

Structural basis for the modular recognition of single-stranded RNA by PPR proteins

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Pentatricopeptide repeat (PPR) proteins represent a large family of sequence-specific RNA-binding proteins that are involved in multiple aspects of RNA metabolism. PPR proteins, which are found in exceptionally large numbers in the mitochondria and chloroplasts of terrestrial plants^{1–5}, recognize single-stranded RNA (ssRNA) in a modular fashion^{6–8}. The maize chloroplast protein PPR10 binds to two similar RNA sequences from the *ATPI-ATPH* and *PSAJ-RPL33* intergenic regions, referred to as *ATPH* and *PSAJ*, respectively^{9,10}. By protecting the target RNA elements from 5' or 3' exonucleases, PPR10 defines the corresponding 5' and 3' messenger RNA termini^{9–11}. Despite rigorous functional characterizations, the structural basis of sequence-specific ssRNA recognition by PPR proteins remains to be elucidated. Here we report the crystal structures of PPR10 in RNA-free and RNA-bound states at resolutions of 2.85 and 2.45 Å, respectively. In the absence of RNA binding, the nineteen repeats of PPR10 are assembled into a right-handed superhelical spiral. PPR10 forms an antiparallel, intertwined homodimer and exhibits considerable conformational changes upon binding to its target ssRNA, an 18-nucleotide *PSAJ* element. Six nucleotides of *PSAJ* are specifically recognized by six corresponding PPR10 repeats following the predicted code. The molecular basis for the specific and modular recognition of RNA bases A, G and U is revealed. The structural elucidation of RNA recognition by PPR proteins provides an important framework for potential biotechnological applications of PPR proteins in RNA-related research areas.

PPR proteins function in multiple aspects of organelle RNA metabolism, such as RNA splicing, editing, degradation and translation^{1–5}. In plants, PPR mutants may cause embryonic lethality^{12–14}, and a number of PPR proteins act as restorers of fertility to overcome cytoplasmic male sterility^{15–19}. In humans, mutations in the mitochondrial PPR protein LRPPRC are associated with the French-Canadian-type Leigh syndrome characterized by the deficiency in Complex IV^{20,21}.

PPR proteins contain 2–30 tandem repeats, each typically comprising 35 amino acids that are organized into a hairpin of α -helices^{1,6,22,23}. PPRs are divided into two classes: the P-class, whose members only comprise the 35-amino-acid repeats; and the PLS-class, which has repeats of 31–36 amino acids and extra domains at the carboxyl terminus^{3,12}. Computational and biochemical analyses suggest that PPR proteins may recognize RNA in a modular fashion, but different from that of the RNA-binding PUF domain^{6,24}. The putative RNA recognition code by PPR proteins derived from bioinformatic and biochemical analyses awaits structural corroboration^{2,6–8}.

To elucidate the mechanism of specific RNA recognition by PPR proteins, we sought to determine the crystal structure of well-characterized PPR proteins in complex with their target RNAs. The recombinant protein of maize chloroplast PPR10, which belongs to the P-class, specifically binds to the 17-nucleotide (nt) (*ATPH*) and 18-nt (*PSAJ*) RNA

oligonucleotides (Extended Data Fig. 1a)¹⁰. We launched a systematic effort to determine the structures of PPR10 in both RNA-free and RNA-bound states.

The crystal structure of the RNA-free PPR10 fragment (residues 61–786) containing quadruple Cys mutations (C256S/C279S/C430S/C449S) was determined at 2.85 Å resolution. PPR10 forms a right-handed two-turn superhelical assembly, with 19 PPR motifs (residues 107–771) capped by three short α -helices at the amino-terminal domain (NTD) and a single α -helix at the C terminus (Fig. 1a). Capping motifs are known to contribute to ligand specificity for repeat proteins such as TPR (tetratricopeptide repeat)²⁵ and TALE (transcription activator-like effector)^{26,27}. The function of the extra motifs in PPR10 remains to be determined.

The 35 amino acids in each PPR motif form a hairpin of α -helices, each containing four helical turns, followed by a five-residue loop (Fig. 1b). The two helices, designated helix a and helix b, are connected by a short turn of two amino acids. Helices a and b of each repeat constitute the inner and outer layers of the superhelical assembly, respectively (Fig. 1a). In the crystals, there is one molecule of PPR10 in each asymmetric unit, yet two symmetry-related molecules are intertwined in an antiparallel fashion. The N terminus of one molecule is in close contact with the C terminus of the other, yielding an overall appearance of an ellipsoid with a polar axis of approximately 140 Å and an equatorial diameter of 70 Å (Fig. 1c).

On the basis of the PPR10 structure, we defined the starting amino acid of helix a as the first residue in a PPR motif (Fig. 1b and Extended Data Fig. 1b). This definition results in a one-residue shift either forwards^{6,12} or backwards^{7,28} within each repeat compared to the previously described boundary of a PPR motif (Extended Data Fig. 1c). With the new boundary assignment of a PPR motif, the residues that were predicted to determine RNA binding specificity are all included in one structurally intact motif. We hope that this structure-based demarcation of the PPR motif will simplify future descriptions of PPR proteins.

After numerous unsuccessful crystallization trials for PPR10-*ATPH* complexes, we finally determined the structure of PPR10 (residues 69–786, C256S/C279S/C430S/C449S) in the presence of 18-nt *PSAJ* RNA (5'-GUAUUCUUUAUUAUUUC-3') at 2.45 Å resolution (Extended Data Table 1). In the crystals, there is one antiparallel PPR10 dimer in each asymmetric unit. Analysis by sedimentation equilibrium analytical ultracentrifugation (SE-AUC) of *PSAJ*-bound PPR10 (residues 37–786, C256S/C279S/C430S/C449S) supports its dimeric existence at micromolar concentration in solution (Extended Data Fig. 2). The two PPR10 protomers can be superimposed with a root-mean-squared deviation of 1.3 Å over 629 C α atoms (Extended Data Fig. 3). The overall appearance of the dimer has changed to a hollow cylindrical tube (Fig. 2a), and the N- and C-terminal portions of the PPR10 protomer are compressed towards the centre, resulting in a reduction of 20 Å in axial length (Fig. 2b).

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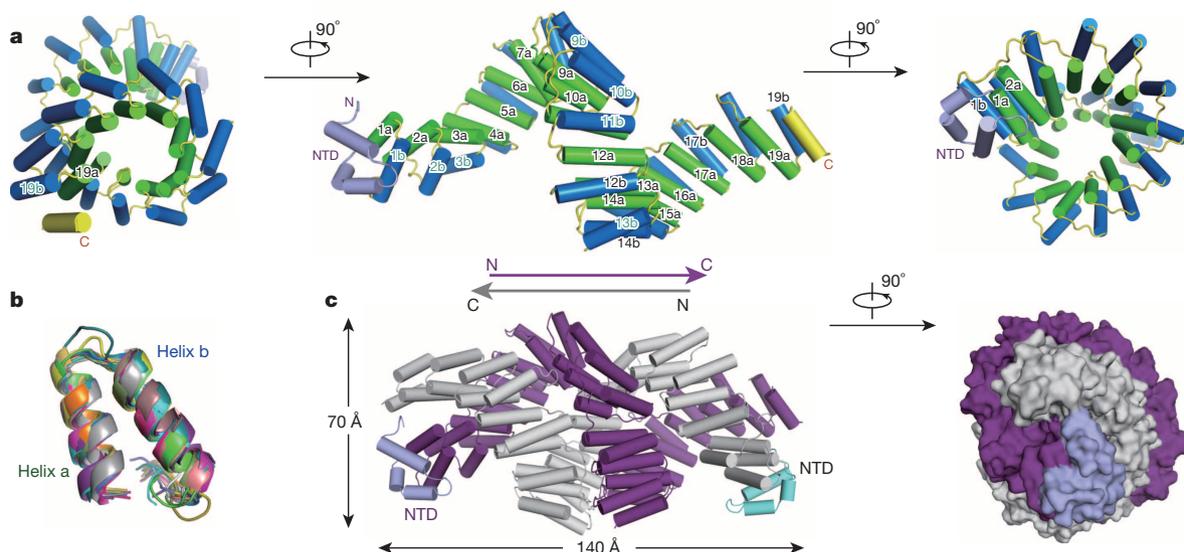


