

Frontier Topics in Empirical Economics: Week 2

Non-parametric Method

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Non-parametric Method: Introduction

- Common Parametric Models
 - Linear Model: $y = X\beta + e, e \sim N(0, \sigma^2)$;
 - Probit/Logit Model: $P(y=1|X) = G(X\beta)$ where G is a nonlinear function
- Explicit Parametric Structure for Distribution
- Common Estimator
 - OLS, MLE, Nonlinear LS, Efficient GMM etc.
- Key Properties of the Estimator
 - Consistency, BLUE, Asymptotic Efficiency etc.

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Non-parametric Method: Introduction

- In linear model, we have to assume that CEF is linear
- Why linear? Simple? Why not $y = x^3 + \ln x + e$?
- What if linear specification is wrong?
- Everything collapses. No data can save.
- It becomes only a linear approximation
- For example, if true model is Logit, but not linear regression
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- Non-parametric statistics are NOT based on functional form assumptions
- The data can be collected from a sample that does not follow a specific distribution

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- Potential Outcome Framework is intrinsically non-parametric
- If we can directly get estimations of $E(y|X = 1)$ and $E(y|X = 0)$
- We can estimate the ATE/ATT in a more general way without regression
- There are many other statistical modeling methods
- Non-parametric, semi-parametric to estimate CEF directly
- To understand tools beyond linear regression

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- Give up the "parametric" model like linear regression
- Do not assume that CEF is linear
- Go back to the original question to estimate $E(y_i|x_i)$ without imposing any functional form assumption

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- Notation: $x_i; y_i$ denotes random variable; $X_i; Y_i$ denotes realizations; $x; y$ denotes random variables or some value of the random variables
- Realizations are given (sample), they are NOT random in our context
$$\int_{D_x} x < \int_{D_x} X_i dx < \int_{D_x} X_i D_x dx$$

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$$\int_{\mathcal{D}} x \int_{\mathcal{D}} \sum_{i=1}^n X_i dx < \int_{\mathcal{D}} \sum_{i=1}^n X_i \int_{\mathcal{D}} x dx$$

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$$\int_{\mathcal{D}_x} x < \int_i^n X_i dx \quad < \int_i^n X_i \mathcal{D} x dx$$

Non-parametric Method: Kernel Regression

- Let's consider the first non-parametric method: Kernel regression
- It is super intuitive and interesting
- Instead of assuming $E(y_i|x_i) = x_i^2$, we consider this CEF **point by point**
- That is, estimate $E(y_i|x_i)$ for each possible point of $x_i = x$

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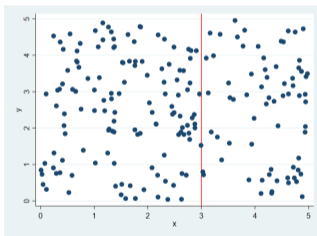
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Non-parametric Method: Kernel Regression

Step 1: Estimating a cumulative density

- Consider estimating a cumulative density function (CDF)

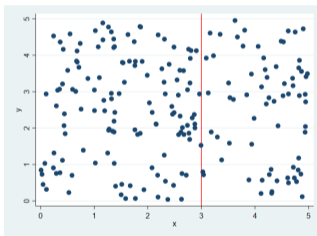


- What is the CDF at $x = 3$? $\hat{F}(x = 3) = ?$
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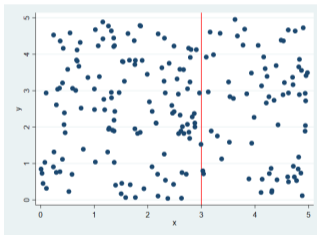


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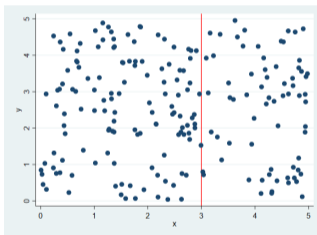


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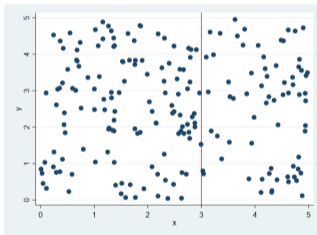


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Non-parametric Method: Kernel Regression

- Just count how many points lie on the left to the red line:

$$\hat{F}(x) = 3 \quad \frac{1}{n} = \frac{1}{10} \times 3$$

- In general, we have an estimation of $F(x)$ as:

$$F(x) = P(X \leq x) \quad \hat{F}(x) = \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n \mathbb{1}_{X_i \leq x}$$

