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# Editors' Introduction

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It is our great pleasure to introduce the first issue of the sixth volume of PoPETS, an open access journal that publishes articles accepted to the annual Privacy Enhancing Technologies Symposium (PETS). Recognizing the need to increase the free, public availability of scientific publications, PoPETS is published under the open-access Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs license.

Since 2015 PoPETS/PETS follows the hybrid conference-journal model started by PVLDB, and now adopted by many other conferences in the field such as FSE, CHES, the IEEE Security and Privacy Symposium and the USENIX Security Symposium. This model has improved the quality of the published articles as well as both reviewers' and authors' experience regarding the review process. By enabling the resubmission of articles once comments from previous reviews have been addressed PoPETS provides a more predictable path to acceptance for authors while maintaining a high quality rigorous peer-review process.

PoPETS double-blind peer review process is similar to other top-tier computer security conferences, including phases for bidding, reviews, author rebuttals, discussion among reviewers, and consensus recommendation. By having four issues per year, to which articles can be resubmitted once previous reviews have been addressed.

Articles submitted to this issue were reviewed by 102 members of the Editorial Board and 64 External Reviewers. The submitted articles, reviews, and discussion were available to all members of the editorial board that did not have a conflict of interest with the authors of the article. To identify conflicts of interest, the editorial board membership was published before submissions were opened and authors were asked to indicate members with whom any of the authors had a conflict of interest. In addition, editorial board members were asked to list the authors and institutions with which they have conflicts of interest. Finally, the edito-

rial board chairs also checked for missed conflicts. Editorial board members were welcome to submit articles, while the chairs were precluded from doing so.

There were 58 submissions to this issue of PoPETS. Nine of the 58 submissions had been invited to resubmit after major revision in a previous issue, which were re-assigned to the editorial board members that had reviewed the previous version. Additionally, seven articles that had been rejected from a previous issue were re-submitted to the journal, and were re-assigned to the same reviewers whenever possible. For all these resubmissions the authors provided a summary of changes between the prior and current version that explained how review concerns had been addressed.

A major novelty for 2019 is that we decided, after many months of conversations with members of our community, to repeat the famous NIPS consistency experiment, with the goal of quantifying randomness in the reviewing process within the security domain. The experiment involves all four issues of 2019 and is briefly described below; a more detailed description is available on PoPETS' website.<sup>1</sup>

For the experiment, we split the PC in two: PC-A and PC-B, making sure that both contain representative expertise in the topics relevant to PoPETS. Then, we randomly selected 20 newly submitted papers (i.e., we excluded resubmissions) to be reviewed by both PCs, and the remainder were assigned to one of the two committees uniformly at random. Members of each PC did not know whether a paper they review is also being reviewed by the other PC or not. Both PCs ran as usual, with the same phases and deadlines. At the end of the decision phase, we took the best of the two decisions for the paper, i.e. always benefit the authors, to avoid making them feel uneasy with the experiment. Authors were informed about whether their paper would get two sets of reviews or not.

Despite the overhead and the technical complications of running such an experiment, our initial impressions after the first issue, as well as the feedback we got so far from the community, were very encouraging. We hope to make this a great experience for everyone; the results of the experiment will be made public after

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<sup>1</sup> <https://petsymposium.org/experiment.php>

all four issues have been completed, so that they are statistically significant.

Regarding the reviewing phases, in the first phase most of the submissions received four individual reviews (in a few cases, articles received three or more than four reviews; also, duplicated papers received two sets of four reviews). Most articles had an external review drawn from a pool of young experts proposed by the community<sup>2</sup>. Further external experts were invited to review certain articles where necessary. The reviews were sent to authors, who were given the opportunity to submit a rebuttal. After the rebuttal period there was a discussion among the reviewers, other members of the editorial board and the chairs to reach a consensus decision for each paper. One of the reviewers was then selected to write a meta-review that summarized the conclusion of the discussion and the justification for the decision.

Of the 58 submissions, four were accepted with minor changes and ten were conditionally accepted subject to minor revisions. For the latter, a reviewer was assigned as a shepherd to ensure that the important points from the meta-review were addressed in the camera-ready version. Fourteen articles were ultimately accepted and are published in this issue and will be presented at PETS 2019, to be held on July 16–20, 2019 in Stockholm, Sweden.

The authors of 32 other articles were invited to re-submit to a future issue of PoPETs. Eleven of them received a Major Revisions decision and, if submitted to one of the next PoPETs two submission deadlines, will be reviewed by the same editorial board members who will judge if the major issues pointed in the meta-review are addressed. The remaining 21 received an encouraging meta-review that pointed revisions needed that were deemed too serious or too abstract to be addressed in short time. Six papers were rejected due to them requiring a major rewriting that effectively results in a new paper, or due to not being considered sufficiently close to the topics listed in the call for papers. Finally, four papers were withdrawn by the authors during the reviewing period, and 2 were desk rejected for being out of scope.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://bit.ly/2gxVDd8>

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Sincerely,

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