Zero-Knowledge Proofs

CS 601.642/442 Modern Cryptography

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What is a Proof?

- An argument (or sufficient evidence) that can convince a reader of the truth of some statement
- Mathematical proof: Deductive argument for a statement, by reducing the validity of the statement to a set of axioms or assumptions
- Desirable features in a proof:
  - The verifier should accept the proof if the statement is true
  - The verifier should reject *any* proof if the statement is false
  - Proof must be finite (or succinct) and efficiently verifiable
- E.g., Proof that there are infinitely many primes should not simply be a list of all the primes. Not only would it take forever to generate that proof, it would also take forever to verify it

What is a Proof? (contd.)

1. Question 1: How to model efficient verifiability?
   - Verifier must be polynomial time in the length of the statement
2. Question 2: Must a proof be *non-interactive*?
   - Or can a proof be a conversation? (i.e., *interactive*)

Interactive Protocols

- Interactive Turing Machine (ITM): A Turing machine with two additional tapes: a read-only communication tape for receiving messages, a write-only communication tape for sending messages.
- An interactive protocol (M_1, M_2) is a pair of ITMs that share communication tapes s.t. the send-tape of the first ITM is the receive-tape of the second, and vice-versa
- Protocol proceeds in rounds. In each round, only one ITM is active, the other is idle. Protocol ends when both ITMs *halt*
- $M_1(x_1, z_1) \leftrightarrow M_2(x_2, z_2)$: A (randomized) protocol execution where x_i is input and z_i is auxiliary input of M_i
- $\mathsf{Out}_{M_i}(e)$: Output of M_i in an execution e
- $\mathsf{View}_{M_i}(e)$: View of M_i in an execution e consists of its input, random tape, auxiliary input and all the protocol messages it sees.

Interactive Proofs

Definition (Interactive Proofs)

A pair of ITMs (P, V) is an interactive proof system for a language L if V is a PPT machine and the following properties hold:

- **Completeness:** For every $x \in L$,

$$\Pr\left[\mathsf{Out}_V[P(x) \leftrightarrow V(x)] = 1\right] = 1$$

- **Soundness:** There exists a negligible function $\nu(\cdot)$ s.t. $\forall x \notin L$ and for all adversarial provers P^*,

$$\Pr\left[\mathsf{Out}_V[P^*(x) \leftrightarrow V(x)] = 1\right] \leqslant \nu(|x|)$$

Remark: In the above definition, prover is not required to be efficient. Later, we will also consider efficient provers.

Why Interactive proofs?

- Let L be a language in **NP** and let R be the associated relation
- For any $x \in L$, there exists a "small" (polynomial-size) witness w
- By checking that $R(x, w) = 1$, we can verify that $x \in L$
- Therefore, w is a *non-interactive* proof for x
- E.g. Graph Isomorphism: Two graphs G_0 and G_1 are isomorphic if there exists a permutation π that maps the vertices of G_0 onto the vertices of G_1.

So why use interactive proofs after all?

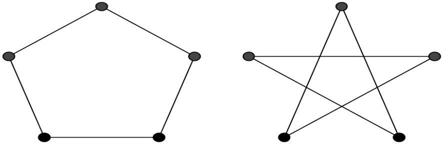
Why Interactive proofs? (contd.)

Two main reasons for interaction:

1. Proving statements in languages not known to be in **NP**
   - Single prover [Shamir]: **IP** = **PSPACE**
   - Multiple provers [Babai-Fortnow-Lund]: **MIP** = **NEXP**
2. Achieving privacy guarantee for prover
   - Zero knowledge [Goldwasser-Micali-Rackoff]: Verifier learns nothing from the proof beyond the validity of the statement!

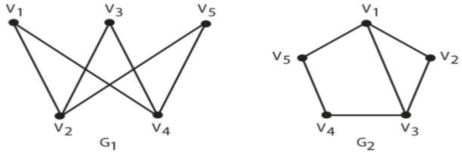
Notation for Graphs

- Graph $G = (V, E)$ where V is set of vertices and E is set of edges
- $|V| = n$, $|E| = m$
- Π_n is the set of all permutations π over n vertices
- Graph Isomorphism: $G_0 = (V_0, E_0)$ and $G_1 = (V_1, E_1)$ are isomorphic if there exists a permutation π s.t.:
  - $V_1 = \{\pi(v) \mid v \in V_0\}$
  - $E_1 = \{(\pi(v_1), \pi(v_2)) \mid (v_1, v_2) \in E_0\}$
  - Alternatively, $G_1 = \pi(G_0)$
  - Graph Isomorphism is in **NP**



Notation for Graphs (contd.)

- Graph Non-Isomorphism: G_0 and G_1 are non-isomorphic if there exists no permutation $\pi \in \Pi_n$ s.t. $G_1 = \pi(G_0)$



- Graph Non-Isomorphism is in **co-NP**, and not known to be in **NP**

How to Prove Graph Non-Isomorphism?

- Suppose P wants to prove to V that G_0 and G_1 are not isomorphic
- One way to prove this is to write down all possible permutations π over n vertices and show that for every π, $G_1 \neq \pi(G_0)$. However, this is not efficiently verifiable
- How to design an efficiently verifiable interactive proof?

