Prototype Pollution

Affecting nconf package, versions **<0.11.4**

Snyk CVSS

Exploit Maturity **Proof of concept**

Attack Complexity **Low**

See more

INTRODUCED: 7 FEB 2022 CVE-2022-21803

CWE-1321 FIRST ADDED BY SNYK

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How to fix?

Upgrade `nconf` to version 0.11.4 or higher.

Overview

nconf is a Hierarchical node.js configuration with files, environment variables, command-line arguments, and atomic object merging.

Affected versions of this package are vulnerable to Prototype Pollution. When using the `memory` engine, it is possible to store a nested JSON representation of the configuration. The `.set()` function, that is responsible for setting the configuration properties, is vulnerable to Prototype Pollution. By providing a crafted property, it is possible to modify the properties on the `Object.prototype` .

PoC

```
const nconf = require('nconf');
nconf.use('memory') console.log({}.polluted)
nconf.set('__proto__:polluted', 'yes')
console.log({}.polluted)
```

NVD 7.5 HIGH

Do your applications use this vulnerable package?

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Details

Prototype Pollution is a vulnerability affecting JavaScript. Prototype Pollution refers to the ability to inject properties into existing JavaScript language construct prototypes, such as objects. JavaScript allows all Object attributes to be altered, including their magical attributes such as `__proto__`, `constructor` and `prototype`. An attacker manipulates these attributes to overwrite, or pollute, a JavaScript application object prototype of the base object by injecting other values. Properties on the `Object.prototype` are then inherited by all the JavaScript objects through the prototype chain. When that happens, this leads to either denial of service by triggering JavaScript exceptions, or it tampers with the application source code to force the code path that the attacker injects, thereby leading to remote code execution.

There are two main ways in which the pollution of prototypes occurs:

- Unsafe `Object` recursive merge
- Property definition by path

Unsafe Object recursive merge

The logic of a vulnerable recursive merge function follows the following high-level model:

```
merge (target, source)
foreach property of source

  if property exists and is an object on both the target and the
  source merge(target[property], source[property]) else
  target[property] = source[property]
```

When the source object contains a property named `__proto__` defined with `Object.defineProperty()`, the condition that checks if the property exists and is an object on both the target and the source passes and the merge recurses with the target, being the prototype of `Object` and the source of `Object` as defined by the attacker. Properties are then copied on the `Object` prototype.

Clone operations are a special sub-class of unsafe recursive merges, which occur when a recursive merge is conducted on an empty object: `merge({},source)`.

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Credit **Alessio Della Libera of Snyk Research Team**

`lodash` and `Hoek` are examples of libraries susceptible to recursive merge attacks.

Property definition by path

There are a few JavaScript libraries that use an API to define property values on an object based on a given path. The function that is generally affected contains this signature: `theFunction(object, path, value)`

If the attacker can control the value of "path", they can set this value to `__proto__.myValue`. `myValue` is then assigned to the prototype of the class of the object.

Types of attacks

There are a few methods by which Prototype Pollution can be manipulated:

Type	Origin	Short description
Denial of service (DoS)	Client	This is the most likely attack. DoS occurs when `Object` holds generic functions that are implicitly called for various operations (for example, `toString` and `valueOf`). The attacker pollutes `Object.prototype.someattr` and alters its state to an unexpected value such as `Int` or `Object`. In this case, the code fails and is likely to cause a denial of service. **For example:** if an attacker pollutes `Object.prototype.toString` by defining it as an integer, if the codebase at any point was reliant on `someobject.toString()` it would fail.

Type	Origin	Short description
Remote Code Execution	Client	Remote code execution is generally only possible in cases where the codebase evaluates a specific attribute of an object, and then executes that evaluation. **For example:** `eval(someobject.someattr)`. In this case, if the attacker pollutes `Object.prototype.someattr` they are likely to be able to leverage this in order to execute code.
Property Injection	Client	The attacker pollutes properties that the codebase relies on for their informative value, including security properties such as cookies or tokens. **For example:** if a codebase checks privileges for `someuser.isAdmin`, then when the attacker pollutes `Object.prototype.isAdmin` and sets it to equal `true`, they can then achieve admin privileges.

Affected environments

The following environments are susceptible to a Prototype Pollution attack:

- Application server
- Web server
- Web browser

How to prevent

1. Freeze the prototype— use `Object.freeze (Object.prototype)`.
2. Require schema validation of JSON input.
3. Avoid using unsafe recursive merge functions.
4. Consider using objects without prototypes (for example, `Object.create(null)`), breaking the prototype chain and preventing pollution.
5. As a best practice use `Map` instead of `Object`.

For more information on this vulnerability type:

Arteau, Oliver. “JavaScript prototype pollution attack in NodeJS application.” GitHub, 26 May 2018

References

- GitHub PR
- GitHub Release

Press Kit

Events

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