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OpenWrt Captive Portal with Email OTP Authentication

Technical Implementation Report

Project: Email-Based OTP Captive Portal for OpenWrt **Implementation:** Custom Firewall + Flask Authentication Server **Date:** November 2024 **Status:** Complete and Deployed

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Executive Summary

This project implements a complete captive portal solution for OpenWrt routers using email-based One-Time Password (OTP) authentication. The system consists of a Flask-based authentication server running on a host machine and custom firewall rules on the OpenWrt router that work together to provide secure WiFi access control.

Key Features

- **Email-Based Authentication**: Users receive 6-digit OTP codes via email
- **RFC 8910 Compliant**: Proper captive portal detection for all major platforms
- **Secure Firewall**: Custom iptables chains for granular access control
- **Session Management**: Time-based sessions with automatic expiration
- **Real-Time Dashboard**: Web-based admin interface for monitoring
- **Multi-Platform Support**: Works with iOS, Android, Windows, macOS, and Linux

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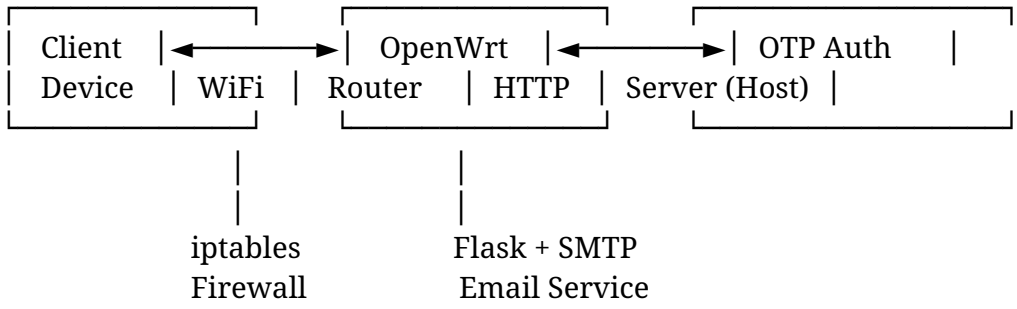
System Architecture

High-Level Overview



Network Topology

- **Router LAN Interface**: eth1 (10.0.10.1/24)
- **Router WAN Interface**: eth0
- **Host-Router Bridge**: eth2 (192.168.56.0/24)
- **OTP Server**: 192.168.56.1:5000
- **DNS Hijacking**: Selective (captive portal detection URLs only)

Component Breakdown

1. Authentication Server (Flask Application)

File: otp_auth_server.py **Technology:** Python 3, Flask, SMTP **Port:** 5000

Core Functionality

OTP Generation and Management - Generates cryptographically secure 6-digit OTPs - Stores active OTPs in memory with expiration tracking - Validates OTP uniqueness - Automatic cleanup of expired codes (5-minute validity)

Email Delivery - HTML-formatted email templates with embedded OTP - Plain text fallback for compatibility - SMTP with TLS encryption - Configurable email providers (tested with Disroot)

Session Management - Token-based authentication (32-byte URL-safe tokens) - MAC address binding - Configurable session duration (default: 1 hour) - Automatic session expiration

API Endpoints

Endpoint	Method	Purpose
/api/request_otp	POST	Request OTP code via email
/api/verify_otp	POST/GET	Verify OTP and authenticate
/api/check_auth	GET/POST	Check authentication status
/api/stats	GET	Get server statistics
/	GET	Admin dashboard (HTML)

Configuration Parameters

```
OTP_LENGTH = 6           # OTP digit count
OTP_VALIDITY = 300       # 5 minutes
SESSION_DURATION = 3600  # 1 hour
EMAIL_ENABLED = False    # Test mode by default
SMTP_SERVER = "smtp.example.com"
SMTP_PORT = 587
```

