

Audit Results



BITCOIN CORE AUDIT: FROM STATIC REVIEW TO FUZZING — INSIDE BITCOIN'S TESTING INFRASTRUCTURE

w/ Robin David, PhD

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with:

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Quarkslab  OSTIF

Introduction

Bitcoin ₿

(Key aspects in 5 mins)



Bitcoin

*decentralized network
protocol*



bitcoin

*unit of value, digital asset
on the network*

1 SATOSHI (*smallest unit*)
1 BTC = 100 000 000 SAT

Core Principles

- Permissionless and decentralized network
- Trustless ownership (*verifiable transferability*)
- Scarcity (*only 21 millions BTC will be emitted*)

⇒ Security provided by peers **mining** blocks (*miners*)

⇒ Decentralization provided by peers maintaining the **ledger**



Network

21813	13145 (60.26%)
Total Public Nodes	Tor Network Nodes

Rank	Client Name	Nodes	Market Share
1	Bitcoin Core	17566	80.53%
2	Bitcoin Knots	4199	19.25%
3	btcd	21	0.10%
4	CKCoinD	5	0.02%
5	bcoin	3	0.01%
6	Bitcoin Classic	1	0.00%

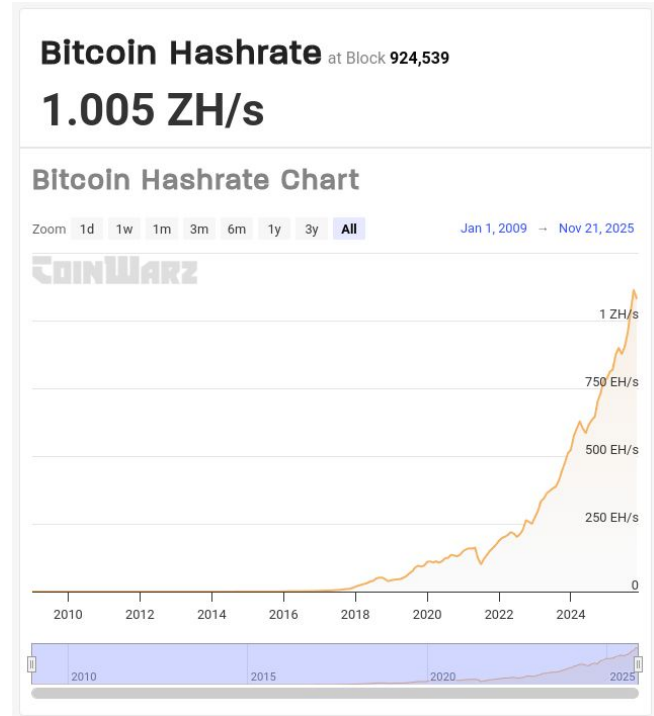


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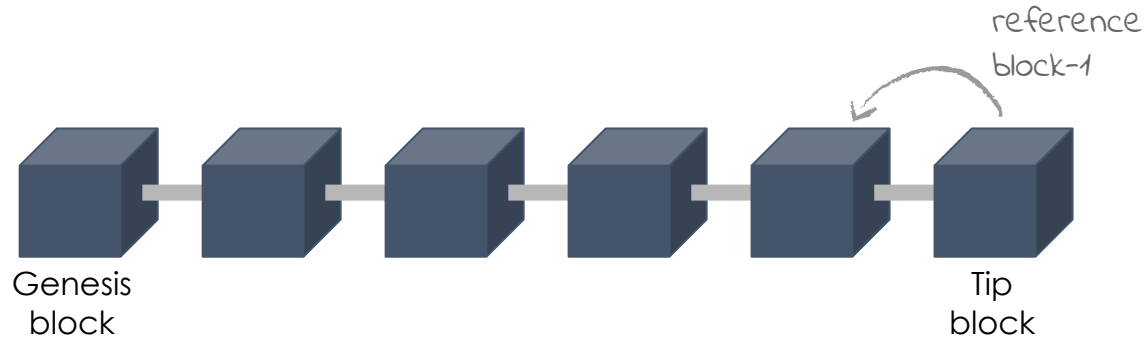
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Hashrate



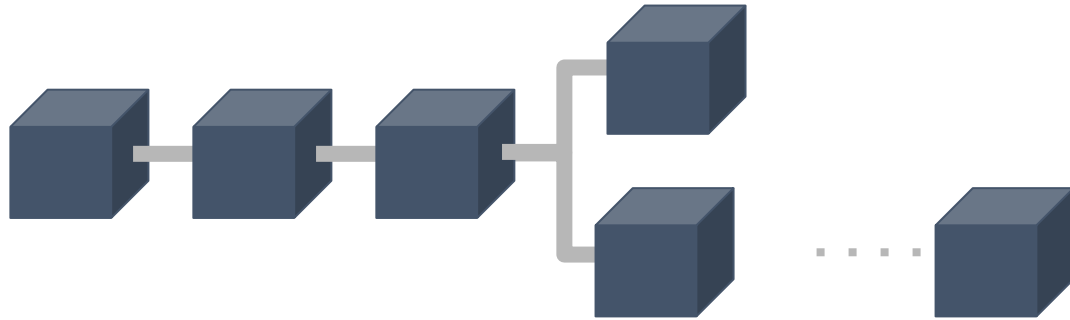


- Blockchain
- Fork & Chain Reorganization
- UTXO Model
- Bitcoin Script
- Mempool



Properties

- Transactions are grouped in blocks
- Blocks are chained with crypto hashes
- Blocks are emitted approximately every 10 minutes
(through an adjustable difficulty parameter)



Properties:

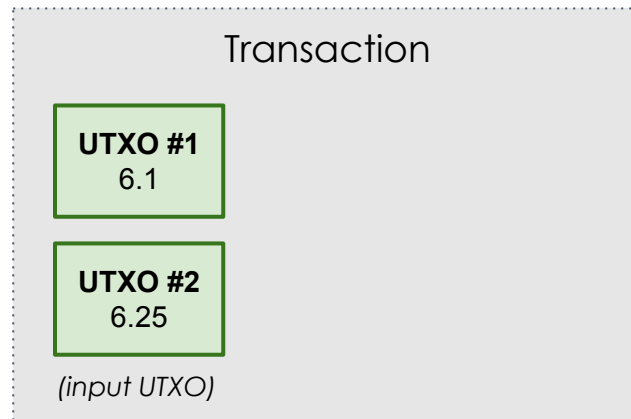
- Nodes always follow the **longest chain** (*the one with the most PoW to be exact*)
- There is **no finality** on Bitcoin

UTXO Unspent-Transaction-Output. Small data holding:

- an amount of BTC
- some condition to be able to spend them (e.g: *presenting a valid signature*)

Properties:

- Can be “consumed” **once**.
- The only UTXOs created ex-nihilo comes from miner's coinbase transactions

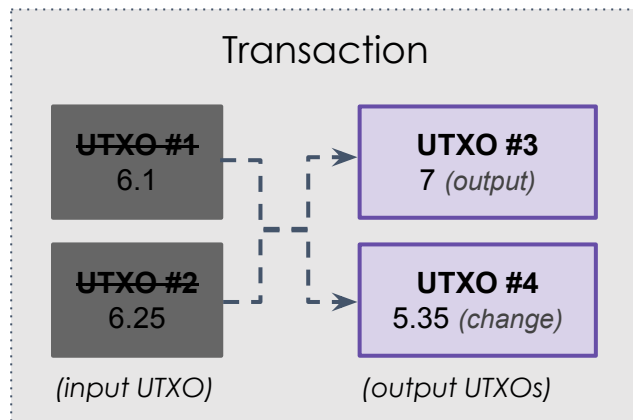


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⇒ **Stack**-based virtual machine (*not turing complete*).