- The proportion of points (realizations) that are smaller than x

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Non-parametric Method: Kernel Regression

Step 2: Estimating a probability density

- Consider estimating a probability density function (PDF)
- PDF represents a marginal increase in CDF at some point (derivative)

$$f(x) = \frac{dF(x)}{dx} = \lim_{h \rightarrow 0} \frac{F(x+h) - F(x-h)}{2h}$$
$$\hat{f}(x) = \frac{\hat{F}(x+h) - \hat{F}(x-h)}{2h}$$

- Changes of $F(x)$ in a very small interval (with length $2h$)
- h is called "bandwidth"

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- Then we can write the probability density $f(x)$ at some value x as:

$$\hat{f}(x) = \frac{1}{2h} \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n \mathbb{1}_{X_i \in [x-h, x+h]} = \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n \mathbb{1}_{X_i \in [x-h, x+h]} \frac{1}{2h}$$

- How to interpret this?
- We count the number of obs within a small interval around x , dividing by the length and the total number of obs
- $\frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n \mathbb{1}_{X_i \in [x-h, x+h]}$ is the number of obs per unit length
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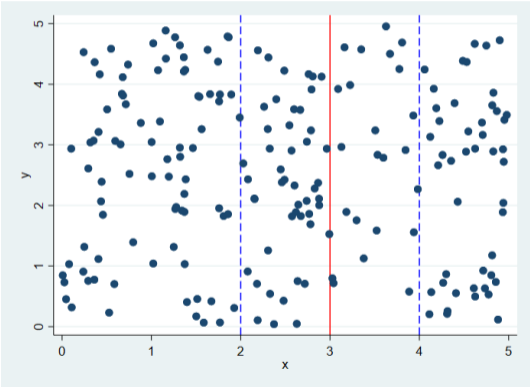
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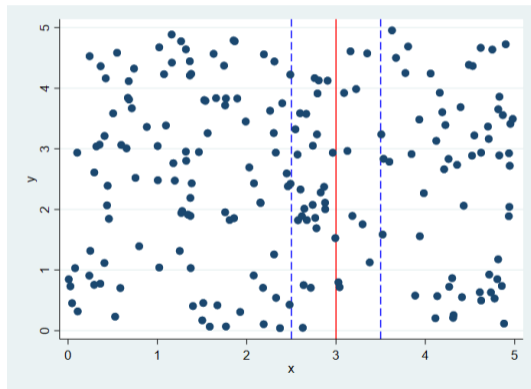
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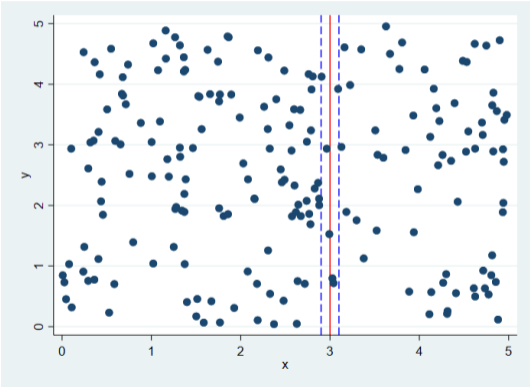
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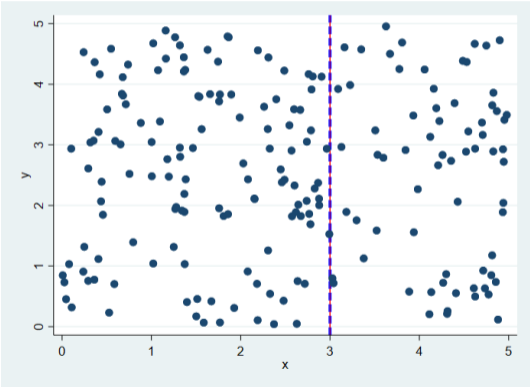
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Non-parametric Method: Kernel Regression



Non-parametric Method: Kernel Regression

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$$\hat{f}(x) = \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n \frac{1}{h} k\left(\frac{X_i - x}{h}\right)$$

- We call $k(v)$ a uniform kernel function
- This $\hat{f}(x)$ is a kernel estimator of the PDF (uniform kernel)
- Kernel is weight!
- There can be other kinds of kernel functions, when we assign different weights to different observations

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Non-parametric Method: Kernel Regression

