

ResolverFuzz: Automated Discovery of DNS Resolver Vulnerabilities with Query-Response Fuzzing

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Feel free to visit my homepage (qifanz.com) for slides
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Short Bio

➤ 4th-year Ph.D. student of Department of EECS

➤ Advisor: Prof. Dr. Zhou Li

➤ Field of Research:

➤ Domain Name System (DNS)

- [Security'24] Zhang, Q., Bai, X., Li, X., Duan, H., Li, Q. and Li, Z., *ResolverFuzz: Automated Discovery of DNS Resolver Vulnerabilities with Query-Response Fuzzing.*
- [NDSS'23] Li, X., Liu, B., Bai, X., Zhang, M., Zhang, Q., Li, Z., Duan, H. and Li, Q., *Ghost Domain Reloaded: Vulnerable Links in Domain Name Delegation and Revocation.*
- [Security'23] Li, X., Lu, C., Liu, B., Zhang, Q., Li, Z., Duan, H. and Li, Q., *The Maginot Line: Attacking the Boundary of DNS Caching Protection.*
- [IEEE Access'22] Liao, X., Xu, J., Zhang, Q. and Li, Z., *A Comprehensive Study of DNS Operational Issues by Mining DNS Forums.*

Short Bio

➤ 4th-year Ph.D. student of Department of EECS

➤ Advisor: Prof. Dr. Zhou Li

➤ Field of Research:

➤ Machine Learning and Security

- [ACSAC'22] Zhang, Q., Shen, J., Tan, M., Zhou, Z., Li, Z., Chen, Q.A. and Zhang, H., *Play the Imitation Game: Model Extraction Attack against Autonomous Driving Localization.*
- [Under review in ICLR'24] Han, S., Buyukates, B., Hu, Z., Jin, H., Jin, W., Sun, L., Wang, X., Xie, C., Zhang, K., Zhang, Q. and Zhang, Y., 2023. *FedMLSecurity: A Benchmark for Attacks and Defenses in Federated Learning and Federated LLMs.*
- [Under review in ICLR'24] Han, S., Wu, W., Buyukates, B., Jin, W., Yao, Y., Zhang, Q., Avestimehr, S. and He, C., 2023. *Kick Bad Guys Out! Zero-Knowledge-Proof-Based Anomaly Detection in Federated Learning.*

Domain Name System

➤ Domain Name System (DNS)

- Entry point of many Internet activities
 - Interpret domain names into network addresses (IPs)
 - E.g., translate uci.edu into 128.200.151.40
- Security guarantee of multiple application services
- Domain names are widely registered

➤ Fundamental for other apps

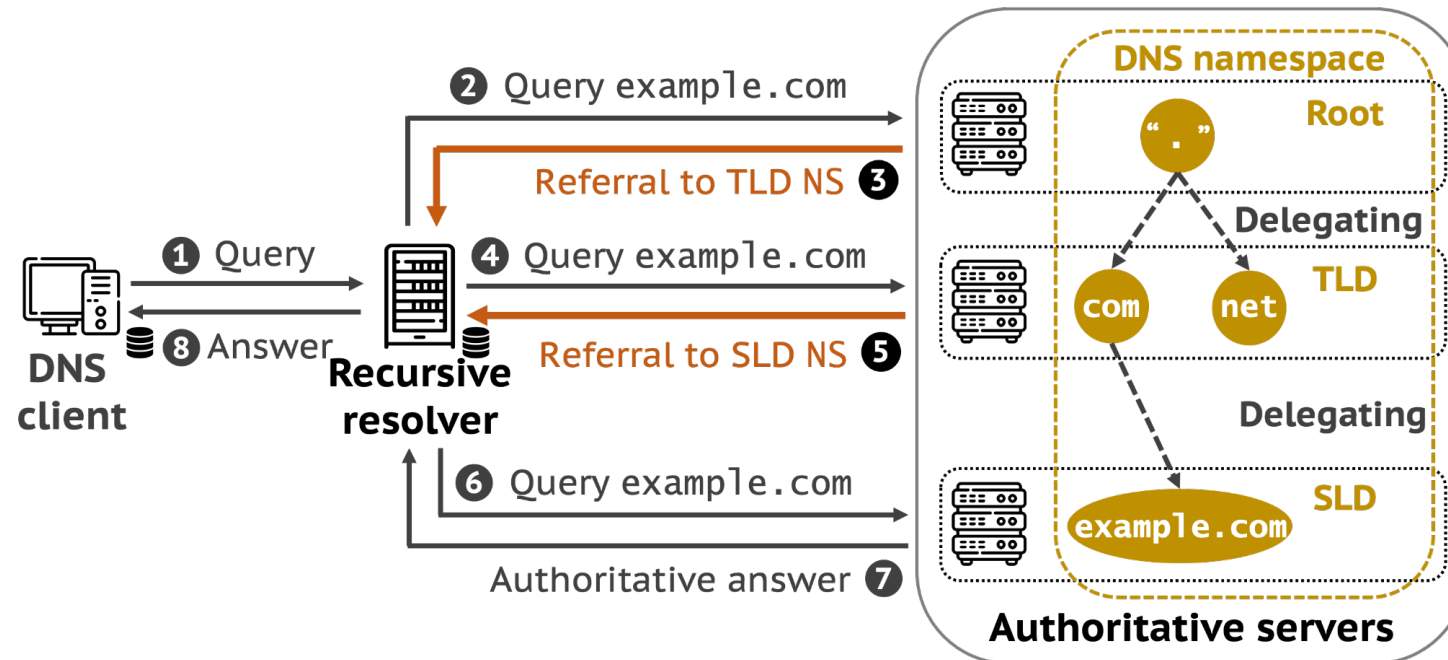
- Web, CDN, Email, Certificate Authentication, etc.

DNS Resolution

➤ Recursive/Iterative process

➤ Multiple roles

➤ Forwarder, recursive resolver, authoritative server



DNS Resolution

➤ Cache Mechanism

- Cache DNS recourse records (RRs) for future references
- One of the **most vulnerable** parts in DNS
 - Cache poisoning, e.g., MaginotDNS [Security'23], SAD DNS [CCS'20&21]
 - Domain delegation (Ghost Domain), e.g., Phoenix Domain [NDSS'23]
- Only involved for recursive resolvers
 - Focus on **recursive resolvers**

DNS Vulnerability Detection

➤ How to find vulnerabilities automatically?

