

After murders, France seeks unity

by [Elizabeth Bryant](#) in the [February 4, 2015](#) issue

Heads of state and religious leaders joined millions on the streets of Paris in a January 11 march for free expression and to remember victims of the shootings at the satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo*.

Witnesses and police say two or three masked men shouted “Allahu Akbar” and opened fire during an editorial meeting at the magazine January 7, killing cartoonists and staff members. The men, who described themselves as being from al-Qaeda in Yemen, also killed two police officers, one a Muslim.

[In an attack January 9, an Islamic extremist killed four Jewish men at a kosher supermarket in Paris.]

At the march two days later, high school student Amina Tadjouri clasped a Jewish newspaper as she stood on the edge of the crowd next to a Muslim cleric railing against radical Islam.

“I’m Muslim, and I’m not OK with these killings,” she said. “Jews and Muslims refuse to be enemies. And we refuse to let people be killed for free expression. Everyone should be allowed to say what they want.”

Mainstream Muslims are fearful of a backlash after the shootings; several mosques have already been attacked.

“French Muslims are sick of being stigmatized; we’re tired of being the scapegoats for everything that happens,” said Abdallah Zekri, head of the National Observatory Against Islamophobia, an arm of the French Muslim Council.

France’s far-right National Front party has been surging in popularity amid long-held fears about foreigners and Islam.

Francklin Boulot joined the rally to protest Islam.

“I’m afraid of Islam,” Boulot said. “It wants to destroy our society.”

Such sentiments suggest that the unity on display after the attacks may be crumbling already.

“I hope we are able to turn the page” after the attack, said Franck Fregosi, a researcher on Islam in Europe. “But anti-Muslim sentiment exists in French society, and I fear this drama will make it worse.” —Religion News Service