How does the Gerrymander Sequence Continue?

Manuel Kauers
Institute for Algebra
Johannes Kepler University
Altenberger Straße 69, 4040 Linz, Austria
manuel.kauers@jku.at

Christoph Koutschan
Johann Radon Institute for Computational and Applied Mathematics
Austrian Academy of Sciences
Altenberger Straße 69, 4040 Linz, Austria
christoph.koutschan@oeaw.ac.at

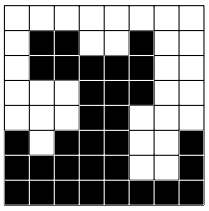
George Spahn
Department of Mathematics
Rutgers University (New Brunswick)
110 Frelinghuysen Road, Piscataway, NJ 08854-8019, USA
geosp98@gmail.com

Abstract

We compute a few additional terms of the gerrymander sequence (OEIS A348456) and provide guessed equations for the generating functions of some sequences in its context.

1 Introduction

In a guest lecture on April 28, 2022, in Zeilberger's famous course on experimental mathematics at Rutgers [9], Sloane talked about some of his favorite entries of the OEIS. One of the entries he highlighted in his lecture was A348456. The nth term of this sequence is defined as the number of ways to dissect a $2n \times 2n$ chessboard into two polyominoes, each of area $2n^2$. Here is one of the solutions for $n = 4$:



Finding such dissections can be viewed as a combinatorial version of gerrymandering, and it has thus been suggested to call the sequence the gerrymander sequence. When Sloane gave his lecture, only the first three terms of the gerrymander sequence were known (they are 2, 70, 80518). He declared, perhaps exaggerating a bit, that he considers the next term of this sequence as the "most wanted number" in the whole OEIS. This statement motivated Zeilberger to offer a donation of $100 to the OEIS in honor of the person who first manages to compute this most wanted number. In this paper, we explain how we computed not only the next term of A348456, but in fact the next four terms. They are

$$\begin{aligned}&7157114189,\\ &49852157614583644,\\ &2828935859304341472594435 3,\ \text{and}\\ &133505657942308037118645688854373 2162,\end{aligned}$$

respectively. In addition, we confirm the correctness of the previously known three terms. Our Mathematica source code is available at http://www.koutschan.de/data/gerry/.

We employ the transfer-matrix method, a classical technique in enumerative combinatorics whose general idea is nicely explained in Sect. 4.7 of Stanley's textbook [10]. We tweak this method by introducing catalytic variables, in order to apply it to the problem at hand; this is explained in Sect. 2. Besides the computation of specific terms, the transfer-matrix method also allows us to derive structural information about the generating function for boards of rectangular shapes $m \times n$ when m is fixed and n varies. The case $m = 3$ was proposed by Knuth as a Monthly problem a few years ago [8]. It turns out that if a_n is the number of ways to break a $3 \times 2n$ board into two connected components of the same size (A167242), then

$$\sum_{n=0}^{\infty} a_n x^n = \frac{1+\sqrt{1-4x}}{(\sqrt{1-4x}+x)^2}\,\frac{1}{\sqrt{1-4x}} - \frac{1-x^2+2x^3}{(1-x)^3}.$$

It is not a coincidence but a consequence of a theorem of Furstenberg [2] that the generating function is algebraic. In principle, it can be computed by combining the transfer-matrix method with the method of creative telescoping [11, 1, 5]. However, this quickly becomes expensive when m increases. In Sect. 4, we report on some computations we did in this direction.

