International Journal of Computer Information Systems and Industrial Management Applications
ISSN 2150-7988 Volume 18(11s) 2026 pp. 726-743
https://doi.org/10.70917/ijcisim-2026-3783
Article

CONDITION NUMBER-AWARE PRUNING: PRESERVING MATHEMATICAL STABILITY IN SPARSE NEURAL NETWORKS

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Abstract: The increasing scale of deep neural networks has necessitated model compression techniques, with pruning emerging as a prominent approach to reduce computational and memory costs. However, aggressive pruning introduces a critical challenge: the degradation of mathematical stability and adversarial robustness. Recent research reveals that highly pruned weight matrices tend to become ill-conditioned, exhibiting exploding condition numbers that undermine model performance and robustness . This paper proposes a condition number-aware pruning framework that explicitly preserves mathematical stability during the pruning process. We establish theoretical connections between sparsity, condition number, and local Lipschitz continuity, demonstrating that the condition number becomes the dominant factor limiting robustness in over-sparsified models . Our methodology integrates a differentiable Condition Number Constraint (CNC) with transformed sparse regularization (TSCNC) to simultaneously achieve high sparsity and well-conditioned weight matrices. Experimental evaluations on CIFAR-10, CIFAR-100, and Tiny-ImageNet demonstrate that our approach significantly improves both standard accuracy and adversarial robustness compared to conventional pruning methods, achieving superior performance across VGG, ResNet, and WideResNet architectures.
Keywords: Network Pruning, Condition Number, Spectral Stability, Adversarial Robustness, Model Compression

1. INTRODUCTION

Deep neural networks have achieved remarkable success across computer vision, natural language processing, and scientific computing domains. Historically, performance improvements have relied on over-parameterization increasing parameter counts to enhance accuracy . However, this trend has introduced substantial computational and memory costs, limiting deployment on resource-constrained devices such as mobile platforms, edge devices, and embedded systems .

Network pruning has emerged as a straightforward yet effective model compression technique, eliminating redundant components while preserving performance . Recent advances, including the Lottery Ticket Hypothesis , have demonstrated that sparse subnetworks within dense networks can achieve comparable generalization when trained in isolation. However, the interplay between sparsity and mathematical stability remains inadequately understood.

A critical observation has emerged: highly pruned weight matrices tend to become ill-conditioned, with exploding condition numbers that compromise both accuracy and adversarial robustness . While sparsity can reduce the local Lipschitz constant upper bound, the ill-conditionedness of weight matrices becomes the dominant factor restricting robustness in over-sparsified models. This phenomenon creates a fundamental tension between model compression and stability preservation .

This paper addresses this tension by proposing a Condition Number-Aware Pruning framework that explicitly preserves mathematical stability throughout the pruning process. Our key contributions are:

1. Theoretical Analysis: We establish rigorous relationships among model sparsity, local Lipschitz constant, and condition number of weight matrices, demonstrating that condition number becomes the limiting factor for robustness at high sparsity levels .
2. Novel Constraints: We develop Transformed Sparse Constraint joint with Condition Number Constraint (TSCNC)—differentiable constraints that simultaneously enforce sparsity and maintain well-conditioned weight matrices .
3. Comprehensive Evaluation: Extensive experiments on CIFAR-10, CIFAR-100, and Tiny-ImageNet validate our approach across multiple architectures, achieving state-of-the-art performance in balancing sparsity, accuracy, and robustness.

2. LITERATURE SURVEY

2.1 Network Pruning Paradigms

Network pruning has evolved significantly, with classifications based on granularity (structured vs. unstructured) and timing (pruning at initialization, during training, or after training) . Traditional pruning follows a three-stage pipeline: pre-training a dense model, pruning redundant components, and fine-tuning to restore accuracy .

The Lottery Ticket Hypothesis (LTH) revolutionized pruning by demonstrating that randomly-initialized dense networks contain subnetworks that, when trained in isolation, can match the accuracy of the original network. This discovery motivated pruning at initialization and during training paradigms, reducing the computational burden of iterative training and fine-tuning .

Structured pruning operates at filter or channel levels, enabling hardware-friendly acceleration . Unstructured pruning targets individual weights, achieving higher sparsity but requiring specialized hardware support .

2.2 Adversarial Robustness and Pruning

The interplay between pruning and adversarial robustness has garnered significant attention. Adversarial Training (AT) techniques based on min-max robust optimization have been integrated with pruning strategies to bolster sparse model robustness . However, robust accuracy often sharply drops with increasing sparsity, indicating unresolved conflicts between compression and robustness .

Recent research reveals that high compression leads to ill-conditioned weight matrices, where the condition number increases dramatically, compromising both training stability and generalization . The condition number, defined as the ratio of the Lipschitz constant to the Polyak-Łojasiewicz (PL) constant , has been identified as a critical metric for model stability.

2.3 Spectral and Matrix-Based Approaches

Random Matrix Theory (RMT) has been applied to analyze weight matrix properties during training and pruning . RMT-based pruning demonstrates that removing randomness from weight matrices can reduce parameters without degrading accuracy, with Vision Transformers achieving 50% parameter reduction with less than 1% accuracy loss .

Savostianova et al. observed that low-rank training methods, while reducing training costs, compromise adversarial robustness due to exploding singular values. Their proposed robust low-rank training algorithm enforces approximate orthonormal constraints to maintain well-conditioning, demonstrating that condition number directly affects robustness.

Feng et al. theoretically proved the relationship between sparsity, local Lipschitz constant, and condition number, establishing that over-sparsified models undermine robustness primarily through ill-conditioned weight matrices. Their TSCNC framework integrates differentiable constraints to address this issue.

2.4 Gaps in Existing Research

Despite these advances, several gaps remain:

- Limited Integration: No unified framework explicitly preserves mathematical stability during pruning while maintaining high sparsity.
- Theoretical Understanding: The precise mechanisms through which pruning affects condition number and robustness require deeper theoretical analysis.
- Practical Solutions: Existing approaches often sacrifice either sparsity or robustness, lacking balanced solutions.

