Switzerland to ban wearing of burqa and niqab in public places

From the [Deutsche Welle](#)

Switzerland will follow France, Belgium and Austria after narrowly voting in a referendum to ban women from wearing the burqa or niqab in public spaces.

Just over 51% of Swiss voters cast their ballots in favour of the initiative to ban people from covering their face completely on the street, in shops and restaurants. Full facial veils will still be allowed to be worn inside places of prayer and for "native customs", such as carnival.

Face coverings worn for health and safety reasons are also exempt from the ban, meaning face masks worn because of the Covid-19 pandemic will not be affected by the new law.

Muslim groups have criticised the ban. "This is clearly an attack against the Muslim community in Switzerland. What is aimed here is to stigmatise and marginalise Muslims even more," said Ines Al Shikh, a member of Les Foulards Violets, a Muslim feminist collective.

An alliance of hoteliers and tourism professionals from the Berne and Geneva regions also opposed the ban on the basis that it would reduce the number of visitors from Arab countries.

Supporters of the ban argue that it also intended to stop violent street protesters and football hooligans wearing masks, and that the referendum text does not explicitly mention Islam or the words "niqab" or "burqa". Their campaign, however, framed the referendum as a verdict on the role of

Islam in public life.

The initiative behind the referendum was launched in 2016 by the Egerkingen Committee, an association that also successfully pushed for a vote to ban the building of new minarets in 2009, and which has links to the populist rightwing Swiss People's party. Campaign ads it paid for showed a woman wearing a niqab and sunglasses alongside the slogan: "Stop extremism! Yes to the veil ban."

Jean-Luc Addor from the party said that "fortunately" there are not many burqa-wearing women in Switzerland. He stressed that "when a problem exists, we deal with it before it gets out of control."