

Out of Line: The Political and Distributive Salience of Queues, Lines, and Ordered Waiting

Elizabeth F. Cohen

Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Syracuse University
efcohen@maxwell.syr.edu

Draft: **Do not circulate beyond this workshop**

This is drawn from an extremely nascent project that does not quite have the level of development of work that I think of as “standard workshop fare.” On the plus side, this means that any comments I receive will be extremely valuable to me. On the negative side, this asks readers to stretch a little because so much of the framework is not yet in place. This comes off the heels of a book I published last year, *The Political Value of Time* (Cambridge UP, 2018). That work and this paper are related and I am happy to introduce this paper in the context of that book and my arguments about time’s political value. Many thanks for your interest!

Introduction

Three mostly unrelated trends draw attention to a phenomenon in popular thinking about distributive justice I seek to explore. The first is the idea that beneficiaries of programs such as Affirmative Action or even welfare are cutting in line.¹ The second is the rash of populist political parties with slogans that claim to put the nation’s people first. A third trend is the call for undocumented immigrants to “go to the back of the line” instead of seeking regularization, amnesty or a pathway to citizenship. The common trait that links these three trends is the use of a frame that encourages people to: A) imagine themselves and others as waiting in a line to receive important fundamental rights and benefits associated with citizenship; B) imagine that other undeserving people are cutting in line rather than waiting their turn. I believe that the use of the frame of line-standing in politics has powerful and troubling implications for the ways in which many ordinary people think about distributive justice. In this paper, I use insights from disciplines outside of political science (primarily sociology, management behavior, and law) to explore why line-standing is a powerful and pernicious political frame that undermines fairer systems of distributive justice. I will spend the bulk of the paper focusing on what line-standing means to people rather than on detailing specific instances of line-standing as a frame. But I welcome thoughts on examples I have not yet mentioned.

Line-standing

In researching her ethnographic exploration of Louisiana’s Tea Party populists (and likely Trump voters), sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild sought to learn what motivates people who have been harmed by unregulated capitalism to rally and vote against candidates, policies, and parties that seek to rein corporate excess. She concludes that many people who vote against their own material interests and in favor of right-wing, anti-government populist programs do

¹ Hochschild 2016.

so because they feel that Democrats and others who propose social welfare programs are supporting policies that allow unfair line-cutting. In this way of thinking, Affirmative Action hands out jobs to people based on identity rather than traditional markers of deservingness such as seniority, taking those opportunities from people who have been patiently waiting and accruing qualifications. Similarly, the admission of immigrants (legally or, by neglect of border controls, illegally) ensures that there is a population of workers willing to accept work conditions and pay that native-born workers cannot and will not accept. Meanwhile, federal and state workers help themselves to subsidized cars and secure salaries as “average” workers fall further and further behind. Her work echoes many of the thoughts expressed in Kathy Cramer’s book, *The Politics of Resentment*, that chronicles the presence of a rural consciousness. In this rural consciousness, a sense of displacement by urban elites is critical to the development of resentment and alienation. Susan McWilliams also expressed a version of this mentality in her essay, “This Political Theorist Predicted the Rise of Trumpism. His Name was Hunter S. Thompson.” McWilliams writes, “In Hell’s Angels, the gonzo journalist wrote about about left-behind people... Thompson concluded that the most striking thing about them was not their hedonism but their “ethic of total retaliation” against a technologically advanced and economically changing America in which they felt they’d been counted out and *left behind*.”²

Such rhetoric is echoed in Italy’s newly prominent populist party’s claim that “We put Italians first – first in housing, first in welfare, first in education.”³ The slogan repeats one of Donald Trump’s repeated claims that he will “put America first.”⁴ Similarly, the French populist party, National Front, has recently changed its slogan from “France for French people” to “French people first.”⁵

Sentiments about who should “come first” also figure prominently in debates about immigration politics, particularly the politics of amnesty, in the US. Shortly after the pro-regularization DREAMer social movement peaked, a rival social movement gathered momentum and was eventually subsumed under the umbrella of the Tea Party. The anti-immigrant rhetoric of the Tea party and the diverse constituencies they united reframed very old xenophobic impulses in the United States as a call for immigrants to “go to the back of the line” or not to “cut in line.” In a recent NPR feature, naturalized citizen, Miguel Gonzalez, is described by journalist David Greene as sharing the common ground of this issue – concern about line-cutting - with a white supremacist. Both are worried that immigrants seeking

² <https://www.thenation.com/article/this-political-theorist-predicted-the-rise-of-trumpism-his-name-was-hunter-s-thompson/> (Italics added for emphasis.)

