

Software Vulnerabilities and Exploits

Brad Karp
UCL Computer Science



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Imperfect Software

- To be useful, software must **process input**
 - From files, network connections, keyboard...
- Programmer typically intends his code to manipulate input in particular way
 - e.g., **parse HTTP request, retrieve matching content, return it to requestor**
- Programs are complex, and **often include subtle bugs unforeseen by the programmer**
- Fundamentally hard to prevent all programmer error
 - Design itself may use **flawed logic**
 - Even formal reasoning may not capture all ways in which program may deviate from desired behavior
 - **Remember: security is a negative goal...**

Imperfect Software (2)

- Even if logic correct, implementation may vary from programmer intent
- C and C++ particularly dangerous
 - Allow arbitrary manipulation of pointers
 - Require programmer-directed allocation and freeing of memory
 - Don't provide memory safety; very difficult to reason about which portions of memory a line of C changes
 - Offer high performance, so extremely prevalent, especially in network servers and OSes
- Java offers memory safety, but not a panacea
 - JRE written in (many thousands of lines of) C!

Software Vulnerabilities and Exploits

- **Vulnerability:** broadly speaking, input-dependent bug that can cause program to complete operations that deviate from programmer's intent
- **Exploit:** input that, when presented to program, triggers a particular vulnerability
- Attacker can use exploit to **execute operations without authorization** on vulnerable host
- Vulnerable program executes with some privilege level
 - Many network servers execute as **superuser**
 - Users run applications with their **own user ID**
 - Result: great opportunity for exploits to do harm

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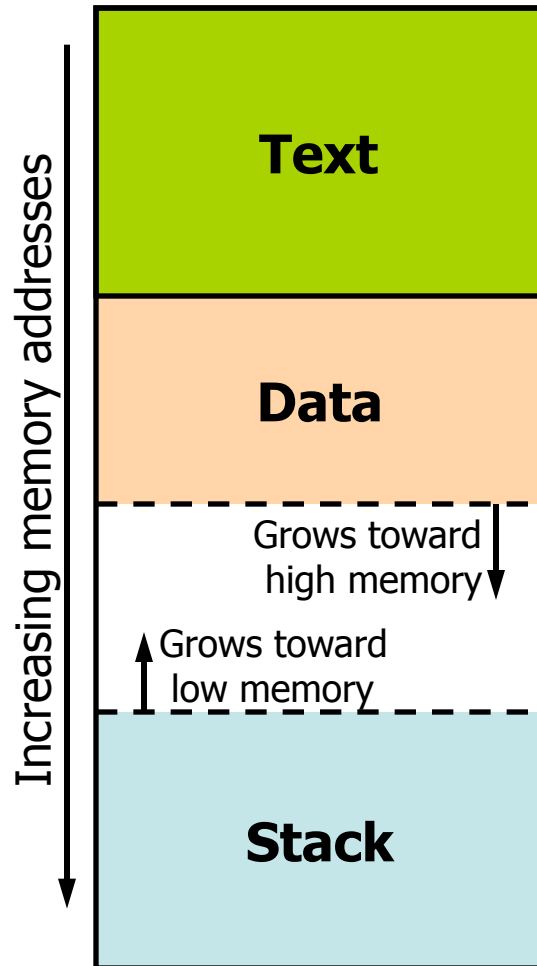
Today: vulnerabilities in C programs that **allow an attacker to execute his own arbitrary code within the vulnerable program**

- Vulnerable program executes with some privilege level
 - Many network servers execute as **superuser**
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 - Result: great opportunity for exploits to do harm

Buffer Overflows in C: General Idea

- Buffers (arrays) in C manipulated using **pointers**
- C allows **arbitrary arithmetic on pointers**
 - Compiler has **no notion of size of object pointed to**
 - So programmers **must explicitly check in code** that pointer remains within intended object
 - But programmers often do not do so; **vulnerability!**
- **Buffer overflows** used in many exploits:
 - Input long data that runs **past end of programmer's buffer**, over memory that guides program control flow
 - Enclose **code you want executed** within data
 - Overwrite control flow info with **address of your code!**

Memory Map of a UNIX Process



- Text: executable instructions, read-only data; size fixed at compile time
- Data: initialized and uninitialized; grows towards higher addresses
- Stack: LIFO, holds function arguments and local variables; grows toward lower addresses

Intel X86 Stack: Stack Frames

- Region of stack used within C function: **stack frame**
- Within function, **local variables** allocated on stack
- SP register: **stack pointer**, points to top of stack
- BP register: **frame pointer (aka base pointer)**, points to bottom of stack frame of currently executing function

Intel X86 Stack: Calling and Returning from Functions

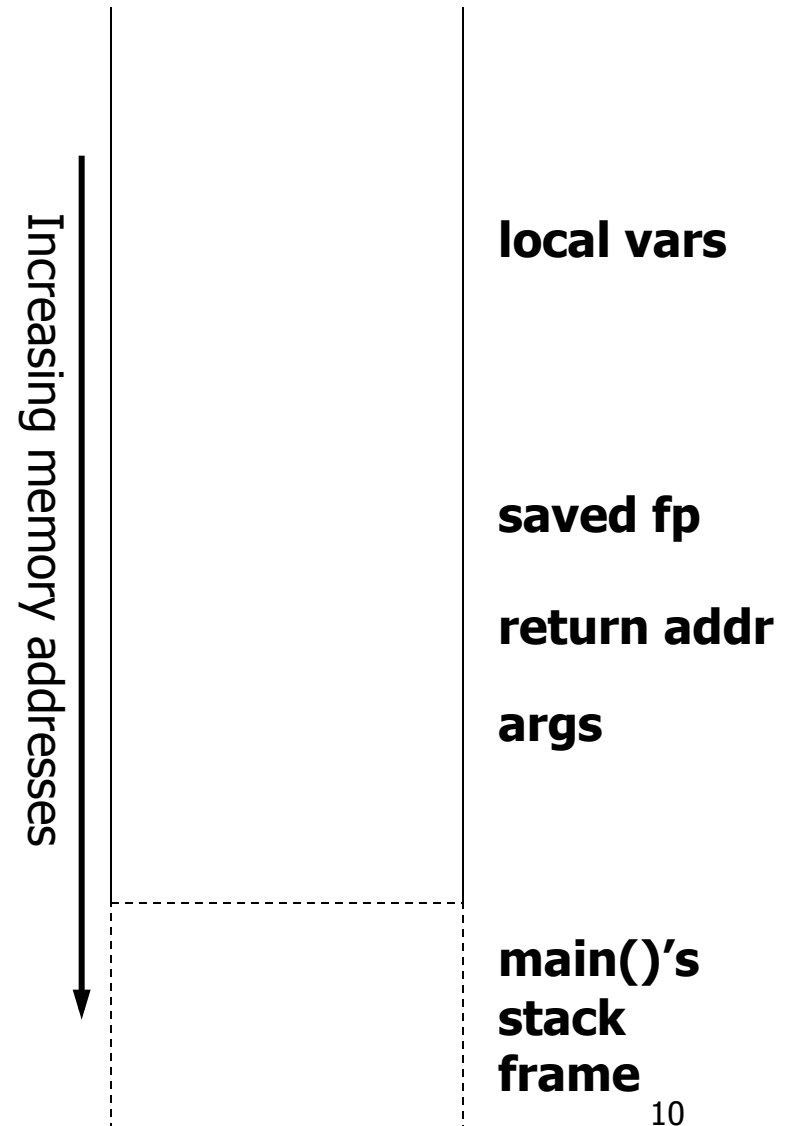
- To call function $f()$, **allocate new stack frame**:
 - Push **arguments**, e.g., $f(a, b, c)$
 - Push **return address**: next instruction (IP) in caller
 - Set **IP = address of $f()$** ; jump to callee
 - Push **saved frame pointer**: BP for caller's stack frame
 - Set **BP = SP**; sets frame pointer to start of new frame
 - Set **SP -= sizeof(locals)**; allocates local variables
- Upon return from $f()$, **deallocate stack frame**:
 - Set **SP += sizeof(locals)**; deallocates local variables
 - Set **BP = saved frame pointer from stack**; change to caller's stack frame
 - Set **IP = saved return address from stack**; return to next instruction in caller

Example: Simple C Function Call

```
void dorequest(int a, int b)
{
    char request[256];

    scanf("%s", request);
    /* process the request... */
    ...
    return;
}

int main(int argc, char **argv)
{
    while (1) {
        dorequest(17, 38);
        fprintf (log, "completed\n");
    }
}
```

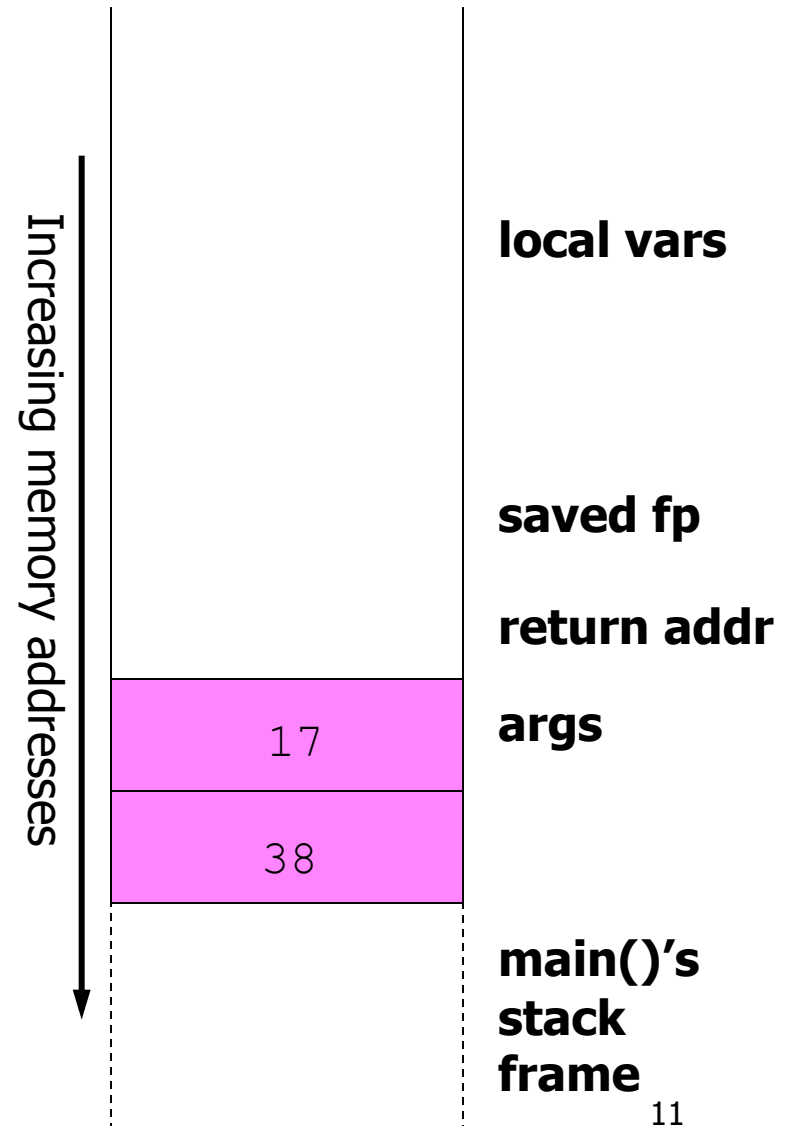


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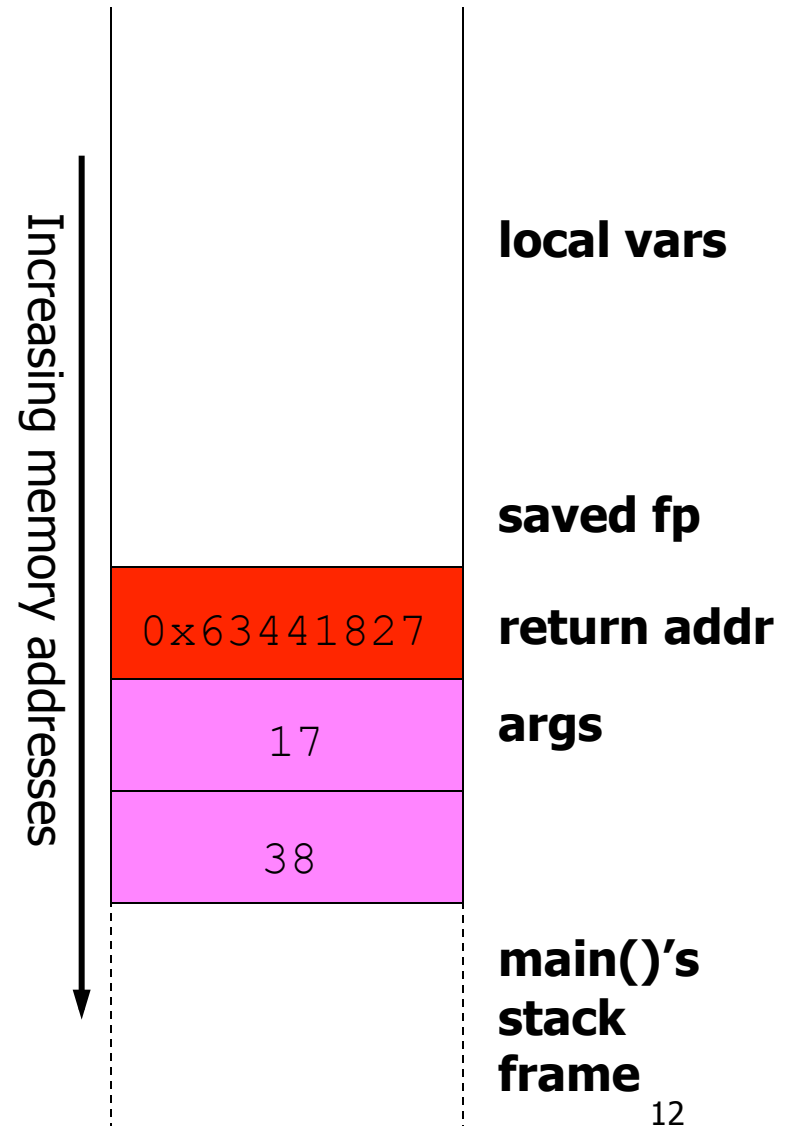


