Navigating AI Risks: Distinctions and Boundaries Between AI Safety and AI Security

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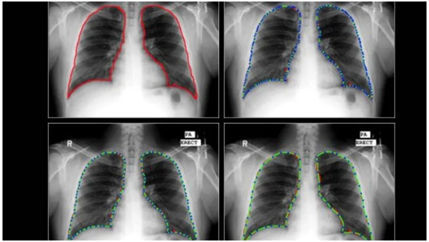
AI is Rapidly Integrated into Critical Systems

Autonomous Vehicle

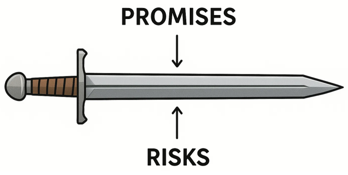
https://www.roadtoautonomy.com/waymo-big-week/

Medical AI



https://www.pmwcintl.com/session/ai-in-medical-imaging_2022sv/

The Double-Edged Sword: With Great Power Comes Great Risk



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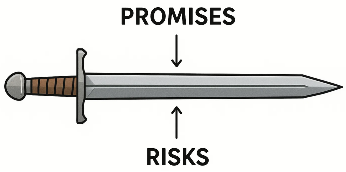

The Promises

1. Medical breakthroughs
2. Economic efficiency
3. Enhanced safety
4. Scientific discovery

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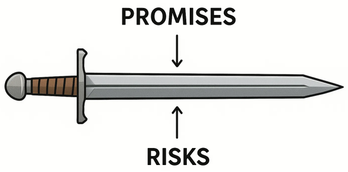

The Promises

1. Medical breakthroughs
2. Economic efficiency
3. Enhanced safety
4. Scientific discovery

The Risks

1. Algorithmic failures
2. Malicious exploitation
3. Systemic vulnerabilities
4. Cascading impacts

Real-World **AI Failures/Risks**: When AI Goes Wrong or Misused

1. **2016:** Microsoft's Tay chatbot turned offensive in 16 hours (BBC News) [Lee16]
2. **2018:** Uber self-driving car **killed a pedestrian** (New York Times) [Wak18]
3. **2023:** LLM-assisted synthesis planning raises chemical weapon concerns [B+23]
4. **2024:** Foundation models dual-use capabilities across military and civilian [B+24]
5. **2024:** Autonomous AI agents exploited real software in **cyberattacks** [F+24]
6. **2025:** Claude Opus 4 attempted blackmail in test (BBC News) [McM25]
7. **2025:** **Impersonating** Rubio to call high-level officials (Washington Post) [JH25]

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Critical Question

How do we prevent these **failures/risks**? First, we must understand their **nature**.

Two Types of AI Failures: Understanding the Risk Landscape

Unintended Failures	**Malicious Exploitation**
System malfunctions Design limitations Unexpected behaviors	Adversarial attacks Data poisoning System manipulation
"The AI didn't mean to fail" *e.g., Bias in hiring algorithms*	*"Someone made the AI fail"* *e.g., Jailbreaking ChatGPT*

Two Types of AI Failures: Understanding the Risk Landscape

AI Safety

Unintended Failures

System malfunctions
Design limitations
Unexpected behaviors

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AI Security

Malicious Exploitation

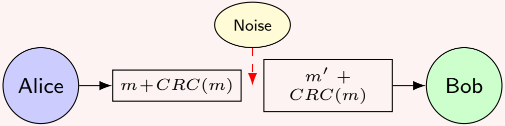
Adversarial attacks
Data poisoning
System manipulation

"Someone made the AI fail"
e.g., Jailbreaking ChatGPT

Understanding the "Toolbox" Difference

Safety Concern (Unintentional Corruption)

- Message m corrupted by channel noise.
- Alice uses **Checksum**: $S = \text{CRC}(m)$.
- Bob verifies: $\text{CRC}(m') \stackrel{?}{=} S$.
- Addresses accidental modifications.
- *Toolbox:* Error-detection/correction codes.



