



# SECOND REPORT ON ISLAMOPHOBIA IN BRAZIL

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## **II Report on Islamophobia in Brazil**

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@2025 Francirosy Campos Barbosa; GRACIAS – Grupo de Antropologia em Contextos Islâmicos e Árabes

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

*In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.*

The *Group for Combating Islamophobia* of GRACIAS – (Group of Anthropology in Islamic and Arab Contexts) at FFCLRP/USP has been monitoring Islamophobia in the Brazilian context for several years. One of the results of this work is the *1st Report on Islamophobia in Brazil*, published in 2022, with an English version released in 2023. The concept of Islamophobia coined by us can be found in the publication *Dicionário das Relações Étnico-Raciais Contemporâneas (Dictionary of Contemporary Ethnic-Racial Relations)*, published in 2023 (Barbosa & Souza), in which we highlight relevant conceptualizations in the field to help us understand the Brazilian cases. Concerns regarding Islamophobia are also indicated in the *Report of Recommendations on Hate Speech and Extremism in Brazil (2023)*, coordinated by Manuela D’Ávila in partnership with the Ministry of Human Rights and Citizenship, which included contributions from the coordinating professor of GRACIAS.

The recent events that have taken on disproportionate scale in the Middle East, taking the lives of more than 14,500 Palestinians and 1,200 Israelis as of the date of this report, resulted in an intense *trigger event* (Green, 2015) for the Muslim community in Brazil. Aiming to measure this impact, we conducted a questionnaire composed of ten closed questions and one open question for comments, using the Google Forms web application. These questions sought to capture the concerns of the Brazilian Muslim community, before and after October 7, 2023, regarding the increase or decrease of Islamophobic actions directed at Muslims. The questionnaire was shared on social media and disseminated with the collaboration of WAMY (World Assembly of Muslim Youth – Brazil), ARRESALA (Islamic Center in Brazil), and ANAJI (National Association of Islamic Jurists), to whom we express our gratitude. Likewise, we thank all Muslims who responded to and shared our survey.

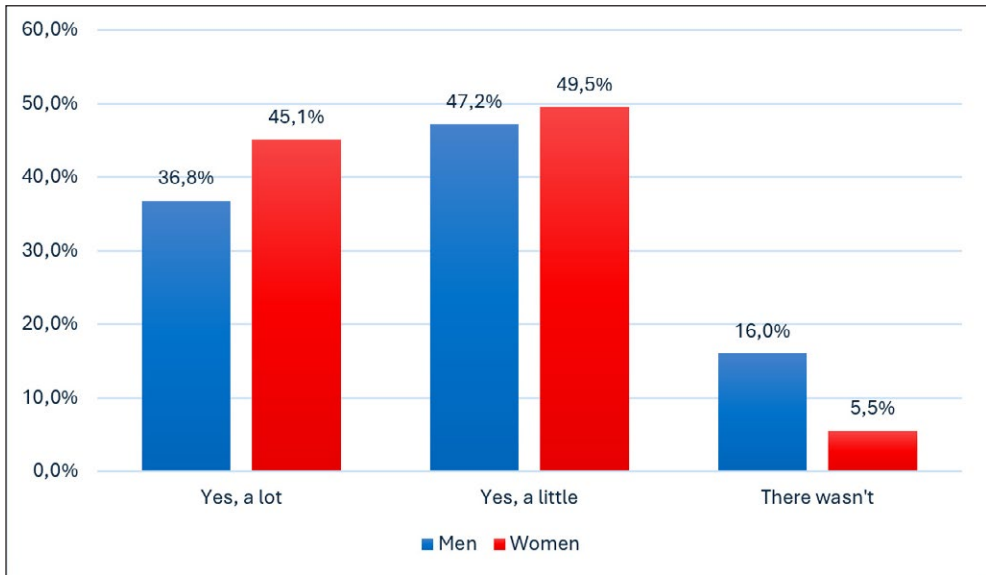
According to ANAJI data, the increase in notifications via emails sent to the Association reached 900%, which already signaled to us a significant increase in violence suffered by Muslims. However, we were interested in obtaining greater precision regarding specific themes related to these acts, making it necessary to generate quantitative and qualitative data to monitor the development of the phenomenon. The results of the survey presented here confirm this increase and indicate important points that must be analyzed and considered for a more effective effort to combat Islamophobia in our country.

