

Grid Modernization in the Era of Inverter-Based Resources: Stability, Protection, and Control Perspectives

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Abstract. The fast penetration of inverter interface energy resources (IIEs), such as solar PV, wind power and battery ES, is changing fundamentally the structure of modern power systems. Although these devices allow for decarbonization and power system flexibility, they lead to important issues in terms of reduced inertia, weakening of the systems' strength, changing fault characteristics, or interactions control problems. Conventional grid topologies and protection/control are designed for synchronous machine systems and more ill-suited to this new mode of operation. This paper investigates grid modernization in the context of stability, protection, and control of IBR-plagued grids. It provides a systematic integration of emerging challenges for the full range of time scales, reports recent control and protection schemes as well as technology developments, and discusses validation and deployment aspects. This paper emphasizes the importance of coordinated grid-forming control, adaptive protection, and planning by the entity responsible for system operation in guaranteeing reliable resilient secure operation of power systems.

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1 Introduction

The fast development of renewable energies and power electronics-dominated generation is changing the structure of modern electric systems around the world. In this light, the concept of grid modernization at a supplement to inverter control sophistication, adaptive protection strategies and system-wide coordination schemes should be addressed. This paper contributes to this debate by consolidating the stability, protection and control viewpoints for inverter-dominant power systems in a systematic manner. More importantly, this paper (i) consistently categorizes IBR-related grid problems over the relevant time scales; and (ii) elaborates control models and protection mechanisms that are applicable for renewable-integrated power grids; as well as (iii) formulates a verification-oriented upgrade approach to facilitate robust deployment of IBRs in future power systems [1-3].

2 Evolution of Power Systems toward Inverter-Dominated Grids

Power systems all over the world are experiencing a transformation in their underlying structure caused by the mass integration of inverter-based generation resources namely wind turbines, solar photovoltaic plants and battery-based energy storage systems. In the past large synchronous generators were powering electric grids whose entity with respect to their electro-mechanical structure provided inherent system inertia, short-circuit strength and firm voltage support. These mechanical characteristics resulted in predictable frequency response, high fault current contribution and easy protection coordination [4]. However, with the increasing retirement of synchronous machines and addition of power-electronics-interfaced generation in modern power systems, grid behavior is undergoing a fundamental change. Inverter-dominated grids are characterized by critical system features that have transitioned from being inherent to the system to almost entirely control-based. In the present-day inertia is no longer a real inherent characteristic but an owned up emulation by quickly closing control loops in time and fault contribution is limited by semiconductors than electromagnetic. This means that control response is defined in software, with voltage regulation and frequency stability dependent upon pre-defined software responses (or control – design), parameter tuning and interactions between multiple inverters can impact significantly upon system performance. This changes both the flexibility and complexity of grid operation. In this changing scenario, two main inverter control strategies have been formulated: grid-following and grid-forming [5-6]. This shifting architecture for the grid is sketched out in Fig. 1, which illustrates the transition from central synchronous generation to distributed resources based on inverters, coordinated via hierarchical control layers." This development demonstrates the importance of system

control and protection inverter dominated power systems based on an integrated approach [7].

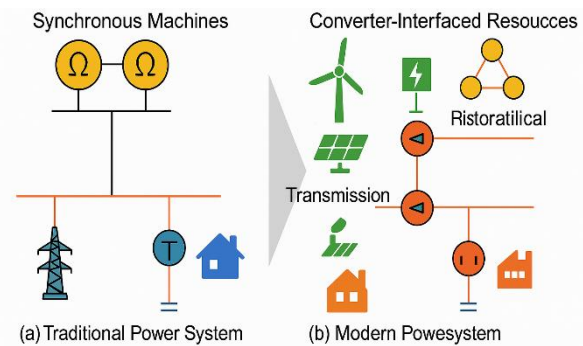


Fig. 1. Conceptual Evolution of Power Grid Architecture.

