Learning Antidote Data to Individual Unfairness

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Abstract

Fairness is essential for machine learning systems deployed in high-stake applications. Among all fairness notions, individual fairness, deriving from a consensus that ‘similar individuals should be treated similarly,’ is a vital notion to describe fair treatment for individual cases. Previous studies typically characterize individual fairness as a prediction-invariant problem when perturbing sensitive attributes on samples, and solve it by Distributionally Robust Optimization (DRO) paradigm. However, such adversarial perturbations along a direction covering sensitive information used in DRO do not consider the inherent feature correlations or innate data constraints, therefore could mislead the model to optimize at off-manifold and unrealistic samples. In light of this drawback, in this paper, we propose to learn and generate antidote data that approximately follows the data distribution to remedy individual unfairness. These generated on-manifold antidote data can be used through a generic optimization procedure along with original training data, resulting in a pure pre-processing approach to individual unfairness, or can also fit well with the in-processing DRO paradigm. Through extensive experiments on multiple tabular datasets, we demonstrate our method resists individual unfairness at a minimal or zero cost to predictive utility compared to baselines. Code available at https://github.com/brandeis-machine-learning/AntiIndivFairness.

1. Introduction

Unregulated decisions could reflect racism, ageism, and sexism in high-stakes applications, such as grant assignments (Mervis, 2022), recruitment (Dastin, 2018), policing strategies (Gelman et al., 2007), and lending services (Bartlett et al., 2022). To avoid societal concerns, fairness, as one of the fundamental ethical guidelines for AI, has been proposed to encourage practitioners to adopt AI responsibly and fairly. The unifying idea of fairness articulates that ML systems should not discriminate against individuals or any groups distinguished by legally-protected and sensitive attributes, therefore preventing disparate impact in automated decision-making (Barocas & Selbst, 2016).

Many notions have been proposed to specify AI Fairness (Dwork et al., 2012; Kusner et al., 2017; Hashimoto et al., 2018). Group fairness is currently the most influential notion in the fairness community, driving different groups to receive equitable outcomes in terms of statistics like true positive rates or positive rates, regardless of their sensitive attributes (Hardt et al., 2016). However, these statistics describe the average of a group, hence lacking guarantees on the treatments of individual cases. Alternatively, individual fairness established upon a consensus that ‘similar individuals should be treated similarly,’ shifts force to reduce the predictive gap between conceptually similar instances. Here, ‘similar’ usually means two instances have close profiles regardless of their different sensitive attributes, and could have customized definitions upon domain knowledge.

Previous studies solve the individual fairness problem mainly by Distributionally Robust Optimization (DRO) (Yurochkin et al., 2020; Yurochkin & Sun, 2021; Ruoss et al., 2020; Yeom & Fredrikson, 2021). They convert the problem to optimize models for invariant predictions towards original data and their perturbations, where the perturbations are adversarially constructed to mostly change the sensitive information in samples. However, the primary use case of DRO in model robustness is to adversarially perturb data distribution by a small degree which usually bounded by some divergence (Duchi & Namkoong, 2018; Levy et al., 2020). In that case, the perturbations can be regarded as local perturbations, and the adversarial samples are still on the data manifold. In contrast, perturbing a sample to best convert its sensitive information, e.g., directly flipping its sensitive attributes like gender from male to female, cannot be regarded as a local perturbation. These perturbations may violate inherent feature correlations, e.g., some features are subject to gender but without notice, thus driving the adversarial samples leave the data manifold. Additionally, perturbations in a continuous space could break the innate...
constraints from tabular, e.g., discrete features should be exactly in a one-hot format. Consequently, these adversarial samples for fairness are unrealistic and do not match the data distribution. Taking these data can result in sub-optimal tradeoffs between utility and individual fairness.

In this work, we address the above limitations and propose an approach to rectify models to be individually fair from a pure data-centric perspective. By establishing a concrete and semantically rich setup for ‘similar’ samples in individual fairness, we learn the data manifold and construct on-manifold samples with different sensitive attributes as antidote data to mitigate individual unfairness. We launch two ways to use the generated antidote data: simply inserting antidote data into the original training set and training models through generic optimization, or equipping antidote data to the DRO pipeline as an in-processing approach. Our approach is capable of multiple sensitive attributes with multiple values. We conduct experiments on census, criminalological, and educational datasets. Compared to standard classifiers and several baseline methods, our method greatly mitigates individual unfairness, and has minimal or zero side effects on the model’s predictive utility.

2. Individual Fairness: Problem Setup

Notations Let \( f_0 \) denote a parameterized probabilistic classifier, \( \mathcal{X} \) and \( \mathcal{Y} \) denote input and output space with instance \( x \) and label \( y \), respectively. For tabular datasets, we assume every input instance \( x \) contains three parts of features: sensitive features \( s = [s_1, s_2, \cdots, s_{N_s}] \), continuous features \( c = [c_1, c_2, \cdots, c_{N_c}] \), and discrete features \( d = [d_1, d_2, \cdots, d_{N_d}] \), with \( N \) denoting the number of features in each part. We assume these three parts of features are exclusive, i.e., \( s, c, \) and \( d \) do not share any feature or column. We use \( d_x \) to denote the discrete features of instance \( x \), and the same manner for other features. For simplification we shall assume discrete features \( d \) contain categorical features before one-hot encoding. Continuous features \( c \) contain features in a unified range like \([0, 1]\) after some scaling operations, and all data have the same feature dimension. We consider sensitive attributes in a categorical format. Any continuous sensitive attribute can be binned into discrete intervals to fit our scope. We use \( \oplus \) to denote feature-wise vector-vector or vector-scalar concatenation.

