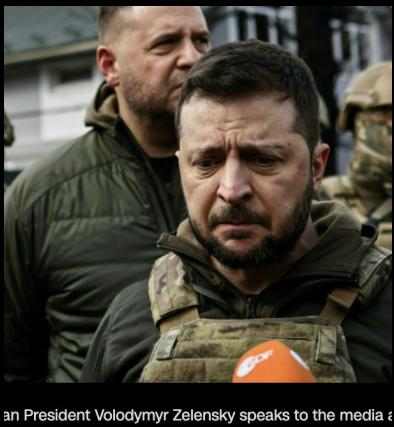


Protecting Users from Adversarial Networks

Roya Ensafi
University of Michigan



Destruction is seen in Borodianka, Ukraine, on April 5. Borodianka



an President Volodymyr Zelensky speaks to the media

The day the news died Here are all Russia's independent media outlets banned, blocked, or shuttered in just the past few days

12:49 am, March 5, 2022 · Source: Meduza

Russia blocks access to Facebook and Twitter



Russia's Internet Censorship Machine Is Going After Tor

The attempt to block the site, which helps users mask their online activity, is the latest in the country's efforts to control the internet.

Russia is blocking more and more VPNs

By Anthony Spadafora published 23 days ago

BBC, CNN and other global news outlets suspend reporting in Russia

BBC's director-general says new Russian legislation 'appears to criminalise the process of independent journalism'

Russian Internet Takes a Hit as Cogent Cuts Off Its Backbone Network

A major internet service provider's disconnection is a new step toward the "splinternet" that adds fragmentation to the global communication network.

Over 600 Companies Have Withdrawn from Russia—But Some Remain

April 14, 2022

TikTok created an alternate universe just for Russia

The Chinese-owned social media giant weathered Putin's information crackdown by muzzling its users there and cutting them off from the outside world, while allowing state propaganda



Technical questions:

- What **sites** are being blocked? What is still accessible?
- How, technically, has Russia implemented its **information controls**?
- What will Russia likely do next ?
- What does this mean for **Internet freedom** ?

Detecting and defending against adversarial networks is challenging, due to the **Internet's vast size and heterogeneity, the powerful capabilities of in-network threat actors, and the lack of ground-truth.**

Experiments must be conducted ethically and safely.

I build scalable techniques and systems to protect users from adversarial networks that violate the **confidentiality**, **integrity**, or **availability** of users' legitimate traffic.

WHO

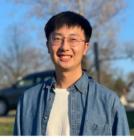
- Governments
- Consumer ISPs
- VPNs
- Transit ISPs
- Cellular providers
- Content providers
- Content delivery networks
- Device manufacturers
- Hackers for hire

WHAT

- Blocking
- Tampering
- Net neutrality violation
- Mass surveillance
- Targeted surveillance
- Content removal
- Throttling
- Denial of Service (DoS)

My team build scalable techniques and systems to protect users from adversarial networks that violate the **confidentiality, integrity, or availability** of users' legitimate traffic.

The Censored Planet Lab

 Roya Ensafi Professor	 Reethika Ramesh PhD Candidate	 Ram Sundara Raman PhD Candidate	 Diwen Xue PhD Candidate	 Anna Ablowe Phd Student
 Wayne Wang PhD Student	 Aaron Ortwein PhD Candidate	 Piyush Kumar Postdoc	 Hieu Van Le Postdoc	 Armin Huremagic Lead Engineer

In this talk, I cover...



Leveraging side channel measurement to
detect and understand censorship



Applying a multi-perspective approach to
safeguard the consumer VPN ecosystem



Investigating the Geo-inequity
of users' online experiences



Detecting Censorship with Side Channels

The Art of Censorship Analysis

FOCI 2023

Censored Planet: An Internet-wide, Longitudinal Censorship Observatory
ACM CCS 2020

Measuring the Deployment of Network Censorship Filters at Global Scale;
NDSS 2020

Quack: Scalable Remote Measurement of Application-Layer Censorship
USENIX Security 2018

Internet-Wide Detection of Connectivity Disruptions
IEEE S&P (“Oakland”) 2017
[Invited to appear in the IEEE Security & Privacy Magazine](#)

Global Measurement of DNS Manipulation
USENIX Security 2017
[Invited to appear in USENIX ;login:, Winter 2017 Issue](#)

Analyzing the Great Firewall of China Over Space and Time
PETs 2015

Detecting Intentional Packet Drops on the Internet via TCP/IP Side
Channels
[Passive and Active Measurement \(PAM\), 2014](#)

Idle Scanning and Non-interference Analysis of Network Protocol Stacks
Using Model Checking
USENIX Security 2010

How Have We Collected Data on Censorship?

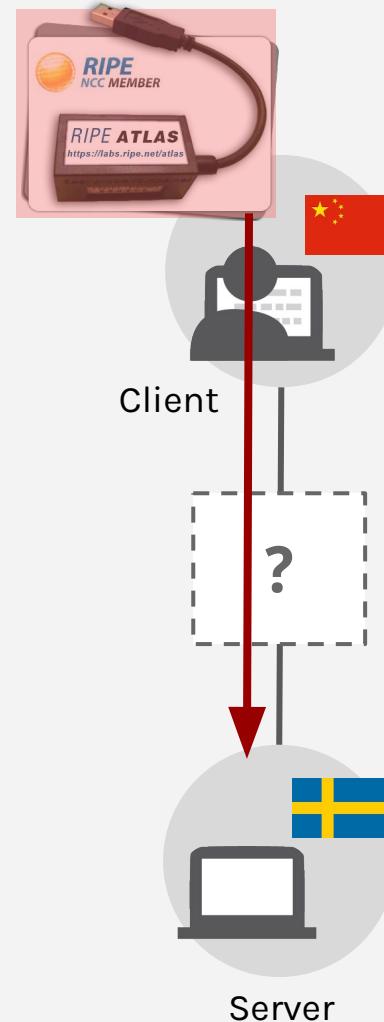
Old state of the art:

- Deploy hardware or software in censored region (e.g. RIPE Atlas, OONI probe)
- Ask people on the ground, or use VPNs, or research networks (e.g., PlanetLab)

THREE KEY CHALLENGES:

Coverage, continuity, and ethics

Collecting consistent, continuous, and global data requires a different approach.

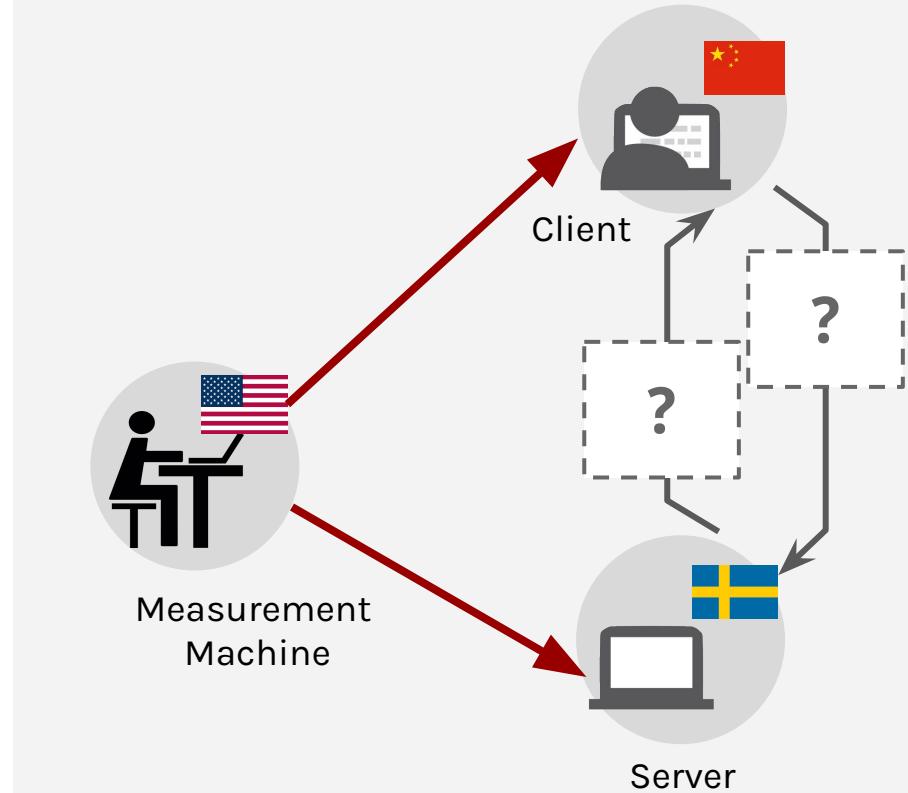


Measuring Internet Censorship Globally... Remotely!

REFRAMING THE PROBLEM:

How can we detect whether pairs of hosts around the world can talk to each other?

... without volunteer participation?



Leveraging Existing Hosts as Vantage Points



217 million IPv4 hosts w/ open ports
7 million open DNS resolvers
2 billion web servers

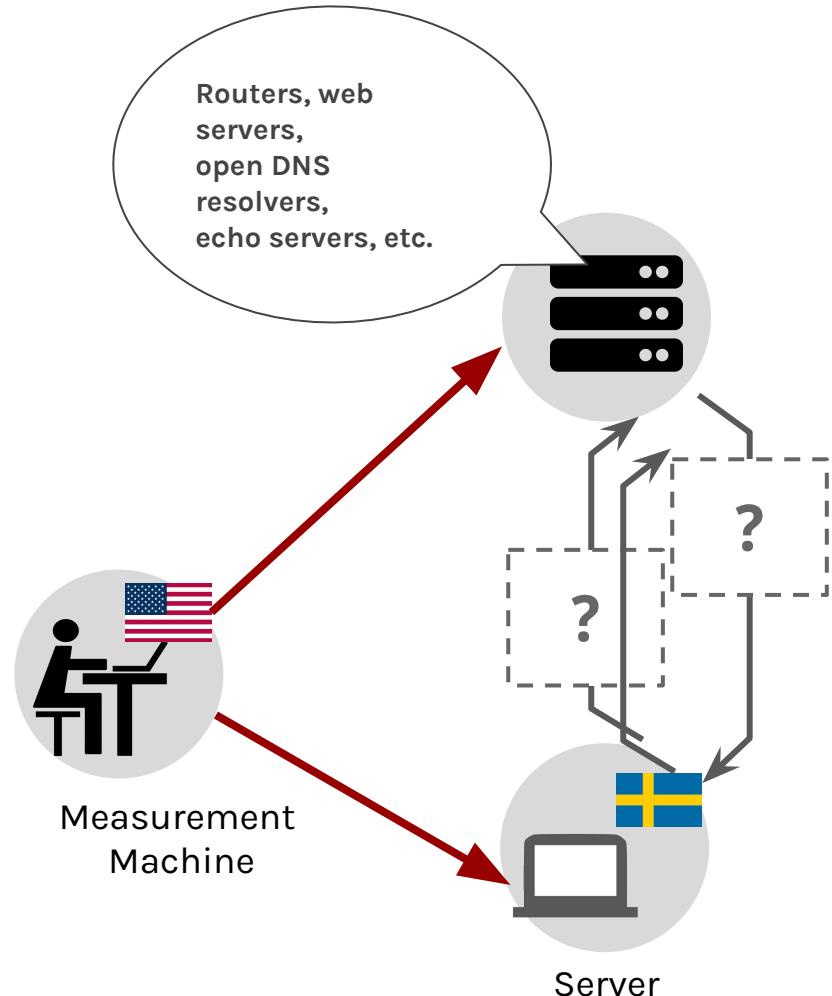
...

These machines speak to the world, and they follow **different Internet Protocols.**

My Approach: Using Side Channels

REFRAMING THE PROBLEM:

How can we leverage
subtle behavior of different Internet Protocols
to detect whether two distant hosts can
communicate on a given layer?



