

POLITICS

## Gabriel Attal, France's new prime minister, says his Jewish ancestry has shaped him

BY RON KAMPEAS    JANUARY 9, 2024



French Minister of National Education and Youth Gabriel Attal talks to media prior an education and youth Ministers Council meeting in the Europa building in Brussels, Nov. 23, 2023. (Thierry Monasse/Getty Images)

([JTA](#)) — France's newest prime minister is getting attention for the two firsts he brings to the job: Gabriel Attal, at 34, is the country's youngest ever prime minister, and its first to be openly gay.

He says another facet of his identity also shapes him: His late father's Jewishness.

Attal's mother raised him and his siblings in her Russian Orthodox Christian faith. But his father, the film producer Yves Attal, was Jewish, born in Paris to Tunisian Jewish and European Jewish parents.

“My father said to me, ‘Perhaps you’re Orthodox but you’ll feel Jewish all your life, mainly because you’ll suffer antisemitism because of your name,’” Attal told Liberation in 2019. Attal is a common North African Jewish name and would be recognized as such in France, where there are large populations of Tunisian and Algerian Jews.

Attal told Le Monde last year that he is “not a stranger to transcendence” and still celebrates Orthodox Easter, but he no longer considers himself a religious believer in part because his father, who had relatives deported during the Holocaust, would tell him, “God died at Auschwitz.”

Attal was named on an antisemitic poster displayed at a Paris protest during the pandemic. A government spokesperson at the time, he decried “absolutely abject comparisons” between Nazi persecution and public health measures, a theme of anti-vaccine protests.

A rising star in President Emmanuel Macron’s center-right Renaissance party, Attal was education minister until Tuesday morning, when Macron selected him to replace Elisabeth Borne as prime minister. Borne resigned over differences with Macron over immigration after Macron backed legislation that made it easier to deport foreigners in France.

Borne also derives a Jewish identity from her late father, a Holocaust survivor who died by suicide.

The previous youngest prime minister is Laurent Fabius, a Socialist who was 37 when he started his two-year stint in 1984. Fabius was born to Jewish parents who converted to Roman Catholicism and raised him in that religion.