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# A robust instrumental-variables estimator

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**Abstract.** The classical instrumental-variables estimator is extremely sensitive to the presence of outliers in the sample. This is a concern because outliers can strongly distort the estimated effect of a given regressor on the dependent variable. Although outlier diagnostics exist, they frequently fail to detect atypical observations because they are themselves based on nonrobust (to outliers) estimators. Furthermore, they do not take into account the combined influence of outliers in the first and second stages of the instrumental-variables estimator. In this article, we present a robust instrumental-variables estimator, initially proposed by [Cohen Freue, Ortiz-Molina, and Zamar \(2011, Working paper: <http://www.stat.ubc.ca/~ruben/website/cv/cohen-zamar.pdf>\)](http://www.stat.ubc.ca/~ruben/website/cv/cohen-zamar.pdf), that we have programmed in Stata and made available via the `robivreg` command. We have improved on their estimator in two different ways. First, we use a weighting scheme that makes our estimator more efficient and allows the computations of the usual identification and overidentifying restrictions tests. Second, we implement a generalized Hausman test for the presence of outliers.

**Keywords:** st0252, robivreg, multivariate outliers, robustness, S-estimator, instrumental variables

## 1 Theory

Assume a linear regression model given by

$$\mathbf{y} = \mathbf{X}\boldsymbol{\theta} + \boldsymbol{\varepsilon} \tag{1}$$

where  $\mathbf{y}$  is the  $n \times 1$  vector containing the value of the dependent variable,  $\mathbf{X}$  is the  $n \times p$  matrix containing the values for the  $p$  regressors (constant included), and  $\boldsymbol{\varepsilon}$  is the vector of the error term. Vector  $\boldsymbol{\theta}$  of size  $p \times 1$  contains the unknown regression parameters and needs to be estimated. On the basis of the estimated parameter  $\hat{\boldsymbol{\theta}}$ , it is then possible to fit the dependent variable by  $\hat{\mathbf{y}} = \mathbf{X}\hat{\boldsymbol{\theta}}$  and estimate the residual vector

$\mathbf{r} = \mathbf{y} - \hat{\mathbf{y}}$ . In the case of the ordinary least-squares (LS) method, the vector of estimated parameters is

$$\hat{\boldsymbol{\theta}}_{\text{LS}} = \arg \min_{\boldsymbol{\theta}} \mathbf{r}'\mathbf{r}$$

The solution to this minimization leads to the well-known formula

$$\hat{\boldsymbol{\theta}}_{\text{LS}} = \underbrace{(\mathbf{X}^t \mathbf{X})^{-1}}_{n\hat{\boldsymbol{\Sigma}}_{\mathbf{XX}}} \underbrace{\mathbf{X}^t \mathbf{y}}_{n\hat{\boldsymbol{\Sigma}}_{\mathbf{Xy}}}$$

which is simply, after centering the data, the product of the  $p \times p$  covariance matrix of the explanatory variables  $\hat{\boldsymbol{\Sigma}}_{\mathbf{XX}}$  and the  $p \times 1$  vector of the covariances of the explanatory variables and the dependent variable  $\hat{\boldsymbol{\Sigma}}_{\mathbf{Xy}}$  (the  $n$  simplify).<sup>1</sup>

The unbiasedness and consistency of the LS estimates crucially depend on the absence of correlation between  $\mathbf{X}$  and  $\boldsymbol{\varepsilon}$ . When this assumption is violated, instrumental-variables (IV) estimators are generally used. The logic underlying this approach is to find some variables, known as instruments, that are strongly correlated with the troublesome explanatory variables, known as endogenous variables, but independent of the error term. This is equivalent to estimating the relationship between the response variable and the covariates by using only the part of the variability of the endogenous covariates that is uncorrelated with the error term.

