

WTF

is SRE? conference

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Know Your Data: The stats behind the numbers

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#WTFisSRE

Quick: What's the difference between Mean, Median and Mode?



Monitoring is a numbers game



- Metrics are numbers that represent selected behavior
- Generally
 - Timestamped
 - Key-Values
- Data, to be useful, must be
 - Aggregated
 - Analyzed
 - Visualized



Some questions to ponder

- How do you deal with outliers (spikes) in monitoring?
- How do you get a representative value between vastly different quantities (rates, speeds)?
- How do you arrive at values to represent rate of change over time?

Mean, Median, Mode

Data:

2, 6, 4, 9, 5, 1, 7, 8, 1, 9, 9, 1, 10, 2, 9, 6, 7, 2, 1, 4, 7, 1, 10, 9, 2, 7, 1, 1, 4, 3, 5, 6, 3, 8, 1, 8, 4, 7, 6, 3, 9, 9, 9, 4, 9, 1, 4, 1, 9, 8, 10, 10, 1, 1, 1, 7, 10, 9, 7, 3, 7, 4

Mean:

A measure of central tendency that represents the average value of a set of data.

Mean = 5.444

Median:

Represents the middle value in a set of ordered data

Median = 6

Mode:

The value that appears most frequently in a set of data.

Mode = 1

Mean, Median, Mode

Data:

2, 6, 4, 9, 5, 1, 7, 8, 1, 9, 9, 1, 10, 2, 9, 6, 7, 2, 1, 4, 7, 1, 10, 9, 2, 7, 1, 1, 4, 3, 5, 6, 3, 8, 1, 8, 4, 7, 6, 3, 9, 9, 9, 4, 9, 1, 4, 1, 9, 8, 10, 10, 1, 1, 1, 7, 10, 9, 7, 3, 7, 4

Mean:

A measure of central tendency that represents the average value of a set of data.

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Median = 6

Mode:

The value that appears most frequently in a set of data.

Mode = 1

Mean = 5.444

Or is it 4.130 or 2.791?

Means to an End

Arithmetic, Harmonic, Geometric, Trimmed, Weighted, Moving

- Each has potential uses and drawbacks
- Often already implemented in the monitoring software
- Can give very different results
- Can make like and unlike comparisons easier

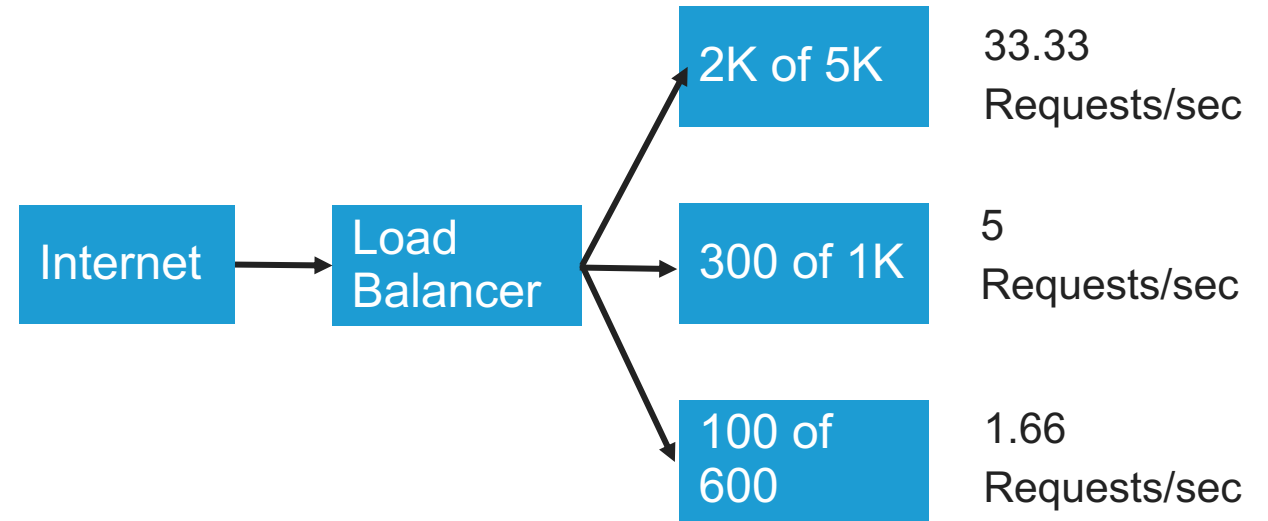
Arithmetic

- Most common
- Is the central point in a normal distribution
 - This is not the 50% mark (mostly)
- Useful for comparing current to previous conditions
- May be aggregated into groups (time series)

In a time series, we usually calculate constantly to incorporate new data

Geometric

- Another central tendency
- Often used for things growing exponentially
- Multiply all the items together, take the n th root
- In DevOps
 - Average number of deploys per unit of time
 - Average lead time for changes
 - MTTR
 - Throughput



Geometric mean = $(33.33 * 5 * 1.66)^{(1/3)} = \mathbf{6.525 \text{ requests per second}}$

Harmonic

- Measure the performance where multiple systems are involved
- Weights the lowest figure the highest
- Divide n by the sum of the reciprocals
- In DevOps
 - Performance within range
 - Overall indication of latency or thruput
 - Use in complex environments
 - Especially useful for outliers

