

Partial Identification

Francis DiTraglia

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Roadmap for this Lecture

The Limits of Causal Inference

- ▶ (Y_0, Y_1) never observed for the same person; can't learn their joint distribution.
- ▶ Quantities like $\text{Var}(Y_1 - Y_0)$ or $\mathbb{P}(Y_1 - Y_0 > 0)$ are **not identifiable**.

Partial Identification

- ▶ Even if we can't pin θ down *exactly*, we may be able to **rule out** many values.

Outline

1. Simplest example of partial identification.
2. Bounds on ATE while allowing for selection bias.
3. Bound the distribution of treatment effects.

Simple Example: Reverse Regression Bounds

Population Linear Regression

- ▶ α and β are intercept and slope from population linear regression of Y on X
- ▶ Thus we can write $Y = \alpha + \beta X + U$ where we define

$$\beta \equiv \frac{\text{Cov}(X, Y)}{\text{Var}(X)}, \quad \alpha \equiv \mathbb{E}[Y] - \beta \mathbb{E}[X], \quad U \equiv Y - \alpha - \beta X$$

- ▶ By **construction** we have $\mathbb{E}(XU) = \mathbb{E}(U) = 0$.

Point Identification

- ▶ If we could observe the whole population from which our sample was drawn, could we uniquely determine the parameters of interest?
- ▶ Suppose we observe the joint distribution of (X, Y)
- ▶ This is enough information to calculate (α, β) explicitly: they are **point identified**.

Classical Measurement Error

- ▶ Suppose we observe (Y, \tilde{X}) rather than (Y, X) , where $\tilde{X} = X + W$
- ▶ W is **classical measurement error**: $\text{Cov}(W, X) = \text{Cov}(W, U) = \mathbb{E}(U) = 0$
- ▶ Are α and β still point identified?

The Good News

$$\mathbb{E}(\tilde{X}) = \mathbb{E}(X + W) = \mathbb{E}(X)$$

$$\begin{aligned}\text{Cov}(\tilde{X}, Y) &= \text{Cov}(X + W, Y) = \text{Cov}(X, Y) + \text{Cov}(W, Y) \\ &= \text{Cov}(X, Y) + \text{Cov}(W, \alpha + \beta X + U) \\ &= \text{Cov}(X, Y) + \text{Cov}(W, U) + \beta \text{Cov}(W, X) \\ &= \text{Cov}(X, Y)\end{aligned}$$

Are α and β still point identified?

The Bad News

- ▶ Because $\text{Var}(W)$ is not point identified, neither are α and β .

$$\text{Var}(\tilde{X}) = \text{Var}(X + W) = \text{Var}(X) + \text{Var}(W) \geq \text{Var}(X)$$

$$\beta \equiv \frac{\text{Cov}(X, Y)}{\text{Var}(X)} = \frac{\text{Cov}(\tilde{X}, Y)}{\text{Var}(\tilde{X}) - \text{Var}(W)}, \quad \alpha \equiv \mathbb{E}[Y] - \beta\mathbb{E}[X] = \mathbb{E}[Y] - \beta\mathbb{E}[\tilde{X}].$$

Partial Identification

- ▶ We can still **bound** β and hence α : the so-called **reverse regression bounds**

A Lower Bound for β

- ▶ Since $\text{Cov}(X, Y) = \text{Cov}(\tilde{X}, Y)$,

$$\frac{\text{Cov}(\tilde{X}, Y)}{\text{Var}(\tilde{X})} = \frac{\text{Cov}(X, Y)}{\text{Var}(X) + \text{Var}(W)} = \frac{\text{Cov}(X, Y)/\text{Var}(X)}{1 + \text{Var}(W)/\text{Var}(X)} = \frac{\beta}{1 + \text{Var}(W)/\text{Var}(X)}.$$

- ▶ Since $\text{Var}(W)/\text{Var}(X)$ is non-negative, $\text{Cov}(\tilde{X}, Y)/\text{Var}(\tilde{X})$ has same *sign* as β and

$$\left| \frac{\text{Cov}(\tilde{X}, Y)}{\text{Var}(\tilde{X})} \right| \leq |\beta|.$$

