UNDERSTANDING POLITICS · CHAPTER 14

Citizens, Political Identity and Populism

Why people vote as they do, and what populism is

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OPENING PUZZLE

A voter who changes sides

Before

Voted for the same party for twenty years.

After

Votes for a new anti-establishment party.

Ask: what changed: the voter, the parties or the issues?

FOUR MODELS OF VOTING

Different questions, different evidence

	Explanation	Classic source
Sociological	Social position shapes views	Lazarsfeld et al. (1944)
Psychological	Party identification as attachment	Campbell et al. (1960)
Rational choice	Policy benefit and party competition	Downs (1957)
Retrospective	Judging past performance	Key (1966)
Fiorina (1981)		

PARTY IDENTIFICATION

> *“A person thinks, politically, as he is socially.”*

Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet (1944), p. 27

The American Voter: an ‘affective orientation to an important group-object’.

VOTING WITH LITTLE INFORMATION

Shortcuts can work

Heuristics

Party labels, endorsements and cues (Popkin, 1991).

Evidence

Voters who knew endorsements voted like the informed (Lupia, 1994).

Low information is not the same as irrationality.

RETROSPECTIVE VOTING

Rewarding and punishing governments

The defence

‘Voters are not fools’ (Key, 1966).

The doubt

Voters punish governments for events beyond their control (Achen and Bartels, 2016).

Clarity

Coalitions blur responsibility (Powell and Whitten, 1993).

DEFINING POPULISM

> *“The pure people” versus “the corrupt elite” … politics should be an expression of the volonté générale of the people.*

Mudde (2004), p. 543

The general will: a direct link back to Rousseau in Chapter 3.

WHAT MAKES POPULISM DISTINCTIVE?

Three accounts

Antipluralism

A claim to represent the whole people exclusively (Müller, 2016).

Mobilisation

A logic of constructing a people against power (Laclau, 2005).

Thin ideology

Attaches to left or right programmes (Mudde, 2004).

WHY POPULISM NOW?

Competing explanations

Cultural

Backlash against value change (Norris and Inglehart, 2019).

Economic

Trade, technology and austerity.

Political

Cartelised parties losing social roots (Katz and Mair).

POLARISATION

Distance or dislike?

Ideological

Parties’ policy positions move apart.

Affective

Partisans dislike and distrust each other (Iyengar, Sood and Lelkes, 2012).

Motivated scepticism

People counter-argue unwelcome evidence (Taber and Lodge, 2006).

WHO PARTICIPATES?

Unequal participation

Resources

Time, money and skills (Verba, Schlozman and Brady, 1995).

Recruitment

Networks that ask people to take part.

Clientelism

Participation as exchange (Wantchekon, 2003).

Lijphart (1997): unequal participation is democracy’s unresolved dilemma.

SEMINAR TASK · 30 MINUTES

Code the texts, then compare

1. Pairs code the same two texts independently.
2. Pairs compare scores and identify every disagreement.
3. The class proposes sharper coding rules.

THIS WEEK'S ESSAY

Is populism a threat or a corrective to democracy?

Plan

Define: Mudde, Müller, Laclau.

Test

Corrective claims versus antipluralism in office.

Judge

Where exactly does the danger lie?

1,500 words maximum · Student Pack: essay questions