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Azeri Muslims Protest

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BAKU, Azerbaijan — Hundreds of people protested in Azerbaijan on Friday for the right to wear Islamic headscarves in schools, challenging the strictly secular regime.

Around 800 to 1,000 people took part in the demonstration outside the Education Ministry, far more than Azerbaijan's opposition has mustered in recent years to demand reforms. Twelve people were arrested, police said.

Some Islamic communities in mainly Shi'ite Azerbaijan complain of discrimination by a regime analysts say is anxious to stem any challenge from politicized Islam or radicalism as a potential threat to stability.

There is no explicit ban on the wearing of headscarves in schools, but the government this year introduced a standard school uniform that precludes traditional Islamic dress.

(Reuters)

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