

# Long-Term Differential Effects of Affirmative Action for College Admissions – Evidence from a Selective Law School in Brazil

Ana Trindade Ribeiro and Fernanda Estevan  
Stanford University and São Paulo School of Economics

## Introduction

Affirmative action (AA) policies continue to be a controversial solution for leveling the playing field for college admissions. We use one of the first quota policies implemented in Brazil, at Rio de Janeiro's State University (UERJ), to separately investigate its long-term effects for AA applicants who benefited from the policy and non-AA applicants displaced by it using a Regression Discontinuity strategy. We focus on applications to the undergraduate law major at UERJ for three reasons, explained here.

## Groups and balance tests

First, UERJ's application process allows us to identify applicants to either AA or non-AA slots, and, among them, those who were offered admissions. At the time in Brazil, applicants had to choose their major prior to taking the entry exam to any college. At UERJ, applicants also had to choose to apply to a non-affirmative action (non-AA, 55%) slot, or one of the affirmative action (AA) slots if eligible, where 20% of slots were reserved for black and brown applicants, 20% to public school students, and 5% to applicants with some disability. Additionally, all AA slots are subject to a maximum family income threshold. To increase statistical power we pool the racial and public school applicants into one AA category (disability slots are often not filled).

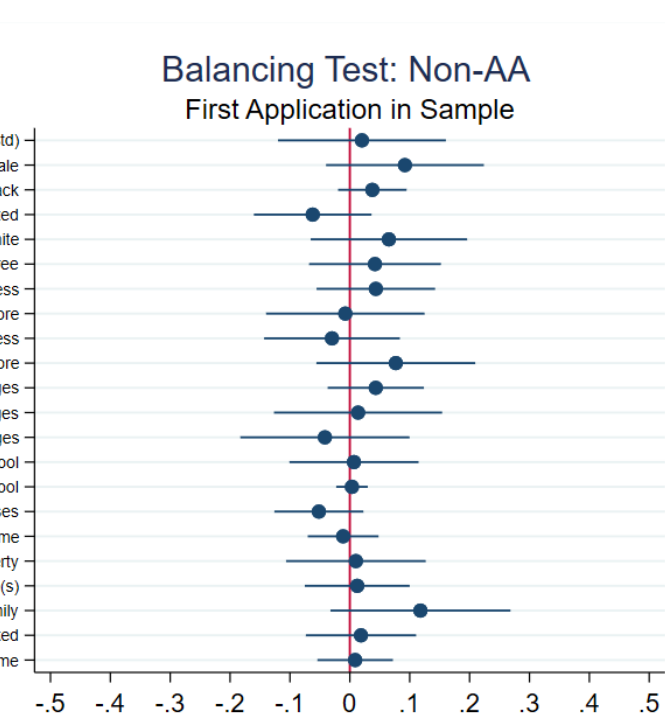


Figure 1:

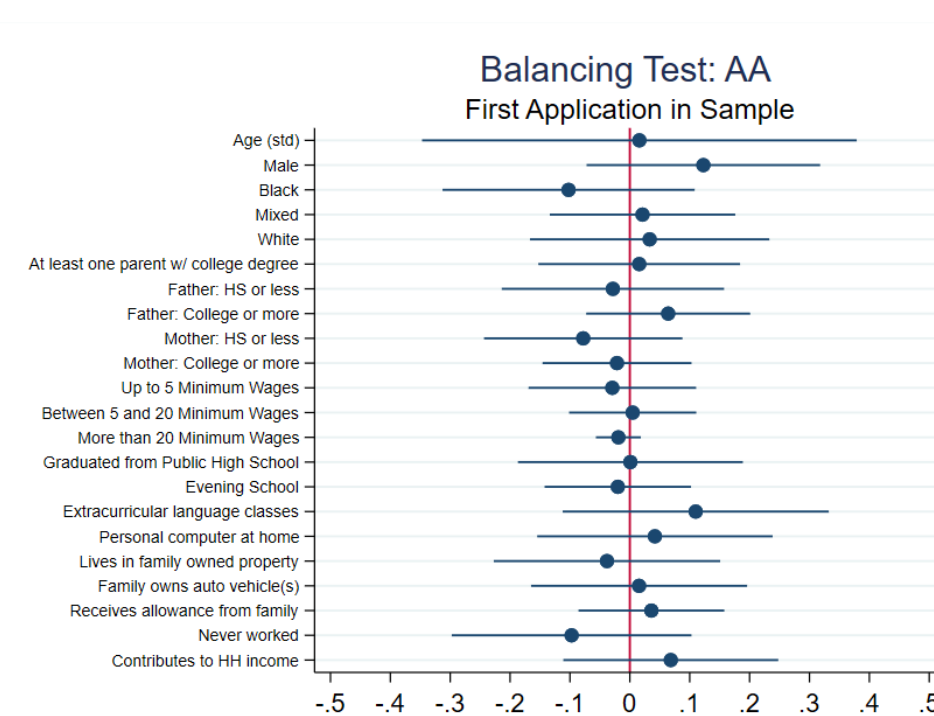


Figure 2:

## Selectivity

Second, this is a highly selective undergraduate program. A 30-40 point (out of 100) difference in the cutoff scores between AA and non-AA shows that AA applicants were subjected to a much lower bar for admissions.

