



Recommenders in the Wild

...a tutorial

RecSys 2023 | Singapore

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Lead Data Scientist

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Morten Arngren

PhD in Machine Learning in 2011
ex-Nokia | ex-Issuu | ex-Adform
(My first Rec. Engine)

Lead Data Scientist at



WUNDERMAN

Kim Falk

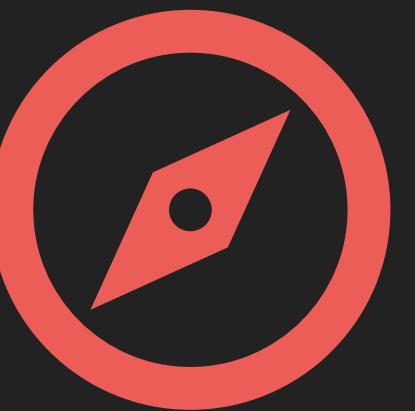
Author: "Practical Recommender Systems"
ex-Adform | ex-Shopify

Principal Data Scientist at ViSenze

Recommenders in the Wild



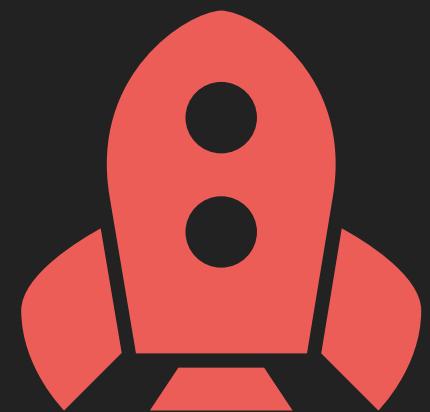
Its a big jungle out
there....



Prepare you for
entering the wild



Understanding of what A/B
test is...to prepare you



Own
experience



Practical
angle...

What is a Recommender in the Wild

Developing the Recommender

Business considerations

Beyond accuracy

Personalisation - the myth of
the long sessions

RecSysOps



14:10

Kim Falk

15:20

A/B test deep dive from
a practical angle

Bayesian
A/B test

Classic
A/B test

Bandit
A/B test

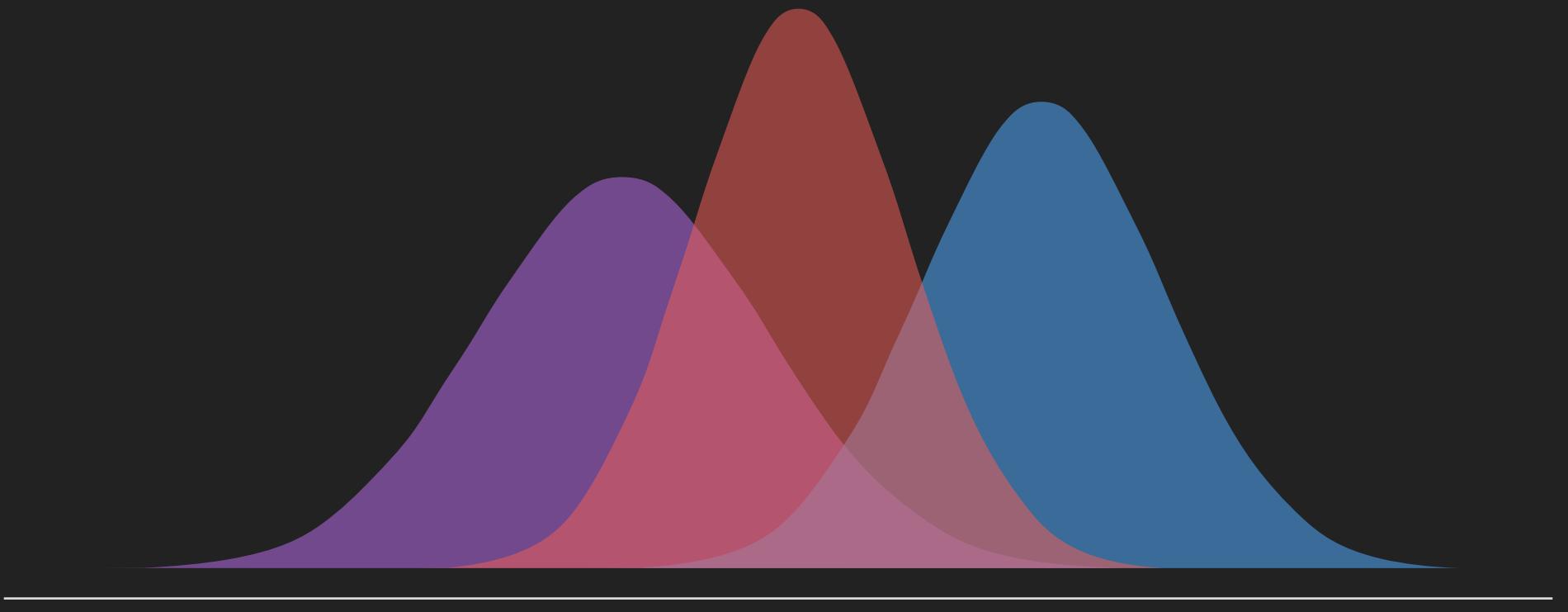


16:05

Morten Arngren

17:35





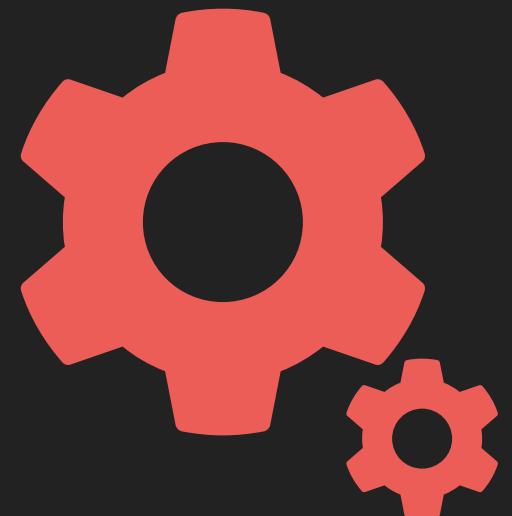
A/B-TestingBayesianand Bandits

RecSys 2023
Singapore

Morten Arngren
Lead Data Scientist



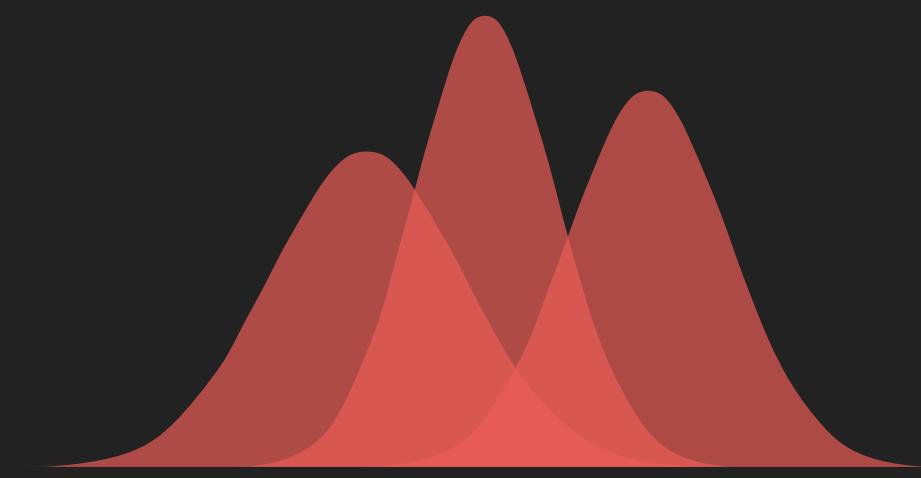
WUNDERMAN



Classic & Complex
A/B testing

Hypothesis testing and
the infamous

p-value



Bayesian A/B testing

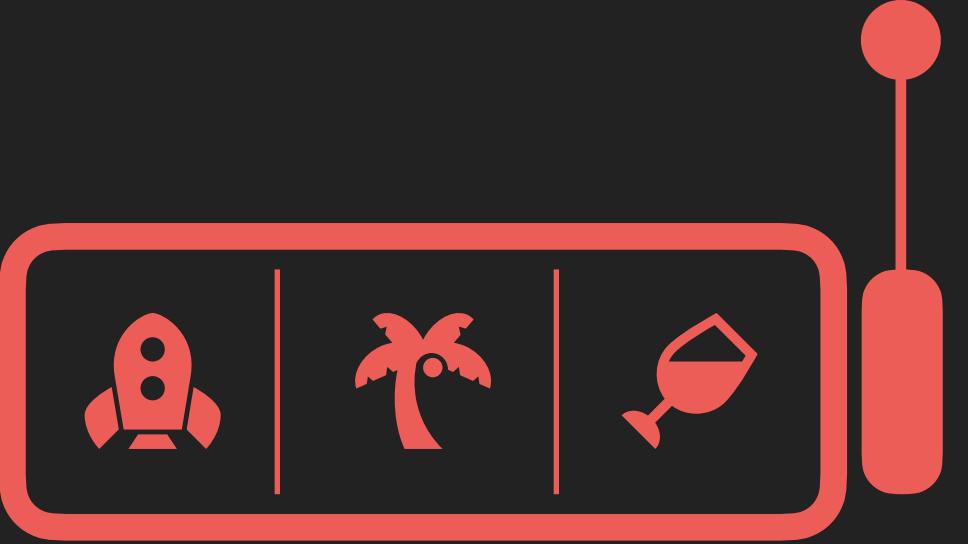
A/A-testing

Bayesian evaluation



Campaign

Simulation

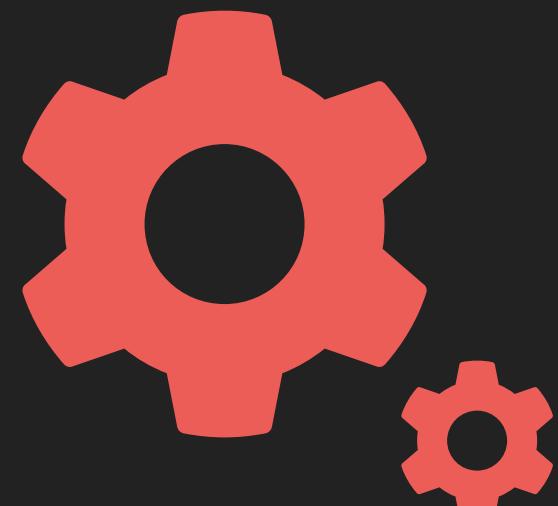


Bandit testing

Dynamic A/B-testing

Classic & Complex
A/B testing

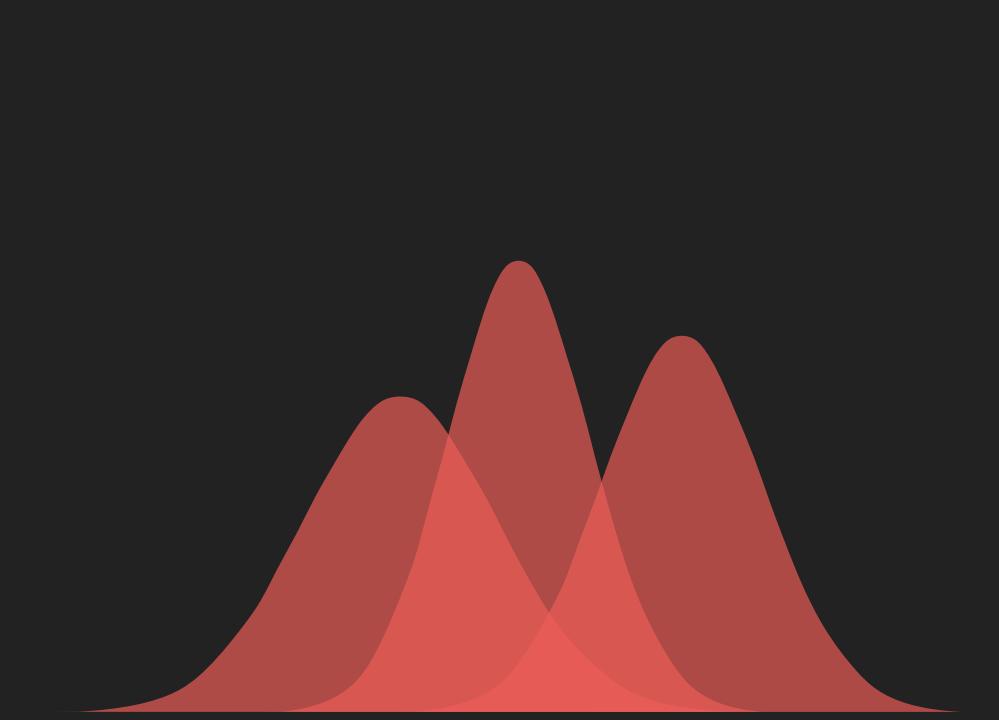
Hypothesis testing and
the infamous
 p -value



Bayesian A/B testing

A/A-testing

Bayesian evaluation



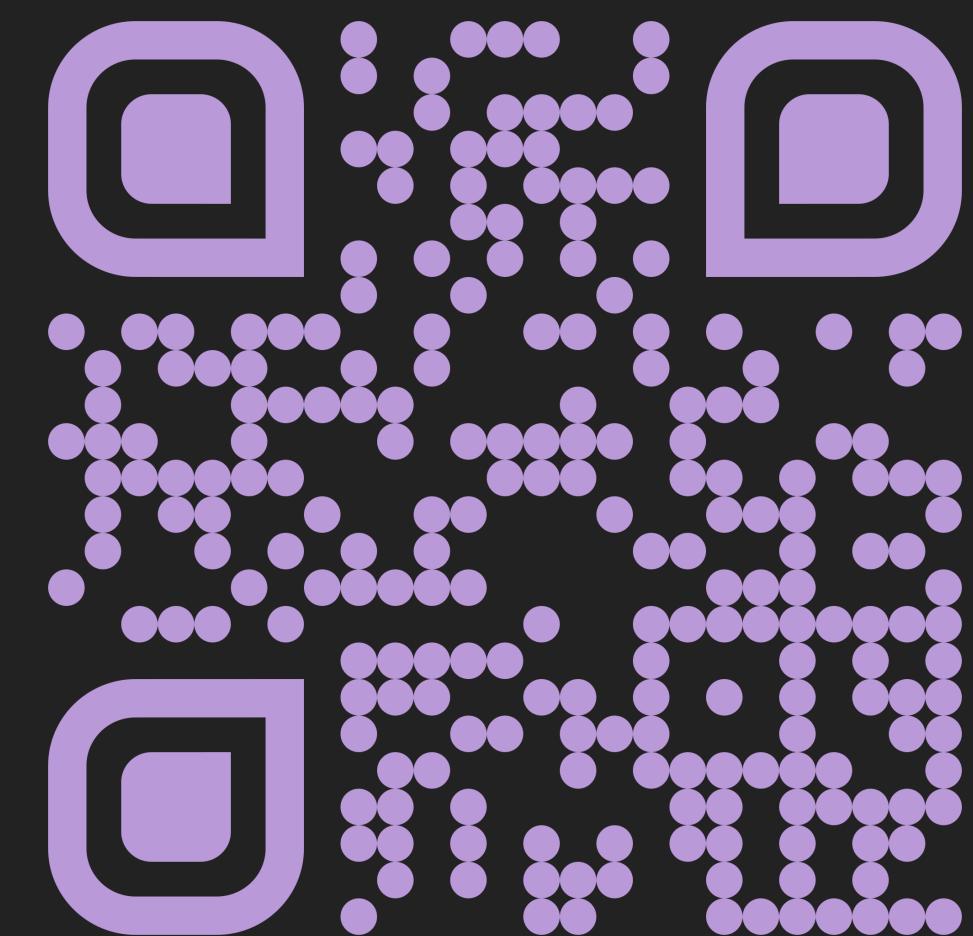
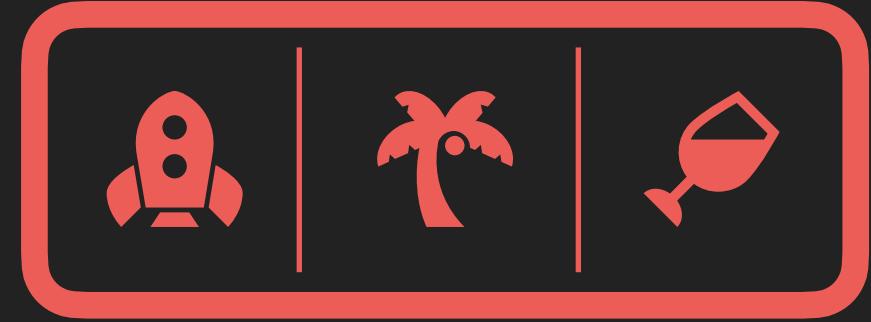
Campaign

Simulation



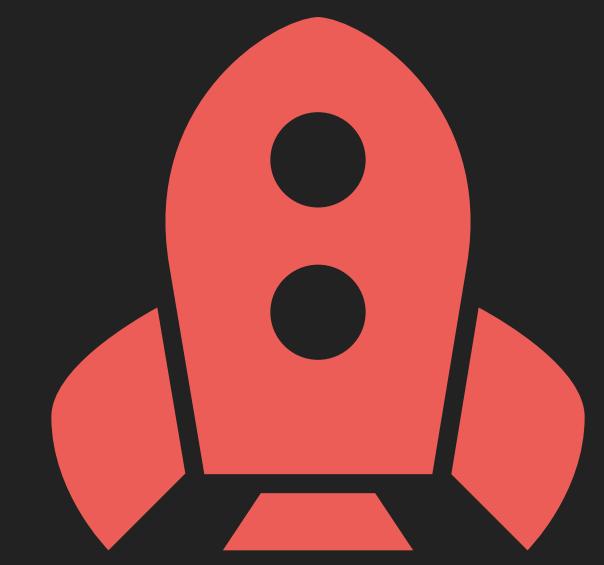
Bandit testing

Dynamic A/B-testing



Code and
keynote
available on
GitHub

<https://github.com/Arngren>



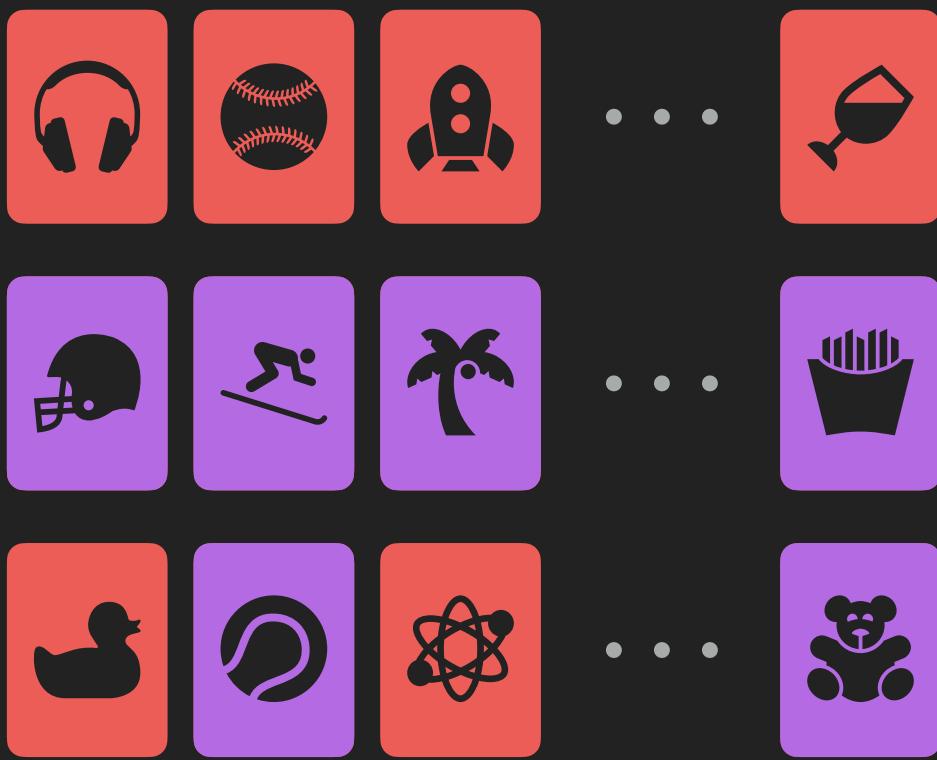
The stage

The stage

Two Rec. Engines

Movie Streaming

Recommendations



Slates



Running in production

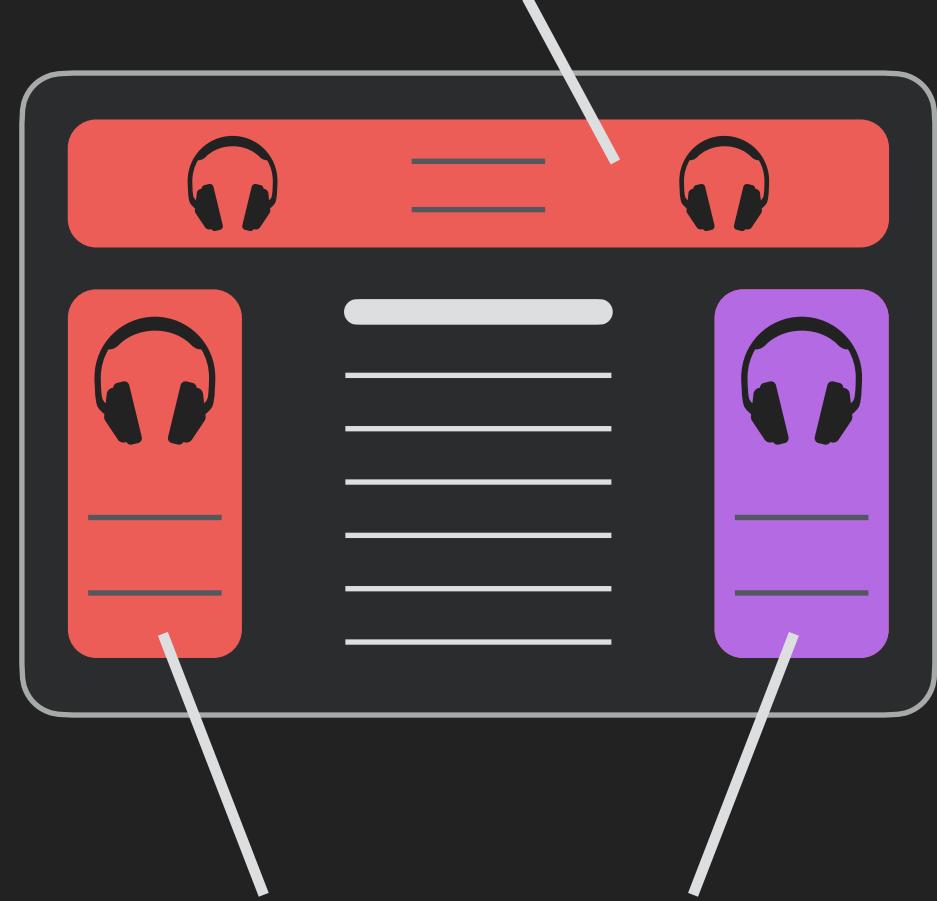


New developed Rec. Engine

which has
the best
performance
?

News site

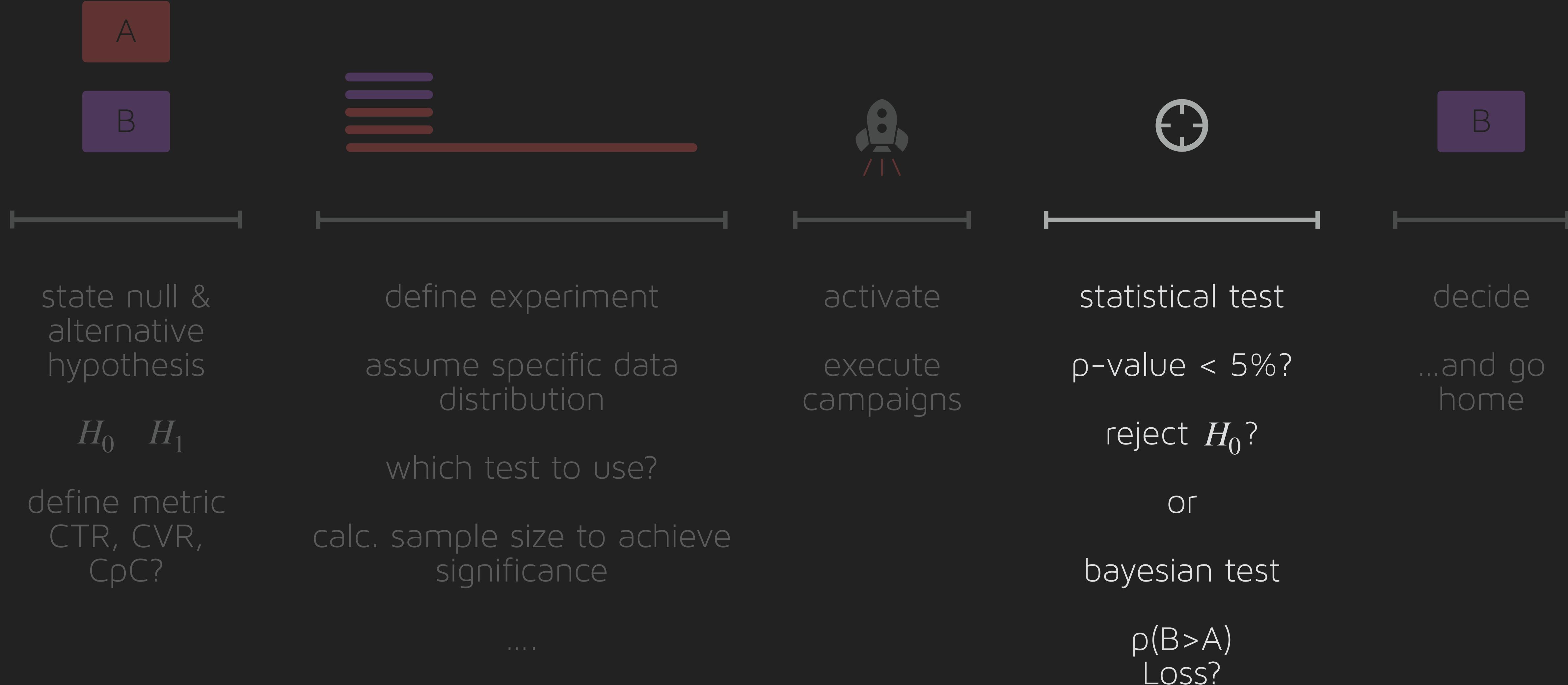
Advertisement



Advertisements

A/B testing

Classic approach

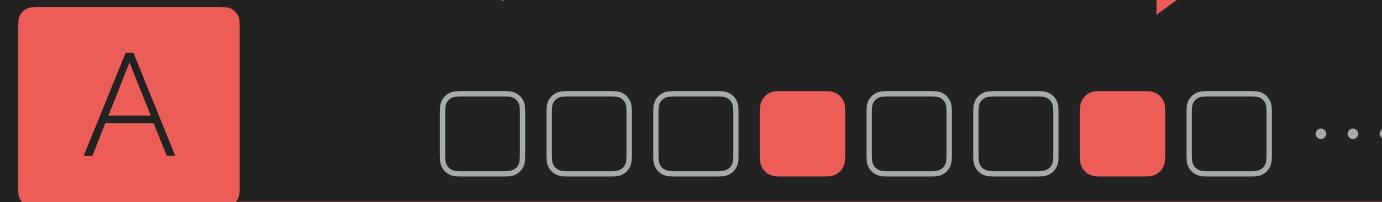


The stage

...
...
...

logs

impressions clicks / conversions



business metrics

CTR | Click-Through-Rate
Fraction of clicks? [%]

CVR | Conversion Rate
Product buys [%]

CpC | Cost-per-Click
Price of a click [\\$]

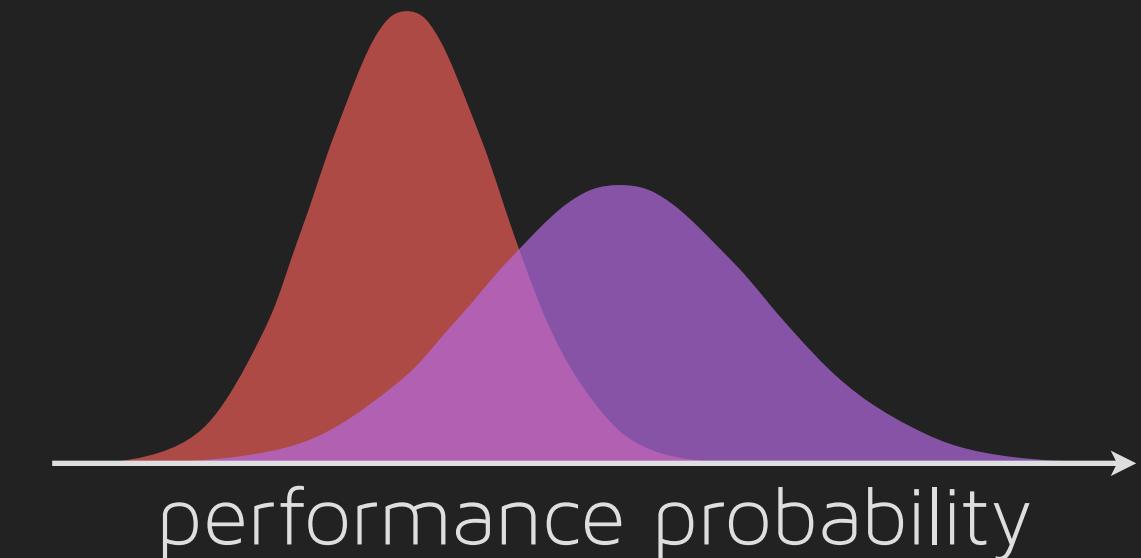
??? | Webshops margins
Earnings [\\$]

evaluation

Hypothesis testing
 $p\text{-value} < 5\%?$

or

Bayesian testing

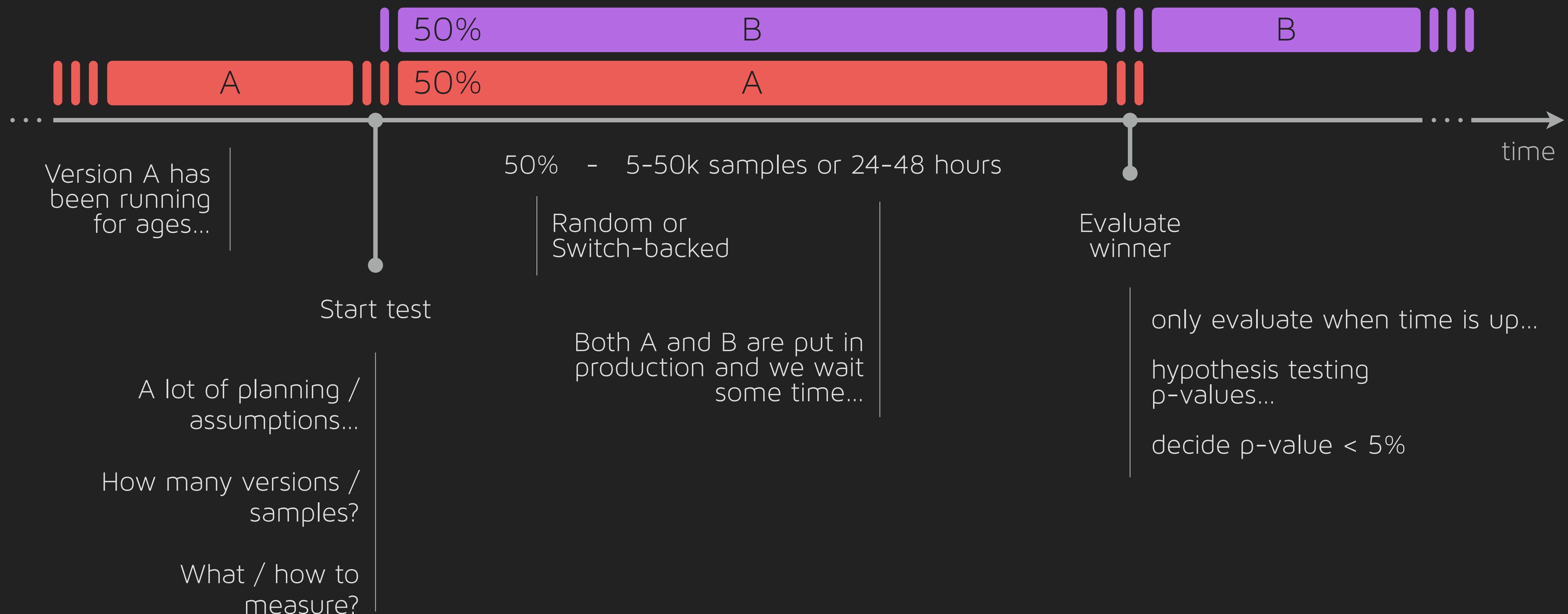




Introduction

Classic A/B-test

Timeline...



Complex A/B-test

...or the more right way...

$\frac{\sim 20\%}{}$

Reserve

don't spend it all on testing,
what if B sucks....

