

Learning the latent structure of background distributions

Santiago Tanco

INFN Genova

In collaboration with Ezequiel Álvarez¹ and Jernej Kamenik²

¹ICAS, CONICET, Argentina

²Jožef Stefan Institute, Slovenia



ML4Jets - Vienna

September 17, 2026

Challenges in background estimation

- Accurate background estimation is crucial to any experimental analysis

Challenges in background estimation

- Accurate background estimation is crucial to any experimental analysis
- **Monte Carlo simulations**
 - Encode our knowledge of known physics
 - May not accurately reproduce data in some situations
 - Depend on a specific parametrization

Challenges in background estimation

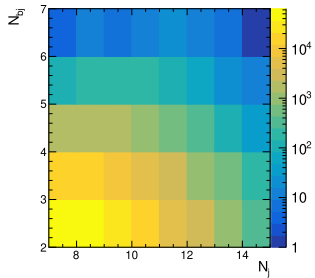
- Accurate background estimation is crucial to any experimental analysis
- **Monte Carlo simulations**
 - Encode our knowledge of known physics
 - May not accurately reproduce data in some situations
 - Depend on a specific parametrization
- **Data-driven methods**
 - ABCD and similar techniques extrapolate from background-dominated regions
 - Key assumptions*: observable independence, signal confinement
 - *may not be exactly fulfilled, resulting in biased estimations

Challenges in background estimation

- Accurate background estimation is crucial to any experimental analysis
- **Monte Carlo simulations**
 - Encode our knowledge of known physics
 - May not accurately reproduce data in some situations
 - Depend on a specific parametrization
- **Data-driven methods**
 - ABCD and similar techniques extrapolate from background-dominated regions
 - Key assumptions*: observable independence, signal confinement
 - *may not be exactly fulfilled, resulting in biased estimations

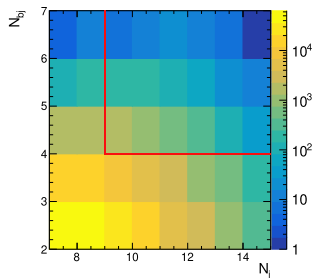
How can we inject more information from known physics (multiple MC samples) into a data-driven inference pipeline?

A practical example: $pp \rightarrow t\bar{t}jj$



S. Choi and H. Oh [1906.10831]

A practical example: $pp \rightarrow t\bar{t}jj$



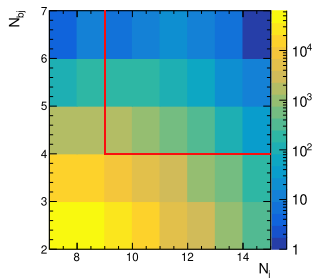
S. Choi and H. Oh [1906.10831]

Data-driven background estimation:

- The expected signal lies in a specific region (SR) in the space of 2 observables
- The **correlation** between observables is small

$$P(x,y) = P_x(x) P_y(y) [1 + \epsilon(x,y)]$$

A practical example: $pp \rightarrow t\bar{t}jj$



S. Choi and H. Oh [1906.10831]

Data-driven background estimation:

- The expected signal lies in a specific region (SR) in the space of 2 observables
- The **correlation** between observables is small

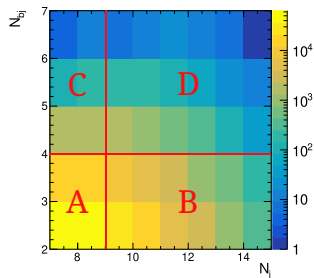
$$P(x,y) = P_x(x) P_y(y) [1 + \epsilon(x,y)]$$

- Use event counts in control regions (CR) to estimate the background in SR

A practical example: $pp \rightarrow t\bar{t}jj$

■ If $\epsilon = 0$,

$$\hat{D} = \frac{C}{A} \times B$$



S. Choi and H. Oh [1906.10831]

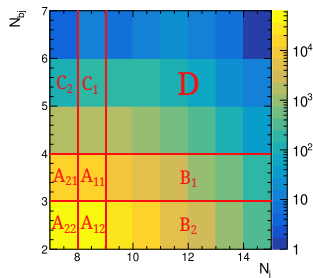
Data-driven background estimation:

- The expected signal lies in a specific region (SR) in the space of 2 observables
- The **correlation** between observables is small

$$P(x,y) = P_x(x) P_y(y) [1 + \epsilon(x,y)]$$

- Use event counts in control regions (CR) to estimate the background in SR

A practical example: $pp \rightarrow t\bar{t}jj$



S. Choi and H. Oh [1906.10831]

Data-driven background estimation:

- The expected signal lies in a specific region (SR) in the space of 2 observables
- The **correlation** between observables is small

$$P(x,y) = P_x(x) P_y(y) [1 + \epsilon(x,y)]$$

- Use event counts in control regions (CR) to estimate the background in SR

- If $\epsilon = 0$,

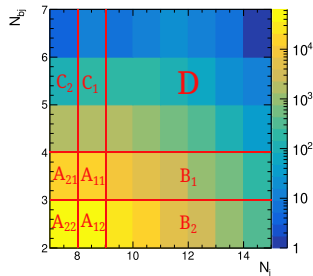
$$\hat{D} = \frac{C}{A} \times B$$

- If $\epsilon \ll 1$,

$$\hat{D} = \left(\frac{C_2 B_2}{A_{22}} \right)^{-\frac{1}{3}} \left(\frac{C_1 B_1}{A_{11}} \right)^{\frac{4}{3}} + \mathcal{O}(\Delta^3)$$

$$\hat{D} = \frac{C_2 B_2}{A_{22}} \left(\frac{C_1 B_1}{A_{11}} \right)^4 \left(\frac{C_2 B_1}{A_{21}} \right)^{-2} \left(\frac{C_1 B_2}{A_{12}} \right)^{-2} + \mathcal{O}(\Delta^4)$$

A practical example: $pp \rightarrow t\bar{t}jj$



S. Choi and H. Oh [1906.10831]

■ If $\epsilon = 0$,

$$\hat{D} = \frac{C}{A} \times B$$

■ If $\epsilon \ll 1$,

$$\hat{D} = \left(\frac{C_2 B_2}{A_{22}} \right)^{-\frac{1}{3}} \left(\frac{C_1 B_1}{A_{11}} \right)^{\frac{4}{3}} + \mathcal{O}(\Delta^3)$$

$$\hat{D} = \frac{C_2 B_2}{A_{22}} \left(\frac{C_1 B_1}{A_{11}} \right)^4 \left(\frac{C_2 B_1}{A_{21}} \right)^{-2} \left(\frac{C_1 B_2}{A_{12}} \right)^{-2} + \mathcal{O}(\Delta^4)$$

Extrapolation method	Prediction ($\hat{F}_D$)	$\hat{F}_D/F_D$
ABCD (Eq. 12)	3333 ± 77	0.684 ± 0.015
Ext. ABCD (Eq. 14)	4149 ± 132	0.851 ± 0.027
Ext. ABCD (Eq. 15)	4352 ± 271	0.893 ± 0.056
Ext. ABCD (Eq. 16)	4247 ± 217	0.871 ± 0.045

Topic modeling: *Latent Dirichlet Allocation* (LDA)

Given a *corpus* of M **documents**, learn a representation in terms of a reduced number of K topics

Topic modeling: *Latent Dirichlet Allocation* (LDA)

Given a *corpus* of M **documents**, learn a representation in terms of a reduced number of K topics

- **Topic:** probability distribution over words

$$\vec{\varphi}^{(k)} = (\varphi_1^{(k)}, \dots, \varphi_V^{(k)}),$$

$$\sum_{v=1}^V \varphi_v^{(k)} = 1, \quad k = 1, \dots, K$$

Topic modeling: *Latent Dirichlet Allocation* (LDA)

Given a *corpus* of M **documents**, learn a representation in terms of a reduced number of K topics

- **Topic**: probability distribution over words

$$\vec{\varphi}^{(k)} = (\varphi_1^{(k)}, \dots, \varphi_V^{(k)}),$$

$$\sum_{v=1}^V \varphi_v^{(k)} = 1, \quad k = 1, \dots, K$$

- **Document** (bag of words): mixture of topics

$$\vec{\theta}^{(d)} = (\theta_1^{(d)}, \dots, \theta_K^{(d)}),$$

$$\sum_{k=1}^K \theta_k^{(d)} = 1, \quad d = 1, \dots, M$$

Topic modeling: *Latent Dirichlet Allocation* (LDA)

Given a *corpus* of M **documents**, learn a representation in terms of a reduced number of K topics