➤ Formal analysis

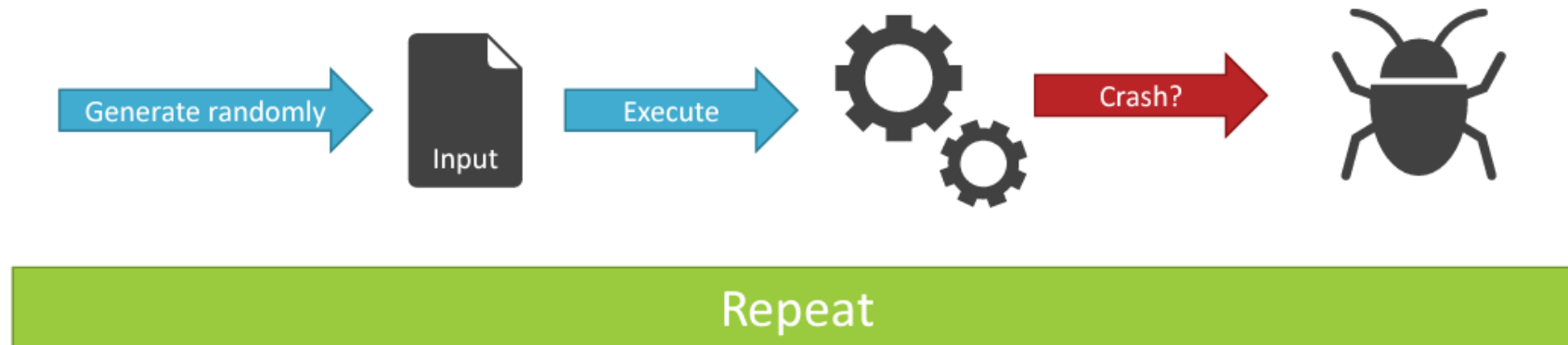
➤ Already applied to nameservers: SCALE [SIGCOMM'22], G-Root [NSDI'20]

➤ Lack rigorous specifications as references for vulnerability detection

➤ Fuzzing

Fuzzing

- **Suitable for testing large-size software in large scale**
- **Flexible for multiple scenarios**
 - Lexical-based: Blackbox/Graybox/Whitebox fuzzing
 - Syntactic-based: (Probabilistic) Grammar-based fuzzing
 - Semantic-based: Concolic/Symbolic fuzzing



Fuzzing on DNS

➤ Previous works

- AFL++/AFLNet

- SnapFuzz [ISSTA'22], DNS Fuzzer (a github repo)

- Focus on **memory vulnerabilities**

 - Could **only** detect crashes

- But cache poisoning is semantic vulnerabilities

 - Traditional memory-based fuzzers does not work

- **Need to design a fuzzer to detect semantic bugs in DNS**

**Which part is more vulnerable?
Where should we focus on?**

Check vulnerabilities which **have been** identified
Focus on where they were **most** spotted

Comprehensive Study of CVEs

➤ Understand the distribution and root causes of DNS-related vulnerabilities

Table 1: Study results of DNS CVEs for mainstream DNS software.

Software*	# CVE								
	Semantic					Memory			Total
	Cache poison. ¹	Res. consumpt. ²	Serv. crash ³	Others	Total	Corrupt. ⁴	Others	Total	
BIND	18	17	73	10	118	22	1	23	141
Unbound	4	5	5	3	17	8	1	9	26
Knot Resolver	6	3	2	0	11	0	0	0	11
PowerDNS Recursor	13	7	7	9	36	6	0	6	42
MaraDNS	2	3	3	0	8	7	0	7	15
Technitium	3	1	0	0	4	0	0	0	4
Total	46	36	90	22	194	43	2	45	239

*: Recursive or forwarding modes. ¹: Cache poisoning. ²: Resource consumption. ³: Service crash. ⁴: Corruption.

CVE of the forwarding mode only: Total (7), BIND (5), Unbound (0), Knot (1), PowerDNS (0), MaraDNS (0), and Technitium (1).

CVE of the authoritative mode only: Total (45), BIND (19), Unbound (4), Knot (2), PowerDNS (19), MaraDNS (1), and Technitium (0).

CVE of other software: Total (131), Microsoft DNS (90), Simple DNS Plus (1), Dnsmasq (33), CoreDNS (1), NSD (4), Yadifa (1), and TrustDNS (1).

Comprehensive Study of CVEs

➤ Findings:

➤ Most of the CVEs are about resolvers

➤ 284 CVEs, only 45 related to nameservers

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Comprehensive Study of CVEs

➤ Findings:

➤ Diversified CVEs among DNS software

➤ BIND has the most CVEs

➤ Only 13 out of 239 CVEs affect all software

Table 1: Study results of DNS CVEs for mainstream DNS software.

Software *	# CVE								Total
	Semantic				Memory				
	Cache poison. ¹	Res. consumpt. ²	Serv. crash ³	Others	Total	Corrupt. ⁴	Others	Total	
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Comprehensive Study of CVEs

➤ Findings:

➤ Most of the CVEs are semantic bugs

➤ Cache poisoning, resource consumption and service crash

Table 1: Study results of DNS CVEs for mainstream DNS software.

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Comprehensive Study of CVEs

➤ Findings:

- Nearly every field of a DNS message has related CVEs
 - Query name, query type, query flag, RCODE, RDATA, TTL, etc.
- Most of the CVEs are triggered with short message sequence

Table 1: Study results of DNS CVEs for mainstream DNS software.

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How should we design ResolverFuzz?

Black box, Stateful and Grammar-based fuzzing

Two input generators

Identify diff. vuln. by adapting diff. oracles

ResolverFuzz Infrastructure

➤ Input:

➤ Query Generator

➤ Response Generator

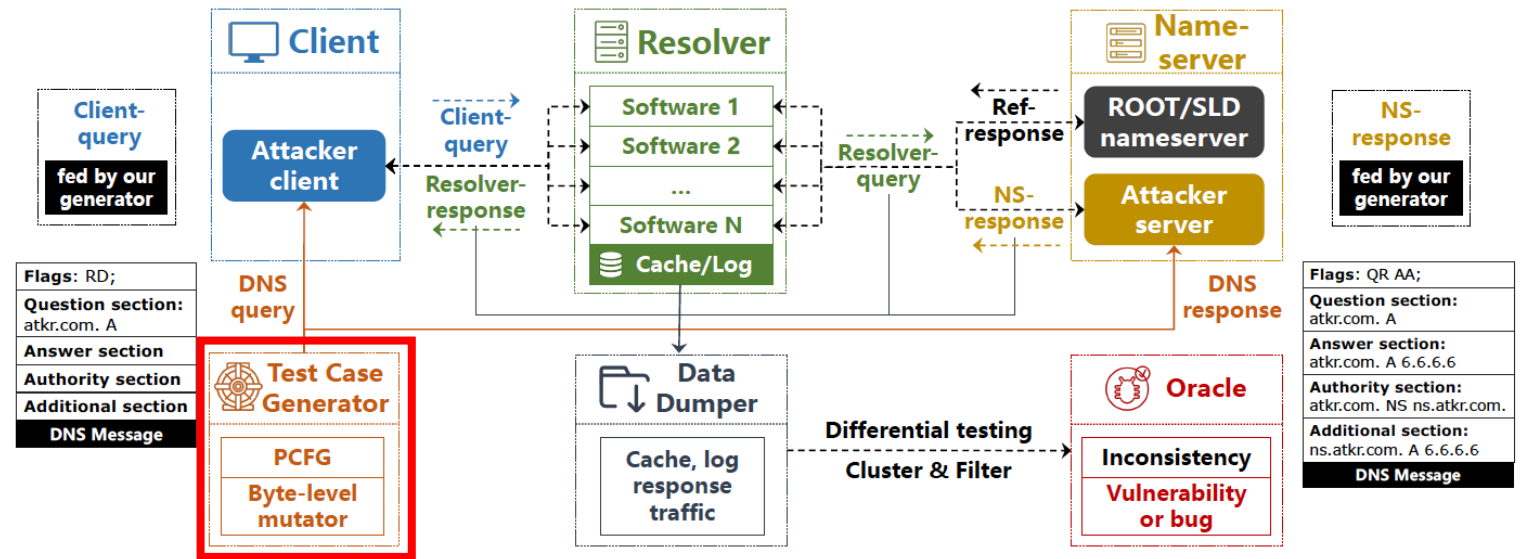


Figure 3: Workflow of RESOLVERFUZZ.

ResolverFuzz Infrastructure

➤ Output:

- Response
- Cache
- System logs

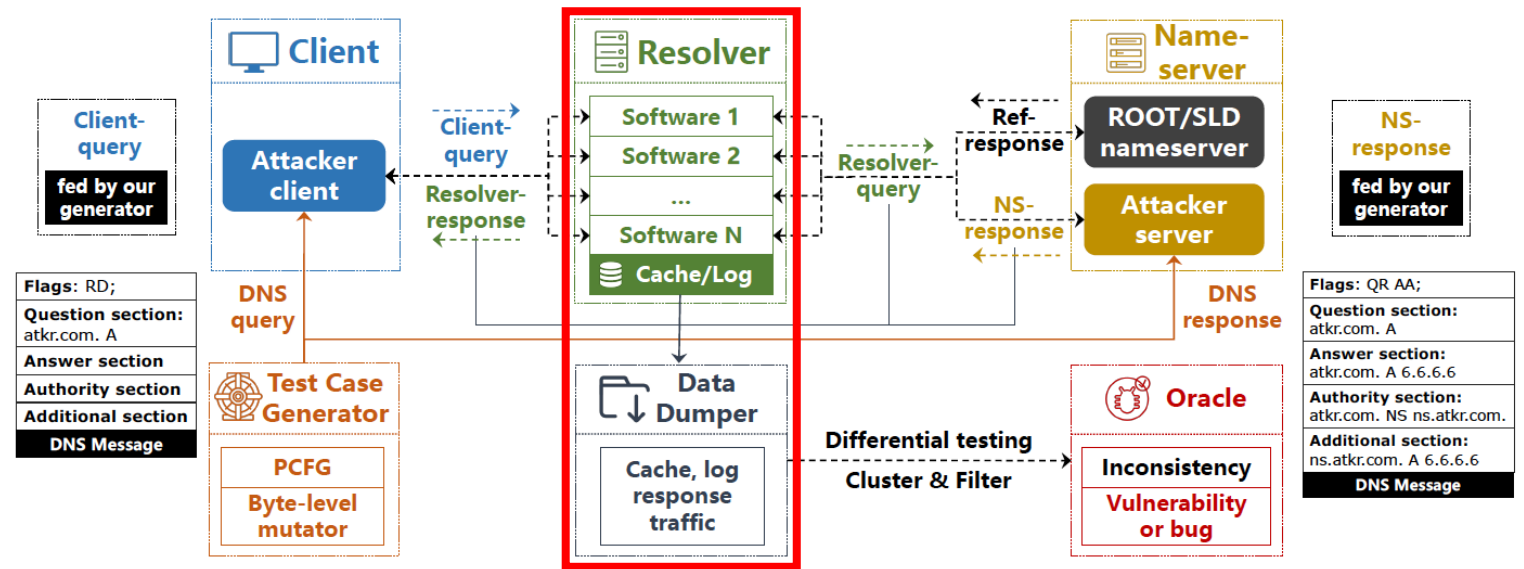


Figure 3: Workflow of RESOLVERFUZZ.

ResolverFuzz Infrastructure

➤ Oracle:

- Measure divergence
- Bug/vuln. analysis

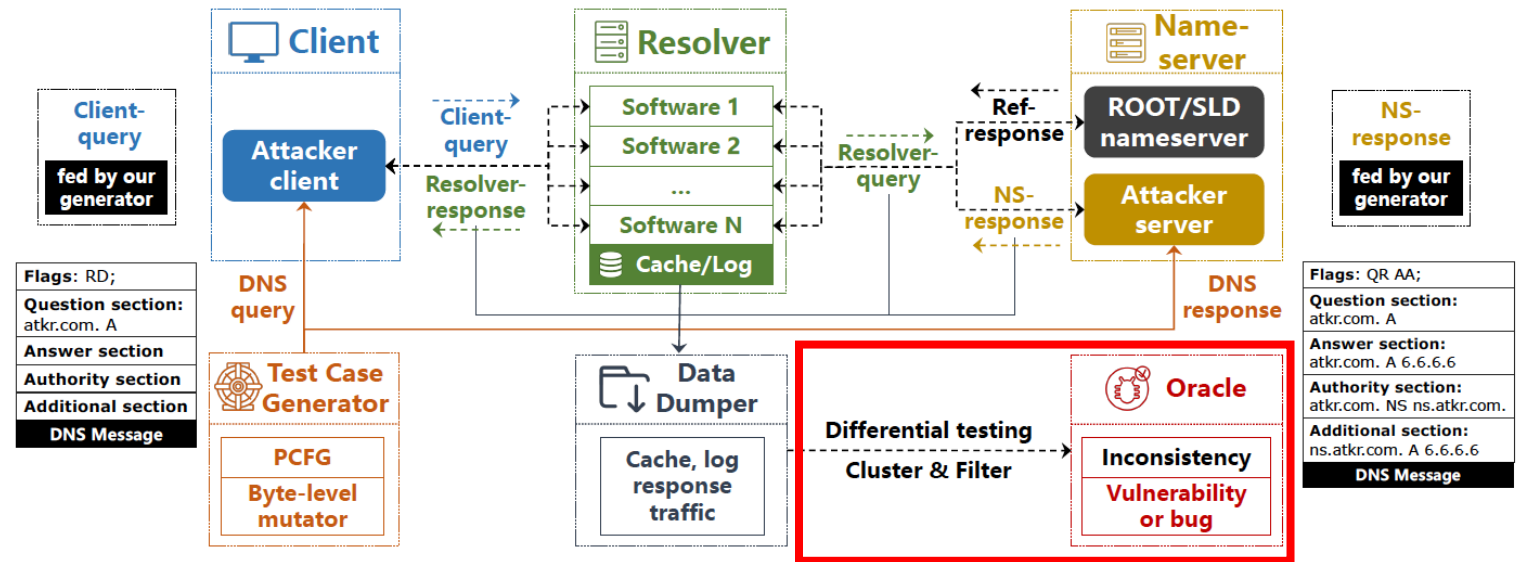


Figure 3: Workflow of RESOLVERFUZZ.

ResolverFuzz: Workflow

- Initialize DNS Resolvers

- Test case generation
 - Query & Responses

- Test case execution
 - Data dump

- Reset for next round

- Differential analysis

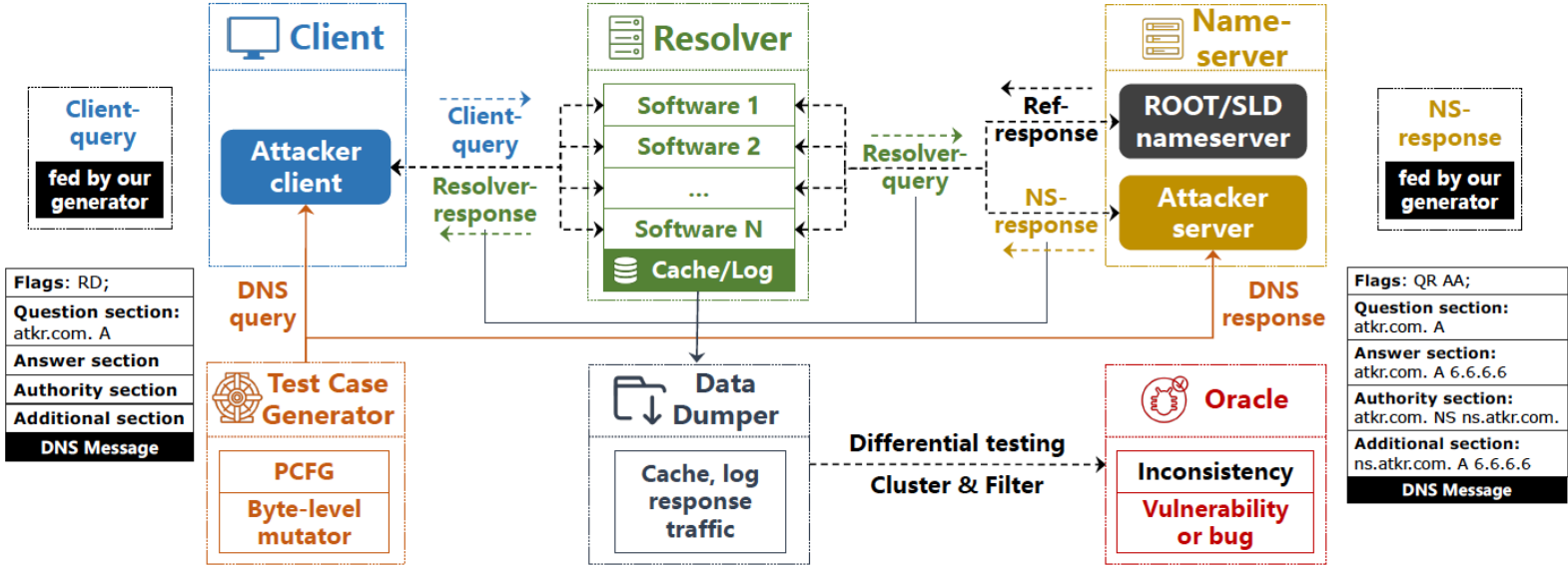


Figure 3: Workflow of RESOLVERFUZZ.

What are the challenges for ResolverFuzz?

Efficiency
Mutation
Stateful Fuzzing
Oracle

Efficiency

- **Some DNS software are slow**
 - E.g., BIND (~0.4s per query) v.s. PowerDNS (> 1s per query)
- **Empty cache for each test**
- **Preset timeouts**
- **Pre- and post-processing**
 - NS initialization
 - Data collection
- **Solution: Run several test units in parallel**
 - “High efficiency via high throughput”

Mutation

➤ Coverage-based fuzzers

- Fail to provide sufficient guidance
- Poor on deciding which part should be mutated
- Reason: no preliminary knowledge on DNS packets

