

# An Efficient Election Protocol in a Mobile Computing Environment\*

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**Abstract.** The Election protocol can be used as a building block in many practical problems such as group communication, atomic commit and replicated data management where a protocol coordinator might be useful. The problem has been widely studied in the research community since one reason for this wide interest is that many distributed protocols need an election protocol. However, despite its usefulness, to our knowledge there is no work that has been devoted to this problem in a mobile computing environment. Mobile systems are more prone to failures than conventional distributed systems. Solving election in such an environment requires from a set of mobile hosts to choose a mobile host or a fixed host based on their priority despite failures of both mobile computing and/or fixed hosts. In this paper, we describe a solution to the election problem from mobile computing systems. This solution is based on the Garcia Molina's Bully algorithm.

## 1 Introduction

The wide use of small portable computers and the advances in wireless networking technologies have made mobile computing today a reality. There are different types of wireless media: cellular (analog and digital phones), wireless LAN, and unused portions of FM radio or satellite services. A mobile host can interact with the three different types of wireless networks at different point of time. Mobile systems are more often subject to environmental adversities which can cause loss of messages or data [8]. In particular, a mobile host can fail or disconnect from the rest of the network. Designing fault-tolerant distributed applications in such an environment is a complex endeavor.

In recent years, several paradigms have been identified to simplify the design of fault-tolerant distributed applications in a conventional static distributed system. Election is among the most noticeable, particularly since it is closely related to group communication [7], which (among other uses) provides a powerful basis for implementing active replications.

The Election problem [1] requires that a unique coordinator be elected from a given set of processes. The problem has been widely studied in the research community [2,3,4,5,6] since one reason for this wide interest is that many distributed

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protocols need an election protocol. However, despite its usefulness, to our knowledge there is no work that has been devoted to this problem in a mobile computing environment.

The aim of this paper is to propose a solution to the election problem in a specific mobile computing environment. This solution is based on the Garcia's Bully algorithm that is a classical one for synchronous distributed systems. The rest of this paper is organized as follows: in Section 2, we mention motivations and related works. In Section 3, a solution to the election problem in a conventional synchronous system is presented. Section 4 describes the mobile system model we use. A protocol to solve the election problem in a mobile computing system is presented in Section 5. We conclude in Section 6.

## 2 Motivations and Related Works

So far, many kinds of election algorithms are presented in the research articles based upon the different system topologies, i.e. some based upon complete topology, some based upon ring topology and others based upon tree topology. But applying such an election algorithm to the mobile computing environment without modifications clearly gives rise to some problems.

Among the problems, there are some critical ones such as delayed termination of the election protocol or failure of the election protocol at the worst by environmental adversities which can cause the loss of messages or data in a mobile computing environment. In particular, in a case where mobile host failure or disconnection/connection is most common, these problems would be more serious than the ones in static distributed systems.

As an example, consider the Garcia-Molina's Bully algorithm applying to mobile computing environment. When the algorithm has started, each node should check all other node failures. It clearly causes a lot of message traffics. Moreover, frequent connection/disconnection of mobile nodes eventually leads to a failure of the algorithm. It is because that it is almost impossible for a node to check the failures of all the nodes correctly in the mobile computing environment.

Therefore, to elect a leader correctly in a mobile computing environment, a new election algorithm fitting for mobile computing environments is required. However, no work has been devoted to this problem in a mobile computing environment. If the role of a coordinator is limited to a static fixed host, any election algorithm for static distributed systems would be easily applied to the mobile computing environment.

The role of coordinator cannot be restricted only to a static fixed host. By considering a non-fixed coordinator, the coordinator freedom to move about without any infra-structural constraints is enabling the construction of mobile information systems whose use is mainly associated to specialized applications such as vehicle traffic, fleet and events management, emergency disaster relief, rescue and battlefield operations.

### 3 Election in a Static System

#### 3.1 Model and Definitions

We consider a synchronous distributed system composed of a finite set of process  $\Pi = \{p_1, p_2, \dots, p_n\}$  completely connected. Communication is by message passing, synchronous and reliable. A process fails by simply stopping the execution (*crashing*), and the failed process does not recover. A correct process is the one that does not crash. Synchrony means that there is a bound on communication delays or process relative speeds. Between any two processes there exist two unidirectional channels. Processes communicate by sending and receiving messages over these channels.

