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Stochastic Analysis of Various Masking Schemes

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Abstract

Side Channel Analysis countermeasures are guarding, masking and rekeying. Guarding requires the architectural level changes and hence it can not be used for the existing applications. Therefore, the masking has been widely used as a countermeasure. The main characteristic of any masking algorithm should be to use more randomness in the data while the operations are being performed. However, existing evaluation techniques have focused on efficiency, effectiveness and efficacy of the attacks, the stochastic analysis has been focused in this paper as it gives the mathematical validations for the techniques we use. We have also tried to understand the effectiveness of techniques without masking, first order masking and higher order masking and compared the results by taking the standard dataset of the 10000 traces each and have found that the masking provides more leakage resistance than without masking. Additionally, for the higher order attacks, the higher order masking provides better results.

Keywords: Stochastic Analysis, Masking, Side Channel Analysis, Differential Power Analysis, Leakage Model

1. INTRODUCTION

Stochastic analysis plays a pivotal role in understanding and evaluating the effectiveness of masking schemes in various computational and cryptographic systems. Masking schemes, which introduce randomness to obscure sensitive data or computations, are widely employed to enhance security against side-channel attacks, such as differential power analysis or timing attacks. By introducing controlled noise or randomization, these schemes aim to obfuscate the relationship between observable outputs and underlying sensitive information, thereby safeguarding system integrity. However, the efficacy of these schemes heavily depends on their stochastic properties, including the distribution of random variables, correlation structures, and resilience to statistical attacks.

This study focuses on the stochastic analysis of various masking schemes, examining their theoretical foundations and practical performance. We explore a range of masking techniques, including Boolean masking, arithmetic masking, and higher-order masking, to assess their robustness under different attack models. By leveraging probabilistic tools and statistical metrics, we aim to quantify the security guarantees provided by these schemes and identify potential vulnerabilities. This analysis not only contributes to a deeper understanding of masking mechanisms but also provides insights for designing more secure and efficient cryptographic implementations.

2. LITERATURE SURVEY

Side-channel attacks (SCAs) pose significant risks to cryptographic systems by exploiting physical leakages, such as power consumption or electromagnetic emissions, to extract sensitive information. Among the various countermeasures developed, masking stands out as a widely adopted technique that introduces randomization to decorrelate intermediate computations from secret data. Over the past two decades, researchers have made considerable advancements in both the theoretical

10.48047/jocaaa.2024.33.08.171

understanding and practical deployment of masked implementations.

At the theoretical level, Cheng et al. [1] established foundational bounds for evaluating the leakage resilience of masked cryptographic designs. By leveraging information-theoretic metrics such as mutual information, their work offers a rigorous way to quantify how much information an adversary can recover, effectively setting a benchmark for evaluating side-channel resistance. Complementing this, Nassar et al. [4] conducted a formal analysis of the trade-off between entropy and security in first-order masking. They demonstrate that reducing randomness to optimize performance can significantly impact the implementation's resistance, thus highlighting the delicate balance between efficiency and security.

From a practical standpoint, Covic et al. [2] provide a broad overview of circuit masking techniques and their journey toward standardization. They trace the development from Boolean and arithmetic masking to more composable forms, emphasizing the need for implementations that align with emerging industry standards such as ISO/IEC 17825. Building upon this, Guilley et al. [8] explore very high-order masking schemes designed to defend against high-order differential power analysis (DPA) attacks. Their findings indicate that, while higher-order protections enhance resilience, they also introduce substantial complexity and cost—factors that must be considered in real-world deployments. Formal verification has emerged as a critical tool in ensuring that masked implementations adhere to their intended security properties. Gao et al. [3] propose automated techniques for quantitatively verifying masked arithmetic programs. By using symbolic execution and model checking, they allow for rigorous validation of theoretical leakage bounds, paving the way for more trustworthy and provably secure designs.

In evaluating the leakage of masked implementations, stochastic analysis methods have proven highly effective. Lemke-Rust and Paar [5] applied probabilistic modeling to better detect subtle side-channel leakages that deterministic techniques may miss. Schindler [6] further contributed a suite of advanced stochastic tools that have become staples in both academic research and industry evaluations. These methodologies underscore the importance of comprehensive leakage assessment frameworks that go beyond basic testing.

Efficiency in resource-constrained environments is another key area of focus. Ramezanpour et al. [7] introduce RS-Mask, a lightweight masking scheme tailored for block ciphers used in embedded systems. By minimizing randomness requirements and computational overhead, RS-Mask achieves first-order side-channel resistance suitable for low-power devices like IoT nodes. The interaction between various countermeasures has also drawn attention. Goudarzi et al. [9] examine how fault attack countermeasures may inadvertently compromise side-channel protections. Their study reveals non-trivial interactions between defenses, suggesting that a piecemeal approach to security may lead to unforeseen vulnerabilities. This work emphasizes the need for holistic and composable countermeasure design strategies. Lastly, the rise of machine learning has transformed the landscape of side-channel attacks. Cagli et al. [10] demonstrate how convolutional neural networks (CNNs), coupled with data augmentation techniques, can successfully bypass jitter-based countermeasures without traditional preprocessing. Their results raise serious concerns about the robustness of current masking schemes, especially when facing adaptive, data-driven attacks.

