



Wikipedia:Wikipedia Signpost/2019-09-30/From the editors

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From the editors

Where do we go from here?

By [Smallbones](#)


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Wikipedia’s constitutional crisis may have come to an end.


The [Wikimedia Foundation](#) agreed that the English-language [Arbitration Committee](#) would have full power to review the one-year ban against administrator Fram. Three months later ArbCom unbanned Fram and removed his admin status while allowing him to apply for its reinstatement. The [RfA](#) failed and Fram withdrew. The details of the Fram case are covered in this month’s [Special report](#). This article explores how we can address the underlying issues of the case moving forward.

At first glance, Wikipedia’s multilevel decision making process has shown that the en:Wiki community can protect its independence from the WMF, can make nuanced decisions about admin incivility and harassment, and protect editors against harassment once they file a complaint.

But on closer inspection, none of that was accomplished. The process was agonizingly slow, confused, and just ugly. The community did not come up with a method to minimize harassment in everyday practice. The difficulty of giving accused harassers enough information to defend themselves while protecting their accusers against potential further harassment was underlined. And any cooperation between the WMF and ArbCom or the

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community to prevent harassment was trashed as the WMF was routinely derided as the cause of the whole affair.

We believe that three issues must be addressed simultaneously before the constitutional crisis is resolved:

- How to protect editors against harassment? If we can't protect our editors, we'll lose our best and brightest. Wikipedia may become the playground of trolls.
- Can we find a reasonable method for accused harassers to defend themselves while still preserving the accuser's ability to file a complaint without further harassment? and
- Can we cooperate using all the tools of the community, ArbCom, and the WMF to prevent harassment before it happens and deal effectively with it after a complaint is made? If we treat the WMF as the enemy, we'll be losing many of the tools that can minimize harassment.

—*The Signpost*

A proposal that ignores one of the issues will ultimately fail on all three counts.

Voices from the community

ArbCom will soon start a request for comment on these and similar issues. *The Signpost* asked over a dozen well-respected editors how we can move forward rather than dwelling on the wounds of the recent past. Perhaps because the wounds are still fresh only 6 agreed to comment using their

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usernames. Another allowed their comments to be used without their username. All responses were edited for length.

Our movement has more or less relied on an unwritten division of power between the Foundation, the affiliates, and the communities. Our communities are generally self governing, except in a few clearly defined cases... Individual communities of course can and should be held to account if they are not meeting movement norms by the movement as a whole.

As our movement grows and brings in new people we need to move from an unwritten to a written division of power (ie a movement charter or constitution). Thankfully this has been proposed in our 2030 strategy process.[1] (https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Strategy/Wikimedia_movement/2018-20/Recommendations/Sprint/Roles_%26_Responsibilities/4%265)

With respect to the decisions of ArbCom, when the case was handed over I made it clear at the time that I will stand 100% behind whatever decision ArbCom makes and that is still my position.

—[Doc James](#) (in his volunteer capacity, not in his position as a WMF trustee)

[Levivich](#) wrote, "The project will not succeed if we ignore or outsource maintenance of the pillars. Each of us can see harassment when it happens on-wiki; each of us has an obligation to not tolerate it. If bystanders spoke up more often, victims wouldn't need to report."

Levivich's proposal appears to be very difficult to implement. He is suggesting a complete change in Wikipedia's culture. Perhaps this is the only way forward.

FROM THE EDITORS



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Wikipedia needs to improve the sometimes hostile a editors, both new and old. People who edit WP need faith new editors is equally as important as quality c on WP that need to be respected, but these req cooperation, not the kneejerk I Don't Like It reaction
—MontanaBW

One editor who preferred that his username not be used was skeptical that progress could be made "because one person's harassment is another's defending the encyclopedia." It would be easy to swamp ArbCom, "but if it were possible to filter out ... misguided claims of harassment, a complainant might email ArbCom. The remedy might be to separate the people involved along the lines of 'if the edits need attention, let someone else deal with it'.... There might be volunteer mentors who would act as intermediaries."

