

# Evaluating Automated Driving Planner Robustness against Adversarial Influence

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## Abstract

Evaluating the robustness of automated driving planners is a critical and challenging task. Although methodologies to evaluate vehicles are well established, they do not yet account for a reality in which vehicles with autonomous components share the road with adversarial agents. Our approach, based on probabilistic trust models, aims to help researchers assess the robustness of protections for machine learning-enabled planners against adversarial influence. In contrast with established practices that evaluate safety using the same evaluation dataset for all vehicles, we argue that adversarial evaluation fundamentally requires a process that seeks to defeat a specific protection. Hence, we propose that evaluations be based on estimating the difficulty for an adversary to determine conditions that effectively induce unsafe behavior. This type of inference requires precise statements about threats, protections, and aspects of planning decisions to be guarded. We demonstrate our approach by evaluating protections for planners relying on camera-based object detectors.

## 1 Introduction

As autonomous vehicle (AV) technology matures towards higher SAE automation levels and intended human intervention decreases, unexpected behavior by automated driving planners can cause increasingly devastating effects. AVs utilize object detectors developed via machine learning (ML) for planning tasks, such as the decision to brake due to the perception of a stop sign. Discovery of attacks against object detectors indicates that unsafe behavior can occur not only as the result of rare natural events, but due to adversarial *disturbances*, deliberate actions by an adversary. Trustworthy *protections* aimed at preventing or reacting to adversarial influence are needed. Trusting protections to guard the decisions of a planner requires an evaluation methodology to: **compare protections** to unambiguously determine which is better for mitigating a specific threat; and, **justify confidence** in a protection to determine how well it guards a planner's decisions against specific adversaries.

The robotics and automation research community understands the criticality of evaluating safety for AVs (Kone

et al. 2019). Moreover, recent guidance recognizes special considerations for the safe use of ML in autonomous systems (Hawkins et al. 2021). Nevertheless, current practices and recommendations do not include satisfactory methodologies to evaluate protections for ML-enabled automated driving planners, a problem at the intersection of AV safety, AV security, disturbance generation via simulation, and adversarial ML.

Guidance on the assurance of ML-enabled autonomous systems recommends evaluation datasets that are relevant, complete, and balanced (Hawkins et al. 2021). The call for complete evaluation datasets already poses a challenge in non-adversarial situations due to the long tail of rare cases in the complex environments in which AVs operate. The space of possible tests is larger when including disturbances due to adding the actions of an adversary to the other parameters. Thus, a static test set cannot be expected to feasibly cover the space for adversarial evaluation. Additionally, adversarial actions occur strategically rather than by chance, and consequently, once effective disturbances are discovered, they cannot be considered rare corner cases.

Existing work has already argued that benchmarks do not adequately assess risk across deployment spaces (Norden, O'Kelly, and Sinha 2019). The safety research community relies on simulation to evaluate AVs when complexities of systems and environments are too difficult to fully model (Kalra and Paddock 2016; Corso et al. 2021) and to generate disturbances via search techniques like Bayesian Optimization (BO) (Tuncali et al. 2018; Abeyirigoonawardena, Shkurti, and Dudek 2019; Nguyen et al. 2020). Work in AV security is broader in scope and typically includes other more traditional aspects of security shared with cyber-physical systems (Thing and Wu 2016) and software assurance (Chattopadhyay, Lam, and Tavva 2020).

Work in ML adversarial robustness (Szegedy et al. 2014; Nicolae et al. 2019) has brought awareness of the susceptibility of ML algorithms to a wide range of attacks. However, system evaluations need context of how ML algorithms are used and protected in specific applications. For example, a defense for object detectors (Braunegg et al. 2020) using adversarial training is not evaluated in the context of how a planner will use the object detector's decisions. In general, works related to algorithm attacks such as adversarial physical attacks (Brown et al. 2018) and adversar-

ial policies (Gleave et al. 2019) are complementary to our work. Currently, however, AV planners do not implement protections inspired by algorithm defenses—e.g., (Salman et al. 2020; Braunegg et al. 2020; Abeyirigoonawardena, Shkurti, and Dudek 2019; Gleave et al. 2019; Thing and Wu 2016)—against these adversaries.

