Campus Political Climate and University Choice: Evidence from France

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Abstract

Do political preferences shape where students choose to study? We investigate this question in France, combining administrative data on the universe of Parcoursup applicants with a conjoint survey experiment conducted with 1,040 final-year high school students. In the administrative data, students are more likely to apply to universities whose campus political climate aligns with the political leaning of their ZIP code, controlling for student, university, and major fixed effects, and the same applicant tailors the political content of her statements of purpose to the leaning of each institution. In the conjoint experiment, where alignment is randomly assigned, campus political climate carries a weight comparable to that of distance: students are willing to travel approximately one additional hour to attend a politically aligned institution, and 72% of surveyed students report that a university whose political atmosphere differed strongly from their own would make them hesitate to attend. We then combine the two data sources, using the conjoint estimates to correct the administrative estimates for endogeneity. Counterfactual simulations quantify the effect of a taste for political alignment: it leads students to attend programs 2.6 kilometers farther from home. The effects are heterogeneous by academic grade, socio-economic background, and political leaning: it pulls centrist students toward more distant, more expensive, and more selective programs, and left-leaning students in the opposite direction.

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1 Introduction

In Western democracies, political sorting is well documented across residential choices, workplaces, marriage markets, and social networks (Brown and Enos, 2021; Colonnelli, Neto and Teso, 2022; Iyengar, Konitzer and Tedin, 2018; Halberstam and Knight, 2016). This evidence, however, leaves out an institution central to the formation of political views and participation: higher education (Firoozi, 2023; Kaplan, Spenkuch and Tuttle, 2025*b*; Bell et al., 2024, see Willeck and Mendelberg, 2022 for a review). We ask: *do high-school students sort politically when they decide where to apply to university?* And if so, *how does political sorting shape the allocation of students across universities?*

To answer it, we turn to France, where a centralized admission platform records the application choices of every undergraduate applicant, and we combine these administrative data with a conjoint survey experiment conducted with 1,040 final-year high-school students. Both sources show that students do sort politically. In the administrative data, each unit of political misalignment between a student and a university reduces the probability of applying by 17%. In the survey, political alignment carries a weight comparable to distance, worth about one additional hour of travel, and 72% of students report that a university whose political atmosphere differed strongly from their own would make them hesitate to attend. We then combine the two sources, using the conjoint estimates to correct the administrative estimates for endogeneity, and find that political taste leads students to attend programs farther from home on average, with effects that differ sharply across student types.

The first part of the paper documents political sorting using administrative data. Our empirical setting is France, one of the few countries where every undergraduate application goes through a single national platform, Parcoursup. Its records give us an unusually complete picture: the full list of applications, responses to offers, and the final allocation for every applicant, together with the universe of programs on the supply side and rich student-level covariates. To measure *political misalignment* for each institution-student pair, we proceed in two steps. First, we construct a value-based measure of campus political climate at the institution level, taking values in $\{-1, 0, 1\}$. We define campus political climate as the perceived political atmosphere of an institution, as reflected in its active student associations or public reputation, rather than in formal institutional positions or the views of its faculty. Second, we pair this measure with student-level measures of political leaning on the same scale, derived from ZIP-code voting. Political misalignment between an institution and a student is then the absolute difference between the two, taking values 0 (aligned), 1 (moderate misalignment), and 2 (strong misalignment).

In the administrative data, controlling for student, university, and major fixed effects, each unit of political misalignment between a student and a university reduces the probability of applying by 17% relative to the mean application probability, so that students in pairs with opposite leanings are about a third less likely to apply than politically aligned students. We also find within-student evidence of deliberate alignment: applicants adapt the content of their statements of purpose to the campus political climate of each target institution. The administrative data capture revealed choices for the universe of applicants, but they cannot separate political taste from confounders such as geography, peer composition, or socioeconomic background.

The second part of the paper turns to the conjoint experiment. We ask respondents to choose between hypothetical programs of the same major whose selectivity, distance, fees, and main student associations are randomly assigned; we proxy the campus political climate with randomized political student associations, and we measure students' own leaning from their stated priorities for society. Political alignment enters students' utility with a weight comparable to

distance: students are willing to travel approximately one additional hour to attend a politically aligned institution. Relatedly, 72% report they would hesitate to attend a university whose political atmosphere differed strongly from their own. The conjoint provides clean exogenous variation in political alignment but relies on hypothetical decisions and a small sample.

Finally, we combine the two sources, using each to correct the other's blind spots (Todd and Wolpin, 2023). Throughout, we refer to administrative-data choices as *revealed preferences* (RP) and conjoint choices as *stated preferences* (SP). To move from correlation to causation, we apply two complementary strategies. First, a partial-identification framework (Meango, Henry and Mourifie, 2025) bounds the probability that a randomly drawn student would apply to at least one institution at a given level of misalignment if that level were randomly assigned, using the marginal distributions of stated and revealed preferences without imposing functional-form assumptions. Under the identifying assumptions, the bounds imply a causal effect of misalignment on applications: the lower bound on the application probability for aligned pairs (0.573) lies strictly above the upper bound for strongly misaligned pairs (0.473), whereas the bounds for aligned and moderately misaligned pairs overlap.

Second, we estimate a discrete-choice model in both samples and combine the estimates through a ratio-transfer step. Because political alignment is randomized in the conjoint, the conjoint estimates identify the ratio of the political-alignment and distance coefficients. In the administrative data, the distance coefficient is consistently estimated under the assumption of no residential sorting, whereas the alignment coefficient may be biased. Scaling the administrative distance coefficient by the conjoint ratio then recovers the alignment coefficient on the revealed-preference scale. Counterfactual simulations that remove the political taste component imply that, in partial equilibrium, students would attend programs about 2.6 km closer to home and marginally less selective, with no significant change in fees. This average masks sharp heterogeneity. The reallocation is concentrated among high-grade students and students from working-class backgrounds, whereas low-grade students move in the opposite direction. By political leaning, centrist students would attend programs about 28 km closer, 266 € cheaper, and less selective. Left-leaning students, whose aligned options are already cheap and selective, move in the opposite direction on every dimension, and right-leaning students barely move. One interpretation is that political alignment acts as a student-specific anchor: students are drawn toward the politically coded programs in their feasible set, and removing this taste reallocates each student toward the distance, fees, and selectivity profile that would otherwise govern her choice.

These findings carry implications beyond individual choice. Political sorting in higher education may amplify existing polarization by separating ideological groups at a formative stage, and may reinforce geographic and socioeconomic divides. France is a particularly apt setting, since affective polarization has increased in recent decades (Boxell, Gentzkow and Shapiro, 2024), youth voters are disproportionately concentrated at the political extremes (Ipsos, 2024), and universities have become visible arenas of political expression. In both 2022 and 2024, institutional bodies publicly opposed far-right parties (Dessaux, 2024).

Our contribution is fourfold. First, we bring administrative data on the universe of applicants to a question the literature has primarily approached through enrolled students or through subsequent political behavior. A large body of work documents the effect of education on political participation (see Willeck and Mendelberg, 2022 for a review; Kaplan, Spenkuch and Tuttle, 2025*b*; Bell et al., 2024) and on political preferences (Firoozi, 2023; Cantoni et al., 2017; Billings, Chyn and Haggag, 2021; Kaplan, Spenkuch and Tuttle, 2025*a*,*b*). These effects operate through peer composition, roommates, campus norms, and curricula. Our focus is distinct: we

study political sorting *at the moment of application*, before any selection by admissions, peer effects, or curriculum can operate. Related in spirit is Bell et al. (2024), who show that attending a college with higher voter turnout rates increases an individual's likelihood of voting. Their focus is the reverse causal arrow (college experience shaping political engagement), and they treat colleges' turnout rates as residual characteristics rather than active choice dimensions.[1] Acton, Cook and Ugalde (2025) are closest to our reduced-form analysis: they document political homophily in US college choice using HERI freshman survey data (1980–2020) and conjoint experiments. Three design differences distinguish our approach: we use administrative data on the universe of active applicants rather than enrolled students (avoiding post-rationalization), observe the full supply side of a centralized system, and combine revealed and stated preferences to produce causal counterfactual predictions.

Second, we extend the empirical literature on political sorting, documented in workplaces (Colonnelli, Neto and Teso, 2022; Chinoy and Koenen, 2024), residential location (Glaeser and Ward, 2006; Brown and Enos, 2021), and dating and marriage markets (Iyengar, Konitzer and Tedin, 2018), to higher education in a large European multiparty democracy, a setting where the choice has formative consequences both for cohorts of young adults and for the institutions that admit them.

Third, we contribute to two strands of the college-choice literature. The first asks what drives college choice beyond academic quality: Delavande and Zafar (2019) show that non-pecuniary factors, including a university's ideology and parental approval, matter as much as earnings in Pakistan, using subjective expectations data and a conjoint with enrolled first-year students. We extend this finding to a high-income European context, using administrative data on active applicants. The second studies how preferences and constraints shape application behavior in centralized assignment mechanisms (Pathak, 2011; Agarwal and Somaini, 2020; Fack, Grenet and He, 2019). We take the assignment mechanism as given and study how an additional, non-traditional preference dimension, political alignment between students and institutions, shapes choices.

Fourth, we provide a causal estimate of the magnitude and opportunity cost of political alignment in higher-education choice by combining administrative and survey data, an exercise infeasible from either source alone. Many studies use survey moments to discipline demand estimation (Petrin, 2002; Berry, Levinsohn and Pakes, 2004; Grieco, Murry and Yurukoglu, 2021); see also Conlon and Gortmaker (2025) for an overview. Other studies compare estimates from experimental and administrative sources (Adamowicz, Louviere and Willians, 1994; Tuchman, 2019; Giustinelli and Shapiro, 2024; Meango, Henry and Mourifie, 2025; Moshary, Shapiro and Drango, 2025). This literature typically uses stated-preference data to supply variation unavailable in administrative records (Train, 2009). We instead use experimental evidence to correct for the endogeneity of a characteristic that the administrative data do contain, and to quantify a causal effect of political sorting.

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 describes the institutional context and data. Section 3 presents reduced-form evidence of political sorting using administrative data. Section 4 describes the survey design and reports results from the conjoint experiment. Section 5 combines administrative and survey data through two complementary causal strategies: a partial-identification framework and a structural discrete-choice model with counterfactual simulations.

[1] Moreover, their results reject the hypothesis of no selection of students with higher initial propensity to vote into universities with higher voting rates, even in specifications with extensive controls or when comparing siblings with different pre-enrollment voting records.

2 Institutional Context and Data

2.1 Administrative Data

Parcoursup, introduced in 2018, is the centralized platform through which all French students apply to undergraduate programs.[2] It implements a dynamic college-proposing deferred acceptance mechanism (Hakimov, Schmacker and Terrier, 2025; Fabre, 2026). The procedure runs in three phases:

1. **Application (January–March):** Students submit a non-ranked list of up to 10 programs, along with a statement of purpose and extracurricular activities description for each.[3] We observe the complete list for every high school graduate, including programs added and removed over time.

2. **Ranking (April–May):** Programs review applications and rank all candidates. Rankings are finalized and cannot be revised. We observe the complete rankings, though not the weights programs assign to individual characteristics.

3. **Admission (June–July):** The platform sends offers following program rankings. Students may permanently accept an offer, tentatively accept while remaining on a preferred program's waitlist, or reject. As offers are rejected, they pass to the next candidate. We observe the full sequence of offers, acceptances, and rejections.

More than 93% of matches occur through the automated phase (Ministère de l'Enseignement Supérieur et de la Recherche, 2022).

The administrative records provide information on each applicant's academic profile (grades, distinction at the *baccalauréat*, school track), socioeconomic background (parental occupation), and residential location (ZIP code). For each application, we observe the statement of purpose submitted at the program level, a critical feature for Section 3.4, where we analyze the political content of these letters across applications by the same student. Detailed variable descriptions are available at the CASD documentation for Parcoursup.[4]

The data covers all high school graduates, regardless of whether they applied to a university. Our focus is on intensive-margin sorting, specifically the political congruence between students and the institutions they apply to; extensive-margin selection into higher education is left for future work.[5]

2.2 Sample

In addition, we apply the following sample restrictions. We retain:

[2]Centralized admission platforms have spread widely across education markets; see Neilson et al. (2024) for an overview. For a detailed description of Parcoursup specifically, see Hakimov, Schmacker and Terrier (2025).

[3]Each program choice can include multiple sub-choices (*sous-vœux*), making the effective list of considered options substantially larger. This nested structure brings the mechanism closer to a full DA setting in which students rank all acceptable options. See Parcoursup FAQ.

[4]Psup'stat and Parcoursup brut.

[5]Individuals with lower levels of education are more likely to position themselves further to the right on the political spectrum (Gidron, 2022), suggesting that extensive-margin selection may also operate along political lines.

1. **Students**: students enrolled in *terminale* in the general track, residing in France, who obtained their *baccalauréat* in the current year or the preceding year (current-year graduates and one-year repeaters). The main year under study is 2022;

2. **Programs**: programs offered by *grands établissements*;

3. **Applications**: applications submitted during the main application phase.

To keep the estimation computationally feasible, we conduct the analysis on a random subsample of 10,000 students, a practice that is standard in the school choice literature (Fabre, 2026).

All subsequent analyses are conducted at the university-major level. Throughout the paper, *university* is a shorthand for all *grands établissements*.[6] We define a *major* as a group of programs sharing the same broad disciplinary area: Medicine, Humanities, Sports, Social Sciences, STEM, Law, and Other. The unit of analysis is therefore the university-major pair.

Tables A2–A3 in Appendix A summarise the student sample. Of the 10,000 students, 51.6% are female and 33.8% reside in left-leaning ZIP codes; the average *baccalauréat* distinction is 3.56 (corresponding to *assez bien*, on a scale of 1–6).

The university sample comprises 380 classified institutions (Tables A4–A5 in Appendix A).[7] Left Campus Climate universities represent 35% of the sample, Neutral Campus Climate 56%, and Right Campus Climate 8%. The three groups differ substantially in fees and institutional type: Left Campus Climate institutions charge average annual fees of 506 €, compared to 3,492 € for Neutral Campus Climate and 3,271 € for Right Campus Climate institutions. Left Campus Climate universities are almost entirely public (3.7% private), while Right Campus Climate institutions are predominantly private (71.9%).

2.3 Survey data

The paper draws on two rounds of survey data collected on final-year high-school students and their post-enrolment counterparts.

The **main round** was conducted in May 2025, running from May 6 to May 30, at the moment when universities were ranking students and students themselves had no updates on the platform (the application stage had ended mid-April, the offer stage begins early June). We recruited 1,040 students in their final year of high school from approximately 40 partner high schools across the country. Details on the recruitment process, survey flow, sample representativity, attrition, and randomisation balance are in Appendix E. The survey includes a conjoint analysis of university choices and open-ended questions.[8]

The **follow-up round** was conducted in June and July 2026, one year after enrolment, on a subset of the same students who consented to be recontacted. It reached 96 respondents in the primary analysis sample. The follow-up validates the political-leaning measures constructed in the main round, tests directly whether the political coding of an institution shifts students'

[6] This includes grandes écoles, institutes, and specialized institutions. On average, *grands établissements* account for 84% of first-year higher education enrollment in our data; see Table A1.

[7] Institutions are counted here at the `cod_uai_aff_form` level. This count is higher than the institution level in 2.3.

[8] In a given context, there are pros and cons to both. One might think that conjoint analysis in this context would suffer from limited external validity, while open-ended questions might be prone to demand bias (Bansak et al., 2021; Haaland et al., 2024). We believe combining the two helps identify the effect.

inferences about its other attributes, and characterises the mechanisms through which political alignment enters lived experience. Design details and full results are in Appendix I.

2.4 Measurement

Campus political climate. We define *campus political climate* as the perceived political orientation of the student body, as reflected in student associations, electoral patterns, and public reputation,[9] rather than formal institutional positions such as faculty ideology or administrative stance. Our proxies capture the social environment that students anticipate encountering, which is the dimension most relevant to their choice decision and directly observable from the data available to us.[10]

To classify universities by campus political climate, we rely on classifications obtained from a LLM classification (see Appendix B.1). Our sample of *grands établissements* (Section 2.2) includes 223 classified institutions,[11] among which 33% are classified as Left, 10% as Right and 57% as Center. Examples of Left Campus Climate universities include Université Paris Cité, Sciences Po, and Lumière Lyon 2, while examples of Right Campus Climate universities are Paris-Panthéon-Assas, the Catholic Institute of Paris, and the University of Toulon (Table A6). Classified institutions account for 58% of realized matches in 2022. Campus political climate is relatively equally distributed across space (Figure A1).

We validate this classification using actual student election results, detailed in Appendix B.2. The results confirm directional alignment (Figure A8), that is, universities classified as Left by the LLM exhibit the highest average Left vote shares in student elections, Center universities are dominated by Center lists, and Right universities show relatively higher Right vote shares.

Students' political leaning. Throughout the paper, we use three distinct measures of students' political leaning:

1. *ZIP code vote share (administrative proxy, used in Section 3):* We proxy students' political leaning using the first-round results of the 2022 Legislative Elections in their ZIP code of residence.[12] A student is classified as Left (Right) if the Left vote share exceeds the 80th (is below the 20th) percentile of the national distribution; the remainder are Center.[13] This yields 33% Left, 7% Right, and 60% Center students (Figure A4), consistent with the spatial distribution of voting patterns across French municipalities. These student shares mirror the university seat distribution: there are 6.1 times more seats in Left Campus Climate universities than in Right Campus Climate ones. Figure A6 shows that application portfolios depend on students' political leaning.

[9] The follow-up survey (Appendix I) confirms this construction. Of the 96 respondents surveyed on the perceived sources of an institution's political orientation, 76% identify student climate (associations, peer environment) as the primary driver of political leaning, followed by reputation and external signals (49%), faculty culture (40%), formal institutional positioning (39%), and academic content (30%).

[10] Note that we measure campus political climate at the university level rather than the program level. While a more fine-grained measure might be conceivable, program-level classification would risk being self-referential (e.g., defining it based on students admitted in previous years would mechanically introduce peer effects). We also consider the university level to be the most organic scale for campus political climate.

[11] Counted at the institution level, see footnote 7.

[12] This is the *epidemiological approach* (Kleven, 2022). The distribution of vote shares is in Figure A9.

[13] We focus on Left support as the primary sorting dimension because left-leaning parties typically favor public education spending and access (Ansell, 2010).

2. *Value-based score from the survey (used in Section 4).* For students who completed our conjoint survey, we construct a value-based leaning score from a multi-issue prioritization question administered near the end of the questionnaire. The construction and validation are described in Section 4.

3. *Political content of Statements of Purpose (used in Section 3.4):* For students who submitted at least one statement of purpose, we classify the political tone of each letter using a dictionary-based approach.

The three measures are correlated but imperfect proxies of individual leaning. The ZIP code measure is available for all applicants but introduces noise from aggregate-to-individual attribution. The value-based score is precise but limited to survey respondents. The letter-based measure applies only to applicants who submit a letter with detectable political content. Figure A14 documents the ZIP-vs-individual comparison.

Political alignment. Using all measures, we define *political misalignment* for each student i-university j pair as $|\Delta\text{Leaning}_{ij}| = |L_i - L_j|$ (Table 1). Larger values correspond to greater misalignment.

Table 1: Measure of political alignment

Campus Climate / Student	Left (-1)	Neutral (0)	Right (1)
Left (-1)	0	1	2
Centrist (0)	1	0	1
Right (1)	2	1	0

Notes. The table defines the political alignment measure. Campus political climate ($L_j \in \{-1, 0, 1\}$ for Left, Neutral, Right Campus Climate) is obtained from a classification of universities, validated against student-association election results (see Appendix B). Student leaning ($L_i \in \{-1, 0, 1\}$) is constructed using the measure indicated in the relevant analysis. Alignment is measured as $|\Delta\text{Leaning}_{ij}| = |L_i - L_j|$ and takes values 0 (aligned), 1 (moderate misalignment), and 2 (strong misalignment).

3 Political Sorting in University Applications: Administrative Evidence

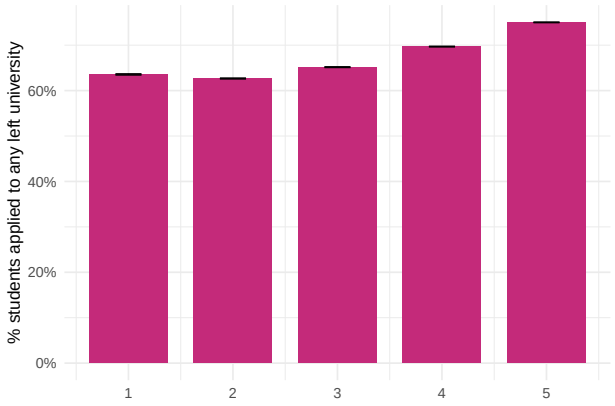
This section presents evidence from administrative data on sorting of students by campus political climate in France.

3.1 Application Patterns by Campus Political Climate

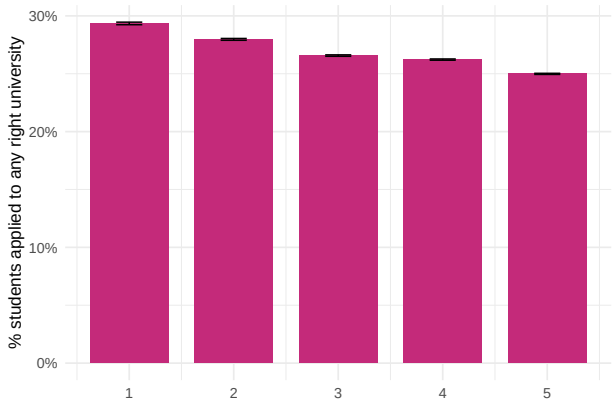
In this section, we show evidence of political sorting: students tend to apply to universities whose campus political climate aligns with their own political leaning. Our analysis focuses on students' application behavior on the platform.

Figure 1 presents descriptive evidence of political sorting by quintile of left-party vote share in the student's ZIP code. Panel (a) shows the share of students who applied to at least one Left Campus Climate university; Panel (b) shows the corresponding share for Right Campus Climate universities. The pattern is monotonic in both panels: students from areas with higher left-party

support are more likely to apply to Left Campus Climate universities (63%–72% across quintiles) and less likely to apply to Right Campus Climate universities (25%–29% across quintiles).



(a) Share of students applying to at least one Left Campus Climate university



(b) Share of students applying to at least one Right Campus Climate university

Figure 1: Applications to Left Campus Climate (Panel a) and Right Campus Climate (Panel b) universities by quintile of left-party vote share in ZIP code

Notes. The figures plot the average percentage of students who applied to at least one Left or Right Campus Climate university by quintile of left-party vote share in the student's ZIP code of residence. 95% confidence intervals are shown. Source: Parcoursup, 2022.

Appendix Figures A15, A16, and A17 replicate the exercise using quintiles of far-right, far-left, and right-party vote share in the ZIP code, respectively. The patterns are broadly consistent across all four measures of local political leaning. One exception is the far-right quintile: the gradient for far-right vote share quintiles is less pronounced along the intensive margin, consistent with far-right students facing a smaller supply of climate-aligned institutions and potentially sorting along the extensive margin instead.

3.2 Campus Climate and Application Probability: Regression Evidence

The descriptive patterns above establish the presence of political sorting, but do not rule out confounders such as geography or socioeconomic background. To address this, we estimate a student-by-university fixed effects specification that absorbs all time-invariant individual and institutional characteristics. For this analysis we restrict the sample to universities with a clear political leaning.

$$Applied_{ijk} = \beta|\Delta\text{Leaning}_{i,j}| + \delta \cdot \text{PeerShare}_{ijk} + \gamma_i + \theta_j + \theta_k + \epsilon_{ijk}, \tag{1}$$

where $Applied_{ijk} \in \{0, 1\}$ is a dummy for student i's application to university j in major k, $|\Delta\text{Leaning}_{i,j}| = |L_i - L_j|$ with $L_i, L_j \in \{-1, 0, 1\}$, PeerShare_{ijk} is the share of student i's peers who applied to major k at university j, and γ_i, θ_j, θ_k are student, university, and major fixed effects. Errors are clustered at the individual level. If political sorting is present, we expect $\beta < 0$.

The within-student fixed effect γ_i absorbs all time-invariant characteristics of students, including ability, family background, and residential location, while the university and major fixed

effects absorb supply-side heterogeneity. Including peer share further controls for the key social channel through which spatial sorting could induce spurious political alignment: if politically similar students cluster in the same neighborhoods and tend to apply to the same programs together, the peer share control isolates the residual effect of political misalignment from this social spillover.

The results are in Table 2. Column (1) reports the baseline specification with only the misalignment indicator and a distance control. Column (2) adds peer share. The estimated coefficient on $|\Delta\text{Leaning}|$ is -0.001 ($p < 0.001$) and stable across the two specifications, indicating that the sorting pattern is not driven by peer networks. Relative to the mean application probability of 0.006 in the estimation sample, the coefficient corresponds to a 17% reduction in the probability of applying for each unit of misalignment.

Table 2: Application probability and political misalignment (student × university × major level)

	(1)	(2)
$\|\Delta\text{Leaning}\|$	-0.001^{***}	-0.001^{***}
	(0.000)	(0.000)
Peer share		20.044^{***}
		(0.248)
Distance (10km)	0.000^{***}	0.000^{***}
	(0.000)	(0.000)
Observations	4418482	4418482
Mean Dep. Var	0.006	0.006
Student FE	Yes	Yes
University FE	Yes	Yes
Major FE	Yes	Yes
Region FE	Yes	Yes
Distance control	Yes	Yes

Notes. The table reports linear probability model estimates of Equation (1) on the universe of student × university × major application combinations. The dependent variable equals one if student i applied to major k at university j, and zero otherwise. $|\Delta\text{Leaning}|$ is the absolute difference between student i's political leaning and university j's campus political climate, taking values in $\{0, 1, 2\}$. Peer share is the share of student i's high-school peers enrolled in the same university–major pair. Column (1) reports the baseline specification with only the misalignment indicator and a distance control. Column (2) additionally controls for peer share. Both specifications include student, university, major, and region fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at the student level. Significance levels: $^{*}\,p < 0.05$, $^{**}\,p < 0.01$, $^{***}\,p < 0.001$. Source: Parcoursup, 2022 (10,000 random subsample).