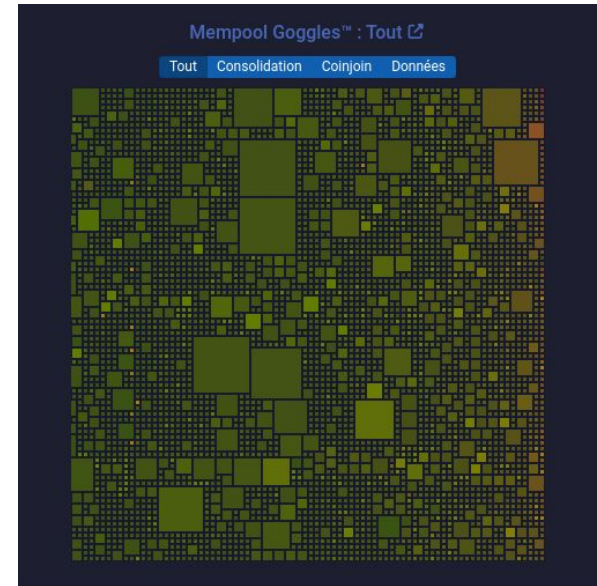
Each stack slot is up to 520 bytes. Execution should returns a boolean.

Hex	Opcode	Description
0x00	OP_FALSE	Push 0 on stack, namely false (empty array)
0x75	OP_PUSHDATA1	The next byte contains the number of bytes to be pushed onto the stack
0x63	OP_IF	If top value on stack true execute following statements
0x67	OP_ELSE	If preceding OP_IF/NOTIF/ELSE not executed. Execute following statements
0x68	OP_ENDIF	Ends and if/else block.
0x69	OP_VERIFY	Check top stack value. If false transaction invalid . otherwise no-op.
0x6a	OP_RETURN	Mark transaction as invalid (unspendable)
0x76	OP_DUP	Duplicates top stack item
0x87	OP_EQUAL	Compare two top stack items. Returns 1 if equal, 0 otherwise
0x8b	OP_1ADD	Add 1 to top stack item
0xa9	OP_HASH160	Hash top stack item (SHA-256 then RIPEMD-160)
0xac	OP_CHECKSIG	Check ECC signature if two top stack items (sig, pubkey)
0xae	OP_CHECKMULTISIG	
0xb1	OP_CHECKLOCKTIMEVERIFY	Check if top stack item greater than transaction's nLockTime field
...

0x01 - 0x4b indicate number of data bytes to push on stack

⇒ **Mempool**: Pending transactions storage area. (*Memory state shared between nodes*)

- Only valid transaction should be accepted (*respect consensus, policy*)
- Storage in RAM, thus need to be particularly secure
- Fee competition between transactions (+RBF)
- Miners pick transactions in mempool to create a block
- At each new blocks transaction should be removed from mempool
- In case of chain reorg block transactions **should return** to mempool !



<https://mempool.space/fr/>

A Primer of Bitcoin Core



Bitcoin Core: Reference implementation of the protocol

Bio:

- first version by Satoshi Nakamoto (*Aug 2009*)
- 99% of nodes running
- 10+ active developers
- 46,000 commits

Features:

- full node
- GUI / wallet
- mining features

Dependencies:

- Boost 1.73.0 / libevent 2.18 (*for RPC*)
- Qt 6.2 (*GUI*) / ZeroMQ (*monitoring*) / SQLite (*wallet*)
- univalued (*json*) / secp256k1 / leveldb / minisketch

internalized



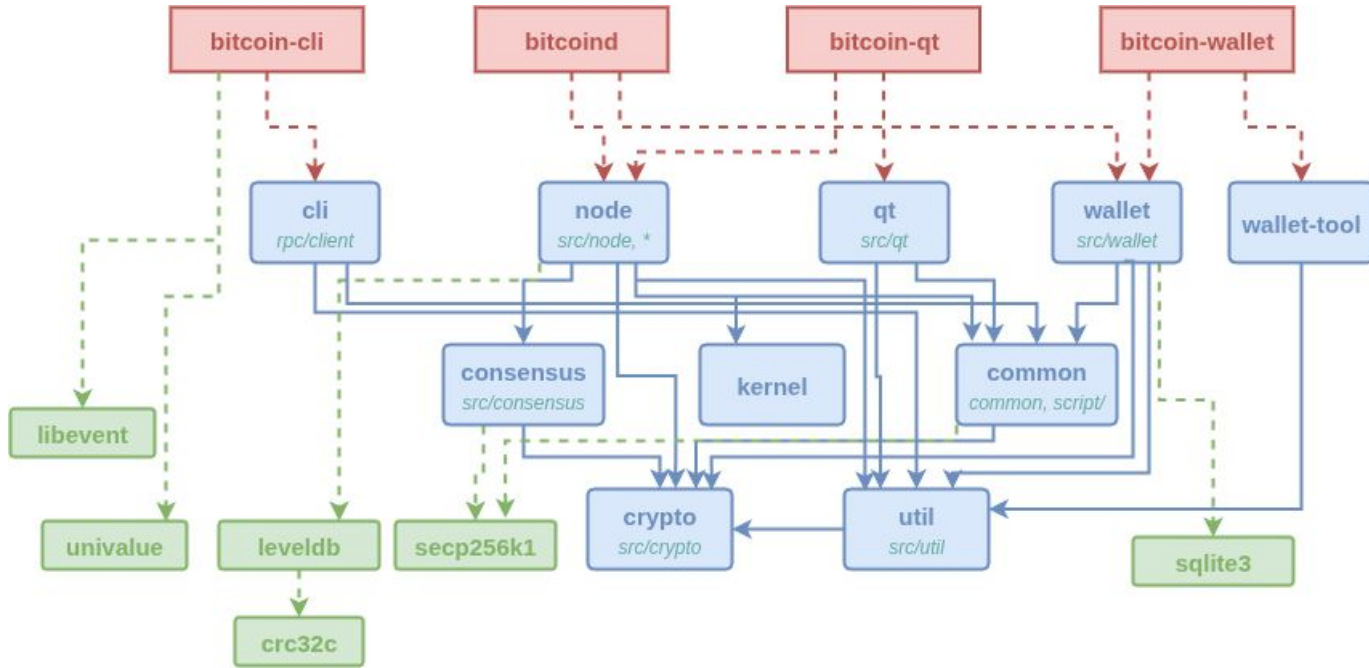
<https://github.com/bitcoin/bitcoin>



Language	files	code*
C++	806	184605
C/C++ Headers	624	63210
C	24	28586
Total	1454	276401

