

# Efficient and Scalable Bipartite Matching with Fast Beta Linkage (fabl)

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**Abstract.** Recently, researchers have developed Bayesian versions of the Fellegi Sunter model for record linkage. These have the crucial advantage of quantifying uncertainty from imperfect linkages. However, current implementations of Bayesian Fellegi Sunter models are computationally intensive, making them challenging to use on larger-scale record linkage tasks. To address these computational considerations, we propose fast beta linkage (**fabl**), an extension to the Beta Record Linkage (BRL) method of [Sadinle \(2017\)](#). Specifically, we propose independent prior distributions over the matching space, allowing us to use hashing techniques that reduce computational overhead. This also allows us to complete pairwise record comparisons over large datasets through parallel computing and to reduce memory costs through a new technique called storage efficient indexing. Through simulations and two case studies, we show that **fabl** has markedly increased speed with minimal loss of accuracy when compared to BRL.

**Keywords:** entity resolution, data fusion, hashing, record linkage, Bayesian, distributed computing.

## 1 Introduction

In many data analysis tasks, analysts seek to identify duplicate records across two datafiles. This is an increasingly important task in “data cleaning,” and is used for inferential and predictive analyses in fields such as statistics, computer science, machine learning, political science, economics, precision medicine, official statistics, and others ([Christen, 2012](#); [Gutman et al., 2013](#); [Dalzell and Reiter, 2018](#); [Tang et al., 2020](#)). In this article, we consider bipartite record linkage, which merges two datafiles that contain duplications across, but not within, the respective datafiles.

Many statistical record linkage methods are extensions of the seminal work of [Fellegi and Sunter \(1969\)](#) and [Newcombe et al. \(1959\)](#). Specifically, [Fellegi and Sunter \(1969\)](#) created comparison vectors for each pair of records in the data and independently classified each pair as a match or a non-match using a likelihood ratio test. Recent work in the statistical literature has extended this approach for a wide variety of applications ([William E Winkler and Thibaudeau, 1990](#); [Fair, 2004](#); [Wagner et al., 2014](#); [Gill and Goldacre, 2003](#); [Enamorado et al., 2019](#); [Aleshin-Guendel and Sadinle, 2022](#)). Additionally, some methods model records directly ([Steorts et al., 2016](#); [Marchant et al., 2019](#); [Betancourt et al., 2021](#)), but in this paper, we build on the contributions to the comparison vector approach.

The independent pairwise matching assumption from [Fellegi and Sunter \(1969\)](#) is popular mainly for its mathematical simplicity, but can be unreasonable in practice. In

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many situations, we know that there are no duplications within a datafile, meaning that each record in one file should be linked with at most one other record in the other file. Thus, when the procedure results in many-to-one matches, some of these links must be false. Many extensions to Fellegi and Sunter (1969) resolve these false matches as a post-processing step (Jaro, 1989), but this model misspecification can still lead to poor results (Sadinle, 2017).

Alternatively, one can embed one-to-one matching requirements into the model specification itself (Gutman et al., 2013; Tancredi and Liseo, 2011), at an additional computational cost. Larsen (2005) employed a Metropolis-Hastings algorithm to only allow sampling matches that respected one-to-one assumptions, but such algorithms exhibit slow mixing due to the combinatorial nature of the constrained matching space. Fortunato (2010) used simulated annealing to target the space of matches permitted under the one-to-one constraint, but the method is computationally intensive and, to our knowledge, has not been applied on datafiles with more than 100 records. Sadinle (2017) proposed the Beta Record Linkage model (BRL), using a prior distribution over the space of bipartite matchings to strictly enforce one-to-one requirements throughout a Gibbs sampler. Additionally, he introduced a class of loss functions that allows for a flexible estimation of the linkage structure, such that the modeler can weigh the relative importance of false positives and false negatives, and identify records pairings to be decided through clerical review. BRL was shown to work on larger tasks than previous one-to-one methods, but in our experience, it becomes slow when applied to files with more than a few thousand records.

In this paper, we propose fast beta linkage (**fabl**), which extends the BRL model for increased efficiency and scalability. Following the suggestion in Wortman (2019), we relax the one-to-one matching requirement of BRL and propose independent priors over the matching space. This allows us to (1) employ hashing techniques that speed up calculations and reduce computational costs, (2) compute the pairwise record comparisons over large datasets via parallel computing, and (3) reduce memory costs through what we call storage efficient indexing. These contributions allow **fabl** to perform record linkage on much larger datafiles than previous Bayesian Fellegi Sunter models at significantly increased speed with minimal loss of accuracy. In particular, computation time under BRL grows quadratically, with the size of each datafile, while computation time under **fabl** grows linearly, only with the size of the smaller datafile.

In what follows, Section 2 reviews the work of Fellegi and Sunter (1969) and Sadinle (2017). Section 3 proposes the **fabl** model, provides the Gibbs sampler for posterior inference, and shows the loss function used to calculate the Bayes estimate for the bipartite matching. Section 4 introduces the hashing technique and storage efficient indexing used to increase the speed of calculations and the scale of linkage tasks amenable to **fabl**. Sections 5 and 6 demonstrate the speed and accuracy of **fabl** through simulation studies and case studies of homicides from the El Salvadoran Civil War and the National Long Term Care Study.

## 2 Review of Prior Work

Consider two datafiles  $\mathbf{X}_1$  and  $\mathbf{X}_2$  containing records  $\{x_{1i}\}_{i=1}^{n_1}$  and  $\{x_{2j}\}_{j=1}^{n_2}$  respectively. Without loss of generality, denote files such that  $n_1 \geq n_2$ . We follow the convention established by [Sadinle \(2017\)](#) and say “record  $i \in \mathbf{X}_1$ ” rather than the more compact  $x_{1i}$  in order to avoid double subscripts. In the context of bipartite matching, we assume that there are duplications across, but not within, each datafile. Under this framework, the set of matches across datafiles can be represented in two equivalent ways. First, we may use a matrix  $\Delta \in \{0, 1\}^{n_1 \times n_2}$ , where

$$\Delta_{ij} = \begin{cases} 1, & \text{if records } i \in \mathbf{X}_1 \text{ and } j \in \mathbf{X}_2 \text{ refer to the same entity;} \\ 0, & \text{otherwise.} \end{cases} \quad (1)$$

Though intuitive, this sparse matrix representation can become cumbersome for large linkage tasks. More compactly, bipartite matching also can be viewed as a labeling  $\mathbf{Z} = (Z_1, \dots, Z_{n_2})$  for the records in datafile  $\mathbf{X}_2$  such that

$$Z_j = \begin{cases} i, & \text{if records } i \in \mathbf{X}_1 \text{ and } j \in \mathbf{X}_2 \text{ refer to the same entity;} \\ n_1 + j, & \text{if record } j \in \mathbf{X}_2 \text{ does not have a match in datafile } \mathbf{X}_1. \end{cases} \quad (2)$$

We can go back and forth between the two using  $\Delta_{ij} = I(Z_j = i)$ , where  $I(\cdot) = 1$  when the expression inside the parentheses is true, and  $I(\cdot) = 0$  otherwise.

Denote the set of matches by  $\mathbf{M} = \{(i, j) : i \in \mathbf{X}_1, j \in \mathbf{X}_2, \Delta_{ij} = 1\}$ , and the set of non-matches by  $\mathbf{U} = \{(i, j) : i \in \mathbf{X}_1, j \in \mathbf{X}_2, \Delta_{ij} = 0\}$ . The record linkage task can be viewed as identifying the sets of  $\mathbf{M}$  and  $\mathbf{U}$ . We refer to record pairs that are estimated as matches as “links” and to record pairs that are estimated as non-matches as “non-links.”

Intuitively, matching records (those that refer to the same entity) should be similar; records that are not non-matching should not be similar. [Fellegi and Sunter \(1969\)](#) proposed encoding this is using a comparison vector  $\gamma_{ij}$  computed for each record pair  $(i, j)$  in  $\mathbf{X}_1 \times \mathbf{X}_2$ . Denote the number of criteria for comparing records by  $F$ , such that  $\gamma_{ij} = (\gamma_{ij}^1, \gamma_{ij}^2, \dots, \gamma_{ij}^f, \dots, \gamma_{ij}^F)$ . In most cases,  $\gamma_{ij}$  consists of one comparison for each feature shared between the two datasets. We refer to set of all comparison vectors  $\gamma_{ij}$  as  $\Gamma$ .

The simplest way to compare two records is to check for agreement or disagreement, and this is commonly used for categorical variables. For numerical data, we can use absolute difference, and for text data, we can use string distance metrics such as Levenstein or Jaro-Winkler distance ([Cohen et al., 2003](#)). We can then set thresholds that allow us to represent comparisons through discrete levels of disagreement ([Bilenko and Mooney, 2006](#); [Elmagarmid et al., 2007](#)). Let  $\mathcal{S}_f(i, j)$  denote a general similarity measure for feature  $f$  of records  $i$  and  $j$ , where the range of  $\mathcal{S}_f$  can be divided into  $L_f + 1$  intervals denoted by  $I_{f0}, I_{f1}, \dots, I_{fL_f}$ . Following convention,  $I_{f0}$  represents the highest level of agreement (inclusive of complete agreement) and  $I_{fL_f}$  represents the highest level of disagreement (including complete disagreement). Thus, we can construct comparison vectors in the following way:  $\gamma_{ij}^f = l$  if  $\mathcal{S}_f(i, j) \in I_{fl}$ . The choices of  $I_{fl}$  are application specific, which we discuss in our simulation and case studies.

106 **2.1 Fellegi-Sunter Model**

The Fellegi Sunter model employs two independence assumptions: first, that comparison vectors are conditionally independent given their matching status, and second, that the matching status of the record pairs are independent. This allows us to model the comparison data using mixture models in the following way:

$$\begin{aligned}\Gamma_{ij} &= \gamma_{ij} \mid \Delta_{ij} = 1 \stackrel{iid}{\sim} \mathcal{M}(\mathbf{m}), \\ \Gamma_{ij} &= \gamma_{ij} \mid \Delta_{ij} = 0 \stackrel{iid}{\sim} \mathcal{U}(\mathbf{u}), \\ \Delta_{ij} &\stackrel{iid}{\sim} \text{Bernoulli}(p),\end{aligned}\tag{3}$$

where  $\mathcal{M}$  and  $\mathcal{U}$  are the distributions for matching and non-matching record pairs,  $\mathbf{m}$  and  $\mathbf{u}$  are their respective sets of parameters, and  $p$  is the marginal probability that a record pair is a match. When using comparison vectors with discrete agreement levels as described above, the  $\mathbf{m}$  parameter takes the form  $\mathbf{m} = (\mathbf{m}_1, \dots, \mathbf{m}_F)$ , where  $\mathbf{m}_f = (m_{f1}, \dots, m_{fL_f})$  and  $m_{fl} = P(\gamma_{ij}^f = l \mid Z_j = i)$  for all fields  $f$  and agreement levels  $l$ . The  $\mathbf{u}$  parameters are defined similarly, with  $u_{fl} = P(\gamma_{ij}^f = l \mid Z_j \neq i)$ . The  $\mathbf{m}$  and  $\mathbf{u}$  parameters are used to calculate the likelihood ratio

$$w_{ij} = \frac{P(\gamma_{ij} \mid \Delta_{ij} = 1)}{P(\gamma_{ij} \mid \Delta_{ij} = 0)}.\tag{4}$$

107 This ratio will be large when there is strong evidence of the pair being a match, and  
108 small otherwise.

109 The Fellegi Sunter method then uses thresholds  $T_m$  and  $T_u$  such that all record  
110 pairs with  $w_{ij} > T_m$  are declared as links, and all those with  $w_{ij} < T_u$  are declared as  
111 non-links (with those such that  $T_u < w_{ij} < T_m$  left undetermined and subject to clerical  
112 review). This is a problem in practice as transitive closures can be violated. Since each  
113  $w_{ij}$  is calculated independently, there can be situations in which both  $w_{ij} > T_m$  and  
114  $w_{i'j} > T_m$ , so both  $(i, j)$  and  $(i', j)$  are declared as links, even though such a matching  
115 is not allowed by assumption.

