



Optimistic and Zero-Knowledge Rollups

Understanding blockchain

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1. Introduction

The emergence and widespread adoption of blockchain technology has revealed a fundamental structural limitation: scalability. Along with decentralization and security, scalability is one of the three fundamental components of the blockchain trilemma. The trilemma states that a blockchain system can only optimize two of these three properties at the same time, forcing designers to accept trade-offs in performance or trust assumptions.

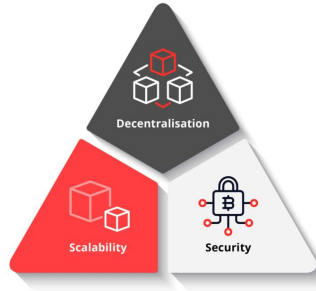


Figure 1: The blockchain trilemma

Interestingly, scalability challenges are not unique to blockchain systems. Traditional database architectures have long faced a comparable tension, often described as the CAP Theorem. Even though applied to different technologies, both frameworks highlight the same underlying idea: achieving perfect performance, resilience and correctness at the same time is structurally difficult, and often impossible.

Blockchain scalability can thus be understood not as an isolated limitation, but as the continuation of a broader historical challenge in distributed systems.

There are two main strategies to improve blockchain scalability. The first one is to modify the underlying blockchain architecture (Layer1, or L1). The second is to implement a second layer (L2) consisting of auxiliary technologies built on top of L1.

Among L2 solutions, Rollups (and in particular Optimistic Rollups and Zero-Knowledge Rollups) have gained central importance because they shift most computational load off-chain while preserving the security guaranteed by Layer 1.

This document examines the technical and functional characteristics of both approaches and discusses their differences, advantages and limitations, as well as potential adoption scenarios. The goal is to assess how these mechanisms contribute to addressing the scalability challenge and to evaluate the extent to which they can offer a viable path toward more efficient and widely deployable blockchain systems.