SVVAMP: Simulator of Various Voting Algorithms in Manipulating Populations
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We present SVAMP, a Python package dedicated to the study of voting systems with an emphasis on manipulation.

Introduction

History of voting theory has been marked by the discovery of several paradoxes, such as Gibbard–Satterthwaite impossibility theorem on manipulation (Gibbard 1973; Satterthwaite 1975). Since no reasonable voting system can avoid these paradoxes totally, their likeliness of occurrence under various probability assumptions or in real-life elections has been studied at length. However, there remain open questions in the domain, especially about the relative performance of various voting systems according to different criteria and under different sets of assumptions on the preferences of the voters.

Recently, interesting results were published about algorithmic issues linked to voting systems and their manipulation (Bartholdi and Orlin 1991; Xia et al. 2009; Walsh 2010; Zuckerman, Procaccia, and Rosenschein 2009; Zuckerman, Lev, and Rosenschein 2011; Gaspers et al. 2013). However, to the best of our knowledge, there was no publicly available software building on these existing techniques, in particular for the study of manipulability.

This observation led us to develop SVAMP (Simulator of Various Voting Algorithms in Manipulating Populations), a Python package designed to study voting systems and their manipulability.

Voters’ preferences can be imported from external files or generated by a variety of probabilistic models. SVAMP currently implements more than 20 voting systems, and its object-oriented design facilitates the implementation of new voting systems. Special attention has been paid to Coalitional Manipulability (CM) and its variants. Algorithms for Condorcet efficiency, Individual Manipulability (IM) and Independence of Irrelevant Alternatives (IIA) are also implemented.

Functionalities

SVAMP can investigate multiple manipulation-related criteria for a large set of populations and voting systems.
Coalitional manipulation: can a subset of voters, by casting insincere ballots, secure an outcome $c$ that they strictly prefer to $w$ (while other voters still vote sincerely).

Ignorant-Coalition Manipulation (ICM), Unison-Manipulation (UM) and Trivial Manipulation (TM), three alternative types of coalitional manipulation.

Technical details

Algorithms

Determining manipulability, especially CM, can be computationally challenging (for example, it is NP-complete for Borda Rule, Maximin, Coombs method and IRV).

SV\AMP is the first publicly available software implementing state-of-the-art algorithms (Xia et al. 2009; Zuckerman, Procaccia, and Rosenschein 2009; Zuckerman, Lev, and Rosenschein 2011; Gaspers et al. 2013; Walsh 2010) and original heuristics. By default, it tries its most precise algorithm among those running in polynomial time (exact computation can be specified). Approximations conventionally return NaN if they cannot decide.

SV\AMP also embeds brute force algorithms to provide exact computation for any voting system (only recommended for small instances).

Architecture

SV\AMP is written in a modular way. For instance, testing CM is defined in class Election and calls a set of specific sub-functions. Each of these sub-functions can be overridden in the subclass implementing a specific voting system, while keeping the others. This facilitates the definition of new voting systems.

These generic methods defined in SV\AMP allow developers to quickly define a new voting system, only by its rule, and already benefit from generic manipulation algorithms, which makes SV\AMP easily extensible.

Voting systems also come with special attributes that represent a variety of properties that are used to avoid unnecessary computations. For instance, if a voting systems verifies the Condorcet criterium and if a population admits a Condorcet winner, then SV\AMP immediately concludes that the corresponding election meets the IIA criterium.

Also note that SV\AMP tries to be as lazy as possible. For example, if asked to determine if an election is CM, it will first perform some preliminary checks based on election’s properties, then it will cycle through the candidate until it finds a manipulation. If later one wants to get the list of candidates for which a manipulation is possible, SV\AMP resumes the computation where it stopped.

Performance

SV\AMP is designed to run large scale experiments on regular computers. To give an order of magnitude, a full study of all voting systems on 10,000 populations drawn with the Spheroid culture, with $V = 33$ voters and $C = 5$ candidates takes less than one half-hour on a 2.3 GHz personal laptop.

Available code

SV\AMP is a free software, under GNU General Public License version 3. Its documentation includes installation procedure, tutorials, reference guide and instructions for new contributors. It is available at:

https://svvamp.readthedocs.org

We hope that it will be useful to researchers, teachers and students interested in voting theory.

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References


