UCI University of California, Irvine

The Threat in Your Pocket:

Trends, Challenges, and Solutions in Mobile Application Security

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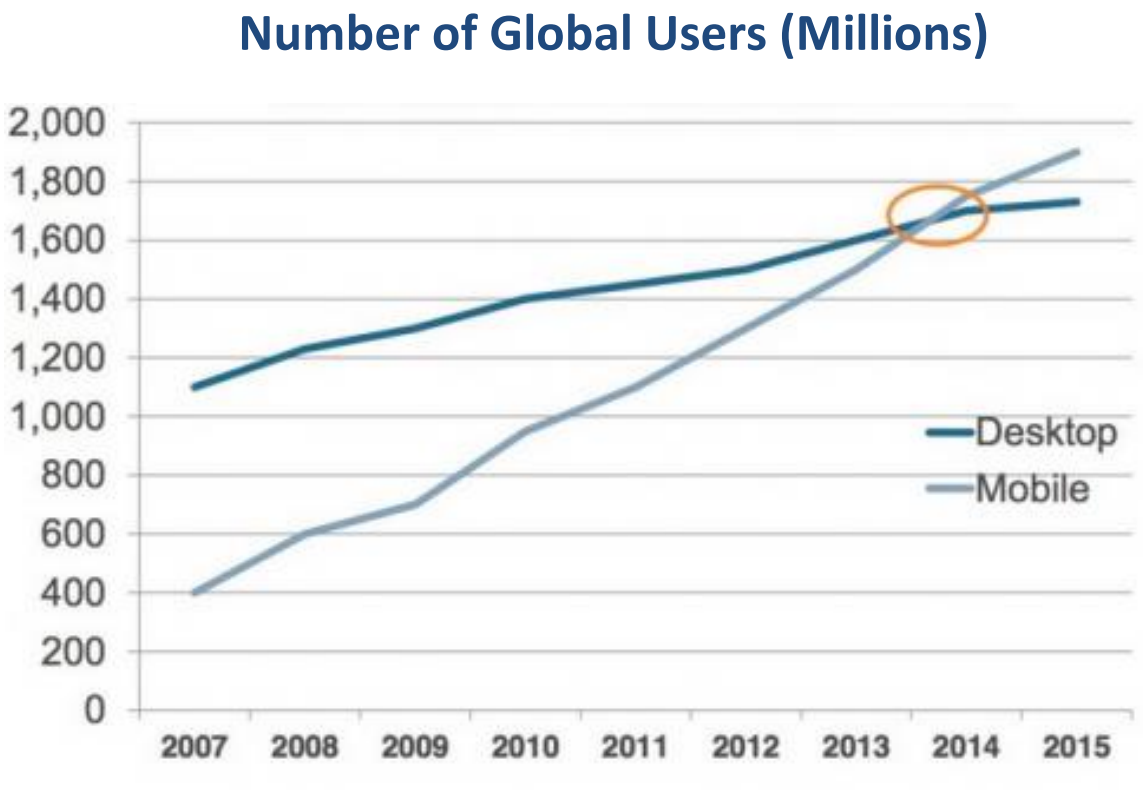
ISR

Smartphones have fundamentally changed computing



Source: Morgan Stanley Research

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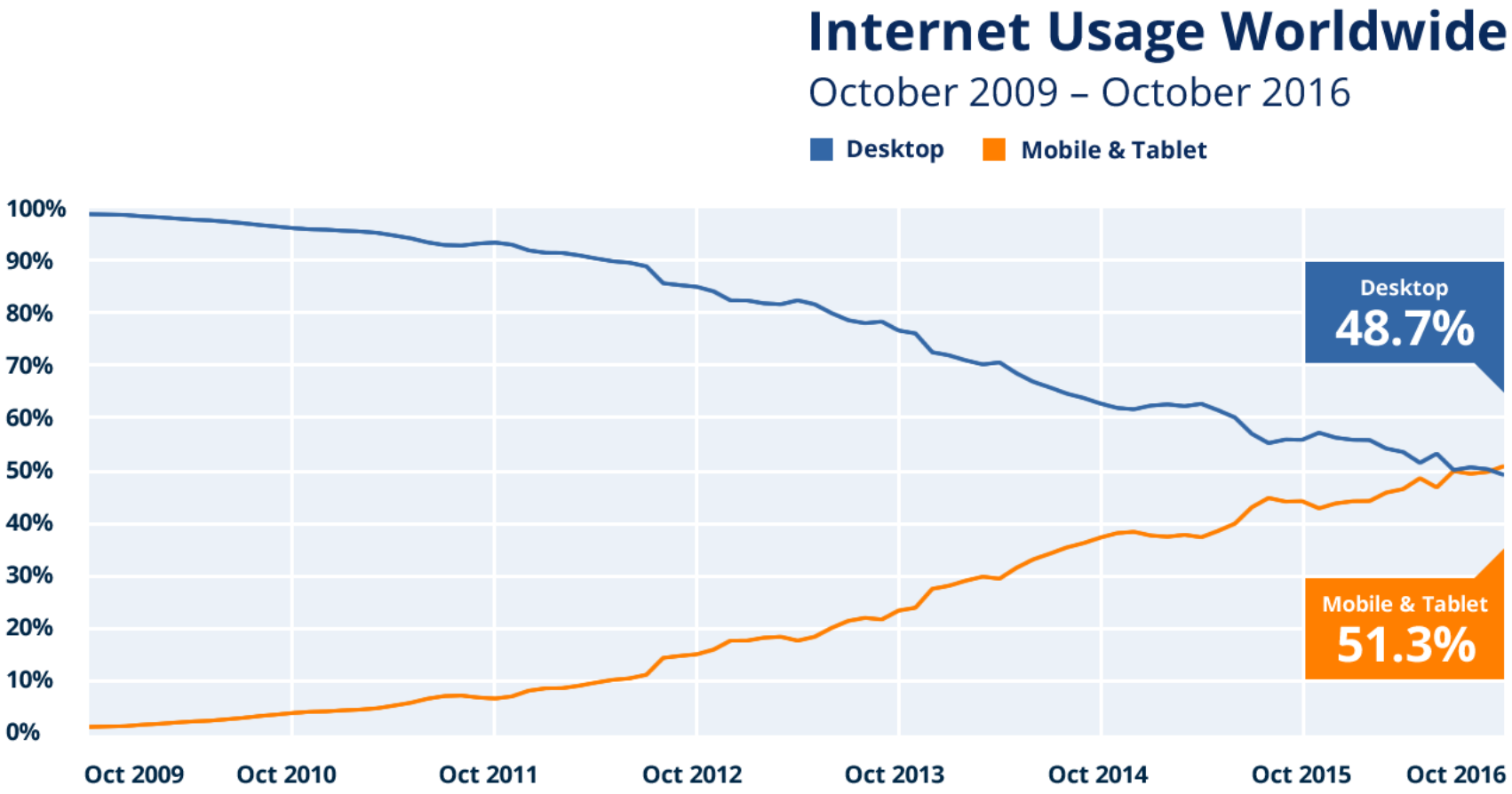
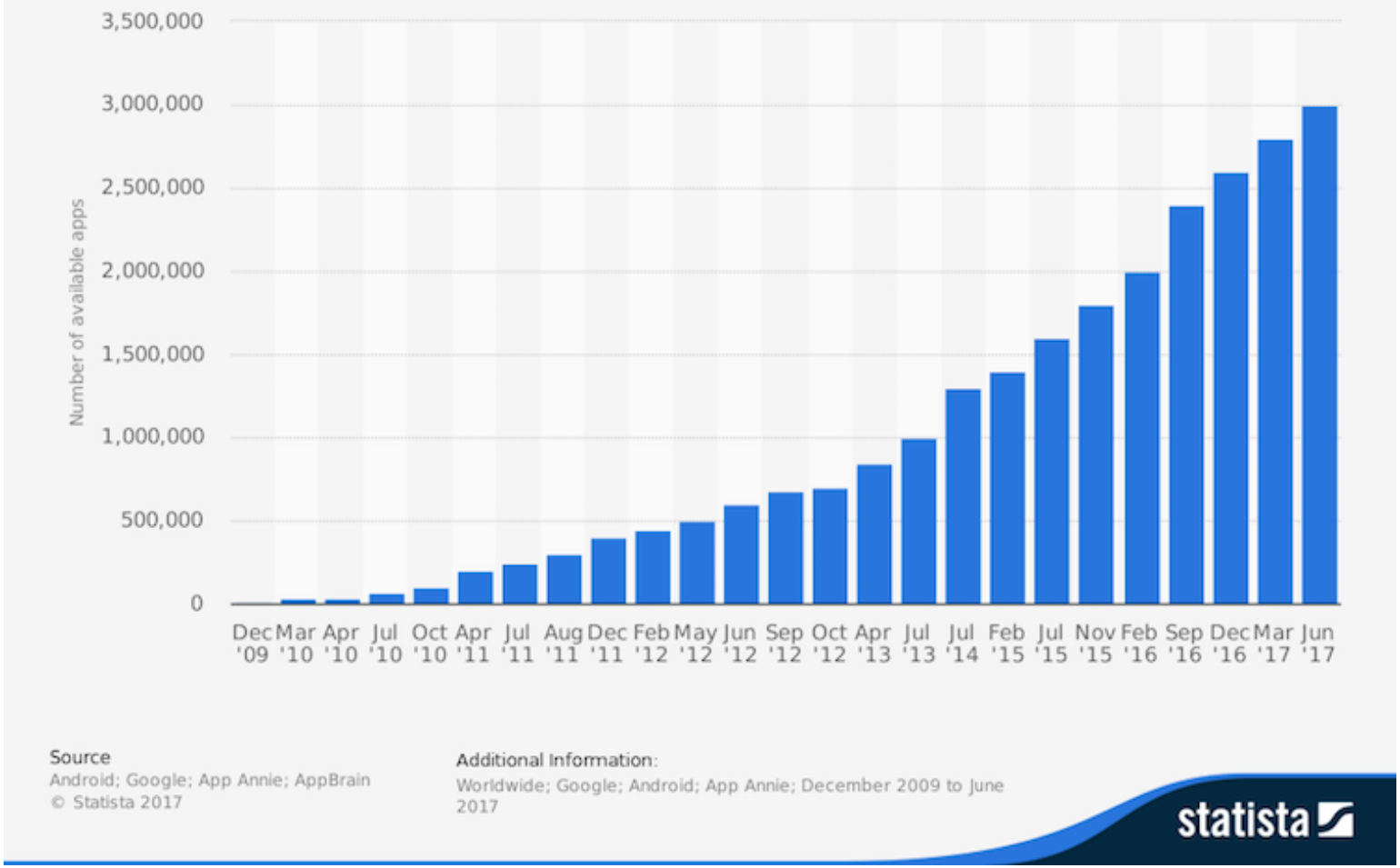


Source: StatCounter Global Stats

Explosive growth in mobile apps

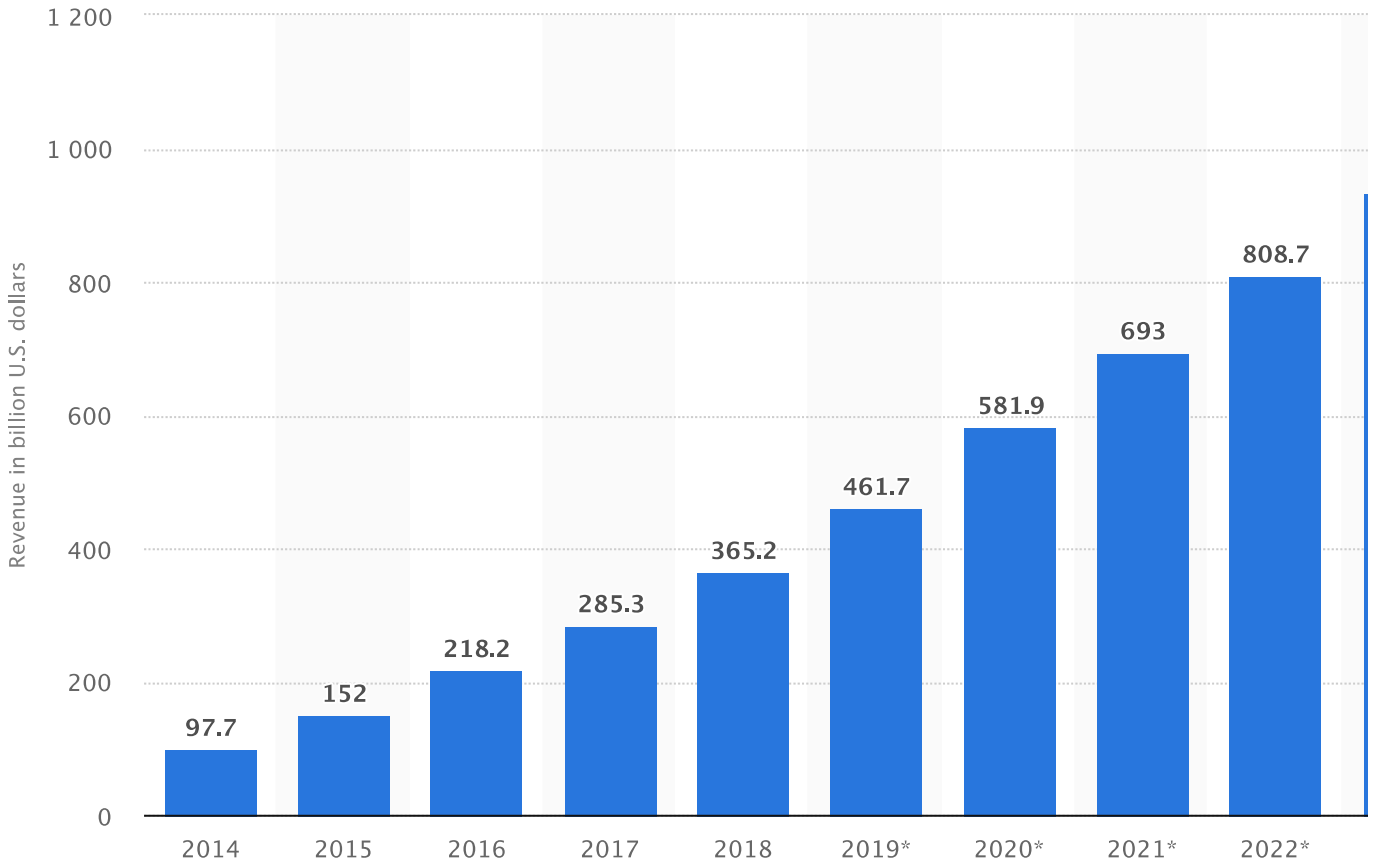
Number of apps in Google Play store



Source:

statista

Mobile app revenues



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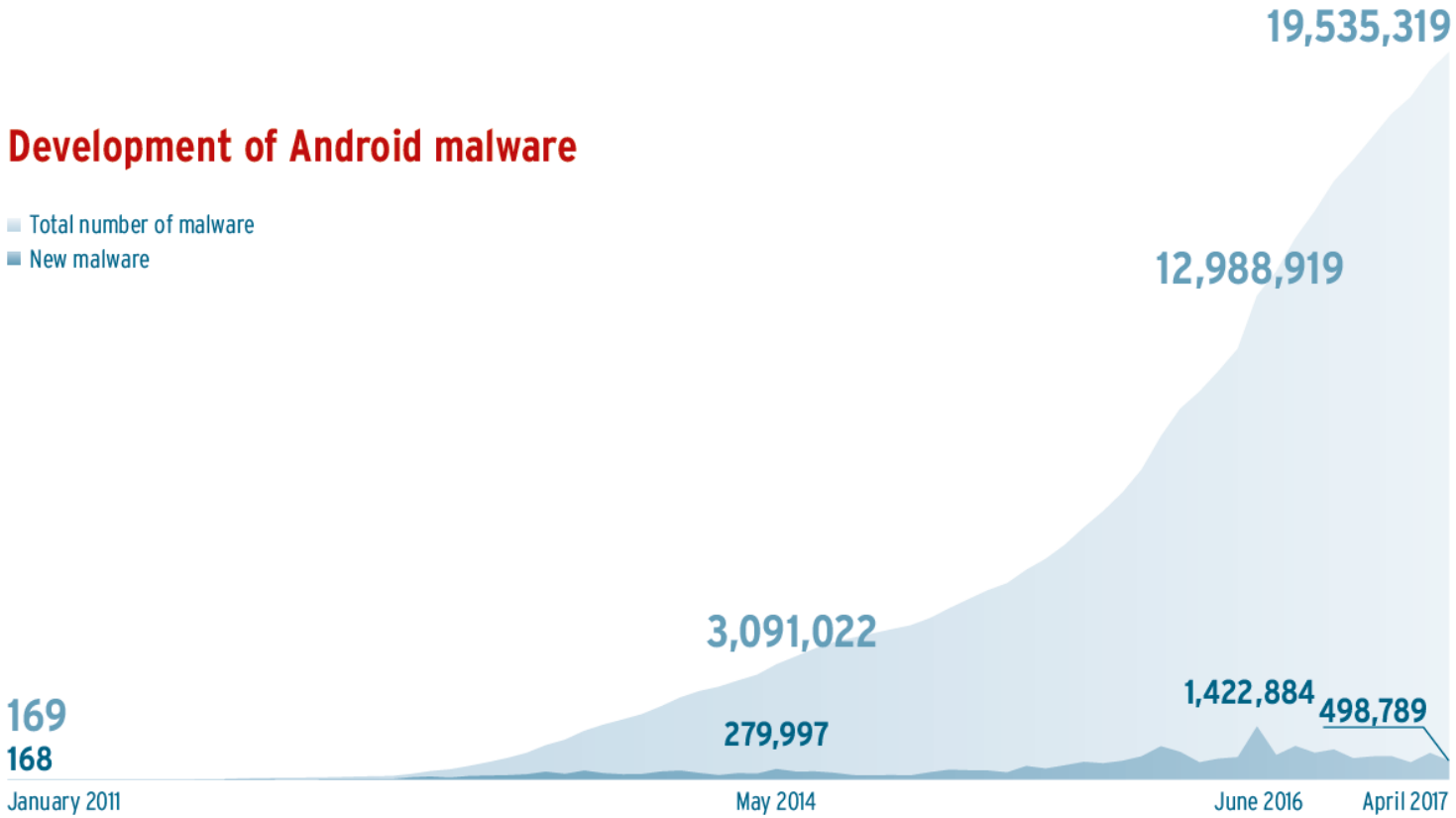
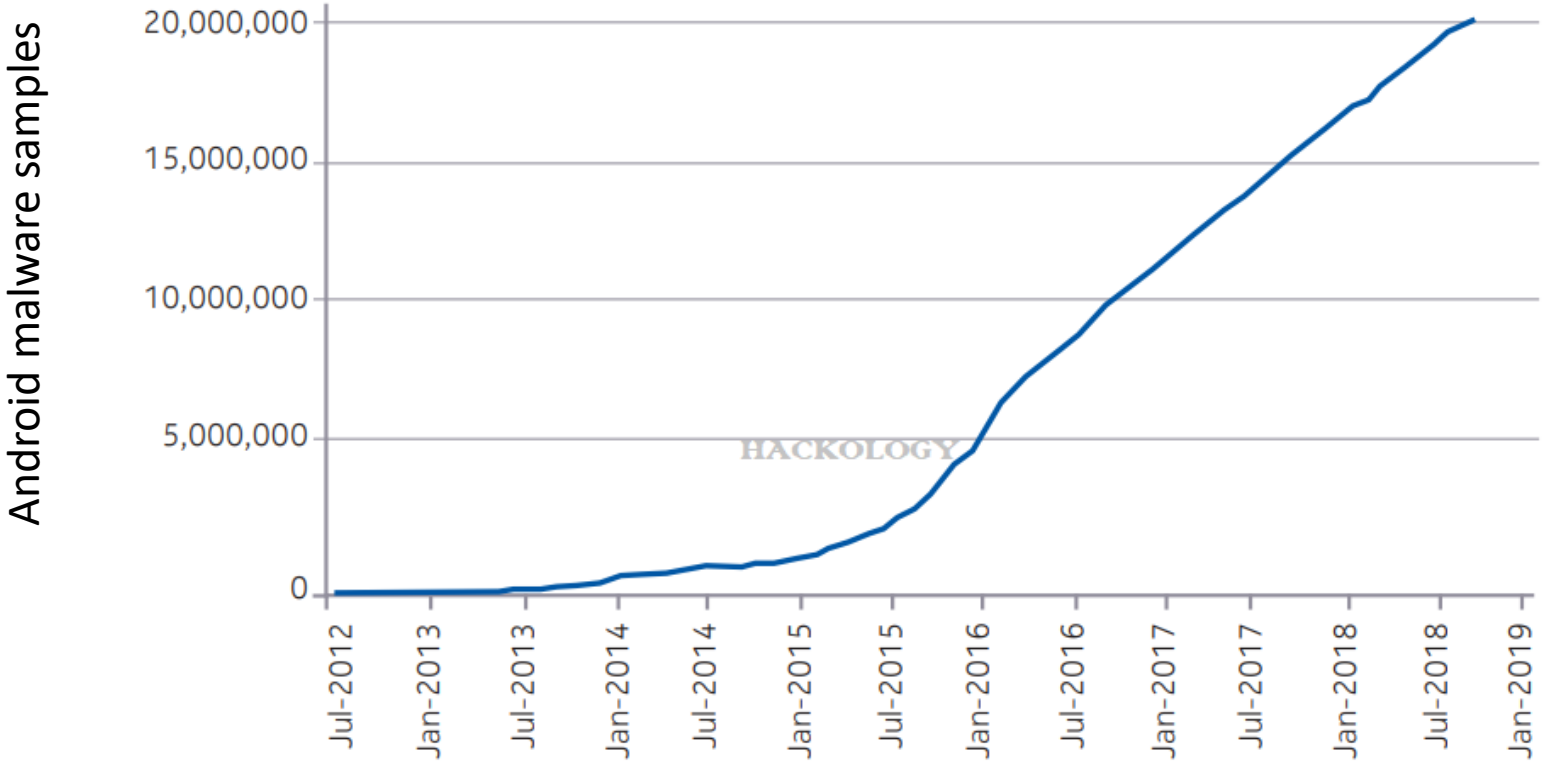
statista

Increasing security problems



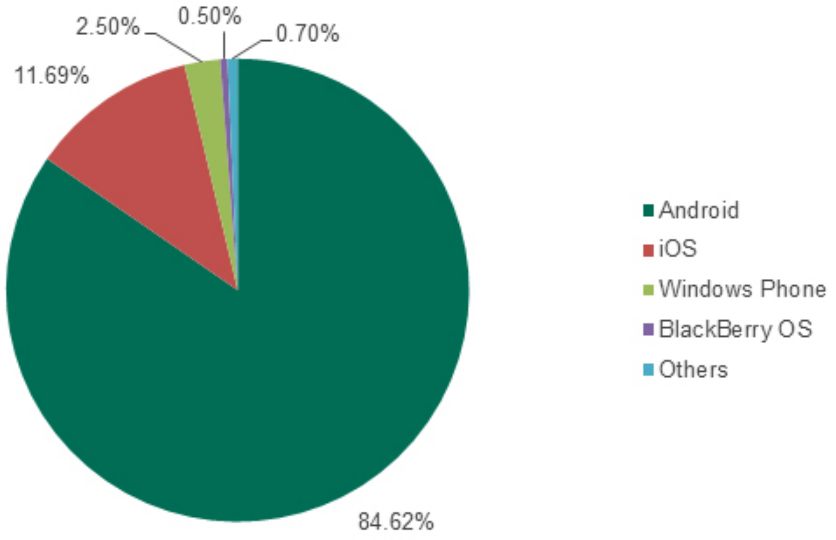
Source:
AV-TEST
The Independent IT-Security Institute
Magdeburg Germany

