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***npstat*: An Efficient Tool to Explore the Population Genome Variability and Divergence using Pool Sequencing Data**

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Abstract

Pool sequencing has emerged as a valuable approach in ecological studies, particularly when dealing with very small organisms (with limited amount of DNA available), when distinguish individual organisms is a challenge (e.g., in colonies, microbiome), when there is a trade-off between the sequencing cost and the number of individuals to sequence, when the main goal is to estimate nucleotide variability and variant frequency patterns at the population level (that is, when individual information is not required). Estimates of variability can be efficiently explored by analyzing sequences of pooled individuals sampled from the population. When using this approach, the number of pooled individuals and the mean read depth are key choices in the experimental design. The software *npstat* calculates different estimates of nucleotide variability and neutrality tests, including the number of synonymous and nonsynonymous variants and the proportion of beneficial substitutions (alpha) using the MKT approach, these last when a GTF annotation file and an outgroup is provided.

Key Words

Polymorphism, Divergence, Population Genomics, Proportion of Beneficial substitutions, Sliding Windows Analyses.

Running Head

npstat for Pool Sequencing Variability Analysis

1. Introduction

Pool sequencing is widely employed in molecular ecology studies [e.g., 1,2,3,4], particularly when working with non-model organisms, as they typically have fewer genetic tools and resources and for which obtaining individual sequencing data remains expensive. Still, it has been used in large-scale population studies of model organisms like *Drosophila melanogaster* [4,5]. However, this approach has some limitations, such as uncertainty in the number of sequenced individuals in a given sample and the lack of individual information. Despite these constraints, pool sequencing has proven to be an effective method for assessing population variability [6]. Among its advantages is that including many individuals in the pool significantly reduces the variance in variability estimates while reducing the sequencing costs compared to individual sequencing [6]. The variance in the estimates of allele frequency arises from a two-step sampling process: first, by sampling individuals from the population, and second, by sampling sequencing reads from the pooled sample. The total variance is approximately the sum of the variances from these two sampling events [6,7]. Therefore, for experiments with the same read depth, increasing the number of pooled individuals is an effective strategy to reduce the overall variance in the allele frequency estimates.

In analysis of variation using pool sequencing, the primary goal is typically to infer the whole-genome site frequency spectrum of the population to subsequently obtain the population-level estimates and statistics derived from this data [e.g., 8,7]. In contrast, *npstat* is designed for the direct estimation of summary statistics of genetic variation commonly used in population genetics from the data, such as Watterson's, Tajima's, and Fay and Wu's estimators [9,10,11,12]. It also performs neutrality tests like Tajima's *D*, Fay and Wu's *H*, and the McDonald-Kreitman test (MKT) [11,12,13]. Some of these analyses require a GFF (Generic Feature Format, <https://gmod.org>) annotation file to calculate synonymous and nonsynonymous positions and an outgroup sequence.

2. Materials

Data requirements to run *npstat*

npstat requires pool sequencing DNA data from a population to perform the analysis of variability. This data must be provided in mpileup format [14]. Pool sequencing reads (e.g., files in fastq format) must first be trimmed and filtered (i.e., to remove duplicated reads, adapter sequences, low-quality reads), and then aligned

against a reference sequence. The reference sequence (in FASTA format) is usually a consensus genome sequence from the same species, although a closely related species or an outgroup may also be used as a reference. Once the filtered reads are aligned against the reference (using for example bwa [15]), and optionally optimized and re filtered (e.g., removing duplicates and recalibrating base quality scores using GenomeAnalysisToolKit [16]), the resulted aligned pool sequencing data (in BAM format [14]) can be converted to mpileup format using bcftools [14,17].

Additional files can be used to perform optional analysis:

- (i) A FASTA-formatted outgroup sequence aligned to the reference sequence used in the pool-sequencing dataset. This is necessary to perform analysis that needs to estimate divergence (e.g., when comparing patterns of polymorphism versus divergence). In case of using an outgroup as a reference, the same sequence can be used to perform this analysis.
- (ii) A GFF (version 3) file containing the annotation of functional regions analyzed (e.g., the coordinates of genes or cds regions, the strand and the frame of exons) of the species used as a reference. This information is needed to estimate the number of nonsynonymous and synonymous variants from the pool sequencing data.
- (iii) A text file containing the coordinates of specific SNP (Single Nucleotide Polymorphisms) in the analysed region. Each row should correspond to a specific position for each SNP. If this option is used, the program only analyzes the included positions in the file.