Individual Fairness: Concept and Practical Usage The concept of individual fairness is firstly raised in Dwork et al. (2012). Deriving from a consensus that ‘similar individuals should be treated similarly,’ the problem is formulated as a Lipschitz mapping problem. Formally, for arbitrary instances \( x \) and \( x' \in \mathcal{X} \), individual fairness is defined as a \((D_x, D_y)\)-Lipschitz property of a classifier \( f_0 \):

\[
D_y(f_0(x), f_0(x')) \leq D_x(x, x'),
\]

where \( D_x(\cdot, \cdot) \) and \( D_y(\cdot, \cdot) \) are some distance functions respectively defined in the input space \( \mathcal{X} \) and output space \( \mathcal{Y} \), and shall be customized upon domain knowledge. However, for a general problem, it could be demanding to carry out a concrete and interpretable \( D_x(\cdot, \cdot) \) and \( D_y(\cdot, \cdot) \), hence making individual fairness impractical in many applications. To simplify this problem from a continuous Lipschitz constraint, some works evaluate individual fairness of models with a binary distance function: \( D_x(x, x') = 0 \) for two different samples \( x \) and \( x' \) if they are exactly the same except sensitive attributes, i.e., \( c = c', d = d', \) and \( s \neq s' \) (Yurochkin et al., 2020; Yurochkin & Sun, 2021). Despite the interpretability, this constraint can be too harsh to find sufficient comparable samples since other features may correlate with sensitive attributes. For empirical studies, these studies can only simulate the experiments with semi-synthetic data: flipping one’s sensitive attribute to construct a fictitious sample and evaluate the predictive gap. Note that for tabular data, simply discarding the sensitive attributes could be perfectly individually fair to this simulation. Other work (Lahoti et al., 2019) defines \( D_x(\cdot, \cdot) \) on representational space with Euclidean distance, therefore lacking interpretability over the input tabular data.

To have a practical and interpretable setup, we present Definition 2.1 as an examplar to describe in what conditions we consider two samples to be comparable for an imperfect classifier. When \( x \) and \( x' \) are coming to be comparable, from the purpose of individual fairness, their predictive gap \(|f_0(x) - f_0(x')|\) should be minimized through the classifier.

Definition 2.1 (comparable samples). Given thresholds \( T_d, T_c \in \mathbb{R}_{\geq 0} \), \( x \) and \( x' \) are comparable iff all constraints are satisfied: 1. For discrete features, \( \sum_{i=1}^{N_d} 1\{d_i \neq d'_i\} \leq T_d; \) 2. For continuous features, \( \max_i |c_i - c'_i| \leq T_c, \forall 1 \leq i \leq N_c \); and 3. For ground truth label, \( y = y' \).

Remark 2.1. For some pre-defined thresholds \( T_d \) and \( T_c \), two samples are considered as comparable iff 1. there are at most \( T_d \) features differing in discrete features; 2. the largest disparity among all continuous features is smaller or equal to \( T_c \); and 3. two samples have the same ground truth label.

Definition 2.1 allows two samples to be slightly different in discrete and continuous features, and arbitrarily different in sensitive attributes. Distinct to previous definitions, the constraints in Definition 2.1 are relaxed to find out sufficient real comparable samples, and meanwhile are highly interpretable and semantically rich compared to defining them in representational space. As a practical use case, in lending data, to certify individual fairness for two samples, we can set discrete features to the history of past payment status (where value 1 indicates a complete payment, and value 0 indicates a missing payment), and continuous features to the monthly amount of bill statement. Two samples are considered to be comparable if they have a determin-
nate difference in payment status and amount of bills. Note that Definition 2.1 is only one exemplar of comparable samples in individual fairness. Other definitions, for instance, involving ordinal features or enforcing some features to be identical, are also practicable, and are highly flexible to extend upon task demand. In this paper, we take Definition 2.1 as a canonical example and this formulation does not affect our model design. In this paper, we shall evaluate individual fairness towards Definition 2.1, and mostly consider comparable samples with different sensitive attributes.

3. Learning Antidote Data to Individual Unfairness

Motivation Several methods solve the individual fairness problem through Distributionally Robust Optimization (DRO) (Yurochkin et al., 2020; Yurochkin & Sun, 2021; Ruoss et al., 2020; Yeom & Fredrikson, 2021). The high-level idea is to optimize a model at some distribution with perturbations that dramatically change the sensitive information.

The optimization solution can be summarized as:

\[
\begin{align*}
\min_{f_0} \mathbb{E}_{(x,y)} [\ell(f_0(x), y)], \\
\min_{f_0} \mathbb{E}_{(x,y)} \max_{x+\epsilon \sim \mathcal{D}_{\text{Sen}}} \ell(f_0(x+\epsilon), y),
\end{align*}
\]

(2)

where the first term is standard empirical risk minimization, and the second term is for loss minimization over adversarial samples. The formulation is technically relevant to traditional DRO (Duchi & Namkoong, 2018; Levy et al., 2020), while the difference derives from \(\mathcal{D}_{\text{Sen}}\), which is set to some customized distribution offering perturbations to specifically change one’s sensitive information. For example, Yurochkin et al. (2020) characterizes \(\mathcal{D}_{\text{Sen}}\) as a subspace learnt from a logistic regression model, which contains the most predictability of sensitive attributes. Ruoss et al. (2020) finds out this distribution via logical constraints.

Though feasible, we would like to respectfully point out that (1) Perturbations that violating feature correlations could push adversarial samples leave the data manifold. An intuitive example is treating age as the sensitive attribute. Perturbations can change a person’s age arbitrarily to find an optimal age that encourage the model to predict the most differentially. Such perturbations ignore the correlations between the sensitive feature and other features like education or annual income, resulting in an adversarial sample with age 5 or 10 but holding a doctoral degree or getting $80K annual income. (2) Samples with arbitrary perturbations can easily break the nature of tabular data. In tabular data, there are only one-hot discrete values for categorical variables after one-hot encoding, and potentially a fixed range for continuous variables. For arbitrary perturbations, the adversarial samples may in half bachelor degree and half doctoral degree. These two drawbacks lead samples from \(\mathcal{D}_{\text{Sen}}\) to be unrealistic and escaping the data manifold, thus distorting the learning, and, as shown in our experiments, resulting in sub-optimal tradeoffs between fairness and utility.

In this work, we address the above issues related to \(\mathcal{D}_{\text{Sen}}\), and propose to generate on-manifold data for individual fairness purposes. The philosophy is, by giving an original training sample, generate its comparable samples with different and reasonable sensitive attributes, and the generated data should fit into existing data manifold and obey the inherent feature correlations or innate data constraints. We name the generated data as antidote data. The antidote data can either mix with original training data to be a pre-processing technique, or either serve as \(\mathcal{D}_{\text{Sen}}\) in Equation (2) as an in-processing approach. By taking antidote data, a classifier would give individually fair predictions.