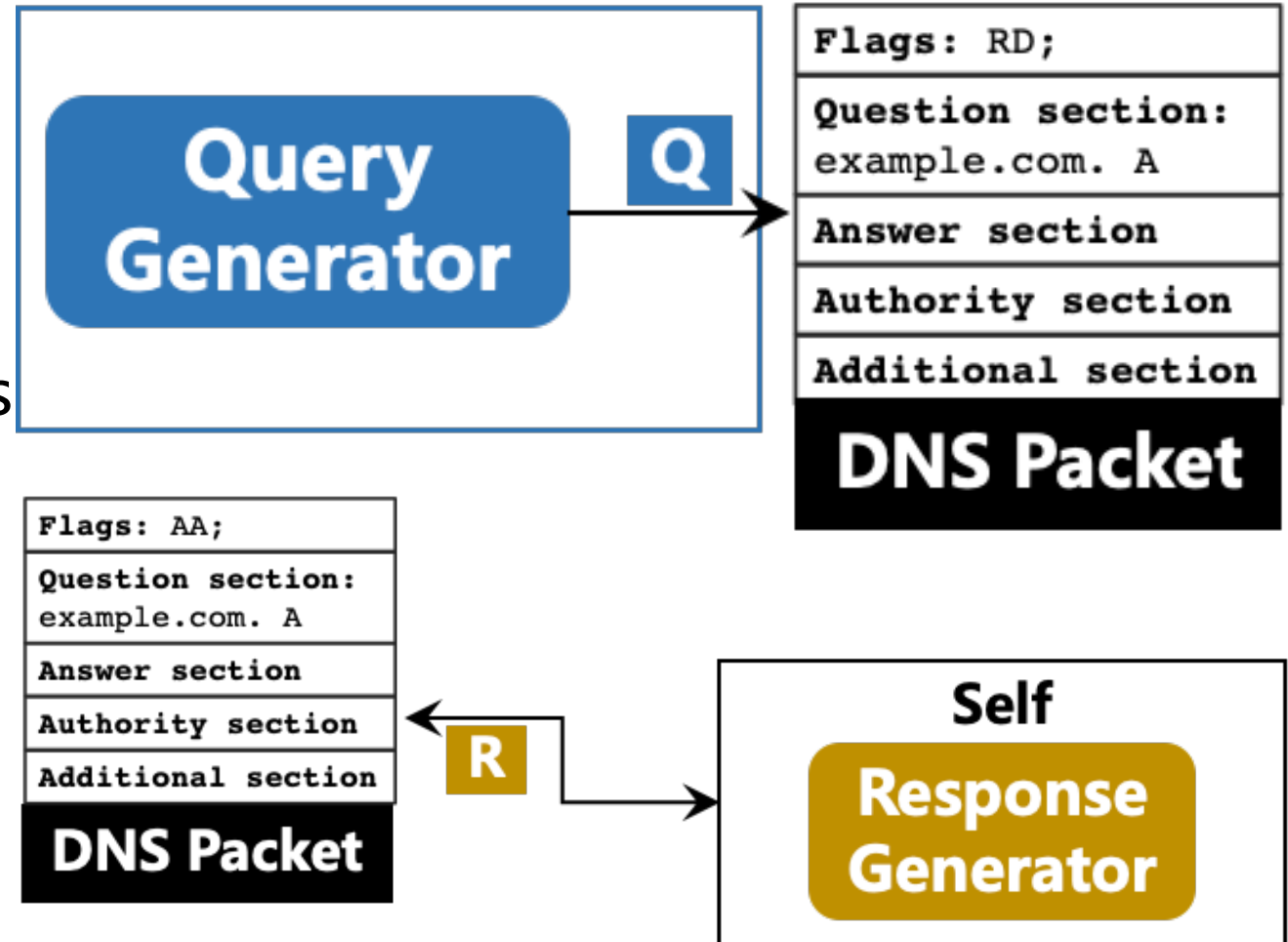
➤ Input dimension

- Only one dimension (query or NS response) leads to many invalid tests

Input Generation

➤ Two dimensions

- Client-queries
 - For attacker clients
- Nameserver (NS)-responses
 - For attacker NSes



Input Generation

➤ Grammar-based Fuzzing

➤ Probabilistic context-free grammar (PCFG)

➤ Queries and Responses

➤ High prob. for certain fields

➤ Guide fuzzing process

```
<start> ::= <query>
<query> ::= <Header><Question>
<Header> ::= <TransactionID><Flags><RRs>
<TransactionID> ::= (randomly generated 2-byte hex value)
<Flags> ::= <QR><OPCODE><AA><TC><RD><RA><Z><AD><CD><RCODE>
<QR> ::= 0
<OPCODE> ::= QUERY[.80] | IQUERY[.04] | STATUS[.04] |
            NOTIFY[.04] | UPDATE[.04] | DSO[.04]
<AA> ::= 0 | 1
<TC> ::= 0 | 1
<RD> ::= 0 | 1
<RA> ::= 0 | 1
<Z> ::= 0 | 1
<AD> ::= 0 | 1
<CD> ::= 0 | 1
<RCODE> ::= NOERROR[.80] | FORMERR[.01] | SERVFAIL[.01] |
            NXDOMAIN[.01] | NOTIMP[.01] | REFUSED[.01] | YXDOMAIN
            [.01] | YXRRSET[.01] | NXRRSET[.01] | NOTAUTH[.01] |
            NOTZONE[.01] | DSOTYPENI[.01] | BADVERS[.01] | BADKEY
            [.01] | BADTIME[.01] | BADMODE[.01] | BADNAME[.01] |
            BADALG[.01] | BADTRUNC[.01] | BADCOOKIE[.01]
<RRs> ::= <QDCOUNT><ANCOUNT><NSCOUNT><ARCOUNT>
<QDCOUNT> ::= 1
<ANCOUNT> ::= 0
<NSCOUNT> ::= 0
<ARCOUNT> ::= 0
<Question> ::= <QNAME><QTYPE><QCLASS>
<QNAME> ::= (base domain)[.40] |
            (sub-domain)[.40] |
            (2-9th sub-domain)[.10] |
            (10-max sub-domain)[.10] |
<QTYPE> ::= A | NS | CNAME | SOA | PTR | MX | TXT | AAAA |
            RRSIG | SPF | ANY
<QCLASS> ::= IN
```

Listing 1: PCFG for DNS query.

Input Generation

➤ Byte-level mutation

- Some DNS implementations fail to correctly decode strings with **special characters** embedded
 - E.g., \., \000, @, /, and \
 - Jeitner et al. [Security'21]
- Addition, deletion, and replacement
 - After PCFG test generation

Stateful Fuzzing

➤ DNS resolvers are stateful

- Depending on cache records, configurations, etc.
- Major challenge for network fuzzing
 - Large search space of input sequences

➤ **Solution:**

- Generate one pair of the query and (authoritative) response
 - Cover most vulnerable cases
- Deploy the auth. response on the NS side
- Start to test by sending the query
 - Communication between DNS resolvers and the NS
 - Preset timeout (5s) is deployed

Oracle

- **Lack an oracle to detect semantic bugs**

- Memory bugs have their oracle

- E.g., AddressSanitizer [USENIX ATC'12]

- **Differential testing**

- Used for memory bugs, but none for DNS

- **How to connect inconsistency with vulnerabilities?**

- Inconsistencies are common in DNS

- Many of them do not indicate vulnerabilities

Differential Analysis

- Runs multiple programs, comparing their outputs for the same input
 - Detecting rendering regressions in browsers (e.g., R2Z2 [ICSE'22])
 - Comparing outputs from different versions
 - Efficient to find divergences