We argue that the effectiveness of protections can only be adequately evaluated when the assumptions about threats and valid behavior to preserve are well specified. This is key to be able to compare protections against a specific threat. Comparison is necessary, but not sufficient. Even with a suitable solution, it is possible to draw inaccurate conclusions about the overall robustness of a protection. For example, a fixed set of tests may suggest a protection has better performance than another, yet an adversary could more easily find new tests that are effective against the seemingly stronger protection. The strategy for selecting the tests for each protection must also be evaluated. Thus, to justify confidence in a protection, we need to assess the difficulty for an adversary to find the parameters of an effective disturbance over an infinite, but well-defined, set of possible disturbances.

To address current limitations, the contribution of this work is to propose a framework combining established ideas about threat modeling to engineer secure systems (Shevchenko et al. 2018) with state-of-the-art ideas about probabilistic knowledge representation and inference to evaluate protections for AVs. This framework employs *probabilistic trust models (PTMs)* to state probabilistic assumptions about adversarial threats, protections, and aspects of valid AV planner behavior that must be preserved. Encoding PTMs via *generative programs* (Cusumano-Towner et al. 2019) enables inference tasks necessary for estimating effectiveness of a disturbance against a protection. Together, generative programs and simulation enable computational estimates of the risk posed by a disturbance from the prior probability distribution over the set of disturbances and the posterior probability of faults induced determined by running the disturbance in simulation. We improve upon simulated disturbance generation via search by defining assurance metrics using probabilistic trust models that more adequately encode priors and inference tasks related to concrete definitions of valid behavior to preserve. Hence, our work offers a way to contextualize the work of multiple communities, including the adversarial ML robustness community, to concretely evaluate the effectiveness of a set of protections for a specific planner. Our tool, PARAPET, automates the generation of synthetic data using PTMs encoded in generative programs combined with simulation to justify confidence in protections for an ML-enabled automated driving planner.

## 2 Method

The *falsification safety validation task* (Corso et al. 2021) seeks failure examples and computes search coverage metrics to reason about confidence in the safety of autonomous cyber-physical systems. PARAPET extends falsification to failures caused by adversarial threats. When a system and an adversary interact with an environment, a safety property  $\psi$  is defined over (ground truth) state sequences  $s = [s_1, \dots, s_t]$ , where  $s_t \in S$  is the state of the environment, at

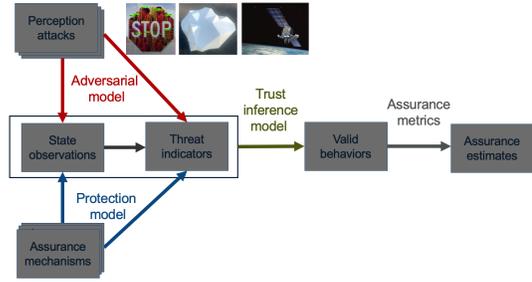


Figure 1: PTMs model relationships between threats, protections, and behavior to reason about assurance.

time  $t \in \{1, \dots, t_{max}\}$ . A *disturbance* is an action  $x$  from the adversary. The falsification task is defined as the process of finding a disturbance sequence  $x$  for  $s$  that induces a state sequence  $s'$  which violates the safety property  $\psi$  for the system equipped with the protection. That is,  $x$  is a *counterexample* demonstrating that  $\psi$  does not hold. Assurance provided by the protection is related to the difficulty of finding a counterexample. To perform the falsification task, it is necessary to (1) turn the task into an optimization problem over disturbance sequences with a suitable objective function; and (2) attempt to solve the problem efficiently with appropriate coverage metrics.

