threat, the vocabulary used in *El País* underpins the victimisation of the Arab-Islamic population. According to the Sketch Engine analysis, the usual terms that occur in combination with Islamophobia are racism, terrorism, violence, hate, anti-semitism, and xenophobia. Finally, Google Trends data confirmed the peak in public interest in the Barcelona and Cambrils attacks (17A).

Keywords: Islam; Spain; media; public attention; threat; hate; racism; xenophobia; terrorism

1. Introduction

A quick historical assessment confirms that Spain is the Western country with the largest number of encounters—and misunderstandings—in relation to the Arab-Islamic world. This tradition began in 711 with the conquest of the Spanish peninsula and persists today, especially linked to immigration. According to the latest demographic study by the Observatorio Andalusí, 2,250,486 Muslims were living in Spain on 31 December 2021, representing 4% of the total population in the country (Unión de Comunidades Islámicas de España 2022). While 42% of Muslims are Spanish, most of them due to naturalisation or being second-generation migrants, 58% are immigrants (38% Moroccans and 20% of other nationalities), although the particularity of the autonomous Spanish cities of Ceuta and Melilla at the border between Spain and Morocco must be considered. While the times of battles, conquests, and reconquests are over, contemporary challenges mainly concern the social sphere wherein migrant integration and Islamophobia stand out.

In the case of Islamophobia, Spain is no exception to the dynamics affecting European and other Western societies. Hostile feelings or attitudes towards Islam and Muslims are a well-known phenomenon in the political, social, and media spheres, as well as on academic

agendas and in public debates (Allievi 2022; Sealy 2021; Lean 2019). The topic appears to be common in people's minds, as shown in a study by the Spanish Observatory for Racism and Xenophobia: 83% of Spaniards were found to believe that Islamophobia is widespread in the country, with Muslims and Gypsies as the worst-valued minority groups (Aparicio-Gómez 2020). Another survey shows that 15 to 20% of respondents would not like to have immigrants and Muslims as neighbours, ranking Spain as one of the most intolerant countries in Western Europe (Bell et al. 2021). Nevertheless, these data contrast sharply with those registered by the Pew Research Center (2019) on attitudes towards Islam, in which Spaniards (54%) had more positive views towards Muslims. Looking at the overall results of the survey, Spain is a moderate country among the Western European countries with a more favourable view, such as the United Kingdom, France, the Netherlands, Germany, and Sweden and those that have a more critical stance towards Muslims such as Poland, Greece, or Italy. This "positive turn" in outgroup perceptions in Spain is highlighted by additional recent findings. The results of a nine-country survey study during the COVID-19 pandemic confirmed that of all Europeans, Spanish respondents reported the most positive perceptions towards immigrants and Muslims (De Coninck et al. 2022a).

Hate crimes are another significant barometer of the status of Islam and Muslims in Spain. Based on data from the Spanish Ministry of Interior (Ministerio del Interior 2021), 34.6% of 1401 reported hate crimes and incidents in 2020 involved racism or xenophobia, and 3.2% were related to religious beliefs or practices, which presents a decrease compared to 2019. Paradoxically, there are no specific statistics on Islamophobia or anti-Muslim bias, even though the report includes anti-semitism, anti-Gypsyism, and aporophobia. The European Islamophobia Report 2020 (Bayrakli and Hafez 2021) addresses several of these crimes in more detail, both for the Spanish case and for other European countries. In parallel, recent research conducted in Madrid has demonstrated Islamophobic microaggressions at work, in educational institutions, and in the public sphere (Ouassini 2021). Other studies have shown the problems caused by voluntary conversions to Islam, such as social rejection or difficulties in finding a job (Ainz-Galende and Rodríguez-Puertas 2021; Ainz-Galende et al. 2021). However, it is important to acknowledge that Islamophobia in Spain is influenced by institutionalised practices that may not always be overtly expressed in public discourse (Gil-Benumeya 2023). Additionally, it is connected to political actors (Corral et al. 2023; Gil-Benumeya 2021).

The media discourse is undeniably a key indicator for assessing Arab-Islamic conditions in Spain. Based on quantitative and qualitative investigations of news stories, some of the conclusions reached by the latest report from the Observatory for Islamophobia in the Media (from 2020) are that mediated Islamophobia tends to be higher when violent events take place outside Spain. Somewhat paradoxically, (violent) events that occur close by or within Spain tend to be reported with more accuracy and nuance (Aatar et al. 2021). Therefore, news stories concerning national Islam are less Islamophobic than those dealing with international issues. When it comes to journalistic genres, interviews (involving face-to-face conversations) are also less Islamophobic than news or opinion articles. The most common topics are the conditions of Muslim women (with a focus on the hijab), radicalisation, and terrorism. Particularly the latter topic was present in 42% of the articles. At this point, research on media effects in Spain shows that people's opinion about Islam tends to be more inclusive when consistently exposed to a so-called inclusive media frame and showing more prejudice against Muslims among those exposed to Islamophobic media frames (Durán 2020).

In that respect, the rise of hate speech towards Islam and Muslims on social networks is not to be neglected. For example, a study of the hashtag #StopIslam on Instagram shows that it is used to demonise Muslims, as a form of "modern racism" (Civila et al. 2020). "Most of the posts related to Muslims are focused on political issues and terrorism, causing the sensation of threat and, therefore, fomenting hatred towards Muslims" (p. 16). This finding is similar to that of another study on the Twitter accounts of far-right nationalist political party Vox and Santiago Abascal, concluding that the right-wing populist party advocates discriminatory policies against Muslims, invariably linking Islam to crime, insecurity, mafia,

jihadist terrorism, and fundamentalism (Corral et al. 2023). More concretely, the work describes the paradigmatic run-up to the campaign for the election of the regional parliament of Catalonia in 2021, when Twitter temporarily suspended the Vox profile for disseminating messages inciting hatred, such as hashtag #StopIslamización or the "Separatism takes us to the Islamic Republic of Catalonia" slogan. Without a doubt, Twitter has become an important source for the spread of Islamophobia (González-Baquero et al. 2023; Vidgen et al. 2022; Zamora-Medina et al. 2021; Arcila-Calderón et al. 2020; Awan 2014).

