Portland State University

PDXScholar

7-18-2022

Involving More People in Election Observation with Stephanie Frank Singer

Stephanie Singer
Portland State University, stephanie.singer@pdx.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/pdxplores

Part of the Political Science Commons

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Involving More People in Election Observation with Stephanie Singer

Welcome to PDXPLORES a Portland State research podcast featuring scholarship, innovations, and discoveries pushing the boundaries of knowledge practice and what is possible for the benefit of our communities and the world.

I'm Stephanie Frank Singer. I am a senior fellow at the Center for Public Service. I started my career in academia as a mathematician, and then I went out into the real world and got involved with politics and elections and came to the Hatfield school in 2019 to do a data science project related to election verification.

Professor Benstead and I are interested in election observation and in particular how to motivate people to get involved in election observation. This is in part because we believe that part of keeping free and fair elections in the U.S., and really anywhere in the world, has to do with people getting more involved, has to do with people learning to do direct observation in a constructive way that holds board of election accountable. Dr. Benstead and I are studying election observation. And in particular, how do we motivate people to get more involved in election observation and to do election observation in a really constructive way.

On the one hand election observers are incredibly important for holding boards of election accountable. On the other hand, elections are complex and it's very easy to watch for the first time and see something that you don't expect and that you don't understand that may well be just part of the complex process. So, the more people have repeated routine experience with election observation, the more constructively they can observe and be part of the process of supporting free and fair elections.

So, the goals of the project are to identify some interventions that increase people's interest in election observation. If you show people a video, does that make them more likely to want to get involved with election observation? How about if you actually take them to observe? How about if you take them to observe and you train them first? How about if you show them a video where the person who is talking in the video sounds like someone from their demographic group? What are all the things that make a single intervention stronger for motivating people to get involved in a constructive way?

Part of this project is to take people to observe an election at the Multnomah County Board of Elections. And for that, we will be recruiting students and members of the community. We will be training them first on what to expect as they observe the election and how to respond if they see something they don't understand.

And so, we're really excited to bring people to the board of elections, to observe with their own eyes. We believe that if people go and observe, that will increase their interest in observing. But we don't actually know that's true so we want to study it scientifically.

We also want to understand how racial, gender and other identities come into it. How those categories and identities and how people's experiences, their social economic status, how all those factors affect their willingness to observe elections and how to approach the task of encouraging more people to observe. It's so important that election observation, not just be something for people who have a lot of free time on their hands. Elections belong to everybody and election observation should also belong to everybody.

We hope that this project is only the beginning of a large program of testing all kinds of different ways to get people more interested in election observation and to support them as they learn about election observation. And more generally, we are interested in academic studies that will support free and fair elections here and around the globe.

I'm Stephanie Frank Singer. I work in data science and political science, and I focus on projects that will support free and fair elections and more involvement by average citizens in those elections.