Figure 1 | Crystal structure of RNA-free PPR10. **a**, Overall structure of RNA-free PPR10. The fragment (residues 61–786, C256S/C279S/C430S/C449S) comprises 19 repeats capped by a small NTD (light purple) and a C-terminal helix (yellow). The two helices within each repeat, designated helix

a and helix b, are coloured green and blue, respectively. **b**, Structural superimposition of the 19 repeats of PPR10. **c**, Overall structure of the PPR10 dimer. Two molecules from adjacent asymmetric units form an intertwined antiparallel dimer. All structure figures were prepared with PyMol³⁰.

Following assignment of most amino acids of PPR10 into the electron density map, strong electron densities indicative of RNA bases became clearly visible in the cavities on both ends of the cylindrical tube (Fig. 2c). Assignment of 18 and 14 nucleotides of the two bound RNA elements was validated by the anomalous signals of bromine (Br), which were collected for crystals of PPR10 bound to Br-labelled RNA oligonucleotides (Extended Data Fig. 4 and Extended Data Table 2). The 5' and 3' portions of the ssRNA are specifically recognized by the N-terminal repeats of one protomer and C-terminal repeats of the other. By contrast, the middle portion of the ssRNA, comprising nucleotides U5 to A10, remains largely uncoordinated by PPR10 (Fig. 2d and Extended Data Fig. 5a, b).

PPR10 has 19 repeats and the bound *PSAJ* RNA contains 18 nucleotides. Consistent with a bioinformatic prediction⁶, specific recognition of the *PSAJ* RNA begins with repeat 3 (Fig. 3a). Each of the first four nucleotides on the 5' end, 5'-GUAU-3', is recognized by one PPR10 repeat. Such recognition exhibits a modular pattern involving residues that were predicted through biochemical and bioinformatic analyses^{2,6,7}. Each RNA base is surrounded by four residues, the 2nd residues from two adjacent repeats, and the 5th and 35th residues from a corresponding repeat. In addition to base recognition, the backbone phosphate or ribose groups of the bound *PSAJ* RNA are also coordinated by charged or polar amino acids from PPR10 (Extended Data Fig. 5c).

A polar amino acid located at the 5th position in each repeat appears to be the most important determinant for RNA base specificity. Thr 178, Asn 213, Ser 249 and Asn 284 in repeats 3–6 recognize the bases G1, U2, A3 and U4, respectively, through direct hydrogen bonds (Fig. 3b). The importance of the 5th residue in RNA recognition is supported by mutational analysis. Mutating any of the 5th residues in repeats 4 (N213A), 5 (S249L) or 6 (N284A) resulted in complete abolishment of RNA binding. By contrast, substitution of the 5th residues of repeats 7, 8, 10, 11 or 13, which are not involved in RNA binding in the structure, showed little or no effect on *PSAJ* binding (Extended Data Fig. 6).

Buttressing the hydrogen bonds, five residues at the 2nd position of PPR repeats 3–7 sandwich the four bases mainly through van der Waals interactions (Fig. 3a). For example, G1 is surrounded by Arg 175/Val 210 of repeats 3 and 4. Similarly, U2, A3 and U4 are sandwiched by Val 210/Phe 246, Phe 246/Val 281 and Val 281/Val 316, respectively (Fig. 3). The 35th residue is located in the vicinity of the base. It is possible that water molecules, although invisible in the structure, may mediate hydrogen bonds between the polar residues and the bases. Importantly, Asp 244

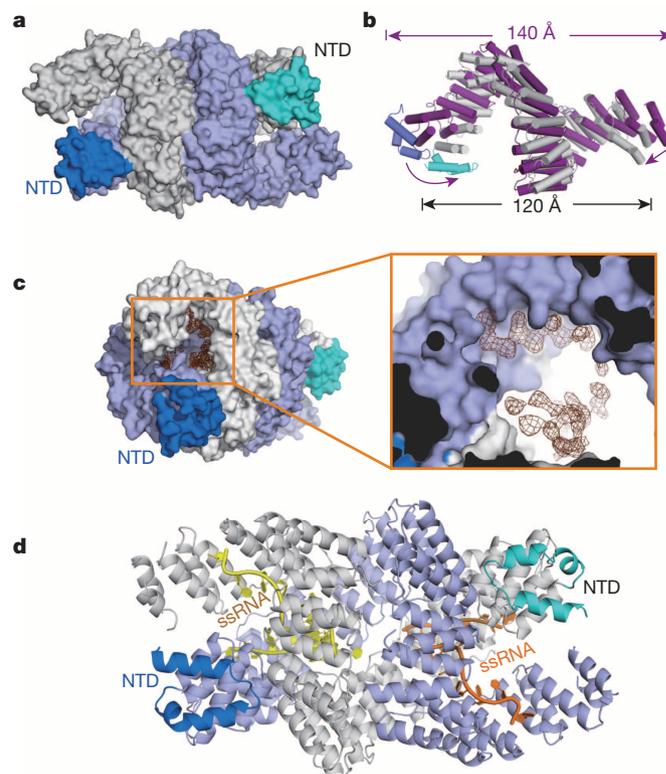


Figure 2 | Structure of PPR10 bound to an 18-nt *PSAJ* RNA element. **a**, The PPR10 dimer (residues 69–786, C256S/C279S/C430S/C449S) forms a cylindrical tube in the presence of *PSAJ*. The two protomers are coloured light purple and grey with their NTDs coloured blue and cyan. **b**, The PPR10 protomer undergoes pronounced conformational changes upon binding to *PSAJ*. The structure of RNA-free PPR10 is coloured magenta with the NTD coloured lilac. **c**, Electron densities found in the cavities on both ends of the PPR10 dimer. The 'omit' electron density, with a close-up view in the inset, is contoured at 3σ . **d**, Overall structure of the PPR10–*PSAJ* complex. The two ssRNA molecules are coloured yellow and orange.

was determined by selenium-based single-wavelength anomalous diffraction and refined to 2.85 Å resolution (Extended Data Table 1). In the effort to crystallize PPR10 in complex with its target RNA, despite numerous trials, most PPR10-*ATPH* complexes defied crystallization; for those that crystallized, X-ray diffraction was consistently poor. We applied the same strategy to complexes between PPR10 and *PSAJ*. After screening more than 100,000 conditions, we were able to crystallize the complex between PPR10 (residues 69–786, C256S/C279S/C430S/C449S) and the 18-nt *PSAJ* RNA (5'-GUAUUCUUUAAUUAUUUC-3') in the space group $P4_3$. These crystals diffract X-rays beyond 2.5 Å. The structure was determined by molecular replacement using successive segments of the RNA-free PPR10 structure, but not the entire molecule. We were able to assign all 18 nucleotides of one bound *PSAJ* RNA element, but only 14 of the other. For details of electrophoretic mobility shift assay and SE-AUC experiments, please refer to Methods.