2. Background

2.1. Origins and Definition of Islamophobia

The consolidation of the concept of Islamophobia in the social arena is relatively recent. It is accepted that the idea was seeded thanks to the report conducted by Runnymede Trust (1997) and that the 9/11 attacks fertilised it (Bangstad 2022; Tavkhelidze 2021; Allen 2020; Lean 2019; Bravo-López 2011; Rana 2007). However, its real genesis lies—for the time being—at the turn of the 20th century, in 1910, when it was used by two French Africanists, Maurice Delafosse and Alain Quillien (Bravo-López 2011). By the end of that century, the academic debate on the appropriateness of the term and the controversy over its definitions had already begun. An example is the distinction between Islamophobia and anti-Muslimism (Halliday 1999). Other options are being discussed today, such as the "Muslim Question", which aims to systematically and structurally analyse the problematisation of Muslims in Europe (Bracke and Hernández-Aguilar 2021; Sayyid 2018a; Meer and Modood 2019). Consequently, within the social sciences, Islamophobia has often been interpreted as a "moral panic", notably emerging in Western contexts due to concerns about the perceived Muslim threat (Mekki-Berrada and d'Haenens 2023; Sayyid 2014; Morgan and Poynting 2012).

Basically, Islamophobia is the concept that has flourished to theorise a phenomenon. In fact, Islamophobia's space could have been taken up by Orientalism, the term that Said (1978) defined as the Western discourse or thought for dominating and shaping Eastern lands and populations, especially Muslims or Arabs, or as "hostility to Islam in the modern Christian West" (Said 1985, p. 99). According to Lean (2019, p. 15), "the meaning of the word is a result of how it is commonly understood and used." This author argues "whether or not it is 'anxiety', 'fear', 'dread', 'hate', 'hostility', or a 'historically rooted ideology' that give life to 'exclusionary practices' and 'discrimination', the fact remains that wherever 'Islamophobia' is present, an injustice has occurred and has been enacted upon one group of people by another". In all cases, Islamophobia clearly has many faces (Grosfoguel 2012), typologies (Ameli and Merali 2019), or vectors (Bangstad 2022). Rooted in a relationship of social domination, Islamophobia encompasses the attempt to ontologically inferiorise, dehumanise, and animalise the Muslim Other. Islamophobia is first and foremost a question of power. It is, in its Foucauldian sense, a form of "governmentality of Muslim otherness" (Mekki-Berrada 2018, p. 24) which, far from confining itself to an expression of extreme right-wing violent radicalisation, tends today to be both normalised and globalised (Sayyid 2018a).

Nevertheless, it seems unquestionable that Islamophobia is a form of racism as suggested by several authors (Gil-Benumeya 2023; Hernández Aguilar 2023; Ejiofor 2023; Brun and Cosquer 2022; Cheng 2022; Meer and Modood 2019; Massoumi et al. 2017; Hajjat and Mohammed 2023; Sayyid 2014) or proposed in the review published by the Runnymede Trust on the twentieth anniversary of the first report (Elahi and Khan 2017). In this document, the following definition, which, in our opinion, captures all the nuances of this complex term, can be found: "Islamophobia is any distinction, exclusion, or restriction towards, or preference against, Muslims (or those perceived to be Muslims) that has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life" (p. 1). Even more, because of its relevance and actuality, the correct conception of Islamophobia must consider aporophobia, that is, the hatred, fear, aversion, or rejection of poverty, poor people, or the underprivileged (Cortina 2017). According to this author, economic status is equally (sometimes even more) significant than background, culture, or religion for judging a person.

As the context of this study is Spain, the perception of Islamophobia cannot be understood separately from the term "Moor" (moro), the pejorative Spanish notion to designate—even today—Moroccans, Maghrebins, or North Africans in particular, but also Muslims in general (Mateo-Dieste 2017; Rosón-Lorente 2012; Martín-Corrales 2004). Therefore, Spanish Islamophobia implies a form of Maurophobia, as hostility, alienation, or hatred towards the Moors, whose origins are in North Africa or the Maghreb (Olmos-Alcaraz 2017; López-Bargados 2016; Zapata-Barrero 2006; González-Alcantud 2002) and who are back on the peninsula due to immigration (Ouahib 2022). Other authors suggest that reducing Islamophobia to Maurophobia is a denial of the racist nature of Islamophobia, which ends up being culturised and linked to the past (Téllez-Delgado and Ramírez-Fernández 2018; López-Bargados 2016). In this sense, Mateo-Dieste (2017) asserts that the Maurophobic rhetoric has been Islamophobising since the late 1990s. In conclusion, by emphasising stereotyped physical or cultural traits of the Muslimness (Sayyid 2018b), this Maurophobia is related to Arabophobia and ends up as cultural racism (Khader 2016).

