Just rides: Ride-hailing, the capabilities approach and the just city

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Abstract

Vehicle-for-hire services are critical for the local economy and are frequently regulated by municipalities. With ridehailing platforms taking a dominant role in organizing the industry today, the treatment of workers has emerged as a subject for political debate about what municipalities can do to support local workers. This case study examines how justice for platform drivers should be considered at the municipal scale. It does so by examining the experience of drivers in the City of Toronto and surrounding Greater Golden Horseshoe. Drawing on Susan Fainstein's just city theory and particularly her use of the capabilities approach to human development, the paper examines how diverse values are expressed in the capabilities of individual drivers. Results show that drivers are drawn to the flexibility of the industry but are empowered only by sacrificing other capabilities and ultimately suffer from multiple vulnerabilities such as poor pay and unfair discipline. At the same time, the paper finds a latent solidarity amongst drivers that seeks empowerment against arbitrary and unilateral judgements from platforms or government regulators. The paper concludes by considering a renewed orientation for local authorities to support drivers by enabling driver capabilities.

Keywords: splatform economy, the just city, the capabilities approach, ride-sharing

Résumé

Les services de location de véhicules sont essentiels pour l'économie locale et sont fréquemment réglementés par les municipalités. Avec l'arrivée des plates-formes de location de véhicules qui jouent un rôle dominant dans l'organisation du secteur aujourd'hui, le traitement des travailleurs est devenu un sujet de débat politique sur ce que les municipalités peuvent faire pour soutenir les travailleurs locaux. Cette étude de cas examine comment la justice pour les conducteurs de plates-formes devrait être envisagée à l'échelle municipale. Elle le fait en examinant l'expérience des chauffeurs de la ville de Toronto et des environs du Greater Golden Horseshoe. En s'appuyant sur la théorie de la ville juste de Susan Fainstein et en particulier sur son utilisation de l'approche par les capacités du développement humain, l'article examine comment diverses valeurs sont exprimées dans les capacités des conducteurs individuels. Les résultats montrent que les conducteurs sont attirés par la flexibilité de l'industrie, mais qu'ils n'ont de pouvoir qu'en sacrifiant d'autres capacités et qu'en fin de compte, ils souffrent de multiples vulnérabilités telles que les mauvais salaires et une discipline injuste. En même temps, le document constate une solidarité latente entre les conducteurs qui cherche à s'opposer aux jugements arbitraires et unilatéraux des plateformes ou des régulateurs gouvernementaux. Le document conclut en envisageant une nouvelle orientation pour les autorités locales afin de soutenir les conducteurs en renforçant leurs capacités.

Mots-clés : plateformes electronique, la ville juste, l'approche des capacités, covoiturage

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Introduction

Private firms have increasingly applied information and communication technologies to local services through digital platforms (Zysman et al. 2010). For urban policy makers and planners this trend has led to new ways of thinking about organizing the city that challenge centralized regulatory systems and prioritize markets (Sundararajan 2016). Ride-hailing platforms, Uber and Lyft, are prominent examples of this trend. As these platforms have come to dominate the vehicle-for-hire industry (Schaller 2017), their treatment of workers has become an object of political struggle (Dubal 2017; Palagashvili 2018; Tippett 2019). Among some scholars and industry watchers, the experience for workers has improved due to the reduced costs to enter the market and greater market flexibility (Feeney 2015; Lobel 2019; Mitchell and Koopman 2019). Yet, critics counter that the centralization of control by platforms has undermined these gains by leaving workers vulnerable to the whims of the platform (Collier, Dubal, and Carter 2016; Rosenblatt 2018). The contradiction between these perspectives leads to a question of justice: Are the current conditions facing platform drivers just? And, what policies might address apparent injustices? To address these questions this paper turns to Susan Fainstein's Just City theory (2010) and conducts a qualitative analysis of the capabilities of a sample of platform drivers aimed at identifying a policy orientation to achieve justice in the vehicle-for-hire industry.

Vehicle-for-hire services are an important industry for cities and contribute to the local economy by providing a prompt transportation link. Consequently, cities have commonly regulated the industry to maintain high quality service, control supply, and set fares to balance competing stakeholder interests (Cooper, Mundy and Nelson 2010). Moreover, with municipal policy determining minimum fares and limiting the number of drivers among other things, this industry is one in which municipal governments have been unusually influential regarding outcomes for workers (Dempsey 1996; Cooper, Mundy, and Nelson 2010). However, where platforms now facilitate the practice of vehicle-for-hire services, scholars argue that platforms have now taken on a regulatory role (Harding, Kandilikar and Gulati 2016; Sundararajan 2016; Lobel 2019). At the same time, scholars Collier, Dubal, and Carter (2018) find that municipalities have become less interventionist. Cities such as Toronto have withdrawn from regulating things like the number of drivers in the industry and relied more on the market to determine supply (Harding, Kandilikar and Gulati 2016; Adediji, Donaldson, and Haider 2019). This partial shift from municipal to industry-based regulation makes the vehicle-for-hire industry a useful case from which to consider the potential of local policy in the gig economy.

