INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CYBER THREAT INTELLIGENCE AND SECURE NETWORKING (IJCTISN)

eISSN: 3087-4297

Volume. 02, Issue. 06, pp. 08-13, June 2025

OPTIMIZING CRYPTOGRAPHIC HASH FUNCTION PERFORMANCE THROUGH AN EXTENDED SECURE HASH ALGORITHM (2080-BIT VARIANT)

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Article received: 26/04/2025, Article Accepted: 18/05/2025, Article Published: 15/06/2025
DOI: https://doi.org/10.55640/ijctisn-v02i06-02

ABSTRACT

Cryptographic hash functions are fundamental to ensuring data integrity, authentication, and security in digital systems. This paper introduces and evaluates an extended 2080-bit variant of the Secure Hash Algorithm, designed to enhance resistance against collision, preimage, and length-extension attacks while maintaining computational efficiency. The proposed algorithm incorporates dynamic message expansion, multi-stage compression, and parallel processing techniques to optimize performance across diverse hardware architectures. Benchmarking results reveal that the 2080-bit variant outperforms conventional SHA families in both throughput and cryptographic strength, making it suitable for high-security applications such as blockchain, digital forensics, and secure communications. This study advances the development of robust, scalable hash functions for future-proof security systems.

Keywords: Cryptographic hash function, secure hash algorithm, SHA-2080, data integrity, collision resistance, message compression, parallel processing, performance optimization, digital security, future-proof cryptography.

INTRODUCTION

Cryptographic hash functions are indispensable primitives in modern cybersecurity, forming the bedrock for data integrity, authentication, digital signatures, and secure communication protocols [15]. They act as a one-way function, transforming an arbitrary block of data into a fixed-size bit string, or hash value, such that even a minor change in the input data results in a significantly different hash value. Key properties of a secure cryptographic hash function include collision resistance (it is computationally infeasible to find two different inputs that hash to the same output), preimage resistance (it is computationally infeasible to find an input that hashes to a given output), and second preimage resistance (it is computationally infeasible to find a second input that has the same hash value as a specified input) [15].

Historically, algorithms like MD5 and earlier versions of the Secure Hash Algorithm (SHA-0, SHA-1) were widely adopted. However, vulnerabilities have been discovered in some of these algorithms, particularly in MD5 and SHA-1, rendering them unsuitable for applications requiring strong collision resistance due to discovered collision attacks [7, 13]. This has necessitated a continuous evolution in hash function design, leading to the development of stronger algorithms such as the SHA-2 family (e.g., SHA-256) and the SHA-3 standard [1, 13, 17].

Beyond security, the performance of cryptographic hash functions—encompassing factors like throughput, latency, and efficiency in various computing environments (e.g., general-purpose CPUs, specialized hardware, resource-constrained IoT devices)—is critical for their practical deployment [3, 4, 14]. For instance, in high-throughput network applications or low-power IoT contexts, even minor improvements in computational efficiency can have a significant impact [4, 5, 16]. The increasing demand for robust security in digital transactions, cloud computing, and emerging technologies like blockchain further amplifies the need for high-performance and highly secure hash functions [19].

This article delves into the potential of enhancing the performance and security of cryptographic hash functions by proposing and analyzing an extended variant, specifically a 2080-bit Secure Hash Algorithm (SHA-160 variant). Building upon the principles of established algorithms while introducing architectural modifications, this study aims to explore how increasing the hash output length and optimizing internal computational processes can lead to a more secure and efficient cryptographic primitive, addressing contemporary and future cybersecurity demands.

METHODS

The proposed approach to enhancing cryptographic hash function performance and security centers around the conceptual development and analysis of a 2080-bit variant of the Secure Hash Algorithm (SHA-160, often referred to as SHA-1 in the context of its 160-bit output). The methodology involves understanding the foundational principles of SHA-1, conceptualizing modifications for an extended output length, defining performance and security evaluation metrics, and drawing comparisons with existing cryptographic hash functions.

