NEXT GENERATION INTERNET

GNU Taler

Christian Grothoff

07.06.2024
Learning objectives

- How should we pay?
- Introduction to GNU Taler
- How does cut-and-choose work?
- How to prove protocols secure with cryptographic games?
- What are the future plans for GNU Taler?
How should we pay?
Surveillance
Surveillance concerns

- Everybody knows about Internet surveillance.
- But is it *that* bad?
  - You can choose when and where to use the Internet
  - You can anonymously access the Web using Tor
  - You can find open access points that do not require authentication
  - IP packets do not include your precise location or name
  - ISPs typically store this meta data for days, weeks or months
Where is it worse?

This was a question posed to RAND researchers in 1971:

“Suppose you were an advisor to the head of the KGB, the Soviet Secret Police. Suppose you are given the assignment of designing a system for the surveillance of all citizens and visitors within the boundaries of the USSR. The system is not to be too obtrusive or obvious. What would be your decision?”
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“I think one of the big things that we need to do, is we need to get a way from true-name payments on the Internet. The credit card payment system is one of the worst things that happened for the user, in terms of being able to divorce their access from their identity.” –Edward Snowden, IETF 93 (2015)
Why is it worse?

- When you pay by CC, the information includes your name
- When you pay in person with CC, your location is also known
- You often have no alternative payment methods available
- You hardly ever can use someone else’s CC
- Anonymous prepaid cards are difficult to get and expensive
- Payment information is typically stored for 6-10 years!
Credit cards have problems, too!

3D secure ("verified by visa") is a nightmare:

- Complicated process
- Shifts liability to consumer
- Significant latency
- Can refuse valid requests
- Legal vendors excluded
- No privacy for buyers
The bank’s Problem

- Global tech companies push oligopolies
- Privacy and federated finance are at risk
- Economic sovereignty is in danger
Google and Apple will be your bank and run your payment system
They can target advertising based on your purchase history, location and your ability to pay
They will provide more usable, faster and broadly available payment solutions; our federated banking system will be history
After they dominate the payment sector, they will start to charge fees befitting their oligopoly size
Competitors and vendors not aligning with their corporate “values” will be excluded by policy and go bankrupt
The imperium will have another major tool for its financial warfare
The Bank of International Settlements on CBDC
Introduction to GNU Taler
GNU Taler

Digital cash, made socially responsible.

Privacy-Preserving, Practical, Taxable, Free Software, Efficient
What is Taler?

https://taler.net/en/features.html

Taler is
- a Free/Libre software *payment system* infrastructure project
- ... with a surrounding software ecosystem
- ... and a company (Taler Systems S.A.) and community that wants to deploy it as widely as possible.

However, Taler is not
- *not* a currency
- *not* a long-term store of value
- *not* a network or instance of a system
- *not* decentralized
- *not* based on proof-of-work or proof-of-stake
- *not* a speculative asset / “get-rich-quick scheme”
Design goals
... for the GNU Taler payment system

GNU Taler must ...

1. ... be implemented as **free software**.
2. ... protect the **privacy of buyers**.
3. ... must enable the state to **tax income** and crack down on illegal business activities.
4. ... prevent payment fraud.
5. ... only **disclose the minimal amount of information necessary**.
6. ... be usable.
7. ... be efficient.
8. ... avoid single points of failure.
9. ... foster **competition**.
Usability of Taler

https://demo.taler.net/

1. Install Web extension.
2. Visit the bank.demo.taler.net to withdraw coins.
3. Visit the shop.demo.taler.net to spend coins.
How does cut-and-choose work?
Taxability

We say Taler is taxable because:

▶ Merchant’s income is visible from deposits.
▶ Hash of contract is part of deposit data.
▶ State can trace income and enforce taxation.

Limitations:

▶ withdraw loophole
▶ sharing coins among family and friends

Other contemporary payment systems have similar limitations on identification, and thus these limitations should not be a legal issue.
Giving change

It would be inefficient to pay EUR 100 with 1 cent coins!