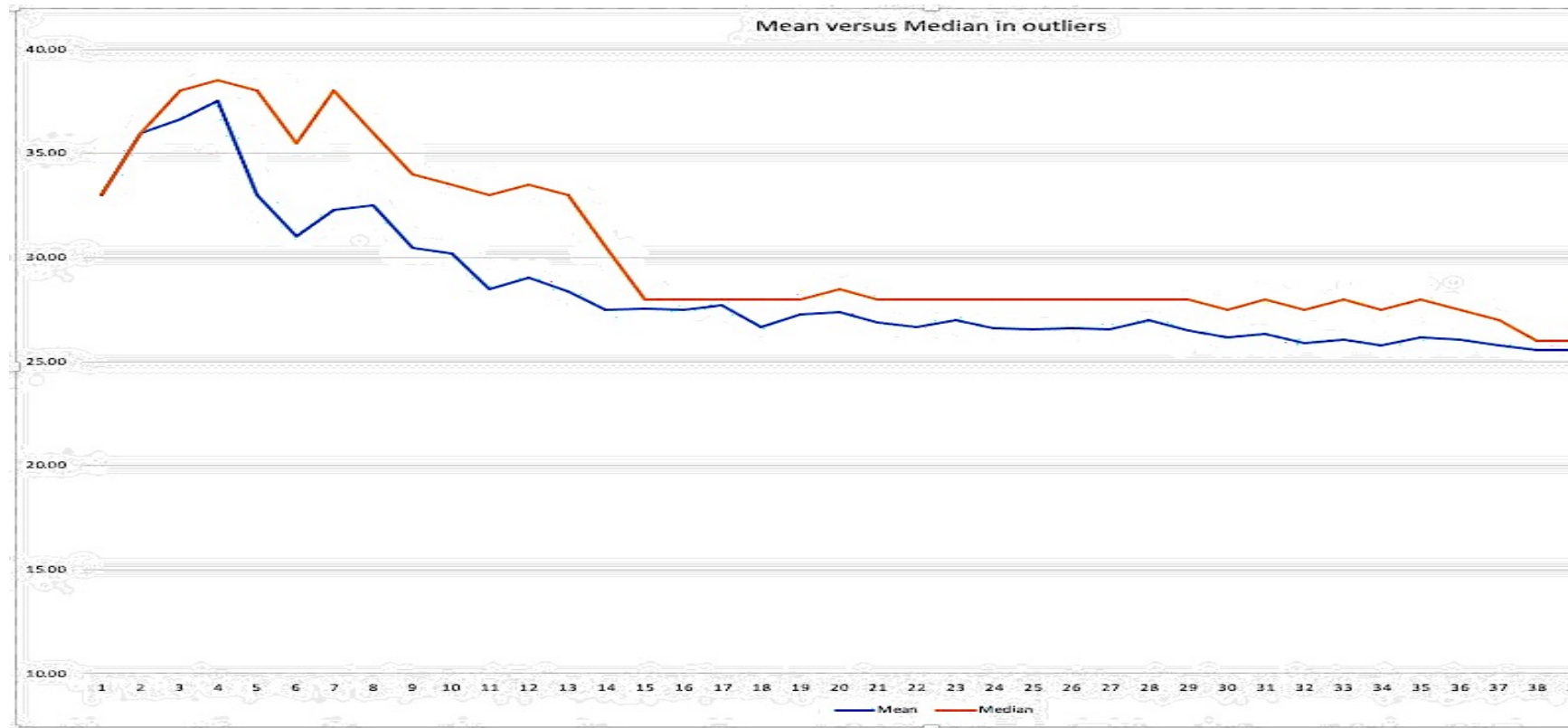
$$n / (1/x_1 + 1/x_2 + \dots + 1/x_n)$$

	First % used	Second % Used
Node 1	30%	30%
Node 2	40%	40%
Node 3	20%	10%
Node 4	10%	80%
Harmonic	19.19%	32.82%

Median

- Amazingly underutilized!
- Center value of a sorted list
- Median is always the 50% point of a normal curve

