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Northeastern canton of St Gallen bans face veils in what critics call an Islamophobic move.

Al Jazeera (23.09.2018) - <https://bit.ly/2DmnWdQ> - The Swiss region of St Gallen has voted in favour of a "burqa ban", prohibiting all face-covering garments in public spaces, a decision that a local Islamic organisation has termed "Islamophobic".

In a referendum on Sunday in the northeastern canton of St Gallen, nearly 67 percent of voters approved the ban, the second region in Switzerland to do so after Ticino two years ago.

Three other Swiss cantons - Zurich, Solothurn and Glarus - have rejected introducing such bans in recent years.

The referendum was held after local parties, Green Party and Young Socialists, demanded a vote following the passage of a law in St Gallen parliament last year.

That law stated that "any person who renders themselves unrecognisable by covering their face in a public space, and thus endangers public security or social and religious peace will be fined".

Drafted following an uproar in the canton over a girl who wore a face veil to school, the law, critics said, does not define when a woman wearing veil constitutes a danger. They also warn of arbitrary sanctions.

The Islamic Central Council of Switzerland slammed the ban as "Islamophobic". Other opponents argued the ban was "useless" since very few women wear "burqas" or other face-covering veils in St Gallen.

National referendum

Last year, the Swiss government opposed a nationwide "burqa ban", saying it should be up to the regions to determine if such measures were appropriate.

A national referendum on the issue is expected next year after the right-wing Swiss People's Party gathered 100,000 signatures required to put any subject to vote under Switzerland's famous direct democratic system.

In 2009, Switzerland banned the construction of minarets at mosques in a similar referendum, attracting worldwide attention.

Earlier this year, a survey by two Swiss papers found that an emphatic 76 percent of respondents favoured a ban on face veils, while 20 percent opposed it.

Several other European countries including Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, France and the Netherlands have introduced full or partial bans on face veils and head coverings in recent years.