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*A critique of David Easton's
Systems Theory*

System theories

- As far as system theory is concerned, the political system - like other systems such as the economic system - represents a subsystem.
- What makes the political system so special is that it is in this system that "authoritative allocation of values" are made or authoritative value assignments are made = decisions that are binding for all.

What is a System

A system is a collection of ELEMENTS that are related to each other by some PATTERN of behaviour and actions

The purpose of a political system is to convert inputs (demands and support) into outputs (decisions)

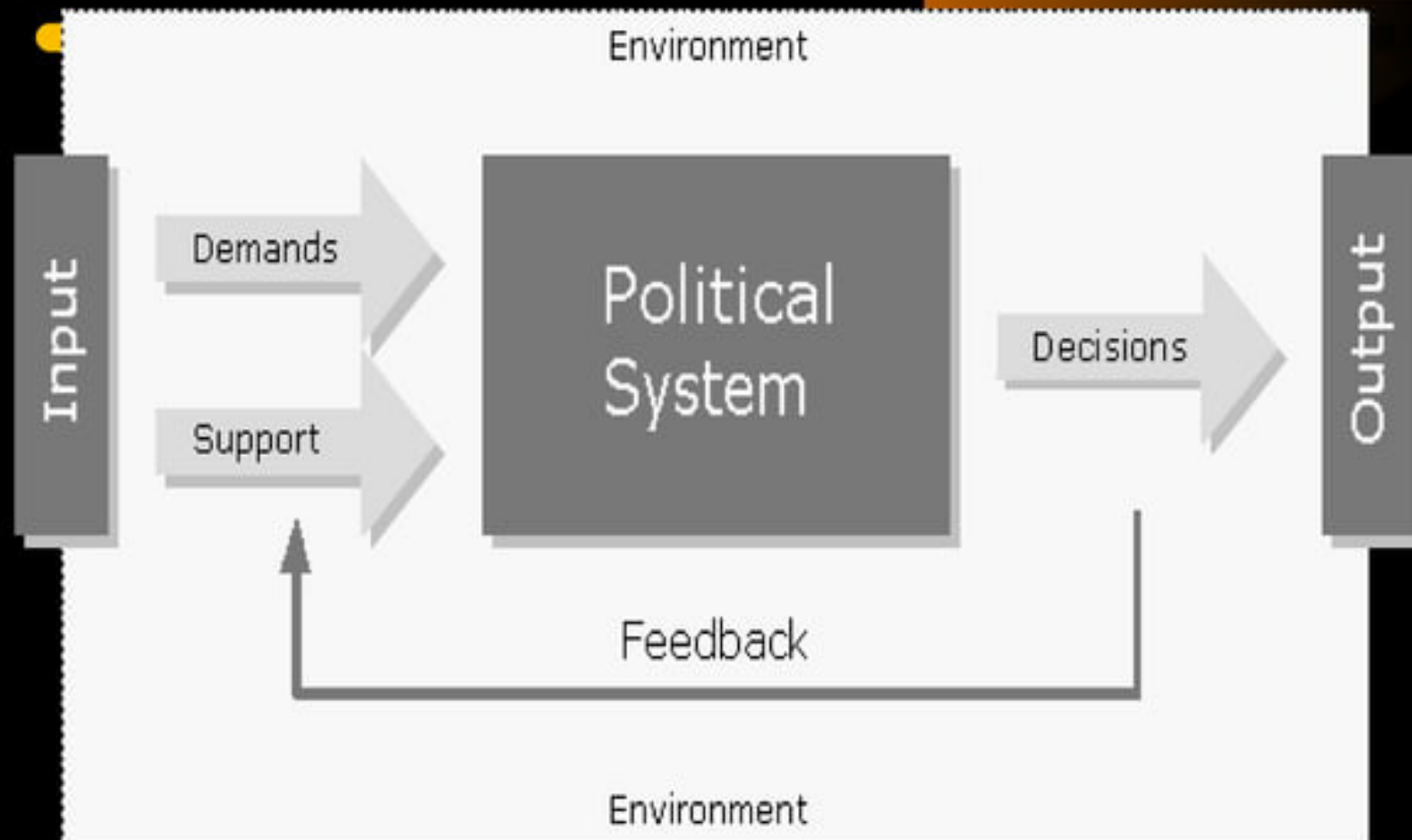
The boundary of the system determines what is system and what is not, that is, what actions are political and what actions are not. Actions that are political are inside the system (endogenous)

The environment depicts all actions and conditions that are not POLITICAL (exogenous)

The Key Assumption

- The key assumption built into this definition is that in every society people have different values such as interests, objectives, desires, resources, and these must be authoritatively allocated or distributed in a conflict situation (scarcity vs. incompatible goals).
- “How is this done” or “how are values distributed,” or in Lasswell’s classic phrase, “Who gets What, When, and How?” becomes the basic question of politics and the main task of any political system.

Teaching politics: political system (Easton)



Inputs

Ways in which average citizens and groups engage in political life

Can support or place demands on the state

Demands have their birth in two sectors of experience: either in the environment of a system or within the system itself.

Support - is fed into the political system in relation to three objects: the community, the regime, and the government.

Examples: Electoral system, political parties,
Interest groups

The Political System

The structure of the political institutions and the values, skills and personalities of the leaders

Filtering of demands by the 'gate-keepers' in the political system in order to avoid systems overload

Common comparison study political systems for instance between Parliamentary systems and Presidential systems

Examples: British system viz a vis the Zambian System

Output

Regulates behaviour and distributes resources through

- Policies
- Plans
- Programmes; and
- Projects

The decisions from the political system addresses political, legal, social and economic aspects of a local, regional and international character (foreign affairs)

Feedback

People find out about public policy and react to it through news, social media, interaction with public interest groups etc

Feedback can either be positive or negative.

Positive feedback signals a need to seek or increase input as well as amplify deviation from a predetermined norm.

Negative feedback indicates the need to cut off or reduce inputs

Environment cont..

Social factors include the demographic, health consciousness and cultural aspects of the external macro-environment.

Technological factors can lower barriers to entry, reduce minimum efficient production levels, and influence outsourcing decisions. Some technological factors include automation, technology incentives and rate of technological change

Critiques of Easton's Model

Easton claims to create a “general theory” but he really succeeded in describing or defining the political system

Black box view of politics

Not clear of how conversion inside the box operates

Assumes politics is ordered and complete

Too mechanical and rigid, not dynamic

Ideologically the system model is too western and applies mainly to mature and stable democracies



The End

Thank You