

Package ‘observationalBlocks’

May 9, 2026

Type Package

Title Block Designs for Observational Studies

Version 1.0.0

Description Creates block designs of fixed size J with at least one treated and control unit per block. Blocks larger than pairs better distinguish effects caused by a treatment from unmeasured confounding in assignment of individuals to treatment. Somewhat counterintuitively, blocks larger than pairs can use more units while attaining better covariate balance and block homogeneity. A forthcoming manuscript by Brumberg and Rosenbaum details the design.

License GPL-2

Encoding UTF-8

Imports iTOS, lpSolve, stats

Suggests DOS2, sensitivity2x2xk, sensitivitymv, weightedRank, xtable, testthat (>= 3.0.0)

Config/testthat/edition 3

Depends R (>= 3.5.0)

NeedsCompilation no

RoxygenNote 7.3.2

LazyData true

Author Katherine Brumberg [aut, cre] (ORCID:
<<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5193-6250>>),
Paul Rosenbaum [aut]

Maintainer Katherine Brumberg <kbrum@umich.edu>

Repository CRAN

Date/Publication 2026-04-10 09:50:02 UTC

Contents

balEq	2
-----------------	---

basicDistance	3
blockMatch	5
blockSizes	6
Hpylori	7

Index	9
--------------	----------

balEq	<i>Assess covariate balance and homogeneity in matched sample</i>
-------	---

Description

Computes balance diagnostics for a specified covariate in the output of `blockMatch`. Compares treated vs control means before and after matching, standardized differences, and within-block homogeneity.

Usage

```
balEq(vname, o, detail = FALSE)
```

Arguments

<code>vname</code>	Character string naming the variable to assess (must be a column in both <code>o\$m</code> and <code>o\$all</code>).
<code>o</code>	A list containing <code>m</code> and <code>all</code> , as returned by <code>blockMatch</code> : <code>m</code> is the matched sample and <code>all</code> is the full data frame (with <code>z</code> and <code>matched</code>).
<code>detail</code>	Logical. If <code>FALSE</code> (default), returns the balance matrix. If <code>TRUE</code> , returns a list with <code>balance</code> , <code>y</code> (variable by block), <code>z</code> (treatment by block), and <code>d</code> (within-block differences).

Value

If `detail = FALSE`, a 1-row matrix with columns:

T-before, C-before Mean for treated and control before matching

T-after, C-after Equally weighted averages of within-block treated or control means after matching

dif.before, dif.after Raw difference (T mean - C mean) before and after

sdif.before, sdif.after Standardized difference of means before and after; for comparability, both use the pooled standard deviation of `vname` in the full sample before matching, where the pooling equally weights the treated and control groups

med, q9 Median and 90th percentile of within-block means of pairwise absolute differences

pct0 Percent of blocks with within-block mean pairwise difference of 0

If `detail = TRUE`, a list with `balance` (that matrix), `y`, `z`, and `d`.

Examples

```
#' data(Hpylori)
df <- Hpylori[sample(1:nrow(Hpylori), 1000), ]
pr <- glm(hepaA ~ age + female, data = df, family = binomial)$fitted
cochran <- cumsum(c(0, .07, .18, .25, .25, .18, .07))
df$prc <- as.integer(cut(pr, stats::quantile(pr, cochran), include.lowest = TRUE))
df$z <- df$hepaA
bd <- basicDistance(df, near = df$female)
out <- blockMatch(df, cost = bd$cost, J = 4, ratio = 4)
balEq("age", out)
```

basicDistance	<i>Compute distance matrix for matching</i>
---------------	---

Description

Compute distance matrix for matching

Usage

```
basicDistance(
  dat,
  xm = NULL,
  near = NULL,
  xinteger = NULL,
  prc.penalty = 1000,
  near.penalty = 100,
  integer.penalty = 20,
  compute_distance = TRUE
)
```

Arguments

dat	A data frame with N rows containing at least columns z and prc. Treatment z: binary with treated = 1, control = 0 (numeric or logical, not a factor). Stratum prc: numeric (typically integer labels). Many distinct values (e.g. over 50) can make matching slow or unstable; a warning is issued in that case. If dat has a column id, it is renamed to Previous.id and a new id column is added (row indices 1:N).
xm	A numeric matrix or data frame with N rows, or NULL. Covariates for robust Mahalanobis distance; for a covariate with K>2 nominal levels, recode as K-1 binary variables as opposed to one numeric variable for better performance.
near	A numeric vector of length N, or a numeric matrix or data frame with N rows, or NULL. Each column is one nominal covariate (coded numerically) for near-exact matching. If near is a matrix, each column can have its own penalty via near.penalty.

