Untrusted Hosts and Confidentiality: Secure Program Partitioning

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Abstract

This paper presents secure program partitioning, a language-based technique for protecting confidential data during computation in distributed systems containing mutually untrusted hosts. Confidentiality and integrity policies can be expressed by annotating programs with security types that constrain information flow; these programs can then be partitioned automatically to run securely on heterogeneously trusted hosts. The resulting communicating subprograms collectively implement the original program, yet the system as a whole satisfies the security requirements of participating principals without requiring a universally trusted host machine. The experience in applying this methodology and the performance of the resulting distributed code suggest that this is a promising way to obtain secure distributed computation.

1. Introduction

A significant challenge for computer systems, especially distributed systems, is maintaining the confidentiality and integrity of the data they manipulate. Existing techniques cannot ensure that an entire computing system satisfies a security policy for data confidentiality and integrity.[1] Standard mechanisms, such as access control and encryption, are essential tools for ensuring that system components do not violate these security policies. However, for systems that contain non-trivial computational components, access control and encryption are much less helpful for ensuring (and proving) that the system obeys the desired security policies.

A requirement that controls the *end-to-end* use of data in a secure system is an *information-flow policy* [3, 4, 7, 8, 15]. Information-flow policies are the natural way to specify confidentiality and integrity requirements because these policies constrain how information is used by the entire system, rather than simply regulating which principals (users, machines, programs, or other entities) can read or modify the data at particular points during execution. An informal example of such a confidentiality policy is "the information contained in my bank account file may be obtained only by me and the bank managers." Because it controls information rather than access, this policy is considerably stronger than the similar access control policy, "only processes authorized by me or bank managers may open the file containing my bank account information." This paper addresses the problem of how to practically specify and enforce information-flow policies in distributed systems.

A promising approach for describing such policies is the use of *security-typed languages* [1, 17, 27, 35, 42, 46, 50]. In this approach, explicit program annotations specify restrictions on the flow of information, and the language implementation (the compiler and run-time system) rejects programs that violate the restrictions. The program does not have to be trusted to enforce the security policy; only the compiler must be trusted. Static analysis also offers advantages over run-time enforcement because any purely run-time mechanism can enforce only safety properties, which excludes many useful information-flow policies [40].

To date, security-typed languages have addressed information-flow security in systems executed on a single trusted host. This assumption is unrealistic, particularly in scenarios for which information-flow policies are most desirable—when multiple principals need to cooperate but do not entirely trust one another. Simple examples of such scenarios abound: email services, web-based shopping and financial planning, business-to-business transactions, and joint military information systems. We expect sophisticated, collaborative, inter-organizational computation to become increasingly common; some way is needed to assure that data confidentiality is protected.

The general problem with these collaborative computations is ensuring that the security policies of all the participants are enforced. When participants do not fully trust each others' hosts, it is necessary to distribute the data and computational work among the hosts. This distribution creates a new threat to security: the hosts used for computation may cause security violations—either directly, by leaking information, or indirectly, by carrying out computations in a way that causes other hosts to leak information. Of course, the program itself may also cause security violations. Because existing single-host techniques address this problem, we focus on the new threat, untrusted hosts.

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[1] *Confidentiality* is used here as a synonym for secrecy; it is an important aspect of privacy.

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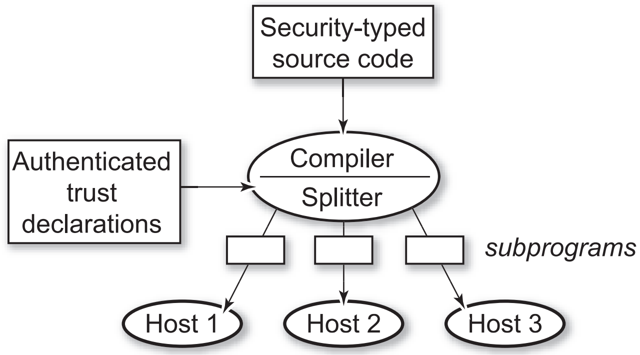

Figure 1: Secure program partitioning

In this paper, we present *secure program partitioning*, a novel way to protect the confidentiality of data for computations that manipulate data with differing confidentiality needs on an execution platform comprising heterogeneously trusted hosts. Figure 1 illustrates the key insight: The security policy can be used to guide the automatic splitting of a security-typed program into communicating subprograms, each running on a different host. Collectively, the subprograms perform the same computation as the original; in addition, they satisfy all the participants' security policies without requiring a single universally trusted host. We are primarily interested in enforcing confidentiality policies; in this setting, however, enforcement of confidentiality requires enforcement of simple integrity policies as well.

The splitter receives two inputs: the program, including its confidentiality and integrity policy annotations, and also a set of signed trust declarations stating each principal's trust in hosts and other principals. The goal of secure program partitioning is to ensure that if a host h is subverted, the only data whose confidentiality or integrity is threatened is data owned by principals that have declared they trust h.

It is useful to contrast this approach with the usual development of secure distributed systems, which involves the careful design of protocols for exchanging data among hosts in the system. By contrast, our approach provides the following benefits:

- **Stronger security:** Secure program partitioning can be applied to information-flow policies; most distributed systems make no attempt to control information flow. It can also be applied to access control policies, which are comparatively simple to enforce with this technique.

- **Decentralization:** Collaborative computations can be carried out despite incomplete trust. In addition, for many computations, there is no need for a universally trusted host. Each participant can independently ensure that its security policies are enforced.

- **Automation:** Large computing systems with many participating parties contain complex, interacting security policies that evolve over time; automated enforcement is becoming a necessity. Secure program partitioning permits a computation to be described as a single program independent of its distributed implementation. The partitioning process then *automatically* generates a secure protocol for data exchange among the hosts.

- **Explicit policies:** Security-typed programs force policy decisions to be made explicit in the system design, making them auditable and automatically verifiable. Type checking can then reveal subtle design flaws that make security violations possible.

Secure program partitioning has the most value when strong protection of confidentiality is needed by one or more principals, the computing platform consists of differently trusted hosts, there is a generally agreed-upon computation to be performed, and security, performance, or functionality considerations prevent the entire computation from being executed on a single host. One example of a possible application is an integrated medical information system that stores patient and physician records, raw test data, and employee records, and supports information exchange with other medical institutions. Another example is an automated business-to-business procurement system, in which profitable negotiation by the buyer and supplier depends on keeping some data confidential.

This paper describes Jif/split, our implementation of secure program partitioning, which includes a static checker, program splitter, and run-time support for the distributed subprograms. We present simple examples of applying this approach and give performance results that indicate its practicality.

Our system can express security policies that control covert and overt storage channels. However, certain classes of information-flow policies are not controlled by our system: timing and termination channels, which would be more important in a malicious-code setting. Language-based work on timing and termination flows, largely orthogonal to this work, is ongoing elsewhere (e.g., [2, 42]).

The rest of the paper is structured as follows. The next section describes the model for writing secure programs in a Java-like language that permits the specification of information-flow policies. Section 3 describes the assumptions about the networked environment, and discusses the assurance that secure program partitioning can provide in this environment. Section 4 describes the static conditions that are imposed when a program is split, including additional static checks needed in a distributed environment. Section 5 covers the dynamic (run-time) checks that are needed in addition to prevent attackers from violating the assumptions of the static checking. Section 6 describes the partitioning translation, including the optimization techniques for arriving at efficient split programs. Section 7 gives details of our prototype implementation and reports performance results. Section 8 discusses the trusted computing base and shows that it can be made small and localized to trusted hosts. Related and future work is considered in Sections 9 and 10. Section 11 concludes.

2. Secure Programming Model

The Jif/split program splitter extends the compiler for Jif [27, 29], a security-typed extension to Java that incorporates confidentiality labels from the decentralized label model [28]. In this model, principals can express ownership in data; the correctness of secure partitioning is defined in terms of this idea of ownership. The label model supports selective declassification, a feature needed for realistic applications of information-flow control.

2.1 Security Labels

Central to the model is the notion of a *principal*, which is an entity (e.g., user, process, party) that can have a confidentiality or integrity concern with respect to data. Principals can be named in information-flow policies and are also used to define the *authority* possessed by the running program. The authority at a point in the program is simply a set of principals that are assumed to authorize any action taken by the program at that point. Different program points may have different authority, which must be explicitly granted by the principals in question.

Security *labels* express confidentiality policies on data in a program; they provide the core vocabulary of the overall system security policy. A simple label is written $\{\texttt{o:r}_1\texttt{,r}_2\texttt{,...,r}_n\}$, meaning that the labeled data is owned by principal `o`, and that `o` permits the data to be read by principals $\texttt{r}_1$ through $\texttt{r}_n$ (and, implicitly, `o`).