Side Channels Techniques for Remotely Measuring Censorship

DNS Layer

Satellite (2017) →
Institutional open resolvers

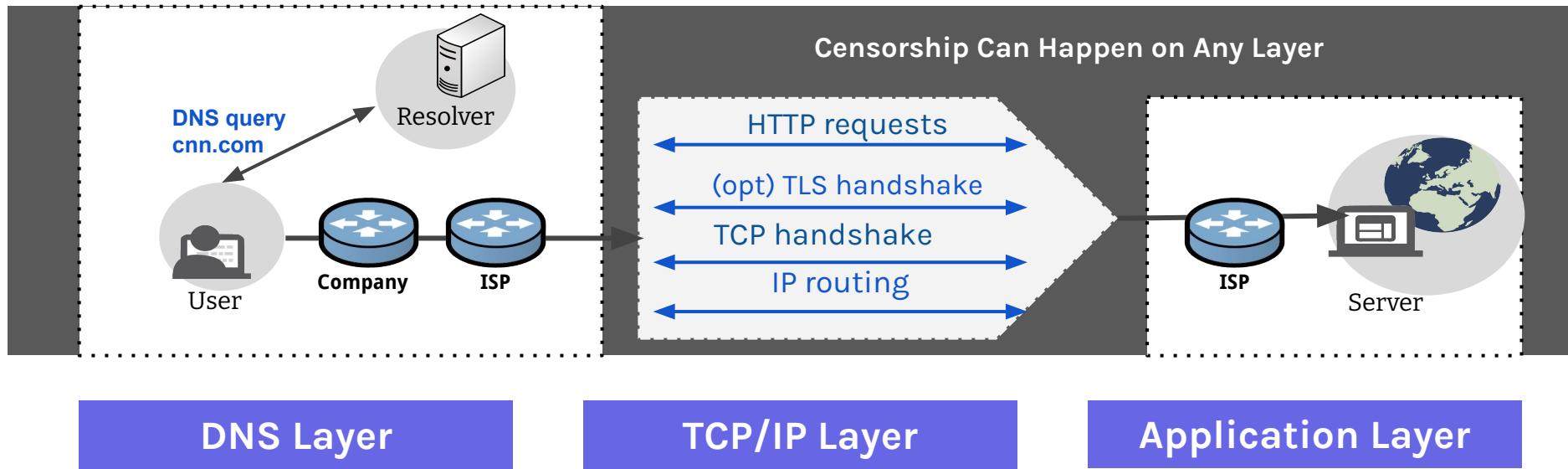
TCP/IP Layer

Spooky (2014)
Augur (2017)
→ Global IP_ID routers

Application Layer

Quack (2018)
HyperQuack (2020)
→ Services that reflect data
(e.g. Echo, HTTP, HTTPS)

Side Channels Techniques for Remotely Measuring Censorship



DNS Layer

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Institutional open resolvers

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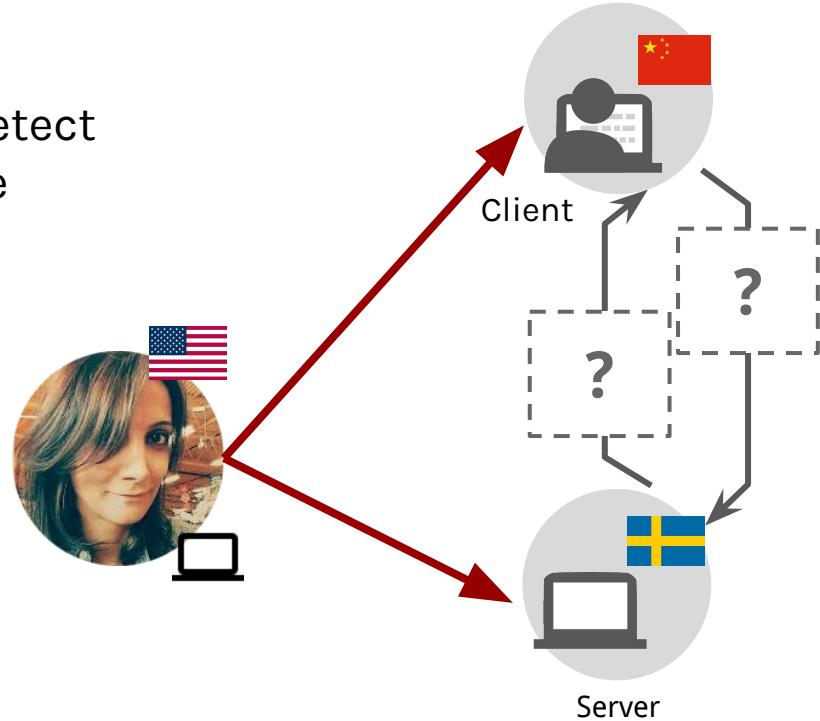
Application Layer

Quack (2018)
HyperQuack (2020)
→ Services that reflect data
(e.g. Echo, HTTP, HTTPS)

Spooky Scan

Spooky Scan uses TCP/IP side-channels to detect whether a client and server can communicate (and in which direction packets are blocked)

Goal: Detect blocking from off-path



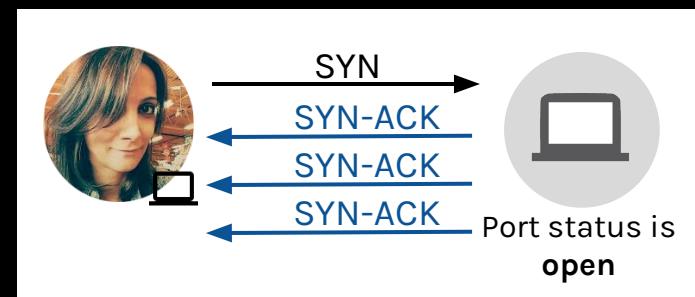
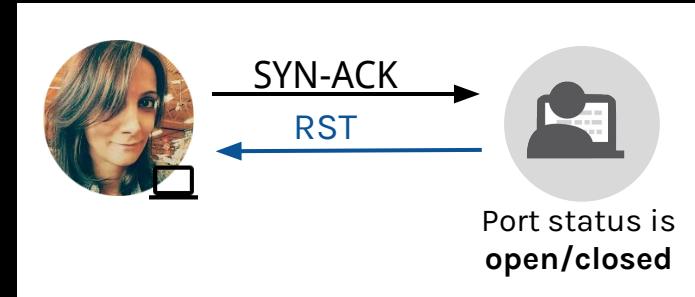
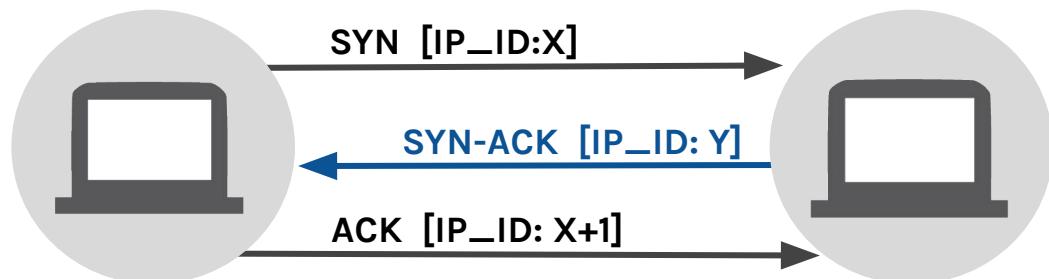
* Detecting Intentional Packet Drops on the Internet via TCP/IP Side Channels
Roya Ensafi, Knockel, Alexander, and Crandall (PAM '14)

* Idle Port Scanning and Non-interference Analysis of Network Protocol
Stacks Using Model Checking
Roya Ensafi, Park, Kapur, and Crandall (Usenix Security 2010)

* TCP Idle Scan Antirez (Bugtraq 1998)

Background: TCP/IP Protocol

TCP Handshake:



Spooky Scan Requirements



Client

Must maintain a
global value for IP_ID



Server

Open port and
retransmitting
SYN-ACKs

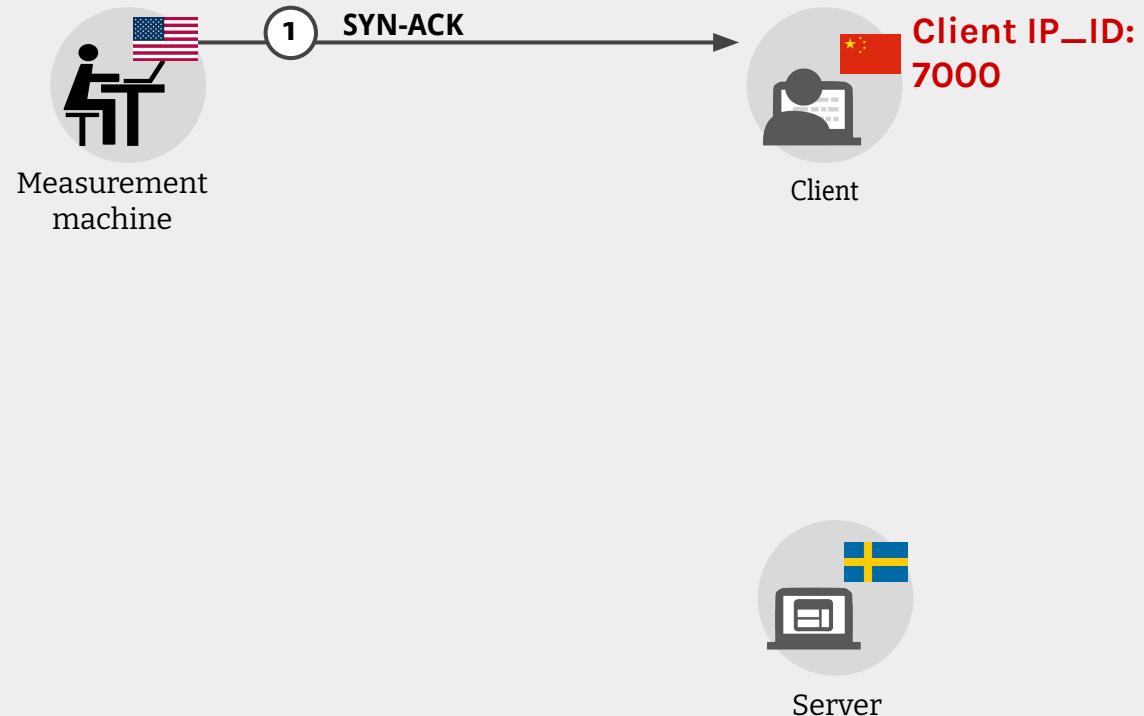


Measurement Machine

Must be able to spoof packets

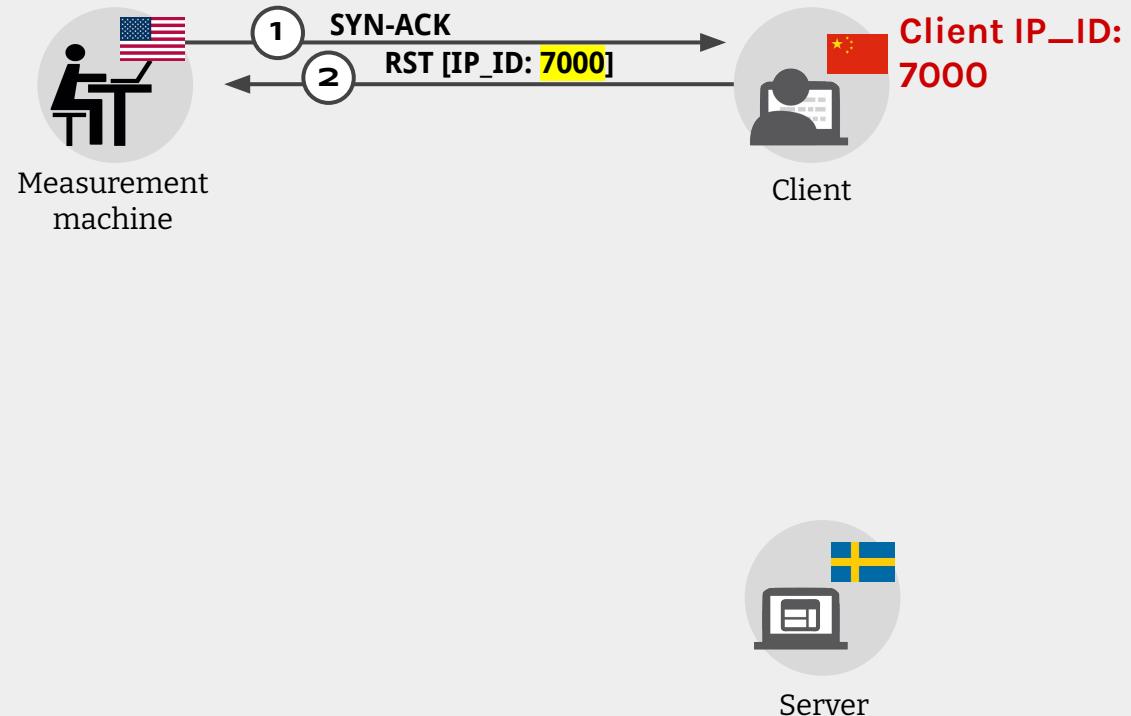
Spooky Scan

No direction blocked



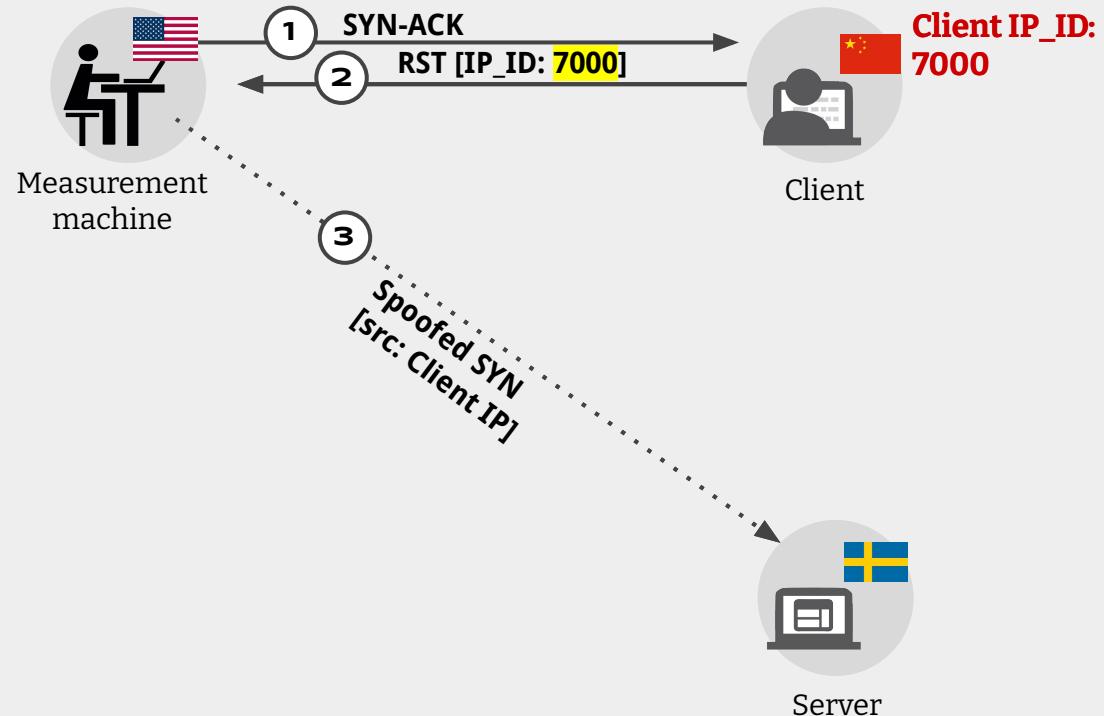
Spooky Scan

No direction blocked



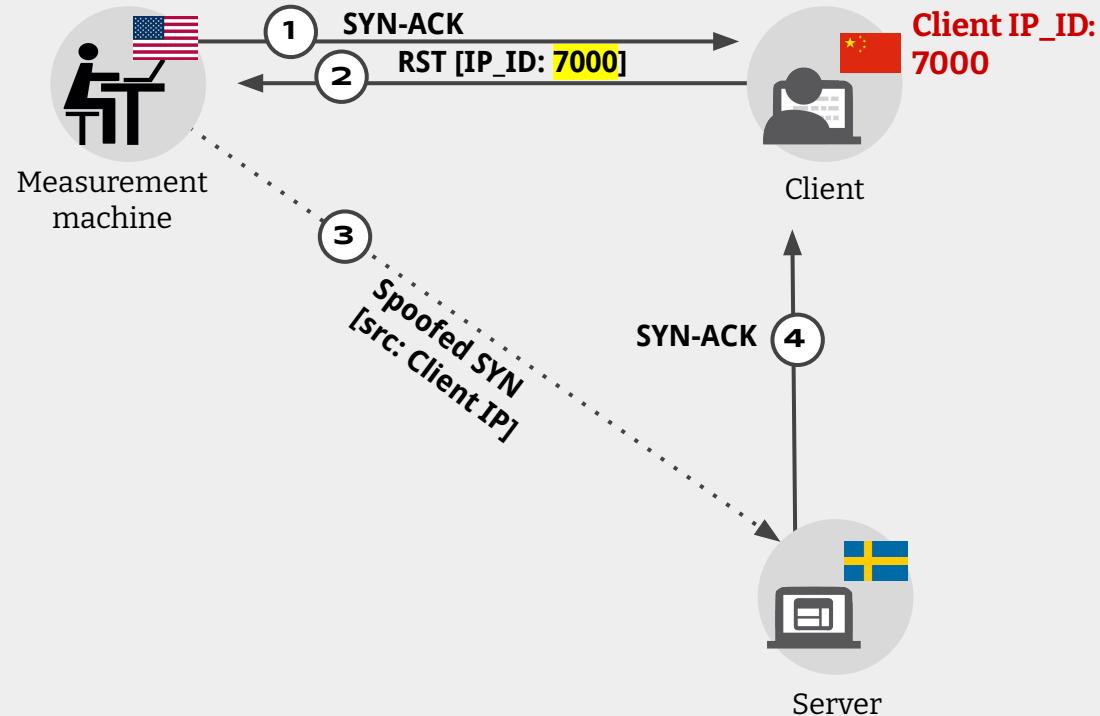
Spooky Scan

No direction blocked



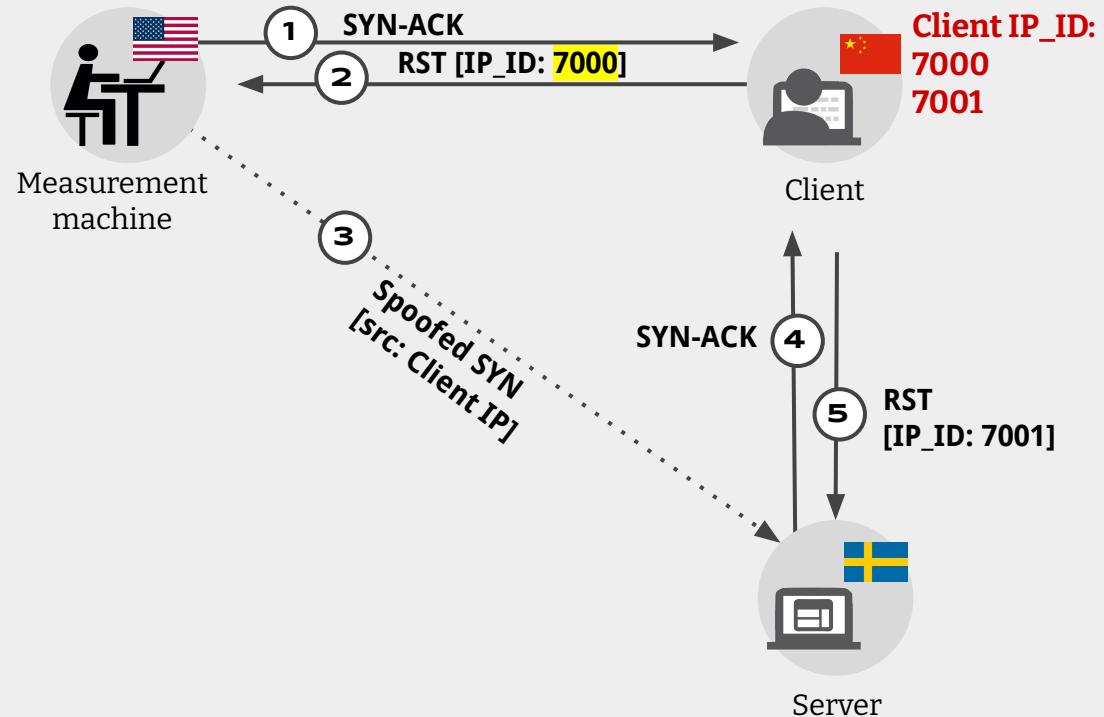
Spooky Scan

No direction blocked



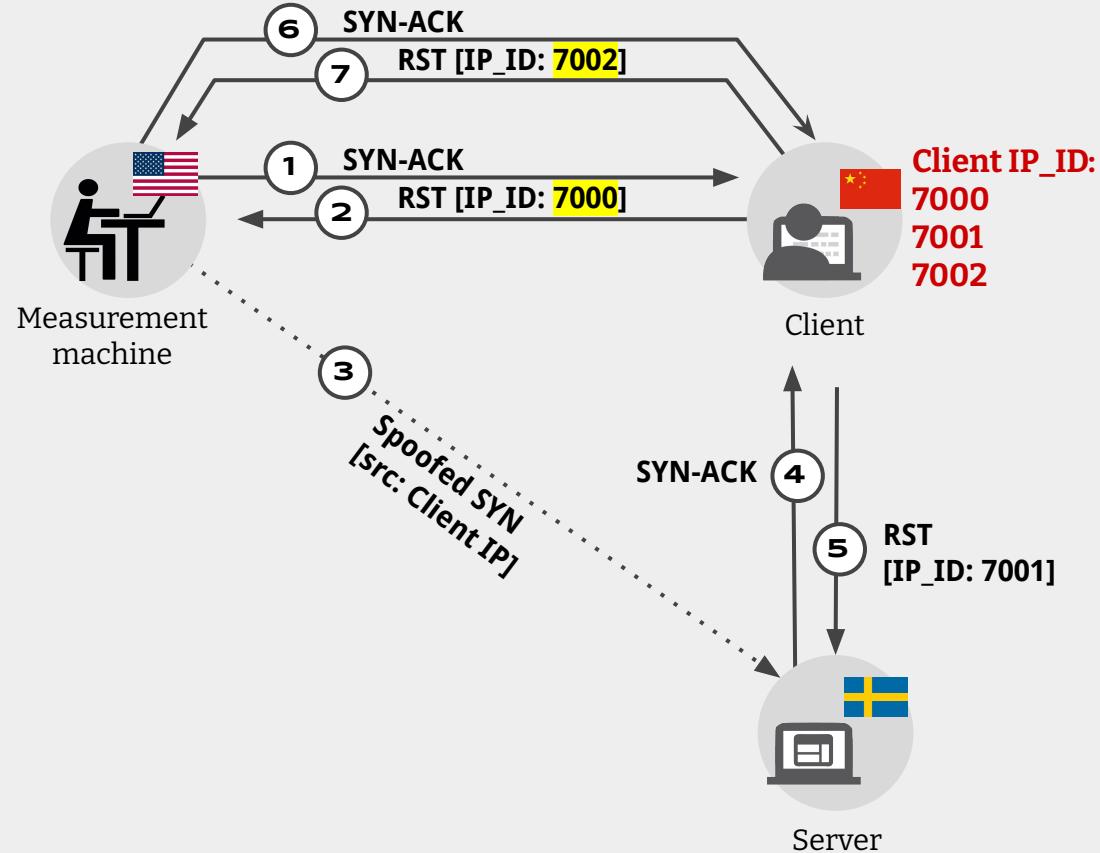
Spooky Scan

No direction blocked



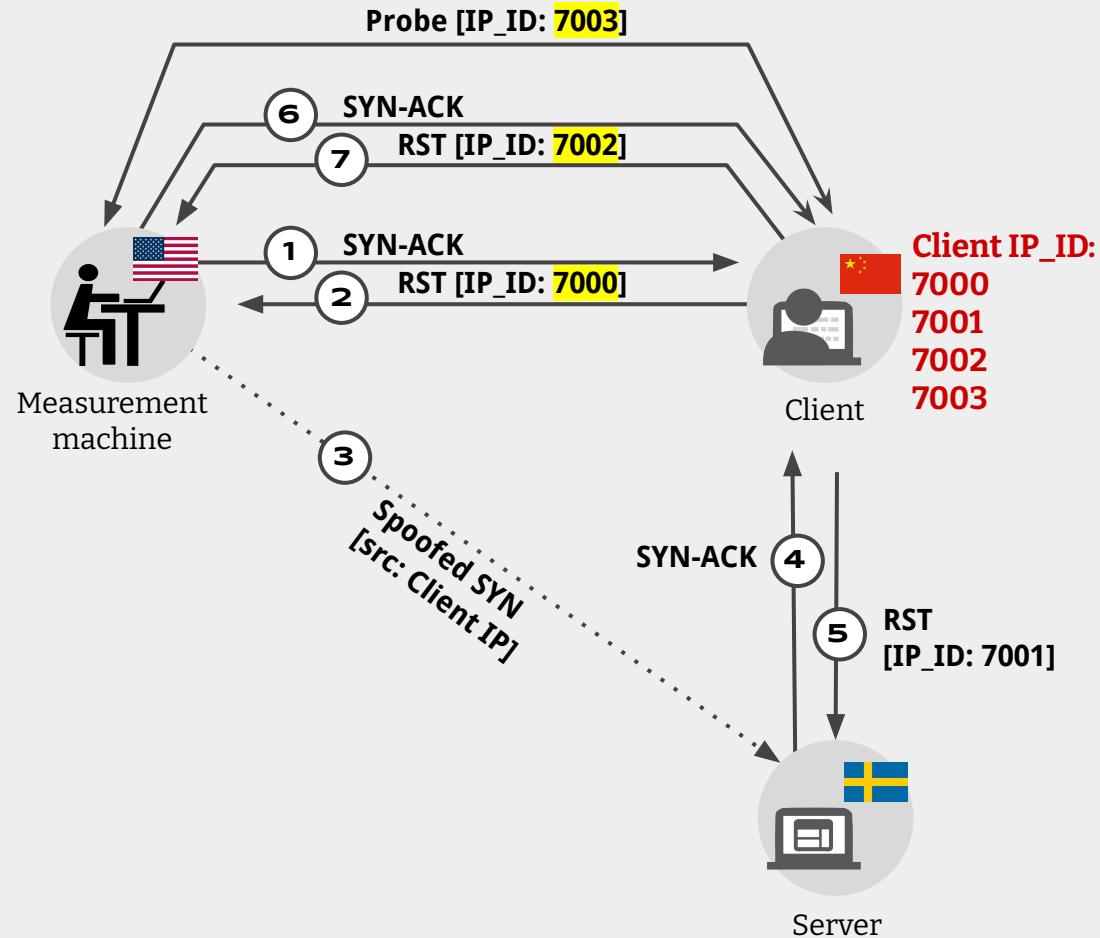
Spooky Scan

No direction blocked



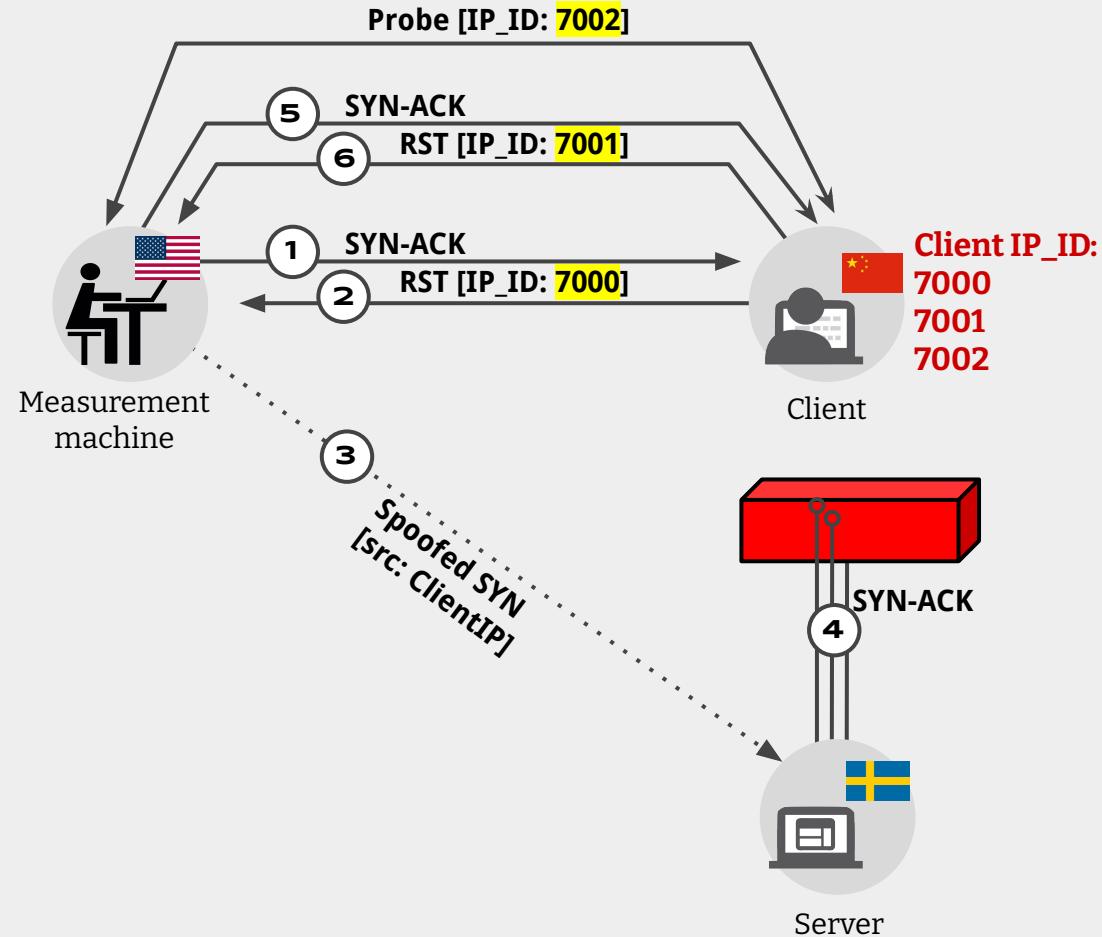
Spooky Scan

No direction blocked



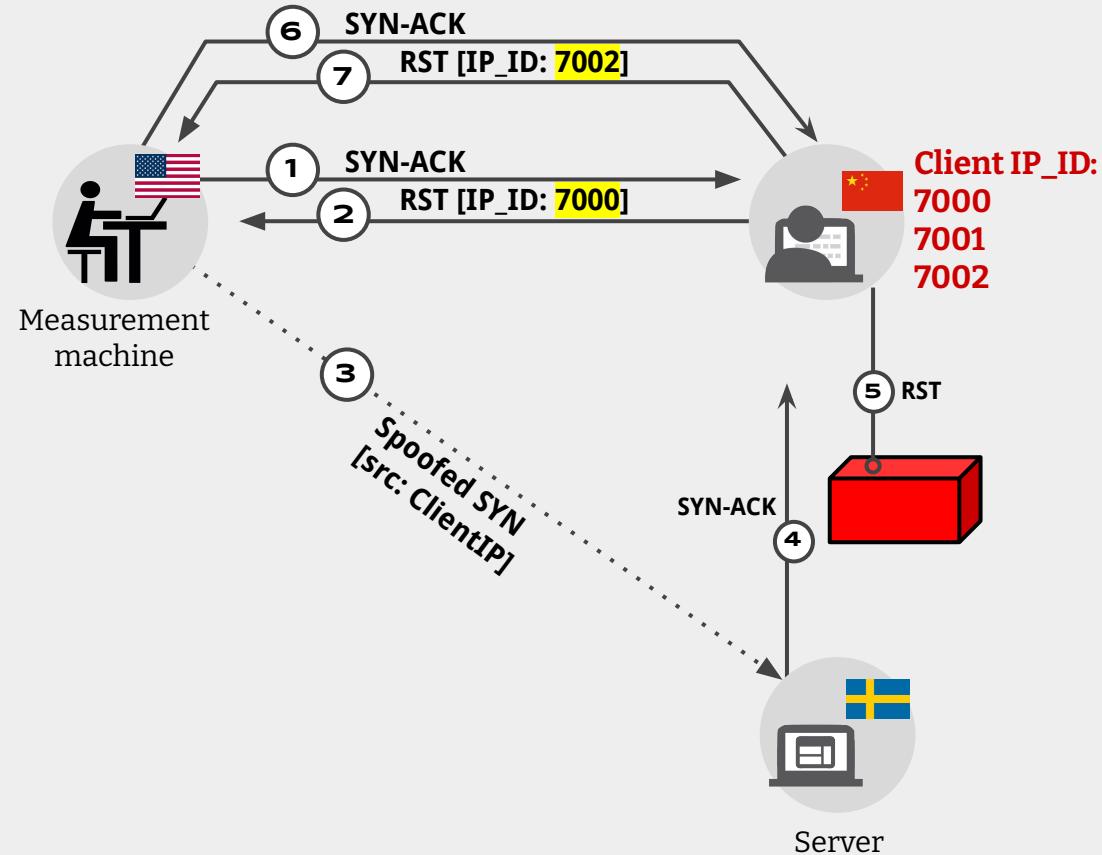
Spooky Scan

Server-to-Client
blocked



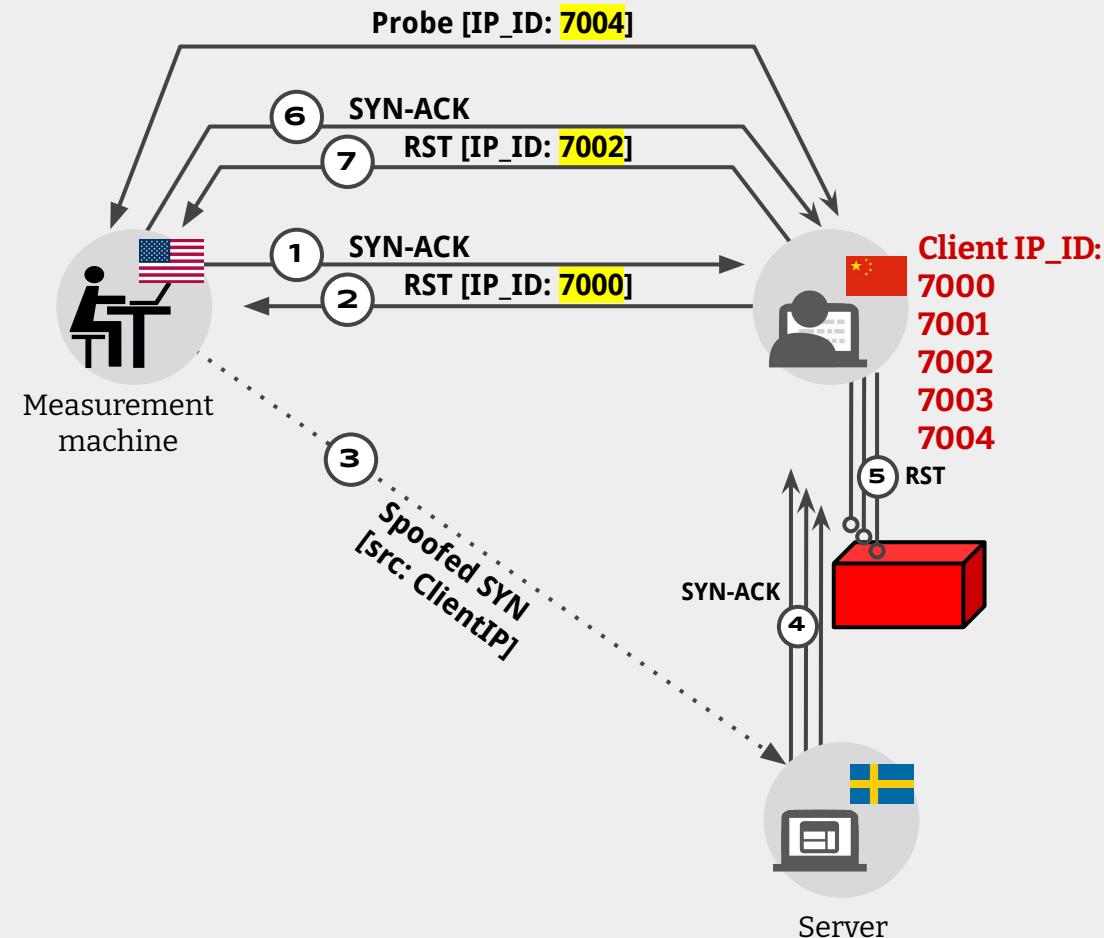
Spooky Scan

Client-to-Server
blocked



Spooky Scan

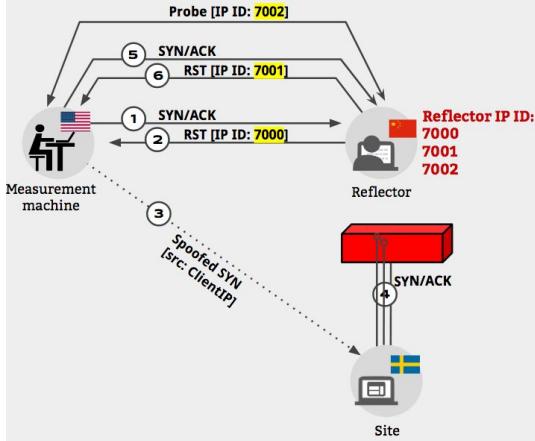
Client-to-Server
blocked



Spooky Scan

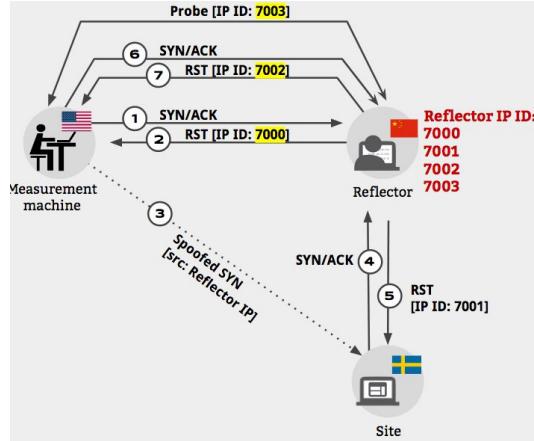
Server-to-Client Blocked

$$\Delta \text{IP_ID1} = 1$$
$$\Delta \text{IP_ID2} = 1$$



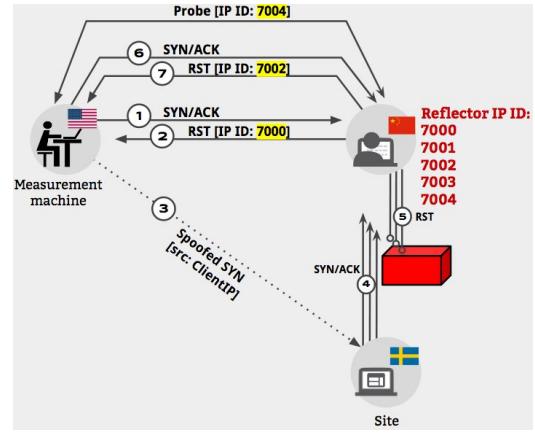
No Direction Blocked

