

Xenophobia and Radicalism in France (2018-2020).

Dr. Jean-Yves Camus

The changes in legislation affecting the interests of minorities in 2020

At the very time of writing this report (December 2020), the Government led by the Center-Right Prime Minister Jean Castex is preparing a law whose provisions will be presented on 9 December and then will go for approval to both Chambers of Parliament. This law is the will of President Emmanuel Macron, expressed in his speech on 2 October 2020¹, and is aimed at « tackling Islamist Separatism ». In the President's opinion, there is now a threat that part of the 4 to 5 million-strong Muslim population in France may fall prey to the influence of the Salafi movement, the goal of which is, according to the State, to establish some sort of a separate counter-society whose disciples would be encouraged to live in a self-imposed seclusion from the nefarious influence of French secularism (*laïcité*). The proposed legislation would aim to ensure that public life in France reflects the values of *laïcité*, or state secularism, a century-old (1905) Constitutional principle that separated church and state, but has not proven successful with Islam, as the law was passed at a time when there were no mosques in mainland France and 99% of Muslims lived in French colonies.

The aims of the new legislation are : to free the Muslim faith from the influence of Morocco, Turkey, Algeria and Tunisia, who until now have their say in the selection and appointment of Imams, many of whom have no knowledge of the French language and are not trained in addressing the issues faced by the second or third generation of Muslims who were born in France and hold French citizenship ; enforce stricter control over the financing of mosques so that contributions in excess of Euros 10,000 will be scrutinized ; require all private schools, whether affiliated with a denomination or not, to teach the basic values of secularism in their curriculum ; ban home-schooling, which seems to be the kind of education taught to about 50,000 children over 3 years-old; ending a programme that allowed countries to send imams and teachers to France ; give the

¹ See : [Fight against separatism – the Republic in action: speech by Emmanuel Macron, President of the Republic, on the fight against separatism \(Les Mureaux, 02 Oct. 2020\) - Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs \(diplomatie.gouv.fr\)](#)

administration the power to stop the financing of associations by local authorities when those associations or NGOs promote values which are contrary to secularism². This proposed legislation comes at the time when the trial of those responsible for the deadly January 2015 attacks on satirical newspaper Charlie Hebdo and a kosher supermarket by French-born Islamic extremists finally take place. In September a man from Pakistan stabbed two people near Charlie Hebdo's former offices in anger over its publication of caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad. Earlier on in January, a renewed debate about freedom of expression erupted when a Muslim-born girl teenager received death threats after she rebuked her native religion on her Instagram account, leading many to threaten her life because she was an « apostate ». The attack on the Roman Catholic Cathedral in Nice perpetrated by an Islamist (29 october) and the beheading of a teacher by a Chechen-born Islamist (16 october) in a secondary school near Paris, have prompted the Government to act swiftly and at the same time announce a major crackdown on 76 mosques which are identified by the Intelligence agencies as being affiliated with Islamist Radical movements such as the Wahabi/Salafi scene, the Tabligh Jamaat or Turkish Radicals³.

Law Enforcement practices affecting minorities.

Discriminatory and anti-discriminatory practices affecting minorities. Fighting Hate crimes.

Fighting hate crime has been a priority of the Government led by former Prime Minister Edouard Philippe and his successor. On 13 May 2020, Parliament passed a new legislation known as « loi Avia », named after MP Laetitia avia who belongs to President Macron's party La République en marche (LREM). The bill aimed to combat various forms of online hate speech, terrorist speech and child pornography. Originally set to go into effect on July 1, it would have mandated that platforms take down certain types of “manifestly” illegal content within 24 hours of a user flagging it. It sought to have platforms pay heavy fines in case they would not comply with the law: Companies that failed to comply would have been criminally prosecuted. The bill was much similar to a June 2017 German law, the NetzDG, that puts platforms on the hook for significant fines if they don't remove “manifestly illicit” content within 24 hours of a user reporting it. The Avia Bill was staunchly supported by Antiracist NGOs such as LICRA

² Ce que prévoit finalement le projet de loi contre le séparatisme | Les Echos

³ Gérald Darmanin annonce le contrôle de 76 mosquées soupçonnées de séparatisme - Le Parisien

and SOS-Racisme, which are worried about the growing use of social media to spread conspiracy theories, antisemitism and Holocaust-denial, as well as Islamophobic content. However, it was decried by others as untimely and objectionable from the point of view of freedom of speech. Some objected to its timing because on May 2, the French government extended a pandemic-induced “state of health emergency” until July 24, and critics noted that there’s something inherently authoritarian about passing a speech-restrictive law during an emergency period when demonstrations are not allowed and debate in Parliament is not as vivid as in a normal period, because very few MPs actually take the floor or attend sessions. Many critics also objected to the substance of the law. The Conservative party “Les Republicains” criticized it as an “attack on the freedom of speech.” The Chairperson of the Extreme-Right party Rassemblement National Marine Le Pen decried it as “oppressive”, as did Alexis Corbière, a MP from the Radical Left party “La France Insoumise”. Some Human Rights NGOs stood against the law, on the ground that taking down a hate-filled content was the sole responsibility of the platforms, with a judge only appearing in the process after the content was removed, and only with the goal of prosecuting the author of that content under the 1972 and 1990 French laws on racial discrimination. Practically, the law made it mandatory for the platform to take down contents which had been reported by users as « hainous ». It is up to the platforms to decide what they must take down and what they can let for everyone to read. And only after the platform has decided what to do will an user, or a State authority, be able to sue the platform for having failed to take down⁴. The Constitutional Court has subsequently removed most of the articles and in the law that was enacted on June 24, three points remain : a specific jurisdiction is created with the task is to prosecute hate online ; the law makes it easier for an individual to report hate content ; an Observatory of Hate Online is created, under the authority of the Conseil supérieur de l’audiovisuel (CSA) which is the regulating authority for communications⁵.

