

# Power capping: a prelude to power shifting

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**Abstract** We present a technique that controls the peak power consumption of a high-density server by implementing a feedback controller that uses precise, system-level power measurement to periodically select the highest performance state while keeping the system within a fixed power constraint. A control theoretic methodology is applied to systematically design this control loop with analytic assurances of system stability and controller performance, despite unpredictable workloads and running environments. In a real server we are able to control power over a 1 second period to within 1 W and over an 8 second period to within 0.1 W.

Conventional servers respond to power supply constraint situations by using simple open-loop policies to set a safe performance level in order to limit peak power consumption. We show that closed-loop control can provide higher performance under these conditions and implement this technique on an IBM BladeCenter HS20 server. Experimental results demonstrate that closed-loop control provides up to 82% higher application performance compared to open-loop control and up to 17% higher performance compared to a widely used ad-hoc technique.

**Keywords** Power capping · Power shifting · Power management · Power budget · Feedback control · Servers · Power supplies · Provisioning

## 1 Introduction

As modern enterprise data centers continue to increase computing capabilities to meet their growing business requirements, high-density servers become more and more desirable due to space considerations and better system management features. However, the greatest immediate concerns about high-density servers are their power and cooling requirements, imposed by limited space inside the server chassis.

Server products have been traditionally designed to provide for worst-case operating environments and workloads by over-provisioning the cooling and power delivery systems. Such over-provisioning adds cost to the system and enlarges the server footprint, but benefits few real environments or workloads. In response, server designers have started to adopt a “better-than-worst-case” design approach [22]. Ideally, such servers would dynamically monitor the available operating margin and adjust the system operating point to run safely at the edge of physical limitations. For example, a server could dynamically adjust its operation to the highest performance possible that did not violate power and thermal constraints.

One widely deployed example of “better-than-worst-case” design is Intel’s use of Thermal Design Power (TDP) [21]. Intel recommends vendors build a cooling system that is sufficient for most situations, but not for unrealistic workloads. During rare periods when the processor temperature exceeds the limits of the cooling system, the processor reduces the processor speed to a safe, predetermined set-

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ting. This allows the cooling system capability to be under-provisioned and yet maintain safety at all times.

Similar techniques for system-level power constraints have been less studied. In this paper, we demonstrate management of the peak system-level power consumption with a feedback controller that uses precise system-level power measurements to periodically select the highest performance state that keeps the server within the desired power constraint. When the server runs at less than the power supply capacity, it runs at full speed. When the server power would be greater than the power supply capacity, it runs at a slower speed so that its power consumption matches the available power supply capacity. This gives vendors the option to use smaller, cost-effective power supplies that allow real-world workloads to run at nominal frequency, but under exceptional conditions result in a small performance degradation.

On a different level, power budgeting (or “capping”) a single server will become important for power-limited data centers. Power capping is a key element for implementing power shifting, which is the dynamic setting of power budgets for individual servers such that a global power cap for the cluster is maintained [23, 25]. This allows the available power capacity to flow on demand to the servers with the highest priority workload by reducing the power budget of servers with lower priority. Robust power shifting solutions will depend on reliable power capping mechanisms to avoid overloading circuit breakers and power distribution units.

This paper makes the following contributions:

1. We are the first to demonstrate managing the peak system power of a single server to a power constraint using precision measurement with a closed-loop control system. This differentiates our work from previous solutions that manage average power, use ad-hoc control, or use estimations of power in place of real measurement. In addition, we control whole-server power consumption (not only the power of the processor) and can compensate for power load changes in other components.
2. We present a novel control design based on feedback control theory to manage system-level power with theoretic guarantees on accuracy and stability. We show that a P controller is sufficient to control server-level power in our prototype. Often PI controllers are used to obtain zero steady-state error, however our system has an integration step in the actuator (as part of a first-order delta-sigma modulator) such that zero steady-state error can be achieved without resorting to PI controllers.
3. We demonstrate how to derive controller parameters such that the controlled system is guaranteed to achieve the desired controller performance in the presence of runtime variations that cause the system to behave differently from the control model.
4. We implement our control system directly in an IBM BladeCenter blade server and evaluate it using industry standard benchmarks.

5. We show that under a heavy power constraint, our controller can provide much better performance than simpler open-loop and ad-hoc techniques. Under light power constraints, our controller often runs workloads at full speed.
6. Our controller allows server designers to safely under-provision the power supply to lower costs while negligibly affecting performance of real-world workloads. Additionally, the controller provides a solid foundation for building power shifting solutions across the data center.

In the next section we highlight the distinction of our work by discussing related work. In Sect. 3, we discuss system-level management of power in conventional systems and those with feedback controllers. We then demonstrate how we design the controller based on feedback control theory in Sect. 4. Next, in Sect. 5, we analyze the control performance and show how to account for system variation. In Sect. 6, we describe the detailed implementation of each component in the feedback control loop. Our empirical results are presented in Sect. 7 and followed by a discussion in Sect. 8. We draw conclusions in Sect. 9.

## 2 Related work

Power consumption is one of the most important design constraints for high-density servers. Much of the prior work has attempted to reduce power consumption by improving the energy-efficiency of individual server components [1]. In contrast, our paper is focused on providing an effective power management algorithm to control system-level power. Previous work [2] has shown that processors are often the dominant consumers of power in servers. This is particularly true in dense blade server environments. We use processor clock modulation as the actuator in our power controller.

Many researchers use expensive power measurement equipment to instrument servers for their studies [2]. In our work, we use an inexpensive, yet highly accurate, power measurement circuit built-in to recent IBM servers [20] which measures power consumed by the entire server. This enables our technique for power management to be used in ordinary, high-volume servers.

There has been much work done on system-level power management. Zeng et al. [3] and Lu et al. [4] have developed power management strategies for operating systems. In contrast, our work is at the system-architecture level. Our feedback controller in the service processor firmware directly controls the main host processors to keep the system-level power within a power constraint, while requiring no support from the OS or workloads running on the system and is operational during system boot. Thus, the power management is more robust and less susceptible to software errors or malicious threats.