Table A10 in Appendix D estimates the university-level specification replacing $|\Delta\text{Leaning}|$ with dummies for moderate and strong misalignment. Relative to aligned pairs, moderate misalignment reduces application probability by 27% of the mean and strong misalignment by 53%.

Full specifications at the university level and a functional-form robustness check using misalignment dummies are in Tables A9, and A10 in Appendix D.[14]

Table A11 in Appendix D further documents the directional relationship between student and university climate, controlling explicitly for geographic confounders. We estimate:

$$L_j = \beta \cdot L_i + X_{\text{ZIP}(i)} + \alpha_k + \alpha_r + \alpha_{k\times r} + \varepsilon_{ij},$$

where $L_j \in \{-1, 0, 1\}$ is the university's campus political climate and L_i is the student's leaning, with ZIP code-level controls for local political context, and major, region, and region-by-major fixed effects. The significant positive $\hat{\beta}$ confirms that sorting is not driven by the geographic clustering of politically similar students near politically similar institutions.

3.3 Does Climate Sorting Come at a Quality Cost?

A natural question is whether students who choose politically aligned universities pay a price along other dimensions. Whether such a trade-off exists is an empirical matter, and it can depend on student type: under a feasible-set logic, high-grade students typically have access to a wider range of programs, so political alignment need not constrain their academic choice; for students with lower grades, however, the available aligned options may sit at a different point in the selectivity distribution, generating a binding trade-off. We focus here on the trade-off with academic selectivity, the dimension of program quality most directly observed in our data, and we measure it at the level of realized matches rather than applications, so that the comparison reflects the programs students actually attend.

To do so, we examine the average selectivity of universities to which students are matched, separately for students with different graduation distinctions, Figure 2. Selectivity, which we use as a proxy for quality, is defined as the average *baccalauréat* distinction of admitted students. These distinctions are defined based on the country-wide standardized graduation exam. Hence, these grades are comparable across different schools and regions.

Figure 2 shows that for students graduating without distinction, or with *assez bien* (Merit),[15] average university selectivity is higher when there is strong political misalignment with the student.[16] In other words, for these groups, there appears to be a trade-off between selectivity and political alignment. We propose at least two plausible explanations for why students with high distinctions do not exhibit such a trade-off. First, they typically have access to a wider range of feasible programs, making it easier for them to find politically aligned universities. Second, quality considerations may be relatively more important for them than for students with lower graduation grades, precisely because their academic records suggest a stronger focus on studies and performance. The average selectivity gap between strongly misaligned and aligned matches is 0.15 (about 5%). Hence, students matched to politically congruent universities forgo about 5% in university selectivity.

[14] Results are robust to restricting the sample to non-neutral universities (i.e., excluding centrist-climate institutions from the comparison set).

[15] Students without distinction or with *assez bien* (Merit) represent approximately 57% of all *baccalauréat* candidates in 2022 (DEPP – Direction de l'évaluation, de la prospective et de la performance, 2023).

[16] Figure A18 reports the trade-off by the assigned political leaning of the students.

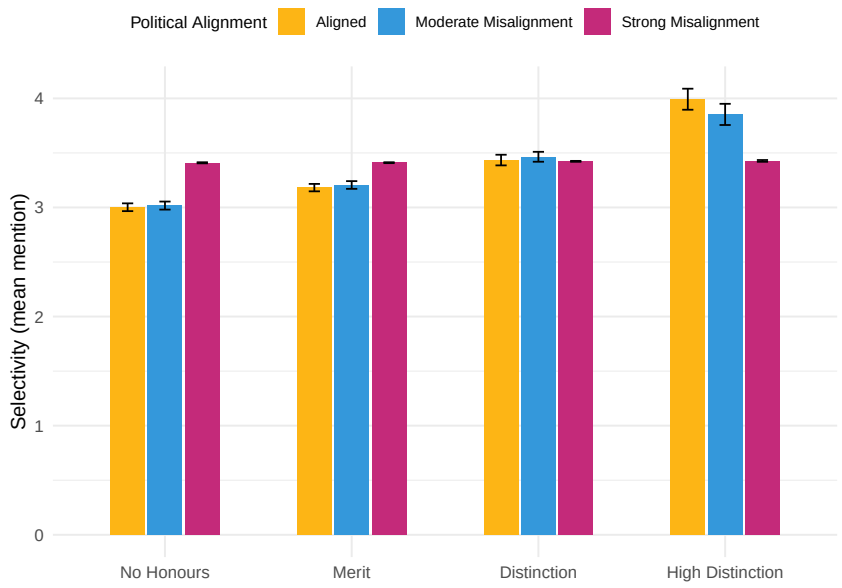


Figure 2: Trade-off between climate alignment and program quality (selectivity), disaggregated by student academic performance

Notes. The figure plots average program selectivity, defined as the mean *baccalauréat* distinction of admitted students, by students' own academic performance and their political alignment with the university. Political alignment is measured as the absolute difference between the estimated political leaning of the student and that of the university. Source: Parcoursup, 2022 (10,000 random subsample).

3.4 Within-Student Evidence: Statements of Purpose and Campus Climate

Evidence that students actively adapt their political expression to match the campus climate of target institutions comes from within-student variation in the content of statements of purpose. As described in Section 2.1, applicants may attach a statement of purpose to each university application. For the 10,000 random subsample, we analyze the political leaning expressed in these statements of purpose.

We proceed by classifying words as left- or right-wing and computing a measure of political leaning based on the relative frequency of these terms. Using this dictionary-based approach, we first document the overall distribution of political content in motivation letters. While a large share of letters contains no explicit political references, a non-negligible fraction includes left-wing references, right-wing references, or a mix of both. Appendix D.4 provides illustrative examples of statements with clear left- and right-leaning political content. The distribution of letter types is reported in Figure 3, which shows substantial heterogeneity in political expression across applicants.

We then exploit the fact that individual students often submit multiple applications, each accompanied by a distinct statement of purpose. Focusing on within-student variation, we compute the mean political leaning of letters at the applicant level and show that political expression varies meaningfully across applications submitted by the same individual. Figure 4 further illustrates that even among applicants who ever express political content, the average leaning spans a wide range, indicating that political tone is not fixed at the individual level.

Finally, we examine whether students adapt the political content of their statements to the

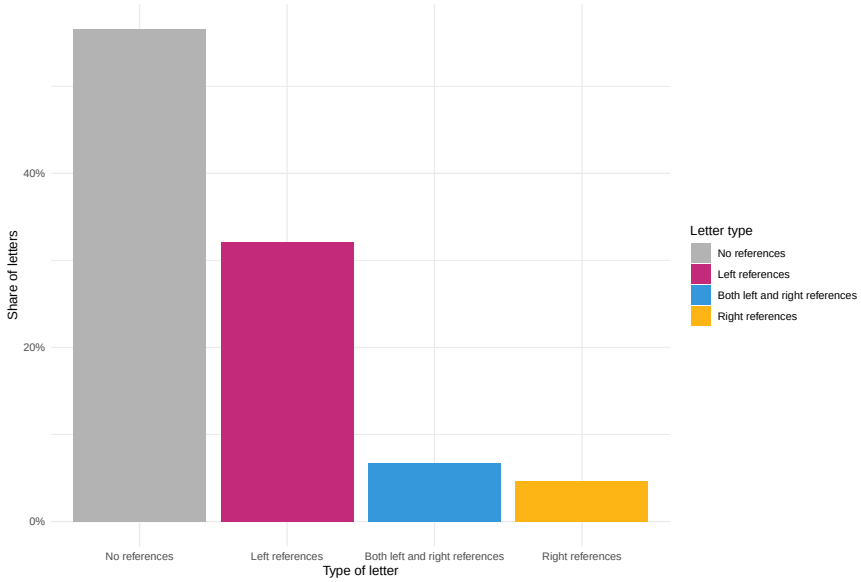


Figure 3: Distribution of letter types in statements of purpose

Notes. The figure plots the share of students whose statements of purpose contain left-leaning content, right-leaning content, a mix of both, or no detectable political content. Classification uses a dictionary-based approach. Source: Parcoursup, 2022 (10,000 random subsample).

perceived political leaning of the university to which they apply. To do so, we regress the political leaning of a given statement of purpose on the political leaning of the destination university, including student fixed effects. This specification isolates within-student variation and allows us to test whether applicants strategically adjust their expressed political orientation across applications. The results, reported in Table 3, suggest that students partially tailor the political tone of their statements to the political environment of the target institution. The point estimate of 0.017 on university political climate (column 3) corresponds to roughly 5% of the within-student standard deviation of letter leaning, consistent with strategic adaptation rather than purely expressive behavior.

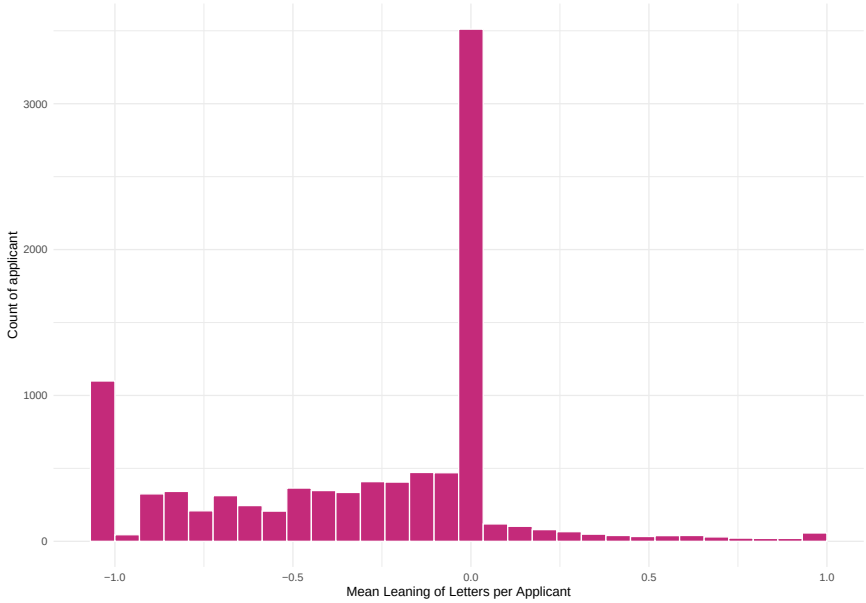


Figure 4: Within-student variation in statement of purpose leaning

Notes. The figure plots the distribution of each applicant's average statement-of-purpose political leaning across all submitted applications. The sample is restricted to applicants with at least one letter containing detectable political content. Positive (negative) values indicate net left-leaning (right-leaning) content. Source: Parcoursup, 2022 (10,000 random subsample).

Table 3: Adaptation of political content in statements of purpose

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Campus Political Climate	0.021***		0.017**
	(0.004)		(0.006)
Neutral Campus Climate		0.025***	
		(0.006)	
Right Campus Climate		0.038***	
		(0.011)	
Observations	27,568	27,568	27,568
Mean Dep. Var	-0.356	-0.356	-0.356
Student FE	Yes	Yes	Yes
Region FE	No	No	Yes
Major FE	No	No	Yes
Major × Student FE	No	No	Yes

Notes. The table shows how students adapt to the campus political climate of universities. The dependent variable is the political leaning of the statement of purpose attached to a given application, constructed from the relative frequency of left- and right-wing keywords. All specifications include student fixed effects, so identification comes from within-student variation across applications submitted to different universities. Column (1) relates the political content of the letter to a continuous measure of campus political climate. Column (2) replaces this measure with indicators for Neutral Campus Climate and Right Campus Climate universities (Left Campus Climate is the omitted reference). Column (3) additionally controls for region fixed effects, major fixed effects, and major-by-student fixed effects, allowing for differential application strategies across fields and regions. Standard errors are in parentheses. Significance levels: $^{*}p < 0.05$, $^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{***}p < 0.001$. Source: Parcoursup, 2022 (10,000 random subsample).

3.5 Electoral Salience: Event-Study Evidence

Political salience may amplify sorting behavior. We test this using electoral cycles as a source of exogenous variation and estimate an event study around election dates. The results show that sorting intensifies in the period immediately preceding elections, consistent with political salience increasing the weight students place on campus political climate. Full specification details and robustness checks are in Appendix D.5.

4 Survey Evidence on Political Sorting

Section 3 establishes that political sorting is a robust feature of application behavior. To examine *why* students sort by campus political climate and to quantify the strength of this preference relative to other program attributes, we turn to a complementary survey instrument. This section presents direct evidence from a conjoint experiment designed to isolate the political dimension and uses open-ended questions to explore the underlying mechanisms.

4.1 Description of the Survey

The main-round survey and its recruitment are described in Section 2.3 and Appendix E. This section presents the design and results of the conjoint analysis fielded in that round.

4.1.1 Estimating Political Misalignment

Measure of political leaning of students. Students who completed our conjoint survey were asked, near the end of the questionnaire: "In your opinion, what are the fundamental priorities for the future of society? Choose up to three answers" (Climate change, Immigration, Inequality, National traditions, Public services, Security).[17] We code each priority as either left-coded (climate change, inequality, public services) or right-coded (security, immigration, national traditions). Right(Left)-leaning students are those who selected at least two right(left)-coded priorities and zero left(right)-coded priorities. All other students (including mixed selections) are coded as centrist. Figure A12 shows the distribution of answer combinations and Figure A10 the resulting distribution of leaning. Figure A13 reports the correlation between value items, supporting the clustering used in that construction. We validate the classification against IPSOS survey data on 18–24 year olds in France (Appendix C.3.1): respondents citing climate change or discrimination as a top concern identify as left-leaning with probability above 60%, while those citing immigration identify as right-leaning with 71% probability.

Measure of campus political climate of programs. For the conjoint analysis, among other features, we introduced an attribute of *main student associations* and randomized the presence of political student associations to define the campus political climate of a hypothetical program based on its student associations. There are several real main student political associations in France, which participate in elections to the student councils, and have seats in National Council for Higher Education and Research. For the conjoint analysis we take four most prominent political associations (Table 4). We randomize two main associations per profile such that with probability 2/3 the first association is political and with probability 1/3 the second association is political. We deliberately allow some profiles to display only non-political

[17] The question follows a recurring IPSOS instrument, and we use it precisely because the IPSOS poll provides external benchmarks that allow us to validate our classification.

associations so that respondents do not infer from the experimental design that the conjoint is about political alignment.

Association	Leaning (L_j)	Description
UNI	Right (1)	Conservative student organization promoting strict academic standards and national values
La Cocarde Étudiante	Right (1)	Student organization focused on preserving French educational and cultural traditions
UNEF	Left (-1)	Progressive student organization focused on student rights, campus equality, and inclusive representation
Union Étudiante	Left (-1)	Activist student union committed to fighting inequality and defending social progress within and beyond the university

Table 4: Political student associations used in the conjoint

Notes. The table highlights the four political associations shown in the conjoint. Each is presented with a short description inspired from the association's own official website, keeping the experimental cue close to the public-facing image students would encounter when researching campuses.

All other associations are selected to be either *neutral* (e.g., hobby-related) or to promote *social engagement* in a politically neutral manner (e.g., debate clubs). The complete list of organizations considered is provided in Table A20.

Measure of political alignment between students and hypothetical programs. We proceed as in Section 2.4 and define political misalignment as the absolute distance between a student's political leaning and a program's campus political climate, $|\Delta\text{Leaning}_{ij}| = |L_i - L_j|$ (Table 1).

4.1.2 Design of the Conjoint

Our primary objective in this section is to measure the effect of political alignment on the program choice. In particular, we are interested in documenting the effect of alignment on choice and estimating the relative importance of alignment compared to other program attributes: selectivity, distance, and fees. The former serves as a proof of concept, while the latter allows us to better judge the importance of political alignment and quantify the behavioral implications of sorting in the following section.

To this end, our conjoint analysis includes the following four attributes of programs, also summarized in Table A19:

1. Prestige: *Selective / Moderately Selective / Non-Selective*,
2. Main Student Associations: *List of two active student associations*,
3. Distance between the institution and your home town: *Less than 1 hour / Between 1h and 2h / More than 2h*,
4. Tuition Fees: *Free / Moderate Fees* ($< 3{,}000\,€$) / *High Fees* ($> 3{,}000\,€$).

Each student was presented with six such choice tasks. An example of a choice situation from the conjoint experiment is shown in Figure A29.

4.2 Conjoint Results

We estimate a linear probability model with attribute dummies and a binary indicator for the chosen alternative as the outcome. Figure 5 presents the results.

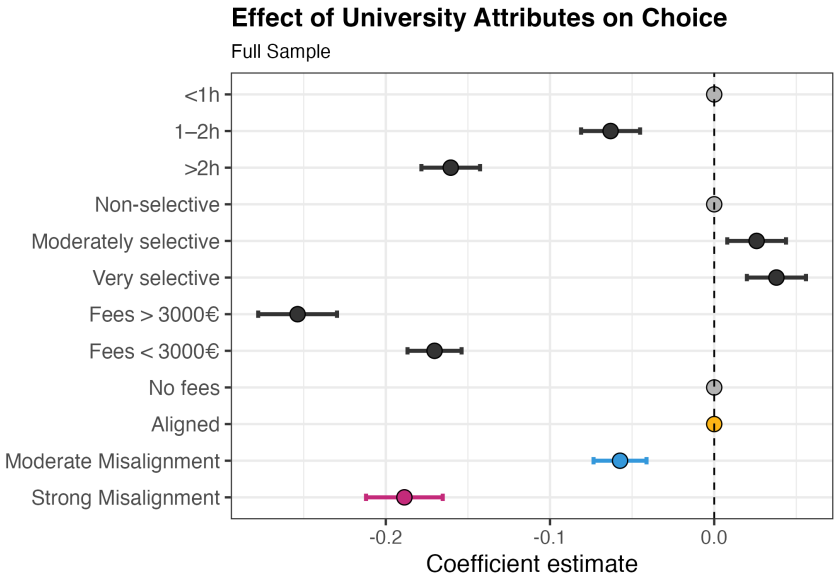


Figure 5: Results of the conjoint experiment with four university attributes

Notes. The figure plots OLS estimates of the conjoint linear probability model: each point reports the coefficient on a single attribute level relative to its baseline. The outcome equals one if the alternative is chosen. Baseline categories are distance less than 1 hour, non-selective, no tuition fees, and political alignment ($|\Delta\text{Leaning}| = 0$). Standard errors are heteroskedasticity-robust (HC2). 95% confidence intervals are shown. The sample comprises 1,040 survey respondents. Source: conjoint experiment, May 2025.

The estimates reveal the expected effects of the various attributes, consistent with findings in the school choice literature (Delavande and Zafar, 2019): students dislike longer distances and higher fees, and they prefer selective over non-selective universities. Our primary interest, however, lies in the role of political alignment. Students prefer universities whose political leaning is aligned with their own, with the preference strengthening as the degree of misalignment increases. The magnitude of the effect of moderate political misalignment is comparable to that of a 1–2 hour increase in distance, the corresponding coefficients are statistically indistinguishable. These findings indicate that political sorting exists in this context and can be identified independently of other forms of sorting.

To better understand the nature of political sorting revealed by the conjoint experiment, we next decompose political distance into two distinct margins. Specifically, we distinguish between preferences over whether campus life is politicized at all and directional political alignment conditional on politics being salient. Rather than summarizing political mismatch in a single distance index, this decomposition allows us to separately identify the role of neutrality and the penalty associated with being politically misaligned among politicized institutions.

Figure 6 reports the coefficient estimates from this decomposition. The estimates indicate that political alignment matters strongly among politicized campuses, while neutral campus environments occupy an intermediate position relative to aligned and misaligned politicization.

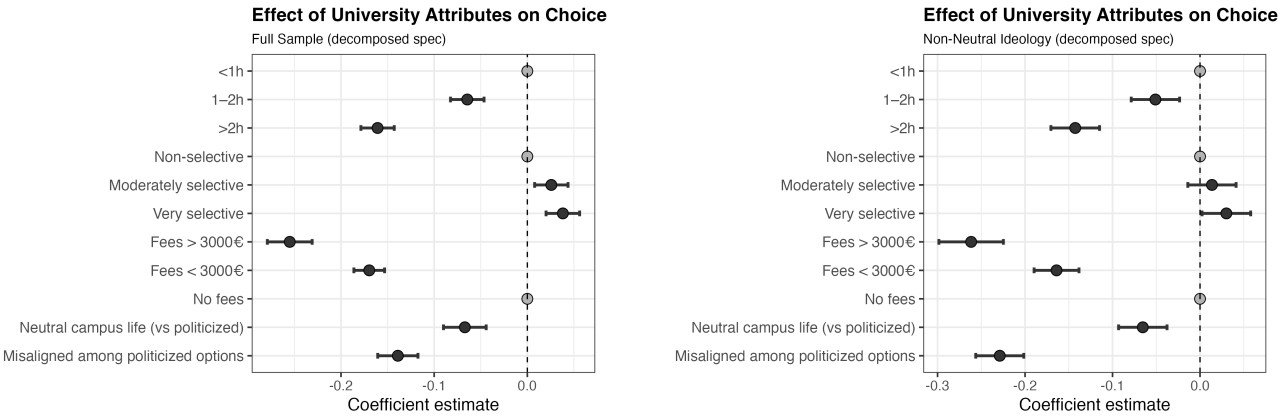
This implies a clear ordering: aligned politicized campuses are most attractive, neutral campuses lie in between, and misaligned politicized campuses are least attractive (Appendix

Figure A31).

Quantitatively, the overall penalty associated with strong political mismatch combines two components. Roughly one-third reflects the loss relative to a neutral campus environment, while the remaining two-thirds reflect an additional penalty from directional political misalignment once politics is salient.[18]

Importantly, this ordering is not driven solely by politically centrist students. The same pattern appears when restricting the sample to respondents with non-neutral political orientations (Figure 6, right panel).

Finally, the alignment penalty remains large and statistically significant when attention is restricted to politicized campus profiles only, excluding neutral environments altogether (Appendix Figure A30). This confirms that the estimated alignment effect is not mechanically driven by comparisons with neutral campuses, but reflects genuine directional political sorting among politicized institutions.



(a) Full sample

(b) Non-neutral ideology

Figure 6: Decomposing political distance in the conjoint experiment

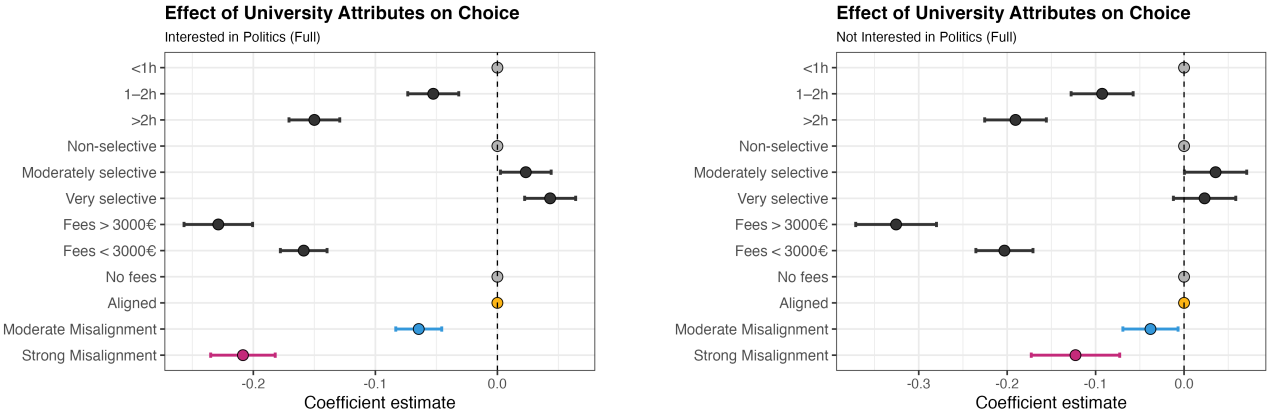
Notes. Each panel reports estimates from a linear probability model including all conjoint attributes. Political distance is decomposed into two components: an indicator for a non-politicized campus environment (relative to a politicized and aligned baseline) and an indicator for political misalignment among politicized options. The outcome equals one if the alternative is chosen. Standard errors are heteroskedasticity-robust (HC2). 95% confidence intervals are shown. The sample comprises 1,040 survey respondents. Source: conjoint experiment, May 2025.

Following the conjoint analysis, students were asked about their interest in politics and their perception of universities' political leaning. Approximately 75% reported being very or somewhat interested in politics, and around 63% stated that they believe universities have a political leaning. These figures suggest that political considerations are salient for French youth and constitute a salient perceived dimension of the higher education system.

One concern is that the political association attribute could be interpreted as a signal for other university characteristics. For instance, the political leaning of an association could proxy for the income composition of the student body. The heterogeneity analysis below helps distinguish these channels.

[18]The follow-up survey on a subset of the same students (Appendix I.6) independently produces the same ordering. Alignment-related components score higher than politicization-related components in both the pull and the push directions.

To address this issue, we examine heterogeneity in conjoint effects by students' political interest (Figure 7). Students who are interested in politics are more responsive to political alignment, consistent with genuine political sorting rather than confounding channels. Heterogeneity by beliefs about university leaning and views on campus activism is reported in Appendix Figure A32.



(a) Politically interested

(b) Politically uninterested

Figure 7: Heterogeneity in conjoint treatment effects by political interest

Notes. Each panel reports estimated marginal effects of the political alignment attribute (relative to baseline categories) from the full conjoint model including all covariates. Estimates are shown separately for students who are politically interested (left) and politically uninterested (right). The outcome equals one if the alternative is chosen. Standard errors are heteroskedasticity-robust (HC2). 95% confidence intervals are shown. The sample comprises 1,040 survey respondents. Source: conjoint experiment, May 2025.

4.3 Mechanisms and Open-Ended Question Results

Figure 8 categorizes students' responses to the question, "When you hear about universities now, what are the first things that come to mind?", into non-mutually exclusive topics.

For most high school students, universities are primarily associated with major life changes: the academic workload they will impose, the stress and anxiety generated by waiting for admissions decisions, and the competitive nature of higher education. These themes dominate spontaneous responses when students are asked what universities evoke for them.

Importantly, political considerations also emerge spontaneously. Even when the question is asked before any section related to political values, a non-negligible share of students mention politics, indicating that politicization is already a salient dimension of how higher education is perceived.