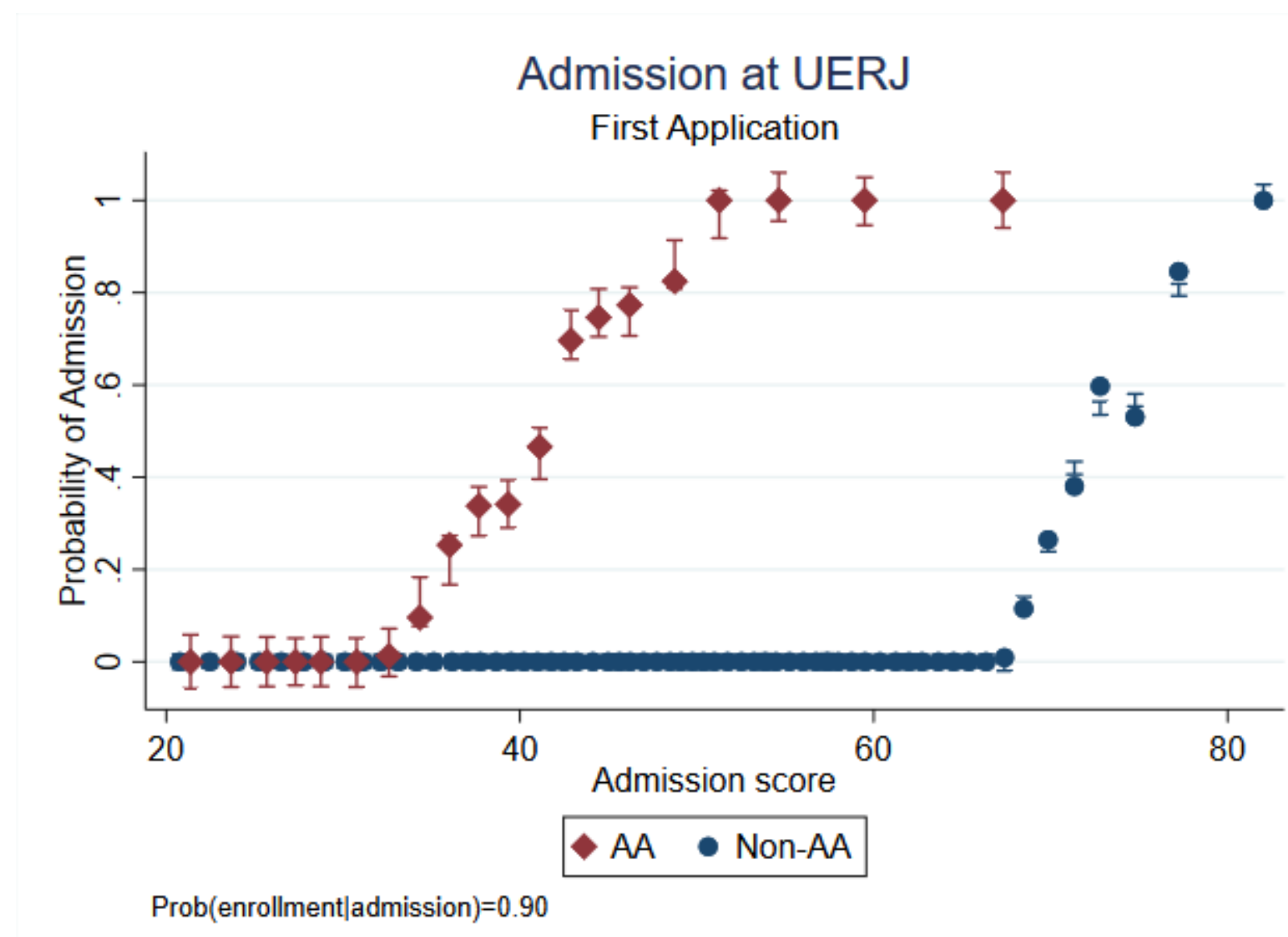


Figure 3:

## Outcomes

Third, a high-stakes post-college exam (lawyers' licensing process) enables tracking applicants into the law career after college. In addition, we combine government data, including employment information (RAIS), firm ownership, and graduate degrees, along with online scraped data for the lawyer licensing exam, internship applications, and college graduation. For applications between 2006-2011, we are able to track about 87% of AA and 79% of non-AA applicants around each group-specific cutoff across outcomes.

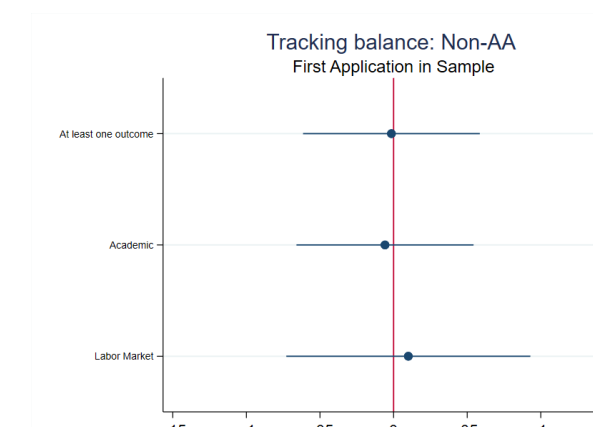


Figure 4:

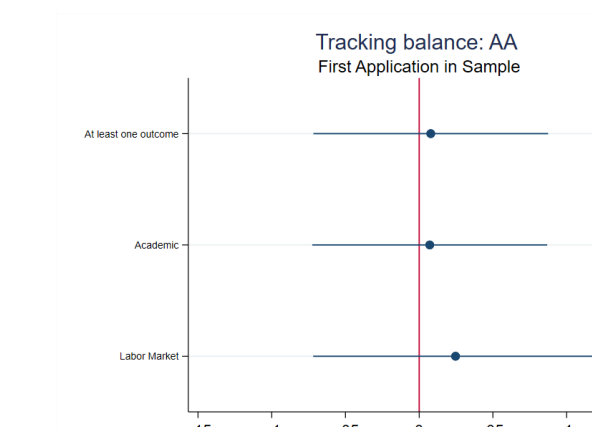
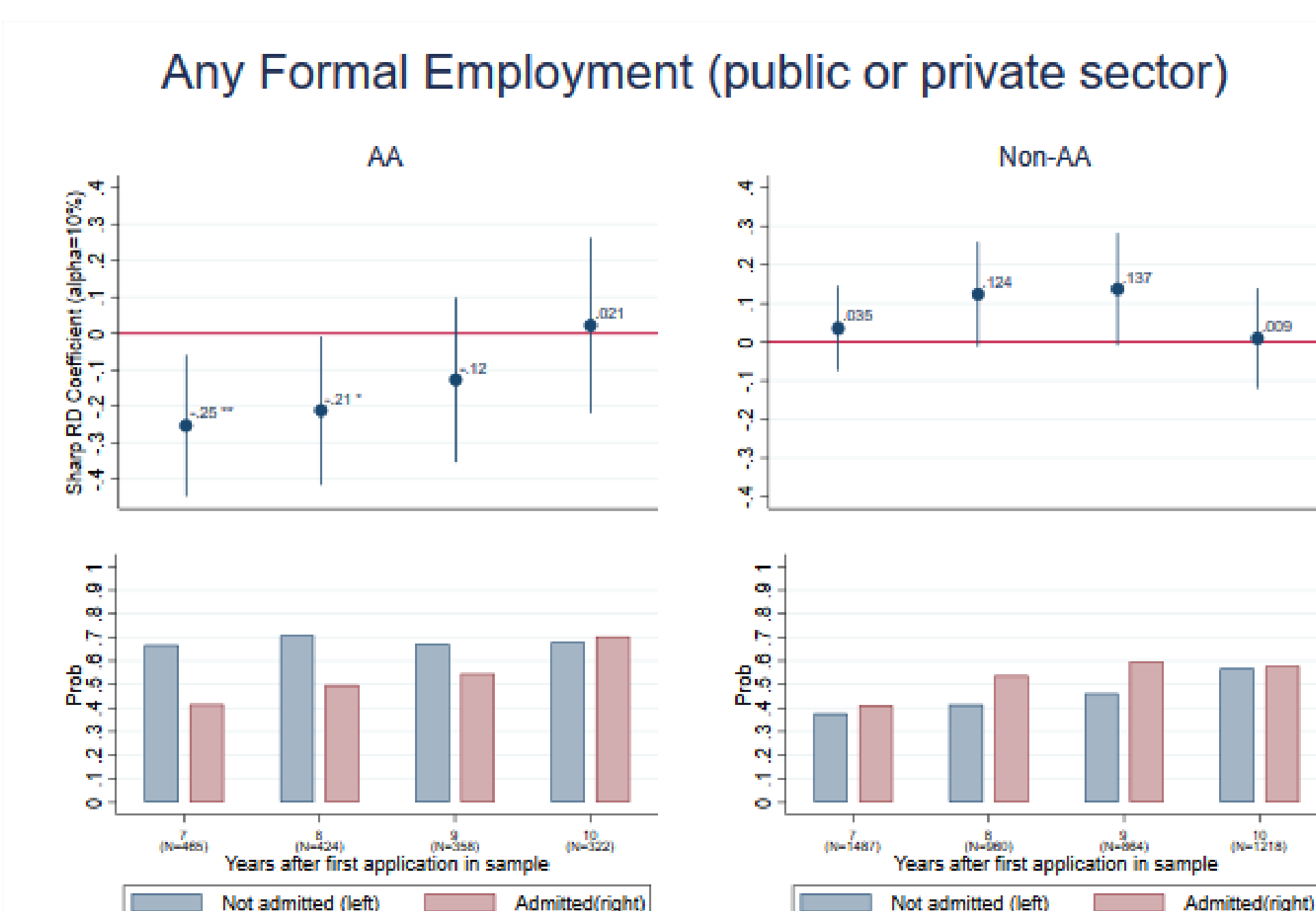


