

Integrating Continuous Credentials in Authentication Mechanisms

Dor Malka, Ittay Eyal

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1 Abstract

Authentication is a fundamental aspect of security that can be viewed from two main perspectives: credentials and protocols. The credentials aspect is familiar to most of us through username and password, or OTPs used when accessing personal bank account or authenticating into services such as Google/Apple ID. While these discrete credentials, which rely on simply having or knowing something are widely used, there remains a largely unexplored space: continuous credentials.

Continuous credentials appear in several applications such as biometric authentication (fingerprints, eigenface or iris) and SSO mechanisms that rely on behavioral or environmental signals like GPS location etc. These credentials are not evaluated in a discrete way. Rather, they are measured by a mechanism that determines whether there are enough similarities above a predetermined threshold between an input and a stored figure.

These mechanisms introduce a spectrum of confidence instead of a strict yes or no decision. As achieving high security level based on one credential and satisfying the mechanism might be hard, we aim to study the integration of several continuous credentials. Our research will explore how multiple continuous credentials can be fused to form a robust authentication mechanism and determine an optimal mechanism, achieving high security level in wallet design for both digital and physical assets.

2 Related Work

Lin Hong et al. [1] found that automatic personal identification system based solely on fingerprints or faces is often not able to reach sufficiently low FAR and FRR. They integrated a biometric system which makes personal identification by integrating both faces and fingerprints operates during identification mode. The decision fusion of their system is designed to operate at measurement level, that is the system doesn't just output a single decision or label but rather a set of labels with confidence values. The system decision is based on the confidence of each one of the modules which might lead to a more reliable and informative overall confidence score.

These confidence values are characterized by the FAR values of the credential. The FAR values were calculated as the number of similarities between 2 measures above a threshold t . If there are 5 similarities out of 8 between 2 fingerprints and the threshold was 4, these 2 fingerprints will be considered equal.

Prabhakar et al. [2] examined the tradeoff between False Acceptance Rate (FAR) and False Rejection Rate (FRR), highlighting its impact on both the accuracy and security of biometric systems. Their findings suggest that most applications aim to operate at a point that balances these two metrics.

This concept is further developed by Sarkar et al. [3], who introduced it as the Equal Error Rate (EER). Sarkar defined this point as the operating point of the biometric system, emphasizing that the lower the EER value, the greater the performance of the biometric authentication system.

Eyal et al. [5] designed and formulated a foundational wallet model, defining four possible states for each credential – safe, loss, leak and theft. However, this work did not address the type of credentials involved, nor proposed a method to determine the probability of each credential’s state.

3 Authentication Model

An authentication mechanism M is built on a set of credentials $\{c_1, c_2, \dots, c_n\}$ and two players: a user U and an attacker A . Both players, try to satisfy the system with their own set of credentials $\{c_1, c_2, \dots, c_n\}$ in order to reach the asset. Each credential c_i can be either discrete or continuously distributed. In this paper, we will focus on continuously distributed credentials. We will formalize the systems success and identify the optimal operating point for both single and multiple credentials.

3.1 Model Details

We follow the definitions given by Eyal [5]. A wallet w is defined by predicate of availability of N keys. Each key can be in one of the following states. Safe: only the user has access to the key. Loss: neither the user nor the attacker has access to the key. Leak: both the user and the attacker have access to the key. Theft: only the attacker has access to the key.

We define the probability associated with each state as follows: P_{safe} , P_{loss} , P_{leak} and P_{theft} corresponding respectively to the states of safe, loss, leak, and theft. Furthermore, the confidence associated with different decisions may be characterized by the genuine distribution and the impostor distribution, which are used to establish two error rates: false acceptance rate (FAR), which is defined as the probability of an impostor being accepted as a genuine individual and false rejection rate (FRR), which is defined as the probability of a genuine individual being rejected as an impostor.

A wallet w is comprised of a set of credentials $\{c_1, c_2, \dots, c_n\}$ clasified as one of previously defined states.

Denoted S , i.e., $\{c_1, c_2, \dots, c_n\} \in S = \{\text{safe}, \text{loss}, \text{leak}, \text{theft}\}$ the state of each credential. A scenario σ is defined as a vector of states of each credential in the wallet. Denote σ_i the state of credential c_i in scenario σ . An availability vector represents the availablity of all credentials to a user U or an attacker A . Denote by σ^U, σ^A the availability vector of the user and the attacker respectively.

