

# 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:  $P(y|X) = G(X\beta)$  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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- In linear model, we have to assume that CEF is linear
- Why linear? Simple? Why not  $y = \beta x^{3\gamma} \cdot \ln x + e$ ?
- What if linear specification is wrong?
- Everything collapses. No data can save.
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- For example, if true model is Logit, but not linear regression
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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
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- Give up the "parametric" model like linear regression
- Do not assume that CEF is linear
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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

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# Non-parametric Method: Kernel Regression

- Let's consider the first non-parametric method: Kernel regression
- It is super intuitive and interesting
- Instead of assuming  $E(y_i|x_i) = x_i'\beta$ , 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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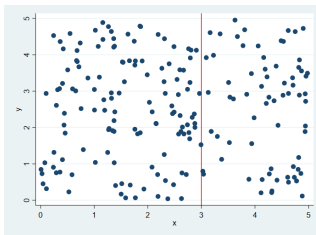
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# Non-parametric Method: Kernel Regression

## Step 1: Estimating a cumulative density

- Consider estimating a cumulative density function (CDF)

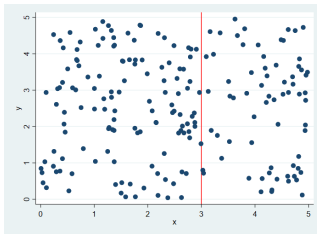


- What is the CDF at  $x = 3$ ?  $\hat{F}(x = 3) = ?$
- Go back to kindergarten!
- What is the probability of drawing  $x \leq 3$ ?  
 $\Rightarrow$  How many points are there to the left of 3 (compare to all points)

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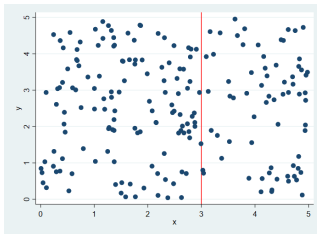


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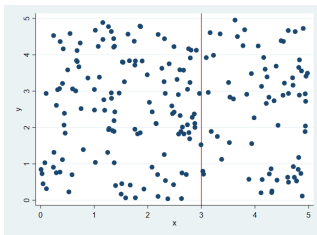
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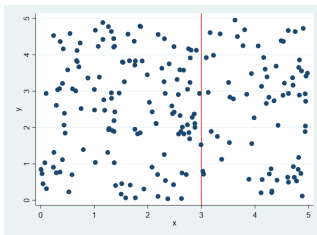


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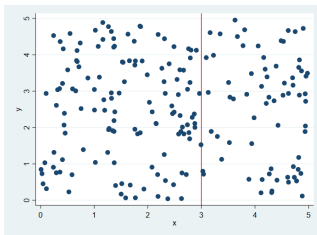


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- Just count how many points lie on the left to the red line:

$$\hat{F}(x = 3) = \frac{1}{n} \sum \mathbf{1}(X_i \leq 3)$$

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

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

- 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)

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

$$\hat{f}(x) = \frac{\hat{F}(x+h) - \hat{F}(x-h)}{2h}$$

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

$$\begin{aligned}\hat{f}(x) &= \frac{1}{2h} \left[ \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n \mathbf{1}(X_i \leq x+h) - \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n \mathbf{1}(X_i \leq x-h) \right] \\ &= \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n \frac{1}{2h} \mathbf{1}(x-h \leq X_i \leq x+h)\end{aligned}$$

- How to interpret this?
- Count the number of obs within a small interval around  $x$ , dividing by the length and the total number of obs
- $\sum_{i=1}^n \frac{1}{2h} \mathbf{1}(x-h \leq X_i \leq x+h)$  is the number of obs per unit length
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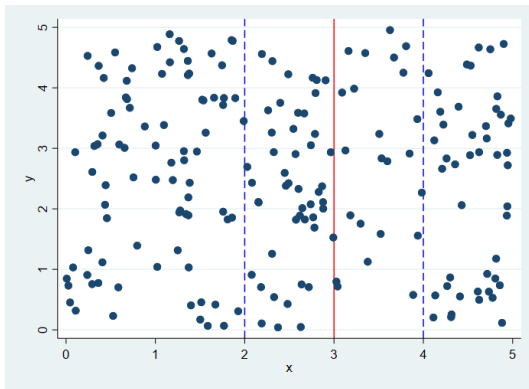
# Non-parametric Method: Kernel Regression