To address this issue, Jaro (1989) proposed solving the following linear sum assignment problem:

$$\begin{aligned}\max_{\Delta} \quad & \sum_{i=1}^{n_1} \sum_{j=1}^{n_2} w_{ij} \Delta_{ij} \quad \text{subject to} \quad \Delta_{ij} \in \{0, 1\}; \\ & \sum_{i=1}^{n_1} \Delta_{ij} \leq 1, j = 1, 2, \dots, n_2; \text{ and} \\ & \sum_{j=1}^{n_2} \Delta_{ij} \leq 1, i = 1, 2, \dots, n_1.\end{aligned}\tag{5}$$

116 The solution to this problem, for which several simple algorithms exist, is a bipartite  
117 matching that maximizes the sum of the Fellegi Sunter weights among matched pairs.

118 Jaro provided no theoretical justification for using this approach; however [Sadinle \(2017\)](#)  
 119 recently showed that under certain conditions, (5) is the maximum likelihood estimate  
 120 for bipartite matching.

## 121 2.2 Beta Record Linkage Model

To estimate a one-to-one matching without using a post-processing step, [Sadinle \(2017\)](#) incorporated this constraint directly into the model through a prior distribution over the matching space. He proposed the beta distribution for bipartite matching, given by

$$P(\mathbf{Z}|\alpha_\pi, \beta_\pi) = \frac{(n_1 - n_{12}(\mathbf{Z}))!}{n_1!} \frac{B(n_{12}(\mathbf{Z}) + \alpha_\pi, n_2 - n_{12}(\mathbf{Z}) + \beta_\pi)}{B(\alpha_\pi, \beta_\pi)},$$

122 where  $B(\cdot, \cdot)$  represents the Beta function, hyperparameters  $\alpha_\pi$  and  $\beta_\pi$  encode prior  
 123 beliefs about the proportion of records in  $\mathbf{X}_2$  that have matches in  $\mathbf{X}_1$ , and  $n_{12}(\mathbf{Z}) =$   
 124  $\sum_{j=1}^{n_2} I(Z_j \leq n_1 + j)$  is the number of records in  $\mathbf{X}_2$  that have a match in  $\mathbf{X}_1$ . This prior  
 125 induces a Gibbs sampler that strictly enforces one-to-one matching, removing previously  
 126 matched records from the set of candidate records when sampling  $Z_j$ . This creates a  
 127 dependency that makes the sampler inherently serial, which can be slow when working  
 128 on linkage tasks with more than a few thousand records.

## 129 3 Fast Beta Linkage

In contrast to the prior over the vector  $\mathbf{Z}$  from [Sadinle \(2017\)](#), we follow [Wortman \(2019\)](#) and use independent priors for each component  $Z_j$ . However, unlike [Wortman \(2019\)](#) who proposes a flat prior for  $Z_j$ , we use a proper prior. We denote the fast beta prior as follows:

$$Z_j|\pi = \begin{cases} \frac{1}{n_1}\pi, & z_j \leq n_1; \\ 1 - \pi, & z_j = n_1 + j; \end{cases}$$

$$\pi \sim \text{Beta}(\alpha_\pi, \beta_\pi).$$

130 This set of priors says that record  $j \in \mathbf{X}_2$  has some match in  $\mathbf{X}_1$  with probability  $\pi$ ,  
 131 and that each record  $i \in \mathbf{X}_1$  is equally likely to be that match. The parameter  $\pi$  is given  
 132 hyperparameters  $\alpha_\pi$  and  $\beta_\pi$  that encode prior beliefs about the proportion of records in  
 133  $\mathbf{X}_2$  that have matches in  $\mathbf{X}_1$ .

134 Note that linkage in this setting is conducted at the record level, rather than at  
 135 the record pair level as in the Fellegi Sunter model. That is,  $\pi$  under **fabl** estimates  
 136 the proportion of records in  $\mathbf{X}_2$  that have matches, while  $\lambda$  in the Fellegi Sunter  
 137 model estimates the proportion of record pairs that are matches. We find  $\pi$  to be  
 138 more interpretable parameter than  $\lambda$  in the bipartite case. In this setting, there are at  
 139 most  $n_2$  matching pairs out of  $n_1 n_2$  total pairs, meaning that  $\lambda$  is bounded above by  
 140  $\frac{1}{n_1}$  and tends towards 0 as the size of the linkage task grows. Additionally, while the  
 141 Fellegi Sunter model makes  $n_1 \times n_2$  independent matching decisions and **BRL** makes  $n_2$   
 142 dependent matching decisions, **fabl** strikes a middle ground between the two, making

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Symbol	Description
$\mathbf{X}_1, \mathbf{X}_2$	datasets
$i \in 1, \dots, n_1$	index over records in $\mathbf{X}_1$
$j \in 1, \dots, n_2$	index over records in $\mathbf{X}_2$
$f \in 1, \dots, F$	index over fields used for comparisons
$l \in 1, \dots, L_f$	index over agreement levels for field $f$
$n_{12}$	number of entities in common between $\mathbf{X}_1$ and $\mathbf{X}_2$
$\gamma_{ij}$	comparison vector for records $i \in \mathbf{X}_1$ and $j \in \mathbf{X}_2$
$Z_j = i$	records $i \in \mathbf{X}_1$ and $j \in \mathbf{X}_2$ match
$Z_j = n_1 + j$	record $j \in \mathbf{X}_2$ has no match in $\mathbf{X}_1$
$m_{fl}$	$P(\gamma_{ij}^f = l   Z_j = i)$
$u_{fl}$	$P(\gamma_{ij}^f = l   Z_j \neq i)$
$\pi$	probability that a record in $\mathbf{X}_2$ has a match in $\mathbf{X}_1$

Table 1: Summary of model notation

$n_2$  independent matching decisions. As shown in Sections 5 and 6, this allows **fabl** to achieve the benefits from BRL while making efficiency gains possible by exploiting independence.

Importantly, this independence relaxes the one-to-one requirement from BRL; the Gibbs sampler under **fabl** does ensure that each record in  $\mathbf{X}_2$  can be matched to at most one record in  $\mathbf{X}_1$ , but allows for the possibility that multiple records in  $\mathbf{X}_2$  match to the same record in  $\mathbf{X}_1$ . To resolve many-to-one matchings and obtain a one-to-one estimate, we use the post processing procedure explained in Section 3.2.

Lastly, we note that it is common to encounter missing information in datasets used for record linkage. Whether information is missing in record  $i \in \mathbf{X}_1$  or  $j \in \mathbf{X}_2$ , the comparison vector  $\gamma_{ij}$  will have missing values. We handle this issue by assuming that this missingness occurs at random (MAR, by Little and Rubin (2002)). With this assumption, we can marginalize over the missing data, and do all computation simply using the observed data. To notate this, we use the indicator  $I_{obs}(\cdot)$ , which takes on the value 1 when the argument inside the parentheses is observed, and 0 otherwise.

With the **fabl** prior defined and our missingness assumptions addressed, we present the full model:

$$\begin{aligned}
\mathcal{L}(\mathbf{Z}, \mathbf{m}, \mathbf{u} \mid \boldsymbol{\Gamma}) &= \prod_{j=1}^{n_1} \prod_{i=1}^{n_2} \prod_{f=1}^F \prod_{l=1}^{L_f} \left[ m_{fl}^{I(Z_j=i)} u_{fl}^{I(Z_j \neq i)} \right]^{I(\gamma_{ij}^f=l) I_{obs}(\gamma_{ij}^f)}, \\
\mathbf{m}_f &\sim \text{Dirichlet}(\alpha_{f0}, \dots, \alpha_{fL_f}), \\
\mathbf{u}_f &\sim \text{Dirichlet}(\beta_{f0}, \dots, \beta_{fL_f}), \\
Z_j \mid \pi &= \begin{cases} \frac{1}{n_1} \pi, & z_j \leq n_1; \\ 1 - \pi, & z_j = n_1 + j; \end{cases} \\
\pi &\sim \text{Beta}(\alpha_\pi, \beta_\pi).
\end{aligned}$$

For convenience, a summary of notation is provided in Table 1.

### 3.1 Gibbs Sampler

We initialize  $\mathbf{m}$  and  $\mathbf{u}$  from random draws from their prior distributions, and initialize  $\mathbf{Z}$  to reflect no matches across datasets; that is,  $\mathbf{Z} = (n_1 + 1, \dots, n_1 + n_2)$ . We then sample  $\mathbf{m}$  and  $\mathbf{u}$  from their full conditionals:

$$\mathbf{m}_f | \Gamma, \mathbf{Z} \sim \text{Dirichlet}(\alpha_{f1}(\mathbf{Z}), \dots, \alpha_{fL_f}(\mathbf{Z})),$$

$$\mathbf{u}_f | \Gamma, \mathbf{Z} \sim \text{Dirichlet}(\beta_{f1}(\mathbf{Z}), \dots, \beta_{fL_f}(\mathbf{Z})),$$

where  $\alpha_{fl}(\mathbf{Z}) = \alpha_{fl} + \sum_{i,j} I_{\text{obs}}(\gamma_{ij}^f) I(\gamma_{ij}^f = l) I(z_j = i)$ , and  $\beta_{fl}(\mathbf{Z}) = \beta_{fl} + \sum_{i,j} I_{\text{obs}}(\gamma_{ij}^f) I(\gamma_{ij}^f = l) I(z_j \neq i)$ .