Data may have multiple owners, each controlling a different component of its label. The label $\{\texttt{o}_1\texttt{:r}_1\texttt{,r}_2\texttt{; o}_2\texttt{:r}_1\texttt{,r}_3\}$, for example, contains two components and says that owner $\texttt{o}_1$ allows readers $\texttt{r}_1$ and $\texttt{r}_2$ and owner $\texttt{o}_2$ allows readers $\texttt{r}_1$ and $\texttt{r}_3$. Because *all* of the policies described by a label must be obeyed, only $\texttt{r}_1$ will be able to read data with this annotation. Such composite labels arise naturally in collaborative computations: for example, if `x` has label $\{\texttt{o}_1\texttt{:r}_1\texttt{,r}_2\}$ and `y` has label $\{\texttt{o}_2\texttt{:r}_1\texttt{,r}_3\}$, then the sum `x + y` has the composite label $\texttt{int}\{\texttt{o}_1\texttt{:r}_1\texttt{,r}_2\texttt{; o}_2\texttt{:r}_1\texttt{,r}_3\}$, which expresses the conservative requirement that the sum is subject to both the policy on `x` and the policy on `y`.

In this paper, the decentralized label model is extended with label components that specify integrity. The label $\{\texttt{?:p}_1\texttt{,...,p}_n\}$ specifies that principals $\texttt{p}_1$ through $\texttt{p}_n$ *trust* the data—they believe the data to be computed by the program as written. (Because integrity policies have no owner, a question mark is used in its place.) This is a weak notion of trust; its purpose is to protect security-critical information from damage by subverted hosts. Labels combining integrity and confidentiality components also arise naturally.

We write $\texttt{L}_1 \sqsubseteq \texttt{L}_2$ if the label $\texttt{L}_1$ is less restrictive than the label $\texttt{L}_2$. Intuitively, data with label $\texttt{L}_1$ is less confidential than data with label $\texttt{L}_2$—more principals are permitted to see the data, and, consequently, there are fewer restrictions on how data with label $\texttt{L}_1$ may be used. For example, $\{\texttt{o:r}\} \sqsubseteq \{\texttt{o:}\}$ holds because the left label allows both `o` and `r` to read the data, whereas the right label admits only `o` as a reader.

The relation $\sqsubseteq$ is a pre-order whose equivalence classes form a distributive lattice; we write $\sqcup$ and $\sqcap$ for the lattice join and meet operations, respectively. The label join operation combines the restrictions on how data may be used. As in the example above, if `x` has label $\texttt{L}_1$ and `y` has label $\texttt{L}_2$, the sum `x + y` has label $\texttt{L}_1 \sqcup \texttt{L}_2$, which includes the restrictions of both.

For any label `L`, the functions $C(\texttt{L})$ and $I(\texttt{L})$ extract the confidentiality and integrity parts of `L`, respectively. Because confidentiality and integrity are duals [4], if $\texttt{L}_1 \sqsubseteq \texttt{L}_2$, then $\texttt{L}_2$ must specify at least as much confidentiality and at *most* as much integrity as $\texttt{L}_1$. This interpretation is consistent with the idea that labels represent restrictions on how data may be used; data with higher integrity has *fewer* restrictions on its use.

Types in Jif are labeled, allowing the programmer to declare variables and fields that include security annotations. For example, a value with type `int{o:r}` is an integer owned by principal `o` and readable by `r`. When unlabeled Java types are written in a program, the label component is automatically inferred.

Every program expression has a labeled type that indicates an upper bound (with respect to the $\sqsubseteq$ order) of the security of the data represented by the expression. Jif's type-checking algorithm prevents labeled information from being *downgraded*, or assigned a less-restrictive label (i.e., lower in the lattice). In general, downgrading results in a loss of confidentiality or a spurious increase in claimed integrity. The type system tracks data dependencies (information flows) to prevent unintentional downgrading.

2.2 Declassification

Systems for enforcing information-flow policies have often run into practical difficulties. In part this has resulted from their basis in the security property of *noninterference* [15], which captures the requirement that data labeled `L` cannot affect any data whose label is not at least as restrictive. Noninterference allows the expression of controls on the end-to-end information flow within a system, but it does not provide sufficient expressive power: realistic systems require limited violations of noninterference, such as the ability to release encrypted data. An important feature of the decentralized label model is the ability to write computations that include controlled forms of downgrading, providing an escape hatch from strict noninterference.

Downgrading confidentiality is called *declassification*; it is provided in Jif by the expression `declassify(e, L)`, which allows a program acting with sufficient authority to declassify the expression `e` to label `L`. A principal p's authority is needed to perform declassifications of data owned by p. For example, owner `o` can add a reader `r` to a piece of data by declassifying its label from $\{\texttt{o:}\}$ to $\{\texttt{o:r}\}$.

The integrity counterpart to `declassify` is `endorse`, which allows a principal to declare trust in a piece of data based on information outside the program text. For example, a principal might `endorse` a message after verifying that it has been signed by a trusted principal. Neither `declassify` nor `endorse` has a run-time cost; they simply change the label of the security type of their argument.

2.3 Implicit Flows

One complication for security-typed languages is *implicit flows*, which arise from the control flow of the program. Consider this example in which four program points (A–D) are indicated by arrows:

$$\uparrow_A \texttt{if x then } \uparrow_B \texttt{y = true; else } \uparrow_C \texttt{y = false;} \uparrow_D$$

This code creates a dependency between the value `x`, which has type `boolean{L}`, and the value stored in `y`—the code is equivalent to the assignment `y = x`. For this assignment to be secure, `y`'s label must be at least as restrictive as `L`. Note that in the example information flows from `x` to `y` even though only constant values are assigned to `y`.

To control these implicit information flows, a label is assigned to each program point, indicated by the arrows. From a confidentiality standpoint, the label captures the information that can be learned by knowing that the program reached that point during execution; from an integrity standpoint, it captures the integrity of the information that determines the control flow to that point. In this example, if the label of program point $\uparrow_A$ is $\texttt{L}_A$, the label at point $\uparrow_B$ is $\texttt{L}_A \sqcup \texttt{L}$ because reaching point $\uparrow_B$ depends on both reaching point $\uparrow_A$ and the value of `x`, which has label `L`. Similarly, $\uparrow_C$ also has label $\texttt{L}_A \sqcup \texttt{L}$. Reaching point $\uparrow_D$ depends only on reaching point $\uparrow_A$ (both branches fall through to point $\uparrow_D$), so it has label $\texttt{L}_A$.

Because naming program points is quite cumbersome, we introduce a special label, $\underline{\texttt{pc}}$, which is the label of the program counter at each program point. Which program point $\underline{\texttt{pc}}$ refers to is usually clear from context, so we might say "the $\underline{\texttt{pc}}$ inside the branch is $\texttt{L}_A \sqcup \texttt{L}$." To conservatively control implicit flows, the label for any expression in the program includes the $\underline{\texttt{pc}}$ label for that program point. For example, it means that the assignment `y = true` is allowed only if `y`'s label is at least as restrictive as $\texttt{L}_A \sqcup \texttt{L}$, which correctly captures `y`'s dependency on `x`.

Using the labels provided by the programmer and the inferred $\underline{\texttt{pc}}$ label, the compiler is able to statically verify that all of the information flows apparent in the program text satisfy the label constraints that prevent illegal information flows from occurring. If the program does not satisfy the security policy, it is rejected.

```
1  public class OTExample {
2    int{Alice:; ?:Alice} m1;
3    int{Alice:; ?:Alice} m2;
4    boolean{Alice:; ?:Alice} isAccessed;
5
6    int{Bob:} transfer{?:Alice} (int{Bob:} n)
7    where authority(Alice) {
8      int tmp1 = m1;
9      int tmp2 = m2;
10     if (!isAccessed) {
11       isAccessed = true;
12       if (endorse(n, {?:Alice}) == 1)
13         return declassify(tmp1, {Bob:});
14       else
15         return declassify(tmp2, {Bob:});
16     }
17     else return 0;
18   }
19 }
```

Figure 2: Oblivious transfer code

2.4 Language Features

In addition to these changes to the Java type system, Jif adds a number of constructs for creating secure programs. The following are germane to this paper:

- An optional `authority` clause on method declarations describes the authority available in the body of the method. Code containing such a clause can be added to the system only with the permission of the principals named in it.