xinteger	A numeric vector of length N, or a numeric matrix or data frame with N rows, or NULL. Integer-ordered covariates for near-fine balancing (adjacent-category imbalance is cheaper than distant). If xinteger is a matrix, each column can have its own penalty via integer.penalty.
prc.penalty	A single finite positive number: penalty for propensity score stratum (prc) mismatches in the distance.
near.penalty	Nonnegative penalties for near, finite. If individuals differ on their values of a covariate from near, then the distance between them is increased by adding near.penalty. If near is a vector : must be a single value (length 1). If near is a matrix : either one value (length 1), reused for every column, or a vector of length ncol(near) giving one penalty per column. A penalty of 0 skips that column.
integer.penalty	Nonnegative penalties for xinteger, finite. If individuals differ on a covariate from xinteger by dif in absolute value, the distance between them is increased by adding dif * integer.penalty. If xinteger is a vector : must be a single value (length 1). If xinteger is a matrix : either one value (length 1), reused for every column, or a vector of length ncol(xinteger) giving one penalty per column. A penalty of 0 skips that column.
compute_distance	If TRUE (default), build the cost matrix. If FALSE, only augment dat with id, check z and prc columns, and return cost = NULL (e.g. before passing a separate cost matrix to blockMatch).

Details

This function borrows much of its functionality from the package 'iTOS'. Documentation for 'iTOS' functions `addNearExact`, `addinteger`, `addMahal` could prove helpful.

Value

A list with components:

dat	The input data frame with column <code>id</code> added (and <code>z</code> , <code>prc</code> coerced in place where applicable).
cost	The cost/distance matrix for matching (rows = treated, cols = control), or NULL if <code>compute_distance = FALSE</code> .

Examples

```
#' data(Hpylori)
df <- Hpylori[sample(1:nrow(Hpylori), 1000), ]
pr <- glm(hepaA ~ age + female, data = df, family = binomial)$fitted
cochran <- cumsum(c(0, .07, .18, .25, .25, .18, .07))
df$prc <- as.integer(cut(pr, stats::quantile(pr, cochran), include.lowest = TRUE))
df$z <- df$hepaA
bd <- basicDistance(df, near = df$female)
```

blockMatch	<i>Block matching within propensity score strata</i>
------------	--

Description

Creates blocks of fixed size J with at least one control and one treated. Within each stratum, the function chooses a matching strategy based on the treated-to-control ratio: direct matching when one group dominates, or a two-stage seed-and-add approach when groups are more balanced.

Usage

```
blockMatch(dat, cost, J = 4, ratio = 4, solver = "rlemon", rseed = 12345)
```

Arguments

dat	A data frame with N rows containing at least columns <code>z</code> and <code>prc</code> . Treatment <code>z</code> : binary with <code>treated = 1</code> , <code>control = 0</code> (numeric or logical, not a factor). Stratum <code>prc</code> : numeric (typically integer labels). Many distinct values (e.g. over 50) can make matching slow or unstable; a warning is issued in that case. If <code>dat</code> has a column <code>id</code> , it is renamed to <code>Previous.id</code> and a new <code>id</code> column is added (row indices $1:N$).
cost	Distance matrix: one row per treated unit and one column per control, with <code>rownames</code> and <code>colnames</code> set to unit ids (row indices of <code>dat</code> , $1:N$). Often <code>basicDistance(...)\$cost</code> .
J	Target number of individuals per matched block. Each block has at least one control and at least one treated.
ratio	Minimum matching ratio, greater than or equal to $J - 1$. Matching in fixed ratio occurs when the larger group is larger than the smaller group by at least this factor. Otherwise, blocks are allowed to have varying ratios of treated to control units.
solver	Either <code>"rlemon"</code> or <code>"rrelaxiv"</code> . The <code>rlemon</code> solver is automatically available without special installation. The <code>rrelaxiv</code> solver requires a special installation as detailed at https://github.com/josherrickson/rrelaxiv .
rseed	Single finite number. Fix <code>rseed</code> if you want to replicate the match or vary <code>rseed</code> to compare different random samples.

Value

A list with components:

m	A data frame of the matched sample, with columns <code>mset</code> (matched set ID), <code>type</code> (factor: <code>"seed"</code> , <code>"add"</code> , or <code>"single"</code> , indicating whether the unit was included in a seed match, added to a seed match, or included as part of a single stage match for strata with highly imbalanced treatment-control ratios), plus all columns from <code>dat</code> .
all	The full <code>dat</code> with an added <code>matched</code> logical column indicating who was matched.