⇒ Also, 349 Python files (57915 LoC) for testing purposes

Components Overview

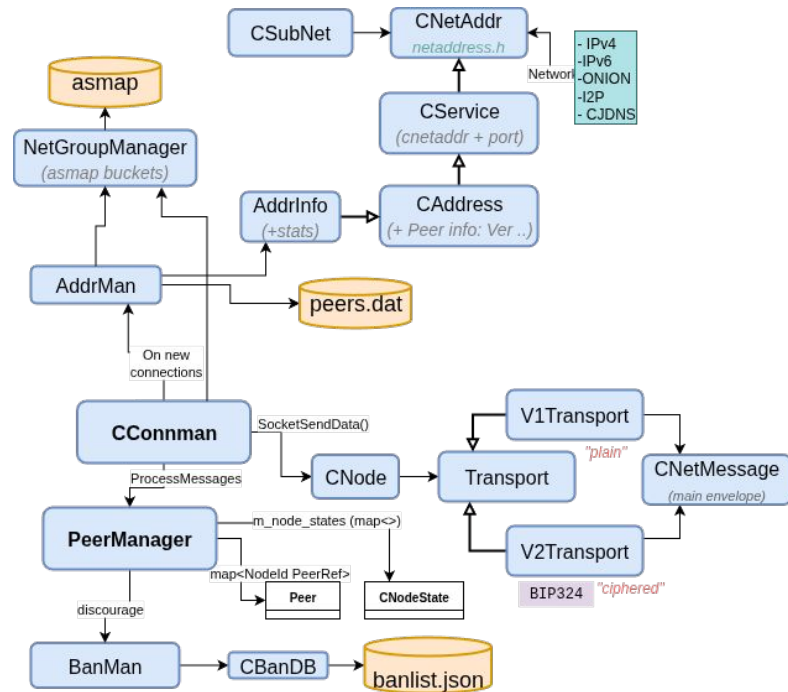




⇒ Communication protocol between peers

Properties:

- Main **attack-vector**
- 2 versions:
 - legacy (*plain-text*)
 - E2E ciphered [BIP-324]
- Multiple proxies available (*Tor, I2P*)
- Multiple anti-DoS features
- Asmap peer balancing



Goal

Resilience against **DoS**, **Eclipse** attacks etc.



Handshake

VERSION	Protocol version info
VERACK	Acknowledge VERSION

Node Parameters

WTXIDRELAY	WTXID relay support
SENDCMPCT	Compact block support
SENDADDRV2	Request ADDRv2 support
SENDHEADERS	Request header updates
SENDCMPCT	Compact block support

Network Discovery

GETADDR	Request peer addresses
ADDR	Address of peers
ADDRV2	Extended ADDR message

Connection Health

PING	Keep-alive message
PONG	Response to PING
NOTFOUND	Data not found

Data

INV	Inventory of objects
GETDATA	Request data
MERKLEBLOCK	Filtered block
TX	Transaction data
GETBLOCKS	Request block headers
BLOCK	Block data
CMPCTBLOCK	Compact block data
GETBLOCKTXN	Request block txns
BLOCKTXN	Block transactions
GETHEADERS	Request headers
HEADERS	Block headers

(And more for SPV clients: FILTERLOAD, FILTERADD, FILTERCLEAR, GETCFILTERS, GETCFHEADERS, GETCFCHECKPT, FEEFILTER, CFILTER, CFHEADERS, CFCHECKPT)

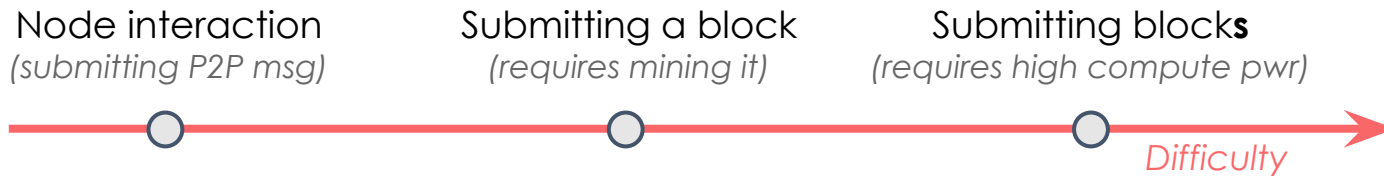
Security Assessment



Report Date	Type	Severity	Past Security Advisories
2025-04	DoS	Low	CVE-2025-46597 - Highly unlikely remote crash on 32-bit systems An attacker could produce a block that crashes nodes running on 32-bit systems in a rare edge case. A fix was released on October 10th 2025 in Bitcoin Core v30.0.
2025-04	DoS	Low	CVE-2025-46598 - CPU DoS from unconfirmed transaction processing Specially crafted invalid unconfirmed transactions could cause unnecessary resource usage. A fix was released on October 10th 2025 in Bitcoin Core v30.0.
2022-03	DoS	Low	CVE-2025-54604 - Disk filling from spoofed self connections An attacker could cause a victim node to fill up its disk space by repeatedly faking self-connections over a long time. A fix was released on October 10th 2025 in Bitcoin Core v30.0.
2022-05	DoS	Low	CVE-2025-54605 - Disk filling from invalid blocks An attacker could cause a victim node to fill up its disk space by repeatedly sending invalid blocks. A fix was released on October 10th 2025 in Bitcoin Core v30.0.
2021-06	DoS	Low	CVE-2024-52919 - Remote crash due to addr message spam (part 2) An attacker could crash a node by spamming it with addr messages for a very long time. A fix was released on April 14th 2025 in Bitcoin Core v29.0.
2023-05	DoS	Medium	CVE-2024-52922 - Hindered block propagation due to stalling peers A peer could hinder block propagation by announcing blocks first and then simply withholding the block.

Bugs to consider

- ▶ Standard C, C++ bugs
- ▶ Consensus specific bugs (*node disagreement on shared state*)
- ▶ Decentralized network specific bugs (*DoS, eclipses etc*)



Bugs to consider

- ▶ Standard C, C++ bugs
- ▶ Consensus specific bugs (node disagreement on shared state)
- ▶ Decentralized network specific bugs (51% attack, etc)

For the audit focuses on
components reachable by **P2P
interface**

Node interaction
(submitting P2P msg)

Submitting a block
(requires mining it)

Submitting blocks
(requires high compute pwr)



Static Analysis



⇒ Static analysis focused on **Thread analysis** (*harder to address dynamically*)

⇒ Bitcoin used extensively: LLVM **Thread Safety Analysis**

<https://clang.llvm.org/docs/ThreadSafetyAnalysis.html>

- Compilation-time checks ! (*nothing done at runtime*)
- Efficient but has some limitations:
 - intra-procedural analysis
 - no alias analysis
 - no checks in constructors destructors

Activated with: `-Wthread-safety`

Defines MACROS:

- GUARDED_BY
- PT_GUARDED_BY
- EXCLUSIVE_LOCKS_REQUIRED
- SHARED_LOCKS_REQUIRED
- REQUIRES
- ACQUIRED_BEFORE
- ...

