Automation of Secure and Compliant Infrastructure Orchestration Utilizing Terraform

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MSc Cloud Computing

Anusha Singamaneni
Student ID: 23237066

School of Computing
National College of Ireland

Supervisor: Ms. Shaguna Gupta

National College of Ireland
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Automation of Secure and Compliant Infrastructure Orchestration Utilizing Terraform

Anusha Singamaneni
23237066

Abstract

The complexity of managing secure and compliant infrastructure increases the need now for applying automation technologies. In this research, we focus on a secure and compliant approach for the automation of infrastructure orchestration with Terraform, which is an open-source IaC tool. Ideally, it aligns the goals to automate the provisioning of secure cloud infrastructure aligned to best practices and compliance rules. This research stream also applies infrastructure automation from the Terraform tool, reduces human intervention, and enforces compliance standards when defining, provisioning and managing resources.

This paper explores different approaches to the incorporation of security controls and compliance standards into Terraform practices to bolster cloud security. It is done through the recording of fundamentals and the weighing of several techniques like role-based access control, encryption, and continuous monitoring of infrastructure with the view of making sure that it is provisioned safely. Also, the thesis explores issues with working with multiple clouds and state files for Terraform in a large enterprise. This research also helps to address the existing gap in the adoption of Terraform in securing cloud infrastructure through presenting improved mechanisms of compliance and automation The research also provides a baseline for future developments in the automation of secure infrastructure management.

Practical use and theoretical examination show that with proper application and planning, Terraform can be as effective at providing idempotent and compliant solutions that can scale as desired, although there is room for future growth and improvement in the automation of security.

1 Introduction

With cloud computing becoming the new norm for doing business, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are presented with opportunities and risks. Currently, there is a tremendous utilization of cloud solutions, specifically the IaaS model, which has enabled SMEs to obtain affordable and variable IT assets. Nevertheless, as the focus shifts to the use of cloud-based solutions, business leaders struggle with securing sophisticated information-protection measures as well as compliance.

On-demand self-service helps businesses to subscribe to services offered by cloud computing without owning any form of capital investment in the form of physical assets like storage, network, or virtual machines. There are several benefits that include high cost-effectiveness, capacity for expansion, and practicability for organizations with a distributed workplace. In this regard, IaaS is a favorite choice for SMEs attesting to the fact that it offers an environment within which numerous IT structures can easily be established and implemented without requiring huge amounts of money at the initial stages of business formation.

Nonetheless, the following remaining as hurdles have been identified to be hard to overcome especially in cloud infrastructure for SMEs with less capital and human capital. Configuration of safe and compliant cloud solutions may be rather a long and delicate process, which needs significant analysis and certain expertise. Manual configurations become very precarious because they introduce a lot of room for error and a vulnerability to security breaches.

Security issues are particularly exaggerated with the advancing scale and increasing sophistication of cloud infrastructures. Different security issues may arise from poor uptake in security features for SMEs and limited resources for security to be implemented as appropriate. That is why one of the major challenges for many SMEs is the maintenance of security policies and standards consistent with rapidly growing and highly flexible cloud structures.

AWS as a cloud service provider, provides a broad range of tools and services for different business operations and sizes. To SMEs, AWS provides a chance to implement a well-grounded cloud infrastructure that considers its scale and cost usage. Nevertheless, the potential of AWS can only be unleashed if SMEs tackle well-preserved security and compliance issues and reproduce results. Which will resolve most of the challenges addressed by Alkawsi et al. [2015]

A significant part of creating security for the cloud structures is the aspect of replacability, and repeatability used to create reliable structures. Identity confirms infrastructure is maintainable in an appropriate and sustainable manner for interval in future. It reduces mistakes, makes it easier to restore during eventualities, and is also adept at serving development and deployment processes continuously. However, as organizations expand, the growth of infrastructure and at the same time sustaining the security aspect brings about new issues such as; designs and infrastructure to align performance with security, control of access, and application of security policies within large environments.

Automation, especially when through the Infrastructure as Code (IaC) guidelines, overlays these challenges successfully. Frameworks such as Terraform allow the configuration of infrastructures in code, which improves consistency, and speed and also ensures the reduction of errors while making the whole process cheaper. IaC avoids lengthy manual procedures in establishing infrastructure while making sure it is both elastic and inherently safe from security and compliance vulnerabilities as discovered by Sharma et al. [2023]

The focus of this research specifically is to apply the use of Terraform in the automation of the provision of secure AWS infrastructure for SMEs. It is designed to become a part of infrastructural development where security is considered as one of the foundational aspects; Terraform modules and practices introduce compliance validation and look for possible security issues. In doing so, this work aims at enabling SMEs to control and optimize their cloud infra, improve over resource scarcity, and provide a proven blueprint for secure environments.

Research Question:
What would be the approach to using Terraform to automate infrastructure creation in AWS, how policy and compliance can be integrated to ensure that the created infrastructure is secure as well as having straight-forward ways to recreate itself in the future where there are growths or changes, all with minimal configuration changes for small and

medium enterprises?

2 Related Work

Oulaaffart et al. [2021] states that the scope of cloud computing and infrastructure is increasing, and the need for proper safe, and suitable infrastructure is the requirement for SME's. Kavas [2023] investigates the application of Terraform, an IaC tool with an explanation of cloud resources management with reference to AWS. The research problem concerns the capacity and the challenge of creating repeatable, reliable, and compliant cloud environments for SMEs that can involve minimal configuration and that do not produce errors from such work. This challenge has been addressed in the proposed research. defines the need to employ security in cloud services. It states the

2.1 Infrastructure as Code and Terraform

Currently, one of the leading practices embraced in cloud computing to provide the architecture is Infrastructure as Code abbreviated as IaC that utilizes definition files readable by machines. Terraform which is improved by HashiCorp was one of the most famous and commonly used IaC tools in open source.[1]

Howard [2022] explore how Terraform can leverage plugins and abstract infrastructure providers for provider-agnostic, multiple-cloud management. It supports CDK for Cloud Development which means the configuration can be done using languages such as Python or Java and so on, and thus has improved compatibility with other tools. At the same time, the single set of challenges concerns multi-cloud adaptation and dependency management, which relates to the proposed research's potential optimizations of template-based automation.

Kovacevic and Dicola [2023] investigates the use of integrated security tools to enhance the speed of response, and positional security using workflow automation. it is also similar to the proposed research because both are focused on automating the optimization of secure practices to manage structures. Some of the gaps include little or no emphases placed in monitoring compliance in real-time, as well as the integration of Infrastructure as Code (IaC) tools like Terraform to these automated frameworks. This brings a focus on the possibility of using Terraform to address both security and compliance needs at the same time.

Ibrahim et al. [2022] aims to develop an understanding of how DevSecOps can be applied to an organization and implemented jointly with IaC tools such as Terraform to enforce compliance and security policies. It draws focus on process-related security that is not safeguarded well with conventional security systems with no automated and real-time security assurance during the deployment phase. Accordingly, the study provides evidence about the need to operationalize security during the early stages of orchestration pipelines.

Teppan et al. [2022] focuses on developing security templates for IaC to enforce security policies and practices throughout distinct implementations. They point out flaws in existing structures that have issues with multi-cloud compatibility and propose the use of Terraform as well. The results of this work extend the understanding of the role of unification and provide attention to the various orchestration strategies.

[1]https://aws.amazon.com/blogs/apn/terraform-beyond-the-basics-with-aws/

Kumara et al. [2021] classifies possible threats in Terraform IaaS instances, including misconfigurations and weak role-based access control. It emphasizes the necessity to have combined risk management instruments which, in turn, matches in improving security in orchestration.

Battula [2024] examines compliance issues with software services in combined cloud structures and offers solutions for automated rule-checking of IaC templates. The approach helps to unload the amount of manual work thus relevant for Terraform engagements focused on compliance.

2.2 AWS Infrastructure Management and Security

Because of the service sectors it offers, AWS has been considered to be a flexible cloud provider for so many organizations. However, there are a couple of challenges in AWS infrastructure's management in both secure and efficient ways which requires a couple of efforts, particularly to SMEs. Security in the AWS environment is also discussed by Sharma [2024] and Pessa [2023] So, as in other works, Sharma [2024] reveal that the main issues in AWS architectures are caused by misconfigurations, and access and network control. However, Pessa [2023] thus states that for managing orders and performing typical security actions across the AWS resources, it is beneficial to use IaC tools like Terraform. From these studies, it could be noticed the potential of the Terraform in addressing the challenge of security in AWS space which relates closely to the current research question. Nonetheless, neither of them directly targeted SMEs or provided a clear, specific policy and compliance enforcement plan, which is why the proposed research is necessary.

