

METERING UPDATE

AUGUST 2019



STEPHANIE LEUTERT, SAVITRI ARVEY, AND ELLIE EZZELL

INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 2018, CBP officers began to be stationed at the United States' international boundary with Mexico to inform arriving asylum seekers that U.S. ports of entry were full and that they needed to wait their turn in Mexico. Simultaneously, these CBP officials accepted limited numbers of asylum seekers a day—in a process known as metering—often communicating directly with Mexican officials regarding these numbers. As lines of asylum seekers grew longer in border cities, Mexican authorities and civil society groups responded by providing humanitarian assistance and creating informal waitlists.

In December 2018, the Robert Strauss Center at the University of Texas at Austin, the Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies (USMEX) at the University of California San Diego, and the Migration Policy Centre published a report documenting these practices. This report highlighted how metering had spread across the U.S.-Mexico border and described the waitlist systems in eight border cities. It found that 6,000 asylum seekers were waiting along the border in Mexico and that the waitlist process varied in each Mexican border city. Since the report's publication, there have been changes in every border community. Some of these changes were documented in the February 2019 and May 2019 report updates, which estimated that 4,800 and 19,000 asylum seekers, respectively, were waiting along the border.

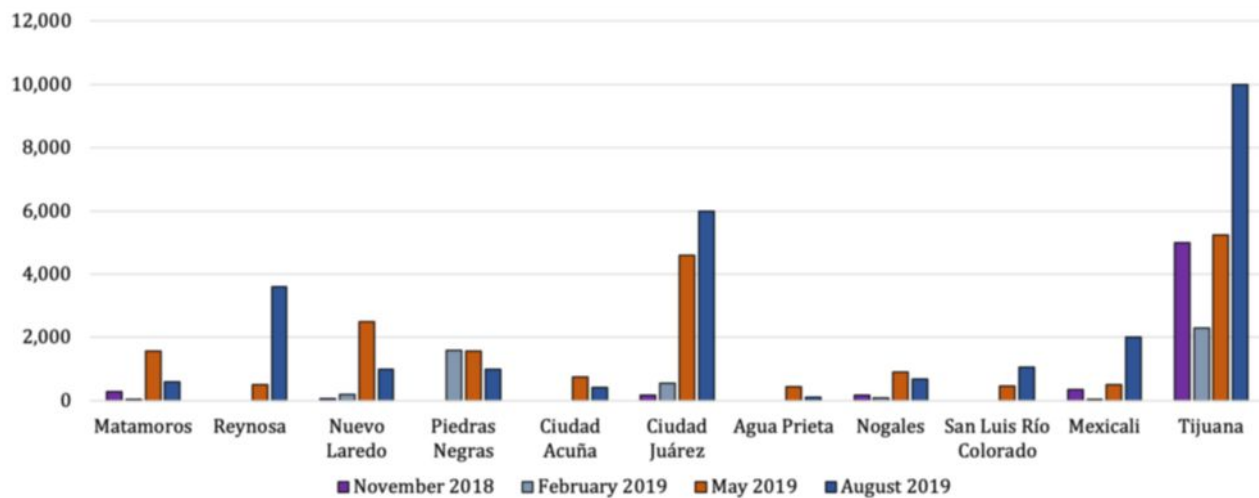
However, since May 2019, asylum seekers have continued to arrive at the U.S.-Mexico border, Mexican responses have evolved, and U.S. policy has continued to shift. One prominent change is the expansion of the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP) to Laredo and Brownsville. While MPP began in late January 2019 in San Diego, it quickly spread to Calexico and El Paso. In early July, the program finally arrived to the Rio Grande Valley in south Texas. Under MPP, asylum seekers are processed briefly in the United States and then returned to Mexico to wait for the duration of their U.S. asylum cases. So far, the United States has returned more than 30,000 individuals to Mexico under MPP. This means that people on metering lists may spend weeks or months in a border city before being admitted to the United States to ask for asylum, and then are returned to Mexico to wait during their court case.

