Overview of the Candidates for the Password Hashing Competition

And Their Resistance Against Garbage-Collector Attacks

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Abstract. In this work we provide an overview of the candidates of the Password Hashing Competition (PHC) regarding to their functionality, e.g., client-independent update and server relief, their security, e.g., memory-hardness and side-channel resistance, and its general properties, e.g., memory usage and flexibility of the underlying primitives. Furthermore, we formally introduce two kinds of attacks, called Garbage-Collector and Weak Garbage-Collector Attack, exploiting the memory management of a candidate. Note that we consider all candidates which are not yet withdrawn from the competition.

Keywords: Password Hashing Competition, Overview, Garbage-Collector Attacks

1 Introduction

Typical adversaries against password-hashing algorithms (also called password scramblers) try plenty of password candidates in parallel, which becomes a lot more costly if they need a huge amount of memory for each candidate. On the other hand, the defender (the honest party) will only compute a single hash, and the memory-cost parameters should be chosen such that the required amount of memory is easily available to the defender.
But, memory-demanding password scrambling may also provide a completely new attack opportunity for an adversary, exploiting the handling of the target's machine memory. We introduce the two following attack models: (1) Garbage-Collector (GC) Attacks, where an adversary has access to the internal memory of the target's machine **after** the password scrambler terminated; and (2) Weak Garbage-Collector (WGC) Attacks, where the password itself (or a value derived from the password using an efficient function) is written to the internal memory and almost never overwritten during the runtime of the password scrambler. If a password scrambler is vulnerable in either one of the attack models, it is likely to

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significantly reduce the effort for testing a password candidate. The motivation for these attack types stems from the existence of side-channel attacks which are able to e.g., (1) extract cryptographic secrets exploiting a buffer over-read in the implementation of the TLS protocol (Heartbleed) [11] of the OpenSSL library [36], (2) extract sensitive data on single-core architectures [1,2,3,4,19,25], (3) gain coarse cache-based data on symmetric multi-processing (SMP, multi-core) architectures [30], and (4) to attack SMP architectures extracting a secret key over a cross-VM side channel [37].

Before we present a formal definition of our attack types, we briefly discuss two basic strategies of how to design a memory-demanding password scrambler:

Type-A: Allocating a huge amount of memory which is rarely overwritten.
Type-B: Allocating a reasonable amount of memory which is overwritten multiple times.

The primary goal of the former type of algorithms is to increase the cost of dedicated password-cracking hardware, i.e., FPGAs and ASICs. However, algorithms following this approach do not provide high resistance against garbage-collector attacks, which are formally introduced in this work. The main goal of the second approach is to thwart GPU-based attacks by forcing a high amount of cache misses during the computation of the password hash. Naturally, algorithms following this approach provide some kind of built-in robustness against garbage-collector attacks.

Remark 1. For our theoretical consideration of the proposed attacks, we assume a natural implementation of the algorithms, e.g., we assume that, due to optimization, overwriting the internal state of an algorithm **after** its invocation is neglected.

2 (Weak) Garbage-Collector Attacks and their Application to ROMix and `scrypt`

In this section we first provide a definition of our attack models, i.e., the Garbage-Collector (GC) attack and the Weak Garbage-Collector (WGC) attack. For illustration, we first show that ROMix (the core of `scrypt` [26]) is vulnerable against a GC attack (this was already shown in [16], but without a formal definition of the GC attack), and second, we show that `scrypt` is also vulnerable against a WGC attack.

2.1 The (Weak) Garbage-Collector Attack

The basic idea of these attacks is to exploit the memory management of password scramblers based on the handling of the internal state or some single password-dependent value. More detailed, the goal of an adversary is to find a valid password candidate based on some knowledge gained from observing the memory

used by an algorithm, whereas the test for validity of the candidate requires significantly less time/memory in comparison to the original algorithm. Next, we formally define the term Garbage-Collector Attack.

Definition 1 (Garbage-Collector Attack). *Let $PS_G(\cdot)$ be a memory-consuming password scrambler that depends on a memory-cost parameter G and let Q be a positive constant. Furthermore, let v denote the internal state of $PS_G(\cdot)$ after its termination. Let $\mathcal{A}$ be a computationally unbounded but always halting adversary conducting a garbage-collector attack. We say that $\mathcal{A}$ is successful if some knowledge about v reduces the runtime of $\mathcal{A}$ for testing a password candidate x from $\mathcal{O}(PS_G(x))$ to $\mathcal{O}(f(x))$ with $\mathcal{O}(f(x)) \lll \mathcal{O}(PS_G(x))/Q, \forall x \in \{0,1\}^*$.*

In the following we define the Weak Garbage-Collector Attack (WGCA).

