

KeyDroid: A Large-Scale Analysis of Secure Key Storage in Android Apps

Jenny Blessing
University of Cambridge
jenny.blessing@cl.cam.ac.uk

Ross J. Anderson
University of Cambridge
University of Edinburgh

Alastair R. Beresford
University of Cambridge
alastair.beresford@cl.cam.ac.uk

Abstract

Most contemporary mobile devices offer hardware-backed storage for cryptographic keys, user data, and other sensitive credentials. Such hardware is capable of protecting credentials from extraction by an adversary who has compromised the main operating system, such as a malicious third-party app. Since 2011, Android app developers can access trusted hardware via the Android Keystore API [24], making hardware-backed key storage a widely accessible PET. In this work, we conduct the first comprehensive survey of hardware-backed key storage in Android devices. We analyze 490,119 Android apps, collecting data on how trusted hardware is used by app developers (if at all) and cross-referencing our findings with sensitive user data collected by each app, as self-reported by developers via the Play Store’s data safety labels [80].

We find that despite industry-wide initiatives to encourage adoption, 56% of apps self-reporting as processing sensitive user data do not use Android’s trusted hardware capabilities at all, while just 5% of apps collecting some form of sensitive data use the strongest form of trusted hardware, a secure element distinct from the main processor. To better understand the potential downsides of using secure hardware, we conduct the first empirical analysis of trusted hardware performance in mobile devices, measuring the runtime of common cryptographic operations across both software- and hardware-backed keystores and providing the first empirical analysis to date of the performance of secure elements in mobile devices. We find that while hardware-backed key storage using a coprocessor is viable for most common cryptographic operations, secure elements capable of preventing more advanced attacks make performance infeasible for symmetric encryption with non-negligible payloads.

Keywords

trusted hardware, key storage, Android, secure element

1 Introduction

Mobile devices store highly sensitive user data ranging from private health information and payment credentials to personal photographs and correspondence. At the same time, mobile handsets are regularly lost or stolen, making data stored on devices vulnerable to an adversary with physical device access. Similarly, sensitive data may be accessed by an adversary who is able to compromise the main operating system (OS), such as malicious third-party apps

which circumvented app store vetting processes or were independently downloaded by users [89, 93].

Modern encryption methods may provide data confidentiality and integrity against such threats, but data is only as secure as the cryptographic keys used to encrypt it. Keys stored in a software keystore (e.g., Java’s Bouncy Castle keystore) are vulnerable to memory-extraction attacks [62, 82] where an adversary with full control over the operating system or physical access to the device can retrieve the decryption keys or other sensitive data through a memory dump of device RAM.

Fortunately, mobile device key storage has seen major security and privacy improvements over the past decade: almost all modern mobile handsets now offer some form of hardware-backed credential storage capable of protecting keys against an adversary with root permissions [52]. The most common form of hardware-backed storage (commonly called “trusted hardware” or “secure hardware”) is the trusted execution environment (TEE), a special mode of operation by the main processor (e.g., Arm TrustZone or Intel VT). Keys are generated and stored within specialized hardware, and all cryptographic operations using these keys take place within the hardware component. Provided the TEE is not compromised, these operations cannot be inspected or interfered with by the Android OS (e.g., an attacker who compromises the device cannot extract keys or use them to decrypt data stored off-device). Android has offered the Android Keystore system [24] as its public trusted hardware API for developers since 2011.

Recent premium models of Android smartphones such as the Google Pixel devices contain additional hardware in the form of a separate secure processor, commonly known as a secure element (SE) [24, 57]. While a TEE is a separate area of the main processor, an SE is an entirely separate processor with its own CPU, memory, and storage. In Android, the SE is called the StrongBox Keymaster [11]. The Android Keystore API uses the device’s TEE by default but offers developers the option of requesting StrongBox instead.

Despite the fact that secure hardware is a widely available Privacy-Enhancing Technology (PET) with considerable benefits for mobile data privacy, there is currently a lack of empirical evidence on when and how developers use TEEs and SEs in practice. Secure hardware is only useful if it is actually used, and the Android Security team acknowledges that apps need to explicitly use these APIs in order to see a security benefit as Android’s historical Java cryptography APIs use a software-backed keystore by default [63]. Furthermore, while hardware-backed keystores provide significant security benefits, runtime performance is a critical consideration for mobile developers. More advanced forms of secure hardware (e.g., StrongBox), tend to come with an accompanying performance hit, as acknowledged at a high level in Android’s documentation [11], but to date there has been no publicly available empirical data on

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, PO Box 1866, Mountain View, CA 94042, USA.



Proceedings on Privacy Enhancing Technologies 2026(3), 215–235

© 2026 Copyright held by the owner/author(s).

<https://doi.org/10.56553/popets-2026-0079>

hardware keystore performance to the best of our knowledge. At the same time, however, Android is pursuing public initiatives to encourage wider adoption of secure hardware such as the Android Ready SE Alliance (see §2.2.2). The lack of empirical evaluation of performance and existing usage patterns is a major barrier to encouraging more widespread adoption: without detailed performance statistics, developers cannot make informed choices about the trade-offs between security and performance for their use case. Indeed, Google’s own warnings of performance trade-offs without providing quantitative guidelines of what these performance trade-offs are in practice data could prompt developers to avoid StrongBox even in ideal use cases [24].

In this work, we conduct the first comprehensive and systematic study of secure credential storage in Android, analyzing both the contemporary usage and performance of key storage schemes. We compile and analyze a dataset of 490,119 Android applications between October 2023 and August 2024, extracting data from 64 API calls relevant to key storage in Android. We find that 56.3% of apps report collecting sensitive data as part of the Play Store’s data safety labels do not use any form of trusted hardware, and only 5.0% contain a reference to the SE API. Moreover, these usage figures represent an upper bound on security within the Android app ecosystem as it is not possible to detect at scale whether apps which contain at least one reference to the Android Keystore API are using it to secure all sensitive and relevant credentials. In particular, of those apps that do use the Android Keystore API, 94.7% of key initializations are located in third-party components, indicating that use of the Keystore API may be due to using a general-purpose library rather than a conscious choice to use hardware-backed key storage. Furthermore, we find that 8.5% of keys generated in the Android Keystore explicitly disable Android’s randomized encryption requirement (i.e., IND-CPA), indicating that secure defaults are not enough to enforce security guarantees.

Having measured the usage of secure key storage across the Android app ecosystem, we investigate the runtime performance of common cryptographic operations performed using hardware-backed key storage to consider whether performance overhead may discourage adoption. We find that the performance of TEE-backed key storage is viable for the vast majority of common app use cases, and is noticeably different from a software-backed keystore only for large payloads greater than 5 MiB. StrongBox introduces a far more significant performance hit. For instance, encrypting a 1MiB message with AES-GCM takes around 3 seconds and simply generating asymmetric keys in StrongBox takes over 9 seconds in Google’s flagship Pixel 8 device, a runtime which may be prohibitive even for security-conscious apps. However, StrongBox’s performance is indeed viable for its primary intended use case of handling very small payloads, such as using StrongBox to encrypt an existing key, and its performance has improved significantly since first introduced by Android in 2018. To the best of our knowledge this is the first time comprehensive performance measurements of trusted hardware in mobile devices have been published, providing Android developers with empirical evidence to make informed decisions for their particular use case.

Our specific contributions are as follows:

- We design KeyDroid, a tool for static analysis of key storage in Android apps.
- Conduct large-scale static analysis of ~500,000 apps to understand how trusted hardware is used, cross-referencing results with user data collection practices.
- Run comprehensive measurements of key storage performance on all hardware primitives in Android devices.
- Conduct a developer survey to better understand factors influencing developer decisions about trusted hardware.
- Provide developers with concrete guidance on trusted hardware usage patterns and performance.

2 Key Storage in Android

At a systems level, Android provides three options for storing cryptographic keys and other sensitive credentials: a software keystore via long-standing Java APIs, hardware-backed key storage logically separated from the main Android Operating System (OS) to protect against OS compromise, and hardware-backed key storage located on a separate processor to guard against more advanced logical and physical attacks. We discuss security properties and limitations of each below.

2.1 Software-backed Key Storage

Mobile devices have historically relied on software keystores which operate within the mobile OS and use the device’s internal storage. Java’s Cipher API [10] and the Java Keystore API [14] using a software-backed provider (either Bouncy Castle or AndroidOpenSSL, also known as Conscrypt [27]) are both examples of software-backed keystores within Android that have been available since Android’s inception in 2007. On all Android devices today, if no keystore provider is specified when using Java’s cryptographic APIs (namely `java.security.*` and `javax.crypto.*`) Android defaults to using a software-backed keystore even if the device supports hardware-backed key storage [42, 87].

Software key storage implementations are vulnerable to memory extraction attacks, where an adversary with root permissions in the Android operating system can observe the key as it is decrypted in RAM while being used [50, 62]. Mobile applications are particularly vulnerable to such attacks since apps are long-running processes and keys stored in memory are not garbage collected until a process has terminated. Malware, malicious third-party apps, and other privileged users are all capable of compromising the underlying OS, including kernel access control measures, and launching an attack of this sort.

Prior work investigating Java cryptography APIs has also observed that these libraries have an unfortunate tendency to use the weakest ciphers as defaults (ECB mode with symmetric encryption being the most pervasive example) [43, 46]. Such choices shift the responsibility for achieving an adequate security level from the API provider to the developer.

2.2 Hardware-backed Key Storage

The defining feature of hardware-backed key storage is that keys are stored and used in hardware separate from the main OS. A compromise of the Android operating system, then, will not compromise any cryptographic keys or other processes running inside

the hardware element. Importantly, secure hardware ensures that keys will never be revealed in memory while they are used (and therefore cannot be viewed or extracted even by a privileged user).

The vast majority of modern smartphones today contain at least some form of secure execution environment [52, 63]. We use the terms “secure hardware”, “trusted hardware”, and “hardware enclave” interchangeably throughout this work to broadly characterize hardware-backed key storage.

There are two main forms of hardware-backed key storage in the Android ecosystem, each offering different security properties: (1) a trusted execution environment (TEE), available in Android through the Android Keystore API [24] and (2) a secure element (SE), termed (StrongBox Keymaster [11] and provided as a subset of the Android Keystore API. We discuss each of these in turn below as different forms of secure hardware vary in degree of isolation from the Android OS, and hence the attacks they protect against. Throughout the rest of the paper, in accordance with Android’s own terminology we use the terms “Android Keystore” and “Keystore” to refer specifically to Android’s trusted hardware API (either TEE or SE).

2.2.1 Trusted Execution Environment. A trusted execution environment (TEE) is a discrete area of the main processor intended to provide a more secure, logically isolated execution environment. It has its own operating system (named Trusty in Android [22]), and communicates with the Android OS through requests forwarded through the Android Keystore interface to the TEE, referencing keys by a string alias. In Android, the TEE is located on the main processor, which is divided into the Android OS and the Trusty OS [22], also commonly referred to as the *normal world* and the *secure world*. The hardware used to protect the normal world from the secure world depends on the processor architecture: TrustZone is used for ARM-based systems and provides dual execution environments [70] while Intel x86 uses virtualization technology to provide similar support [54].

The primary security benefit of a TEE is to guard against kernel compromise, including malicious applications installed on the device which could request root permissions [63, 73]. The Android kernel and applications run in the normal world, while the secure world (i.e., the hardware enclave) stores long-term cryptographic key material and performs operations using these keys. Trusted hardware has numerous other benefits for mobile device security, such as enabling hardware root of trust schemes to authenticate firmware running on the device, but in this paper we focus on the direct security to app developers for storing and using cryptographic keys.

In Android, a TEE has been available since Android 4.3 (API level 18) was released in 2013, with new features added over the years since [24, 39]. The initial version of the Android Keystore only supported asymmetric cryptographic operations and did not add support for symmetric keys until Android 6.0 (API level 23) in 2015 (approximately two years after the initial release date). Hardware-level key attestation, the ability to verify that keys are indeed stored in a hardware-backed keystore, and other more advanced features were introduced in Android 7.0 (API level 24) [23].

In addition to hardware-derived security benefits, the Keystore API makes deliberate design choices that provide an increased level

of security in practice when compared with older Java APIs. The API explicitly disallows certain insecure key configurations, such as symmetric encryption with a constant initialization vector, and offers more secure defaults.

While TEEs offer substantial benefits over software-backed key storage, including protection from memory extraction, they are still vulnerable to various physical attacks, including side-channel attacks. There have been several documented attacks on Intel SGX [36, 85, 86], which is an example of a TEE; most of these were side-channel attacks [66]. Prior work has also discovered several architectural design flaws in ARM TrustZone implementations leaving data stored even in TEEs potentially vulnerable to sophisticated threat actors [35, 77]. To protect against the most advanced attacks, a device needs to contain a hardware element entirely separate from the main processor: a secure element.

2.2.2 Secure Element. Most premium Android smartphones include a secure element (SE), a form of hardware security module (HSM) which must have its own CPU and storage, tamper-resistant packaging, and a true random number generator [11, 24]. An SE provides all the benefits of a TEE and more: the increased isolation from the main Android OS and processor provides resistance to various side-channel attacks, including cold-boot memory attacks and shared-resource attacks [24]. As with a TEE, cryptographic keys are generated and stored within the confines of the SE, and any operations performed using the key material take place within the hardware so the key never enters an application’s host memory. Different hardware elements are not mutually exclusive—for instance, a mobile device containing an entirely separate SE will almost certainly also contain a TEE as part of its main processor.