Increasing security problems

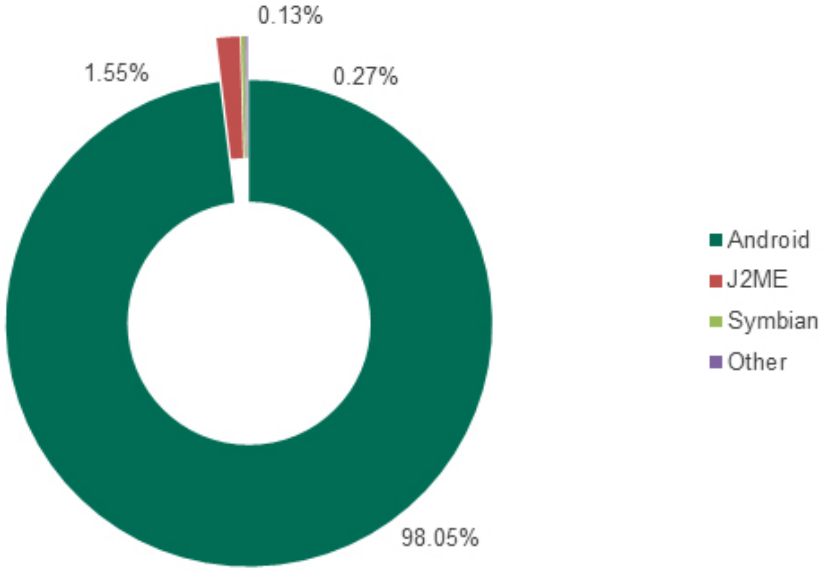


Source:

Android is the primary target



Market Distribution

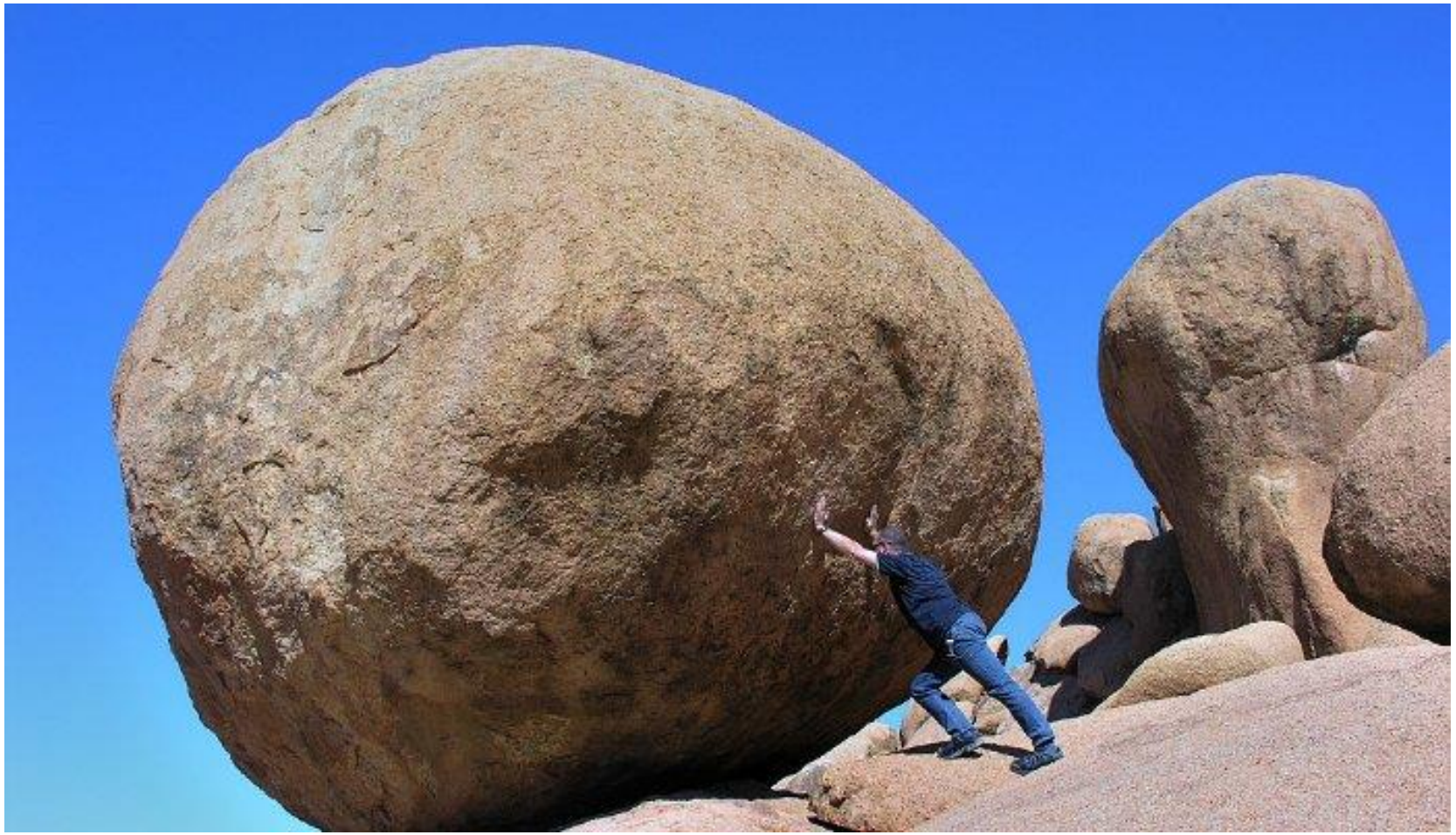


Attack Distribution

Source:
kaspersky

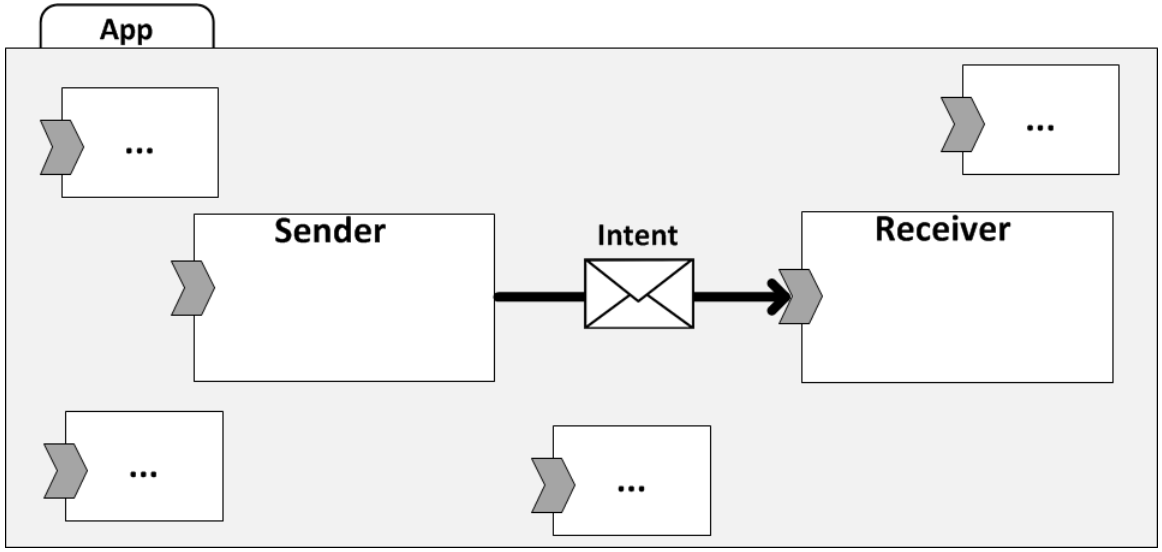
Missteps in Android development framework are at fault

Getting the framework design “right” is exceptionally difficult



Architecture-based development in Android

- Component types
  - Activity
  - Service
  - Content Provider
  - Broadcast Receiver
- Events
  - Intent messages



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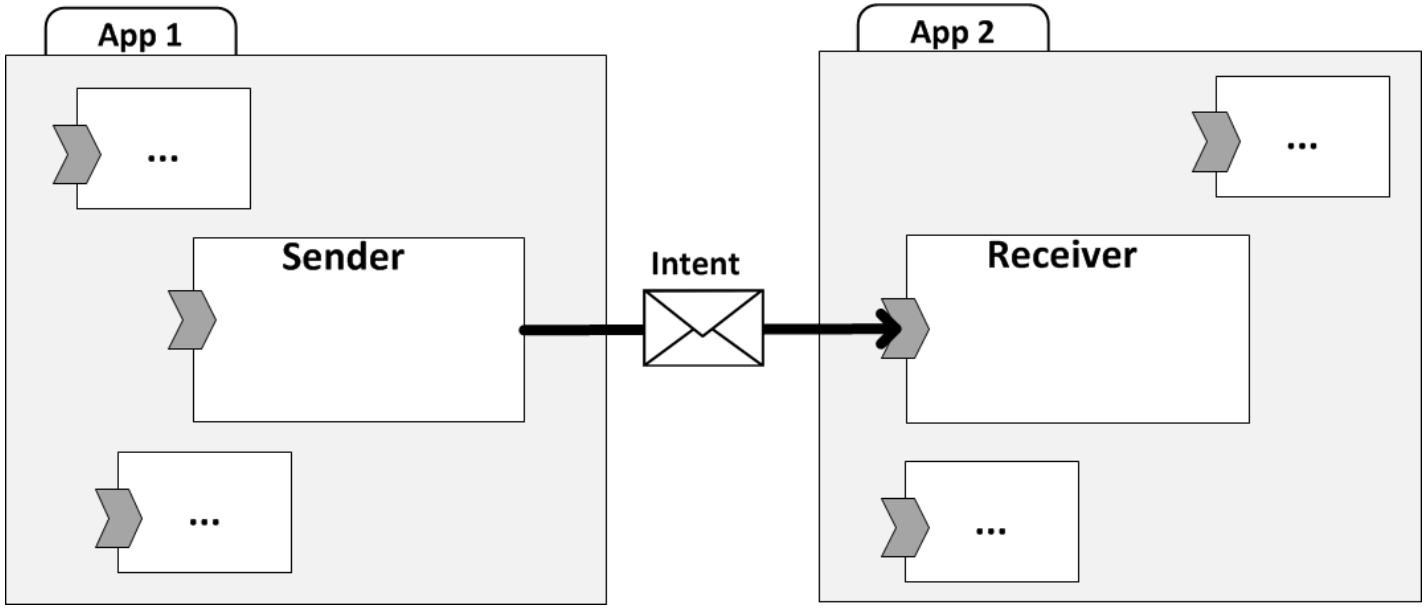
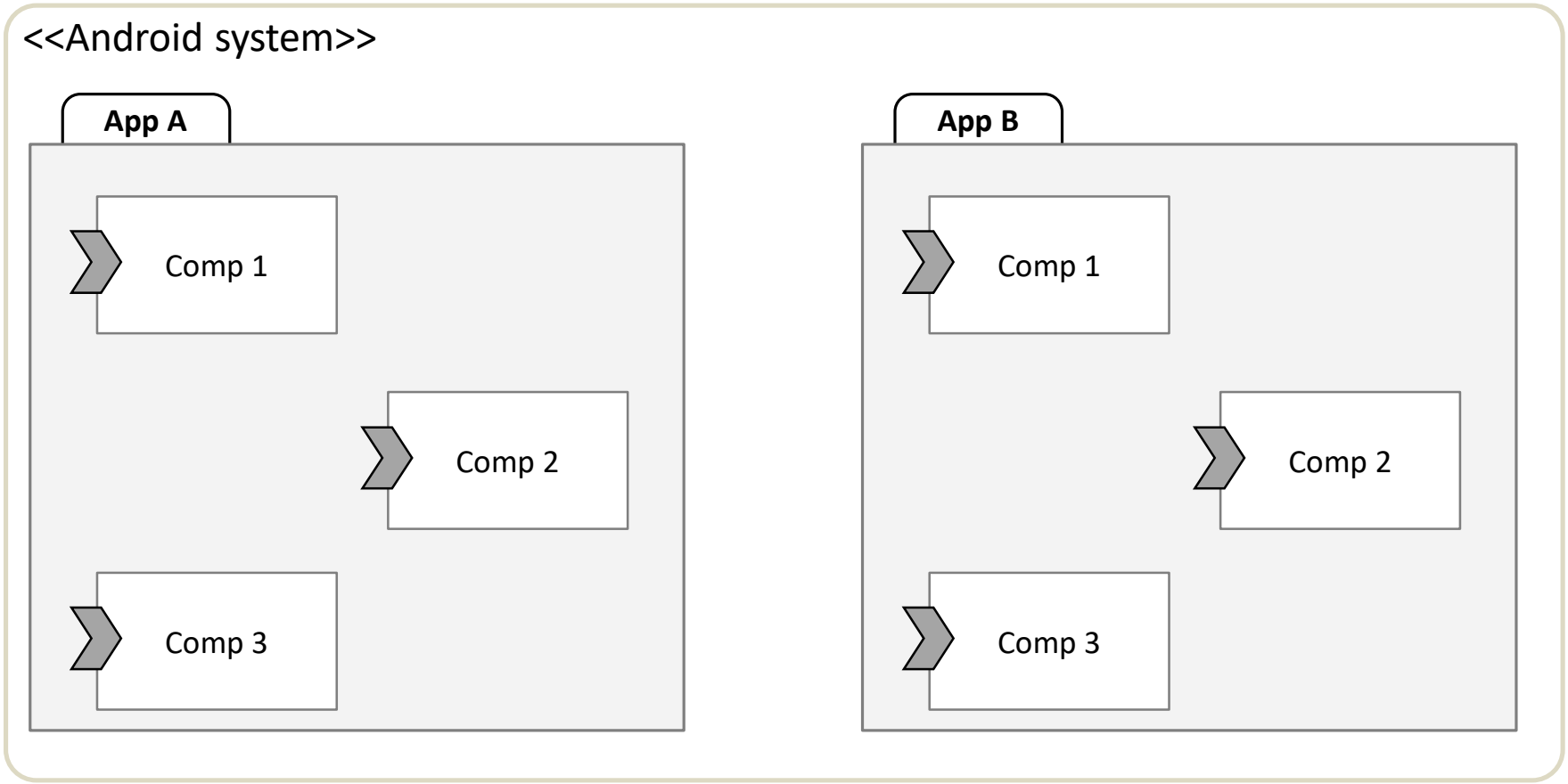


Principle of Least Privilege

- Each software component must be able to access only the information and resources that are necessary for its legitimate purpose

- Android systematically violates this principle

Overprivileged resource access



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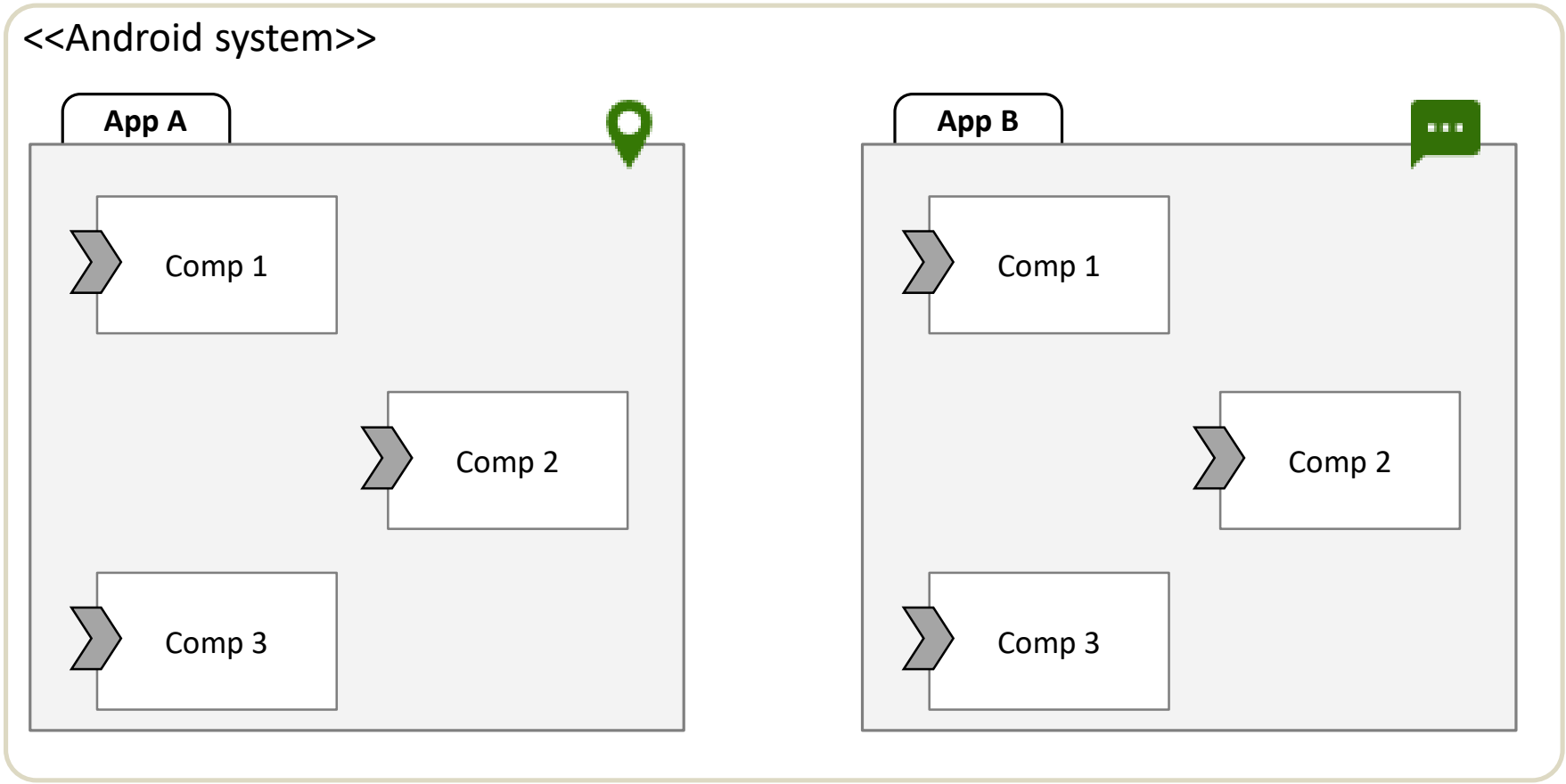

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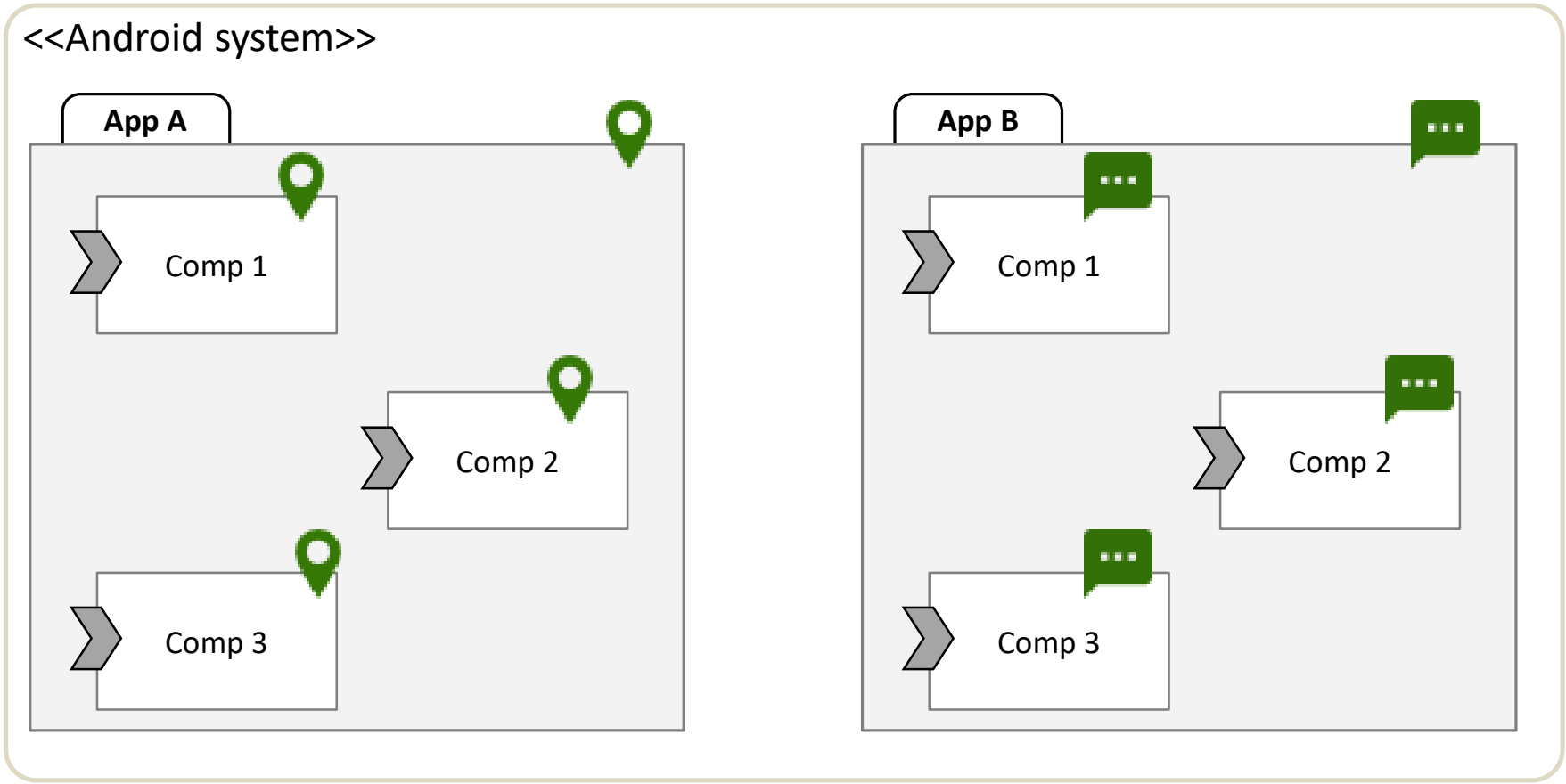
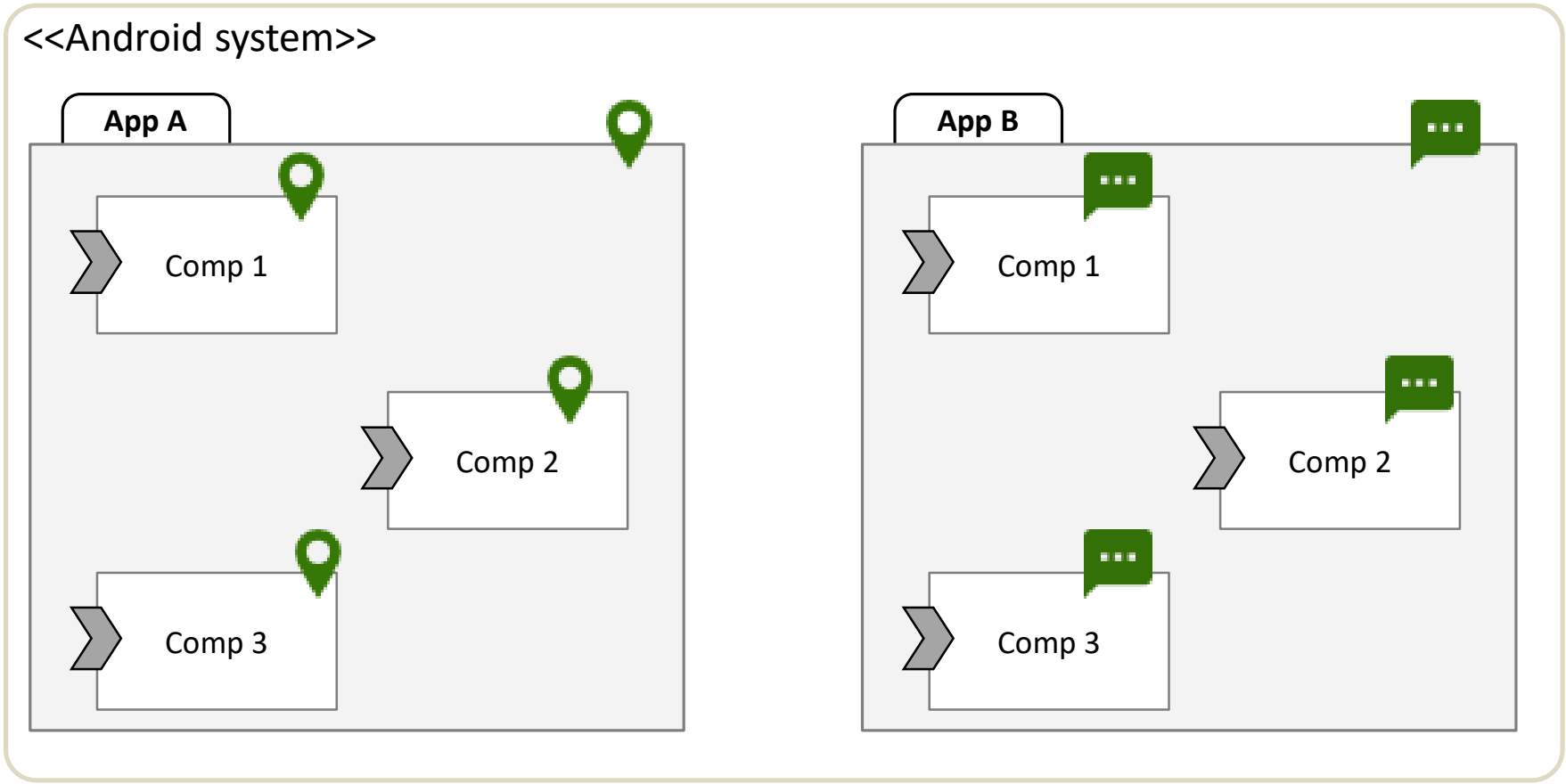


