

ChronOS Linux: A Best-Effort Real-Time Multiprocessor Linux Kernel

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ABSTRACT

We present ChronOS Linux, a best-effort real-time Linux kernel for chip multiprocessors (CMPs). ChronOS addresses the intersection of three problem spaces: a) OS-support for obtaining best-effort timing assurances, b) real-time Linux kernel augmented with the `PREEMPT_RT` patch, and c) OS support for CMP-aware real-time scheduling. While each of these spaces have been studied in the past, their intersection, which has strong problem motivations, was previously empty. Best-effort timeliness targets real-time applications with run-time uncertainties and resource overloads, and optimizes collective application timeliness — as specified by the application. ChronOS directly supports the implementation of best-effort real-time schedulers on CMPs, in addition to others, in the global and partitioned scheduling disciplines. ChronOS extends the `PREEMPT_RT` Linux patch, and thus provides full kernel preemptibility and retains stock Linux features. We validate our claims by reporting on the implementation of a suite of best-effort and non-best-effort CMP schedulers on a quad-core AMD Phenom platform.

Categories and Subject Descriptors

E.2.1 [Embedded Software and Tools]: Real-time operating systems and middleware

General Terms

Design

Keywords

Real-time, task scheduling, Linux

1. INTRODUCTION

Chip manufacturers are increasingly using chip- and system-level parallelism to improve performance by manufacturing a new generation of processors with multiple cores on a chip, called chip multiprocessors (or CMPs). Consequently, the

design of multiprocessor real-time scheduling algorithms has become important in order to allow real-time applications to take advantage of CMPs. This also motivates the need for real-time operating systems which support CMP scheduling.

The real-time problem space includes application contexts where key aspects of application behavior—e.g., task arrivals, execution times, resource access patterns—are deterministically bounded or known a-priori. CMP real-time schedulers that target this space provide *schedulability utilization bounds*, U , below which all tasks meet their deadlines. Examples include the Pfair and LLREF algorithms with $U = m$ and the global EDF algorithms with $U \approx m/2$ on an m -processor CMP [3]. Although this is an extremely important real-time application space, there also exist some real-time applications with behaviors outside this envelope — e.g., those with uncertainties on task arrival, execution time, and resource access behaviors, caused due to data- and context-dependent executions, resulting in overloads (i.e., $U > m$) [5]. During overloads, such applications typically desire “best-effort” timing assurance in the sense that processor cycles are assured to be allocated in a way that optimizes, and enables the reasoning of, collective application timeliness — as specified by the application [9]. Best-effort real-time scheduling requires, among other things, a two-way interaction between the application and OS kernel, especially for asynchronously and safely aborting selected tasks.

Our primary motivation in this paper is to create an OS platform that can support best-effort real-time schedulers on CMPs. When creating an RTOS platform, the open-source Linux kernel is often a compelling base platform choice. Linux is one of the most mature operating systems with wide acceptance in industry and is used across various form factors — from enterprise level servers to embedded devices.

In the past, efforts have been made to provide real-time extensions to the Linux kernel. Two popular extensions, RTAI and Xenomai, are built around the idea of Linux running as a task above the ADEOS nanokernel [1]. Both have the downside that real-time tasks are written to the APIs of the extension, rather than standard Linux APIs. Recently, the Linux kernel team’s `PREEMPT_RT` patch enables extensive kernel preemption and improves worst-case latencies, allowing real-time tasks to execute within Linux itself. While not reducing latencies as much as the nanokernel approach, it is a compelling RTOS platform for many applications.

Thus, our goal is to create an OS platform with the following properties:

P1: The platform must support the implementation of best-effort real-time schedulers.

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P2: The platform must support CMP real-time scheduling.

P3: The platform must be based on the Linux kernel.

P4: The platform must use the `PREEMPT_RT` patch.

