

HALAL MEAT BANS

IMPACT: Halal is a Quranic term used to indicate what is lawful or permitted for Muslims. It refers to the requirements that Muslims must adhere to in their daily lives, including in their consumption of food and drink. Far-right political parties in Europe have begun to pass legislation that restricts the ability of Muslims to produce and consume halal meat, depicting halal slaughter as a form of resistance to cultural integration.

- According to Oxford Islamic Studies Online, the term **halal** describes what is permissible in Islam. Although a halal lifestyle concerns a number of industries, ranging from finance to cosmetics, the **word “halal” on its own typically refers to Islamic dietary laws, particularly the preparation of meat.**
- **In order for meat to be halal, it must meet several requirements.** The animal being slaughtered must be healthy. The butcher, who must be Muslim, must say a blessing for the animal, turn the animal’s head to face Mecca, and slaughter the animal with a quick cut to the throat. The butcher must then drain all the blood from the carcass. The Jewish religious community engages in a similar practice, referring to ritual slaughter as kosher.
- **Halal certification varies from country to country and the certification process varies depending on who is performing the service.** For example, in Australia individual products, production facilities, and retail premises can individually be certified. A 2016 report produced by *Reuters* estimated that the **global market for halal-certified food and beverage products is worth \$415 billion.** The largest exporters of halal food to the Organization of Islamic Countries (made up of 57 Muslim-majority countries) are Brazil, India, Argentina, Russia, and France, and the largest importers of halal food are Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, the UAE, Indonesia, and France. **The market for halal food is worth \$1.9 billion in the U.S. and \$30 billion in Europe.**
- Governments in Europe and the United States have regulations in place requiring animals to be stunned before slaughter so they do not feel any pain. However, the U.S. and most European countries exempt ritual slaughter.
- Kosher meat cannot be pre-stunned, because the animal must be in perfect health when it is slaughtered. **Some Muslim authorities reject the practice of pre-stunning for the same reason; however, many Muslims and halal-certified butchers use methods of pre-cut stunning that do not permanently injure the animal.** In 2012 the UK Food Standards Agency found that over 80% of animals slaughtered for religious purposes underwent pre-stunning. In 2004, data from Meat Hygiene Service estimated that around 90% of halal slaughter in the U.K. used pre-stunning.
- According to a report on religious slaughter in Europe by the Library of Congress, **Sweden, Norway, Iceland, Denmark, and Slovenia provide no religious exceptions to pre-cut stunning, effectively banning all kosher and some halal meat production.** Switzerland and Liechtenstein only exempt poultry from pre-cut stunning. Furthermore, **Finland mandates concurrent sedation for ritual slaughter, which is forbidden by the rules for kosher slaughter.**
- A 2019 *New York Times* piece noted that **animal rights activists and right-wing groups have teamed up to propose legislation abolishing religious exemptions for pre-cut stunning.** Animal rights activists claim that slaughter without pre-cut stunning is inhumane, while right-wing figures claim that such laws fight the “Islamization” of Europe. Jewish and Muslim religious leaders argue that ritual slaughter is quick and painless and that the requirements are centered on treating animals well.

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- In **2019, the Wallonian and Flemish regions of Belgium** voted to ban the slaughter of an animal without pre-cut stunning. The law was proposed by **Ben Weyts, the government minister for animal welfare and a right-wing Flemish nationalist**. In 2014, Weyts attended the birthday party of a Belgian Nazi collaborator and later far-right politician, drawing criticism. Ann De Greef, a Belgian animal rights advocate, stated that those abiding by kosher and halal standards “want to keep living in the Middle Ages.” **In response, the Conference of European Rabbis, which includes top Jewish leaders from 40 countries, called the new ban an affront to European values and said it ‘put Jewish life at risk.’”**
- The **German far-right party Alternative for Germany (AfD)** has proposed a similar ban. AfD is known for its anti-Muslim policies as it also advocates banning burqas, an Islamic religious garment, and minarets, the tower of the mosque that issues the call to prayer. Alexander Gauland, the AfD leader in the Bundestag, stated that Islam is “always associated with the takeover of the state” and thus the “Islamization of Germany is a danger.”
- **Muslim and Jewish communities have expressed concern about the intentions of halal and kosher meat bans**. In 2019, the president of the European Jewish Congress wrote that the bans were to “make Europe more uncomfortable for Jews.” He also characterized the Belgian ban as the “greatest assault on Jewish religious rights in Belgium since the Nazi occupation.” Similarly, the chairman of the Council of Muslim Organizations said that these bans will “be understood...as a kind of Muslim hate or anti-Muslim sentiment.”
- **Religious leaders recall that Hitler banned kosher meat in 1933 shortly after becoming chancellor of Germany**. The president of the Consistoire Organization of Belgian Jewry asked Belgian lawmakers not to “repeat the Nazis’ acts” in banning slaughter without stunning.
- Such concerns about the future of religious freedom are exacerbated by the other policies advocated by proponents of kosher and halal bans. The **right-wing UK Independence Party (UKIP)** calls for banning slaughter without stunning. UKIP, particularly under its former leader Gerard Batten, adopted an anti-Islam agenda. Batten is known for calling Islam a “death cult,” claiming that it “glorifies death.”
- **French far-right politician Marine Le Pen also supports banning animal slaughter without stunning**. Le Pen ran for president on an anti-Islam and anti-immigration platform, and compared Muslims praying on the streets to “an occupation of territory” similar to that of the “second world war.” She also proposed banning the headscarf from all public places.
- In another attempt to eliminate halal meat options for Muslims, the **mayor of the French city Beaucaire and far-right National Front politician, Julien Sanchez, outlawed providing alternatives to pork in school cafeterias in 2018**. The decision would affect 150 out of the district’s 600 students. **Sanchez stated that he “refuse[s] to assist in the great replacement of pork,” echoing the “great replacement” conspiracy theory** coined by French writer Renaud Camus. It refers to the right-wing conspiracy that white Europeans are being replaced by (mostly Muslim) immigrants. A similar law banning pork alternatives in a town in Burgundy was overturned by a local court for not being “in the best interests of children.”
- Also **in 2018, the far-right Freedom Party of Austria (FPO) proposed in the Austrian state of Lower Austria, a law that would require Jews and Muslims to register with the government if**

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they wanted to purchase kosher or halal food. The Jewish and Muslim communities alike condemned the proposal. *The Washington Post* [reported](#) that **Jewish organizations drew comparisons to the Nazi era**; the American Jewish Committee responded, “Soon with a star on the chest?” and the Viennese Israeli Cultural Community called the proposal an “Aryan paragraph.” The **Islamic Religious Community stated that such a proposal brings back “memories of one of the darkest chapters in recent history.”** Following this backlash, the national chapter of the FPO [stated](#) that such registration “will certainly not take place in Austria.”

- **Laws requiring pre-stun slaughter threaten religious freedom and Muslim and Jewish organizations are challenging these laws in court.** Muslim and Jewish leaders in Belgium [filed](#) lawsuits against the new pieces of legislation earlier this year. Such challenges have proven effective in the past. When Poland passed a law in 2013 requiring stunning, for example, the Polish Jewish and Muslim communities [challenged](#) the law in Poland’s Constitutional Court, which ruled the law unconstitutional.

Bridge Initiative FactSheet