More precisely, define  $\mathbf{Z}$  as the  $n \times m$  matrix (where  $m \geq p$ ) containing the instruments. The IV estimator (generally called two-stage least squares when  $m > p$ ) can be conceptualized as a two-stage estimator. In the first stage, each endogenous variable is regressed on the instruments and on the variables in  $\mathbf{X}$  that are not correlated with the error term. In the second stage, the predicted value for each variable is then fit (denoted  $\hat{\mathbf{X}}$  here). In this way, each variable is purged of the correlation with the error term. Exogenous explanatory variables are used as their own instruments. These new variables are then replaced in (1), and the model is fit by LS.

The final estimator is (again centering the data and recalculating the intercept term)

$$\hat{\boldsymbol{\theta}}_{\text{IV}} = \left\{ \hat{\boldsymbol{\Sigma}}_{\mathbf{XZ}} \left( \hat{\boldsymbol{\Sigma}}_{\mathbf{ZZ}} \right)^{-1} \hat{\boldsymbol{\Sigma}}_{\mathbf{ZX}} \right\}^{-1} \hat{\boldsymbol{\Sigma}}_{\mathbf{XZ}} \left( \hat{\boldsymbol{\Sigma}}_{\mathbf{ZZ}} \right)^{-1} \hat{\boldsymbol{\Sigma}}_{\mathbf{Zy}} \quad (2)$$

where  $\hat{\boldsymbol{\Sigma}}_{\mathbf{XZ}}$  is the covariance matrix of the original right-hand-side variables and the instruments,  $\hat{\boldsymbol{\Sigma}}_{\mathbf{ZZ}}$  is the covariance matrix of the instruments, and  $\hat{\boldsymbol{\Sigma}}_{\mathbf{Zy}}$  is the vector of covariances of the instruments with the dependent variable.

A drawback of the IV method is that if outliers are present, all the estimated covariances are distorted, even asymptotically. [Cohen Freue, Ortiz-Molina, and Zamar \(2011\)](#) therefore suggest replacing classical estimated covariance matrices in (2) with some robust counterparts that withstand the contamination. These could be minimum covariance determinant scatter matrices as presented in [Verardi and Dehon \(2010\)](#) or S-estimators of location and scatter as described by [Verardi and McCathie \(2012\)](#). We use the latter, and the superscript <sup>S</sup> is used to indicate it.

1. The constant term has to be recalculated.

The robust IV estimator can therefore be written as

$$\hat{\theta}_{\text{RIV}}^S = \left\{ \hat{\Sigma}_{\mathbf{XZ}}^S \left( \hat{\Sigma}_{\mathbf{ZZ}}^S \right)^{-1} \hat{\Sigma}_{\mathbf{ZX}}^S \right\}^{-1} \hat{\Sigma}_{\mathbf{XZ}}^S \left( \hat{\Sigma}_{\mathbf{ZZ}}^S \right)^{-1} \hat{\Sigma}_{\mathbf{ZY}}^S$$

As shown by [Cohen Freue, Ortiz-Molina, and Zamar \(2011\)](#), this estimator inherits the consistency properties of the underlying multivariate S-estimator and remains consistent even when the distribution of the carriers is not elliptical or symmetrical. They also demonstrate that under certain regularity conditions, this estimator is asymptotically normal, regression and carrier equivariant. Finally, they provide a simple formula for its asymptotic variance.

An alternative estimator that would allow a substantial gain in efficiency is

$$\hat{\theta}_{\text{RIV}}^W = \left\{ \hat{\Sigma}_{\mathbf{XZ}}^W \left( \hat{\Sigma}_{\mathbf{ZZ}}^W \right)^{-1} \hat{\Sigma}_{\mathbf{ZX}}^W \right\}^{-1} \hat{\Sigma}_{\mathbf{XZ}}^W \left( \hat{\Sigma}_{\mathbf{ZZ}}^W \right)^{-1} \hat{\Sigma}_{\mathbf{ZY}}^W$$