Install *npstat*

npstat repository is located in <https://github.com/lucaferretti/npstat>. *npstat* can be installed locally using a docker container. Using Docker to build and run *npstat* provides a consistent and reproducible environment, minimizing issues related to dependencies and system configurations. To do it, install first Docker following the instructions below:

- Installing Docker

For Linux systems, you can install Docker using the package manager of your distribution. For MacOS and Windows, you can download the Docker Desktop application from the official Docker website. For example, to install Docker on Ubuntu/Debian or CentOS, you can use the following commands:

In Ubuntu/Debian

```
sudo apt-get update
```

```
sudo apt-get install docker-ce
```

in CentOS

```
sudo yum install docker
```

For more detailed installation instructions, refer to the official [Docker documentation](#).

In MacOS

- (i) Download Docker Desktop: Visit the [Docker Desktop for Mac page](#).
- (ii) Run the Installer: Open the downloaded .dmg file and drag Docker to the Applications folder.
- (iii) Start Docker Desktop: Open Docker from the Applications folder.
- (iv) Verify Installation: Open a Terminal and run:

```
docker --version
```

in Windows

- (i) Download Docker Desktop: Visit the [Docker Desktop for Windows page](#).
- (ii) Run the Installer: Open the downloaded .exe file and follow the installation instructions.

- Using *npstat* container

Before using the container, you need to pull the image from Docker Hub. The image is available at the following location: [biotechvana/npstat](#).

Pull the image from docker hub

```
docker pull biotechvana/npstat
```

tag the image, if you want to use a different name or to avoid using the long image name

```
docker tag biotechvana/npstat npstat
```

Verify that the image has been successfully pulled by running the following command:

```
docker run --rm npstat
```

Using the Docker Container

To run the *npstat* application, use the following command:

```
docker run --rm npstat
```

This command will display the usage information for *npstat*.

- Running *npstat* with Data:

To analyze specific data, you can mount a local directory containing your data files to the container and specify the input files. For example:

```
docker run --rm -v /path/to/data:/data npstat -n sample_size -l window_length [options] FILE.pileup
```

(i) Replace *sample_size* with the haploid sample size.

(ii) Replace *window_length* with the window length in base pairs.

(iii) Replace */path/to/data* with the path to your local directory containing the data files and *FILE.pileup* with the name of your input file.

Note: that “*:/data*” specifies the mount point inside the container where the data files will be available and mounted as the current working directory. And the mount point “*/data*” is fixed inside the container and should not be changed. “*/data*” is also the default working directory inside the container.

For example, if you have a data file named *FILE.pileup* in a directory */home/user/npstat_data*, you can run *npstat* as follows:

```
docker run --rm -v /home/user/npstat_data:/data npstat -i /data/FILE.pileup ## as /data is the working directory inside the container, you can also run it as follows
```

```
docker run --rm -v /home/user/npstat_data:/data npstat -i FILE.pileup
```

Alternatively, if you have a data file named *FILE.pileup* in your current directory, you can run *npstat* as follows:

```
docker run --rm -v $(pwd):/data npstat -i FILE.pileup
```

or

```
docker run --rm -v ./:/data npstat -i FILE.pileup
```

The output file will be generated in the same directory where the input file is located.

