

# Finite-Sample Symmetric Mean Estimation with Fisher Information Rate

**Shivam Gupta** (UT Austin),  
Jasper C.H. Lee (UW–Madison),  
Eric Price (UT Austin)

July 18, 2023

# Asymptotic Mean Estimation

- Given  $n$  samples from a distribution, want to estimate mean  $\mu$ .

# Asymptotic Mean Estimation

- Given  $n$  samples from a distribution, want to estimate mean  $\mu$ .

	Estimator	Converges to	Notes
<b>Unknown Distribution</b>	Empirical Mean	$\mathcal{N}(\mu, \frac{\sigma^2}{n})$	Central Limit Theorem
<b>Known Distribution</b>	MLE	$\mathcal{N}(\mu, \frac{1}{n\mathcal{I}})$	$\mathcal{I}$ is the <i>Fisher Information</i>
<b>Unknown Symmetric Distribution</b>	KDE + MLE	$\mathcal{N}(\mu, \frac{1}{n\mathcal{I}})$	[Stone; 1975]

Table: Classical Asymptotic Results

# Asymptotic Mean Estimation

- Given  $n$  samples from a distribution, want to estimate mean  $\mu$ .

	Estimator	Converges to	Notes
<b>Unknown Distribution</b>	Empirical Mean	$\mathcal{N}(\mu, \frac{\sigma^2}{n})$	Central Limit Theorem
<b>Known Distribution</b>	MLE	$\mathcal{N}(\mu, \frac{1}{n\mathcal{I}})$	$\mathcal{I}$ is the <i>Fisher Information</i>
<b>Unknown Symmetric Distribution</b>	KDE + MLE	$\mathcal{N}(\mu, \frac{1}{n\mathcal{I}})$	[Stone; 1975]

Table: Classical Asymptotic Results

- In *finite-sample* setting, when distribution is **unknown**, [Catoni; 2012], [Lee, Valiant; 2022] show estimator  $\hat{\mu}$  such that with probability  $1 - \delta$ ,

$$|\hat{\mu} - \mu| \leq \sqrt{\frac{2\sigma^2 \log \frac{2}{\delta}}{n}} (1 + o(1))$$

# Asymptotic Mean Estimation

- Given  $n$  samples from a distribution, want to estimate mean  $\mu$ .

	Estimator	Converges to	Notes
<b>Unknown Distribution</b>	Empirical Mean	$\mathcal{N}(\mu, \frac{\sigma^2}{n})$	Central Limit Theorem
<b>Known Distribution</b>	MLE	$\mathcal{N}(\mu, \frac{1}{n\mathcal{I}})$	$\mathcal{I}$ is the <i>Fisher Information</i>
<b>Unknown Symmetric Distribution</b>	KDE + MLE	$\mathcal{N}(\mu, \frac{1}{n\mathcal{I}})$	[Stone; 1975]

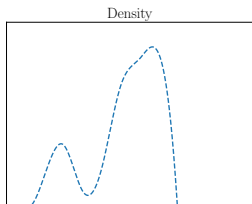
Table: Classical Asymptotic Results

- In *finite-sample* setting, when distribution is **unknown**, [Catoni; 2012], [Lee, Valiant; 2022] show estimator  $\hat{\mu}$  such that with probability  $1 - \delta$ ,

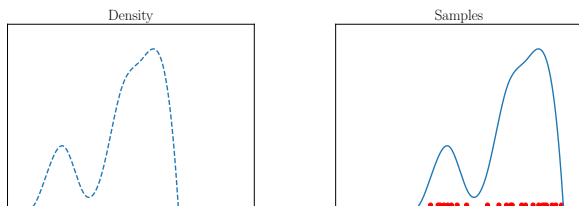
$$|\hat{\mu} - \mu| \leq \sqrt{\frac{2\sigma^2 \log \frac{2}{\delta}}{n}} (1 + o(1))$$

- Natural Question:** What if distribution is **known/symmetric**?