While calls to improve conditions for platform drivers are frequently directed to upper-level governments and the courts (Harris and Krueger 2015; Palagashvili, 2018; Ravenelle 2019), there have been attempts to support platform drivers at the municipal scale in cities like New York and Seattle (Goldman 2018; Groover 2020). However, beyond isolated examples, there is no consensus about best practices to support drivers and studies of the vehicle-for-hire industry before platforms, find that drivers have long been challenged by low wages, burdensome debts and unsafe conditions despite municipal regulation (Blasi and Leavitt 2006; Abraham, Sundar, and Whitmore 2008; Bruno 2009; Feeney 2015). Further, occasional driver and commentator Harry Campbell (2019) argues that workers do not always welcome regulation even on their behalf, stating that drivers fear the effects of restrictive policies on their own flexibility—a view that is supported by the recent ballot-box rejection of legislation in California that had been intended to extend employment protections to gig workers (Bellon and Vengattil 2020).

I argue that as platforms personalize the experience of urban services, regulations of these services can come to resemble constraints to personal liberty, invoking a long-debated tension between the concepts of liberty and equity (Nelson 2008). Fainstein's just city theory (2010) provides one tool that may help to navigate this conflict by providing a framework for resolving diverse values in municipal policy (Medved 2018; Connolly 2019). Fainstein builds from Rawls' abstract theory of "justice as fairness" (1971), but focusses her account on real world urban settings. She does this, first, by recognizing the importance of historical context, and second, by identifying justice with the values of diversity, democracy and equity as expressed in the practical capabilities of individual stakeholders (Fainstein 2010; Connelly and Steil 2009). That is to say, Fainstein (2010) identifies how these diverse values are integrated together to understand whether or how the capabilities available to individuals can be expected to provide for a dignified life.

She then supports urban policies that grant capabilities to those residents who are the least well-off. In this way, the just city theory provides a foundation for reconsidering policy that prioritizes equity and freedom in equal measure.

Following this orientation to diverse public values and individual capabilities, this paper explores justice for ridehailing drivers from an analysis of the accounts of drivers themselves. Thirty-two drivers from the City of Toronto and surrounding Greater Golden Horseshoe (GGH) region were recruited and interviewed to provide their account of driving with ridehailing platforms. This does not allow for a comprehensive assessment of municipal policy in the GGH region directly (alternatively see Adediji, Donaldson, and Haider 2019), but presents an analysis of what just policy might look like for drivers. Readers should note limitations of the study. Drivers were predominantly recruited from an airport location, which limits the representativeness of the sample. The study is also limited to a single region and does not capture the diversity of systems that can be found across all municipalities. However, the GGH region does fit a category of municipalities that have adapted vehicle-for-hire regulations to suit platforms and in that respect, it is a typical case (Collier, Dubal, and Carter 2018).

The paper begins by reviewing the literature on the changing context of ridehailing policy and the role of municipalities. It then provides an overview of other studies that examine the experience of drivers and orients this literature to Fainstein's interpretation of justice and individual capabilities. The paper proceeds to introduce the qualitative methods of the research and describes the Greater Golden Horseshoe case study before moving to present the results. These results are reported through an analysis of the capabilities and challenges experienced by drivers. The paper concludes by identifying a vision of a more just vehicle-for-hire industry that empowers drivers without applying arbitrary limitations.

Ride hailing policy and the challenges facing drivers

The rise of ridehailing platforms has produced a distinct era of regulation for the vehicle-for-hire industry (Harding et al. 2016). Whereas municipalities have commonly regulated the industry in the past (Dempsey 1996; Cooper, Mundy, and Nelson 2010), scholars find that upper-level governments, the courts and the platforms themselves have become increasingly relevant for setting policy in the industry today (Sundararajan 2016; Palagashvili 2018; Plantin et al. 2017; Collier et al. 2018;). Still, scholars like Rauch (2019) and Davidson and Infranca (2019) find municipalities continue to be relevant for the regulation of ridehailing platforms. Not only is the vehicle-for-hire industry particularly influential in regards to local matters such as traffic congestion and public transit (Rauch 2019), but Davidson and Infranca (2019) explain that many municipalities continue to have a legislated duty to regulate the industry. They add that municipalities have valuable regulatory experience, a small scale that enables regulatory innovation and a sensitivity to social consequences. Rauch (2019) notes that ridehailing platforms are also relevant to municipalities due to their potential for supporting redistributive policies. And finally, Ferreri and Sanyal (2018) expand on this potential where they emphasize the importance of questions of justice regarding urban services and urban form. They note that services help set the parameters for how cities are built and re-built and, thus, how the emerging city will modify existing patterns of urbanity.

To address these local interests in ridehailing platforms, scholars have produced an expanding body of literature that documents technical, social and regulatory changes and their effects on local interests (Collier et al. 2018; Spicer, Eidelmann, and Zwick 2019). Studies explore the quality of ridehailing services (Brown and LaValle 2020); the impact of platforms on traffic patterns, public transit and congestion (Clewlow and Mishra 2017; Henao and Marshall 2019a, 2019b); the geographic and cultural distribution of the service (Thebault-Spieker, Terveen, and Hecht 2017); the health and environmental impacts of ridehailing (Jalali et al. 2017; Rodier 2018; Reid-Musson, MacEachen, and Bartel 2020); and the pricing/matching policies that are used (Chen, Mislove, and Wilson 2015) among other topics. These works have produced an increasingly nuanced understanding of how platforms contribute to urban systems.