Overprivileged inter-component communication (ICC)



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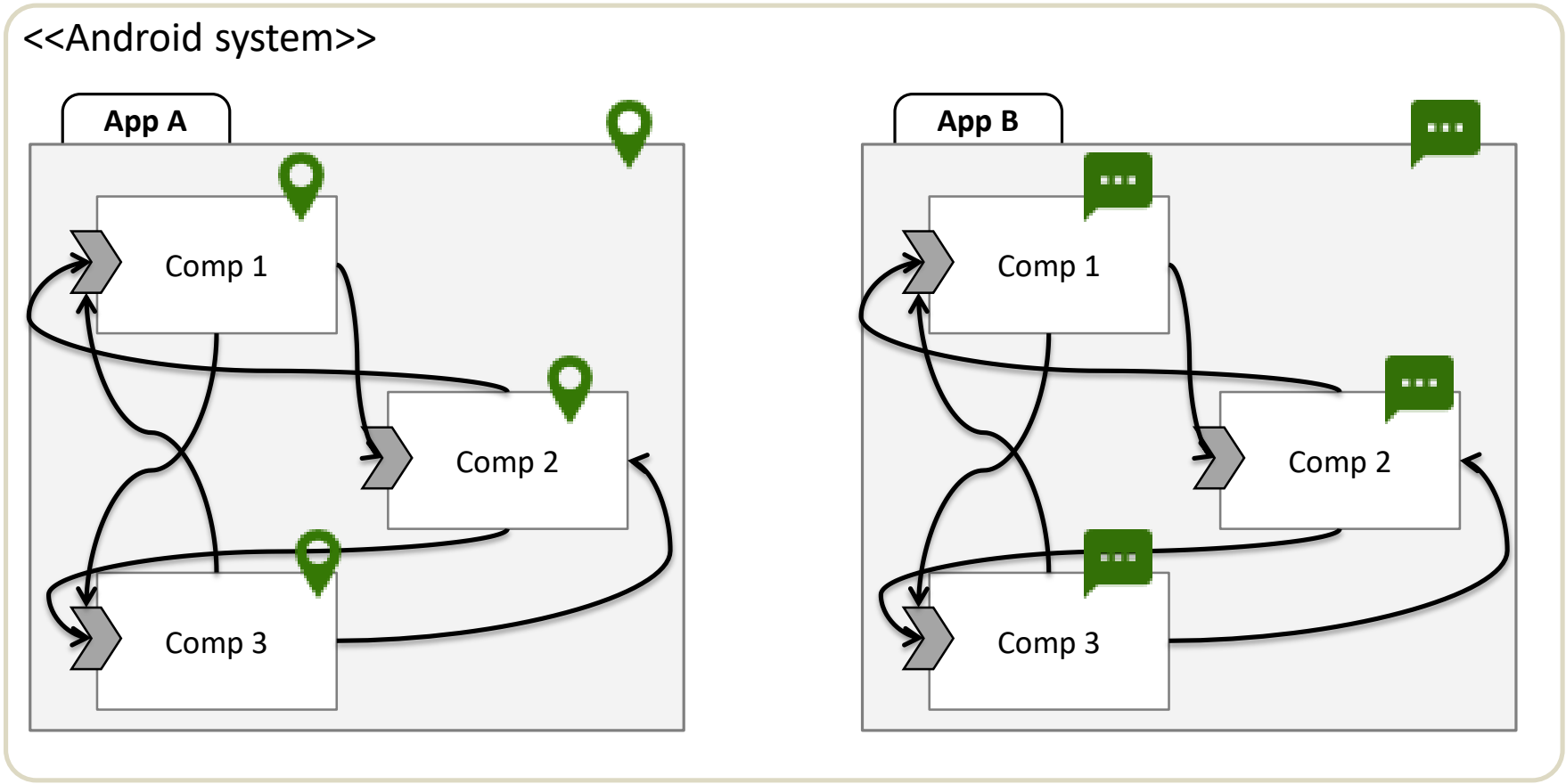

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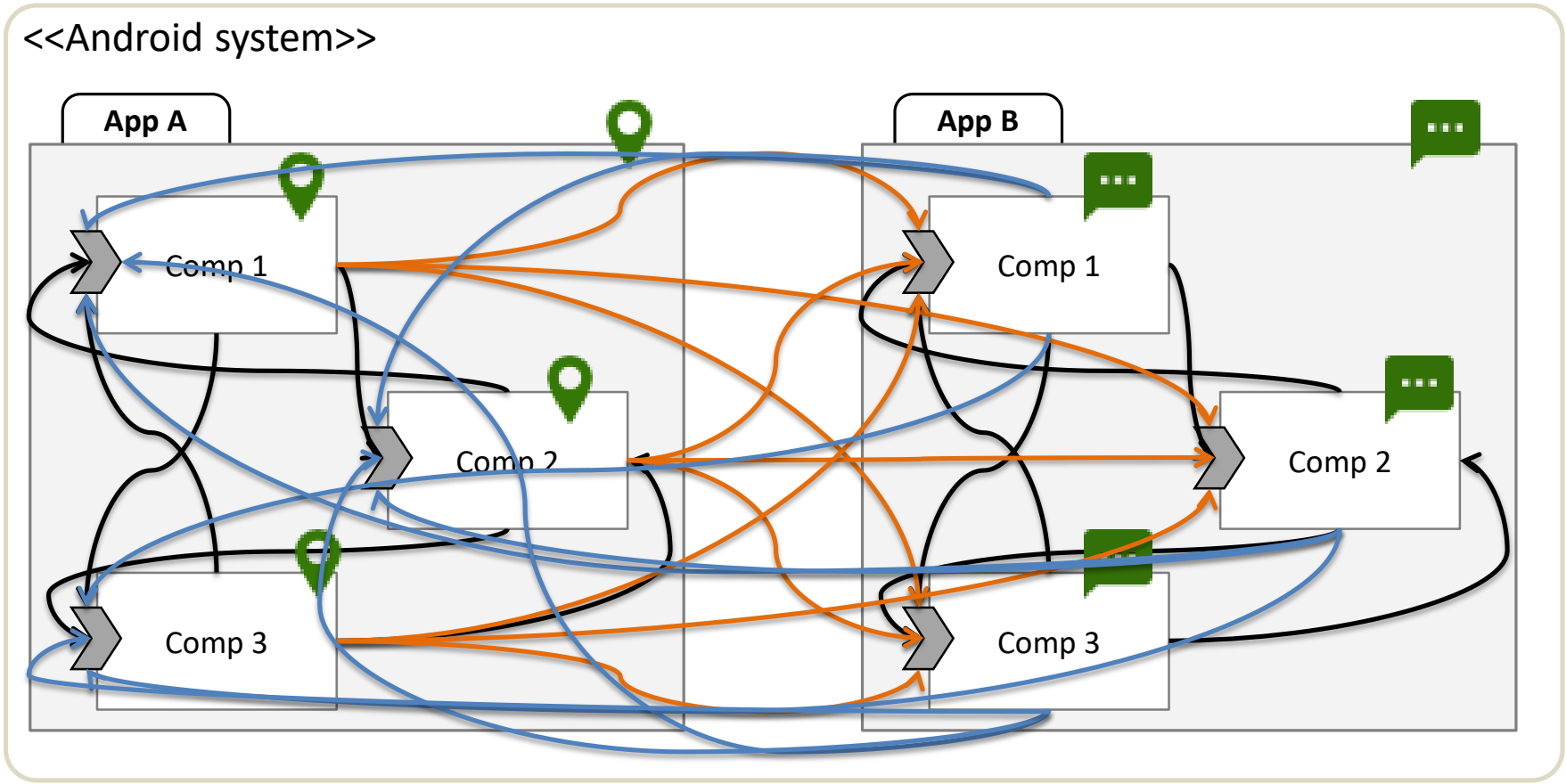
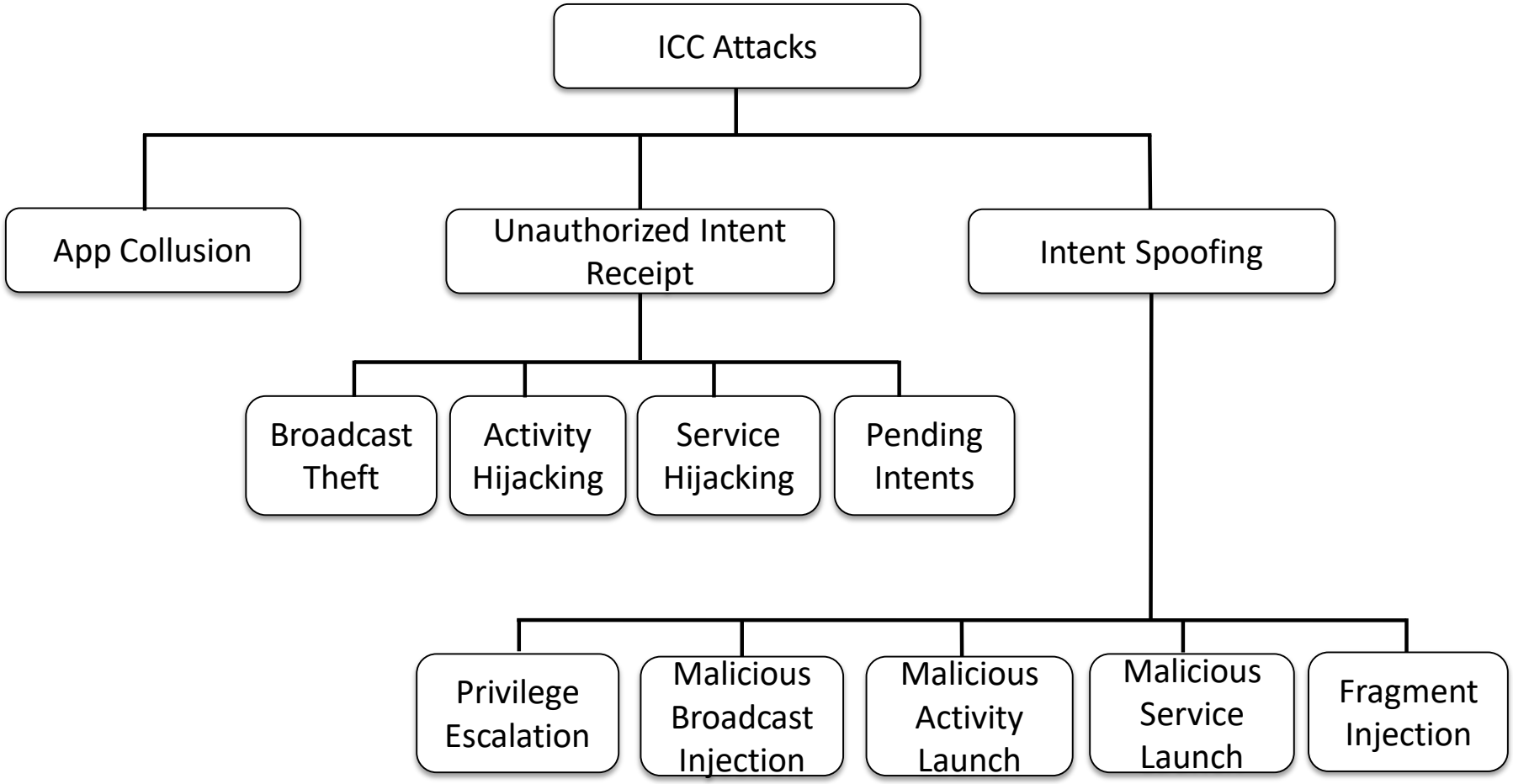
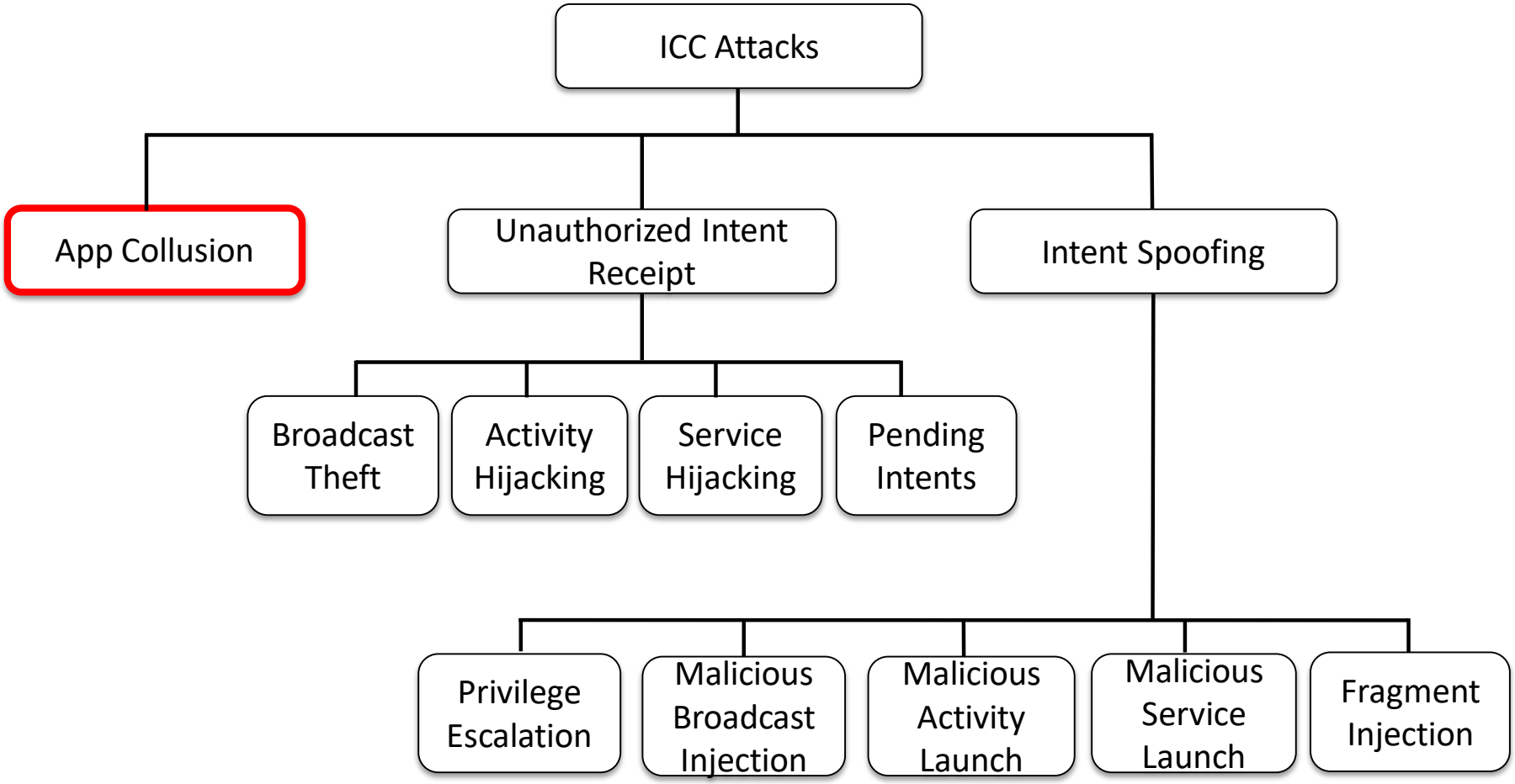


Inter-component communication attacks



Sadeghi, Bagheri, Garcia, and Malek. A Taxonomy and Qualitative Comparison of Program Analysis Techniques for Security Assessment of Android Software. *TSE* 2017.

Inter-component communication attacks



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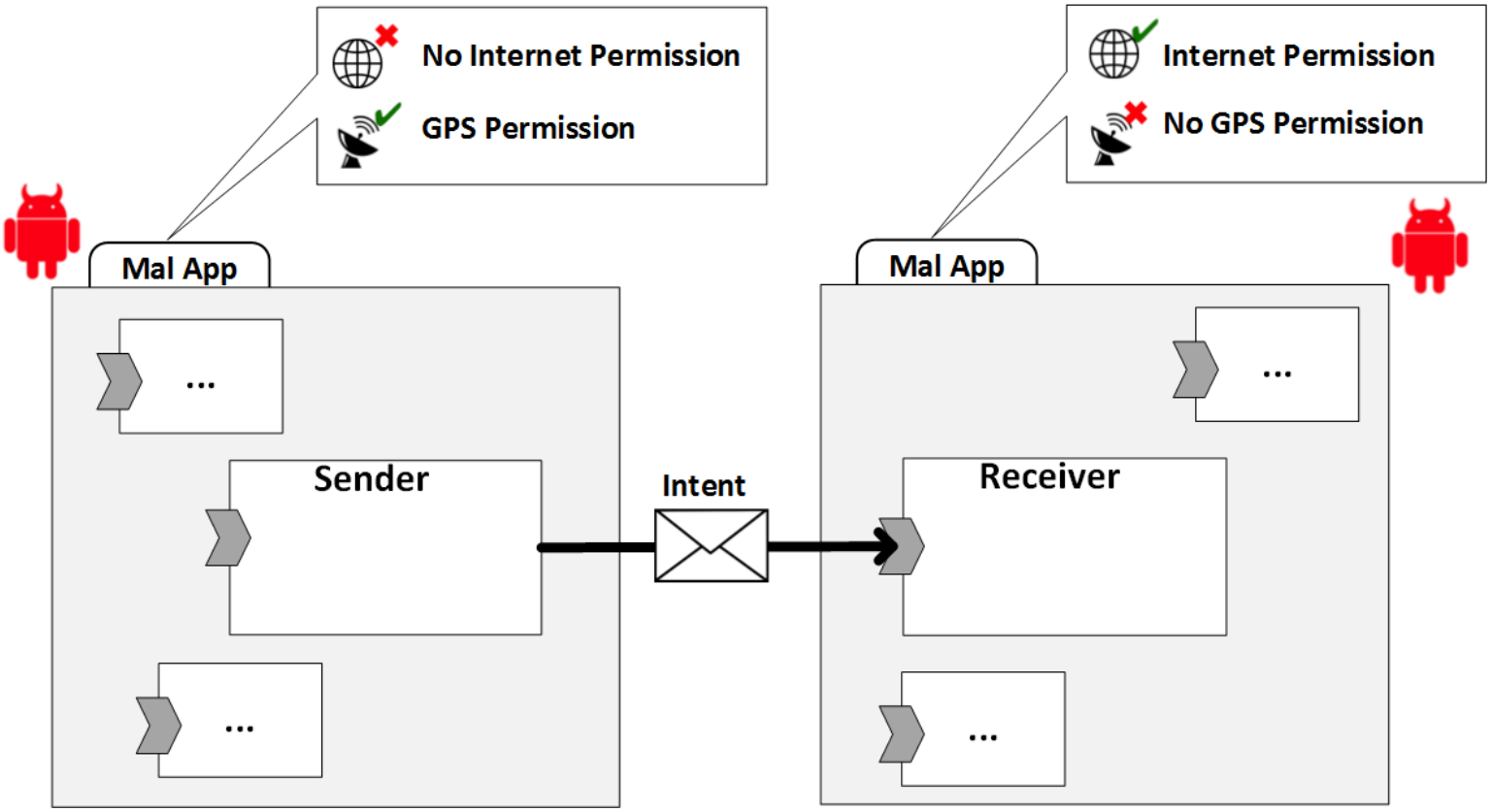
App collusion attack



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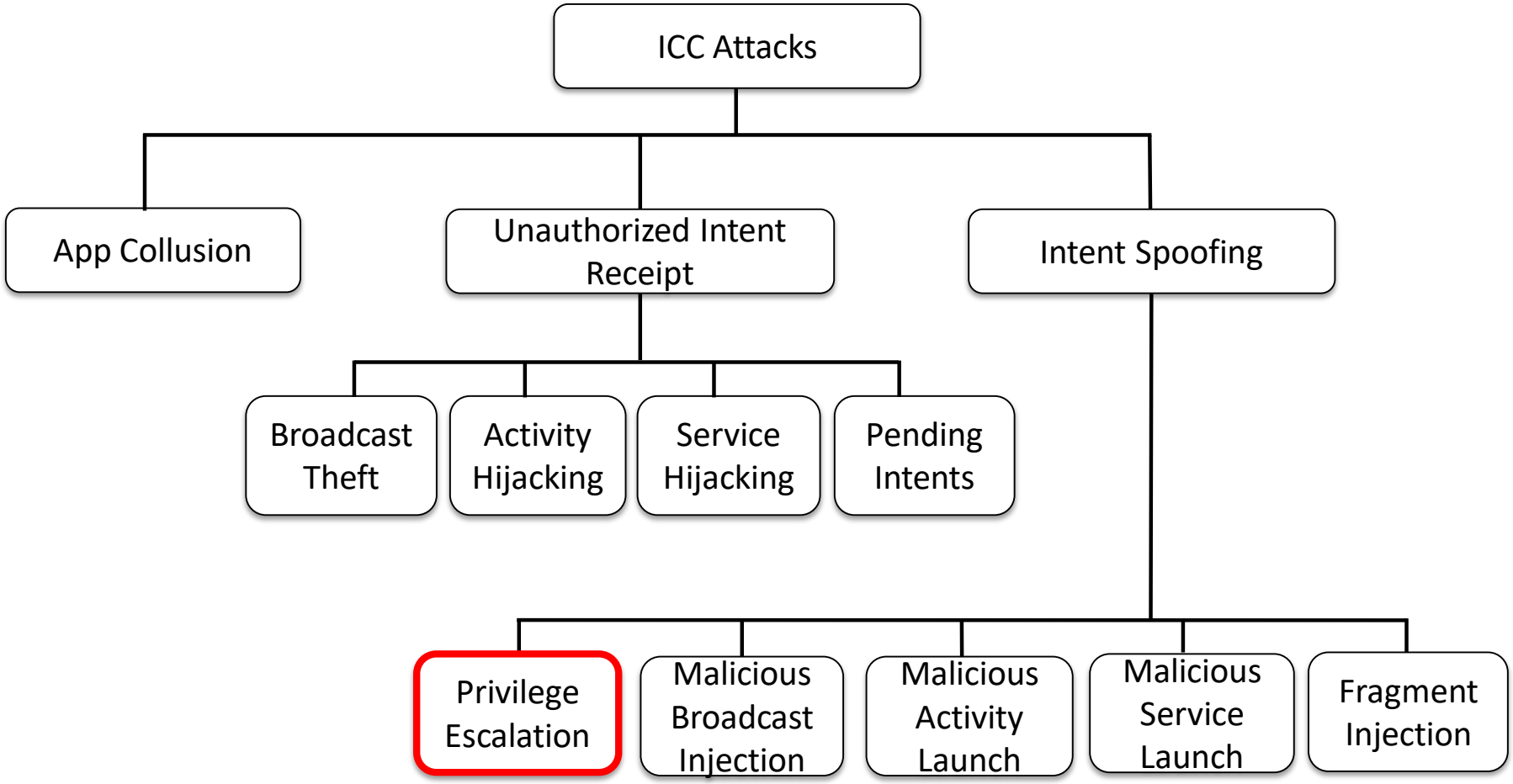