- Optional label bounds on the initial and final $\underline{\mathtt{pc}}$ labels of a method. For example, the method signature

  $$\mathtt{int\{L_1\}\ m\{I\}(int\{L_2\}\ x):\ \{F\}}$$

  means that the method `m` can only be called when $\underline{\mathtt{pc}} \sqsubseteq \mathtt{I}$. It takes an integer `x` with label $\mathtt{L}_2$ and returns an integer labeled $\mathtt{L}_1$. Upon exiting `m`, the condition $\underline{\mathtt{pc}} \sqsubseteq \mathtt{F}$ holds.

Jif also introduces some limitations to Java, which apply to this work as well. The most important is that programs are assumed to be sequential: the `Thread` class is not available. This limitation prevents an important class of timing channels whose control is an open research area. Providing support for full-fledged threaded and concurrent distributed programming is the focus of ongoing work [22, 41, 42].

2.5 Oblivious Transfer Example

Figure 2 shows a sample program that we will use as a running example. It is based on the well-known Oblivious Transfer Problem [11, 36], in which the principal Alice has two values (here represented by fields `m1` and `m2`), and Bob may request exactly one of the two values. However, Bob does not want Alice to learn which of the two values was requested. We chose this example because it is short, has interesting security issues, and has been well studied: for instance, it is known that a trusted third party is needed for a secure distributed implementation [6].[2]

[2] Probabilistic solutions using two hosts exist, but these algorithms leak small amounts of information. Because Jif's type system is geared to possibilistic information flows, these probabilistic algorithms are rejected as potentially insecure. Ongoing research [16, 45, 39] attempts to address probabilistic security.

Alice's secret data is represented by fields `m1` and `m2`. The policy `{Alice:; ?:Alice}` indicates that these fields are owned by Alice, that she lets no one else read them, and that she trusts their contents. The boolean `isAccessed` records whether Bob has requested a value yet.

Lines 6 through 18 define a method `transfer` that encapsulates the oblivious transfer protocol. It takes a request, `n`, owned by Bob, and returns either `m1` or `m2` depending on `n`'s value. Note that because Alice owns `m1` and `m2`, releasing the data requires declassification (lines 13 and 15). Her authority, needed to perform this declassification, is granted by the `authority` clause on line 7.

Ignoring for now the temporary variables `tmp1` and `tmp2` and the `endorse` statement, the body of the `transfer` method is straightforward: Line 10 checks whether Bob has made a request already. If not, line 11 records the request, and lines 12 through 15 return the appropriate field after declassifying them to be visible by Bob. If Bob has already made a request, `transfer` simply returns `0`.

The simplicity of this program is deceptive. For example, the $\underline{\mathtt{pc}}$ label at the start of the `transfer` method must be bounded above by the label `{?:Alice}`, as indicated on line 6. The reason is that line 11 assigns `true` into the field `isAccessed`, which requires Alice's integrity. If the program counter at the point of assignment does not also have Alice's trust, the integrity of `isAccessed` is compromised.

Other subtle interactions between confidentiality, integrity, and trust explain the need for the temporary variables and endorsement. We shall discuss these interactions throughout the rest of the paper as we describe security considerations in a distributed environment. One benefit of programming in a security-typed language is that the compiler can catch many subtle security holes even though the code is written in a style that contains no specification of how the code is to be distributed.

3. Assumptions and Assurance

The goal of secure program partitioning is to take a security-typed source program and a description of trust relationships and (if possible) produce a distributed version of the same program that executes securely in any consistent environment. This section discusses our assumptions about the distributed environment and describes the confidentiality and integrity assurance that can be provided in this environment.

3.1 Target environment

Clearly, any secure distributed system relies on the trustworthiness of the underlying network infrastructure. Let H be a set of *known hosts*, among which the program is to be distributed. We assume that pairwise communication between two members of H is reliable, in-order, and cannot be intercepted by hosts outside H or by the other members of H. Protection against interception can be achieved efficiently through well-known encryption techniques (e.g, [43, 48]); for example, each pair of hosts can use symmetric encryption to exchange information, with key exchange via public-key encryption. We assume that the same encryption mechanisms permit each member of H to authenticate messages sent and received by one another.

To securely partition a program, the splitter must know the trust relationships between the participating principals and the hosts H. To capture this information, we need two pieces of data about each host h:

- A *confidentiality* label $\mathtt{C}_h$ that describes an upper bound on the confidentiality of information that can be sent securely to host h.

- An *integrity* label $\mathtt{I}_h$ describing which principals trust data received from h.

These trust declarations are public knowledge—that is, they are available on all known hosts—and are signed by the principals involved. We assume the existence of a public-key infrastructure that makes digital signatures feasible.

Consider a host A owned by Alice but untrusted by Bob, and a host B owned by Bob and untrusted by Alice. A reasonable trust model might be:

$$\mathtt{C}_A = \{\mathtt{Alice:}\} \quad \mathtt{I}_A = \{\mathtt{?:Alice}\}$$
$$\mathtt{C}_B = \{\mathtt{Bob:}\} \quad \mathtt{I}_B = \{\mathtt{?:Bob}\}$$

Because `Bob` does not appear as an owner in the label $\mathtt{C}_A$, this description acknowledges that Bob is unwilling to send his private data to host A. Similarly, Bob does not trust information received from A because `Bob` does not appear in $\mathtt{I}_A$. The situation is symmetric with respect to Alice and Bob's host.

Next, consider hosts T and S that are partially trusted by Alice and Bob:

$$\mathtt{C}_T = \{\mathtt{Alice:;Bob:}\} \quad \mathtt{I}_T = \{\mathtt{?:Alice}\}$$
$$\mathtt{C}_S = \{\mathtt{Alice:;Bob:}\} \quad \mathtt{I}_S = \{\mathtt{?:}\}$$

Alice and Bob both trust T not to divulge their data incorrectly; on the other hand, Bob believes that T may corrupt data—he does not trust the integrity of data received from T. Host S is also trusted with confidential data, but neither Alice nor Bob trust data generated by S.

We will use hosts A, B, T, and S when discussing various partitions of the oblivious transfer algorithm in what follows.

3.2 Security assurance

Our goal is to ensure that the threats to a principal's confidential data are not increased by the failure or subversion of an untrusted host that is being used for execution. Bad hosts—hosts that fail or are subverted—have full access to the part of the program executing on them, can freely fabricate apparently authentic messages from bad hosts, and can share information with other bad hosts. Bad hosts may execute concurrently with good hosts, whereas good hosts preserve the sequential execution of the source language—there is only one good host executing at a time. However, we assume that bad hosts are not able to forge messages from good hosts, nor can they generate certain capabilities to be described later.

It is important to distinguish between intentional and unintentional release of confidential information. It is assumed that the `declassify` expressions in the original program intentionally release confidential data—that the principal authorizing that declassification trusts the program logic controlling its use. However, bad hosts should not be able to subvert this logic and cause more data to be released than intended. In programs with no `declassify` expressions, the failure or subversion of an untrusted host should not cause data to be leaked.

The security of a principal is endangered only if one or more of the hosts that the principal trusts is bad. Suppose the host h is bad and let $\mathtt{L}_e$ be the label of an expression in the program. The confidentiality of the expression's value is endangered only if $C(\mathtt{L}_e) \sqsubseteq \mathtt{C}_h$; correspondingly, the expression's integrity may have been corrupted only if $\mathtt{I}_h \sqsubseteq I(\mathtt{L}_e)$.

If Alice's machine A from Section 3.1 is compromised, only data owned by Alice may be leaked, and only data she trusts may be corrupted. Bob's privacy and integrity are protected. By contrast, if the semi-trusted machine T malfunctions, Alice and Bob's data may be leaked, but only Alice's data may be corrupted because only she trusts the integrity of the machine.

If there are multiple bad machines, they may cooperate to leak or corrupt more data. Our system is intended to enforce the following property:

> **Security Assurance:** The confidentiality of an expression e is not threatened by a set H_{bad} of bad hosts unless $C(\mathtt{L}_e) \sqsubseteq \bigsqcup_{h \in H_{\text{bad}}} \mathtt{C}_h$; its integrity is not threatened unless $\bigsqcap_{h \in H_{\text{bad}}} \mathtt{I}_h \sqsubseteq I(\mathtt{L}_e)$.

Providing this level of assurance involves two challenges: (1) Data with a confidentiality label (strictly) higher than $\mathtt{C}_h$ should never be sent (explicitly or implicitly) to h, and data with an integrity label lower than $\mathtt{I}_h$ should never be accepted from h. (2) Bad hosts should not be able to exploit the downgrading abilities of more privileged hosts, causing them to violate the security policy of the source program. The next two sections describe how a combination of static and dynamic mechanisms achieves this goal.