It should be noted that this report primarily addresses the quantitative aspect; thus, we will make considerations mainly regarding the responses to the multiple-choice questions. The qualitative part, which consists primarily of the final open-ended question of the questionnaire, will be addressed in the complete report to be published in 2024.

In total, 310 (three hundred and ten) people responded to the questionnaire between November 10 and 18, 2023 – 125 men, 182 women, and 3 individuals who preferred not to identify themselves. In this Report, we will present each response given by men and women of the Muslim community together.

We opened the questionnaire with the following statement: *As of October 7, 2023, the Palestinian population began to suffer attacks from Israel in retaliation for the attacks carried out by the Hamas group. A conflict located in the Middle East has begun to affect the lives of Muslim men and women around the world, including in Brazil. This survey aims to understand the impacts of the conflict on the perceptions of practitioners of Islam in Brazil regarding the prejudice and intolerance they may experience. To this end, the following questions were prepared:*

## 1. Before October 7, 2023, do you believe there was intolerance against Muslim women and men in Brazil?

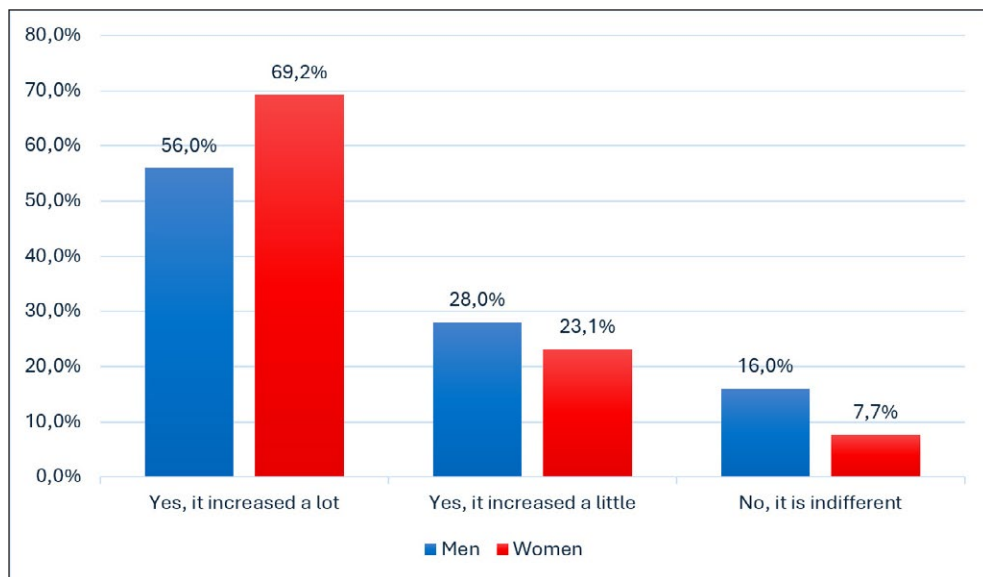


The survey shows that 36.8% of Muslim men indicated that there was *a lot* of intolerance, while 47.2% indicated *a little*. We conclude that 84% of men already identified attitudes of intolerance toward Muslims before October 7. Meanwhile, 16% stated that *there was no intolerance* before that date.

Among Muslim women, 45.1% indicated that there was *a lot* of intolerance, while 49.5% indicated *a little*, demonstrating that 94.6% already perceived some degree of intolerance and only 5.5% *did not identify it*. This finding confirms what our first report demonstrated: that women are the ones who most identify themselves as experiencing episodes of Islamophobia.

Thus, there is a widespread perception that Muslim women and men were already treated with intolerance even before the events that unfolded after October 7 in Palestine. In the Brazilian imaginary, Muslim men and women are consistently portrayed as terrorists and submissive, respectively, as Barbosa (2023) presented in the *Second Report on Religious Intolerance in Brazil*, which refers to a Western construction of Muslim monsters (Arjana, 2015).

