Pairs Trading: Optimizing via Mixed Copula versus Distance Method for S&P 500 Assets

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- Gerry Bamberger and Nunzio Tartaglia's quantitative group at Morgan Stanley in the early 1980s.
 - David Shaw founded one of the most successfull statistical arbitrage hedge funds to this day (D. E. Shaw & Co).
 - Foundation of statistical arbitrage and consequently, algorithmic trading.
- Pairs Trading is a contrarian strategy designed to generate abnormal profits from the mean-reverting behavior between a pair of stocks.
 - It is well-planned assault on the Efficient Market Hypothesis.

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Two-Dimensional Pairs Trading





- Pairs Trading is statistical arbitrage that involves the simultaneous long and short positions of two relatively mispriced stocks which have strong historical co-movements.
 - Market-neutral strategy.
 - Self-financing.
 - Exploit the mean reverting behaviour of co-integrated pairs.
- However, pairs trading strategy is by no means risk free.
 - Trend rather than mean-reverting.

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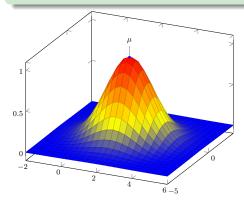
- The most popular strategy is known as distance method (see Gatev et al., 2006).
 - It uses the distance between normalized prices to capture the degree of mispricing stocks.
 - According to Xie et al. (2014) the distance method has a multivariate normal nature.
 - Alternative measurement of the linear association

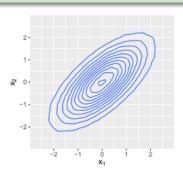
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Bivariate Normal Distribution

$$f(x,y) = \frac{\exp\left\{-\frac{1}{2(1-\rho^2)}\left[\left(\frac{x-\mu_x}{\sigma_x}\right)^2 - 2\rho\left(\frac{x-\mu_x}{\sigma_x}\right)\left(\frac{y-\mu_y}{\sigma_y}\right) + \left(\frac{y-\mu_y}{\sigma_y}\right)^2\right]\right\}}{2\pi\sigma_x\sigma_y\sqrt{1-\rho^2}}$$





- \bullet Linear correlation (ρ) fully describes the dependence between securities if the series have joint normal distribution.
- Tail dependence
 - Heavy tails
 - Possibly Asymmetric.
- A single distance measure may fail to catch the dynamics of the spread between a pair of securities.
 - Initiate and close the trades at non-optimal positions.
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Sklar's Theorem (1959)

Theorem 1

Let $X_1, ..., X_d$ be random variables with distribution functions $F_1, ..., F_d$, respectively. Then, there exists an d-copula C such that,

$$F(x_1,...,x_d) = C(F_1(x_1),...,F_d(x_d)),$$
 (1)

for all $\mathbf{x} = (x_1, ..., x_d) \in \mathbb{R}^d$. If $F_1, ..., F_d$ are all continuous, then the function C is unique; otherwise C is determined only on $\operatorname{Im} F_1 \times ... \times \operatorname{Im} F_d$.

Why should we care about copulas?

• Assuming that $F(\cdot)$ and $C(\cdot)$ are differentiable, by (1) we have

$$\frac{\partial^{d} F(x_{1},...,x_{d})}{\partial x_{1}...\partial x_{d}} \equiv f(x_{1},...,x_{d}) = \frac{\partial^{d} C(F_{1}(x_{1}),...,F_{d}(x_{d}))}{\partial x_{1}...\partial x_{d}}$$

$$= c(u_{1},...,u_{d}) \prod^{d} f_{i}(x_{i}),$$

$$(3)$$

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where $u_i = F_i(x_i), i = 1, ..., d$.

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where $u_i = F_i(x_i), i = 1, ..., d$.

• Estimate the multivariate distribution in two parts: (i) finding the marginal distributions; (ii) finding the dependency between the filtered data from (i).

Copula

- Any multivariate joint distribution can be written in terms of their univariate marginal distribution function and the dependence structure (represented in C) between the variables.
- Copulas accommodate various forms of dependence through suitable choice of the copula "correlation matrix" since they conveniently se parate marginals from dependence component.

