

# Secure Operating Systems

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Australian Research Council

## NICTA Members



Department of State and  
Regional Development



The University of Sydney



## NICTA Partners

- **Operating systems security overview**
- Security policies
- OS security verification
- Security mechanisms
- Design principles
- OS design for security

- Provides for secure execution of applications
- Must provide security policies that support the users' security requirements
- Must enforce those security policies
- Must be safe from tampering etc.

- *Security policy*
  - specifies *allowed* and *disallowed states* of a system
  - OS needs to ensure that no disallowed state is ever entered
  - OS *mechanisms* prevent transitions from allowed to disallowed states
- Security policy needs to identify the *assets* to be secured
  - for computer security, assets are typically data
- Perfect security is generally unachievable
  - need to be aware of *threats*
  - need to understand what *risks* can be tolerated

Three aspects:

- **Confidentiality:** prevent *theft* of data
  - concealing data from unauthorised agents
  - need-to-know principle
- **Integrity:** prevent *damage* of data
  - trustworthiness of data: data *correctness*
  - trustworthiness of origin of data: *authentication*
- **Availability:** prevent *denial* of service
  - ensuring data is usable when needed

- Partitions system into allowed and disallowed states
- Ideally mathematical model
- In practice, usually natural-language description
  - often imprecise, ambiguous, inconsistent, unenforceable
  - Example: transactions over \$10k require manager approval
    - but transferring \$10k into own account is no violation

- Used to enforce security policy
  - computer access control (login authentication)
  - operating system file access control system
  - controls implemented in tools
- Example:
  - Policy: only accountant can access financial system
  - Mechanism: on un-networked computer in locked room with only one key
- A secure system provides mechanisms that ensure that violations are
  - prevented
  - detected
  - recovered from

- Systems always have *trusted entities*
  - hardware, operating system, sysadmin
- Totally of trusted entities is the *trusted computing base* (TCB)
  - the part of the system that can circumvent security
- Assumed to be *trustworthy*
  - is it???



TCB: *The totality of protection mechanisms within a computer system — including hardware, firmware and software — the combination of which is responsible for enforcing a security policy.* [RFC 2828]

A TCB consists of one or more components that together enforce a unified security policy over a product or system.

The ability of the TCB to correctly enforce a security policy depends solely on the mechanisms within the TCB and on the correct inputs by system administrative personnel or parameters related to the security policy.

- Information flow that is not controlled by a security mechanism
  - security requires *absence of covert channels*
- Two types of covert channels
  - covert *storage* channel uses an attribute of a shared resource
    - typically meta data, like existence or accessibility of an object
    - global names create covert storage channels
    - in principle subject to access control
    - a sound access-control system should be *free* of covert channels
  - covert *timing* channel uses temporal order of accesses to shared resource
    - outside access-control system
    - difficult to reason about
    - difficult to prevent

# Covert Timing Channels

- Created via shared resource whose behaviour can be monitored
  - network bandwidth
  - CPU load
  - response time
  - locks
- Requires access to a time source
  - real-time clock
  - anything else that allows unrelated processes to synchronise
  - preventable by perfect virtualisation?
- Critical issue is bandwidth
  - in practice the damage is limited if the bandwidth is low
    - e.g. DRM doesn't care about low-bandwidth channels
  - beware of amplification
    - e.g. leaking of passwords

# Establishing Trustworthiness

- Process to show TCB is trustworthy
- Two approaches:
  - Assurance (systematic evaluation and testing)
  - Formal verification (mathematical proof)
- Certification confirms process was successfully concluded

- Process for *bolstering* (substantiating or specifying) trust
  - Specifications
    - unambiguous description of system behaviour
    - can be formal (mathematical model) or informal
  - Design
    - justification that it meets specification
    - mathematical translation of specification or compelling argument
  - Implementation
    - justification that it is consistent with the design
    - mathematical proof or rigorous testing
    - by implication must also satisfy specification
  - Operation and maintenance
    - justification that system is used as per assumptions in specification
- Assurance does not *guarantee* correctness or security!