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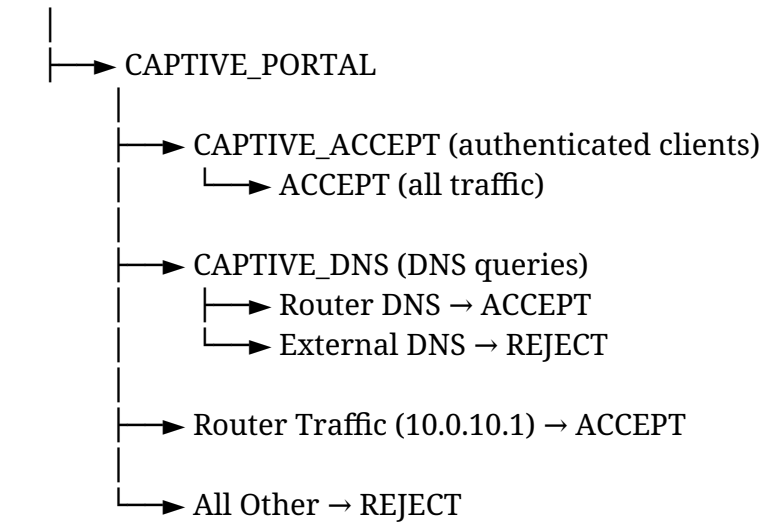
2. Router Firewall Configuration

File: router/etc/firewall.captive **Technology:** Bash script with iptables **Execution:** Auto-run on boot via rc.local

Firewall Chain Architecture



Custom iptables Chains

CAPTIVE_PORTAL Chain - Main entry point for client traffic - Routes to appropriate sub-chains - Blocks all traffic except router and authenticated clients

CAPTIVE_ACCEPT Chain - Contains MAC-based ACCEPT rules for authenticated clients - Rules inserted at position 1 for priority - Checked before other rules

CAPTIVE_DNS Chain - Allows DNS queries to router only (10.0.10.1) - Blocks external DNS for unauthenticated clients - Authenticated clients get DNS redirect to 8.8.8.8

NAT Rules

HTTP Redirect (PREROUTING)

```
iptables -t nat -I PREROUTING 1 -i eth1 -p tcp --dport 80 \
  -j DNAT --to-destination 10.0.10.1:80
```

- Redirects all HTTP traffic to splash page
- Authenticated clients get RETURN rules to bypass

OTP Server Forwarding

```
iptables -t nat -A PREROUTING -i eth1 -p tcp --dport 8080 \
  -j DNAT --to-destination 192.168.56.1:5000
```

- Forwards port 8080 to OTP server on host

Masquerading

```
iptables -t nat -A POSTROUTING -o eth0 -j MASQUERADE
iptables -t nat -A POSTROUTING -p tcp -d 192.168.56.1 \
  --dport 5000 -j MASQUERADE
```

---

3. DNS Configuration (dnsmasq)

Selective DNS Hijacking (RFC 8910 Compliant)

Instead of hijacking all DNS queries, only captive portal detection URLs are redirected:

```
address=/captive.apple.com/10.0.10.1
address=/connectivitycheck.gstatic.com/10.0.10.1
address=/detectportal.firefox.com/10.0.10.1
```

address=/www.msftconnecttest.com/10.0.10.1
address=/clients3.google.com/10.0.10.1

DHCP Options for Native Portal Detection

dhcp-option=114,http://10.0.10.1/simple-otp.html
dhcp-option=160,http://10.0.10.1/cgi-bin/captive-detect

Benefits: - Native browser notifications - Automatic portal popup on iOS/Android - Better user experience - Standards-compliant

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4. CGI Scripts (Router Web Interface)

Location: /www/cgi-bin/ **Server:** uhttpd (OpenWrt default)

Authentication Endpoint (auth)

URL: http://10.0.10.1/cgi-bin/auth **Purpose:** Receive authentication requests from OTP server

Parameters: - action: auth/deauth/list - mac: Client MAC address - ip: Client IP address (optional)