3 Stability Challenges under High Inverter-Based Resource Penetration

The wide integration of inverter-based resources has fundamentally transformed the stability behaviour of contemporary power systems, and classical stability concepts should be re-considered with respect to various operational time scales. Unlike synchronous machines, EFRs offer no rotational inertia or electromechanical damping themselves. Therefore, the stability of renewable-dominated power grids in general depends on control strategies, system strength and cooperation among converters. The most serious challenge at sub-second time frames is increased AC system rushing, to be seen from the larger forcing after a disturbance. High RoCoF's limit the amount of time for protection systems and frequency containment reserves to respond, and also increases risk of cascading outages. In weak grid scenarios (i.e. low short circuit strength), these fast dynamics are also aggravated, resulting in the inability of converter controls to tolerate voltages disturbances and measurement noise [8]. Seconds to minutes timescale Small-signal stability issues are prevalent, especially in converter-rich grids. Cross-couplings between inverter control loops, such as phase lock loop (PLL), current controller and voltage regulator or generator control loop can create weakly damped oscillatory modes. These oscillations are more severe in weakly gridded systems, where the impedance property acts to magnify control coupling effects. Without proper damping, such interactions may cause enduring power oscillations and even a complete loss of synchronism in networks with inverter-based generation. At longer time horizons voltage stability becomes a major issue because of the limited reactive power capabilities of inverter-based generators close to their current limits. Moreover, coordination deficiencies among active power voltage control at transmission- and distribution- levels might bring extra instability, if control purposes do not match [9].

Table 1. Stability Challenges under High IBR Penetration

Time Scale	Challenge	Root Cause	Mitigation
Sub-second	High RoCoF	Low inertia	Grid-forming control
Seconds	Oscillations	Converter interactions	Impedance shaping
Minutes	Voltage instability	Reactive power limits	Volt/VAR control
Cross-scale	Control coupling	Multiple controllers	Hierarchical control

In order to systematically identify these issues, Table 1 provides an overview on the key stability challenges in inverter-dominated grids by associating observed symptoms with their root causes and commonly applied measures over several operational horizons. This constructive taxonomy serves to develop tailored control methodologies and drives subsequent discussions on grid-forming control and coordinated stability reinforcement [10].

4 Protection Challenges in Converter-Dominated Power Systems

The penetration of inverter-based resources at distribution grid changes the nature of fault attribute at modern power systems and poses an abundant challenge to conventional protection schemes. Historical protection paradigms for synchronous-machine-dominated grids have been developed with resistance against fault currents high enough to operate overcurrent, distance, and impedance-based protections in a reliable fashion. In converter dominated systems, in contrast, the fault response is mostly defined by control algorithms than electromagnetic machine physics leading to significantly decreased fault current magnitude and duration. Inverter-type resources are generally designed with strong current limiting for protection of semiconductor devices. Within these ruptures, the converters can inject currents above-rated levels but at times are transient and of short duration with wave shape representations very different from sinusoidal assumptions. For this reason, traditional overcurrent protection may be unable to detect faults in a timely manner or become non-coordinating between protection zones. Instantaneous protection and distance schemes that requires estimation of impedance become less secure because of the distorted voltage and current measurement, fast transients introduced by control, dynamic nature of power system during fault conditions. Another important issue results from the swift and flexible response of inverter controls. Grid-forming and grid-following converters change their output continuously due to disturbance that can lead unintended trips of the protection. Control functions (e.g. voltage regulation, fault ride through, current control) may be used to conceal these signatures, confuse the protection relays. These effects are exacerbated in weak-grid scenarios with increased risk of mis-coordination, delayed clearing or false tripping [11].