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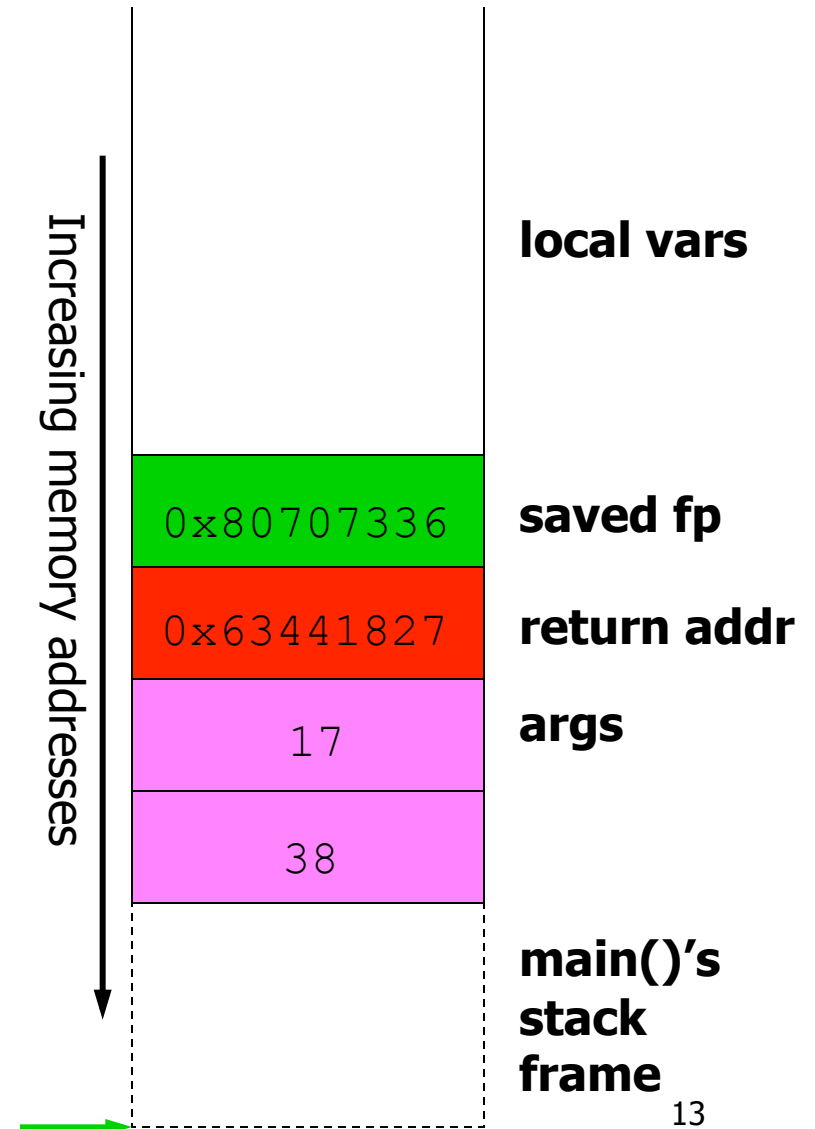


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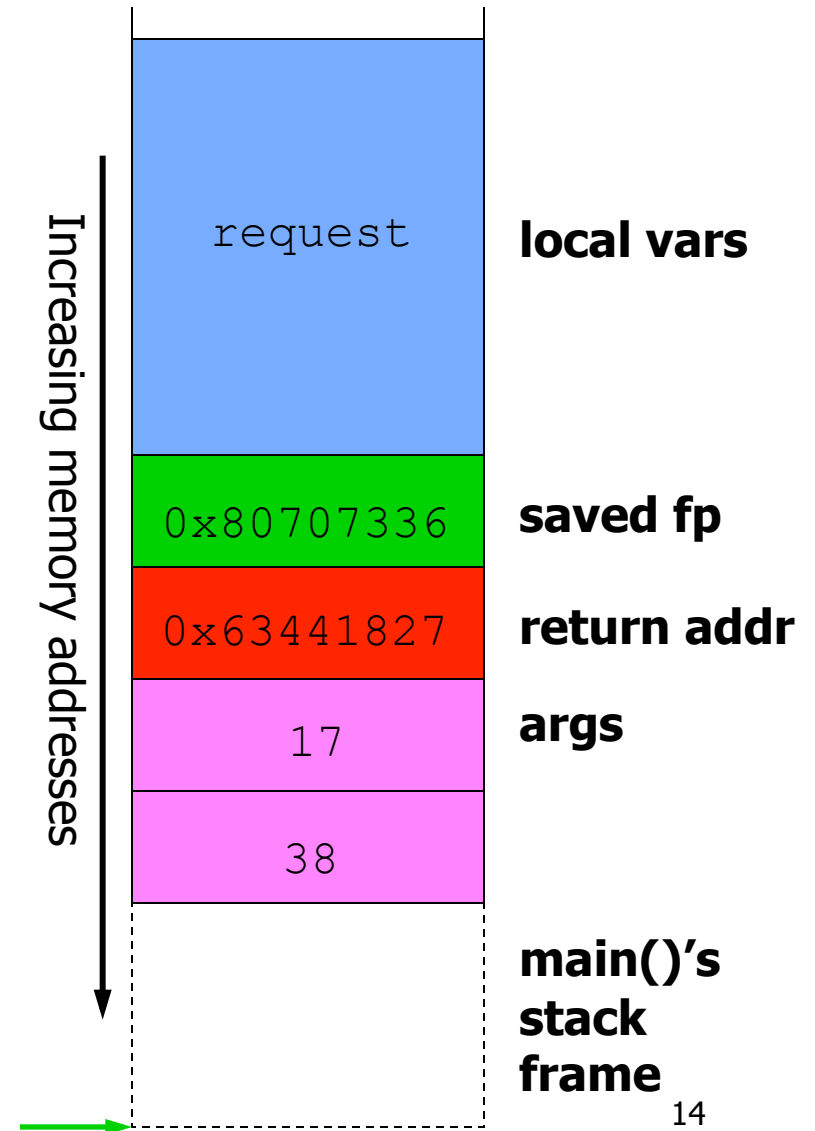


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Stack Smashing Exploits: Basic Idea

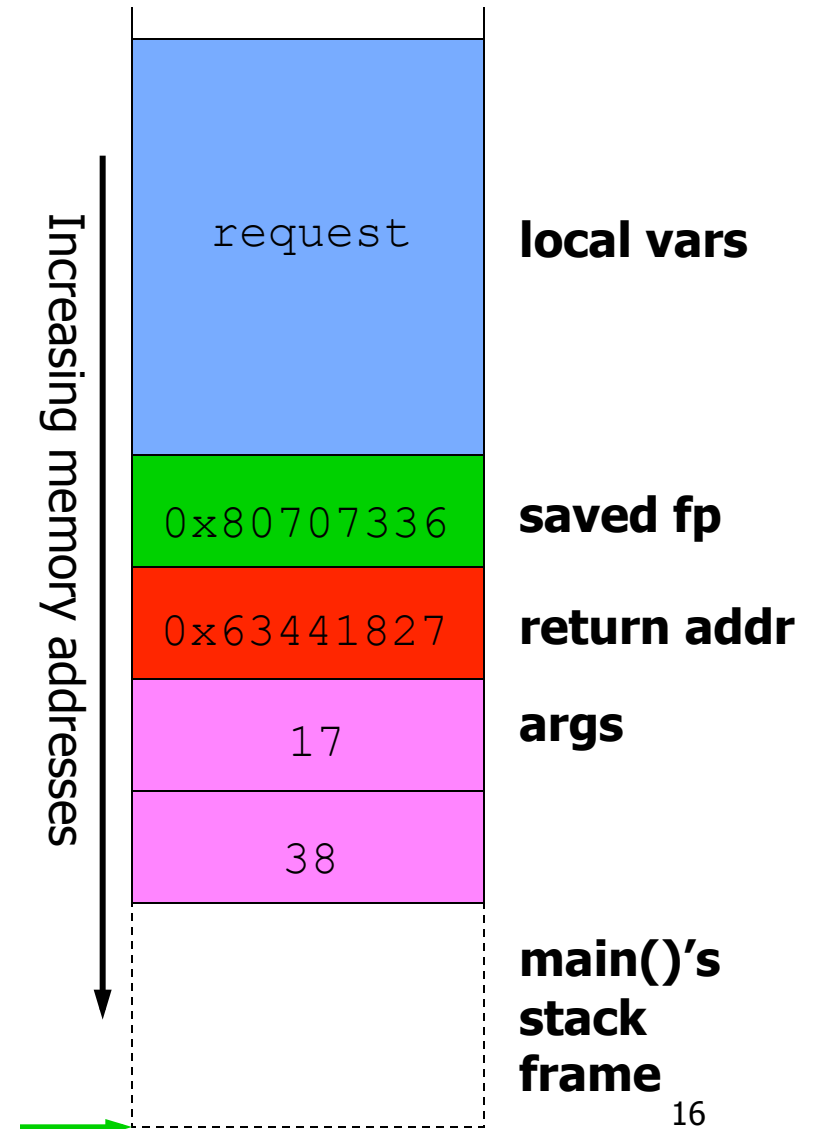
- Return address **stored on stack** directly influences program control flow
- Stack frame layout: local variables allocated **just before return address**
- If programmer allocates buffer as local on stack, reads input, and writes it into buffer without checking input fits in buffer:
 - Send input containing **shellcode** you wish to run
 - Write past end of buffer, and overwrite return address with **address of your code within stack buffer**
 - When function returns, **your code executes!**

Example: Stack Smashing

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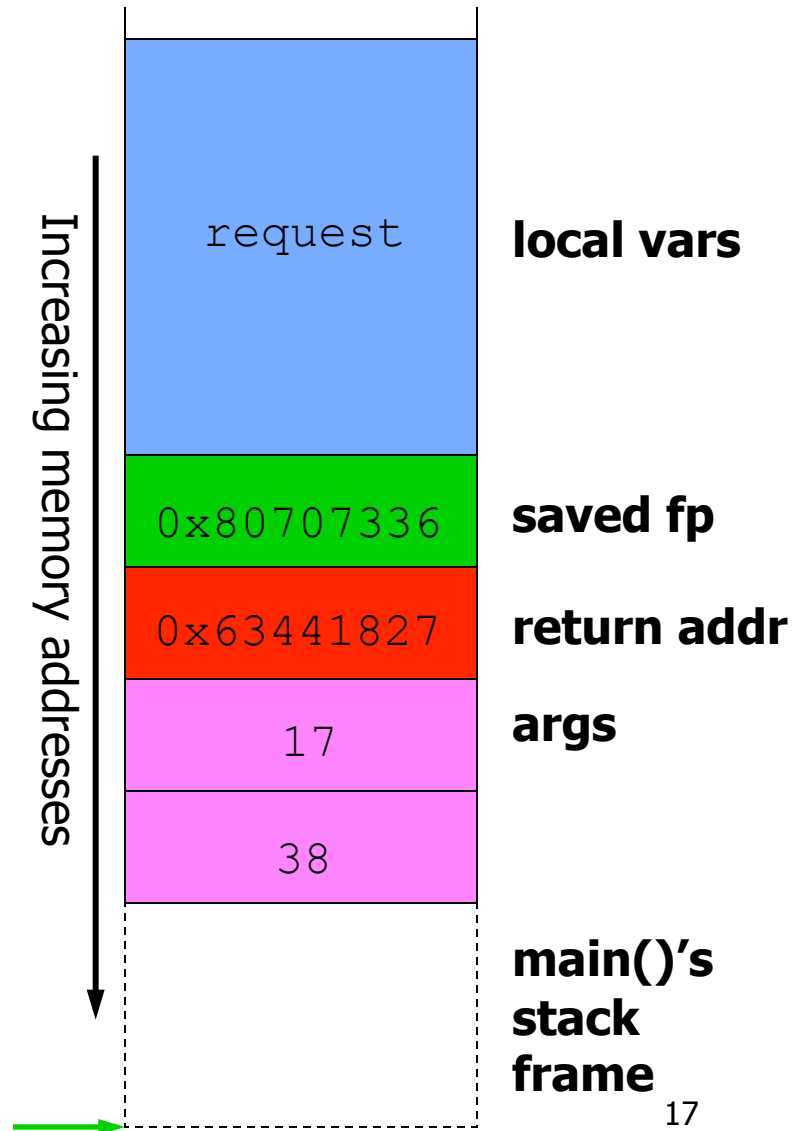
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**malicious
input**

