



Chapter Twenty-two

The Nature of American Democracy

The Growth of Government

- For the first 150 years, the government grew slowly
- The Supreme Court defined government authority narrowly
- Popular opinion supported a limited governmental role
- The political system was designed to limit government

Expanding Federal Action

- Courts have changed their interpretation of the Constitution
- The Bill of Rights has been extended to the states by the doctrine of incorporation
- Citizens can use federal courts to alter state policies
- Business is now regulated
- Broad discretion is granted to administrative agencies

Distribution of Political Resources

- The number of interest groups has grown
- There is easier access to the federal courts
- Through TV and mass protests, information is disseminated more widely and more rapidly
- College education is more common
- Political candidates must present a wider, mass appeal – not dependent on party bosses

The Old System

- Small agenda of political issues
- Importance of states' rights was generally accepted
- The focus of policy debate was domestic
- The presidency was less powerful and Congress protected local constituencies
- Extraordinary powers were exercised only during times of crisis

The New System

- Began in 1930s but did not take its present form until 1970s
- Large policy agenda
- The debate over the legitimacy of government action has ended, except in regard to the First Amendment
- There is a diffusion and decentralization of congressional power
- There is a multiplication of interest groups

The Changing Political Landscape

- Early 1930s: Depression / New Deal
- Mid-1960s: intellectual / political ferment; LBJ election in 1964 – Great Society and War on Poverty
- The 1960s probably had the greater impact, because of the changes in leadership patterns

Consequences of an Activist Government

- Bureaucratization of all organizations—more time is spent managing the organization than creating the programs
- The rise of competing policies and agencies results in diffused accountability and control, and more paperwork

Consequences of an Activist Government

- Less control by the electorate, because parties and turnout have less impact on government programs than do interest groups and lobbies
- As government is held responsible for more, there is a greater risk of government failure and a consequent decline in public confidence

The Influence of Ideas

- There is an assumption that affected groups have a right to participate in policy formation
- More “red tape”—government efficiency and effectiveness is limited
- More recently, this has become a debate about equality of opportunity versus equality of results

The Influence of Ideas

- More decentralized and fragmented government means that there is more opportunity for ideas to surface through debate
- New programs become possible when there is popular support for an idea