

OCTOBER 2025

AUSTRIAN HIJAB BAN SURVEY: WHAT MUSLIM WOMEN THINK



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THE BRIDGE INITIATIVE



The Bridge Initiative is a multi-year research project on Islamophobia housed in Georgetown University. The Bridge Initiative aims to disseminate original and accessible research, offers engaging analysis and commentary on contemporary issues, and hosts a wide repository of educational resources to inform the general public about **Islamophobia**.

To cite this report: Farid Hafez, Austrian Hijab Ban Survey: What Muslim Women Think, *The Bridge Initiative at Georgetown University's ACMCU*, October 9, 2025.

SUMMARY



JOE KLAMAR/AFP

The Austrian Hijab Ban Survey sheds light on how Muslim women and girls in Austria view the government’s proposed legislation banning the hijab in schools up to the 8th grade. Conducted shortly after the bill’s announcement on 10 September 2025, the survey collected responses from almost 1,000 Muslim women in Austria, offering a rare insight into the voices most directly affected.

The findings are striking: 93% of respondents oppose the ban. The results further challenge claims that the hijab negatively impacts education or personal development, with overwhelming majorities disputing such arguments. Also, Muslim women who do not wear the hijab expressed strong opposition to the law. Politically, most respondents supported the Social Democrats (SPÖ), despite the party’s participation in the coalition pushing the ban, while many also favored smaller parties, but clearly rejected the two most vocal parties supporting the bill, the Conservatives (ÖVP) and the Liberals (NEOS), polling with only 1 percent each.

Overall, the survey highlights both the broad rejection of the hijab ban among Muslim women and the gap between political rhetoric and the lived experiences of Austria’s Muslim community.

INTRODUCTION:

THE AUSTRIAN GOVERNMENT'S NEW ANTI-HIJAB BILL

On 10 September 2025, the Austrian government announced a ban on the Hijab for pupils from 1st to 8th grade. The bill is named “Federal law to strengthen the self-determination of underage girls at schools by introducing a headscarf ban.” Back in 2019, a previous government coalition of the Conservatives (ÖVP) and the far-right Freedom Party (FPÖ) had already implemented a Hijab ban in elementary schools, which was later overturned by the Constitutional Court. This time, a coalition of the ÖVP with the Liberals (NEOS) and the Social Democrats (SPÖ) is attempting once again to introduce such legislation.

The government has framed the ban as an emancipatory measure, claiming it creates a space for Muslim girls to “develop freely.” Arguing that children are not yet “religiously mature” and therefore unable to decide for themselves, the bill denies Muslim girls the right to agency and disregards their own interpretations of the Hijab. Instead, the Hijab is defined solely as a symbol of oppression.

While the previous ÖVP-FPÖ government (2018–2020) had openly declared that its elementary school ban was only the first step toward broader restrictions—extending to middle and high schools, universities, and eventually the public service—the current government has refrained from such statements.

However, a Hijab ban for teachers had already been negotiated in a secret side letter under the last ÖVP–Green government (2020–2024), though it was never implemented due to the Constitutional Court’s ruling.

Given that the FPÖ won the most recent national elections in 2024 and has consistently led in the polls since, its inclusion in a future governing coalition would make further restrictions increasingly likely. Against this backdrop, the government’s current rhetoric about “protecting young girls” should be understood as part of a long-standing trend that risks setting a precedent for future expansion of the ban.

DISCRIMINATION OF MUSLIMS IN AUSTRIA

In 2024, the EU’s Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) released *Being Muslim in the EU – Experiences of Muslims*, a study that surveyed nearly 10,000 Muslim respondents across 13 EU member states and found that Austria had the highest discrimination rate. 71% of Muslim respondents experienced racial discrimination in the five years before the survey. 62% experienced discrimination in the 12 months preceding the survey. Only 6% of Muslims reported discriminatory incidents to authorities, indicating a widespread belief that reporting would not be effective. Muslim women who wear religious clothing, such as headscarves, face even higher levels of discrimination, particularly when looking for work, according to the FRA’s reports. Meanwhile, Austria has failed to implement the EU Anti-Racism Action Plan 2020–2025’s, which calls on member states to develop national action plans (NAPs) against racism, including anti-Muslim racism/Islamophobia.