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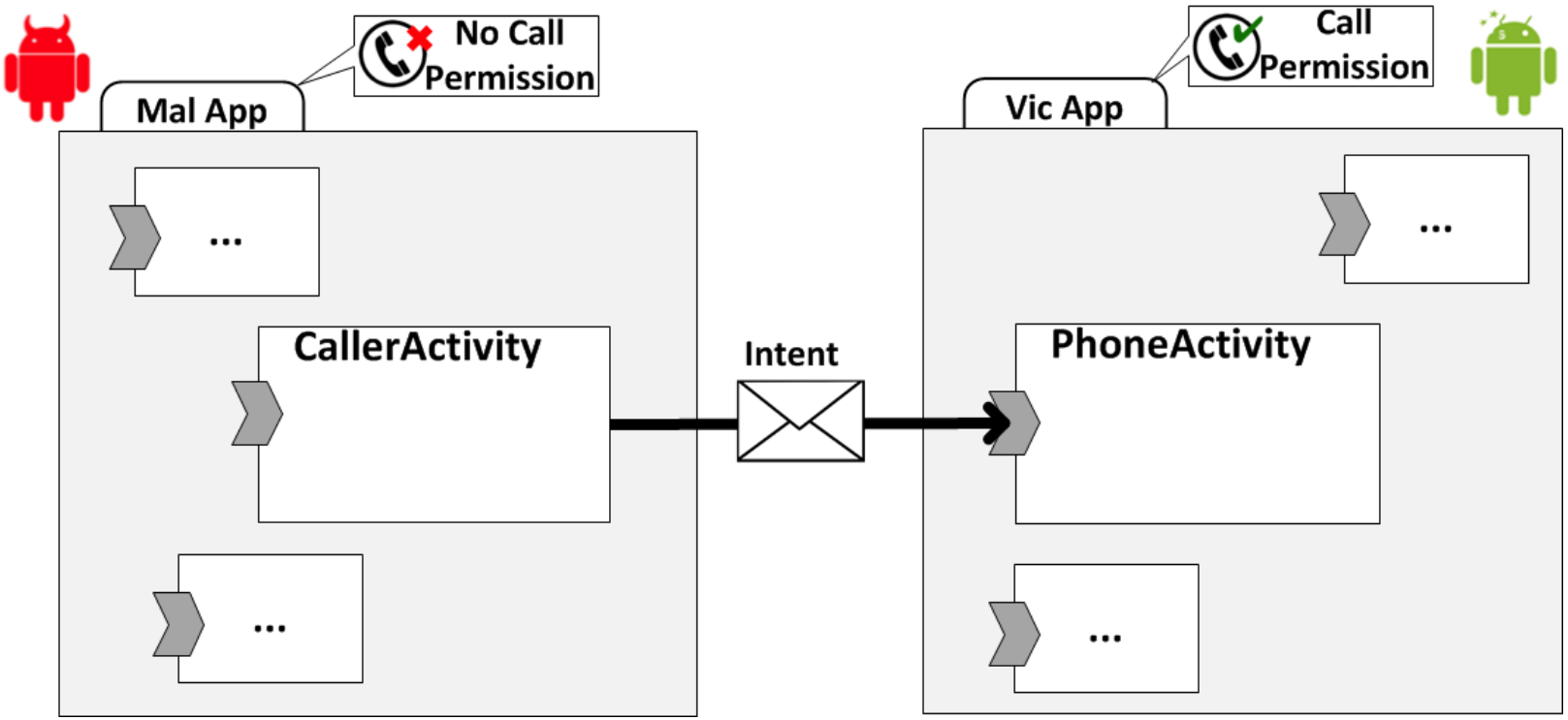
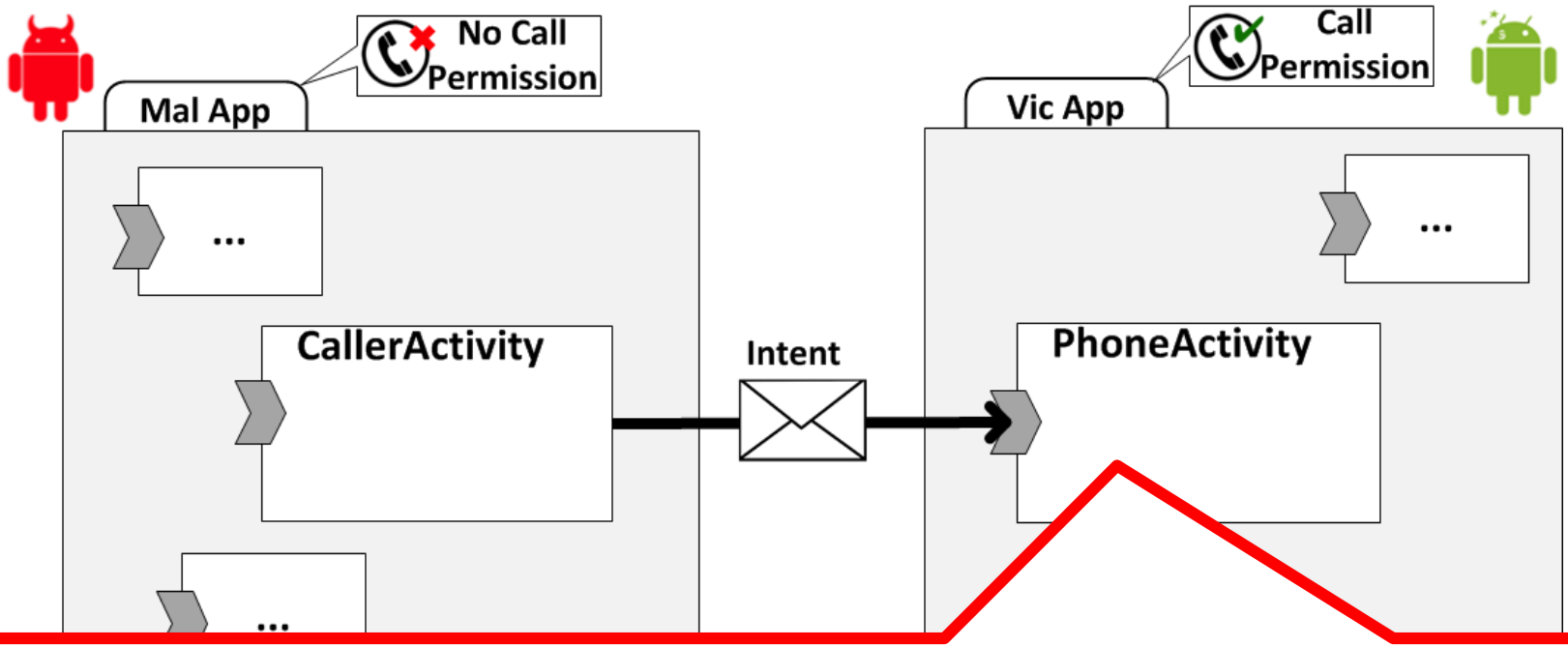
Privilege escalation attack



- *PhoneActivity* defines a public interface (Intent Filter), but fails to check if the caller has the proper permission

Privilege escalation attack



Developer needs to remember to check the caller's permission as follows:

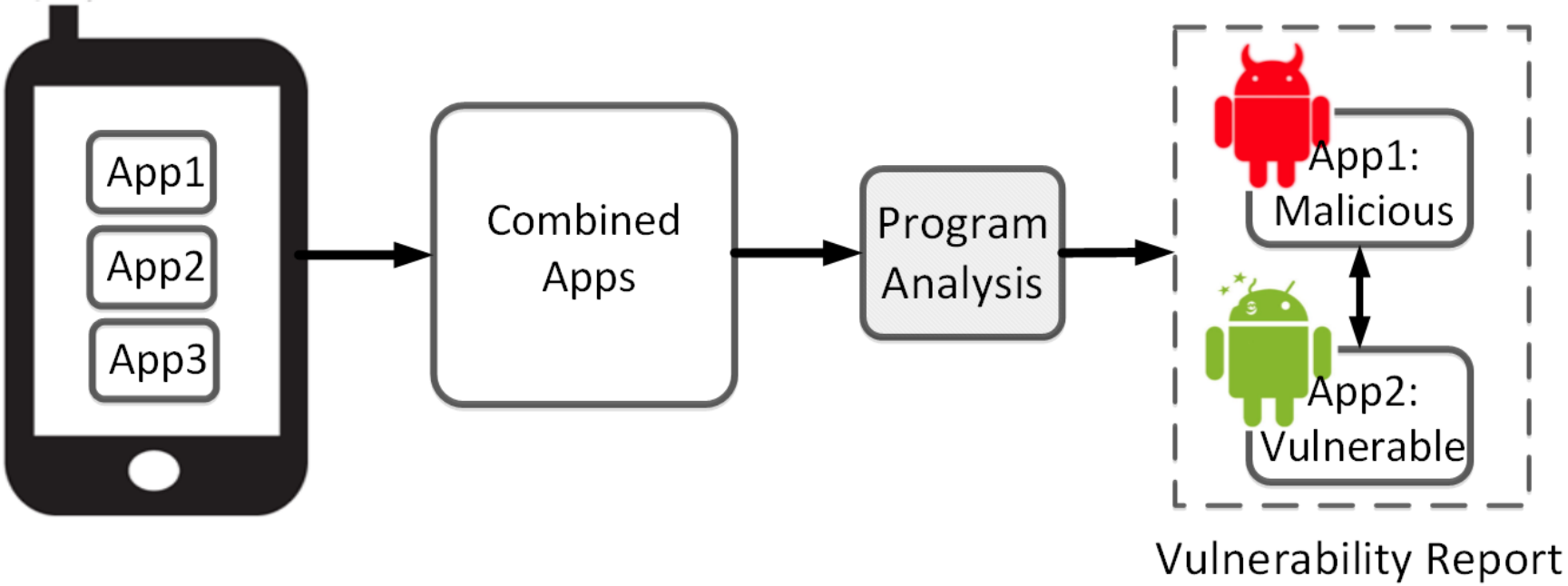
```
// receives the Intent
if (checkCallingPermission("permission.CALL_PHONE")==PackageManager.PERMISSION_GRANTED) {
        // makes a sensitive API call
}
```

How can we solve the security problems?

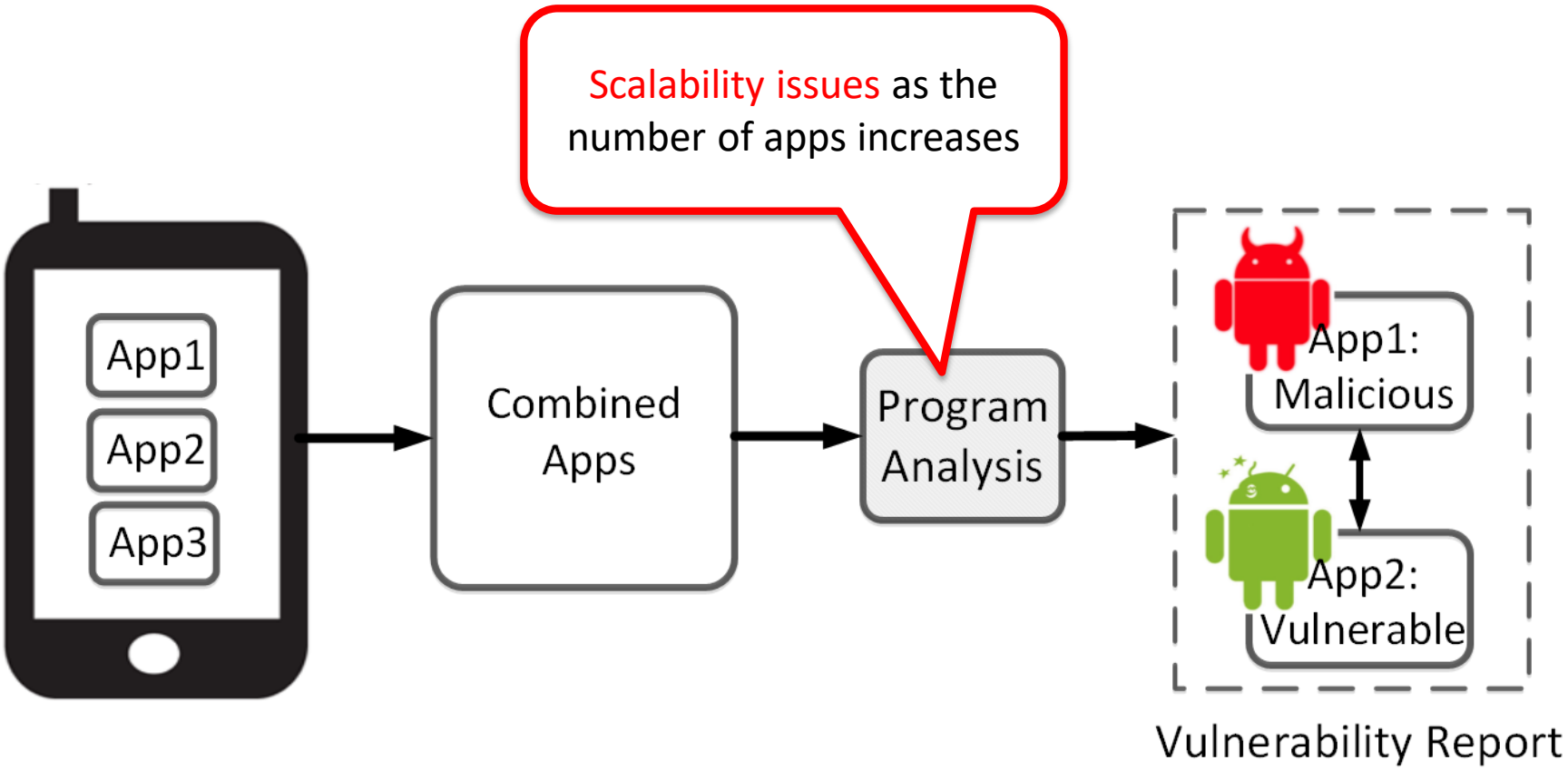
1. Accept Android “as is”
   - Develop tools to detect the security issues
2. Change Android
   - Develop mechanisms to prevent the security issues

Accept Android “as is”

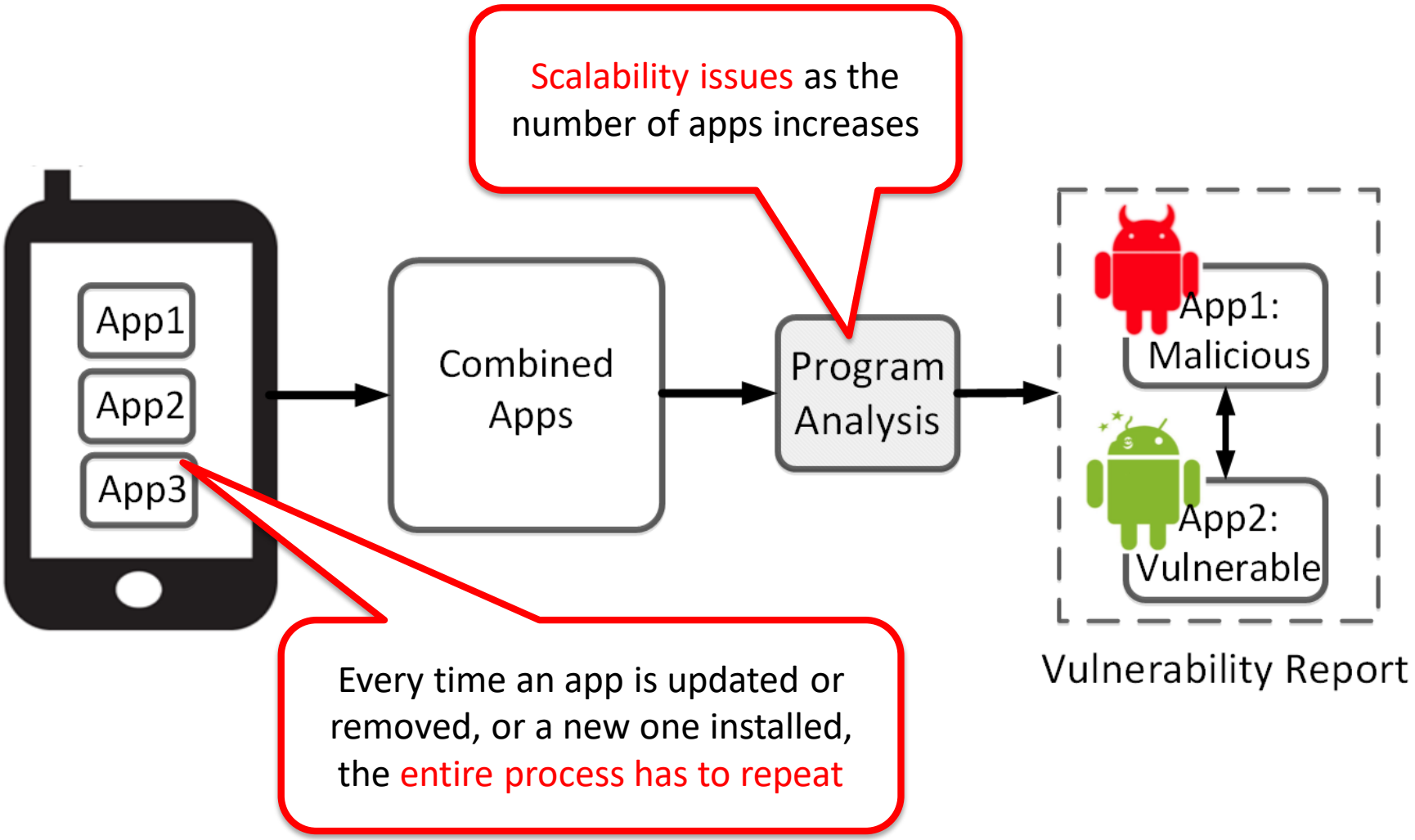
Naïve approach



Naïve approach



Naïve approach



Requirements and Insights

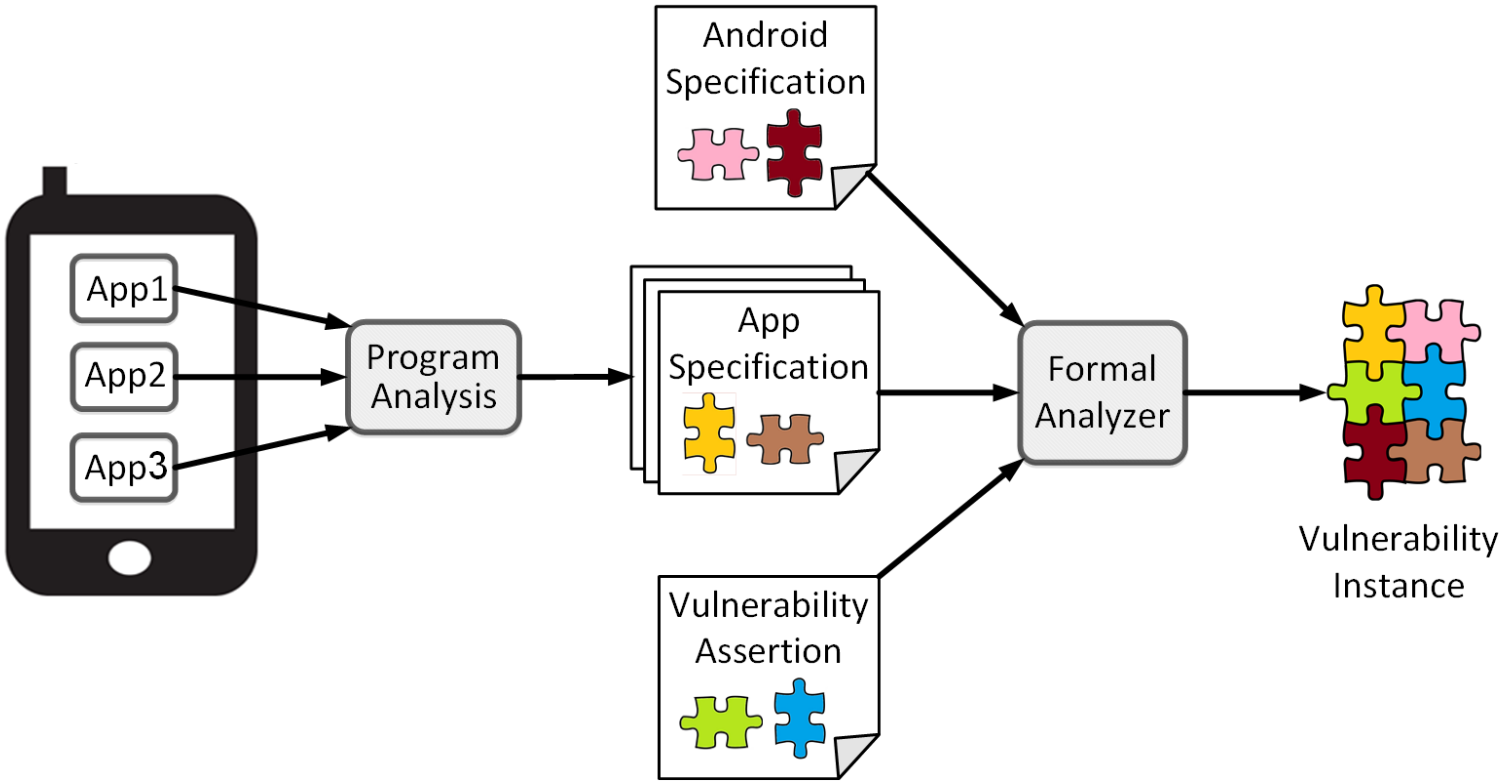
Requirements and Insights

- The analysis needs to be both scalable and compositional
  - Analyze each app in isolation, yet be able to reason about the security posture of the entire system

- Insight: security vulnerabilities are architectural in nature
  - Lift the analysis to the granularity of software architecture

COVERT

Compositional Analysis **o**f Inter-app **V**uln**er**abili**t**ies



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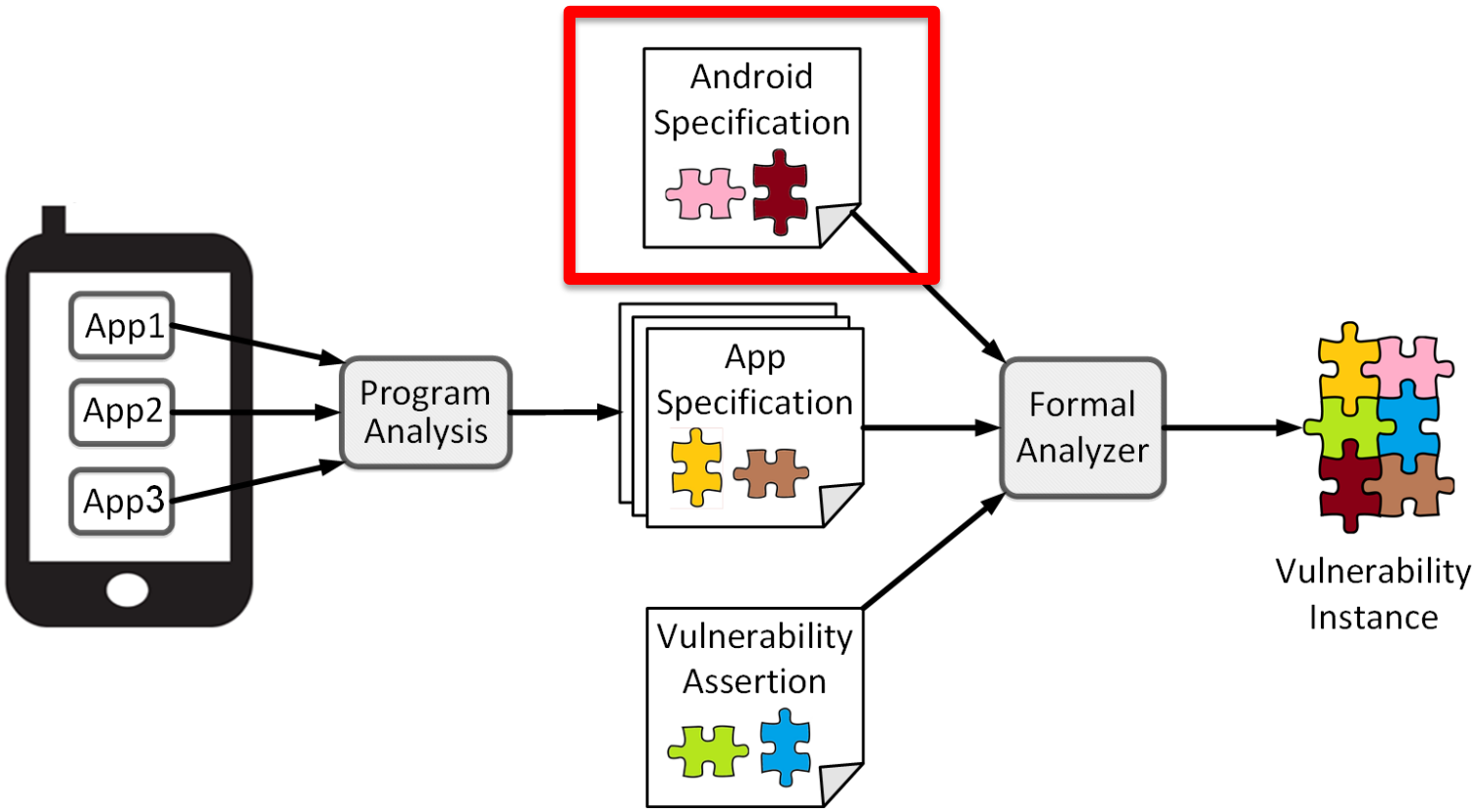