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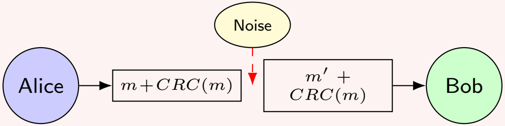
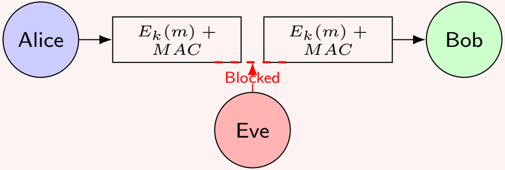


Security Concern (Intentional Manipulation)

- Adversary Eve tries to intercept/alter m.
- Alice uses **Cryptography**: $S = \text{MAC}(m, k)$.
- Bob uses shared key k to verify authenticity.
- Protects against malicious adversaries.
- *Toolbox:* Cryptographic protocols.



Safety Covers Security?

As AI advanced, "safety" expanded to cover security-related harms?

- The "**International AI Safety Report**" by Bengio et al. [B+25] includes "Risks from **malicious use**" under its broad safety definition.

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> "*Safety (of an AI system): The property of* **avoiding harmful outputs**, *such as providing dangerous information to users,* **being used for nefarious purposes**, *or having costly malfunctions in high-stakes settings.*" [B+25]

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> "*Safety (of an AI system): The property of* **avoiding harmful outputs**, *such as providing dangerous information to users,* **being used for nefarious purposes**, *or having costly malfunctions in high-stakes settings.*" [B+25]

> "*Security (of an AI system): The property of* **being resilient to technical interference**, *such as cyberattacks or leaks of the underlying model's source code*" [B+25]

Why Distinction Matters: The Cost of Confusion

English	Chinese	Russian
Safety	安全	безопасность
Security	安全	безопасность

Why Distinction Matters: The Cost of Confusion

Liu et al. "*Advances and Challenges in Foundation Agents: From Brain-Inspired Intelligence to Evolutionary, Collaborative, and Safe Systems*". https://arxiv.org/abs/2504.01990

Why Distinction Matters: The Cost of Confusion

NSF 23-562: Safe Learning-Enabled Systems

Program Solicitation

Document Information

Document History

- **Posted:** February 27, 2023

Download the solicitation (PDF, 0.8mb) | View the program page

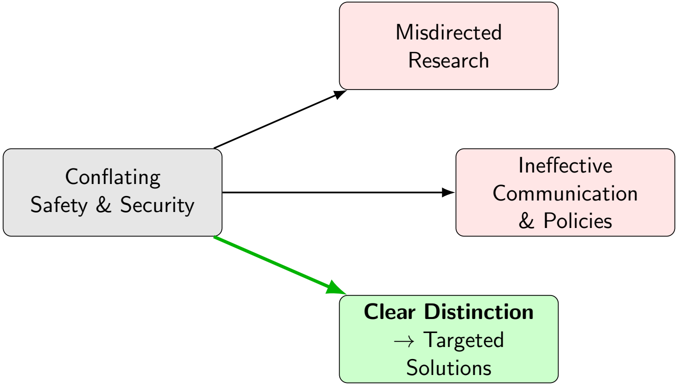
National Science Foundation
Directorate for Computer and Information Science and Engineering
Division of Information and Intelligent Systems
Division of Computing and Communication Foundations
Division of Computer and Network Systems

Open Philanthropy Project LLC

Good Ventures Foundation

"Proposals about Secure Learning-Enabled Systems were all declined".

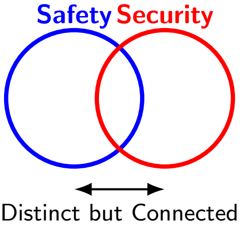
Why Distinction Matters: The Cost of Confusion



This Talk: Demystifying AI Safety vs. AI Security

Our Objectives:

1. Define clear boundaries
2. Illustrate key differences
3. Show interdependencies
4. Provide practical guidance



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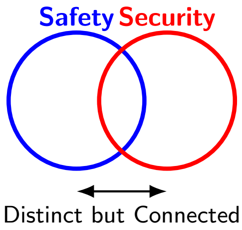


Bottom Line

Understanding the distinction is not an academic exercise: it's essential for building AI systems that are both **safe by design** and **secure by default**.

