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## Analysis of the journalistic treatment given to the migration phenomenon in [www.elPaís.com](http://www.elPaís.com)

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**Abstract:** This article aims to analyze migration-related content incorporated in the portal [www.elPaís.com](http://www.elPaís.com). The paper studies the formal treatment given, the issues and rights incorporated, the valuation made of migration and the migrant subject, and the main actors, among other aspects. The categories that divide the analysis are drawn from a review of the *Barcelona Process-Union for the Mediterranean*, the European Neighbourhood Policy, and the *Alliance of Civilizations*. All with the aim of establishing the way in the subject of migration appears in this online newspaper. To this end, we analyze both informative and editorial texts from the perspective of the social construction of reality theory.

**Keywords:** Migration; cyber-daily El País; journalistic treatment of the migration phenomenon; social construction of reality.

**Summary:** 1. Introduction. 2 Methodology. 2.1. Methodological strategies. 2.2. Data collection. 3. Results. 3.1. Formal aspects in the presentation of content. 3.2. Main themes incorporated. 3.3. Reference to different types of rights. 3.4. Valuation of migration. 3.5. Actors in the units of analysis. 4. Discussion and conclusions. 5. Bibliographic references. 6. Appendix.

Translated by **Cruz Alberto Martínez Arcos**

### 1. Introduction

Migration movements are a reality and the social, economic and cultural policies of the countries involved in migration flows from South to North are becoming progressively more relevant (Velazquez, 2002: 43). Based on this situation, this article aims to analyze the treatment that the online newspaper [www.elpaís.com](http://www.elpaís.com) has given to the subject of migration.

The research, which is part of a project funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation (2009-2011) under the title "The social construction of the Euro-Mediterranean space in the media. The information in press and television" (CSO2008-01579/SOCl), seeks to address from different perspectives the way in which the issue of migration is covered in this website of informative quality, at least in the Spanish-speaking area. "The prestigious newspaper aims to influence opinion leaders. That is, it targets an audience that might be considered *homogénero* and demanding given its broad cultural background and its hegemonic role in the areas previously mentioned. The newspaper's graphic elements are not very ambitious, as it does not abuse the headlines or relies on a balance between written and blank surfaces (Alvarado, 2008: 30).

These same characteristics used to describe the printed newspaper El País could be used almost entirely to describe its online version. "The news production is the result of a process which puts into play the knowledge of the interests and needs of the public, and the ability of the journalist to deliver and process information without distorting reality, selecting and ranking what is news" (De la Torre and Téramo, 2009: 84).

This study is not just about analyzing case by case each one of the references to the migration phenomenon, but instead it seeks to go beyond and offer an analysis covering the formal aspects of migration-related articles, to the main contents incorporated, the rights considered, the valuation of immigration and the immigrant subject, and the key actors in the units of analysis, among other aspects. "The fact that immigration has been included in journalistic discourse entails the development of its symbolic representation, because the media occupy a central position in shaping images of the world

around us" (Casero, 2005: 139).

All these elements will be studied guided by some parameters extracted from the analysis of the documents approved within the frameworks of the *Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean*, the European Neighbourhood Policy, and the *Alliance of Civilizations*.

The categories of analysis and the subsequent elaboration of variable values were selected based on the elements that stood out as very important in each one of the policies and with an emphasis on those elements highlighted by all three policies. This will allow us to understand the treatment given by [www.elpais.com](http://www.elpais.com) to migration. "A responsible society should constantly reflect on the media discourse, in order to encourage a plural media flow rich in points of view but respectful of facts and built on interpretations based on intellectual honesty" (Román, 2009).

To set a precedent, we summarize the contribution of Roncal Ciriaco (2006), who asserted that the media offers a superficial, biased and narrow treatment of the subject, is inclined to a stereotypical view, and does not delve into the matter through the opinions of experts. The media's negative view of the migration phenomenon is also reflected on the investigation of Igartua, Muniz and Otero (2006), whose results indicated that "generically, the news analyzed refer to negative events from the perspective of immigrants".