Over the past three months, the Trump administration has taken additional steps to curb migration and the number of asylum seekers arriving at the border. On July 15, the Trump administration created a new “interim rule” to bar asylum seekers who pass through any country before arriving to the United States.¹ Less than two weeks later, this latest policy was blocked by a California court.² However, the administration has also signed a similar agreement with Guatemala's president that aims to achieve the same objective and is attempting to sign Safe Third Country agreements with Mexico, Honduras, El Salvador, Panama, and Brazil. These latter shifts would ban all asylum seekers—except Mexican nationals—who are currently waiting on the U.S. border from seeking asylum. Simultaneously, the Mexican government has also increased its immigration enforcement during the past three months, deploying the National Guard to provide support for the National Migration Institute (INM). This has made it more difficult for an asylum seeker to arrive at the U.S.-Mexico border and sign up on an asylum waitlist.

This August metering update estimates that there are currently around 26,000 asylum seekers on waitlists or waiting to get on these waitlists in 12 Mexican border cities. This is an increase of 40 percent since May 2019, with the biggest increases in the number of asylum seekers occurring in Tijuana, Reynosa, and Ciudad Juárez.

The waitlists in these three cities account for 72 percent of all asylum seekers waiting to enter the United States through a port of entry. However, it is possible that the actual number of people waiting along the border is lower than the number of people on waitlists, given that a portion of waiting asylum seekers grow desperate and cross into the United States between ports of entry.

Figure 1: Number of People Waiting on Asylum Waitlists



This update aims to highlight changes over the past three months across 14 Mexican border cities. It looks at changes in the asylum waitlist process, the number of asylum seekers waiting in each border city, and current CBP processing levels. The update draws on interviews with government officials, representatives from civil society organizations, and members of the public on both sides of the border.

Figure 2: Mexican Border Cities Covered in the August 2019 Asylum Waitlist Update



Metering & Asylum Waitlists: August 2019

Port of Entry <i>List Administrator</i>	# of Asylum Seekers on List <i>Date Recorded</i>	Estimated Wait Time	CBP Processing #s	Recent Changes
Matamoros, Tamaulipas <i>National Migration Institute (Instituto Nacional de Migración, INM)</i>	600 <i>August 5, 2019</i>	1 to 2 months	10 to 15 per day	<p>There is one waitlist system in Matamoros, which is administered by INM. In the past few months, there have been reports that asylum seekers who lack documentation and legal status in Mexico are being barred from signing up on the list, and are instead being deported.</p> <p>Since MPP's implementation, the number of asylum seekers processed every day appears to have increased, while wait times have decreased. However, MPP returnees have filled the city, leading to its two main migrant shelters being closed to newcomers.</p> <p>A few smaller shelters have opened but their capacity is limited. Asylum seekers who are waiting for their turn on the waitlist stay in hotels, if they can afford them, or in a makeshift camp by the Gateway bridge. The makeshift camp lacks bathrooms, and there have been reports of asylum seekers using the river as both a restroom and a place to wash clothes.</p> <p>Civil society members bring asylum seekers food and water and have paid to rent portable restrooms and showers. However, they have only been able to afford such amenities intermittently. There are also concerns regarding the extreme heat and lack of drinking water in the camp.</p> <p>Asylum seekers on the waitlist are from a range of countries, including Nicaragua, El Salvador, Cuba, Venezuela, Colombia, and Russia.</p>

Metering & Asylum Waitlists: August 2019 (continued)

Port of Entry <i>List Administrator</i>	# of Asylum Seekers on List <i>Date Recorded</i>	Estimated Wait Time	CBP Processing #s	Recent Changes
Nuevo Progreso, Tamaulipas	0 <i>August 4, 2019</i>	N/A	N/A	<p>There are no longer any Cubans or Venezuelans waiting on the Nuevo Progreso - Progreso bridge. Two security guards now stand watch at the bridge's turnstiles on the Mexican side, ostensibly to stop asylum seekers from entering the international bridge.</p> <p>On June 25, 2019, there were 45 Cubans waiting on the bridge. These Cubans had organized their own waitlist and noted that INM had told them that no one else would be able to get on the bridge after they entered the United States. As of July 23, 2019, there were only 7 Cubans left on the bridge.³ CBP processed the last Cuban on the bridge at the end of July.</p> <p>There are reports of asylum seekers running into U.S territory via the international bridge's car lanes in order to seek asylum. Currently, CBP officers are stationed in the car lanes on the international bridge to check drivers' migration documents as they cross the bridge's midpoint and enter U.S. territory.</p>
Reynosa, Tamaulipas <i>Senda de Vida migrant shelter</i>	3,600 <i>August 5, 2019</i>	2 to 3 months	25 to 30 per day	<p>The Senda de Vida Migrant Shelter in Reynosa runs four separate lists: a single adult male list, a single adult female list, a family list, and a list for pregnant women.</p> <p>Asylum seekers must sign up on the waitlist at the shelter, regardless of whether they stay at the shelter or find other accommodations, such as hotels or rented apartments. Asylum seekers who stay elsewhere often return to the shelter to eat and check their place on the list. As of August 5, 2019, there were</p>