5 Advanced Control Paradigms for Grid Modernization

The integration of high-penetration inverter resources in power systems requires the inevitable migration from conventional control paradigms. Traditional control techniques that were designed for transmission networks initially dominated by synchronous machines exploit natural inertia, strong electromechanical coupling and predictable dynamic responses. Fast power-electronic controls (there is limited overcurrent capability) and a significant reliance on communication and coordination take the place of these traits in inverter-dominated fields. Consequently, advanced control methodologies have been developed for achieving stable and resilient operation of renewable-rich power systems at high penetration levels. Among the most important developments is grid-forming control of inverters, allowing them to dictate voltage magnitude and frequency, rather than simply tracking an external grid reference. Grid-forming inverters act as regulated voltages sources and are able to function responsibly under weak-grids and low-inertia conditions. Through synthetic inertia, fast frequency response and stable voltage references, grid-forming control enables islanded operation, black start and enhanced disturbance rejection. Nevertheless, ensuring a stable power sharing among the multiple grid-forming units is not straightforward and must be properly adjusted in order to successfully achieve the objective, especially when different types of inverters coexist in the system. Grid-forming control is closely related with droop-based methods as well as the virtual synchronous machine (VSM) concept. Droop control, which applies Governor and Excitation like concepts to the power-electronic world via active power–frequency as well as reactive power–voltage relationships. They are decentralized, economical and easy to deploy which are attractive for practical use. VSM-based methods take a step further by providing dynamic-equivalent models for synchronous generators, with inertia and damping effects simulated to enhance frequency stability and oscillation damping. Although VSM control brings improvement to system-level behaviour, it will bring more key component and sensitivity for model parameters. Another notable category of methods belongs to the field of impedance shaping and interaction-aware control. Due to the interaction of inverter control loops with network impedance, small-signal instability and oscillation may occur under weak grid and dense converter situations. Virtual impedance and adaptive current limitation approaches alter the apparent electrical characteristics of inverters in order to mitigate resonances and enhance robustness. These approaches work well at distribution level but rely on consistent and relatively accurate grid model information as well as coordinated tuning across all devices [12].

Table 2. Advanced Control Paradigms for Grid Modernization

Control Paradigm	Primary Objective	Deployment Context	Key Limitations
Grid-Forming Control	Voltage & frequency reference	Weak grids, islanded operation	Tuning complexity
Droop Control	Power sharing & stability	Microgrids, DER clusters	Reduced dynamic performance
Virtual Synchronous Machine	Inertia emulation	Low-inertia systems	Parameter sensitivity
Impedance Shaping	Oscillation damping	Converter-dense feeders	Accurate modeling required
Hierarchical Control	Multi-level coordination	Large interconnected grids	Communication dependency

In addition to a device level control, hierarchical and coordinated control architectures are required for the grid wide modernization. This is conceptually depicted in Figure 2, showing the trend towards multi-level control structures featured in present power systems. Fast current and voltage dynamics are controlled at the device level, active power sharing and voltage support between distributed resources is coordinated at the feeder level, and frequency restoration, congestion management, economic dispatching are governed at the system levels. This hierarchy provides for rapid local reactions while maintaining global optimization and security goals.

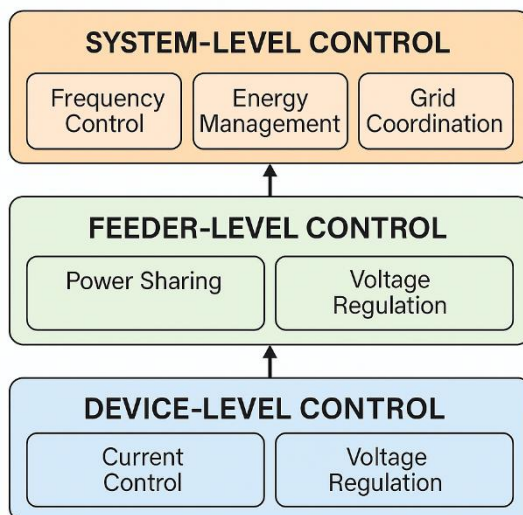


Fig. 2. Hierarchical Control Architecture for Grid Modernization in Inverter-Dominated Power Systems

Advanced control schemes also need to consider protection-aware and constraint-aware functionalities. The inverter controls should be compliant with fault ride-through requirements, current limits and protection coordination constraints to prevent out-of-range trip schemes or loss of selectivity.