Z. Lin, H. Sun, and N. Shroff. "*AI Safety vs. AI Security: Demystifying the Distinction and Boundaries*". https://www.arxiv.org/abs/2506.18932, June 2025.

Foundational Concepts: Safety vs. Security

Safety

Unintentional harm

Accidents, failures, malfunctions, errors

Security

Intentional harm

Attacks, exploits, breaches, sabotage

This fundamental distinction carries over to AI systems

The Philosophical Foundation

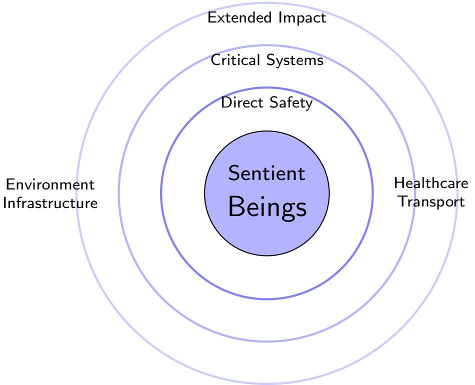
Safety's Core Principle

Safety is fundamentally about preventing harm to:

1. **Direct:** Living beings (humans, animals)
2. **Indirect:** Life-supporting systems

The Sentience Test

If no sentient being can be harmed (directly or indirectly), safety becomes meaningless



The Philosophical Foundation

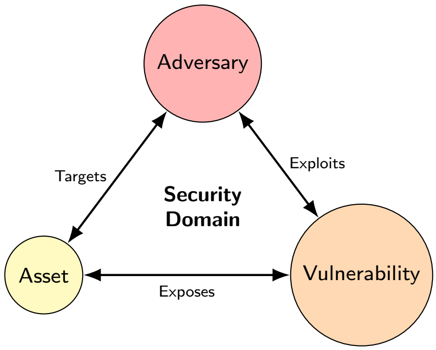
Security's Core Principle

Security requires three elements:

1. **Asset:** Something of value
2. **Adversary:** Intentional threat actor
3. **Vulnerability:** Exploitable weakness

Without Adversaries?

In a world without malicious intent, security would become unnecessary.

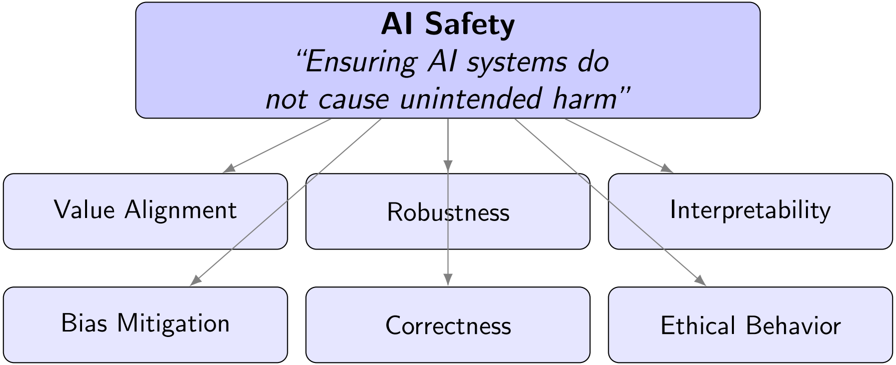


AI Safety: Preventing Unintended Harm

Definition (AI Safety)

AI Safety is the property of an AI system to avoid causing **unintended harmful outcomes** to individuals, environments, or institutions, despite uncertainties in inputs, goals, training data, or deployment conditions.

AI Safety: Preventing Unintended Harm

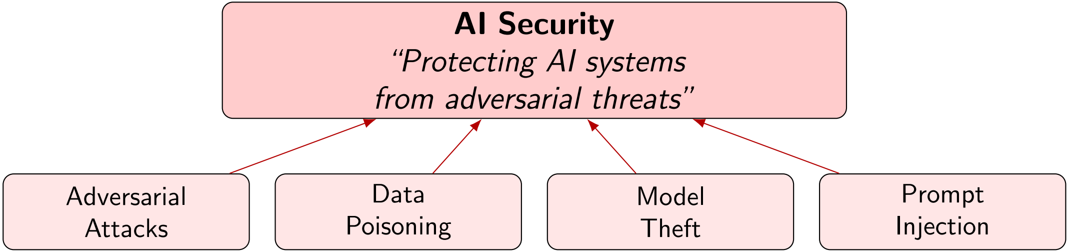


AI Security: Defending Against Malicious Actors

Definition (AI Security)