⇒ *Thus relevant to review annotations a threads behaviors.*



⇒ Code is heavily “harnessed” with lots of **assertion checks**
(But an assert would be dramatic for such a high-availability network)

Macro/Function	DEBUG	RELEASE	Count
CHECK_NONFATAL()	error msg	error msg	183
Assert()	abort	abort	167
Assume()	abort	-	411

Testing & Fuzzing



Unit Test

657
tests

- Use Boost test framework
- all built in a single binary
`test_bitcoin`



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Fuzzing

221
fuzzing harnesses

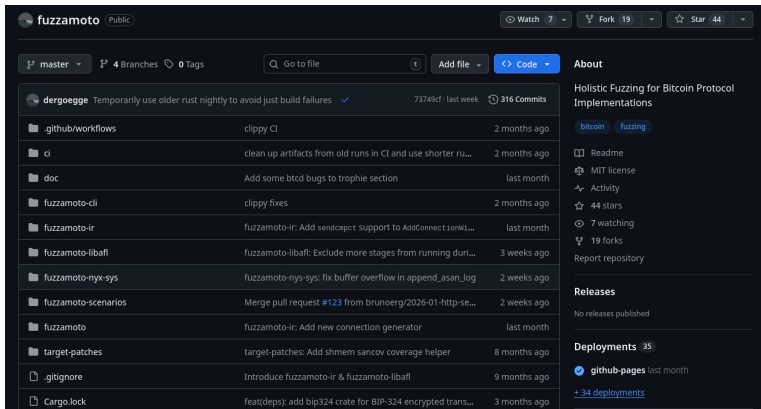
- Use libfuzzer interface (`LLVMFuzzerTestOneInput`)
- Fuzzed by OSS-Fuzz !
- Also has a AFL++ support

Existing Testing around Bitcoin



Grammar-based & Snapshot Fuzzing

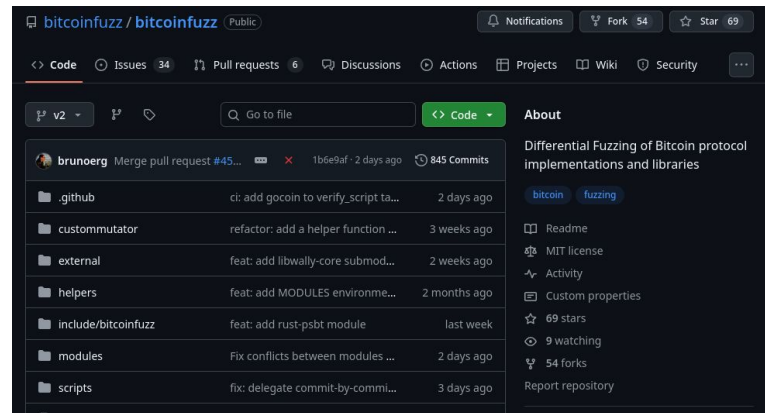
Fuzzamoto [\[↗\]](#)



- Snapshot fuzzing based on libAFL NYX mode (*and a custom IR*)
- **Actively developed** (by Niklas Gögge)
- Also other projects: btcser, etc.

Differential Fuzzing:

Bitcoinfuzz [\[↗\]](#)



- Test Bitcoin Core against other implementation e.g. *btcd*, *rustbitcoin*
- Also test Lightning implementation
- **Actively developed** (by Bruno Garcia)

⇒ **Our goal:** Finding our way to improve fuzzing without overlapping with existing approaches

Fuzzing Existing Harnesses *(with Ensemble Fuzzing)*

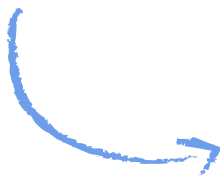


⇒ OSS-Fuzz does not use AFL++, and thus do not leverage different engines advantages (e.g: AFL++ *cmplog*, etc..)



⇒ Re-run existing harnesses in our ensemble fuzzing framework **PASTIS*** that leverage AFL++, Honggfuzz and libfuzzer with *cmplog* and dictionary support.

Input shared based only if **LLVM coverage** improved, thanks to a live computation of current coverage. (Otherwise engines are spamming each other)



Casually found new edges, instances or lines (but no significant improvements)

* <https://quarkslab.github.io/pastis/>

New Harnesses

Fuzzing Coverage *(closer look)*



⇒ Goal: Trying to cover **untested areas**

!

(that might contains some bugs)

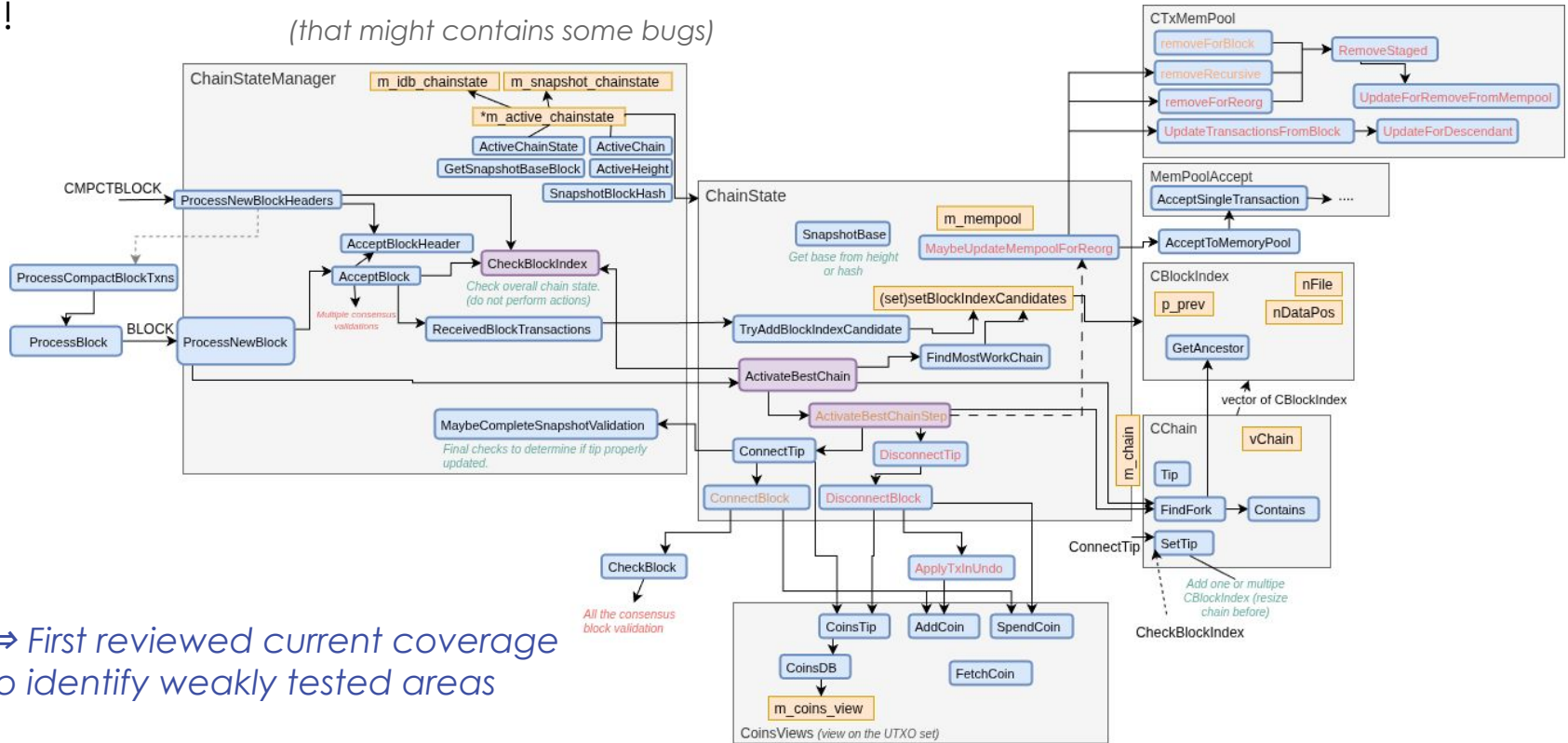
Fuzzing Coverage (closer look)



