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THE CHANGING DISCOURSES ON ISLAMOPHOBIA IN THE UK PRESS: A MODERN-DIACHRONIC CORPUS-ASSISTED STUDY

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ABSTRACT

This study presents a modern-diachronic corpus-assisted analysis of the discourses surrounding Islamophobia in the UK broadsheet press across four time points: 2005; 2010; 2013; and 2021. Our analysis is driven by two approaches to keyword analysis (analysing shared keywords across years, versus generating keywords by comparing annual datasets against each other directly). The findings reveal a nuanced evolution in the discursive representation of Islamophobia, marked initially by a focus on violence against Muslims, scepticism about the extent of Islamophobia in the UK, and critiques of alleged over-reporting in 2005. By 2010, the discourse moves towards articulating more critical stances on Islamophobia, particularly in the context of right-wing extremism, and begins to equate Islamophobia with racism, suggesting a broadening societal recognition of it as a serious form of discrimination. Coverage in 2013 focuses on the aftermath of Lee Rigby's murder, highlighting intensified Islamophobia and its impacts on Muslim communities. In 2021, the discourse expands to include institutional Islamophobia, with significant attention paid to political contexts, both in the UK and elsewhere. Throughout the analysis, we identify evidence of both stability and change in the discourse, with a general movement towards greater recognition and condemnation of Islamophobia, albeit with a persistent tendency for some sections of the broadsheet press to minimise or delegitimise claims about Islamophobia's prevalence and severity in UK society. We conclude by considering the possible impacts of these discursive trends for Muslims experiencing Islamophobia in the UK, and by reflecting on the affordances of the two-pronged approach to keyword analysis used in the study.

KEYWORDS

Islamophobia: UK press; Modern-Diachronic Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies: media discourse

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The changing discourses on Islamophobia in the UK press: A modern-diachronic corpus-assisted study

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1. Introduction

Islamophobia can be defined as ‘a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness’ (Muslim Council of Britain, 2021, p. 12). Islamophobia, then, is ‘rooted in racism’ (Muslim Council of Britain, 2021, p. 12), and it is a form of racism that is on the rise across many countries of the world (Devji, 2020). The present article examines the discourses on Islamophobia in print media from one of these countries – the UK. ‘Discourses’ are taken here to be ways of constructing reality through language use. Importantly, discourses are ‘not valid descriptions of people’s “beliefs” or “opinions” and they cannot be taken as representing an inner, essential aspect of identity such as personality or attitude. Instead, they are connected to practices and structures that are lived out in society from day to day’ (Baker, 2023, p. 5).

In addressing discourses, then, we provide not a sociological investigation into Islamophobia but, rather, a corpus-assisted discourse analysis of the ways in which Islamophobia is represented (i.e. reported on and discussed), and in that way ‘constructed’, in UK broadsheet newspapers. In particular, we undertake corpus-assisted discourse study of the discourses that are used to construct the concept of Islamophobia in British broadsheet newspapers across four points in time, between 2005 and 2021. Corpus-assisted discourse studies, or CADS, can be regarded as a ‘set of studies into the form and/or function of language as communicative discourse which incorporate the use of computerised corpora in their analyses’ (Partington, Duguid & Taylor, 2013, p. 10). CADS is methodologically eclectic in terms of the specific corpus techniques that are used, as well as in terms of how discourse is defined and identified. In adopting a diachronic focus, our study contributes to the field of ‘modern diachronic corpus-assisted discourse studies’ (MD-CADS), defined by Partington (2012, p. 51–52) as ‘a discipline [which] employs large corpora of a parallel structure and content from different moments of contemporary time in order to track changes in modern language usage but also social, cultural and political changes over modern times, as reflected in language’ (see also: Marchi, 2010; Partington, 2010). Where this definition suggests a focus on ‘changes in modern language’, in this study we aim to account not only for what has changed as regards the discourses on Islamophobia, but also for what has remained stable during the period under focus.

This article is divided into five sections. Following this brief introduction, the next section begins by introducing in more detail the concept of Islamophobia and describes its prevalence and consequences in society. The second half of that section then reviews previous discourse-based work on the topic of Islamophobia. In line with the focus of the

analysis presented in this paper, our treatment of Islamophobia in the next section focuses on the UK context. Section 3 then outlines our data and methodological approach. Our results are reported in Section 4 and then discussed in the concluding Section 5.

2. Islamophobia in discourse and society

The term 'Islamophobia' first entered scholarly discourse in the late 20th century, though the phenomenon it describes, of course, predates this (Allen, 2011). According to Allen (2011), Islamophobia is characterised by the belief that Islam is monolithic, unchanging, and inherently separate from – and importantly, inferior to – the West. In contemporary debates, Islamophobia is often seen as barbaric, irrational, primitive, sexist, and as a political ideology used for political or military advantage (Allen, 2011). Significantly, this definition extends beyond mere prejudice; rather, it encompasses a structural and ideological dimension which affects societal attitudes and (particularly governmental) policies. Indeed, an influential report on Islamophobia and British Muslims, published in 1997 by the Runnymede Trust, identified Islamophobia as an unfounded hostility towards Muslims, resulting in discrimination, marginalisation, and the exclusion of Muslims from mainstream political and social affairs. This report was pioneering in acknowledging Islamophobia as a form of racism targeting religious and cultural identities.

The consequences of Islamophobia for Muslims are negative and can be quite significant, ranging from verbal abuse to physical violence and discrimination. In a recent report, Jones and Unsworth (2022) suggest that Islamophobia is prevalent in the UK. They found that Muslims are the second least favoured group in the UK (disliked by 25.9% of the public, only behind Gypsy and Irish Travellers who are negatively viewed by 44.6% of the public). Moreover, there is more support (18.1%) for banning Muslim migration to the UK compared to other ethnic and religious groups. Interestingly, the report found that British people are more confident about their understanding of Islam compared to other, non-Christian religions (contrasting with an admitted lack of knowledge about Jewish and Sikh scriptures). Yet at the same time, the report also found that the British public often hold incorrect assumptions about Islam. For example, 26.5% of the public believe in the false notion of Sharia 'no-go areas' in Britain (a belief that was particularly prevalent among Conservative and 'Leave' voters (43.4%). Meanwhile, 21.1% incorrectly believe that Islam mandates a literal interpretation of the Qur'an. Switching our focus to the macro, societal-level consequences of the above, Meer and Modood (2009) highlight the capacity for Islamophobia to undermine social cohesion by marginalising Muslim communities and fostering a sense of alienation, while Kundnani's (2007) analysis shows how Islamophobia can influence policymaking, leading to laws and practices which disproportionately target Muslim communities. Such phenomena, in turn, contribute to the erosion of democratic values such as tolerance and equality, all the while fuelling the growth and spread of far-right ideologies.