$$\Delta \text{IP_ID1} = 2$$
$$\Delta \text{IP_ID2} = 1$$

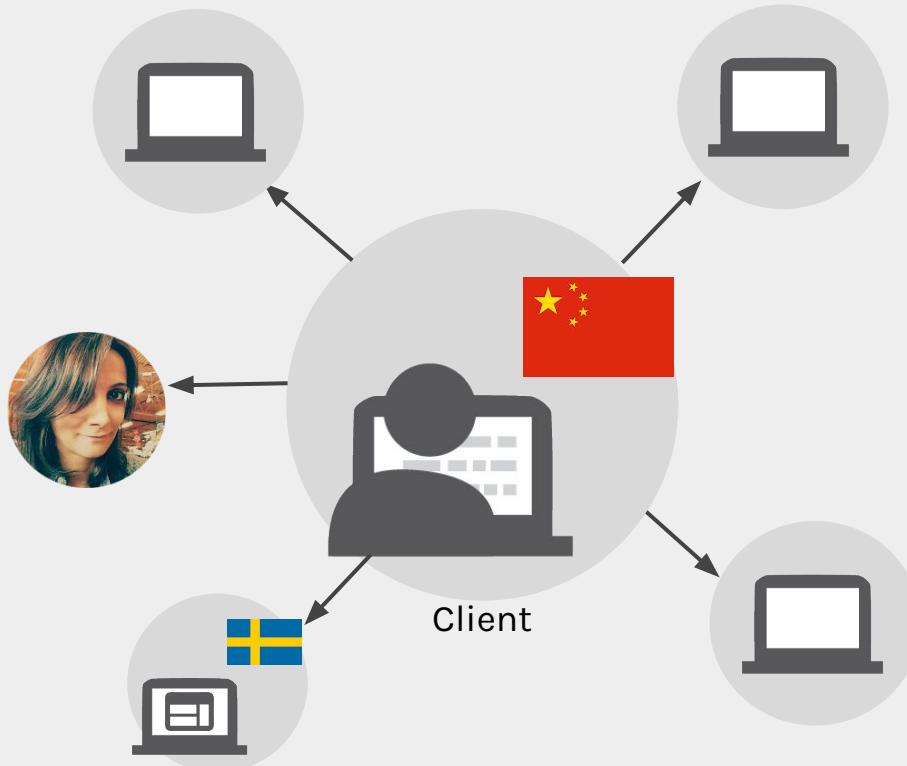


Client-to-Server Blocked

$$\Delta \text{IP_ID1} = 2$$
$$\Delta \text{IP_ID2} = 2$$



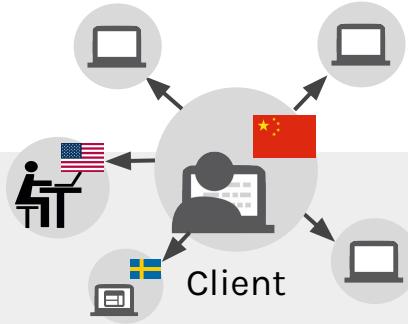
Client IP_ID Noise



Coping with Client IP_ID Noise

Amplifying the signal

Effect of sending N spoofed SYNs:



Server-to-Client Blocked

$$\begin{aligned}\Delta \text{IP_ID1} &= (1 + \text{noise}) \\ \Delta \text{IP_ID2} &= \text{noise}\end{aligned}$$

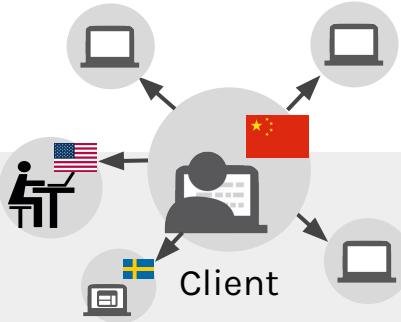
No Direction Blocked

$$\begin{aligned}\Delta \text{IP_ID1} &= (1 + N + \text{noise}) \\ \Delta \text{IP_ID2} &= \text{noise}\end{aligned}$$

Client-to-Server Blocked

$$\begin{aligned}\Delta \text{IP_ID1} &= (1 + N + \text{noise}) \\ \Delta \text{IP_ID2} &= (1 + N + \text{noise})\end{aligned}$$

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Client-to-Server Blocked

$$\begin{aligned}\Delta \text{IP_ID1} &= (1 + N + \text{noise}) \\ \Delta \text{IP_ID2} &= (1 + N + \text{noise})\end{aligned}$$

Repeating the experiment

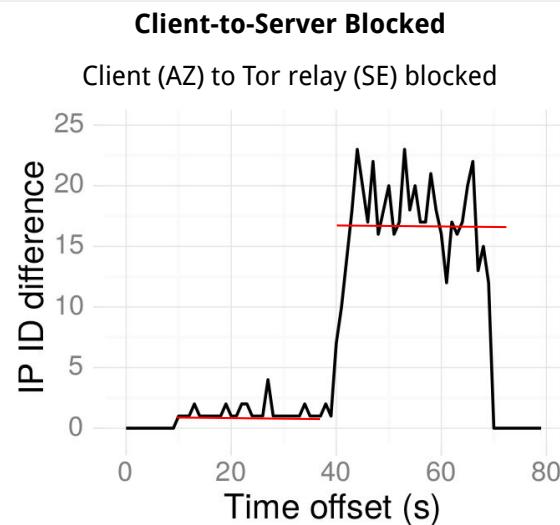
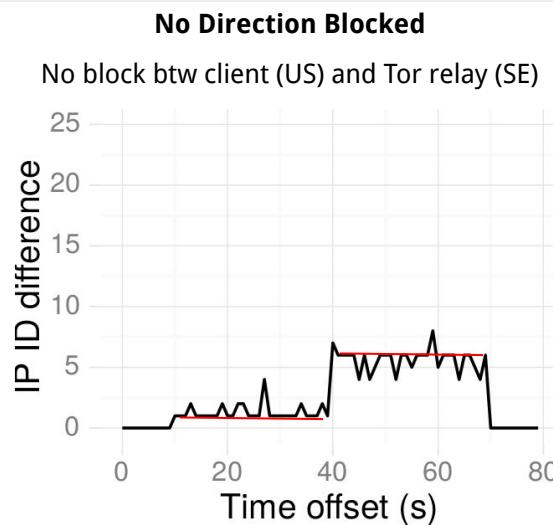
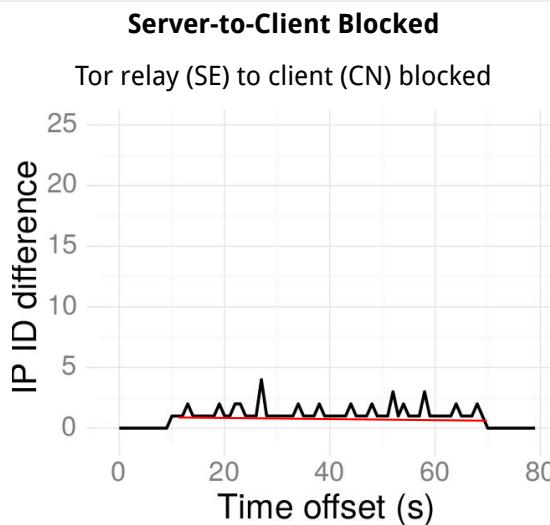
To eliminate the effects of packet loss, sudden bursts of packets, ...

