




# Essentializing Muslims in Ecuadorian Journalism: A Corpus-Informed Study of El Comercio<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

The relationship between Latin America and the so-called ‘Muslim World’ is a tenuous one, as public perceptions of Muslims are generally quite negative despite consistent, typically economically-beneficial immigration from the Middle East. Indeed, despite Muslims constituting less than one-tenth of one percent (0.011%) of the total population in the predominantly Catholic country of Ecuador, which is located in northwestern South America, anti-Muslim sentiments are increasing both in frequency and severity. As a result, this article contextualizes the reality and challenges of Muslims in Ecuador by offering a thematic analysis of almost one thousand articles concerning Muslims in El Comercio, the Quito-based, leading newspaper of Ecuador. Two subcorpora were created and are referenced here, one containing article titles (3,095 words) and one containing article content (543,389 words). By utilizing a computationally-driven, mixed methods approach to extract and examine these articles, this analysis is couched within the understanding that discourses surrounding Muslims overwhelmingly perpetuate and reinforce negative stereotypes through deliberate rhetorical choices.

**Key words:** discourse analysis; Islamophobia; Ecuador; Latin America; journalism.

## Resumen

### La Esencialización de los Musulmanes en el Periodismo Ecuatoriano: Un Estudio de Corpus de “El Comercio”

La relación entre América Latina y el llamado “mundo musulmán” es escasa, ya que la percepción pública de los musulmanes es en general bastante negativa a pesar de los beneficios económicos de la constante inmigración histórica y contemporánea procedente

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<sup>1</sup> Artículo de investigación

de Medio Oriente. De hecho, a pesar de que los musulmanes constituyen menos de una décima parte del uno por ciento (0,011 %) de la población total de Ecuador, país predominantemente católico situado en el noroeste de Sudamérica, los sentimientos antimusulmanes están aumentando tanto en frecuencia como en gravedad. Por ello, este artículo contextualiza la realidad y los retos de los musulmanes en Ecuador ofreciendo un análisis temático de casi mil artículos relativos a los musulmanes en “El Comercio”, el principal periódico de Ecuador, con sede en Quito. Se crearon dos corpus a los que se hace referencia aquí, uno con los títulos de los artículos (3.095 palabras) y otro con su contenido (543.389 palabras). Al utilizar un método computacional mixto para extraer y examinar estos artículos, este análisis se enmarca en el entendimiento de que los discursos en torno a los musulmanes perpetúan y refuerzan abrumadoramente los estereotipos negativos a través de elecciones retóricas deliberadas en dichos artículos periodísticos.

**Palabras claves:** análisis del discurso crítico; Islamofobia; Ecuador; América Latina; periodismo.

### **Résumé**

#### **L'essentialisation des musulmans dans le journalisme équatorien: une étude de corpus de “El Comercio”**

La relation entre l'Amérique latine et le soi-disant « monde musulman » est ténue, dans la mesure où la perception publique des musulmans est généralement assez négative malgré une immigration historique et contemporaine constante, généralement bénéfique sur le plan économique, en provenance du Moyen-Orient. En effet, bien que les musulmans représentent moins d'un dixième d'un pour cent (0,011 %) de la population totale de l'Équateur, un pays à majorité catholique situé au nord-ouest de l'Amérique du Sud, les sentiments anti-musulmans deviennent, à la fois, de plus en plus fréquents et graves. En conséquence, cet article contextualise la réalité et les défis des musulmans en Équateur en proposant une analyse thématique de près d'un millier d'articles concernant les musulmans dans El Comercio, le principal journal équatorien basé à Quito. Deux sous-corpus ont été créés et sont référencés ici, l'un contenant les titres des articles (3 095 mots) et l'autre contenant le contenu des articles (543 389 mots). En utilisant une méthodologie mixte centrée sur l'informatique pour extraire et examiner ces articles, cette analyse s'inscrit dans la compréhension que les discours entourant les musulmans perpétuent et renforcent massivement les stéréotypes négatifs par des choix rhétoriques délibérés.

**Mots-clés :** analyse de discours critique ; Islamophobie ; Équateur ; Amérique Latine ; journalisme.

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## INTRODUCTION

Until recent surges of violent crime, national unrest, and governmental instability, the Republic of Ecuador remained obscure—to varying degrees—to those outside Latin America. Beyond serving as a top exporter of petroleum, seafood, bananas, and cocoa, Ecuador has maintained a reputation as a country of rich diversity and relative peace. Despite having a relatively ‘open’ policy concerning entry into the country, it has not experienced the extensive extra-regional immigration that has disproportionately impacted other South American nations (cf. Schodt, 1987/2019). Indeed, excluding citizens who were raised and/or live abroad, Ecuador has only been significantly impacted by large numbers of immigrants from Colombia, Peru, Venezuela, and Haiti (cf. Gómez & Herrera, 2022; Jiménez & Pugh, 2020).

As a consequence of this immigration, public broadcasting and journalism frequently focus on regional issues in neighboring countries that may impact domestic policy and economic stability. This is not to suggest, of course, that an expansive media is a new phenomenon; on the contrary, Ecuadorian journalism has been extensively covered in extant scholarship (see e.g., Ayala Mora, 2012; Bakker, 2012; Coronel Salas, 2015; González Cordova, 2016; La Asociación Técnica de Diarios Latinoamericanos [ATDL], 2017; Lopez, 1991; Llorente & Cuenca, 2013; Panchana & Mena Iturralde, 2020; Robayo Valencia et al., 2015; Rogel, 2013; Rivera Rogel, 2012; Viveros & Mellado 2018). For instance, Pugh et al. (2020) investigate shifting perceptions toward Colombian immigrants in light of increased immigration from Venezuela over the last few years, fueling a more broadly negative stance toward newcomers to the country.

Consequently, immigrants from Muslim-majority countries are discussed comparatively less often within the Ecuadorian context, though it would stand to reason that citizens might very well have their own opinions about potential neighbors with perceptible differences in values, practices, and beliefs. Following the *World Values Survey, 2017-2022* (cf. Haerpfer et al., 2022), some three-quarters of Ecuadorians completely or partially trust religious organizations; on the other hand, a marginally larger proportion would either not trust very much (40.7%) or would not trust at all (37.2%) a neighbor who practices a different religion<sup>2</sup>. In fact, almost half the population

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<sup>2</sup> It should also be recognized here that these percentages do represent an increase from earlier results reported in Inglehart et al. (2014), in which 32.1% of respondents noted that they would prefer not to live next to someone of another religion. Similarly, there was a marginal increase of moderate distrust and a substantial increase in complete distrust for those who practice another religion, listed in 2014 at 38.3% and 27.1%, respectively. To contextualize this even further, the complete lack of trust in such a neighbor represents an almost forty percent increase over the last decade. In some ways, this can be understood as somewhat unsurprising, given Zepeda and Carrion’s (2014, p. 13) findings that approximately seventy percent (N=69.8%) of the Ecuadorian population felt that their national identity was in decline, that a greater emphasis upon this area was necessary to reverse earlier trends, and that immigration to the

(45.6%) indicated strong or moderate agreement that their religion is the only acceptable one. Despite this, eighty percent of the population either does not belong to a religious organization or is only nominally religious<sup>3</sup>. Consequently, a religiously-grounded justification for this fear of the religion of one's neighbor seems unlikely. On the other hand, only one-quarter of Ecuadorians do not trust the news that they receive on television or through journalistic accounts in print.