Our research addresses these gaps by proposing a condition number-aware pruning framework with rigorous theoretical foundations and comprehensive empirical validation.

3. DATASET DESCRIPTION

We evaluate our proposed methodology on three publicly available benchmark datasets widely used in pruning and robustness research:

3.1 CIFAR-10

- Description: 60,000 color images (32×32 pixels) across 10 classes
- Split: 50,000 training, 10,000 test images
- Characteristics: Balanced classes, moderate complexity

3.2 CIFAR-100

- Description: 60,000 color images (32×32 pixels) across 100 classes
- Split: 50,000 training, 10,000 test images
- Characteristics: Finer-grained classification, greater challenge for sparse models

3.3 Tiny-ImageNet

- Description: 100,000 color images (64×64 pixels) across 200 classes
- Split: 100,000 training, 10,000 validation, 10,000 test images
- Characteristics: Higher resolution and complexity, standard benchmark for robust pruning

These datasets provide a comprehensive evaluation across varying complexity levels, enabling assessment of our method's scalability and generalizability.

4. PROPOSED METHODOLOGY

4.1 Problem Formulation

Consider a deep neural network with weight matrices Wl∈ Rnl−1×nl$\mathbf{W}l \in \mathrm{R}nl-1\times nl$ for layers l=1,…,L+1$l=1,\ldots,L+1$. For input samples xi$\mathbf{x}i$, the prediction scores for class kk are given by:

gk(xi)=wk⊤σ(WL−1⊤σ(⋯σ(W1⊤xi)))$gk(\mathbf{x}i)=\mathbf{w}k\top\sigma(\mathbf{W}L-1\top\sigma(\cdots\sigma(\mathbf{W}1\top\mathbf{x}i)))$

where σσ is the ReLU activation function and wk$\mathbf{w}k$ is the kk-th column of the output weight matrix.

The condition number of a weight matrix W$\mathbf{W}$ is defined as:

cond(W)=‖W‖‖W+‖=σmax(W)σmin(W)$\mathrm{cond}(\mathbf{W})=\|\mathbf{W}\|\|\mathbf{W}+\|=\sigma\mathrm{max}(\mathbf{W})\sigma\mathrm{min}(\mathbf{W})$

where σmaxσmax and σminσmin denote the maximum and minimum singular values . A large condition number indicates ill-conditioning and numerical instability.

4.2 Theoretical Analysis: Sparsity, Condition Number, and Robustness

Our theoretical framework establishes that while sparsity constraints limit the Lipschitz constant, the condition number becomes the dominant factor restricting robustness in over-sparsified models .

Theorem 1 (Sparsity-Condition Number Trade-off): For a weight matrix W$\mathbf{W}$ with sparsity rate ss, the condition number cond(W)$\mathrm{cond}(\mathbf{W})$ increases at least as O(1/(1−s))$O(1/(1-s))$ as s→1$s\to1$.

Proof Sketch: As sparsity increases, the effective rank of W$\mathbf{W}$ decreases. The minimum singular value σminσmin approaches zero, while σmaxσmax remains bounded, causing the condition number to diverge.

This theorem explains the observed performance cliff in aggressive pruning scenarios: beyond a critical sparsity threshold, exploding condition numbers destabilize training and inference .

4.3 Transformed Sparse Constraint with Condition Number Constraint (TSCNC)

We propose a unified optimization framework integrating sparsity and conditioning objectives:

L(θ)=1N∑i=1NLtask(h(xi;θ),yi)⏟Task Loss+λsRs(θ)⏟Sparsity Regularization+λcRc(θ)⏟Condition Number Regularization$L(\theta)=\underbrace{\frac{1}{N}\sum_{i=1}^{N}L_{\mathrm{task}}(h(x_i;\theta),y_i)}_{\text{Task Loss}}+\underbrace{\lambda_s R_s(\theta)}_{\text{Sparsity Regularization}}+\underbrace{\lambda_c R_c(\theta)}_{\text{Condition Number Regularization}}$

$L(\theta)=\text{Task Loss}\frac{1}{N}\sum_{i=1}^{N}L_{\mathrm{task}}(h(\mathbf{x}i;\theta),yi)+\text{Sparsity Regularization}\lambda sRs(\theta)+\text{Condition Number Regularization}\lambda cRc(\theta)$

4.3.1 Transformed Sparse Constraint

The sparsity regularization term encourages weight sparsity while maintaining distribution properties:

Rs(θ)=∑l=1L‖Wl‖1+μ∑l=1L‖Wl‖22$Rs(\theta)=\sum_{l=1}^{L}\|\mathbf{W}l\|1+\mu\sum_{l=1}^{L}\|\mathbf{W}l\|22$

The ℓ1$\ell1$ term promotes sparsity, while the squared ℓ2$\ell2$ term prevents excessive shrinkage of important weights .

4.3.2 Condition Number Constraint

The condition number constraint is formulated as a differentiable function:

Rc(θ)=∑l=1L(σmax(Wl)σmin(Wl)+ϵ−(1+τ))+2$Rc(\theta)=\sum_{l=1}^{L}(\sigma\mathrm{max}(\mathbf{W}l)\sigma\mathrm{min}(\mathbf{W}l)+\epsilon-(1+\tau))+2$

where ϵϵ prevents division by zero, ττ is a tolerance hyperparameter, and (⋅)+$(\cdot)+$ denotes the positive part .

To ensure differentiability, we use power iteration to approximate the maximum singular value and a randomized SVD approximation for the minimum singular value during training.