- **Topic**: probability distribution over words

$$\vec{\varphi}^{(k)} = (\varphi_1^{(k)}, \dots, \varphi_V^{(k)}),$$

$$\sum_{v=1}^V \varphi_v^{(k)} = 1, \quad k = 1, \dots, K$$

- **Document** (bag of words): mixture of topics

$$\vec{\theta}^{(d)} = (\theta_1^{(d)}, \dots, \theta_K^{(d)}),$$

$$\sum_{k=1}^K \theta_k^{(d)} = 1, \quad d = 1, \dots, M$$

- **Generative process**: for each document $d = 1, \dots, M$:

- For each word $n = 1, \dots, N_d$:

1. Sample a topic $z_{dn} \sim \text{Categorical}(\vec{\theta}^{(d)})$
2. Sample a word $w_{dn} \sim \text{Categorical}(\vec{\varphi}^{(z_{dn})})$

Topic modeling: *Latent Dirichlet Allocation* (LDA)

Given a *corpus* of M **documents**, learn a representation in terms of a reduced number of K topics

- **Topic**: probability distribution over words

$$\vec{\varphi}^{(k)} = (\varphi_1^{(k)}, \dots, \varphi_V^{(k)}),$$

$$\sum_{v=1}^V \varphi_v^{(k)} = 1, \quad k = 1, \dots, K$$

- **Document** (bag of words): mixture of topics

$$\vec{\theta}^{(d)} = (\theta_1^{(d)}, \dots, \theta_K^{(d)}),$$

$$\sum_{k=1}^K \theta_k^{(d)} = 1, \quad d = 1, \dots, M$$

- **Generative process**: for each document $d = 1, \dots, M$:

- For each word $n = 1, \dots, N_d$:

1. Sample a topic $z_{dn} \sim \text{Categorical}(\vec{\theta}^{(d)})$
2. Sample a word $w_{dn} \sim \text{Categorical}(\vec{\varphi}^{(z_{dn})})$

- **Inference**: given documents $\{w_{dn}\}$, learn the topics $\vec{\varphi}^{(k)}$ and their distributions $\vec{\theta}^{(d)}$

Topic modeling: *Latent Dirichlet Allocation* (LDA)

Given a *corpus* of M **documents**, learn a representation in terms of a reduced number of K topics

- **Topic**: probability distribution over words

$$\vec{\varphi}^{(k)} = (\varphi_1^{(k)}, \dots, \varphi_V^{(k)}),$$

$$\sum_{v=1}^V \varphi_v^{(k)} = 1, \quad k = 1, \dots, K$$

- **Document** (bag of words): mixture of topics

$$\vec{\theta}^{(d)} = (\theta_1^{(d)}, \dots, \theta_K^{(d)}),$$

$$\sum_{k=1}^K \theta_k^{(d)} = 1, \quad d = 1, \dots, M$$

- **Generative process**: for each document $d = 1, \dots, M$:

- For each word $n = 1, \dots, N_d$:

1. Sample a topic $z_{dn} \sim \text{Categorical}(\vec{\theta}^{(d)})$
2. Sample a word $w_{dn} \sim \text{Categorical}(\vec{\varphi}^{(z_{dn})})$

- **Inference**: given documents $\{w_{dn}\}$, learn the topics $\vec{\varphi}^{(k)}$ and their distributions $\vec{\theta}^{(d)}$

- **Co-occurrence** of words tend to group them by meaning

Topic modeling: *Latent Dirichlet Allocation* (LDA)

Given a *corpus* of M **documents**, learn a representation in terms of a reduced number of K topics

- **Topic**: probability distribution over words

$$\vec{\varphi}^{(k)} = (\varphi_1^{(k)}, \dots, \varphi_V^{(k)}),$$

$$\sum_{v=1}^V \varphi_v^{(k)} = 1, \quad k = 1, \dots, K$$

- **Document** (bag of words): mixture of topics

$$\vec{\theta}^{(d)} = (\theta_1^{(d)}, \dots, \theta_K^{(d)}),$$

$$\sum_{k=1}^K \theta_k^{(d)} = 1, \quad d = 1, \dots, M$$

- **Generative process**: for each document $d = 1, \dots, M$:

- For each word $n = 1, \dots, N_d$:

1. Sample a topic $z_{dn} \sim \text{Categorical}(\vec{\theta}^{(d)})$
2. Sample a word $w_{dn} \sim \text{Categorical}(\vec{\varphi}^{(z_{dn})})$