## 2. After October 7, 2023, do you believe intolerance against Muslim women and men increased in Brazil?

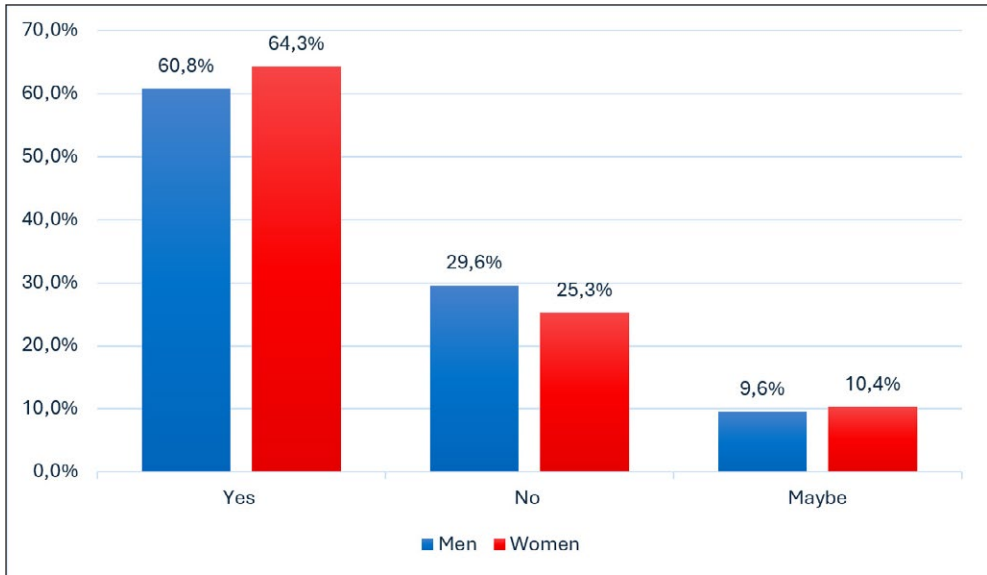


Among Muslim men, 84% considered that *intolerance increased*; 56% indicated that *intolerance increased a lot*, and 16% said it *remained unchanged*. Among Muslim women, 92.3% affirmed that *intolerance increased*; of these, 69.2% believe it *increased a lot*, and only 7.7% indicated that *there was no increase*.

Muslim men and women thus point out that Islamophobia already existed beforehand and subsequently increased even more. The impacts of Islamophobia are long-lasting (Awan & Zempi, 2015), potentially leading to episodes of mental suffering and feelings of inability to interact with other groups, encouraging values contrary to multiculturalism, democracy, and a plural society.

Even if there is a slight decrease in perception among women, the fact remains that Islamophobia is common, recurrent, and relegates Muslims to a harmful discursive and representational space – women being viewed at times as victims and at other times as accomplices in an attack against the West (Hussein, 2016), and men as terrible monsters, capable of all brutality (Arjana, 2015).

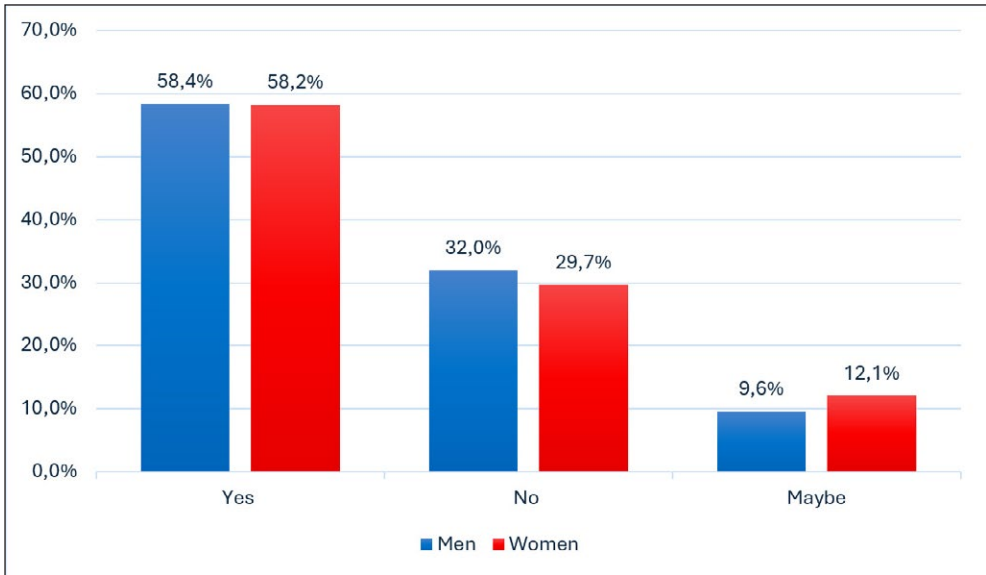
### 3. Have you experienced any episode of intolerance due to your choice of Islam before October 7, 2023?



