Accelerating Parallel Verification via Complementary Property Partitioning and Strategy Exploration

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***Abstract*—Industrial hardware verification tasks often require checking a large number of properties within a testbench. Verification tools often utilize parallelism to improve scalability, either in *portfolio* mode where different solver strategies run concurrently, or in *partitioning* mode where disjoint property subsets are verified independently. While most tools focus solely upon reducing end-to-end wall-time, reducing overall CPU-time is a comparably-important goal influencing power consumption, competition for available machines, and IT costs. Portfolio approaches often degrade into highly-redundant work across processes, where similar strategies address properties in nearly-identical order. Partitioning should take *property affinity* into account, atomically verifying high-affinity properties to minimize redundant work of applying identical strategies on individual properties with nearly-identical logic cones. We improve multi-property parallel verification with respect to both wall- and CPU-time. We extend affinity-based partitioning to guarantee *complete* utilization of available processes, with provable *partition quality*. We propose methods to minimize redundant computation, and dynamically optimize work distribution. We deploy our techniques in a sequential redundancy removal framework, using *localization* to solve non-inductive properties. Our techniques offer upto 3× speedup as demonstrated by extensive experiments.**

I. Introduction

Practical hardware and software verification often mandates checking a large number of properties on a given design. For example, *functional verification* involves checking a suite of low-level assertions and higher-level encompassing properties. *Equivalence checking* compares pairwise equality of each output across two designs, yielding a distinct property per output. *Redundancy removal* requires proving many gate-equalities throughout a design, each comprising a distinct property.

Each property has a distinct minimal *cone of influence* (COI), or fan-in logic of the signals referenced in the property. Verification of a group of properties requires resources proportional to the collective COI size, which is often exponential (after lighter logic reductions). Each property adds distinct logic to the group's collective COI; *affinity* refers to the degree of common vs. distinct logic in the COI. *Atomic verification*[1] of a group of low-affinity properties is thus often significantly slower than solving them one-at-a-time. Conversely, atomic verification of a high-affinity group saves considerable verification resource, as the effort expended for one property can benefit the others without significantly slowing them down [1, 2]. Parallel verification resource can be optimized to leverage these facts using affinity-based *property partitioning* [3], where each parallel process, or *worker*, runs the same strategy on a different property group. An alternate way to accelerate verification is by using a parallel portfolio (*strategy exploration*), where the same property group is concurrently verified using a different strategy per worker, as depicted in Fig. 1. However, portfolio approaches often degrade into highly-redundant work across processes, where similar algorithms address properties in nearly-identical order.

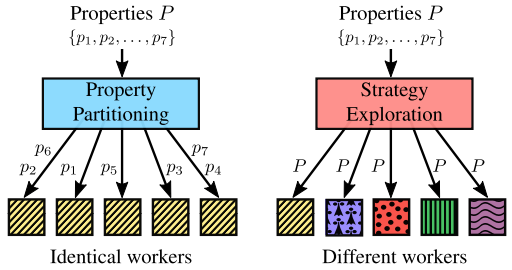


Fig. 1. Parallel verification: property partitioning vs. strategy exploration.

Contributions: We optimize parallel verification using complementary *property partitioning* and *strategy exploration*, in terms of both wall- and CPU-time. **(1)** We present a scalable property partitioning algorithm (Sect. III-A), extending [3] to guarantee *complete* utilization of available processes with provable partition quality. **(2)** We propose parallel scheduling improvements (Sect. III-B), such as resource-constrained irredundant group iteration, incremental repetition, and group decomposition to dynamically cope with more-difficult groups or slower workers. **(3)** We address irredundant strategy exploration of a localization portfolio in a sequential redundancy removal framework (Sect. IV), which we have found to be the most-scalable strategy to prove non-inductive redundancies. To our knowledge, this is the first published approach to mutually-optimize property partitioning and strategy exploration within a multi-property localization portfolio.

A. Related Work

Despite the prevalence of parallel verification tools and multi-property testbenches, little research has addressed mutual optimization of parallel partitioning and strategy exploration. Furthermore, most approaches optimize wall-time alone without considering CPU-time, treating additional CPUs as free horsepower to fill with slightly-modified strategies without attempting to minimize redundant computation.

Methods to group properties based on COI similarity are either computationally-prohibitive [1, 2, 4], or do not optimally

[1]*Atomic verification* refers to running a set of single-process verification engines (called a *strategy*) on a group of properties. *Serial verification* refers to beginning one atomic task after another finishes, using a single process. *Concurrent* or *parallel verification* refers to dispatching multiple atomic tasks on concurrently-running parallel processes.

utilize available parallel processes [3]. They may generate fewer groups than processes, or lose affinity guarantees when requiring *number of groups* as an algorithmic parameter.

Much prior work addresses ways to parallelize specific algorithms in a *single-property* context [5]–[7]. Other work incrementally reuses information between properties to accelerate specific algorithms [8]–[11]. These are complementary to our work, and can be used as strategies therein.

Much research has addressed sequential redundancy removal and localization. Various strategies including induction [12]–[14], simulation [15, 16], and synergistic transformation and verification algorithms [16, 17] have been proposed to scale the former, though mainly in a single-process context when solving non-inductive redundancies. Localization is a powerful scalability boost to property checking [18]–[21] and redundancy removal [14, 16, 22]. Prior work is focused mostly upon single-property single-process contexts [18]–[21], or solely upon parallel property partitioning [3]. These are complementary to our work: we extend state-of-the-art solutions for both, to mutually-optimized parallel verification.