- Building the Docker Image [Optional]

If you want to build the Docker image locally, you can follow these steps:

1. Clone the *npstat* repository from GitHub:

```
git clone https://github.com/ahmedihafez/npstat.git
```

2. Change to the *npstat* directory:

```
cd npstat
```

3. Build the Docker image using the provided Dockerfile:

```
docker build -t npstat .
```

4. Verify that the image has been successfully built by running the following command:

```
docker run --rm npstat
```

3. Methods

Statistics calculated in *npstat*

npstat implements algorithms to estimate nucleotide variation at the population level and to perform neutrality tests from pool sequencing data. The statistics included in this software were developed in [6]. *npstat* software calculates estimates of variation and neutrality tests given a specified window size (in base pairs) and considering the options defined by the user. All these statistics are computed after filtering for minimum read depth, sequence quality and a minimum allele count. Specifically, *npstat* contains the following statistics:

- (i) S , the number of Segregating sites per window and its variance,
- (ii) the variability Watterson estimator of θ [9] per nucleotide and window and its variance (see [6] equation 1 and 2 and its Suppl. Information section SI.3, and SI.5),
- (iii) the Tajima's π estimator of heterozygosity [10] per nucleotide and window (see [6] equation 3 and its Suppl. Information section SI.2),
- (iv) the neutrality tests Tajima's D [11] per window (see [6] equation 5 and its Suppl. Information section SI.5),

- (v) the unnormalized Fay and Wu's H test [12] per nucleotide and window, in case an outgroup sequence is provided (it is also possible to obtain the Fay and Wu's H variability estimator just summing π , See equation 8 in [6] and its Suppl. Information section SI.3),
- (vi) the normalized (unnormalized value divided by its variance) Fay and Wu's H test [12], see also [6] equation 7 and its Suppl. Information section SI.5),
- (vii) the synonymous and non-synonymous segregating sites per window in case the annotation file with the information of the coding sequence regions is provided. Note that we assume all aminoacids to be 4-fold degenerate (i.e. non-synonymous and synonymous sites correspond to the 1st/2nd base and 3rd base in the codon, respectively),
- (viii) the synonymous and non-synonymous divergence (fixed variants) in case an outgroup sequence and the annotation file are provided,
- (ix) the proportion of beneficial substitutions (α , [18]) per window. This is estimated using the number of segregating sites and the divergence for synonymous and non-synonymous positions using the equation $\alpha = 1 - S_n/S_s * K_s/K_n$, where S_n is the number of non-synonymous Segregating sites, S_s is the number of synonymous Segregating sites, K_s is the synonymous divergence and K_n is the non-synonymous divergence.

Run npstat

From the working directory, use the command

```
./npstat -n sample_size -l window_length [options] FILE.pileup
```

All the available options to run *npstat* are shown in **Table 1**.

An important option is *-nolowfreq m*. This specifies how many reads with the alternative variant there must be to discard specific positions (i. e., remove positions with low-frequency alleles). The default option is $m=1$, which means that if the alternative variant is supported only by 1 read this position will be discarded. High depth or error rate sequencing data would need higher values, e.g. $m=2$ above read depth 50, $m=3$ above read depth 100, etc. Use $m=0$ only if the SNPs have already been called by an external SNP caller and input into the program through the option *-snppile*.

Output

The output file retains the same name as the input file, with the extension *.stats*. The output file contains 18 columns, each corresponding to information regarding the analyzed window, including the above mentioned statistics, while each row refers to an individual genomic window. (**Tables 2 and 3**):

Additionally, the HKA test [19] can be obtained from the estimated S (columns 5), Var(S) (column 11) and divergence (column 13). Also, the significance for McDonald-Kreitman test [13] can be obtained from the estimated synonymous/non-synonymous polymorphism/divergence data from columns 14-17 in a 2×2 contingency table.

We include a R script with which the user can plot the results included in the output file. The script is called *npstat_plot_windows.R* and can be run with the command:

```
R --vanilla < ./npstat_plot_windows.R file_out file_out.pdf
```

where *file.out* is the output file obtained after running *npstat*. Two PDF output files are generated after running this script, one containing plots for each statistic, showing its value across windows and the other containing the distributions of the different statistics.

