

# Kazakhstan police raid another Baptist church

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TARAZ, Kazakhstan (BP)—A police raid on a Baptist worship service in Kazakhstan is the latest reported incident in a long string of religious liberty violations in the Central Asian country.

The raid in early March brought the total to three Baptist churches invaded and fined in the city of Taraz in a seven-week span, [news sources reported](#).

Anti-terrorism police forces have filmed, photographed, fingerprinted and threatened church members, and five people have been levied large fines of one or two months' wages.

Government officials say they are coming after the churches because they are meeting without government permission. Such religious liberty violations are a continuing trend, and Baptists aren't the only ones being targeted, according to [Forum 18 news service](#).

Other incidents in 2019 in the country of 18 million people include:

- Punishment aimed at Muslims who are praying in ways not sanctioned by the state-controlled Muslim Board. In January, a Muslim in the city of Almaty was fined one month's wages for saying the word "amen" aloud.
- A raid on a group of Hare Krishna devotees who met for chants in an apartment in the city of Atyrau. The case was later dropped.

# Deteriorating religious freedom

It's not a new battle for people of faith in Kazakhstan. Religious freedom in the country began deteriorating in late 2011 after the former Soviet satellite's government adopted a restrictive law banning unregistered religious activity, according to the [U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom](#).

Since 2013, the country's treatment of religious freedom has been problematic enough to earn it a Tier 2 spot on the commission's annual report, a designation just below Countries of Particular Concern. In December 2016, amendments to the law increased penalties and controls even more. The newest [report](#) released in December 2018 found the country still holding its place in Tier 2.

Last year, 165 people, organizations and religious communities were prosecuted for the way they exercised their faith, Forum 18 reported. Of these, 139 ended up with some kind of punishment— fines, bans on activity, seizure of materials, jail terms or deportation.

Baptist churches make up part of those statistics. Two Baptists served a few days in jail in 2018 for refusing to pay fines—a stance many Baptists in the country take. Most appeal their fines and refuse to pay them, seeing it as a kind of civil disobedience, according to news reports.

The newest Baptists fined are no different. Four have appealed their fines, but one—a pensioner—has chosen not to appeal.

“Yakov Fot is a pensioner, and he chose not to appeal against his fine,” a fellow Baptist told Forum 18. “We don't pay fines voluntarily, so they'll take the money from his pension.”