

# 11. (Linear) Regression

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Gov 2002 (Harvard)

# Where are we? Where are we going?

- Learned about estimation and inference in general.
- Now: building to a specific estimator, least squares regression.
- First we need to understand what a “linear model” is and when/why we need it.
  - No estimators quite yet. First, let’s understand what we are estimating.
- Linear model is ubiquitous but poorly understood. Lots of subtlety here.

# Regression derivatives and partial effects

- Goal of regression: how mean of  $Y$  changes with  $X$ .

$$\mu(\mathbf{x}) = \mathbb{E}[Y \mid \mathbf{X} = \mathbf{x}]$$

- For continuous regressors, we can use the partial derivative:

$$\frac{\partial \mu(x_1, \dots, x_k)}{\partial x_1}$$

- For binary  $X_1$ , we can use the difference in conditional expectations:

$$\mu(1, x_2, \dots, x_k) - \mu(0, x_2, \dots, x_k)$$

- “Partial effect” of  $X_1$  holding other included variables constant
- Exact form will depend on the functional form of  $\mu(\mathbf{x})$ .
  - How do we decide what form  $\mu(\mathbf{x})$  should take?

# Estimating the CEF for discrete covariates

- To motivate function form, useful to think about estimation.
- How do we estimate  $\mu(x) = \mathbb{E}[Y|X = x]$  for binary  $X$ ?
- **Subclassification:** calculate sample averages with levels of  $X_i$ :

$$\hat{\mu}(1) = \frac{1}{n_1} \sum_{i=1}^n Y_i X_i$$

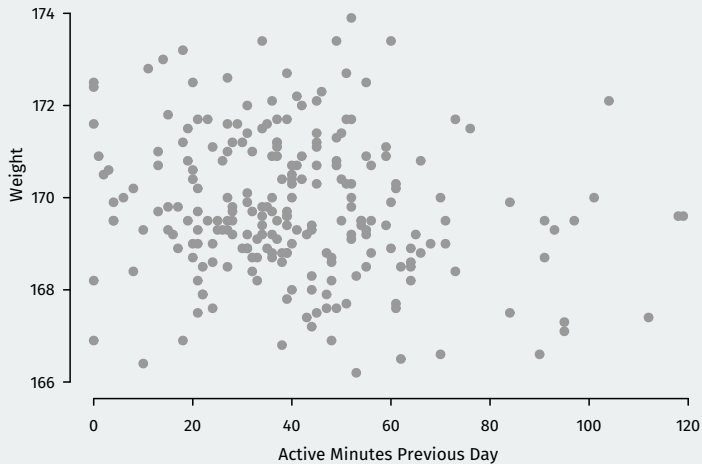
- $n_1 = \sum_{i=1}^n X_i$  is the number of units with  $X_i = 1$  in the sample.
- More generally for any discrete  $X_i$ :

$$\hat{\mu}(x) = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^N Y_i \mathbb{1}(X_i = x)}{\sum_{i=1}^N \mathbb{1}(X_i = x)}$$