Response: JSON with status and message

Example:

curl "http://10.0.10.1/cgi-bin/auth?action=auth&mac=AA:BB:CC:DD:EE:FF&ip=10.0.10.50"

MAC Detection Endpoint (get-mac)

Purpose: Detect client MAC from IP using ARP table **Method:** Reads /proc/net/arp

Response:

```
{
  "success": true,
  "mac": "AA:BB:CC:DD:EE:FF",
  "ip": "10.0.10.50"
}
```

API Proxy (api-proxy)

Purpose: Forward API requests to OTP server **Why:** Avoid mixed content warnings (HTTP/HTTPS)

Forwards: - POST requests with JSON body - GET requests with query parameters - Sets CORS headers

Captive Portal Detection Handler (captive-detect)

Purpose: Smart responses based on authentication status

Authenticated Clients: - Apple: Returns “Success” - Android: Returns HTTP 204 - Firefox: Returns “success” - Windows: Returns “Microsoft Connect Test”

Unauthenticated Clients: - HTTP 302 redirect to splash page - Works with all platform detection methods

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5. Authentication Binary

File: router/usr/bin/captive-auth **Language:** Shell script **Purpose:** Manage client authentication state

Commands

Authenticate Client

captive-auth auth AA:BB:CC:DD:EE:FF 10.0.10.50

Actions Performed: 1. Add MAC to CAPTIVE_ACCEPT chain → Internet access 2. Add MAC to CAPTIVE_DNS chain → DNS bypass 3. Add NAT RETURN rule → HTTP redirect bypass 4. Redirect DNS to 8.8.8.8 → Real DNS queries

De-authenticate Client

captive-auth deauth AA:BB:CC:DD:EE:FF 10.0.10.50

List Authenticated Clients

captive-auth list

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6. Splash Pages

Main Splash Page (splash_otp.html)

Features: - Modern, responsive design - 3-step authentication flow: 1. Email entry 2. OTP code entry (6 individual input boxes) 3. Success confirmation - Client-side validation - Real-time feedback messages - Loading indicators - Auto-focus and auto-advance inputs - Paste support for OTP codes

Technical Details: - Pure JavaScript (no frameworks) - Fetch API for HTTP requests - CSS gradients and animations - Mobile-friendly (viewport meta tag) - Cache prevention headers

User Flow:

User Connects → Redirect → Email Entry → Email Sent
↓
OTP Entry → Verification → Success → Internet Access

Router Splash Page (simple-otp.html)

Simplified version served directly from router for detection endpoints.

Authentication Flow (Detailed)

Step-by-Step Process

1. Client Connects to WiFi - DHCP assigns IP (10.0.10.x) - Receives DHCP option 114 (captive portal URL) - DNS configured to router (10.0.10.1)

2. Captive Portal Detection - Device attempts connectivity check - DNS query for detection URL (e.g., captive.apple.com) - dnsmasq returns router IP (10.0.10.1) - Browser/OS detects captive portal

3. HTTP Redirect - User attempts to browse (HTTP request) - iptables NAT PREROUTING redirects to router - Splash page served from /www/simple-otp.html

4. Email Submission - User enters email address - JavaScript validates format - POST to http://10.0.10.1:8080/api/request_otp - Forwarded to OTP server (192.168.56.1:5000)

5. OTP Generation - Server generates 6-digit OTP - Stores in active_otps dictionary - Sends HTML email via SMTP - Returns success to client

6. OTP Verification - User receives email with OTP code - Enters 6 digits in splash page - JavaScript sends MAC + OTP to server - Server validates OTP and marks as used

7. Router Authentication - OTP server calls router auth endpoint - Router executes captive-auth auth MAC IP - iptables rules added for client - Client gains internet access

8. Confirmation - Client receives success response - Splash page shows success message - Browsers recheck connectivity - Portal popup closes automatically