Online Content Any additional Methods, Extended Data display items and Source Data are available in the online version of the paper; references unique to these sections appear only in the online paper.

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Author Contributions P.Y., Q.L., J.-K.Z., Y.S. and N.Y. designed all experiments. P.Y., Q.L., C.Y., Y.L., J.L., F.Y., Z.W., J.L., J.H., H.-W.W., J.W. and N.Y. performed the experiments. All authors analysed the data and contributed to manuscript preparation. N.Y. wrote the manuscript.

Author Information The atomic coordinates and structure factors of RNA-free and RNA-bound PPR10 have been deposited in the Protein Data Bank (PDB) with the accession codes 4M57 and 4M59, respectively. Reprints and permissions information is available at www.nature.com/reprints. The authors declare no competing financial interests. Readers are welcome to comment on the online version of the paper. Correspondence and requests for materials should be addressed to N.Y. (nyan@tsinghua.edu.cn).

METHODS

Protein preparation. The codon-optimized complementary DNA of full-length PPR10 (Gene ID: 100302579) from *Zea mays* was subcloned into pET15b vector (Novagen). Overexpression of PPR10 protein was induced in *E. coli* BL21 (DE3) with 0.2 mM isopropyl- β -D-thiogalactoside at an $OD_{600\text{nm}}$ of 1.2. After growing for 16 h at 16 °C, the cells were collected, homogenized in a buffer containing 25 mM Tris-HCl, pH 8.0, and 150 mM NaCl. After sonication and centrifugation, the supernatant was applied to Ni²⁺ affinity resin (Ni-NTA, Qiagen) and further fractionated by ion-exchange chromatography (Source 15Q, GE Healthcare). The PPR10 mutants were generated using two-step PCR and subcloned, overexpressed and purified in the same way as the wild-type protein.

A systematic protein engineering effort was mounted for crystallization of RNA-free and -bound PPR10. A series of protein truncations were tested without giving rise to crystals. There are 18 Cys residues within the repeat region. It is well known that the presence of surface Cys residues, which are subject to oxidation, may lead to protein heterogeneity and impede crystallization. We therefore generated 18 mutants, each consisting of a single Cys to Ser mutation and tested their binding with the 17-nt *ATPH* element. For those that completely retained binding affinity, we further grouped them to double, triple and quadruple mutations. Finally, the PPR10 mutant containing C256S/C279S/C430S/C449S showed the same binding affinity as wild type and exhibited excellent protein behaviour. For consistency, all the PPR10 proteins used in the manuscript contain the quadruple Cys mutations.

For the crystallization trials of RNA-free PPR10 (residues 61–786, C256S/C279S/C430S/C449S), the protein was concentrated and applied to gel filtration chromatography (Superdex-200 10/30, GE Healthcare) in the buffer containing 25 mM Tris-HCl, pH 8.0, 150 mM NaCl and 10 mM dithiothreitol (DTT). Selenomethionine (Se-Met)-derived protein was purified similarly.

To obtain the crystals of protein–RNA complex, PPR10 (residues 69–786, C256S/C279S/C430S/C449S) was purified through Ni²⁺ affinity resin (Ni-NTA, Qiagen), followed by heparin affinity column (HiPrep Heparin FF 16/10, GE Healthcare). The protein was then applied to gel filtration chromatography (Superdex-200 10/30, GE Healthcare). The buffer for gel filtration contained 25 mM Tris-HCl, pH 8.0, 50 mM NaCl, 5 mM MgCl₂ and 10 mM DTT. The peak fractions were incubated with target RNA oligonucleotides with a molar ratio of approximately 1:1.5 at 4 °C for about 40 min before crystallization trials.

Crystallization. Both RNA-free and RNA-bound PPR10 proteins were crystallized by hanging-drop vapour-diffusion method at 18 °C. PPR10 (residues 61–786, C256S/C279S/C430S/C449S), at a concentration of approximately 6.0 mg ml⁻¹, was mixed with an equal volume of reservoir solution containing 1.8–2.1 M sodium formate, and 0.1 M Bis-Tris propane, pH 6.5. Plate-shaped crystals appeared overnight and grew to full size within 1–2 weeks. Se-Met-labelled protein was crystallized similarly.

To obtain crystals of protein–RNA complex, various combinations of protein boundaries and RNA oligonucleotides (Takara) were examined. Because the first visible residue in the structure of RNA-free PPR10 starts at position 69, we invested more effort into this construct. Finally, the protein (residues 69–786, C256S/C279S/C430S/C449S) and 18-nt RNA from the *PSAJ*–*RPL33* intergenic region with the sequence 5'-GUAUUCUUUAAUUUUUC-3' (designated *PSAJ* RNA) gave rise to crystals in the reservoir solution containing 8–10% (w/v) polyethylene glycol 3350, 8% Tacsimate, pH 6.0 (Hampton Research), and 0.1 M MES, pH 5.5.

Data collection and structural determination. All data sets were collected at SSRF beamline BL17U or SPring-8 beamline BL41XU and processed with the HKL2000 packages³¹. Further processing was carried out with programs from the CCP4 suite³². Data collection and structure refinement statistics are summarized in Extended Data Tables 1 and 2.

The RNA-free PPR10 structure was solved by single anomalous diffraction (SAD) of Se-Met using the program ShelxC/D/E³³. Then a crude helical model

was manually built in the program Coot³⁴. Using this partial model as input, the identified Se atom positions were refined and phases were recalculated using the SAD experimental phasing module of the program Phaser³⁵. With the improved map, the molecular boundary was unambiguously defined and one molecule was found in an asymmetry unit. The crude model was further rebuilt with Coot and refined with Phenix³⁶. The sequence docking was aided by anomalous map of selenium.