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

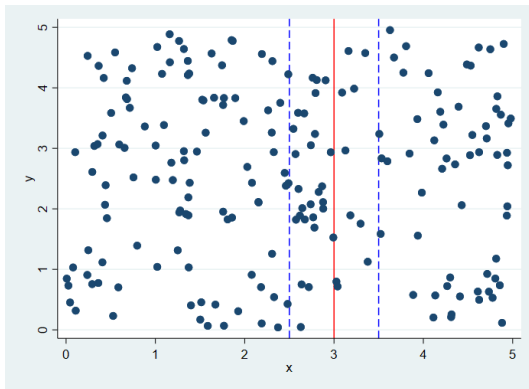
$$\begin{aligned}\hat{f}(x) &= \frac{1}{2h} \left[ \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n \mathbf{1}(X_i \leq x + h) - \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n \mathbf{1}(X_i \leq x - h) \right] \\ &= \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n \frac{1}{2h} \mathbf{1}(x - h \leq X_i \leq x + h)\end{aligned}$$

- How to interpret this?
- Count the number of obs within a small interval around  $x$ , dividing by the length and the total number of obs
- $\sum_{i=1}^n \frac{1}{2h} \mathbf{1}(x - h \leq X_i \leq x + h)$  is the number of obs per unit length
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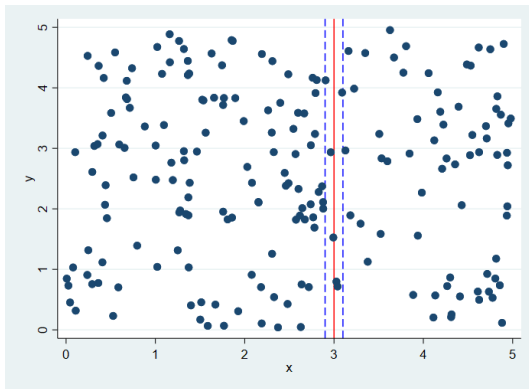
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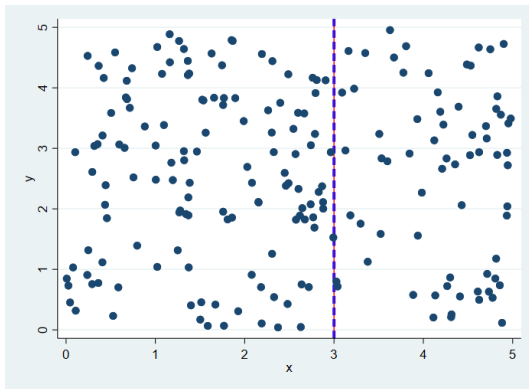
# Non-parametric Method: Kernel Regression



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# Non-parametric Method: Kernel Regression

- Define  $k(v) = \frac{1}{2}\mathbf{1}(|v| \leq 1)$ . Then we have:

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

- 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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  - $k(v)$  is integrated to 1
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- Triangular Kernel:  $k(v) = (1 - |v|)\mathbf{1}(|v| \leq 1)$
- Epanechnikov Kernel:  $k(v) = \frac{3}{4}(1 - v^2)\mathbf{1}(|v| \leq 1)$
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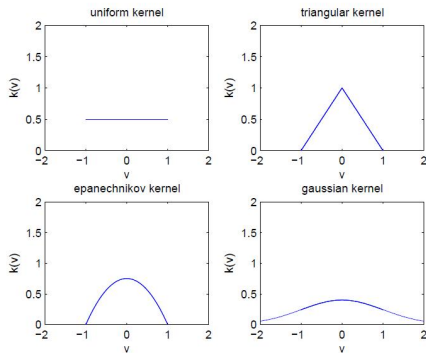


