Why Vulnerabilities are Hard to Eliminate

UT CS361S

FALL 2021

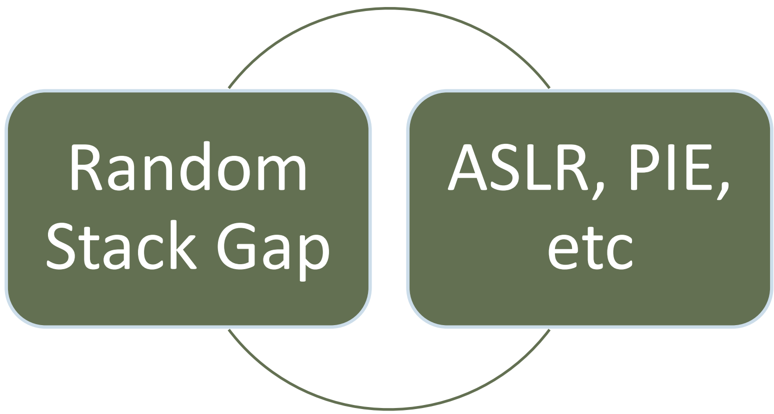
LECTURE NOTES

Make it harder to control a subverted flow

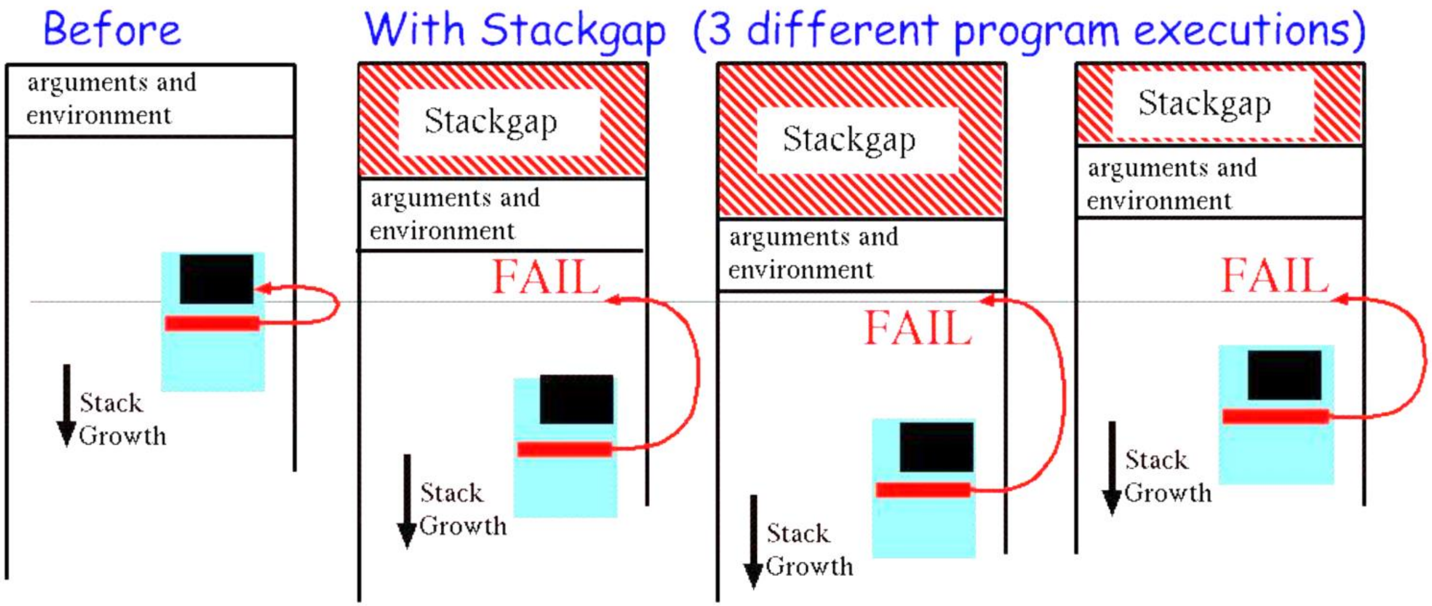
Make taking control of the flow innocuous

