STA732
Statistical Inference

Lecture 13: Minimax optimality + Minimax estimators

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Recap from Lecture 12

1. We have finished the Bayesian estimation
    - Hierarchical Bayes
    - Empirical Bayes
2. James-Stein estimator

Goal of Lecture 13

1. Minimax risk, minimax estimator
2. Least favorable priors
3. Least favorable prior sequence
4. Minimaxity via submodel restriction
5. Minimaxity vs. admissibility

5.1, 5.2 of Lehmann and Casella

Minimax risk, minimax estimator

Where we are

We are at the second approach of arguing for “the best” estimator in point estimation: global measure of optimality

- We finished average risk optimality: Bayes optimal
- We will start the minimax risk optimality

Minimax estimator

In minimax estimation, our global measure of risk is the worst-case risk.

Def. minimax estimator

Given $X \sim P_\theta$, where $\theta \in \Omega$, and a loss function $L(\theta, d)$, we look for an estimator δ that minimizes the worse-case risk

$$\sup_{\theta \in \Omega} R(\theta, \delta).$$

Any minimizer δ is called a minimax estimator.

Minimax risk

The minimum achievable sup-risk is called the minimax risk of the estimation problem

$$r^* = \inf_{\delta} \sup_{\theta \in \Omega} R(\theta, \delta)$$

minimax risk is just a single number!

Game theory interpretation of the minimax risk

A game between data analyst and Nature

- Data analyst chooses estimator δ
- Given the estimator δ, Nature chooses parameter θ to maximize the risk

  Nature chooses θ, not X!

Comparison to Bayes

- In minimax estimation, Nature plays adversarially
- Compared to Bayes estimation, Nature plays a specific mixed strategy: θ is drawn from a fixed prior distribution

How to upper and lower bound the minimax risk?

Upper bound

Choose any estimator δ_0, compute its worst-case risk, we have

$$r^* \leq \sup_{\theta \in \Omega} R(\theta, \delta_0)$$

Lower bound

Key observation: average-case risk $\leq$ worst-case risk

Take any Bayes estimator δ_Λ with prior Λ with Bayes risk r_Λ, we have

$$r_\Lambda = \inf_\delta \int R(\theta, \delta) d\Lambda(\theta) \leq \inf_\delta \max_{\theta \in \Omega} R(\theta, \delta) \leq r^*$$

One vague strategy to compute the minimax risk

The previous slide gives a vague strategy to compute the minimax risk

1. Find δ_0 with a small worst-case risk
2. Find prior Λ with large Bayes risk
3. Repeat step 1 and 2 until the upper and lower bounds match

Least favorable prior

Least favorable prior

Recall the Bayes risk under prior Λ is

$$r_\Lambda = \inf_\delta \int R(\theta, \delta) d\Lambda(\theta).$$

Def. least favorable prior

A prior Λ is a least favorable prior if $r_\Lambda \geq r_{\Lambda'}$ for any other prior Λ'.

The Bayes risk for the least favorable prior should give the tightest lower bound for the minimax risk

When an estimator has equal Bayes risk and worst-case risk

Thm. 5.1.4 in Lehmann and Casella

Suppose δ_Λ is Bayes for Λ satisfying

$$r_\Lambda = \sup_{\theta \in \Omega} R(\theta, \delta_\Lambda).$$

That is, the Bayes risk of δ_Λ is also the worst-case risk. Then

1. δ_Λ is minimax
2. Λ is a least favorable prior
3. If δ_Λ is the unique Bayes estimator for λ (a.s. for all P_θ), then it is the unique minimax estimator

This theorem shows that to find a minimax estimator it is sufficient to find a Bayes estimator with Bayes risk equal to its worst-case risk

Proof idea:

$$\sup_{\theta \in \Omega} R(\theta, \delta) \geq \int R(\theta, \delta) d\Lambda(\theta) \geq \int R(\theta, \delta_\Lambda) d\Lambda(\theta) = \sup_{\theta \in \Omega} R(\theta, \delta_\Lambda)$$

$$r_{\Lambda'} = \inf_{\delta} \int R(\theta, \delta) d\Lambda'(\theta) \leq \int R(\theta, \delta_\Lambda) d\Lambda'(\theta) \leq \sup_{\theta \in \Omega} R(\theta, \delta_\Lambda) = r_\Lambda$$