3.1. Antidote Data Generator

We start by elaborating on the generator of antidote data. The purpose of antidote data generator \(g_\theta\) is, given a training sample \(x\), generating its comparable samples with different sensitive attribute(s). To ensure the generations have different sensitive features, we build \(g_\theta\) as a conditional generative model to generate a sample with pre-defined sensitive features. Given new sensitive attributes \(\tilde{s} \neq s_x\) (recall \(s_x\) is the sensitive attribute of \(x\)), the objective is:

\[
g_\theta : (x, \tilde{s}, z) \rightarrow \hat{x},
\]

with \(s_{\hat{x}} = \tilde{s}\), \(x\) and \(\hat{x}\) satisfy Definition 2.1, (3)

where \(z \sim \mathcal{N}(0, 1)\) is drawn from a standard multivariate normal distribution as a noise vector. The generation \(\hat{x}\) should follow the data distribution and satisfy some innate constraints from discrete or continuous features, i.e., the one-hot format for discrete features and a reasonable range for continuous features. In the following, we shall elaborate the design and training strategy for \(g_\theta\).

Value Encoding We encode categorical features using one-hot encoding. For continuous features, we adopt model-specific normalization (Xu et al., 2019) to encode every column of continuous values independently, which shown to be effective on modeling tabular data. We use Variational Bayesian to estimate the Gaussian mixture in the distribution of one continuous feature. This approach will decompose the distribution into several modes, where each mode is a Gaussian distribution with unique parameters. Formally, given a value \(c_{i,j}\) in the \(i\)-th column of continuous feature and \(j\)-th row in the tabular, the learned Gaussian mixture is \(\mathbb{P}(c_{i,j}) = \sum_{k=1}^{K_i} w_{i,k} N(c_{i,j}; \mu_{i,k}, \sigma_{i,k}^2)\), where \(w_{i,k}\) is the weight of \(k\)-th mode in \(i\)-th continuous feature, and \(\mu_k\) and \(\sigma_k\) are the mean and standard deviation of the normal distribution of \(k\)-th mode. We use the learned Gaussian mixture to encode every continuous value. For each value \(c_{i,j}\), we estimate the probability from each mode
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via $p_{i,k}(c_{i,j}) = w_{i,k}N(c_{i,j}; \mu_{i,k}, \sigma^2_{i,k})$, and sample one mode from the discrete probability distribution $p_i$ with $K_i$ values. Having a sampled mode $k$, we represent the mode of $c_{i,j}$ using a one-hot mode indicator vector, an all-zero vector $\epsilon_{i,k}$ except the $k$-th entry equal to 1. We use a scalar to represent the relative value within $k$-th mode: $v_{i,x} = (c_{i,j} - \mu_{i,k})/4\sigma_{i,k}$. By encoding all continuous values, we have a re-representation $\tilde{x}$ to substitute $x$ as the input for antidote data generator $g_0$:

$$\tilde{x} = (v_{1,x} \oplus e_{1,x} \oplus \cdots \oplus v_{N_e,x} \oplus e_{N_e,x}) \oplus d_x \oplus s_x.$$ (4)

Recall $\oplus$ denotes vector-vector or vector-scalar concatenation. To construct a comparable sample $\tilde{x}$, the task for continuous features is to classify the mode from latent representations, i.e., estimate $e_{i,k}$, and predict the relative value $v_{i,x}$. We can decode $v_{i,x}$ and $e_{i,k}$ back to a continuous value using the learned Gaussian mixture.

**Structural Design** The whole model is designed in a Generative Adversarial Networks (Goodfellow et al., 2014) style, consisting of a generator $g_0$ and a discriminator $d_0$.

The generator $g_0$ takes the re-representation $\tilde{x}$, a pre-defined sensitive feature $\hat{s}$, and noisy vector $z$ as input. The output from $g_0$ will be a vector with the same size as $\tilde{x}$ including $v_{\tilde{x}}, e_{\tilde{x}}, d_{\tilde{x}},$ and $s_{\tilde{x}}$. To ensure all discrete features are in a one-hot manner so that the generations will follow a tabular distribution, we apply Gumbel softmax (Jang et al., 2017) as the final activation to each discrete feature and obtain $d_{\tilde{x}}$. Gumbel softmax is a differentiable operation to encode a continuous distribution over a simplex and approximate it to a categorical distribution. This function controls the sharpness of output via a hyperparameter called temperature. Gumbel softmax is also applied to sensitive features $s_{\tilde{x}}$ and mode indicator vectors $e_{\tilde{x}}$ to ensure the one-hot format.

The purpose for the discriminator model $d_0$ is to distinguish the fake generations from real samples, and we also build discriminator to identify generated samples in terms of its comparability from real comparable samples. Through discriminator, the constraints from comparable samples are implicitly encoded into the adversarial training. We formulate the fake sample for discriminator as $\hat{x} \oplus \bar{x} \oplus (\hat{x} - \bar{x})$, and real samples as $\hat{x}' \oplus \bar{x} \oplus (\hat{x}' - \bar{x})$, where $\hat{x}'$ is the re-representation of a comparable sample $x'$ to $x$ drawn from the training data. The third term $\hat{x} - \bar{x}$ is encoded to emphasize the different between two comparable samples. Implicitly regularizing the comparability leaves full flexibility to the generator to fit with various definitions of comparable samples, and avoid adding complicated penalty terms, as long as there are real comparable samples in data.

**Training Antidote Data Generator** We train the model iteratively through the following objectives with gradient penalty (Gulrajani et al., 2017) to ensure stability:

$$\min_{g_0} \mathbb{E}_{x,x' \sim D_{\text{comp}}} [\ell_{\text{CE}}(s_{\hat{x}}, s_{x'}) - d_0(g_0(\hat{x} \oplus s_{x'} \oplus z))],$$

$$\min_{d_0} \mathbb{E}_{x,x' \sim D_{\text{comp}}} [d_0(g_0(\hat{x} \oplus s_{x'} \oplus z)) - d_0(\hat{x}')]$$

where $D_{\text{comp}}$ is the distribution describing the real comparable samples in data, $\ell_{\text{CE}}$ is cross entropy loss to penalize the prediction of every sensitive attribute in $s_{\hat{x}}$ with $s_{x'}$ as the ground truth.

### 3.2. Learning with Antidote Data

In practice, it is not guaranteed that $g_0$ will produce comparable samples submitting to Definition 2.1, since in the training of generator we only apply soft penalties to enforce them to be comparable. Thus, we adopt a post-processing step $\text{Post}$ to select comparable samples from all the raw generations. Given a dataset $X$, for one iteration of sampling, we input every $x$ with all possible sensitive features (except $s_{\hat{x}}$) to the generator, collect raw generations $X$, and apply $\text{Post}(X)$ to get the antidote data. The label $y$ for antidote data is copied from the original data. In experiments, we may have multiple iterations of sampling to enlarge the pool of antidote data.

