

PLSC 30600

Week 2: Identification, ignorability, and propensity scores

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Recap MCAR: Missing Completely at Random

- Let Y_i and R_i be random variables with $\text{Supp } [R_i] = \{0, 1\}$.

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- Y_i is MCAR if:
 - $Y_i \perp R_i$ (independence of outcome and response).
 - $\Pr[R_i = 1] > 0$ (nonzero probability of response).
- Note: implicitly, MCAR is with respect to *all* data, observed and unobserved. So, $R_i \perp (Y_i, X_i, \dots, Z_i, \dots)$.

Missingness wrt the full data

Definition (Full data, observed data, and response indicator)

Let U_i denote the *full-data* random vector for unit i , and let $R_i \in \{0, 1\}$ indicate whether the outcome component Y_i of U_i is observed. Write $U_i = (Y_i, X_i)$ where X_i collects all covariates measured (or conceptually present) for unit i . We observe

$$Y_i^* = Y_i R_i + (-99)(1 - R_i).$$

MCAR: Missing Completely at Random

Definition (Missing Completely at Random (MCAR))

Let $U_i = (Y_i, X_i)$ be the full-data vector and let $R_i \in \{0, 1\}$ be the response indicator. We say Y_i is *missing completely at random* if the following conditions hold:

1. $R_i \perp\!\!\!\perp U_i$ (missingness is independent of the full data),
2. $\Pr(R_i = 1) > 0$ (nonzero probability of response).

Equivalently, $R_i \perp\!\!\!\perp (Y_i, X_i)$ and $\Pr(R_i = 1) > 0$.

MAR: Missing at Random

Definition (Missing at Random (MAR))

Let Y_i and R_i be random variables and let $R_i \in \{0, 1\}$ be the response indicator. We observe X_i for all units (even when $R_i = 0$). We say Y_i is *missing at random conditional on X_i* if the following conditions hold:

1. $R_i \perp\!\!\!\perp Y_i \mid X_i$ (conditional independence of missingness and outcome),
2. $\exists \varepsilon > 0$ such that $\Pr(R_i = 1 \mid X_i) > \varepsilon$ a.s. (positivity).

Proposition (MCAR implies MAR)

If $R_i \perp\!\!\!\perp (Y_i, X_i)$, then $R_i \perp\!\!\!\perp Y_i \mid X_i$. Therefore, MCAR implies MAR (with the same positivity condition).

Recap: missing data → potential outcomes

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- Identification requires assumptions about the assignment mechanism.

Recap: Manski and Nagin (1998) Utah juvenile court data

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- How should judges sentence convicted juvenile offenders?
- Juvenile offenders in Utah may be assigned to residential or non-residential treatment programs.

Treatment (sentencing): $D = 1$ residential, $D = 0$ non-residential

Outcome (recidivism): $Y = 1$ recidivates, $Y = 0$ does not recidivate

Random assignment

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- Aside: Does this independence need to hold for the full data?

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 - $0 < \Pr[D_i = 1] < 1$ (positivity).
- Under this assumption, $E[\tau_i]$ is point identified.
- Aside: Does this independence need to hold for the full data?
- Implicitly: $R_i \perp\!\!\!\perp U_i^{pre}$ (missingness is independent of the full pre-intervention data)

ATE under random assignment

- If D_i is randomly assigned, then:

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- If D_i is randomly assigned, then:

$$E[Y_i(1)] = E[Y_i \mid D_i = 1], \quad E[Y_i(0)] = E[Y_i \mid D_i = 0].$$

$$E[\tau_i] = E[Y_i \mid D_i = 1] - E[Y_i \mid D_i = 0].$$

Difference-in-means estimator

- Plug-in estimator under random assignment:

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$$\hat{E}[\tau_i] = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n Y_i D_i}{\sum_{i=1}^n D_i} - \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n Y_i (1 - D_i)}{\sum_{i=1}^n (1 - D_i)}.$$

Difference-in-means estimator (matrix form)

- Let

$$\mathbf{Y} = \begin{bmatrix} Y_1 \\ Y_2 \\ \vdots \\ Y_n \end{bmatrix}, \quad \mathbf{D} = \begin{bmatrix} D_1 \\ D_2 \\ \vdots \\ D_n \end{bmatrix}, \quad \mathbb{1} = \begin{bmatrix} 1 \\ 1 \\ \vdots \\ 1 \end{bmatrix}.$$

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- Let $n_1 = \mathbb{1}^\top \mathbf{D}$ and $n_0 = \mathbb{1}^\top (\mathbb{1} - \mathbf{D})$.