The *objective function*  $f : X \mapsto \mathbb{R}$ ,  $x \in X$  such that, for a safety threshold  $\epsilon$ ,  $f(x) < \epsilon$  (dependent on risk tolerance) if and only if the probability that  $x$  is a counterexample is above an assurance threshold  $\delta$ . Corso et al.’s objective functions are designed such that  $f(x) < \epsilon$  if and only if  $x$  is a counterexample. In practice, it may not be possible to state with certainty that a specific disturbance  $x$  is a counterexample when the effect of  $x$  is non-deterministic or depends in part on aspects of the environment or system. In contrast, PARAPET objective functions are encoded via PTMs, which define a distribution over possible outcomes (cf. *traces of generative programs* below) of a simulation. A simulation returns the observed sequence  $r$  of state representations (e.g., sensor readings) corresponding to  $s$  disturbed by  $x$ . PARAPET uses  $r$  to estimate the probability that  $x$  will induce  $s'$  to violate  $\psi$ . To do so, it is neither sufficient nor necessary to observe a failure; a failure can be caused by some other factor than  $x$ , and  $x$  may not cause a failure in every run due to non-deterministic factors. Therefore, as opposed to Corso et al.’s deterministic mapping between  $x$  and  $s$ , we think of the set of sequences  $S$  that are not only induced by  $x$ , but also by actions of the system and uncertain aspects of the environment.

In PARAPET testers encode safety properties and assumptions via PTMs specified via generative programs in languages such as Gen (Cusumano-Towner et al. 2019). PTMs define probability distributions on traces of programs  $(\omega, \zeta)$  that can make probabilistic random choices during execution where  $\zeta$  is the weight proportional to the likelihood of a program trace  $\omega$ . When a generative program  $P$  is executed with a parameter vector  $z$ , it produces the trace  $\omega$  with probability  $p(\omega; P, z)$ , which is useful to drive simu-

lations subject to the assumptions in the adversarial model. Generative programs also enable the automatic estimation of posterior distributions  $p(\omega|\mathbf{y}; P, \mathbf{z})$ , associated with the objective function for the falsification task. When these models are conditioned on observations, they induce posterior distributions that allow computation of assurance metrics.

Hence, PTMs relate threats, protections, and aspects of valid behavior to be preserved, and are typically composed of an adversarial model, a protection model, a trust inference model, and a set of assurance metrics (Figure 1). *Adversarial models* express prior assumptions about the likelihood of disturbances, the probable effects of disturbances on observed state representations, and the constraints of the adversary, such as whether the adversary has white or black box knowledge of the system, including the protection. *Protection models* specify how protections affect observed state representations via assumptions about the state prior to applying and limitations on the effect of the protection. Protections can passively attempt to detect the presence of an adversary or can actively modify observations to mitigate possible disturbances. *Trust inference models* specify how to infer valid behavior from observations that could have been influenced by disturbances and protections. The posterior distributions also reflect uncertainties associated with making decisions with partial and imperfect information. Trust inference models take into account how actions selected by a planner may result in unsafe conditions if, for example, an object were misdetected, or an estimated location were inaccurate. We use trust inference models to implement objective functions (cf. § 3). *Assurance metrics* capture (i) the objective function measuring the effectiveness of a disturbance over a state sequence in causing invalid behavior (by summarizing the posterior probability distributions via numeric degrees of belief associated with the probability that a planner’s decisions will result in invalid behavior); and (ii) an estimate of adversary difficulty in finding an effective disturbance (by describing coverage notions related to the search space of disturbances). Types of coverage metrics include probabilistic, disturbance-space, and state-space coverage, which we leave to future work.

PARAPET combines PTMs with a strategy to explore the set of disturbances guided by the objective function to solve the associated falsification task efficiently. While an adversary can employ any strategy, solving the optimization problem via an uninformed search strategy is not feasible in general. The best known informed strategies either rely on gradient methods when  $f(\mathbf{x})$  is differentiable and inexpensive to evaluate or BO when  $f(\mathbf{x})$  is a black-box function that can only be noisily and expensively evaluated. PARAPET returns any counterexamples discovered in simulation, disturbances  $\{\mathbf{x}\}$  found to cause the system to violate  $\psi$ . If none are found, PARAPET returns a dataset  $\{\mathbf{x}_i, \mathbf{r}_i\}$  of pairs and an estimate of the number of attempts the adversary needs to perform to find a counterexample, if the adversary used a similar strategy to solve the falsification task.

### 3 Use Case

PARAPET is illustrated by evaluating a *sensor-fusion* protection designed for automated driving planners relying on

camera-based object detectors. Valid behavior requires the planner to initiate a transition to a minimal risk condition, alerting the driver and disengaging autonomous driving, when the protection predicts the presence of a disturbance.