Feedback control theory has proven to be an effective way in improving performance and robustness of computing systems [5]. Skadron et al. [6] use control theory to dynamically manage the temperature of microprocessors. Likewise, Wu et al. [7] manage power using dynamic voltage scaling by controlling the synchronizing queues in multi-clock-domain processors. In contrast to their work, we control peak power for a whole server instead of just the processors and implement it on a conventional server. For example, we are able to handle unexpected power demand from memory, disk, and I/O components.

Minerick et al. [8] develop a feedback controller for managing the average power consumption of a laptop to prolong battery lifetime. Their study relies on experiments to find the best control parameters. In contrast, we derive parameters based on a systematically built control model. In addition, we not only design our controller based on feedback control theory, but also analytically model the possible system variations and provide corresponding theoretic guarantees. We believe our work is the first to provide such insightful analyses for system-level power management. As a result, our control method does not assume any knowledge about potential workloads and thus can be generally applied to any server system. In addition, our controller is designed to meet the tighter real-time constraints for the overload condition of server power supplies. Femal et al. [9] present a two-level framework for controlling cluster-wide power. The *Local Power Agent* (LPA) applies the controller from Minerick et al. to each server in order to limit the server-level power. The *Global Power Agent* dynamically re-allocates the power budgets between the local managers. Our blade server prototype could be used in place of the LPA to control cluster-wide power with tighter margins.

Sharma et al. [10] effectively apply control theory to control application-level quality of service requirements. Chen et al. [11] also develop a controller to manage the response time in a server cluster. Although they both use control theory to manage power consumption, power is only used as a knob to control application-level service metrics. As a result, they do not provide any absolute guarantee to the power consumption of a computing system. In this paper, we explicitly control the power consumption itself to adhere to a given power constraint.

Brooks et al. [17] use ad-hoc control to limit processor temperature so cheaper heat-sinks can be used. In a similar way, one result of our work is that system designers are no longer required to use over-provisioned power supplies to survive worst-case scenarios.

Felter et al. [18] use open-loop control to shift power between processor and memory components to maintain a server power budget. In contrast, our solution can operate at smaller design margins because it uses precision measurement. Our controller could be added to such a system to provide tight guarantees on the system-level limit and provide

a safe environment for power shifting between components that do not use measurement.

Foxton [19], which is not yet available in products, uses on-chip power measurement to control power in a single Itanium processor. Our technique is used outside the main application processor and is therefore applicable to a wider range of architectures. Our power measurement circuit has already been deployed across multiple server products spanning three processor architectures [20].

Ranganathan et al. propose using processor performance states to control blade server power [23]. However, they rely on ad-hoc control methods that do not guarantee stability across a variety of workloads.

Our control system design has been previously described in a technical report [15] and conference paper [24]. This paper adds a detailed discussion of the controller, design implications, and the relationship between power capping and power shifting.

### 3 System-level power management

We present a description of the current power management solution in the BladeCenter as an example of requirements in conventional servers that the control loop must meet in order to satisfy power supply constraints.

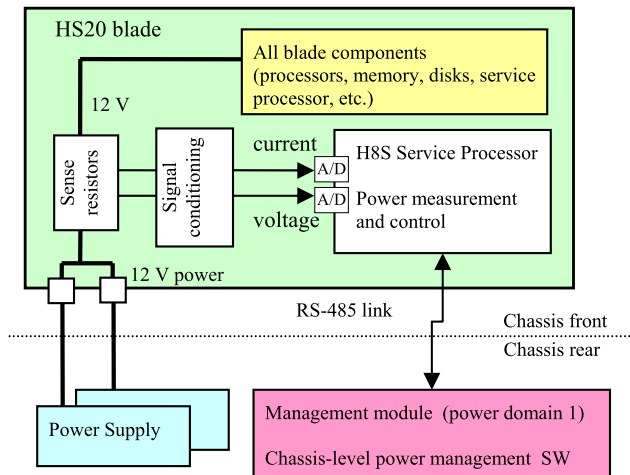
#### 3.1 BladeCenter test platform

Our test platform is a single IBM BladeCenter HS20 blade server with Intel Xeon microprocessors. The power management architecture of BladeCenter is shown in Fig. 1. A BladeCenter chassis has two power domains and is configured with four 2000 W power supplies total. Each power domain is redundantly connected to two of the power supplies so that in the event of a single supply failure, the domain continues operating with the remaining power supply. The first power domain provides power for six blade servers as well as supporting components shared by the blades including management modules, fans, the media tray, and network switches. The second power domain holds eight blade servers. Our discussion and experiments focus on the second power domain because its blades have a stricter, lower power constraint.

BladeCenter adheres to a policy which specifies that the power supplies must not be in an overload situation (drawing more power than their rating) for more than 1 second [14]. Overload can happen when one of the power supplies fails and the load is shifted completely to the remaining supply. If the load remains too high on the single supply for too long, then the remaining power supply may turn off and remove power from all blades in the domain. In practice, the one second target is conservative and the power supply can sustain a power overload for even longer periods of time.

### BladeCenter chassis with 8 blades in second power domain

(Note: figure shows only one blade in the domain)



**Fig. 1** BladeCenter chassis

In this work, we design the controller to manage power at this one second time scale. Servers with different overload power constraints may have different requirements.

Our blade has a label power of 308 W. During overload conditions, the power must be reduced to 250 W. The mechanism to throttle blade power is processor clock modulation (“clock throttling”) which lowers the effective frequency of the processors. There are 8 performance states which correspond to effective frequencies of 12.5%, 25%, 37.5%, 50%, 62.5%, 75%, 87.5%, and 100%.

### 3.2 Feedback control of power

We have developed a feedback control loop which adaptively controls the power consumption of the server by manipulating the processor clock modulation setting. There are two reasons for us to use processor throttling as our actuation method. First, processors typically have well-documented interfaces to adjust performance levels. Second, processors commonly contribute the majority of total power consumption of small form-factor servers. As a result, the processor power difference between the highest and lowest performance states is often large enough to compensate for the power variation of other components. Developing additional power controller for non-processor components would further extend the power control range for the server. Femal et al. and Ranganathan et al. have adopted the approach of using only processor performance states to limit whole-server power consumption [9, 23].

The key components in the control loop include the monitor, the controller, and the actuator. The control loop is invoked periodically and its period is decided based on the trade-off between actuation overhead and system settling time. At each control period, a precision measurement of

the real system-level power consumption is input to the controller. The controller computes the new performance state and sends it to the actuator. The actuator sets the processors to the new performance state. A detailed description of each component is given in Sect. 6.

