

Study and Improvement of Zeus Election System

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Abstract— Technology is advancing rapidly; traditional voting methods are now slowly being replaced by E-voting, which provides people a more digital and convenient way to vote [1]. Zeus Election is an example of E-voting system. It is an open-source polling system for election that offers verifiable online election. It is web-based application and currently has served more than 4000 electronic polls and 600000 voters. In this paper, we will study the cryptographic approaches and algorithms that applied to Zeus Election system, thus propose for an improvement to strengthen its security by applying the alternative cryptographic algorithms.

Keywords—E-voting, Public-Key Cryptography, Asymmetric-Key Cryptography, Symmetric-Key Cryptography, AES, RSA, SHA-256 Hashing.

I. INTRODUCTION

As our living environments has become more digitalized and number of users grown tremendously, privacy is a matter of increasing concern. Nowadays, more elections are conducted online. These elections platform will require the users to create a new account with their identity before they can vote, and end-to-end connection from user's device to system's server should be encrypted and should not exposed to anywhere. Therefore, data protection is needed to against privacy violation from illegal hacking activities in any election platform. In this case study, a security scheme will be proposed for increasing an existing system's security. Every voting system's primary purpose is to ensure that the votes of the voters are counted; therefore, electronic democratic governance that ensures a transparent and trustworthy election is required. The conventional way of voting entails casting a vote on a real paper ballot. This is vulnerable to time-consuming procedures, ballot snatching, a lack of voter privacy, and raises concerns about the fairness of the democratic process. The application that are chosen by us are Zeus Elections. It is an open-source polling system for election. Several different ballot types and election systems are supported, such as simple questions with predefined answers, party lists, score voting, or single transferable vote (STV). Zeus Elections has served more than 4328 electronic polls and 643861 voters. Based on our analysis toward the system, the functionalities are quite complete but there is no guarantee for data security or any privacy protection by the website administrator and provider. Therefore, Zeus Election is a decent system for us to evaluate their security environment, thus make some improvements by proposing the crypto methods that suitable for the system. In this paper, we propose to use Advanced Encryption Standard (AES) as symmetric algorithms and RSA (Rivest Shamir Adleman) and Message Hashing (SHA-256) as information digest to improve the security services of the existing Zeus E-voting system.

II. PROBLEM

While thousands of individuals have profited from these tools, we have discovered that it is vulnerable to cross-site scripting attacks. Cross-Site Scripting (XSS) is a client-side

code injection attack that can be used to persuade a user to make a malicious request. If an attacker can persuade a voter to click on a specially planned link, the voter will be taken to a page that has been manipulated, allowing the attacker to violate ballot confidentiality or influence votes. Voting is the most important feature of any election system because when a user is voting, no one is allowed to view or modify the content of its ballot. In order to secure the voting channel, encryption such as AES, RSA is required for a better security.

III. RELATED WORKS

There are several solutions that could be adopted to enhance the channel security between ballots and destinations. Examples include Advanced encryption standard [2], Digital Signature Algorithm (DSA) [3], Rivest Shamir Adleman (RSA) [4], Homomorphic encryption [5] and many others encryption structure that providing advance algorithm in securing the ballots. Most of these solutions required the authentication signature on the server side in order to decrypt a ballot's cipher text. Strong security is formed in this case; thus, we will refer to the above work for cryptographic experiments. In addition, message digest is also needed to make a ballot's data even more protected with integrity. This means that verification is required to ensure that the ballot was sent by the same user and not altered by other unauthorized persons. In this situation, we choose SHA-256 [6] because it's not an encryption but a hash algorithm where a user's message can be completely shuffled. It is a one-way cryptographic hash. It is highly secured because the encrypted message by this algorithm can never be decrypted [7].

Based on our proposed solution, we will implement the experiment by using AES, RSA and SHA-256.

IV. METHODOLOGY

To examine the effectiveness of our proposed solution, we will make an experiment for the voting process starting from the preparation, voting process and information digest by shuffling.