3.2 Single Credential

For a wallet w comprised of a single credential c_1 , $w^{\text{single}}(c_1) = c_1$ we have built FAR vs FRR curves for Uniform, Parabolic and Gaussian probabilistic distribution functions and defined each one of the states as follows:

$$\begin{aligned}
P_{\text{loss}} &= \text{FRR} \cdot (1 - \text{FAR}) \\
P_{\text{leak}} &= \text{FAR} \cdot (1 - \text{FRR}) \\
P_{\text{theft}} &= \text{FRR} \cdot \text{FAR} \\
P_{\text{safe}} &= 1 - P_{\text{loss}} - P_{\text{leak}} - P_{\text{theft}}
\end{aligned}$$

The probability for success of the wallet w , is defined as the probability of users successfully defend their wallets. In a single credential wallet, this is simply the probability that the key is neither theft, loss or leaked. i.e.,

$$P_{\text{success}}(w^{\text{single}}) = P_{\text{safe}}.$$

Until now, it has been common practice to select the operating point at the Equal Error Rate (EER), where $\text{FAR} = \text{FRR}$ following Sarkar's claim: "The operating point is that point where the FAR is equal to the FRR and known as Equal Error Rate (EER)" [3]. Our findings indicate that a different operating point can yield a higher P_{safe} , thereby enhancing the system's overall security. Furthermore, We found that the operating point depends on the variance of the PDFs. We will further explore this in the following sections for different distributions.

3.2.1 Uniformly Distributed Credential

At first we analyzed the simple case of a single credential uniformly distributed. We defined two probability distribution functions (PDFs) for the user and the attacker, P_U and P_A respectively.

$$\begin{aligned}
P_U(t) &= \frac{1}{u_2 - u_1} \quad \text{for } u_1 \leq t \leq u_2 \\
P_A(t) &= \frac{1}{a_2 - a_1} \quad \text{for } a_1 \leq t \leq a_2
\end{aligned}$$

Where u_1, u_2 are the user PDFs' bounds and a_1, a_2 are the attacker PDFs' bounds.

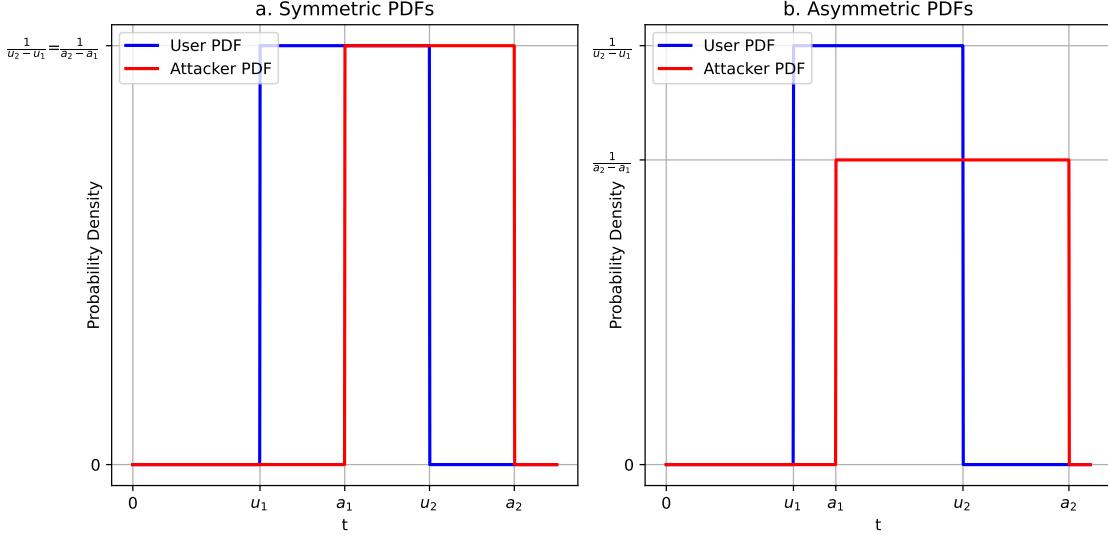


Figure 1: Symmetric and Asymmetric Uniform PDFs

Without loss of generality, we assume that $u_1 < a_1$ and $u_2 < a_2$. Furthermore, we assume there is an overlapping region between the distributions; otherwise the scenario reduces to a trivial case. We also assume that the user and attacker PDFs are do not fully contain one another, as such cases would render them non-separable. Figure 1a illustrates the case where the user and attacker PDF's are symmetric, while Figure 1b illustrates asymmetric PDFs. The probability of success for a single credential wallet is defined as:

$$P_{\text{success}}(w^{\text{single}}) = P_{\text{safe}} = 1 - P_{\text{loss}} - P_{\text{leak}} - P_{\text{theft}} = 1 - \text{FRR} - \text{FAR} + \text{FRR} \cdot \text{FAR}$$