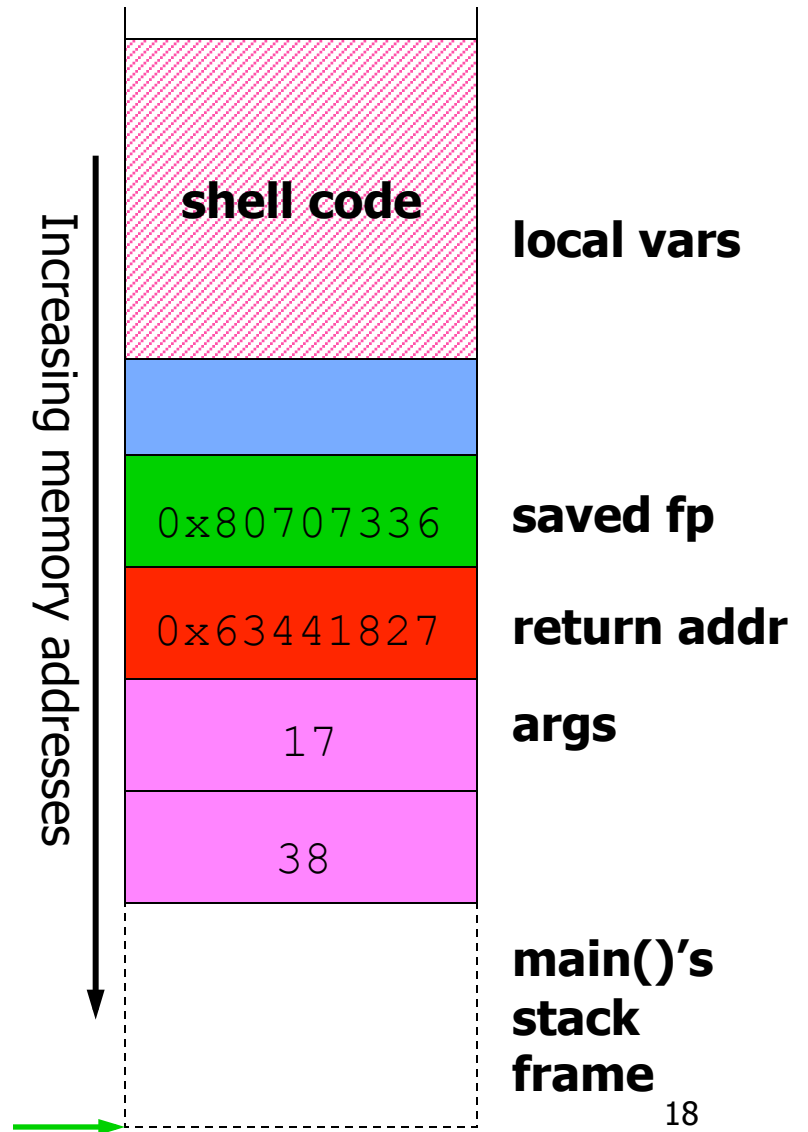


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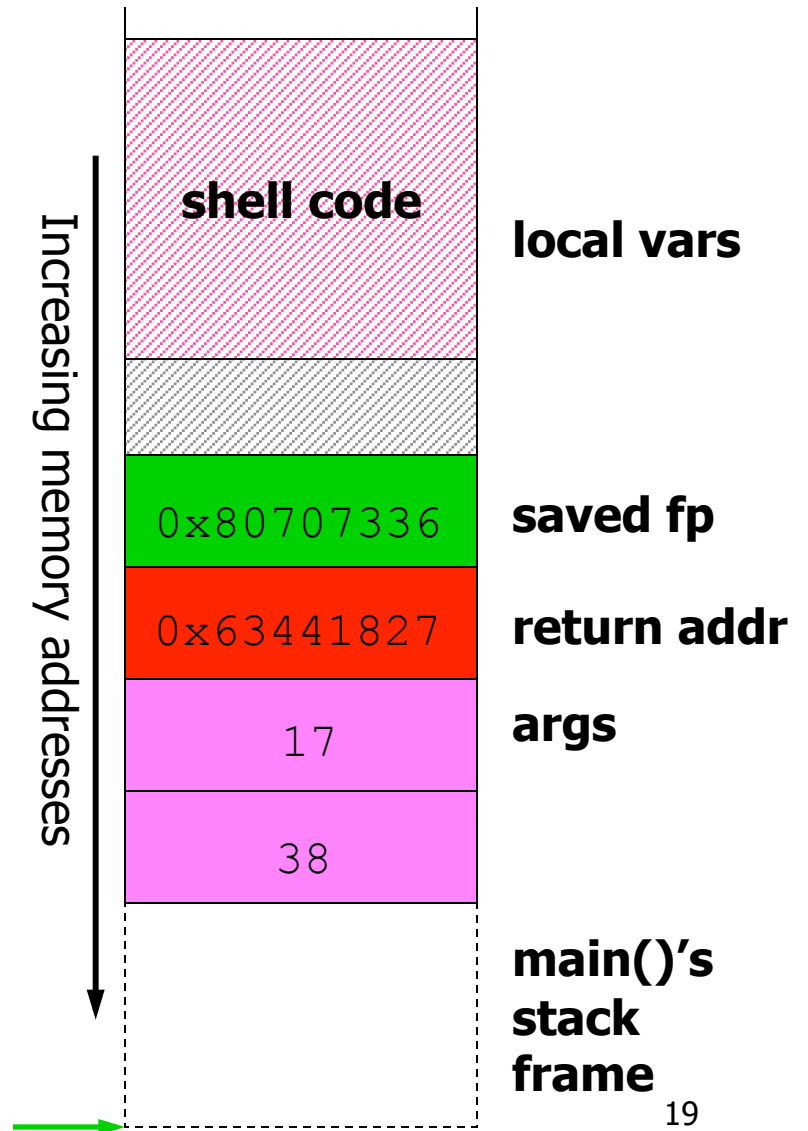
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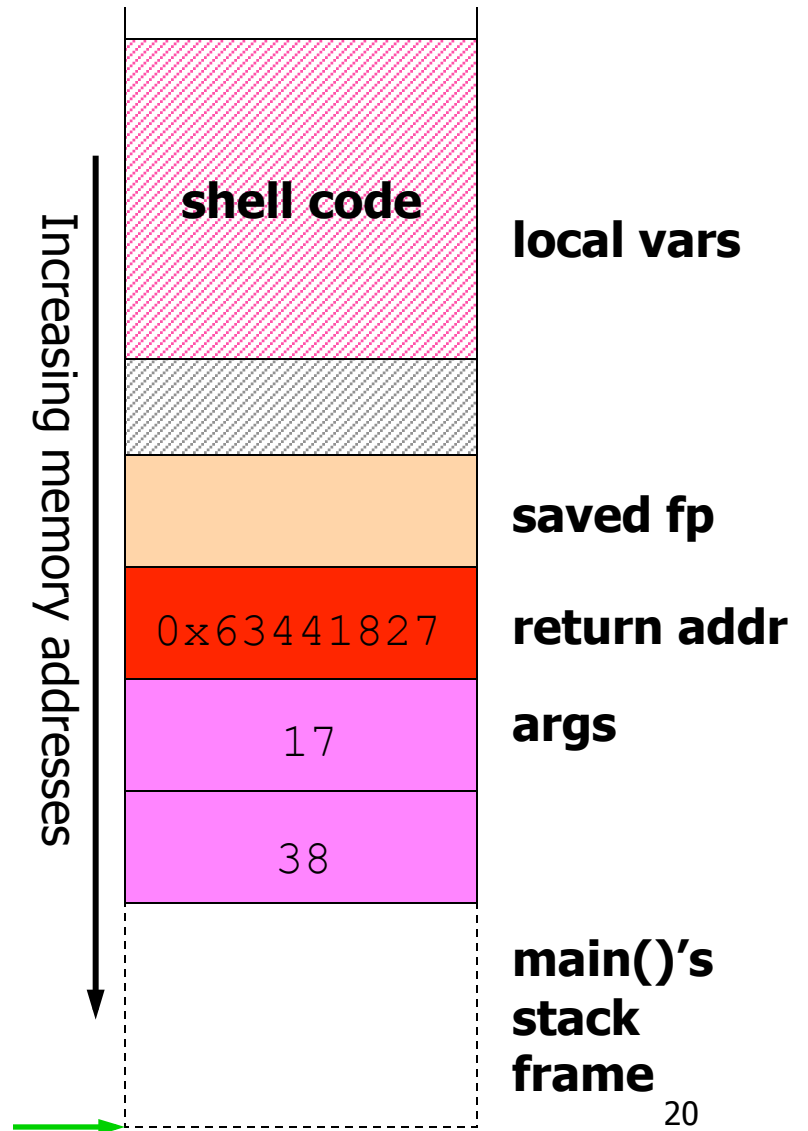


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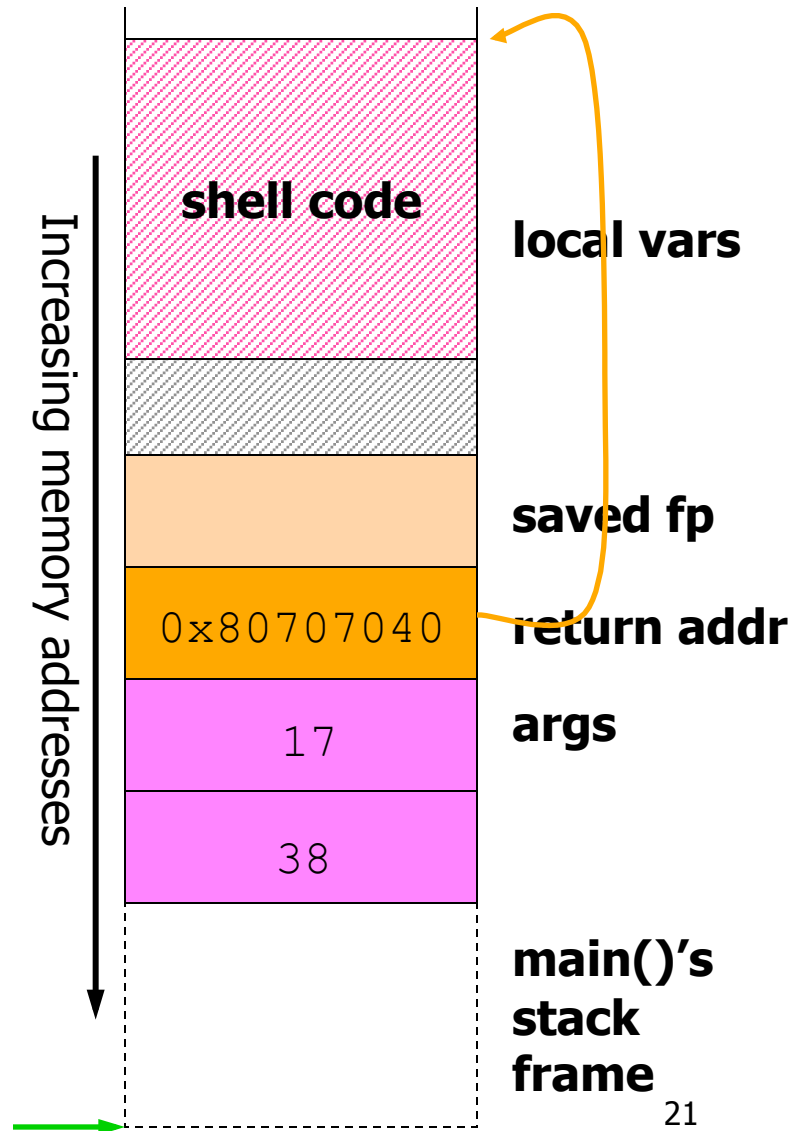