## 2. Methodology

The analysis is based on the theory of social construction of reality, i.e. on the idea that the social context determines reality and established knowledge (Berger and Luckmann, 1976), and particularly on the idea that media is crucial in such construction.

Therefore, this study tends to be a phenomenological interpretation from a theoretical perspective.

The analysis of the subject matter starts by analysing the units of analysis based on a series of categories of formal character, such as those derived from professional routines and in particular in relation to those elements leading to the inclusion and exclusion of issues in and from the online publication and their subsequent ranking. Therefore, the analysis focuses on the decision-making process and agenda setting within the online newspaper. "Productive routines are the processes and patterns of production and work put into practice daily by journalists in different media. It is, to put it in some way, everything a journalist does since he or she starts thinking of certain information until it is published in any medium of communication" (Sabés and Verón, 2008).

Secondly, the study is focused on categories related to the treatment that the media undertakes when addressing these issues. In this sense, the second part of the questionnaire allows us to address issues related to migration and its rights. In this case, as it has been already indicated, the study starts by analyzing the recommendations made by the *Barcelona Process-Union for the Mediterranean*, the European Neighborhood Policy, and the *Alliance of Civilizations*.

Finally, the paper addresses another very important element involved in the unit of analysis: the major players.

### 2.1. Methodological strategies

On the one hand, this paper is a descriptive study presenting the way the cyber-daily El País addresses the migration phenomenon. But we could also consider it a case study because it deals with the processing of information in a particular medium.

The study tackles the research questions through quantitative content analysis of informative and editorial news articles published by El País online (owned by Grupo Prisa) in October 2009. In this sense, Krippendorff (1990) argues that the data provided by content analysis allows the researcher to make reproducible and valid observations that can be contextually applied and justified.

Similarly, Holsti (1968) argues that content analysis is a method that allows the examination and quantification of communication materials, and the detailed and in-depth study of contents of any communication.

The form of categories of analysis applied can be found in the appendix section at the end of this article.

### 3. Results

The analysis of [www.elpais.com](http://www.elpais.com) during October produced a total of 54 articles related to migration, which is about two a day, a figure that can be described as low in comparison to the total level of publication.

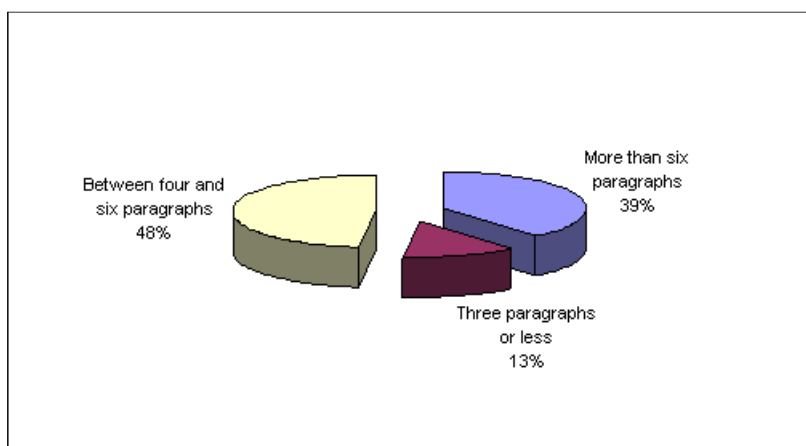
#### 3.1. Formal aspects in the presentation of content

Migration-related content is offered mainly through the informative genre (96%), while editorial articles are relegated to second place (4%). 81% of these articles on migration are presented in the news format, i.e. the journalistic genre of more actuality and in which the facts and events are the real protagonists. The remaining 19% of articles are reports, i.e. the second informative genre par excellence and which aims to deepen in the information content with more work and sources of data. As for the editorial pieces, they were only observed on article format.