Android’s public SE API is termed the StrongBox Keymaster [11] (henceforth abbreviated as StrongBox) and has been available to external developers since Android 9.0 (API level 28) was released in August 2018 [24]. An SE was first introduced in Pixel devices, Google’s flagship device line, with the Titan M chip (Google’s in-house secure element processor) in the Pixel 3 in 2018 [92]. This was upgraded to the Titan M2 chip beginning with the Pixel 6 in 2021 [57]. System-on-chip (SoC) hardware, or integrated secure elements (iSE), qualify as providing StrongBox support as long as they meet the requirements above [24]. In 2021, Google’s Pixel 6 introduced Google Tensor, a system-on-chip (SoC) that is isolated from the main processor but also has its own CPU and RAM, among other features [57]; Google Tensor interfaces with the Titan M2 chip. While secure elements are still comparatively novel in mobile handsets, Hugenroth et al. [52] estimated secure element availability in contemporary mobile devices and found that as of 2023, 96% of iPhones and 45% of Android devices offer some form of SE. We expect these percentages will increase in future years as older devices are cycled out.

Spurred on by the advanced security properties SEs can provide, industry firms have invested significant resources into encouraging the development and adoption of HSM schemes: Google launched the Android Ready SE Alliance in 2021, a “collaboration between Google and Secure Element (SE) vendors” that aims to make discrete hardware-backed storage (e.g., StrongBox) “the lowest common denominator for the Android ecosystem” and to facilitate interoperability and consistency across secure element vendors within the

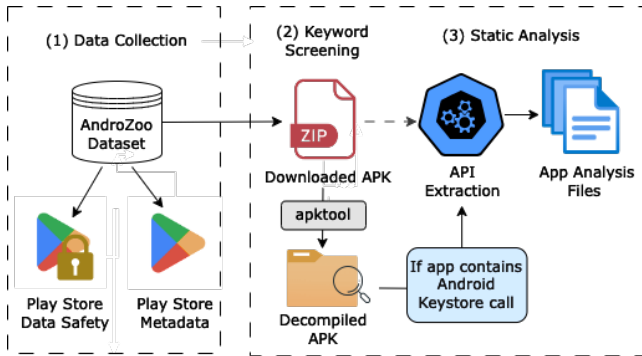


Figure 1: KeyDroid Stages: We (1) scrape Play Store metadata and data safety information for all apps in the AndroZoo dataset with at least 10,000 downloads and (2) decompile each app and pre-screen for any relevant API references. If an app contains a reference to the Android Keystore API, we run KeyDroid, our in-depth static analysis tool, to generate the app call graph and extract all API references, arguments, and call packages.

Android ecosystem [3, 51]. We discuss recommended best practices and legal mandates in further detail in Appendix §A.1.

Despite the industry shift towards SEs as the desirable and intended outcome, to the best of our knowledge there have been no prior studies on the usage or performance of this form of trusted hardware. This is of particular concern since SEs are widely acknowledged to reduce performance. As of August 2025, Google’s documentation described StrongBox’s performance as “a little slower and resource-constrained (meaning that it supports fewer concurrent operations) compared to TEE”, and recommends StrongBox for developers who “want to prioritize higher security guarantees over app resource efficiency” [24]. As of February 2026, and after the public release of this work, Google has updated its documentation to use stronger language with regard to StrongBox’s performance, informing developers that StrongBox is “slower”, “may introduce performance trade-offs”, and is “not necessary” for most apps [24]. Due to these performance drawbacks, the Android Keystore API is structured so that developers must explicitly opt in to using StrongBox even when the application is running on a device that contains a SE.

2.3 Key Considerations

Trusted hardware is not a panacea: although hardware-backed key storage prevents keys from being exported off-device or revealed in memory, the keys can still be *used* on-device by an attacker with root privileges, a “fundamental limitation” of hardware-backed storage [37, 63]. Even so, the adversary will only be able to decrypt data stored on the device which, depending on the application, may limit the damage they can cause if they are unable to use the keys to decrypt data stored *off* the device (e.g., data stored on a remote server). Additional authentication requirements prior to key use can also substantially mitigate this risk.

Furthermore, the use of hardware-backed protection for cryptographic key material is “best effort” in the sense that the Android

Keystore API uses the TEE if it is available on the device (or SE if specially requested), but reverts to a software-backed keystore otherwise. The default reversion to a software-backed keystore instead of throwing an error reflects a desire to support backwards compatibility and a fragmented Android ecosystem containing many different device vendors with different price budgets and hardware specifications. Developers who desire to require hardware-backed storage as the minimum security level of their product can add runtime conditional checks hardware availability and adjust accordingly. A key goal of this work, then, is to explore whether app developers do indeed request to use trusted hardware on devices where it is available.

3 Methodology

We begin by describing our process for collecting our dataset of Android apps and analyzing these apps with respect to API usage. Figure 1 provides a high-level overview of all app analysis stages. We further describe our methodology for testing the runtime performance of different keystores across common cryptographic operations.

3.1 Dataset Selection

We use the publicly available AndroZoo dataset [6] as our source for Android applications. AndroZoo provides the raw APK files, while all other app metadata and data safety information was scraped directly from the Google Play Store. We initially identify 8,804,118 apps in the AndroZoo dataset from the Play Store marketplace which were crawled on or after July 2013, when Android’s trusted hardware API was first released to developers, though this number includes different versions of the same app and apps no longer available for download. We necessarily only consider free apps since the AndroZoo dataset does not include paid apps.

For each app provided in the AndroZoo dataset that passed preliminary filtering, we scrape the Play Store from October 2023 to March 2024 to filter for apps available at the point of scraping with at least 10,000 downloads. The 6-month duration reflects the heavy computational load required to download and analyze a large number of APK files. Filtering based on a 10,000-download threshold yields a dataset of 490,119 unique APKs. When we encountered multiple versions of the same app (as identified using Android’s APK package name, which must be unique in the Google Play Store and cannot be changed once the app is uploaded), we include only the most recently crawled version in our dataset. Our dataset therefore presents a snapshot of contemporary trusted hardware usage among Android apps rather than a longitudinal view of trusted hardware adoption over time, as the latter would require analysis of each individual version of an app (some of which are updated every few weeks).

We were able to successfully download and decompile almost all of our dataset of 490,119 unique apps, leaving us with a revised dataset of 486,234 apps. We further record the following metadata for each app, scraped from the Play Store at the same time the APK is downloaded: app package ID, title, number of installs, developer name and email, genre, release date of the latest version (release date of initial version is not available), and version number. We then download the Android Package (.apk) archive file containing

the app source code, metadata, and other resource files for each of these 486,234 apps.

3.2 Play Store Data Safety Labels

App key storage is only a concern if the app processes sensitive or confidential data. In this work we use the Play Store’s data safety label information to determine which apps process sensitive data, and therefore which apps may be expected to make use of secure key storage. Since July 2022 Google has required each app listed in the Play Store to complete a data safety form containing self-reported information from the app developers on what types of user data the app collects and shares with third-parties, and for what purpose [80]. This includes data collected by third-party libraries. For instance, the Signal messaging app notes that it collects only a user’s phone number for “app functionality and account management”, and does not share data with third parties [81].

Published data safety information. According to Google’s developer documentation, “all developers that have an app published on Google Play must complete the data safety form” (including apps that self-report not collecting user data) [80]. In practice, we find that only 74.47% (342,872/460,362) of apps have submitted a data safety form at the time of scraping in March through April 2024¹. Khandelwal et al. [56] had previously conducted a large-scale analysis of Play Store data safety labels in May 2023 (approximately one year earlier) and found that only 46.8% of apps reported any data, so we note the percentage of apps providing a data safety label has increased significantly from approximately a year earlier, though it is still noticeably far from satisfying the Play Store mandate.

For apps that have data safety information, we classify each app as “sensitive” or “innocuous” based on the types of data the developer has reported. We provide more detail on these data type categories in §A.2.

Developer self-reporting. Google uses a counter-intuitive notion of what constitutes data collection: instructions to developers state data is considered to be collected if it is transmitted “from your app off a user’s device” [80], and user data that is only processed and stored locally does not need to be reported as “collected”. In short, it is possible that an app that processes sensitive user data locally (and may therefore be expected to use some form of hardware-backed key storage) yet this app would not be listed as collecting sensitive data. We provide further discussion on the limitations of developer-reported data in Appendix A.2.

Therefore, by using the information in the data safety labels there is a risk our analysis excludes apps which do in fact process sensitive data. Nevertheless, there exists no clear definition at scale for determining which apps “should” use trusted hardware which covers all scenarios. After careful consideration, we conclude that Play Store apps’ self-reported data collection is the metric which most closely approximates sensitive data collection. We further argue that there is much to be gained from understanding how

¹The slight difference in number of apps for which we attempted to retrieve a data safety label (460,263) vs. number of apps downloaded and decompiled (486,234) is due to apps that were available in the Play Store at the time we began scraping apps themselves in October 2023 but had been removed by the time we began scraping app data safety pages in March 2024.

the Keystore API is used by those apps which state they process sensitive data: if these apps do not make use of hardware-based secure storage, we hypothesize that it is unlikely that those apps which do process sensitive data, but do not declare it in their data safety label, process such data securely.

Additionally, an app that collects sensitive data and makes use of the Keystore API in its source code does not necessarily use the API for the purpose of securing that sensitive data. For instance, an app could reference the Keystore API indirectly through a third-party analytics library, while using only the software-backed Java Keystore to encrypt highly sensitive authentication keys in its own codebase. We discuss this limitation and steps taken to mitigate it throughout our work. Most importantly, to address this possibility our analysis focuses primarily on the reverse scenario, apps that collect sensitive data but do not make use of the Keystore API, as this category of apps would indeed be expected to use trusted hardware to secure relevant keys or other sensitive information.

3.3 Static Analysis

To reduce computational load, we use multiple layered static analysis techniques to filter for references to Android’s trusted hardware APIs and extract relevant API calls. We begin by executing a basic keyword search across all APKs in our dataset to narrow down the set of APKs which reference the Keystore API in any capacity, and then perform more in-depth static analysis on any APKs flagged as relevant.

Keyword Filtering. Since analyzing the call graph is very resource-intensive, to filter candidate apps we first decompile each .apk file using apktool [28] and run an initial grep search for any call to the Android Keystore API (`android.security.keystore`). After filtering out any apps that do not contain at least one reference to the Keystore API, we are left with a dataset of 122,305 apps.

Inter-Procedural Call Graph Analysis. To analyze the bytecode of the 122,305 apps flagged as having at least one relevant API call, we use Soot [2], a well-known framework for inter-procedural static analysis [59] also used by similar related work. We experimented with using FlowDroid and other static analysis tools that more accurately model the Android lifecycle (e.g., by detecting implicit callback methods such as `onCreate` or `onClick` listener) but found that the runtime was sufficiently large as to make it infeasible for a dataset of our size, in large part due to its iterative callback calculation, which recomputes the call graph each time a new callback is encountered. Prior work [91] showed that FlowDroid did not finish app call graph generation on 24% of apps even with a timeout of 5 hours, consistent with our own observations, and so we ultimately determined Soot offered the right balance of accuracy and efficiency.

We allocate each APK 10GB RAM and set an automatic timeout of 30 minutes. Our analysis tool begins by generating the call graph of the APK to determine the context for a particular API reference. To keep runtime manageable, we assume that all methods are reachable while generating the initial call graph, and conduct a custom reachability analysis (described in more detail below) tracing backwards from a method of interest along the method call chain.

We search for 64 distinct API calls, including all methods from the primary KeyStore API as well as other Android cryptography APIs that in turn call the KeyStore API, such as `androidx.security.cryptography.MasterKey` [15] and `android.security.keystore.KeyProtection` [13], and the primary methods from the Java KeyStore [14] and Cipher APIs [10]. The Java cryptographic APIs allow developers to specify a keystore provider, and so we check these to see if developers are referencing the Keystore API indirectly. The full list of specific API methods searched for is available in our dataset in §10. For each API call identified, we collect the full method signature of the calling method, including associated package and class names, record the object on which the method is called (i.e., register value), and extract all parameter values by applying backwards program slicing [90]. As part of our reachability analysis, we conduct a backwards breadth-first search and trace each method containing a relevant API call backwards through the call graph for up to 1,000 nodes, recording all possible paths.

Package Analysis. We are particularly interested in determining whether an API call is located within the main application code or whether it is part of a third-party library. First-party usage indicates that developers have consciously chosen to store cryptographic key material in trusted hardware, while for certain third-party libraries developers may be unaware that this is even occurring.

To determine call context, we classify packages as first- or third-party by checking whether the same package is called by other APKs, following similar methodology used by Oltrogge et al. [69] (described in more detail below). While there are a small number of public datasets of third-party library signatures, we find that these are generally too outdated or otherwise incomplete to be fit for purpose (e.g., LibRadar [61] was last updated in 2018).

We collect all packages containing a call to the Android Keystore key generation constructor `android.security.keystore.KeyGenParameterSpec.Builder(String keystoreAlias, int purposes)`. If a package is referenced by multiple APKs from different developers, we consider it to be third-party; otherwise, if it is referenced by only a single APK or by multiple APKs from the same developer, we classify it as a first-party package. By cross-referencing the package with the app developer, we ensure that a package referenced across multiple apps from the same developer is correctly classified as first-party.

Obfuscation. We observe a significant amount of obfuscation of package names where package names are shortened and anonymized (e.g., `o8` or `q1.x.a`), likely due to built-in obfuscation techniques available to developers in Android Studio and other widely used development tools.

Different packages may share the same obfuscated name, and so we exclude obfuscated packages from party analysis. To identify non-obfuscated package names, if a package name has at least one sub-component (i.e., character string separated by periods) of at least three characters in length, we consider it to be an authentic (non-obfuscated) package name.

Reachability. Our call-graph generation methodology described above errs on the side of favoring false positives over false negatives (i.e., we would prefer to include a relevant API call that may be

unreachable than to exclude a call that is used). To reduce the risk of false positives, once we have classified all packages as first-party or third-party, to determine whether a particular API call is reachable we trace backwards through the recorded call paths along the control flow. If there exists at least one path containing a call to first-party source code, we consider the API call to be reachable.