US Department of Defence “*Orange Book*” [DoD 86]:

- Defines security classes
  - D: minimal protection
  - C1–2: discretionary access control (DAC)
  - B1–B3: mandatory access control (MAC)
  - A1: verified design
- Designed for military use
- Systems can be certified to a certain class
  - very costly, hence only available for big companies
  - most systems only certified C2 (essentially Unix-style security)
- Superseded by Common Criteria

# Assurance: Common Criteria

## *Common Criteria for IT Security Evaluation* [ISO/IEC 15408]:

- ISO standard, developed out of Orange Book and other approaches
  - US, Canada, UK, Germany, France, Netherlands
  - for general use (not just military, not just operating systems)
- Unlike Orange Book, doesn't prescribe specific security requirements
  - evaluates quality assurance used to ensure requirements are met
- *Target of evaluation* (TOE) evaluated against *security target* (ST)
  - ST is statement of desired security properties
  - based on *protection profiles* (PPs) — generic sets of requirements
    - defined by “users” (typically governments)
- Seven *evaluation assurance levels* (EALs)
  - higher levels imply more thorough evaluation (and higher cost)
  - *not* necessarily better security
- Details later

- Process of mathematical proof of security properties
- Based on a mathematical *model* of the system
- Two parts:
  - proof that *model satisfies security requirements*
    - generally difficult, except for very simple models
  - proof that *code implements model*
    - proving theorems showing correspondence
    - even harder, feasible only for few 1000 LOC
    - hardly ever done
- Note: *model checking* (static analysis) is not sufficient
  - shows presence or absence of certain properties of code
    - uninitialised variables, array-bounds, null-pointer de-ref.
  - does not prove implementation correctness



- Computer security is complex
  - depends on many aspects of computer system
- Policy defines security, mechanisms enforce security
- Important to consider:
  - what are the assumptions about threats and trustworthiness?
  - incorrect assumptions  $\Rightarrow$  no security
- Security is never absolute
  - given enough resources, mechanisms can be defeated
  - important to understand limitations
  - inherent tradeoffs between security and usability
- Human factors are important
  - people make mistakes
  - people may not understand security impact of actions
  - people may be less trustworthy than thought

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# Security Policies: Categories

- *Discretionary* (user-controlled) policies (DAC)
  - e.g. A can read B's objects only with A's permission
  - user decides about access (at their discretion)
  - classical example: Unix permissions
- *Mandatory* (system-controlled) policies (MAC)
  - e.g. certain users cannot ever access certain objects
  - no user can change these
  - focus on restricting *information flow*
- *Role-based* policies (RBAC)
  - agents can take on specific pre-defined roles
    - well-defined set of roles for each agent
    - eg normal user, sysadmin, database admin
  - access rights depend on role

# Security Policy Models

- Represent a whole class of security policies
- Most system-wide policies focus on confidentiality
  - e.g. military-style multi-level security models
  - classical example is *Bell-LaPadula* model [BL76]
  - most others developed from this
  - Orange Book based on this model
- Other models
  - *Chinese-wall* policy focusses on conflict of interest
  - *Clark-Wilson* model focusses on separation of duty

# Bell-LaPadula Model

- Each object  $a$  has a security *classification*  $L(a)$
- Each agent  $o$  has a security *clearance*  $L(o)$
- Classifications and clearances form hierarchical *security levels*
  - e.g. top secret > secret > confidential > unclassified
- Rule 1 (*no read up*):
  - $a$  can *read*  $o$  only if  $L(a) \geq L(o)$
  - standard confidentiality
- Rule 2 (*★ Property — no write down*)
  - $a$  can *write*  $o$  only if  $L(a) \leq L(o)$
  - prevents *leakage* (accidental or by conspiracy)
  - problems:
    - logging
    - command chain
  - need way to *de-classify* data

# Bell-LaPadula Extensions

- Can combine with discretionary access rights
  - read/write permissions on specific objects
  - e.g. SELinux
- Can add orthogonal security categories indicating types of data
  - restrict access to relevant categories
  - Denning's *lattice model* [Den76]

- Employed by investment banks to manage conflict of interest
- Idea: Consultant cannot talk to clients' competitors
  - single consultant can have multiple concurrent clients
- Define *conflict classes* (groups of potentially competing clients)
  - eg banks, oil companies, insurance companies, OS vendors
- Consultant dealing with client of class  $A$  cannot talk to others in  $A$ 
  - but can continue talking to members of other classes
  - some data belongs to several conflict classes
- Public information is not restricted
  - consultant can read and write public info at any time
  - but must observe  $\star$  property (cannot publish confidential info)
- Example of a *dynamic MAC policy*
  - allowed information flow changes over time
  - needs a rule for removing conflicts (after deal is done)

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# Common Criteria Protection Profiles

- Controlled Access Protection Profile (CAPP)
  - standard OS security, derived from Orange Book C2
  - certified up to level EAL3
- Single-level Operating System Protection Profile
  - superset of CAPP
  - certified up to EAL4+
- Labeled Security Protection Profile (LSPP)
  - mandatory access control for COTS OSeS
  - similar to Orange Book B1
- Role-based Access Control Protection Profile
- Multi-level Operating System Protection Profile
  - superset of CAPP, LSPP
  - certified up to EAL4+
- Separation Kernel Protection Profile (SKPP)
  - strict partitioning
  - certifications aiming for EAL6+