Next, we sample  $\mathbf{Z}$  componentwise from the full conditionals for each  $Z_j$ :

$$p\left(Z_j^{(s+1)} = i | \Gamma, \mathbf{m}, \mathbf{u}, \mathbf{Z}^{(s)}\right) \propto \begin{cases} w_{z_j, j}, & z_j \leq n_1; \\ n_1^{\frac{n_2 - n_{12}(\mathbf{Z}) + \beta_\pi}{n_{12}(\mathbf{Z}) + \alpha_\pi}}, & z_j = n_1 + j, \end{cases}$$

where

$$w_{ij} = \prod_{f=1}^F \prod_{l=1}^{L_f} \left( \frac{m_{fl}}{u_{fl}} \right)^{I(\gamma_{ij}^f = l) I_{\text{obs}}(\gamma_{ij}^f)}.$$

Derivations for these full conditionals can be found in Appendix 7.1.

### 3.2 Bayes Estimate

We calculate a Bayes estimate  $\hat{\mathbf{Z}}$  for the linkage parameter  $\mathbf{Z}$  by assigning different positive losses to different types of errors, and minimizing posterior expected loss. We adopt the loss function proposed in [Sadinle \(2017\)](#) in which  $\hat{Z}_j \in \{1, \dots, n_1 + j, R\}$ , with  $R$  representing the option to leave the matching undetermined by the model. Specifically, we have

$$L(\hat{Z}_j, Z_j) = \begin{cases} 0, & \text{if } Z_j = \hat{Z}_j; \\ \theta_R, & \text{if } \hat{Z}_j = R; \\ \theta_{10}, & \text{if } Z_j \leq 1, \hat{Z}_j = n_1 + j; \\ \theta_{01}, & \text{if } Z_j = n_1 + j, \hat{Z}_j \leq n_1; \\ \theta_{11}, & \text{if } Z_j \leq n_1, \hat{Z}_j \leq n_1, Z_j \neq \hat{Z}_j. \end{cases}$$

Here,  $\theta_R$  is the loss from not making a decision on the linkage status,  $\theta_{10}$  is the loss from a false non-match,  $\theta_{01}$  is the loss from a false match, and  $\theta_{11}$  is the loss from the special case of a false match in which the record has a true match other than the one estimated by the model.

In general, we set  $(\theta_{10}, \theta_{01}, \theta_{11}, \theta_R) = (1, 1, 2, \infty)$  inducing the decision rule

$$\hat{Z}_j = \begin{cases} i, & \text{if } P(Z_j = i | \Gamma) > \frac{1}{2}; \\ 0, & \text{otherwise.} \end{cases}$$

173 For a more in-depth explanation of this function and the induced Bayes estimate, see  
 174 [Sadinle \(2017\)](#).

175 Since the Gibbs sampler does not strictly enforce one-to-one matching, it is possible  
 176 for this Bayes estimate to link multiple records in  $\mathbf{X}_2$  to one record in  $\mathbf{X}_1$ . To achieve a  
 177 Bayes estimate that fulfills one-to-one matching requirement, we simply minimize the  
 178 expected loss subject to the constraint that  $\hat{Z}_j \neq \hat{Z}_{j'}$  for all  $j \neq j'$ . In the event that we  
 179 have two records  $j$  and  $j'$  such that both  $P(Z_j = i|\Gamma) > \frac{1}{2}$  and  $P(Z_{j'} = i|\Gamma) > \frac{1}{2}$ , we  
 180 accept the match with the highest posterior probability, and declare the other to have  
 181 no match. A similar approach appears in the most probable maximal matching sets used  
 182 by [Steorts et al. \(2016\)](#) to match records to latent entities.

## 183 4 Efficient and Scalable Implementation

184 The scale of linkage tasks possible within the Fellegi Sunter framework is limited by (1)  
 185 the memory costs of storing  $n_1 \times n_2$  comparison vectors for every pair of records across the  
 186 two datafiles, and (2) the speed of the linkage algorithm over those comparison vectors.  
 187 One common solution to these challenges is to utilize blocking, which places similar  
 188 records into partitions, or “blocks,” to reduce this computational burden ([Christen,](#)  
 189 [2019](#)). In deterministic blocking, the modeler chooses a field thought to be highly reliable,  
 190 and only compares records that agree on that field. The record linkage method is then  
 191 applied independently across all blocks, which can be done in parallel for additional  
 192 speed gains. However, blocking on an unreliable field can lead to missed matches, making  
 193 this form of blocking undesirable in some situations ([Steorts et al., 2014](#)).

194 Another technique is indexing, in which the modeller decides a priori certain criteria  
 195 that all linked pairs must satisfy, and labels any record pairs that do not meet that  
 196 criteria as non-links. For example, one might only consider pairs with a certain similarity  
 197 score on a field deemed to be important, like first name, or only pairs that exactly match  
 198 on a specified number of fields. However, this kind of indexing requires knowledge of the  
 199 application and invites room for human error ([Murray, 2016](#)).

200 With **fabl**, we introduce two techniques to expand the scalability of probabilistic  
 201 record linkage without the drawbacks of blocking and indexing. First, we propose hashing  
 202 methods that allow us to compute sufficient statistics which reduce the computational  
 203 complexity of the Gibbs sampler. Second, we introduce storage efficient indexing (SEI),  
 204 which reduces the memory costs associated with unlikely matches.

### 205 4.1 Data Representation, Hashing, and Storage

206 Following insight from [Enamorado et al. \(2019\)](#), we recognize that record pairs contribute  
 207 to posterior calculations only through the agreement pattern of the  $\gamma_{ij}$  vector. To make  
 208 this more precise, let  $h_1, \dots, h_P$  denote the unique agreement patterns, and collect these  
 209 unique patterns in the set  $\mathcal{P} = \{h_1, \dots, h_P\}$ . Here,  $P = |\mathcal{P}|$  is the total number of  
 210 unique agreement patterns.  $P$  is bounded above by  $\prod_{f=1}^F L_f$  which does not depend  
 211 on  $n_1$  or  $n_2$ . In this context, the integers  $\{1, \dots, P\}$  serve as hashed values that encode



the same information as the original vectors themselves. Whenever possible, we conduct calculations over these  $P$  agreement patterns, instead of the typical  $n_1 \times n_2$  record pairs. Additionally, we store “one-hot encodings” of these patterns rather than the original Fellegi Sunter comparison vectors, to aid in vectorized computations. See Appendix 7.2 for details.

First, we hash record pairs of the same agreement pattern to unique integer values. Enamorado et al. (2019) accomplished this efficiently through the hashing function

$$h^*(i, j) = \sum_{f=1}^F I(\gamma_{ij}^f > 0) 2^{\gamma_{ij}^f + I(k>1) \sum_{e=1}^{k-1} (L_e - 1)}.$$

This function maps each agreement pattern to a unique integer, allowing us to store a scalar quantity instead of an entire vector for each record pair. For computational ease, we then map these integers to sequential integers from  $\{1, \dots, P\}$  corresponding to the enumerated patterns in  $\mathcal{P}$ . When the  $(i, j)$  pair exhibits the  $p^{th}$  pattern, we say  $(i, j) \in h_p$ .

With all record pairs converted to hashed values, we can create a more compact nested list

$$\mathcal{R} = \{ \{r_{j_p}\}_{p=1}^P \}_{j=1}^{n_2},$$

where  $r_{j_p} = \{i \in \mathbf{X}_1 | (i, j) \in h_p\}$  is a list of records in  $\mathbf{X}_1$  that share agreement pattern  $p$  with record  $j \in \mathbf{X}_2$ . This representation is useful because it allows us to easily compute two sets of sufficient statistics. First, we compute the number of records in  $\mathbf{X}_1$  that share agreement pattern  $p$  with record  $j \in \mathbf{X}_2$ , given by

$$N_{j_p} = \sum_{i=1}^{n_1} I((i, j) \in h_p) = |r_{j_p}|.$$

Second, we compute the number of comparison vectors in  $\Gamma$  that exhibit pattern  $p$ , given by

$$H_p = \sum_{i=1}^{n_1} \sum_{j=1}^{n_2} I((i, j) \in h_p) = \sum_{j=1}^{n_2} N_{j_p}.$$

We collect these sufficient statistics in the sets  $\mathcal{N} = \{ \{N_{j_p}\}_{j=1}^{n_2} \}_{p=1}^P$  and  $\mathcal{H} = \{H_p\}_{p=1}^P$ . As we will show in Section 4.3, all posterior calculations are conducted with these sufficient statistics. Note that  $\mathcal{P}$ ,  $\mathcal{R}$ , and  $\mathcal{H}$  fully characterize the comparison matrix  $\Gamma$  with no loss of information, so we proceed with  $\tilde{\Gamma} = \{\mathcal{P}, \mathcal{R}, \mathcal{N}, \mathcal{H}\}$  for posterior inference.

## 4.2 Scaling to Large Linkage Tasks

With storage efficient indexing (SEI), we can calculate the above sufficient statistics for all  $n_1 \times n_2$  record pairs, but greatly reduce the memory costs associated with unlikely matches, allowing us to conduct all-to-all comparisons for substantially larger linkage tasks. Observe that all records  $i \in \mathbf{X}_1$  that share agreement pattern  $p$  with record

$j \in \mathbf{X}_2$  have the same Fellegi Sunter weight  $w_{ij}$ . Therefore, these records have the same probability to be identified as a link when sampling  $Z_j$ . Thus, we know that records  $i \in r_{j_p}$  such that  $N_{j_p}$  is large are very unlikely to be sampled consistently enough to be deemed a match through the Bayes estimate. We know this regardless of the form of the agreement pattern itself, or its associated probabilities. Therefore, rather than store all of these unlikely record labels, we choose to store only a small number  $S$  of them in a new nested list  $\mathcal{R}^{\text{SEI}}$ . Instead of storing  $n_1 \times n_2$  record labels, SEI allows us to store at most  $n_2 \times P \times S$  labels, regardless of how large  $n_1$  might be. In practice, we recommend  $S = 10$ , as this reduces the number of stored indices for highly unlikely record pairings, but does not likely to eliminate any of the indices for plausible matches. Choosing  $S$  too low, like  $S = 1$  or  $S = 2$ , can concentrate undue mass on unlikely matches and distort linkage results. Posterior calculations still attribute the appropriate weight to all records through the summary statistics in  $\mathcal{H}$ , and thus we can proceed with posterior inference through the memory reduced  $\tilde{\Gamma}^{\text{SEI}} = \{\mathcal{P}, \mathcal{R}^{\text{SEI}}, \mathcal{N}, \mathcal{H}\}$ .

For large data, we can partition the two datasets  $\mathbf{X}_1$  and  $\mathbf{X}_2$  into smaller chunks  $\{\mathbf{X}_{1m}\}$  and  $\{\mathbf{X}_{2n}\}$  for more manageable computations. On a single machine, we can read-in data sequentially, conduct hashing, compress information through SEI, and delete the original data from memory before continuing with the next chunk of data. With multiple cores or multiple machines, this can be done in parallel. Summary statistics from each pairwise chunk comparison can then be easily synthesized to recover sufficient statistics for the larger linkage task. Thus, the combination of partitioning, hashing, and SEI allows us to conduct linkage tasks over much larger datasets.

