

AUDIT NEWS

Citizens not Disengaged

Professor Pat Seyd, member of the International Advisory Committee of the Democratic Audit of Australia, has released major new findings that show citizens are not as disengaged as has been assumed in much of the recent literature on western democracies.

Professor Seyd has been co-directing a 'Citizen Audit' of the United Kingdom which has interviewed twice more than 13,000 people in 2000 and 2001. The Audit data shows that over a 12-month period three out of four adult citizens have engaged in one or more political activities, defined as activities designed to influence rules, laws or policies.

Despite declining party memberships and voter turnout, one in two citizens are signing petitions, two in three are donating money to citizens' organisations and around 40 per cent are buying or boycotting goods for political reasons. Even in the year before the massive protests against the Iraq war and in defence of fox hunting, six per cent took part in a public demonstration.

Contrary to the literature on democratic disenchantment Professor Seyd and his colleagues have found a rise in the number of political activities coinciding with an increased confidence in democracy and sense of being able to influence policies.

The Citizen Audit findings are summarized below and more information can be obtained from <http://www.shef.ac.uk/~pol/citizenaudit/>

Acts of political participation

Percentage yes

Donated money to an organisation	67
Voted in a local government election	54
Signed a petition	50
Boycotted certain products	41
Bought certain products for political, ethical or	

environmental reasons	39	
Raised funds for an organisation	32	
Worn or displayed a campaign badge or sticker	28	
Contacted a public official (for example a person from the housing or social security offices)	28	
Contacted a solicitor or judicial body	24	
Contacted a politician (for example, a member of parliament or local councillor)	16	
Contacted an organisation (for example, Shelter or Help the Aged)		12
Contacted the media		11
Attended a political meeting or rally		7
Taken part in a public demonstration		6
Formed a group of like minded people	5	
Taken part in a strike		4
Participated in illegal protest activities	2	
N=13,416		