According to Boll (2020), it is surprising that the Spanish tourism industry celebrates its Moorish past, while the media presents a consistently negative image of Islam and Muslims. It is accepted that the new Moor is dependent on old stigmas and is recognised by images such as being treacherous, uneducated, dirty, backward, irrational, posing a sexual threat, and leading to uncontrolled reproduction. However, if something stands out, it is its Islamic religious dimension (Mateo-Dieste 2017). As Martín-Corrales (2004) describes, Spanish clichés surrounding the Moors include fanaticism, savagery, cruelty, lascivious behaviour, laziness, or two-facedness. The Moor concept is applicable to other present and past identities, such as Saracens, Berbers, Turks, Arabs, Ottomans, or Persians, because being a Muslim in Spain implies being a Moor. Moreover, the association between Islamophobia and the Moors is also recognised in Latin America (Lindley-Highfield 2022) and Southeast Asia (Mohamed-Osman 2019) due to colonisation. At this point, let us explore the Spanish media discourse on Islam and Muslims.

2.2. Spanish Media Discourses on Islam and Muslims

The media agenda on Islam and Muslims in Spain—and on the Moors and Arabs—differentiates between domestic and international topics, as numerous studies have shown (Aatar et al. 2021; Barba del Horno 2021; Cervi et al. 2021; Moreno-Mercado 2021; Calvo-Barbero and Carrasco-Campos 2020; Corral et al. 2020; Olmos-Alcaraz and Politzer 2020; Durán 2019; Berry et al. 2015; Fernández and Corral 2016; Piquer-Martí 2015; Beck 2012; López et al. 2010). On the one hand, themes such as immigration, the hijab, religion, Ceuta and Melilla, unaccompanied foreign minors (menas in Spanish), Islamophobia, delinquency, fundamentalism, radicalisation, or terrorism are usually highlighted as domestic affairs. On the other hand, Morocco, the Western Sahara, Islamophobia (especially in Europe, related to Islamophobic acts or hate crimes, social movements, political discourses, extreme far-right parties, etc.), and international jihadist terrorism are international issues that receive media attention, repeatedly linked to news stories on women, Islamism, the Middle East conflicts, the Palestinian–Israeli events, or Afghanistan. Sometimes, these issues are even approached from an internal lens, as was the case of the Arab Spring (Corral and d'Haenens 2020). Nevertheless, the tendency reflects that some themes are overrepresented (immigration, terrorism, women), while others receive scant attention (culture, inequalities, corruption), which confirms that Spanish media use the same patterns of representation that prevail in the Western world (Khader 2016; Piquer-Martí 2015; Valenzuela 2013; Beck 2012).

One of these routines that scholars have demonstrated is othering Muslimness through the emphasis on, e.g., confrontation, Islamisation, generalisation, demonisation, and simplification (Olmos-Alcaraz and Politzer 2020, 2022; Rojo et al. 2021; Calvo-Barbero and Carrasco-Campos 2020; Sahagún 2018; Piquer-Martí 2015; Beck 2012). Myths about European invasion or replacement, incompatibility with democratic life, or backwardness compared to the West are common (Calvo-Barbero and Sánchez-García 2018; Khader 2016). This process of dehumanisation culminated finally in the reconfiguration and standardisation of

a new species, the *Homo Muselmann* (Rana 2007) or the *Homo Islamicus* (Martín-Muñoz 2010; Rodinson 1989), although with variations between the sexes (Aatar et al. 2021; Beck 2012). However, the bad Muslims face the good Muslims, who are secular, rational, conscious, educated, active, and internationally minded or Westernised (Zahedi 2014; Martín-Muñoz 2007; Mamdani 2004). This dichotomy is also reproduced in the stereotype of the friendly Moor versus the distant Moor (Martín-Corrales 2004). Other research concludes that the Spanish coverage of Muslims and Islam draws a homogeneous portrayal and tends to construct the Muslim as the alien other, a stranger, and implicitly excluded (Durán 2019).

In the specific case of Islamophobia, in addition to the reports of the Observatory for Islamophobia in the Media previously presented, a recent study on the media coverage in Spain and Italy confirmed that Islamophobia is dominant in representations of Islam and Muslims and is more consistent in conservative newspapers than in left-leaning ones (Cervi et al. 2021). The research distinguished between ontological and banal Islamophobia: while the former affects ideology, culture, and religion in a holistic way (prejudices), the latter focuses on individuals or physical attributes (orientalist stereotypes). In this sense, ontological Islamophobia "emerges when dealing with international or domestic terrorism" and banal Islamophobia "when Muslims are portrayed within the narration of immigration or integration" (p. 14). Moreover, the authors confirm that Islamophobia is highlighted more strongly in the headlines than in the news stories themselves, which suggests that sensationalism could be the main source of misrepresentation, including the clicks, views, and likes contemporary journalism thrives on. This finding contradicts the hypotheses of the so-called new media Islamophobia, which would be more sophisticated, subliminal, latent, or politically correct, avoiding the classic stereotypes or generalisations, but supported by the configuration of agendas, themes, and graphic design (Hafez 2016).

The present study aims to shed light on the development and occurrence of the term Islamophobia in the Spanish mainstream press. Because of the absence of a clear consensus on its origin (Meer and Modood 2019), one of our goals is to identify when this term emerged in the Spanish press and to analyse its prominence alongside key events (e.g., terror attacks). Looking beyond this initial meta-reflection on the term Islamophobia, we are also interested in studying the ideological stances in the representations of four Spanish newspapers—*ABC*, *El Mundo*, *El País*, and *La Vanguardia*—during the period of 1987–2022 and to contribute to the debate on its social consolidation.