Make it harder to get control of the flow

Disrupting Exploitative Operations



Random Stack Gap



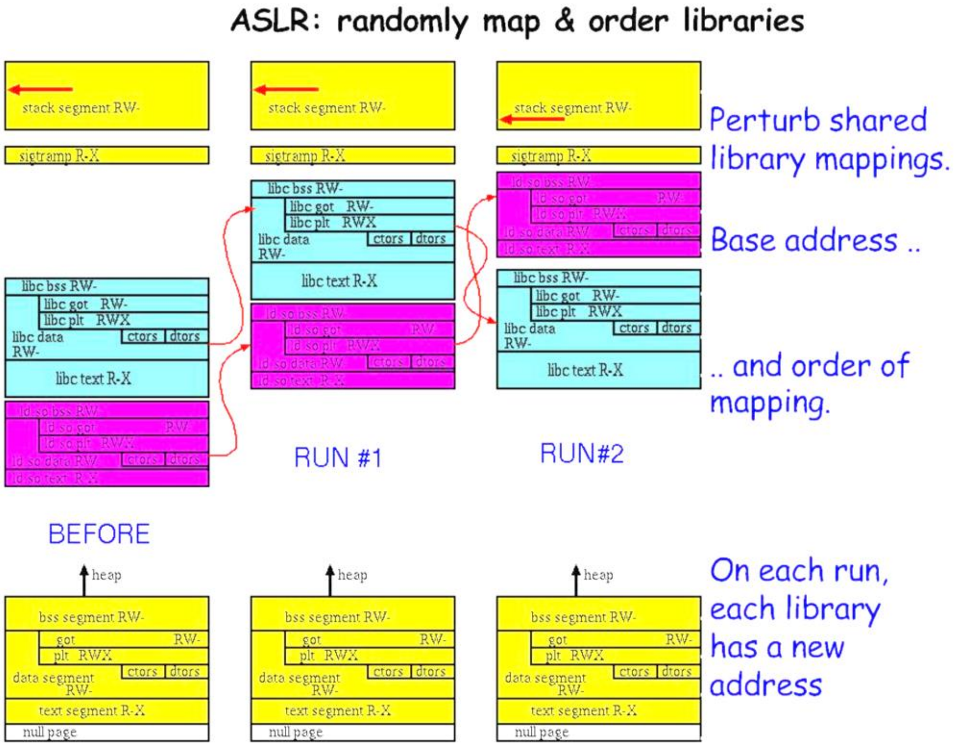
ASLR

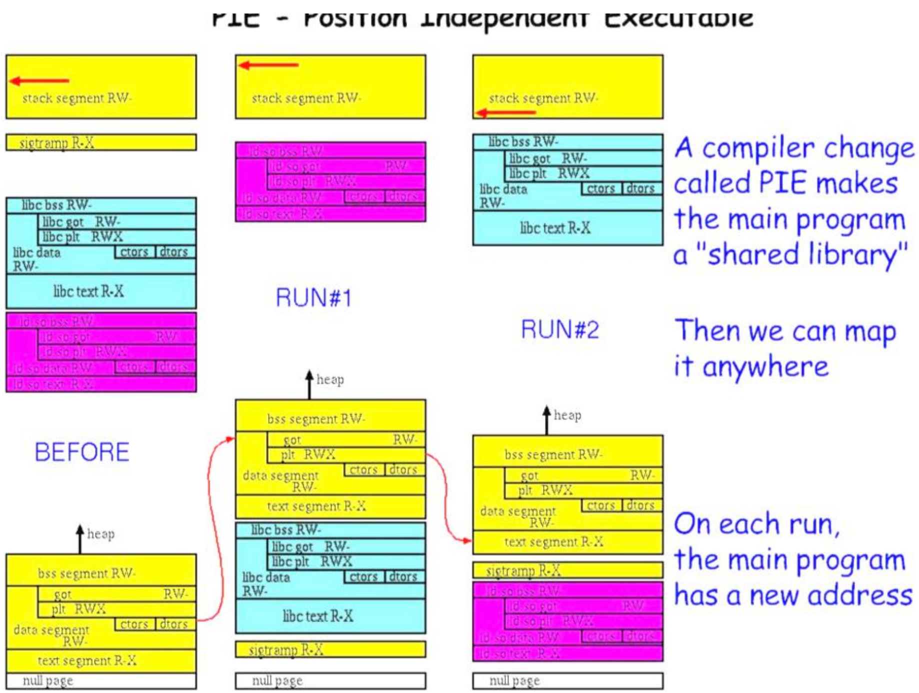
Address Space Layout Randomization

Subversion usually needs to know memory layout

General goal: make layout unpredictable

Start With Libraries





Add Executables

Finally, Dynamic Allocations

mmap

malloc

Limitations of ASLR

1. **Boot-time based randomization**
2. **Unsupported executables/libraries, low-entropy.**
3. **ASLR does not *trap* the attack**
4. **ASLR does not alert in a case of an attack**
5. **ASLR does not *provide information* about an attack**
6. **ASLR is being bypassed by exploits daily**

Posted by **MORDECHAI GURI, PH.D.** on December 17, 2015

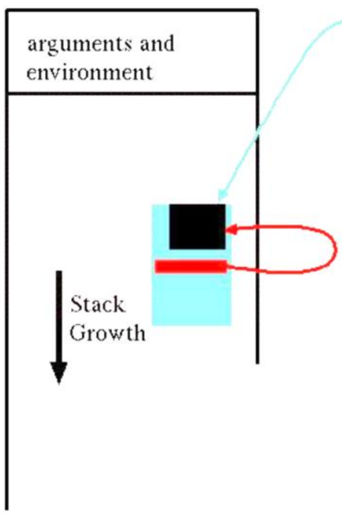
Making Violations Less Dangerous

W^X Permissions

rodata

W|x Permissions

Many bugs are exploitable because the address space has memory that is both writeable and executable (permissions = W | X)



this location has to be executable for the exploit to work

We could make the stack non-executable...