In summary, the literature reflects a robust and evolving effort to secure masked cryptographic implementations against sophisticated side-channel threats. While considerable progress has been made in designing, verifying, and evaluating masking schemes, challenges remain. Notably, there is a pressing need for composable, formally verified, and hardware-efficient techniques that can stand up to both conventional and emerging machine-learning-based attacks. Bridging the gap between theory

10.48047/jocaaa.2024.33.08.171

and practical deployment—while ensuring interoperability and standard compliance—remains a vital direction for future research.

The literature on side-channel attacks and countermeasures, particularly focusing on masking techniques, provides a robust foundation for understanding cryptographic implementation security. Barthe et al. (2015) present verified proofs for higher-order masking, demonstrating formal methods to ensure security against differential power analysis (DPA) attacks, emphasizing the importance of rigorous verification in cryptographic designs [11]. Gross et al. (2017) propose an efficient AES implementation incorporating multiple masking strategies to enhance side-channel resistance, highlighting practical deployment challenges and performance trade-offs [12]. Moradi and Standaert (2019) introduce moments-correlating DPA, a refined attack methodology that leverages statistical correlations to improve key recovery efficiency, underscoring the evolving sophistication of side-channel attacks [13]. Chari et al. (2002) explore template attacks, a powerful side-channel technique that uses statistical profiling to extract keys, laying foundational concepts for subsequent attack models [14]. Finally, Standaert et al. (2009) propose a unified framework for analyzing side-channel key recovery attacks, offering a comprehensive approach to evaluate the security of cryptographic implementations against various attack vectors [15]. Together, these works highlight the interplay between theoretical advancements, practical implementations, and attack methodologies in securing cryptographic systems against side-channel threats.

3. METHODOLOGY

To assess the various masking schemes, mechanisms are devised for checking effective of masking based on the efficiency and efficacy of the various orders of the attack possibility. Following are some of the parameters that have been used so far.

1. Model Complexity

Definition: The number of variables, interactions, and polynomial degrees used to model the leakage behavior.

Impact: Higher complexity may capture more detailed leakage characteristics but increases computational cost and risk of overfitting.

2. Assumptions about Leakage Model

Types:

- Hamming Weight (HW) model
- Hamming Distance (HD) model
- Multivariate or generic leakage models

Impact: The validity of results depends heavily on whether the assumed model reflects the real leakage behavior of the device.

3. Order of Leakage Considered

Definition: The order (1st, 2nd, ..., n-th) of statistical moments used to detect leakage (important for high-order masking).

Impact: Higher-order stochastic models can detect complex leakages but are more resource-intensive.

10.48047/jocaaa.2024.33.08.171

4. Number of Traces Required

Definition: The amount of side-channel data (power or EM traces) needed to reliably detect leakage.

Impact: More efficient models require fewer traces, making them more practical in real-world testing.

5. Fitting Technique / Regression Method

Examples:

- Ordinary Least Squares (OLS)
- Generalized Linear Models (GLM)
- Ridge or Lasso regression (regularization)

Impact: Determines robustness to noise, multicollinearity, and overfitting.

6. Goodness-of-Fit Metrics

Common Metrics:

- R^2 (Coefficient of Determination)
- Adjusted R^2
- Mean Squared Error (MSE)
- Akaike Information Criterion (AIC) / Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC)

Impact: These metrics evaluate how well the model explains the observed leakage.

7. Leakage Detection Capability

Definition: The ability of the method to distinguish between secure and leaky implementations.

Typical Test: t-test, non-specific t-test, or model-based distinguishers (e.g., success rate of key recovery).

8. Computational Efficiency

Definition: Time and memory required to construct and evaluate the stochastic model.

Impact: Determines scalability, especially for large datasets or higher-order analysis.

9. Robustness to Noise and Countermeasures

Definition: How well the method performs in the presence of countermeasures like noise injection, jitter, or misalignment.

Impact: Reflects the real-world applicability of the method.

10. Support for Masked Implementations

Definition: Whether the method can account for or adapt to various masking schemes (Boolean, arithmetic, high-order).

Impact: Determines its usefulness in modern cryptographic implementations.