3. Hypotheses and RQs

Against the backdrop of the origins of Islamophobia in Spain and the role that the Spanish media play in the representations of Muslims and Islam, we ask the following research questions:

RQ1. *Is the concept of Islamophobia equally recurrent in the four newspapers?*

RQ2. *What are the decisive moments of the emergence of the term Islamophobia in Spanish newspapers? How is the issue of Islamophobia linked with the occurrence of jihadist attacks in Western countries?*

RQ3. *Is there a link between newspaper reporting on Islamophobia and the public interest in the topic?*

RQ4. *How are Islamophobia and related terms represented in Spanish legacy newspapers?*

H1. *The representation of Islamophobia and related terms varies widely and depends on media type.*

H2. *The frequency of the term "Islamophobia" in news media increases when jihadist attacks are carried out in Western countries.*

4. Materials and Methods

First, the phenomenon of Islamophobia is analysed in the four most influential Spanish newspapers (Armañanzas and Díaz-Noci 1996; Reig 2000) and those with the highest daily readership according to the General Media Study (first wave of 2022 data) carried out by the Association for Media Research: *ABC* (380,000 readers per day), *El Mundo* (461,000 readers per

day), *El País* (762,000 readers per day), and *La Vanguardia* (381,000 readers per day). The latter is a conservative Catalan newspaper, while the other three have a more nationwide reach, although they are ideologically diverse: *El País* is left-leaning and progressive, *ABC* is linked to Catholicism, monarchy, traditionalism, and conservative values; and *El Mundo* considers itself liberal (Martínez-Lirola 2022; Durán 2019; Moreno-Espinosa 2000; Canel 1999).

The selection of the articles that constitute the corpus followed two strategies: the LexisNexis Academic service was used in the case of *El Mundo* and *El País*; for *ABC* and *La Vanguardia*, their virtual archives were consulted given that they are not available through LexisNexis Academic. In all cases, every news or opinion article containing the term Islamophobia was collected. The final sample was derived from a first reading of key elements of each article (headline, lead, picture captions, highlights) to clean up invalid or duplicated cases and to record their date and headline. The period covered by this research ranged from the first reference to the term Islamophobia in the Spanish press in 1987 until May 2022. In total, 1475 articles were included.

Subsequently, two preliminary quantitative content analyses were carried out to reconstruct the timeline of Islamophobia in Spanish newspapers with a focus on certain particularities of the discourse provided in the articles and their headlines.

This first analysis was conducted by recording the dates and headlines of the articles and supplementing them with Google Trends data, allowing us to go back to 2004 and find out the number of Google searches for the term Islamophobia in Spain—thereby gauging its "prominence" among the general public. Despite its limitations, it is a useful resource to capture the interest of Spaniards in this concept and compare it with the media agenda (Orduña-Malea 2019).

The second, more in-depth analysis relied on automated content analysis. One usually consults a dictionary to find out the meanings of words; an alternative way is to look at the context in which those words are used, given that words that occur in close proximity to each other influence each other's meaning. The widely used linguistic software Sketch Engine, which creates so-called word sketches, was used for the frequency and collocation analyses. Those word sketches are overviews of how often words are combined to create a certain meaning. Likewise, Sketch Engine enables the calculation of a so-called thesaurus score, a number between 0 and 1, indicating how strongly two words collocate with one another. The closer the number is to 1, the greater their affinity. More in particular, the thesaurus scores with the highest values in the context of "islamofobia" are the object of this study. A corpus was composed of all news stories containing the word "islamofobia" (in Spanish) in the four newspapers during the period 1987–2022.

5. Findings

5.1. Media Attention to Islamophobia

The distribution of the 1475 newspaper articles showed disparate results. With regard to the first research question, *El País* stood out from the rest of the newspapers, as this left-leaning newspaper published 775 articles (52.5%). In contrast, the three remaining newspapers offered a more balanced coverage: *El Mundo* provided 252 articles (17.1%), *ABC* had 230 articles on offer (15.6%), and *La Vanguardia* published 218 articles (14.8%).

5.2. Timeline

To answer our second research question, we wanted to investigate when the term Islamophobia acquired relevance in Spanish newspapers. Figure 1 shows that 2001 was a defining year when three Spanish newspapers included the term in their articles. The 9/11 attacks were likely the central reason for this interest, but the first reference in that year occurred in March, six months before the attacks, in an opinion article on democracy and public opinion, published in *La Vanguardia* and written by Norbert Bilbeny. However, the very first time a newspaper used the term Islamophobia was in June 1987 by *ABC*. It appeared next to other concepts such as neo-Arabism or Maurophilia in the literary supplement and referred to the poetry of Ibn Jafaya of Alzira.
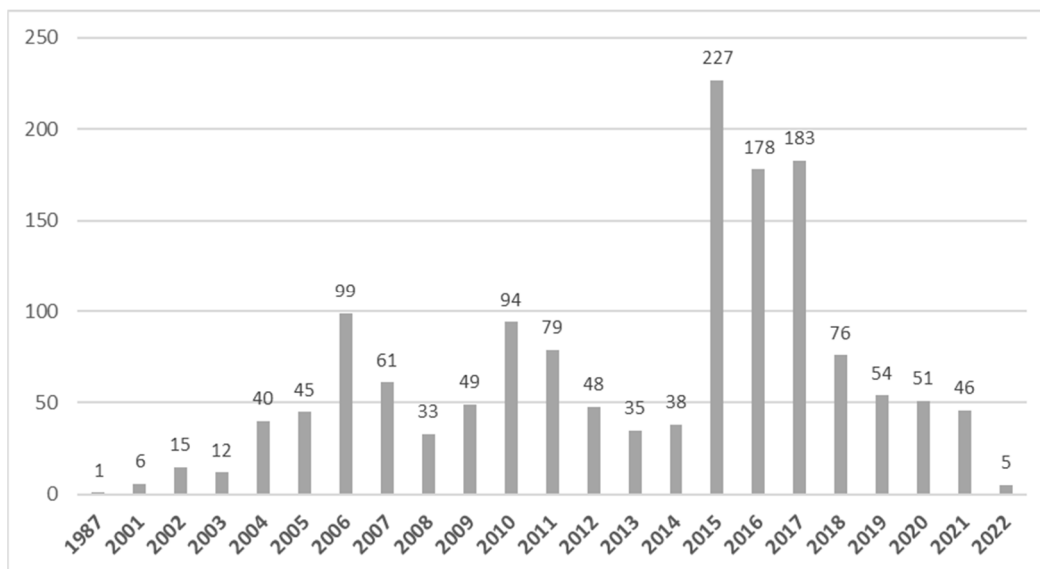
Figure 1. Yearly coverage of the term Islamophobia in Spanish newspapers (total).