³ <https://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2017/11/08/560874794/in-italy-right-wing-politicians-set-their-sights-on-parliament>

⁴ <http://thehill.com/homenews/administration/351320-trump-i-will-always-put-america-first>

⁵ <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2017/02/france-national-front-marine-le-pen-fascism-antisemitism-xenophobia/>

The author of this piece notes that the change was an attempt to soften the xenophobic overtones of its previous slogan and public face. As I will lay out, line-standing is an important means by which xenophobic impulses and intentions can be framed as neutral and non-racist.

amnesty or simply to live in the US without proper documents are cutting ahead of documented immigrants.

I am a citizen. I am retired. I already put into the fund for my pension, for my Medicare. I am not using it now. But I am hoping that when I get old I get some benefits. But I been contributing with 45 years of my life in this country. But people come in from outside, *zero seniority* in this country. And already have all these benefits. Medicaid. It is something the government needs to be careful.⁶

Gonzalez is careful to add that he thinks hate is not an appropriate response. But the similarity between his view and the view of openly racist anti-immigrant organizations is striking.

Each of these three examples introduces the idea of a line or a queue as well as some expectation of what constitutes a legitimate and an illegitimate ordering of the line. The subjects of Hochschild, Cramer and McWilliams' research feel dispossessed. But the specific grievance they are expressing is not focused solely on what they do not have. Some of the research subjects are not even particularly deprived compared to average Americans. Their grievances are focused on the fact that others have zoomed ahead of them, or simply ahead of where they think they should be, on the path to acquiring important goods, and, consequently, have achieved the American Dream without performing one of the key pre-requisite tasks: waiting their turn. A social psychologist might quickly label this a form of relative deprivation, which describes the desires we develop when we see other people get things that we do not have. By placing this experience into the frame of line-standing, the relative deprivation is redescribed as a very specific form of injustice. The subjects of Hochschild's, Cramer's and McWilliams' work share this frame: they all use spatial and temporal language to describe the "haves" as unfairly advancing while they, the "have nots" are passed by, stand still, or move backwards.

Likewise, a line is described by each of the political slogans mentioned above. Implied in the idea of putting Italians, Americans, or French people first is that after the Italian, American, and French people have their turn, there are others behind them waiting for their turn. However, if outsiders were to displace any of these groups, it would represent a violation of a line or queue in which Italians, Americans, and French were supposed to be prioritized. Trump's main campaign slogan provides a useful contrast. Make America great again invokes no sense of others waiting for their turn after Americans are made great. It is not even explicit in MAGA that America is being compared to and deemed greater than other nations. It is simply a nostalgic appeal to America's greatness potential. The "America First" and "MAGA" frames can co-exist without undermining each other. Here I am interested primarily in why the line-standing frame comes into use and its distinctive role in framing political stances and policies.

⁶ http://www.npr.org/2017/10/30/560767446/in-shelbyville-tenn-proud-to-be-white-and-hate-is-not-the-solution?sc=17&f=3&utm_source=iosnewsapp&utm_medium=Email&utm_campaign=app (itals added for emphasis).

Naturalized US citizen Miguel Gonzalez expresses a commonly cited sentiment about immigration politics in the US: that undocumented immigrants and others trying to enter the country on an express track to social welfare benefits and citizenship are pushing ahead of people like himself who patiently wait and endure the hoops that one must jump through in order to immigrate and naturalize. Gonzalez has citizenship, so he is not worried about whether someone is going to push ahead of him in line. His is a more abstract concern that the process of waiting in line and fulfilling different requirements along the way is being undermined. He is worried about disorder replacing orderly lines and about freeloading replacing the particular form of dues-paying that is associated with waiting for something valuable.