3.4 Performance Measurements

From the average developer’s perspective, performance is perhaps the most important consideration when choosing among different key storage APIs. A natural corollary to surveying the usage of secure key storage is to investigate storage runtime performance, particularly among different forms of hardware-backed key storage.

To conduct systematic performance measurements we wrote a benchmarking test application that performs symmetric and asymmetric key generation, message encryption, and message signing following canonical examples provided in Android documentation and Android’s developer blog [12, 55]. We use AWS Device Farm [1] to run our test application across a variety of Android devices.

4 Secure Hardware Usage in Android

As the first step in our work, we conduct a comprehensive survey of all Android API calls relevant to key storage or trusted hardware, collecting arguments provided and relevant context (e.g., class and package name in which the call occurred). While we make every effort to retrieve the parameter argument via constant propagation in cases where static analysis initially returns the register value, this is not always possible and thus in the results below the parameter total for a particular API method call is generally lower than the method call total shown in Table 2 in the Appendix.

We further note that unless otherwise specified, statistics for API calls discussed throughout this section are not necessarily distinct: if a particular API call is located within a third-party library, this call configuration (e.g., parameters) is then duplicated in our findings for each call to this library (including across separate apps). We intentionally consider duplicates in our findings since our purpose is to understand the state of Android security and keystore usage in the wild, though for certain highly relevant calls we will distinguish between first-party (e.g., unique) calls and third-party library calls. Similarly, we will frequently distinguish between API usage as a percentage of total *calls* for a particular API method and percentage of individual *apps* containing at least one reference to the method in question since a single app can reference the same method numerous times.

4.1 Overall Usage

Of the 486,234 in our dataset (apps currently in the Play Store with at least 10,000 downloads) which we were able to download and decompile, through keyword searching as described in §3.3 we find 122,305 apps containing a reference to the Android Keystore API within their source code. This provides us with an upper bound of 25.15% of apps within the Play Store using device trusted hardware. If we consider only the 159,241 apps self-reporting to the Play Store as collecting sensitive data, we find 69,583 apps referencing the Android Keystore API and the upper bound of trusted hardware use rises to 43.7%.

In practice, these calls may be located within components of third-party libraries not referenced by the app, or within unreachable or legacy source code of the app itself. We then run our in-depth static analysis tool, KeyDroid, on all 122,305 apps flagged as directly referencing the Android Keystore API in some capacity to verify which calls are reachable and collect detailed statistics on how the API is used². We are able to successfully analyze 116,555 apps, with the remaining 2.82% erroring out for various miscellaneous reasons, most commonly exceeding the time limit.

The Android Keystore API further requires developers to specify an intended purpose at the time of key initialization and enforces this purpose when developers attempt to use the key (e.g., a key specified as being intended for encryption cannot later be used to sign). We find that of the 278,056 total init calls for which we were able to retrieve the purpose value, 92.31% of keys are designated as being used for encryption and decryption only, while 5.60% are used for signing or verifying message authentication codes.

A full list of all Keystore API endpoints and their total usage counts is shown in Appendix A.8. We further describe how usage varies by Play Store category in §A.3, describe alternative keystores used from a manual review of a subset of apps flagged as not using the Android Keystore API in §A.4, and provide an in-depth manual analysis of the top 15 finance apps in §A.5.

StrongBox Usage. We find that 22,875 of the 116,555 apps with any reference to the Android Keystore API (19.62%) further contain a reference to the StrongBox API `setIsStrongBoxBacked(boolean)`, which is 4.7% as a percentage of the overall dataset (and 5.03% as a percentage of apps collecting sensitive data). However, since the API takes in a boolean parameter some of these instances may explicitly request *not* to use StrongBox. To calculate how many apps *enable* StrongBox, we are able to retrieve the argument value for 21,022 out of 24,630 calls and find that while 94.85% of these instances request to use StrongBox, the remaining 5.15% explicitly opt out of using StrongBox and storing cryptographic key material in the device’s secure element. Applying this percentage to the 22,875 apps referencing the API, we estimate that 22,367 apps, or 4.6% of our overall dataset, request to use StrongBox for at least one key. This percentage rises slightly to 5.03% if we consider only apps self-reporting collecting sensitive data.

To better understand the context behind developer choices without being hampered by source code obfuscation, we manually searched for instances of StrongBox disabling on GitHub [48] as of August 2025. Of the 18 unique (i.e., non-fork) repositories which contained a call disabling StrongBox, one repository included a comment that using StrongBox had produced an error (but did not provide further specifics) [88], two repositories cited performance reasons in a nearby comment, and 12 opted out without explanation. The remaining three repositories disabled StrongBox only if a `StrongBoxUnavailableException` was thrown and were therefore false positives.

²A small number of APKs (2,365, or 0.48% of our overall dataset) were flagged as containing the string “AndroidKeystore” but did not contain any references to the actual `android.security.keystore` API when searching the source code. After manual investigation we hypothesize that in most cases this is due to requesting the Android Keystore provider via a different Java API in potentially unreachable code (and so the Keystore API references along the call chain were removed at compilation). We include these APKs in our upper bound percentages reported above but exclude them from more in-depth analysis

The two repositories citing performance reasons were the Salesforce Android SDK [76] and the cryptocurrency wallet Tonhub [38], the latter of which has over one million downloads in the Google Play Store. The Salesforce Android SDK disables StrongBox as the runtime is “too slow” and therefore “not a good fit for [their] use case, since the key will need to be retrieved multiple times” in a comment dated September 2019 [74, 75]. Tonhub similarly noted concern over “a lot of examples of instability and slowness” with StrongBox in a comment from a May 2022 commit, citing as an example a 2021 GitHub Issues thread from an unrelated project which reported experiencing random data loss [83]. Tonhub’s source code comment concluded that “CPU-bound encryption” (i.e., TEE-backed encryption) “is enough for [their] use case” and characterized StrongBox as “some internal magic” [83].

We further investigate which ciphers are being used to generate StrongBox-backed keys. The nested structure of Android key generation makes it difficult to reliably link a key generation call (which specifies the algorithm to be used) with the Android Keystore’s parameter specification, and simply checking whether both calls are located in the same method is too imprecise since a single method may generate multiple keys. Instead, we can indirectly estimate ciphers used for StrongBox specifically by linking key size with StrongBox usage. For the 98 keys which set both StrongBox and the key size, we find that 97 of 98 keys used StrongBox with an AES-256 cipher while just one key used StrongBox to generate an RSA-2048 key, a distribution which again suggests runtime is a significant consideration when using StrongBox as asymmetric encryption is substantially slower than symmetric encryption.

4.2 First-Party vs. Third-Party Usage

Here we present a package-level analysis of the location context in which trusted hardware is referenced. In particular, we are interested in determining whether apps flagged as using trusted hardware are doing so as part of the core application source-code or because the hardware API is referenced indirectly as part of a third-party library. First-party usage indicates that developers have consciously chosen to store cryptographic key material in trusted hardware, while for certain third-party libraries (such as analytics libraries) developers may be unaware that this is occurring.

Overall, we find that the vast majority of Keystore API usages are located in third-party source code (definition provided in §3.3). Of a total of 199,156 calls to the Keystore init method located in non-obfuscated packages, we find that 94.69% of calls originated in third-party libraries, while 5.31% are located in first-party source code. This observed distribution is also true for SE usage. Of the 17,400 StrongBox calls located in non-obfuscated packages, 98.31% are located in third-party libraries, while only 294 (1.69%) are first-party calls within custom app source code.

Third-Party Libraries. A natural follow-on question is *which* third-party libraries referencing the trusted hardware API are most commonly used by apps. We find that while six of the top 10 libraries referencing the Keystore API are security-focused libraries (including both general-purpose key storage libraries as well as Android’s biometric library), four are primarily app development and analytics libraries, suggesting that the details of key generation and storage are abstracted from developers who may be unaware

Package Name	Call Count
androidx.security.crypto	11,424
com.oblador.keychain.cipherStorage	2,161
com.microsoft.identity.common.internal .platform	1,019
com.salesforce.marketingcloud.sfmcsdk .components.encryption	758
com.iproov.sdk.crypto	179
androidx.tracing	136
com.ionicframework.IdentityVault	129
com.oblador.keychain.g	108
com.epicshaggy.biometric	76
com.it_nomads.fluttersecurestorage.ciphers	66

Table 1: Top 10 third-party libraries referencing Android’s secure element StrongBox Keymaster API. We chose to classify `androidx.security.crypto` [8] as a third-party library after finding that the vast majority of references were to the `EncryptedFile` and `EncryptedSharedPreferences` classes which abstract the details of key generation and storage from the developer (i.e., a developer could simply create an encrypted file without understanding where the encryption keys are stored).

of what data is stored where. Table 3 in the Appendix shows all top 10 third-party libraries used by Android apps to reference the Keystore API.

We focus particularly on third-party libraries using StrongBox given that the vast majority of StrongBox usage is third party. Table 1 shows the top 10 third-party libraries referencing the StrongBox API. Three of the top 10 are general-purpose cryptography libraries, while four are related to identity and authentication (particularly biometric authentication) and the remaining three are app development or analytics libraries. Notably, several of the cryptography libraries which referenced the Android Keystore API do not use StrongBox (i.e., they use only the basic TEE-backed API). Specifically, neither Google’s Tink cryptography library [49] (#6 in Table 3 in the Appendix showing the top-10 libraries using the Keystore API) nor Amazon Web Service’s internal key-value datastore (#8 in Table 3 in the Appendix) use StrongBox, instead opting to use only the TEE keystore. Furthermore, as Table 1 shows, 11,424 of the 24,630 total StrongBox calls across Android (i.e., just under half) come from one of Android’s own cryptography libraries used to encrypt files and key-value data pairs, with usage dropping off precipitously outside of official Android development libraries.

4.3 Key Authentication

The Android Keystore API allows for a variety of authentication configurations to determine when a key can be accessed. The core authentication method `setUserAuthenticationRequired(boolean)` requires users to authenticate via any available form of device unlock (device pattern/PIN/password or biometric credentials) for any cryptographic operations using a private key [20]. More specialized API methods allow developers to require a specific form of

authentication (e.g., biometric authentication only) and to set the duration during which the authentication is valid.

We find that 15.84% of keys stored in the Android Keystore require some form of user authentication prior to granting access, with 2.78% requiring biometric authentication specifically (and disallowing any other form of authentication, such as device passcode).

By default, if a key requires any form of authentication then a user must authenticate each time the key is used. 21.75% of keys that require authentication force the user to authenticate each time they initiate an operation requiring key access, the most secure configuration but also one that can use friction for the user experience. To provide a more user-friendly configuration, the Keystore API allows developers to set a validity duration period in seconds during which the key can be reused without any need to reauthenticate. Of calls that set a specific duration, the most popular durations were 5 seconds (set by 38.53% of keys which set a duration) and 1 hour (set by 4.45% of keys). A significant percentage of API calls set very short validity durations: 13.2% of calls that set a duration set it to 3 seconds or less, meaning that the user can only reuse the key within the next few seconds. For some use cases, unless the user proceeds very quickly this is effectively the same as requiring authentication each time.

As an alternative to requiring a user to provide information to authenticate, a user can instead approve a pop-up message via the `setUserConfirmationRequired(boolean)` API before proceeding. As a standalone API this does not require the individual approving the message to provide any information indicating that they are indeed the device owner (i.e., they need only tap to approve), but it can be used in combination with the authentication APIs described above to provide cryptographic certification that a user has approved a certain action. However, we find that very little use of this feature: of the 26 calls to the `setUserConfirmationRequired` API detected where we were able to retrieve the argument value, only two of them enabled confirmation (with the remaining 24 disabling).

4.4 Implementation Security

Ciphers. Of 232,283 key generation calls to Android cryptographic APIs requesting the Android Keystore as provider, 63.51% requested an AES key, 34.48% requested an RSA key pair, and 0.9% of keys requested an EC key pair. Table 4 in the Appendix shows the full list of requested ciphers and their respective usage counts. The low prevalence of EC keys compared to RSA keys is likely due in part to the Android Keystore only supporting asymmetric encryption or decryption using RSA (and so EC key pairs can only be used for signing).

As a point of comparison, of the 20,042 calls requesting the AndroidOpenSSL software-backed provider, 99.74% generated an RSA key pair with just 51 generating an AES key. We hypothesize that developers avoid hardware-backed key storage for asymmetric encryption out of performance concerns, which we discuss further in subsequent sections.

The Android Keystore API also includes legacy ciphers for backwards compatibility and interoperability, some of which have since been deprecated. 3DES, for instance, was simultaneously added and deprecated in API level 28 [25]. In our analysis, we fortunately

find very few instances of apps using insecure or legacy ciphers. In particular, we find no instances of 3DES or HMAC-SHA1 even though these ciphers are available within the Android Keystore [26].

Defaults. Android Keystore API defaults are significantly more secure than those of software-based Java cryptography APIs historically available in Android. For instance, if a developer requests an AES cipher without specifying the accompanying encryption mode(s) as in `javax.crypto.Cipher.getInstance("AES")`, Java's Cipher API defaults to AES with ECB mode, an insufficiently random configuration [16].

Android Keystore, on the other hand, disallows various insecure cryptographic operations by default, including using ECB mode in symmetric encryption, RSA encryption/decryption without proper padding, and using an insufficiently random IV [19]. All of the six essential rules in cryptography laid out by Egele et al. [43] (e.g., do not use ECB mode with symmetric encryption, do not use a non-random IV for CBC) in 2013 are not possible within the Keystore API by default. Unless the developer explicitly disallows randomized encryption, many of the same configurations that run smoothly or are even the default in Java's software APIs will throw an `InvalidKeyException` with the Android Keystore. In addition to disallowing insecure configurations by default, the Keystore API is designed such that it requires developers to provide specific configurations instead of only a high level cipher (e.g., for symmetric encryption a developer must specify the block mode(s) and encryption padding at the point of key generation using the designated `setBlockModes` and `setEncryptionPaddings` APIs [40, 41]). Android Keystore then verifies that the configuration provided is valid, secure, and compatible with the specified key purpose.