Thus, while one cannot argue straightforwardly that the population blindly follows the representations of Muslims to which they are exposed, one also cannot state unequivocally that Ecuadorians are not influenced by such portrayals. In fact, within the context of Ecuadorian social media, Islamophobic discourse is widespread, resulting in a straightforward bifurcation of society that seemingly reinforces the positions indicated by the *World Values Survey*:

[T]he 'insider' is defined as a civilized, modern, honest native speaker of Spanish who reads the Bible and practices Christianity. On the other hand, the 'outsider' is defined as a backwards, outdated, opportunistic foreigner who speaks Arabic, discriminates against women, reads and blindly follows the teachings of the Qur'ān, has ancestral or social roots in the Middle East, and will never be accepted into mainstream Ecuadorian society, thus perpetually existing as a member of a perceived fringe, minoritized group (Spier, 2022, p. 347).

To this end, in considering the historical and contemporary context of immigration to and perceptions of the 'Other' within Ecuador, the present study is guided by three research questions: (1) How are Muslims represented within Ecuadorian journalism through articles published in *El Comercio*? (2) What are the most common collocations in articles that reference Muslims? (3) How does sentiment analysis inform this discussion more broadly? Although the answers to these questions present a primarily descriptive overview, these could reflect or underpin a more theoretical understanding of the ways in which Ecuadorians engage in identity contestation and negotiation, both of the 'Self' and the 'Other.'

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country was problematic (N=42.5%). For the sake of comparison, only 9.7% viewed immigrants positively. Such positionality is likely influenced by the drastic shift in governmental policies toward immigration, as those enacted between 2007-2014 offered greater rights to immigrants; 2014-2020, greater restrictions on immigration (cf. Gómez & Herrera, 2022, p. 84). Despite these results, most citizens (N=99.1%) expressed pride in being Ecuadorian, and two-thirds (N=67.8%) were not considering an international relocation within the following three years (Zepeda & Carrion, 2014).

<sup>3</sup> This can be contrasted with a statement attributed to Simón Bolívar, the so-called 'Liberator of America,' that "Ecuador es un convento, Colombia es una universidad y Venezuela es un cuartel." As a result, while Catholicism might not figure prominently in the lives of all citizens, a nominal religiosity prevails and certainly influences perceptions of those of different faiths. Nonetheless, Articles 11, 19, 66, and 174 of the Constitución de la República del Ecuador provide legal protections against intolerance and discrimination.

Nonetheless, in order to answer these questions, the remainder of this article is divided into an additional four parts. Section 2 introduces the larger background of immigration to and the presence of Arabs and Muslims within Ecuador. Section 3 describes the computational methodology underpinning and the corpus/corpora informing this study. Section 4 offers a discussion of the results and preliminary findings through sociolinguistic and discursive analysis with particular emphasis upon traditional computational linguistic metrics, lexical frequency and distribution, and sentiment analysis. Finally, Section 5 presents concluding thoughts and areas for future research within this area.

### **'Los Turcos' and Muslims in the Ecuadorian Context**

The Republic of Ecuador, which is located in northwestern South America, is a geographically, biologically, ethnically, and linguistically diverse nation with seventeen million inhabitants. Colonized by the Spaniards in the sixteenth century and by the Inca Empire earlier yet, Ecuador would later gain recognition in February 1840 as an independent nation before beginning the process of nation-building. Among those who would contribute toward this endeavor include *Los Turcos*, a group of nineteenth-century immigrants from Lebanon<sup>4</sup>, Syria, and Palestine. Departing the Ottoman Empire in some cases to avoid oppression (cf. Roberts, 2000) and in other cases in search of economic prosperity through non-agricultural opportunities, *Los Turcos* were generally adherents of Christianity. As a result, their presence in the nation was recognized not through religious beliefs and practices but, rather, primarily through the type of employment in which they engaged. As Suquillo (2002) outlines, many engaged in the sale of household wares and the trading of dates, rose water, and baklava; thus, the items, as opposed to the people themselves, were more likely to be perceived as 'exotic' or 'foreign.' Still, others opened less informal businesses like stores, restaurants, and hotels (cf. Bejarano Escanilla, 1997). Indeed, this early immigration is still saliently reflected not only in the popularization of shawarma in street eateries and the opportunity to purchase Arab desserts in bakeries, but also in the surnames of former leaders, such as Julio Teodoro

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<sup>4</sup> Because the Lebanese arrived in greater numbers than the Syrians and Palestinians, significantly more research has been written about their arrival. More information about their presence in Ecuador can be found in Almeida (1997) and Roberts (2000). Following Kim's (1999) racial triangulation approach, these earlier and later immigrant groups from the Middle East can be distinguished from one another through recourse to a variety of planes. Although they do not differ in a racialized sense from one another, they do present differently according to religion and are accompanied by the 'baggage' associated with the spatiotemporal and geopolitical contexts of their countries of origin. Put another way, while a Palestinian Christian and a Palestinian Muslim are both Palestinians, the time at which s/he departed Palestine may disproportionately impact their perception by others at the same time that their religion provides an additional definitional criterion by which to evaluate their foreignness.

Salem, Abdalá Jaime Bucaram Ortiz, and Jamil Mahuad<sup>5</sup>. Indeed, fear of or aversion toward Arabs not only did not exist at the *fin de siècle*, but immigrants from the Middle East were perceived as part of the collective Ecuadorian nation:

Ahora, cuando somos más o menos todos Comerciantes de fantasías chinos<sup>6</sup>, debemos protegernos mutuamente y amparar a turcos, sirios, árabes, judíos y más levantinos. Soy del pueblo, soy pueblo, y salgo mejor librado con ellos que con los comerciantes nacionales siempre en vísperas de la quiebra y con los precios en las nubes (Calle, 1911, como se cita en Carrillo, 2012, p. 195).<sup>7</sup>