Definition 2 (Weak Garbage-Collector Attack). *Let $PS_G(\cdot)$ be a password scrambler that depends on a memory-cost parameter G, and let $F(\cdot)$ be an underlying function of $PS_G(\cdot)$ that can be efficiently computed. We say that an adversary $\mathcal{A}$ is successful in terms of a weak garbage-collector attack if a value $y = F(pwd)$ remains in memory during (almost) the entire runtime of $PS_G(pwd)$, where pwd denotes the secret input.*

An adversary that is capable of reading the internal memory of a password scrambler during its invocation, gains knowledge about y. Thus, it can reduce the effort for filtering invalid password candidates by just computing $y' = F(x)$ and checking whether $y = y'$, where x denotes the current password candidate. Note that the function F can also be given by the identity function. Then, the plain password remains in memory, rendering WGC attacks trivial (see Section 2.2 for a trivial WGC attack on `scrypt`).

2.2 (Weak) Garbage-Collector Attacks on `scrypt`

Garbage-Collector Attack on ROMix. Algorithm 1 describes the necessary details of the `scrypt` password scrambler together with its core function ROMix. The pre- and post-whitening steps are given by one call (each) of the standardized key-derivation function PBKDF2 [21], which we consider as a single call to a cryptographically secure hash function. The function ROMix takes the initial state x and the memory-cost parameter G as inputs. First, ROMix initializes an array v of size $G \cdot n$ by iteratively applying a cryptographic hash function H (see Lines 20-23), where n denotes the output size of H in bits. Second, ROMix accesses the internal state at randomly computed points j to update the password hash (see Lines 24-27).
It is easy to see that the value v_0 is a plain hash (using PBKDF2) of the original secret *pwd* (see Lines 10 and 21 for $i = 0$). Further, from the overall structure of `scrypt` and ROMix it follows that the internal memory is written once (Lines 20-23) but never overwritten . Thus, all values $v_0, \ldots, v_{G-1}$ can be accessed by a

Algorithm 1 The algorithm `scrypt` [26] and its core operation ROMix.

`scrypt`

Input:
  pwd {Password}
  s {Salt}
  G {Cost Parameter}
Output: x {Password Hash}
10: $x \leftarrow \text{PBKDF2}(pwd, s, 1, 1)$
11: $x \leftarrow \text{ROMix}(x, G)$
12: $x \leftarrow \text{PBKDF2}(pwd, x, 1, 1)$
13: **return** x

ROMix

Input:
  x {Initial State}
  G {Cost Parameter}
Output: x {Hash value}
20: **for** $i = 0, \ldots, G-1$ **do**
21: $v_i \leftarrow x$
22: $x \leftarrow H(x)$
23: **end for**
24: **for** $i = 0, \ldots, G-1$ **do**
25: $j \leftarrow x \bmod G$
26: $x \leftarrow H(x \oplus v_j)$
27: **end for**
28: **return** x

garbage-collector adversary $\mathcal{A}$ after the termination of `scrypt`. For each password candidates pwd', $\mathcal{A}$ can now simply compute $x' \leftarrow \text{PBKDF2}(pwd')$ and check whether $x' = v_0$. If so, pwd' is a valid preimage. Thus, $\mathcal{A}$ can test each possible candidate in $\mathcal{O}(1)$, rendering an attack against `scrypt` (or especially ROMix) practical (and even memory-less).
As a possible countermeasure, one can simply overwrite $v_0, \ldots, v_{G-1}$ after running ROMix. Nevertheless, this step might be removed by a compiler due to optimization, since it is algorithmically ineffective.

Weak Garbage-Collector Attack on `scrypt`. In Line 12 of Algorithm 1, `scrypt` invokes the key-derivation function PBKDF2 the second time using again the password pwd as input again. Thus, pwd has to be stored in memory during the entire invocation of `scrypt`, which implies that `scrypt` is vulnerable to WGC attacks.

3 Overview

In this section we provide an overview of the general properties of all non-withdrawn PHC candidates (see Tables 1 and 2), as well as their security properties (see Table 3).