Randomized Encryption. The Keystore API allows developers to circumvent Android Keystore's secure default settings and implement known insecure configurations. By setting Keystore's `setRandomizedEncryption(boolean)` API [19] to false, developers can disable the Keystore API's default mandate that configurations must be sufficiently randomized to provide *IND-CPA*, an important security property that requires ciphertexts to be indistinguishable given chosen plaintexts.

We find that 77.94% of calls to the randomized encryption API disable the setting (a relatively unsurprising result given that it is enabled by default, and so referencing the API with `True` as the argument has no effect). When estimating how this configuration is distributed as a percentage of all hardware-backed keys, however, given that there were 30,245 references to the randomized encryption API endpoint we estimate that approximately 8.45% of all Android Keystore-backed keys disable *IND-CPA*, a surprisingly high percentage given that this configuration violates a core cryptographic security property.

There are a handful of scenarios in which a developer may deem it necessary to disable this requirement (for instance, if a custom IV is needed), though the API documentation suggests alternative workarounds to avoid disabling randomized encryption for several common cases [19]. To investigate this further, we identify the ten most-used libraries containing a call disabling randomized encryption and manually review each, though we find only three are public without significant reverse engineering: (1)

`com.amazonaws.internal.keyvaluestore`, AWS's internal key-store which generates a secure key configuration (AES/GCM/NoPadding) but disables randomized encryption because the API "does not work consistently in API levels 23-28" [31], (2) `com.apptentive.android.sdk.encryption.resolvers`, a customer engagement platform which uses a custom initial vector (IV) and thus is required to disable randomized encryption [29], and (3) `dev.mcodex.RNSensitiveInfo`, a React Native wrapper library which disables randomized encryption for a basic AES/GCM/NoPadding configuration as AWS did [64]. Our results are inconclusive as we manually searched Android bug trackers for historical issues with randomized encryption API and could not find any relevant results, but these reported issues with consistency may be an area for the Android team to issue public guidance.

Key Attestation. Android Keystore allows developers to require key attestation, which verifies that keys are indeed stored in device hardware [18]. We find 2,724 calls to `setAttestationChallenge(byte[])`, indicating that 0.98% of all keys generate an attestation certificate chain. While still a relatively small percentage, this nonetheless represents a significant increase from Imran et al. [53] who previously scanned a randomly sampled subset of 112,886 Android apps for attestation in January 2021 and found only 5 apps using key attestation.

5 Key Storage Performance

Having surveyed the current usage of trusted hardware, in order to judge when hardware-backed key storage *should* be used we must first understand what performance differences, if any, exist compared with software-backed key storage. Unfortunately, to the best of our knowledge Android does not currently publish any empirical statistics evaluating the performance of software or hardware keystores.

To conduct our own measurements, we use AWS Device Farm [1] to measure the runtime performance of key storage options across a variety of Android devices. Our test app calculates the runtime performance of each individual operation for the following three keystores: the device's default software-based keystore (Bouncy Castle for the Pixel XL and AndroidOpenSSL for all other devices), the Android Keystore using the default TEE configuration, and the Android Keystore using a SE (StrongBox Keymaster). The numbers reported below for each operation represent the average performance across 100 distinct iterations.

5.1 Performance Evolution

We first measure how key generation and encryption performance has changed over time using Google's flagship Pixel device line from 2016 through 2023.

Key Generation. Our results show that symmetric key generation has a negligible performance impact regardless of the keystore used. In the most recently released Pixel device, the Pixel 8, generating an AES-GCM-256 key takes 0.002 s in Android's software keystore, 0.021 s in Android's TEE keystore, and 0.071 s in Android's SE keystore, StrongBox. We observe similar runtimes for older Pixel devices. While this represents a large percentage difference, the real runtime impact is negligible given the small execution times.

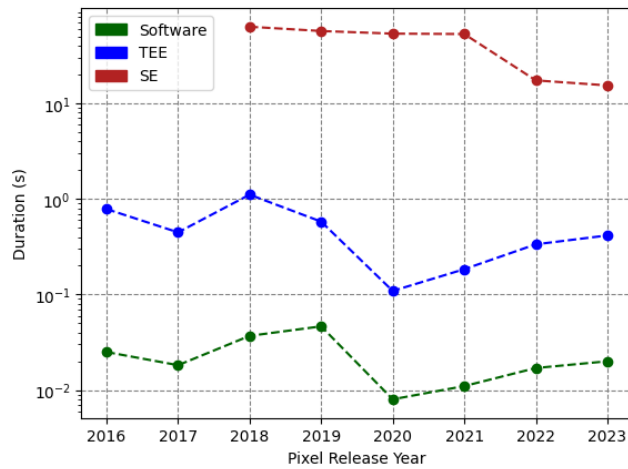


Figure 2: Performance evolution of encrypting 1 MiB with AES-GCM in Pixel devices. Each data point corresponds to the Pixel device released in that year (e.g., 2023 represents measurements taken from the Pixel 8). The y-axis is log-scaled.

Runtime differences are more significant with asymmetric encryption: in the Pixel 8, generating an RSA-2048 key takes 0.21 s in a software keystore, 1.93 s in Android’s TEE keystore, and 9.22 s in StrongBox.

Encryption. Figure 2 shows the comparative performance of encrypting a randomly generated 1MiB payload with AES-GCM-256 across Pixel devices released between 2016 and 2023. Android introduced a secure processor beginning with the Pixel 3, and consequently StrongBox measurements are only shown from 2018 on.

The performance impact of software-backed encryption and TEE-backed encryption has roughly stayed the same over time, with the original Pixel and the most recent Pixel 8 reporting TEE measurements of 0.78 and 0.41 seconds respectively. For a payload of 1MiB or smaller there is minimal difference between running cryptographic operations inside a TEE and running them natively in terms of what is observable to the end user (i.e. a runtime of 1 second versus 0.1 seconds will not be noticeable to most users), which has been the case since the initial release of the Android Keystore API.

StrongBox encryption, however, is significantly slower than the other two keystore types for any but the very smallest payloads. In the Pixel 8, symmetric encryption of a 1 MiB payload takes an average of 15.43 s in StrongBox while TEE encryption takes 0.42 s and encryption using a software-backed key takes just 0.02 s. StrongBox performance has improved over time, and so execution times are even longer in older devices: the Pixel 3 (released in 2018) had a symmetric encryption runtime of 63.43 s, and StrongBox runtimes largely remained the same until the release of the Pixel 7 in 2022 when the performance dropped significantly to 17.42 s.³

³The sharp performance improvement between the Pixel 6 and Pixel 7 is somewhat surprising since both devices use Google’s in-house Titan M2 security chip [57]. The Pixel’s main processor changed from Google Tensor in the Pixel 6 to Google Tensor

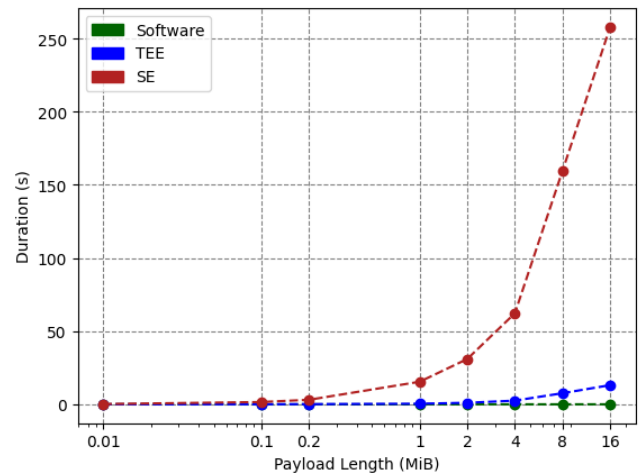


Figure 3: Execution times of AES-GCM-256 encryption as a function of message length on the Pixel 8. The x-axis is log-scaled. The precise numerical runtimes are shown in Table 5 in the Appendix.

For asymmetric encryption using the same RSA-2048 cipher as above, we measure Pixel 8 performance across keystores on a very small payload of 256 bits (i.e., the use case where a software-backed AES key is encrypted by a hardware-backed RSA key). We find that asymmetric encryption incurs very little performance overhead on minuscule payloads regardless of keystore, with TEE encryption taking an average of 0.0065s and StrongBox encryption taking 0.0125s on average.

Overall, symmetric encryption using a SE-backed key is roughly 35 to 55 times slower than encryption using a TEE-backed key depending on the device, either the cost of round-trip communications between the main processor and secure processor, or to a simpler overall processor architecture for TEEs. This finding somewhat contradicts Android’s official documentation, which described StrongBox’s performance on the devices and API versions used in this experiment as “a little slower” as previously mentioned in §2.2.2. On the most recently released Pixel device, however, basic symmetric encryption of a 1MiB payload within StrongBox takes approximately 37 times (and 15 seconds) longer than the same operation within a TEE. Even so, these runtimes do not indicate that SEs should be avoided, but rather that SEs are only sufficiently performant when encrypting a very small payload (such as a software-backed encryption key). In practice, Strongbox’s performance is perfectly viable in some cases as StrongBox (and the Keystore API more generally) are typically only intended to be used for small payloads. However, since Google’s documentation does not provide developers with any guidance with respect to payload size, we survey a wide range of possible payload sizes to reflect all possible developer implementations.

G2 between the 6 and 7 devices, however, and it is possible that the main Tensor G2 processor is able to communicate with the Titan M2 chip more efficiently.

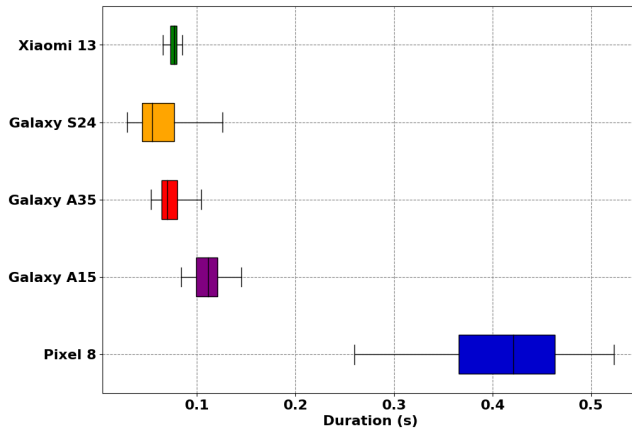


Figure 4: Runtime duration of encrypting 1 MiB with AES-GCM within a TEE across a range of Android devices recently released in the past two years. While four of the five devices cluster around 0.1 seconds, the runtime of the Pixel 8 is noticeably longer and with a wider range.

5.2 Performance vs. Payload Length

We further measure the impact of message length on encryption performance. Figure 3 shows the performance of payload sizes between 1MiB and 16MiB for the Pixel 8 (again using AES-GCM-256 with no padding). In this experiment we used the average of 10 iterations for payloads 4MiB and above (instead of 100 iterations as with other experiments) due to rapidly increasing execution times.

While encryption runtime increases linearly with message length for all three keystore types, StrongBox runtime quickly becomes unmanageable for large lengths. A relatively small payload of 0.1 MiB takes the Android Keystore 0.08 s to encrypt using the TEE and takes StrongBox 1.59 s. A 4MiB payload, however, will take StrongBox roughly 1 minute to encrypt, while the TEE-backed keystore can encrypt the same payload in just 2.56 s, making the TEE viable even for larger message lengths. A software-backed keystore provides the best performance by far as expected, encrypting payloads of up to 16 MiB in just 0.3 s given that all operations are in-process with no IPC calls or context switch. Table 5 in the Appendix contains the TEE and SE execution times and standard deviations for all message sizes tested on the Pixel 8 (shown visually in Figure 3).

Execution times for message signing are similarly cost-prohibitive using StrongBox. As shown in Table 6 in the Appendix, while StrongBox needs only 1 second to sign a small payload of 0.1 MiB, this runtime increases to 9 s for a payload of 1 MiB and 35.91 s for a 4 MiB payload. In contrast, a TEE is able to sign a 4 MiB message in 1.76 s, making it roughly 20x faster than StrongBox.

5.3 Cross-Provider Performance

We further investigate how Pixel performance compares with other commonly used mobile devices in the Android ecosystem. Figure 4 shows TEE performance for symmetric encryption across a range of Android devices, including Samsung and Xiaomi. The five devices measured were chosen by selecting the most recently released device across all device lines available through AWS Device Farm.

Four of the five devices measured (Samsung Galaxy A15, Samsung Galaxy A35, Samsung Galaxy S24, and Xiaomi 13) consistently report runtimes around 0.1 seconds for TEE-backed symmetric encryption, while the Pixel 8’s average runtime is 0.41 seconds.

While the Galaxy A15, Galaxy A35, and Xiaomi 13 devices do not include a secure element⁴, we compare StrongBox performance between the Pixel 8 and the Samsung Galaxy S24 (released in January 2024) and find a noticeable difference in performance in symmetric encryption. While the Pixel 8 takes 15.43 s to execute AES-GCM for a 1MiB payload, the Galaxy S24 takes 26.39 s, or close to twice as long. Curiously, the inverse is true for these two devices when considering TEE performance as shown in Figure 4: the Pixel 8 takes 0.41 s to execute symmetric encryption using a TEE-backed key, while the Galaxy S24 takes far less time at 0.06 s, illustrating the nuances and complexities of each individual device’s processor(s) and hardware architecture.

6 Developer Survey

To better understand why Android developers opt not to use hardware APIs, we conducted a large-scale developer survey in August 2024 for apps flagged as matching either of two trusted hardware configurations of interest. This study was approved by our department’s ethics committee (equivalent to IRB), and all response data was aggregated and anonymized (see §A.7 for an in-depth ethics discussion). The survey questions are shown in Appendix A.8.