V. EXPERIMENTAL RESULTS

There are 3 stages to carry out this experiment, from stage 0 to stage 2 where the AES, RSA and SHA-256 are implemented. The Results are presented in the form of a table and any relevant figures in the references.

VI. STAGE 0: VOTER PREPARATION STAGE

The system administrator adds users to the voting system at this step. The user's name and email address are used by the administrator. The encryption system receives the email as an input message. The system will then encrypt the data and generate a secret message, which the user will receive and use as the system's default login password. AES Encryption is the encryption algorithm used here.

A. AES Algorithm

It is a symmetric encryption, meaning it only takes one key to encrypt and decrypt a message, which is known as a secret

key. AES encryption is a symmetric key encryption with a high level of security. We'll use AES-128, which means the key length is 128 bits in this case. After that, we'll encrypt the data in 128-bit blocks for ten rounds.

B. AES Key

After that, we'll begin with the essential expansion. This will accept a four-word (16-byte) key as input and output a 44-word matrix (176 bytes). This matrix of words, each of which is unique, is enough to give keys for AddRoundKey in all 10 rounds, with each AddRoundKey procedure using a four-word array [10].

C. AES Encryption

For this example, we will choose the following plaintext and key, as shown in Table 1. To make demonstration easier, we will use the same value as our reference from the AES

Table 1: Key and Message chosen for example.

Plaintext (message)	32 43 f6 a8 88 5a 30 8d 31 31 98 a2 e0 37 07 34
Subhead	2b 7e 15 16 28 ae d2 a6 ab f7 15 88 09 cf 4f 3c

Before we start with the encryption, the message will need to be divided into a block of 4x4 matrix.

32	88	31	E0
43	5a	31	37
F6	30	98	07
A8	8d	A2	34

This message will first go through the initial process transformation where it will combine with the first AddRoundKey.

The key will go through Key Expansion process to find the w0-w43.

Key: 2b 7e 15 16 28 ae d2 a6 ab f7 15 88 09 cf 4f 3c

From the key, we can get w0-w3:

$w_0 = 2b7e1516$ $w_1 = 28aed2a6$ $w_2 = abf71588$ $w_3 = 09cf4f3c$

To get the value of w4-w34, we need to perform Key Expansion. Figure 1 illustrates the process of key expansion.

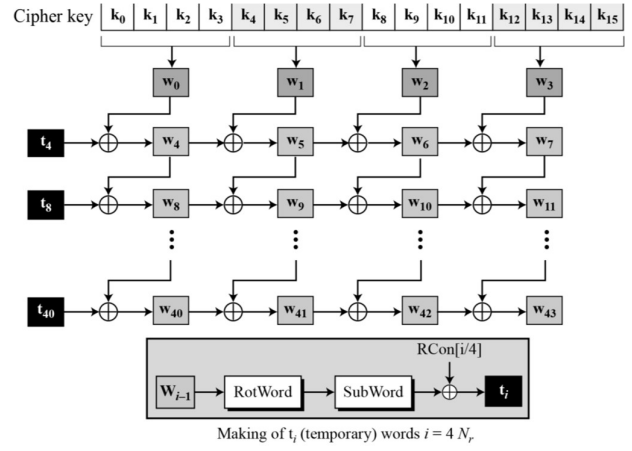


Figure 1: Process of Key Expansion

Table 2: Key expansion for each round.

