Raft: A Consensus Algorithm for Replicated Logs

COS 418: Distributed Systems
Lectures 13-14

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Consensus

Definition:
• A general agreement about something
• An idea or opinion that is shared by all the people in a group

Where do we use consensus?
• What is the order of operations
• Which operations are fully executed (committed) and not
• Who are the members of the group
• Who are the leaders of the group

Raft Overview

1. Leader election
2. Normal operation (basic log replication)
3. Safety and consistency after leader changes
4. Neutralizing old leaders
5. Client interactions
6. Reconfiguration

Goal: Replicated Log

• Replicated log =⇒ replicated state machine
  – All servers execute same commands in same order
  – Group of \(2f+1\) replicas can tolerate \(f\) replica crashes
• Consensus module ensures proper log replication

RAFT slides based on those from Diego Ongaro and John Ousterhout
The Need For a Leader Election

- Recall consensus-based replication easier for f failed backup replicas
- But what if the f failures include a failed primary?
  - All clients’ requests go to the failed primary
  - System halts despite merely f failures

Leaders and Views

- Let different replicas assume role of leader (primary) over time
- System moves through a sequence of views
  - View = { leader, { members }, settings }

Server States

- At any given time, each server is either:
  - Leader: handles all client interactions, log replication
  - Follower: completely passive
  - Candidate: used to elect a new leader
- Normal operation: 1 leader, N-1 followers

Liveness Validation

- Servers start as followers
- Leaders send heartbeats (empty AppendEntries RPCs) to maintain authority over followers
- If electionTimeout elapses with no RPCs (100-500ms), follower assumes leader has crashed and starts new election
Terms (aka epochs)

- Time divided into non-fixed-time terms
  - Election (either failed or resulted in 1 leader)
  - Normal operation under a single leader
- Each server maintains current term value
- Key role of terms: identify obsolete information

Elections

- Start election:
  - Increment current term, change to candidate state, vote for self
- Send RequestVote to all other servers, retry until either:
  1. Receive votes from majority of servers:
     - Become leader
     - Send AppendEntries heartbeats to all other servers
  2. Receive RPC from valid leader:
     - Return to follower state
  3. No-one wins election (election timeout elapses):
     - Increment term, start new election

Safety:

- Each server votes only once per term (persists on disk)
- Two different candidates can’t get majorities in same term

Liveness:

- Some candidate eventually wins
  - Each choose election timeouts randomly in [T, 2T]
  - One usually initiates and wins election before others start
  - Works well if $T >>$ network RTT

Technique used throughout distributed systems:

- Desynchronizes behavior without centralized coordination!

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Log Structure

- Log entry = < index, term, command >
- Log stored on stable storage (disk); survives crashes
- Entry committed if known to be stored on majority of servers
  - Durable / stable, will eventually be executed by state machines

Normal operation

- Client sends command to leader
- Leader appends command to its log
- Leader sends AppendEntries RPCs to followers
- Once new entry committed:
  - Leader passes command to its state machine, sends result to client
  - Leader piggybacks commitment to followers in later AppendEntries
  - Followers pass committed commands to their state machines

Log Operation: Highly Coherent

- If log entries on different server have same index and term:
  - Store the same command
  - Logs are identical in all preceding entries
- If given entry is committed, all preceding also committed

Normal operation

- Crashed / slow followers?
  - Leader retries RPCs until they succeed
- Performance is “optimal” in common case:
  - One successful RPC to any majority of servers
Log Operation: Consistency Check

- AppendEntries has \langle index, term \rangle of entry preceding new ones
- Follower must contain matching entry; otherwise it rejects
- Implements an induction step, ensures coherency

Leader Changes

- New leader's log is truth, no special steps, start normal operation
  - Will eventually make follower's logs identical to leader's
  - Old leader may have left entries partially replicated
- Multiple crashes can leave many extraneous log entries

Safety Requirement

Once log entry applied to a state machine, no other state machine must apply a different value for that log entry

- Raft safety property: If leader has decided log entry is committed, entry will be present in logs of all future leaders
- Why does this guarantee higher-level goal?
  1. Leaders never overwrite entries in their logs
  2. Only entries in leader's log can be committed
  3. Entries must be committed before applying to state machine

Picking the Best Leader

- Elect candidate most likely to contain all committed entries
  - In RequestVote, candidates incl. index + term of last log entry
  - Voter V denies vote if its log is "more complete": (newer term) or (entry in higher index of same term)
  - Leader will have "most complete" log among electing majority
• Case #1: Leader decides entry in current term is committed
  • Safe: leader for term 3 must contain entry 4

• Case #2: Leader trying to finish committing entry from earlier
  • Entry 3 not safely committed:
    – $s_5$ can be elected as leader for term 5 (how?)
    – If elected, it will overwrite entry 3 on $s_1$, $s_2$, and $s_3$

Solution: New Commitment Rules
  • For leader to decide entry is committed:
    1. Entry stored on a majority
    2. $\geq 1$ new entry from leader’s term also on majority
  • Example: Once e4 committed, $s_5$ cannot be elected leader for term 5, and e3 and e4 both safe

Challenge: Log Inconsistencies
  Leader changes can result in log inconsistencies
Repairing Follower Logs

- New leader must make follower logs consistent with its own
  - Delete extraneous entries
  - Fill in missing entries
- Leader keeps nextIndex for each follower:
  - Index of next log entry to send to that follower
  - Initialized to (1 + leader’s last index)
- If AppendEntries consistency check fails, decrement nextIndex, try again

Neutralizing Old Leaders

- Leader temporarily disconnected
  - Other servers elect new leader
  - Old leader reconnected
  - Old leader attempts to commit log entries
- Terms used to detect stale leaders (and candidates)
  - Every RPC contains term of sender
  - Sender’s term < receiver:
    - Receiver: Rejects RPC (via ACK which sender processes…)
  - Receiver’s term < sender:
    - Receiver reverts to follower, updates term, processes RPC
- Election updates terms of majority of servers
  - Deposited server cannot commit new log entries

Client Protocol

- Send commands to leader
  - If leader unknown, contact any server, which redirects client to leader
- Leader only responds after command logged, committed, and executed by leader
- If request times out (e.g., leader crashes):
  - Client reissues command to new leader (after possible redirect)
- Ensure exactly-once semantics even with leader failures
  - E.g., Leader can execute command then crash before responding
  - Client should embed unique request ID in each command
  - This unique request ID included in log entry
  - Before accepting request, leader checks log for entry with same id
RECONFIGURATION

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Configuration Changes

- View configuration: \{ leader, \{ members \}, settings \}
- Consensus must support changes to configuration:
  e.g., replace failed machine, change degree of replication
- Cannot switch directly from one config to another:
  conflicting majorities could arise

Configuration Changes

- Joint consensus in intermediate phase: need majority of both old and new
  configurations for elections, commitment
- Configuration change just a log entry; applied immediately on receipt
  (committed or not)
- Once joint consensus is committed, begin replicating log entry for final config

2-Phase Approach via Joint Consensus

- Any server from either configuration can serve as leader
- If leader not in \( C_{\text{new}} \), must step down once \( C_{\text{new}} \) committed

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Summary

- RAFT “looks like a single machine” that does not fail
  - Use majority (f+1) out of 2f+1 replicas to make progress
- RAFT is similar to multi-paxos / viewstamped replication
  - Details make it easier to understand and implement
- Strong leader add constraints, but makes things simple
  - Only vote for a leader with a log ≥ your log
  - Leader's log is canonical, gets others replica's logs to match