One of the most interesting aspects from the analysis of [elpais.com](http://elpais.com) is the design of the online content. In fact, most of the articles are intended for its printed counterpart but also are still used for publishing online. In this sense, one must understand the way they are presented, with the written text as protagonist, with the photograph in a secondary level and without other types of input such as videos, graphics or info-graphics that would help improving the information provided and would help catching readers' attention towards the content. "Let's make something very clear: no matter how much the new information and communication technologies affect the information market, if the *ciberperiódico* (cyber-daily) is an informative product its design will always be of journalist style" (Parra, 2009: 263).

The protagonist role of the written text is evident again when looking at the length of articles. Almost half (48%) of them have four to six paragraphs; while 39% have more than six, and only 13% is of a maximum of three. In fact, this journalistic approach can be understood from the point of view of a printed publication but generates many questions in an online publication, like the one analyzed, mainly because of the presentation form, which offers a very vast volume of written text.

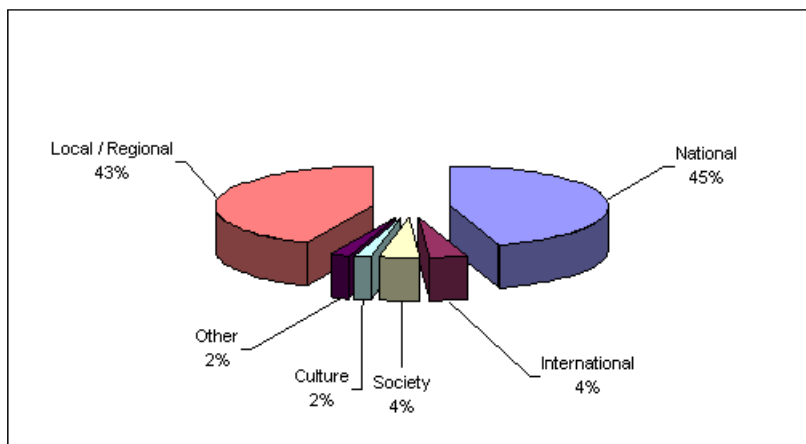
**Figure 1: Extent of the unit of analysis**



Source: Personal compilation

If one delves into the treatment of these units of analysis, it should be noted that most of the published texts do not have any complementary icons (78%), while only 22% include a photograph. Yet, the large number of commercial banners seen within these pages has to be highlighted.

There are two sections in which we found the majority of migration content. Both are under the umbrella term *Spain*, although it is necessary to differentiate between National (45%) and Regional/Local (43%), i.e. the special pages that are made for some Autonomous Communities: Catalonia, Valencia, Madrid, Andalusia, Galicia, and the Basque Country. The other sections in which the migration references are made have a minimal impact.

**Figure 2: Sections in which migration-related content appears**

Source: Authors' compilation.

The vast majority of the migration-related content published by [elPais.com](http://elpais.com) is of its own creation (96%), while only 4% has been supplied by news agencies.

### 3.2. Main themes incorporated

This section highlights the main themes linked to the subject of study, migration, within the articles sampled.

There are four main theme categories within migration-related contents: the arrival of migrants (39%), the reception of migrants (30%), measures against illegal migration (14%), and the integration of migrant communities in host countries (11%).

**Figure 3 sub-topics related to migration**

Subtopics	Percentage
Arrival of Migrants	39
Reception of migrants	30
Measures against illegal migration	14
Readmission of migrants	5
Integration of migrant communities in host countries	11
Causes of migration	2
Total	100

Source: Authors' compilation.

Similarly, 31% of articles studied include in its thematic aspects related to policy and legislation, with two aspects that stand out: international law (88%) and political parties (12%).

In relation to content related to peace and security, 57% of the units of analysis incorporated it. The sub-themes included in this category are: international terrorism (6%), organized crime (13%) and irregular migration (31%).

