

In-person session 10

March 26, 2026

PMAP 8521: Program evaluation
Andrew Young School of Policy Studies

Plan for today

RDD fun times

Quarto fun times?

RDD fun times

Is there a rule of thumb to determine which quasi-experimental method we should use?

How do we know which method applies to which circumstance? Does the data tell us?

With RDD we rely on "the rule" to determine treatment and control groups

**How do you decide on the rule?
You mentioned that it's arbitrary—
we can choose whatever rule we want?**

Can we use RDD to evaluate a program that doesn't have a rule for participation?

Can we use a binary running variable?

e.g. someone is eligible for a program if they complete a course

**Do we have to limit
the data to a bandwidth?**

**How common are these kinds of rules
in the real world?**



Andrew Heiss

@andrewheiss



changing my behavior at the discontinuity by holding off on finishing a couple books until saturday so they count in my 2022 goodreads stats

11:51 PM · Dec 30, 2021 · Twitter for iPhone



Andrew Heiss @andrewheiss · Dec 30, 2021



Replying to [@andrewheiss](#)

what're you gonna do about that, econometricians??

Where do these eligibility thresholds come from? Do policy makers research them first and reexamine them later?

Discontinuities everywhere!

Size	Annual	Monthly	138%	150%	200%
1	\$12,760	\$1,063	\$17,609	\$19,140	\$25,520
2	\$17,240	\$1,437	\$23,791	\$25,860	\$34,480
3	\$21,720	\$1,810	\$29,974	\$32,580	\$43,440
4	\$26,200	\$2,183	\$36,156	\$39,300	\$52,400
5	\$30,680	\$2,557	\$42,338	\$46,020	\$61,360
6	\$35,160	\$2,930	\$48,521	\$52,740	\$70,320
7	\$39,640	\$3,303	\$54,703	\$59,460	\$79,280
8	\$44,120	\$3,677	\$60,886	\$66,180	\$88,240

Medicaid
138%*

ACA subsidies
138–400%*

CHIP
200%

SNAP/Free lunch
130%

Reduced lunch
130–185%

The US's official poverty measure



Mollie Orshansky

Formula created in 1963

Based solely on food expenses from a survey of household budgets in 1955

The US's official poverty measure

Official formula:

1955 annual food budget × 3

That's all!

In 1963 poverty line was 50% of median income;
in 2005 it was 28%; 18% today

Why don't we change it?