2.3 Policy and Compliance as Code

The idea of taking the infrastructure code flow and adding policy and compliance was refined to run as an efficient form as organizations aim to orchestrate their governance. Anderson et al. [2023] formalized the notion that compliance had to be institutional, that is, to become a 'code' of the organization, that is, one had to ensure the integration of the check-up mechanisms so that they became 'part' of the organization. Similarly, the current work has also pointed in Vakhula et al. [2023], that organizational policy as code is significantly linked with the enhanced protective results in the utilization of cloud services and is even a recent work. This position is as follows: The two works propose that policy and 'compliance checks should be integrated into the provisioning of structures' which proposed research of objectives. However, both the mentioned works failed to emphasize how this can be achieved using Terraform in the context of AWS or, in particular, for SMEs. This gap implies that there is potential usefulness of the present research in setting up the simplest condition for policy and compliance as code to be efficient on Terraform constructs for AWS.

Luo and Ben Salem [2016] presents a novel approach for dynamic Security Configuration Management in software-defined environments with special focus towards scalability and flexibility. This is highly relevant to the proposed research as it establishes that orchestration can effectively approach security policies. Nevertheless, the study does not deeply integrate Terraform or similar IaC tools, which is the limitation of the study that this research tries to overcome by generalizing the approach to represent the approach to include secure deployment automation via Terraform.

Moric et al. [2024] explores container orchestration platforms, this work offers an understanding of how to protect orchestration workflows under one architecture. While it mostly focuses on containers, its concept of continuous monitoring and policy enforcement is translatable into the use of Terraform for orchestration of the infrastructure.

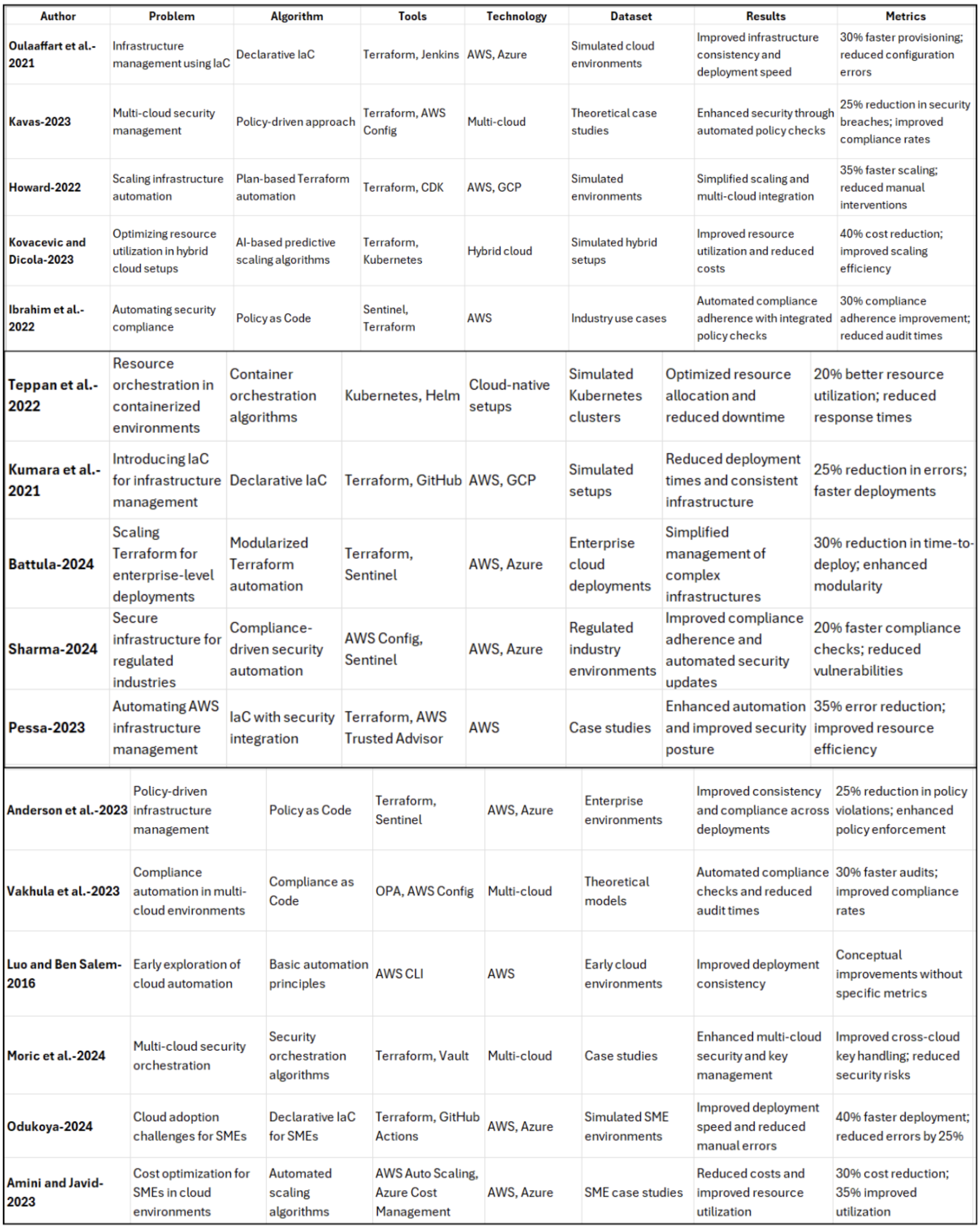
2.4 Cloud Infrastructure Management incorporated with Small to Medium Enterprises

The literature of existing literature review reviews a considerable amount of literature depicting the global management of cloud structures, however, in contrast to a number of previous studies in this regard, there are only the nominal types of literature lined up to apply this work in the context of SMEs.

Futhermore, Odukoya [2024] and Amini and Javid [2023] contribute on the challenges that organization face while implementing cloud technologies for SME. Initial work involves investigating that though cloud initiatives can be adopted in SMEs they themselves lack the financial capital which is much required and the technical know-how to tackle problems which arise due to management of cloud structures are also lacking. Second research concerns itself with barriers that hinder the adoption of cloud solutions by some of the SMEs by offering security solutions.

Even though Terraform and Infrastructure as Code (IaC) have progressed security and compliance concerns for infrastructure orchestration, there are still knowledge-related issues, and multidimensional, and scalability issues concerning SMEs. SMEs' resource and technical limitations are overlooked in the literature, and they primarily revolve around Large Enterprises. The application of multi-cloud strategies is quite limited though it can be applied for coordinating security policies among the providers. Other complex capabilities including threat intelligence and response, compliance enforcement at scale, and intelligent misconfiguration remediation are not highly developed either. Moreover, reproducibility and auditable ability during the continuous deployment phase and the incorporation of Policy-as-Code (PaC) for real-time standards enforcement have not garnered adequate attention in the literature. These gaps can only be addressed with real-life examples and best practices, as well as solutions geared toward implementation in SMEs, to assist practitioners in bridging these gaps and adopting Terraform more effectively and securely on a large scale. This research helps fill these gaps by offering specific findings that improve the orchestration of cloud computing.

Following Figure 1 summarizes the aforementioned related review.



Author	Problem	Algorithm	Tools	Technology	Dataset	Results	Metrics
Oulaaffart et al.-2021	Infrastructure management using IaC	Declarative IaC	Terraform, Jenkins	AWS, Azure	Simulated cloud environments	Improved infrastructure consistency and deployment speed	30% faster provisioning; reduced configuration errors
Kavas-2023	Multi-cloud security management	Policy-driven approach	Terraform, AWS Config	Multi-cloud	Theoretical case studies	Enhanced security through automated policy checks	25% reduction in security breaches; improved compliance rates
Howard-2022	Scaling infrastructure automation	Plan-based Terraform automation	Terraform, CDK	AWS, GCP	Simulated environments	Simplified scaling and multi-cloud integration	35% faster scaling; reduced manual interventions
Kovacevic and Dicola-2023	Optimizing resource utilization in hybrid cloud setups	AI-based predictive scaling algorithms	Terraform, Kubernetes	Hybrid cloud	Simulated hybrid setups	Improved resource utilization and reduced costs	40% cost reduction; improved scaling efficiency
Ibrahim et al.-2022	Automating security compliance	Policy as Code	Sentinel, Terraform	AWS	Industry use cases	Automated compliance adherence with integrated policy checks	30% compliance adherence improvement; reduced audit times
Teppan et al.-2022	Resource orchestration in containerized environments	Container orchestration algorithms	Kubernetes, Helm	Cloud-native setups	Simulated Kubernetes clusters	Optimized resource allocation and reduced downtime	20% better resource utilization; reduced response times
Kumara et al.-2021	Introducing IaC for infrastructure management	Declarative IaC	Terraform, GitHub	AWS, GCP	Simulated setups	Reduced deployment times and consistent infrastructure	25% reduction in errors; faster deployments
Battula-2024	Scaling Terraform for enterprise-level deployments	Modularized Terraform automation	Terraform, Sentinel	AWS, Azure	Enterprise cloud deployments	Simplified management of complex infrastructures	30% reduction in time-to-deploy; enhanced modularity
Sharma-2024	Secure infrastructure for regulated industries	Compliance-driven security automation	AWS Config, Sentinel	AWS, Azure	Regulated industry environments	Improved compliance adherence and automated security updates	20% faster compliance checks; reduced vulnerabilities
Pessa-2023	Automating AWS infrastructure management	IaC with security integration	Terraform, AWS Trusted Advisor	AWS	Case studies	Enhanced automation and improved security posture	35% error reduction; improved resource efficiency
Anderson et al.-2023	Policy-driven infrastructure management	Policy as Code	Terraform, Sentinel	AWS, Azure	Enterprise environments	Improved consistency and compliance across deployments	25% reduction in policy violations; enhanced policy enforcement
Vakhula et al.-2023	Compliance automation in multi-cloud environments	Compliance as Code	OPA, AWS Config	Multi-cloud	Theoretical models	Automated compliance checks and reduced audit times	30% faster audits; improved compliance rates
Luo and Ben Salem-2016	Early exploration of cloud automation	Basic automation principles	AWS CLI	AWS	Early cloud environments	Improved deployment consistency	Conceptual improvements without specific metrics
Moric et al.-2024	Multi-cloud security orchestration	Security orchestration algorithms	Terraform, Vault	Multi-cloud	Case studies	Enhanced multi-cloud security and key management	Improved cross-cloud key handling; reduced security risks
Odukoya-2024	Cloud adoption challenges for SMEs	Declarative IaC for SMEs	Terraform, GitHub Actions	AWS, Azure	Simulated SME environments	Improved deployment speed and reduced manual errors	40% faster deployment; reduced errors by 25%
Amini and Javid-2023	Cost optimization for SMEs in cloud environments	Automated scaling algorithms	AWS Auto Scaling, Azure Cost Management	AWS, Azure	SME case studies	Reduced costs and improved resource utilization	30% cost reduction; 35% improved utilization