Spooky Scan with Noise: Visualization

Probing method

For first 30s, query IP_IDs. Then, for another 30s

Send 5 spoofed SYNs per second
Query IP_ID once per second



Augur: Spooky for Continuous Scanning

PROBLEM: Want to optimize Spooky to probe many hosts, all the time.

INSIGHT: Some measurements are much noisier than others.

Augur: Spooky for Continuous Scanning

PROBLEM: Want to optimize Spooky to probe many hosts, all the time.

INSIGHT: Some measurements are much noisier than others.

Probing Methodology:

Until we have high enough confidence (or up to):

- Run
 - For first 4s, query IP_ID every sec
 - { Send 10 spoofed SYNs
 - Query IP_ID
 - Query IP_ID

Augur: Spooky for Continuous Scanning

PROBLEM: Want to optimize Spooky to probe many hosts, all the time.

INSIGHT: Some measurements are much noisier than others.

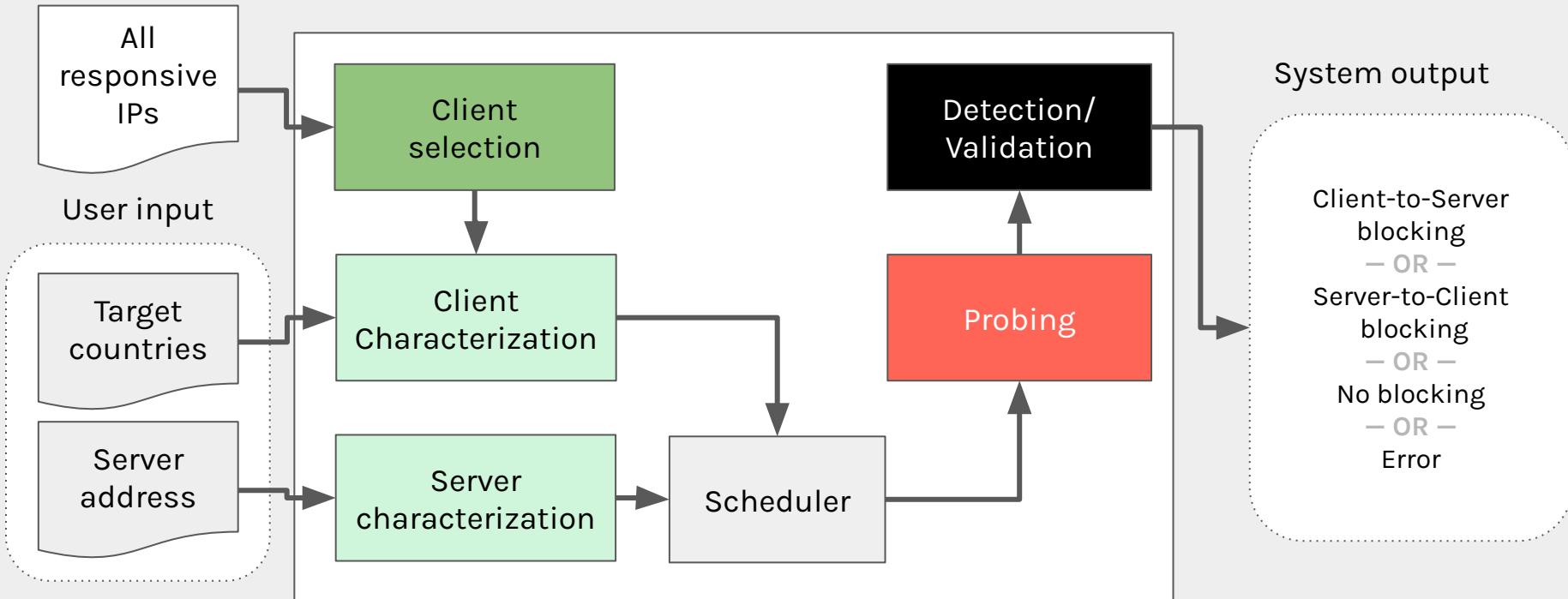
Probing Methodology:

Until we have high enough confidence (or up to):

- Run
 - For first 4s, query IP_ID every sec
 - { Send 10 spoofed SYNs
 - Query IP_ID
 - Query IP_ID

Repeat runs and use
Sequential Hypothesis Testing
to gradually build confidence.

Augur Framework



Coverage

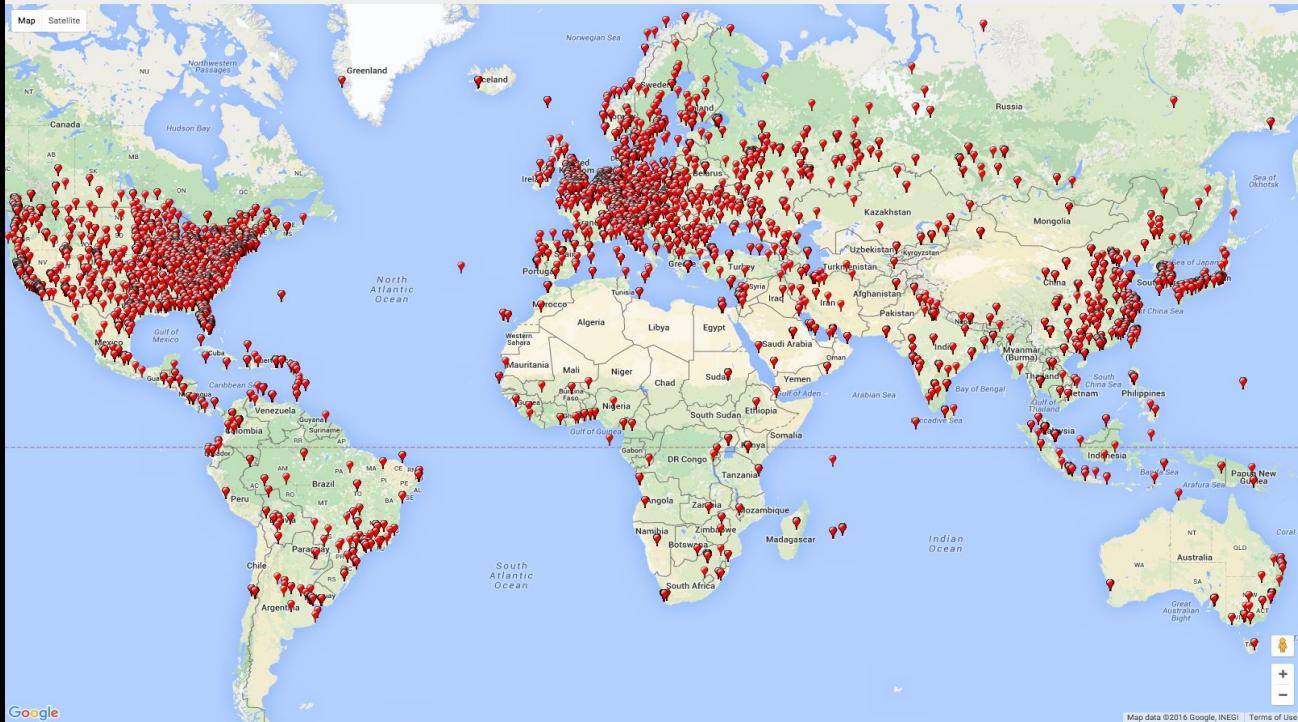
CHALLENGE:

Need global vantage points from which to measure

Scanning IPv4 on port 80:

22.7 million potential clients (with global IP_ID)

Compare: 10,000 in prior work (RIPE Atlas)



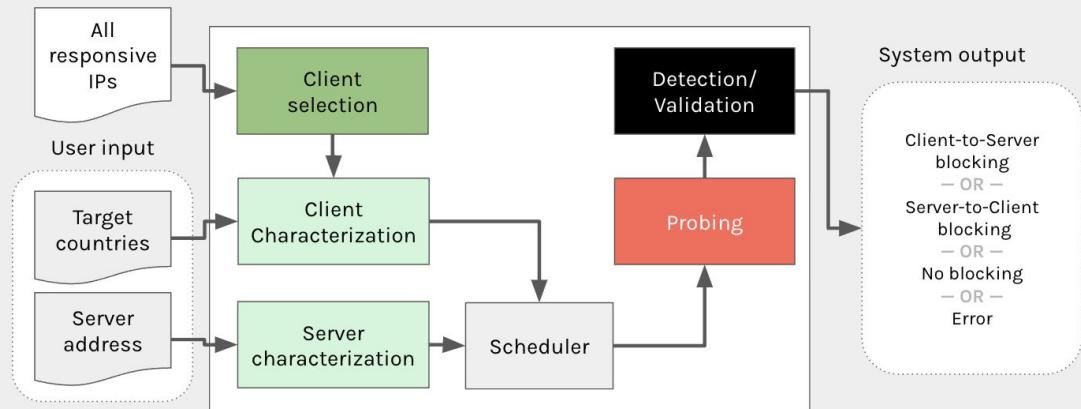
THREE KEY CHALLENGES:
Coverage, continuity, and ethics

Continuity

CHALLENGE:

Need to repeat measurements over time

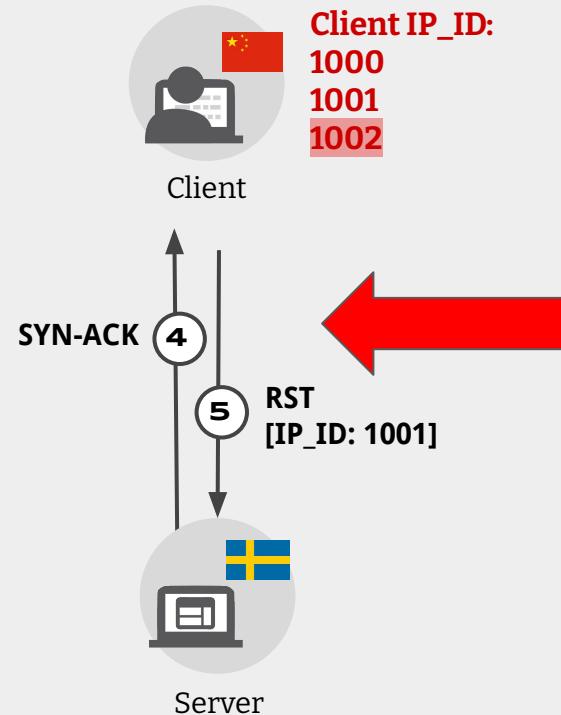
Augur doesn't depend on end users' participation, allowing us to collect measurements continuously.



Ethics

CHALLENGE:

Probing banned sites from users' machines creates risk



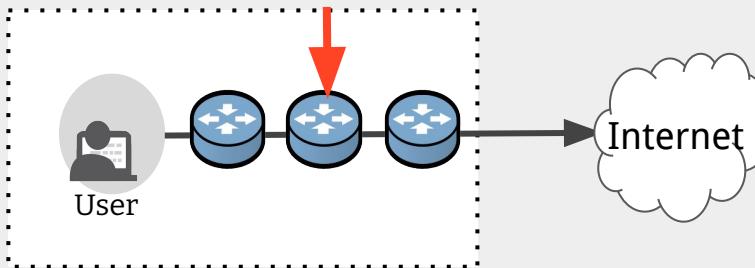
THREE KEY CHALLENGES:
Coverage, continuity, and ethics

Ethics

CHALLENGE:

Probing banned sites from users' machines creates risk

Use only **infrastructure devices** to source probes



Global IP_ID	22.7 million	236 countries (and dependent territories)
Two hops back from end user	<u>53,000</u>	180 countries

Ethics in Censorship Measurement

More generally, censorship research frequently raises ethical considerations.

E.g., under what conditions is it safe enough to use remote vantage points?

The slide contains the following text:

ACM SIGCOMM Workshop on Ethics in Networked Systems Research

Ethical Concerns for Censorship Measurement

Ben Jones, Roya Ensafi, Nick Feamster, Vern Paxson, Nick Weaver
Princeton University, UC Berkeley, International Computer Science Institute

Abstract
Based on our experiences in measuring censorship in several projects, we frame various ethical questions and challenges that we have encountered. We offer this short document to highlight open questions that we view as important to consider when establishing ethical norms for censorship measurement.

• Deploy software to citizens. Another approach is to entice citizens and activists who already live in the country to install or deploy software that performs measurements. This approach may sometimes achieve more continuous measurements, but it does not always achieve continuity, and it also potentially places people in harm's way.

IRBs are often not positioned to help.

Common Rule ([45 CFR 46.102\(f\)](#)) defines a human subject as "a living individual about whom an investigator conducting research obtains (1) data through intervention or interaction with the individual or (2) identifiable private information."

We turn to authorities such as the **Belmont and Menlo Reports** to guide ethical thinking.

Frequently consult with colleagues to check our reasoning and conclusions.

Questions we regularly consider include:

- **What populations of users are affected?**
- **Is informed consent feasible?**
- **Have we considered all anticipatable risks?**
- **Do humans incur no more than minimal risk?**
- **Can we take steps to further reduce risks?**
- **Do benefits accrue to the population that is subjected to the risk?**

From (Raw) Data points to Understanding Censorship?

Side channels



TCP/IP Layer
→ Spooky (2014)
→ Augur (2017)



DNS Layer
→ Satellite (2017)



Application Layer
→ Quack (2018)
→ HyperQuack (2020)

Challenges



- Disruption detection is not necessary censorship detection
- Ambiguity in location and granularity of filtering
- The techniques are each specialized to detect one type of censorship, and have only been used for a single snapshot in time



Building Censored Planet Observatory

NEED: A platform for continuously monitoring global Internet censorship

We build Censored Planet:

- Orchestrate running remote measurement techniques
- Use data science to distill understanding
- Disseminate and facilitate data use



Censored Planet



* Censored Planet: An Internet-wide, Longitudinal Censorship Observatory
R. Raman, P. Shenoy, K. Kohls, R. Ensafi
ACM CCS 2020

Orchestrate Running Side Channels



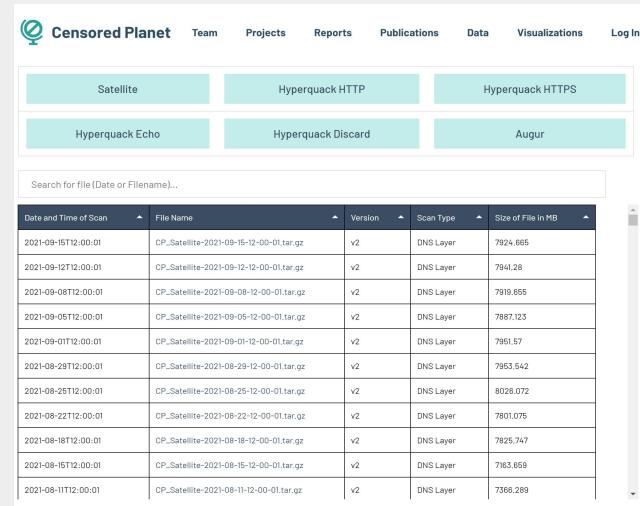
From August 2018, been running these side channels in parallel

continuously testing reachability to 2000 sensitive domains from 95,000 vantage points!



94 billion data points

Largest public censorship dataset



Screenshot of the Censored Planet web interface. The top navigation bar includes links for Censored Planet, Team, Projects, Reports, Publications, Data, Visualizations, and Log In. Below the navigation is a search bar and a grid of six buttons: Satellite, Hyperquack HTTP, Hyperquack HTTPS, Hyperquack Echo, Hyperquack Discard, and Augur. The main area is a table titled "Data and Time of Scan" with columns for Date and Time of Scan, File Name, Version, Scan Type, and Size of File in MB. The table lists 14 rows of data, each corresponding to a file named CP_Satellite-2021-09-[date]-00-01.tar.gz, version v2, and scan type DNS Layer, with file sizes ranging from 7924.665 to 7366.289 MB.

Date and Time of Scan	File Name	Version	Scan Type	Size of File in MB
2021-09-15T12:00:01	CP_Satellite-2021-09-15-12-00-01.tar.gz	v2	DNS Layer	7924.665
2021-09-12T12:00:01	CP_Satellite-2021-09-12-12-00-01.tar.gz	v2	DNS Layer	7941.28
2021-09-08T12:00:01	CP_Satellite-2021-09-08-12-00-01.tar.gz	v2	DNS Layer	7919.655
2021-09-05T12:00:01	CP_Satellite-2021-09-05-12-00-01.tar.gz	v2	DNS Layer	7887.123
2021-09-02T12:00:01	CP_Satellite-2021-09-02-12-00-01.tar.gz	v2	DNS Layer	7951.57
2021-08-29T12:00:01	CP_Satellite-2021-08-29-12-00-01.tar.gz	v2	DNS Layer	7963.542
2021-08-25T12:00:01	CP_Satellite-2021-08-25-12-00-01.tar.gz	v2	DNS Layer	8026.072
2021-08-22T12:00:01	CP_Satellite-2021-08-22-12-00-01.tar.gz	v2	DNS Layer	7801.075
2021-08-18T12:00:01	CP_Satellite-2021-08-18-12-00-01.tar.gz	v2	DNS Layer	7825.747
2021-08-15T12:00:01	CP_Satellite-2021-08-15-12-00-01.tar.gz	v2	DNS Layer	7163.659
2021-08-11T12:00:01	CP_Satellite-2021-08-11-12-00-01.tar.gz	v2	DNS Layer	7366.289

Challenges with Analyzing Censorship

Unexpected anomalies

1. CDN behavior

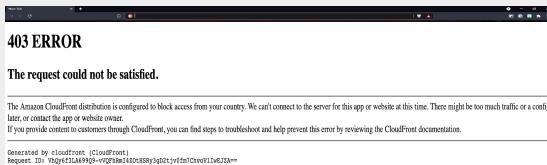
Access Denied

You don't have permission to access "/" on this server.
Reference #18.9872c17.1631203469.b24e5df9

2. Bot detection

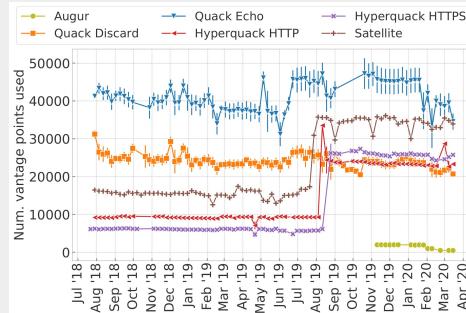


3. Geoblocking

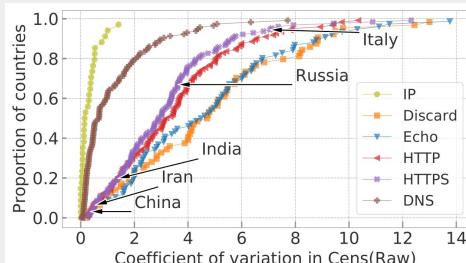


Temporal & Spatial Variance

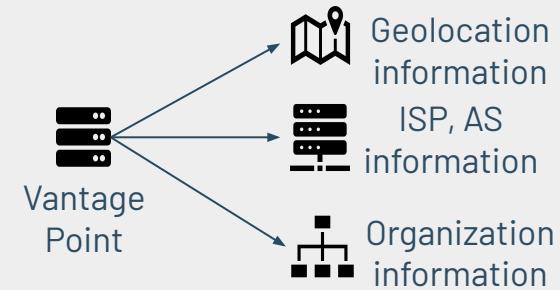
1. Vantage Point Changes



2. Organizational Policies



Insufficient Metadata



Variance in Errors

Error Types

Resets

Timeout

DNS errors

TLS/HTTP errors

Analyzing Censorship

Building universal data schema

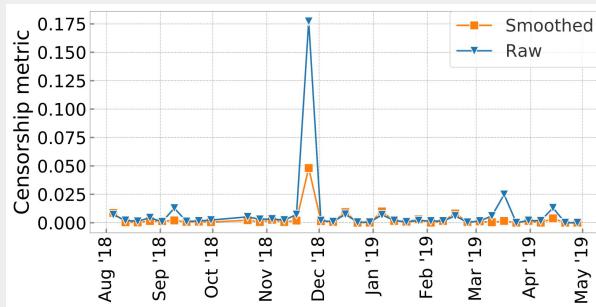
- that covers all techniques

Obtain a representative metric of censorship

- not every vantagepoint is equally weighted within a country

Dealing with outlier vantage points

- apply an **optimization model** (Nelder-Mead) to obtain a weight for each Autonomous System that smooths the metric.