The Election problem is specified as following two properties. One is for *safety* and the other is for *liveness*. The *safety* requirement asserts that all processes connected the system never disagree on a leader. The *liveness* requirement asserts that all processes should eventually progress to be in a state of normal operation in which all processes connected to the system agree to the only one leader. An election protocol is a protocol that generates runs that satisfy the Election specification.

#### 3.2 Bully Algorithm to Solve Election

As a classic paper, Garcia-Molina specifies the leader election problem for synchronous distributed systems with crash failures and gives an elegant algorithm for the system; these algorithms are called the Bully Algorithm [2]. The basic idea in the Bully Algorithm is that the operational process with the highest priority becomes a leader. The bully algorithm is described as follows.

- Each process has a unique ID that is known by all processes. The leader is initially the process with the highest priority.
- If a process detects failure of its leader, it gets into the election status and checks whether processes with higher-priority than itself are operational.
- If some of them are operational, the process waits, giving those higher-priority processes a chance to become a leader.
- If none of them are operational, then the process becomes a new leader and informs the processes with low-priority of the fact that it is a new leader by sending them a message.
- When a process receives such a message, the process adopts the newly elected leader as its own new leader.

### 4 Mobile System Model

A distributed mobile system consists of two distinct set of entities: a large number of mobile hosts (MH) and a set of fixed hosts, some of which act as mobile support stations (MSSs) or base stations. The non MSS fixed hosts can be viewed as MSSs whose cells are never visited by any mobile host. All fixed hosts and all

communication paths connecting them form the static network. Each MSS is able to communicate directly with mobile hosts located within its cell via a wireless medium.

A cell is the geographical area covered by a MSS. A MH can directly communicate with a MSS (and vice versa) only if the MH is physically located within the cell serviced by the MSS. At any given instant of time, a MH can belong to one and only one cell. In order to send message to another MH that is not in the same cell, the source MH must contact its local MSS which forwards the messages to the local MSS of the target MH over the wireless network. The receiving MSS, in its turn, forwards the messages over the wireless network to the target MH.

When a MH moves from one cell to another, a *Handoff procedure* is executed by the MSSs of the two cells. Message propagation delay on the wired network is arbitrary but finite and channels between a MSS and each of its local mobile hosts ensure FIFO delivery of messages.

#### 4.1 Characteristics of Mobile Hosts

The bandwidth of the wireless link connecting a MH to a MSS is significantly lower than bandwidth of the links between static hosts [9]. In addition, mobile hosts have tight constraints on power consumption relative to desktop machines, since they usually operate on stand-alone energy sources such as battery cells. Consequently, they often operate in a doze mode or voluntarily disconnect from the network.

Transmission and reception of messages over wireless links also consume power at a MH. So, distributed algorithm for mobile systems need to minimize communication over wireless links. Furthermore, mobile hosts are less powerful than fixed hosts and have less memory and disk storage. Hence, while designing distributed algorithms for mobile systems, the following factors should be taken into account [10,11]:

- The amount of computation performed by a mobile host should be kept low
- The communication overhead in the wireless medium should be minimal
- Algorithm should be scalable with respect to the number of mobile hosts
- Algorithm should be able to easily handle the effect of mobile host disconnections and connections

### 5 Election in a Mobile System

In the following, we consider a broadcast group  $G = (G\_MSS, G\_MH)$  of communicating mobile hosts, where  $G\_MH$  and  $G\_MSS$  are respectively a set of  $m$  mobile hosts roaming in a geographical area (like a campus area) covered by a fixed set of  $n$  MSSs. In so far, local mobile hosts of base station  $MSS_i$ , which currently residing in  $MSS_i$  cell, will refer to mobile hosts that belong to group  $G$ .