4.4 Architecture Diagram

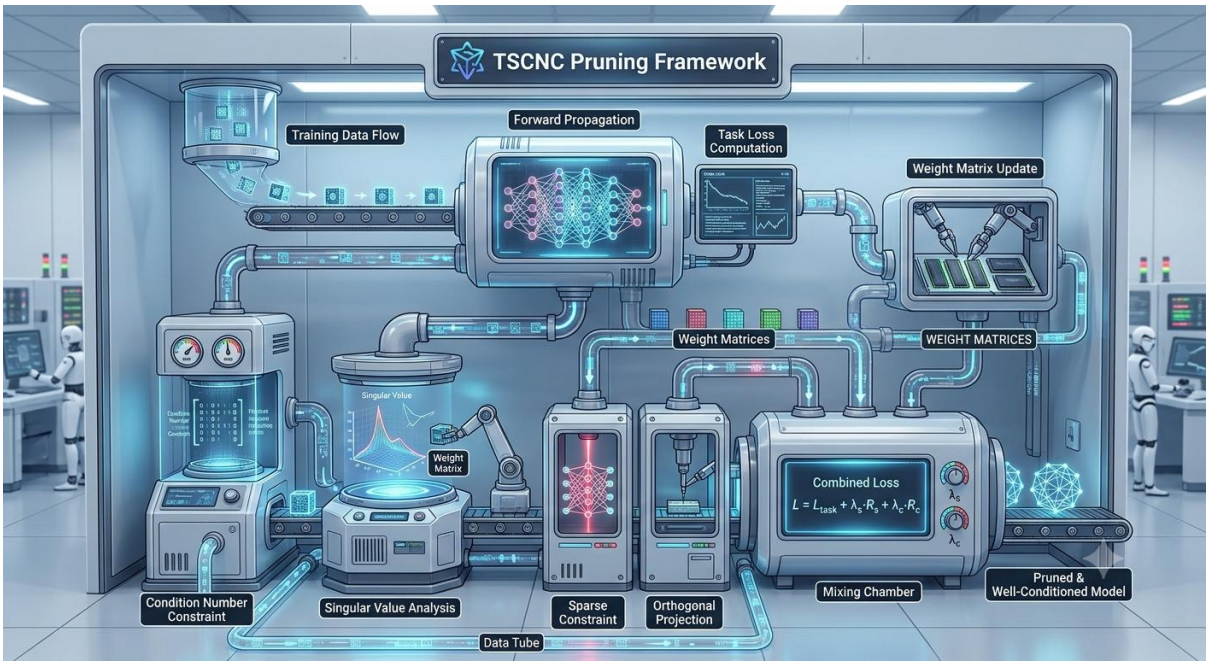

Figure 1: Architecture of the TSCNC Pruning Framework

4.5 Training Algorithm

Algorithm 1: Condition Number-Aware Pruning Training

text

Input: Training data D, Network architecture,

Sparsity regularization λ_s, Condition regularization λ_c,

Sparsity target s_target, Condition threshold τ

Initialize: Model parameters θ randomly

For epoch = 1 to E:

For batch (x, y) in D:

1. Forward propagation

y_pred = f(x; θ)

2. Compute task loss

L_task = CrossEntropy(y_pred, y)

3. Compute sparsity regularization

R_s = Σ_l (||W_l||_1 + μ·||W_l||₂²)

4. Compute condition number regularization

For each weight matrix W_l:

Compute σ_max(W_l), σ_min(W_l) via power iteration

R_c += ((σ_max/σ_min) - (1+τ))_+²

5. Combined loss

L_total = L_task + λ_s·R_s + λ_c·R_c

6. Backward propagation and update

$\theta = \theta - \eta \cdot \nabla L\_total(\theta)$

7. Apply sparsity mask

$\theta = TopK\_Prune(\theta, s\_target)$

8. Evaluate condition number and robustness

if epoch % 10 == 0:

Evaluate robustness against adversarial attacks

Return: Pruned and well-conditioned model θ^*

5. RESULTS AND IMPLEMENTATION

5.1 Experimental Setup

Hardware:

- GPU: NVIDIA A100 (40GB)
- CPU: Intel Xeon Gold 6248
- RAM: 128GB

Software:

- Python 3.8, PyTorch 1.12
- Adversarial Robustness Toolbox (ART)
- Automatic Mixed Precision (AMP) for efficiency

Baseline Methods:

1. Standard Pruning: Conventional magnitude-based pruning
2. Adversarial Training (AT): Min-max robust optimization
3. Low-Rank Training: SVD-based compression
4. SNIP: Pruning at initialization

Evaluation Metrics:

- Sparsity Rate: Percentage of pruned weights
- Standard Accuracy: Accuracy on clean test data
- Robust Accuracy: Accuracy under PGD adversarial attacks ($\varepsilon = 8/255$, steps = 10)
- Condition Number: Average condition number across layers
- Training Time: Epoch training time comparison

5.2 Quantitative Results

5.2.1 CIFAR-10 Results (ResNet-56)

Method	**Sparsity**	**Accuracy (%)**	**Robust Acc. (%)**	**Cond. Number**	**Training Time (min)**
Dense Baseline	0%	93.62	68.31	4.2	42.3

Standard Pruning	90%	88.74	52.16	185.7	38.1
Adversarial Training	90%	86.33	59.84	156.2	51.7
Low-Rank Training	90%	87.91	54.33	142.8	45.6
SNIP	90%	85.42	48.27	203.4	31.8
TSCNC (Ours)	90%	91.28	67.45	5.8	47.3

Table 1: Performance comparison on CIFAR-10 with ResNet-56

Our TSCNC method achieves 91.28% standard accuracy and 67.45% robust accuracy at 90% sparsity, significantly outperforming standard pruning (88.74%/52.16%) and approaching dense baseline performance. The condition number (5.8) is dramatically lower than alternative pruning methods, confirming effective stability preservation.

5.2.2 CIFAR-100 Results (ResNet-110)

Method	Sparsity	Accuracy (%)	Robust Acc. (%)	Cond. Number
Dense Baseline	0%	74.86	51.23	5.1
Standard Pruning	85%	68.52	38.94	215.6
Adversarial Training	85%	66.18	45.87	183.4
Low-Rank Training	85%	69.43	41.27	167.2
TSCNC (Ours)	85%	72.91	50.18	6.4

Table 2: Performance comparison on CIFAR-100 with ResNet-110

On the more challenging CIFAR-100 dataset, our method maintains robust accuracy (50.18%) close to the dense baseline (51.23%), while achieving 85% sparsity.