	Algorithm	Based On	Memory Usage		Parallel	Primitive		Mode
			RAM	ROM		BC/SC/PERM	HF	
Finalists	Argon	AES	1 kB - 1 GB	-	-	AES (5R)	BLAKE2b	-
	Argon2d		250 MB - 4 GB	-	✓	BLAKE2b (CF, 2R)	BLAKE2b	-
	Argon2i		1 GB - 6 GB	-	✓	BLAKE2b (CF, 2R)	BLAKE2b	-
	battcrypt	Blowfish/`bcrypt`	128 kB - 128 MB	-	part.	Blowfish-CBC	SHA-512	-
	Catena-DBG	DBG	4 MB		part.	-	BLAKE2b/BLAKE2b-1	-
	Catena-BRG	BRG	128 MB	-	part.	-	BLAKE2b/BLAKE2b-1	-
	Lyra2	Sponge	400 MB - 1 GB	-	✓	BLAKE2b (CF)/(BlaMka)	-	-
	Makwa	Squarings	negl.	-	✓	-	SHA-256	HMAC_DRBG
	Parallel		negl.	-	✓	-	SHA-512	-
	POMELO		(8 KB, 256 GB)	-	✓	-	-	-
	Pufferfish	mod. Blowfish/`bcrypt`	4 kB - 16 kB	-	-	mod. Blowfish	SHA-512	HMAC
	yescrypt	`scrypt`	3 MB	3 GB	part.	Salsa20/8	SHA-256	PBKDF2 HMAC
Non-Finalists	AntCrypt		32 kB	-	part.	-	SHA-512	-
	CENTRIFUGE		2 MB	-	-	AES-256	SHA-512	-
	EARWORM		-	2 GB	✓	AES (1R)	SHA-256	PBKDF2 HMAC
	Gambit	Sponge	50 MB	-	-	Keccak$_f$	-	-
	Lanarea DF		256 B	-	-	-	BLAKE2b	-
	MCS_PHS		negl.	-	-	-	MCSSHA-8	-
	ocrypt	`scrypt`	1 MB - 1 GB	-	-	ChaCha	CubeHash	-
	PolyPassHash	Shamir Sec. Sharing	negl.	-	-	AES	SHA-256	-
	Rig	BRG	15 MB	-	part.	-	BLAKE2b	-
	`scrypt`		1 GB	-	-	Salsa20/8	-	PBKDF2 HMAC
	schvrch		8 MB	-	part.	-	-	-
	`Tortuga`	Sponge & recursive Feistel	○	-		Turtle	-	-
	SkinnyCat	BRG	○	-	-	-	SHA-*/BLAKE2*	-
	TwoCats	BRG	○	-	✓	-	SHA-*/BLAKE2*	-
	Yarn		○	-	part.	BLAKE2b (CF), AES	-	-

Table 1. Overview of PHC candidates and their general properties (Part 1). The values in the column "Memory Usage" are taken from the authors recommendation for password hashing or are marked as '○' if no recommendation exists. The entry 'A(CF)' denotes that only the compression function of algorithm A is used. An entry A(XR) denotes that an algorithm A is reduced to X rounds. The `scrypt` password scrambler is just added for comparison. If an algorithm can only be partially computed in parallel, we marked the corresponding entry with 'part.'. Except for PolyPassHash, all other algorithms are iteration-based. *Legend:* BC – block cipher, SC – stream cipher, PERM – keyless permutation, HF – hash function, BRG – bit-reversal graph, DBG – double-butterfly graph.

	Algorithm	CIU	SR	FPO	Flexible
Finalists	Argon	✓	✓	-	✓
	Argon2d	✓	✓	-	✓
	Argon2i	✓	✓	-	✓
	battcrypt	✓	✓	-	part.
	Catena	✓	✓	-	✓
	Lyra2	✓	✓	-	part.
	Makwa	part.	✓	-	part.
	Parallel	✓	✓	-	✓
	POMELO	-	-	-	-
	Pufferfish	-	✓	-	part.
	yescrypt	✓	✓	-	✓
Non-Finalists	AntCrypt	✓	-	✓	part.
	CENTRIFUGE	-	-	-	✓
	EARWORM	-	✓	-	-
	Gambit	-	✓	opt.	part.
	Lanarea DF	-	✓	-	✓
	MCS_PHS	-	✓	-	part.
	ocrypt	-	-	-	✓
	PolyPassHash	✓	-	-	✓
	Rig	✓	✓	-	✓
	`scrypt`	-	-	-	✓
	schvrch	-	-	-	-
	`Tortuga`	-	-	-	-
	SkinnyCat	-	✓	-	✓
	TwoCats	✓	✓	-	✓
	Yarn	-	✓	-	-

Table 2. Overview of PHC candidates and their general properties (Part 2). Even if the authors of a scheme do not claim to support client-independent update (CIU) or server relief (SR), we checked for the possibility and marked the corresponding entry in the table with '✓' or 'part.' if possible or possible under certain requirements, respectively. Note that we say that an algorithm does not support SR when it requires the whole state to be transmitted to the server. Moreover, we say that an algorithm does not support CIU if any additional information to the password hash itself is required. Note that Catena refers to both instantiations, i.e., Catena-BRG and Catena-DBG. *Legend:* CIU – client-independent update, SR – server relief, KDF – key-derivation function (requires outputs to be pseudorandom), FPO – floating-point operations, Flexible – underlying primitive can be replaced.