Let T denote the threshold. Then the False Acceptance Rate (FAR) and False Rejection Rate (FRR) are defined as:

$$\text{FAR}(T) = \int_{a_1}^T \frac{1}{a_2 - a_1} dt = \begin{cases} 0 & \text{if } T \leq a_1 \\ \frac{T-a_2}{a_2-a_1} & \text{if } a_1 < T \leq a_2 \\ 1 & \text{if } T > a_2 \end{cases}$$

$$\text{FRR}(T) = \int_T^{u_2} \frac{1}{u_2 - u_1} dt = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if } T \leq u_1 \\ \frac{u_2-T}{u_2-u_1} & \text{if } u_1 < T \leq u_2 \\ 0 & \text{if } T > u_2 \end{cases}$$

We defined the probability of success as a function of the threshold T by setting the $\text{FAR}(T)$ $\text{FRR}(T)$ into the equation and received:

$$P_{\text{success}}(T) = \begin{cases} 0 & \text{if } T \leq u_1 \\ 1 - \frac{u_2-T}{u_2-u_1} & \text{if } u_1 < T \leq u_1 \\ 1 - \frac{T-a_1}{a_2-a_1} - \frac{u_2-T}{u_2-u_1} + \frac{(T-a_1)(u_2-T)}{(a_2-a_1)(u_2-u_1)} & \text{if } a_1 < T \leq u_2 \\ 1 - \frac{T-a_1}{a_2-a_1} & \text{if } u_2 < T \leq a_2 \\ 0 & \text{if } T > a_2 \end{cases}$$

$P_{\text{success}}(T)$ is a continuous function in $[u_1, a_2]$, differentiable in (u_1, a_2) and maintains $P_{\text{success}}(u_1) = P_{\text{success}}(a_2)$ thus by Rolle's Theorem, there exists at least one point in (u_1, a_2) such that:

$$\frac{d}{dT}P_{\text{success}}(T) = 0.$$

The horizontal tangent point is:

$$T = \frac{a_2 + u_1}{2} \quad \text{for } a_1 \leq T \leq u_2$$

$$\frac{d}{dt}P_{\text{success}}(T) > 0, \text{ For every } T \in (u_1, \frac{a_2 + u_1}{2})$$

$$\frac{d}{dt}P_{\text{success}}(T) < 0, \text{ For every } T \in (\frac{a_2 + u_1}{2}, a_2)$$

Thus, by the First Derivative Test the maximum point is at $T = \frac{a_2 + u_1}{2}$.

$$P_{\text{success}}(T_{\text{opt}}) = \frac{(a_2 - u_1)^2}{4(u_2 - u_1) \cdot (a_2 - a_1)}$$

We calculated the EER point and showed it is not equal to the optimal point:

$$T_{\text{EER}} = \frac{a_1 \cdot u_1 - a_2 \cdot u_2}{u_2 - u_1 + a_2 - a_1} \neq \frac{a_2 + u_1}{2}$$

The maximum point represents the optimal threshold of the wallet. By selecting the threshold value, we influence the wallet's security sensitivity by adjusting the probability associated with each state in S . The optimal point indicates that increasing the offset between the two uniform distributions is likely to improve the wallet's success. This optimal point suggests an asymmetry between the user's and the attacker's distribution intervals. Figure 2 illustrates the probability of success for a single credential wallet depends on the threshold T .