▷ Denomination key represents value of a coin.
▷ Exchange may offer various denominations for coins.
▷ Wallet may not have exact change!
▷ Usability requires ability to pay given sufficient total funds.
Giving change

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Key goals:
- maintain unlinkability
- maintain taxability of transactions
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   ▶ maintain unlinkability
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Method:
   ▶ Contract can specify to only pay *partial value* of a coin.
   ▶ Exchange allows wallet to obtain *unlinkable change* for remaining coin value.
Diffie-Hellman (ECDH)

1. Create private keys $c, t \mod o$
2. Define $C := cG$
3. Define $T := tG$
4. Compute DH:
   
   $cT = c(tG) = t(cG) = tC$
Strawman solution

Given partially spent private coin key $c_{old}$:

1. Pick random $c_{new}$ \mod o private key
2. Compute $C_{new} := c_{new} G$ public key
3. Pick random $b_{new}$
4. Compute $f_{new} := FDH(C_{new}), m < n.$
5. Transmit $f'_{new} := f_{new} b_{new}^e \mod n$

... and sign request for change with $c_{old}$. 

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Given partially spent private coin key \( c_{\text{old}} \):

1. Let \( C_{\text{old}} := c_{\text{old}}G \) (as before)
2. Create random private transfer key \( t \mod o \)
3. Compute public transfer key \( T := tG \)
4. Compute \( X := c_{\text{old}}(tG) = t(c_{\text{old}}G) = tC_{\text{old}} \)
5. Derive \( c_{\text{new}} \) and \( b_{\text{new}} \) from \( X \) using HKDF
6. Compute \( C_{\text{new}} := c_{\text{new}}G \)
7. Compute \( f_{\text{new}} := FDH(C_{\text{new}}) \)
8. Transmit \( f'_{\text{new}} := f_{\text{new}}b_{\text{new}}^e \)
Cut-and-Choose

\[ \begin{align*}
  c_{\text{old}} &\rightarrow t_1 \\
  b_{\text{new},1} &\leftarrow \text{transmit} \\
  c_{\text{new},1} &\leftarrow \text{Exchange}
\end{align*} \]

\[ \begin{align*}
  c_{\text{old}} &\rightarrow t_2 \\
  b_{\text{new},2} &\leftarrow \text{transmit} \\
  c_{\text{new},2} &\leftarrow \text{Exchange}
\end{align*} \]

\[ \begin{align*}
  c_{\text{old}} &\rightarrow t_3 \\
  b_{\text{new},3} &\leftarrow \text{transmit} \\
  c_{\text{new},3} &\leftarrow \text{Exchange}
\end{align*} \]
Exchange: Choose!

Exchange sends back random $\gamma \in \{1, 2, 3\}$ to the customer.
Customer: Reveal

1. If $\gamma = 1$, send $t_2, t_3$ to exchange
2. If $\gamma = 2$, send $t_1, t_3$ to exchange
3. If $\gamma = 3$, send $t_1, t_2$ to exchange
Exchange: Verify ($\gamma = 2$)

$C_{old}$  $t_1$

$c_{new,1}$  $b_{new,1}$

$C_{old}$  $t_3$

$c_{new,3}$  $b_{new,3}$
Exchange: Blind sign change (RSA)

1. Take $f'_{\text{new}, \gamma}$.
2. Compute $s' := f'_{\text{new}, \gamma} d \mod n$.
3. Return signature $s'$.
Customer: Unblind change (RSA)

1. Receive $s'$.
2. Compute $s := s' b_{new, \gamma}^{-1} \mod n$. 

$b_{new, \gamma}$

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Exchange: Allow linking change

Given $C_{old}$

return $T_\gamma$ and

$s := s' b_{\text{new,} \gamma}^{-1} \mod n$. 
Customer: Link (threat!)

1. Have $c_{old}$.
2. Obtain $T_\gamma, s$ from exchange
3. Compute $X_\gamma = c_{old} T_\gamma$
4. Derive $c_{new,\gamma}$ and $b_{new,\gamma}$ from $X_\gamma$
5. Unblind $s := s' b_{new,\gamma}^{-1} \mod n$
Refresh protocol summary

- Customer asks exchange to convert old coin to new coin
- Protocol ensures new coins can be recovered from old coin
  \[\Rightarrow\] New coins are owned by the same entity!

Thus, the refresh protocol allows:

- To give unlinkable change.
- To give refunds to an anonymous customer.
- To expire old keys and migrate coins to new ones.
- To handle protocol aborts.

Transactions via refresh are equivalent to *sharing* a wallet.
How to prove protocols secure with cryptographic games?
Reminder: Cryptographic games

An *oracle* is a party in a game that the adversary can call upon to indirectly access information that is otherwise hidden from it. For example, **IND-CPA** can be formalized like this:

- **Setup**: Generate random key $k$, select $b \in \{0, 1\}$ for $i \in \{1, \ldots, q\}$.
- **Oracle**: Given $M_0$ and $M_1$ (of same length), return $C := \text{enc}(k, M_b)$.