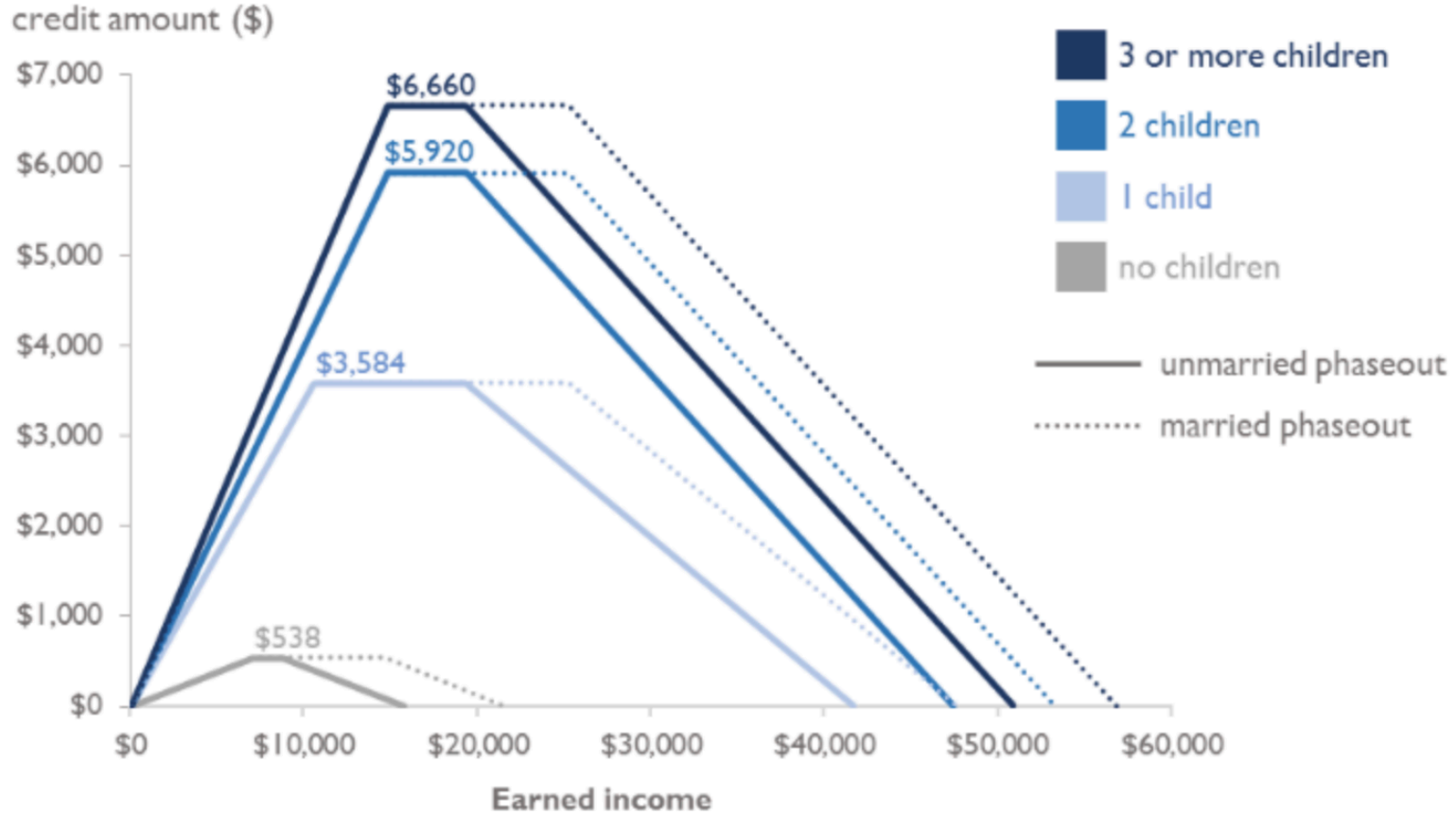
A New Formula for Poverty - The West Wing