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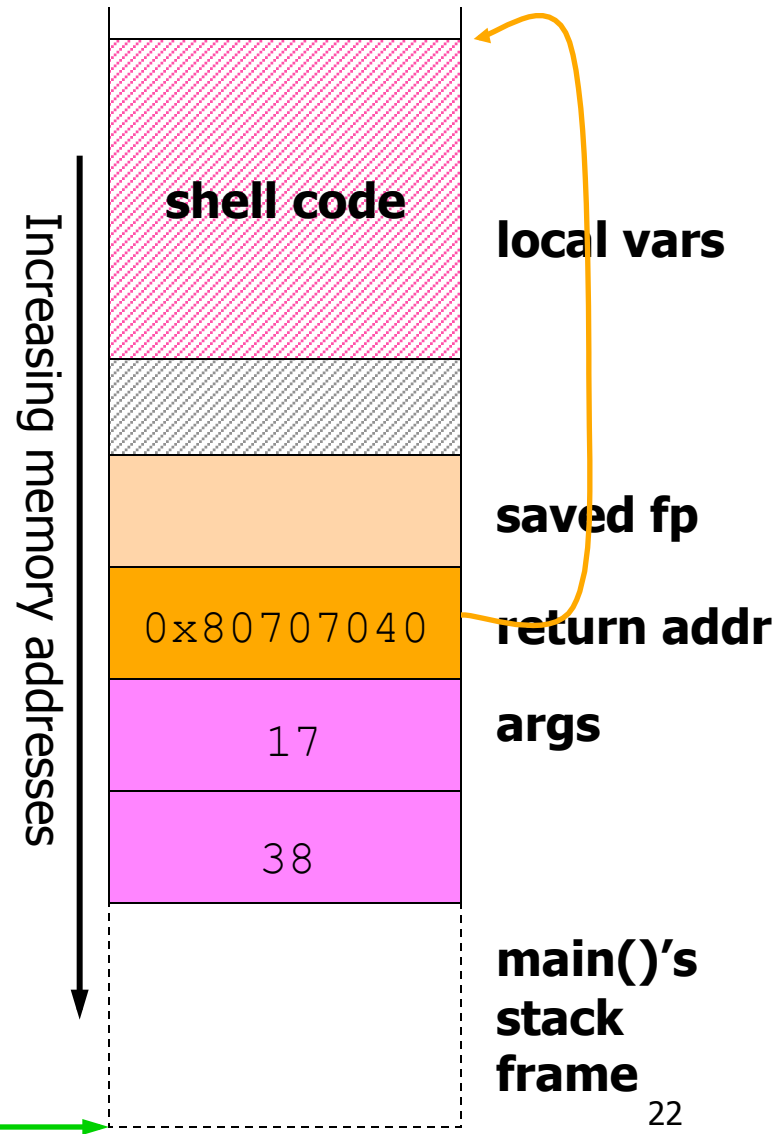
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    while (1) {
        dorequest(17, 38);
        fprintf (log, "completed\n");
    }
}
```

Owned!

malicious input



Designing a Stack Smashing Exploit

- In our example, attacker had to know:
 - existence of stack-allocated buffer without bounds check in program
 - **exact address** for start of stack-allocated buffer
 - **exact offset** of return address beyond buffer start
- Hard to predict these exact values:
 - stack size before call to function containing vulnerability may vary, changing exact buffer address
 - attacker may not know exact buffer size
- Don't need to know either exact value, though!

Designing a Stack Smashing Exploit (2)

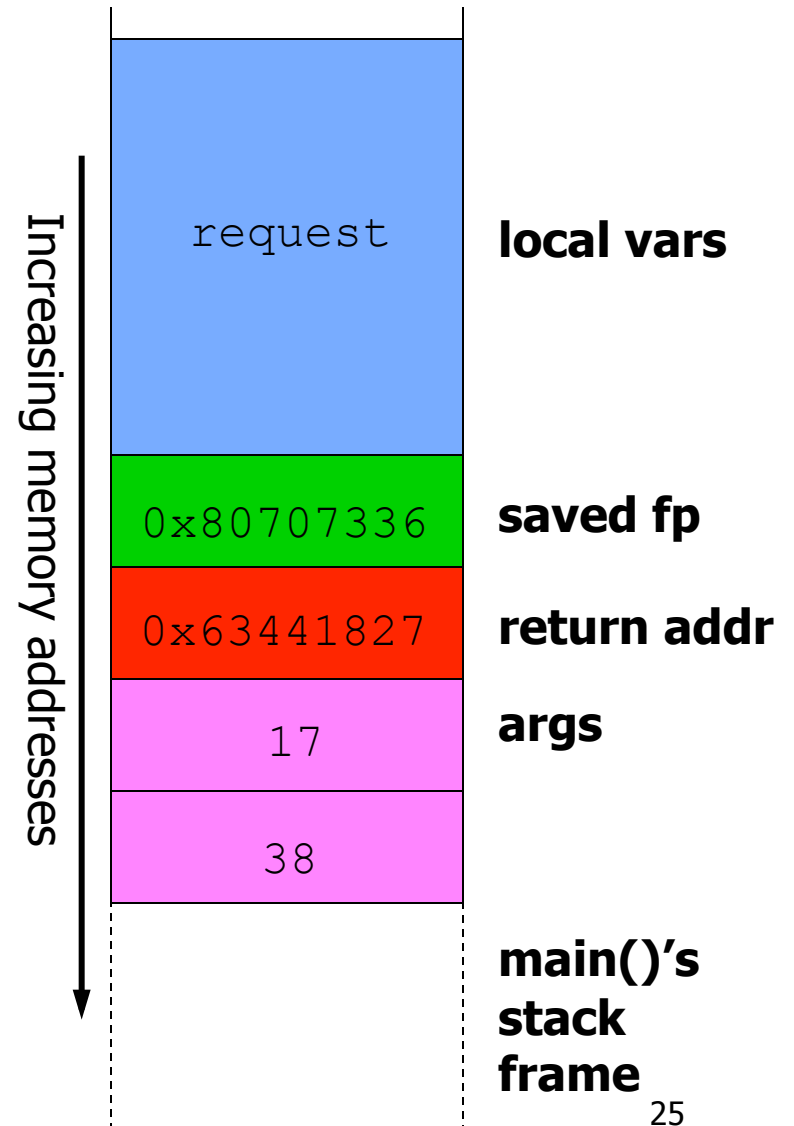
- No need to know exact return address:
 - Precede shellcode with **NOP slide**: long sequence of NOPs (or equivalent instructions)
 - So long as **jump into NOP slide**, shellcode executes
 - Effect: range of return addresses works
- No need to know exact offset of return address beyond buffer start:
 - **Repeat shellcode's address many times** in input
 - So long as first instance occurs before return address's location on stack, and enough repeats, will overwrite it

Example: Stack Smashing "2.0"

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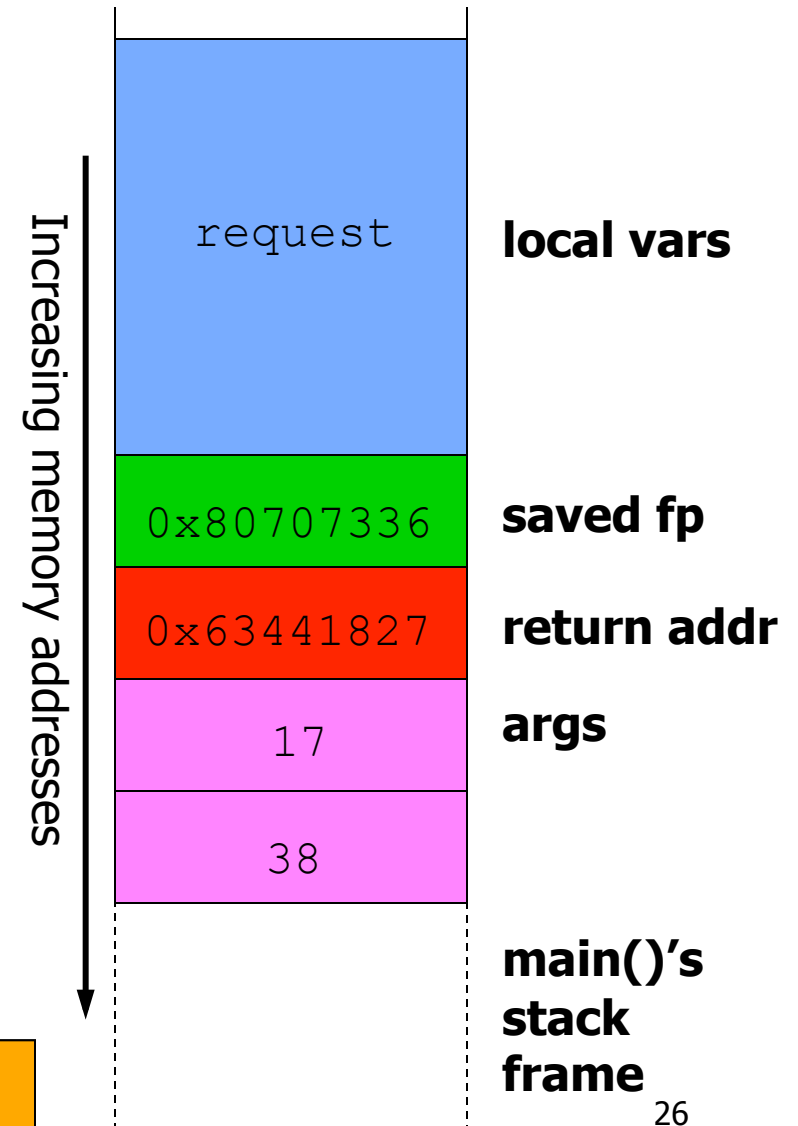
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**malicious
input**



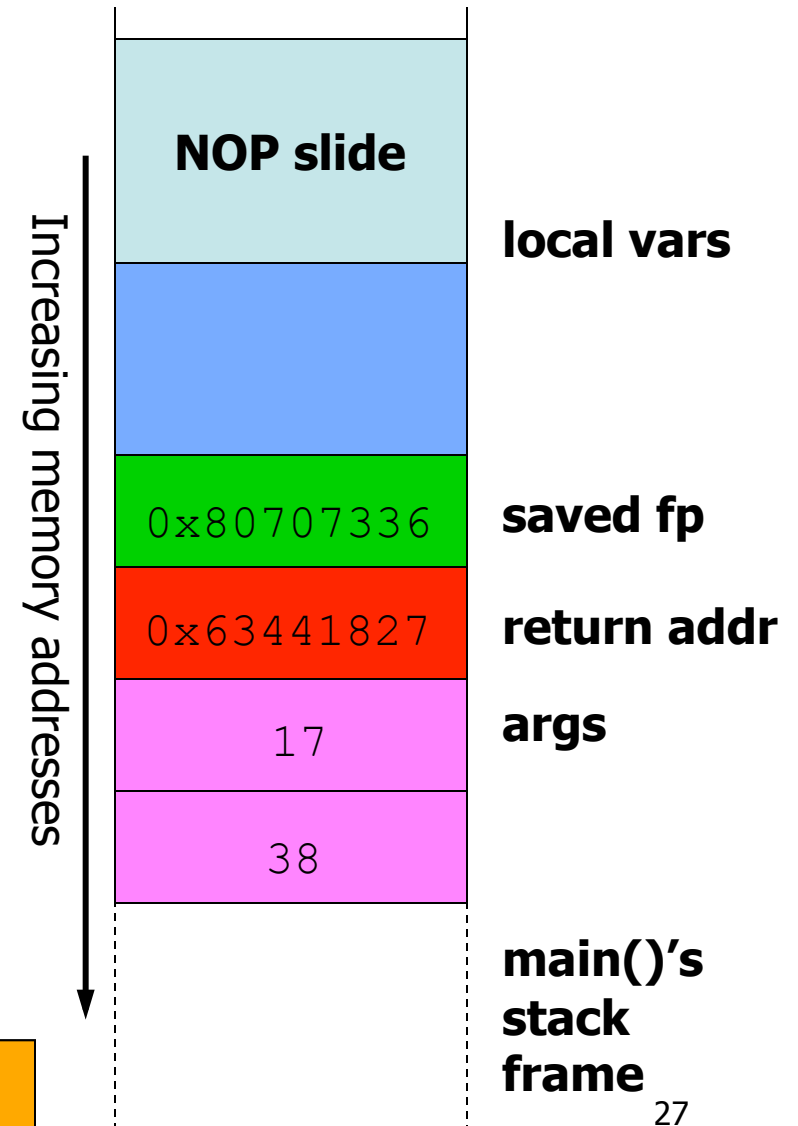
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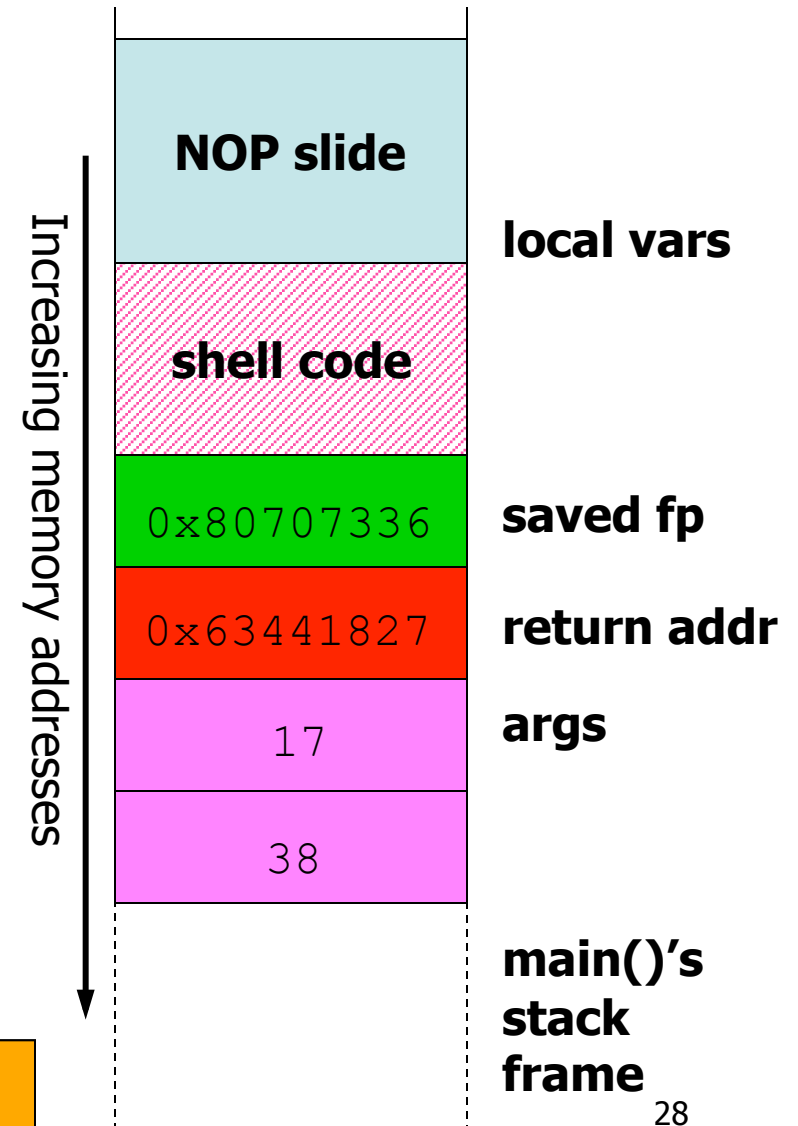
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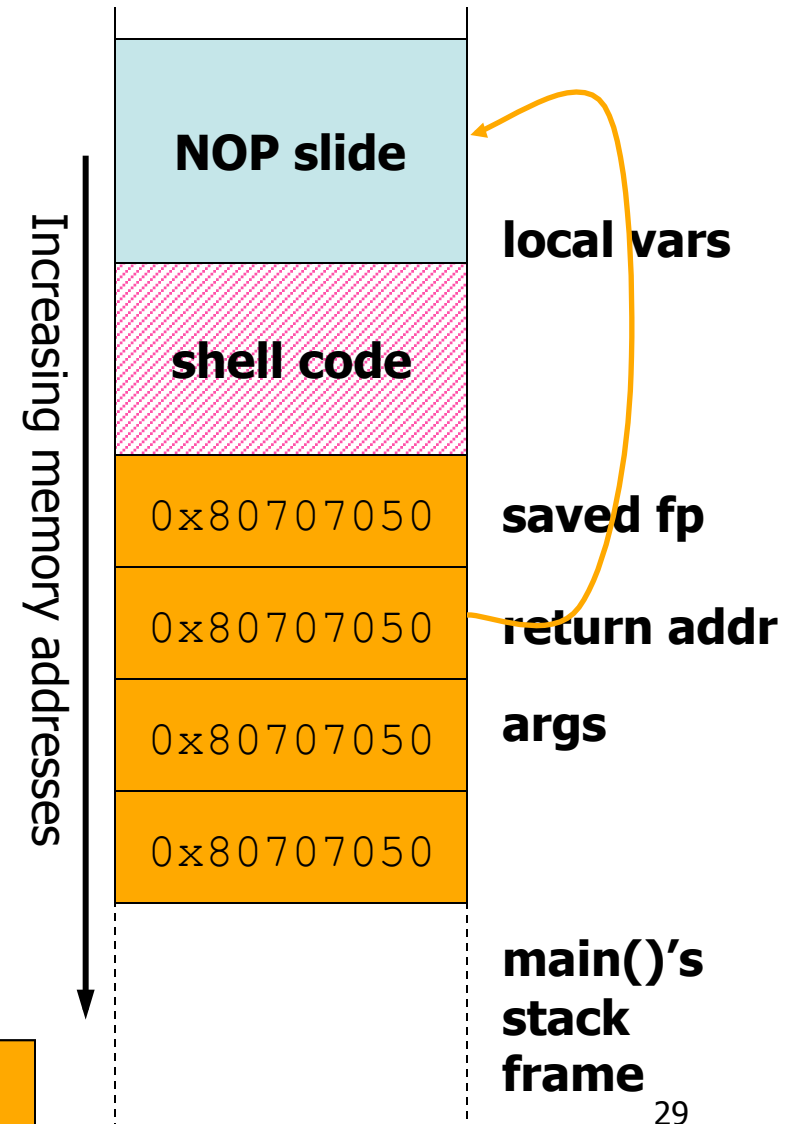
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**malicious
input**



Designing Practical Shellcode

- Shellcode normally executes `/bin/sh`; gives attacker a shell on exploited machine
- `shellcode.c`:

```
void main()  
{  
    char *name[2];  
    name[0] = "/bin/sh";  
    name[1] = NULL;  
    execve(name[0], name, NULL);  
    exit(0); /* if execve fails, don't */  
}           /* dump core */
```

Designing Practical Shellcode (2)

- Compile shellcode.c, disassemble in gdb to get hex representation of instructions
- Problem: to call `execve()`, **must know exact address of string `"/bin/sh"` in memory** (i.e., within stack buffer)
 - **Difficult to predict, as before**

Designing Practical Shellcode (3)


- Both `jmp` and `call` instructions allow **IP-relative addressing**
 - Specify target by offset from current IP, not by absolute address
- Finding absolute address of `"/bin/sh"` at runtime:
 - add `call` instruction at end of shellcode, with target of first shellcode instruction, **using relative addressing**
 - place `"/bin/sh"` immediately after `call` instruction
 - `call` will **push next "instruction's" address onto stack**
 - precede first shellcode instruction with `jmp` to `call`, **using relative addressing**
 - after `call`, **stack will contain address of `"/bin/sh"`**

Practical Shellcode Example

```
jmp 0x2a # 3 bytes
popl %esi # 1 byte
movl %esi,0x8(%esi) # 3 bytes
movb $0x0,0x7(%esi) # 4 bytes
movl $0x0,0xc(%esi) # 7 bytes
movl $0xb,%eax # 5 bytes
movl %esi,%ebx # 2 bytes
leal 0x8(%esi),%ecx # 3 bytes
leal 0xc(%esi),%edx # 3 bytes
int $0x80 # 2 bytes
movl $0x1,%eax # 5 bytes
movl $0x0,%ebx # 5 bytes
int $0x80 # 2 bytes
call -0x2f # 5 bytes
.string \"/bin/sh\" # 8 bytes
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Writes string address on stack!

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Pops string address from stack!

Writes string address on stack!

Eliminating Null Bytes in Shellcode

- Often vulnerability copies string into buffer
- C marks end of string with **zero byte**
 - So functions like `strcpy()` will stop copying if they encounter zero byte in shellcode instructions!
- Solution: replace shellcode instructions containing zero bytes with **equivalent instructions that don't contain zeroes in their encodings**

Defensive Coding to Avoid Buffer Overflows

- **Always explicitly check input length against target buffer size**
- Avoid C library calls that don't do length checking:
 - e.g., `sprintf(buf, ...)`, `scanf("%s", buf)`, `strcpy(buf, input)`
- Better:
 - `snprintf(buf, buflen, ...)`,
`scanf("%256s", buf)`,
`strncpy(buf, input, 256)`

Overview: Format String Vulnerabilities and Exploits

- Recall C's `printf`-like functions:
 - `printf(char *fmtstr, arg1, arg2, ...)`
 - e.g., `printf("%d %d", 17, 42);`
 - **Format string** in 1st argument specifies number and type of further arguments
- Vulnerability:
 - If programmer **allows input to be used as format string**, attacker can force `printf`-like function to **overwrite memory**
 - So attacker can devise exploit input that **includes shellcode, overwrites return address...**

Background: %n Format String Specifier

- “%n” format string specifier directs printf to write number of bytes written thus far into the integer pointed to by the matching int * argument

- Example:

```
int i;  
printf("foobar%n\n", (int *) &i);  
printf("i = %d\n", i);
```

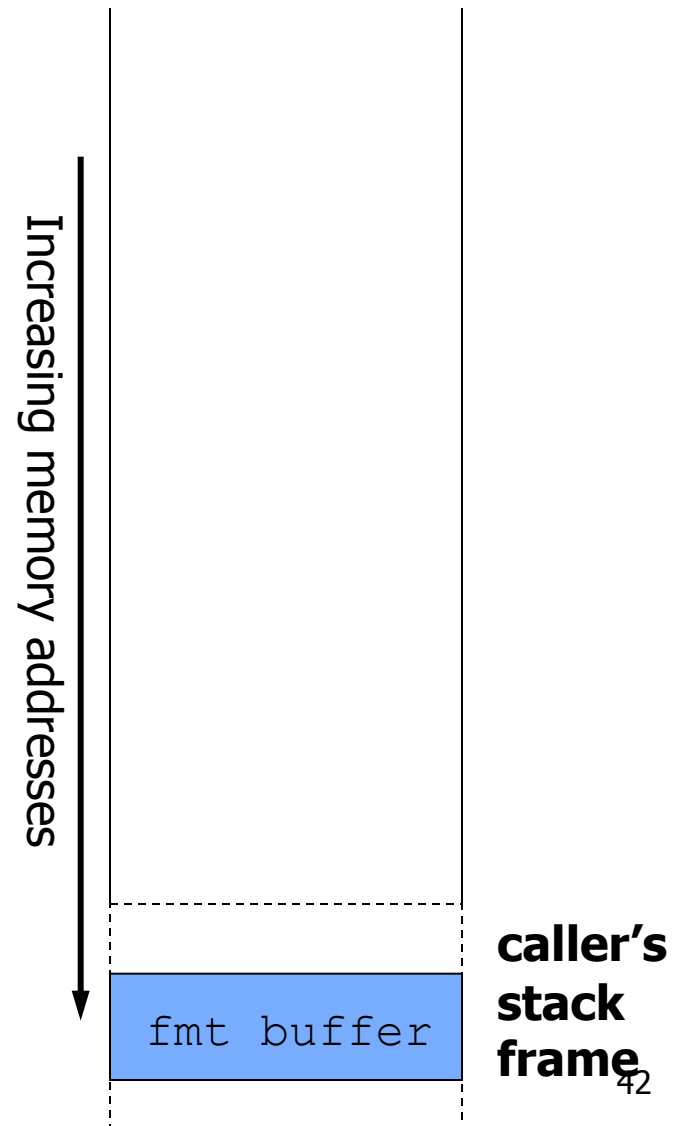
- Output:

```
foobar  
i = 6
```

Abusing %n to Overwrite Memory

- printf's caller often allocates format string buffer on stack
- C pushes parameters onto stack in right-to-left order
 - format string pointer on top of stack, last arg on bottom
- printf() increments pointer to point to successive arguments