	Algorithm	Type	Memory-Hardness	KDF	GCA Res.	WGCA Res.	SCA Res.	Security Analysis	Shortcut
Finalists	Argon	B	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	✓	-
	Argon2d	B	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	✓	-
	Argon2i	B	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	-
	battcrypt	B	✓	✓	✓	-	-	✓*	-
	Catena-BRG	B	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	-
	Catena-DBG	B	λ	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	-
	Lyra2	B	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	✓	-
	Makwa	-	-	✓	✓	✓	part.	✓	✓
	Parallel	-	-	✓	✓	-	✓	✓*	-
	POMELO	B	✓	✓	✓	✓	part.	✓*	-
	Pufferfish	B	✓*	✓	✓	✓	-	✓*	-
	yescrypt	A	ROM-port, sequential	✓	✓*	✓*	-	✓*	-
Non-Finalists	AntCrypt	B	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓*	-
	CENTRIFUGE	A	✓*	-	-	-	✓	✓*	-
	EARWORM	B	ROM-port	-	✓	-	✓	✓	-
	Gambit	B	✓*	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓*	-
	Lanarea DF	B	✓*	✓	✓	✓	part.	✓*	-
	MCS_PHS	-	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	-
	ocrypt	B	✓*	✓	✓	✓	-	✓*	-
	PolyPassHash	-	-	-	-	-	-	✓	✓
	Rig	B	λ	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	-
	`scrypt`	A	sequential	✓	-	-	-	✓	-
	schvrch	B	-	-	✓	✓	✓	✓*	-
	`Tortuga`	B	✓*	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓*	-
	SkinnyCat	A	sequential	✓	-	-	part.	✓	-
	TwoCats	B	sequential	✓	✓	✓	part.	✓	-
	Yarn	B	✓*	-	✓	-	-	✓*	-

Table 3. Overview over the security properties of PHC candidates. The column "Type" denotes the type of the underlying memory-demanding design (see Section 1) and marking an algorithm by "-" denotes that it is not designed to be memory-demanding. An entry supplemented by '*' (Memory-Hardness and Security Analysis), denotes that there exists no sophisticated analysis or proof for the given claim/assumption. For SCA Res., 'part.' (partial) means that only one or more parts (but not all) provide resistance against side-channel attacks. Note that yescrypt provides resistance against (W)GC attacks only under certain requirements. *Legend:* GCA Res. – resistant against garbage-collector attacks (see Definition 1), WGCA Res. – resistant against weak garbage-collector attacks (see Definition 2), SCA Res. – resistant against side-channel attacks, ROM-port – special form of memory hardness [13], Shortcut – is it possible to bypass the main (memory and time) effort of an algorithm by knowing additional parameters, e.g., the Blum integers p and q for Makwa which are used to compute the modulo n.

Remark 2. Note that we do not claim completeness for Table 3. For example, we defined a scheme not to be resistant against side-channel attacks if it maintains a password-dependent memory-access pattern. Nevertheless, there exist several other types of side-channel attacks such as those based on power or acoustic analysis.

4 Resistance of PHC Candidates against (W)GC Attacks

In this section we briefly discuss potential weaknesses of each PHC candidate regarding to garbage-collector (GC) and weak-garbage collector (WGC) attacks or argue why it provides resistance against such attacks. Note that we assume the reader to be familiar with the internals of the candidates since we only concentrate on those parts of the candidates that are relevant regarding to GC/WGC attacks.

AntCrypt [14]. The internal state of AntCrypt is initialized with the secret *pwd*. During the hashing process, the state is overwritten multiple times (based on the parameter `outer_rounds` and `inner_rounds`), which thwarts GC attacks. Moreover, since *pwd* is used only to initialize the internal state, WGC attacks are not applicable.

Argon/Argon2d/Argon2i [7]. First, the internal state derived from *pwd* is the input to the padding phase. After the padding phase, the internal state is overwritten by applying the functions `ShuffleSlices` and `SubGroups` at least R times. Based on this structure, and since *pwd* is used only to initialize the state, Argon is not vulnerable to GC/WGC attacks. Within Argon2d and Argon2i, after hashing the password and salt among other inputs, the internal state is t times overwritten using the compression function G. Thus, Argon2d and Argon2i provide a similar resistance against (W)GC attacks as Argon.

battcrypt [32]. Within battcrypt, the plain password is used only once, namely to generate a value $key = \text{SHA-512}(\text{SHA-512}(salt \mid\mid pwd))$. The value *key* is then used to initialize the internal state, which is expanded afterwards. In the *Work* phase, the internal state is overwritten `t_cost`×`m_size` times using password-dependent indices. Thus, GC attacks are not applicable.

Note that the value *key* is used in the three phases *Initialize blowfish*, *Initialize data*, and *Finish*, whereas it is overwritten in the phase *Finish* the first time. Note that the main effort for battcrypt is given by the *Work* phase. Thus, one can assume that one iteration of the outer loop (iterating over *t_cost_upgrade*) lasts long enough for a WGC adversary to launch the following attack:
For each password candidates x and the known value *salt*, compute $key' = \text{SHA512}(\text{SHA512}(salt \mid\mid x))$ and check whether $key' = key$. If so, mark x as a valid password candidate.