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Subset of Android specification in Alloy

- Formally codifies Android's architectural constructs
  - Signatures represent the constructs
  - Fields represent the relations
  - Facts represent the constraints

```
module androidDeclaration

abstract sig Application{
  usesPermissions: set Permission,
  appPermissions: set Permission
}
abstract sig Component{
  app: one Application,
  intentFilters: set IntentFilter,
  permissions: set Permission,
  paths: set Path
}
abstract sig Intent{
  sender: one Component,
  component: lone Component,
  action: lone Action,
  categories: set Category,
  data: set Data,
}
abstract sig IntentFilter{
  actions: some Action,
  data: set Data,
  categories: set Category,
}
fact IntentFilterConstraints{
  all i:IntentFilter| one i.~intentFilters
  no i:IntentFilter| i.~intentFilters in Provider
}
```

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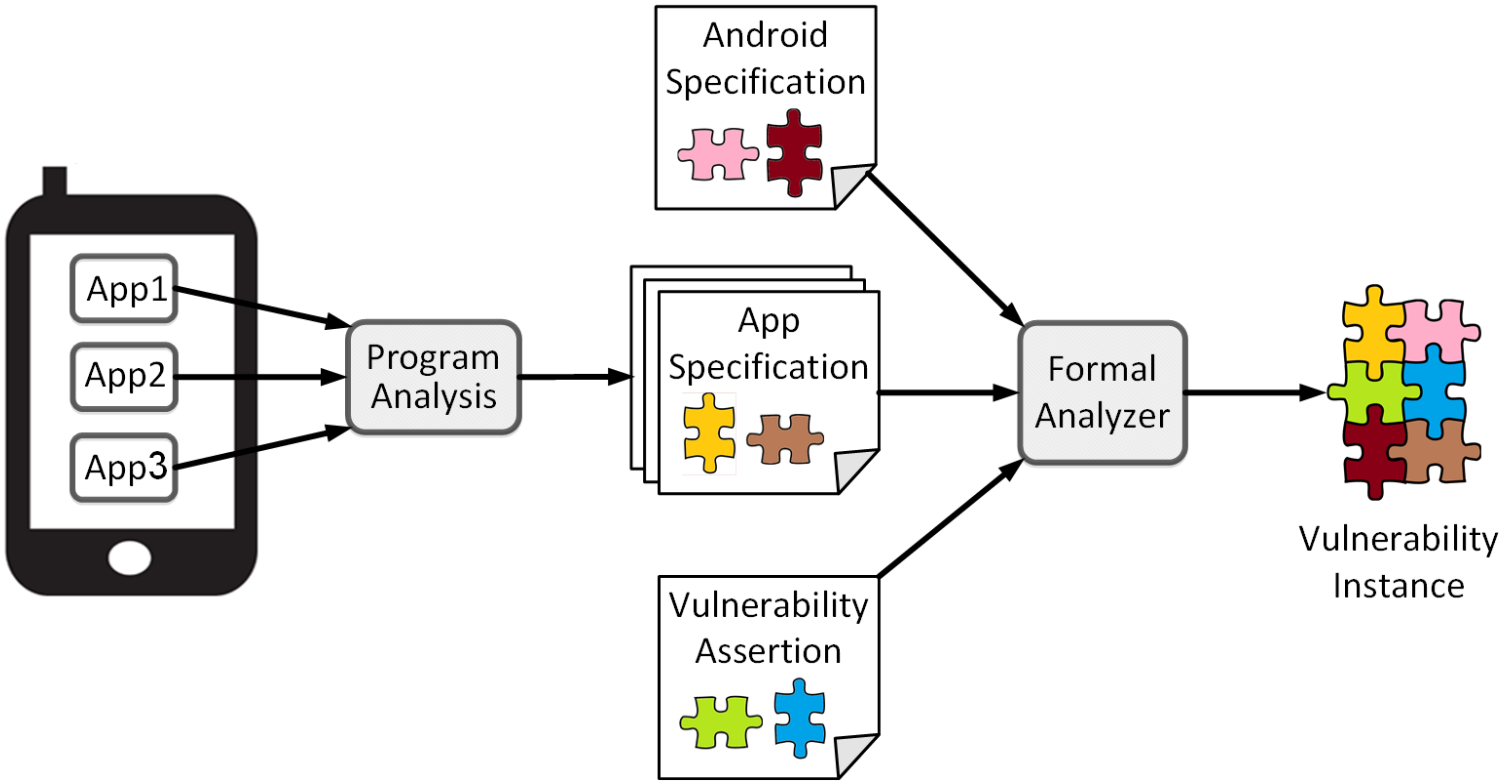

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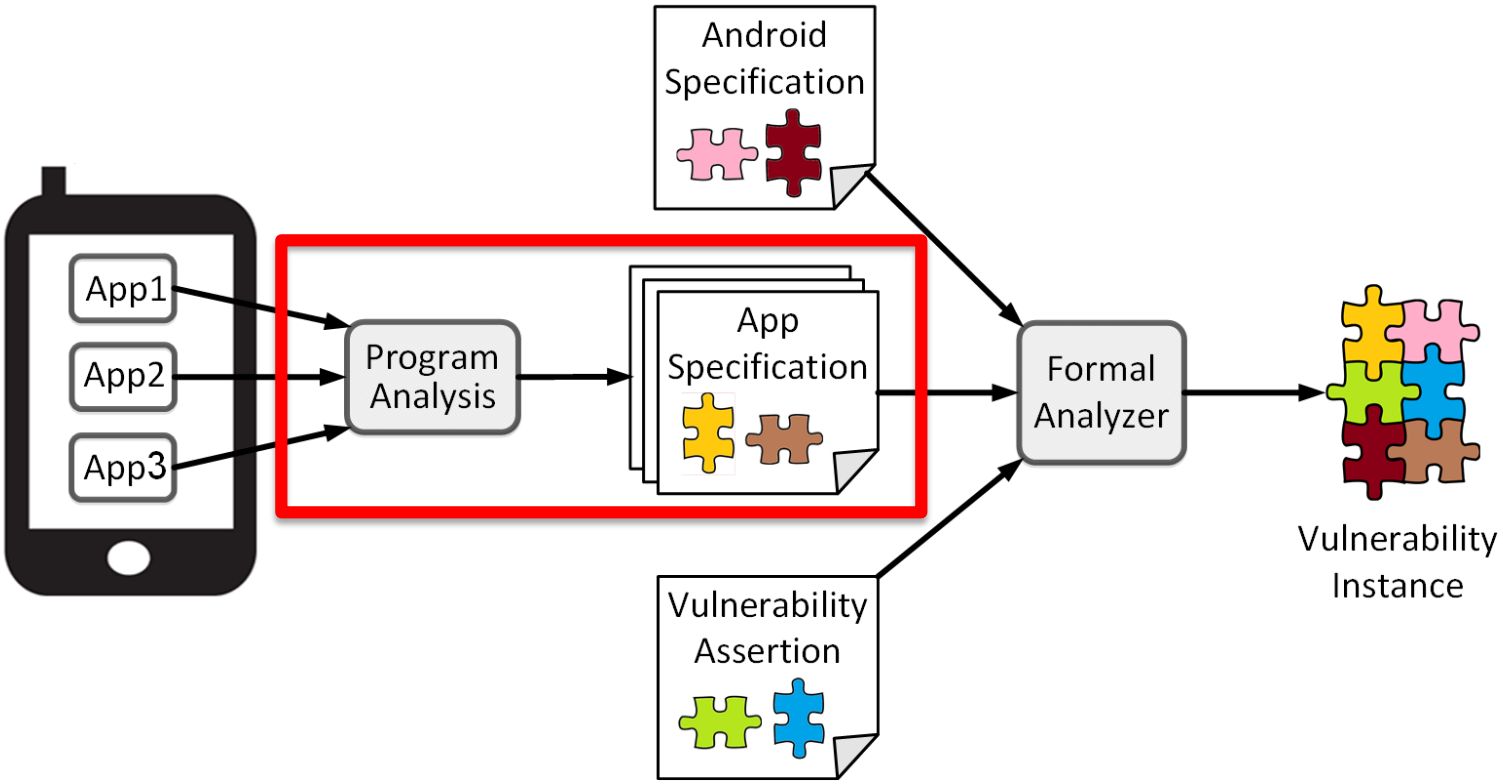

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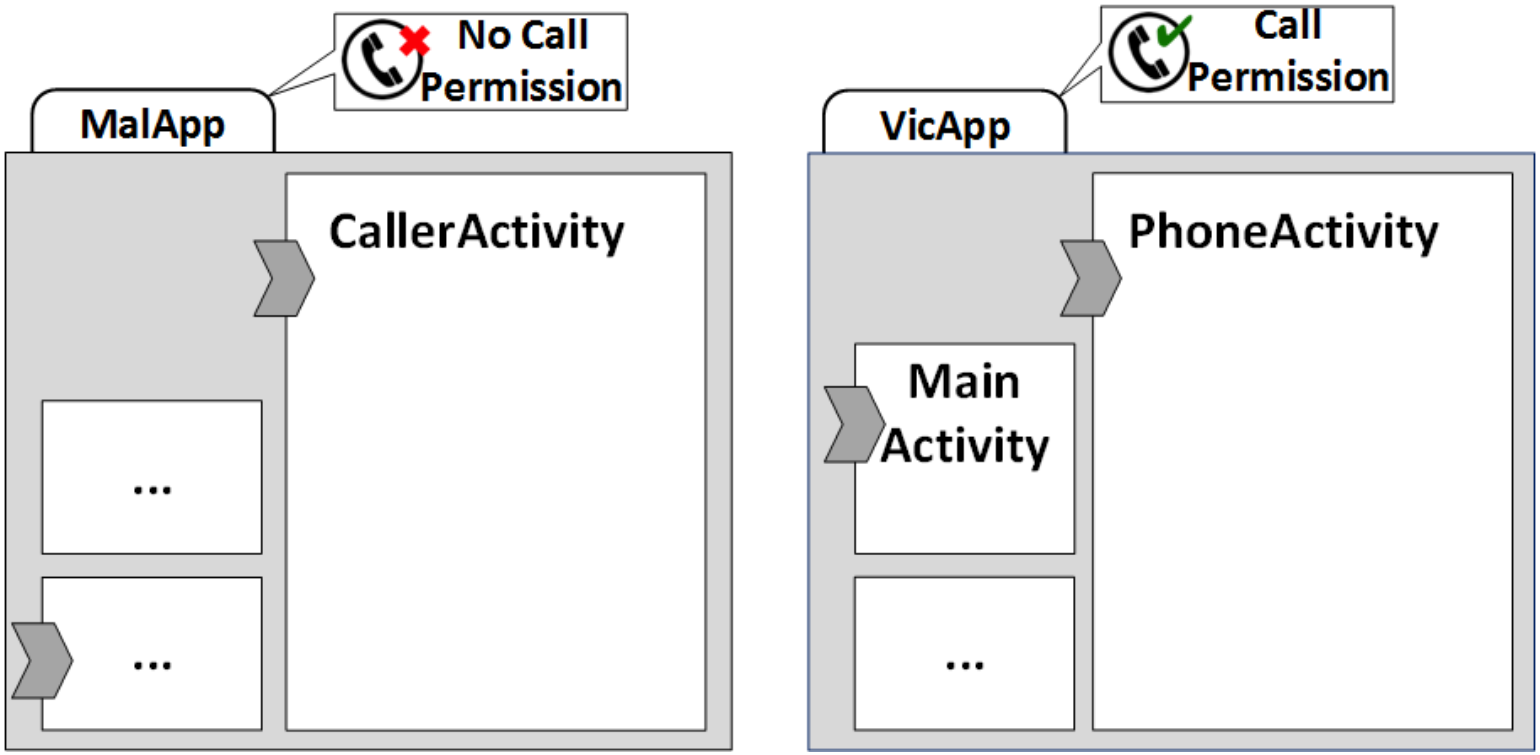
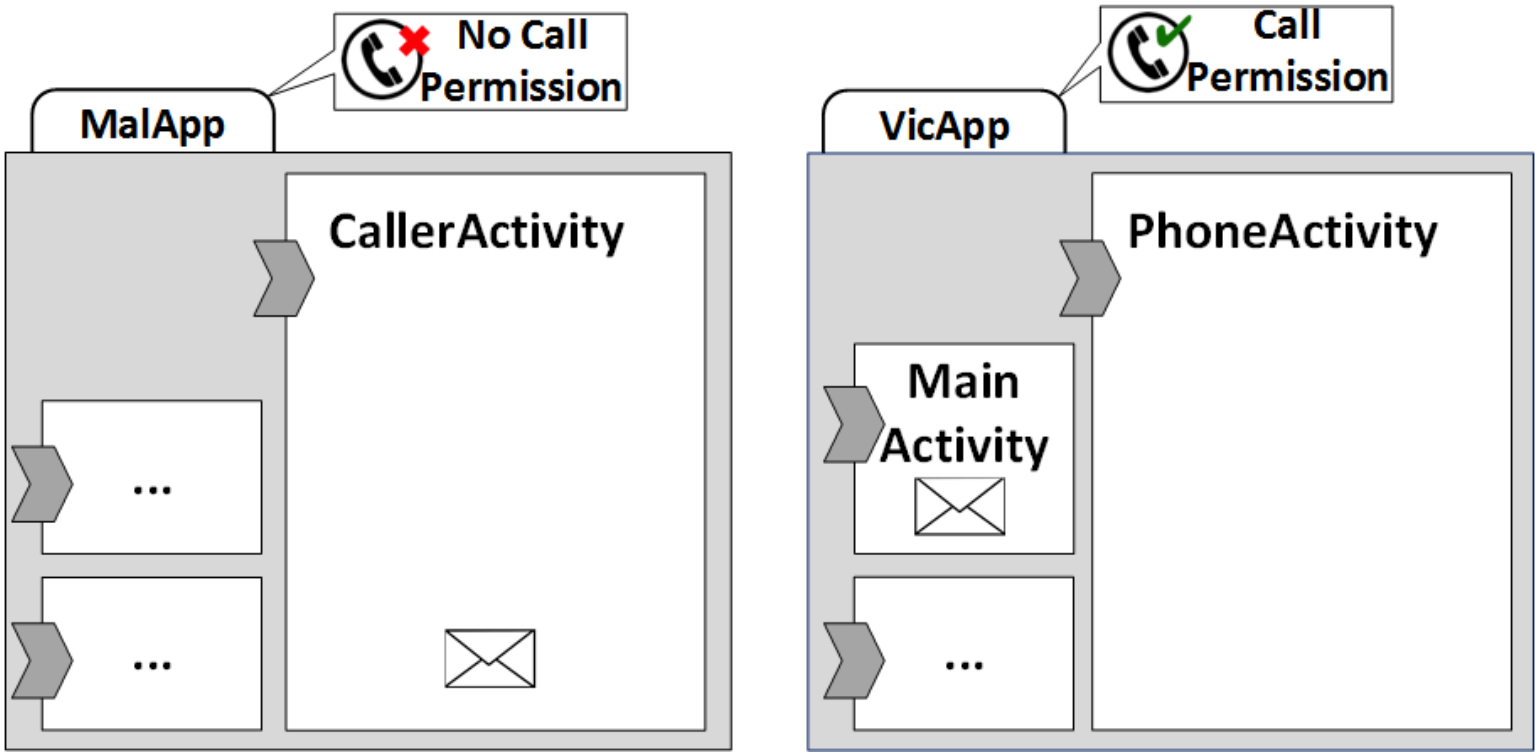
Static extraction of architecture

1. Architectural elements and properties defined in the manifest file



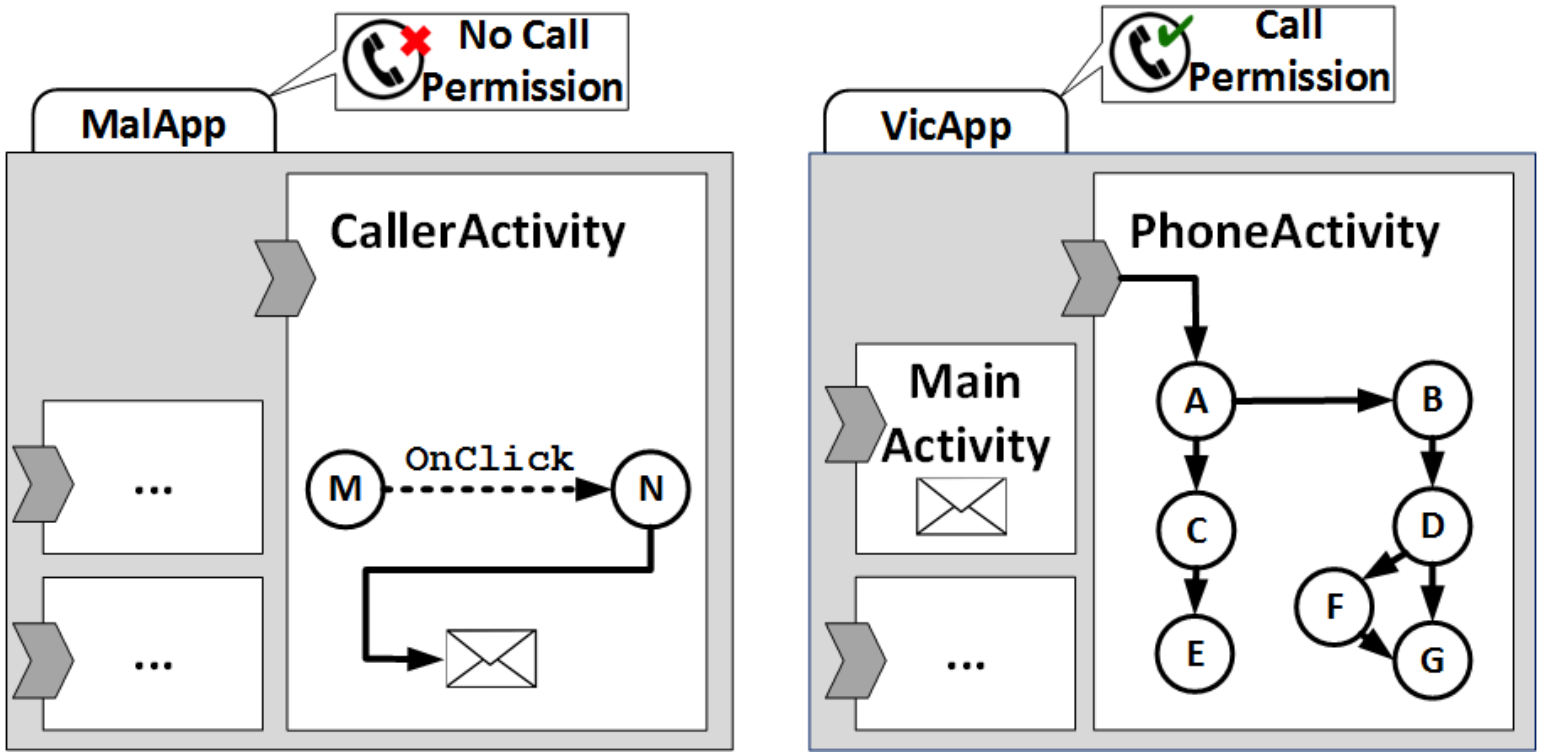
Static extraction of architecture

1. Architectural elements and properties defined in the manifest file
2. Architectural elements (e.g., Intent and Filters) that are latent in code



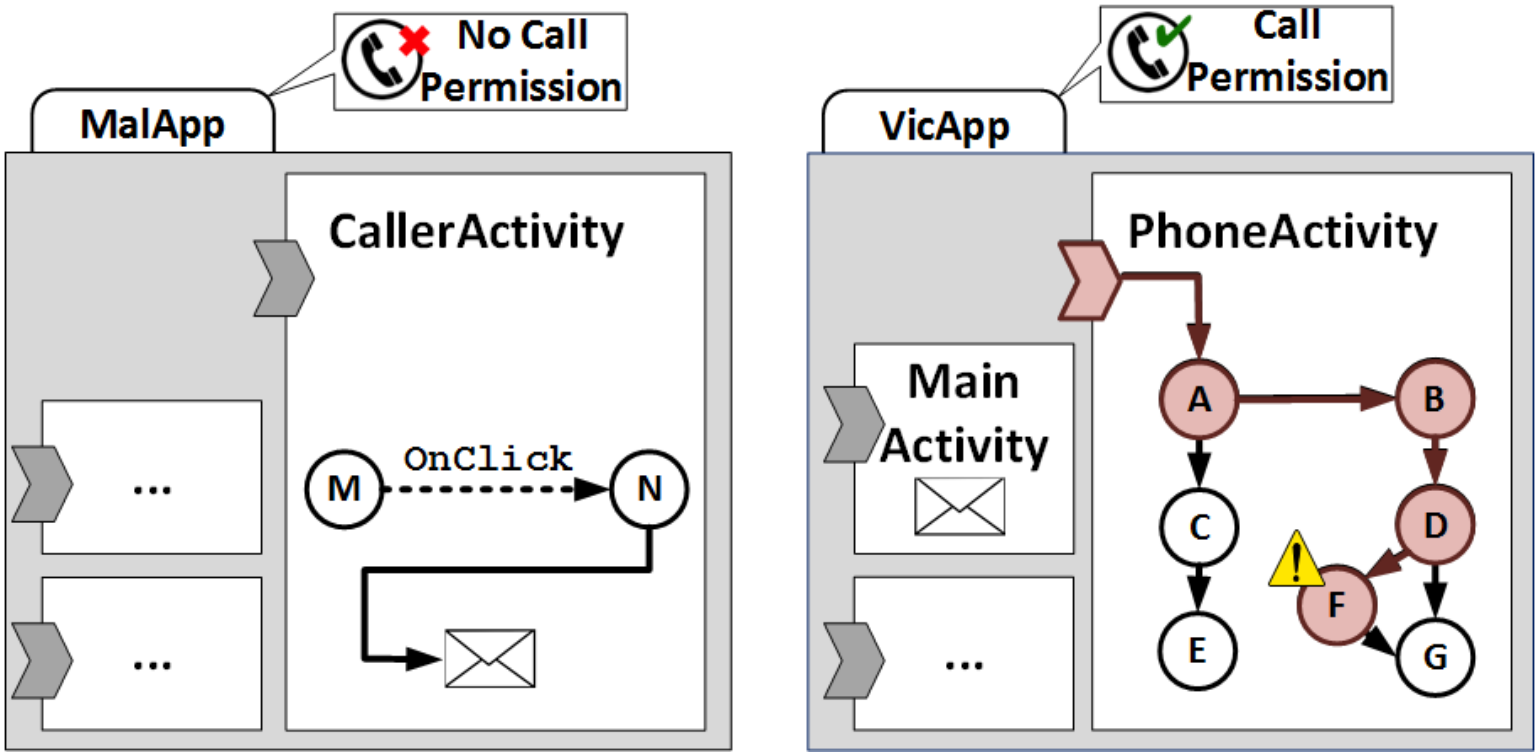
Static extraction of architecture

1. Architectural elements and properties defined in the manifest file
2. Architectural elements (e.g., Intent and Filters) that are latent in code
3. Event-driven behavior of each app