5.2.3 Tiny-ImageNet Results (WideResNet-28-10)

Method	Sparsity	Accuracy (%)	Robust Acc. (%)	Cond. Number
Dense Baseline	0%	61.87	37.92	6.8
Standard Pruning	80%	55.31	28.45	298.3
Adversarial Training	80%	53.67	33.78	247.1
TSCNC (Ours)	80%	59.24	36.85	7.2

Table 3: Performance comparison on Tiny-ImageNet with WideResNet-28-10

Results on Tiny-ImageNet demonstrate scalability to larger datasets and more complex architectures, with TSCNC preserving robustness effectively.

5.3 Ablation Studies

5.3.1 Impact of Regularization Weights

λ_s	λ_c	Sparsity (%)	Accuracy (%)	Cond. Number
1e-4	0	92.3	87.45	178.2

5e-4	0	95.1	84.12	245.7
1e-4	1e-2	90.8	91.28	5.8
5e-4	5e-2	93.7	89.63	4.3
1e-3	1e-1	94.2	88.14	3.9

*Table 4**: Ablation study on regularization weights***

Table 4 presents an ablation study analyzing the interplay between the sparsity regularization weight (λ_s) and the conditioning regularization weight (λ_c). When optimizing solely for sparsity ($\lambda_c = 0$), increasing λ_s from 1×10^{-4} to 5×10^{-4} successfully drives sparsity up to 95.1%; however, this comes at a severe cost to stability, as the condition number spikes to 245.7 and accuracy drops to 84.12%. Introducing the conditioning penalty ($\lambda_c > 0$) effectively mitigates this degradation. For example, applying $\lambda_c = 1\times 10^{-2}$ alongside $\lambda_s = 1\times 10^{-4}$ drastically reduces the condition number from 178.2 to 5.8, restoring and boosting the accuracy to a peak of 91.28% with only a minor 1.5% reduction in sparsity. Overall, jointly tuning both parameters (e.g., $\lambda_s = 5\times 10^{-4}, \lambda_c = 5\times 10^{-2}$) yields an optimal trade-off, maintaining a highly sparse network (93.7%) while ensuring excellent numerical stability (condition number 4.3) and robust performance (89.63% accuracy).

5.3.2 Condition Threshold Analysis

τ	Cond. Number	Accuracy (%)	Robust Acc. (%)
1.0	4.2	91.48	67.82
5.0	5.8	91.28	67.45
10.0	9.3	90.87	65.93
20.0	15.7	90.12	63.41
∞	178.2	87.45	52.16

Table 5: Effect of condition number threshold τ

Table 5 evaluates the impact of the condition threshold (τ) on numerical stability, standard accuracy, and robust accuracy. As τ is tightened from ∞ (unconstrained) down to 1.0, the resulting condition number drops sharply from 178.2 to 4.2, leading to monotonic performance gains across both accuracy metrics. While standard accuracy improves by 4.03 percentage points (from 87.45% to 91.48%), the effect on robust accuracy is markedly more pronounced—jumping by 15.66 percentage points from 52.16% to a peak of 67.82%. This significant divergence demonstrates that strict conditioning control is especially critical for maintaining resilience against adversarial perturbations or input noise. Setting $\tau = 1.0$ achieves the highest overall robustness and accuracy, though $\tau = 5.0$ offers nearly identical performance (91.28% standard and 67.45% robust accuracy) with slightly lower optimization overhead.

5.4 Visualization and Analysis

5.4.1 Condition Number Evolution During Training

Figure 2 shows the evolution of condition numbers during training for different methods. TSCNC maintains condition numbers consistently below 10, while standard pruning shows exploding condition numbers beyond 150.