Figure 1: Brief Summary of Existing Literature

3 Methodology

The research methodology outlined for this research is centered around Infrastructure as Code (IaC) and the use of the IaC tool - Terraform to build a secure infrastructure on the AWS cloud. The methodology is detailed step-by-step below and shown in Figure **??**::

3.1 Research methods

- **Infrastructure as Code (IaC):** Infrastructure as Code or IaC refers to the process of provision of computing infrastructure and management of infrastructure using configuration mechanisms in a computer-readable format distinct from traditional manual methods. IaC makes it possible to achieve dependable, scale-up, and reproducible by automating the creation, tuning, and coordination of cloud assets. This strategy reduces the role of persons in the construction of virtual structures with considerable speed in deployment processes and known conformity to organizational guidelines and policies.

- **Most used IaC tools in the industry:** A number of tools reign supreme in sphere of IaC such as Terraform, AWS CloudFormation, Ansible, Chef, Puppet etc. This means that each tool independent on itself reflects certain qualities and is perfect in particular circumstances and for particular tasks.

  AWS CloudFormation: Developed exclusively for AWS, it contains significant levels of integration with AWS services but lacks broad cloud orchestration features.

  Ansible: A tool to do configuration management that encompasses support for a declarative approach to automated configuration management but lacks robust support for sa tate-based approach to managing infrastructure.

  Chef and Puppet: Stable and good in configuration management but not so effective in provisioning a new infrastructure.

- **Terraform in action:** According to the literature review, Terraform from HashiCorp is widely considered as an IaC software because of its multi-cloud handling, effective state handling, and modularity. Its key advantages include:

  Provider-Agnostic: Compatible with several cloud solutions; thus, flexible when using a mix of multiple cloud solutions.

  Declarative Syntax: Therefore, there is the users' will or the state they want to achieve, and there is the execution by Terraform.

  State Management: Maintains records of the state of infrastructures which would allow for updates, rollback as well as identifying changes to be made and reconciling those changes.

  Modularity: Promoting reusable modules for infrastructure constructs and hence facilitates better maintainability and scalability.

Terraform is used in this research to automate and gain secure infrastructure for SMEs on AWS. The implementation is centered on the pillar of baselining AWS services and security controls, where utilization of Terraform modules guarantees standardized conformity.

- **IAM, Groups, Policies and Role:**IAM is an AWS service that Terraform manages to provide a secure way to access AWS resources. Computerized users, groups, policies as well as roles facilitate centralization of access control as well as easier audits.

- **Virtual Private Cloud - VPC :**A Virtual Private Cloud (VPC) is a logically isolated section of a public cloud where users can launch resources like servers and databases in a secure, virtual network. It offers control over IP address ranges, subnets, route tables, and network gateways to customize and secure cloud infrastructure.

- **Security Groups and NACLs:** Security groups are similar to firewalls and control traffic in and out of a specific resource. Terraform follows the least privilege principle in a very formal way because it has predefined rules. At the subnet level, there is extra protection by a technique known as Network Access Control Lists or NACLs for short.

- **Bastion Host:** Bastion Host and NAT Instances are fully featured machines usually placed in a DMZ or another externally separated network to enable some sort of access to the internal networks for temporary time periods. A bastion host is provided to allow administrative access into instances in the private subnets. What NAT instances are used for is to allow private resources to connect to the Internet while not necessarily being exposed directly to it.

- **VPC Flow Logs:** VPC flow logs of AWS using Terraform help the network monitor and audit flow traffic by network

- **TLS termination and the reference of security groups:** Secure communication is configured in the system to allow for the termination of TLS. This provides security control allowed to the granular levels of traffic for resources so as to also accept fine-tuned addition of associates within the security group.

- **VPC Peering:** VPC peering is used in order to allow different VPCs to communicate with one another while keeping the information exchanged private and without going through the internet.

This means that security is built into the value proposition of using Terraform because the declarative model forms an input that always factor in security. Key measures include:

Centralized access control is achieved through IAM configurations that ensure accurate levels of access permissions, significantly reducing the risk of insider threats. Network segmentation divides subnets into public and private, effectively minimizing attack vectors. Traffic monitoring is enabled through VPC flow logs, allowing for the identification of unusual traffic flows. Encryption, including TLS termination, ensures secure and safe connections between resources. Additionally, the use of Terraform modules for implementing security policies promotes modularity and reusability, streamlining adherence to proper formats and simplifying maintenance.

This research shows that SMEs can automate the provision of secure and compliant clouds by integrating Terraform with AWS in accordance with the best practices presented in this research. This methodology makes a solution not only replicable but also inherently safe, satisfying the requirements of growth and adapting to the complexity of business.