II. Preliminaries

A. Basic Definitions

The design under verification is represented as a *netlist* N, which is a tuple $\langle\langle V, E\rangle, F\rangle$ where $\langle V, E\rangle$ is a directed graph with vertices V representing *gates*, and edges $E \subseteq V \times V$ representing interconnections between gates. Function $F : V \rightarrow types$ assigns vertices to gate types: constants, primary inputs, combinational logic such as *AND* gates, and sequential logic such as *registers*. A *state* is a valuation to the registers. Certain gates are labeled as *properties*. The *fan-in* (*fan-out*) of gate u is the set of gates which may be reached by traversing edges backward (forward) from u. The fan-in of property p is called the *cone of influence* (COI) of p. Registers and inputs in the COI are called *support variables*. The number of support variables in the COI is its *size*. A *merge* of gate u onto gate v consists of moving the output edges of u onto v, then eliminating u from the netlist by treating u as a rename for v. A *strongly connected component* (SCC) is a set of interconnected gates such that there is a non-empty directed path between every pair of gates in the same SCC.

B. Affinity Analysis

Property grouping algorithms represent support variable information as a *Boolean bitvector* per property [23]. Every support variable in the netlist is indexed to an unique position in the bitvector, set to "1" if and only if the support variable is in the COI of the property. These bitvectors may be compared to determine relative property *affinity*. Properties p_1, p_2 with bitvectors bv_1, bv_2 respectively have

$$0 \leq \text{affinity}(p_1, p_2) = 1 - \frac{\text{hamming}(bv_1, bv_2)}{\text{length}(bv_1)} \leq 1.0$$

where hamming(bv_1, bv_2) is the Hamming distance between bv_1 and bv_2, and length(bv_1) is the number of support variables in the netlist [3]. The *distance* between p_1, p_2 equals the Hamming distance between their bitvectors, i.e., dist$(p_1, p_2) =$ hamming(bv_1, bv_2). A *group* g is a set of properties, with a single property g^* therein representing its *center*. The *quality* $Q(g)$ of a group is the minimum affinity between any property in g vs. its center g^*:

$$Q(g) = \min(\{\text{affinity}(p, g^*) \mid \forall p \in g\})$$

It is desirable that property partitioning algorithms guarantee group quality to be greater than a specifiable threshold.

```
structural_grouping (Properties P, Netlist N, Level l, Affinity t)
1: Groups G = P  # each property in singleton group
2: if l ≥ 1 : grouping_level_1 (G, N)  # identical COI
3: if l ≥ 2 : grouping_level_2 (G, N, t)  # large SCCs in COI
4: if l ≥ 3 : grouping_level_3 (G, N, t)  # Hamming distance
5: return G  # return high-affinity groups
```

Fig. 2. Algorithm to group properties based on structural affinity [3].

C. High-Affinity Property Grouping

Three-leveled grouping [3] (Fig. 2) utilizes support bitvectors of properties, generating high-affinity groups based upon: a) *Level-1*: identical bitvectors; b) *Level-2*: common large SCCs in the COI; and c) *Level-3*: small Hamming distance between bitvectors, scalably identified by equivalence-classing *mapped* bitvectors using threshold-aware mapping functions. SCC computation has linear runtime [24]. Bitvectors are computed during a linear sweep of the netlist, and have size proportional to the number of SCCs plus non-SCC support variables. This entire process consumes near-linear runtime and memory in practice (a few seconds on netlists with millions of support variables and properties), when computing bitvectors in topological netlist order and garbage-collecting bitvectors whose values are no longer needed [23]. Straightforward grouping approaches such as pairwise-comparing property affinity are computationally prohibitive [23]. Bitvector equivalence-classing [3] has linear-runtime, enabling a scalable online partitioning algorithm with provable quality bounds [3].

Theorem 1 ([3])**.** *Level-1 grouping generates property groups G such that $\forall g \in G : Q(g) = 1.0$.*

Theorem 2 ([3])**.** *Given affinity t, level-2 grouping generates property groups G such that $\forall g \in G : Q(g) \geq t$.*

Theorem 3 ([3])**.** *Given affinity t, level-3 grouping generates property groups G such that $\forall g \in G : Q(g) \geq 3 * t - 2$.*

Note that desired number of property groups is not an algorithmic parameter; affinity analysis determines the optimal number of groups respecting configurable quality bounds. For more details on leveled grouping, we refer the reader to [3].

III. Parallel Verification

Parallel processing can improve verification wall-time via property partitioning and/or strategy exploration (Fig. 1). Existing tools often independently use these modes in different contexts, particularly strategy exploration first running qualitatively-different strategies in available workers (e.g.,

BMC, IC3, interpolation) then padding differently-configured identical strategies in the remaining processes (e.g., IC3 with different heuristics). The latter yields increasingly-redundant CPU-time for diminishing gains in wall-time. These modes need not be mutually-exclusive: a strategy could partition within a worker, and partitioning could use different strategies for different groups. This is effectively the mutual optimization explored in this paper, addressing the following challenges:

Property partitioning $\rightarrow$

P1 Some workers are not utilized if the number of high-affinity groups is less than available workers.

P2 Some workers finish their tasks and idle (no more partitions to dispatch) while others degrade wall-time solving large or difficult groups, or run on slower machines.

Strategy exploration $\rightarrow$

P3 Nearly-identical strategies verify the same properties concurrently yielding redundant computation; 2+ workers would solve the same property at nearly the same time.

P4 A worker gets stuck on the first difficult property inhibiting progress; easy properties go unexplored.

P5 When using a round-robin resource-constrained approach to avoid **P4**, a worker fails to solve a difficult property in the allocated time even after several repetitions.

A. Property Grouping Algorithm

Many organizations have large clusters of computers for load-balancing of tasks such as verification. The maximum number of available workers for a given task (n) is often known, e.g. the maximum number of organizational job submissions allowed per user, minus how many that user wishes to reserve for other tasks. Existing scalable grouping algorithms [3] may generate fewer high-affinity groups than n (**P1**). While partitioning a high-affinity group may yield redundant CPU-time (similar effort expended on nearly-identical COIs), it may benefit wall-time due to disparate difficulty of properties therein (e.g. one may be inductive, and another require deep sequential analysis). Traditional clustering algorithms can be configured to produce $\geq n$ groups, though are computationally prohibitive for online use and may not yield affinity guarantees if n does not align with the given netlist.