Static extraction of architecture

1. Architectural elements and properties defined in the manifest file
2. Architectural elements (e.g., Intent and Filters) that are latent in code
3. Event-driven behavior of each app
4. Sensitive paths



Specification of architecture in Alloy

```
module MalApp

open appDeclaration

one sig MalApp extends Application{}{
   no usesPermissions
   no appPermissions
}

one sig CallerActivity extends Activity{}{
   app in MalApp
   intentFilter = IntentFilter1
   no permissions
}
one sig intent1 extends Intent{}{
    sender = CallerActivity
    component = PhoneActivity
    action = PHONE_CALL
    no categories
    extraData = Yes
}
```

```
module VicApp

open appDeclaration

one sig VicApp extends Application{}{
   usesPermissions = CALL_PHONE
   no appPermissions
}

one sig PhoneActivity extends Activity{}{...}
```

Each app's architecture is specified declaratively, independent of other apps

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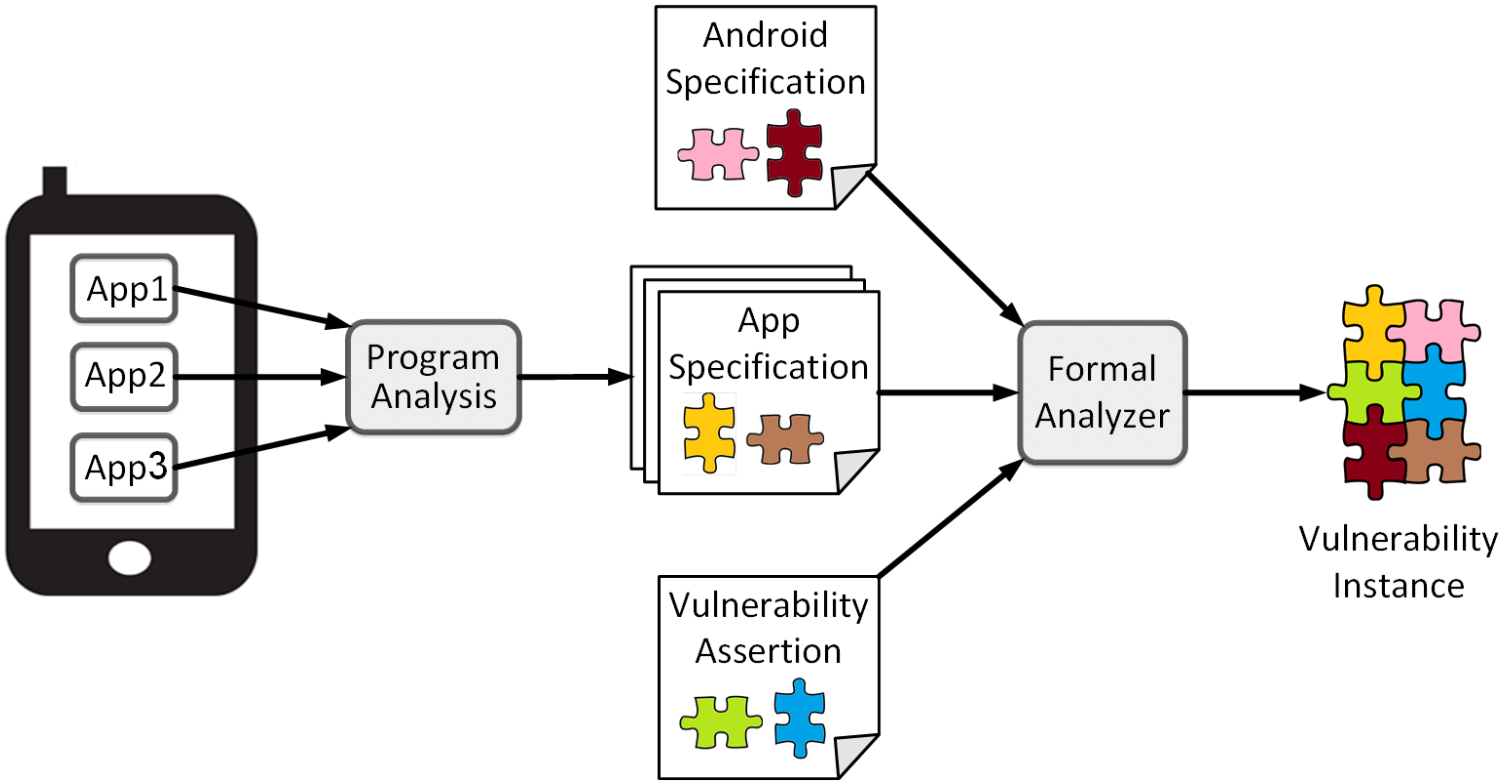

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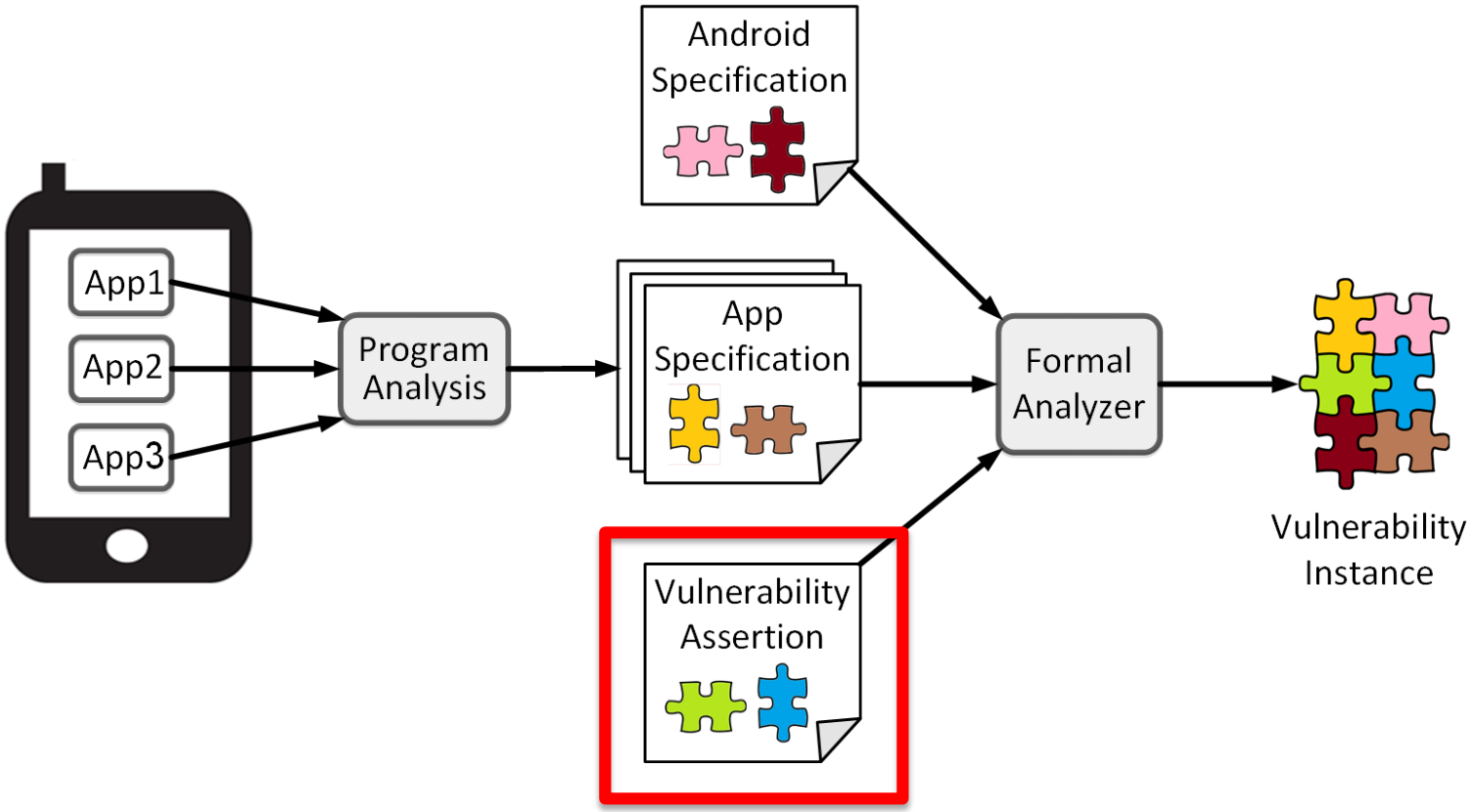

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Specification of privilege escalation in Alloy

```
assert privilegeEscalation{
  no disj src, dst: Component, i:Intent|
  (src in i.sender) &&
  (dst in intentResolver[i]) && some dst.paths &&
  (some p: dst.app.usesPermissions |
    not (p in src.app.usesPermissions) &&
    not ((p in dst.permissions) ||(p in dst.app.
         appPermissions)))
}
```

An assertion states a security property that is checked in the extracted specifications

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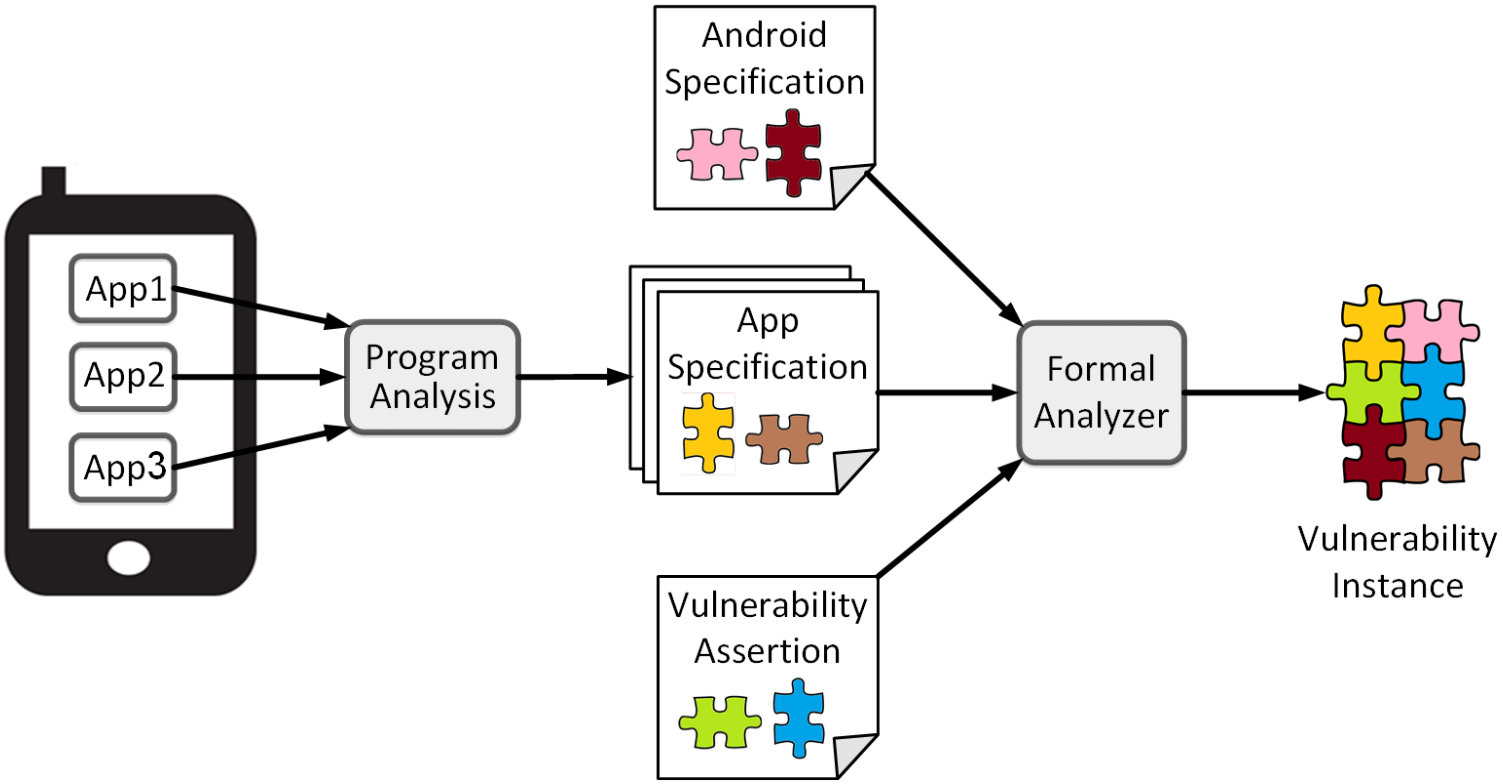

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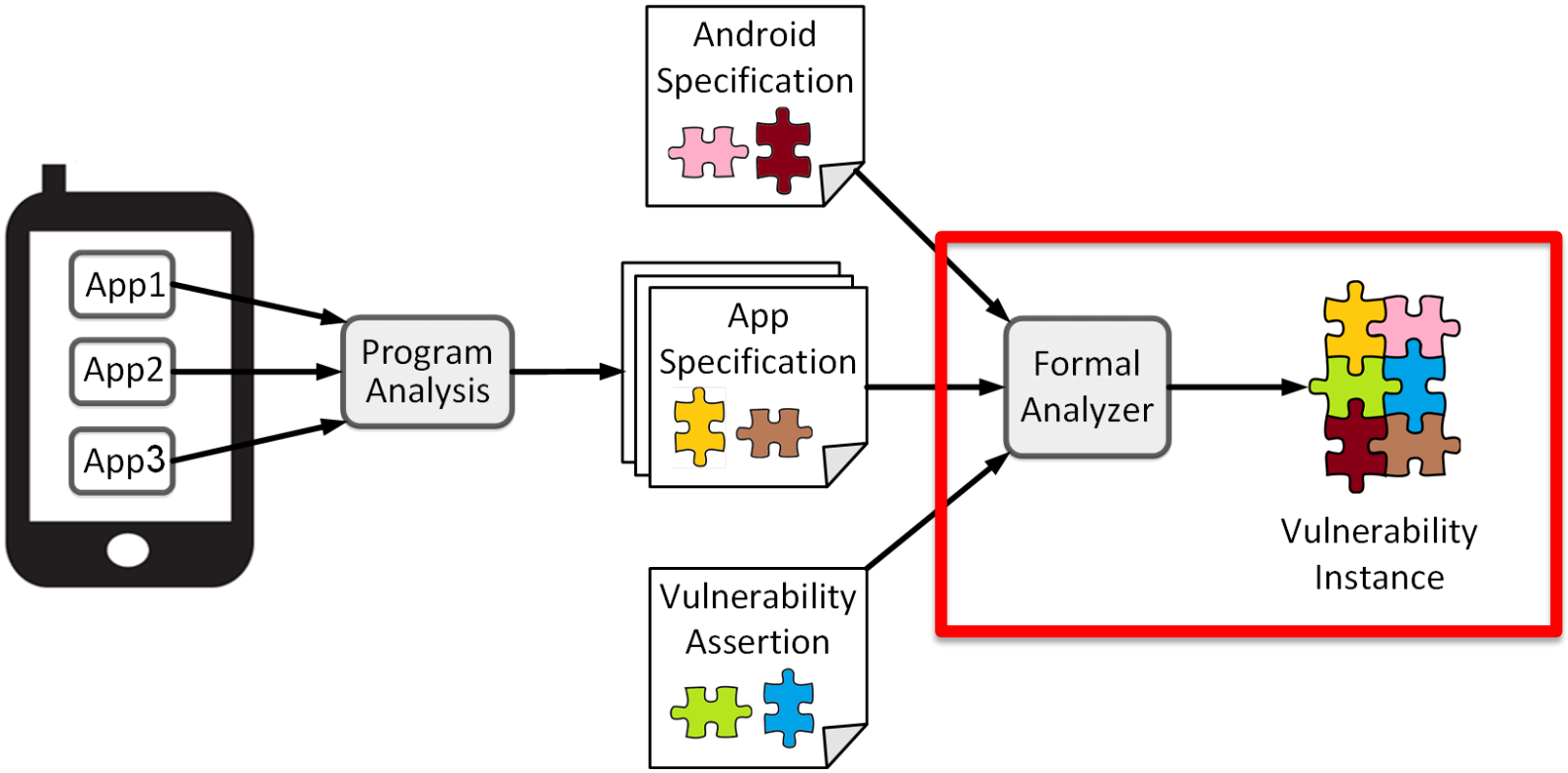

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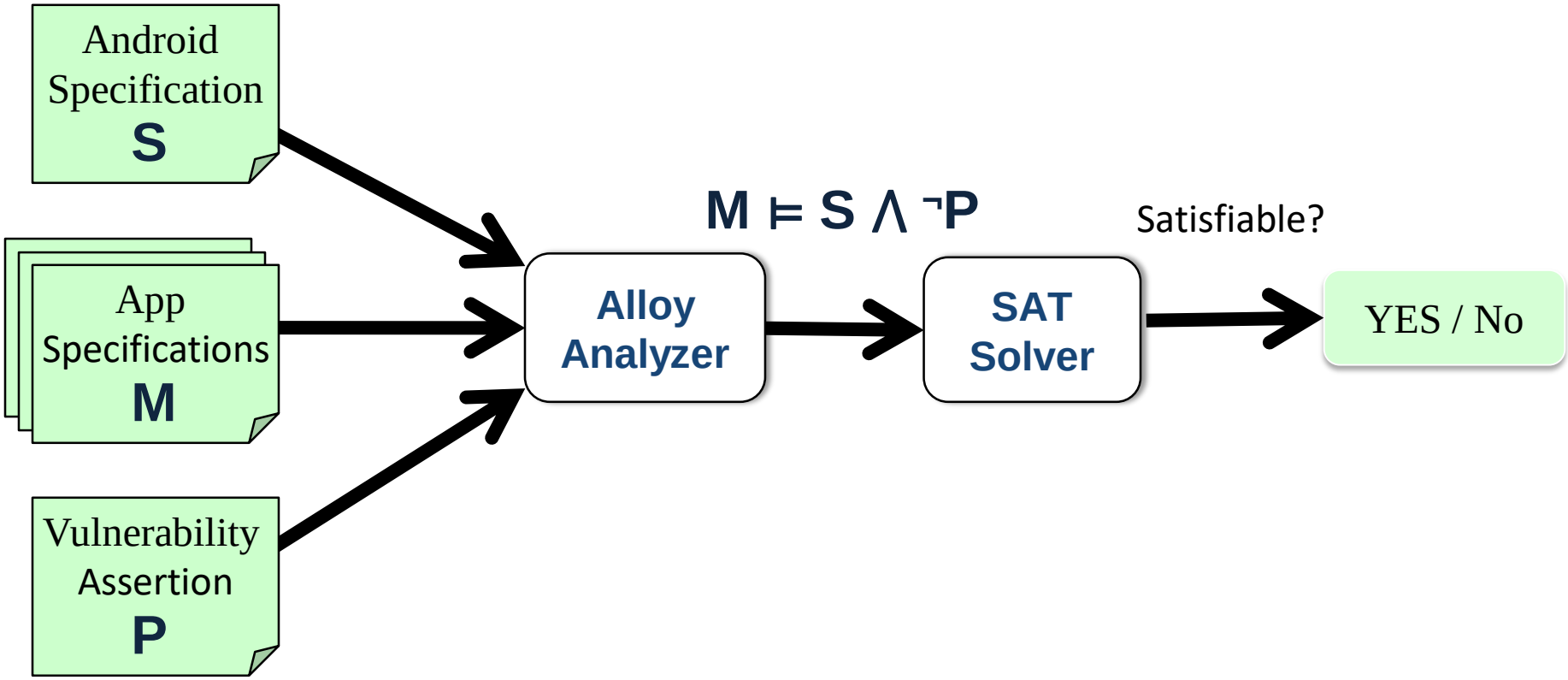
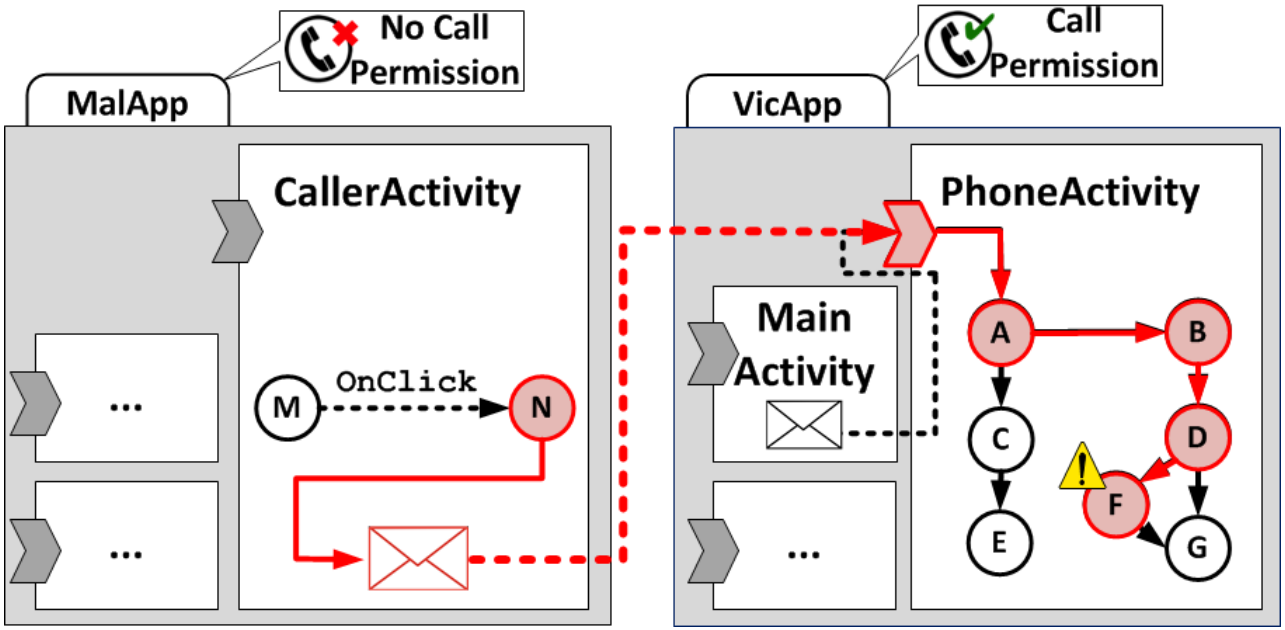
Formulation as a model checking problem



Given Android specification **S,** app specifications **M**, and vulnerability assertion **P**, assert whether **M** does not satisfy **P** under **S**

Model checker finds the ICC vulnerabilities

... // omitted details of model instances
privilegeEscalation_src={MalApp/CallerActivity}
privilegeEscalation_dst={VicApp/PhoneActivity}
privilegeEscalation_i={intent1}
privilegeEscalation_p={appDeclaration/CALL_PHONE}



Experimental results

Experimental results

- 4,000 Android apps from four repositories
  - **Google Play** (1,000 most popular + 600 random)
  - **F-Droid** (1,100 apps)
  - **Malgenome** (1,200 random)
  - **Bazaar** (100 most popular)
- Partitioned into 80 non-overlapping bundles, each comprising 50 apps
- Total number of detected vulnerabilities: 385
  - Intent hijack: 97
  - Activity/Service launch: 124
  - Information leakage: 128
  - Privilege escalation: 36
- Manual analysis revealed 61% true positive rate in real-world apps