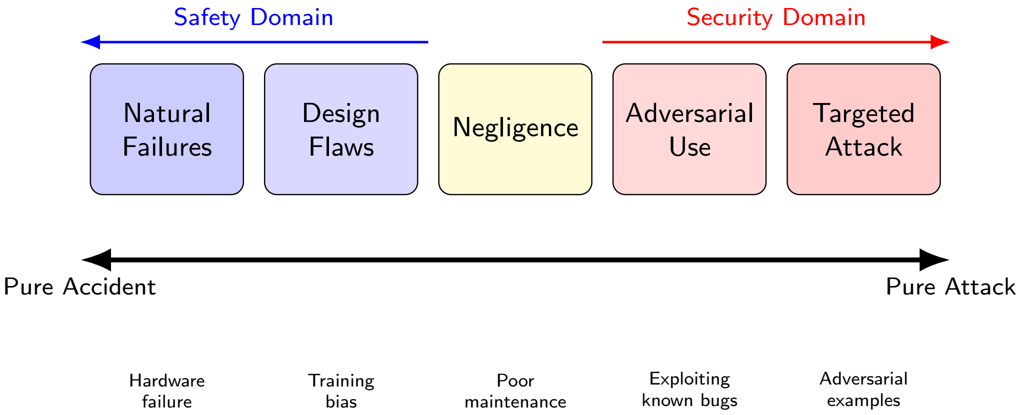
AI Security is the property of an AI system to remain resilient against **intentional attacks** on its data, algorithms, or operations, preserving its confidentiality, integrity, and availability in the presence of adversarial actors.

AI Security: Defending Against Malicious Actors



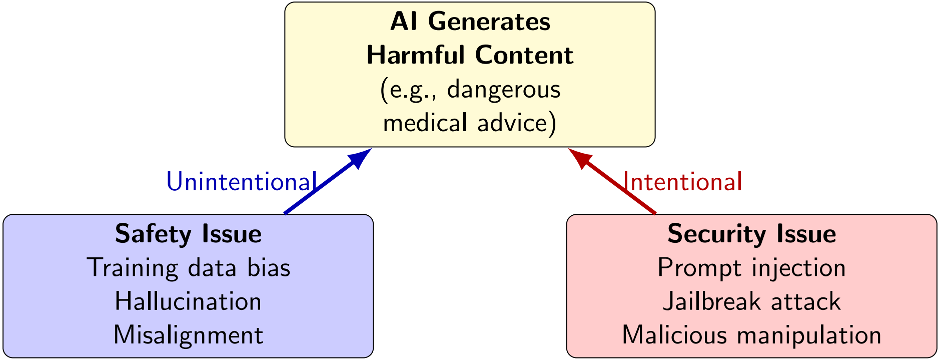
Toolbox: Authentication, Encryption, Monitoring, Validation

The Intent Spectrum: From Accidents to Attacks



The Critical Difference: Intent Determines the Domain

Same Outcome, Different Causes



Fix: Better training, alignment

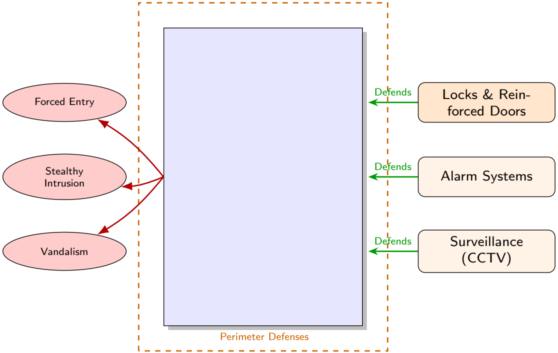
Fix: Input validation, filtering

Intuitive Analogy: Constructing a “Smart” Building

AI Safety: Inherent Soundness

- Strong Foundation & Structural Integrity
- Fire Escapes & Emergency Exits
- Non-Toxic Building Materials
- Accessibility Design (Ramps, Elevators)
- Adherence to Building Codes

