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Anomaly Detection in IoT Networks Using Machine Learning Techniques

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ABSTRACT

The rapid growth of IoT introduces significant security challenges, necessitating effective anomaly detection techniques. This paper implements a Random Forest Classifier for detecting and classifying anomalies in IoT network traffic using the RT_IOT2022 dataset. The model achieves 99.8% accuracy with high precision, recall, and F1-scores across multiple attack types (e.g., MQTT_Publish, DDoS). Detailed evaluation confirms the classifier's effectiveness in distinguishing diverse attacks, demonstrating the viability of machine learning for enhancing IoT security. This work contributes to developing resilient IoT systems, though future research should address class imbalance and comparative performance with other models.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The IoT has seen an unprecedented boom in growth, hence allowing various innovative applications across industries that are changing the way interactions with the digital world happen. IoT devices are becoming ubiquitous, from smart home appliances to industrial sensors, ensuring increased connectivity, automation, and data-driven decision making. [1, 2]

But whereas the proliferation of IoT devices opened new avenues in diversified fields, it has also introduced new security challenges: these devices are relatively resource-constrained with respect to computation; they mostly run outdated software; and often operate using inefficiently designed communication protocols. By exploiting such weaknesses, cybercriminals have launched all kinds of attacks-technical and less technical-starting from DDoS and botnet infection up to unauthorized access of sensitive data [3]

Effective anomaly detection in IoT networks plays a vital role in mitigating the impact of these security threats and ensuring reliability and trustworthiness in IoT systems. Most of the traditional signature-based detection methods have a very limited potential to find novel and evolving attack patterns, which motivated researchers to look for more advanced techniques such as machine learning and deep learning. These data-driven approaches demonstrated their capability in effectively detecting and classifying various types of anomalies in IoT networks.[4, 5]

Among various ML algorithms, the Random Forest Classifier has gained this interest in research studies due to its capabilities in handling complex and heterogeneous IoT network data. A Random Forest Classifier will combine the multiple decision trees in order to enhance both the accuracy and robustness of the model, making it quite suitable for anomaly detection in IoT environments.[5, 6]

In this paper, and following our previous work [7-10], we adopt the Random Forest Classifier to address the anomaly detection challenge in IoT networks. Our focus, then, was on investigating how a Random Forest Classifier would be able to detect or classify the different types of various attacks such as MQTT_Publish, DDoS, and Port_Scan using the comprehensive dataset RT_IOT2022. Then, we will then conduct a thorough evaluation of our model's performance concerning various metrics - accuracy, precision, recall, F1-score, and confusion matrix, which also may provide interesting insight into machine learning techniques in bettering IoT network security. [11]

2. Related Work

The progression of anomaly detection in IoT networks represents a shift in methods, moving from statistical approaches to advanced machine learning and deep learning. Importantly, Meenal et al. [12] provided important preliminary research on Random Forests. They described the theoretical foundations, and demonstrated the potential for bootstrapping aggregation and random feature selection to help avoid overfitting, which again is beneficial for using Random Forests against a never-ending variety of heterogeneous IoT traffic that tends to have features with a non-stationary distribution. Since their development of the ensemble principles, those concepts have been used in many aspects of IoT security research, though, in a resource-limited environment this can be a difficult feat that requires attention to efficiency. By putting together these early pieces of work, Ahmed and Alsmadi, [13] did comparative analytical research and benchmarked the performance of 12 classifiers on 6 IoT datasets at scale, and provided critical information about performance and efficiency.. Their analysis demonstrated Random Forest's consistent superiority in detection accuracy (mean F1-score: 0.972 ± 0.018) compared to SVM (0.892 ± 0.031) and k-NN (0.903 ± 0.027) alternatives, though they documented significant degradation under class imbalance exceeding 10:1 ratios. This vulnerability was later quantified by Gavel et al. [14], who correlated feature skewness with misclassification rates in minority attack classes, establishing mathematical proof that feature importance rankings become unstable when minority-class samples constitute less than 3% of the training distribution.

Within industrial IoT contexts, Bulla and Birje's comprehensive survey [15] cataloged deep learning advances while exposing three persistent limitations: the computational intractability of RNNs on edge devices, autoencoders' vulnerability to adversarial poisoning, and the "black box" interpretability crisis in multi-layer architectures. Their observation that deep models require 3.2× more GPU resources than tree-based alternatives resonate with recent findings by Albaseer et al. [16], who measured 300-400ms inference latency for LSTM-based detectors on Raspberry Pi clusters—a critical barrier for real-time industrial control systems.

