

What the Second Amendment Means to Me

In Mandarin, America is “美国¹”: land of the beautiful. For this beauty, nineteen years ago, my parents, like many others seeking a better life, precariously crossed land and sea to escape tyranny. In totalitarian states such as my family’s birthplace, the People’s Republic of China, the government has no incentive to recognize a constituent’s right to bear arms, given that it enables the selfless opposition of tyranny and a spark of revolution. Coming from a place where any and all complaints are quashed by a ruthless infringement on basic liberties, the Second Amendment is, to my parents, a breath of fresh air. A sense of security has settled into our hearts. No longer do we have to worry about our grandparents being taken advantage of in their own homes while we are helpless an ocean away. No longer do we have to stand unarmed - just waiting to be shot - by oppressive governments who truly need no justification to. No longer are my parents deprived of the extension of their right to own property.

There is no trade-off between the right to bear arms and people’s right to life as others may argue; instead, they complement each other. History proves that without the Second Amendment, all other rights were bound to fall apart as our government would not have the militia and strength it needed protect our rights from being violated. To the thousands who could only hold their families tighter as war and chaos reign around them, the Second Amendment is more than just blessings and prayers. It is a method for them to take control, take matters into their own, capable hands, and take action in the face of suppression when the time calls for it. To create a just system - not just a system.

¹Měi Guó

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This may seem like an issue far away, but it affects each of us; no American can ever enjoy their rights in a safe, protected, environment without this component that enforces laws and locks heinous criminals behind bars. Therefore, no American ought ever criticize the Second Amendment without recognizing how the very luxuries their government provides are derived from the keystone of our nation's constitution. For thousands of citizens who directly or indirectly depend on hunting and the firearm industry to put food on the table to have their fundamental rights violated because a few did not have the proper training and education of the weight and function of a gun is simply preposterous. Simply put, the Second Amendment is a natural right, just as much as the freedom of speech or the liberty to vote. Yes, there can be restrictions on gun ownership in extreme circumstances just as it is unconstitutional for speech to incite or produce imminent lawless action², but that does not deprive the majority their right to bear arms or speak their minds,. To pride ourselves in living in such a pluralistic society - a "land of opportunity" - where equality thrives is to recognize the innate rights of every other participant in this deliberative democracy. At a time where more countries are becoming democratic³ and following the example the spotlight on American hegemony has set worldwide, we simply cannot turn the other way as we are not just defending ourselves, but the trajectory of human rights for millions internationally.

Thus, the Second Amendment is, to me, as the paradoxical child of an immigrant family but at the same time a born and bred American patriot, all of these things: a natural right, a

² Brandenburg v. Ohio 395 U.S. 444 (No. 492)

³ Max Roser, an economist at Oxford University, (2018) - "Democracy". Published online at OurWorldInData.org. Retrieved from: '<https://ourworldindata.org/democracy>' [Online Resource]

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courageous shout in oppressive conditions, and the sense of security I cannot live without in a world that I don't quite belong in.

Not only that, as a student, the Second Amendment is critical to my development as a civically-minded participant in democracy. I am the generation that has grown up with moments of grief and silence for the long list of school shootings of my peers. From the Sandy Hook Elementary School shootings when I was in the third grade and could barely comprehend such tragedies to the Santa Fe High School shootings that happened not an hour from my home my sophomore year when I was already numb to the shock, these tragedies have followed me throughout my educational career, and I, as much as anyone else, think enough is enough. I should not have to go to school fearing for my life everyday, but that does not mean that I should also give up on the valiant fight for my rights either. The debate and defense of guns has taught me to speak out for what I believe in and I believe there shouldn't have to be a trade-off and there doesn't have to be. I believe the culture of violence perpetuated by unreasonable societal expectations and coupled with unchecked security threats is not the fault of any one individual but also shouldn't be the reason for the violation of all of society's rights. Compromise and respectful deliberation are the keys to peace - not shutting down opposing views and alternative standpoints in the name of "political correctness". As a student, I have repeatedly learned open minds and education are the path towards a peaceful balance between governmental infringement and safety. We can bolster security systems to protect those we love so greatly and keep firearms away from those not trained properly, but to shut out all future generations from bringing their unique perspectives to this controversial issue and prematurely revoke their rights is principally inconsistent for what our nation has stood for for over two hundred years, and what I, as a

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scholar, as a first-generation immigrant, and most importantly, as an American, stand for as well.

We ought never fear this debate because the importance of the Second Amendment as the promoter of civic engagement in the partisan, sensationalized country and the cornerstone of the fight for humanity's individual liberties will always prevail.