The frequency of the term increased in 2002 and was maintained in 2003, even though it was not until 2004 when a notable rise in the number of articles was observed. Undoubtedly, the March 11 Madrid attacks in 2004 had an impact on this trend, especially in *El País* (Figure 2), but the year is also characterised by—among other matters—the controversy over the legislation of the hijab in France and some religious incidents (i.e., the desecration of Muslim tombs in the Alsace region). From this moment onwards, it can be stated that Islamophobia constitutes an issue in itself, as it appears in the headlines together with others, such as Islam, racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, Judeophobia, hatred, hijab, jihad, or religion. This status quo was broken in 2005 due to the 7/7 London attacks, as well as the aftermath and the anniversary of the Madrid attacks. In this sense, *El País* remains the newspaper that appears most interested in the term.
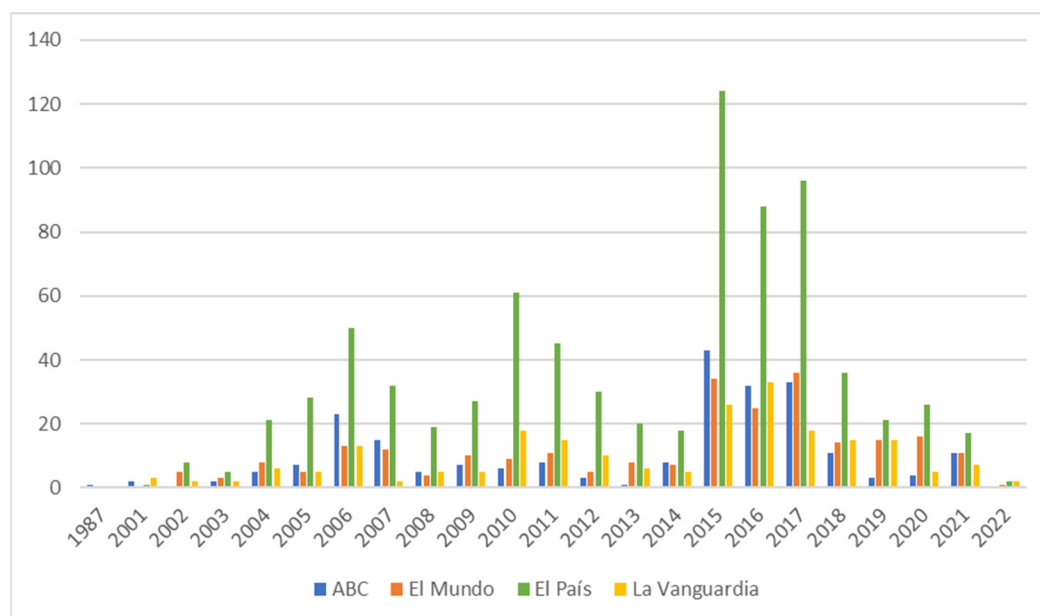

Figure 2. Yearly coverage of the term Islamophobia by newspaper (total).

In the first years of the origin of Islamophobia, 2006 was the most significant one. Throughout that year, some events occurred that provoked a rise in media focus in all

newspapers, for example, the polemics about the Mohammed cartoons and depictions which generated debates surrounding the freedom of speech; the interest of the Spanish Muslim community in reclaiming *La Mezquita de Córdoba*—originally a mosque which had been used by Christians during the last five centuries (*El Mundo*, 27 February 2006); or the controversies about the Pope Benedict XVI speech regarding Islam and its prophet (*La Vanguardia*, 21 September 2006). In the following two years, there was a substantial decline. Nevertheless, headlines such as "Londonistán" (*ABC*, 2 February 2007), "Nueva polémica sobre el islam en Europa" (*La Vanguardia*, 26 August 2007), and "Bruselas, 'capital' de 'Eurabia'" (*El Mundo*, 9 October 2007) were found in the conservative newspapers. On the contrary, *El País* published a broader thematic range of news stories in relation to Islam, as shown by these three headlines: "Morisco, palabra maldita" (*El País*, 15 June 2007), "Ciudadanos musulmanes" (*El País*, 28 December 2007), or "¿Y si el 'hiyab' es algo escogido?" (*El País*, 4 March 2008). In addition, it is interesting to note how an extra-European attack such as the one in Mumbai in 2008 was hardly linked to the word Islamophobia.

It was not until 2010 that the term regained a considerable amount of media interest, again with *El País* as the frontrunner. The controversies regarding the hijab were prominent that year. Thereafter, the annual frequencies decreased progressively. However, the year 2011 was still relevant because of the rise of far-right Islamophobia in the Netherlands led by Geert Wilders, the Anders Breivik's Oslo massacre, and the tenth anniversary of 9/11. Meanwhile, the Arab Spring was barely tied to the term Islamophobia. Significant events for the media in relation to Islamophobia between 2011 and 2015 included the rise of the Islamophobic far-right in Europe, especially in France and Germany, the tenth anniversary of 11M (Madrid attacks), and the new threat that the Islamic State (ISIS) represents.