### 4.3 Efficient Posterior Inference

Calculated at the level of the record pairs, updating  $\alpha_{fl}(\mathbf{Z})$  and  $\beta_{fl}(\mathbf{Z})$  for each field and level in the linkage task constitutes  $2 \times \sum_f L_f$  many summations over  $n_1 \times n_2$  quantities. These are simple calculations, but become computationally burdensome when working on large linkage tasks.

Instead, we use one-hot encodings of the agreement patterns  $\mathcal{P}$  for more efficient calculations. Denote  $H_p^m = \sum_{j=1}^{n_2} I((Z_j, j) \in h_p)$  to be the number of matching record pairs with agreement pattern  $p$ . It follows that the number of non-matching record pairs with agreement pattern  $p$  is  $H_p^u = H_p - H_p^m$ . Then, if  $\alpha_0$  and  $\beta_0$  are vectors of length  $\sum_f L_f$  of prior parameters for the  $\mathbf{m}$  and  $\mathbf{u}$  distributions respectively, the posterior update becomes

$$\begin{aligned}
 \alpha(\mathbf{Z}) &= \alpha_0 + \sum_{p=1}^P H_p^m \times h_p, \\
 \beta(\mathbf{Z}) &= \beta_0 + \sum_{p=1}^P H_p^u \times h_p.
 \end{aligned}$$

Although sampling  $Z_j$  from the full conditional provided in Section 3.1 is conceptually straightforward, it becomes computationally burdensome when  $n_1$  is large. This is because sampling a value from  $n_1$  options with unequal weights requires normalizing the weights

Symbol	Description
$h_p$	one hot encoding of agreement pattern $p$
$(i, j) \in h_p$	comparison vector between records $i \in \mathbf{X}_1$ and $i \in \mathbf{X}_2$ exhibits pattern $p$
$r_{j_p}$	list of records in $\mathbf{X}_1$ that share agreement pattern $p$ with record $j \in \mathbf{X}_2$
$N_{j_p}$	number of records in $\mathbf{X}_1$ that share agreement pattern $p$ with record $j \in \mathbf{X}_2$
$H_p$	number of total comparison vectors that exhibit pattern $p$
$H_p^m$	number of matching comparison vectors that exhibit pattern $p$
$H_p^u$	number of non-matching comparison vectors that exhibit pattern $p$

Table 2: Summary of hashing notation.

to probabilities, which has a computational cost that scales with  $n_1$ . To speed up computation, we break this sampling step into two. First, we calculate the Fellegi Sunter weight  $w_p$  associated with each unique pattern and sample the agreement pattern between  $j$  and its potential link, according to (6).

$$P\left(\left(Z_j^{(s+1)}, j\right) \in h_p \mid \tilde{\Gamma}, \mathbf{m}, \mathbf{u}, \mathbf{Z}^{(s)}\right) \propto \begin{cases} w_p \times N_{j_p}, & p \leq P; \\ n_1 \frac{n_2 - n_{12}(\mathbf{Z}) + \beta_\pi}{n_{12}(\mathbf{Z}) + \alpha_\pi}, & p = P + 1. \end{cases} \quad (6)$$

Since all posterior updates are governed by the agreement patterns of the record pairs rather than the record labels themselves, we complete the entire Gibbs sampler first at the level of the  $P$  agreement patterns. After all iterations are complete, we can back-fill the records uniformly among records of the sampled agreement pattern through (7).

$$P\left(Z_j^{(s+1)} = i \mid \left(Z_j^{(s+1)}, j\right) \in h_p\right) = \begin{cases} \frac{1}{N_{j_p}}, & (z_j, j) \in h_p; \\ 0, & \text{otherwise.} \end{cases} \quad (7)$$

258 We emphasize the computational gains of this split sampler: the first step is a sample  
 259 from  $P$  options, where  $P$  does not scale with the size of the linkage task; and the second  
 260 step is sampling uniformly at random, which is computationally simple even for large  
 261 sets of candidate records. These changes drastically improve the speed of the sampler,  
 262 and each can be parallelized if desired for additional computational gains. We provide a  
 263 summary of the notation used for the hashing procedure in Table 2. The computational  
 264 complexity of **fabl** is given in Lemma 1.

265 **Lemma 1.** Recall that  $n_1$  and  $n_2$  are the number of records in  $\mathbf{X}_1$  and  $\mathbf{X}_2$ , respectively.  
 266 Let  $F$  be the number of fields used for comparisons across records, and  $P$  be the number  
 267 of patterns that comparison vectors can exhibit. We assume  $B$  processors available  
 268 for parallelization. Then, the overall computational complexity of **fabl** is  $O(\frac{F}{B}n_1n_2) +$   
 269  $O(n_2P)$ .

270 *Proof.* To prove the computational complexity, we consider two steps: constructing the  
 271 comparison vectors and the Gibbs sampler. The computational complexity of all pairwise  
 272 comparisons across the two datafiles  $\mathbf{X}_1$  and  $\mathbf{X}_2$  is  $O(Fn_1n_2)$ . The hashing procedure  
 273 for all pairwise comparisons is also  $O(Fn_1n_2)$ . With  $B$  processors available, we can split  
 274 these computations across  $B$  equally sized partitions and compute these comparisons in

	m		u	
	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree
First Name	$\frac{19}{20}$	$\frac{1}{20}$	$\frac{1}{100}$	$\frac{99}{100}$
Last Name	$\frac{19}{20}$	$\frac{1}{20}$	$\frac{1}{100}$	$\frac{99}{100}$
Day	$\frac{20}{19}$	$\frac{1}{20}$	$\frac{1}{30}$	$\frac{29}{30}$
Month	$\frac{20}{19}$	$\frac{1}{20}$	$\frac{1}{12}$	$\frac{11}{12}$
Year	$\frac{20}{19}$	$\frac{1}{20}$	$\frac{1}{12}$	$\frac{11}{12}$

Table 3: Probabilities used for  $m$  and  $u$  distributions in simulation studies

parallel, so the complexity becomes  $O(\frac{F}{B}n_1n_2)$ . There are then trivial computational costs associated with synthesizing summary statistics across these partitions.

Without hashing, the computational complexity of updating the  $\mathbf{m}$  and  $\mathbf{u}$  parameters is  $O(Fn_1n_2)$ . However, by doing calculations over the agreement patterns rather than the individual records, hashing reduces the overall complexity to  $O(P)$ . The complexity of updating  $\mathbf{Z}$  sequentially at the record level is  $O(n_1n_2)$ . With hashing, we split this sampling into two steps. First, we sample the agreement pattern of the match with complexity  $O(n_2P)$ , and then we sample the record exhibiting that pattern with complexity  $O(n_2)$ . Thus, the complexity of sampling  $\mathbf{Z}$  is  $O(n_2P)$ . Since  $P \ll n_1$  in most applications, we have reduced the complexity of the Gibbs sampler from  $O(Fn_1n_2)$  under BRL to  $O(n_2P)$  under **fabl**. In summary, the total computational complexity is  $O(\frac{F}{B}n_1n_2) + O(n_2P)$ .  $\square$

## 5 Simulation Studies

We demonstrate the speed and accuracy of **fabl** as compared to BRL through several simulation studies.

### 5.1 Speed

In our first simulation, we generate comparison vectors from pre-specified distributions so that we can easily increase the size of the linkage problem. We use five binary comparisons with probabilities for matching and non-matching pairs shown in Table 3. The  $\mathbf{u}$  parameters are chosen to emulate what is seen in practice for first name, last name, day of birth, and month of birth. The parameters for year would vary largely by context, so we choose them here to adjust the desired difficulty of the linkage task. We simulate these data for different values of  $n_1$  and  $n_2$ , always with  $n_2/2$  records in common across datasets, and compare the run-time of **fabl** against BRL. Since we have 5 binary comparison fields, the number of unique patterns  $P$  is bounded above by  $2^5 = 32$ , a bound which is consistently attained in simulations with more records.

We note here that the implementation of BRL that we use is coded in C (Sadinle, 2017). In contrast, we use non-optimized code written in R for **fabl**. While this complicates comparisons, and indeed disfavors **fabl**, the computational speed gains for **fabl** are still evident, especially for larger sample sizes. Additionally, although **fabl** is amenable

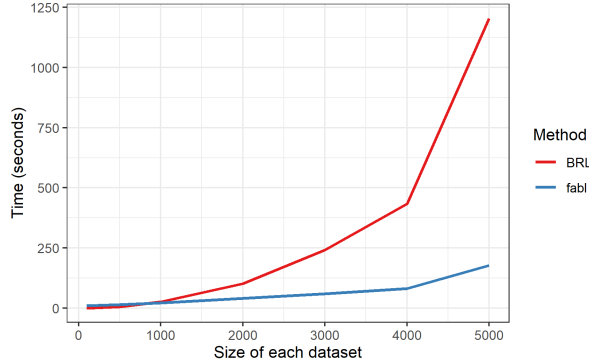


Figure 1: Run-time for BRL and `fabl` to run 1000 Gibbs iterations, including the hashing step for `fabl`, for increasing values of both  $n_1$  and  $n_2$ . We see near quadratic growth in run-time for BRL, and near linear growth for `fabl`.

305 to parallelization, this simulation was run on a single core. Implementing `fabl` in C++  
 306 with parallelization for the hashing step and sampling the matching status of the record  
 307 pairs should lead to even more computational gains.

308 In Figure 1, where we increase both  $n_1$  and  $n_2$ , BRL is faster than `fabl` for low sample  
 309 sizes, but `fabl` is significantly faster at handling larger data. In particular, run-time for  
 310 BRL grows quadratically (or linearly with the size of both  $\mathbf{X}_1$  and  $\mathbf{X}_2$ ) while run-time  
 311 for `fabl` grows linearly (in the size of only  $\mathbf{X}_2$ ).

312 In Figure 2, where we fix  $n_2 = 500$ , we see linear growth for the run-time under  
 313 BRL as  $n_1$  increases, and much more static run-time under `fabl`. The slight increases  
 314 in run-time for `fabl` are due primarily to the hashing step, which again can be run  
 315 in parallel for large data. To illustrate that these trends are generalizeable to other  
 316 specifications of the comparison vectors, we have included the run-time results for an  
 317 additional simulation study, under different comparison vector settings, in Appendix 7.4.