i	temp	After Rot Word	After Sub Word	Rcon [i/4]	After XOR Rcon	w[i-4]	XOR w[i-4]
4	09cf4f3c	cf4f3c09	8a84eb01	01000000	8b84eb01	2b7e1516	a0fafe17
5	a0fafc17					28aed2a6	88542cb1
6	88542cb1					abf71588	23a33939
7	23a33939					09cf4f3c	2a6c7605
8	2a6c7605	6c76052a	50386be5	02000000	52386be5	a0fafe17	f2c295f2
9	f2c295f2					88542cb1	7a96b943
10	7a96b943					23a33939	5935807a
11	5935807a					2a6c7605	7359f67f
12	7359f67f	59f67f73	cb42d28f	04000000	cf42d28f	f2c295f2	3d80477d
13	3d80477d					7a96b943	4716fe3e
14	4716fe3e					5935807a	1e237e44
15	1e237e44					7359f67f	6d7a883b
16	6d7a883b	7a883b6d	dac4e23c	08000000	d2c4e23c	3d80477d	ef44a541
17	ef44a541					4716fe3e	a8525b7f
18	a8525b7f					1e237e44	b671253b
19	b671253b					6d7a883b	db0bad00
20	db0bad00	0bad00db	2b9563b9	10000000	3b9563b9	ef44a541	d4d1c6f8
21	d4d1c6f8					a8525b7f	7c839d87
22	7c839d87					b671253b	caf2b8bc
23	caf2b8bc					db0bad00	11f915bc
24	11f915bc	f915bc11	99596582	20000000	b9596582	d4d1c6f8	6d88a37a
25	6d88a37a					7c839d87	110b3efd
26	110b3efd					caf2b8bc	dbf98641
27	dbf98641					11f915bc	ca0093fd
28	ca0093fd	0093fdca	63dc5474	40000000	23dc5474	6d88a37a	4e54f70e
29	4e54f70e					110b3efd	5f5fc9f3
30	5f5fc9f3					dbf98641	84a64fb2
31	84a64fb2					ca0093fd	4ea6dc4f

32	4ea6d c4f	a6dc4f 4e	248684 2f	800000 00	a48684 2f	4c54f7 0e	ead273 21
33	ead27 321					5f5fc9f 3	b58dba d2
34	b58d bad2					84a64f b2	312bf5 60
35	312bf 560					4ea6dc 4f	7f8d29 2f
36	7f8d2 92f	8d292f 7f	5da515 d2	1b0000 00	46a515 d2	ead273 21	ac7766 f3
37	ac776 6f3					b58dba d2	19fadc 21
38	19fad c21					312bf5 60	28d129 41
39	28d1 2941					7f8d29 2f	575c00 6e
40	575c 006e	5c006e 57	4a639f 5b	360000 00	7c639f 5b	ac7766 f3	d014f9 a8
41	d014f 9a8					19fadc 21	c9ee25 89
42	c9ee2 589					28d129 41	e13f0c c8
43	e13f0 cc8					575c00 6e	b6630c a6

The key will then be passed to the AddRoundKey method as an input. As a result, an AddRoundKey stage begins and ends the encryption. Without this step, other operations can be reversed to obtain the plaintext, even if the key is unknown.

The encryption starts with the key expansion and then moves on to the AddRoundKey stage, which is followed by nine rounds that each include all four operations. Then there's the tenth round, which just takes three steps. *Substitute* bytes, *ShiftRows*, *MixColumns*, and *AddRoundKey* are the four procedures in each round except the last. The MixColumns process is skipped in the final round.

Figure below show the encryption process.

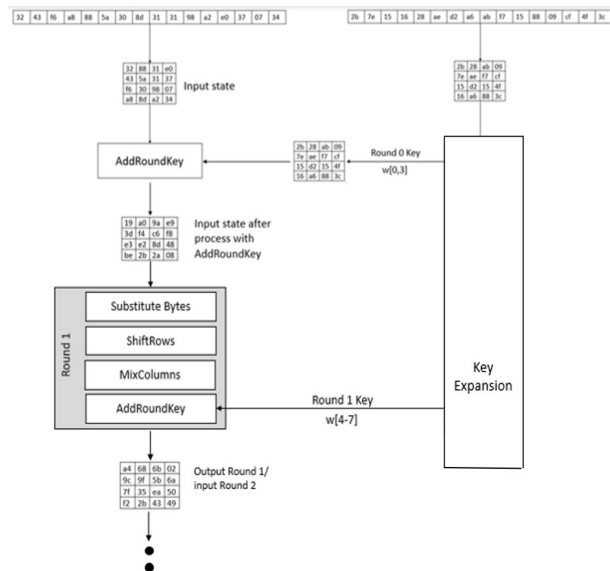


Figure 2: Encryption process, Round 0-1

The process (or Round) will continue until round 10, with the exception that Round 10 emits the MixColumns Process. This is done to ensure that the encryption can be reversed or decrypted.