Fig. 3 shows our extension to leveled grouping [3] (Fig. 2), guaranteeing generation of at least $\mathsf{min}(n, |P|)$ provable-affinity groups. Each property is returned as a singleton if there are fewer than n properties. Otherwise, grouping is performed in three levels that iteratively generate fewer, larger groups. Later levels are skipped if the number of generated groups becomes less than n at any level. The algorithm then rebalances as needed by fine-grained affinity analysis: subdividing large or lower-affinity groups to generate at least $\mathsf{min}(n, |P|)$ property groups. As discussed in Sect. III-B, this procedure is beneficial even after initial partitioning to subdivide a difficult group into provably high-affinity subgroups.

The rebalancing algorithm is shown in Fig. 4. It subdivides groups based on the grouping level l_c that generated fewer groups than n. For level-1, quality is already 100% so division

```
structural_grouping_parallel (Properties P, Netlist N, Level l,
                              Affinity t, Workers n)
 1: Level l_c = 0  # current grouping level
 2: Groups G = singletons(P) # initialize to singleton groups
 3: if |G| ≤ n : return G  # fewer properties than workers
 4: if l ≥ 1 : grouping_level_1 (G, N), l_c = 1  # identical COI
 5: if l ≥ 2 and |G| ≥ n :  # else fewer groups than workers
 6:     grouping_level_2 (G, N, t), l_c = 2  # large SCCs in COI
 7: if l ≥ 3 and |G| ≥ n :  # else fewer groups than workers
 8:     grouping_level_3 (G, N, t), l_c = 3  # Hamming distance
 9: if |G| < n :  # fewer groups than available workers
10:     rebalance (G, N, l_c, t, n)  # distribute groups, see Fig. 4
11: assert ( |G| ≥ n)  # guaranteed to hold
12: return G  # return high-affinity groups
```

Fig. 3. Property grouping guaranteed to generate at least $\mathsf{min}(n, |P|)$ high-affinity groups for n parallel workers.

```
rebalance (Groups G, Netlist N, Level l_c, Affinity t, Workers n)
 1: if l_c == 1 :  # divide large level-1 groups in half
 2:     halve_groups (G, n)  # see Fig. 5
 3: else # rollback lower-quality level-2 & level-3 groups
 4:     rollback_groups (G, N, l_c, t, n)  # see Fig. 6
```

Fig. 4. Algorithm to subdivide high-affinity groups for n workers.

```
halve_groups (Groups G, Workers n)
 1: while |G| < n :
 2:     Group g = pick largest non-singleton group from G
 3:     G = (G \ g) ∪ halve_group (g)  # see below

halve_group (Group g)
 1: return {first half of g, second half of g}  # split in half
```

Fig. 5. Algorithm for subdividing large level-1 groups in half.

is based on number of properties in the group (Fig. 5). Groups with the most properties are halved until at least $\mathsf{min}(n, |P|)$ groups are generated. Finer-grained analysis may be integrated if desired, e.g. considering affinity of combinational gates in the combinational fan-in of these properties. Group rollback for higher levels is more intricate (Fig. 6), with the goal of *improving* group quality. The group with lowest quality is conservatively subdivided until at least $\mathsf{min}(n, |P|)$ groups are generated. The lower-quality group is split to yield smaller, higher-quality subgroups. This process has negligible runtime, reuses precomputed support bitvectors and requires only a few milliseconds on the largest netlists.

The rebalancing procedure generates groups with quality bounds per Theorems 1, 2 and 3. Note that arbitrarily subdividing level-2,-3 groups without careful affinity consideration might violate affinity thresholds, because the quality of group g is measured with respect to its center property g^*. Assume that we generate subgroups g_0 and g_1 from g. If g^* is in g_0, we trivially have $Q(g_0^*) \geq Q(g^*)$ for any properties subgrouped with g^*. However, no such claim can be made about g_1; its properties might have been nearer to g^* than to each other. It is thus desirable to subdivide the most-distant property g_1^* from g^* to improve vs. risk degrading the resulting quality of both subgroups. Moreover, simply rolling back a higher level group to lower-level subgroups risks generating more groups than necessary, e.g., one level-2 group rolled back

```
rollback_groups (Groups G, Netlist N, Level l_c, Affinity t, Workers n)
 1: while |G| < n :
 2:     Group g = pick lowest quality non-singleton group from G
 3:     G = (G \ g) ∪ rollback_group (g, N, l_c, t)  # see below

rollback_group(Group g, Netlist N, Level l_c, Affinity t)
 1: Groups G = singletons(g)  # split g to singletons
 2: grouping_level_1 (G, N)  # level-1
 3: if |G| == 1 : G = halve_group (g ∈ G) return G  # |G| == 2
 4: else if |G| == 2 : return G  # g had two 100% quality subgroups
 5: rollback_group_level (G, N, t, 2)  # level-2
 6: if |G| == 2 : return G
 7: if l_c == 3 : rollback_group_level (G, N, t, 3)  # level-3
 8: return G  # |G| == 2

rollback_group_level (Groups G, Netlist N, Affinity t, Level l)
 1: Groups G_c = G  # local copy of G
 2: Group g_0, g_1 = ∅  # temporary groups, initially empty
 3: if l == 2 : grouping_level_2 (G_c, N, t)  # level-2
 4: else : grouping_level_3 (G_c, N, t)  # level-3
 5: if |G_c| == 1 :  # G_c is one group containing all properties in G
 6:     g_0 = g ∈ G containing center property g_c^*
 7:     # extract most-distant property into distinct subgroup
 8:     g_1 = g ∈ G s.t. dist(g_0^*, g^*) == max({dist(g_0^*, g_i^*) | ∀g_i ∈ G})
 9:     for each group g ∈ G :  # merge groups to minimize distance
10:         if dist(g_0^*, g^*) ≤ dist(g_1^*, g^*) : add properties in g to g_0
11:         else : add properties in g to g_1
12:     G = {g_0, g_1}  # note Q(g_0), Q(g_1) ≥ Q(g_c), see Thm. 4
13: else : G = G_c  # |G| ≥ 2
```

Fig. 6. Algorithm for subdividing lower-quality groups.

to ten level-1 groups. The algorithm in Fig. 3 generates *a minimal number* $|G|$ of high-affinity groups with provable affinity bounds, where $|G| \geq \mathsf{min}(n, |P|)$.

