

Emmanuel Macron

IMPACT: Emmanuel Macron is a former banker turned politician who currently serves as the president of France. Under Macron's leadership, the French government has implemented a number of anti-Muslim policies, including the "anti-Separatism" law. Macron has claimed that Islam is a "religion that is in crisis all over the world today," and routinely claims acts of violence as unique to French Muslims. Many activists and experts argue that Macron has adopted Islamophobia as an electoral strategy ahead of the April 2022 presidential elections.

- Emmanuel Macron is a **French politician who has served as the president of France since May 14, 2017**. Macron was originally a member of the center-left Socialist Party of France from 2006 to 2009. However **in 2016, he founded La République En Marche! (LREM) (also known as En Marche!)** and ran as the party's presidential candidate against Marine Le Pen of the National Rally. **On May 7, 2017, at the age of thirty-nine, Macron was elected as the youngest president in the history of France.**
- Prior to being elected President, Macron served as the Minister of Economy and Industry in the second Valls Cabinet in 2014. During his tenure in this position, he spearheaded Macron's Law, which focused on regulations in the transport sector and was passed in 2015.
- Early in his presidential career, Macron expounded sympathetic and inclusive values. **During a 2016 rally held by En Marche! Macron stated, "No religion is a problem in France today," and "we have a duty to let everybody practice their religion with dignity."** Similarly in 2016, Macron expressed his opposition to banning headscarves in universities, saying, "Personally, I do not believe we should be inventing new texts, new laws, new standards, in order to hunt down veils at universities and go after people who wear religious symbols during field trips." In October 2019, the BBC reported that "Macron had warned against 'stigmatizing' Muslims or linking the Islamic religion with the fight against terrorism."
- Despite these previous statements, **many academics and critics have noted that Macron has adopted Islamophobia as part of his government's policy and electoral strategy ahead of the April 2022 presidential elections.** In April 2021, Marwan Muhammad, the former director of the Collective Against Islamophobia in France (CCIF), noted that "the French president is trampling the rights of minority communities, fuelling Islamophobia in a bid for votes."
- A string of events occurred in late 2020 demonstrating Macron's rightward shift and increasing negative pressure on the French Muslim community. **On October 2, Macron unveiled a plan to tackle "radicalism" in France. During his speech, he described Islam as "a religion that is in crisis all over the world today."** Macron stated that government would draft a law to strengthen secularism in France against what he described as "Islamist separatism" in the country. While Macron spoke of "freeing" Islam in France from "foreign influences," he also acknowledged how France's "colonial past has contributed to many of the problems in the country today," stating, "we have created our own separatism in some of our areas."
- On October 16, 2020, Samuel Paty, a French middle school teacher, was murdered by an eighteen-year-old man of Chechen origin following a campaign against the teacher for showing cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad during a class on the freedom of speech. **In the wake of Paty's murder, the New York Times reported that the French authorities unleashed a crackdown on French Muslim**

communities with the government “carrying out dozens of raids, vowing to shut down aid groups and threatening to expel foreigners.” **Macron’s interior minister, Gérald Darmanin, even described “radicalized” Muslims as “the enemy within.”** Darmanin went on to describe the Collective Against Islamophobia (CCIF), which documents anti-Muslim hate crimes, as “an enemy of the republic.” **In December 2020, Macron’s government dissolved the CCIF.**