We present ChronOS Linux, which provides these properties. ChronOS Linux (hereafter referred to as ChronOS) supports the notion of real-time scheduling segments that facilitate the expression and enforcement of time constraints, and asynchronous and safe task termination. ChronOS provides a scheduling framework for the implementation of a broad range of CMP real-time schedulers as plugins, including best-effort, non-best-effort, global, partitioned, and uniprocessor scheduler. We implement a suite of schedulers in ChronOS including G-EDF, G-NP-EDF, P-EDF [3], P-DASA [6], G-GUA, and NG-GUA [7] on a quad-core AMD Phenom platform. Our experiments reveal that the scheduler behaviors are consistent with their theoretical behaviors.

Past efforts that overlap with a subset of ChronOS’s problem space include the Alpha OS [9], RED-Linux [11], and LITMUS^{RT} [3]. Alpha, which pioneered the best-effort real-time concept, is not Linux-based. RED-Linux supports fixed and dynamic priority scheduling, but does not support CMPs. LITMUS^{RT} provides extensive support for CMP scheduling on Linux, but it does not support best-effort real-time scheduling. Neither RED-Linux nor LITMUS^{RT} use the `PREEMPT_RT` patch. Thus, to the best of our knowledge, ChronOS is the only Linux/`PREEMPT_RT` kernel that supports CMP real-time scheduling including best-effort scheduling — the paper’s contribution.

2. PREEMPT_RT REAL-TIME PATCH

The stock Linux kernel provides soft real-time capabilities, such as the POSIX primitives and the ability to set priorities. The kernel provides two real-time scheduling policies — `SCHED_FIFO` and `SCHED_RR` and a “nice”-based scheduling policy called `SCHED_NORMAL`. `SCHED_FIFO` executes processes in FIFO order within a priority and will only preempt a task to execute a newly arrived task at a higher priority. This is primarily a POSIX-specified feature. `SCHED_RR`, on the other hand, schedules processes of the same priority in a round robin fashion while favoring higher priority tasks.

In order to introduce real-time semantics to the kernel, a preemptible kernel is required. To achieve this we use the `PREEMPT_RT` patch which enables nearly complete kernel preemption. The patch improves interrupt latencies and allows preemption of most parts of the Linux kernel except for a few regions which are inherently unpreemptible, such as the task scheduler. In-kernel locking primitives have been re-implemented using wait queuing mutexes. As a result, critical sections that are protected with spinlocks or read-write locks can sleep and are therefore preemptible. Priority inheritance has been implemented for in-kernel spinlocks and semaphores. Interrupt handlers in the kernel have been converted into preemptible kernel threads.

3. CHRONOS REAL-TIME SCHEDULER

3.1 Priority Bit-map and Run-queues

There are 140 priority levels in Linux, represented as a per-processor bit-map. Priorities [0...99] are referred to as real-time priorities while [100...139] are called “nice” prior-

ities. In the kernel-space, “0” is the highest real-time priority while “99” is the least (which is opposite to that in the user-space). Each CPU has a run-queue of active tasks at a priority. The scheduler starts from the highest priority bit in the processor’s bit-map, looks for tasks at that priority level and executes them before going to the next level.

The use of the `PREEMPT_RT` patch means interrupts now reside in the same priority space as real-time tasks. We therefore cannot take the same approach as Litmus and place our tasks in a priority band higher than all other tasks in the system, because this would block interrupts, which we may need. In order to facilitate working on the real-time tasks, for every priority level in the bit-map we create another queue called the ChronOS real-time run-queue (`CRT-RQ`) which holds references to the ChronOS real-time tasks in the Linux run-queue. The `CRT-RQ` is therefore always a subset of the Linux run-queue. Tasks can therefore be given a priority representing their dependence on various interrupts.

3.2 Scheduling Real-Time Tasks

The ChronOS scheduler extends the Linux scheduler. Every ChronOS real-time task starts as a Linux real-time task scheduled under `SCHED_FIFO`. It becomes a ChronOS real-time task by entering a real-time segment. A real-time segment is defined as a portion of the thread which needs to be executed with real-time time constraints. This can be done using the following system calls in ChronOS: `begin_rt_seg()` is used to indicate the start of a real-time scheduling segment and also to provide the real-time timing constraints for a given task. `end_rt_seg()` indicates the end of a real-time scheduling segment. We add additional parameters to the task descriptor to specify the real-time properties of a task, such as the task’s worst case execution cost (`WCET`), deadline, period and time-utility function (`TUF`). These are set during the `begin_rt_seg()` system call.