Theorem 4. *Given a group g, the rollback_group procedure subdivides g into two disjoint subgroups g_0 and g_1 such that $Q(g_0) \geq Q(g)$ and $Q(g_1) \geq Q(g)$.*

Proof. (Sketch) The algorithm returns two 100% affinity groups when properties in g generate at most two level-1 subgroups. Otherwise, the greatest-Hamming-distance property $g_1^* \in g$ from g's center property g^* is identified. Subgroup g_0 inherits g^* as its center, and g_1 inherits g_1^* as its center. Remaining properties in g are added to g_0 vs. g_1 to minimize distance from g_0^* vs. g_1^*, ensuring provable quality bounds. □

Corollary 4.1. *Given affinity t and level l, grouping for parallelism (Fig. 3) generates groups G such that $\forall g \in G$: a) $Q(g) = 1.0$ if $l = 1$, b) $Q(g) \geq t$ if $l = 2$, and c) $Q(g) \geq 3 * t - 2$ if $l = 3$.*

Proof. The proof follows per Theorems 1, 2 and 3 when no rebalancing occurs. Otherwise, rebalancing divides group g in to smaller groups based on: (i) $l = 1$, level-1 subgroups are generated and $Q(g) = 1.0$ per Theorem 1; (ii) $l = 2$, levels-1 or 2 subgroups are generated and $Q(g) \geq t$ per Theorems 2 and 4; and (iii) $l = 3$, levels-1, 2 or 3 subgroups are generated and $Q(g) \geq 3 * t - 2$ per Theorems 3 and 4. □

Theorem 5. *Given groups G over a set of properties P, and workers n with $|G| < n$ and $|P| \geq n$, rebalancing generates property groups G' such that $|G'| = n$.*

Proof. Both halve_group and rollback_group subdivide a non-singleton group g into exactly two subgroups, and iterate until $|G'| \geq n$. Therefore, the number of groups increases by exactly one in every iteration, unless all groups become singleton which cannot happen until $|G'| = |P| \geq n$. □

Corollary 5.1. *Given a set of properties P and n workers, grouping for parallelism (Fig. 3) generates groups G from P such that $|G| \geq \mathsf{min}(n, |P|)$.*

Proof. The proof holds when $\geq n$ groups are generated without rebalancing; when $|P| \leq n$ singleton groups are generated; or otherwise per Theorem 5 when relabancing occurs. □

B. Group Distribution Heuristics

We propose three heuristics to optimally utilize parallel workers, used on-the-fly by a *manager* that dispatches property groups and dynamically adjusts based upon worker feedback. When partitioning is supported by an engine within a strategy (e.g. a localization engine [3]), there might be multiple managers partitioning an identical or overlapping set of properties.

Iteration order (I): Fig. 3 orders groups deterministically, and thus distributed managers within a strategy will likely verify common properties in the same order. This results in redundant CPU-time, where 2+ strategies may solve the same property at nearly the same time (**P3**). The root manager could instead dispatch disjoint properties to different workers, though there are motivations for building intelligence into distributed managers working on the entire property set, such as enabling incrementality and data sharing across properties [8]–[11]. To minimize redundant work, the manager may be augmented with options to iterate common groups in different orders: 1) smallest to largest COI (*forward*); 2) largest to smallest COI (*backward*); and 3) *random* to heuristically minimize concurrent solving of the same group while more groups than workers remain unsolved. If all properties are of comparable difficulty, running 2 identical strategies with opposite group ordering effectively halves wall-time with almost no redundant CPU-time. This approach can yield superlinear irredundant speedup when different strategies are tailored for easier vs more-difficult properties: a lighter strategy can iterate *forward* heuristically addressing easier properties first (the heavier strategy would be slower for these), while the heavier strategy can iterate *backward* addressing more-difficult properties first (the lighter strategy might be unable to solve these).

Controlled repetition (R): Each worker solves groups one-at-a-time. Encountering a difficult group inhibits overall progress (**P4**). Easier groups might follow, which when solved might speed-up incremental verification of the previous difficult group. Furthermore, solving easy properties sooner benefits other workers, allowing them to focus on fewer difficult groups. It is thus beneficial to impose time-limits per group within certain *fast* strategies. The manager must be capable of pruning already-solved properties (possibly solved by different workers), and repeating groups up to a configurable maximum allowed repetitions (to reduce redundant CPU-time). It may

get_next_group (**Groups** G, **Netlist** N, **Level** l_c, **Affinity** t)

1: **Group** g = pick unsolved or inactive group from G
2: **if** g == null : **return** null *# all group are solved or active*
3: **if** unsolved(g) **and** inactive(g) : **return** g *# dispatch group*
4: **if** unsolved(g) : *# decompose (new groups are unsolved and inactive)*
5: **if** l_c == 1 : $G = (G \setminus g) \cup$ halve_group(g) *# see Fig. 5*
6: **else** $G = (G \setminus g) \cup$ rollback_group(g, N, l_c, t) *# see Fig. 6*
7: **else** remove g from G *# group is already solved*
8: **goto** 1 *# pick next group to dispatch*

Fig. 7. *Manager* routine to dispatch unsolved groups using decomposition.

