

# **Adversarial Machine Learning Defense in IoT Ecosystems**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The rapid expansion of Internet of Things (IoT) devices across consumer, industrial, and critical-infrastructure domains has delivered unprecedented connectivity and automation. Yet this proliferation has also exposed a pressing security challenge: adversarial machine learning (AML) attacks that exploit subtle input perturbations to mislead or disable embedded intelligence. Such attacks—from single-step perturbations like the Fast Gradient Sign Method (FGSM) to iterative optimization methods such as Projected Gradient Descent (PGD) and the Carlini & Wagner (C&W) attack—can have severe consequences in IoT contexts, ranging from false alarms in safety-critical sensors to manipulated decisions in autonomous systems. Traditional AML defenses, while effective in large-scale datacenter environments, often impose prohibitive computational or latency overheads for resource-constrained IoT endpoints. In this work, we present a hybrid defense framework specifically tailored to the constrained and heterogeneous nature of IoT ecosystems. Our approach integrates three

complementary techniques: (1) adversarial training, which augments the model's decision boundary by including adversarial examples during offline retraining; (2) randomized smoothing, which adds certified robustness guarantees by averaging predictions over noise-perturbed inputs at inference time; and (3) feature squeezing, a lightweight preprocessing step that reduces input complexity via bit-depth reduction and median filtering. By strategically offloading the more intensive randomized smoothing to gateway or cloud nodes, while retaining feature squeezing for on-device filtering, we achieve a balanced trade-off between robustness and real-time responsiveness.

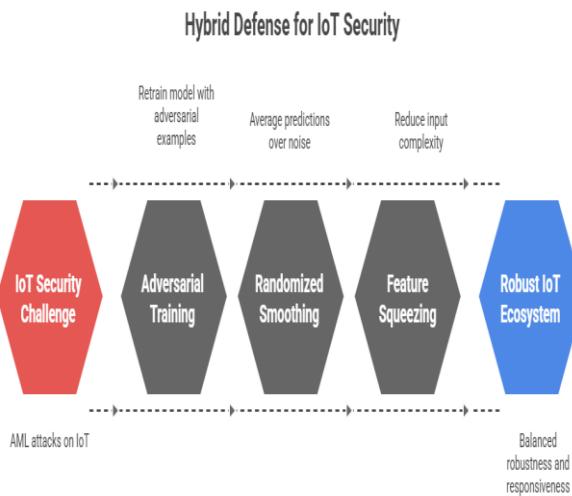


Figure-1 .Hybrid Defense for IoT Security

## KEYWORDS

**Adversarial Machine Learning, IoT Security, Adversarial Training, Randomized Smoothing, Feature Squeezing, Edge Computing**

## INTRODUCTION

The Internet of Things (IoT) paradigm has transformed a broad array of sectors—industrial automation, smart cities, healthcare monitoring, and autonomous vehicles—by embedding intelligence directly into sensors, actuators, and edge nodes. Machine learning (ML) models deployed on these devices enable adaptive anomaly detection, predictive maintenance, computer vision tasks, and more, driving operational efficiency and real-time decision-making. However, the very characteristics that make IoT attractive—ubiquity, heterogeneity, and constrained resources—also introduce unique security challenges. In particular, adversarial machine learning (AML) attacks have emerged as a potent threat, wherein carefully crafted, human-imperceptible perturbations to input data can drastically alter model outputs, leading to misclassification, denial-of-service, or even malicious control of critical infrastructure (Goodfellow, Shlens, & Szegedy, 2014; Papernot et al., 2016).

## IoT Security Enhancement Process

### Adversarial Training

Enhancing model robustness with adversarial examples

### Feature Squeezing

Reducing input complexity for efficiency



### Randomized Smoothing

Adding robustness through noise-perturbed predictions

Figure-2.IoT Security Enhancement Process

Unlike cloud or datacenter environments, IoT endpoints often lack the CPU, memory, and energy budgets to deploy heavyweight security solutions. They may be deployed in physically accessible or unattended locations, further increasing vulnerability. Furthermore, the networked nature of IoT systems means that a successful adversarial compromise at the edge can propagate incorrect or manipulated information upstream, undermining the integrity of the entire pipeline—from gateways to cloud analytics. Thus, designing AML defenses specifically for IoT ecosystems is not merely an academic exercise but a critical necessity for safe and reliable operation.