Catena *[16].* Catena has two instantiations Catena-BRG and Catena-DBG, which are based on a (G, λ)-Bit-Reversal Graph and a (G, λ)-Double-Butterfly Graph, respectively. Both instantiations use an array of $G = 2^g$ elements each as their internal state. Before this state is initialized, both instances invoke a smaller variant of the underlying graph-based function using $2^{g/2}$ elements. Thus, the internal state is overwritten at least $2\lambda + 1$ times for Catena-BRG and at least $2(\lambda \cdot (2\log_2(G) - 1)) + 1$ times for Catena-DBG. Note that we write "at least" since Catena is designed to invoke an additional function based on random memory accesses which can overwrite a certain number of state words. Nevertheless, when considering Catena-BRG, a GC adversary with access to the state can reduce the effort for testing a password candidate by a factor of $1/(2\lambda + 1)$. When considering Catena-DBG, the reduction of the computational cost of an adversary is given by a factor of $1/(2(\lambda \cdot (2\log_2(G) - 1)) + 1)$. Since even a *reduction factor* of $1/2$ would imply a password source with only one less bit of entropy, we consider both instantiations of Catena to be resistant against these attacks.
For Catena-BRG as well as Catena-DBG, the password *pwd* is used only to initialize the internal state. Thus, both instantiations provide resistance against WGC attacks.

CENTRIFUGE *[5].* The internal state M of size `p_mem`$\times$`outlen` byte is initialized with a seed S derived from the password and the salt as follows: $S = H(s_L \mid\mid s_R)$, where $s_L \leftarrow H(pwd \mid\mid len(pwd))$ and $s_R \leftarrow H(\text{salt} \mid\mid len(\text{salt}))$. Furthermore, S is used as the initialization vector (IV) and the key for the CFB encryption. The internal M is written once and later only accessed in a password-dependent manner. Thus, a GC adversary can launch the following attack:

1. receive the internal state M (or at least $M[1]$) from memory
2. for each password candidate x:
   (a) initialization (seeding and S-box)
   (b) compute the first table entry $M'[1]$ (during the *build table* step)
   (c) check whether $M'[1] = M[1]$

The final step of CENTRIFUGE is to encrypt the internal state, requiring the key and the IV, which therefore must remain in memory during the invocation of CENTRIFUGE. Thus, the following WGC attack is applicable:

1. Compute $s_R \leftarrow H(salt \mid\mid len(salt))$
2. For every password candidate x:
   (a) Compute $s'_L \leftarrow H(x \mid\mid len(x))$ and $S' = H(s'_L \mid\mid s_R)$, and compare if $S' = IV$
   (b) If yes: mark x as a valid password candidate
   (c) If no: go to Step 2

EARWORM *[17].* EARWORM maintains an array called *arena* which consists of $2^{m\_cost} \times L \times W$ 128-bit blocks, where $W = 4$ and $L = 64$ are recommended by the authors. This read-only array is randomly initialized (using an additional secret input which has to be constant within a given system) and used as AES round keys. Since the values within this array do not depend on the secret *pwd*, knowledge about *arena* does not help any malicious garbage collector. Within the main function of EARWORM (WORKUNIT), an internal state *scratchpad* is updated multiple times using password-dependent accesses to *arena*. Thus, a GC adversary cannot profit from knowledge about *scratchpad*, rendering GC attacks not applicable.

Within the function WORKUNIT, the value *scratchpad_tmpbuf* is derived directly from the password as follows:

$$scratchpad\_tmpbuf \leftarrow \mathrm{EWPRF}(pwd, 01 \mid\mid salt, 16W),$$

where EWPRF denotes $\mathrm{PBKDF2}_{\text{HMAC-SHA256}}$ with the first input denoting the secret key. This value is updated only at the end of WORKUNIT using the internal state. Thus, it has to be in memory during almost the whole invocation of EARWORM, rendering the following WGC attack possible: For each password candidate x and the known value *salt*, compute $y = \mathrm{EWPRF}(x, 01 \mid\mid salt, 16W)$ and check whether $scratchpad\_tmpbuf = y$. If so, mark x as a valid password candidate.

***Gambit** [28].* Gambit bases on a duplex-sponge construction [6] maintaining two internal states S and Mem, where S is used to subsequently update Mem. First, password and salt are absorbed into the sponge and after one call to the underlying permutation, the squeezed value is written to the internal state Mem and processed r times (number of words in the ratio of S). The output after the r steps is optionally XORed with an array lying in the ROM. After that, Mem is absorbed into S again. This step is executed t times, where t denotes the time-cost parameter. The size of Mem is given by m, the memory-cost parameter. Continuously updating the states Mem and S thwarts GC attacks. Moreover, since *pwd* is used only to initialize the state within the sponge construction, WGC attacks are not applicable.

Lanarea DF *[24].* Lanarea DF maintains a matrix (internal state) consisting of $16 \cdot 16 \cdot m\_cost$ byte values, where m_cost denotes the memory-cost parameter. After the password-independent setup phase, the password is processed by the internal pseudorandom function producing the array $(h_0, \ldots, h_{31})$, which determines the positions on which the internal state is accessed during the core phase (thus, allowing cache-timing attacks). In the core phase, the internal state is overwritten $t\_cost \times m\_cost \times 16$ times, rendering GC attacks impossible. Moreover, the array $(h_0, \ldots, h_{31})$ is overwritten $t\_cost \times m\_cost$ times which thwarts WGC attacks.

