

SELF-EXECUTING EXPERIMENTS

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HOW TO CRITICIZE A RANDOMIZED STUDY

- Non-double blind
 - Hawthorne effects
 - John Henry effects
- Generalizability
 - Self-selection
 - Different population
 - Different scale
- Imperfect randomization
 - Attrition
 - Crossover
 - Spillovers
- Disagreement about importance of dependent variable

POSSIBLE RESPONSE TO RANDOMIZED STUDY

- Approach 1: Stick with status quo unless these problems are absent
- Approach 2: Stick with status quo unless experiment leads to widespread agreement about best course of action
- Approach 3: Abandon status quo unless experiment leads to widespread agreement in favor of status quo
- Approach 4: Make policy change dependent on some previously specified threshold of success, based on one or more variables of interest

THE CASE FOR SELF-EXECUTION BASED ON ARBITRARY THRESHOLDS

- 0.05 p -value is arbitrary too
- Agreeing to thresholds in advance protects against inertia
 - Akin to preregistration of experiments
- If ex ante claims of empirical disagreement are dishonest, argument for self-execution may expose this
- Political agreements may be easier to form, if different parties have genuine disagreement
- Two-sided self-execution

PROBABILISTIC SUNSETS

- Google AdWords decides in Advance
- Conditional Sunset Unless Agency Certifies Improved Outcome
- Moving the Goal Posts
- Randomization Aversion
- Arbitrary, But Not Capricious