Example

We include three examples to show three different types of analyses that can be performed (uploaded at <https://zenodo.org/records/13364757>). Here, we collected sequencing data obtained from the Drosophila Genetic Reference Panel (DGRP) [20] that were pooled (specifically, we pooled the inbred lines with the reference RAL numbers indicated in the Table S1 from [20]), aligned to the *D. melanogaster* reference genome, version 6.12, and processed and filtered as indicated in [21]. A pileup file containing the chromosome 2L was used as the input file for running *npstat*. In the example 1, we used this pileup without an outgroup and without an annotation file. In the second example, we added an outgroup (the line of *Drosophila yakuba* SRR26246471 [22], which was aligned to the reference sequence using standard methods indicated in the Methods section). In the example 3, we additionally included a GFF annotation file for *D. melanogaster*, in order to identify non-synonymous and synonymous variants. The commands used are the following:

```
echo "Example 1: "
```

```
./npstat -n 16 -l 100000 -nolowfreq 2 -minqual 18 Pool_seq2.mel_mpileup_2L.txt
```

```
mv Pool_seq2.mel_mpileup_2L.txt.stats Pool_seq2.mel_mpileup_2L.txt.stats.ex1.txt
```

```
echo "Example 2: "
```

```
./npstat -n 16 -l 100000 -nolowfreq 2 -minqual 18 -outgroup Dyakuba-mel_final_cns_2L.fa
```

```
Pool_seq2.mel_mpileup_2L.txt
```

```
mv Pool_seq2.mel_mpileup_2L.txt.stats Pool_seq2.mel_mpileup_2L.txt.stats.ex2.txt
```

```
echo "Example 3 "
```

```
./npstat -n 16 -l 100000 -nolowfreq 2 -minqual 18 -outgroup Dyakuba-mel_final_cns_2L.fa -annot dmel-all-
```

```
r6.12_sorted_2L.gtf Pool_seq2.mel_mpileup_2L.txt
```

```
mv Pool_seq2.mel_mpileup_2L.txt.stats Pool_seq2.mel_mpileup_2L.txt.stats.ex3.txt
```

This generates an output file in tabular format (see example in **Table 1**) with 18 columns, and as many rows as windows specified in the analysis (plus a header with the name of the columns). This table can be used to compute summary statistics and plot some figures from the obtained results. Note that in this example, we change the name of the output files to avoid overwriting the output file since the name for the output file is obtained from the name of the input file and in all three examples we use the same input file.

To visualize the results, run the R script `npstat_plot_window.R`. For these examples, run the following:

```
R --vanilla < npstat_plot_windows.R --args Pool_seq2.mel_mpileup_2L.txt.stats
```

```
Pool_seq2.mel_mpileup_2L.txt.stats_ex1.pdf
```

```
R --vanilla < npstat_plot_windows.R --args Pool_seq2.mel_mpileup_2L.txt.stats.ex1.txt
```

```
Pool_seq2.mel_mpileup_2L.txt.stats.ex2.pdf
```

```
R --vanilla < npstat_plot_windows.R --args Pool_seq2.mel_mpileup_2L.txt.stats.ex1.txt
```

```
Pool_seq2.mel_mpileup_2L.txt.stats.ex3.pdf
```

The R script is designed to generate two kinds of figures: (i) sliding window plots with the values of each statistic in the y-axis and the window in the x-axis (**Figure 1**), and (ii) density (violin) plots with the density distribution of the statistics (**Figure 2**). Other interesting plots not included in the script can be, for example, those corresponding to the analysis of autocorrelation or to comparative studies between scaffolds or to other populations.

4. Notes

Pool sequencing offers a cost-effective alternative with the advantage of higher accuracy in estimating nucleotide variability compared to individual sequencing. This is because more individuals can be included in the pool at the same cost compared to an individual sequencing sample, which reduces the variance in the estimates. This advantage makes the careful design of pool sequencing experiments essential. One critical parameter is the number of haploid samples included in the analysis, specified using the `-n` option in the software. If the exact number of samples in the pool is unknown, this can pose a problem depending on the sample size. For small pools (around 10 individuals), inaccurately doubling or halving the sample size can significantly alter the estimates of the statistics. However, for larger pools (e.g., $n > 100$), an error of this magnitude is less likely to substantially impact variability estimates.

Additionally, sequencing quality (controlled by the `-minqual` option) can influence the detection of variants, particularly if the quality threshold is set too high. While high thresholds may reduce the number of detected variants, they are unlikely to affect overall variability estimates, as sequence quality impacts both monomorphic and polymorphic positions equally. Conversely, setting a low-quality threshold can be offset by excluding low-frequency variants using the `-nolowfreq` option. The software *npstat* addresses these potential sequencing errors by efficiently calculating variability estimates while considering this ascertainment bias. The statistical power of the analyses using pool sequencing data has been previously discussed in detail [6].