# Location Estimation (Known Distribution Case)

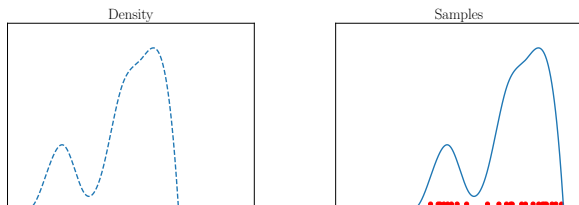


# Location Estimation (Known Distribution Case)



- Fit density to samples, aka **Maximum Likelihood Estimate (MLE)**

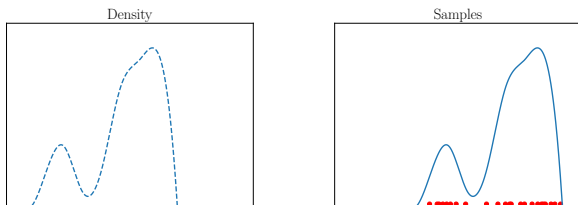
# Location Estimation (Known Distribution Case)



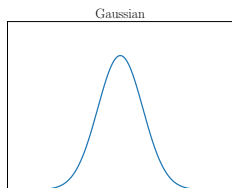
- Fit density to samples, aka **Maximum Likelihood Estimate (MLE)**
- Converges to  $\mathcal{N}(\mu, \frac{1}{n\mathcal{I}})$  where  $\mathcal{I}$  is the *Fisher information*



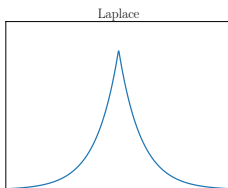
# Location Estimation (Known Distribution Case)



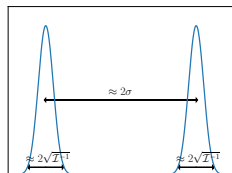
- Fit density to samples, aka **Maximum Likelihood Estimate (MLE)**
- Converges to  $\mathcal{N}(\mu, \frac{1}{n\mathcal{I}})$  where  $\mathcal{I}$  is the *Fisher information*



$$\frac{1}{\mathcal{I}} = \sigma^2$$



$$\frac{1}{\mathcal{I}} = \frac{\sigma^2}{2}$$



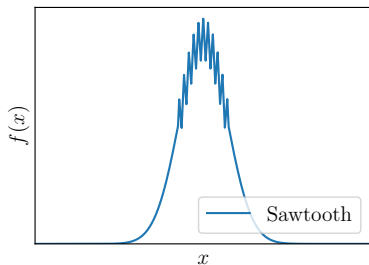
$$\frac{1}{\mathcal{I}} \ll \sigma^2$$

# Finite-Sample Setting

- In *finite-sample* setting, might expect  $|\hat{\mu} - \mu| \leq \sqrt{\frac{2 \log \frac{2}{\delta}}{n\mathcal{I}}}$

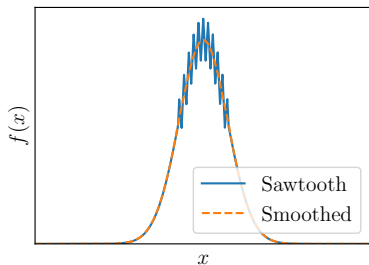
# Finite-Sample Setting

- In *finite-sample* setting, might expect  $|\hat{\mu} - \mu| \leq \sqrt{\frac{2 \log \frac{2}{\delta}}{n\mathcal{I}}}$
- Unfortunately, impossible!



# Finite-Sample Setting

- In *finite-sample* setting, might expect  $|\hat{\mu} - \mu| \leq \sqrt{\frac{2 \log \frac{2}{\delta}}{n\mathcal{I}}}$
- Unfortunately, impossible!

