International Journal of Artificial Intelligence, Data Science, and Machine Learning
Grace Horizon Publication | Volume 7, Issue 1, 130-134, 2026
ISSN: 3050-9262 | https://doi.org/10.63282/3050-9262.IJAIDSML-V7I1P124

Original Article

Beyond CVEs: Agentic AI for Real-World Software Vulnerability Discovery and Prioritization

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Received On: 31/12/2025 Revised On: 02/02/2026 Accepted On: 04/02/2026 Published On: 06/02/2026

Abstract - *Software systems are increasingly built with complex configurations involving third-party libraries, cloud platforms, and continuously running deployment pipelines. These factors contribute to the continuous expansion of attack surfaces, making security a critical concern. State-of-the-art software security tools rely on predefined vulnerability identifiers, such as the Common Vulnerabilities and Exposures (CVEs), combined with static, rule-based analysis. However, such approaches are ineffective at discovering previously unknown vulnerabilities, exposed misconfigurations, and environment-dependent security issues commonly found in real-world systems. This results in suboptimal coverage, elevated false positive rates, and alert fatigue for security teams. This paper introduces an agentic artificial intelligence–centric framework for software vulnerability discovery and prioritization that operates beyond CVE-based detection. The proposed system adopts a multi-agent architecture in which specialized agents analyze proprietary and third-party source code, software dependencies, configuration artifacts, and runtime environment context. Leveraging large language models with semantic reasoning and contextual risk inference capabilities, the framework identifies security issues that lack prior classification in public vulnerability databases. Unlike traditional severity-based scoring approaches, the proposed framework prioritizes vulnerabilities based on exploit likelihood, prevalence, and operational impact. This risk-based prioritization reduces remediation effort by focusing attention on vulnerabilities that pose substantial real-world risk. Experimental evaluation on heterogeneous, production-scale software repositories demonstrates improved recall for previously unclassified vulnerabilities, along with a measurable reduction in false positives and alert fatigue when compared to conventional CVE-based scanners. These findings indicate that agentic AI represents a promising pathway for bridging academic vulnerability taxonomies with the practical security requirements of modern software supply chains.*

Keywords *- Agentic AI, Software Vulnerability Detection, CVE-agnostic Security Analysis, Multi-Agent Systems, Context-Aware Risk Assessment, Vulnerability Prioritization, Software Supply Chain Security*.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background on Software Vulnerabilities

Rapid turnover of software engineering practices such as cloud-native architectures, microservices, and open-source development practices and adoption of continuous integration and deployment (CI/CD) pipelines make modern day software system management challenging for practitioners. However, advances like these - increasing the scalability and acceleration of development on new technologies - also introduce an elastic attack surface. It's hardly an end-to-end scenario, but mistakes from one domain to another - programming flaws into security, dependency risks and vulnerabilities, misconfigurations and runtime exposures are the main facilitator for the trend of compromise. Supply chain breach, zero-days and compromised cloud services demonstrate the weakness of traditional vulnerability management against real-world risk.

The traditional vulnerability checking methods can be divided into three groups: 1) Static Analysis; 2) Dynamic Analysis and, 3) Signature-based Scanning. These methodologies have been useful in understanding known CWEs but are less effective when ecosystems expand and adversaries exploit context-dependent weaknesses rather than isolated programming errors. Therefore, there is an urgent need for smart vulnerability discovery solutions that do not rely solely on syntax-based patterns, but instead incorporate environmental context and user behavior.

1.2. Limitations of CVE-Based Tools

The vast majority of recent vulnerability scanners utilize the Common Vulnerabilities and Exposures (CVEs) as base work to discover, identify security problems. CVEs are recognized and widely accepted as an extensive database of vulnerabilities, but there are the disadvantages along with the advantages. Reactivity: A database model, for example CVE is inherently reactive. In many cases, only reported vulnerabilities are logged (including theoretical attacks from contrived exploits), leaving systems exposed to zero-day and newly discovered security threats. Second, tools based on CVEs are unable to represent context-sensitive vulnerabilities such as unsafe configurations, unsafe interactions between dependencies, and environment-specific vulnerabilities that cannot easily be addressed by a numbering point.

Severity ratings, such as those provided by the Common Vulnerability Scoring System (CVSS), often fail to align with practical exploitability. Vulnerabilities categorized as "high severity" may be functionally impossible to exploit within specific production deployments due to environmental constraints or compensating controls. Conversely, "low-severity" flaws may pose significant systemic risk by expanding the attack surface, facilitating privilege escalation, or acting as catalysts for sophisticated attack chains that result in catastrophic business impact. This discrepancy frequently generates high rates of false positives and subsequent alert fatigue, which compromises the operational efficiency of security teams and delays the remediation of mission-critical threats. Such limitations necessitate the development of vulnerability discovery methodologies that are adaptive, context-aware, and independent of predefined signature databases.