The articles including the topics of economics and finance account for 19% of the sample, and refer to a key issue, poverty and/or inequality. 43% of the texts studied address matters related to human and social development, with particular emphasis on employment (48%), and poverty (35%) and supplemented with youth (9%), education and training (4%), and civil society (4%).

The presence of themes like education, gender, religion and culture is insignificant compared to the previous list, which highlights the lack of diversity of issues included in the informative and editorial treatment of [elpais.com](http://elpais.com).

### 3.3. Reference to different types of rights

28% of the units analysed refer to human rights, and the majority of those, 73%, corresponds to the violation of these rights, while 27% dealt with their promotion and protection.

As for civil and political rights, it should be noted that 61% of the sampled texts have references relevant to this matter.

Regarding economic, social and cultural rights, it should be noted that 59% of the articles studied feature at least one of them.

However, it is surprising the lack of references to the right to development, which was only mentioned in 9% of the text analysed. In the same line, it is important to note that there are no references to communication, information and cyberspace rights.

### 3.4. Valuation of migration

This section analyzes from different perspectives the valuations made of the migration phenomenon within the contents incorporated in each unit of analysis.

For the migrant subject, the definition of migration is firstly related to its origin (31%), as a problem or risk (30%), and according to the amount of immigrants (19%).

**Figure 4: Approach/valuation of the migration phenomenon for the migrant subject in the first place**

Valuation of migration for the migrant subject	Percentage
Problem / risk	30%
Opportunity	4%
Origin	31%
Amount	19%
Legal Status	9%
None	7%
Total	100

The journalistic approach to the migrant subject in the articles analysed is an important element to take into account to study the image of the migrant. In fact, the origin (34%) and the amount (26%) are the two main references found in the sample. The presence of minor immigrants (13%) and the legal status (15%) are the other two valuations detected in the texts.

**Figure 5: How is the migrant subject approached/valued?**

How is the migrant subject defined / valued?	Percentage
Amount	26%
Origin	34%
Age (Minors)	13%
Legal Status	15%
None	12%

Source: Authors' compilation.

The valuation made of the migration phenomenon for the host country is essentially that it is a problem and risk (34%) and depending on the origin (31%). The amount (13%) and legal status (11%) are the other two elements prioritized on a considerable percentage of the sample.

**Figure 6: How is migration defined or valued for the host country?**

How is migration defined or valued for the host country?	Percentage
Problem / Risk	34%
Opportunity	4%
Provenance	31%

Amount	13%
Legal Status	11%
None	7%
Total	100%

Source: Authors' compilation

### 3.5. Actors involved in the sample

Public institutions and ordinary people are the two main actors detected in the articles analyzed (56% and 29%, respectively). The participation of social actors is much lower (9%).

**Figure 7: Distinguished Actors involved in the sample**

Distinguished Actors	Percentage
Institutionals	56%
Socials	9%
Ordinary People	29%
None	6%

Source: Authors' compilation

The governments, the executive powers, are the major players among the institutional references found in the articles analyzed (57%). Standing out were the armed forces, with 23%, and the judicial system (10%).

**Figure 8: Institutional Actors Featured in the unit of analysis**

Institutional Actors	Percentage
Government (executive power)	57
Political parties	7
Judicial system	10
Forces of order / Armed Forces	23
Official institutions	3
Health system	0
Total	100

Source: Authors' compilation

## 4. Discussion and conclusions

This study is a first approach to the treatment given by the online newspaper El País to the migration phenomenon. Our intention is to delve into this area by extending the analysis to the whole Euro-Mediterranean media and focus it onto the realm of information and not editorial.

Importantly, this study of [www.elpais.com](http://www.elpais.com) can establish some conclusions that are relevant to future further investigations of this nature.