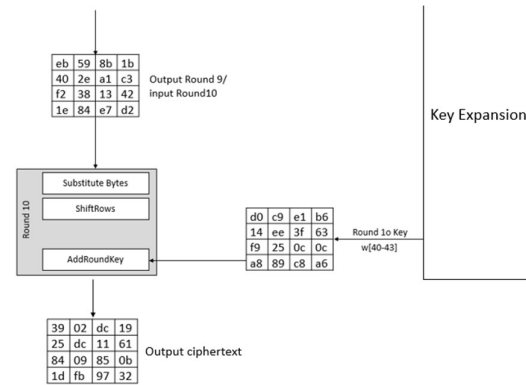


Figure 3: Encryption process, Round 10

Once the encryption process is completed, the output ciphertext that is in hexadecimal form will be converted into Base64.

Output: `OQLcGSXcEWqECYULHfuXMg==`

This output then will be used by the users as the user as a default password to log in to the voting system.

Figure 4: User email with the generated password.

The user can now use their email and newly generated email to enter the voting system.

VII. STAGE 1: VOTING STAGE

This is where the voting part of the system takes place. To gain access to the system, the user must type the voting URL into their computer, which will then submit a secure HTTP request to the server. As a private key, the server will choose

r_1 at random. It will choose g^{r_1} as a public key at the same time. This public key g^{r_1} will be returned to the computer to indicate that the connection has been established, allowing the user to access the voting system and view the website. The process of a user gaining access to the system is depicted in the diagram below.

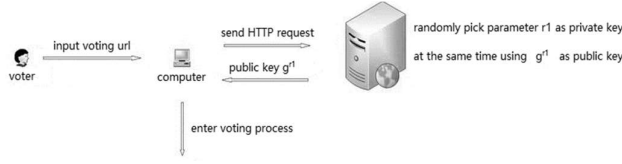


Figure 5: User accessing the system.

Once the user enters the website, they will input a vote, m to the computer. This online system will then generate a randomly picked parameter, s which then generates a ciphertext $(g^{r_1})g^m$, where m is the vote. The system will also produce a certificate $\{h^s g^{r_1}, g^{r_1}\}$ for the user to validate or verify that they have made the vote and the vote has been processed by the system.

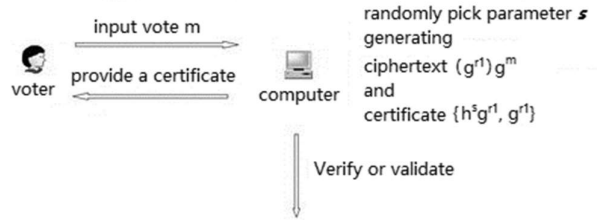


Figure 6: User input vote

The user's verification process is the following stage. The user will request to see the parameter s , which is the ciphertext generated in the previous phase in order to verify. If that parameter matches the one that was previously generated, the vote is valid.

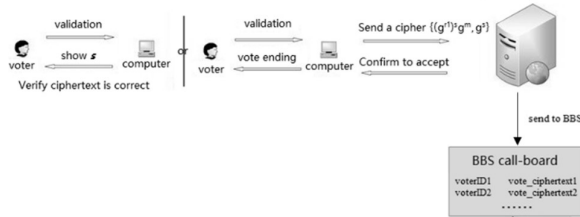


Figure 7: Vote validation process.