An Upper Bound for β

- ▶ Run the **reverse regression** \tilde{X} on Y

$$\frac{\text{Cov}(\tilde{X}, Y)}{\text{Var}(Y)} = \frac{\text{Cov}(X, Y)}{\beta^2 \text{Var}(X) + \text{Var}(U)} = \frac{\beta \text{Var}(X)}{\beta^2 \text{Var}(X) + \text{Var}(U)}.$$

- ▶ Take the reciprocal:

$$\frac{\text{Var}(Y)}{\text{Cov}(\tilde{X}, Y)} = \beta + \frac{\text{Var}(U)}{\beta \text{Var}(X)} = \beta \left[1 + \frac{\text{Var}(U)}{\beta^2 \text{Var}(X)} \right].$$

- ▶ Factor in brackets *greater* than one, so $\text{Var}(Y)/\text{Cov}(\tilde{X}, Y)$ has same sign as β and

$$\left| \frac{\text{Var}(Y)}{\text{Cov}(\tilde{X}, Y)} \right| \geq |\beta|.$$

Reverse Regression Bounds

Terminology

- ▶ A bound is **sharp** if it cannot be improved, under our assumptions.
- ▶ A bound is **tight** if it is short enough to be useful in a practical example.

Assumptions

- ▶ $Y = \alpha + \beta X + U$ where $\mathbb{E}(XU) = \mathbb{E}(U) = 0$.
- ▶ Observe (\tilde{X}, Y)
- ▶ $\tilde{X} = X + W$ with $\mathbb{E}(W) = \text{Cov}(W, X) = \text{Cov}(W, U) = 0$

Sharp Bounds for β

- ▶ β lies between $\frac{\text{Cov}(\tilde{X}, Y)}{\text{Var}(\tilde{X})}$ and $\frac{\text{Var}(Y)}{\text{Cov}(\tilde{X}, Y)}$

How tight are the reverse regression bounds?

- ▶ Let r denote the correlation between \tilde{X} and Y . Then:

$$r^2 \equiv \frac{\text{Cov}(\tilde{X}, Y)^2}{\text{Var}(\tilde{X})\text{Var}(Y)} = \frac{\text{Cov}(\tilde{X}, Y)}{\text{Var}(\tilde{X})} \cdot \frac{\text{Cov}(\tilde{X}, Y)}{\text{Var}(Y)}.$$

- ▶ Re-arranging, it follows that:

$$r^2 \cdot \frac{\text{Var}(Y)}{\text{Cov}(\tilde{X}, Y)} = \frac{\text{Cov}(\tilde{X}, Y)}{\text{Var}(\tilde{X})}.$$

- ▶ All else equal, bounds for β are *tighter* when \tilde{X} and Y are strongly correlated:

$$\text{Width} = \left| \frac{\text{Var}(Y)}{\text{Cov}(\tilde{X}, Y)} - \frac{\text{Cov}(\tilde{X}, Y)}{\text{Var}(\tilde{X})} \right| = (1 - r^2) \left| \frac{\text{Var}(Y)}{\text{Cov}(\tilde{X}, Y)} \right|.$$

```
library(tidyverse)
library(broom) # for tidy()
set.seed(1066)

n <- 5000
X <- rnorm(n)
U <- rnorm(n)
W <- rnorm(n)

alpha <- 0.5
beta <- 1
Y <- alpha + beta * X + U
Xtilde <- X + W
```

```
c(forward = cov(Xtilde, Y) / var(Xtilde),  
  truth = beta,  
  reverse = var(Y) / cov(Xtilde, Y)) %>% round(2)
```

```
## forward    truth reverse  
##    0.51     1.00     1.95
```

```
# The regression we can't run in practice!
```

```
lm(Y ~ X) %>% tidy()
```

```
## # A tibble: 2 x 5  
##   term          estimate std.error statistic    p.value  
##   <chr>         <dbl>     <dbl>     <dbl>    <dbl>  
## 1 (Intercept)    0.489     0.0140      34.8 9.56e-238  
## 2 X              1.02      0.0138      73.9 0
```

```
# Reduce the correlation between X and Y, hence Xtilde and Y  
Y <- alpha + beta * X + 3 * U
```

```
c(forward = cov(Xtilde, Y) / var(Xtilde),  
  truth = beta,  
  reverse = var(Y) / cov(Xtilde, Y)) %>% round(2)
```

```
## forward    truth reverse  
##    0.52     1.00     9.31
```

```
# The regression we can't run in practice!  
lm(Y ~ X) %>% tidy()
```

```
## # A tibble: 2 x 5  
##   term          estimate std.error statistic    p.value  
##   <chr>          <dbl>     <dbl>     <dbl>    <dbl>  
## 1 (Intercept)    0.466     0.0421      11.1 3.95e- 28  
## 2 X              1.07      0.0414      25.7 7.45e-137
```