As a matter of fact, editorial content on the matter is almost inexistent, which leads us to think that the subject of migration results interesting for the media only from the perspective of information. In this sense, the subject of migration is seen as appropriate primarily for the news genre. Surprisingly, on the other hand, the articles sampled exhibit scarcity of descriptive elements and are produced with resources very similar to those we find in the traditional newspaper format and do not take advantage of the potential offered by the web. Thus, text predominates in the articles sampled, which is made clear by the length of the articles, which are similar to those we find in the printed newspaper. In fact, most of the articles are similar in both formats, which suggests the subordination of the online daily to the traditional newspaper. The interest on migration-related content is evidenced by the positioning of most of the articles in the national section, although many of them may be located under particular regional sections.

Concern for the arrival of immigrants is evident when dealing with sub-topics related to the migration phenomenon. In fact, practically two sub-topics represent 70% of the information: the arrival and reception of immigrants.

Also, the study demonstrated that *elpais.com* continues to approach migration information mostly from the perspective of the Western population that does not value positively the migration phenomenon. Only in few cases the information is intended to address the situation from the point of view of the countries of origin, or mainly from migrants.

In the sample also predominate the topics of peace and security issues, human and social development policy and legislation. It should be noted that in the first of these contents mainly corresponds to the phenomenon of irregular migration (31%).

Regarding the presence of a number of rights in the articles analyzed, it is noteworthy that the majority of them are related to civil and political rights and economic, social and cultural rights which appear in approximately 60% of the sample.

Origin, amount, and the problem/risk are the three main issues covered when exploring the migration phenomenon, the migrant subject, and even the valuation of migration from the perspective of the recipient country.

Moreover, among the key players referred within the texts, governments and ordinary people are the two that predominate, which demonstrates the heavy weight of migration-related contents, in which institutional sources are quoted.

These results should lead to a deep reflection on the media's portrayal of the migration phenomenon in order to improve the informative treatment offered by the media. As noted by Ximena Póo (2009) in her analysis of Peruvian immigration in the Chilean printed press, "it should not be forgotten that the media constructions presented here pass to the public debate, become institutionalized and circulate once again, and cause serious effects on the ways citizenships are understood and exercised".

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## 6. Appendix

Form for the analysis of the treatment of the migration phenomenon in [www.elPaís.com](http://www.elPaís.com)

\* Mandatory

V0 ID Questionnaire number

\* For example: EP001

V1 Date of publication of the unit of analysis

\* Formal aspects, of hierarchy, and context.

dd/mm/yyyy

V2 Length of the unit

1. Three paragraphs or less
2. Six paragraphs or less
3. Less than six paragraphs

V3 Information or editorial genre

\* Formal aspects of hierarchy and context. Select a value.

1. Informative
2. Editorial

V4 Informative Genre

\* Formal aspects of hierarchy and context. Select a value.

1. News
2. Chronicle
3. Feature
4. Interview
5. None
6. Other

V5 Editorial Genre

\* Formal aspects of hierarchy and context. Select a value.

1. Article
2. Editorial
3. None

V6 Section

\* Formal aspects of hierarchy and context. Select a value.

1. Local / Regional
2. National



- 3. International
- 4. Booklet
- 5. Society
- 6. Economy
- 7. Culture
- 8. Showbiz - Entertainment
- 9. Radio / TV
- 10. Sports
- 11. Education
- 12. Environment
- Other:

V7 Icons accompanying the text

\* Formal aspects of hierarchy and context. Select one

- 1. Yes
- 2. No

V8 Source of unit of analysis

\* Formal aspects of hierarchy and context. Select one

- 1. Own source
- 2. Agency

Other:

V9 Policy and Legislation

\* Themes included in the unit of analysis. Select a value. It applies to HEADLINE and LEAD

- 1. International Law and Human Rights
- 2. Democracy and good governance
- 3. Political parties
- 4. Regional integrity and/or self-determination of cities
- 5. Multilateral Policies
- 6. Responsible political leadership
- 7. None

Other:

V10 Peace and security

Themes included in the unit of analysis. Select a value. It applies to HEADLINE and LEAD