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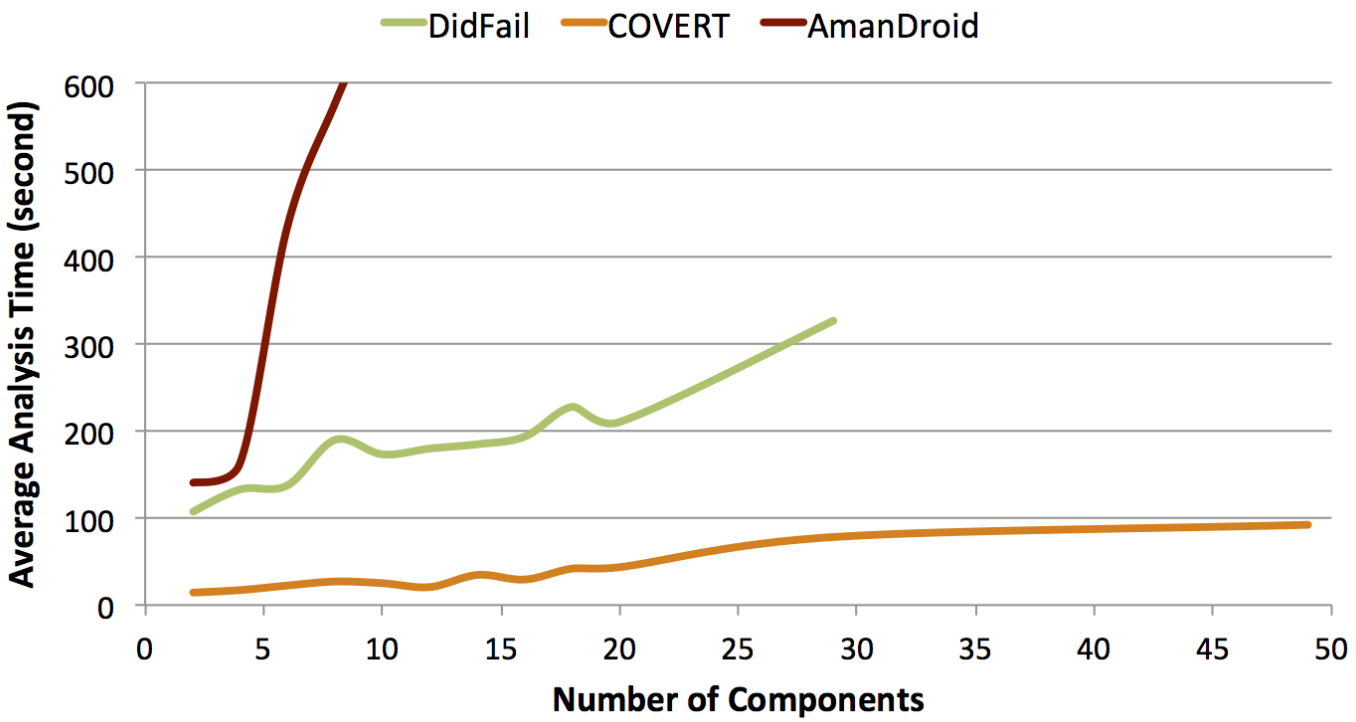
Example of a previously unknown vulnerability: service launch

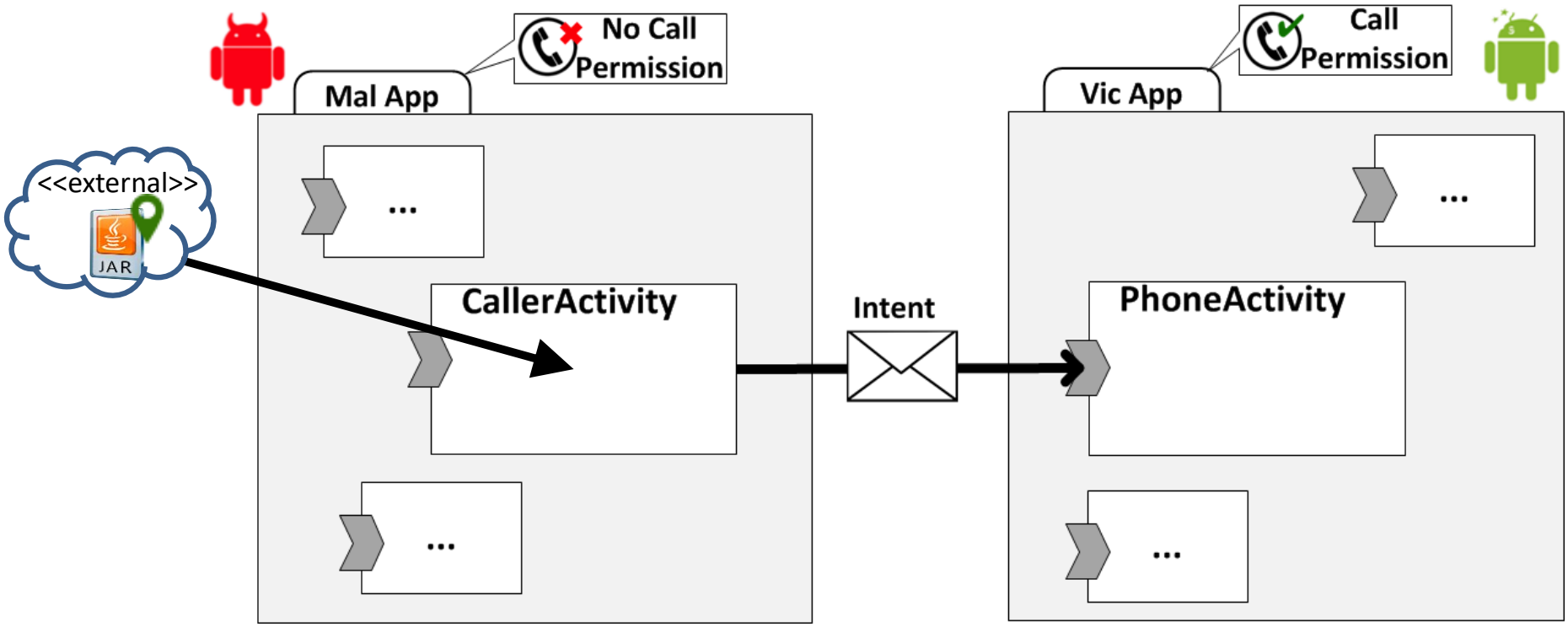
Any app

- *Barcode Scanner* app
  - One of its services exposes an unprotected Intent filter
  - Allows a malicious app to make unauthorized payment through SMS

Performance compared to tools ignoring the architectural knowledge



Remaining challenge: hidden code



COVERT does not work if the code is not present

Change Android

What kind of change is acceptable?

What kind of change is acceptable?

Usability

What kind of change is acceptable?

Usability

Compatibility with existing apps

What needs to change?

Systematic violation of the least-privilege principle in Android is the mother of all evil

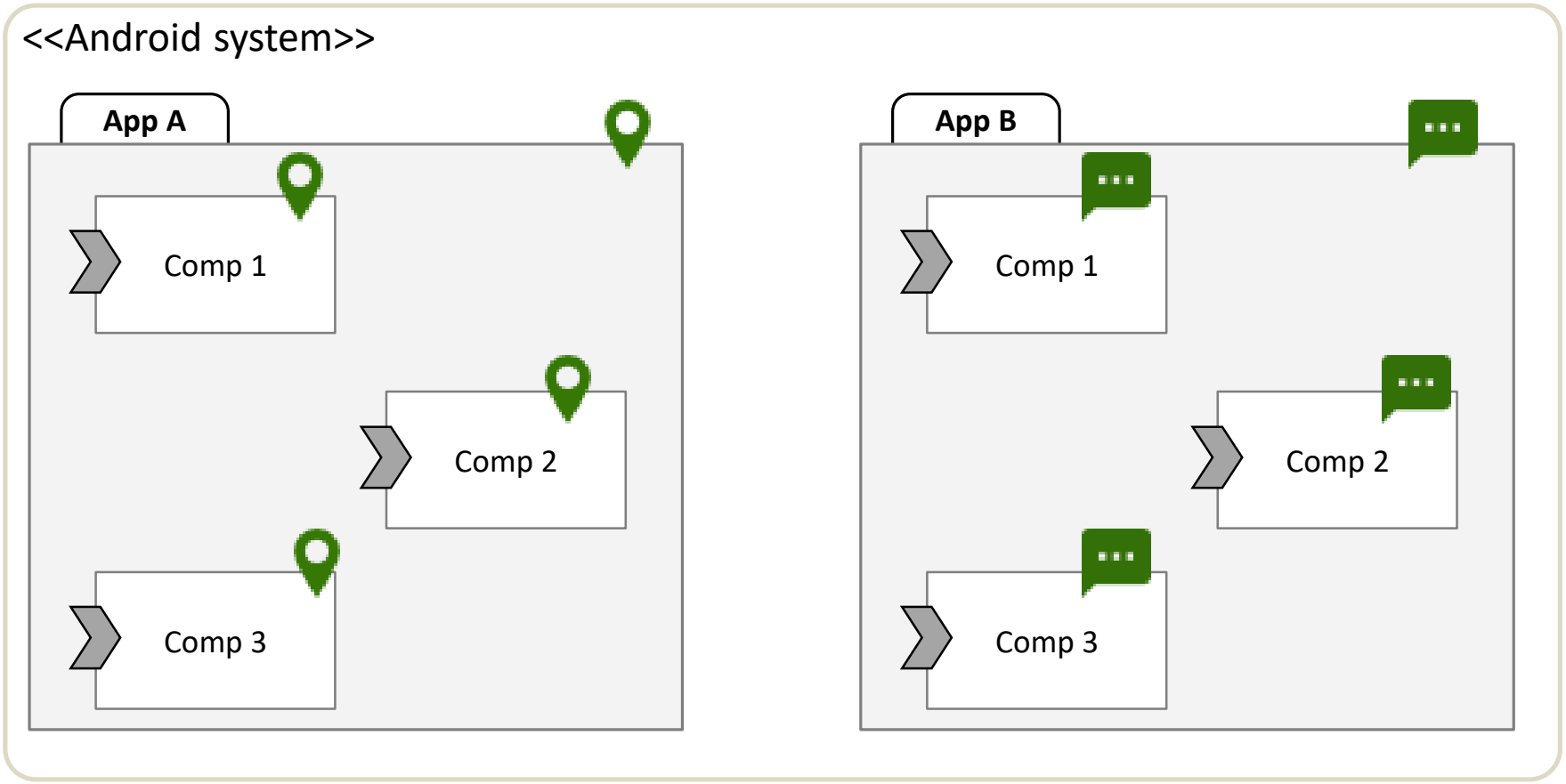
What needs to change?

Systematic violation of the least-privilege principle in Android is the mother of all evil

Build an analysis to determine the exact privileges required for each component from its implementation logic

Resource access privileges

- Determine which permissions are actually used by each component
  - Use a mapping of API calls to permissions



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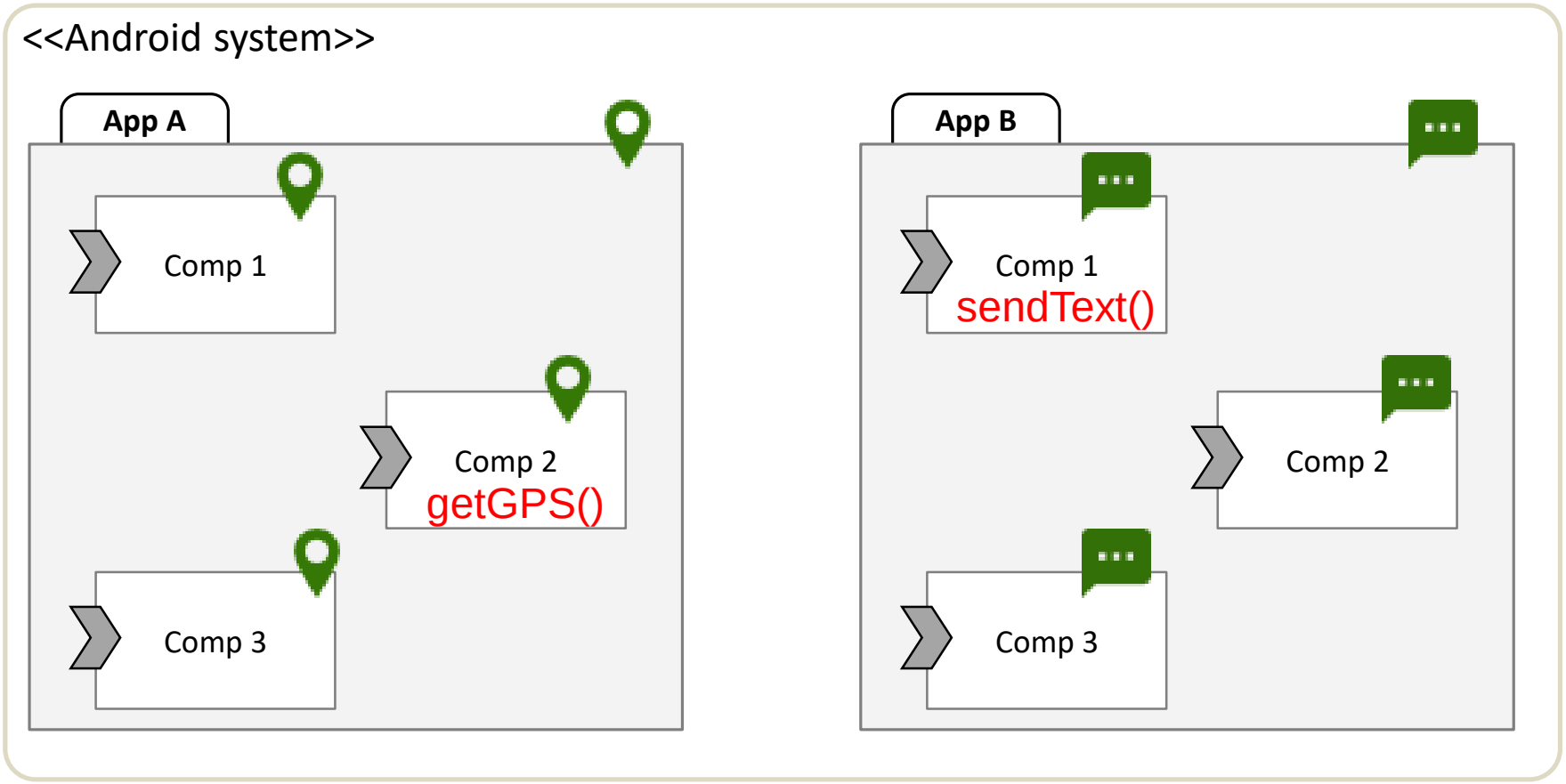

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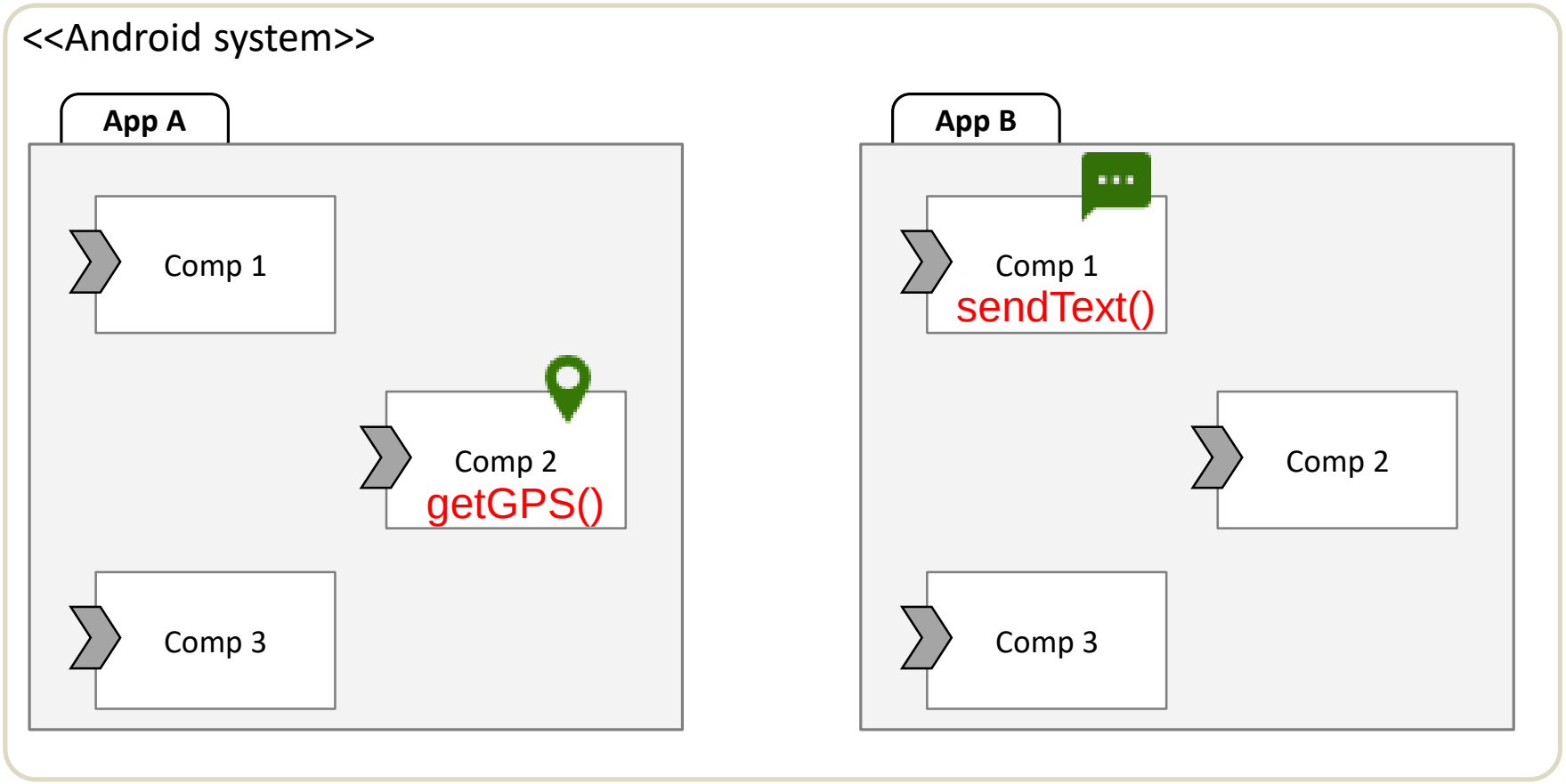
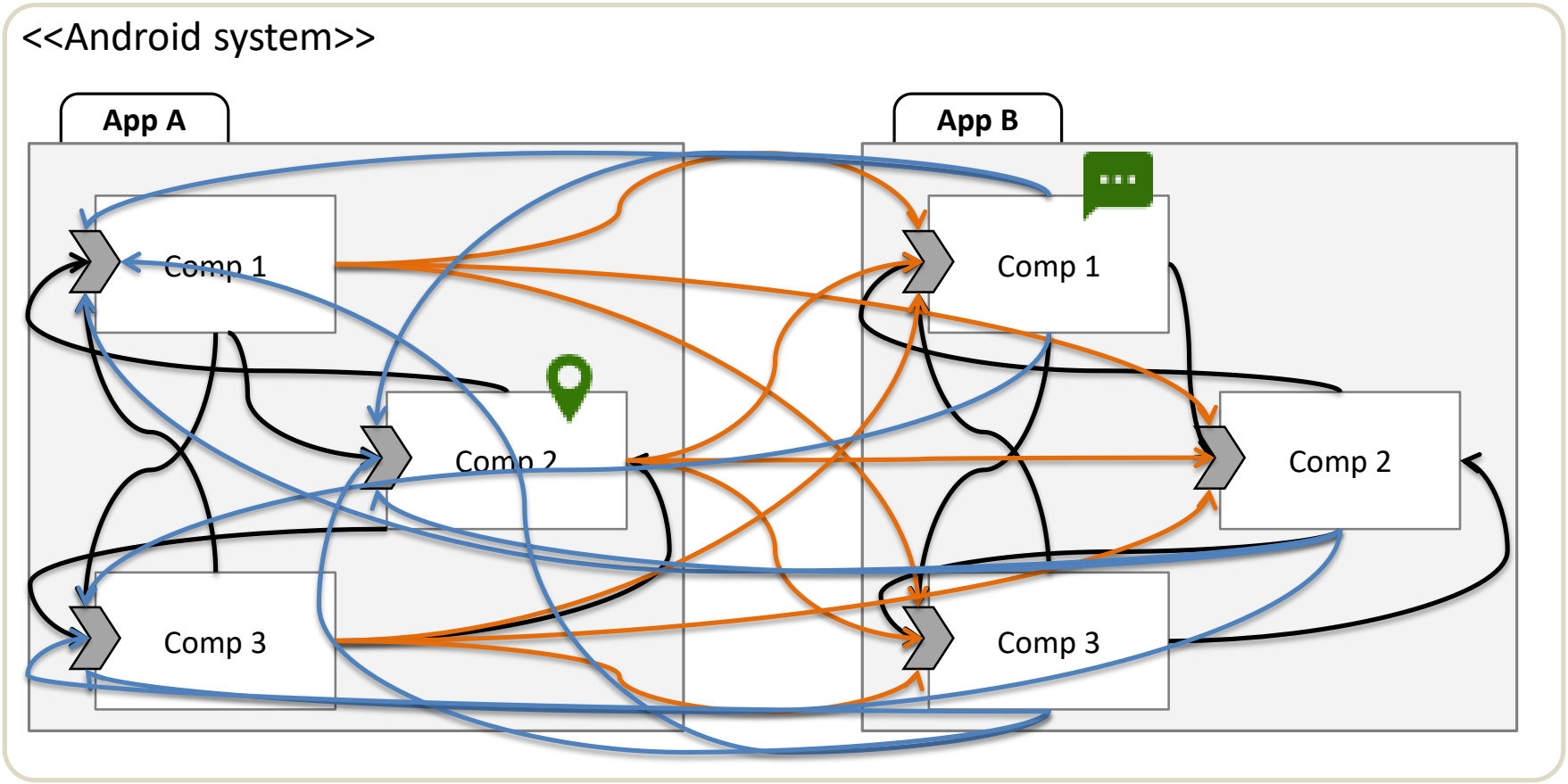


ICC privileges

- Determine the required ICCs for each component to run
  - Resolve the Intents and their recipients



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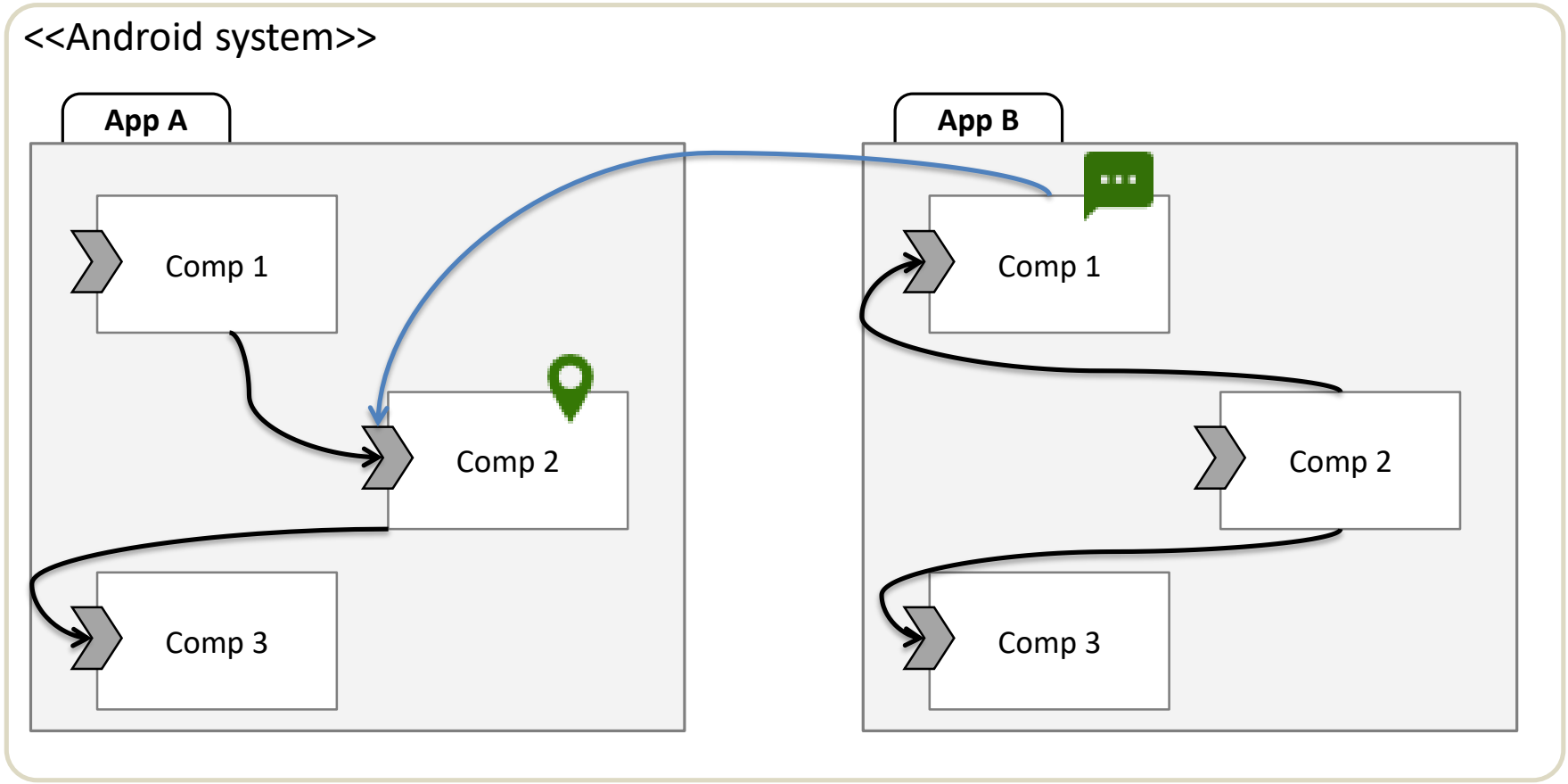

