Kostas Chatzikokolakis and Carmela Troncoso

Editors' Introduction

It is our great pleasure to introduce the third 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 desk rejection, bidding, reviews, author rebuttals, discussion among reviewers, and consensus recommendation. By having four issues per year, and enabling resubmissions, PoPETs hopes to improve the quality of the published articles as well as the peer-review experience for both authors and reviewers.

Articles submitted to this issue were reviewed by 102 members of the Editorial Board and 87 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 editorial 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 80 submissions to this issue of PoPETs. Twelve of the 80 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.

In the third issue of 2019 we continued the consistency experiment started in the previous issue.[1] The experiment consists in the following: 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.

Regarding the reviewing phases, we first selected 8 papers for the 'fast check' at the beginning of the reviewing period in which we invited two experts to provide an opinion on papers for which it was not clear whether they are on scope. Five of these papers were deemed out of scope by the experts. From the papers that passed to the normal reviewing process, 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 reviews). Most articles had an external review drawn from a pool

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

of young experts proposed by the community[2]. 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 80 submissions, five were accepted with minor changes and seventeen 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. Twenty-two 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 33 other articles were invited to resubmit to a future issue of PoPETs. Nine of them received a Major Revisions decisions and, if submitted to one of the next PoPETs two submission deadlines, will be reviewed by the same reviewers who will judge if the major issues pointed in the meta-review are addressed. The remaining 24 received an encouraging meta-review that pointed revisions needed that were deemed too serious or too abstract to be addressed in short time. Eight 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, seven papers were withdrawn by the authors before or during the reviewing period, and 10 submissions were desk rejected for being out of scope (5 clear cases decided by the chairs, and 5 by the fast check).

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2 https://bit.ly/2gxVDd8

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Program Co-Chairs of PETS 2019 and Co-Editors-in-Chief of PoPETs volume 2019.