## 318 5.2 Accuracy under Full Estimates

319 We replicate a simulation study from [Sadinle \(2017\)](#) to compare `fabl` against BRL on  
 320 several synthetic datasets with varying amounts of error and overlap (the number of  
 321 records in common across files). Following methods proposed by [Christen and Pudjijono \(2009\)](#) and [Christen and Vatsalan \(2013\)](#), clean records are first simulated from frequency  
 322 tables for first name, last name, age, and occupation in Australia. Fields are then chosen  
 323 for distortion uniformly at random. Names are subject to string insertions, deletions  
 324 and substitutions, as well as common keyboard, phonetic, and optical recognition errors.  
 325 Age and occupation are distorted through keyboard errors and missingness.  
 326

327 We create comparison vectors according to the default settings of the `compareRecords`  
 328 function from the BRL package, shown in Table 4. Each simulation identifies matched

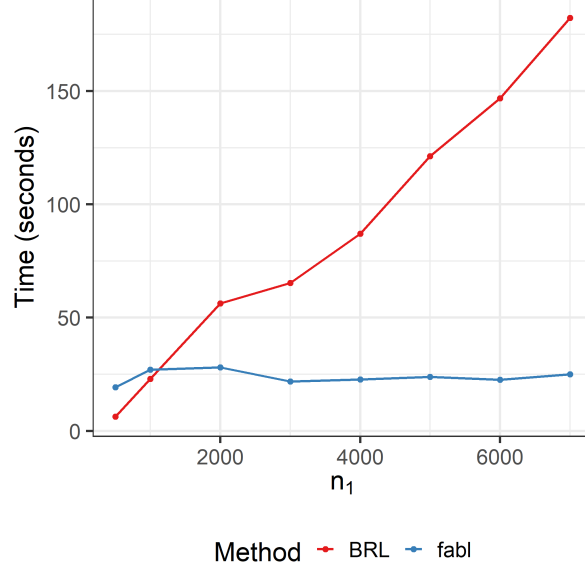


Figure 2: Run-time for BRL and `fabl` to run 1000 Gibbs iterations, including hashing step for `fabl`, with increasing  $n_1$  and  $n_2$  fixed at 500. We see linear growth in run-time for BRL, and near constant run-time for `fabl`.

Fields	Similarity	Level of Disagreement			
		1	2	3	4
First and Last Name	Levenstein	0	(0, .25]	(.25, .5]	(.5, .1]
Age and Occupation	Binary	Agree	Disagree		

Table 4: Construction of comparison vectors for accuracy study with simulated datasets.

329 individuals between two datasets, each with 500 records. We conduct linkage when  
 330 matching records exhibit 1, 2, and 3 errors across the four fields, and when there are 50,  
 331 250, and 450 individuals in common across datasets. Under each of these settings, we  
 332 have 100 pairs of simulated datasets in order to obtain uncertainty quantification on  
 333 our performance metrics. We use flat priors for all  $m$  and  $u$  parameters, run the Gibbs  
 334 Sampler for 1000 iterations, and discard the first 100 as burn-in. We calculate Bayes  
 335 estimates of the linkage structure using the losses  $\theta_R = \infty, \theta_{10} = 1, \theta_{01} = 1, \theta_{11} = 2$ .  
 336 Traceplots for parameters of interest for one example simulation are provided in Appendix  
 337 7.3; they show no obvious concern over MCMC convergence.

338 We compare `fabl` to BRL in terms of recall, precision and F-measure, as defined in  
 339 Christen (2012). Recall is the proportion of true matches found by the model, that is,  
 340  $\sum_{j=1}^{n_2} I(\hat{Z}_j = Z_j, Z_j \leq n_1) / \sum_{j=1}^{n_2} I(Z_j \leq n_1)$ . Precision is the proportion of links found  
 341 by the model that are true matches, that is  $\sum_{j=1}^{n_2} I(\hat{Z}_j = Z_j, Z_j \leq n_1) / \sum_{j=1}^{n_2} I(\hat{Z}_j \leq n_1)$ .

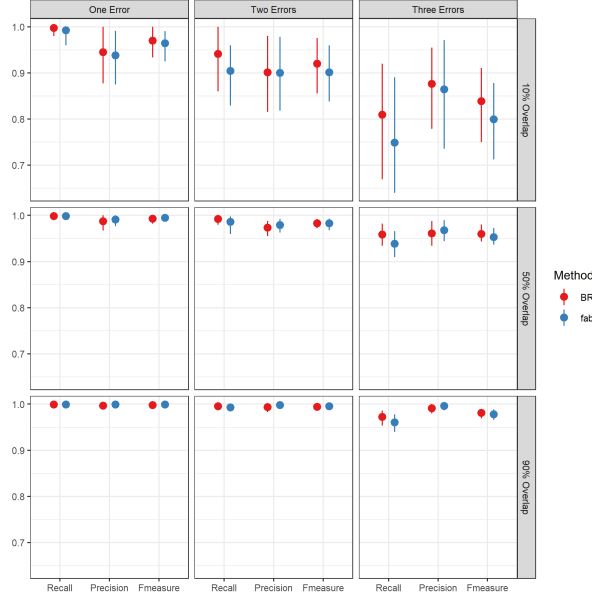


Figure 3: Posterior means and credible intervals for accuracy metrics under the replication of simulation study from [Sadinle \(2017\)](#). For each level of overlap and each level of error, we have 100 paired sets of 500 records. Thus this table represents results for 900 datasets. We see comparable performance for all levels of error and overlap.

342 The F-measure balances the two metrics to provide an overall measure of accuracy, and  
 343 is defined as  $2 \times (\text{Recall} + \text{Precision}) / (\text{Recall} \times \text{Precision})$ . In Figure 3, we see that  
 344 the two methods have comparable performance at all levels of error and overlap. In  
 345 the specific case of high error and low overlap, widely regarded as the most difficult  
 346 linkage scenario, we see that **fabl** performs slightly worse on average; however, the  
 347 overall accuracy level remains high.

### 348 5.3 Accuracy under Partial Estimates

349 By leaving  $\theta_{10} = \theta_{01} = 1$  and  $\theta_{11} = 2$ , but setting  $\theta_R = 0.1$ , we allow the model  
 350 to decline to decide a match for certain records, with nonassignment being 10% as  
 351 costly as a false match. In this context, we are no longer focused on finding all true  
 352 matches, but rather protecting against false matches. Thus, instead of recall, we use the  
 353 negative predictive value (NPV), defined as the proportion of non-links that are actual  
 354 non-matches. Mathematically,  $\text{NPV} = \sum_{j=1}^{n_2} I(\hat{Z}_j = Z_j = n_1 + j) / \sum_{j=1}^{n_2} I(\hat{Z}_j = n_1 + j)$ .  
 355 We continue to use the precision, which is renamed the positive predictive value (PPV)  
 356 in this context. Lastly, we also examine the rejection rate (RR), or how often the model  
 357 declines to make a linkage decision, defined as  $\text{RR} = \sum_{j=1}^{n_2} I(\hat{Z}_j = R) / n_2$ . To convey  
 358 this information alongside NPV and PPV, for which values close to 1 indicate strong

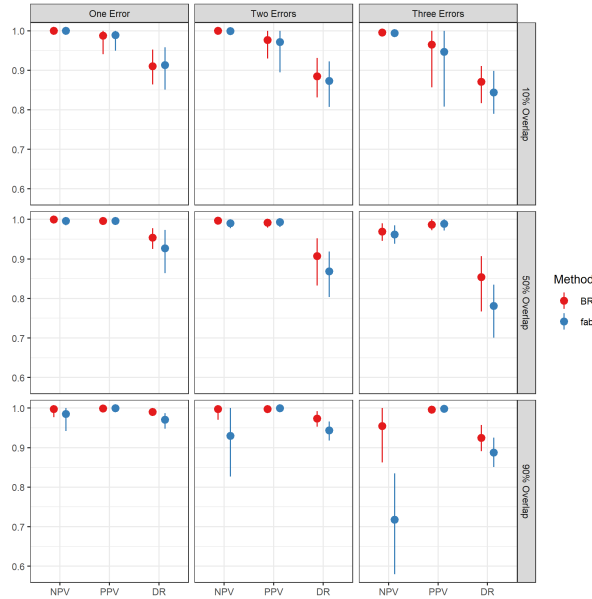


Figure 4: Negative predictive value (NPV), positive predictive value (PPV), and decision rate (DR) on simulated datasets. We see poorer performance for **fabl** only in situations with high overlap.

performance, we report the decision rate (DR), defined as  $DR = 1 - RR$ .

In Figure 4, we see that **fabl** maintains equivalently strong PPV as **BRL** across all linkage settings. However, with high amounts of error, and thus fewer accurate and discerning fields of information, the rejection rate under **fabl** rises, leading to a decrease in NPV. Since **fabl** does not remove previously matched records from consideration for a new record, posterior probabilities of matches at times can be split across more records; in contrast, **BRL** is able to maintain higher confidence in matches in this setting. If one wishes to use partial estimates, **fabl** will possibly leave more linkages for the modeller to match by hand than would be left under **BRL**, but the decisions made by each method will have nearly equal accuracy.

## 6 Case Studies

In our first case study, we revisit data from the El Salvadoran Civil War analyzed by [Sadinle \(2017\)](#). Though the data files used in this case study are small, it shows how the computational complexity of **fabl** depends on the number of unique agreement patterns found in the data, and how significant computational gains can be achieved by simplifying the construction of the comparison vectors. In the second case study, we apply **fabl** to link records from the National Long Term Care Study (NLTCs), a larger



linkage task that is not feasible in reasonable time under BRL with typical computing setups.

## 6.1 Civilian Casualties from the El Salvadoran Civil War

The country of El Salvador was immersed in civil war from 1980 to 1991. Throughout the time, several organizations attempted to document casualties of the conflict. When estimating the total number of casualties, one cannot simply sum the numbers recorded by each organization, as it is likely that the same individuals are recorded in multiple casualty lists. Instead, record linkage techniques must be used to merge datasets before analyzing the data (Lum et al., 2013). We utilize lists of casualties from the war, one collected by El Rescate - Tutela Regal (ERTL) and another from the Salvadoran Human Rights Commission (CDHES, by its acronym in Spanish).<sup>1</sup> The ERTL dataset consists of digitized denunciations that had been published throughout the conflict, and the CDHES dataset consists of casualties that had been reported directly to the organization (Howland, 2008; Ball, 2000). The ERTL required additional investigation before recording denunciations as human rights abuses, and reports to the CHDES were made shortly after the events occurred; thus, both datasets are thought to be fairly reliable.

There are several challenges with these data. First, both datasets have been automatically digitized, which inherently leads to some degree of typographical error. Second, the only fields recorded are given name, last name, date of death, and place of death. It is relatively common for a parent and child to share the same given name, resulting in indistinguishable records for two different individuals.

Following Sadinle (2017), we utilize records that have non-missing entries for given and last name, which results in  $n_1 = 4420$  records in CHDES and  $n_2 = 1323$  records in ERTL. We standardize names to account for common misspellings and use a modified Levenstein distance when comparing names to account for the fact that second names are often omitted in Spanish. Place of death is recorded by municipality and department within that municipality; however, since department is missing in 95% of records in CHDES and 80% of records in ERTL, we exclude department from our analysis. Thus, we conduct record linkage using given name, last name, municipality, and day, month, and year of death. We again flat priors for the  $\mathbf{m}$  and  $\mathbf{u}$  parameters.