Ryan Burge



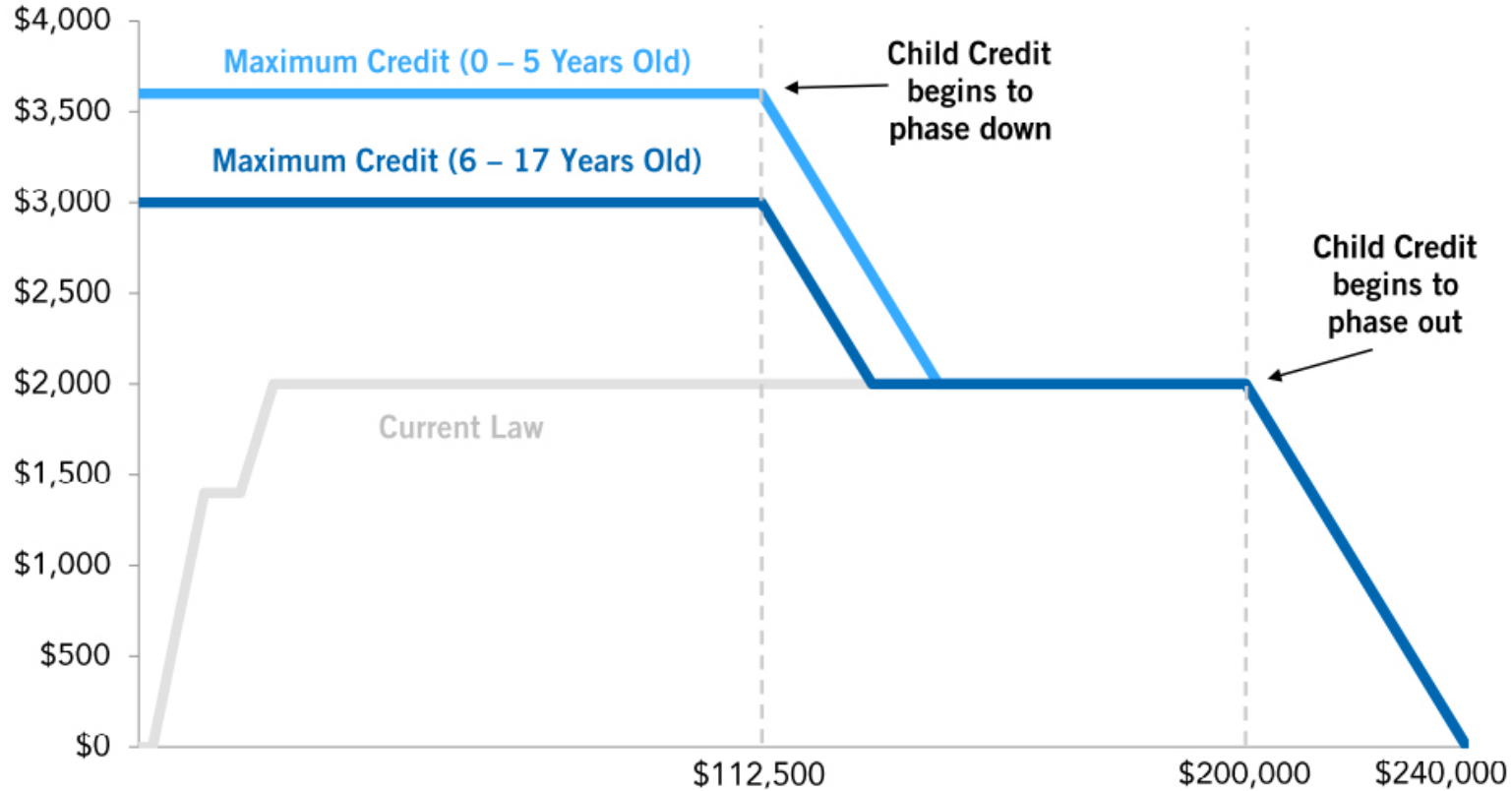
Watch on

EITC Amount by Number of Qualifying Children, Marital Status, and Income, 2020



The Child Tax Credit is fully refundable under the American Rescue Plan

CTC FOR A SINGLE PARENT WITH ONE CHILD FOR 2021 (DOLLARS)



SOURCE: Congressional Research Service, *The Child Tax Credit: Temporary Expansion for 2021 Under the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021*, March 2021.

NOTE: Single parent is assumed to file as head of household.

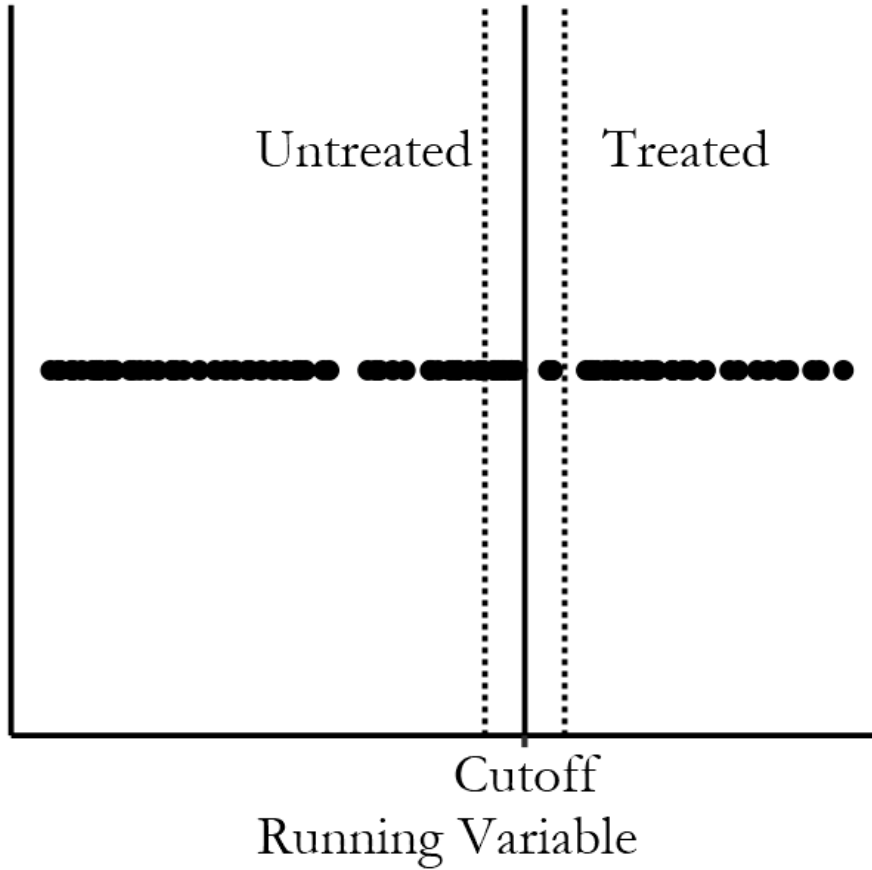
**Why does the cutoff need
to be unique to the
program of interest?**

