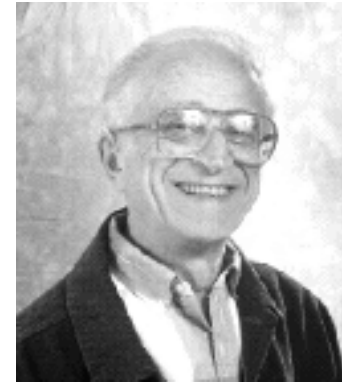


Political system, the system theory

PMCb1006 Political and media systems



The system theory



- Linked to D. Easton
- The ambitions of the system theory
- Reaction to historicism and „hyperfactualism“ of political science
- Behavioral revolution
- A general theory of politics as the ultimate goal of the ST

Roots of the political system theory

- Systéma = the whole in Greek
- Originally in biology
- L. von Bertalanffy – the theory of open systems
- The new meaning of the „system“
- System environment
- Subsystems



Easton and the system theory

- Three key assumptions:
 1. The basic unit of analysis is a political system defined as a “system of behavior”:
 - Partial units are *interactions*
 - Departing from the theory of T. Parsons – interactions linked in a systemic way, the social system
 - The stress put on the dynamics vs. institutionalism

Easton and the system theory

2. Specification of *political* interactions
 - Pol. interaction one of the types of social interactions
 - Orientation on the “*binding or authoritative allocation of values to society*”
 - the political system = a set of interactions, distinguishable from other social interaction, through which the authoritative allocation of values take place
 - Pol. system as an „analytical system“ (vs natural/membership based) – political roles

Easton and the system theory

3. Political system as part of society
 - Functions of the PS – authoritative allocation of values in the *society*
 - Affecting society as the most important part of the environment of the PS – open system
 - Types of the PS environment:
 - *intrasocietal* – economics, environment
 - *extrasocietal* – other political systems, international organizations

Easton and the system theory

- Borders of the political system
 - Delineation of the PS compared to the environment:
 - a) Political roles vs other types of roles
 - b) Specifics of groups “playing” political roles
 - c) Hierarchy of political roles
 - d) Specific mechanisms for selection of the execution of political roles

Functioning of the political systems

- How do political systems survive?
- The necessity to keep the ability to authoritatively allocate values in society under the pressure from the environment
- The feedback between the environment and the political system as a condition for the survival of the political system
- *Persistence through change*

Relationship of the PS and its environment

- *Inputs:*
 - Demands
 - Support
- *Outputs*
- *Feedback*
- „*simplified model of political system*“ – so-called „input – output model“
- The crucial triad: input – **conversion** (the political system, processes) – output
- gigantic communications network into which one kind of information flows and out of which another kind of information emerges

Inputs I.

Demands– aiming at binding decisions by authorities (vs *wants*)

- Two types of demands:
 - *external inputs*– from the PS environment (environmental protection, culture, economics...)
 - *withinputs* – stemming from the evolution within the system, related to polity, not demands *sensu stricto*, e.g. The role of equal representation (electoral districts), constitutional reforms
 - *flesh and blood of politics*, but also pressure – *demand input overload, content stress*, potential threat to the very functioning of the PS

Inputs II.

Support

- Positive and negative attitudes to the PS
- Crucial for the survival of the PS (*stress through the erosion of support*)
- Three objects of support– pol. community, regime, government
 - *Political community*– sense and will to belonging
 - *Regime* – „rules of game“, norms, structures, decision making
 - *Government* –specific decision-makers
 - Not necessarily dependent on each other
- Mechanism of support – outputs reflecting demands, politicization (political socialization, learning of attitudes)

Diffuse and specific support

- **Specific support** – performance of the system base on outputs, authority, effectiveness, instrumental attitudes
- **Diffuse support**– relatively independent on outputs
- Regime, political community, partially authority, less prone to changes
- Allows for tolerance of the system inability to react to demands – crucial for the system survival (community)
- *Trust and legitimacy*
- Sources – political socialization and direct experience