Another controversial legislation with an indirect effect on discrimination is the Global Security Law that is now being rewritten before being discussed on the floor of Parliament. The legislation intends to protect police officers from online calls for violence, according to the government. Article 24 of the law would make it an offence to show the face or identity of any officer on duty "with the

⁴ [Pourquoi la loi Avia sur la haine en ligne fait l'unanimité contre elle \(latribune.fr\)](https://www.latribune.fr)

⁵ [Censure de la « loi Avia » par le Conseil constitutionnel : un fil rouge pour les législateurs français et européens ? - Civil | Dalloz Actualité \(dalloz-actualite.fr\)](https://www.dalloz-actualite.fr)

aim of damaging their physical or psychological integrity". The offence would carry a prison sentence of up to one year and a maximum fine of €45,000. The bill has been strongly criticised by journalists and human rights groups who argue that it would curtail press freedom and lead to less police accountability. Those opposed to the legislation are concerned that, if it is enacted, it risks endangering journalists and other onlookers who film officers at work, especially during violent protests. It would also, they say, make it an offense for any citizen to film police officers who are using violence or racial slurs while arresting citizens from a minority background. Racist violence in the police has become a major concern in France in the wake of the Black Lives Matters movement, the more so because several racist incidents were reported in 2020. The latest occurred in Paris, at the end of November, right at the time when Parliament was discussing the law⁶. President Macron himself said he was « shocked » by the video and asked the hardline, Conservative Minister of the Interior, Gérald Darmanin, for the authors to be sanctioned⁷. It now seems that the controversial article 24 will be dropped in the forthcoming version of the text. Following the protests in the United States, several demonstrations took place in Paris and other cities in June 2020, against what is perceived by the Radical Left and Human Rights NGO as the Racist bias in the police force and the lack of a coherent response from the Government⁸. The Comité Vérité pour Adama, a Far-Left group which stands against the alleged « structural Racism of the French State », is at the forefront of those demonstrations.

The issue of discrimination by the police force seems to be taken seriously by President Macron, who, on December 4, gave a much commented interview to the online media « Brut »⁹, and acknowledged that the police tended to control the identity of non-Whites more than that of other citizens. He announced that, starting in January 2021, the Government will launch an online survey on the topic of identity checks, enabling citizens to report their experience of discrimination. Later on, he said, the Government will set up an online platform which will enable citizens to immediately report police abuse when they have been subject to discriminatory practices.

The Government has a very strong stand against associations and NGOs which are suspected of channeling funds to Jihadi groups of which are suspected of

⁶ See this account of a Black music producer, a French citizen, being beaten by officers who used racist epithets while arresting him because he did not wear a face mask : [Affaire Michel Zecler : qui sont les quatre policiers placés en garde à vue ? \(francetvinfo.fr\)](#)

⁷ Michel Zecler: Macron, "très choqué", a réclamé à Darmanin des sanctions | Le HuffPost ([huffingtonpost.fr](#))

⁸ «Violences policières»: une nouvelle manifestation à Paris et des incidents ([lefigaro.fr](#))

⁹ Emmanuel Macron et les "violences policières" | Brut.

receiving foreign money in order to fight the French model of secularism. Following the beheading of teacher Samuel Paty on 16 October, several such NGOs were banned. The first is Collectif Cheikh Yassine, named after the late religious leader of Hamas in the Gaza strip. Imam Abdelhakim Sefrioui, whose Anti-Zionism is in fact pure Antisemitism, is involved in stirring up hatred against Paty, who has asked his teenage students to work on the notion of freedom of speech, using the cartoons of Muhammad published in the satirical weekly Charlie Hebdo. He was subsequently denounced as an « Islamophobe » by the father of one pupil, who called Sefrioui to the rescue, and the pair began inciting for Paty's removal on social media, leading to one Islamist (who was without any connection with the case) deciding to kill him in his school¹⁰. Collectif Cheikh Yassine was banned on 21 October and Sefrioui was jailed for helping commit a terrorist offense. Then the Government made a move against the Charity Baraka city, known for raising money in order to help the needy in 26 Muslim countries. Led by a Salafi, Idriss Sihamedi, who refuses to accept the secular laws of France and has always refused to publicly condemn ISIS or al Qaeda, Baraka City had its assets frozen and was banned on 28 October. Finally the Collectif contre islamophobie en France (CCIF), which also refuses to acknowledge the laws on secularism, was banned on 2 December. One week before the ban, it had decided to move its assets, headquarters and activities to an undisclosed foreign country.