We are interested in two broad categories of apps and conducted separate surveys for each: (1) Sensitive-NonKeystore: apps that self-reported as collecting sensitive user data but did not use Android’s trusted hardware APIs (either in first-party or third-party components) and (2) StrongBox-Disabled: apps that referenced the Android Keystore API in a first-party context but explicitly disabled StrongBox for at least one key (e.g., they requested to only use TEE-backed key storage). Both of these high-level configurations indicated that the app developers may have made a conscious decision not to use some form of trusted hardware.

For the first (Sensitive-NonKeystore) configuration, we surveyed a random sample of 10,000 developers via email using the contact information given on the Play Store, and have received $n = 42$ responses at the time of writing. We attribute the low response rate in large part to the use of Play Store app support email addresses, which are often read by a customer service team (if one exists) and who may not pass on our survey request to developers.

Of the 42 responses, 18 respondents reported that one factor in opting not to use trusted hardware APIs is that their app does not store credentials and/or deemed the security benefits unnecessary given the type of user data collected. Three respondents reported general performance concerns, while 14 respondents indicated that legacy development or compatibility reasons were prohibitive factors, reporting either a desire to maximize devices the app can run on or that the app was developed prior to the Android Keystore API release date in 2013. One such developer specified that their

⁴Samsung first introduced a secure processor in 2020 but only within its Galaxy S series [65]. Devices recently released as part of other series (such as the Galaxy A15 and Galaxy A35 devices, introduced in December 2023 and March 2024, respectively) do not include a secure processor (and thus throw a `StrongBoxUnavailableException` if a developer attempts requests to store keys in the StrongBox). We confirmed this through our own tests.

app uses SQLite due to “lack of knowledge [of the Android Keystore API] at the time of development and difficulties for migrating later.” Notably, API usability did not appear to be a widespread concern—just two of the 42 respondents indicated they had found the Keystore API difficult to use.

For the StrongBox-Disabled configuration, after filtering out third-party StrongBox calls we identified $n = 25$ apps matching a StrongBox-disabled configuration. Unfortunately we received no responses for our StrongBox-Disabled survey, a relatively unsurprising response rate given our restriction of the dataset to first-party disabled calls limited our sample size. Even so, our manual review of disabled StrongBox configurations on GitHub described in §4.1 provided a window into developers’ thought processes.

7 Limitations

Here we acknowledge the following limitations of our analysis and describe steps taken to mitigate these limitations.

Accuracy of static analysis: As with prior work in Android app analysis, our research is subject to the inherent technical limitations of static analysis. Given that we only have access to packaged bytecode instead of the original source code, we cannot guarantee that certain source code components have not been obfuscated, though it is unlikely that this would be the case for Android system API calls for several reasons. By default, common Android obfuscation tools such as ProGuard and R8 do not obfuscate Android SDK classes or libraries. While it is possible for the Keystore API to be invoked through reflection, making it more challenging to detect using static analysis, this would be unusual for a standard Android SDK call to a stable, public API intended to be referenced directly. Even so, our preliminary keyword search filtering will still detect reflection invoked using string constants. Keystore API use via reflection will go undetected in our analysis only if the class name is built dynamically, returned from native code, or intentionally obfuscated, all situations which are uncommon for the Android Keystore API in a typical, non-malware app.

While code obfuscation (including reflection) has minimal impact on our binary detection of trusted hardware API usage, obfuscation has a significant impact on our ability to understand the broader context of Keystore usage. Built-in Android obfuscation tools frequently obfuscate the names of first-party methods, classes, and fields, replacing semantic names with short arbitrary strings. As such, while we conduct manual validation and review of results where especially relevant, there is a time and resource trade-off between conducting high-level analysis of a large number of apps (thereby gaining insights into overarching trends), and conducting in-depth manual case review of individual uses among a small subset of apps. Since the objective of this work is to characterize structural security patterns and behaviors of Android applications at scale, our methodology centers primarily on large-scale, comprehensive analysis, as described further below.

While static analysis cannot reliably detect whether a particular component is executed at runtime (i.e., dead or legacy code), this is a natural trade-off with the scale of our work. Modern compilers and widely used app optimization tools are highly effective at removing unused source code and so we anticipate app bytecode is unlikely to contain unreachable code at the point of our analysis. Dynamic

analysis would further preclude studying certain categories of apps, such as financial apps, since we cannot create easily test financial accounts.

Necessity of high-level analysis: The scale of our work (downloading and analyzing around half a million apps) necessarily means that our analysis will be comparatively high-level. In particular, static analysis is unable to automatically detect the semantic application context in which a trusted hardware API call occurs, including what particular data is being stored within the hardware element and how keys generated are being used, or to guarantee that the flagged API call is used to protect sensitive data at runtime (e.g., an app might import a marketing analytics API that in turn references the Keystore API for processing analytics data). However, in our work we are primarily interested in which apps choose *not* to use trusted hardware, particularly SEs, and why. Our results provide an empirical upper bound on secure key storage usage and provide comprehensive data on API usage and performance across the Android ecosystem as a whole.

8 Discussion

Trusted hardware usage is still comparatively low: While both industry and government have launched various initiatives encouraging developers to move towards trusted hardware [3, 5, 84], usage remains stubbornly low even among apps that, by their own admission, collect sensitive user data. Just 43.7% of apps processing sensitive data use any form of trusted hardware, and almost all of this usage comes from third-party components. While some of these apps may be collecting relatively innocuous data (such as a user’s first name) or may rely primarily on a remote server to handle most cryptographic operations instead of storing data on device, this is still a comparatively low rate given there is little to no performance drawback for common use cases in a TEE-backed keystore.

Additionally, the vast majority of apps using hardware-backed storage use a TEE instead of an SE (43.7% compared to 5.03%). Put another way, while Google’s public goal is to make the SE the “lowest common denominator” in credential storage [3], as of 2024 we observe that only around 10% of apps using trusted hardware at all are using the SE at least once. As side-channel attacks become ever more sophisticated and effective [34], it is even more important for applications to use the most advanced storage available to protect data.

Android Keystore API provides more secure defaults: In addition to the protection secure hardware provides against OS compromise, the Android Keystore API also offers significantly more secure defaults than similar Java cryptographic APIs. Android Keystore mandates an IND-CPA-secure configuration by default, disallowing insecure configurations that have plagued other cryptographic APIs [43, 46]. Android also runs checks to ensure the security and validity of a configuration, including cross-referencing the stated purpose of a key (e.g., EC keys cannot be used for encryption and decryption, only signing). While it is still possible for developers to circumvent this default (as 8.45% of them do), this nonetheless requires a conscious decision by the developer. Android Keystore’s default settings alone make it a security improvement over other cryptographic APIs.

TEE-backed storage performance is viable for small-to-medium message sizes: We find a negligible difference (<0.5 seconds) between TEE-backed and software-backed cryptographic operations for payloads less than 1MiB, empirically confirming that in common and intended use case scenarios hardware key storage runtime is not a prohibitive factor when using the Android Keystore API. A TEE keystore can thus provide significant security benefits with minimal performance impact, providing an ideal trade-off between enhanced security and performance overhead for most app use cases.

Need for public performance evaluations of StrongBox: In comparison to the TEE, Android's SE demonstrates significantly worse processing time for all but the smallest payloads. If we consider acceptable processing times to be less than three seconds, StrongBox can only encrypt message sizes of roughly 0.2 MiB or less even in the most recently released Pixel devices. For comparison, a TEE can encrypt message sizes of up to around 2 MiB within the same time frame.

Even so, StrongBox's execution time is likely practical for most cases involving very small payloads: for instance, an app may use StrongBox to encrypt a different cryptographic key. Equally, developers may evaluate overhead cost differently depending on whether it is a one-time operation (e.g., initial login) or a repeated process. Developers need quantitative information in order to make case-by-case decisions, a gap which our work fills.

Most importantly, while StrongBox's performance is indeed viable for short payloads, the lack of information on StrongBox's performance may lead developers to opt out either as a precautionary measure or after attempting to use StrongBox for larger payloads than intended and observing poor performance. Google's Android Keystore documentation states that StrongBox is "slower, more resource-constrained, and supports fewer concurrent operations" and "may introduce performance trade-offs" [24], effectively cautioning developers away from using StrongBox even in cases where StrongBox's performance impact is minimal. Hence 5.15% of developers referencing the Android Keystore API explicitly opt out of using StrongBox (in some cases directly citing performance concerns, as in the Salesforce example in §4.1). Our performance measurements, static analysis of symmetric versus asymmetric usage patterns, developer survey, and manual review of calls disabling StrongBox all suggest that developers are intentionally avoiding StrongBox in certain scenarios out of concern for performance. To make an informed decision, developers need official, empirical performance measurements based on contemporary device measurements in place of the ambiguous language currently used in the documentation, and which should be publicly available and easily accessible to developers.

9 Related Work

Android App Analysis: Most prior work studying security and privacy in Android apps used metrics such as permissions requested [45, 60, 72] and traffic analysis [44, 69, 71] and often overlooked data storage, even when investigating overall app security [58]. For instance, Gilsenan et al. [47] studied security issues in two-factor authentication apps and recommended that apps use the Android Keystore, but did not investigate how apps actually store their

keys. We outline work related to general cryptographic misuses in Android applications in more detail in §A.6.

There have been a handful of studies focusing on particular subsets of hardware-related API usage in Android. Bianchi et al. [32] conducted an empirical survey of Android's Fingerprint API and found very low adoption rates, with just 424 of 30,459 popular apps scanned using the API. Imran et al. [53] ran a keyword search for the key attestation API on a subset of apps in sensitive categories (e.g., finance, communication, medical), finding that of 112,886 apps only five use key attestation. Concurrently to our work, Bove [33] conducted a high-level study on various TEE-based Android APIs (including the Biometrics and Digital Rights Management APIs) on a randomly sampled subset of Play Store apps and found that 32.0% of apps analyzed contained a call to the Keystore API (excluding gaming apps), but studied the binary question of whether an app contained *any* Keystore API call without investigating usage of specific API endpoints. Moreover, the primary focus of our work is comparing TEE and SE APIs in both usage and performance.

Trusted Hardware Performance: To the best of our knowledge, Android does not provide official quantitative assessments of trusted hardware performance. There has been a small amount of prior work measuring specific aspects of trusted hardware performance as supporting experiments demonstrating the viability of a proposed cryptographic scheme. Hugenroth et al. [52] measured the performance of HMAC execution in SEs on Android and iPhone devices to confirm their proposed key stretching scheme was feasible on contemporary devices, observing that time elapsed increases linearly with input length and that a 10 KiB payload takes approximately 1 second to execute in the Pixel 3 SE. In our work, we present the first comprehensive, longitudinal analysis of the performance of various key storage schemes, measuring the comparative performance of all widely used ciphers across the three major key storage options for developers.

10 Dataset

To support open science we provide researcher access to all data used in our analysis, including our APK dataset, keyword search and call graph analysis for all APKs as well as our performance benchmarking test app and all the source code and testing scripts used. Our dataset can be accessed at: <https://github.com/jenny-blessing/keydroid>.

11 Conclusion

This work presents the first comprehensive, large-scale survey of trusted hardware usage and performance in Android devices. While even the most secure trusted hardware configuration is ultimately best-effort as developers have to contend with available device hardware, we find that a significant percentage of apps, including those self-reporting to the Play Store as collecting sensitive user data, do not make use of the Android Keystore trusted hardware API. Our performance results show that TEE-backed key storage is viable for all but very large payloads, removing one of the most significant barriers to adoption. Our results provide app developers with concrete performance data to encourage adoption and ultimately to enable them to make an informed decision for their individual use case(s).

Acknowledgments

Jenny Blessing was funded by Entrust and Nokia Bell Labs. Ross Anderson made important contributions to the ideas contained in this paper. Unfortunately he died on 28th March 2024 before the final version was written; any errors remain our own.