Interactive Proof for Graph Non-Isomorphism

Common Input: $x = (G_0, G_1)$

Protocol (P, V): Repeat the following procedure n times using fresh randomness

$V \to P$: V chooses a random bit $b \in \{0, 1\}$ and a random permutation $\pi \in \Pi_n$. It computes $H = \pi(G_b)$ and sends H to P

$P \to V$: P computes b' s.t. H and $G_{b'}$ are isomorphic and sends b' to V

$V(x, b, b')$: V outputs 1 if $b' = b$ and 0 otherwise

(P, V) is an Interactive Proof

- **Completeness:** If G_0 and G_1 are not isomorphic, then an unbounded prover can always find b' s.t. $b' = b$
- **Soundness:** If G_0 and G_1 are isomorphic, then H is isomorphic to both G_0 and G_1! Therefore, in one iteration, any (unbounded) prover can correctly guess b with probability at most $\frac{1}{2}$. Since each iteration is independent, prover can succeed in all iterations with probability at most 2^{-n}.

Interactive Proofs with Efficient Provers

- Prover in graph non-isomorphism protocol is inefficient.
- For languages in **NP**, we can design interactive proofs with *efficient* provers
- Prover strategy must be efficient when it is given a witness w for a statement x that it attempts to prove

Definition

An interactive proof system (P, V) for a language L with witness relation R is said to have an *efficient prover* if P is PPT and the completeness condition holds for every $w \in R(x)$

- **Main Goal:** *Zero Knowledge*, i.e., ensuring that verifier does not gain any knowledge from its interaction with prover beyond learning the validity of the statement x (e.g., P's witness w remains private from V)

Towards Zero Knowledge

- Q. 1: How to formalize "does not gain any knowledge?"
- Q. 2: What is knowledge?

Towards Zero Knowledge (contd.)

Rules for formalizing "(zero) knowledge":

Rule 1: Randomness is for free

Rule 2: Polynomial-time computation is for free

That is, by learning the result of a random process or result of a polynomial time computation, we gain no knowledge

When is knowledge conveyed?

- Scenario 1: Someone tells you he will sell you a 100-bit random string for \$1000.
- Scenario 2: Someone tells you he will sell you the product of two prime numbers of your choice for \$1000.
- Scenario 3: Someone tells you he will sell you the output of an exponential time computation (e.g., isomorphism between two graphs) for \$1000.

Think: Should you accept any of these offers?

We can generate 100-bit random string for free by flipping a coin, and we can also multiply on our own for free. But an exponential-time computation is hard to perform on our own, since we are PPT. So we should reject first and second offers, but seriously consider the third one!

Zero Knowledge: Intuition

- We do not gain any knowledge from an interaction if we could have carried it out on our own
- Intuition for ZK: V can generate a protocol transcript on its own, without talking to P. If this transcript is indistinguishable from a real execution, then clearly V does not learn anything by talking to P
- Formalized via notion of *Simulator*, as in definition of semantic security for encryption

Zero Knowledge: Definition I

Definition (Honest Verifier Zero Knowledge)

An interactive proof (P, V) for a language L with witness relation R is said to be *honest verifier zero knowledge* if there exists a PPT simulator S s.t. for every non-uniform PPT distinguisher D, there exists a negligible function $\nu(\cdot)$ s.t. for every $x \in L$, $w \in R(x)$, $z \in \{0,1\}^*$, D distinguishes between the following distributions with probability at most $\nu(n)$:

- $\left\{\mathsf{View}_V[P(x,w) \leftrightarrow V(x,z)]\right\}$
- $\left\{S(1^n, x, z)\right\}$

Remarks on the Definition

- Captures that whatever V "saw" in the interactive proof, it could have generated it on its own by running the simulator S
- The auxiliary input to V captures any a priori information V may have about x. Definition promises that V does not learn anything "new"
- Problem: However, the above is promised only if verifier V follows the protocol
- What if V is malicious and deviates from the honest strategy?
- Want: Existence of a simulator S for every, possibly malicious (efficient) verifier strategy V^*
- For now, will relax the simulator and allow it to be *expected* PPT, i.e., a machine whose expected running time is polynomial

Zero Knowledge: Definition II

Definition (Zero Knowledge)

An interactive proof (P, V) for a language L with witness relation R is said to be *zero knowledge* if for every non-uniform PPT adversary V^*, there exists an expected PPT simulator S s.t. for every non-uniform PPT distinguisher D, there exists a negligible function $\nu(\cdot)$ s.t. for every $x \in L$, $w \in R(x)$, $z \in \{0,1\}^*$, D distinguishes between the following distributions with probability at most $\nu(n)$:

- $\left\{\mathsf{View}^*_V[P(x,w) \leftrightarrow V^*(x,z)]\right\}$
- $\left\{S(1^n, x, z)\right\}$

- If the distributions are statistically close, then we call it *statistical zero knowledge*
- If the distributions are identical, then we call it *perfect zero knowledge*

Reflections on Zero Knowledge

Paradox?

- Protocol execution convinces V of the validity of x
- Yet, V could have generated the protocol transcript on its own

To understand why there is no paradox, consider the following story:

- Alice and Bob run (P, V) on input x where Alice acts as P and Bob as V
- Now, Bob goes to Eve: "x is true"
- Eve: "Oh really?"
- Bob: "Yes, you can see this accepting transcript"
- Eve: "That doesn't mean anything. Anyone can come up with such a transcript without knowing a witness for x!"
- Bob: "But I computed this transcript by talking to Alice who answered my challenge correctly every time!"

Reflections on Zero Knowledge Proofs (contd.)

Moral of the story:

- Bob participated in a “live” conversation with Alice, and was convinced by *how* the transcript was generated
- But to Eve, who did not see the live conversation, there is no way to tell whether the transcript is from real execution or produced by simulator