The adversary is assumed to not have internal access to the system and is unable to directly manipulate digital data, but can create static physical artifacts via the ShapeShifter attack (Chen et al. 2018).

ShapeShifter computes a perturbation that is physically applied to an object to induce misclassifications effective in multiple bounding boxes detected at different scales, viewing angles, and distances over a range of lighting conditions and camera constraints. It is demonstrated in the original paper on the Faster-RCNN object detector (Ren et al. 2015). Because the attacked object detector is easily available, the adversary is assumed to have “white-box” knowledge about the ML model structure and weights. To model an adversary with practical computational powers, the perturbation need not be computed in real time. The adversary is assumed to only be able to manipulate certain regions of an object and cannot change the shape of an object, such as the octagonal shape of a stop sign. The perturbation *strength* corresponds to ShapeShifter’s hyperparameter  $c$ . The adversary can manipulate the placement of the object in multiple dimensions relative to its standardized location. A disturbance is defined via five continuous parameters: the perturbation strength applied to and the placement of a stop sign as deviation from the normal height, roll, pitch, and yaw. As the AV operates in a world with humans, disturbances are practically limited in strength and deviation from the norm. Large disturbances causing humans to misclassify objects may be replaced by a different object entirely, nullifying use of the ShapeShifter attack. Conspicuous disturbances that draw the attention of humans are detected, unable to cause unexpected effects (i.e., this is related to minimizing the *strength* of a perturbation while maintaining attack effectiveness (cf. (Chen et al. 2018))). The adversary’s goal is to induce invalid actions by reducing the planner’s confidence that it is detecting a stop sign in time to brake.

The sensor-fusion protection model (implemented via a generative program  $P_s$ ) encodes probability distributions of traces  $p(\omega_s; P_s, \mathbf{z}_s)$ , where  $\mathbf{z}_s$  corresponds to sensor data. That is,  $P_s$  encodes a prior distribution of correlations between object detectors, derived from simulations without an adversary.  $P_s$  also encodes an assumption that when an adversary is present, the correlations between object detectors are drawn from a uniform distribution. The protection also encodes an assumption about the existence of disturbances relative to the location of real stop signs using Poisson distributions. This way,  $P_s$  integrates streams of observations from three sensors, Faster-RCNN and Yolo3 (Redmon and Farhadi 2018) object detectors and GPS, as well as mapping information giving the expected locations of stop signs.

$P_s$  can be used to estimate the posterior  $p(\omega|\mathbf{y}_s; P_s, \mathbf{z}_s)$  conditioned on new observations  $\mathbf{y}_s$ . When likely traces  $w$  (consistent with this posterior) correspond to traces where an adversary may be present, the sensor-fusion protection raises an alert. This protection is compared to a *trivial* protection that never alerts.

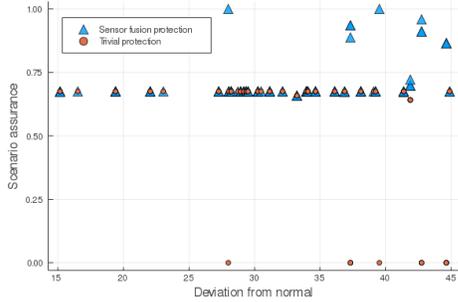


Figure 2: Comparison between trivial and sensor-fusion protections plotting Euclidean distance to an undisturbed sign against objective function score.



Figure 3: Validation setup.

The objective function evaluates the effectiveness of a disturbance to evade alerts in a situation that may likely lead to an accident. The disturbance is effective if the protection does not alert when  $x$  is present and  $s'$  violates  $\psi$  (such that the vehicle does not detect the attacked stop sign). The disturbance is moderately effective when the alert is raised outside of possible braking distance or within possible but unsafe braking distance given the speed. The disturbance is mildly effective when it results in unnecessary alerts, i.e., asking the driver to take control unnecessarily when the planner is likely to adequately detect the stop sign and stop as a result. Last, the objective function favors disturbances that are less likely to be noticed (relative to the deviation from the norm w.r.t. placement and strength of the perturbation).