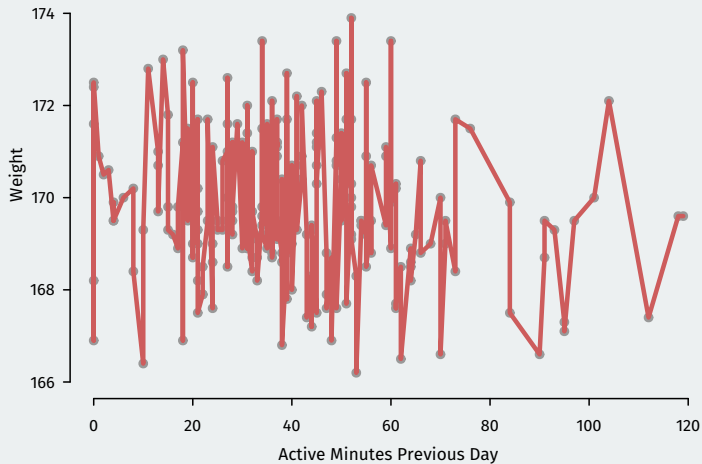
# Continuous covariates

- What if  $X$  is continuous? Subclassification fall apart.
  - Each  $i$  has a unique value:  $\sum_{i=1}^N \mathbb{1}(X_i = x) = 1$
  - Very noisy estimates
  - What about any  $x$  not in the sample?
- **Stratification:** bin  $X_i$  into categories and treat like as discrete.
  - Every  $x$  in the same bin gets the same conditional expectation.
  - Depends on arbitrary bin cutoffs/sizes.
- Example:
  - Personal data science: I wear an activity tracker and have a smart scale.
  - Relationship between my weight and active minutes in the previous day.

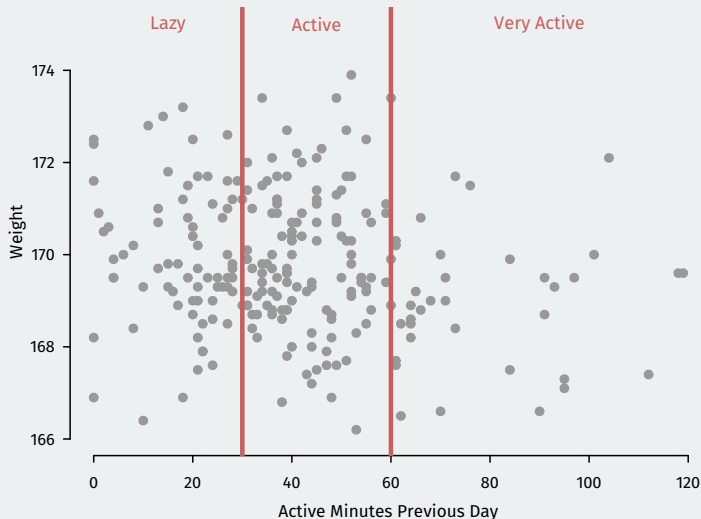
# Continuous covariate example



# Continuous covariate CEF: interpolation

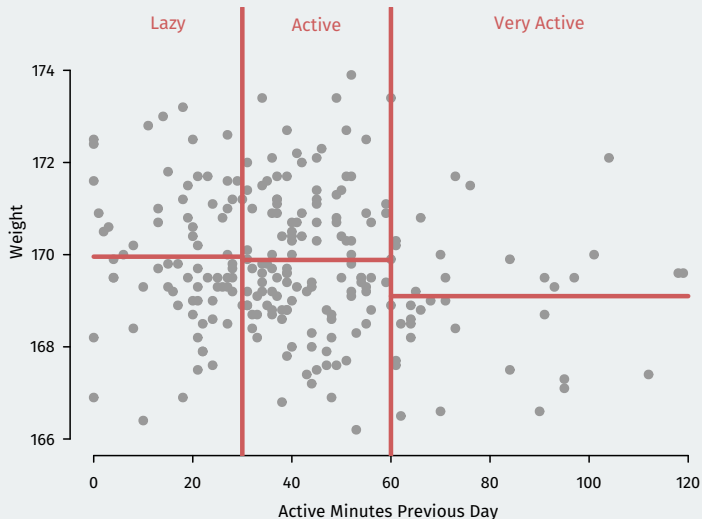


# Continuous covariate CEF: stratification





# Continuous covariate CEF: stratification



# Linear CEFs

- Stratification requires lots of choices/hidden assumptions.
  - Number of categories, cutoffs for the categories, constant means within strata, etc.
- Alternative: assuming that the CEF is **linear**:

$$\mu(x) = \mathbb{E}[Y_i | X_i = x] = \beta_0 + \beta_1 x$$

- **Intercept**,  $\beta_0$ : the condition expectation of  $Y_i$  when  $X_i = 0$
- **Slope**,  $\beta_1$ : change in the CEF of  $Y_i$  given a one-unit change in  $X_i$