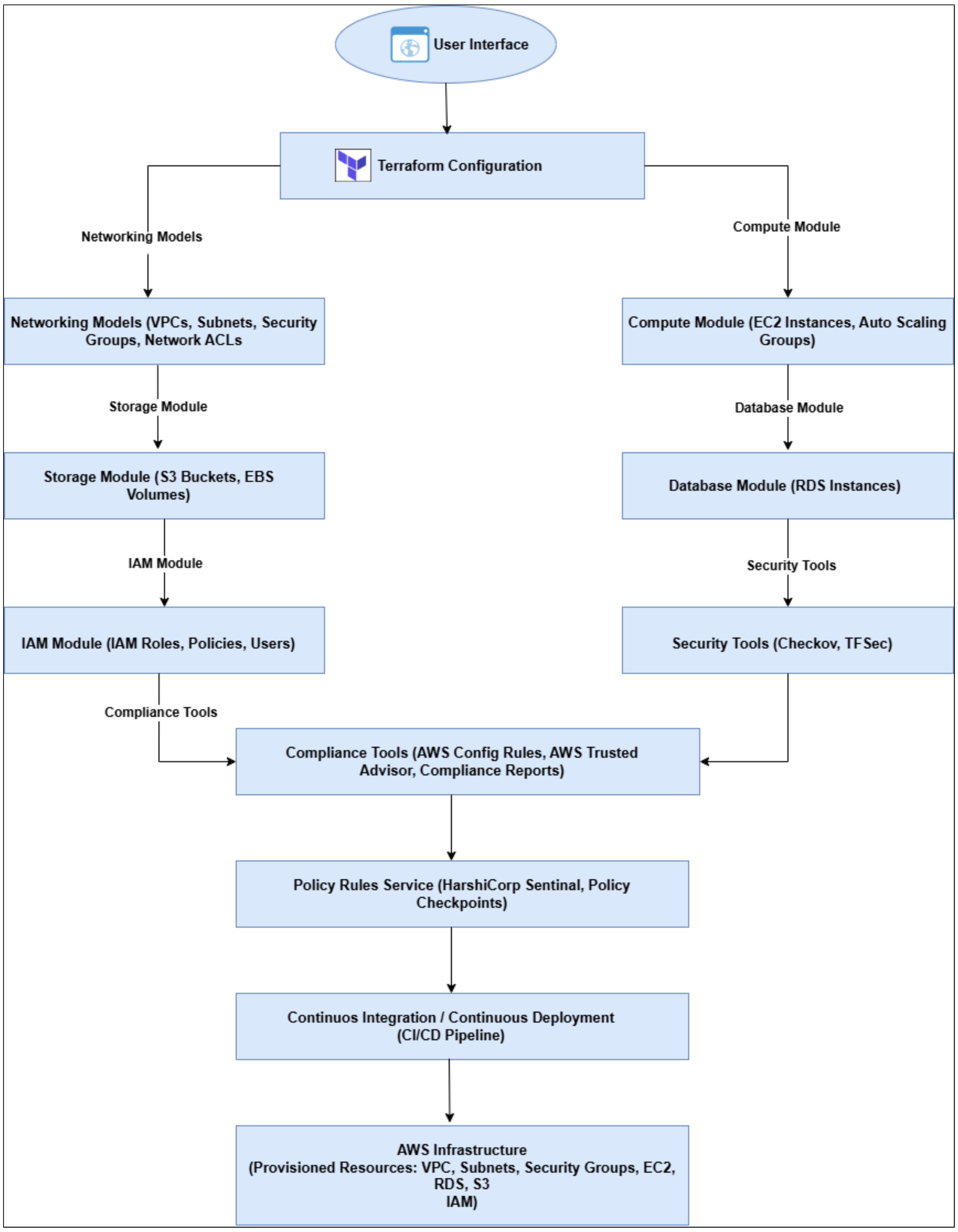

User Interface
Terraform Configuration
Networking Models
Compute Module
Networking Models (VPCs, Subnets, Security Groups, Network ACLs
Compute Module (EC2 Instances, Auto Scaling Groups)
Storage Module
Database Module
Storage Module (S3 Buckets, EBS Volumes)
Database Module (RDS Instances)
IAM Module
Security Tools
IAM Module (IAM Roles, Policies, Users)
Security Tools (Checkov, TFSec)
Compliance Tools
Compliance Tools (AWS Config Rules, AWS Trusted Advisor, Compliance Reports)
Policy Rules Service (HarshiCorp Sentinal, Policy Checkpoints)
Continuos Integration / Continuous Deployment (CI/CD Pipeline)
AWS Infrastructure (Provisioned Resources: VPC, Subnets, Security Groups, EC2, RDS, S3 IAM)

Figure 2: Architectural Flow of Proposed Research

3.2 Tools and Technologies

1. **Terraform:** Terraform, developed by HashiCorp, is an open-source Infrastructure as Code (IaC) tool. It allows users to define, deploy, and manage infrastructure through code.

2. **AWS (Amazon Web Services):** AWS is a robust cloud computing platform offering scalable infrastructure and security features. Key Services Integrated:

IAM (Identity and Access Management): Configures access controls, roles, and permissions based on the principle of least privilege.

VPC (Virtual Private Cloud): Sets up isolated virtual networks to host resources securely.

EC2 (Elastic Compute Cloud): Provides virtual machines, including bastion hosts and NAT instances.

S3 (Simple Storage Service): Stores resources like VPC flow logs securely with encryption.

CloudTrail and CloudWatch: Enable logging and monitoring of resource activity.

RDS (Relational Database Service): Ensures database security and encryption while supporting reliable backups.

3. **HashiCorp Configuration Language (HCL):** The configuration language used for writing Terraform scripts. Defines components such as IAM roles, VPCs, security groups, and subnets.

4. **NAT (Network Address Translation) Gateway**: A managed AWS service that enables private resources to access the internet securely.

5. **Bastion Host:** A secure point of access for private resources within a VPC.

6. **Security Groups and NACLs (Network Access Control Lists)**: AWS tools for managing traffic to and from resources.

7. **TLS Encryption:** Provides secure communication between system components.

8. **S3 Bucket with Encryption:** S3 buckets are used for secure data storage, including logs.

9. **Monitoring and Logging Tools:** AWS CloudWatch and CloudTrail are employed for real-time monitoring and logging.

10. **IAM Policies and Roles:** Customized policies and roles enforce access control and security compliance.

3.3 Structure of the Report

1. Introduction: Background and context for the research.

2. Literature Review: Overview of related works and research gaps.

3. Methodology: Explanation of the approach, tools, and technologies.

4. Design and Architecture: Details of the proposed system and its components.

5. Implementation: Technical details about the Terraform setup and configurations.

6. Evaluation: Analysis of experiments, metrics, and comparison with other methods.

7. Conclusion and Future Work: Summary of findings and potential advancements

3.4 Metrics Evaluated and Computation

Metrics Evaluated:

• Provisioning Time: Time taken to cause preparations manually against with the help of Terraform.

• Accuracy: Number of successful, error, and failure rates of resource provisioning.

• Scalability: Scalability, ease with which new resources can be incorporated in a system and the duplication of facilities especially in large systems.

• Compliance: Specificity of implementing pre-ordained security and compliance measures.

Computation of Metrics:

• Provisioning Time: This parameter was measured in minutes by using stopwatches for both manual and automatic methods of setup.

• Accuracy: Derived from the availability analysis by dividing the number of successful resource creations by the number of errors or failures.

• Scalability: Measurable through the amount of time it takes with the amount of effort needed to scale up any resources implemented.

• Compliance: Ensured through verifying policies that IAM offers meet standard, encrypting settings used, and logging mechanisms available.

4 Design Specification

The design specifications of this research relate to the establishment of secure and highly elastic cloud architecture through the use of Terraform on AWS as shown in Figure 3. The design is separated into clear components and layers and remains expressive of an architecture that aligns with security best practices while being Terraform reproducible through the use of the DAG dependency model. The following section will discuss it in detail.

4.1 Architecture and Components

The proposed architecture consists of the following components, each contributing to the security, scalability, and functionality of the cloud environment:

- **Virtual Private Cloud (VPC)**

A VPC is the foundation of the network topology as it creates an isolated platform for placing resources. **Public Subnets:** These can be used for the hosting of internet-faced resources for example the bastion hosts. **Private Subnets:** Specifically suited to SCSI and other resources whose access should not be exposed to the internet such as application servers and databases. Route Tables: Designed for the purpose of controlling the flow of traffic within the VPC and access to or from the internet or to any other network.

- **Identity and Access Management -IAM**

IAM configurations guarantee the protection of access to available resources in AWS. While defining user access to resources, the role of the user and his or her responsibilities ought to be considered. Policies: Regulate least-privilege access by means of individual and prepared policies. Whereas roles support concurrent and continual secure access across service and/or accounts' boundaries.

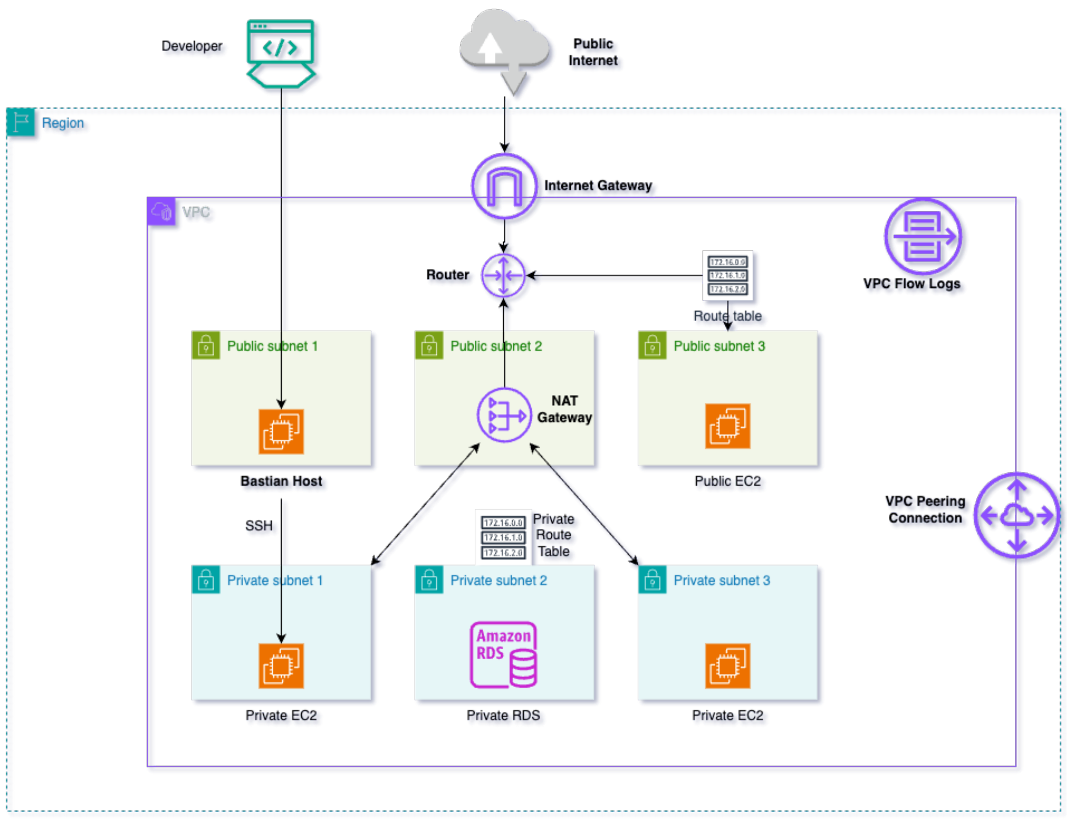


Figure 3: Architecture of proposed research

- **Bastion Host**

It is used as a Bastion host in the public subnet to provide secure administrative access to the instances placed in private subnets. The bastion host is only accessible by authorised users by way of security groups.