Review of Potential Outcomes Framework

- ▶ See <https://expl.ai/QHUAVRV> and <https://expl.ai/DWVNRZU> for more details.
- ▶ Binary **Treatment** $D \in \{0, 1\}$
- ▶ **Observed Outcome** Y depends on **Potential Outcomes** (Y_0, Y_1) via

$$Y = (1 - D)Y_0 + DY_1 = Y_0 + D(Y_1 - Y_0)$$

- ▶ Only one of (Y_0, Y_1) is observed for any given person at any given time.
- ▶ The unobserved potential outcome is a **counterfactual**, i.e. a **what if?**
- ▶ **Average Treatment Effect:** $ATE \equiv \mathbb{E}(Y_1 - Y_0)$.
- ▶ **Treatment on the Treated:** $TOT \equiv \mathbb{E}(Y_1 - Y_0 | D = 1)$.

Example: Y is Wage, D is Attend University

Counterfactuals

- ▶ $D = 1 \implies Y_0$ is the wage you *would have earned* if you *hadn't* attended.
- ▶ $D = 0 \implies Y_1$ is the wage you *would have earned* if you *had* attended.

Treatment Effects

- ▶ $ATE = \mathbb{E}(Y_1 - Y_0)$ is the average effect of *forcing* a randomly-chosen person to attend university.
- ▶ $TOT = \mathbb{E}(Y_1 - Y_0 | D = 1)$ is the average effect of attending university *for the sort of people who choose to attend*.

Problem: Selection Bias

- ▶ We don't force randomly-chosen people to attend university!
- ▶ People who choose to attend are likely different in *many ways*

Selection Bias

Naïve Comparison of Means

$$\begin{aligned}\mathbb{E}(Y|D=1) - \mathbb{E}(Y|D=0) &= \mathbb{E}(Y_1|D=1) - \mathbb{E}(Y_0|D=0) \\&= \mathbb{E}(Y_1|D=1) - \mathbb{E}(Y_0|D=0) + \mathbb{E}(Y_0|D=1) - \mathbb{E}(Y_0|D=1) \\&= \underbrace{\mathbb{E}(Y_1 - Y_0|D=1)}_{\text{TOT}} + \underbrace{[\mathbb{E}(Y_0|D=1) - \mathbb{E}(Y_0|D=0)]}_{\text{Selection Bias}}\end{aligned}$$

How does selection matter?

1. TOT is probably different from ATE: selection on gains.
2. Average value of Y_0 (“outside option”) probably varies with D .

How to solve the problem of selection bias?

Randomized Controlled Trial

- ▶ $D \perp\!\!\!\perp (Y_0, Y_1) \implies \mathbb{E}(Y_0|D) = \mathbb{E}(Y_0)$ and $\mathbb{E}(Y_1|D) = \mathbb{E}(Y_1)$ (video)
- ▶ Hence: TOT = ATE and Selection Bias = 0.