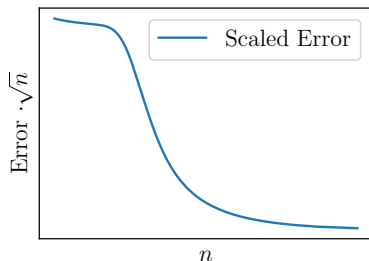
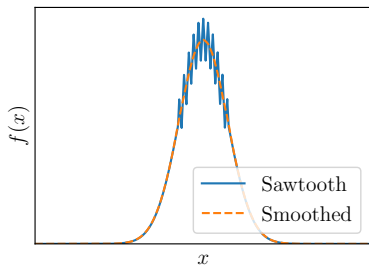


- **Solution:** smoothing [G., Lee, Price, Valiant; NeurIPS 2022]  
Smooth samples and distribution with a radius  $r \approx \sigma/n^{1/6}$  Gaussian, then run MLE. With probability  $1 - \delta$ ,

$$|\hat{\mu} - \mu| \leq \sqrt{\frac{2 \log \frac{2}{\delta}}{n\mathcal{I}_r}} (1 + o(1))$$

# Finite-Sample Setting

- In *finite-sample* setting, might expect  $|\hat{\mu} - \mu| \leq \sqrt{\frac{2 \log \frac{2}{\delta}}{n\mathcal{I}}}$
- Unfortunately, impossible!



- **Solution:** smoothing [G., Lee, Price, Valiant; NeurIPS 2022]  
Smooth samples and distribution with a radius  $r \approx \sigma/n^{1/6}$  Gaussian, then run MLE. With probability  $1 - \delta$ ,

$$|\hat{\mu} - \mu| \leq \sqrt{\frac{2 \log \frac{2}{\delta}}{n\mathcal{I}_r}} (1 + o(1))$$

# Finite-Sample Mean Estimation

	Error	Notes
<b>Unknown Distribution</b>	$\sqrt{\frac{2\sigma^2 \log \frac{2}{\delta}}{n}}$	[Cat12, LV22]
<b>Known Distribution</b>	$\sqrt{\frac{2 \log \frac{2}{\delta}}{n\mathcal{I}_r}}$	[GLPV22], $\mathcal{I}_r$ is the <i>smoothed</i> Fisher Information
<b>Unknown <i>Symmetric</i> Distribution</b>	$\sqrt{\frac{2 \log \frac{2}{\delta}}{n\mathcal{I}_r}}$	<b>This paper</b>

Table: Finite-Sample Results

# Finite-Sample Mean Estimation

	Error	Notes
Unknown Distribution	$\sqrt{\frac{2\sigma^2 \log \frac{2}{\delta}}{n}}$	[Cat12, LV22]
Known Distribution	$\sqrt{\frac{2 \log \frac{2}{\delta}}{n\mathcal{I}_r}}$	[GLPV22], $\mathcal{I}_r$ is the <i>smoothed</i> Fisher Information
Unknown <i>Symmetric</i> Distribution	$\sqrt{\frac{2 \log \frac{2}{\delta}}{n\mathcal{I}_r}}$	<b>This paper</b>

Table: Finite-Sample Results

## Main Theorem (Informal)

For  $r \approx \sigma/n^{1/3}$ , our estimator  $\hat{\mu}$  given  $n$  samples from a *symmetric* distribution satisfies, with probability  $1 - \delta$ ,

$$|\hat{\mu} - \mu| \leq (1 + o(1)) \sqrt{\frac{2 \log \frac{2}{\delta}}{n\mathcal{I}_r}}$$

The  $o(1)$  depends on  $\delta, n$ , but is independent of the distribution.

