

**RECOGNIZING SINGLE-PEAKED PREFERENCES
ON A TREE**

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RECOGNIZING SINGLE-PEAKED PREFERENCES ON A TREE

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Abstract. The Condorcet winner is a natural choice as the winner of an election, when it exists. When preference orders are restricted to be single-peaked on a tree, it is known that there is a Condorcet winner. We give an algorithm for determining whether or not a set of preferences is single-peaked on some tree. Knowing this tree is useful for two reasons: its form may reflect the perceptions of the candidates by the electorate, and the existence of a tree guarantees stronger, more difficult to check, properties.

Key words. voting theory, single-peaked preferences

1. Introduction. When a group of electors chooses from a set of candidates, a natural choice is that candidate who is preferred over each other candidate by a majority of the electors. Such a candidate is termed the *Condorcet winner*. Unfortunately, due to the *Condorcet Paradox* (or the *Paradox of Cyclic Majorities*) it is well known that not every election has a Condorcet winner. A large body of literature in social choice theory is concerned with determining conditions under which a Condorcet winner is guaranteed to exist. One method to guarantee a Condorcet winner is to restrict the allowable preferences of the electors. The most studied restriction is that of single-peakedness, first studied by Black (1958). Single-peaked preferences are preferences derived from a linear ordering of the candidates, say along the liberal-conservative spectrum. Single-peakedness provides a number of nice properties, including non-manipulability (Moulin, 1980) and the transitivity of the majority rule (Inada, 1969) in addition to guaranteeing a Condorcet winner.

Demange (1982) generalizes the concept of single-peakedness by generalizing the underlying graph. Single-peaked preferences must be single peaked on a path; Demange allows preferences to be single-peaked on a tree. He shows that such a restriction is sufficient to guarantee a Condorcet winner (although other nice properties such as the transitivity of the majority rule do not hold). Demange also shows that any simple game has a non-empty core when the preferences are so restricted.

Given just a set of preferences, it is not at all obvious whether they satisfy a given preference restriction. Generally, an analyst would not know the underlying ordering or tree being used by the electorate. Rather, the analyst would like to find the underlying structure from the preferences to show how the candidates are perceived by the voters. Furthermore, the preferences can be single-peaked without the underlying structure corresponding to the perceptions of any single voter. In this case, the stronger properties (non-manipulability,

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non-emptiness of the core) still hold. Finding the underlying structure is one way of proving that these properties apply.

The recognition problem for single-peaked preferences is solved in Bartholdi and Trick (1986). They reduce the problem to the graph theoretic question of determining if a set of edges form subpaths of a single path. This is then solved by an algorithm of Booth and Lueker (1976).

In this paper we show how to determine if there is a tree for which the preferences are single-peaked. We show that this problem is a special case of the graph theoretic problem of determining whether a given collection of sets of nodes induces subtrees of a single tree. For this special case, we are able to provide a very efficient algorithm.

We begin by reviewing some basic concepts in graph theory and voting theory. We then give the algorithm and prove its correctness. We also provide some specializations when the preferences are further restricted.

2. Single-Peaked Preferences on a Tree. Consider a finite set C of candidates and a finite set E of electors. Each elector $i \in E$ has a strict, transitive preference order \succ_i on C . A candidate $c \in C$ is a *Condorcet winner* if $|\{i: i \in E; c \succ_i c'\}| > |\{i: i \in E; c' \succ_i c\}|$ for all $c' \in C, c' \neq c$.

A graph G on C is a set of unordered pairs of distinct elements of C , called *edges*. A *path* of G is a sequence $c_1, c_2, c_3, \dots, c_k$ where $c_i \in C, i \in \{1, 2, \dots, k\}, c_i \neq c_j$ for $i \neq j$, and (c_i, c_{i+1}) is an edge for $i \in \{1, 2, \dots, k-1\}$. A graph is a *tree* if any two points are linked by a unique path.

An ordering \succ is *single-peaked on a path* P if, for any pair c_i, c_j , if c_k is on the path from c_i to c_j then c_k is not the least preferred of the three under \succ .

DEFINITION. Let T be a tree on C . An ordering \succ is *single-peaked on the tree* T iff it is single-peaked on every path of T .

