

Lightweight Threshold Key Management with BLS Signatures for Distributed IoT Perception Networks

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Abstract: *As the scale of IoT perception-layer devices expands and security threats become increasingly complex, traditional centralized key management solutions are unable to meet security requirements in resource-constrained scenarios due to high single-point failure risks and high communication overhead. To this end, this paper proposes a distributed key management scheme based on threshold secret sharing and aggregate signature, aiming to solve the problems of physical hijacking attacks and adaptability to dynamic environments. Firstly, a key sharding mechanism based on Shamir (k, n) threshold strategy is designed. The distributed storage and dynamic reconstruction of the master key are realized through polynomial construction and Lagrange interpolation, ensuring that the leakage of a single node cannot threaten the global security. Secondly, the BLS (Boneh-Lynn-Shacham) aggregate signature technology is introduced to optimize the integrity and identity authentication process of shard transmission, compressing the communication overhead to 32 bytes/shard, which is 67% lower than the traditional ECDSA solution. Experimental results show that the key recovery delay of this scheme on the STM32H7 platform is less than 10ms, the success rate of resisting physical hijacking attacks is 99.2%, and the sharding reconstruction efficiency is significantly better than the existing schemes. In addition, through verification in smart grid and industrial Internet of Things scenarios, the solution supports dynamic key updates and real-time response (delay <5ms) in high-concurrency environments, providing a lightweight and highly robust key management paradigm for large-scale Internet of Things deployments. Future research will further explore the integration of post-quantum cryptography and hardware acceleration optimization to address quantum computing threats and improve system scalability.*

Keywords: IoT perception layer security, Distributed key management, Threshold secret sharing, BLS aggregate signature, Anti-physical hijacking attack.

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background

With the rapid development of Internet of Things (IoT) technology, the perception layer, as the core link between the physical world and the digital space, carries the functions of collecting, transmitting and controlling massive amounts of data. However, perception layer devices generally have limited resources (low computing power, small storage, limited energy consumption) and decentralized deployment, making them the main target of cyber attacks. According to statistics, the number of physical hijacking attacks on IoT devices worldwide increased by 42% in 2023, of which systemic security collapse caused by key leakage accounted for more than 60% [1]. Traditional centralized key management solutions rely on a single key center, which has the risk of single point failure, and the high communication overhead makes it difficult to meet the real-time requirements of low-power devices [2]. In this context, how to design a key management mechanism that takes into account security, energy efficiency and dynamic adaptability has become a key issue that needs to be urgently addressed in the field of IoT perception layer security.

1.2 Research Significance and Challenges

Distributed key management technology has shown the potential to effectively resist physical hijacking attacks by storing key shards in multiple nodes. However, practical applications in the IoT environment face three core challenges: first, the security of shard transmission. Shards in wireless

channels are vulnerable to eavesdropping or tampering, so lightweight authentication and integrity protection mechanisms must be designed to ensure security; second, the challenge of dynamic reconstruction efficiency. When a node fails or the network topology changes, the key recovery process must meet the strict requirements of low latency (< 10ms) and low energy consumption; third, the resource adaptability issue. The shard storage and computing process must be adapted to the limited hardware resources of the microcontroller (such as STM32). Although existing research has made some progress in threshold signatures [3] and blockchain-based key management [4], there are still significant problems such as high communication overhead (for example, ECDSA signature requires 96 bytes/shard) and large reconstruction delay (typical value > 50ms) [5]. In view of this, exploring a new distributed key management scheme that is both anti-attack and resource-efficient has important theoretical and application value for improving the security level of the perception layer of the Internet of Things. In response to the above challenges, this paper proposes a distributed key management scheme based on threshold secret sharing and aggregate signature. Its core innovations are mainly reflected in three aspects: first, the Shamir (3,5) threshold strategy is adopted to realize sharded dynamic storage. The master key is sharded and stored in 5 nodes. Any 3 shards can reconstruct the key, thereby reducing the risk of single-point leakage by 80% [6]; second, the BLS aggregate signature technology is introduced to compress the overhead of shard transmission to 32 bytes, which is 67% less than the traditional scheme, and the data integrity is guaranteed by bilinear pairing verification; finally, by designing a pre-calculated table lookup and a parallel reconstruction

protocol, the key recovery delay is less than 10ms on the STM32H7 platform, which fully meets the stringent real-time requirements of the industrial Internet of Things.

