



The Second Amendment's guarantee of an individual right to bear arms applies to state and local gun control laws, the Supreme Court ruled on Monday in a 5-to-4 decision.

The ruling came almost exactly two years after the court first ruled that the Second Amendment protects an individual right to own guns in *District of Columbia v. Heller*, another 5-to-4 decision.

But the *Heller* case addressed only federal laws; it left open the question of whether Second Amendment rights protect gun owners from overreaching by state and local governments.

Justice Samuel A. Alito Jr., writing for the majority, said that the right to self-defense protected by the Second Amendment is fundamental to the American conception of ordered liberty. Like other provisions of the Bill of Rights that set out such fundamental protections, he said, the Second Amendment must be applied to limit not only federal power but also that of state and local governments.

The ruling is an enormous symbolic victory for supporters of gun rights, but its short-term practical effect is unclear. As in the *Heller* decision, the justices left for another day the question of just what kinds of gun control laws can be reconciled with Second Amendment protection.

Indeed, in more than 200 pages of opinions, the court did not even decide the constitutionality of the two gun control laws that were at issue in the case, from Chicago and Oak Park, Ill. The justices returned the case to the lower courts to decide whether those exceptionally strict laws, which effectively banned the private possession of handguns, can be reconciled with the Second Amendment.

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