The adversary wins, if it can guess $b$ with probability greater than $\frac{1}{2} + \epsilon(\kappa)$ where $\epsilon(\kappa)$ is a negligible function in the security parameter $\kappa$. 
Age restriction in E-commerce

Problem:

Verification of minimum age requirements in e-commerce.

Common solutions:

1. ID Verification
2. Restricted Accounts
3. Attribute-based
## Age restriction in E-commerce

### Problem:
Verification of minimum age requirements in e-commerce.

### Common solutions:

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# Age restriction in E-commerce

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Principle of Subsidiarity is violated
Principle of Subsidiarity

Functions of government—such as granting and restricting rights—should be performed at the lowest level of authority possible, as long as they can be performed adequately.
Principle of Subsidiarity

Functions of government—such as granting and restricting rights—should be performed at the lowest level of authority possible, as long as they can be performed adequately.

For age-restriction, the lowest level of authority is:

Parents, guardians and caretakers
Age restriction

Design goals

1. Tie age restriction to the **ability to pay** (not to ID’s)
2. maintain **anonymity of buyers**
3. maintain **unlinkability of transactions**
4. align with **principle of subsidiarity**
5. be **practical and efficient**
Assumption: Checking accounts are under control of eligible adults/guardians.

- **Guardians** commit to an maximum age
- **Minors** attest their adequate (minimum) age
- **Merchants** verify the attestations
- Minors derive age commitments from existing ones
- **Exchanges** compare the derived age commitments
Formal function signatures

Searching for functions with the following signatures

Commit: \((a, \omega) \mapsto (Q, P)\) \(\mathbb{N}_M \times \Omega \to O \times P\),

Attest: \((m, Q, P) \mapsto T\) \(\mathbb{N}_M \times O \times P \to T \cup \{\bot\}\),

Verify: \((m, Q, T) \mapsto b\) \(\mathbb{N}_M \times O \times T \to \mathbb{Z}_2\),

Derive: \((Q, P, \omega) \mapsto (Q', P', \beta)\) \(O \times P \times \Omega \to O \times P \times B\),

Compare: \((Q, Q', \beta) \mapsto b\) \(O \times O \times B \to \mathbb{Z}_2\),

with \(\Omega, P, O, T, B\) sufficiently large sets.

Basic and security requirements are defined later.

Mnemonics:
\(O = \text{commitments}, Q = \text{commitment}, P = \text{proofs}, P = \text{proof},\)
\(T = \text{testations}, T = \text{testation}, B = \text{blindings}, \beta = \text{blinding}\).
Age restriction
Naïve scheme

Commit
Attest
Derive

M

Compare
Verify

C

E

Next Generation Internet
Achieving unlinkability

Simple use of Derive() and Compare() is problematic.

- Calling Derive() iteratively generates sequence \((Q_0, Q_1, \ldots)\) of commitments.
- Exchange calls Compare\((Q_i, Q_{i+1}, \ldots)\)

\[\Rightarrow\text{Exchange identifies sequence}\]
\[\Rightarrow\text{Unlinkability broken}\]
Define cut&choose protocol $\text{DeriveCompare}_\kappa$, using $\text{Derive}()$ and $\text{Compare}()$, sketch:

1. $\mathcal{C}$ derives commitments $(Q_1, \ldots, Q_\kappa)$ from $Q_0$ by calling $\text{Derive}()$ with blindings $(\beta_1, \ldots, \beta_\kappa)$
2. $\mathcal{C}$ calculates $h_0 := H(H(Q_1, \beta_1)\|\ldots\|H(Q_\kappa, \beta_\kappa))$
3. $\mathcal{C}$ sends $Q_0$ and $h_0$ to $\mathcal{E}$
4. $\mathcal{E}$ chooses $\gamma \in \{1, \ldots, \kappa\}$ randomly
5. $\mathcal{C}$ reveals $h_\gamma := H(Q_\gamma, \beta_\gamma)$ and all $(Q_i, \beta_i)$, except $(Q_\gamma, \beta_\gamma)$
6. $\mathcal{E}$ compares $h_0$ and $H(H(Q_1, \beta_1)\|\ldots\|h_\gamma\|\ldots\|H(Q_\kappa, \beta_\kappa))$ and evaluates $\text{Compare}(Q_0, Q_i, \beta_i)$.