Hmmmm... how about a generic policy for the whole address space:

A page may be either writeable or executable, but not both (unless the program specifically requests)

We call this policy W ^ X (W xor X)

Executable Stacks

This is what static executables used to look like in memory.

The stack has a piece of executable called the "signal trampoline"

First problem: The stack is executable

What is this?

5.6 Returning from a signal handler

When the program was interrupted by a signal, its status (including all integer and floating point registers) was saved, to be restored just before execution continues at the point of interruption.

This means that the return from the signal handler is more complicated than an arbitrary procedure return - the saved state must be restored.

To this end, the kernel arranges that the return from the signal handler causes a jump to a short code sequence (sometimes called *trampoline*) that executes a `sigreturn()` system call. This system call takes care of everything.

In the old days the trampoline lived on the stack, but nowadays (since 2.5.69) we have a trampoline in the vsyscall page, so that this trampoline no longer is an obstacle in case one wants a non-executable stack.

Linux Trampoline?

Linux Trampoline!!!

No-execute stacks [edit]

Some implementations of trampolines cause a loss of no-execute stacks (NX stack). In the GNU Compiler Collection (GCC) in particular, a nested function builds a trampoline on the stack at runtime, and then calls the nested function through the data on stack. The trampoline requires the stack to be executable.

No execute stacks and nested functions are mutually exclusive under GCC. If a nested function is used in the development of a program, then the NX stack is silently lost. GCC offers the `-Wtrampoline` warning to alert of the condition.

Software engineered using secure development lifecycle often do not allow the use of nested functions due to the loss of NX stacks.[11]

.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trampoline_(computing)#No-execute_stacks

The .rodata Segment

W^X Transition: The .rodata segment

Readonly strings and pointers were stored in the .text segment: X | R

Meaning const data could be executed (could be code an attacker could use as ROP payload)

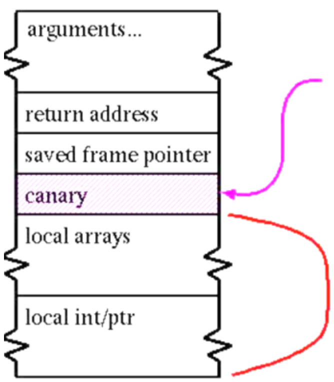
Solution: start using the ELF .rodata segment

These objects are now only R, lost their X permission

Greater policy: "minimal set of permissions"

Finally, Blocking Exploits

Stack Protector



A typical stack frame...

Random value is inserted here by function prologue ...

... and checked by function epilogue

Reordering: Arrays (strings) placed closer to random value -- integers and pointers placed further away

-fstack-protector-all compiled system is 1.3% slower at make build

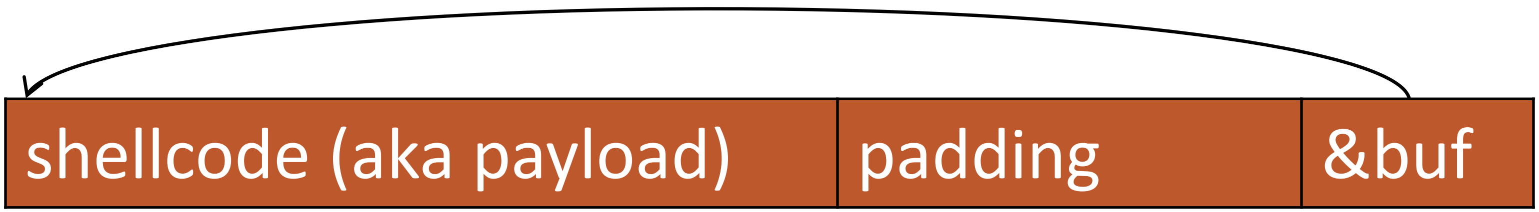
return-oriented programming

David Brumley

Carnegie Mellon University

Credit: Some slides from Ed Schwartz

Control Flow Hijack: Always control + computation



computation + ***control***

```
"\x31\xc9\xf7\xe1\x51\x68\x2f\x2f”
"\x73\x68\x68\x2f\x62\x69\x6e\x89”
"\xe3\xb0\x0b\xcd\x80”;
```

Previously: Executable code as input

Control Flow Hijack: Always control + computation

shellcode (aka payload)	padding	&buf

computation + ***control***

Today: Return Oriented Programming
Execution without injecting code

ROP Overview

Idea:

We forge shell code out of existing application logic gadgets

Requirements:

vulnerability + gadgets + some *unrandomized* code
(we need to know the addresses of gadgets)