The effects of ridehailing platforms on the lives of workers has likewise received significant scholarly attention and in these studies scholars have frequently been critical of platforms and warn of unjust working conditions (Rosenblat 2018; Ravenelle 2019; Wells 2019; Attoh, Wells, and Cullen 2019). These studies document that platforms unilaterally alter terms of service or reduce rates with little warning or consultation (Rosenblat 2018; Wells 2019), demand that drivers agree to rides without the information needed to make a sound business decision (Rosenblat 2018), and subject drivers to strict oversight and unpredictable discipline (Ticona, Mateescu, and Rosenblat 2018). Altogether these studies document a combination of falling incomes, limited flexibility and unpredictable discipline that suggest platforms are exploiting workers who are in an otherwise challenged position in the labour market (Hua

and Ray 2018; Rosentblat 2018; Peticca-Harris, deGama, and Ravishankar 2018; Ticona, Mateescu, and Rosenblat 2018; Wells 2019).

Other perspectives on the industry find that drivers benefit from the flexibility of ridehailing (Lobel 2019). For instance, the costs to begin driving with ridehailing platforms are relatively modest when compared to the historical costs of taxi licensure (Rosenthal 2019). This ease of entry and exit makes ridehailing more practical as a temporary job that drivers can use to supplement and stabilize incomes from other jobs (Kantor 2014; Farrell, Greig, and Hamoudi 2018; Kumar 2018)—something that is increasingly valuable as incomes generated by individuals throughout the economy can be unstable (Hannagan and Morduch 2015). From such a perspective, ridehailing would seem to be more just than the past iterations of vehicle-for-hire industry. Indeed, Wells' (2019) research finds that despite finding instances of injustice, nearly half of drivers "would recommend the job to a friend" (p. 11). For drivers there is a risk to supporting a more protected workplace. The ridehailing model, has expanded ridership, creating work for a growing labour market (Schaller 2017), whereas government intervention may well lead to limited demand and result in fewer opportunities.

Fainstein's just city theory (2010) provides a tool to integrate such diverging perspectives on justice in order to direct public policy. According to Steil and Delgado (2019), the theory does so by recognizing a diverse set of values and resolving their contradictions through an analysis of capabilities available to individuals trying to piece together a meaningful and dignified life. The theoretical framework arises from Fainstein's survey of contemporary western theories of justice and her approach to make concrete what are undoubtedly abstract concepts. Fainstein (2010) identifies the values of democracy, diversity and equity as the foundation of a just city and she is motivated to confront what she describes as an urban system that consistently works against these values by rewarding those individuals who are already better off. Accordingly, this pushes Fainstein to prioritize equity amongst the three values.

Fainstein's approach is largely based on John Rawls' (1971) theory of justice and his concept of justice as fairness (Fainstein 2010). For Rawls, a situation is just when one would agree to that state of affairs without knowing one's future position in the state of affairs beforehand (1971, 12). Once guaranteed basic liberties and a fair distribution of "primary resources", individuals are then free to apply their resources to their own pursuits. Under such an evaluation, growth and inequality is desirable only where it maximizes the primary resources that are available to the least fortunate (Rawls 1971, 151). Fainstein's (2010) contribution to this theory is to set it into an urban context, where she argues that the benefits of growth are generally captured by those with the most wealth already. She then contrasts this with the promise that cities can also be places where local infrastructure and collective forms of consumption empower residents and mitigate the destabilizing effects of uneven development (Fainstein 2010). For Fainstein (2010), this situated balance of growth and social solidarity places a responsibility on urban policy makers to promote justice and the diverse values that inform a dignified and meaningful life.

While the just city has been applied by several scholars in recent years (Yiftachel and Mandelbaum 2017; Medved 2018; Connolly 2019; Steil and Delgado 2019;), critics argue that the theory lacks deliberative tools to effectively balance diverse interests (Lake 2016). Others contend that her theory presents an incrementalistic, expert-oriented paradigm that is too restrained to consider the large-scale social changes that are needed to achieve justice (Harvey and Potter 2003). Proponents counter that Fainstein does not refuse the tools of collaborative planning, but tempers their use by recognizing the inequalities that result from deliberative procedures (Connolly 2019). In regards to the incrementalism label, Fainstein accepts the argument. But rather than seeing it as a hindrance, she sees incrementalism as a method for building a sturdy basis for social change. Quoting from the work of Nancy Fraser, Fainstein calls on urban policy makers to support those who are most vulnerable and support their political constituencies in order to "set in motion a trajectory of change in which more radical reforms become practicable over time" (Fainstein 2010, loc. 372). This prioritization of incremental social mobilization is then expressed by Fainstein with a focus on individual capabilities (Steil and Delgado 2019). In doing so, Fainstein draws on Nussbaum's version of the capabilities approach to human development, where justice is a function of "what individuals are actually able to do and to be" (Nussbaum 2000 n.p.).

The focus on capabilities presents a tool of ethical theory that is used to diversify the goals of public policy (Robeyns 2017). Fainstein integrates this tool into her theory in order to identify how the values of democracy, diversity and equity can be applied to urban policy. To do so, Fainstein (2010) explicitly references Nussbaum's deductive method of identifying just standards of empowerment. Nussbaum identifies a list of essential individual capabilities defined by an "overlapping consensus" amongst stakeholders that are "always rational to want… whatsoever else one wants" (Rawls 1971, 92; Nussbaum 2000; 2011). This is not to say that individuals will always use their capabilities,

even when those capabilities are available to them. But those individuals do have the opportunity to use those capabilities as they pursue their own meaning in life.