Given the prevalence of Islamophobic sentiment not just in the UK but globally, it is perhaps no surprise that a great deal of research has critically examined the discourses

through which such sentiment is expressed (and, conversely, through which it might be challenged). As we noted in the previous section, such work has interrogated the discursive choices made in texts which offer some representation of Islam and/or Muslims. While a wide range of cultural and textual contexts have been considered, of particular relevance to this study is the considerable body of research that has investigated the depiction of Islam and Muslims in the British press. Perhaps the most comprehensive analyses of this topic remain the book-length treatments provided by Said (1997), Richardson (2004) and Poole and Richardson (2006). Another of the most comprehensive analyses of this topic is provided by Baker, Gabrielatos and McEnery (2013), whose approach represented a fusing together of one popular methodology (CDA) with another whose application in this area was, at that time, emerging (corpus linguistics). Since then, a growing body of work has utilised corpus linguistic techniques in order to examine media representations of Islam and Muslims, including in the context of the UK press (e.g., Clarke, McEnery & Brookes, 2021; Clarke, Brookes & McEnery, 2022; Baker & McEnery, 2018).

The studies described above, and many more besides, have shed much light on the dominant discourses surrounding Islam and Muslims in the press. These include discourses, for example, which construct Islam as a strict and intolerant faith that is diametrically opposed to Christianity, which ‘Other’ Muslims by constructing ‘Them’ and distinct from ‘Us’, which depict Muslims as holding values that are incongruous with so-called ‘British’ values (e.g., of equality and democracy), which present Muslims as being resistant to integrating into British society, and which associate Muslims with violence (and, particularly, forms of terrorism). Importantly, such work has, in turn, provided insight into the kinds of discourses through which Islamophobic sentiment is frequently articulated in the media. In this sense, such discourses can be considered discourses of Islamophobia. Yet, considerably less attention has been paid to the discourses that surround Islamophobia as a concept – i.e. those which refer to Islamophobia more explicitly, which are used to define the concept, as well as to describe, debate and otherwise discuss it in some way. Rather than being discourses *of* Islamophobia, we can consider such discourses to be discourses *on* Islamophobia.

To our knowledge, the only detailed analysis of discourses on Islamophobia is provided as part of Richardson’s (2004) study. Richardson identified in his dataset a series of articles reporting on the publication of the aforementioned report by the Runnymede Trust. That report had criticised not only ‘British society’ as a whole on the issue of Islamophobia, but the press in particular. Richardson (2004) observed how the reporting involved a rhetorical management of that criticism on the part of the press. The broadsheets he considered either ignored the criticism or published articles on the topic written by staff journalists or in the form of readers’ letters (suggesting, Richardson argued, a lack of interest in the topic from the newspapers themselves). Furthermore, Richardson described how, alongside these articles, two of the newspapers (the *Guardian* and *Independent*) also published on the same page articles which mitigate the criticism of the report, by presenting Muslims as being happy living in the UK, by attributing Islamophobic

discrimination to other social actors (not press organisations), or by deflecting the religious focus of such discrimination by reframing it as being about ‘race’ rather than religion, in the process further deflecting criticism by locating the problem of racism within the past (the 1960s and 1970s). Richardson’s analysis demonstrates how the press might ‘close ranks’ in mitigating, deflecting or obscuring altogether criticism directed its way on the grounds of Islamophobia. That analysis therefore provides interesting and helpful insight for our purposes, yet his focus on this particular topic emerged somewhat incidentally, and as such constituted a relatively small part of his analysis. In the present study, we aim to provide the first dedicated analysis of discourses on Islamophobia, and hope to build on the insights provided by Richardson’s (2004) qualitative analysis through a systematic analysis of these discourses across a series of corpora representing language use in UK broadsheets at different points in time.

3. Methodology

Our approach, as noted, can be situated within MD-CADS. Our approach to data collection is broadly aligned with that taken by Partington (2012) in his analysis of changing discourses on antisemitism, which was also based on UK broadsheet newspaper data. However, our analytical approach deviates from Partington’s in several important ways, including, as noted, incorporating a focus on stability as well as change over time. Below, we first describe our approach to data selection and preparation, before outlining our method of analysis.

3.1. Data

Our analysis of UK broadsheet discourses on Islamophobia is based on a comparison of samples of text taken from the Siena-Bologna Modern Diachronic Corpus (the SiBol Corpus). The SiBol Corpus consists of English language news published in selected years from 1993 and up to 2021 (at the time of writing). For this study, we focussed just on the newspapers that are available across all years of the corpus, which are the following UK broadsheets: *Guardian*, *Telegraph* and *Times* (and, where available, their Sunday editions). We accessed the corpus through Sketch Engine. To obtain text samples for analysis, we first searched for uses of the term *Islamophob** in each year represented in the corpus, focusing just on the newspapers mentioned above. Some years returned 0 hits, so were excluded from our analysis. The years that returned at least one hit were 2005, 2010, 2013, and 2021. From within the texts returned by this search, we then extracted all paragraphs containing one or more uses of *Islamophob**, along with the 100 characters prior to and following each paragraph. What ‘counts’ as a paragraph in journalistic text can vary from a single sentence up to what might be regarded as a more conventional paragraph comprising several sentences. Therefore, we also included, for each paragraph, 100 characters of text preceding each paragraph and 100 characters of text following. The range of 100 characters in either direction represents the limit for pre-loaded corpora in Sketch Engine. As well as providing additional context within each sample, this also brought our

samples closer in average length (mean: 548 characters) to those analysed by Partington (2012; mean: 600 characters). This procedure gave some duplicated contents (where a paragraph might contain more than one hit of our search term). We removed these manually, which resulted in the data set out in Table 1 below.