Technically, *PREDICTABLE*

Motivation: Return-to-libc Attack

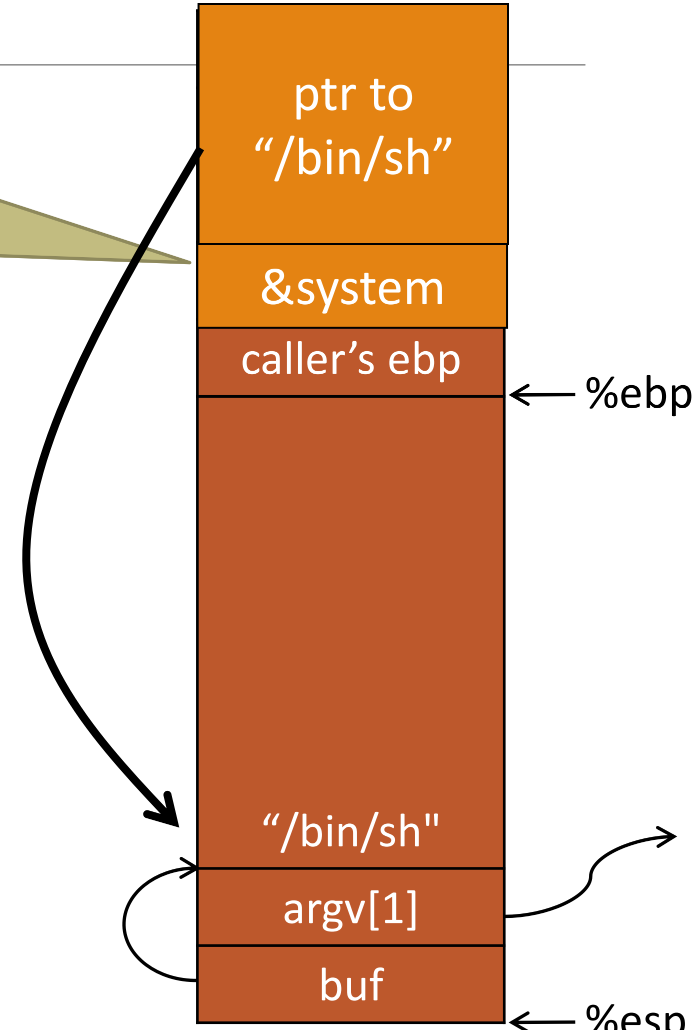
ret transfers control to `system`, which finds arguments on stack

Overwrite return address with *address* of libc function

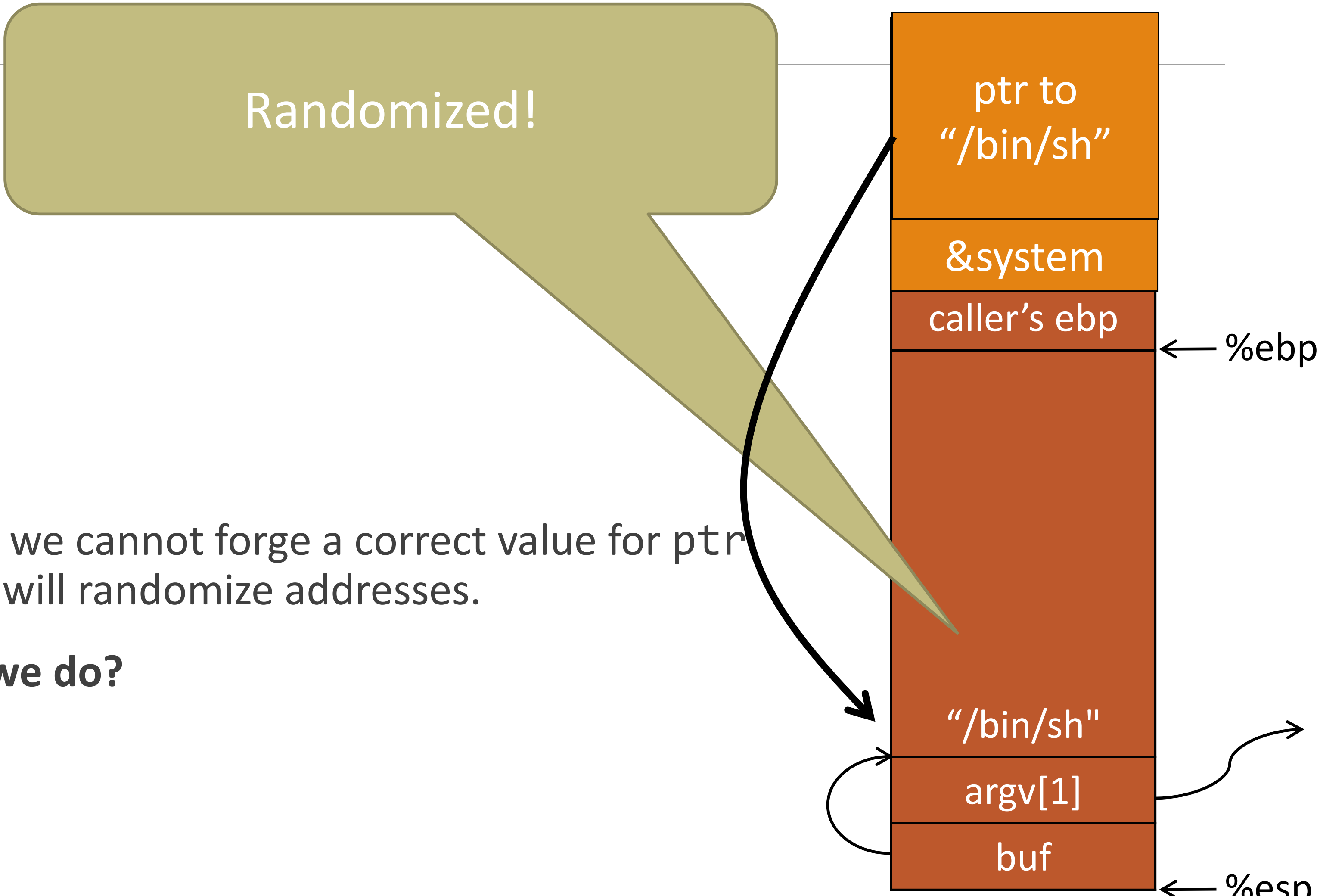
setup fake return address and argument(s)