References

- [1] AWS Device Farm. <https://aws.amazon.com/device-farm/>.
- [2] Soot. <https://soot-oss.github.io/soot/>.
- [3] Android Ready SE. <https://developers.google.com/android/security/android-ready-se>, 2021. Last accessed August 25th 2024.
- [4] Cryptography in Mobile Apps. <https://mobile-security.gitbook.io/mobile-security-testing-guide/general-mobile-app-testing-guide/0x04g-testing-cryptography>, 2024.
- [5] Shifting the Balance of Cybersecurity Risk: Principles and Approaches for Secure by Design, October 2023.
- [6] Kevin Allix, Tegawendé F Bissyandé, Jacques Klein, and Yves Le Traon. Androzoo: Collecting millions of android apps for the research community. In *Proceedings of the 13th international conference on mining software repositories*, pages 468–471, 2016.
- [7] Android. `AndroidKeyStoreBCWorkaroundProvider.java`. <https://android.google-source.com/platform/frameworks/base/+marshmallow-mr1-release/keystore/java/android/security/keystore/AndroidKeyStoreBCWorkaroundProvider.java>.
- [8] Android. `androidx.security.crypto`. <https://developer.android.com/reference/androidx/security/crypto/package-summary>.
- [9] Android. App Security Improvement Program. <https://developer.android.com/privacy-and-security/googleplay-asi>.
- [10] Android. Cipher. <https://developer.android.com/reference/javax/crypto/Cipher>.
- [11] Android. Hardware security module. <https://developer.android.com/privacy-and-security/keystore#HardwareSecurityModule>.
- [12] Android. `KeyGenParameterSpec`. <https://developer.android.com/reference/android/security/keystore/KeyGenParameterSpec>.
- [13] Android. `KeyProtection`. <https://developer.android.com/reference/android/security/keystore/KeyProtection>.
- [14] Android. `KeyStore`. <https://developer.android.com/reference/java/security/KeyStore>.
- [15] Android. `MasterKey`. <https://developer.android.com/reference/androidx/security/crypto/MasterKey>.
- [16] Android. Remediation for unsafe encryption mode usage. <https://support.google.com/faqs/answer/10046138>.
- [17] Android. Security guidelines. <https://developer.android.com/privacy-and-security/security-tips>.
- [18] Android. `setAttestationChallenge`. [https://developer.android.com/reference/android/security/keystore/KeyGenParameterSpec.Builder#setAttestationChallenge\(byte\[\]\)](https://developer.android.com/reference/android/security/keystore/KeyGenParameterSpec.Builder#setAttestationChallenge(byte[])).
- [19] Android. `setRandomizedEncryptionRequired`. [https://developer.android.com/reference/android/security/keystore/KeyGenParameterSpec.Builder#setRandomizedEncryptionRequired\(boolean\)](https://developer.android.com/reference/android/security/keystore/KeyGenParameterSpec.Builder#setRandomizedEncryptionRequired(boolean)).
- [20] Android. `setUserAuthenticationRequired`. [https://developer.android.com/reference/android/security/keystore/KeyGenParameterSpec.Builder#setUserAuthenticationRequired\(boolean\)](https://developer.android.com/reference/android/security/keystore/KeyGenParameterSpec.Builder#setUserAuthenticationRequired(boolean)).
- [21] Android. `SharedPreferences`. <https://developer.android.com/reference/android/content/SharedPreferences>.
- [22] Android. Trusty TEE. <https://source.android.com/docs/security/features/trusty>.
- [23] Android. Verify hardware-backed key pairs with Key Attestation. <https://developer.android.com/privacy-and-security/security-key-attestation>.
- [24] Android. Android Keystore system. <https://developer.android.com/privacy-and-security/keystore>, 2024.
- [25] Android. `KEY_ALGORITHM_3DES`. https://developer.android.com/reference/android/security/keystore/KeyProperties#KEY_ALGORITHM_3DES, 2024.
- [26] Android. `KeyProperties`. <https://developer.android.com/reference/android/security/keystore/KeyProperties>, 2024.
- [27] Android Developers. Conscrypt. <https://source.android.com/docs/core/ota/modular-system/conscrypt>.
- [28] Apktool. <https://apktool.org/>, 2024.
- [29] AppTentive. `apptentive/android/sdk/encryption/resolvers/KeyResolver23.java`. <https://github.com/apptentive/apptentive-android/blob/91aebf3fa758edddd40924f06aecd1be4f12683/apptentive/src/main/java/com/apptentive/android/sdk/encryption/resolvers/KeyResolver23.java#L70>.
- [30] American Medical Association. HIPAA security rule & risk analysis. <https://www.ama-assn.org/practice-management/hipaa/hipaa-security-rule-risk-analysis>.
- [31] AWS-SDK-Android. `amazonaws/internal/keyvaluestore/KeyProvider23.java`. <https://github.com/aws-amplify/aws-sdk-android/blob/8fd69db5e22d13973ddeb6f521f5663ae2275c4c/aws-android-sdk-core/src/main/java/com/amazonaws/internal/keyvaluestore/KeyProvider23.java#L91>.
- [32] Antonio Bianchi, Yanick Fratantonio, Aravind Machiry, Christopher Kruegel, Giovanni Vigna, Simon Pak Ho Chung, and Wenke Lee. Broken Fingers: On the Usage of the Fingerprint API in Android. In *NDSS*, 2018.
- [33] Davide Bove. A Large-Scale Study on the Prevalence and Usage of TEE-based Features on Android. *arXiv preprint arXiv:2311.10511*, 2023.
- [34] Elie Bursztein, Luca Invernizzi, Karel Král, Daniel Moghimi, Jean-Michel Picod, and Marina Zhang. Generic attacks against cryptographic hardware through long-range deep learning. *arXiv preprint arXiv:2306.07249*, 2023.
- [35] David Cerdeira, Nuno Santos, Pedro Fonseca, and Sandro Pinto. SoK: Understanding the Prevailing Security Vulnerabilities in TrustZone-Assisted TEE Systems. In *2020 IEEE Symposium on Security and Privacy (SP)*, pages 1416–1432. IEEE, 2020.
- [36] Guoxing Chen, Sanchuan Chen, Yuan Xiao, Yinqian Zhang, Zhiqiang Lin, and Ten H Lai. Sgxpectre: Stealing intel secrets from sgx enclaves via speculative execution. In *2019 IEEE European Symposium on Security and Privacy (EuroS&P)*, pages 142–157. IEEE, 2019.
- [37] Tim Cooijmans, Joeri de Ruiter, and Erik Poll. Analysis of secure key storage solutions on android. In *Proceedings of the 4th ACM Workshop on Security and Privacy in Smartphones & Mobile Devices*, pages 11–20, 2014.
- [38] Whales Corp. Tonhub: Crypto Wallet & Card. https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.tonhub.wallet&hl=en_US&pli=1.
- [39] Android Developers. Jelly Bean. <https://developer.android.com/about/versions/jelly-bean>.
- [40] Android Developers. `setBlockModes`. [https://developer.android.com/reference/android/security/keystore/KeyGenParameterSpec.Builder#setBlockModes\(java.lang.String\[\]\)](https://developer.android.com/reference/android/security/keystore/KeyGenParameterSpec.Builder#setBlockModes(java.lang.String[])).
- [41] Android Developers. `setBlockModes`. [https://developer.android.com/reference/android/security/keystore/KeyGenParameterSpec.Builder#setEncryptionPaddings\(java.lang.String\[\]\)](https://developer.android.com/reference/android/security/keystore/KeyGenParameterSpec.Builder#setEncryptionPaddings(java.lang.String[])).
- [42] Android Developers. Cryptography. <https://developer.android.com/privacy-and-security/cryptography>, Last Accessed September 4 2024.
- [43] Manuel Egele, David Brumley, Yanick Fratantonio, and Christopher Kruegel. An empirical study of cryptographic misuse in android applications. In *Proceedings of the 2013 ACM SIGSAC conference on Computer & communications security*, pages 73–84, 2013.
- [44] Sascha Fahl, Marian Harbach, Thomas Muders, Lars Baumgärtner, Bernd Freisleben, and Matthew Smith. Why Eve and Mallory love Android: An analysis of Android SSL (in)security. In *Proceedings of the 2012 ACM conference on Computer and communications security*, pages 50–61, 2012.
- [45] Adrienne Porter Felt, Erika Chin, Steve Hanna, Dawn Song, and David Wagner. Android permissions demystified. In *Proceedings of the 18th ACM conference on Computer and communications security*, pages 627–638, 2011.
- [46] Riccardo Focardi, Francesco Palmari, Graham Steel, M Squarcina, Mauro Tempista, et al. Mind your keys? a security evaluation of java keystores. In *Proceedings of the Network and Distributed System Security Symposium*, pages 1–15. The Internet Society, 2018.
- [47] Conor Gilsenan, Fuzail Shakir, Noura Alomar, and Serge Egelman. Security and privacy failures in popular {2FA} apps. In *32nd USENIX Security Symposium (USENIX Security 23)*, pages 2079–2096, 2023.
- [48] GitHub. GitHub Search Results. <https://github.com/search?q=%22setIsStrongBacked%28false%29%22+language%3AJava&type=code&l=Java&p=1>.
- [49] Google. Tink Cryptography Library. <https://github.com/tink-crypto>.
- [50] J Alex Halderman, Seth D Schoen, Nadia Heninger, William Clarkson, William Paul, Joseph A Calandrino, Ariel J Feldman, Jacob Appelbaum, and Edward W Felten. Lest we remember: cold-boot attacks on encryption keys. *Communications of the ACM*, 52(5):91–98, 2009.
- [51] Sudhi Herle and Jason Wong. Announcing the Android Ready SE Alliance. <https://security.googleblog.com/2021/03/announcing-android-ready-se-alliance.html>, 2021.
- [52] Daniel Hugenroth, Alberto Sonnino, Sam Cutler, and Alastair R Beresford. Sloth: Key stretching and deniable encryption using secure elements on smartphones. *Cryptology ePrint Archive*, 2023.
- [53] Abdullah Imran, Habiba Farrukh, Muhammad Ibrahim, Z Berkay Celik, and Antonio Bianchi. SARA: Secure Android Remote Authorization. In *31st USENIX Symposium (USENIX Security 22)*, pages 1561–1578, 2022.
- [54] Intel. What Is Virtualization Security? <https://www.intel.com/content/www/us/en/business/enterprise-computers/resources/virtualization-security.html>.
- [55] Trevor Johns. Using Cryptography to Store Credentials Safely. <https://android-developers.googleblog.com/2013/02/using-cryptography-to-store-credentials.html>.
- [56] Rishabh Khandelwal, Asmit Nayak, Paul Chung, and Kassem Fawaz. Unpacking privacy labels: A measurement and developer perspective on google’s data safety section. *arXiv preprint arXiv:2306.08111*, 2023.
- [57] Dave Kleidermacher, Jesse Seed, Brandon Barbelo, and Stephan Somogyi. Pixel 6: Setting a new standard for mobile security. <https://security.googleblog.com/2021/10/pixel-6-setting-new-standard-for-mobile.html>, 2021.

- [58] Konrad Kollnig, Anastasia Shuba, Reuben Binns, Max Van Kleek, and Nigel Shadbolt. Are iPhones really better for privacy? comparative study of iOS and Android apps. *arXiv preprint arXiv:2109.13722*, 2021.
- [59] Li Li, Tegawendé F. Bissyandé, Mike Papadakis, Siegfried Rasthofer, Alexandre Bartel, Damien Octeau, Jacques Klein, and Le Traon. Static analysis of Android apps: A systematic literature review. *Information and Software Technology*, 88:67–95, 2017.
- [60] Rui Li, Wenrui Diao, Zhou Li, Jianqi Du, and Shanqing Guo. Android custom permissions demystified: From privilege escalation to design shortcomings. In *2021 IEEE Symposium on Security and Privacy (SP)*, pages 70–86. IEEE, 2021.
- [61] Ziang Ma, Haoyu Wang, Yao Guo, and Xiangqun Chen. Libradar: Fast and accurate detection of third-party libraries in Android apps. In *Proceedings of the 38th international conference on software engineering companion*, pages 653–656, 2016.
- [62] Carsten Maartmann-Moe, Steffen E. Thorkildsen, and André Arnes. The persistence of memory: Forensic identification and extraction of cryptographic keys. *digital investigation*, 6:S132–S140, 2009.
- [63] René Mayrhofer, Jeffrey Vander Stoep, Chad Brubaker, and Nick Kralevich. The Android Platform Security Model. *ACM Transactions on Privacy and Security (TOPS)*, 24(3):1–35, 2021.
- [64] mCodex. RNSensitiveInfoModule.java. <https://github.com/mCodex/react-native-sensitive-info/blob/495dd7f08c077f5744e56803e45f54787df3dab3/android/src/main/java/dev/mcodex/RNSensitiveInfoModule.java#L313>.
- [65] Samsung Newsroom. Strengthening Hardware Security with Galaxy S20's Secure Processor. <https://news.samsung.com/global/strengthening-hardware-security-with-galaxy-s20s-secure-processor>, May 2020.
- [66] Alexander Nilsson, Pegah Nikbakht Bideh, and Joakim Brorsson. A Survey of Published Attacks on Intel SGX. *arXiv preprint arXiv:2006.13598*, 2020.
- [67] U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Guidance to render unsecured protected health information unusable, unreadable, or indecipherable to unauthorized individuals. <https://www.hhs.gov/hipaa/for-professionals/breach-notification/guidance/index.html>.
- [68] U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The security rule. <https://www.hhs.gov/hipaa/for-professionals/security/index.html>.
- [69] Marten Oltrogge, Yasemin Acar, Sergej Dechand, Matthew Smith, and Sascha Fahl. To pin or not to {Pin=Helping} app developers bullet proof their {TLS} connections. In *24th USENIX Security Symposium (USENIX Security 15)*, pages 239–254, 2015.
- [70] Sandro Pinto and Nuno Santos. Demystifying ARM TrustZone: A Comprehensive Survey. *ACM computing surveys (CSUR)*, 51(6):1–36, 2019.
- [71] Andrea Possemato and Yanick Fratantonio. Towards HTTPS everywhere on Android: We are not there yet. In *29th USENIX Security Symposium (USENIX Security 20)*, pages 343–360, 2020.
- [72] Joel Reardon, Álvaro Feal, Primal Wijesekera, Amit Elazari Bar On, Narseo Vallina-Rodriguez, and Serge Egelman. 50 ways to leak your data: An exploration of apps' circumvention of the Android permissions system. In *28th USENIX security symposium (USENIX security 19)*, pages 603–620, 2019.
- [73] Mohamed Sabt and Jacques Traoré. Breaking into the keystore: A practical forgery attack against Android keystore. In *Computer Security—ESORICS 2016: 21st European Symposium on Research in Computer Security, Heraklion, Greece, September 26–30, 2016, Proceedings, Part II 21*, pages 531–548. Springer, 2016.
- [74] Salesforce. Commit 4b074b7: Refactoring StrongBox code. <https://github.com/forcedotcom/SalesforceMobileSDK-Android/commit/4b074b7c744f44129486029a7df6481d0d7c3eb2>.
- [75] Salesforce. KeyStoreWrapper.java. <https://github.com/forcedotcom/SalesforceMobileSDK-Android/blob/1a11e225b20968cc88ed08cf3304ede28b5701af/libs/SalesforceSDK/src/com/salesforce/androidsdk/security/KeyStoreWrapper.java#L247>.
- [76] Salesforce. SalesforceMobileSDK-Android. <https://github.com/forcedotcom/SalesforceMobileSDK-Android>.
- [77] Alon Shaked, Eyal Ronen, and Avishai Wool. Trust Dies in Darkness: Shedding Light on Samsung's TrustZone Keymaster Design. In *31st USENIX Security Symposium (USENIX Security 22)*, pages 251–268, 2022.
- [78] Google Play Store. Capital One Mobile Data Safety. <https://play.google.com/store/apps/datasafety?id=com.konylabs.capitalone>.
- [79] Google Play Store. Chase Mobile. <https://play.google.com/store/apps/datasafety?id=com.chase.sig.android>.
- [80] Google Play Store. Provide information for Google Play's Data safety section. <https://support.google.com/googleplay/android-developer/answer/10787469?hl=en>.
- [81] Google Play Store. Signal Private Messenger. <https://play.google.com/store/apps/datasafety?id=org.thoughtcrime.securesms&hl=en&gl=US>.
- [82] Yang Tang, Phillip Ames, Sravan Bhamidipati, Ashish Bijlani, Roxana Geambasu, and Nikhil Sarda. CleanOS: Limiting Mobile Data Exposure with Idle Eviction. In *10th USENIX Symposium on Operating Systems Design and Implementation (OSDI 12)*, pages 77–91, 2012.
- [83] tonwhales. KeyStoreModule.java. <https://github.com/tonwhales/wallet/blob/f79298e52c10f8cdb9e92e83f6b413cd7eb8e103/android/app/src/main/java/com/tonhub/wallet/modules/store/KeyStoreModule.java#L351>.
- [84] United Kingdom Department for Science, Innovation and Technology. Code of practice for app store operators and app developers. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/code-of-practice-for-app-store-operators-and-app-developers>.
- [85] Jo Van Bulck, Marina Minkin, Ofir Weisse, Daniel Genkin, Baris Kasikci, Frank Piessens, Mark Silberstein, Thomas F. Wenisch, Yuval Yarom, and Raoul Strackx. Foreshadow: Extracting the keys to the Intel SGX kingdom with transient Out-Of-Order execution. In *27th USENIX Security Symposium (USENIX Security 18)*, pages 991–1008, 2018.
- [86] Stephan Van Schaik, Marina Minkin, Andrew Kwong, Daniel Genkin, and Yuval Yarom. Cacheout: Leaking data on Intel CPUs via cache evictions. In *2021 IEEE Symposium on Security and Privacy (SP)*, pages 339–354. IEEE, 2021.
- [87] Adam Vartanian. Cryptography Changes in Android P. <https://android-developers.googleblog.com/2018/03/cryptography-changes-in-android-p.html>, March 8 2018.
- [88] vehiloco. Encryptor.java. <https://github.com/vehiloco/crypto-checker/blob/c5f4ac384d31f62019d1d3d6039ad521d0e2d11a/demo/app/src/main/java/com/example/demo/Encryptor.java#L78>.
- [89] Wei Wang, Xing Wang, Dawei Feng, Jiqiang Liu, Zhen Han, and Xiangliang Zhang. Exploring permission-induced risk in Android applications for malicious application detection. *IEEE Transactions on Information Forensics and Security*, 9(11):1869–1882, 2014.
- [90] Mark Weiser. Program slicing. *IEEE Transactions on software engineering*, (4):352–357, 1984.
- [91] Daoyuan Wu, Debin Gao, Robert H. Deng, and Chang Rocky KC. When program analysis meets bytecode search: Targeted and efficient inter-procedural analysis of modern Android apps in backdoor. In *2021 51st Annual IEEE/IFIP International Conference on Dependable Systems and Networks (DSN)*, pages 543–554. IEEE, 2021.
- [92] Xiaowen Xin. Titan M makes Pixel 3 our most secure phone yet. <https://blog.google/products/pixel/titan-m-makes-pixel-3-our-most-secure-phone-yet/>, 2018.
- [93] Wu Zhou, Yajin Zhou, Xuxian Jiang, and Peng Ning. Detecting repackaged smartphone applications in third-party Android marketplaces. In *Proceedings of the second ACM conference on Data and Application Security and Privacy*, pages 317–326, 2012.