## 4 Controller design and analysis

The core of our feedback control loop is the controller. First, we mathematically model the system through the process of system identification. Based on the system model, the controller is then designed systematically using feedback control theory. Finally, the control performance of the model is analyzed and the impact of variation between the model and real systems is discussed.

We first introduce the following notation:

$T$ : The control period.

$p(k)$ : The power consumption of the server in the  $k^{\text{th}}$  control period.

$P_s$ : The power set point of the server, namely, the desired power constraint.

$t(k)$ : The performance state of the processors in the  $k^{\text{th}}$  control period.

$d(k)$ : The difference between  $t(k+1)$  and  $t(k)$ . Specifically  $d(k) = t(k+1) - t(k)$ .

The goal of the controller is to guarantee that  $p(k)$  converges to  $P_s$  within a given *settling time*.

For this paper, we construct a control loop that can be used for our particular blade at nominal temperatures. Constructing a control loop for an actual product is similar, but involves taking measurements from many blades to account for manufacturing variation and taking the measurements of the BladeCenter under thermal stress to account for different machine room environments, which is beyond the scope of this paper.

### 4.1 System modeling

We have observed the power consumption changes immediately (within a millisecond) as the performance state changes without regard to the previous performance state. That means the power consumption of the server for a given workload is determined exclusively by the performance setting and is independent of the power consumption in previous control periods. Although temperature also affects system-level power, it operates on a much slower timescale and can be modeled as a disturbance input to the controller. Figure 2 plots the relationship between the processor performance setting and the maximum 1 second power consumption. A linear model fits well ( $R^2 > 99\%$ ) for all workloads. Hence, our system model of power consumption is:

$$p(k) = At(k) + B \quad (1)$$

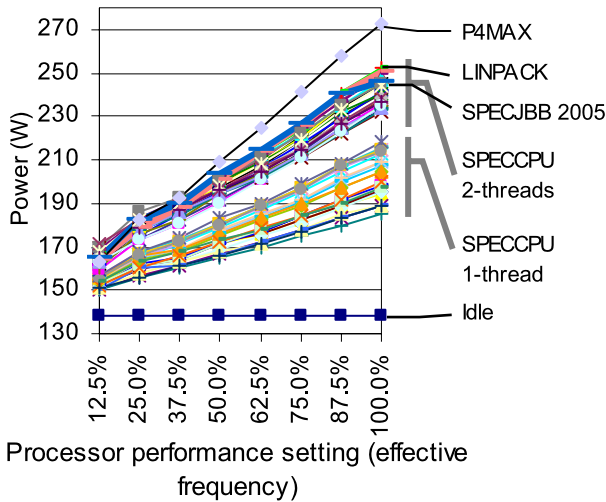


Fig. 2 Maximum system-level power measurement for each processor performance state

The dynamic model of the system as a difference equation is:

$$p(k + 1) = p(k) + Ad(k) \tag{2}$$

### 4.2 Controller design

The goal of the controller design is to meet the following requirements:

- *Stability*: The power should settle into a bounded range in response to a bounded reference input.
- *Zero steady state error*: The power should settle to the set point which is the power constraint.
- *Short settling time*: The system should settle to the set point by a specified deadline.

Following standard control theory, we design a *proportional* (P) controller [12], which has a Z-transform of:

$$C(z) = \frac{1}{A} \tag{3}$$

We used a P controller instead of a more sophisticated PI controller because the actuator includes an integration step (as part of the first-order delta-sigma modulator) such that zero steady-state error can be achieved without resorting to a PI controller.

Figure 3 shows the system diagram.

The time-domain form of our P controller is:

$$d(k) = \frac{1}{A}(P_s - p(k)) \tag{4}$$

It is easy to prove that the controller is stable and has zero steady state error. Satisfying these requirements means that when the power level or set point is changed, the controller will converge precisely to the desired set point. Due

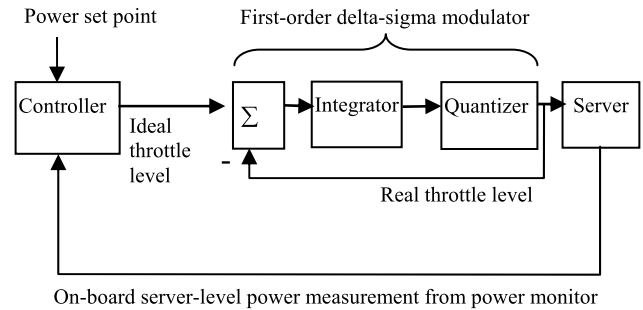


Fig. 3 System diagram for power control

```
// Controller code
error = setpoint - power_measurement;
ideal_throttle = throttle + (1/A) * error;

// Actuator code
// First-order delta-sigma modulation
throttle = truncate(ideal_throttle);
frac = ideal_throttle - throttle;
total_fraction = total_fraction + frac;
if (total_fraction > 1) {
    throttle = throttle + 1;
    total_fraction = total_fraction - 1;
}
// Actuator saturation handling
if (throttle > 7) throttle = 7;
if (throttle < 0) throttle = 0;
```

Fig. 4 Pseudo-code for P controller

to space limitations, we skip the detailed derivation which can be found in standard control textbooks [12].

The desired performance setting in period  $k + 1$  is:

$$t(k + 1) = t(k) + d(k) \tag{5}$$

### 5 Performance analysis for model variation

Our controller is designed to achieve the control performance specified in Sect. 4.2 when the system model is accurate. However, the real system model is usually different from the nominal model (1) we used to design the controller. This variation could have several causes. For example, the server may have different components and configurations from the modeled system, the workload could be different from the ones used in system identification, or manufacturing differences in the microprocessors may cause them to have different power levels. Since developing a different controller for every server and every workload is infeasible, it is very important to analyze the impact of model variation to control performance, before we deliver any theoretical guarantees.

