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The Second Amendment: What Does It Mean?

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There are few topics in contemporary public affairs more divisive than the uncertain language of the Second Amendment and the debates on gun control it ignites. As the issue filters down from the legislative arena to the fodder of pop culture, the facts become warped by paranoid rhetoric, propaganda, and statistical analyses that are skewed to present support for the analyst’s position. Where the specific meaning of a law is unclear, and where experts cannot be relied upon to offer an unbiased interpretation, the most reasonable course of action is to attempt to gauge the intent of the lawmakers—in this case, the Framers of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights—through linguistic analysis and review of their private writings.

Analysis of the Amendment in the greater context of the Constitution as a whole, the recent history at the time it was written, and the beliefs of its creators shows that the greatest Constitutional support lies with those who favor private ownership of firearms. The most compelling question that remains is what restraints, if any, must be placed on that ownership to ensure public safety without compromising the Constitutional rights of citizens.