**The Politics of Routing**

How Malicious Routing Behaviour Correlates with Freedom

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[DATE]

Declaration

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Project Supervisor: Dr Vasileios Giotsas

**Abstract.**

In an era of hidden mass surveillance programs that violate human rights, it has become unclear whether a person’s real-world individual freedoms translate into the digital world. The design of the Internet as a global communication network without centralized control, creates challenges for governments who try to restrict freedom of expression. Consequently, governments that suppress individual freedoms tend to exercise tight control over Internet communications to reduce their citizen’s freedom of speech. This report will investigate the distinctions between online and offline freedoms, how different metrics of freedom correlate with nation states and Autonomous Systems (ASes) that participate in malicious routing behaviour and the impacts of their imposed policies.

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Chapter 1

# Introduction

## Chapter Overview

This chapter will explain the reasons for conducting this research and the potential benefits that may come of it. An early approximation of what could be achieved by the report’s aims and objectives will also be laid out. These are dynamic objectives and may be added to or adjusted depending on how the results shape up. The report’s general structure will also be outlined, and each section explained.

## Motivation for Research

In June 2013, Edward Snowden stole and leaked an estimated 1,500,000 documents exposing the colossal power and capability of intelligence agencies such as the National Security Agency (NSA, US) and their Five-Eyes (FVEY) partners. It was revealed that mass surveillance tools such as “PRISM” [1] and “X-KEYSCORE” [2] provided the capability to collect and search through millions of people’s digital lives. It was also revealed that many Autonomous Systems (ASes) and Internet Service Providers (ISPs) such as British Telecom, Vodafone Cable, Verizon Business, Level 3, Viatel, Global Crossing and Interoute were collaborating with projects such as “TEMPORA” [3] which tapped fibre optic cables and intercepted dataflows. It seemed that the online world was far less private or free than previously realised.

In parallel with the aforementioned revelations, global freedom has been in continual decline for 12 consecutive years [4]. The internet, as an openly accessible and free network, affords freedom of expression, information, religion, identity and trade as laid out by the Human Freedom Index 2018 [5]. Therefore, a decline in internet freedom must be the result of restrictive policies imposed by government, ASes or ISPs. For example, since the Snowden leaks of 2013 and the Investigatory Powers Act of 2016, the UK has dropped 12 places on the Freedom of the Press Index [6]. Restrictions of internet freedom such as these fall under the umbrella term ‘malicious routing’. This report will investigate how these malicious routing policies correlate with an individual’s internet freedom.

## Aims and Objectives

The aims of this report are therefore as follows:

* Determine what it means to have ‘total internet freedom’ and what positive and negative freedoms make up internet freedom.
* Discover the extent to which a correlation exists between a nation’s malicious routing behaviours and the freedom of their citizens.

From the report’s aims, the formal objectives are:

* Form and collect information about each nation’s malicious routing behaviours.
* Analyse and rank nations based on their malicious routing activity.
* Compare each nation’s propensity to engage in malicious routing activity with various measures of their freedom to determine the degree to which they are correlated.
* Consider whether the finding are significant and determine whether propensity to engage in malicious routing activity is a good predictor of freedom.

## 1.4 Report Structure

This report will begin with a review of the relevant existing research surrounding malicious routing. This will help gain a more comprehensive understanding of the current academic reasoning, backgrounds and issues faces in this area of research. The existing research associated with defining and measuring freedom will also be investigated to aid with narrowing the selection of freedom indexes to the most relevant for this topic.

A nation’s freedom can be measured in a wide variety of different ways, each resulting in a different freedom index. Before any research is conducted into malicious routing, the report will cover the various definitions of freedom and determine which indexes are most applicable when correlating with malicious routing. The primary index to be considered will be the Freedom House, Freedom of the Net Index [9]. This index will also function as a prediction for the most closely correlated index and will also help determine whether the best predictor of internet freedom is a nation’s propensity to conduct malicious routing activity.