The question was randomly assigned to appear either before or after the section eliciting political values, to test for priming effects (Haaland et al. (2025)). When asked after this section, references to politics increase markedly, while mentions of stress, anticipation of the coming year, admissions outcomes, and competition decrease significantly. This pattern suggests that politicization is both intrinsic and context-dependent: political meanings are present even without priming, but political reflection further reshapes how students frame higher education, partially displacing concerns related to uncertainty, effort, and emotional strain.

In open-ended questions, and as reported in Table A16 some respondents referred to recent campus protests, perceived political orientations among students or administrative staff, and

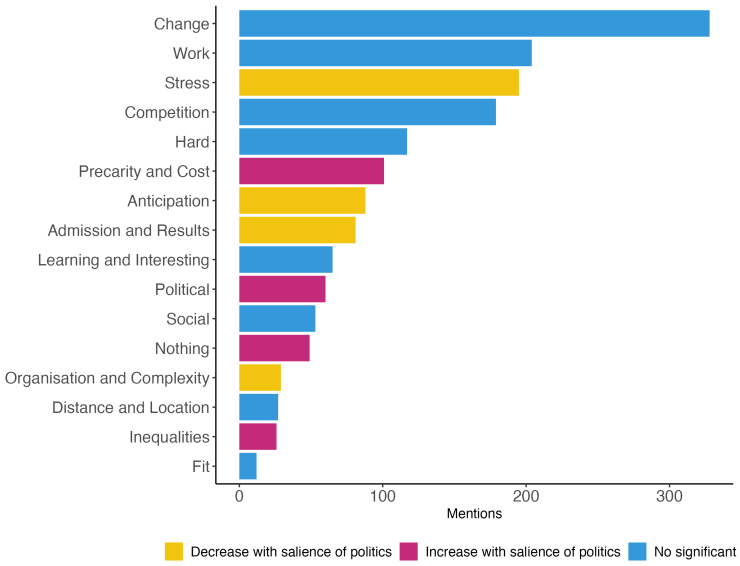


Figure 8: Classification of top of mind answers

Notes. The figure reports the counts of mentions of different non-exclusive topics in a response to the question "When you hear about universities now, what are the first things that come to mind?". Source: conjoint experiment, May 2025.

broader issues of polarization, political freedom, or ideological conflict, including references to the Trump–Harvard dispute (the survey was conducted in May 2025).[19]

We also explicitly ask respondents the following question: "If the political atmosphere of an institution was very far from your ideas, would that make you hesitate to go there?" 72% of respondents answered "Yes", suggesting that students do consider political atmosphere of prospective places when making their choices (Table A17 reports some explanations of why it should or should not matter).

We organize the potential mechanisms along a 2×2 framework distinguishing between politicization level and political alignment on one axis, and costs versus benefits on the other (Appendix F.3, Table A21). To examine which mechanisms are salient in practice, we analyze the open-ended explanations provided by respondents who answered "Yes" to the question above. These explanations are coded using non-mutually exclusive categories corresponding to the mechanisms in Table A21 (Appendix). By construction, this question invites respondents to justify hesitation and therefore mechanically favors the expression of perceived costs over perceived benefits. We therefore interpret relative frequencies with this asymmetry in mind, focusing on which types of concerns are articulated rather than treating prevalence as a direct measure of net utility.

Figure 9a summarizes how frequently each mechanism appears in students' explanations. Two patterns stand out. First, concerns related to the social and experiential dimensions of university life are especially prominent. Alignment-related push mechanisms (such as anticipated social discomfort, pressure, exclusion, or moral conflict) are mentioned more often than concerns related purely to academic functioning. This suggests that students' hesitation is driven less by abstract ideological disagreement than by expectations about day-to-day interactions,

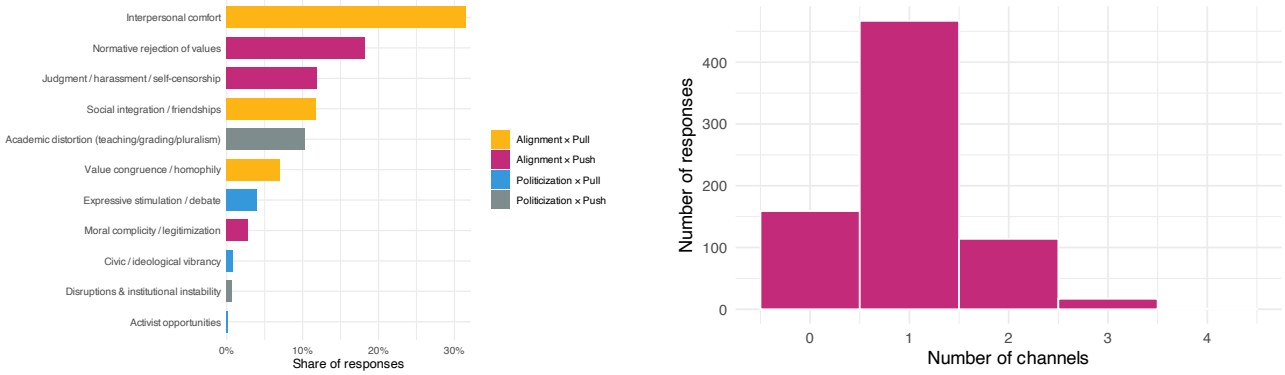
[19] Wordclouds of responses are in Figures A25a–A25c.

psychological comfort, and the social climate in which they would study and socialize.

Second, while push mechanisms dominate (as expected given the nature of the question), pull mechanisms are not absent. Some students explicitly value politically vibrant campuses, opportunities for debate, or environments in which they expect greater social fit and value congruence. Although these attraction-based considerations are mentioned less frequently in this section, they are central to understanding why politicized but aligned institutions are preferred to neutral ones in the conjoint analysis. The qualitative evidence thus complements the experimental results by clarifying that politicization is not uniformly disliked, but becomes attractive when alignment mitigates social and moral costs.[20]

Academic considerations also play a non-negligible role. A substantial share of students explicitly mention concerns about teaching neutrality, indoctrination, or fairness in evaluation, indicating that political environments are perceived as potentially shaping not only campus life but also the quality and objectivity of instruction.

These mechanisms are not mutually exclusive. Figure 9b reports the distribution of the number of distinct channels mentioned within a single response. While some students articulate a single dominant concern, a substantial fraction combine multiple channels in the same explanation, indicating that students evaluate universities as integrated environments and weigh academic quality, campus climate, social interactions, and moral identity jointly rather than as separable attributes.



(a) Distribution of mechanisms

(b) Number of mechanisms per response

Figure 9: Mechanisms underlying political sorting in higher education

Notes. Panel (a) reports the share of respondents mentioning each mechanism in their explanation for why a politically misaligned institution would make them hesitate to enroll. Categories are non-mutually exclusive. Panel (b) reports the distribution of the number of distinct mechanisms mentioned within a single response. Source: conjoint experiment, May 2025.

[20]The follow-up results confirm the framing hypothesis above. Pull dominates push in both columns. Pull-Alignment scores 2.62 versus Push-Alignment 1.90 (paired Wilcoxon $p = 0.003$), and Pull-Politicization 2.36 versus Push-Politicization 1.73 ($p = 0.003$). The survey also surfaces a conditional asymmetry not visible in the main-round open-text design. The push-alignment cost rises sharply with the distance between the student's own political placement and the perceived political leaning of her institution, from 1.31 in the close subgroup to 2.96 in the far subgroup on the 1 to 5 scale (Appendix I.6).

5 Combining Stated and Revealed Preferences

Following the "best of both worlds" logic of Todd and Wolpin (2023), we combine SP and RP data to address causality through two complementary strategies. First, we bound the causal average application probability using a partial identification framework. Second, we estimate a structural discrete choice model that carries the SP ratio of preference parameters into the RP estimation, correcting for endogeneity, incomplete characteristics space, and attenuation bias simultaneously. The structural model enables counterfactual simulations and a full general equilibrium extension via Deferred Acceptance matching (Appendix H).

5.1 Partial Identification: Bounding Selection Bias

We follow Meango, Henry and Mourifie (2025) to bound the causal effect of political misalignment on application behaviour, combining the marginal distributions of our two unmatched samples without functional-form assumptions. The quantity we want is the *causal application probability*

$$\mu(|\Delta\text{Leaning}|) \;=\; E[D_i(|\Delta\text{Leaning}|)],$$

the probability that student i would apply to a university at misalignment level $|\Delta\text{Leaning}|$ if a pair at that level were handed to her at random, rather than encountered through the channels that correlate her exposure with her own type. These channels include residential location, family income, peer composition, and academic profile. The naive administrative share $E[D \mid X = |\Delta\text{Leaning}|]$, defined as the fraction of administrative students who actually applied at that misalignment level, is contaminated by all of them: students with strong political preferences are systematically over-represented in the geographic, socioeconomic, and academic environments where politically-aligned universities are also concentrated, so the administrative students at any given $|\Delta\text{Leaning}|$ are not a random slice of the population.[21]

Two assumptions deliver causal bounds. The first is a selection-on-unobservables condition. Meango, Henry and Mourifie (2025) considers a latent student type η_i, an unobserved scalar that captures the strength of i's political preferences. Assumption 1 then states that conditional on η_i, potential outcomes are independent of the realised misalignment level, $D(|\Delta\text{Leaning}|) \perp |\Delta\text{Leaning}| \mid \eta$. In our setting, η_i is meant to be the single sufficient summary of every channel through which i's selection into a particular $|\Delta\text{Leaning}|$ pair correlates with her application decision. The assumption is that endogenous channels matter only through η. Once η_i is held fixed, the misalignment level i encounters is as good as random for the application decision. In our setting, this means that two students with the same political preferences but different ZIP codes, household incomes, peer groups, or academic profiles would, in expectation, apply at the same rate when handed identical pairs. The sorting channels above shape which pairs each student gets to see, not how she chooses among them.

The second assumption ties the conjoint to the latent type. Define $P_i^{|\Delta\text{Leaning}|}$ as respondent i's share of chosen options in conjoint tasks at misalignment level $|\Delta\text{Leaning}|$. We read $P_i^{|\Delta\text{Leaning}|}$ as a political-pickiness score derived from a controlled environment in which every other attribute of the choice is randomised. Assumption 2 states that the conjoint stated-choice rate is monotone in η. In our setting, stronger political preferences make a misaligned profile less attractive, so a student with high η picks misaligned options less often than a student

[21] We aggregate the application indicator from the pair level to the student level: per-pair application is mechanically tiny ($\approx 1\%$) given the 10-application cap, which would render the bounds numerically uninformative.

with low η in the same conjoint scenario. This monotonicity is what allows P to identify η. We view this assumption as plausible in our setting because the conjoint randomises distance, fees, selectivity, and the description of student associations, so the only systematic reason for a respondent to reject a misaligned profile is her own political preference, which is exactly η.

Under these two assumptions, Corollary 1 of Meango, Henry and Mourifie (2025) delivers sharp partial-identification bounds on μ using only three ingredients. The first is the marginal density f_P, defined as the population distribution of the political-pickiness score and taken from the conjoint. The second is the conditional density $f_{P|X=|\Delta\text{Leaning}|}$, defined as the distribution of P among respondents who saw a scenario at that misalignment level, also taken from the conjoint. The third is the administrative moment $E[D \mid X = |\Delta\text{Leaning}|]$. Our research design fits the framework directly: the conjoint randomises $|\Delta\text{Leaning}|$ at the scenario level (each task displays a profile at a specific $|\Delta\text{Leaning}| \in \{0, 1, 2\}$), and the same misalignment is computed at the pair level in the administrative sample.

The bounds therefore represent the full range of values of $\mu(|\Delta\text{Leaning}|)$ that are consistent with three pieces of evidence. The first is the population shape of political pickiness, captured by the conjoint densities f_P and $f_{P|X=|\Delta\text{Leaning}|}$. The second is the average application rate observed in the administrative data, $E[D \mid X = |\Delta\text{Leaning}|]$. The third is Assumptions 1 and 2 stated above.

Table 5 reports the bounds. The columns separate two distinct sources of imprecision. Point LB and Point UB delimit the partial-identification range described above. Even with infinite data, the true μ may lie anywhere in $[LB, UB]$ under the identifying assumptions.[22] The Bootstrap 95% columns add sampling uncertainty on the administrative side, reporting the 2.5^{th} percentile of the LB distribution and the 97.5^{th} percentile of the UB distribution across $B = 200$ student-level cluster bootstrap draws of the administrative sample, with the conjoint densities held fixed. Because the bootstrap accumulates both kinds of imprecision, the bootstrap-widened interval is typically wider than the partial-identification range.

The results are three-fold. First, the naive estimate sits inside its bound at every $|\Delta\text{Leaning}|$, so selection bias may inflate the raw rate but does not explain the direction or magnitude of the gradient. Second, the point bounds deliver a causal sorting gradient: the lower bound on the aligned application probability (0.573) lies strictly above the upper bound on the strong-misalignment probability (0.473), so under the identifying assumptions students at strong misalignment apply strictly less than students at alignment. Third, the bounds for alignment and moderate misalignment overlap, consistent with the conjoint finding that students treat moderate misalignment as essentially aligned. Strong misalignment is the only category they actively avoid.

5.2 Structural Discrete Choice Model

A second approach to causality estimates a structural model of program choice that explicitly incorporates political taste as a preference parameter.

[22] The width of the range tells us how informative the data are. It is narrow when the conditional and marginal densities of P are similar, which happens when administrative selection at $|\Delta\text{Leaning}|$ is close to random. It is wide when the two distributions differ markedly, which is when administrative selection is heavily skewed by political-preference type.

Table 5: Causal bounds on the average application probability by political misalignment |ΔLeaning|

|ΔLeaning|	Naive	Partial-ID bound		Bootstrap 95%	
	$E[D \mid X]$	LB	UB	LB	UB
Aligned	0.700	0.573	0.762	0.565	0.768
Moderate misalignment	0.699	0.546	0.743	0.539	0.749
Strong misalignment	0.297	0.067	0.473	0.063	0.495

Notes. The table reports partial-identification bounds on $\mu(|\Delta\text{Leaning}|)$ from Corollary 1 of Meango, Henry and Mourifie (2025). The outcome D_i is the indicator that student i applies to at least one university at misalignment $|\Delta\text{Leaning}|$, conditional on having at least one such university in her choice set. The naive column is the student-level observed share $E[D \mid |\Delta\text{Leaning}|]$. Point LB and Point UB are partial-identification bounds. The last two columns report the 2.5th percentile of the LB distribution and the 97.5th percentile of the UB distribution across $B = 200$ student-level cluster bootstrap draws of the administrative sample. Source: Parcoursup, 2022 (10,000 random subsample) and conjoint experiment, May 2025.

5.2.1 Data and Assumptions

For computational tractability, the structural model is estimated on a subsample of students from the Occitanie region drawn from the 10,000 random subsample used throughout. The estimation sample comprises 665 students and 3,238 student-program choice situations spanning 394 universities and 7 major categories, with on average 782 feasible alternatives per choice situation. Feasible sets are defined by each student's graduation grade relative to the grade of the last admitted student in each program, so that students choose only among universities for which they could realistically qualify. Full sample counts are reported in Table A22 of Appendix G.

Our analysis relies on three assumptions. First, we assume that students apply to different institutions independently, rather than assembling application portfolios that balance risk levels, geographic locations, or other factors (for related literature on portfolio choice, see Ali and Shorrer (2025)). Second, while our focus is on *applications*, we assume that the underlying utilities are derived from *being matched* to a program. In other words, when deciding where to apply, students evaluate each university separately, basing their decisions on the expected utility of ultimately being matched to that institution. We further assume that students report their preferences truthfully, meaning that they apply to their most preferred programs among the feasible ones. This, in turn, implies that students have a good understanding of their feasible options and that, within this set, they apply to the programs they truly prefer. Given that the application lists are non-ranked, we simply assume that students prefer every program on their list to all programs in their feasible set that are not listed.

Three further assumptions tie the conjoint and the administrative sample. First, we treat conjoint attributes as randomised at the choice-situation level, so that the conjoint-side residual is uncorrelated with the choice-relevant regressors: $\mathbb{E}[\xi^{SP}_{ijk} \mid Z^{SP}_{ij}] = 0$. This is what allows the conjoint to identify the ratio of preference parameters cleanly. Second, we assume that students make real-world choices in a manner comparable to how they respond in the controlled conjoint

setting, so the ratio of preference parameters for distance and political alignment is the same across the two samples. We test this assumption empirically by comparing the ratio of distance to fees coefficients across the two samples (Appendix G.4). Third, on the administrative side we impose no residential sorting on distance, $\mathbb{E}[\xi_{ijk}^{RP} \mid d_{ij}] = 0$. This is a standard assumption in the centralized-admission demand-estimation literature (Agarwal and Somaini, 2020; Fack, Grenet and He, 2019), motivated by the timing of residential location relative to the application decision. It allows us to recover $\hat{\beta}_1^{RP}$ as an unbiased estimate of the distance coefficient that the ratio-transfer step then anchors.

5.2.2 Model Specification

We assume a true utility of a student i from accepting offer from a program at university j at major k can be written in the following form:[23]

$$U_{ijk} = \beta Z_{ij} + \xi_j + \xi_k + \xi_{ijk} + \epsilon_{ijk}, \tag{2}$$

where Z_{ij} consists of d_{ij}, distance between university j and student i, L_{ij}, political alignment of a student i with a program j. That is, there are two dimensions of sorting we are explicitly considering, with respect to distance and political leaning. Other dimensions of sorting happening at the level of student i - university j pair are captured with ξ_{ijk}.

Denote the respective coefficients for distance and political leaning $\beta = \{\beta_1, \beta_2\}$. ξ_j, ξ_k is a taste for a university j, and major k, which could be estimated as fixed effects in this context; ξ_{ijk} capture individual i specific *unobserved tastes* for programs (university j - major k pair). ϵ_{ijk} denotes T1EV shock. Our main goal is to identify all preference parameters, $\beta = \{\beta_1, \beta_2\}$, and ξ_j, ξ_k.

5.2.3 Identification Strategy

Direct estimation of Equation 2 with administrative data faces three challenges: endogeneity of political alignment, an incomplete characteristics space, and attenuation bias from noisy proxy measures.

One issue with directly estimating Equation 2 with administrative data is that political alignment L_{ij} is likely endogenous. That is, $\mathbb{E}[\xi_{ijk}|L_{ij}] \neq 0$. This can arise from omitted variables. For instance, consider a student's family income I_i. Family income can influence both the student's political orientation, and thus political distance L_{ij} from the university, and unobserved school preferences ξ_{ijk}, if wealthier students are more inclined to attend institutions perceived as elite or attended by similar peers. Failing to account for such confounders would bias the estimate of β_2 in Equation 2.

Another issue with estimating Equation 2 using the administrative data is the incomplete characteristics space: some majors are represented only by Right or Left Campus Climate universities. In this case adding major fixed effects could attenuate the estimated effect of political sorting.[24]

[23] As mentioned in Section 2.2, programs are defined as university-major pairs. This is a simplification for universities offering multiple programs within a major, adopted for computational tractability.

[24] Consider a left-leaning student choosing between programs in social sciences: either economics (only Right Campus Climate programs) or political science (only Left Campus Climate programs). If the student chooses political science because it has a Left Campus Climate, the model would attribute this effect to the major fixed effect, even though the rationale was political sorting. See Appendix G.2 for further discussion.

Moreover, the estimates may be further attenuated due to measurement noise in both student and university political leanings. The *epidemiological approach* of approximating students' political preferences using ZIP code-level measures introduces substantial noise, as documented in Appendix C.4: even if the measure is accurate on average, it remains highly imprecise at the individual level. While this limitation is acceptable for descriptive evidence of political sorting, it poses a challenge for conducting counterfactual analyses based on model estimates.

To address these issues, we combine the estimation of stated and revealed preference data. First, we estimate a discrete choice model using the survey data, which allows us to identify the effect of political alignment, L_{ij}, net of the concerns discussed above. This step provides the *true ratio of coefficients for political alignment and distance*. Second, we estimate a discrete choice model using the administrative data and apply the ratio obtained from the conjoint to decompose the estimated effect of political alignment into the true effect and a bias component, recovering all preference parameters up to a scale transformation. We validate this approach via Monte Carlo simulation in Appendix G.3.

Note that our approach differs conceptually from standard methods, which typically combine survey and administrative data to supply missing variation in the administrative source (see, e.g., Conlon and Gortmaker (2025)). Our primary objective is to address the endogeneity of political alignment in the administrative data by carrying the alignment-distance ratio from the conjoint. By contrast, much of the literature specifies a single optimization problem and/or matches moments across sources (see, e.g., Grieco et al. (2025)). We intentionally avoid that route because we treat political alignment in the administrative data as endogenous and as a proxy for other sorting dimensions (e.g., income, peer composition). In our counterfactuals, when we shut down political sorting, we remove the direct utility from alignment but preserve its proxy role and the associated correlation structure.

5.2.4 Model Estimation

Estimating Preferences with Survey Data. We first estimate stated preferences over program attributes from a conjoint experiment with hypothetical universities, described in Section 4. In the conjoint experiment we specify that the given choice sets are holding major constant. Moreover, we explicitly design universities to be different in every choice situations. Hence, we do not estimate ξ_j^{SP}, ξ_k^{SP} and this omission does not bias the estimation of β.

While our true utility function remains the same as the one in the Equation 2, we estimate it only using attributes Z_{ij}. In the conjoint we extend the characteristics space by introducing two more characteristics to construct more realistic and versatile choice environments: we introduce university fees and program selectivity, both of which would be captured by university-major interactions in the main specification at later stages. We estimate the following demand model:

$$U_{ijk}^{SP} = \beta^{SP} Z_{ij}^{SP} + \xi_{ijk}^{SP} + \epsilon_{ijk}^{SP}$$

Thus, the stated preference data allows us to estimate $\beta^{SP} = \alpha\beta$, where α is an unknown scale (variance) parameter of T1EV distributed ϵ_{ijk}. Hence, what is estimated relative to Equation 2, is the ratio of the coefficients of interest $\frac{\beta_1^{SP}}{\beta_2^{SP}} = \frac{\beta_1}{\beta_2}$.

The results for the preference estimation with the survey with a T1EV distributed shock are in the Appendix A33. Parameter estimates are conceptually similar to the ones we obtain with the OLS estimates in the previous sections. We estimate the trade-off between distance

and political misalignment in the conjoint through the ratio of coefficients, $r^{SP} \equiv \frac{\beta_1^{SP}}{\beta_2^{SP}}$. The bootstrap estimate yields $r^{SP} = 1.34$ with a 95% confidence interval of [1.10, 1.65].[25]

Combining Administrative and Survey Estimates. The key step of our procedure is to carry the ratio $r^{SP} = \hat{\beta}_1^{SP}/\hat{\beta}_2^{SP}$, estimated from the conjoint where political alignment is exogenous by design, into the administrative estimation. Because r^{SP} equals the true ratio β_1/β_2, anchoring $\hat{\beta}_2^{RP}$ to $\hat{\beta}_1^{RP}/r^{SP}$ corrects for endogeneity, incomplete characteristics space, and attenuation bias simultaneously. We assume the same utility form:

$$U_{ijk}^{RP} = \beta^{RP} Z_{ij}^{RP} + \xi_{jk}^{RP} + \xi_{ijk}^{RP} + \epsilon_{ijk}^{RP}, \tag{3}$$

As mentioned before L_{ij}, alignment, is endogenous and estimates of β_2 are biased.

Next, we estimate Equation 3 on the administrative data and obtain $\hat{\beta}_1^{RP}, \hat{\beta}_2^{RP}, \xi_{jk}^{RP}$. Under the assumption of no residential sorting, $\mathbb{E}[\hat{\beta}_1^{RP}] = \beta_1^{RP}$, while $\mathbb{E}[\hat{\beta}_2^{RP}] = \beta_2^{RP} + \Lambda_2$, where Λ_2 collects the residual biases (endogeneity, incomplete characteristics space, attenuation). Using the cross-source ratio invariance $\beta_1/\beta_2 = \beta_1^{RP}/\beta_2^{RP}$, we recover the true value of β_2 on the revealed-preference scale. With this corrected coefficient in hand, the structural preference estimates are now suitable for the counterfactual exercises that follow.

Estimation of the Structural Model. Table 6 presents the estimates of $\hat{\beta}_1^{RP}$ and $\hat{\beta}_2^{RP}$ across different specifications. Both coefficients are negative and statistically significant in every column, and the implied ratio $|\hat{\beta}_2^{RP}/\hat{\beta}_1^{RP}|$ ranges well below the conjoint ratio of 0.74. The same pattern holds when the choice set is restricted to universities within 500 km (Appendix G.5). The analysis mirrors the construction of choice sets in the conjoint.[26]

5.2.5 Counterfactual Implications of Taste for Political Alignment

To identify the effect of students' taste for political alignment on higher-education choices, we combine the conjoint estimation results (Section 4) with the administrative data analysis from the previous subsection. Our aim is to assess how much political sorting is actually driven by this taste, and how distorting it may be for students' educational choices.

A natural question is whether preference for alignment, whose existence is established by both administrative and survey evidence, meaningfully influences actual choices. It is possible that students prefer politically aligned institutions but would choose them anyway for other reasons, such as proximity. In that case, even a strong taste for alignment would have little effect on constraining students' options. To quantify the magnitude of this behavioral channel, we combine the two data sources as described above.[27]

From the conjoint, the ratio $r^{SP} = \hat{\beta}_1^{SP}/\hat{\beta}_2^{SP} = 1.34$, so $\hat{\beta}_2^{SP}/\hat{\beta}_1^{SP} = 0.74$. Under the assumption that this ratio carries over to the real-world setting, the true value of β_2^{RP} implied

[25] This ratio is estimated using a respondent-level cluster bootstrap: in each bootstrap draw, we resample respondents, re-estimate the conjoint logit, and compute the coefficient ratio. We use the bootstrap median as the point estimate in the analysis that follows.

[26] Political alignment is treated as a three-level factor variable: aligned, moderately misaligned, and strongly misaligned. Distance is also categorised in three bands matching the conjoint: less than 1 hour (under 50 km), between 1 and 2 hours (50 to 100 km), and more than 2 hours (over 100 km).

[27] These partial equilibrium estimates hold program supply fixed. Full equilibrium estimates accounting for supply-side constraints are presented in Appendix H.