# Common Criteria Assurance Levels

- EAL1: functionally tested
  - simple to do, can be done without help from developer
- EAL2: structurally tested
  - functional and interface spec
  - black- and white-box testing
  - vulnerability analysis
- EAL3: methodically tested and checked
  - improved test coverage
  - procedures to avoid tampering during development
  - highest assurance level achieved for Mac OS X

# Common Criteria Assurance Levels

- EAL4: methodically designed, tested and reviewed
  - design docs used for testing, avoid tampering during delivery
  - independent vulnerability analysis
  - highest level feasible on existing product (not developed for CC certific.)
  - achieved by main-stream Oses
    - Windows 2000: EAL4 in 2003
    - SuSe Enterprise Linux: EAL4 in 2005
    - Solaris-10 EAL4+ in 2006
      - controlled access protection profile (CAPP)
      - role-based access control PP
    - RedHat Linux EAL4+ in 2007
  - they still get broken!
    - certification is based on assumptions about environment, etc...
    - most use is outside those assumptions
      - certification means nothing in such a case
      - presumably there were no compromises were assumptions held

# Common Criteria Assurance Levels

- EAL5: semiformally designed and tested
  - formal model of TEO security policy
  - semi-formal model of functional spec & high-level design
  - semi-formal argument about correspondence
  - covert-channel analysis
  - IBM z-Series hypervisor EAL5 in 2003 (partitioning)
  - attempted by Mandrake for Linux with French Government support
- EAL6: semiformally verified design and tested
  - semiformal low-level design
  - structured representation of implementation
  - modular and layered TOE design
  - independent vulnerability analysis
  - systematic covert-channel identification
  - Green Hills Integrity microkernel presently undergoing EAL6+ certification
    - separation kernel protection profile

- EAL7: formally verified design and tested
  - formal functional spec and high-level design
  - formal and semiformal demonstration of correspondence
    - between specification and low-level design
  - simple TOE
  - complete independent confirmation of developer tests
  - LynuxWorks claims LynxSecure separation kernel EAL7 “certifiable”
    - but not *certified*
  - Green Hills also aiming for EAL7

## Note:

- *Even EAL7 relies on testing!*
  - EAL7 requires proof of correspondence between formal descriptions
  - However, no requirement of formalising implementation
  - Hence no requirement for formal proof of implementation correctness

- Based on mathematical model of the system
- Complete verification requires two parts:
  - proof that model satisfies requirements of security policies
    - typically prove generic properties that actual policies map to
    - required by CC EAL5–7
  - proof that implementation has same properties as model
    - proof of correspondence between model and implementation
    - not required by CC even at EAL7
    - done by some kernels with very limited functionality
    - never done for any general-purpose OS!
- Model-checking (static analysis) is *incomplete* formal verification
  - shows presence or absence of certain properties
    - eg uninitialised variables, array-bounds overflows
  - nevertheless useful for assurance

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# Security Mechanisms

- Used to implement security policies
- Based on access control
  - discretionary access control (DAC)
  - mandatory access control (MAC)
  - role-based access control (RBAC)
- Access rights
  - simple rights
    - read, write, execute/invoke, send, receive
  - meta rights (DAC only)
    - copy
      - propagate own rights to another agent
    - own
      - change rights of an object or agent



# Access Control Matrix

Agents	Objects			
	$S_1$	$S_2$	$O_3$	$O_4$
$S_1$	terminate	wait, signal, send	read	
$S_2$	wait, signal, terminate			read, execute, write
$S_3$		wait, signal, receive		
$S_4$	control		execute	write

- Defines each agent's rights on any object
- Note: agents are objects too

# Properties of Access Control Matrix

- Rows define agents' *protection domains* (PDs)
- Columns define objects' *accessibility*
- Dynamic data structure:
  - frequent permanent changes (e.g. `chmod`)
  - frequent temporary changes (e.g. `setuid`)
- Very *sparse* with many repeated entries
- Impractical to store explicitly

# Issues for Protection System Design

- Propagation of rights:
  - Can agent grant access to other?
- Restriction of rights:
  - Can agent propagate subset of own rights?
- Revocation of rights:
  - Can access, once granted, be revoked?
- Amplification of rights:
  - Can unprivileged agent perform restricted operations?
- Determination of object accessibility
  - Which agents have access to particular object?
  - Is object accessible at all (garbage collection)?
- Determination of agent's protection domain
  - Which objects are accessible?