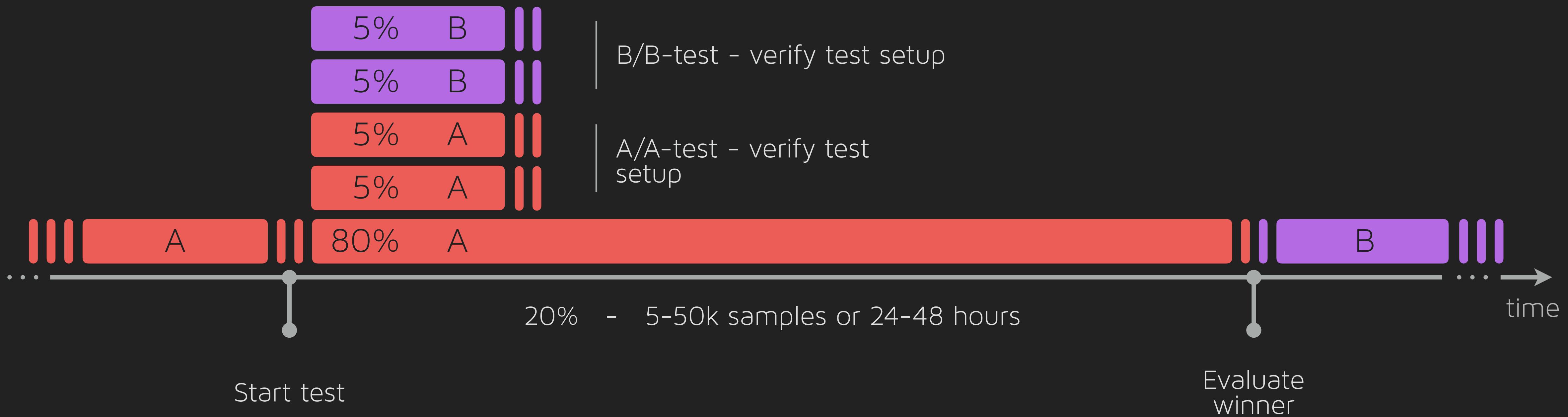
consider business requirements
and price...!

$\frac{A/A \text{ test}}{}$

Verify

split into several smaller tracks

conducting an A/A test to verify
the whole test setup



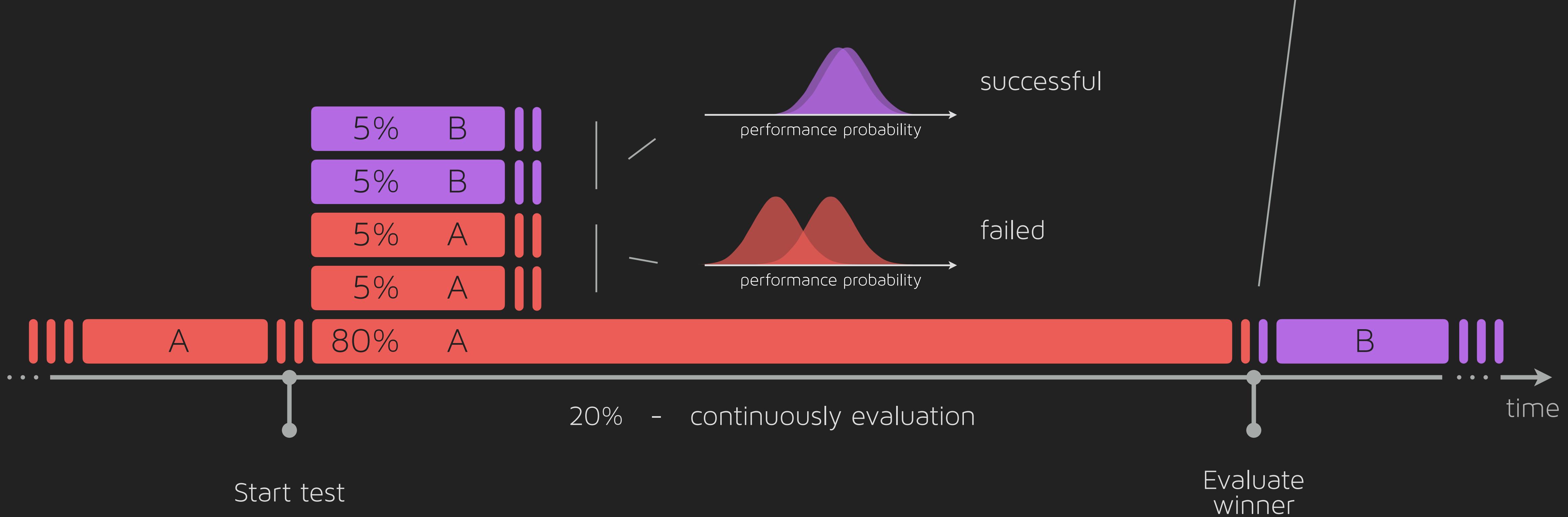
Bayesian A/B-test

Bayesian evaluating - probability of winner

models performance as probability distributions

captures the epistemic uncertainty

allow us to quantify the confidence



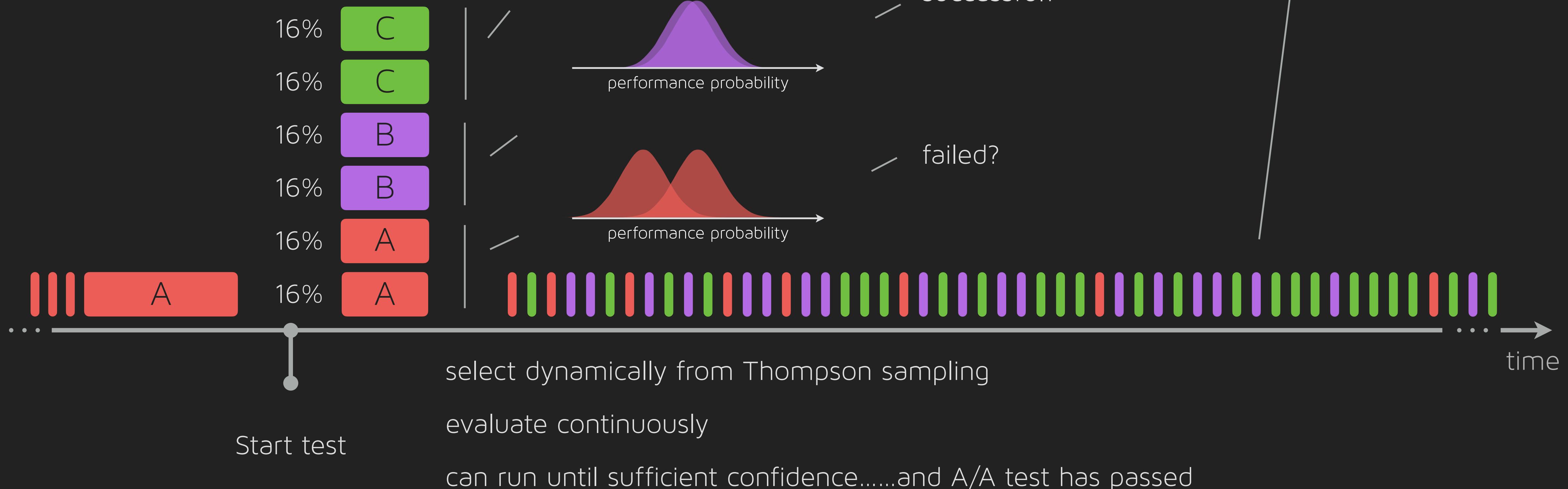
Bandit A/B-test

Dynamic architecture - runs self-contained - drop in new versions as cold start

models performance as probability distributions

captures the epistemic uncertainty

allow us to quantify the confidence



What we really want to know...

λ Performance - eg. CTR / CVR / CpC

$$P(\lambda_B > \lambda_A)$$

Probability of B
being better than A

Hypothesis test answers
another question

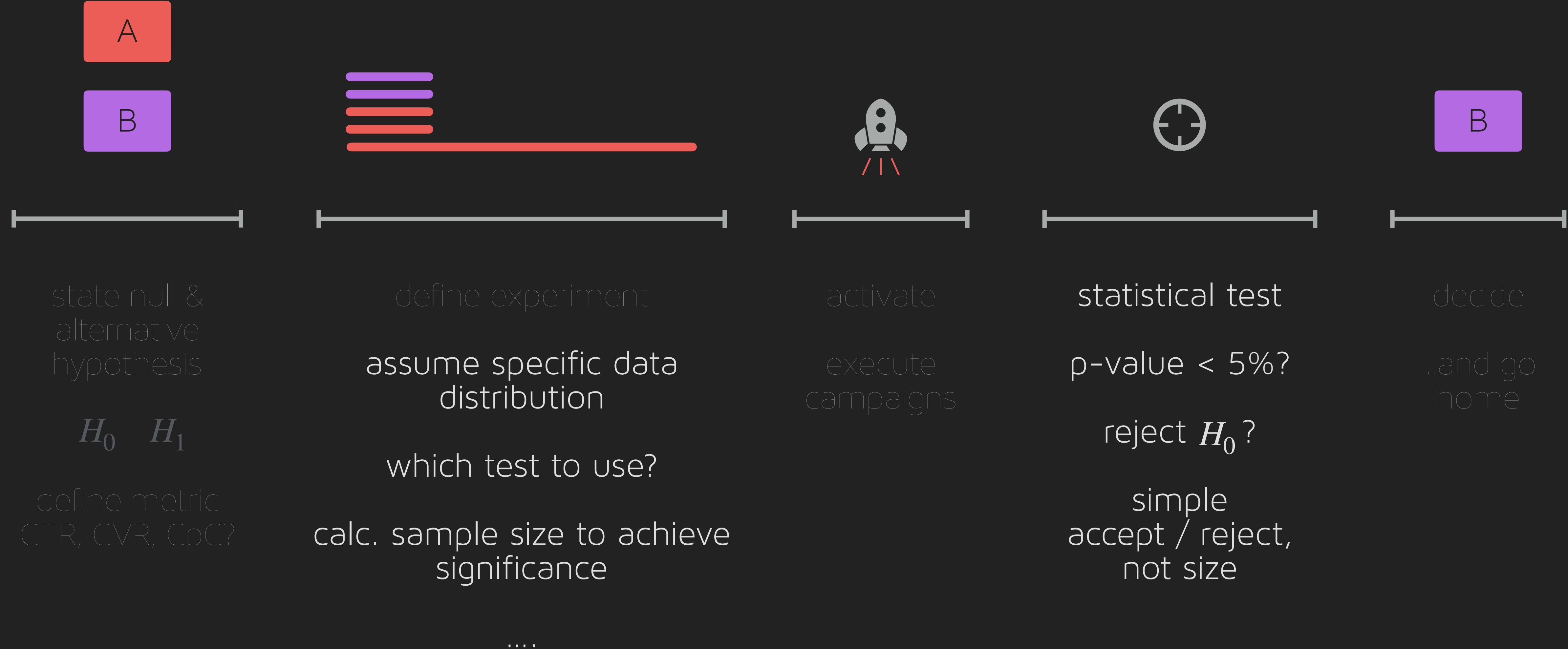
Bayesian approach
answers this question



Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis significance testing

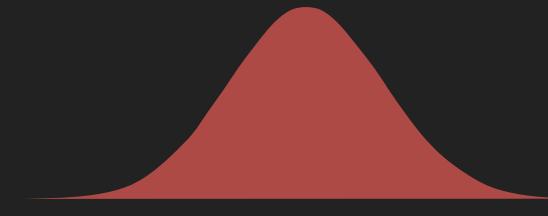
What's specific to it...?



Hypothesis significance testing

Popular hypothesis tests...

Students T-Test



Assumptions

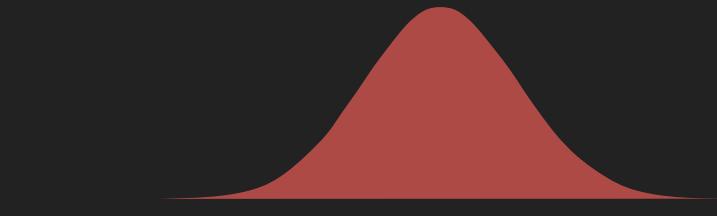
Student-t distributions

Very few samples

Mean of two identical distributions

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Student%27s_t-test

Z-test



Assumptions

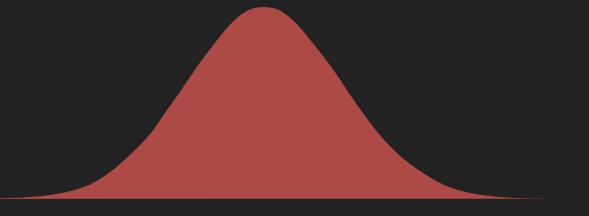
Gaussian distributions

Homogeneity of variance

Mean of two identical Gaussian distributions

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Z-test>

Fisher's exact test



Assumptions

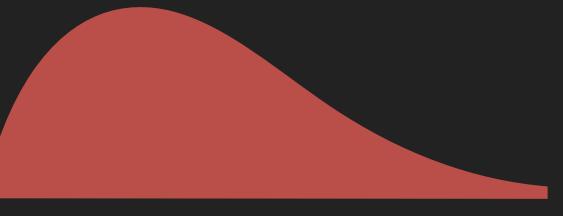
Contingency tables

Small sample sizes

Count data evaluating ratios

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fisher%27s_exact_test

Chi-squared test



Assumptions

Contingency table

Large sample sizes

Count data evaluating ratios

Chi-squared distribution

Generalisation of Fischer test

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chi-squared_test

Hypothesis significance testing

R. Fischer - "Lady tasting tea" - 1935

Classic approach

Test up against alternative hypothesis

Prove by rejecting null-hypothesis
being responsible for the observation

p-value

Probability of seeing the
observed if the null
hypothesis is true...

Reject null-hypothesis if p-value <5%

Milk or tea first?



Dr. Muriel Bristol claimed she could...

The null hypothesis is that she has no
ability to distinguish the teas.

Dr. Muriel Bristol nailed all of them...

4 successes has 1 chance
out of 70 ($\approx 1.4\% < 5\%$)

= p-value

Hypothesis significance testing

Power Analysis - how many samples?

Sample size to detect a significant difference?

$$n = \frac{(Z_\alpha + Z_\beta)^2 \cdot (p_1 \cdot [1 - p_1] + p_2 \cdot [1 - p_2])}{(p_2 - p_1)^2}$$

have to assume a certain lift - what if we are wrong in our assumptions?

Significance

$Z_\alpha = 1.96$ Reliability of 5%
 $Z_\beta = 0.84$ Power of 20%
(80% to reject H_0 if false)

Expected CTR values

$p_1 = 0.1$ CTR of 10% for A - expected...
 $p_2 = 0.11$ CTR of 11% for B - expected...

Sample size

$n = 14.752$ Samples required

Single-sided or double sided test?



What are we testing for?

H_1 A < B

H_1 A <> B

Hypothesis testing challenges



General

can't really interpret probabilities of belief

if p-value > 5%,
then whole campaign is thrown out

blackbox to most....
tells nothing of the difference between A and B

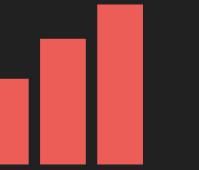


Assumptions

data distribution?
Gaussian, t-student? etc.

one-sided or double sided?

a lot of assumptions - MUST be correct



Sample Size

hypothesis testing requires to estimate sample size first

must guess the performance of each variant. Not easy for B!

relies on estimating the significance when samples is reached

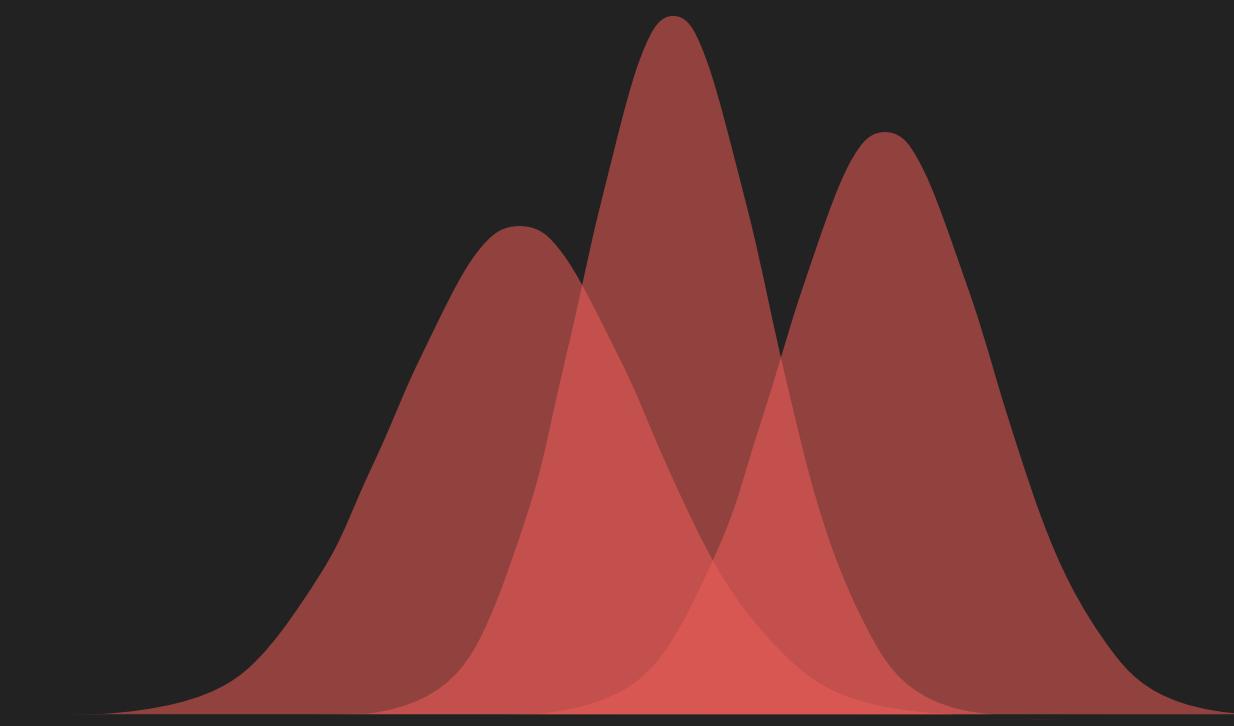


Peeking

"...checking A/B results before the test is over..."

very tempting...

significance assessment only occurs when samples size is reached...



Bayesian A/B testing

Types of Uncertainty

aleatoric uncertainty

natural stochasticity in observations (noise)

can't be reduced with more data

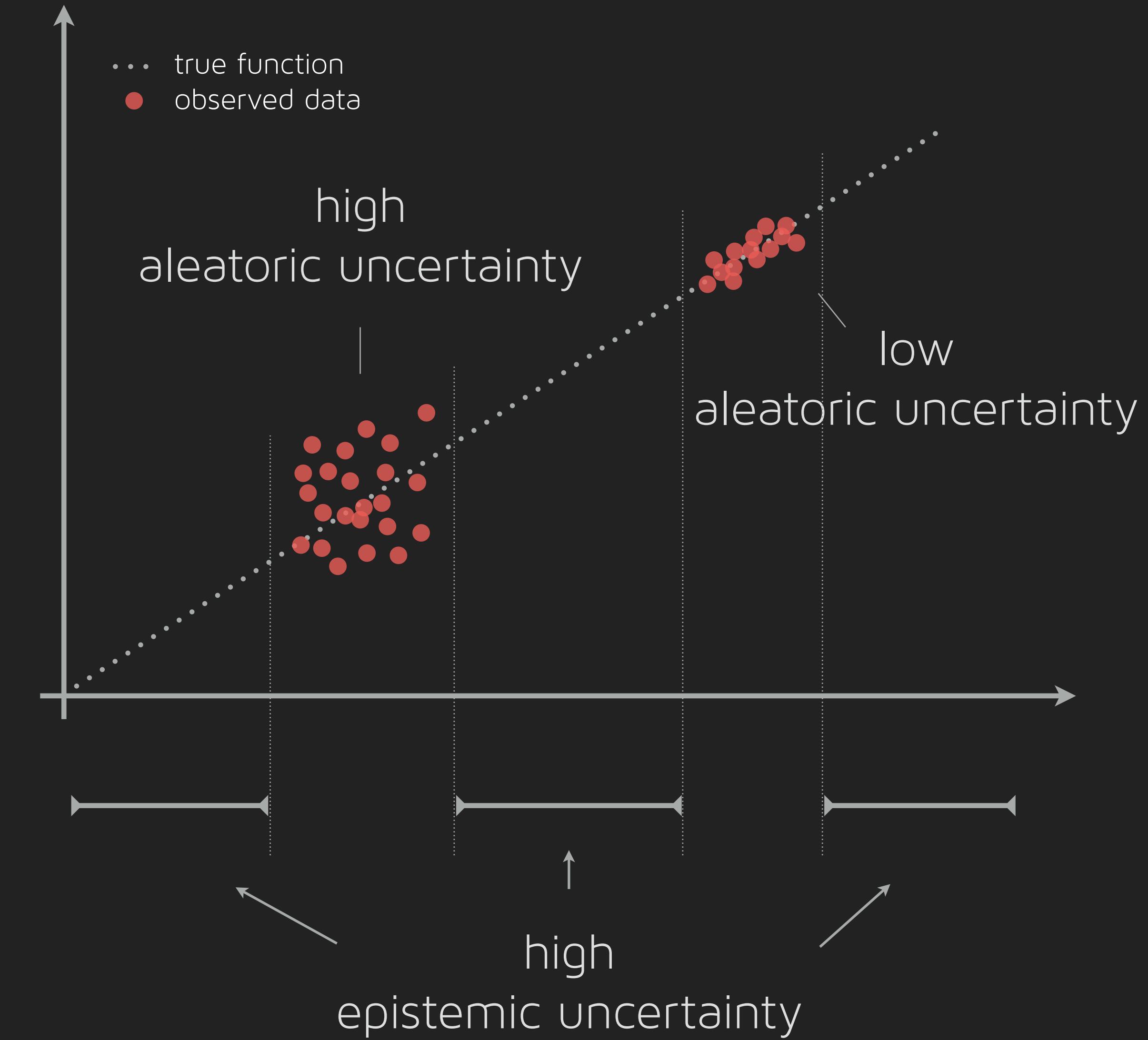
epistemic uncertainty

uncertainty around too few data points

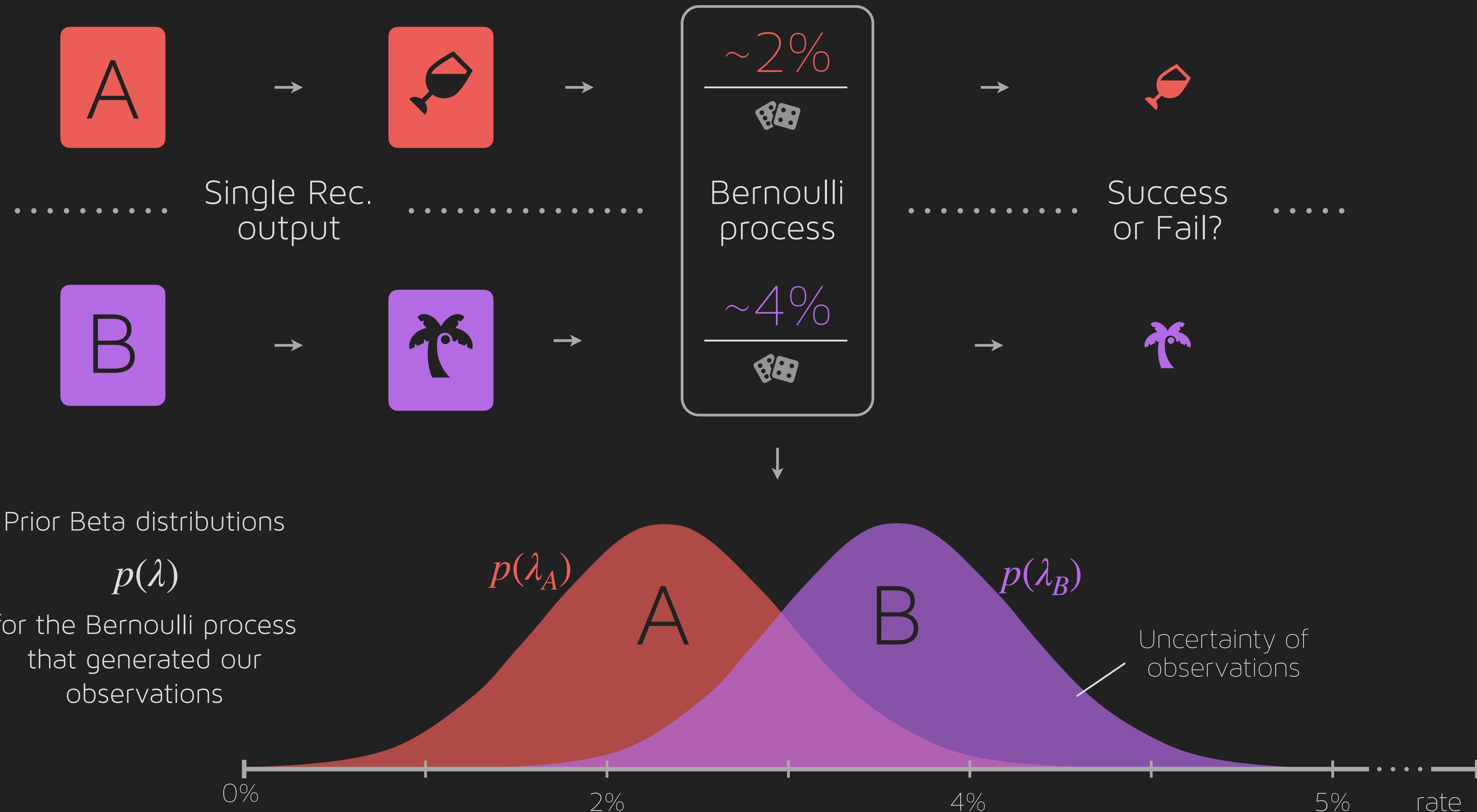
out-of-distribution outliers

two main types

example



Stochastic process behind the scenes...



Bayesian stochastic modeling / testing

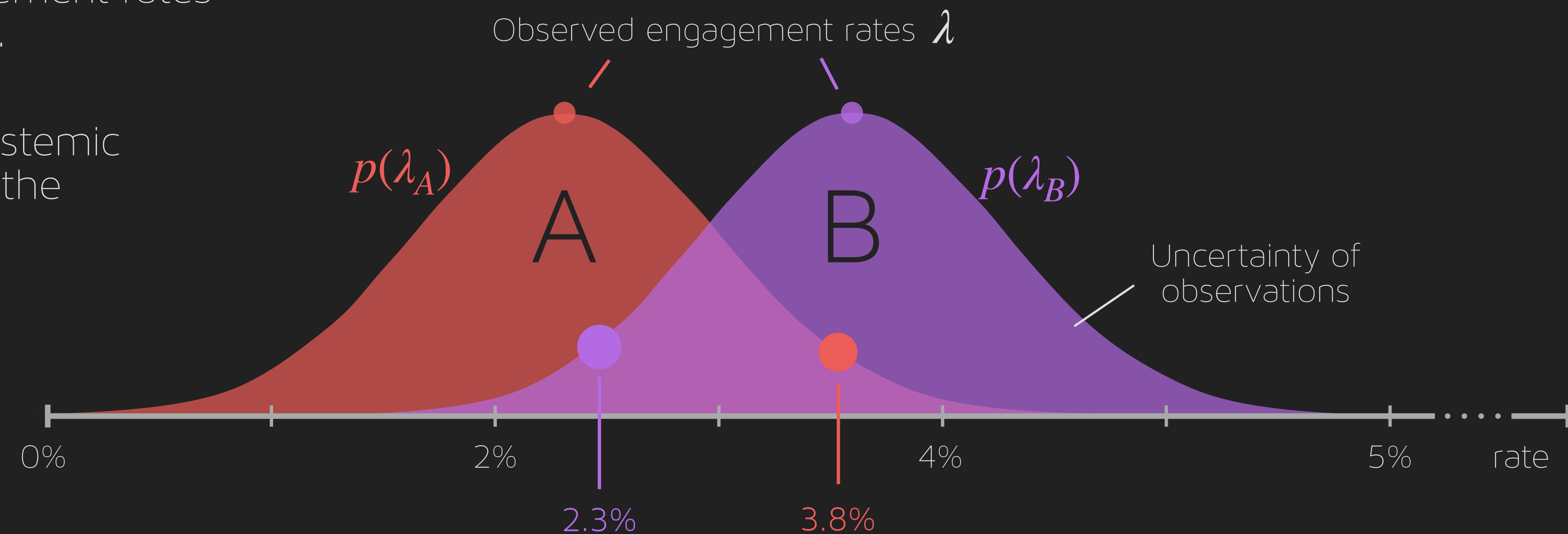
Model events as stochastic Bernoulli engagement events.

The engagement rate for each candidate can then be modelled as a probability distribution to capture the uncertainty.

Example of two candidates and their engagement rates with uncertainty.

Captures the epistemic uncertainty, not the aleatoric in this case.

The uncertainty allows us to quantify how much do we believe B is in fact the winner ...and evaluate the likelihood of many other scenarios.



Example: The unlikely case, where the true engagement rate dictates A is better than B.
These probabilities can be quantified....

Bayesian stochastic modeling / testing

Practical probability distributions to model engagement

clicks / impressions

beta distribution

$$p(x|\alpha, \beta) = x^{\alpha-1}(1-x)^{\beta-1} \cdot \frac{\Gamma(\alpha+\beta)}{\Gamma(\alpha)\Gamma(\beta)}$$

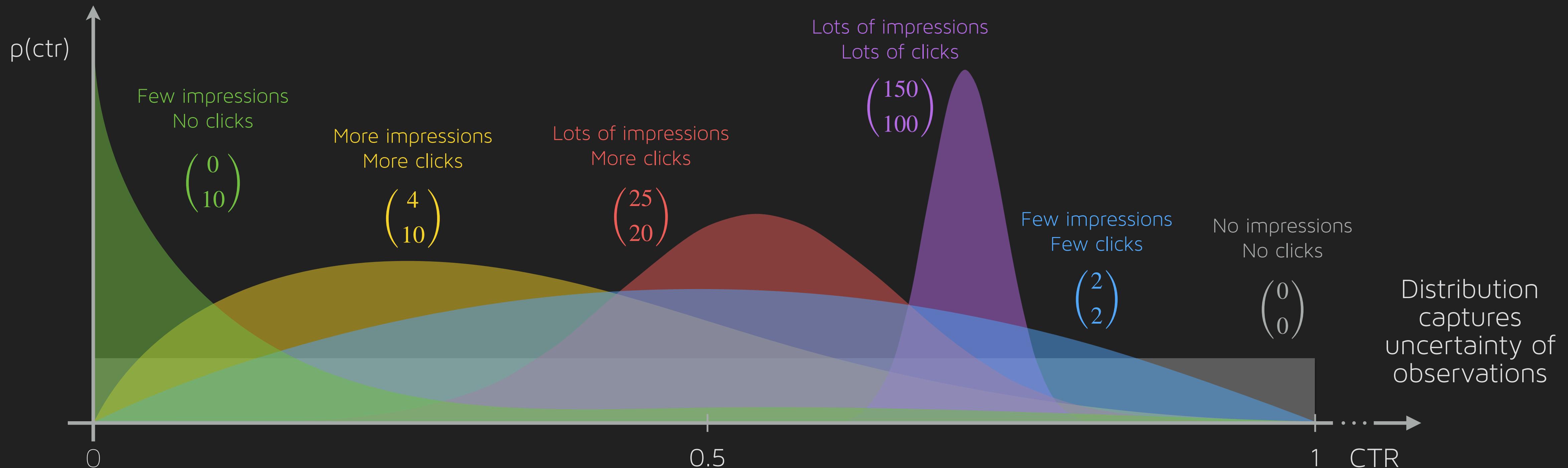
$$\begin{pmatrix} \alpha \\ \beta \end{pmatrix} = \begin{pmatrix} \text{clicks} \\ \text{impressions} - \text{clicks} \end{pmatrix} + \begin{pmatrix} 1 \\ 1 \end{pmatrix}$$

cost / click

gamma distribution

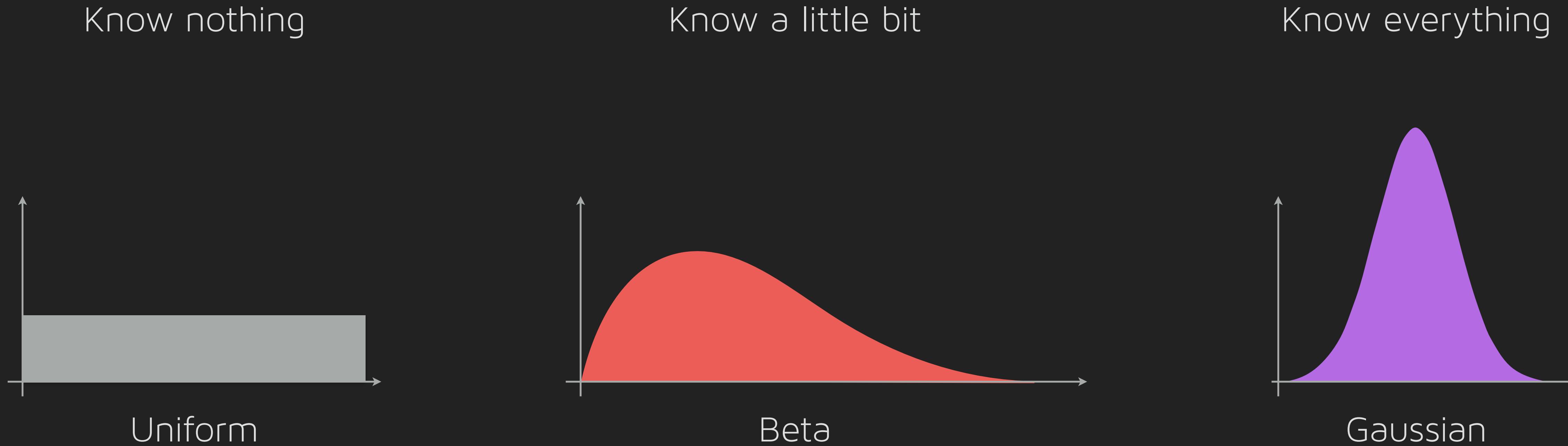
$$p(x|\alpha, \beta) = \frac{\beta^\alpha}{\Gamma(\alpha)} x^{\alpha-1} e^{-\beta x}$$

$$\begin{pmatrix} \alpha \\ \beta \end{pmatrix} = \begin{pmatrix} \text{cost} \\ \text{clicks}^{-1} \end{pmatrix} + \begin{pmatrix} 1 \\ 0 \end{pmatrix}$$



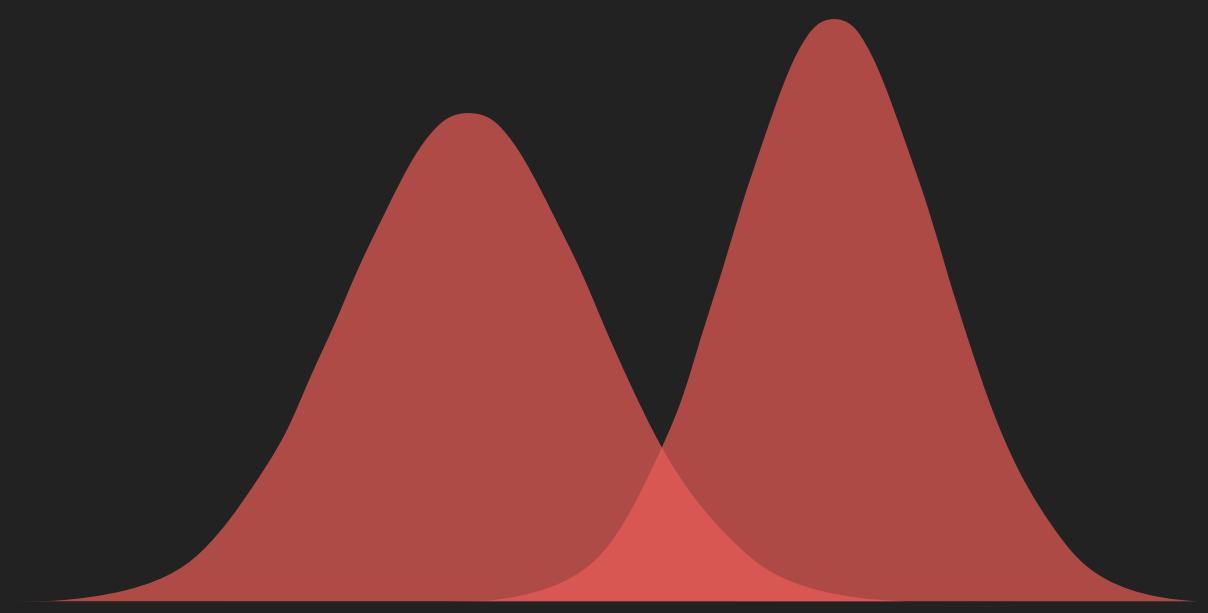
Bayesian stochastic modeling / testing

Why Gauss modelling is often not optimal...