Instead of tackling the high levels of discrimination against Muslim women, the government frames the new policy as a tool to free Muslim girls from a “symbol of oppression.” The government frames the Hijab as an expression of “honor culture,” thus reframing it as non-religious. It speaks of the “Kinderkopftuch” (children-Hijab), arguing that it was not commanded by religion, rather that it was an “expression of extremist tendencies.” Most importantly, the voices of young Muslim girls are not heard, which is where this survey comes in.

This Survey



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The government's proposal is not based on data and overlooks the voices of those directly affected—Muslim girls. This survey seeks to fill that gap by offering insights into what Muslim women and girls think.

One week after the announcement, I conducted a snap poll to explore how young Muslim girls in Austria perceive the planned Hijab ban. From 17 to 20 September, a total of 1,462 people were surveyed, including 1,280 Muslims (1,052 female and 382 male) and 153 not affiliated with the religion of Islam. For our primary interest, the data of men and non-Muslim women, as well as residents outside of Austria, were excluded, leaving polling data of a total of 926 Muslim female respondents from Austria, who answered all questions and who were considered in this survey.

This is an explorative survey, and the poll does not suggest being representative of all Muslim women in Austria. Rather, it aims to reflect the views of the Muslim women who have actively agreed to answer the poll. The respondents were primarily reached through social media channels, including Instagram and WhatsApp chat groups of various ethnic backgrounds. Hence, the responses to this survey are not to be generalized, but indicative of trends within a community that has been singled out by politicians and whose voices are not heard. As for the age groups, among the 926 Muslim women from Austria who have responded to all questions, 86 respondents were under the age of 14, 146 between 15 and 19, 341 aged between 20 and 30, 203 aged between 31 and 40, 147 between 41 and 65, and three persons above 65.

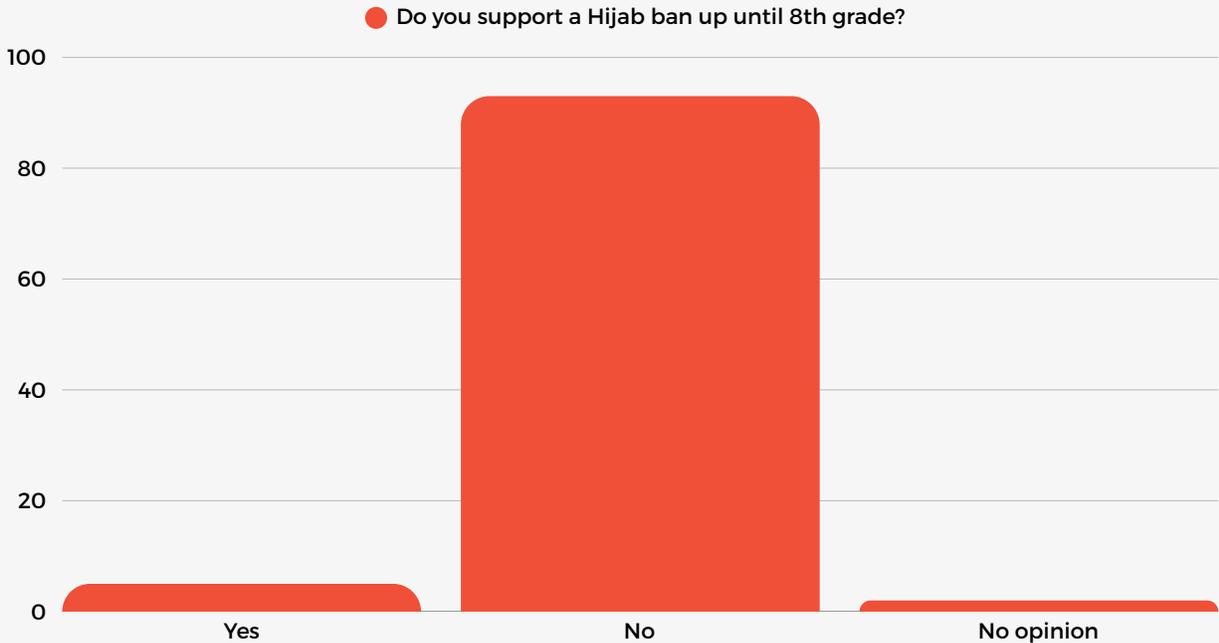
The poll asked Muslim girls whether they support or oppose the ban, whether they accept the government's framing of it as an emancipatory measure, or whether they see it as discriminatory and Islamophobic. This seems especially important given the government's power to define the discourse around the Hijab ban, especially what it stands for, and thus legitimizing the ban. These questions should shed light on whether the government's framing of the Hijab, as well as the Hijab ban, is being shared by the affected community of Muslim girls and women. In addition, the survey captured respondents' political preferences—making this the first large-scale poll in Austria to gather such data from Muslim participants.