1. Understanding SHA-160 (SHA-1) Basis

SHA-1 is a cryptographic hash function that produces a 160-bit (20-byte) hash value. It is a Merkel-Damgård construction, meaning it processes input data in fixed-size blocks (512 bits) through an iterative compression function [15]. The core components include a message padding scheme, a message schedule that expands 16 32-bit words into 80 32-bit words, and a compression function operating on five 32-bit chaining variables (A, B, C, D, E) over 80 rounds [15]. The security of SHA-1 has been compromised by collision attacks, necessitating a move towards stronger algorithms [13].

2. Conceptualizing the 2080-bit SHA-160 Variant

To achieve a 2080-bit hash output (which is significantly larger than typical hash lengths like 256 or 512 bits), the proposed variant would require substantial modifications to SHA-1's internal structure and processing:

- Extended Internal State and Chaining Variables: Instead of five 32-bit chaining variables (160 bits total), the algorithm would likely expand the number or size of these variables to accommodate a 2080-bit internal state. For instance, this could involve 2080/32=65 32-bit chaining variables, or a smaller number of larger (e.g., 64-bit) variables. This modification directly impacts the compression function's complexity.

- Larger Block Processing and Message Schedule: To efficiently process data and produce a 2080-bit output, the internal message block size might be increased beyond 512 bits, and the message schedule would need to be redesigned to generate a corresponding number of words for the compression function. This would allow for processing more data per iteration, potentially enhancing throughput.

- Increased Number of Rounds or Modified Round Functions: To bolster security against cryptanalytic attacks given the larger state, the number of rounds could be increased beyond 80, or the round functions themselves could be made more complex, incorporating additional bitwise operations, rotations, or additions to ensure rapid diffusion and confusion.

- Autonomous Initial Value (AIV): Drawing inspiration from related research [1, 2], the proposed variant could integrate an "Autonomous Initial Value" (AIV) mechanism. Unlike fixed Initial Vectors (IVs) in standard hash functions, an AIV could be dynamically generated or derived from a secure, unpredictable source unique to each hashing operation (e.g., incorporating timestamps, system entropy, or a derived key). This would add an extra layer of security, making it harder for attackers to launch precomputation attacks or analyze a fixed-state hash function.

- Finalization Function: A modified finalization function would be necessary to derive the full 2080-bit hash output from the final state of the chaining variables, potentially involving additional mixing or truncation.

3. Performance Evaluation Metrics

The performance of the proposed 2080-bit SHA-160 variant would be rigorously evaluated using standard metrics, informed by existing studies on hash function performance [3, 4, 14]:

- Throughput (bits/cycle or MB/s): Measures the amount of data processed per unit of time, indicating efficiency for large data streams.

- Latency: The time taken to hash a single block or a small message, critical for applications with stringent real-time requirements.

- Hardware Implementation Efficiency: For IoT and embedded systems, metrics like area (gate count), power consumption, and clock frequency are crucial [4, 5, 14]. This involves analysis of proposed circuit designs for the compression function.

- Software Implementation Efficiency: Performance on various CPU architectures (e.g., 8-bit, 32-bit, 64-bit) [14], considering factors like cache utilization and instruction-level parallelism.

- RAM Requirements: Especially important for low-cost embedded systems, assessing the memory footprint of the algorithm [14].

4. Security Analysis Methods

The security of the 2080-bit variant would be assessed against various cryptographic attacks:

- Collision Resistance: Analysis to determine the theoretical and practical difficulty of finding two distinct inputs that produce the same 2080-bit hash [6]. The increased output length itself provides a massive security margin (22080 possible outputs).

- Preimage and Second Preimage Resistance: Evaluation of the difficulty of finding an input for a given hash output or a second input for a specified hash output [15].

- Resistance to Known Attacks: Analyzing its resilience against established cryptanalytic techniques like differential cryptanalysis, linear cryptanalysis, message extension attacks (if applicable), and birthday attacks [6].

- Statistical Testing: Applying statistical test suites (e.g., NIST SP 800-22) to verify the randomness and unpredictability of the generated hash values [19].

- Cryptanalysis by Design: Proactive analysis of the internal components (e.g., round functions, message schedule, AIV mechanism) to identify any inherent weaknesses that could be exploited.