An important observation from our measurements is that the workloads always exhibit a linear relationship between



power consumption and the performance state, even running on different servers. Based on this observation, we mathematically analyze the impact of model variation on control performance. Without loss of generality, we model the real system as

$$p(k) = g_1 A t(k) + g_2 B \quad (6)$$

where  $g_1 = A'/A$  and  $g_2 = B'/B$  are *system gains* and are used to model the variation between the real system model (6) and the nominal model (1). Since our controller is designed based on the difference equation (2) of the system model,  $g_2$  has no effect on the performance of the controller. The closed-loop transfer function for the real system is

$$\frac{P(z)}{P_s z/(z-1)} = \frac{g_1}{z - (1 - g_1)} \quad (7)$$

Now we investigate each control performance metric.

### 1. Stability

The closed-loop system pole in (7) is  $1 - g_1$ . In order for the system to be stable (i.e. converge to the desired set point), the pole must be within unit circle [12], namely  $|1 - g_1| < 1$ . Hence the system will remain stable as long as  $0 < g_1 < 2$ . This result means that if the slope (i.e.  $A'$  or  $g_1 A$  in (6)) of the real model is less than twice that of the nominal model, the system is still stable. The stability range serves as an important reference when applying our controller to different systems and running different workloads.

### 2. Steady state error

The steady state error of the real system can be derived as

$$\lim_{z \rightarrow 1} (z-1)P(z) = \lim_{z \rightarrow 1} \left( \frac{g_1 z}{z - (1 - g_1)} P_s \right) = P_s \quad (8)$$

Equation (8) means that as the system proceeds, the power will settle to  $P_s$  which is exactly the set point. Hence, as long as the system is stable (i.e.  $0 < g_1 < 2$ ), we can achieve the desired power value. This established stability range is an important guideline for us to choose the control parameter  $A$ .

### 3. Settling time

By transforming the closed-loop response (7) to the time-domain, the power variation model becomes

$$p(k+1) = (1 - g_1)p(k) + g_1 P_s \quad (9)$$

As commonly defined in control theory, the system settles when  $p(k)$  converges into the 2% range around the desired set point  $P_s$ . Hence, the required number of sampling periods,  $k$ , for the system to settle can be calculated as:

$$k \geq \frac{\ln 0.02}{\ln |1 - g_1|} \quad (10)$$

Based on our required settling time of 1 second from Sect. 3.1, we can use (10) to derive a range of  $g_1$ . When  $g_1$  is within this range, the system is guaranteed to achieve the required settling time.

## 5.1 Controller parameters

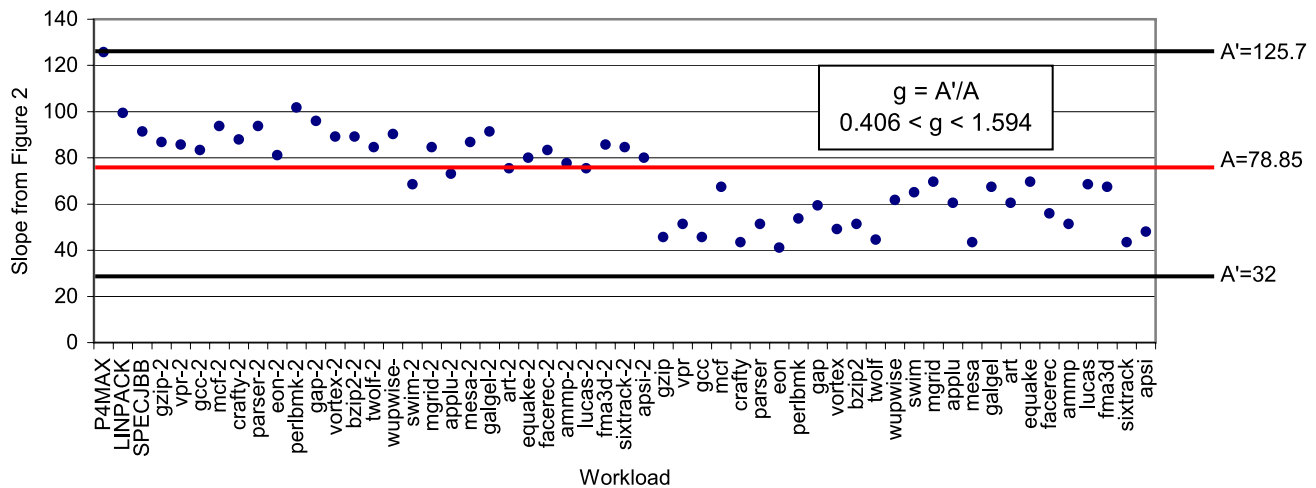
The lower bound to which power can be controlled is constrained by the most power consuming benchmark, running at the lowest performance state. For our blade, the maximum power consumed by any workload at the 12.5% performance state was 170 W. This means that using a set point less than 170 W risks a violation of the power constraint for some workloads. Therefore, the practical range of the set point is from 170 W to 308 W (label power).

The value for  $A$  is chosen by considering the range for  $A'$  as shown in Fig. 5. The maximum value for  $A'$  is the slope of P4MAX, from Fig. 2, which is 125.7, the maximum of all workloads. The minimum value for  $A'$  depends upon the minimum set point value discussed above. We can estimate a safe lower bound for  $A'$  within which the control loop will work. For the minimum  $A'$  we take the slope of the imaginary line connecting (138 W, 0%) to (170 W, 100%). The reasoning is that if the processor were to slow down to near 0% speed, then the power of the workload would be near that of the idle power of 138 W. Therefore, a workload that can go beyond 170 W must have a slope greater than 32. Workloads that have slopes less than 32 cannot reach 170 W and therefore, always run at full-performance as the control loop selects the 100% performance state in an attempt to raise the power to the set point. We calculate  $A$  as the average between the minimum and maximum slopes to guarantee stability even in extreme cases. Therefore,  $A$  is 78.85 and  $0.406 < g_1 < 1.594$ .

Our goal is for system power to settle within 1 second to the set point power. If we use the conventional 2% target for the set point in (10), then power could still be several Watts away from the set point, given that the maximum power measured by P4MAX is 273 W. Therefore, we modify (10) to consider how many intervals are required for the power to settle within 0.5 W:

$$k \geq \frac{\ln \frac{0.5}{273}}{\ln |1 - g_1|} \quad (11)$$

Equation (11) uses 0.5 W out of 273 W to calculate the minimum percentage of the set point to which we need to converge. We calculate that  $k$  is at least 12.1 which means the power will settle in 13 periods. Dividing 1 second by 13 periods tells us the control period should be less than 76.9 ms. For the P controller, we use a slightly more conservative interval of 64 ms.