We say that a set of orderings $\{\succ_i\}$ is single-peaked on the tree T iff each \succ_i is single-peaked on T . Demange shows that if a set of orderings are single-peaked on a tree then a Condorcet winner must exist. The single-peakedness of Black (1958) and others is simply single-peakedness on a tree T , where T is itself a path.

3. Recognizing Single-Peaked Preferences on a Tree. Given a set of candidates C , a set of electors E and their preferences on C , $\{\succ_i\}$, does there exist a tree for which the preferences are single-peaked? It is conceivable that it is difficult to establish single-peakedness on a tree for there are $|C|^{|C|-2}$ distinct trees on C . For even a moderate number of candidates this is far too many trees to check one-by-one.

We show that single-peakedness on trees is recognizable in polynomial time, so that even for a large number of candidates the preferences can be tested quickly.

For a preference ordering \succ_i ; let c_i^k be the k^{th} most preferred element of C for $k \in \{1, 2, \dots, |C|\}$.

DEFINITION. A subset S of the nodes of a tree T *induces a subtree* of T if and only if for every two nodes $c, c' \in S$, the path in T between c and c' is contained in S .

THEOREM 1. *The ordering \succ_i is single peaked on the tree T if and only if the sets $\{c_i^1, c_i^2\}, \{c_i^1, c_i^2, c_i^3\}, \dots, \{c_i^1, c_i^2, \dots, c_i^{|C|-1}\}$ all induce subtrees of T .*

Proof. (\Rightarrow) If not, take the smallest set, say $\{c_i^1, c_i^2, \dots, c_i^k\}$ that does not induce a subtree. The path from c_i^1 to c_i^k contains c_i^j for $j > k$. But then the preference is not single-peaked on that path. Contradiction.

(\Leftarrow) If the ordering is not single-peaked on T then there are three nodes c_i^j, c_i^k, c_i^l such that c_i^l lies on the path from c_i^j to c_i^k but $j < k < l$. But then the set $\{c_i^1, c_i^2, \dots, c_i^k\}$ does not induce a subtree. Contradiction. \square

So the problem of determining a tree for which a set of preferences are single-peaked has been reduced to finding a tree for which a given collection of sets of nodes induce subtrees. Trick (1987) provides an algorithm for solving this general problem. The resulting time complexity is $O(|C|^3|E|)$. We can improve on this time bound by taking advantage of the fact that the sets of nodes come from preference orders.

DEFINITION. A *leaf* of a tree T is a node of T with exactly one edge incident to it.

Our first lemma gives a method for quickly identifying a candidate that must be a leaf.

LEMMA 1. *Any candidate appearing last in a preference order must be a leaf of any tree for which the preferences are single-peaked.*

Proof. Let c appear last in a preference order of elector i and let T be a tree for which the preferences are single-peaked. If c is not a leaf then it has edges to two other nodes, say c^1 and c^2 . The sequence c^1, c, c^2 is a path in T but $c^1 \succ_i c$ and $c^2 \succ_i c$, contradicting the definition of single-peaked on a tree. \square

Our next two lemmas show exactly how the leaf must interact with the rest of the candidates.

LEMMA 2. *For a leaf c , let $B_i(c)$ be the set of candidates preferred to c by i . If c is most preferred by i let $B_i(c) = \{c_i^2\}$ (the second most preferred candidate of i). Then, for any tree T for which the preferences are single-peaked, c is has its edge to some member of $\bigcap_{i \in E} B_i(c)$. If $\bigcap_{i \in E} B_i(c) = \emptyset$ then there is no such T .*

Proof. Suppose there is a tree T and c is adjacent to $c' \notin B_i(c)$. If c is most preferred by i then $c' \neq c_i^2$ so $\{c_i^1, c_i^2\}$ does not induce a subtree. Otherwise $B_i(c) \cup c$ does not induce a subtree. Both cases contradict Theorem 1. If the set is empty then for some i , c is adjacent to no member of $B_i(c)$, so the set $B_i(c) \cup c$ does not induce a subgraph. \square

LEMMA 3. If $|\cap_{i \in E} B_i(c)| > 1$ then c can be placed adjacent to any member of that set.