We elaborate two ways to easily apply the generated antidote data for the individual fairness purpose.

**Pre-processing** The first way to use antidote data is to simply insert all antidote data to the original training set:

$$\min_{f_0} \ell(f_0(x), y), \quad x \in X + \text{Post}(X).$$ (6)

Since we only add additional training data, this approach is model-agnostic, flexible to any model optimization procedure, and fits well with well-developed data analytical toolkits such as sklearn (Pedregosa et al., 2011). We consider the convenience as a favorable property for practitioners.

**In-processing** The second way is to apply antidote data with Distributionally Robust Optimization. We present the training procedure in Algorithm 1. In every training iteration, except the optimization at real data with $\ell(x, y)$, we add an additional step to select $x$’s comparable samples in antidote data with the highest loss incurred by the current model’s parameters, and capture gradients from $\max_{x \in \{\tilde{x}_i\}_{i \leftarrow -x} \ell(\tilde{x}, y)$ to update the model. The algorithm is similar to DRO with perturbations along some sensitive directions, but instead we replace the perturbations with on-manifold generated data. The additional loss term in Algorithm 1 can be upper bounded by gradient smoothing.
Algorithm 1 AntiDRO: DRO with Antidote Data for Individual Fairness

1: **Input:** Training data $T = \{(x_i, y_i)\}_i^n$, learning rate $\eta$, loss function $\ell$
2: Train Antidote Data Generator $g_\theta$ with $\{x_i\}_i^n$ and comparable constraints
3: Sample antidote data $\hat{X}$ using $g_\theta$
4: **repeat**
5: $f_\theta : \theta \leftarrow \theta - \eta E_{(x, y)}[\nabla_\theta (\max_{i \in \{\hat{x}_i\}} \ell(\hat{x}_i, y) + \ell(x, y))] / \{\hat{x}_i\}_M \leftarrow x$ is the set of $M$ comparable samples of $x$ and $\{\hat{x}_i\}_D \in \text{Post}(X)$
6: **until** convergence
7: **Return:** Individually fair classifier $f_\theta$

Regularization terms. Taking Taylor expansion, we have:

$$\max_{\hat{x} \in \{\hat{x}_i\}} \ell(\hat{x}, y) = \ell(x, y) + \max_{\hat{x} \in \{\hat{x}_i\}} \ell(\hat{x}, y) - \ell(x, y)$$

$$= \ell(x, y) + \max_{\hat{x} \in \{\hat{x}_i\}} \ell(\hat{x}, y) - \ell(x, y) + O(\delta^2)$$

$$\leq \ell(x, y) + T_d \max_{i} \nabla_{d, \ell}(x, y) + T_e \max_{i} \nabla_{e, \ell}(x, y)$$

$$+ N_s \max_{i} \nabla_{s, \ell}(x, y) + O(\delta^2).$$

Recall $T_d$ and $T_e$ are the thresholds for discrete and continuous features in Definition 2.1. $O(\delta^2)$ is the higher-order term from Taylor expansion. The last inequality is from Definition 2.1. The three gradients on discrete, continuous, and sensitive features serve as gradient regularization and encourage the model to have invariant loss with regard to comparable samples. However, the upper bound is only a sufficient but not necessary condition, and our solution encodes real data distribution into the gradient regularization to solve individual unfairness with favorable trade-offs.

4. Experiments

4.1. Experimental Setup

**Datasets** We involve census datasets Adult (Kohavi & Becker, 1996) and Dutch (Van der Laan, 2000), educational dataset Law School (Wightman, 1998) and Oulad (Kuzilek et al., 2017), and criminological dataset Compas (Angwin et al., 2016) in our experiments. For each dataset, we select one or two attributes related to ethics as sensitive attributes which expose a significant individual unfairness in regular training. We report their details in Appendix A.

**Protocol** For all datasets, we transform discrete features into one-hot encoding, and standardize the features by removing the mean and scaling to unit variance. We transform continuous features into the range between 0 and 1. We construct pairs of comparable samples for both training and testing sets. We evaluate both the model utility and individual fairness in experiments. For utility, we consider the area under the Receiver Operating Characteristic Curve (ROC), and Average Precision (AP) to characterize the precision of probabilistic outputs in binary classification. For individual fairness, we consider the gap in probabilistic scores between comparable samples when both two samples have the same positive or negative label (abbreviated as Pos. Comp. and Neg. Comp.). We evaluate unfairness for Pos. Comp. and Neg. Comp. in terms of the arithmetic mean (Mean) and upper quartile (Q3). The upper quartile can show us the performance of some worse-performed pairs. For a base model with randomness like NN, we ran the experiments five times and report the average results.

As elaborated in Section 3.2, we set some iterations to sample raw generations $\hat{X}$ from the antidote data generator, and apply $\text{Post}(\hat{X})$ to select all comparable samples. This operation would not result in a fixed amount of antidote data across different datasets since the generator could be different. We report the relative amount of antidote data used in every experiment in the following and Appendix A.

**Baselines** We consider two base models: logistic regression (LR), and three-layers neural networks (NN). We use logistic regression from Scikit-learn (Pedregosa et al., 2011), and our antidote data is compatible with this mature implementation since it does not make a change to the model. Approaches involving DRO currently do not support this LR pipeline, but will be validated through neural networks implemented with PyTorch. We have the following five baselines in experiments: 1. Discard sensitive features (Dis). This approach simply discards the appointed sensitive features in the input data. 2. Project (Proj) (Yurochkin et al., 2020). Project finds a linear projection via logistic regression which minimizes the predictability of sensitive attributes in data. It requires an extra pre-processing step to project input data. 3. SenSR (Yurochkin et al., 2020). SenSR is based on DRO. It finds a sensitive subspace through logistic regression which encodes the sensitive information most, and generates perturbations on this sensitive subspace during optimization. 4. SenSel (Yurochkin & Fun, 2021). SenSel also uses the DRO paradigm, but involves distances penalties on both input and model predictions to construct perturbations; 5. LCIFR (Ruoss et al., 2020). LCIFR computes adversarial perturbations with logical constraints, and optimizes representations under the attacks from perturbations. We basically follow the default hyperparameter setting from the original implementation but fine-tune some parameters to avoid degeneration in some cases. For our approaches, we use Anti to denote the approach that simply merges original data and antidote data, use Anti+Dis to denote discarding sensitive attributes in both original and antidote data, and use AntiDRO to denote antidote data with DRO.
4.2. Antidote Data Empirically Mitigate Unfairness

We present our empirical results on Table 1 and Figure 1, and defer more to Appendix C. From these results we have the following major observations.