where  $W$  stands for weights. First estimated are the robust covariance  $\hat{\Sigma}_{\mathbf{XZy}}^S$  and the robust Mahalanobis distances—that is,  $\hat{d}_i = \sqrt{(\mathbf{M}_i - \hat{\boldsymbol{\mu}}_{\mathbf{M}})' \hat{\Sigma}_{\mathbf{M}}^{-1} (\mathbf{M}_i - \hat{\boldsymbol{\mu}}_{\mathbf{M}})}$ , where  $\mathbf{M} = (\mathbf{X}, \mathbf{Z}, \mathbf{y})$ ,  $\hat{\Sigma}_{\mathbf{M}} = \hat{\Sigma}_{\mathbf{XZy}}^S$  is the scatter matrix of explanatory variables, and  $\hat{\boldsymbol{\mu}}_{\mathbf{M}}$  is the location vector. Outliers are then identified as the observations that have a robust Mahalanobis distance  $\hat{d}_i$  larger than  $\sqrt{\chi_{p+m+1,q}^2}$ , where  $q$  is a confidence level (for example, 99%), given that Mahalanobis distances are distributed as the square root of a chi-squared with degrees of freedom equal to the length of vector  $\hat{\boldsymbol{\mu}}_{\mathbf{M}}$ . Finally, observations that are associated with a  $\hat{d}_i$  larger than the cutoff point are downweighted, and the classical covariance matrix is estimated. The weighting that we adopt is simply to award a weight of 1 to observations associated with a  $\hat{d}_i$  smaller than the cutoff value and to award a weight of 0 otherwise.

The advantage of this last estimator is that standard overidentification, underidentification, and weak instruments tests can easily be obtained, because this weighting scheme amounts to running a standard IV estimation on a sample free of outliers and the asymptotic variance of the estimator is also readily available. We use the user-written `ivreg2` command ([Baum, Schaffer, and Stillman 2007](#)) to compute the final estimates; the reported tests and standard errors are those provided by this command.<sup>2</sup> Finally, a substantial gain in efficiency with respect to the standard robust IV estimator proposed by [Cohen Freue, Ortiz-Molina, and Zamar \(2011\)](#) can be attained. We illustrate this efficiency gain by running 1,000 simulations using a setup similar to that of [Cohen Freue, Ortiz-Molina, and Zamar \(2011\)](#) but with no outliers: 1,000 observations for five random variables  $(x, u, v, w, Z)$  drawn from a multivariate normal distribution with mean  $\boldsymbol{\mu} = (0, 0, 0, 0, 0)$  and covariance

---

2. The `robivreg` command is not a full wrapper for the `ivreg2` command. However, a sample free of outliers can easily be obtained by using the `generate(varname)` option that we describe in the next section.

$$\Sigma = \begin{pmatrix} 1 & 0 & 0 & 0.5 & 0 \\ 0 & 0.3 & 0.2 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 0.2 & 0.3 & 0 & 0 \\ 0.5 & 0 & 0 & 1 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 1 \end{pmatrix}$$

The data-generating process is  $Y = 1 + 2x + Z + u$ , where  $x$  is measured with error and only variable  $X = x + v$  is assumed observable. To remedy this endogeneity bias,  $X$  is instrumented by  $Z$ . For this setup, the simulated efficiency of the two estimators is 46.7% for the raw  $\theta_{\text{RIV}}^S$  estimator and 95.5% for the reweighted  $\theta_{\text{RIV}}^W$  estimator. The efficiency is calculated as follows: Assume  $\theta_{\text{RIV}}^S$  ( $\theta_{\text{RIV}}^W$ ) is asymptotically normal with covariance matrix  $V$ , and assume  $V_0$  is the asymptotic covariance matrix of the classical  $\theta_{\text{IV}}$  estimator. The efficiency of  $\theta_{\text{RIV}}^S$  ( $\theta_{\text{RIV}}^W$ ) is calculated as  $\text{eff}(\theta_{\text{RIV}}^S) = \lambda_1(V^{-1}V_0)$ , where  $\lambda_1(E)$  denotes the largest eigenvalue of the matrix  $E$ , and  $V_0$  and  $V$  are the simulated covariances.