4. Static Security Constraints

At a high level, the partitioning process can be seen as a constraint satisfaction problem. Given a source program and the trust relationships between principals and hosts, the splitter must assign a host in H to each field, method, and program statement in the program. This fine-grained partitioning of the code is important so that a single method may access data of differing confidentiality and integrity. The primary concern when assigning hosts is to enforce the confidentiality and integrity requirements on data; efficiency, discussed in Section 6, is secondary. This section describes the static constraints on host selection.

4.1 Field and Statement Host Selection

Consider the field `m1` of the oblivious transfer example. It has label $\{\mathtt{Alice:;\ ?:Alice}\}$, which says that Alice owns and trusts this data. Only certain hosts are suitable to store this field: hosts that Alice trusts to protect both her confidentiality and integrity. If the field were stored elsewhere, the untrusted host could violate Alice's policy, contradicting the security assurance of Section 3.2. The host requirements can be expressed using labels: $\{\mathtt{Alice:}\} \sqsubseteq \mathtt{C}_h$ and $\mathtt{I}_h \sqsubseteq \{\mathtt{?:Alice}\}$. The first inequality says that Alice allows her data to flow to h, and the second says that Alice trusts the data she receives from h. In general, for a field f with label $\mathtt{L}_f$ we require

$$C(\mathtt{L}_f) \sqsubseteq \mathtt{C}_h \quad \text{and} \quad \mathtt{I}_h \sqsubseteq I(\mathtt{L}_f).$$

This same reasoning further generalizes to the constraints for locating an arbitrary program statement, S. Let $U(S)$ be the set of values *used* in the computation of S and let $D(S)$ be the set of locations S *defines*. Suppose that the label of the value v is $\mathtt{L}_v$ and that the label of a location l is $\mathtt{L}_l$. Let

$$\mathtt{L}_{\text{in}} = \bigsqcup_{v \in U(S)} \mathtt{L}_v \quad \text{and} \quad \mathtt{L}_{\text{out}} = \bigsqcap_{l \in D(S)} \mathtt{L}_l$$

A host h can execute the statement S securely, subject to constraints similar to those for fields.

$$C(\mathtt{L}_{\text{in}}) \sqsubseteq \mathtt{C}_h \quad \text{and} \quad \mathtt{I}_h \sqsubseteq I(\mathtt{L}_{\text{out}})$$

4.2 Preventing Read Channels

The rules for host selection for fields in the previous section are necessary but not sufficient in the distributed environment. Because bad hosts in the running system may be able to observe read requests from good hosts, a new kind of implicit flow is introduced: a *read channel* in which the request to read a field from a remote host itself communicates information.

For example, a naive implementation of the oblivious transfer example of Figure 2 exhibits a read channel. Suppose that in implementing the method `transfer`, the `declassify` expressions on lines 13 and 15 directly declassified the fields `m1` and `m2`, respectively, instead of the variables `tmp1` and `tmp2`. According to Bob, the value of the variable `n` is private and not to be revealed to Alice. However, if `m1` and `m2` are stored on Alice's machine, Alice can improperly learn the value of `n` from the read request.

The problem is that Alice can use read requests to reason about the location of the program counter. Therefore, the program counter at the point of a read operation must not contain information that the field's host is not allowed to see. With each field f, the static checker associates a confidentiality label $\texttt{Loc}_f$ that bounds the security level of implicit flows at each point where f is read. For each read of the field f, the label $\texttt{Loc}_f$ must satisfy the constraint $C(\underline{\texttt{pc}}) \sqsubseteq \texttt{Loc}_f$. Using this label $\texttt{Loc}_f$, the confidentiality constraint on host selection for the field is:

$$C(\texttt{L}_f) \sqcup \texttt{Loc}_f \sqsubseteq \texttt{C}_h$$

To eliminate the read channel in the example while preventing Bob from seeing both `m1` and `m2`, a trusted third party is needed. The programmer discovers this problem during development when the naive approach fails to split in a configuration with just the hosts A and B as described in Section 3.1. The error pinpoints the read channel introduced: arriving at line 13 depends on the value of `n`, so performing a request for `m1` there leaks `n` to Alice. The splitter automatically detects this problem when the field constraint above is checked.

If the more trusted host T is added to the set of known hosts, the splitter is able to solve the problem, even with the naive code, by allocating `m1` and `m2` on T, which prevents Alice from observing the read request. If S is used in place of T, the naive code again fails to split—even though S has enough privacy to hold Alice's data, fields `m1` and `m2` can't be located there because Alice doesn't trust S not to corrupt her data. Again, the programmer is warned of the read channel, but this time a different solution is possible: adding `tmp1` and `tmp2` as in the example code give the splitter enough flexibility to *copy* the data to S rather than locating the fields there. Whether S or T is the right model for the trusted host depends on the scenario; what is important is that the security policy is automatically verified in each case.

4.3 Declassification Constraints

Consider the oblivious transfer example from Alice's point of view. She has two private pieces of data, and she is willing to release exactly one of the two to Bob. Her decision to declassify the data is dependent on Bob not having requested the data previously. In the example program, this policy is made explicit in two ways. First, the method `transfer` explicitly declares that it uses her authority, which is needed to perform the declassification. Second, the program itself tests (in line 10) whether `transfer` has been invoked previously—presumably Alice would not have given her authority to this program without this check to enforce her policy.

This example shows that it is not enough simply to require that any `declassify` performed on Alice's behalf executes on a host she trusts to hold the data. Alice also must be confident that the decision to perform the declassification, that is, the program execution leading to the `declassify`, is performed correctly.

The program counter label summarizes the information dependencies of the decision to arrive at the corresponding program point. Thus, a `declassify` operation using the authority of a set of principals P introduces the integrity constraint: $I(\underline{\texttt{pc}}) \sqsubseteq \texttt{I}_P$ where $\texttt{I}_P$ is the label $\{?\texttt{:p}_1, \ldots, \texttt{p}_n\}$ for $\texttt{p}_i \in P$. This constraint says that each principal `p` whose authority is needed to perform the declassification must trust that the program has reached the `declassify` correctly.

```
Val  getField(HostID h, Obj o, FieldID f)
Val  setField(HostID h, Obj o, FieldID f, Val v)
void forward(HostID h, FrameID f, VarID var, Val v)
void rgoto(HostID h, FrameID f, EntryPt e, Token t)
void lgoto(Token t)
Token sync(HostID h, FrameID f, EntryPt e, Token t)
```

Figure 3: Run-time interface

Returning to the oblivious transfer example, we can now explain the need to use the `endorse` operation. Alice's authority is needed for the declassification, but, as described above, she must also be sure of the integrity of the program counter when the program does the declassification. Omitting the `endorse` when testing `n` on line 12 would lower the integrity of the program counter within the branches—Alice doesn't trust that `n` was computed correctly, as indicated by its (lack of an) integrity label on line 6. She must add her endorsement to `n`, making explicit her agreement with Bob that she doesn't need to know `n` to enforce her security policy.

Using the static constraints just described, the splitter finds a set of possible hosts for each field and statement. This process may yield many solutions, or none at all—for instance, if the program manipulates data too confidential for any known host. When no solution exists, the splitter gives an error indicating which constraint is not satisfiable. We have found that the static program analysis is remarkably useful in identifying problems with apparently secure programs. When more than one solution exists, the splitter chooses hosts to optimize performance of the distributed system, as described in Section 6.

5. Dynamic Enforcement

In the possible presence of bad hosts that can fabricate messages, run-time checks are required to ensure security. For example, access to an object field on a remote host must be authenticated to prevent illegal data transfers from occurring. Thus, the information-flow policy is enforced by a combination of static constraints (controlling how the program is split) and dynamic checks to ensure that running program obeys the static constraints.

When a program is partitioned, the resulting partitions contain both ordinary code to perform local computation and calls to a special run-time interface that supports host communication. Figure 3 shows the interface to the distributed run-time system.[3] There are three operations for transferring data between hosts: `getField`, `setField`, and `forward`; and three operations for transferring control between hosts: `rgoto`, `lgoto`, and `sync`. These operations define building blocks for a protocol that exchanges information among the hosts running partitions.

The `rgoto` and `lgoto` control operations are primitive constructs for transferring control from one program point to another that is located on a different host. In general a program partition comprises a set of code fragments that offer entry points to which `rgoto` and `lgoto` transfer control. These two kinds of goto operations are taken from a low-level security-typed language for which it has been proven that every well-typed program automatically enforces noninterference [50].

[3] We have simplified this interface for clarity; for instance, the actual implementation provides direct support for array manipulation.

The run-time interface describes all the ways that hosts can interact. To show that bad hosts cannot violate the security assurance provided by the system, it is therefore necessary to consider each of the run-time operations in turn and determine what checks are needed to enforce the assurance condition given in Section 3.2.