# Kernel Density Estimate

- If we knew the density, we could run (smoothed) MLE



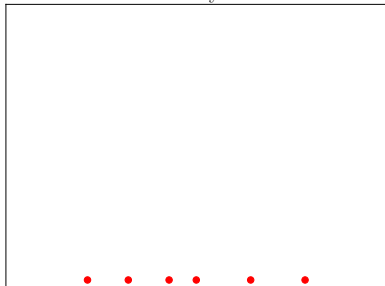
# Kernel Density Estimate

- If we knew the density, we could run (smoothed) MLE
- Since we don't know the density, let's try to estimate it using the Kernel Density Estimate (KDE) on the first (say)  $n^{1/100}$  samples

# Kernel Density Estimate

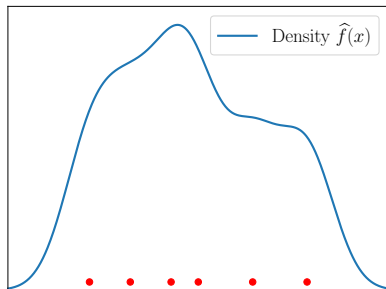
- If we knew the density, we could run (smoothed) MLE
- Since we don't know the density, let's try to estimate it using the Kernel Density Estimate (KDE) on the first (say)  $n^{1/100}$  samples

Kernel Density Estimate



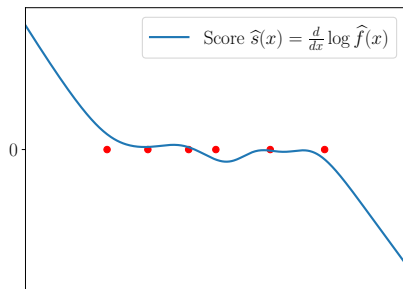
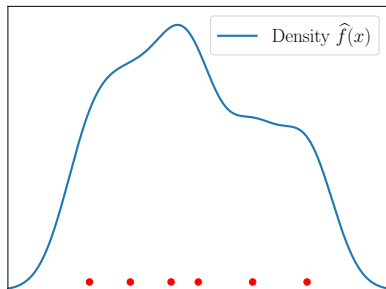
# Kernel Density Estimate

- If we knew the density, we could run (smoothed) MLE
- Since we don't know the density, let's try to estimate it using the Kernel Density Estimate (KDE) on the first (say)  $n^{1/100}$  samples



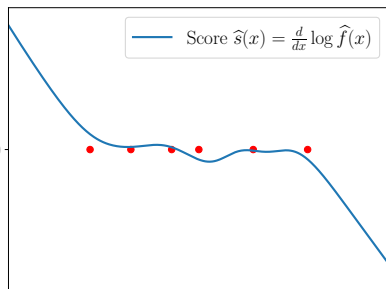
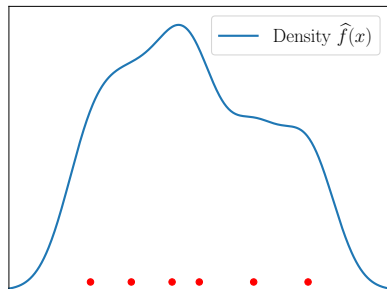
# Kernel Density Estimate

- If we knew the density, we could run (smoothed) MLE
- Since we don't know the density, let's try to estimate it using the Kernel Density Estimate (KDE) on the first (say)  $n^{1/100}$  samples



# Kernel Density Estimate

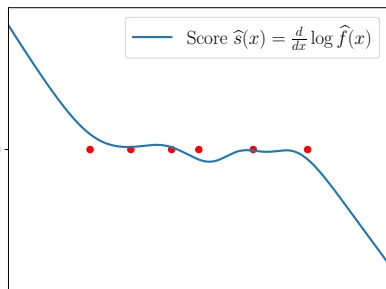
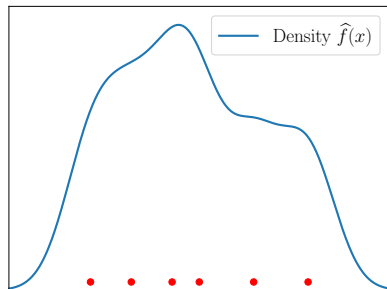
- If we knew the density, we could run (smoothed) MLE
- Since we don't know the density, let's try to estimate it using the Kernel Density Estimate (KDE) on the first (say)  $n^{1/100}$  samples



- Naive algorithm: Run (smoothed) MLE on the KDE/Find zero of KDE score using remaining samples.