Table 6: Program choice model estimates

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
$\hat{\beta}_2^{RP} \lvert\Delta\text{Leaning}_{i,j}\rvert > 0$	-0.191^{***}	-0.105^{**}	-0.155^{***}	-0.105^{**}	-0.103^{**}
	(0.036)	(0.041)	(0.036)	(0.041)	(0.041)
$\hat{\beta}_1^{RP}$ $\text{Distance}_{i,j} > 1\text{h}$	-2.589^{***}	-1.159^{***}	-2.680^{***}	-1.165^{***}	-1.177^{***}
	(0.048)	(0.060)	(0.048)	(0.061)	(0.061)
Ratio SP $\lvert\hat{\beta}_2^{SP}/\hat{\beta}_1^{SP}\rvert$	0.74	0.74	0.74	0.74	0.74
Ratio RP $\lvert\hat{\beta}_2^{RP}/\hat{\beta}_1^{RP}\rvert$	0.074	0.091	0.058	0.090	0.087
Observations	2,531,724	1,928,618	2,531,724	1,928,618	1,265,010
Students	665	665	665	665	665
University FE	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Major FE	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
Uni-Major FE	No	No	No	No	Yes

Notes. The table reports logit estimates of the program-choice model. $\lvert\Delta\text{Leaning}_{i,j}\rvert > 0$ equals 1 if student i and university j are not politically aligned; $\text{Distance}_{i,j} > 1\text{h}$ equals 1 if the university is more than one hour from the student's municipality. Columns (1)–(5) vary the set of fixed effects. Standard errors clustered at the student level. The ratio $\lvert\hat{\beta}_2^{RP}/\hat{\beta}_1^{RP}\rvert$ is recovered from the model estimates, while the conjoint ratio 0.74 is the alignment-to-distance ratio from the stated-preference estimation used to correct for endogeneity. Significance levels: $^{*}\,p < 0.1$, $^{**}\,p < 0.05$, $^{***}\,p < 0.01$. Source: Parcoursup, 2022 (model sample).

by the conjoint is $\hat{\beta}_1^{RP} \times 0.74$. The bias component is therefore $\hat{\Lambda}_2 = \hat{\beta}_2^{RP} - \hat{\beta}_1^{RP} \times 0.74$. Removing political taste is equivalent to setting $\beta_2^{RP} = \hat{\Lambda}_2$, so that only the bias component remains. We next reconstruct the application behavior of students under the two models:

$$\text{With Political Sorting (Default)} : U_{ijk}^{RP} = \hat{\beta}_1^{RP} d_{ij} + \hat{\beta}_2^{RP} L_{ij} + \xi_j^{RP} + \xi_k^{RP}$$

$$\text{Without Political Sorting} : U_{ijk}^{RP} = \hat{\beta}_1^{RP} d_{ij} + \hat{\Lambda}_2 L_{ij} + \xi_j^{RP} + \xi_k^{RP}$$

To quantify the behavioral implications, we conduct a parametric bootstrap over the estimated preference parameters $(\hat{\beta}_1^{RP}, \hat{\beta}_2^{RP})$ and record the change in three program-level outcomes under the counterfactual: distance to home, annual fees, and academic selectivity, displayed in Figure 10.

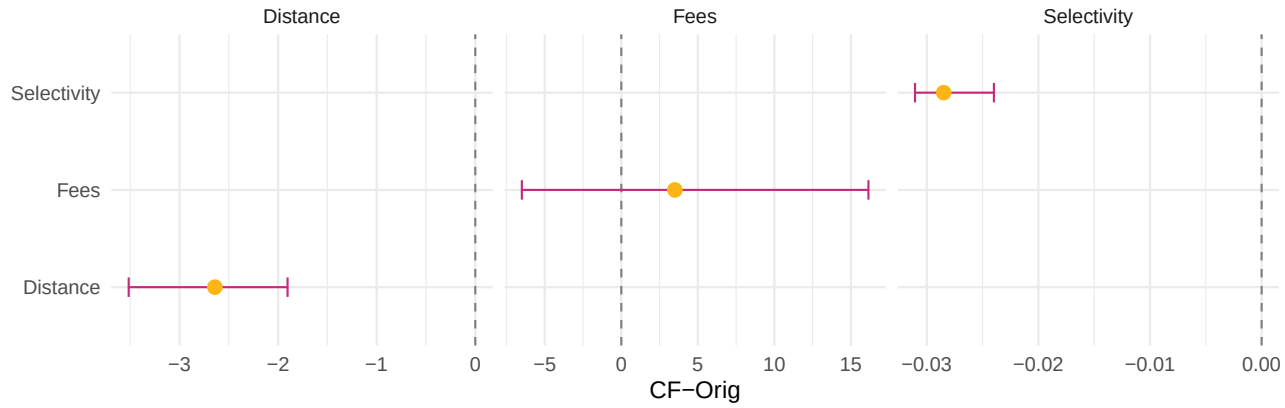


Figure 10: Counterfactual effects on program outcomes

Notes. The figure displays the change (counterfactual minus baseline) in three program outcomes under the no-political-taste counterfactual: distance to home, annual fees, and academic selectivity. Intervals are taken from 300 parametric bootstrap draws of the estimated preference parameters. 95% confidence intervals are shown. Source: Parcoursup, 2022 (model sample).

Absent political taste, students would on average attend programs about 2.6 km closer to home and at marginally lower academic selectivity. Both effects are precisely estimated and statistically distinguishable from zero. The change in annual fees is small and not statistically distinguishable from zero. The reallocation therefore operates through geographic proximity and selectivity rather than price. The selectivity decrease goes in the opposite direction from the descriptive correlation in Section 3, where sorted students attend programs about 5% less selective on average. This is consistent with the descriptive gap reflecting composition rather than the within-student behavioural effect of political taste.

The average effects hide heterogeneity by grade, SES, and student political leaning (Figure 11). By academic grade, high-grade students would attend programs about 9 km closer, 30 € cheaper, and notably less selective (selectivity decrease around 0.05). Low-grade students go in the opposite direction, attending programs roughly 6 km farther and 36 € more expensive. By SES, working-class students see by the largest reallocation on every dimension, with distance, fees, and selectivity all moving notably. High-SES students show smaller and partly insignificant moves. By student political leaning, centrist students would attend programs about 28 km closer, 266 € cheaper, and 0.11 less selective. Left-leaning students move in the opposite direction on every dimension. Right-leaning students show small effects.

A possible reading is that political alignment acts as a student-specific anchor: students are drawn toward the political aligned option in their feasible set, and removing the taste reallocates each student toward the distance, fees, and selectivity profile that would otherwise govern her choice. Because the profile differs across student types, the subgroup-level reallocations point in different directions, and they partially offset each other to produce the modest aggregate headline reported above. Two descriptive facts about the supply make this heterogeneity interpretable. First, students of different grade and SES tiers do not apply uniformly across the political-climate map of the supply: high-SES students apply to Right-coded universities at 29%, against 22% for working-class students, and low-grade students apply to Right slightly more than high-grade students (25% versus 20%, Appendix G, Tables A24–A25). Second, that political-climate map carries strong cost and selectivity signatures: in the structural-model sample Left-climate institutions are predominantly public, more selective, and substantially cheaper (around 400 € in average annual fees, against roughly 2,800 € for Center and 3,300 € for Right institutions), while Right-climate institutions are predominantly private and less selective (Appendix G, Table A23, with the same direction in the national supply, Appendix A, Table A5). Removing the political preference therefore reshuffles each subgroup, which is what could produce the directionally opposite movements by political leaning. That is, centrists shift to closer and cheaper programs once aligned options no longer pull them, while left-leaning students, whose aligned options were already on the cheap and selective side, move in the opposite direction.

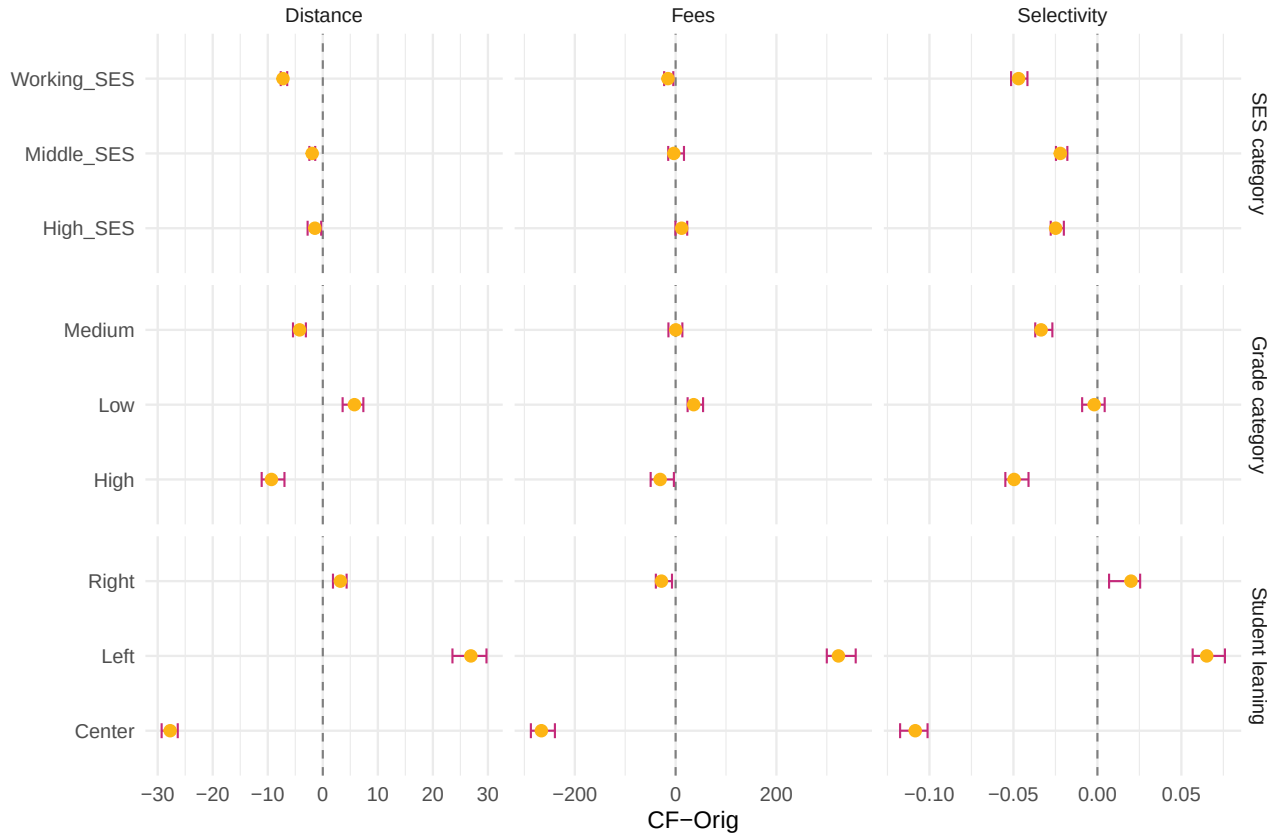


Figure 11: Heterogeneity in counterfactual effects

Notes. The figure displays intervals for the change (counterfactual minus baseline) in distance to home, annual fees, and academic selectivity under the no-political-taste counterfactual, broken out by student grade tercile (Low / Medium / High), SES category (Working / Middle / High), and ZIP-code-based political leaning (Left / Center / Right). Intervals are taken from 300 parametric bootstrap draws of the estimated preference parameters under the same specification as Figure 10. Source: Parcoursup, 2022 (model sample).

6 Conclusion

This paper documents sorting by campus political climate in French higher education and quantifies its behavioral consequences using administrative data and a conjoint experiment.

Using Parcoursup administrative data, we show that students apply more often to universities whose campus political climate aligns with their political leaning. This pattern is robust to student, university, and major fixed effects.

Survey evidence confirms that this sorting reflects genuine preferences: in a conjoint experiment with 1,040 high school students, campus political climate enters the university utility function with a weight comparable to geographic distance, and 72% report that a strongly misaligned campus atmosphere would make them hesitate to enroll.

To assess the behavioral consequences of this sorting, we combine administrative and survey data in a discrete choice model. Counterfactual simulations removing political taste show that students would attend programs closer to home and at marginally lower academic selectivity, with no significant change in fees. The reallocation is concentrated among high-grade and working-class students, who reallocate the most on every dimension; for low-grade students, the effects move in the opposite direction on distance and fees.

Political alignment has increasingly become a key factor shaping individual choices across residential location, labor markets, and partner selection. This paper extends the analysis of political sorting to higher education, a context where ideological self-selection may have long-lasting consequences. Students appear to self-select into universities that align with their values, perhaps out of concern for encountering opposing viewpoints or politically unwelcoming environments.

The broader concern is polarization. Students who sort into climate-aligned institutions at a formative stage will interact with fewer peers holding opposing views. Future work should examine whether universities actively shape their campus climate to attract like-minded students. As political polarization intensifies, understanding these dynamics is crucial to preserving the pluralistic role that universities are meant to fulfill.

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Appendix

A Data & Sample

Table A1: Coverage of French higher education categories in the sample (2013–2024)

Category	**2013–2014**	**2022–2023**	**2023–2024**	**Sample**
Universities	1,479	1,598	1,604	Yes
of which BUT (Bachelor Universitaire de Technologie)	116	107	143	Yes
of which engineering programs	26	32	30	Yes
Engineering schools outside universities	112	146	144	Yes
STS and equivalents (school-based)	255	228	219	No
STS and equivalents (apprentice-based)	61	179	190	No
Preparatory classes for Grandes Écoles (CPGE)	83	81	82	No
Business, management, accounting schools	134	245	250	Yes
Other higher education institutions	348	461	476	Yes
All	2,614	3,077	3,138	
All Included	2,215	2,589	2,647	
Percentage Included (%)	85	84	84	

Notes. The tables reports the types of higher-education institutions included in the sample.

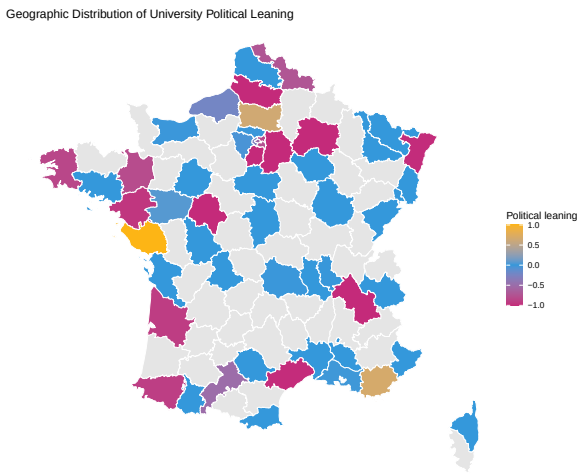


Figure A1: Map of classified universities with their political leaning

Notes. The map displays the geographic distribution of the classified universities in metropolitan France. Classification is based on LLM annotation validated against student election results (Appendix B.2). Source: Parcoursup, 2022.

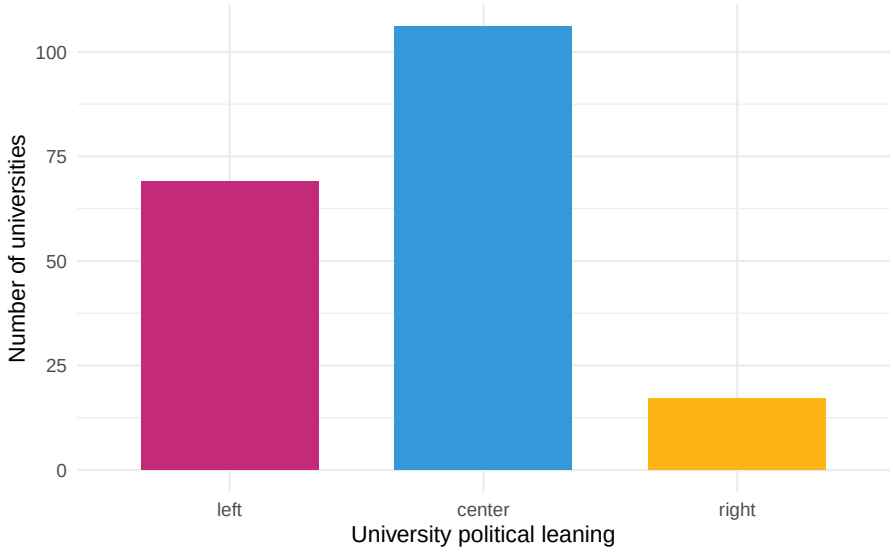


Figure A2: Distribution of political leaning across universities

Notes. The figure plots the distribution of the campus political climate classification (Left, Center, Right) across the 380 classified universities in the sample. Source: Parcoursup, 2022.

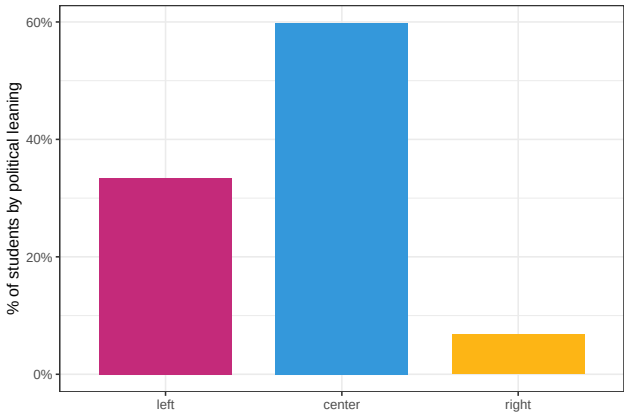


Figure A3: Students: full sample

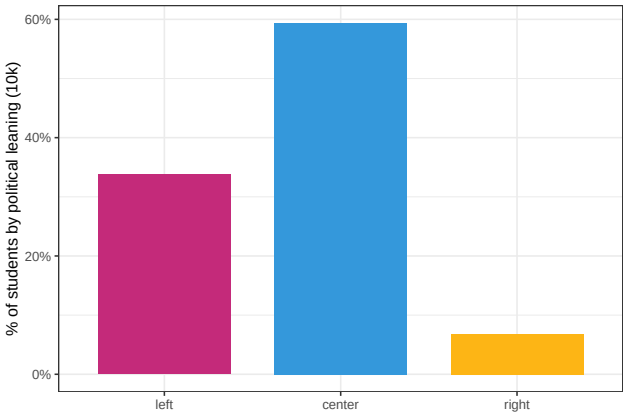


Figure A4: Students: 10,000 random subsample

Notes. The figure plots the distribution of student political leaning ($L_i \in \{-1, 0, 1\}$) constructed from ZIP-code 2022 Legislative Election results. The left panel uses the full administrative sample; the right panel restricts to the 10,000 random subsample. A student is classified as Left ($L_i = -1$) if her ZIP-code Left vote share is in the top quintile, Right ($L_i = +1$) if in the bottom quintile, and Center ($L_i = 0$) otherwise. Source: Parcoursup, 2022.

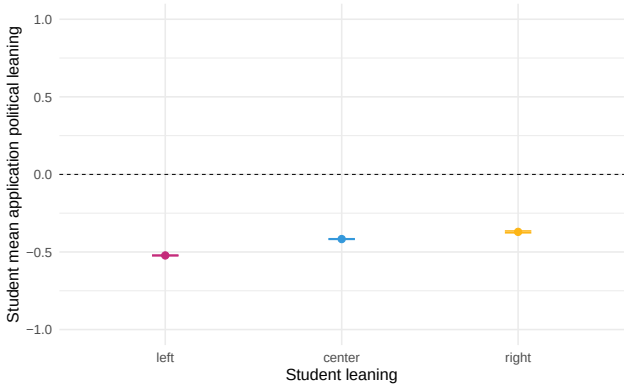


Figure A5: Full sample

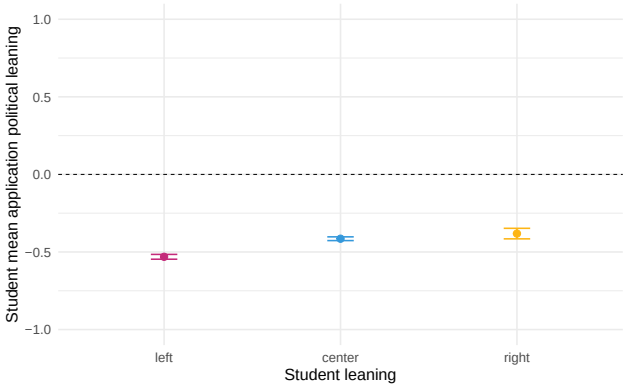


Figure A6: 10,000 random subsample

Notes. The figure plots, by ZIP-code Left vote share quintile, the average campus political climate of the universities in a student's application set. Negative values indicate predominantly Left Campus Climate applications; positive values indicate predominantly Right Campus Climate. The left panel uses the full administrative sample; the right panel restricts to the 10,000 random subsample. Source: Parcoursup, 2022; legislative election results.

Table A2: Sample statistics (part 1): students and applications

Metric	All	10k
Entities in sample		
Students (N)	354445	9791
Universities (N)	401	393
Majors (N)	7	7
Uni-Majors (N)	839	816
Student characteristics		
In Paris (%)	5.6%	5.3%
Urban residence (%)	74.7%	74.6%
Female (%)	51.1%	51.6%
Mean Baccalaureat Grade (%)	3.55	3.56
Left-leaning zip (%)	33.4%	33.8%
Right-leaning zip (%)	6.8%	6.8%

Notes. The table reports summary statistics for the overall sample and the 10,000 random subsample used in the analysis. Mean Baccalauréat Distinction is the numeric conversion of the ordered honour classification: *échec* (1), *sans mention* (2), *assez bien* (3), *bien* (4), *très bien* (5), *très bien avec félicitations* (6). Source: Parcoursup, 2022.

Table A3: Sample statistics (part 2): application behavior

Application behavior		
Avg universities (total)	7.80	7.80
Median universities (total)	5.00	5.00
Avg universities (sample)	6.81	6.82
Median universities (sample)	4.00	4.00
Avg wishes (total)	55.86	55.83
Median wishes (total)	49.00	48.00
Avg wishes (sample)	20.05	20.02
Median wishes (sample)	12.00	12.00
Avg distinct majors (total)	2.56	2.55
Median distinct majors (total)	2.00	2.00
Avg distinct majors (sample)	1.57	1.57
Median distinct majors (sample)	1.00	1.00
Applied to Left uni (%)	69.2%	68.7%
Applied to Center uni (%)	73.3%	73.0%
Applied to Right uni (%)	26.3%	25.9%
Applied to Humanities (%)	9.0%	9.0%
Applied to Medicine (%)	25.2%	25.0%
Applied to Stem (%)	43.5%	43.3%
Applied to Social Sciences (%)	26.4%	26.9%
Applied to Sports (%)	11.6%	11.5%
Applied to Law (%)	18.5%	18.6%

Notes. The table reports application behavior statistics for the overall sample and the 10,000 random subsample used in the analysis. (total) and (sample) refer to the overall universe of higher education programs and those who are included in our sample, respectively. Source: Parcoursup, 2022.

Table A4: University-level summary statistics (sample)

Metric	All universities
N universities	380
Share left universities (%)	35.3%
Share center universities (%)	56.3%
Share right universities (%)	8.4%
Average annual fees (€)	2421
Median annual fees (€)	384
Average selectivity	3.40
Median selectivity	3.21
Average share upper-class students (%)	56.6%
Median share upper-class students (%)	55.0%
Average share middle-class students (%)	23.5%
Median share middle-class students (%)	23.8%
Average share working-class students (%)	18.1%
Median share working-class students (%)	16.7%
Share private universities (%)	31.6%
Average uni×major cells	11.34
Average accepted students	2093.82

Notes. The table reports university-level statistics for the full sample of classified institutions. Annual fees are in euros. Selectivity is the mean *baccalauréat* distinction of admitted students. Source: Parcoursup, 2022.

Table A5: University-level summary statistics by political leaning

Metric	Left	Center	Right
N universities	134	214	32
Average annual fees (€)	506	3492	3271
Median annual fees (€)	238	550	3651
Average selectivity (mean mention)	3.54	3.34	3.23
Median selectivity (mean mention)	3.35	3.18	3.13
Average share upper-class students (%)	53.2%	58.6%	57.0%
Median share upper-class students (%)	50.0%	58.6%	51.0%
Average share middle-class students (%)	23.9%	23.0%	24.5%
Median share middle-class students (%)	23.5%	23.3%	25.2%
Average share working-class students (%)	20.3%	16.9%	17.5%
Median share working-class students (%)	17.9%	16.1%	18.2%
Share private universities (%)	3.7%	43.0%	71.9%
Average uni×major cells	15.87	8.50	11.41
Average accepted students (for selectivity)	3491.55	1107.77	2834.97

Notes. The table reports university-level statistics by campus political climate. Annual fees are in euros. Selectivity is the mean *baccalauréat* distinction of admitted students. Source: Parcoursup, 2022.

B Classification of Universities

B.1 Prompt for Universities' Classification

We use a large language model to classify each university by perceived campus political climate (Left, Center, or Right). The model is asked to weigh observable signals such as student-association affiliations, public reputation, and electoral patterns within the institution, while explicitly avoiding faculty ideology or curriculum content. Each classification is accompanied by a short justification, which we use to spot-check borderline cases. The table A6 below shows some examples of Universities classified as Left or Right.

B.2 Validation of Universities' Classification

B.2.1 Validation via student election results

We validate the campus political climate classification with a subsample of real student-election results scraped from elections-etu.fr. From our full set (233 institutions), 70 universities had some data available. For each institution, we keep the most recent election (see distribution of years in Figure A7). We then aggregate list vote shares into blocs using standard affiliations (UNEF/UEC/Solidaires is assigned to Left, FAGE/PDE-ANEE to Center, while UNI/La Cocarde is assigned to Right) and leave independent lists in their original category. The comparison

Table A6: Sublist of universities classified as Left or Right

Left-Leaning Universities	**Right-Leaning Universities**
Université Paris Cité	Sciences Po Aix
Université Lumière - Lyon 2	Université Paris-Panthéon-Assas
Université de Lille	Institut catholique de Paris
Institut supérieur des arts de Toulouse	Université Jean Moulin - Lyon 3
Sciences Po	Université de Toulon

Notes. The table presents an illustrative subsample of universities classified as Left or Right by the LLM procedure described in Appendix B.1.

shows a clear directional alignment (Figure A8): universities the LLM classifies as Left have the highest mean Left vote shares; Center universities are dominated by Center lists; and Right universities show a higher Right share than elsewhere, though Center lists still take the largest mean share. Right classified universities are also characterized by a higher level of independent associations.