## 2 The robivreg command

### 2.1 Syntax

The **robivreg** command implements an IV estimator robust to outliers.

```
robivreg depvar [varlist1] (varlist2 = instlist) [if] [in] [, first robust
      cluster(varname) generate(varname) raw cutoff(#) mcd graph
      label(varname) test nreps(#) nodots]
```

where *depvar* is the dependent variable, *varlist1* contains the exogenous regressors, *varlist2* contains the endogenous regressors, and *instlist* contains the excluded instruments.

### 2.2 Options

**first** reports various first-stage results and identification statistics. May not be used with **raw**.

**robust** produces standard errors and statistics that are robust to arbitrary heteroskedasticity.

**cluster(varname)** produces standard errors and statistics that are robust to both arbitrary heteroskedasticity and intragroup correlation, where *varname* identifies the group.

`generate(varname)` generates a dummy variable named *varname*, which takes the value of 1 for observations that are flagged as outliers.

`raw` specifies that [Cohen Freue, Ortiz-Molina, and Zamar's estimator \(2011\)](#) should be returned. Note that the standard errors reported are different from the ones that they proposed because these are robust to heteroskedasticity and asymmetry. The asymptotic variance of the `raw` estimator is described in [Verardi and Croux \(2009\)](#).

`cutoff(#)` allows the user to change the percentile above which an individual is considered to be an outlier. The default is `cutoff(0.99)`.

`mcd` specifies that a minimum covariance determinant estimator of location and scatter be used to estimate the robust covariance matrices. By default, an S-estimator of location and scatter is used.

`graph` generates a graphic in which outliers are identified according to their type, and labeled using the variable *varname*. Vertical lines identify vertical outliers (observations with a large residual), and the horizontal line identifies leverage points.

`label(varname)` labels the outliers as *varname*. `label()` only has an effect if specified with `graph`.

`test` specifies to report a test for the presence of outliers in the sample. To test for the appropriateness of a robust IV procedure relative to the classical IV estimator, we rely on the *W* statistic proposed by [Dehon, Gassner, and Verardi \(2009\)](#) and [Desbordes and Verardi \(2011\)](#), where

$$W = \left( \hat{\theta}^{\text{IV}} - \hat{\theta}_{\text{RIV}}^{\text{S}} \right)^t \left\{ \widehat{\text{Var}} \left( \hat{\theta}^{\text{IV}} \right) + \widehat{\text{Var}} \left( \hat{\theta}_{\text{RIV}}^{\text{S}} \right) - 2\widehat{\text{Cov}} \left( \hat{\theta}^{\text{IV}}, \hat{\theta}_{\text{RIV}}^{\text{S}} \right) \right\}^{-1} \left( \hat{\theta}^{\text{IV}} - \hat{\theta}_{\text{RIV}}^{\text{S}} \right)$$

Bearing in mind that this statistic is asymptotically distributed as a  $\chi_p^2$ , where *p* is the number of covariates, it is possible to set an upper bound above which the estimated parameters can be considered to be statistically different and hence the robust IV estimator should be preferred to the standard IV estimator. When the `cluster()` option is specified, a cluster-bootstrap is used to calculate the *W* statistic.

`nreps(#)` specifies the number of bootstrap replicates performed when the `test` and `cluster()` options are both specified. The default is `nreps(50)`.

`nodots` suppresses the replication dots.

### 3 Empirical example

In a seminal article, [Romer \(1993\)](#) convincingly shows that more open economies tend to have lower inflation rates. Worried that a simultaneity bias may affect the estimates, he instruments the trade openness variable—the share of imports in gross domestic product—by the logarithm of a country's land area.