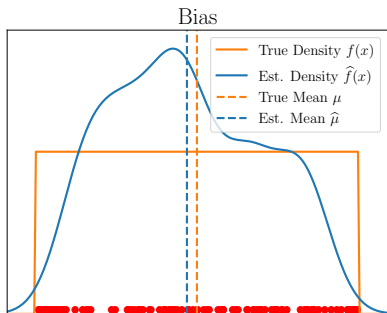
# Kernel Density Estimate

- If we knew the density, we could run (smoothed) MLE
- Since we don't know the density, let's try to estimate it using the Kernel Density Estimate (KDE) on the first (say)  $n^{1/100}$  samples

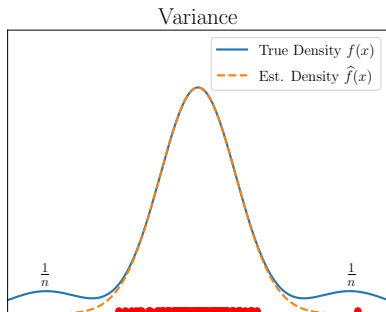
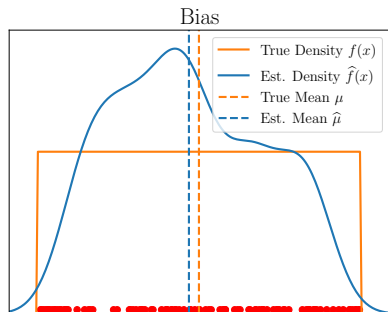


- Naive algorithm: Run (smoothed) MLE on the KDE/Find zero of KDE score using remaining samples. Two issues:
  1. Bias
  2. Variance

# Bias and Variance from KDE



# Bias and Variance from KDE





## Correcting the KDE – Bias

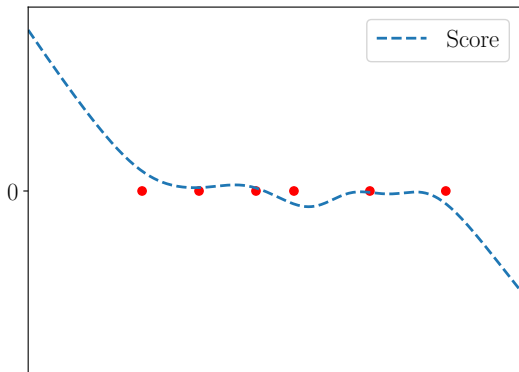
- For a *symmetric* distribution, MLE with respect to *any* (possibly different) symmetric distribution is an unbiased estimator

# Correcting the KDE – Bias

- For a *symmetric* distribution, MLE with respect to *any* (possibly different) symmetric distribution is an unbiased estimator
- **Idea:** (Anti)-symmetrize the KDE score.

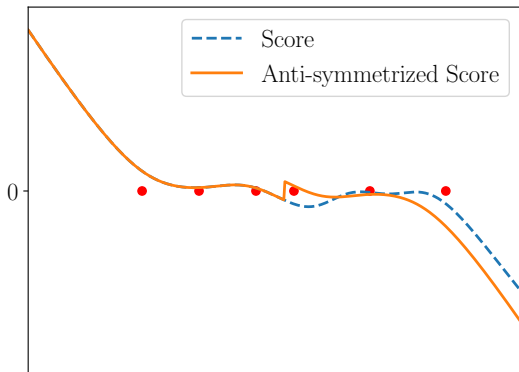
# Correcting the KDE – Bias

- For a *symmetric* distribution, MLE with respect to *any* (possibly different) symmetric distribution is an unbiased estimator
- **Idea:** (Anti)-symmetrize the KDE score.



