Editors' Introduction

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It is our great pleasure to introduce Issue 1 of Volume 2026 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 since its inception has 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 by the authors and re-reviewed by a revision editor. PoPETs publishes four issues per year. By incorporating interactive revision and review 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 Editors-in-Chief and the Desk Review Chair for rules compliance and in-scope content, written reviews by multiple independent reviewers, author rebuttal, discussion among reviewers, and consensus decisions with disagreements resolved by the Editors-in-Chief or the Vice Chairs. The output of the review process is a set of reviews, a meta-review summarizing the reviewers' opinions after discussion (for papers that are not early-rejected during the first round), and one of the following decisions: *Accept*, *Revise*, and *Reject*.

Reviewing by the Editorial Board is performed in two rounds. In the first round, the Editors-in-Chief assign two reviewers from the Regular Editorial Board and a Vice Chair to all papers, and at the end of the round early decisions are made to reject certain papers that have two Reject scores from the reviewers. The remaining papers receive additional reviews in the second round for a total of four reviews (in a few cases, submissions received fewer or more reviews). One of the assigned reviewers is appointed as a meta-review lead, who guides and summarizes the discussion into a meta-review. The assigned Vice Chair, along with the Editors-in-Chief, set a final decision for each paper.

Some articles had an external review drawn from a pool of experts nominated by the community[1] or identified by a member of the Editorial Board as a qualified reviewer. All reviews were sent to the authors of papers that proceeded to the second round of review, and those authors were invited to provide written rebuttals to the reviews. After the rebuttal period there was a discussion among the reviewers, other members of the Editorial Board, the Vice Chairs, and the Editors-in-Chief to reach a consensus decision for each paper. The meta-review lead then wrote a meta-review that summarized the discussion and the justification for the decision.

Authors of articles that received a *Revise* decision were invited to revise their submission according to a well-defined set of revision criteria included in the meta-review. An interactive revision process was used to enable authors to complete the revisions deemed necessary by the reviewers. The revision process was guided by a single revision editor whose identity was kept secret from the authors, and all communication between the authors and the revision editor was done (anonymously) through our article submission system. First, authors were instructed to aim for one of two revision deadlines: the first within one month of author notification, and the second within four months of author notification. Authors were asked to propose a revision schedule appropriate for their chosen deadline, and revision editors were asked to review and approve the schedules. Second, authors revised their submissions according to the meta-review and were able to ask the revision editor for clarifications about the revision criteria listed in the meta-review, for intermediate feedback, or for further direction. Revision editors reviewed intermediate versions, providing additional feedback when necessary, and ultimately issuing a final decision of *Accept* or *Reject*. Submissions accepted by the first (one month) revision deadline are published in this issue of PoPETs, and submissions accepted after the first (one month) but before the second (four month) revision deadline will be published in the next issue of PoPETs.

Articles submitted to this issue were reviewed by 210 members of the Editorial Board, 11 Vice Program Chairs, and 3 external reviewers. The submitted articles, reviews, and discussion were available to all members of the Editorial Board who 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 Editors-in-Chief also checked for missed conflicts. Editorial Board members were welcome to submit articles, while the Editors-in-Chief were precluded from doing so.

There were 144 submissions to this issue of PoPETs. 21 of the 144 submissions had been rejected from a previous issue and were resubmitted to the journal. For all of these resubmissions, the authors provided a summary of the changes that were made to the prior

[1] The nomination form is available on the PETS website.

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version of the paper that explained how concerns from previous reviews had been addressed.

Of the 144 submissions, 3 received a decision of *Accept*, and 32 received a decision of *Revise*. For the latter, a reviewer was assigned as a revision editor to guide the revision process as described above; 19 of these articles were revised and accepted by this issue's revision deadline and 13 articles are pending revision (and may be published in the next issue).

The remaining 109 submissions were not accepted to appear in this issue. 20 submissions were desk-rejected by the Editors-in-Chief without review by the Editorial Board for being out of scope, over the page limit, or non-anonymous. 88 submissions received a decision of *Reject*, 36 after the first round of reviewing, 52 after the second round of reviewing, and 0 during revision. For these rejected papers, reviewers identified either serious deficiencies, that the needed revisions are too large or unlikely to be successfully addressed in a short time, or issues of scope. Finally, 1 submission was withdrawn by the authors during the review process.

In addition to the 144 new submissions, 8 papers were pending revision from the previous issue. Of these, 8 were accepted, 0 were rejected, and 0 were withdrawn.

Considering both new submissions and pending revisions, 30 articles in total are accepted in this issue and will be presented at PETS 2026.

The Andreas Pfitzmann Best Student Paper Award has traditionally been given to papers written solely or primarily by a student who is presenting the work at PETS. New for PoPETs Volume 2026, we select one best student paper award winner for each issue. Of the 30 articles accepted in PoPETs Volume 2026 Issue 1, 16 were eligible for the best student paper award. These eligible papers were considered for their scientific quality, the expected impact on the field, the reviews and discussion of the program committee, and vice-chair nomination statements. The award committee reviewed and discussed these elements and selected the PoPETs Volume 2026 Issue 1 Andreas Pfitzmann Best Student Paper Award winner and a runner-up as follows:

- *Winner*: "Evaluating connection migration based QUIC censorship circumvention" by Seungju Lee (Princeton University), Mona Wang (Princeton University), Watson Jia (Princeton University), Qiang Wu (GFW Report), Henry Birge-Lee (Princeton University), Liang Wang (Princeton University), and Prateek Mittal (Princeton University)
- *Runner-up*: "PriVA-C: Defending Voice Assistants from Fingerprinting Attacks" by Dilawer Ahmed (North Carolina State University), Aafaq Sabir (North Carolina State University), Ahsan Zafar (North Carolina State University), and Anupam Das (North Carolina State University)

Congratulations!

For the 2026 volume, we continue an artifact-review procedure to collect, evaluate, and distribute artifacts related to accepted papers (e.g. source code, datasets, machine-generated proofs, formal specifications, and build environments).[2] Authors of accepted papers are encouraged (but not required) to submit their artifacts for review by an artifact-review committee. The committee performs some checks on artifact quality (e.g. documentation, licensing, and compilation); once approved, artifacts accompany the corresponding papers on the PETS website.

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[2] https://petsymposium.org/artifacts.php

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