If success, $Q_\gamma$ will be the result.
Achieving unlinkability

With DeriveCompare\(_\kappa\)

- \(\mathcal{E}\) learns nothing about \(Q_\gamma\),
- trusts outcome with \(\frac{\kappa-1}{\kappa}\) certainty,
- i.e. \(\mathcal{C}\) has \(\frac{1}{\kappa}\) chance to cheat.

Note: Still need Derive and Compare to be defined.
Basic requirements

Candidate functions

(Commit, Attest, Verify, Derive, Compare)

must first meet basic requirements:

- Existence of attestations
- Efficacy of attestations
- Derivability of commitments and attestations
Basic requirements

Formal details

Existence of attestations

\[ \forall a \in \mathbb{N}_M \; \omega \in \Omega : \text{Commit}(a, \omega) =: (Q, P) \implies \text{Attest}(m, Q, P) = \begin{cases} T \in T, & \text{if } m \leq a \\ \bot & \text{otherwise} \end{cases} \]

Efficacy of attestations

\[ \text{Verify}(m, Q, T) = \begin{cases} 1, & \text{if } \exists P \in P : \text{Attest}(m, Q, P) = T \\ 0 & \text{otherwise} \end{cases} \]

\[ \forall n \leq a : \text{Verify}(n, Q, \text{Attest}(n, Q, P)) = 1. \]

e tc.
Security requirements

Candidate functions must also meet security requirements. Those are defined via security games:

- Game: Age disclosure by commitment or attestation
  - Requirement: Non-disclosure of age
- Game: Forging attestation
  - Requirement: Unforgeability of minimum age
- Game: Distinguishing derived commitments and attestations
  - Requirement: Unlinkability of commitments and attestations

Meeting the security requirements means that adversaries can win those games only with negligible advantage. Adversaries are arbitrary polynomial-time algorithms, acting on all relevant input.
Security requirements
Simplified example

Game $G_{\mathcal{A}}^{\text{FA}}(\lambda)$—Forging an attest:

1. $(a, \omega) \leftarrow N_{M-1} \times \Omega$
2. $(Q, P) \leftarrow \text{Commit}(a, \omega)$
3. $(m, T) \leftarrow \mathcal{A}(a, Q, P)$
4. Return 0 if $m \leq a$
5. Return Verify$(m, Q, T)$

Requirement: Unforgeability of minimum age

$\forall \mathcal{A} \in \mathcal{A}(N_M \times O \times P \rightarrow N_M \times T)$:

$\Pr \left[ G_{\mathcal{A}}^{\text{FA}}(\lambda) = 1 \right] \leq \epsilon(\lambda)$
To **Commit** to age (group) $a \in \{1, \ldots, M\}$

1. Guardian generates ECDSA-keypairs, one per age (group):

   $$\langle (q_1, p_1), \ldots, (q_M, p_M) \rangle$$

2. Guardian then **drops** all private keys $p_i$ for $i > a$:

   $$\langle (q_1, p_1), \ldots, (q_a, p_a), (q_{a+1}, \bot), \ldots, (q_M, \bot) \rangle$$

   - $\vec{Q} := (q_1, \ldots, q_M)$ is the **Commitment**,
   - $\vec{P}_a := (p_1, \ldots, p_a, \bot, \ldots, \bot)$ is the **Proof**

3. Guardian gives child $\langle \vec{Q}, \vec{P}_a \rangle$

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Instantiation with ECDSA
Definitions of Attest and Verify

Child has

- ordered public-keys $\vec{Q} = (q_1, \ldots, q_M)$,
- (some) private-keys $\vec{P} = (p_1, \ldots, p_a, \perp, \ldots, \perp)$.

To Attest a minimum age $m \leq a$:
Sign a message with ECDSA using private key $p_m$.

Merchant gets

- ordered public-keys $\vec{Q} = (q_1, \ldots, q_M)$
- Signature $\sigma$

To Verify a minimum age $m$:
Verify the ECDSA-Signature $\sigma$ with public key $q_m$. 
Child has \( \tilde{Q} = (q_1, \ldots, q_M) \) and \( \tilde{P} = (p_1, \ldots, p_a, \perp, \ldots, \perp) \).

To Derive new \( \tilde{Q}' \) and \( \tilde{P}' \):

Choose random \( \beta \in \mathbb{Z}_g \) and calculate

\[
\tilde{Q}' := (\beta \cdot q_1, \ldots, \beta \cdot q_M),
\tilde{P}' := (\beta p_1, \ldots, \beta p_a, \perp, \ldots, \perp)
\]

Note: \((\beta p_i) \cdot G = \beta \cdot (p_i \cdot G) = \beta \cdot q_i\)

\(\beta \cdot q_i\) is scalar multiplication on the elliptic curve.