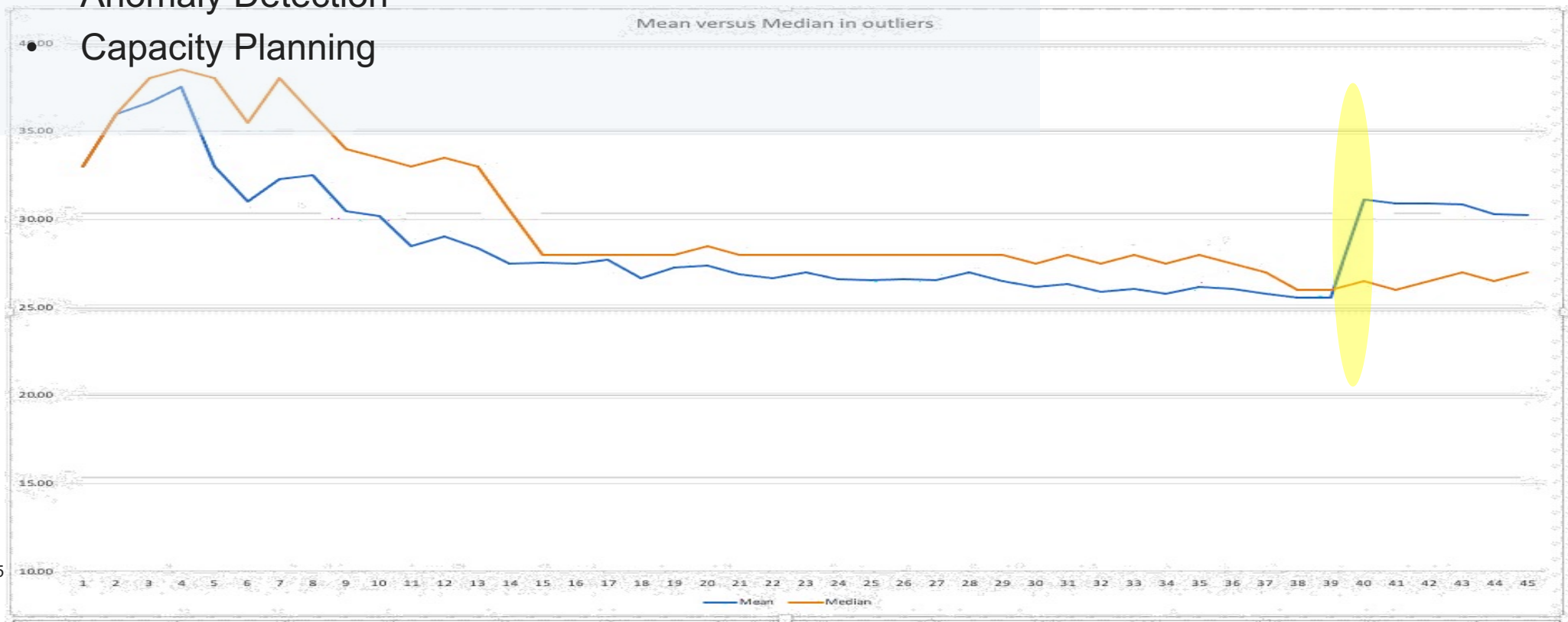
Mean	25.25
Median	26

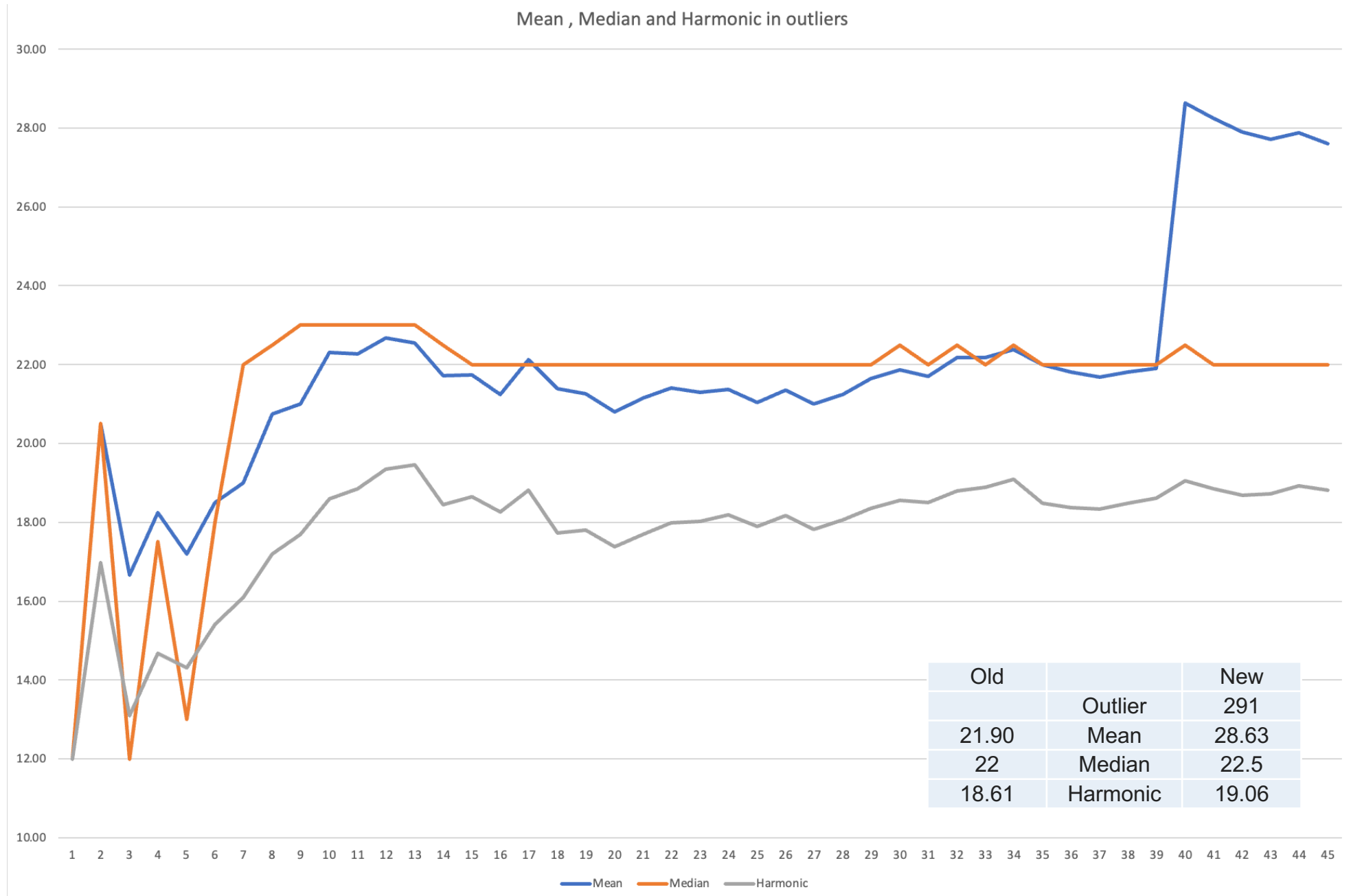


Choosing Between Mean and Median

- Mean can be impacted by outliers
- Resilience is better in median
- In DevOps
 - Response time monitoring
 - Anomaly Detection
 - Capacity Planning