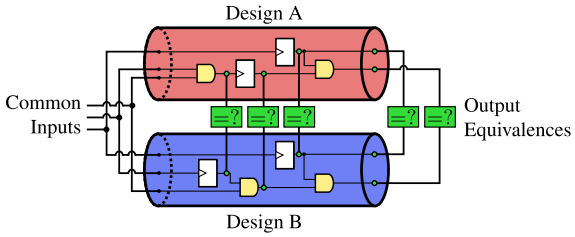


Fig. 8. Sequential equivalence checking uses redundancy removal to eliminate gate-equivalences between two logic designs. Each speculated gate-equality requires verifying a property called a *miter* (depicted as green box =*?*).

be beneficial to increase resource limits between repetitions, possibly after n repetitions with no progress. Engine incrementality is fairly important when imposing time-limits and repetition, to minimize redundant CPU-time.

Decomposition (D): Some groups are more difficult than others, either because they are large (e.g., many properties), or because individual properties therein are more difficult (e.g., having a very-deep counterexample). Some workers might be slower than others, possibly due to varying machine load. A common wall-time degradation occurs when fewer difficult groups than workers remain, and previously-active workers become idle (**P2**). This heuristic decomposes unsolved groups and dispatches them to idle workers, to accelerate convergence despite imposing some redundant CPU-time. Rather than redundantly dispatching an entire unsolved group, this heuristic utilizes the algorithms of Fig. 5 and Fig. 6 to subdivide unsolved groups to smaller and higher-affinity groups, eventually becoming singletons. Smaller groups are easier for idle workers to redundantly solve (**P5**), benefiting but not pre-empting active workers (which might be on the verge of solves). The corresponding manager with decomposition is shown in Fig. 7. A group is *inactive* when no worker is currently verifying it. Solved properties and groups are discarded; groups with *unsolved* properties are subdivided and redundantly dispatched. Singleton groups are not redundantly dispatched, being *inactive* after the first dispatch.

IV. Localization for Redundancy Removal

Industrial hardware designs are often rife with redundancy, e.g. to boost the performance of semiconductor devices, and to implement features such as error resilience, security, initialization logic and post-silicon observability. Verification testbenches yield additional netlist redundancies, due to *input constraints* restricting the set of stimulus applied to the design,

redundancy_removal (**Netlist** N)

1: Guess the *redundancy candidates* - sets of equivalence classes of gates in N, where gate u in class $Q(u)$ is suspected equivalent to every other gate v in the same equivalence class.
2: Select a representative gate $R(Q(u))$ from each class $Q(u)$.
3: Construct the *speculatively-reduced netlist* by replacing source gate u of every edge $(u, v) \in E$ by $R(Q(u))$. Additionally, for each gate v, add a *miter* property asserted when $v \not\equiv R(q(v))$.
4: Attempt to prove that each miter is unassertable.
5: If a miter cannot be proven unassertable, refine the equivalence classes to separate the corresponding gates, and goto Step 2.
6: For all unassertable miters, merge the corresponding gates onto the representative to eliminate redundancy.

Fig. 9. Generic sequential redundancy removal framework [16].

and due to redundancies arising between the design and synthesized properties. Equivalence checking can be viewed as verifying a *composite netlist* comprising two designs as per Fig. 8. *Sequential redundancy removal* [12]–[14, 16, 17, 25, 26] (Fig. 9) is the process of proving that equivalence-classes of gates evaluate to equal or opposite values in all reachable states; each speculated redundancy entails solving a property called a *miter*. When a miter is proven, the corresponding redundant gates can be merged. This COI reduction is highly beneficial to verification scalability, and is the core procedure of sequential equivalence checking (SEC).

Various heuristics control the scope of equivalence-class candidates affecting runtime vs. reduction (Fig. 9 Step 1): e.g. whether to consider only registers vs. all gate types; whether to prune classes to reflect *corresponded signal names* or require per-class candidates spanning both designs in an equivalence-checking context (Fig. 8) [14, 22]. A *speculatively-reduced netlist* (Steps 2-3) accelerates verification of the miters. Techniques such as BMC and guided simulation are typically used to falsify miters; then induction proves the easier miters; and finally multi-engine strategies prove the difficult miters or find difficult counterexamples (Steps 4,5). Failed proofs (falsified miters or inconclusive results) cause a *refinement* of the equivalence classes to separate unproven miters' gates, then another expensive proof iteration is performed. Our goal is to minimize inconclusive proofs to achieve maximum netlist reduction with minimal wall- *and CPU*-time, using a parallel localization portfolio. Note that even if a testbench has only a single property, redundancy removal will often create thousands of miters. The large number of miters often tremendously benefit from parallel processing, as noted for combinational redundancy removal [27] and induction [25]. These miters are distributed throughout the netlist, making affinity partitioning particularly beneficial. Since practical netlists comprise a diversity of logic, different miters benefit from different strategies.

The proof or counterexample of a property often only depends on a small subset of logic in its COI. *Localization* [18]–[21] is a powerful abstraction method to reduce COI size by replacing irrelevant gates by *cutpoints* or unconstrained primary inputs. Since cutpoints can simulate the behavior of the original gates and more, the abstracted netlist over-approximates the behavior of the original netlist: abstract proofs imply original proofs, but abstract counterexamples

```
fast_lossy_localization (Group g, unsigned n, Timeout T)
 1: Netlist L = load_incremental_abstraction(g) # initially empty
 2: unsigned k = load_incremental_bmc_depth(g) # initially 0
 3: while elapsed_time() ≤ T and unsolved(g) :
 4:     localize_bmc (g, L, k, unchanged)  # see below
        # check if netlist unchanged for last n bmc steps
 5:     if unchanged < n : k = k + 1, goto 4  # increment depth
 6:     run_proof_strategy(L, g, T - elapsed_time())
 7: save_incremental_data (G, k, L)  # timeout: save incremental data

localize_bmc (Group g, Netlist L, unsigned k, unsigned unchanged)
 1: bool stop = 0  # some properties fail at depth k
 2: while not stop : # loop until all properties pass at depth k
 3:     Gates c = {}, stop = 1  # cutpoints to refine, initially empty
 4:     for each Property p ∈ g :
 5:         Result r = run_bmc(L, p, k)  # run bmc with depth k
 6:         if r == unsat : continue  # property passes
 7:         if cex not spurious : report_solved(p, cex), continue
 8:         stop = 0 # property fails
 9:         Gates d = cutpoints_to_refine(), c = c ∪ d
10:     if not stop : refine_abstraction(L, c), unchanged = 0
11:     else unchanged += 1  # no change in abstraction
```

Fig. 10. *Fast-and-Lossy* localization with incremental repetition of high-affinity property groups.

might be spurious. Abstraction *refinement* eliminates cutpoints deemed responsible for spurious counterexamples, reintroducing previously-eliminated logic. It is desirable that the abstract netlist be as small as possible to enable scalable verification, while being immune to spurious counterexamples.