The main section of the report will focus on the technical aspects of malicious routing in defining its component elements, examining the nations that partake in it and finding any correlations with freedom. This will begin by accurately defining what actions and policies malicious routing comprises of. Then a table of nations that partake in malicious routing will be built, holding information about the activities of each nation, as well as a standardised numerical score for each nation based on the amount of malicious routing behaviour that said nation conducts. Once the table has been created and the ranks calculated, it will then be possible to contrast malicious routing behaviour with freedom to determine if any correlations are present.

Depending on the results from the correlations, there may be clear connections between certain kinds of malicious routing behaviour and freedom. This next section will examine trends seen across the data as well as stand-out and edge cases. This will be followed up with the ‘findings’ chapter that will contain a careful analysis of the results and a critical review of the methods used. Finally, the report will end with conclusions based on the research and a discussion of the limitations and lessons learnt, as well as any possible future work.

Chapter 2

# Background Research

## 2.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter will briefly summarise what has been learnt from existing research papers about closely related topics. The focus is on malicious routing, however some papers regarding the definitions of freedom have also been included to help form a better understanding of how the varying ideas of freedom can be combined to create an index.

Due to the nature of this project, some information, such as the Snowden leaks which predominately came from news outlets like The Guardian, will be found outside of academic papers. In such a case, only reputable sources of information will be used.

## 2.2 The Politics of Routing: Investigating the Relationship between AS connectivity and Internet Freedom

This study, conducted by Rachee Singh et al, aims to find a relationship between the level of Autonomous System connectivity within a single country, and that country’s Internet Freedom [7]. A network topology graph was constructed for each nation using a BGP path simulator to compute AS paths that are compliant with routing policy. Features of this graph were then extracted and applied to various machine learning techniques that tried to predict freedom.

In this paper, internet freedom of a nation is measured using the Freedom House, Freedom of the Press Index [8]. However, while closely related in legislation, the freedom of individuals online is fundamentally different from the freedom of the press, since there are fewer social and economic constraints acting on a single internet user. Where the vast majority of the press operate in a profit-driven environment, in which straying from the overton window could damage sales, an individual internet user operating under perceived anonymity is somewhat relieved from such pressures, and therefore is more likely to share nonconforming or illegal material. Therefore, this report will primary focus on measuring internet freedom with the newer and more closely related Freedom House, Freedom of the Net Index [9]. The actual differences between these indexes will be investigated in more detail later in the report.

The study found that, of all the graph’s features, IP density and path length were the best predictors of internet freedom. Their machine learning algorithms were able to predict a nation’s freedom category (Free, Partially Free, Not Free) with a 95% accuracy. I will follow a similar method when defining the features that malicious routing comprises of. It will also make an interesting comparison to see whether the correlations between AS connectivity and internet freedom mirror the correlations between malicious routing and internet freedom.

## 2.3 Nation-State Hegemony in Internet Routing

This paper researches the extent to which various countries are dependent on the United States and other Western nations to connect to popular internet destinations [10]. In general terms, their results show that underserved regions of the globe are dependent on North America and Europe. In some cases, over 85% of traffic from an independent nation was routed through another country such as the United States. However, they also found that by using Region Aware Networking, they were able to route traffic away from these hegemonies with middle to high success rates.

This is significant since the level of malicious routing that a nation’s citizens are exposed to extends beyond just the country they live in, and includes nearby hegemonic nations where traffic is likely to be routed through. It will be worth considering the impact and measurability of this when defining what constitutes as malicious routing. It also brings up the question of whether nations should be judged based on solely their own policies, or whether neighbouring hegemonic entities need to be taken into consideration.

## 2.x Related Work

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Chapter 3

# Freedom

## 3.1 Chapter Overview

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## 3.2 Defining Freedom

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Chapter 4

# Malicious Routing

## 4.1 Chapter Overview

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## 4.2 What is Malicious Routing

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## 4.3 Nations and Autonomous Systems

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## 4.4 Methodology

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## 4.5 Correlations

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Chapter 5

# Trends and Impacts

## 5.1 Chapter Overview

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## 5.2 Policy

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## 5.3 Case Studies

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Chapter 6

# Findings

## 6.1 Chapter Overview

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Chapter 7

# Conclusions

## 7.1 Chapter Overview

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