

to political fragmentation. Thus, the ideological beliefs based on a liberal-conservative consensus that prevailed during the cold war years shattered, became “polarized” during the late 1960s and early 1970s, and “fragmented” during the post-Vietnam War years.⁴⁴

The events of the 1960s resulted in the growth of the political Left in the United States and an alternative understanding of American society. Anticommunism and McCarthyism had silenced most liberals and leftists by the early 1950s. However, the new Left emerged on the political scene in the late 1950s with the rise of the civil rights movement and grew dramatically as the Vietnam War intensified. Members of the new Left and the counterculture dissented and rebelled against the liberal-conservative ideological and anticommunist consensus of mainstream society, which they held responsible for Vietnam (the new Left will be discussed at greater length in chapter 13).

The rise of the new Left politicized society and pushed it in a liberal direction. **Liberalism** once again began to emphasize the values of freedom and equality that had predominated throughout the 1930s and 1940s under Franklin Roosevelt by rejecting the importance of anticommunism abroad and at home. Liberals were more likely to promote active governmental intervention in the economy and in support of needy individuals. Moreover, the Vietnam War and events of the 1960s prompted most liberals to become supportive of greater individualism in American life. Thus, liberalism became quite distinct from conservatism in the post-Vietnam years.

At the same time, many Americans continued to hold a more conservative understanding of America and the world, emphasizing the threat of communism abroad and the importance of the private market at home—the same values that had once been the basis of the ideological consensus during the cold war. In fact, the late 1970s witnessed the resurgence of conservatism and the Right, best associated with Ronald Reagan, in reaction to the perceived excesses of liberalism and the Left during the 1960s and 1970s. Conservatives were particularly critical of the insufficient concern with the communist threat abroad and the moral decay they believed prevailed at home. These concerns not only account for the rise of conservatism, but the growth of the ultraconservative and political Right as well, including the religious fundamentalist Right.

Thus, cold war dominance of the liberal-conservative consensus was superseded by greater ideological diversity throughout American society. Liberalism and conservatism became increasingly distinct and competed for influence in American society and within the U.S. government. Furthermore, the growth of liberalism was accompanied by the rise of the new Left, while the resurgence of conservatism was accompanied by the growing strength of the political Right. (See essay 11.2 on American liberalism and conservatism.)

The Rise of Foreign Policy Diversity. Increasing ideological diversity paralleled the breakdown of the foreign policy consensus and the development of different foreign policy schools of thought. According to Holsti and Rosenau, three major competing schools of thought in foreign policy have dominated the post-Vietnam War years: cold war internationalism, post-cold war internationalism,

ESSAY 11.2

AMERICAN LIBERALISM AND CONSERVATISM

Most Americans hold beliefs and values that are consistent with liberalism, conservatism, or some mixture of these two broad political ideologies. Yet, there is considerable confusion, especially throughout the mass public, over what the terms “liberalism” and “conservatism” mean. Confusion is understandable given the common roots of liberalism and conservatism and its evolution throughout American history. Therefore, in order to understand the similarities and differences between American liberalism and conservatism, at least five major points must be kept in mind.

First, modern or twentieth-century liberalism and conservatism in the United States share the same historical roots. They are both derived from “classical liberalism,” which developed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Europe. Liberalism arose in reaction to the order and inequality that characterized medieval society and feudalism under the aristocracy and the church. Classical liberals emphasized the importance of individual freedom in economic and political affairs through the promotion of democracy and capitalism and the separation of church and state. These classical liberal ideas, evident in the work of English philosopher John Locke, influenced many of the founding fathers and, hence, the “Declaration of Independence” and the two constitutions of the United States of America. As Alexis de Tocqueville recognized during the 1830s in his classic *Democracy in America*, the United States was a most liberal society, especially in comparison to Europe.

Second, classical liberalism has evolved throughout American history into two modern derivatives developed during the twentieth century: liberalism and conservatism. Modern American liberalism and conservatism share a belief in individual freedom and a preference for a democratic-capitalistic political economy. However, the historical evolution of the American classical liberal tradition has also produced different interpretations and splits on some issues. The first major dispute in this century concerned the role of the government in the economy. The Great Depression convinced many people—who became known as “liberals”—that the government should take a much more active role in regulating and steering the economy. Moreover, they felt that the government should assist the unemployed and the poor, who were frequently victims of the failures and the flaws of the market economy. On the other hand, many people—who became known as “conservatives”—opposed such New Deal policies and preferred a