Direct and Indirect Discrimination in Generalized Linear Models

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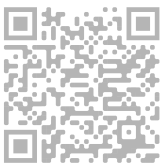

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What are we trying to decompose?

Let S be a sensitive attribute, $\boldsymbol{X}$ non-sensitive covariates, and $f(\boldsymbol{X}, S)$ a fitted prediction.

Diagnostic question

When prediction distributions differ across groups,

strong demographic (un)parity

$$\mathcal{L}\{f(\boldsymbol{X}, S) \mid S = s\} \neq \mathcal{L}\{f(\boldsymbol{X}, S) \mid S = s'\}$$

where does the disparity come from?

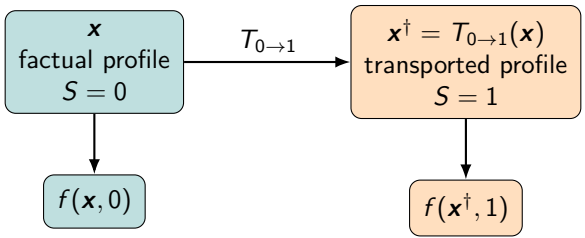
explicit sensitive effect + covariate/proxy channel + distributional structure.

Fairness background:
[Dwork et al., 2012, Hardt et al., 2016, Kusner et al., 2017, Barocas et al., 2017, Charpentier, 2024].

Counterfactual comparison by transport

A transport map compares individuals *mutatis mutandis*:

$$T_{0\to1\#}\,\mathcal{L}(\boldsymbol{X} \mid S=0) = \mathcal{L}(\boldsymbol{X} \mid S=1), \qquad \boldsymbol{x}^\dagger = T_{0\to1}(\boldsymbol{x}).$$



$$\underbrace{f(\boldsymbol{x}^\dagger,0) - f(\boldsymbol{x},0)}_{\text{covariate / indirect}} \qquad \underbrace{f(\boldsymbol{x}^\dagger,1) - f(\boldsymbol{x}^\dagger,0)}_{\text{residual / direct}}.$$

[Villani, 2009, Santambrogio, 2015, Gordaliza et al., 2019, Black et al., 2020, Charpentier et al., 2023, De Lara et al., 2024, Fernandes Machado et al., 2026].

From Oaxaca–Blinder to prediction decompositions

Classical Kitagawa–Oaxaca–Blinder decompositions split a mean gap into characteristics and coefficients:

$$\bar{\boldsymbol{x}}_1^\top \boldsymbol{\beta}_1 - \bar{\boldsymbol{x}}_0^\top \boldsymbol{\beta}_0 = \underbrace{(\bar{\boldsymbol{x}}_1 - \bar{\boldsymbol{x}}_0)^\top \boldsymbol{\beta}_0}_{\text{characteristics}} + \underbrace{\bar{\boldsymbol{x}}_1^\top (\boldsymbol{\beta}_1 - \boldsymbol{\beta}_0)}_{\text{coefficients}}.$$

corresponding to $\mathbb{E}[f(\boldsymbol{X}, S) \mid S = 1] - \mathbb{E}[f(\boldsymbol{X}, S) \mid S = 0]$.

Our use of the idea

We do *not* compare two group-specific regressions. We decompose the disparity generated by a *single fitted predictor*.

$$f_{\text{lin}}(\boldsymbol{x}, s) = \langle \boldsymbol{x}, \boldsymbol{\beta} \rangle + \gamma_s + \beta_0.$$

[Kitagawa, 1955, Oaxaca, 1973, Blinder, 1973, Jann, 2008, Fortin et al., 2011, Fairlie, 2005].