Sufficient conditions for checking minimax via the above theorem

Cor. 5.1.5 in Lehmann and Casella

If a Bayes estimator δ_Λ has constant risk as a function of θ (that is, $R(\theta, \delta_\Lambda) = R(\theta', \delta_\Lambda), \forall \theta, \theta'$), then δ_Λ is minimax

Cor. 5.1.6 in Lehmann and Casella

Given a Bayes estimator δ_Λ, define

$$w_\Lambda = \left\{ \theta : R(\theta, \delta_\Lambda) = \sup_{\theta'} R(\theta', \delta_\Lambda) \right\}.$$

If $\Lambda(w_\Lambda) = 1$, then δ_Λ is minimax.

Draw a picture

Example: Binomial

Suppose $X \sim \text{Binomial}(n, \theta)$ for some $\theta \in (0, 1)$. We use squared error loss.

- Is $\frac{X}{n}$ minimax?
- If not, find a minimax estimator

  Hint: think about the Bayes estimators under Beta prior

Least favorable prior sequence

Minimax risk

The minimum achievable sup-risk is called the minimax risk of the estimation problem

$$r^* = \inf_{\delta} \sup_{\theta \in \Omega} R(\theta, \delta)$$

Recall Least favorable prior

Recall the Bayes risk under prior Λ is

$$r_\Lambda = \inf_\delta \int R(\theta, \delta) d\Lambda(\theta).$$

Def. least favorable prior

A prior Λ is a least favorable prior if $r_\Lambda \geq r_{\Lambda'}$ for any other prior Λ'.

The Bayes risk for the least favorable prior should give the tightest lower bound for the minimax risk

Motivation

If we

- find a least favorable prior
- show that its Bayes risk equals to the worst-case risk

then we find the minimax estimator which is the corresponding Bayes estimator.

It turns out that minimax estimators may not be Bayes!

Intuition: sometimes the least favorable prior is not a proper prior

Motivating example: minimax for normal mean estimation

Suppose $X_1, \ldots, X_n \overset{\text{i.i.d.}}{\sim} \mathcal{N}(\theta, \sigma^2)$ with σ^2 known. We use squared error loss.

- Compute the risk of $\bar{X}$
- Is $\bar{X}$ Bayes with some prior? $\bar{X}$ is not Bayes but a limit of Bayes estimators
- Is $\bar{X}$ minimax?

Least favorable prior sequence

Def. least favorable prior sequence

Let $\{\Lambda_m\}$ be a sequence of priors with minimal average risks $\left\{r_{\Lambda_m}\right\}$ where $r_{\Lambda_m} = \inf_\delta \int R(\theta, \delta) d\Lambda_m(\theta)$. Then, $\{\Lambda_m\}$ is a least favorable sequence of priors if there is a real number r such that $r_{\Lambda_m} \to r < \infty$ and $r \geq r_{\Lambda'}$ for any prior Λ'

Remark: less restrictive than the definition of a least-favorable prior. Useful when the space of achievable risk with proper prior is not compact

Thm. 5.1.12 in Lehmann and Casella

Suppose there is a real number r such that $\{\Lambda_m\}$ is a sequence of priors with $r_{\Lambda_m} \to r < \infty$. Let δ be any estimator such that $\sup_{\theta \in \Omega} R(\theta, \delta) = r$. Then

1. δ is minimax
2. $\{\Lambda_m\}$ is a least-favorable prior sequence

Proof of Thm. 5.1.12:

$$\sup_\theta R(\theta, \delta') \geq \int R(\theta, \delta') d\Lambda_m(\theta) \geq r_{\Lambda_m}$$

$$r_{\Lambda'} = \int R(\theta, \delta_{\Lambda'}) d\Lambda'(\theta) \leq \int R(\theta, \delta) d\Lambda'(\theta) \leq \sup_\theta R(\theta, \delta) = r$$

Back to our example of normal mean estimation

Use Thm. 5.1.12 to show that $\bar{X}$ is minimax

Minimaxity via submodel restriction

Motivation

If an estimator is minimax in submodel and its risk doesn't change when we go to a larger model then it is minimax in this larger class.