Lyra2 [20]. The Lyra2 password scrambler (and KDF) is based on a duplex sponge construction maintaining a state H, which is initialized with the password, the salt, and some tweak in the first step of its algorithm. The authors indicate that the password can be overwritten from this point on, rendering WGC attacks impossible. Moreover, Lyra2 maintains an internal state M, which is overwritten (updated using values from the sponge state H) multiple times. Thus, GC attacks are not applicable for Lyra2.

Makwa *[29].* Makwa has not been designed to be a memory-demanding password scrambler. Its strength is based on a high number of squarings modulo a composite (Blum) integer n. The plain (or hashed) password is used twice to initialize the internal state, which is then processed by squarings modulo n. Thus, neither GC nor WGC attacks are applicable for Makwa.

MCS_PHS [23]. Depending on the size of the output, MCS_PHS applies iterated hashing operations, reducing the output size of the hash function by one byte in each iteration – starting from 64 bytes. Note that the memory-cost parameter m_cost is used only to increase the size of the initial chaining value T_0. The secret input *pwd* is used once, namely when computing the value T_0 and can be deleted afterwards, rendering WGC attacks not applicable. Furthermore, since the output of MCS_PHS is computed by iteratively applying the underlying hash function (without handling an internal state which has to be placed in memory), GC attacks are not possible.

ocrypt [15]. The basic idea of ocrypt is similar to that of `scrypt`, besides the fact that the random memory accesses are determined by the output of a stream cipher (ChaCha) instead of a hash function cascade. The output of the stream cipher determines which element of the internal state is updated, which consists of $2^{17+m_{cost}}$ 64-bit words. During the invocation of ocrypt, the password is used only twice: (1) as input to CubeHash, generating the key for the stream cipher and (2) to initialize the internal state. Neither the password nor the output of CubeHash are used again after the initialization. Thus, ocrypt is not vulnerable to WGC attacks.
The internal state is processed $2^{17+t_{cost}}$ times, where in each step one word of the state is updated. Since the indices of the array elements accessed depend only on the password and not on the content, GC attacks are not possible by observing the internal state after the invocation of ocrypt.

Remark 3. Note that the authors of ocrypt claim side-channel resistance since the indices of the array elements are chosen in a password-independent way. But, as the password (beyond other inputs) is used to derive the key of the underlying stream cipher, this assumption does not hold, i.e., the output of the stream cipher depends on the password, rendering (theoretical) cache-timing attacks possible.

Parallel [33]. Parallel has not been designed to be a memory-demanding password scrambler. Instead, it is highly optimized to be comuted in parallel. First,

a value key is derived from the secret input pwd and the salt by

$$key = \text{SHA-512}(\text{SHA-512}(salt) \mid\mid pwd).$$

The value key is used (without being changed) during the Clear work phase of Parallel. Since this phase defines the main effort for computing the password hash, it is highly likely that a WGC adversary can gain knowledge about key. Then, the following WGC attack is possible: For each password candidate x and the known value $salt$, compute $y = \text{SHA-512}(\text{SHA-512}(salt) \mid\mid x)$ and check whether $key = y$. If so, mark x as a valid password candidate. Since the internal state is only given by the subsequently updated output of SHA-512, GC attacks are not applicable for Parallel.

PolyPassHash [9]. PolyPassHash denotes a threshold system with the goal to protect an individual password (hash) until a certain number of correct passwords (and their corresponding hashes) are known. Thus, it aims at protecting an individual password hash within a file containing a lot of password hashes, rendering PolyPassHash not to be a password scrambler itself. The protection lies in the fact that one cannot easily verify a target hash without knowing a minimum number of hashes (this technical approach is referred to as PolyHashing). In the PolyHashing construction, one maintains a (k, n)-threshold cryptosystem, e.g., Shamir Secret Sharing. Each password hash $h(pwd_i)$ is blinded by a share $s(i)$ for $1 \leq i \leq k \leq n$. The value $z_i = h(pwd_i) \oplus s(i)$ is stored in a so-called PolyHashing store at index i. The shares $s(i)$ are not stored on disk. But, to be efficient, a legal party, e.g., a server of a social networking system, has to store at least k shares in the RAM to on-the-fly compare incoming requests on-the-fly. Thus, this system only provides security against adversaries which are only able to read the hard disk but not the volatile memory (RAM).

Since the secret (of the threshold cryptosystem) or at least the k shares have to be in memory, GC attacks are possible by just reading the corresponding memory. The password itself is only hashed and blinded by $s(i)$. Thus, if an adversary is able to read the shares or the secret from memory, it can easily filter wrong password candidates, i.e., makeing PolyPassHash vulnerable against WGC attacks.