Nevertheless, while those of Arab descent have only arrived in significant numbers since the late 1800s, Muslims have actually immigrated or been transported to Latin America since the early periods of Spanish colonialism (cf. Taboada, 2009), though the exact figures, similar to much of Latin America, remain unclear. What is known, however, is that Muslims started moving to Guayaquil, the coastal capital of Ecuador, in the early to mid-twentieth century (cf. Jibaja, 2017). Earlier scholarship suggests figures ranging from one thousand or four thousand to twenty thousand (Reichert, 1965; Delval, 1992; Djinguiz, 1908). A more recent report from the Pew Research Center provides a more accurate estimate: Less than one-tenth of one percent (0.011%) of the population includes professed and/or practicing Muslims. Consequently, the overwhelmingly Catholic nation of Ecuador does not face any sort of existential crisis at the hands of Muslims, despite the fact that the attacks on September 11, 2001, led by the Islamist group al-Qa'idah, linger in the minds of many and remain a point of discussion on online platforms among Ecuadorians, particularly when Islam or the Middle East is referenced. In fact, despite the work of Ozkan (2017) and Zuñiga and Ozkan (2020), this has not prevented the perpetuation of the belief that Latin America, more broadly, could be or

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<sup>5</sup> Such names do not feature in the corpus here, likely due to the fact that “[...] public discourse about racial groups and their relative status generates a field of racial positions (or, to borrow Gould’s phrase, a particular ‘racial geometry’) in a given time and place” (Kim, 1999, p. 106). Thus, a politician who is viewed positively may be distinguished from his or her identitarian factors and, thus, evaluated based on merit or socioeconomic status within the nation; conversely, with the continued spread of Islamist acts of violence and more widespread, Islamophobic discourse, this recourse may no longer be possible. With reference to Asian Americans, Kim (1999) demonstrates this to be the case when highlighting the fact that anti-Asian speech was commonplace during the fiftieth anniversary of the Japanese-led attack on Pearl Harbor (p. 128).

<sup>6</sup> Although this is a very literal translation from the original Spanish, such stores are typically female-owned in contemporary Quito and sell so-called *ananayes*, a *Quiteñismo* that refers to aesthetically-pleasing, yet unnecessary, purchases at such businesses.

<sup>7</sup> “Now, when we’re all basically Chinese Fantasy Merchants, we need to protect each other and protect the Turks, Syrians, Arabs, Jews, and especially the Lebanese. I am of the people, I am the people, and I get along better with them than I do with the national merchants who are always on the eve of bankruptcy with their exorbitant prices” (own translation).

could become a covert breeding ground for Muslim extremism<sup>8</sup>.

As a result, online discussions tend to become politicized quite quickly and serve to reproduce the otherwise normalized xenophobia within Ecuador<sup>9</sup>. Indeed, even a cursory review of recent posts concerning the violence between Hamas and Israel on the Instagram page for *Revista Vistazo* indicates that regional and global conflicts become localized very quickly in the context of social media. For example, a video was released in mid-November 2023<sup>10</sup> under the title “Gaza: Un Cementerio de Niños.” While some comments expressed support for the Palestinians and/or generalized opposition to the unnecessary death of non-combatants on either side, the comment that elicited the most responses and likes at the time this article was written demonstrated overt opposition:

Que basura esta noticia. Toma partido de un lado en lugar de ser imparcial y publicar las atrocidades también que Hamás ha hecho con Israel en sus ataques, con las personas que capturó. Por que [sic] no dicen que los de Hamás violaron, mutilaron y degollaron a las personas? Que Hamás atacó un hospital? Que todo inició con Hamás porque quieren obtener algo que no les pertenece? Por qué no dicen cuantaa [sic] mujeres y niños mató Hamás? Si el inicio de esta Guerra que ellos la generaron, no ha sido el único ataque y de paso otros países se han unido actuar contra los Israelitas.<sup>11</sup>

On the other hand, these and similar comments suggest that Ecuadorians are overtly motivated by ethical concerns in such situations; however, this does not present

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<sup>8</sup> Indeed, Sills and Baggett (2011) even argue that Arab Muslims can “pass for Latinos very easily” (p. 39). The rationale for this argument is that the Arab-conquered al-Andalus/Andalusia resulted in such genetic mixing that it would stand to reason that their descendents would be almost indistinguishable from their counterparts. In any case, if one accepts this position, then that means that the potential for Muslims to hear and follow the siren call of Islamism would be able to ‘blend’ quite easily into Ecuadorian society. This is, of course, not borne out in extant research, perceptual or otherwise, and reflects a personal belief of the authors, instead.

<sup>9</sup> Restrictions on visa obtainment to Ecuador were relaxed in 2010, enabling people from many countries to enter and reside lawfully in the country. As Bayón Jiménez et al. (2021) note, “Sin embargo, resulta paradójico constatar que en cierto sector de la sociedad civil organizada predomina un nacionalismo ideológico que refuerza la xenofobia” (p. 23). Furthermore, Luzes et al. (2023) relate that twenty-seven to thirty-five percent of the immigrant population faces xenophobia on a regular basis (p. 24). For this reason, if such feelings are entrenched in daily life, then it is not unsurprising that they would or could be reified in an online context.

<sup>10</sup> This video is available at the following link: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CzcOdtFrGI0>.

<sup>11</sup> “This news is trash. They’re [the journalists] taking sides instead of being impartial and also publishing the atrocities that Hamas has committed against Israel through its attacks and the abduction of people. Why aren’t they saying that Hamas has violated, mutilated, and slaughtered people? That Hamas attacked a hospital? That everything started because Hamas wanted to have something that didn’t belong to them? Why don’t they say how many women and children Hamas has killed? They started this war. It wasn’t just a single attack, and now other countries have come together against the Israelis” (own translation).



the full picture. In fact, Islamophobia is commonplace throughout Ecuadorian social media, hereby reinforcing Buchanan's (2015) sentiment that "Muslims are clearly more susceptible to the siren call of terrorism and more likely to be radicalized on the Internet and in mosques than are Christians at church or Jews at synagogue." Indeed, while *masajid* are present in each of the three major cities in Ecuador (Quito, Guayaquil, and Cuenca), social media has enabled a variety of rhetorical strategies to be employed, should one decide to engage in Islamophobic discourse. Ten such strategies are explicated in detail in Spier (2022), and they range from the deliberate usage of scripture to bolster or attack one's position, the promotion of a narrative of 'justifiable fear' based on an equivalence between Muslims in general and those who engage in Islamist-led violence, and the invocation of direct verbal attacks on Muslims, Islam, and the Qur'ān.

## **METHODOLOGY AND CORPUS**

The methodology utilized in the present study is decidedly rooted in the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA); as such, some foundational assumptions are made concerning both the objectives and the implications of the corpus under consideration here. For instance, it is understood that discourses, particularly in the case of periodicals produced for general public consumption, have the potential to manifest, perpetuate, legitimate, and reinforce ideological positions of the authors and/or the readers. Furthermore, it is also recognized here that such ideologically-informed stances and their discursive reproduction are not rooted exclusively in impromptu perceptions but, rather, the culminating result of extant sociocultural structures, resulting in a medium that affords – but rarely attains – the opportunity to mediate socioculturally and linguistically the stances of both parties in a journalistically impartial manner.