Because it is never gaussian, when you have few samples, when you want to evaluate.

Time matters - to save impressions and \$\$\$...



Bayesian Metrics
A/A testing

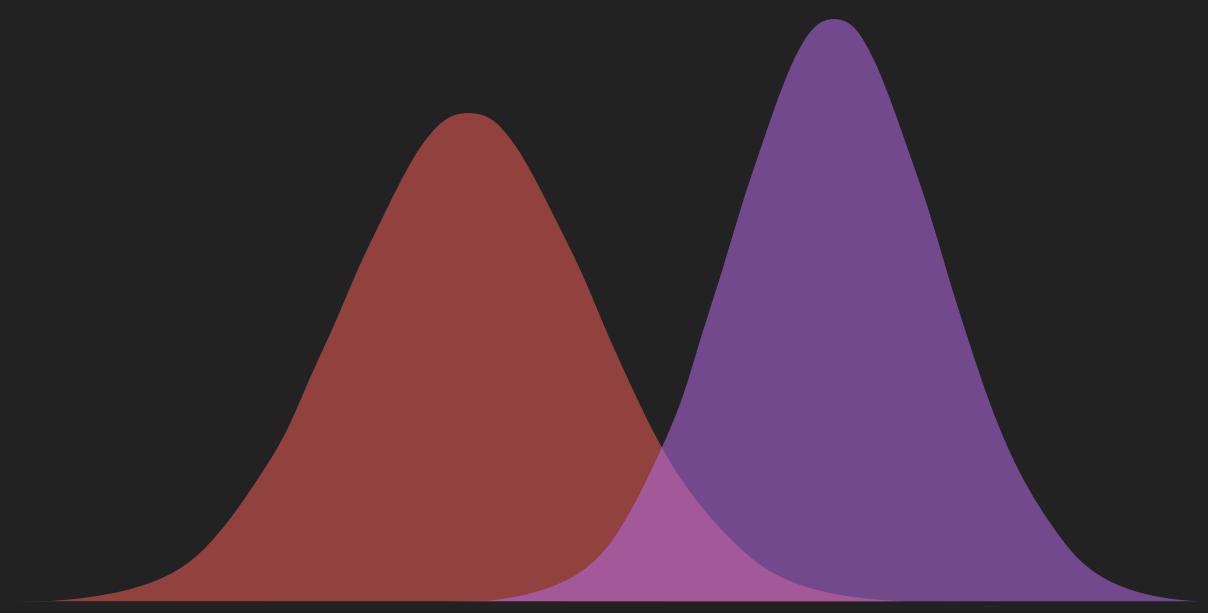
Bayesian same/same test

Selected metrics for measuring differences
between two probability distributions

Are A/A the same
distribution?



Example: A1 and A2 are close enough to each other....or what?



Bayesian Metrics
A/B testing

Bayesian Metrics - Probability of winner

Bayesian testing by calculating

the probability of selecting the right winner

ie. confidence score / certainty

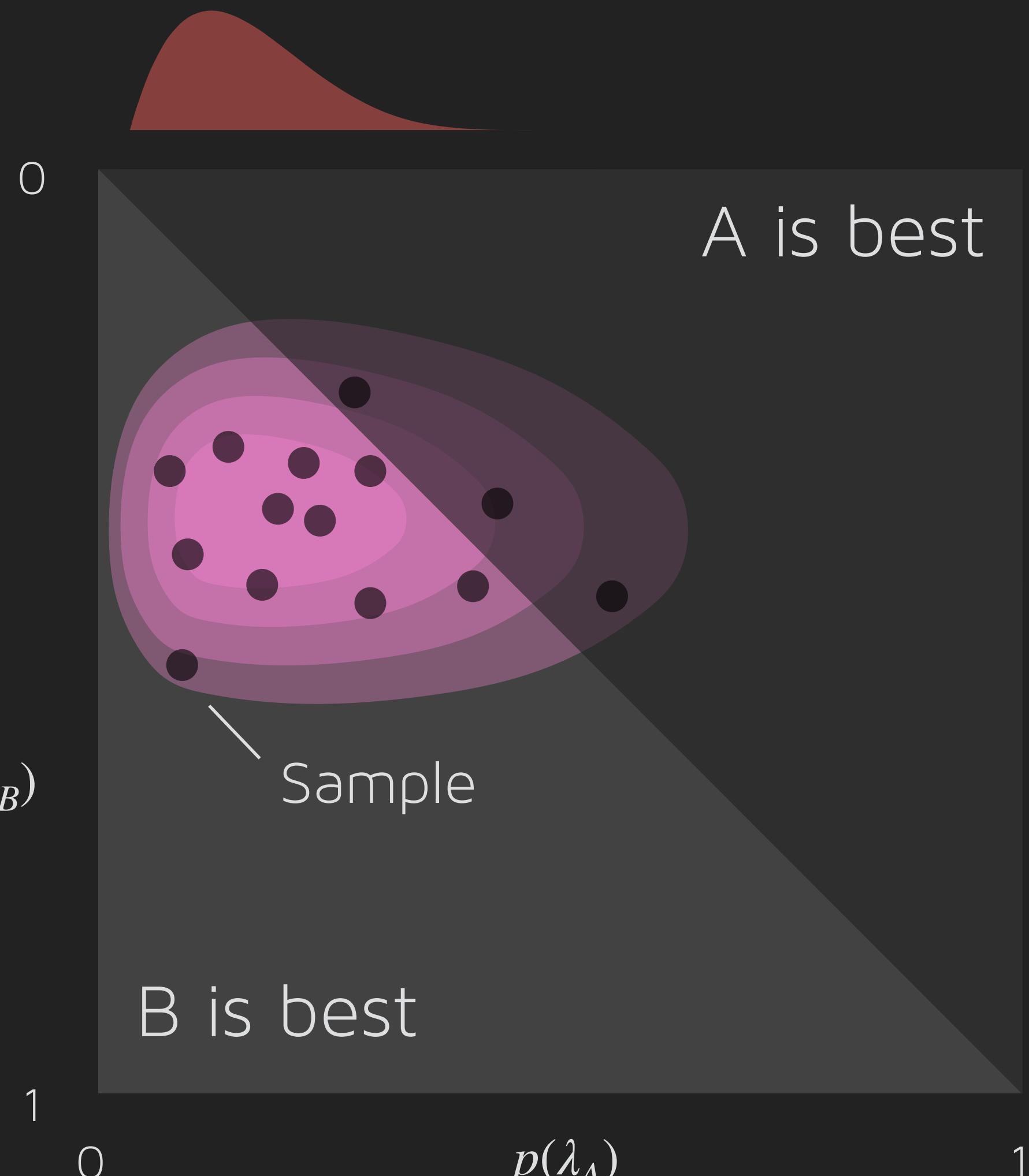
This can be deducted from the joint probability $p(\lambda_A, \lambda_B)$
...and corresponds to the area, where $p_{\lambda_B} > p_{\lambda_A}$

This marginalisation can be estimated via
Monte Carlo sampling

....or calculated analytically from for the
Beta distribution

$$\begin{aligned} P(p_B > p_A) &= \int_0^1 \int_0^{\lambda_A} P(\lambda_A, \lambda_B) d\lambda_B d\lambda_A \\ &= \sum_{i=0}^{\alpha_B-1} \frac{B(\alpha_A + i, \beta_A + \beta_B)}{(\beta_B + i)B(1 + i, \beta_B)B(\alpha_A, \beta_A)} \end{aligned}$$

Joint probability of engagement-rates



Bayesian Metrics - Expected Loss

Average performance loss for wrong choice

Evaluation of loss if choosing wrong

$$\mathcal{L}(\lambda_A, \lambda_B, A) = \max(\lambda_B - \lambda_A, 0)$$

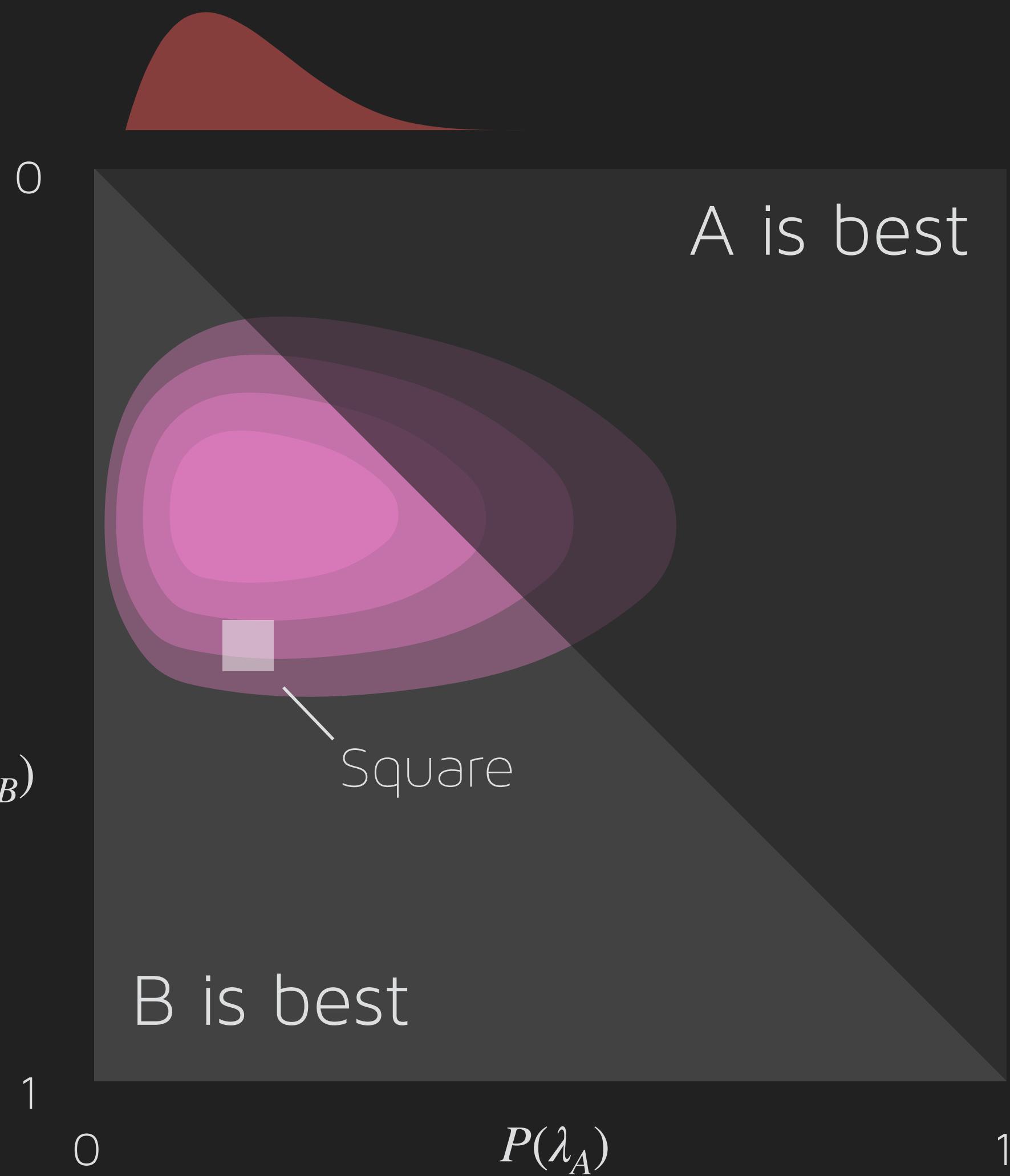
$$\mathcal{L}(\lambda_A, \lambda_B, B) = \max(\lambda_A - \lambda_B, 0)$$

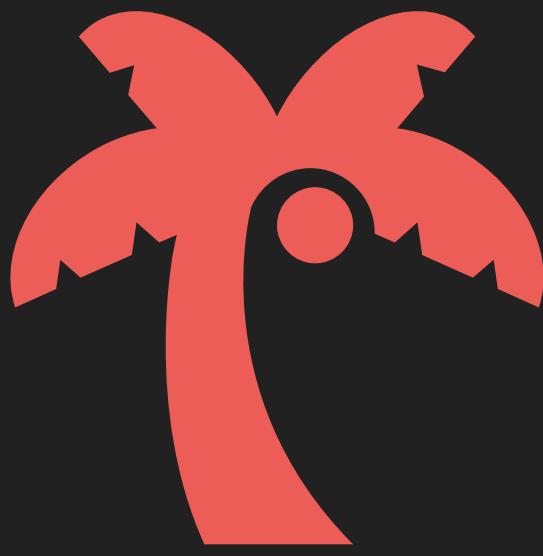
Expectation of loss by integrating across joint distribution

$$E[\mathcal{L}](\cdot) = \int_0^1 \int_0^1 P(\lambda_A, \lambda_B) \mathcal{L}(\lambda_A, \lambda_B, \cdot) d\lambda_B d\lambda_A$$

Unit will be λ - in some cases close to \$, as we shall see...

Joint probability of engagement-rates





Single Example

Example....

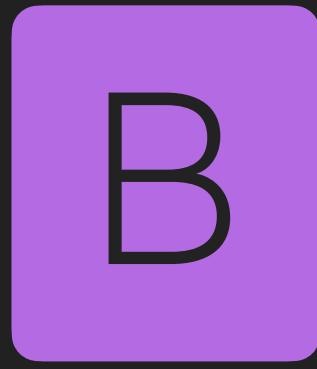
Observations



$\frac{1000}{\text{impressions}}$

$\frac{100}{\text{clicks}}$

$\frac{\$11}{\text{Cost}}$



$\frac{1000}{\text{impressions}}$

$\frac{120}{\text{clicks}}$

$\frac{\$19}{\text{Cost}}$

Hypothesis testing - p-values....

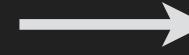
Let's see what the numbers are after 1000 impressions...

Example

Impressions	1000
Clicks A	100
Clicks B	120

$$\lambda_A = \frac{100}{1000} = 10\%$$

$$\lambda_B = \frac{120}{1000} = 12\%$$



B
winner ?

1000
—
#samples

12%
—
p-value

Uuh, this is not good...
...Peeking

3840
—
#samples
actually required

0.2%
—
p-value

Aaaah, much better....

Bayesian Metrics - Probability of winner & lift analysis

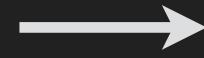
The uncertainty allows for reasoning and exploring the probability of various scenarios.

Example

Impressions
Clicks A
Clicks B

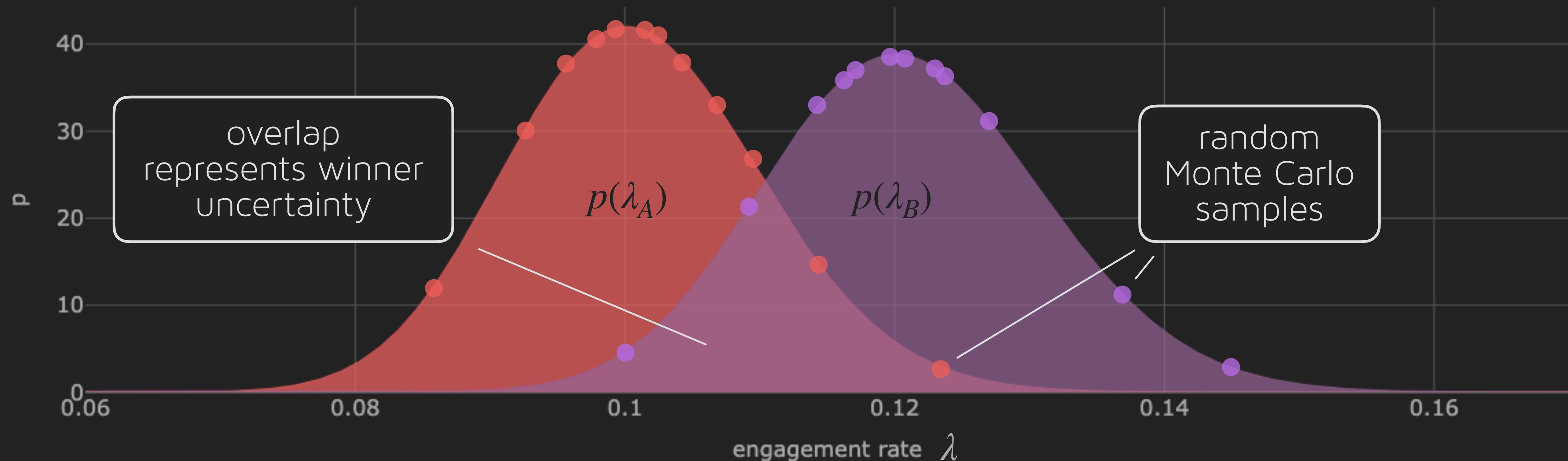
1000
100
120

$$\lambda_A = \frac{100}{1000} = 10\%$$
$$\lambda_B = \frac{120}{1000} = 12\%$$



B
winner ?

Beta distributions of CTR



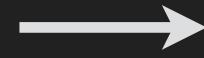
Bayesian Metrics - Probability of winner & lift analysis

The uncertainty allows for reasoning and exploring the probability of various scenarios.

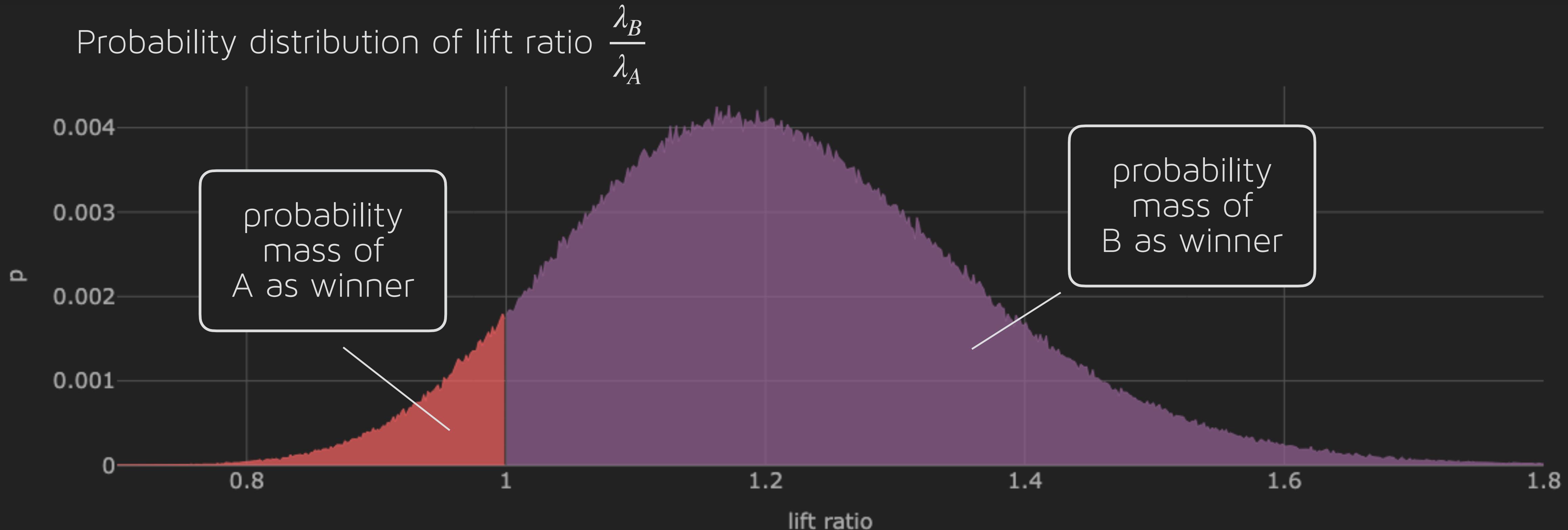
Example

Impressions	1000
Clicks A	100
Clicks B	120

$$\lambda_A = \frac{100}{1000} = 10\%$$
$$\lambda_B = \frac{120}{1000} = 12\%$$



B
winner ?



Bayesian Metrics - Probability of winner & lift analysis

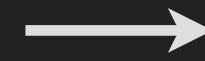
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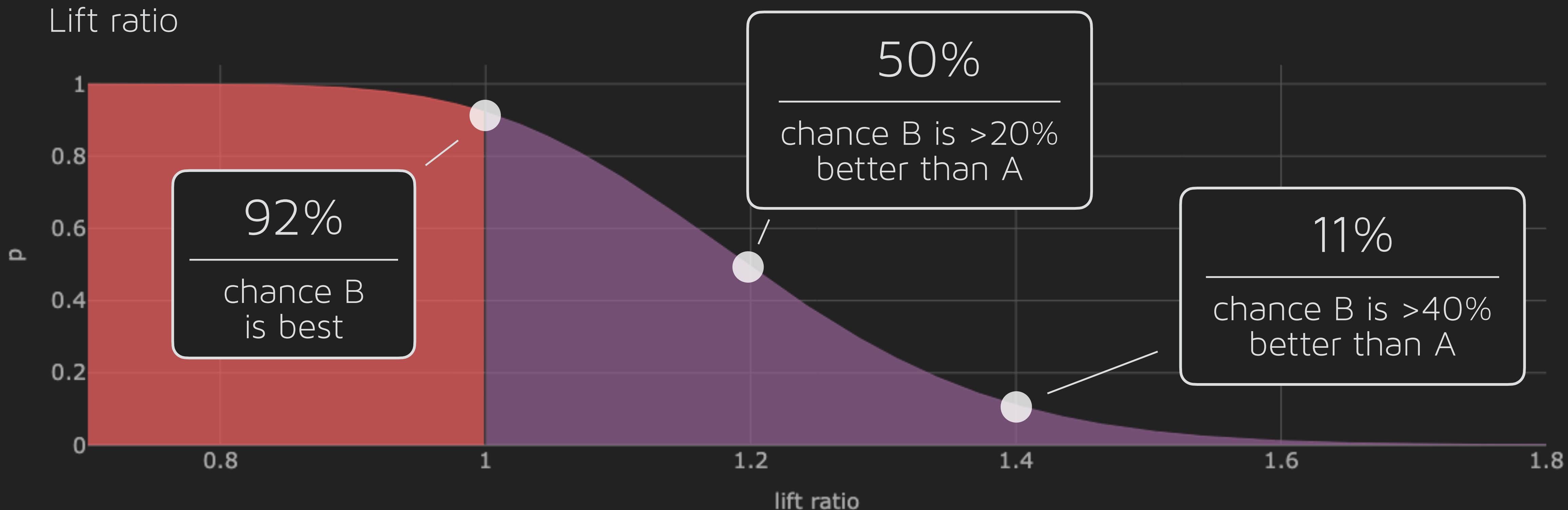
Impressions
Clicks A
Clicks B

1000
100
120

$$\lambda_A = \frac{100}{1000} = 10\%$$
$$\lambda_B = \frac{120}{1000} = 12\%$$



B
winner ?



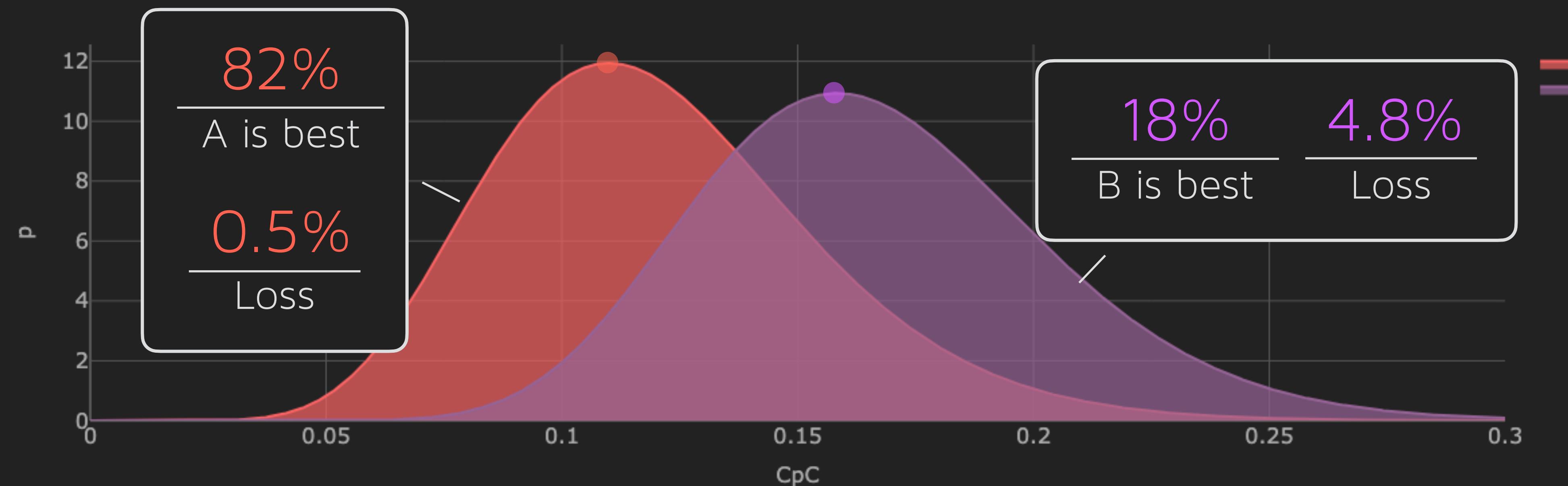
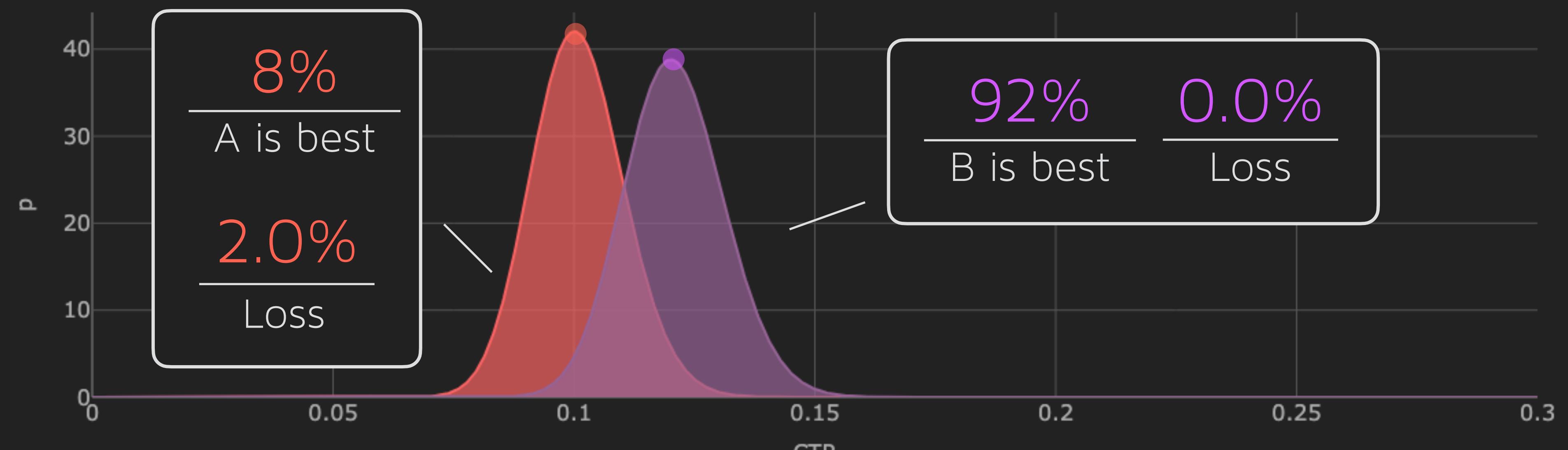
Bayesian A/B Testing - Decision

Click-
Through-
Rate

After 1000
impressions

Cost-per-
Click

Lower is
better

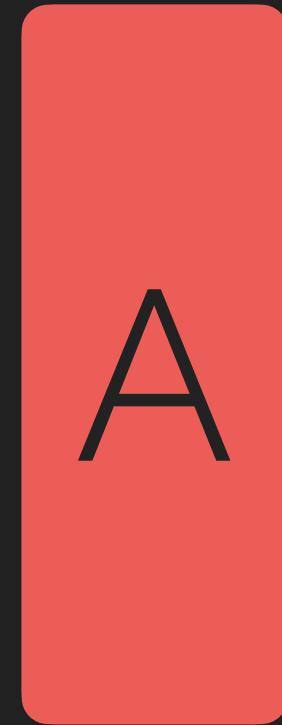




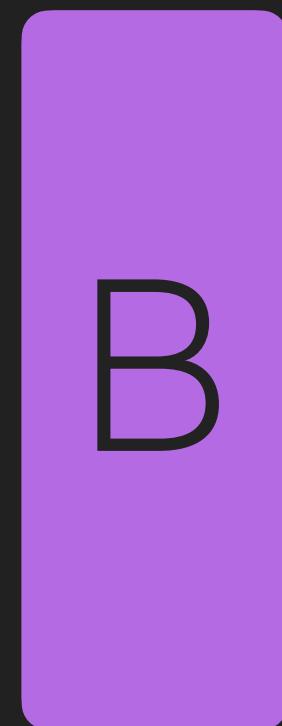
Campaign

A/B Testing - Campaign simulation

...