A. RSA Algorithm

This section will show the implementation of RSA Encryption in the system. RSA is the most commonly used and recognized public-key encryption. The name RSA is taken from its inventors, Rivest, Shamir, and Adleman. The RSA cryptography is a block cipher where the plaintext and ciphertext are integers between 0 and $n - 1$ for some n . A typical size for n is 1024 bits, or 309 decimal digits [8].

B. RSA Key Generation

The key generation process of the RSA algorithm is based on these rules:

1. Select two prime numbers, p and q such that p and q are not equal.
2. $n = p \cdot q$
3. Select e , where $1 < e < \phi(n)$.
 - a. $\gcd(e, \phi(n)) = 1$
 - b. e and $\phi(n)$ are coprime.
4. Calculate d , where $d = e^{-1} \mod \phi(n)$
5. Public key = (e, n)
6. Private key = (d)

C. RSA Encryption

The value n is the public RSA modulus, and $\phi(n) = (p-1)(q-1)$ is the Euler totient. The public key e is freely chosen but must be a coprime to $\phi(n)$. For this example, we will apply the following value. We will perform encryption for Confidentiality where we encrypt using public key and decrypt using private key.

We will start by choosing the value of p and q .

$$p = 157 \text{ and } q = 239.$$

Then, we perform some calculations to get the value of n , e , and d .

Table 3: Calculation of RSA global parameters

Calculate n	$n = p \cdot q$ $n = 157 \cdot 239$ $n = 37523$
Calculate $\phi(n)$	$\phi(n) = (p-1)(q-1)$ $\phi(n) = (157-1)(239-1)$ $\phi(n) = (156)(238)$ $\phi(n) = 37128$
Calculate e	$\gcd(37128, e) = 1$ $1 < e < \phi(n)$ $e = 7253$ thus, $\gcd(37128, 7253) = 1$
Calculate d	$d = e^{-1} \mod \phi(n)$ $d = 7253^{-1} \mod 37128$ $d = 7253^{(n)-1} \mod 37128$ $d = 7253^{(37128)-1} \mod 37128$ $d = 7253^{(9216)-1} \mod 37128$ $d = 7253^{9215} \mod 37128$ $d = 31277$

Then we get the value:

$$p = 157, q = 239, n = 37523, e = 7253, d = 31277.$$

The message we demo as below:

Message (plaintext) = Vote for Person A

The Input text will be separated into segments of Size 1 (the symbol '#' is used as separator).

V # o # t # e # # f # o # r # # P # e # r # s # o # n # #
A

Numbers input in base 10 format.

086 # 111 # 116 # 101 # 032 # 102 # 111 # 114 # 032 #
080 # 101 # 114 # 115 # 111 # 110 # 032 # 065

Encryption into ciphertext $c[i] = m[i]^e \pmod{n}$

Table 4: RSA Encryption

$m[i]^e \pmod{n}$	ciphertext
$086^{7253} \pmod{37523}$	06479
$111^{7253} \pmod{37523}$	05396
$116^{7253} \pmod{37523}$	16351
$101^{7253} \pmod{37523}$	13516
$032^{7253} \pmod{37523}$	18629
$102^{7253} \pmod{37523}$	05044
$111^{7253} \pmod{37523}$	05396
$114^{7253} \pmod{37523}$	18924
$032^{7253} \pmod{37523}$	18629
$080^{7253} \pmod{37523}$	27736
$101^{7253} \pmod{37523}$	13516
$114^{7253} \pmod{37523}$	18924
$115^{7253} \pmod{37523}$	06665
$111^{7253} \pmod{37523}$	05396
$110^{7253} \pmod{37523}$	20734
$032^{7253} \pmod{37523}$	18629
$065^{7253} \pmod{37523}$	01384

Produced ciphertext.