We initially followed the comparison vector constructions set by Sadinle (2017), using using four levels of agreement for each field, according to the thresholds provided in Table 5. This results in  $4^5 \times 2 = 2048$  possible agreement patterns, with 1173 patterns realized in the data. However, conducting record linkage, we noticed that the posterior distributions of several levels of the  $\mathbf{m}$  and  $\mathbf{u}$  parameters were nearly identical, suggesting that these levels were unnecessary.

Therefore, we re-ran our analysis with fewer agreement levels for each field according to Table 6. Among the 216 possible agreement patterns, 159 are realized in the data. With this revised comparison specification, `fabl` ran in 61 seconds, approximately 4 times faster than the BRL run time of 239 seconds. The estimates of the  $\mathbf{m}$  parameters under

---

<sup>1</sup>We thank the Human Rights Data Analysis Group (HRDAG) for granting access to this data.

Fields	Similarity	Level of Disagreement			
		1	2	3	4
First and Last Name	Modified Levenstein	0	(0, .25]	(.25, .5]	(.5, 1]
Year of Death	Absolute Difference	0	1	2	3+
Month of Death	Absolute Difference	0	1	2-3	4+
Day of Death	Absolute Difference	0	1-2	3-7	8+
Municipality	Binary	Agree	Disagree		

Table 5: Construction of comparison vectors for El Salvador data resembling original implementation from (Sadinle, 2018). This set up leads to 2048 possible agreement patterns in total.

Fields	Similarity	Level of Disagreement		
		1	2	3
First and Last Name	Modified Levenstein	0	(0, .25]	(.25, 1]
Year of Death	Binary	Agree	Disagree	
Month of Death	Binary	Agree	Disagree	
Day of Death	Absolute Difference	0	1	2+
Municipality	Binary	Agree	Disagree	

Table 6: Construction of comparison vectors for El Salvador for increased speed under **fabl**. This set up leads to 216 possible agreement patterns in total.

each method are very similar, as shown in Figure 6. Estimates of  $\mathbf{u}$  are indistinguishable, and thus omitted. Traceplots for parameters of interest are provided in Appendix 7.5.

For completeness, we note that linkage with the more detailed comparison vectors required 240 seconds for BRL, and 261 seconds for **fabl**. Apparently, the number of patterns was sufficiently many that the computational savings from **fabl** does not overcome the inherent speed differences of C as opposed to R.

Through **fabl**, we arrive at a Bayes estimate of 179 individuals recorded in both datasets. We calculate posterior samples of the size of the overlap across files by finding the number of matches found in each iteration of the Gibbs sampler, and subtracting the number of matches that violate one-to-one matching. The posterior 95% credible interval for the overlap across files is (206, 238), indicating that the Bayes estimate identifies fewer matches than the Gibbs sampler identifies on average. This is because a large number of records in ERTL have multiple plausible matches in CDHES; **fabl** recognizes that a match exists among the several options, but is unable to definitely declare a specific pair as a match in the Bayes estimate. We also compute a partial estimate of the linkage structure, using  $\theta_{10} = \theta_{01} = 1$ ,  $\theta_{11} = 2$ , and  $\theta_R = 0.1$  as in the simulation study in Section 5.2. Here, the Bayes estimate provides 136 matches of which the model is quite confident, and 175 records to verify manually. This means that after clerical review, the number of individuals replicated across datasets would fall in the interval (136, 311), encapsulating the posterior credible interval. More or fewer records could be identified for clerical review by decreasing or increasing  $\theta_R$ .

We see similar results under BRL, with a Bayes estimate of 181 individuals recorded

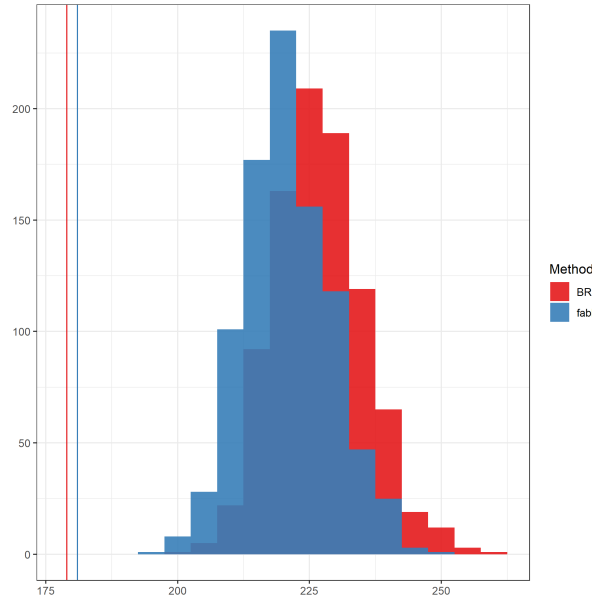


Figure 5: Posterior distribution and Bayes estimate of overlap across the two files. We note they are quite similar under both methods.

in both datasets, a posterior 95% credible interval of (211, 244), and a range of (140, 294) after the partial estimate and clerical review. See Figure 5 for a visual comparison of the Bayes estimate and posterior credible intervals for the two methods. We note that Bayes estimates falling outside of posterior credible intervals has occurred previously in the record linkage literature (Sadinle, 2017; Steorts et al., 2016), and remains a topic for future research.

## 6.2 National Long Term Care Study

The National Long Term Care Study (NLTCs) is a longitudinal study tracking the health outcomes of Medicare recipients. The initial survey began in 1982, with follow-up surveys taken approximately every five years. As such, patients are surveyed at most once in a given year, and many patients are surveyed across multiple years. In addition, patients can either drop out of the study, pass away, or enter as new patients. Hence, the assumptions of our model hold for this study. We seek to link records over the  $n_1 = 20485$  records from 1982 to the  $n_2 = 17466$  records from 1989. The NLTCs data have longitudinal links, so that in reality one does not need to conduct record linkage. However, following the strategy in Guha et al. (2021), we break the longitudinal links and treat the data from 1982 and 1989 as stand-alone datafiles.

We link records using sex, date of birth, and location using the thresholds shown

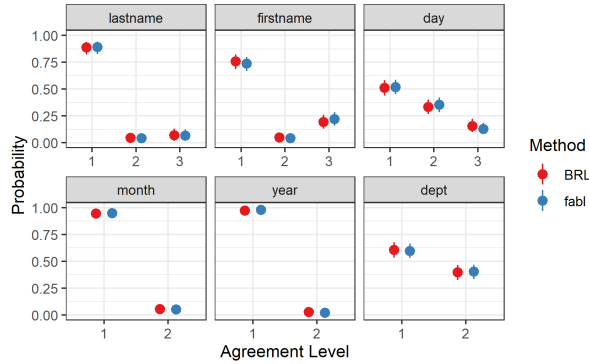


Figure 6: Posterior estimates of  $\mathbf{m}$  parameters with 95% credible intervals for El Salvador case study. They are quite similar across the two methods.

Fields	Similarity	Level of Disagreement		
		1	2	3
Sex	Binary	Agree	Disagree	
Year of Birth	Binary	Agree	Disagree	
Month of Birth	Binary	Agree	Disagree	
Day of Birth	Binary	Agree	Disagree	
Location	Custom	Same State and Office	Same State	Otherwise

Table 7: Construction of comparison vectors for NTLCS data

in Table 7. Storing three comparison scores for each of  $20485 \times 17466 \approx 400,000,000$  record pairs would require approximately 8GB of memory. Standard settings on a 16GB personal computer do not allow storage of an object of this size, and thus BRL is unable to perform this linkage task on such a machine. However, through the `fabl` framework, we compute comparisons over 30 smaller comparison tasks, hash results, and compress information through storage efficient indexing. The resulting data object is just 10 MB, approximately 0.1% of what is required for the raw comparisons. Constructing the comparisons sequentially took approximately 40 minutes, which could be reduced considerably through parallel computing.

We run a Gibbs sampler for 1000 iterations, taking about 235 seconds. As shown in Figure 7, the Bayes estimate of the linkage structure consists of 9634 matches, with a 95% credible interval of (9581, 9740). Since we have access to the true linkage structure, we can calculate recall to be 0.89 and precision to be 0.98, resulting in an F-measure of 0.94. Traceplots do not suggest convergence issues, and are similar to those seen in Appendix 7.3 and 7.5

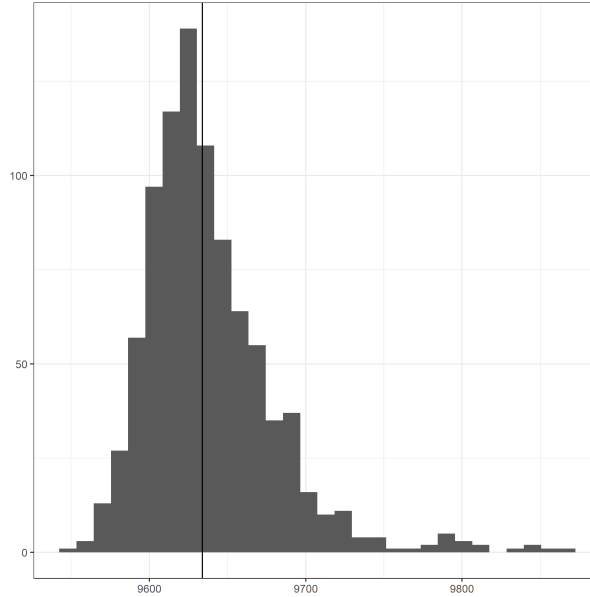


Figure 7: Posterior distribution and Bayes estimate of overlap across years 1982 and 1989 of NLTCs data.

## 7 Conclusion

In this paper, we have proposed **fabl**, a Bayesian record linkage method that extends the work of [Sadinle \(2017\)](#) to scale to large data sets. We have proven that the proposed hashing method and model assumptions allow for a linkage procedure whose computational complexity does not scale with the size of the larger dataset. This makes **fabl** computationally advantageous in many linkage scenarios, particularly when one datafile is substantially smaller than the other. We have also shown that storage efficient indexing, in tandem with hashing, greatly reduces the memory costs required for all-to-all comparisons, giving practitioners an option for larger record linkage tasks without the use of blocking or indexing. We have demonstrated the speed and accuracy of **fabl** by replicating a simulation study and a case study in [Sadinle \(2017\)](#), and through an additional case study that is computationally infeasible under **BRL**.

Although the **fabl** method greatly reduces the memory costs for all-to-all comparisons, the computing all  $n_1 \times n_2$  record pairs can still be infeasible for larger linkage tasks. Indeed, constructing the comparison vectors for the NLTCs linkage task involving around 40,000 records in Section 6.2 took around 40 minutes. Due to the quadratic nature of the comparison space, this computation time would grow quickly with the size of the linkage task, and would be infeasibly slow when dealing with millions of records. Although it is common to use deterministic blocking to reduce the comparison space and then apply probabilistic record linkage within each block, issues arise when sizes of blocks vary

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491 across the linkage task. Thus in future work, we seek to extend **fabl** to account for  
492 such deterministic blocking, making the framework amenable to arbitrarily large linkage  
493 tasks.