Other Approaches

- ▶ Selection-on-observables (chapter 4, video 1, video 2)
- ▶ Instrumental Variables (chapter 5, tomorrow's lecture)
- ▶ Regression Discontinuity (chapter 7)
- ▶ Difference-in-differences (chapter 8)

Partial Identification

Bound the ATE *without* using the above approaches while *allowing* for selection bias.

Bounding the ATE when Y and D are Binary

- ▶ Example: $Y = 1$ if you earn a PhD, $D = 1$ if you attend an Ivy League University
- ▶ We know that D is *not* randomly assigned, and expect selection bias.

Starting point

- ▶ Assume that (Y, D) are observed.
- ▶ Since Y is binary we know that $0 \leq \text{ATE} \leq 1$ without observing any data!

$$0 \leq Y_0 \leq 1 \quad \text{and} \quad 0 \leq Y_1 \leq 1 \implies 0 \leq \mathbb{E}(Y_0) \leq 1 \quad \text{and} \quad 0 \leq \mathbb{E}(Y_1) \leq 1$$

Shorthand

$$P_{11} \equiv \mathbb{P}(Y = 1|D = 1) = \mathbb{E}[Y|D = 1] = \mathbb{E}[Y_1|D = 1]$$

$$P_{10} \equiv \mathbb{P}(Y = 1|D = 0) = \mathbb{E}[Y|D = 0] = \mathbb{E}[Y_0|D = 0]$$

$$p \equiv \mathbb{P}(D = 1) = \mathbb{E}(D).$$

Assumption-Free Bounds: Improving on $-1 \leq \text{ATE} \leq 1$

Y and D Are Observed

- $\implies P_{11} \equiv \mathbb{E}[Y_1|D=1]$, $P_{10} \equiv \mathbb{E}[Y_0|D=0]$, and $p \equiv \mathbb{E}(D)$ are observed

Iterated Expectations

$$\mathbb{E}[Y_1] = \mathbb{E}_D [\mathbb{E}(Y_1|D)] = P_{11}p + \mathbb{E}[Y_1|D=0](1-p)$$

$$\mathbb{E}[Y_0] = \mathbb{E}_D [\mathbb{E}(Y_0|D)] = \mathbb{E}[Y_0|D=1]p + P_{10}(1-p).$$

Bound the Unobserved Quantities

- $\mathbb{E}[Y_1|D=0]$ and $\mathbb{E}[Y_0|D=1]$ are between 0 and 1

$$pP_{11} \leq \mathbb{E}[Y_1] \leq pP_{11} + (1-p)$$

$$(1-p)P_{10} \leq \mathbb{E}[Y_0] \leq p + (1-p)P_{10}$$

Assumption-Free Bounds: Width Equals 1

Previous Slide

$$\begin{aligned} pP_{11} &\leq \mathbb{E}[Y_1] \leq pP_{11} + (1-p) \\ (1-p)P_{10} &\leq \mathbb{E}[Y_0] \leq p + (1-p)P_{10} \end{aligned}$$

Combine These

$$pP_{11} - (1-p)P_{10} - p \leq \mathbb{E}[Y_1 - Y_0] \leq pP_{11} - (1-p)P_{10} + (1-p).$$

Written More Compactly

$$q \leq \text{ATE} \leq (q + 1), \quad q \equiv [pP_{11} - (1-p)P_{10} - p]$$

- Half as wide as $-1 \leq \text{ATE} \leq 1$ but **always includes zero**

Add Assumptions, Tighten the Bounds (Details in Lecture Notes)

Monotone Treatment Selection (MTS)

- ▶ Suppose we know direction of self-selection into treatment, e.g. *positive*:

$$\mathbb{E}(Y_1|D=0) \leq \mathbb{E}(Y_1|D=1) \quad \text{and} \quad \mathbb{E}(Y_0|D=0) \leq \mathbb{E}(Y_0|D=1).$$

- ▶ Positive MTS gives an improved *upper bound* for the ATE:

$$q \leq \text{ATE} \leq P_{11} - P_{10} \leq (q + 1), \quad q \equiv [pP_{11} - (1 - p)P_{10} - p]$$

Monotone Treatment Response (MTR)