- **NAT Instances**

Network Address Translation (NAT) instances provide the ability to make resources in private subnets reachable to the Internet without being exposed. IDS design retains resource segregation while permitting the required outgoing traffic.

- **Security, Groups and Network Access Control Lists (NACLs)**

Security groups are associated with network resources and are used control the traffic in and out of that resource. NACLs extend network security control at the subnet level and are an enhancement of the next level of security.

- **VPC Peering**

The VPC peering is used to communicate various multiple VPCs by securely arranging one VPC with another VPC to be isolated from the public internet but share their resources.

- **TLS Termination**

Termination of TLS guarantees security to clients and resources communicating through traffic by encrypting the same. This is especially the case in web API applications where latency from overloaded servers can be catastrophic.

- **VPC Flow Logs**

Flow logs are enabled for VPC to capture flow logs for the network. Such logs are beneficial for auditing, translating issues, and identifying deviations from the security policy, while staying effective when it comes to continuous security policy enforcement.

4.2 DAG and resource creation in Terraform

Terraform goes about it through the Directed Acyclic Graph (DAG), which displays resource dependency. All of these are described in the configuration files using terraform and the application uses the DAG to know which resource to create next or which to update.

4.2.1 Resource Creation Process in Terraform

- **Defining Resources**

  In Terraform, resources are declared in '.tf' files, which use HashiCorp Configuration Language (HCL). For instance, VPC is created together with its subnets and their related CIDR block and routing.

- **Dependency Resolution**

  In case of resource dependencies, Terraform constructs a diagram of acyclic graphs automatically. For example, a route table has to be created, once the VPC it belongs to has been designed.

- **Execution Plan**

  Terrform simply provides an execution plan which gives the necessary steps to get from the current state to the desired state. This plan helps to be very open before any change is being made.

- **Provisioning Resources**

  Terraform makes provisions in the defined order in the DAG so that the dependencies of an entity are well captured and resources are provisioned effectively.

- **State Management**

  Terraform also has the capability to keep a record of the existing state of the infrastructure in the form of a state file. This state file is crucial for updating and synchronizing the exposures.

4.2.2 Terraform Mechanism of Resource Dependencies

IAM Roles and Policies: Before policy can be associated with role or user it must be created. VPC and Subnets: Subnets cannot be created until the Virtual Private Cloud in which they reside is created. Security Groups and Instances: Security groups have to be created before being applied to instances. Modular design for reusability The scaling of software is usually achieved by modular design and one benefit of this form of design is that it is reusable. Another is that configuration of resources by TF is done in modules that can be reused and the major AWS modules are VPCs, IAMs and security groups. This also makes the task of scaling infrastructure easier and will help those employees who are overseeing multiple deployments to remain consistent. Every module contains the required configurations for a certain component which provides the possibility to develop the design as both maintainable and extensible.

That is why the proposed design organises these modular pieces and uses the DAG-based conveyance of Terraform to guarantee that the infrastructure is safe, reproducible, and compressible to balance the particular requirements of SMEs. This framework gives a solid ground on which to build automation for compliance and security in AWS environments.

5 Implementation

With an emphasis on the concrete outcomes of the implementation process, the implementation outlines the created and used '.tf' files as below

bastionHost.tf:

The bastionHost.tf file has a critical role in producing and defining the Bastion Host inside the AWS ecosystem. It consists of three main components: the security group, the EC2 instance, and the Elastic IP (EIP).

Security Group: The file first sets the security group lead to the aws_security_group.bastion_sg that will determine the traffic permitted into and out of the Bastion Host. The security group is set for permitting only access from port 22 to incoming traffic originating from a particular CIDR block. The only restriction is of incoming connections to TCP port 22 — which often is required for administrative tasks utilizing SSH.

EC2 Instance: The file then moves to the creation of the Bastion Host itself as it is defined by the aws_instance.bastion. It can define particular aspects including the AMI, the type of instance, and even in which subnet. The configuration is done well because the EC2 instance is assigned a public IP and hence can be accessed by external networks' clients and to allow clients' access only, the EC2 instance is assigned the previously created security group.

Elastic IP: To have a stable, non-changing IP for connecting to the Bastion Host, the file attaches an Elastic IP (aws_eip.bastion_eip) to the EC2 instance. This guarantees that the Bastion Host instance retains a set IP address regardless of a reboot which is fundamental in the security process.

flowLogs.tf: The flowLogs.tf file turns on VPC Flow Logs and sinks them into an S3 bucket for managed and compliant storage. To kick off the wizard, it first pulls the current AWS caller identity from the aws_caller_identity data source which contains information about the current AWS account. It is crucial to let IAM policies have conditions to control access to the resources based on the account. The configuration then defines an S3 bucket (aws_s3_bucket.flow_logs_bucket) where the flow logs exist and adds identification tags. Also, all bucket is associated with server-side encryption with AES 256, so the logs are safe.

In addition, the configuration creates the appropriate IAM roles and policies for the involvement of VPC Flow Logs in writing data to S3. It creates an IAM role (aws_iam_role.vpc_flow_logs_role) with the policy, which allows VPC Flow Logs to use resources for writing logs to the S3 bucket. An associated IAM policy (aws_iam_role_policy vpc_flow_logs_s3_policy) grants s3:These are buckets that grant PutObject permissions to VPC Flow Logs services that allow logs to be uploaded securely. Last, the aws_flow_log vpc_flow_logs resource defines the VPC Flow Logs themselves and sets them to deliver to the S3 bucket described above and log all traffic types within the given VPC. This configuration allows for the storage and organization of logs created from the VPC Flow Logs in AWS securely.

IAMGroups.tf: IAMGroups.tf holds the definition and the management of IAM groups and their related policies within the AWS environment. There are several predefined IAM groups in AWS related to the user role in the organization like Admin, DevOps, Developer, Readonly, etc. The IAM policy of each group is well defined with clear ruling on the approval level that can be provided to each of the group members. For instance, the aws_iam_group.admins have the access to AdministratorAccess policy and make the users full proprietors to AWS while the users of the devops group have limited access with custom DevOpsPolicy focusing mostly on infrastructure services such as EC2, RDS, CloudWatch, and S3. Likewise, the developers' group has attributed a policy that can grant them access to development services exclusive to AWS Lambda, Dynamo DB, and Cloud Formation among others.

The configuration also embraces a read-only group, which is assigned under the ReadOnlyAccess policy to enable the user to only view the resources without altering them. The aws_iam_group_policy_attachment resource is used to link the right policies to each of these groups to ensure the rights of users in those groups of respective roles. Also, the IAM policies for the DevOps and Developer groups are created with the aid of aws_iam_policy_document data source, which presents what activity is allowed and on what object. To this end, IAM configurations are the following to enforce security and access control: The users are arranged according to groupings with the least privileges to accomplish their work.

keyPair.tf: The keyPair.tf is designed to handle the creation of an SSH keypair in AWS which provides secure access to instances. It originally first creates a private key using the tls_private_key resource. The algorithm is set to "RSA" and the key size, rsa_bits is configured to 4096 bits though this is standard for RSA encryption.

Subsequently, the generated public key is utilized to construct an AWS EC2 key pair with the help of aws_key_pair resource. The key_name is "awsKey", and the public_key is taken from the previously created private key and should be taken using the public_key_openssh attribute. This key pair will be used to connect securely to instances of EC2 in the set infrastructure through SSH.

Lastly, the private key is printed to the console as a sensitive value by the use of the output block. The tls_private_key resource which has private_key_pem attribute contains the PEM encoded private key for SSH access to instances. The specific output of the private key is marked as sensitive = true so that whenever the output is printed in the console or log file, it doesn't pop out the value of the key. As shown below this setup is essential for secure and managed access to AWS instances with no requirement of password login.

locals.tf locals is a Terraform configuration element used for defining local values that can be used within the configuration file. It makes it possible to declare one copy of frequently used expressions and variables in order to improve the code readability and reusability.

In the first locals block a map named default_tags is created and contains key-value pairs for tags that will be assigned to the resources. These tags are populated iteratively depending on the values of the four global variables: var.application_name, var.tf_branch, var.owner, and var.tf_repo. This enables the tags to be flexibly and quickly adjusted with the view of identifying resources, setting the costs, and managing resources in AWS.

The second block assigns the value to the variable of log_level. This variable determines the log level by looking at the option environment variable. If the environment is "dev", then the log level is set to "DEBUG". This is because during development one wants as much log output as possible. For other environments like production, the log level is then set to "INFO" so that the log does not become very large. This approach assists in checking logging practices with a view of proactively deciding the extent of logs that should be generated based on whether they are in the development stage or the production phase.

Main.tf: In Terraform, the infrastructure components are defined In the main.tf file, resource types in the AWS are like VPCs, subnets and routing. The file starts with stubs that define necessary to import in AWS ecosystem providers ('aws' and 'awscc'). We are using 'awscc' provider, from the HashiCorp registry, for the AWS Cloud Control services, and the simple 'aws' provider to manage resources in AWS. These providers are given credentials and the region along with the feature that allows adding default tags to resources.