Metering & Asylum Waitlists: August 2019 (continued)

Port of Entry	# of Asylum Seekers on List	Estimated Wait Time	CBP Processing #s	Recent Changes
<i>List Administrator</i>	<i>Date Recorded</i>			
Reynosa, Tamaulipas (continued)				<p>530 asylum seekers staying in the Senda de Vida shelter.</p> <p>There continue to be reports that asylum seekers can pay Mexican migration officials to move up on the list faster. Additionally, there have been reports of asylum seekers paying to be driven across the international bridge's midpoint to seek asylum in the United States. Currently, CBP officers are stationed in the car lanes on the international bridge to check drivers' migration documents as they cross the bridge's midpoint and enter U.S. territory.</p> <p>There are also reported safety concerns for the waiting asylum seekers. The Mexican National Guard was brought to the shelter in July to protect migrants and asylum seekers from criminal elements.⁴</p> <p>The majority of the asylum seekers waiting in Reynosa are from Venezuela, Cuba, Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador.</p>
Rio Grande City, Tamaulipas	<p>0</p> <p><i>August 4, 2019</i></p>	N/A	N/A	<p>In the past few weeks, there have been incidents at the Rio Grande City port of entry where Cuban asylum seekers crossed the international midpoint and entered U.S. territory via cars. These asylum seekers hired Mexican drivers who took them into U.S. territory right before the U.S. port of entry. The Cuban asylum seekers then jumped out and ran toward the port of entry, and the Mexican drivers attempted to return to Mexico. To stop these incidents, CBP officers are now stationed in the car lanes on the international bridge to check drivers' migration documents as they cross the midpoint and enter U.S. territory.</p>

Metering & Asylum Waitlists: August 2019 (continued)

Port of Entry <i>List Administrator</i>	# of Asylum Seekers on List <i>Date Recorded</i>	Estimated Wait Time	CBP Processing #s	Recent Changes
Ciudad Miguel Alemán, Tamaulipas <i>National Migration Institute (Instituto Nacional de Migración, INM)</i>	30 <i>August 3, 2019</i>	9 days	3 to 6 per day	<p>When an asylum seeker arrives to the Ciudad Miguel Alemán - Roma international bridge, he or she signs up on the INM waitlist. The asylum seekers then wait on the bridge until it is their turn. On August 3, 2019, there were 30 Cubans (17 women and 13 men) on the bridge.</p> <p>Due to safety concerns in the city, these asylum seekers never leave the bridge after they arrive and rely on church groups to bring food. They also rely on Mexicans to take out money for them and purchase basic goods.</p>
Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas <i>Network of six migrant shelters managing six separate lists (one per shelter)</i>	~1,000 <i>August 6, 2019</i>	1 month (This was 3 to 4 months prior to MPP's expansion to Laredo)	25 to 40 per day	<p>After MPP's implementation in Laredo, the waitlist system was taken over by a network of six migrant shelters that work in conjunction with Mexican migration officials. Each shelter operates their own list, and has been assigned a day of the week when migration officials notify the shelter regarding how many asylum seekers CBP will accept that day.</p> <p>The shelters select which asylum seekers will cross. They claim that this allows them to prioritize urgent cases, such as families or those with severe medical needs. The shelters have also established partnerships with local hospitals to administer care to asylum seekers.</p> <p>Asylum seekers report dangerous conditions in Nuevo Laredo, such as robberies and kidnappings near the shelters and international bridges.⁵</p>

Metering & Asylum Waitlists: August 2019 (continued)