Studies of the workplace and conceptualizations of essential capabilities for workers build from Nussbaum's list (Bonvin 2008; 2012; Kolben 2010; Zimmermann 2012; Subramanian et al. 2013; Miles 2014). Kolben (2010), for example, highlights those categories that he finds most relevant: the capabilities of life', 'bodily health', 'bodily integrity', 'practical reason', 'control over one's environment', 'play', and 'affiliation'. The first three categories point to safe and healthy work conditions—critical considerations in the vehicle-for-hire industry that has long been plagued by unsafe conditions (Dempsey 1996; Feeney 2015). 'Practical reason' and 'control over one's environment' reference the ability of workers to participate in determining the structure of the industry, to participate in decision making, or to respond to conditions with autonomy. Among other scholars this capability is interpreted as a "capability for voice", where one can contest policies or 'exit' from the industry (Subramanian et al. 2013, 295; Bonvin 2012). 'Play', Kolben interprets as a standard of income for workers that enables them to afford spare time free of excessive overtime work, what other scholars describe as the balance of work and life (Zimmermann 2012). In a platform system where work is described as a form of leisure (Cockayne 2016), such a distinction would appear to be of importance for workers.

Finally, 'affiliation' references two capabilities: First, the capability of individuals to build meaningful relationships with colleagues. And second, the capacity to come together politically. It is in the work of recent scholars on the capabilities approach that we find a growing acknowledgement of the importance of groups insofar as they empower the individual (Evans 2002). As Evans argues, "for those already sufficiently privileged to enjoy a full range of capabilities, collective action may seem superfluous to capability, but for the less privileged attaining development as freedom requires collective action" (2002, 56). Fainstein's just city theory places an emphasis on those less privileged and therefore would seem to place an importance on this mode of capability building.

To summarize, debate around the just treatment of platform drivers has produced both calls for greater government oversight and skepticism about the value of that oversight. To understand how municipal policy could best achieve justice given these conflicting perspectives, this study follows Fainstein's just city theory and the account of justice as the expression of diversity, democracy and equity within the capabilities available to individual drivers. The literature has provided a point of departure for understanding the essential capabilities of a just workplace. In the following sections I examine capabilities and vulnerabilities reported by drivers, arguing that just policies in this industry require not just a minimum set of capabilities but a system that is open to expanding those capabilities over time as drivers themselves coalesce around the capabilities that matter most.

Case study introduction and research methods

To identify how platform drivers experience the industry and express justice or a lack of justice through their capabilities, this study conducts a qualitative analysis of key-informant interviews with platform drivers based in Toronto and the Greater Golden Horseshoe (GGH) region of Ontario, Canada. The GGH region was chosen because, with a population of over 9 million, it is a significant market with multiple platforms in operation. Municipalities in the region have also liberalized the industry (Adediji, Donaldson, and Haider 2019), which Collier, Dubal and Carter (2018) find to be a typical path taken by municipal policy makers across North-America.

Like the majority of provinces in Canada, Ontario delegates regulation of the vehicle-for-hire industry to municipalities (Ontario 2001; 2006). And municipalities have typically regulated these industries with a mix of market-based processes and legislated standards (Papillon 1982). Historically, the resulting policy orientation has produced mixed results for drivers (Abraham et al. 2008). An example of this where there has been significant controversy is the policy to limit the numbers of vehicle-for-hire drivers. Over time this limit has been combined with a market approach to buying and selling industry licenses intended to help drivers build wealth. Ultimately the combination of these policies led to a growing financial burden for new drivers as the prices of licenses rose (Abraham et al. 2008). After 1998 and updated in 2014, this secondary market was curtailed by privileging an owner-operator model that limited licenses to one per owner (Abraham et al. 2008; Hui 2014). However, the introduction of ridehailing platforms has pushed regulation to rely more on markets than ever—not only to determine the supply of drivers, but to set standards of quality and market prices as well (Ngabo 2018; Hui 2014). Under this new system, municipalities oversee a system that is largely determined by the platform informed by municipal safety standards (Adediji, Donaldson, and Haider 2019).

To examine the outcomes for drivers within the current policy regime, interviews were used to identify the perceived capabilities and vulnerabilities reported by drivers. A total of 32 interviews were conducted with drivers over nine months from September 2018 to May 2019. These drivers represented different levels of dedication to the job including 13 full-time drivers, eight drivers who had another part-time job, and 11 drivers with other full-time jobs. Drivers were recruited for interviews through face-to-face meetings in areas where drivers wait between rides. Recruiting locations included suburban mall parking lots, city streets, library parking lots but over 80% of participants were recruited at an airport parking lot. This location facilitated interviews without engaging in a transactional relationship because drivers there are informed of their place in queue for the next ride and waits can be as long as two hours. While only a small percentage of the overall vehicle-for-hire market are taken from international airports in similar sized cities (NYC Taxi and Limousine Committee 2018), airports provide drivers with a desirable long-distance ride that drivers have an incentive to wait for after getting a ride to the airport (Ravenelle 2019). This suggests the airport could include any driver from across the region. However, future research should be conducted to understand how representative drivers at airports compare to the overall population of drivers. Some differences that could make this sample unrepresentative are that these drivers might exclude occasional drivers who drive for very short periods of the day.