To this end, a particularly important methodological tool is the ideological square (cf. Van Dijk, 1998, 2011), which enables the analyst to schematize the ways in which attention is given to or removed from positive and negative attributes, behaviors, and beliefs of those belonging to the in-group and those belonging to the out-group. In the case of the present study and with full understanding that Ecuador is a primarily Catholic nation, this reasonably renders the authors and editors in the publishing sector to be members of the in-group; all those who belong to marginalized or minoritized communities, members of the out-group. Put another way, any articles written about Muslims in Ecuadorian newspapers are unlikely to have been written by a follower of Islam; thus, to ignore this factor would be to overlook the significant contribution of one's own positionality in journalistic reporting. Consequently, confirmation of negative other-presentation would reinforce the existence of an anti-Muslim ideology, whereas the absence of this would suggest idiosyncratic beliefs and not the broader journalistic stigmatization of a particular religious group.

Thus, in an attempt to determine to what extent Muslims are discussed – and

under which contexts and in which light – in Ecuadorian journalism, a corpus was created that contains almost one thousand (N=996) articles from *El Comercio*<sup>12</sup>, one of the leading newspapers in the nation and certainly the most widely read newspaper within Quito, the capital city (cf. Llorente & Cuenca, 2013). Furthermore, when considering the total number of followers on typical social media websites, *El Comercio* also ranks consistently higher than many – in some cases, all – of its counterparts. At the time that this article was written, *El Comercio* boasted 3.6 million followers on Facebook, 2.7 million on X (formerly known as *Twitter*), and 1.2 million on Instagram. Although Quito is neither the largest city by population nor the economic powerhouse of Ecuador, it does serve as the center of national governance and as a major cultural and touristic destination due to its designation as the first UNESCO World Heritage Site. For this reason, the articles selected for inclusion are believed to serve as a representative sample of Ecuadorian journalism more broadly.

The criteria for inclusion were straightforward. First, the article needed to contain at least one reference to *musulmán*, *musulmana*, and/or *musulmanes*<sup>13</sup>, which correspond, respectively, to the singular masculine, singular feminine, and non-gendered plural for “Muslim” in Spanish. Second, the article needed to be computationally crawlable, which means that the website where it appeared needed not to have significantly inconsistent code that would prevent ease in extraction. The script used to scrape these pages was written in Python v3.8 and relied on both the *newspaper3k* and *BeautifulSoup4* libraries to facilitate the process. As such, seven years’ worth of such articles (2017-2023) are examined here, resulting in the creation of two subcorpora. The first, comprising only the titles of the articles, contains approximately three thousand types (N=3,095) and around eleven thousand (N=11,026) tokens, yielding a type-token ratio (TTR) of 0.286. The second, comprising only the content of the articles, contains over half a million (N=543,389) tokens and over thirty thousand types (N=35,455), yielding a type-token ratio (TTR) of 0.0653. Titles range in length from one to twenty-six words, and articles themselves range from sixty-nine to over four thousand words (69-4,483). The average length for both, respectively, was 11.18 words and 543.71 words. The median and mode were near-identical for titles, and slightly greater variation was found in articles, where

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<sup>12</sup> An anonymous reviewer suggested that the exclusive focus upon *El Comercio*, as opposed to *El Universo* or *El Extra*, might not serve as adequate evidence of the views of everyday Ecuadorians. This could, indeed, be the case, but the primary objective here is to interrogate how the leading newspaper in the capital city propagates perceptions of Muslims, which could influence the ways in which everyday Ecuadorians view followers of Islam. This is a reasonable assumption, as journalism, whether arriving through a print or electronic medium, “play[s] a central role in helping people understand the wider world” (Bleich & Van der Veen, p. 136). Nonetheless, a more substantive treatment of individual Ecuadorians’ beliefs toward those recognized as outsiders already exists in Haerpfer et al. (2022) and Zepeda and Carrion (2014).

<sup>13</sup> These lexical items were selected based on responses to the regular expression *musulm\** in AntConc (Anthony, 2023).

the median and mode were 477 and 330, respectively.

The articles belong to one of twelve editor-selected categories, over ninety-six percent (96.38%) of which were listed under *Actualidad* ('Current Affairs'), *Tendencias* ('Trending'), or *Opinión* ('Opinion'). Additionally, *Actualidad* contains five subcategories, which establish the importance of reporting on Muslims from political, cultural, and global positionalities. This would seem to suggest that, when mentioned in Ecuadorian newspapers at all, Muslims are usually described under more serious or formal circumstances than if these articles were overwhelmingly classified under *Deportes* ('Sports') or *Viajar* ('Travel')<sup>14</sup>. Nonetheless, all twelve categories –alongside their respective subcategories – and their overall distribution are presented below in Table 1.

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<sup>14</sup> There are, of course, notable exceptions to this, such as in reporting on the construction in Qatar in anticipation of the Olympics, resulting in widespread, international attention on the costs associated, both terms of financial expenditures and the loss of human lives.

**Table 1:** Articles by Editor-Selected Category

Category	Articles (N)	Articles (%)	Subcategories	
<i>Actualidad</i>	710	71.29%	Mundo (668) Cultura (19) General (15)	Política (5) Quito (2) Ecuador (1)
<i>Tendencias</i>	154	15.46%	Sociedad (47) Entretenimiento (45) Curiosidades (27) General (14) Ambiente (4) Tecnología (4)	Salud (3) Ciencia (3) Turismo (3) Cine (2) Cultura (2)
<i>Opinión</i>	67	6.73%	General (63)	Editorial (4)
<i>Deportes</i>	31	3.11%	Futbol (19) General (11)	Carburando (1)
<i>Blogs</i>	14	1.41%	—	
<i>Cartas</i>	8	0.80%		
<i>Afull</i>	3	0.30%		
<i>Video</i>	3	0.30%	General (1) Actualidad (1)	Tendencias (1)
<i>Construir</i>	2	0.20%	—	
<i>Viajar</i>	2	0.20%		
<i>Guaifai</i>	1	0.10%		
<i>Chic</i>	1	0.10%		
<b>Totals</b>	996	≈100%	—	

Once automatic extraction was completed, a random sampling of the data was undertaken to ensure that the information obtained was consistent with that presented on the website, after which the data were subjected to a battery of tests, including lexical frequency and distribution, concordancing, and a host of sociolinguistically-oriented analyses through *PySentimiento* (cf. Pérez et al., 2023), an open-source library created in

Python to facilitate sentiment analysis<sup>15</sup> (positive/negative/neutral), emotion analysis<sup>16</sup> (joy, surprise, fear, disgust, sadness, anger, other emotion), hate speech analysis (hateful, targeted, aggressive), and targeted hate speech analysis (calls, women, LGBTI, racism, class, politics, disability, appearance, criminal). Although other libraries—like *TextBlob*, *NRCLex*, and *VaderSentiment*—are, perhaps, better known, *PySentimiento* was created specifically for analyses of Spanish-language text<sup>17</sup>. Moreover, the two datasets employed by *PySentimiento* foreground different varieties of Spanish; thus, it is more suitable to the present study than any of the alternatives currently available.

## QUANTITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

Because the corpus only contains articles that explicitly mention Muslims, one would reasonably expect a significant number of instances where related lexical items are used. In the subcorpus containing only article titles, five lexical types and fifty lexical tokens were attested; on the other hand, in the subcorpus containing only article content, nine lexical types and almost two thousand (N=1,742) lexical tokens were attested, as shown in Table 2 below. In both corpora, these correspond to two points of morphological differentiation: grammatical gender (masculine/feminine) and number (singular/plural). Additionally, eleven utilize these base forms alongside the prefix *anti-*, and four clitize *bosnio* - to reference a specific nationality of origin, i.e., Bosnia and Herzegovina in the Balkans.

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<sup>15</sup> Sentiment analyzers are generally rule - and/or lexicon - based, where particular lexical items, sequences of lexical items, punctuation usage, non-alphanumeric characters, etc. are considered in determining the affect of a given text. As a result, sentiment analysis that utilizes – or, more precisely, is trained on different datasets of varying sizes – may provide different results.

<sup>16</sup> The range of emotions discussed here were not selected a priori for this study; instead, they are part of *PySentimiento* and are rooted in the scholarship of Ekman (1999), who identified specific emotions as having greater primacy than others, such that “fear, anger, disgust, sadness, and contempt, all negative emotions, differ in their appraisal, antecedent events, probable behavioral response, physiology and other characteristics” (p. 45). For more information concerning the computational detection of these emotions, see Plaza-del-Arco (2020).

<sup>17</sup> This is contrasted, for instance, with *VaderSentiment*, from which derivatives have been created to work with multilingual data; unfortunately, these rely on the use of e.g., Google Translate to render the non-English text into English before subsequently undertaking sentiment analysis. Consequently, these were deemed inherently inaccurate and not utilized.

**Table 2:** Frequency List for Referents to Muslims

Word	Titles			Content		
	Freq.	% of n	% of N	Freq.	% of n	% of N
musulmanes	29	57.99%	0.26%	861	49.43%	0.16%
musulmana	8	16.0%	0.07%	473	27.15%	0.09%
musulmán	9	18.0%	0.08%	287	16.48%	0.05%
musulmanas	2	4.0%	0.02%	106	6.08%	0.02%
antimusulmán	—	—	—	5	0.29%	<0.01%
antimusulmana	0	—	—	3	0.17%	<0.01%
antimusulmanes	2	4.0%	0.02%	3	0.17%	<0.01%
bosniomusulmanes	0	—	—	3	0.17%	<0.01%
bosniomusulmanas	0	—	—	1	0.06%	<0.01%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>≈100%</b>	<b>0.45%</b>	<b>1742</b>	<b>≈100%</b>	<b>0.32%</b>

Instead of reviewing all content individually within the corpus, sentiment analysis was first conducted on article titles and content to determine if any returned overwhelmingly positive or negative results, which would provide a more apt starting point for closer qualitative analysis. Although *PySentimiento* returns a composite value corresponding to the overall affect of the text, values ranging from zero to one were also provided for three categories individually (positive, neutral, negative). As it was possible to define an article as neutral with scores of fifty percent positive and fifty percent negative, the results were reorganized according to three different confidence intervals, as indicated below in Table 3. This was undertaken to ensure that the most ‘extreme’ articles (in terms of statistical significance) received the greatest attention as representatives of two opposing positions. This is not to suggest, of course, that Ecuadorian society can be strictly bifurcated *a priori* into those who support and those who oppose Muslims but, rather, (a) to recognize the limitations of computationally-driven methods in evaluating human emotions and (b) to ensure that the positionality of the researcher did not unfairly influence the articles considered more closely.

**Table 3:** Sentiment Analysis for Article Titles and Content

Sentiment	Titles			Articles		
	<i>Confidence Interval</i>			<i>Confidence Interval</i>		
	≥0.50	≥0.60	≥0.70	≥0.50	≥0.60	≥0.70
<b>Positive</b>	41	29	13	23	14	9
<b>Neutral</b>	380	221	84	541	379	158
<b>Negative</b>	468	336	222	345	253	174
<b>Coverage</b>	889	586	319	909	646	341
	89.26%	58.84%	32.03%	91.27%	64.86%	34.24%

As indicated in Table 3, over thirty percent of titles and articles have been identified as overwhelmingly positive, neutral, or negative at a confidence interval of seventy percent. Of these, the majority of titles (69.59%) are overtly negative, and very few are overtly positive (4.07%). Conversely, slightly greater variation is found in the content of the articles, as a large number are listed as neutral, but it should be recognized that a slim majority (51.02%) are still negative<sup>18</sup>, while far fewer (2.64%) are positive. Interestingly, overlap between negatively-coded titles and content only occurred in the case of thirty-five (35) articles, reinforcing the common notion that titles serve a markedly different rhetorical purpose, e.g., to capture the interest and attention of the reader.

Next, all titles and articles were also subjected to three specific tests to evaluate a range of emotions (joy, surprise, fear, disgust, sadness, anger) and possible categorization as hate speech, revealing that the two dominant emotions portrayed are sadness (51.85%) and anger (42.59%) at a confidence interval  $\geq 0.70$ . Given the reactionary nature of the journalistic reporting on Muslims within El Comercio, this is not particularly surprising. For instance, articles concerning the incarceration and deprivation of rights of the Uyghurs in China were reported through a more somber tone; on the other hand, articles commenting on increased immigration from the Middle East indicated particular frustration with the customs, beliefs, and practices of more conservative Muslims.

<sup>18</sup> It should be understood that this does not provide unequivocal proof that Muslims are represented negatively. Put another way, an article could speak positively about Muslims while using a condemnatory tone toward others. As a result, because quantitative results only present one 'side' of the story, qualitative analysis is also necessary to determine the manner in which Muslims are actually discussed, whether this is positive, neutral, or negative.

Although three dozen titles suggested particular types of hate speech, this was less specific in the actual content of articles, leaving only almost four percent (3.61%) as indicators of more generalized hate speech. The full figures are reproduced in Table 4 below.



