


**Chapter 7: Sampling Distributions**

**Section 7.1**  
**What is a Sampling Distribution?**

The Practice of Statistics, 4<sup>th</sup> edition – For AP\*  
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**+** **Chapter 7**  
**Sampling Distributions**



- **7.1** What is a Sampling Distribution?
- **7.2** Sample Proportions
- **7.3** Sample Means

## + Section 7.1 What Is a Sampling Distribution?

### Learning Objectives

After this section, you should be able to...

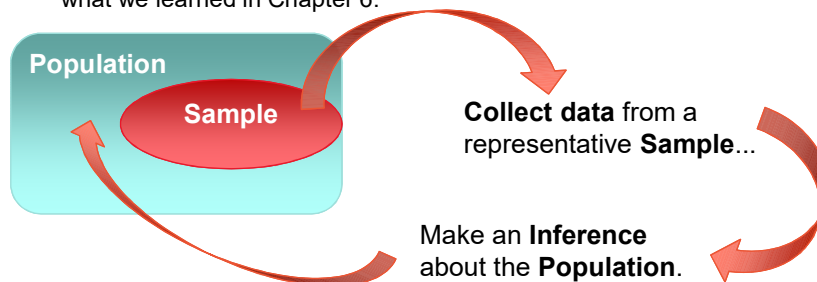
- ✓ DISTINGUISH between a parameter and a statistic
- ✓ DEFINE sampling distribution
- ✓ DISTINGUISH between population distribution, sampling distribution, and the distribution of sample data
- ✓ DETERMINE whether a statistic is an unbiased estimator of a population parameter
- ✓ DESCRIBE the relationship between sample size and the variability of an estimator

### Introduction

The process of *statistical inference* involves using information from a sample to draw conclusions about a wider population.

Different random samples yield different statistics. We need to be able to describe the *sampling distribution* of possible statistic values in order to perform statistical inference.

We can think of a statistic as a random variable because it takes numerical values that describe the outcomes of the random sampling process. Therefore, we can examine its probability distribution using what we learned in Chapter 6.



## Parameters and Statistics

As we begin to use sample data to draw conclusions about a wider population, we must be clear about whether a number describes a sample or a population.

### Definition:

A **parameter** is a number that describes some characteristic of the population. In statistical practice, the value of a parameter is usually not known because we cannot examine the entire population.

A **statistic** is a number that describes some characteristic of a sample. The value of a statistic can be computed directly from the sample data. We often use a statistic to estimate an unknown parameter.

Remember **s** and **p**: statistics come from samples and parameters come from populations

We write  $\mu$  (the Greek letter mu) for the population mean and  $\bar{x}$  ("x - bar") for the sample mean. We use  $p$  to represent a population proportion. The sample proportion  $\hat{p}$  ("p - hat") is used to estimate the unknown parameter  $p$ .

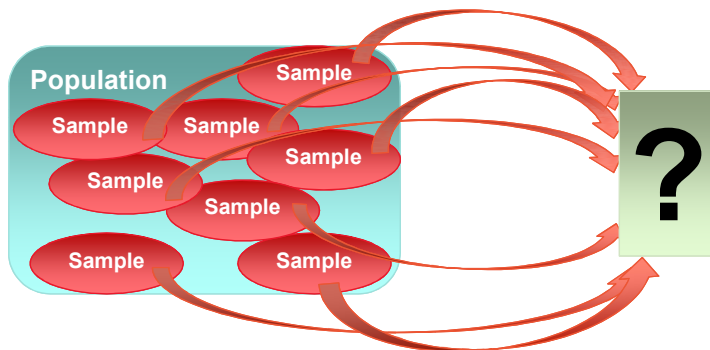
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## Sampling Variability

How can  $\bar{x}$  be an accurate estimate of  $\mu$ ? After all, different random samples would produce different values of  $\bar{x}$ .

This basic fact is called **sampling variability**: the value of a statistic varies in repeated random sampling.

To make sense of sampling variability, we ask, "What would happen if we took many samples?"