Interview participants from this study hailed mostly from the cities adjacent to the airport (Mississauga = 5; Brampton = 6; Toronto = 10) but a considerable number (seven) arrived from farther flung suburban or ex-urban municipalities across the region, while four drivers did not provide a home municipality. Participants were overwhelmingly male, with only a single female participant and only three female-presenting individuals encountered throughout the recruitment process. The sample of drivers included many (20 of 32) who moved to Canada within the last ten years but eight having resided in the country for greater than 20 years (see Table 1). These participants hailed from households with moderate incomes with four participants declaring incomes under $20,000 on the low end, six participants between $60,000 and $80,000 on the high end and no household incomes reported above $80,000. Among these participants, the majority were new to the job with 19 having less than one year experience and only 12 with more than one year experience. This reflects an industry that Ferrell, Greig, and Hamoudi (2018) find to be dominated by part-time and temporary workers even if full-time workers provide a comparable number of rides due to their greater dedication to the job (also see Hall and Krueger 2018).

Drivers from all service levels were invited to participate; however, recruiting at the airport was limited to the parking lot dedicated to UberX/UberSUV/UberPool drivers and did not include the luxury tiers of service. This was done to focus research on the platform tier with the largest number of drivers registered and the most diversity in regards to driver commitment ranging from full-time drivers to hobbyists (Levin 2016). One important note resulting from this focus is that during the time of this research drivers with the luxury segments of ride-hailing platforms were engaged in a self-declared union drive. This movement was not captured in the data collected. Public statements from unionizing drivers excluded the drivers in the less expensive tiers of service due to the lower degree of dedication among those drivers (Kopun 2019).

Interview questions focused on the background and motivation of drivers; the experience drivers have of work including the challenges they face; the strategies they use to overcome these challenges; the examination of earnings; and finally, the opinions of drivers regarding corporate and public policy. Responses to these questions were recorded and transcribed to allow for thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006; Guest, MacQueen, and Namey 2014). The capabilities identified from the literature provided an initial set of themes for coding transcripts, but new themes were also identified through multiple readings of the transcripts. This proceeded first, by coding transcripts using Nvivo software, which is software developed specifically to support qualitative research and analysis. That code was then refined through multiple reviews of the transcripts. Participant perspectives and opinions on each theme were then categorized, tallied, and representative or insightful quotations were selected for use in the paper. These perspectives were then analyzed to understand how they integrate values of democracy, diversity and equity as well as how those values might inform a vision of justice regarding municipal policy.

Driver perspectives on ride-hailing platforms and capabilities at work

Driver participants described a range of interpretations of their work with platforms, however common themes emerged that described a belief in the opportunity platforms provide to drivers, a general satisfaction with the work, but also a disappointment with the treatment they receive from platforms. Many drivers from the sample—including

Table 1
Participating driver characteristics

Work Status			Driver full-time	Has other part-time Job	Has other full-time Job	No response
			13	8	11	0
Length of Time on Platform			< 1 years	1 - 2 years	> 2 years	No response
			19	8	5	0
Household income	< $20,000	$20,001 – $40,000	$40,001 – $60,000	$60,001 – $80,000	> $80,001	
	4	5	12	6	0	
Length of Time Living in Canada	< 2 years	2 – 10 years	10 – 20 years	> 20 Years	No response	
	7	13	1	8	2	
Self-identify as visible minority				Yes	No	No response
				17	10	8

those who were generally satisfied—presented experiences of injustice on the job. These contradictions within the accounts of individual drivers, demonstrate a wide range of factors that affect drivers' assessments of work and that influence how values of diversity, democracy and equity are resolved within their work and lives. Here I outline the capabilities described by participants including the ability to work in safety and with integrity, to contribute to decisions about operations, to balance work and life, and to act collectively to improve conditions.

Workplace safety and integrity

Despite working in a vehicle-for-hire industry that has long had a poor record of driver safety (Dempsey 1996; Abraham et al. 2008), interviewed platform drivers expressed a general level of ease with the safety risks entailed by the job. Drivers expressed approval of the safety precautions added by the platform such as the need for passengers to register and the presence of an emergency services direct line within their application interface. Greater diversity may be possible as safety is perceived to be less of a problem for drivers. At the same time, nearly all drivers revealed moments when they felt vulnerable on the job and 18 of 32 drivers expressed a desire for further safety precautions even at the expense of flexibility (see Table 2). It is notable that the lone woman and a small number of male participants stated that they only drove during daylight hours for safety reasons. Consequently, additional safety features and flexibility were considered meaningful factors for improving safety on ridehailing platforms.