# Why is linearity an assumption?

- Example:  $Y_i$  is income,  $X_i$  is years of education.
  - $\beta_0$ : average income among people with 0 years of education.
  - $\beta_1$ : expected difference in income between two adults that differ by 1 year of education.
- Why is linearity an assumption?

$$\begin{aligned}\mathbb{E}[Y_i|X_i = 12] - \mathbb{E}[Y_i|X_i = 11] &= \mathbb{E}[Y_i|X_i = 16] - \mathbb{E}[Y_i|X_i = 15] \\ &= \beta_1\end{aligned}$$

- Effect of HS degree is the same as the effect of college degree.
- Put another way: average partial effects are constant  $\frac{\partial \mu(x)}{\partial x} = \beta_1$

# Linear CEF with nonlinear effects

- What if we think the effect is nonlinear?
- We can include nonlinear transformations:

$$\mu(x) = \beta_0 + x\beta_1 + x^2\beta_2$$

- Partial effect now varies:  $\partial\mu(x)/\partial x = \beta_1 + 2x\beta_2$
- **Linear** means linear in the parameters  $\beta = (\beta_1, \dots, \beta_k)$ , not  $\mathbf{X}$ .
- We can also include **interactions** between covariates:

$$\mu(x_1, x_2) = \beta_0 + x_1\beta_1 + x_2\beta_2 + x_1x_2\beta_3$$

- Average partial effect of  $X_1$  depends on  $X_2$ :  $\partial\mu(x_1, x_2)/\partial x_1 = \beta_1 + x_2\beta_3$

# Linear CEF with a binary covariate

- Wait-times ( $Y_i$ ) and race ( $X_i = 1$  for white,  $X_i = 0$  for POC)
  - Two possible values of the CEF:  $\mu_1$  for whites and  $\mu_0$  for POC.
- Can write the CEF as follows:

$$\mu(x) = x\mu_1 + (1-x)\mu_0 = \mu_0 + x(\mu_1 - \mu_0) = \beta_0 + x\beta_1$$

- No assumptions, just rewriting! Interpretations:
  - $\beta_0 = \mu_0$ : expected wait-time for POC
  - $\beta_1 = \mu_1 - \mu_0$ : diff. in avg. wait times between whites and POC.
- $> 2$  categories: dummies for all but category and everything is linear.

# Linear CEF with multiple binary covariates

- What if we have two binary covariates,  $X_1$  (race) and  $X_2$  (1 urban/0 rural):

$$\mu(x_1, x_2) = \begin{cases} \mu_{00} & \text{if } x_1 = 0 \text{ and } x_2 = 0 \text{ (POC, rural)} \\ \mu_{10} & \text{if } x_1 = 1 \text{ and } x_2 = 0 \text{ (white, rural)} \\ \mu_{01} & \text{if } x_1 = 0 \text{ and } x_2 = 1 \text{ (POC, urban)} \\ \mu_{11} & \text{if } x_1 = 1 \text{ and } x_2 = 1 \text{ (white, urban)} \end{cases}$$

- Can rewrite this without assumptions as a linear CEF with interaction:

$$\mu(x_1, x_2) = \beta_0 + x_1\beta_1 + x_2\beta_2 + x_1x_2\beta_3$$

- Interpretations:
  - $\beta_0 = \mu_{00}$ : average wait times for rural POC.
  - $\beta_1 = \mu_{10} - \mu_{00}$ : diff. in means for rural whites vs rural POC.
  - $\beta_2 = \mu_{01} - \mu_{00}$ : diff. in means for urban POC vs rural POC.
  - $\beta_3 = (\mu_{11} - \mu_{01}) - (\mu_{10} - \mu_{00})$ : diff. in urban racial diff. vs rural racial diff.
- Generalizes to  $p$  binary variables if **all interactions included (saturated)**