60.8% of Muslim men stated they had experienced some episode of intolerance before October 7; Muslim women reported 64.3%. This demonstrates a reality experienced by the Muslim community in Brazil more broadly: more than half have already suffered some form of intolerance, as shown in the previous report (Barbosa et al., 2022).

If nearly 2 in every 3 Muslims reported having experienced intolerance, it is necessary to consider the different instances that produce, disseminate, and reverberate Islamophobia. A level such as that reported expresses that suffering verbal or physical violence is something that any person who becomes Muslim will probably experience.

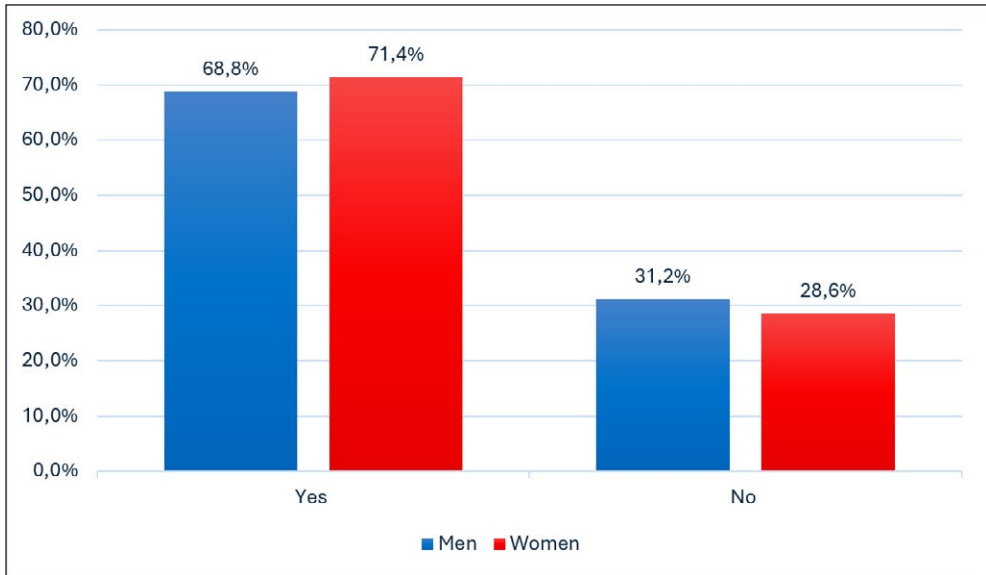
#### 4. Have you experienced any episode of intolerance due to your choice of Islam after October 7, 2023?



When asked whether they experienced intolerance after October 7, more than half indicated experiencing such violence. Although there is a decrease compared to the previous question, it is important to note that responses were collected only until November 18, 2023 – slightly more than one month after October 7. The previous question did not specify a time period; it could include experiences from as far back as a decade ago.

Despite the decrease, Question 4 shows an intense experience of Islamophobia during the ongoing conflict in Palestine – reinforced by the responses to Question 8 in this report.

