

PETSc TAO support for optimisation problems with FEniCSx

Paul T. Kühner, Michal Habera, Andreas Zilian
Department of Engineering | University of Luxembourg

18 June 2025 | FEniCS'25 conference



Optimisation Problems

$$\min_x f(x)$$

Optimisation Problems

Let $f : \mathbb{R}^n \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$

$$\min_{x \in \mathbb{R}^n} f(x)$$

► Unconstrained

Optimisation Problems

Let $f : \mathbb{R}^n \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$, $x^-, x^+ \in \overline{\mathbb{R}^n}$

$$\begin{array}{ll} \min_{x \in \mathbb{R}^n} & f(x) \\ \text{subject to} & x^- \leq x \leq x^+ \end{array}$$

- ▶ Unconstrained
- ▶ Bound constrained

Optimisation Problems

Let $f : \mathbb{R}^n \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$, $x^-, x^+ \in \overline{\mathbb{R}^n}$, $g : \mathbb{R}^n \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^m$ and $h : \mathbb{R}^n \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^l$.

$$\begin{aligned} & \min_{x \in \mathbb{R}^n} f(x) \\ & \text{subject to } x^- \leq x \leq x^+ \\ & \quad g(x) = 0 \\ & \quad h(x) \geq 0 \end{aligned}$$

- ▶ Unconstrained
- ▶ Bound constrained
- ▶ General constrained

Optimisation Problems

Let $f : \mathbb{R}^n \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$, $x^-, x^+ \in \overline{\mathbb{R}^n}$, $g : \mathbb{R}^n \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^m$ and $h : \mathbb{R}^n \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^l$.

$$\begin{aligned} & \min_{x \in \mathbb{R}^n} f(x) \\ & \text{subject to } x^- \leq x \leq x^+ \\ & g(x) = 0 \\ & h(x) \geq 0 \end{aligned}$$

- ▶ Unconstrained
- ▶ Bound constrained
- ▶ General constrained

→ PETSc's Toolkit for **A**dvanced **O**ptimization (TAO) [1]

Optimisation Problems over Function Spaces

$$\begin{array}{ll} \min_{x \in \mathbb{R}^n} & f(x) \\ \text{subject to} & x^- \leq x \leq x^+ \\ & g(x) = 0 \\ & h(x) \geq 0 \end{array}$$

Optimisation Problems over Function Spaces

$$\begin{array}{ll} \min_{x \in \mathbb{R}^n} & f(x) \\ \text{subject to} & x^- \leq x \leq x^+ \\ & g(x) = 0 \\ & h(x) \geq 0 \end{array}$$

$$\begin{array}{ll} \min_{u \in V} & f(u) \\ \text{subject to} & u^- \leq u \leq u^+ \\ & g(u) = 0 \\ & h(u) \geq 0 \end{array}$$

Motivation

- ▶ Non abstraction breaking
- ▶ Automatic differentiation, form manipulation, ... – ufl
- ▶ Uniform interface for un-, bound- or general constrained problems
- ▶ Multi field
- ▶ Optional abstractions

Previous Work

- ▶ Bound constrained, single field, no automatic differentiation
 - FreeFem++ [2]
 - comet-fenicsx [3]
- ▶ SNES solver, blocked systems, ufl
 - dolfiny [4]
 - DOLFINx [5]
- ▶ Variational inequality solvers with SNES VI
 - MFEM [6]
 - Firedrake [7]
- ▶ Convex optimisation with MOSEK, multi field, ufl
 - dolfinx_optim [8]

```
from dolfiny.taoproblem import TAOProblem
```