- **Inference**: given documents $\{w_{dn}\}$, learn the topics $\vec{\varphi}^{(k)}$ and their distributions $\vec{\theta}^{(d)}$

- **Co-occurrence** of words tend to group them by meaning $\Rightarrow$ **correlations ?**

Using LDA in $t\bar{t}jj$

Corpus	$\Rightarrow$	Set of simulations
Document	$\Rightarrow$	Simulation with a given setup
Word	$\Rightarrow$	Event, joint observation of (N_j, N_b)
Topic	$\Rightarrow$	Probability mass function over events

Using LDA in $t\bar{t}jj$

Corpus	$\Rightarrow$	Set of simulations
Document	$\Rightarrow$	Simulation with a given setup
Word	$\Rightarrow$	Event, joint observation of (N_j, N_b)
Topic	$\Rightarrow$	Probability mass function over events

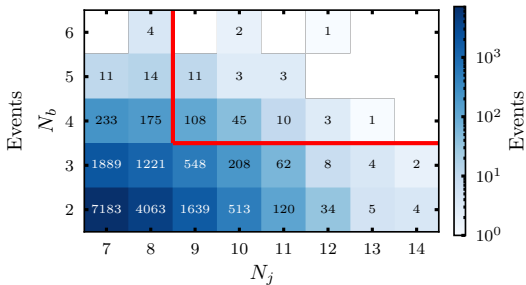
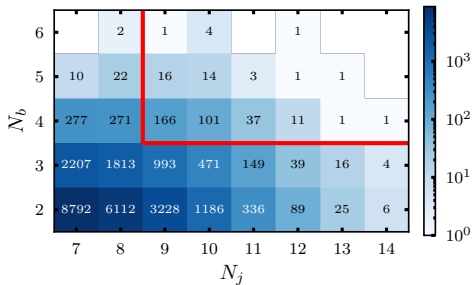
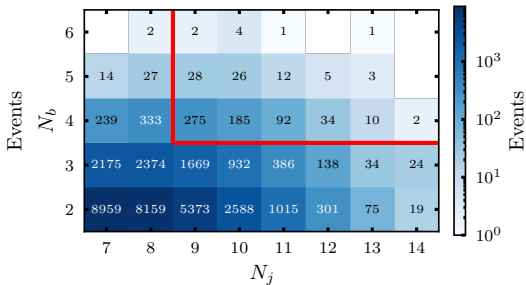
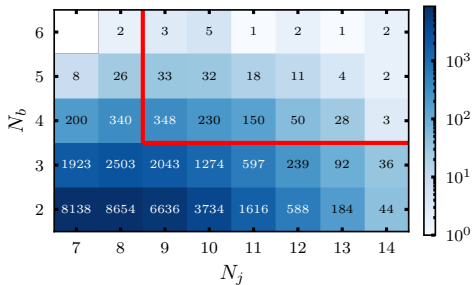
- Learn topics as underlying correlation structures between observations
- Dimensionality reduction

Using LDA in $t\bar{t}jj$

Corpus	$\Rightarrow$	Set of simulations
Document	$\Rightarrow$	Simulation with a given setup
Word	$\Rightarrow$	Event, joint observation of (N_j, N_b)
Topic	$\Rightarrow$	Probability mass function over events

- Learn topics as underlying correlation structures between observations
 - Dimensionality reduction
 - Generate 70 simulations of $pp \rightarrow t\bar{t}jj$ varying factorization scale and p_T^j cut
1. Learn the topics distributions from simulations
 2. Once the topics are known, learn their mixing fractions in the target dataset

Simulations of $pp \rightarrow t\bar{t}jj$



Bayesian inference

Observations $\mathbf{W} = \{w_{dn}\}$, parameters of interest $\Theta = \{\vec{\theta}^{(d)}\}$, $\Phi = \{\vec{\varphi}^{(k)}\}$, probabilistic model

$$p(\mathbf{W} \mid \Theta, \Phi)$$

Bayes' theorem allows us to find the **posterior** distribution,

$$\log p(\Theta, \Phi \mid \mathbf{W}) = \log p(\mathbf{W} \mid \Theta, \Phi) + \log p(\Theta, \Phi) - C$$