Findings

When asked about the Hijab ban bill, an overwhelming majority of 93% of respondents said they do not support the legislation, while only 5% expressed support. 2% had no opinion. Among the respondents, 69% were wearing a Hijab, indicating that even a majority of Muslim women who do not wear the Hijab also reject the proposed ban.

**Q1: DO YOU SUPPORT A HIJAB BAN UP UNTIL 8TH GRADE?
TOTAL NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS. N=926**

Question: Do you support a Hijab ban up until 8th grade?	
Yes	5%
No	93%
No opinion	2%

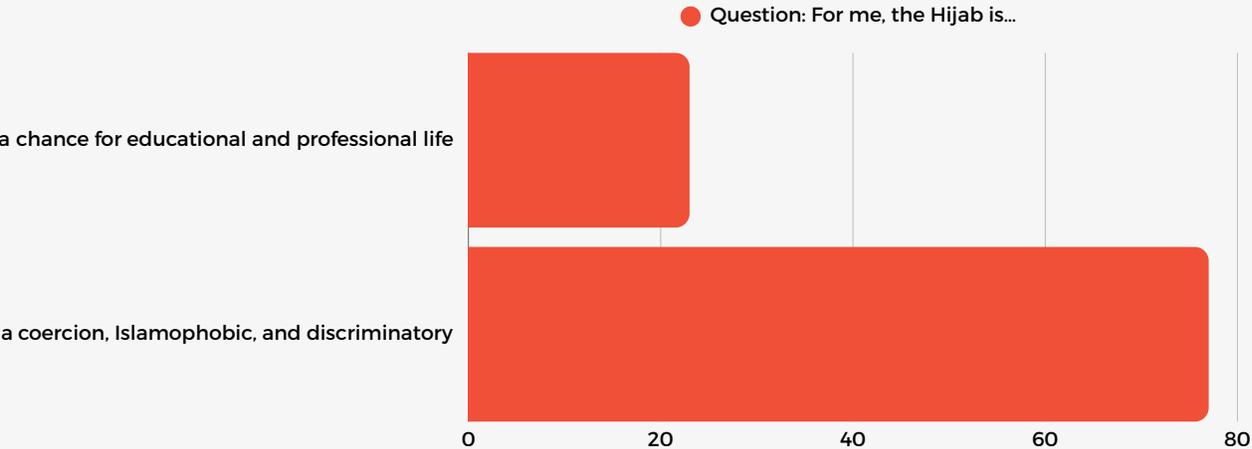


Findings

When asked whether they viewed the Hijab ban as an opportunity for their educational and professional careers, 23% agreed. In contrast, a clear majority of 77% described the ban as “coercive, Islamophobic, and discriminatory.”

Q2: “FOR ME, THE HIJAB BAN IS...” N=926

Question: For me, the Hijab is...	
a chance for educational and professional life	23%
a coercion, Islamophobic, and discriminatory	77%