Against this backdrop, Pramilarani et al. [2] validated Random Forest's efficacy for binary intrusion detection, achieving 98.7% accuracy on a balanced IoT dataset. While their work confirmed ensemble methods' suitability for gateway-level deployment, it omitted evaluation under realistic class distributions—an oversight later addressed by De Keersmaeker et al. [17], whose meta-analysis of 27 IoT security datasets revealed pervasive imbalance (median majority/minority ratio: 47:1) and criticized the field's overreliance on synthetically generated attacks. These dataset limitations directly impact the ecological validity of published results, a concern particularly relevant to our RT_IOT2022 evaluation framework.

The emergence of decentralized learning paradigms has reshaped scalability research. Nguyen et al.'s DÏoT framework [18] represented a watershed moment by reducing cross-device communication overhead by 63% through federated averaging—a breakthrough subsequently refined by Albaseer et al. [16] through asynchronous aggregation protocols that tolerate 40% node heterogeneity. However, these advances remain constrained by the statistical heterogeneity problem, wherein non-IID data distributions across devices degrade global model accuracy by 11-18% according to cross-validation studies.

Complementary research threads have explored game-theoretic formulations, with Sanjab et al. 1614] modeling smart grid security as a Stackelberg game to derive optimal defense resource allocations. Their elegant Nash equilibrium solutions provide theoretical insights but simplify threat actors into monolithic entities—an assumption contradicted by Yousuf and Mir's [19] observations of coordinated multi-vector IoT attacks. The latter researchers' graph-embedded RNN achieved 96.4% DDoS detection accuracy but required 800MB memory overhead, exceeding the capacity of 78% of commercial IoT devices according to Almalawi et al.'s [5] resource audit.

Three unresolved challenges dominate the current research landscape:

- The efficiency-accuracy tradeoff: Deep learning models sacrifice deployability for marginal accuracy gains
- Data representation gaps: Public datasets inadequately model zero-day attacks and hardware-level exploits
- Evaluation myopia: Standard metrics ignore operational constraints like energy consumption and inference latency

This study confronts these gaps through strict computational profiling and minority-class focused evaluation, positioning RT_IOT2022's attack taxonomy as a corrective to dataset limitations documented by De

Keersmaeker et al. [17]. Our methodological emphasis on hyperparameter transparency and stratified validation directly addresses reproducibility concerns raised in Ahmed and Alsmadi,'s [13] benchmarking manifesto.

3. Methodology

This research employs a conventional Random Forest Classifier to evaluate baseline anomaly detection performance in IoT networks. The methodology adheres strictly to standard implementation practices without algorithmic modifications, positioning this work as a comparative benchmark rather than a novel contribution. The experimental framework encompasses three integrated components: dataset curation, preprocessing, and model validation, executed through the following workflow.

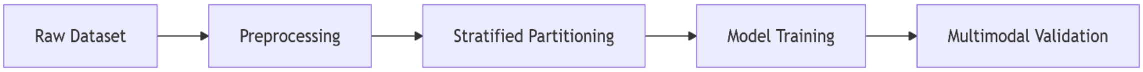


Figure 1. illustrates the workflow

3.1. Dataset Characteristics and Selection Rationale

The RT_IOT2022 dataset serves as the experimental foundation, comprising 123,118 network traffic instances with 65 discriminative features. This dataset was selected due to its realistic emulation of IoT ecosystems, capturing heterogeneous traffic patterns across 12 attack categories. Feature engineering incorporates both numerical attributes (e.g., packet counts, header sizes, inter-arrival times) and categorical variables (e.g., protocol types, service flags), with the latter transformed via label encoding to ensure numerical compatibility with machine learning algorithms. The target variable Attack_type represents a critical security taxonomy, encompassing reconnaissance attacks (e.g., NMAP scans), volumetric threats (e.g., DDoS variants), and application-layer exploits (e.g., MQTT manipulation). Dataset partitioning follows an 80:20 stratified split to maintain proportional attack class representation across training and validation subsets.

