

Game theory

(14.1 - 14.3)

Game theory studies mathematical models of decision-making when two or more decision makers are involved, and their decisions affect each other's outcome.

In this class we will study the classic two-player zero-sum game model.

Penalty kicks: A right-footed soccer player must choose to kick left or right, and the goalie must choose to lean left or right. If the goalie guesses right, the kick is blocked. If they guess wrong, the kick will go in 80% of the time if the kicker kicked left, and 40% if they kicked right.

Both players are trying to maximize the difference between their score and their opponent's score.

Payoff matrix

Rock - paper - scissors: Two players each choose rock (R), paper (P), or scissors (S). P beats R, S beats P, R beats S. The winning player wins 1 point, and 0 points are awarded in a tie. Each player is trying to maximize the difference between their points and their opponent's points.

These are examples of two-player zero-sum games.

- 1) Two players, which we'll call "P1" and "P2" or "row player" and "column player".
- 2) P1 chooses one of m strategies, P2 chooses one of n strategies (choices can be different for each player).
- 3) If P1 chooses strategy i and P2 chooses strategy j , then P1 earns c_{ij} and P2 earns $-c_{ij}$, where c_{ij} is any real number. The matrix $(c_{ij}, -c_{ij})$ is the payoff matrix.

Rival networks: During the 8-9 PM timeslot, two networks are competing for an audience of 100 million viewers. Each network can air either a comedy, drama, or reality show. The number of viewers network 1 will have for each pair of choices is shown. Assume all other viewers will watch network 2.

N1 \ N2	C	D	R	
C	35	15	60	Payoff matrix for N1
D	45	58	50	
R	45	58	70	

This is an example of a constant-sum game. The payoff for N1 plus the payoff for N2 is always 100 million, no matter the choices. A zero-sum game is a constant-sum game where the payoff sum is 0.

Any constant-sum game can be converted to a zero-sum game by subtracting $\frac{c}{2}$ from all payoffs. All our analysis of zero-sum games will carry over to constant-sum games.

Analyzing rock-paper-scissors

Suppose two players are playing RPS repeatedly. What is the "best" strategy for player 1?

		R	P	S
		R	P	S
P ₁	R	0	-1	1
	P	1	0	-1
S	-1	1	0	

Strategy 1 : Rock only

$p_1 \backslash p_2$	R	P	S
R	0	-1	1
P	1	0	-1
S	-1	1	0

Strategy 2: $\frac{1}{2}$ rock, $\frac{1}{2}$ paper

$p_1 \backslash p_2$	R	P	S
R	0	-1	1
P	1	0	-1
S	-1	1	0

Strategy 3: $\frac{1}{3} R, \frac{1}{3} P, \frac{1}{3} S$

		R	P	S
		0	-1	1
		1	0	-1
		-1	1	0
P ₁	P ₂			

General strategy: Let's consider a strategy where we pick R with probability x_R , P with probability x_P , and S with probability x_S . The tuple (x_R, x_P, x_S) is called a **mixed strategy**. What is the best mixed strategy for RPS?

P1 \ P2	R	P	S	Suppose P2 plays R
R	0	-1	1	
P	1	0	-1	
S	-1	1	0	

P_1	R	P	S
R	0	-1	1
P	1	0	-1
S	-1	1	0

P_2 plays P

P1 \ P2	R	P	S
R	0	-1	1
P	1	0	-1
S	-1	1	0

P2 plays S

Let's assume the worst case scenario, that our opponent knows our mixed strategy (x_R, x_P, x_S) . Since the opponent will always choose the strategy which minimizes our expected payoff (equivalently, maximizes their expected payoff since this is a zero-sum game), our expected payoff will be

Therefore, our objective is

If we solve this LP, we get an optimal solution of

$$z = 0 \quad x_R = 1/3 \quad x_P = 1/3 \quad x_S = 1/3$$

Thus, under the assumption that the opponent knows our mixed strategy, the best we can do is a mixed strategy of $(1/3, 1/3, 1/3)$ with payoff 0.