Antidote Data Show Good Performance Across all datasets, with antidote data, our models mostly perform the best in terms of individual fairness, and with only a minimal drop or sometimes even a slight improvement on predictive utility. For example, on Law School dataset in Table 5, our NN+Anti mitigates individual unfairness by 70.38% and 63.36% in terms of the Mean in Pos. Comp. and Neg. Comp., respectively, with improvements on ROC by 0.47% and AP by 0.07%. On this dataset, other methods typically bring a 0.1%-2.5% drop in utility, and deliver less mitigation of individual unfairness. In specific cases, baseline methods do give better individual fairness, e.g., LCIFR for Neg. Comp., but their good fairness is not consistent for positive comparable samples, and is usually achieved at a significant cost on utility (up to a 13.03% drop in ROC).

Additional Improvements from In-processing Our AntiDRO outperforms NN+Anti. This approach gets fairer results and slightly better predictive utility. The reason is AntiDRO introduces antidote data into every optimization iteration and selects the worst performed data instead of treating them equally. The DRO training typically has an iterative optimization in every epoch to search for constructive perturbations. In contrast, AntiDRO omits the inner optimizations but only evaluates antidote data in each round.

Binding Well with Sensitive Feature Removal Removing sensitive features from input data (Dis) generally improves individual fairness, more or less. On Law School dataset in Table 5, discarding sensitive features can bring up to 44.32% - 63.36% mitigation of individual fairness. But once sensitive features are highly correlated with other features, an excellent mitigation is not guaranteed. On Adult dataset in Table 1, removing sensitive features only gives 0.93% - 2.94% improvements across LR and NN. Regardless of the varying performance from Dis, our antidote data bind well with sensitive features discarding. On Adult dataset, our LR+Anti plus Dis boosts individual fairness in Pos. Comp. by 5.36%, where solely discarding sensitive features only has 0.94% improvements. This number is consistent in NN, i.e., 4.96% compared to 0.93%.

Fairness-Utility Tradeoffs In Figure 2 A & B, we show the tradeoffs between utility and fairness. We have two major observations: (1) Models with antidote data perform better tradeoffs, i.e., with more antidote data, we have lower individual unfairness with less drop in model utility. AntiDRO has the best tradeoffs and achieves individual fairness with an inconspicuous sacrifice of utility even when the amount of antidote data goes up. (2) Our models enjoy a lower variance with different random seeds. For baseline methods, when we turn up the hyperparameters controlling the tradeoffs, there is an instability in the final results and a significant variance. However, as our model is optimized on approximately real data, and with no adjustments on models with Anti and only minimal change in optimization from AntiDRO, there is no observational variance in final results.

Generator Convergence In Figure 2 C, we show the change of the comparability ratio, i.e., the ratio of comparable samples from the entire raw generated samples, during the training of Antidote Data Generator over different types of features. The comparability ratio of sensitive features quickly converged to 1 since we have direct supervision. The ratio of discrete and numerical features converged around the 500-th iteration due to the implicit supervision from the discriminator. The ratio of continuous features
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Figure 1. Experimental results on Compas dataset. Experiments in the left three figures use Logistic Regression as the base model, and the right three figures use Neural Networks. The top two rows plot individual fairness, while the bottom two rows plot the model’s utility. Since we set two sensitive attributes for Compas dataset, we plot three situations for comparable samples upon sensitive attributes for these two samples, and use logical expressions to denote them. We use ‘and’ to indicate none of the sensitive attributes is same between a pair of comparable samples, use ‘or’ to denote at least one sensitive attribute is different, and use ‘not’ to indicate both two attributes are consistent. The dash line in box plots indicate the arithmetic mean. Our methods are highlighted with green background in the figure.

Table 2. In comparisons to random comparable samples on Adult dataset (see paragraph Random Comparable Samples)

| Method          | ROC ↑ | Pos. Comp. (Mean/Q3) ↓ |
|-----------------|-------|------------------------|
| NN              | 88.18 | 33.21 / 47.84          |
| +100.0% Rand.   | 88.25 | 31.33 / 44.69          |
| +200.0% Rand.   | 88.18 | 30.16 / 42.51          |
| +300.0% Rand.   | 88.19 | 29.48 / 39.77          |
| +500.0% Rand.   | 88.08 | 27.94 / 39.31          |
| +44.5% Anti     | 87.95 | 26.05 / 35.76          |

is lower than discrete features due to more complex patterns. The imperfect comparability ratio prompts us add an additional step Post() to filter out incomparable samples.

4.3. Modeling the Data Manifold

Random Comparable Samples In Table 2 we compare randomly generated comparable samples to emphasize the benefit of data manifold modeling. We sample the random comparable samples as such: (1) Uniformly sample discrete features and perturb them into a random value in the current feature. The total number of perturbed features is arbitrary in $[0, T_d]$. (2) Uniformly sample values from $[-T_c, T_c]$, and add the perturbations to continuous features. We clip the perturbed features in $[0, 1]$. (3) Randomly perturb an arbitrary number of sensitive features. We add these randomly generated comparable samples to the original training set.

From the results in Table 2, we observe that with only 44.5% antidote data, the model outperforms the one with 500% randomly generated comparable samples in terms of individual fairness. By surpassing 10x data efficacy, the results demonstrated that modeling on-manifold comparable samples is greatly efficient to mitigate individual unfairness.