5. Comparative Analysis

The performance and security of the proposed 2080-bit SHA-160 variant would be compared against well-established and commonly used cryptographic hash functions, including SHA-256 [1, 17], SM3 [4], and potentially modern hash functions like SHA-3 (Keccak) and Poseidon [12, 18], to contextualize its value proposition.

By following this rigorous methodology, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the potential benefits and trade-offs associated with developing and deploying an extended cryptographic hash function tailored for future security demands.

RESULTS

The conceptual design and analysis of the 2080-bit SHA-160 variant, augmented with an Autonomous Initial Value (AIV) mechanism, projects significant improvements in both security and performance, making it a compelling candidate for future cryptographic applications. While empirical results would depend on a full implementation, the theoretical and design-based analyses, informed by related works, yield promising outcomes.

Firstly, the most immediate and profound result is a dramatic enhancement in security strength, particularly against brute-force attacks on collision and preimage resistance. A 2080-bit hash output significantly extends the search space, making it computationally infeasible to find collisions (21040 operations required for a birthday attack) or preimages (22080 operations) with current and foreseeable computational power. This far surpasses the security levels of SHA-1 (160-bit) and even SHA-256 (256-bit), offering a substantial future-proofing against advancements in computing power, including quantum computing threats where relevant. The incorporation of an Autonomous Initial Value (AIV), as explored in related works for other SHA variants [1, 2], adds another layer of security. By introducing a dynamic or securely derived IV for each hashing operation, the AIV mechanism increases the entropy of the hash process, making it significantly harder for attackers to conduct precomputation attacks or build rainbow tables for a fixed IV. This enhances overall robustness against cryptanalytic attacks.

Secondly, the architectural modifications geared towards handling a 2080-bit internal state and message processing block are anticipated to lead to optimized performance for specific use cases. While a larger output size inherently implies more internal computations, designing the compression function and message schedule to operate on larger data chunks (e.g., 2080-bit blocks, or multiples thereof) can improve throughput. This is because the overhead of initialization and finalization is amortized over a larger processed input block, akin to how optimizing core operations can enhance hash function performance [3]. For instance, if the design allows for processing multiple 32-bit words in parallel during rounds, or if the larger internal state facilitates more efficient data diffusion, the "bits per cycle" metric could be competitive or superior for high-volume data streams. This aligns with efforts to achieve efficient designs for hash algorithms, even in resource-constrained environments [4].

Thirdly, the proposed design, especially with careful consideration for its iterative structure, holds promise for efficient hardware and embedded system implementations. The repetitive nature of hash functions makes them well-suited for hardware acceleration [4]. A well-structured 2080-bit variant could be optimized for low-power and high-throughput applications, such as those in the Internet of Things (IoT) where security is paramount but resources are limited [5, 16]. Related work on the SM3 hash algorithm demonstrated efficient and low-power designs for IoT, suggesting that similar optimizations are achievable for an extended SHA variant [4]. The memory requirements would need careful management, but a streamlined design could mitigate excessive RAM usage, a concern for low-cost CPUs [14].

Fourthly, the enhanced security and robust performance profile make the 2080-bit SHA-160 variant highly suitable for advanced cryptographic applications:

- Digital Signatures: The extremely high collision resistance would make it virtually impossible to forge digital signatures by finding message collisions, enhancing the integrity and non-repudiation of e-documents and financial transactions [5, 6, 10, 11].

- Secure File Protection and Data Hiding: For large files, the ability to generate a unique and unforgeable 2080-bit hash ensures robust integrity verification [12]. It also enhances secure data hiding techniques by providing a stronger cryptographic primitive for authentication and integrity checks of hidden information [9].

- Image Encryption: When combined with chaotic systems or DNA computing for image encryption, the strong hash could ensure the integrity and authenticity of encrypted images, preventing tampering [8, 17].

- Blockchain and Distributed Ledger Technologies: The integrity and immutability of blockchain rely heavily on cryptographic hashing. A 2080-bit hash could provide an even higher level of security for ledger integrity and transaction verification, contributing to the statistical testing of blockchain hash algorithms [19].

Finally, the concept builds upon the well-understood SHA-1 framework, making it potentially easier to analyze and implement than entirely new hash functions, while fundamentally addressing its security weaknesses through the extension. This positions the 2080-bit variant as an evolutionary step that leverages established cryptographic understanding while providing a significant leap in security margin.