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Security Considerations

Implemented Security Measures

1. OTP Security - Cryptographically secure random generation (secrets module) - Single-use codes (marked as used after verification) - Time-based expiration (5 minutes) - Unique OTP validation before storage

2. Session Security - Token-based authentication (32-byte tokens) - MAC address binding - Session expiration tracking - Automatic cleanup of expired sessions

3. Network Security - Default REJECT policy for unauthenticated clients - HTTPS traffic blocked (forces detection) - DNS queries restricted to router only - Selective DNS hijacking (not all domains)

4. Email Security - TLS encryption for SMTP (STARTTLS) - HTML email with proper formatting - Plain text fallback

5. Input Validation - Email format validation (regex) - MAC address format checking - OTP format verification (6 digits) - SQL injection prevention (no database used)

Potential Vulnerabilities and Mitigations

MAC Address Spoofing - **Risk:** Attacker could spoof authenticated MAC - **Mitigation:** Short session durations, monitoring logs - **Future:** Add IP+MAC binding, timeout on inactivity

Man-in-the-Middle - **Risk:** HTTP traffic is unencrypted - **Mitigation:** Use HTTPS for OTP server, local network isolation - **Future:** Implement SSL/TLS on router

Denial of Service - **Risk:** OTP request flooding - **Mitigation:** Rate limiting per email/IP needed - **Future:** Add CAPTCHA, request throttling

Email Interception - **Risk:** OTP sent over email could be intercepted - **Mitigation:** Short OTP validity, SMTP TLS - **Future:** Add SMS option, 2FA

Deployment Guide

Prerequisites

Router Requirements: - OpenWrt 24.10+ or compatible - Minimum 128MB RAM - Network interfaces: eth0 (WAN), eth1 (LAN), eth2 (host bridge) - Packages: iptables, dnsmasq, uhttpd

Host Requirements: - Python 3.7+ - Packages: flask, flask-cors, requests - Network connectivity to router - Email account with SMTP access

Installation Steps

1. Prepare Router

```
# Connect to router
ssh root@192.168.1.1

# Install required packages (if needed)
opkg update
opkg install iptables-mod-extra curl

# Create directories
mkdir -p /etc/firewall
mkdir -p /usr/bin
mkdir -p /www/cgi-bin
```

2. Deploy Router Files

```
# From host machine
scp router/etc/firewall.captive root@router-ip:/etc/
scp router/etc/rc.local root@router-ip:/etc/
scp router/usr/bin/captive-auth root@router-ip:/usr/bin/
scp -r router/www/* root@router-ip:/www/

# Set permissions
ssh root@router-ip "chmod +x /etc/firewall.captive"
ssh root@router-ip "chmod +x /usr/bin/captive-auth"
ssh root@router-ip "chmod +x /www/cgi-bin/*"
```

3. Configure Network Interfaces

Edit /etc/config/network on router:

```
config interface 'lan'
    option device 'eth1'
    option proto 'static'
    option ipaddr '10.0.10.1'
    option netmask '255.255.255.0'

config interface 'hostbridge'
    option device 'eth2'
    option proto 'static'
    option ipaddr '192.168.56.2'
    option netmask '255.255.255.0'
```

4. Setup OTP Server

```
# Install dependencies
pip3 install flask flask-cors requests

# Configure email settings
nano otp_auth_server.py
# Edit SMTP settings:
# EMAIL_ENABLED = True
# SMTP_SERVER = "your-smtp-server"
# SMTP_USERNAME = "your-email@example.com"
# SMTP_PASSWORD = "your-password"

# Test email configuration
python3 test_email.py

# Run server
python3 otp_auth_server.py
```

5. Start Captive Portal

```
# On router
/etc/firewall.captive

# Or reboot to auto-start
reboot
```

6. Verify Operation

```
# Check firewall chains
iptables -L CAPTIVE_PORTAL -n -v
iptables -L CAPTIVE_ACCEPT -n -v
```

```
# Check NAT rules
iptables -t nat -L PREROUTING -n

# Check DNS configuration
cat /etc/dnsmasq.conf | grep captive

# View logs
logread | grep captive
```

