Nils Lukas

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Updated on November 29, 2024

Research Interests

Design safe and reliable Machine Learning systems in the presence of untrustworthy

1. **Providers**: Confidential computing via Homomorphic Encryption & Secret Sharing.
2. **Data**: Mitigate data poisoning during training & prompt injection during inference.
3. **Models**: Protect training data privacy through PII scrubbing & differential privacy.
4. **Users**: Control misuse by detecting generated (mis)information with watermarking.

Education

University of Waterloo, Canada — 2019 - 02/2024
Ph.D. in Computer Science

- Advisor: Florian Kerschbaum
- Thesis: Analyzing Threats of Large-Scale Machine Learning Systems
- Awarded the Mathematics Doctoral Prize's Top Honour 🏅

RWTH-Aachen, Germany
M.Sc. in Computer Science *(w/Distinction)* — 2016 - 2018
B.Sc. in Computer Science — 10/2012 - 2016

Honors & Awards

#1 Watermarking Competition, NeurIPS'24 [4,400 USD]	2024
#1 at DGE Elite Hackathon, GITEX'24 [40,000 AED]	2024
Mathematics Top Doctoral Prize, University of Waterloo [1 500 CAD]	2024
Alumni Gold Medal, University of Waterloo	2024
Mathematics Top Doctoral Prize, University of Waterloo [1 500 CAD]	2023
Best Poster Award, Sponsored by David R. Cheriton [300 CAD]	2023
Distinguished Contribution Award, Microsoft MLADS conference	2022, 2023
David R. Cheriton Scholarship, University of Waterloo [20 000 CAD]	2022
Outstanding Reviewer, ICML'22	2019
Best Poster Award, Sponsored by Rogers [1 000 CAD]	2016
KU Global Scholarship, Korea University [1.2 million KRW]	2014
MOGAM Scholarship, RWTH-Aachen [3 000 EUR]	

Conference Publications

[USENIX'24]
PEPSI: Practically Efficient Private Set Intersection in the Unbalanced Setting
Rasoul Mahdavi, **Nils Lukas**, Faezeh Ebrahimianghazani, Thomas Humphries, Bailey Kacsmar, John Premkumar, Xinda Li, Simon Oya, Ehsan Amjadian, Florian Kerschbaum. In the 33rd USENIX Security Symposium, 2024.

[USENIX'24]
Fast and Private Inference of Deep Neural Networks by Co-designing Activation Functions
Abdulrahman Diaa, Lucas Fenaux, Thomas Humphries, Marian Dietz, Faezeh Ebrahimianghazani, Bailey Kacsmar, Xinda Li, **Nils Lukas**, Rasoul Akhavan Mahdavi, Simon Oya, Ehsan Amjadian, Florian Kerschbaum. In the 33rd USENIX Security Symposium, 2024.

[ICLR'24]
AR: 30.8% (2 250/7 262)
Leveraging Optimization for Adaptive Attacks on Image Watermarks
Nils Lukas, Abdulrahman Diaa, Lucas Fenaux, Florian Kerschbaum. In the Twelfth International Conference on Learning Representations, 2024.

[ICLR'24]
AR: 30.8% (2 250/7 262)
🌐 **Media Coverage**
Universal Backdoor Attacks
Benjamin Schneider, **Nils Lukas**, Florian Kerschbaum. In the Twelfth International Conference on Learning Representations, 2024.

[USENIX'23]
AR: 29.2% (422/1 444)
PTW: Pivotal Tuning Watermarking for Pre-Trained Image Generators
Nils Lukas and Florian Kerschbaum. In the 32nd USENIX Security Symposium, 2023.

[S&P'23]
AR: 17.0% (195/1 147)
🏆 **Distinguished Contribution Award at Microsoft MLADS**

Analyzing Leakage of Personally Identifiable Information in Language Models
Nils Lukas, Ahmed Salem, Robert Sim, Shruti Tople, Lukas Wutschitz, Santiago Zanella-Béguelin. In the 44th IEEE Symposium on Security and Privacy, 2023.

[S&P'22]
AR: 14.5% (147/1 012)

SoK: How Robust is Image Classification Deep Neural Network Watermarking?
Nils Lukas, Edward Jiang, Xinda Li, Florian Kerschbaum. In the 43rd IEEE Symposium on Security and Privacy, 2022.

[ICLR'21]
AR: 28.7% (860/2 997)
🏆 **Spotlight (Top 5%)**

Deep Neural Network Fingerprinting by Conferrable Adversarial Examples
Nils Lukas, Yuxuan Zhang, Florian Kerschbaum. The Ninth International Conference on Learning Representations, 2021.