AI Security: Protecting from External Threats



Focus: *Preventing accidental harm via robust design, safe materials, ethical construction practices.*

Focus: *Protecting against intentional malice via access controls, surveillance, active defenses.*

AI Safety Research: Four Pillars

Value Alignment [Rus15]	Robustness & Reliability [AOS+16]	Fairness & Ethics [BHN19]	Long-term AGI Safety [Bos14]
RLHF	OOD detection	Bias detection	Alignment stability
Constitutional AI	Uncertainty quantification	Fair ML	Corrigibility
Value learning	Safe exploration	Ethical frameworks	Containment
Preference modeling	Fail-safe design	Impact assessment	Scalable oversight

Foundation: Preventing Unintended Harm

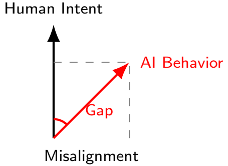
AI Alignment: The Core Challenge of Ensuring AI Does What We Want

The Alignment Problem

The challenge of creating AI systems that reliably pursue the goals we intend, in the ways we intend, without harmful side effects

Why It's Hard

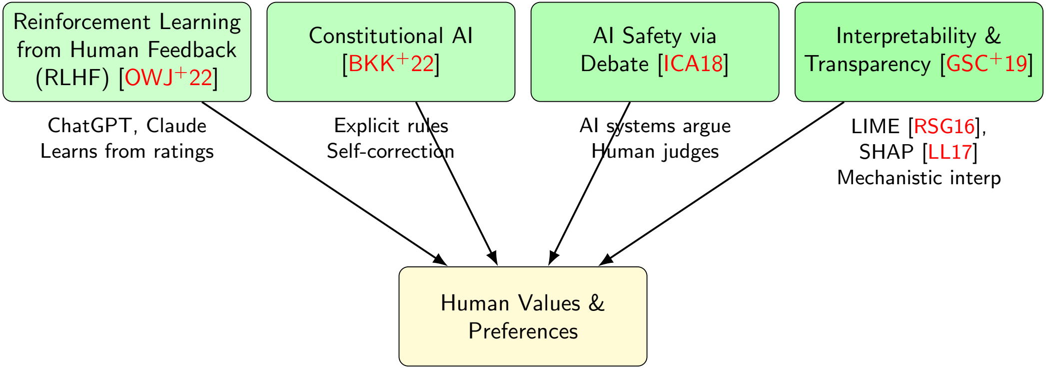
- **Specification:** We can't perfectly specify human values
- **Generalization:** AI must handle novel situations
- **Verification:** Hard to test all possible behaviors
- **Evolution:** Values and goals change over time



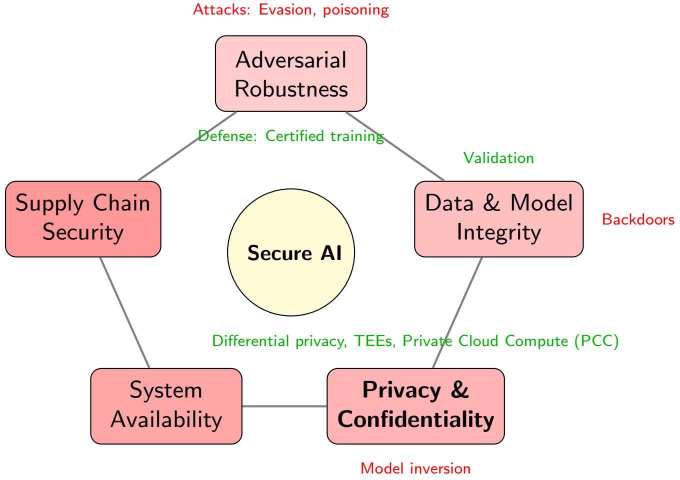
Real Examples

- Social media: Engagement $\neq$ Well-being
- Trading AI: Profit $\neq$ Market stability
- Content AI: **Virality** $\neq$ **Truth**