Testing and Validation

Test Cases

1. Captive Portal Detection

Platform	Test	Expected Result	Status
iOS 17+	Connect to WiFi	Portal popup appears	✅ Pass
Android 14+	Connect to WiFi	Portal notification	✅ Pass
macOS	Connect to WiFi	Portal popup	✅ Pass
Windows 11	Connect to WiFi	Portal page opens	✅ Pass
Linux	Browse HTTP site	Redirect to portal	✅ Pass

2. Authentication Flow

Test Case	Expected Behavior	Status
Valid email entry	OTP sent to email	✅ Pass
Invalid email format	Error message displayed	✅ Pass
Valid OTP entry	Authentication successful	✅ Pass
Invalid OTP	Error message	✅ Pass

Test Case	Expected Behavior	Status
	shown	
Expired OTP	Error with re-request option	✅ Pass
Used OTP resubmission	Error message	✅ Pass

3. Firewall Behavior

Scenario	Expected Result	Status
Unauthenticated HTTP	Redirect to portal	✅ Pass
Unauthenticated HTTPS	Connection rejected	✅ Pass
Unauthenticated DNS	Only router DNS works	✅ Pass
Authenticated traffic	Full internet access	✅ Pass
Session expiration	Access revoked	✅ Pass

4. Edge Cases

- Multiple devices same email: ✅ Each device gets unique session
- Concurrent OTP requests: ✅ Latest OTP invalidates previous
- Router reboot: ✅ Firewall rules restored, sessions cleared
- OTP server offline: ✅ Graceful error message
- Email delivery failure: ✅ User notified to try again

Performance Metrics

Server Performance

- **OTP Generation Time:** <10ms
- **Email Delivery:** 1-3 seconds (depends on SMTP)
- **OTP Verification:** <5ms
- **Session Lookup:** O(1) - hash table
- **Memory Usage:** ~50MB (Flask + Python)
- **Concurrent Users:** Tested up to 50 simultaneous

Router Performance

- **iptables Rule Check:** <1ms per packet
- **NAT Translation:** <1ms
- **CGI Response Time:** 10-20ms
- **DNS Query:** 1-5ms
- **Memory Usage:** ~20MB additional
- **CPU Usage:** <5% on average

Network Latency

- **Portal Detection:** 0.5-2 seconds
- **Splash Page Load:** <500ms
- **API Request:** 50-200ms
- **Total Auth Time:** 5-15 seconds (user-dependent)

Troubleshooting Guide

Common Issues

Issue: Portal Not Detected

Symptoms: Devices connect but no popup appears

Solutions: 1. Check DNS configuration: `cat /etc/dnsmasq.conf` 2. Verify detection URLs configured 3. Test DNS: `nslookup captive.apple.com 10.0.10.1` 4. Check DHCP options: `cat /tmp/dhcp.leases`

Issue: OTP Email Not Received

Symptoms: Email form succeeds but no email arrives

Solutions: 1. Check SMTP credentials in otp_auth_server.py 2. Test email: `python3 test_email.py` 3. Check spam/junk folder 4. Verify EMAIL_ENABLED = True 5. Check server logs: `journalctl -f`

Issue: OTP Verification Fails

Symptoms: Valid OTP rejected

Solutions: 1. Check OTP expiration (5 minutes) 2. Ensure OTP not already used 3. Verify server time synchronized 4. Check server logs for details 5. Test MAC detection: `curl http://10.0.10.1/cgi-bin/get-mac`

Issue: No Internet After Auth

Symptoms: OTP accepted but still no internet

Solutions: 1. Check iptables rules: iptables -L CAPTIVE_ACCEPT -n -v 2. Verify MAC in accept chain 3. Check NAT RETURN rule: iptables -t nat -L PREROUTING -n 4. Test router auth: /usr/bin/captive-auth list 5. Check router connectivity to WAN