- ▶ Suppose we know the direction of the **causal effect**: e.g. *positive effect*: $Y_1 > Y_0$.
- ▶ Positive MTR gives an improved *lower bound* for the ATE, namely zero:

$$0 \leq \text{ATE} \leq (q + 1)$$

A Comparison of Bounds

- ▶ Preceding bounds are *sharp* under their respective assumptions. How *tight* are they?
- ▶ Example: suppose that 8% of Ivy League graduates earn a PhD versus 1.5% of the general public and that 0.2% of people attend an Ivy League institution.

$$(P_{11} = 0.08, P_{10} = 0.015, p = 0.002) \implies q \equiv [pP_{11} - (1 - p)P_{10} - p] \approx -0.017$$

$$\text{No Assumptions: } [q, q + 1] \approx [-0.017, 0.983]$$

$$\text{Positive MTS: } [q, P_{11} - P_{10}] \approx [-0.017, 0.065]$$

$$\text{Positive MTR: } [0, q + 1] \approx [0, 0.983]$$

$$\text{Positive MTS + MTR: } [0, P_{11} - P_{10}] = [0, 0.065].$$

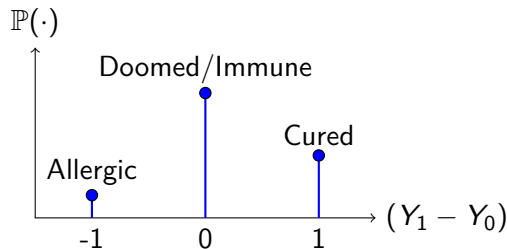
- ▶ Here positive MTR has little effect; positive MTS makes a dramatic difference!

Bounding the Distribution of Treatment Effects

- ▶ Randomly assign $D \implies$ ATE point identified: no selection bias!
- ▶ (Y_0, Y_1) never observed for same person; can't learn joint distribution.
- ▶ Anything that depends on this joint distribution is *not point identified*.
- ▶ Examples: $\text{Var}(Y_1 - Y_0)$, $\mathbb{P}(Y_1 - Y_0 > 0)$
- ▶ Can we *partially identify* the distribution of treatment effect $(Y_1 - Y_0)$?
- ▶ Start with binary Y case; then consider the general case.

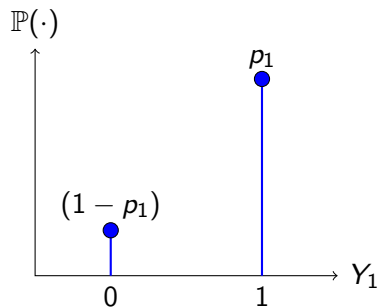
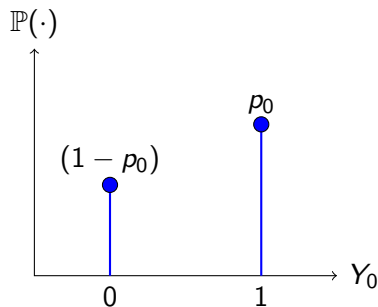
Unobserved: Joint Distribution of (Y_0, Y_1) , Distribution of $(Y_1 - Y_0)$

		Y_1	
		0	1
Y_0	0	$\mathbb{P}(\text{Doomed})$	$\mathbb{P}(\text{Cured})$
	1	$\mathbb{P}(\text{Allergic})$	$\mathbb{P}(\text{Immune})$



- ▶ Dangerous disease, and dangerous treatment.
- ▶ Treatment helps some people (the “Cured”), harms others (the “Allergic”).
- ▶ Treatment has no effect on other people (the “Doomed” and “Immune”)
- ▶ **Are more people helped than harmed?**

Observed: Marginal Distributions of Y_0 and Y_1



- ▶ Assume (Y, D) come from a randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled trial.
- ▶ p_0 is the share of untreated who recover; p_1 is the share of treated who recover.
- ▶ The ATE is $p_1 - p_0$
- ▶ Try to bound what we can't observe using what we can observe.