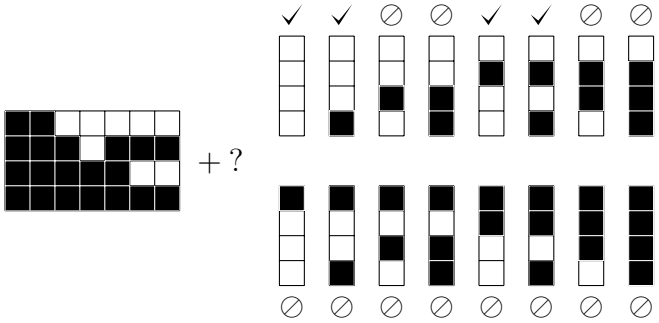
2 The transfer matrix

The transfer-matrix method was invented in the context of statistical mechanics [6, 7], in order to express the partition function of a statistical model in a simpler and more succinct form than its plain definition as a multi-dimensional sum. The method is applicable whenever the mechanical system can be decomposed into a sequence of N subsystems, each of them interacting only with the previous and the next one. Let ℓ denote the number of states that each of these subsystems can have, and $m_{i,j}(k)$ a "statistical weight" that is associated with state i of subsystem $k-1$ being next to state j of subsystem k. The relation between these two adjacent subsystems is then described by the *transfer matrix* $M(k) = \big(m_{i,j}(k)\big)_{1\le i,j\le \ell}$, and the partition function of the whole system can be written in the form

$$v_{\text{init}}^{\top} \cdot M(1) \cdot M(2) \cdots M(N) \cdot v_{\text{final}},$$

where v_{init} and v_{final} are vectors of dimension ℓ.

Recall that we are interested in counting the number of ways that an $m \times n$ grid can be divided into two (or, more generally, q) connected regions, each of which is represented by a different color. We can apply the transfer-matrix method to this gerrymandering problem by decomposing the grid into a sequence of columns that are added one after the other. In each step, not all of the 2^m (resp., q^m) potential columns can be added, because some would violate the rules, e.g., by creating two disconnected regions of the same color:



Clearly, the information how the squares in the right-most column are colored is not sufficient to decide which columns can come next. For example, we need to know that the two black squares in the last column belong to the same connected region, otherwise we could not add a column with only white squares.

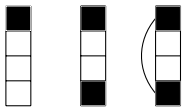
Thus, in order to decide which columns can be added and to tell whether the completed grid has the desired number of connected regions, we introduce *states* for remembering connectivity information that is implied by all previous columns. More precisely, a state is described by a pair (c, P), where $c \in \{0,1\}^{2n}$ encodes the content of the last column (the colors white and black are now represented by the numbers 0 and 1, respectively), and where $P = \{P_1, \ldots, P_k\}$ is a partition of $\{1, \ldots, 2n\}$ that indicates which squares in that column belong to the same connected region. For example, in the figure above, the previous columns

imply that the two black squares are connected, while the two white squares are not. The fact that they could (and should!) be connected by adding further columns is not relevant at this moment. Hence, in the partially completed grid we have k different regions, and P_j gives the positions of squares belonging to the j-th region. In particular, all these squares must have the same color, that is $|\{c_i \mid i \in P_j\}| = 1$ for all $1 \leq j \leq k$.

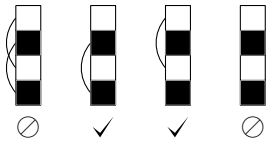
For example, $\big((0,0,1,0),\{\{1,2\},\{3,4\}\}\big)$ or $\big((1,1,0,0),\{\{1,2\},\{3\},\{4\}\}\big)$ are not valid state descriptions because the first violates the same-color condition, while the latter claims that the squares at positions 3 and 4 belong to different regions although they are obviously connected. In contrast,

$$\begin{aligned} &\big((1,0,0,0),\{\{1\},\{2,3,4\}\}\big),\\ &\big((1,0,0,1),\{\{1\},\{2,3\},\{4\}\}\big),\\ \text{or } &\big((1,0,0,1),\{\{1,4\},\{2,3\}\}\big) \end{aligned}$$

are valid state descriptions, which we depict graphically as follows (connections that happen in previous columns are symbolized by an arc):