In contrast, drivers expressed feeling more vulnerable in regards to possible complaints from customers. While platform oversight gave these drivers a sense of safety, they felt that this oversight contributed to a disciplinary system that threatened their integrity and promoted unsafe driving. One form of oversight drivers complained about is the five-star driver rating systems that studies have shown may lead to the removal of drivers from the platform for scores even above 4 out of 5 (Rosenblat 2018; Ticona, Mateescu, and Rosenblat 2018). Another method of oversight that drivers were particularly emotional about where times when customers complained directly to the platform. In

Table 2
Capabilites from 32 drivers

STATEMENTS REGARDING CAPABILITIES	TESTIMONY SUPPORTS STATEMENT	TESTIMONY DOES NOT SUPPORT STATEMENT	DID NOT RESPOND OR TESTIMONY IS UNCLEAR
Capability to Work in Safety and with Integrity			
I would like further safety protections even if it compromises my flexibility.	18	7	7
I experienced or worry about unfair discipline from the platform.	15	10	7
Capability to Voice Worker Concerns			
I am able to resolve problems with platform help.	9	17	6
I work on multiple platforms.	11	21	0
I understand clearly how much I make from driving after expenses.	10	20	2
I am able to select the rides I take strategically.	1	25	6
Capability to Balance Work and Life			
Schedule flexibility is the primary reason I choose to drive on the platform.	22	10	0
Pay after expenses is above local minimum wage.	9	15	8
A minimum wage or pay floor would help drivers.	20	7	5
Capability to Affiliate with Colleagues			
I would support a union or professional association.	20	11	1
I am willing to protest or support protests.	2	28	2
I am active in online forums.	6	23	3

these cases, drivers could be removed immediately after just one unverified complaint. For example, five of 32 drivers reported being falsely reported to the platform for driving under the influence of alcohol. These accusations caused the drivers to be temporarily or permanently removed from the platform. For some drivers this was particularly disappointing as they stated having never once in their lives trying alcohol or drugs. A driver who was kicked off one platform entirely described that "I wasn't allowed to rebut [the complaint] in any way, shape or form. And the person that [complained] got a free ride… Can you go get a breathalyzer in a police station? No! I'm just cut off completely" (Driver 7). Even for those who later were allowed to return to the platform, it was unclear whether the complaint would remain on their record or how such an accusation would continue to affect them.

Drivers described these systems of oversight as arbitrary and felt compelled to acquiesce to customer demands even when these were dangerous. For instance, two drivers reported an experience of customers pressuring them to drive above the speed limit. As one driver explained:

one customer was pushing me very hard to drive fast. He said, 'guy, why are you driving so slow'? I said 'the speed limit is 60 here so why you want me to drive faster? It's not safe for you also'. He said that 'everybody else is driving [fast]'. I said 'I am not responsible for everybody else's ticket'… So that guy gave me a poor rating" (Driver 11).

Another driver recounted actually getting a speeding ticket after being urged by a customer to go faster. These episodes demonstrate a system of oversight that displaces risk onto workers and third-parties in the event of a tragedy. These are public safety concerns that municipalities in the region have overseen in the past and which they continue to have an obligation to oversee. However, drivers described no municipal processes available for them to dispute complaints. Rather, all interactions between drivers and municipal regulators were described as facilitated by the platform.

Where technology has produced tools for greater safety and drivers suggested that they are enabled to tailor their work locations and timing to suit their tolerances, this would seem to make ridehailing platforms a more diverse workplace than past iterations of the vehicle-for-hire industry. However, at the same time, where decision making is inscrutable, the lack of accountability demonstrates a deficit of democratic values and may encourage inequality among drivers who are most dependent upon the job and forced to accept unsafe practices to maintain their good standing. As such this creates a situation, described by Hua and Ray (2018), where those whom already have resources are most likely to succeed, while those without resources remain vulnerable.

Worker voice
Accounts from drivers expressed a limited ability to effect change in the workplace, decide upon workplace practices, or influence platform management. On the face of it, these drivers were independent actors and they acknowledged their ability to choose their time and place of work, something discussed in the following section. One additional freedom that did have meaning to drivers was their ability to refuse a customer. Many drivers stated that they would be willing to use this option when feeling unsafe, yet in practice few had ever done so. Drivers described few other functions in which they exercised autonomy over their business. For example, a minority of drivers took advantage of competition between platforms with only 11 of 32 registered with the two largest platforms, Uber and Lyft, and none registered with any other platform operating in the region.

Otherwise, drivers described an inability to exercise practical reason in their own operations due to a monopolization of information by the platform. Drivers could only guess where the best places were to wait for rides and had no understanding prior to accepting the ride of where their next ride would take them. Twenty of 32 drivers lacked an understanding of how much income they made from the job after expenses encompassing a set of drivers that includes those working full time. One driver expressed a lack of trust regarding the distribution of pay between driver and platform. He noted that "I could never even calculate how much they are charging exactly, like what percentage they charge" (Driver 25). Another driver described the revelation he had when he once saw a passenger's receipt from a trip he had given. He recounted that, "they [the platform] charged him [the passenger] like $40 and they only gave me $20. So, like a 50% [margin for Uber]. Although I pay for everything" (Driver 13).

Regarding drivers' ability to deal effectively with platforms and potentially influence decisions made by the platforms, the results were not positive. Drivers reported that typical interactions are hurried and superficial. Drivers would typically text the platform when faced with a problem and could expect responses promptly. However, drivers complained that any complication would be met by numerous pre-canned responses that would fail to capture the nuances. Finally, drivers argued that judgements, when rendered by the platform, were unilateral decisions that could not be appealed. This caused drivers to give up on resolving issues such as inappropriate complaints or problems with pay. Altogether 19 of 32 interviewed drivers complained that they were treated unfairly by the platform in regards to disputes over conduct or pay. While drivers were able to easily settle small disputes with the platform, there was a lack of opportunities to share information about more complex topics. This presents a deficit of democracy and equity within the regime.