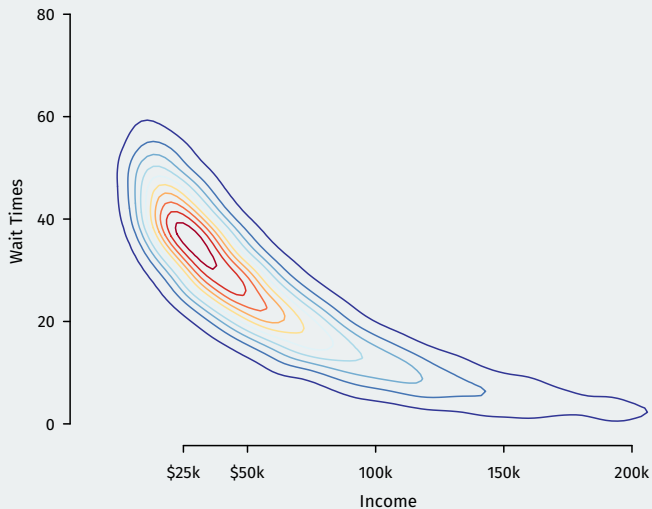
# Linear approximation

- Outside of saturated discrete settings, CEF almost never truly linear.
- Alternative goal: find **best linear predictor** of  $Y$  given  $X$ .
- Formally, linear function of  $X$  that **minimizes squared prediction errors**:

$$(\beta_0, \beta_1) = \arg \min_{(b_0, b_1)} \mathbb{E}[(Y - (b_0 + b_1 X))^2]$$

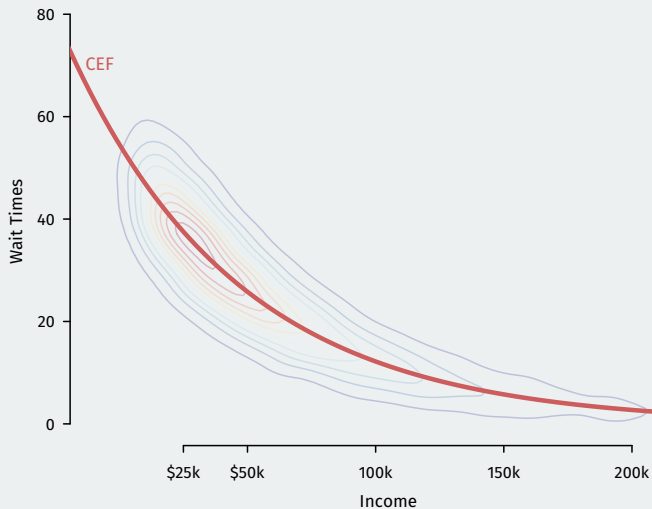
- $m(x) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X$  is called the **linear projection** of  $Y$  onto  $X$ .
  - $\beta_1 = \text{Cov}(X, Y) / \mathbb{V}[X]$
  - $\beta_0 = \mu_Y - \mu_X \beta_1$ , where  $\mu_Y = \mathbb{E}[Y]$  and  $\mu_X = \mathbb{E}[X]$
- In general,  $m(x)$  distinct from the CEF:
  - CEF,  $\mu(x)$  is the best predictor of  $Y_i$  among all functions.
  - Linear projection is best predictor among linear functions.

# Linear approximation

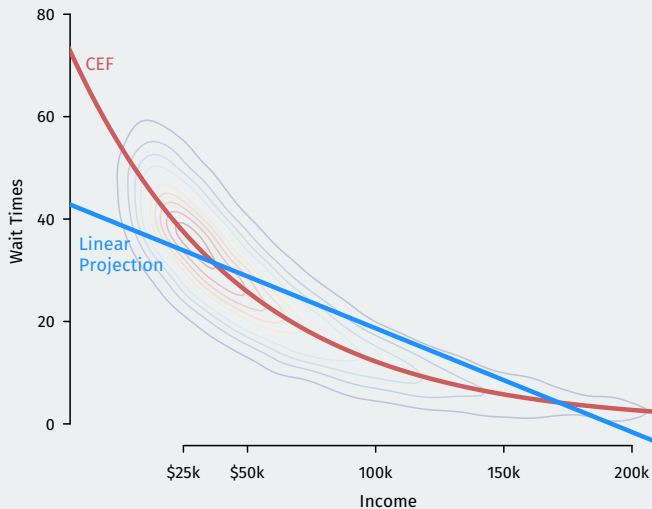




# Linear approximation



# Linear approximation



# Best linear predictor

- We'll almost always condition on a vector  $\mathbf{X} = (X_1, \dots, X_k)'$ :

$$m(\mathbf{x}) = m(x_1, \dots, x_k) = x_1\beta_1 + \dots + x_k\beta_k = \mathbf{x}'\boldsymbol{\beta}$$