Adaptive setpoints, dynamic selection between active and reactive power and coordination with protection systems are therefore essential points of the state-of-the-art control design. A summary of the trade-offs between these control innovations is presented in Table 2. The grid forming and VSM based methodologies provide significant stability benefits but they oddity tuning interoperation issues. Droop-based approaches are secure, scalable and stable but needing compensation for additional damping and/or coordination. System impedance shaping increases stability in weak grids but requires accurate system modelling. The hierarchical coordination enables better system performance for the whole but adds to communication and implementation complexities. Together, these innovative control methodologies represent the cornerstone of grid modernization to facilitate secure operation of power systems in the presence of high penetration levels of inverter-based renewable generation.

6 Flexibility, System Strength, and Operational Planning

In addition to near-real-time control improvements, a successful high-IBR grid modernization requires to secure system strength and operational flexibility. System strength — which can be described using measures such as short-circuit ratio (SCR) or equivalent grid impedance, for example contributes significantly to the stable operation of converter-interfaced generation. Power reversal and control interactions are exaggerated, voltage stability margins weaken and the protection performance drop, if the situation of grid weakness is not appropriately treated system strength planning becomes more important for modern power systems. In the case of low-inertia, IBR-dominated grids, inertia adequacy is not necessarily an attribute of generation assets any longer. Instead, inertia is a new design and implementation consideration that needs to be considered carefully through scenario-based planning. Approaches and methods such as minimum inertia limits, fast frequency response obligations and location dependent strength assessments are getting introduced in transmission and distribution planning studies. Where weaknesses are located, selective reinforcement with additional resources -- such as synchronous condensers, STATCOMs and other FACTS devices is added to increase the capacity of short circuit strength, dynamic voltage support and fault ride-through capability. On the other side, operational flexibility is also critical to cope with variability and uncertainty of the macroeconomic value of variable renewable generation. Energy storage systems can offer fast-response balancing, reserves and congestion management whereas demand response allows loads to participate in frequency and voltage regulation. Network upgrades and more sophisticated policy processes, e.g., dynamic line ratings and topology optimization, then push back the boundaries of flexibility on the grid. Crucially, flexibility and

system strength planning should be integrated, not separate. Storage and demand response will address the energy balancing and ramping requirements, but cannot replace sub-second stability services without proper control and network support. Therefore, contemporary OP frameworks integrate strength-aware constraints, flexibility portfolios and advanced forecasts to secure operation with varying time scales. This holistic view allows the system operators to limit their focus on renewable dominated power systems without compromising the reliability, resiliency, or operational efficiency [13].

7 Methodology and Validation Framework for Modernized Grids

In addition, to assure the trustworthy penetration of inverter-based resources at a large scale, grid modernization needs to be complemented by a systematic and repeatable validation methodology that integrates fast converter dynamics with collective system-level effects, and protection performance under stressed conditions. This paper presents a multiple validation level experimental platform which is able to evaluate the power, angle and frequency stability as well as continuous protection and control performance under various renewables penetration scenarios.

Table 3.