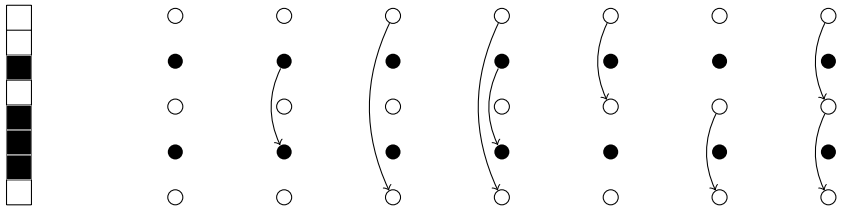
But even if we stick to the above rules, there are still many pairs (c, P) that describe *impossible* states, for example, $\big((0,1,0,1),\{\{1,3\},\{2,4\}\}\big)$. Connecting 1 with 3 and 2 with 4 produces arcs that cross each other, meaning that this connectivity cannot be achieved by extending the column to the left. Similarly, by considering how a column could be extended to the right, we can discard *uninteresting* states, i.e., states that could possibly be reached, but which represent "hopeless" situations that will never allow us to complete the grid in a satisfactory manner. For example, the state $\big((0,1,0,1),\{\{1\},\{2\},\{3\},\{4\}\}\big)$ is uninteresting, because all four squares are declared to belong to different regions, and it is impossible to connect 1 with 3 and 2 with 4 by adding more columns to the right. Hence, for the column $c = (0,1,0,1)$ we consider only two out of four possible states:



Algorithmically, we construct the set of states as follows: in step (1) we enumerate the set of all states that are not impossible, and in step (2) we discard those states which are uninteresting. In both steps it is clear from the construction that no necessary state is discarded, ensuring the correctness of our method.

1. For each tuple $c \in \{0,1\}^{2n}$, all non-crossing arc configurations are generated, where the vertices for these configurations are maximal chunks of squares of the same color. All

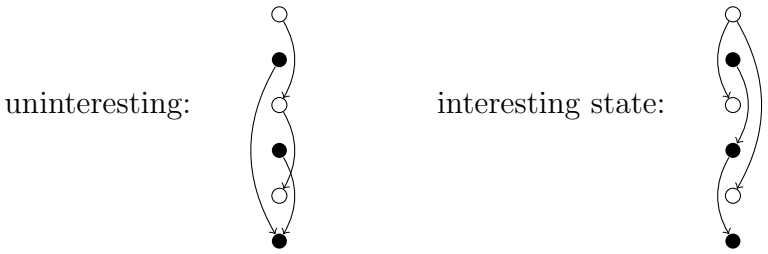
arcs point in the same direction and each arc connects two vertices of the same color. Each vertex has at most one outgoing and at most one incoming arc. For example, the following column of size 8 admits seven such arc configurations:



2. A state (c, P) is uninteresting if there are two connected components $A_1, A_2 \in P$ of the same color and $B_1, B_2 \in P$ of the opposite color such that the following condition holds:

$$\max A_1 + 1 = \min B_1 \wedge \max B_1 = \min A_2 - 1$$
$$\wedge (\max A_2 < \max B_2 \vee \min B_2 < \min A_1).$$

It corresponds to situations where we cannot draw another non-crossing arc configuration on the right side such that all vertices of the same color get connected:



There is one subtle issue one still has to take care of: if the current column equals $(0, \ldots, 0)$ or $(1, \ldots, 1)$, then we need to store the information whether the other color has not yet appeared (in which case this column can be followed by any other column), or whether the other color has appeared previously (in which case this column can only be followed by more copies of the same column). In our graphical notation, we decorate the latter of these two states by a prime.

Let us denote by L the set of states that is constructed according to the above rules. The number of states $\ell = |L|$ grows (at least) exponentially with n, since each of the 2^{2n} possible columns appears in at least one state. For example, for $n = 2$ we have 16 different columns but 26 states in total; they are explicitly enumerated in Figure 1. The number of states for $1 \leq n \leq 7$ is given in Table 1.

To construct the transfer matrix M, for each state we need to determine which other states it can move into by adding an appropriate next column. Note that for this purpose it does not matter in which particular column of the grid we are: in each step we can use the

n	ℓ	v_{init}		v_{final}		M	
		$\#_{\neq 0}$	sparsity	$\#_{\neq 0}$	sparsity	$\#_{\neq 0}$	sparsity
1	6	4	33.33 %	6	0.00 %	16	55.56 %
2	26	14	46.15 %	16	38.46 %	178	73.67 %
3	154	32	79.22 %	34	77.92 %	2546	89.26 %
4	1026	58	94.35 %	60	94.15 %	44008	95.82 %
5	7222	92	98.73 %	94	98.70 %	832454	98.40 %
6	52650	134	99.75 %	136	99.74 %	16505486	99.40 %
7	393878	184	99.95 %	186	99.95 %	337332580	99.78 %