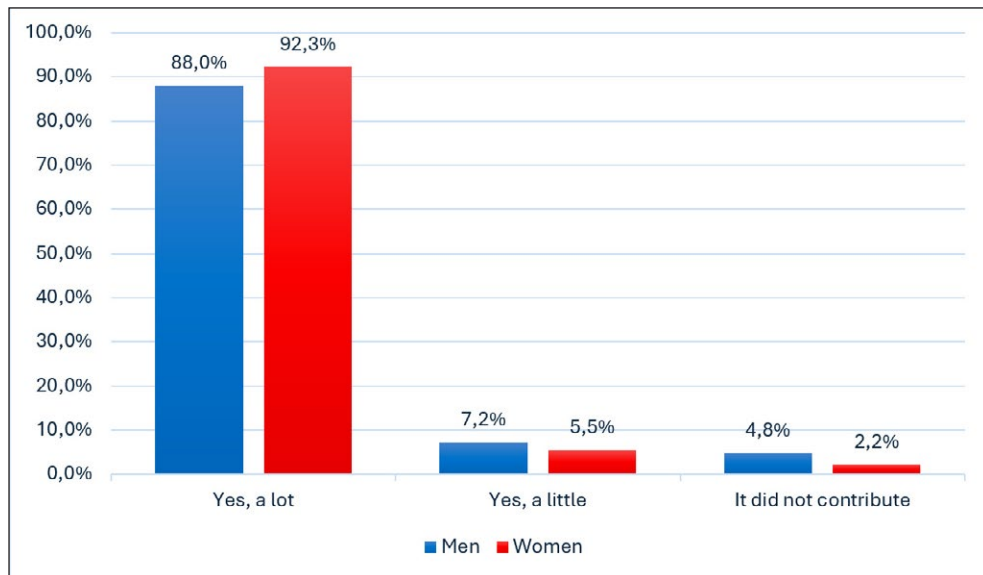
## 5. Do you know anyone who experienced an episode of intolerance due to their choice of Islam after October 7, 2023?



Responses to this question reveal a technical tie between men and women, with around 70% indicating that they know someone who has experienced intolerance. Thus, in addition to personal experiences of Islamophobia – roughly 2 out of 3 Muslims – Question 5 indicates that this number may be even higher, since respondents may know of cases not reflected in the survey.

Olufemi (2020) characterizes Islamophobia as a *cultural environment*, permeating representations imposed on Muslims, which aligns with the data presented here.

## 6. Do you believe that media coverage of the events contributes to intolerance against Muslim women and men?



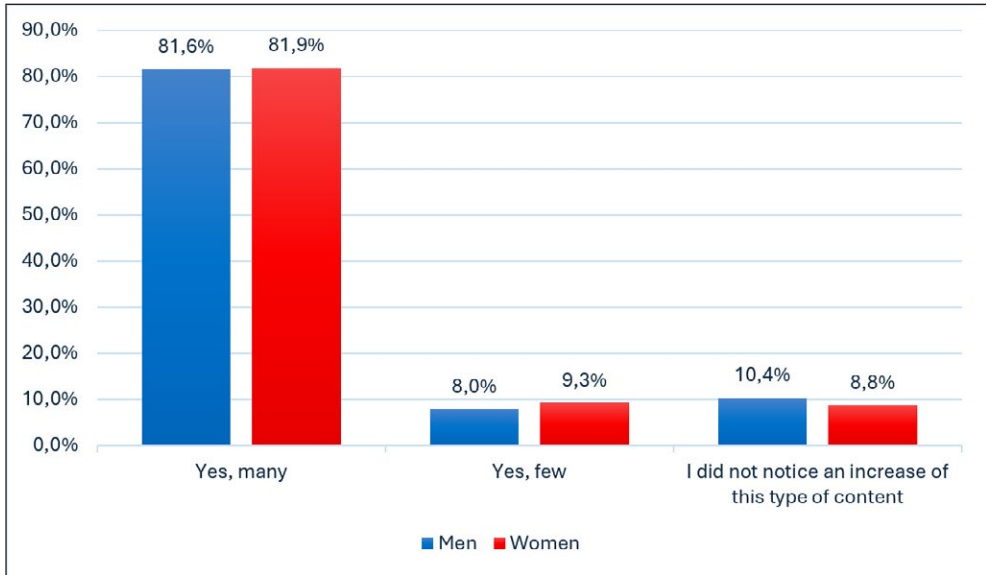
As in the *First Report on Islamophobia in Brazil*, the media is identified as a driver of intolerance against Muslims.

Among Muslim men, 88% indicated that the media is *very responsible*; when combined with those who indicated *a little*, the figure reaches 95.2%. Among Muslim women, 92.3% responded that the media *influences a lot*, and when combined with *a little*, reaches 97.8%, meaning that practically 100% of women signal media coverage as something that contributes to some extent, if not a lot, to intolerance towards Muslims.