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## Appendix

### 7.1 Derivations of Full Conditionals

We provide detailed derivations of the full-conditionals provided in Section 3.1. The  $\mathbf{m}$  and  $\mathbf{u}$  parameters are updated through standard multinomial-Dirichlet distributions. For a particular  $m_{fl}$ , we have

$$\begin{aligned} p(m_{fl}|\Gamma, \mathbf{Z}) &\propto \prod_{i=1}^{n_1} \prod_{j=1}^{n_2} m_{fl}^{I(Z_j=i)I(\gamma_{ij}^f=l)I_{obs}(\gamma_{ij}^f)} \times m_{fl}^{\alpha_{fl}-1} \\ &= m_{fl}^{\alpha_{fl}(\mathbf{Z})-1}, \end{aligned}$$

where  $\alpha_{fl}(\mathbf{Z}) = \alpha_{fl} + \sum_{i,j} I_{obs}(\gamma_{ij}^f)I(\gamma_{ij}^f=l)I(z_j=i)$ . Analogous procedures lead to the posterior distribution  $p(u_{fl}|\Gamma, \mathbf{Z}) \propto u_{fl}^{\beta_{fl}(\mathbf{Z})-1}$ , where  $\beta_{fl}(\mathbf{Z}) = \beta_{fl} + \sum_{i,j} I_{obs}(\gamma_{ij}^f)I(\gamma_{ij}^f=l)I(z_j \neq i)$ . Thus for the vectors of parameters  $\mathbf{m}_f$  and  $\mathbf{u}_f$ , we have

$$\begin{aligned} \mathbf{m}_f|\mathbf{Z}, \Gamma &\sim \text{Dirichlet}(\alpha_{f1}(\mathbf{Z}), \dots, \alpha_{fL_f}(\mathbf{Z})), \\ \mathbf{u}_f|\mathbf{Z}, \Gamma &\sim \text{Dirichlet}(\beta_{f1}(\mathbf{Z}), \dots, \beta_{fL_f}(\mathbf{Z})). \end{aligned}$$

In order to define the full conditional for  $\mathbf{Z}$ , we must provide the posterior distribution for  $\pi$ , and provide a more tractable expression for the portion of the likelihood relevant to a particular record  $j \in \mathbf{X}_2$ . Since  $\pi$  encodes the rate of matching across the two datasets, the posterior distribution  $p(\pi|\Gamma, \mathbf{Z}, \mathbf{m}, \mathbf{u}, \alpha_\pi, \beta_\pi)$  depends only on the number of links  $n_{12}(\mathbf{Z}) = \sum_{i=1}^{n_2} I(z_j < n_1 + j)$  encoded by  $\mathbf{Z}$  (and hyperparameters). Thus, we use  $p(\pi|\mathbf{Z}, \alpha_\pi, \beta_\pi)$  and have

$$\begin{aligned} p(\pi|\mathbf{Z}, \alpha_\pi, \beta_\pi) &\propto p(\mathbf{Z}|\pi)p(\pi) \\ &\propto \pi^{n_{12}(\mathbf{Z})}(1-\pi)^{n_2-n_{12}(\mathbf{Z})}\pi^{\alpha_\pi-1}(1-\pi)^{\beta_\pi-1} \\ &\propto \pi^{n_{12}(\mathbf{Z})+\alpha_\pi-1}(1-\pi)^{n_1-n_{12}(\mathbf{Z})+\beta_\pi-1}. \end{aligned}$$

Thus  $\pi^{(s+1)}|\mathbf{Z}^{(s+1), \alpha_\pi, \beta_\pi}$  has a  $\text{Beta}(n_{12}(\mathbf{Z}) + \alpha_\pi, n_2 - n_{12}(\mathbf{Z}) + \beta_\pi)$  distribution.

Let  $\Gamma_{.j}$  denote the set of  $n_1$  comparison vectors with  $j \in \mathbf{X}_2$ . We have

$$\begin{aligned} p(\Gamma_{.j}|Z_j = z_j, \mathbf{m}, \mathbf{u}) &\propto \prod_{i=1}^{n_1} \left[ \prod_{f=1}^F \prod_{l=1}^{L_f} m_{fl}^{I(Z_j=i)I(\gamma_{ij}^f=l)I_{obs}(\gamma_{ij}^f)} u_{fl}^{I(Z_j \neq i)I(\gamma_{ij}^f=l)I_{obs}(\gamma_{ij}^f)} \right] \\ &\propto \prod_{i=1}^{n_1} \frac{\left[ \prod_{f=1}^F \prod_{l=1}^{L_f} m_{fl}^{I(Z_j=i)I(\gamma_{ij}^f=l)I_{obs}(\gamma_{ij}^f)} u_{fl}^{I(Z_j \neq i)I(\gamma_{ij}^f=l)I_{obs}(\gamma_{ij}^f)} \right]}{\prod_{f=1}^F \prod_{l=1}^{L_f} m_{fl}^{I(\gamma_{ij}^f=l)I_{obs}(\gamma_{ij}^f)} u_{fl}^{I(\gamma_{ij}^f=l)I_{obs}(\gamma_{ij}^f)}} \\ &\propto \prod_{i=1}^{n_1} \left( \prod_{f=1}^F \prod_{l=1}^{L_f} \frac{m_{fl}}{u_{fl}} \right)^{I(z_j=i)I(\gamma_{ij}^f=l)I_{obs}(\gamma_{ij}^f)} \end{aligned}$$

$$= \begin{cases} w_{z_j, j} & z_j \leq n_1; \\ 1 & z_j = n_1 + j, \end{cases}$$

where

$$w_{ij} = \prod_{f=1}^F \prod_{l=1}^{L_f} \left( \frac{m_{fl}}{u_{fl}} \right)^{I(\gamma_{ij}^f = l) I_{obs}(\gamma_{ij}^f)}.$$

With the likelihood in this form, we derive an expression for the posterior distribution of  $\mathbf{Z}$ . Because we sample each  $Z_j$  independently of all other  $Z_{j'}$ , we use only the full conditional for an individual  $Z_j$ :

$$\begin{aligned} & p\left(Z_j^{(s+1)} | \Gamma_{\cdot, j}, \mathbf{m}, \mathbf{u}, \mathbf{Z}^{(s)}, \pi\right) \\ & \propto p(\Gamma_{\cdot, j} | Z_j^{(s+1)}, \mathbf{m}, \mathbf{u}) P(Z_j^{(s+1)} | \pi) \\ & \propto \left( \sum_{i=1}^{n_1} w_{z_j, j} I(z_j = i) + I(z_j = n_1 + j) \right) \left( \pi \sum_{i=1}^{n_1} \frac{1}{n_1} I(z_j = i) + (1 - \pi) I(z_j = n_1 + j) \right) \\ & = \frac{\pi}{n_1} \sum_{i=1}^{n_1} w_{z_j, j} I(z_j = i) + (1 - \pi) I(z_j = n_1 + j). \\ & = \begin{cases} \frac{\pi}{n_1} w_{z_j, j} & z_j \leq n_1; \\ 1 - \pi & z_j = n_1 + j. \end{cases} \end{aligned}$$

594 For more direct comparability with the method from [Sadinle \(2017\)](#), we avoid  
595 sampling  $\pi$  directly, and instead integrate over it in the final full conditional for  $Z_j$ .

$$\begin{aligned} & p\left(Z_j^{(s+1)} = i | \Gamma, \mathbf{m}, \mathbf{u}, \mathbf{Z}^{(s)}\right) \\ & = \int_{\pi} p\left(Z_j^{(s+1)} | \Gamma, \mathbf{m}, \mathbf{u}, \mathbf{Z}^{(s)}, \pi\right) p\left(\pi | \mathbf{Z}^{(s)}\right) d\pi \\ & = \int_{\pi} \left[ \frac{\pi}{n_1} w_{z_j, j} I(z_j \leq n_1) + (1 - \pi) I(z_j = n_1 + j) \right] p\left(\pi | \mathbf{Z}^{(s)}\right) d\pi \\ & = \frac{\int_{\pi} \pi p\left(\pi | \mathbf{Z}^{(s)}\right) d\pi}{n_1} w_{z_j, j} I(z_j \leq n_1) + \left( 1 - \int_{\pi} \pi p\left(\pi | \mathbf{Z}^{(s)}\right) d\pi \right) I(z_j = n_1 + j) \\ & = \frac{n_{12}(\mathbf{Z}) + \alpha_{\pi}}{n_1(n_2 + \alpha_{\pi} + \beta_{\pi})} w_{z_j, j} I(z_j \leq n_1) + \frac{n_2 - n_{12}(\mathbf{Z}) + \beta_{\pi}}{n_2 + \alpha_{\pi} + \beta_{\pi}} I(z_j = n_1 + j) \\ & \propto w_{z_j, j} I(z_j \leq n_1) + n_1 \frac{n_2 - n_{12}(\mathbf{Z}) + \beta_{\pi}}{n_{12}(\mathbf{Z}) + \alpha_{\pi}} I(z_j = n_1 + j) \\ & = \begin{cases} w_{z_j, j} & z_j \leq n_1; \\ n_1 \frac{n_2 - n_{12}(\mathbf{Z}) + \beta_{\pi}}{n_{12}(\mathbf{Z}) + \alpha_{\pi}} & z_j = n_1 + j. \end{cases} \end{aligned}$$

## 7.2 One Hot Encoding Transformation

As described in Section 4, `fabl` makes use of one-hot encodings to aid in vectorized computations. For  $\gamma_{ij}^f$  with  $L_f$  levels, define  $e_{ij}^f$  to be an  $L_f \times 1$  vector. When  $\gamma_{ij}^f = l$ , we set the  $l^{th}$  element of  $e_{ij}^f$  to be 1, and set the other  $L_f - 1$  elements of  $e_{ij}^f$  to be 0. We then concatenate the  $e_{ij}^f$  for all  $f \in \{1, \dots, F\}$ , resulting in the one-hot encoded comparison vector  $e_{ij}$  of length  $\sum_{f=1}^F L_f$ .

For example, consider comparing the toy records shown in Table 8 with  $L = (3, 3, 2, 2)$  levels of agreement for last name, first name, DOB, and city respectively. Since the first name differs by only one letter, a reasonable comparison vector for this pair would be  $\gamma_{ij} = (1, 2, 1, 2)$ . The one hot encoding representation of this vector is  $e_{ij} = (1, 0, 0, 0, 1, 0, 1, 0, 0, 1)$ .

Last Name	First Name	DOB	City
Smith	Taylor	01/01/2000	Durham
Smith	Tayler	01/01/2000	Raleigh

Table 8: Example records for one hot encoding.

## 7.3 Traceplots for Simulation Study

Below are traceplots for one of the 900 linkage tasks that comprise the simulation in Section 5.2. It is set up with one error across the linkage fields and 50 duplicates across files. Traceplots across other settings exhibit similar behavior. Note that traceplots for **u** parameters show very little variation because the overwhelming majority of record pairs are nonmatching.