## 4 Experiments

We demonstrate PARAPET’s ability to compare two protections against a specific adversary and measure the effectiveness of a disturbance—towards reasoning about the difficulty for an adversary to defeat a protection. We demonstrate via real-world validation experiments that PARAPET’s simulation results reasonably approximate evaluation of a protection on a real vehicle against a real adversary.

All simulations are performed using CARLA’s Scenario Runner (Dosovitskiy et al. 2017) with a single camera placed on the front of the vehicle. The priors to inform the protection were derived from comparing the detections of Faster-RCNN and Yolo3 on observations from 45 state trajectories exercising different weather and road conditions. For the simulation experiments, we used a bootstrapping set with 100 trajectories to initialize BO search. Figure 2 plots protection scores against trajectories, demon-

Strength	Height	Roll	Pitch	Yaw	Sim	Real
0.0077	0.36'	5°	22°	-23°	0.68	0.82
0.0100	-0.48'	-12°	-3°	-23°	0.70	0.87
0.0050	-0.05'	22°	-22°	5°	1.00	1.00

Table 1: Parameters of min, mean, and max scores. *Strength* is ShapeShifter’s  $c$  confidence parameter (Chen et al. 2018). Smaller values of this parameter result in more conspicuous but also more robust attacks. *Height*, *Roll*, *Pitch*, and *Yaw*, correspond to the placement of a stop sign. *Sim* corresponds to scores computed from simulations, and *Real* corresponds to scores computed using a real vehicle (cf. fig. 3).

strating that the objective function distinguishes between the sensor-fusion and trivial protection on the disturbances where sensor-fusion alerts while the trivial one does not. When the disturbances are large, the sensor-fusion protection detects the disturbance more often as indicated by more scores above the average, but the score is also penalized for becoming increasingly obvious to humans as indicated by the slight downward trend. Last, both protections receive similar scores for a subset of disturbances. If this subset is used as a fixed test set, performance of the two protections is indistinguishable, emphasizing that the strategy for selecting tests is crucial. For that, we use an approach similar to (Abeyirigoonawardena, Shkurti, and Dudek 2019) to search the disturbance space intending to solve the falsification task. After 150 iterations, BO with an expected improvement acquisition function fails to find a disturbance that induces invalid behavior. Scores are similar to Figure 2. Each simulation took about one hour of computation, totaling over 10 days for both experiments, providing insight into the difficulty of defeating the sensor-fusion protection.

Real world validation experiments were conducted using a vehicle outfitted with a Blackfly S GigE Machine Vision Camera, a KVH GEO FOG 3D Dual GNSS/INS in an urban parking lot at midday with partly cloudy weather. Simulations were parameterized to match the state sequence for the test environment to search for effective disturbances. Perturbations were printed to scale as illustrated in Figure 3. Potential for discrepancies between simulation and real-world is due to approximation error in positioning or print medium inaccuracy. The tests selected for validation in Table 1 represent disturbances with low, average, and high scores. The validation scores are not identical but are ranked the same, suggesting that disturbances that are effective in simulation are likely effective in practice.

## 5 Conclusions

PARAPET is an approach to evaluate protections for automated driving planners against adversarial influence. Generative programs model assumptions about the valid behavior that the protections must preserve under a concrete threat model. We validate that simulation results have real-world applicability. We demonstrate that evaluations using fixed test sets are not sufficient for justifying confidence in a protection; it is also necessary to reason about the sampling

strategy. In future work, we are exploring coverage metrics to reason about the number of evaluations needed to quantify the difficulty of finding disturbances. The protection we evaluate is passive, but algorithmic defenses to ML attacks can be actively applied to mitigate threats. Denoised smoothing guarantees that an image classifier is  $l_p$ -robust to adversarial examples (Salman et al. 2020). We are evaluating the extent to which this may be adapted to make the Faster-RCNN object detector in the sensor-fusion protection robust. Preliminary results suggest denoised smoothing lowers accuracy at a different rate for different parameters, underscoring the usefulness of PTMs for evaluating protections. We are also using assurance metrics to implement planner protections as online monitors.

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