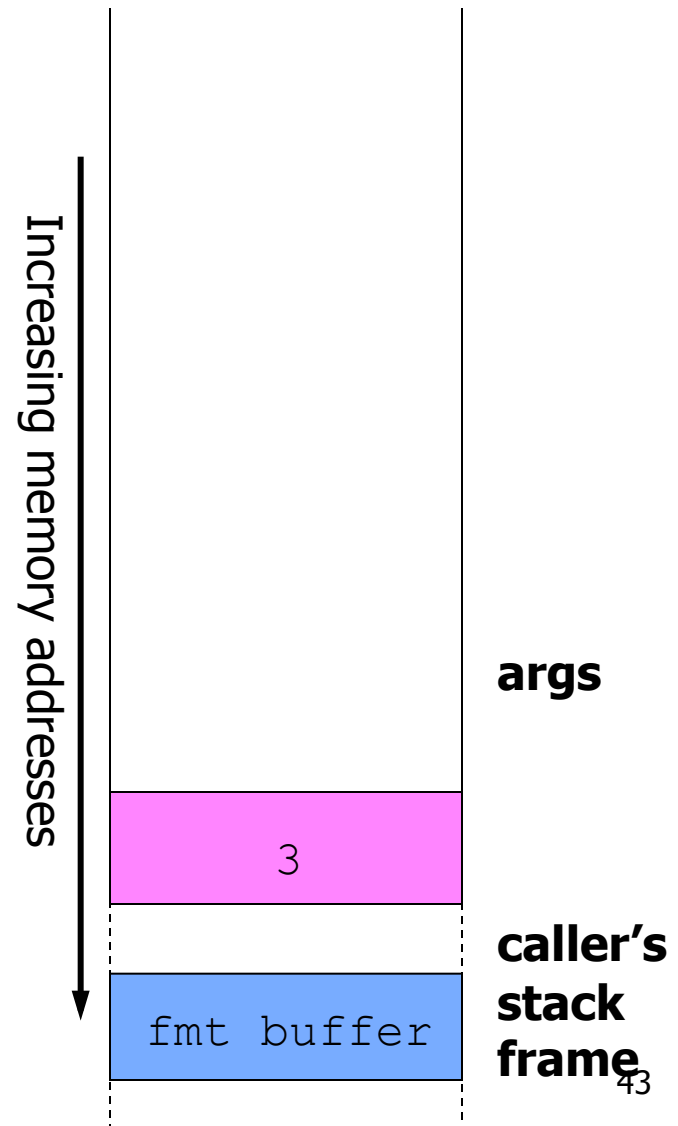
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[suppose input = "%d%d%d\n"]  
char fmt[16];  
strncpy(fmt, input, 15);  
printf(fmt, 1, 2, 3);
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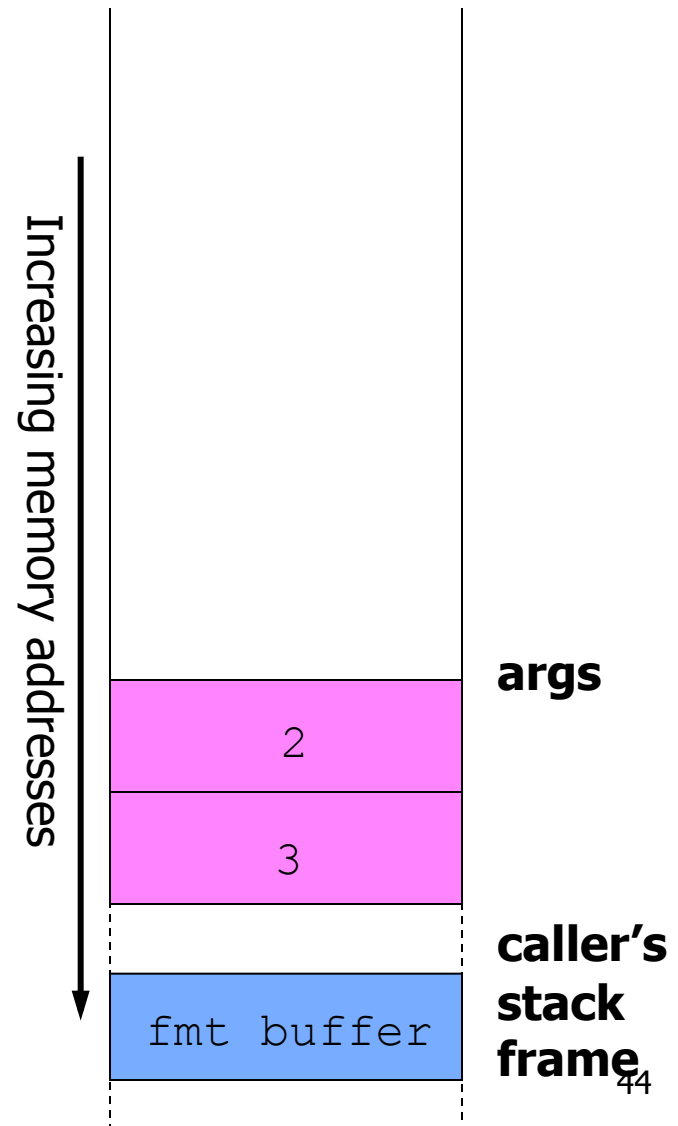
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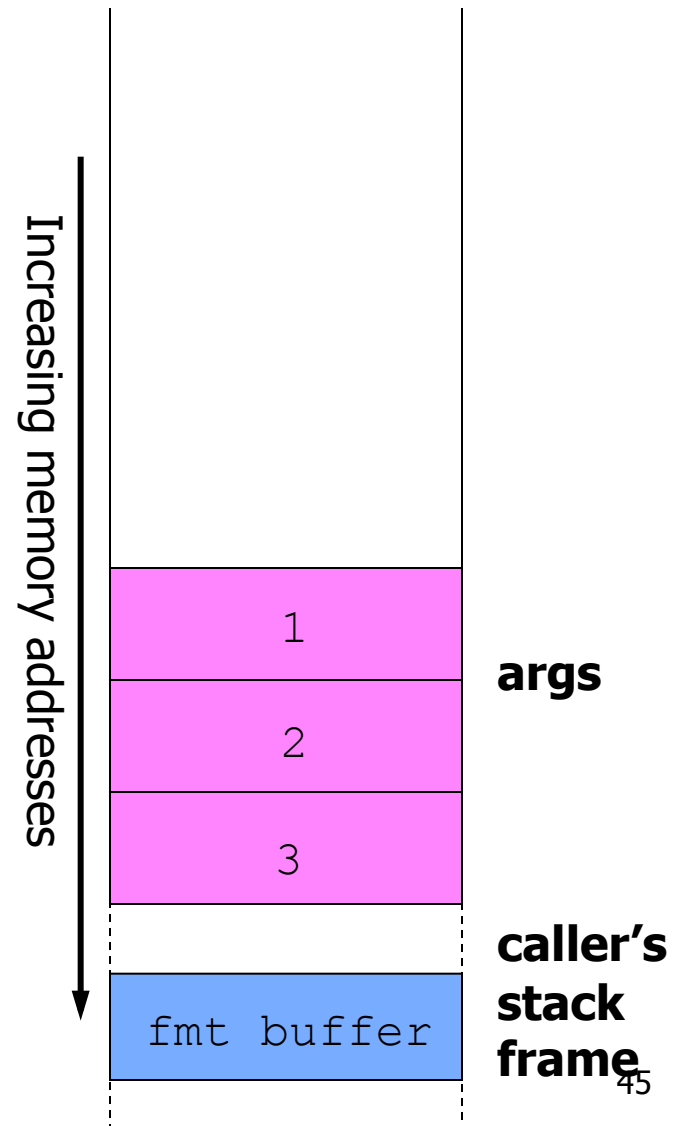
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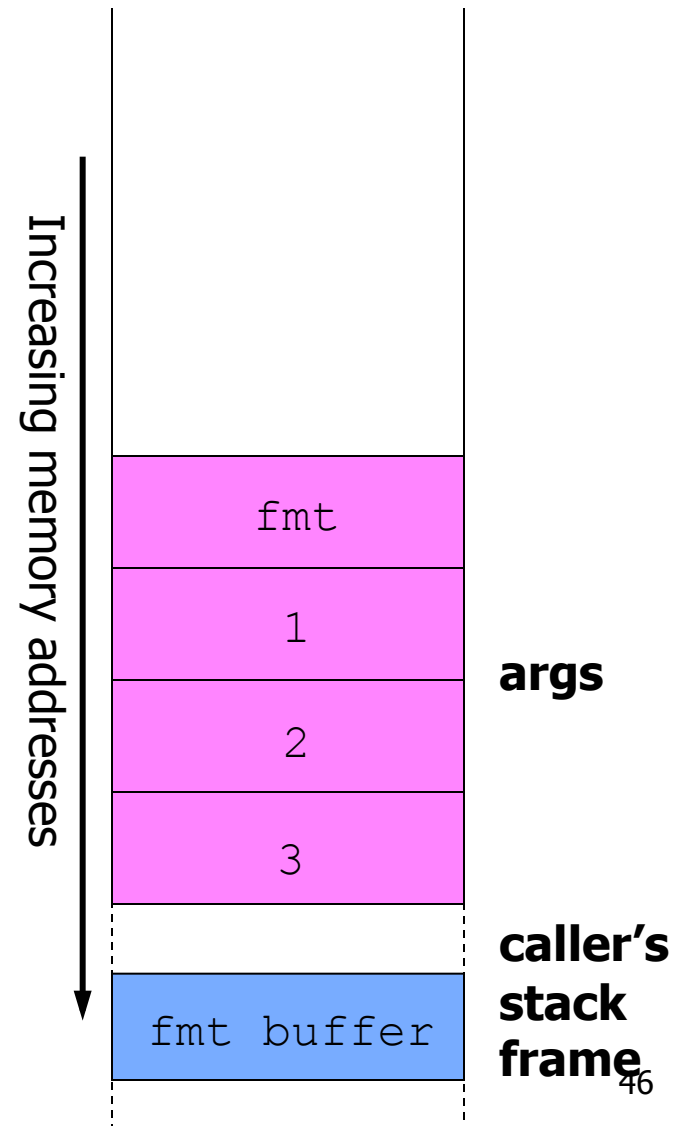
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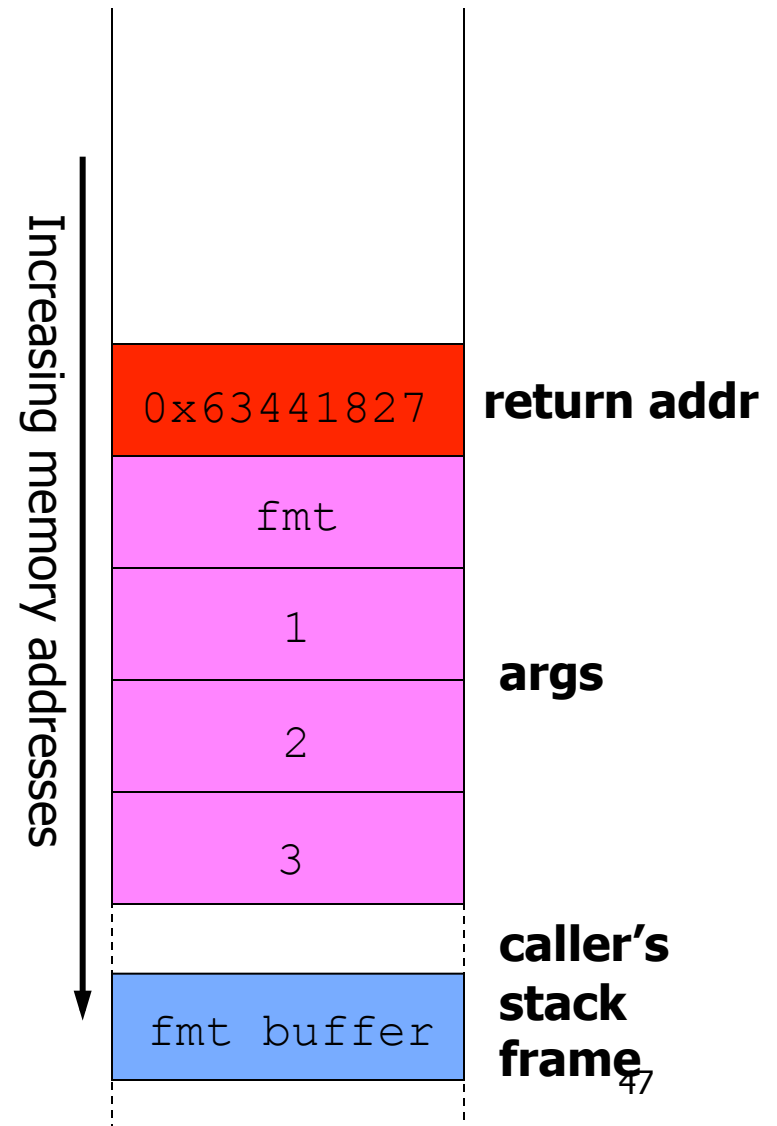
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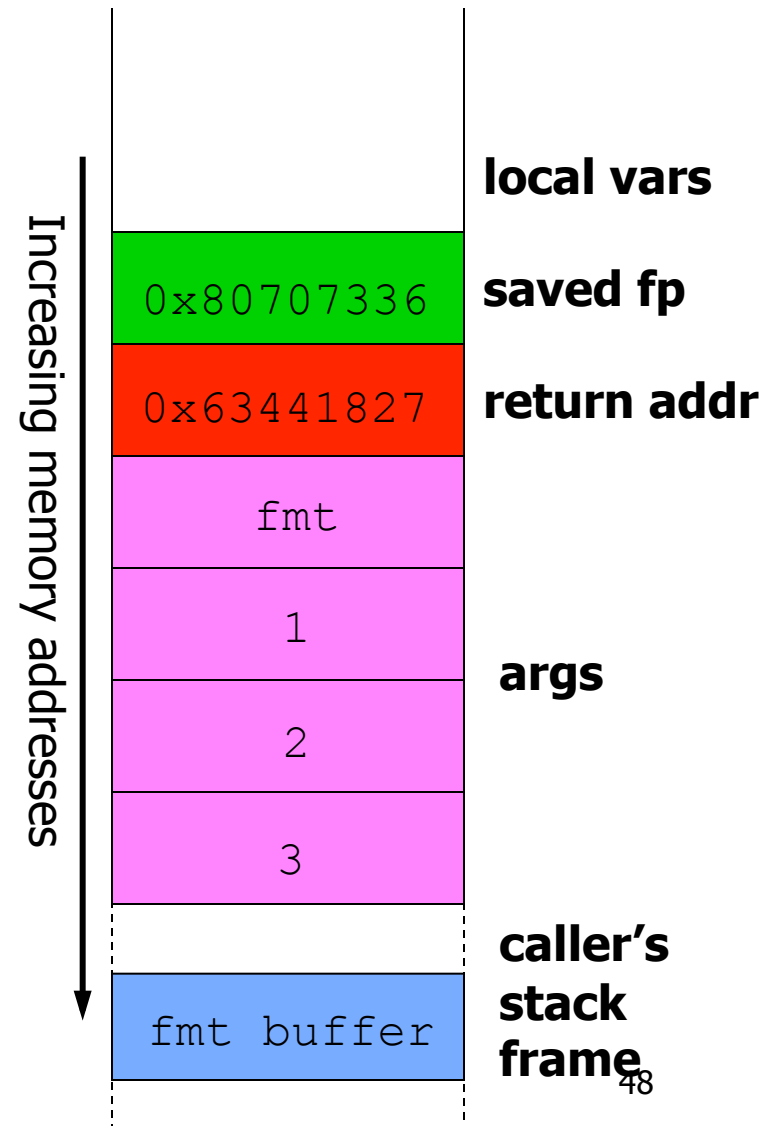
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[suppose input = "%d%d%d\n"]  
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Abusing %n to Overwrite Memory