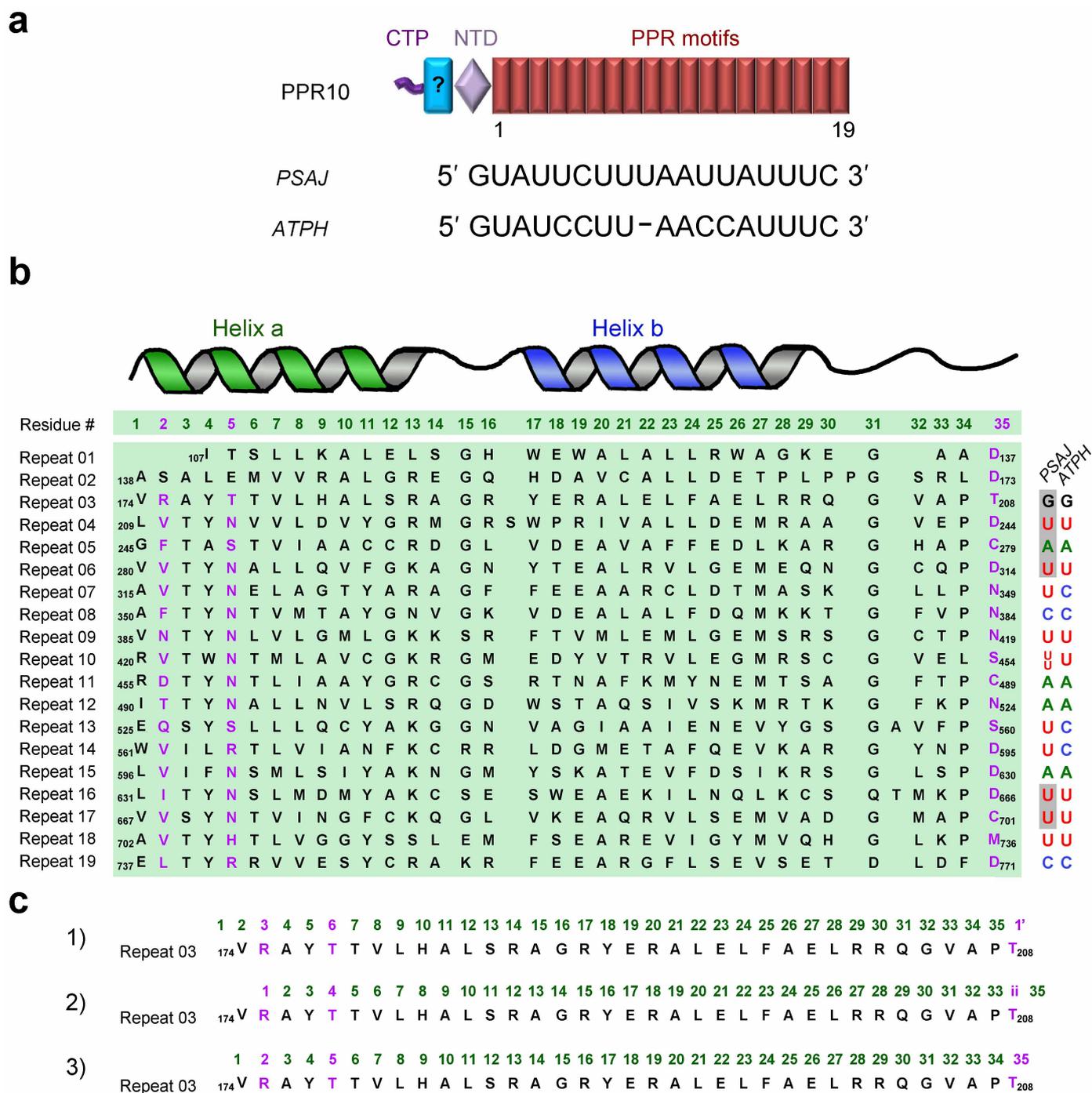
Data sets collected from five crystals of the PPR10–RNA complex were merged for complete and better data. The structure of the PPR10–RNA complex was solved by molecular replacement with the newly solved RNA-free structure as the search model using the program Phaser³⁵. To find the right solution, the structure of the RNA-free PPR10 protomer was divided into three consecutive segments. The assignment of RNA sequence was aided by the anomalous signal of bromine obtained for crystals of PPR10 in complex with Br-labelled RNA oligonucleotides, where U4/U7/U15, U5/U7/U15 or U12 were substituted by 5-bromouracil (Extended Data Table 2). The structure was manually refined with Coot and Phenix iteratively (Extended Data Table 1).

Electrophoretic mobility shift assay (EMSA). The ssRNA oligonucleotides were radiolabelled at the 5' end with [γ -³²P] ATP (PerkinElmer) catalysed by T4 polynucleotide kinase (Takara). The sequences of ssRNA oligonucleotides used in EMSA are: *PSAJ*, 5'-GUAUUCUUUAAUUUUUC-3'; and *ATPH*, 5'-GUAUCCUUAACCAUUUC-3'.

For EMSA, PPR10 (residues 37–786, C256S/C279S/C430S/C449S) and the other variants consisting of the indicated point mutations were incubated with approximately 40 pM ³²P-labelled probe in the final binding reactions containing 40 mM Tris-HCl, pH 7.5, 100 mM NaCl, 4 mM DTT, 0.1 mg ml⁻¹ BSA, 5 μ g ml⁻¹ heparin and 10% glycerol at room temperature (22 °C) for 20 min. Reactions were then resolved on 6% native acrylamide gels (37.5:1 for acrylamide:bisacrylamide) in 0.5 \times Tris-glycine buffer under an electric field of 15 V cm⁻¹ for 40 min. Vacuum-dried gels were visualized on a phosphor screen (Amersham Biosciences) with a Typhoon Trio Imager (Amersham Biosciences).

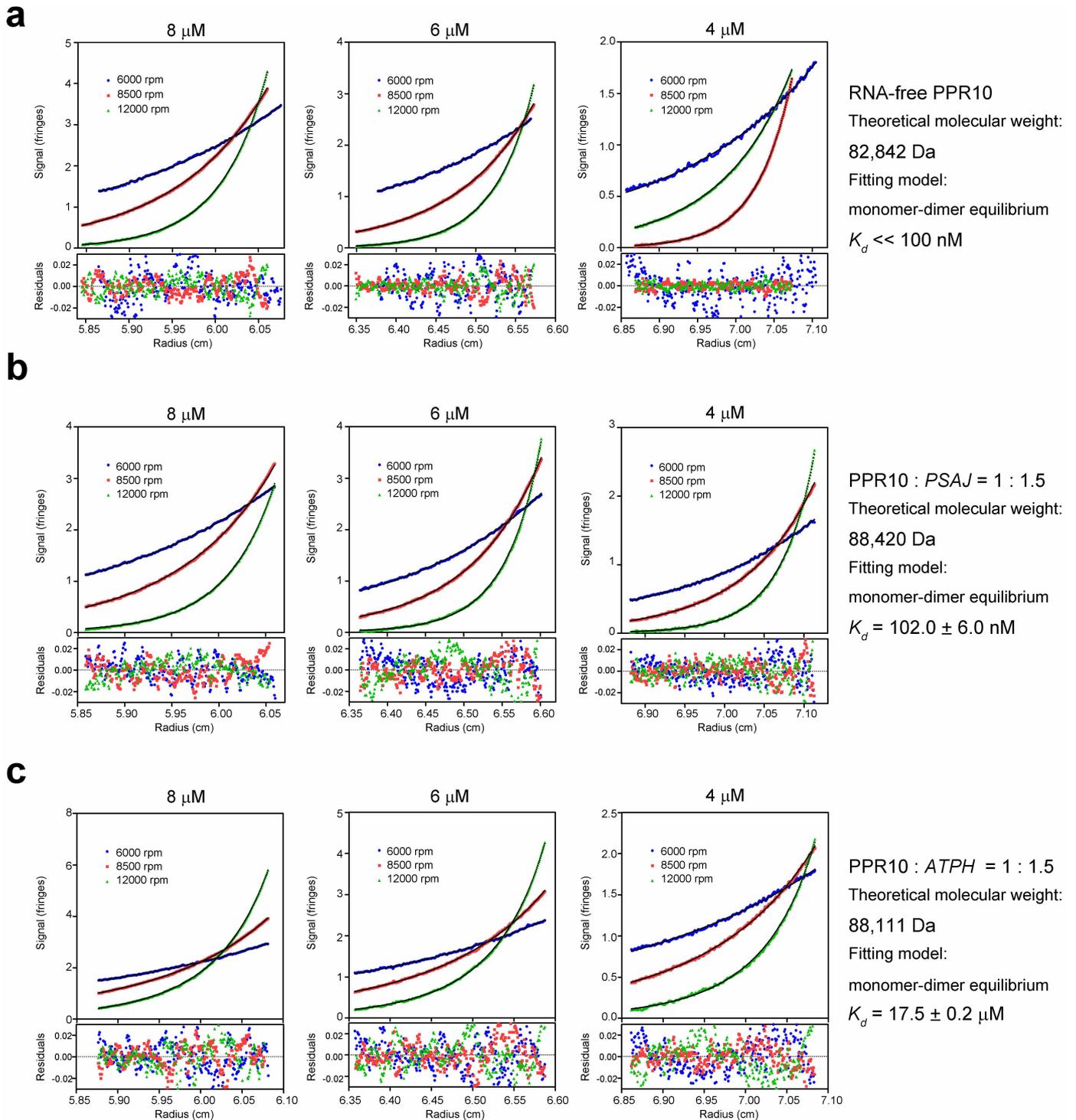
SE-AUC. The oligomeric states of PPR10 (residues 37–786, C256S/C279S/C430S/C449S) with or without target RNA oligonucleotides in solution were investigated by AUC experiments. SE-AUC experiments were performed in a Beckman Coulter XL-I analytical ultracentrifuge using six-channel centrepieces. RNA-free PPR10, *PSAJ*-bound PPR10 and *ATPH*-bound PPR10 were in solutions containing 25 mM Tris-HCl, pH 8.0, 150 mM NaCl and 2 mM DTT. The sequences of RNA oligonucleotides were identical to those used in EMSA. Data were collected by interference detection at 4 °C for all three protein concentrations (4 μ M, 6 μ M and 8 μ M) at different rotor speeds (6,000, 8,500 and 12,000 r.p.m.). The buffer composition (density and viscosity) and protein partial specific volume (V -bar) were obtained using the SEDNTERP program (available through the Boston Biomedical Research Institute). The SE-AUC data were globally analysed using the Sedfit and Sedphat programs³⁷ and were fitted to a monomer–dimer equilibrium model to determine the dissociation constants (K_d) for the homodimers.

