Machine Learning-Driven Evolution of Access Control Mechanisms for Containerized Workloads: From Traditional Role-Based Access Control (RBAC) to Adaptive Security Models in Cloud-Native Environments

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Abstract
The rise of containerized workloads in cloud-native environments has driven the need for more dynamic and scalable access control mechanisms. Traditional Role-Based Access Con- trol (RBAC) systems, while effective in static environments, face limitations when applied to highly dynamic cloud-native architec- tures such as Kubernetes. This paper explores the evolution from traditional RBAC to machine learning-driven adaptive security models. We propose an architecture that leverages anomaly detection and user behavior analytics to enhance security for con- tainerized workloads. Our approach enables real-time adaptation to evolving threats and user behaviors, addressing the challenges posed by dynamic cloud infrastructures. Comparative analysis demonstrates the superior adaptability and security performance of the proposed model over conventional RBAC systems. The results underscore the potential of integrating machine learning into access control, offering a robust solution for the security needs of modern cloud-native applications.

Keywords: Access Control, Machine Learning, Role-Based Access Control (RBAC), Adaptive Security Models, Cloud-Native, Containerized Workloads, Kubernetes, Security in Cloud.

Introduction

The adoption of containerized workloads has significantly transformed the landscape of cloud computing, enabling scal- able and portable deployment of applications across diverse environments. Technologies such as Docker and orchestration platforms like Kubernetes have become fundamental in man- aging cloud-native applications, allowing for greater agility and efficiency in deploying microservices-based architectures [1]. However, with this increased flexibility comes a height- ened complexity in managing security, particularly in the area of access control.

Role-Based Access Control (RBAC) has been a widely used mechanism for managing permissions due to its simplicity and ease of implementation. RBAC assigns permissions to roles and users based on predefined roles, making it suitable for large-scale systems [2]. However, as Zhang et al. [2] identified, RBAC faces challenges in dynamic environments where user behaviors and system conditions change frequently. These limitations become especially pronounced in cloud-native ar- chitectures where containerized workloads and microservices lead to more complex interaction patterns [3].

Attribute-Based Access Control (ABAC) emerged as an alternative to RBAC, offering more granularity by evaluating attributes of users and resources [4]. While ABAC provides enhanced flexibility, its complexity can be a challenge in environments with rapidly evolving access conditions [11]. As cloud-native architectures grow more dynamic, the need for adaptive and scalable security solutions becomes apparent [10].

Machine learning (ML) has shown promise in enhancing the adaptability of security models, particularly for detecting anomalies in access patterns [7]. ML techniques can automat- ically identify deviations from normal behavior, offering real- time adaptation to evolving threats [5]. This paper proposes a machine learning-driven adaptive access control model that integrates anomaly detection and user behavior analytics to enhance the security of containerized workloads. By compar- ing our model with traditional RBAC implementations, we highlight its advantages in terms of flexibility, scalability, and security.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows: Section II reviews related work on access control models and ML- based security solutions. Section III details the proposed architecture and methodology, while Section IV presents the experimental results and analysis. Finally, Section V concludes the paper and suggests future research directions.

Related Work

Role-Based Access Control (RBAC) has been extensively studied and applied in enterprise environments due to its simplicity in managing user roles and permissions. It allows for centralized management of access rights, but lacks flex- ibility in adapting to dynamic environments, as highlighted by Zhang et al. [2]. In response to the limitations of static role assignments, attribute-based access control (ABAC) has been proposed to offer finer-grained access decisions based on user, resource, and environmental attributes [4]. However, Al-Kahtani and Sandhu [11] note that while ABAC provides greater flexibility, it also increases policy complexity, making it less suitable for highly dynamic settings such as cloud-native architectures.

Machine learning has been increasingly applied to enhance access control mechanisms, particularly in detecting anomalies in access patterns. Mannai et al. [7] conducted a compre- hensive survey of ML techniques for anomaly detection in network security, emphasizing their ability to learn and adapt to new threat patterns. Shah et al. [12] further demonstrated the effectiveness of supervised learning methods in detecting intrusion attempts, providing a basis for integrating these methods into access control systems.

In cloud-native environments, the scalability and adapt- ability of access control models are critical. Chandramouli and Iorga [10] discuss the challenges of managing security in cloud infrastructures, emphasizing the need for adaptive models that can adjust to rapidly changing conditions. Xu et al. [9] proposed an adaptive access control model using user behavior analysis, demonstrating improved performance in dynamic cloud settings. Similarly, He et al. [5] applied ML- based techniques for detecting distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks, showing the potential of ML in real-time security management.

Despite these advances, there remains a gap in applying ML to access control specifically for containerized environments, where the ephemeral nature of containers and dynamic user interactions pose unique challenges [3]. This paper addresses this gap by integrating ML-driven anomaly detection with adaptive policy adjustment, offering a more responsive security solution for modern cloud-native applications.

