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Editors' Introduction

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It is our great pleasure to introduce Issue 4 of Volume 2020 of the Proceedings on Privacy Enhancing Technologies (PoPETs). PoPETs is a journal that publishes articles accepted to the annual Privacy Enhancing Technologies Symposium (PETS). To contribute to the free availability of scientific publications, PoPETs is published under the open-access Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs license.

PoPETS/PETS uses a hybrid conference-journal model, one that has since been adopted by many other conferences in the field. In this model, articles are published throughout the year at regular intervals, and the papers for the year are then presented at an annual conference. Reviewers can request revisions of submitted articles, which may then be revised and resubmitted in the same year. PoPETs publishes four issues per year. By enabling resubmission across these issues, PoPETS provides a high-quality peer-review process that enables authors and reviewers to work together to produce and recognize significant scholarly contributions.

The PoPETS double-blind peer-review process is similar to other top-tier computer security publications. The process includes initial review by the Chairs for scope and rules compliance, written reviews by multiple independent reviewers, author rebuttals to the reviews, discussion among reviewers, and consensus recommendation. The output of the review process is a set of reviews, a meta-review summarizing the reviewers' opinions after discussion, and one of the following decisions: Accept, Accept with Minor Revisions, Major Revisions, Reject and Resubmit, and Reject.

Articles submitted to this issue were reviewed by the 94 members of the Editorial Board and 31 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 membership of the Editorial Board was published before submissions were opened, and authors were asked to indicate members with whom any of the authors had a conflict. In addition, Editorial Board members were asked to list the authors and institutions with which they have conflicts of interest. Finally, the Chairs also checked for missed conflicts. Editorial Board members were welcome to submit articles, while the Chairs were precluded from doing so.

There were 89 submissions to this issue of PoPETs. 14 of the 89 submissions had been invited during a previous issue to resubmit after major revision, and these were reassigned to the Editorial Board members that had reviewed the previous version. Additionally, 11 articles that had been rejected from a previous issue were resubmitted to the journal, and they were reassigned to some of the same reviewers. For all these resubmissions, the authors provided a summary of changes made to the prior version that explained how review concerns had been addressed.

The PETS consistency experiment ended in 2019 and was not conducted for this issue. This experiment was performed throughout 2019 to evaluate the consistency of reviewing decisions[1].

In this issue, we continued the two-round reviewing process that was started in Issue 4 of Volume 2019. In the first round, we assigned two reviewers to all papers, and at the end of the round we rejected some papers that had two reject scores (Reject or Reject and Resubmit). Non-rejected papers received additional reviews in the second round for a total of four reviews (in a few cases, submissions received fewer or more reviews). Many articles had an external review drawn from a pool of junior experts nominated by the community[2]. Further external experts were invited to review certain articles. 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 discussion and the justification for the decision.

Of the 89 submissions, 9 papers were accepted, and 15 were conditionally accepted subject to minor revi-

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1 https://petsymposium.org/experiment.php

2 https://bit.ly/2gxVDd8

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sions. For the latter, a reviewer was assigned as a shepherd to ensure that the important points from the meta-review were addressed. 24 articles were ultimately accepted and form the articles published in this issue. These articles will be presented at PETS 2020, July 13–17, 2020, held virtually this year due to SARS-CoV-2.

The authors of 39 other articles were invited to resubmit to a future issue of PoPETs. For 16 of them, specific major revisions were requested, to be reviewed by the same reviewers when submitted to one of the following two PoPETs submission deadlines. The remaining 23 articles received a decision of Reject and Resubmit (5 of them during the first round of review), as reviewers identified needed revisions that were unlikely to be successfully addressed in a short time. 16 papers received a decision of Reject (4 of them during the first round), either due to serious deficiencies or to being on topics out of scope for PoPETs. Finally, 1 paper was withdrawn by the authors before or during the reviewing period, and 9 submissions were rejected by the Chairs without Editorial Board review for being out of scope, over the page limit, or non-anonymous.

For the 2020 volume, we started an artifact-review procedure to collect, evaluate, and distribute any artifacts related to accepted papers (e.g. source code, datasets, machine-generated proofs, formal specifications, and build environments)[3]. Authors of accepted papers were encouraged (but not obliged) to submit their artifacts for review by an artifact-review committee. As a soft start, for 2020 the committee will be performing limited checks (e.g. documentation, licensing, and compilation); once approved, artifacts will accompany the corresponding papers on the PoPETs website.

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3 https://petsymposium.org/artifacts.php

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Sincerely,

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