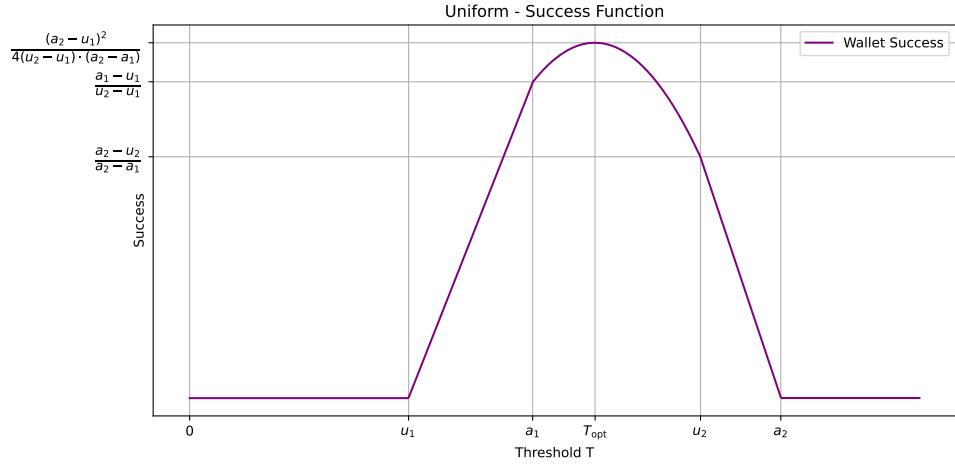


Figure 2: Probability of success for a single credential wallet asymmetrically distributed

We can define the FAR and FRR at the optimal point as follows:

$$\text{FAR}(T_{\text{opt}}) = \frac{\frac{a_2}{2} + \frac{u_1}{2} - a_1}{a_2 - a_1}$$

$$\text{FRR}(T_{\text{opt}}) = \frac{u_2 - \frac{a_2}{2} - \frac{u_1}{2}}{u_2 - u_1}$$

Figure 3 illustrated the FAR vs FRR curve.

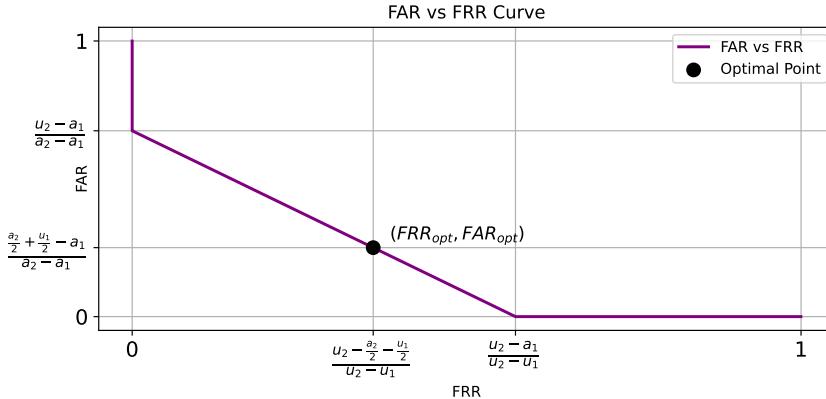


Figure 3: FAR vs FRR curve

3.2.2 Parabolic Distributed Credential

Our goal is to model credentials whose distributions closely resemble those observed in real measurement data. To this end, we analyze a parabolic probability distribution function, which provides a flexible approximation of credential distributions that are often near-Gaussian. This choice is also consistent with the findings of Slobodan et al. on Eigenfinger and Eigenpalm feature distributions [6]. Accordingly, we define two probability density functions (PDFs) for the user and the attacker, denoted by P_U and P_A , respectively.

$$P_U(x) = \begin{cases} a \cdot x^2 + b \cdot x + c & \alpha_1 \leq x \leq \alpha_2 \\ 0 & x > \alpha_2 \vee x < \alpha_1 \end{cases}$$

$$P_A(x) = \begin{cases} d \cdot x^2 + e \cdot x + f & \beta_1 \leq x \leq \beta_2 \\ 0 & x > \beta_2 \vee x < \beta_1 \end{cases}$$

Here, a, b, c and d, e, f denote the parabolic coefficients of the user and attacker distributions, respectively. The parameters α_1, α_2 are the roots of the user's PDF, while β_1, β_2 are the roots of the attacker's PDF. If $\alpha_2 < \beta_1$, the two distributions do not overlap, and the problem becomes trivial. Conversely, if $\alpha_1 > \beta_1$ and $\beta_2 < \alpha_2$, the attacker's distribution is fully contained within the user's, resulting in a non-separable scenario. Without loss of generality, we therefore focus on the intermediate and most meaningful configuration, where

$$\alpha_1 \leq \beta_1 \leq \alpha_2 \leq \beta_2,$$

as illustrated in Figure 4.

