



[French President Macron is Widely Criticized for His Remarks on Islam in the Aftermath of the Samuel Paty Killing](#)

French President Emmanuel Macron has faced major backlash after he made insensitive comments toward Islam while attempting to defend France's commitment to secularism. Earlier this month, Macron described Islam as a "religion in crisis," and doubled down in the aftermath of the killing of Samuel Paty, a French teacher who was beheaded after showing caricatures of the Prophet Mohammed during a class on freedom of expression. Macron said France would "never give up" its cartoons, despite the offense they may cause to certain communities. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan questioned Macron's mental health in response, and multiple Arab countries have begun boycotting French products. The murder of Mr. Paty was the latest example of Islam's strict taboo on creating caricatures of the Prophet Mohammed coming to the fore in French society. Previously, back in 2015, the offices of satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo were attacked after the magazine published cartoons of the Prophet.

France has tried to repeatedly defend its citizens' right to freedom of expression, but Emmanuel Macron's comments about Islam being a religion in crisis has drawn widespread criticism and condemnation from around the world. In the Arab World particularly, several countries have started a boycott of French goods and social media has been flooded with disapproval of Macron. People have also organized street protests outside French diplomatic buildings around the world, and leaders have issued statements condemning Macron's comments. Iran's Foreign Minister Javad Zarif said Macron's comments only fueled extremism, and Pakistan's Foreign Ministry summoned the French Ambassador to express their displeasure. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan called on world leaders to protect Muslims from discrimination in France, and questioned Macron's mental capacity.

In contrast to the reaction in Muslim-majority countries, European Union countries have expressed their solidarity with France, and focused on the killing of Samuel Paty. Leaders in Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands reaffirmed their support for France and its policy of *laïcité*, or state secularism. France has said that restricting freedom of expression to protect a singular community would undermine unity in the country. In an act of defiance, the satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo projected the cartoons shown by Mr. Paty onto buildings in major French cities.

There is a fear that Emmanuel Macron's remarks on Islam could incite a wave of Islamophobia in France. France is home to Western Europe's largest Muslim population, and Macron's comments could lead to ordinary Muslims being seen as a threat for no reason. Macron also said he wanted to tackle "Islamist extremism" in France, and dozens of Muslim organizations in France face dissolution for allegedly being "enemies of the republic," a serious charge that lacks evidence. In the past year, France's Interior Ministry saw a rise of 154% in Islamophobic incidents, which indicates that Islamophobia in France was on the rise even before Macron's comments. In the past, France has been accused of Islamophobia over a ban on the hijab and a legislative proposal to monitor mosques that received funding from abroad. Macron's latest comments are unhelpful in diffusing tensions in France, and may in fact deepen already existing divisions in the country.