- Linear predictor when  $\mathbf{X} = \mathbf{x}$
- $\mathbf{X}$  is now a  $k \times 1$  random vector of covariates:
  - May contain nonlinear transformations/interactions of “real” variables.
  - Typically,  $X_1 = 1$  and is the intercept/constant.
- Assumptions (“Regularity conditions”):
  1.  $\mathbb{E}[Y^2] < \infty$  (outcome has finite mean/variance)
  2.  $\mathbb{E}\|\mathbf{X}\|^2 < \infty$  ( $\mathbf{X}$  has finite means/variances/covariances)
  3.  $\mathbf{Q}_{\mathbf{X}\mathbf{X}} = \mathbb{E}[\mathbf{X}\mathbf{X}']$  is positive definite (columns of  $\mathbf{X}$  are linearly independent)

# Linear Projection

- How to find  $\beta$ ? Minimize squared prediction error!

$$\beta = \arg \min_{\mathbf{b} \in \mathbb{R}^k} \mathbb{E} [(Y - \mathbf{X}'\mathbf{b})^2]$$

- After some calculus:

$$\beta = \mathbf{Q}_{\mathbf{X}\mathbf{X}}^{-1} \mathbf{Q}_{\mathbf{X}Y} = (\mathbb{E}[\mathbf{X}\mathbf{X}'])^{-1} \mathbb{E}[\mathbf{X}Y]$$

- $\mathbb{E}[\mathbf{X}\mathbf{X}']$  is  $k \times k$  and  $\mathbb{E}[\mathbf{X}Y]$  is  $k \times 1$
- Notes about the  $m(\mathbf{x}) = \mathbf{x}'\beta$ :
  - $\beta$  is a population quantity and possible quantity of interest.
  - Well-defined under very mild assumptions!
  - Not necessarily a conditional mean nor a causal effect!

# Projection errors

- Projection error:  $e = Y - \mathbf{X}'\boldsymbol{\beta}$
- Decomposition of  $Y$  into the linear projection and error:  $Y = \mathbf{X}'\boldsymbol{\beta} + e$
- Properties of the projection error:
  - $\mathbb{E}[\mathbf{X}e] = 0$
  - $\mathbb{E}[e] = 0$  when  $\mathbf{X}$  contains a constant.
  - Together, implies  $\text{Cov}(X_j, e) = 0$  for all  $j = 1, \dots, k$
- Distinct from CEF errors:  $u = Y - \mu(\mathbf{X})$  which had the additional property:  $\mathbb{E}[u | \mathbf{X}] = 0$ 
  - Zero conditional mean is stronger: CEF errors are 0 at every value of  $\mathbf{X}$
  - $\mathbb{E}[\mathbf{X}e] = 0$  just says they are uncorrelated.

# Regression coefficients

- Sometimes useful to separate the constant:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \mathbf{X}'\boldsymbol{\beta} + e$$

where  $\mathbf{X}$  doesn't have a constant.

- Solution for  $\boldsymbol{\beta}$  more interpretable here:

$$\boldsymbol{\beta} = \mathbb{V}[\mathbf{X}]^{-1}\text{Cov}(\mathbf{X}, Y), \quad \beta_0 = \mu_Y - \boldsymbol{\mu}'_{\mathbf{X}}\boldsymbol{\beta}$$

# Interpretation of the coefficients

- Interpretation of  $\beta_j$  depends on what nonlinearities are included.
- Simplest case: no polynomials or interactions.
- $\beta_j$  is the average change in predicted outcome for a one-unit change in  $X_j$  holding other variables fixed.
- Let's compare:

$$m(x_1 + 1, x_2) = \beta_0 + \beta_1(x_1 + 1) + \beta_2x_2$$

$$m(x_1, x_2) = \beta_0 + \beta_1x_1 + \beta_2x_2,$$

- Then:

$$m(x_1 + 1, x_2) - m(x_1, x_2) = \beta_1$$

- Holds for all values of  $x_2$  and even if we add more variables.