A Appendix

A.1 Trusted Hardware Best Practices

Legal Mandates. In certain industries, developers have to abide by a heavy patchwork of regulatory standards governing data collection and processing. In the U.S. (the region in which our application dataset and ranking information are collected) since 1996 the medical sector has been governed by the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA)’s Security Rule [68], which specifies minimum security standards that health service providers must meet. The financial sector has a variety of SEC regulations and longstanding laws they must comply with, such as the global Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard (PCI DSS) that governs processing and storage of credit card data.

Regulatory standards in the financial and medical industries generally require that data is encrypted at rest. Specific implementations, such as use of secure hardware to store credentials, are usually not mandated directly. For instance, the American Medical Association acknowledges that since security is an “evolving target, and so HIPAA’s security requirements are not linked to specific technologies or products” [30]. Rather, regulation often encourages adoption indirectly, such as a law that mandates a security standard only provided by the hardware-backed storage mechanism. For instance, an industry may be required to use a FIPS-compliant random number generator [67], which on a particular mobile device is only available via the HSM API. Moreover, even in cases where regulations provide little specific guidance, providers operating in heavily-regulated sectors are generally motivated to prioritize security within their product to keep pace with the sector in which they operate and minimize the risk that they could be charged with running afoul of the law.

Developer Guidelines. Android’s published security guidelines for developers [17] recommends developers use the Android Keystore for long-term or multi-use keys, and the OWASP Mobile Application Security Testing Guide [4] recommends that developers “should always rely on” available secure hardware to store and use encryption keys. To audit app security, Android’s “app security improvement program” [9] further scans all applications for various potential security issues upon initial submission and subsequent updates, including well-known vulnerabilities (e.g., Logjam), unsafe encryption modes, and insecure connection issues. We are not aware of any analysis of key storage.

A.2 Play Store Data Safety Labels

Categories of data reported. Google uses 14 high-level data type categories [80], such as location, financial information, audio files, etc. We consider an app to be sensitive if it collects any information from the following 12 data categories: “Location”, “Personal info”, “Financial info”, “Health and fitness”, “Messages”, “Photos and videos”, “Audio files”, “Files and docs”, “Calendar”, “Contacts”, “App activity”, and “Web browsing”. Together, these categories are sufficiently comprehensive to cover all data that a user may consider to be sensitive. Play Store developer documentation provides more granular data types for each high-level category [80]. For instance, “Personal info” could refer to name, email address, mailing address, gender identity, political or religious beliefs, and more. We exclude

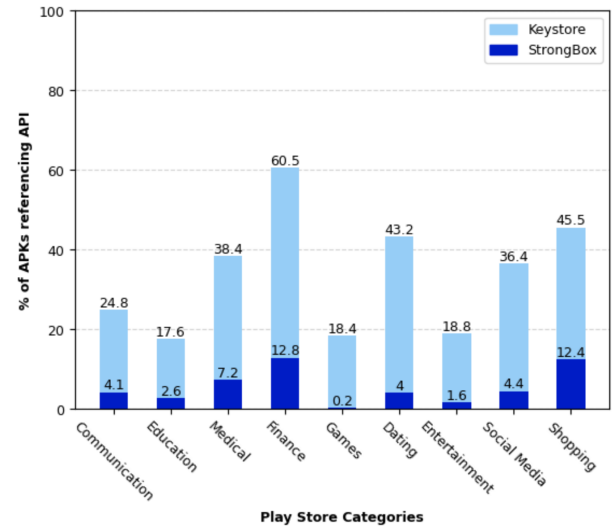


Figure 5: Percentages of Android apps using TEE and SE APIs, respectively, across major categories within the Google Play Store. StrongBox usage is shown here as a subset of Android Keystore API usage (i.e., any app that uses StrongBox necessarily uses the Android Keystore API).

the final two categories, “App info and performance” (defined by Google as crash logs and other app performance data) and “Device or other IDs” (e.g. MAC address or Firebase ID), since we are interested in whether developers are intentionally collecting sensitive user data relating to specific individuals, which we broadly define as user-provided data. Based on this classification, we find that of the 342,872 apps reporting data safety information, 46.75% are sensitive (and therefore 53.25% are non-sensitive, or innocuous).

Inaccuracies in developer self-reporting. There are both benign and malicious reasons for developers inaccurately reporting their use of sensitive data. For example, developers may be unaware of the data collected by third-party libraries or wish to avoid highlighting the data their app collects in their submission, and thus may understate data collected. Conversely, it is also possible that developers may err on the side of *overstating* the sensitivity of the data they collect to ensure they are in compliance with Play Store policies. In principle, Google can often verify whether an app collects sensitive data (or not) and spot any differences between app behavior and reported collection. If discrepancies are found, Google has the ability to block app updates or remove the app from the Play Store altogether. We are unable to determine the extent to which such verification and enforcement takes place and therefore validate the correctness (or otherwise) of the data safety label information.

A.3 Usage by Category

Figure 5 shows the comparative usage of the Android Keystore (TEE) and StrongBox (SE) APIs across a range of categories in the Google Play Store. We show a representative sample of categories here due to space limitations, but data for all categories can be found

in the accompanying code repository (see §10). Unsurprisingly, we find that financial apps demonstrate the highest rates of trusted hardware usage, with over 60% of apps referencing the broader Android Keystore API and 12.8% referencing the StrongBox API. Gaming apps have an exceptionally low rate of StrongBox usage, which we hypothesize is due to the fact that the vast majority of StrongBox references come from third-party APIs, but gaming app development teams are less likely to use high-level app development toolkits given the more advanced functionality required to create the app.

A.4 Manual Analysis

Manual review of most-downloaded apps. To verify our static analysis results and better understand which alternative key storage schemes are used, we select a subset of applications flagged as not using Android’s trusted hardware API for further examination. We scraped the top 200 most-downloaded apps in the Play Store as of April 1, 2024, and then selected the ten most highly-ranked apps which self-reported collecting sensitive data but had been flagged in our initial keyword search as not referencing the Android Keystore API. We decompiled each app using Apktool and manually searched for relevant keywords relating to widely used software-backed keystores provided as part of Android, such as Android’s SharedPreferences API [21].

We verified that each of these ten apps were indeed not using Android’s trusted hardware API, including through reflection or other semi-obfuscated invocations, and found that they instead generally made use of some combination of Android’s SharedPreferences, Android’s default software-backed keystore (i.e., AndroidOpenSSL), or a local SQLite database such as SQLCipher. SharedPreferences is a bit more concerning than other software-backed keystores as it offers very different security properties: some Android keystores (namely SharedPreferences and KeyChain are intended as systemwide credential storage, where keys are accessible to *any* app on the device. While it is challenging to make any definitive statements on individual app use cases due to the high-level nature of our analysis and obfuscation of internal variable names, developers should always exercise caution when using a systemwide keystore.

It is also possible that some apps hardcode encryption keys after obfuscating the keys using Dexguard or a similar tool, but this was not possible to detect given our manual review is relatively cursory and intended primarily to verify our static analysis results and identify other APIs used.

Manual review of StrongBox opt-outs. To validate KeyDroid’s precision and confirm our findings with respect to StrongBox usage, we conduct a manual review of applications explicitly opting out of StrongBox usage (e.g., applications that call `setIsStrongBoxBacked(false)`). Of the 21,022 StrongBox calls for which we are able to retrieve the argument through static analysis, 5.15%, or 1,082 calls, opt out of StrongBox and use the TEE instead.

We manually inspect the top 10 third-party libraries disabling Strongbox and the 18 apps containing a first-party call disabling StrongBox. We find no false positives, independently verifying that all libraries and apps detected as opting out of StrongBox do indeed opt out in at least one case. For the 18 apps containing a first-party opt-out, we find at least six apps containing multiple first-party

references to StrongBox and which in some cases enable and in some cases disable StrongBox in different references, suggesting that it is often an intentional decision to disable StrongBox in certain usage scenarios. However, it is challenging to understand further contextual specifics from the Smali bytecode alone.

Of the top three libraries contributing the highest number of requests to disable StrongBox across the Android app ecosystem, two of the top three were part of the Salesforce SDK, and so the Java source code is publicly available on GitHub as described in §4.1. In particular, 545 references, or roughly half of all 1,082 calls opting out of StrongBox, originate in the `com.salesforce.marketingcloud-sfmcsdk.components.encryption` package in the key generation function of an internal security interface, demonstrating the impact a single library can have on the Android ecosystem. A developer comment reveals that the decision to disable StrongBox was “based on Google’s recommendation ... since the key will need to be retrieved multiple times,” and since StrongBox was “available only on a few devices” in 2019 when the code was originally written [75]. This specific StrongBox references provides a further instructive reminder that source code is often rarely updated once it is written unless needed. StrongBox’s performance and availability have evolved substantially since 2019, but there is no indication that developers have revisited the use case.

A.5 Case Study of Financial Apps

We select a subset of the most widely used financial apps as these apps consistently collect a variety of sensitive data, including personal information (such as Social Security numbers and other government identifiers), financial information, and behavioral data for fraud detection. We analyze the top 15 most widely downloaded financial apps in the Play Store as of February 15, 2026.

First, we observe noticeable differences among the top 15 finance apps in how they choose to self-report sensitive data collection to the Play Store. 14 of the 15 apps were flagged as collecting sensitive data per our methodology, but the app that was not flagged as collecting sensitive data, Capital One Mobile, reported collecting only “device or other IDs” data [78]. By contrast, Chase Mobile, which provides virtually identical banking services, reports collecting data on device or other IDs, financial information, app information and performance, files and documents, photos and videos, personal information, app activity, and location [79]. Similarly, Venmo, which provides a simple interface to send and receive money and is linked to a user’s bank account on the backend, reports collecting only “app activity” data, while Cash App and PayPal, which again provide many of the same services as Venmo, report a long list of data categories collected (e.g., financial information, location information, user contacts, personal information, app activity, etc.). While reporting differences such as these have minimal impact on the accuracy of our results given that we consider only the binary data point of whether an app is collecting any type of sensitive data or not (and in fact confirm our methodological choice to keep any analysis of sensitive data collection more high level), these case studies demonstrate the general unreliability of developer self-reported data collection in the Google Play Store and beyond.