Good Learning Efficacy from Antidote Data In Table 3 we study the model binary classification performance by training only on generated data. We use Accuracy (Acc.), Balanced Accuracy (Bal. Acc.), and F1 Score (F1) for evaluation. We construct a synthetic training set that has the same amount of data as the original training set. We use two baselines. Random Data: the randomly generated data fit the basic feature-wise constraints from tabular data. Pert. in SenSel: we collect adversarial perturbations from the original data in every training iteration of SenSel, and uniformly
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Figure 2. A & B: The tradeoffs between utility and fairness on Adult dataset. For SenSeI we iterate the controlling hyperparameter in (1e+3, 5e+3, 1e+4, 5e+4, 1e+5, 2e+5, 5e+5). For LCIFR, we iterate the weight for fairness in (0.1, 1.0, 10.0, 50.0, 100.0). For Anti, we have the proportion of antidote ratio at 0%, 45%, 90%, 134%, 180%, 225%, 270%, 316%, 361%, and 406%. For AntiDRO, we have the proportion of antidote ratio at 45%, 90%, 136%, 180%, 225%. Every point is plotted with variances, and the variance for our models is too small to observe in this figure. C: The convergence of the comparability ratio during training (see paragraph Generator Convergence).

Table 3. Learning efficacy on Adult dataset

|              | Acc. ↑ | Bal. Acc. ↑ | F1 ↑ |
|--------------|--------|-------------|------|
| Original Data| 84.64  | 76.16       | 65.55|
| Random Data  | 30.48  | 40.25       | 29.59|
| Pert. in SenSeI | 53.81  | 67.83       | 50.36|
| Antidote Data| 78.48  | 74.03       | 59.84|

sample training data from these perturbations.

Within expectation, results in Table 3 show that our antidote data suffer from a performance drop compared to the original data because the generator cannot perfectly fit the data manifold. Even so, antidote data surpass random data and perturbations from SenSeI, indicating that antidote data capture the manifold and are closer to the original data.

5. Related Work

Machine Learning Fairness AI Fairness proposes ethical regulations to rectify algorithms not discriminating against any party or individual (Li et al., 2021; Hardt et al., 2016; Li & Liu, 2022; Li et al., 2020; Song et al., 2021; Chhabra et al., 2022). To quantify the goal, the concept ‘group fairness’ asks for equalized outcomes from algorithms across sensitive groups in terms of statistics like true positive rate or positive rate (Hardt et al., 2016). Similarly, minimax fairness (Hashimoto et al., 2018) characterizes the algorithmic performance of the worst-performed group among all. Though appealing, both of these two notions guarantee poorly on individuals. To compensate for the deficiency, counterfactual fairness (Kusner et al., 2017) describes the consistency of algorithms on one instance and its counterfacts when sensitive attributes got changed. However, this notion and corresponding evaluations strongly rely on the causal structure (Glymour et al., 2016), which originates from the data generating process. Thus, in practice, an explicit modeling is usually unavailable. Individual fairness (Dwork et al., 2012) describes the pair-wise predictive gaps between similar instances, and it is feasible when the constraints in input and output spaces are properly defined.

Individual Fairness Several methods have been proposed for individual fairness. Sharifi-Malvajerdi et al. (2019) studies Average Individual Fairness. They regulate the average error rate for individuals on a series of classification tasks with different targets, and bound the rate for the worst-performed individual. Yurochkin et al. (2020); Yurochkin & Sun (2021); Ruoss et al. (2020); Yeom & Fredrikson (2021) develop models via DRO that iteratively optimized at samples which violate fairness at most. To overcome the hardness for choosing distance functions, Mukherjee et al. (2020) inherits the knowledge of similar/dissimilar pairs of inputs, and propose to learn good similarity metrics from data. Ilvento (2020) learns metrics for individual fairness from human judgements, and construct an approximation from a limited queries to the arbiter. Petersen et al. (2021) develops a graph smoothing approach to mitigate individual bias based on a similarity graph. Lahoti et al. (2019) develops a probabilistic mapping from input to low-rank representations that reconcile individual fairness well. To introduce individual fairness to more applications, Vargo et al. (2021) studies individual fairness in gradient boosting, and the model is able to work with non-smooth models such as decision trees. Dwork et al. (2020) studies individual fairness in a multi-stage pipeline. Maity et al. (2021); John et al. (2020) study model auditing with individual fairness.

Crafting Adversarial Samples Beyond regular adversary (Madry et al., 2018), using generative models to craft on-manifold adversarial samples is an attractive technique for model robustness (Xiao et al., 2018; Zhao et al., 2018;
6. Conclusion

In this paper we studied individual fairness on tabular datasets, and focused on an individual fairness definition with rich semantics. We proposed an antidote data generator to learn on-manifold comparable samples, and used the generator to produce antidote data for the individual fairness purpose. We provided two approaches to equip antidote data to regular classification pipeline or a distributionally robust optimization paradigm. By incorporating generated antidote data, we showed good individual fairness as well as good tradeoffs between utility and individual fairness.

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A. Dataset and Relevant Details

We introduce datasets and experimental details related to datasets in this section. The thresholds $T_d$ and $T_c$ in Definition 2.1 are chosen to offer sufficient comparable samples in experiments. These two values are consistent across all datasets and are not dataset-specific. The only case we enlarge $T_c$ is on Law School dataset because the initial value cannot offer enough comparable samples for learning.

**Adult dataset**  The Adult dataset contains census personal records with attributes like age, education, race, etc. The task is to determine whether a person makes over $50K$ a year. We use $45.25\%$ antidote data for Anti, and $225.97\%$ antidote data for AntiDRO in Table 1. We set $T_d = 1$ and $T_c = 0.025$ for the constraints of comparable samples.

**Compas dataset**  The Compas dataset is a criminological dataset recording prisoners’ information like criminal history, jail and prison time, demographic, sex, etc. The task is to predict a recidivism risk score for defendants. We use $148.55\%$ antidote data for Anti, and $184.89\%$ antidote data for AntiDRO in Figure 1. We set $T_d = 1$ and $T_c = 0.025$.

**Law School dataset**  The Law School dataset contains law school admission records. The goal is to predict whether a candidate would pass the bar exam, with available features like sex, race, and student’s decile, etc. We use $56.18\%$ antidote data for Anti, and $523.23\%$ antidote data for Anti in Table 5. We set $T_d = 1$ and $T_c = 0.1$.

**Oulad dataset**  The Oulad dataset contains information of students and their activities in the virtual learning environment for seven courses. It offers students’ gender, region, age, and academic information to predict students’ final results in a module-presentation. We use $523.23\%$ antidote data for Anti, and $338.50\%$ antidote data for AntiDRO in Table 6. We set $T_d = 1$ and $T_c = 0.025$.