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- Let $n_1 = \mathbb{1}^\top \mathbf{D}$ and $n_0 = \mathbb{1}^\top (\mathbb{1} - \mathbf{D})$. Mechanically,

$$n_1 = [1 \ 1 \ \cdots \ 1] \begin{bmatrix} D_1 \\ D_2 \\ \vdots \\ D_n \end{bmatrix} = \sum_{i=1}^n 1D_i,$$

$$n_0 = [1 \ 1 \ \cdots \ 1] \begin{bmatrix} 1 - D_1 \\ 1 - D_2 \\ \vdots \\ 1 - D_n \end{bmatrix} = \sum_{i=1}^n 1(1 - D_i).$$

Difference-in-means estimator (matrix form)

$$\widehat{E}[\tau_i] = \left(\frac{\mathbf{D}}{n_1} - \frac{\mathbb{1} - \mathbf{D}}{n_0} \right)^\top \mathbf{Y}$$

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$$\widehat{E}[\tau_i] = \left[\frac{D_1}{n_1} - \frac{1-D_1}{n_0}, \frac{D_2}{n_1} - \frac{1-D_2}{n_0}, \dots, \frac{D_n}{n_1} - \frac{1-D_n}{n_0} \right] \begin{bmatrix} Y_1 \\ Y_2 \\ \vdots \\ Y_n \end{bmatrix}$$

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$$\begin{aligned} &= \sum_{i=1}^n \left(\frac{D_i}{n_1} - \frac{1-D_i}{n_0} \right) Y_i = \frac{1}{n_1} \sum_{i=1}^n D_i Y_i - \frac{1}{n_0} \sum_{i=1}^n (1-D_i) Y_i \\ &= \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n Y_i D_i}{\sum_{i=1}^n D_i} - \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n Y_i (1-D_i)}{\sum_{i=1}^n (1-D_i)}. \end{aligned}$$

Utah example: random assignment intuition

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- Treat D_i as randomly assigned to residential vs. non-residential.
- Then treated and control groups have the same potential outcome distributions.
- Sample means within $D = 1$ and $D = 0$ identify $E[Y_i(1)]$ and $E[Y_i(0)]$.

Science table: random assignment

What would the difference in recidivism rates be if all juveniles were assigned to residential instead of non-residential treatment?

Target: $E[Y_i(1)] - E[Y_i(0)]$

i	$Y_i(0)$	$Y_i(1)$	D_i	Y_i
1	0	?	0	0
2	?	1	1	1
3	1	?	0	1
4	?	1	1	1
5	0	?	0	0
6	?	1	1	1
7	1	?	0	1
8	?	0	1	0
9	1	?	0	0
10	?	1	1	1

$$\hat{E}[Y_i(1)] = \frac{1 + 1 + 1 + 0 + 1}{5} = 0.8, \quad \hat{E}[Y_i(0)] = \frac{0 + 1 + 0 + 1 + 1}{5} = 0.6$$

$$\hat{E}[\tau_i] = 0.8 - 0.6 = 0.2$$

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 - $\exists \varepsilon > 0$ such that $\varepsilon < \Pr[D_i = 1 \mid X_i] < 1 - \varepsilon$ (positivity).
- Random assignment implies strong ignorability (with pre-treatment X_i). Strong ignorability does *not* imply random assignment.

ATE under strong ignorability

- If D_i is strongly ignorable conditional on X_i , then:

ATE under strong ignorability

- If D_i is strongly ignorable conditional on X_i , then:

$$\begin{aligned} E[\tau_i] = & \sum_x E[Y_i \mid D_i = 1, X_i = x] \Pr[X_i = x] - \\ & \sum_x E[Y_i \mid D_i = 0, X_i = x] \Pr[X_i = x]. \end{aligned}$$

Conditional ATE under strong ignorability

- For any $x \in \text{Supp}[X_i]$:

Conditional ATE under strong ignorability

- For any $x \in \text{Supp}[X_i]$:

$$E[\tau_i | X_i] = E[Y_i | D_i = 1, X_i] - E[Y_i | D_i = 0, X_i].$$

Post-stratification plug-in estimator under MAR

- Under MAR, $Y \perp R | X$, so:

$$E[Y] = \sum_{x \in \text{Supp}[X]} E[Y | R = 1, X = x] \Pr[X = x].$$

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- Sample plug-in estimator:

$$\hat{E}[Y] = \sum_{x \in \text{Supp}[X]} \left(\frac{\sum_{i=1}^n Y_i^* \mathbb{1}(R_i = 1) \mathbb{1}(X_i = x)}{\sum_{i=1}^n \mathbb{1}(R_i = 1) \mathbb{1}(X_i = x)} \right) \left(\frac{\sum_{i=1}^n \mathbb{1}(X_i = x)}{n} \right).$$

Science table: ignorability (conditioning on X)

i	X_i	$Y_i(0)$	$Y_i(1)$	D_i	Y_i
1	A	0	?	0	0
2	A	?	1	1	1
3	B	1	?	0	1
4	B	?	1	1	1
5	A	0	?	0	0
6	A	?	1	1	1
7	B	1	?	0	1
8	B	?	0	1	0
9	A	1	?	0	0
10	B	?	1	1	1

$$\hat{E}[Y_i \mid D_i = 1, X_i = A] = 1, \quad \hat{E}[Y_i \mid D_i = 0, X_i = A] = 1/3$$

$$\hat{E}[Y_i \mid D_i = 1, X_i = B] = 2/3, \quad \hat{E}[Y_i \mid D_i = 0, X_i = B] = 1$$

$$\hat{E}[Y_i(1)] = \frac{5}{10} \cdot 1 + \frac{5}{10} \cdot \frac{2}{3} = 0.833, \quad \hat{E}[Y_i(0)] = \frac{5}{10} \cdot \frac{1}{3} + \frac{5}{10} \cdot 1 = 0.667$$

$$\hat{E}[\tau_i] = 0.833 - 0.667 = 0.167$$

Response propensity function

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$$p_R(x) = \Pr[R_i = 1 \mid X_i = x], \quad \forall x \in \text{Supp}[X_i].$$

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- The random variable $p_R(X_i)$ is the (response) propensity score for unit i .
- It is the conditional probability of response given covariates.

MAR and the propensity score

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- Let $Y_i^* = Y_i R_i + (-99)(1 - R_i)$ and let X_i be a random vector.
- If Y_i is MAR conditional on X_i , then:
 - $R_i \perp X_i \mid p_R(X_i)$ (balance conditional on $p_R(X_i)$).

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 - $Y_i \perp R_i \mid p_R(X_i)$ (independence of outcome and response conditional on $p_R(X_i)$).

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 - $Y_i \perp R_i \mid p_R(X_i)$ (independence of outcome and response conditional on $p_R(X_i)$).
 - $\exists \varepsilon > 0$ such that $\varepsilon < \Pr[R_i = 1 \mid p_R(X_i)] < 1 - \varepsilon$.

Science table: MAR and the propensity score

i	$X_{[1]i}$	$X_{[2]i}$	$Y_i(0)$	R_i	$Y_i^*(0)$
1	A	0	0	1	0
2	A	0	?	0	-99
3	B	0	1	1	1
4	B	0	?	0	-99
5	A	1	0	1	0
6	A	1	?	0	-99
7	B	1	1	1	1
8	B	1	?	0	-99
9	A	0	1	1	1
10	B	1	?	0	-99

Science table: add the (empirical) propensity score

i	$X_{[1]i}$	$X_{[2]i}$	$\hat{p}_R(X_i)$	$Y_i(0)$	R_i	$Y_i^*(0)$
1	A	0	0.67	0	1	0
2	A	0	0.67	?	0	-99
3	B	0	0.50	1	1	1
4	B	0	0.50	?	0	-99
5	A	1	0.50	0	1	0
6	A	1	0.50	?	0	-99
7	B	1	0.33	1	1	1
8	B	1	0.33	?	0	-99
9	A	0	0.67	1	1	1
10	B	1	0.33	?	0	-99

$$\hat{p}_R(X_i) = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n R_i \mathbb{1}(X_{[1]i}, X_{[2]i})}{\sum_{i=1}^n \mathbb{1}(X_{[1]i}, X_{[2]i})}$$