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⇒ First reviewed current coverage to identify weakly tested areas



- **ConnectBlock:** Test all block validation checks *(to be added on tip)*
 - ▶ Stateless code *(no file written no internal state to restore)*
 - ▶ Perform all consensus validation rules *(block and all Txs)*



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 - ▶ Exercise most-worked chain selection
 - ▶ Very heavy initialization, restoration



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Virtual FileSystem: Abstraction layer to File* to use open_memstream and performing all files operations **in-memory**. For fast **state restoration** and **reproducibility**!

⇒ **Newly covered** key functions: `CTxMemPool::removeForReorg`, `ApplyTxInUndo`, `DisconnectTip`, `ActivateBestChainStep`, `MaybeUpdateMemPoolForReorg`.

Coverage

	Functions	Instances	Regions	Lines	Branches	MCDC
Base	6155	12476	54995	75792	26815	2811
New	6194	12611	55655	76593	27164	2858
Final	+39 (+0.43%)	+135 (+0.54%)	+660 (+0.68%)	+801 (+0.68%)	+349 (+0.76%)	+47 (+0.79%)

Results: File coverage



File	Functions	Instances	Regions	Lines	Branches	MCDC
<i>src/chain.cpp</i>	14	14	82 (+1)	105 (+1)	51 (+1)	9 (+2)
<i>src/chain.h</i>	28	30	140	156	45 (+1)	6 (+1)
<i>src/compressor.h</i>	5	24 (+3)	19	37	6	0
<i>src/core_memusage.h</i>	7	35 (+6)	19	36	9	0
<i>src/cuckooocache.h</i>	15	25 (+1)	57	117	32	2
<i>src/deploymentstatus.h</i>	4	4	23 (+1)	16	6 (+1)	0
<i>src/hash.h</i>	19	60 (+7)	30	87	4	0
<i>src/indirectmap.h</i>	13 (+1)	13 (+1)	13 (+1)	13 (+1)	0	0
<i>src/kernel/ disconnected_transactions.cpp</i>	7 (+5)	7 (+5)	35 (+20)	47 (+38)	14 (+10)	0
<i>src/memusage.h</i>	21 (+2)	75 (+9)	32 (+2)	56 (+6)	6	0
<i>src/node/blockstorage.cpp</i>	35 (+1)	35 (+1)	361 (+8)	411 (+15)	127 (+5)	5 (+1)
<i>src/primitives/transaction.h</i>	43	122 (+1)	106	143	55	14
<i>src/serialize.h</i>	118	2624 (+60)	236	455	76	3
<i>src/streams.h</i>	64 (+3)	340 (+4)	206 (+14)	288 (+18)	87 (+5)	5
<i>src/sync.h</i>	25	98 (+1)	51	62	7	0
<i>src/test/ fuzz/connect_block.cpp</i>	13 (+13)	13 (+13)	340 (+340)	420 (+420)	165 (+165)	18 (+18)
<i>src/txmempool.cpp</i>	75 (+6)	75 (+6)	870 (+90)	896 (+102)	357 (+49)	16 (+3)
<i>src/uint256.h</i>	29	68 (+1)	52	67	11	3
<i>src/undo.h</i>	4	18 (+3)	13	20	4	0
<i>src/util/check.h</i>	5	76 (+2)	19	18	5	0
<i>src/ util/transaction_identifier.h</i>	19 (+1)	45 (+2)	23 (+1)	23 (+1)	1	0
<i>src/validation.cpp</i>	141 (+5)	141 (+5)	3146 (+171)	2898 (+188)	1340 (+105)	145 (+22)
<i>src/validationinterface.cpp</i>	43 (+2)	58 (+4)	218 (+11)	165 (+11)	30 (+7)	0

Additional Fuzzing Experiments

FuzzDataProvider limitations

- ▶ FuzzDataProvider is “somehow” structured but not really
- ▶ Harnesses encodes extremely complex inputs
- ▶ Many bitcoin related inputs are extremely interdependent (*fields referencing each other, crypto signatures etc..*)

```
FUZZ_TARGET(process_messages, .init = initialize_process_messages)
{
    FuzzedDataProvider fuzzed_data_provider(buffer.data(), buffer.size());

    std::vector<CNode*> peers;
    const auto num_peers_to_add = fuzzed_data_provider.ConsumeIntegralInRange(1, 3);
    for (int i = 0; i < num_peers_to_add; ++i) {
        peers.push_back(ConsumeNodeAsUniquePtr(fuzzed_data_provider, i).release());
        CNode& p2p_node = *peers.back();

        FillNode(fuzzed_data_provider, connman, p2p_node);
        connman.AddTestNode(p2p_node);
    }

    LIMITED_WHILE(fuzzed_data_provider.ConsumeBool(), 30) {
        const std::string random_message_type{
            fuzzed_data_provider.ConsumeBytesAsString(CMessageHeader::MESSAGE_TYPE_SIZE)};

        CSerializedNetMsg net_msg;
        net_msg.m_type = random_message_type;
        net_msg.data = ConsumeRandomLengthByteVector(fuzzed_data_provider, MAX_LENGTH);

        CNode& random_node = *PickValue(fuzzed_data_provider, peers);

        (void)connman.ReceiveMsgFrom(random_node, std::move(net_msg));

        bool more_work{true};
        while (more_work) {
            more_work = connman.ProcessMessagesOnce(random_node);
            g_setup->m_node.peerman->SendMessages(&random_node);
        }
    }
}
```



- Rewrote some harnesses by using **Libprotobuf-mutator** (based on protobuf definitions)
- Enabled defining more explicit grammar and type dependencies
- Difficulty to get it embedded in the existing fuzzing target

```
message CComplexTransaction {
  message TxInput {
    required uint32 indexTx = 1;
    required uint32 indexTxOut = 2;
    required Sequence sequence = 3;
    message UnlockScript {
      required CScript script = 1;
      repeated bytes scriptWitness = 2;
    }
    optional UnlockScript unlockScript = 4;
  }
  message TxOutput {
    required uint64 amount = 1;
    optional CScript script = 2;
  }
  optional uint32 version = 1;
  required uint32 nLockTime = 2;
  repeated TxInput inputs = 3;
  repeated TxOutput outputs = 4;
}
```

Example transaction definition in protobuf

⇒ *No better coverage obtained*



Targets*

- CPU specific variants of **SHA256** (*SHANI and Aarch64 not covered by Fuzzing*)
- **ChaCha20-Poly1305**. Facing P2P interface for E2E encryption. (*added in 2023*)

Testing Approaches

- **Compliance Testing** against standard vectors (NIST etc.)
- **Differential Fuzzing** against OpenSSL implementation



CryptoCondor

<https://github.com/quarkslab/crypto-condor>



DeltAFly

Differential Fuzzer based on LibAFL.