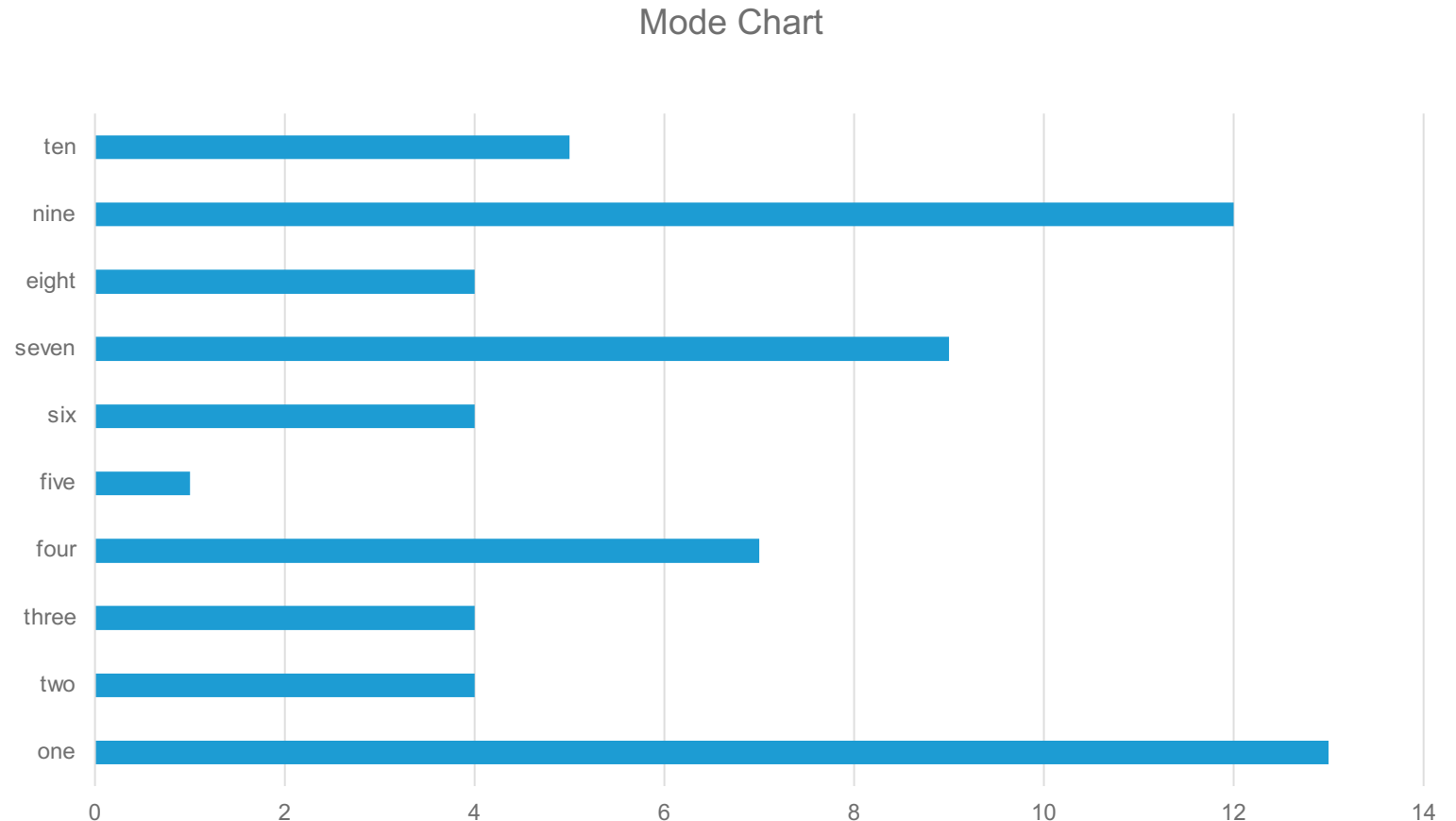
Old		New
	Outlier	250
25.54	Mean	31.15
26	Median	26.5