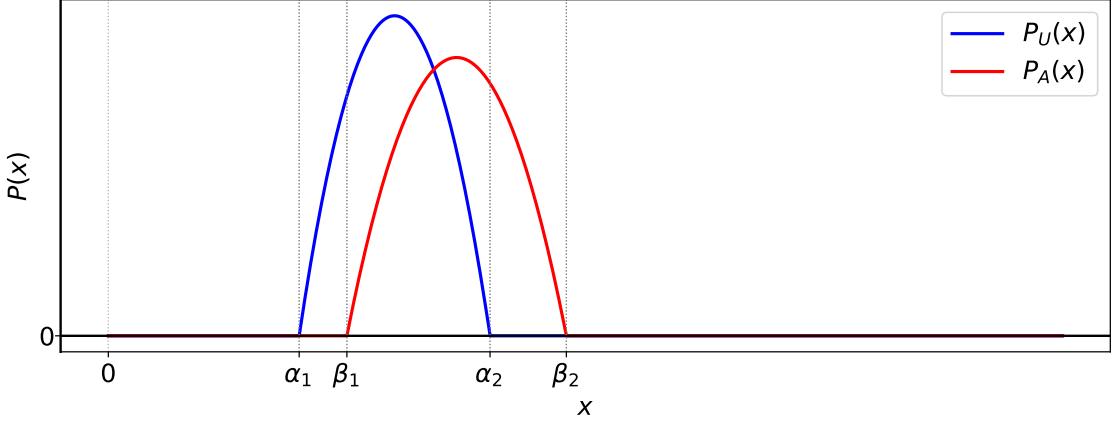


Figure 4: Parabolic PDFs

To reduce the degrees of freedom of the parabolic functions while maintaining a symbolic analysis, we express the coefficients directly in terms of their roots. Under the additional assumption that the integral of each PDF over its roots interval equals 1, the coefficients become fully determined. Accordingly, we define the coefficients as follows.

$$\alpha_1 \cdot \alpha_2 = \frac{c}{a} \rightarrow a = \frac{c}{\alpha_1 \cdot \alpha_2}$$

$$\alpha_1 + \alpha_2 = -\frac{b}{a} \rightarrow b = -\frac{c \cdot (\alpha_1 + \alpha_2)}{\alpha_1 \cdot \alpha_2}$$

$$\beta_1 \cdot \beta_2 = \frac{f}{d} \rightarrow d = \frac{f}{\beta_1 \cdot \beta_2}$$

$$\beta_1 + \beta_2 = -\frac{e}{d} \rightarrow e = -\frac{f \cdot (\beta_1 + \beta_2)}{\beta_1 \cdot \beta_2}$$

$$\int_{\alpha_1}^{\alpha_2} (a \cdot x^2 + b \cdot x + c) dx = 1 \Rightarrow c = \frac{6 \cdot \alpha_1 \cdot \alpha_2}{(\alpha_1 - \alpha_2)^3}$$

$$\int_{\beta_1}^{\beta_2} (d \cdot x^2 + e \cdot x + f) dx = 1 \Rightarrow f = \frac{6 \cdot \beta_1 \cdot \beta_2}{(\beta_1 - \beta_2)^3}$$

Therefore, we can write the parabolic PDFs as:

$$P_U(x) = \begin{cases} \frac{6}{(\alpha_1 - \alpha_2)^2} \cdot x^2 - \frac{6 \cdot (\alpha_1 + \alpha_2)}{(\alpha_1 - \alpha_2)^3} \cdot x + \frac{6 \cdot \alpha_1 \cdot \alpha_2}{(\alpha_1 - \alpha_2)^3} & \alpha_1 \leq x \leq \alpha_2 \\ 0 & x > \alpha_2 \vee x < \alpha_1 \end{cases}$$

$$P_A(x) = \begin{cases} \frac{6}{(\beta_1 - \beta_2)^2} \cdot x^2 - \frac{6 \cdot (\beta_1 + \beta_2)}{(\beta_1 - \beta_2)^3} \cdot x + \frac{6 \cdot \beta_1 \cdot \beta_2}{(\beta_1 - \beta_2)^3} & \beta_1 \leq x \leq \beta_2 \\ 0 & x > \beta_2 \vee x < \beta_1 \end{cases}$$