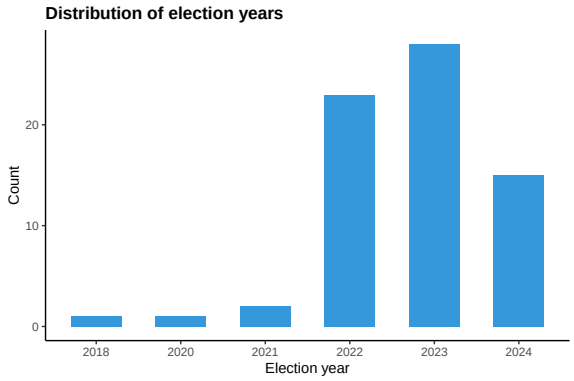


Figure A7: Distribution of the latest election year available in the scraped election data

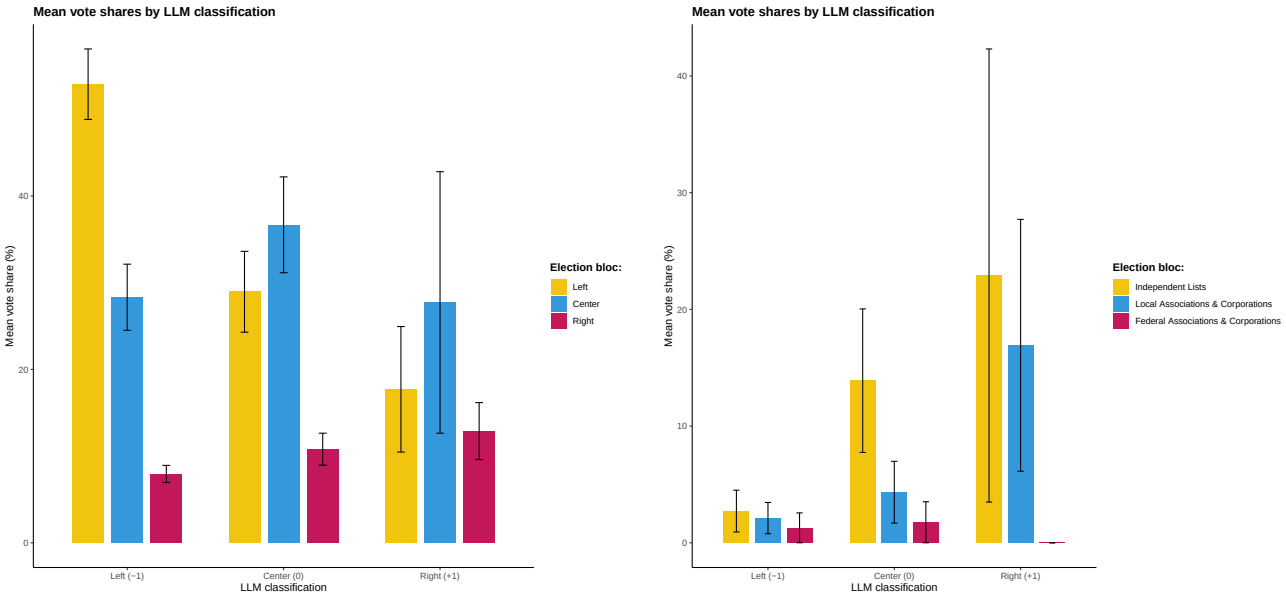
Notes. The figure plots the distribution of the most recent student election year available for each of the 70 universities in the validation sample. Source: elections-etu.fr.

B.2.2 Validation via the follow-up survey

The follow-up survey provides an independent validation exercise on a subset of the same students. Each respondent placed two benchmark institutions on a 1 to 5 left-right scale (Appendix I.2). The Left-Right ordering implied by the LLM classification is independently confirmed. Respondents place Sciences Po significantly to the left of Assas (means 2.72 versus 3.51, one-sided Wilcoxon $p = 0.001$), and the gap doubles among the subset reporting any prior familiarity with these institutions (means 2.54 versus 4.18, one-sided $p < 0.001$).

B.3 Re-classification Robustness

The main classification used in the paper was obtained through a LLM web interface (Appendix B.1). To assess the robustness of our results to the choice of classification model and



(a) Politicized mean vote shares by LLM classification

(b) Independent mean vote shares by LLM classification

Figure A8: Comparison of LLM classification with election results

Notes. The figures compare mean student union vote shares by LLM-based campus political climate classification (Left, Center, Right). The left panel shows vote shares of politicized lists. The right panel shows vote shares of independent lists. The validation sample includes 70 universities with available student election data. Source: elections-etu.fr.

elicitation procedure, we re-classify the 233 institutions using a more recent and capable model, while keep the same snapshot.

Table A7 reports the joint distribution of the original and new classifications.

Table A7: Old vs. new classification of 233 institutions

	Re-classification			
Original classification	Left	Center	Right	Total
Left	26	50	1	77
Center	0	118	15	133
Right	0	9	14	23
Total	26	177	30	233

Notes. The table compares the original LLM classification used in the main analysis with the re-classification.

The two classifications agree on 67.8% of institutions. The main source of disagreement is a shift toward Center: 50 institutions classified as Left in the original are reclassified as Center, and 15 originally Center institutions become Right. The new model is markedly more conservative, defaulting to Center whenever it lacks specific information. Agreement is monotonic in the re-classification self-reported confidence, reaching 93.1% on the 29 High-confidence rows.

We re-run the reduced-form regressions of Section 3 using the new `gpt-4o` classification. The results are reported in Tables A12 of Appendix D.3: the political-misalignment coefficient remains negative and statistically significant across distance caps and fixed-effect specifications.

C Classification of Students

C.1 Administrative Classification

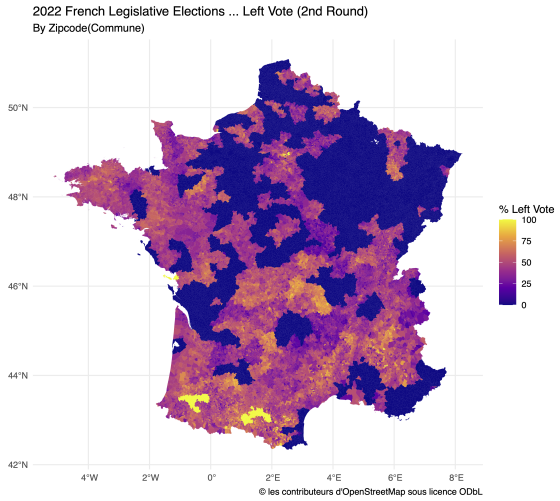


Figure A9: Distribution of Left-Coalition vote share by ZIP code in the 2022 Legislative Elections

Notes. The figure plots the distribution of the Left-Coalition first-round vote share at the ZIP code level in the 2022 French Legislative Elections. Students are classified as Left (Right) if the vote share in their residential ZIP code exceeds the 80th (falls below the 20th) national percentile; remaining students are classified as Center. Source: 2022 Legislative Elections (first-round results).

C.2 Survey Classification

C.3 Validation of the Mapping Between Values and Leaning in Conjoint

C.3.1 Validation via revealed priority-to-leaning posteriors

To support our survey classification, we benchmark the mapping with recent polling among 18-24 year-olds on their top three national worries.[28] The question reads: *"Which three of the following topics do you find the most worrying in your country?"* (among others, climate change, security, immigration, health services, discriminations). Using the observed propensity of each party family's youth sympathizers to select each issue, we compute the probability of being *Left*, *Center* or *Right* conditional on naming a given issue as a strong priority:

$$P(c \mid \text{issue}) \;=\; \frac{P(\text{issue} \mid c)\, P(c)}{\sum_{c' \in \{L,C,R\}} P(\text{issue} \mid c')\, P(c')},$$

[28] IPSOS (2024)

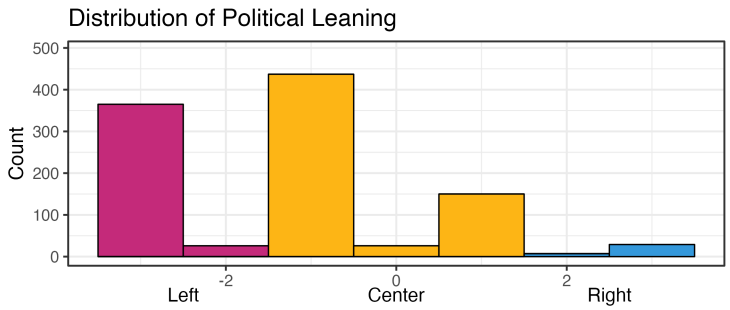


Figure A10: Distribution of respondents' political leaning

Notes. The figure plots the distribution of political leaning among the 1,040 survey respondents. Source: conjoint experiment, May 2025.

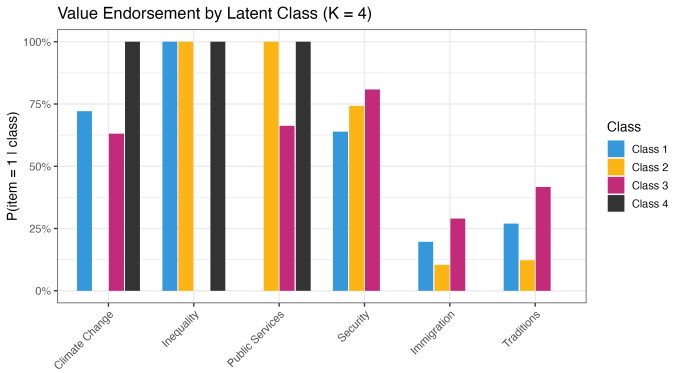


Figure A11: LCA-derived value classes

Notes. The figure plots the LCA-derived value classes from survey responses on societal priorities. Each bar shows the share of respondents selecting each priority within the corresponding class. Source: conjoint experiment, May 2025.

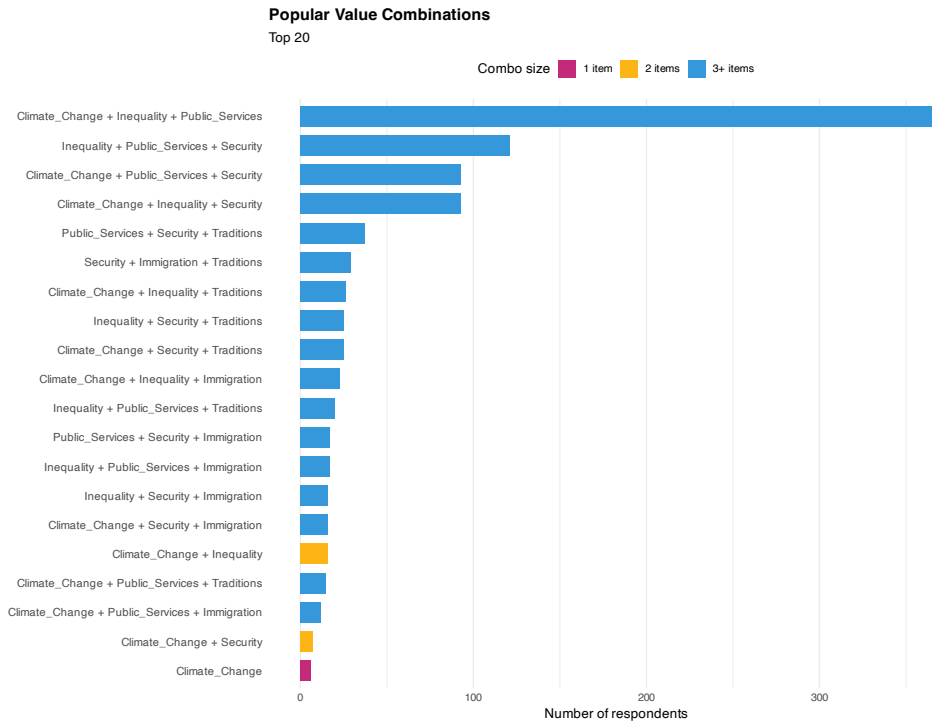
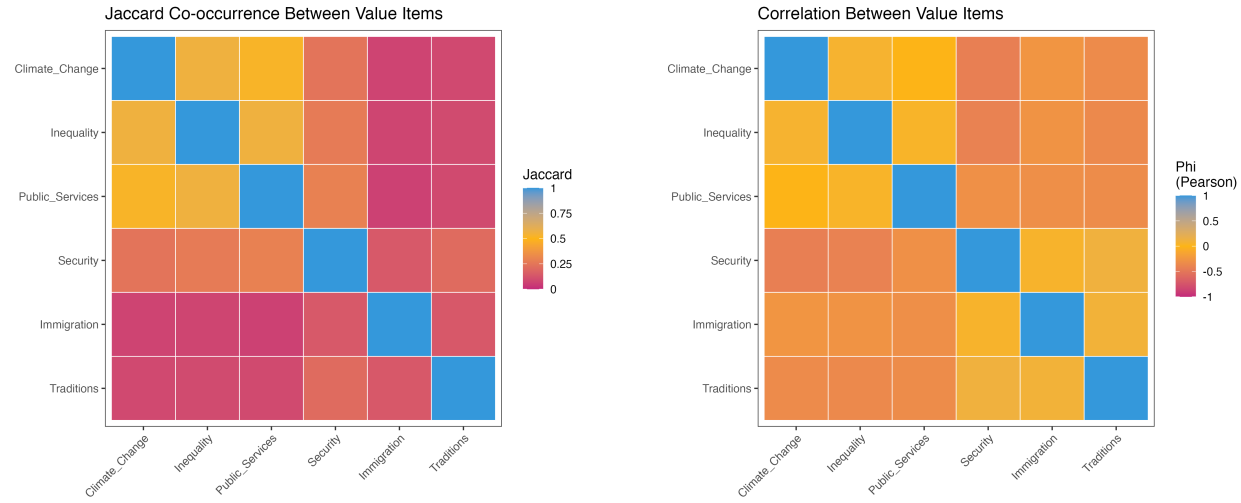


Figure A12: Popular value combinations in the survey

Notes. The figure plots the 20 most frequent combinations of societal priorities chosen by survey respondents. Each combination corresponds to a distinct set of up to three priorities selected simultaneously. Source: conjoint experiment, May 2025.



(a) Jaccard co-occurrence

(b) Phi Pearson correlation

Figure A13: Similarity between value items

Notes. The figure plots two measures of co-selection among priority items. Panel (a) shows the Jaccard co-occurrence index. Panel (b) shows the Phi Pearson correlation between binary item indicators. Source: conjoint experiment, May 2025.

where $P(\text{issue} \mid c)$ are the issue selection rates by leaning and $P(c)$ are leaning priors among young people. We set the priors to the youth distribution at the contemporaneous legislative election, $P(L) = 0.41,\ P(C) = 0.13,\ P(R) = 0.31$ (Harris Interactive, 2024).

Table A8: Posterior probability of ideological camp given a single strong priority (18-24)

Issue named as strong priority	Left (%)	Center (%)	Right (%)
Climate change	61	12	27
Security	35	13	52
Discriminations	68	10	22
Health services	40	22	38
Immigration	21	8	71

Notes. The table reports the posterior probability of ideological camp given a single stated priority, computed via Bayes' rule. Source: Ipsos (2024); Harris Interactive, 2024.

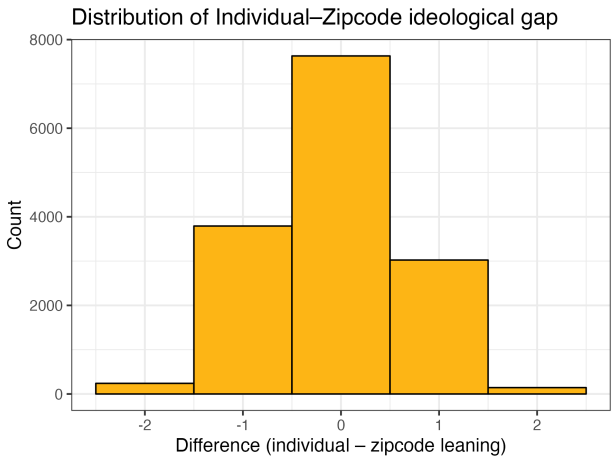
These posteriors align with our coding. Climate and discriminations are strongly left-identifying while immigration and security are right-identifying. Health services is more balanced.

C.3.2 Validation via the follow-up survey

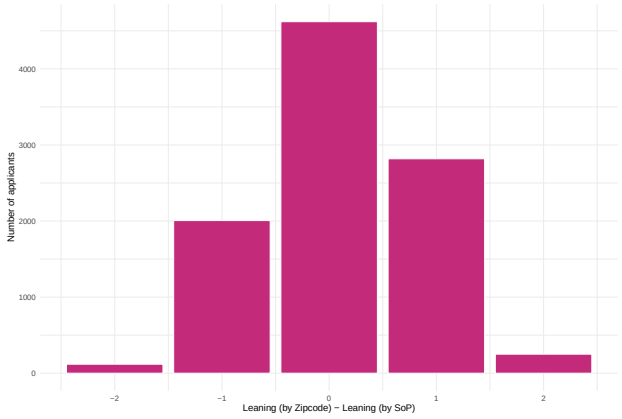
The follow-up survey re-elicits the values battery on a subset of the same students, adds an explicit 0 to 10 left-right self-placement slider, and asks a party-closeness item mapped to a five-category L-R spectrum. Pairwise correlations confirm that the values mapping converges with direct self-placement and partisan identification. The Spearman rank correlation between values and self-placement is $\rho = -0.60$, between values and party $\rho = -0.70$, and between self-placement and party $\rho = +0.77$. All six individual value items load on self-placement in the expected direction (Appendix I.3).

C.4 Validation of the Epidemiological Approach Through Survey Political Leaning

We check the accuracy of the epidemiological approach of using zipcode political leaning in the administrative data by comparing it with the leaning we find in the survey, and through the Statements of Purpose (see Section 3.4). We do find a realistic, yet noisy, proxy, as highlighted in the following Figure A14.



(a) Survey-based political leaning



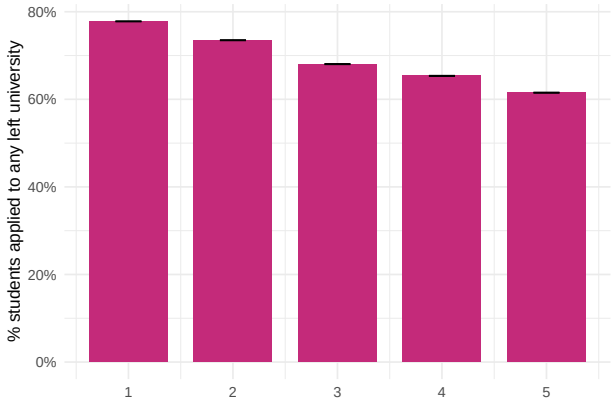
(b) Statement of Purpose political leaning

Figure A14: Validation of the epidemiological proxy: difference between individual-level political leaning (survey or Statement of Purpose) and administrative zipcode-based political leaning

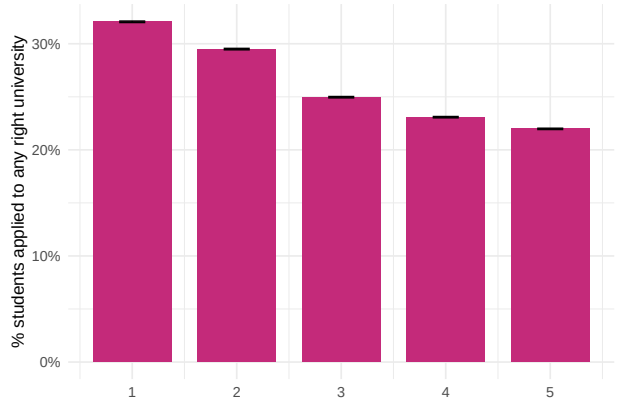
Notes. The figure compares the ZIP code-based administrative proxy for student political leaning with two individual-level measures. Panel (a) shows the difference between the survey-based leaning score and the ZIP code proxy for matched survey respondents. Panel (b) shows the difference between the Statement of Purpose political leaning and the ZIP code proxy. Source: Parcoursup, 2022; conjoint experiment, May 2025.

D Reduced-Form Results

D.1 Sorting Patterns



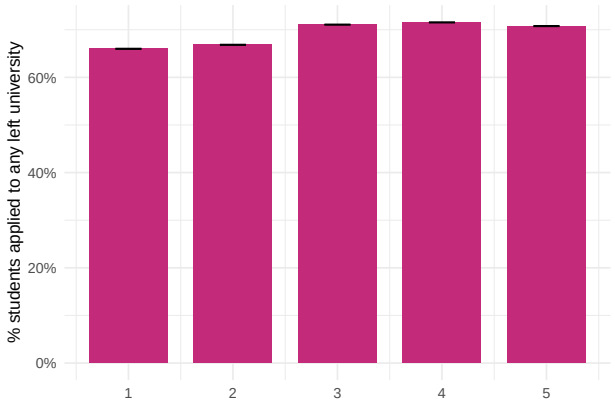
(a) Share of students applying to at least one Left Campus Climate university



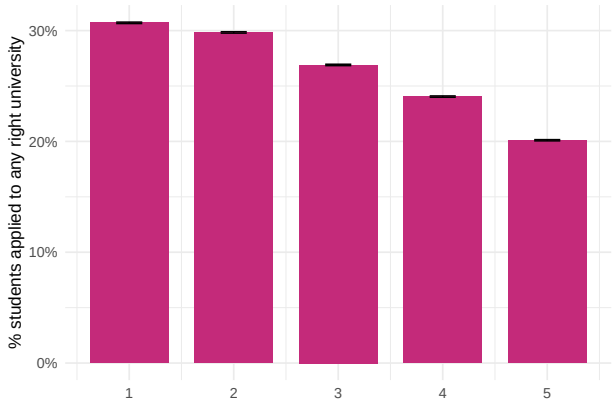
(b) Share of students applying to at least one Right Campus Climate university

Figure A15: Applications to Left Campus Climate (Panel a) and Right Campus Climate (Panel b) universities by quintile of far-right vote share in ZIP code

Notes. The figures plot the average share of students who applied to at least one Left or Right Campus Climate university by quintile of far-right vote share in the student's ZIP code of residence. 95% confidence intervals are shown. Source: Parcoursup, 2022.



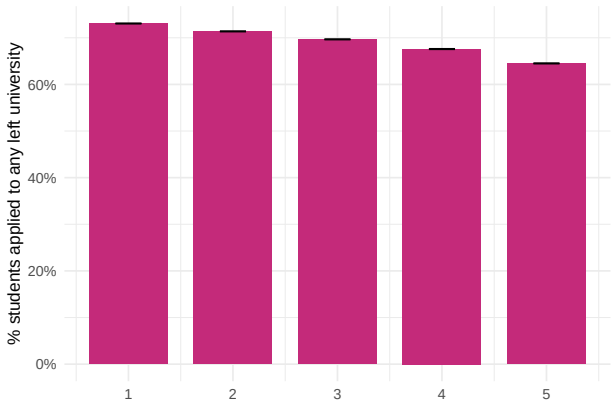
(a) Share of students applying to at least one Left Campus Climate university



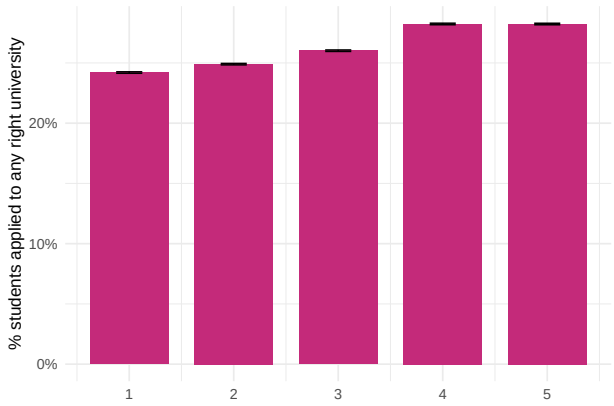
(b) Share of students applying to at least one Right Campus Climate university

Figure A16: Applications to Left Campus Climate (Panel a) and Right Campus Climate (Panel b) universities by quintile of far-left vote share in ZIP code

Notes. The figures plot the average share of students who applied to at least one Left or Right Campus Climate university by quintile of far-left vote share in the student's ZIP code of residence. 95% confidence intervals are shown. Source: Parcoursup, 2022.



(a) Share of students applying to at least one Left Campus Climate university



(b) Share of students applying to at least one Right Campus Climate university

Figure A17: Applications to Left Campus Climate (Panel a) and Right Campus Climate (Panel b) universities by quintile of right-party vote share in ZIP code

Notes. The figures plot the average percentage of students who applied to at least one Left or Right Campus Climate university by quintile of right-party vote share in the student's ZIP code of residence. 95% confidence intervals are shown. Source: Parcoursup, 2022 (10,000 random subsample).

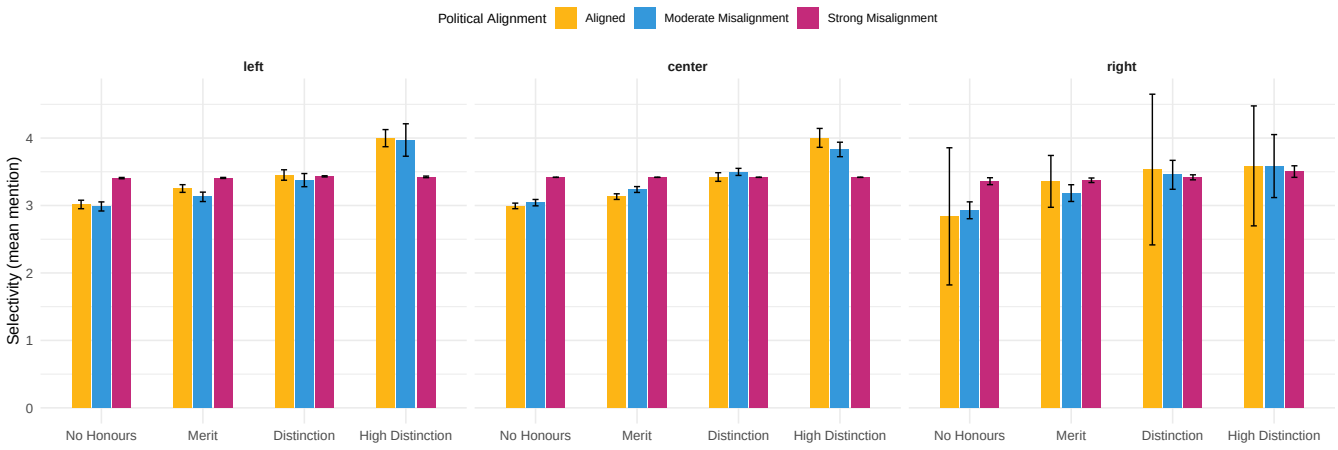


Figure A18: Trade-off between political alignment and program quality (selectivity) by students' political leaning, disaggregated by student academic performance.