To schedule, we hook into the existing Linux `SCHED_FIFO` scheduler. After `SCHED_FIFO` has found the highest priority, we call the ChronOS scheduler. When a ChronOS scheduler is enabled and the `CRT-RQ` for that priority is not empty, the ChronOS scheduler selects a task from the `CRT-RQ` based on the scheduling algorithm selected, and returns the task to `SCHED_FIFO` for execution. Therefore, a ChronOS real-time task executes before a Linux real-time task of the same priority, but after a Linux real-time task of a greater priority.

The real-time scheduler is invoked at various scheduling events. A scheduling event is defined as a trigger that forces the system into a scheduling cycle resulting in a call to the scheduler, which selects a new task. In ChronOS we define the following scheduling events.

Task begins a segment – When a task begins its segment, it is added to the `CRT-RQ` and the scheduler is invoked. At that time, the scheduling algorithm selects the best task from the `CRT-RQ` and returns it to `SCHED_FIFO`.

Task ends a segment – When a task finishes its scheduling segment, the task is removed from the `CRT-RQ` and the scheduler is invoked.

Resource is requested – When a task requests a resource such as a mutex, ChronOS tags the task as `RESOURCE_REQUESTED` and schedules. This lets the scheduling algorithm look at the dependency chain based on the resource requested and pick the best task for execution.

Resource is released – When a task releases a resource, ChronOS invokes the scheduler in order to allow a new task

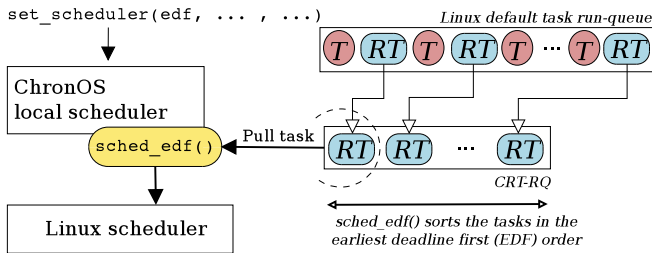


Figure 1: ChronOS scheduling approach on a single-processor system

to be picked which might be blocking on the resource that was just released. The decision to choose the new task is done by the scheduling algorithm.

A scheduling algorithm is selected via the `set_scheduler()` system call. All scheduling algorithms are created as Linux modules in ChronOS which provides the flexibility to add or remove any scheduling algorithm from a running kernel without restarting the system. The scheduling algorithms are implemented in a modular fashion using a set of functions that we refer to as the “scheduler plugin”. Once a scheduler is selected for a set of processors, all the real-time tasks that are added to the system on those processors are scheduled using the selected scheduling algorithm.

4. SINGLE PROCESSOR SCHEDULING

Fig. 1 illustrates an example of scheduling on a single processor machine. As the scheduling algorithms are written as modules in ChronOS, they can be dynamically loaded into a running kernel. This adds the scheduling algorithms to the list of available schedulers. In Fig. 1, the call to `set_scheduler()` is made from the real-time application to select EDF as the real-time scheduler. ChronOS checks if the EDF kernel module is available. If the scheduler is found, ChronOS loads the plugin and makes it the default ChronOS local scheduler for running real-time tasks. All the real-time tasks are now added to the CRT-RQ at their deadline position. At every scheduling event, the ChronOS scheduler invokes `sched_edf()`. Since items are inserted in order, the head of the CRT-RQ now represents the earliest deadline task, which is returned to `SCHED_FIFO` for execution. For algorithms that use dynamic keys, such as TUF-based algorithms, the scheduler would have to sort the CRT-RQ.

