# Cannes dress code sparks debate over fashion freedom and gender norms



Not for the first time, the Cannes Film Festival—a beacon of glamour and sartorial expression—has imposed a dress code that restricts attendees from embracing bold and daring fashion choices. In a recent statement, festival organisers indicated that various outfits will be off-limits this year, specifically citing a ban on “naked dressing” and oversized garments. According to organisers, the rationale for these restrictions hinges on “decency reasons” and the necessity of maintaining a smooth flow of guests and suitable seating arrangements in the Grand Théâtre Lumière.

The new guidelines encourage more conventional attire, including cocktail or black dresses, with a nod to the increasingly popular dark-coloured pantsuit. Historically, the festival has seen a plethora of extravagant fashion statements, but this year, the rules appear to signal an inclination towards more conservative sartorial choices. In previous years, high-heeled shoes had already been the subject of debate, but now, the stakes seem higher, with a clear directive: elegance is key.

However, just five days into the 12-day festival, it was evident that the memo had not reached every attendee. High-profile figures such as Halle Berry, Eva Longoria, and Heidi Klum made striking entrances in gowns that defied the new restrictions. Berry, a jury member, was seen adorned in a voluminous pink gown by Celia Kritharioti, and while she stated, “I’m not going to break the rules,” her outfit suggested otherwise. Similarly, Klum’s elaborate pink organza gown with a long train drew its share of attention and defiance against the diktat.

The longstanding tradition of provocative and revealing outfits on the Cannes red carpet dates back to at least the 1970s, with iconic moments such as Jane Birkin’s hip-slit gown and Madonna’s daring Jean Paul Gaultier ensemble. This ongoing trend has raised critical discussions about the policing of women’s bodies in the public sphere. As fashion historian Einav Rabinovitch-Fox posits in her work "Dressed for Freedom," while clothing can serve as a medium of social control, it equally provides a form of transgression and empowerment.

Feminist author Natasha Walter, known for her insights into media portrayal of women, critiques the growing trend of nudity on the red carpet, suggesting it enhances objectification and hyper-sexualisation. Nevertheless, she cautions that prohibitive measures may inadvertently reinforce these issues. “Banning it feels counterproductive,” she stated. “It's like school uniforms for girls; the tiniest skirt becomes an act of rebellion.”

The paradox at play is stark: while the festival has few regulations concerning on-screen nudity, it seems at odds to allow artistic expressions of the body within films yet impose strict dress codes on attendees at the events themselves. The very celebration of cinema—and the red carpet's dual role in promoting films—contradicts the notion that bodies express creativity and individualism.

Interestingly, the enforcement of these new guidelines remains ambiguous. Despite the official ban, no punitive measures were levied against those who opted to defy the dress code, leaving many to speculate whether this is another instance of theatrical censorship or simply a misguided attempt to reclaim “good taste.” Furthermore, the focus on what women wear raises critical questions about gender norms in fashion. Walter highlights that limiting their expression can imply that “women are not appreciated for their talent” and must instead resort to more ostentatious means to garner attention.

In the wake of such debates, guests continue to grace the red carpet, navigating the delicate balance between personal expression and institutional expectations. As some attendees embrace more subtle styles, like Bella Hadid’s unexpected choice of modesty over her usual daring looks, the festival presents a telling moment in fashion and feminism—a stage that often reflects broader societal shifts.

Overall, the Cannes Film Festival's recent move reflects not just an internal struggle within the fashion world but an ongoing cultural discourse about autonomy, visibility, and the complex tapestry of gender politics within public arenas.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraphs 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 9
2. Paragraphs 1, 2, 4
3. Paragraphs 3, 4, 7
4. Paragraphs 5, 6
5. Paragraphs 2, 7
6. Paragraphs 2, 8
7. Paragraph 6

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2025/may/16/a-push-towards-the-conservative-cannes-tries-to-ban-oversized-outfits-and-naked-dressing> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2025/may/16/a-push-towards-the-conservative-cannes-tries-to-ban-oversized-outfits-and-naked-dressing> - The Guardian reports that the Cannes Film Festival organizers have imposed a ban on 'naked dressing' and oversized outfits, citing 'decency reasons' and the need to maintain proper guest flow and seating arrangements. Attendees are now encouraged to wear cocktail dresses, black dresses, or dark-colored pantsuits. The new rules apply to evening screenings at the Grand Théâtre Lumière. Despite the ban, some celebrities, including Halle Berry, Eva Longoria, and Heidi Klum, wore gowns with large trains, leading to debates about the festival's conservative shift.
3. <https://www.marieclaire.com/fashion/cannes-red-carpet-dress-code-naked-dress-ban/> - Marie Claire discusses the Cannes Film Festival's controversial update to its red carpet dress code, prohibiting nudity and banning sheer 'naked dresses' and voluminous gowns. The organizers cited 'decency' and the need to prevent disruption in guest flow as reasons behind the change. This move directly affects regular celebrity attendees known for bold, skin-baring fashion choices, sparking backlash from stylists who criticized the rules as patriarchal and regressive. The updated guidelines list modest attire such as cocktail dresses, pantsuits, or a dressy top with black pants as acceptable alternatives.
4. <https://apnews.com/article/598f63831e619b5aa8129daa55ab554d> - Associated Press reports on the Cannes Film Festival's enforcement of its new dress code, which bans nudity and voluminous outfits on the red carpet. Despite the ban, several attendees showcased extravagant ensembles at the event's opening ceremony. Notably, Heidi Klum wore a striking pink-and-white gown with a long train, defying the policy. Bella Hadid opted for a more modest black dress, signaling a shift from her usual bold styles. The policy’s enforcement remains ambiguous, as no actions were taken against those who defied it.
5. <https://www.reuters.com/business/media-telecom/halle-berry-had-change-cannes-red-carpet-dress-last-minute-due-dress-code-2025-05-13/> - Reuters reports that at the 2025 Cannes Film Festival, actress and jury member Halle Berry had to change her planned red carpet outfit due to the festival's newly updated dress code. The revised guidelines prohibit nudity and voluminous attire, including dresses with large trains that could obstruct other guests or complicate theater seating. As a result, Berry could not wear a designer dress by Gupta and had to opt for a less extravagant ensemble. She expressed understanding for the nudity restriction.
6. <https://apnews.com/article/2655d4d76dab30f5bba075b63221cf5c> - Associated Press reports that ahead of its 78th edition, the Cannes Film Festival has reinforced its red carpet dress code by officially prohibiting nudity. This update clarifies previously unwritten norms, stating that full nudity is banned both on the red carpet and within the festival grounds. The policy is intended to align with the festival’s institutional standards and French law, rather than to police fashion overall. The move has garnered attention due to a recent rise in revealing outfits, like those worn by Bianca Censori at the Grammys.
7. <https://www.marieclaire.com/fashion/2025-cannes-film-festival-best-dressed/> - Marie Claire highlights the 2025 Cannes Film Festival's best-dressed stars, noting that despite the newly introduced and restrictive dress code, celebrities have ignited the red carpet with stunning, rule-bending fashion. Bella Hadid wowed in multiple Saint Laurent looks that balanced glamour with compliance, while Angelina Jolie made a highly-anticipated return in a glitter-adorned Brunello Cucinelli gown. Other standout appearances included Zoe Saldaña in Saint Laurent, Angela Bassett in dramatic Burberry, and Halle Berry, who pivoted to a stylish yet compliant Celia Kritharioti dress.