5.1 Access Control

The simplest operations provided by the run-time interface are `getField` and `setField`, which perform remote field reads and writes. Both operations take a handle to the remote host, the object that contains the field, and an identifier for the field itself. The `setField` operation also takes the value to be written.

These requests are dispatched by the run-time system to the appropriate host. Suppose h_1 sends a field access request to h_2. Host h_2 must perform an access control check to determine whether to satisfy the request or simply ignore it, while perhaps logging any improper request for auditing purposes. A read request for a field f labeled $\mathtt{L}_f$ is legal only if $C(\mathtt{L}_f) \sqsubseteq \mathtt{C}_{h_1}$, which says that h_1 is trusted enough to hold the data stored in f. Similarly, when h_1 tries to update a field labeled $\mathtt{L}_f$, h_2 checks the integrity constraint $\mathtt{I}_{h_1} \sqsubseteq I(\mathtt{L}_f)$, which says that the principals who trust f also trust h_1. These requirements are the dynamic counterpart to those used for host selection (see Section 4.1).

Note that because field and host labels are known at compile time, an access control list can be generated for each field, and thus label comparisons can be optimized into a single lookup per request. There is no need to manipulate labels at run time.

5.2 Data Forwarding

Another difficulty with moving to a distributed setting is that the run-time system must provide a mechanism to pass data between hosts without violating any of the confidentiality policies attached to the data. The problem is most easily seen when there are three hosts and the control flow $h_1 \longrightarrow l \longrightarrow h_2$: execution starts on h_1, transfers to l, and then completes on h_2. Hosts h_1 and h_2 must access confidential data d (and are trusted to do so), whereas l is not allowed to see d. The question is how to make d securely available to h_2. Clearly it is not secure to transfer d in plaintext between the trusted hosts via l.

There are essentially two solutions to this problem: pass d via l in encrypted form, or forward d directly to h_2. We chose to implement the second solution. After hosts have been assigned, the splitter infers statically where the data forwarding should occur, using a standard definition-use dataflow analysis. The run-time interface provides an operation `forward` that permits a local variable to be forwarded to a particular stack frame on a remote host. The same mechanism is used to transmit a return value to a remote host. Data forwarding requires that the recipient validate the sender's integrity, as with `setField`.

5.3 Control Transfer Integrity

So far, we have not addressed the issue of concurrency, which is inherently a concern for security in distributed systems. The problem of protecting confidentiality in a concurrent setting is difficult [47, 42], and we do not attempt to solve the general case here. Instead, we take advantage of the single-threaded nature of the source program by using the idea that the integrity of the program counter obeys a stack discipline.

Consider a scenario with three hosts: h_1 and h_2 have high integrity, and l has relatively lower integrity (that is, its integrity is not equal to or greater than that of h_1 or h_2). Because the program has been partitioned into code fragments, each host is prepared to accept control transfers at multiple entry points, each of which begins a different code fragment. Some of the code fragments on h_1 and h_2 make use of the greater privilege available due to higher integrity (e.g., the ability to declassify certain data).

Suppose the source program control flow indicates control transfer in the sequence $h_1 \longrightarrow l \longrightarrow h_2$. A potential attack is for l to improperly invoke a privileged code fragment residing on h_2, therefore violating the behavior of the original program and possibly corrupting or leaking some data. Hosts h_1 and h_2 can prevent these attacks by simply denying l the right to invoke entry points that correspond to privileged code, but this strategy prevents h_2 from using its higher privileges after control has passed through l—even if this control transfer was supposed to occur according to the source program.

We have developed a mechanism to prevent these illegal control transfers, based on a stack discipline for manipulating capabilities. The intuition is that the block structure and sequential behavior of the source program, which are embodied at run-time by the stack of activation records, induce a similar LIFO property on the program counter's integrity. The deeper the stack, the more data the program counter depends on, and consequently, the lower its integrity.

This correspondence between stack frames and $\underline{\mathtt{pc}}$ integrity is not perfect because the $\underline{\mathtt{pc}}$ label need not decrease in lock step with every stack frame. A single stack frame may be used by a block of code that is partitioned across several hosts of differing integrity, for example. Nevertheless, this correspondence suggests that we use a stack discipline based on integrity to regulate control transfers. To distinguish between the stack of activation records (whose elements are represented by `FrameID` objects) and the stack of host control transfers, we refer to the latter as the ICS—integrity control stack.

Informally, in the scenario above, the first control transfer (from h_1 to l) pushes a capability for return to h_2 onto the ICS, after which computation is more restricted (and hence may reside on a less trusted machine). The second control transfer (from l to h_2) consumes the capability and pops it off the ICS, allowing h_2 to regain its full privileges. The idea is that before transferring control to l, trusted machines h_1 and h_2 agree that the only valid, privileged entry point between them is the one on h_2. Together, they generate a capability for the entry point that h_1 passes to l on the first control transfer. Host l must present this capability before being granted access to the more privileged code. Illegal attempts to transfer control from l to h_1 or to h_2 are rejected because h_1 and h_2 can validate the (unique) capability to transfer control from l.

5.4 Example Control Flow Graph

Figure 3 shows the signatures for the three control transfer facilities: `rgoto` (for "regular" control transfers that do not affect the ICS), `lgoto` (for "LIFO" transfers—ICS pops), and `sync` (for generating capabilities—ICS pushes). The capabilities are represented as `Token` objects. In addition to the code fragment to be jumped to (given by the `EntryPt` argument), control transfer is to a specific stack frame (given by `FrameID`) on a particular host.

We describe in detail the operation of these mechanisms in the next section, but first it is helpful to see an example of their use.

Figure 4 shows the control-flow graph of a possible splitting of the oblivious transfer example in a host environment that contains Alice's machine A, Bob's machine B and the partially trusted server, T from Section 3.1. We have chosen this simple example because it presents an interesting partitioning without being too large to describe here. For completeness, we describe the unoptimized behavior; optimizations that affect the partitioning process and run-time performance are discussed in Sections 6 and 7.

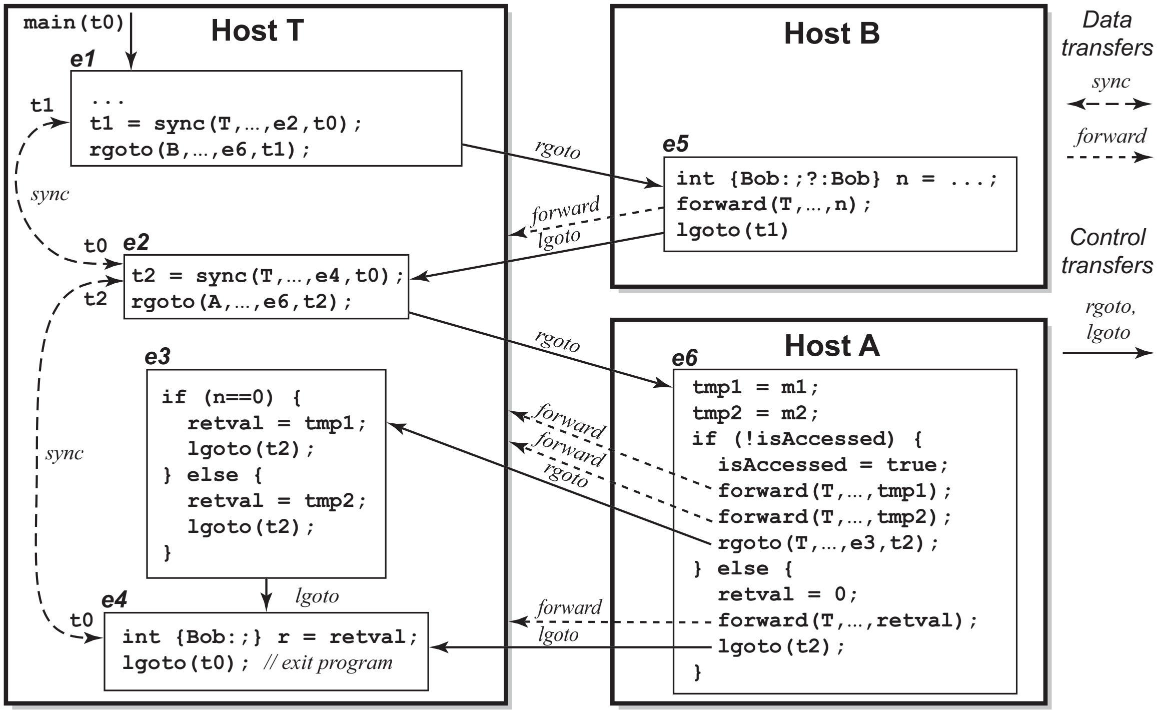

Figure 4: Control flow graph of the oblivious transfer program

For lack of space, we show only a fragment of the `main`[4] method. Host T initially has control and possesses a single capability `t0`, which is on top of the ICS. Bob's host is needed to initialize `n`—his choice of Alice's two fields. Recall that $\{$`?:Bob`$\} \not\sqsubseteq \{$`?:Alice`$\}$, which means that B is relatively less trusted than T. Before transferring control to B, T `sync`'s to a suitable return point (entry `e2`), which pushes a new capability, `t1`, onto the ICS (hiding `t0`). The `sync` operation then returns this fresh capability token, `t1`, to `e1`.