Work-life balance

Drivers were most enthusiastic in their approval of flexible working hours. Twenty-two of 32 drivers selected flexibility as the primary quality that led them to choosing this work. Fourteen of 32 drivers had dependents for whom they were responsible and the ability to fashion an individualized schedule helped ease complicated lives. As one driver described, "Well I'm a father, I have a wife and a small daughter, she's 5 years old and lives with me, so it's a matter of when I finish here I'll go pick her up from kindergarten and we'll spend some time together, mommy comes home and I go out and drive again" (Driver 7). While the literature suggests that low prices and pricing policies that reward certain hours over others essentially apply a rigid schedule for drivers, this sample provided several examples of drivers making decisions about when to work for their own reasons. For instance, one driver only worked on their commute to their full-time job, while others refused to work at night for safety reasons.

But high numbers of drivers using the platforms did undermine the expected balance of work and life among this sample of drivers by necessitating longer hours at work over the course of their time on the platform. Among interviewed drivers who felt confident that they knew their income after costs, consensus was that hourly wages were below the $14/hour minimum wage in the jurisdiction. For other drivers whose costs were unclear, most felt that their income was decreasing over time. One driver who explicitly acknowledged his own lack of financial savviness reported that "actually Uber is just paying for my gas and my livings. The depreciation the car works, I don't count it. Uber is just using my car for free… If we go like depreciation, I'm making like $9 bucks an hour, $8 bucks. Which is like—if you're living in Toronto—is not good" (Driver 31). Twenty-one drivers expressed frustration about the under-valuation of their labour and personal investments in the business. Only four described pay as fair, while seven made no clear statement. These concerns led drivers to support the idea of new government or company interventions to raise fares for drivers or limit the number of drivers on the road.

For drivers from this sample, work-life balance was a valuable quality that could help facilitate greater diversity and equity in the workforce. Nevertheless, the sample revealed anxiety among drivers about the future of their earnings. With flexibility delivered by the easy entry and exit of drivers from the system, this very mechanism is what risks compromising driver wages, ultimately producing an inequitable market structure where drivers carry all the risks of excess supply, while the platforms carry none.

Collective organization

Collective organization from drivers in the sample was mostly informal. Particularly when discussing safety concerns, drivers mentioned the need for personal connections that would help in an emergency. Frequently, these connections were friends or family, but just as often these individuals were other drivers. Several drivers described participating in a large digital messenger group for drivers that shared news and other forms of support. Among drivers that frequented the airport, there were individuals who would venture out to meet and discuss with other drivers in the airport parking lot where co-location promoted interpersonal connection. Other locations did not appear to offer this same level of interaction between drivers though this is an area where more research would be valuable to understand how physical co-location supports collective organization in the gig economy.

More formal interactions between drivers for the pursuit of collective interests was not evident in this sample. While over the period of recruitment, drivers from the luxury-tier of ridehailing services were mobilizing to form a union, drivers of lower-tier services like UberX were explicitly excluded (Kopun 2019). There was no similar initiative for mobilization among drivers in this sample. Nonetheless, drivers in this survey expressed support for more formal organization. Twenty interview participants of 32 supported the idea of a union or professional association of drivers. Among these 20, five drivers noted that they were previously not supportive of unions and were only becoming supportive as a result of poor conditions on the job. Drivers generally supported cooperative but not antagonistic forms of collective action, with only two drivers in support of protests and only one stating they would be active in those protests. Instead, many drivers envisioned collective organization as a means to raise the importance of driver concerns and to impress upon platforms the value of a skilled and motivated roster of drivers.

Drivers noted a lack of cohesion and a feeling of alienation that discouraged collective action. These barriers between drivers were generally ascribed to different levels of commitment to the work, particularly between full-time and part-time drivers. Drivers also described seeing their fellow drivers as competition. One driver who described his own changing perceptions noted that in the past "I might feel like they [other drivers] are competition. So, it's kind of my own reservation that I had... [Now,] I see it more as a co-worker type of relationship," (Driver 1). However, the

lack of cohesion was also linked by drivers to the ridehailing system. They noted that the market rewards individuals particularly when there are fewer people working, which means one person's protest is another driver's business opportunity. "When you're protesting," one driver argued, "when you start a revolution, you need a bunch of people that think like you. The same thinking. So, if I stop driving, these people are going to work, work, work. They're not going to bother at all". This conflict between drivers challenges democratic values and places vulnerable drivers who would most benefit from collective action in a position where cooperation is strained.

Vision of justice for drivers

The sample of drivers in this study reveal an experience of ridehailing platforms that enables some capabilities at the cost of other capabilities. In particular, platforms have produced conditions that potentially suit more diversity, including newcomers and those with demanding household obligations. However, the very market mechanisms that enable this diversity also might increase inequality, as drivers—alone—face the costs of a growing glut of drivers in the market.

Still, drivers who might benefit from government intervention were only moderately supportive of policy change to address inequality. The common values that drivers prioritized from the sample were flexibility, driver autonomy and fairness in pay and dispute resolution—values that drivers worried may be incompatible for their industry. Drivers worried that public policy would limit their flexibility and their access to work. Consequently, drivers offered uneven support for specific policies. Twenty drivers, for instance, supported the idea of a minimum wage or a wage floor, while 16 thought a limit should be placed on the number of drivers to increase business for those online. At the same time, there were sizable minorities that strongly disagreed with both of these policies (seven and 11 respectively). They argued that under such a policy, they themselves might not have had the chance to join the industry.