# Access Matrix Implementation: ACLs

Represent column-wise: *access control list* (ALC):

- *ACL* associated with *object*
  - Propagation: meta right (e.g. owner can chmod)
  - Restriction: meta right
  - Revocation: meta right
  - Amplification: protected-invocation right (e.g. setuid)
  - Accessibility: explicit in ACL
  - Protection domain: hard (if not impossible) to determine
- Usually condensed via *domain classes* (UNIX, NT groups)
- Full ACLs used by Multics, Apollo Domain, Andrew FS, NTFS
- Can have *negative rights* to:
  - reduce window of vulnerability
  - simplify exclusion from groups
- Sometimes implicit (Unix process hierarchy)
- Implemented in almost all commercial systems

# Access Matrix Implementation: Capabilities

Represent row-wise: *capabilities*:

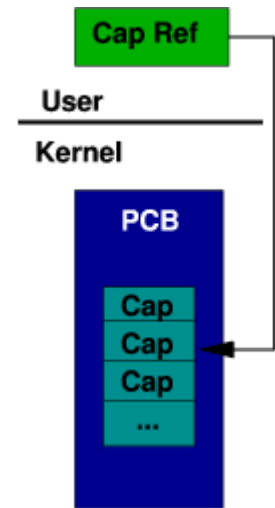
- *Capability list* associated with agent
- Each capability confers a certain right to its holder
  - Propagation: copy capabilities between agents (how?)
  - Restriction: lesser rights require creation of new (derived) caps
  - Revocation: requires invalidation of caps from all agents
  - Amplification: special invocation capability
  - Accessibility: requires inspection of all capability lists (how?)
  - Protection domain: explicit in capability list
- Can have *negative rights* to:
  - reduce window of vulnerability
  - simplify management of groups of capabilities
- Only successful commercial systems: IBM System/38 / AS400 / i-Series

- Main advantage of capabilities is the fine-grained access control:
  - easy to provide access to specific agents
- Capability presets *prima facie* evidence of the *right to access*
  - capability  $\Rightarrow$  *object identifier* (implies naming)
  - capability  $\Rightarrow$  (set of) *access rights*
    - $\rightarrow$  any representation must contain object ID and access rights
    - $\rightarrow$  any representation must protect capability from forgery
- How are caps implemented and protected?
  - tagged — protected by hardware
  - partitioned/segregated — protected by software
  - sparse — protected by sparsity (probabilistically secure, like encryption)

- *Tag bit(s)* with every (group of) memory word(s)
  - tag identifies capabilities
  - capabilities are used and copied like “normal” pointers
  - hardware checks permissions when deferencing capability
  - modifications turn tags off (convert to plain data)
  - Only privileged instructions(kernel) can turn tags on
  - Properties:
    - ➔ propagation easy
    - ➔ restriction requires kernel to make new capability
    - ➔ revocation virtually impossible (requires memory scan)
    - ➔ amplification possible (below)
    - ➔ accessibility virtually impossible to determine
    - ➔ protection domain difficult to establish
- IBM System/38, AS/400, i-Series, many historical systems

# Partitioned Capabilities

- System maintains capability list (Clist) with each process
  - user code uses indirect references to caps (clist index)
    - c.f. Unix file descriptors
  - System validates access via clist when mapping any page
  - Properties:
    - validation is explicit at map time
    - propagation: system call to copy between clients
    - restriction: kernel to make new capability
    - revocation: kernel to remove cap from clist
      - one specific or all
    - accessibility: requires scanning all clists
    - protection domain: explicitly represented in clist
- Few commercial systems (KeyKOS)
- Many research systems
  - Hydra, Mach, EROS, and many others

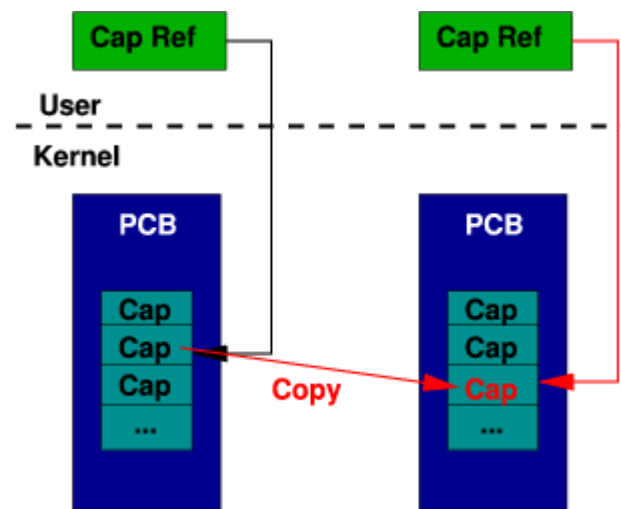




# Propagating Partitioned Capabilities

- Capabilities can be included in IPC messages

- sender supplies cap (clist index) to system call
- 2 kernel looks up cap in sender's clist
  - 3 kernel inserts caps into receiver's clist
  - 4 kernel replaces sender's clist index by receiver's and delivers message

