Social Reproduction in the

French Grandes Écoles throughout the 20ᵗʰ Century:

the insight of surnames[1]

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Abstract

This paper tackles multigenerational social mobility in the French *Grandes Écoles* (higher education elite schools) using surnames to track lineages. We constructed a nominative dataset of 295,069 graduate students from eleven French elite schools over six cohorts between 1886 and 2015. We estimated the relative admission rates of several groups of surnames across generations. Essentially, we compared the frequency of surnames in the schools to their frequency among the French population. Our methodology shows that Parisians have had 5 to 9 times more chances to enroll such schools over the last century and that aristocratic families significantly increased their presence in the *Grandes Écoles*, providing more than 3% of the students nowadays. These patterns differ depending on schools' specializations. We also investigated the benefits of having a relative who studied in a *Grande École*, using rare surnames in order to focus on actual relatives, and not on bearers of highly occurring surnames. The offspring of a graduate from a century ago still has significantly more chances to enroll today. Although we show that social mobility has improved in the *Grandes Écoles* over the 20th Century, our results provide evidence that the French elite secures the education outcomes of its offspring over generations.

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