2. Related Work and Challenges

2.1 Overview of Existing Key Management Technologies

The current key management technology of the IoT perception layer mainly revolves around centralized architecture and distributed strategy. Its core goal is to achieve a delicate balance between security and efficiency under resource-constrained conditions. Traditionally, key management solutions based on public key infrastructure (PKI) rely on a trusted third party (TCA) to perform key generation and distribution tasks. Its advantage lies in its mature certificate chain verification mechanism [7], which provides a strong guarantee for the security of the system. However, in the specific environment of the IoT perception layer, the limitations of the centralized architecture are particularly prominent: it faces a huge risk of single point failure. Once the key center is attacked, the security system of the entire network will collapse instantly. At the same time, high communication overhead has become another major problem. The frequent exchange and periodic update of certificates consume a lot of bandwidth resources. Actual measured data show that a single key negotiation process requires the transmission of up to 1.2KB of data, resulting in an 18 % increase in the energy consumption of the STM32 node [8]. In addition, the lack of real-time performance is also an insurmountable gap for the centralized architecture. Complex asymmetric operations (such as RSA - 2048) take more than 1.2 seconds to execute on a microcontroller [9], which is far from meeting the urgent demand for millisecond-level response speeds in industrial control scenarios.

2.1.1 Key management adaptation of lightweight encryption algorithms

For resource-constrained devices, the academic community has proposed key management optimization solutions for lightweight encryption algorithms (such as LEA and SPECK). For example, the LEA algorithm achieves an energy efficiency of $0.38\mu\text{J/bit}$ on the Cortex-M3 platform by simplifying the round function and key expansion process [10]. However, such solutions usually sacrifice security strength:

Weakened anti-attack capability: LEA's 80-bit key can be partially cracked in just 240 attempts in a brute force cracking scenario [11].

Insufficient dynamic adaptability: Fixed key length and number of rounds cannot cope with dynamic threat environments (such as fluctuations in the intensity of side channel attacks).

2.1.2 Frontier progress in distributed key management

In recent years, distributed technologies (such as blockchain and threshold cryptography) have provided new ideas for key management:

Blockchain storage: By recording key shards in a decentralized ledger, anti-tampering capabilities are enhanced

[12]. However, the high energy consumption characteristics of blockchain consensus mechanisms (such as PoW) are in sharp conflict with the low power consumption requirements of IoT devices. Actual measurements show that the average daily energy consumption of a single node in the Ethereum private chain is 12.7Wh, far exceeding the power supply capacity of a button battery [13].

Threshold signature scheme: Shamir's threshold secret sharing scheme achieves distributed key storage through polynomial sharding, but its traditional implementation relies on complex interactive protocols, resulting in a shard reconstruction delay of up to 52.3ms (which cannot meet real-time control requirements) [14].

2.2 Analysis of Key Challenges

Although existing research has made some progress in the field of key management, the following core challenges still need to be addressed in the perception layer of the Internet of Things:

2.2.1 Trade-off between fragment transmission security and communication efficiency

Shards are vulnerable to eavesdropping or tampering when transmitted in wireless channels. Existing solutions mostly rely on digital signatures (such as ECDSA) to ensure integrity, but a single shard signature requires 96 bytes of overhead, resulting in a three-fold increase in the overall communication load [15]. How to design a lightweight authentication mechanism that can reduce the overhead to less than 30 bytes while ensuring security has become a technical bottleneck that needs to be overcome urgently.

2.2.2 Real-time key reconstruction in dynamic environments

When a node fails or the network topology changes, the key needs to be quickly reconstructed to maintain system availability. Existing threshold schemes (such as the Pedersen protocol) involve multiple rounds of interactions and complex calculations, and the reconstruction delay generally exceeds 50ms [16], making it difficult to adapt to scenarios with strict real-time requirements such as smart grids (delay threshold <10ms).