Next, T passes `t1` to entry point `e5` on B via `rgoto`. There, Bob's host computes the value of `n` and returns control to T via `lgoto`, which requires the capability `t1` to return to a host with relatively higher integrity. Upon receiving this valid capability, T pops `t1`, restoring `t0` as the top of the ICS. If instead B maliciously attempts to invoke any entry point on either T or A via `rgoto`, the access control checks deny the operation. The only valid way to transfer control back to T is by invoking `lgoto` with one-time capability `t1`. Note that this prevents Bob from initiating a race to the assignment on line `11` of the example, which might allow two of his transfer requests (one for `m1` and one for `m2`) to be granted and thus violate Alice's declassification policy.

Alice's machine must check the `isAccessed` field, so after B returns control, T next `sync`s with the return point of `transfer` (the entry point `e4`), which again pushes new token `t2` onto the ICS. T then transfers control to `e6` on A, passing `t2`. The entry point `e6` corresponds to the beginning of the `transfer` method.

Alice's machine performs the comparison, and either denies access to Bob by returning to `e4` with `lgoto` using `t2`, or forwards the values of `m1` and `m2` to T and hands back control via `rgoto` to `e3`, passing the token `t2`. If Bob has not already made a request, T is able to check `n` and assign the appropriate value of `tmp1` and `tmp2` to `retval`, then jump to `e4` via `t2`. The final block shows T exiting the program by invoking the capability `t0`.

5.5 Control Transfer Mechanisms

This section describes how `rgoto`, `lgoto`, and `sync` manipulate the ICS, which is itself distributed among the hosts, and defines the dynamic checks that must occur to maintain the desired integrity invariant.

A capability token `t` is a tuple $\{h, f, e\}_{k_h}$ containing a `HostID`, a `FrameID`, and an `EntryPt`. To prevent forgery and ensure uniqueness, the tuple is appended to its hash with h's private key and a nonce.

The global ICS is represented by a collection of local stacks, as shown in Figure 5. Host h's local stack, s_h, contains pairs of tokens $(\mathtt{t}, \mathtt{t}')$ as shown. The intended invariant is that when the top of h's stack, $\mathtt{top}(s_h)$, is $(\mathtt{t}, \mathtt{t}')$, then `t` is the token most recently issued by h. Furthermore, the only valid `lgoto` request that h will serve must present the capability `t`. The other token, $\mathtt{t}'$, represents the capability for the next item on the global stack; it is effectively a pointer to the tail of the global ICS.

To show that these distributed stacks enforce a global stack ordering on the capabilities, we prove a stronger invariant of the protocol operations [51]. Whenever control is transferred to low-integrity hosts, there is a unique re-entry point on high-security hosts that permits high-integrity computation. This uniqueness ensures that if a low-integrity host is bad, it can only jeopardize the security of low-integrity computation.

The recipients of control transfer requests enforce the ordering protocol. Assume the recipient is the host h, and the initiator of the request is i. The table in Figure 6 specifies h's action for each type of request. We write $e(f, \mathtt{t})$ for local invocation of the code identified by entry point e in stack frame f, passing the token `t` as an additional argument.

This approach forces a stack discipline on the integrity of the

[4] We omitted the `main` method and constructors from Figure 2 to simplify the presentation; they contain simple initialization code. We also omit the details of `FrameID` objects, which are unimportant for this example.

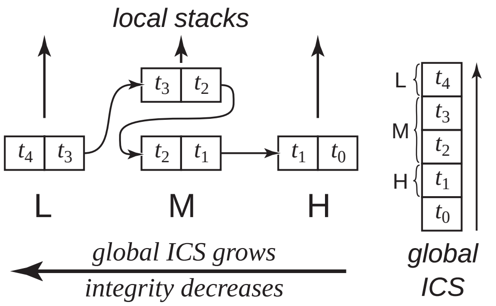

Figure 5: Distributed implementation of the global stack

control flow: `rgoto` may be used to transfer control to an entry point that requires lesser or equal integrity; `lgoto` may transfer control to a higher-integrity entry point—provided that the higher-integrity host previously published a capability to that entry point. These capabilities can be used at most once: upon receiving an `lgoto` request using the valid capability `t`, h pops its local capability stack, thereby invalidating `t` for future uses. Calls to `sync` and `lgoto` thus come in pairs, with each `lgoto` consuming the capability produced by the corresponding `sync`.

Just as we have to dynamically prevent malicious hosts from improperly accessing remote fields, we must also ensure that bad hosts cannot improperly invoke remote code. Otherwise, malicious hosts could indirectly violate the integrity of data affected by the code. Each entry point e has an associated dynamic access control label $\mathtt{I}_e$ that regulates the integrity of machines that may remotely invoke e. The receiver of an `rgoto` or `sync` request checks the integrity of the requesting host against $\mathtt{I}_e$ as shown in Figure 6. The label $\mathtt{I}_e$ is given by $(\prod_{v \in D(e)} \mathtt{L}_v) \sqcap \mathtt{I}_P$, where $D(e)$ is the set of variables and fields written to by the code in e and $\mathtt{I}_P$ is the integrity label of the principals, P, whose authority is needed to perform any declassifications in e.

The translation phase described in the next section inserts control transfers into the source program. To prevent confidentiality and integrity policies from being violated by the communications of the transfer mechanisms themselves, there are constraints on where `rgoto` and `sync` may be added.

Suppose a source program entry point e is assigned to host i, but doing so requires inserting an `rgoto` or `sync` to another entry point e' on host h. The necessary constraints are:

$$C(\underline{\mathtt{pc}}) \sqsubseteq \mathtt{C}_h \qquad \mathtt{I}_i \sqsubseteq \mathtt{I}_{e'} \qquad \mathtt{I}_e \sqsubseteq \mathtt{I}_{e'}.$$

The first inequality says that i can't leak information to h by performing this operation. The second inequality says that host i has enough integrity to request this control transfer. This constraint implies that the dynamic integrity checks performed by h are guaranteed to succeed for this legal transfer—the dynamic checks are there to catch malicious machines, not well-behaved ones. Finally, the third constraint says that the code of the entry point e itself has enough integrity to transfer the control to e'. Furthermore, because `sync` passes a capability to h, it requires the additional constraint that $I_h \sqsubseteq I(\underline{\mathtt{pc}})$, which limits the damage h can do by invoking the capability too early, thus bypassing the intervening computation.

These enforcement mechanisms do not attempt to prevent denial of service attacks, as such attacks do not affect confidentiality or integrity. These measures *are* sufficient to prevent a bad low-integrity host from launching race-condition attacks against the higher integrity ones: hosts process requests sequentially, and each capability offers one-shot access to the higher integrity hosts.

$\mathtt{rgoto}(h, f, e, \mathtt{t})$

Transfers control to the entry point e in frame f on the host h. Host i's current capability `t` is passed to h.	`if` $(\mathtt{I}_i \sqsubseteq \mathtt{I}_e)$ $\{$ $e(f, \mathtt{t})$; $\}$ `else ignore;`

$\mathtt{lgoto(t)}$ (where $\mathtt{t} = \{h, f, e\}_{k_h}$)

Pops h's local control stack after verifying the capability `t`; control moves to entry point e in frame f on host h, restoring privileges.	`if` $(\mathtt{top}(s_h)\mathtt{==}(\mathtt{t},\mathtt{t}'))$ $\{$
	  $\mathtt{pop}(s_h)$;
	  $e(f, \mathtt{t}')$;
	$\}$ `else ignore;`

$\mathtt{sync}(h, f, e, \mathtt{t})$

Host h checks i's integrity; if sufficient, h returns to i a new capability (`nt`) for entry point e in frame f.	`if` $(\mathtt{I}_i \sqsubseteq \mathtt{I}_e)$ $\{$
	  $\mathtt{nt} = \{h, f, e\}_{k_h}$;
	  $\mathtt{push}(s_h, (\mathtt{nt}, \mathtt{t}))$;
	  $\mathtt{send}(i, \mathtt{nt})$;
	$\}$ `else ignore;`

Figure 6: Host h's response to transfer requests from i

While our restrictive stack-based control transfer mechanism is *sufficient* to provide the security property of Section 3.2, it is not *necessary*; there exist secure systems that lie outside the behaviors expressible by the ICS. However, following the stack discipline is sufficient to express many interesting protocols that move the thread of control from trusted hosts to untrusted hosts and back. Moreover, the splitter determines when a source program can obey the stack ordering and generates the protocol automatically.