It is important to highlight that *npstat* uses a relatively simple method to differentiate between synonymous and nonsynonymous positions. It considers nonsynonymous positions strictly as those located at the second base of codons, while positions at the first and third bases are treated as synonymous. This approach ensures accurate variability estimates for nonsynonymous positions. However, this method may miss some nonsynonymous

variants at the first and third codon positions (counted as synonymous), which could slightly bias the Syn/NSyn ratio for both polymorphism and divergence. Nonetheless, this bias is not expected to have a significant impact.

A second version of *npstat* is currently in development, which will include the analysis of multi-scaffold pool sequencing data, additional variability statistics (such as theta E from Zeng and Zeng's E test [23]), more accurate estimates of variability for synonymous and nonsynonymous sites, and improved methods for the obtaining these estimates. The new version will also include the calculation of population differentiation metrics (e.g., *F*_{st}, as per equations 11-13 in [6]), using two pool sequencing pileup files.

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Figure Captions

Figure 1. Scatter plots obtained with the R script *npstat_plot_windows.R*. The plot shows different estimates of nucleotide variability using non-overlapped windows of physical size 1e5 bp across the chromosome 2L in a pool of 15 *D. melanogaster* inbred lines. (A) Levels of nucleotide variability of Pi (black) and Watterson theta (red) at windows for example 1. (B) Levels of nucleotide variability of Pi (black), Watterson theta (red) and theta H (blue) at windows for example 2.

Figure 2. Violin and box plots showing the distribution of the nucleotide variability, and using the same data and the same output than in Figure 1 (see Example section). (A) This plot shows the distributions of nucleotide variability for Pi (red) and Theta Watterson (cyan) analysed in the example 1. (B) Plot showing the distributions of nucleotide variability of Pi (red), Theta Watterson (green) and theta H (blue) analysed in the example 2. (C) Distribution of the neutrality tests Tajima's D analysed in the example 1. (D) Distribution of the neutrality tests Tajima's D (cyan) and Fay and Wu's H (red) analysed in the example 2. Each plot includes data points, box plots and density curves.

Table Captions

Table 1. List of options available to run *npstat*

Table 2. Information and statistics obtained per window (rows) in the *npstat* output file.

Table 3. *npstat* output file for example 3. The first line shows the name of each column, and each of the next rows show the values for each window analyzed by *npstat*.

Table 1.

Option	Value	Definition
-n	sample_size	haploid sample size. (only allowed even sample sizes)
-l	window_length	window length in base pairs.
-mincov	minimum coverage	Minimum coverage filter (default 4).
-maxcov	maximum coverage	Maximum coverage filter (default 100).
-minqual	minimum base quality	Base quality filter (default 10)
-nolowfreq	m	Minimum allele count filter > m (default 1).
-outgroup	file.fa	outgroup file in FASTA.
-snppfile	file.snp	consider SNPs only if present in file.snp.
-annot	file.gff3	annotation file in GFF3 format.

Table 2.

Column number	Definition
1	Window number
2	Number of base pairs covered by sequences
3	Number of bases covered and with known outgroup allele
4	Average read depth
5	Number of segregating sites S
6	Watterson estimator of θ
7	Tajima's Π estimator of heterozygosity
8	Tajima's D
9	Unnormalized Fay and Wu's H
10	Normalized Fay and Wu's H
11	Variance of the number of segregating sites
12	Variance of the Watterson estimator,
13	Divergence per base (from outgroup),
14	Nonsynonymous polymorphisms,
15	Synonymous polymorphisms,
16	Nonsynonymous divergence,
17	Synonymous divergence,
18	α (fraction of substitutions fixed by positive selection)