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## Sampling Distribution

Suppose we took several different samples of 20 chips from a box that contain 100 red and 100 blue chips. There are many, many possible SRSs of size 20 from a population of size 200. If we took every one of those possible samples, calculated the sample proportion for each, and graphed all of those values, we'd have a **sampling distribution**.

### Definition:

The **sampling distribution** of a statistic is the distribution of values taken by the statistic in all possible samples of the same size from the same population.

In practice, it's difficult to take all possible samples of size  $n$  to obtain the actual sampling distribution of a statistic. Instead, we can use simulation to imitate the process of taking many, many samples.

One of the uses of probability theory in statistics is to obtain sampling distributions without simulation. We'll get to the theory later.

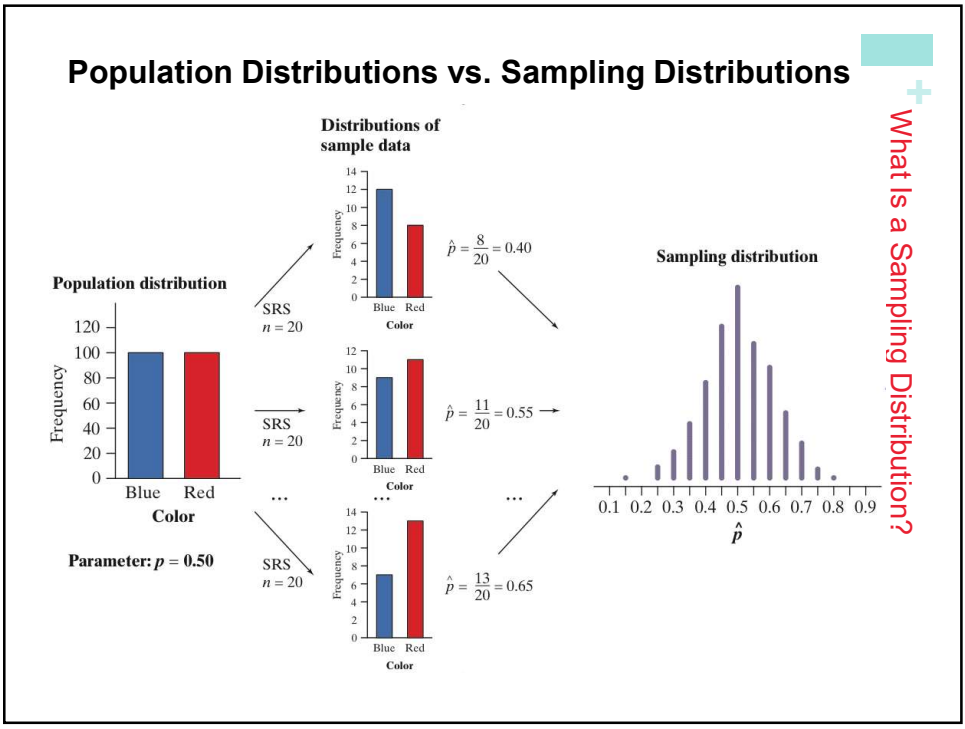
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## Population Distributions vs. Sampling Distributions

There are actually three distinct distributions involved when we sample repeatedly and measure a variable of interest.

- 1) The **population distribution** gives the values of the variable for all the individuals in the population.
- 2) The **distribution of sample data** shows the values of the variable for all the individuals in the sample.
- 3) The **sampling distribution** shows the statistic values from all the possible samples of the same size from the population.

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### Describing Sampling Distributions

The fact that statistics from random samples have definite sampling distributions allows us to answer the question, "How trustworthy is a statistic as an estimator of the parameter?" To get a complete answer, we consider the center, spread, and shape.

**Center: Biased and unbiased estimators**

In the chips example, we collected many samples of size 20 and calculated the sample proportion of red chips. How well does the sample proportion estimate the true proportion of red chips,  $p = 0.5$ ?

Note that the center of the approximate sampling distribution is close to 0.5. In fact, if we took ALL possible samples of size 20 and found the mean of those sample proportions, we'd get *exactly* 0.5.