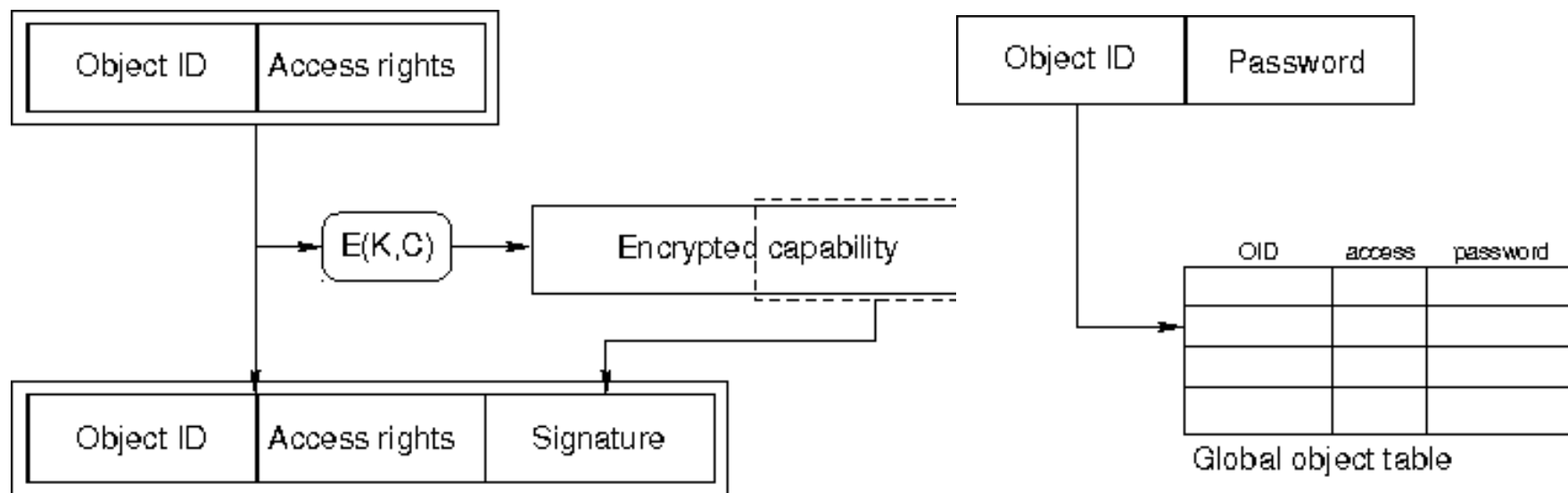


# Partitioned Capabilities Summary

- Secure through protection by kernel
  - real caps live in kernel space
- Validation at mapping time  $\Rightarrow$  apps use “normal” pointers
- Fast validation (clist check is simple, validation cached by MMU)
- Propagation requires marshaling and kernel intervention
- Reference counting possible to detect unaccessible objects

# Sparse Capabilities

- Basic idea similar to encryption
  - add bit string to make valid capabilities a very small subset of cap space
  - either encrypted object info or password
  - secure by infeasibility of exhaustive search of cap space



- Sparse caps are user-level objects
  - can be passed like other data
    - similar to tagged caps, but without hardware support
    - validated at mapping time (explicit or implicit)
  - good match to user-level servers
    - no central authority, no kernel required on most ops
    - cannot reference-count objects
- Issues:
  - Full mediation requires extra work
    - but doable, see Mungi
    - essentially provided user-level cap segregation
  - High amplification of leaked data
    - problem with convert channels

- Problem 1: Executing untrusted code
  - you downloaded a game from the internet
  - how can you be sure it doesn't steal/corrupts your data?
- Problem 2: Digital rights management (DRM)
  - you own copyrighted material (e.g. entertainment media content)
  - you want to let others use it (for a fee)
  - how can you prevent them from making unauthorised copies?
- You need to *confine* the program (game, viewer) so it cannot leak
- Cannot be done with most protection schemes!
  - not with Unix or most other ACL-based schemes
  - not with most tagged or sparse capability schemes
  - multi-level security has some inherent confinement (but can't do DRM)
- Some protection models can confine in principle
  - e.g segregated caps system, can instruct system not to accept any
  - EROS has formal proof of confinement of a model of the system [SW00]
- In practice difficult to achieve due to *covert channels*

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# Design Principles for Secure OS

- Least privilege (POLA)
- Economy of mechanisms
- Fail-safe defaults
- Complete mediation
- Open design
- Separation of privilege
- Least common mechanisms
- Psychological acceptability

