**Learning Objective:**

Explain the causes and effects of continuing policy debates about the role of the federal government over time.

**Thematic Focus:**

*Debates fostered by social and political groups about the role of government in American social, political, and economic life shape government policy, institutions, political parties, and the rights of citizens.*

1. Liberalism influenced postwar politics and court decisions, but it came under increasing attack from the left as well as from a resurgent conservative movement.
2. In the 1960s, conservatives challenged liberal laws and court decisions and perceived moral and cultural decline, seeking to limit the role of the federal government and enact more assertive foreign policies.
   1. The assassination of leading candidate Robert F. Kennedy in 1968 left the Democratic Party divided between supporters of Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey and Senator Eugene McCarthy. Humphrey won the nomination, but antiwar demonstrations at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago forced Humphrey to lead a badly divided party into the fall election.
   2. The turmoil within the Democratic Party benefitted former vice president Richard Nixon. Nixon campaigned and won on a promise to restore law and order. He successfully appealed to many middle-class Americans fed up with years of riots and protests.
   3. The Silent Majority was the name given by President Nixon to moderate, mainstream Americans who quietly supported his Vietnam War policies. Members of the Silent Majority believed that the United States was justified in supporting South Vietnam.
   4. Richard Nixon wanted to reduce the size and influence of the federal government. Known as New Federalism, Nixon’s plan called for distributing a portion of federal power to state and local governments. Under a program called revenue sharing, state and local governments could spend their federal dollars however they saw fit, with certain limitations.
   5. Congressional legislation including a bill giving 18-year-olds the right to vote, increasing Social Security benefits and funding for food stamps, establishing the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA), the Clean Air and Water Acts, and the Federal Election Campaign Act were passed against the desire of President Nixon.
3. Public confidence and trust in government’s ability to solve social and economic problems declined in the 1970s in the wake of economic challenges, political scandals, and foreign policy crises.
   1. White House Abuses
      1. In October 1973, Vice President Spiro Agnew resigned after being accused of income tax fraud and having accepted bribes. He was replaced by Congressman Gerald R. Ford.
      2. Nixon was accused of paying almost no income taxes between 1969 and 1972 and of using public funds for improvements to his private residences in California and Florida. The IRS assessed him nearly $500,000 in back taxes.
   2. Watergate Scandal
      1. In June of 1972, members of Richard Nixon’s Committee for the Re-Election of the President (CREEP) broke into the Democratic headquarters at the Watergate apartment complex in Washington D.C. The men were caught while going through files and installing electronic eavesdropping devices.
      2. On June 22, Nixon announced that the administration was in no way involved in the burglary attempt.
      3. Burglar James McCord wrote a letter to a federal judge arguing that high-ranking Republican officials had known in advance about the burglary and that perjury had been committed at the trial. Soon, the head of CREEP and Nixon’s attorney John Deane revealed that they had been involved and that Nixon had been involved in covering up the incident, including the payment of “hush” money to the burglars, destruction of FBI records, forgery of documents, and wiretapping. While John Deane was fired, White House Chiefs of Staff H.R. Haldeman and John Ehrlichman, as well as Attorney General Richard Kleindienst, resigned.
      4. Nixon claimed that he had not personally been involved in the cover-up but refused, on the grounds of executive privilege, to allow investigation of White House documents.
      5. During Senate testimony, it was revealed that President Nixon had recording devices installed in the White House. Prosecutor Archibald Cox obtained a court-ordered subpoena of the tapes. After losing a court case to keep them private, Nixon was forced to hand over the tapes. It soon became known that some of the tapes were missing and that a portion of another had been erased.
      6. In March 1974, Nixon was named a coconspirator in the Watergate cover-up. Nixon released more edited tapes in April which led to calls for his resignation. A court issued a subpoena for 64 more tapes, which Nixon refused to turn over, causing the case to go to the Supreme Court. Before Congress began to debate impeachment, Nixon was ordered by the Supreme Court to release the subpoenaed tapes to the special prosecutor. One of the tapes revealed that Nixon had used the CIA to keep the FBI from investigating the case. Nixon announced his resignation on August 8, 1974, making Gerald Ford become president.
   3. Ford Administration
      1. Gerald Ford pardoned Richard Nixon of all charges early in his presidency.
      2. Saigon, South Vietnam fell to the North Vietnamese in April 1975 after Congress rejected Ford’s request to provide more arms to the South.
      3. As inflation crept up in the 1970s, Ford called for voluntary restraints on spending, which caused the economy to go into decline. Ford called for tax cuts to stimulate business.
   4. Iran Hostage Crisis
      1. In 1978 a revolution forced the shah of Iran to flee the country, replacing him with a religious leader, Ayatollah Khomeini. Because the U.S. had supported the shah with arms and money, the revolutionaries were strongly anti-American, calling the United States the “Great Satan.”
      2. After Carter allowed the exiled shah to come to the United States, some 400 Iranians broke into the U.S. embassy in Tehran, taking the occupants captive. Carter refused to return the shah to Iran to stand trial, but froze Iranian assets in the U.S. and established a trade embargo against Iran. In April 1980, Carter ordered a marine rescue attempt, but it collapsed as helicopters broke down and crashed, killing 8 men.
      3. Carter’s unsuccessful attempts to free the hostages became a symbol of a failed presidency.
   5. Inflation Crisis
      1. During the 1970s, the American economy experienced both an increasing rate of inflation and a slowing of economic growth. Inflation was caused by spending from the Vietnam War, rising energy costs, soaring federal budget deficits, and rising healthcare costs.
      2. This combination of rising inflation and rising unemployment was called stagflation.
      3. In addition to increasing unemployment and inflation, the 1970s was also marked by increasing government spending, increasing interest rates, and spiking gasoline prices due to the 1973 Arab oil embargo and the 1979 revolution in Iran.
   6. Crisis of Confidence
      1. The Iranian hostage crisis and the worsening economy hurt Carter’s approval rating.
      2. In 1979, in what the press called Carter’s “national malaise” speech, he blamed the problems of the United States on a “moral and spiritual crisis” of the American people. By that time, however, many Americans blamed the president for weak and indecisive leadership.
4. The 1970s saw growing clashes between conservatives and liberals over social and cultural issues, the power of the federal government, race, and movements for greater individual rights.
   1. Dismayed at what they perceived to be the excesses of the counterculture, feminism, and the civil rights movement, some Americans were eager to bring the country back to traditional values based on religious principles.
   2. Other Americans were alarmed by the rapidly rising cost of social welfare programs created by the New Deal and Great Society. Conservatives argued that liberal programs were counterproductive in fighting poverty and stimulating economic growth.
   3. The conservative resurgence began in the 1970s at the grassroots level by a variety of groups that focused on single issues such as ending abortion, criticizing affirmative action, emphasizing nuclear families, and opposing the gay rights movement