6. Translation

Given a program and host configuration, the splitting translation is responsible for assigning a host to each field and statement. The Jif/split compiler takes as input the annotated source program and a description of the known hosts. It produces as output a set of Java files that yield the final split program when compiled against the run-time interface. There are several steps to this process.

In addition to the usual typechecking performed by an ordinary Java compiler, the Jif/split front end collects security label information from the annotations in the program, performing label inference when annotations are omitted. This process results in a set of label constraints that capture the information flows within the program. Next, the compiler computes a set of possible hosts for each statement and field, subject to the security constraints described in Section 4. If no host can be found for a field or statement, the splitter conservatively rejects the program as being insecure.

There may also be many valid host assignments for each field or statement, in which case performance drives the host selection process. The splitter uses dynamic programming to synthesize a good solution by attempting to minimize the number of remote control transfers and field accesses, two operations that dominate run-time overhead. The algorithm works on a weighted control-flow graph of the program; the weight on an edge represents an approximation to the run-time cost of traversing that edge.

This approach also has the advantage that principals may indicate a preference for their data to stay on one of severally equally trusted machines (perhaps for performance reasons) by specifying a lower cost for the preferred machine. For example, to obtain the example partition shown in Figure 4, Alice also specifies a preference for her data to reside on host A, causing fields `m1`, `m2`, and isAccessed to be located on host A. Without the preference declaration, the optimizer determines that fewer network communications are needed if these fields are located at T instead. This alternative assignment is secure because Alice trusts the server equally to her own machine.

After host selection, the splitter inserts the proper calls to the runtime, subject to the constraints described in Section 5. An lgoto must be inserted exactly once on every control flow path out of the corresponding sync, and the sync–lgoto pairs must be well nested to guarantee the stack discipline of the resulting communication protocol. The splitter also uses standard dataflow analysis techniques to infer where to introduce the appropriate data forwarding.

Finally, the splitter produces Java files that contain the final program fragments. Each source Jif class C translates to a set of classes C$Host$_i$, one for each known host $h_i \in H$. In addition to the translated code fragments, each such class contains the information used by the runtime system for remote references to other classes. The translation of a field includes accessor methods that, in addition to the usual get and set operations, also perform access control checks (which are statically known, as discussed in Section 4). In addition, each source method is represented by one frame class per host. These frame classes correspond to the FrameID arguments needed by the runtime system of Figure 3; they encapsulate the part of the source method's activation record visible to a host.

7. Implementation

We have implemented the splitter and the necessary run-time support for executing partitioned programs. Jif/split was written in Java as a 7400-line extension to the existing Jif compiler. The run-time support library is a 1700-line Java program. Communication between hosts is encrypted using SSL (the Java Secure Socket Extension (JSSE) library, version 1.0.2) [18]. To prevent forging, tokens for entry points are hashed using the MD5 implementation from the Cryptix library, version 3.2.0 [5].

To evaluate the impact of our design, we implemented several small, distributed programs using the splitter. Because we are using a new programming methodology that enforces relatively strong security policies, direct comparison with the performance of other distributed systems was difficult; our primary concern was security, not performance. Nevertheless, the results are encouraging.

7.1 Benchmarks

We have implemented a number of programs in this system. The following four are split across two or more hosts:

- **List** compares two identical 100 element linked lists that must be located on different hosts because of confidentiality. A third host traverses the lists.
- **OT** is the oblivious transfer program described earlier in the paper. One hundred transfers are performed.
- **Tax** simulates a tax preparation service. A client's trading records are stored on a stockbroker's machine. The client's bank account is stored at a bank's machine. Taxes are computed by a tax preparer on a third host. The principals have distinct confidentiality concerns, and declassify is used twice.
- **Work** is a compute-intensive program that uses two hosts but communicates relatively little.

Writing these programs requires adding security policies (labels) to some type declarations from the equivalent single-machine Java program. These annotations are 11–25% of the source text, which is not surprising because the programs contain complex security interactions and little real computation.

Metric	List	OT	Tax	Work	OT-h	Tax-h
Lines	110	50	285	45	175	400
Elapsed time (sec)	0.51	0.33	0.58	0.49	0.28	0.27
Total messages	1608	1002	1200	600	800	800
forward (×2)	400	101	300	0	-	-
getField (×2)	2	100	0	0	-	-
lgoto	402	200	0	300	-	-
rgoto	402	400	600	300	-	-
Eliminated (×2)	402	600	400	300	-	-

Table 1: Benchmark measurements

7.2 Experimental Setup

Each subprogram of the split program was assigned to a different physical machine. Experiments were run on a set of three 1.4 GHz Pentium 4 PCs with 1GB RAM running Windows 2000. Each machine is connected to a 100 Mbit/second Ethernet by a 3Com 3C920 controller. Round-trip ping times between the machines average about 310 μs. This LAN setting offers a worst-case scenario for our analysis—the overheads introduced by our security measures are relatively more costly than in an Internet setting. Even for our local network, network communication dominates performance. All benchmark programs were run using SSL, which added more overhead: the median application-to-application round-trip time was at least 640 μs for a null Java RMI [37] call over SSL.

All benchmarks were compiled with version 1.3.0 of the Sun javac compiler, and run with version 1.3.0 of the Java HotSpot Client VM. Compilation and dynamic-linking overhead is not included in the times reported.

7.3 Results

For all four benchmarks, we measured both running times and total message counts so that performance may be estimated for other network configurations. The first row of Table 1 gives the length of each program in lines of code. The second row gives the median elapsed wall-clock time for each program over 100 trial runs. The following rows give total message counts and a breakdown of counts by type (forward and getField calls require two messages). The last row shows the number of forward messages eliminated by piggybacking optimizations described below.

For performance evaluation, we used Java RMI to write reference implementations of the Tax and OT programs and then compared them with our automatically generated programs. These results are shown in the columns OT-h and Tax-h of Table 1. Writing the reference implementation securely and efficiently required some insight that we obtained from examining the corresponding partitioned code. For example, in the OT example running on the usual three-host configuration, the code that executes on Alice's machine should be placed in a critical section to prevent Bob from using a race condition to steal both hidden values. The partitioned code automatically prevents the race condition.

The hand-coded implementation of OT ran in 0.28 seconds; the automatically partitioned program ran in 0.33 ms, a slowdown of 1.17. The hand-coded version of Tax also ran in 0.27 seconds; the partitioned program ran in 0.58 seconds, a slowdown of 2.17. The greater number of messages sent by the partitioned programs explains most of this slowdown. Other sources of added overhead turn out to be small:

- Inefficient translation of local code
- Run-time checks for incoming requests
- MD5 hashing to prevent forging and replaying of tokens

The prototype Jif/split compiler attempts only simple optimizations for the code generated for local use by a single host. The resulting Java programs are likely to have convoluted control flow that arises as an artifact of our translation algorithm—the intermediate representation of the splitter resembles low-level assembly code more than Java. This mismatch introduces overheads that the hand-coded programs do not incur. The overhead could be avoided if Jif/split generated Java bytecode output directly; however, we leave this to future work.

Run-time costs also arise from checking incoming requests and securely hashing tokens. These costs are relatively small: The cost of checking incoming messages is less than 6% of execution time for all four example programs. The cost of token hashing accounted for approximately 15% of execution time across the four benchmarks. Both of these numbers scale with the number of messages in the system. For programs with more substantial local computations, we would expect these overheads to be less significant.

For a WAN environment, the useful point of comparison between the hand-coded and partitioned programs is the total number of messages sent between hosts. Interestingly, the partitioned Tax and OT programs need fewer messages for control transfers than the hand-coded versions. The hand-coded versions of OT and Tax each require 400 RMI invocations. Because RMI calls use two messages, one for invocation and one for return, these programs send 800 messages. While the total messages needed for the Jif/split versions of OT and Tax are 1002 and 1200, respectively, only 600 of these messages in each case are related to control transfers; the rest are data forwards. The improvement over RMI is possible because the `rgoto` and `lgoto` operations provide more expressive control flow than procedure calls. In particular, an RMI call must return to the calling host, even if the caller immediately makes another remote invocation to a third host. By contrast, an `rgoto` or `lgoto` may jump directly to the third host. Thus, in a WAN environment, the partitioned programs are likely to execute more quickly than the hand-coded program because control transfers should account for most of the execution time.