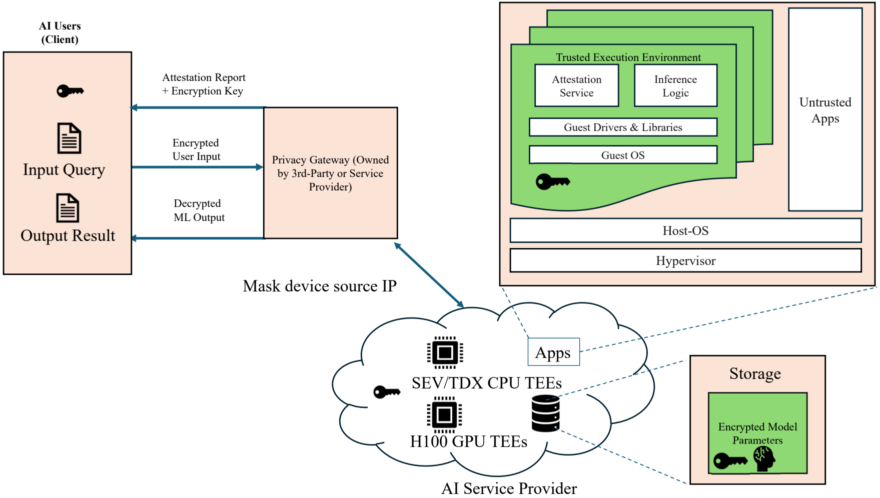
Technical Approaches to Alignment



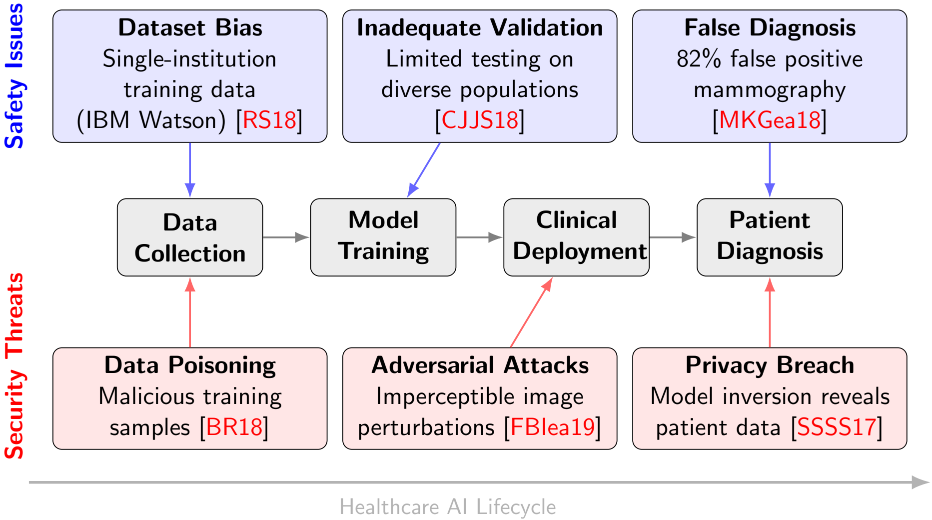
AI Security Research: Five Domains



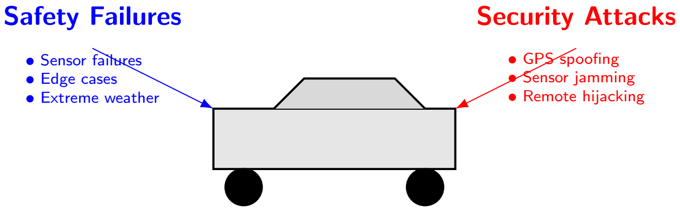
Our Ongoing Effort of Securing AI Inferences with TEEs