From mean gaps to Wasserstein disparity

Mean gaps miss dispersion and shape. Let

$$\nu_{f|S=s} = \mathcal{L}\{f(\boldsymbol{X}, S) \mid S = s\}.$$

A Wasserstein barycentric measure of distributional disparity is

$$W_2^2(\nu_0, \nu_1) = \int_0^1 (F_0^{-1}(u) - F_1^{-1}(u))^2 du$$

$$U_{W_2}(f) := \min_{\nu \in \mathcal{P}_2(\mathbb{R})} \sum_{s=1}^{M} \pi_s \, W_2^2\big(\nu_{f|S=s}, \nu\big)$$

Linear-Gaussian simplification

If

$$f_{\text{lin}}(\boldsymbol{X}, S) \mid S = s \sim \mathcal{N}(m_s, b_s^2),$$

then

$$U_{W_2}(f_{\text{lin}}) = U_2(f_{\text{lin}}) = \text{Var}_S(m_S) + \text{Var}_S(b_S).$$

[Agueh and Carlier, 2011, Dowson and Landau, 1982, Gelbrich, 1990, Takatsu, 2011, Fukuchi and Sakuma, 2023].

Linear benchmark: exact four-way decomposition

Consider one fitted predictor

$$f_{\text{lin}}(\boldsymbol{x}, s) = \langle \boldsymbol{x}, \boldsymbol{\beta} \rangle + \gamma_s + \beta_0$$

For each group, suppose $\boldsymbol{\mu}_s = \mathbb{E}[\boldsymbol{X} \mid S = s]$, $\boldsymbol{\Sigma}_s = \text{Cov}(\boldsymbol{X} \mid S = s)$ and denote

$$m_s = \mathbb{E}[f_{\text{lin}}(\boldsymbol{X}, S) \mid S = s], b_s = \sqrt{\text{Var}(f_{\text{lin}}(\boldsymbol{X}, S) \mid S = s)}.$$

Under the Gaussian benchmark,

$$U_{W_2}(f_{\text{lin}}) = \text{Var}_S(m_S) + \text{Var}_S(b_S).$$

Since $m_S = \langle \boldsymbol{\mu}^{(S)}, \boldsymbol{\beta} \rangle + \gamma_S + \beta_0$, we obtain

$$U_2(f_{\text{lin}}) = \underbrace{\text{Var}_S(\gamma_S)}_{\text{direct}} + \underbrace{\text{Var}_S(\langle \boldsymbol{\mu}^{(S)}, \boldsymbol{\beta} \rangle)}_{\text{indirect}} + \underbrace{2\,\text{Cov}_S(\gamma_S, \langle \boldsymbol{\mu}^{(S)}, \boldsymbol{\beta} \rangle)}_{\text{interaction}} + \underbrace{\text{Var}_S(b_S)}_{\text{structural}}.$$

[Tierny et al., 2026a, Tierny et al., 2026b].

How to read the four terms

$$U_2(f_{\text{lin}}) = \underbrace{\text{Var}_S(\gamma_S)}_{\text{direct}} + \underbrace{\text{Var}_S(\langle \boldsymbol{\mu}^{(S)}, \boldsymbol{\beta} \rangle)}_{\text{indirect}} + \underbrace{2\,\text{Cov}_S(\gamma_S, \langle \boldsymbol{\mu}^{(S)}, \boldsymbol{\beta} \rangle)}_{\text{interaction}} + \underbrace{\text{Var}_S(b_S)}_{\text{structural}}.$$

- **Direct:** explicit fitted contribution of the sensitive attribute.
- **Indirect:** differences in average non-sensitive covariates.
- **Interaction:** direct and indirect channels reinforce or offset.
- **Structural:** differences in within-group predictive dispersion.

Caution

A negative interaction is only a statistical offset in the fitted score, not a normative correction.

Why generalized linear models?

Actuarial targets are rarely Gaussian on their natural scale.

Actuarial quantity	**Typical GLM**
Occurrence / hospitalization	Logistic regression
Frequency / number of visits	Poisson regression
Utilization / pure premium / cost	Tweedie regression

GLMs combine a latent additive score $\eta = \langle \boldsymbol{X}, \boldsymbol{\beta} \rangle + \gamma_S + \beta_0$

with a nonlinear inverse link $f(\boldsymbol{X}, S) = h(\eta)$.

