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Abstract

In France, while schools are supposed to be sources of social mobility, as in any democratic society, it appears that children from privileged socio-economic categories are increasingly overrepresented in preparatory classes for the Grandes Écoles. The French studies trying to understand elite reproduction have mainly focused on family inheritance overlooking the fact that social privilege is also mediated through institutions, as highlighted by the scientific literature on selective admissions in the US. Following such line of inquiry, this article aims to show how patterns of ?school-linking processes? allow for social closure in France?s first-class higher education. It presents a comparative case study research which is both descriptive and explanatory in design. Results combine quantitative data to identify the secondary schools that feed the elite paths of three major high schools offering preparatory classes; and qualitative data in order to understand the strategies of these three major high schools to select their applicants. The findings suggest that access to French elite education is clearly shaped by school-linking phenomena but that the forms of these links depend on the preparatory

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classes? geographical location and catchment areas inducing different types of strategies from the selection committees. The conclusion highlights that these French specificities in terms of institutional linkages lead to different practical implications from those of US research. (HRK / Abstract übernommen) Buisson-Fenet, Hélène, E-Mail: helene.buissonfenet@enslyon.fr