5. MULTIPROCESSOR SCHEDULING

Scheduling on multiprocessors can be mainly categorized into three forms – partitioned, clustered, and global scheduling. ChronOS supports all these variants. Since clustering is simply a combination of the two, we only describe the details of partitioned and global architectures.

5.1 Partitioned Scheduling

Partitioned scheduling can be described as uniprocessor scheduling done on multiprocessors. The key idea of partitioned scheduling is to divide the task-set using an off-line heuristic (such as first-fit or best-fit) to partition a set of tasks on M processors. This has been shown to be equivalent to the bin-packing problem [10] and hence NP-hard in the strong sense. Baruah *et al.* present a polynomial-time algorithm to partition collection of sporadic tasks onto M processors in [2].

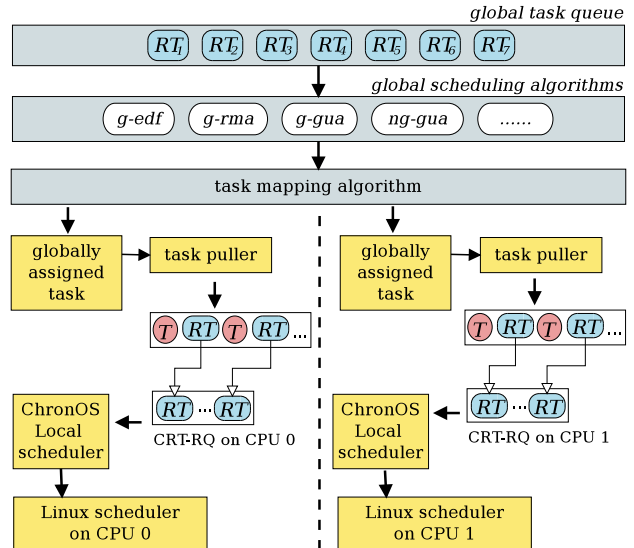


Figure 2: ChronOS global scheduling approach on a multiprocessor system

To use partitioned scheduling algorithms on ChronOS, we partition the task-set using off-line polynomial-time heuristics. For an M processor system, the heuristic divides the task-sets into M processor bins. Once all the tasks have been divided, the affinity of each of the tasks is set to the processor they have been assigned to. The tasks are added to the CRT-RQ of their respective assigned processors. As partitioned scheduling is an extension of uniprocessor scheduling, the partitioned scheduler is set as the local ChronOS scheduler on all processors using the `set_scheduler()` system call. Each processor runs its scheduling algorithm independently. At every scheduling event, the processor enters its local scheduler, looks at the local CRT-RQ, and picks the next task to be executed.

5.2 Global Scheduling

Most of the multiprocessor scheduling algorithms, such as G-EDF, G-GUA and NG-GUA are based on global scheduling. The main idea behind global scheduling is that the tasks are assigned to a global queue instead of individual local queues. The scheduling algorithm on each processor looks at the global queue to make a scheduling decision. Clustering is a simple extension of global scheduling wherein multiple global scheduling domains are created, each of which spans some subset of the system’s processors.

Fig. 2 illustrates the global scheduling approach used in ChronOS. In order to implement global scheduling, we create another level of scheduling abstraction. At the top we have the “global scheduler” which looks at the “global task queue”. The global scheduler maps to a “local scheduler” on individual processors which extends from `SCHED_FIFO`. The global scheduler (invoked on a processor) either picks the top task or the top M tasks, depending on its type. In the latter case, these tasks are given to the task mapping algorithm which maps these tasks on M underlying processors. The tasks assigned by the task mapping algorithm are pushed into the “globally assigned task” block from where the “task puller” on each CPU picks up the task and moves it to the head of its local queue. The default local scheduling algorithm for global scheduling algorithms on each processor is FIFO, which picks the head of the CRT-RQ queue and gives