	Captured	
Distance	Linear	Gaussian
Copula	Linear and Nonlinear	No assumption

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Strategy	Associations	Required Marginal
	Captured	Distributions
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Data

- Adjusted closing prices of all shares that belongs to the S&P 500 market index from July 2nd, 1990 to December 31st, 2015.
 - 6,426 days
 - 1100 stocks over all periods
 - Eliminate survivorship bias
 - Bloomberg
 - Fama and French factors

- The matching partner for each stock is found by looking for the security that minimizes the sum of squared deviations between two normalized price series over a twelve-month period (formation period).
 - January to December or from July to June.
 - Adjust them by dividends, stock splits and other corporate actions.
- Select the top 5, 10, ..., 35 of those combinations that have the smallest sum
 of squared spreads, allowing re-selection of a specific pair, during the formation
 period.
 - These pairs are then traded in the next six-month period (trading period).
- In Gatev et al. (2006), the long-short position is opened when pair prices have diverged by 2σ and the position is closed when prices revert back.

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Pairs Methodology

• To calculate the daily percentage excess returns for a pair, we compute

$$r_{pt} = w_{1t}r_t^L - w_{2t}r_t^S, (4)$$

where L and S stands for long and short, respectively.

- The weights w_{1t} and w_{2t} are initially assumed to be one. After that, they change according to the changes in the value of the stocks, *i.e.*, $w_{it} = w_{it-1}(1 + r_{it-1})$.
- Committed capital and fully invested capital.

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Distance

- Trades that do not converge can result in a loss if they are still open at the end of the trading period when they are automatically closed.
 - Fat left tails.
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Copula: Methodology

• By using the fact that the partial derivative of the copula function gives the conditional distribution function, i.e.,

$$P(U_{1} \leq u_{1} | U_{2} = u_{2}) = \frac{\partial C(u_{1}, u_{2})}{\partial u_{2}} = P(X_{1} \leq x_{1} | X_{2} = x_{2}),$$

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Xie et al. (2014) define a measure to denote the degree of mispricing.

Definition 2

• Let R_t^X and R_t^Y represent the random variables of the daily returns of stocks X and Y on time t, and the realizations of those returns on time t are r_t^X and r_t^Y , we have

$$MI_{X|Y}^{t} = P(R_{t}^{X} < r_{t}^{X} \mid R_{t}^{Y} = r_{t}^{Y})$$
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$$\begin{split} P\left(U_{1} \leq u_{1} \left| U_{2} = u_{2} \right.\right) &= \frac{\partial C\left(u_{1}, u_{2}\right)}{\partial u_{2}} = P\left(X_{1} \leq x_{1} \left| X_{2} = x_{2} \right.\right), \\ P\left(U_{2} \leq u_{2} \left| U_{2} = u_{1} \right.\right) &= \frac{\partial C\left(u_{1}, u_{2}\right)}{\partial u_{1}} = P\left(X_{2} \leq x_{2} \left| X_{1} = x_{1} \right.\right), \end{split}$$

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(5)

 A conditional value of 0.5 means that the two underlying stocks are considered fairly-valued.

Copula: Methodology

- \bullet The conditional probabilities, $M_t^{X|Y}$ and $M_t^{Y|X}$, only measure the degrees of relative mispricing for a single day.
 - To determine an overall degree of relative mispricing we follow Rad et al. (2016).
- Let $m_{1,t}$ and $m_{2,t}$ be the overall mispricing indexes of stocks X_1 and X_2 , defined by $\left(M_t^{X|Y} 0.5\right)$ and $\left(M_t^{Y|X} 0.5\right)$, respectively. At beggining of each trading period two cumulative mispriced indexed M_1 and M_2 are set to zero and then evolve for each day through

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Copula

- Sensitivity analysis to open a long-short position once one of the cumulative indexes is above $0.05,\,0.10,\,\ldots,\,0.55$ and the other one is below $-0.05,\,-0.10,\,\ldots,\,-0.55$ at the same time for Top $5,\,10,\,\ldots,\,35$ pairs.
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- Calculate daily returns for each stock during the formation period and estimate the marginal distributions of returns separately.
 - ARMA(p,q)-GARCH(1,1).
- Estimate the two-dimensional copula model to data that has been transformed to [0,1] margins, i.e.,

$$H\left(r_{t}^{X}, r_{t}^{Y}\right) = C\left(F_{X}\left(r_{t}^{X}\right), F_{Y}\left(r_{t}^{Y}\right)\right),$$

where H is the joint distribution, r_t^X e r_t^Y are stock returns and C is the copula.