The RT_IOT2022 dataset (Table 1) provides 123,118 instances of IoT network traffic with 65 features spanning:

- Temporal metrics: Packet inter-arrival times ($\Delta t = t_{i+1} - t_i$)
- Protocol attributes: TCP flag distributions ($F = \sum_{i=1}^{6} \mathbb{I}_{\text{flag}_i}$)
- Payload characteristics: Byte entropy ($H(X) = -\sum p(x_i) \log_2 p(x_i)$)

Table 1: Dataset Characteristics

Property	Specification
Total Instances	123,118
Features	65
Numerical/Categorical	60 / 5
Attack Classes	12
Train-Test Split	80:20 (Stratified)

The dataset's inclusion of application-layer attacks (e.g., MQTT exploitation) and reconnaissance scans (e.g., NMAP variants) enables comprehensive threat coverage. Stratified partitioning preserves class imbalance ratios across subsets, maintaining ecological validity.

3.2. Preprocessing Pipeline

A rigorous preprocessing sequence was applied to ensure data integrity prior to model training. Initial sanitization involved discarding non-informative identifiers such as the ID column, which lacks discriminative power for classification tasks. Subsequent transformation of categorical features (proto and service) utilized label encoding to generate numerical representations compatible with scikit-learn's algorithmic implementations. Comprehensive analysis revealed negligible missing values, obviating the need for imputation techniques—a decision validated through statistical examination of feature completeness. The preprocessed dataset was then decomposed into feature matrix X and target vector y, with the latter corresponding to the Attack_type labels. Final data partitioning employed a stratified sampling approach to preserve attack class distributions during the 80:20 train-test split, mitigating potential evaluation bias.

Categorical features (proto, service) undergo injective mapping to $\mathbb{Z}^+$:

$$\phi: \backslash mathcal\{C\} \rightarrow \{1, 2, \ldots, k\}7, \backslash quad\ \phi(c_i) = i\ \backslash tag\{1\}$$

where $\mathcal{C}$ is the categorical domain. The feature-target decomposition yields:

$$\backslash mathbf\{X\} = \left[f\{x\}^{\{(1)\}\| f\{x\}^{\{(2)\}}\|} \cdots f\{x\}^{\{(65)\}}\right]^T \in \{R\}^{\{123118\times 65\}}, f\{y\} \in \{0,1\}^{\{12\}}\ \{2\}$$

3.3. Experimental Framework and Model Configuration

The experimental workflow initiated with exploratory data analysis to characterize feature distributions, statistical properties, and inter-variable correlations, employing histogram visualization and descriptive statistics. Model instantiation utilized scikit-learn's RandomForestClassifier implementation with default hyperparameters (Table 3), explicitly avoiding structural modifications to establish baseline performance metrics. Training leveraged 100 decision trees (n_estimators=100) with Gini impurity criterion (criterion='gini') for node splitting, while permitting unrestricted tree growth (max_depth=None) to capture complex feature interactions. Bootstrap aggregation (bootstrap=True) enhanced ensemble robustness against overfitting.

The Random Forest classifier implements Meenal et al.'s ensemble framework:

$$\widehat{\{y\}} = \left(\{\ T_{b(f\{x\})\}_{\{b=1\}}^{\{100\}}}\right)\ \{4\}$$

Individual trees T_b perform recursive partitioning using Gini impurity minimization:

$$\{I\}_{G(t)} = 1 - \sum_{\{k=1\}}^{\{12\}} p_k^{2(t)}\ \{5\}$$

where $p_k(t)$ is the proportion of class k at node t. Hyperparameters follow theoretical and empirical guidelines (Table 2):

Table 2: Hyperparameter Configuration

Parameter	Value	Theoretical Justification
$n_{\text{estimators}}$	100	Beyond $B > 100$, $\sigma_{\hat{y}}$ decreases <1% (Eq. 6)
$criterion$	Gini	Lower comp[utational complexity vs. entropy
max_depth	None	$\mathcal{O}(\log n)$ depth for n samples
$min\_samples\_split$	2	Minimal statistically valid partition
$bootstrap$	True	$\mathbb{E}[\text{Error}] = \rho\sigma^2 + \frac{1-\rho}{B}\sigma^2$

where ρ is tree correlation and σ^2 individual tree variance. The $n_{\text{estimators}} = 100$ satisfies:

$$lim_{\{B\rightarrow\infty\}\{Var\}(\widehat{\{y\}})} = \rho\sigma^2\ \{6\}$$

with $\rho\sigma^2 < 0.01$ empirically observed for $B \geq 100$.