Port of Entry	# of Asylum Seekers on List	Estimated Wait Time	CBP Processing #s	Recent Changes
<i>List Administrator</i>	<i>Date Recorded</i>			
Piedras Negras, Coahuila	~1,000 people	2 months	0 to 12 per day	<p>On July 11, 2019, Hector Menchaca—the list manager from the municipal government—noted that there were ~380 people on the list.⁶ However, in early August, civil society members noted that due to the asylum waitlist being closed, the total numbers of people on the list or currently waiting to get on the list in Piedras Negras is closer to 1,000.</p>
<i>Municipal government</i>	<i>July 30, 2019</i>			
Ciudad Acuña, Coahuila	303 individuals	4 months (individuals)	1 to 3 per day (individuals)	<p>There are two list systems in Ciudad Acuña: one for adult individuals and one for families. The adult list is run by Civil Protection and is now closed. The majority of the 303 asylum seekers who are on the adult list are from Cuba (237), with the remaining 47 asylum seekers from the African countries of Angola, Congo, and Cameroon. There is also one asylum seeker from Russia.⁷</p> <p>The adult asylum seekers have set up a makeshift camp in a park near the international bridge, comprised of tents and tarps. One asylum seeker acts as a spokesman for the camp, and communicates with Civil Protection officials about the asylum waitlist. Some of the asylum seekers in the camp work in Ciudad Acuña during the day. The asylum seekers who are next on the list stay in another area that is close to the international bridge.</p>
<i>Civil Protection (Protección Civil): individuals</i>	30 families (113 family members)	2 months (families)		
<i>Grupo Beta: families</i>	<i>August 2, 2019</i>			

Metering & Asylum Waitlists: August 2019 (continued)

Port of Entry <i>List Administrator</i>	# of Asylum Seekers on List <i>Date Recorded</i>	Estimated Wait Time	CBP Processing #s	Recent Changes
Ciudad Acuña, Coahuila (continued)				The family list appears to remain open. The list was publicly available outside the Grupo Beta office and the last family signed up had arrived on August 1, 2019. Families stay at a migrant shelter. As of August 1, 2019, on the family list there were 30 families. Within these families, 43 people were from Mexico, 28 from Congo, 13 from Cuba, 12 from Honduras, 10 from Angola, 6 children from the United States, and 1 baby with Brazilian nationality.
Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua <i>State Population Council (Consejo Estatal de Población, COESPO)</i>	5,645 <i>August 5, 2019</i>	3.5 to 6 months	0 to 15 per day ⁸	<p>The Mexican State Population Council (COESPO) continues to administer the waitlist in Ciudad Juárez, where a total of 17,778 asylum seekers have registered from October 29, 2018 to August 2, 2019.⁹</p> <p>CBP calls COESPO twice a day, once in the morning around 9am, and once in the afternoon around 3pm, to let them know how many asylum seekers will be accepted that day.</p> <p>COESPO uses a closed Facebook group to notify asylum seekers when it is their turn to cross. An estimated 80 percent of those currently registered on the list are from Cuba, 10 to 12 percent are from Central America, and the rest are from Mexico.</p> <p>Enrique Valenzuela, head of COESPO, estimates that the number of asylum seekers in Ciudad Juárez may be closer to 3,600 - 3,800 due to asylum seekers crossing into the United States between ports of entry or returning to their countries of origin.¹⁰</p>

Metering & Asylum Waitlists: August 2019 (continued)

Port of Entry <i>List Administrator</i>	# of Asylum Seekers on List <i>Date Recorded</i>	Estimated Wait Time	CBP Processing #s	Recent Changes
Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua (continued)				<p>Asylum seekers stay in a variety of accommodations, including shelters and hotels. Civil society organizations, churches, and the municipal government have established a combined 16 shelters in the city. All shelters are approaching full capacity.</p> <p>There have also been reports of criminal groups targeting asylum seekers in Ciudad Juárez, and cases of asylum seekers who have been injured and killed.¹¹</p>
Agua Prieta, Sonora <i>CAME migrant shelter</i>	100 <i>August 1, 2019</i>	2 months	1 family	At the end of June 2019, the National Guard tried to enter the CAME shelter, claiming that they had received a report of an armed man in the shelter. In recent weeks, the shelter has reported a marked decrease in the arrival of asylum seekers. The shelter only has capacity for 50 people.
Nogales, Sonora <i>Private individual</i>	680 <i>July 30, 2019</i>	9 to 11 weeks	0 to 6 families	The number of asylum seekers that CBP processes every day in Nogales has varied widely. Days have passed when no one was being processed. Shelters are over capacity and currently housing roughly 300 asylum seekers.