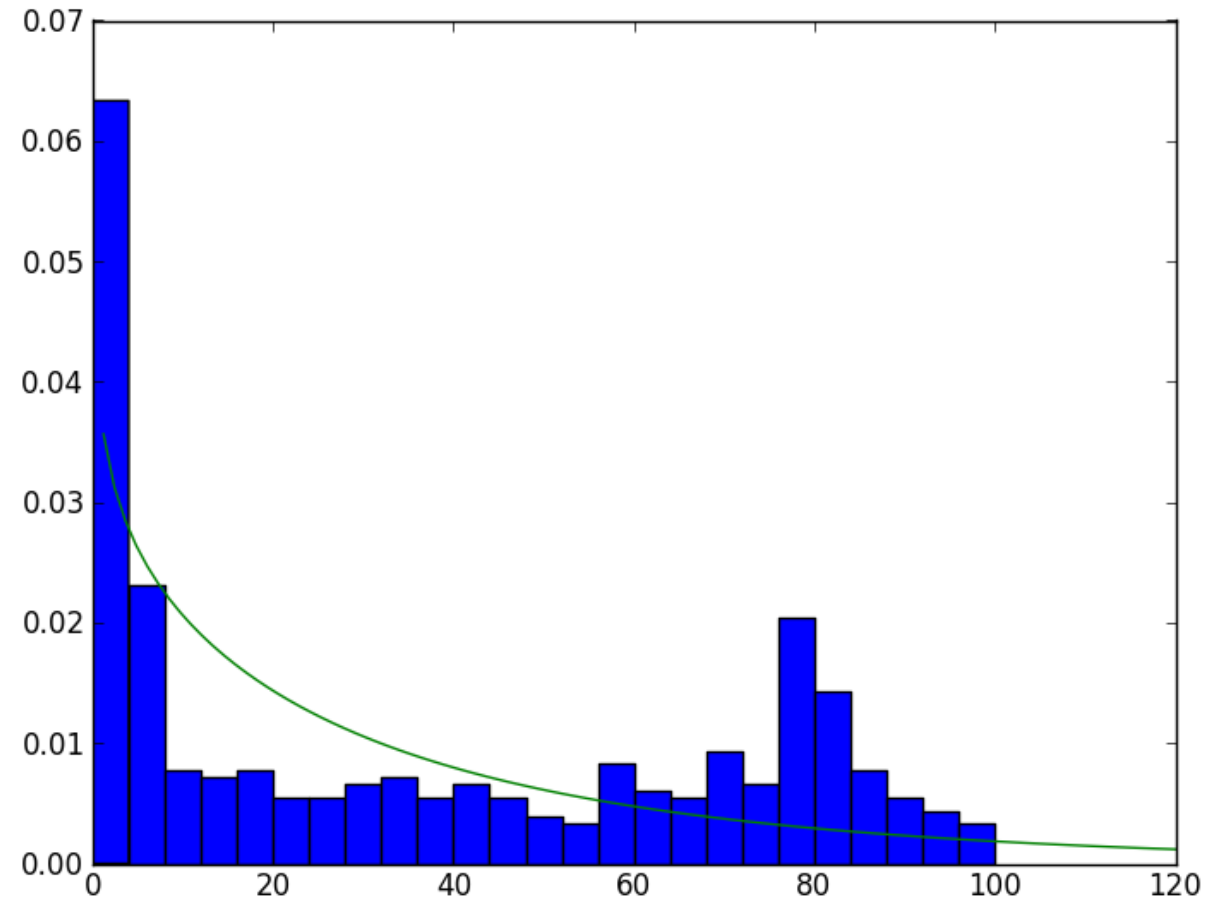
How about the Mode?

- The most commonly recurring value in the set
- Often presented as a histogram
- Not commonly used in DevOps, mostly inferential
 - Log Analysis
 - Security Monitoring
 - User Behavior Analysis