- A function can be used as a kernel if
 - $k(x, x)$ is integrated to 1
 - $k(x, y)$ is symmetric with $k(y, x) = k(x, y)$
- The weights sum to one; The weights are symmetric
- Triangular Kernel: $k(v) = \frac{1}{2} (|v| + 1) \mathbb{1}_{|v| \leq 1}$
- Epanechnikov Kernel: $k(v) = \frac{3}{4} (1 - v^2) \mathbb{1}_{|v| \leq 1}$
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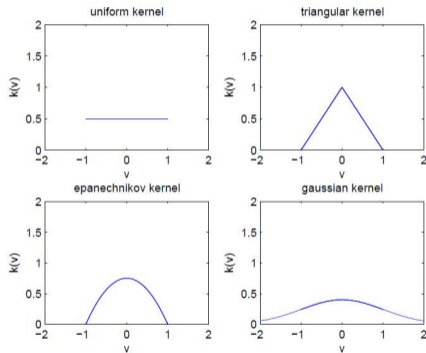


Figure 1: Various Kernels

Non-parametric Method: Kernel Regression

- For multivariate case, let $V = (V_1; V_2; \dots; V_q)$.
- Define product kernel: $K(V) = k(V_1)k(V_2) \dots k(V_q)$.
- The estimator becomes:

$$\hat{f}(x) = \frac{1}{nh_1h_2 \dots h_q} \sum_j K\left(\frac{X_j - x}{h}\right)$$

- Define $h = (h_1; h_2; \dots; h_q)$
- $\sum_j K\left(\frac{X_j - x}{h}\right)$ is the weighted sum of points within the q-dimension hypercube
- $h_1h_2 \dots h_q$ is the volume of this q-dimension hypercube

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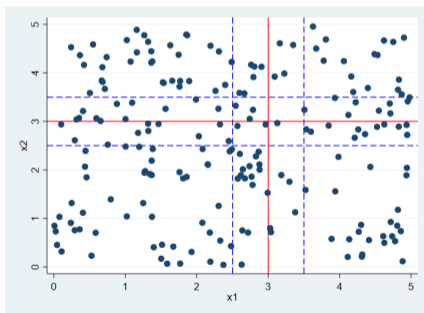
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Non-parametric Method: Kernel Regression

In two dimension case, we have

- $K \frac{X_i - x}{h}$ is the weighted sum of points within the rectangular
- $h_1 h_2$ is the area of this rectangular



Non-parametric Method: Kernel Regression

Step 3: Estimating a CEF

- Finally, let's see how to estimate a CEF using kernel method
- Not like linear regression, we estimate the CEF **point by point**
- Assume that we have CEF:

$$Y = g(X) + u$$
$$E(Y|X) = g(X)$$

- u has a conditional variance $Var(u|X) = \sigma^2(x)$

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- Based on the CDF and PDF we've got, we have Nadaraya-Watson Estimator (N-W) for CEF as follows:

$$\hat{g}(x) = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n Y_i K_h(X_i - x)}{\sum_{i=1}^n K_h(X_i - x)}; \text{ where } K_h(X_i - x) = \frac{K\left(\frac{X_i - x}{h}\right)}{h}$$

- Intuition: The conditional Expectation of Y given $X=x$ is estimated as a **weighted average of observed Y_i closely around x** (within the range of bandwidth h).
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Non-parametric Method: Kernel Regression

Homework:

- 1. Derive NW Estimator from the kernel estimator of CDF and PDF. This can be a little bit hard. You can refer to Notes from Carol (or Hansen's book) for help.
- 2. What is NW Estimator, if we use the uniform kernel?

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Theorem (Asymptotics for N-W Estimator)

Under some regularity conditions, as $n \rightarrow \infty$, $h_s \rightarrow 0$ $s = 1, \dots, q$, $nh_1 \dots h_q \rightarrow \infty$ and $nh_1 \dots h_q < \frac{q}{s-1} h_s^6 \rightarrow 0$, we have:

$$\frac{\bar{O}}{nh_1 \dots h_q} \hat{g}(x) - g(x) = \frac{1}{h_s^2} B_s(x) + o_p\left(\frac{1}{n}\right); \quad E \int k(v)^2 dv = \int k(v)^2 dv$$

$$\text{where } B_s(x) = \frac{\int v^2 k(v) dv}{2f(x)} - 2 \frac{\partial f(x)}{\partial x_s} \frac{\partial g(x)}{\partial x_s} - f(x) \frac{\partial^2 g(x)}{\partial x_s^2}$$