This perception shows that there is a media-related issue that must be addressed and modified when discussing Islam and Muslims. Media coverage of Islam and Muslims is controversial and demands serious reflection by researchers and content producers. Edward Said (1997) highlighted this at the end of the 1990s, and few initiatives since then have guided media outlets in approaching these issues without reinforcing negative representations about an entire population with no relation to the events. The UNESCO-published guide *Terrorism and the Media: A Handbook for Journalists* (Marthoz, 2018) provides valuable recommendations.

The full impact of media on people's lives remains to be properly assessed; however, it is not an exaggeration to state that digital and print news strongly influence contemporary experiences, including those of Muslims.

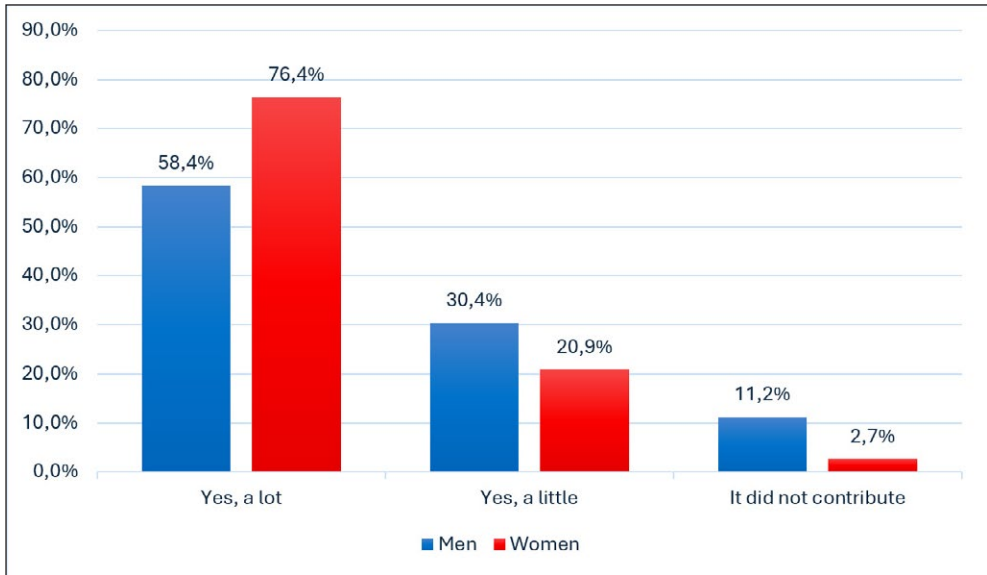
## 7. Do you believe that social media platforms have begun to present posts and publications portraying Islam and Muslims negatively after October 7, 2023?



Social media constitute a sensitive point when it comes to attacks on Muslim men and women: 81.6% of Muslim men responded that it increased *a lot*, added to *a little* it reaches 89.6%; in the case of Muslim women, around 91.2% perceive that social media *had an increase* in Islamophobic expressions. If “(...) events involving the international Muslim community have local impacts in Brazil, especially on social media and occasionally leading to attacks on practitioners of the faith, such as vandalism against religious buildings.” (Souza, 2022, p.16), then online Islamophobia (or cyber-Islamophobia) serves as an indicator of the intensity of Islamophobia experienced by Muslims in a given location.

In addition to generalized online Islamophobia (Souza, 2017), there are specificities of the Islamophobia that women face (Souza, 2021), which must be taken into account in understanding and interpreting the phenomenon. Policymakers could be made aware of this fact, supporting action against gendered Islamophobia in virtual environments.

## 8. Do you believe that international events involving Muslim populations reflect in situations affecting the Muslim population in Brazil?