Notes. The figure plots average program selectivity, defined as the mean *baccalauréat* distinction of admitted students, by students' own academic performance and their political alignment with the university. Source: Parcoursup, 2022.

D.2 Regression Tables

Table A9: Application probability and political misalignment (university level, continuous indicator)

	(1)
$\lvert\Delta\text{Leaning}\rvert$	-0.004^{***}
	(0.000)
Distance (10km)	-0.001^{***}
	(0.000)
Observations	1327520
Mean Dep. Var	0.015
Student FE	Yes
University FE	Yes
Region FE	Yes
Distance control	Yes

Notes. The table reports linear probability model estimates of application probability on political misalignment at the university level. $\lvert\Delta\text{Leaning}\rvert$ is the continuous misalignment index ($\in \{0, 1, 2\}$). Columns vary the set of fixed effects and controls. Standard errors are clustered at the student level. Significance levels: $^{*}\, p < 0.05$, $^{**}\, p < 0.01$, $^{***}\, p < 0.001$. Source: Parcoursup, 2022 (10,000 random subsample).

Table A10: Application probability and political misalignment (university level, misalignment dummies)

	(1)
Moderate misalignment ($\|\Delta\text{Leaning}\| = 1$)	-0.004^{***}
	(0.001)
Strong misalignment ($\|\Delta\text{Leaning}\| = 2$)	-0.008^{***}
	(0.001)
Distance (10km)	-0.001^{***}
	(0.000)
Observations	1327520
Mean Dep. Var	0.015
(Strong) - (Moderate)	-0.003^{***}
Student FE	Yes
University FE	Yes
Region FE	Yes
Uni × Region FE	Yes
Distance control	Yes

Notes. The table reports linear probability model estimates using misalignment dummies. Standard errors are clustered at the student level. Significance levels: $^{*}p < 0.05$, $^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{***}p < 0.001$. Source: Parcoursup, 2022 (10,000 random subsample).

Table A11: Relationship between students' and universities' political leaning

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Leaning Student	0.084^{***}	0.033^{***}	0.014^{*}
	(0.003)	(0.006)	(0.008)
Mean Dep. Var	-0.43	-0.43	-0.43
ZIP Controls	No	No	Yes
Major FE	No	Yes	Yes
Region FE	No	Yes	Yes
Major × Region FE	No	Yes	Yes
Observations	92,283	92,283	92,134

Notes. The table reports OLS estimates of the relationship between student and university political leaning. Standard errors are clustered at the student level. Significance levels: $^{*}p < 0.05$, $^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{***}p < 0.001$. Source: Parcoursup, 2022 (10,000 random subsample).

D.3 Robustness: Alternative Specifications

Tables A12 report robustness checks for the main reduced-form regression with the re-classification.

Table A12: Robustness: Application probability and political misalignment (university level, misalignment dummies)

	(1)
Moderate misalignment ($\lvert\Delta\text{Leaning}\rvert = 1$)	-0.007^{***}
	(0.001)
Strong misalignment ($\lvert\Delta\text{Leaning}\rvert = 2$)	-0.014^{***}
	(0.001)
Distance (10km)	-0.001^{***}
	(0.000)
Observations	1327520
Mean Dep. Var	0.014
Student FE	Yes
University FE	Yes
Region FE	Yes
Distance control	Yes

Notes. The table reports linear probability model estimates of the application probability on $\lvert\Delta\text{Leaning}\rvert$ and its interactions with the variable indicated at the column head. These specifications use the `gpt-4o` re-classification of universities described in Appendix B. All specifications include student, university, and region fixed effects and a distance control. The estimation sample is the full set of student–university pairs (no distance cap). Standard errors are clustered at the student level. Significance levels: $^{*}\,p < 0.05$, $^{**}\,p < 0.01$, $^{***}\,p < 0.001$. Source: Parcoursup, 2022 (10,000 random subsample).

D.4 Illustrative Examples of Political Content in Statements of Purpose

Student A (right-leaning content): "J'ai la conviction qu'aucun parcours littéraire qui vise à appréhender des questions de notre société ne devrait nier les racines chrétiennes de notre civilisation."

Translation: "I am convinced that no literary path that aims to understand questions of our society should deny the Christian roots of our civilization."

Student B (left-leaning content): "[Votre établissement] est la seule école de France à détenir la double labellisation diversité et égalité, des valeurs que je soutiens pleinement."

Translation: "[Your institution] is the only school in France to hold the double diversity and equality labelling, values that I fully support."

D.5 Electoral Salience

An important limitation of the regression analysis in Section 3 is that it cannot fully disentangle political sorting from other confounding mechanisms. Here we provide additional evidence by exploiting electoral salience. Our analysis hinges on the assumption that during elections the salience of politics increases, while other dimensions of sorting are unaffected.

The 2022 Legislative elections (two rounds: 12th and 19th of June) took place during *the offer stage (2 June – 15 July 2022)*. The first round revealed a deeply polarized country, with the centrist coalition Ensemble and the left-to-radical left-wing coalition each receiving 26% of the vote, while the radical right National Rally secured 19%. We estimate a Difference-in-Differences specification comparing electoral (2022) and non-electoral (2021) years on the sample of rejected offers for institutions with clear political leaning:

$$|\Delta\text{Leaning}_{ijt\tau}| = \sum_{t,\tau} \beta_{t,\tau} \times t \times \tau + \gamma_i + \theta_j + t + \tau + \epsilon_{ijt}, \tag{4}$$

where t is the time (in days) from the beginning of the respective offer stage, $\tau \in \{0, 1\}$ equals 0 for 2021 (no elections), and 1 for 2022 (elections), $\Delta\text{Leaning}_{ijt\tau} \in \{-2, -1, 0, 1, 2\}$ is the political alignment of the rejected offer by i from university j on day t in year τ. Errors are clustered at individual level.

We restrict the analysis to rejected offers because the number of rejections substantially exceeds acceptances, and rejections are comparatively low-stakes decisions more likely to reflect the political salience effect. The identifying assumption is that, absent the elections, offer dynamics in 2022 would have followed a similar pattern to 2021, which is plausible because offer stages begin on the same weekday and last the same number of weeks.

Figure A19 presents the results. The absolute difference in political leanings for rejected offers is approximately 0.1 points larger on election day relative to the same day in 2021, corresponding to an effect of roughly 16% relative to the mean. A central advantage of the design is the ability to control for both student and institution fixed effects, which isolates within-student variation over time and accounts for average differences in political congruence across campuses.

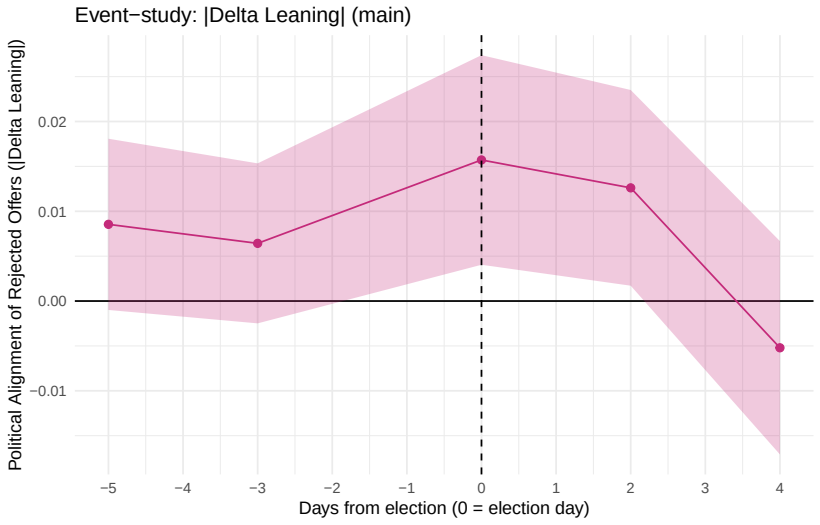


Figure A19: Difference-in-difference estimates for the political misalignment of rejected offers comparing non-electoral (2021) with electoral (2022) years

Notes. The figure plots difference-in-differences estimates from Equation (4) on the sample of rejected offers. The outcome is the absolute political distance between the student and the university, $|\Delta\text{Leaning}_{ij}|$. The plotted coefficients $\beta_{t,\tau}$ capture the difference in political mismatch on the same day of the offer stage between the electoral year (2022) and the non-electoral year (2021). The timeline is recentered so that day 0 corresponds to the 2022 election day (the 10th day of the offer stage). 95% confidence intervals are shown. Standard errors are clustered at the student level. Source: Parcoursup, 2022.

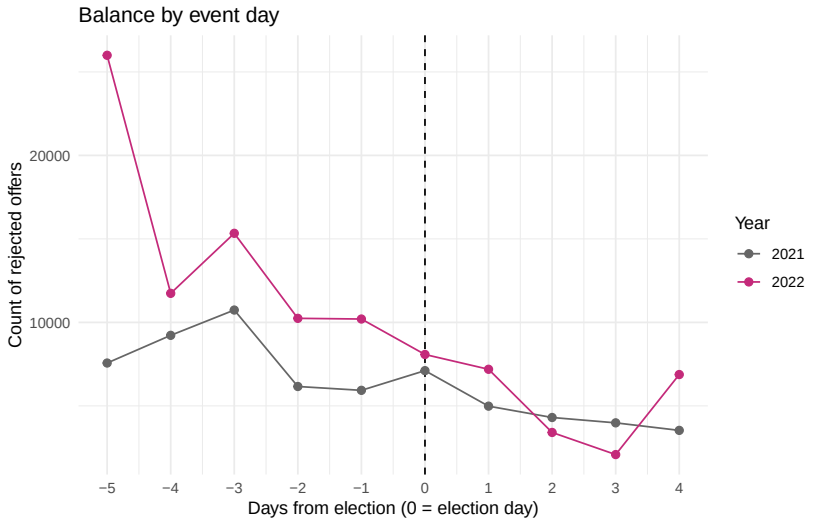


Figure A20: Pre-trends balance test for the event-study design

Notes. The figure reports pre-trend coefficients from Specification 4 on the sample of rejected offers. 95% confidence intervals are shown. Source: Parcoursup, 2022.

E Survey & Field Work

E.1 Survey Timeline and Campaign

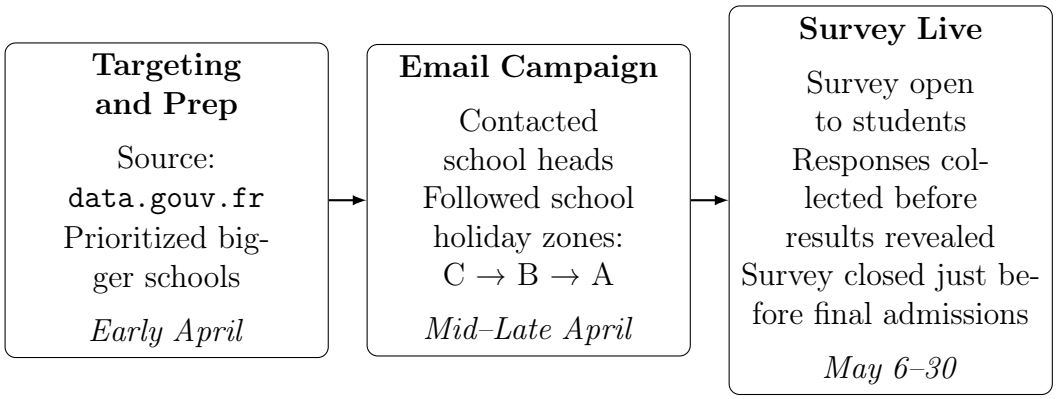


Figure A21: Survey timeline

Notes. The figure illustrates the survey administration timeline relative to the Parcoursup application calendar in 2022. The application stage closes in mid-April and the offer stage begins in early June. Source: conjoint experiment, May 2025.

E.2 Campaign Details

Between early April and May 30, 2025, we contacted approximately 1,500 French high schools via email, asking school heads to circulate the survey through Pronote, the standard online communication system for French high schools. Schools were stratified by academic zone and prioritized by enrollment size to maximize reach and statistical power. Contact emails followed a standardized template including project description, confidentiality assurances, and practical participation steps.

Of the schools contacted, 55 initially agreed to participate and 38 ultimately returned responses. Four slightly modified survey versions were distributed depending on whether the school was Catholic (gender question wording) and whether the school declined the incentive. Table A13 summarizes campaign reach.

Table A13: Survey reach metrics

Channel Event	**Schools**	**% of Contacted**
Schools contacted by email	≈ 1,500	
Agreed to distribute survey	55	3.7%
Ultimately yielded student data	38	2.5%
Agreed but no student responses	3	0.2%
Not contacted, but had student responses	4	0.3%

Notes. The table reports campaign reach metrics for the survey conducted between April and May 2025. Source: conjoint experiment, May 2025.



Figure A22: Survey circulation flyer

Notes. The figure shows the recruitment flyer distributed to partner high schools.

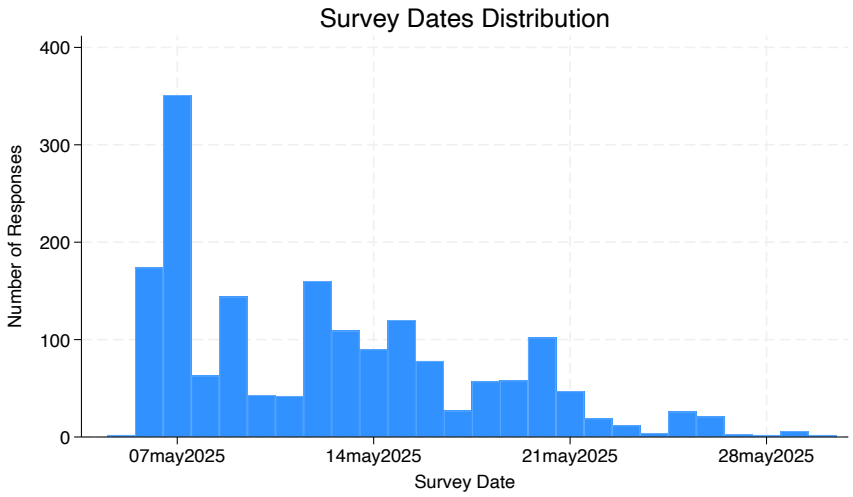


Figure A23: Distribution of survey timing relative to the application calendar

Notes. The figure plots the distribution of survey completion dates. The survey was conducted between May 6 and May 30, 2025. Source: conjoint experiment, May 2025.

E.3 Survey Timing

Table A14: Survey completion stages

Screening Step	Count	Percentage
All observations	1762	100%
High School Screening	1584	90%
Applying-to-Parcoursup Screening	1575	89%
Older-than-16 Screening	1574	89%
Real Answers	1569	89%
Completed survey	1040	59%
Main sample	1040	59%
Deemed Comprehensive	1032	59%
Passed Attention Test	1026	58%
Robust sample	1005	57%

Notes. The table reports the number of respondents reaching each successive stage of the survey. Source: conjoint experiment, May 2025.

E.4 Randomization Balance

Table A15: Randomization sanity check

Attribute	Level	Expected	Observed
Selectivity	Moderately Selective	0.33	0.34
Selectivity	Non-Selective	0.33	0.33
Selectivity	Selective	0.33	0.33
Association (1st)	Engagement	0.06	0.07
Association (1st)	Neutral	0.28	0.27
Association (1st)	Political - Left	0.33	0.34
Association (1st)	Political - Right	0.33	0.33
Association (2nd)	Engagement	0.33	0.33
Association (2nd)	Neutral	0.50	0.52
Association (2nd)	Political - Left	0.08	0.08
Association (2nd)	Political - Right	0.08	0.07
Distance from Home	1–2h	0.33	0.33
Distance from Home	<1h	0.33	0.34
Distance from Home	>2h	0.33	0.33
Annual Study Cost	Free	0.60	0.60
Annual Study Cost	High (>€3,000)	0.10	0.10
Annual Study Cost	Moderate (<€3,000)	0.30	0.30

Notes. The table reports as a sanity check the expected share for each feature displayed in the conjoint experiment and the observed share. Source: conjoint experiment, May 2025.

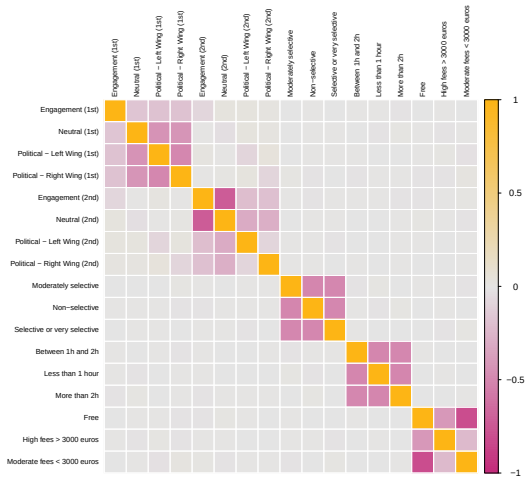


Figure A24: Randomization balance: covariate coefficient plot

Notes. The figure reports covariate-balance estimates from regressing each pre-determined student characteristic on the randomized conjoint treatment assignment. Coefficients close to zero confirm that attribute assignment is independent of student background. 95% confidence intervals are shown. Source: conjoint experiment, May 2025.

E.5 Open-Ended Questions

Table A16: Example of political-related answers to *When you hear about universities now, what are the first things that come to mind?*

ID	Explanation
5	The predominant political orientation among students or the administrative staff
6	Blockades, student protests, reform of the education system, equal opportunity
8	Polarization
9	Activism at Sciences Po
25	Overly politicized
27	The political orientation of the institution
36	Activism, Palestine, politics
39	Student strikes and protests, repression by the administration
40	The ideological conflict between Trump and Harvard
56	Social mobilization, political debates, hubs of activism, values of academic freedom

Notes. The table presents selected open-ended responses to the question "When you hear about universities now, what are the first things that come to mind?". Source: conjoint experiment, May 2025.

Table A17: Example of explanations to *If the political atmosphere of an institution was very far from your ideas, would that make you hesitate to go there?*

	Explanation
No	If it's free and has a good reputation, that compensates. In any case, better to 'suffer' for two or three years at this school than spend a lifetime without its diploma.
No	The training I choose is for my future, regardless of values.
No	I'm there to learn, not to engage in political debate.
No	To discover new values, or at least try to understand them.
No	No, because political influence should not affect my future.
Yes	I want to go to an institution that reflects my ideas.
Yes	It wouldn't encourage me to study at that institution.
Yes	I wouldn't feel comfortable there.
Yes	Because I wouldn't feel very comfortable being surrounded by people with different values, even if it might be interesting to hear their views and open my mind. But I think it would be hard in the long term.
Yes	Yes, but only if those values are truly upheld by the institution, not just by some of the students.

Notes. The table presents selected open-ended responses to the question "If the political atmosphere of an institution was very far from your ideas, would that make you hesitate to go there?" 72% of respondents answered Yes. Source: conjoint experiment, May 2025.



(a) Top-of-mind associations (b) Enrollment-related answers (c) Political sorting answers

Figure A25: Wordclouds of open-ended responses

Notes. The figure displays word clouds of open-ended responses. Panel (a) shows top-of-mind associations with universities, elicited before the political values section. Panel (b) shows enrollment-related responses. Panel (c) shows responses addressing political sorting and campus atmosphere. Source: conjoint experiment, May 2025.

E.6 Distribution of Answers per High School

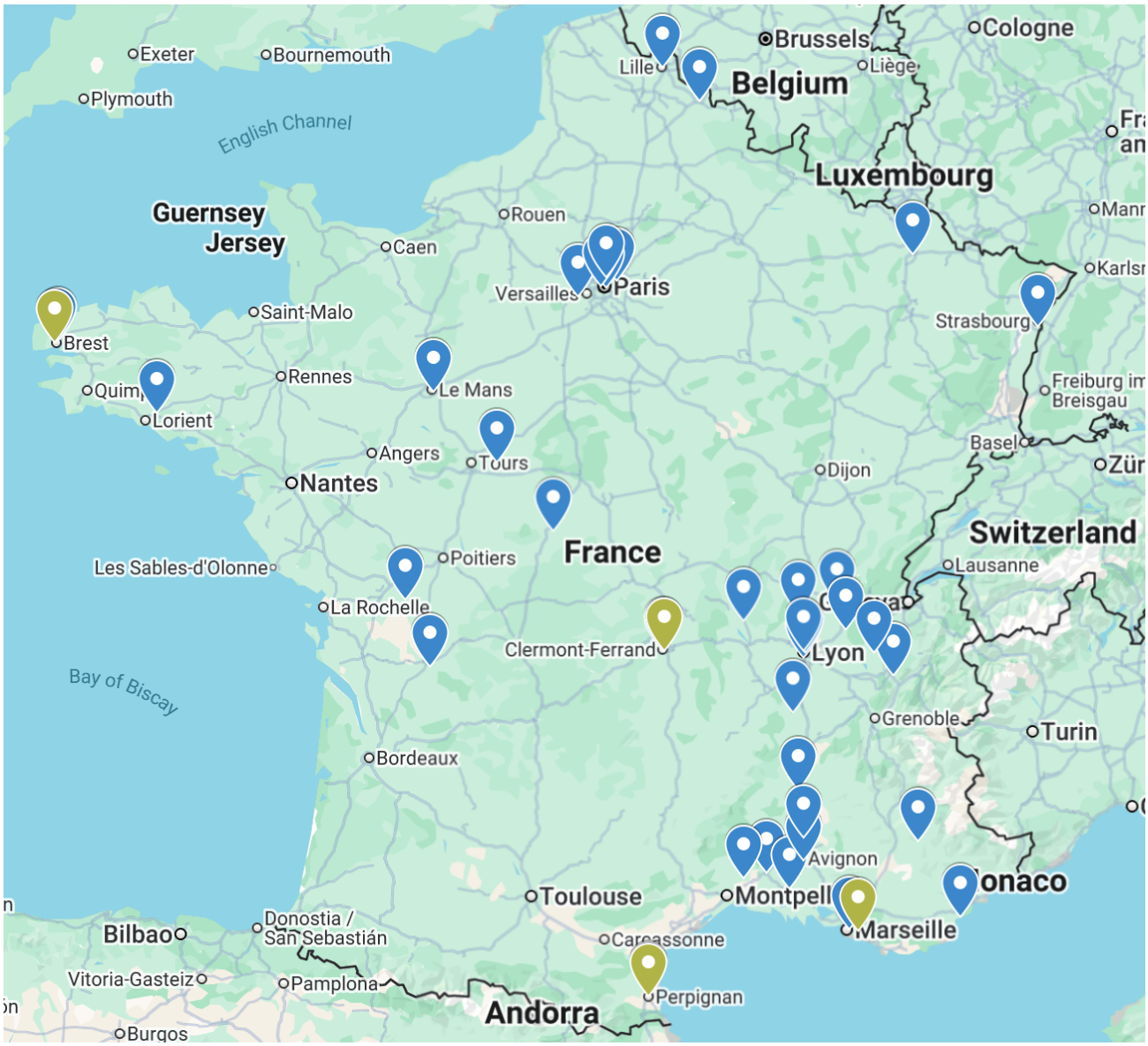


Figure A26: Geographic distribution of participating high schools

Notes. The figure shows the geographic location of the high schools that participated in the survey. Source: conjoint experiment, May 2025.

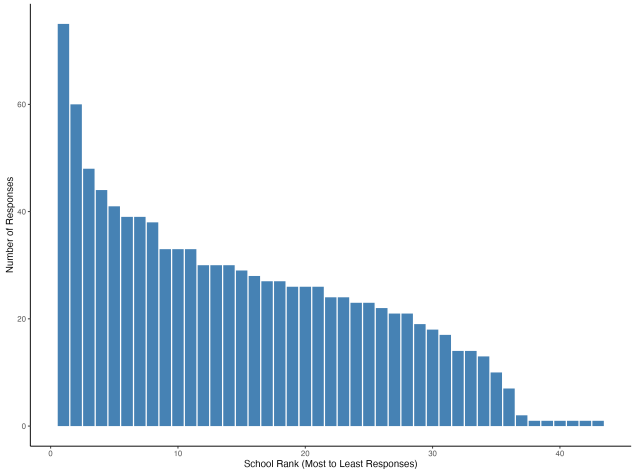


Figure A27: Distribution of student responses by school

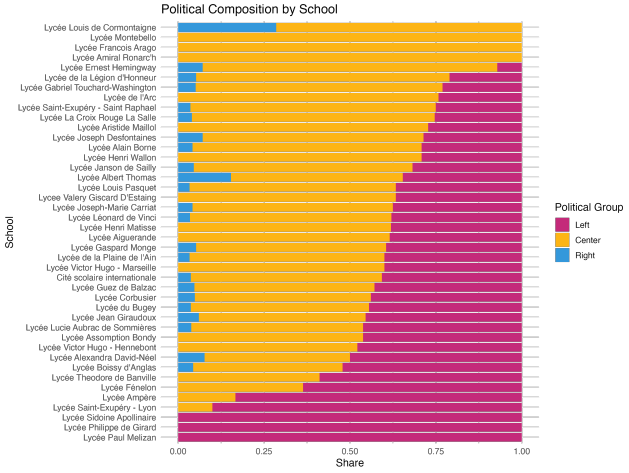


Figure A28: Distribution of political assignment by school

Notes. The figure plots the distribution of survey responses by high school (Panel a) and the distribution of political leaning assignment by high school (Panel b). Source: conjoint experiment, May 2025.

