This is the week of the San Fermín fiesta, beginning with “the running of the bulls,” made famous by Ernest Hemingway’s novel, *The Sun Also Rises*, and now attracting about 1,000,000 international tourists to Pamplona, Spain, which has a population of about 200,000. There are various protests at the event. The following is from Spanish, other international, and United States sources deemed reasonably reliable; it can be difficult to get actual, current judicial, legislative and other legal information for other nations. Some articles have explicit, disturbing photos.

Saint Fermín was reputedly an approximate third-century convert to Christianity, who then studied in France, returned to preach in his Pamplona hometown, then returned to France, where he was martyred; relics of his body were returned to Pamplona. However, there is dispute whether he actually lived or is an “apocryphal saint.” [http://www.sanfermin.com/en/party-guide/history/](http://www.sanfermin.com/en/party-guide/history/). (Note this site has comical cartoon depictions of bulls.)

Bullfighting is under a range of European law and Spanish national and local laws:

1) EU law requires respect for both animal welfare and Member States’ laws and customs, and excludes animals killed in cultural or sports events.
2) Spanish law provides for regulation of “tauromachy” as cultural heritage (Law 18/2013), and its laws regulate the conduct of fights.
3) Legal questions can arise because Spain is a decentralized nation, with 17 autonomous communities and 2 autonomous cities, with authority, sometimes shared with the State (i.e., national government), over various issues, and challenges and disputes arise whether a bullfight issue is classified as sport, art, public spectacle, culture or animal welfare.
4) In 2010, for example, Catalan banned fights, but not bull runnings; the Constitutional Court overturned the ban in 2016, ruling that Catalan’s Parliament exceeded its legal authority, where fights are part of Spain’s common cultural heritage. (See [https://www.raco.cat/index.php/RCDP/article/viewFile/327362/417891.](https://www.raco.cat/index.php/RCDP/article/viewFile/327362/417891).) Josep F. Vandellos Alamilla, *The shifting legal landscape of bullfighting in Spain*, LawInSport, October 9, 2018; [https://www.lawinsport.com/topics/articles/item/the-shifting-legal-landscape-of-bullfighting-in-spain.](https://www.lawinsport.com/topics/articles/item/the-shifting-legal-landscape-of-bullfighting-in-spain.) (The article’s footnotes contain links to legal sources.)

The referenced legislation described bullfighting as “cultural heritage worthy of protection,” and was introduced by the then ruling, conservative Popular Party (PP), and included provisions for using public funds to promote and protect
bullfighting and running of the bulls events; there has been criticism of this aspect of the law, in addition to opposition to bullfighting and related events themselves.

The Canary Islands’ regional government in 1991 banned abuse in fights and at local fiestas.

In 2017, the Balearic Islands banned killing in fights and infliction of physical and psychological damage; fights were to have 10-minute maximums. There was some reporting that the Constitutional Court likewise overturned this ban. Valencia, Mallorca and San Sebastián instituted bans; more than 100 Spanish towns have bans.

In March 2018, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, in Concluding Observation 25, urged Spain not to let children attend fights, nor to conduct bullfighting “schools”:
http://docstore.ohchr.org/SelfServices/FilesHandler.ashx?enc=6QkG1d%2fPPRiCAqkhKb7yhsTvWdCiXbcdHJgod%2f48UvVLFjvw69pQaqdk3icKuqRzUXT0u9Jkdgy7484z0GiSTkXAAbmzZQRDft4dHK6kwj%2b88PsBa5U52YlaA437rBzH;

Fights are banned in other nations, including Argentina, Canada, Cuba, Denmark, Italy, the United Kingdom, and the United States (fights where the bull is killed).

In March 2019, Spain’s Supreme Court ruled against torturing bulls at the Toro de la Vega festival, in which bulls are stabbed to death by the crowd.

In April 2019, the Socialist Party (PSOE) had the highest number of seats elected in Spain’s general election. The PP, which introduced the cultural-heritage bill, lost seats, mainly to the right-wing Vox party. Conservative parties ran several bullfighters as candidates, none of whom won. PSOE’s victories are significant, as pro-bullfight initiatives, and challenges to efforts to ban, typically come from conservative parties, while efforts to ban or limit them come from liberal or “left” parties, keeping in mind that Spanish politics, as in many other nations, is more diverse than in the United States regarding the number of viable parties and their representation in national, regional and local bodies. Spain even has an animal rights party, Pacma, founded in 2003 to end bullfighting; Pacma gets some showing in elections.

Socially, hence politically and perhaps eventually legally, data is inconsistent, but appears to show a trend away from bullfighting, certainly in cities and larger
towns, with support for it tending to be in rural areas. Besides the regions and cities and towns with bans, data indicates that in 2008 there were 810 bullfights throughout Spain, but only 368 in 2018. This is questionable, as another source cited 1,553 in 2017, but still down 2.8% from 2016. The disparity might result from what were deemed fights, for example, if they were in large cities or smaller communities, or rural areas, and how data was collected and defined. A 2015 government survey showed only 9.5% regularly attended fights for entertainment, compared with over 30% who attended theater and over 40% who went to museums. A more recent survey indicated only 19% of Spaniards support bullfighting, with 58% opposing.

Regarding the San Fermín festival, it has also been criticized for incidents of rape and other sexual violence, sometimes explained as both being parts of a “macho” culture, and arguably another example of the link between violence toward nonhumans and toward humans. Authorities have improved monitoring of and law enforcement presence at the festival, and resources for women: https://www.npr.org/2019/07/08/739406023/organizers-of-pamplona-bull-run-step-up-efforts-to-address-sexual-assault-concer; https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jul/07/pamplona-bull-run-festival-steps-up-protection-for-women.

Given Spain’s political and, in turn, legal structures, which create situations somewhat comparable to the United States’ states’-rights and local-option scenarios, it will be interesting to see how the Socialist Party’s and Pacma’s progress and, more importantly, changing societal attitudes, will affect bullfighting’s future.