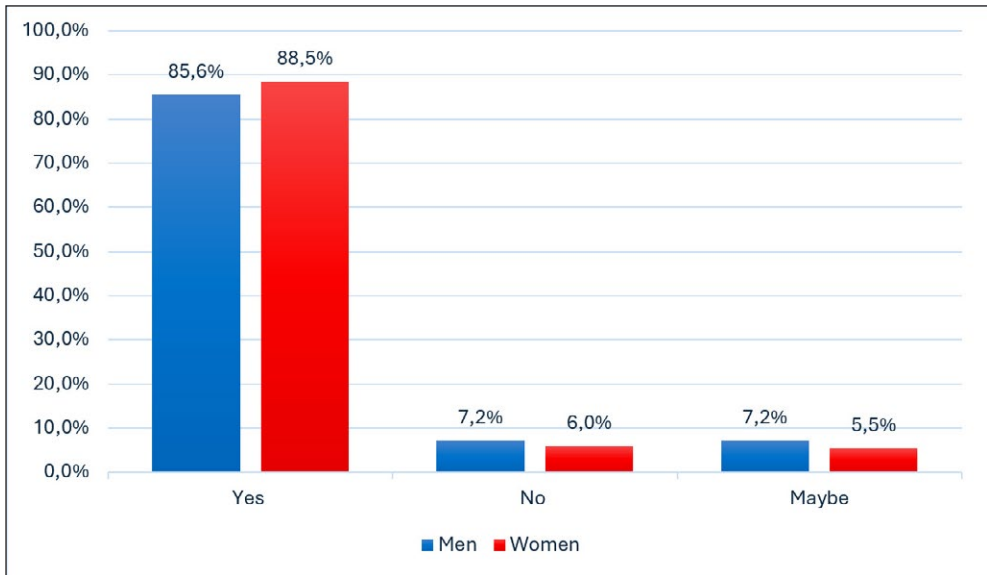


International events identified as *trigger events* were considered *very relevant* by 58.4% of Muslim men and 76.4% of Muslim women. When combined with those who indicated that such events influence *a little*, 88.8% of men and 97.3% of women believe that international events impact Muslim communities in Brazil.

This indicates a normalization of *proxy guilt*: when an event involving Muslim communities occurs abroad, Brazilian Muslims are immediately associated with it. It is not surprising that again women point to a greater influence of these events – possibly because they experience them more frequently and intensely.

Thus, an entire population that most of the time has nothing to do with the event covered by the media and disseminated on social media suffers the effects and influences of international occurrences. As if the reinforcement of the stigmatization of practitioners of Islam were not enough, there is a demand for mobilization and manifestation from these people, as if they had some responsibility or as if they had to take sides between the involved parties (Souza, 2017).

## 9. Do you believe that the media and social networks confuse Muslims, Arabs, and Palestinians?



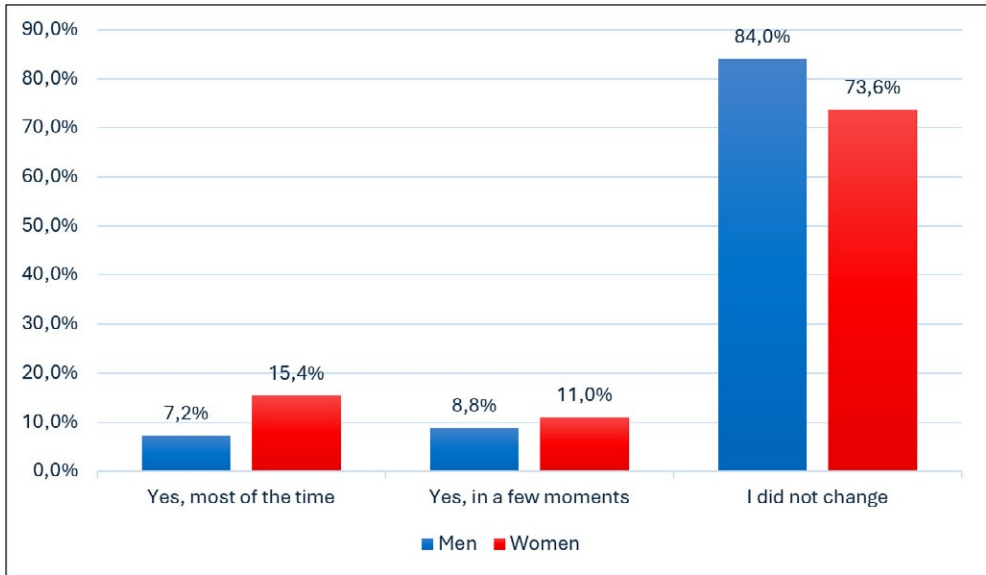
Confusion between Muslims, Arabs, and Palestinians is very common in our society. Most people believe that most Muslims are Arabs – when, in fact, the largest Muslim populations are Asian, followed by African populations, with Arabs forming only the third largest group (Pinto, 2010).