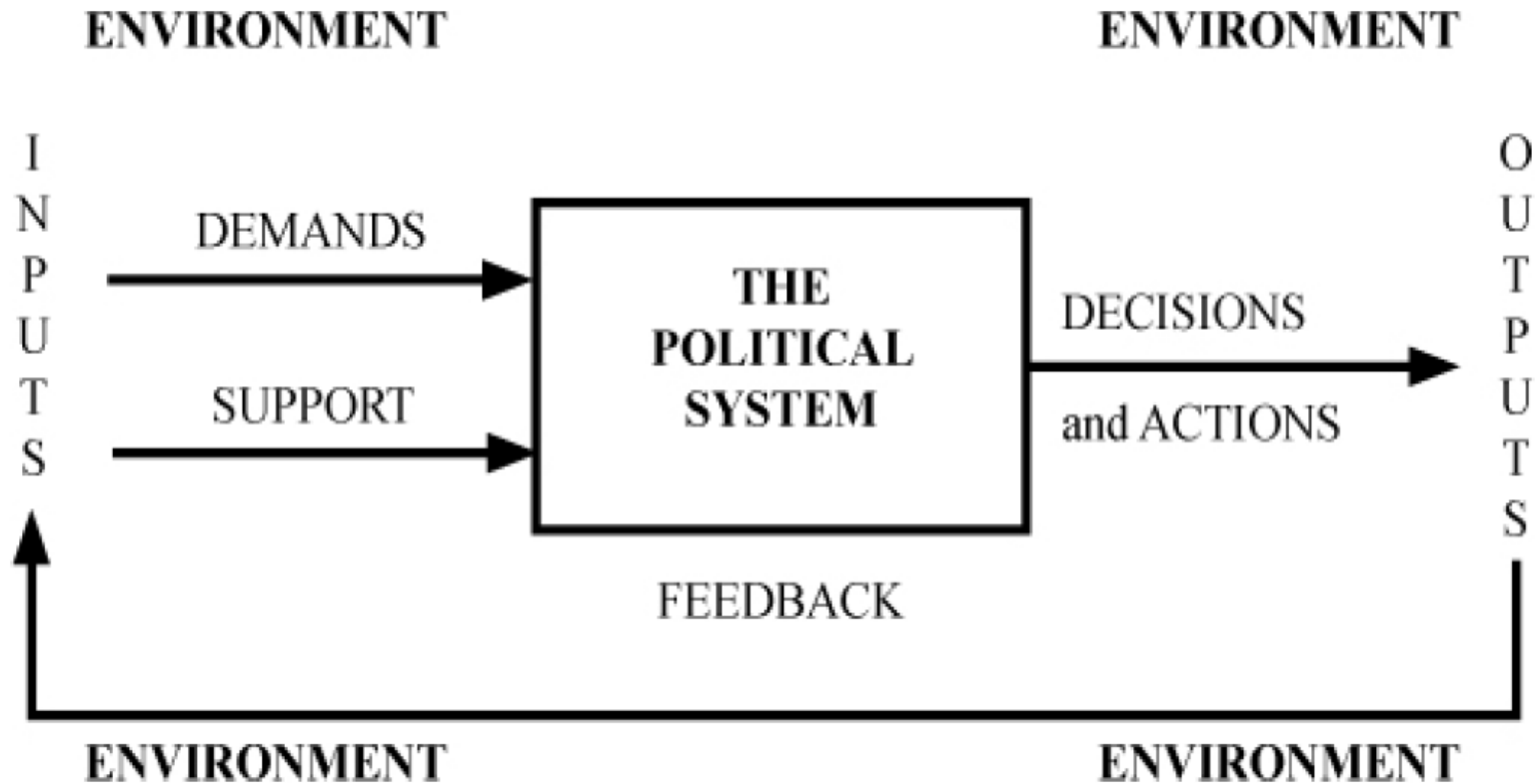
Outputs

- Authoritative allocation of values – decision makers
- Political decisions and their implementation affect the functioning of both the environment and the system itself
- PS reacting to demands
- Types:
- Outputs vs. outcomes
- Authoritative and associated (declarations, reasonings...)

Feedback

- Information about outcomes – from environment to PS
- Crucial for the system survival
- Enable for correction of the future behavior based on the past experience
- Central element of the dynamic theory defined by interactions
- Beginning of new inputs (demands, support) – „never-ending story“

Simplified model of PS (Easton 1957)



Source: based on Easton 1957: 384.

The role of media in PS theory?

- Information flow
- Demands formulation
- Outputs communication
- Support building (news exposure)
- Soft power
- Media as gatekeepers (e.g. news value criterion)
- Systemic changes also as consequence of media changes (political parties, government, pressure groups, political participation)

Summary

- Ambitious and influential
- General theory explaining political functioning of society
- Reaction to institutionalism
- Point of departure for broad empirical research (political participation, political culture, public opinion, political régime changes, policy analysis, electoral behavior ...)
- The role of the media in the theory

Thank you for your attention