From Joint (Unobserved) to Marginals (Observed)

Recall: $p_0 \equiv \mathbb{P}(Y_0 = 1)$ and $p_1 \equiv \mathbb{P}(Y_1 = 1)$.

		Y_1		
		0	1	
Y_0	0	$\mathbb{P}(\text{Doomed})$	$\mathbb{P}(\text{Cured})$	$\implies (1 - p_0) = \mathbb{P}(D) + \mathbb{P}(C)$
	1	$\mathbb{P}(\text{Allergic})$	$\mathbb{P}(\text{Immune})$	$\implies p_0 = \mathbb{P}(A) + \mathbb{P}(I)$
		\Downarrow	\Downarrow	
		$(1 - p_1) = \mathbb{P}(D) + \mathbb{P}(A)$	$p_1 = \mathbb{P}(C) + \mathbb{P}(I)$	

Shorthand: $\alpha \equiv \mathbb{P}(\text{Allergic})$

Previous Slide

$$(1 - p_0) = \mathbb{P}(\text{Doomed}) + \mathbb{P}(\text{Cured})$$

$$p_0 = \mathbb{P}(\text{Allergic}) + \mathbb{P}(\text{Immune})$$

$$(1 - p_1) = \mathbb{P}(\text{Doomed}) + \mathbb{P}(\text{Allergic})$$

$$p_1 = \mathbb{P}(\text{Cured}) + \mathbb{P}(\text{Immune})$$

Rearranging

$$\mathbb{P}(\text{Immune}) = p_0 - \alpha$$

$$\mathbb{P}(\text{Doomed}) = (1 - p_1) - \alpha$$

$$\mathbb{P}(\text{Cured}) = (p_1 - p_0) + \alpha$$

- Everything is written in terms of observables (p_0, p_1) and α !

Bounding $\alpha \equiv \mathbb{P}(\text{Allergic})$

Previous Slide

- ▶ $\mathbb{P}(\text{Immune}) = p_0 - \alpha$, $\mathbb{P}(\text{Doomed}) = (1 - p_1) - \alpha$, $\mathbb{P}(\text{Cured}) = (p_1 - p_0) + \alpha$

Probabilities are between 0 and 1

- ▶ Apply Immune, Doomed, and Cured to bound α :

$$0 \leq (p_1 - p_0) + \alpha \leq 1, \quad 0 \leq (1 - p_1) - \alpha \leq 1, \quad 0 \leq p_0 - \alpha \leq 1.$$

Simplify

- ▶ Rearrange the preceding, and combine with $0 \leq \alpha \leq 1$

$$\max\{-\text{ATE}, 0\} \leq \alpha \leq \min\{p_0, (1 - p_1)\}, \quad \text{ATE} = (p_1 - p_0).$$

(Pointwise) Sharp Bounds for Distribution of Treatment Effects

Previous Slide

- ▶ $\mathbb{P}(\text{Immune}) = p_0 - \alpha$, $\mathbb{P}(\text{Doomed}) = (1 - p_1) - \alpha$, $\mathbb{P}(\text{Cured}) = (p_1 - p_0) + \alpha$
- ▶ $\max\{-(p_1 - p_0), 0\} \leq \alpha \leq \{p_0, (1 - p_1)\}$

Shorthand

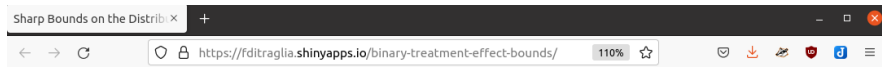
- ▶ $\underline{\alpha} \equiv \max\{-(p_1 - p_0), 0\}$, $\bar{\alpha} \equiv \min\{p_0, (1 - p_1)\}$