Among Muslim men, 85.6% believe that people do not know how to differentiate among these identities; among Muslim women, the figure is 88.5%. This can be interpreted as a manifestation of *banal orientalism* affecting everyone uniformly. Such orientalism assumes, for example, that everyone in the Middle East is Muslim.

Thus, nationality (Palestinian) is confused with religious affiliation (Muslim) and with ethnicity (Arab), resulting in a misunderstanding that reveals little about actual reality – one can be Brazilian by nationality, Muslim by religion, and Latin American by ethnicity, for example.

That Muslims themselves perceive it is an indication that there is much to be improved in media coverage and educational processes so that such confusion does not propagate or remain as it is.

## 10. Have you changed the way you dress to avoid situations of prejudice after October 7?



This question is particularly sensitive, as our *First Report* already demonstrated that women who wear the headscarf (hijab) are the most vulnerable when it comes to violence against Muslims. 26.4% of Muslim women have already altered their clothing; that is, more than one in four people from the female population, while Muslim men changed their clothing by around 17%.

The Islamic headscarf is understood as a form of devotion to God, representing freedom of worship and conscience. Women who choose to wear it do so to express their religiosity and report feeling distressed when forced to remove it. Academic works on this topic, such as those by Barbosa-Ferreira (2013), offer further insight.

It is important to highlight that many Muslim women reported *not* having changed their clothing. While for men this may be easier – since their attire often does not identify them visibly as Muslim – for women this becomes a sensitive issue. Thus, we understand that those who did *not* change their modest dress do so despite the generalized climate of Islamophobia that both preceded October 7 and worsened afterward.

## Recommendations

It is necessary to invest in training and structuring notification routines in records of RELIGIOUS INTOLERANCE/ISLAMOPHOBIA in the country. It is essential for the State to implement public policies to address this issue. Likewise, attention must be given to the mental health and security of people who suffer Islamophobic violence.

It is important to publicize *Dial 100* so that people can report incidents to the Ministry of Human Rights and Citizenship. Reports may also be submitted to ANAJI at **contato@anaji.org.br** and to GRACIAS at **islamofobia.gracias@gmail.com**.

Contemporary society has mobilized against antisemitism, homophobia, transphobia, misogyny, xenophobia, racism, and other forms of prejudice. However – reflecting the perceptions highlighted by respondents in this survey regarding the media – it is also necessary to understand that a society without Islamophobia is essential.

*Religious racism* is a concept that can help us understand Islamophobia, especially since such Islamophobia is widespread, recurrent, and deeply rooted in our society. Considering the dictionary entry for Islamophobia, we note that:

The Islamophobic bases are: 1. in xenophobia, i.e., the fear of the other, the different, which is a fear attributed to the imagined fact that Muslims could change the culture of the country where they choose to live, that they would be capable of making habits of the Islamic culture they bring prevail in these countries, which would ultimately be assimilated and, in this way, would come to dominate public spaces in a fearful manner, promoting a reverse colonialism of peoples who for centuries were colonizers now on the verge of being “colonized”, in a process indicated as Islamization; 2. in religious intolerance, due to the fact that Islam is not a predominant faith in the countries where there is an incidence of Islamophobia - in this case, this intolerance comes from social actors linked to the far-right political spectrum; and 3, in racism, since a process of racialization directed at practitioners of Islam is undertaken, with Islamic diacritical signs being mobilized in strategies of prejudice against the Muslim population. (Barbosa; Souza, 2023, p.206)

Thus, initiatives such as an anti-Islamophobia curriculum, the establishment of study and research groups in universities, the rescue of the history of the first Muslims in Brazil who came on slave ships, the establishment of partnerships between Muslim associations and civil society, etc., are all initiatives that should be considered. In our *First Report*, we listed several recommendations for civil society, which we reinforce here.

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