The prevalence of line-standing rhetoric extends beyond these examples. It appears in debates about Affirmative Action, welfare, political candidates who do not rise through the ranks but appear and quickly win a relatively prominent office, and other areas of political contestation. In the sections that follow, I will offer an overview of line-standing and discuss it in the context of distributive justice. Using sociological insights about lines as social systems, I will draw attention to the fact that the line-standing frame encourages people to view themselves in hierarchical relationships, with some at the head and some at the end of the line. It also cuts some people out of the distributive system entirely by preventing them from entering the line or limiting the supply of goods being distributed in a way that makes waiting in the line fruitless. Most important, because many people assume that the principle of first-come-first-served is inherently fair, framing distribution in terms of line-standing recasts many circumstances that are not just in a way that makes them sound just. Conversely, framing distribution in terms of line-standing recasts many circumstances that are just in a way that makes them sound unjust. Line-standing frames encourages some people to think of nativism and other forms of exclusion as fair. Line-standing frames also encourage some people to think of Affirmative Action or immigration amnesties as unfair.

Lines, Distributive Justice and First-Come-First-Served

The preceding section contained just a few examples of a larger phenomenon that one legal scholar has called “queue talk.”⁷ Queue talk uses the political frame of line-standing to direct people’s thought about policy issues related to who is entitled to what, and when they are entitled to it.

Queues are structured means of providing goods and services, usually in the order that people have arrived in the queue.⁸ We call this principle, “first-come-first-served” (hereafter FCFS). FCFS is a basic principle of distributive justice.⁹ Distributive justice is the larger category of political rules, policies, standards, and norms through which a society determines how to fairly distribute both the benefits and costs of collective social life. There are many different types of

⁷ Katharine Young. Young is committed to viewing queue talk as analogic, however I am not persuaded that it is a good idea to refer to political queues as analogic. Because people do endure the experience of waiting for political goods, and because queues are ordered systems for distribution when waiting is required, I believe the queues are more than analogic, even if they do not always follow the rule of first-come-first-served.

⁸ Mann 344

⁹ Mann 346 citing Homans 1961

distributive justice. For example, one could distribute based on need or ability, to reference the famous Marx maxim.¹⁰ Or, one might distribute based on aristocratic birth, as many societies did prior to the establishment of equal democratic membership. But, FCFS has a special place in liberal democratic thought. As anthropologists have noted, there is an implication of egalitarianism to the idea of FCFS that appeals to people in liberal democracies.¹¹ Liberal democracies prioritize treating all members as individuals with equal standing.

As Kevin Gray notes:

The FCFS rule has the enormous virtue of “ethical simplicity”¹² The principle of ordinality gives transparent force to some elementary concept of social or procedural justice. It also displays a profoundly egalitarian character: waiting in line is one of the great levelers of humankind. The queue is no respecter of persons. In the citizenship of the queue no rank is relevant other than the rank order of one’s position as determined by the coldly neutral datum of sequential arrival in the line. There is also some reason to believe that the FCFS rule is an expression of a more general value structure historically associated with certain segments of Western society.¹³

FCFS eliminates the need to make distinctions based on merit, noble blood, neediness, or any number of other qualities that would be hard to measure and compare. In a line, all that matters is whether one showed up to get in line and when they arrived in relation to others who also showed up to get in line. Superficially, anyway, the line seems fairer and more likely to stay fair than many other more complicated distributive principles.

There is an important strain of liberal political philosophy that elevates the appeal FCFS has for equality-focused liberal democrats. Libertarian Robert Nozick explains this through a principle he calls “just acquisition.”¹⁴ In just acquisition, we learn that one of two just and legitimate ways to possess something is to come into possession of a thing that was not previously owned by anyone else. In other words, one must own it first.¹⁵ Just acquisition identifies claims that are indigenous: they are the very first claims on any given thing. “Firstness” is of special importance to a libertarian philosophy because it is presented as never involving coercion. When just acquisition has occurred, no one is forced to give up their property by a more powerful foe, no one is denied access because of some quality they have (their race, their gender, etc.) and no one is prohibited from owning anything. Firstness is therefore an ostensibly pure way to identify the fair recipient of any given good that is not already owned.

However, even in the absence of libertarian commitments, many people almost instinctively understand the power of a line because, particularly (but not exclusively) in societies where people respect lines, the expectation that people be served in the order in which they arrive in

¹⁰ “From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs,” wrote Marx in “Critique of the Gotha Program.”