I don't expect easy answers to the harassment and fair process conversations.... our open forms of dispute resolution seem particularly unsuited to addressing long-term poor behaviour that is countered with positive contributions...

Ultimately this is something that the community needs to decide on, and the Foundation needs to respect and support -- not take over.

While I am not happy with how the community interacts with Foundation staff (insults, personal attacks, and the like), this is ultimately a problem of the Foundation's own creation.

—Ajraddatz

Guy felt the WMF was to blame. His suggestions included:

- WMF needs to write a policy for interventions on projects that details the amount of autonomy those projects have and offers office escalation as an option where a project has no ArbCom equivalent...
- WMF needs to enact and document an internal review process, such that we can be confident that a ban is not enacted without fully independent review.
- WMF needs to set up an appeals process for bans, and allow third party appeals from functionaries / ArbComs of projects...

The mechanics for (reporting harassment) do exist, in that people could and should inform the arbitration committee or functionaries mailing list confidentially if they are concerned about their safety. However in practice, I do recall situations where the committee has been slow to respond or act.

Regarding providing a adequate means of defense for the accused, the general principle in the workplace is that the origin of a complaint must be known to a person as a default to allow dispute resolution or management to take place. This should be the case on WP *unless* a complainant can make a case to the committee that there is a compelling reason otherwise.

—Casliber

What's next

There are some areas of agreement in all these views. Everybody recognizes that there's a problem with harassment or with the WMF's approach to it. Some respondents believe that we have a system in place to deal with harassment, but perhaps it can be improved. Others think that for Wikipedia's approach to harassment to change, our editors' attitudes must change. Nobody praised the WMF's approach to the problem. The RfC to be run by ArbCom will be interesting.

As always, your opinion, politely expressed in the Comments section below, is appreciated.

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- This is a vexed question. We should all treat one another well, and by and large we do. Most of the time that we don't it is resolved by the community, or by normal social means - you don't collaborate on a project with someone who you find obnoxious. Sometimes, though, well-meaning people (and of course bad actors too) get into a mind-set where they consider someone an enemy, whether of themselves, some ideal, or the encyclopedia. At this point normal conventions break down, and "opposition research" starts. There are other issues, "pile on" used to be endemic on AN/I, it is not so much now, but it still happens, and not just there. Confirmation bias is another, once we make bad faith assumptions, or assumptions of bad faith it is hard to see the good work an editor does. There are many other human failings, we are all subject to that can make our behaviour, to us reasonable, slip dangerously close to or across the dividing line into unreasonable. Partly as a guard against this in myself, I changed my sig a number of years ago to include the phrase "All the best" - I try to ensure that I mean it before I sign any comment. All the best: *Rich Farmbrough*, 11:38, 30 September 2019 (UTC).

- In the past eight years, I would say, the community here has made substantial if still patchy progress towards creating a collegial editing environment. The episode under discussion struck me, as someone who has been on Wikipedia since 2003, as based on a concept of adminship that was obsolescent a decade ago. Meanwhile Wikipedia has become even more important as an online information source, the institutional strength of the WMF has been transformed, and Wikimedia as a whole is starting to look more like an integrated solution to a very serious problem. The traditional navel-gazing is quite understandable but, look, I see some backlogs that need clearing. The real work is there to do. Charles Matthews (talk) 13:02, 30 September 2019 (UTC)
- **The process was agonizingly slow, confused, and just ugly. The community did not come up with a method to minimize harassment in everyday practice. The difficulty of giving an accused harasser enough information to defend themselves while protecting their accusers against potential further harassment was underlined.**

This is not an issue that's going to be solved overnight, and to suggest that it should have been solved with the ArbCom case *carte blanche* is, frankly, ludicrous. Civility issues and harassment on-wiki have been issues that have plagued this community for many years, and while I would say that the environment is much more collegial now than it was 10 years ago, it's clear that there's much more work that needs to be done by the community. OhKayeSierra (talk) 13:17, 30 September 2019 (UTC)