**libsecp256k1 purposely left out of scope*



⇒ Both SHA256 and ChaCha20-Poly1305 tested against **OpenSSL** implementation

Coverage Results (SHA256)

File	Baseline			DeltAFly		
	Line	Function	Region	Line	Function	Region
<i>sha256.cpp</i>	96.94%	100.00%	87.78%	31.02%	71.43%	32.05%
	(571/589)	(19/19)	(79/90)	(161/519)	(15/21)	(25/78)
<i>sha256_sse4.cpp</i>	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%
	(935/935)	(1/1)	(1/1)	(935/935)	(1/1)	(1/1)
<i>sha256_x86_shani.cpp</i>	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	27.05%	72.73%	83.33%
	(0/286)	(0/11)	(0/13)	(76/281)	(8/11)	(20/24)
<i>sha256_arm_shani.cpp</i>	×	×	×	22.22%	50.00%	30.92%
				(292/1314)	(1/2)	(64/207)

⇒ Similar compliant results with ChaCha20-Poly1305

Differential Testing

(not fuzzing)



Problem: Developers want to identify through testing if a given input behaves differently across versions (*e.g: a peer connection, formerly denied now accepted etc.*)



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Observation: Execution of an input update the node state. From one version to the other the side-effects should remain (mostly) the same. (*e.g a peer or a transaction accepted shouldn't change unless consensus, policy changes*)



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Idea: We can reason on inputs in terms of side-effects produced to identify discrepancies across versions. (*while remaining independent from any code, control-flow refactoring*)

Tracepoints



⇒ Hooking points in the implementation to retrieve data (*through eBPF*)

⇒ Used to monitor a node activity



⇒ **Goal:** Hijacking this mechanism to generate **data trace**

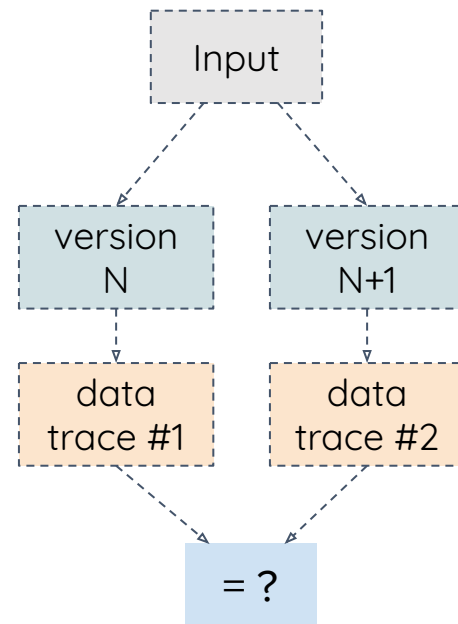
net	inbound_message
	outbound_message
	inbound_connection
	outbound_connection
	evicted_inbound_connection
	misbehaving_connection
	closed_connection
validation	block_connected
utxocache	flush
	add
	spent
	uncache
mempool	added
	removed
	replaced
	rejected

```
TRACEPOINT(net, inbound_connection,  
  pnode->GetId(),  
  pnode->m_addr_name.c_str(),  
  pnode->ConnectionTypeAsString().c_str(),  
  pnode->ConnectedThroughNetwork(),  
  GetNodeCount(ConnectionDirection::In)  
);
```



Methodology:

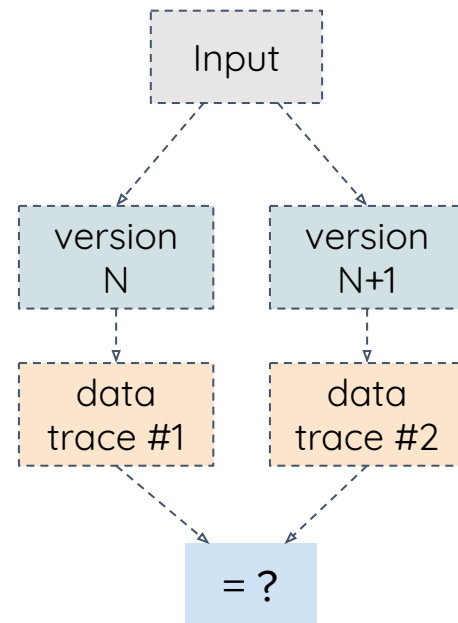
- Change TRACEPOINT macro to write data to a file
- Run the same input on two different versions
- Compare resulting datatrace files to identify discrepancies*
- **Bonus:** We define the `SERIALIZE_TO_DATATRACE` macro to write any variables, object etc, to the trace file.





Methodology:

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- Run the same input on two different versions
- Compare resulting datatrace files to identify discrepancies*
- **Bonus:** We define the `SERIALIZE_TO_DATATRACE` macro to write any variables, object etc, to the trace file.



Conclusion

⇒ This data could also be used to **drive fuzzing** (*libfuzzer* *extracounters* or *IJON-mode* on *AFL++*)

Conclusion



○ Findings

- **2** lows on thread-safety and assume usage
- **13** informational (*especially to improve fuzzing harnesses*)



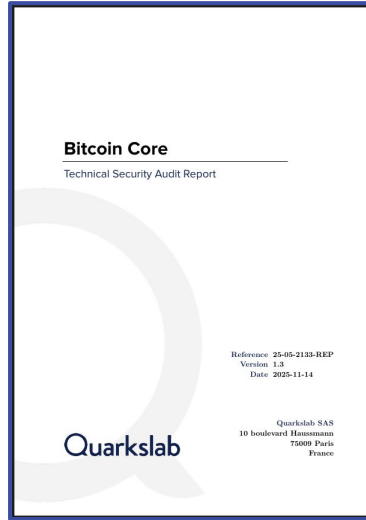
○ Findings

- 2 lows on thread-safety and assume usage
- 13 informational (*especially to improve fuzzing harnesses*)

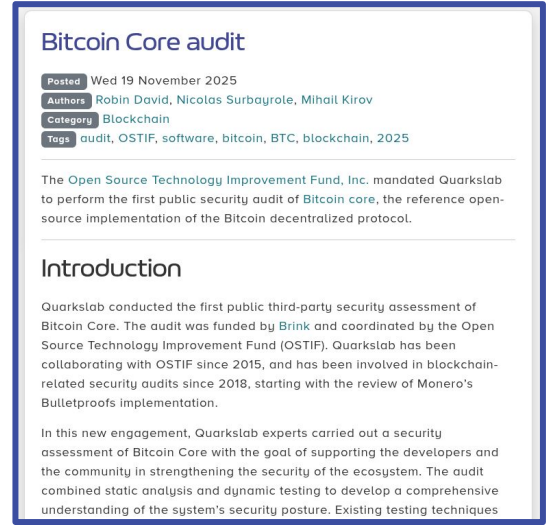
○ Deliverables

- public audit report
- 3 new fuzzing harnesses [\[↗\]](#)
- test-cases for qa-assets repository (*along with the associated coverage*)
- a docker image and some testing scripts

Thank you!



