

# Why the Dutch 'Burqa Ban' is a Good Thing

On Tuesday, the Netherlands joined a growing number of [European nations](#) to issue what is referred to as a "Burqa Ban"—a ban on clothing that covers all or part of the face. Various efforts to implement these bans have been met with criticism because of their effect on Muslims who choose to wear either a burqa or niqab. Concerns over national security, individual rights, religious liberty, and extremism have been raised by people on all sides of the debate. Below I argue for why the ban is reasonable. Once you've read it, [check here](#) for the arguments against the ban.

"The visibility of the face is one of the elementary conditions of sociability, of this mutual awareness that is prior to and conditions any declaration of rights," writes [Pierre Manent](#). "To present visibly one's refusal to be seen is an ongoing aggression against human coexistence."

He has a point. Eye contact and facial expressions are an essential piece of inter-personal communication, and the inability to see someone's face while interacting with them makes it difficult to establish trust. Especially in western cultures, people tend to look [between and just below](#) a person's eyes to determine their identity, gender, and emotions. If all or some of a person's face is covered, it is much more difficult to discern if they are hostile, friendly, confused, upset, or afraid. Manent argues that the burqa is inadmissible, not only because it affects only women, thus resulting in inequality, but also because it goes against a basic element of human interaction in the western world. Integration cannot be achieved while a person is actively rejecting a culture's values and customs.

The argument that the Netherlands' recent ban on clothing that conceals most or all of a person's face, including the burqa

and niqab, in most public space is a violation of individual rights and religious freedom is overstated. Granted, anything that limits free practice of religion should be approached very carefully and taken seriously as a potential threat to liberty, but it is also important to acknowledge that living in a free society often means accepting certain requirements and limitations.

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Such limitations are not unheard of in the west, even as we uphold values of liberty and diversity. Take, for example, the fact that polygamy is illegal in the US, even though it is an acceptable or encouraged practice in some religions. When George Reynolds, a practicing polygamist, challenged anti-bigamy laws in 1879, the Supreme Court [held](#) that Reynolds could not be prevented from holding such beliefs, but could be prevented from acting on them.

Similarly, most of Europe, including the Netherlands, has laws regulating the practice of ritual animal slaughter. Though it is legal, there are certain requirements that must be met in order for it to be practiced. If prevention of animal cruelty is a reasonable cause for regulating certain religious practices, why shouldn't national security concerns be seen as equally pressing?

The Dutch ban is limited to certain public spaces where the inability to see someone's face creates potential security concerns. If the ban applied exclusively to religious garb, then a case could be made that it is religious discrimination. However, the ban applies to all clothing that obscures a person's face, whether worn for religious purposes or not. With an [increase](#) in the number of deadly terrorist attacks in Europe in recent years, these security measures are simply common sense.

Ideally, such a ban would not be needed, but given the security situation in Europe, a limited ban is a reasonable and necessary step for the safety of Dutch citizens. The Netherlands has gone about this ban in the best way possible, taking steps to protect religious freedom by limiting the ban to select situations, while implementing necessary laws for the sake of their people's safety.

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