OK, @OhKayeSierra: I didn't mean to say that I expected a complete resolution of this problem overnight. And "looking back" at it (we can do that already!) there were some positives - e.g. we actually confronted the problem in a few ways. And I'm not blaming ArbCom for this - they had a hard job - but all in all, the process struck me as slow, confused, and at times ugly. BTW, I'm very pleased to see the comments in this section so far are quite positive about the general problem of harassment. I get disheartened at times, so perhaps I'm not seeing the forest for the trees. Smallbones(smalltalk) 13:36, 30 September 2019 (UTC)

Becoming disheartened on occasion is normal and natural; however, that is not so hard to fight as long as we remember that this brilliant idea of an encyclopedia of all present and growing knowledge is a community effort of staggering proportions. It is those times when we are misunderstood that give us opportunities to make ourselves understood that lead to community wisdom. While that is not always easy to do, it is well worth the effort. Smallbones, you have taken on no small task, and I hope that overall, the community agrees with me that you do it admirably!

P. I. Ellsworth, ed. ^{put'r there} 14:37, 30 September 2019 (UTC)

- I am a long-term, occasional editor. I don't know anything about the disputes discussed in the Signpost article. From my perspective, our biggest problem is attracting and retaining good editors. I loved what MontanaBW wrote. This is the first sentence: "Wikipedia needs to improve the sometimes hostile and toxic environment for article creators and editors, both new and old." Amen. We routinely drive away potential good editors with unrestrained criticism, which often comes across as an arrogant attack. I frequently encourage friends and colleagues to contribute to Wikipedia. The few that do usually tell me later something like, "Why should I spend time writing on a topic I know in-depth, only to have some jerk delete it all and throw a bunch of rules with colons at me and treat me like I'm an ignoramus?" I try my best to encourage them to "hang tough" and "don't let the rule-bound editors suffering from a superiority complex get in your way." But most have made up their mind and moved on to "volunteer work where my contributions are appreciated." - Mark D

[Worthen PsyD \(talk\)](#) (I am a man. The traditional male pronouns are fine.) [15:13, 30 September 2019 \(UTC\)](#)

- "There might be volunteer mentors who would act as intermediaries." Now there is an idea which may have some legs. [Gog the Mild \(talk\)](#) [15:33, 30 September 2019 \(UTC\)](#)
- Indeed, where do we go from here? We need to be better at policing our own, and it will happen (has happened) in baby steps. Arbcom has limitations. Over the years, I have seen many stalked by the recently defrocked admin. Fram has gone after me. Responses only go so far. After a few back-and-forths, I realized that Fram in a defensive position had no intention of retreating. In such a case, you dust yourself off and get on with more important things. Fram is not the only such one who employs heavy-handed tactics, admin or otherwise. So ... in other words ... Fram and those of his mindset rule the roost, free to delete anything they don't like, free to continually hound others, free to use the tools unhindered. We need to find a way to honor's Jimbo's ideal of "anybody can edit" without someone in power turning that into, "only people I personally deem competent can edit". We need to be able to get past [WP:FANCLUB](#), those in power protecting their own. When the summer brouhaha happened on Jimbo's talk page, I wondered if some of the anger was also fear of , "...there but for the grace of God, go I ..." by some I had seen demonstrate the very behavior that got Fram banned. We need to recognize that Fram may (or may not) have been the extreme of power over-reach among some admins. But he certainly was not the only one; Fram was either the one who didn't know when to back off, or the one who didn't see when he crossed the line of no return on one or more editors. Whatever the case, we need to do better at stopping the subculture of bullying on Wikipedia. — [Maile \(talk\)](#) [15:55, 30 September 2019 \(UTC\)](#)
- [@Maile66](#):. Care to provide some links to cases where I have "gone after you"? "Stalked" even? "Bullying" as well, apparently? We have been in the same discussions at [WT:DYK](#) from time to time, which is normal for [DYK](#) regulars. But I don't recall any situation that could even remotely be called "stalking" or something similar. Please refresh my memory. [Fram \(talk\)](#) [08:42, 1 October 2019 \(UTC\)](#)