14437 # 28888 # 24126 # 01339 # 06783 # 08880 # 28888 #
10418 # 06783 # 11710 # 01339 # 10418 # 01601 # 28888 #
28412 # 06783 # 26277

Decryption into plaintext $m[i] = c[i]^d \pmod{n}$

Table 5: RSA Decryption

$c[i]^d \pmod{n}$	plaintext
$06479^{31277} \pmod{37523}$	00086
$05396^{31277} \pmod{37523}$	00111
$16351^{31277} \pmod{37523}$	00116
$13516^{31277} \pmod{37523}$	00101
$18629^{31277} \pmod{37523}$	00032
$05044^{31277} \pmod{37523}$	00102
$05396^{31277} \pmod{37523}$	00111
$18924^{31277} \pmod{37523}$	00114
$18629^{31277} \pmod{37523}$	00032
$27736^{31277} \pmod{37523}$	00080
$13516^{31277} \pmod{37523}$	00101
$18924^{31277} \pmod{37523}$	00114
$06665^{31277} \pmod{37523}$	00115
$05396^{31277} \pmod{37523}$	00111
$20734^{31277} \pmod{37523}$	00110
$18629^{31277} \pmod{37523}$	00032
$01384^{31277} \pmod{37523}$	00065

Decrypted ciphertext

00086 # 00111 # 00116 # 00101 # 00032 # 00102 #
00111 # 00114 # 00032 # 00080 # 00101 # 00114 #
00115 # 00111 # 00110 # 00032 # 00065

Decrypted ciphertext in text form:

Output: Vote for Person A

D. RSA Message Authentication

After successfully perform encryption and decryption of ballot's information by using RSA, we can now do the message authentication to enhance the integrity of ballot's data. This step is very important because it shows that the message really comes from the sender and has not been altered. For instance, we can shuffle the message by implementing SHA-256 because the signature of hash must be equal between user and receiver.

For certificate verification, we will only need the public RSA parameters, the modulus n , and public key e .

In the real environment, the RSA key size is much larger, unlike the example we show in the previous part. The key can be in 512 or 1024 or 2048, or even 4096 bits. This makes the algorithm stronger and hard for attackers to break.

We will show another example to demonstrate the RSA signature generation and validation. We will use 1024 bits key size.

Table 6: RSA key in 1024 bits size

Public key (e)	MIGfMA0GCsqGSIb3DQEBAQUAA4GNADCBiQKBgQCxe0PnyCClvsyYwB+IXZ+XBwDEtny8uAACtnUaRXkQYkmndWpgr71xfCayZWEZPnDH2hpMMtn75Q9+ejdHq8ggC9s205ZsNWewM0sRig4O5Fznd++WMD6NU0zXrOes0q8ZaZCWqSbounZpily/xNCmzMbgaIOUvhipiSldcHojQIDAQAB
Private key (d)	MIICXQIBAAKBgQCxe0PnyCClvsyYwB+IXZ+XBwDEtny8uAACtnUaRXkQYkmndWpgr71xfCayZWEZPnDH2hpMMtn75Q9+ejdHq8ggC9s205ZsNWewM0sRig4O5Fznd++WMD6NU0zXrOes0q8ZaZCWqSbounZpily/xNCmzMbgaIOUvhipiSldcHojQIDAQAB AoGANOL/bC0VIW5Stz9fPV61tKJwly2t4+qMjkJiiM6U8c3oF s+FOIR91jhq51MHuKdZuBWH8ixfmTWhtDTljdNMMNAtb Gsn/OCs1nXiQIH/crMD+AX0G5zdn1/02rAkjd5P4w5g9zg4Jm uygl8jdRfdmoODTpsW8nlq//yc2oJsYECQQDZ3xYw8GvqlQ O2dLpd2mtSuQLGUNily/V10ckG4EGRs7INTyY/e59WRwRbll Wf981M3adrZREHFz85rhjnvztAkeA0lqowEvRcKNrMp3kn weOgYgRxcB4pvHBhO6nuT1B26iT4B6Zush7e8wlSm42jkU sXrel27gVm7QbwgkklTGtQJBAJjOY5UNetL7krAmB13Y3H8 Xbb/D/bAuvalGldVlxoZL5E15qhzKsRXLd1337ESHG4G20G5 9YxTzFBATcDdtUf0CQE159k/a2yjZzc0ZxclubdxowjyMhirGb R6Y3dCCCh3YHaE3ZEaCC4swe/RGtuiuqllmP9nU61Zqs16EIX 6F3Ki4ECQQCUEKSnK6AcPHj9wOIJ3L6ibo+Mju434B5f8DQ vpJhV5FkQHeneaNQegMhuFih5U5H26q16h3FcwZxBhTmhW +/A