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$$\tilde{O}_{nh_1 \dots h_q} \hat{g}(x) - g(x) = \frac{1}{n} \sum_{s=1}^q h_s^2 B_s(x) + N(0; \frac{2}{f(x)} E[k(v)^2] dv)^q$$

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Non-parametric Method: Kernel Regression

$$\text{Asymptotic Bias} \sim h_s^q \int \frac{D^2 v^2 k(v) dv}{2f(x)} \left[2 \frac{\partial f(x)}{\partial x_s} \frac{\partial g(x)}{\partial x_s} - f(x) \frac{\partial^2 g(x)}{\partial x_s^2} \right]$$

$$\text{Asymptotic Variance} \sim \frac{1}{nh_1 \dots h_q} \frac{1}{f(x)} \int D^2 k(v)^2 dv$$

- (1) h_s Bias ; Variance
we have trade-off in choosing kernel bandwidth.
- (2) q Variance exponentially
We call this "Curse of Dimensionality".
- (3) Kernel more concentrated Bias $\int D^2 v^2 k(v) dv$; Variance $\int D^2 k(v)^2 dv$
- (4) Slope Effect and Curvature Effect on bias: $\frac{\partial f(x)}{\partial x_s} \frac{\partial g(x)}{\partial x_s} ; \frac{\partial^2 g(x)}{\partial x_s^2}$
- (5) $f(x)$ Bias ; Variance (more observations)

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$$\text{Asymptotic Bias} \sim h_s^q \frac{D^2 v^2 k v dv}{2 f x} \left(2 \frac{\partial f x}{\partial x_s} \frac{\partial g x}{\partial x_s} - f x \frac{\partial^2 g x}{\partial x_s^2} \right)$$

$$\text{Asymptotic Variance} \sim \frac{1}{n h_1 \dots h_q} \frac{x}{f x} D^2 k v^2 dv^q$$

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$$\text{Asymptotic Bias} \sim h_s^q \int \frac{v^2 k(v) dv}{2f(x)} \left[2 \frac{\partial f(x)}{\partial x_s} \frac{\partial g(x)}{\partial x_s} - f(x) \frac{\partial^2 g(x)}{\partial x_s^2} \right]$$

$$\text{Asymptotic Variance} \sim \frac{1}{nh_1 \dots h_q} \int \frac{k(v)^2 dv}{f(x)^2}$$

- (1) h_s Bias ; Variance

we have trade-off in choosing kernel bandwidth.

- (2) q Variance exponentially

We call this "Curse of Dimensionality".

- (3) Kernel more concentrated Bias $\int v^2 k(v) dv$; Variance $\int k(v)^2 dv$

- (4) Slope Effect and Curvature Effect on bias: $\frac{\partial f(x)}{\partial x_s} \frac{\partial g(x)}{\partial x_s} ; \frac{\partial^2 g(x)}{\partial x_s^2}$

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- In linear regression, we use a global linear function to fit data
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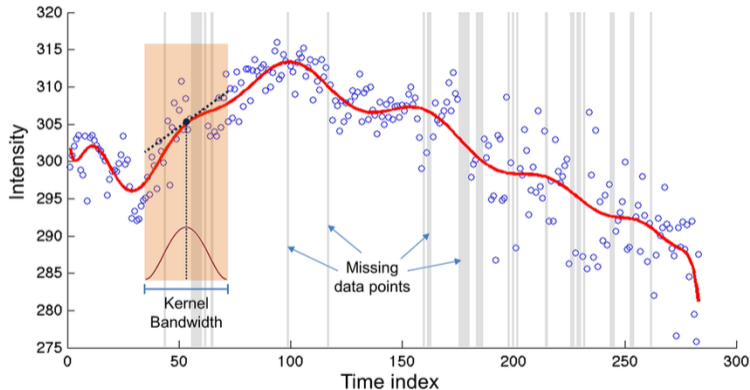
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For some $X = x$, we fit $g(x)$ by choosing samples very close to x . Then we fit a polynomial for these observations. (Here, linear)

Non-parametric Method: Local Polynomial

- For $g(x)$, we solve the following optimization problem at each point x :

$$\min_{b_0, b_1, \dots, b_p} \sum_{j=1}^n K \frac{X_j - x}{h} Y_j - b_0 - b_1 (X_j - x) - b_2 (X_j - x)^2 - \dots - b_p (X_j - x)^{p-2}$$