[IH&MMSEC'21]
AR: 40.3% (128/318)

On the Robustness of Backdoor-based Watermarking in Deep Neural Networks
Masoumeh Shafieinejad, **Nils Lukas**, Jiaqi Wang, Xinda Li, Florian Kerschbaum. Proceedings of the 2021 ACM Workshop on Information Hiding and Multimedia Security, 2021.

[ACSAC'20]
AR: 20.9% (104/497)

Practical Over-Threshold Multi-Party Private Set Intersection
Rasoul Mahdavi, Thomas Humphries, Bailey Kacsmar, Simeon Krastnikov, **Nils Lukas**, John Premkumar, Masoumeh Shafieinejad, Simon Oya, Florian Kerschbaum, Erik-Oliver Blass. Annual Computer Security Applications Conference (ACSAC), 2020.

[EuroS&P'20]
AR: 20.9% (39/187)

Differentially Private Two-Party Set Operations
Bailey Kacsmar, Basit Khurram, **Nils Lukas**, Alexander Norton, Masoumeh Shafieinejad, Zhiwei Shang, Yaser Baseri, Maryam Sepehri, Simon Oya, Florian Kerschbaum. IEEE European Symposium on Security and Privacy (EuroS&P), 2020.

Journal Publications

[AIP'18]

SunFlower: A new Solar Tower Simulation Method for use in Field Layout Optimization,
Pascal Richter, Gregor Heiming, **Nils Lukas**, Martin Frank. AIP Conference Proceedings, Volume 2033, Issue 1, 2018.

Working Papers

Optimizing Adaptive Attacks against Content Watermarks for Language Models, Online Preprint
Abdulrahman Diaa, Toluwani Aremu and **Nils Lukas**.

Research Talks

Optimizing Adaptive Attacks against Content Watermarks

- DeepMind, hosted by David Stutz — 2024
- University of California, Berkeley, hosted by https://dawnsong.io/ — 2024

Analyzing Leakage of Personal Information in Language Models

- Microsoft M365, hosted by Robert Sim — 2024
- Meta, hosted by Will Bullock — 2023
- MongoDB, hosted by Marilyn George and Archita Agarwal — 2023

How Reliable is Watermarking for Image Generators?

- Google, hosted by Somesh Jha — 2023
- University of California, Berkely, hosted by Dawn Song — 2023

Keynotes

Aviation Future Week, hosted by Emirates, Dubai — 2024
Cyber Energy Leadership Forum, Abu Dhabi — 2024

Work Experience

Assistant Professor, MBZUAI, Abu Dhabi, UAE from 08/2024

Research Intern, Royal Bank of Canada, Borealis AI, Toronto 2024

- Vertical Federated Learning, hosted by Kevin Wilson

Research Intern, Microsoft Research, Cambridge, UK 2022

- Privacy for Language Models, hosted by Shruti Tople & Lukas Wutschitz

Research Assistant, RWTH-Aachen, Aachen 2014 - 2018

Student Researcher, DSA Daten- und Systemtechnik GmbH, Aachen 2016

Software Engineer Intern, A.R. Bayer DSP Systeme GmbH, Düsseldorf 2012

Teaching

Instructor, MBZUAI, UAE

- ML807: Federated Learning 2025
- ML818: Emerging Topics in Trustworthy Machine Learning 2024

Teaching Assistant, University of Waterloo, Canada

- CS458/658: Computer Security and Privacy 2020, 2021
- CS246 - Object Oriented Programming 2021

Co-Instructor, RWTH-Aachen, Germany

- Course: Data-driven Medicine 2018

Service

Program Committee

- ACM Conference on Computer and Communications Security (CCS) 2025
- IEEE Symposium on Security and Privacy (S&P) 2025
- Recent Advances in Intrusion Detection (RAID) 2024

Artifact Evaluation Committee

- The ACM Conference on Computer and Communications Security (CCS) 2023, 2024

Reviewer

- ACM TheWebConf (WWW) 2025
- International Conference on Learning Representations (ICLR) 2024, 2025
- International World Wide Web Conference (TheWebConf) 2024
- Recent Advances in Intrusion Detection (RAID) 2023
- Neural Information Processing Systems (NeurIPS) 2022, 2023
- International Conference on Machine Learning (ICML) 2022
- The Conference on Information and Knowledge Management (CIKM) 2020

Other

- **Sub-Reviewer**, Proceedings on Privacy Enhancing Technologies (PETS) 2021, 2022, 2023
- **Session Chair**, IEEE Symposium on Security and Privacy (S&P) 2023
- **Organization**, Workshop on Semantic Web Solutions for Large-Scale Biomedical Data Analytics (SeWeBMeDA) 2018

Student Board Member, Cybersecurity and Privacy Institute 2022, 2023, 2024

School Advisory Committee on Appointments Liaison, CrySP Lab 2022