Using GConf as an Example of How to Create an Userspace Object Manager

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Background - SELinux

- Flask architecture
  - Security server
  - Object managers
  - Access vector caches (AVCs)

- Object Managers
  - Bind security labels to their objects
  - Query the security server for labeling and access decisions
  - Enforce the security decisions of the security server
Background - GConf

- Configuration system for GNOME
  - Not GNOME specific
- Stores configuration data for programs
- Provides change notification to programs
GConf Architecture

- Configuration sources
- Client library
- Per-user configuration server
- ORBit
  - CORBA
Configuration Sources

• Data: Key-value pairs
• Metadata: expected type, default value, description
• Accessed through a backend
Client Library

- Interface to access the configuration sources
- Caches configuration values
- Allows a specific set of configuration sources to be specified
- Works with the configuration server to notify the client when the value of a registered key changes
Per-user Configuration Server

- Accesses the configuration sources through the appropriate backend
- Presents a unified set of configuration data to the client
- Notifies the client library of all clients affected when the value of a key changes
Providing Security Controls over a Program

• Adequate control is often achieved by merely running an application in the domain of its parent.

• If not, then either:
  - The application should not be run
  - The security goals of the system reduced to allow the program to run, or
  - Security controls must be added
Four Strategies for Adding Security Controls over a Program

- Add SELinux policy for the program
- Add additional or finer-grained controls to SELinux
- Re-architect the program to make use of existing SELinux controls
- Modify the program to become an userspace object manager
Add SELinux Policy

• Does not require modification of the program
  - Least obtrusive strategy

• May be able to use the policy for another program with similar functions

• Custom policy involves:
  - Specifying the security label the process will run in
  - Labeling security-relevant objects
  - Specifying rules for the process and objects to interact with each other and the rest of the system
Add Additional Features to SELinux

• Add additional or finer-grained SELinux kernel controls

• SELinux is meant to have comprehensive controls over kernel objects, so new kernel controls shouldn't be required often

• If new controls are written, then new policy is needed to take advantage of those controls
Re-Architect the Program

- Decompose a program into a small, privileged process and a larger, unprivileged process
- Run multiple copies of the program in different domains
- Rewrite the program
Creating an Userspace Object Manager

• SELinux provides object managers for kernel objects

• New object managers are needed for any object not controlled by the kernel

• Natural part of implementing the Flask architecture on Linux
Functions of an Userspace Object Manager

• Bind security labels to the objects that it controls

• Request labeling and access decisions from the appropriate security server

• Enforce the decisions returned by the security server
Trust Required of an Userspace Object Manager

- Only trusted to control its objects
- Not trusted in all of its operations
- Still controlled by the system's security policy
Steps in Creating an Userspace Object Manager

• Identify the objects in greater detail

• Provide a way to uniquely and reliably label the object

• Add access checks and labeling requests where needed to control the object

• Make the subject's label available at the access checks
Steps in Creating an Userspace Object Manager (Cont)

- Add an access vector cache (AVC) to the program to cache the access decisions of the security server
- Create new SELinux policy classes and permissions as needed
- Create SELinux policy to control the objects
What Needs to be Secured in GConf

- Configuration sources
- Key-value pairs
- ORBit IORs
Adding SELinux Policy to Secure GConf

• Only the configuration server can access or modify the configuration data of the user

• Cannot label the configuration data itself
Strategies Not Used to Secure GConf

• Add additional features to SELinux
  – Configuration data of GConf is only visible to the configuration server at the appropriate granularity

• Re-Architect GConf
  – Some advantages, more disadvantages
GConf Needs to be an Userspace Object Manager

- Using the other strategies, some progress has been made
- Configuration data still not adequately controlled
- Configuration data is only visible at the right level to the configuration server
- The configuration server must be made into an userspace object manager
Labeling the Configuration Data

• Security labels stored in a separate namespace
  - /selinux

• Security labels are normal GConf value strings

• Created functions to access the security labels of a key without knowing about the namespace

• Security label always chosen from the default configuration sources
Adding Labeling Requests and Access Checks

• Access checks are done before an operation on the configuration data
  - For server-side notification registration, the check is done sooner
  - For querying all keys in a directory or all directories in a directory, the check is done after

• Labeling request is done on a set operation if the key doesn't already have a security context
Making the Client's Security Context Available

• Would like to get it from the kernel
  - Can't because the client and server communicate through ORBit

• Would like to get it from a process that the server trusts
  - Modifying ORBit to provide the context would be a lot of work
  - If D-Bus replaces ORBit, then it would be easier

• Actually trusts the client to provide the context
Add an Access Vector Cache (AVC)

- Provided by the library libselinux
- Start the AVC when the configuration server starts
- Used GConf specific memory allocation, logging, and audit callback functions
Create New SELinux Policy Class and Permissions

- Security class
  - gconf

- Permissions
  - get_value, set_value, create_value, remove_value, get_meta, set_meta, relabel_from, relabel_to
Create SELinux Policy to Control Objects

• Sensitive keys must be identified and labeled

• Processes that need to have different accesses to configuration data must run in different domains
  - Currently, most user processes run in one domain

• Only policy to test for proper operation has been written at this time
Conclusions

- Questions?