Table 1: Number ℓ of states and number $\#_{\neq 0}$ of non-zero entries in v_{init}, v_{final}, and in the transfer matrix M.

same matrix M, which is in contrast to the general situation sketched at the beginning of this section. The rows and columns of the transfer matrix are indexed by the states; hence we obtain an $\ell \times \ell$ matrix. Let $s = (c, P)$ be any of the ℓ states and let $c' \in \{0,1\}^{2n}$ be an arbitrary column. If attaching c' to the state s would violate the connectivity requirements, then the matrix entries at positions (s, s') are set to 0, where s' is any state containing c'.

But what should be put as the matrix entry when a transition is actually possible? Here another condition has to be considered that so far has not been taken care of: the two regions must have the same area. Since this requirement can only be checked at the very end when the whole grid is filled, we need to propagate information about the number of squares of either color through the whole computation. For this purpose, we introduce a "catalytic" variable x that counts the number of white squares that have been used so far. In each transition this counter has to be increased accordingly. Assume that state $s = (c, P)$ admits attaching column c' to it, which basically means that no existing region gets disconnected (this happens when c and c' have opposite colors at all positions given by some $P_j \in P$), except when all squares of c' have the same color and only a single $P_j \in P$ is related to the other color, in which case we move to one of the two primed states. In any case, the new connectivity information P' is uniquely determined from c, c', P, and therefore yields a new state $s' = (c', P')$. It may well happen that $s' \notin L$ is an uninteresting state, in which case no matrix entry is generated. Otherwise the matrix entry at position (s, s') is set to $x^{\#_0(c')}$, where $\#_0(c')$ denotes the number of 0's in c'.

Now that we have constructed the transfer matrix M, it remains to consider the start and the end of this process. We start the grid with a single column. There cannot be any additional connectivity information other than what can be seen in this column. We define a start vector v_{init}, which is indexed by the states and hence is ℓ-dimensional. Its entry at position $s = (c, P)$ equals $x^{\#_0(c)}$ if the parts of P correspond exactly to the consecutive runs of entries of the same color in c (in other words, if the graphical representation of s has no arcs (and no prime!)), and 0 otherwise.

When we have filled the grid up to the last column, we have to decide which states are