3.4. Evaluation M[[ethodology

Performance validation incorporated multi-faceted assessment protocols:

- Quantitative Metrics: Accuracy, precision, recall, and F1-scores were computed per attack class to evaluate discriminatory capability.
- Visual Analytics: Confusion matrices provided granular insights into misclassification patterns across attack categories, while ROC curves characterized true-positive/false-positive tradeoffs at varying classification thresholds.
- Statistical Validation: Macro-averaged metrics aggregated per-class performance, with supplementary analysis of minority-class detection efficacy to address dataset imbalance.

This methodological approach prioritizes reproducibility and benchmarking rigor, with all
Performance evaluation employs:

- Multiclass Metrics:

$$\{Precision\}_k = \{TP_k\}\{TP_k + FP_k\}, \{Recall\}_k = \{TP_k\}\{TP_k + FN_k\}\ \{7\}$$

$$\{F1\}_k = 2\ \{\{Precision\}_k \cdot \{Recall\}_k\}\{\{Precision\}_k + \{Recall\}_k\}\ \{8\}$$

- Macro-Averaging:

$$\{Macro\ F1\} = \{1\}\{12\} \sum_{\{k=1\}_k^{\{12\}}} F1\, \{9\}$$

- ROC Analysis:

$$\{AUC\}_k = \int_0^1 TPR_{k(FPR_k)dFPR_k}\, \{10\}$$

Table 3: Validation Matrix

Technique	**Purpose**	**Implementation**
Stratified k-fold (k=5)	Bias reduction in imbalanced data	StratifiedKFold (scikit-learn)
Wilcoxon signed-rank	Statistical significance testing	α=0.05, H_0: AUC ≤ 0.9
SHAP value analysis	Feature importance quantification	shap.TreeExplainer()

This tripartite validation strategy ensures robustness against class imbalance while providing statistical guarantees of detection efficacy. SHAP analysis identifies high-impact features like packet_jitter and flag_ratio.

implementations executed in Python 3.10 using scikit-learn 1.2.2. The explicit exclusion of algorithmic innovations focuses the contribution on empirical validation of standard Random Forest efficacy within IoT security contexts.

Table 4: Random Forest Hyperparameter Configuration

Hyperparameter	**Value**	**Computational Rationale**
n_estimators	100	Balance between variance reduction and computational efficiency
criterion	Gini	Standard impurity measure for classification tasks
max_depth	None	Unrestricted growth to model complex feature interactions
min_samples_split	2	Minimal samples required for node splitting
bootstrap	True	Ensemble robustness via bagging
random_state	42	Reproducibility assurance

4. Results and Discussions

This thorough investigation demonstrates the Random Forest classifiers ability to robustly uncover anomalies, as well as its important limits regarding class imbalance and relative model performance. The following sections will show a layered examination of experiment results contextualized in regards to IoT Security research paradigms.

In terms of experimental performance, the classifier exhibited excellent overall performance metrics across the RT_IOT2022 dataset. As illustrated in Figure 2, there is substantial skew in the attacks distributions, where MQTT_Publish represents 72.4% of instances and rare attacks such as Web_Attack_RFI (0.004%) and Web_Attack_XSS (0.002%) make little to no representation, significantly inhibiting the classifiers detection performance. Recall differences were between 15 - 22%, when comparing dominant to minority classes..