DELDroid

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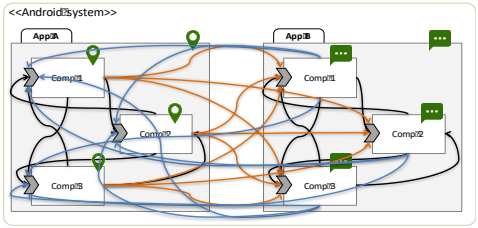

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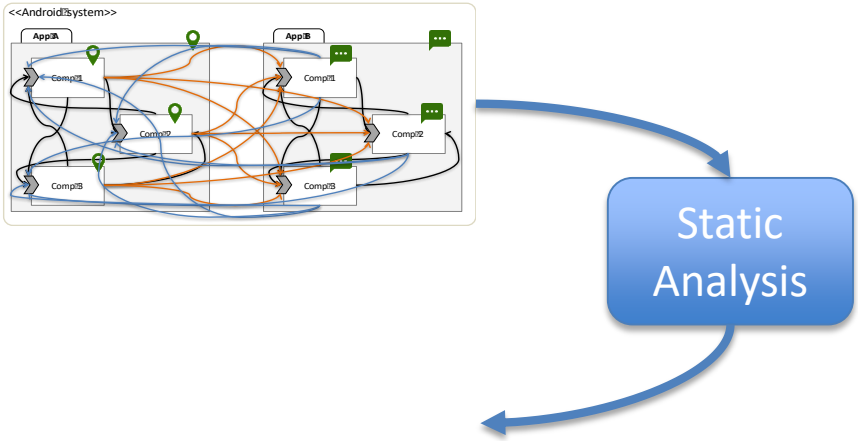

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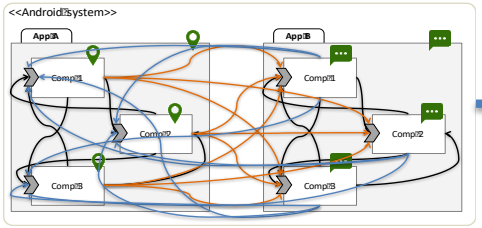
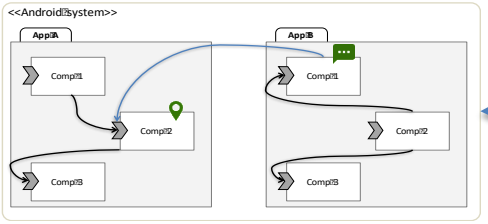


Static Analysis

Least-privilege architecture



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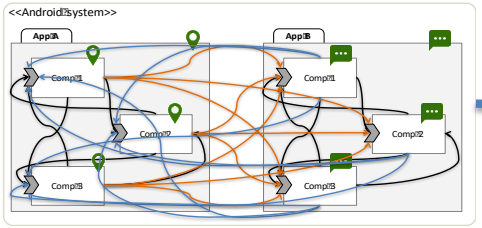

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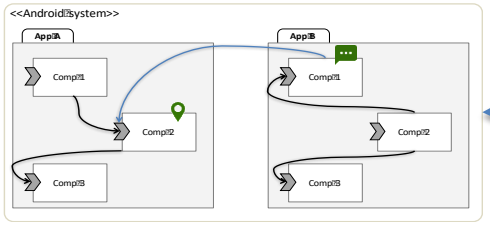

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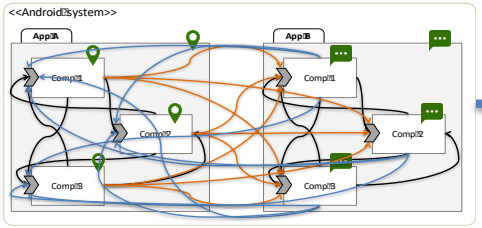

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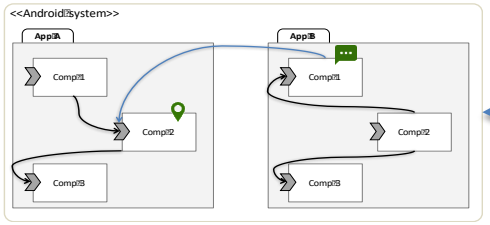

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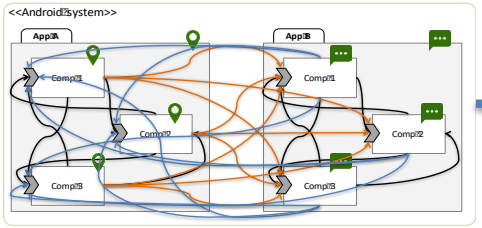

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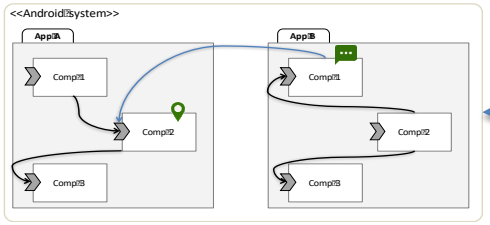

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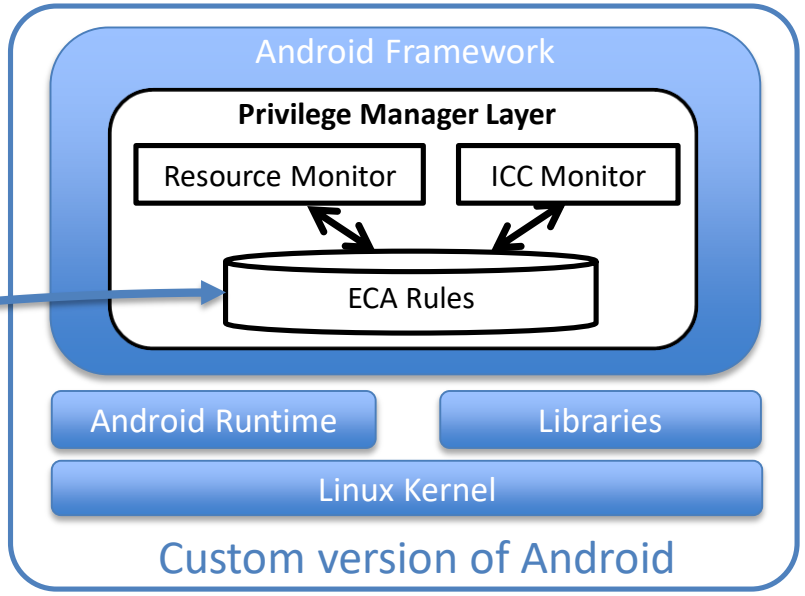

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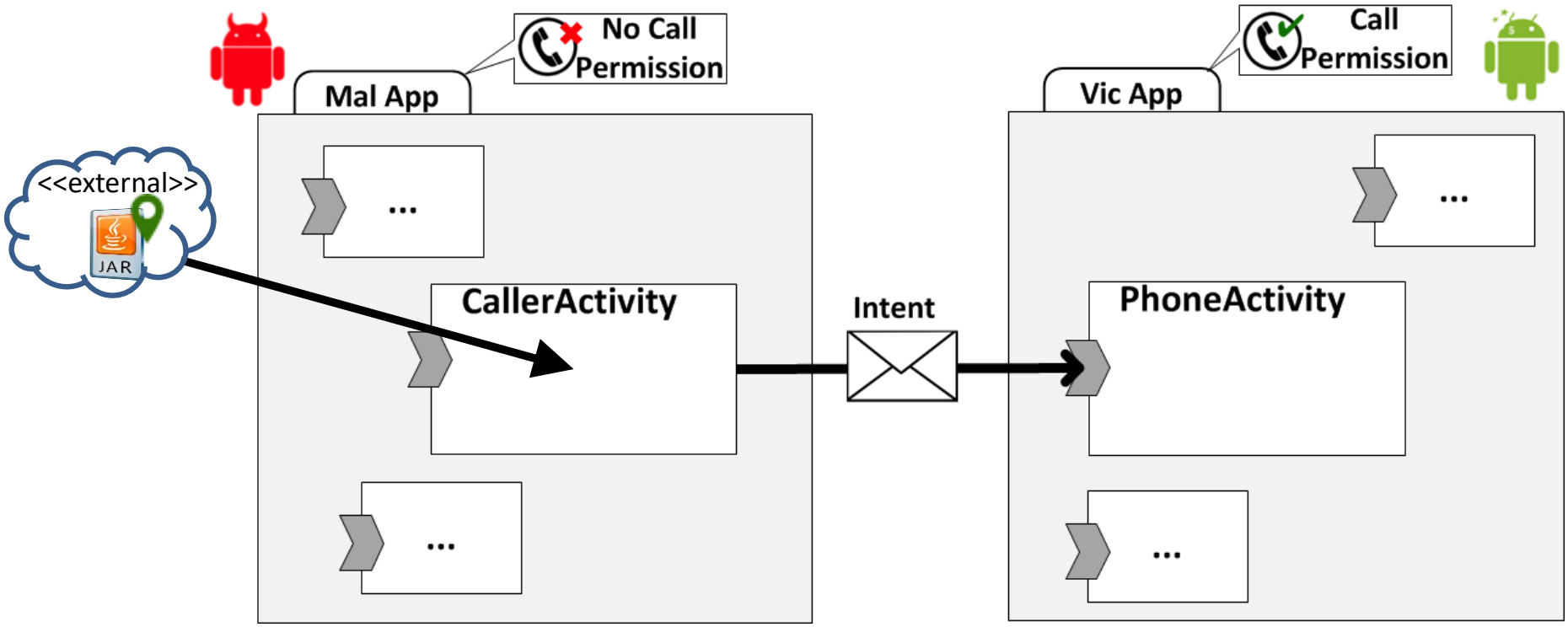
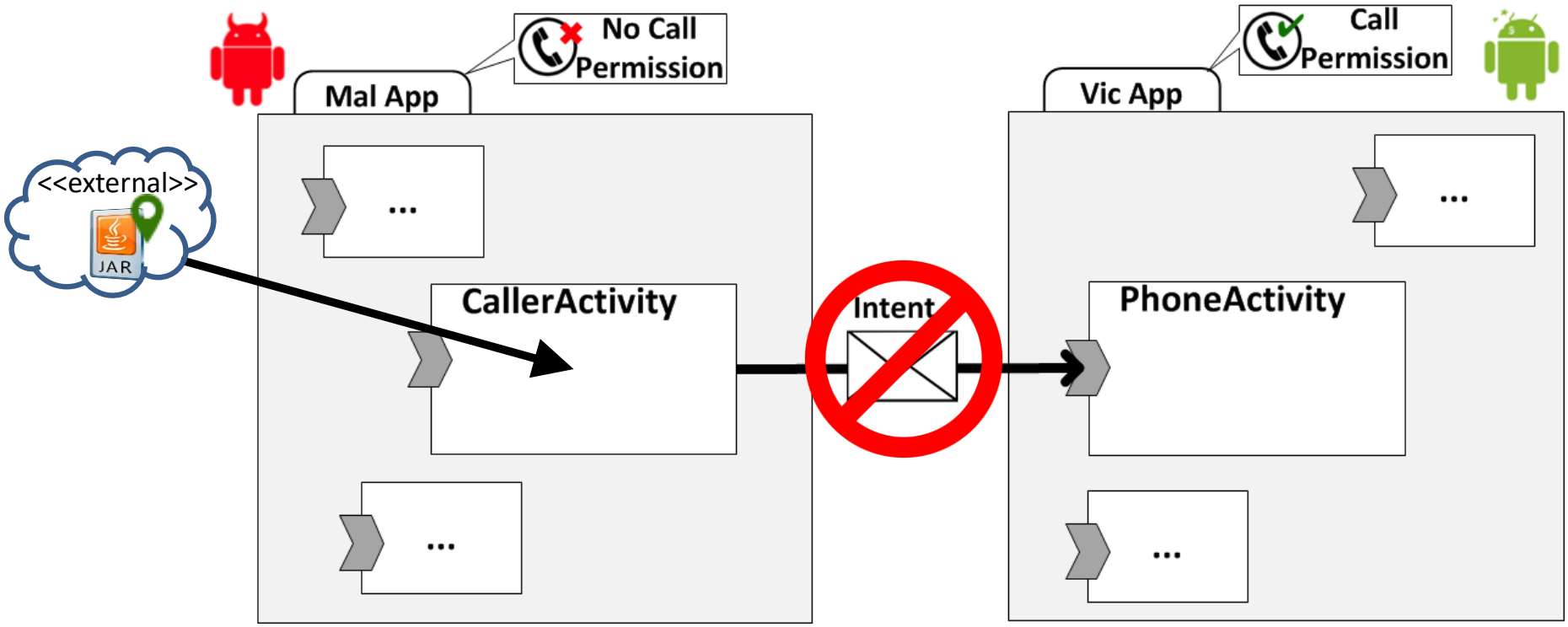
Hidden code


No Call Permission
Mal App
Call Permission
Vic App
<<external>>
JAR
...
CallerActivity
Intent
PhoneActivity
...
...
...

Hidden code



DELDroid can effectively thwart such attacks

Attack surface reduction

Num of Apps	Num of Comps	Communication Domain			Permission Granted Domain		
		Original	LP	Reduction (%)	Original	LP	Reduction (%)
30	306	29,031	42	99.86	1,642	45	97.26
30	432	78,237	625	99.20	2,954	61	97.94
30	422	65,709	173	99.74	2,510	54	97.85
30	449	80,372	205	99.74	4,234	78	98.16
30	353	56,868	345	99.39	1,536	51	96.68
30	541	85,556	661	99.23	4,461	181	95.94
30	562	82,863	137	99.83	1,577	58	96.32
30	362	50,208	250	99.50	1,946	24	98.77
30	265	25,817	129	99.50	1,568	30	98.09
30	421	50,001	74	99.85	2,386	28	98.83
Average	411.3	60,466.2	264.1	99.58	2,481.4	61.0	97.58
Avg. (per app)	13.7	2,015.5	8.8	99.56	82.7	2.0	97.54

10 experiments with 30 randomly selected apps

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Attack surface reduction – ICC

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Over **99%** reduction in ICC privileges

Attack surface reduction – resource access

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Over **97%** reduction in resource access privileges

How effective is attack surface reduction in preventing attacks?

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- 54 malicious and vulnerable apps
  - The steps and inputs required to create the attacks are known
- The dataset contains
  - 18 privilege escalation attacks
  - 24 hidden ICC attacks through dynamic class loading

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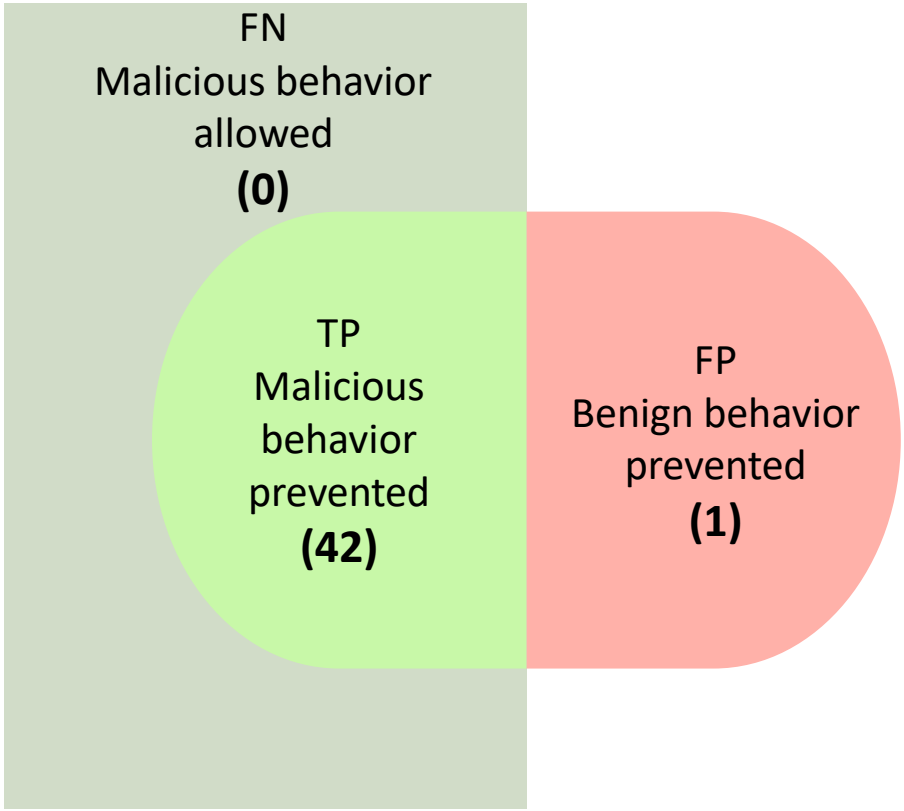
How effective is attack surface reduction in preventing attacks?

18 privilege escalation
24 hidden ICC attacks
42 attacks



Precision ( ) = 97.76%

Recall ( ) = 100%

Recap

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Missteps in Android development framework are at fault

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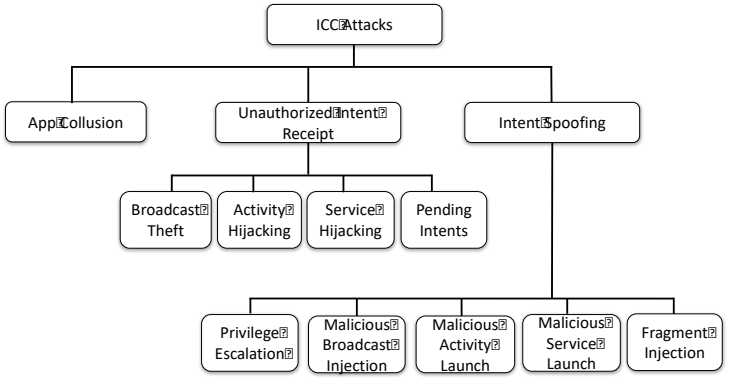
Inter-component communication attacks



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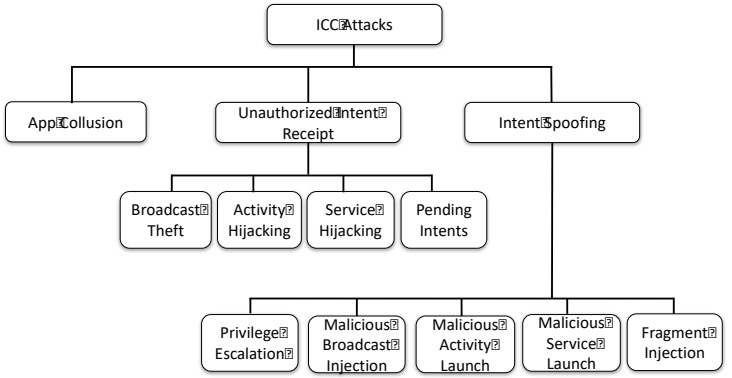

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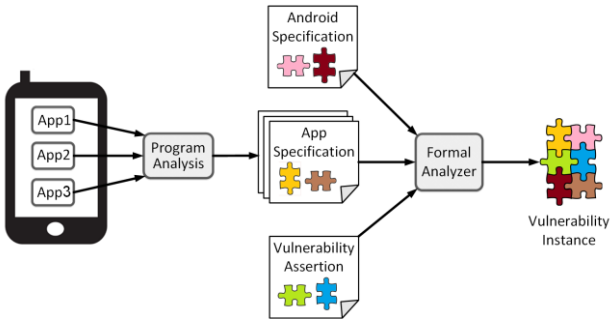
COVERT

Compositional Analysis **o**f Inter-app **V**uln**er**abili**t**ies



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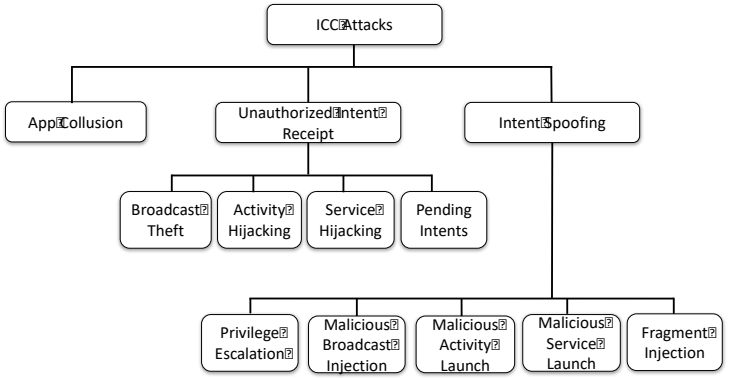

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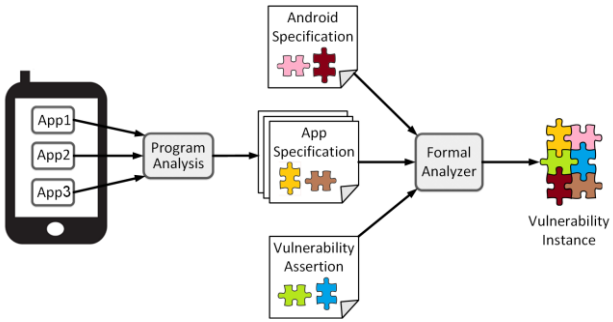

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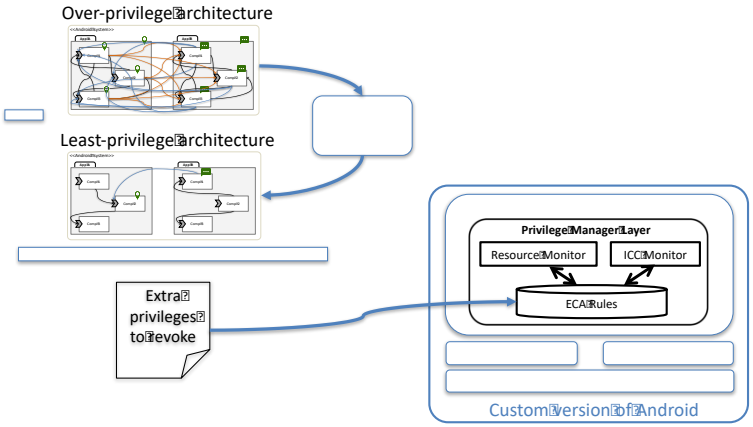

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Broader takeaways

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  - Determines the security properties of your application
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  - New opportunities to improve security properties of applications

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Acknowledgement

Students and Collaborators

Hamid Bagheri, UNL

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Daniel Jackson, MIT

Bradley Schmerl, CMU

Eunsuk Kang, CMU

Sponsors

Thank you

The Threat in Your Pocket:

Trends, Challenges, and Solutions in Mobile Application Security

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