- Gaussian, t, Clayton, Frank, Gumbel.
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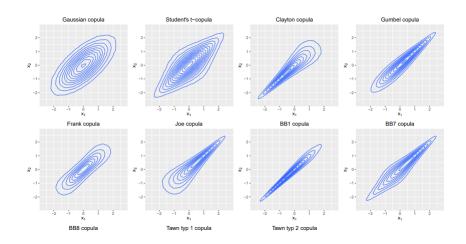
$$\mathcal{C}_{\theta}^{CFG}\left(u_{1},u_{2}\right)=\pi_{1}\mathcal{C}_{\alpha}^{C}\left(u_{1},u_{2}\right)+\pi_{2}\mathcal{C}_{\beta}^{F}\left(u_{1},u_{2}\right)+\left(1-\pi_{1}-\pi_{2}\right)\mathcal{C}_{\delta}^{G}\left(u_{1},u_{2}\right),$$

and

$$C_{\xi}^{CtG}(u_1, u_2) = \pi_1 C_{\alpha}^{C}(u_1, u_2) + \pi_2 C_{\Sigma, \nu}^{t}(u_1, u_2) + (1 - \pi_1 - \pi_2) C_{\delta}^{G}(u_1, u_2),$$

where $\theta = (\alpha, \beta, \delta)'$ are the Clayton, Frank and Gumbel copula (dependence) parameters and $\xi = (\alpha, (\Sigma, \nu), \delta)'$ are the Clayton, t and Gumbel copula parameters, respectively, and $\pi_1, \pi_2 \in [0, 1]$.

Tail Dependence



① Take the first derivative of the copula function to compute conditional probabilities and measure mispricing degrees $MI_{X|Y}$ and $MI_{Y|X}$ for each day.

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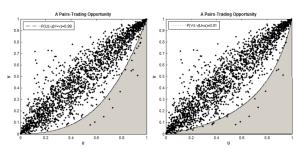
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 - Conversely, build positions long/short of X and Y on the day that $M_{1,t} < \Delta_2$ and $M_{2,t} > \Delta_1$ if there is no positions in X or Y.

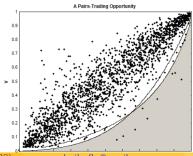
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- All positions are closed if $M_{1,t}$ reaches Δ_3 or $M_{2,t}$ reaches Δ_4 , where $\Delta_1, \Delta_2, \Delta_3$ and Δ_4 are predetermined thresholds or are automatically closed out on the last day of the trading period if they do not reach the thresholds.

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 - Here we use $\Delta_1 = 0.2, \Delta_2 = -0.2$ and $\Delta_3 = \Delta_4 = 0$.



Illustration





Risk-Return characteristics

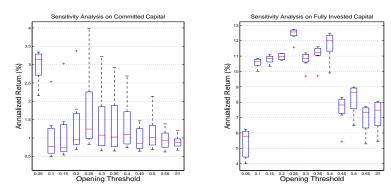


Figure 1: Annualized returns of pairs trading strategies after costs on committed and fully invested capital

These boxplots show annualized returns on committed (left) and fully invested (right) capital after transaction cost to different opening thresholds from July 1991 to December 2015 for Top 5 to Top 35 pairs.

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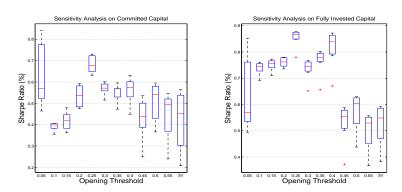


Figure 2: Sharpe ratio of pairs trading strategies after costs on committed and fully invested capital

Trading Statistics

 ${\bf Table\ 1:}\quad {\bf Trading\ statistics.}$

Strategy	Distance	Mixed Copula
	P	Panel A: Top 5
Average price deviation trigger for opening pairs	0.0594	0.0665
Total number of pairs opened	352	348
Average number of pairs traded per sixmonth period	7.18	7.10
Average number of round-trip trades per pair	1.44	1.42
Standard Deviation	1.0128	1.33
Average time pairs are open in days	50.70	37.70
Standard Deviation	39.24	38.93
Median time pairs are open in days	38.5	19
	P	anel B: Top20
Average price deviation trigger for opening pairs	0.0681	0.0821
Total number of pairs opened	1312	749
Average number of pairs traded per sixmonth period	26.78	15.29
Average number of round-trip trades per pair	1.34	0.76
Standard Deviation	0.99	0.99
Average time pairs are open in days	51.65	23.60
Standard Deviation	39.62	→

Trading Statistics

Table 2: Trading statistics.