`ret` will "call" libc function

No injected code!

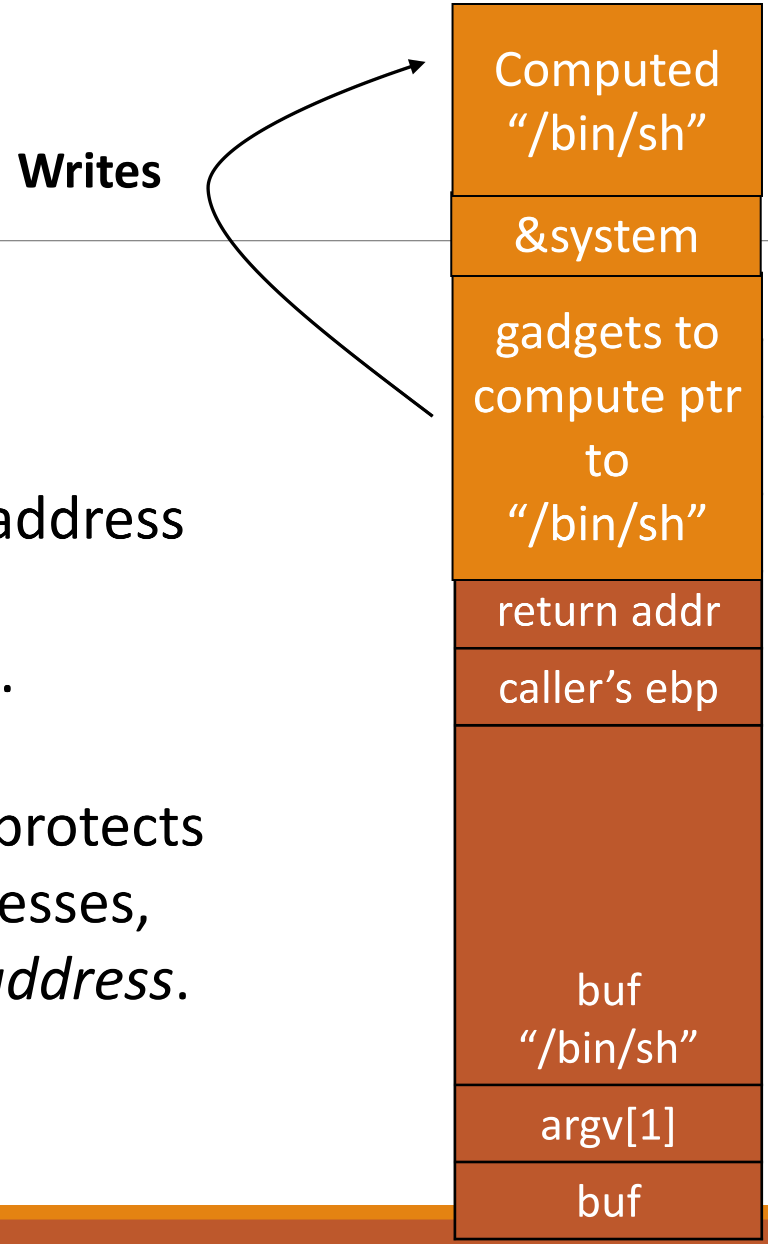


Question



With ASLR, we cannot forge a correct value for `ptr` since ASLR will randomize addresses.

What can we do?



Idea!

Get a copy of ESP to calculate address of
“/bin/sh” on randomized stack.

This works because ASLR only protects against knowing *absolute* addresses, while we will find it’s *relative address*.

Return Chaining

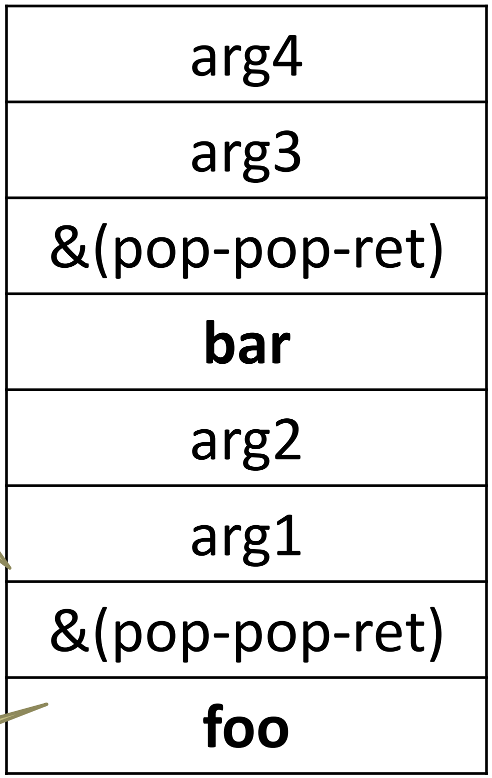
Suppose we want to call 2 functions in our exploit:

foo(arg1, arg2)
bar(arg3, arg4)

Stack unwinds up

First function returns into code to advance stack pointer

- e.g., pop; pop; ret



What does this do?