Next, we conduct a more in-depth analysis of trusted hardware usage among these 15 apps. We find that 13 of the 15 apps reference

the Android Keystore API at least once. Freecash, an app which allows users to earn money through games and surveys and is linked to a user's financial accounts elsewhere, and IRS2Go, the official app of the U.S. Internal Revenue Service which allows users to make payments on taxes and requires users to enter their Social Security Number and other identifying personal information, do not use trusted hardware. We manually verified this observation through multiple independent grep searches and a manual review of a subset of smali files to ensure the APK was decompiled correctly.

The majority of apps using trusted hardware reference the Keystore API in a variety of contexts, including in first-party calls in first-party authentication and authorization modules and third-party calls to AWS, Android's biometrics API, fraud detection libraries, and data analytics APIs such as AppsFlyer and Salesforce's Marketing Cloud service. The Capital One Mobile and Google Wallet apps are noticeable exceptions, since Google Wallet has just one reference to the Keystore API and the majority of references in the Capital One app derive from the inMobile API used to send SMS messages and other user notifications. Eight of the 13 apps use biometric trusted hardware authentication, typically through the `androidx.biometrics` library, and four of the 13 use ThreatMetrix, an automated risk management and fraud detection service, which in turn references the Keystore API.

In some cases, such as PayPal, the package and class names were sufficiently obfuscated beyond Android Studio defaults that it was not possible to gain any contextual information (e.g., `smalclasses2/xf/c.smali`). In other cases, descriptive class names strongly hint at the Keystore use case, such as TurboTax's API reference in the `intuit.utilities.components.reliabletransmission.PassPhraseManager` class. Even in cases where we can recover class names and reconstruct the overall code structure using Java decompiling tools such as JADX, however, we are nonetheless unable to recover method names, limiting our ability to accurately infer specific use cases.

Just eight of the 15 apps use the StrongBox API at any point, confirming our high-level results that a significant number of apps collecting highly sensitive data do not use the most advanced forms of trusted hardware. Even apps that reference StrongBox do so sparingly. PayPal and Venmo, for instance, each contain just one reference requesting StrongBox storage, although the package names are sufficiently obfuscated (e.g., `com.venmo/smali/vb.smali`) that it is not possible to learn additional information from this usage. Overall, we are only able to detect two apps containing a direct, first-party reference to the StrongBox API of the 15 total apps, with the rest either not using StrongBox, referencing the API only through third-party packages, or obfuscating package names to the extent that it is not possible to determine whether a reference is first-party or third-party.

A.6 Related Work in Android Cryptographic Misuse

Egele et al. [43] studied cryptographic misuses in Android applications in 2014, but looked only at the software-backed Java Cryptographic Architecture APIs (presumably due to the timing of the work, since the initial Android trusted hardware API was only

released in 2013). They noted at the time that both Java and Android JCA APIs allowed a developer to specify only the encryption algorithm (e.g., AES), in which case Java and Android used ECB mode with PKCS7Padding as the default. Focardi et al. [46] similarly analyzed the confidentiality and integrity properties provided by various software-backed Java keystores in 2018.

Coojimans et al. [37] systematized high-level security properties of Android key storage options in 2014, observing that while Android's TEE-backed key storage provides device binding (i.e. prevents keys from being extracted from the device) where software keystores are vulnerable, the implementation of the TEE keystore made it possible for an attacker with root permissions to use other apps' keys (i.e. did not effectively provide app-binding). Our work expands on this discussion to consider new forms of hardware (namely, SEs) that were not available when Coojimans et al. surveyed Android key storage in 2014.

A.7 Ethics Considerations

We carefully considered the ethics of all components of our research. All static analysis is conducted on publicly available data, including both published apps and Play Store metadata. We intentionally keep our discussion of usage analysis aggregated and comparatively high-level to avoid the perception of targeting specific apps for potentially insecure configurations, though we open-source all analysis results as described in §10.

Developer survey. As part of our developer survey, we sent a single initial email to each app developer in our random sample of 10,000 apps, after filtering the random sample to ensure that we only selected one app from each developer (i.e., a developer would not receive more than one email). All email addresses were retrieved by scraping the Play Store and were intentionally provided as a point of contact for the public. We did not send follow-up or reminder emails to avoid spam.

Our email clearly identified ourselves as academic researchers, including institutional affiliation, in the first sentence and emphasized that we were conducting a voluntary research study in which all responses were anonymous. If recipients clicked on the survey link, we further included an informed consent statement at the beginning of the survey that included similar information in greater detail, and invited respondents to reach out directly over email with any questions.

Our developer survey was approved by our computer science department's ethics committee (the effective equivalent of an Institutional Review Board) after the committee reviewed the proposed survey questions, email, and informed consent statement appearing at the beginning of the survey. Additional specifics of the methodology are described in §6. We opted not to financially compensate participants in order to adequately preserve anonymity in line with similar work involving large-scale surveying of Play Store developers but took care to keep the survey length to a minimum (estimated 2-3 minutes) to be respectful of developers' time.

A.8 Developer Survey Questions

- (1) Which of the following best describes your role?
 - a. Programmer/Developer
 - b. Software Tester/Quality Assurance

- c. Project Manager
 - d. Software Design/Architecture
 - e. Administration (Non-Technical)
 - f. Other
- (2) Approximately how many people (including project managers, developers, testers, etc.) are involved in developing the app?
- a. 1
 - b. 2 - 5
 - c. 6 - 20
 - d. 21 - 50
 - e. 50+
- (3) How many years of experience do you have working with Android app development?
- a. None
 - b. Less than 1 year
 - c. 1 - 5 years
 - d. 5 - 10 years
 - e. 10 years or more
- (4) On a five-point scale, how much do you agree with the following statement: Our development team prioritizes security as part of the development process.
- a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neither agree nor disagree
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly disagree
- (5) On a five-point scale, how much do you agree with the following statement: Our app collects and processes potentially sensitive user data (e.g., name, other demographic information, health data, financial data, etc.).
- a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neither agree nor disagree
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly disagree
- (6) On a five-point scale, how much do you agree with the following statement: I am familiar with the concept of trusted hardware (e.g., Intel SGX and Arm TrustZone).
- a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neither agree nor disagree
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly disagree
- (7) On a five-point scale, how much do you agree with the following statement: I am familiar with the Android Keystore trusted hardware API, commonly used in Android development for credential storage (e.g., storing cryptographic keys).
- a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neither agree nor disagree
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly disagree
- (8) [If app did not reference Android Keystore API at all.] Based on our static analysis as of November 2023, your app was recorded as not using the Android Keystore API. Which of

the following reasons best describe the main considerations behind this decision? Please select all that apply.

- Security benefits were unclear
 - Security benefits were not needed given type of data (if any) collected by app
 - Performance concerns
 - Lack of features: Desired algorithm and/or key size was unavailable with Android Keystore
 - We wanted to maximize our app's ability to run on many different devices (potentially running older versions of Android)
 - App was developed prior to Android's Keystore API release date in 2013
 - Found Keystore API difficult to use
 - Unaware this API existed
 - Don't know/don't remember
 - We believe your static analysis result to be incorrect: [open text]
 - Other: [open text]
- (9) [If app did not reference Android Keystore API at all.] To the best of your knowledge, what libraries, if any, does your app use within Android for credential storage (either user login credentials or developer credentials such as cryptographic keys)? [Open text]
- (10) [If app was recorded as disabling StrongBox.] A secure element (called the StrongBox Keymaster in Android) is a more advanced form of trusted hardware. Based on our static analysis of your app from November 2023, we determined your app used the Android Keystore API but disabled usage of the secure element in at least one instance. (Specifically, the `setIsStrongBoxBacked` API described in the link above was set to false). Which of the following reasons best describe the main considerations behind this decision? Please select all that apply.
- Security benefits were unclear
 - Security benefits were not needed given type of data (if any) collected by app
 - Performance concerns
 - Lack of features: desired cryptographic algorithm and/or key size was unavailable with StrongBox Keymaster
 - We wanted to maximize our app's ability to run on many different devices (potentially running older versions of Android)
 - Don't know/don't remember
 - We believe your static analysis result to be incorrect: [open text]
 - Other: [open text]

Keystore API Method	Count
void <init>(java.lang.String,int)	278,567
android.security.keystore.KeyGenParameterSpec\$Builder setEncryptionPaddings(java.lang.String[])	235,719
android.security.keystore.KeyGenParameterSpec\$Builder setBlockModes(java.lang.String[])	224,169
android.security.keystore.KeyGenParameterSpec\$Builder setKeySize(int)	166,379
android.security.keystore.KeyGenParameterSpec\$Builder setUserAuthenticationRequired(boolean)	48,150
android.security.keystore.KeyGenParameterSpec\$Builder setDigests(java.lang.String[])	48,095
android.security.keystore.KeyGenParameterSpec\$Builder setCertificateNotAfter(java.util.Date)	44,087
android.security.keystore.KeyGenParameterSpec\$Builder setCertificateNotBefore(java.util.Date)	44,062
android.security.keystore.KeyGenParameterSpec\$Builder setRandomizedEncryptionRequired(boolean)	30,245
android.security.keystore.KeyGenParameterSpec\$Builder setIsStrongBoxBacked(boolean)	24,656
android.security.keystore.KeyGenParameterSpec\$Builder setUserAuthenticationValidityDurationSeconds(int)	23,946
android.security.keystore.KeyGenParameterSpec\$Builder setKeyValidityForOriginationEnd(java.util.Date)	15,334
android.security.keystore.KeyGenParameterSpec\$Builder setSignaturePaddings(java.lang.String[])	9,313
android.security.keystore.KeyGenParameterSpec\$Builder setUserAuthenticationParameters(int,int)	8,974
android.security.keystore.KeyGenParameterSpec\$Builder setInvalidatedByBiometricEnrollment(boolean)	6,629
android.security.keystore.KeyGenParameterSpec\$Builder setAlgorithmParameterSpec (java.security.spec.AlgorithmParameterSpec)	5,531
android.security.keystore.KeyGenParameterSpec\$Builder setAttestationChallenge(byte[])	2,724
android.security.keystore.KeyGenParameterSpec\$Builder setKeyValidityEnd(java.util.Date)	1,295
android.security.keystore.KeyGenParameterSpec\$Builder setKeyValidityStart(java.util.Date)	1,088
android.security.keystore.KeyGenParameterSpec\$Builder setUnlockedDeviceRequired(boolean)	383
android.security.keystore.KeyGenParameterSpec\$Builder setKeyValidityForConsumptionEnd(java.util.Date)	230
android.security.keystore.KeyGenParameterSpec\$Builder setUserAuthenticationValidWhileOnBody(boolean)	93
android.security.keystore.KeyGenParameterSpec\$Builder setUserConfirmationRequired(boolean)	47
android.security.keystore.KeyGenParameterSpec\$Builder setUserPresenceRequired(boolean)	38

Table 2: Usage count of Android Keystore API methods across all apps in the Play Store.

Package Name	Call Count
com.google.android.gms.internal	
firebase-auth-api	30,055
androidx.security.crypto	26,345
com.appsflyer	23,566
androidx.biometric	15,960
com.microsoft.appcenter.utils.crypto	12,282
com.google.crypto.tink.integration.android	11,656
com.flurry.sdk	7,806
com.amazonaws.internal.keyvaluestore	4,138
com.oblador.keychain.cipherStorage	4,073
com.huawei.secure.android.common	
encrypt.keystore.aes	2,794

Table 3: Top 10 third-party libraries referencing the Android Keystore key initialization API <init>(java.lang.String, int). We chose to classify androidx.security.crypto [8] as third party after finding that the majority of references were to the EncryptedFile and EncryptedSharedPreferences classes which abstract the details of key generation and storage.

Cipher	Usage Count
AES	147,529
RSA	80,096
HMAC-SHA256	2,321
EC	2,233
HMAC-SHA512	100

Table 4: List of ciphers requested for the Android Keystore provider through the javax.crypto.KeyGenerator, java.security.KeyPairGenerator, javax.crypto.Cipher and java.security.KeyStore APIs along with respective usage counts. We include results from both the “Android-Keystore” and “AndroidKeyStoreBCWorkaround” providers due to an Android bug dating back to 2015 [7].

Message Size (MiB)	Avg. Runtime (s)	
	TEE	SE
0.01	0.03 ± 0.01	0.21 ± 0.01
0.1	0.08 ± 0.01	1.59 ± 0.02
0.2	0.12 ± 0.02	3.11 ± 0.02
1	0.42 ± 0.06	15.43 ± 0.10
2	1.13 ± 0.09	30.88 ± 0.16
4	2.56 ± 0.19	62.23 ± 0.33
6	4.25 ± 0.74	94.68 ± 0.37
8	7.67 ± 1.02	159.61 ± 0.72
10	5.83 ± 0.63	127.01 ± 0.69
12	9.24 ± 0.83	192.37 ± 0.80
14	10.87 ± 1.14	223.44 ± 1.02
16	13.10 ± 1.44	257.69 ± 1.09

Table 5: Execution times of AES-GCM-256 encryption as a function of message length. These measurements were taken from the TEE and SE in Google’s Pixel 8 device.

Message Size (MiB)	Avg. Runtime (s)	
	TEE	SE
0.01	0.02 ± 0.01	0.15 ± 0.02
0.1	0.06 ± 0.01	0.99 ± 0.07
0.2	0.14 ± 0.02	1.89 ± 0.02
1	0.48 ± 0.03	9.05 ± 0.05
2	0.89 ± 0.04	17.99 ± 0.06
4	1.76 ± 0.05	35.91 ± 0.09

Table 6: Execution times of generating an Elliptic Curve Digital Signature Algorithm (ECDSA) signature with SHA-256. These measurements were taken from the TEE and SE in Google’s Pixel 8 device.