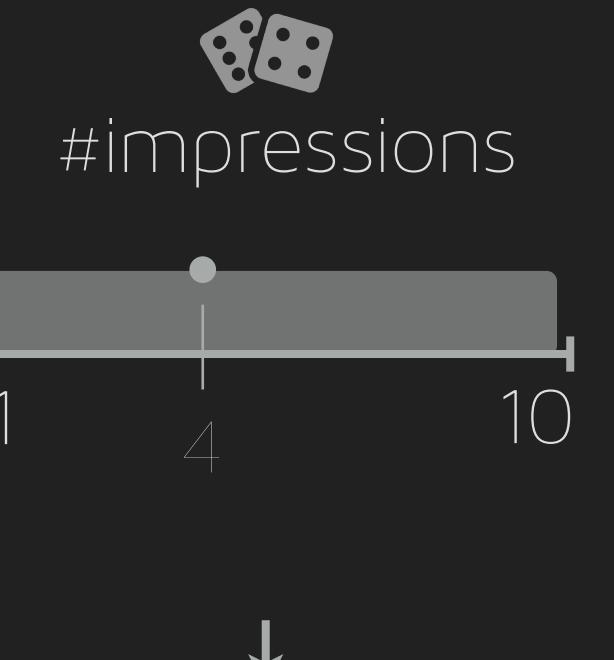


A
10%
CTR A
\$11
CPM A

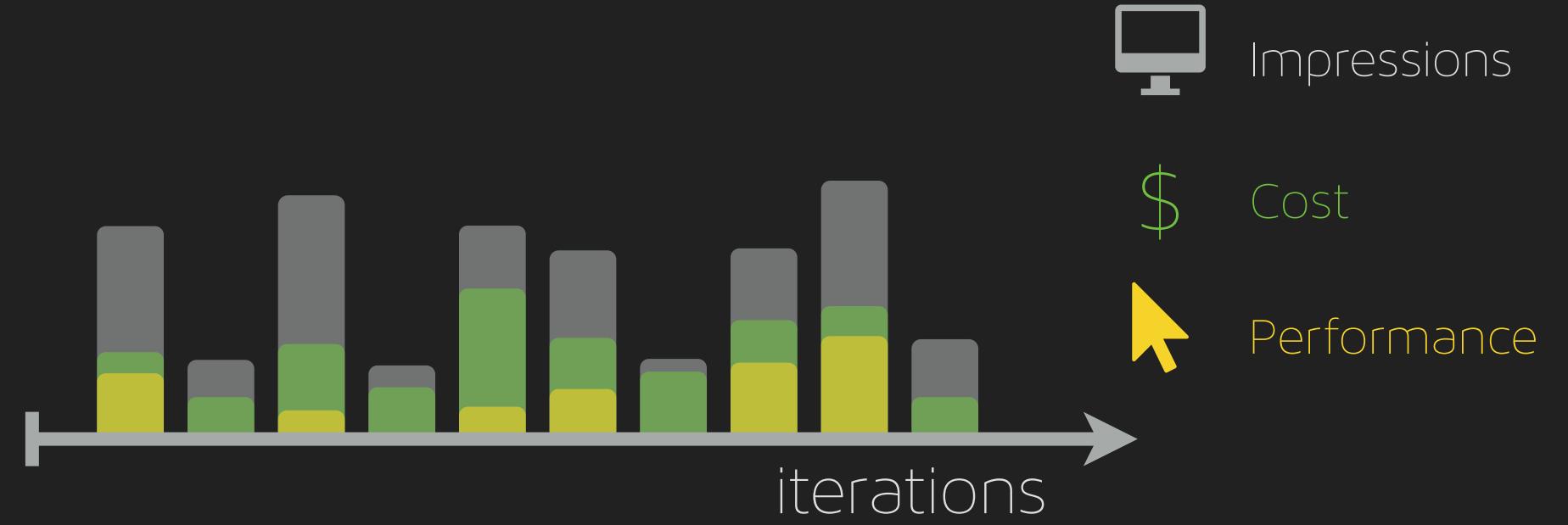


B
12%
CTR B
\$19
CPM B

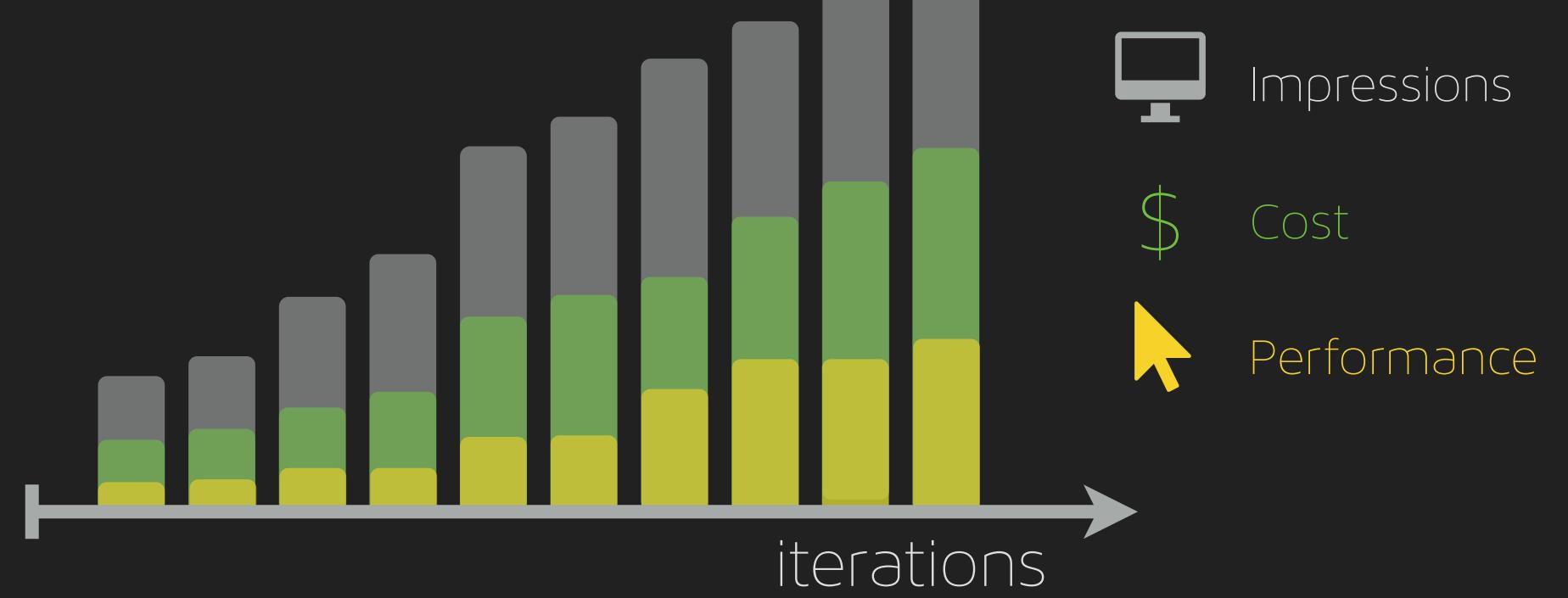
Simulate impression,
clicks and cost



logs



accumulated



Impressions

Cost

Performance

Impressions

Cost

Performance

Campaign simulation

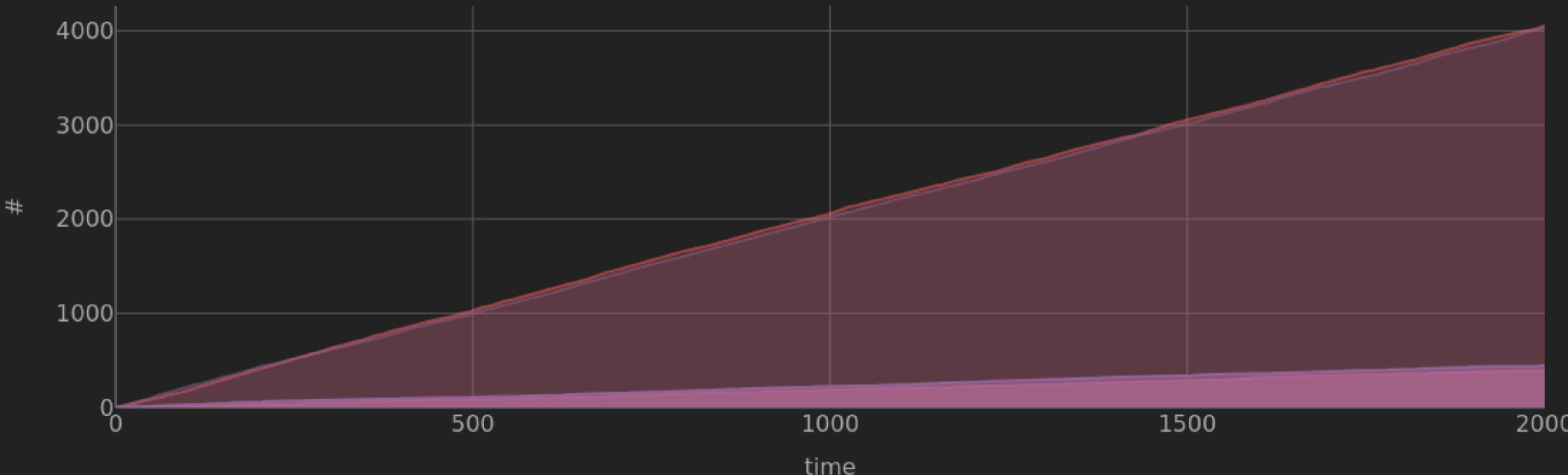
Observations and performance

A

10%
CTR A

\$11
CPM A

Observations - impr. & clicks

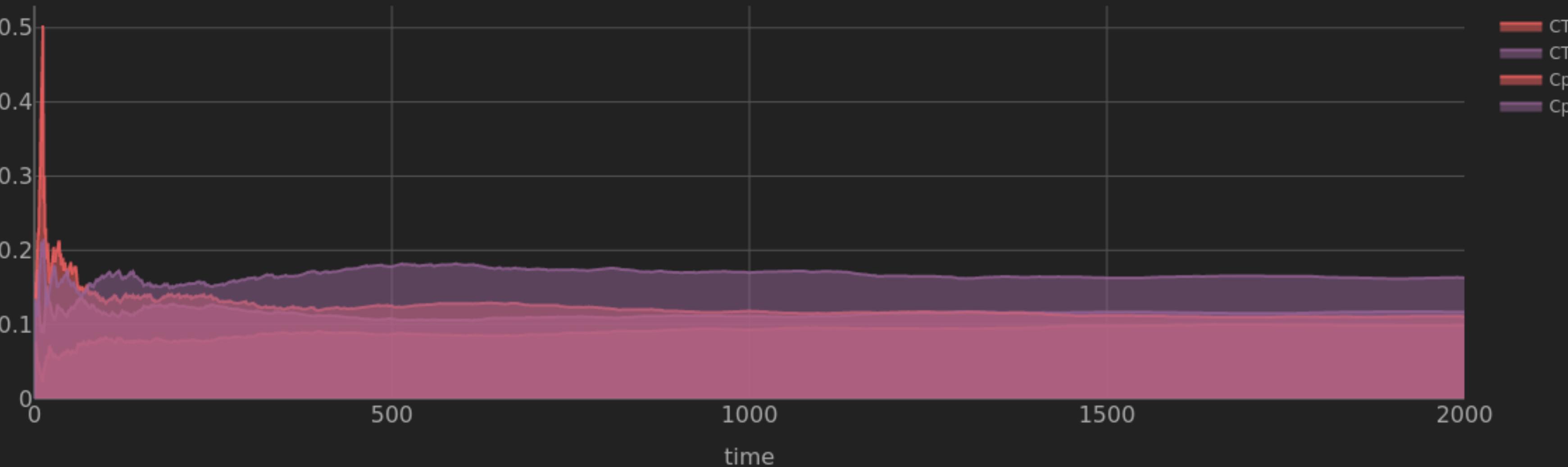


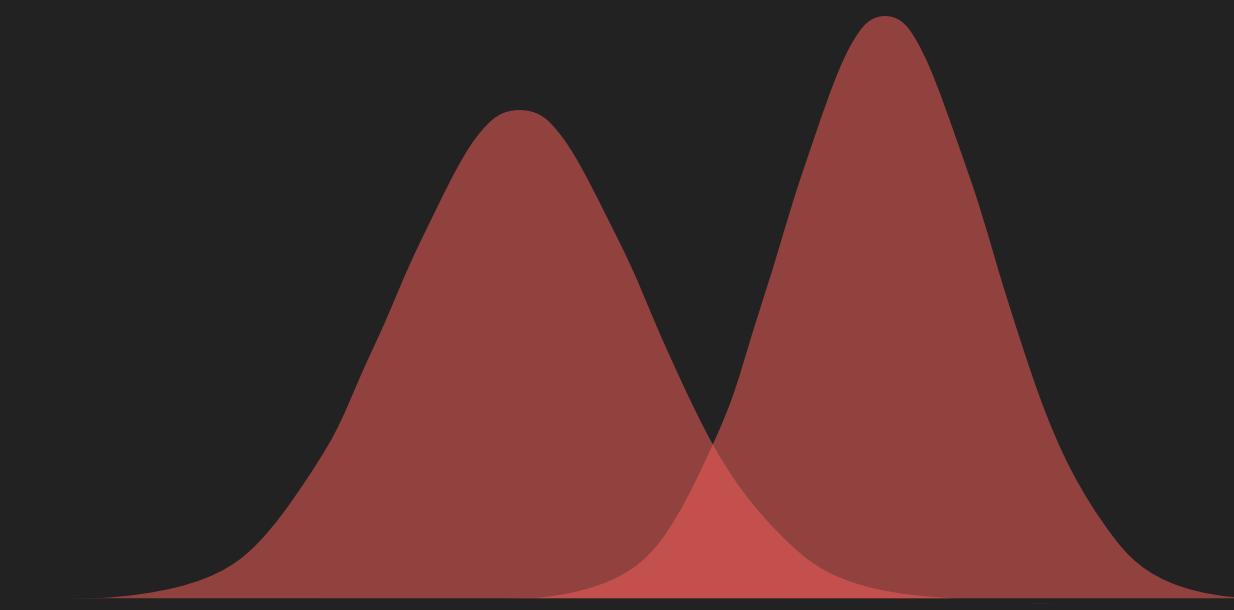
B

12%
CTR B

\$19
CPM B

Performance - CTR & CpC





Bayesian A/A testing

Hypothesis A/A Testing - Campaign simulation

Same / Same test - CTR

A

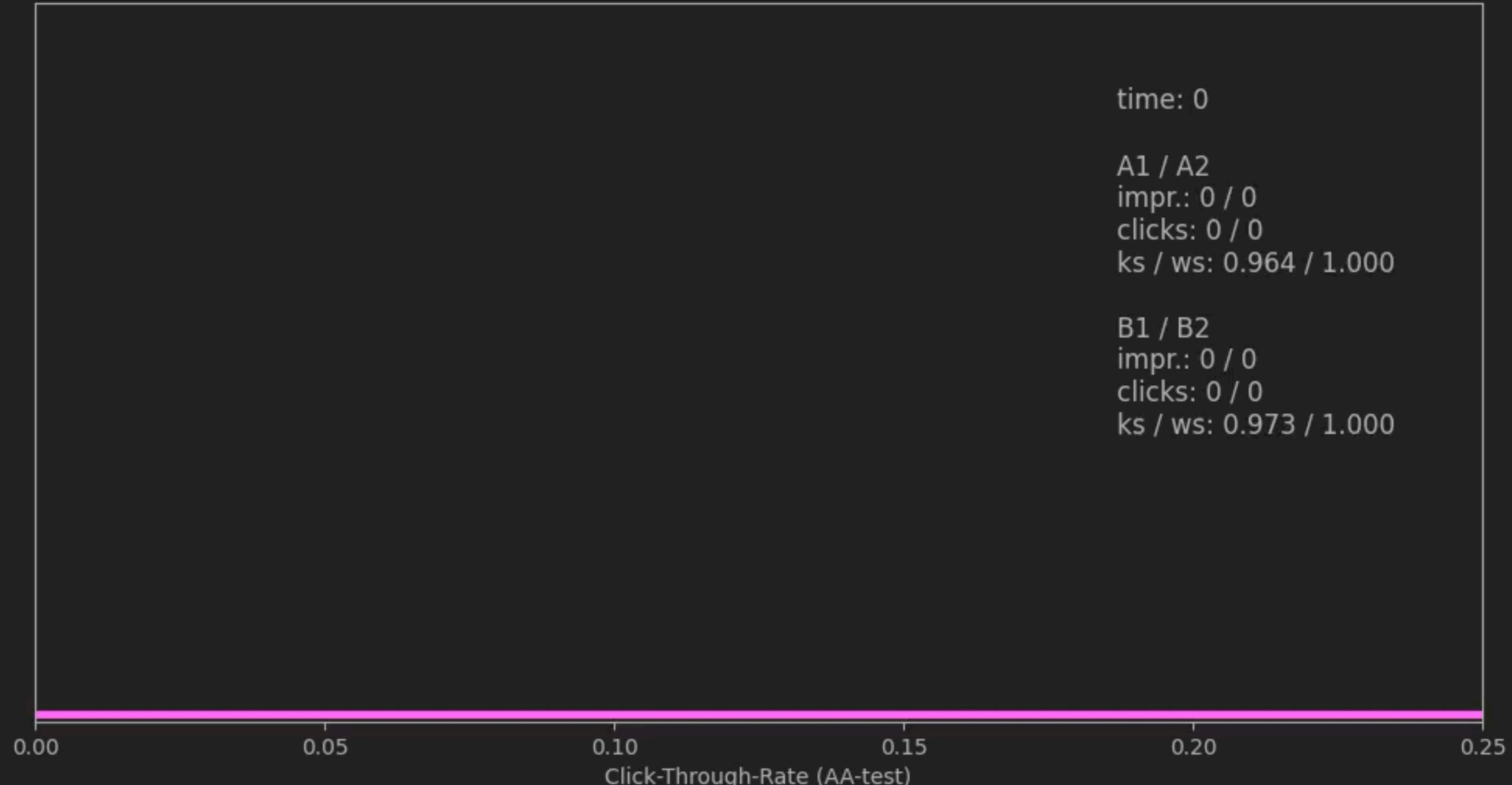
10%
—
CTR A

\$11
—
CPM A

B

12%
—
CTR B

\$19
—
CPM B



Hypothesis A/A Testing - Campaign simulation

Same / Same test

A

$\frac{10\%}{\text{CTR A}}$

$\frac{\$11}{\text{CPM A}}$

$\frac{4054}{4078}$

impressions

$\frac{393}{410}$

clicks

$\frac{45}{45}$

cost

B

$\frac{12\%}{\text{CTR B}}$

$\frac{\$19}{\text{CPM B}}$

$\frac{4040}{4088}$

impressions

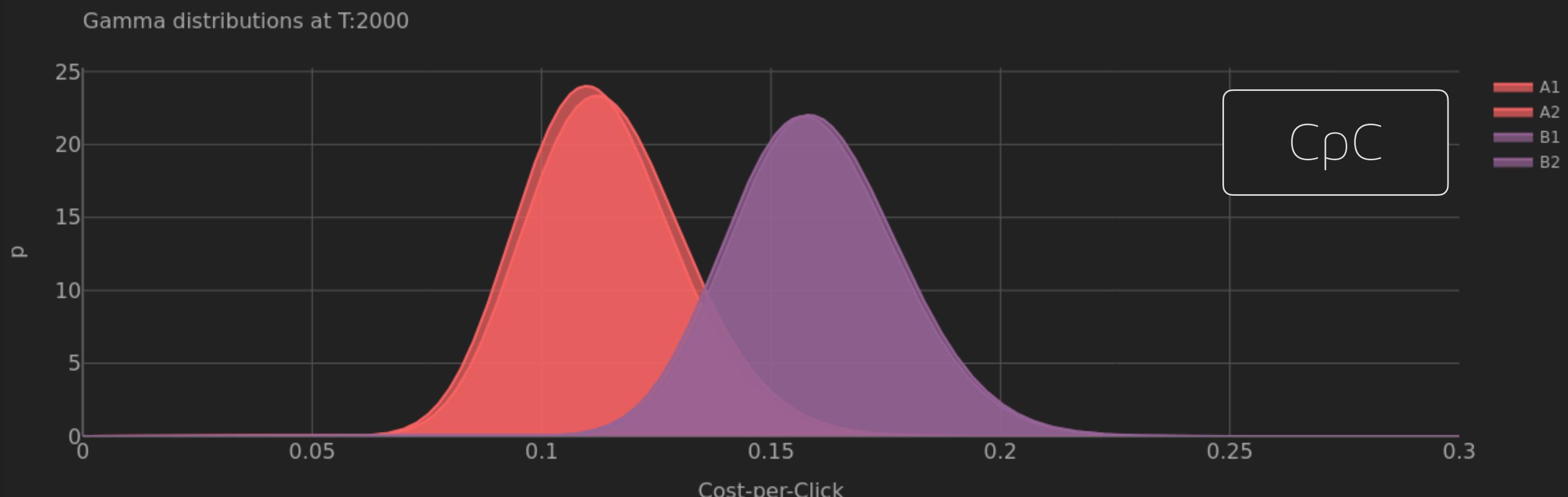
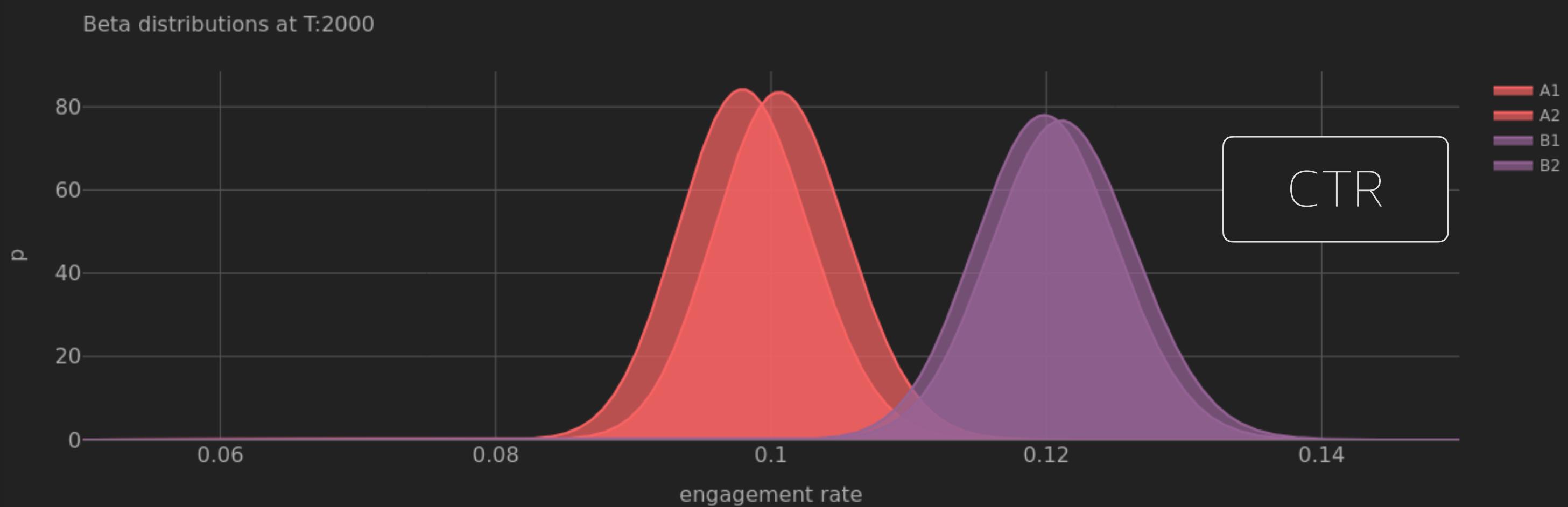
$\frac{447}{503}$

clicks

$\frac{77}{78}$

cost

End-of-simulation



Hypothesis A/A Testing - Campaign simulation

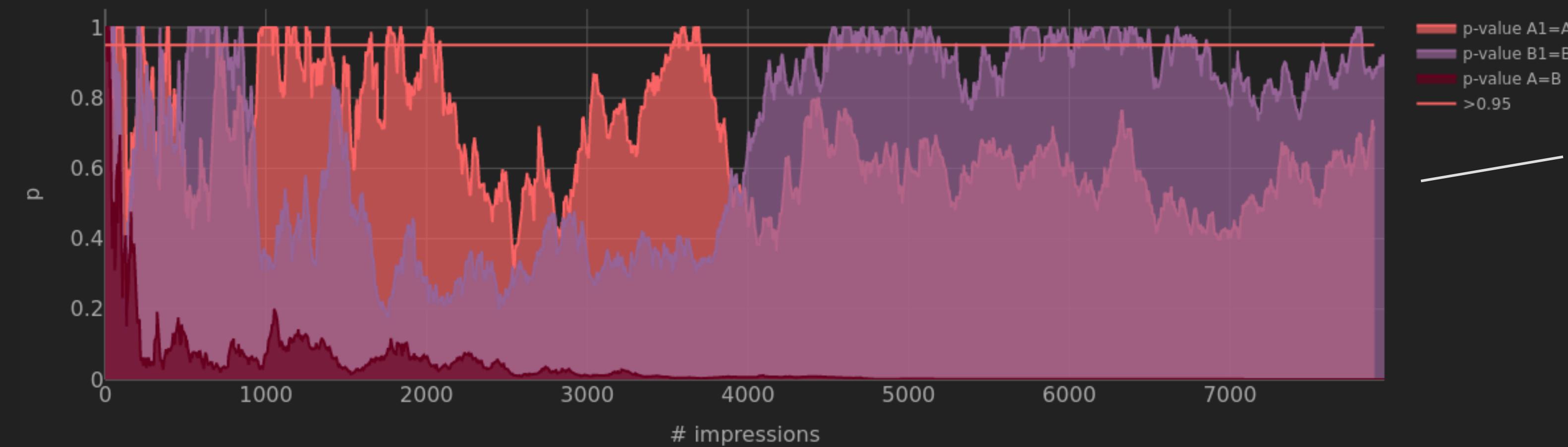
Same / Same test - CTR

A

10%
CTR A

\$11
CPM A

Chi2 test - p-value of A/A (CTR)



Aleatoric uncertainty
Very difficult to get stable...

A didn't make it...

65%
p-value

97%
p-value

Does it make
sense to use hyp.
test for this?

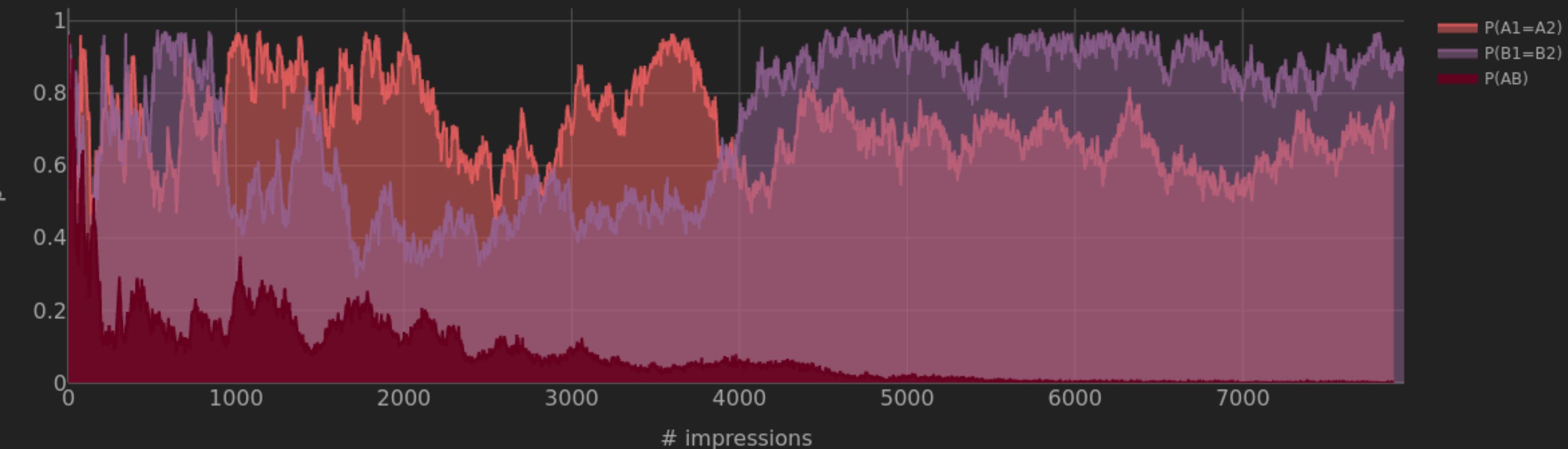
B

12%
CTR B

\$19
CPM B

AA & BB are
more similar
than AB

Kolmogorov-Smirnov A/A (CTR)



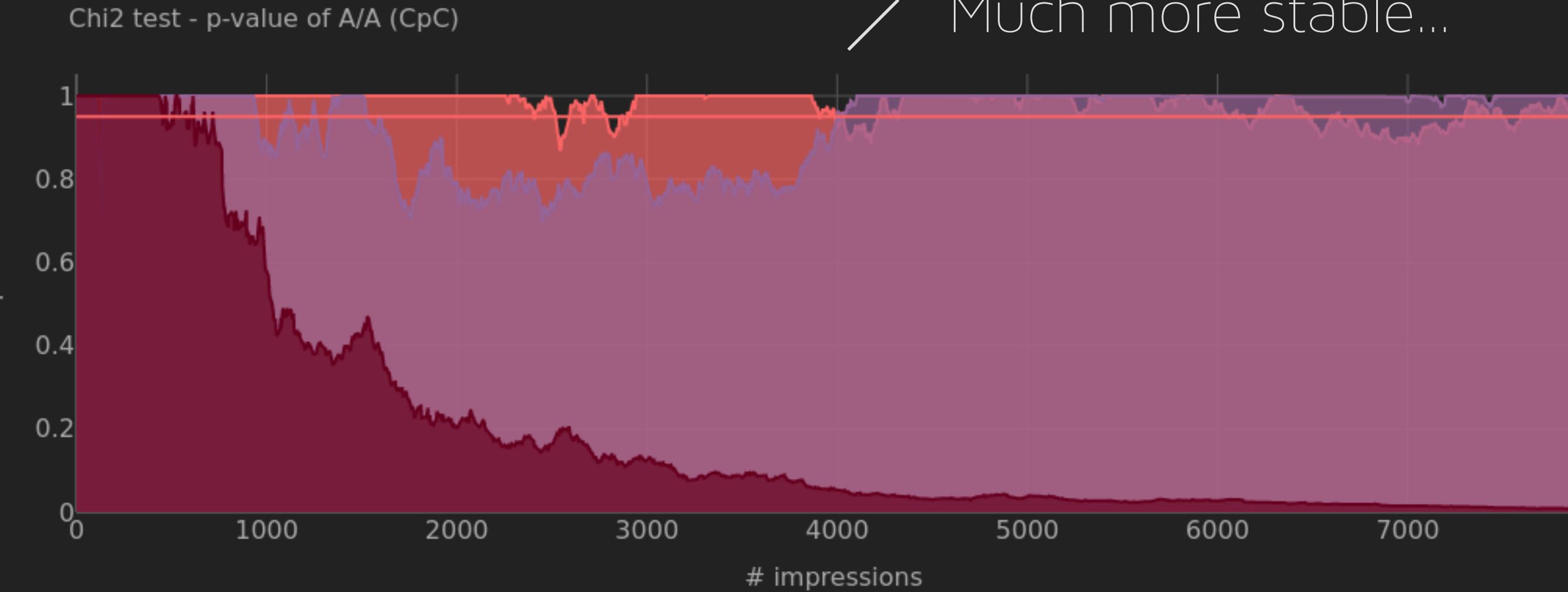
Hypothesis A/A Testing - Campaign simulation

Same / Same test - CpC

A

$\frac{10\%}{\text{CTR A}}$

$\frac{\$11}{\text{CPM A}}$



They made it...