Figure 1: Various Kernels



# 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:

$$\hat{f}(x) = \frac{1}{nh_1h_2\cdots h_q} \sum_i K\left(\frac{X_i - x}{h}\right)$$

- Define  $h = (h_1, h_2, \dots, h_q)$
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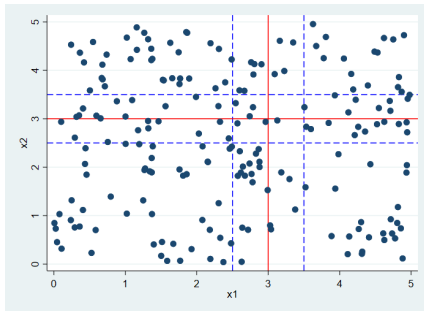
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# Non-parametric Method: Kernel Regression

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  $\text{Var}(u|X) = \sigma^2(x)$

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

$$\sqrt{nh_1 \dots h_q} (\hat{g}(x) - g(x) - \sum_{s=1}^q h_s^2 B_s(x)) \xrightarrow{d} N(0, \frac{\sigma^2(x)}{f(x)} (\int k(v)^2 dv)^q)$$

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$$\text{Asymptotic Bias} = \sum_{s=1}^q h_s^2 \frac{\int v^2 k(v) dv}{2f(x)} \left[ 2 \frac{\partial f(x)}{\partial x_s} \frac{\partial g(x)}{\partial x_s} + f(x) \frac{\partial^2 g(x)}{\partial x_s^2} \right]$$

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  - ⇒ The bias-variance tradeoff
- Given data, impossible to have lower bias and lower variance at the same time
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- In linear regression, we use a global linear function to fit data
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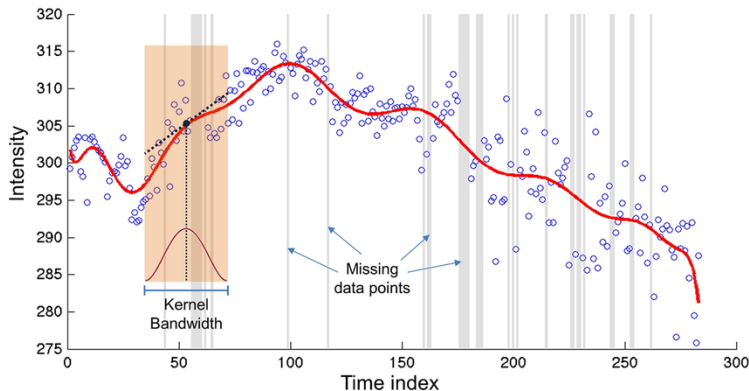
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For some  $X = x$ , we fit  $g(x)$  by choosing samples very close to  $x$ . Then we fit a polynomial for these observations. (Here, linear)

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

$$\min_{b_0, b_1, \dots, b_p} \sum_{i=1}^n k\left(\frac{X_i - x}{h}\right) (Y_i - b_0 - b_1(X_i - x) - b_2(X_i - x)^2 - \dots - b_p(X_i - x)^p)^2$$

- When  $p = 1$ , we call it local linear regression
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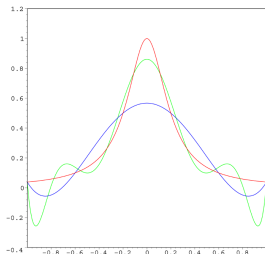
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- The biggest problem for polynomial series is Runge's phenomenon