**Table 4:** Analysis of Emotional Tone and Hate Speech for Article Titles and Content

	Titles				Articles		
	Confidence Interval				Confidence Interval		
	≥0.50	≥0.60	≥0.70		≥0.50	≥0.60	≥0.70
<b>Emotion Analysis</b>							
<i>joy</i>	9	8	7		9	6	6
<i>surprise</i>	2	1	1		—	—	—
<i>fear</i>	5	3	2		—	—	—
<i>disgust</i>	—	—	—		—	—	—
<i>sadness</i>	34	29	24		81	67	56
<i>anger</i>	8	6	2		86	69	46
Coverage	58	47	36		176	142	108
	5.82%	4.72%	3.61%		17.67%	14.26%	10.84%
<b>General Hate Speech</b>							
<i>hateful</i>	26	17	12		75	54	34
<i>targeted</i>	1	1	1		—	—	—
<i>aggressive</i>	6	4	1		13	6	2
Coverage	33	22	14		88	60	36
	1.71%	0.10%	0.40%		8.84%	6.02%	3.61%
<b>Specific Hate Speech</b>							
<i>calls</i>	5	5	4		—	—	—
<i>women</i>	3	3	3		—	—	—
<i>sexuality</i>	1	1	1		—	—	—
<i>racism</i>	31	25	20		—	—	—
<i>class</i>	1	1	—		—	—	—
<i>politics</i>	1	1	1		1	1	1
<i>(dis)ability</i>	1	1	1		—	—	—
<i>appearance</i>	—	—	—		—	—	—

<i>criminal</i>	4	3	3	—	—	—
Coverage	47	40	33	1	1	1
	4.72%	4.02%	3.31%	0.20%	0.20%	0.20%

## QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

Although statistical analysis reveals that approximately ninety percent of titles and articles reporting on Muslims present at least partially negative sentiment at a confidence interval of  $\geq 0.50$ , it cannot reveal straightforwardly the manner or context in which this negativity is expressed. For this reason, a closer examination of the lexical items in Table 2 is undertaken here, in addition to an investigation of the most salient, recurring themes throughout the articles.

### Key Words in Context (KWIC)

While the masculine singular ‘*musulmán*’ is primarily used adjectively, the non-gendered plural ‘*musulmanes*’ arises mostly in nominal phrases. In both instances, common collocations include abstract places (*mundo* and *país*), toponyms (*Egypt*, *Turkey*, *Indonesia*), age-sets (*niño* and *marido*), attributions (*conservador*, *ultraconservador*, and *practicante*), temporal referents (*mes*, *calendario*, *viernes*, and *ramadan*), and relevant actions or topics for daily Muslim life (*ayuno*, *vestimenta*, *peregrinos*, and *animales*). The context reveals that the attributions are overwhelmingly negative, remarking that an Islamic lifestyle leads to limitations in women’s rights, sexual abuse, and restrictions on members of the LGBTQ community. Interestingly, space is dedicated toward describing the reasons and types of animals that are considered permissible (*halal*) or not (*haram*) for public consumption. Finally, some limited discussions of interreligious activities are discussed, such as the relationship between Muslims and Christians (generally neutral), Sunni and Shi’a Muslims (skewed negative), and Muslims and Hindus (quite negative)<sup>19</sup>.

The significant presence of the feminine singular ‘*musulmana*’ might suggest a journalistic preoccupation with the status and/or representation of Muslim women. However, this term is attested only in the post-nominal adjectival position for five points of reference, including measure words (*mayoría*, *minoría*, *mayoritariamente*, *predominantemente*), collectivities (*comunidad*, *población*, *religión*, *miembros*, *tradición*, *inmigración*, *tribu*, *fe*, *etnia*, *pandilla*, *hermandad*), specific ethnolinguistic groups (*Rohinyá* and *Uigur*) or places (*región*, *país/países*, *república*, *Somalia*, *Libia*, *Sinkiang/Xinjiang*, *Cáucaso*,

<sup>19</sup> In fact, one bigram presents Hindus as disproportionately violent toward Muslims, even going as far as using the perfective ‘*linchado*’ in instances of interreligious violence.

*Sudán, Irán*), Muslim religious celebrations (*aid, fitr, eid, adha*) or more general gatherings (*fiesta* and *festividad*), and age-sets (*niña* and *adolescente*). Indeed, the log likelihood of these collocates, particularly measure words and collectivities, is so statistically significant that these present a meaningful<sup>20</sup> characterization of Muslims.

On the other hand, the feminine plural ‘musulmanas’ is found in both adjectival and nominal roles. When employed adjectivally, it follows the same points of reference as its singular counterpart, though it does offer additional geographical coverage in remarking on the election of Muslim women (viz. Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib) to the Congress of the United States and analogizing the struggles of Latinos and Muslims to those of African Americans under the perceived restrictions of the ‘Stop and Frisk’ policy of New York City. When employed nominally, however, it is employed to comment on the general struggles of Muslims in China and to contextualize the rights and limitations of Muslim women within the broader Israeli-Palestinian conflict<sup>21</sup>.

Interestingly, all attested instances with the prefix *anti-* almost exclusively foreground North America and Europe. In particular, the attack by Brenton Tarrant, which led to the death or injury of almost one hundred people at al-Noor Mosque in March 2020 in New Zealand, is referenced in conjunction with statements from Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and a spokesperson from Da’esh. Additionally, the former American President, Donald Trump, features prominently through remarks made about his government policies, which are discussed in conjunction with responses from American politicians and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). Finally, protests in New Delhi, India, against anti-Muslim policies and statements, widely perceived as Islamophobic, made by Beatrix von Storch, the leader of the conservative *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) political party are highlighted<sup>22</sup>.

On the other hand, the usage of *bosnia-* occurs in only two articles. The first focuses primarily on the existential threat that Muslims face globally and begins by highlighting the ongoing plight of the Rohingya people in Myanmar (2016-present) and analogizes

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<sup>20</sup> Meaningfulness and accuracy are not the same, as a log likelihood strictly describes the probability that these will co-occur with a greater degree of frequency than with other collocates.

<sup>21</sup> It is also important to note that some articles do pay close attention to the terminology they employ. Seemingly in response to inconsistent nomenclature published elsewhere, one even notes that the usage of ‘Palestinian’ instead of ‘Arab’ is more accurate: “Las raíces del conflicto palestino-israelí—esta es la denominación actualmente más correcta, y no la de “árabe-israelí”, ya que hay muchos árabes que pertenecen al Estado de Israel— se hunden en sucesos que acontecieron varios siglos atrás, y sería muy largo y complejo de explicar.”

<sup>22</sup> In response to a multilingual statement, which included Arabic-language text, by the Cologne Police Department on New Year’s Eve, von Storch remarked on X (formerly known as Twitter) in a now-deleted post that the department was trying to placate barbaric, male Muslims engaging in gang-rape: “Was zur Hölle ist in diesem Land los? Wieso twittert eine offizielle Polizeiseite aus NRW auf Arabisch. Meinen Sie, die barbarischen, muslimischen, gruppenvergewaltigenden Männerhorden so zu besänftigen?” This quote was translated into Spanish in the article.

their situation to those of the Bosnians during the Yugoslav Wars and, in particular, during the Serb-led genocide of Bosnian Muslims. The second article contains three of the four instances and focuses primarily upon the comments of Peter Handke. His being a recipient of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2016 has led, according to the article, to a great deal of condemnation due to his questioning of the Bosnian Genocide. The article notes the connection between Handke and Radovan Karadžić, the former President of Republika Srpska, who was sentenced to forty years in prison for his role in the massacre at Srebrenica.