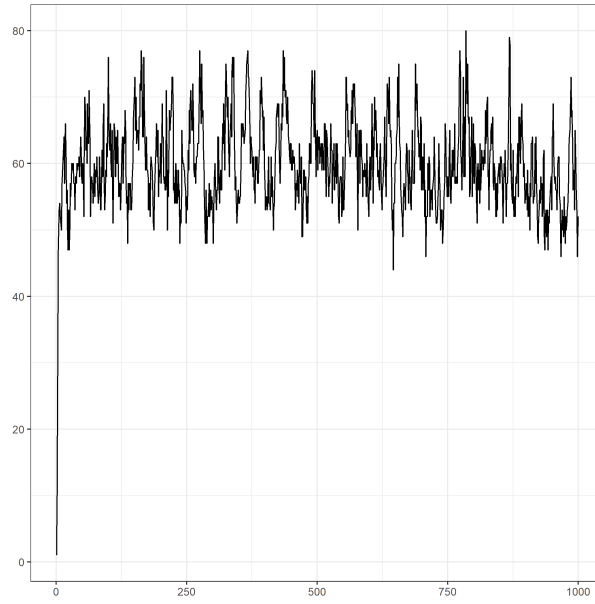


Figure 8: Representative traceplot of overlap between files from simulation study in Section 5.2

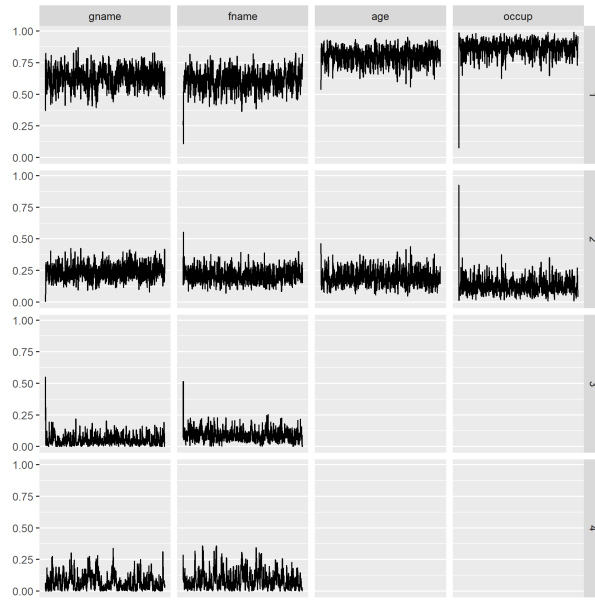


Figure 9: Representative traceplot of  $m$  parameter from simulation study in Section 5.2

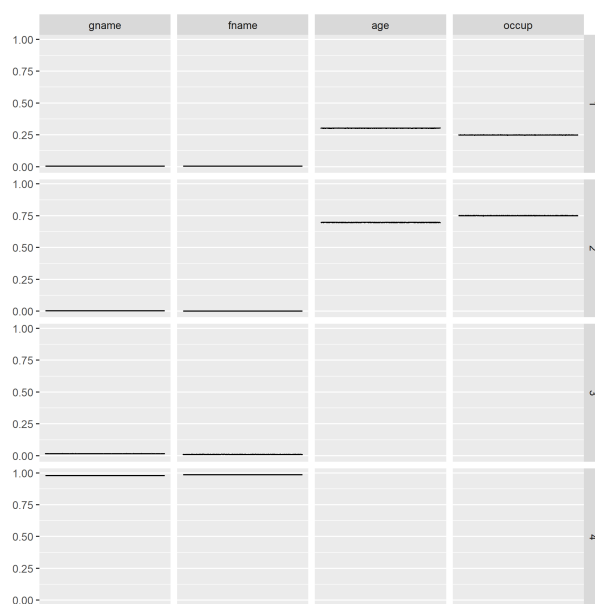


Figure 10: Representative traceplot of  $u$  parameters from simulation study in Section 5.2

## 7.4 Additional Speed Simulation Study

To illustrate that different constructions of the comparison vectors lead to similar speed gains, we replicate the speed study of Section 5.1 under different settings. Here, we use four fields of comparison, each with three possible levels of agreement, resulting in  $3^4 = 81$  possible patterns.

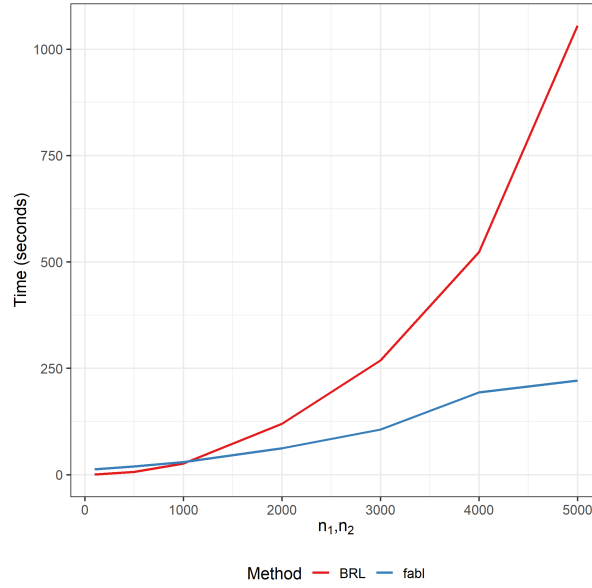


Figure 11: Run-time for BRL and `fabl` to run 1000 Gibbs iterations, including hashing step for `fabl`, for increasing values of both  $n_1$  and  $n_2$ . We see near quadratic growth in run-time for BRL, and near linear growth for `fabl`.

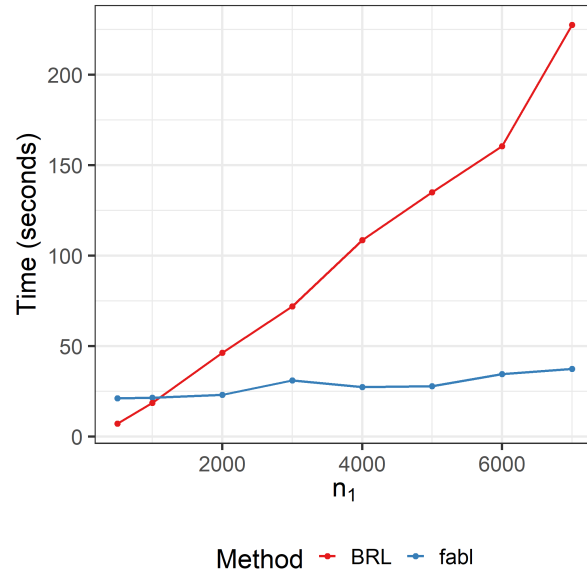


Figure 12: Run-time for BRL and **fabl** to run 1000 Gibbs iterations, including hashing step for **fabl**, with increasing  $n_1$  and  $n_2$  fixed at 500. We see linear growth in run-time for BRL, and near constant run-time for **fabl**.



## 618 7.5 Traceplots for El Salvador Case Study

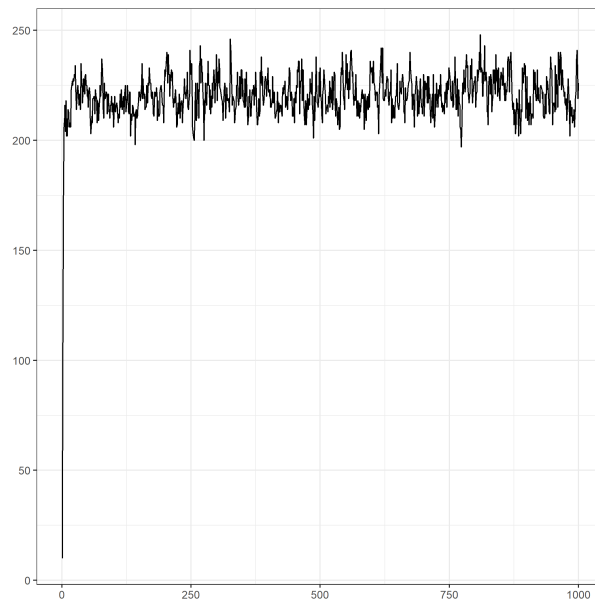


Figure 13: Traceplot for number of matches found across datasets in El Salvador case study.

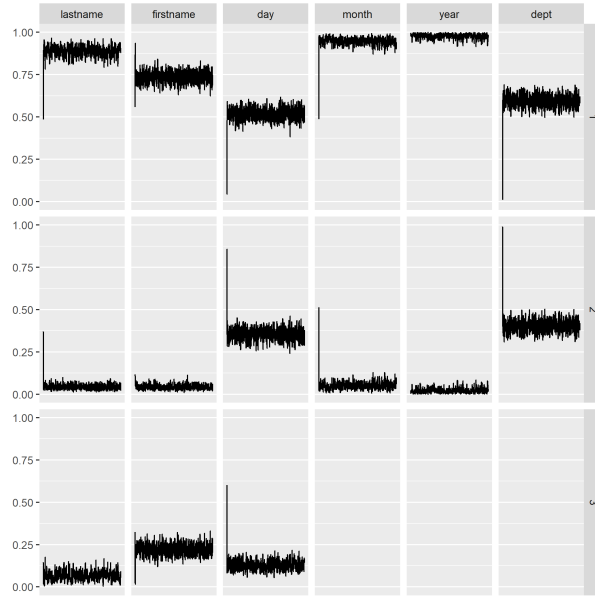


Figure 14: Traceplot for m parameter in El Salvador case study.

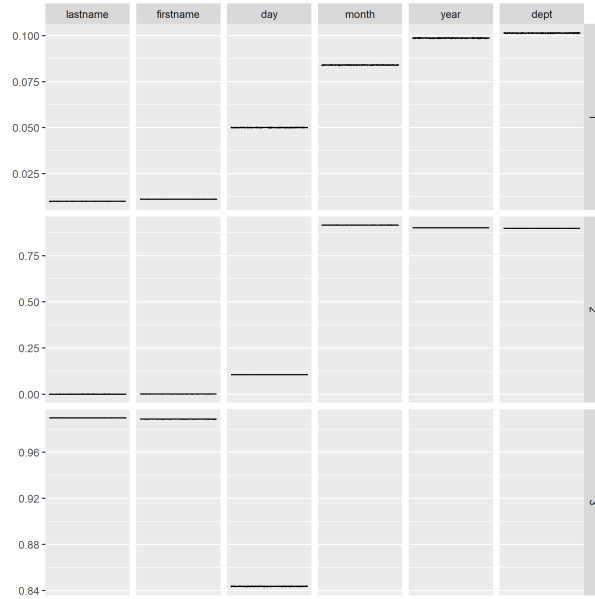


Figure 15: Traceplot for u parameter in El Salvador case study.