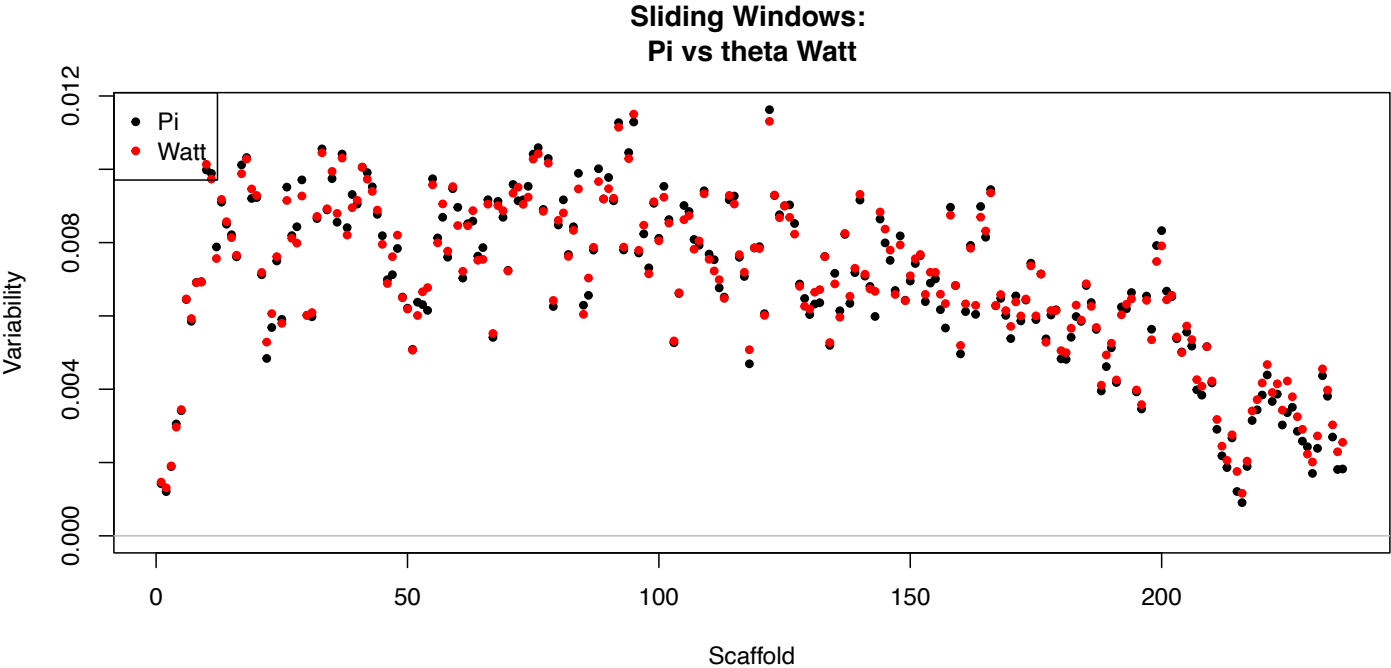
Table 3.

wind ow	leng th	length_ou tgroup	read_d epth	S	Watte rson	Pi	Tajim a_D	var_S	var_Watt erson	unnorm_Fa yWu_H	FayW u_H	div	nonsyn _pol	syn_ pol	nonsyn _div	syn_ div	alpha
1	901 83	52920	43.977 446	36 2	0.001 466	0.001 423	- 0.155 877	23936.069 934	0.00000 0	0.000640	0.515 096	0.073 375	21	28	624	1393	- 0.674 279
2	999 53	72054	43.760 267	35 9	0.001 310	0.001 207	- 0.421 497	23577.520 614	0.00000 0	0.000418	0.490 813	0.071 613	37	31	792	2100	- 2.164 712
3	100 000	77130	45.281 160	52 9	0.001 908	0.001 889	- 0.052 169	50169.640 868	0.00000 1	0.000653	0.570 728	0.062 868	37	89	654	2199	- 0.397 846
4	907 86	63662	42.475 800	72 2	0.002 967	0.003 052	0.154 076	95863.629 616	0.00000 2	0.000972	0.505 745	0.056 517	21	55	319	794	0.049 644
5	997 71	79387	44.565 575	94 4	0.003 445	0.003 414	- 0.046 439	160219.35 1405	0.00000 2	0.000957	0.489 224	0.052 792	38	112	382	1420	- 0.261 219