### Salient Points of Discussion in the Articles

It should be noted that *El Comercio* does a surprisingly effective job at contextualizing the historical events and figures who feature prominently in the events they relay. For this reason, although a clear bias — and frequently a negative one at that — is present throughout most of the articles examined, the reader is provided with details that might be otherwise unknown even to the most learned among them. Nevertheless, there are some salient points of discussion that evince the publication's own positionality toward the 'Muslim World'<sup>23</sup> more generally.

The most commonly recurring theme throughout the articles manifests clear binary oppositions, which reflect the construction and perpetuation of similar narratives established earlier *inter alia* in Spier (2022). As such, these oppositions establish Muslims as the societal *Other* and assign a range of negative attributes to them, hereby contrasting their beliefs and behaviors with those of non-Muslims and non-Muslim Ecuadorians. In doing so, this also reifies two distinct imaginaries, i.e., the 'good' Muslim and the 'bad' Muslim. While the former is an acceptable candidate for possible integration into Ecuadorian society, the latter stands in opposition to national progress and interpersonal solidarity. While many of the articles in the corpus hint at the attributes of the 'bad' Muslim, some articles<sup>24</sup> establish this positionality even more strongly by remarking that

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<sup>23</sup> It should, of course, be acknowledged that Muslims do not constitute a monolith. Accordingly, many have challenged the notion of a 'Muslim World' in the first place. I have chosen not to avoid this terminology for two reasons. First, the articles specifically make reference to *el mundo musulmán*. In fact, 'mundo' is the most frequently occurring collocate of 'musulmán.' Second, when so many people — scholars and lay-people alike — lack the necessary prerequisite knowledge of Islam and Muslims, it would be unfruitful to talk about 'Somali Muslims' and 'Chechen Muslims' as if they had zero commonalities.

<sup>24</sup> "Dos décadas después y un quinquenio gobernado por la izquierda progre, España tiembla ante la posibilidad que los masivos incendios en Francia, se repitan en este país que no tuvo tantos reparos para dejar ingresar masivamente a musulmanes cuyos descendientes, aun naciendo en España, no se sienten hispanos sino árabes, mantienen su idioma, no comen cerdo, odian el cristianismo, sus mujeres se cubren el pelo y crean barriadas exclusivas donde la policía no puede ingresar. Algo que los ecuatorianos y en general los sudamericanos no hacemos. Simplemente llegamos y nos integramos, hablamos con la z, comemos jamón serrano, vamos a la iglesia católica y los hijos de nuestros migrantes no dicen ser

the linguistic behaviors, culinary preferences, and gendered rights and responsibilities of Muslims do not lead to integration but, rather, perpetuate segregation, self-imposed or otherwise, through the development of distinct communities that may challenge the authority of a cohesive, national identity. On the other hand, the ‘good’ Muslim, despite continued adherence to his or her faith, which can be manifested through attendance at religious festivities like Eid al-Adha and Eid al-Fitr, is one who becomes part of his or her new community. Similarly, the ‘good’ Muslim is one whose identity is dictated solely by the imposed circumstances of other forces, such as those faced by the Rohingya in Myanmar and the Uyghurs in China, in addition to those facing repressive Islamist forces in Afghanistan.

In some instances, however, the ‘good’ Muslim can transform into the ‘bad’ Muslim. For example, Suhaili Fadhil Thohir, Regent of Central Lombok (Indonesia), urged female government employees in June 2020 – at the height of the COVID-19 Pandemic – to purchase and wear more traditional religious garb to cover their head and faces<sup>25</sup>, as opposed to using the recommended medical face masks, to mitigate the risk of becoming infected. However, these facts are not simply reported as such in *El Comercio*; instead, it is suggested that this was yet another attempt to impose conservative restrictions upon women and insists that this is contrary to the reputation Indonesia has as a nation of tolerant, progressive Muslims<sup>26</sup>. In this case, the ‘good’ Muslims of Indonesia are becoming ‘bad’ Muslims through governmental policies.

On the other hand, the ‘bad’ Muslim can also represent an idealized, morally correct citizen, some of whose actions should be emulated. This most often occurred through the mobilization of erstwhile negative attributes in a seemingly positive manner, at least when this aligned with one’s own beliefs. Although traditional Islamic courts enforce their own understanding of the Shari’ah, which is oftentimes interpreted as

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ecuatorianos, sino que se dicen y se sienten españoles; trabajan, tributan y solo se reúnen en ciertas fiestas para comer hornado, sin formar guetos ni áreas excluyentes. A Ecuador le siguen negando la exención de la visa Schengen, a pesar de que nos adaptamos sin problemas a las culturas europeas y hacemos los trabajos más duros, a diferencia de los musulmanes que no se integran y exigen leyes que blinden su cultura en tierras ajenas.” The corresponding article, entitled “Turismo Sudaca” and published on 23 July 2023, is available at the following link: <https://www.elcomercio.com/opinion/turismo-sudaca-guido-calderon-columnista.html>

<sup>25</sup> His original statement, reported in the Indonesian-language newspaper *Radar Mandalika*, read, “Dan nanti kita coba Lombok Tengah dengan gerakan muslimah harus pakai cadar, sekaligus maskernya.” Similar commentary was also recorded by *Tribunnews* and is available at the following link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k-Edgm-Vna4>

<sup>26</sup> “Indonesia, que durante mucho tiempo ha tenido la reputación de practicar un islam muy tolerante, ha visto cómo las corrientes musulmanas conservadoras han ganado terreno en las últimas décadas.” The corresponding article, entitled “Indonesia impone el velo en lugar de la mascarilla a las mujeres contra el coronavirus y desata polémica” and published on 10 July 2020, is available at the following link: <https://www.elcomercio.com/actualidad/mundo/indonesia-imposicion-velo-mujeres-mascarilla.html>

antiquated or even uncivilized in the ‘West’, some articles characterized such jurisprudence as a necessary means of combating otherwise immoral actions. In the case of the decriminalization of abortion within Ecuador, for example, the Sharī‘ah is represented not only as inflexible in these matters, but also the appropriate solution: “En otras sociedades coma la musulmana, imponen al violador el castigo de la castración. Por lo tanto, existen soluciones.”<sup>27</sup> Thus, while other descriptions indicate that Islamic *fatāwā*<sup>28</sup> are regressive, a particular response is attributed to Muslims as a collective and described as the more appropriate response.