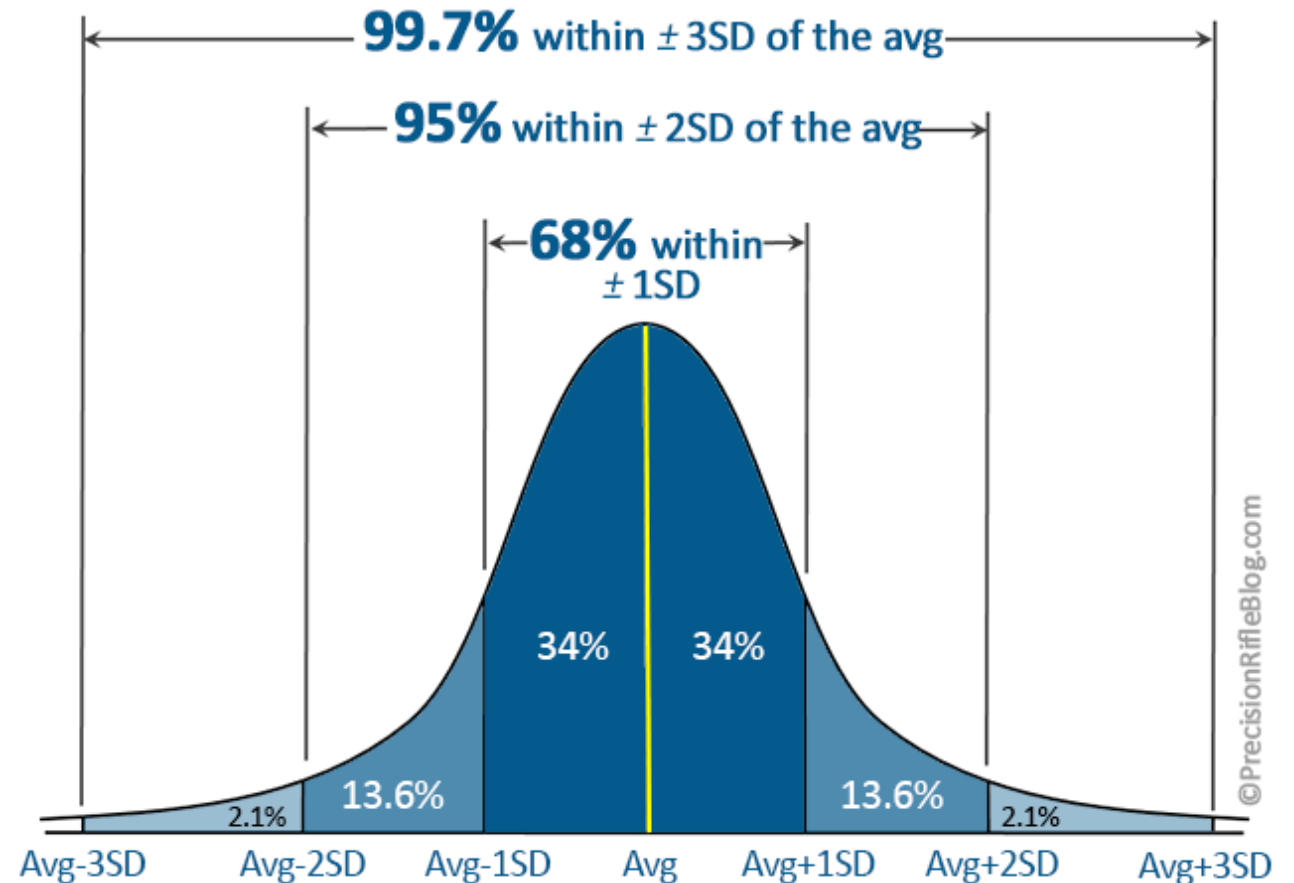
Distributions

- Normal
 - Data equally distributed
- Poisson
 - used to model the occurrence of rare events
- Beta
 - Success/failure of binomial events
- Exponential
 - Time between async events
- Weibull
- Log-normal
 - Values based on many small events



Slight sidetrack: Standard deviation

- Measures the variability of your data
- Identifies trends and outliers
- NOT percentage based
 - Except with coefficient of variability
 - $CV = \text{Mean} / \text{std dev} \times 100$
 - Useful for measurement ignoring range
- SRE cases
 - Lead times
 - Recovery times
 - Anomalies (alerts)
 - SLO / SLI



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Deeper dive: Weibull

- Usually used for time-to-failure
- Defined by a Shape and a Scale parameter
 - This can be challenging
 - Don't ask the math
 - R does it for you!

Component	Time-to-Failure
Spinning Rust	500 hours
Memory	1000 hours
Power Supply	1500 hours
CPU	2000 hours
SSD	2500 hours

```
library(fitdistrplus)
data <- c(500, 1000, 1500, 2000, 2500)
fit.weib <- fitdist(data, "weibull")
summary(fit.weib)
```

Fitting of the distribution ' weibull ' by maximum likelihood

Parameters :	estimate	Std. Error
shape	1.0624082	0.3820112
scale	2158.2561922	943.0326941

```
p.failure <- pweibull(3000, shape = fit.weib$estimate[1],
scale = fit.weib$estimate[2])
1 - p.failure
```

[1] 0.2905977

Deeper dive: Exponential

- Models the “rate” (time between events that are unrelated)
- Use cases
 - Network performance
 - User Requests
 - Messaging service
 - System failures
- Don’t ask the math
 - R does it for you

User request arrival time	Count
5 seconds	120
10 seconds	60
15 seconds	30
20 seconds	10

```
library(MASS)
data <- c(rep(5, 120), rep(10, 60), rep(15, 30), rep(20, 10))
fit.exp <- fitdistr(data, "exponential")
summary(fit.exp)
```

```
estimate
rate 0.04232899
```

```
p.request <- pexp(10, rate = fit.exp$estimate)
p.request
```