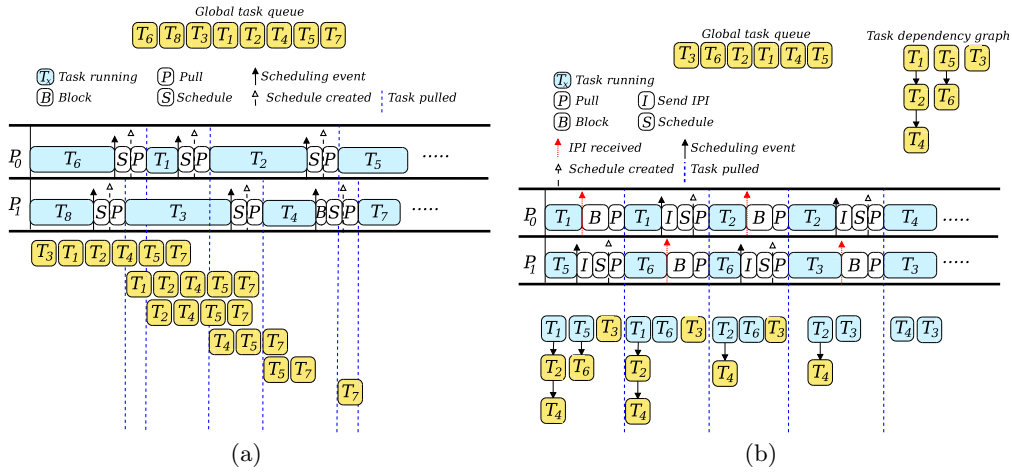


Figure 3: Global scheduling architecture models in ChronOS (a) “Application concurrent” model (b) “Stop-the-World” model

the task to `SCHED_FIFO` for execution.

There are two ways in which global scheduling can be achieved. In the “Application Concurrent” scheduling model, the global scheduler (such as `G-MP-EDF`) picks a task for itself. In the “Stop-the-World”(STW) scheduling model, the global scheduler (such as `G-EDF`) picks the tasks for all M available processors.

5.2.1 Application Concurrent Scheduling Model

Fig. 3(a) illustrates the application concurrent scheduling model. For the sake of explanation of the model, we will assume that the scheduling algorithm picks the task at the head of the queue, and that task execution is non-preemptible. At the beginning, task T_6 is running on processor P_0 and task T_8 is running on processor P_1 . As shown, T_8 finishes before T_6 . However, T_6 is not preempted on P_0 . After T_8 finishes, it generates a scheduling event. P_1 enters the global scheduler, picks the first eligible task T_3 from the global queue and assigns it to P_1 . The local scheduler on P_1 pulls the task T_3 and starts executing it. While P_1 pulls its task, T_6 finishes on P_0 and generates a scheduling event. It pulls T_1 from the global queue and starts executing it without preempting T_3 on P_1 . The same procedure is repeated for other scheduling events.

There might be a scenario when both processors finish their tasks concurrently. As shown in the Fig. 3(a), when T_2 finishes on P_0 , T_4 finishes on P_1 . As the global task queue is shared between processors, while P_0 enters the global scheduler, P_1 blocks. When P_0 finishes, P_1 unblocks and enters the scheduler. There may also be a case where P_1 is not executing a real-time task when P_0 schedules. In such a case, an “Inter-processor Interrupt” (IPI) is sent to P_1 to force it to reschedule.

`G-NP-EDF` and `G-FIFO` are some of the algorithms that use such an architecture model. The downside of the application concurrent model is that it is difficult to implement scheduling algorithms that consider resource dependencies. Additionally, since the schedule is only generated for a single processor, there is no way to implement optimal algorithms such as `LLREF` or `PFair`.

5.2.2 Stop-the-World Scheduling Model

In order to allow optimal global scheduling algorithms and resource management, ChronOS implements the STW

scheduling model. Fig. 3(b) provides an illustration of the model. The figure shows the dependency relation of the tasks in the global task queue with each other. Task T_4 needs a resource owned by task T_2 which in turn requires a resource held by task T_1 . In a similar fashion, task T_6 needs a resource owned by task T_5 . Task T_3 does not have any dependents. Let us assume that the scheduling algorithm considers the tasks that have the maximum dependents as the most eligible tasks for execution.