Overwritten ret addr

Return Chaining

When **foo** is executing, &pop-pop-ret is at the saved EIP slot.

When **foo** returns, it executes pop-pop-ret to clear up arg1 (pop), arg2 (pop), and transfer control to **bar** (ret)

arg4
arg3
&(pop-pop-ret)
bar
arg2
arg1
&(pop-pop-ret)
foo

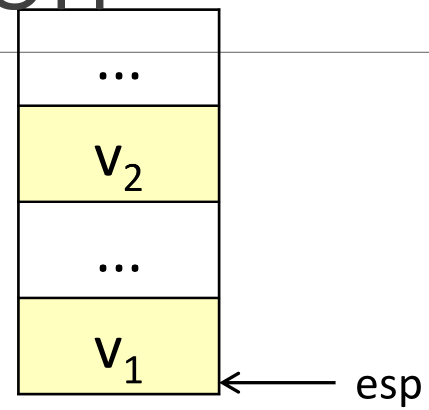
There are many *semantically equivalent* ways to achieve the same net shellcode effect

Let’s practice thinking in gadgets

An example operation

`Mem[v2] = v1`

Desired Logic



Stack

a_1: `mov eax, [esp] ; eax has v1`

a_2: `mov ebx, [esp+8] ; ebx has v2`

a_3: `mov [ebx], eax ; Mem[v2] = eax`

Implementation 1

implementing with gadgets

Suppose a_5 and a_3 on stack

```
Mem[v2] = v1
```

Desired Logic

Stack	
a_5	
v_2	
a_3	
v_1	← esp

Stack

eax	v_1
ebx	
eip	a_1

a_1: pop eax
a_2: ret
a_3: pop ebx
a_4: ret
a_5: mov [ebx], eax

Implementation 2

implementing with gadgets

`Mem[v2] = v1`

Desired Logic

a_5
v_2
a_3
v_1

esp

Stack

eax	v_1
ebx	
eip	a_3

```
a1: pop eax
a2: ret
a3: pop ebx
a4: ret
a5: mov [ebx], eax
```

Implementation 2

implementing with gadgets

Mem[v2] = v1

Desired Logic

a_5
v_2
a_3
v_1

esp

Stack

eax	v_1
ebx	v_2
eip	a_3

a_1: pop eax
a_2: ret
a_3: pop ebx
a_4: ret
a_5: mov [ebx], eax

Implementation 2

implementing with gadgets

Mem[v2] = v1

Desired Logic

a_5	
v_2	← esp
a_3	
v_1	

Stack

eax	v_1
ebx	v_2
eip	a_4

```
a1: pop eax;
a2: ret
a3: pop ebx;
a4: ret
a5: mov [ebx], eax
```