Year	Samples (n)	Words (n)
2005	189	18,009
2010	113	10,879
2013	122	11,949
2021	376	32,956

Table 1: Breakdown of number of samples and words for each annual dataset

3.2. Analytical approach

Our analysis of the discourses on Islamophobia is driven by the keywords procedure. Keywords are words that occur with a statistically marked frequency in one (sub-)corpus compared against another. For this analysis, we obtained two sets of keywords for each of our annual datasets. The first was generated by comparing each one to all of the articles in the corresponding year in the SiBol corpus. For example, to obtain keywords for the 2005 dataset, we compared this against all articles published in SiBol in 2005. The resulting keywords for each dataset were thus taken to represent what characterises the language used in the ‘local’ textual environments surrounding mentions of Islamophobia (and its related terms) as compared against general UK broadsheet newspaper articles published in the same year. We then compared each of the lists to identify words that were present in each set. These allowed us to access potential points of similarity across the dataset, and in that way to assess potential stability in the discourse. As will be seen, this approach, unlike just comparing our datasets directly against each other, allowed for the same word to arise as key in more than one dataset, thereby allowing us to more easily assess discourses that might be stable across a period of time (although, of course, a recurring keyword does not, in and of itself, necessarily reflect the recurrence of the same discourse(s), and in that way is not a *prima facie* indicator of stability – see below).

We also set out to analyse differences between the temporally organised datasets – and in that way, to identify evidence of changes in the discourse. To obtain our second set of keywords, we compared each dataset against its predecessor, in order to ascertain what had changed year on year. In particular, we obtained keywords for the 2010 data (target) by comparing it against the 2005 data (reference), and for the 2013 data (target) by comparing it to the 2010 data (reference), and then for the 2021 data (target) by comparing it to the 2013 data (reference). Since we did not have a predecessor for the 2005 data (with

this year featuring the earliest hit of *Islamophob** in SiBol), this part of our analysis began from 2010 onwards.

In terms of statistical measures, for the generation of keywords, we focused only on keywords that were significant to the level of 0.0001 (with Bonferroni correction applied). Regarding the frequency threshold, to take into account the differing sample sizes, we adjusted the thresholds for each keyword list, in order to ensure that the minimum relative frequencies of the keywords were comparable across the corpora. For the smallest dataset (2010) the minimum frequency was 5. We then adjusted from there. For example, as the 2021 dataset is 3.03 times greater in size than the 2010 dataset, we multiplied 5 by the same figure (i.e. 3.03), which resulted in a minimum frequency of 15.15 (rounded down to 15) for keywords in the 2021 dataset. Accordingly, the minimum frequencies we stipulated for keywords in each corpus were as follows: 8 for 2005; 5 for 2010; 5 for 2013; and 15 for 2021.

Another important feature of our approach to keyword analysis is that our keywords represent what characterises language use within the immediate textual environment in which words denoting Islamophobia are used, rather than the entire texts (as is the case for most keyword analyses). This can be linked to Mahlberg's (2005, 2013) notion of 'local textual functions'. The local textual functions of lexical items 'describe the meanings of items in texts. The functions are local because they are not claimed to capture general meanings. They are specific to a set of items or a set of texts' (Mahlberg, 2013, p. 3).

Following the identification of keywords, both analysts independently analysed all cases of each keyword using concordance analysis (and, where it was beneficial for forming interpretations, more extensive samples of text). This qualitative analysis set out to identify the representational functions that each keyword performed, focusing in particular on the representation of the concept of Islamophobia itself, as well as social actors involved in the events and circumstances in which islamophobia is construed as relevant within the coverage. Rather than attempt to characterise all uses of every keyword, which limitations on space prevent us from doing, we instead report the most common patterns observed per year. This qualitative step also allowed us to identify cases where recurring keywords did indeed indicate stability (and, conversely, where recurring keywords were used in ways that suggested a change in the discourse). Importantly, and in the spirit of CADS research as described by Partington *et al.* (2013) and others, our interpretations of the functions of the keywords, and our hypothesis-generation about their possible impacts on Muslims based in the UK, is informed by our engagement with sources outside of the corpus data.

4. Results

4.1. Identifying keywords

We begin this section by presenting the keywords on which our analysis is based. As noted in the previous section, to allow for similarities between years to be observed, we

generated keywords for each dataset by comparing each one to the rest of the corresponding year in SiBol. Then, we narrowed our focus just to those words that were key across all four years. These keywords are displayed in Table 2 below. These keywords can be taken to represent language use that is fairly stable in terms of being marked within reporting around Islamophobia over time. However, it should be noted that their use in context can vary, as the same concepts and constructs can be invoked to different ends at different points in time.

Keyword	2005		2010		2013		2021	
	Freq.	LL	Freq.	LL	Freq.	LL	Freq.	LL
<i>against</i>	40	30.51	29	27.96	35	35.77	16	50.75
<i>anti-muslim</i>	70	91.22	6	65.56	14	165.52	25	284.42
<i>attacks</i>	40	177.36	10	32.08	46	267.71	22	65.71
<i>extremism</i>	14	104.64	7	53.53	5	34.65	18	124.72
<i>islam</i>	49	362.93	35	286.80	28	218.33	23	174.17
<i>islamophobia</i>	176	2669.06	92	1428.72	89	1508.75	298	4310.16
<i>islamophobic</i>	44	669.10	33	514.24	50	861.99	119	1729.85
<i>muslim</i>	168	1343.15	43	311.23	53	347.62	188	1770.33
<i>muslims</i>	120	1003.65	36	297.25	56	470.49	108	1042.58
<i>racism</i>	23	160.81	22	185.71	11	77.56	55	261.89
<i>racist</i>	18	112.37	16	120.51	8	47.96	42	191.94

Table 2: Words that are key in each dataset when compared against general newspaper coverage that year (as represented in SiBol)

In conjunction with this focus on shared forms, as noted we also wanted to consider formal differences between the datasets, by comparing it against its temporal predecessor. Table 3 below shows the result of this keyword analysis, revealing keywords that distinguish each year against the one prior to it in our data.

Year (and reference corpus)	Keyword	Freq.	LL
2010 (compared against 2005)	<i>edl</i>	26	50.76
	<i>mosque</i>	21	29.29
2013 (compared against 2010)	<i>incidents</i>	41	40.10
	<i>woolwich</i>	26	33.80
	<i>mama</i>	20	26.00
	<i>recorded</i>	17	22.09
	<i>attacks</i>	46	22.03
	<i>tell</i>	23	18.91
2021 (compared against 2013)	<i>party</i>	234	119.18
	<i>labour</i>	119	81.92
	<i>johnson</i>	51	41.95
	<i>boris</i>	42	34.54
	<i>conservative</i>	58	30.31
	<i>starmer</i>	26	21.38
	<i>scotland</i>	33	20.29

Table 3: Keywords for the 2010, 2013 and 2021 data (when compared against their predecessors; ranked by LL score)

In the sections that follow, we present our joint analysis of the keywords in Tables 2 and 3 per year, and, in that way, we aim to address both similarity and difference across the years in our data.