- 1. Armed conflict
- 2. Diplomatic conflict
- 3. Nationalist/ separatist terrorism
- 4. International Terrorism
- 5. Organized crime
- 6. Irregular Migration
- 7. None

Other:

V11 Migrations

\* Themes included in the unit of analysis. Select a value. It applies to HEADLINE and LEAD

- 1. Arrival of Migrants
- 2. Exit of Migrants
- 3. Reception of migrants
- 4. Measures against illegal migration
- 5. Readmission of migrants
- 6. Integration of migrant communities in host countries
- 7. Causes of migration
- 8. None

Other:

V12 Economics & Finance

\* Themes included in the unit of analysis. Select a value. It applies to HEADLINE and LEAD

- 1. Euro-Mediterranean Free Trade Zone
- 2. Energy Resources
- 3. Natural resources and environment
- 4. Sustainable development
- 5. Infrastructure and transport

6. South-South economic integration
  7. Financial reforms, investment promotion
  8. Poverty and/or economic inequalities
  9. None
- Other:

#### V13 Human Rights

\* Themes included in the unit of analysis. Select a value. It applies to HEADLINE and LEAD

1. Violation
  2. Promotion and protection
  3. No
- Other:

#### V14 Reference to Civil and Political Rights

\* Reference = Citation. Themes included in the unit of analysis. Select a value. It applies to HEADLINE and LEAD

1. Yes
2. No

#### V15 Reference to Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

\* Reference = Citation. Themes included in the unit of analysis. Select a value. It applies to HEADLINE and LEAD

1. Yes
2. No

#### V16 Reference to the Right to development

\* Reference = Citation. Themes included in the unit of analysis. Select a value. It applies to HEADLINE and LEAD

1. Yes
2. No

#### V17 Reference to Communication Rights, Information and Cyberspace

\* Reference = Citation. Themes included in the unit of analysis. Select a value. Applicable to HEADLINE and LEAD

1. Communication Rights
  2. Information Rights
  3. Cyberspace Rights
  4. Freedom of the Press / Freedom of expression
  5. No
- Other:

#### V18 Human and social development

\* Themes present in the unit of analysis. Select a value. Applicable to HEADLINE and LEAD

1. Poverty
  2. Employment
  3. Education and training
  4. Civil Society
  5. Decentralized cooperation
  6. Gender equality
  7. Youth
  8. Media
  9. Information society
  10. None
- Other:

#### V19 Education

\* Themes present in the unit of analysis. Select a value. Applicable to HEADLINE and LEAD

1. School failure, exclusion
  2. Teaching about cultures and religions
  3. Exchanges and youth training
  4. Mobility of researchers and scientific integration
  5. Media Literacy
  6. None
- Other:

**V20 Gender**

\* Themes present in the unit of analysis. Select a value. Applicable to HEADLINE and LEAD

1. Discrimination and/or exclusion
2. Oppression
3. Violence / abuse
4. Integration in political life
5. Integration in the socio-economic life
6. None

Other:

**V21 Culture**

\* Themes present in the unit of analysis. Select a value. Applicable to HEADLINE and LEAD

1. Dialogue and mutual understanding
2. Cultural Heritage
3. Intercultural Relations
4. Cultural Diversity
5. Cultural Specifications
6. Cultural identity
7. None

Other:

**V22 Religion**

\* Themes present in the unit of analysis. Select a value. Applicable to HEADLINE and LEAD

1. Religion-State Relationship
2. Dialogue and mutual understanding
3. Freedom of religion
4. Specific features
5. Inter-religious relations
6. Intra-religious relations
7. None

Other:

**V23 Definitions and Valuations of migration for the migrant subject**

\* First. Definitions and Valuations. Select a value. Applicable to HEADLINE and LEAD

1. Problem/risk
2. Opportunity
3. Origin
4. Amount
5. Legal Status
6. None

Other:

**V24 Definitions and Valuations of migration for the migrant subject**

\* Second. Definitions and Valuations. Select a value. Applicable to HEADLINE and LEAD