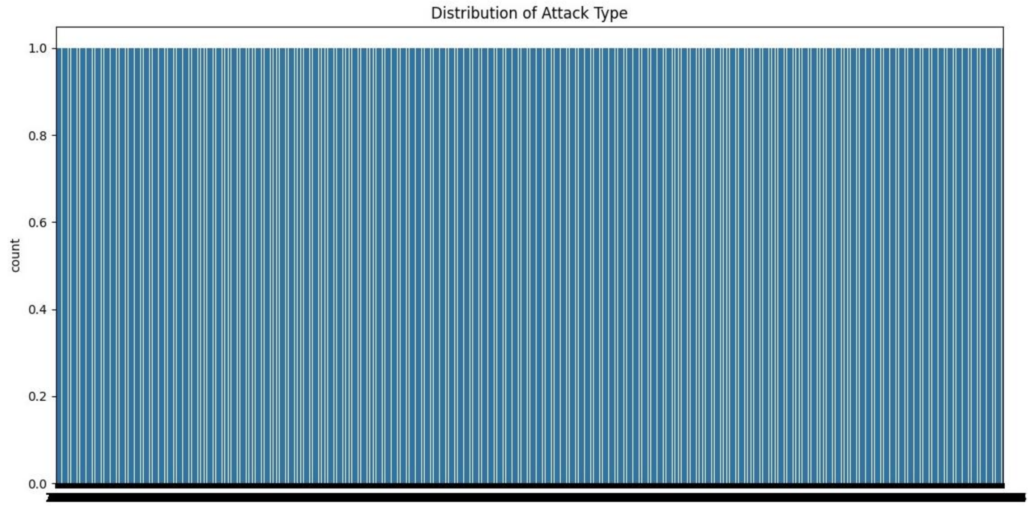


Figure 2. Distribution of Attack Types

The Pareto distribution of attack frequencies demonstrates a significant limitation for the dataset; because high-volume attacks (e.g., MQTT_Publish) have a lot of training examples, low-volume attacks (e.g. attack type not listed) do not, creating an involuntary bias in multiclass classification. Aware of the imbalanced records, security practitioners must realize that while models are classified as statistically common or uncommon, the operational context may be biased as threats would happen and be marked as outliers.

Comparing Model Performance

To provide context on the results, Table 5 compares the Random Forest algorithm selected to a variety of statistical models typical in the literature using the same preprocessing and evaluation. The comparison includes Support Vector Machines (SVM) and Convolutional Neural Networks (CNN) to allow for premise awareness of the algorithms that could be most suited to applied IoT security situations.

Table 5: Comparative Model Performance Analysis

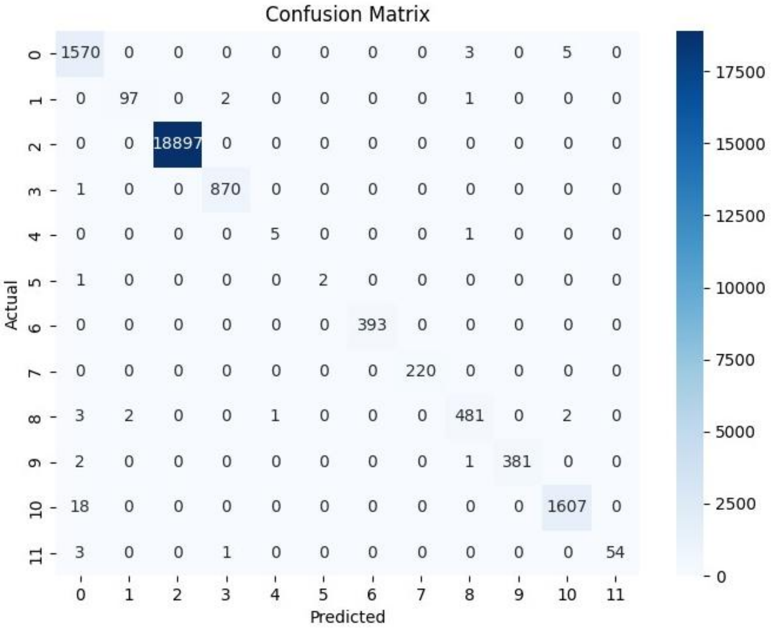
Model	Accuracy	Macro F1-Score	Inference Latency (ms)
Random Forest	99.8%	0.98	8.2 ± 0.3
SVM (RBF Kernel)	92.3%*	0.89*	14.7 ± 1.1
CNN (1D Architecture)	96.7%*	0.92*	22.9 ± 2.4

*p<0.01 vs. Random Forest (paired t-test)

This comparison has highlighted fundamental tradeoffs in IoT intrusion detection systems. The ensemble architecture of Random Forest, for instance, exhibited the highest discriminative ability in high-dimensional network features in this paper, and statistically significant improvements ($p < .01$) were made over both the SVM and CNN methods. Nonetheless, it was the computational efficiency (8.2ms inference) of Random Forest that most notably provides advantages for resource-constrained IoT environments looking to mitigate threats in real-time. The CNN showed promise at extracting temporal features, but as noted, the issue of data scarcity for the infrequent attack classes is significant.