What if there are multiple cutoffs?

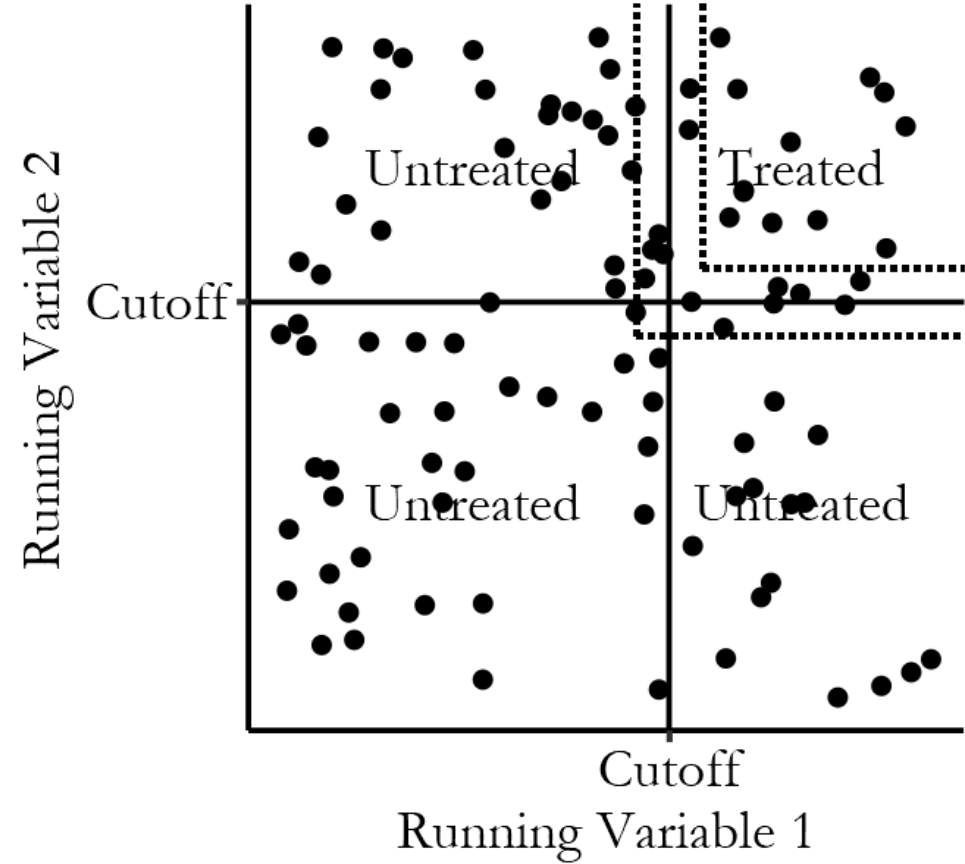
College admission is based on GPA *and* test scores...

WIC/SNAP/Medicaid are based on income *and* family size...