As noted in the previous section, while we analysed all uses of all keywords in Tables 2 and 3, in the interests of space, we focus mostly on the majority patterns that characterise the uses of all keywords per year (with occasional reference to substantial, but minority, counter-discourses). This offers an in-depth insight into the complex discourses on

Islamophobia, in any given year. Owing to the fact that they arise due to our search term, we do not focus on the keywords *islamophobia* or *islamophobic* themselves. Rather, our analysis of the other keywords, which accompany these terms in the data, provide sufficient insight into how these terms and the concepts they denote are represented. For the same reason, we do not focus explicitly on the keywords referring directly to Muslims (i.e. *muslim*, *muslims*) or Islam (*islam*).

4.2. *Analysing keywords across time*

2005

In the 2005 data, the representation of Islamophobia was characterised by a complex set of discourses relating to violence, protection, legislative challenges, and societal debates. A notable feature of this reportage, relative to the years that follow, is a pronounced focus on statistics and reports on violence and persecution *against* Muslims. Note that the document number for the file (as stored on Sketch Engine) from which each extract derives is given in brackets.

- (1) Recent figures by the Crown Prosecution Service at the end of January showed 50% of religiously aggravated offences were directed **against** Muslims. (611703)

Accordingly, organizations that are dedicated to combating violence against Muslims feature prominently in the coverage, including the *Forum Against Islamophobia* and police forces. These are positioned as taking an active stance *against* Islamophobia.

- (2) The senior police source said: “It’s about policing, it’s not just about being nice to communities. You protect them against Islamophobia, and work with Muslims to protect them against extremists.” (622754)

In contrast to reporting that asserted the extent and severity of islamophobia in society, we found that in our 2005 data, the keyword *anti-muslim* featured mostly in critiques of alleged over-reporting of violence against Muslims. Such critiques expressed scepticism towards the kinds of (statistical) claims, seen earlier, regarding the widespread nature of Islamophobia.

- (3) Exaggerating **anti-Muslim** prejudice is also useful for mainstream politicians, and especially for a government that has faced a battering over Iraq and its anti-terror laws. (695547)

This scepticism, we argue, serves to minimise the perceived prevalence and severity of anti-Muslim sentiment, indicating a wider tension within public debate regarding the reality and extent of Islamophobia at the time. The discourses around uses of the keyword *attacks* often mirrored this scepticism, too, with reports often downplaying the number of attacks against Muslims and undermining the legitimacy of the reports by questioning their felicity.

- (4) Everyone insisted physical **attacks** were rife, though few had been attacked or knew anyone who had. What is being created here is a culture of victimhood in which “Islamophobia” has become a one-stop explanation for the many problems facing Muslims. (695547)

In some cases, the delegitimation of reporting around the scale of Islamophobic incidents in the country leads to the warning (hypothesis) that exaggerating the extent of Islamophobia in the country might, in fact, lead to an increased risk of Muslims in the country being radicalised. This is indicated in the majority of co-occurrences of the keyword *Islamophobia* and *extremism*.

- (5) The more the threat of Islamophobia is exaggerated, the more ordinary Muslims believe that they are under constant attack. It helps create a siege mentality, it stokes up anger and resentment, and it makes Muslims more inward looking and more open to religious **extremism**. (619240)

In most cases, though, the keyword *extremism* occurred within reporting about measures to protect the country against the threat of extremism from within Muslim communities. Typically, these involved police forces and politicians working with members of Muslim communities.

- (6) Tony Blair met moderate British Muslim leaders and agreed on a taskforce to produce measures to tackle **extremism**. The Special Branch units will have language skills and seek detailed knowledge of the dynamic of Islamic communities in their areas. (622754)

Uses of the keyword *racism* and its associated form, *racist*, tend to occur in articles whose authors seem to be attempting to delegitimise claims about the extent of islamophobia while minimising the perceived impacts this has on Muslim’s lives.

- (7) The Islamic Human Rights Commission monitored 344 attacks on Muslims in the year after September 11, most of which is nasty and distressing. But taken together they do not suggest a climate of uncontrolled hostility towards Muslims. It is certainly nothing like the **racism** we faced 20 years ago. [...] It is ironic that in the 70s and 80s when **racism** was ferocious, the issue rarely hit the headlines. Today, when anti- Muslim prejudice is much weaker, there is constant hand-wringing about Islamophobia. (619240)

This recurring function of *racism* and *racist* in this data, evidenced in the previous two extracts, demonstrate a rhetorical strategy to delegitimise claims about the extent of anti-Muslim prejudice while minimising its perceived impacts and, more broadly, dismissing claims about the growth of islamophobia in society.

2010

Coverage of islamophobia in 2010 is characterised by a focus on the anti-Muslim stances and activities of right-wing social actors. In particular, there is pronounced focus on the English Defence League (hence the keyness of *EDL* in this year, relative to 2005). Broadly, the EDL is positioned as being opposed to (i.e. *against*) Islam in its actions and stances, and is evaluated negatively in the coverage. For instance, *EDL* is frequently labelled as *ra-*

cist and is described as not representing the views of most in the country. Significantly, the organization is also frequently associated with *Islamophobia* and *anti-Muslim* stances. All of this, taken together, arguably suggests that *Islamophobia* is likely to have been taken more seriously across the press by this time, and evaluated in more strongly negative terms within the coverage.

- (8) The **EDL** claims it is a peaceful and non-**racist** organisation only concerned with protesting **against** “militant Islam”. However, over the last four months the Guardian has attended its demonstrations and witnessed **racism**, violence and virulent **Islamophobia**. (868113)

The prominence of reporting around the activities of the *EDL* in 2010 also helps to explain the keyness of *mosque* in this year as compared to 2005. The uses of this term are split between some reporting on the prospect of a mosque being constructed near the site of the 9/11 attacks in New York and, in the majority of cases, protests and attacks targeted as mosques in the UK that had been orchestrated by the *EDL*.

- (9) Following Channel 4’s recent inflammatory documentary, *Britain’s Islamic Republic*, which saw concentrated attacks on the East London **Mosque**, the English Defence League marched through central London with placards including the demand “Close the East London **Mosque** now”. The East End of London is not new to having its communities attacked by fascists and the media. (854903)

Consistent with such constructions, the debate concerning whether *Islamophobia* is a form of *racism* seems to have largely settled by this point, with *Islamophobia* now being straightforwardly equated with *racism* in the vast majority of cases. This change marks a significant development in the discourse, then, perhaps reflecting broader and growing recognition, within society, of *Islamophobia* as a form of discrimination that is akin to, or at least as serious as, racial prejudice.