**Learning Objective:**

Explain the effects of the growth of religious movements over the course of the 20th century.

**Thematic Focus:**

*Creative expression, demographic change, philosophy, religious beliefs, scientific ideas, social mores, and technology shape national, regional, and group cultures in America, and these varying cultures often play a role in shaping government policy and developing economic systems.*

1. New demographic and social developments, along with anxieties over the Cold War, changed U.S. culture and led to significant political and moral debates that sharply divided the nation.
2. The rapid and substantial growth of evangelical Christian churches and organizations was accompanied by greater political and social activism on the part of religious conservatives.
   1. Dismayed at what they perceived to be the excesses of the counterculture, feminism, and the civil rights movement, some Americans were eager to bring the country back to traditional values based on religious principles.
   2. The conservative resurgence began in the 1970s at the grassroots level by a variety of groups that focused on single issues such as ending abortion, criticizing affirmative action, emphasizing nuclear families, and opposing the gay rights movement.
   3. Instrumental in energizing conservatives throughout the 1970s and 1980s were right-wing evangelical Christians. These fundamentalist groups denounced the moral relativism of liberals and believed in a more literal interpretation of the Bible.
   4. Evangelical groups became increasingly political, with pastors such as Billy Graham, Jerry Falwell, and Pat Robertson mobilizing like-minded citizens to support the Republican Party and bring together various conservative groups to form a movement known as the New Right.