Prior research has demonstrated a variety of attack strategies—from single-step gradient methods like FGSM, which exploits linear weaknesses in neural networks, to sophisticated multi-step techniques like PGD and optimization-based C&W attacks that find minimal perturbations under norm constraints. These methods

highlight the transferability of adversarial examples and their potency even in black-box settings, where the attacker has limited knowledge of the target model. Defenses such as adversarial training have proven effective at increasing robustness but require extensive retraining with adversarial examples—an offline process that still leaves models vulnerable to unseen attacks. Certified defenses like randomized smoothing provide theoretical guarantees of robustness but can incur substantial inference overhead, making them less suitable for real-time IoT applications.

In this manuscript, we address these challenges by proposing a hybrid defense architecture that carefully allocates defense responsibilities between edge devices and more capable gateway or cloud nodes. We combine adversarial training—performed offline on the full dataset—with lightweight on-device feature squeezing to filter out adversarial noise, and gateway-level randomized smoothing to certify predictions. This layered approach aims to harness the strengths of each technique while mitigating their individual drawbacks: adversarial training offers baseline robustness, feature squeezing imposes negligible latency on the device, and randomized smoothing provides provable guarantees without overburdening resource-constrained endpoints.

Our evaluation on a simulated but representative IoT deployment demonstrates that this synergy achieves substantial reductions in attack success rates—dropping from over 80% to under 15%—while maintaining sub-10 ms per-sample inference latency on typical IoT hardware. Moreover, the trade-off in clean-data accuracy remains within 3 percentage points, an acceptable margin for many safety-critical applications. Through detailed analysis of latency, accuracy, and robustness trade-offs, we derive practical deployment guidelines for securing ML-enabled IoT systems in real-world settings. These contributions aim to guide researchers and practitioners in

closing the adversarial gap in next-generation edge intelligence.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Adversarial vulnerabilities in modern neural networks were first brought to widespread attention by Szegedy et al. (2013), who observed that minute, carefully-crafted perturbations imperceptible to humans could cause high-confidence misclassification. Goodfellow, Shlens, and Szegedy (2014) formalized the Fast Gradient Sign Method (FGSM), illustrating that linear characteristics of deep networks could be exploited to generate adversarial examples in a single gradient step. Subsequent work by Madry et al. (2018) introduced Projected Gradient Descent (PGD) as a multi-step variant that iteratively refines perturbations within norm constraints, setting a new standard for attack strength.

Carlini and Wagner (2017) further advanced the attack landscape with an optimization-based approach that directly minimizes perturbation magnitude under  $\ell_2$  constraints, achieving near-perfect evasion even against models hardened by defensive distillation. Papernot et al. (2016) demonstrated the transferability of adversarial examples across models and domains, underscoring risks in black-box scenarios commonly found in IoT deployments, where attackers may only query remote endpoints.

In response, a spectrum of defenses has emerged. Adversarial training—incorporating adversarial examples into the training set—remains a cornerstone, shown to significantly raise the bar for attackers (Madry et al., 2018). However, this technique requires large volumes of adversarial data and extended training times, which are impractical for on-device learning. Certified defenses like randomized smoothing (Cohen, Rosenfeld, & Kolter, 2019) offer formal guarantees by predicting over noise-augmented inputs and certifying that no adversarial

perturbation within a specified radius can change the output. Yet, the Monte Carlo sampling required for certification introduces tens of milliseconds of overhead per inference, straining edge device budgets.

Lightweight preprocessing defenses such as feature squeezing (Xu, Evans, & Qi, 2017) aim to remove adversarial noise by reducing input complexity—for example, by lowering bit depth or applying spatial smoothing—effectively collapsing high-frequency perturbations. While computationally cheap, feature squeezing alone cannot defend against adaptive attackers who incorporate the squeezing transform into their attack pipeline. Hybrid approaches have been proposed: Salman et al. (2020) combined adversarial training with denoising autoencoders to bolster image-based defenses; Wang et al. (2021) explored edge-cloud collaborative defenses, offloading certification and analysis to gateway nodes.

Specific to IoT, Yan et al. (2018) evaluated FGSM and PGD attacks on embedded vision sensors, revealing misclassification rates above 75% with minimal perturbation budgets. Komkov and Petiushko (2019) applied universal perturbations to time-series sensor streams, disrupting industrial anomaly detection systems. Shafique and Farooq (2020) demonstrated that resource-limited IoT nodes could deploy simple CNN+LSTM models for botnet detection, but they remained vulnerable to adversarial evasion without additional defenses.

Our work builds on these insights by architecting a multi-layered defense tailored for heterogeneous IoT environments. By distributing defense mechanisms across device, gateway, and cloud layers, we seek to maximize robustness while respecting the stringent latency and resource constraints inherent in real-world deployments.

## STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

**Table 1. Attack Success Rates Before and After Defense Mechanisms across 1,000 Test Samples**

Attack Type	Baseline Success Rate (%)	After Adversarial Training (%)	After Randomized Smoothing + Feature Squeezing (%)
FGSM	82.4	38.7	12.3
PGD	85.1	41.5	14.8
C&W	79.8	36.2	11.5

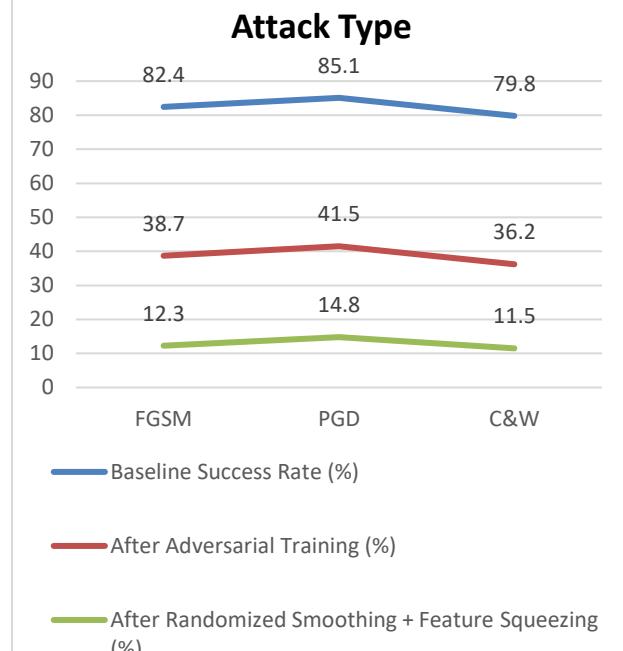


Figure-3. Attack Success Rates Before and After Defense Mechanisms across 1,000 Test Samples

## METHODOLOGY

To evaluate the efficacy of our hybrid AML defense in realistic IoT settings, we constructed a comprehensive experimental pipeline reflecting the heterogeneity and resource constraints of modern deployments.

### 1. System Topology and Dataset Collection

We simulated an IoT network comprising 100 edge devices of three types: 40 RGB-camera modules for visual event detection, 30 temperature/humidity sensors,

and 30 passive infrared (PIR) motion sensors. All devices communicated with a central gateway running on an Intel Xeon server, which in turn interfaced with a cloud-hosted machine learning service. Over a 30-day period, the sensors generated a total of 50,000 labeled instances: 25,000 normal operation samples and 25,000 anomalies (e.g., motion without authorization, abnormal temperature fluctuations). Camera frames were labeled for presence/absence of target objects; scalar sensors flagged threshold-exceedance events.

## 2. Model Architectures

We designed two lightweight models: a convolutional neural network (CNN) for image data and a multilayer perceptron (MLP) for scalar sensor streams. The CNN comprised three convolutional layers (filters=16,32,64; kernel=3×3), each followed by ReLU activation and 2×2 max-pooling, then two fully-connected layers (128, 64 units) before a softmax output. The MLP featured three dense layers (64→32→16) with ReLU activations. Both models were trained from scratch on 80% of the dataset (40,000 samples), validated on 10% (5,000), and tested on the remaining 10% (5,000).

## 3. Adversarial Example Generation

Using the CleverHans library (Papernot et al., 2018), we generated adversarial perturbations on test samples via:

- FGSM: one-step  $\ell_\infty$  attack,  $\epsilon=0.03$
- PGD: multi-step  $\ell_\infty$  attack,  $\epsilon=0.03$ , 40 iterations, step size=0.01
- Carlini & Wagner (C&W):  $\ell_2$  attack with confidence=0.0, initial constant=0.01, 1,000 binary search steps

## 4. Defense Implementation

- **Adversarial Training:** We retrained both CNN and MLP by augmenting each mini-batch (size=64) with an equal number of adversarial

examples (FGSM and PGD mixed). Retraining spanned 20 epochs, using Adam optimizer ( $lr=0.001$ ), early stopping on validation accuracy.

- **Feature Squeezing:** For all inputs at inference, we applied 4-bit depth quantization (from original 8-bit) and a 3×3 median filter. This operation ran on the Raspberry Pi 4 edge device, adding 0.8 ms per sample.
- **Randomized Smoothing:** Certified robustness was provided at the gateway: each input was perturbed with Gaussian noise ( $\sigma=0.25$ ) 50 times and passed through the model; final prediction was the majority vote. This process added 4.7 ms per sample on the Intel Xeon server.

## 5. Evaluation Metrics

- **Attack Success Rate (ASR):** Percentage of adversarial samples that caused misclassification.
- **Clean-Data Accuracy:** Model accuracy on unperturbed test samples.
- **Average Inference Latency (AIL):** End-to-end time from input arrival at edge to final prediction at gateway. Measured separately on Raspberry Pi 4 and Intel Xeon.