Implementation 2

implementing with gadgets

`Mem[v2] = v1`

Desired Logic

Stack	
a_5	← esp
v_2	
a_3	
v_1	

Stack

eax	v_1
ebx	v_2
eip	a_5

a_1: pop eax;
a_2: ret
Gadget 1

a_3: pop ebx;
a_4: ret
Gadget 2

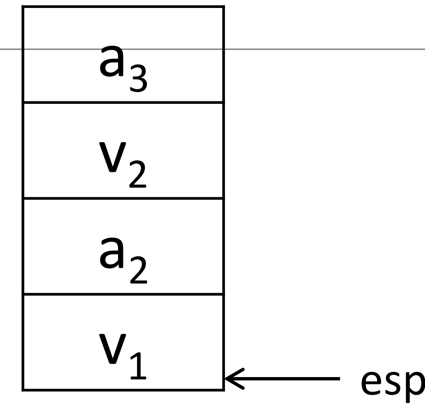
a_5: mov [ebx], eax

Implementation 2

Equivalence

`Mem[v2] = v1`

Desired Logic



Stack

semantically equivalent

"Gadgets"

```
a1: pop eax; ret
a2: pop ebx; ret
a3: mov [ebx], eax
```

Implementation 2

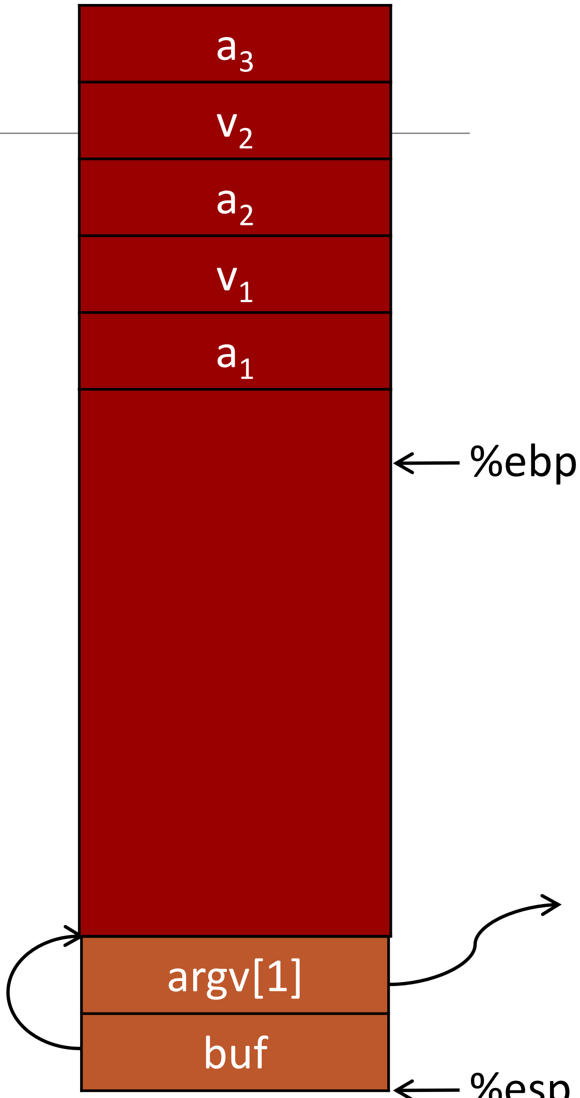
Return-Oriented Programming (ROP)

Mem[v2] = v1

Desired *Shellcode*

```
a1: pop eax; ret
a2: pop ebx; ret
a3: mov [ebx], eax
```

Desired store executed!



Gadgets

A gadget is a set of instructions for carrying out a semantic action

- mov, add, etc.

Gadgets typically have a number of instructions

- One instruction = native instruction set
- More instructions = synthesize <- ROP

Gadgets in ROP generally (but not always) end in return

Image by Dino Dai Zovi

RO(P?) Programming

1. Disassemble code
2. Identify ***useful*** code sequences as gadgets
3. Assemble gadgets into desired shellcode

Attacker Oriented Programming?

Behavior isn't a program

We should be able to perfectly detect bad behavior, right?

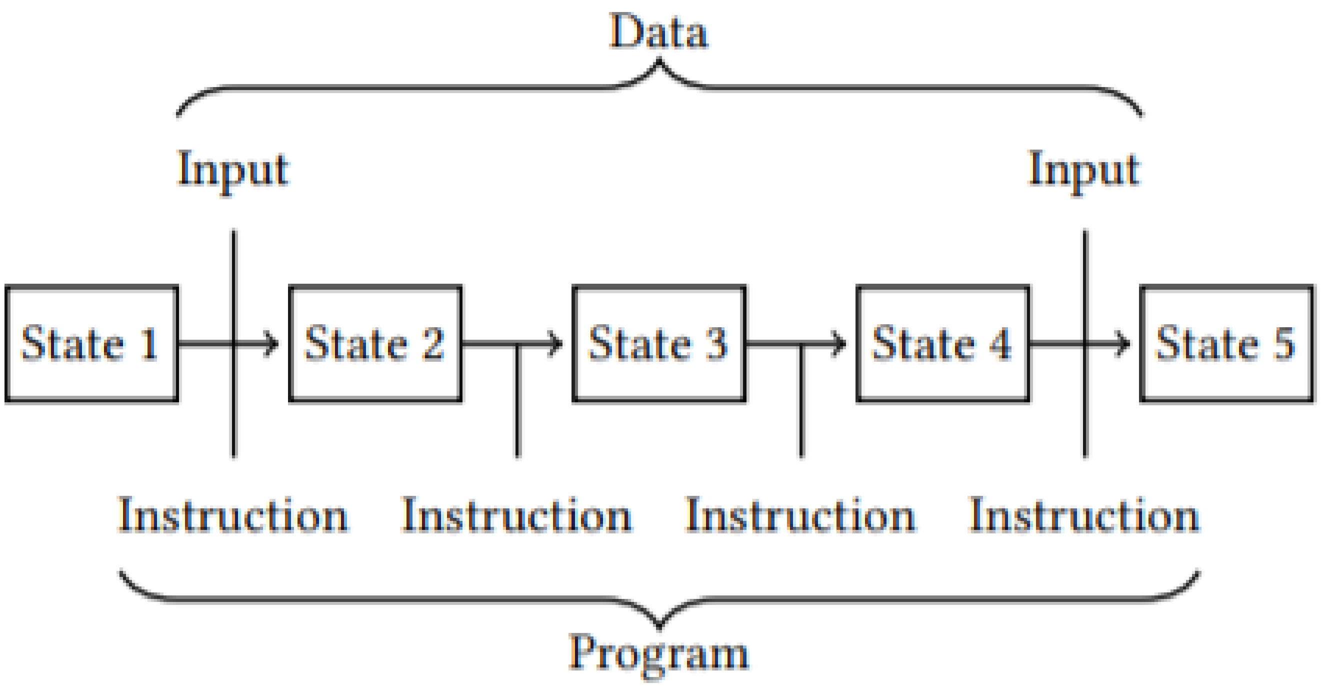
“Weird Machines”

“Weird machines, exploitability, and provable unexploitability”

Written by Thomas Dullien

Explains that users interacting with a program ***is a program***

What is a Program?