- printf's caller often allocates format string buffer on stack
- C pushes parameters onto stack in right-to-left order
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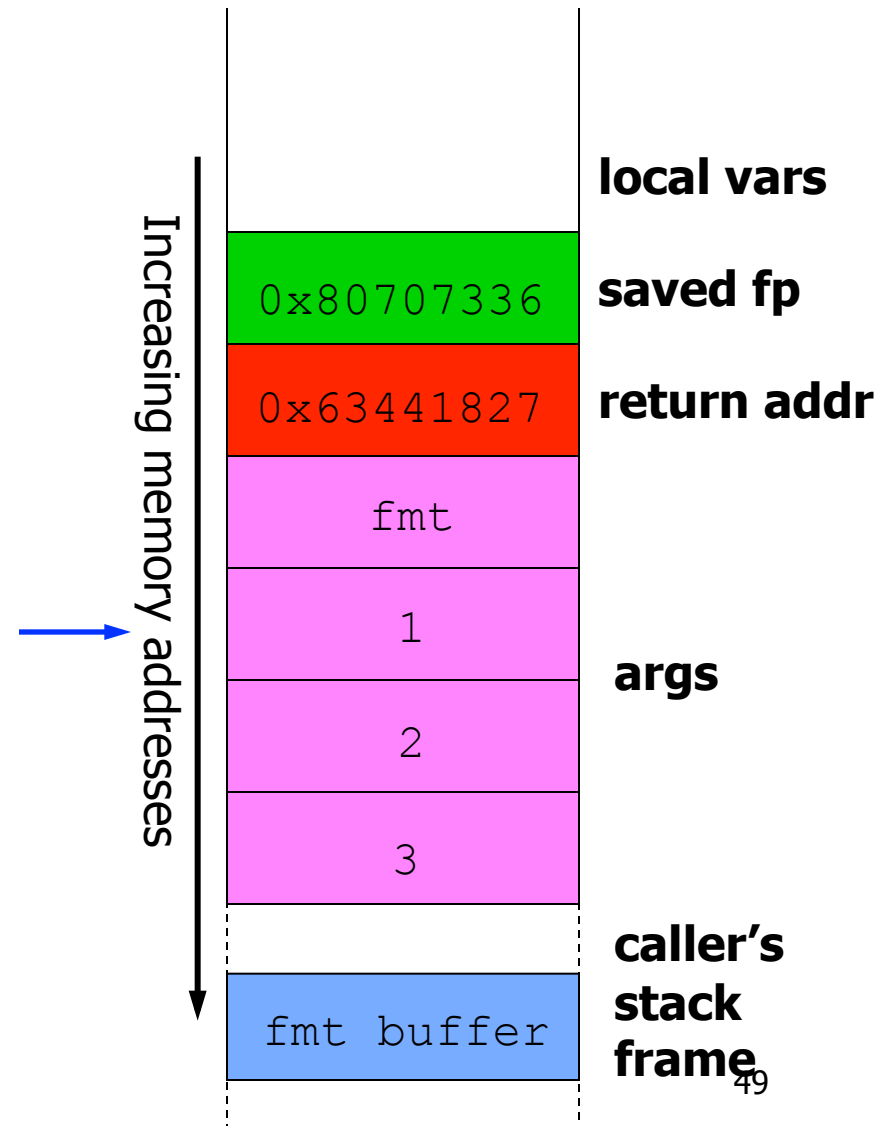
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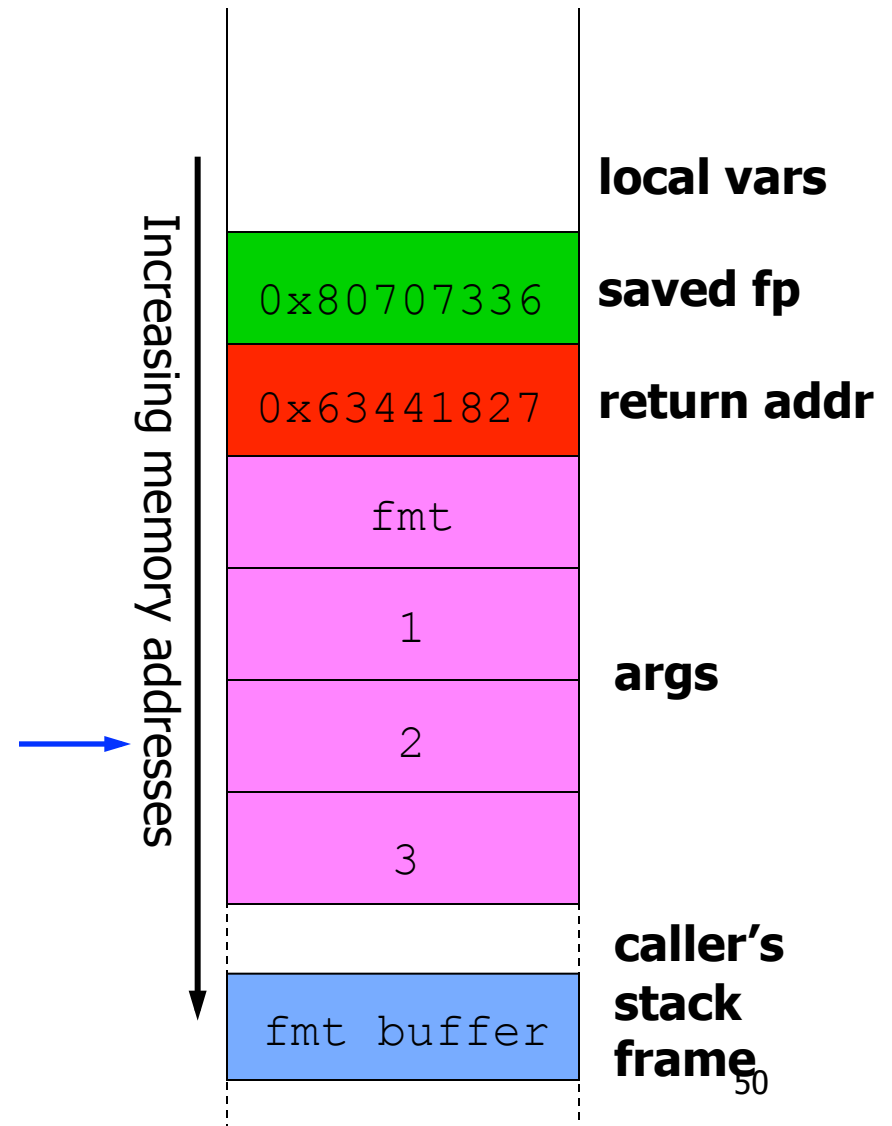
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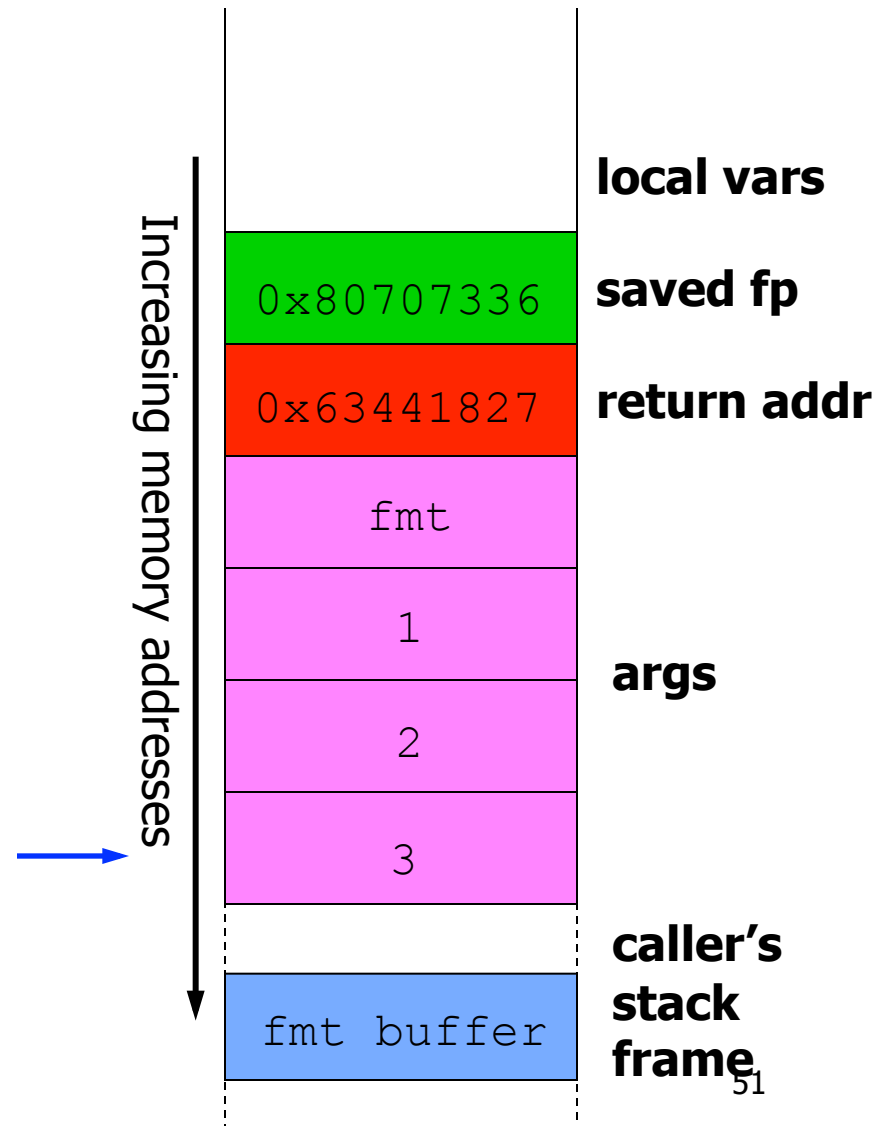
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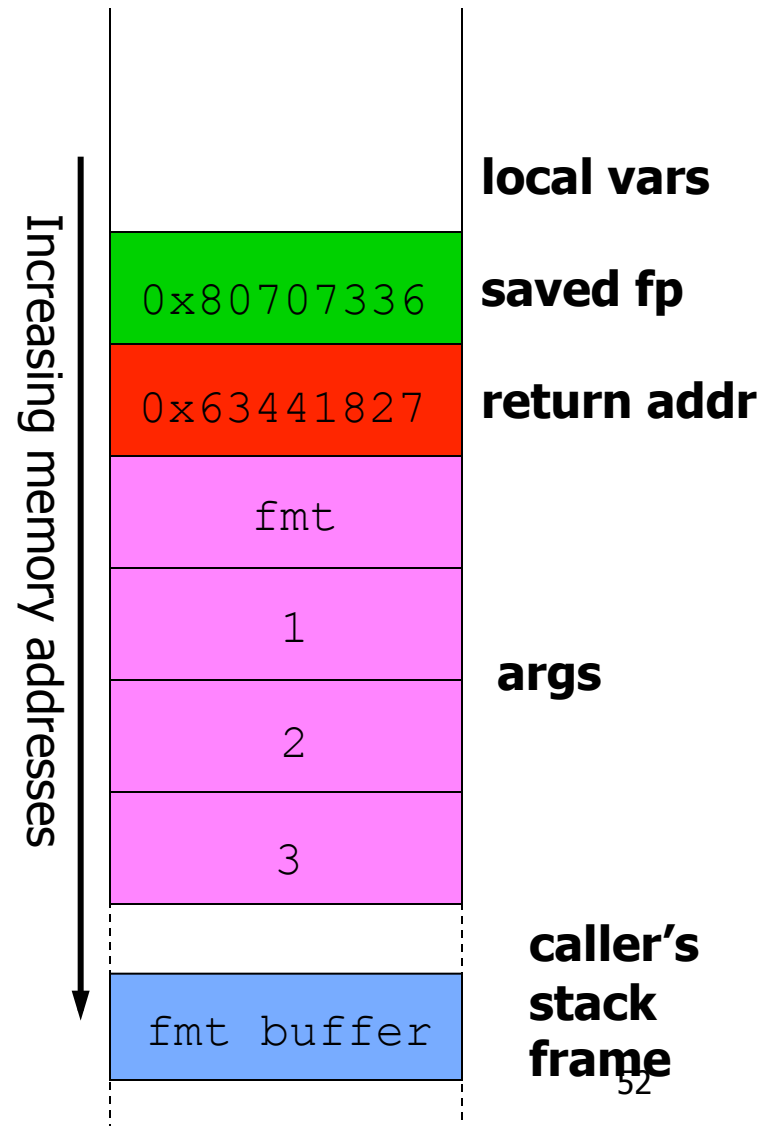
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Abusing %n to Overwrite Memory (2)

- Idea:
 - Use specifiers in format string to **increment printf()'s arg pointer so it points to format string itself**
 - Supply **target address to write** at start of format string
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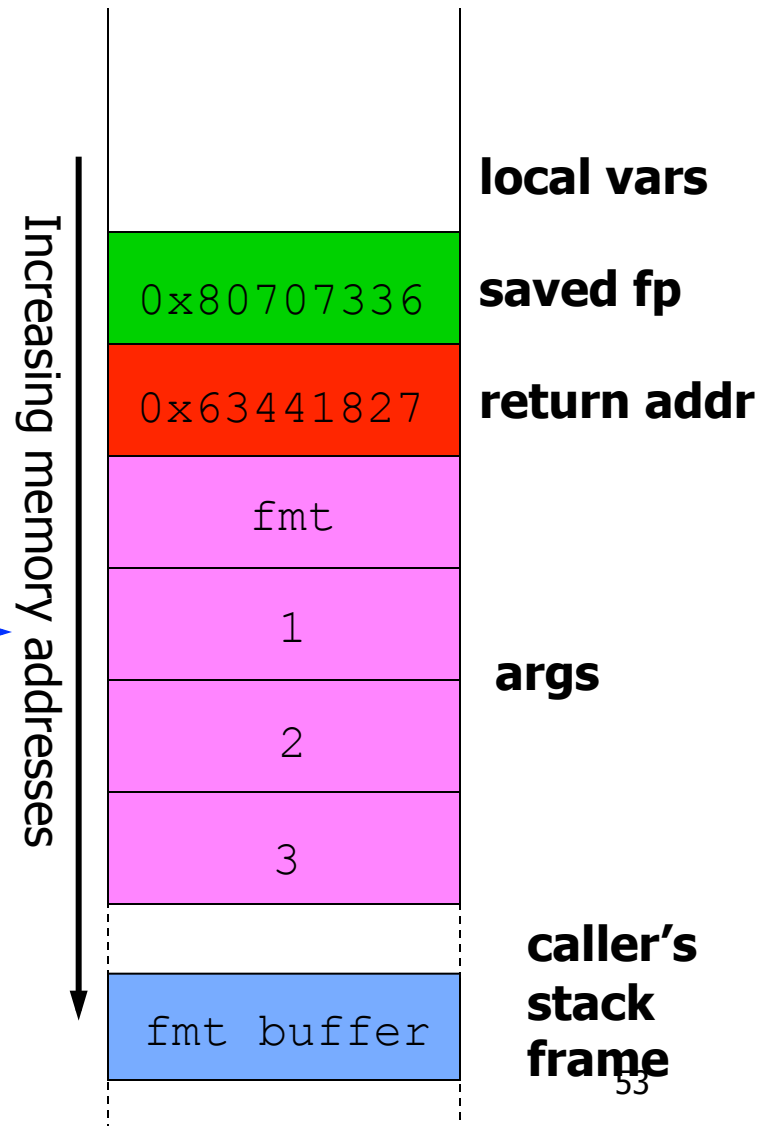
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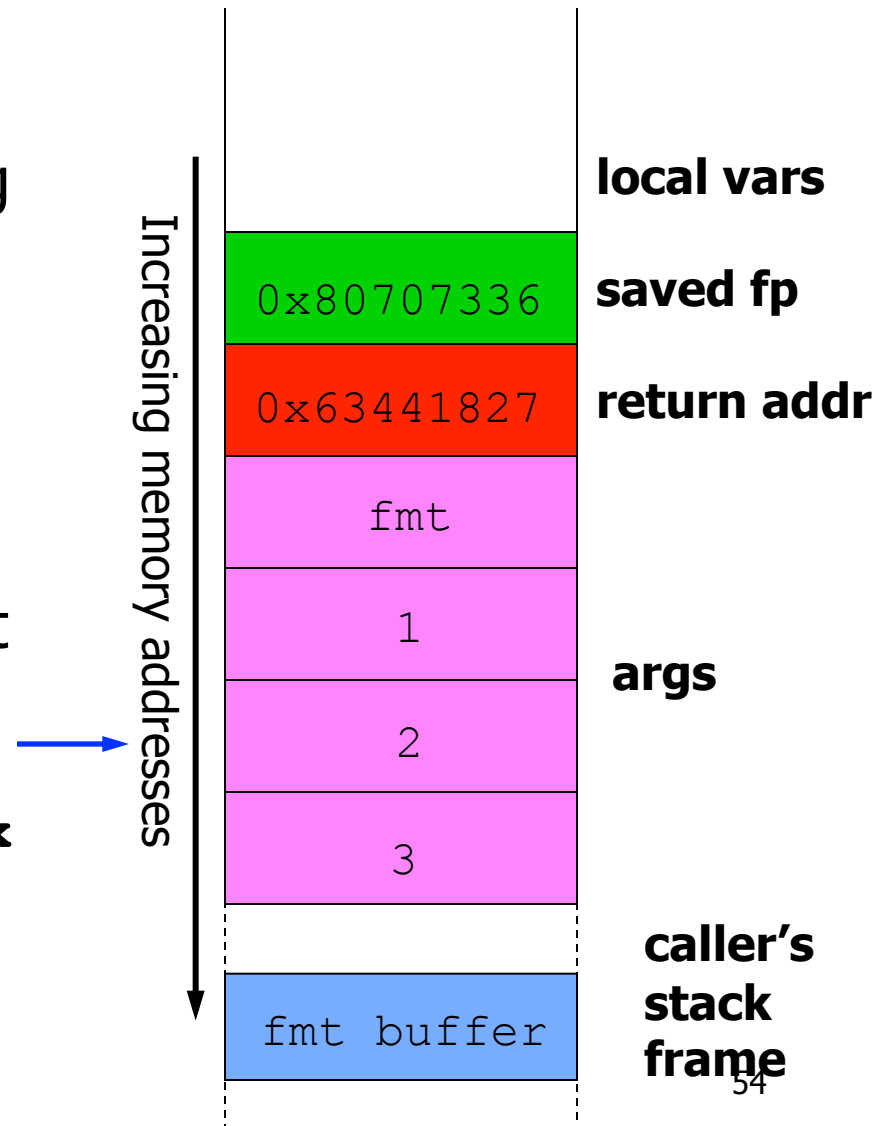
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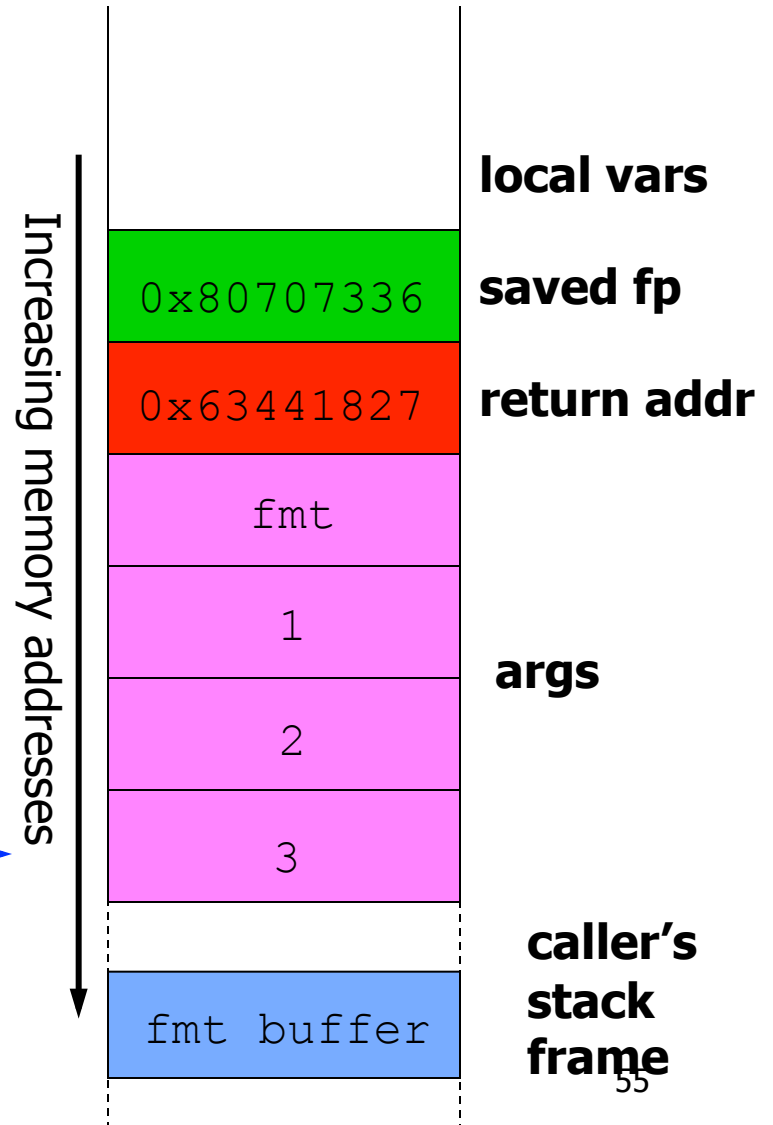
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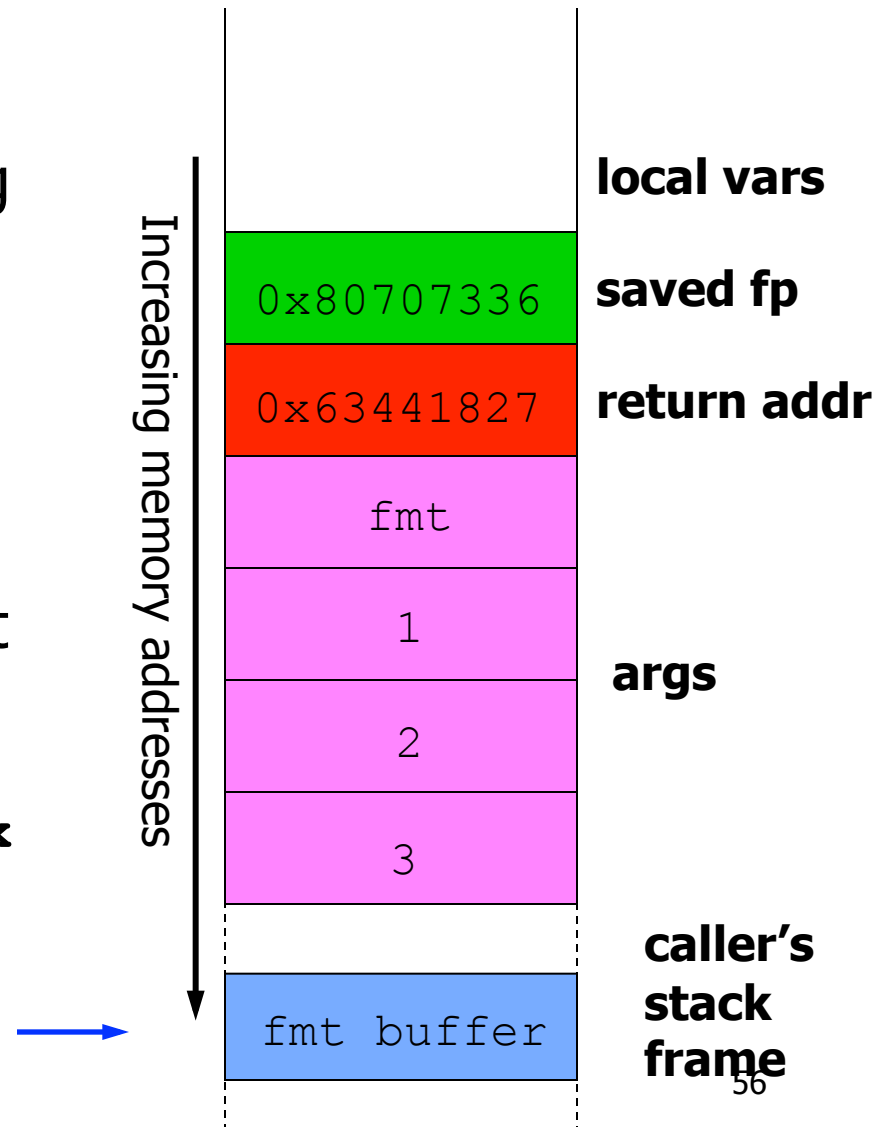
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Abusing %n to Overwrite Memory (2)