Example: minimax for i.i.d. normal random variables unknown mean and variance

$X_1, \ldots, X_n \overset{\text{i.i.d.}}{\sim} \mathcal{N}(\theta, \sigma^2)$, with both θ and σ^2 unknown. We would like to estimate θ with squared error loss.

- Find a minimax estimator for $\Omega = \left\{(\theta, \sigma^2) : \theta \in \mathbb{R}, \sigma^2 \leq B_0\right\}$

Minimaxity via submodel restriction

Lem. Lehmann and Casella 5.1.15

Suppose δ is minimax for a submodel $\theta \in \Omega_0 \subset \Omega$ and satisfies

$$\sup_{\theta \in \Omega_0} R(\theta, \delta) = \sup_{\theta \in \Omega} R(\theta, \delta)$$

Then, δ is minimax for the full model $\theta \in \Omega$.

proof idea: same as in the normal mean example

Example: nonparametric minimax estimator, LC 5.1.16

Suppose $X_1, X_2, \dots, X_n$ are i.i.d. with common CDF F, with mean $\mu(F) < \infty$ and variance $\sigma^2(F) < \infty$. Find a minimax estimator of $\mu(F)$ under squared error loss under each of the following csontraint

1. Assume $\sigma^2(F) \leq B$
2. Assume $F \in \mathcal{F}$ where $\mathcal{F}$ is the set of all CDFs with support contained in $[0, 1]$.

proof:

1. Try $\bar{X}$
2. Try the minimax estimator for binomial

Admissibility of minimax estimators

Admissible estimator with constant risk is minimax

Lemma

If δ is admissible with constant risk, then δ is also minimax

In general, minimaxity does not guarantee admissibility!

But unique minimax estimator is admissible

admissible vs. minimax in normal mean estimation

Let $X_1, \ldots, X_n \overset{\text{i.i.d.}}{\sim} \mathcal{N}(\theta, \sigma^2)$ where σ^2 is known, and θ is the estimand. Then we know that $\bar{X}$ is minimax under squared error loss.

- Is $\bar{X}$ admissible?
- More generally, for $a, b \in \mathbb{R}$, is $a\bar{X} + b$ admissible?

See Example 5.2.5 in Lehmann and Casella proof idea:

- To show admissibility: unique Bayes, or show no dominating estimators
- To show inadmissiblity: find an dominating estimator

1. $0 < a < 1$
2. $a = 0$
3. $a = 1, b \neq 0$
4. $a > 1$
5. $a < 0$
6. $a = 1, b = 0$

Summary

- Minimax risk $r^* = \min_\delta \max_{\theta\in\Omega} R(\theta, \delta)$
- To get an upper bound of the minimax risk, consider any estimator δ_0

$$r^* \leq \sup_{\theta\in\Omega} R(\theta, \delta_0)$$

- To get a lower bound, consider any prior Λ

$$r^* \geq \int R(\theta, \delta_\Lambda) d\Lambda(\theta)$$

- Find least favorable prior/ least favorable prior sequence, can help us prove one estimator is minimax
- Submodel restriction is another strategy to find minimax estimators
- Minimaxity does not guarantee admissibility in general, while unique Bayes optimality does

Other comments on minimax

- Minimax estimators depend on the loss, depend on Ω
- Minimax estimators may be hard to find
- However, minimax lower bounds are often used in Stat theory to characterize hardness
- Critique on minimax optimality: A problem might be easy throughout most of parameters space but very hard in some bizzare corner you rarely encounter in practice.

What is next?

Basics in large sample theory

- Convergence in probability/distribution
- continuous mapping theorem, Slutsky's theorem
- Delta method

Thank you