Fig. 3(b) shows that tasks T_1 and T_5 are currently executing on processors P_0 and P_1 , respectively. Task T_5 finishes first and generates a scheduling event. In the STW model, once a scheduling event is generated, the schedule needs to be created for all the processors. This requires a processor to be able to force a scheduling event on all other processors. When task T_5 triggers the scheduling event, processor P_1 sends an (IPI) to all the processors which forces the processors to schedule.

In the example shown in Fig. 3(b), processor P_1 sends an IPI to all processors. After sending the IPI, P_1 enters its global scheduler and looks at the available tasks in the run-queue to create the schedule. Meanwhile, processor P_0 receives the IPI and is forced into the scheduler. However, as P_1 is already in the global scheduler, P_0 blocks. The global scheduler on P_1 picks two eligible tasks (assuming a two-processor system in the example) and hands these tasks to the mapping algorithm. The task mapper pushes these tasks into the “globally assigned task” block of each processor. Each processor pulls its assigned task to the head of its local queue which is then executed by the Linux scheduler.

5.3 Mapping Tasks to Processors

Fig. 4 illustrates the mapping algorithm used in ChronOS for global scheduling. The job of the algorithm is to take the M most eligible tasks that have been selected by the global scheduler and map them to the M available processors such that task migrations are reduced and cache coherence is preserved. The algorithm shown in Fig. 4 is selected as the default for global scheduling algorithms. However, the default task-mapper can be overridden in ChronOS.

The mapping is done using a three-pass algorithm. In Fig. 4 tasks RT_5 , RT_8 , RT_1 and RT_4 are four real-time tasks that have been selected by the global scheduling algorithm.

Each run-queue shows the tasks that belong to the individual processors. We also highlight the currently running task on each processor before the scheduling event was triggered. Task RT_2 is the currently running task on processor P_0 , task RT_5 on P_1 , task RT_9 on P_2 , and task RT_7 on P_3 .

In the first pass, the algorithm examines the final schedule and maps currently running tasks to the processors they are running on. As shown in Fig. 4, task RT_5 , the currently running task on P_1 , is mapped to P_1 . In the second pass, the algorithm examines the final schedule and maps tasks to the processor they are currently on. This prevents tasks from being unnecessarily migrated. As shown, since task RT_4 resides on processor P_0 , it is mapped there. In the similar fashion, task RT_8 is mapped to P_2 . In the last pass, the leftover tasks are mapped to the remaining processor(s). As shown, task RT_1 is assigned to processor P_3 . Since task RT_1 resides on processor P_0 , this step results in the migration of the mapped tasks.

If the final schedule consists of M tasks that all belong to the same processor, the worst case migration cost is $M - 1$ migrations. In such cases, cache-aware scheduling algorithms can be used to create a cache conscious schedule which limits migrations. Guan *et al.* [8] and Calandrino *et al.* [4] present cache-aware real-time scheduling algorithms.

6. EXPERIMENTAL EVALUATION

To evaluate the performance of ChronOS, we conducted experiments on a quad-core AMD Phenom machine with a clock speed of 2.3 GHz. We measured overheads associated with real-time scheduling and experimentally compared the scheduling algorithms previously listed with their theoretical results.

6.1 NG-GUA and G-GUA

NG-GUA and G-GUA are multiprocessor polynomial-time heuristic scheduling algorithms that provide best-effort timeliness behavior in the presence of run-time uncertainties, overloads, and dependencies, yet still yield optimal total utility in underload conditions. NG-GUA defaults to G-EDF during under-loads while G-GUA does not. G-EDF and NG-GUA should therefore meet all deadlines until $m/2$, while G-GUA may miss deadlines earlier. Once G-GUA and NG-GUA begin missing deadlines, both should be free from the "domino effect" commonly seen in EDF-type algorithms. For brevity, the details of the algorithms have been omitted. They are given by Garyali *et al.* in [7].