6	999 95	80622	43.591 280	17 68	0.006 463	0.006 447	- 0.013 118	566276.27 5348	0.00000 8	0.000828	0.230 309	0.048 113	99	317	398	1315	- 0.031 855
7	910 88	72905	41.242 085	14 45	0.005 928	0.005 854	- 0.068 949	388685.95 6111	0.00000 7	0.000633	0.193 967	0.040 560	50	114	167	519	- 0.363 063
8	982 57	78848	41.738 563	18 18	0.006 907	0.006 914	0.006 187	611554.24 1101	0.00000 9	0.001211	0.320 836	0.043 907	39	163	160	648	0.030 982
9	999 49	78544	44.269 908	18 99	0.006 920	0.006 935	0.011 452	648435.60 2548	0.00000 9	0.001141	0.285 613	0.052 467	93	334	483	1477	0.148 529
10	892 48	64929	42.292 892	24 35	0.010 134	0.009 982	- 0.082 024	1089674.6 57138	0.00001 9	0.004013	0.633 532	0.037 302	23				

Figure 1

A



B

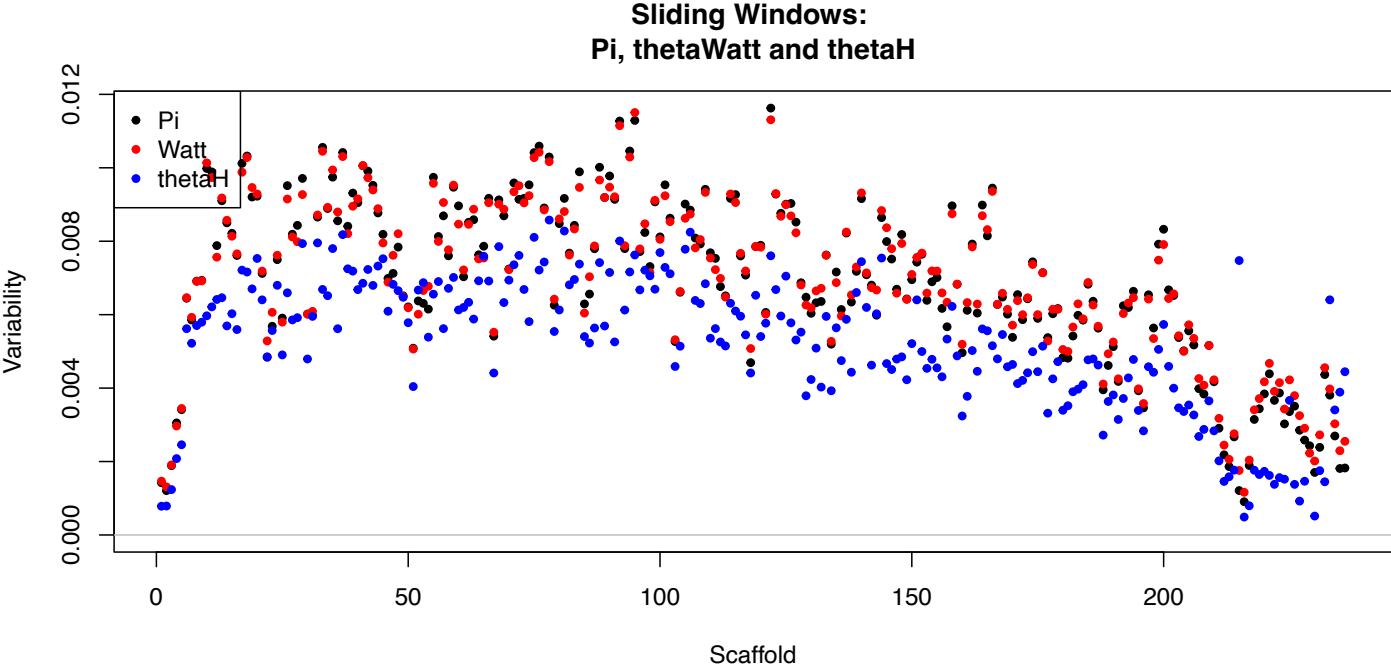
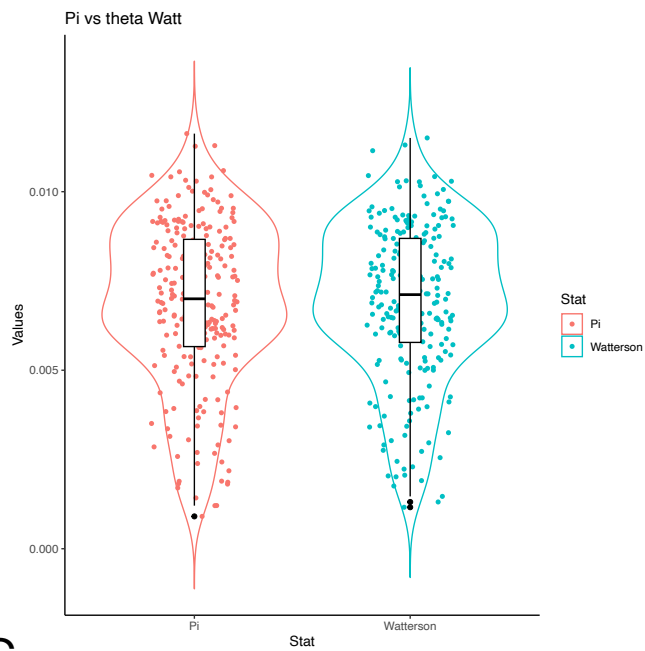
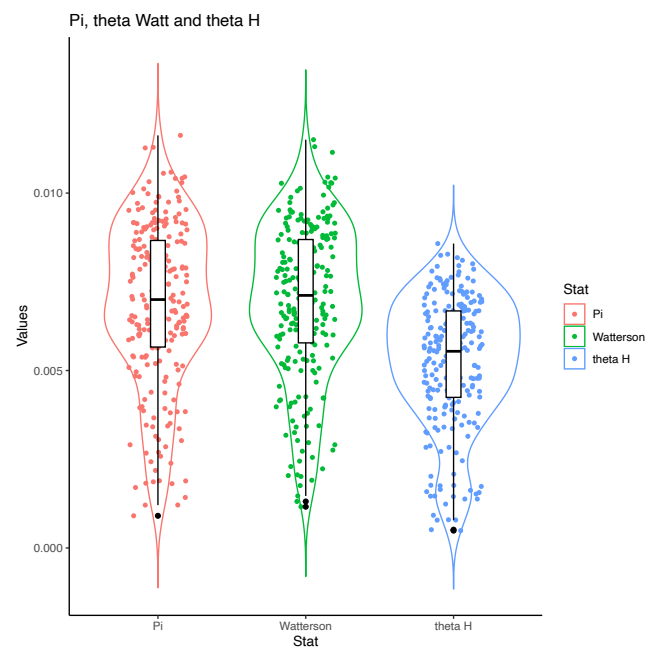