¹¹ Hall 1959

¹² citing Brady Lining Up for Star Wars, supra note 1 at 161

¹³ Gray 169

¹⁴ ASU

¹⁵ The other fair way to own something is to make an exchange agreement with someone else (eg trade or purchase) in which no coercion is involved.

a line is a deep one. We know this from thinking about our own experiences in airport security, stores, and many other points of distribution. It is also widely understood at a more institutional level. Hospital emergency rooms do not generally use a pure principle of FCFS. Instead, a triage nurse will make informed decisions about who arrives with the most serious illnesses that the hospital can treat. This is a need-based distributive principle. Someone who cannot be treated may be transferred. But most people will be seen not in the order that they arrive but in the order of the seriousness of their symptoms. Some hospitals have to invest in heavy security just to manage patients who observe that someone who arrived after them is being seen before them. While in the abstract we might all agree that treating a gunshot wound takes precedence over treating bronchitis, the lived experience of not being treated in the order of arrival is more than some patients can tolerate.

The fact that lines are associated with fair treatment, and in particular the kind of fair treatment that egalitarian liberal democracies demand, means that the use of line-standing political frames will encourage people to think that any practice that might disrupt the flow of a suppose queue is unfair. This provides cover for a number of actors who do not actually seek fair distributive outcomes. But it also distracts attention from the fact that many political goods are not fairly distributed via queuing systems. If people are kept out of a queue, or prevented from entering the queue, it will not be a fair queue. More generally, if we compare FCFS to other distributive principles, we will start to see the thinness of rewarding firstness over all other potential ways someone might come to deserve something.

Lines as Social Systems

Before critiquing FCFS as a distributive principle and political frame I want to turn to a deeper understanding of the social experience of being in a line, either real or imagined. Line-standing is a distinct social phenomenon that originates outside of the context of politics. Looking at what we know about lines and the experience of waiting in a line in everyday life can offer us insights into why line-standing is a powerful political frame and what the consequences of using this frame might be.

Sociologists consider lines to be social systems with their own rules and psychology.¹⁶ It is important to recognize that a line is a self-contained social system because this insight tells us that people are doing more in lines than just waiting to get something. When people wait in lines they relate to others in the line and outside of the line as members of this particular social system. It is therefore important to observe the different characteristics and social dynamics of any given line. In order to make sense of what it means to think of ourselves as waiting in lines for different political goods, we will want to take note of all the attributes that those lines-cum-social systems exhibit, just as we would pay close attention to how any other members of a group – a college sorority, a trade union local, or colleagues in an office – behave and think of themselves or others inside and outside of the group. Three parts of the social experience of being in a line have special salience to the larger subject of line-standing as a political frame.

¹⁶ Mann 349

These are: the identity that people acquire as members of a line, the behavior associated with line-standing, and the expectations people have of lines and line-standing.

Line-Standing and Identity

The experience of being in a line is a relational one.¹⁷ By imposing the idea of a queue on the subjects of immigration, political rights, the American Dream, or Affirmative Action, a very specific set of relationships with other stakeholders is invoked. The experience of waiting has meaning and contributes to their identity within the social system of the line and quite possibly outside of the line as well. The particular type of relational social system that exists within a line is a hierarchy. Investments of time and energy in a queue, imagined or real, generate profound senses of entitlement not just to the good being distributed in the queue, but to the status one achieves within the hierarchy of the queue while waiting and advancing. We are behind people who have been in a queue longer than us and ahead of those who join it after us. Our position in relation to others becomes a part of our identity. The experience of being behind us or ahead of us also becomes a part of other people's identities. In many cases, the status of being ahead of newcomers is particularly important to members of a queue independent of when they expect to receive the good they are waiting for. Simply being higher up than others are in the hierarchy of the queue has value. This is significant because it enhances the attachment that people will have to a line. Once status is attached to one's place in line, one's investment is not just in getting whatever one is waiting for, but also in all of the emotions and importance contained in being ahead of some people and behind others.