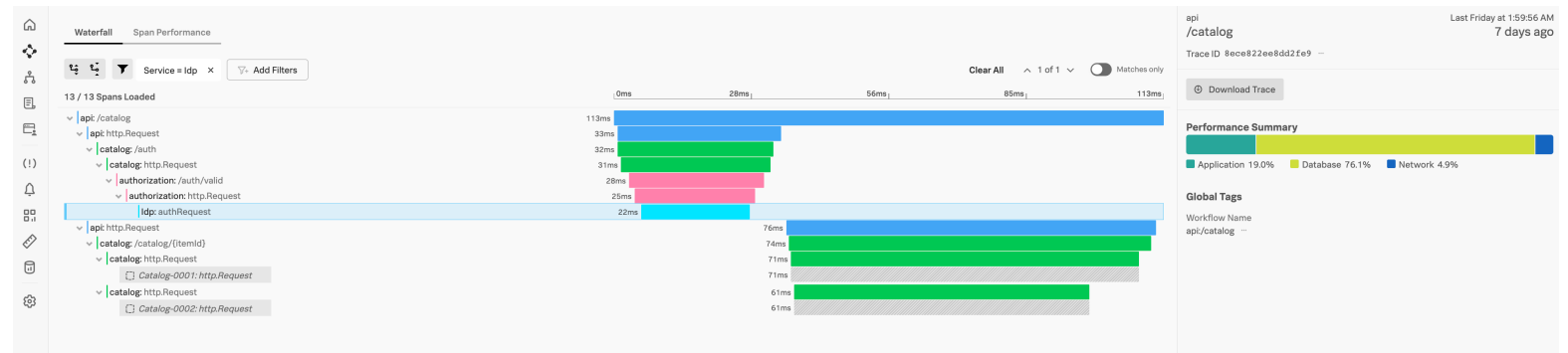
```
[1] 0.3943056
```

Slight sidetrack: Descriptive versus Inferential stats

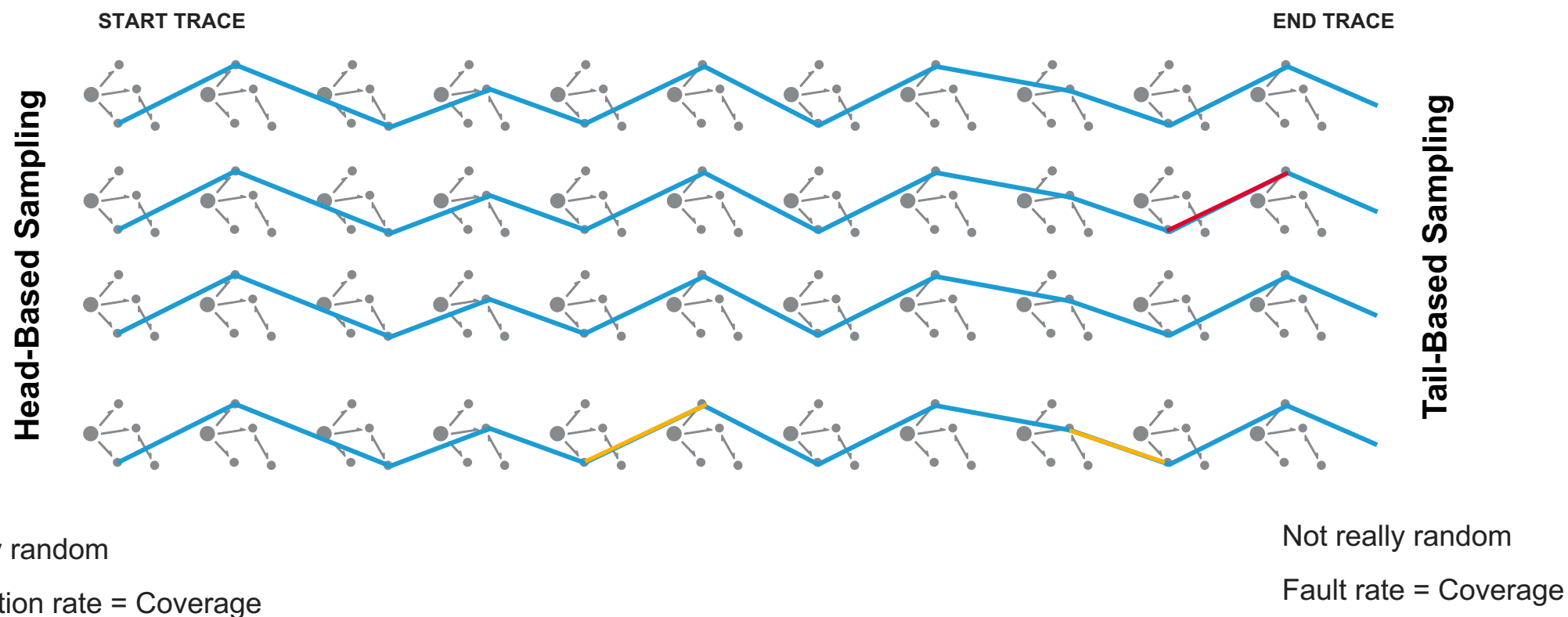
- Descriptive uses the whole data set to draw statistical conclusions
 - Used for visualization
 - Can define and extract trends
- Inferential uses a sampled set to draw conclusions
 - Used for predictions or hypothesis testing
 - Can also visualize
- But this leads us to sampling