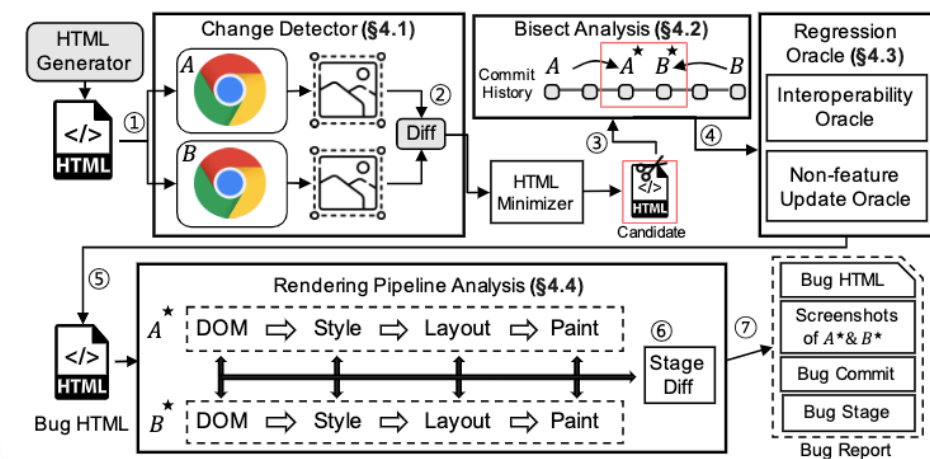
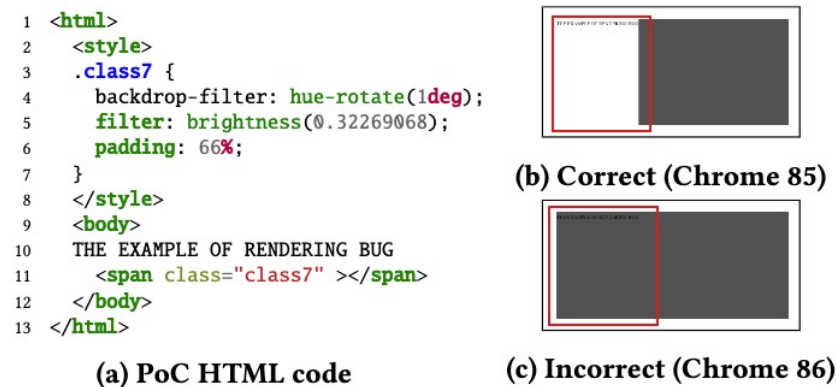


Figure 2: A rendering bug example (Chrome Issue #1122021).

Oracle

➤ Different DNS software

- Objects of differential analysis

➤ Three Oracles

- Cache poisoning oracle

- Semi-automatic, differential-analysis based
- Record the max # different records of one software from the others
- Cluster by Bisecting K-Means
- Manually check each cluster to identify possible vulnerabilities

Oracle

➤ Three Oracles

➤ Resource consumption oracle

➤ 4 metrics:

- # queries

- Sizes of responses

- Resolution timeout

- Frequency of internal operations (e.g., cache search)

➤ Compare metrics with the value distribution in normal cases

Oracle

➤ Three Oracles

➤ Crash & Corruption oracle

- Monitor DNS software processes
- Check if the process is running after each test case

How does ResolverFuzz perform?

Tested in 6 popular DNS software and 4 popular modes
Good coverage of different field values
Efficient runtime performance

Evaluation

➤ 6 DNS software

- BIND 9, Unbound, PowerDNS, Knot, Technitium and MaraDNS
- Docker-based
- Schedulers and oracles implemented in Python

Evaluation

➤ 4 configurations:

➤ Recur.-only, Fwd-only, CDNS w/ fallback and CDNS w/o fallback

```
options {  
    recursion yes;  
    // includes the entire namespace  
}
```

(a)

```
options {  
    recursion no;  
    // disables recursive resolution  
    forwarders {  
        x.x.x.x port 53;  
    }  
    // forward the entire zone "." to an upstream server  
}
```

(b)

```
options {  
    recursion yes;  
}  
// create a forward zone for test-cdns.example.com  
zone "test-cdns.example.com" {  
    type forward;  
    forwarders { x.x.x.x port 53; };  
    forward only; // fallback mode disabled  
}
```

(c)

```
options {  
    recursion yes;  
}  
// create a forward zone for test-cdns.example.com  
zone "test-cdns.example.com" {  
    type forward;  
    forwarders { x.x.x.x port 53; };  
    forward first; // fallback mode enabled  
}
```

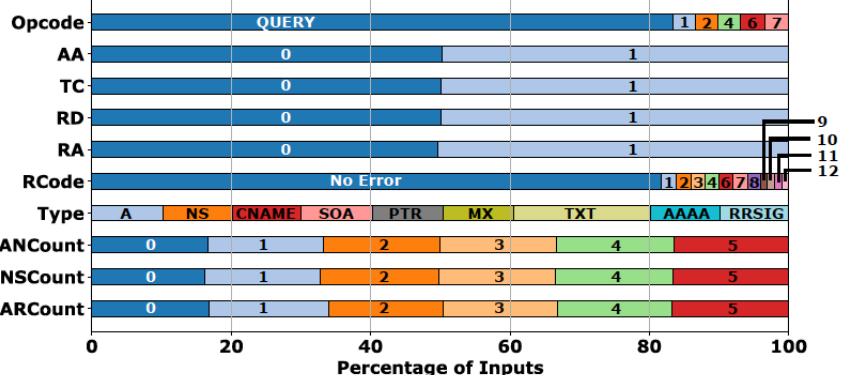
(d)

Figure 11: Example BIND configs of a) recursive-only, b) forward-only, c) CDNS without fallback, and d) CDNS with fallback.

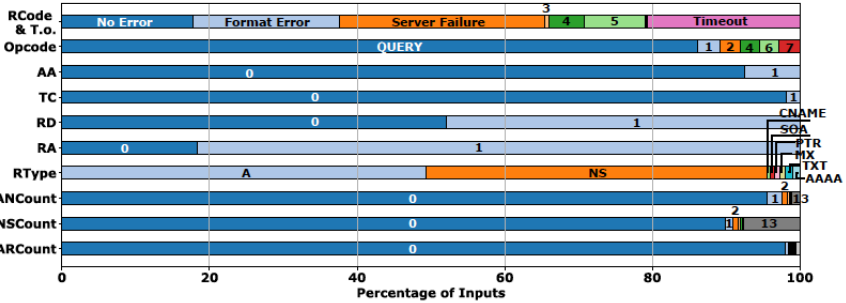
Evaluation

➤ Analysis of tests generation

- Good coverage of different field values
- Rule probabilities of PCFG
 - Test certain code logic more intensively
- Test cases prone to trigger errors
 - Potentially bugs
 - Only 17.8% have RCODE=NOERROR



(a) Client-queries and NS-responses.