- (10) **Racist** organisations seek to exploit people’s insecurities at a time of financial crisis and global recession. Some sections of the media are unrestrained in their anti-immigrant and anti-asylum-seeker rhetoric and are drifting towards the normalisation of **racist** discourse. *Islamophobia* and antisemitism have also intensified. (860455)

The intense focus on the activities of organisations such as the *EDL* might, then, have helped to create a press discourse which seems to be less tolerant (or, at least, more openly intolerant) of *Islamophobia*.

2013

The coverage around *Islamophobia* in 2013 is marked in terms of its focus on the murder of Lee Rigby, which took place this during this year. Lee Rigby was a British Army soldier who was murdered on 22nd May in Woolwich, southeast London. Rigby was off-duty and walking near the Royal Artillery Barracks when he was attacked by two men, Michael Adebolajo and Michael Adebowale. The attackers ran him down with a car before attacking him with knives and a cleaver, attempting to behead him. The attackers attempted to justify their actions to bystanders by claiming their motive was to avenge the

killing of Muslims by British armed forces. The focus on this event gave rise to the keyness of a number of words in this year relative to 2010. For instance, as well as donating the location of the attack, the keyword *woolwich* was also used as a short-hand to refer to the event, for example as the *woolwich killing*, the *woolwich atrocity* and the *woolwich attacks* (the latter of which helps to explain why *attacks* is key for this year not only relative to SiBol 2013, but also compared to our 2010 data).

The reporting around Islamophobia in this context focused on the intensification of the discrimination faced by Muslims in the UK following the events in Woolwich. For example, Muslim communities were frequently given as the targets of *attacks*. Likewise, uses of the keyword *against* highlighted a renewed focus on violence against Muslims, while reports of *anti-Muslim* sentiment tended to focus an increase in the prevalence of such attitudes, including cases of violence and discrimination.

- (11) Woolwich killing: Sharp rise in reports to hotline sparks fears of further **attacks against** Muslims
 Fears that Muslim communities across the country are facing a sustained wave of **attacks** and intimidation intensified yesterday after it emerged that almost 200 Islamophobic **incidents** had been reported since the murder of British soldier Drummer Lee Rigby in Woolwich, south-east London, last week. (53259)

The heightened focus on such cases also helps to account for the keyness of words in this corpus relative to 2010. In particular, these *incidents* or *attacks* are described as being *recorded* when statistics are cited in the coverage. Moreover, such incidents were frequently described as *racist* or referred to as instances of *racism*. Building on the foundations laid in 2010, such uses of these terms indicates a continued focus on the intersection of racism and Islamophobia – an association that by this point was not challenged (at least so openly) in our data. The keywords *racism* and *racist* in particular found use in reporting of the activities of the EDL following the events in Woolwich (like in 2010, the EDL continued to be evaluated negatively in the coverage).

- (12) This was a huge defeat for the EDL. It attempted to revive itself by stirring up **racism**, Islamophobia and division following the murder of Lee Rigby, but this did not gain the sympathy with public. (74686)

Reports concerning hatred targeted at Muslims in the UK were commonly accompanied by statistics provided by Tell MAMA (which explains the keyness of both *tell* and *mama* in this year, relative to 2010). Tell MAMA is a UK-based independent, non-governmental organisation that works to monitor and document incidents of anti-Muslim hate and Islamophobia. As well as drawing on statistics provided by Tell MAMA when reporting the scale of discrimination experienced by Muslims in the UK at this time, some articles quoted representatives from the organisation, who commented on the impacts that such discrimination was likely to have on Muslims in the UK.

- (13) The **Tell Mama** hotline for reporting Islamophobic **incidents recorded** 148 **incidents** since the **Woolwich attacks** took place, including eight **attacks** on mosques. **Tell Mama** co-

ordinator Fiyaz Mughal said it usually **recorded** three or four **incidents** on an average day. (52857)

Yet analysing the reporting of such incidents, we also observed a number of discursive choices which could be viewed as framing the events in ways which, again, minimised them. As in previous years, in a minority of cases, writers accusing Tell MAMA of exaggerating the scale of the incidents.

- (14) Last weekend Andrew Gilligan took **Tell Mama** to task, accusing it of exaggerating the problem. He pointed out that only a small proportion of the **incidents** it had **recorded** involved physical violence against an individual: many were online **attacks**, or at the “lower end of seriousness”, and that while the “Islamophobia industry” says the problem is getting worse, it has actually calmed down. (54837)

This extract also demonstrates how anti-Muslim sentiment could be constructed as being in opposition to physical violence (which might be problematised). This could function to present non-physically violent manifestations of Islamophobia as potentially admissible.

Another linguistic choice that could be viewed as potentially minimising the scale of the problem regards the use of collective nouns in reference to such incidents. In this context, we see such attacks frequently being referred to, for example, as *wave(s)* (see earlier example), as well as *round(s)*.

- (15) The latest round of Islamophobic **attacks** came as counter-terrorism police launched an investigation at a prison in east Yorkshire after three Muslim inmates assaulted two prison officers and held one of them hostage. (53259)

Referring to these incidents in this way arguably renders them as countable entities, and any series of attacks as discrete. As well as risking minimising the impacts that such incidents had on the individuals involved, we would argue that this discourse also obscures the systemic and sustained nature of Islamophobia, in this case by presenting these ‘waves’ as being triggered by particular events (in this year, notably the murder of Lee Rigby). By contrast, the attack on Rigby is linked to more systemic issues attributed to Islam, for example by being ‘linked to Islamist *extremism*’, where the use of the nominalised form arguably renders the problem less tangible, more systemic, and potentially more widespread.

- (16) After the Woolwich killing was linked to Islamist **extremism**, the number of incidents the project recorded skyrocketed from an average of about eight a day to 221. (54837)

2021

The year 2021 can be distinguished from the other years in our data in terms of its focus on institutional islamophobia, with a particularly strong focus on political actors and organisation. This is indicated by the keyness of a raft of terms in this year, relative to 2013. These include words denoting political organisations (*party, labour, conservative, tories*), as

well as individuals within these (*johnson, boris, starmer*). These keywords arise due to reporting on the outcome of an independent report regarding allegations of Islamophobia within the UK Conservative Party. This investigation, led by Professor Swaran Singh, was commissioned by the party in response to widespread accusations and concerns about Islamophobia and discrimination within the party. The report, released in May 2021, examined the handling of discrimination complaints, specifically focusing on Islamophobia, from 2015 onwards. The investigation found that while there was evidence of anti-Muslim sentiment at individual levels within the party, the Conservative Party itself was not institutionally racist. However, the report did criticize the party for its response to allegations of Islamophobia, highlighting that complaints were often handled inconsistently and with a lack of transparency. It also noted that the party's complaint-handling process was in places 'insensitive' to the impact of discrimination and recommended several changes to improve processes and the party's approach to tackling discrimination. The report met with mixed reactions. While some welcomed its recommendations and the acknowledgment of failings in handling discrimination complaints, others (including Muslim groups and some party members) criticized it for not fully addressing the breadth and depth of Islamophobia within the party. They argued that the report's findings and recommendations did not go far enough to confront the structural issues related to racism and discrimination within the Conservative Party.