$X_{[1]}$	$X_{[2]}$	n	\hat{p}_R
A	0	3	0.67
A	1	2	0.50
B	0	2	0.50
B	1	3	0.33

Estimation with the propensity score

$$\begin{aligned}\widehat{\mathbb{E}}[Y_i(0)] &= \frac{3}{10} \widehat{\mathbb{E}}[Y_i \mid R_i = 1, \hat{p}_R(X_i) = 0.67] + \\ &\quad \frac{4}{10} \widehat{\mathbb{E}}[Y_i \mid R_i = 1, \hat{p}_R(X_i) = 0.50] + \\ &\quad \frac{3}{10} \widehat{\mathbb{E}}[Y_i \mid R_i = 1, \hat{p}_R(X_i) = 0.33]\end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned}\widehat{\mathbb{E}}[Y_i \mid R_i = 1, \hat{p}_R(X_i) = 0.67] &= \frac{1}{2}, \quad \widehat{\mathbb{E}}[Y_i \mid R_i = 1, \hat{p}_R(X_i) = 0.50] = \frac{1}{2}, \\ \widehat{\mathbb{E}}[Y_i \mid R_i = 1, \hat{p}_R(X_i) = 0.33] &= 1 \\ &= \frac{3}{10} \cdot \frac{1}{2} + \frac{4}{10} \cdot \frac{1}{2} + \frac{3}{10} \cdot 1 = 0.65\end{aligned}$$

Treatment propensity function

- Let $Y_i(0)$, $Y_i(1)$, and D_i be random variables with $\text{Supp}[D_i] = \{0, 1\}$.

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- The treatment propensity function is:
$$p_D(x) = \Pr[D_i = 1 \mid X_i = x], \quad \forall x \in \text{Supp}[X_i].$$
- The random variable $p_D(X_i)$ is the (treatment) propensity score for unit i .

Strong ignorability and the propensity score

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 - $D_i \perp X_i \mid p_D(X_i)$ (balance conditional on $p_D(X_i)$).
 - $(Y_i(0), Y_i(1)) \perp D_i \mid p_D(X_i)$ (conditional independence).
 - $\exists \varepsilon > 0$ such that $\varepsilon < \Pr[D_i = 1 \mid p_D(X_i)] < 1 - \varepsilon$.

Science table: strong ignorability and the propensity score

i	$X_{[1]i}$	$X_{[2]i}$	$Y_i(0)$	$Y_i(1)$	D_i	Y_i
1	A	0	0	?	0	0
2	A	0	?	1	1	1
3	B	0	1	?	0	1
4	B	0	?	1	1	1
5	A	1	0	?	0	0
6	A	1	?	1	1	1
7	B	1	1	?	0	1
8	B	1	?	0	1	0
9	A	0	1	?	0	0
10	B	1	?	1	1	1

Science table: add the (empirical) propensity score

i	$X_{[1]i}$	$X_{[2]i}$	$p_D(X_i)$	$Y_i(0)$	$Y_i(1)$	D_i	Y_i
1	A	0	0.33	0	?	0	0
2	A	0	0.33	?	1	1	1
3	B	0	0.50	1	?	0	1
4	B	0	0.50	?	1	1	1
5	A	1	0.50	0	?	0	0
6	A	1	0.50	?	1	1	1
7	B	1	0.67	1	?	0	1
8	B	1	0.67	?	0	1	0
9	A	0	0.33	1	?	0	0
10	B	1	0.67	?	1	1	1

$X_{[1]}$	$X_{[2]}$	n	$p_D(X)$
A	0	3	0.33
A	1	2	0.50
B	0	2	0.50
B	1	3	0.67

Estimation with the treatment propensity score

$$\begin{aligned}\widehat{\mathbb{E}}[Y_i(1)] &= \frac{3}{10} \widehat{\mathbb{E}}[Y_i \mid D_i = 1, \hat{p}_D(X_i) = 0.33] + \\ &\quad \frac{4}{10} \widehat{\mathbb{E}}[Y_i \mid D_i = 1, \hat{p}_D(X_i) = 0.50] + \\ &\quad \frac{3}{10} \widehat{\mathbb{E}}[Y_i \mid D_i = 1, \hat{p}_D(X_i) = 0.67] \\ &= \frac{3}{10} \cdot 1 + \frac{2}{10} \cdot 1 + \frac{2}{10} \cdot 1 + \frac{3}{10} \cdot \frac{1}{2} = 0.85\end{aligned}$$