(b) Resolver-responses. “RCode & T.o.” refers to “RCODE and Timeouts”.

Figure 6: Input coverage analysis on: a) client-queries and ns-responses; b) resolver-responses. The client-query and ns-response have the similar distribution for fields from OPCODE to TYPE. AN/NS/ARCOUNT applies to ns-responses. The values marked on bars are standard DNS values from [78].

Evaluation

➤ Runtime performance

➤ Use concurrency to speed up

➤ 5.9 QPS (CDNS w/ f.b.)

➤ BIND and Unbound only

➤ 2.8 QPS (other modes)

➤ MaraDNS, PowerDNS: low on efficiency

➤ Similar speed with real-world DNS resolution

➤ Google DNS: 300-400 ms per query

➤ i.e., 2.5-3.3 QPS

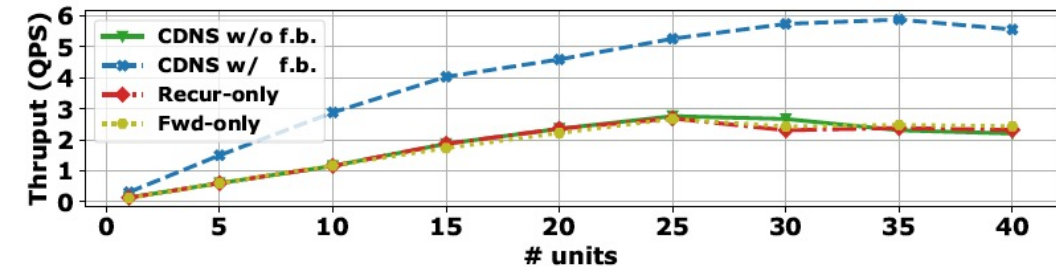


Figure 7: Throughput (“*Thruput*”) of 4 modes with regard to the number of units. *CDNS w/o f.b.*, *CDNS w/ f.b.*, *Recur-only* and *Fwd-only* refers to *CDNS without fallback*, *CDNS with fallback*, *Recursive-only*, and *Forwarder-only*.

How many new vuln. are discovered?

23 vulnerabilities identified
19 confirmed, 15 CVEs assigned
Categorized into 3 classes

Discovered Vulnerabilities

➤ 23 vulnerabilities identified

- 19 vulnerabilities confirmed
- 15 CVEs assigned
- Details available in the paper

Table 2: Identified bugs and test cases of six mainstream DNS software.

Software*	Cache poisoning					Resource consumption							Crash& Corruption	Total	
	CP1	CP2	CP3	CP4 ¹	Tot. ²	RC1	RC2	RC3	RC4	RC5	RC6	RC7	Tot.		CC1
BIND	✓ [†]	✗	✓	✓	3	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	0	✓	4
Unbound	✗	✗	✓	✓ [†]	2	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	4	-	6
Knot	✓ [†]	✗	✓	✓ [†]	3	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	1	-	4
PowerDNS	✗	✓	✗	✓ [†]	2	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	2	-	4
MaraDNS	✗	✗	-	✓ [†]	1	✗	✗	✗	✓ [†]	✗	✗	✗	1	-	2
Technitium	✓ [†]	✗	-	✓ [†]	2	✗	✗	✗	✓ [†]	✗	✗	✗	1	-	3
Total	3	1	3	6	13	1	2	1	2	1	1	1	9	1	23

*: Recursive or forwarding modes. ¹: They are triggered by different responses and their cache are inconsistent. ²: Total.

✓ or ✓[†]: Vulnerable. ✓: In discussion. ✓: Confirmed and/or fixed by vendors. ✗: Not vulnerable. [†]: CVEs are assigned. '-': Not applicable.

Amount of test case: CP1 (19), CP2 (1,422), CP3 (111,328), CP4 (7,856), RC1 (539,745), RC2 (112,126), RC3 (88,935), RC4 (132), RC5 (272)

RC6 (6,264), RC7 (4,448), and CC1 (5).

CP1: Out-of-Bailiwick Cache Poisoning

➤ Bailiwick rule

- NS should not return RRs out of their controlled zone
- E.g., RRs from .com server should not contain .org RRs

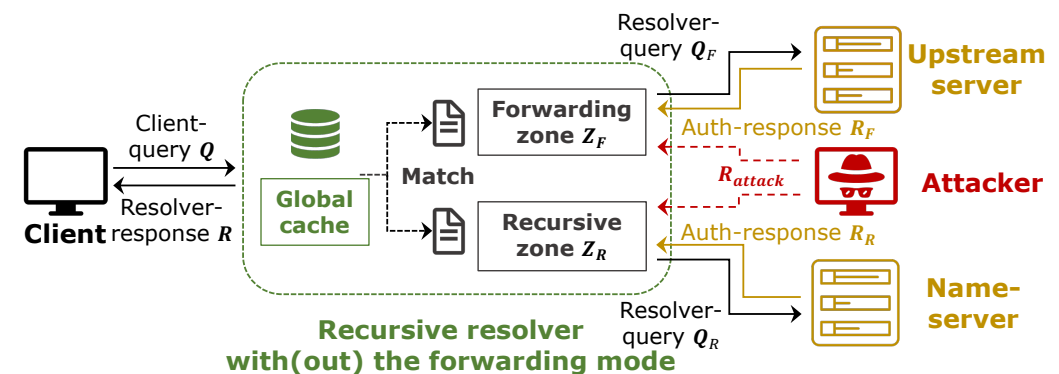
Header: TXID; QR AA;
Question section: atkr-fwd.com. A
Answer section: atkr-fwd.com. A x.x.x.x
Authority section: com. NS ns.atkr-fwd.com.
Additional section: ns.atkr-fwd.com. A a.t.k.r

CP1: Out-of-Bailiwick Cache Poisoning

➤ Out-of-Bailiwick attack

- First found in BIND under CDNS without fallback mode
 - Also identified in Knot and Technitium
- Forged NS records with AA Flag have **higher** trust level
- Resolvers may overwrite cached records with the forged one
 - Some DNS resolver do not check the response
- Hijack the whole .com zone into ns.atkr-fwd.com
- Details analyzed in MaginotDNS [Security'23]

Header: TXID; QR AA;
Question section: atkr-fwd.com. A
Answer section: atkr-fwd.com. A x.x.x.x
Authority section: com. NS ns.atkr-fwd.com.
Additional section: ns.atkr-fwd.com. A a.t.k.r



RC1: Excessive cache search operations

- **Forward-only mode, PowerDNS**
- **Looks up its local cache for trust anchors and NS records before sending it to a server**
 - E.g., s.atkr-fwd.com
 - Should be only one search only
 - PowerDNS: search records in the order of s.atkr-fwd.com, atkr-fwd.com, .com and root servers
 - Until an NS record is found
 - May cause resource consumption due to excessive cache search

Conclusion

- **Comprehensive study of published DNS CVEs**
- **Develop a blackbox fuzzing system for DNS resolvers**
- **Novel techniques**
 - Stateful fuzzing
 - Differential testing
 - Grammar-based fuzzing
- **12 types of vulnerabilities and 15 CVEs assigned**

Thanks for listening!