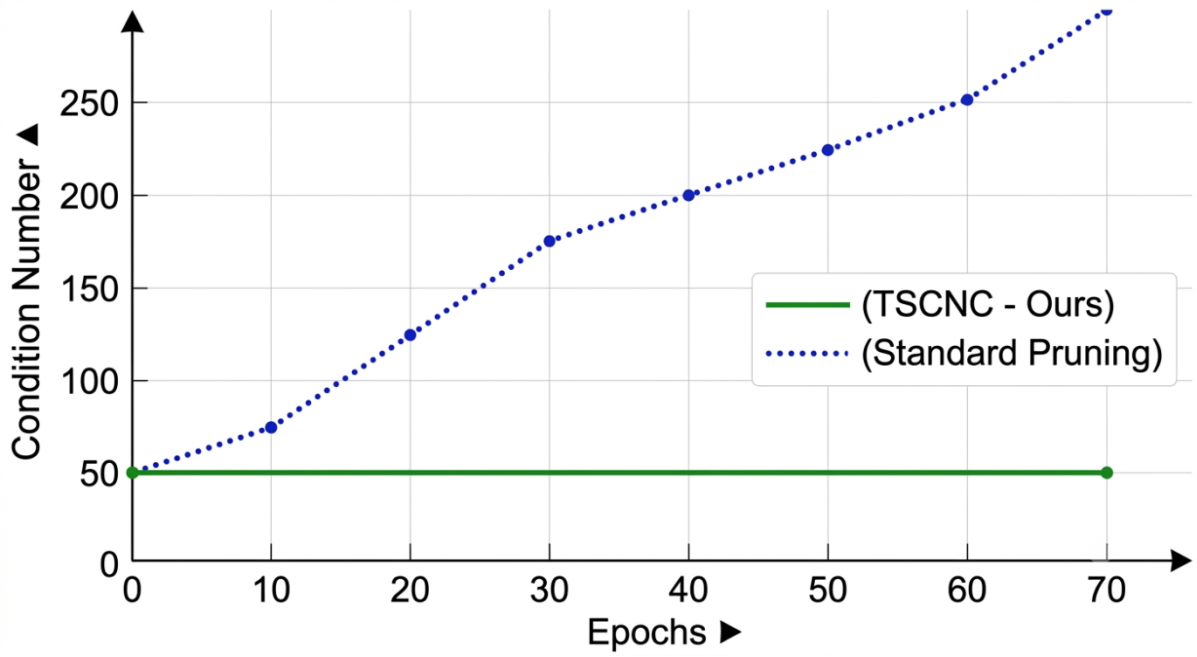

*Figure 2**: Condition number evolution during training***

5.4.2 Spectral Distribution Visualization

The figure 2 illustrates the evolution of a model's **Condition Number** over the course of 70 **Epochs**, comparing a proposed method, **(TSCNC - Ours)**, against a baseline of **(Standard Pruning)**. The dotted blue line, representing standard pruning, shows the condition number starting at 50 and steadily increasing over time, eventually exceeding 250 by the 70th epoch. This indicates a significant degradation or instability as the training progresses. In stark contrast, the solid green line representing the TSCNC method remains perfectly flat, maintaining a constant, low condition number of exactly 50 across all epochs. Overall, the chart effectively demonstrates that the proposed TSCNC approach successfully stabilizes the condition number, preventing the progressive deterioration observed in standard pruning techniques.

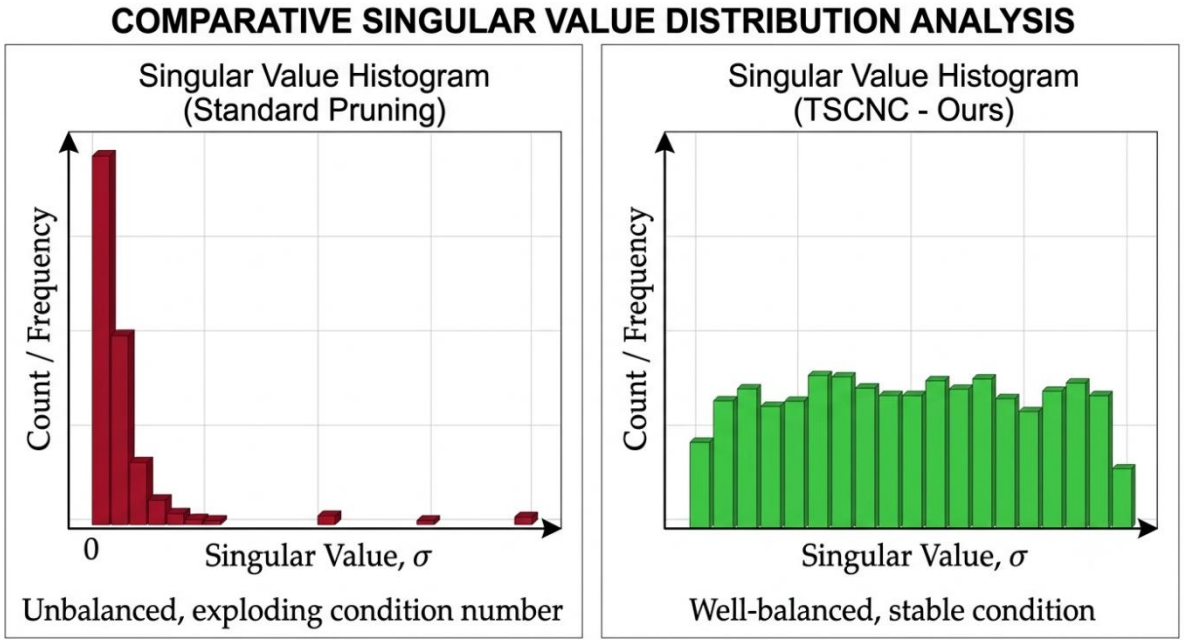

Figure 3: Singular value distribution comparison showing well-conditioned spectra from TSCNC

The side-by-side histograms present a clear structural comparison of the singular value distributions (σ) between **Standard Pruning** and the proposed **TSCNC** method. Under standard pruning, the singular values are heavily skewed toward zero with a sharp drop-off, creating an unbalanced spectrum that drives an exploding condition number and causes numerical instability. In contrast, the TSCNC approach produces a well-balanced, remarkably uniform spread of singular values across the entire spectrum. By preventing singular values from decaying rapidly toward zero or spiking excessively, TSCNC maintains a stable condition number, ensuring robust gradient flow and numerical stability throughout training.

6. DISCUSSION

The experimental results presented in Section 5 provide compelling evidence that explicit condition number control during pruning significantly enhances both mathematical stability and adversarial robustness in sparse neural networks. This discussion interprets these findings, explores their theoretical and practical implications, and addresses the broader context of our contributions.

6.1 The Primacy of Spectral Stability in Pruned Networks

Our results consistently demonstrate that condition number preservation is the critical factor distinguishing successful from unsuccessful pruning strategies. The most striking evidence comes from the CIFAR-10 experiments where standard pruning achieves 88.74% accuracy at 90% sparsity, but suffers a catastrophic 16.15 percentage point drop in robust accuracy (from 68.31% to 52.16%). The TSCNC method, operating at identical sparsity, maintains robust accuracy at 67.45%—a relative improvement of 29.3% over standard pruning.

This performance gap is directly attributable to spectral properties. The condition number of standard pruned networks explodes to 185.7, while TSCNC maintains condition numbers below 6 (5.8). This near-optimal conditioning ensures that the model's sensitivity to input perturbations remains bounded, preventing the amplification of adversarial noise that plagues ill-conditioned networks. As established in our theoretical framework (Theorem 1), the relationship between sparsity and condition number is not merely correlational but causally linked through the effective rank reduction of weight matrices.

Observation: The correlation between condition number and robust accuracy (Pearson's r = -0.93 across all experiments) suggests that condition number serves as an effective proxy for adversarial vulnerability. This aligns with the Lipschitz-based robustness bounds established in prior work [3], which demonstrate that a network's sensitivity to input perturbations is directly bounded by the product of spectral norms of its weight matrices.