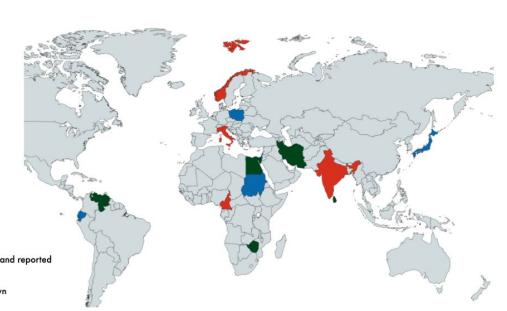


Trend Analysis - Mann-Kendall test

- Increasing levels of DNS censorship >100 countries.
 - HTTPS censorship showing increasing trend.
 - 11 categories of domains increasingly blocked
 - e.g., News Media, Provocative Attire.

Anomaly Detection - Bitmap-based detection

- Identified 15 key censorship events

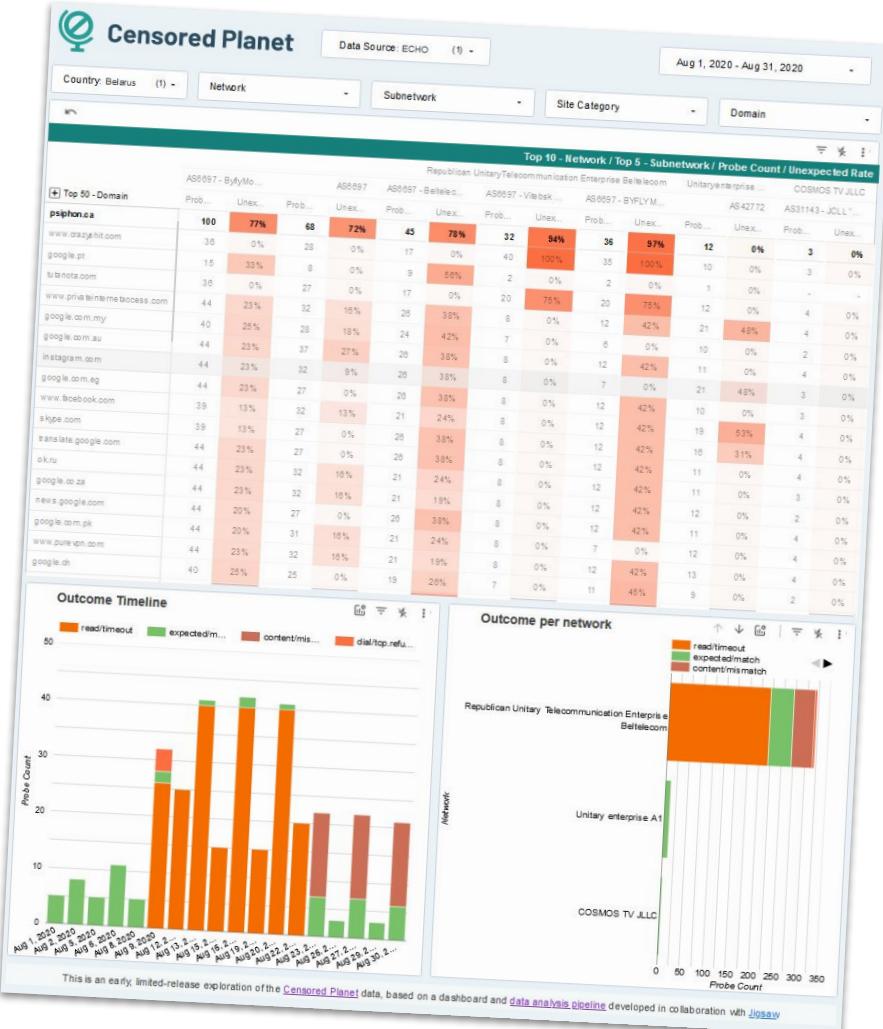


Censored Plant Dashboard

Developed in collaboration with Google's Jigsaw

To facilitate data use and enable easy visualizations, we built our dashboard that automatically gets updates after each scans.

We provide free access to our data users.





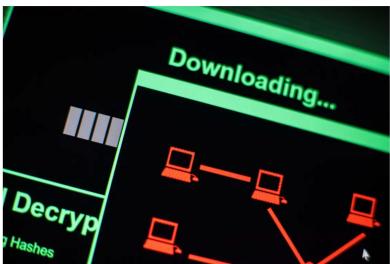
Censored Planet Rapid Response

Censored Planet team has exposed **significant new government censorship tactics**, and our results have been highlighted in more than 100 popular press articles.

Google, Apple and Mozilla to block internet surveillance in Kazakhstan

It's a response to the government's attempt to intercept users' browser data.

Oscar Gonzalez
Aug 21, 2019 7:02 a.m. PT



The makers of the most popular browsers are taking a stand against the Kazakh government.
Picture Alliance/Getty Images



Laws, cheap web filters arm Russia to block news, says Censored Planet

By Madeline Earp/CJU Consultant Technology Editor on November 7, 2019 11:36 AM EST

When Daniil Kislov tried to view the website of Fergana from his computer in Moscow on November 1, his browser showed



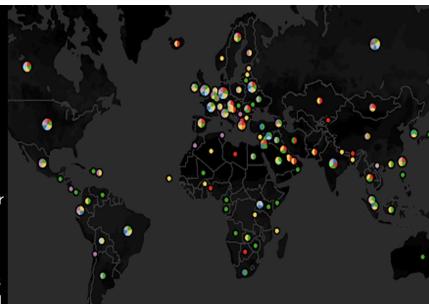
STORIES

Roskomnadzor successfully slows down Twitter. American researchers explained how he did it. They even found a small loophole for users - it's a pity that it's unlikely to help them

01:36, April 8, 2021

Source: Meduza

- Allot
- Barracuda
- CacheFlow
- Cisco
- Fortinet
- IBM QRadar
- Juniper
- Palo Alto
- Senhua
- SmartFilter
- SonicWall
- Squid
- Sucuri
- VAS Experts
- Watchguard



Real-time monitor tracks the growing use of network filters for censorship

February 21, 2020

The team says their framework can scalably and semi-automatically monitor the use of filtering technologies for censorship at global scale.

IMC '21

Throttling Twitter: an emerging censorship technique in Russia



FC '21

Lost in Transmission:
Investigating Filtering of
COVID-19 Websites



CCS '20

Censored planet: an internet-wide, longitudinal censorship observatory



IMC '20

Investigating large scale HTTPS interception in Kazakhstan



Censored Planet

Research papers

NDSS '20

Decentralized Control: A Case Study of Russia



NDSS '20

Measuring the deployment of network censorship filters at global scale



USENIX '18

Quack: Scalable Remote Measurement of {Application-Layer} Censorship



S&P '17

Augur: Internet-wide detection of connectivity disruptions



IEEE Security & Privacy '18

Toward continual measurement of global network-level censorship



USENIX '17

Global measurement of {DNS} manipulation



IMC '17

A look at router geolocation in public and commercial databases



NS ETHICS '15

Ethical Concerns for Censorship Measurement



PETS '15

Analyzing the Great Firewall of China Over Space and Time.



PAM '14

Detecting intentional packet drops on the Internet via TCP/IP side channels





VPNalyzer

Safeguarding the consumer VPN ecosystem

"All of them claim to be the best": Multi-perspective study of VPN users and VPN providers

R. Ramesh, A. Vyas, R. Ensafi
Under submission

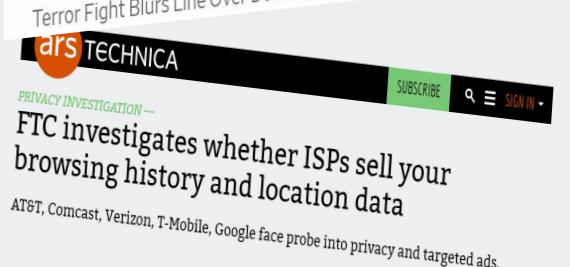
OpenVPN is Open to VPN Fingerprinting

D. Xue, R. Ramesh, M. Kallitsis, J. Halderman, J. Crandall, R. Ensafi
USENIX Security, August 2022

VPNalyzer: Systematic Investigation of the VPN Ecosystem

R. Ramesh, L. Evdokimov, D. Xue, R. Ensafi
NDSS, Apr 2022

VPNs are on the Rise



“From 2010 to year-end 2019, the use of VPNs has increased by **approximately four times**”
[American cybersecurity company PC Matic](#)

“VPN usage increased 3% week over week and hit a new peak at 81% higher than a typical pre-COVID day”
[Verizon Network Report, May, 2020](#)

Reasons:

Protection from surveillance, censorship circumvention, accessing work/school/university resources, circumventing geo-blocking, entertainment, etc

VIRTUAL PRIVATE SNOOPING —

FTC must scrutinize Hotspot Shield over alleged traffic interception, group says

intercept and redirect HTTP requests to partner websites."



HACKERNOON

Log in



Who's Really Behind the World's Most Popular Free VPNs?



Find products, advice, tech news

Home > News > Security > VPN

NordVPN Ad Banned for Exaggerating Threat of Public Wi-Fi



VPNs are Lying About Logs

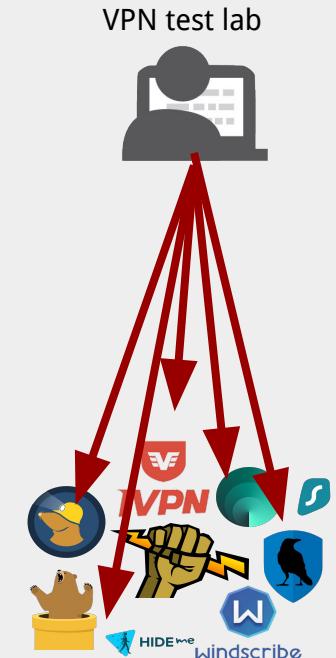
This multibillion-dollar industry includes many snakeoil products, hyperbolic claims, is laxly regulated, and remains severely understudied.

Challenges to Investigating VPNs

Previous reports are lab-based:

- Used inconsistent heuristics that prevent monitoring of issues over time (unsystematic investigation)
- Limited in the scale and types of VPN products (covering only a small slice of the market)
- Involved a large amount of manual effort

KEY CHALLENGE:
Rigor, Scale, Automation





We built VPNalyzer
to address these challenges

VPNalyzer: Systematic Investigation of the VPN Ecosystem

R. Ramesh, L. Evdokimov, D. Xue, R. Ensafi

NDSS, Apr 2022

Building VPNAlyzer to Address Key Challenges

Repeated VPN evaluations over time
should not require starting from scratch

Testing and validating VPN providers' fixes
for issues reported as disclosures requires
an easily updatable test suite



**VPNAlyzer must adopt a
modular, extensible test
suite implementation**

VPN ecosystem has increasing:

- number of VPN providers
- number of users w/ varied threat models
- use cases

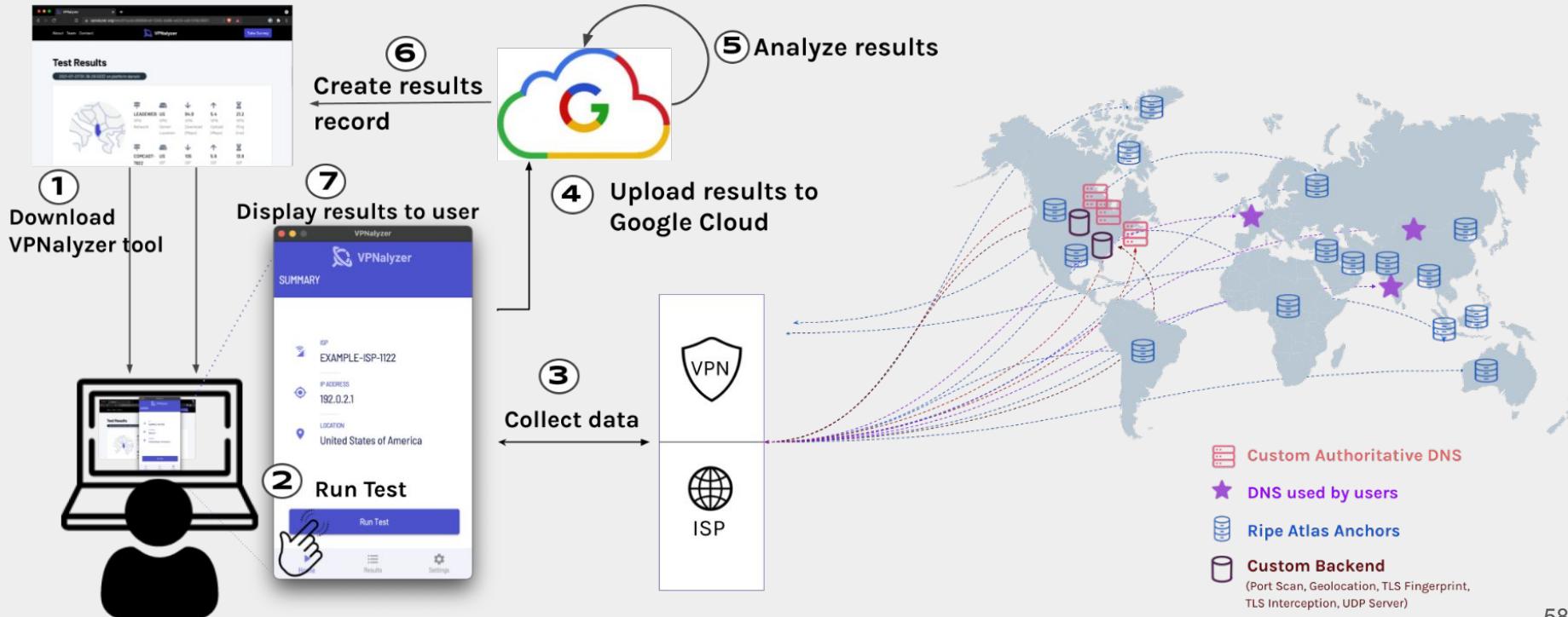


**VPNAlyzer must facilitate
large-scale crowd-sourced
measurements**



VPNalyzer System Design

User-friendly tool with a one-click install process for Windows, MacOS, and Linux



What do we test with VPNalyzer?



VPNalyzer has a modular, extensible test suite covering aspects of performance, security, and privacy

Aspects of Service

Bandwidth and latency

Geolocation

RPKI validation

Misconfiguration and Leakages

DNS leaks

IPv6 leaks

Data leaks during tunnel failure

Security and Privacy Essentials

Lack of support for DoH

TLS Interception

Port scanning

Router interface reachability

Presence of DNS proxy

QNAME minimization

Testing VPNAlyzer

We tested VPNAlyzer with
80 popular VPNs and
uncovered dozens of
previously unreported
problems

We tested random servers in each VPN provider, on Windows and MacOS for VPN default and secure mode:

- **58 paid** VPN providers
- **18 free** VPN providers
- **4 self-hosted** VPN solutions
(Algo, OpenVPN Access Server on AWS, Outline, Streisand)

VPNalyzer Findings: Misconfiguration and Leakages

VPNalyzer found evidence of many traffic leaks, which seriously risk exposing sensitive user data.

IPV6 traffic

Only 14% support IPv6

Five VPNs leak IPv6 traffic to the ISP by default

UMich VPN is among them

During tunnel failure

In default configuration,
33% of providers leak traffic to the user's ISP

Even in their most secure setting, 10 providers leak traffic to the user's ISP

Insecure default configuration

Misleading default configuration caused (non-browser) traffic to be exposed to the ISP

Astrill VPN and Psiphon tunneled only browser traffic by default

**VPNalyzer team filed 26 disclosure to these VPNs due to
security and privacy risk exposing sensitive user data
through traffic leaks**

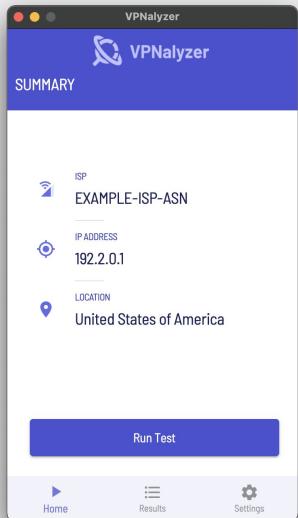


What's Next: Deployment and Crowdsourcing

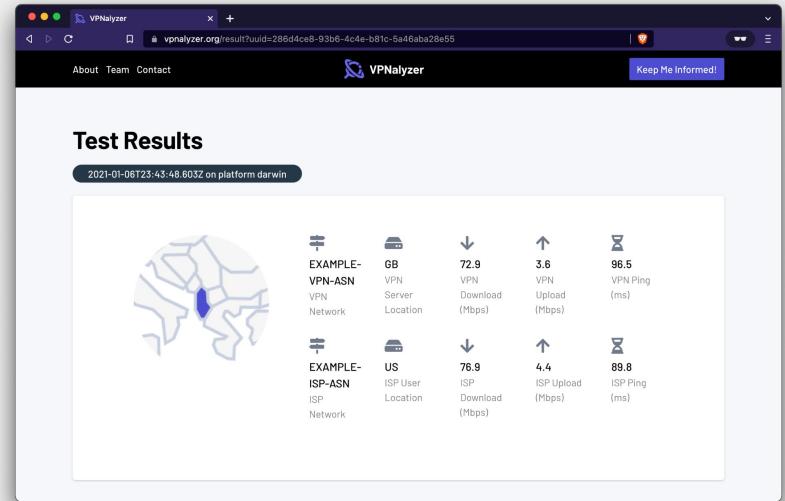
VPNalyzer Tool beta-launched at NDSS 2022 

Crowdsourced study:

- Help scale coverage to many hundreds of providers
- Study region-specific VPNs that are often overlooked



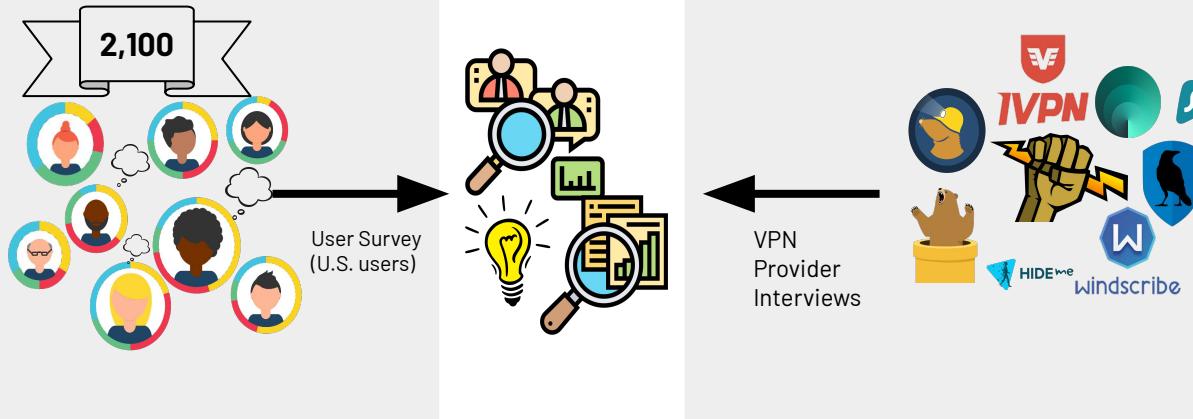
For the future, crowdsourcing will provide continuous data from users to spot new problems, monitor fixes for known issues, and keep findings up to date



Measuring the Efficacy of Currently Deployed Tools



Understanding the user needs and considerations, and VPN providers to bridge gaps and highlight (mis)aligned incentives



Multi-perspective study of VPN users and VPN providers



With support from Consumer Reports, our survey received 2,100 responses from > 40 countries

User study highlight:

86.7% of users feel somewhat/very safe using a VPN

40% of users have a flawed mental model of the security their VPN provides (no significant difference between users of different expertise)

57% of users are highly reliant on VPN recommendation sites (of whom 94% rate them trustworthy)

VPN provider highlight:

VPN providers reveal recommendation sites are largely **not objective** and instead are **motivated by profit**

“You honestly cannot find even one ranking site that is honest, if you just tell people that...so that people know”

Multi-perspective study of VPN users and VPN providers



With support from Consumer Reports, our survey received 2,100 responses from > 40 countries

Big lesson:

- Prioritizing **user education**
- Oversight on **advertisements and marketing surrounding VPNs**
- **Regulations to curb misleading marketing** that leads to flawed mental models

VPNalyzer Impact

Consumer Reports used our **VPNalyzer tool** for their own investigation to help recommend VPNs to their millions of subscribers



[Become a Member](#) | [Donate](#)

Should You Use a VPN?

Virtual private networks can provide a layer of privacy and security, but many people don't need them



[Become a Member](#) | [Donate](#)

VPN Testing Reveals Poor Privacy and Security Practices, Hyperbolic Claims



[Become a Member](#) | [Donate](#)

Mullvad, IVPN, and Mozilla VPN Top Consumer Reports' VPN Testing

We evaluated 16 services for privacy and security, and these were the best VPNs overall

Other work:

Investigating the Geo-inequity of users' online experiences

splintering.net



The Impact of Geoblocking and the U.S. Embargo on Internet Freedom in Cuba

A Ablove, R Sundra Ramen, R Ramesh, S. Chandrashekaran, Y. UeharaD. Madory, R. Ensafi
Under Submission

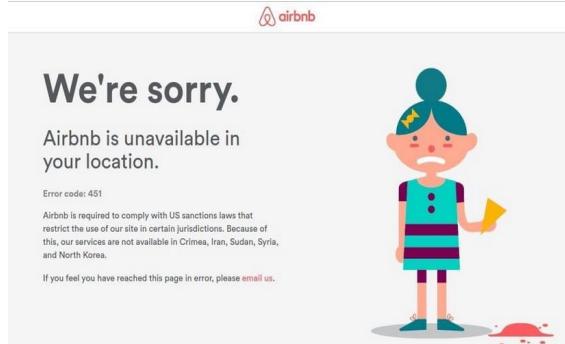
A large-scale investigation into geo-differences in mobile apps.

R. Kumar, A. Virkud, R. Sundra Raman,A. Prakash,R. Ensafi.
In USENIX Security, 2022.

403 Forbidden: A Global View of CDN Geoblocking

A. McDonald, M. Bernhard, B. VanderSloot, W. Scott, A. Halderman, R. Ensafi
ACM Internet Measurement Conference (IMC), November 2018

Server-side geo-discrimination is on the rise → Balkanization of Internet



Unfortunately, our website is currently unavailable in most European countries. We are engaged on the issue and committed to looking at options that support our full range of digital offerings to the EU market. We continue to identify technical compliance solutions that will provide all readers with our award-winning journalism.

Measuring geo-blocking

Why do sites Geoblock?

Sites may attempt to minimize fraud or **combat abuse**.

Iran, Syria, Sudan, North Korea and Cuba are under **U.S. sanctions**, some companies block access to comply.

Increasingly CDNs make it easy to block sites by a click by offering an easy accessible country-level blocking tool in their client's portal.

Impact: Subsequent to our study, **CloudFlare disabled geoblocking** for all but Enterprise customers.



CLOUDFLARE®

Other works:

A first large-scale investigation into geo-differences in mobile apps. [USENIX Security 2022]

The Impact of Geoblocking and the U.S. Embargo on Internet Freedom in Cuba

Study: Russia's Web-Censoring Tool Sets Pace for Imitators

By The Associated Press

Nov. 6, 2019



WASHINGTON — Russia is succeeding in imposing a highly effective internet censorship regime across thousands of disparate, privately owned providers in an effort also aimed at making government snooping pervasive, according to a study released Wednesday.

WIRED

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CHRIS STOKEL-WALKER

SECURITY APR 1, 2022 7:00 AM

Russia Inches Toward Its Splinternet Dream

For years, the country has been trying to create its own sovereign internet—a goal given new impetus by the backlash to its invasion of Ukraine.

Real-time monitor tracks the growing use network filters for censorship

MICHIGAN RADIO

npr

91.7 Ann Arbor/Detroit 104.1 Grand Rapids
91.3 Port Huron 89.7 Lansing 91.1 Flint

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News

Research team investigating Internet censorship with tracking system

Michigan Radio | By Lauren Janes

Published February 6, 2019 at 4:38 PM EST

US-China relations

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US blocks Hong Kong users from some government websites

Sites hosting economic data have been inaccessible to users in the Asian financial centre for months

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THE REVOLUTION WILL NOT BE TWEETED —

Russia's Twitter throttling may give censors never-before-seen capabilities

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Why you should be more concerned about internet shutdowns

zilla move to s

opping'

The Economist

International

Oct 16th 2021 edition >

lockheads

Governments are finding new ways to squash free expression online

Extremely aggressive' internet censorship spreads in the world's democracies

STORIES

Roskomnadzor successfully slows down Twitter. American researchers explained how he did it. They even found a small loophole for users - it's a pity that it's unlikely to help them

Forbes

CYBERSECURITY

Apple, Google And Mozilla Block Kazakh Government Surveillance

Emma Woollacott Senior Contributor

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01:36, April 8, 2021



SUMMIT FOR DEMOCRACY





Protecting Users from Adversarial Networks

Roya Ensafi
University of Michigan