From a pedagogical perspective, it is useful to start with the dependent variable (which is the average annual inflation rates since 1973), in levels, as in example 16.6 of Wooldridge (2009, 558).

```
. use http://fmwww.bc.edu/ec-p/data/wooldridge/OPENNESS
. merge 1:1 _n using http://www.rodolphedesbordes.com/web_documents/names.dta
```

Result	# of obs.
not matched	0
matched	114

```
( _merge==3)

. ivregress 2sls inf (opendec = lland)
```

Instrumental variables (2SLS) regression	Number of obs =	114
	Wald chi2(1) =	5.73
	Prob > chi2 =	0.0167
	R-squared =	0.0316
	Root MSE =	23.511

inf	Coef.	Std. Err.	z	P> z	[95% Conf. Interval]	
opendec	-33.28737	13.91101	-2.39	0.017	-60.55245	-6.022284
_cons	29.60664	5.608412	5.28	0.000	18.61435	40.59893

```
Instrumented: opendec
Instruments: lland
```

The coefficient on **opendec** is significant at the 5% level and suggests that a country with a 50% import share had an average inflation rate about 8.3 percentage points lower than a country with a 25% import share.

We may be worried that outliers distort these estimates. For instance, it is well known that countries in Latin America have experienced extremely high inflation rates in the 1980s. Hence, we refit the model with the **robivreg** command.

```

. robivreg inf (opendec = lland), test graph label(countryname)
(sum of wgt is      8.3000e+01)
IV (2SLS) estimation

```

---

Estimates efficient for homoskedasticity only  
Statistics consistent for homoskedasticity only

		Number of obs =	83
		F( 1, 81) =	2.50
		Prob > F =	0.1181
Total (centered) SS	=	Centered R2 =	0.0514
Total (uncentered) SS	=	Uncentered R2 =	0.8844
Residual SS	=	Root MSE =	3.935

inf	Coef.	Std. Err.	t	P> t	[95% Conf. Interval]
opendec	-12.07379	7.642656	-1.58	0.118	-27.28027 3.1327
_cons	14.60224	2.500814	5.84	0.000	9.626404 19.57808

Underidentification test (Anderson canon. corr. LM statistic): 16.073  
Chi-sq(1) P-val = 0.0001

---

Weak identification test (Cragg-Donald Wald F statistic): 19.453  
Stock-Yogo weak ID test critical values: 10% maximal IV size 16.38  
15% maximal IV size 8.96  
20% maximal IV size 6.66  
25% maximal IV size 5.53

Source: Stock-Yogo (2005). Reproduced by permission.

---

Sargan statistic (overidentification test of all instruments): 0.000  
(equation exactly identified)

---

Instrumented: opendec  
Excluded instruments: lland

---

H0: Outliers do not distort 2SLS classical estimation

---

chi2(2)=10.53  
Prob > chi2 = .005

Once the influence of outliers is downweighted, the value of the coefficient on `opendec` becomes much smaller and loses statistical significance. Our test for outliers, requested using the option `test`, confirms that outliers distort enough the original estimates such that robustness should be favored at the expense of efficiency.

The outliers can be easily identified using the `graph` option. We facilitate the identification of each type of outlier by setting vertical and horizontal cutoff points in the reported graph. The vertical cutoff points are 2.25 and -2.25. If the residuals were normally distributed, values above or below these cutoff points would be strongly atypical because they would be 2.25 standard deviations away from the mean (which is 0 by construction), with a probability of occurrence of 0.025. The reported residuals are said to be robust and standardized because the residuals are based on a robust-to-outliers estimation and have been divided by the standard deviation of the residuals associated with nonoutlying observations. In line with our downweighting scheme, the horizontal

cutoff point is, by default,  $\sqrt{\chi^2_{p+m+1,0.99}}$ . Vertical outliers are observations above or below the vertical lines, while leverage points are to the right of the horizontal line.