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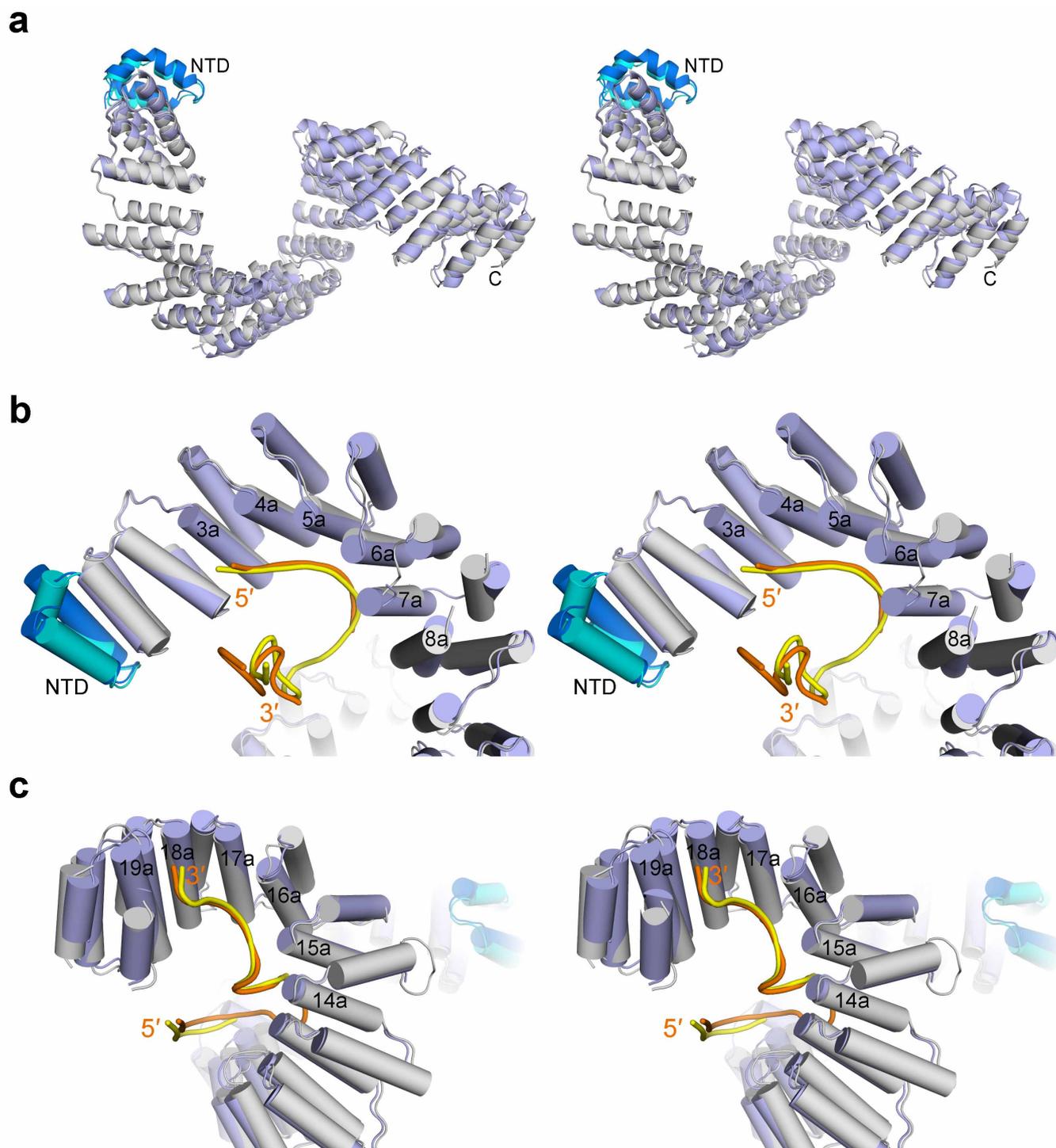
Extended Data Figure 1 | Sequence alignment of the 19 repeats of PPR10. a, PPR10 from maize specifically recognizes two RNA elements. The cartoon above illustrates the predicted domain organization of PPR10. 1 and 19 refer to the repeat numbers. CTP, chloroplast transit peptide. The blue brick with '?' represents a fragment of approximately 30 amino acids whose function remains to be characterized. The minimal RNA elements of *PSAJ* and *ATPH* that are targeted by PPR10 are shown below the cartoon. b, Sequence alignment of 19 repeats in PPR10. The secondary structural elements of a typical PPR motif are shown above. The residues at the 2nd, 5th and 35th positions which were

predicted to be the molecular determinants for RNA-binding specificity are highlighted in magenta. The RNA sequences that can be recognized by PPR10 are listed on the right, 5' to 3' from top to bottom. The nucleotides which are recognized by PPR10 in a modular fashion in the *PSAJ*-PPR10 structure are shaded grey. c, The three numbering systems for a PPR motif. 1 is being used by *Lurin et al.*¹², *Barkan et al.*⁶ and others; 2 is adopted by the Pfam database and being used by *Kobayashi et al.*²⁸, *Yagi et al.*⁷ and others; and 3 is our proposed, structure-based numbering system. The residues that are predicted to specifically recognize RNA are coloured magenta.