- When $p = 1$, we call it local linear regression
- When $p = 2$, we call it local quadratic regression

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- Both kernel and local polynomial regressions are Kernel-based methods
- There are three disadvantages of this method:
 - Computational burden is large (point by point estimation)
 - Hard to include information or restrictions over functional form
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$p_0 X^0 + p_1 X^1 + p_2 X^2 + \dots + p_K X^K$

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- The vector of $\{p_0; p_1; p_2; \dots; p_K\}$ is called "basis"
- This is "global" polynomial, in contrast to "local" polynomial

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- Runge's phenomenon
- Red: original true function; Blue: fifth-order poly; Green: ninth-order poly

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- But Carol claims that Spline basis is in general a better choice
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- Non-parametric model is so general that we do not impose any structure
- Totally data driven, no prior information
- Convergence rate is low, variance is high, requirement for data is high
- What if we want to impose some structure, but not the full structure?
- Semi-parametric model

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- Partially linear model
- One of the most popular semi-parametric models

$$Y = X\beta + g(Z) + u; \quad E(u|X;Z) = 0; \quad \text{Var}(u|X;Z) = \sigma^2$$

- X enters in the model linearly, Z non-parametrically

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- $E(Y|Z)$ and $E(X|Z)$ can be estimated using methods introduced previously
- Then we have estimators for $E(Y|Z)$ and $E(X|Z)$
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- In the second step, we subtract $\hat{\alpha}^T$ from Y :

$$Y - X^T \hat{\alpha} = g(Z) + u$$

- $g(Z)$ can be estimated using methods introduced previously

Non-parametric Method: Semi-parametric Model

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- Question: How to estimate the variance of \hat{Z} ?
- Can we use the variance from the non-parametric regression directly?
- No! Because $\hat{Y} = \hat{X}^{\top}$ is also estimated
- It contains more uncertainty from the first step
- This is a common mistake in empirical work:
When you have first stage estimation as known parameter in the second stage, watch out for the std err estimation!

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- Similarly, how to conduct inference for 1st step?
- It is a combination of non-parametric and regression estimations
- No closed-form variance equation is available
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In these two cases, we need bootstrap for inference

Non-parametric Method: Bootstrap

- Bootstrap is a non-parametric method for inference
- It is used when there is no closed-form standard errors
- Instead of deriving the closed-form equation of variance
- We use simulation to estimate it
- Random sampling with replacement

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- Step 1: Given full sample with size n , draw R new samples of size n , with replacement. Index each new sampler by
- Step 2: Calculate the simulated variance $\hat{\sigma}_{fx}^2$ by:
$$\hat{\sigma}_{fx}^2 = \frac{1}{R-1} \sum_{r=1}^R (\hat{g}_r(x) - \hat{g}(x))^2$$
- Step 3: Use $\hat{\sigma}_{fx}^2$ to calculate confidence intervals and implement statistical tests
- We call this bootstrapped variance

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- But using bootstrapped variance to construct confidence interval is a poor choice
- It relies on asymptotic normality, which is not accurate in finite sample
- A better choice is "percentile interval"
- First, we stack the sample of bootstrap estimates $\hat{\Lambda}^1, \hat{\Lambda}^2, \dots, \hat{\Lambda}^R$
- We have an empirical distribution of $\hat{\Lambda}$
- The bootstrap 100(1 - α)% confidence interval is then: $q_{\alpha}^{\sim}; q_{1-\alpha}^{\sim}$
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Non-parametric Method: Application

- Where to apply non-parametric methods?
- Anything related to estimation of CEF
- Potential outcome framework is non-parametric
- Non-parametric inference in complicated models (Bootstrap)
- If you focus on prediction and fit, but not the structure behind it
Predict stock price, machine learning, RDD fitting
- We will show these in the following lectures

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Final Conclusion

- There are statistical modeling methods other than Linear regression
- Non-parametric methods impose no prior structure, totally data-driven
 - Kernel-based methods: Kernel estimators, Local polynomials
 - Spline-based methods: Polynomial, Fourier, B-spline, Wavelet
- They are very useful in causal inference to directly estimate CEF
- However, they have weaknesses: **Not always better to make model more flexible**
 - Hard to incorporate restrictions
 - Require large sample size to have accurate estimation
- We will discuss more about it next week
- A semi-parametric model is between non-parametric and parametric

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