Estimation with the treatment propensity score

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Estimation with the treatment propensity score

$$\begin{aligned}\widehat{\mathbb{E}}[Y_i(1)] &= \frac{3}{10} \widehat{\mathbb{E}}[Y_i \mid D_i = 1, \hat{p}_D(X_i) = 0.33] + \\ &\quad \frac{4}{10} \widehat{\mathbb{E}}[Y_i \mid D_i = 1, \hat{p}_D(X_i) = 0.50] + \\ &\quad \frac{3}{10} \widehat{\mathbb{E}}[Y_i \mid D_i = 1, \hat{p}_D(X_i) = 0.67] \\ &= \frac{3}{10} \cdot 1 + \frac{2}{10} \cdot 1 + \frac{2}{10} \cdot 1 + \frac{3}{10} \cdot \frac{1}{2} = 0.85\end{aligned}$$

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Post-treatment variables

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- Preview: we will formalize this with DAGs in Weeks 3–4.

Post-treatment variables: why independence fails

- Example: $D \rightarrow M \rightarrow Y$ with M a post-treatment mediator.

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- Conditioning on M forces treated/control units to have the same mediator value, which mixes causal pathways and changes the estimand.

$$\Pr[M = 1 \mid D = 1] \neq \Pr[M = 1 \mid D = 0] \quad \Rightarrow \quad D \not\perp M.$$

Generalized potential outcomes model

- Allow multi-valued treatments: $D_i \in \text{Supp } [D_i]$.

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- Preview: generalized propensity scores summarize $\Pr[D_i = d | X_i]$.

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- Under conditional independence, the CEF is causal, so:

Average marginal causal effect

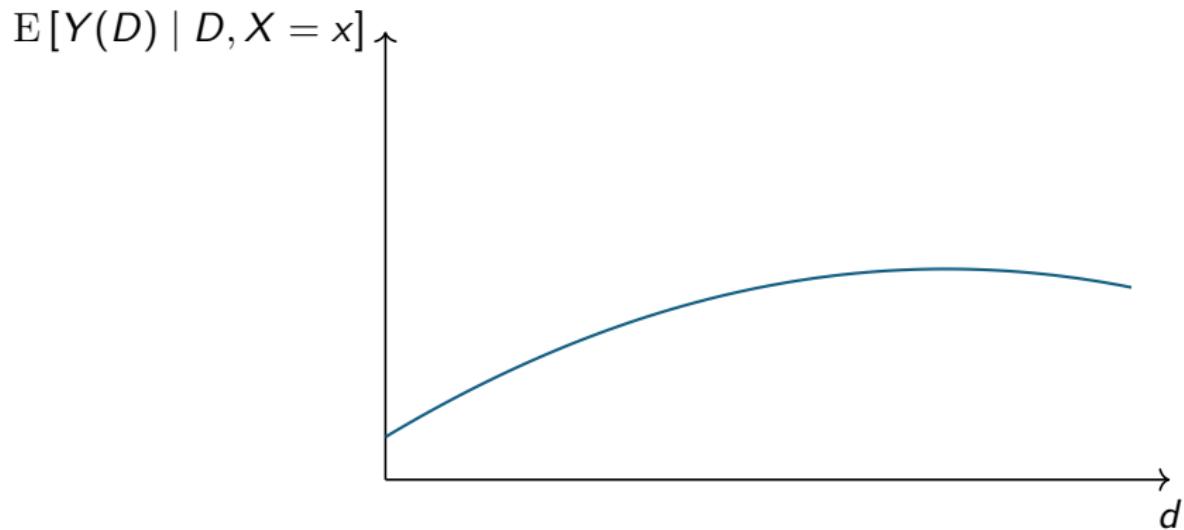
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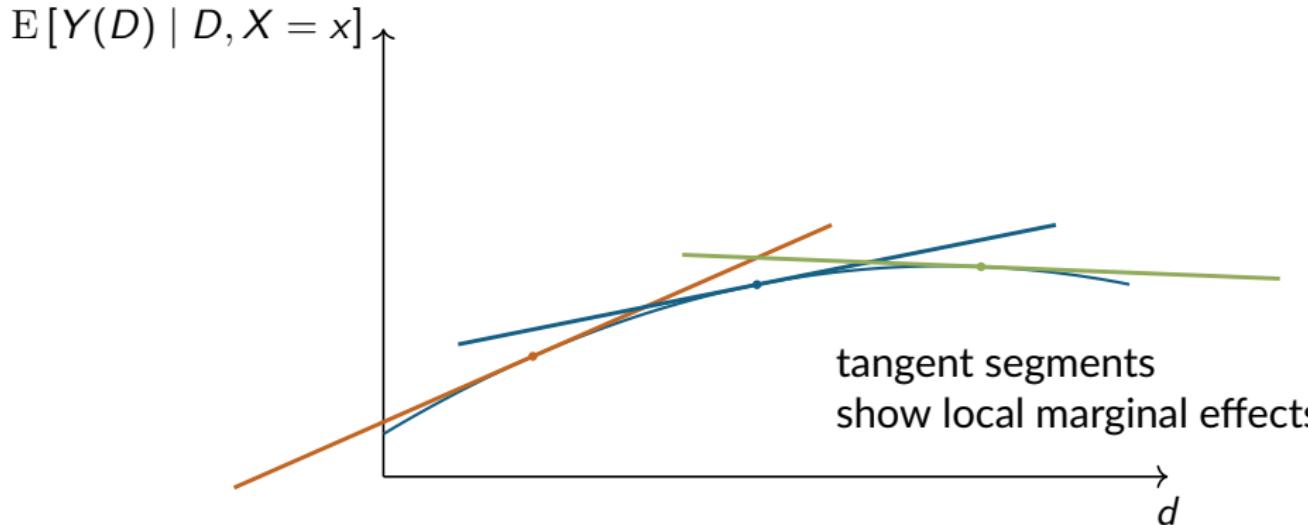
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AMCE: local marginal effects