$\frac{98\%}{\text{p-value}}$

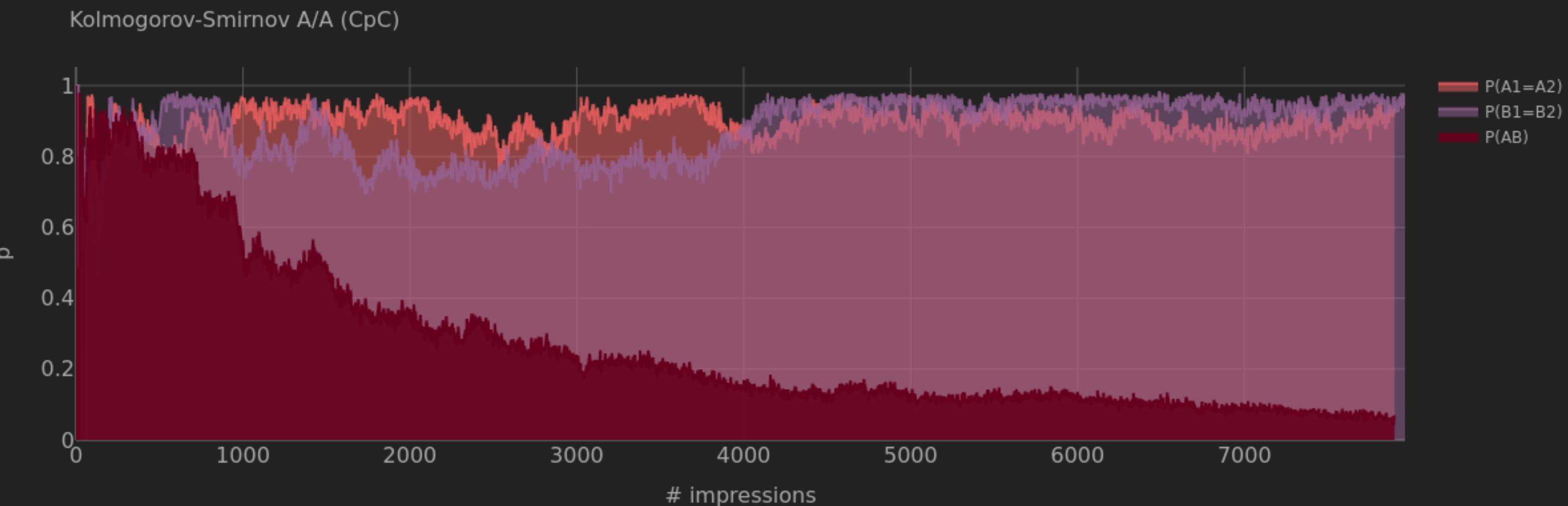
$\frac{100\%}{\text{p-value}}$

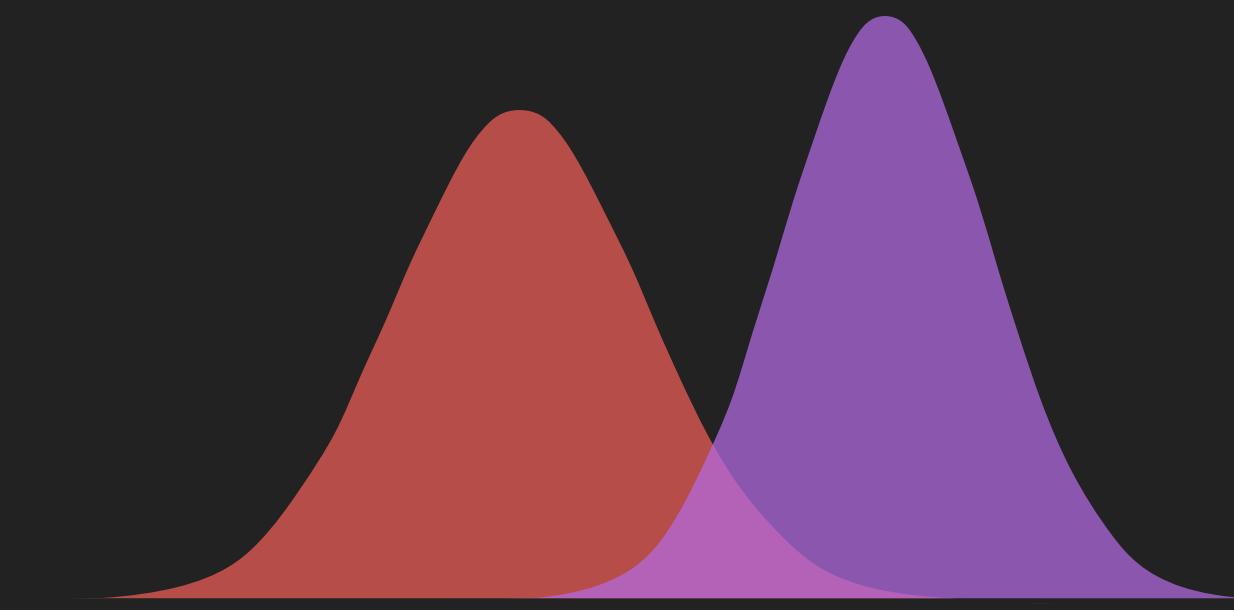
B

$\frac{12\%}{\text{CTR B}}$

$\frac{\$19}{\text{CPM B}}$

AA & BB are
more similar
than AB





Bayesian A/B testing

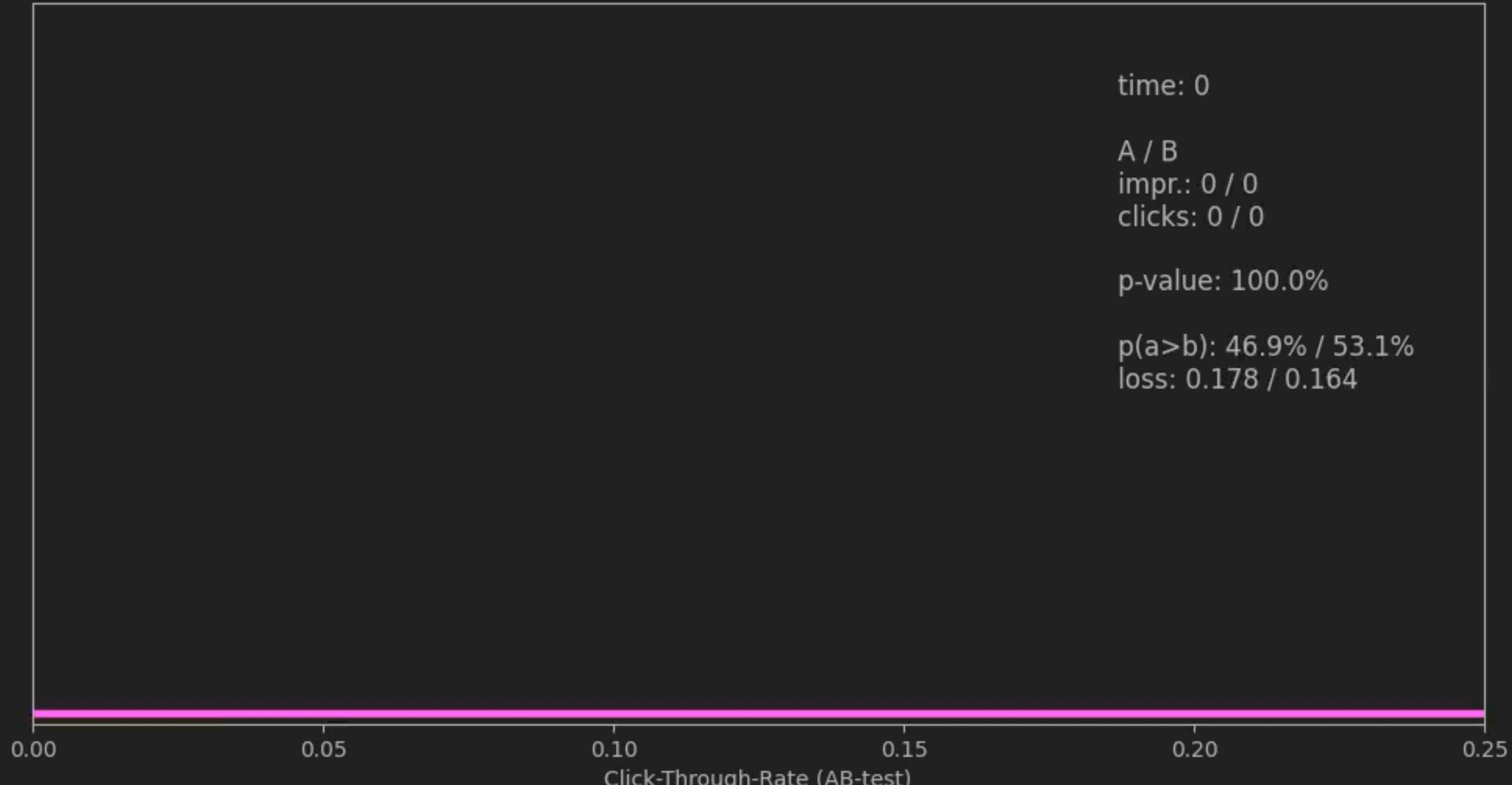
Bayesian A/B Testing - Campaign simulation

A/B-test - CTR

A

10%
—
CTR A

\$11
—
CPM A



B

12%
—
CTR B

\$19
—
CPM B

Hypothesis A/B Testing - Campaign simulation

A/B-test

A

10%
CTR A

\$11
CPM A

7898

impressions

784

clicks

87

cost

B

12%
CTR B

\$19
CPM B

7961

impressions

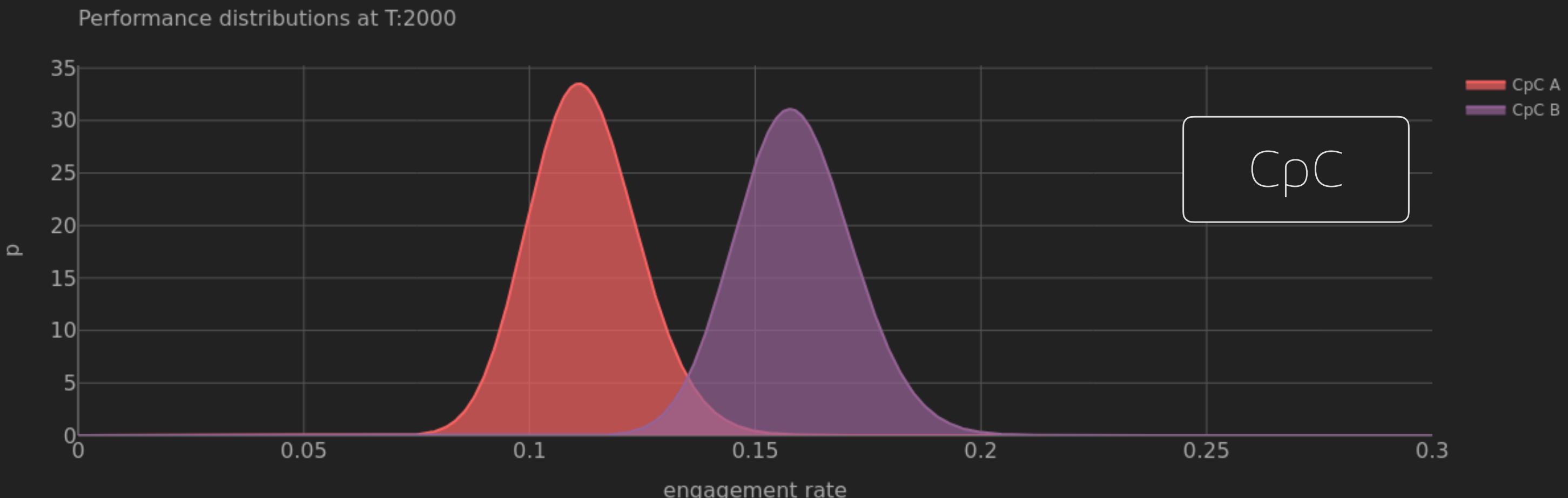
959

clicks

151

cost

End-of-simulation



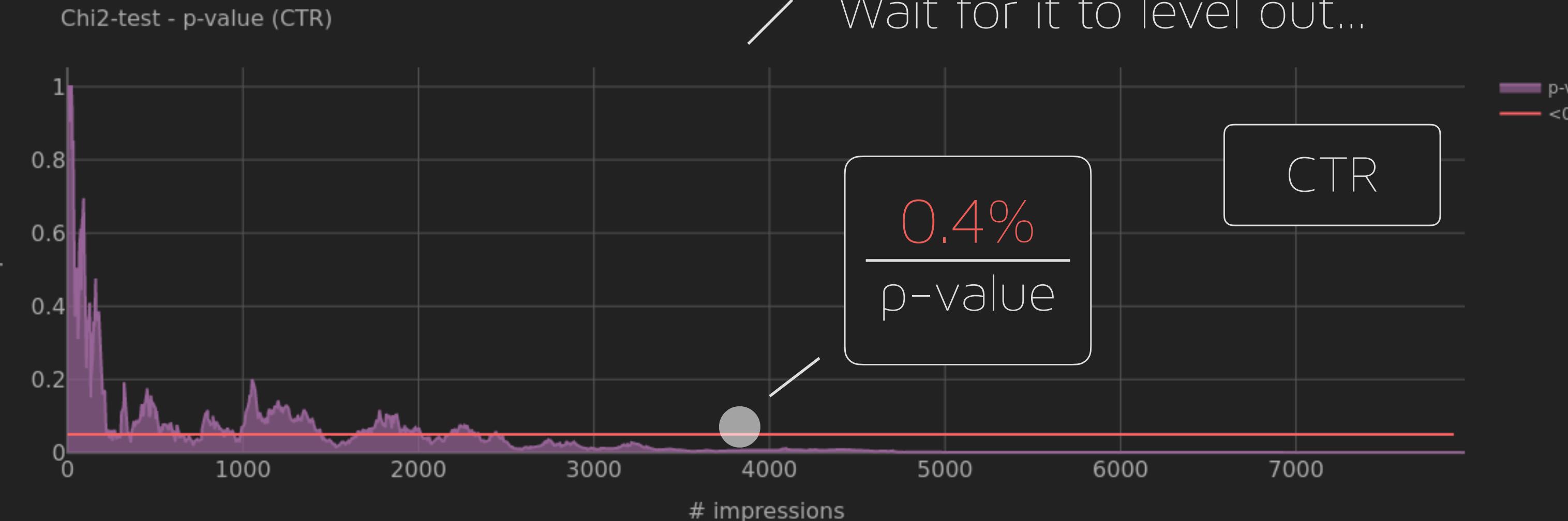
Hypothesis A/B Testing - Campaign simulation

A/B test

A

10%
CTR A

\$11
CPM A



Aleatoric uncertainty
Wait for it to level out...

Required
number of
samples

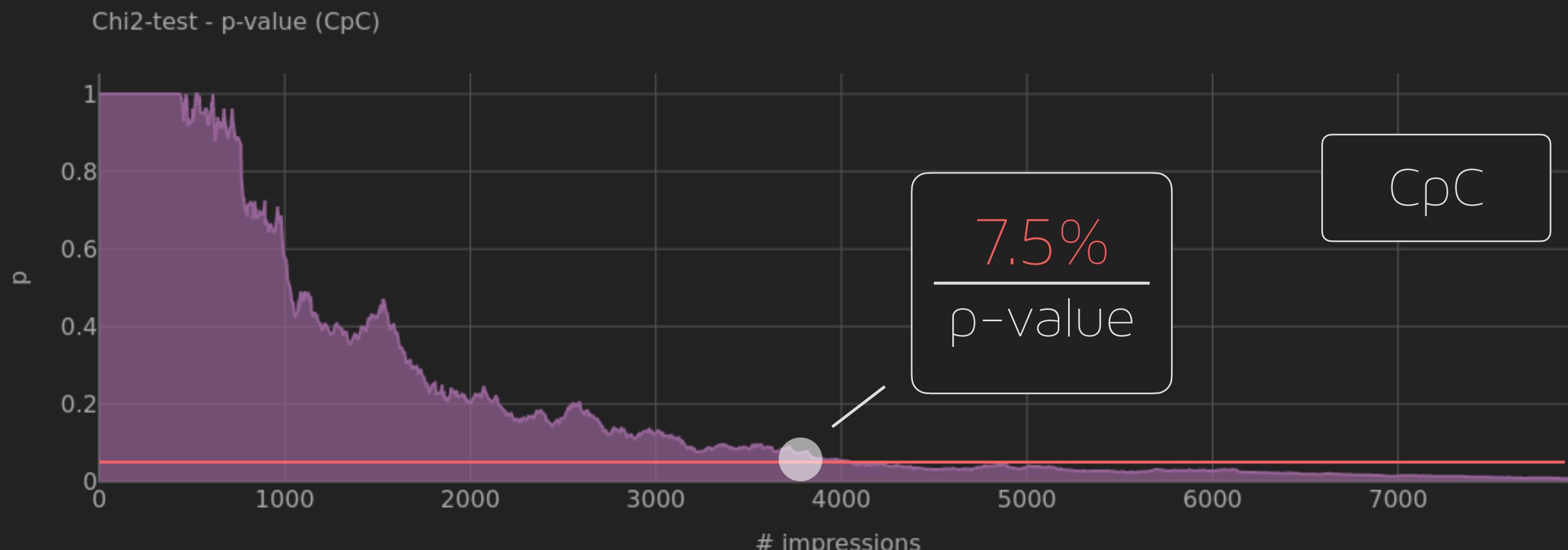
3840

#samples

B

12%
CTR B

\$19
CPM B



Hmmm, B didn't
pass...

Higher cost did
not outweigh
better click rate...

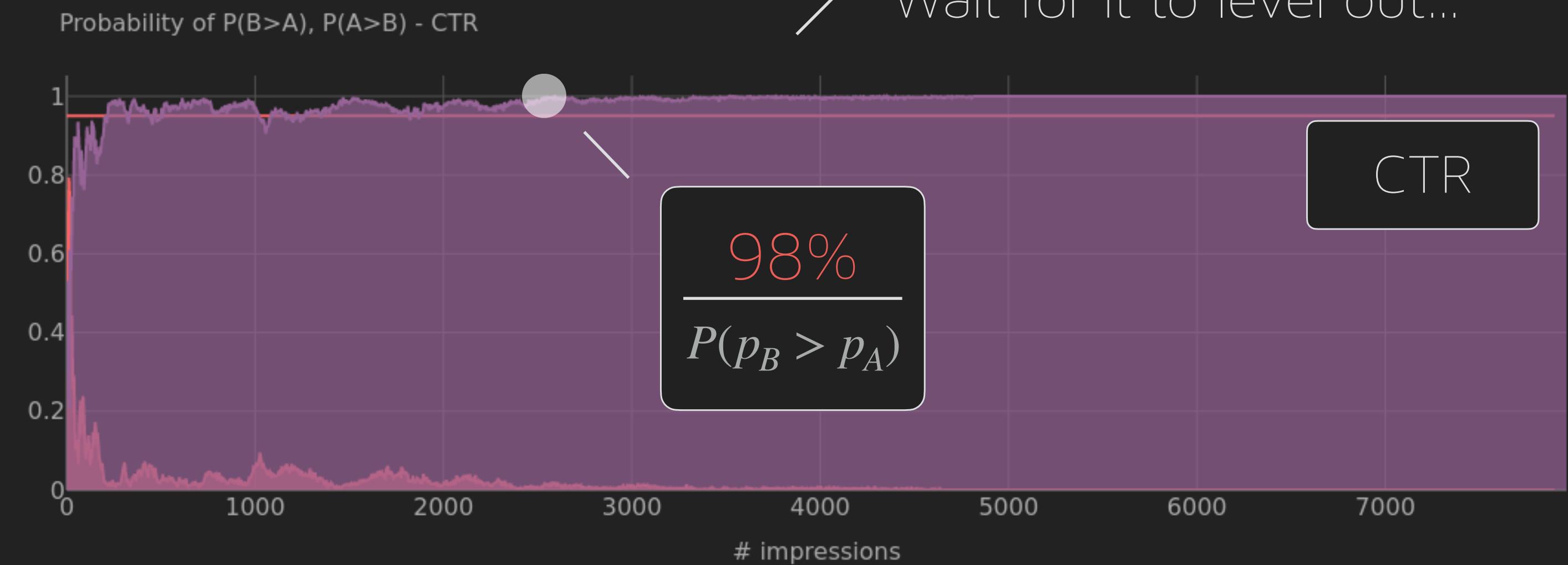
Bayesian A/B Testing - Campaign simulation

A/B test – $P(B > A)$

A

10%
CTR A

\$11
CPM A



Aleatoric uncertainty
Wait for it to level out...

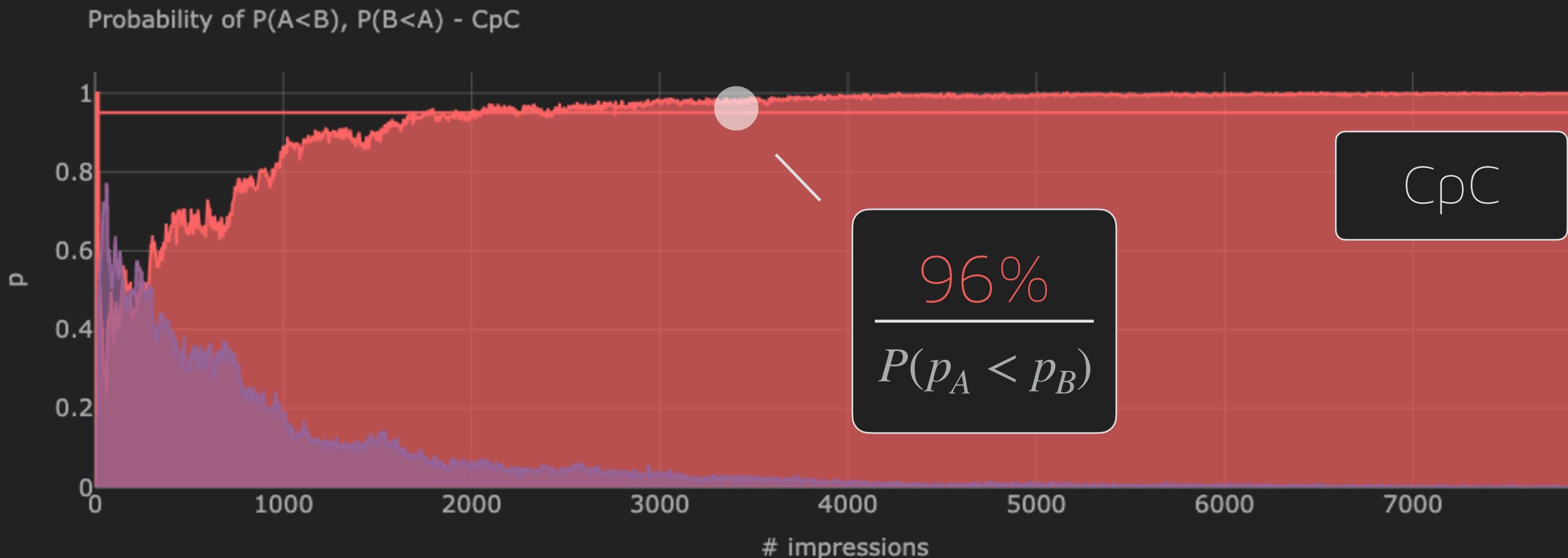
Could we get
results earlier?

$\frac{\sim 500-2500}{\# \text{samples}}$

B

12%
CTR B

\$19
CPM B



Aleatoric
uncertainty
messes with
us...

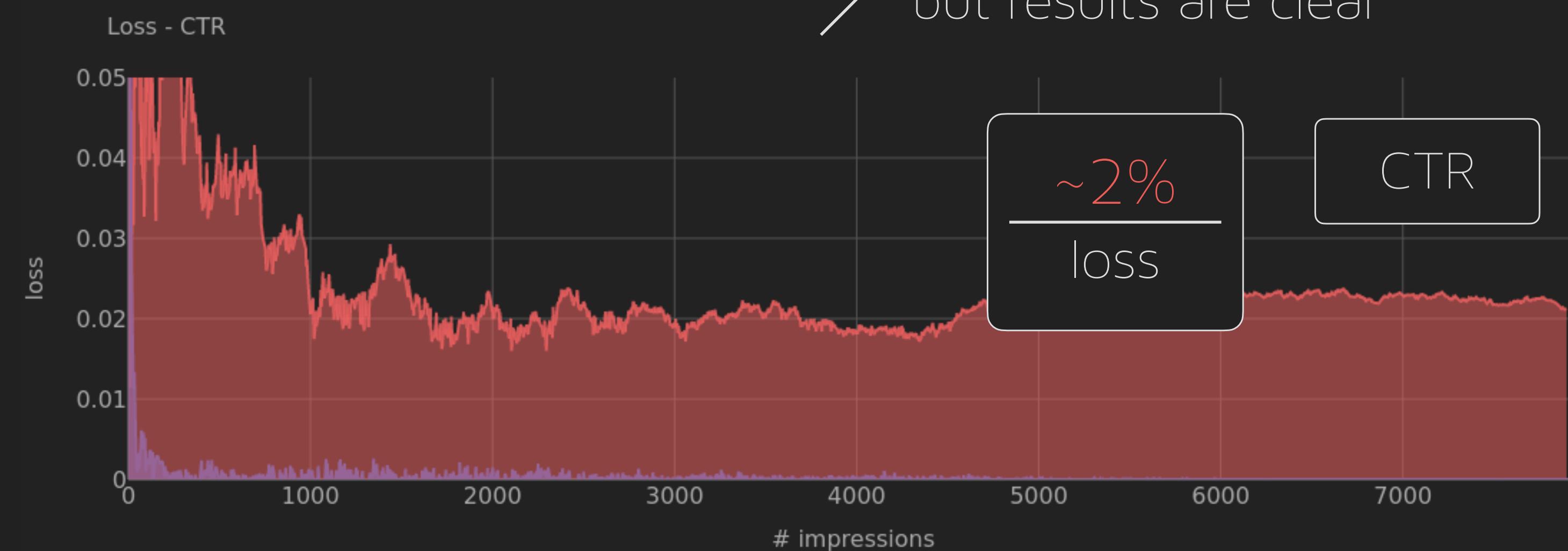
Bayesian A/B Testing - Campaign simulation

A/B test - Losses

A

$\frac{10\%}{\text{CTR A}}$

$\frac{\$11}{\text{CPM A}}$



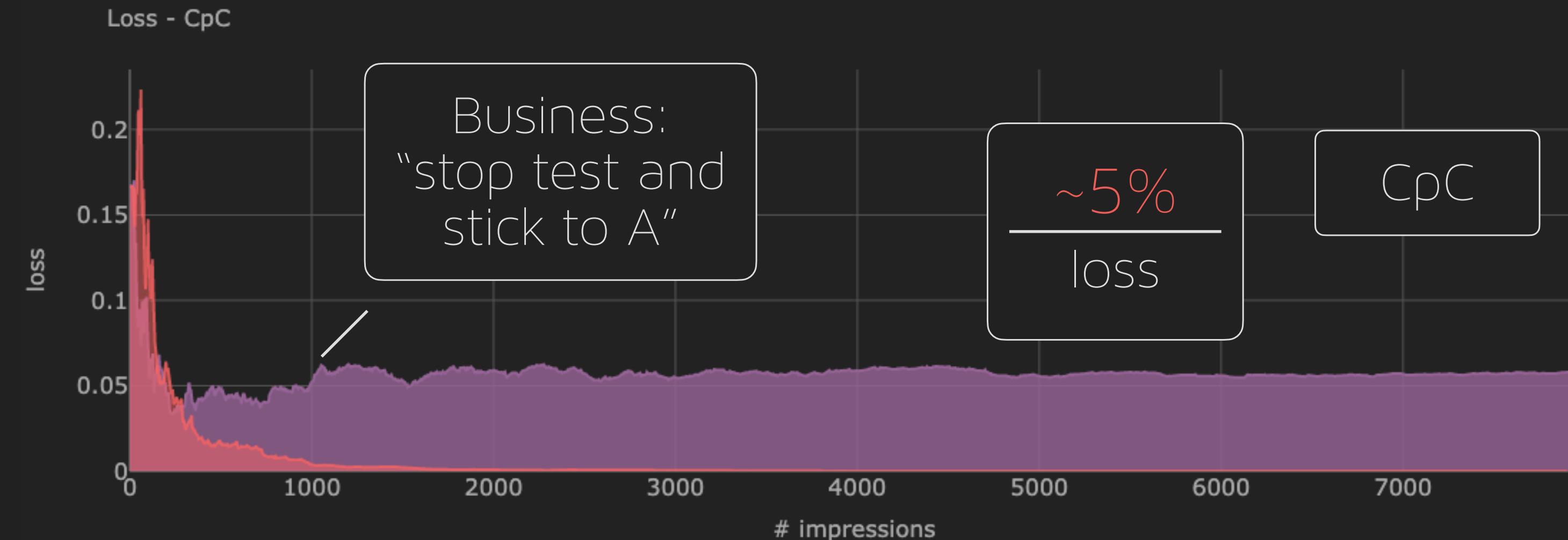
Aleatoric uncertainty not stable,
but results are clear

Choosing A
is pretty
expensive...

B

$\frac{12\%}{\text{CTR B}}$

$\frac{\$19}{\text{CPM B}}$



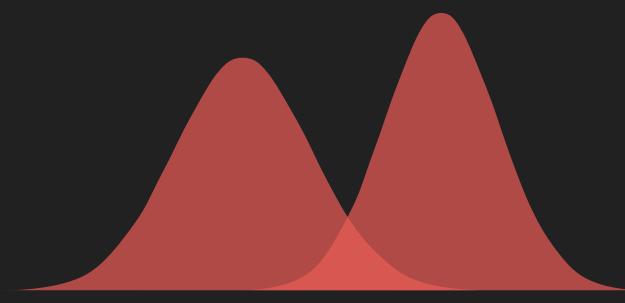
Choosing B is
pretty
expensive...

This time in
real \$\$\$

Bayesian End-of-Level summary



Uncertainty is important for practical evaluations



A/A-test - don't forget
Simple tools to evaluate - but not so simple to decide...?

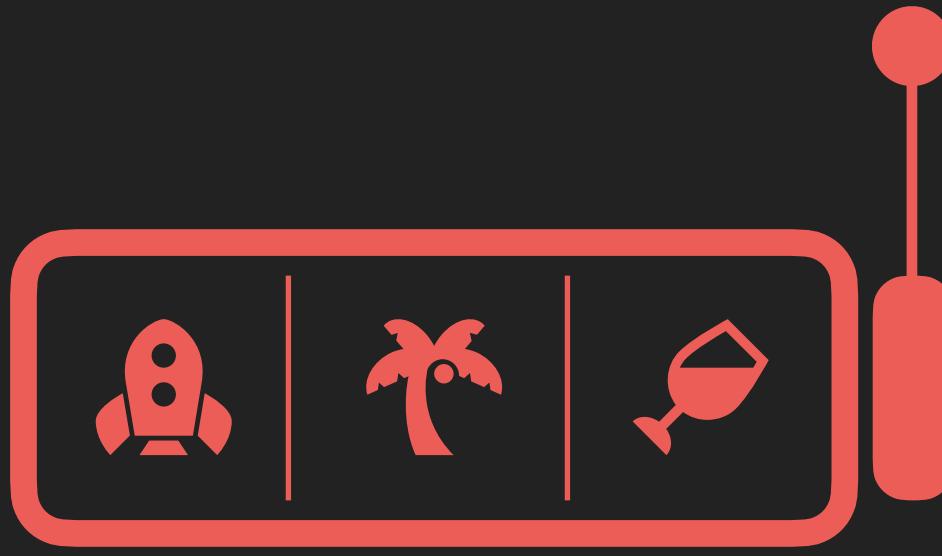


Bayesian A/B-testing - white box - easier to understand
Interpretable metrics - probabilities & losses



Peeking is “allowed”, but be carefull with the aleatoric uncertainty - it will mess with you....

Always be critical



Bayesian Bandit Testing

A/B-test challenges....

\$\$\$

Suboptimal for
23.5 hours

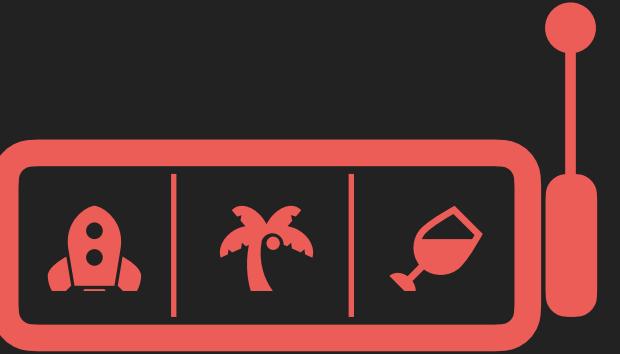
Test keeps running
even after winner is
found...



non-stationary environment

Fails test on
Monday / Tuesday

But better on
weekends



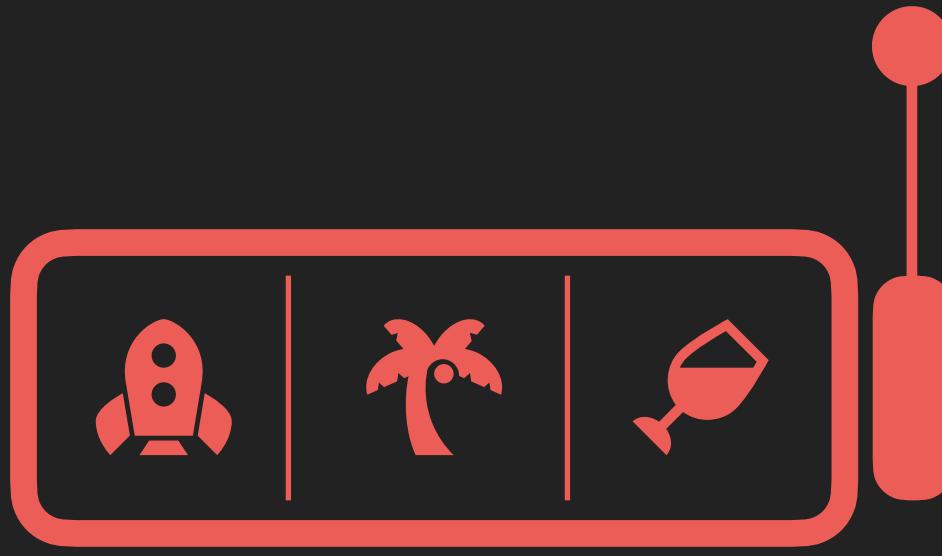
Bayesian Bandits

A bandit test system can handle soft activation / deactivation of all variants

....while you sleep :-)

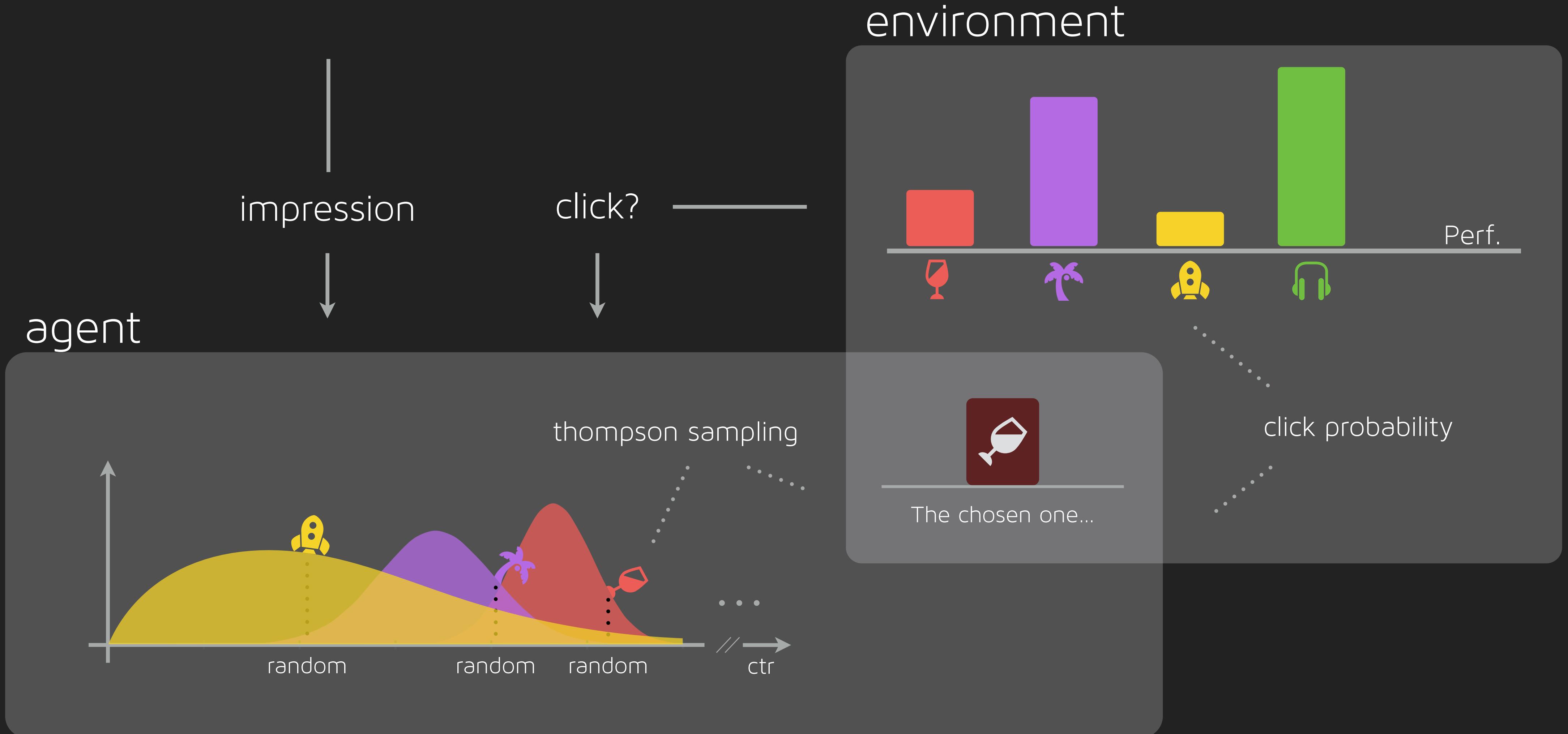
Just put it in and let it run....