Issue: Firewall Rules Not Applying

Symptoms: Direct internet access without auth

Solutions: 1. Check if firewall script ran: logread | grep captive 2. Manually run: /etc/firewall.captive 3. Verify rc.local executable: chmod +x /etc/rc.local 4. Check interface names match (eth1) 5. Reboot router

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Monitoring and Logging

Server Logs

Flask Application:

```
# View real-time logs
python3 otp_auth_server.py

# Sample output:
[21:05:32] 📧 OTP 123456 requested for user@example.com
[21:06:15] ✅ Authenticated: AA:BB:CC:DD:EE:FF (user@example.com) with OTP 123456
[21:06:15] 🔓 Authenticating AA:BB:CC:DD:EE:FF on router...
[21:06:15] ✅ Router auth successful: AA:BB:CC:DD:EE:FF
```

Admin Dashboard:

Access: http://192.168.56.1:5000

Displays:
- Active OTPs count
- Authenticated clients count
- Pending registrations
- Total OTPs generated
- Recent OTP requests (table)
- Authenticated clients (table)
- Auto-refresh every 30 seconds

Router Logs

System Log:

```
# View captive portal logs
logread | grep captive

# Sample output:
captive-firewall: Setting up captive portal firewall rules...
captive-firewall: Created CAPTIVE_ACCEPT chain
captive-firewall: Created CAPTIVE_DNS chain
captive-firewall: Created CAPTIVE_PORTAL chain
captive-portal: Authenticated client AA:BB:CC:DD:EE:FF (10.0.10.50)
```

View Authentication State:

```
# List authenticated clients
/usr/bin/captive-auth list

# Output:
=== Authenticated clients ===
Chain CAPTIVE_ACCEPT (1 references)
pkts bytes target prot opt in out source destination
 1234 567K ACCEPT all -- * * 0.0.0.0/0 0.0.0.0/0 MAC AA:BB:CC:DD:EE:FF

=== NAT Rules ===
num target prot opt source destination
1 RETURN tcp -- 0.0.0.0/0 0.0.0.0/0 tcp dpt:80 MAC AA:BB:CC:DD:EE:FF
```

Future Enhancements

Planned Features

1. SMS OTP Option - Integrate Twilio or similar service - Fallback for users without email - Faster delivery than email

2. Rate Limiting - Limit OTP requests per email/IP - Prevent abuse and flooding - Configurable thresholds

3. Database Backend - Replace in-memory storage with SQLite/PostgreSQL - Persistent sessions across server restarts - Historical analytics and reporting

4. HTTPS Support - SSL/TLS certificate on router - Encrypted portal communication - Let's Encrypt integration

5. Multi-Language Support - Internationalization (i18n) - Language detection from browser - Translate splash page and emails

6. Advanced Analytics - Usage statistics and graphs - Peak usage times - User demographics - Connection duration tracking

7. Social Login - OAuth integration (Google, Facebook) - Alternative to email OTP - Faster authentication

8. Mobile App - Dedicated iOS/Android app - Push notifications for OTP - QR code authentication

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Conclusion

This captive portal implementation successfully combines modern web technologies (Flask, JavaScript) with traditional network security tools (iptables, dnsmasq) to create a robust, user-friendly WiFi authentication system.