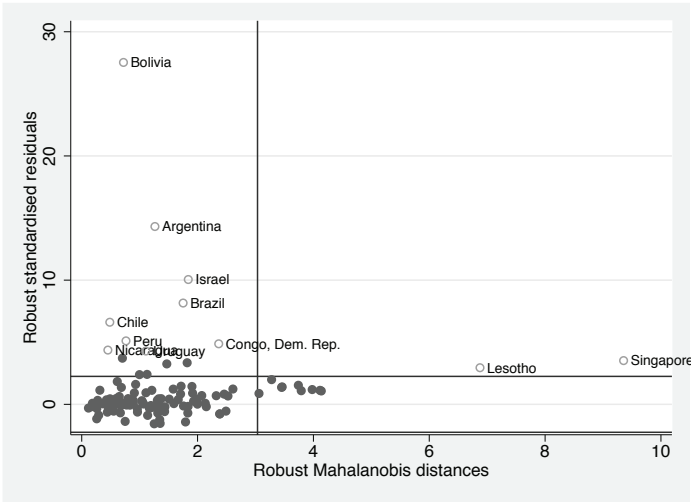


Figure 1. Identification of outliers when `inf` is used

Romer (1993) was fully aware that his results could be sensitive to outliers. This is why he decided to use as a dependent variable the log of average inflation.

```
. ivregress 2sls linf (opendec = lland)
Instrumental variables (2SLS) regression

Number of obs =      114
Wald chi2(1)    =    11.06
Prob > chi2     =    0.0009
R-squared       =    0.1028
Root MSE       =    .66881
```

linf	Coef.	Std. Err.	z	P> z	[95% Conf. Interval]	
opendec	-1.315804	.3957235	-3.33	0.001	-2.091408	-.5401999
_cons	2.98983	.1595413	18.74	0.000	2.677135	3.302525

```
Instrumented:  opendec
Instruments:   lland
```

The coefficient on `opendec` is now significant at the 1% level and suggests, using the Duan smearing estimate, that a country with a 50% import share had an average inflation rate about 5.4 percentage points lower than a country with a 25% import share.

However, even though taking the log of average inflation has certainly reduced the influence of extreme values of the dependent variable, outliers may still be an issue. Hence, we refit the model again with the `robivreg` command.

```
. robivreg linf (opendec = lland), test graph label(countryname)
(sum of wgt is      8.9000e+01)
IV (2SLS) estimation
```

Estimates efficient for homoskedasticity only  
 Statistics consistent for homoskedasticity only

		Number of obs =	89
		F( 1, 87) =	3.03
		Prob > F =	0.0851
Total (centered) SS	=	18.9763507	
Total (uncentered) SS	=	533.2560195	
Residual SS	=	16.17036311	
		Centered R2 =	0.1479
		Uncentered R2 =	0.9697
		Root MSE =	.4311

linf	Coef.	Std. Err.	t	P> t	[95% Conf. Interval]	
opendec	-1.225348	.7034456	-1.74	0.085	-2.623523	.1728262
_cons	2.796497	.2300043	12.16	0.000	2.339339	3.253656

Underidentification test (Anderson canon. corr. LM statistic): 20.963  
 Chi-sq(1) P-val = 0.0000

Weak identification test (Cragg-Donald Wald F statistic): 26.806  
 Stock-Yogo weak ID test critical values: 10% maximal IV size 16.38  
   15% maximal IV size 8.96  
   20% maximal IV size 6.66  
   25% maximal IV size 5.53

Source: Stock-Yogo (2005). Reproduced by permission.

Sargan statistic (overidentification test of all instruments): 0.000  
 (equation exactly identified)

Instrumented: opendec  
 Excluded instruments: lland

H0: Outliers do not distort 2SLS classical estimation

chi2(2)=4.86  
 Prob > chi2 = .088

In that case, the magnitude of the coefficient is preserved, but its statistical significance sharply decreases. Once again, we can identify outliers by using the `graph` option.