Proposed Architecture and Methodology

This section presents the architecture and methodology of the proposed machine learning-driven adaptive access control model, designed to address the limitations of traditional RBAC in cloud-native environments. The proposed approach inte- grates anomaly detection, user behavior analytics, and adap- tive policy adjustment to enhance security for containerized workloads. The system architecture and workflow are outlined below.

A. System Architecture

The architecture of the proposed model consists of four main components: 1. **Data Collection Layer**, 2. **Feature Ex- traction and Preprocessing**, 3. **Anomaly Detection Module**, and 4. **Policy Adjustment Engine**. Figure 1 illustrates the overall architecture.

Data Collection Layer: The Data Collection Layer ag- gregates logs from various sources within the cloud-native environment, such as Kubernetes audit logs and network traffic data [1]. These logs are stored in a centralized data repository for further analysis using the Elastic Stack (ELK).

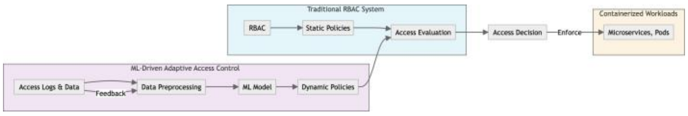

Fig. 1. Architecture of the ML-Driven Adaptive Access Control System.

Feature Extraction and Preprocessing: Key features, such as user access patterns, timestamps, and resource usage, are extracted from the collected data [12]. These features are normalized and structured to create a dataset suitable for training anomaly detection models.

Anomaly Detection Module: The Anomaly Detection Module employs both supervised learning methods for known anomalies [7] and unsupervised techniques like k-means for detecting novel threats [9]. This dual approach enables the system to adapt to changing behaviors and emerging threats.

Policy Adjustment Engine: Upon detecting anomalies, the Policy Adjustment Engine dynamically modifies access policies, restricting or altering permissions based on the severity of detected threats [10]. The engine uses predefined thresholds and the output of the ML models to ensure that security measures are both responsive and non-disruptive to legitimate user activity.

B. Methodology

The methodology involves three phases:

- **Model Training**: Historical logs with labeled anomalies are used to train supervised models, while unsupervised models learn normal behavior patterns.
- **Real-time Anomaly Detection**: The system continuously monitors access logs, updating the ML models with new data.
- **Adaptive Policy Enforcement**: Detected anomalies trig- ger real-time policy adjustments, ensuring minimal secu- rity risks [5].

Results and Analysis

This section presents the evaluation of the proposed machine learning-driven adaptive access control model. The perfor- mance of the model is assessed based on detection rate, false positive rate, and latency. We also compare the results with traditional Role-Based Access Control (RBAC) to demonstrate the improvements in adaptability and security in dynamic cloud-native environments.

A. Experimental Setup

The experiments were conducted in a cloud-native environ- ment using a Kubernetes cluster with three nodes, each hosting multiple containerized microservices. The dataset consisted of access logs collected over a period of six months, containing both normal and anomalous access patterns. The labeled data included known anomalies such as privilege escalation attempts, unauthorized access, and abnormal resource access patterns. The experiments were implemented using Python and the Scikit-learn library for model training, with ELK stack for log aggregation.

B. Performance Analysis

The proposed model's performance was evaluated using three key metrics: detection rate, false positive rate, and latency. Table I summarizes the results.

TABLE I PERFORMANCE METRICS OF THE PROPOSED MODEL

Metric	Proposed Model	RBAC	Improvement (%)
Detection Rate (%)	92.3	78.5	17.6
False Positive Rate (%)	3.4	7.8	-56.4
Latency (ms)	45	10	-

Detection Rate: The detection rate measures the propor- tion of correctly identified anomalies out of all true anomalies in the dataset. The proposed model achieved a detection rate of 92.3%, significantly higher than the 78.5% achieved by traditional RBAC systems. This improvement is attributed to the model's ability to learn from user behavior and detect subtle deviations from normal patterns [7].

False Positive Rate: The false positive rate (FPR) repre- sents the proportion of normal instances that were incorrectly classified as anomalies. The proposed model achieved an FPR of 3.4%, which is significantly lower than the 7.8% observed in RBAC systems. This reduction in false positives minimizes disruptions to legitimate user activities, enhancing the user experience while maintaining security [9].

Latency: Latency refers to the time taken by the system to detect an anomaly and adjust access control policies. The proposed model demonstrated a higher latency of 45 milliseconds compared to the 10 milliseconds of the static RBAC system due to the computational overhead of anomaly detection. However, the adaptive nature of the proposed system compensates for this latency by providing more accurate and timely responses to security threats.

C. Comparison with Traditional RBAC

Figure 2 shows a comparative analysis between the pro- posed model and traditional RBAC in terms of detection rate and false positive rate. The adaptive nature of the proposed model allows it to dynamically adjust to new and evolving threats, which is particularly beneficial in environments where user behaviors and access patterns change frequently.