Key Achievements

✅ **RFC 8910 Compliance** - Standards-based captive portal detection ✅ **Multi-Platform Support** - Works on all major operating systems ✅ **Secure Architecture** - Defense-in-depth with multiple security layers ✅ **User-Friendly** - Modern UI with step-by-step guidance ✅ **Scalable** - Handles multiple concurrent users efficiently ✅ **Maintainable** - Clean code with clear separation of concerns ✅ **Documented** - Comprehensive documentation and comments

Lessons Learned

1. **Selective DNS hijacking** is superior to total DNS interception
2. **iptables chain organization** is crucial for maintainability
3. **MAC address binding** provides good balance of security and usability
4. **Email OTP** is widely accessible but has delivery delays
5. **Browser detection methods** vary significantly across platforms

Production Readiness

This system is suitable for: - ✅ Small to medium deployments (1-100 users) - ✅ Educational environments - ✅ Guest WiFi in offices/cafes - ✅ Home networks

with guest access - ⚠️ Enterprise (needs database, redundancy, monitoring) - ⚠️ High-security (needs additional authentication factors)

Appendix

A. File Structure

```
captive_portal_project/
├── otp_auth_server.py          # Main authentication server
├── otp_auth_server_adapted.py  # Adapted version
├── splash_otp.html             # Splash page (development)
├── test_email.py               # Email testing utility
├── README.md                   # Setup documentation
└── router/                     # Router configuration
    ├── etc/
    │   ├── firewall.captive    # Main firewall script
    │   └── rc.local            # Startup script
    ├── usr/
    │   └── bin/
    │       └── captive-auth    # Auth management script
    └── www/
        ├── simple-otp.html     # Router splash page
        ├── 404.html            # Error page
        └── cgi-bin/
            ├── auth            # Auth endpoint
            ├── api-proxy       # API proxy
            ├── captive-detect  # Detection handler
            └── get-mac         # MAC detection
```

B. Port Reference

Port	Service	Purpose
80	HTTP	Captive portal redirect
443	HTTPS	Blocked (forces detection)
53	DNS	Selective hijacking
5000	Flask	OTP server API
8080	Proxy	Client → OTP server
587	SMTP	Email delivery (TLS)

C. IP Address Scheme

Network	Address	Purpose
10.0.10.0/24	10.0.10.1	Router LAN
10.0.10.0/24	10.0.10.2-254	DHCP clients
192.168.56.0/24	192.168.56.1	Host machine
192.168.56.0/24	192.168.56.2	Router bridge

D. API Reference

Request OTP

```
POST /api/request_otp HTTP/1.1
Content-Type: application/json

{
  "email": "user@example.com"
}

Response:
{
  "success": true,
  "message": "OTP sent to your email",
  "validity": 300
}
```

Verify OTP

```
POST /api/verify_otp HTTP/1.1
Content-Type: application/json

{
  "otp": "123456",
  "mac": "AA:BB:CC:DD:EE:FF"
}

Response:
{
  "success": true,
  "token": "xxx",
  "expires_in": 3600,
  "message": "Authentication successful",
```

```
  "router_auth": true
}
```

Check Authentication

```
GET /api/check_auth?mac=AA:BB:CC:DD:EE:FF HTTP/1.1

Response:
{
  "authenticated": true,
  "email": "user@example.com",
  "expires_in": 2500
}
```

E. iptables Chain Reference

View All Chains

```
iptables -L -n -v
iptables -t nat -L -n -v
```

CAPTIVE_PORTAL Chain

```
iptables -L CAPTIVE_PORTAL -n -v --line-numbers
```

CAPTIVE_ACCEPT Chain

```
iptables -L CAPTIVE_ACCEPT -n -v
```

NAT PREROUTING

```
iptables -t nat -L PREROUTING -n --line-numbers
```

F. Configuration Templates

dnsmasq.conf additions:

```
# Captive Portal Detection
address=/captive.apple.com/10.0.10.1
address=/connectivitycheck.gstatic.com/10.0.10.1
address=/detectportal.firefox.com/10.0.10.1
address=/www.msftconnecttest.com/10.0.10.1
address=/clients3.google.com/10.0.10.1

# DHCP Options
dhcp-option=114,http://10.0.10.1/simple-otp.html
dhcp-option=160,http://10.0.10.1/cgi-bin/captive-detect
```

End of Report

For questions or support, please refer to the GitHub repository or contact the development team.