- During a ceremony to honor Paty, **Macron defended the publication of cartoons depicting the Prophet Mohammed, stating, “We will not give up cartoons,”** and “He [Paty] was killed because Islamists want our future.” In response to Macron’s comments about Islam and his public defence of the cartoons, a number of Muslim-majority countries responded by launching an international boycott of French goods. In an October 2020 interview with *Al Jazeera* **Macron explained that the caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad were from “free and independent newspapers,” and was “not a government project.”** **Macron said he had “no problem” with Islam, and was only against terrorism and those who promote “radical Islam.”**
- In November 2020, **Amnesty International said that while the response from Macron’s government to Paty’s murder was to proclaim their support for freedom of expression, “they have also doubled down on their perpetual smear campaign against French Muslims, and launched their own attack on freedom of expression.”** In response to the measures taken by Macron’s government, **English-French academic Dr. Myriam François noted that “a failure to distinguish habitual Islamic practices from genuine radicalization has fuelled a culture war” by Macron’s government against French Muslims.** Similarly the French political scientist, Olivier Roy, stated that the government’s focus on “radicalization” is counterproductive, and that “the government comes across as defending the cartoons, instead of defending freedom of expression.”
- In **November 2020, Macron gave Muslim leaders fifteen days to work with the authorities to come up with a “charter of republican values” as part of the government’s efforts to tackle “Islamist separatism.”** A November 2020 *BBC piece* noted that the charter “will state that Islam is a religion and not a political movement, while also prohibiting ‘foreign interference’ in Muslim groups.” The “Imam charter,” which was revealed in January 2021, rejected “instrumentalizing” Islam for political ends and “affirms equality between men and women, while denouncing practices such as female circumcisions, forced marriages or ‘virginity certificates’ for brides.” Further, **article 9 of the charter stated that “denunciations of a so-called State racism” are “slander,” and that such denunciations “feed and exacerbate both anti-Muslim hatred and anti-France hatred.”**
- In response, at least three Muslim groups refused to support the charter, stating, “We believe that certain passages and formulations in the text submitted are likely to weaken the bonds of trust between the Muslims of France and the nation,” and that “some statements are prejudicial to the honour of Muslims, with an accusatory and marginalising tone.” In January 2021, the French Council of Muslim Faith (CFCM) adopted the charter, which included a “framework for Muslim faith leaders to transform Islam in France into an ‘Islam of France.’” In **March 2021, a coalition of civil society organizations urged the European Commission to investigate France at the European Court of Justice over the charter, saying that it “violates Muslims’ right to free speech and religious freedoms.”**
- In December 2020, the French parliament began debating a bill introduced by Macron’s government aimed at tackling “Islamist radicalism” and “separatism.” **The wide-ranging bill, titled Strengthening Republic Values, was approved by Members of Parliament in February 2021 and adopted by**

the National Assembly on July 23, 2021. A November 2020 *BBC* [article](#) noted that the bill includes measures such as “restrictions on home-schooling” and potential imprisonment and a hefty fine for anyone found “threatening, violating or intimidating an elected official or public sector employee.” Other **measures included stricter financial controls on foreign money sent to religious organizations in France and gave authorities the power to “close any places of worship for up to two months in order to stop hate preachers.”** Further, **the bill also extends France’s “neutrality principle,” which prohibits civil servants from wearing religious symbols like the hijab, beyond public sector employees to all private contractors of public services.**