The file also contains a 'data "aws_availability_zones"' block that will readthe available availability zone in the given region. This must be done to achieve high availability and resource distribution across zones.

The main infrastructure components defined in this file include:

- **VPC ('aws_vpc.main'):** A Virtual Private Cloud is initiated with precise CIDR block and DNS-High support. The VPC has a tag assigned as "MySecureVPC".
- **Public Subnets ('aws_subnet.public'):** Many public subnets are set for which the CIDR block and availability zone are different for each subnet. For the subnets tagged as having mapPublicIpOnLaunch set to true, instances launched in those subnets will be assigned public IPs.
- **Private Subnets ('aws_subnet.private'):** Just like with private subnets, these are created and each comes with a CIDR block and availability zone.
- **Internet Gateway ('aws_internet_gateway.igw'):** Internet gateway is then created as the link to the Internet for instances residing on the public subnets.
- **Public Route Table ('aws_route_table.public'):** A route table is created for the public subnets that allowed to directing the traffic (0.0.0.0/0) to internet gateway.
- **Route Table Association ('aws_route_table_association.public_assoc'):** Each public subnet has its own public route table to allow the subnets to direct traffic to internet.

This configuration is crucial for obtaining secure connected and isolated network in AWS using dedicated subnets for public and private resources and proper routing to request Internet.

NAT.tf: The NAT.tf in the Terraform reflects NAT, which enables instances in private subnets to go online.. The first section of the following file describes the security group of the NAT instance that functions under the Ec2 service with the name ‘aws_security_group.nat_sg‘. This means that the NAT instance can accept any type of traffic because the inbound and outbound traffic are both from any IP address source (0.0.0.0/0). The ingress and egress rules are configured to permit all types of protocols as well as ports, hence enabling free communication between the instance and other parts of the network. This security group is appropriately named as NATInstanceSecurityGroup for easy tracing of the group.

The second part of the file defined the NAT itself as well as the resources related to the NAT and/or the subnet. The ‘aws_instance.nat‘ resource declares a NAT instance that is launched in a public subnet (‘aws_subnet.public[0]‘) from the specified Amazon Machine Image (AMI). The instance type is t2.nano, best for basic NAT operations. The option ‘source_dest_check‘ is set to ‘false‘ and that means that the instance will be able to route traffic. Also part of the automation, a user data script is added in order to forward IP and configure iptables for NAT. What we can Berk newer is to assign an Elastic IP (‘aws_eip.nat‘) to the NAT instance to provide fixed IP for outbound traffic. Lastly, the ‘aws_route_table.private‘ resource is used to setup a route table for the private subnets; where all instances are free to go out in the internet, but only through the NAT instance. The private subnets are then mapped to the route table so they can be able to use the NAT instance to access the internet.

outputs.tf: In the Terraform, the output.tf file contains a number of output variables for obtaining important information on the created resources in the infrastructure. The vpc_id returns the main VPC id which in some cases might be used to referring or double check the VPC that was created at the initial setup on Terraform. In the same manner, the public_subnets returns the IDs of all the public subnets through aws_subnet.public[*].id, the same as private_subnets returns the IDs of all private subnets through aws_subnet.private[*].id. These outputs make it easier for the user to get back the subnet IDs for future use or to combine with other configuration.

Also, the file comprises outputs periodically as well as for particular examples in the infrastructure. The output of the nat_instance_id is the identification number of the NAT instance is required for directing Internet traffic from the private subnets. In the bastion_host_id output you denote the ID of Bastion Host instance which is often used for reaching instances located in private subnets protected with firewalls etc. These outputs are essential for handling and accessing certain resources in the environment, allowing users to bespoke their topologies once the Terraform plan has been worked out.

securityGroups.tf: In Terraform, securityGroups.tf looks at multiple security groups within a Virtual Private Cloud (VPC) and each layer contains different access rules.

The aws_security_group.database_sg resource is to create and manage access to the database servers to allow only traffic from the private_app_sg SG. It brings permission for MySQL (TCP port 3306), Postgresql (TCP port 5432) and Oracle (TCP port 1521) inbound connection while all outbound connection are restricted unless and until not specifically allowed for security purposes. The aws_security_group.private_app_sg is used to control the traffic that is allowed to go to application servers in a private subnet. This security group allows HTTP 80 and HTTPS 443 from the public_web_sg security group; only traffic on public web servers will be allowed in, while outgoing is allowed for updates and services.

The aws_security_group.load_balancer_sg provides control on the load balancer where inbound http(80) and https(443) connections are permitted from any where on internet. The security group also allows any outbound access to all destinations which is a standard best practice in load balancers. Finally, the aws_security_group.public_web_sg resource is defined for group associating the public web servers allowing 'http and https' from sg of load balancer to allow only the traffic from load balancer to reach to the public web servers. All security group are tagged, making them easy to recognize based on their function for instance; DatabaseSG, PrivateAppSG, LoadBalancerSG, PublicWebSG. These security groups remain paramount for ensuring communication between the layers of the infrastructure is safe when applying the principle of least privilege.

variables.tf Variables are created using the input variables block in the 'variables. tf' file allows for input parameters and values to be set allowing for elasticity as a module may be used by multiple users all with different resource requirements. This includes metadata variables that enable tagging and/or organization of resources based on the owner, the team, or the application name. Other key inputs provide details of environment configurations like region, environment etc., and network CIDR block for VPC and for public and private subnets like vpc_cidr, public_subnet_cidrs and private_subnet_cidrs. Security-related parameters like 'allowed_ssh_cidr', 'aws_access_key', 'aws_secret_key', and 'aws_session_token' keep the AWS resources mostly open.

6 Evaluation

The proposed study is thoroughly reviewed in a critical evaluation using the various evaluation methods to determine whether the objectives have been achieved. It is about assessing the system's performance limits and considering design trade-offs.

6.1 Experiment 1: Time Comparison - Manual vs Automated Networking Infrastructure Creation

Objective: To evaluate and compare the time required to create networking infrastructure (1 VPC, 2 VPCs and 3 VPCs, each VPC having 3 subnets, Bastion host, NAT gateway, security groups, and route tables) using manual setup versus automated setup with Terraform.

Setup: For this experiment, the AWS networking components were configured manually using the AWS Management Console. In which the time taken involves transit between services, and confirmation reliances and settings, and making applications. For the rest of the procedure the already designed Terraform configuration files were baseline and I deployed them using the terraform apply command. For this part the time measured within this includes resources such as Terraform resource planning, creating, and validation. The time taken for each setup was calculated and is tabulated in table 1. Results are shown in Table 1 and in Figure 4.

Observations:

As the data provided shows, automation with the help of Terraform allows for a three times faster configuration of networking infrastructure in AWS. In all configurations, the time saved by the automated approach exceeded 75%; with more complex configurations saving more time. Terraform saved an average of 35 minutes (around 77.78%) of setup

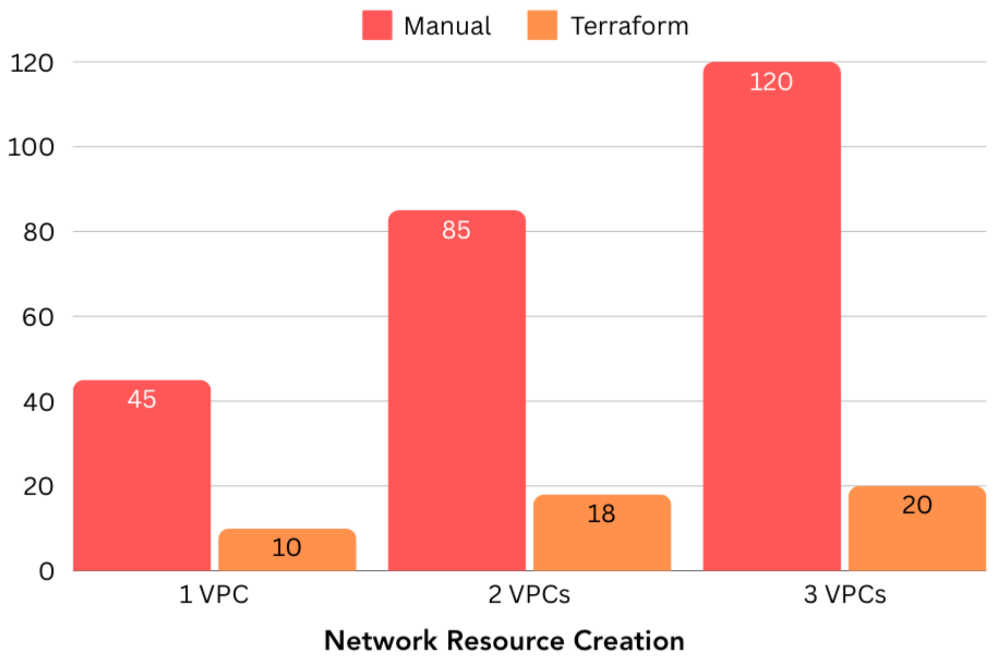


Figure 4: Time Taken for Networking Infrastructure Creation

Configuration	Manual Setup (min)	Terraform Setup (min)	Time Saved (min)	% Time Reduced
1 VPC (3 Subnets)	45	10	35	77.78%
1 VPC with Bastion, NAT	80	17	65	78.75%
2 VPCs (Each 3 Subnets)	85	18	67	78.82%
2 VPCs with Bastion, NAT	120	23	97	80.83%
3 VPCs (Each 3 Subnets)	120	20	100	83.33%
3 VPCs with Bastion, NAT	140	25	115	82.14%

Table 1: Time Taken for Networking Infrastructure Creation

time for a single VPC with basic network components of 3 subnets. This trend continued as more components like Bastion hosts and NAT gateways were included making the total time be 65 minutes (78.75%).

