



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on April 3, 2013

Georgia Town Requires Every Homeowner to Own a Gun

On Monday evening, the town council in Nelson, Georgia, located about 50 miles north of Atlanta, [passed its Family Protection Ordinance](#) requiring the head of every household to own a gun and the ammunition to feed it. It exempts felons and those with certain disabilities, and it comes without penalties for noncompliance. It was passed to make a statement to local criminals scoping out the place, as well as to government officials looking to push federal restrictions on gun ownership.



When the ordinance was first considered back in March, Nelson was a sleepy little bedroom community famed only for being the birthplace of Claude Akins and not much else. Since then it has become the center of attention in the great gun wars of 2013. Jackie Jarrett, a Nelson city councilman, told AP writer Kate Brumback, "It has really surprised me that we've gotten so much attention, especially since this isn't affecting the world. It's just a small town thing." Duane Cronic, the councilman who proposed the ordinance which was passed unanimously, said he likened the measure to putting up a security sign in the front yard:

Some people have security systems and some people don't, but they put up those signs anyway. I really felt like this ordinance was a security sign for our city. Basically it was a deterrent ordinance to tell potential criminals they might want to go on down the road.

The mayor of Nelson, Mike Haviland, said that their new law "bumps up against the national issue on guns," and expresses the feelings of many of the town's 1,314 residents. [One whose feelings weren't expressed in the law](#), Lamar Kellett, said passing such a law was pointless: "People who want a gun probably already have one. There's been no violent crime in Nelson in the past 10 years, so how are you going to improve [on that]?"

[Some compared](#) Nelson's ordinance to that passed back in 1982 by another small Georgia community, Kennesaw, whose population at the time was barely 5,000. It gained instant national attention, not all of it favorable, when its city council passed a similar law. That ordinance, designed to "protect the safety, security and general welfare of the city and its inhabitants" was mostly symbolic as well, representing a reaction to a law passed in Morton Grove, Illinois, barring its residents from owning guns. Fred Bentley, the Kennesaw lawyer who drafted the law, said at the time that "it was official but we were protesting as much as anything."

It was a reaction to how the national press presented the Morton Grove law, said Robert Jones, president of the Kennesaw Historical Society. Kennesaw residents were outraged not only at the Morton Grove law but also "the slobbering way that the press portrayed the law as taking a stand against 'evil' handguns."

[But something happened in Kennesaw](#) that neither its residents nor the national press expected: Crime fell, precipitously, and has remained low ever since. Home burglaries dropped from 65 the year before the Kennesaw ordinance was passed to 26 the year after, and down to 11 the year after that. Overall



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crime in Kennesaw dropped more than 50 percent between 1982 and 2005. In 2008, Kennesaw, home now to more than 35,000 people, experienced just 31 violent crimes, compared to other similar-sized towns nearby without the law, such as Dalton (127) and Hinesville (188). Craig Graydon, a police lieutenant in Kennesaw for 24 years said, "Firearms are involved in less than 2 percent of the crime around here. If nothing else, the law draws a lot of attention to the importance of crime prevention."

Even those who don't comply with the law in Kennesaw — gun agnostics — are very happy with the law. John Grimm, who works part-time at a gift shop in town, told a reporter from Financial Times, "If someone is going to rob you, they don't know if you have got a gun or not, so they're likely to go somewhere else."

By contrast, Morton Grove [experienced an increase](#) in its crime rate of 15.7 percent the year following its imposition of the gun ban on its citizens, and [today has an overall crime rate](#) higher than five of eight of its nearest cities.

At least two conclusions may safely be drawn from the new ordinance in Nelson, Georgia: The town will continue to get attention as the national debate on gun ownership intensifies, and its crime rate, already low, is likely to decline even further.

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