# Least Privilege

- Also called the principle of *least authority* (POLA)
- Agent should only be given the minimal rights needed for task
  - minimal protection domain
  - PD determined by *function*, not *identity*
    - Unix root is evil
    - Aim of role-based access control (RBAC)
  - rights added as needed, removed when no longer needed
  - violated by all mainstream Oses
- Example: executing web applet
  - should not have all of user's privileges, only minimal access
  - hard to do with ACL-based systems



# Least Privilege Implications for OS

- OS kernel executes in privileged mode of hardware
  - kernel has unlimited privilege!
- POLA implies keeping kernel code to an absolute minimum
  - this means a secure OS must be based on a microkernel!
- Trusted computing base can bypass security
- POLA requires that TCB is minimal
  - microkernel plus minimal security manager

# Economy of Mechanisms

- KISS principle of engineering
  - “keep it simple, stupid!”
- Less code/features/stuff  $\Rightarrow$  less to get wrong
  - makes it easier to fix if something does go wrong
  - complexity is the natural enemy of security
- Also applies to interfaces, interactions, protocols, ...
- Specifically applies to TCB

# Fail-Safe Defaults

- Default action is no-access
  - if action fails, system remains secure
  - if security administrator forgets to add rule, system remains secure
  - “better safe than sorry”

- Check every access
  - violated in Unix file access:
    - access rights checked at `open()`, then cached
    - access remains enabled until `close()`, even if attributes change
  - also implies that any rights propagation must be controlled
    - not done with tagged or sparse capability systems
- In practice conflicts with performance!
  - caching of buffers, file descriptors etc
  - without caching unacceptable performance
- Should at least limit window of opportunity
  - e.g. guarantee caches are flushed after some fixed period
  - guarantee no cached access after revoking access

- Security must not depend on secrecy of design or implementation
  - TCB must be open to scrutiny
  - Security by obscurity is poor security
    - not all security/certification agencies seem to understand this
- Note that this doesn't rule out passwords or secret keys
  - but their creation requires careful *cryptoanalysis*

# Separation of Privilege

- Require a combination of conditions for granting access
  - e.g. user is in group wheel *and* knows the root password
  - take-grant model for capability-based protection:
    - sender needs *grant* right on capability
    - receiver needs *take* right to accept capability
- Closely related to least privilege

# Least Common Mechanisms

- Avoid sharing mechanisms
  - shared mechanism  $\Rightarrow$  shared channel
  - potential covert channel
- Inherent conflict with other design imperatives
  - simplicity  $\Rightarrow$  shared mechanisms

# Psychological Acceptability

- Security mechanisms should not add to difficulty of use
  - hide complexity introduced by security mechanisms
  - ensure ease of installation, configurations, use
  - systems are used by humans!
- Inherently problematic:
  - security inherently inhibits ease of use
  - idea is to minimise impact
- Security-usability tradeoff is to a degree unavoidable



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- Minimize kernel code
  - kernel = code that executes in privileged mode
  - kernel can bypass any security
  - kernel is inherently part of TCB
  - kernel can only be verified as a whole (not in components)
    - it's hard enough to verify a minimal kernel
- How?
  - generic mechanisms (economy of mechanisms)
  - no policies, only mechanisms
  - mechanisms as simple as possible
  - only code that must be privileged in order to support secure systems
  - free of covert channels:
    - no global names, absolute time
- Formally specify API