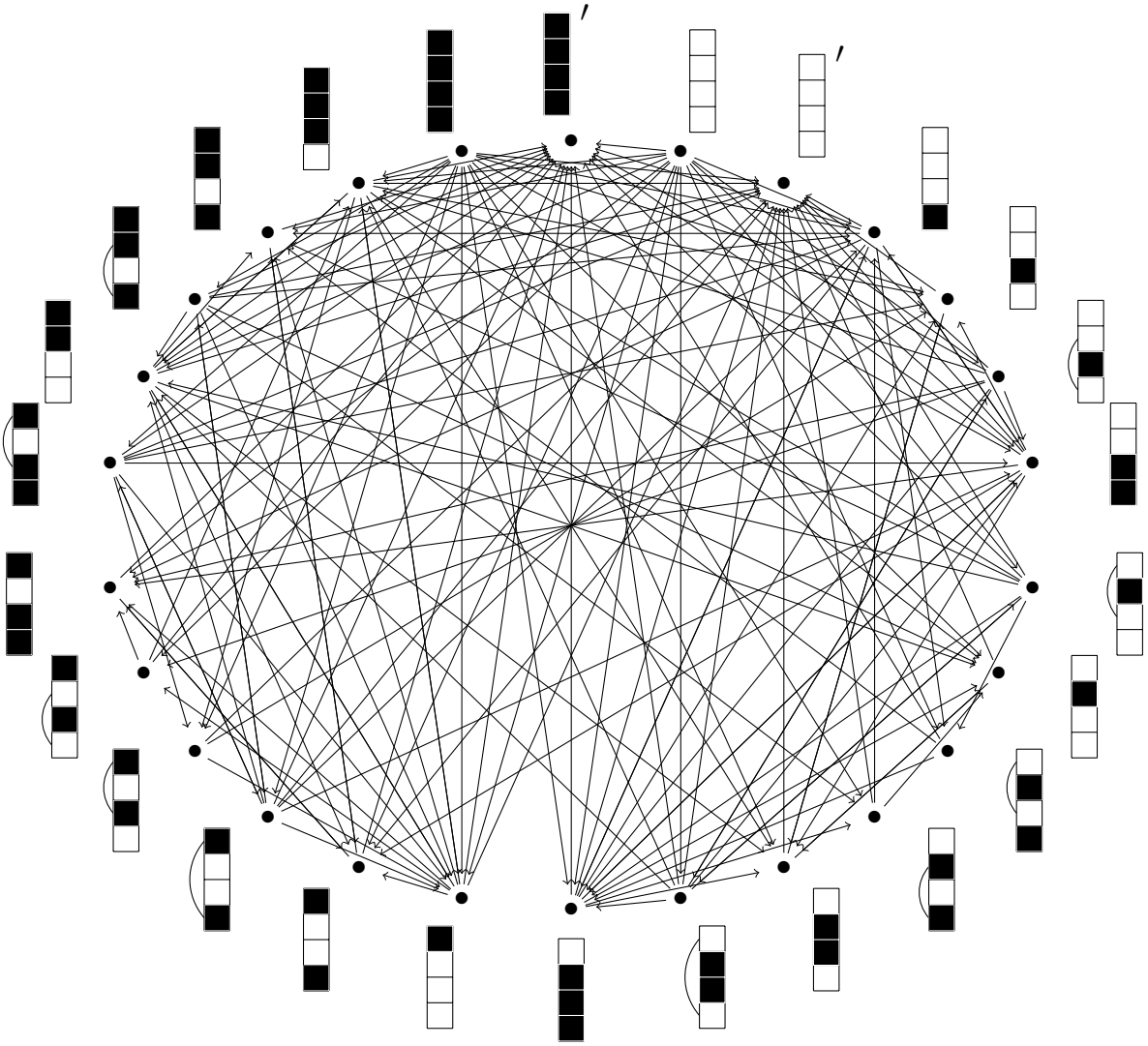


Figure 1: All 26 states for a grid with 4 rows and their possible transitions; note that each state can also be followed by itself — these loops are not depicted.

"accept" states. Clearly, this is the case for states $s = (c, P)$ such that $|P| \leq 2$. Since we just want to add up the results of all acceptable states, we define a vector v_{final} that is 1 at accept states and 0 otherwise (see Table 1).

Having all this at hand—the transfer matrix M, the start vector v_{init}, and the end vector v_{final}—one can compute

$$p(x) = v_{\text{init}}^{\top} \cdot M^{2n-1} \cdot v_{\text{final}}, \tag{1}$$

which is a polynomial in x. The coefficient of x^k in p gives the number of ways that the $2n \times 2n$ grid can be divided into a white polyomino of k squares and a black polyomino consisting of $4n^2 - k$ squares. This means that for sequence A348456 we need to extract the coefficient of x^{2n^2} and divide the result by 2 in order to eliminate the distinction between black and white.

3 Optimizations

In this section, we discuss some optimizations that one can employ when implementing the method described in Section 2. For our purposes, we have used the computer algebra systems Maple and Mathematica.

First, it is clear that in (1) one should not compute M^{2n-1} explicitly, using expensive matrix multiplications. Instead, it is more efficient to exploit the associativity of matrix multiplication and perform only (cheap) matrix-vector multiplications:

$$p(x) = (\cdots((v_{\text{init}}^{\top} \cdot M) \cdot M) \cdots) \cdot v_{\text{final}}.$$

Then we address the problem that the matrices get large: for example, for $n = 7$ the transfer matrix M has 393878^2, i.e., about 115 billion entries, which poses memory challenges when one does not have a supercomputer at hand. However, we realize that the matrix is very sparse. Clearly, in each row we can have at most 2^{2n} nonzero entries (because this is the number of different grid columns we can add), but actually there are much fewer, since many of these columns are not admissible (e.g., because they disconnect existing regions). Table 1 shows the sparsity of the transfer matrix M and of the vectors v_{init} and v_{final}. In Mathematica, one can use the command `SparseArray` to store such matrices in a memory-efficient way, which has the additional advantage that it also speeds up the matrix-vector multiplications. Note that the vector will quickly become dense as we multiply the matrix to it, reflecting the fact that we have no unreachable states in L.

