



in the waiting line

Étienne Ollion and Dimitri Charrel – June 27, 2024

• *waiting line* • *politics* • *sociology* • *power* • *conformism* • *experience*

Our societies are built around waiting. At the bus stop, at the doctor's, in a store, in government offices, on the phone for help, this exercise in patience structures our lives. It is so prevalent that we forget that it affects us daily. Waiting is also unequal. The rich wait less than the poor: they see their requests granted immediately, while the latter defer their wants, often for a long time, sometimes indefinitely. It is a way of demonstrating that one person's time is more important than that of someone else who is being kept waiting; it is to wield power.

And yet, even among the elite, it is sometimes necessary to wait. Achieving political power takes time, sometimes a lot of time. A recent study by Étienne Ollion (2021), which serves as the basis for this visual essay, showed that to become a Member of Parliament, it takes years, sometimes decades, of prior involvement in politics. Hence, the idea of representing the path to the top of the power pyramid as a long queue.

The image is compelling. It is also a useful means for grasping a series of phenomena at play in politics. The existence of such a queue imposes a selection process that favors certain profiles and excludes others. Because they skew representation in favor of the upper classes, and because they also increase the discriminatory nature of the political field, waiting lines act as a filter. The essay describes the various stages at which the filter is imposed.

It also has a homogenizing effect: because it socializes those who wait in it, the queue makes individuals more alike—in their ways of thinking, speaking, and even dressing. Toward the end of the essay, we see that individuals increasingly come to resemble one another.