Metering & Asylum Waitlists: August 2019 (continued)

Port of Entry <i>List Administrator</i>	# of Asylum Seekers on List <i>Date Recorded</i>	Estimated Wait Time	CBP Processing #s	Recent Changes
<p>San Luis Río Colorado, Sonora</p> <p><i>Casa del Migrante</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>La Divina Providencia</i> <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>1,050</p> <p><i>August 1, 2019</i></p>	<p>3 months</p>	<p>3 to 4 per day</p>	<p>On May 31, 2019, Grupo Beta transferred the list management to the Casa del Migrante “La Divina Providencia,” which currently houses 80 to 85 asylum seekers (mainly women and children). To get on the shelter list, asylum seekers register their name, date of birth, state/country of origin, and phone number. The other shelter in the city, Don Chon, houses roughly 180 asylum seekers.</p> <p>Since most asylum seekers cannot stay in shelters, they rent a room or go to other cities to wait their turn. They call the shelter to see if their turn is coming up. The list currently has 882 registrants, but the total number of individuals is higher since every family is given a single number. CBP calls the shelter and either requests single adults or families. CBP recently requested single adults for the first time in 2 weeks, which had led to a backlog.</p> <p>The asylum seekers on the list are from 18 different countries. Roughly 57 percent are from Mexico, 27 percent from Cameroon, 5 percent from Cuba, and 4 percent from Honduras. The asylum seekers from Cameroon traveled together first to Tijuana, but due to the length of the waitlist they decided to go to San Luis Río Colorado.</p>

Metering & Asylum Waitlists: August 2019 (continued)

Port of Entry <i>List Administrator</i>	# of Asylum Seekers on List <i>Date Recorded</i>	Estimated Wait Time	CBP Processing #s	Recent Changes
Mexicali, Baja California <i>Grupo Beta</i>	2,000 <i>August 2, 2019</i>	6 to 12 months	5 to 10 per day	<p>The average temperature in Mexicali in the summer is 110 degrees Fahrenheit, which has been a challenge for asylum seekers waiting in the city. Mexicali's 14 shelters have space for roughly 3,000 people. Yet, many asylum seekers don't have access to food, water, or shelter, and must pay to stay in places such as Hotel Migrante. These conditions have led some Central American asylum seekers to return home.</p> <p>There are also allegations of unfair practices that put Mexicans and others at the top of the list.</p>
Tijuana, Baja California¹² <i>Grupo Beta / Support from asylum seekers</i>	10,000 <i>August 4, 2019</i>	6 to 9 months	0 to 69 per day ¹³	<p>Grupo Beta operates and stores the notebook with the asylum waitlist, but receives list management support from asylum-seekers who are also on the list. The asylum seekers who help with the list have previously been from Central America, although in recent months, they have been almost exclusively from Mexico. For the last two weeks, African asylum seekers have served as list managers for the first time.</p> <p>In the current iteration of the list, 37,590 people have signed their name into the notebook, and the names of approximately 27,690 asylum seekers have been called. Currently, most asylum seekers signing up for the list are from Haiti or Africa.¹⁴ About a third of the people signing up for the list are from Mexico, which are generally families that come from the country's southern states. Central Americans make up around 10 percent of signees, and another roughly 10 percent come from a</p>

Metering & Asylum Waitlists: August 2019 (continued)

Port of Entry	# of Asylum Seekers on List	Estimated Wait Time	CBP Processing #s	Recent Changes
<i>List Administrator</i>	<i>Date Recorded</i>			
Tijuana, Baja California (continued)				<p>range of other countries such as Iraq, Russia, and Turkey. According to the Municipal Migrant Attention Office, Tijuana currently has space for 1,500 people across 18 shelters.</p> <p>The legal services organization Al Otro Lado reports that an estimated 35 percent of people do not show up to cross when their names are called. Although this figure is complicated by the number of asylum seekers who cross into the United States without ever being on the list.¹⁵ These asylum seekers allegedly pay bribes to Grupo Beta to be able to cross, with the bribe amount reportedly increasing over the last three months from US\$300 to US\$1,200.</p>

*The numbers shift every day and should be interpreted as a general range rather than an exact figure.