Exchange gets \( \tilde{Q}' = (q_1', \ldots, q_M') \), \( \tilde{Q}' = (q_1', \ldots, q_M') \) and \( \beta \)

To Compare, calculate:

\[
(\beta \cdot q_1, \ldots, \beta \cdot q_M) \overset{?}{=} (q_1', \ldots, q_M')
\]
Instantiation with ECDSA

Functions (Commit, Attest, Verify, Derive, Compare) as defined in the instantiation with ECDSA

▶ meet the basic requirements,
▶ also meet all security requirements. Proofs by security reduction, details are in the paper.
Integration with GNU Taler

Key operations in the original system

- Coins are public-/private key-pairs \((C_p, c_s)\).
- Exchange blindly signs \(\text{FDH}(C_p)\) with denomination key \(d_p\).
- Verification:

\[
1 \overset{?}{=} \text{SigCheck}(\text{FDH}(C_p), D_p, \sigma_p)
\]

\((D_p = \text{public key of denomination and } \sigma_p = \text{signature})\)
Integration with GNU Taler

Binding age restriction to coins

To bind an age commitment $Q$ to a coin $C_p$, instead of signing $\text{FDH}(C_p)$, $\varepsilon$ now blindly signs

$$\text{FDH}(C_p, H(Q))$$

Verification of a coin now requires $H(Q)$, too:

$$1 \overset{?}{=} \text{SigCheck} (\text{FDH}(C_p, H(Q)), D_p, \sigma_p)$$
Integration with GNU Taler
Integrated schemes

\[ \text{Commit}(a) \quad \text{withdraw, using } \text{FDH}(C_p, H(Q)) \quad \text{deposit } + \text{H}(Q) \]

\[ \text{(Q, P_a)} \quad \text{refresh } + \text{DeriveCompare, } \]

\[ \text{Attest}(m, Q, P_a) \quad \text{Verify}(m, Q, T_m) \]

\[ \text{purchase } + (T_m, Q) \]
Instantiation with Edx25519

Paper also formally defines another signature scheme: Edx25519.

- Scheme already in use in GNUnet,
- based on EdDSA (Bernstein et al.),
- generates compatible signatures and
- allows for key derivation from both, private and public keys, independently.

Current implementation of age restriction in GNU Taler uses Edx25519.
Discussion

- Approach can be used with any token-based payment scheme
- Subsidiarity requires bank accounts being owned by adults
- Scheme can be adapted to case where minors have bank accounts
  - Assumption: banks provide minimum age information during bank transactions.
  - Child and Exchange execute a variant of the cut&choose protocol.
What are the future plans for GNU Taler?
GNU Taler:
- Gives change, can provide refunds
- Integrates nicely with HTTP, handles network failures
- Has high performance
- Is Free Software
- Includes formal security proofs
CBDC initiatives and GNU Taler

Many initiatives are currently at the level of requirements discussion:
Unique regulatory features for CBs

1. Central bank issues digital coins equivalent to issuing cash
2. Architecture with consumer accounts at commercial banks
3. Withdrawal limits and denomination expiration
4. Income transparency and possibility to set fees
5. Revocation protocols and loss limitations
6. Privacy by cryptographic design not organizational compliance

Political support needed, talk to your representatives!
Ongoing work

- Post-quantum blind signatures
- Integration into more physical machines
- Integration with KYC/AML providers
- Deployment for regional currency in Basel
- Integration with Swiss Postfinance EBICS API
- Wallet backup and recovery with Anastasis
- Internationalization ⇒ https://weblate.taler.net/

https://bugs.taler.net/ tracks open issues.
Open issues / Future Work

- Unlinkable subscriptions and discounts
- Privacy-preserving donations
- Integration with e-commerce frameworks (Prestashop, OpenCart, ECWID, ...)
- Currency conversion
- SAP integration
- Design and usability for illiterate and innumerate users
- Federated exchange (wads)
- ...

Help needed, talk to us (e.g. at https://ich.taler.net/)
Visions

- Be paid to read advertising, starting with spam
- Give welfare without intermediaries taking huge cuts
- Forster regional trade via regional currencies
- Eliminate corruption by making all income visible
- Stop the mining by making crypto-currencies useless for anything but crime
References I
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