The next observation concerns the structure of the transfer matrix. Since each specific column of the matrix is responsible for producing the counting polynomial for a specific state (c, P), by matrix multiplication, all entries of this column of M must either be 0 or $x^{\#_0(c)}$. No other powers of x can occur in the same column. It is more efficient to work with the $\{0, 1\}$-matrix $M' = M\big|_{x \to 1}$ and store the x-powers in a separate diagonal matrix

$$X = \operatorname{diag}\big(\big(x^{\#_0(c)}\big)_{(c,P) \in L}\big)$$

transfer matrix		mult. in $\mathbb{Z}[x]$	in $\mathbb{Z}[x]/(x^{2n^2+1})$	eval-int. + CRT
dense	M	23.1 s	22.3 s	69.6 s
dense	$M'X$	9.1 s	8.3 s	89.7 s
sparse	M	16.3 s	15.3 s	1.8 s
sparse	$M'X$	1.9 s	2.0 s	0.6 s

Table 2: Effect of different strategies on the runtime, for $n = 4$.

n	create states	build M	total time for matrix-vector multiplications		
			mult. in $\mathbb{Z}[x]$	in $\mathbb{Z}[x]/(x^{2n^2+1})$	eval-int. + CRT
3	0.01 s	0.39 s	0.10 s	0.12 s	0.06 s
4	0.06 s	10 s	1.9 s	2.0 s	0.6 s
5	0.87 s	5 min	56 s	54 s	21 s
6	13.6 s	5 h	49 min	44 min	10 min
7	4 min	5 d	29 h	25 h	5 h

Table 3: Runtime observed for various strategies and various problem sizes, using the decomposition $M'X$ and the sparse matrix representation.

such that $M = M' \cdot X$. Computing $v_{\text{init}}^\top \cdot M$ has the disadvantage that large intermediate expressions are produced that can only be combined after expansion, since they are sums of products of monomials times polynomials. This is avoided by computing $\left(v_{\text{init}}^\top \cdot M'\right) \cdot X$.

We know that the result is a polynomial $p(x)$ of degree $4n^2$, whose coefficient of x^{2n^2} we wish to extract. Hence, the whole computation can be done modulo x^{2n^2+1}, which does not change the coefficient of x^{2n^2}, but which reduces the size of intermediate expressions. Alternatively, one can apply the evaluation-interpolation technique combined with the Chinese remainder theorem (CRT). Not only the degree of $p(x)$ is known, we also know that it is palindromic, i.e., $p(x) = x^{4n^2} p(1/x)$. Therefore $p(x)$ can be interpolated by using only $2n^2 + 1$ evaluation points. In addition, we can determine an a-priori bound on the height of $p(x)$: let k be the maximal number of nonzero entries in any row (or column) of M, then the entries of M^{2n-1} are polynomials with coefficients at most k^{2n-2} and the height of $p(x)$ is thus bounded by $\ell^2 k^{2n-2}$.

Table 2 illustrates the effect of the different strategies on the runtime of the computation. Table 3 shows computation times for $3 \le n \le 7$. Note that we used parallelization for some of the tasks, but the timings are given in CPU time. They were measured on Intel Xeon E5-2630v3 processors at 2.4 GHz. As a curiosity, we realized that Mathematica takes about twice as long for computing $v_{\text{init}}^\top \cdot M$ (row vector times matrix) compared to computing the equivalent product $M^\top \cdot v_{\text{init}}$ (transposed matrix times column vector). The timings in the last column of Table 3 refer to the minimal number of primes that are needed to reconstruct the correct result (which we know already from the two previous computations). In order

to obtain a provably correct result with the CRT approach, one would have to use enough primes to exceed the bound on the height of $p(x)$. For example, the result for $n = 7$ is approx. $1.335 \cdot 10^{36}$, therefore requiring 4 primes of size 2^{31}, while our bound $\ell^2 k^{2n-2}$ with $\ell = 393878$ and $k = 16384$ yields $5.804 \cdot 10^{61}$, corresponding to 7 primes of the same size.