(a) One Running Variable



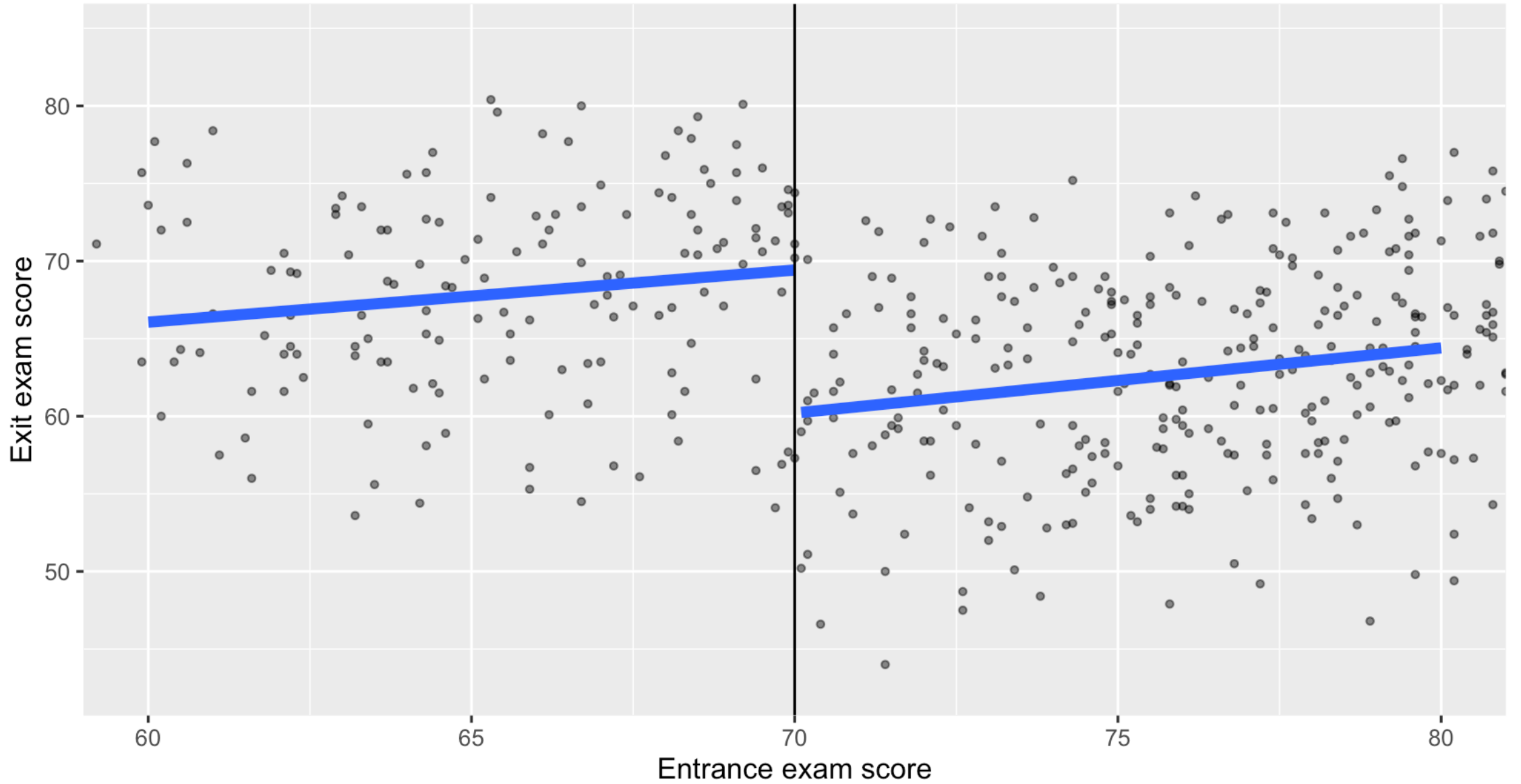
(b) Multiple Running Variables



<https://stats.andrewheiss.com/motherly-dolphin/>

**Why do we center
the running variable?**

Regression is just fancy averages!