Proof. For any i examine any set $\{c_i^1, c_i^2, \dots, c_i^k\}$ containing c . Since c is in the set, so is all of $\cap_{i \in E} B_i(c)$, so being adjacent to any element of the set will still induce a subtree. \square

Finally, our fourth lemma allows us to delete a leaf and solve the problem on a smaller number of candidates.

LEMMA 4. For a leaf c , if the preferences $\{\succ_i\}$ restricted to $C - c$ are not single-peaked on any tree then neither are $\{\succ_i\}$ for C .

Proof. Suppose there is a tree T for the preferences on C . By assumption c is a leaf of T so $T - c$ is a tree. The preferences restricted to $C - c$ still give rise to induced subtrees so the preferences are single-peaked on $T - c$. Contradiction. \square

We are now ready to present the algorithm for finding a suitable tree or proving none exist. This is given by Algorithm Make_Tree.

ALGORITHM MAKE_TREE.

make_tree($C, \{\succ_i\}, T$)

Input: candidates C , preferences $\{\succ_i\}$

Output: tree realizing single-peakedness, T , or *failure*

if $|C| = 0$ then $T = \emptyset$; return

if $|C| = 1$ then $T =$ single node marked with the number of the candidate; return

if $|C| = 2$ then $T =$ two-node tree marked with the candidate numbers

with an edge connecting nodes; return

let L be set of all candidates last in a preference

if for any $c \in L$, $\cap_{i \in E} B_i(c) = \emptyset$ return *failure*

$C' = C - L$; $\succ'_i = \succ_i$ restricted to C'

make_tree($C', \{\succ'_i\}, T$)

for each $c \in L$ attach node marked c to any node in $\cap_{i \in E} B_i(c)$ in T

return

end (*make_tree*)

Algorithm Make_Tree

THEOREM 2. *Algorithm Make-tree either finds a suitable tree or shows that no tree exists.*

Proof. If the algorithm returns *failure* then a restriction found only by deleting leaves has no tree (by Lemma 2). Therefore the original problem has no solution (by Lemma 4, repeatedly).

Otherwise the algorithm must return a tree. We show that this tree is correct by induction. Clearly, if $|C| \leq 2$ then the tree is suitable. Assume the algorithm returns a suitable tree for $|C| \leq k$. At the stage where we are attempting to add the $(k+1)^{\text{st}}$ node, say, c , we know we have a suitable tree. Since $\bigcap_{i \in E} B_i(c) \neq \emptyset$ we have a place to add the node. By Lemmas 2 and 3, any node in that set will do, so we can add the next node. The theorem follows by induction. \square

The bottleneck of this algorithm is the calculation of $B_i(c)$. A straightforward analysis gives the time complexity as $O(|C|^2|E|)$. It may be possible to preprocess the preferences to streamline the calculation of $B_i(c)$. The difficulty arises that the sets are defined with respect to restricted preferences and both candidates above c and just below c (if c is most preferred) are included. It is not obvious how to improve on the straightforward algorithm.

An interesting special case is when each candidate is most preferred by some elector. This occurs in facility location, where the feasible locations are the current customer locations and each customer most prefers its location (see Hanson and Thisse, 1981). Bartholdi and Trick (1986) coined the term *narcissistic* for this restriction.

THEOREM 3. *For narcissistic preferences, if the preferences are single-peaked on a tree then*

- a) *the tree is unique, and*
- b) *the tree can be found in $O(|E||C|)$ time.*

Proof. For part (a), if there were two trees T and T' , then T would have an edge i, j not in T' . The path between i and j in T' must include some node k . Examine the placement of k in T . Either the path from i to k contains j or the path from j to k contains i . In the first case, since some elector most prefers i , the preferences in T show $i \succ j \succ k$ by that elector. But this is not single-peaked for T' . The other case is similar. Contradiction.

The time complexity follows easily from the observation that $|\bigcap_{i \in E} B_i(c)| = 1$ for all c and all restrictions of the preferences. Therefore, preprocessing the preferences so as to be able to determine if $c \succ_i c'$ (which is $O(|C||E|)$) is sufficient to calculate $\bigcap_{i \in E} B_i(c)$ in $O(|E|)$ time, which gives the desired time bound. \square

Note that due to the uniqueness of the tree, it is unnecessary to independently check for single-peakedness on a path. If narcissistic preferences are single-peaked on a path, then that path is the unique tree realizing single-peakedness.

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