There is a notable political divide in how the outcome of the inquiry was reported on by the newspapers represented in our data. The left-leaning *Guardian*, which was broadly critical of the governing Conservatives and broadly supportive of Labour, were critical of the Conservatives for not addressing Islamophobia within the party. This could also be articulated as personalised criticism of Boris Johnson himself.

- (17) Apparent indifference to complaints of Islamophobia within the **Conservative** party may also have played its part. Someone may well have calculated that antagonising Muslims and human rights activists is more likely to attract Tory votes than lose them. (1646937)

On the other hand, the right-leaning broadsheets, which are broadly supportive of Johnson and the Conservatives, frequently reported on such findings in a way that mitigated them, for example by downgrading them to 'perceptions' of the Conservative party, or by presenting the issue as one that the party has adequately dealt with or is dealing with, including by citing senior members of the party when reporting on it. Another recurring feature of the right-leaning press is arguably to shift focus to the opposition Labour Party, towards whom these newspapers hold a broadly unfavourable stance. For example, criticism directed at the Conservative Party from the Labour Party regarding institutional Islamophobia is frequently dismissed, for example as being 'predictable' and 'nothing new'. Right-leaning reporting also airs concerns of Muslim voters that Labour is taking their votes for granted, and highlights doubts about leader Keir Starmer's ability to address Islamophobia within the Labour party.

- (18) In Hartlepool, Labour's share fell, and in Batley and Spen, Muslim voters defected en masse because of a belief that **Labour** is failing to take a stance on injustices in Palestine and Kashmir,

the party's perceived failure to tackle Islamophobia, and a sense that their votes are taken for granted. They are not paranoid: one Batley Labour campaign source bragged to a journalist that they "basically built a new electoral coalition in six weeks. Lost the **conservative** Muslim vote over gay rights and Palestine, and won back a lot of 2019 Tory voters." (1668070)

As one might imagine, the kinds of institutionalised islamophobia reported on during this year in particular did not seem to manifest in the kinds of violent incidents frequently reported on in previous years. For instance, for the first time in our data, during this year the keyword *anti-Muslim* pre-modified sentiment more than any other term, indicating an increased focus on Islamophobic attitudes (as opposed to material processes).

- (19) The perception that the party has a "Muslim problem" is widespread, with numerous instances of party members and elected officials alleged to have behaved in a discriminatory manner. **Anti-Muslim** sentiment is present in the party, mostly at local level, but it is not systemic, the inquiry says. (1661627)

On one hand, this could be viewed as reflecting a broadened understanding of Islamophobia, extending beyond violent acts to include institutional and verbal forms of discrimination. Yet on the other hand, it could be viewed as yet another means for the right-leaning press (who were the exclusive users of the bigram *anti-Muslim sentiment* during this year) to mitigate the reported discrimination of Muslims within the Conservative Party. Indeed, the word *sentiment* could be argued to have a more neutral, or at least less explicitly negative, discourse prosody (Morley & Partington, 2009) than a term such as HATE. Indeed, by contrast, uses of this lemma in conjunction with *anti-Muslim* are reserved for reporting on contexts such as right-wing marches and discrimination at football matches.

- (20) Football authorities in England accused of not taking Islamophobia seriously
Grassroots players tell study about regularly facing **anti-Muslim** hatred from fans, teammates and opponents (1644643)

The focus on Islamophobia within this year was not confined to political parties, though, and in uses of the keyword *against* we find that the majority pattern is to report on crimes and discrimination against Muslims, and this reporting evinces a focus on a range of contexts, including other institutions, such as schools.

- (21) Her letter detailed numerous incidents including pupils saying "n***** lips" and "gorilla fingers", as well as what she described as an accepted culture of xenophobia against Polish and Lithuanian students and Islamophobia **against** Muslim children. (1651325)

The word *scotland* emerges as key for this year compared against 2013 due to reporting on the outcome of an inquiry which shed light on the everyday experiences of Islamophobia of Muslims in Scotland. Again, this inquiry and reporting on it addressed institutional contexts but also cases of Islamophobia happening in what might be regarded as more public spaces.

- (22) The inquiry revealed that 80 per cent of Muslims in **Scotland** said they had directly experienced Islamophobia; 75 per cent said it was a regular or everyday issue in Scottish society; and 78 per cent said the problem was getting worse, with the figure rising to 82 per cent of respondents in Glasgow. Islamophobia mainly occurred on the street but happened in shops, restaurants and on public transport. (2016084)

Islamophobia is viewed as problematic in this year, then, and there is markedly less evidence in the use of the keywords of Islamophobia being legitimised, as we had seen in previous years. However, in uses of the keyword *extremism*, we find some traces of evidence of the legitimisation of targeting Muslim communities with anti-extremist discourse and measures. By this year, though, most uses of this term feature in arguments that such measures cannot be viewed as Islamophobic, due to there being a problem of extremism within the Muslim community.

The final set of keywords we consider here are shared with the preceding years but their use in 2021 is marked in the sense that, for the first time in our data, they tend to be used in reporting on international rather than domestic news. The keyword *attacks*, for example, is used during this year to refer to Islamophobic violence in Canada, as well as to publish quotes from figures who are critical of a failure within Australian society to acknowledge the severity of societal Islamophobia, in the wake of the Christchurch *attacks*, in which an Australian national murdered Muslims in a mosque in New Zealand, two years prior.

- (23) “There is a reluctance to acknowledge the role that Islamophobia in Australia had in the Christchurch **attacks**”, says Jabri-Markwell. (1671008)

The most common use of the keyword *attacks* during this year, though, is in reference to the US Capitol riot which took place in the aftermath of the 2020 US Presidential election. In particular, reports highlight the role played by ‘The Proud Boys’ (a far-right, neo-fascist organization which engages in political violence in North America) in taking part in the riot. In the reporting, the group are characterised in terms of their purportedly discriminatory views, including their Islamophobic stance.