We will find FAR and FRR as a function of the threshold T and define the probability of success based on the single credential wallet as shown in section 3.2:

$$\text{FAR}(T) = \int_{\beta_1}^T P_A(x)dx = \begin{cases} 0 & T \leq \beta_1 \\ \frac{6\left(\frac{T^3}{3} - \frac{\beta_1^3}{3}\right)}{(\beta_1 - \beta_2)^3} - \frac{6\left(\frac{T^2}{2} - \frac{\beta_1^2}{2}\right)(\beta_1 + \beta_2)}{(\beta_1 - \beta_2)^3} + \frac{6\beta_1\beta_2(T - \beta_1)}{(\beta_1 - \beta_2)^3} & \beta_1 < T \leq \beta_2 \\ 1 & T > \beta_2 \end{cases}$$

$$\text{FRR}(T) = \int_T^{\alpha_2} P_U(x)dx = \begin{cases} 1 & T \leq \alpha_1 \\ \frac{6\left(\frac{\alpha_2^3}{3} - \frac{T^3}{3}\right)}{(\alpha_1 - \alpha_2)^3} - \frac{6\left(\frac{\alpha_2^2}{2} - \frac{T^2}{2}\right)(\alpha_1 + \alpha_2)}{(\alpha_1 - \alpha_2)^3} + \frac{6\alpha_1\alpha_2(\alpha_2 - T)}{(\alpha_1 - \alpha_2)^3} & \alpha_1 < T \leq \alpha_2 \\ 0 & T > \alpha_2 \end{cases}$$

$$P_{\text{success}} = \begin{cases} 0 & T < \alpha_1 \vee T > \beta_2 \\ \frac{(T - \alpha_1)^2(2T + \alpha_1 - 3\alpha_2)}{(\alpha_1 - \alpha_2)^3} & \alpha_1 \leq T \leq \beta_1 \\ -\frac{(T - \alpha_1)^2(T - \beta_2)^2(2T + \alpha_1 - 3\alpha_2)(2T - 3\beta_1 + \beta_2)}{(\alpha_1 - \alpha_2)^3(\beta_1 - \beta_2)^3} & \beta_1 \leq T \leq \alpha_2 \\ -\frac{(T - \beta_2)^2(2T - 3\beta_1 + \beta_2)}{(\beta_1 - \beta_2)^3} & \alpha_2 \leq T \leq \beta_2 \end{cases}$$

We differentiate $P_{\text{success}}(T)$ and compute its critical points in each interval. By comparing the stationary values obtained in all valid regions, we identify the global maximum, which corresponds to the optimal threshold T_{opt} .

Before writing the piecewise derivative, we define the polynomial coefficients:

$$q = 4,$$

$$m = -\alpha_1 - 5\alpha_2 - 5\beta_1 - \beta_2,$$

$$n = -\alpha_1^2 + 3\alpha_1\alpha_2 + \alpha_1\beta_1 + 6\alpha_2\beta_1 + \alpha_2\beta_2 + 3\beta_1\beta_2 - \beta_2^2,$$

$$s = \alpha_1^2\beta_1 - 3\alpha_1\alpha_2\beta_1 - 3\alpha_2\beta_1\beta_2 + \alpha_2\beta_2^2.$$

With these coefficients, the derivative of $P_{\text{success}}(T)$ is given by the following piecewise expression:

$$\frac{dP_{\text{success}}}{dT} = \begin{cases} 0, & T < \alpha_1 \vee T > \beta_2, \\ \frac{6(T - \alpha_1)(T - \alpha_2)}{(\alpha_1 - \alpha_2)^3}, & \alpha_1 \leq T \leq \beta_1, \\ -\frac{6(T - \alpha_1)(T - \beta_2)}{(\alpha_1 - \alpha_2)^3(\beta_1 - \beta_2)^3}(qT^3 + mT^2 + nT + s), & \beta_1 \leq T \leq \alpha_2, \\ -\frac{6(T - \beta_1)(T - \beta_2)}{(\beta_1 - \beta_2)^3}, & \alpha_2 \leq T \leq \beta_2. \end{cases}$$

In the second interval, the derivative has a single critical point at $T = \alpha_1$. Since the derivative is strictly positive for all $T > \alpha_1$, this point corresponds to a local minimum rather than a maximum.

Similarly, in the fourth interval, the only critical point occurs at $T = \beta_2$, and the derivative is strictly negative for all $T < \beta_2$. Therefore, this interval also contains no maximum either.

We therefore turn to the third interval. In this region, the derivative is the product of a cubic polynomial and two linear factors. The linear factors vanish at $T = \alpha_1$ and $T = \beta_2$, both of which lie outside the third interval. Consequently, the existence of critical points within this interval depends solely on the cubic term. Solving this cubic ,reveals exactly one real root with the remaining two roots being complex. The closed form of the cubic solution can not be simplified further more than a complex expression. Thus, we denote the solution as T_{cubic} .