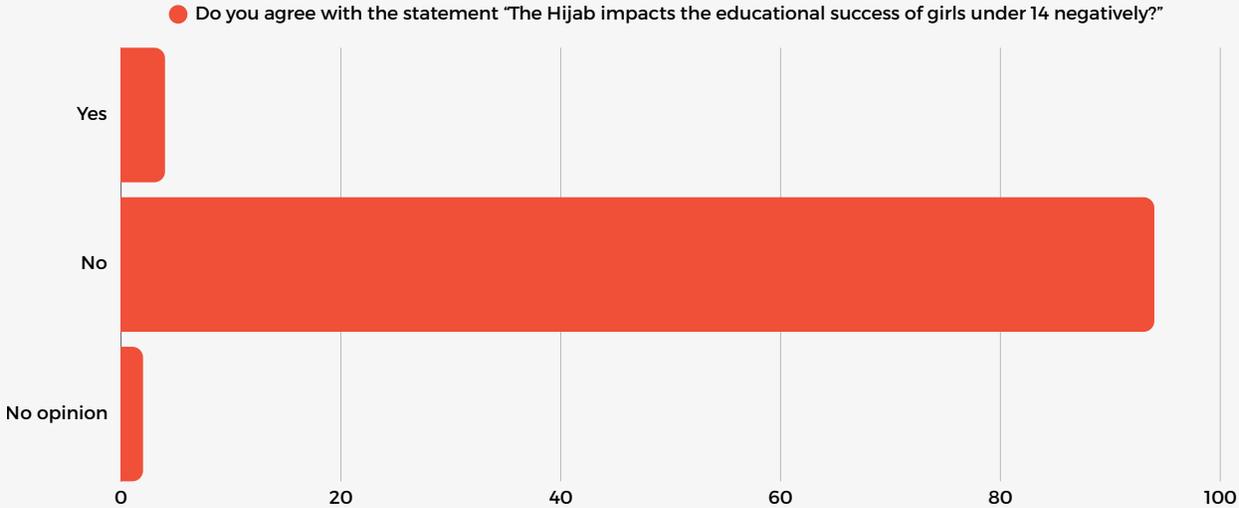


Findings

94% of respondents rejected the statement that “the headscarf negatively affects the educational performance of girls under the age of 14,” while only 3.8% expressed support for it.

Q3: DO YOU AGREE WITH THE STATEMENT “THE HIJAB IMPACTS THE EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS OF GIRLS UNDER 14 NEGATIVELY?” N=926

Do you agree with the statement “The Hijab impacts the educational success of girls under 14 negatively?”	
Yes	4%
No	94%
No opinion	1%

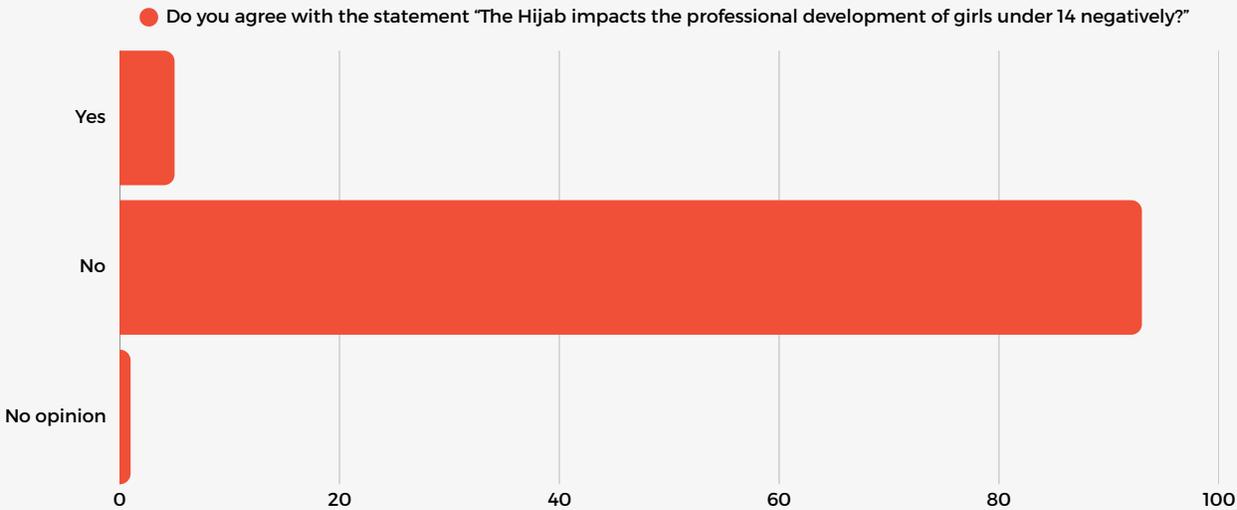


Findings

When asked whether wearing the Hijab has a negative impact on personal development, 93% of respondents disagreed with the statement, while only 5% agreed.