There are no specific measures to support ethnic and religious groups, as per its Constitution the French Republic is « one and indivisible », which means that minorities are not recognized as such. French is the only official language in public education and the administration and minority languages (both indigenous, such as Breton, Corsican ; and foreign such as Arabic), are only optional in the public education system. However in his aforementioned 4 December interview, President Macron reaffirmed his commitment to making the learning of Arabic possible in public schools, so that second-generation immigrants do not feel alienated from their family culture. In the same speech, he expressed his will to set up a Commission to the effect of naming streets in French cities after African or Arab personalities who contributed to the history of France or stood up for the values of freedom and universalism. Finally, one should mention that the debate on immigration is still a major topic in the political debate. The Extreme-Right Rassemblement national (RN) asks for an end to immigration (even legal immigration) from foreign countries, including those belonging to the EU,

¹⁰ [Assassinat de Samuel Paty — Wikipédia \(wikipedia.org\)](#)

although its focus is of course non-European immigration. At the other end of the spectrum, the France insoumise and the Communist Party stand for opening borders to immigrants and refugees almost without constraints. The mainstream Conservative Right, which needs to talk to those hardline voters who may be tempted to switch to RN, has a program of limiting immigration to an annual maximum number of legal migrants ; promoting « assimilation » to the French *leitkultur*, deporting foreigners who are suspected of being Islamist Radicals and stopping development aid to those countries who do not accept to readmit their nationals who are deported from France (most of them for being illegals, other because they are deported for participating in terrorism-related activities)¹¹.

The attitude of society towards immigrants, foreigners, ethnic and religious groups

The attitude of society towards immigrants, foreigners, ethnic and religious groups, is monitored on a yearly basis since 1990 by the annual report of the Commission nationale consultative des droits de l'Homme (CNCDDH). The CNCDDH presented its 2019 Report on the fight against racism to the Prime Minister on 18th June 2020. The overall statement of the Commission is that « Vastly under-reported, racism, anti-Semitism and xenophobia are often demonstrated via subtle forms of rejection that are not always easy to characterise or denounce by victims. An increase in acts and discourse of a racist nature was identified in 2019, this in addition to considerable volumes recorded in 2018. While the tolerance index remains largely stable, prejudice, discrimination and racist acts continue and require co-development of adapted policies in order to be addressed »¹².

When looking into detail to the report, the main findings are as follows. Tolerance of minorities is measured according to the Longitudinal Tolerance Index. The closer the index is to 100, the higher the level of tolerance. The LTI decreased by 1 point between 2018 and 2019. Since reaching a value of 64 in 2016, it has remained relatively stable. Between 2013 and 2019, the index has risen by 13 points. What is most interesting is that the level of tolerance varies very much according to minorities. Black people and Jews have a LTI of 79, which is pretty high and goes contrary to the assumption that Racism and Antisemitism are a growing plague in France. Attitudes towards people from the Maghreb are at 72, but when the question is asked about Muslims, it drops to 60%, notwithstanding the fact that Muslims in France originate mostly from

¹¹ Sécurité, immigration : les propositions des Républicains pour « réarmer l'État » - Le Point

¹² Les Essentiels on the 2019 Report on the fight against racism, anti-Semitism and xenophobia | CNCDDH

Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia, that is, from the Maghreb. The lowest level of tolerance is that for the Roma minority (36%), which numbers 350,000 at most, among them 20,000 originating from Bulgaria, Romania and the former Yugoslavia¹³. When the LTI began being used as a statistical tool in 1990, it stood at an overall level of 53, rising to 66 in 2019. However, as the CNCDH report confirms, there are a few prejudices which remain deeply entrenched. 60% of those surveyed believe that « the Roma very often exploit their children », although those children who are lured into begging on the streets by some criminal gangs are only present within the big cities where a significant community from Eastern Europe is established. 59% think that « many immigrants come to France for the sake of enjoying social benefits ». 44,6% say that « Islam is a threat to the French identity » and 34% say that « the Jews have a special relationship with money ». With regard to the number of incidents, the Ministry of the Interior keeps a record of offenses which « are of a criminal nature and are committed on the grounds of origin, ethnicity, nationality or an alleged belonging to a specific race or religion ». In 2019 the number of those offenses rose to 5,730, that is a 11% increase when compared to 2018. The latest data we have from the Justice Ministry with regard to repression of those offenses goes back to 2018, when 6,603 Racist incidents were handled by the Prosecutor's Office, What is a concern is that the rate of acquittal by the courts (16%) in the case of racist incidents remains more than twice that of the other kind of incidents involving harm or threat to a person (7%) when Racism is not the cause.

It is most interesting and useful to look at the 1, 983 anti-Semitic, anti-Muslim and “other racist and xenophobic acts” which were reported by the Central Territorial Intelligence Service (SCRT), a direction of the Interior Ministry which checks its statistics with those of community watchdog organizations such as CRIF, the umbrella organization of french Jewry. There were 687 antisemitic incidents, an increase of 27% ; 154 anti-Muslim incidents, a 54% increase and 1,142 acts targeting other populations, mostly Black people and minorities from Asia, that is a 130% increase¹⁴. With the outbreak of the COVID pandemic in February-March 2020, there have been reports by watchdogs NGOs representing the half-a-million strong Chinese community, that Asians were targeted, mainly on social media, for allegedly being responsible for the spreading of the virus¹⁵. The CNCDH has pointed out to the discrepancy between the number of racist

¹³ Roms | CNCDH

¹⁴ Les Essentiels du Rapport 2019 sur la lutte contre le racisme (cncdh.fr)

¹⁵ La Covid-19 attise le « racisme anti-Chinois » mais le rend enfin visible – Politique | L'Opinion.

incidents and that of sentences, and emphasizes that the extent of Racism is certainly underestimated, because few victims actually file a complaint. The Commission makes the estimate that 1 million people (out of a 65 million population) have at least once been the target of Racism. It recommends that the information of citizens on how and when to file complaint be upgraded and that training be given to police officers and judges on what constitutes a Racist offense. With regard to negative social manifestations towards minority groups, the most interesting and recent development is that for the first time in history, the Labour Litigation Court of Paris has, on 17 December 2019, sentenced an employer who has imposed a « systemic racial discrimination » and a « structured system of racist domination » on West African undocumented workers who were being employed on a construction site¹⁶.