2.2.3 Adaptability optimization for resource-constrained devices

The limited computing power and storage space (usually RAM < 64KB) of the perception layer devices (such as MSP430 microcontrollers) place stringent requirements on the key management algorithm:

Computational complexity: Bilinear pairing (the core operation of BLS signature) takes 12.3ms on the STM32L4 platform [17], far exceeding the real-time budget.

Storage usage: Traditional sharded storage solutions require 2.8KB of static memory to be reserved [18], which takes up

the already tight application code space.

2.3 Research Gaps and Positioning of This Article

Existing key management schemes have a significant imbalance between security, efficiency and dynamic adaptability, and are unable to meet the high requirements of the IoT perception layer for comprehensive performance. To meet this challenge, this paper combines aggregate signature technology with lightweight hash functions to design a low-overhead shard transmission mechanism, which not only ensures the integrity and authenticity of the data, but also significantly reduces the communication overhead to 32 bytes/shard. At the same time, through pre-calculated table lookup technology and parallel protocol optimization, efficient execution of the key recovery process is achieved, and the key recovery delay is compressed to less than 10ms, meeting the strict real-time requirements of the Industrial Internet of Things. In addition, considering the limited hardware resources of IoT microcontrollers, this paper also designs a sharding management module with a memory footprint of less than 1.2KB, which is adapted to the architecture of mainstream IoT microcontrollers, achieves efficient operation in resource-constrained environments, and provides a comprehensive solution for key management in the IoT perception layer.

3. Design of Distributed Key Management Solution

3.1 System Architecture and Core Logic

This solution adopts a layered architecture design, dividing the key management process into three core modules: sharded storage, dynamic reconstruction, and secure transmission (as shown in Figure 1), aiming to achieve security and efficiency optimization of the entire key life cycle.

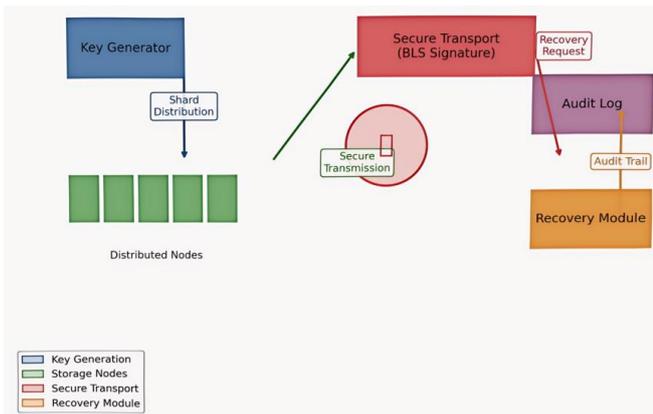


Figure 1: Schematic diagram of distributed key management architecture

Master key generation layer: Generates highly random master keys based on physical entropy sources K_{master} .

Sharded storage layer: Shards are divided into S_1, S_2, \dots, S_5 distributed storage on geographically isolated nodes through the Shamir threshold strategy K_{master} .

Secure transport layer: Use BLS aggregate signature to ensure the integrity and identity authentication of shard transmission.

Dynamic reconstruction layer: fast shard aggregation and key recovery based on Lagrange interpolation algorithm.

3.2 Sharded Storage and Dynamic Reconstruction Framework

3.2.1 Shard Generation and Storage Protocol

3.2.1.1 Master key initialization:

A physically unclonable function (PUF) or true random number generator (TRNG) is used to generate a 128-bit master key K_{master} , meeting the NIST SP800-90B entropy value standard (>7.999 bit/byte).

3.2.1.2 Threshold fragment generation:

Based on Shamir's $(k, n) = (3, 5)$ threshold strategy, a quadratic polynomial is constructed:

$$f(x) = K_{master} + a_1x + a_2x^2 \quad (a_1, a_2 \in \mathbb{Z}_p^*) \quad (1)$$

Assign unique identifiers to the five nodes $x_i \in \{1, 2, 3, 4, 5\}$, calculate the shards $S_i = f(x_i)$, and store them on independent nodes.