**Fig. 5** Selection of  $A$  and  $g_1$ . “2” in workload name denotes 2 threads.  $Y$ -axis is the slope of the lines from Fig. 2

## 6 System architecture and implementation

The power control architecture in our server has three pieces. A *power monitor* (hardware and firmware) and a *controller* (firmware) are two new pieces added to the blade that measure power at 1000 samples per second and decide on a throttle setting for the processors every 64 ms. The *actuator* piece providing performance state selection is already available in processors today. We augment the actuator by modulating between the available performance states to effectively produce a finer range of performance states. The pseudo-code used on the service processor for the controller and the actuator components is shown in Fig. 4.

### 6.1 Power monitor

The power monitor measures the blade’s power at its 12 V bulk power supply interface. The power supply interface is attached to sense resistors and a signal conditioning circuit to obtain the current and voltage levels. The conditioning circuit attaches to analog-to-digital converters on the service processor. Every millisecond, the power monitor firmware in the service processor (a 29 MHz Renesas H8) converts the current and voltage signals into a calibrated power measurement for the entire blade. After every 64 readings, the power monitor calculates the average power over the previous 64 ms interval which is sent to the controller.

The absolute measurement is accurate to within 2% due to a calibration feature realized between the hardware and service processor firmware and due to the 1% accuracy rating of the sense resistors. The calibration step reduces a number of additional circuit thermal, aging, and precision issues that would otherwise have led to measurements that varied by 5% or worse as temperatures changed inside the chassis and as a blade’s components aged over time. It is

fundamental to the entire server system to build its power measurement and management around precision dynamic measurements. The quality of the power measurement is constrained by the cost of the measurement circuit. For a high-volume, low-cost server, we use a low-cost circuit that meets a 2% maximum error goal and a 0.1 Watt digital resolution representation of the discrete power signal.

### 6.2 Controller

At each 64 ms control interval, the average power during the last 64 ms is used to select the processor performance state. The output of the controller is an ideal throttle value represented as a floating-point number. The value 0 represents the 12.5% performance state and 7 represents the 100% performance state. It is possible to represent effective performance states that are not strictly available in the processor. For example, 6.2 represents a performance state of 90%. The actuator is responsible for approximating this value.

### 6.3 Actuator

Since the output of the controller is a floating-point value, the actuator code must resolve this to a series of discrete performance state settings to approximate the value. For example, to approximate 6.2, the modulator would output the sequence 6, 6, 6, 6, 7, 6, 6, 6, 6, 7, etc. To do this, we implement a first-order delta-sigma modulator [16], which is commonly used in analog-to-digital signal conversion.

If the modulator outputs a performance state that was different from the previous control interval, the service processor affects the actuation by activating a BIOS routine on the host processor. This routine sets the IA32\_CLOCK\_MODULATION register in the Xeon processor to invoke the performance state. All processors in the server are set to the same performance state.

In the worst case, the controller may actuate every control period. In our two processor server, the BIOS takes 40 microseconds to change the performance state. Therefore, the effect of actuation overhead on system performance is no more than 0.07% (40 microseconds/64 ms). In situations where the performance state does not change (e.g. server requires less than the power constraint), there is no actuation overhead.

#### 6.4 Power budget

In Sect. 5, we found the minimum value for the controller set point to be 170 W. Considering we have a 2% maximum error in power measurement, we must subtract the measurement error from the desired power budget to form the set point used in the controller. For example, if the desired power budget is 250.0 W, then we use 245.0 W as the controller set point to ensure that the real power is below the budget even with the worst case measurement error. Accounting for the worst-case measurement error means the lowest power budget we can guarantee is 173.4 W. When the server power consumption is below the set point the controller saturates at the highest performance state which allows the system to operate at full performance. Selection of the highest performance state is desired because we want the system to run at full performance in normal situations.

## 7 Results

In this section, we present the experimental results of using closed-loop control of power on a single IBM BladeCenter blade. We first describe the experimental environment and benchmarks used in our experiments. Then we introduce the open-loop and ad-hoc controllers to compare with the P controller. Finally we present results evaluating common benchmarks under several power budgets.

### 7.1 Experimental environment

Our test environment is an IBM BladeCenter HS20 blade which was introduced in Sect. 3.1. This server is fully populated with two 3.6 GHz Intel Xeon Irwindale SMP processors with hyper-threading, 8 GB memory, two 36 GB SCSI hard-disks, dual 1 Gb Ethernet interfaces, and a Fibre Channel daughter card.

We compare our P controller to an open-loop controller and an ad-hoc controller that both represent common solutions found in industry. We evaluate each of these three power management policies using power budgets ranging from 210 W to 250 W. The 250 W budget corresponds to the case in which the BladeCenter has lost a single redundant 2000 W power supply. Each measurement presented is the average value of three runs.

**Table 1** Controller set points used in application performance measurements. The open-loop performance setting is determined by the finding the highest performance setting that runs P4MAX without a violation of the power budget. P controller set point is calculated by reducing the power budget by 2% measurement error. Ad-hoc controller set point is 6.1 W lower than P controller set point to account for safety margin due to steady-state error in the ad-hoc controller

Power budget	Open-loop processor performance setting	Improved ad-hoc set point	P control set point
250 W	75%	238.9 W	245.0 W
240 W	62.5%	229.1 W	235.2 W
230 W	62.5%	219.3 W	225.4 W
220 W	50%	209.5 W	215.6 W
210 W	37.5%	199.7 W	205.8 W

**Table 2** Workloads

Workload	OS	Notes
P4MAX	Windows	Run for 3 minutes on both processors using 100% setting (4 threads total)
SPEC CPU2000	Linux	Compiled with Intel Compiler 9.0 (32-bit). Performance results are only shown for rate mode (2 users)
SPECjbb2005	Windows	JVM is BEA JRockit JRE 5.0 Update 3 (RR25.2.0-28). Run 4 warehouses only
Intel Optimized LINPACK	Linux	Version 2.1.2. Run with two threads. 15000x15000 matrix

Our evaluation workloads are listed in Table 2. Some of the workloads are run under SUSE Linux Enterprise Server 9 SP 2 and others are run under Windows Server 2003 Enterprise x64 Edition. In our evaluation, we do not show results for single thread SPEC CPU2000 because the power consumption is typically below the power budgets we evaluate and would result in no application slowdown. The P4MAX workload is a program designed to produce the maximum power consumption on the Intel Xeon microprocessors [13].