# Non-parametric Method: Series-based Methods

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

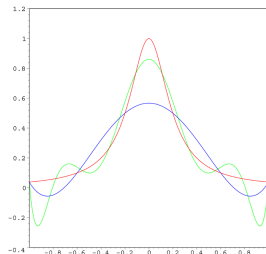


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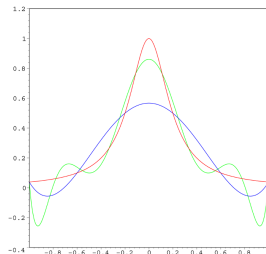
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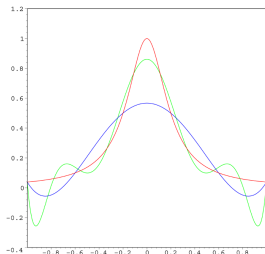
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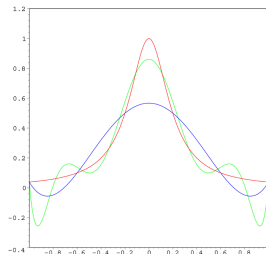
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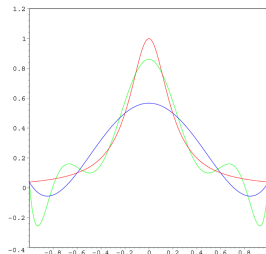
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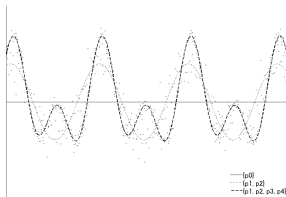
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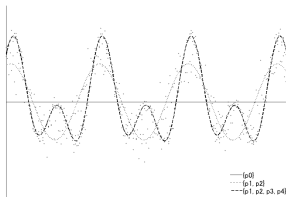
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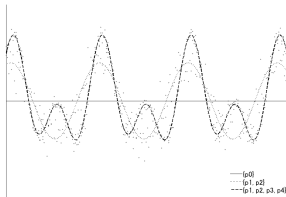
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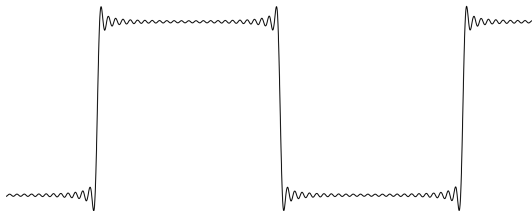
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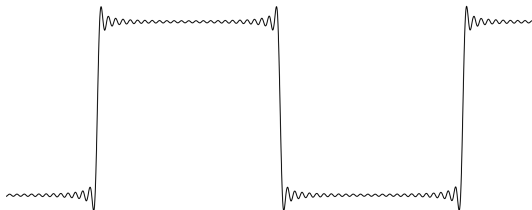
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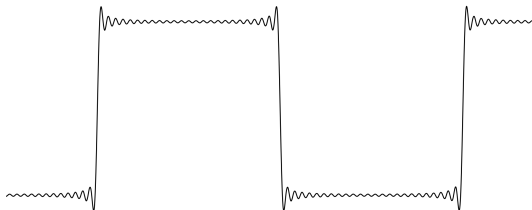
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- One of the most popular semi-parametric models

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

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- It relies on asymptotic normality, which is not accurate in finite sample
- A better choice is "percentile interval"
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- First, we stack the sample of bootstrap estimates  $\{\hat{\beta}^1, \hat{\beta}^2, \dots, \hat{\beta}^R\}$
- We have an empirical distribution of  $\hat{\beta}^r$
- The bootstrap  $100(1 - \alpha)\%$  confidence interval is then:  $[q_{\alpha/2}^*, q_{1-\alpha/2}^*]$
- $q^*$  is the quantile of this empirical distribution

# Non-parametric Method: Bootstrap

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# Non-parametric Method: Application

- Where to apply non-parametric methods?
- Anything related to estimation of CEF
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- 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
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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: N-V estimator, Local polynomial
  - Series-based methods: Polynomial, Fourier, 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
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# References

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