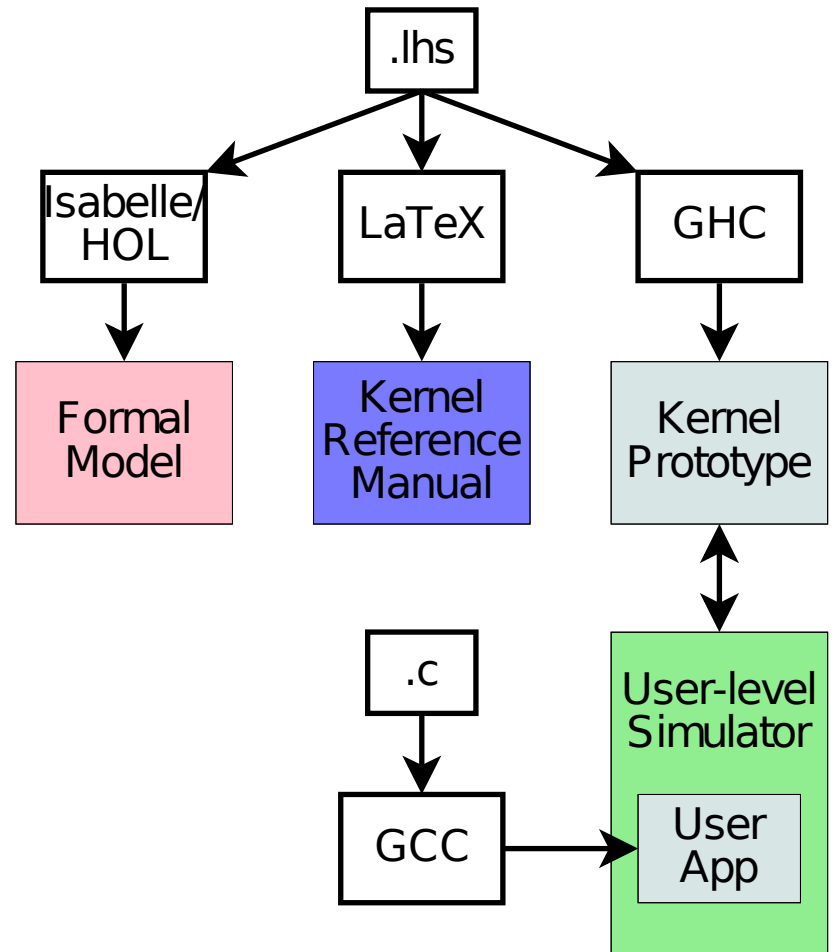
- Minimize mandatory TCB
  - unless formally verified, TCB must be assumed imperfect
  - the smaller, the fewer defects
  - POLA requires, economy of mechanisms leads to minimal TCB
- Ensure TCB is well defined and understood
  - make security policy explicit
  - make granting of authority explicit
- Flexibility to support various uses
  - make authority delegatable
  - ensure mechanisms allow high-performance implementation
- Design for verifiability
  - minimize implementation complexity

# Example: seL4

- High-security version of L4 microkernel API
  - all authority granted by capabilities
  - only four system calls: read, write, create, derive
  - kernel memory explicitly managed by user-level resource manager
  - 7,000–10,000 lines of kernel code
- Semi-formal API spec in Haskell
  - easily formalised in theorem prover
  - machine-checked proofs of security properties
  - designed for formal verification, to be finished mid-2008

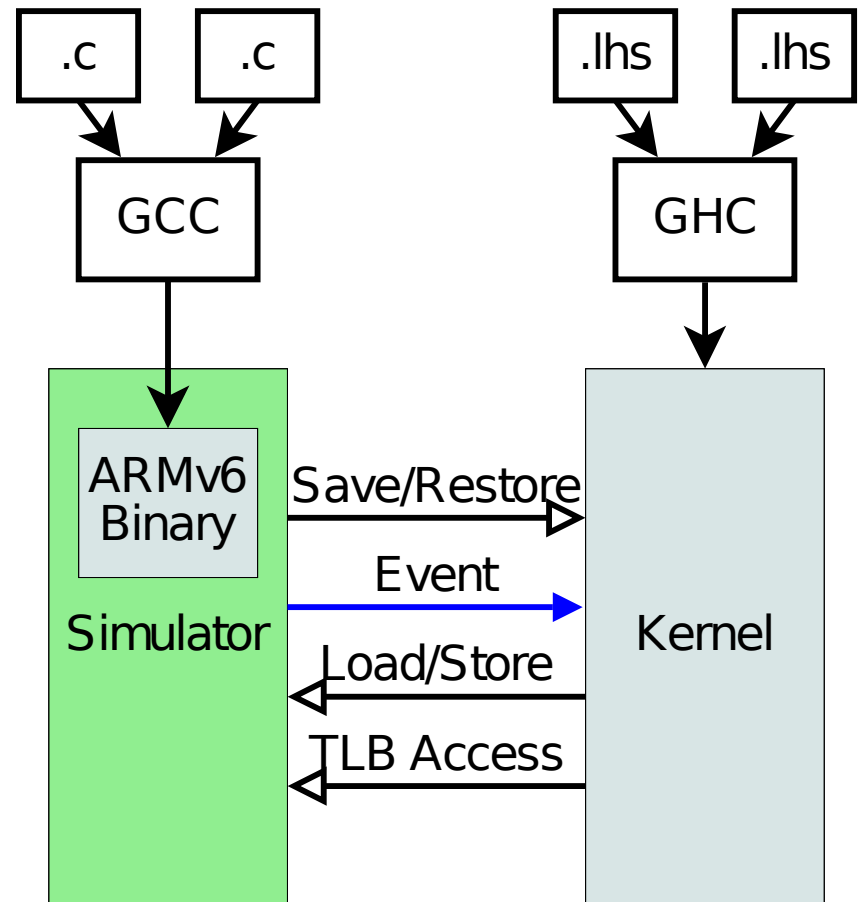
# Kernel Prototyping in Haskell

- Model the kernel in detail
- Literate Haskell to model
  - Pure functional programming language
  - Embedded documentation
  - Close to Isabelle/HOL
  - Formalized Haskell becomes intermediate representation for refinement proof
- Executable
  - Supports running user-level code