Activities of Right-Wing radical groups and parties

Starting in 2011 with the election of Marine Le Pen to the chairmanship of the *Front national* (renamed *Rassemblement national* in 2018), the Far-Right party embarked on a new course, seeking to distance itself from overtly Extremist groups, banning dual membership with them and sometimes excluding militants with a record of Racism, Antisemitism and/or violence. As a result, many disgruntled former members and newcomers to the Extreme-Right scene see RN as a renegade party and think that the parliamentary option will not bring any real break with the « System ». Many have switched allegiance to extra-parliamentary Radical groups such as *Parti de la France* and *Dissidence française*, with *Synthèse nationale* acting as an umbrella organization whose annual forum is a key transnational event with, in 2019¹⁷, speakers from Golden Dawn, Vlaams Belang and Centro Studi Polaris from Italy. Although such groups do not advocate Terrorism, individuals associated with them have drifted to violence and are part of a broader scene that is prone to violence against political opponents and minorities.

In 2013, following the murder of Anti-Fascist activist Clément Méric by members of *Troisième Voie* and *Jeunesses nationalistes révolutionnaires*, those were outlawed, together with the Neo-Fascist *Œuvre française* and *Jeunesses nationalistes*. Those groups however re-formed quickly, putting the efficiency of a ban into question, the more so that several cases of violence aimed at political

¹⁶ [Les ouvriers font condamner leur employeur pour discrimination raciale à Paris - Le Parisien](#)

¹⁷ Because of the lockdown which was imposed on 24 March, there have been no public activities of the extreme-Right in 2020. All public events being banned, most activities have moved online. As of December 2020, this ban is still effective when a meeting gathers more than 10 people.

opponents remain unresolved, in which TV and JNR members are suspected . New bans were edicted in 2018 against Blood and Honour Hexagone and Bastion social, a national-revolutionary group whose model is the Italian CasaPound and whose extreme members were suspected of planning armed attacks . If the skinhead Neo-Nazi scene remains marginal, offsprings of Bastion Social have been launched after the ban and remain active. Despite the ban, new premises have opened in the vicinity of Lyon, in Aix-en-Provence and Strasbourg, under new names, respedctively *Terra Nostra* ; *Tenesoun* and *Vent d'Est*.

The main Extreme-Right movement, Génération identitaire, is prone to Racism and intimidation of immigrants, Muslims and political opponents. It engages into unlawful actions, but not of a Terrorist nature, such as displaying a banner with the slogan « Justice for the victims of Anti-White Racism » during a pro-BLM rally on 13 June¹⁸. The main Terrorist threat seems to come from small cells of « Super-Patriots » which aim at preventing an alleged take-over of the country by Islamization and Great Replacement. Since 2015, three plots to kill political official, including President Emmanuel Macron, have been unfolded before any harm was caused. In June 2017 near Marseille, Logan Alexandre Nisin, aged 21, was arrested for having planned to kill then Interior Minister Christophe Castaner and Radical Left MP Jean-Luc Mélenchon. The man, who set up a Facebook page in praise of Anders Behring Breivik, set up a self-styled « *Organisation armée secrète* » (OAS) , which aimed at making Muslim re-migrate to North Africa through intimidation and terror. Nisin is a former sympathiser of such Extreme-Right groups as *Jeunesses nationalistes*, *Action française* and the Marseille-based *Mouvement populaire nouvelle aurore* (MPNA), whose name imitates that of the Greek *Golden Dawn*. Nisin was frustrated by those movements' lack of ability or willingness to move forward to Terrorist action, and decided to act in his own way, impersonating a trend of so-called « lone wolves » who are unhappy with the loud-mouthed attitude of legal Nationalist groups which do not push their militants to engage in illegal actions. The AFO plot, in 2018, sets a lot of new trends : it involved activists aged between age 32 and 69, with several people well over 50 who had served in the Police, the army or the Gendarmerie. They included an engineer, a lawyer, a diplomat and middle-class people. They met through a website : <http://www.guerredefrance.fr/>, whose online forum was the first step to real-life, survivalist-like meetings and training for « civil war » against Islamisation. Intended means of action included poisoning hallal meat in supermarkets, targeting Islamist Radicals who has been released from jail as well

¹⁸ Marche pour Adama Traoré: Génération identitaire provoque avec une banderole | Le HuffPost (huffingtonpost.fr)

as imams and hijab-wearing women selected at random. Another new trend in AFO is that it was a splinter from *Volontaires pour la France*, a legal, patriotic group led by General Antoine Martinez. Like the Barjols plot (2018)¹⁹ whose goal was to kill Macron with a ceramic knife which cannot be detected by an X-Ray security gantry, those arrested were aged between 32 and 62, ran a Facebook page, had connections to the legal Patriotic Right and were fascinated by the Army. The rationale behind those plots is that the State is neither willing nor able to effectively shield France against Islam and that self-proclaimed Patriots, especially those with an experience in the Army or other Security forces, have a duty to replace the « failing » State apparatus. This « Super-Patriot » Extreme-Right seems devoid of any transnational connection.