# Interpretation with nonlinear terms

- What if we include a nonlinear function of one covariate?

$$m(x_1, x_1^2, x_2) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 x_1 + \beta_2 x_1^2 + \beta_3 x_2,$$

- One-unit change in  $x_1$  is more complicated:

$$m(x_1 + 1, (x_1 + 1)^2, x_2) = \beta_0 + \beta_1(x_1 + 1) + \beta_2(x_1 + 1)^2 + \beta_3 x_2$$

$$m(x_1, x_1^2, x_2) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 x_1 + \beta_2 x_1^2 + \beta_3 x_2,$$

- Better to think of the **marginal effect** of  $X_{i1}$ :

$$\frac{\partial m(x_1, x_1^2, x_2)}{\partial x_1} = \beta_1 + 2\beta_2 x_1$$

- Interpretations:
  - $\beta_1$ : “effect” of  $X_{i1}$  on predicted  $Y_i$  when  $X_{i1} = 0$  (holding  $X_{i2}$  fixed)
  - $\beta_2/2$ : how that “effect” changes as  $X_{i1}$  changes
  - Maybe better to visualize than to interpret



# Interpretation with interactions

- What if we include an interaction between two covariates?

$$m(x_1, x_2, x_1x_2) = \beta_0 + \beta_1x_1 + \beta_2x_2 + \beta_3x_1x_2$$

- Two different **marginal effects** of interest:

$$\frac{\partial m(x_1, x_2, x_1x_2)}{\partial x_1} = \beta_1 + \beta_3x_2,$$

$$\frac{\partial m(x_1, x_2, x_1x_2)}{\partial x_2} = \beta_2 + \beta_3x_1$$

- Interpretations:
  - $\beta_1$ : the marginal effect of  $X_{i1}$  on predicted  $Y_i$  when  $X_{i2} = 0$ .
  - $\beta_2$ : the marginal effect of  $X_{i2}$  on predicted  $Y_i$  when  $X_{i1} = 0$ .
  - $\beta_3$ : the change in the marginal effect of  $X_{i1}$  due to a one-unit change in  $X_{i2}$  **OR** the change in the marginal effect of  $X_{i2}$  due to a one-unit change in  $X_{i1}$ .

# Partitioned Regression

$$(\alpha, \beta, \gamma) = \arg \min_{(a, b, c) \in \mathbb{R}^3} \mathbb{E}[(Y_i - (a + bX_i + cZ_i))^2]$$

- Can we get an expression for just  $\beta$ ? With some tricks, yes!
- Population residuals from projection of  $X_i$  on  $Z_i$ :

$$\tilde{X}_i = X_i - (\delta_0 + \delta_1 Z_i) \quad \text{where} \quad (\delta_0, \delta_1) = \arg \min_{(d_0, d_1) \in \mathbb{R}^2} \mathbb{E}[(X_i - (d_0 + d_1 Z_i))^2]$$

- $\tilde{X}_i$  is now **orthogonal** to  $Z_i$ .
- Project  $Y$  onto these residuals gives  $\beta$  as coefficient:

$$\beta = \frac{\text{cov}(Y_i, \tilde{X}_i)}{\text{V}[\tilde{X}_i]}$$

- Works if  $\mathbf{Z}_i$  is a vector and  $\tilde{X}_i = X_i - m_X(\mathbf{Z}_i)$ .
  - $m_X(\mathbf{Z}_i)$  is the BLP of  $X_i$  on  $\mathbf{Z}_i$