- Idea:

Use specifiers in format string

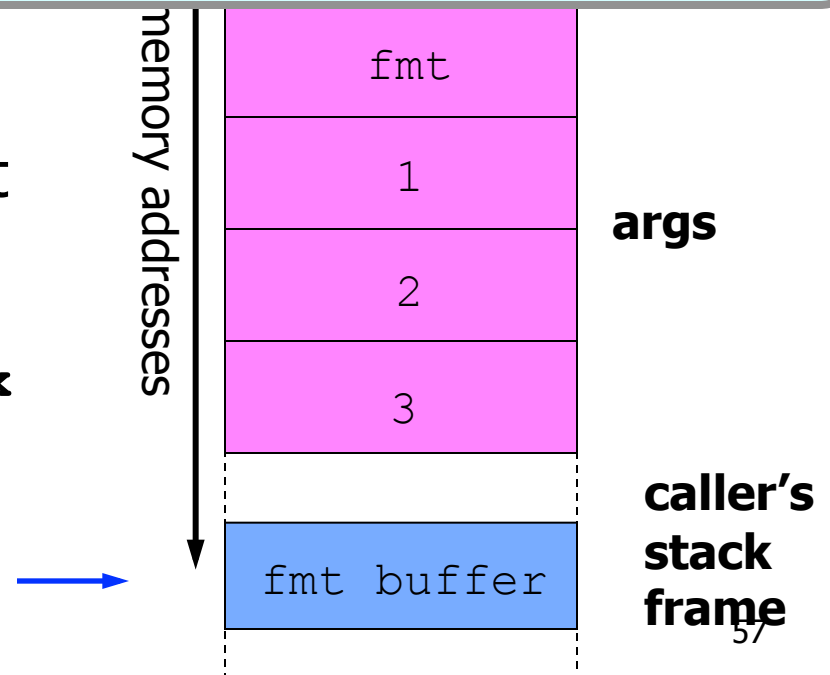
local vars

Result: can overwrite chosen location with small integer

Still need to choose value we overwrite with...

- Supply target address to write at start of format string
- Supply "%n" at end of format string

```
[input =  
"\xc0\xc8\xff\xbf%08x%08x%08x  
%08x%08x%n"]  
char fmt[16];  
strncpy(fmt, input, 15);  
printf(fmt, 1, 2, 3);
```



Controlling Value Written by %n

- %n writes number of bytes printed
- But number of bytes printed **controlled by format string!**
 - Format specifiers allow indication of exactly how many characters to output
 - e.g., “%20u” means “use 20 digits when printing this unsigned integer”
- So we can use “%[N]u%n” format specifier to **set least significant byte of target address to value [N]!**

Example: Using %[N]u%n

- Example format string:

“ [spop] \x01\x01\x01\x01\xc0\xc8\xff\xbf%50u%n”

- [spop] is sequence of “%08x” values, to advance printf ()’s arg pointer to first byte after [spop]
- \x01\x01\x01\x01 is dummy integer, to be consumed by %50u
- \xc0\xc8\xff\xbf is address of integer whose least significant byte will be changed by %n
- %50u sets number of output bytes to 50 (0x32)
- %n writes number of output bytes to target address
- Result: least significant byte of 4-byte value at 0xbfffc8c0 overwritten with number of bytes printed total: 0x32 + 0x08 + [bytes printed by spop]

Overwriting Full 4-Byte Values

- Template for format string:
 - [4 non-zero bytes (dummy int)]
 - [4 bytes target address]
 - [dummy int][4 bytes (target address + 1)]
 - [dummy int][4 bytes (target address + 2)]
 - [dummy int][4 bytes (target address + 3)]
 - [spop]
 - %[1st byte value to write]u%n
 - %[2nd byte value to write]u%n
 - %[3rd byte value to write]u%n
 - %[4th byte value to write]u%n
- N.B. LSB always in lowest memory address (Intel is little-endian)

Overwriting 4-Byte Values (2)

- Counter for %n is **cumulative**
- But **only least significant byte written matters**
- Say %n count is x so far, want next overwritten byte to have value y
- Next %u should be %[N]u, where:
$$N = (0x100 + y - (x \bmod 0x100)) \bmod 0x100$$

if $(N < 10)$
$$N += 0x100$$

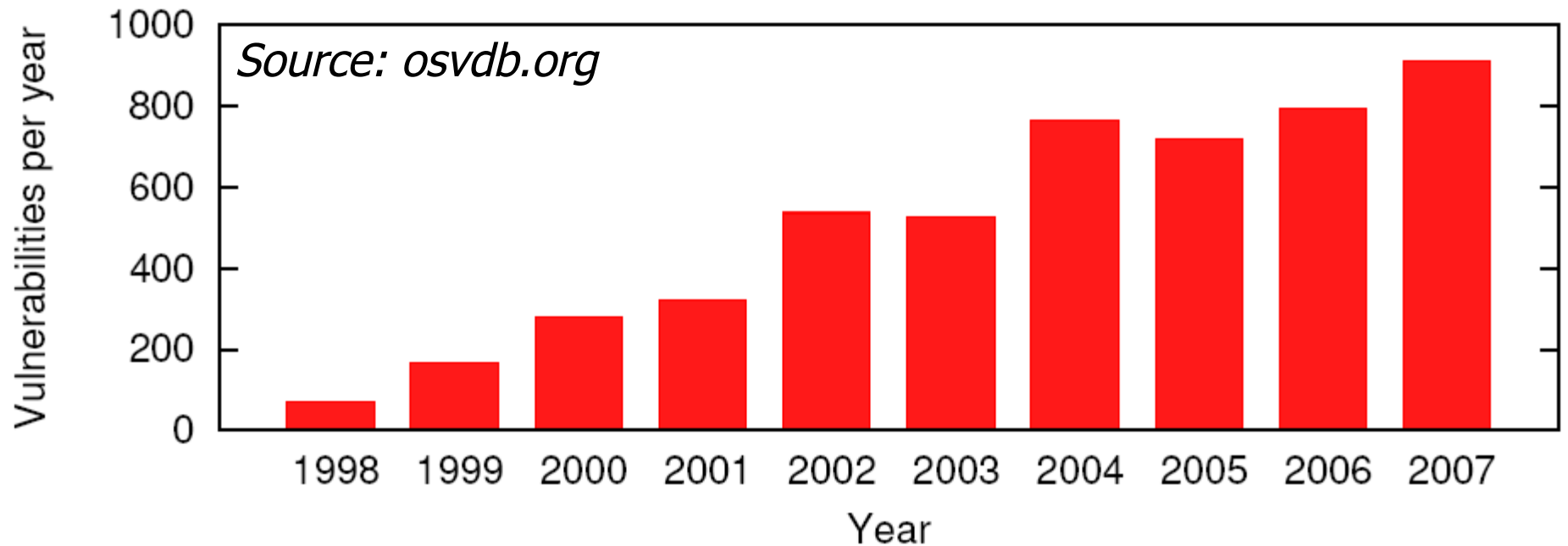
Format String Vulnerabilities Are Real and Versatile

- Example: `wu-ftpd <= 2.6.0`:

```
{  
  char buffer[512];  
  snprintf (buffer, sizeof (buffer), user);  
  buffer[sizeof (buffer) - 1] = '\\0';  
}
```

- Ability to overwrite arbitrary memory makes format string vulnerabilities **versatile**:
 - Sure, can overwrite return address to return to shellcode, but **other ways to attack, too**
 - If server contains “superuser” flag (0 or 1), just **overwrite that flag to be 1...**

Vulnerability Prevalence



- More scrutiny of software than ever
- Little progress in producing vulnerability-free software

Disclosure and Patching of Vulnerabilities

- Software vendors and open-source developers audit code, **release vulnerability reports**
 - Usually describe vulnerability, but don't give exploit
 - Often include announcement of **patch**
- Race after disclosure: users patch, attackers devise exploit
 - Users often lazy or unwilling to patch; "patches" can **break software**, or include **new vulnerabilities**
- Attackers prize exploits for undisclosed vulnerabilities: **zero-day exploits**
- Disclosure best for users: **can patch or disable**, vs. risk of **widest harm by zero-day exploit**

Summary

- Many categories of vulnerabilities in C/C++ binaries; **2 we've seen hardly exhaustive**
- Incentives for attackers to find vulnerabilities and design exploits are high
 - **Arbitrary code injection allows:**
 - Defacing of widely viewed web site
 - Stealing valuable confidential data from server
 - Destruction of data on server
 - Recruitment of **zombies** to **botnets** (**spam, DoS**)
 - **Market in vulnerabilities and exploits!**
- Preventing all exploits extremely challenging
 - Stopping one category leads attackers to use others
 - New categories continually arising