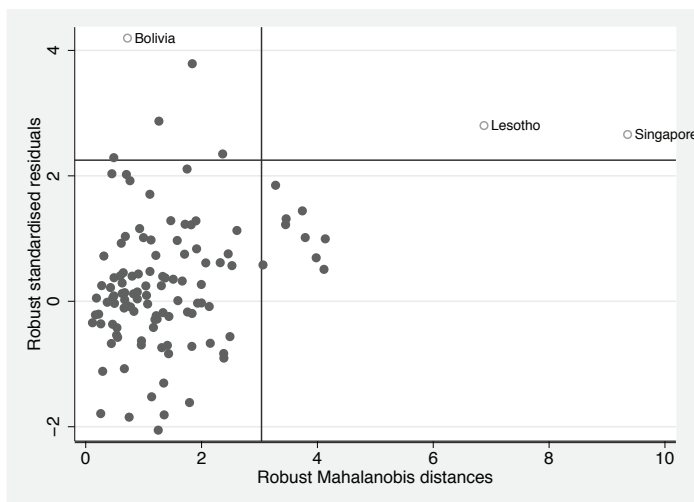


Figure 2. Identification of outliers when `ln(inf)` is used

In figure 1, we can see that taking the log of `inf` has been insufficient to deal with all outliers in the dependent variable because **Bolivia** remains an outlier. Furthermore, Romer was right to be worried that **Lesotho** or **Singapore** may “have an excessive influence on the results” [Romer \(1993, 877\)](#). The remoteness of these two observations from the rest of the data led to an inflation of the total sample variation in trade openness, resulting in undersized standard errors and spuriously high statistical significance.

For the final example, we illustrate the use of the `test` option with the `cluster()` option. The clustering variable is `idcode`.

```
. webuse nlswork, clear
(National Longitudinal Survey. Young Women 14-26 years of age in 1968)
. keep if _n<1501
(27034 observations deleted)
. robivreg ln_w age not_smsa (tenure = union south), cluster(idcode) test
(sum of wgt is      8.4700e+02)
IV (2SLS) estimation
```

Estimates efficient for homoskedasticity only

Statistics robust to heteroskedasticity and clustering on idcode

Number of clusters (idcode) =	209	Number of obs =	847
		F( 3, 208) =	5.16
		Prob > F	= 0.0018
Total (centered) SS	= 126.4871762	Centered R2	= -0.0831
Total (uncentered) SS	= 2988.447827	Uncentered R2	= 0.9542
Residual SS	= 136.9920776	Root MSE	= .4031

ln_wage	Coef.	Robust Std. Err.	t	P> t	[95% Conf. Interval]	
tenure	.1260126	.0439573	2.87	0.005	.0393536	.2126715
age	.0029424	.0032327	0.91	0.364	-.0034306	.0093155
not_smsa	-.2569617	.0921363	-2.79	0.006	-.4386024	-.075321
_cons	1.434409	.1009936	14.20	0.000	1.235307	1.633511

Underidentification test (Kleibergen-Paap rk LM statistic):	16.263
Chi-sq(2) P-val =	0.0003

Weak identification test (Cragg-Donald Wald F statistic):	27.689
(Kleibergen-Paap rk Wald F statistic):	11.305
Stock-Yogo weak ID test critical values: 10% maximal IV size	19.93
15% maximal IV size	11.59
20% maximal IV size	8.75
25% maximal IV size	7.25

Source: Stock-Yogo (2005). Reproduced by permission.

NB: Critical values are for Cragg-Donald F statistic and i.i.d. errors.

Hansen J statistic (overidentification test of all instruments):	0.010
Chi-sq(1) P-val =	0.9207

Instrumented: tenure  
Included instruments: age not\_smsa  
Excluded instruments: union south

Test with clustered errors

bootstrap replicates (50)

—|— 1 —|— 2 —|— 3 —|— 4 —|— 5  
..... 50

H0: Outliers do not distort 2SLS classical estimation

chi2(4)=2.86  
Prob > chi2 = .582

The robust-cluster variance estimator has been used to estimate the standard errors, and as previously explained, a cluster-bootstrap procedure (sampling is done from clusters with replacement to account for the correlations of observations within cluster) has been used to calculate the  $W$  statistic of the outlier test.

## 4 Conclusion

The `robivreg` command implements an IV estimator robust to outliers and allows their identification. In addition, a generalized Hausman test provides the means to evaluate whether the gain in robustness outweighs the loss in efficiency and thus justifies the use of a robust IV estimator.

## 5 References

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