- **French legal scholar Rim-Sarah Alouane described the bill as an “attack” on civil liberties, stating, “I see a blatant attack on freedom of association. This bill has no safeguards of potential abuse from public authorities,” and further noted that “French Muslims are paying the price of the failure of the state to prevent terrorist attacks from happening.”** A March 2021 *NBC News* [piece](#) reported that some French citizens believed “Macron’s focus on Islamic radicalization had reinforced negative religious stereotypes, dividing French Muslims over the bill and their relationship with their nation.” Further, **during the National Assembly’s adoption of the bill, Jean-Luc Mélenchon, the head of the far-left France Unbowed party, stated the bill was a cover for “anti-Muslim” bias. Additionally, many who opposed the bill expressed concern that it would “trample on religious freedom and make all Muslims into potential suspects.”**
- In an October 2020 *Washington Post* piece, Dr. James McAuley [argued](#) that Macron’s actions failed to address “the alienation of French Muslims, especially in France’s exurban ghettos, or banlieues.” He further stated that the government has failed to “commit to measuring the systemic discrimination that fuels so much of the ‘separatism’ it seeks to combat.”
- In January 2021, a coalition of **thirty-six organizations from thirteen countries submitted a twenty-eight-page document to the United Nations Human Rights Commission (UNHRC), calling on the international body to “open formal infringement procedures against France’s government for entrenching Islamophobia and structural discrimination against Muslims.”** The organizations alleged that under Macron’s governance, France’s recent “actions and policies in relation to Muslim communities violated international and European laws.”
- In a 2020 piece for *Al Jazeera*, **Ali Saad, a French sociologic and media critic, described Macron’s actions as not only using Islamophobia for his 2022 election but also distracting from his “own failed policies towards French Muslim citizens which have led to the marginalisation and alienation of an entire community.”** Saad argued that by focusing on Islam as a “primary motivator for violent extremism,” and accusing the French Muslim community of failing to “integrate,” Macron has failed to focus on more pressing concerns, such as “job and housing discrimination, police brutality, poverty and everyday racism.” Due to his low approval rating and fear of not being reelected, in an October 2020 piece **Dr. Tarek Cherkaoui argued that Macron has resorted “to diversionary tactics, such as the stigmatization of the Muslim minority.”**
- In February 2021, Frédérique Vidal, the French Minister of Higher Education and Research, [declared](#) her intention to order the National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS) to **mount an investigation into “Islamogauchism” or “Islam-leftism” in the country’s universities. Vidal had indicated in an interview with CNews that “Islam-leftism is plaguing the entire society.”**
- Dr. Philippe Marlière, a Professor of French and European Politics at University College London, [argued](#) that the term “Islam-leftism” is “reminiscent of the anti-semitic ‘Judeo-Bolshevism’ slur of the 1930s which blamed [the spread of communism on Jews.](#)” In a March 2021 *Al Jazeera* piece, Ali Saad [stated](#) that

the government's "Islamism" accusations threatened academic freedom, noting that such claims "aim to whip up public hatred against the left – a traditionally secular force – by linking it to 'Islamism,' the eternal bogeyman in French society." Further, Saad also described the actions of Macron and his government as a "witch-hunt" comparable to the "one in the United States led by Senator Joseph McCarthy in the 1950s."

- In response to Vidal's statement, which won her approval from the far-right National Rally, the **Conference of University Presidents (CPU) dismissed "Islamism" as a "pseudo-concept which belongs to the gutter press and far-right rhetoric."** Further, the CNRS itself maintained that the word "Islamism" had no scientific grounds. **Experts also noted that Vidal's targeting of academics was reminiscent of Macron's own June 2020 statements following mass protests against systemic racism in France.** Macron had declared that "the academic world, looking for a niche, is guilty of having encouraged the racialisation of socio-economic issues. The outcome of this can only be a secessionist one. It boils down to breaking down the Republic."
- In a November 2020 piece for the *Financial Times*, **Macron claimed that there were "districts where small girls aged three or four are wearing a full veil, separated from boys, and, from a very young age, separated from the rest of society, raised in hatred of France's values," and argued that these areas were "breeding grounds for terrorists in France."** In an April 2021 *Middle East Eye* piece, Nabila Ramdani argued that Macron was spreading "fake news" about France's five millions Muslims and "reproduced despicable tropes with no facts to support them." In March 2021, it was revealed that the *Financial Times* was investigating a complaint about Macron's article, which alleged that the President had issued false and inflammatory statements about Muslims.
- In May 2021, it was reported that **Macron's LREM barred Sara Zemmahi, a French Muslim, from running as an en Marche! candidate in a local election after she was photographed in a hijab for a campaign flyer.** While a May 2021 *Al Jazeera* piece noted that "French law does not prohibit the wearing of the hijab or other religious symbols in images that appear on campaign fliers," the head of LREM stated that "Wearing ostentatious religious symbols on a campaign document is not compatible with the values of LREM."