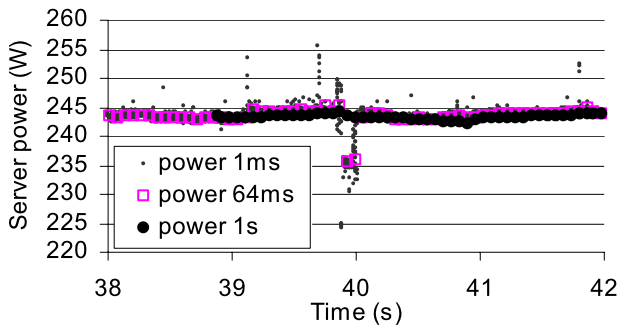
### 7.2 Open-loop control

The open-loop controller, referred to as *open-loop*, selects a fixed performance setting for a given power budget. It assumes that the system could be running any workload and therefore must lower the performance state to the point that even the most power-consuming workload could be run. For this study we take the highest power load to be P4MAX running at normal machine room temperatures. The performance state used for a specific power budget is shown in Table 1 which comes from our power measurements of P4MAX in Fig. 2.

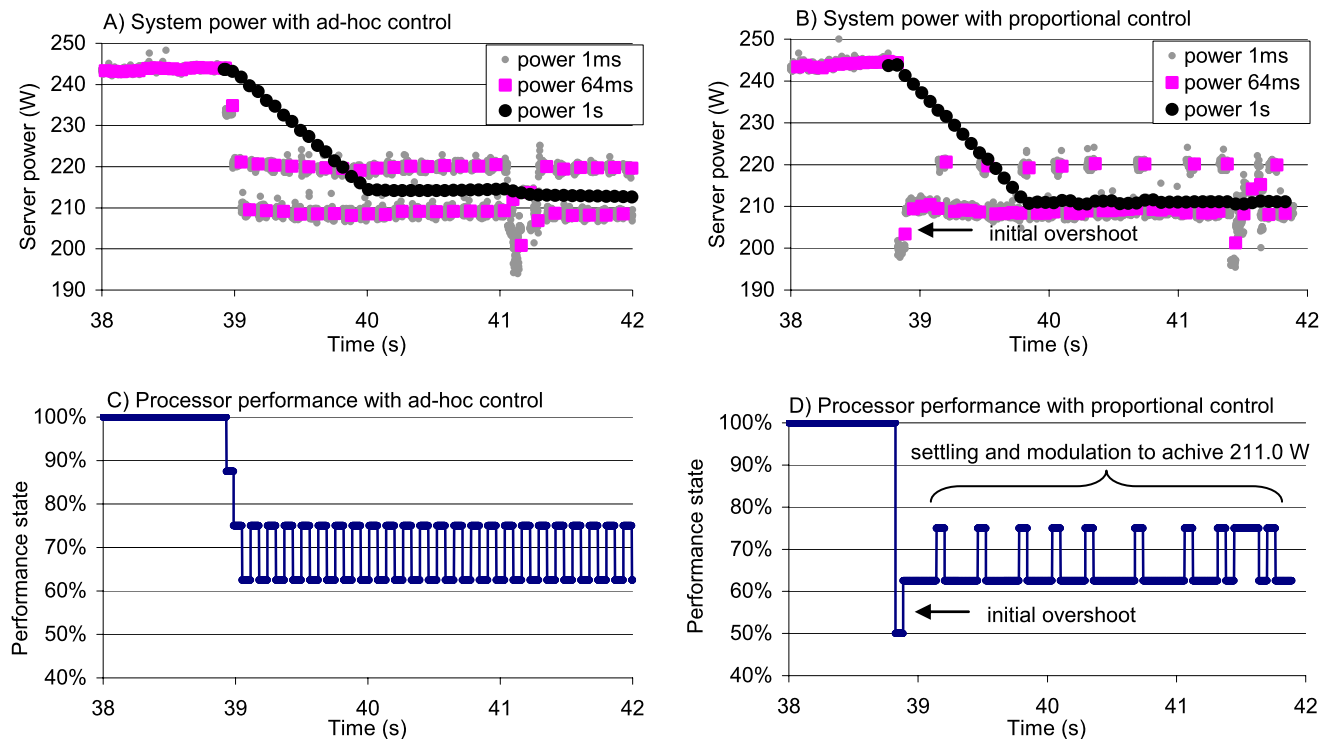


### 7.3 Ad-hoc control

We also compare the P controller with an ad-hoc controller that is representative of typical industry solutions to control power and temperature. We use this to motivate our use of control theory and demonstrate that ad-hoc controllers do not generally have the desired properties that make them



**Fig. 6** LINPACK without power management. Graph shows 4 seconds of the LINPACK benchmark after running for 38 seconds. Average power over 1 ms, 64 ms, and 1 s periods is plotted. LINPACK has almost constant power consumption with periodic dips in power (as seen around the 40 second mark)



**Fig. 7** Example of ad-hoc controller and P controller. The LINPACK benchmark is run and the feedback controller is turned on at 39 seconds into the run with a set point of 211.0 W. In (A) and (C), the ad-hoc controller moves one performance state up or down depending on whether the 64 ms power is below or above the set point. At  $t = 40$ , the processor speed averages 68.8% and the average 1 second power is 216.0 W, violating the set point by 5 W. In (B) and (D), the P controller shows more effective use of the actuator to precisely achieve the 211.0 W target. At  $t = 40$ , the average power over 1 second is 210.7 W and is considered to be settled (by design, within 0.5 W of the set point). By  $t = 41$ , the average power over 1 second measures 211.0 W and the processor speed averages 65.8%

safe and reliable. Our ad-hoc controller actuates every 64 ms just like the P controller. However, it simply raises or lowers the performance state by one step depending on whether the measured power is lower or higher than the power set point.