VIII. STAGE 2: SHUFFLE

From here, we will use the same message as before, that is Vote for person A.

There are several algorithms for RSA signature generation, but the one we will use today is SHA256 with RSA. SHA256 with RSA signature is an efficient asymmetric encryption method used in many secure APIs. The three basic steps in this algorithm:

1. Hashing.
2. Padding the hash for signature generation.
3. Modular exponentiation using the private exponent and the modulus.

Using the previous values stated in table 6 and the message stated, we can get the following value of signature.

eIOUMLix3fR/IcyTOYqs8IRdPq1Y0z+TtRLFjG4Pk+xJ
EhIwdZnSoAsnsPoajUsCmOS/J3umfzZnn2ieopp8MZxu
4E7WthSEJOGO5HcTdKADMPJ3qMym9+moLkrl13w
kbSJyYEjMTFP8DxYKp8OyEEr8LUyUxbJHAC67D/7
GjEY=

This signature is sent together with the ciphertext, and the receiver can verify the ciphertext's validity by comparing the digital signature's value to the value above. The decrypted ciphertext is not the same as the original plaintext if the ciphertext is signed by another person's key. The value of the signature is likewise different. In the shuffle process, the ciphertext sent by the voter is encrypted numerous times to increase the key required to decrypt the ciphertext, so if the ciphertext is obtained by the middleman, they will not be likely to be able to decrypt the cipher text.

IX. SECURITY ANALYSIS

This paper implements a combination of two cryptography algorithms, that is AES and RSA. Table below shown the example of data inputs of multiple value bits and random private keys.

Table 7: Recommended Security Bit Level

Security Bit Level	Key size	
	AES	RSA
80	-	1024
112	-	2048
128	128	3072
192	192	7680
256	256	15360

Based on our findings and experiments, RSA can be concluded as a very effective encryption algorithm suitable for this study because of the straightforward implementation

X. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

In this paper we use AES, RSA and SHA-256 hash algorithm to make sure it gives great security. We show the work by using the AES as the key generator and make it unique to do the secret message to the voter. Given the RSA is the process between voters to the system. In addition, using SHA-256 to validate the ballot's data.

As afore mentioned , the summary of the proposal is that we know that this application requires improvement in their security to make sure the voting system attain integrity. What can be implemented in the system is our own original idea after referring to some security implementation done previously on e-voting system and are referred to make sure the proposal can be implement properly. We hope by using this suggestion will strengthen their security. Zeus election system will need this proposal to ensure the system security strength in order to gain the trust from their client.

For future work, I believe that there is a lot more encryptions can be considered in securing the channel for ballot to be sent securely to the server. One encryption that should be useful in this situation is homomorphic encryption [5]. A homomorphic encryption [9] strategy permits client to work on ciphertext. At the point when client decodes the resultant figure, it is same as though tasks are done on plaintext. In this manner, utilizing homomorphic encryption guarantees clients that their information is secure in all state: stockpiling, transmission and preparing. Therefore, any improvements to the Zeus election system are bound to take the system's security to the next level.

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We are so grateful to our dear lecturer, DR. RASHIDAH BINTI KADIR for teaching us SECR3443 Introduction to Cryptography for this semester. We have learned a lot from the lectures and now we feel like we are ready to implement what we learn in the real working environment.

We would also like to again thank our lecturer for also giving us the chance to do this mini project, which requires us to work together in a team and implement what we've learn the whole semester into a working idea.

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