**Dutch dataset**  The Dutch dataset dataset contains people profiles in Netherlands in 2001. It provides information like sex, age, household, citizenship, etc., and aim to predict a person’s occupation. We remove $8,549$ duplication in the test set and reduce the size to $6,556$. We use $205.44\%$ antidote data for Anti, and $780.65\%$ antidote data for AntiDRO in Table 7. We set $T_d = 1$ and $T_c = 0.025$.

### Table 4. Dataset Statistics.

| Dataset          | #Sample | #Dim. | Sensitive Attribute | #Pos. Comp. | #Neg. Comp. |
|------------------|---------|-------|---------------------|-------------|-------------|
| Adult            | 30,162 / 15,060 | 103   | marital-status      | 739 / 193   | 38,826 / 10,412 |
| Compas           | 4,626 / 1,541   | 354   | race + sex          | 24,292 / 2,571 | 8,116 / 118   |
| Law School       | 15,598 / 5,200  | 23    | race                | 13,425 / 1,530 | 1,068 / 118   |
| Oulad            | 16,177 / 5,385  | 48    | age, band           | 33,747 / 3,927 | 5,869 / 608   |
| Dutch            | 45,315 / 6,556  | 61    | sex                 | 1,460,028 / 6,727 | 1,301,376 / 9,390 |

B. Implementation Details

**Model Architecture**  We elaborate the architecture of our model in details by using $h$ as the hidden representations.

$$g_a = \begin{cases} 
  h_1 = \text{ReLU}(\text{BatchNorm1d}(\text{Linear} \to 256(\hat{x} \oplus \hat{s} \oplus z))) \oplus \hat{x} \oplus \hat{s} \oplus z \\
  h_2 = \text{ReLU}(\text{BatchNorm1d}(\text{Linear} \to 256(h_1))) \oplus h_1 \\
  h_3 = \text{ReLU}(\text{BatchNorm1d}(\text{Linear} \to \text{Dim}(\hat{y})) (h_2)) \\
  \hat{v}_i = \text{tanh}(\text{Linear} \to 1(h_3[\text{index for } v_i])) \quad \forall \ 0 \leq i \leq N_c \\
  \hat{d}_i = \text{gumbel}_{0.2}(\text{Linear} \to |d_i|(h_3[\text{index for } K_i])) \quad \forall \ 0 \leq i \leq N_c \\
  \hat{d}_i = \text{gumbel}_{0.2}(\text{Linear} \to |d_i|(h_3[\text{index for } d_i])) \quad \forall \ 0 \leq i \leq N_d 
\end{cases}$$
Hyperparameter Setting We use Adam optimizer for training the generator. We set the learning rate for generator $g_{θ}$ to 2e-4, for discriminator $d_{θ}$ to 2e-4, weight decay for $g_{θ}$ to 1e-6, for $d_{θ}$ to 0. We set batch size to 4096 and training epochs to 500. The hyperparameters are inherited from (Xu et al., 2019). For logistic regression, we set the strength of $ℓ_2$ penalty to 1, and max iteration to 2.048. For neural networks, we set optimization iterations to 10,000, initial learning rate to 1e-1, $ℓ_2$ penalty strength to $1e^{-2}$, with SGD optimizer and decrease learning rate by 50% for every 2,500 iterations. In Table 8, we use the default XGBClассifier from https://xgboost.readthedocs.io/en/stable/.

C. Additional Results

We present experimental results on Dutch dataset in Table 6, on Oulad dataset in Table 7, tradeoffs study in Figure 3, and results with XGBoost classifier in Table 8. Similar conclusions can be drawn as stated in Section 4.2: with antidote data, our models Anti and AntiDRO achieve good individual fairness and favorable tradeoffs between fairness and model predictive utility.

Table 5. Experimental results on Law School dataset. Our methods are highlighted with green background in the table.

|                | ROC ↑ | AP ↑ | Pos. Comp. (Mean/Q3) ↓ | Neg. Comp. (Mean/Q3) ↓ |
|----------------|-------|------|-------------------------|------------------------|
| LR (Base)      | 86.14 | 97.80| 3.67 / 5.39             | 11.70 / 15.21          |
| LR+Proj        | 85.84 | 97.74| 2.23 / -39.35 / 2.48 / -54.07 | 8.66 / -25.99 / 11.40 / -25.05 |
| LR+Dis         | 86.18 | 97.79| 2.04 / -44.32 / 2.32 / -56.90 | 7.33 / -37.36 / 11.25 / -26.04 |
| LR+Anti        | 86.22 | 97.80| 1.79 / -51.20 / 2.20 / -59.14 | 6.56 / -43.98 / 8.64 / -43.21 |
| LR+Anti+Dis    | 86.20 | 97.80| 1.76 / -52.08 / 2.16 / -59.96 | 6.28 / -46.33 / 8.36 / -45.03 |
| NN (Base)      | 85.70 | 97.72| 5.38 / 8.22              | 12.55 / 16.47          |
| NN+Proj        | 85.89 | 97.76| 2.04 / -62.07 / 2.27 / -72.39 | 5.52 / -56.00 / 6.46 / -60.77 |
| NN+Dis         | 85.99 | 97.78| 1.97 / -63.36 / 2.22 / -72.98 | 5.34 / -57.42 / 6.45 / -60.11 |
| SenSR          | 84.49 | 97.55| 2.58 / -51.99 / 3.23 / -60.67 | 5.56 / -55.68 / 7.81 / -52.57 |
| SenSel         | 84.59 | 97.49| 7.01 / +0.33% / 10.83 / +31.64 | 18.22 / +45.16% / 24.99 / +51.72 |
| LCIFR          | 74.53 | 95.28| 2.63 / -51.05 / 3.06 / -62.79 | 3.35 / -73.28% / 3.78 / -77.07 |
| NN+Anti        | 86.11 | 97.79| 1.59 / -70.38% / 1.94 / -76.44 | 4.60 / -63.36% / 6.31 / -61.69 |
| NN+Anti+Dis    | 86.07 | 97.79| 1.54 / -71.31% / 1.80 / -78.05 | 4.44 / -64.66% / 5.47 / -66.78 |
| AntiDRO        | **86.56** | **98.88** | **1.52** / -71.75% / 1.82 / -77.82 | 4.10 / -67.34% / 5.54 / -66.33 |

Table 6. Experimental results on Dutch dataset. Our methods are highlighted with green background in the table.