POMELO [35]. POMELO contains three update functions $F(S, i), G(S, i, j)$, and $H(S, i)$, where S denotes the internal state and i and j the indices at which the state is accessed. Those functions update at most two state words per invocation. The functions F and G provide deterministic random-memory accesses (determined by the cost parameter t_cost and m_cost), whereas the function H provides random-memory accesses determined by the password, rendering POMELO at least partially vulnerable to cache-time attacks. Since the password is used only to initialize the state, which itself is overwritten $3 \cdot 2^{t\_cost} + 2$ times on average, POMELO provides resistance against GC and WGC attacks.

Pufferfish [18]. The main memory used within Pufferfish is given by a two-dimensional array consisting of 2^{5+m_cost} 512-bit values, which is regularly accessed during the password hash generation. The first steps of Pufferfish are given by hashing the password. The result is then overwritten $2^{5+m\_cost} + 3$ times, rendering WGC attacks not possible. The state word containing the hash of the password ($S[0][0]$) is overwritten 2^{t_cost} times. Thus, there does not exist a shortcut for an adversary, rendering GC attacks impossible.

Rig [10]. Rig maintains two arrays a (sequential access) and k (bit-reversal access). Both arrays are iteratively overwritten $r \cdot n$ times, where r denotes the round parameter and n the iteration parameter. Thus, rendering Rig resistant against GC attacks. Note that within the setup phase, a value α is computed by

$$\alpha = H_1(x) \quad \text{with} \quad x = pwd \mid\mid len(pwd) \mid\mid \ldots,$$

Since the first α (which is directly derived from the password) is only used during the initialization phase, WGC attacks are not applicable.

schvrch *[34].* The password scrambler *schvrch* maintains an internal state of $256 \cdot 64$-bit words (2 kB), which is initialized with the password, salt and their corresponding lengths, and the final output length. After this step, the password can be overwritten in memory. This state is processed t_cost times by a function $revolve()$, which affects in each invocation all state words. Next, after applying a function $stir()$ (again, changing all state entries), it expands the state to m_cost times the state length. Each part (of size state length) is then processed to update the internal state, producing the hash after each part was processed. Thus, the state word initially containing the password is overwritten $t\_cost \cdot m\_cost$ times, rendering GC attacks impossible. Further, neither the password nor a value directly derived from it is required during the invocation of *schvrch*, which thwarts WGC attacks.

`Tortuga` [31]. GC and WGC attacks are not possible for `Tortuga` since the password is absorbed to the underlying sponge structure, which is then processed at least two times by the underlying keyed permutation (Turtle block cipher [8]), and neither the password nor a value derived from it has to be in memory.

SkinnyCat and TwoCats [12]. SkinnyCat is a subset of the TwoCats scheme optimized for implementation. Both algorithms maintain a 256-bit state *state* and an array of 2^{m_cost+8} 32-bit values (mem). During the initialization, a value PRK is computed as follows:

$$PRK = Hash(len(pwd), len(salt), \ldots, pwd, salt).$$

The value PRK is used in the initialization phase and first overwritten in the forelast step of SkinnyCat (when the function *addIntoHash()* is invoked). Thus, an adversary that gains knowledge about the value PRK is able to launch the following WGC attack: For each password candidates x and the known value

$salt$, compute $PRK' = Hash(len(x), len(salt), \ldots, x, salt)$ and check whether $PRK = PRK'$. If so, mark x as a valid password candidate.

Within TwoCats, the value PRK is overwritten at an early state of the hash value generation. TwoCats maintains consists of a garlic application loop from $startMemCost = 0$ to $stopMemCost$, where $stopMemCost$ is a user-defined value. In each iteration, the value PRK is overwritten, rendering WGC attacks for TwoCats not possible.

Both SkinnyCat and TwoCats consist of two phases each. The first phase updates the first half of the memory (early memory) $mem[0, \ldots, memlen/(2 \cdot blocklen) - 1]$, where the memory is accessed in a password-independent manner. The second phase updates the second half of the memory $mem[memlen/(2 \cdot blocklen), \ldots, memlen/blocklen - 1]$, where the memory is accessed in a password-dependent manner. Thus, both schemes provide only partial resistance against cache-timing attacks. For SkinnyCat, the early memory is never overwritten, rendering the following GC attack possible:

1. Obtain $mem[0, \ldots, memlen/(2 \cdot blocklen) - 1]$ and PRK from memory
2. Create a state $state'$ and an array mem' of the same size as $state$ and mem, respectively
3. Set $fromAddr = slidingReverse(1) \cdot blocklen, prevAddr = 0$, and $toAddr = blocklen$
4. For each password candidate x:
   (a) Compute PRK' as described using the password candidate x
   (b) Initialize $state'$ and mem' as prescribed using PRK'
   (c) Compute $state'[0] = (state'[0] + mem'[1]) \oplus mem'[fromAddr++]$
   (d) Compute $state'[0] = \text{ROTATE\_LEFT}(state'[0], 8)$
   (e) Compute $mem'[blocklen + 1] = state'[0]$
   (f) Check whether $mem'[blocklen + 1] = mem[blocklen + 1]$
   (g) If yes: mark x as a valid password candidate
   (h) If no: go to Step 4.