References

Cochran, W. G. (1968). The effectiveness of adjustment by subclassification in removing bias in observational studies. *Biometrics*, 24(2), 295–313.

Examples

```
data(Hpylori)
df <- Hpylori[sample(1:nrow(Hpylori), 1000), ]
pr <- glm(hepaA ~ age + female, data = df, family = binomial)$fitted
cochran <- cumsum(c(0, .07, .18, .25, .25, .18, .07))
df$prc <- as.integer(cut(pr, stats::quantile(pr, cochran), include.lowest = TRUE))
df$z <- df$hepaA
bd <- basicDistance(df, near = df$female)
out <- blockMatch(df, cost = bd$cost, J = 4, ratio = 4)
table(out$all$matched, out$all$hepaA)
```

blockSizes

Maximum number of blocks of size J from treated and control counts

Description

Solves an integer program when there are nt treated and nc control units. The smaller group is exhausted (all of those units are placed in blocks). Subject to that, the linear program maximizes units from the larger group.

Usage

```
blockSizes(nt, nc, J)
```

Arguments

<code>nt</code>	Number of treated units.
<code>nc</code>	Number of control units.
<code>J</code>	Block size (number of units per matched block).

Details

This function reproduces some calculations in Section 4 of the forthcoming paper “Constructing Observational Block Designs When the Propensity Score Exhibits Limited Overlap” by Brumberg and Rosenbaum.

If either nt or nc is 0, or if $nt + nc < J$, a warning is issued and the function returns a degenerate result with zero blocks and zero counts.

Value

A list with components:

detail	Named vector with blocks (total number of blocks), treated, and control units used.
counts	Named integer vector of length J-1: number of blocks with 1, 2, ..., J-1 treated units.

Examples

```
blockSizes(nt = 2, nc = 10, J = 5)
blockSizes(nt = 10, nc = 2, J = 5)
blockSizes(nt = 6, nc = 6, J = 5)
```

Hpylori

Evidence of Fecal-Oral Transmission of Helicobacter Pylori

Description

Motivated by the study by Bui et al. (2016), these data from NHANES 1999-2000 concern evidence about the possible fecal-oral transmission of *Helicobacter Pylori*.

Usage

```
data(Hpylori)
```

Format

A data frame with observations (age ≥ 3 , complete cases on key variables) on the following 11 variables.

SEQN NHANES id number

female 1 if female, 0 if male

age Age in years

education Education level. Ordered factor with levels <9 < 9-11 < HS/GED < SomeCol < College < Age<20

income Family income relative to poverty. Ordered factor with levels <2, ≥ 2 , Missing

black 1 if black, 0 otherwise

hispanic 1 if hispanic, 0 otherwise

born Country of birth. Ordered factor with levels US < Mexico < Other

peopleroom1 1 if people per room > 1 , 0 otherwise

hepaA Hepatitis A antibody, 1 if positive, 0 if negative

helioBP *Helicobacter pylori*.

Details

Does oral consumption of fecal matter – perhaps because someone prepared food without washing their hands – cause infection with *Helicobacter Pylori*, a type of bacteria that infects the stomach and may cause peptic ulcers or gastric cancer? It is difficult to study this question, because there is no record of incidents in which small amounts of fecal matter were ingested. It is known that hepatitis A virus is mostly transmitted by the fecal-oral route. Following prior studies, Bui et al. (2016) used antibodies for hepatitis A as an indicator of a higher level of ingestion of fecal matter, and examined its relationship with *Helicobacter pylori*, adjusting for possible confounders, such as age, country of birth, or a crowded home.

Source

NHANES, US National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, 1999-2000. <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nhanes/>

References

Bui, D., Brown, H. E., Harris, R. B. and Oren, E. (2016) Serologic evidence for fecal–oral transmission of *Helicobacter pylori*. *The American Journal of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene*, 94(1), 82–88. doi:10.4269/ajtmh.150297 <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC4710451/>

Examples

```
data(Hpylori)
boxplot(Hpylori$helioBP ~ Hpylori$hepaA)
```

Index

- * **Causal inference**

 - Hpylori, [7](#)

- * **Observational studies**

 - Hpylori, [7](#)

- * **Observational study**

 - Hpylori, [7](#)

- * **datasets**

 - Hpylori, [7](#)

balEq, [2](#)

basicDistance, [3](#)

blockMatch, [2](#), [4](#), [5](#)

blockSizes, [6](#)

Hpylori, [7](#)