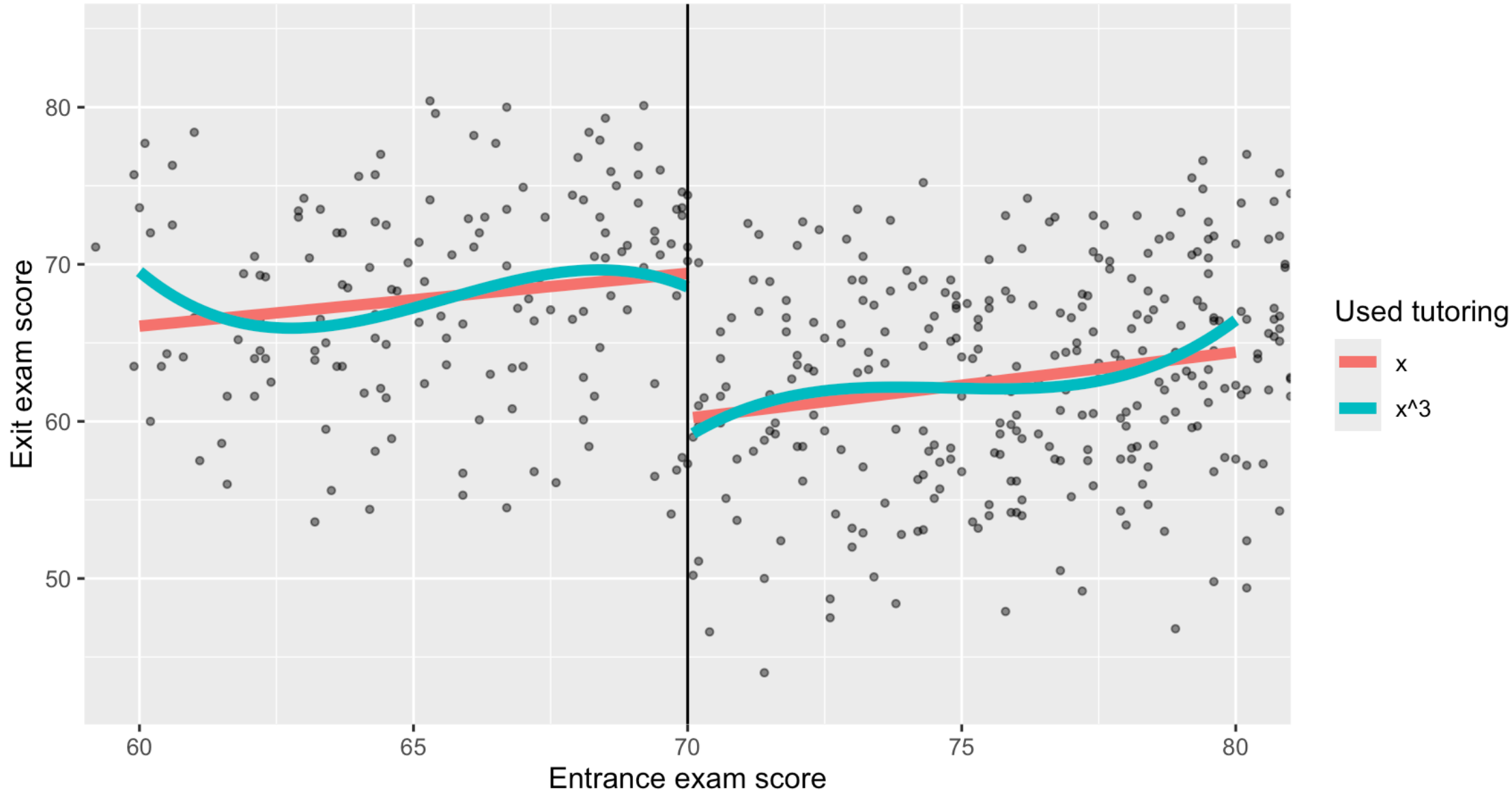
```
lm(exit_exam ~ entrance_exam + tutoring,
    data = filter(tutoring, entrance_exam <= 80,
                  entrance_exam >= 60)) %>%
model_parameters(verbose = FALSE)
```