Dealing with the data

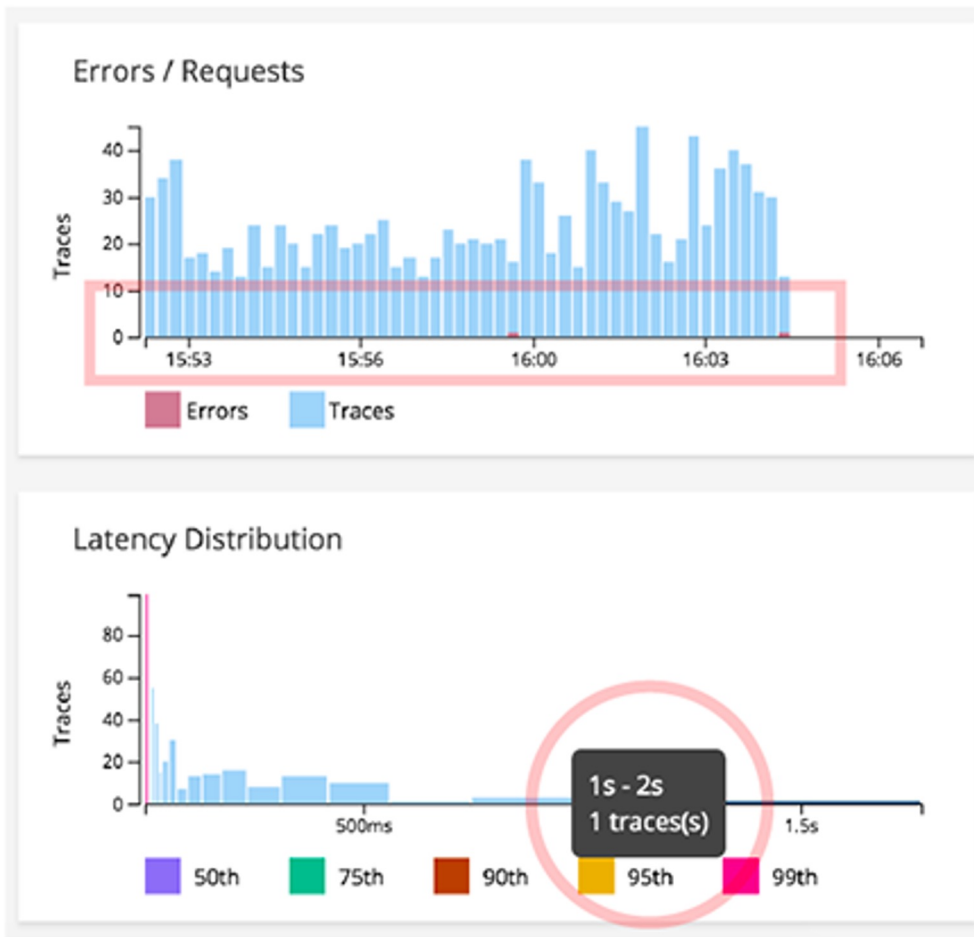
- Monitoring is now a data problem
 - Observability signals: Metrics, Traces, Logs
- Analysis is often
 - Aggregated or Analyzed in segments: Time-defined
 - Sampled and inferential
 - **Random** sampling
 - Stratified sampling
 - Cluster sampling
 - Systematic sampling
 - **Purposive** sampling



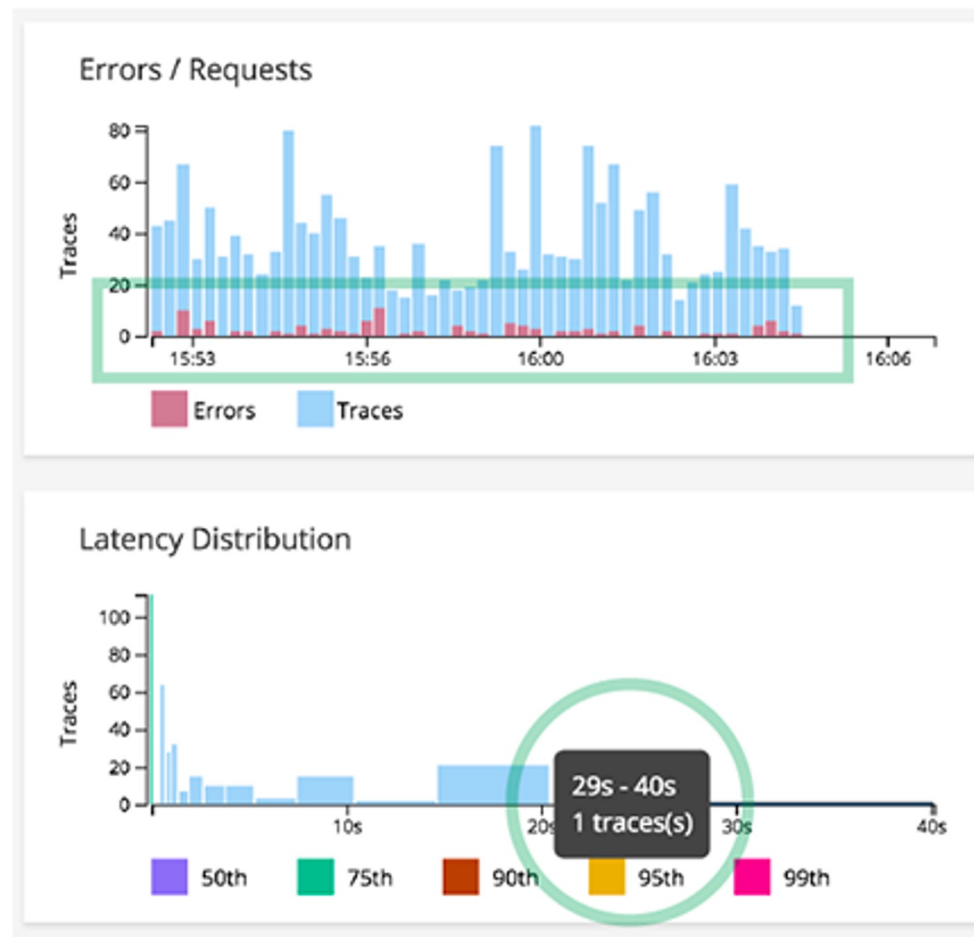
Lets consider tracing and sampling



Sampling



No Sampling



Sampling

- Changes behavior from Descriptive to Inferential
- Can hide outlier behavior
 - Metrics are not usually sampled
- May make forensics tougher
 - Lack of direct correlation
- A necessary evil



Summary

- Statistics are how we tend to analyze our metrics
- Statistics are aggregation and reduction to reveal central tendencies
 - They do not show individual behavior
- Most choices make use of very few basics
 - But other choices may show amazing inferential results
- And finally

The most effective debugging tool is still careful thought, coupled with judiciously placed print statements.

-Brian Kernighan Unix for Beginners 1979

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Thanks



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Slides on GitHub



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