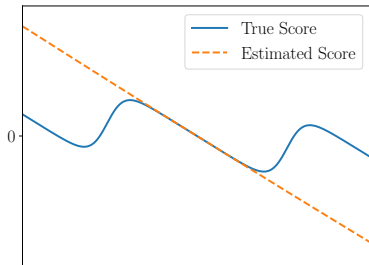
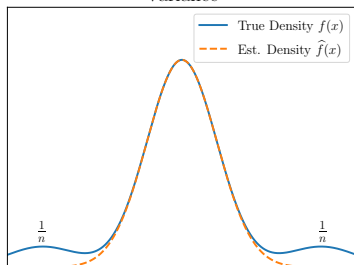
# Correcting the KDE – Bias

- For a *symmetric* distribution, MLE with respect to *any* (possibly different) symmetric distribution is an unbiased estimator
- **Idea:** (Anti)-symmetrize the KDE score.

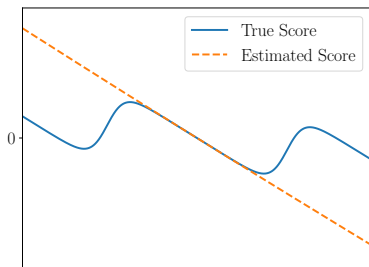
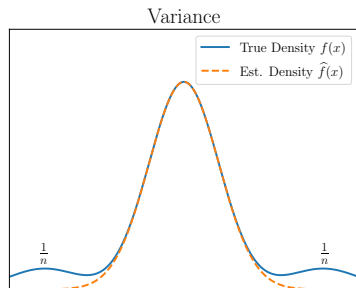


# Correcting the KDE – Variance

Variance



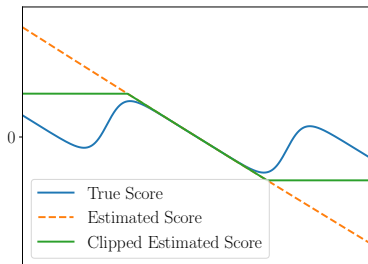
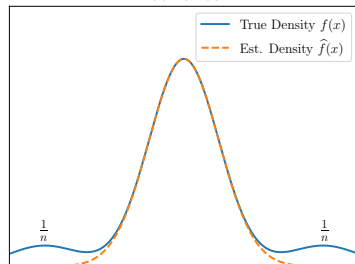
# Correcting the KDE – Variance



- The true score is close to 0 near the small bumps

# Correcting the KDE – Variance

Variance



- The true score is close to 0 near the small bumps
- **Solution:** Clip the score

# High-Level Summary

- Use the first (say)  $n^{1/100}$  samples to compute the KDE



# High-Level Summary

- Use the first (say)  $n^{1/100}$  samples to compute the KDE
- Symmetrize and clip the KDE score appropriately

# High-Level Summary

- Use the first (say)  $n^{1/100}$  samples to compute the KDE
- Symmetrize and clip the KDE score appropriately
- Run (variant of) smoothed MLE using the symmetrized and clipped KDE score

# High-Level Summary

- Use the first (say)  $n^{1/100}$  samples to compute the KDE
- Symmetrize and clip the KDE score appropriately
- Run (variant of) smoothed MLE using the symmetrized and clipped KDE score

## Main Theorem (Informal)

For  $r \approx \sigma/n^{1/3}$ , our estimator  $\hat{\mu}$  given  $n$  samples from a *symmetric* distribution satisfies, with probability  $1 - \delta$ ,

$$|\hat{\mu} - \mu| \leq (1 + o(1)) \sqrt{\frac{2 \log \frac{2}{\delta}}{n \mathcal{I}_r}}$$

The  $o(1)$  depends on  $\delta, n$ , but is independent of the distribution.