## Parameter	Coefficient	SE	95% CI	t(401)
## (Intercept)	33.19	8.64	[16.19, 50.18]	3.84
## entrance_exam	0.39	0.11	[0.16, 0.61]	3.40
## tutoringTRUE	9.27	1.31	[6.70, 11.85]	7.09

```
tutoring_centered <- tutoring %>%
  mutate(entrance_centered = entrance_exam - 70)

lm(exit_exam ~ entrance_centered + tutoring,
  data = filter(tutoring_centered, entrance_exam <= 80,
    entrance_exam >= 60)) %>%
  model_parameters(verbose = FALSE)
```

## Parameter	Coefficient	SE	95% CI	t(40)
## (Intercept)	60.38	0.75	[58.90, 61.85]	80.
## entrance_centered	0.39	0.11	[0.16, 0.61]	3.
## tutoringTRUE	9.27	1.31	[6.70, 11.85]	7.



What's the difference between weighting with kernels and inverse probability weighting?

There must be some math behind for the non-parametric lines. Should we care about that or should we just trust in R?

Should we control for confounders?

How do we decide on the right model?

Parametric with $y = x$?

With $y = x^2 + x$?

With $y = x^{\text{whatever}} + x^{\text{whatever}} + x$?

Nonparametric?

`rdrobust()` or just `lm()`?

Controls or no controls?

How do you justify a bandwidth?

Does the bandwidth need to be the same on both sides?

How should we think about the impact of the program on people who score really high or low on the running variable?

If we're throwing most of the data away and only looking at a narrow bandwidth of people, what does this say about generalizability?

**What do we do about noncompliance
and manipulation?**

Fuzzy regression discontinuity!

Why wait for fuzzy regression discontinuity?

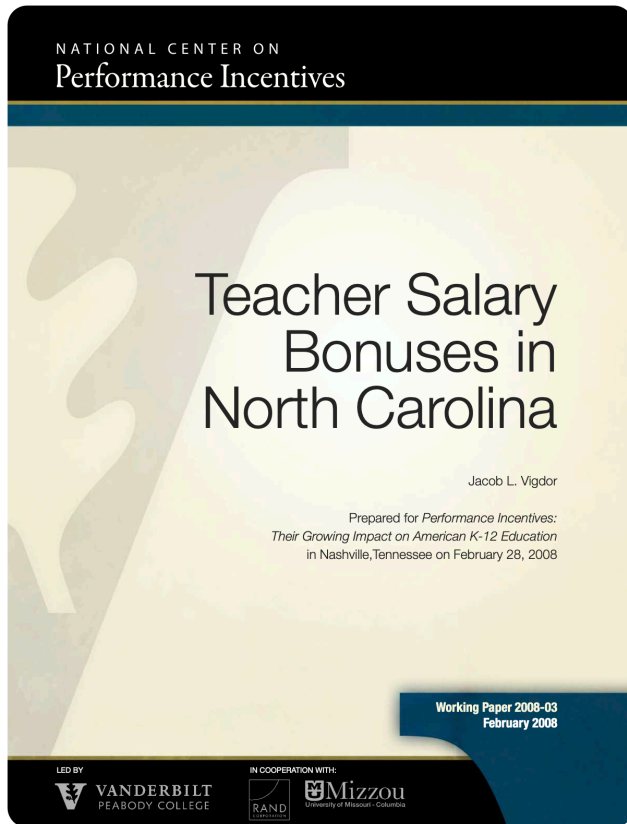
It's RD + instrumental variables

Can other quasi-experimental methods be combined too?

Difference in discontinuity!
Diff-in-diff + RD

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jebo.2023.12.001>

RD play time!



Teachers in North Carolina Public schools earn a bonus of \$750 if the students in their school meet a standard called "expected growth." A summary statistic called "average growth" is computed for each school; the expected growth standard is met when this summary measure exceeds zero.

Does getting a bonus in year t cause improved student performance in year $t + 1$?

Quarto fun times