Bayesian inference

Observations $\mathbf{W} = \{w_{dn}\}$, parameters of interest $\Theta = \{\vec{\theta}^{(d)}\}$, $\Phi = \{\vec{\varphi}^{(k)}\}$, probabilistic model

$$p(\mathbf{W} \mid \Theta, \Phi)$$

Bayes' theorem allows us to find the **posterior** distribution,

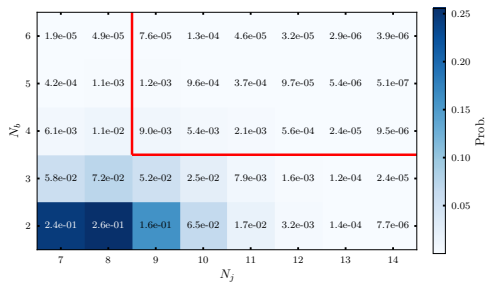
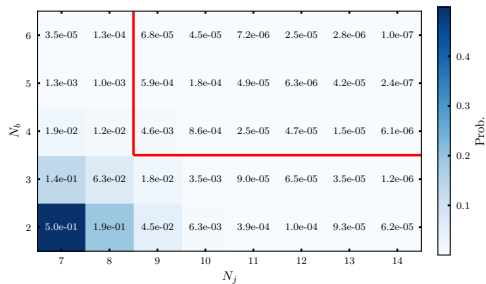
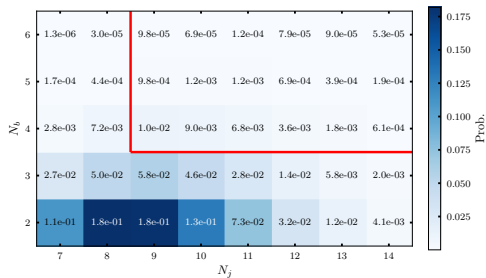
$$\log p(\Theta, \Phi \mid \mathbf{W}) = \log p(\mathbf{W} \mid \Theta, \Phi) + \log p(\Theta, \Phi) - C$$

Hamiltonian Monte Carlo (HMC) to sample the posterior

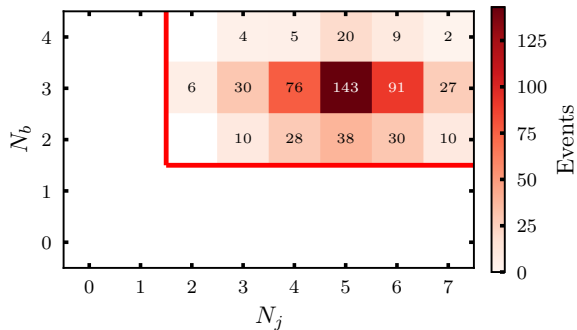
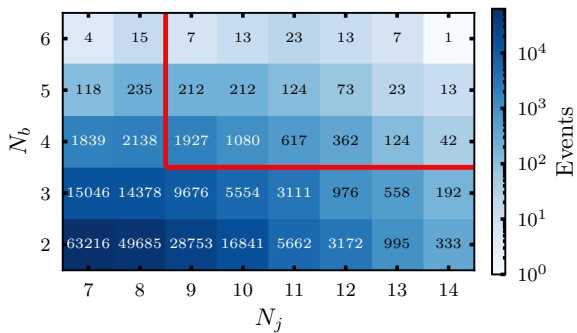
- Mapping the inference problem to a Hamiltonian dynamical system
- Parameters to infer $\leftrightarrow$ generalized coordinates
- Auxiliary momenta ρ

$$H(\rho, \Theta, \Phi) = -\log p(\rho \mid \Theta, \Phi) - \log p(\Theta, \Phi \mid \mathbf{W}) = T + V$$

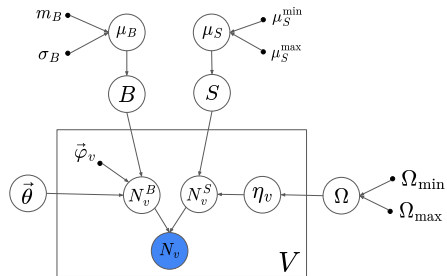
Topics ($K = 3$)



