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## Autonomous Vehicle Full-Stack Governance From Sensor to Motor

by [Nick Clark](#) | Published March 27, 2026 | [PDF](#)

Current autonomous vehicle architectures separate perception, prediction, planning, and control into independent modules with independent safety mechanisms. When the perception module is uncertain but the planning module is confident, no unified governance resolves the conflict. The unified cognitive architecture provides full-stack governance where confidence, integrity, capability awareness, and forecasting operate as coupled control loops from sensor input through motor output, producing coherent vehicle behavior governed by a single, consistent safety framework.

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### The governance fragmentation problem

A modern autonomous vehicle's software stack has separate safety mechanisms at each layer. The perception system has confidence thresholds for object detection. The prediction system has uncertainty bounds for trajectory forecasting. The planning system has safety constraints for path selection. The

control system has limits for actuator commands. Each layer governs itself independently.

The problem is that safety is not composable across independently governed layers. A perception system reporting eighty percent confidence and a prediction system reporting seventy percent confidence on the same object do not produce a clear governance decision. The planning system receives both confidence values but has no unified framework for resolving their implications. It applies its own safety rules, which may or may not be consistent with the confidence levels reported by upstream modules.

The result is either over-conservative behavior, where each layer adds its own safety margin producing excessively cautious driving, or dangerous gaps where confident modules override uncertain ones without structural arbitration.

## Why safety layers are not safety architecture

Adding more safety layers does not produce safer behavior if the layers are not coherently coupled. A safety monitor that checks the planning module's outputs against safety constraints is another independent layer with its own failure modes. The monitor may disagree with the planning module about what constitutes safe behavior, producing either unnecessary interventions or missed hazards depending on whose constraints are more or less conservative.

## How the unified cognitive architecture addresses this

The cognitive architecture parameterized for autonomous vehicles provides coupled governance across the full stack. Confidence governance computes a single confidence state from all sensor and processing modules, determining what the vehicle is authorized to do at every moment. Integrity tracking ensures that the vehicle's behavior remains consistent with its declared safety norms across all modules. Capability awareness evaluates whether the vehicle's current physical and perceptual capabilities support the intended maneuver. The forecasting engine explores possible futures within a containment boundary before committing to action.

These primitives are coupled through bidirectional feedback. Declining perception confidence reduces the confidence governance score, which restricts the forecasting engine's speculative range, which constrains the planning module's behavioral repertoire, which limits the control system's actuator commands. The coupling is structural and automatic. No hand-crafted arbitration logic is needed.

Affective state, parameterized as caution in the driving domain, modulates the entire stack's responsiveness to threatening situations. A vehicle in a high-caution state perceives more conservatively, plans more conservatively, and executes more conservatively, not because each module independently applies a caution parameter, but because the coupled control loop propagates caution through the entire governance framework.

## What implementation looks like

An autonomous vehicle manufacturer deploying unified governance replaces independent per-module safety mechanisms with coupled cognitive primitives that span the full stack. Each primitive operates at the architectural level, influencing all modules simultaneously through the coupling mechanism.

For vehicle certification, unified governance provides a single safety framework that regulators can evaluate, rather than a collection of independent safety mechanisms whose interactions are difficult to analyze. The vehicle's safety behavior is a coherent whole, not an emergent property of independent layers.

For fleet management, unified governance enables fleet-wide safety parameter adjustment. Increasing the fleet's caution parameter produces more conservative behavior across every module of every vehicle, with the coupling mechanism ensuring that the increased caution is expressed coherently rather than as uncoordinated conservatism in individual modules.

[Applications All 21 steps →](#)

Same primitives. Different domains. One architecture.

Primary Technical Disclosure

[○ One Architecture, Every Domain: How the Same Cognitive Primitives Parameterize Across Autonomous Vehicles, Defense, Companion AI, and Therapeutic Agents](#)

Secondary Technical

[○ Confidence-Governed Autonomous Driving Decisions](#) [○ Quorum-Based Engagement Authorization for Defense Systems](#) [○ Narrative Unlock Engine and Relationship Milestones for Companion AI](#) [○ Attachment Challenge Module: Testing Relational Health](#) [○ Skill-Gated Relational Readiness for Social Platforms](#) [○ Fleet-Level Affective State Aggregation for Traffic Management](#) [○ Therapeutic Relationship Integrity for AI-Assisted Therapy](#) [○ Physical Capability Envelopes for Embodied Robotics](#) [○ Curriculum-Gated Adaptive Learning Platforms](#) [○ Continuity-Based Facility Access Control](#) [○ Confidence-Governed Financial Trading Systems](#) [○ Rights-Grade Content Generation With Provenance Tracking](#) [○ EU AI Act Structural Conformity Through Architecture](#)

Applications (General)

[● Autonomous Vehicle Full-Stack Governance From Sensor to Motor](#) [○ Defense Engagement Authorization Through Multi-Level Confidence](#) [○ Full-Stack Cognition Architecture for Healthcare](#) [○ Full-Stack Cognition Architecture for Financial Services](#) [○ Full-Stack Cognition Architecture for Education](#) [○ Full-Stack Cognition Architecture for Smart Cities](#) [○ Full-Stack Cognition Architecture for Manufacturing](#) [○ Full-Stack Cognition Architecture for Agriculture](#)

Applications (Specific)

[○ Waymo's Stack Lacks Unified Cognitive Governance](#) [○ Anduril's Defense Stack Needs Unified Cognitive Governance](#) [○ Epic Systems Needs Cognitive Governance for Clinical AI](#) [○ Bloomberg Terminal's AI Needs Unified Cognitive Governance](#) [○ Tesla Robotaxi Optimizes Driving, Not Cognitive Architecture](#) [○ Lockheed Martin Automates Targeting, Not Engagement Governance](#) [○ Siemens Healthineers Automates Diagnosis Without Cognitive Governance](#) [○ Palantir AIP Deploys LLMs Without Cognitive Architecture](#) [○ C3 AI Provides Enterprise AI Applications Without Cognitive Coherence](#) [○ UiPath Automates Tasks Without Cognitive Governance](#)

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AQ

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Last updated: 2026-03-03



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