E.7 Sample Representativity

Table A18: High school representativity

	Comparison Group		
	Not In Sample N = 2,354	**In Sample** N = 42	**p-value**
School Size and Social Context			
Number of Students	791 (429)	1,078 (422)	<0.001
Social Position Index (IPS)	116 (16)	113 (16)	0.3
IPS Standard Deviation	31.9 (3.6)	33.5 (3.6)	<0.001
Remoteness Index	103 (7)	100 (5)	0.032
Facilities and Sections			
Catering	2,214 (94%)	42 (100%)	0.2
Accommodation	1,411 (60%)	28 (67%)	0.4
Apprenticeship	1,159 (51%)	22 (52%)	0.8
Art Section	1,268 (56%)	30 (71%)	0.040
Cinema Section	371 (16%)	11 (26%)	0.085
Theatre Section	593 (26%)	11 (26%)	>0.9
Sport Section	685 (30%)	17 (40%)	0.14
International Section	105 (4.6%)	4 (9.5%)	0.13
European Section	1,662 (73%)	36 (86%)	0.061
School Characteristics	67		
Private	839 (36%)	4 (9.5%)	<0.001

F Conjoint

F.1 Visual Representation of a Hypothetical Case in the Conjoint

If you had to choose between two courses in the same *field* but at two different establishments, which of these two establishments would you choose for your training? *(Example: Physics-Chemistry at University A or University B)*

Dimension *(not shown):*	University A	University B
Prestige	Selective	Moderately Selective
Main Student Associations	1. UNI (Conservative student organization promoting education and national values) 2. Club Photographie (Offers photography workshops and organizes exhibitions)	1. Club d'Échecs (Organizes chess games and tournaments for students) 2. Club de Musique (Brings together students for music practice and concerts)
Distance	More than 2h	More than 2h
Tuition Fees	Free	Moderate Fees *(< 3000 Euro)*

Prefer A | Prefer B

Figure A29: Conjoint Experiment Layout. Example

F.2 Conjoint Design

The following subsection reports the attributes tables, as well as the associations involved by categories and with their assigned probabilities.

Table A19: Conjoint design

Attribute	**Levels**	**Probabilities**
Selectivity	Selective, Moderately Selective, Non-Selective	1/3 each
Association (1st)	Political Left, Political Right, (Engagement & Neutral)	1/3, 1/3, 1/3
Association (2nd)	Political, Engagement, Neutral	1/6, 1/3, 1/2
Distance from home	<1h, 1–2h, >2h	1/3 each
Annual study cost	Free, Moderate (< €3,000), High (> €3,000)	60%, 30%, 10%

Notes. The table describes the conjoint experiment design. Each respondent evaluated six pairs of hypothetical university profiles. The four attributes were randomized independently across profiles. Political leaning is signaled through the student association attributes.

Association	Category	Description
UNI	Political	Conservative group promoting strict academic standards and national values.
La Cocarde Étudiante	Political	Focused on preserving French educational and cultural traditions.
UNEF	Political	Advocates for student rights, campus equality, and inclusive representation.
Union Étudiante	Political	Activist union fighting inequality and promoting social progress.
Club d'Échecs	Neutral	Chess club fostering critical thinking and connection through matches.
Club Photographie	Neutral	Creative group offering photography workshops and exhibitions.
Club de Musique	Neutral	Music group supporting student performance and collaboration.
Club de Cuisine	Neutral	Promotes food culture through cooking workshops and social meals.
Bureau des Sports (BDS)	Neutral	Athletic club organizing events to promote student fitness and teamwork.
Association de Cinéma	Neutral	Film club curating screenings and creative cinema projects.
Club Théâtre Universitaire	Neutral	Theater group exploring acting, writing, and production.
Club Randonnée & Nature	Neutral	Outdoor club organizing hikes and nature exploration.
Bureau des Arts (BDA)	Neutral	Cultural group promoting student creativity and campus engagement.
Club de Lecture	Neutral	Literary group hosting discussions and readings.
Association de Journalisme	Engagement	Civic group encouraging journalism and student media.
Association de Débats	Engagement	Debate club promoting open dialogue and critical thinking.

Table A20: Student associations used in the conjoint

Notes. The table highlights the associations shown in the conjoint. Each is presented with a short description.

F.3 Mechanism Framework

Political considerations may enter higher-education choices for multiple reasons that go beyond ideological agreement or disagreement per se. Students may therefore care about campus politics insofar as they anticipate effects on academic quality, social interactions, psychological comfort, and moral identity.

We conceptualize these considerations along two analytically distinct dimensions. The first distinguishes whether politics matters through the *level of politicization* of campus life, whether political conflict, activism, or institutional positioning is perceived as present at all, or through *political alignment*, whether the dominant political climate of the institution is perceived as being "on one's side." The second distinguishes whether these considerations operate as *costs* that generate avoidance (push factors) or as *benefits* that generate attraction (pull factors). Together, these dimensions yield a 2×2 framework organizing the potential mechanisms (Table A21).

Within this framework, politics may deter students through several channels. Politicization-related costs include concerns that political conflict may distort teaching, undermine neutrality or fairness in evaluation, or disrupt study conditions through strikes or institutional instability. Alignment-related costs arise when students anticipate social pressure, judgment, harassment, or self-censorship if their views are in the minority, as well as moral discomfort associated with attending institutions whose values they find normatively unacceptable. Conversely, politics may attract students when campuses are perceived as offering expressive stimulation, opportunities for activism, or civic vibrancy, or when political alignment promises interpersonal comfort, social integration, and value congruence.

Table A21: Mechanisms linking campus politics to university choice

	Politicization (level) Is politics present at all?	**Alignment (direction)** Is it on my side?
Push factors (Costs / avoidance)	**Costs of politicization** • Academic distortion (teaching bias, reduced pluralism, grading fairness) • Campus disruptions and institutional instability	**Costs of misalignment** • Judgment, harassment, self-censorship • Normative rejection of values • Moral complicity and legitimization
Pull factors (Benefits / attraction)	**Benefits of politicization** • Expressive stimulation and debate • Participatory or activist opportunities • Civic or ideological vibrancy of campus life	**Benefits of alignment** • Interpersonal comfort • Social integration • Value congruence / homophily

Notes. The table summarizes the framework across the two dimensions, which are politicization (level or direction) and factor typology (push and pull).

F.4 Additional Results

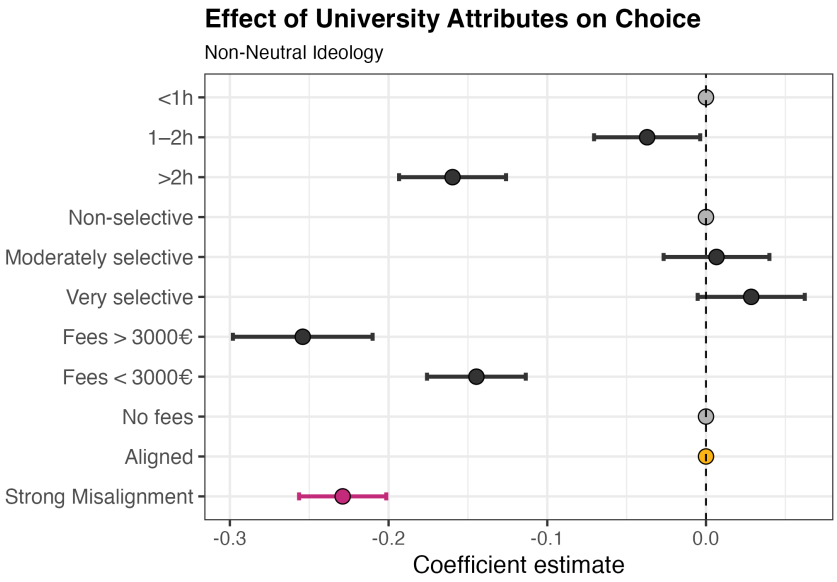


Figure A30: Political alignment effects restricted to politicized campus profiles

Notes. The figure reports results from the baseline conjoint specification, restricting the sample to profiles with politicized student associations only (i.e., excluding neutral campus life). Political distance is measured using the same alignment index as in the main text. The outcome equals one if the alternative is chosen. Standard errors are heteroskedasticity-robust (HC2). 95% confidence intervals are shown. The sample comprises 1,040 survey respondents. Source: conjoint experiment, May 2025.

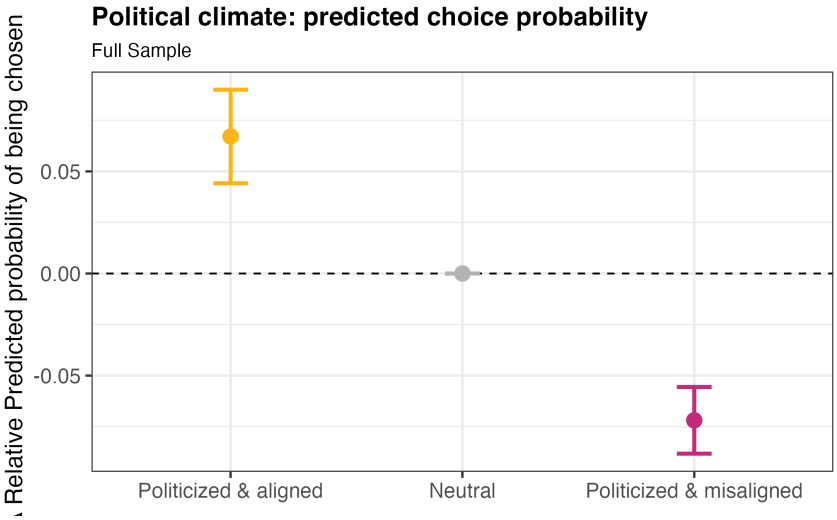
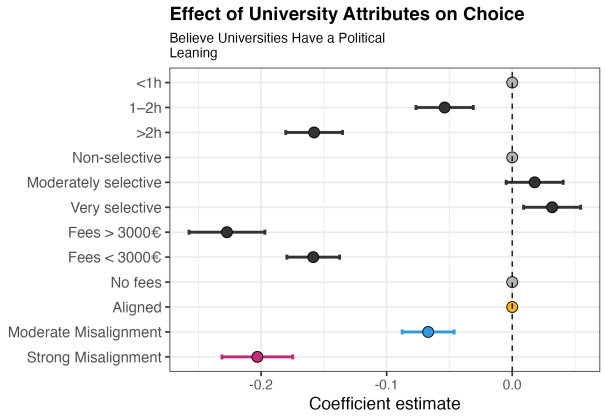
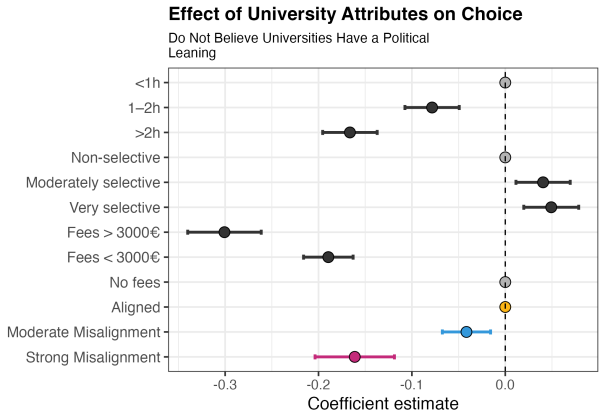


Figure A31: Predicted choice probabilities by campus political climate (relative to neutrality)

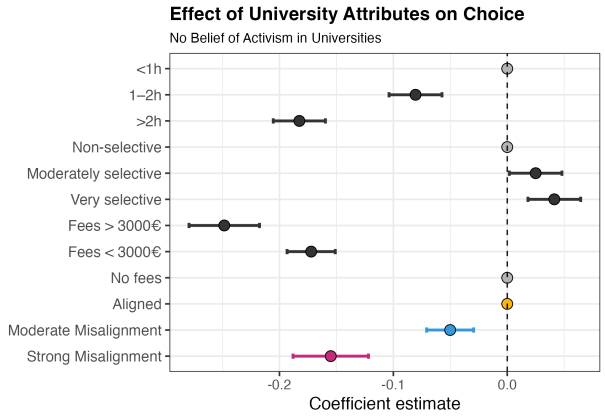
Notes. The figure plots predicted choice probabilities implied by the decomposed conjoint model, normalizing the probability of choosing a neutral (non-politicized) campus to zero. Predictions are evaluated at baseline values of non-political attributes. Positive values indicate a higher probability of being chosen relative to a neutral campus, while negative values indicate a lower probability. Standard errors are heteroskedasticity-robust (HC2). 95% confidence intervals are shown. The sample comprises 1,040 survey respondents. Source: conjoint experiment, May 2025.



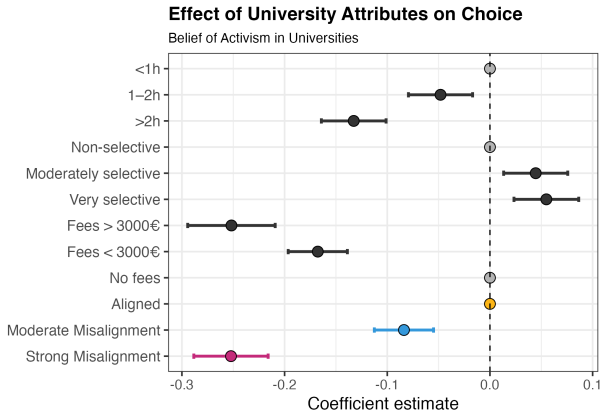
(a) Perceives universities as politically biased



(b) Does not perceive political bias



(c) Universities seen as sites of activism



(d) Universities not seen as activist sites

Figure A32: Heterogeneity in conjoint effects by beliefs about universities

Notes. Each panel reports estimated marginal effects of the political alignment attribute from the full conjoint model, for subsamples defined by respondents' beliefs about universities' political orientation and activist role. The outcome equals one if the alternative is chosen. Standard errors are heteroskedasticity-robust (HC2). 95% confidence intervals are shown. The sample comprises 1,040 survey respondents. Source: conjoint experiment, May 2025.

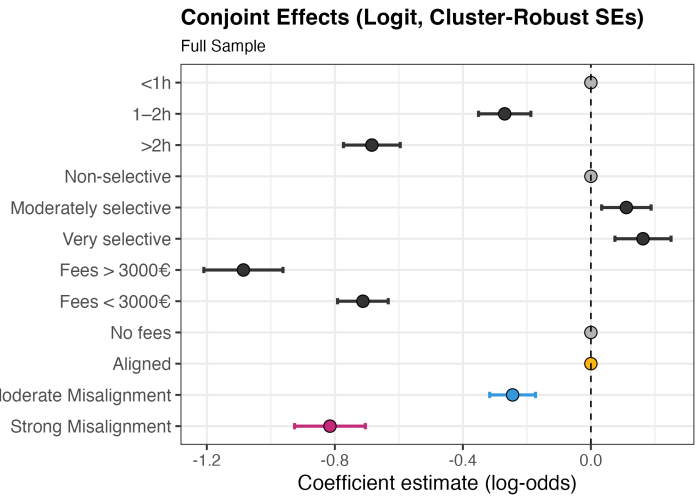


Figure A33: Results of the conjoint experiment. Discrete choice model specification with T1EV shock

Notes. The figure plots Type-I extreme value shock estimates for each attribute level relative to its baseline. The outcome equals one if the alternative is chosen. Standard errors are heteroskedasticity-robust (HC1 sandwich estimator). Coefficient ratios are estimated via respondent-cluster bootstrap with 1,000 draws. 95% confidence intervals are shown. The sample comprises 1,040 survey respondents. Source: conjoint experiment, May 2025.

G Model & Estimation

G.1 Structural-Model Sample

Table A22: Sample counts for the structural-model estimation sample

Metric	Value
Students	665
Choice sets	3238
Alternatives	2531724
Avg alternatives per set	781.9
Median alternatives per set	795
Min alternatives per set	673
Max alternatives per set	821
Sets with ≥ 4 alternatives (%)	100.0%
Avg choice sets per student	4.87
Median choice sets per student	3
Min choice sets per student	1
Max choice sets per student	49
Universities	394
Majors	7
Uni-Major pairs	821

Notes. The table reports sample counts for the structural-model estimation sample. A choice set is a student-by-major combination defining one discrete choice problem. Alternatives are the (university, major) options available within each choice set. Uni-Major pairs counts distinct (university, major) combinations across the sample. Source: Parcoursup, 2022 (model sample).

Table A23: University-level summary statistics (model sample)

Metric	Left	Center	Right
N universities	333.00	408.00	80.00
Average annual fees	401.12	2818.42	3283.79
Average selectivity	3.31	3.20	3.12
Share private universities (%)	2.00	28.00	74.00

Notes. The table reports institutions characteristics across political climate. Source: Parcoursup, 2022 (model sample).

Table A24: Climate-applied shares by grade tercile (model sample)

	Left	Center	Right	n
Low	72.1	66.9	25.0	172
Medium	75.5	66.7	28.4	363
High	70.8	68.5	20.0	130

Notes. The table reports the share of students in a grade tercile who applied to at least one university of the corresponding political climate, restricted to the structural-model sample (n=665). Source: Parcoursup, 2022 (model sample).

Table A25: Climate-applied shares by SES category (model sample)

	Climate			
	Left	Center	Right	n
Working SES	70.6	71.4	22.2	126
Middle SES	81.0	69.0	20.4	142
High SES	72.0	65.0	29.0	397

Notes. The table reports the share of students in an SES category who applied to at least one university of the corresponding political climate, restricted to the structural-model sample (n=665). Source: Parcoursup, 2022 (model sample).

G.2 Majors and Potential Confounders

Our conjoint design implements a *ceteris paribus* comparison: respondents evaluate profiles while abstracting from the field of study (major). In the actual application process, however, major choice is a first-order determinant of the feasible set of programs and plausibly precedes university choice. Descriptive evidence from the application data supports this interpretation. Table A26 shows that students submit substantially more applications per major than per university: while the median student applies to three programs within a given major, they typically apply to only one program per university. This pattern is consistent with students

first selecting a field of study and subsequently choosing among universities offering programs within that field.

Table A26: Average application portfolio size per student, by major and university

Metric	Major	University
Min.	1.0	1.0
1st Qu.	2.0	1.0
Median	3.0	1.0
Mean	6.8	2.3
3rd Qu.	7.0	2.0
Max.	140.0	23.0

Notes. The table reports the number of applications within major and within institution. Source: Parcoursup, 2022.

This sequencing matters for two related reasons. First, if students sort into majors based on characteristics correlated with political preferences, observed university choices may partly reflect major selection rather than preferences over university attributes per se. Second, universities can differ systematically in their average political leaning both *within* and *across* majors, implying that the political signal attached to a given institution may not be comparable across fields.

Figure A34 illustrates that the average political leaning of universities varies across majors, consistent with the presence of major-specific political composition in higher education. This heterogeneity motivates conducting our main analyses at the university–major level and controlling flexibly for major when pooling observations across fields.

The follow-up survey provides direct evidence that students perceive more political variation across institutions than across academic fields. On a 1 to 5 left-right scale, the intraclass correlation of ratings across targets is 0.51 for universities and 0.45 for academic fields, and the mean within-respondent standard deviation of ratings is 0.80 across the two universities each respondent rates and 0.92 across the three academic fields (Appendix I.4). Both metrics support keeping the institution as the primary unit of political sorting while controlling for the field of study.

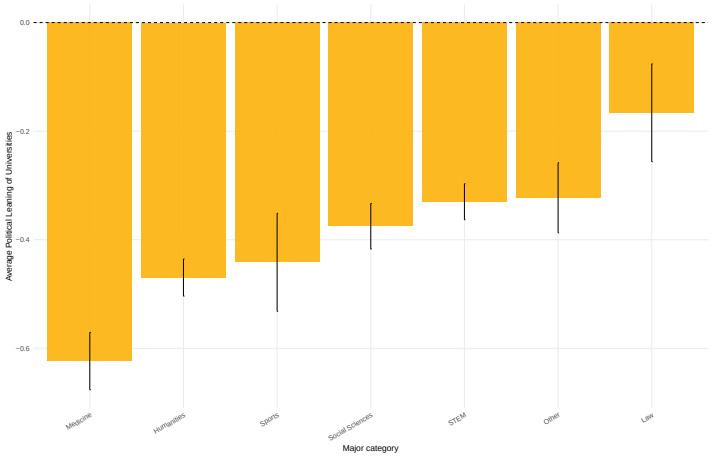


Figure A34: Average political leaning by major

Notes. The figure plots the average campus political climate score by major category. Positive (negative) values indicate a Left Campus Climate (Right Campus Climate) average for that major. Major categories follow the classification used in the administrative analysis. Source: Parcoursup, 2022.

We further examine how universities' average political leaning varies with two salient institutional attributes: fees and selectivity. If fees and selectivity are correlated with political leaning, they may confound estimates that attribute students' choices to political considerations. Figures A35 and A36 report these relationships. The association between political leaning and fees appears non-monotonic, and the relationship with selectivity is likewise not purely increasing or decreasing. These descriptive patterns suggest that fees and selectivity capture overlapping but distinct dimensions of institutional sorting.

G.3 Monte Carlo Design

In the main text we develop a method to recover the effect of the political sorting in a demand choice model of universities, and to estimate counterfactual values of interest. The

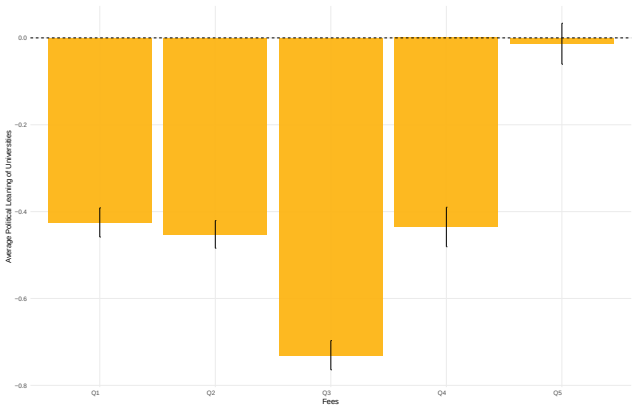


Figure A35: Average political leaning by fee level

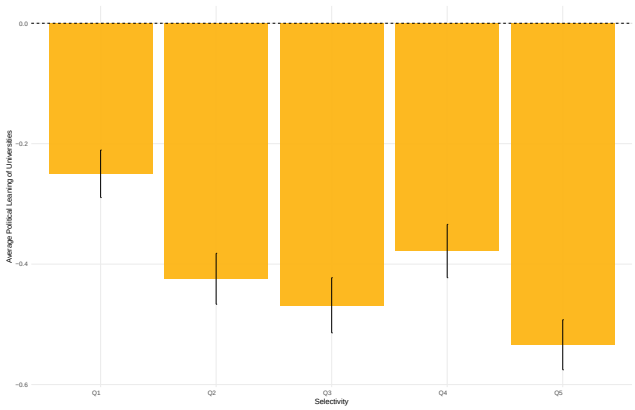


Figure A36: Average political leaning by selectivity level

Notes. The figure plots the average campus political climate score by fee and selectivity level. Positive (negative) values indicate a Left Campus Climate (Right Campus Climate) average for that major. Source: Parcoursup, 2022.

essence of this method is to estimate the demand choice model twice: first, using the survey data from the conjoint, and second, using the administrative data. The important issue with the estimation of political sorting effect using administrative data is that it is inherently prone to the omitted variable bias. To account for that, we bring the ratio of the parameters from the conjoint and incorporate it into administrative estimates.

In this section via Monte Carlo simulation we demonstrate that this method could indeed be used to recover the full model of choice (up to scale normalization). We study ratio estimates of multinomial logit (MNL) coefficients in a controlled Monte Carlo (MC) environment, and show that while omitted variable bias in discrete choice models could arise even under no correlation between variables, it does not affect the ratio estimates of the variables *uncorrelated* with the omitted variable. In the dataset, individuals face $J = 5$ unordered alternatives. For individual i and alternative j, utility is

$$U_{ij} = X'_{ij}\beta + \varepsilon_{ij}, \qquad \varepsilon_{ij} \sim \text{EV Type I i.i.d.} \tag{5}$$

$$\beta = (\beta_1, \beta_2, \beta_3, \beta_4)' = (1.0,\ -0.8,\ 0.6,\ 0.9)'. \tag{6}$$

Choice is $y_{ij} = \mathbf{1}\{U_{ij} = \max_k U_{ik}\}$. The $K = 4$ observed attributes $X_{ij} = (X_{1,ij}, X_{2,ij}, X_{3,ij}, X_{4,ij})'$ are drawn as

$$X_{ij} \sim \mathcal{N}(0, \Sigma)\,,$$

with the correlation structure

$$\Sigma = \begin{bmatrix} 1 & 0 & 0 & 0.6 \\ 0 & 1 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & 1 & 0 \\ 0.6 & 0 & 0 & 1 \end{bmatrix},$$

so that X_4 **is correlated only with** X_1 (corr. $= 0.6$), while (X_2, X_3) are independent of X_4 and of each other.

Estimators. For each simulated dataset we estimate two MNL specifications:

1. **Correct *full* model:** $\Pr(y_{ij}=1)=\frac{\exp(\alpha_j+X_{ij}'\beta)}{\sum_k \exp(\alpha_k+X_{ik}'\beta)}$, using all four regressors $X_1,\ldots,X_4$.
2. **Misspecified *short* model:** the same MNL but omitting X_4 (i.e., estimated on X_1, X_2, X_3 only).

From each fit we record the coefficient ratios

$$r_{1,2}^{\text{full}}=\frac{\widehat{\beta}_1^{\text{full}}}{\widehat{\beta}_2^{\text{full}}},\quad r_{1,2}^{\text{short}}=\frac{\widehat{\beta}_1^{\text{short}}}{\widehat{\beta}_2^{\text{short}}},\qquad r_{2,3}^{\text{full}}=\frac{\widehat{\beta}_2^{\text{full}}}{\widehat{\beta}_3^{\text{full}}},\quad r_{2,3}^{\text{short}}=\frac{\widehat{\beta}_2^{\text{short}}}{\widehat{\beta}_3^{\text{short}}}.$$

For reference we also plot the "true" ratios β_1/β_2 and β_2/β_3 implied by the DGP.

MC grid and aggregation. We vary the number of choice situations N over a grid

$$N\in\{5000,\,6000,\,\ldots,\,14{,}000\},$$

and for each N run $R=20$ independent replications. For every N we report the Monte Carlo mean and standard deviation of each ratio:

$$\bar{r}(N)=\frac{1}{R}\sum_{r=1}^{R} r^{(r)}(N),\qquad \text{sd}(N)=\sqrt{\frac{1}{R-1}\sum_{r=1}^{R}\left(r^{(r)}(N)-\bar{r}(N)\right)^2}.$$

We show two figures. The first plots the mean and ± 1 SD error bars of $\widehat{\beta}_1/\widehat{\beta}_2$ by N (Figure A37). The second plots the same for $\widehat{\beta}_2/\widehat{\beta}_3$. In both figures, the full (correct) model is displayed in pink and the misspecified model in yellow; horizontal reference lines mark the true ratios from the DGP. All simulations are seeded for reproducibility.