The improvement was even more significant when multiple Virtual Private Clouds were connected, which is shown below. For example, in the case of the 3 VPCs and Bastion hosts configuration, Terraform yielded 82.14% time reduction which is 115 minutes when compared to manual work These results highlight the effectiveness of Terraform in large topology configurations and its capacity to manage them with virtually no direct human intervention. These are explained by the fact that Terraform is declarative and as a result, it minimizes resource provision and the general manual processes that are repetitive in nature.

Also, manual setup is uneconomical, largely due to the time and efforts involved and more so with the rise of large and complicated configurations, hence the importance of automation. The greatest time saving of 83.33% percent used in the experiment was however demonstrated in the 3 VPCs (Each with 3 Subnets) topology which indicates that, as the number of components increases, benefits of automation increases as well. This shows that Terraform is used where there is a need to provision infrastructure quickly, where there is need to have consistent and reproducible infrastructures.

Resource Configuration	Manual Setup (min)	Terraform Setup (min)	Time Saved (min)	% Time Reduced
IAM Groups with Policies (Admin, DevOps, Developer, ReadOnly)	60	15	45	75.00%
Security-Focused Roles (Auditor, DB Admin)	90	25	65	72.22%
Password Policy Enforcement	15	5	10	66.67%
Total	165	45	120	72.73%

Table 2: Time Taken for Resource Creation

6.2 Experiment 2: Time Comparison for Resource Creation - Manual vs Automated

Objective: Evaluate and compare the time required to create and configure IAM groups, roles, policies, and security enhancements using manual setup versus automated setup with Terraform.

Setup: Defined each resource with the AWS Management Console to conform with dependencies such as using policies and linking them to groups and roles. Measures of time involves aspects such as; Wayfinding, data entry checks, solving errors displayed on the console. On the other hand for the automated infrastructure planning defined the resources using Terraform scripts and ran the terraform apply command. The definitions of time measured include planning, implementation of such an infrastructure, and the validation of the same. Results are shown in Table 2 and in Figure 5.

Observations:

The outcome of the experiment depicts the effectiveness of using Terraform to minimize the time taken in developing and developing IAM resources as compared to manual setting up. In all the resource scenarios, Terraform was enabling setup time savings over 65%, with the highest noted improvements being obtained in cases where policy and role management were complicated.

For instance, IAM groups with related policies (Admin, DevOps, Developer, ReadOnly) consumed about 60 minutes for creating it by hand and Terraform did it 15 minutes only, hence, saving 45 minutes, which is (75% of time saved). The significant improvement is made by Terraform's approach of 'declare what you want to happen' where policies are created and attached just as automatically, without having to navigate the AWS Management Console and minimise human error.

The development of security-oriented positions (Auditor and Database Administrator) also revealed the benefits of automation processes. Another 90 minutes went into manual setting up as the JSON-based policies and role dependencies are not as intuitive as one would expect. However, using Terraform, the time taken to achieve this was just twenty-five minutes hence a reduction of 72.22% compared to the manual methods. Likewise, for setting up a policy whereby passwords could not remain the same, Terraform saved time by 6/7 or extremely close to a third of the time it would have taken to achieve this manually, which clocked in at 5 minutes. In general, the experiment proves effectiveness of the scaling by Terraform, which manages IAM configurations. Thus as the resources get even more complicated, the time differences become even more significant in showing the ability of Terraform as a key resource in ensuring efficiency and standard development of infrastructure. It not only enhances the speed of resource provisioning but also adds reliability to the task with decreased operational overhead on manual configurations.

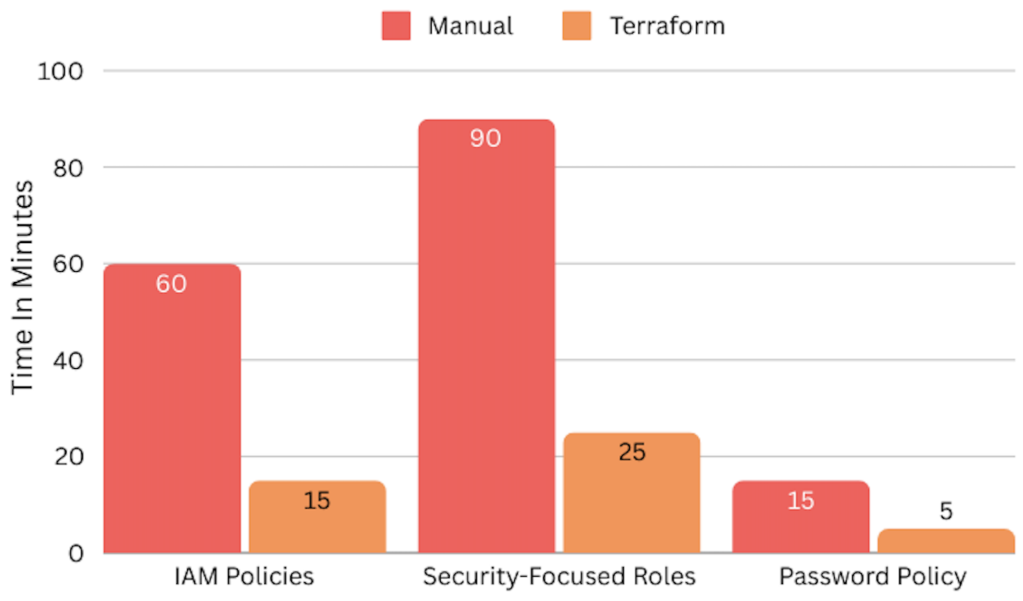


Figure 5: Time Taken for Resource Creation

6.3 Experiment 3: Accuracy of Resource Creation – in Manual vs Automated Processes

Objective: Evaluate the accuracy of resources created using manual setup versus automated setup with Terraform by analyzing the number of mistakes and failures encountered during the creation of the entire infrastructure.

Setup: In Manual Setup resources were created separately by going through the AWS Management Console. These comprised of; misconfigured parameters: resources that failed to meet the required parameter settings Missing dependencies, Incorrect policy attachments: when a resource action was not properly attached to a specific policy, rejections were instances where the resources could not be created they required multiple tries due to errors. Meanwhile for Automated Setup (Terraform) Infrastructure was Provisioned through the Terraform scripts with specifications as defined above. Others were mistakes made when writing scripts in Terraform (e.g. syntax errors) or when identifying resources that needed to be dependent on another in the early stages of planning a project. Issues were defined as situations when the Terraform plan or apply stopped with an error, and further action was needed in the script. Results are shown in Table 3 and in Figure 6

Observations:
1. Higher Accuracy with Terraform: Automated setup success using Terraform was higher at 96% compared to the success rate of manual setup at 74%. This improvement can be attributed to Terraform where configuration can be validated during the planning step before the creation of any resource.
2. Reduction in Mistakes: Manual setup introduced 8 errors, caused by misconfiguration and wrong dependencies, some policies and resources were attached to instances of another tenancy. Terraform was able to get this down to just 2 mistakes – these were minimal script mistakes that were made when the process was being tested for the first