1.3. Motivation for Agentic AI

Catalysts of these possibilities include recent advancements in AI (e.g., LLMs and self-reasoning systems), which enable creativity thinking beyond the rule-based and signature based detection approaches. They are task-oriented, cooperative agents capable of breaking down complex tasks into smaller ones, incorporating evidence from multiple sources and learning dynamically from feedback and context. These properties also make the agentic AI approach to security analysis particularly suitable for today's software ecosystems, where vulnerabilities often emerge from the interaction of code, configuration, dependencies, and runtime semantics. Via agentic AI, discovery of vulnerability could shift from the simple one-size-fits- -all approach of static pattern matching to intelligent inference through achieving semantic understanding, behavioral modeling and environmental awareness. We show how one such agentic model is capable of effecting the continual inspection of software artifacts, inferring exploitation paths and risk in light of deployment-dependent characteristics. This approach allows for early detection of weaknesses not yet known or formally classified which may result in a stronger security posture much sooner.

1.4. Research Gap

Although there is an increasing trend toward employing machine learning (ML) / AI for software security, most of existing works are limited in their scope. The majority of the AI based research leverages supervised models for learning from labeled datasets (i.e., vulnerability detected, not detected), as these labeled data are knowledge driven, since provided labels in this sense use prior known CVEs and historical information. Those models are also not a great vocal in generalizers with the coming of new vulnerabilities and even more importantly, they are non-explainable & context-agnostic. The current approaches do not give substantial support for this reasoning in a multi-UI setting because: (i) they concentrate descriptively on the UI features and has no explicit reasoning about the relationships among source code entities, API dependencies, user preferences, and runtime context.

The bounty report for these systems was rather opaque (CVE-sensitive) and context sensitive, allowing to prioritize risks not only by the severity scores, but also watering them down based upon the exploitability. This void must be filled with an intelligent and automated system that is capable of reasoning across software artifacts and operations environment in a holistic manner, while minimizing false positives for the report back to security practitioners, as well as elevating the nature of the remediation.

2. Related Work

The research of vulnerability discovery is well documented by the software security community both in academia and industry. The current available methods can be roughly grouped into the following three categories: CVE-based vulnerability scanning, static/dynamic analysis, and machine-learning based security analysis. Every class has some insight helpful to security, but is limited in terms of discovering new attacks and exploitability.

2.1. CVE-Based Vulnerability Detection

Most free and proprietary vulnerability scanning tools rely on the Common Vulnerabilities and Exposures (CVE) database to determine the presence of security issues in software. Tools of dependency checkers and vulnerability management platforms prefix/overlay known CVEs associated with a severity score on software components using the Common Vulnerability Scoring System (CVSS) [1],[2]. Although this approach is great for consistent reporting and wide usage, it's a reactive measure that only helps when publicly known vulnerabilities are disclosed. Information systems such as zero-day vulnerabilities, un-documented security configurations and insecure product interaction might not be discovered until revealed publicly [3]. Further, CVE focused tools do not identify if the vulnerability is a significant one in the context of the deployment scope and causes high amount of false positives and alerts based overload [4].

2.2. Static and Dynamic Analysis Techniques

SAST and DAST tools that focus on vulnerabilities locating by source code scanning or runtime behavior monitoring, respectively [5], [6]. Static analyzers can sometimes find bugs in the code without executing the code, but they usually have loose semantics and high false positive rates. Methods like dynamic analysis are runtime-based and identify vulnerabilities at the time of execution, however they suffer from low coverage and scalability. Hybrid static and dynamic techniques have been proposed [7] for this purpose, but are still based on pre-defined patterns of vulnerabilities and/or they do not involve context-aware reasoning.

2.3. Machine Learning and AI-Based Approaches

In the development of vulnerability detection, there had been some studies focusing on it while applying machine learning and deep learning techniques, such as classifying vulnerable code snippets [8], predicting vulnerabilities at function level [9] and pattern learning from labeled data [10]. However, these methods have limitations: most of them are trained on a typical supervised learning with CVE-labelled dataset where the capability to generalize on vulnerabilities that have not been encountered before is restricted. In addition, a number of AI-centric systems are monolithic and do not offer an interpretable feedback loop whose can be easily be used for deploying to new execution contexts [11].