By examining the sign of the derivative on both sides of the critical point T_{cubic} , we verify that it constitutes a global maximum of $P_{\text{safe}}(T)$. We denote this maximizing point by T_{opt} .

To demonstrate that this optimal threshold differs from the Equal Error Rate (EER) threshold, we computed the EER point separately as follows:

$$T_{\text{EER}} = \frac{\alpha_1 \beta_1 - \alpha_2 \beta_2}{\alpha_1 - \alpha_2 + \beta_1 - \beta_2} \neq T_{\text{opt}}$$

We illustrate several user and attacker distributions and present their corresponding probability of success curves, expressed as functions of the threshold T in Figure 5 and Figure 6 respectively.

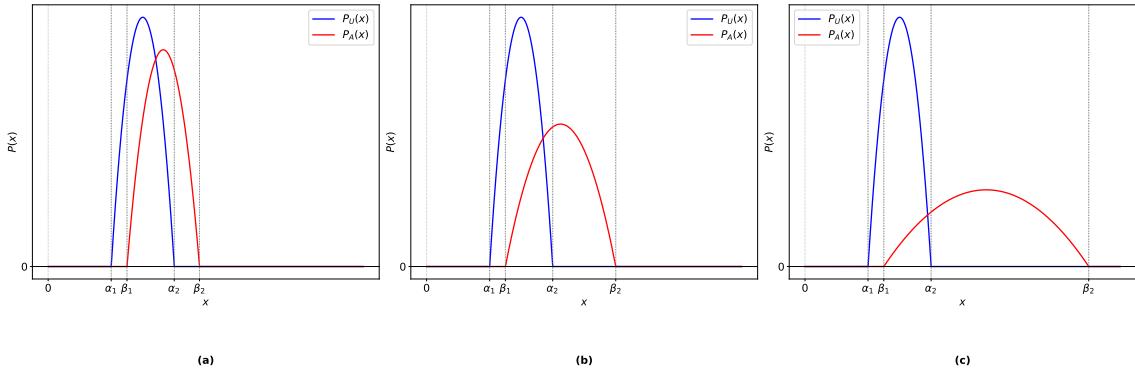


Figure 5: User and Attacker Parabolic Distributions

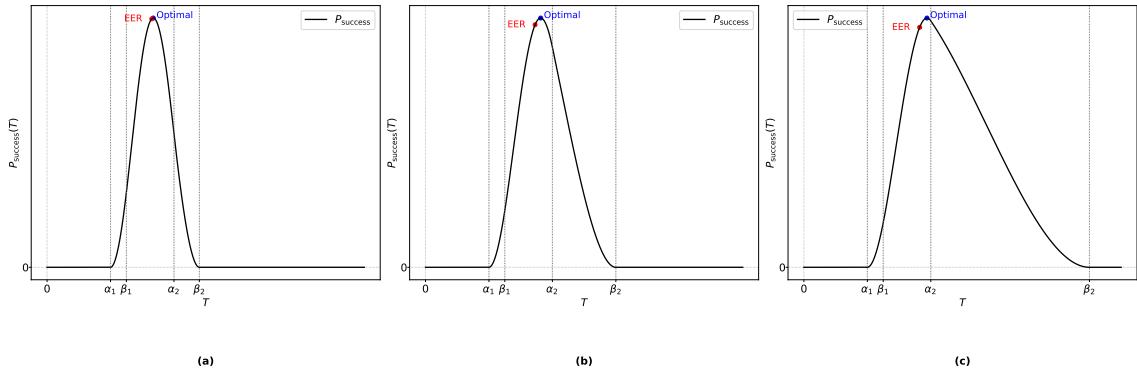


Figure 6: Probability of success for a single credential wallet parabolic distributed

Moreover, we illustrate the FAR–FRR curves for each pair of user and attacker distributions, and mark both the optimal point and the EER point, as shown in Figure 7.