- (24) Canada’s public safety minister said his office was closely watching the Proud Boys and the “ideologically-motivated violent extremists” within the group. “They are white supremacists, antisemitics, **Islamophobic**, misogynist groups. They’re all hateful, they’re all dangerous,” the public safety minister, Bill Blair, told CTV News over the weekend. (1638441)

Two other keywords that are frequently used in relation to US politics during this year are *racism* and *racist* which, as well as featuring in definitions given of Islamophobia, are also used in the context of reporting on the stances and track records of political social actors. However, rather than being applied to the political parties that occupy most of the focus of the articles in our 2021 data, they tend, instead, to be used in the context of reporting on overseas events. In particular, there is a strong focus on concerns around race relations in the US, and criticism of politicians in the country who endorse candidates who do not have a positive record on issues of discrimination (including Islamopho-

bia), as a replacement for then-outgoing President, Donald Trump as leader of the Republican Party. Similarly, there is critical reporting on the rise of populist politicians in Europe, including the Hungarian Prime Minister, Viktor Orbán. Tellingly, then, while racism continues, by this time, to be viewed as a serious social problem that is similar to, if not akin to, Islamophobia, the newspapers in our data seem to stop short of accusing UK-based politicians and political organisations, who are attributed Islamophobic actions and stances, of racism (as they had done in regard to the EDL in 2010 and 2013, for example).

In a somewhat similar vein, the final keyword we consider here, *extremism*, continues to be reserved, in the vast majority of cases, for reporting around extremism that is related to Islam (only being applied to the aforementioned right-wing organisations, for example, in a very small minority of cases, and never at all in relation to the ‘sentiments’ attributed to social actors within political organisations). During this year, the emphasis in uses of *extremism* tends to be on measures to prevent Muslims from becoming radicalised. In line with the broadening out of the contexts in which Islamophobia is reported on within this year, in most cases the reporting focuses on community- and institution-based interventions.

- (25) Teachers reported worrying about broaching certain sensitive topics out of fear they would “get it ‘wrong’”, clarity from government about the need to have time in the curriculum for frank and open discussions about **extremism**.” (1679184)

5. Discussion and conclusions

Our analysis of representations of discourses on Islamophobia in UK broadsheet newspapers has uncovered a nuanced evolution in the discourse surrounding anti-Muslim sentiment and actions. The year 2005 was marked by a duality in representations, with considerable attention given to violence and discrimination against Muslims, as evidenced by statistics from the Crown Prosecution Service and the active roles of organizations such as the Forum Against Islamophobia. However, this year also saw significant scepticism being expressed towards such claims of widespread Islamophobia, with some articles suggesting there to be an over-reporting of violence against Muslims and critiquing the notion of a pervasive anti-Muslim sentiment as exaggeration. This scepticism, we argued, seemed to be intended to undermine the legitimacy of Islamophobia claims, suggesting a tension within the public debate over its prevalence and severity.

By 2010, the focus moved more towards criticism of Islamophobia, particularly in the context of critical coverage of the activities of right-wing groups such as the EDL. This period saw Islamophobia increasingly equated with racism, reflecting a growing societal recognition of Islamophobia as a serious form of discrimination. This marked a shift in attitudes relative to 2005, and this shift coincided with a broader media condemnation of Islamophobic actions and sentiments.

In 2013, the coverage was dominated by the aftermath of the murder of Lee Rigby, which intensified public and media focus on Islamophobia. This year saw an increase in

discrimination and attacks against Muslims, and organizations such as Tell MAMA played a significant role in documenting these incidents, in the process highlighting the ongoing challenges faced by Muslim communities. Despite such efforts receiving ample attention from the broadsheets in our data, there were still evidence of a discursive minimisation of the extent of Islamophobia, for example framing instances of Islamophobic discrimination as a reaction to specific events rather than acknowledging its systemic nature.

The final year in our data, 2021, was marked by a significant focus on institutional Islamophobia, particularly within political contexts. The discourse expanded to include criticisms of the handling of Islamophobia within the Conservative Party, as revealed by an independent report. This period saw Islamophobia being reported on not just in terms of individual acts of violence but as a broader issue involving institutional discrimination and attitudes within political parties. However, the media's treatment of Islamophobia varied, with some outlets minimising the issue or shifting focus to other political parties. This year in particular also highlighted the global dimension of Islamophobia, with a focus on political institutions and social actors in other countries.

When we consider what these changing representations might mean for Muslims living in the UK, a somewhat mixed picture emerges. From an anti-discrimination perspective, there are some encouraging signs. For instance, the recognition of Islamophobia and its extent and severity within society have broadly grown over time. This is likely to contribute towards (or reflect) increased public awareness of the challenges faced by Muslims, which could translate into greater solidarity from non-Muslim communities and more robust support for anti-Islamophobia initiatives. Meanwhile, the shift towards recognizing Islamophobia as akin to racism and documenting institutional cases of Islamophobia could be viewed as legitimizing the experiences of discrimination and prejudice that many Muslims face. This in turn potentially validates the concerns of Muslim communities, giving weight to calls for change, in terms of policy and legislation. Similarly, as media reportage highlights instances of institutional Islamophobia, there may be increased pressure on organizations, including political parties, to scrutinise and change their practices.

Yet on the other hand, we should bear in mind that our analysis also highlighted various ways in which claims about the extent and severity of Islamophobia have been discursively minimised and delegitimised by the broadsheets in our data. This included: expressing scepticism towards statistical claims regarding such discrimination; representing Muslims (and advocacy organisations, such as Tell MAMA) as exaggerating claims about lived experiences of Islamophobia; presenting anti-Muslim attacks as occurring in 'waves' (rather than being sustained and systemic); and comparing Islamophobia 'today' to racism in the UK in the 1970s (as a rhetorical device to minimise the severity of the former). It is difficult to account for why such discourses were drawn upon by the broadsheets. These discourses might be viewed as preserving a positive self-image of the majority non-Muslim 'Us' of news media agencies (who are, themselves, targets of criticism for stoking flames of division and discrimination at various points during the period covered by our

data). At the same time, they might be viewed as maintaining a positive self-image of the UK-based readerships for whom these news organisations 'design' their news (Bell, 1984). In the case of the former in particular, such discourses could also be viewed as being guided by the news value of 'consonance' (Galtung & Ruge, 1965), as well as broadly serving a banal nationalistic agenda (Billig, 1995) that is concerned with presenting the UK as a fair and tolerant society.