4 Further results

While the gerrymandering problem for a rectangular board of size $m \times n$ is symmetric in m and n, the cost of the transfer-matrix method is highly asymmetric. As explained above, the cost depends exponentially on the side length that determines the transfer matrix but only polynomially on the side length that appears in the exponent. Because of this discrepancy, slim rectangular boards are somewhat easier to handle than boards that are quadratic or close to quadratic. For small values of m, it is not too hard to let n grow into the hundreds or even thousands.

For fixed m and varying n, we are interested in the number of solutions to the gerrymandering problem for a board of size $m \times n$. Obviously there is no solution when both m and n are odd. Therefore, for fixed and even m, we define a_n as the number of solutions for a board of size $m \times n$, and for fixed odd m, we define a_n as the number of solutions for a board of size $m \times 2n$. For certain vectors $v_{\text{init}}, v_{\text{final}}$ and a certain matrix M whose entries are polynomials in x, we then have $a_n = \frac{1}{2}[x^{nm/2}](v_{\text{init}}^\top M^{n-1} v_{\text{final}})$ if m is even and $a_n = \frac{1}{2}[x^{nm}](v_{\text{init}}^\top M^{2n-1} v_{\text{final}})$ if m is odd. We know from linear algebra that the entries of a matrix power M^n are C-finite sequences with respect to n, i.e., they satisfy linear recurrences with constant coefficients, or in other words, their generating functions are rational. An explicit formula is given in Thm. 4.7.2 of Stanley's book [10]: for a fixed $\ell \times \ell$-matrix M and any $i, j \in \{1, \ldots, \ell\}$, the generating function of the sequence appearing in the (i, j)th entry of M^n is

$$(-1)^{i+j} \frac{\det(I_\ell - t\, M)^{[j,i]}}{\det(I_\ell - t\, M)},$$

where the exponent $[j, i]$ indicates the removal of the jth row and the ith column of the matrix $I_\ell - tM$. The generating function for a sequence defined as $v_{\text{init}}^\top M^{n-1} v_{\text{final}}$ is just a certain linear combination of such rational functions.

In particular, the rational generating function for the sequence $(v_{\text{init}}^\top M^{n-1} v_{\text{final}})_{n=0}^\infty$ (or $(v_{\text{init}}^\top M^{2n-1} v_{\text{final}})_{n=0}^\infty$, if m is odd) can be explicitly computed from the vectors $v_{\text{init}}, v_{\text{final}}$, and the matrix M. At least in principle. In practice, for large matrices M involving a symbolic parameter x, computing the determinant of $I_\ell - t\, M$, which involves an additional symbolic parameter t, can be a hassle. We have managed to compute the rational expressions using evaluation/interpolation techniques for $m = 3, \ldots, 7$. The computation is non-rigorous in so far as the number of evaluation points was only determined experimentally. In Table 4, we summarize their sizes. The cases $m = 1$ and $m = 2$ are quite simple, for example, for $m = 2$

m	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
$\deg_t$ of numerator	2	4	7	17	36	75	203
$\deg_x$ of numerator	2	4	23	34	190	236	1425
monomials in numerator	3	9	76	194	1955	4312	55218
$\deg_t$ of denominator	2	4	7	17	36	75	203
$\deg_x$ of denominator	2	4	22	34	188	235	1422
monomials in denominator	4	9	76	194	1935	4310	55188

Table 4: Sizes of rational generating functions for various values of m.

the generating function is

$$\begin{aligned}&\frac{-t^4x^4 - t^3x^4 - 2t^3x^3 - t^3x^2 + 4t^2x^2 - tx^2 + 2tx - t + 1}{(t-1)^2(tx^2-1)^2}\\ &= 1 + (x^2+2x+1)t + (x^4+4x^3+4x^2+4x+1)t^2\\ &\quad + (x^6+6x^5+6x^4+6x^3+6x^2+6x+1)t^3 + \cdots\end{aligned}$$

For $m = 3$, the expression is already too big to fit in a line, and as can be seen in the table, the sizes increase significantly with respect to m.