Localization is often essential to solve non-inductive miters, leveraging speculative reduction to abstract nearly all logic except for differently-implemented yet functionally-equivalent logic *between* speculated equivalences [14, 16]. Without localization, the COI of a miter may be very large despite speculative reduction. This large COI size may choke even fairly-scalable provers such as IC3. While the benefits of localization for sequential redundancy removal are well-known [17], prior work considered only single-process miter verification, aside from use of a standard parallel model-checking portfolio to solve miters [22]. Ours is the first to optimize a parallel localization portfolio in this (or any multi-property) context, using property partitioning and irredundant scheduling procedures (Figs. 3 and 7), along with the following complementary strategies tailored for easier vs. difficult properties. Note that substrategies in either may be employed by the other.

A. Fast-and-Lossy Localization

Fast-and-Lossy localization (Fig. 10) attempts to quickly discharge easier property groups, using timeouts to skip difficult groups. If the group is not solved within the allotted time, verification data (e.g., the current abstract netlist and achieved BMC depth) is saved for incremental reuse to accelerate later repetition. Skipped groups can be repeated as-is, or rebalanced (Fig. 7) after several repetitions of no progress. Note that repeating a group as-is may likely proceed further upon repetition, by incrementally skipping earlier processing and since a different worker might have solved some targets therein. *Fast-and-Lossy* localization uses counterexample-based refinement sometimes without quick proof-based abstraction (PBA), possibly yielding larger abstract netlists that are more-difficult to prove but with less time expended in BMC itself [20] for faster performance on easier groups. When ready to prove (i.e., no refinements occur for n consecutive BMC steps), abstracted groups are passed to a sequence of lighter reduction engines then IC3 [5, 28]) under a modest time-limit of $\leq 300s$ which can be increased across repetitions (**R**).

```
aggressive_localization (Group g, unsigned n, bool pba, bool semantic,
                         Affinity t, Timeout T, Multiplier m)
 1: Netlist L = initial_abstraction(g)  # initially empty
 2: unsigned k = 0  # bmc depth
 3: localize_bmc (g, L, k, unchanged)  # see Fig. 10
 4: if semantic : collect_support_info (...)  # see Sect. IV-C
 5: if pba : minimize L using proof-based abstraction
    # check if netlist unchanged for last n bmc steps
 6: if unchanged < n : k = k + 1, goto 3  # increment depth
 7: Groups Ĝ = semantic ? structural_grouping (g, L, 3, t) : G
    # Sort via (I) mode (Sect. III-B): forward, backward, or random
 8: Sort Ĝ by abstract COI size
 9: for each unsolved group ĝ ∈ Ĝ :
10:     while elapsed_time() ≤ T and unsolved(ĝ) :
11:         run_proof_strategy(L, ĝ, T - elapsed_time())
12: if unsolved groups remain : T = T × m, goto 9
```

Fig. 11. *Aggressive* localization with semantic partitioning, counterexample- and proof-based abstraction.

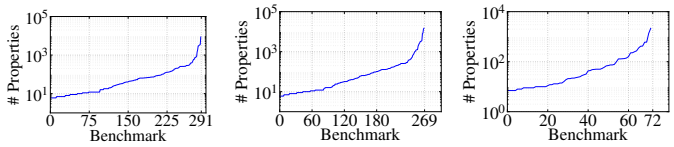
B. Aggressive Localization

Aggressive localization (Fig. 11) is aimed at solving difficult properties, where *Fast-and-Lossy* may fail due to larger-than-necessary abstractions, insufficient reductions prior to IC3, or small group time-limits. *Aggressive* never repeats groups, so either imposes no time limit whatsoever, or a large time-limit as shown applied to semantically-partitioned (Sec. IV-C) subgroups but iterated and increased until the group is solved. *Aggressive* typically uses a hybrid of counterexample-based refinement and PBA run after every unsatisfiable BMC result, to yield smaller abstractions than the former alone to accelerate subsequent proofs at the expense of more runtime spent in BMC itself [20]. When ready to prove (i.e., no refinements occur for n consecutive BMC steps), abstracted groups are passed to a sequence of heavy reduction engines (including nested induction-only sequential redundancy removal across *all gates*, which might be too expensive to converge on large netlists before localization) followed by IC3 [5, 28]).

C. Semantic Partitioning

Semantic partitioning [3] refers to re-partitioning a group whose *unabstracted COI* was high-affinity, yielding subgroups of high affinity with respect to *abstract COI* as correlates to subsequent verification complexity. Abstract COI information is mined onto support bitvectors on a per-property basis as cutpoints are refined (Fig. 11 Step 4), considering minimized counterexamples for individual properties despite incrementally using the same BMC instance for the entire group. The group is partitioned into smaller, high-localized-affinity subgroups (Step 7) before attempting to prove.

Improvements to semantic partitioning vs. [3]: Per-property abstract-COI bloat may arise during counterexample analy-



(a) Set B1 (b) Set B2 (c) Set B3

Fig. 12. Number of properties per benchmark set.