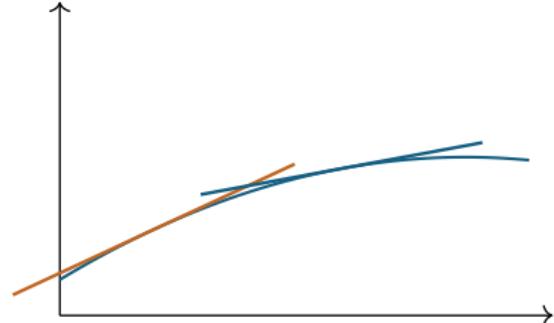
AMCE: local marginal effects



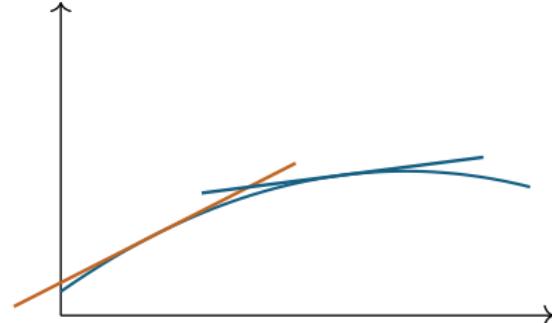
AMCE heterogeneity across covariates

Local slopes vary by X

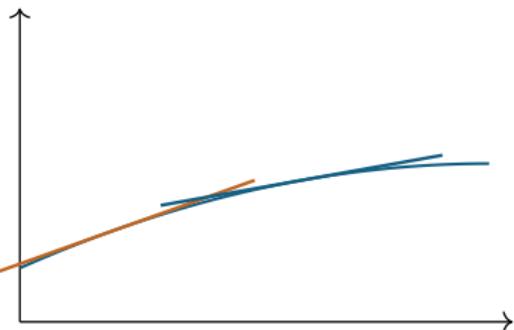
$X = A$



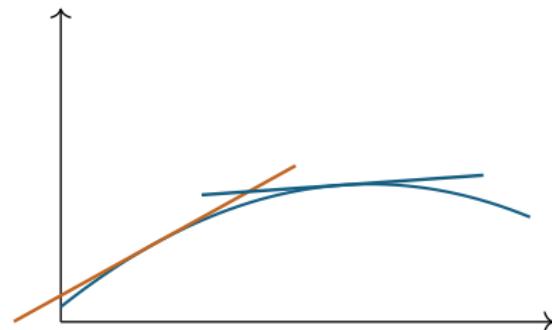
$X = B$



$X = C$



$X = D$



Practice: AMCE with a non-uniform treatment

- Let $D \sim \text{Beta}(2, 2)$ on $(0, 1)$ and $X \sim \text{Bernoulli}(p)$, independent.