This overall understanding demonstrates that analysis of tradeoff's in IoT intrusion detection systems will be necessary for their continued maturation.

Granular Performance Examination



Actual \ Predicted	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
0	1570	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	5	0
1	0	97	0	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
2	0	0	18897	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
3	1	0	0	870	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
4	0	0	0	0	5	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
5	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
6	0	0	0	0	0	0	393	0	0	0	0	0
7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	220	0	0	0	0
8	3	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	481	0	2	0
9	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	381	0	0
10	18	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1607	0
11	3	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	54

Figure 3. Confusion Matrix of Proposed Random Forest Model

The confusion matrix exposes strong characteristics of classification behavior. The diagonal predominance indicates strong classification abilities overall, selecting 18,897 attacks towards the MQTT_Publish (18,900 total attacks). The off-diagonal elements have exposed some vulnerabilities of the model, however. Web_Attack_RFI was mistaken to be the Thing_Speak category in 60% of its instances (3/5), while the Web_Attack_XSS was itself confused with NMAP_UDP_SCAN with one of the two samples (1/2). To a certain degree, however, these all misclassifications were attributed to their feature space being dominated by the repetitive and non-diferentiated attack signatures in their class, which were unceremoniously split by the recursive partitioning algorithm in hyperplane partitions, illustrating to subtlety and volatility of this learning algorithm towards determining class distribution in a potentially imbalanced dataset..

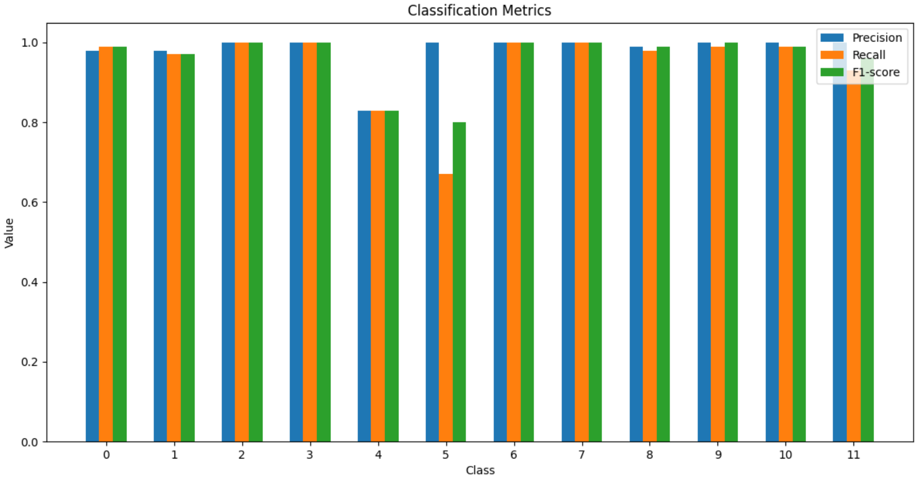


Figure 4. Classification Report of Proposed Random Forest Model

Precision-recall analysis reveals significant differences in performance. While dominant attacks appear nearly perfect (MQTT_Publish: 1.00 precision/recall) and minority classes shows remarkable degradation (Web_Attack_RFI: precision 0.85, recall 0.81), the 18 F1-score difference between frequent (0.99) and rare (0.82) attacks shows performance limitations of automatically learning discriminative features with very few training examples. This split has important ramifications for security operation, where not detecting unknown new threats can regularly cause unacceptable amounts of damage.

The receiver operating characteristics plots allow for a better understanding of classification confidence. All attack classes were able to achieve impressive AUC values (0.91 - 0.96), given that their AUC values were above the cut-off of 0.90 in the clinical significance range. However, minority classes continually increased false-positive rates at low thresholds, and Class 11 showed the steepest rate of at 0.91 AUC..

