Bagging and Random Forests

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Ensemble Methods: Introduction

Ensembles: Parallel vs Sequential

- Ensemble methods combine multiple models
- **Parallel ensembles**: each model is built independently
  - e.g. bagging and random forests
  - Main Idea: Combine many (high complexity, low bias) models to reduce variance
- **Sequential ensembles**:
  - Models are generated sequentially
  - Try to add new models that do well where previous models lack

The Benefits of Averaging

A Poor Estimator

- Let $Z, Z_1, \ldots, Z_n$ i.i.d. $\mathbb{E}Z = \mu$ and $\operatorname{Var} Z = \sigma^2$.
- We could use any single Z_i to estimate μ.
- Performance?
- Unbiased: $\mathbb{E}Z_i = \mu$.
- Standard error of estimator would be σ.
  - The **standard error** is the standard deviation of the sampling distribution of a statistic.
  - $\mathrm{SD}(Z) = \sqrt{\operatorname{Var}(Z)} = \sqrt{\sigma^2} = \sigma$.

Variance of a Mean

- Let $Z, Z_1, \ldots, Z_n$ i.i.d. $\mathbb{E}Z = \mu$ and $\operatorname{Var} Z = \sigma^2$.
- Let's consider the average of the Z_i's.
  - Average has the same expected value but smaller standard error:

$$\mathbb{E}\left[\frac{1}{n}\sum_{i=1}^{n} Z_i\right] = \mu \qquad \operatorname{Var}\left[\frac{1}{n}\sum_{i=1}^{n} Z_i\right] = \frac{\sigma^2}{n}.$$

- Clearly the average is preferred to a single Z_i as estimator.
- Can we apply this to reduce variance of general prediction functions?

Averaging Independent Prediction Functions

- Suppose we have B independent training sets from the same distribution.
- Learning algorithm gives B decision functions: $\hat{f}_1(x), \hat{f}_2(x), \ldots, \hat{f}_B(x)$
- Define the average prediction function as:

$$\hat{f}_{\text{avg}} = \frac{1}{B} \sum_{b=1}^{B} \hat{f}_b$$

- What's random here?

Averaging Independent Prediction Functions

- Fix some $x \in \mathcal{X}$.
- Then average prediction on x is

$$\hat{f}_{\text{avg}}(x) = \frac{1}{B}\sum_{b=1}^{B}\hat{f}_b(x).$$

- Consider $\hat{f}_{\text{avg}}(x)$ and $\hat{f}_1(x),\ldots,\hat{f}_B(x)$ as random variables (since training data random).
- $\hat{f}_1(x),\ldots,\hat{f}_B(x)$ are i.i.d.
- $\hat{f}_{\text{avg}}(x)$ and $\hat{f}_b(x)$ have the same expected value, but
- $\hat{f}_{\text{avg}}(x)$ has smaller variance:

$$\begin{aligned}\operatorname{Var}(\hat{f}_{\text{avg}}(x)) &= \frac{1}{B^2}\operatorname{Var}\left(\sum_{b=1}^{B}\hat{f}_b(x)\right)\\ &= \frac{1}{B}\operatorname{Var}\left(\hat{f}_1(x)\right)\end{aligned}$$

Averaging Independent Prediction Functions

- Using
$$\hat{f}_{\text{avg}} = \frac{1}{B}\sum_{b=1}^{B}\hat{f}_b$$
seems like a win.
- But in practice we don't have B independent training sets...
- Instead, we can use **the bootstrap**....

Bagging

Bagging

- Draw B bootstrap samples $D^1, \ldots, D^B$ from original data $\mathcal{D}$.
- Let $\hat{f}_1, \hat{f}_2, \ldots, \hat{f}_B$ be the decision functions for each set.
- The **bagged decision function** is a **combination** of these:

$$\hat{f}_{\text{avg}}(x) = \text{Combine}\left(\hat{f}_1(x), \hat{f}_2(x), \ldots, \hat{f}_B(x)\right)$$

- How might we combine
  - decision functions for regression?
  - binary class predictions?
  - binary probability predictions?
  - multiclass predictions?
- Bagging proposed by Leo Breiman (1996).

Bagging for Regression

- Draw B bootstrap samples $D^1, \ldots, D^B$ from original data $\mathcal{D}$.
- Let $\hat{f}_1, \hat{f}_2, \ldots, \hat{f}_B : \mathcal{X} \to \mathbf{R}$ be the predictions functions for each set.
- Bagged prediction function is given as

$$\hat{f}_{\text{bag}}(x) = \frac{1}{B} \sum_{b=1}^{B} \hat{f}_b(x).$$

- Empirically, $\hat{f}_{\text{bag}}$ often performs similarly to what we'd get from training on B independent samples:
  - $\hat{f}_{\text{bag}}(x)$ has same expectation as $\hat{f}_1(x)$, but
  - $\hat{f}_{\text{bag}}(x)$ has smaller variance than $\hat{f}_1(x)$

Out-of-Bag Error Estimation

- Each bagged predictor is trained on about 63% of the data.
- Remaining 37% are called **out-of-bag (OOB)** observations.
- For ith training point, let

$$S_i = \left\{ b \mid D^b \text{ does not contain } i\text{th point} \right\}.$$

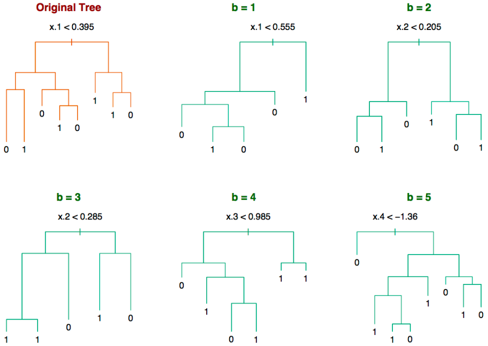
- The **OOB prediction** on x_i is

$$\hat{f}_{\text{OOB}}(x_i) = \frac{1}{|S_i|} \sum_{b \in S_i} \hat{f}_b(x_i).$$

- The OOB error is a good estimate of the test error.
- OOB error is similar to cross validation error – both are computed on training set.