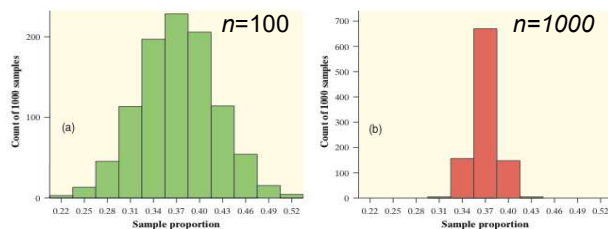
**Definition:** A statistic used to estimate a parameter is an **unbiased estimator** if the mean of its sampling distribution is equal to the true value of the parameter being estimated.

What is a Sampling Distribution?

## Describing Sampling Distributions

### Spread: Low variability is better!

To get a trustworthy estimate of an unknown population parameter, start by using a statistic that's an unbiased estimator. This ensures that you won't tend to overestimate or underestimate. Unfortunately, using an unbiased estimator doesn't guarantee that the value of your statistic will be close to the actual parameter value.



Larger samples have a clear advantage over smaller samples. They are much more likely to produce an estimate close to the true value of the parameter.

### Variability of a Statistic

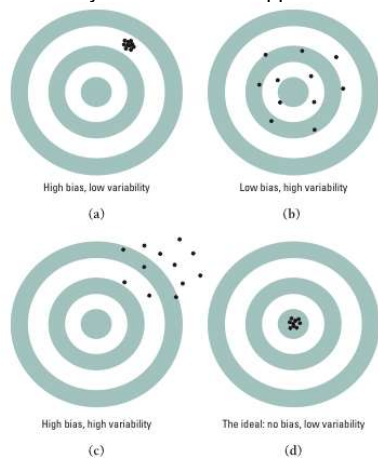
The **variability of a statistic** is described by the spread of its sampling distribution. This spread is determined primarily by the size of the random sample. Larger samples give smaller spread.

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## Describing Sampling Distributions

### Bias, variability, and shape

We can think of the true value of the population parameter as the bull's-eye on a target and of the sample statistic as an arrow fired at the target. Both bias and variability describe what happens when we take many shots at the target.



**Bias** means that our aim is off and we consistently miss the bull's-eye in the same direction. Our sample values do not center on the population value.

High **variability** means that repeated shots are widely scattered on the target. Repeated samples do not give very similar results.

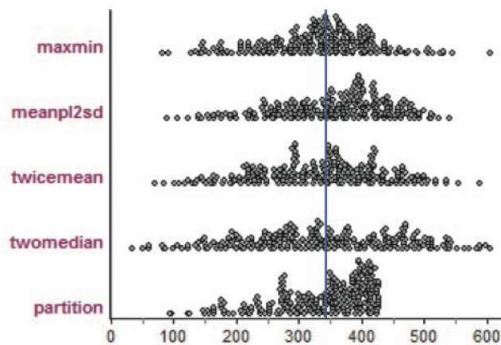
The lesson about center and spread is clear: **given a choice of statistics to estimate an unknown parameter, choose one with no or low bias and minimum variability.**

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## Describing Sampling Distributions

### Bias, variability, and shape

Sampling distributions can take on many shapes. The same statistic can have sampling distributions with different shapes depending on the population distribution and the sample size. Be sure to consider the shape of the sampling distribution before doing inference.



Sampling distributions for different statistics used to estimate the number of tanks in the German Tank problem. The blue line represents the true number of tanks.

Note the different shapes. Which statistic gives the best estimator? Why?

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## Section 7.1

### What Is a Sampling Distribution?

#### Summary

In this section, we learned that...

- ✓ A **parameter** is a number that describes a population. To estimate an unknown parameter, use a **statistic** calculated from a sample.
- ✓ The **population distribution** of a variable describes the values of the variable for all individuals in a population. The **sampling distribution** of a statistic describes the values of the statistic in all possible samples of the same size from the same population.
- ✓ A statistic can be an **unbiased estimator** or a **biased estimator** of a parameter. Bias means that the center (mean) of the sampling distribution is not equal to the true value of the parameter.
- ✓ The **variability** of a statistic is described by the spread of its sampling distribution. Larger samples give smaller spread.
- ✓ When trying to estimate a parameter, choose a statistic with low or no bias and minimum variability. Don't forget to consider the shape of the sampling distribution before doing inference.