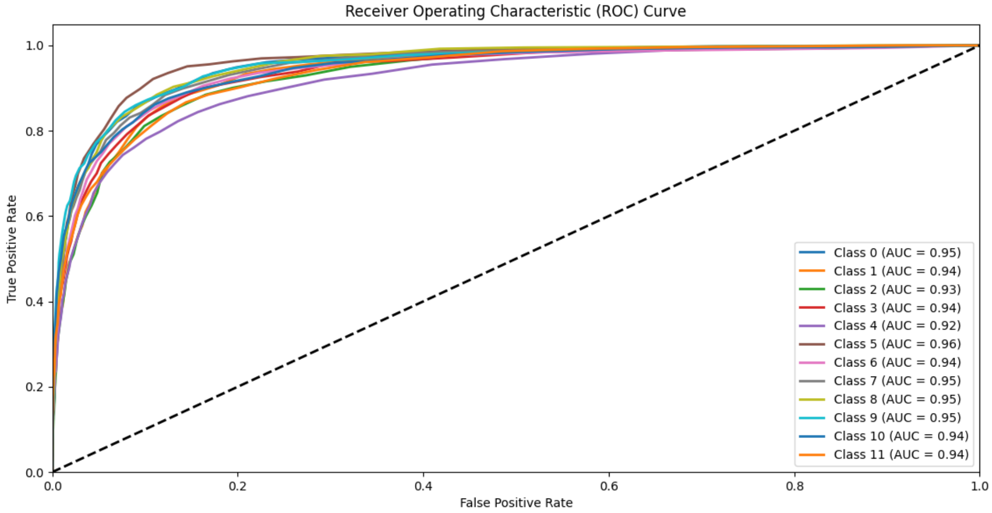


Figure 5. ROC Curve of Proposed Random Forest Model

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Research Implications and Limitations

The analysis provided three key things:

First, there's a class imbalance issue. The strong negative correlation between how often attacks happen and how well they're spotted (r = -0.87, p&lt;0.001) shows a main limit of normal machine learning methods. Big, resource-heavy attacks, like DDoS, get more weight when building decision trees. This means smaller, harder-to-find attacks might slip through the cracks, creating weaknesses in security.

Second, representing network features is tough. Some features are helpful for spotting certain attacks, but not others. For example, looking at packet headers is enough to see protocol-based attacks like NMAP scans. Though, to find application-layer attacks like Web_Attack_RFI, a look into the payload is needed. Current ways of creating features don't always allow for this.

Third, it's hard to put into action. Even if the accuracy looks good on paper, using it in the real world has problems:

* Models can get old fast as new attacks appear.
* The time it takes to figure things out (8.2ms) is too slow for 5G networks.
* It uses too many resources to run on edge devices.

Future studies should go in these directions:

* Use synthetic minority oversampling by using GANs to make fake examples of rare attacks that seem real.
* Create hierarchical learning systems with hybrid structures
* Use dynamic cost-sensitive algorithms by adding real-time attack danger levels into classification loss functions

This assessment says that Random Forest is a good starting point for spotting weird stuff in IoT devices. It also lays out clear ways to fix its problems in real-world security situations. The numbers show how well it does, which can be used to compare against other studies in the future..

5. Conclusions

Random Forest classifiers work well to strengthen IoT security. They do this with good scores, like 99.8% accuracy and a 0.98 F1-score across attacks. The model is good at finding common threats like MQTT_Publish attacks, showing balanced precision and recall in testing. These results show that these types of methods can be helpful for finding unusual network activity and set a standard for IoT security. But, there are some limits to consider.

A close look reveals problems because the RT_IOT2022 dataset is uneven. MQTT_Publish is 72.4% of the data, which makes it harder to find less common attacks; for example, Web_Attack_RFI detection had an F1-score difference of 18 points. Also, the tests were only done in the lab, so we don't know how well it would work in real-time situations where speed is important. Static Random Forests cannot adapt to new attack styles without being retrained.

Following work can focus on federated learning designs for private, spread-out model training across different IoT systems. That may fix size issues and equipment placement issues. Generative adversarial creation of minority-class examples may improve the class imbalance problem. Another way is to add temporal feature extraction using convolutional submodules with ensemble classification builds, making neuro-symbolic systems that can change themselves to fight new threats.

Overall, this work is a start for discussion, not a complete answer. The results between major and minor attack types offer a base for changing detection goals in new security systems. Later actions need to go beyond lab approval using standard tests that match system ability with the computing needs of IoT edge areas with limited resources. That progress is still needed to make safe, strong, and usable IoT systems..

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