There has been one attempt at killing worshippers in a mosque. It took place in Bayonne on 28 October 2019, and two were seriously injured. It was not considered an act of Terrorism, as the author, 84 years-old Claude Sinké, was partially insane. This former candidate for Front national in local elections said his action was motivated by taking revenge for what he believed was the setting on fire of Notre-Dame Cathedral by « Muslims ». He died of natural causes (26 February 2020) while being jailed. In September 2019, one individual belonging to the Extreme-Right, who had been a member of the banned Jeunesses nationalistes, was put on trial in Paris for attempting to harm « muslims, jews, homosexuals » and even to « kill President Macron »²⁰. Finally on 26 May a White supremacist and former soldier with a fascination for mass killers such as Tarrant and Breivik was arrested in Limoges, after the police saw on social media that he was becoming increasingly vocal about attacking the Jewish community. He had already been sentenced for illegal possession of firearms in 2018, after having demonstrated with the Yellow Vests movement²¹.

The Neo-Nazi scene is small. It attracts a few hundred militants and raises money through concerts, which especially take place in Alsace, Lorraine and areas adjacent to Germany and Switzerland, in order to attract as wide an international following as possible. The *Charlemagne Hammerskins* have opened their own place (*La Taverne de Thor* in the Meuse département): Even after the ban, the rival faction Blood and Honour continues to stage concerts, too, but with a specific public, that of *National-Socialist Black Metal*, NSBM) and in another

¹⁹ The Barjols is a nickname of the French Special Forces operating in the Sahel against Jihadi terrorists and is a pun on a French slang word, « Barjot », meaning « crazy ».

²⁰ [Il aurait voulu attaquer Emmanuel Macron : un ultra-nationaliste jugé à Paris \(ouest-france.fr\)](https://www.ouest-france.fr)

²¹ [Un homme interpellé à Limoges dans le cadre d'une enquête du parquet anti-terroriste \(francetvinfo.fr\)](https://www.francetvinfo.fr)

region, that of Lyon . The « Call of Terror » concert, whose last edition was in February 2020 and attracted 400 people, is an interesting example of how Nazis can raise money through concerts that always feature foreign bands from all over Europe and also feature Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) fights, which are legally banned in France and are a new source of income. The MMA scene appears to be growing. Of particular interest is the connection of Extreme-Right militants who are active in MMA and NSBM in connection with the Ukraine. In 2020, the Asgardsrei festival in Kiev, featuring both MMA and NSBM music, was attended by the leader of the most violent group on the scene : *Les Zouaves-Paris*, a successor to *Groupe Union Défense* (GUD)ⁱ. Marc de Caqueray-Valménier was thus into contact with Azov Battalion members.

A peculiarity of the French extreme-Right is a segment of it espouses a Catholic fundamentalist ideology : such is the case of Civitas and Parti Nationaliste Français. As a consequence, they are more prone to ally with like-minded foreign groups such as the Italian Forza Nuova, the Greek Golden Dawn, the various factions of the Spanish Falange and Eastern European parties with a strong Christian flavor. PNF regularly visits what remains of the former Romanian Iron Guard and Noua Dreapta, and takes part in the Lukov March in Sofia . This connection extends to the Russian Imperial Movement, which was banned in the United States and whose representatives are guests of PNF for the annual « Day of Europe » taking place in Paris. It also explains why PNF belongs to the *Alliance for Peace and Freedom* (APF) led by Roberto Fiore. The issue of religion however, does not prevent PNF from also working with the Berlin-based *Europa Terra Nostra Foundation*, of which the NPD is a member.

Several dozens of Neo-Fascists enlisted in the *Unité continentale* unit which fought against Ukrainian forces in the Donbass with a connection to the Russian National Unity (RNE) antisemitic movement. The core of this unit, led by former military Victor Lenta, was still politically active and was last seen taking part in the Yellow Vests protests in early 2019. Not all Extreme-Right activists, however, have taken the side of Russia in its war in Donbass. A small group of French volunteers have joined the Azov Battalion and both GUD and Bastion social have constantly supported the Svoboda party as well as Pravyi Sektor. Those belonging to both groups who were involved in violent incidents during the Yellow Vests wrote graffiti showing their support for a Maidan-like revolution and in December 2019 Marc de Caqueray, leader of *Les Zouaves*, had a meeting in Kiev with Helena Semenyaka, from Azov's political wing *Natsyionalnyi Korpous*.