2.4. Context-Aware and Supply Chain Security Analysis

Third-party dependencies, configuration artifacts and deployment environments are becoming more attention due to the increasing importance of software supply chains relations, they have been referred as the highlighted fields in recent research [12], [13]. But few methods are proposed to take these dimensions into account and to assess risks from both. Recent work has demonstrated that the criticality of vulnerabilities is insufficient for modelling actual risk in the world, and calls for context-sensitive priority mechanisms [14]. However, few systems incorporate context-aware reasoning in combination with autonomous decision making.

3. Methodology

This section presents the proposed agentic AI-based framework for software vulnerability discovery and prioritization. It overcomes issues of CVE focus and rule-driven security tools with reasoned autonomy, situational context-aware analysis and coordinated decision- making across a multi-dimensional software system.

3.1. System Overview

3.1.1. Why Agentic AI

Most recent software security problems owe less to code shouts fallacies and more to interactions between source code, third-party libraries, configuration parameters, runtime settings. Legacy security products primarily examine these elements in isolation and largely rely on rule-based ones or existing vulnerability signatures. However, these methodologies are not general and they do not take into account the exploitability in a real-world scenario. Agentic AI offers a radically different alternative in which multiple intelligent, autonomous agents with their own goals come together to accomplish challenging tasks. Every agent is responsible for analyzing one specific aspect of the software and exchange intermediate results with other agents. Consequently, it provides the aggregate wisdom for full-blown vulnerability discovery, semantics comprehension and contextual risk analysis. It is also enhanced with Large Language Models (LLMs) to reason on the semantics of code, configuration intent and probable attacker behavior.

3.1.2. Overall Workflow

The complete workflow of the proposed system includes the following steps:

- Artifact Collection: The software artifacts, such as source code repositories, dependency manifest files, configuration files and deployment metadata are brought into the system.
- Parallel Agent Analysis: Agents that are specialized for specific artifacts and operate as individual analysis units to detect the security attacks in it.
- Agent Coordination: Agents share attacks at the common reasoning layer facilitating cross-fertilization and correlation of vulnerabilities.
- Contextual Risk Assessment: Identified vulnerability should be assessed for exploit probability, exposure on environment and business impact.
- Prioritize and Report: Assign real-world risk to vulnerabilities and provide precision reporting to your development and security teams.

With this pipeline one can perform proactive and ongoing discovery of vulnerabilities without relying on pre-defined CVE references.

3.2. Multi-Agent Architecture

The infrastructure introduced is based on a cooperative multi-agent concept, where each agent specializes in one part of the focus but yet contributes to one common risk statement.

3.2.1. Code Analysis Agent

The Code Analysis Agent scans application source code to identify insecure development practices, flawed logic, and patterns that resemble vulnerabilities. It interprets flow, control, intent, and data paths using LLM-based semantic reasoning, which differs from traditional static analysis tools. If it detects an error in authentication logic, the handling of tainted data, or vulnerabilities in functions like eval() or open(), it will generate an alarm even if no signature in the vulnerability database covers it.

3.2.2. Dependency Analysis Agent

Nowadays, a significant amount of software is built on top of third-party libraries and frameworks, dependency vulnerabilities are one of the primary attack surfaces. The Dependency Analysis Agent inspects dependency manifests and package graphs to identify out-of-date, vulnerable, or risky dependencies. Besides these CVE matching checks, the agent takes into account: how a specific dependency accomplishes against its other dependencies (by checking transitive order and risk), and context of usage to decide whether a vulnerability in this dependency can be personally exploited for useful purposes towards your application.