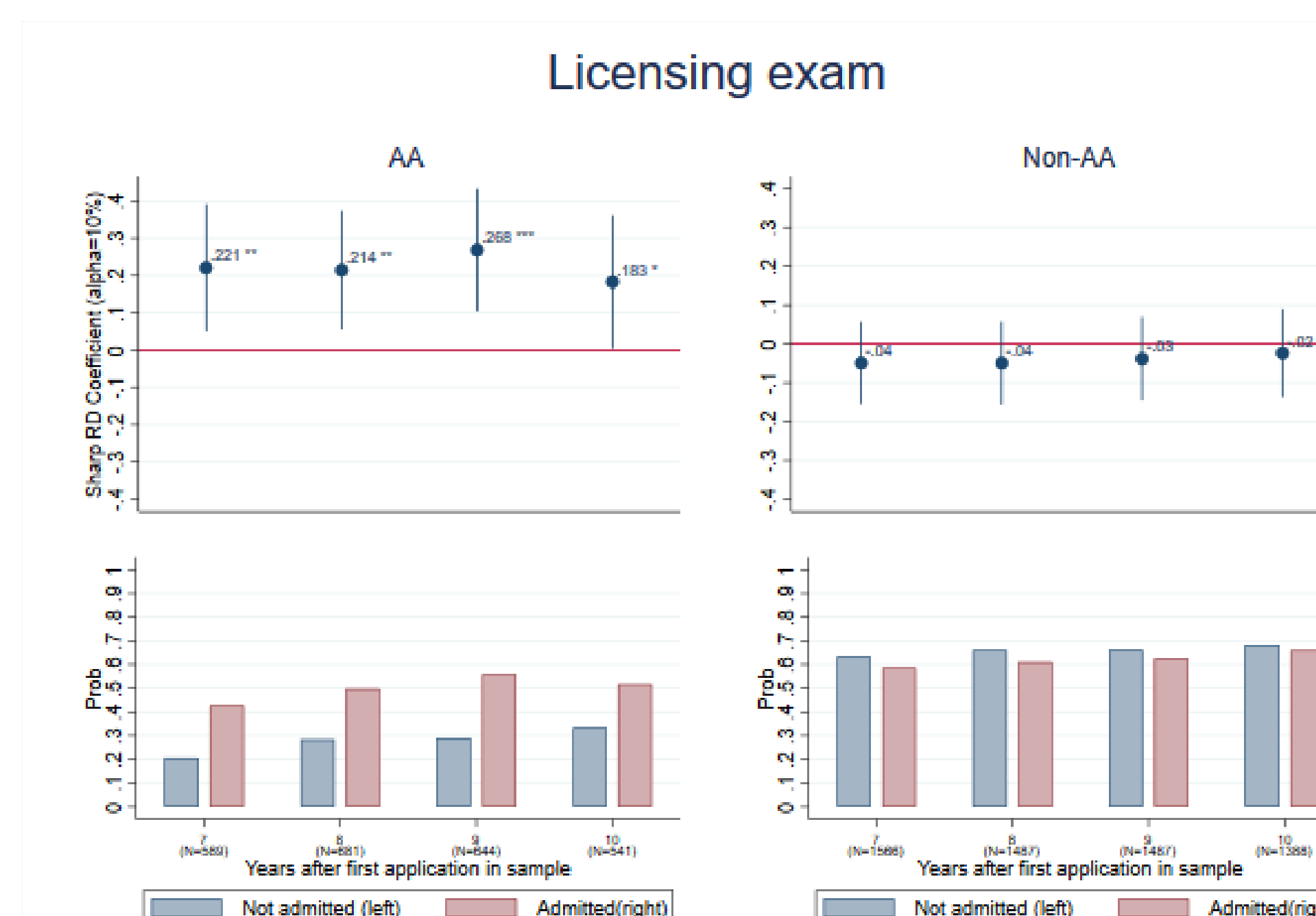
Figure 5:

## Results

For beneficiaries, this AA quota policy increases the probability of becoming a certified lawyer from 31% to about 70% around the admission cutoff. We have not found evidence of differences in formal employment or wages from it within application groups between 6-11 years after first application. We estimate that non-AA applicants both slightly above (admitted) and below (displaced) the cutoff have a 70% chance of becoming a licensed lawyer, and 25% of being employed as such. However, the rate of licensing tends to be higher for non-AA as well as observed wages, while entry in the formal labor market tends to be lower.



\* p < .1, \*\* p < .05, \*\*\* p < .01



\* p < .1, \*\* p < .05, \*\*\* p < .01

## Conclusion

We interpret the net effect of this policy to be potentially positive, giving opportunities for those who don't typically have it without significant direct impacts on others.

## Next steps

We expect to incorporate employment information for self-employed lawyers using webscraping tools and extend the labor market results into longer periods of time as the data becomes available.

## References

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- [2] Sandra E Black, Jeffrey T Denning, and Jesse Rothstein. Winners and Losers? The Effect of Gaining and Losing Access to Selective Colleges on Education and Labor Market Outcomes. Working Paper 26821, National Bureau of Economic Research, March 2020.

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## Contact Information

- Email: [anactr@stanford.com](mailto:anactr@stanford.com)
- Phone: +1 (650) 283 3049