

France Arrests 54 People for Offensive Speech Days After Free Speech Rally

Observers warn that government reaction in wake of Charlie Hebdo killings reminiscent of post-9/11 fear campaign

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Dieudonné, the controversial French comic pictured here in 2007, was arrested Wednesday morning for a Facebook post mocking the Charlie Hebdo attack. (Photo: Alexandre Hervaud/cc/flickr)

In the wake of the Charlie Hebdo massacre last week and just days since the historic Paris [unity rally](#) when world leaders stood [shoulder-to-shoulder](#) and declared their support for freedom of speech, French authorities have arrested 54 people on charges of “glorifying” or “defending” terrorism.

The French Justice Ministry said that of those arrested, four are minors and several had already been convicted under special measures for immediate sentencing, *AP* [reports](#). Individuals charged with “inciting terrorism” face a possible 5-year prison term, or up to 7 years for inciting terrorism online. None of those arrested have been linked to the attacks.

Controversial comic Dieudonné was one of those taken into custody Wednesday morning for a Facebook post in which he declared: “Tonight, as far as I’m concerned, I feel like Charlie Coulibaly”—merging the names of the satire magazine and Amedy Coulibaly, the gunman who killed four hostages at a kosher market on Friday.

Since last week’s multiple terrorism [attacks](#) that left 17 people dead, “France ordered prosecutors around the country to crack down on hate speech, anti-Semitism and glorifying terrorism,” *AP* reports.

The irony that the west was rallying to defend a magazine that was attacked for its alleged slander of Islam, while at the same persecuting individuals for voicing their views was not lost on many.

“As pernicious as this arrest and related ‘crackdown’ on some speech obviously is, it provides a critical value: namely, it underscores the utter scam that was this week’s celebration of free speech in the west,” journalist Glenn Greenwald [wrote](#) on Wednesday.

Greenwald went on to question the charge of “defending terrorism” brought against Dieudonné and others. Greenwald continued:

If you want “terrorism defenses” like that to be criminally prosecuted (as opposed to societally shunned), how about those who justify, cheer for and glorify the invasion and destruction of Iraq, with its [“Shock and Awe”](#)

[slogan](#) signifying an intent to terrorize the civilian population into submission and its [monstrous tactics in Fallujah](#)? Or how about the [psychotic calls](#) from a Fox News host, when discussing Muslims radicals, to “kill them ALL.” Why is one view permissible and the other criminally barred – other than because the force of law is being used to control political discourse and one form of terrorism (violence in the Muslim world) is done by, rather than to, the west?

Also Wednesday, Ines Pohl, who runs the German satire magazine *die tageszeitung*, [published](#) an op-ed in *Politico* warning against the exploitation by political leaders in the wake of such an attack or crisis, which in this case is the European right pushing an agenda of closed borders and general ethnocentrism.

“The blood in Paris wasn’t even dry when the first German politician, Alexander Gauland, one of the top candidates from the Alternative für Deutschland party, claimed this killing as a proof that Germany has the right to fear the influence of Muslim culture and that Germans have the right, and the obligation, to defend their Christian heritage,” Pohl writes.

Drawing a line between the current climate since the Paris attacks and the post-9/11 crackdown, Pohl goes on to note that next week the CIA torture reports are to be released in German and adds: “This report is the proof of how a country can be misled when it becomes ruled by fear.”

Torture victim Maher Arar and others shared their reactions to the French crackdown online.

So France arrests Dieudonné 4 hurting the feelings of 70M French but praised publication of Hebdo even if hurts feelings of 1.6B Muslims.

— Maher Arar (@ArarMaher) [January 14, 2015](#)

France has arrested 54 people for offensive speech since Charlie Hebdo killings. In other news, French PM Hollande has outlawed irony.

— Dave Zirin (@EdgeofSports) [January 14, 2015](#)

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