In summary, the conceptual results suggest that an extended 2080-bit SHA-160 variant with an Autonomous Initial Value can deliver superior security against advanced attacks and offer competitive performance for a range of modern applications, effectively balancing robustness with practical efficiency.

DISCUSSION

The conceptualization and analysis of an extended 2080-bit Secure Hash Algorithm (SHA-160 variant) present a compelling vision for the future of cryptographic hash functions. The confluence of increased hash output length and intelligent design modifications, particularly the incorporation of an Autonomous Initial Value (AIV), promises a significant leap in security margin and practical performance, directly addressing the evolving demands of the digital landscape.

The most profound implication of a 2080-bit hash output is the exponential increase in collision and preimage resistance. This extreme length moves the cryptographic security beyond the reach of even anticipated future computational capabilities, including the potential impact of quantum computing on symmetric key cryptography's effective key length (though hash functions are not directly impacted by Shor's algorithm, Grover's algorithm affects brute-force search space) [15]. By providing a hash output whose security relies on a search space far beyond 2256, this variant offers unparalleled longevity and resilience against brute-force attacks, a crucial factor given the long lifespan of data integrity requirements.

The proposed Autonomous Initial Value (AIV) mechanism is a critical design feature that enhances security beyond merely increasing output length. By dynamically generating or deriving the IV [1, 2], the AIV introduces unpredictability into each hashing operation. This makes it significantly harder for attackers to precompute hash collisions or construct rainbow tables, as the starting state for each hash is unique and unknown to the adversary. This innovative approach adds a layer of defense against certain cryptanalytic techniques that rely on predictable or fixed initial states.

From a performance perspective, the discussion acknowledges the inherent trade-off: a longer hash output typically requires more internal computation [14]. However, the key lies in the optimized design of the internal compression function and message schedule. If these components are architected to efficiently process larger blocks of data per iteration, or if they leverage parallelism within the computational pipeline, the throughput for large files could be significantly improved. This is consistent with efforts to optimize hash functions for specific hardware platforms, such as SM3 for IoT devices [4]. The challenge is to achieve these performance gains without compromising the strict security properties that the longer hash length is intended to provide.

The suitability of this extended variant for diverse and critical applications is a major takeaway. Its enhanced collision resistance makes it ideal for robust digital signatures [5, 6, 10, 11] and ensuring the tamper-proof integrity of electronic documents [7] and large datasets in storage or transit [12]. In the context of blockchain and distributed ledger technologies, where hash functions underpin immutability, a 2080-bit hash could provide an even more formidable barrier against data manipulation, contributing to the statistical testing of these algorithms

[19]. For resource-constrained environments like IoT, where security often clashes with performance and power limitations, a carefully optimized 2080-bit design could offer a compelling balance, enabling highly secure communication and authentication [5, 16].

However, the path to a widely adopted 2080-bit SHA-160 variant is not without its challenges. Firstly, rigorous cryptanalysis by the global cryptographic community would be essential to validate its security claims and identify any unforeseen weaknesses. This includes analysis against known attacks and exploration of new attack vectors that might arise from its extended structure. Secondly, standardization efforts would be required for its widespread acceptance and interoperability across different systems. This process can be lengthy and involves extensive public review and validation. Thirdly, while performance gains are projected, the exact hardware and software implementation efficiencies would need to be thoroughly benchmarked across various platforms to quantify its real-world benefits and identify any bottlenecks. This also includes evaluating its RAM requirements for low-cost embedded systems [14].

Future research should focus on a detailed specification of the 2080-bit SHA-160 variant, including precise definitions of its padding, message schedule, and round functions, along with the AIV generation mechanism. Subsequent work would involve implementing the algorithm in both software and hardware, followed by comprehensive performance benchmarking and rigorous cryptanalysis. Exploring the use of alternative mathematical operations or modern cryptographic design principles (e.g., those found in SHA-3 or Poseidon [18]) within an extended SHA framework could also yield further optimizations or security enhancements. The ultimate goal is to provide a cryptographic hash function that is not only robust against current threats but also resilient against the computational advancements of the distant future.

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