7.4 Optimizations

Several simple optimizations improve system performance:

- Calls to the same host do not go through the network.
- Hashes are not computed for tokens used locally to a host.
- Multiple data forwards to the same recipient are combined into a single message and also piggybacked on `lgoto` and `rgoto` calls when possible. As seen in Table 1, this reduces `forward` messages by more than 50% (the last row is the number of round trips eliminated).

A number of further simple optimizations are likely to be effective. For example, much of the performance difference between the reference implementation of OT and the partitioned implementation arises from the server's ability to fetch the two fields `m1` and `m2` in a single request. This optimization (combining `getField` requests) could be performed automatically by the splitter as well.

Currently, `forward` operations that aren't piggybacked with control transfers require an acknowledgment to ensure that all data is forwarded before control reaches a remote host. It is possible to eliminate the race condition that necessitates this synchronous data forwarding. Because the splitter knows statically what forwards are expected at every entry point, the generated code can block until all forwarded data has been received. Data transfers that are not piggybacked can then be done in parallel with control transfers. However, this optimization has not been implemented.

8. Trusted Computing Base

An important question for any purported security technique is the size and complexity of the *trusted computing base* (TCB). All else being equal, a distributed execution platform suffers from a larger TCB than a corresponding single-host execution platform because it incorporates more hardware and software. On the other hand, the architecture described here may increase the participants' confidence that trustworthy hosts are being used to protect their confidentiality.

What does a principal p who participates in a collaborative program using this system have to trust? The declaration signed by p indicates to what degree p trusts the various hosts. By including a declaration of trust for a host h in the declaration, p must trust the hardware of h itself, the h's operating system, and the splitter runtime support, which (in the prototype implementation) implicitly includes Java's.

Currently, the Jif/split compiler is also trusted. Ongoing research based on certified compilation [26] or proof-carrying code [30] might be used to remove the compiler from the TCB and instead allow the bytecode itself to be verified [20].

Another obvious question about the trusted computing base is to what degree the partitioning process itself must be trusted. It is clearly important that the subprograms a program is split into are generated under the same assumptions regarding the trust relationships among principals and hosts. Otherwise, the security of principal p might be violated by sending code from different partitionings to hosts trusted by p. A simple way to avoid this problem is to compute a one-way hash of all the splitter's inputs—trust declarations and program text—and to embed this hash value into all messages exchanged by subprograms. During execution, incoming messages are checked to ensure that they come from the same version of the program.

A related issue is where to partition the program. It is necessary that the host that generates the program partition that executes on host h be trusted to protect all data that h protects during execution. That is, the partitioning host could be permitted to serve in place of h during execution. A natural choice is thus h itself: each participating host can independently partition the program, generating its own subprogram to execute. That the hosts have partitioned the same program under the same assumptions can be validated using the hashing scheme described in the previous paragraph. Thus, the partitioning process itself can be decentralized yet secure.

9. Related Work

There are two primary areas of research related to this work: static and dynamic enforcement of information-flow policies and support for transparently distributed computation.

There has been much research on end-to-end security policies and mandatory access control in multilevel secure systems. Most practical systems have opted for dynamic enforcement using a mix of mandatory and discretionary access control, for example as described in the Orange Book [9]. These techniques (e.g., [13, 23]) have difficulty controlling implicit information flows accurately.

Static analysis of information flow has a long history, although it has not been as widely used as dynamic checking. Denning originally proposed a language to permit static checking [8], but it was not implemented. Other researchers [24, 25, 12] developed techniques for information-flow checking using formal specifications and automatic or semi-automatic theorem proving.

Recently, there has been more interest in provably-secure programming languages. Palsberg and Ørbæk have developed a simple type system for checking integrity [33]. Others have taken a similar approach to static analysis of secrecy, encoding rules similar to Denning's in a type system and showing them to be sound using programming language techniques [46, 17, 35]. No language of the complexity of Jif [27] has been proven to enforce noninterference; also, extended notions of soundness that encompass declassification are not yet fully developed. All of these previous language-based techniques assume execution on a trusted platform.

Program slicing techniques [44] provide information about the data dependencies in a piece of software. The use of backward slices to investigate integrity and related security properties has been proposed [14, 21], but the focus has been on debugging and understanding existing software.

A number of systems (such as Amoeba and Sprite [10]) automatically redistribute computation across a distributed system to improve performance, though not security. Various transparently distributed programming languages have been developed as well; a good early example is Emerald [19]. Modern distributed interface languages such as CORBA [31] or Java RMI do not enforce end-to-end security policies.

In our approach, certain parts of the system security policy are explicit in the labels appearing in the program; others are implicit in the declassifications and endorsements made in the program text. There has been some work on specifying end-to-end security for systems containing downgrading, such as the work on intransitive noninterference [38, 34] and on robust declassification [49].

Jif and secure program partitioning are complementary to current initiatives for privacy protection on the Internet. For example, the recent Platform for Privacy Preferences (P3P) [32] provides a uniform system for specifying users' confidentiality policies. Security-typed languages such as Jif could be used for the implementation of a P3P-compliant web site, providing the enforcement mechanisms for the P3P policy.

10. Future Work

The Jif/split prototype has given us insight into the difficulties of building distributed systems with strong end-to-end information-flow guarantees, but there is still much room for improvement.

Experience with larger and more realistic programs will be necessary to determine the real trade-offs involved. This paper has focused on one axis of security, namely protecting confidential data. Other axes, such as reliability and auditing of transactions, also play a role in the security of distributed computations, and they should not be neglected.

Of course security and performance are often at odds, and the same is true here. Jif/split assumes that the security of the data is more important than the performance of the system. However, we believe that encoding the security policy in the programming language makes this trade-off more explicit: if the performance of a program under a certain security policy is unsatisfactory, it is possible to relax the policy (for instance, by declaring more trust in certain hosts, or by reducing the restrictions imposed by the label annotations). Under a relaxed policy, the compiler may be able to find a solution with acceptable performance—the relaxed security policy spells out what security has been lost for performance. The prototype allows some control over performance by allowing the user to specify relative costs of communication between hosts. The host assignment tries to find a minimum cost solution, but other constraints could be added—for example, the ability to specify a particular host for a given field.

Another limitation to the current prototype is that it accepts only sequential source programs. Providing information-flow guarantees in concurrent systems is a difficult problem, but one that is important for providing realistic, secure systems. The main obstacle is soundly accounting for information flows that arise due to synchronization of the processes—without imposing restrictions that prohibit useful programs. Another difficulty in the concurrent setting, which we have not addressed in the present work, is the problem of garbage collection.

More immediately, there are a number of useful features of Jif that are not yet supported in Jif/split. Full Jif includes an `actsfor` relation, which allows the program to determine whether one principal has delegated privileges to another, a `switch label` construct and dynamic labels, which allows labels to be compared and manipulated at run time, and label polymorphism, which allows classes to be parameterized by a security level and enables code re-use. Jif also provides support for tracking information flows through exceptions and other non-local control transfers.

Some of these features can be straightforwardly incorporated into Jif/split. The control-transfer mechanisms described in Section 5 are already sufficient to express exceptions and non-local control transfers. Likewise, the `actsfor` construct presents no technical difficulties, and could readily be included. Label polymorphism could be implemented (at the expense of code bloat) by duplicating the code for each instantiation of a parameterized class; we are investigating cleaner solutions. Dynamic labels appear to be the most difficult feature of Jif to provide in Jif/split. The difficulty is that our code-partitioning scheme relies on the label information to transform the program, but dynamic labels aren't known until run time. This problem we leave to future work.

11. Conclusion

This paper presents a language-based technique for protection of confidential data in a distributed computing environment with heterogeneously trusted hosts. Security policy annotations specified in the source program allow the splitter to partition the code across the network by extracting a suitable communication protocol. The resulting distributed system satisfies the confidentiality policies of principals involved without violating their trust in available hosts. The system also enforces integrity policies, which is needed because of the interaction between integrity and confidentiality in the presence of declassification. The Jif/split prototype demonstrates the feasibility of this architecture. Our experience with example programs has shown the benefits of expressing security policies explicitly in the programming language, particularly with respect to catching subtle bugs.

Collaborative computations carried out among users, businesses, and networked information systems continue to increase in complexity, yet there are currently no satisfactory methods for determining whether the end-to-end behavior of these computations respect the security needs of the participants. The work described in this paper is a novel approach that is a useful step towards solving this essential security problem.

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