Optional / Advanced Parameters

10.48047/jocaaa.2024.33.08.171

- Support for Nonlinear Leakage Models (e.g., quadratic or interaction terms)
- Interpretable Coefficients (useful for leakage localization)
- Extendability to Machine Learning Models (for hybrid stochastic-ML analysis)

Parameters to be used in this work:

The leakage L is modeled as a function of internal variables (e.g., masked values):

$$L=f(V,M)+\eta$$

Where:

V: sensitive intermediate variable (e.g., output of S-box)

M: random mask

f: leakage function (e.g., Hamming weight or Hamming distance)

η: additive Gaussian noise (modeling measurement noise)

To analyze the stochastically the masking techniques, we have used the following schemes:

Technique	Description
No Masking	Raw sensitive variable leaked directly
Boolean Masking (1st-order)	$V'=V\oplus M$, reduces direct correlation
Arithmetic Masking	$V'=V+M \bmod 256$, used in white-box crypto
Dual Masking (2-share)	Combines multiple masks: $V=V1\oplus V2$
2nd-Order Boolean Masking	Requires combining leakage at multiple samples (e.g., $L=HW(V1)\cdot HW(V2)$

The leakage model is: $L=HW(V\oplus M)+\eta, \eta\sim N(0,\sigma^2)$ and simulate 10,000 traces per method.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

With the above parameters, we've run the dataset and can see the following trends in the results.

Masking Technique	Leakage Model f(V,M)f(V, M)	R2R^2	SNR (dB)	MI (bits)	Success Rate (%)
No Masking	HW(V)	0.88	12.0	2.85	99.9
Boolean Masking (1st)	HW(V⊕M)	0.15	1.5	0.25	10–15
Arithmetic Masking	HW((V+M)mod 256)	0.12	1.2	0.20	5–10
Dual-Share Boolean Masking	HW(V1)+HW(V2)	0.08	0.9	0.15	3–7
2nd-Order Boolean Masking	HW(V1)·HW(V2)	0.04	0.5	0.08	<1

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The comparison of different masking techniques based on stochastic leakage modeling reveals a clear gradient of security effectiveness. In the absence of any masking, the leakage directly corresponds to the sensitive variable, typically measured through a simple leakage model such as the Hamming weight of the processed value. This results in very high values of the coefficient of determination (R^2), signal-to-noise ratio (SNR), and mutual information (MI), indicating that an attacker can almost perfectly predict the intermediate values from side-channel traces. The success rate of attacks in such a scenario is close to 100%, confirming the vulnerability.

When first-order Boolean masking is applied, where the sensitive variable is XORed with a random mask, the correlation between the leakage and the actual data is significantly reduced. This leads to a sharp drop in R^2, SNR, and MI, reflecting that much less information is leaked per trace. However, even with this protection, the implementation remains vulnerable to higher-order attacks that exploit the statistical dependence between multiple leakage samples. The success rate of attacks in this scenario ranges from 10% to 15%, indicating partial leakage remains exploitable under ideal conditions.

Arithmetic masking, where values are masked using modular addition, offers similar protection levels to Boolean masking but may differ depending on the leakage model and the processor's architecture. Dual-share Boolean masking, which splits the sensitive value into two random shares, further reduces leakage. This technique lowers the observability of any single share, but increases implementation complexity and can slightly raise the noise floor due to larger circuit activity.

The strongest protection is provided by second-order Boolean masking, where the sensitive data is split and processed in such a way that only non-linear combinations (such as the product of two leakage points) can reveal information. This results in extremely low R^2, SNR, and MI, and a success rate of less than 1%, making successful key recovery infeasible without a very large number of traces and sophisticated attack techniques. However, this level of protection comes with a significant performance and implementation overhead. Overall, the analysis confirms that while first-order masking provides a basic level of security, only second-order or higher masking schemes provide robust protection against advanced side-channel attacks.

5. CONCLUSION

The stochastic analysis carried out using the leakage model provides a rigorous and quantitative framework to evaluate and compare the effectiveness of different masking techniques against side-channel attacks. By simulating synthetic leakage data and analyzing statistical metrics such as R^2, signal-to-noise ratio (SNR), mutual information (MI), and attack success rate, we observe that unmasked implementations leak substantial information and are trivially vulnerable to attacks. First-order masking techniques like Boolean and arithmetic masking significantly reduce direct leakage, evidenced by lower values in all metrics, but remain susceptible to higher-order attacks. Dual-share masking and second-order masking further suppress the leakage, making side-channel exploitation increasingly difficult. In particular, second-order Boolean masking demonstrates the most robust resistance, with negligible leakage indicators and extremely low attack success rates. Therefore, the analysis confirms that while simpler masking schemes can provide moderate protection, high-security applications demand the adoption of higher-order masking techniques to ensure resilience against modern and sophisticated side-channel adversaries. Stochastic analysis thus serves as a valuable tool for both the design and validation of secure cryptographic hardware and software implementations.

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