Linux Plumbers Conference 2022



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Pollable ptraced pidfds

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When a process wants to ptrace a child without imposing unacceptable signal-handling latencies, it has to waitpid() on it, so that when a signal is received it is immediately detected and can be dispatched to the tracee. But if that process also wants to do anything else at all, it cannot be stuck in waitpid: it must be able to go off and do that other work. So it must use waitpid(WNOHANG). To avoid even worse latencies if that work takes time, it is best done in other threads (or processes). But ptracing is thread-specific, and only the ptracing thread can make changes in the traced process or receive information about it via waitpid(). So when the other work the process is doing needs any changes to be done in the traced child, the process must inform the ptracing thread of it, so that thread can make them.

Now if ptrace waitpid()s were pollable via pidfds, you could use one poll() in the ptracing thread to receive messages about work to be done in the traced child *and* to get told about changes of state in the traced child that require attention from the ptracing thread. But right now that is impossible: waitpid() only wakes up polled pidfds if the pid is an actual child, not a ptracee, and you can only waitpid() on pids, not fds. So the problem pidfds aim to solve, i.e. that there are two incompatible waiting systems, one for pids and one for fds, *still exists* for ptraced children. I think this should be fixed, and fixing it is not hard: but fixing it without breaking existing users of pidfds might be harder, since they won't expect ptraced children to wake up poll()ed pidfds, because they didn't historically. I have ideas and even working code, but I need some advice about how to make it upstream- ready: maybe it's acceptable to break compatibility in this minor way or maybe we need to do something cleverer. I don't know. Could anyone advise?

I agree to abide by the anti-harassment policy

Yes

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