Adding signal to target data



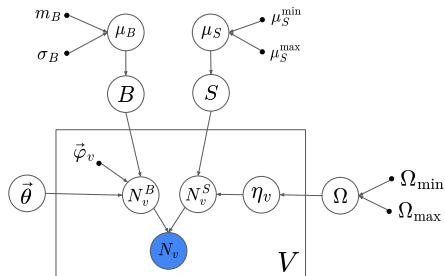
Adding signal to the model



- Signal and background mixture,

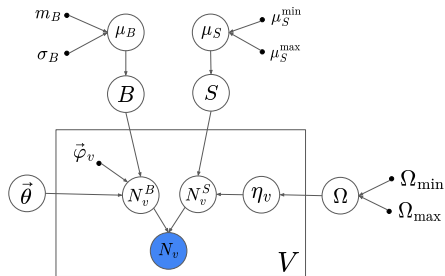
$$S \sim \text{Poisson}(\mu_S), \quad B \sim \text{Poisson}(\mu_B)$$

Adding signal to the model



- Signal and background mixture,
 $S \sim \text{Poisson}(\mu_S), \quad B \sim \text{Poisson}(\mu_B)$
- In CR: $N_v \sim \text{Poisson}(\mu_B \vec{\theta} \cdot \vec{\varphi}_v)$
- In SR: $N_v \sim \text{Poisson}(\mu_B \vec{\theta} \cdot \vec{\varphi}_v + \mu_S \eta_v)$

Adding signal to the model



- Signal and background mixture,

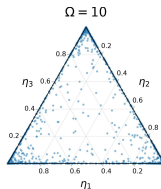
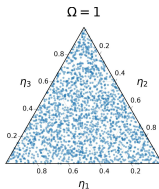
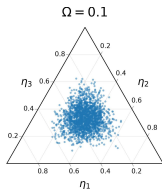
$$S \sim \text{Poisson}(\mu_S), \quad B \sim \text{Poisson}(\mu_B)$$

- In CR: $N_v \sim \text{Poisson}(\mu_B \vec{\theta} \cdot \vec{\varphi}_v)$

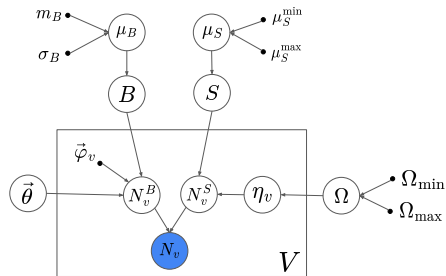
- In SR: $N_v \sim \text{Poisson}(\mu_B \vec{\theta} \cdot \vec{\varphi}_v + \mu_S \eta_v)$

- Signal distribution η_v

$$\{\eta_v\}_{v \in \text{SR}} \sim \text{Dir}\left(\frac{1}{\Omega}, \dots, \frac{1}{\Omega}\right)$$



Adding signal to the model



- Signal and background mixture,

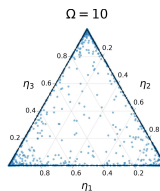
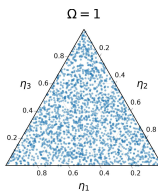
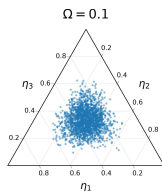
$$S \sim \text{Poisson}(\mu_S), \quad B \sim \text{Poisson}(\mu_B)$$

- In CR: $N_v \sim \text{Poisson}(\mu_B \vec{\theta} \cdot \vec{\varphi}_v)$

- In SR: $N_v \sim \text{Poisson}(\mu_B \vec{\theta} \cdot \vec{\varphi}_v + \mu_S \eta_v)$

- Signal distribution η_v

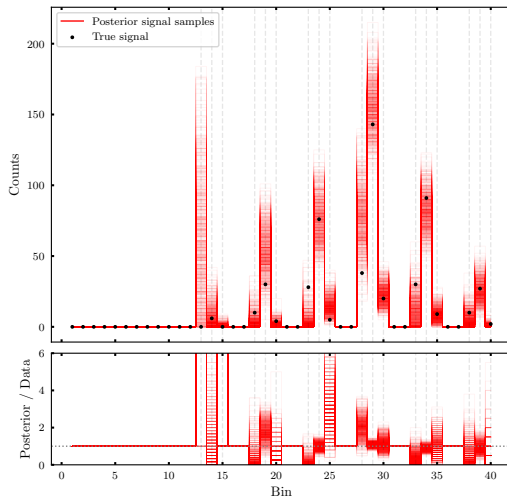
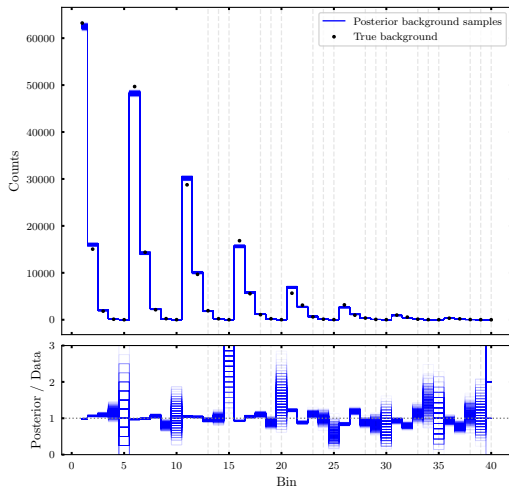
$$\{\eta_v\}_{v \in \text{SR}} \sim \text{Dir}\left(\frac{1}{\Omega}, \dots, \frac{1}{\Omega}\right)$$