Bagging Classification Trees

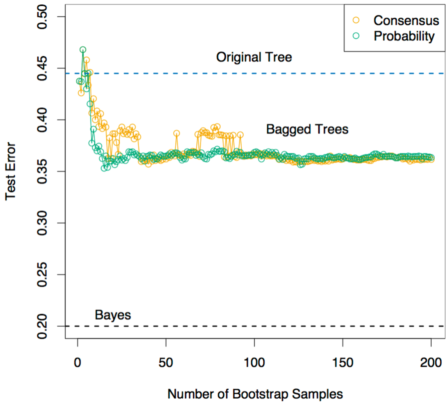
- Input space $\mathcal{X} = \mathbf{R}^5$ and output space $\mathcal{Y} = \{-1, 1\}$.
- Sample size $N = 30$ (simulated data)



From ESL Figure 8.9

Comparing Classification Combination Methods

- Two ways to combine classifications: consensus class or average probabilities.



From ESL Figure 8.10

Terms "Bias" and "Variance" in Casual Usage (Warning! Confusion Zone!)

- Restricting the hypothesis space $\mathcal{F}$ "**biases**" the fit
  - **away** from the best possible fit of the training data, and
  - **towards** a [usually] simpler model.
- Full, unpruned decision trees have very little bias.
- Pruning decision trees introduces a bias.
- **Variance** describes how much the fit changes across different random training sets.
- If different random training sets give very similar fits, then algorithm has high **stability**.
- Decision trees are found to be high variance (i.e. not very stable).

Conventional Wisdom on When Bagging Helps

- Hope is that bagging reduces variance without making bias worse.
- General sentiment is that bagging helps most when
  - Relatively unbiased base prediction functions
  - High variance / low stability
    - i.e. small changes in training set can cause large changes in predictions
- Hard to find clear and convincing theoretical results on this
- But following this intuition leads to improved ML methods, e.g. Random Forests

Random Forests

Recall the Motivating Principal of Bagging

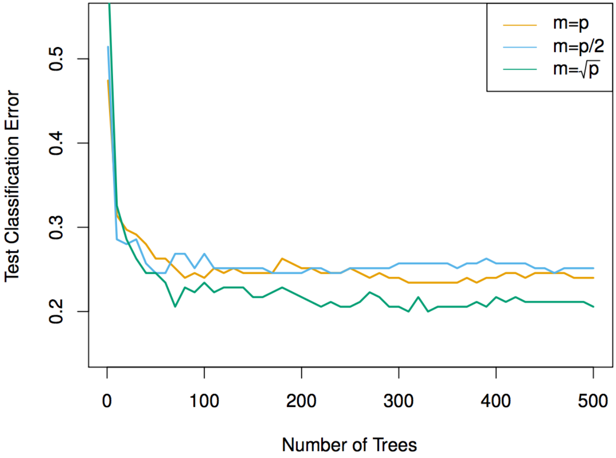
- Averaging $\hat{f}_1, \ldots, \hat{f}_B$ reduces variance, if they're based on i.i.d. samples from $P_{\mathcal{X} \times \mathcal{Y}}$
- Bootstrap samples are
  - independent samples from the training set, but
  - are **not** indepedendent samples from $P_{\mathcal{X} \times \mathcal{Y}}$.
- This dependence limits the amount of variance reduction we can get.
- Would be nice to reduce the dependence between $\hat{f}_i$'s...

Main idea of random forests

Use **bagged decision trees**, but modify the tree-growing procedure to reduce the correlation between trees.

- **Key step** in random forests:
  - When constructing **each tree node**, restrict choice of splitting variable to a randomly chosen subset of features of size m.
- Typically choose $m \approx \sqrt{p}$, where p is the number of features.
- Can choose m using cross validation.

Random Forest: Effect of m size



From *An Introduction to Statistical Learning, with applications in R* (Springer, 2013) with permission from the authors: G. James, D. Witten, T. Hastie and R. Tibshirani.

Appendix

Variance of a Mean of Correlated Variables

- For $Z, Z_1, \ldots, Z_n$ i.i.d. with $\mathbb{E}Z = \mu$ and $\text{Var}Z = \sigma^2$,

$$\mathbb{E}\left[\frac{1}{n}\sum_{i=1}^{n} Z_i\right] = \mu \qquad \text{Var}\left[\frac{1}{n}\sum_{i=1}^{n} Z_i\right] = \frac{\sigma^2}{n}.$$

- What if Z's are correlated?
- Suppose $\forall i \neq j$, $\text{Corr}(Z_i, Z_j) = \rho$. Then

$$\text{Var}\left[\frac{1}{n}\sum_{i=1}^{n} Z_i\right] = \rho\sigma^2 + \frac{1-\rho}{n}\sigma^2.$$

- For large n, the $\rho\sigma^2$ term dominates – limits benefit of averaging.