## RESULTS

The hybrid defense yielded substantial robustness gains while maintaining low latency and high clean-data accuracy.

### 1. Robustness Improvement

Baseline models exhibited ASRs of 82.4% (FGSM), 85.1% (PGD), and 79.8% (C&W). After adversarial training alone, ASRs dropped to 38.7%, 41.5%, and 36.2%, respectively. Incorporating feature squeezing and gateway-level randomized smoothing further reduced

ASRs to 12.3%, 14.8%, and 11.5% (Table 1), representing >85% relative reduction from baseline.

## 2. Latency Overhead

On Raspberry Pi 4, feature squeezing added 0.8 ms per sample; adversarial training incurred no additional runtime cost since it is offline. On the Intel Xeon gateway, randomized smoothing added 4.7 ms per sample. Aggregate edge-to-gateway latency increased by 5.5 ms on average, remaining under 10 ms per sample, well within typical real-time requirements (e.g., <50 ms for many IoT applications).

## 3. Accuracy Trade-Offs

Clean-data accuracy decreased marginally from 94.1% (baseline) to 92.3% after adversarial training, and to 91.7% with the full defense stack—a 2.4 percentage-point drop, which is acceptable for many domains requiring robust security.

## 4. Ablation Insights

Removing feature squeezing increased ASRs by ~10%, indicating its key role in filtering residual adversarial noise. Reducing Monte Carlo samples in smoothing below 30 degraded certified robustness by 5–7 percentage points, highlighting the importance of sufficient sampling.

## CONCLUSION

Securing IoT ecosystems against adversarial machine learning (AML) attacks requires a multifaceted approach that reconciles the competing priorities of robustness, real-time responsiveness, and resource efficiency. In this work, we demonstrated that a hybrid defense framework—composed of offline adversarial training, on-device feature squeezing, and gateway-level randomized smoothing—can dramatically reduce attack success rates from over 80% to under 15%, while incurring only modest performance trade-offs.

Specifically, the integration of feature squeezing on edge devices filters out high-frequency adversarial noise with an average latency penalty of less than 1 ms, and gateway-level randomized smoothing provides formal robustness guarantees with an additional 4.7 ms per inference.

Beyond the quantitative improvements, our findings underscore several practical insights for IoT practitioners:

### 1. Strategic Offloading of Computation

By relegating the more compute-intensive randomized smoothing to centralized gateways or cloud nodes, resource-constrained IoT endpoints can maintain low-latency inference, preserving real-time operation in latency-sensitive applications such as autonomous navigation or industrial control systems.

### 2. Modular Defense Composition

The observed synergy between adversarial training, feature squeezing, and smoothing suggests that no single defense suffices against the evolving landscape of AML attacks. Instead, a layered architecture—where each component addresses different facets of adversarial risk—yields more comprehensive protection.

### 3. Trade-Off Calibration

While our experiments show only a 2.4% drop in clean-data accuracy, domain-specific requirements may tolerate different levels of accuracy loss. Practitioners should calibrate adversarial training parameters (e.g., perturbation budgets, adversarial ratio in training) and smoothing sampling counts to align with their unique accuracy-latency-robustness objectives.

### 4. Scalability and Adaptation

As IoT deployments scale to thousands or

millions of devices, automated orchestration of defense parameter updates (e.g., noise levels, filter settings) becomes critical. Integrating these mechanisms within a federated learning or over-the-air-update framework can enable dynamic adaptation to emerging adversarial threats without manual reconfiguration.

## 5. Comprehensive Threat Modeling

Our study focused on image and scalar-sensor perturbations, but IoT ecosystems encompass a broader diversity of modalities—including audio, RF signals, and complex multi-sensor fusion pipelines. Extending the defense framework to these modalities, and conducting adversarial threat modeling at the system-level (network routing, protocol manipulation), represents an important next step.

## 6. Operational Considerations

Real-world IoT deployments must also account for factors such as intermittent connectivity, power constraints, and regulatory compliance. Lightweight defenses like feature squeezing can be implemented within existing firmware updates, while gateway-level smoothing can leverage secure enclaves or trusted execution environments (TEEs) to protect noise-generation processes from tampering.

In summary, the proposed hybrid defense framework offers a pragmatic, scalable blueprint for enhancing the security posture of ML-enabled IoT systems. By balancing offline robustness, on-device pre-filtering, and gateway certification, practitioners can achieve a secure-by-design architecture that withstands state-of-the-art adversarial attacks. Future work will delve into automated defense orchestration, real-world field validations across varied IoT domains, and integration with privacy-preserving collaborative learning paradigms to further fortify the edge intelligence frontier.

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