The number of colors affects the growth of the expressions even more significantly. We have considered a variant of the problem where besides black cells and white cells we also have gray cells. The question is then how many ways there are to dissect the $m \times n$ grid into three connected regions, with prescribed areas for each color. The corresponding rational generating function contains three variables: one marking the length n of the board, one marking the area of black cells, and one marking the area of white cells. (There is no need for a variable marking the area of the gray cells because we know that the areas of the three colors must sum to mn.) We were only able to construct the rational generating function for the case $m = 3$. Its numerator has degree 29 in t and degree 32 in x_1 and x_2, it altogether consists of 7939 monomials. The denominator has degree 28 in t and degree 30 in x_1 and x_2, and it consists of 7412 monomials.

Returning to the case of two colors, it remains to discuss the coefficient extraction operator. If $a(x,t)$ is a rational generating function in x and t, viewed as power series in t whose coefficients are polynomials in x, extracting the coefficient of $x^{\alpha n}$ (with $\alpha = m/2$ or $\alpha = m$ depending on whether m is even or odd) from the nth term of the series is the same as extracting the coefficient of x^{-1} from $x^{-1}a(x, t/x^\alpha)$. This can be done by creative telescoping [11, 1, 5], as follows: using computer algebra, we can compute polynomials $p_0(t), \ldots, p_r(t)$ which only depend on t as well as a rational function $b(x,t)$ such that

$$p_0(t)\frac{a(x,t/x^\alpha)}{x} + \cdots + p_r(t)\frac{d^r}{dt^r}\frac{a(x,t/x^\alpha)}{x} = \frac{d}{dx}b(x,t).$$

Applying $[x^{-1}]$ on both sides, we get zero on the right, because the derivative of a rational function cannot have a residue. On the left, observe that taking the residue with respect

to x commutes with the polynomials $p_i(t)$ and the derivations in t. Therefore the series $a(t) := \frac{1}{2}[x^{-1}]\big(x^{-1}a(x, t/x^\alpha)\big)$ satisfies the differential equation

$$p_0(t)a(t) + \cdots + p_r(t)\frac{d^r}{dt^r}a(t) = 0.$$

In practice, using the second-named author's implementation [4], this approach works nicely for $m = 3$ (A167242), where we obtain a computer proof of Knuth's result mentioned in the introduction, and for $m = 4$ (A167247), where we find a differential equation of order 5 and polynomial coefficients of degree 208. Using guessing [3], we can also find a differential equation of order 2 with polynomial coefficients of degree 96 as well as a polynomial equation of degree 2 with polynomial coefficients of degree 51. The correctness of these guessed equations can be proved by showing that the corresponding differential operators are right factors of the differential operators obtained via creative telescoping, and checking an appropriate number of initial values. The equations, as well as the rational generating functions, are available at http://www.koutschan.de/data/gerry/.

For $m \geq 5$, we have not been able to find equations either by creative telescoping or by guessing, although Furstenberg's theorem guarantees their existence. Following Zeilberger's example, the first-named author (M.K.) will therefore offer a donation of €100 to the OEIS in honor of the person who first manages to find a differential equation for some $m \geq 5$, either experimentally or rigorously.

5 Acknowledgment

We thank Doron Zeilberger for encouraging us to work on this problem and to write this paper. We are also indebted to the anonymous referee for checking our manuscript very carefully, by even producing an own implementation of our method. This process helped to clarify some inaccuracies and thus greatly improved the readability of the paper. M.K. was supported by the Austrian FWF grant P31571-N32.

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2010 *Mathematics Subject Classification*: Primary 05A15. Secondary 68W30, 33F10.

Keywords: transfer-matrix method, polyomino, computer algebra.

(Concerned with sequences A167242, A167247, and A348456.)

Received ???; revised version received ???. Published in *Journal of Integer Sequences*, ???.

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