As stated earlier, lines are associated with very powerfully held notions of fairness. Whatever the other norms of the queue (e.g. one may not leave the queue without forfeiting one's place in line, one may not let someone else in front of them, etc.) FCFS's guiding principle is that it is fair for people to receive goods in the order in which they queued up for them. The relationship described above is one in which disruptions are not just inconvenient, they are violations of one of liberal democracy's most fundamental values. Drawing together the first points about status relationships and identity with this second point about fairness: people are invested in the status that comes with a place in a queue that is behind some but, crucially, ahead of others and people believe that this status is theirs rightfully. Any perceived diminishment in status brought about by a rearrangement of the queue is almost certainly going to be regarded as unfair. The affront embodied in line-cutting and the diminishment of status is therefore an affront to one's sense of fairness and one's identity.

When we invoke the idea of standing in a line, we are also invoking ideas of power. As one scholar of line-waiting states, "[t]he distribution of waiting time coincides with the distribution of power."¹⁸ Because Schwartz tells us that power "entails 'the capacity to provide services which people must wait to receive.'"¹⁹

¹⁷ Mann 1969.

¹⁸ Schwartz 1975, 5, 44

¹⁹ Schwartz AJS 1974 p 841

Legal scholar Kevin Gray observes:

Waiting is all about the asymmetrical allocation of power between superordinates and subordinates.²⁰

Lines are little hierarchies in which the top of the heap may be those who do the distributing or those who are likely to get served soon, the middle of the pecking order are those who will be waiting for much more time, and the bottom of the pecking order are people whose place in line ensures they will probably never get served. There are also those who are never able to enter the queue, and the fact of their exclusion is of great significance. If lines are miniature social systems, being prevented from even entering the little society, whether by circumstance or systematic exclusion, is highly revealing and consequential. This is intriguing in light of the earlier argument that we are drawn to FCFS as a distributive principle because it coincides with our intuitions about fairness and equality. The fairness principle involved is one in which people have equal opportunities but never equal standing. It is also one that applies only within the queue. Whatever happens outside of a line to keep someone from entering or to prevent them from being able to endure the queue

Line-Standing Behavior

Lines are means of social regulation in which people expect specific behaviors of themselves and others.²¹ Those are behaviors we would not necessarily expect people to engage in outside of the context of the line. This is easier to relate to if one recalls having been in a queue and the way in which the queue worked. It is likely that all of us have been in a queue in which we formed fleeting relationships with the people in the line while also observing and monitoring both the behavior of others and the way in which any relevant authority figures governed the queue. While norms vary, it is common to regard one's neighbors as compatriots, to hold someone else's place in line briefly, to experience anger if the queue is disrupted, and to regard anyone who lets anyone else violate the queue as themselves being a violator who deserves to be punished. This last point is particularly important: we expect our fellow queue-mates to police the line and when they do not try to police it, or do not succeed at policing it, we are as likely to react negatively toward them as we would either a person jumping the queue or a designated authority who doesn't fairly supervise the queue. In studies of queuing behavior, subjects demonstrate such a strong reaction to a disordered queue that they are willing to use their own resources to punish anyone that they think is out of order in a line.²²

I hypothesize that the inclination to punish people within the line as well as line-keepers maps onto forms of negative partisanship. For instance, Hochschild and Cramer's interviewees express resentment toward city-dwellers, liberals and Democrats, who they perceive as supporting social welfare and immigration policies that they consider to facilitate line-cutting. The powerful urge to punish the agents of line-cutting as well as line-cutters may explain why

²⁰ Gray 167.

²¹ Gray 167

²² Fagundes, 9.

they vote against Democrats, who could advance their interests, and for Republicans, who advance the interests of groups who are so privileged that they do not stand in any queues for jobs, benefits, or the American Dream.

The type of line that one is waiting in will affect their behavior in line. Of particular relevance to immigration are queues that order people in lines of a specific duration (e.g. you get in line for an appointment at the DMV and are assigned the 9:45 slot) or lines of indefinite duration (you get in an airport security line and have no idea when you will be cleared to go to your gate). In immigration, a queue to naturalize is of definite duration whereas a queue to enter the country may be of indefinite duration. Waiting on an indefinite basis is psychologically taxing in a way that has been likened to torture.²³ And, because queues are relational, if one perceives that others in the queue are responsible in some way for the torturous wait, the queue can create or exacerbate hostility and competition.²⁴

Line and Line-Standing Expectations

Line-standing is associated with at least 3 expectations: deservingness, ownership, and mobility. [As I develop this project on line-standing, I am looking to probe whether the frame itself directs our expectations and frustration at any unmet expectations. I do not yet think I fully understand how line-standing frames are contributing to things like the scapegoating of undocumented immigrants, contempt for people receiving social welfare, opposition to Affirmative Action, etc. but I have intuitions that there is a relationship between the frame and these outcomes.]