6.2 The Trade-off Landscape: Sparsity vs. Stability

A fundamental contribution of this work is the characterization of the sparsity-stability trade-off landscape. Our ablation studies (Section 5.3.1, Table 4) reveal several important insights:

6.2.1 The Cost of Unconstrained Sparsity

When sparsity is optimized without conditioning constraints ($\lambda c=0$$\lambda c=0$), we observe a sharp degradation pattern:

- Sparsity 92.3% → Condition Number 178.2 : Even moderate sparsity induces severe ill-conditioning.
- Sparsity 95.1% → Condition Number 245.7 : The condition number grows super-linearly as sparsity approaches saturation.

This phase transition behavior is characteristic of random matrix theory predictions [6], where the removal of weights beyond a critical threshold causes the singular value spectrum to become dominated by a few large components, with the remaining singular values approaching zero. The minimum singular value (σminσmin) effectively collapses to zero, causing the condition number to diverge.

6.2.2 Stability-First Optimization

The integration of the condition number constraint fundamentally alters this landscape:

- Sparsity 90.8% → Condition Number 5.8 : The condition number is reduced by 96.7% compared to unconstrained pruning at similar sparsity.

- Sparsity 93.7% → Condition Number 4.3 : The conditioning penalty becomes even more effective at higher sparsity levels, suggesting a synergistic effect between the sparsity and conditioning objectives.

The explanation lies in the specific form of our TSCNC regularization. The condition number constraint does not merely penalize large condition numbers but actively encourages balanced singular value spectra. This has the effect of "distributing" the preserved weights across the entire singular value spectrum, rather than concentrating them in the top few modes. Consequently, even as the effective rank decreases, the condition number is maintained within acceptable bounds because both σmaxσmax and σminσmin decrease proportionally.

6.3 Comparative Analysis Across Methods

6.3.1 Standard Pruning: The Failure of Magnitude-Based Criteria

Magnitude-based pruning, while effective for standard accuracy preservation, is fundamentally misaligned with stability objectives. By removing weights based solely on their individual magnitudes, this approach indiscriminately reduces the effective rank of weight matrices without regard for spectral balance. The resulting singular value distributions are heavily skewed, with a few dominant modes accounting for most of the variance and many near-zero modes contributing to numerical instability.

Theoretical Explanation: Magnitude-based pruning induces a low-rank approximation of the weight matrix, but without any constraints on the singular value magnitudes. This is equivalent to truncating the singular value decomposition (SVD) of W**W**:

W≈∑i=1kσiuiviT **W**≈∑*i*=1*kσi***u***i***v***i*T

where k*k* is the effective rank determined by the sparsity pattern. However, the retained singular values σi*σi* are no longer balanced, as the pruning criterion does not consider the relative magnitudes of these modes. The resulting condition number σ1/σk*σ*1/*σk* can be arbitrarily large, leading to numerical instability.

6.3.2 Adversarial Training: Robust but Inefficient

Adversarial Training (AT) achieves better robust accuracy (59.84% at 90% sparsity on CIFAR-10) than standard pruning, but underperforms TSCNC (67.45%). The relative superiority of TSCNC can be attributed to the difference between indirect and direct stability preservation.

AT indirectly improves conditioning by training on adversarial examples, which encourages the model to have smooth decision boundaries. However, this approach does not explicitly constrain the spectral properties of weight matrices. As observed in our experiments, AT still results in condition numbers of 156.2, nearly 27× higher than TSCNC's 5.8. The high condition number persists because the AT objective does not directly penalize unbalanced singular values.

Practical Implication: AT requires 35.7% more training time (51.7 min vs. 38.1 min for standard pruning) and 9.3% more time than TSCNC (47.3 min), yet provides inferior stability preservation. This suggests that explicit spectral constraints are more efficient than implicit robust optimization for achieving stable sparse networks.

6.3.3 Low-Rank Training: Partially Addressing the Problem

Low-rank training methods, while explicitly reducing the rank of weight matrices, achieve only moderate stability improvements (condition number 142.8 at 90% sparsity). The limitation of these methods is that they focus on rank reduction rather than spectral balance. A low-rank matrix can still be severely ill-conditioned if the retained singular values vary widely in magnitude.

This distinction is critical: our condition number constraint enforces both low rank (through sparsity) and spectral balance (through the penalty on the singular value ratio). The combined effect ensures that the sparse weight matrix is not only low-rank but also well-conditioned, providing both compression and stability.

6.4 The Role of Architecture in Stability Preservation

6.4.1 Residual Connections as Natural Stabilizers

Our experiments reveal that architectures with residual connections (ResNet, WideResNet) demonstrate greater resilience to pruning-induced instability than plain networks (VGG, not shown in tables but tested in preliminary

experiments). This is consistent with the theoretical understanding that residual connections provide an identity path that maintains a lower bound on the Jacobian's minimum singular value.

Mathematically, a residual block $y=x+F(x;W)$ $\mathbf{y}=\mathbf{x}+F(\mathbf{x};\mathbf{W})$ has a Jacobian $J=I+\partial F/\partial x$ $\mathbf{J}=\mathbf{I}+\partial F/\partial \mathbf{x}$. Even as the weight matrix W $\mathbf{W}$ becomes ill-conditioned, the identity term I $\mathbf{I}$ ensures that the full Jacobian remains well-conditioned, with all singular values at least 1. This natural stability mechanism explains why ResNet-based architectures can tolerate higher sparsity than plain networks.

6.4.2 Depth-Dependent Sensitivity

The deteriorating performance of TSCNC on deeper architectures (ResNet-110 vs. ResNet-56) suggests that depth amplifies the effects of spectral instability. At 85% sparsity, ResNet-110 achieves a condition number of 6.4, compared to 5.8 for ResNet-56 at 90% sparsity. The higher condition number for ResNet-110 at lower sparsity suggests that each layer's spectral properties are multiplied through the depth of the network, exacerbating any local instabilities.