1. Problem/risk
2. Opportunity
3. Origin
4. Amount
5. Legal Status
6. None

Other:

**V25 Definition/Valuation of the migrant subject**

\* First. Definitions and Valuations. Select a value. Applicable to HEADLINE and LEAD

1. Amount
2. Provenance
3. Gender
4. Age (adults)
5. Age (minors)
6. Unaccompanied Minors
7. Racist agresion
8. Legal Status
9. No

Other:

## V26 Definition/Valuation of the migrant subject

\* Second. Definitions and Valuations. Select a value. Applicable to HEADLINE and LEAD

1. Amount
  2. Provenance
  3. Gender
  4. Age (adults)
  5. Age (minors)
  6. Unaccompanied Minors
  7. Racist agresion
  8. Legal Status
  9. No
- Other:

## V27 Definition/Valuation of migrantion for the receiving country

\* First. Definitions and Valuations. Select a value. Applicable to HEADLINE and LEAD

1. Problem / Risk
  2. Opportunity
  3. Origin
  4. Amount
  5. Legal Status
  6. No
- Other:

## V28 Definition/Valuation of migration for the receiving country

\* Second. Definitions and Valuations. Select a value. Applicable to HEADLINE and LEAD

1. Problem / Risk
  2. Opportunity
  3. Origin
  4. Amount
  5. Legal Status
  6. No
- Other:

## V29 Definition/Valuation of migration for the country of origin

\* First. Definitions and Valuations. Select a value. Applicable to HEADLINE and LEAD

1. Problem / Risk
  2. Opportunity
  3. Origen
  4. Amount
  5. Legal Status
  6. No
- Other:

## V30 Definition/Valuation of migration for the country of origin

\* Second. Definitions and Valuations. Select a value. Applicable to HEADLINE and LEAD

1. Problem / Risk
  2. Opportunity
  3. Origen
  4. Amount
  5. Legal Status
  6. No
- Other:

## V31 Definition/Valuation of gender

\* Definitions and Valuations. Select a value. Applicable to HEADLINE and LEAD

1. Biological difference
  2. Family Roles
  3. Aggression
  4. Labour Roles
  5. Education level
  6. None
- Other:

## V32 Definition/Valuation of armed violence

\* Definitions and Valuations. Select a value. Applicable to HEADLINE and LEAD

1. Terrorism
  2. Armed action of different armies
  3. Related to migration
  4. Related to religion
  5. Related to independence
  6. None
- Other:

V33 Definition/Valuation of the living conditions in Northern countries

\* Definitions and Valuations. Select a value. Applicable to HEADLINE and LEAD

1. Related to economic difficulties
  2. Related to education difficulties
  3. Related to conflict/oppression situations
  4. Gender inequality
  5. None
- Other:

V34 Definition/Valuation of the living conditions in Southern countries

\* Definitions and Valuations. Select a value. Applicable to HEADLINE and LEAD

1. Related to economic difficulties
  2. Related to education difficulties
  3. Related to conflict/oppression situations
  4. Gender inequality
  5. None
- Other:

V35 Definition/Valuation of religion

\* Definitions and Valuations. Select a value. Applicable to HEADLINE and LEAD

1. Obstacle
  2. Patrimony
  3. Fundamentalism
  4. None
- Other:

V36 Distinguished Actors in the unit of analysis

\* Narrative and pragmatic Aspects. Select a value. Applicable to HEADLINE and LEAD

1. Institutional actors
  2. Social actors
  3. Ordinary people
  4. None
- Other:

V37 Who are the distinguished institutional Actors?

\* Narrative and pragmatic Aspects. Select a value. Applicable to HEADLINE and LEAD

1. Governments (executive power)
  2. Political parties
  3. Judicial System
  4. Forces of order / Armed forces
  5. Institutional officials
  6. Health System
  7. None
- Other:

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