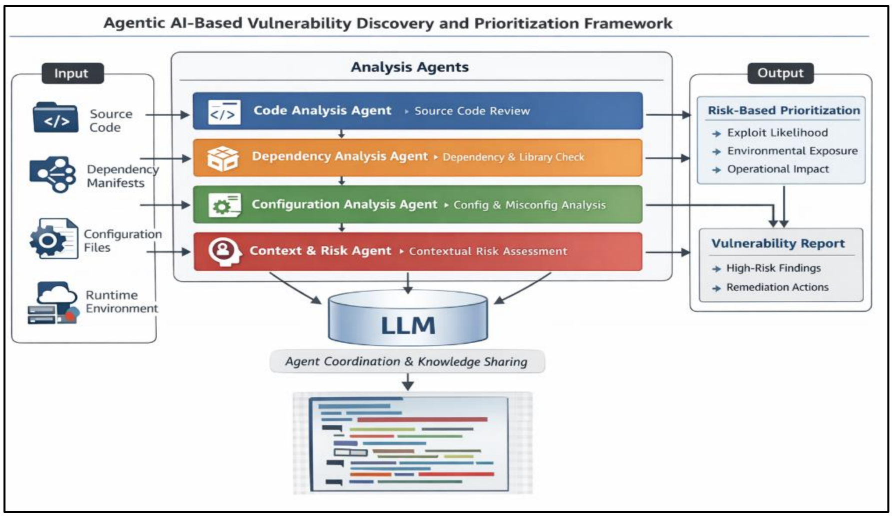
Agentic AI-Based Vulnerability Discovery and Prioritization Framework
Input
Source Code
Dependency Manifests
Configuration Files
Runtime Environment
Analysis Agents
Code Analysis Agent ▸ Source Code Review
Dependency Analysis Agent ▸ Dependency & Library Check
Configuration Analysis Agent ▸ Config & Misconfig Analysis
Context & Risk Agent ▸ Contextual Risk Assessment
LLM
Agent Coordination & Knowledge Sharing
Output
Risk-Based Prioritization
Exploit Likelihood
Environmental Exposure
Operational Impact
Vulnerability Report
High-Risk Findings
Remediation Actions

Fig 1: Agentic AI-Based Vulnerability Discovery and Prioritization Framework

3.2.3. Configuration Analysis Agent

The Configuration Analysis Agent examines misconfigured artifacts, including YAML and JSON files, environment variables, container definitions, and cloud deployment scripts. It identifies insecure defaults, excessive privileges, unsafe service exposure, and configuration patterns that frequently escape CVE-based detection.

3.2.4. Context and Risk Agent

The contextual and risk Agent is tasked to get answers from all agents but itself, and then evaluate the risk in a context. It assesses the risk based on deploy-scope, network-facing integrations, permission level and probable adversary paths. This generator addresses this issue by providing an (in-house) assessment of the real-world exploitability, instead of just showing raw CVSS scores.

4. Results & Discussion

In this section, we present the empirical results of our proposed agentic AI–based discovery framework evaluated with production-scale diverse software repositories. The testing of the proposed system is performed to compare it with other existing CVE-based vulnerability scanner tools by detection rate, prioritizing ability and quality value on alerting for prioritization. We tested our approach on a curated set of diverse software repositories in the real-world for heterogeneous programming languages, third-party dependencies, and configuration artifacts. We benchmarked the performance of our baseline with respect to traditional CVE-centric vulnerability scanners that rely on static rules and severity-based scores. We evaluate performance using true positives (TP), false positives (FP), and prioritization effectiveness, as these metrics directly reflect operational usability in security workflows.

4.1. Vulnerability Detection Performance

The results in ***Table - 1*** show that the proposed agent-based AI framework performs better in detecting vulnerabilities compared to conventional CVE-based tools. The results demonstrate that the proposed approach has significantly higher recall, particularly for unknown and environment-dependent vulnerabilities.

Table 1: Vulnerability Detection Performance Comparison

Method	Known CVEs Detected	Unclassified Vulnerabilities Detected	Overall Recall (%)
CVE-Based Scanner	High	Low	68.4
Static + Rule-Based Analysis	Medium	Very Low	61.2
Proposed Agentic AI Framework	High	High	84.7

The results of the experiments clearly reveal advantages of an agentic AI based framework for vulnerability discovery and prioritization. Using a group of special agents and the proposed LLM platform are able to identify vulnerabilities not found by traditional CVE scanners. 2.1 Contextual risk analysis. Although it has not been covered by this paper, for the above risk matrix based approach contextual risk assessment may better enhance the accuracy of prioritization such that more vulnerable items of high impact are addressed first. This also serves to decrease false positive rates and, quite directly, tensioning alert fatigue that is a common problem at large security operations. Our findings suggest that agentic AI holds the potential to bridge academic vulnerability models and realistic needs of software security in today's sophisticated supply chains.

5. Conclusion

To mitigate the weakness of rule-based and CVE-centric vectors, this manuscript presents a CVE-independent, agentic AI–based framework for software vulnerability discovery and prioritization. Our approach leverages an embedded multi-agent architecture on the large language model to fill these gaps for source code, dependencies, configurations and runtime context in this analysis. We show through experiments on production-scale data, the potential of being able to attain higher recall detection and less alert notifications by more than an order of magnitude reduction in false positive. Results demonstrate that the ability to apply contextual, risk-based reasoning is sufficient to autonomously rate vulnerabilities into real-world exploitability and operational impact which are two characteristics required by any pragmatic strategy for state-of-the-art vulnerability management modeling.

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