## CONCLUSION

In a country with very few Muslims, it is unsurprising that El Comercio focuses so greatly on the behaviors of those outside the country. However, if there exists such great concern over the possibility that Muslims and non-Muslims could ever co-exist peacefully in Ecuador, greater emphasis could, of course, be placed on highlighting domestic issues, both positive and negative. Although there are only approximately two thousand Muslims in Ecuador, the nation has a history of immigration from Muslim-majority countries, and many may take for granted the positive impact that this has had. Additionally, with *masajid* available in the three most populated cities, it is possible to enter, observe, and learn. If this is not feasible for an individual, however, the editors at El Comercio could recognize and highlight the fact that Muslims *are* present *and* living peacefully in Ecuador. To focus exclusively on issues caused by or affecting Muslims in other parts of the world, however, is deliberately to avoid localizing and normalizing a portion of the population, however small, that otherwise singularly exists in their own communities. In many ways, this is similar to the results in Bleich and Van der Veen’s (2022) treatment of Muslims in American newspapers. They note not only that geographical and cultural distance have a direct impact on the possibility for negative sentiment when discussing foreign issues, but also that:

[...] Muslim articles are remarkably negative by any measure, and not only relative to our representative corpus: they are negative compared to articles mentioning other world religious groups; and Muslim American articles are negative

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<sup>27</sup> “In other societies like those of Muslims, they impose the penalty of castration upon the person who committed the act of sexual assault. Therefore, solutions do exist” (own translation, emphasis added). The corresponding article, entitled “Aborto: sentencia de muerte de inocentes” and published on 30 April 2021, is available at the following link: <https://www.elcomercio.com/cartas/aborto-sentencia-muerte-inocentes-cartas.html>

<sup>28</sup> *Fatāwā*, the plural of *fatwā*, are religio-legal rulings that can only be issued by a learned scholar of Islam. The internet has made it much easier, however, for *fatāwā* to be issued by individuals whose qualifications might be unknown but whose rulings might be accepted blindly.

compared to stories linked to African Americans, Latinos, Mormons, or atheists. Of course, as already noted, individual articles in our corpus may be positive, and some are strongly so. Yet articles mentioning Muslims or Islam in US newspapers are undeniably and conspicuously negative overall, no matter what point of comparison we use (p. 46).

Regardless of the sentiment invoked or the type of language utilized, discussions of Muslims are, thus, reduced to a *there*-problem, not a *here*-topic. In doing so, this prevents Ecuadorians from having to recognize that Muslims – and those of Muslim ancestors – do reside in their communities without causing any issues to national identity.

On one hand, in examining the larger subcorpora, only a small portion of which is described here, it becomes clear that *El Comercio* presents a remarkable level of detail to contextualize historical events influencing current issues and to characterize the orthodoxy and orthopraxy of Muslims more broadly. For instance, this is accomplished through discussions of the two major religious holidays (*Eid al-Fitr* and *Eid al-Adha*) and the Five Pillars of Islam (*shahadah*, *salat*, *zakat*, *saum*, and *hajj*). On the other hand, prosaic explications of restricted rights for women and homosexuals; warfare, genocide, and Islamist-inspired acts of violence; and broad-brushed attributions to Muslims collectively present an overly negative representation of a religious community constituting one-quarter of the world's population. Such a bifurcation does not appear to be unique to Ecuador, though, as Bleich and Van der Veen (2022) also found – in newspapers from the USA, the UK, Canada, and Australia – that four recurring themes (violence, extremism, religiosity, and value clash) dominated coverage about Muslims. This suggests a reductive view of Muslims as a monolithic group that can be straightforwardly understood, either positively or negatively, through the journalistic medium.

As Adichie (2009) relayed in her famous TED Talk, “[t]he single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story” (13:03-13:16). Because the latter proposition occurs with far greater frequency than the former, this offers the reader a one-sided reification of the narratives that lead people *not* to immigrate to their country and certainly *not* to want Muslims to be their neighbors. Similarly, while the content of articles is, perhaps, more important than the titles themselves, editors realize that readers have increasing access to far more information more readily than ever before; as a result, should a reader be ‘scrolling’ the news electronically and come across titles that, at almost any confidence interval, embody negativity and hate speech, one cannot exclude the possibility that this alone impacts personal and collective imaginaries.

Indeed, the point still remains that Muslims face a number of challenges within Ecuador not simply through journalistic representation, but also through broader perception of them. If Ecuadorians, whether nominally religious or not, feel that their religion is the most appropriate one (i.e., Catholicism) and that they feel significant levels

of distrust toward those who practice a different faith, access to *masajid* alone will not mitigate this lack of confidence. Similarly, if enough Ecuadorians reproduce Islamophobic discourse in electronic spaces, an environment to which most of the planet's inhabitants have consistent access, then this will certainly arrive with enough regularity on one's social media to confirm existing prejudices, to challenge currently-held views, or to impose a single story.

There are, however, certainly areas where this research could be expanded. For instance, while this article specifically looks at articles published in *El Comercio*, there do exist other widely-read newspapers within the country, which might provide a different 'lens' through which to understand Muslims<sup>29</sup>. Additionally, the present study only considers invocations of the Spanish-language equivalent for 'Muslim' and not other relevant terms. For example, although most references to Islam are made through periphrasis (*la religión musulmana*), there were attestations of the singular lexical item 'Islam' that remain undiscussed. In a similar vein, a more targeted examination within a particular domain (e.g., words in Arabic or toponyms) might also yield interesting results. Moreover, this article specifically examined articles that include *Musulm(án/ana/anes/anas)* in the title and/or content; however, relating their treatment and frequency of reference in a larger corpus containing articles on any topic could suggest the extent to which Muslims are salient in the minds of journalists. Finally, a comparative approach in which differential imaginaries of those belonging to other identity-based groups could offer findings that suggest an (a)symmetrical treatment. This applies not only to Muslims as a faith-based group, but also to those belonging to different national or linguistic origins, whether autochthonous or allochthonous. In fact, as Hochschild et al. (2013) rightly ask, "If some immigrants are members of a visible racial, ethnic, or religious minority in a host country, what do we learn or obscure by analyzing them along with native-born members of their particular group, rather than with co-immigrants who are part of the racial or religious majority?" (p. 4).

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<sup>29</sup> The anonymous reviewers for this article disagreed with each other on this point. While one suggested that other newspapers in Ecuador likely reproduce the same discourse on Muslims, another argued that the lack of inclusion of other newspapers within this study served as an indication that additional research is needed. I tend to agree more with the latter perspective, as assuming a priori that all newspapers in any country will reflect an identical position on an issue is a tenuous one that must be confirmed to avoid unnecessary bias. Indeed, it might be the case that *El Comercio* presents a decidedly negative view when other commonly-read periodicals offer a neutral or even positive view of the discursive landscape.



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