#	Strategy	Grouping	Semantic	Iteration (I)	Repetition (R)	Decomposition (D)
S1	Fast-lossy	Level-1	✗	Forward	✓	✗
S2	Fast-lossy	Level-1	✗	Reverse	✓	✓
S3	Fast-lossy	Level-3	✓	Forward	✓	✓
S4	Aggressive	Level-1	✗	Forward	✗	-
S5	Aggressive	Level-1	✗	Reverse	✗	-
S6	Aggressive	Level-3	✓	Forward	✗	-

Fig. 13. Six-process complementary localization portfolio.

sis, because the group must be mutually refined to be free of spurious counterexamples. Eager partitioning (as soon as any diverged abstract COI occurs) *could* circumvent this ambiguous bloat, though often severely hurts performance since intermediate abstract-COI differences often reconverge. In practice, lazy partitioning deferred until modest BMC time limits are exceeded is far superior, retaining high-affinity atomic verification benefits. Abstract-COI ambiguities can be largely corrected during proof analysis, by analyzing a distinct proof per property. Incremental data should be saved when semantically re-partitioning, to minimize restart penalty.

Difficult sub-groups are susceptible to delaying easier later sub-groups. Subgroups should be ordered as per **(I)** mode (Sect. III-B): *forward*, *backward*, and *random*, configured differently in parallel strategies for better portfolio performance with less redundant CPU-time. Subgroups are verified in the chosen order using controlled repetition (**R**) and large *Aggressive* time-limits (Steps 9–11). We recommend T $\geq$ 1h multiplying 2$\times$ at each iteration (Step 12) and overriding to *unlimited* when a single sub-group remains.

V. Experimental Results

We evaluate our techniques within the post-induction proof strategy of a sequential redundancy removal framework (Fig. 9). To eliminate *noise* such as different counterexamples yielding different equivalence-classes (Step 5), we snapshotted the speculatively-reduced netlist after ten minutes of induction, before the final iteration of a six-hour eight-process semi-formal bug-hunting [29] and localization portfolio to eliminate most incorrect and easier [26] miters. The following experiments[2] run on these snapshotted netlists (pruning those with fewer miters than processes), yielding three benchmark sets. Set **B1** (Fig. 12a) are the most-difficult 291 of 1822 proprietary SEC benchmarks, where initial equivalence classes comprise original properties and *name corresponded* register pairs. Set **B2** (Fig. 12b) has 269 netlists derived from the former, including a large equivalence class for registers without name correlation. Set **B3** has 72 netlists from the SINGLE property HWMCC 2017 benchmarks, comprising a large initial equivalence class of all registers. Our techniques are implemented within *RuleBase: Sixthsense Edition* [30].

A. Localization Portfolio

We selected our localization portfolio (Fig. 13) from extensive evaluation of 36 single-process localization configurations and 30 subsequent proof strategies, exploring options such as enabling vs. disabling PBA [20]; different levels of property grouping vs. no grouping [3]; enabling vs. disabling semantic partitioning (Sect. IV-C); and different policies for group iteration **(I)**, repetition **(R)**, and decomposition **(D)** (Sect. III-B). The best-performing collection was chosen, maximizing *complementary* unique solves. *Aggressive* localization (Sect. IV-B) primarily uses both counterexample- and proof-based abstraction, yielding smallest abstract netlists solved with a single-process heavy strategy of combinational rewriting; input elimination [31]–[33] which is especially powerful after localization due to inserted cutpoints; min-area retiming [34]; a nested induction-only gate-based sequential redundancy removal; then IC3. *Fast-and-Lossy* localization (Sect. IV-A) uses counterexample-based refinement mainly with no or lighter PBA for faster BMC, yielding larger abstract netlists solved using light combinational rewriting, input elimination, then IC3. The former is fastest for difficult properties; the latter for easier properties.

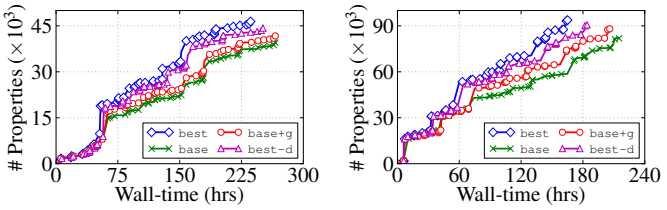
We compare four 6-process localization portfolios derived from Fig. 13, to highlight individual contributions. The localization configuration and subsequent solving strategy of each process is identical across portfolios, except for adherence to the illustrated scheduling differences as discussed below. For greater portfolio value, each process includes localization configuration differences beyond the illustrated scheduling distinction. **S1** only performs counterexample-based refinement. **S2** vs. **S3** perform hybrid counterexample-based refinement with light PBA (capped SAT time limits) after every unsatisfiable BMC step vs. only before the subsequent solving strategy, respectively. Abstract-netlist gates remaining after PBA in **S2** are considered *committed* and cannot be eliminated in further PBA steps [18]. **S3** utilizes a minimal unsatisfiable core to further reduce the abstract netlist. **S4-S6** are identical to **S1-S3**, respectively, without imposed time-limits and modulo the above-mentioned subsequent solving strategy differences.

1) `base`: No property grouping or incremental repetition of properties; all processes iterate properties in forward order. This represents a standard state-of-the-art localization portfolio approach, without property grouping.
2) `base+g` extends `base` with affinity property grouping, including semantic partitioning in one *Fast-and-Lossy* and one *Aggressive* strategy. This represents a state-of-the-art localization portfolio with property grouping [3].
3) `best-d` extends `base+g` with incremental repetition **(R)** and irredundant iteration order **(I)**, to reduce CPU-time.
4) `best` extends `best-d` with decomposition **(D)**.

B. Proprietary Benchmarks

Fig. 14 shows the number of properties solved vs. wall-time for **B1** and **B2**. (CPU-times are approximately 6$\times$ wall-time in all experiments.) `best` is the clear winner, solv-

[2]Detailed results available at http://temporallogic.org/research/FMCAD20



(a) Set B1 (b) Set B2

Fig. 14. #Properties solved vs. wall-time for **B1** and **B2**; 6-hour time limit.