# Omitted variable bias

- Consider two projections/regressions with and without some  $Z$ :

$$m(\mathbf{X}_i, Z_i) = \mathbf{X}_i' \boldsymbol{\beta} + Z_i \gamma, \quad m_{-Z}(\mathbf{X}_i) = \mathbf{X}_i' \boldsymbol{\delta},$$

- How do  $\boldsymbol{\beta}$  and  $\boldsymbol{\delta}$  relate? Use law of iterated projections:

$$\begin{aligned} \boldsymbol{\delta} &= (\mathbb{E}[\mathbf{X}_i \mathbf{X}_i'])^{-1} \mathbb{E}[\mathbf{X}_i Y_i] \\ &= (\mathbb{E}[\mathbf{X}_i \mathbf{X}_i'])^{-1} \mathbb{E}[\mathbf{X}_i (\mathbf{X}_i' \boldsymbol{\beta} + Z_i \gamma + e_i)] \\ &= (\mathbb{E}[\mathbf{X}_i \mathbf{X}_i'])^{-1} (\mathbb{E}[\mathbf{X}_i \mathbf{X}_i'] \boldsymbol{\beta} + \mathbb{E}[\mathbf{X}_i Z_i] \gamma + \mathbb{E}[\mathbf{X}_i e_i]) \\ &= \boldsymbol{\beta} + \underbrace{(\mathbb{E}[\mathbf{X}_i \mathbf{X}_i'])^{-1} \mathbb{E}[\mathbf{X}_i Z_i]}_{\text{coefs from } Z \sim \mathbf{X}} \gamma \end{aligned}$$

- Leads to the “**omitted variable bias**” formula:

$$\boldsymbol{\delta} = \boldsymbol{\beta} + \boldsymbol{\pi} \gamma, \quad \boldsymbol{\pi} = (\mathbb{E}[\mathbf{X}_i \mathbf{X}_i'])^{-1} \mathbb{E}[\mathbf{X}_i Z_i]$$

- $\boldsymbol{\delta} - \boldsymbol{\beta} = \boldsymbol{\pi} \gamma$  is the “bias” but this is misleading.
  - $\boldsymbol{\beta}$  not necessarily “correct”, we’re just relating two projections

# Best linear approximation

- What is the relationship between  $m(\mathbf{X})$  and  $\mu(\mathbf{X}) = \mathbb{E}[Y | \mathbf{X}]$ ?
  - If  $\mu(\mathbf{X})$  is linear, then  $\mu(\mathbf{X}) = m(\mathbf{X}) = \mathbf{X}'\boldsymbol{\beta}$ .
  - But  $\mu(\mathbf{X})$  could be nonlinear, what then?
- Linear projection justification: best linear approximation to  $\mu(\mathbf{X})$ :

$$\boldsymbol{\beta} = \arg \min_{\mathbf{b} \in \mathbb{R}^K} \mathbb{E} [(\mu(\mathbf{X}) - \mathbf{X}'\boldsymbol{\beta})^2]$$

- Linear projection is best linear approximation to  $Y$  and  $\mathbb{E}[Y | X]$ .
- Limitations:
  - If nonlinearity of  $\mu(\mathbf{X})$  is severe,  $m(\mathbf{X})$  can only be so good.
  - $m(\mathbf{X})$  can be sensitive to the marginal distribution of  $\mathbf{X}$ .

$$Y = \mathbf{X}'\boldsymbol{\beta} + e$$

- “The Linear Model”: is this an assumption?
- Depends on what we assume about the error,  $e$ 
  - If  $\mathbb{E}[e | \mathbf{X}] = 0$ , then we are assuming the CEF is linear,  $\mathbb{E}[Y | X] = \mathbf{X}'\boldsymbol{\beta}$
  - If just  $\mathbb{E}[\mathbf{X}e] = 0$ , then this is just a linear projection.
  - First is very strong, second is very mild.
- Why do we care? Affects the properties of OLS.
  - Some finite-sample properties of OLS (unbiasedness) require linear CEF
  - Asymptotic results (consistency, asymptotic normality) apply to both.
  - OLS will consistently estimate something, but maybe not what you want.