A Poisson Solver

We consider

$$\begin{aligned} -\Delta u &= f & \text{in } \Omega &= (0, 1)^2 \\ u &= g & \text{on } \partial\Omega \end{aligned}$$

as energy minimisation problem

$$\min_{\substack{u \in H^1(\Omega) \\ u|_{\partial\Omega} = g}} \frac{1}{2} \int_{\Omega} \nabla u^2 \, dx - \int_{\Omega} f u \, dx.$$

```
from dolfinx import fem, mesh
from dolfinx.taoproblem import TAOProblem

domain = mesh.create_unit_square(
    MPI.COMM_WORLD, 32, 32
)
V = fem.functionspace(domain, ("P", 1))

u = fem.Function(V)
F = (
    .5 * ufl.inner(ufl.grad(u), ufl.grad(u)) * ufl.dx
    - f * u * ufl.dx
)
bc = fem.dirichletbc(g, facet_dofs, V)

opts = PETSc.Options("poisson")
opts["tao_type"] = "bqnls"
opts["tao_ls_type"] = "armijo"
opts["tao_max_it"] = 300
opts["tao_gttol"] = 1e-5

tao = TAOProblem(F, [u], bcs=[bc], prefix="poisson")
tao.solve()
```

But, SNES can line search

- ▶ Both TAO and SNES search for a stationary point

$$\delta f(u^*) = R(u^*) = 0.$$

- ▶ For a descent direction p , line search computes step size

$$\alpha = \operatorname{argmin}_{\hat{\alpha} > 0} f(u + \hat{\alpha} p).$$

- ▶ SNES will use (by default)

$$f(u) = \|R(u)\|_2^2.$$

- Dangerous – not respecting discretization.

Poisson with Bound Constraints

We consider

$$\begin{aligned} -\Delta u &= f & \text{in } \Omega = (0, 1)^2 \\ u &= g & \text{on } \partial\Omega \end{aligned}$$

as energy minimisation problem

$$\min_{u \in H^1(\Omega)} \frac{1}{2} \int_{\Omega} \nabla u^2 \, dx - \int_{\Omega} f u \, dx$$

subject to $g - \iota_{\partial\Omega} \leq u \leq g + \iota_{\partial\Omega}$,

$$\text{where } \iota_{\partial\Omega} = \begin{cases} 0 & x \in \partial\Omega \\ \infty & \text{else.} \end{cases}$$

```
u = fem.Function(V)
F = (
    .5 * ufl.inner(ufl.grad(u), ufl.grad(u)) * ufl.dx
    - f * u * ufl.dx
)

lb = fem.Function(V)
lb.interpolate(
    lambda x: np.where(
        np.isclose(x[0], 0) or np.isclose(x[0], 1) or
        np.isclose(x[1], 0) or np.isclose(x[1], 1),
        g,
        np.full(x.shape[1], -np.inf),
    )
)

ub = fem.Function(V)
ub.interpolate(...)

opts = PETSc.Options()
opts["tao_type"] = "bnls"
opts["tao_ls_type"] = "unit"
opts["tao_gatol"] = 1e-14

tao = TAOProblem(F, [u], ub=[ub], lb=[lb])
tao.solve()
```

Optimal Control

We consider

$$\min_{f \in H^1(\Omega)} \|u_d - u(f)\|_{L^2}^2 + \frac{\alpha}{2} \|f\|_{L^2}^2$$

where $u(f)$ is the solution of

$$\begin{aligned} -\Delta u &= f && \text{in } \Omega = (0, 1)^2 \\ u &= g && \text{on } \partial\Omega. \end{aligned}$$

```
from dolfiny.taoproblem import sync_functions

state_problem = fem.petsc.LinearProblem(...)
adjoint_problem = fem.petsc.LinearProblem(...)

@sync_functions(f)
def F_hat(tao, x):
    state_problem.solve()
    return comm.allreduce(fem.assemble_scalar(F))

@sync_functions(f)
def J_hat(tao, x, J):
    state_problem.solve()

    adjoint_problem.solve()

    # jacobian = p + alpha * f
    jacobian.x.array[:] = (
        p.x.array[:] + alpha * f.x.array[:]
    )
    fem.petsc.assign(jacobian, J)

tao = TAOProblem(
    F_hat, [f], J=(J_hat, f.x.petsc_vec.copy())
)
tao.solve()
```

German Pavilion Expo '67

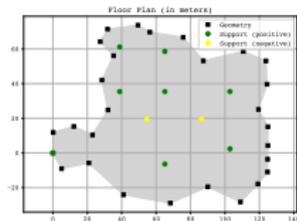


German Pavilion at Expo '67 in Montreal [9].