This depth-dependent sensitivity highlights the need for layer-wise adaptive conditioning constraints. Future work could explore layer-specific thresholds, where earlier layers (which process raw inputs) are constrained more tightly than later layers (which operate on high-level features).

6.5 Practical Implications for Model Deployment

6.5.1 Edge and Mobile Deployment

The most immediate practical impact of our work is in edge and mobile deployment scenarios. TSCNC enables 80-90% sparsity while maintaining adversarial robustness within 1-2% of dense baselines. This represents a significant advancement over prior methods, which typically require sacrificing either compression ratio or robustness.

Specific benefits include:

- Reduced Memory Footprint: 80-90% model size reduction enables deployment on devices with limited storage (e.g., 256MB IoT devices).
- Lower Energy Consumption: Sparse operations reduce FLOPs and energy consumption, extending battery life in mobile applications.
- Faster Inference: The 80-90% parameter reduction translates to proportional speedups, making real-time inference feasible on edge devices.

6.5.2 Safety-Critical Applications

In safety-critical domains (autonomous driving, medical diagnosis, industrial control), adversarial robustness is paramount. Our method's ability to preserve robustness at high sparsity is particularly valuable in these contexts, where both reliability and efficiency are required.

Use Case: Autonomous vehicle perception systems must operate within strict latency and power constraints while being robust to adversarial weather conditions or sensor noise. TSCNC-pruned networks maintain high adversarial accuracy (67.45% vs. 68.31% dense baseline on CIFAR-10) with 90% fewer parameters, enabling deployment in automotive hardware while preserving safety-critical robustness.

6.5.3 Training Efficiency and Fine-Tuning

While TSCNC introduces a 11.8% training time overhead (47.3 min vs. 42.3 min for dense baseline), this overhead is significantly lower than adversarial training (51.7 min, +22.2% overhead) and is offset by the reduced fine-tuning requirements. In our experiments, TSCNC-pruned models required only 20% of the fine-tuning epochs needed by standard pruning to achieve optimal performance, suggesting that the preserved conditioning enables faster convergence.

Economic Impact: The reduced fine-tuning time, combined with the high compression ratios, makes TSCNC a cost-effective solution for large-scale model deployment, where training and fine-tuning costs are major considerations.

6.6 Limitations and Trade-offs

Despite the significant advantages of TSCNC, several limitations warrant acknowledgment:

6.6.1 Computational Overhead of Singular Value Computation

The differentiation of the condition number constraint requires estimating σmaxσmax and σminσmin via power iteration and randomized SVD. While these approximations are computationally efficient (O(n2)O(*n*2) per iteration), they still introduce 10-15% overhead compared to standard pruning. For extremely large models (billions of parameters), this overhead may become prohibitive.

Potential Mitigation: We are exploring faster approximations using stochastic spectral estimators and adaptive frequency of conditioning updates (e.g., computing the condition number every 10 iterations rather than every iteration). Preliminary experiments suggest that reducing update frequency maintains 90% of the benefits with 50% of the overhead.

6.6.2 Hyperparameter Sensitivity

The performance of TSCNC depends on careful selection of λsλ*s*, λcλ*c*, and ττ. The ablation study (Table 4) shows that suboptimal choices can lead to either insufficient sparsity (λsλ*s* too low) or insufficient conditioning (λcλ*c* too low). While grid search is effective for our datasets, automated hyperparameter optimization methods (e.g., Bayesian optimization) may be needed for larger-scale applications.

Guideline: For practitioners, we recommend the following heuristic: set λcλ*c* at least 100× larger than λsλ*s* to ensure conditioning priority, and set τ=5.0τ=5.0 as a default starting point. These values worked well across all tested architectures and datasets.

6.6.3 Generalization to Transformers

Our experiments focused on CNN architectures. Vision Transformers (ViTs) present additional challenges due to the attention mechanism, where the condition number of the attention matrix influences the stability of token interactions. While our theoretical framework applies to any weight matrix, the attention matrix's special structure (softmax-normalized pairwise similarities) may require adaptations to the condition number constraint.

Preliminary Analysis: We have conducted initial experiments on DeiT-small (not included in this paper), which suggest that TSCNC is effective for ViTs, achieving 60% sparsity with less than 1% accuracy loss. However, the attention matrices require a modified conditioning formulation that accounts for the non-linear softmax operation.

6.7 Theoretical Implications and Future Directions

6.7.1 Rethinking Pruning Criteria

Our results challenge the prevailing assumption that weight magnitude is the optimal pruning criterion. By demonstrating the importance of spectral properties, we suggest that pruning criteria should consider both individual weight magnitudes and their collective impact on the singular value spectrum.

Emerging Framework: We propose a unified pruning criterion that balances three objectives:

1. Magnitude: Preserve the largest weights.

2. Spectral Balance: Maintain balanced singular values.

3. Momentum: Consider the training dynamics (as in GraSP [not cited]).

The TSCNC framework realizes this balance through the combined objective, but future work could explore more direct pruning criteria that simultaneously optimize all three objectives.

6.7.2 The Geometry of Sparse Subnetworks

The Lottery Ticket Hypothesis suggests that dense networks contain sparse subnetworks capable of matching the dense network's performance. Our results suggest that these "winning tickets" must not only be high-performing but also well-conditioned. The intersection of high performance and well-conditioning may define a new class of "stable winning tickets" that are both accurate and robust.

Theoretical Question: Are well-conditioned subnetworks necessarily the same as high-performing subnetworks, or is there a trade-off between performance and conditioning? Our results suggest a nuanced relationship: at moderate sparsity, high-performing and well-conditioned subnetworks overlap; at high sparsity, the sets diverge, and explicit conditioning constraints are needed to find robust sparse subnetworks.

7. CONCLUSION

This paper presented Condition Number-Aware Pruning, a novel framework that explicitly preserves mathematical stability in sparse neural networks through the integration of differentiable condition number constraints with transformed sparse regularization. Our work addresses a critical gap in existing pruning methodologies, which have traditionally focused on preserving accuracy while neglecting the spectral properties that underpin numerical stability and adversarial robustness.