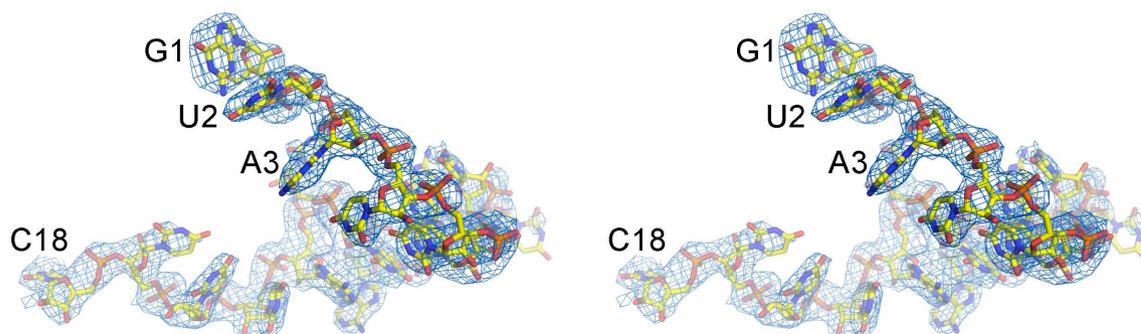
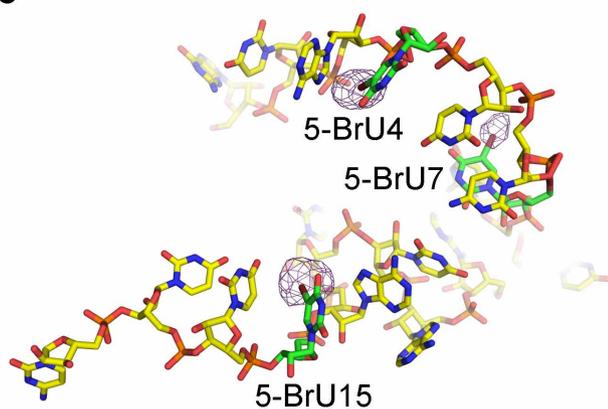
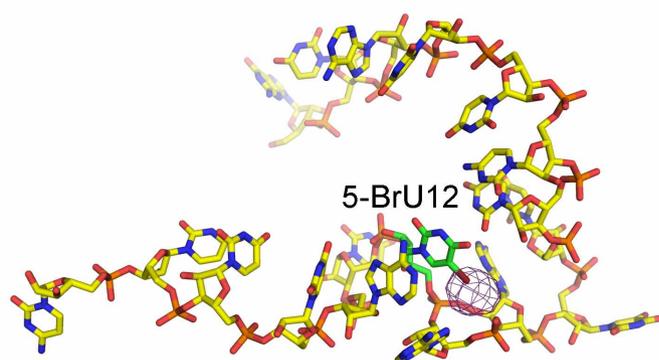
Extended Data Figure 2 | AUC-SE of PPR10 (residues 37–786, C256S/C279S/C430S/C449S) in the absence or presence of the target RNA elements. The molar concentrations of PPR10 are indicated above each panel.

PPR10 and the RNA oligonucleotides were mixed at a stoichiometric ratio of approximately 1:1.5. Details of the experiments are described in Methods.



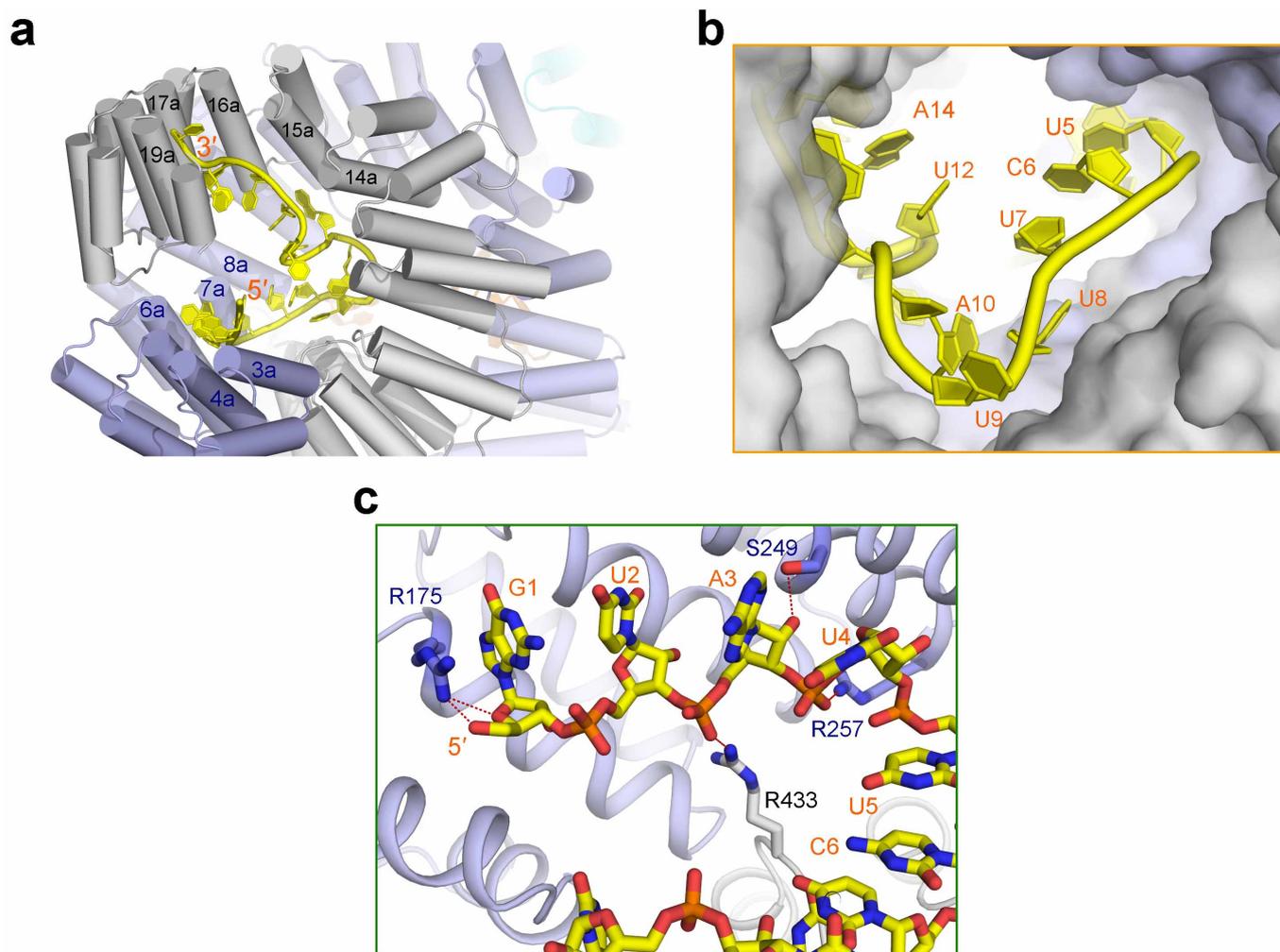
Extended Data Figure 3 | The two protomers of the RNA-bound PPR10 dimer exhibit similar conformations. **a**, The two protomers can be superimposed with a root-mean-squared deviation of 1.31 Å over 629 C α atoms. **b**, **c**, The two ssRNA segments are coordinated by the PPR10 dimer

similarly. The 5' and 3' segments of the bound *PSAJ* RNA are separately coordinated by the N-terminal repeats of one protomer (**b**), and the C-terminal repeats of the other protomer (**c**). Stereo-views are shown for all panels.

a**b****c**

Extended Data Figure 4 | Electron density maps for a bound ssRNA segment. **a**, The $2F_o - F_c$ electron density for one segment of the bound *PSA* RNA. The electron density, contoured at 1σ and coloured blue, is displayed in

stereo. **b**, **c**, The anomalous signals for bromine in the structures where the highlighted nucleotides were substituted with 5-bromouracil (5-BrU). The anomalous signals, shown in magenta mesh, are contoured at 5σ .

