

Dutch Parliament approves limited ban on burqa, niqab

Only a few hundred women in the Netherlands wear face-covering veils, studies suggest.

by [Raf Casert](#) in the [August 1, 2018](#) issue



A woman in front of the Supreme Court in the Hague, the Netherlands. [Some rights reserved](#) by [Patrick Rasenberg](#).

The Netherlands has approved a limited ban on “face-covering clothing” in public places, including Islamic veils and robes such as the burqa and niqab—but not the hijab, which covers only the hair. Firebrand politician Geert Wilders had pushed for the ban for over a decade.

Parliament’s upper chamber gave the final approval in a vote June 26.

Wilders’s far-right Party for Freedom claimed the development as a major victory, and Sen. Marjolein Faber-van de Klashorst called it “a historical day because this is the first step to de-Islamize the Netherlands.”

Building on Wilders’s anti-Islam rhetoric, she said, “This is the first step and the next step is to close all the mosques in the Netherlands.”

The Dutch law is described by the government as “religion-neutral” and does not go as far as more extensive bans in neighboring countries such as France and Belgium. It applies on public transportation and in government buildings, educational institutions, and health facilities.

Successive Dutch governments have sought to ban niqabs, which cover most of the face but still show the eyes, and burqas, which cover the face and body—even though studies suggest that only a few hundred women in the Netherlands wear the garments. The ban also covers ski masks and full-face helmets.

The government said people still have freedom in how to dress except in education and health-related situations. The ban does not apply to public streets, although police may ask an individual to remove face-covering clothing for identification.

“This is actually virtually a complete ban because the only spaces that are still available for women [who wear face-covering clothing] are the street and the private sector,” said Annelies Moors, professor of anthropology and sociology at the University of Amsterdam. “And, of course, the private sector can also have their house rules, they could also possibly legislate against their presence.”

Ruard Ganzevoort, a senator in the Green Party, criticized how the measure restricts access to activities such as swimming in a public pool.

“It is completely disproportionate and the only effect will be that many of these women will stay at home even more,” Ganzevoort said. “They will not have an opportunity to go to school.” —Associated Press

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