Strategy	Distance	Mixed Copula
	Pa	nel C: Top 35
Average price deviation trigger for opening pairs	0.0729	0.0893
Total number of pairs opened	2238	941
Average number of pairs traded per sixmonth period	45.68	19.20
Average number of round-trip trades per pair	1.30	0.55
Standard Deviation	1.02	0.84
Average time pairs are open in days	52.72	19.35
Standard Deviation	40.48	30.56
Median time pairs are open in days	42	6

Note: Trading statistics for portfolio of top 5, 20 and 35 pairs between July 1991 and December 2015 (49 periods). Pairs are formed over a 12-month period according to a minimum-distance (sum of squared deviations) criterion and then traded over the subsequent 6-month period. Average price deviation trigger for opening a pair is calculated as the price difference divided by the average of the prices.

Empirical Results

Table 3: Excess returns on committed capital of pairs trading strategies on portfolios of Top 5, 20 and 35 pairs after costs.

Strategy	Mean Return (%)	Sharpe ratio	Sortino ratio	t-stat	% of negative trades	MDD1	MDD2
		Retu	Panel A - To	nitted Capital p 5 pairs	I		
Distance Mixed Copula	2.60 3.98	0.31	0.58 1.08	1.86* 3.49***	46.98 41.79	6.73 4.36	19.62 9.29
			Panel B - Top	20 pairs			
Distance Mixed Copula	3.14 1.24	0.65 0.64	1.13 1.04	3.32*** 3.52***	48.02 41.33	3.88 2.07	9.69 3.43
			Panel C - Top	35 pairs			
Distance Mixed Copula	3.12 0.82	0.77 0.73	1.36 1.19	3.92*** 3.95***	47.97 41.31	2.70 1.18	7.52 1.98
S&P 500	4.36	0.23	0.52	1.79*	47.45	12.42	46.74

Note: Summary statistics of the annualized excess returns, annualized Sharpe and Sortino ratios on portfolios of top 5, 20 and 35 pairs between July 1991 and December 2015 (6,173 observations). The t-statistics are computed using Newey-West standard errors with a six-lag correction. The columns labeled MDD1 and MDD2 compute the largest drawdown in terms of maximum percentage drop between two consecutive days and between two days within a period of maximum six months, respectively.

***, **, * significant at 1%, 5% and 10% levels, respectively.

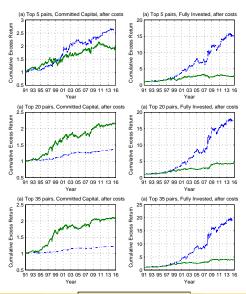
Empirical Results

Table 4: Excess returns on fully invested capital of pairs trading strategies on portfolios of Top 5, 20 and 35 pairs after costs.

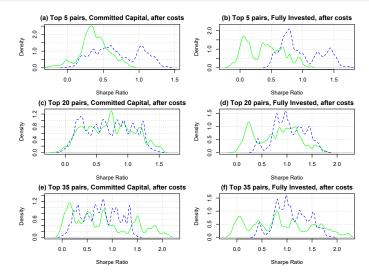
Strategy	Mean Return (%)	Sharpe ratio	Sortino ratio	t-stat	% of negative trades	MDD1	MDD2
		Return	on Fully In	vested Capit	al		
			Panel A - Top	5 pairs			
Distance	4.01	0.28	0.57	1.81*	46.98	8.70	38.36
Mixed Copula	11.58	0.78	1.43	4.26***	41.79	9.00	25.68
			Panel B - Top	20 pairs			
Distance	6.07	0.66	1.19	3.55***	48.06	5.43	20.03
Mixed Copula	12.30	0.85	1.54	4.60***	41.31	9.00	25.68
			Panel C - Top	35~pairs			
Distance	5.76	0.76	1.38	4.05***	47.97	4.24	15.07
Mixed Copula	12.73	0.88	1.59	4.73***	41.28	9.00	25.68

^{***, **, *} significant at 1%, 5% and 10% levels, respectively.