Combine

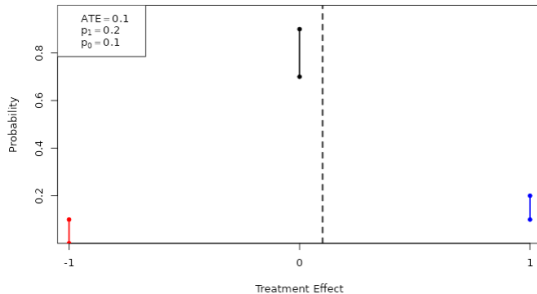
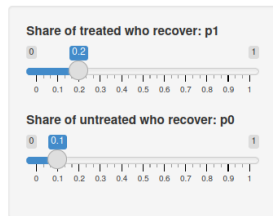
- ▶ Recall that $\alpha \equiv \mathbb{P}(\text{Allergic}) = \mathbb{P}(Y_1 - Y_0 = -1)$

$$\begin{aligned}\underline{\alpha} &\leq \mathbb{P}(Y_1 - Y_0 = -1) \leq \bar{\alpha} \\ (1 - p_1) + p_0 - 2\bar{\alpha} &\leq \mathbb{P}(Y_1 - Y_0 = 0) \leq (1 - p_1) + p_0 - 2\underline{\alpha} \\ (p_1 - p_0) + \underline{\alpha} &\leq \mathbb{P}(Y_1 - Y_0 = 1) \leq (p_1 - p_0) + \bar{\alpha}\end{aligned}$$

<https://fditraglia.shinyapps.io/binary-treatment-effect-bounds/>



Sharp Bounds on the Distribution of Treatment Effects: Binary Outcome



The General Case: Fan & Park (2010)

- ▶ Above we assumed that (Y_0, Y_1) were both binary.
- ▶ We asked which joint distributions were **not ruled out** based on the marginals.
- ▶ Pointwise sharp bounds for $\mathbb{P}(Y_1 - Y_0 = -1)$, $\mathbb{P}(Y_1 - Y_0 = 0)$ and $\mathbb{P}(Y_1 - Y_0 = 1)$.
- ▶ Special case of a general result: [Fan and Park \(2010\)](#).
- ▶ Same basic idea, but math is harder when (Y_0, Y_1) may not be binary.
- ▶ **This is a result you may actually use in practice!**
- ▶ Explain their result without proving it.

Fan & Park (2010) Bounds

Observables

- ▶ $F_0(y) \equiv \mathbb{P}(Y_0 \leq y)$ and $F_1(y) \equiv \mathbb{P}(Y_1 \leq y)$

Goal

- ▶ Sharp bounds for $F(\delta) \equiv \mathbb{P}(Y_1 - Y_0 \leq \delta)$

Notation

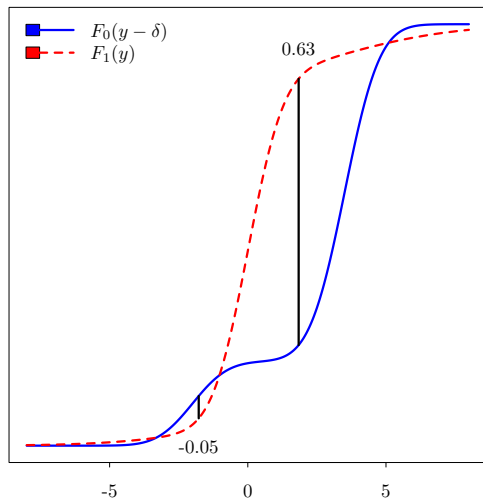
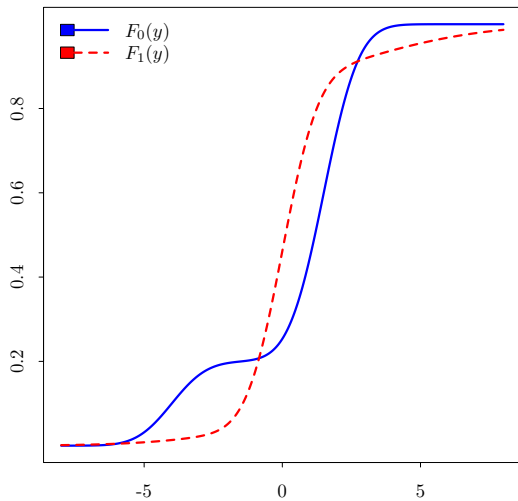
$$\underline{F}(\delta) \equiv \sup_y F_1(y) - F_0(y - \delta)$$

$$\overline{F}(\delta) \equiv 1 + \left[\inf_y F_1(y) - F_0(y - \delta) \right]$$