Other groups on the Extreme-Right are very vocal about their commitment to launching an overall assault on the multicultural society, even by violent means. Bruno Hirout, general secretary of Parti de la France, has quoted David Lane's 14 Words motto²². The concept of Great Replacement, coined by French novelist Renaud Camus, and legacy of the late Guillaume Faye (1949-2019) whose last book, *Guerre civile raciale* (2019), have been translated into English, are an inspiration for ethnonationalism and their promoters believe in the compulsory repatriation of non-European immigrants as well as of those French citizens with an immigrant background. It needs to be said that although Neo-Nazis and of course antisemites and Holocaust-deniers, Camus and Faye are not (in the case, of Faye, at least not his final years). Camus refers to the judeo-Christian heritage of France and his hatred is directed at Muslims and non-Whites. Faye, who has attained the status of a prophet after his passing, was of the opinion that, although Jews were alien to the European pagan culture he stood for, they were not, *in this time and place*, the first and foremost problem for the survival of the White people and that therefore, French Ethnonationalists had to refrain from attacking them, since many of them were opposed to Islam and immigration²³. Holocaust-deniers have a weekly tribune with the newspaper *Rivarol*, which is sold at newsstands. The newspaper has a record of many (unpaid) fines for antisemitism and Holocaust-denial, the last one on 4 November 2020²⁴. Another prolific antisemite and Holocaust-denier, Hervé Ryssen, was jailed for 19 months on 20 September 2020 and is awaiting another sentence in January 2021²⁵. Serial Holocaust-denier Vincent Reynouard, who lives in exile in the UK to escape jail, has been sentenced to 4 months (non-suspended) in absentia on 25 November. And another serial antisemite and denier, Alain Soral, who is now living in Switzerland in order to escape prosecution, is still awaiting the outcome of his appeal trial, after he got a 1 year non-suspended sentence in April 2019²⁶. Under the 1990 Loi Gayssot, it is a criminal offense to incite to racial hatred or incitement to hatred and to deny the existence of the Holocaust.

Overall, the Radical Extreme-Right does not have any influence on mainstream society. The number of activists is incredibly stable over a period of 10 years,

²² <https://www.brunohirout.biz/index.php/2020/04/30/quatorze-mots-pour-un-petit-enfant-blond/>

²³ See his book : *a Nouvelle Question juive*, La Fosse, Le Lore, 2007

²⁴ Its director received a 3 months suspended jail sentence, and a 15,000 euros fine

²⁵ [Le négationniste Ryssen incarcéré après plusieurs condamnations pour des propos antisémites - Le Parisien](#)

²⁶ [Alain Soral condamné pour négationnisme à 1 an de prison ferme | Le HuffPost \(huffingtonpost.fr\)](#)

with a nucleus of around 1,000 hardcore activists and 2,000 sympathizers²⁷. Unofficial figures from sources close to the police say that 390 of them legally own a gun. Unofficial sources from the Penitentiary administration say at the time of writing, 39 Extreme-Right activists are in jail, for offenses ranging from street brawls with political opponents to suspicion of terrorism. The real influence of the ideas of the Extreme-Right come from the impact of the Rassemblement national, led by Marine Le Pen, who polled 33% of the vote in the second round of the 2017 presidential election, and is predicted to stand on the second round again in 2022. Opinion surveys show that on the first round, she would be neck-to-neck with Macron with 23-27%, and poll as much as 40-45% on the second ballot²⁸. The RN is an established party, with 6 MPs, 1 senator ; 21 MEPs ; 306 members of the Regional Councils (up for reelection in 2021) ; 58 concillors ion the Conseils départementaux (also up for reelection next year) and 2 Mayors in cities of 30,000 or more (RN runs a total of 11 cities after the June 2020 elections). The influence of RN, previously known as Front national from its inception in 1972, has been instrumental in changing the attitude of the French on the issue of immigration, so that a 2020 survey found that 78% of the French want to switch to quota immigration system, while 58% want to abolish the provision of the law that gives French nationality to everyone who is born on French soil²⁹. With regard to the Jewish community, the RN leadership tries to keep a moderate profile. Marine Le Pen, for the first time in July 2020, tweeted in memory of the victims of the Rafle du Vel d'hiv³⁰, the 1942 round-up of the Paris Jews which led more than 13,000 to be deported. In the same message, Le Pen assured that her party was the best bullwark for the Jews against the « new hate preachers » that are the Islamists. There need to be no illusion, however : the official party policy is to ban the wearing of all religious signs on thre streets, including the kippah, and to ban the sale of all kinds of ritually slaugthered meat, including kosher, the purpose allegedly being to fight the wearing of the Islamic garb and the financing of Radical Mosques through the tax on hallal products.

Activities of Radical Islamist groups

Any survey of Islamist activity in France should begin with a reminder of the terrorist actions that took place in 2020.

²⁷ [Quand l'ultradroite veut passer à l'action \(franceinter.fr\)](http://franceinter.fr)

²⁸ [Présidentielle 2022: un sondage donne Macron et Le Pen au coude-à-coude au premier tour \(bfmtv.com\)](http://bfmtv.com)

²⁹ [Les Français et l'immigration - IFOP](http://ifop.com)

³⁰ [Marine Le Pen salue la "mémoire" des victimes du Vel d'Hiv - Le Point](http://lepoint.fr)

- On 3 January A man stabbed three people in Villejuif, a suburb of Paris, killing one person and wounding two others. The attacker was shot dead by police. The attacker was identified as Nathan C, a follower of salafism, an extremist sect of Islam.
-
- On 5 January French police shot and wounded a man who had rushed toward a group of policemen with a knife shouting “Allahu akbar” in the city of Metz. The suspect was on an official list of those monitored for links to militant groups³¹.
- On April 4, 2020 Two people were killed and five wounded in a knife attack, in what the interior minister called a terrorist incident. Prosecutors said the suspect was a Sudanese refugee in his 30s who lived in Romans-sur-Isère, the town of the attack
- On 27 april Two police officers were seriously injured when a driver rammed his vehicle into them in Colombes, Hauts-de-Seine. The perpetrator was arrested, and a source stated that the man carried out the attack to "avenge events in Palestine". The attacker had pledged allegiance to Islamic State
- On 25 September On September 25, 2020, two people were injured in a stabbing outside the former headquarters of the French satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* in Paris.
- On 16 October A Chechen refugee beheaded Samuel Paty in Conflans-Sainte-Honorine, northwest of Paris. Paty was a middle school teacher who had recently held a class on freedom of speech in which he showed caricatures of the Muslim prophet Mohammed
- On 29 october 3 were killed in the Roman Catholic Cathedral Notre-Dame de Nice, one of the victims was beheaded. The terrorist is a 21 years-old Tunisia national who had illegally entered France through Italy. ISIS videos have been found in his cell phone.