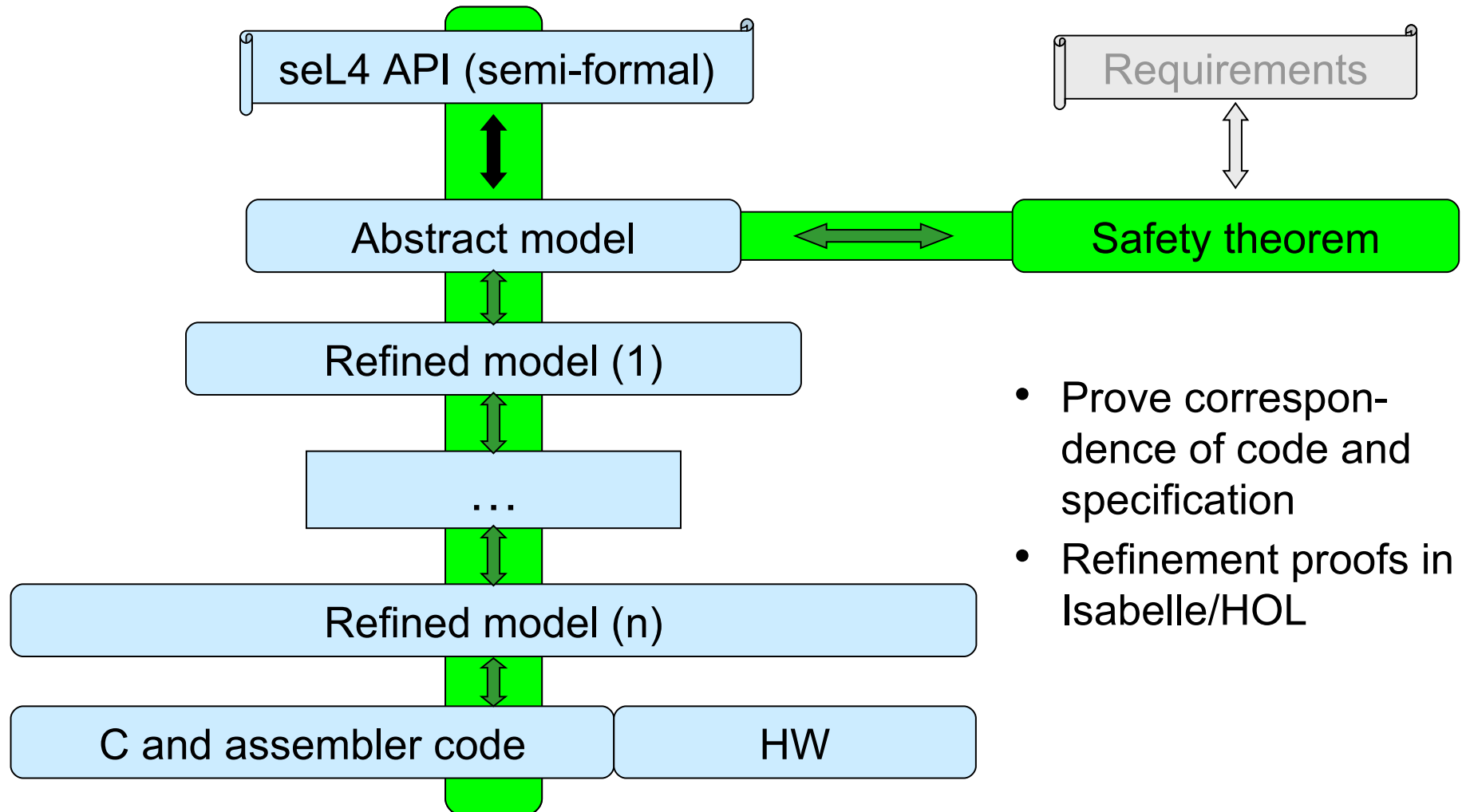


# Simulation of User-Level Execution

- Simulator for user-level ISA
  - M5 Alpha simulator
  - Locally-developed ARMv6 simulator
  - QEMU
- Executes compiled user-level binaries
- Sends events to the Haskell kernel
- Combination allows running complete boot image
- Port system components before kernel implementation is complete



# L4.verified: Formal Correctness Proof



Thank you!