DOES THE FIELD OF STUDY INFLUENCE STUDENTS’ POLITICAL ATTITUDES?

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Abstract

We investigate whether the field of study influences university students’ political ideologies. To disentangle self-selection from learning effects, we first establish to what extent the incoming students’ choice of their field of study depends on their political ideologies. In a second step we then explore how the political ideologies change as the students’ progress in their studies. Our results are based on a German panel survey whose sample size exceeds that of comparable student surveys by an order of magnitude. We find systematic differences between the student’s political attitudes across eight fields of study. These differences can in most cases be attributed to self-selection. The only exception is economics. Even though self-selection also plays an important role, training in economics has a decided influence on the economics students’ political attitudes.

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