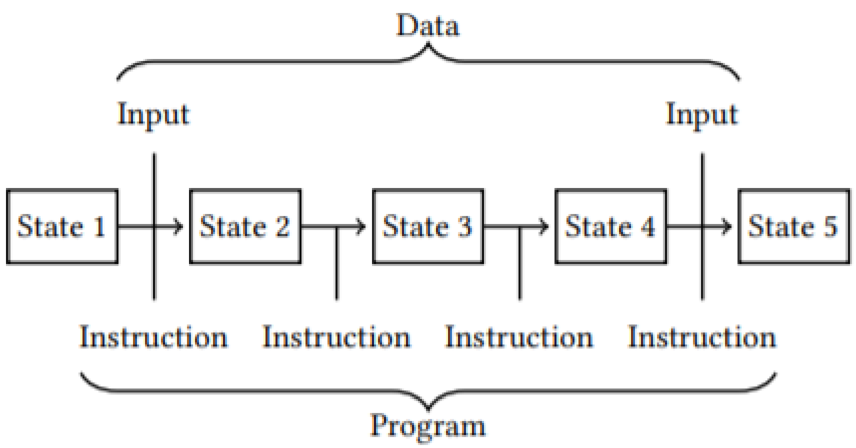
*From Dullien's Paper

State Machine View

View a “Program” as a state machine

Program starts in state S_0

Based on instruction, advances to state S_i

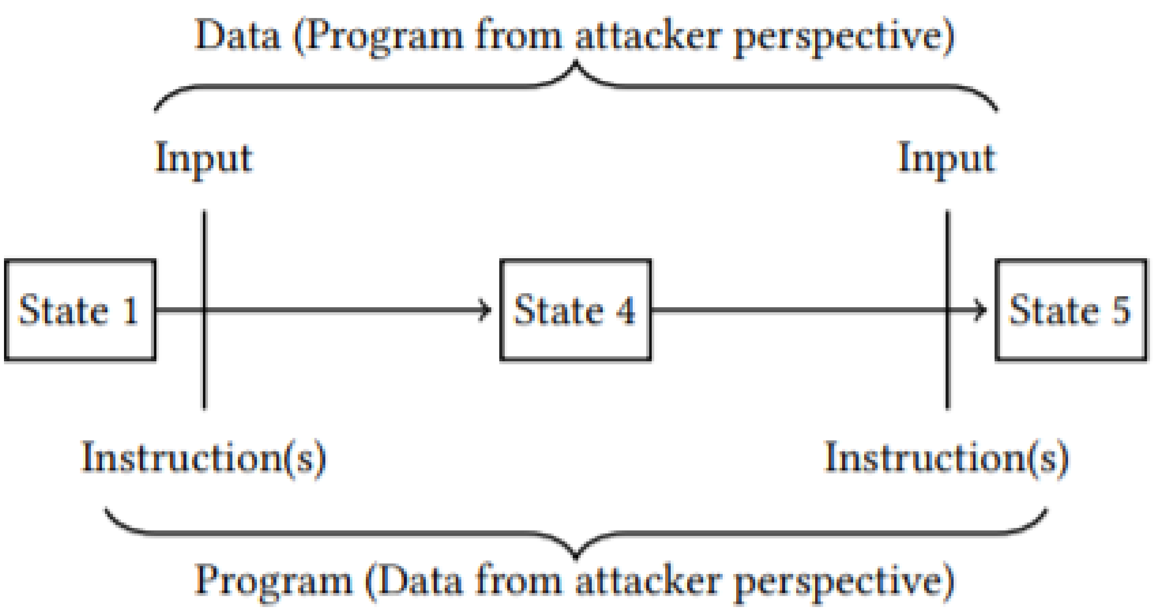


States and User Interactions

Program is in some State. Call it S_0

User interacts with the program

Program advances to state S_1



What is a “User”?

Do we literally mean a flesh-and-blood human?

Really, “user” is just whatever provides the input

This can, of course, just be another process

Thus, two processes interacting ***IS A PROGRAM***

Therefore, determining if “behavior” is good is undecidable

One More Big Problem

Decidability is a fundamental, ***unsolvable*** problem

Another big problem is ***Supply Chain***

1984: Thompson’s Reflections

“Reflections on Trusting Trust” by Ken Thompson, 1984

Demonstrated creating an evil compiler

Would compile a login program with a backdoor

BUT! ***ALSO COMPILED <u>COMPILERS</u> WITH THIS LOGIC!***

“Clean” compiler source code compiled by an evil compiler ***is evil!***

Proved that a “source code review” can’t catch all evil