Cumulative excess returns of pairs trading strategies after costs



Kernel density estimation of 5-year rolling window Sharpe ratio after costs



Fama-French

Table 5: Monthly risk profile of Top 5 pairs: Fama and French (2016)'s five factors plus Momentum and Long-Term Reversal.

Strategy	Intercept	Rm-Rf	SMB	HML	RMW	CMA	Mom	LRev	R^2	R^2_{adj}
			Sect	ion 1: Return	on Committe	d Capital				
Distance	0.0025	0.0091	-0.0032	0.0113	0.0003	-0.0029	-0.0107	-0.0084	0.028	0.027
Mixed Copula	(1.89)* 0.0035	(4.22)*** 0.0052	(-0.71) -0.0043	(2.05)** 0.0039	(0.25) -0.0035	(-0.18) 0.0027	(-4.80)*** -0.0054	(-1.96)** -0.0057	0.015	0.014
	(3.55)***	(3.68)***	(-1.83)*	(1.20)	(-0.99)	(0.63)	(-2.99)***	(-1.57)		
			Sectio	n 2: Return o	n Fully Invest	ed Capital				
Distance	0.0040	0.0170 (4.88)***	-0.0031 (-0.45)	0.0185	0.0049	-0.0018	-0.0161 (-4.30)***	-0.0150 (-1.97)**	0.025	0.024
Mixed Copula	0.0098	0.0148	-0.0084	0.0152	(0.76) -0.0053	(0.05) 0.0087	-0.0082	-0.0222	0.018	0.017
	(4.17)***	(3.51)***	-1.45	1.6355	-0.60	0.75	(-2.19)**	(-2.08)**		

^{***, **, *} significant at 1%, 5% and 10% levels, respectively.

- Alphas are significantly positive and higher than the raw excess returns by about 2-7 bps per month.
 - Only a small part of the excess returns can be attributed to their exposures to the seven risk determinants.

Fama-French

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- By capturing linear/nonlinear associations and covering a wider range of possible dependencies structures, the mixed copula strategy outperforms the distance method when the number of trading signals is equiparable, especially after the subprime mortgage crisis.
- We show that the mixed copula pairs trading strategy generates large and significant (at 1%) abnormal returns.
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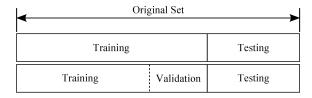
Future Research

- Varying Threshold
- Copula-based arbitrage for triplets to increase information dependency information and measure relative pricing more comprehensively.



- Vine Copulas (Pair-Copula Constructions)
 - Superior flexibility

Future Research



- Machine Learning and AI-based methodologies
 - Explore non-linear approaches
- News Sentiment Factor
 - Contain relevant information about the economic activity
 - Can provide increased risk-adjusted returns

Thanks! Any questions?

Table 6: Excess returns on committed capital on portfolios of Top 5 pairs after costs.

Strategy	Mean Return (%)	Sharpe ratio	Sortino ratio
	Return on Commit Panel A: 1991		
S&P 500 Mixed Copula	$7.17 \\ 2.66$	$0.72 \\ 0.45$	$\frac{1.30}{0.74}$
	Panel B: 1996	-2000	
S&P 500 Mixed Copula	10.03 6.90	$0.51 \\ 1.05$	1.01 1.77
	Panel C: 2001	-2005	
S&P 500 Mixed Copula	-2.28 6.84	-0.13 0.83	-0.06 1.44
	Panel D: 2006	:2010	
S&P 500 Mixed Copula	-1.71 1.56	-0.07 0.24	0.09 0.46
	Panel E: 2011	:2015	
S&P 500 Mixed Copula	9.91 2.01	$0.61 \\ 0.61$	1.09 1.08

***, **, * significant at 1%, 5% and 10% levels, respectively.

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Table 7: Excess returns on fully invested capital on portfolios of Top 5 pairs after costs.

Strategy	$egin{array}{ll} egin{array}{ll} egi$	Sharpe ratio	Sortino ratio
	Return on Fully Inv Panel A: 199		
S&P 500 Mixed Copula	7.17 7.69	0.72 0.56	1.30 1.02
	Panel B: 199	6-2000	
S&P 500 Mixed Copula	10.03 19.61	0.51 1.13	1.01 1.96
	Panel C: 200	1-2005	
S&P 500 Mixed Copula	-2.28 18.07	-0.13 1.14	-0.06 2.07
	Panel D: 200	6:2010	
S&P 500 Mixed Copula	-1.71 9.42	-0.07 0.57	0.09 1.16
	Panel E: 201	1:2015	
S&P 500 Mixed Copula	9.91 3.62	$0.61 \\ 0.37$	1.09 0.69

***, **, * significant at 1%, 5% and 10% levels, respectively.

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Table 8: Excess returns on committed capital on portfolios of Top 20 pairs after costs.