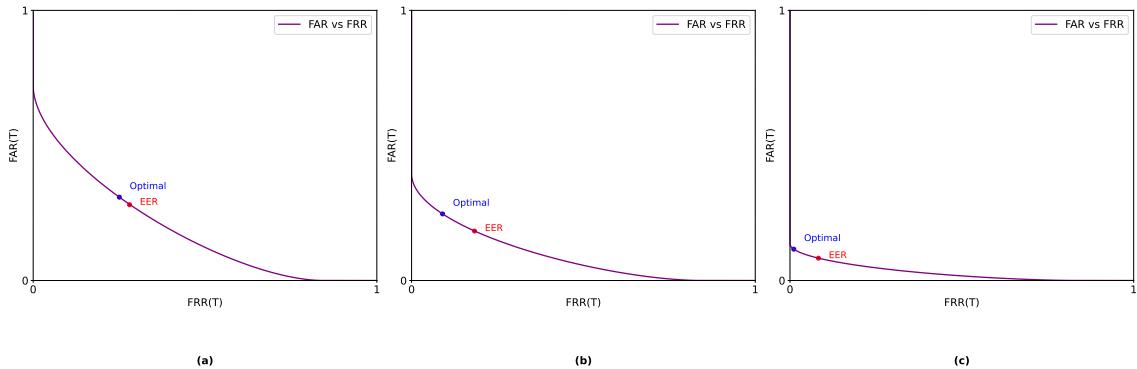


Figure 7: FAR vs FRR curve parabolic distributed

To quantify the effect of the variance on the deviation between the optimal operating point T_{opt} and the equal error rate (EER) point T_{EER} , we numerically computed this gap as a function of the overlap area between the user and attacker PDFs. Increasing the overlap area between the distributions, achieved by reducing the distance between their roots, corresponds to lower variance and reduced separability between the two distributions. The simulations reveal that as the variance increases, the gap $|T_{\text{opt}} - T_{\text{EER}}|$ grows accordingly, until the operating threshold moves into a regime where it effectively minimizes only one of the error rates, either FAR or FRR, driving the other to zero. This phenomenon is shown in Figure 8. These findings indicate that higher attacker variance enlarges the potential security advantage gained by operating at T_{opt} rather than at the EER point.

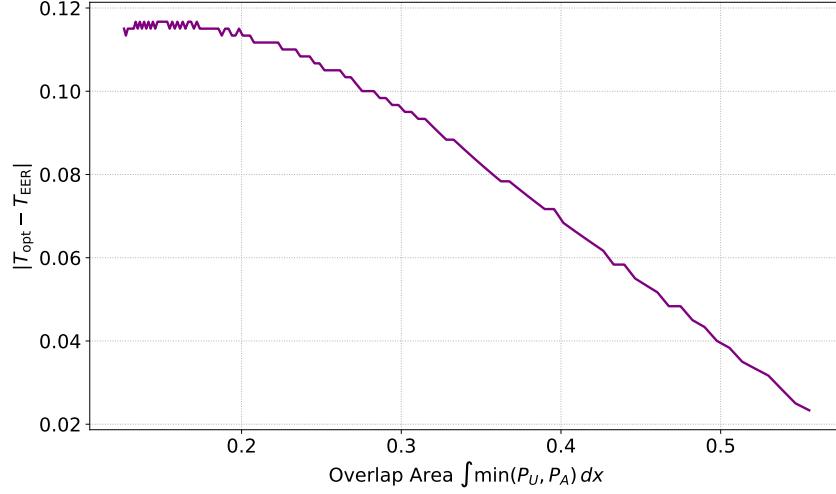


Figure 8: Gap between optimal point and EER point vs overlapping area parabolic distributed

3.3 Two Credentials

For a wallet w comprised of two independently and identically distributed credentials, derived from either the same or different PDF's, we defined the integrated system success as the probability of users successfully defend their wallets under two scenarios:

a. **AND** Require both credentials to be satisfied. For success, we need both credentials to be either in safe state, or one in safe state and the other in leak state. If one of the credentials is either loss or theft, the owner cannot satisfy the wallet and thus the wallet fails.

$$P_{\text{Success}}(w^{\text{AND}}) = P_{\text{safe1}} \cdot P_{\text{safe2}} + P_{\text{safe1}} \cdot P_{\text{leak2}} + P_{\text{safe2}} \cdot P_{\text{leak1}}$$

b. **OR** Require at least one credential to be satisfied. For success, we need both credential to be either in safe state, or one in safe state and the other in loss state. If one of the credentials is either leak or theft, the attacker can satisfy the wallet and thus the wallet fails.

$$P_{\text{Success}}(w^{\text{OR}}) = P_{\text{safe1}} \cdot P_{\text{safe2}} + P_{\text{safe1}} \cdot P_{\text{loss2}} + P_{\text{safe2}} \cdot P_{\text{loss1}}$$

Our analysis

4 Model

4.1 Mechanism Success 2 credentials

4.2 Mechanism Success 3 credentials

5 Optimal Mechanism

6 Conclusion

References

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