A mobile host can move from one cell to another. If its current base station fails, the connection between the mobile host and the rest of system is broken. To recover its connection, a mobile host must move into another cell covered by an operational or correct base station. So, unless it crashes, a mobile host can always reconnect to the network. A mobile host may fail or voluntarily disconnect from the system. When a

mobile host fails, its volatile state is lost. All mobile and fixed hosts have unique identifier which decides their priority.

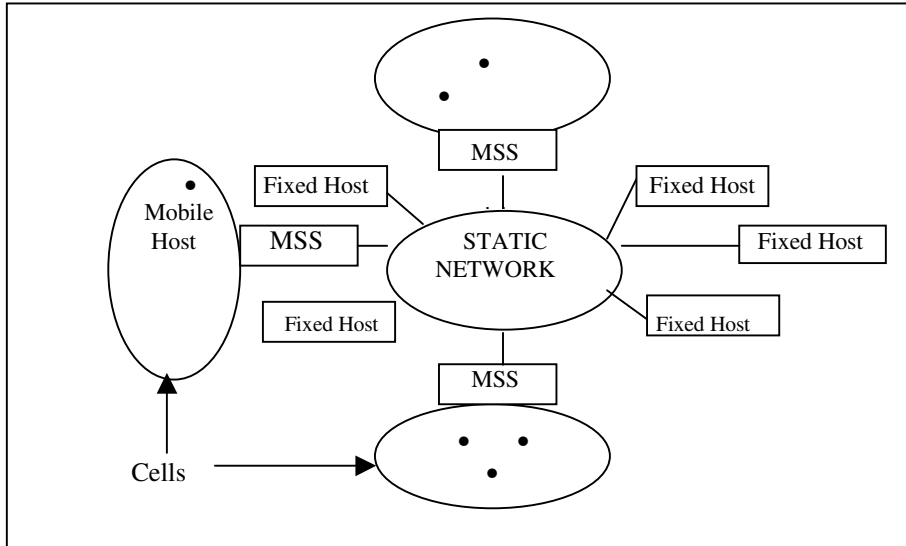


Fig. 1. Mobile System Model

In this environment, the election problem is defined over the set  $G_{MH}$  of mobile hosts. When a mobile host  $h_k$  detects a leader failure, it broadcasts the leader crash to all other mobile hosts through its  $G_{MSS}$ . In this case, a mobile host or a static host based on their highest priority eventually should be elected as a new leader. Due to the resources constraints of mobile hosts and the limited bandwidth of wireless links, the distributed algorithm to solve election is executed by the set of MSSs on behalf of the set  $G_{MH}$  of mobile hosts.

In a first phase, MSSs have to elect their local leaders amongst the subset of  $G_{MH}$  of mobile hosts roaming in their respective cells. In the second phase, each MSS starts bully algorithm to elect a global leader in the broadcast group  $G$ . Finally each MSS forwards the newly elected leader to the mobile hosts that currently reside in its cell.

## 5.1 Principle

The election protocol proposed in this paper is based on the solution described by Garcia Molina in bully algorithm [2]. The outlines of their protocol have been described in Section 2. In this section, we give an overview of our protocol and identify the major differences compared with the original bully algorithm. We assume that the election is initiated by a mobile host which requests its current base station to launch the election. The contacted base station forwards the request to all other base stations.

During the election, each base station on one hand interacts with the mobile hosts located in its cell to gather the id of each mobile host and on the other hand interacts with the other base stations to elect a unique global leader. In our approach, a base

station  $MSS$  which participates in the election protocol, always acts on behalf of a subset of mobile hosts. More precisely, the initial value of a variable  $Leader_i$  is the id of a mobile host elected as a local leader from the mobile hosts that reside in  $MSS_i$ . After exchanging messages with a base station which plays a role of an election coordinator, the value of  $Leader_i$  may include the id of a mobile host elected as a global leader from mobile hosts of all cells.

The election protocol in such an environment consists of three phases. In the first phase, that is a local election phase, each base station does two tasks concurrently. One is searching a mobile host with high priority from the mobile hosts connected to the base station and the other is participating in the election of a base station that plays a role of an election coordinator during the election period. During the election in a mobile computing environment, a base station to play a role of an election coordinator is needed to reduce the message traffic among base stations. The algorithm to elect an election coordinator among base stations is similar to the bully algorithm to elect a leader in static distributed systems.