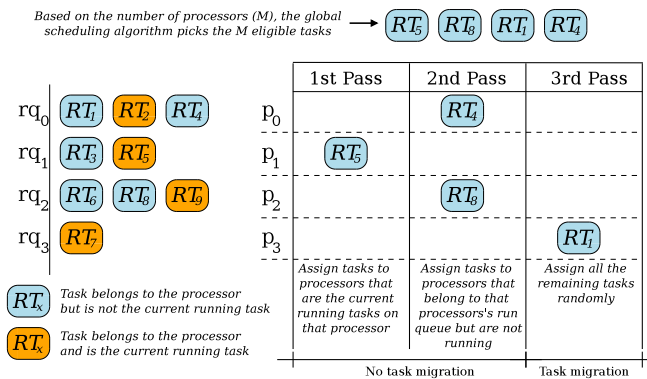


Figure 4: Task mapping for global scheduling algorithms in ChronOS

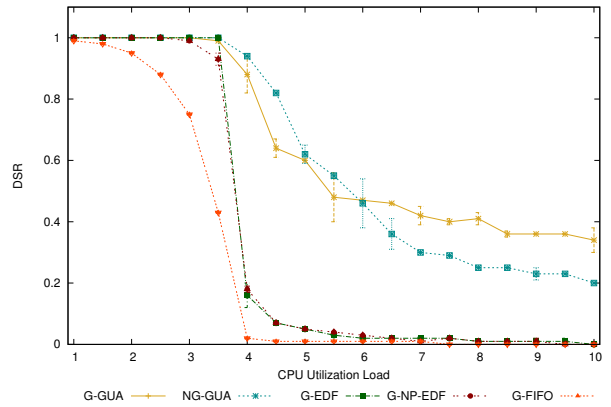


Figure 5: Deadline satisfaction ratio (DSR)

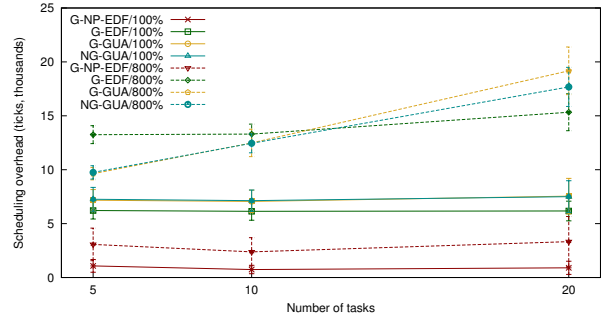


Figure 6: ChronOS scheduling overheads

6.2 Scheduling Results

We create a real-time test application using ChronOS APIs which periodically fires real-time tasks with specified time-constraints. For each task, we use a `burn_cpu(wcet)` function, which takes the WCET as an input and burns processor cycles for that amount of time. To simplify experimentation, we use periodic tasks with deadlines equal to periods. Fig. 5 shows deadline satisfaction ratio (DSR) results for several best-effort and non-best-effort scheduling algorithms. The results shown are for a 12-task taskset with periods distributed between 40ms and 2s, and randomly generated utilities and execution times. We observe that the results are consistent with the theoretical behavior of the algorithms; G-EDF and G-NP-EDF demonstrate the "domino effect" when overloaded, which causes them to miss nearly all deadlines. The TUF based algorithms exhibit best-effort performance in overloads, meeting a large percentage of deadlines. G-EDF and NG-GUA also exhibit identical performance in underloads, as expected. More extensive scheduling results are presented by Garyali *et al.* in [7].

6.3 Overheads

To measure the overhead incurred by our scheduling framework over `SCHED_FIFO`, we measured four sources of overhead: context switching overhead, scheduling overhead, in-scheduler migration overhead, and the overhead of our real-time specific system calls. All times measured, both in the kernel and in the userspace, were taken by reading the x86 architecture's Time Stamp Counter (TSC) before and after the event measured. All results are from at least 1000 runs.

