An effective policy-making apparatus takes the details of the political system into account. Several models exist that describe how the political system works. Four are outlined here.

**Political systems theory**

This model is the most useful in understanding policy-making, as it gives us a good picture of how the separate components interact in the policy-making process and highlights how this interaction can be full of conflict. It can be applied in nearly all types of political and policy-making situations.

**Inputs from the Environment**

- **Demands**: for action from interested parties, often in conflict with each other
- **Supports**: actions taken to support political system, such as obeying laws, paying taxes

**Political System**

- **Officials**: arbitrate among various inputs to decide which societal values should factor into decisions. This arbitration can be very contentious.

**Outputs**

(Urls, Policies)

**Feedback**

As the outputs, or policies, are formulated and implemented, feedback occurs. This feedback alters the environment and creates new demands and supports.

**Other Theories**

**Group theory**

This model says that group struggles determine policy choices. Government officials, particularly the legislature, are arbiters in these struggles.

**Example**

The National Rifle Association often opposes efforts of large and powerful urban groups (such as police departments) who seek stiffer gun-control laws.

**Elite theory**

Members of a ruling class or “elite” establish policy for a society based upon a shared set of values. Shifts in power, and consequently policy, happen incrementally and slowly over decades and even centuries.

**Example**

The ruling elite in the early years of U.S. history, including many framers of the Constitution, valued private enterprise over government involvement in economic affairs. Only gradually was government regulation of business allowed.

**Institutionalism**

This model emphasizes the importance of official systems of governance and politics. It says that particular structural distinctions—that is, prescribed roles and functions, rules of operations, membership guidelines, etc.—between institutions determine specific approaches to policy problems and policy-making.

**Example**

In yearly budget negotiations, Congress members try to protect programs of regional interest, while the president seeks to promote programs that serve the entire country.