



NAVACELLE

Focus

A year of criminal justice:

major criminal trials from July 2025 to July 2026

Navacelle looks back at the criminal trials held in France that made headlines for their legal, political, social, or criminal significance.

July 2026

Appeal trial for the murder of Samuel Paty: the judicial reckoning of a national trauma.

On 16 October 2020, Samuel Paty, a history and geography teacher, was stabbed to death and beheaded near his school by an Islamist terrorist of Chechen origin. While the perpetrator of the attack was shot dead by the police shortly afterwards, the appeal proceedings concerned the responsibility of several individuals accused of having participated in the campaign of denunciation that preceded the attack. The stakes of the case extend beyond individual criminal liability and raise broader questions regarding the ability of public institutions to respond to radicalisation, threats to the freedom to teach and the terrorist threat.



Investigation

- 16 October 2020: the National Anti-Terrorism Prosecutor's Office (PNAT) opened an investigation into murder in connection with a terrorist enterprise and terrorist criminal conspiracy following the assassination of Samuel Paty.
- October 2020: anti-terrorism investigating judges were appointed and a judicial investigation was opened to determine the circumstances surrounding the preparation of the attack, as well as any accomplices and support networks that may have assisted the perpetrator.
- Several individuals were placed under formal investigation, including Brahim Chnina, a parent who initiated a campaign against the teacher on social media, and Abdelhakim Sefrioui, an Islamist activist, for their alleged role in the events leading up to the attack.
- The investigation revealed exchanges between Brahim Chnina and Abdoullakh Anzorov in the days preceding the murder, as well as the dissemination of content that contributed to Samuel Paty being singled out as a target.
- May 2023: the judicial investigation was closed and the defendants were committed for trial before the Special Criminal Court and the Juvenile Court, depending on their age at the time of the events.



Trial

November-December 2023: trial of the juvenile defendants before the Paris Juvenile Court.

Conviction for their involvement in the events leading up to the murder of Samuel Paty.

- six secondary school pupils for **false accusation**
- for **criminal conspiracy**, in the case of the youths who helped the terrorist identify the victim in return for payment

November-December 2024: trial of eight adult defendants. Conviction of Brahim Chnina and Abdelhakim Sefrioui.

- Brahim Chnina sentenced 13 years' imprisonment
- Abdelhakim Sefrioui sentenced 15 years' imprisonment

January 26-February 27, 2026: appeal trial before the Paris Special Court of Appeal.



Sentencing

On 2 March 2026

Confirmation of the convictions of Brahim Chnina and Abdelhakim Sefrioui for **terrorist criminal conspiracy**.

- Brahim Chnina: reduction of sentence to 10 years imprisonment.
- Abdelhakim Sefrioui: confirmation of the 15 years prison sentence.



Impacts

- A **landmark case highlighting the challenges posed by online radicalisation, the role of social media in the dissemination of hate campaigns ("digital fatwa"), and the criminal liability of those who instigate them.**
- **Confirmation of the judicial approach according to which a terrorism offence may be established through a decisive causal contribution to a criminal enterprise, even in the absence of physical contact or direct participation in its execution.**
- A **case of major symbolic significance for the protection of the freedom to teach, freedom of expression and republican values in the face of intimidation and radicalisation.**