Understanding Politics — Chapter 14 Student Practice Pack

Citizens, Political Identity and Populism

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About this pack

This pack follows the practice-chapter template: a text-coding exercise on populist rhetoric and a case that explains one group's vote with competing models. Answers are in the Instructor Pack, available to teaching staff from www.oxterpress.com. Student Pack, Chapter 14, version 1.0 (October 2026). © Oxter Press. CC BY-NC 4.0.

Chapter at a glance

Approach	Why people vote as they do	Key sources
Sociological	Social position shapes political views	Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet (1944)
Psychological	Party identification as group attachment	Campbell et al. (1960); Achen and Bartels (2016)
Rational choice	Voters choose the party offering most benefit	Downs (1957); Popkin (1991); Lupia (1994)
Retrospective	Voters judge past performance	Key (1966); Fiorina (1981)
Clientelist	Support exchanged for benefits	Wantchekon (2003)

Populism is defined by Mudde (2004) as a thin ideology separating 'the pure people' from 'the corrupt elite' and appealing to the general will. Müller (2016) stresses antipluralism; Laclau (2005) treats populism as a logic of mobilisation; Norris and Inglehart (2019) explain its rise as cultural backlash.

Exercise: coding populist rhetoric

Choose three political texts from different parties or leaders: manifesto introductions, conference speeches or campaign launch addresses, each 500–1,500 words. Use official party or government sources.

Code each text on Mudde's three elements, scoring 0 (absent), 1 (present) or 2 (central), and record one short phrase as evidence for each score.

Text	People-centrism	Anti-elitism	Antipluralism / general will	Total (0–6)	Evidence

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Then answer (300–500 words):

1. Did any text score high on anti-elitism but low on antipluralism? What does that show about Müller's definition?
2. Compare your scores with a classmate's. Where did you disagree, and why? (This is a reliability check.)
3. Is populism a property of parties, of leaders or of particular texts?

Case analysis: explaining a vote

Choose one group of voters whose behaviour changed at a recent election, using published election-study or exit-poll findings. Explain the change four ways:

Model	Explanation it offers	Evidence that supports it	Evidence that would refute it
Sociological			
Party identification			
Issue or rational choice			
Retrospective			

Which explanation is strongest, and what single piece of evidence would most change your view?

Self-test

1. The Columbia studies concluded that:
    - A. Voters are purely rational
    - B. A person thinks, politically, as he is socially
    - C. Campaigns decide everything
    - D. Voters follow newspapers
2. *The American Voter* described party identification as:
    - A. A policy calculation
    - B. A habit of turnout
    - C. Membership of a party
    - D. An affective orientation to an important group-object
3. Downs modelled voters as choosing:
    - A. The party whose expected policies benefit them most
    - B. The party of their parents
    - C. At random
    - D. The incumbent always
4. Low-information rationality means voters:

- A. Ignore politics
- B. Are irrational
- C. Use shortcuts such as endorsements and party labels
- D. Know every policy

5. Lupia found that voters with little detail but knowledge of endorsements:
   - A. Voted randomly
   - B. Voted much like well-informed voters
   - C. Abstained
   - D. Followed newspapers
6. Achen and Bartels argue that:
   - A. Social identities drive voting and policy views often follow
   - B. Voters are policy experts
   - C. Elections produce responsive government
   - D. Turnout decides outcomes
7. Key's critical elections produce:
   - A. Higher turnout
   - B. Coalition governments
   - C. New parties only
   - D. Sharp and lasting changes in group–party alignment
8. Wantchekon's Benin experiment found that clientelist messages:
   - A. Always failed
   - B. Were illegal
   - C. Generally attracted more support, with variation
   - D. Had no effect
9. Mudde defines populism as an ideology dividing society into:
   - A. The pure people and the corrupt elite
   - B. Rich and poor
   - C. Left and right
   - D. Nations and empires
10. Müller treats the defining feature of populism as:
    - A. Economic radicalism
    - B. A claim to exclusive moral representation (antipluralism)
    - C. Charismatic leadership
    - D. Use of social media
11. Laclau treats populism as:
    - A. Always authoritarian
    - B. An economic programme
    - C. A logic of political mobilisation
    - D. A party family
12. Norris and Inglehart explain populist support mainly as:
    - A. Economic crisis alone
    - B. Media bias
    - C. Institutional design

- D. Cultural backlash against value change

13. Affective polarisation refers to:
    - A. Growing dislike of opposing partisans
    - B. Policy disagreement
    - C. Media fragmentation
    - D. Voter turnout
14. Issue ownership means parties:
    - A. Own media outlets
    - B. Have reputations for handling particular issues
    - C. Own policies legally
    - D. Avoid issues
15. Motivated scepticism means people:
    - A. Distrust all information
    - B. Ignore politics
    - C. Rate arguments supporting their views as stronger and counter-argue the rest
    - D. Change views easily

Short answers and essays

Short answers: (1) Sociological versus psychological models. (2) Rational choice and its limits. (3) Retrospective voting. (4) Party identification change. (5) Realignment versus dealignment. (6) Clientelist participation. (7) Mudde's definition of populism. (8) Antipluralism. (9) Affective versus ideological polarisation. (10) Unequal participation.

Essays: (1) Are voters rational? (2) Is populism a threat or a corrective to democracy? (3) Are cultural or economic explanations of populism stronger? (4) Does polarisation damage democracy? (5) Does unequal participation make democracy less legitimate? (6) Are identities more important than interests in voting?

Glossary

Term	Definition
Party identification	Durable psychological attachment to a party
Retrospective voting	Judging parties on past performance
Heuristic	A shortcut for decisions under limited information
Realignment	Lasting change in group–party alignment
Dealignment	Weakening of party attachments
Populism	Pure people versus corrupt elite, appeal to the general will
Antipluralism	Claim to represent the whole people exclusively
Affective polarisation	Hostility towards opposing partisans