Report



Blog post



Warm thanks to:
Mike, Niklas and Michael, **Brink**
Antoine Poinot, **Chaincode lab**
Helen, Amir and Derek, **OSTIF**



```
OP_DUP OP_HASH160 <pubKeyHash> OP_EQUALVERIFY OP_CHECKSIG
```

UTXO: **Locking Script**
 ScriptPubKey

Example: P2PKH (CTxIn)



<sig> <pubKey>

OP_DUP OP_HASH160 <pubKeyHash> OP_EQUALVERIFY OP_CHECKSIG

Unlocking Script
ScriptSig

Locking Script
ScriptPubKey

Example: P2PKH (CTxIn)



<sig> <pubKey>

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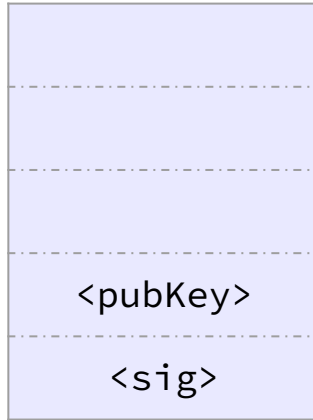
Stack

Example: P2PKH (CTxIn)



<sig> <pubKey>

OP_DUP OP_HASH160 <pubKeyHash> OP_EQUALVERIFY OP_CHECKSIG



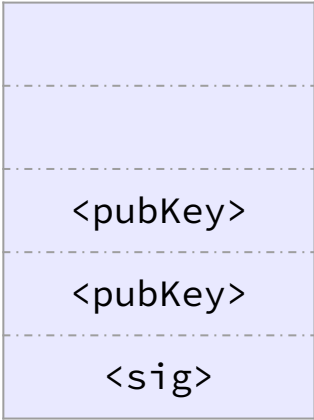
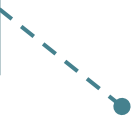
Stack

Example: P2PKH (CTxIn)



<sig> <pubKey> OP_DUP OP_HASH160 <pubKeyHash> OP_EQUALVERIFY OP_CHECKSIG

Duplicate item on top of stack



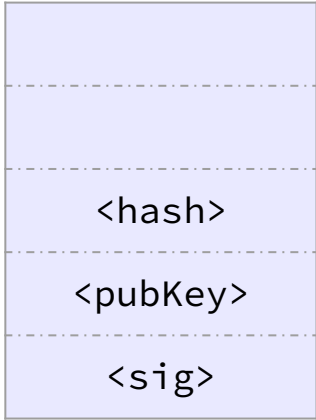
Stack

Example: P2PKH (CTxIn)



<sig> <pubKey> OP_DUP OP_HASH160 <pubKeyHash> OP_EQUALVERIFY OP_CHECKSIG

Pop stack item
compute hash and
push back result



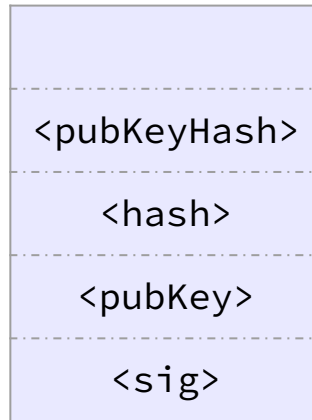
Stack

Example: P2PKH (CTxIn)



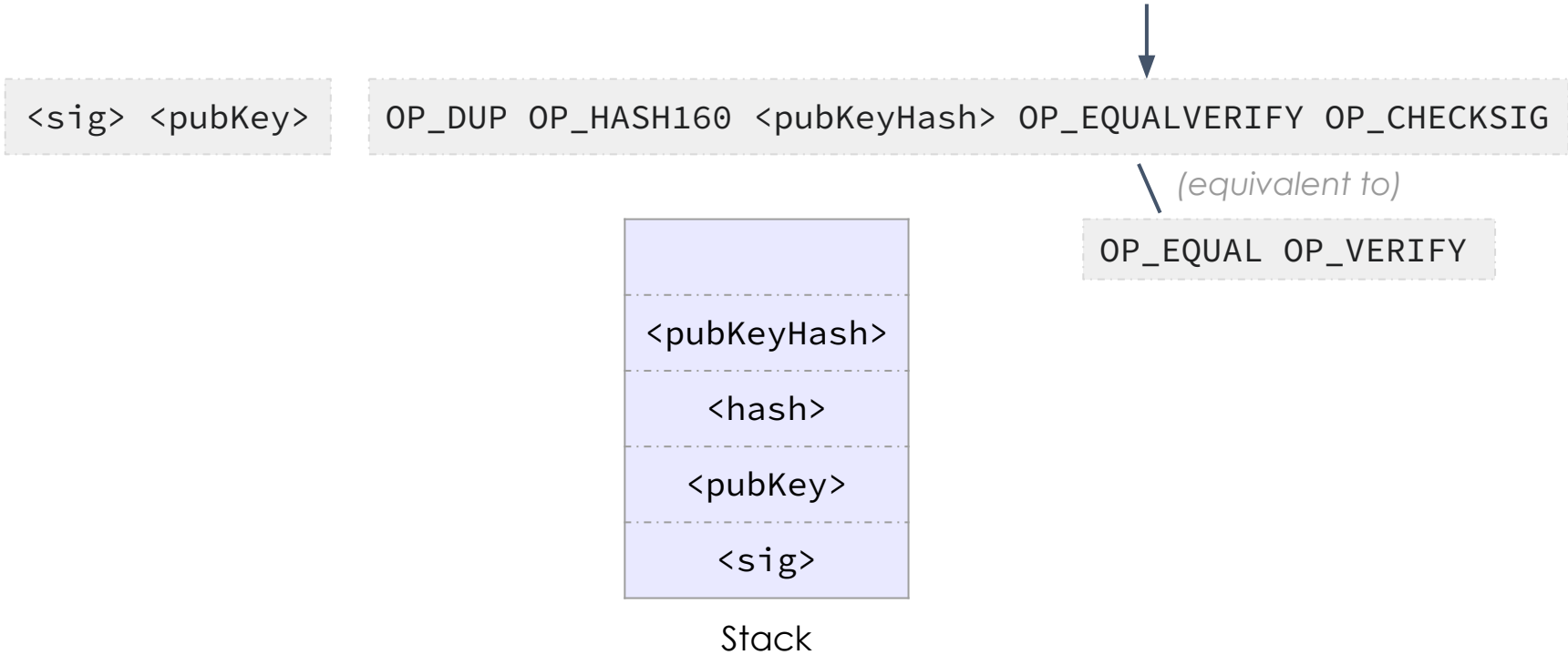
<sig> <pubKey>

OP_DUP OP_HASH160 <pubKeyHash> OP_EQUALVERIFY OP_CHECKSIG



Stack

Example: P2PKH (CTxIn)