Key issue

A disparity that is additive on the latent scale may be compressed, amplified, or reshaped on the prediction scale.

[McCullagh and Nelder, 1989, De Jong and Heller, 2008, Ohlsson and Johansson, 2010, Frees, 2009, Dunn and Smyth, 2018, Denuit et al., 2019].

The GLM diagnostic: three quantities

For

$$f(\boldsymbol{X}, S) = h(\eta)\,,$$

define the empirical output-scale criterion

$$U_2(f) = \mathrm{Var}_S(\mu_f(S)) + \mathrm{Var}_S(\sigma_f(S)),$$

where

$$\mu_f(s) = \mathbb{E}[f(\boldsymbol{X}, S) \mid S = s], \qquad \sigma_f(s) = \sqrt{\mathrm{Var}(f(\boldsymbol{X}, S) \mid S = s)}.$$

The first-order proxy transports latent moments:

$$\widetilde{\mu}_f(s) = h(m_s), \qquad \widetilde{\sigma}_f(s) = h'(m_s) b_s,$$

and

$$\widetilde{U}_2(f) = \mathrm{Var}_S(\widetilde{\mu}_f(S)) + \mathrm{Var}_S(\widetilde{\sigma}_f(S)).$$

Decomposition target

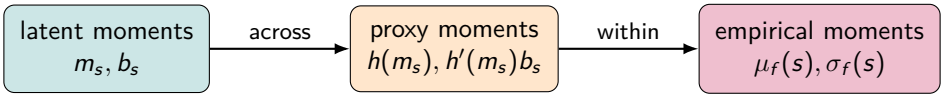
$D_1(f)$ is the leading decomposition of $\widetilde{U}_2(f)$ around the global latent mean $\bar{m}$.

Delta-method approximation: [Oehlert, 1992, van der Vaart, 1998, Serfling, 1980].

Main GLM identity

The GLM diagnostic separates the empirical criterion into a leading interpretable term and two approximation gaps:

$$U_2(f) = D_1(f) + \Delta_{\text{within}}(f) + \Delta_{\text{across}}(f)$$



$$\Delta_{\text{within}}(f) = U_2(f) - \widetilde{U}_2(f), \qquad \Delta_{\text{across}}(f) = \widetilde{U}_2(f) - D_1(f).$$

Leading GLM decomposition

$$D_1(f) = \{h'(\bar{m})\}^2 \Big[\underbrace{\mathrm{Var}_S(\gamma_S)}_{\text{direct}} + \underbrace{\mathrm{Var}_S(\langle \boldsymbol{\mu}^{(S)}, \boldsymbol{\beta} \rangle)}_{\text{indirect}} + \underbrace{2\,\mathrm{Cov}_S(\gamma_S, \langle \boldsymbol{\mu}^{(S)}, \boldsymbol{\beta} \rangle)}_{\text{interaction}} + \underbrace{\mathrm{Var}_S(B)}_{\text{structural}} \Big]$$
$$+ \underbrace{2h'(\bar{m})h''(\bar{m})\bar{b}\ \mathrm{Cov}_S(M, B)}_{\text{curvature coupling}} + \underbrace{\{h''(\bar{m})\}^2 \bar{b}^2\, \mathrm{Var}_S(M)}_{\text{curvature amplification}}.$$

What changes from the linear case?

The four linear channels remain, rescaled by $\{h'(\bar{m})\}^2$, but the inverse link adds two curvature terms.

[Tierny et al., 2026b].

Curvature creates prediction-scale channels

Curvature coupling

$$2h'(\bar{m})h''(\bar{m})\bar{b}\ \mathrm{Cov}_S(M, B).$$

It links group differences in latent means and latent dispersions.
Its sign can be positive or negative.