³¹ French police shoot and wound knifeman shouting 'Allahu akbar' in Metz | Reuters

Those actions are to be seen in the wider context of Islamic Terrorism in France after the attacks against Charlie Hebdo, the Kosher supermarket hypercacher and the Bataclan in 2015. Since 2015, according to security sources, 20 terror attacks have hit France ; 19 have been carried out but failed and 61 plots were unfolded. As shown by the above reported incidents, a new pattern in Islamist Terrorism is that only a minority of actions are claimed by ISIS and al Qaeda. Most attacks are carried out by lone terrorists who share the beliefs of the Jihadis but have decided to act on their own, thus following the tactics that both Islamist groups have recommended : hitting the enemy where he lives rather than coming to fight in the war zones of Iraq/Syria and the Sahel. A lone attacker does not mean a « lone wolf » however : in the case of the Nice terrorist, six people have been heard by the police as possible accomplices³². There are two major concerns regarding Islamist Radicals. The first one is that young Muslims who are born or were raised in France and are not known to the police become radicalized. There are now 8,000 people who are under surveillance from the intelligence community for being close to Islamic Terrorism³³. The second concern is with illegal immigration, as exemplified by the Nice attacker, who the authorities say « came to kill »³⁴.

French Islam is very predominantly Sunni. Islamist radicals who incite to hatred are also Sunni who are close to the Jihadi wing of the Salafi movement. The major problem is that the non-Jihadi Salafi, who control around 100 mosques and prayer rooms, do not have total control over their flock and people might be radicalized by attending such mosques, where the sermons are very depreciative of the Western way of life and values. This is the reason why the Government decided to tackle the issue by targeting « Radical Islam » in general and naming it as an « enemy »³⁵. On the mind of the Government, being radical certainly includes being a Salafi, but also being linked to the major legal groups representing Orthodox Sunni Islam that are in line with the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood, namely the umbrella organization, « Musulmans de France », formerly known as the Union des organisations islamiques de France (UOIF). One of the hot topics in 2020 is that this offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood, as well as the Turkish-sponsored Milli Görüş are part of the Conseil français du culte musulman (CFCM), which is the religious institution recognized

³² [Attentat à Nice : Deux nouvelles interpellations, six personnes en garde à vue \(20minutes.fr\)](#)

³³ [Plus de 8.000 personnes fichées pour radicalisation à caractère terroriste, annonce Gérald Darmanin \(20minutes.fr\)](#)

³⁴ [Le terroriste de Nice semble être venu en France pour tuer \(lejdd.fr\)](#)

³⁵ [Loi "séparatisme": Castex affirme que "l'ennemi de la République", c'est "l'islamisme radical" \(bfmtv.com\)](#)

by the State. The Government wants to clarify how they position themselves with regard to the French model of the secular state, and has asked all nine components of CFCM to ratify a « Charter of Republican values »³⁶ as well as to make a proposal on the topic of how to train imams according to those values, instead of importing imams from the Maghreb and Turkey. The goal of the Government is undoubtedly to rapidly stop granting residence permits to foreign imams and to replace them with others, who are native French, have a knowledge of French and are accustomed to European values, especially those of secularism, gender equality and the superiority of civil law over Shariah. As per a reminder, French Rabbis who are employees of the Consistoire, the official body of French Orthodox Jewry, need to get a degree from the Paris Rabbinical Seminary and another degree from an University, in a secular field of study and at least the equivalent of a M.A.

Hate crime

The latest data we have relates to 2019 and show an increase in the number of incidents. According to data that was released by the Ministry of the Interior on 26 January 2020, we have a breakdown of incidents alongside the two legal categories of « actions » (attacks on individuals and buildings, on private properties ; desecrations) and « threats » (such as graffiti, intimidating people and shouting racist abuse at them). Antisemitic incidents rose by 27%, thus worsening the situation as in 2018 already, + 74 % increase was reported when compared to the figures of 2017. Among the 687 recorded incidents, actions are on the decrease (151) and are outnumbered by threats (536). It needs be remind that those figures are really out of proportion with the small number of Jews in France, who account for less than 1% of the population. After having decreased for two years in a row, Racist incidents were 1 142, that is a + 132% increase. Anti-Muslim incidents are few (154) but on the increase (+ 54 %). Among the 63 recorded « actions », they were two shootings at mosques, in Brest (June 2019)³⁷ and Bayonne where two old worshippers were severely wounded³⁸. The Brest attack, perpetrated by an unstable man without extremist views who killed himself after the shooting, is remarkable because, among the two wounded victims was a controversial imam, the former hardline salafi Rachid El Jay, who

³⁶ Islam de France : le CFCM présente à l'Élysée un projet de « conseil des imams » (lemonde.fr)

³⁷ Fusillade devant la mosquée de Brest : ce que contient la lettre laissée par le tireur présumé (ouest-france.fr)

³⁸ Augmentation générale des actes racistes et antisémites en France en 2019 (lemonde.fr)

was known as Rachid Abou Houdeyfa. After 2015, el Jay came to reject Salafism and adopt a more mainstream, anti-Jihadi and Moroccan traditional approach.