Category	Metric	Test Scenario	Acceptance Criteria
Frequency Stability	RoCoF, nadir	N-1 generation loss	Within grid-code limits
Voltage Stability	Recovery time	Weak-grid fault	Recovery \leq specified time
Small-Signal Stability	Damping ratio	Inter-area oscillation	Damping \geq target
Protection	Selectivity	Low fault current	Correct isolation
Resilience	Restoration time	Islanding/black-start	Stable reconnection

The methodology starts with identifying a representative power system that includes both transmission and distribution networks, providing the coordination of analysing bulk-system and feeder-level changes. Scenarios are developed to model incremental growth in the penetration of inverters-based resources, different system strength levels, and typical contingencies including generator trips, line faults and islanding situations. This scripted approach guarantees the coverage of normal and abnormal conditions of operations encountered by modern power systems. EMT simulation is used to consider sub second dynamics related to inverter control loops, grid-forming behaviour, and protection interactions. For longer timescale operational analysis, RMS or phasor-domain

simulations are performed to assess frequency restoration, voltage regulation and reserve activation over minutes to hours. Co-simulation methodologies are applicable for connecting EMT and RMS tools, achieving a consistent analysis of time scales at reduced computational cost. Optionally, hardware-in-the-loop (HIL) tests are included to validate controller designs with realistic signal delays, measurement noise and communication restrictions. Control-HIL and power-HIL setups can also test grid-forming and protection algorithms on high-fidelity network models before deployment. End-to-end benchmarking workflow the complete benchmarking process, from system modelling and parameterization, to scenario generation, simulation run and performance analysis is shown in These measures and their corresponding test cases are summarized in Table 3, which serves as a clear framework for comparing control and protection solutions. Together, they enable iterative evaluation and decision-making on grid modernization, rich in renewables [14].

8 Discussion: Implications for Utilities, Operators, and Policymakers

The findings in this paper emphasize that grid modernization for the high-level penetration of inverter-based resources is not only a single-technology challenge but also a universal change of stability, protection and control. From a security point of view, the findings explain why grid-forming control solutions are increasingly surpassing traditional grid-following techniques in weak-grid and low-inertia regions. Grid forming inverters set the voltage and frequency reference levels to counteract high RoCoF, improve damping of oscillations as well as resiliency of the system during contingencies. For utilities and system operators, this means a transition in operating philosophy—from implicitly “managing” inertia via synchronous machines to the procurement and coordination of stability services from IBRs. The protection-related results offer further proof that the protection approaches must be adaptive and control-aware. Overcurrent-based techniques, although reliable for operation in synchronous grids, can have difficulty maintaining selectivity and sensibility under limited-inverter current condition. The protection redesign and control deployment should be combined process for utilities, so fault-ride through requirements, current limits and protection logic should be co-simulated instead of being handled separately. Operationally and policy-wise, a major message here is that balancing and flexibility of power alone will not work without proper provisions for sub-second stability. Storage and demand response may be able to address ramping and adequacy, but they need to be supported by fast control capabilities and system-strength reinforcement. Policymakers and regulators have an essential responsibility to facilitate this evolution, through updating grid codes, defining performance requirements for grid forming behaviour, and promoting certification and testing processes. Finally,

practical barriers remain significant. Interoperability between vendors, workforce skills for advanced power-electronics-dominated systems, and cybersecurity risks with the greater digitalization that they enable need to be proactively considered. Across utilities, operators, manufacturers and regulators - coordinated action is necessary where technical progress can become reliable, scale-able deployment.

9 Conclusion and Future Research Directions

This paper concludes that in the age of inverter-based resources grid modernization requires an integrated redesign of stability mechanisms, protection systems and control architectures. The high penetration of renewables challenges traditional inertia availability, fault current strength and control decoupling wisdoms, requiring inherently new concepts for power system design and operation. This work provides an exhaustive extended roadmap for the analysis and deployment of stabilizing solutions in grid-dominated by inverters, presenting a structured taxonomy of stability issues in such power systems, comparisons between advanced control paradigms and reproducible validation framework. These results underscore that grid-forming control, hierarchical coordination, and adaptive protection are not add-ons but system-wide necessities for next-generation power systems. 4 System strength and flexibility planning should be incorporated into both operational and long-term decision-making. The suggested validation framework also facilitates the transparent benchmarking and comparability between studies' results, bridging even more research and deployment gaps.

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