In the second phase, each base station sends to the election coordinator the value of  $Leader$  that is the id of a local leader elected from mobile hosts in the cell. After collecting the values of  $Leader$  from all base stations, the election coordinator picks up a global leader which is a mobile host with highest priority and informs all other base stations of this newly elected global leader.

In the third phase, each base station received this message from the election coordinator sends it to mobile hosts that are connected to the base station.

## 5.2 Protocol

The protocol is composed of three parts and each part contains a defined set of actions. Part A (figure 2) describes the role of an arbitrary mobile host  $h_k$ . Part B presents the protocol executed by a base station  $MSS_i$ . It is subdivided in two sub-parts: sub-part B1 (figure 3) and sub-part B2.

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Begin
% Mobile host  $h_k$  is located in  $MSS_i$  cell
(1) Upon the program application requires to start an election
    Send INIT_1 to  $MSS_i$ 
(2) Upon receipt of INIT_3 from  $MSS_i$ 
% Let the value of variable  $h_k$  be an id value provided by the mobile host  $h_k$ .
    Send PROPOSE( $h_k$ ) to  $MSS_i$ 
(3) Upon receipt of DECIDE(New_Leader) from  $MSS_i$ 
    exit
% The result of the election protocol is delivered to the application program
end

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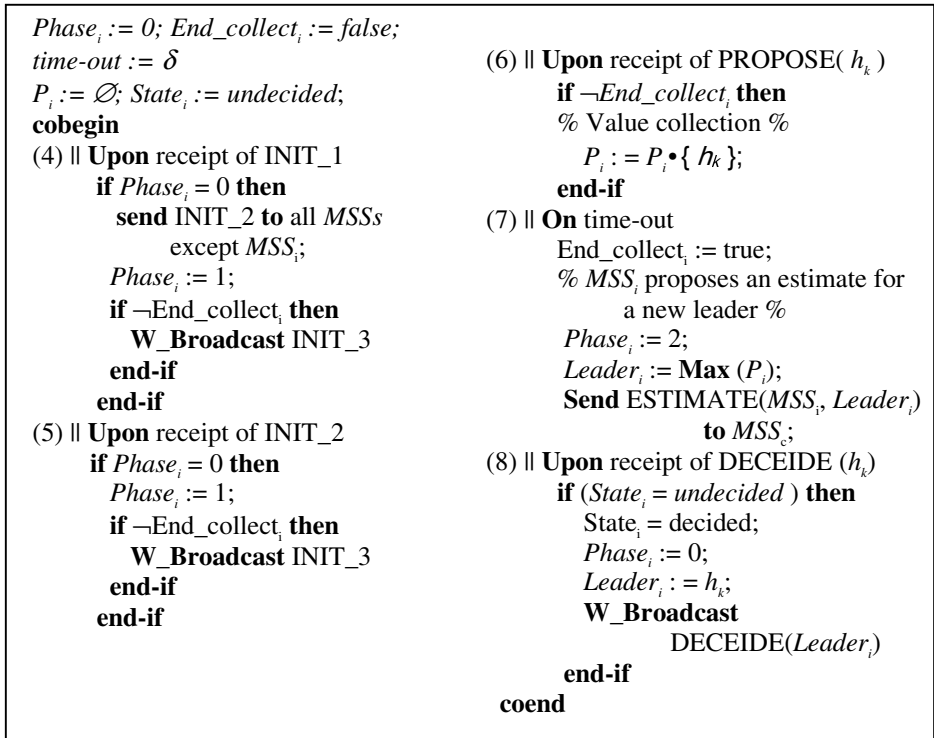
**Fig. 2.** Protocol Executed by a Mobile Host  $h_k$  (Part A)

Sub-part B1 is related to the interactions between a base station and its local mobile hosts, on one hand and the election coordinator on the other hand. Sub-part B2 is the Bully protocol adapted to our environment to elect an election coordinator

among base stations. So, it is abbreviated. Finally, the part C of the protocol is the handoff protocol destined to handle mobility of hosts between different cells.