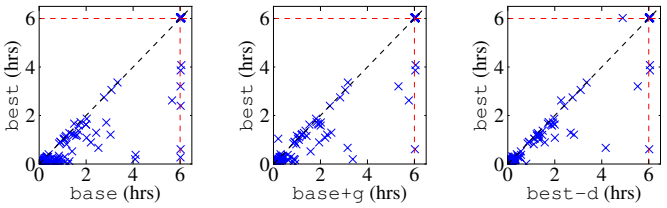


Fig. 15. **best** vs. baselines for **B1** (points below diagonal are in favor).

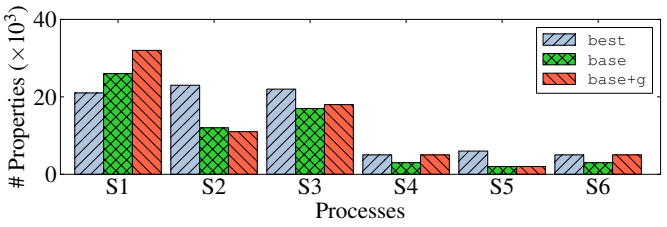
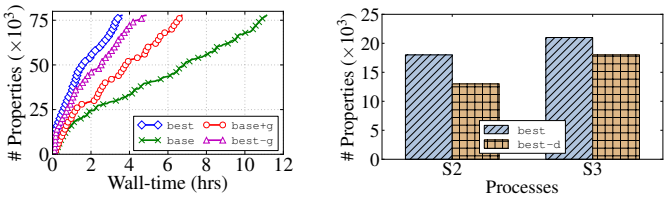


Fig. 16. #Properties solved on **B2** per process of Fig. 13.

ing 18.1% (15.3%) more properties in 17.2% (22.9%) less time for **B1** (**B2**, respectively) compared to `base`. Affinity-grouping significantly improves performance of `base+g` over `base`. Level-3 grouping with semantic partitioning benefits *Aggressive*, atomically solving properties in fewer, larger high-abstract-affinity groups compared to level-1,-2. Incremental repetition and irredundant iteration allows `best-d` to solve 8.1% more properties than `base+g`, less-severely hindered by difficult groups. `best` yields additional solves through decomposition of difficult groups after five incremental repetitions of no progress, solving all properties in 4 vs. 6 benchmarks in **B1** vs. **B2** that time out with other portfolios. Fig. 15 details per-**B1**-benchmark runtimes of `best` vs. other portfolios.

Fig. 16 shows the distribution of properties solved per process (Fig. 13) within these portfolios. The percentage solved by each *Fast-and-Lossy* (and *Aggressive*) process is nearly uniform in `best`, showing near-optimal irredundant work distribution. In contrast, without **(I)** and **(R)**, `base` and `base+g` have highly-uneven distributions due largely to parallel processes addressing the same groups concurrently. While the number of solved (easier) miters is considerably larger with *Fast-and-Lossy*, we emphasize how critical the *Aggressive* solution of difficult miters is to the overall redundancy removal process. If any are left unsolved, Fig. 9 Step 5 will forgo attempting to merge the corresponding gates, thereby weakening netlist reductions, risking unsolved SEC, and hurting runtime by requiring yet another proof iteration with refined equivalence classes [14] – where fan-out miters become more-difficult than those unsolved in prior iterations.



(a) Properties vs. time (b) Work distribution

Fig. 17. #Properties solved vs. wall-time for **big**: (a) by all portfolios; (b) per process of Fig. 13 within `best` and `best-d`.

To further highlight the value of decomposition **(D)**, Fig. 17b illustrates an additional **big** benchmark containing 77728 properties partitioned into 9958 level-1 and level-2, and 2991 level-3 high-affinity groups. Fig. 17a shows the number of properties solved by each portfolio vs. time. `best` is 3.0× faster than `base`. Fig. 17b shows the number of properties solved by two *Fast-and-Lossy* processes of `best` and `best-d`; decomposition enables **S2** and **S3** in `best` to collectively solve 25.2% more properties than `best-d`.

C. HWMCC Benchmarks

Fig. 18 shows the number of properties solved by each portfolio for set **B3**. `best` is again the winner, solving 3054 more properties in less time than `base`. Incremental repetition and irredundant iteration is particularly beneficial in this set: several benchmarks have counterexamples that are discovered in earlier repetitions of these properties, enabling *Aggressive* and later *Fast-and-Lossy* repetitions to direct resource upon more-difficult provable miters.

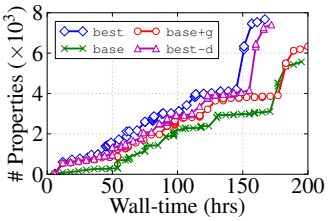


Fig. 18. #Solved vs. wall-time for **B3**.

VI. Conclusions and Future Work

We focus upon boosting the scalability of multi-property parallel verification, with application to sequential redundancy removal. Our contributions optimize both wall-time and CPU-time, using complementary strategy exploration and property partitioning. **(1)** We extend scalable affinity-based property partitioning to guarantee *complete* utilization of available processes with provable partition affinities. **(2)** We propose improvements to the scheduling of parallel processes, such as resource-constrained irredundant iteration, incremental repetition, and decomposition of difficult groups. **(3)** We deliver a carefully-optimized localization portfolio, self-tailoring to irredundantly address a range of property difficulties through a synergistic balance of *Fast-and-Lossy* vs. *Aggressive* configurations. To our knowledge, this is the first published approach to optimize both property partitioning and strategy exploration within a multi-property localization portfolio. Extensive benchmarks illustrate the value of our techniques. Exploring these techniques across a broader set of engines, and exploring incrementality of strategies across localization and equivalence-class refinements is a promising research direction.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We thank Alexander Ivrii for assistance in implementing various localization features and for feedback on early drafts of this paper, and Raj Kumar Gajavelly for providing benchmarks and assistance with experimental evaluation. This work is partially supported by NSF CAREER Award CNS-1664356.

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