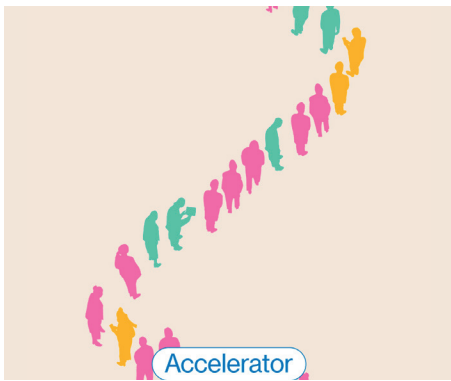
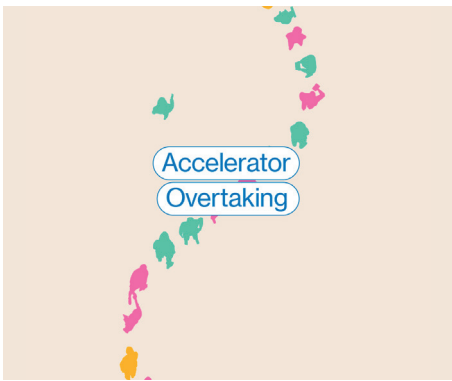
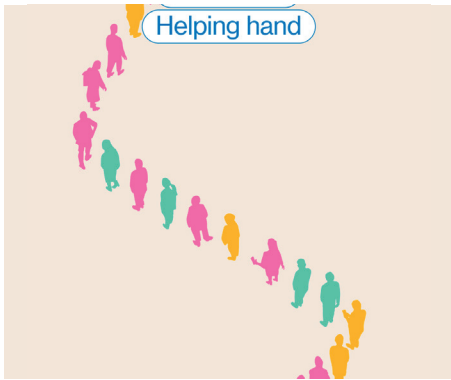
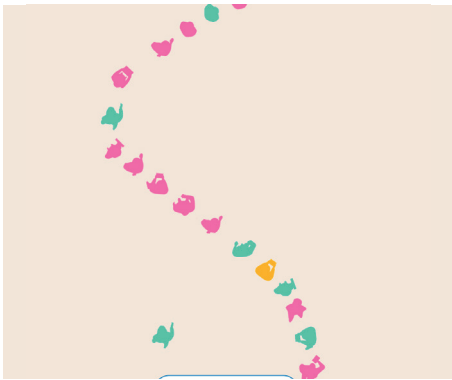
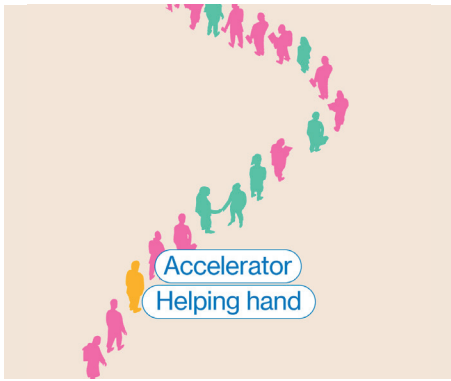
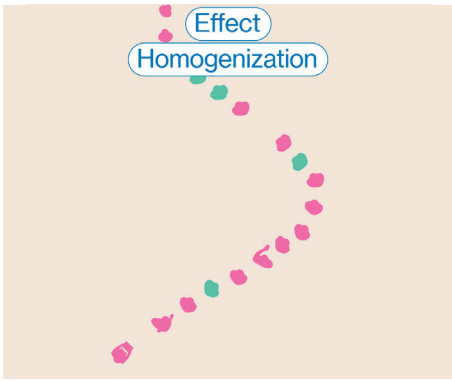
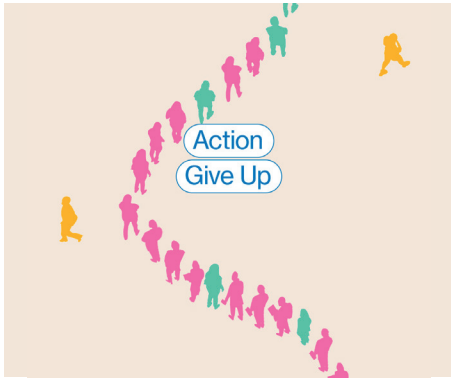
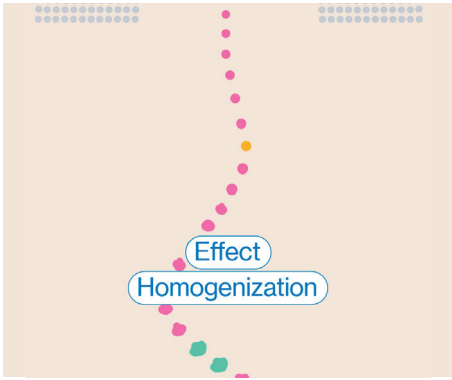
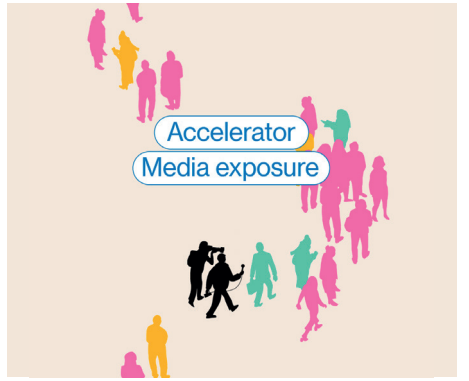
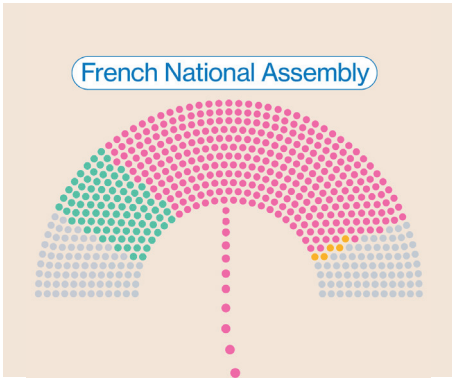
Finally, the queue individualizes: because it pits people against each other for the few available positions, it encourages self-serving strategies and betrayal. Thus, it is no surprise that they are over-represented at the summits of the Palais Bourbon (home to France's National Assembly). Conversely, members of the working classes, who represent half of the active population, are virtually absent at the top.