The MC simulations demonstrate that one could recover the ratio of the variables, which are believed to be exogenous (in this case, X_2, X_3), while the ratio that involves an endogenous variable X_1 could not be consistently estimated.

In the case of our model, X_1 refers to the value of political alignment, which could be expected to be correlated with unobserved preference heterogeneity. In contrast, we assume no sorting closer to one's preferred institution, an assumption common in the school choice literature (Agarwal and Somaini, 2020), e.g. X_2 is exogenous. Likewise, we expect universities fixed effects to be exogenous in this sense (X_3). Hence, MC simulations allow us to claim that we could recover $\widehat{\beta}_2/\widehat{\beta}_3$ up to a scaler. Combining this with the known ratio of $\widehat{\beta}_1/\widehat{\beta}_2$ from the conjoint completes our procedure for the recovery of the structural parameters of the model.

G.4 Comparison of Choice Models across the Two Data Sources

An important assumption of our analysis is that the models of choice are identical across the conjoint experiment and the real-world setting of applying to university. To justify this assumption, we follow a standard approach in the marketing literature and compare the ratios of coefficients across the two models.

In the survey experiment, we include four dimensions of differentiation: (1) distance, (2) political associations, (3) fees, and (4) selectivity. The first two are the primary focus of the

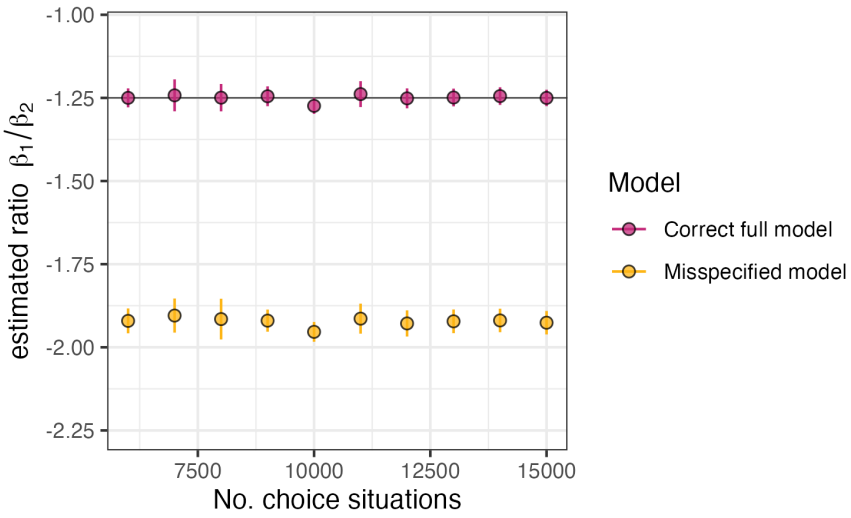


Figure A37: Estimated ratio of $\widehat{\beta}_1/\widehat{\beta}_2$ across both models

Notes. The figure plots the mean ±1 SD of the estimated ratio $\widehat{\beta}_1/\widehat{\beta}_2$ across $R = 20$ replications by number of choice situations N. The full model (pink) includes all four regressors; the short model (yellow) omits the endogenous variable X_4 (correlated with X_1). The horizontal dashed line shows the true ratio from the data-generating process. Source: simulated data.

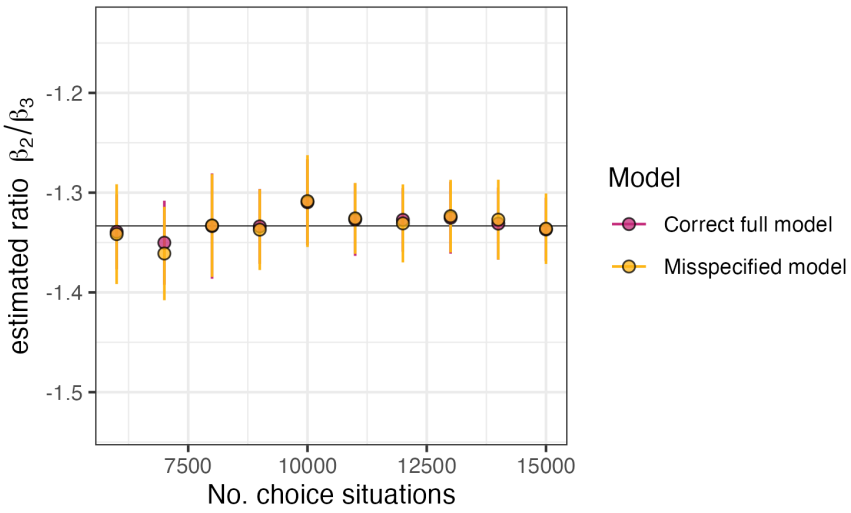


Figure A38: Estimated ratio of $\widehat{\beta}_2/\widehat{\beta}_3$ across both models

Notes. The figure plots the mean ±1 SD of the estimated ratio $\widehat{\beta}_2/\widehat{\beta}_3$ across $R = 20$ replications. Unlike the $\widehat{\beta}_1/\widehat{\beta}_2$ ratio in Figure A37, this ratio is unaffected by the omission of X_4, confirming that ratios among exogenous variables are consistently estimated despite misspecification. Source: simulated data.

analysis in the remainder of the paper, while the last two are plausibly well captured by university and major fixed effects.

We focus on comparing the ratio of coefficients for *distance* and *fees* (while the challenges of identifying the effect of political sorting on university choice have already been discussed in detail in the main text). Our aim is to show that the ratio of these two coefficients is similar across the two models, which would suggest that, at least for these variables, the choice processes are indeed comparable.

To collect the data on fees we scraped the information from the Parcoursup web platform. This website has information on all the education institutions to which one could apply, including (sometimes) information on tuition.[29] We complete the dataset with more aggregate information from the Ministry of Education surveys.[30]

We conduct the following exercise. Using the same sample of students as before, we estimate models including political leaning, distance, and fees. A key complication is the coarseness of the fee information available from the web platform, which does not allow us to distinguish well between universities charging less than 3,000 Euro and those charging no tuition apart from a small entrance fee (typically a one-time payment of about 200 Euro). To address this, we define a single category for universities charging more than 3,000 Euro. Similarly, we create a binary indicator for distance, equal to one for universities located more than two hours away.[31] We then re-estimate the conjoint model and the corresponding model using the administrative data.

Figure A39 provides the CI for the same ratio of parameter estimates of distance (>2 hours) relative to fees (>3000 Euro) using different data sources. The ratios are substantially different, and confidence intervals are not intersecting, with the ratio from the administrative data being much larger.

The fact that the role of distance seems to be much larger in the administrative data leads us to the following analysis. We restrict attention in administrative data only to universities located within a travel distance, assuming that in the rest of the cases students would have to move from their current place of residence and, hence, real travel time will be different. The results are presented in the second part of Figure A39. The point estimates of ratios of coefficients in this case are very similar, and confidence intervals are well overlapped. We interpret this result as evidence for the validity of the assumption that the choice models behind the choices of students in the real world, and in the conjoint, are very similar.

G.5 Robustness: Sample Restricted to 500 km

Table A27 replicates the main model estimates restricting the choice set to universities located within 500 km of the student's municipality. This restriction removes long-distance pairs where travel time assumptions are less reliable, and brings the sample closer to the setting used to validate the distance-to-fees ratio (Appendix G.4). Estimates are qualitatively identical and the implied ratio $|\hat{\beta}_2^{RP}/\hat{\beta}_1^{RP}|$ is similar across specifications and remains far below the conjoint ratio of 0.74.

[29] For instance, this is the webpage of one of the University of Strasbourg's Humanities program.

[30] See https://data.enseignementsup-recherche.gouv.fr/explore/assets/fr-esr-insersup/

[31] Distances are calculated between the university and the student's municipality centroid. We assume that distances greater than 250 km are equivalent to more than two hours of travel.

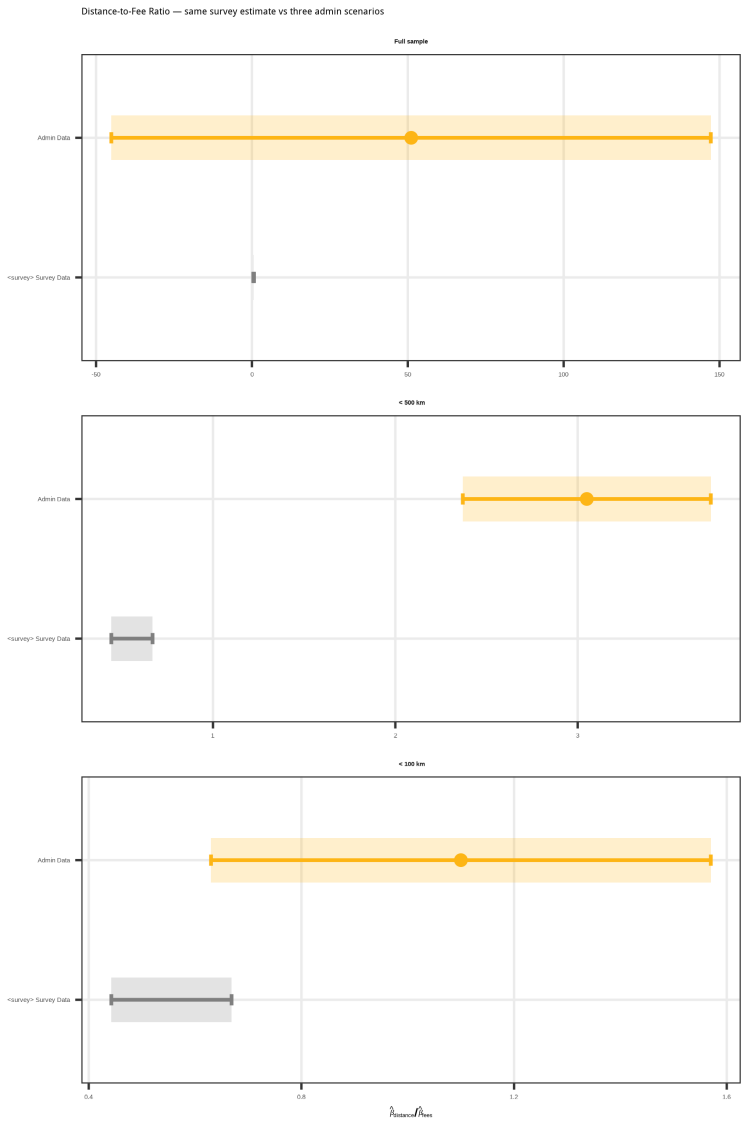


Figure A39: Distance-to-fees coefficient ratio: conjoint vs administrative data

Notes. The figure compares the distance-to-fees coefficient ratio estimated from the conjoint experiment and from the administrative data, using a binary indicator for annual fees above 3,000 €. The left panel uses the full administrative sample; the right panel restricts to universities within 500 km of the student's municipality. 95% confidence intervals are shown. Source: Parcoursup, 2022; conjoint experiment, May 2025.

Table A27: Program choice model estimates: sample restricted to 500 km

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
$\hat{\beta}_2^{RP}$ $\lvert\Delta\text{Leaning}_{i,j}\rvert > 0$	-0.167^{***}	-0.137^{***}	-0.134^{***}	-0.138^{***}	-0.137^{***}
	(0.045)	(0.048)	(0.045)	(0.048)	(0.048)
$\hat{\beta}_1^{RP}$ $\text{Distance}_{i,j} > 1\text{h}$	-2.302^{***}	-1.331^{***}	-2.360^{***}	-1.341^{***}	-1.361^{***}
	(0.052)	(0.062)	(0.053)	(0.062)	(0.063)
Ratio SP $\lvert\hat{\beta}_2^{SP}/\hat{\beta}_1^{SP}\rvert$	0.74	0.74	0.74	0.74	0.74
Ratio RP $\lvert\hat{\beta}_2^{RP}/\hat{\beta}_1^{RP}\rvert$	0.073	0.103	0.057	0.103	0.101
Observations	794,670	649,794	794,670	649,794	477,949
Students	665	665	665	665	665
University FE	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Major FE	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
Uni-Major FE	No	No	No	No	Yes

Notes. The table reports logit estimates of the program-choice model on the sample restricted to student-university pairs within 500 km. The variable $\lvert\Delta\text{Leaning}_{i,j}\rvert > 0$ equals 1 if student i and university j are not politically aligned. The variable $\text{Distance}_{i,j} > 1\text{h}$ equals 1 if the university is more than one hour from the student's municipality. Columns (1)–(5) vary the set of fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at the student level. The ratio $\lvert\hat{\beta}_2^{RP}/\hat{\beta}_1^{RP}\rvert$ is recovered from the model estimates, while the conjoint ratio 0.74 is the alignment-to-distance ratio from the stated-preference estimation used to correct for endogeneity. Significance levels: $^{*}\,p < 0.1$, $^{**}\,p < 0.05$, $^{***}\,p < 0.01$. Source: Parcoursup, 2022 (model sample).

Metric	Value
Students (ident_can, N)	665
Choice sets (chid, N)	3238
Alternatives (rows, N)	1102339
Avg alternatives per set	340.438233477455
Median alternatives per set	323
Min alternatives per set	214
Max alternatives per set	663
Sets with â<U+0089>¥4 alternatives (%)	100.0%
Avg choice sets per student	4.86917293233083
Median choice sets per student	3
Min choice sets per student	1
Max choice sets per student	49
Universities (cod_uai_aff_form, N)	335
Majors (major_category, N)	7
Uniâ<U+0080><U+0093>Major pairs (uni_major_id, N)	703

H Full Equilibrium Estimation

This appendix presents the framework and results of the full equilibrium extension. Students and programs are matched via the student-proposing Deferred Acceptance algorithm; capacities are taken from Parcoursup records. Counterfactual outcomes are computed across 30 preference-shock draws (common random numbers across baseline and counterfactual scenarios to minimize simulation variance).

H.1 Program-Side Preferences

Parcoursup reveals programs' priorities through (possibly truncated) ranked lists and may provide several lists by applicant categories (e.g. general high schools versus other tracks). Priorities are at the program level; hence, we aggregate at the (j,k) level as the minimum priority ranking, min_rank_{ijk}. For each university–major pair (j,k), we observe for some applicants i a priority rank, while other applicants are left unranked. Although evaluation criteria vary across programs and are not fully transparent,[32] we interpret these rankings as the empirical manifestation of a latent program-side utility:

$$V_{ijk} = \theta_g \,\text{Grade}_i + \theta_s \,\text{SES}_i + \nu_{ijk},$$

where Grade_i is the baccalauréat score, SES_i is a socioeconomic proxy and ν_{ijk} is an idiosyncratic shock. Higher V_{ijk} corresponds to a better priority.

We construct an "effective rank" at the student–program level:

$$\text{eff_rank}_{ijk} = \begin{cases} \text{min_rank}_{ijk}, & \text{if student } i \text{ is on any ranking list of } (j,k), \\ 1 + \max\{\text{min_rank}_{i'jk} : i' \text{ ranked by } (j,k)\}, & \text{otherwise.} \end{cases}$$

We then estimate

$$\text{eff_rank}_{ijk} = \beta_g \,\text{Grade}_i + \beta_s \,\text{SES}_i + \alpha_{jk} + \varepsilon_{ijk},$$

with university–major fixed effects α_{jk}. The coefficients $(\widehat{\beta}_g, \widehat{\beta}_s)$ summarize how programs value observed student characteristics in their priority formation. We convert predicted ranks into a program utility index by taking their negative:

$$\widehat{V}^{\text{det}}_{ijk} = -\big(\widehat{\beta}_g \,\text{Grade}_i + \widehat{\beta}_s \,\text{SES}_i + \widehat{\alpha}_{jk}\big),$$

which we interpret as the deterministic component of program preferences.

H.2 Full Equilibrium

Environment. Let I denote the set of students and $\mathcal{J} \times \mathcal{K}$ the set of university–major pairs. Student i has attributes x_i, and each pair (j,k) has capacity q_{jk}. Political distance is summarized by

$$|\Delta\text{Leaning}_{ij}| = |L_i - L_j|,$$

where political leaning is defined at the university level.

[32] For more details on programs' criteria within Parcoursup, see Cour des comptes (2020). On the indirect importance of socioeconomic background in access to French higher education, see Bonneau et al. (2021).

Preferences. Students have random-utility preferences over university–major pairs:

$$U_{ijk} = Z'_{ijk}\beta + \xi_j + \xi_k + \varepsilon_{ijk},$$

where Z_{ij} includes distance and political alignment (as in the main text), ξ_j and ξ_k are university and major fixed effects, and ε_{ijk} is an i.i.d. Type-I extreme value error. This specification corresponds to the structural counterpart of the main utility equation, excluding the student–program specific component ξ_{ijk}, which cannot be used in equilibrium analysis.

Programs (at the university–major level) have random-utility preferences over students:

$$V_{ijk} = \widehat{V}^{\text{det}}_{ijk} + \nu_{ijk},$$

where ν_{ijk} is i.i.d. Type-I extreme value. Within each university–major pair (j, k), students are ranked by decreasing V_{ijk}.

Matching Mechanism. The allocation is determined by the student-proposing Deferred Acceptance algorithm. At each step, students apply to their most-preferred university–major pair not yet rejecting them; each (j, k) tentatively accepts up to q_{jk} highest-ranked applicants and rejects the rest. The process terminates when all students either hold an offer or have been rejected by all university–major pairs.

Equilibrium. A stable matching equilibrium is a triple (U_{ijk}, V_{ijk}, μ) such that:

1. (U_{ijk}, V_{ijk}) are generated by the random-utility models above;
2. μ is the outcome of student-proposing DA given capacities $\{q_{jk}\}$;
3. μ is stable: there is no student–program pair (i, j, k) such that $(j, k) \succ_i \mu(i)$ and $i \succ_{(j,k)} i'$ for some $i' \in \mu(j, k)$.

Justification of the Stability Assumption. Following Fabre (2026), we rely on three arguments. First, a stable matching exists as long as there are no complementarities between admitted students (Gale and Shapley, 1962). This condition holds in Parcoursup: programs rank applicants individually using an online tool that generates rankings based on program-chosen weights, without conditioning on the composition of the admitted cohort. Second, Azevedo and Leshno (2016) prove that a continuum model generically has a unique stable matching, and that all stable matchings of a discrete economy converge to this unique matching as the economy grows large; with hundreds of thousands of applicants processed annually, the French higher education system qualifies as such a large discrete economy. Third, stability does not require students to be perfectly truthful or to list all programs: it only requires that each student applies to her preferred feasible program. Students submit long application lists (see Table A3), and admission cutoffs are highly persistent across years, making feasibility straightforward to anticipate (Fack, Grenet and He, 2019).

Stability implies that each student enrols in her preferred program among those willing to admit her. The observed match can therefore be written as the solution to a discrete choice problem with student-specific feasible sets (Fack, Grenet and He, 2019):

$$\mu(i) = \arg \max_{(j,k) \in \mathcal{F}_i} U_{ijk},$$

where $\mathcal{F}_i = \{(j,k) \in \mathcal{J} \times \mathcal{K} : V_{ijk} > V_{(j,k)\mu(j,k,R_{jk})}\}$ is the set of programs that would admit student i over their last-admitted applicant. Admission cutoffs are highly persistent across years (the correlation of last-admitted ranks between 2022 and 2023 is above 0.95), making feasibility easy to anticipate (Fack, Grenet and He, 2019).

H.3 Counterfactual Results

Table A28 reports the mean change in program outcomes. In general equilibrium, all three outcomes are near zero. These near-zero means are consistent with the small partial-equilibrium effects reported in Section 5: supply-side constraints absorb the individual-level demand shift almost entirely. When all students simultaneously reduce their political taste, competition for the programs they newly prefer increases, leaving aggregate outcomes nearly unchanged.

Table A28: General equilibrium counterfactual

Outcome	Mean	SD	N draws
Distance	-0.16	5.97	30
Fees	9.13	76.53	30
Selectivity	0.00	0.01	30

Notes. The table reports the mean and standard deviation of the difference (counterfactual − baseline) across 30 DA simulation draws. Common random numbers (same EV1 seed) are used for baseline and counterfactual to minimize simulation variance. SD reflects sensitivity of the DA assignment to idiosyncratic preference shocks, not estimation uncertainty. Counterfactual removes the taste component of political alignment by setting $\hat{\beta}_2^{RP} = \hat{\Lambda}_2$. Source: Parcoursup, 2022 (model sample).

I Follow-up Survey Evidence

I.1 Sample and Design

The follow-up survey was fielded in June and July 2026, one year after the main-round conjoint. We contacted the 597 main-round respondents who consented to recontact. A respondent enters the analysis sample if she cleared consent, screening (currently enrolled in higher education), attention check, bot trap, duration, and reCAPTCHA. This yields 96 respondents in the primary sample.[33] Ninety-four respondents arrived via a personalised panel link (Panel) and two

[33]Results are qualitatively unchanged when we restrict to the 70 respondents who additionally submitted the survey with the Qualtrics Finished flag. The pooled inference-confound coefficient is 0.87 (SE 0.08) versus 0.86,

through a public share link forwarded by a panel respondent (Snowball). Panel-only analyses (leaning evolution and belief updating) use the 94-respondent subset. Table A29 summarises the demographic composition.

Table A29: Follow-up sample characteristics

Characteristic	**Panel**	**Snowball**	**Total**
N	94	2	96
Female	66 (71.7%)	2 (100.0%)	68 (72.3%)
Age: mean (SD)	17.4 (0.5)	19.0 (0.0)	17.4 (0.6)
Parents: any higher education	73 (96.1%)	n/a	73 (96.1%)

Notes. This table reports some demographics of the follow-up sample. Source: follow-up survey, June-July 2026.

I.2 University-Leaning Validation

Each follow-up respondent rated two institutions on a 1 to 5 left-right scale, her own current institution plus one randomly assigned benchmark from {Sciences Po Paris, Université Paris 2 Panthéon-Assas}. The comparison of Sciences Po (n = 39) versus Assas (n = 35) is between-subject. Sciences Po receives a mean placement of 2.72 (median 2) and Assas of 3.51 (median 4). A one-sided Wilcoxon rank-sum test rejects the null that Sciences Po is placed at or to the right of Assas ($p = 0.001$). By direction match against the LLM classification, 51% of Sciences Po raters place it strictly Left, and 54% of Assas raters place it strictly Right. Restricting to respondents reporting any prior familiarity (familiarity ≥ 2 on the four-point scale) sharpens the ordering. Mean Sciences Po drops to 2.54 and Assas rises to 4.18, a 1.64-point spread on the 1 to 5 scale (one-sided $p < 0.001$).

I.3 Student-Leaning Convergent Validity

The follow-up survey re-elicits the main-round values battery, adds an explicit 0 to 10 left-right self-placement slider, and asks a party-closeness item mapped to a five-category L-R spectrum. Pairwise Spearman correlations across measures confirm convergence. The values-to-self correlation is $\rho = -0.60$ (n = 88), values-to-party $\rho = -0.70$ (n = 26), and self-to-party $\rho = +0.77$ (n = 26). All six individual value items load on the 0 to 10 self-placement slider in the expected direction. Left-coded items (égalité / lutte contre les discriminations, services publics, climat / environnement) yield lower mean self-placement among pickers (3.06, 3.43, 3.19) than among non-pickers (5.72, 4.48, 6.42). Right-coded items (culture / traditions, sécurité / ordre public, gestion migratoire) yield higher mean self-placement among pickers (5.15, 5.63, 5.78) than non-pickers (3.48, 2.76, 3.44).

the Sciences Po versus Assas Wilcoxon test is significant under both definitions, and the mechanism question means are indistinguishable across the two.

I.4 Field versus Institutional Differentiation

The follow-up asks each respondent to place a set of academic fields and a set of universities on the 1 to 5 left-right scale. The intraclass correlation of ratings across targets is 0.51 for universities and 0.45 for academic fields, and the mean within-respondent standard deviation of ratings is 0.80 across the two universities and 0.92 across the three academic fields. Both metrics indicate that students discriminate more sharply between universities than between academic fields.

I.5 Perceived Drivers of Institutional Politicization

The follow-up asks respondents to select, from a fixed list of drivers, the factors they see as making an institution politically distinctive. Student climate (associations, peer environment) is picked by 76%, reputation and external signals by 49%, faculty culture by 40%, formal institutional positioning by 39%, academic content by 30%, and "do not know" by 6%. Student climate dominates by a wide margin, and the ordering is stable across sample definitions. This validates the paper's construction of campus political climate around student associations, electoral patterns, and public reputation.

I.6 Mechanisms: Push, Pull, Politicization, and Alignment

The follow-up fields a battery of six lived-experience items on a 1 to 5 frequency scale (from "never" to "very often"). Each item maps to one cell of the 2×2 push/pull by politicization/alignment framework introduced in Appendix F.3. The mapping is push-politicization (perceived teaching bias, campus disruption), push-alignment (minority discomfort, discomfort with the dominant association), pull-politicization (enjoyed debates), and pull-alignment (comfort among like-minded peers). Means and the share of respondents reporting "often" or "very often" (score ≥ 4) are as follows. Pull-Alignment scores 2.62 (32% at ≥ 4, n = 78), Pull-Politicization 2.36 (21%, n = 78), Push-Alignment 1.90 (14%, n = 65), and Push-Politicization 1.73 (13%, n = 66). Within-respondent paired Wilcoxon tests reject the null on both push versus pull contrasts. Push-alignment versus pull-alignment gives a mean difference of -0.79 ($p = 0.003$, n = 65 paired), and push-politicization versus pull-politicization gives -0.58 ($p = 0.003$, n = 66). We stratify by the absolute distance between the respondent's own 1 to 5 left-right self-placement and her perceived left-right placement of her own institution. Very close (distance < 1, n = 40) yields push-alignment 1.73 and pull-alignment 2.80. Close (distance in $[1, 2)$, n = 20) yields push-alignment 1.31 and pull-alignment 2.80. Far (distance ≥ 2, n = 15) yields push-alignment 2.96 and pull-alignment 2.07. The misalignment cost rises steeply as own-uni distance grows, from 1.31 in the close cell to 2.96 in the far cell, a 2.3-fold rise, and pull-alignment declines symmetrically. Students who sit far from the perceived leaning of an institution anticipate substantial discomfort, which the aggregate coefficient conflates with a taste for alignment.