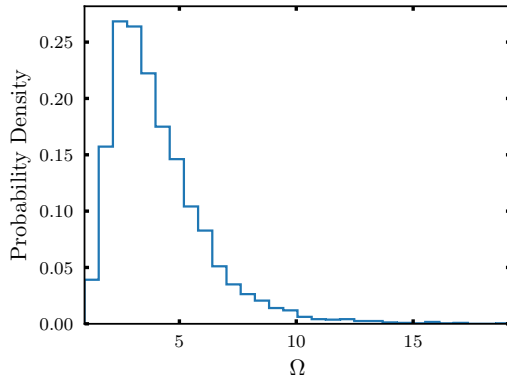
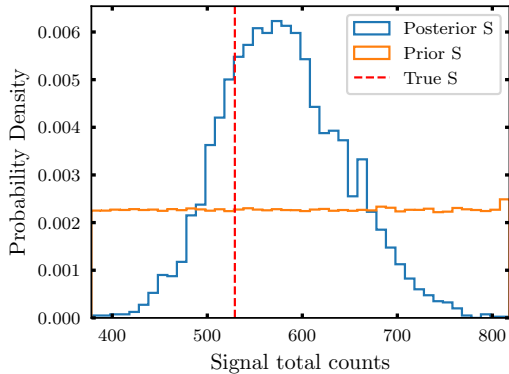
- Given the topics $\{\vec{\varphi}_v\}$, obtain posterior distributions of μ_B , μ_S , $\vec{\theta}$ and Ω

Preliminary results

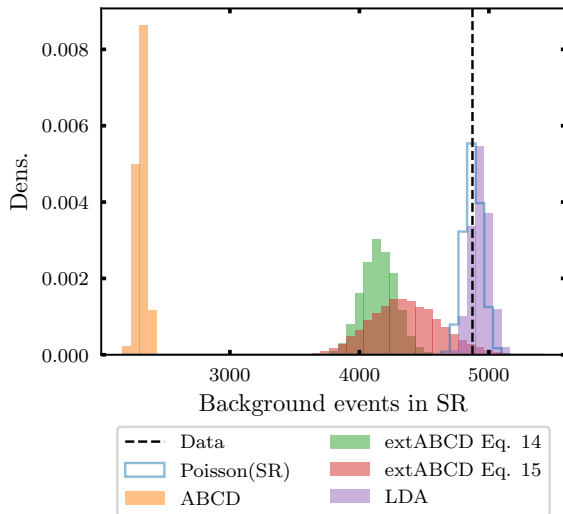
Sample new data from posterior distributions and compare with the training data



Preliminary results



Comparing with ABCDs



Coverage of signal

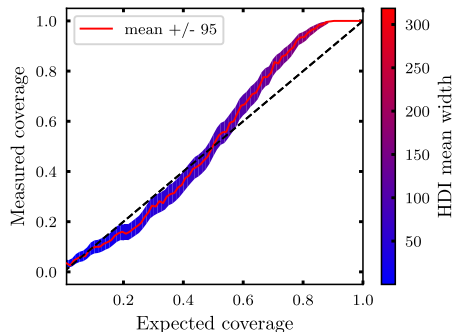
Given the posterior of the number of signal events (S), the **smallest credible interval**

$$\text{SCI}_{\alpha\%} = \arg \min_{s_{\min}, s_{\max}} (s_{\max} - s_{\min}) = [s_{\min}, s_{\max}], \quad \int_{s_{\min}}^{s_{\max}} p(S|\mathbf{d}) dS = \alpha$$