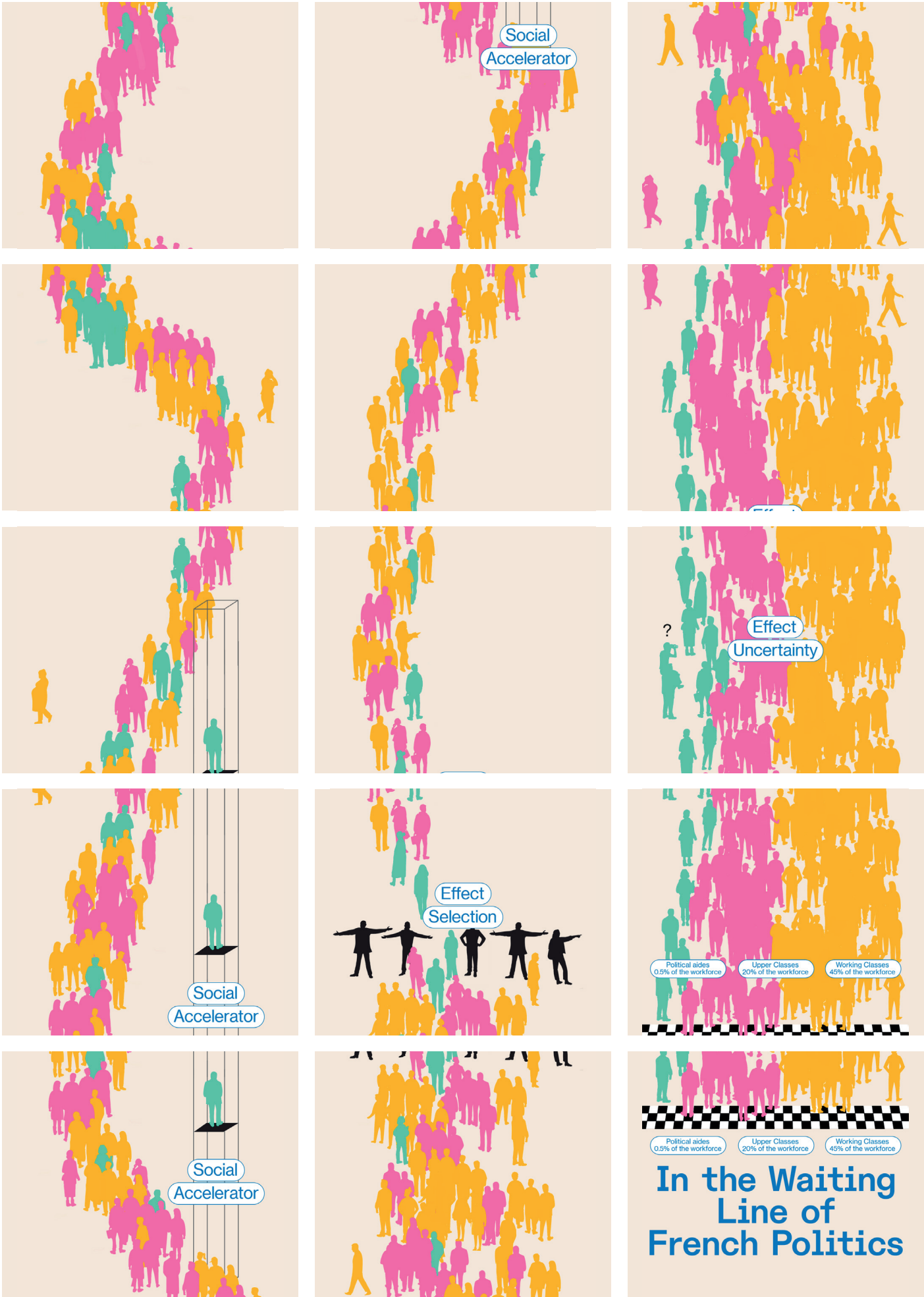
In the Waiting Line is a visual essay that seeks to describe contemporary politics through the device of a queue. Through a stylized form it illustrates the various mechanisms that produce the homogeneous political class that governs us. The essay makes use of the format provided by `.able` to convey its process-driven nature, while deliberately emphasizing its stylized aspect.

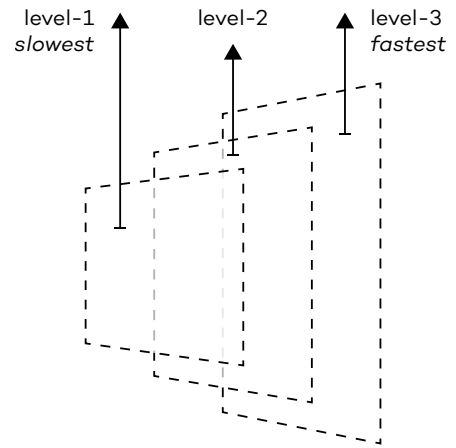
Based on politics, this study aims to draw attention to the everyday mechanisms that discreetly guide our practices.

In the Waiting Line is produced using the `scroll.able` format, adapted to the highly interdisciplinary nature of the project. Indeed, visual art and design (Dimitri Charrel, Lorène Gaydon) are necessary for creating the dynamic means of representing these social organizations, which sociologist Étienne Ollion analyzed in his most recent book.