Such discourses, which minimise and delegitimise claims about Islamophobia, have, in our data, waned in terms of their frequency over time. Where once they were 'dominant' in terms of their frequency, by the end of the time period under study, they certainly resembled more 'minority' positions in the broadsheet press. While this can be viewed as a positive development in terms of tackling discrimination, we should remain mindful (and critical) of the persistence of these discourses, even if they constitute more marginal stances today relative to the past. Moreover, we should be mindful that as well as reflecting social attitudes, the media can also shape these (Fairclough, 1995). Readers' attitudes will not necessarily change in the ways that media discourses dictate; for better or worse, news media messages can be read in ways that are 'resistant' to the ideologies that such messages carry, and deep-seated discriminatory attitudes in readers might be unlikely to change as flexibly as those expressed within news media texts.

Yet even if readers do follow the lead of the newspapers they read, and over time regard Islamophobia as a more serious societal problem, they might also follow the newspapers' lead in terms of associating Muslims with extremism. Indeed, our analysis revealed this to be a persistent association, and area of relative stability across the time period covered. Even if not a 'dominant' association in the coverage of Islamophobia by 2021, discourses such of this derive power from their persistence, working incrementally (Fairclough, 1995) to forge the association between Muslims and extremism, and to reinforce this association over time, to the extent that readers might be 'primed' (Hoey, 2005) to expect to read about Muslims in the context of extremist activity, as others have argued (Baker *et al.*, 2013). Such associations have given rise to – and arguably helped sustain – a climate of suspicion around Muslims in the UK, which in turn has legitimised the surveillance of Muslim communities (including in some of the articles in our data). Yet, accounts within and beyond our corpus tell us that such surveillance, such as Prevent in the UK, can contribute to Islamophobia and a sense of marginalisation in Muslim communities. Ironically, perhaps, this sense of marginalisation has been identified as a factor for increased risk of Muslim individuals actually becoming radicalised in the first place.

Our optimism about the changes in reporting around Islamophobia is also somewhat mitigated when we consider the shift towards focusing on institutional (particularly political) contexts. On one hand, this focus could, as noted, contribute to a climate in which institutions are rendered more publicly accountable for discrimination occurring within their ranks, as well as in terms of what they are doing to tackle this. Yet on the other hand, we also observed how Islamophobia within these contexts was frequently mitigated in the ways on which it was reported. In particular, the forms of discrimination

associated with such organisations were arguably presented as less severe in their comparison with the activities of groups such as the EDL. Indeed, at worst, political organisations held anti-Muslim *sentiments* (compared to the material processes attributed to the EDL), and the newspapers stopped short of labelling such discrimination as *racist* or *racism* (which, again, was not the case for groups such as EDL). Perhaps predictably, the newspapers' political interests and allegiances were also a factor, pro-Conservative publications tending to downplay accusations of Islamophobia, present the party positively as addressing such issues, and diverting attention towards away from the party and towards political rivals. There is a risk, then, if it has not already happened, that the charge of Islamophobia becomes a political football used by the media to serve their own (political) aims by sullyng the name of a rival, rather than constituting a culture of political accountability. Furthermore, viewed through a critical lens, the international focus of the reporting around this topic could potentially divert attention from the domestic issues of Islamophobia – or rather, English issues (see the focus on Scotland during this year) – thereby framing it as a problem that is more prevalent or severe in places other than England. Taking all of this together, while we might welcome the increased focus on institutionalised forms of Islamophobia (and the general broadening out of what is considered to constitute Islamophobic hate), we are ultimately left somewhat sceptical as to whether the manner of such reporting reflects (and indeed, is likely to create) a genuine appetite to challenge discrimination in these contexts.

Overall, then, the general direction of travel for broadsheet discourses on Islamophobia can be considered to be a positive one, from an anti-discrimination perspective. However, we must also acknowledge the important caveat that there remains evidence of mitigation in the representation of Islamophobia's extent and severity, especially when political allegiances come into play. A truly anti-discrimination agenda would, we argue, be better served by more categorically (and unmitigated) negative appraisal of all forms of Islamophobia (and not just of that attributed to right-wing groups like the EDL). We were also struck by the general absence of individual stories of Islamophobia from members of Muslim communities. Creating space for such voices – and not just for those of advocacy groups – might help to illuminate the lived realities of Islamophobia from the perspectives of those targeted by it. At the time of writing, tensions arising due to the conflict in Gaza has led to a reported increase in Islamophobia in UK society (Monetta, 2024), as well as to a rise in antisemitism too (McGarvey, 2023). Research, including discourse-based research, which critically highlights and challenges the linguistic means by which such hate is both incited and articulated, is as important now as it ever has been.

We conclude this article with a brief methodological reflection, specifically with regard to the two-pronged approach we have taken in our analysis. As noted earlier, by focusing on keywords that were shared across the datasets (when compared to the remainder of the coverage in their respective years in SiBol), we hoped that our analysis would be able to identify areas of stability, as well as change, across the years under study. This approach did, indeed, bear fruit; we were able to identify various points of stability in discourses across some or all years of the data (e.g. in uses of the keyword *extremism*).

Of course, and as we anticipated, a word being key across consecutive years was not a *prima facie* indicator of stability; our qualitative analysis of such words' uses through the prism of concordance was essential for determining such cases. Likewise, this qualitative step in our approach allowed us to ascertain cases in which recurring keywords were, in fact, used in ways that indicated discursive change.

The other half of our two-pronged approach provided a more 'direct' route to change. This was because we contrasted each year with the dataset that preceded when the data-sets were organised chronologically. Our claims to change based on this approach were buttressed by quantitative evidence; these keywords were statistically salient in their respective years, relative to the preceding year in our data. These, it could be argued, represent advantages of this second approach when compared to the first, based on the shared keywords. Yet at the same time, comparing each year against the preceding one also yielded keywords which indicated changes that were not always so surprising. For example, our knowledge of the context and time-period under study braced us for keywords relating to the murder of Lee Rigby, which took place during that year, while our cognisance of the high-profile inquiry into Islamophobia in the Conservative party in 2021 meant that we were not surprised by the plethora of politics keywords for that year. Such keywords could be said to have enabled findings that invoked an element of what Partington (2017, p. 341) describes as 'hindsight post-dictability', then. On the other hand, the often-subtle changes that we identified in analysing uses of the keywords shared across years were less obvious and less expected, and in that way brought us closer to the kind of serendipitous insights that CADS approaches can beneficially yield (Partington, 2017, p. 341). Our combination of both approaches was, we feel, valuable to our analysis and should be taken not as two separate analyses, but two parts of the same analysis. This joint approach provided statistical evidence to confirm our hunches and suspicions about the data, while also allowing us to identify less-obvious changes and areas of stability over time.

Competing interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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