In figure 2, the three actions performed by an arbitrary mobile host are:

- (1) A mobile host sends INIT\_1 message to its base station when it receives a request from an upper application program to initiate an election.
- (2) Message INIT\_3 is sent to a mobile host either when its local base station is informed (on receipt of INIT\_2) that an election has started or when the mobile host enters a cell managed by a base station which is not yet aware of its value. Upon receipt of such a message, each mobile host sends to the MSS its id value  $h_k$  that represents the priority of the mobile host  $h_k$ .
- (3) When the election protocol terminates, the id of the newly elected leader is forwarded to each mobile host.



**Fig. 3.** Protocol Executed by a Base Station MSS<sub>i</sub> (Part B)

Actions of the protocol in figure 3 numbered from (4) to (8) are executed a mobile support system MSS<sub>i</sub>. They have the following meaning:

(4) When a base station is asked by a mobile host to initiate an election, it sends an INIT\_2 message to the other base station to inform that an election has started. Next, by broadcasting INIT\_3 message, each base station starts to collect values from local mobile hosts, if any, and until time-out holds ( $End\_collect_i = true$ ). Testing if ( $Phase_i = 0$ ) ensures that the election is undergoing.

(5) When a base station receives an INIT\_2 from other base stations, it broadcasts INIT\_3 message to all its local mobile hosts to inform the fact that an election has

been initiated. Next, like (5), each base station starts to collect  $id$  values from local mobile hosts until time-out holds ( $End\_collect_i = true$ ).

(6) Each base station  $MSS_i$  gathers the ids of its local mobile hosts, while time-out is false.

(7) On time-out,  $MSS_i$  lets the variable  $End\_collect$  be true and chooses a local host with highest priority as its local leader. After that,  $MSS_i$  recommends it as a global new leader to the election coordinator.

(8) A base station  $MSS_i$  receives a message  $DECIDED(h_i)$  when the election coordinator has gathered all local host ids proposed from other  $MSS_s$  and has decided a host with highest priority as a global leader.  $MSS_i$  adapts this host as new global leader, changes its state to *decided*, forwards the decided global leader to local mobile hosts and terminates (Phase<sub>i</sub> = 0).

Actions of the protocol in figure 4 numbered from (9) and (10) are executed a mobile support system which is an election coordinator. They have the following meanings:

(9) When time is out, the election coordinator  $MSS_c$  chooses a host with highest priority among hosts recommended from other base stations and decides it as a new global leader. After that, the  $MSS_c$  sends the id of global leader to other base stations and terminates the role of the coordinator.

(10) When  $MSS_c$  has received an id of a local host proposed by a  $MSS$ , it saves the id into the set while it doing the role of the coordinator.

<pre> Coordinator := true; V<sub>c</sub> := ∅; <b>begin</b> (9)    <b>On</b> time-out % MSS<sub>c</sub> decide a new leader %   h<sub>c</sub> := <b>Max</b> (V<sub>c</sub>);   <b>Send</b> DECIDE(h<sub>c</sub>) <b>to</b> all MSS<sub>i</sub>;   Coordinator := false; <b>exit</b> </pre>	<pre> time-out := θ; (10)    <b>Upon</b> receipt of ESTIMATE(h<sub>k</sub>)   <b>if</b> Coordinator = true <b>then</b>     V<sub>c</sub> := V<sub>c</sub> • {h<sub>k</sub>};   <b>end-if</b> <b>end</b> </pre>
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**Fig. 4.** Protocol Executed by an election coordinator  $MSS_c$

As shown in Figure 5, the handoff protocol is reduced. When a mobile host  $h_k$  moves from  $MSS_j$  cell to  $MSS_i$  cell, the handoff protocol execution is triggered. Mobile host  $h_k$  has to identify itself to its base station by sending a message  $GUEST(h_k, MSS_i)$ . Upon receiving this message,  $MSS_i$  learns that a new mobile host  $h_k$ , coming from  $MSS_j$  cell has entered in its cell.  $MSS_i$  informs  $MSS_j$  to remove  $h_k$  from the set of mobile hosts that reside in its cell and eventually to transfer information about the last state of  $h_k$  to  $MSS_i$ .  $MSS_i$  queries  $h_k$  to send back its id value, if an election has already started and the value collection is still possible.