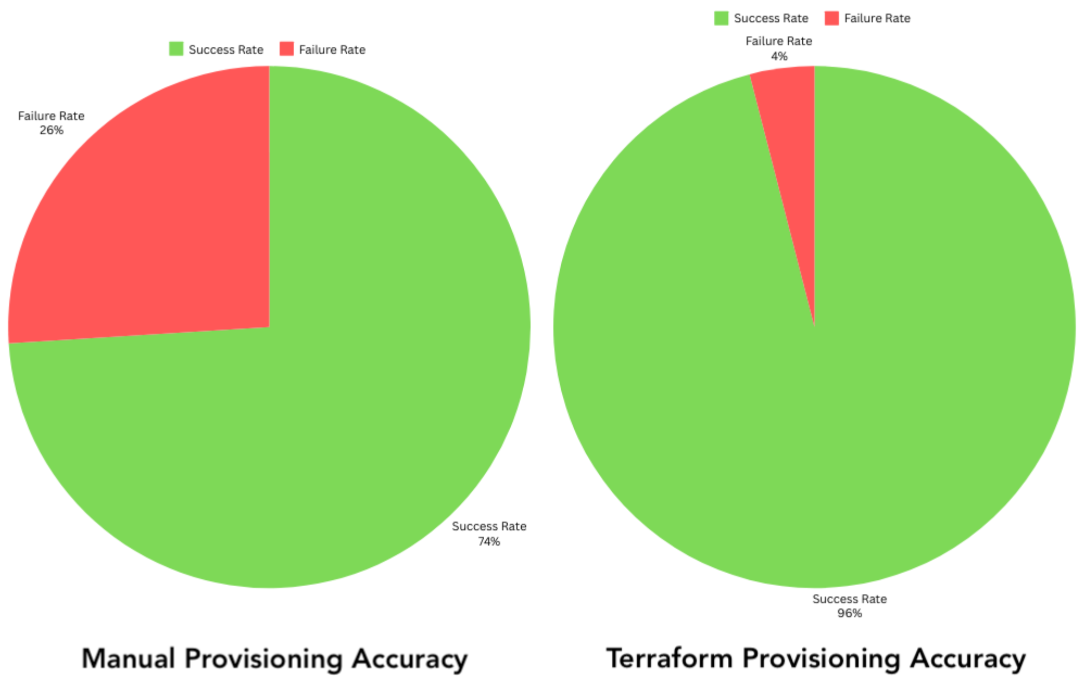


Figure 6: Accuracy Analysis of Resource Creation

Metric	Manual Setup (min)	Terraform Setup (min)	Improvement
Total Resources Attempted	50	50	-
Mistakes (Misconfigurations)	8	1	87.50%
Failures (Failed Resources)	5	1	80.00%
Success Rate (%)	74%	96%	+22%

Table 3: **Accuracy Analysis of Resource Creation**

time.
3. Fewer Failures: This was significantly lower than the failures we encountered in other manual attempts (5 failures). Terraform had inbuilt features of failure feedback handling and dependency tracking which helped to ensure that the resources were only created in the right sequence, helping to avoid several failures.
4. Error Correction Efficiency: During manual setup most problems took considerable amount of time before being solved because to trace errors during setup it involved guesswork. The iterative process of the state, apply and the validation done in Terraform helped correct errors more efficiently and quicker.

6.4 Experiment 4: Network Connectivity Testing for Infrastructure Components

Objective: Evaluate the network connectivity of the created AWS infrastructure to verify expected behaviour for the networking components such as private instance, public instance, NAT gateway, and bastion host. Results of this experiment are tabulated in Table 4

Observations:
1. Private Instance: NAT Gateway was engaged to successfully provide an internet

Component	Expected Behavior	Actual Behavior	Success (%)	Issues Observed
Private Instance	Internet access via NAT Gateway only	Internet accessible as expected	100%	None
Public Instance	Direct internet access via Internet Gateway	Internet accessible as expected	100%	None
NAT Gateway	Routes internet traffic from private instances	Correct routing verified	100%	None
Bastion Host	SSH access to private instances	Secure access confirmed	100%	None
Overall	**All components functioned as expected**		**100%**	**None**

Table 4: **Network Connectivity Test Results**

connection while maintaining the private instance offline from internet access. Routing configurations and security groups proved to function as planned.
2. Public Instance: The public instance used the Internet Gateway directly to connect to the Internet without any hitches.
3. NAT Gateway: All traffic outgoing to Private instances was going through the correct route table confirming the correctness of the above route tables.
4. Bastion Host: Accessing the private instance through SSH was done using the Bastion Host to ensure it was well-placed and configured.

6.5 Experiment 5: Assessing Infrastructure Security Features

Objective: Assess and validate the security features implemented in the AWS infrastructure, focusing on IAM configurations, network control mechanisms, and other security-enhancing elements such as encryption, monitoring, and secure instance access. Results of this experiment are tabulated in Table 5

Observations:
1. IAM Security: Additional policy assigned to the groups (Admin, DevOps, Developers, ReadOnly) kept limiting access privilege as a principle. Specific changes such as role or users removal were specifically prohibited due to their sensitive nature.
2. Network Control: Individual instances, were limited from direct connection with Internet however they could be accessed in a restricted form through the available methods such as Bastion Host and NAT Gateway. Security Groups, that were set up organsilaterally, were adjusting to allow only desirable incoming and outgoing traffics in order to reduce the opportunities for attacks.
3. Monitoring and Logging: Many resources' utilization, activity in IAM, and any changes in the configurations were recorded by CloudTrail and CloudWatch. Key events were documented and the logs were checked for validation to assess whether there are security incidents that emerged.
4. Encryption: For S3 buckets, RDS DBs data, and EBS volumes data, it was encrypted at rest. Terraform scripts in this case made default encryption policies stay enforced to make data more secure without much effort.
5. Scalability and Modularity: Security Group referencing proved appropriate in handling dependencies by allowing Resource Scalability and modularity for different resources to be set.

6.6 Discussion (Evaluation Section)

The evaluation reveals significant benefits of using Terraform for automating AWS infrastructure:

- **Efficiency and Time Savings**: Through automation systems achieved over 75%

Security Feature	Implementation	Status	Remarks(%)
IAM Groups and Policies	Least privilege principle enforced	Implemented	Verified group-specific custom policies.
Network Access Control	Security Groups restrict access based on ports/IP	Implemented	Configured precise rules for public/private access.
Subnet Isolation	Public and private subnets segregated	Implemented	Private instances accessible only via NAT/Bastion.
Bastion Host	Enables SSH access to private resources	Implemented	Configured with restrictive security group rules.
NAT Gateway	Routes internet traffic for private instances	Implemented	Ensures private resources are not directly exposed.
Monitoring and Logging	CloudTrail and CloudWatch enabled	Implemented	Logs verified for IAM, network activity, and changes.
Data Encryption	S3, RDS, and EBS volumes encrypted	Implemented	Default encryption policies applied where possible using KMS.
Security Group Referencing	Cascading rules applied for modular configurations	Implemented	Simplified and optimized using Terraform modules.
Password Policy	Enforced strong password rules	Implemented	Validated policy compliance via Terraform outputs.

Table 5: **Security Feature Evaluation**

reduced setup durations which significantly benefits complex VPC configurations with multiple components. Terraform demonstrates capable deployment at scale.

• **Enhanced Accuracy:** Terraform's declarative syntax decreases human mistakes so setups with declarative syntax have a 87.5

• **Security Integration:** Security best practices (including IAM and encryption along with network segmentation) integrated within Terraform help organizations fulfil compliance requirements and safeguard against mistakes made through traditional manual methods.

• **Scalability for SMEs:** The modular design of configurations provides businesses with cost savings through resource reuse capability as well as secure scalability opportunities throughout their development phases.

• **Strategic Cloud Adoption:** SMC companies use Terraform to simplify their journey to the cloud through streamlined technical interface management and risk-controlled procedural implementation that demands low extra cost.

7 Conclusion and Future Work

This work focuses on optimising the infrastructure orchestration to be automated, secure, and compliant with Terraform as tool and presents a radical shift in managing cloud resources. Based on the strengths offered by Terraform in the use of IaC, the research also proposes a framework to minimise human interference in operations on cloud infrastructure. The adoption of Terraform also shows improved and optimized speed plus repeatable and scalable infrastructure with security compliance.

The generally automated management of infrastructure applied in this thesis has established that operational efficiency increases through minimal human error and scaled down costs while embracing better security measures. Due to the ability to use the plugin with different cloud providers and compliance tools such as AWS Config, AWS IAM, custom policies, Terraform can be considered as a perfect tool for organizations that want to keep their cloud environments compliant. In addition, security checks which occur automatically and real-time compliance validation allows risk management in complex cloud environment.

However, some of the challenges which were met include; Scale and management of state for Terraform in large scale environments and Integration of multi-cloud orchestration with Terraform. Such difficulties stress the need for additional research and enhancements to the majority of Terraform outputs and integration features that would work well in rather complex scenarios.

The future work on automating secure and compliant Infrastructure as Code using Terraform should continue to be directed to the development and improvement of multi-cloud orchestration. While today Terraform has some multi-cloud capabilities in its basic set, it can be stated that its integration could be developed better to provide the opportunity to manage heterogeneous environments. More specifically, research could be focused on the development of flexible abstractions for early module standardization to facilitate and enhance the operational agility of resource deployment and management across multiple cloud providers, yet without compromising the vendor lock-in factor Research could also be funnelled into the assimilation of machine learning models for security and compliance checks, and for online conception of Terraform-style infrastructural management and deployment.

There is also one more perspective direction for development in the future, which is related to the optimisation of state management within the Terraform. It shows that dealing with huge Terraform state is hard when the infrastructure is complicated. Possibly using TE or using other tools, improving solutions for distributed state management could address the issue introduced by increasing infrastructure sizes and improve cooperation between different teams. Studies of factors that potentially enhance performance of teams overseeing big structures enhance operations.

System Performance Compared to Other Studies
Performance Benefits:

• It provided up to 83% improved setup time as compared to the time taken to set up tools manually.

• The number of errors reduced up to a 96% success rate of Terraform set up against the 74% for the manual configuration.

Comparison with Other Studies:

• After this research, most of the manual methods were beaten and other studies as it combined efficiency with integrated security and compliance policies.

• The research also demonstrated the efficacy of scaling infrastructures for SMEs, which is not well discussed in most of the research.

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