



Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on August 4, 2023

New Zealand ‘Accidentally’ Releases Names, Addresses, and More of Registered Gun Owners

In New Zealand, a recent data breach made public the private details of certain gun owners, and that was not the first occurrence of such an incident. This serves as a stark reminder of how even the most well-meaning government actions can swiftly transform into nightmarish encroachments on civil liberties.

I’m not suggesting that a “law” establishing a national gun registry could ever reasonably be called “well-meaning.” I’m certain, however, that it would have been sold to New Zealanders as a way of “reducing the number of illegal weapons used in violent crimes.”



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In the wake of the 2019 mass shooting at a Christchurch mosque, New Zealand implemented a string of reforms aimed at averting future tragedies. These encompassed a ban on most semi-automatic firearms and a successful gun buyback program that reclaimed over 50,000 weapons. Additionally, one measure endowed New Zealand’s Firearms Safety Authority (FSA) with the authority to “effectively regulate the legitimate possession and use of firearms.” Essentially, this instated a nationwide “firearms registry” to “establish a link between firearms and license holders, enhancing the ability to trace legally owned firearms in New Zealand,” as explained by Angela Brazier, the Firearms Safety Authority’s executive director.

In a recent incident, a shared email jointly dispatched by the FSA and the Auckland Central Police District reached 147 registered gun owners. This communication pertained to the potential necessity of updating their listed addresses. However, the email addresses were (mistakenly) placed in the CC field, exposing every recipient’s email address. Distressingly, this error inadvertently unveiled not only email addresses but, in many instances, also divulged recipients’ first and last names.

As [reported by the *New Zealand Herald*](#), the publicly disclosed addresses “included [those of] various prominent Auckland residents, including lawyers, company directors, police officers and government officials.”

This incident is neither the first nor the most critical instance of data exposure involving New Zealand gun owners. During the 2019 gun buyback initiative, a government-operated website was established for firearm owners to register their weapons to facilitate their surrender to police. Subsequently, law enforcement conceded that visitors to the site could easily access the personal details of fellow registrants, including their names, addresses, dates of birth, and even bank account particulars. And in a separate episode, in 2022, as many as 400 gun owners’ records were stolen from an abandoned police department after officials neglected to shred the files before relocating operations to a new site.

The same article from the *New Zealand Herald* quotes a spokesman for the New Zealand political party



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ACT as saying that the doxxing of the gun owners' personal information "shows once again that the police are incapable of keeping licensed firearms owners' information secure."

(A relevant inquiry would be whether law enforcement was incapable or *unwilling* to protect that data.)

Here in the United States, registries such as those in New Zealand are prohibited by current law. The [Congressional Research Service reports](#):

Four provisions of current law prohibit a national registry of most, but not all, modern firearms. Two of these prohibitions set limits on the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) principally, while the other two set limits on the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). In 2016, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) found ATF mainly in compliance with its limits, but a May 2021 proposed rule has raised questions anew about ATF record retention. This rule would require gun dealers to retain transaction records for the entirety of their licensed activities, as opposed to the last 20 years of those activities.

It is noteworthy that while registration of "most, but not all, modern firearms" is prohibited by the "law," *every* infringement is prohibited by the supreme law: the U.S. Constitution.

The ATF has a couple of regulations aimed at prohibiting the creation of gun registries, but if the Second Amendment doesn't stop Congress or the courts or the president from encroaching on the right of the people to keep and bear arms, it is doubtful a couple of completely unconstitutional regulations would do much to impede the infringement, either.

Despite such prohibitions on the federal level, gun registries do exist in select states, and support from progressive legislators and advocates is driving the call for broader adoption. Giffords, the gun control advocacy organization named after former Rep. Gabrielle Giffords (D-Ariz.), who survived a near-fatal shooting during her time in office, contends that registries prove effective in curbing illicit gun activity and fostering responsible firearm practices. This sentiment aligns with that of Sen. Cory Booker (D-N.J.), who, during his 2019 presidential campaign, proposed a national licensing system for gun owners.

Yet, gun owners are right to warn that today's registry would evolve into tomorrow's gun confiscation initiative. Additionally, a blueprint such as Booker's necessitates meticulous record-keeping by the federal government to prevent inadvertent arrests — not something that federal law enforcement is adept at doing.

Another hurdle arises from noncompliance, as observed in New Zealand, where according to estimates only a portion of newly prohibited weapons were actually surrendered. Similarly, in neighboring Australia, often upheld as a model of effective gun control, only approximately a fifth of banned firearms are believed to have been relinquished.

Politicians occupying offices created by the Constitution have never hesitated to break their oaths of office and disregard the Second Amendment (and the rest of the Constitution, for that matter), so regardless of regulations or restrictions, it won't be long before some federal agency, no doubt in response to another highly publicized act of violence, will mandate the compiling of a national database of "legal" gun owners. In order to accomplish this constitutionally violative act, the federal agency tasked with creating the catalog would force state and local law-enforcement agencies to gather this information or face forfeiture of federal grants.



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Setting aside the fact that the federal government has no authority whatsoever to dole out money to the states and that the states, by accepting those funds, are complicit in the unconstitutional arrangement, such a registry will eventually be proposed and the people recorded on that registry will likely go through the same doxxing that gun owners in New Zealand experienced, having their names, addresses, and other private and personal information collected and cataloged by the federal government and then “accidentally” released to the public.

States need to learn from the events in New Zealand and preemptively prohibit state and city participation in any forthcoming federal gun registry. This is accomplished through faithful adherence to the counsel given by James Madison in *Federalist* 46 to “refuse to cooperate with officers of the Union” when the government of the union goes beyond the boundaries of its constitutional authority.

Finally, Americans must be reminded that, although in 2013 the U.S. Senate [voted against enforcing it](#), the United States is still a signatory of the United Nations Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), Article 5 of which requires that all countries participating in the treaty “shall establish and maintain a national control system, including a national control list.” This list should “apply the provisions of this Treaty to the broadest range of conventional arms.”

Additionally, Article 12 of the UN’s ATT adds to the record-keeping requirement, mandating that the list include “the quantity, value, model/type, [and] authorized international transfers of conventional arms,” as well as the identity of the “end users” of these items.

All it would take to enforce those provisions in the United States would be the vote of a future Senate to ratify the treaty.

Gun owners in the United States should urge Congress to get the United States out of the United Nations — and to do so *now!*





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