Strategy	Mean Return (%)	$_{ m ratio}$	Sortino ratio
	Return on Committe Panel A: 1991-1.		
S&P 500 Mixed Copula	7.17 0.93	$0.72 \\ 0.46$	1.30 0.70
Mixed Copula	0.93	0.40	0.70
	Panel B: 1996-2	000	
S&P 500	10.03	0.51	1.01
Mixed Copula	1.67	0.84	1.37
	Panel C: 2001-2	005	
S&P 500	-2.28	-0.13	-0.06
Mixed Copula	2.43	1.09	1.86
	Panel D: 2006:2	010	
S&P 500	-1.71	-0.07	0.09
Mixed Copula	0.49	0.22	0.38
	Panel E: 2011:20	015	
S&P 500	9.91	0.61	1.09
Mixed Copula	0.70	0.77	1.30

***, **, * significant at 1%, 5% and 10% levels, respectively.

Table 9: Excess returns on fully invested capital on portfolios of Top 20 pairs after costs.

Strategy	Mean	Sharpe	Sortino
	Return (%)	ratio	ratio
	Return on Fully Inve Panel A: 1991-		
S&P 500	7.17	$0.72 \\ 0.63$	1.30
Mixed Copula	8.18		1.10
	Panel B: 1996-	2000	
S&P 500	10.03	$0.51 \\ 1.08$	1.01
Mixed Copula	18.48		1.85
	Panel C: 2001-	2005	
S&P 500	-2.28	-0.13	-0.06
Mixed Copula	21.07	1.34	2.42
	Panel D: 2006:	2010	
S&P 500	-1.71	-0.07	0.09
Mixed Copula	12.09	0.74	1.48
	Panel E: 2011:	2015	
S&P 500	9.91	$0.61 \\ 0.25$	1.09
Mixed Copula	2.33		0.49

**, * significant at 1%, 5% and 10% levels, respectively.

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Table 10: Excess returns on committed capital on portfolios of Top 35 pairs after costs.

Strategy	Mean Return (%)	Sharpe ratio	Sortino ratio	
	· '		ratio	
	Return on Commir Panel A: 1991			
S&P 500	7.17	0.72	1.30	
Mixed Copula	0.70	0.60	0.93	
	Panel B: 1996	-2000		
S&P 500	10.03	0.51	1.01	
Mixed Copula	0.99	0.84	1.37	
	Panel C: 2001	-2005		
S&P 500	-2.28	-0.13	-0.06	
Mixed Copula	1.59	1.23	2.11	
	Panel D: 2006	:2010		
S&P 500	-1.71	-0.07	0.09	
Mixed Copula	0.35	0.28	0.46	
	Panel E: 2011	:2015		
S&P 500	9.91	0.61	1.09	
Mixed Copula	0.50	0.86	1.56	

***, **, * significant at 1%, 5% and 10% levels, respectively.

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Table 11: Excess returns on fully invested capital on portfolios of Top 35 pairs after costs.

Strategy	Mean	Sharpe	Sortino
	Return (%)	ratio	ratio
	Return on Fully Inve Panel A: 1991-		
S&P 500	7.17	0.72	$\frac{1.30}{1.14}$
Mixed Copula	8.50	0.65	
	Panel B: 1996-	2000	
S&P 500	10.03	$0.51 \\ 1.12$	1.01
Mixed Copula	19.10		1.93
	Panel C: 2001-	2005	
S&P 500	-2.28	-0.13	-0.06
Mixed Copula	21.81	1.38	2.50
	Panel D: 2006:	2010	
S&P 500	-1.71	-0.07	$0.09 \\ 1.51$
Mixed Copula	12.39	0.76	
	Panel E: 2011:	2015	
S&P 500	9.91	$0.61 \\ 0.27$	1.09
Mixed Copula	2.56		0.53

**, * significant at 1%, 5% and 10% levels, respectively.

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