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$$m(d, x) = \alpha + \beta d + \gamma d^2 + \eta x d.$$

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- Suppose the conditional mean function is

$$m(d, x) = \alpha + \beta d + \gamma d^2 + \eta x d.$$

- Compute the average marginal causal effect:

$$\text{AMCE} \equiv E \left[\frac{\partial}{\partial d} m(D, X) \right].$$

Step 1: Differentiate $m(d, x)$ with respect to d .

$$m(d, x) = \alpha + \beta d + \gamma d^2 + \eta x d.$$

Differentiate term-by-term:

$$\frac{\partial}{\partial d} m(d, x) = 0 + \beta + 2\gamma d + \eta x = \beta + 2\gamma d + \eta x.$$

AMCE

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Step 2: Use linearity of expectation.

$$\text{AMCE} = E[\beta + 2\gamma D + \eta X] = \beta + 2\gamma E[D] + \eta E[X].$$

Since $X \sim \text{Bernoulli}(p)$,

$$E[X] = p.$$

Step 3: Compute the needed moment for $D \sim \text{Beta}(2, 2)$.

Screenshot of a web browser showing the Wikipedia page for the Beta distribution. The page details the probability density function, parameters, support, PDF, CDF, mean, and median.

Definitions

The probability density function (PDF) of the beta distribution, for $0 \leq x \leq 1$ or $0 < x < 1$, and shape parameters $\alpha, \beta > 0$, is a power function of the variable x and of its reflection $(1 - x)$ as follows:

$$f(x; \alpha, \beta) = \text{constant} \cdot x^{\alpha-1} (1-x)^{\beta-1}$$

$$= \frac{x^{\alpha-1} (1-x)^{\beta-1}}{\int_0^1 u^{\alpha-1} (1-u)^{\beta-1} du}$$

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

$$= \frac{1}{B(\alpha, \beta)} x^{\alpha-1} (1-x)^{\beta-1}$$

where $B(z)$ is the gamma function. The beta function, B , is a normalization constant to ensure that the total probability is 1. In the above equations

Parameters	$\alpha > 0$ shape (real) $\beta > 0$ shape (real)
Support	$x \in [0, 1]$ or $x \in (0, 1)$
PDF	$\frac{x^{\alpha-1} (1-x)^{\beta-1}}{B(\alpha, \beta)}$ where $B(\alpha, \beta) = \frac{\Gamma(\alpha)\Gamma(\beta)}{\Gamma(\alpha + \beta)}$ and Γ is the Gamma function.
CDF	$I_x(\alpha, \beta)$ (the regularized incomplete beta function)
Mean	$E[X] = \frac{\alpha}{\alpha + \beta}$ $E[\ln X] = \psi(\alpha) - \psi(\alpha + \beta)$ $E[X \ln X] = \frac{\alpha}{\alpha + \beta} [\psi(\alpha + 1) - \psi(\alpha + \beta + 1)]$ (see section: Geometric mean) where ψ is the digamma function
Median	$I_{\frac{1}{2}}^{[-1]}(\alpha, \beta)$ (in general) $\approx \frac{\alpha - \frac{1}{2}}{\alpha + \beta - \frac{2}{3}}$ for $\alpha, \beta > 1$

Step 3: Compute the needed moment for $D \sim \text{Beta}(2, 2)$.

Compute $E[D]$. For the Beta distribution,

$$E[D] = \frac{\alpha}{\alpha + \beta} = \frac{2}{2 + 2} = \frac{1}{2}.$$

AMCE

Step 4: Substitute back into AMCE.

$$\text{AMCE} = \beta + 2\gamma \frac{1}{2} + \eta p = \beta + \gamma + \eta p.$$

$$\boxed{\text{AMCE} = \beta + \gamma + \eta p.}$$

References I

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