Opportunity to rule out losers...

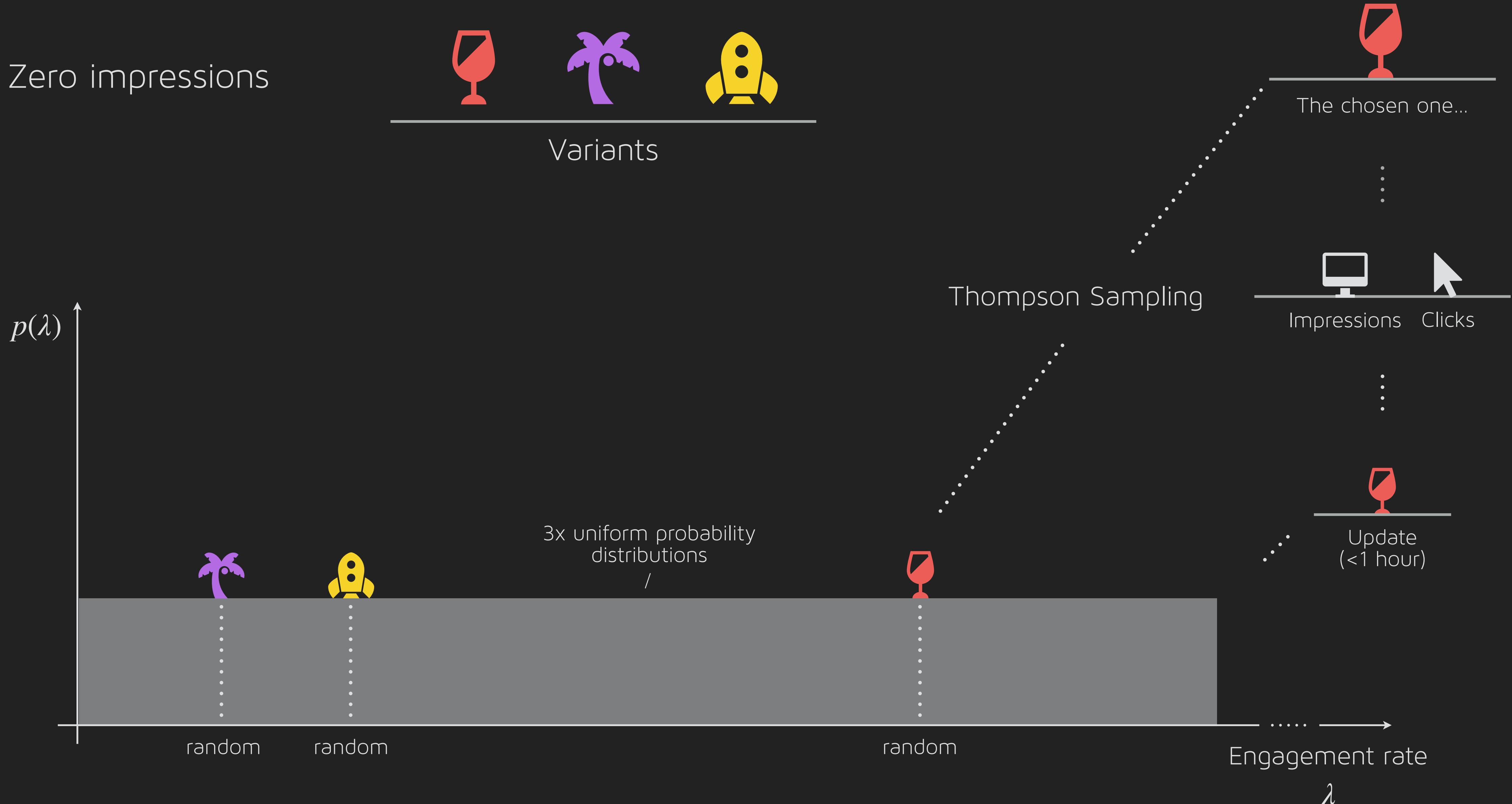


The Process

Bandit Architecture



Bayesian Beta Bandits



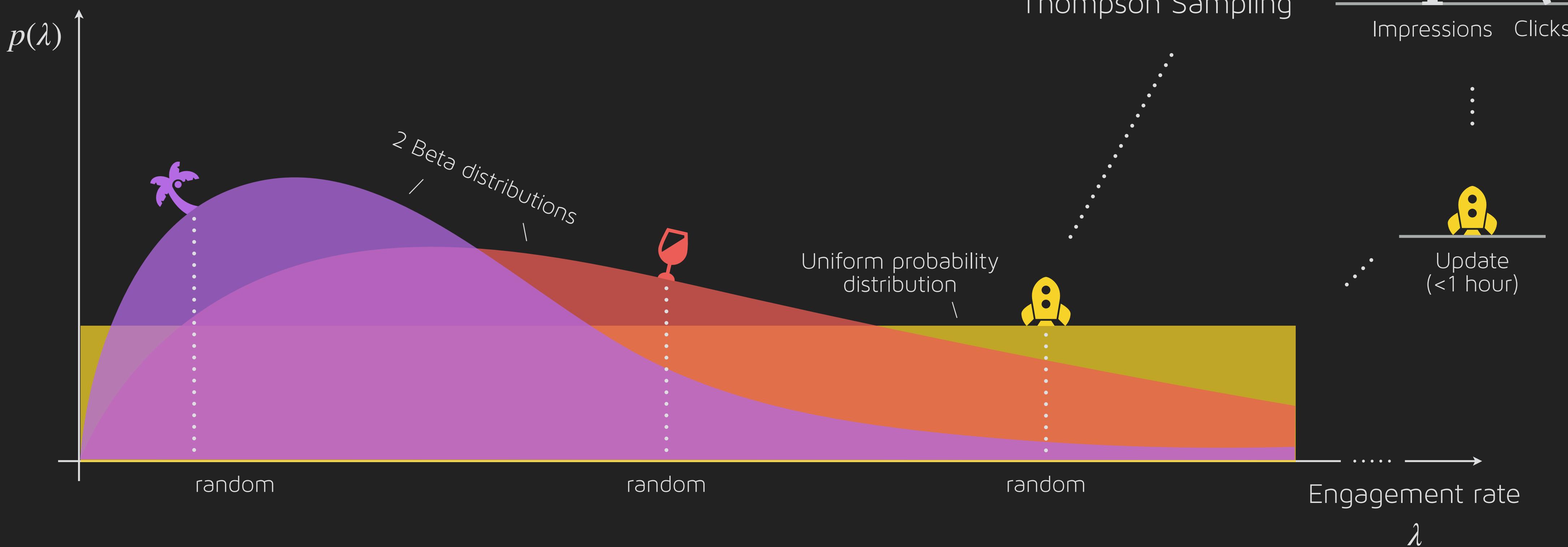
Bayesian Beta Bandits

Few impressions

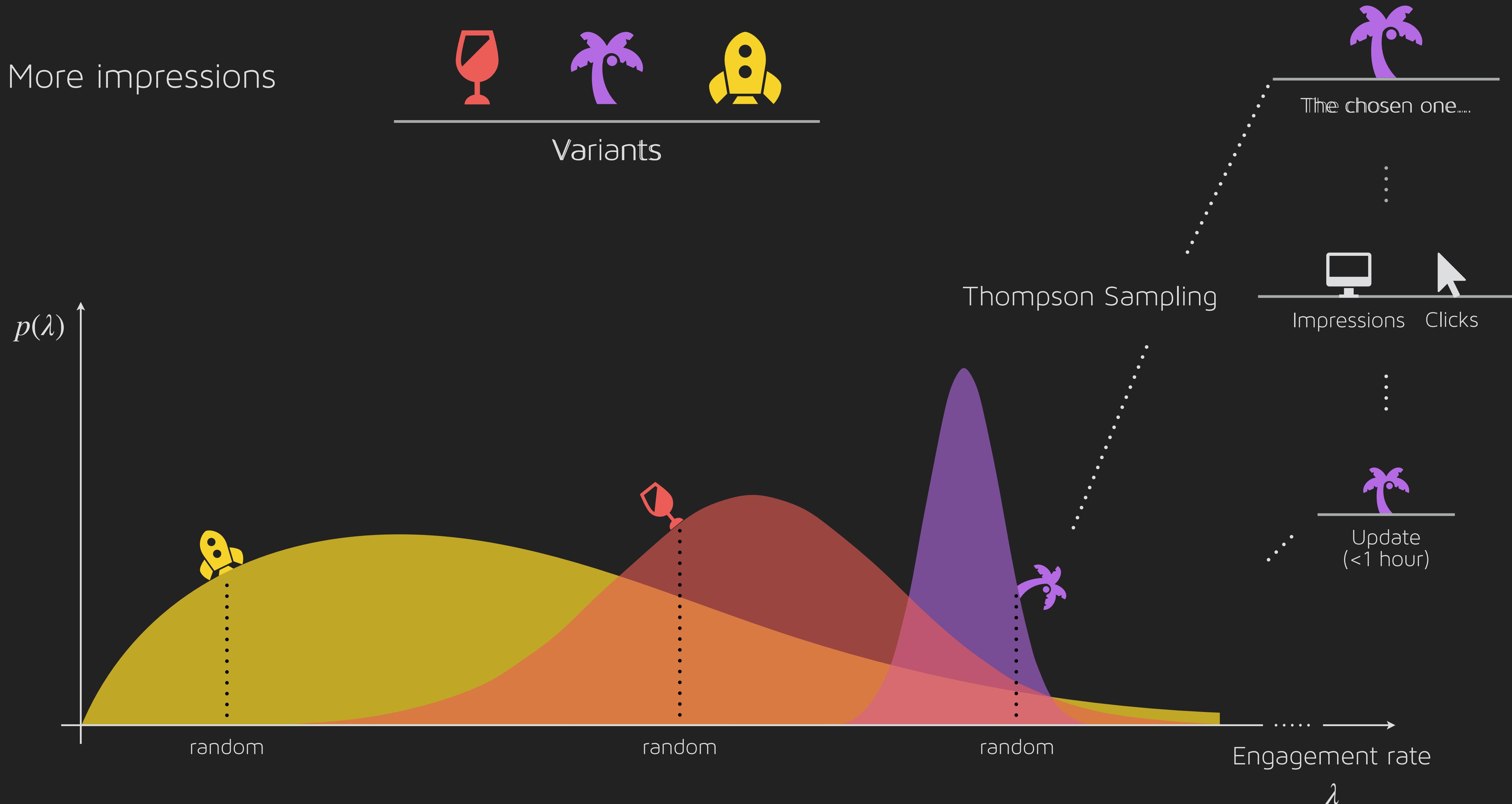


Variants

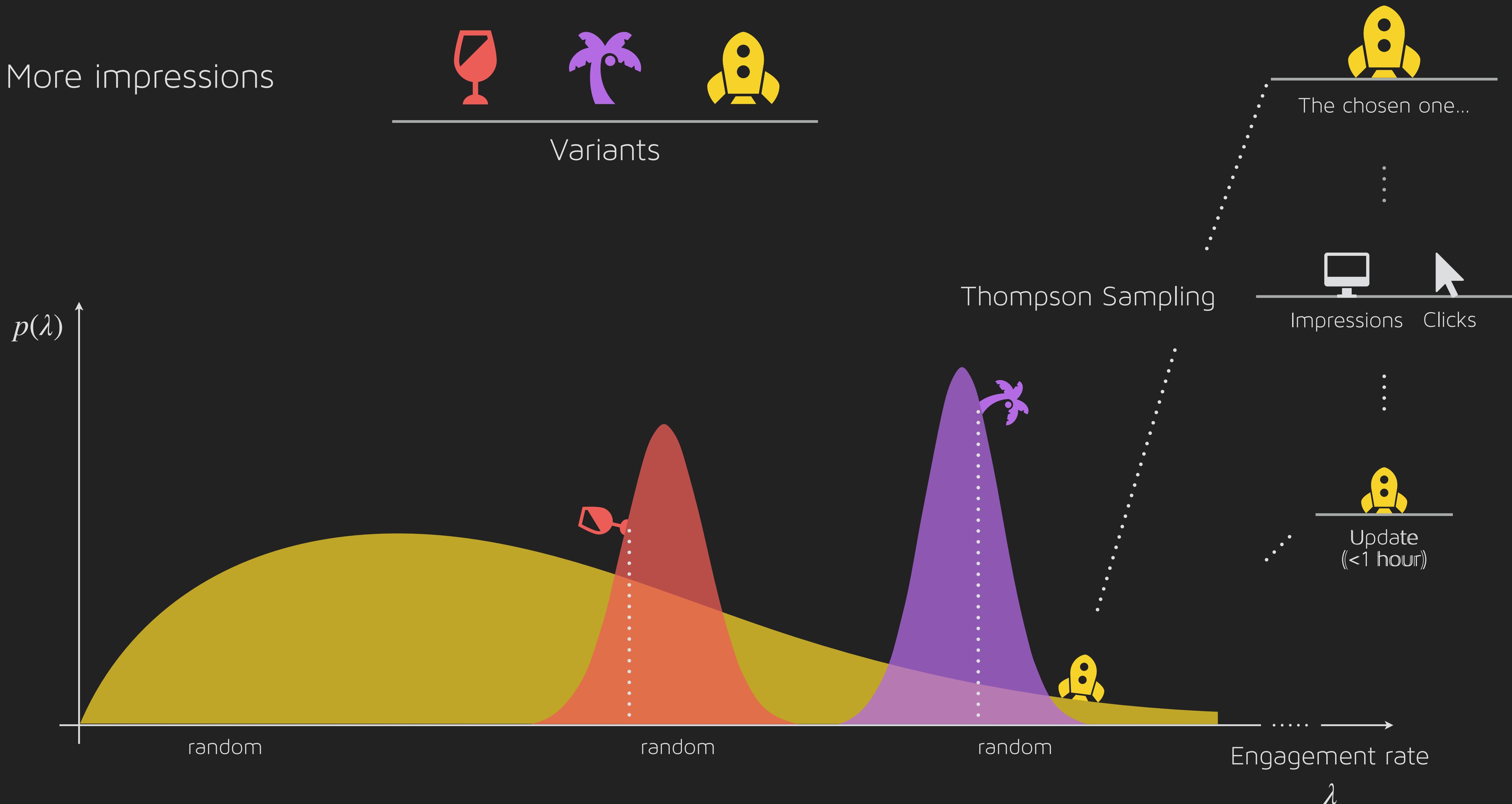
A large, stylized yellow rocket ship icon is centered on a black background. The rocket has a pointed nose cone at the top, two circular windows on the side, and two small fins on the side. It is positioned above a thin horizontal grey bar.



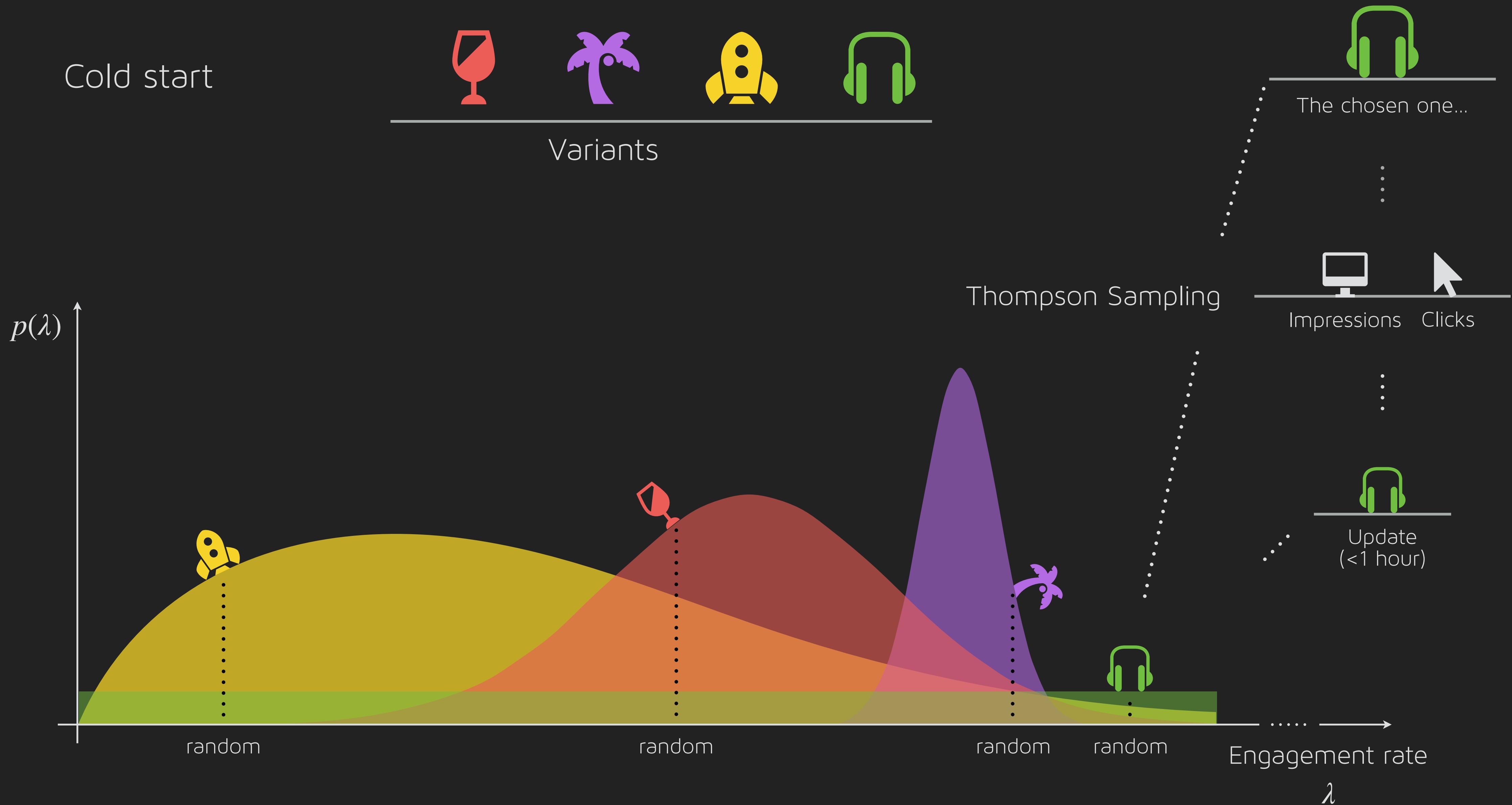
Bayesian Beta Bandits



Bayesian Beta Bandits



Bayesian Beta Bandits



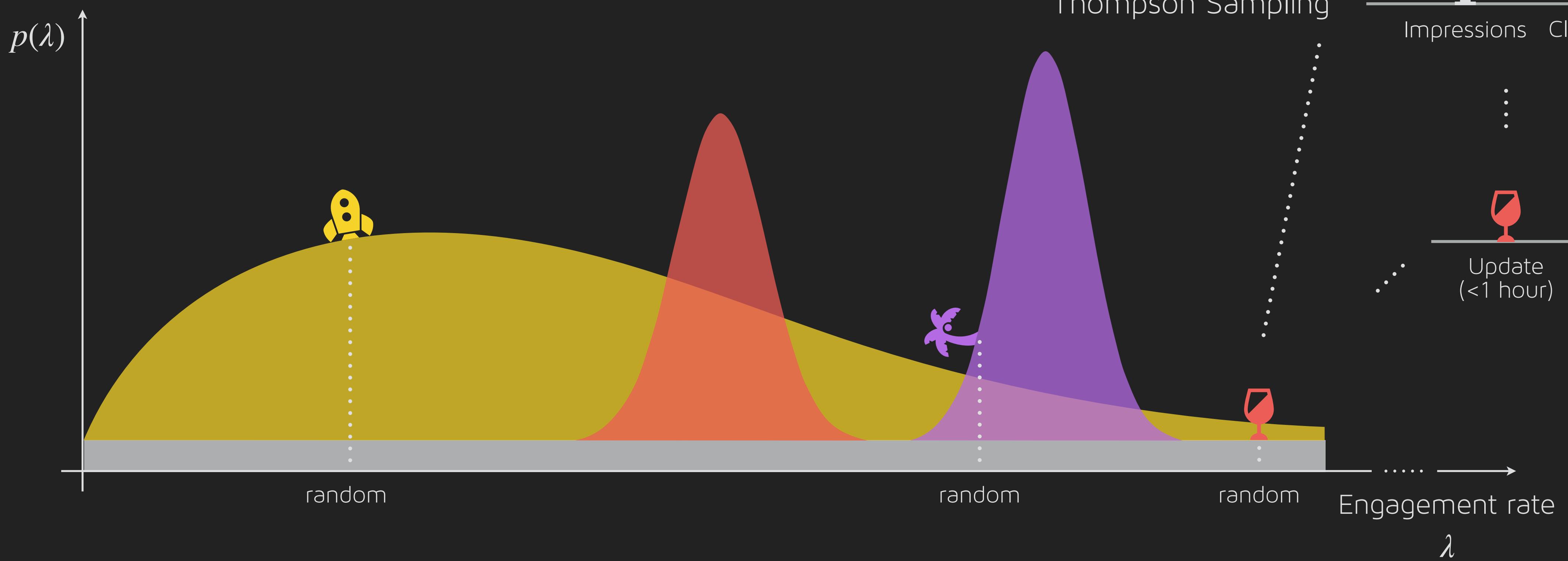
Exploration

vs.

Exploitation

Bayesian Beta Bandits

Naive Exploration
 ϵ - greedy

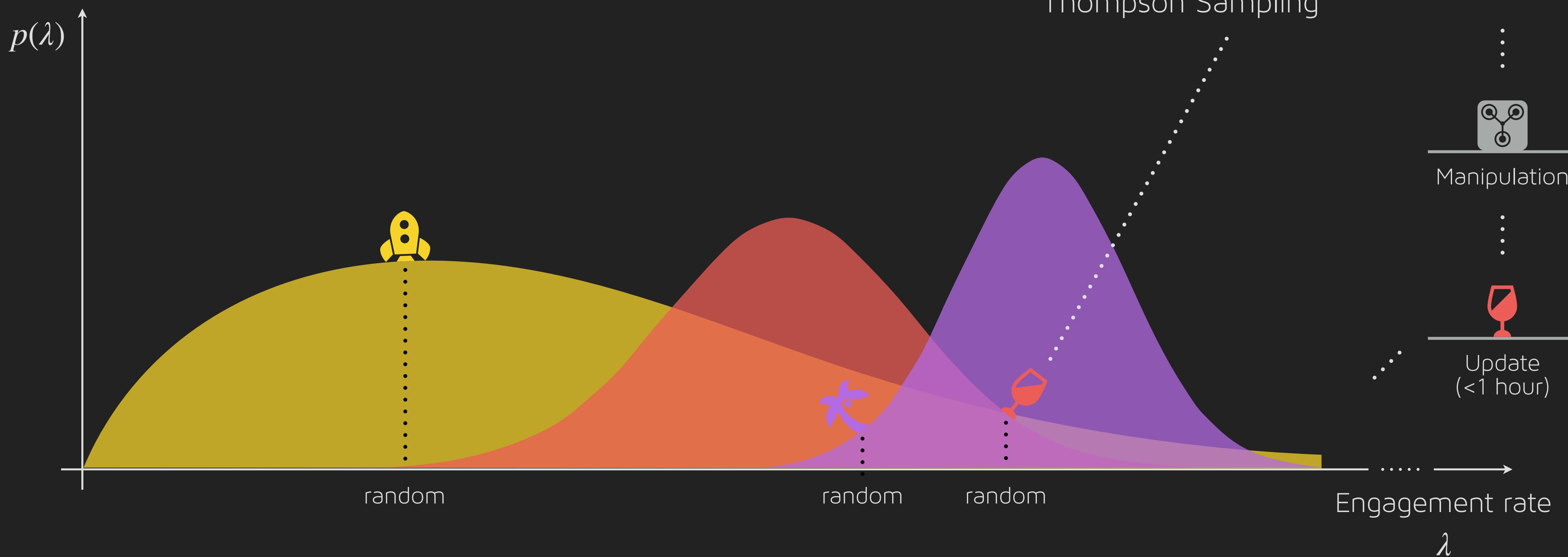


Bayesian Beta Bandits

More impressions



Variants



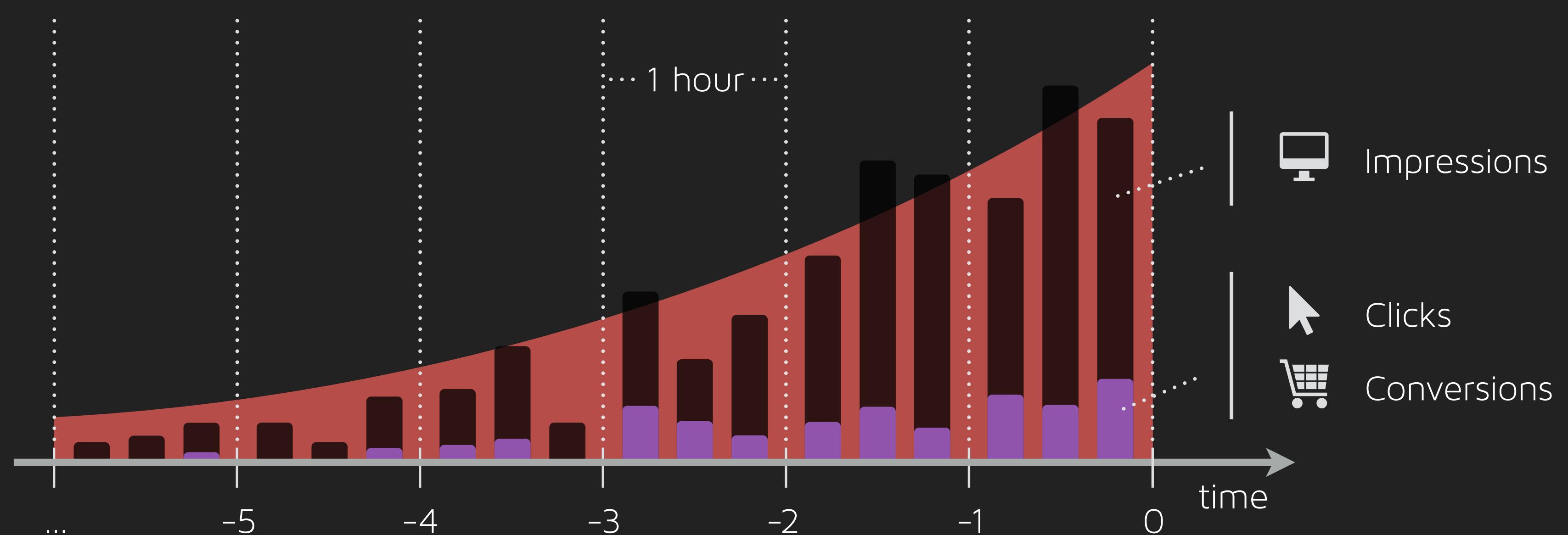


Recency
forgetting the past...