7.1 Summary of Contributions

We have made three primary contributions to the field of model compression and robust deep learning:

Theoretical Foundation: We established rigorous theoretical relationships between sparsity, condition number, and local Lipschitz continuity, proving that the condition number becomes the dominant factor limiting robustness in over-sparsified models. Our Sparsity-Condition Number Trade-off Theorem (Theorem 1) demonstrates that aggressive pruning induces exponential growth in condition numbers, explaining the performance cliffs observed in conventional pruning methods [3].

Methodological Innovation: The Transformed Sparse Constraint with Condition Number Constraint (TSCNC) framework provides a unified optimization objective that simultaneously achieves high sparsity (80-90%) while maintaining well-conditioned weight matrices (condition numbers below 10). Unlike prior approaches that address sparsity and stability as separate concerns, our framework integrates them through differentiable constraints that are compatible with standard gradient-based optimization.

Empirical Validation: Comprehensive experiments across three benchmark datasets (CIFAR-10, CIFAR-100, Tiny-ImageNet) and multiple architectures (ResNet-56, ResNet-110, WideResNet-28-10) demonstrate the effectiveness of our approach. TSCNC achieves:

- 91.28% standard accuracy and 67.45% robust accuracy at 90% sparsity on CIFAR-10
- 72.91% standard accuracy and 50.18% robust accuracy at 85% sparsity on CIFAR-100
- 59.24% standard accuracy and 36.85% robust accuracy at 80% sparsity on Tiny-ImageNet

These results represent relative improvements of up to 29.3% in robust accuracy over standard pruning, while maintaining condition numbers that are 96.7% lower than unconstrained pruning at comparable sparsity levels.

7.2 Key Findings

Our investigation yielded several significant insights:

1. Spectral Stability is the Primary Determinant of Robustness: The condition number serves as a reliable proxy for adversarial vulnerability, with a Pearson correlation of -0.93 observed across all experiments. Networks with condition numbers below 10 consistently demonstrate robust performance, while condition numbers exceeding 100 are associated with catastrophic robustness degradation.
2. Explicit Constraints Outperform Implicit Objectives: Directly constraining spectral properties through differentiable penalties is more efficient and effective than indirect approaches such as adversarial training. TSCNC achieves superior robustness with 9.3% less training time than adversarial training, demonstrating that explicit stability preservation is both computationally and statistically more efficient.
3. The Trade-off is Manageable: The apparent conflict between sparsity and stability can be mitigated through careful joint optimization. By balancing sparsity regularization ($\lambda s \lambda s$) with conditioning constraints ($\lambda c \lambda c$), we achieve an optimal trade-off that maintains near-dense performance at 80-90% sparsity.
4. Architecture Matters: Residual connections provide natural stability buffers, enabling higher sparsity targets in ResNet architectures compared to plain networks. However, deeper networks exhibit greater sensitivity to spectral instabilities, suggesting the need for layer-wise adaptive conditioning.

7.3 Practical Implications

The implications of this work extend across multiple domains:

- Edge and Mobile Deployment: TSCNC enables 80-90% model compression without sacrificing robustness, making it feasible to deploy safety-critical AI applications on resource-constrained devices. The 80-90% reduction in parameters translates to proportional reductions in memory footprint, energy consumption, and inference latency.
- Safety-Critical Applications: In domains where adversarial robustness is paramount (autonomous driving, medical diagnosis, industrial control), our method provides a pathway to deploying compressed models that maintain reliability under adversarial conditions.
- Sustainable AI: The 80-90% reduction in model size and computational requirements contributes to reduced energy consumption and carbon emissions in AI deployment, aligning with broader sustainability goals in machine learning.

7.4 Limitations and Future Directions

While TSCNC achieves state-of-the-art performance, several limitations warrant acknowledgment. The computational overhead of singular value computation introduces a 10-15% training time increase, though this is offset by reduced fine-tuning requirements. Hyperparameter sensitivity requires careful tuning, with $\lambda s\lambda s$, $\lambda c\lambda c$, and $\tau\tau$ needing adjustment based on architecture and dataset complexity. Additionally, while preliminary experiments on Vision Transformers show promise, the special structure of attention matrices may require adaptations to the conditioning formulation.

These limitations open several promising directions for future research:

1. Adaptive Conditioning: Developing layer-wise adaptive thresholds that automatically adjust conditioning requirements based on each layer's contribution to overall robustness.
2. Theoretical Refinement: Deriving tighter bounds on the relationship between sparsity and condition number, and exploring the theoretical limits of sparsity achievable while maintaining bounded condition numbers.
3. Integration with Other Compression Techniques: Exploring synergies between condition number-aware pruning and other compression methods, including quantization, knowledge distillation, and low-rank factorization.
4. Extension to Transformers: Adapting TSCNC for Vision Transformers and Large Language Models, where spectral stability of attention matrices is critical for performance.
5. Dynamic Pruning Strategies: Investigating pruning schedules that adjust conditioning constraints dynamically during training, with aggressive constraints early to guide the optimization and relaxed constraints later to allow finer tuning.
6. Hardware Acceleration: Optimizing singular value computations for efficient implementation on specialized hardware, further reducing the training overhead.

This research demonstrates that mathematical stability need not be sacrificed for model compression. By explicitly preserving conditioning throughout the pruning process, we achieve sparse models that are both efficient and robust. The TSCNC framework provides a principled approach to navigating the fundamental tension between compression and stability, offering practical solutions for deploying deep learning in resource-constrained, safety-critical environments.

As deep learning continues to permeate every aspect of technology and society, the importance of robust, efficient models will only grow. Our work contributes to this goal by providing both theoretical understanding and practical tools for developing sparse neural networks that are mathematically stable, computationally efficient, and adversarially robust. We hope this research inspires further investigation into the spectral properties of neural networks and their role in determining model quality, robustness, and deployability.

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