Further, even supporters of these measures identified fears that arbitrary limits, like the date one started on the platform, would curb their ability to work. As one driver said, "just because I got in early doesn't mean everyone else shouldn't have a chance to make their own money too… You come from Newfoundland and you know the importance of having a job, being able to work" (Driver 7). Other drivers were less worried about new drivers, but did express solidarity with other current drivers. One part-time driver that demonstrated this dynamic suggested that it is those drivers who have committed to the work that should be given priority.

> If I'm using this, you know, two times a week and buddy is using it seven times a week as his full-time job he should have a little bit more priority. But you shouldn't leave the priority to my score rating from some customer just giving me a one. That shouldn't determine why I get that ride. It should be the guy who put in the most hours that week" (Driver 10).

This expression of individual self-interest within a broader concern for drivers as a class hints at an emerging solidarity demonstrated by this sample and a direction for public policy that encourages a dignified livelihood for drivers without hard restrictions to the industry.

These accounts from drivers suggest that municipal regulation and the empowerment of ridehailing platforms has contributed to unjust conditions particularly in regards to the values of democracy and equity. And yet, municipalities have significant authority to intervene for change particularly in regards to standards of quality, limits to the numbers of drivers and oversight regarding fares (Ontario 2001, 156 (1) a-c; Ontario 2006). Thus, there is an opportunity for greater justice where these legislative parameters come to express greater democracy and equity for drivers. For example, municipalities may empower drivers by building a greater understanding of the industry amongst those drivers, establishing clearer rules and procedures for comportment and discipline, stabilizing relationships between industry actors, and setting minimum fares that must be passed on to drivers. Policies that have the potential to align policy to these values include:

- Mandated driver training: Cities like Toronto have already identified a need for increased training to drivers that was not being provided by the platform (Moore 2019). This sample of drivers suggests that skills training should include teaching safety procedures, basic business training, and explanations about how platform algorithms reward or punish typical driver practices.
- Impartial tribunals: With discipline for platform drivers left to the platform, standards of good work are unclear or left up to individual passenger preferences (Adediji, Donaldson and Haider

2019). Extending tribunals to platform drivers ensures disciplinary procedures are more clear and sets drivers on a more equal footing with platforms and customers.

- Direct municipal licensure of drivers: Municipalities have typically used licenses to limit numbers of drivers and ensure high standards of service. While licensure continues in GGH municipalities like Toronto, the relationship between municipalities and drivers are largely mediated by the platform (Adediji, Donaldson, and Haider 2019). A return to a direct relationship between municipal regulator and platform drivers, could require platforms to contract with any and all drivers from the municipal roster of licensed operators thus eliminating the direct control platforms currently wield over drivers.

- Support for professional associations: Support for drivers could further be achieved through cooperation between the municipality and labour organizations. Such a model has already been seen in New York City where the municipality has coordinated an informal negotiation between collectively organized drivers and ridehailing platforms (Johnston 2018).

- Fare and ride distribution oversight: Municipalities may set minimum fares that are paid to drivers not platforms and demand the public disclosure of variables that determine fares on the platform, how rides are distributed to drivers, and the fares that are paid to drivers.

Conclusion

The current platform-centric vehicle-for-hire regime appears to have raised the capabilities of drivers in this sample, particularly where drivers faced hurdles in accessing the job market or have limited availability to work due other life pressures. Yet, in achieving greater diversity, these platforms hinder the pursuit of democracy and equity in the workplace. The policies that enable easy market entry and exit are also what risk driver wages and capabilities for collective organization. Ultimately, drivers described only limited control over their work and had a poor understanding of how they could improve their outcomes. While these results only bear a direct relationship to drivers who frequent the airport within the Greater Golden Horseshoe, the challenges that drivers describe confirm results from past studies that find platform operations to be exploitative of vulnerable workers due to a thin focus on access over other important aspects of a just workplace (Hua and Ray 2018; Wells 2019; Attoh, Wells, and Cullen 2019; Rosenblat 2018).

For policy makers, this account of injustice in the vehicle-for-hire industry signals that there remains value to continued regulation at a local level. Solidarity between drivers was present but subdued and drivers showed little capacity to address injustices on their own. At the same time, this sample demonstrated only moderate support for traditional forms of regulation. I argue that the just city theory, with its emphasis upon building capabilities for the least well-off, provides a useful alternative policy orientation for decision makers. This alternative orientation leads to policies that support workers directly rather than placing limits on the industry with the expectation that outcomes for drivers will be improved as a response. For their part, ridehailing platform firms should be encouraged by their value proposition to drivers and should work with local interests to fill out their approach to find mutually beneficial policies that support drivers and build a solid industry.

Looking to the larger gig economy, where digital platforms are emerging as infrastructure for all manner of local services, the vehicle-for-hire industry provides a useful example of what local intervention might look like. For example, in the era of COVID-19, where food delivery has become increasingly important, North American cities have already begun intervening to ensure positive interactions between delivery platforms and other stakeholders in the economy—notably restaurants (Snyder 2020). In Toronto, it was the city that encouraged provincial intervention in the industry (Draaisma 2020). The troubled history of municipal regulation of vehicle-for-hire services, and the opportunities apparent from municipal policy oriented around capabilities for vulnerable workers present lessons that researchers and policy makers should take care to consider as they weigh the costs and benefits of expanding local intervention in the gig economy more broadly.

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