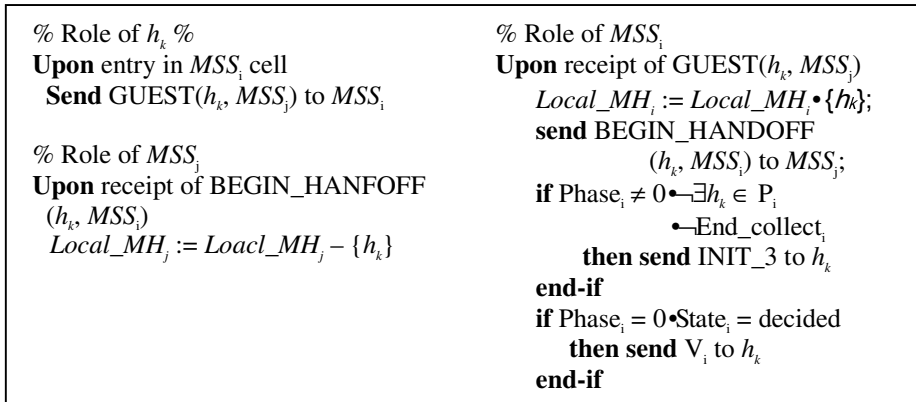


Fig. 5. Handoff Procedur

### 5.3 Correctness Proof

As our protocol is based on the Bully algorithm proposed by Garcia-Molina, some statements of lemmas and theorems that follow are similar to the ones encountered in [2].

**Theorem 1.** All the mobile hosts in the system never disagree with a leader when the hosts are in the state of a normal operation (safety property).

**Proof.** A mobile host decides (action 3) a leader only if its base station has decided (action 6): in that case the mobile host adapts the leader broadcasted by this base station. Consequently, theorem 1 is valid if no two base stations decide differently. Assume that at least one base station has decided (action 8). In that case, a coordinator has previously broadcasted a message DECIDED (action 9). So, at least a majority of base stations have adopted the host as a new leader sent by the election coordinator. Eventually, all base stations in the system reach to the decision adopting a mobile host as a new leader since there exists only one election coordinator and the coordinator sends a message every base station to inform a newly elected leader. Therefore, all base stations never disagree with a leader when the base stations are in the state of a normal operation.  $\square$ <sub>Theorem 1</sub>

**Theorem 2.** All the processes should eventually progress to be in the state of a normal operation in which all hosts in the system agree to the only one leader (liveness property).

**Proof.** Consider that a leader is crashed. Then eventually at least one correct host knows the leader's crash and initiates an election protocol. After an election has started, one base station is elected as a election coordinator. The coordinator decides a global leader and sends the leader to all base stations. Then all collect base stations eventually deliver such a DECIDE message to their mobile hosts (action 8). Consequently, any mobile host will receive the decided leader either when its base

station decides (action 8) or when it enters in the cell of a base station that previously decided.  $\square$  *Theorem 2*

## 6 Conclusion

The communication over wireless links are limited to a few messages (in the best case, two messages: one to inform the initial value and the other to get the decided leader) and the mobile hosts CPU time is low since the actual election is run by the base stations. The protocol is then more energy efficient. The protocol is also independent from the overall number of mobile hosts and all needed data structures are managed by the base stations. So, the protocol is scalable and can not be affected by mobile host failures.

Another interesting characteristics of the protocol are as follows. 1) During the election period, a base station that plays a role of the election coordinator should be elected to reduce the message traffics between base stations before electing a global mobile host which acts as a leader. 2) In such a mobile computing environment, a handoff algorithm is needed to perform elections efficiently, but it is not needed in static distributed systems.

The election algorithm in a mobile computing environment consists of two important phases. One is a local election phase in which all  $MSS_s$  have to elect local leaders amongst the set of  $G\_MH$  of mobile hosts in their respective cells. The other is a global election phase in which each  $MSS$  takes part in the election of a global leader among all  $MSS_s$  in the broadcast group  $G$ .

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