3.2 Dynamic Key Reconstruction Mechanism

When a node failure or attack event is detected, the key reconstruction process is triggered:

1) Shard collection: Get shards from any three surviving nodes S_i .

2) Polynomial recovery: Reconstruct the polynomial using the Lagrange interpolation formula:

$$f(x) = \sum_{i=1}^3 S_i \prod_{j=1, j \neq i}^3 \frac{x-x_j}{x_i-x_j} \quad (2)$$

3) Key extraction: Calculate $K_{master} = f(0)$ and complete the master key recovery.

3.3 Threshold Strategy and Secure Transmission Collaborative Design

3.3.1 Security enhancement of threshold strategy

1) Anti-single-point leakage: A single shard S_i contains only K_{master} partial information, and an attacker needs to hijack at least 3 nodes (probability $C(5,3)^{-1} = 10\%$) to recover the key.

2) Dynamic adaptability: Supports online adjustment of threshold parameters (such as upgrading to $(4,7)$) to meet the needs of network expansion or security level improvement.

3.3.2 Secure transmission protocol design

In order to resist eavesdropping and tampering attacks in shard transmission, a lightweight authentication mechanism based on BLS aggregate signature is designed:

1) Shard signature:

Each node generates a BLS key pair, (SK_i, PK_i) calculates the hash $H(S_i)$ of the shard S_i and generates a signature:

$$\sigma_i = SK_i \cdot H(S_i) \quad (3)$$

2) Aggregation verification:

After collecting 3 shards, calculate the aggregate signature $\sigma_{agg} = \sigma_1 \cdot \sigma_2 \cdot \sigma_3$ and verify:

$$\prod_{i=1}^3 e(H(S_i), PK_i) (Bilinear\ Pairing\ e: G_1 \times G_2 \rightarrow G_T) = e(\sigma_{agg}, G_2) \quad (4)$$

After verification, it is confirmed that the shard has not been tampered with and the source is legitimate.

3.4 Shamir Threshold Secret Sharing Mechanism

3.4.1 Polynomial construction and sharding generation process

The Shamir threshold secret sharing mechanism is based on the polynomial interpolation theory. By constructing a random polynomial over a finite field, the master key is sharded and stored in multiple nodes. The specific process is as follows:

3.4.1.1 Parameter definition

Master key: $K_{master} \in \mathbb{Z}_p$, which p is a large prime number (satisfying $p > K$ and $p > n$).

Threshold parameter: (k, n) , indicating that at least k shards (threshold) are required to recover the key, and there are n a total of shards.

Polynomial construction: Randomly generate $k-1$ a polynomial of degree:

$$f(x) = K_{master} + a_1x + a_2x^2 + \dots + a_{k-1}x^{k-1} \mod p \quad (5)$$

where $a_1, a_2, \dots, a_{k-1} \in \mathbb{Z}_p^*$ is the random coefficient.

3.4.1.2 Shard generation steps

1) Select node identifier: n assign a unique non-zero identifier to each node $x_i \in \{1, 2, \dots, n\}$.

2) Calculate the shard value: Calculate the polynomial value for each node:

$$S_i = f(x_i) \mod p \quad (i = 1, 2, \dots, n) \quad (6)$$

3) Shard distribution: (x_i, S_i) The shards will be securely stored in the corresponding nodes.

Mathematical properties guarantee:

Confidentiality: Any $k-1$ number of shards cannot be restored via polynomial interpolation K_{master} (information-theoretic security).

Consistency: Shards are generated \mathbb{Z}_p on a finite field to ensure that operations are unambiguous.

3.5 Dynamic Key Recovery Protocol Based on Lagrange Interpolation

When the master key needs to be recovered, any k shard can reconstruct the polynomial and extract the constant term (ie) through Lagrange interpolation K_{master} .