To best replicate the original online experience, the reader should start reading the article from the last image, then move up column by column to the first image







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credits

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Étienne Ollion (PhD) is a sociology professor at the École Polytechnique and a researcher at CNRS. A specialist in politics, his works investigate the texture of power in modern societies. He uses qualitative and quantitative methods alike, and is an enthusiastic promoter of computational social sciences.

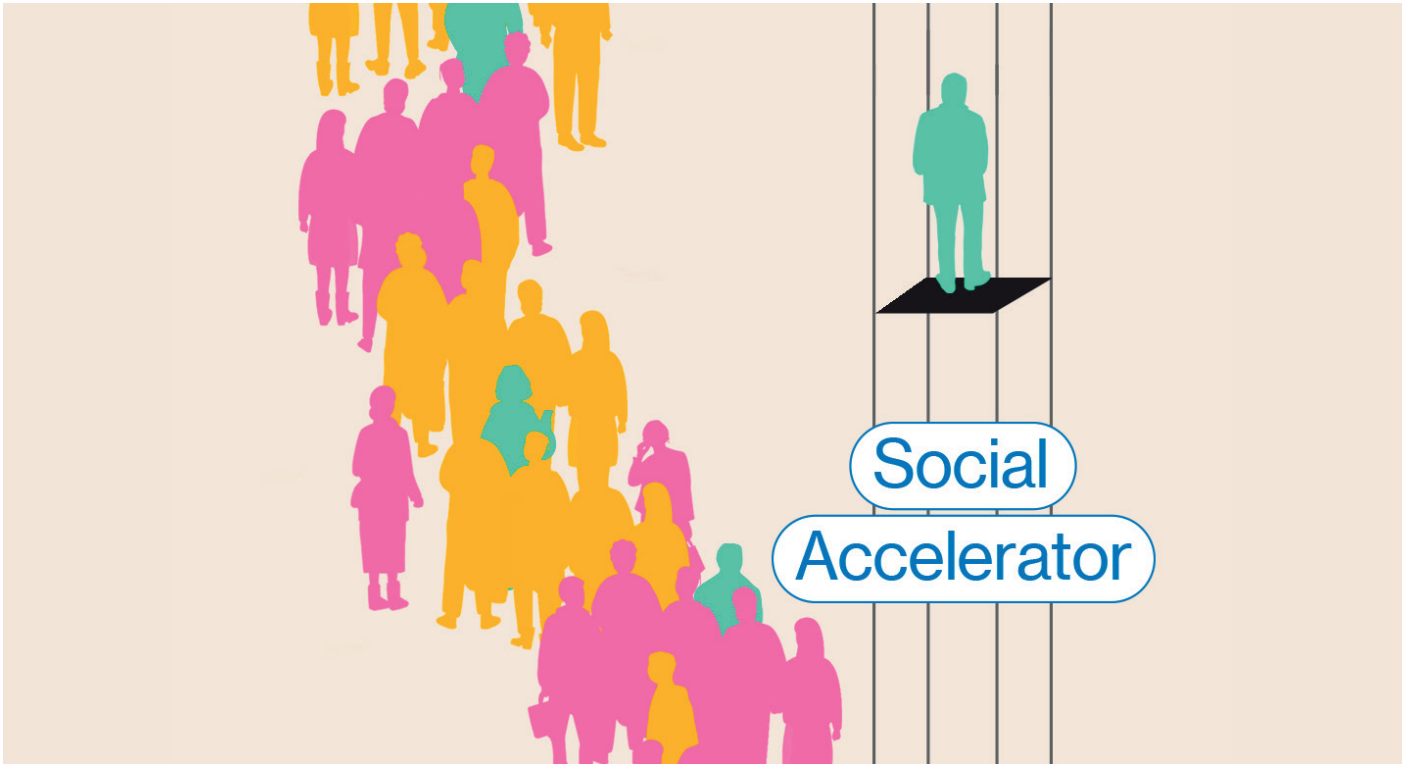
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Dimitri Charrel is a freelance graphic designer and a teacher at the École des Arts Décoratifs de Paris. In 2018, he founded the studio Arp is Arp, which designs visual identities, books, and websites for events and cultural institutions, research and creation laboratories, artists, designers, architects, and researchers.

<https://www.arp-is-arp.com>

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bibliography and references

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