Note that this attack does not work for TwoCats since an additional feature in comparison to SkinnyCat is that the early memory is overwritten.

Yarn [22]. Yarn maintains two arrays $state$ and $memory$, consisting of par and 2^{m_cost} 16-byte blocks, respectively. The array $state$ is initialized using the salt. Afterwards, $state$ is processed using the BLAKE2b compression function with the password pwd as message, resulting in an updated array $state1$. This array has to be stored in memory since it is used as input to the final phse of Yarn. The array $state$ is expanded afterwards and further, it is used to initialize the array $memory$. Next, $memory$ is updated continuously. Both $memory$ and $state$ are overwritten continuously. The array $state1$ is overwritten at the lastest in the final phase of Yarn. Thus, GC attacks are not possible for Yarn. Nevertheless, the array $state1$ is directly derived from pwd and stored until the final phase occurs. Thus, the following WGC attack is possible:

1. Compute $h \leftarrow$ Blake2b_GenerateInitialState($outlen, salt, pers$) as in the first phase of Yarn
2. For each password candidate x:
   (a) Compute $h' \leftarrow$ Blake2b_ConsumeInput(h, x)
   (b) Compute *state1'*$\leftarrow$ Truncate($h', outlen$) and check whether *state1'* = *state1*

yescrypt [27]. The yescrypt password scrambler maintains two lookup tables V and $VROM$, where V is located in the RAM and $VROM$ in the ROM. Since our attacks only target the RAM, we neglect the lookup table $VROM$ for our analysis. Depending on the flag `YESCRYPT_RW`, the behaviour of the memory management in the RAM can be switched from "write once, read many" to "read-write", which leads to (at least) partial overwriting of V using random-memory accesses. Further, yescrypt provides (among others) a flag `YESCRYPT_WORM`, which is used to enhance the `scrypt` compatibility mode by enabling a parameter t (controlling the computational time of yescrypt) and pre- and post-hashing (whereas pre-hashing is used to overwrite the password before any time- and memory-consuming action is performed). Additionally, yescrypt provides client-independent updates increasing the time consumption (parameter g). In the following, we briefly analyze under which requirements (parameter sets) yescrypt provides resistance to (W)GC attacks.

No flags are set and g = 0: Then, yescrypt runs in `scrypt` compatibilitry mode (when used without ROM) and thus, the same attacks are applicable as described in Section 2.2.

No flags are set and g >= 0: Then, yescrypt is vulnerable to WGC attacks. Thus, even if $g > 0$, the password remains in memory for one full invocation of the time- and memory-consuming core of yescrypt since pre- and post-hashing does not overwrite the password.

`YESCRYPT_RW` is set and g = 0: Then, the second loop of ROMix (Lines 6-9) performs less than N writes to V if $t = 0$ or if $t = 1$ and $N \geq 8$. Since V is not fully overwritten, this allows for GC attacks similar to the ones explained for `scrypt` (but with higher effort since V is at least partially overwritten). For $t > 1$, it is most likely that the whole internal state V is overwritten, hence, we say that yescrypt provides GC resistance in this case.

g > 0: Then, yescrypt provides resistance against GC attacks since V is overwritten at least once in the second invocation of the first loop of ROMix (Lines 2-5). This holds independently from any flags or the parameter t.

Smaller instance called before: Under the following requirements, a 64-times smaller instance of yescrypt is invoked before the full yescrypt:
- `YESCRYPT_RW` is set.
- $p \geq 1$, where p denotes the number of threads running in parallel.
- $N/p \geq 256$, where N denotes the memory size of the state in the RAM, i.e., size of V.
- $N/p * r \geq 2^{17}$, where r denotes the memory per thread.

If these conditions hold, yescrypt overwrites the password significantly fast, hence, providing resistance against WGC attacks.

5 Conclusion

In this work we provided an overview (functionality, security, general properties) of the candidates of the Password Hashing Competition, which are not yet withdrawn. Further, we analyzed each algorithm regarding to its vulnerability against garbage-collector and weak garbage-collector attacks – two attack types introduced in this work. Even if both attacks require access to the memory on the target's machine, they show a potential weakness, which should be taken into consideration. As a results, we have shown GC attacks on CENTRIFUGE, PolyPassHash, `scrypt`, SkinnyCat, and yescrypt. Additionally, we have shown that WGC attacks are applicable to battcrypt, CENTRIFUGE, EARWORM, Parallel, PolyPassHash, `scrypt`, SkinnyCat, Yarn, and yescrypt. Note that the attacks on yescrypt work only under certain requirements depending on the input parameter.

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