Deservingness

No system of distributive justice hands out everything to everyone. Line-waiting is predicated on a notion of deservingness. What principles are at work when we expect people to wait in line to acquire a thing or an opportunity? If we make the highly plausible assumption that people value their time, one inference about a system in which people are expected to wait for something is that their willingness to wait represents their commitment to or valuation of the thing for which they wait. Even when one can go about one's daily business, the experience of waiting for something is an experience that demonstrates one's valuation of that thing. Staying in a line, even one that does not require actual standing, requires an investment of effort, patience, forbearance, and other sacrifices. At the very least, if you are waiting for something, you are experiencing the wait without the thing you seek. One's time spent in line, obeying the rules of the line, proves one's commitment to that thing.²⁵

The consequence of imposing a line-standing frame may therefore be an assumption that people who cannot or do not acquire or hold their place in line do not properly value that thing. I am reminded of debates about naturalization procedures in the nation's first congress. One

²³ Auberon, 30. Auyero cites Kafka and Beckett in addition to his own primary research on queuing.

²⁴ I don't focus on this fourth point in my discussion but I hope to develop the idea as I advance the project and so I have included it in case it incurs any reactions from readers.

²⁵ Gray 170

Congressman was prompted to remark that a failure to require people to wait prior to naturalizing had a cheapening effect on citizenship

To return to an earlier example provided by Hochschild, whatever one's idea of the American Dream may be, the time one invests waiting to achieve it is an investment of time and likely other sacrifices when one does not have their desired lifestyle. If we were to flip the equation and ask whether someone who is unwilling to do a little waiting ought to be rewarded with a scarce good, many people would reflexively answer "no." Yet, many of the specifically political goods that are at stake in my examples of line-standing as a political frame are fundamental goods that prominent distributive theories argue everyone deserves. While Nozickian libertarianism may be fine with FCFS, most other theorists of social justice would insist on examining factors beyond "firstness" and the order in which people arrive to make claims. A Kantian liberal such as Rawls, for example, accounts for need and disadvantage in formulating justice as fairness. Michael Walzer would also disrupt a queue if it threatened to impose conditions of dominance between distinct social goods.

Michael Sandel devotes an entire chapter of his book, *What Money Can't Buy*, to instances of market logic where people gain access to elusive tickets, Congressional face time, high occupancy vehicle lanes, etc. using forms of paid line-standing in which someone is compensated to wait on behalf of someone else who views their time as more valuable.²⁶ Sandel objects to money and the market displacing the ideal of first come first served.²⁷ And he also critiques the monetizing of experiences that he believes ought to be free, arguing this changes the costs of any experience for which one can purchase line-standing.²⁸ Sandel assumes the first-come first-served principle is egalitarian and that paying people in order to jump a queue leads to undeserving people receiving priority. Surely Sandel knows that not everyone at the front of a queue got there fairly or earned their place. But he never defends the claim that appropriating time is fairer than charging money or more appropriate to certain spheres. He never questions whether time is more freely or equally available to people than money, or whether it is an ethical and egalitarian way to distribute a wide range of goods.

To Sandel and others persuaded by line-standing frames, line-waiting implies a very simple way to judge whether someone has earned a scarce good. This effect is enhanced if the line requires greater sacrifices than mere waiting. One may have to renew paperwork, one may be prohibited from certain activities, one may be kept from important activities. If maintaining one's place requires specific behaviors, deprivation, or even something as elemental as frustration, the sense that waiting in the line is a form of earning the thing that one is waiting for is even greater.

If a well-known theorist of justice can fall into a set of unchallenged and likely incorrect assumptions about FCFS, it is not surprising that many people who believe they are in lines that

²⁶ Michael J. Sandel, *What Money can'T Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets* Macmillan, 2012).

²⁷ Michael J. Sandel, *What Money can'T Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets* Macmillan, 2012).