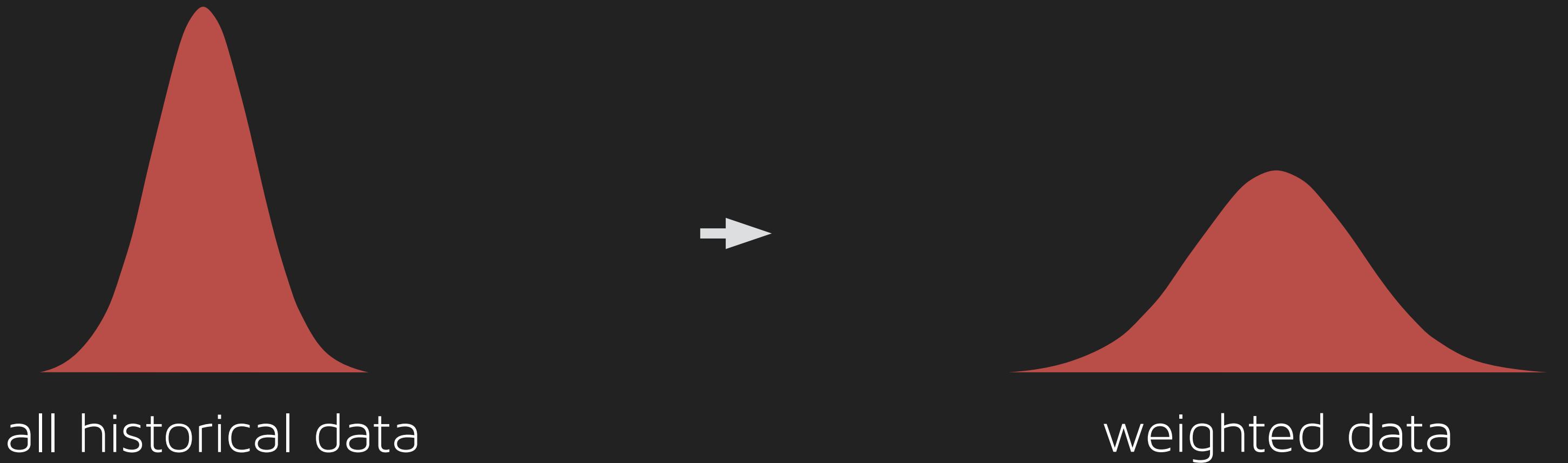
Recency - forgetting the past

Weight all counts
too limit the
influence of
historical data

Increases the
epistemic
uncertainty



weighted counts
are used to
define our
knowledge

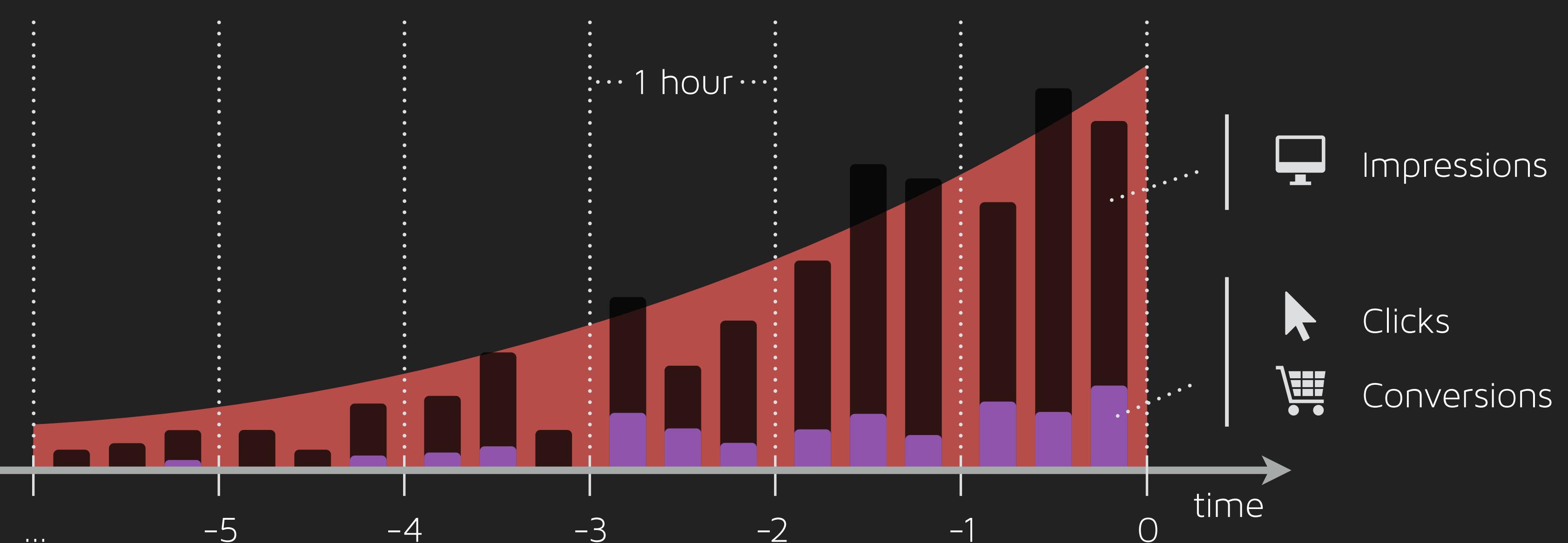


Recency - forgetting the past

Weight all counts
too limit the
influence of
historical data

Increases the
epistemic
uncertainty

decay
function



$$f(t) = \alpha^t, \text{ where } 0 \leq \alpha \leq 1$$

Explore / Exploit trade-off

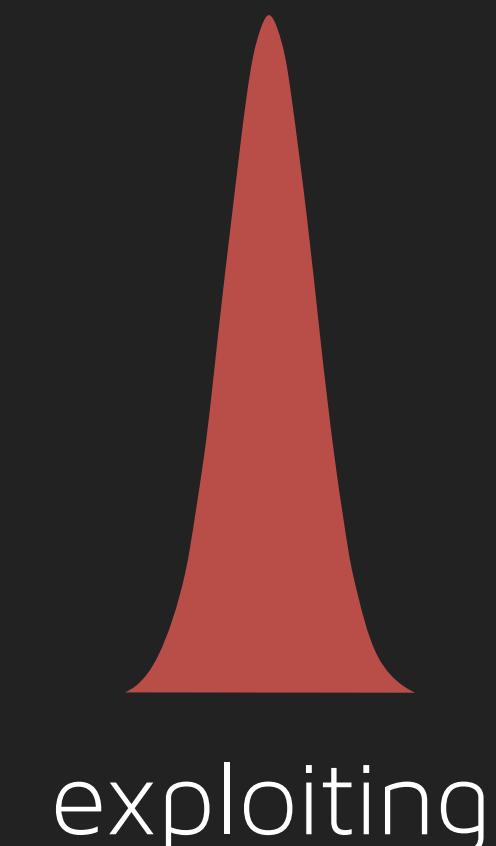
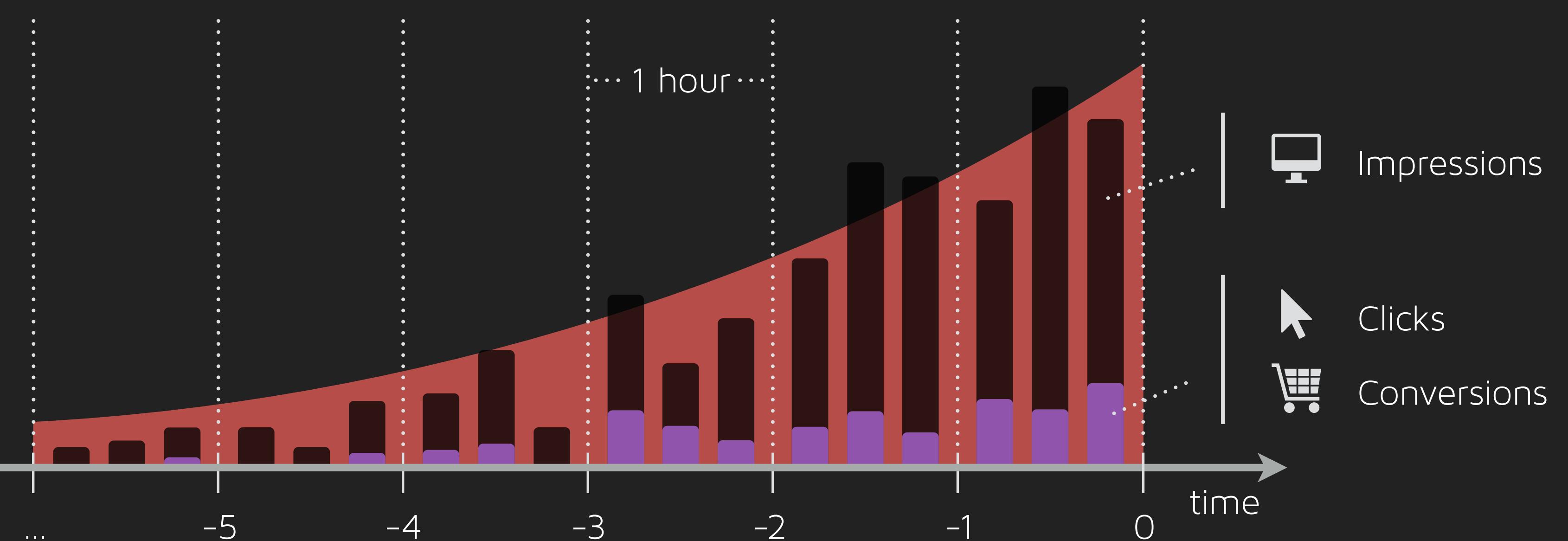
Weight all counts
too limit the
influence of
historical data

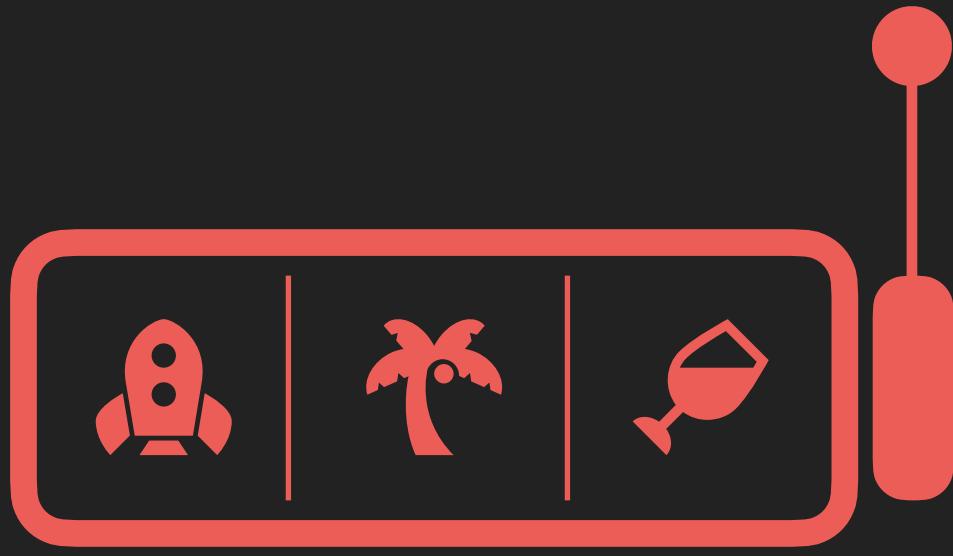
Increases the
epistemic
uncertainty

balance between
adapting to the
environment

or

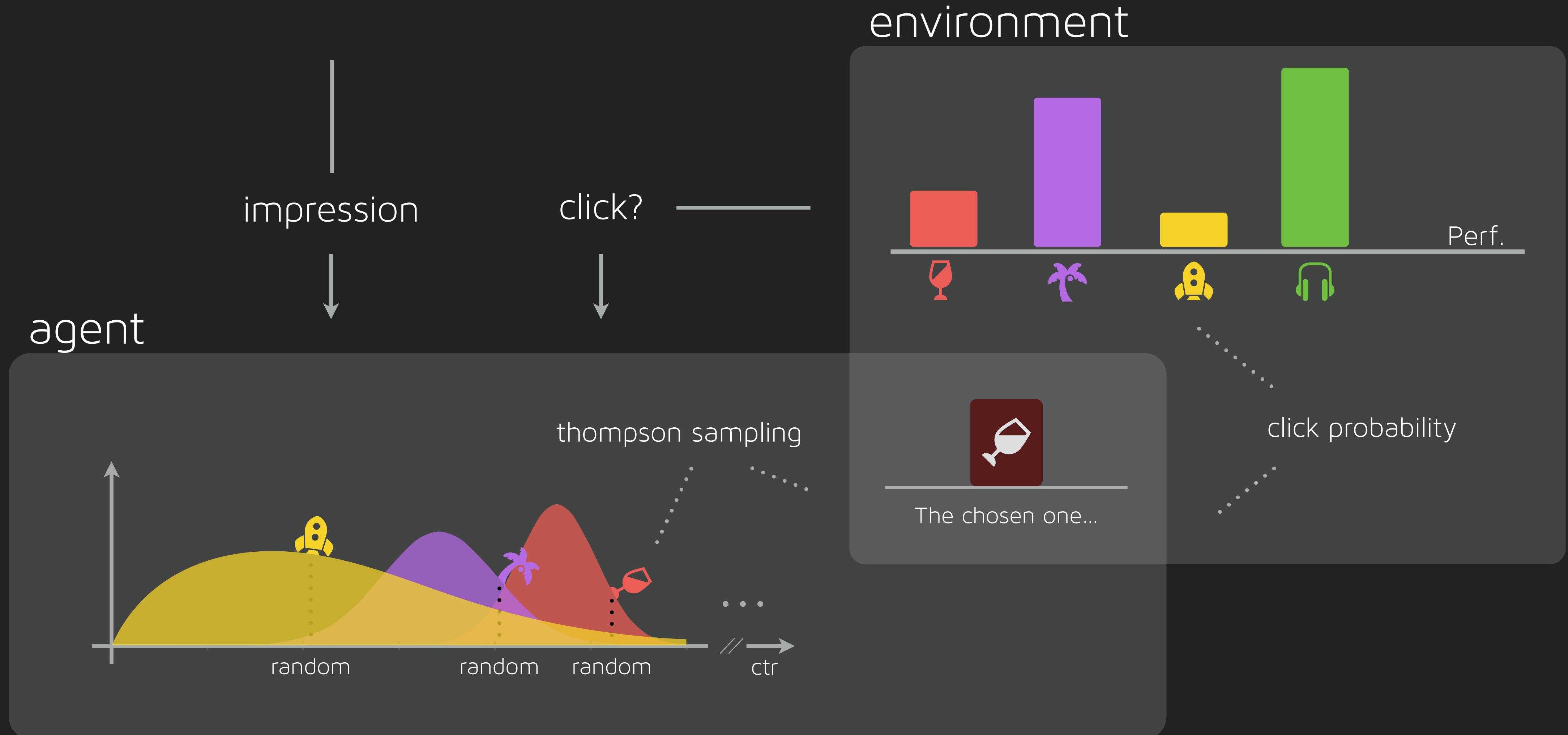
just going for it...





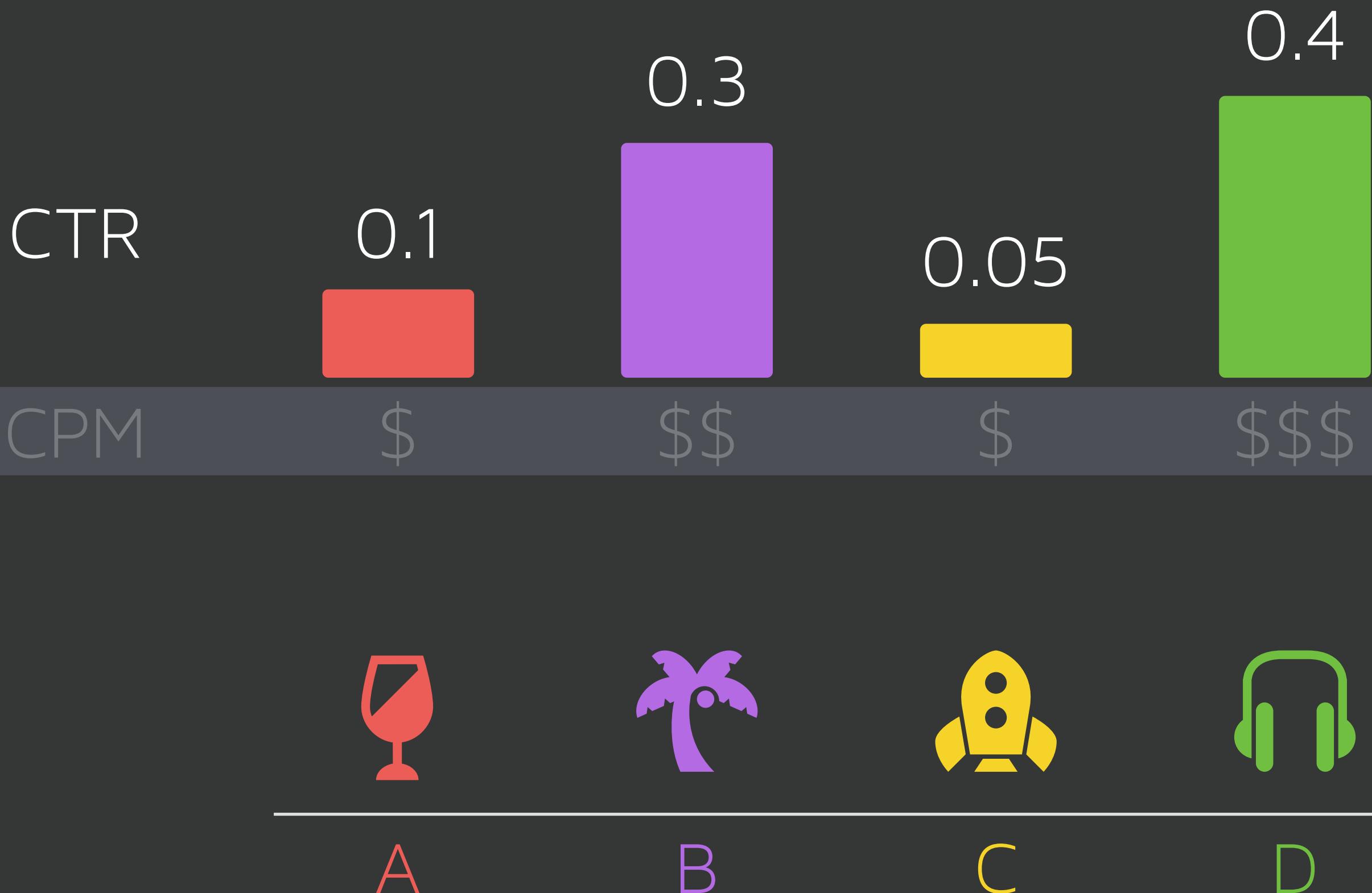
Simulation

Bandit Architecture



Bandit Architecture

environment





metric

regret - average

in words

Average number of times the optimal ad was not selected.

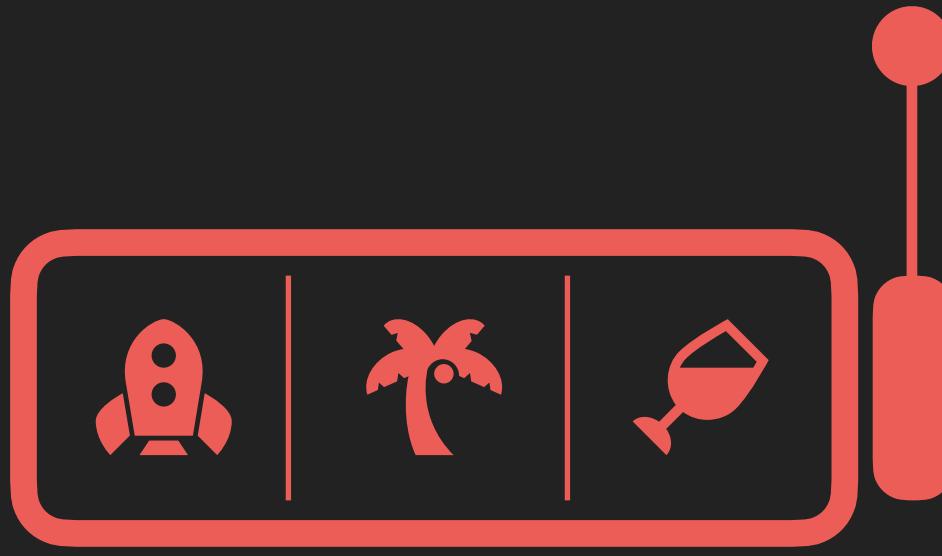
lower is better

in math

$$\rho = T\mu^* - \sum_{t=1}^T \hat{r}_t \quad \mu^* = \max_k(\mu_k)$$

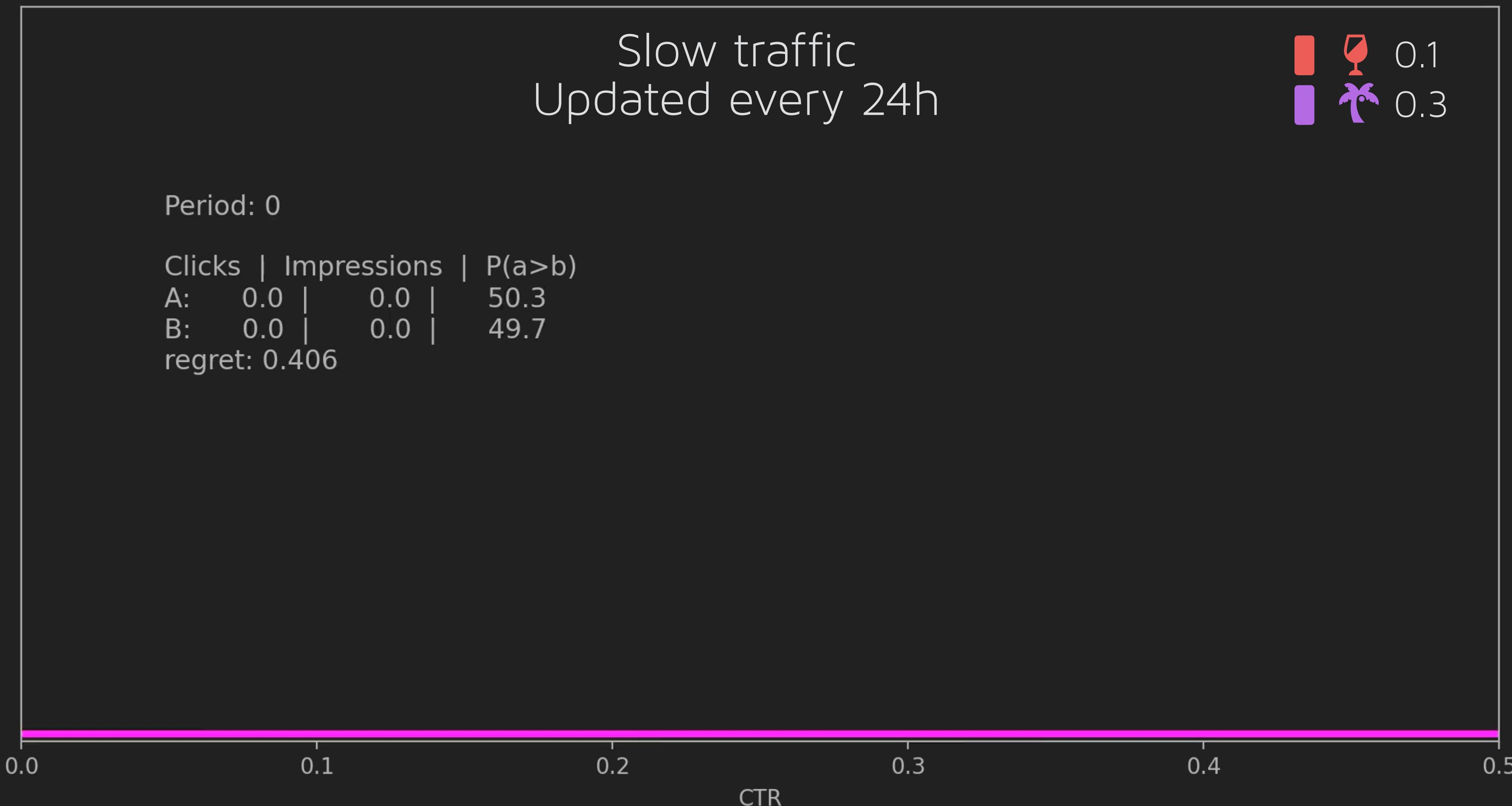
in code

```
(max_reward_mean - n_optimal_selections_b) / imp_per_period
```



Bayesian Bandit A/B testing

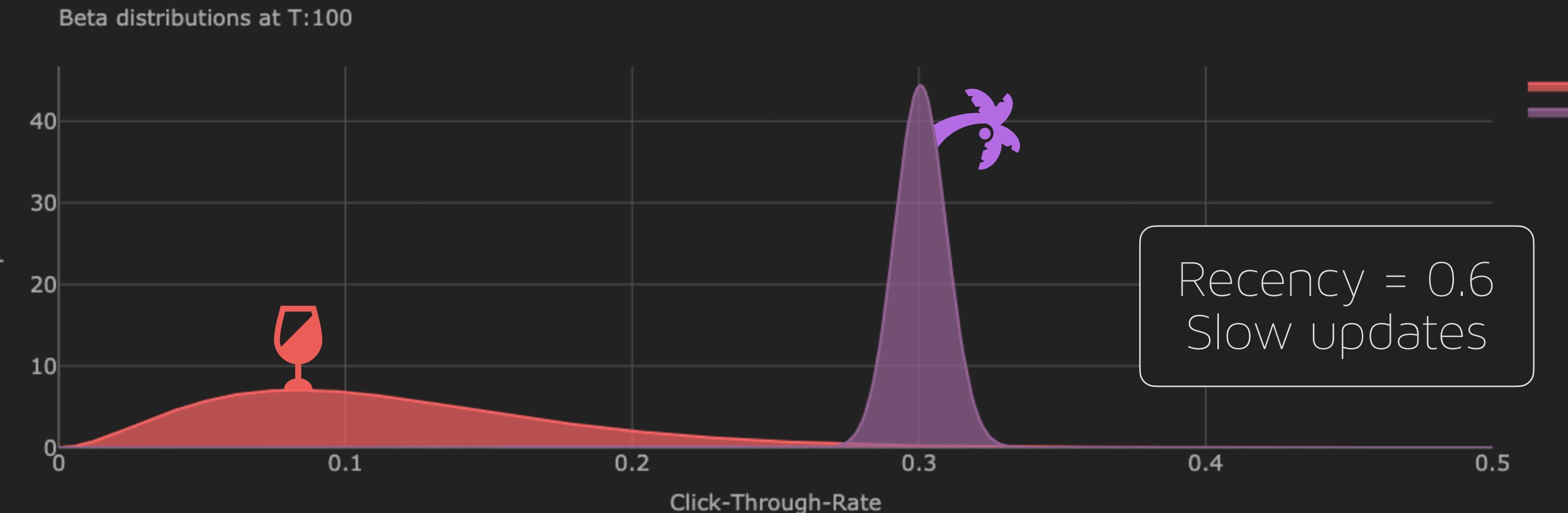
Bandit A/B-test



Bandit A/B-test

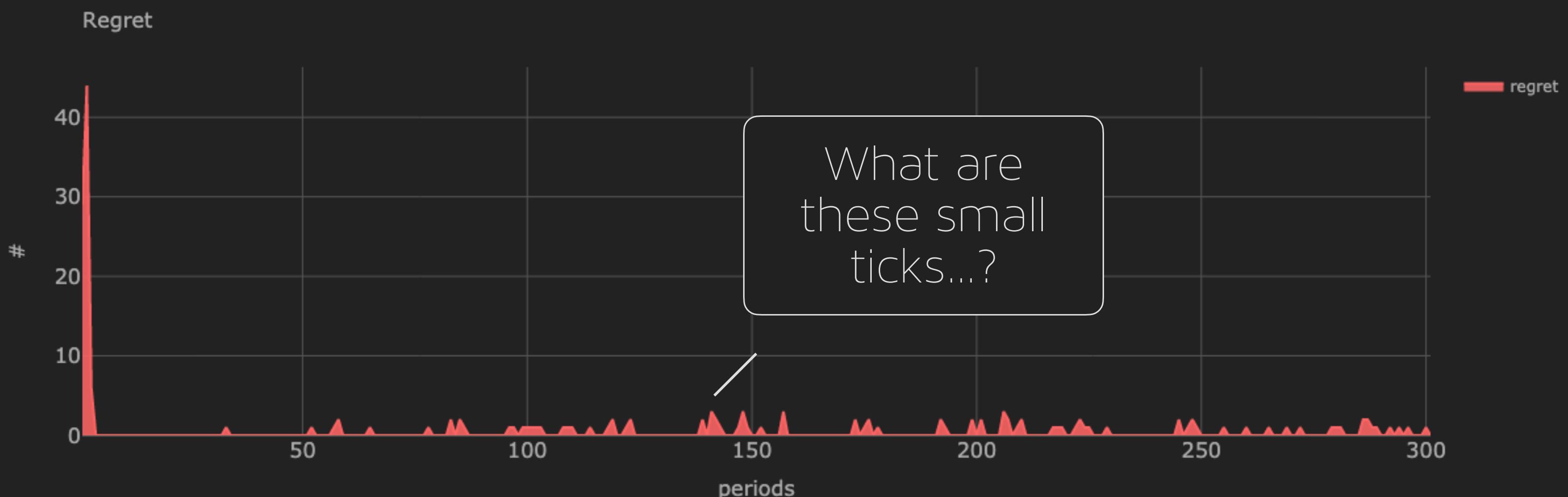
Beta Distributions

B is clearly in front
and we know very
little of A



Regret

Average number of
times the optimal
ad was not
selected.



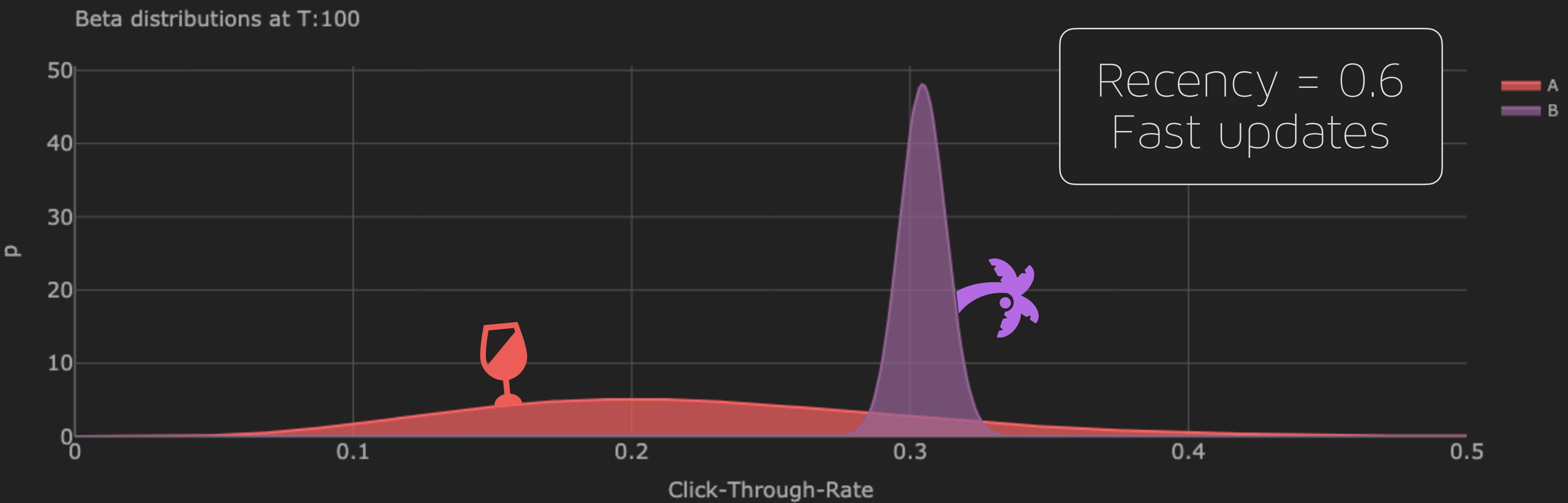
Bandit A/B-test



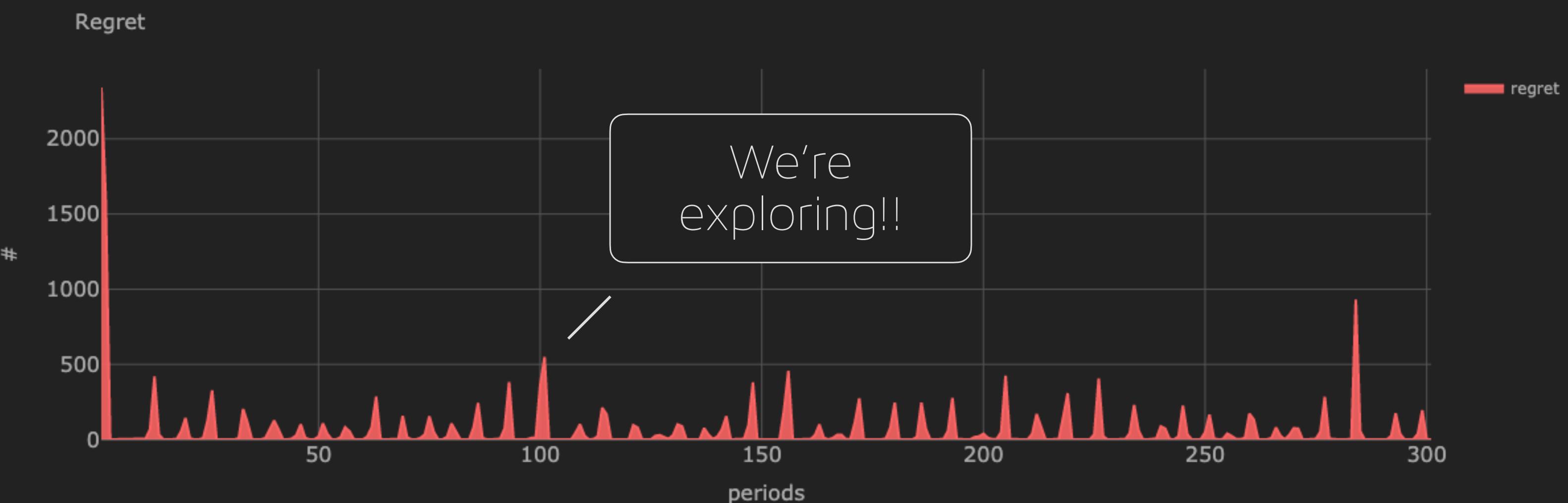
Bandit A/B-test

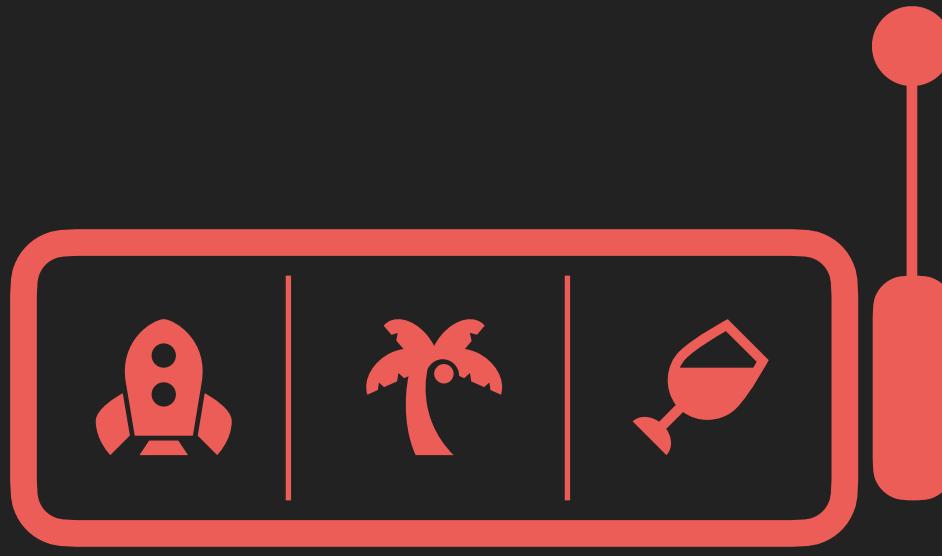
Beta Distributions

Example of the
recency making A
wide



This makes A get
selected more
often and we're
exploring...