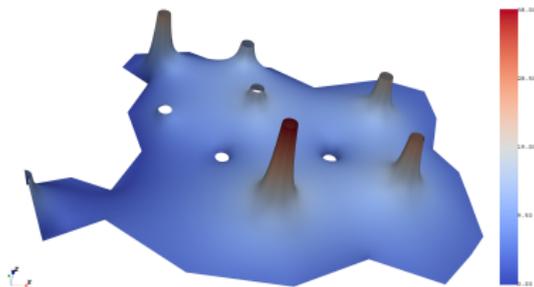
$$\min_{\substack{g \in H^1(\Omega) \\ g|_{\partial\Omega} = h}} \int_{\Omega} \sqrt{|\nabla g|^2 + 1} \, dx + \alpha \|g\|_{H^1}^2$$

subject to $\phi \leq u \leq \psi$.

- For smooth h , ϕ and ψ this is well-posed [10].



Floor plan of the Pavilion geometry [11].



Computed surface $\{(x, y, g(x, y)) \mid (x, y) \in \Omega\}$.

Truss Sizing Optimisation

$\Omega \subset \mathbb{R}^3$ truss structure [12]

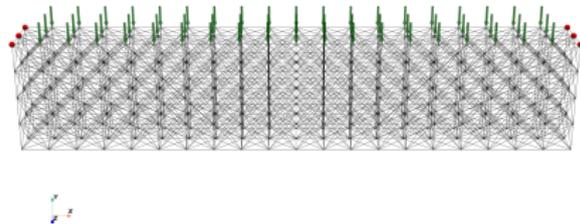
$$\min_{s \in DG_0(\Omega)} \int_{v \in \Gamma_f} u(s) \cdot f \, dP$$

subject to $s_{\min} \leq s \leq s_{\max}$

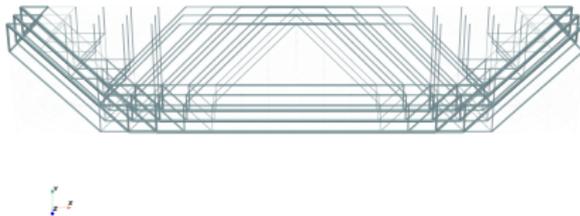
$$\int_{\Omega} s \, dx = \frac{1}{20} \int_{\Omega} s_{\max} \, dx,$$

where $u(s) \in P_1(\Omega)$ solves

$$\int_{\Omega} s \sigma(u) \varepsilon(v) \, dx = \int_{v \in \Gamma_f} f \cdot v \, dx \quad \forall v.$$



Truss geometry $100 \times 20 \times 10$ m.



Optimised truss structure, radii scaled by factor 5.

Experience with PETSc TAO

- ▶ Python TAO interface sparsely used
 - GitHub search for `PETSc.TAO()` yields 70 results
 - Routines for general constrained problems previously not exported
- ▶ Unconstrained and bound constrained problems – *just work*
- ▶ General constrained problems – *not battle tested*
 - ALMM is the only usable general constrained solver – Bugs identified
 - PDIPM does not support ghosted vectors – IPOPT [13] contender?