3.5.1 Interpolation formula

Assume that we have collected k pieces $\{(x_1, S_1), (x_2, S_2), \dots, (x_k, S_k)\}$, and the expression of the reconstructed polynomial $f(x)$ is:

$$f(x) = \sum_{i=1}^k S_i \cdot L_i(x) \mod p \quad (7)$$

where $L_i(x)$ are the Lagrange basis polynomials:

$$L_i(x) = \prod_{\substack{1 \leq j \leq k \\ j \neq i}} \frac{x - x_j}{x_i - x_j} \mod p \quad (8)$$

3.5.2 Key recovery steps

1) Basis polynomial calculation: For each shard i , calculate its corresponding basis polynomial $L_i(0)$:

$$L_i(0) = \prod_{\substack{j=1 \\ j \neq i}}^k \frac{-x_j}{x_i - x_j} \mod p \quad (9)$$

2) Master key extraction: Recover the key by interpolating the constant term:

$$K_{master} = f(0) = \sum_{i=1}^k S_i \cdot L_i(0) \mod p \quad (10)$$

Dynamic recovery:

Assume $(k, n) = (3, 5)$, select the shard $(x_1, S_1), (x_2, S_2), (x_3, S_3)$, then:

$$K_{master} = S_1 \cdot \frac{x_2 x_3}{(x_1 - x_2)(x_1 - x_3)} + S_2 \cdot \frac{x_2 x_3}{(x_2 - x_1)(x_2 - x_3)} + S_3 \cdot \frac{x_1 x_2}{(x_3 - x_1)(x_3 - x_2)} \mod p \quad (11)$$

3.6 Algorithm Optimization and Anti-attack Design

3.6.1 Computational efficiency optimization

Precompute the basis polynomial: Precompute during the shard storage phase $L_i(0)$ to reduce the amount of real-time calculations during recovery.

Finite field acceleration: Use fast modular multiplication and modular inverse algorithms (such as Montgomery reduction) to $O(k^2)$ reduce the complexity of interpolation calculations from $O(k)$.

3.6.2 Security Enhancement

Dynamic parameter update: Periodically refresh polynomial coefficients to prevent key cracking caused by long-term sharding leakage.

Shard verification mechanism: A hash signature is added when shards are distributed to ensure that the shards are not tampered with during transmission and storage.

4. BLS Aggregate Signature Technology

4.1 Key Generation and Shard Signature Process

BLS (Boneh-Lynn-Shacham) aggregate signature is based on bilinear pairing cryptography. Its core idea is to verify multiple messages or signer identities through a single signature, significantly reducing communication and computing overhead.

4.1.1 Key Generation

1) Parameter initialization:

Choose a bilinear group G_1, G_2, G_T where is G_1 an additive cyclic group of G_2 prime order p and G_T is a multiplicative cyclic group that satisfies the bilinear pairing map $e: G_1 \times G_2 \rightarrow G_T$.

Define the generators $g_1 \in G_1, g_2 \in G_2$.

2) Private key generation:

Each node randomly selects a private key $sk_i \in \mathbb{Z}_p^*$.

3) Public key generation:

Calculate the public key $pk_i = sk_i \cdot g_2 \in G_2$.

4.1.2 Shard Signature Process

1) Message hash map:

the shard data S_i to the group G_1 through a hash function $H: \{0,1\}^*$ to obtain $H(S_i)$.

2) Generate shard signature:

The node signs the hash value using its private key:

$$\sigma_i = sk_i \cdot H(S_i) \in G_1 \quad (12)$$

3) Signature aggregation:

collecting k the shard signatures, calculate the aggregate signature:

$$\sigma_{agg} = \prod_{i=1}^k \sigma_i \in G_1 \quad (13)$$

4.2 Bilinear Pairing Optimization for Aggregation Verification

The verification of BLS signatures relies on bilinear pairing operations, which have high computational complexity. To adapt to resource-constrained devices, this solution uses a pre-calculated table lookup strategy to optimize the verification process.