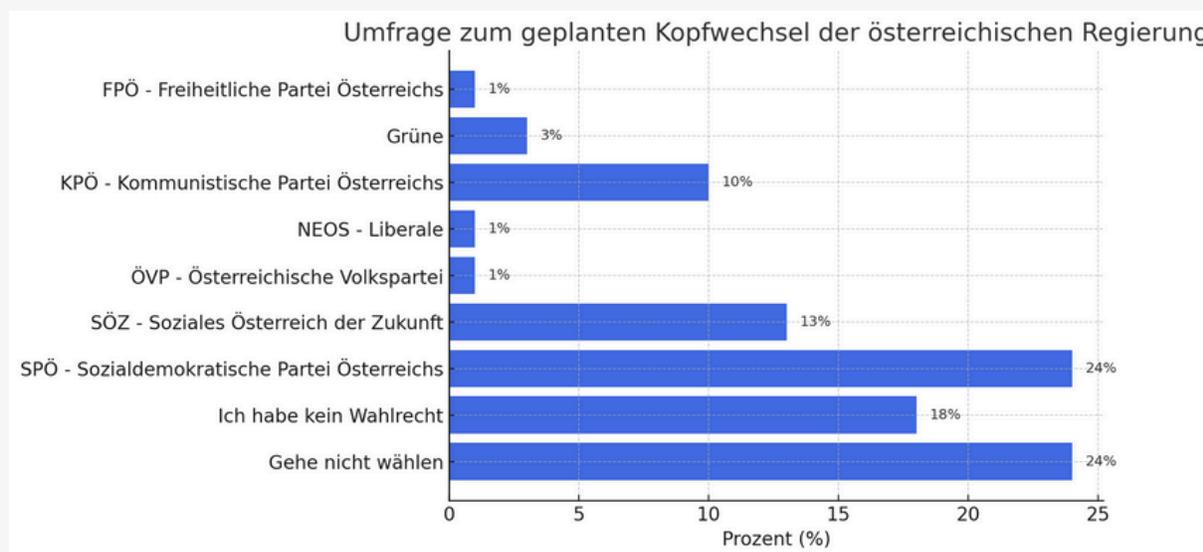
Q4: DO YOU AGREE WITH THE STATEMENT “THE HIJAB IMPACTS THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF GIRLS UNDER 14 NEGATIVELY?” N=926

Do you agree with the statement “The Hijab impacts the professional development of girls under 14 negatively?”	
Yes	5%
No	93%
No opinion	1%



Findings

Q5: IF THE NATIONAL PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS WERE HELD NEXT SUNDAY, I WOULD VOTE FOR THE FOLLOWING PARTY. N=926



When asked about their party preferences, the majority of respondents chose the SPÖ (Social Democratic Party), with 30% support. The second and third largest groups were those who said they do not vote (24%) and those who lack voting rights (18%). Notably, after the SPÖ, the next most favored parties were two that are not even represented in the national parliament: SÖZ (Social Austria of the Future) with 13%, and the KPÖ (Communist Party of Austria) with 10%. Only after these did the parties currently in parliament follow, with the Greens at 3%, and the FPÖ (far-right Freedom Party), the Liberals (NEOS), and the Conservatives (ÖVP) each at just 1%.

What stands out is that while the ÖVP and NEOS have been actively pushing the Hijab ban bill in recent months, the SPÖ—despite being the most supported party among Muslim women—forms part of the coalition that is set to implement the legislation in spring 2026. It is not possible to determine whether the bill has affected party support due to a lack of comparable data. However, it is striking that almost a third of Muslim female voters still back the Social Democrats. Equally noteworthy is the comparatively high support for the KPÖ, a party with limited regional success (holding the mayoralty in Graz and the vice-mayorality in Salzburg), as well as for the SÖZ, which runs only in Vienna and is led primarily by politicians of Turkish origin.

At the same time, the large proportion of respondents who either do not vote or cannot vote—together making up 42%—points to a significant gap in political participation.

This calls for structural solutions to increase voting rights on the one hand. On the other hand, Muslims have to engage more politically to be effectively represented, especially given that overall voter turnout in national elections in Austria are comparatively high, with usually more than 75%.

Conclusion



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The responses demonstrate a strong consistency across the survey, with one exception: opinions on whether the Hijab ban could be seen as an opportunity for educational and professional advancement. On this question, views were more divided than on the others. Nevertheless, the results overwhelmingly show that Muslim women—including those who do not wear the Hijab—reject the ban.

They also reject the rationale advanced by governing parties, overwhelmingly disagreeing with claims that the Hijab harms Muslim girls' academic performance or personal development. This rejection of the bill aligns with the rejection of the political parties driving it—most prominently the Conservatives (ÖVP) and the Liberals (NEOS). However, the same does not hold true for the Social Democrats (SPÖ), who, despite supporting the legislation, continue to command the backing of roughly a third of respondents

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