Context switching overhead describes the cost of the Linux kernel's `context_switch()` function, which performs the actual switching of the old and new tasks. The function is also

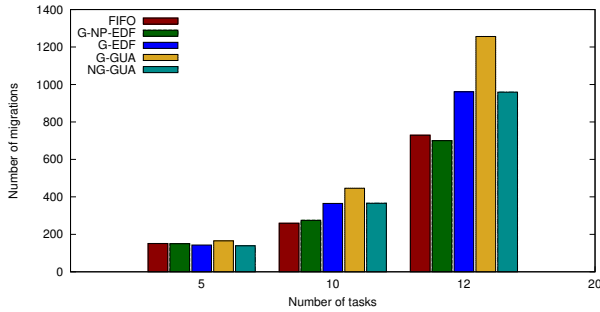


Figure 7: Number of migrations

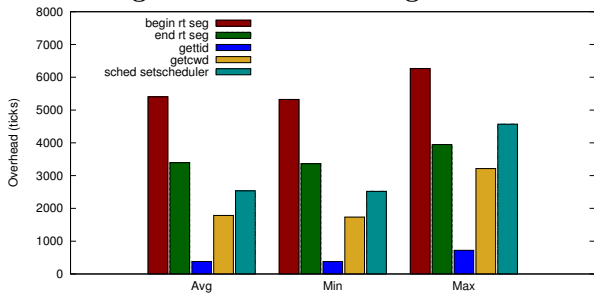


Figure 8: ChronOS system call overheads

called by the Linux scheduler and is therefore not specific to ChronOS, but due to the fully preemptive nature of certain scheduling algorithms (such as NG-GUA, G-GUA), context switches are much more frequent under these algorithms than under SCHED_FIFO. Also, a context switch under such algorithms is more expensive, since the task that is being switched in often has been preempted from another processor, incurring cache misses. The average context switching overhead under SCHED_FIFO was 3750 ticks with a standard deviation of 1327 ticks. Under G-GUA, the average time was 14533 ticks with a standard deviation of 1868 ticks.

Scheduling overheads represent the time required to actually run the scheduling code for a specific algorithm. Scheduling overheads are shown for various algorithms, numbers of tasks, and utilizations in Fig. 6. Scheduling overheads are expectedly high at low load for the more complex GUA family of algorithms, due to their more complex task selection scheme. Likewise, at high loads non-abortive algorithms such as G-EDF display a higher overhead, since they backlog tasks, rather than aborting and removing them.

In-scheduler migration reflects the time required by the kernel scheduler to pull a specific task from a remote run-queue to the local run-queue. This is largely dominated by the time required to lock the necessary spinlocks. We found that average in-kernel task migration overhead in ChronOS is 7948 ticks, with a standard deviation of 3351 ticks. We also recorded the number of such migrations performed by each algorithm on various task-sets. These are displayed in Fig. 7. As expected, G-EDF and NG-GUA (which defaults to G-EDF) performs a significantly higher number of migrations than G-NP-EDF, which is similar to SCHED_FIFO. G-GUA performs by far the most migrations on a given task-set. Therefore, while on a per-migration basis the cost is constant, G-GUA suffers much higher migration overhead.

We recorded the overheads for two system calls used by our real-time tasks to begin and end real-time scheduling segments. In Fig. 8 they are compared to the time required by three standard Linux system calls, `gettid()`, `getcwd()`, and `sched_setscheduler()`. Since `gettid()` simply returns

a value from the task descriptor of the calling task, it is a reasonable estimate of system call overhead. As shown, our system calls are comparatively long; the majority of this time is the time needed to call the scheduler.

7. CONCLUSIONS

We have presented ChronOS, a Linux/PREEMPT_RT OS that supports CMP real-time scheduling including best-effort scheduling. At its core, ChronOS demonstrates that the best-effort timeliness notion, pioneered by the Alpha kernel, can be supported on Linux/PREEMPT_RT CMP platforms.

Our future work will focus on understanding and increasing the scalability of global schedulers in ChronOS on high core-count systems. This paper is based on ChronOS Beta 2.4 and Linux kernel 2.6.31.14. ChronOS is open-sourced under GPL and is publicly available at www.chronoslinux.org.

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