|                | ROC ↑ | AP ↑ | Pos. Comp. (Mean/Q3) ↓ | Neg. Comp. (Mean/Q3) ↓ |
|----------------|-------|------|-------------------------|------------------------|
| LR (Base)      | **89.55** | **87.87** | 17.84 / 24.15          | 21.81 / 30.29          |
| LR+Proj        | 86.62 | 85.13 | 7.74 / -56.60% / 8.21 / -65.99 | 8.01 / -63.30% / 8.55 / -71.79 |
| LR+Dis         | 87.51 | 85.71 | 8.44 / -52.67% / 9.03 / -62.63 | 9.11 / -58.22% / 11.29 / -62.72 |
| LR+Anti        | 85.41 | 83.38 | 9.55 / -46.47% / 10.37 / -57.05 | 10.74 / -50.77% / 12.70 / -58.09 |
| LR+Anti+Dis    | 87.40 | 85.51 | **7.08** / -60.32% / **7.06** / -70.76 | **7.10** / -67.44% / **7.48** / -75.31 |
| NN (Base)      | **90.22** | **88.93** | 15.88 / 20.85          | 21.42 / 31.68          |
| NN+Proj        | 88.18 | 86.94 | 8.11 / -48.95% / 9.44 / -54.75 | 7.65 / -64.29% / 9.73 / -69.28 |
| NN+Dis         | 88.21 | 86.92 | 8.18 / -48.51% / 9.41 / -54.87 | 8.18 / -61.80% / 10.53 / -66.76 |
| SenSR          | 87.78 | 86.68 | 8.54 / -46.20% / 9.71 / -53.46 | 7.72 / -63.94% / 8.61 / -72.83 |
| SenSel         | 89.91 | 83.34 | 16.21 / +2.07% / 21.12 / +1.29% | 21.98 / +2.65% / 31.25 / +1.35 |
| LCIFR          | 88.04 | 86.54 | 8.12 / -48.84% / 9.30 / -55.42 | 8.41 / -60.73% / 10.61 / -66.50 |
| NN+Anti        | 87.05 | 85.59 | 8.71 / -45.11% / 10.50 / -49.67 | 9.49 / -55.70% / 13.23 / -58.23 |
| NN+Anti+Dis    | 87.80 | 86.37 | 6.78 / -47.30% / 7.37 / -64.65 | 6.32 / -70.48% / 7.15 / -77.44 |
| AntiDRO        | 88.00 | 87.13 | **6.34** / -60.04% / **6.06** / -70.93 | **4.91** / -77.08% / **5.41** / -82.93 |
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### Table 7. Experimental results on *Oulad* dataset. Our methods are highlighted with green background in the table.

|                  | ROC ↑ | AP ↑  | Pos. Comp. (Mean/Q3) ↓ | Neg. Comp. (Mean/Q3) ↓ |
|------------------|-------|-------|------------------------|------------------------|
| LR (Base)        | 63.04 | 76.73 | 8.41 / 12.09           | 9.08 / 12.97           |
| LR+Proj          | **65.20** +3.44% | **79.29** +3.34% | 5.33 -36.61% / 7.50 -37.99% | **5.46** -39.88% / **7.69** -40.71% |
| LR+Dis           | 62.52 -0.83% | 76.39 -0.45% | 5.42 -35.50% / 7.89 -34.77% | 5.89 -35.14% / 8.74 -32.63% |
| LR+Anti          | 62.17 -1.38% | 76.24 -0.64% | 6.42 -23.61% / 9.19 -24.02% | 7.10 -21.76% / 9.78 -24.63% |
| LR+Anti+Dis      | 60.82 -3.52% | 75.07 -2.17% | **5.10** -39.31% / **6.95** -42.53% | 5.81 -36.04% / 8.67 -33.17% |
| NN (Base)        | **65.80** | **79.72** | 6.63 / 9.59           | 6.81 / 9.73           |
| NN+Proj          | 65.42 -0.57% | 79.49 -0.29% | 4.76 -28.26% / 6.70 -30.11% | 4.65 -31.68% / 6.71 -31.00% |
| NN+Dis           | 65.51 -0.43% | 79.59 -0.16% | 4.78 -27.94% / 6.84 -28.75% | 4.75 -30.27% / 6.94 -28.66% |
| SenSR            | 65.58 -0.34% | 79.57 -0.19% | 4.96 -25.17% / 7.00 -27.08% | 4.23 -37.85% / 6.16 -36.67% |
| SenSel           | 64.14 -2.52% | 78.68 -1.31% | 5.53 -16.49% / 8.13 -15.22% | 5.50 -19.18% / 7.99 -17.90% |
| LCIFR            | 65.21 -0.89% | 79.40 -0.40% | 4.13 -37.61% / 5.66 -41.01% | **3.70** -45.70% / 5.26 -45.94% |
| NN+Anti          | 64.75 -1.59% | 79.08 -0.80% | 4.09 -38.32% / 5.82 -39.36% | 4.51 -33.69% / 6.30 -35.27% |
| NN+Anti+Dis      | 64.97 -1.26% | 79.20 -0.65% | 4.00 -39.70% / 5.53 -42.33% | 4.18 -38.68% / 5.97 -38.61% |
| AntiDRO          | 64.38 -2.16% | 78.62 -1.38% | **2.86** -56.80% / **3.71** -61.34% | 3.97 -41.64% / **5.22** -46.31% |

### Table 8. Experimental results on *Adult* dataset with XGBoost classifier.

|                  | ROC ↑ | AP ↑  | Pos. Comp. (Mean/Q3) ↓ | Neg. Comp. (Mean/Q3) ↓ |
|------------------|-------|-------|------------------------|------------------------|
| XGBoost          | 92.63 | 82.78 | 10.29 / 15.47          | 11.62 / 18.39          |
| XGBoost+Anti     | 92.57 -0.06% | 83.01 +0.28% | 8.89 -13.61% / 15.27 -12.9% | 10.52 -9.47% / 17.51 -4.79% |

**Figure 3.** The tradeoffs between utility and fairness on *Compas* dataset. For SenSel we iterate the controlling hyperparameter in (1e+3, 5e+3, 1e+4, 5e+4, 1e+5, 2e+5, 5e+5). For LCIFR, we iterate the weight for fairness in (0.1, 1.0, 10.0, 50.0, 100.0). For Anti, we have the proportion of antidote ratio at 110%, 130%, 150%, 167%, 185%, 206%. For AntiDRO, we have the proportion of antidote ratio at 129%, 146%, 167%, 184%, 201%, 222%. Every point is plotted with variances.