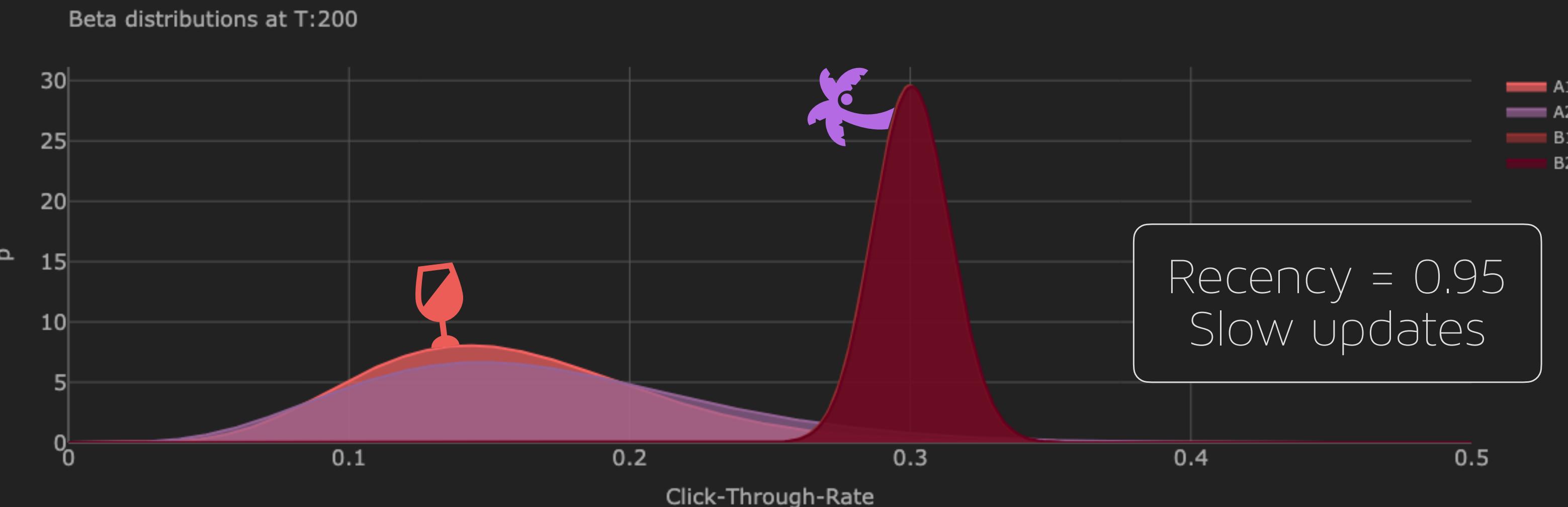




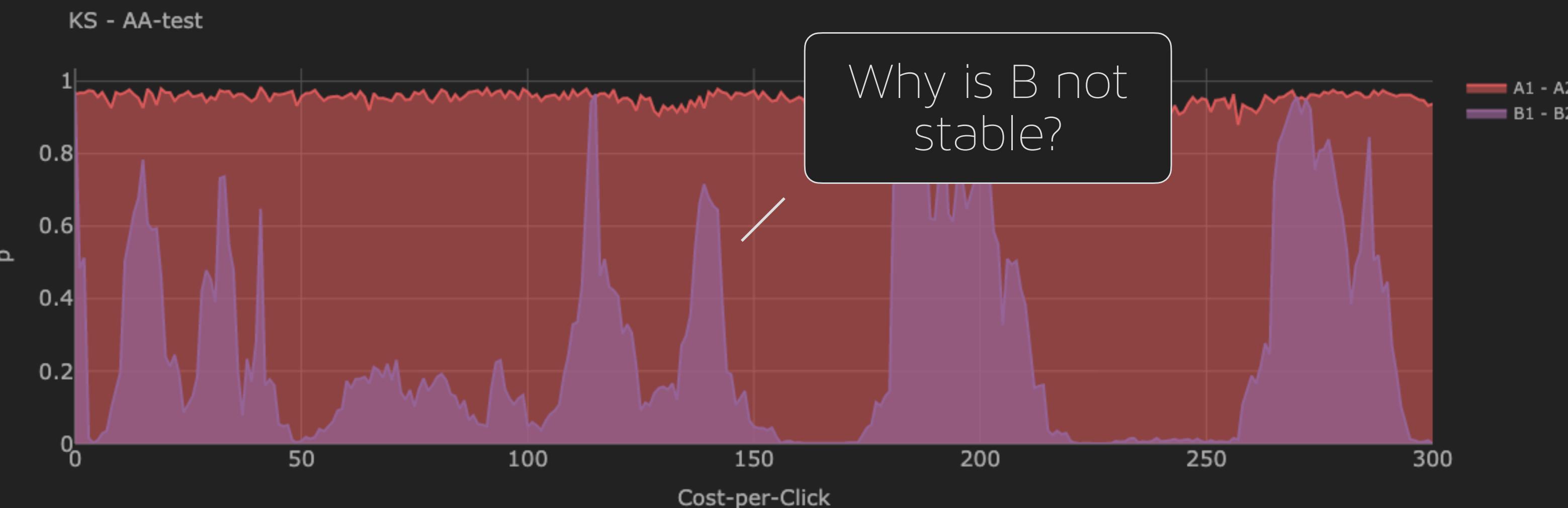
Bayesian A/A testing

Bandit A/A-test

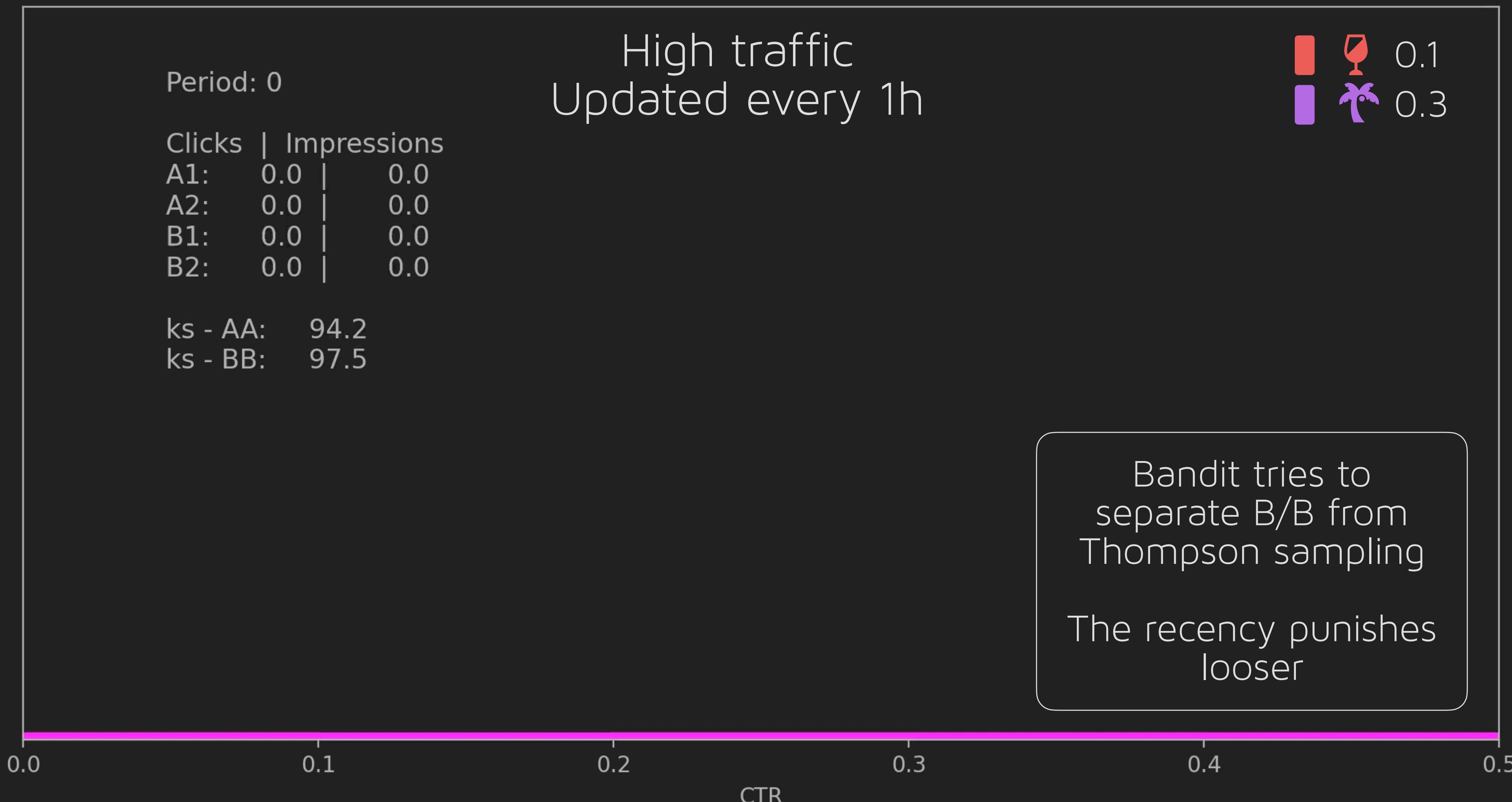
Both A/A and B/B
seems similar

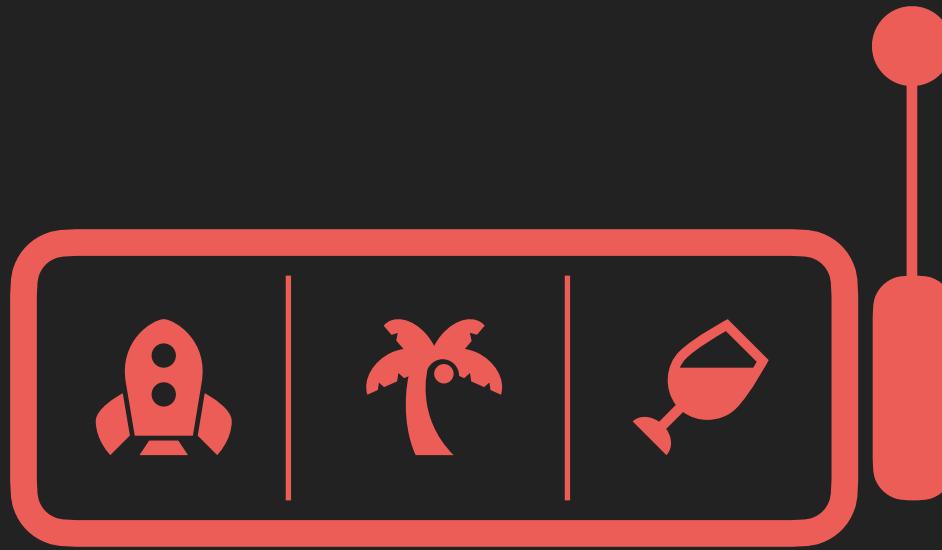


Kolmogorov-Smirnov
Similarity score



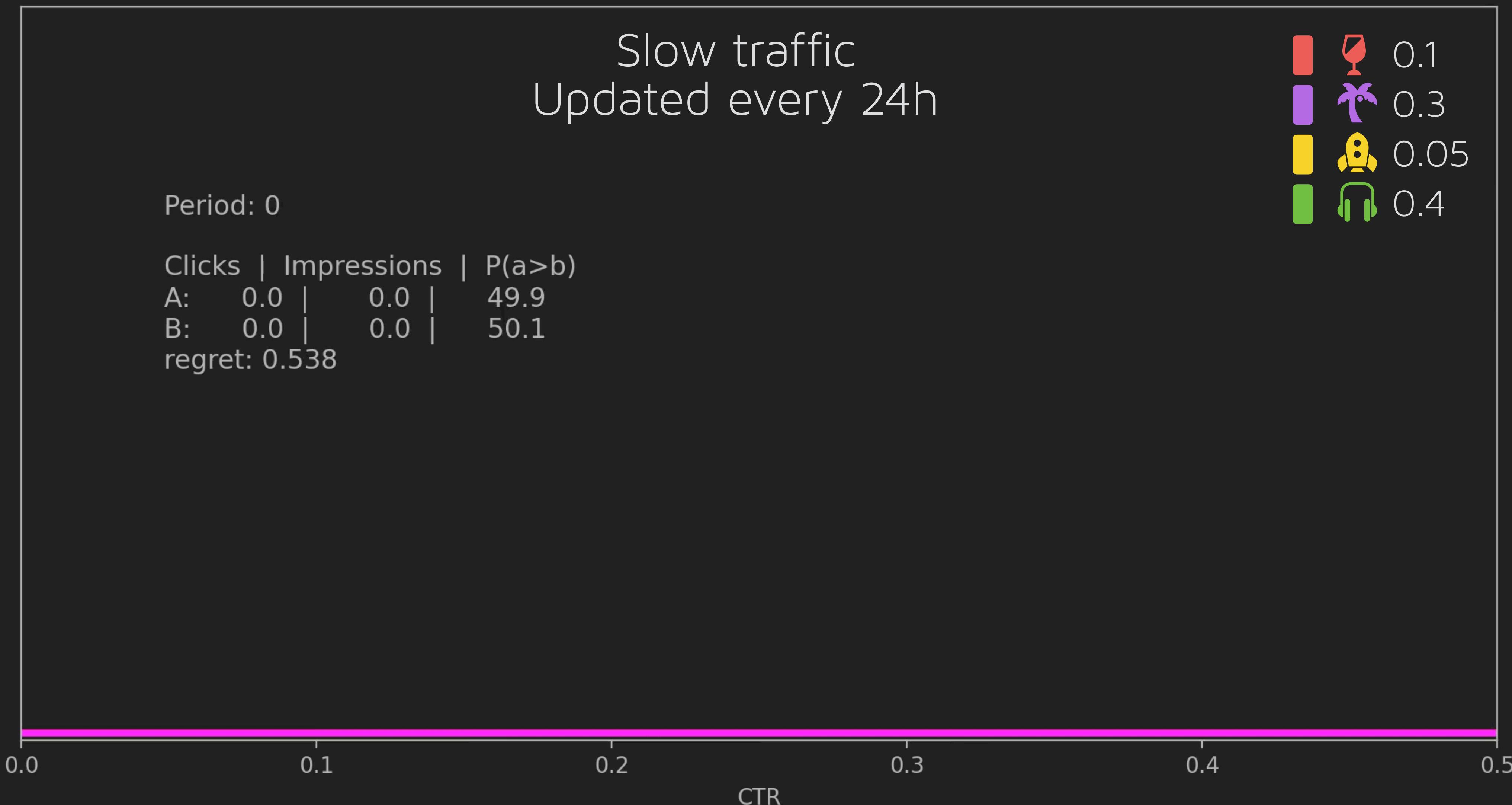
Bandit A/A-test





Cold starting...

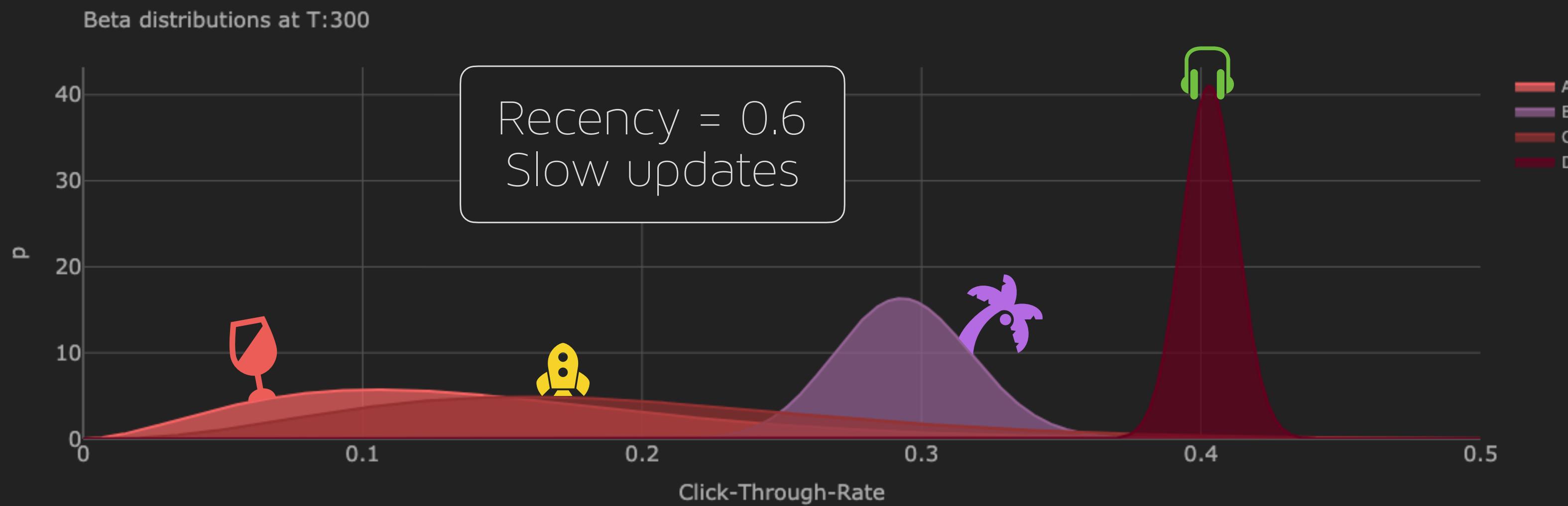
Bandit A/B/C/D-test



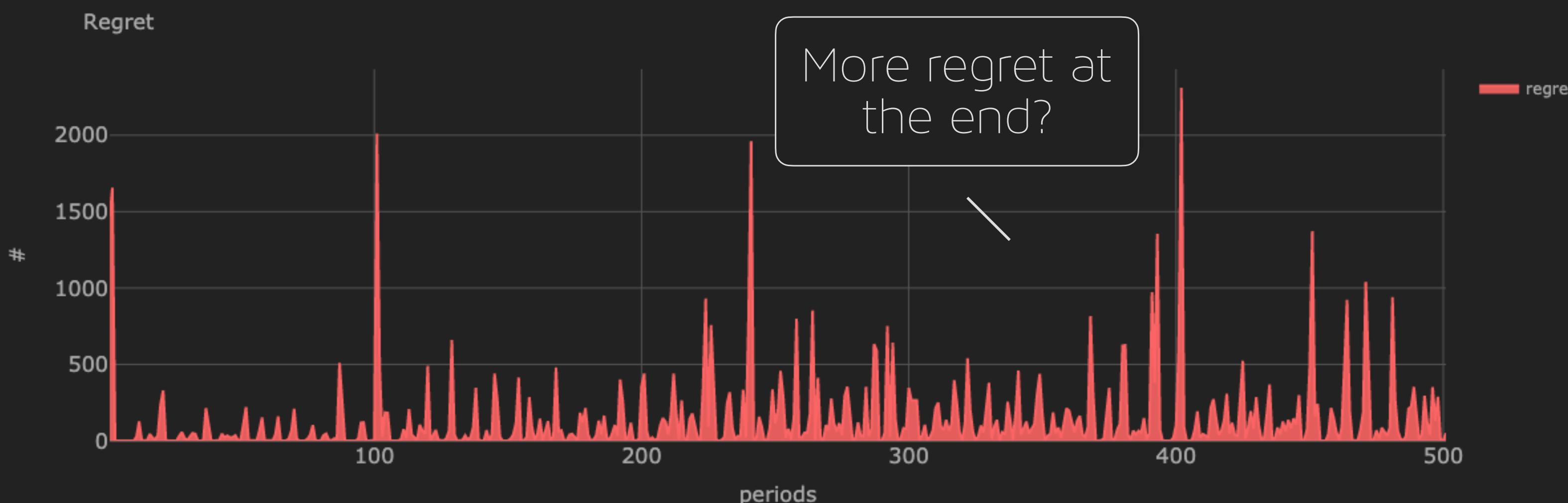
Bandit A/B/C/D-test

Beta Distributions

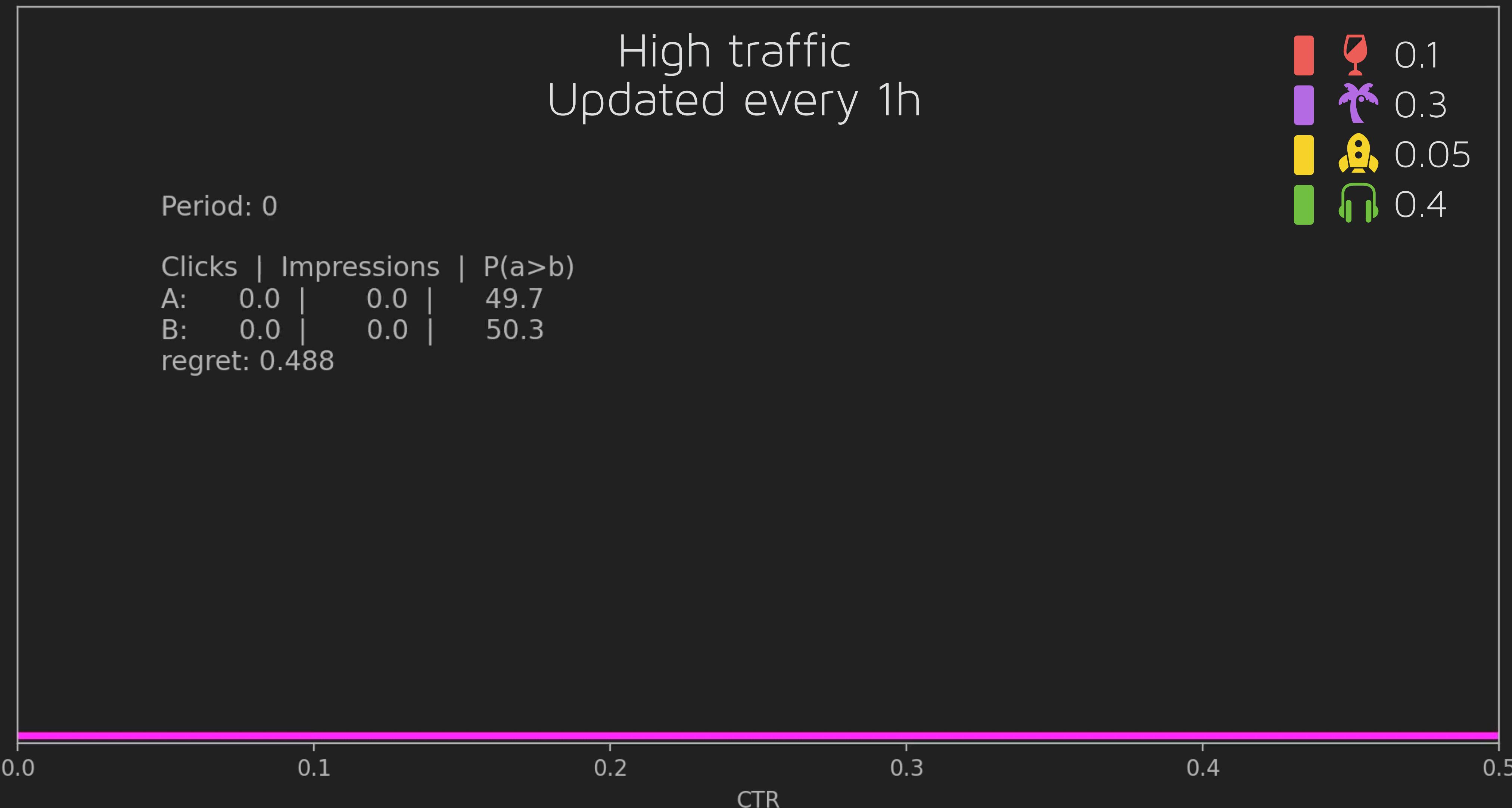
Example of the
recency making A
wide



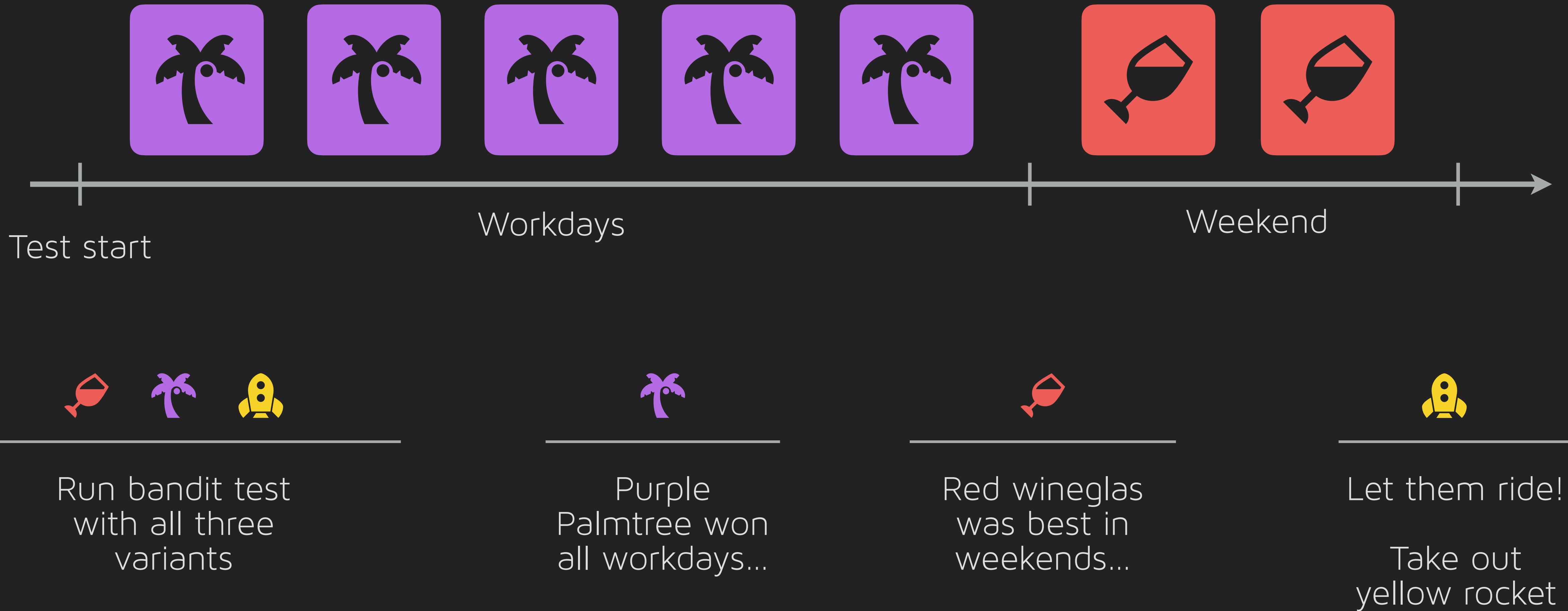
This makes A get
selected more
often and we're
exploring...



Bandit A/B/C/D-test

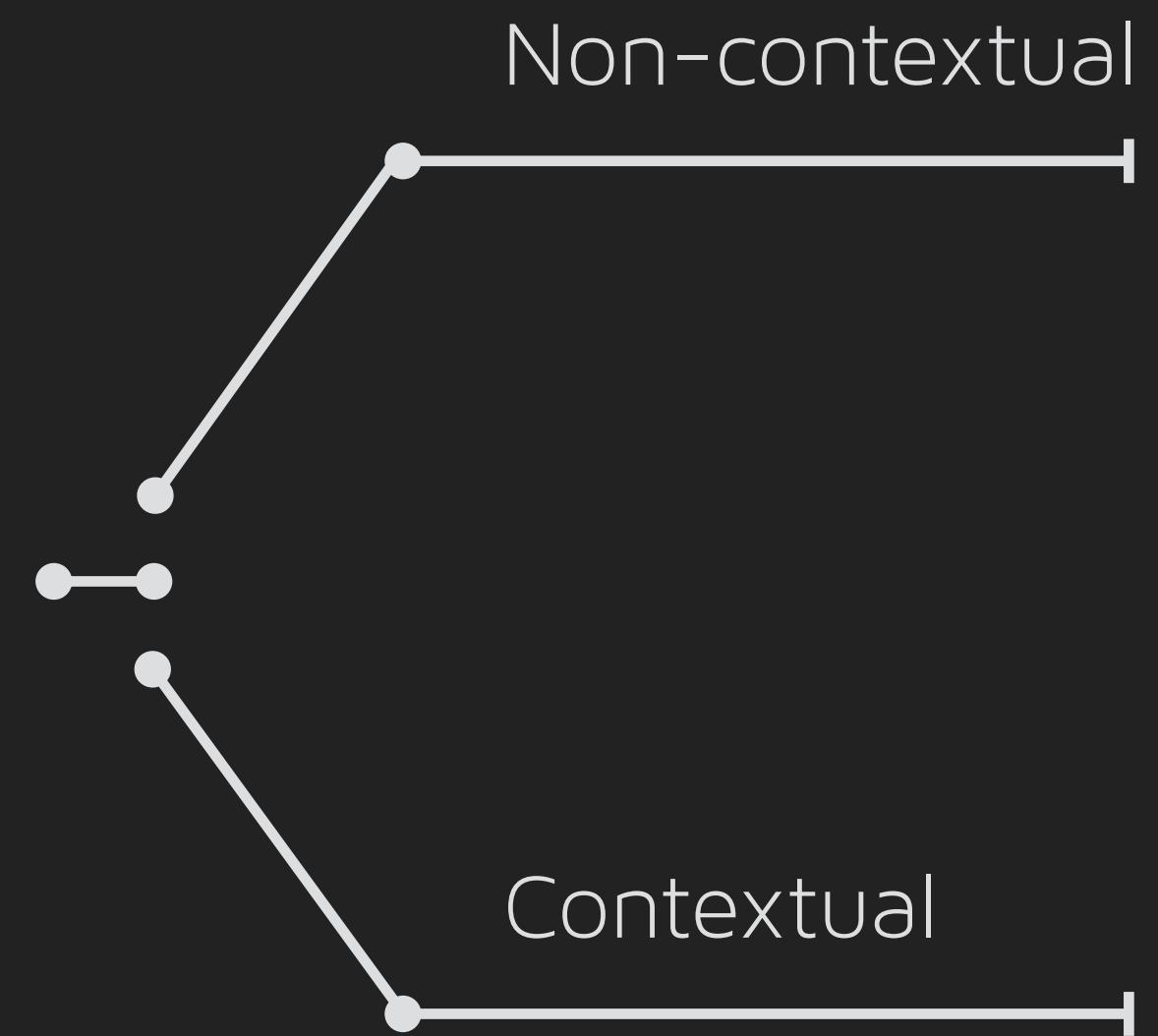
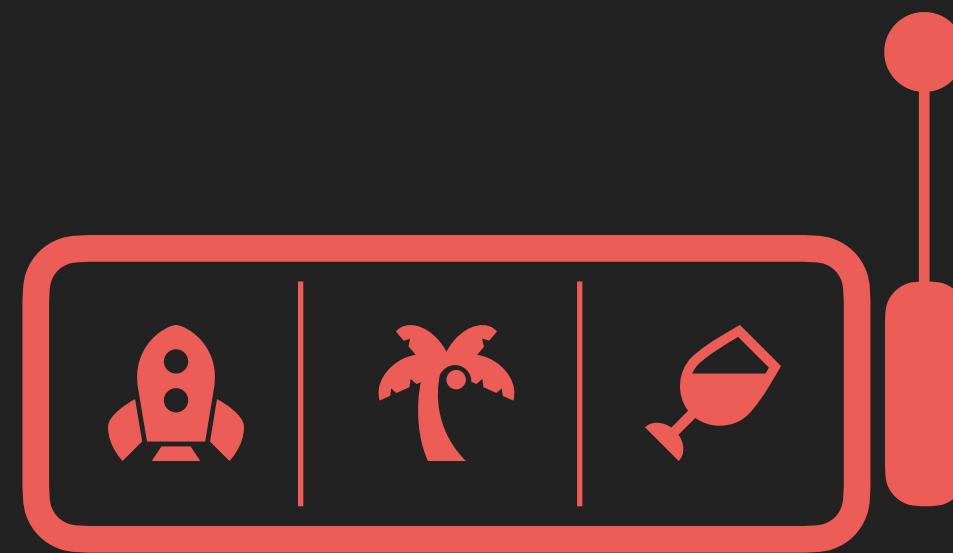


Look for losers instead...



In a normal A/B test - expensive to let it ride

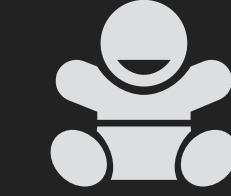
Things I didn't cover...



History



History



User



Domain



Location



Device



Other Metrics

Bayes Factor | False Detection Rate | ...



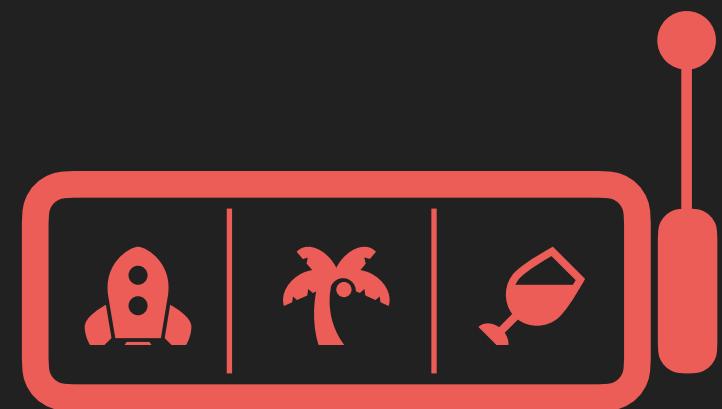
Stopping Criteria

ROPE metrics -

Bayesian Bandit End-of-Level summary



Uncertainty is important for practical evaluations

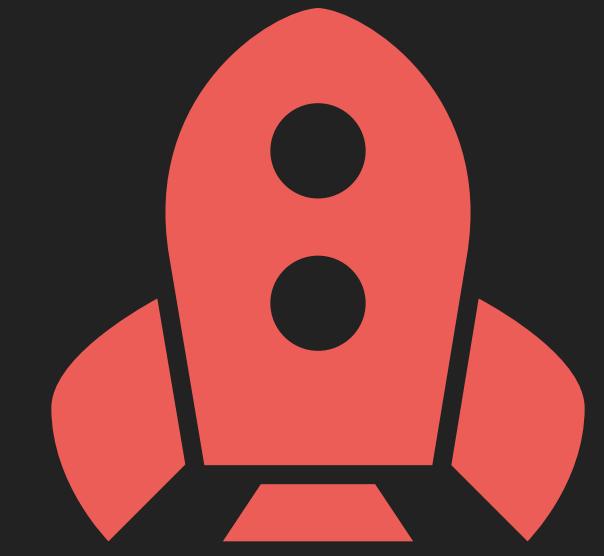


Bayesian Bandit A/B-testing - white box
More dynamic - harder to interpret and yet not...



Let it ride - not necessarily one winner.
Don't have to use it as an A/B-test....

Always be critical



References

References

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Chris Stucchio

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kruschke

Bayesian Estimation Supersedes the t Test

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Hass et al.

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<https://gist.github.com/lucidyan/89eee0db8ce353d91e6bfbc51b5dcf19>

Sureshkumar

Bayesian experimentation methods for products

<https://towardsdatascience.com/bayesian-experimentation-methods-for-products-636514951e43>



The end...