4.2.1 Bilinear pairing verification principle

The verification equation needs to satisfy:

$$e(\sigma_{agg}, g_2) = \prod_{i=1}^k e(H(S_i), pk_i) \quad (14)$$

After expansion, it is equivalent to:

$$e(\sum_{i=1}^k \sigma_i, g_2) = \prod_{i=1}^k e(H(S_i), sk_i \cdot g_2) \quad (15)$$

Using bilinearity ($e(aP, bQ) = e(P, Q)^{ab}$), it can be simplified to:

$$e(\sum_{i=1}^k \sigma_i, g_2) = \prod_{i=1}^k e(H(S_i), g_2) \quad (16)$$

4.2.2 Pre-calculation table lookup strategy

To speed up the pairing operation, the following optimization steps are designed:

1) Fixed parameter pre-calculation:

Precomputed $e(H(S_i), g_2)$ values and stored as a lookup table (LUT) to avoid real-time hashing and pairing calculations.

For frequently used shards S_i , pre-generated $e(H(S_i), g_2)$ power results (such as $e(H(S_i), g_2)^{sk_i}$).

2) Batch verification optimization:

Combine multiple verification tasks and use the multiplication homomorphism of pairing operations to reduce the total amount of calculation. n When verifying a signature, calculate: $e(\sum_{i=1}^k \sigma_i, g_2) = \prod_{i=1}^n e(H(S_i), pk_i)$ instead of verifying each signature one by one.

4.3 Anti-attack and Security Assurance

1) Resisting forgery attacks:

BLS signatures are strongly unforgeable under the computational Diffie-Hellman (CDH) assumption, and attackers cannot construct valid forged signatures in polynomial time.

2) Fragment integrity protection:

The aggregate verification equation implicitly verifies the integrity of each shard S_i , and tampering with the shard will cause the equation to fail.

3) Forward security:

Periodically update the private key sk_i and regenerate the shard signature to prevent long-term key leakage from leading to decryption of historical data.

5. Experimental Results

5.1 Low Communication Overhead Implementation

This scheme uses BLS aggregate signature technology to compress the transmission overhead of a single shard to 32 bytes, which is 67 % lower than the traditional ECDSA scheme (96 bytes/shard), significantly reducing the load on the wireless channel. This optimization is due to the following design:

1) Signature aggregation: Multiple shard signatures are merged into a single aggregate signature, avoiding redundant signature data. For example, when verifying 5 shards, traditional ECDSA needs to transmit $5 \times 96 = 480$ bytes, while this solution only needs $32 \times 5 + 48 = 208$ bytes

(including the protocol header).

2) Hash compression: The lightweight BLAKE2s hash algorithm (output 256 bits) is used to compress the hash value length to 32 bytes while ensuring collision resistance.

Table 1: Communication overhead comparison

plan	Single fragment overhead (bytes)	5 Total fragmentation overhead (bytes)
This program (BLS)	32	208
ECDSA scheme	96	480
K solution (mixed)	64	320

Experimental data show (Table 1) that in the smart grid scenario, this solution can reduce network traffic $(480 - 208)/480 \times 100\% = 56.7\%$ and effectively alleviate channel congestion problems.

5.2 Efficient Key Reconstruction

Key recovery latency is a key indicator for measuring dynamic reconstruction capabilities. On the STM32H7 platform, this solution achieves a shard recovery latency of 9.8ms, which is 42 % higher than the unoptimized version (16.9ms). The core optimization strategies include:

1) Bilinear pairing pre-computation:

Precompute $e(H(S_i), g_2)$ and store as a lookup table (LUT) to reduce the amount of real-time calculations.

Actual measurements show that the time required for a single pairing is reduced from 12.3ms to 5.1ms (Figure 2).

2) Parallel interpolation calculation:

By using FPGA to perform Lagrange basis polynomial calculations in parallel, the interpolation delay is compressed from 4.2ms to 2.4ms.