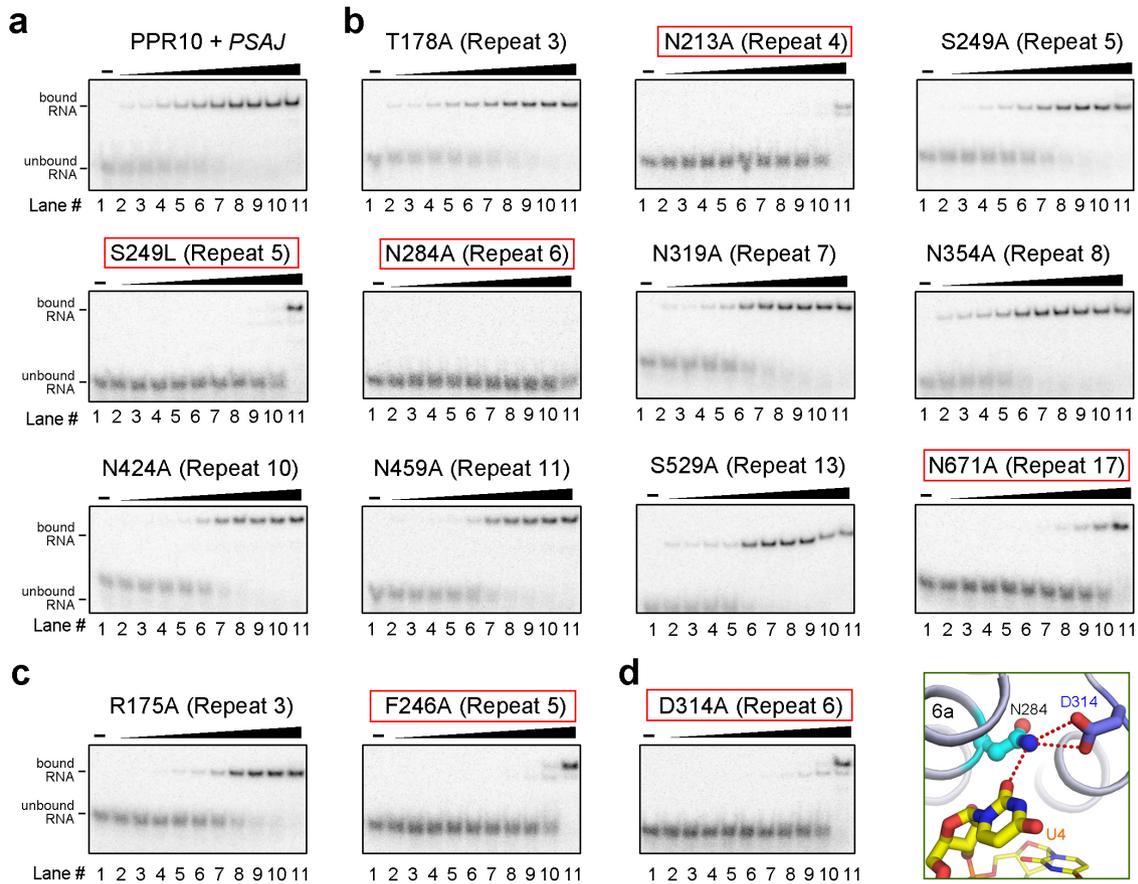


Extended Data Figure 5 | Coordination of the bound ssRNA by PPR10.

a, The 5' and 3' portions of the *PSAJ* RNA element are separately bound by the N-terminal and C-terminal repeats of the two PPR10 protomers. Shown here is a close-up view of the binding of *PSAJ* by one end of the PPR10 dimer.

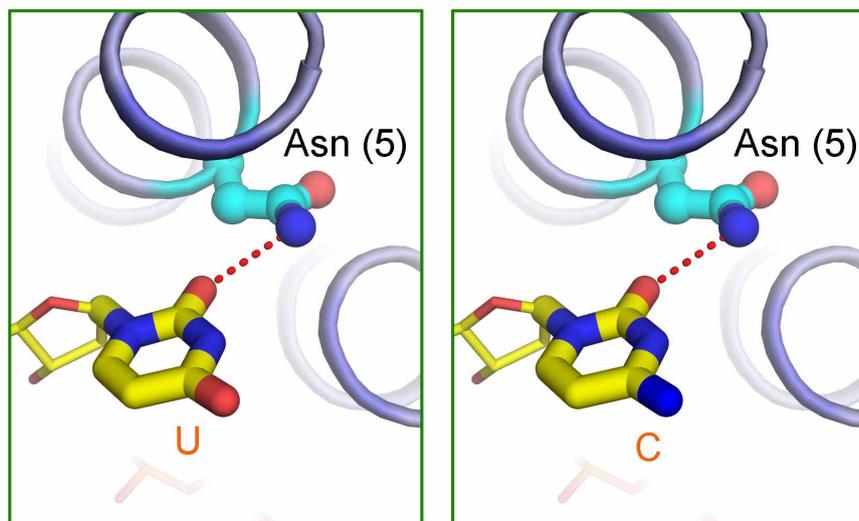
b, The nucleotides U5–A10, which form a U-turn in the ssRNA, are

uncoordinated in the cavity of the PPR10 dimer. The two protomers of PPR10 are shown in semi-transparent surface contour. **c**, The RNA backbone is coordinated by polar or charged residues through hydrogen bonds. The hydrogen bonds are represented by red dotted lines. The two protomers of PPR10 are coloured light purple and grey.