Figure 2

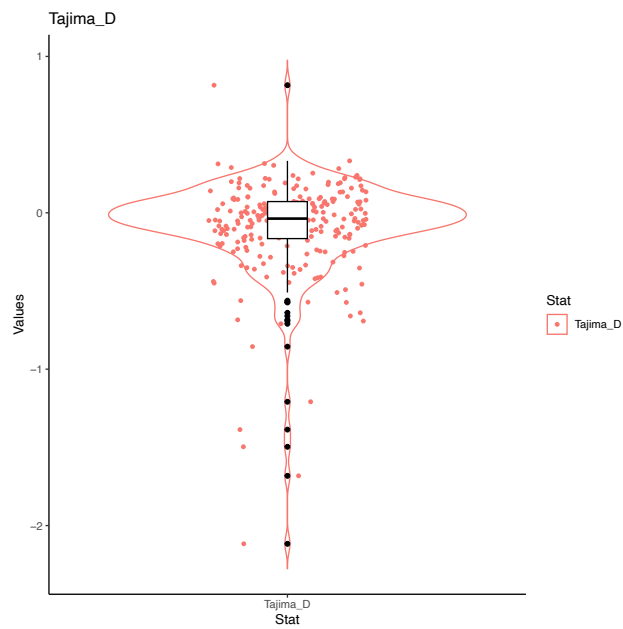
A



B



C



D