Any questions?

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Discovered Vulnerabilities

➤ Cache poisoning (CP)

- CP1: Out-of-bailiwick cache poisoning
- CP2: In-bailiwick cache poisoning
- CP3: Fragmentation-based cache poisoning
- CP4: Iterative subdomain caching

Table 2: Identified bugs and test cases of six mainstream DNS software.

Software*	Cache poisoning					Resource consumption								Crash & Corruption	Total
	CP1	CP2	CP3	CP4 ¹	Tot. ²	RC1	RC2	RC3	RC4	RC5	RC6	RC7	Tot.	CC1	
BIND	✓ [†]	X	✓	✓	3	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	0	✓	4
Unbound	X	X	✓	✓ [†]	2	X	✓	✓	X	✓	✓	X	4	-	6
Knot	✓ [†]	X	✓	✓ [†]	3	X	X	X	X	X	X	✓	1	-	4
PowerDNS	X	✓	X	✓ [†]	2	✓	X	✓	X	X	X	X	2	-	4
MaraDNS	X	X	-	✓ [†]	1	X	X	X	✓ [†]	X	X	X	1	-	2
Technitium	✓ [†]	X	-	✓ [†]	2	X	X	X	✓ [†]	X	X	X	1	-	3
Total	3	1	3	6	13	1	2	1	2	1	1	1	9	1	23

*: Recursive or forwarding modes. ¹: They are triggered by different responses and their cache are inconsistent. ²: Total.
 ✓ or ✓: Vulnerable. ✓: In discussion. ✓: Confirmed and/or fixed by vendors. X: Not vulnerable. †: CVEs are assigned. '-': Not applicable.
 # Amount of test case: CP1 (19), CP2 (1,422), CP3 (111,328), CP4 (7,856), RC1 (539,745), RC2 (112,126), RC3 (88,935), RC4 (132), RC5 (272), RC6 (6,264), RC7 (4,448), and CC1 (5).

Header: TXID; QR AA;	Header: TXID; QR AA;
Question section: atkr-fwd.com. A	Question section: vctm-fwd.com. A
Answer section: atkr-fwd.com. A x.x.x.x	Answer section: vctm-fwd.com. A x.x.x.x
Authority section: com. NS ns.atkr-fwd.com.	Authority section: s.vctm-fwd.com. NS ns.vctm-fwd.com.
Additional section: ns.atkr-fwd.com. A a.t.k.r	Additional section: ns.vctm-fwd.com. A a.t.k.r

(a) Auth-response for CP1. (b) Auth-response for CP2.

Header: TXID; QR AA;	Authority section: victim.com. NS ns.victim.com.
Answer section: victim.com. A x.x.x.x	Additional section: ns.victim.com. A a.t.k.r
Additional section: victim.com. RRSIG xxx...x	

(c) 1st fragment for CP3. (d) spoofed 2nd fragment for CP3.

Header: TXID; QR AA;	Header: TXID; QR AA;
Question section: s.atkr-rev.com. A	Question section: s.atkr-rev.com. A
Answer section: s.atkr-rev.com. A a.t.k.r	Answer section: (Empty)
Authority section: s.atkr-rev.com. NS ns.atkr-rev.com.	Authority section: s.atkr-rev.com. NS ns.atkr-rev.com.
Additional section: ns.atkr-rev.com. A a.t.k.r	Additional section: ns.atkr-rev.com. A a.t.k.r

(e) Auth-response for CP4. (f) Ref-response for CP4.

Figure 9: DNS responses utilized for cache poisoning attacks. Red parts carry the attacking payloads.

Discovered Vulnerabilities

➤ Resource Consumption Bugs (RC)

- RC1: Excessive cache search operations
- RC2: Unlimited cache store operations
- RC3: Ignoring the RD flag
- RC4: Following a self-CNAME reference
- RC5: Large responses to clients
- RC6: Overlong waiting time over UDP
- RC7: Excessive queries for resolution over TCP

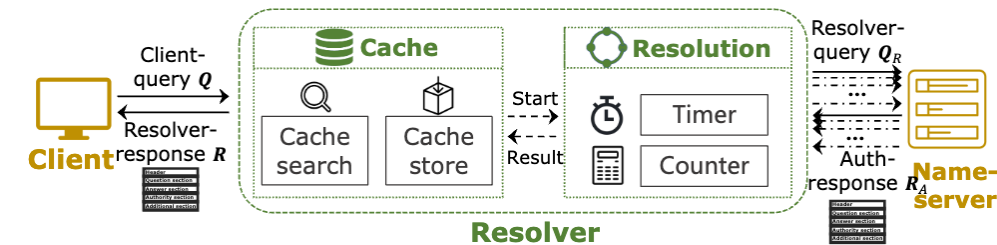


Figure 10: Threat model of resource consumption bugs.

Discovered Vulnerabilities

➤ Crash & Corruption Bugs

➤ Assertion failure when receiving queries

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BIND	✓ [†]	X	✓	✓	3	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	0	✓	4
Unbound	X	X	✓	✓ [†]	2	X	✓	✓	X	✓	✓	X	4	-	6
Knot	✓ [†]	X	✓	✓ [†]	3	X	X	X	X	X	X	✓	1	-	4
PowerDNS	X	✓	X	✓ [†]	2	✓	X	✓	X	X	X	X	2	-	4
MaraDNS	X	X	-	✓ [†]	1	X	X	X	✓ [†]	X	X	X	1	-	2
Technitium	✓ [†]	X	-	✓ [†]	2	X	X	X	✓ [†]	X	X	X	1	-	3
Total	3	1	3	6	13	1	2	1	2	1	1	1	9	1	23

*: Recursive or forwarding modes. ¹: They are triggered by different responses and their cache are inconsistent. ²: Total.

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