The next triennium was decisive for the popularisation of Islamophobia in all newspapers. The Charlie Hebdo attacks; the publication of Michel Houellebecq's controversial novel *Soumission*; the fear towards ISIS; the refugee crisis; the social Islamophobia rise in Europe(e.g., Pegida in Germany); or the November Paris attacks (Bataclan, Stade de France) represent some of the most symbolic events that explained the exponential growth in 2015. That year was a turning point for the use of the term Islamophobia in the media and probably also for Islamophobia as a social phenomenon. It is noteworthy that the 2015 results of *El País* (124 articles) exceeded 50% of the records of the rest of the newspapers.

The 2016 decline was relatively modest. Apart from the appearance of the burkini on the agenda and the fact that terrorist attacks were taking place in other Western cities such as Brussels, Orlando (Florida), Nice, or Berlin, those issues were practically an extension of the previous year. In this sense, the feeling of fear and doubts about European multiculturalism persisted. Moreover, if *ABC* reminded its readers that there are also phobias to other religions in "La cristianofobia que nos asola" (29 March 2016), as that message had already been introduced some years before in "¿Islamofobia? Won't it be Christianophobia?" (1 January 2010), *El País* was concerned about the rising Islamophobia in the United States after Donald Trump's victory.

Unsurprisingly, the double attack in Barcelona and Cambrils (17A) dominated the Spanish newspapers in 2017, although there were also notable references to other jihadist attacks such as Manchester, the Quebec Mosque shootings, and the Finsbury Park terror attack, which put Islamophobia in focus. Besides terrorism, domestic issues were focused on radicalisation, the integration of Muslims, and Islamophobia, while Marine Le Pen, Trump, ISIS, or the Rohingya, among others, attracted international awareness.

While 2017 was the second year with the highest number of news items, in 2018 there was a sharp drop. From that year on, the decline was progressive until gradually disappearing in 2022. To what extent the COVID-19 pandemic (and the subsequent decline in migration) has contributed to this trend is unclear. Between January and May 2022 (at the time of writing), only five articles including Islamophobia on Boris Johnson, the Ukrainian crisis, the hijab, and Vox have been published. Issues such as religion, the far-right in Europe, and the 17A anniversary of the attacks in Barcelona and Cambrils dominated the media coverage of Islamophobia in 2018. The Christchurch Mosque shootings in 2019 had an impact, but not as

much as might have been expected. The far-right in Spain and Europe, the assassination of Samuel Paty, or the attack in Nice represented the most notorious themes of 2020. Finally, there were references to the events in Afghanistan and the commemoration of 9/11 in 2021, but the Spanish media agenda continued the classic issues: religion, Islamophobia, populism, far-right, the Islamic veil, etc.

5.3. Public Interest in Islamophobia

To answer the third research question, public interest was gauged by studying Google Trends, providing insight through a graph into when and how often the term "Islamophobia" has been searched for using Google's search engine. The combination of automated text analysis and tracking the number of times the term Islamophobia recurred in Google searches allowed us to compare the media agenda with the public interest in Islamophobia against the background of related incidents at home and abroad. Figure 3 shows that 2015 is the first key moment for the popularity of Islamophobia, which establishes some correspondence with media coverage. The first peak corresponds to January 2015—coinciding with Charlie Hebdo attacks—and the next one after the drop of the blue line, in November of the same year, right as the attacks took place in different locations in Paris, with the Bataclan being the deadliest. However, the most popular moment, that is, when the blue line reaches 100, was August 2017. In other words, the Barcelona and Cambrils attacks appear to be the most defining moment for Islamophobia searches in Spain.
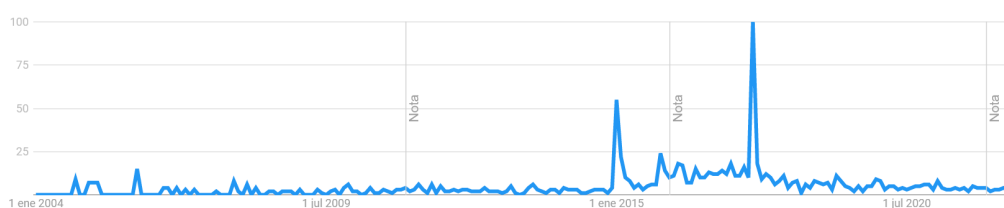

Figure 3. Google searches of term "islamofobia" in Spain from 2004 to 2022 (*Google Trends*).

Delving deeper into the possibilities offered by this application, it is revealed that the top 23 searches related to the term Islamophobia are "islamophobia Spain", "islamophobia in Spain", "islam", "racism", "xenophobia", "what is islamophobia", "islamophobia rae", "anti-semitism", "islamophobia definition", "Barcelona", "islamophobia Barcelona", "islamophobia meaning", "islamophobia in Europe", "homophobia", "intolerance", "totalitarianism", "anti-Christianity", "plataforma ciudadana contra la islamofobia", "stop islamophobia", "despotism", "no to islamophobia", "machismo", and "islamophobia". These findings demonstrate that users of Google's search engine are clearly interested in learning about the meaning of the concept. It is equally significant to check how it is close to the search for notions such as racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, homophobia, intolerance, or anti-Christianity. As Moreno-Mercado (2021) stated, Google Trends is a useful tool for social and communication researchers, but with certain conditioning factors that prevent making categorical assertions such as knowing the number of specific searches.