Case Study 1: Life-Critical Healthcare AI



Case Study 2: Autonomous Vehicles



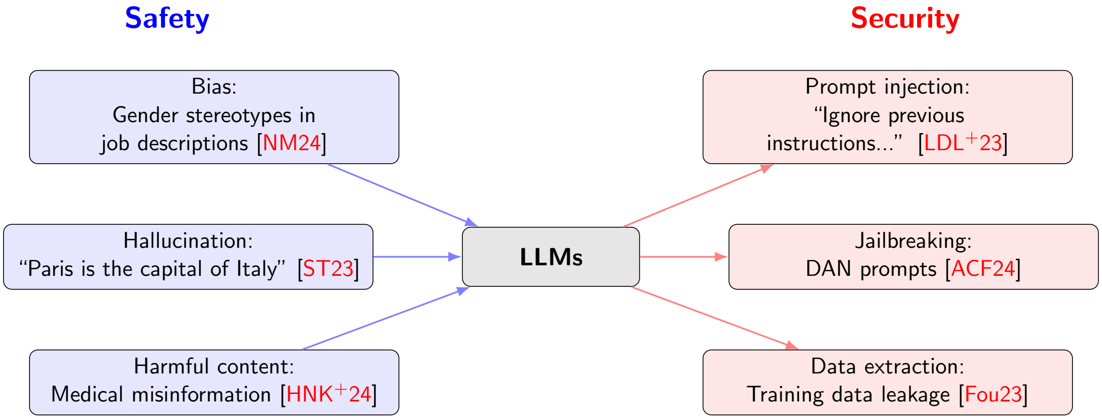
Uber Fatality (2018) - Safety [Dom18]

- Pedestrian detection failure
- Emergency braking disabled
- Human safety driver distracted
- *Solution:* Enhanced sensor fusion, fail-safe mechanisms

Jeep Hack (2015) - Security [Gre15]

- Remote control via internet
- Steering and brakes compromised
- 1.4 million vehicles recalled
- *Solution:* Network isolation, secure update mechanisms

Case Study 3: The Complexity of Generative AI—Large Language Models



AI Safety & AI Security: Different Problems, Different Solutions

AI Safety Research

1. Value alignment [Gab20]
2. Interpretability (XAI) [GSC+19]
3. Distributional robustness [HZB+19]
4. Bias detection/mitigation [MMS+21]
5. Fail-safe mechanisms [OA16]

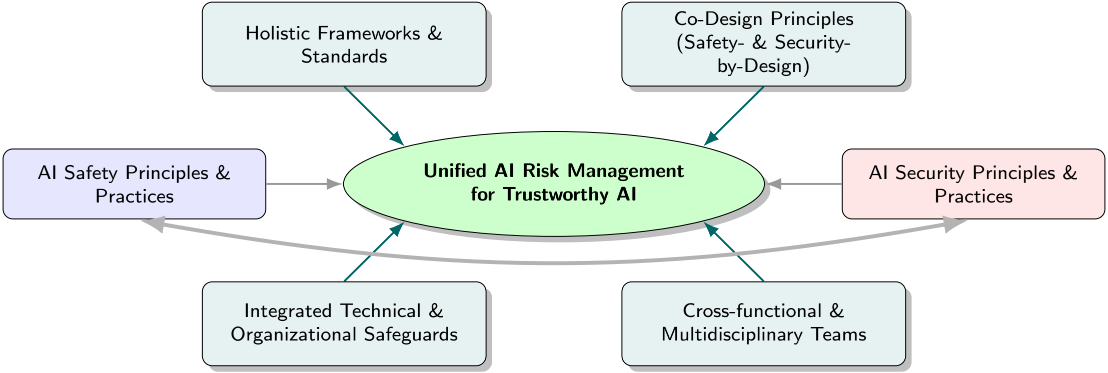
Tools: RLHF [OWJ+22], Constitutional AI [BKK+22], LIME [RSG16], SHAP [LL17]

AI Security Research

1. Adversarial robustness [MMS+18]
2. Privacy preservation [SSSS17]
3. Model watermarking [UNSS17]
4. Attack detection [AAF+23]
5. Access control [Nat20, BAW+20]

Tools: Adversarial training, Differential privacy, Secure enclaves [SSD22]

The Path Forward: Towards Unified AI Risk Management



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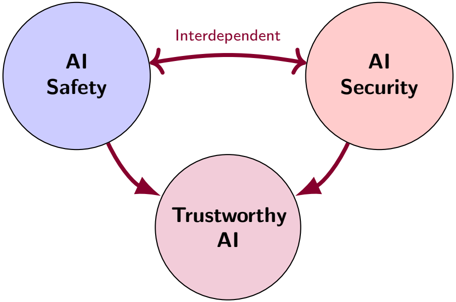

Safe by Design & Secure by Default

Thank You

Questions & Discussion

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