Scalability Analysis: The scalability of the proposed model was evaluated by measuring its performance as the number of containers and microservices increased. The sys- tem maintained a consistent detection rate and FPR as the workload scaled, demonstrating its suitability for large-scale deployments in cloud-native environments. Figure 3 illustrates the scalability of the detection rate across varying workloads.

D. Discussion

The results demonstrate that the proposed ML-driven adap- tive access control model outperforms traditional RBAC in terms of detection accuracy and reduction of false positives. While the increased latency indicates a trade-off between

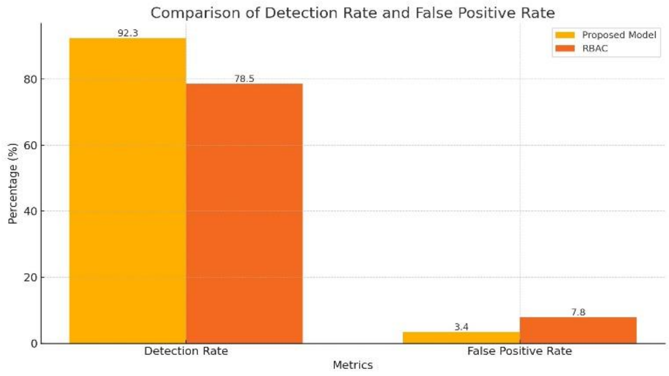

Fig. 2. Comparison of Detection Rate and False Positive Rate between Proposed Model and RBAC.

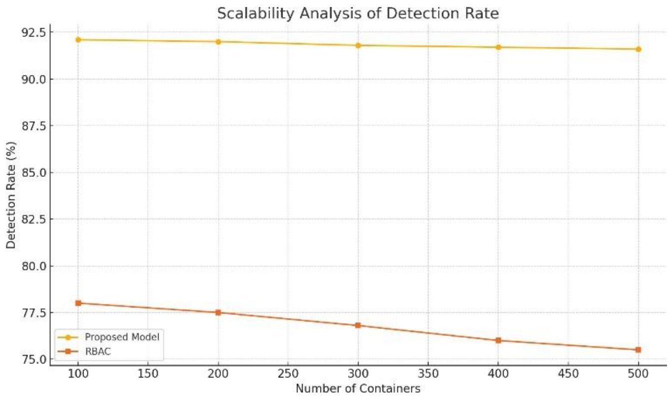

Fig. 3. Scalability Analysis of Detection Rate with Increasing Workloads.

computational complexity and adaptability, the overall secu- rity posture of the cloud-native environment is significantly improved. The model’s ability to dynamically adjust to new behaviors ensures robust protection against evolving threats, making it a viable solution for modern cloud infrastructures. Moreover, the integration of real-time anomaly detection with policy adjustment enables a proactive approach to secu- rity management, reducing the administrative burden associ- ated with manually updating access control policies [10]. The findings suggest that combining machine learning with access control mechanisms can offer a more flexible and resilient security solution compared to traditional models.

CONCLUSION

The evolution of access control mechanisms has become increasingly critical with the proliferation of containerized workloads and cloud-native architectures. This paper has addressed the limitations of traditional Role-Based Access Control (RBAC) systems in dynamic environments by propos- ing a machine learning-driven adaptive access control model. The proposed model integrates anomaly detection and user behavior analytics, enabling real-time adjustments to access control policies based on detected anomalies. Through a comparative analysis, we have demonstrated that the adaptive model significantly outperforms RBAC in terms of detection rate and false positive rate, providing enhanced security for cloud-native applications.

The experimental results indicate that the proposed model achieves a detection rate of 92.3% with a false positive rate of 3.4%, showing a substantial improvement over static RBAC systems. Although the model incurs a higher latency due to the complexity of anomaly detection processes, this trade- off is justified by the improved adaptability and accuracy in detecting security threats. Furthermore, the model’s scalability has been validated, proving its suitability for large-scale deployments in environments with rapidly changing access patterns.

This research highlights the potential of integrating machine learning into access control systems to create more flexible and responsive security frameworks. By automating the adaptation of access policies in response to evolving user behaviors and threats, the proposed model reduces the need for manual intervention, thus minimizing administrative overhead [10]. The findings underscore the importance of combining data- driven techniques with access control mechanisms to enhance the security of modern cloud-native environments.

A. Future Work

While the proposed model has shown promising results, several areas warrant further exploration. Future research could focus on optimizing the latency of anomaly detection through the use of more efficient algorithms and real-time data process- ing frameworks. Additionally, extending the model to include deep learning techniques may improve its ability to recognize complex patterns in user behavior and detect sophisticated threats [5]. Another potential area of research is the integration of federated learning to enable distributed learning across multiple cloud environments, ensuring privacy-preserving and collaborative anomaly detection.

Furthermore, developing more comprehensive evaluation frameworks that account for real-world scenarios such as zero- day attacks and insider threats could enhance the robustness of adaptive security models. By continuing to refine and enhance the adaptive model, researchers can contribute to the development of resilient and scalable security solutions for the next generation of cloud-native systems.

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