A simple example of the P controller and ad-hoc controller shows how they are different from each other. First, consider the LINPACK benchmark shown in Fig. 6 which runs at up to 245 W with no power management. In Fig. 7, a power constraint of 211.0 W is introduced at  $t = 39$  s.

The ad-hoc control responds by stepping down the performance state of the processors until the power is lower than the set point. Afterwards, the controller oscillates between the 62.5% and 75% performance states because the set point power is between the power consumption levels at these performance states for LINPACK. The power consumption never settles to the set point and has a steady-state error of 5 W. Even if the ad-hoc controller used a shorter control period, it would still oscillate and have a steady-state error.

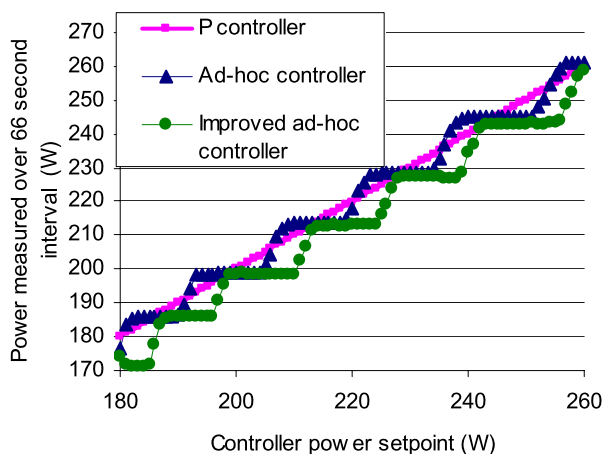
The P controller initially responds by lowering the performance state by several steps in the first control interval. One important benefit of proportional control is that it can react quicker than the ad-hoc method. It initially overshoots

the set point, but then settles within 1 second as designed to the set point power. The first-order delta-sigma modulator in the P controller modulates performance states to run the processors at an effective frequency of 65.8% to meet this set point.

One is tempted to think that the delta-sigma modulator could easily be added to the ad-hoc controller to improve its steady-state error. However, it is difficult in practice. Imagine using an ad-hoc controller that uses smaller step sizes to change the ideal throttle level (e.g., 0.1 instead of 1.0). As the number of discrete performance steps available rises, the steady-state error would reduce, but at the cost of increased settling time. While it may be possible in some cases to design an ad-hoc controller that works well in practice, proportional control is preferred because there are established techniques to provide theoretical guarantees on the control performance and in the case of our P controller there is no steady-state error.

#### 7.4 Improved ad-hoc control

The ad-hoc controller of the previous section can be improved to not have positive steady-state error. In Fig. 8, we show the result of running both the P controller and the ad-hoc controller at many set points from 180 W to 260 W. The results are collected by running P4MAX and collecting the long-term steady-state error observed after a few minutes. The P controller is able to precisely meet the set point with 0.1 W precision. However, the ad-hoc controller shows steady-state error that is often above the set point. At most it is 6.1 W above the set point. An improved ad-hoc



**Fig. 8** Steady-state error. P4MAX, is run with set points from 180 W to 260 W. The maximum power for a 66 second interval is recorded and the average of 3 runs is plotted. The P controller matched the set point to 0.1 W precision. The ad-hoc controller showed long-term, steady-state violations of up to 6.1 W. The improved ad-hoc controller is run with a safety margin by subtracting 6.1 W from the set point and exhibits no power budget violation

controller that always runs at or below the set point is created by subtracting 6.1 W from the set point used. The figure shows that the improved ad-hoc controller with the safety margin does not violate the set point. We use this improved version of the ad-hoc controller in the rest of the paper.

#### 7.5 Application performance

In this section, we investigate the impact of closed-loop power control on the performance of common microprocessor benchmarks. We use the improved ad-hoc controller with the safety margin of 6.1 W because this allows both controllers to run with the same power constraints so that application performance can be compared. Without the safety margin, the ad-hoc controller would violate the power constraint for some workloads and show better performance than the P controller.

We ran *open-loop*, (improved) *ad-hoc*, and *P controller* under each power budget and recorded the throughput achieved. In Fig. 9, we present the benchmark performance as a percentage of the throughput at full-performance. For example, a measure of 100% means the application ran at the same rate as it would in the 100% performance state (no power management). A measure of 50% means that the workload achieved half of the throughput as it would the 100% performance state. The throughput for LINPACK is measured in GFLOP/S, the throughput for SPECjbb2005 is measured in business operations per second, and SPEC CPU2000 is run with 2 user threads and recorded as number of runs per second. CPU2000 is divided into CINT2000 and CFP2000 which consist of integer and floating-point benchmarks, respectively. The reported result is the average for all benchmarks in the category.

Over the entire power budget range, application performance with the *P controller* is 31% to 82% faster than *open-loop* and up to 17% faster than *ad-hoc*. The *open-loop* policy runs applications at 29% to 76% of full-performance. The slowdown is very high because open-loop does not use real-time measurement and must select a single static speed at which to run the processors. The *improved ad-hoc* policy does much better and runs applications at 49% to 99% of full-performance. However, the *P controller* can do even better due to quicker settling times in response to changing power levels and more efficient modulation of the performance states in the processors. The *P controller* achieves between 53% and 100% of full-performance on the workloads across power budgets from 210 W to 250 W. Budgets beyond 250 W for *P controller*, cause performance to quickly converge to full-performance for all workloads.

Figure 10 summarizes the speedup of the P controller over other methods. The speedup is calculated as the throughput of workload under the P controller divided by the throughput of the workload under the other control mechanism. In general, the largest improvements are made at