5.4. What the Legacy Newspapers Tell Us about Islamophobia and Related Terms

To answer how Islamophobia and related terms are represented in Spanish legacy media (RQ4), the 25 most prominent words that appear together with "islamofobia" in the news stories under study were used to yield the word cloud of collocations below (Figure 4). As can be seen in Table 1, the concepts that exceed the 0.15 score, thus occurring most frequently in the context of Islamophobia, are racism, terrorism, violence, hate, anti-semitism, and xenophobia.

Figure 4. Word cloud of 25 top collocates of "islamofobia" (*Sketch Engine*).

Table 1. Overview of thesaurus scores of the term "islamofobia" (*Sketch Engine*).

Terms	Thesaurus Result Score
Racismo	0.23
Terrorismo	0.20
Violencia	0.19
Odio	0.18
Antisemitismo	0.17
Xenofobia	0.16
Guerra	0.13
Discriminación; islam	0.12
Delito; ataque	0.11
Intolerancia; extremismo; musulmán; sentimiento	0.10
Atentado; debate; política; exclusión; derecha	0.09
Amenaza; agresión; problema; islamismo; presencia	0.08

The next question we want to answer is whether different collocations of words in the context of Islamophobia occur in the ideologically different newspapers under scrutiny. For this purpose, we compare the corpus of the three right-wing newspapers with the corpus of the left-wing newspaper *El País*. What stands out is the size of the corpus in *El País* (602,797 words), which presupposes much more attention to Islamophobia than in the other right-wing newspapers (*La Vanguardia*: 320,021 words; *ABC*: 250,661 words; *El Mundo*: 220,095 words).

When looking in more detail at the selected words, these can be interpreted as representing four categories, three of which appear in Table 2. A first category of words unsurprisingly refers to the phenomenon of Islam ("islam") and Muslims ("musulmanes"). The two following categories add more meaning to the concept of Islamophobia, referring to racism and discrimination, and hence emphasising the "victim" status of those who suffer from Islamophobia: i.e., "discriminación" (discrimination), "odio" (hate), "xenofobia" (xenophobia), "racismo" (racism), "antisemitismo" (anti-semitism), "intolerancia" (intolerance), and "exclusión" (exclusion). Other words pointing at the violent realities that may nourish the phenomenon of Islamophobia, such as "terrorismo" (terrorism), "guerra" (war), "ataque" (attacks), "atentado" (assaults), "violencia" (violence), "delito" (crime), "amenaza" (threat), "islamismo" (Islamism), and "agresión" (assault), are at the root of the feelings of Islamophobia. These words colour Islamophobia as something that results from a violent reality to which Islamophobia is a reaction provoked, as it were, by Islam itself.

Table 2. Terms revolving around categories of victimisation, threat, and politics (*Sketch Engine*).

Category	Terms	Combined Frequency in 3 Right-Wing Newspapers	Frequency in Left-Wing Newspaper	Share of the Frequencies in Left-Wing Newspaper (in %)
Victimisation	Odio	436	361	45
	Discriminación	157	154	50
	Racismo	272	281	51
	Antisemitismo	169	191	53
	Intolerancia	84	112	57
	Xenofobia	123	157	56
	Exclusión	37	50	57
Threat	Guerra	665	421	39
	Ataque	432	346	44
	Amenaza	352	286	45
	Atentado	699	595	46
	Agresión	104	94	47
	Islamismo	157	153	49
	Violencia	322	339	51
	Delito	175	184	51
	Terrorismo	533	594	53
Politics	Política	532	431	45
	Debate	326	299	48
	Derecha	380	394	51
	Extremismo	68	72	51

The fourth category consists of words that refer to the political debate provoked by the reality of Islamophobia. Logical words in this category are "política" (politics), "debate" (debate), and "derecha" (right-wing), as well as the politically linked term "extremismo" (extremism). Discussions about left-wing politics also fall in this category, but since Islamophobia is mostly a phenomenon present in right-wing politics, it is not surprising that "derecha" (right-wing) appears in the top 20 collocations, while in left-wing politics does not.

Another term that might be located in the category of politically charged words is "sentimiento" (feeling). Feelings may motivate political stances; however, "sentimiento" is probably a more general term that does not undeniably belong in one of the four categories: i.e., the synonyms, the terms referring to victimisation, violence, and politics. "Presencia" (presence) and "problema" (problem) are equally such general words that do not unquestionably fit into one of those categories.

Having divided the key words that collocate with Islamophobia into categories, we move on to the next question: Are there any differences as to the relative occurrence of the victimisation, threat, and politics-oriented words in the left-leaning versus right-leaning newspapers? It is assumed that while victim and political framings will be more prominent in left-wing newspapers, the framing of violence will be more obvious in right-wing newspapers (see Bosilkov and Drakaki 2018; Berry et al. 2015; Van-Gorp 2005).

Most percentages hover around 50, which means that the different words are evenly distributed across the three right-wing newspapers compared to the left-wing newspaper. As for the politics frame, two words occur more often in the left-wing newspaper—"derecha" and "extremismo"—although the difference with the right-wing newspapers is minor (51% versus 49%). Out of the seven words that made it into the top 25 in relation to "islamofobia" and victimisation, six occur predominantly in *El País*. This is true of "discriminación" (50%), "racismo" (51%), "antisemitismo" (53%), "xenofobia" (56%), "intolerancia" (57%), and "exclusión" (57%), with "odio" (45%) being an exception with a clear predominance in the right-wing newspapers.