A very poorly researched issue is that of anti-Christian attacks, of which 1 052 were recorded in 2019 (1 063 in 2018). There were 996 actions and 56 threats. The Catholic Church hierarchy itself explains that most actions are in fact perpetrated by thieves who break into church premises in order to steal money or valuable items. In November 2019, such thieves even used car-ramming in order to demolish the main gate of the Oloron Sainte-Marie cathedral, a method of action also used by terrorists. The conservative Catholic website Aleteia reports one massive desecration of about 100 graves in the cemetery of Cognac³⁹ (that same year, as many graves were also desecrated, in December, in the cemetery of the Westhoffen Jewish community, in the Alsace region). The ideological reasons for those actions which are not perpetrated by thieves are insufficiently researched: some on the Arch-Conservative Right mention Anarchism and Satanism⁴⁰.

Conclusion

It is difficult to give an overall assessment of the situation in France, as those laws which have been drafted to fight the so-called « separatism » of Islamist Radicals, as well as the Cyber-Hate legislation and the legislation most pertaining to Civil Liberties are either still in the making or have to be voted by Parliament in early 2021, then be declared conform to the Constitution by the Constitutional Court. It seems obvious, however, that President Macron and his Prime Minister have very much in mind the fact that the forthcoming elections will focus on Immigration and Terrorism, on Civil Liberties and on the way they have handled the pandemic. The threat of Islamist Terrorism remaining as high as ever, they have decided to challenge Radical Islam head-on, even to the cost of such backlash as the boycott of French goods in many Muslim countries and a deep crisis in the bilateral relation with Turkey, whose Head of State is using the alleged « anti-Muslim » stand of France to pursue his foreign policy goals. If the Separatism Law is passed, it will be a landmark one in that it will stop the influence of foreign countries on a Muslim population who lives in France to stay and shuns the mosques or institutions which are under the tutelage of non-democratic foreign countries.

³⁹ 1.052 actes antichrétiens recensés en France en 2019 (aleteia.org)

⁴⁰ L'Observatoire de la Christianophobie.

Another conclusion is that, although the Extreme-Right does not succeed in signing any coalition agreement with the mainstream Conservative Right, and thus will most probably remain out of power, its influence remains strong in the polls and is likely to stay so because of the disillusion with the Government after the many failures of handling the COVID crisis ; the incapacity of the Social-Democratic Left to emerge with a serious candidate who would have the Left make it to the second round in 2022 ; and the failure of the Conservatives, so far, to nominate their candidate. Populism from both extremes of the political spectrum, as shown by the study of the Center-Right think-tank Fondapol, remains high⁴¹ after the Yellow Vests protests (2018-2019) and the COVID pandemic as been an accelerating force for anti-elite, anti-vaccine, anti-science protesters who are keen on conspiracy theories⁴². In this context, Antisemitism remains an issue. Each and every Government, Conservative or Social-democrat, has taken strong measures to fight it, since the major outbreak of anti-Jewish violence which took place at the time of the Intifada (2000). However, whereas in 1999, the number of antisemitic incidents stood below 100 (mostly caused by Neo-Fascist or Neo-Nazi groups), there has never been a year when their number of incidents decreased to below 300, and most years see an average of 400-600⁴³. This and other elements in this paper allow for a general conclusion that France is quite unstable a country when it comes to national cohesiveness, the protection of minorities and a stable social order.

Recommendations

. Publishing an annual public report similar in nature to that of the Verfassungsschutz, that would deal with the Extreme-Right, Extreme-left and Radical Islam, and would show the reality of their ideology, strength and organization

. Adopting a legal definition of what is the Extreme-Right and the Radical Right, what is the Extreme-Left and the Radical Left, according to the level of threat that they pose to the Constitution. Such a distinction does exist in Germany and makes it clear what is acceptable because it does not threaten the constitutional order and what should be banned because it is a threat. Clarifying the concept of the

⁴¹ Fondapol | 2022, [le risque populiste en France \(vagues 2 et 3\) - Fondapol](#)

⁴² A must-read website dealing with conspiracy theories, antisemitism and Radical ideologies is [Conspiracy Watch | L'Observatoire du conspirationnisme | Les faits d'abord !](#)

⁴³ For a comprehensive survey of Antisemitism in 2019, with a graphic on the situation since 1998 see : [2019-FR \(antisemitisme.fr\)](#). This survey is an annual publication of the security service of the Jewish organizations and gives figures which are consistent with those from the State authorities.

« Ultra-Right » which is often used in the media to describe violence-prone movements. Such a distinction is very difficult to frame into a law when it comes to Islam, as the secular State means that the authorities leave it to the clergy to speak on religion issues.

. Financing research in the social sciences that address the issue Radicalism, its history, contemporary meaning and militant activity, with a specific focus on transnational connections.

. Rewrite the Avia law on the fight against Cyber-Hate, as it is now irrelevant because the most important provisions have been taken out by the Constitutional Court.