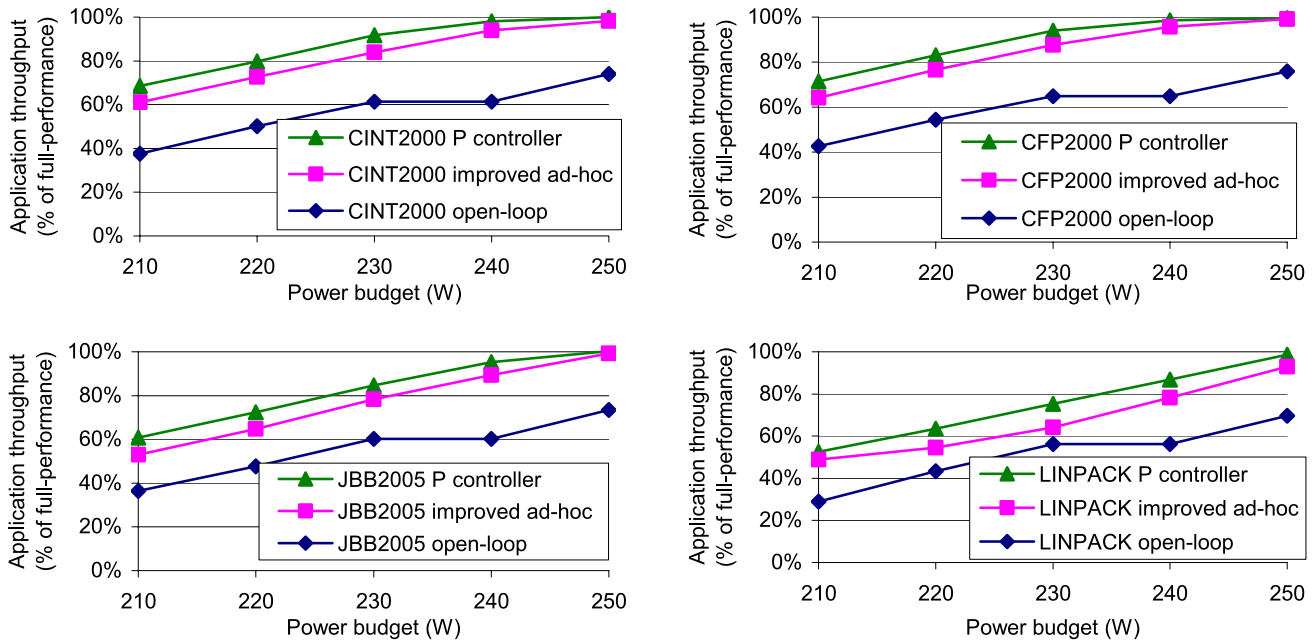


Fig. 9 Application performance. Full-performance (no power management) is denoted by 100% on Y-axis

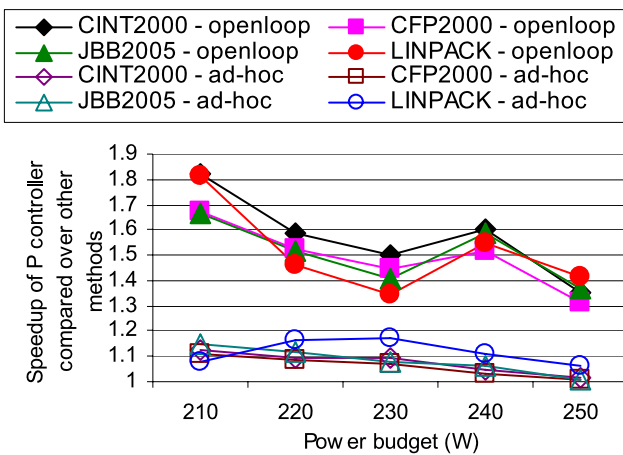


Fig. 10 Speedup of P controller over other methods

the lowest power budgets where the power constraints are the greatest. At the highest power budgets (240 W and 250 W), the improved ad-hoc and P controller policies ran most benchmarks near full performance because the workloads often run below the power set point at these levels.

## 8 Discussion

### 8.1 Accurate power measurement

Accurate power measurement is a vital component to implementing superior power control. All power sensors are measurement instruments which have some measurement er-

ror. This error directly impacts the application performance achieved by the power controller. For example, our power sensors have a 2% measurement error so that a power budget of 240 W would use a controller set point of 235.2 W (4.8 W lower) to avoid the risk of having a real power consumption steady-state error above 240 W. In Fig. 9 we see that each additional 1 W in the power budget used by the P controller results in an increase of more than 1 percentage point in application throughput for LINPACK. If it were possible to use a measurement circuit with negligible error and the controller set point was equal to the power budget, then LINPACK performance could be increased by 4 to 5 percentage points across the power budget range used in the experiments. More realistically, improving the measurement circuitry to have a 1% measurement error would increase LINPACK performance by over 2 percentage points.

### 8.2 Power shifting

The example of LINPACK above shows that allocating even 1 W more to a server can have a measurable impact (over 1%) in application performance. In power-limited data centers, each additional Watt that is allocated to a server comes from another server that had to reduce its power budget and likely its performance. We predict that the ability to allocate server power budget in units of 1 W, will be necessary for achieving efficient power shifting implementations. Additionally, extending a server’s power capping range by implementing even lower-power processor performance states or extending power control to the memory, IO, and storage

subsystems will allow shifting algorithms to scavenge more power from low priority servers.

## 9 Conclusions

In this paper we present a control-theoretic peak power management system for servers. We show that a relatively simple closed-loop controller provides better application performance under a power constraint than by using open-loop solutions found in conventional servers. Since the closed-loop controller measures the actual power the system consumes, it can react to workload changes and adapt the performance state to meet the requested power budget. This can increase application performance by up to 82%. A key factor in realizing this performance improvement is having accurate power measurement which reduces controller design margins and utilizes the available power supply effectively.

We compared our controller to a widely used ad-hoc technique. In general our controller is superior because (1) it has no steady-state error, (2) it has much shorter settling time, (3) it has less actuation overhead, (4) it has guaranteed stability and predictable settling time even when the system model is not accurate, and (5) it provides a stability range which gives the designer confidence about the degree of variation that the control system can tolerate. The P controller runs applications at up to 17% faster than the ad-hoc controller.

Feedback control of power has many implications for the future design and operation of servers. Enforcing a runtime power constraint with closed-loop control, rather than a design-time power constraint with open-loop control, will allow servers to flexibly adapt to changing power and thermal environments. In addition, it allows design-time safety margins to be reduced so that servers run closer to the limits of the available power supply constraints. In our blade, we could reduce label power from 308 W to 250 W with a minimal impact on the performance of real applications. At the server-level, we expect that power capping will be applied to low-cost rack-mount and blade servers so that cost-effective power supplies with lower power ratings can be used. Within a data center, power capping will enable power shifting optimizations to dynamically match server power consumption to workload priority, power distribution constraints, and available rack cooling capacity.

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