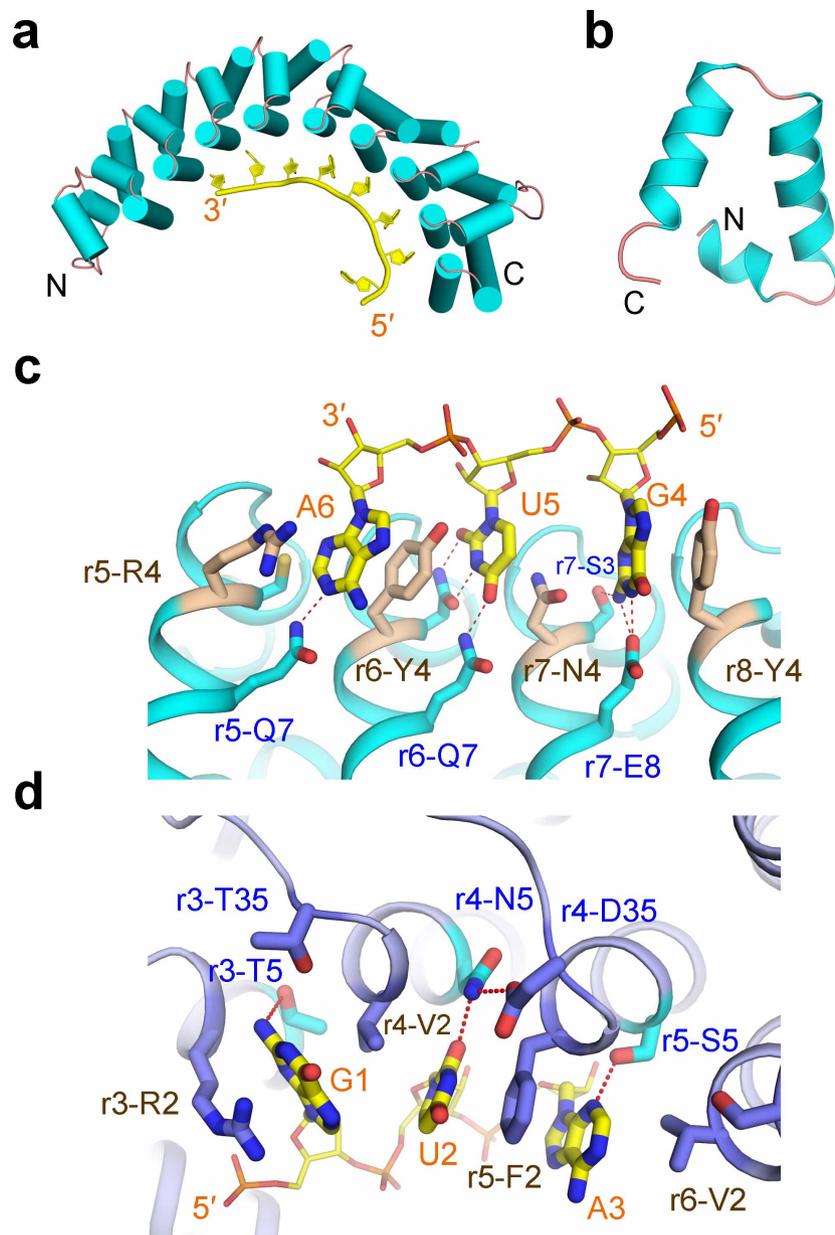
Extended Data Figure 6 | Mutational analysis of PPR10 residues that may be important for PSAJ. **a**, EMSA analysis of the interaction between PPR10 (residues 37–786, C256S/C279S/C430S/C449S) and PSAJ (5'-GUAUUCUUAAUUUUUC-3'). PPR10 was added with increasing concentrations of 0, 2, 4, 8, 16, 31, 63, 125, 250, 500, 1,000 nM in lanes 1–11 with approximately 40 pM 32 P-labelled PSAJ in each lane. **b**, Mutational analysis of

the 5th residues of the indicated PPR motifs. The indicated point mutations were introduced to PPR10 (residues 37–786, C256S/C279S/C430S/C449S). **c**, Examination of the 2nd residues in repeats 3 and 5. **d**, Examination of the 35th residue of repeat 6. Note that the side group of Asp 314 is hydrogen bonded to the side chain of Asn 284, the 5th residue of repeat 6. The same structural feature is also seen in repeat 4 (Fig. 3b).



Extended Data Figure 7 | The predicted coordination of base C by an Asn at the 5th position of a PPR motif. Left, the coordination of base U by Asn

observed in the structure. Right, the coordination of base C by Asn at the 5th position of a PPR motif modelled on the basis of the structure shown on the left.



Extended Data Figure 8 | Comparison of ssRNA coordination by PUF and PPR proteins. **a**, The structure of the human PUF protein PUM1 (also known as HSPUM) bound to the RNA element NRE1-19 (PDB accession code, 1M8W)²⁴. The PUF repeats constitute an arc with 8-nt ssRNA bound to the concave side. Notably, the orientations of the bound RNA and the protein are antiparallel, namely the 5' end is close to the C terminus of PUF. **b**, The structure of a PUF repeat. One canonical PUF repeat contains three helices, of which a short helix precedes a helical hairpin. **c**, Representative recognition of the RNA bases G, U, A by PUF repeats as seen in the structure of PUM1 bound to NRE1-19. The amino acids are labelled by the repeat number (r5, r6, r7, r8) followed by its one-letter code and position on the 2nd helix

within a PUF repeat (S3, N4, E8, and so on). The same scheme applies to **d**. **d**, The coordination of RNA bases G, U, A by PPR10. It is noteworthy that PUF and PPR proteins share several common features for RNA binding: (1) the ssRNA elements are coordinated by the helices on the inner layer; and (2) the base is sandwiched mostly by hydrophobic residues or Arg. Yet the differences are evident between the two families of repeat proteins. As seen in **c**, the RNA base is usually coordinated by two residues that are located at the 4th and the 7th positions on helix 2 within a PUF repeat. By contrast, the base is mainly coordinated by the 5th residue of a PPR motif. The 35th residue, the last residue of a PPR motif that is located at a loop region preceding the next PPR motif, also contributes to base recognition.

Extended Data Table 1 | Statistics of data collection and refinement. Values in parentheses are for the highest resolution shell

	Se-PPR10	PPR10-PSAJ complex
Number of crystals	1	5
Space Group	P2 ₁ 2 ₁ 2	P4 ₃
Cell dimensions		
<i>a</i> , <i>b</i> , <i>c</i> (Å)	68.37, 176.54, 64.53	83.43, 83.43, 226.91
α , β , γ (°)	90, 90, 90	90, 90, 90
Wavelength (Å)	0.9793	0.9067
Resolution (Å)	40-2.85 (2.95-2.85)	40-2.45 (2.54-2.45)
R _{merge} (%)	12.7 (88.7)	8.9 (91.7)
I/sigma	28.9 (3.6)	27.7 (2.3)
Completeness (%)	100.0 (100.0)	96.3 (98.0)
Number of measured reflections	227,350	426,030
Number of unique reflections	18,683	54,087
Redundancy	12.2 (12.4)	7.9 (7.8)
Wilson B factor (Å ²)	73.3	82.9
R _{work} / R _{free} (%)	23.98/25.38	25.84/28.78
No. atoms		
Protein	5,326	10,384
main chain	2,808	5,480
side chain	2,518	4,904
RNA		652
water		114
B-factors		
Protein	74.8	85.45
main chain	75.2	85.13
side chain	74.3	85.81
RNA		93.84
water		67.51
R.m.s. deviations		
Bonds (Å)	0.011	0.015
Angle (°)	1.361	1.049
Ramachandran plot statistics (%)		
Most favorable	87.6	88.8
Additionally allowed	11.2	10.3
Generously allowed	1.1	0.9
Disallowed	0.0	0.0

Extended Data Table 2 | Statistics of data collection

	12-5BrU	4/7/15-5BrU	5/7/15-5BrU
Space Group	P4 ₃	P4 ₃	P4 ₃
Cell dimensions			
<i>a</i> , <i>b</i> , <i>c</i> (Å)	83.48, 83.48, 227.94	83.11, 83.11, 227.68	83.30, 83.30, 226.10
α , β , γ (°)	90, 90, 90	90, 90, 90	90, 90, 90
Wavelength (Å)	0.9194	0.9194	0.9194
Resolution (Å)	40-3.2 (3.31-3.20)	40-3.00 (3.11-3.00)	40-3.20 (3.31-3.20)
R _{merge} (%)	12.2 (74.5)	11.7 (91.1)	14.8 (79.9)
I/sigma	21.2 (3.5)	26.2 (2.8)	20.1 (3.1)
Completeness (%)	100.0 (100.0)	99.8 (100.0)	100.0 (100.0)
Number of measured reflections	209,591	246,450	212,113
Number of unique reflections	25,708	30,609	25,347
Redundancy	8.2 (8.0)	8.1 (8.5)	8.4 (8.6)
Wilson B factor (Å ²)	69.0	79.6	71.4