Curvature amplification

$$\{h''(\bar{m})\}^2\bar{b}^2\,\mathrm{Var}_S(M).$$

It converts latent mean heterogeneity into output-scale dispersion.
It is always nonnegative.

Main message

The inverse link does not merely rescale disparities; it can create additional prediction-scale disparity channels.

Logistic regression: explicit decomposition

Here $h(\eta) = (1 + e^{-\eta})^{-1}$. Let $\bar{\mu} = h(\bar{m})$ and $a = \bar{\mu}(1 - \bar{\mu})$. Since

$$h'(t) = h(t)\{1 - h(t)\} \text{ and } h''(t) = h(t)\{1 - h(t)\}\{1 - 2h(t)\},$$

then the leading logistic decomposition is

$$D_{1,\text{logit}}(f) = a^2 \Big[\underbrace{\text{Var}_S(\gamma_S)}_{\text{direct}} + \underbrace{\text{Var}_S(c_S)}_{\text{indirect}} + \underbrace{2\,\text{Cov}_S(\gamma_S, c_S)}_{\text{interaction}} + \underbrace{\text{Var}_S(B)}_{\text{structural}} \Big]$$
$$+ \underbrace{2a^2(1 - 2\bar{\mu})\bar{b}\ \text{Cov}_S(M, B)}_{\text{curvature coupling}} + \underbrace{a^2(1 - 2\bar{\mu})^2\bar{b}^2\,\text{Var}_S(M)}_{\text{curvature amplification}},$$

where

$$c_s = \langle \boldsymbol{\mu}_s, \beta \rangle, \qquad M = m_S, \qquad B = b_S.$$

Low-probability regime

When $\bar{\mu}$ is small, $a = \bar{\mu}(1 - \bar{\mu}) \simeq \bar{\mu}$, so the whole decomposition is compressed by roughly $\bar{\mu}^2$ on the probability scale.

Empirical reading: what to report

For each fitted model and sensitive comparison, report

$$U_2(f), \qquad \widetilde{U}_2(f), \qquad D_1(f),$$

together with

$$\Delta_{\text{within}}(f) = U_2(f) - \widetilde{U}_2(f), \qquad \Delta_{\text{across}}(f) = \widetilde{U}_2(f) - D_1(f).$$

How to read the output

- $U_2(f)$: observed output-scale disparity.
- $D_1(f)$: interpretable leading decomposition.
- gaps: reliability of the approximation.

Empirical illustration: MEPS

The paper uses MEPS-HC data and two sensitive comparisons:

Hispanic vs. non-Hispanic, uninsured vs. insured.

Model	Outcome	Scale
Linear	$\log(1 + \texttt{TOTEXP16})$	expenditure proxy
Logistic	hospitalization indicator	probability
Poisson	`OBTOTV16`	frequency
Tweedie	`OBTOTV16`	overdispersed utilization

Empirical question

Is the fitted disparity mostly due to explicit group effects, proxy covariates, dispersion structure, or nonlinear link geometry?

[Tierny et al., 2026b].

Scope and limitations

The framework is

- a diagnostic for fitted prediction disparities;
- a decomposition of statistical channels;
- adapted to actuarial GLMs;
- useful for model audit and governance.

The framework is not

- a legal test of discrimination;
- a full causal identification strategy;
- a full characterization of distributional parity outside the linear-Gaussian benchmark;
- a normative definition of a fair tariff.

Take-away

The linear benchmark decomposes disparity into

$$\text{direct} + \text{indirect} + \text{interaction} + \text{structural}.$$

The GLM extension keeps these four channels and adds

$$+ \text{ curvature coupling} + \text{curvature amplification}.$$

Main message

In actuarial GLMs, prediction disparities are shaped not only by coefficients and covariates, but also by the inverse link transporting the latent score to the actuarial scale.

$$U_2(f) = D_1(f) + \Delta_{\text{within}}(f) + \Delta_{\text{across}}(f)$$

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