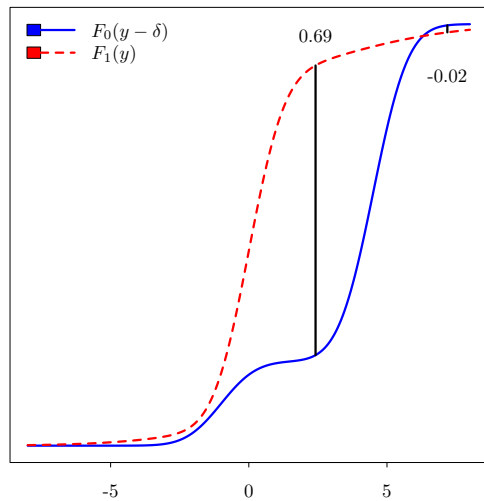
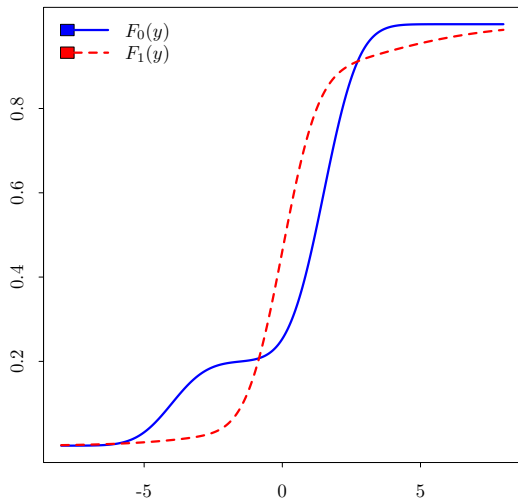
Theorem

- ▶ For any δ , $0 \leq \underline{F}(\delta) \leq F(\delta) \leq \overline{F}(\delta) \leq 1$. These bounds are (pointwise) sharp.

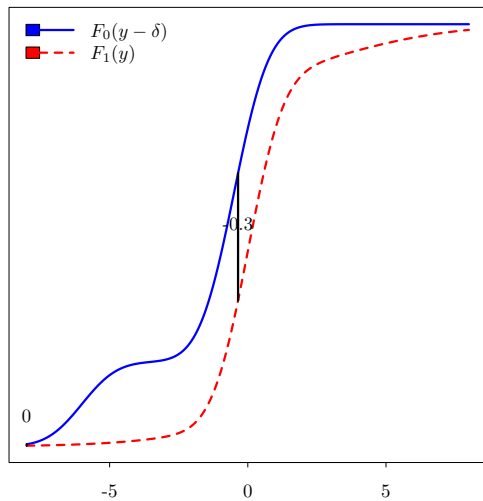
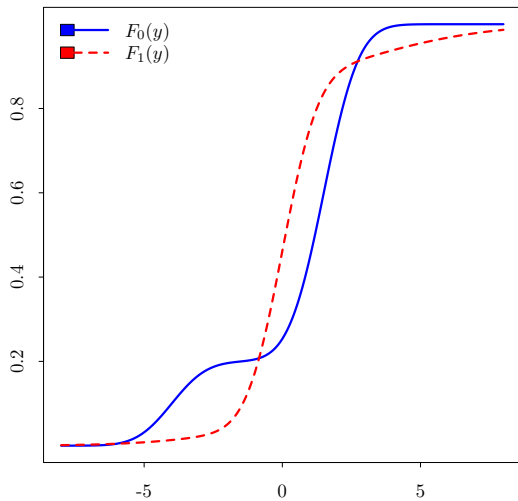
Left: $\delta = 0$, Right: $\delta = 2$



Left: $\delta = 0$, Right: $\delta = 3$



Left: $\delta = 0$, Right: $\delta = -2$



All the bounds!