ENDNOTES

- 1 “Asylum Eligibility and Procedural Modifications,” Department of Homeland Security & Executive Office for Immigration Review, July 16, 2019, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2019/07/16/2019-15246/asylum-eligibility-and-procedural-modifications>.
- 2 Miriam Jordan and Zolan Kanno-Youngs, “Trump’s latest attempt to bar asylum seekers is blocked after a day of dueling rulings,” New York Times, July 24, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/24/us/asylum-ruling-tro.html>.
- 3 “El testimonio de Emma, una cubana que lleva meses esperando en México para cruzar la frontera de EE.UU.,” CiberCuba, July 23, 2019, <https://www.cibercuba.com/noticias/2019-07-23-u1-e20037-s27061-enma-cubana-lleva-meses-esperando-cruzar-frontera-eeuu>.
- 4 “El calvario de migrantes en la frontera: albergues en Reynosa registran sobrecupo de 450%,” Infobae, July 23, 2019, <https://www.infobae.com/america/mexico/2019/07/23/el-calvario-de-migrantes-en-la-frontera-albergues-en-reynosa-registran-sobrecupo-de-450/>.
- 5 María Verza, “Asylum seekers waiting in Nuevo Laredo fear lurking dangers,” Associated Press, July 18, 2019, <https://www.apnews.com/9da8f4c1d433417a9dba2ae17d67e404>.
- 6 Alejandro Montenegro, “En espera 380 migrantes de asilo político en los EU; 20 son menores de edad,” Vanguardia, July 12, 2019, <https://vanguardia.com.mx/articulo/en-espera-380-migrantes-de-asilo-politico-en-los-eu-20-son-menores-de-edad>.
- 7 In July 2019, groups of Haitians reportedly arrived at the makeshift camp during the daytime and then crossed the Rio Grande river at night to ask for asylum in the United States. Mexican officials are now stationed along the river to prevent such crossings. There were reports of asylum seekers who drowned during these river crossings.
- 8 In May 2019, CBP officials processed 20 to 50 asylum seekers a day. However, from July 21, 2019 through July 31, 2019, CBP did not process any asylum seekers. CBP stated that its facilities were at capacity. On July 31, 2019, CBP processed 15 asylum seekers.
- 9 Over the last three months, COESPO reports that the average number of asylum seekers registering on the asylum waitlist every day has declined. In May, COESPO registered an average of 100 to 130 asylum seekers a day, with a maximum of 250 people registered in a single day and a minimum of 80 people. In June, that average fell to between 30 and 40 asylum seekers a day, and in July, the highest number of asylum seekers registered in one day was 50 and the lowest number was 9. Currently, there is an average of 20 asylum seekers registering on the list every day.
- 10 Julian Resendiz, “CBP stops calling asylum seekers in Juárez,” KTSM, July 30, 2019, <https://www.ksm.com/news/border-report/cbp-stops-calling-asylum-seekers-in-juarez/>.
- 11 Javier Olmos, “Van 9 migrantes muertos en Juárez desde octubre,” El Diario, July 29, 2019, <https://diario.mx/juarez/van-9-migrantes-muertos-en-juarez-desde-octubre-20190729-1544701.html>
- 12 The data provided for the asylum waitlist in Tijuana was collected by a team of Al Otro Lado volunteers during daily visits to the Chaparral port of entry.
- 13 From June 16 to July 16, 2019, CBP reduced the number of asylum-seekers that they would accept on any given day. For several four- or five-day periods in early July, zero people were accepted. On July 4 and July 9, 2019, dozens of African asylum-seekers, led by those from Cameroon and Eritrea, led small, peaceful sit-ins in protest.
- 14 Al Otro Lado has documented cases of discrimination against black asylum seekers, and their documents are often subjected to a higher level of scrutiny than other asylum seekers. Additionally, acquiring proper documentation can be more difficult for asylum seekers coming from outside of the Western Hemisphere, and language barriers complicate their inquiries with Grupo Beta or the list managers.
- 15 The result of these people skipping the line is that those who have been waiting are forced to wait even longer. This climate bred distrust and frustration with the list process in late May through early June.