Among the words that represent threat, we notice a predominance of six words that are more frequently identified in right-wing newspapers. These are "guerra" (with only 39% of the mentions in the left-wing newspaper), "ataque" (44%), "amenaza" (45%), "atentado"

(46%), "agresión", and "islamismo" (49%). Three words, however, are slightly more frequent in the leftist Spanish press: "violencia" (51%), "delito" (51%), and "terrorismo" (53%).

In sum, terror and threat seem to be more of a focus of the three newspapers we labeled as right-wing than of the left-wing newspaper *El País*, although the dominance of the threat frame in the right-wing press is less outspoken than that of the victimisation frame in the left-wing press.

6. Discussion and Conclusions

One of the first findings is that the concept of Islamophobia was already in use in the Spanish press prior to 9/11 or the Runnymede Trust report. Two articles published in *ABC* (June 1987) and in *La Vanguardia* (March 2011) confirm that Islamophobia was in the media scene before the 9/11 attacks. According to the literature review, thereafter, the idea gained notoriety, but it was not until 2006 that the records acquired some significance due to the controversy over the publication of the Muhammad caricatures as well as other incidents. In this sense, neither the Madrid (March 2004) nor the London (July 2005) attacks had the same relevance. In fact, our analysis has confirmed that the succession of terrorist attacks is just as important for the spread of the term as the debates on freedom of speech (RQ2). In addition, nationalism and anti-Muslim populism should not be forgotten as keywords that are closely related to Islamophobia in the press.

For reasons such as the two major terror attacks in Paris, the growing fear of ISIS, the 2014–2016 European refugee crisis, and the rise of Islamophobic social movements, among others, the most prolific moment for the term Islamophobia is 2015 (and the years that follow), as discussed in the timeline (H2). However, we confirm that our longitudinal look taught us that attention to Islamophobia is very much linked to incidents involving terror. Our analysis also showed that editors make different choices regarding the tone of the reporting, depending on where the incident took place (i.e., within Europe or outside the Western world) beyond the expected dichotomy between popular and quality media.

From the perspective of public attention, Google Trends data confirm that it was in 2015 when Spanish users of the well-known search engine began to show greater interest in the term, especially due to the attack on Charlie Hebdo. However, the highest peak of searches coincided with the time of the Barcelona and Cambrils attacks (August 2017), confirming the link between newspaper reporting on Islamophobia and the public interest in the topic (RQ3) and the existence of a certain moral panic in society as a consequence of the terrorist attacks. The top 10 most common queries related to Islamophobia from Spain were "islamophobia Spain", "islamophobia in Spain", "islam", "racism", "xenophobia", "what is islamophobia", "islamophobia rae" (*Real Academia Española*), "anti-semitism", "islamophobia definition", and "Barcelona". Furthermore, this situation demonstrates the social confusion or lack of familiarity around the notion of Islamophobia, because two of these ten searches ask for a definition of the concept ("what is islamophobia"; "islamophobia definition"), and one directly asks the *Real Academia Española* (RAE) for clarification ("islamophobia rae").

Another aspect that has been detected is that there is a certain disparity between the Spanish press outlets. The interest that *El País* has shown in the concept of Islamophobia is unparalleled in any other newspaper (RQ1). It has invariably offered the most records since 2002 and, from 2004 onwards, the difference from the rest of the newspapers remains clearly visible, particularly in the period of 2015–2017. It is worth recalling that this left-wing newspaper registered 52.2% of the total number of mentions of the term, which is significantly higher than the results of *El Mundo* (17.1%), *ABC* (15.6%), or *La Vanguardia* (14.8%). We cannot confirm this without going deeper into the discourse, but this reality could imply that the left-wing press is more interested in multiculturalism and the integration of minorities than the right-wing press.

Additionally, our analyses of media texts using corpus statistics provide an informed description of how Islamophobia has been framed in the sphere of mainstream media in Spain, what can be referred to as "mediated Islamophobia". It has been observed that while Islamophobia is reported on in *El País* in a context of victimisation (i.e., intolerance,

exclusion, or xenophobia), right-wing newspapers link it to ideas that reinforce the threat such as war, attack, or threat itself (H1), which supports our suspicions mentioned above about the interest of this type of media in multiculturalism and the integration of minorities. Considering the results of the entire corpus, the most recurrent and related terms to the concept of Islamophobia in the Spanish press are racism, terrorism, violence, hate, anti-semitism, and xenophobia (RQ4). Thus, it is assumed that newspapers intend to define Islamophobia when relying on ideas such as racism, hate, anti-semitism, and xenophobia, or others, such as discrimination, crime, intolerance, sentiment, exclusion, or aggression.

We acknowledge that these lexical analyses must be complemented with further manual analysis of media content in the realm of discourse analysis, as well as with further work on the public's opinions on the issue of Islamophobia, with a focus on their reactions to the mainstream media in open online forums. The literature informs us that attitudes toward Muslims and Islam are not the same everywhere, hence the importance of cross-country analysis (De Coninck et al. 2022b). A recommended direction for future research involves delving deeper into the contextual aspects surrounding the awareness and visibility of Islamophobia in Spain. Specifically, future studies should focus on providing a more explicit differentiation and emphasis on how the term is utilized in domestic versus international news.

Finally, it is worth introducing *Muslim people and journalism* (Rojo et al. 2021), a guide published for Spanish and European journalists where possible doubts on the coverage of Muslim communities are explained and solved with the aim of counter-Islamophobia and ensuring a more inclusive and plural journalism. Issues such as migrations, terrorism, gender, and imagery are discussed in depth, in relation to their relevance in hegemonic news treatment. This guideline is rounded off by a glossary of key terms and ten recommendations on matters relating to documentation, language, contextualisation, and credibility.

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