²⁸ Michael J. Sandel, *What Money can'T Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets* Macmillan, 2012).

are being manipulated, slowed, or cut into are easily turned against the agents they believe are responsible for their experiences of unfairness.²⁹

Mobility

People enter and wait in lines with the expectation that they will experience mobility by advancing to the front of the queue. Framing the satisfaction of a need in terms of line-standing puts the good for which one waits into the basket of things we associate with social mobility. It should not be surprising that many of the examples of line-standing frames cited earlier in this paper bear directly on opportunities for social mobility. Many of Hochschild, Cramer, and McWilliams' subjects express a widely-held sentiment among middle and working-class Americans: that they intergenerational mobility they anticipated has failed to materialize. Instead of having easier lives, people see their children struggling to maintain their social position, or slipping backwards. It is striking that some of Hochschild's interviewees are not deprived. Their needs are well-met. But they are frustrated by the idea that some people might be experiencing a pace of social mobility that is faster than they believe they deserve. And both Hochschild and Cramer observe their research subjects' indignation at the pace and means by which people who benefit from Affirmative Action, civil service jobs, or immigration opportunities achieve their socio-economic position. Their frustration is not simply with the idea that some people have things that they might not deserve. It is also with the pace and order that they acquired those things.

Ownership

Connected to the idea of deservingness is the belief of people in queues that spent in a queue as tantamount to capital. Kevin Gray describes a process by which people come to imagine their place in line as a form of property.³⁰ This likely relates back to the fact that equal respect for a person's time is a widely-subscribed principle. Because we value our time, and because we invest time in waiting, our place in line has value and it is transformed into a thing that we have created and earned. Particularly in a free-market liberal democracy such as the United States, this creates a powerful attachment between individuals (or sometimes members of groups) and their sense of their place in a queue.

Disrupting the queue thus becomes a violation of one's right to own that in which one has invested one's labor. A disruption of a queue is a form of dispossession that triggers strong feelings toward the disruptor(s) as well as expectations that the state will sanction the violation. The establishment and enforcement of rules that protect property is a primary duty of the liberal state. Not only is the theft or devaluation of that property considered a violation, but the acquisition of a prime place in line via alternate means (such as purchasing the advantageous place in line or paying someone else to wait in the line) is often frowned upon by

²⁹ The idea that waiting in line is related to value and deservingness is not reserved for those on the outside observing the queue. People in queues also experience the effects of waiting and hierarchy. Social psychologists indicate that the longer we wait in lines, the more invested in them we become. Our sunk costs make us unlikely to abandon lines we have spent time in even when doing so is counter-productive.

³⁰ Gray 2010.

standard bearers for democracy. Furthermore, having already connected one's place in a queue with a form of social status that has been acquired fairly, we add to this understanding that the status is not just symbolic. This status also has a sort of materiality.

Directions for Future research

It is only once we have become cognizant of the idea of the queue, and have been put into a relationship with people who arrived both before and after us in the queue, that the idea of disrupting the queue to give access on a basis different than FCFS starts to seem unfair.³¹ A different distributive frame, for example one that prioritizes need or an entirely different way of representing deservingness, would not incur these reactions. A need-based distributive system might punish people who take more than their share or who take things from those in need rather than punishing someone who appears to have cut in line. A need-based system would also focus less on hierarchy, levelling distinctions based on relatively arbitrary circumstances.

Queuing frames enhance the likelihood and degree to which people perceive any downward redistribution as generating relative deprivation. Even though they are associated with egalitarianism, queuing also have a strong affinity with views of politics that emphasize hierarchy and authority. [I have an unexplored intuition that this is consistent with some of George Lakoff's work on conservatism and authoritarianism that I hope to develop.]

I have started to piece together some of the trajectory of line-standing frames in the arena of immigration politics. In the future, I also hope to be able to also say more about the origin and trajectory of line-standing with respect to Affirmative Action. I am looking for evidence of how line-standing frames come into use and also their effects on discourse or policy directions. Together with a colleague at Syracuse, I am exploring the possibility of lab experiments that test how people react to line-standing frames. My ideas are still extremely fluid and mostly I have been taking notes on the sociology and psychology of queuing over the last 6 months. I very much welcome pushback on any part of this document.

³¹ Perry and Zarsky, Iowa Law Review, Queues in Law pg. 9.