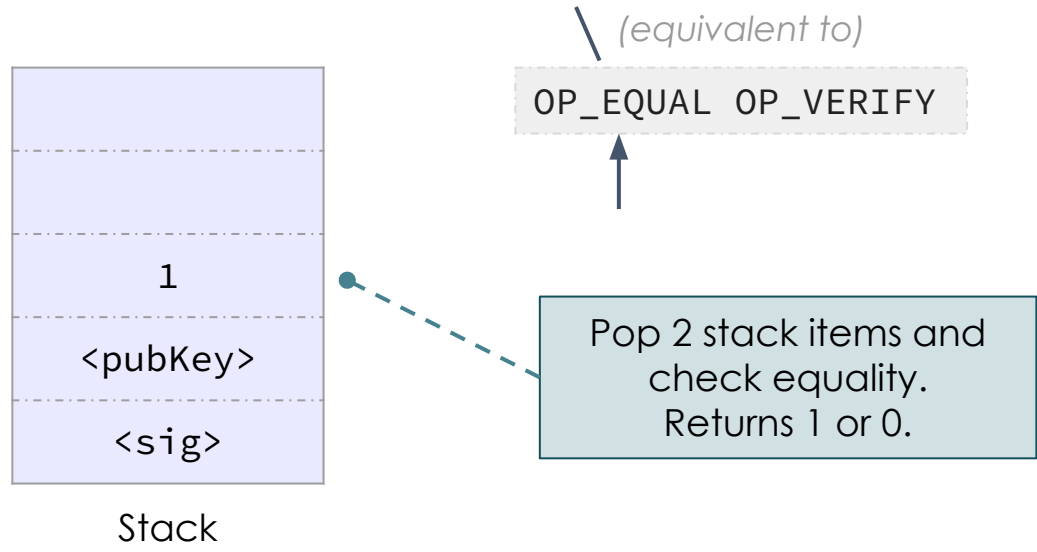


Example: P2PKH (CTxIn)



<sig> <pubKey>

OP_DUP OP_HASH160 <pubKeyHash> OP_EQUALVERIFY OP_CHECKSIG



Example: P2PKH (CTxIn)

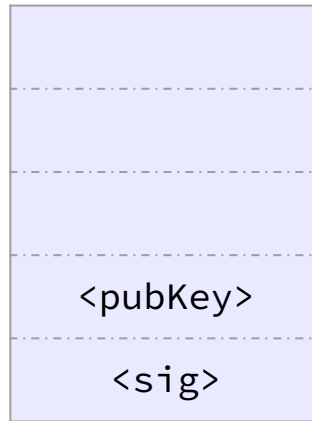


<sig> <pubKey>

OP_DUP OP_HASH160 <pubKeyHash> OP_EQUALVERIFY OP_CHECKSIG

(equivalent to)

OP_EQUAL OP_VERIFY



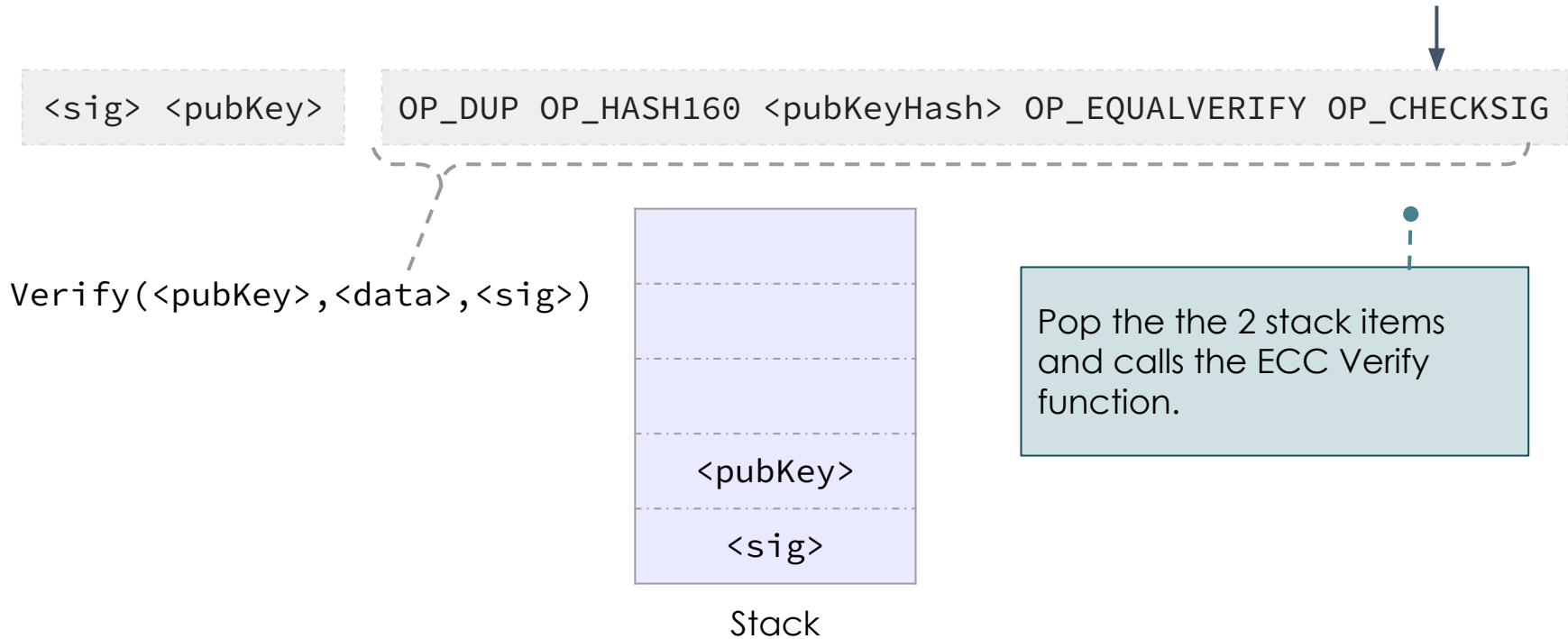
Stack

Pop top stack item.

- If true (1): no-op
- if false (0) ⇒ **invalid transaction**

⇒ Yet anyone can submit the expected public key !

Example: P2PKH (CTxIn)



- ▶ Anyone can submit a valid signature !
- ▶ But `OP_EQUALVERIFY` did check it matches the right pubkey!

Example: P2PKH (CTxIn)



<sig> <pubKey>

OP_DUP OP_HASH160 <pubKeyHash> OP_EQUALVERIFY OP_CHECKSIG



Stack

CTxIn accepted
(spending the UTXO)