Coverage of signal

Given the posterior of the number of signal events (S), the **smallest credible interval**

$$\text{SCI}_{\alpha\%} = \arg \min_{s_{\min}, s_{\max}} (s_{\max} - s_{\min}) = [s_{\min}, s_{\max}], \quad \int_{s_{\min}}^{s_{\max}} p(S|\mathbf{d}) dS = \alpha$$



- Repeat the process for 500 independent signal samples
- Compute the fraction of times that the $\text{SCI}_{\alpha\%}$ contains the true value of S
- Compare the measured coverage with the nominal $\alpha\%$

Conclusions

- We propose a method based on topic modeling (LDA) for background estimation

Conclusions

- We propose a method based on topic modeling (LDA) for background estimation
- Test $pp \rightarrow t\bar{t}jj$ with (N_j, N_b) as observables
 - Restrict to the case of signals exclusively in a defined SR
(generalization is $\sim$ straightforward)

Conclusions

- We propose a method based on topic modeling (LDA) for background estimation
- Test $pp \rightarrow t\bar{t}jj$ with (N_j, N_b) as observables
 - Restrict to the case of signals exclusively in a defined SR
(generalization is $\sim$ straightforward)
- Extract the latent topic distributions from a set of simulations with different parametrizations
 - Learns correlations between measurements that could be difficult to model
 - Could allow to reduce the impact of inaccurate simulations

Conclusions

- We propose a method based on topic modeling (LDA) for background estimation
- Test $pp \rightarrow t\bar{t}jj$ with (N_j, N_b) as observables
 - Restrict to the case of signals exclusively in a defined SR
(generalization is $\sim$ straightforward)
- Extract the latent topic distributions from a set of simulations with different parametrizations
 - Learns correlations between measurements that could be difficult to model
 - Could allow to reduce the impact of inaccurate simulations
- Infer the topic mixture in the target background + injected signal
 - Significant improvement in background estimation compared to the traditional ABCD method and some of its extensions

Conclusions

- We propose a method based on topic modeling (LDA) for background estimation
- Test $pp \rightarrow t\bar{t}jj$ with (N_j, N_b) as observables
 - Restrict to the case of signals exclusively in a defined SR
(generalization is $\sim$ straightforward)
- Extract the latent topic distributions from a set of simulations with different parametrizations
 - Learns correlations between measurements that could be difficult to model
 - Could allow to reduce the impact of inaccurate simulations
- Infer the topic mixture in the target background + injected signal
 - Significant improvement in background estimation compared to the traditional ABCD method and some of its extensions
- Paper is not out yet, but check out 2604.02219 by Álvarez, Benevedes, Szewc, Thaler for a similar application

Conclusions

- We propose a method based on topic modeling (LDA) for background estimation
- Test $pp \rightarrow t\bar{t}jj$ with (N_j, N_b) as observables
 - Restrict to the case of signals exclusively in a defined SR (generalization is $\sim$ straightforward)

Thank you!

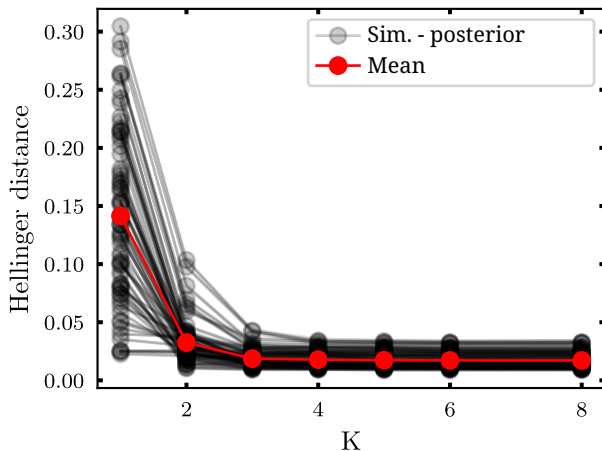
- Infer the topic mixture in the target background + injected signal
 - Significant improvement in background estimation compared to the traditional ABCD method and some of its extensions
- Paper is not out yet, but check out 2604.02219 by Álvarez, Benevedes, Szewc, Thaler for a similar application

Backup

Choosing the number of topics

For each simulation, Hellinger distance from posterior to true

$$H(P, Q) = \frac{1}{\sqrt{2}} \sqrt{\sum_{v=1}^V (\sqrt{p_v} - \sqrt{q_v})^2}$$



Best topic mixture allowed by priors