Outlook

- ▶ NEST matrices
- ▶ Multiple constraint support
- ▶ Further applications in shape- and topology optimisation
- ▶ Custom optimiser through PETSc Python interface
- ▶ Automatic reduced functional – `pyadjoint-x`? [14]

 `dolfiny.uni.lu`

 `fenics-dolfiny/dolfiny`

 `pip install dolfiny`

References

- [1] Satish Balay et al. 'Efficient Management of Parallelism in Object-Oriented Numerical Software Libraries'. In: *Modern Software Tools for Scientific Computing*. Ed. by Erlend Arge, Are Magnus Bruaset and Hans Petter Langtangen. Boston, MA: Birkhäuser Boston, 1997, pp. 163–202. ISBN: 978-1-4612-1986-6. DOI: 10.1007/978-1-4612-1986-6_8. URL: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4612-1986-6_8.
- [2] Frédéric Hecht. 'New development in FreeFem++'. In: *J. Numer. Math.* 20:3-4 (2012), pp. 251–265. ISSN: 1570-2820. URL: <https://freefem.org/>.
- [3] Jeremy Bleyer. *Numerical tours of Computational Mechanics with FEniCSx*. Version v0.2. Sept. 2024. DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.13838486. URL: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.13838486>.
- [4] Andreas ZILIAN and Michal HABERA. 'dolfiny: Convenience wrappers for DOLFINx'. English. In: <https://dx.doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.14495262>. Cambridge, United Kingdom, 23 March 2021. URL: <https://fenics2021.com/talks/zilian.html>.
- [5] Igor A. Baratta et al. *DOLFINx: The next generation FEniCS problem solving environment*. Dec. 2023. DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.10447666. URL: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10447666>.
- [6] R. Anderson et al. 'MFEM: A Modular Finite Element Methods Library'. In: *Computers & Mathematics with Applications* 81 (2021), pp. 42–74. DOI: 10.1016/j.camwa.2020.06.009.
- [7] David A. Ham et al. *Firedrake User Manual*. First edition. Imperial College London et al. May 2023. DOI: 10.25561/104839.
- [8] Jeremy Bleyer. 'Applications of conic programming in non-smooth mechanics'. In: *Journal of Optimization Theory and Applications* (2022), pp. 1–33.
- [9] René Lavigne. *Pavillon de l'Allemagne (2).jpg*. [Online; accessed June 14, 2025]. 1967. URL: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pavillon_de_l%27Allemagne_\(2\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pavillon_de_l%27Allemagne_(2).jpg).
- [10] L. A. Caffarelli. 'The obstacle problem revisited'. In: *J. Fourier Anal. Appl.* 4:4-5 (1998), pp. 383–402. ISSN: 1069-5869,1531-5851. DOI: 10.1007/BF02498216. URL: <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02498216>.
- [11] Alba López Gómez, Diego Paniagua Padilla and Luis Ruiz Andrés. 'Pabellón alemán: EXPO'67, Montreal (Canadá): Frei Otto, Rolf Gutbrod: arquitectura textil, análisis del edificio'. Working Paper. 2015. URL: <https://oa.upm.es/39614/>.
- [12] Peter W. Christensen and Anders Klarbring. 'Sizing Stiffness Optimization of a Truss'. In: *An Introduction to Structural Optimization*. Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2009, pp. 77–95. ISBN: 978-1-4020-8666-3. DOI: 10.1007/978-1-4020-8666-3_5.
- [13] Andreas Wächter and Lorenz T. Biegler. 'On the implementation of an interior-point filter line-search algorithm for large-scale nonlinear programming'. In: *Math. Program.* 106:1 (2006), pp. 25–57. ISSN: 0025-5610,1436-4646. DOI: 10.1007/s10107-004-0559-y. URL: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10107-004-0559-y>.
- [14] Sebastian K. Mitusch, Simon W. Funke and Jørgen S. Dokken. 'dolfin-adjoint 2018.1: automated adjoints for FEniCS and Firedrake'. In: *Journal of Open Source Software* 4:38 (2019), p. 1292. DOI: 10.21105/joss.01292. URL: <https://doi.org/10.21105/joss.01292>.