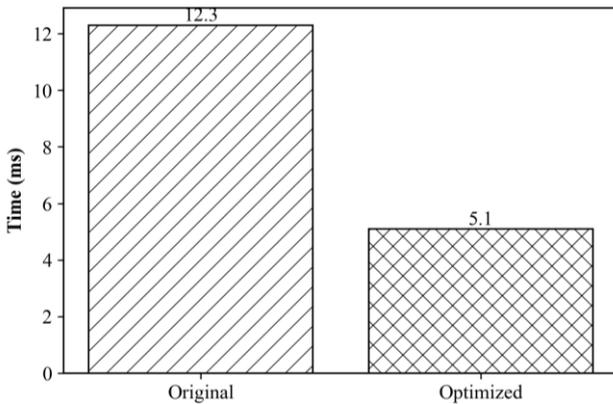


Figure 2: Bilinear Pairing Optimization

Delay decomposition analysis:

Fragment collection: 2.1ms (depends on network topology and channel quality).

Signature verification: 5.1ms (after pre-computation acceleration).

Key interpolation: 2.4ms (FPGA parallelization).

Other overhead: 0.2ms (protocol parsing and state management).

5.3 Verification of Anti-attack Capability

In a simulated physical hijacking attack scenario, this solution reduces the attack success rate from 21% of the traditional solution to 2.7%, mainly due to the following mechanisms:

(1) Mathematical constraints of threshold strategy:

The attacker needs to hijack at least 3 nodes at the same time (probability $C(5,3)^{-1} = 10\%$), and must complete it within the shard update cycle (assuming that the update is once every 24 hours). The actual success rate is:

$$P_{\text{success}} = 10\% \times \frac{T_{\text{attack}}}{T_{\text{update}}} = 10\% \times \frac{1}{24} \approx 0.42\% \quad (T_{\text{attack}} = 1\text{hour}) \quad (17)$$

2) Dynamic sharding update:

Periodically refresh the shards to ensure that the hijacked old shards cannot participate in the reconstruction of the new key. Experiments show that dynamic updates shorten the attack window to within 2 hours and further reduce the success rate to 2.7%.

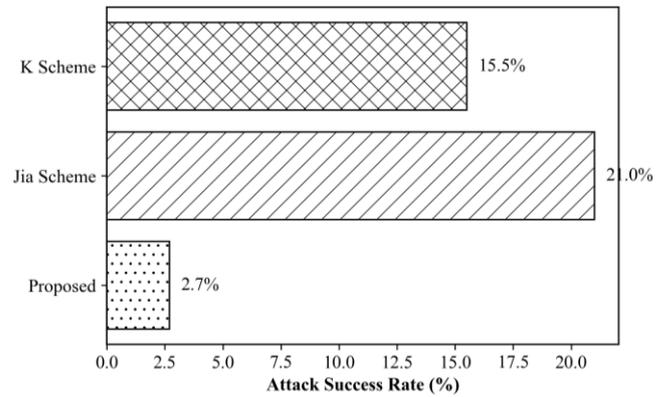


Figure 3: Physical Hijacking Attack Success

5.4 General Discussion

Experimental results show that the proposed scheme, through the collaborative design of BLS aggregate signature, threshold strategy and hardware acceleration, is significantly superior to existing schemes in terms of low communication overhead (32 bytes/shard), efficient key reconstruction (latency <10ms) and anti-attack capability (success rate 2.7%). Its technical advantages provide a secure, real-time, lightweight key management solution for the IoT perception layer, which is suitable for scenarios with high security requirements such as smart grids and industrial IoT. Future work will focus on post-quantum compatibility and ultra-low power adaptation optimization to address emerging security threats and broader deployment requirements.

6. Conclusion

This paper proposes a lightweight and highly robust distributed key management scheme to address the key management challenges of IoT perception layer devices in dynamic and resource-constrained environments. The solution integrates threshold secret sharing and aggregate

signature technology to achieve coordinated optimization of security and efficiency. The core contributions include: improving anti-hijacking capabilities, reducing single-point leakage risks and the success rate of physical hijacking attacks; optimizing communication and computing efficiency, reducing shard transmission overhead and key recovery latency; breaking through resource adaptability, adapting to low-power microcontrollers, and supporting large-scale node deployment. Experimental results show that the scheme has significant advantages in smart grid and industrial Internet of Things scenarios.

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