Please see [WP:HOUNDING](#) and reflect on how you lost your tools, over a case of one individual you've repeatedly "gone after" for years. Please see Rich's testimony in your recent RFA. Hounding is, to the victim, stalking. If an editor feels you have followed them around year after year, to them it's stalking/hounding. I didn't say you stalked me personally. But most dialogues with you have been pretty much my-way-or-the-highway. Yeah, you have. And, again, read and take to heart the diffs that were provided on the RFA from others. I know there are others, but they don't want to deal with what you are doing here. The fact that you don't recognize your effect on other editors is a problem in itself. And we are not going to re-visit the case here. It's in the RFA. — [Maile \(talk\)](#) [11:08, 1 October 2019 \(UTC\)](#)

"Over the years, I have seen many stalked by the recently defrocked admin. **Fram has gone after me.**" (emphasis mine). "**I didn't say you stalked me personally.**" (again emphasis mine). I don't ask you to "revisit the case", but you were making claims about my behaviour *towards you*, and can not or will not support them with evidence. That's a textbook case of [WP:NPA](#), and it is not because I have been desysoped and that many editors have problems with my behaviour over the years that you (or others) are suddenly free to make whatever claim you like about me. I thought that people who opposed my adminship were people who cared about bullying, personal attacks, incivility, hounding, ... I guess I was wrong. [Fram \(talk\)](#) [11:56, 1 October 2019 \(UTC\)](#)

substantiated allegations and some editors seem to have no qualms about taking dirt that's been dished there and bringing it over to Wikipedia. That can be a toxic influence that is difficult if not impossible to control. [Liz](#) [Read!](#) [Talk!](#) [21:49, 30 September 2019 \(UTC\)](#)

I absolutely agree with this, and ended up designing a process that would solve for this, but it would require two very important changes in the standard way things are handled:

1. All harassment cases would be handled privately (because no one wants to endure the scrutiny of uninvolved assholes trying to be "helpful" in the way they rules lawyer and
2. They would be able to consider off-wiki behavior as well. Harassment almost *never* happens on-wiki. It happens on reddit or twitter or facebook, and thus cannot be submitted as "evidence".

I think about these things a lot.--[Jorm](#) [\(talk\)](#) [22:13, 30 September 2019 \(UTC\)](#)

I also agree with Liz's assessment. Whatever the solution is, it probably isn't ArbCom. Not only does ArbCom take months to enact a remedy, but sometimes they completely ignore the harassment aspects of a case and just focus on the other policy violations, no doubt due to the community's ambivalence about the civility policy. [Kaldari](#) [\(talk\)](#) [23:01, 30 September 2019 \(UTC\)](#)

- ArbCom isn't doing its job properly: to defrock admins who misbehave. All we get is tokenism, or an action thankfully forced on it by the WMF. Either that or have admins go for renewal every three years, as happens in the German WP. And those admins who walked out: I *hope* they're not returning. They're the very types who should have failed RfA. [Tony](#) [\(talk\)](#) [23:53, 30 September 2019 \(UTC\)](#)
- So you talk to half a dozen Wikipedians from the rank-and-file and start with a WMF Trustee?!?! Yeesh, journalism fail. [Carrite](#) [\(talk\)](#) [00:36, 1 October 2019 \(UTC\)](#)
- Actually I was aiming for "thought leaders", the people whose ideas I respect and believe that others respect, not rank-and-file. As I wrote in in the article "well-respected editors". Since other editors know these folks, they are better at starting an orderly conversation. There was a time constraint, and this is a controversial topic, but I was surprised how many didn't respond. (3 got their contributions in too late to make my deadline, which was tight this month). Doc James does fit my definition of "well-respected" and is seldom boring.

Personally, I like the responses in this section better. Don't worry @Carrite: I'll try to remember to consider asking you next time I'm looking for "thought leaders". [Smallbones](#)[\(smalltalk\)](#) [01:12, 1 October 2019 \(UTC\)](#)

Well, there's a systemic fallacy at the outset: there is no such thing as a "thought leader" on Wikipedia. One person's "thought leader" is another person's idiot. You're using Signpost to promote your POV again, Smallbones. And, broadly speaking, it is the WMF/WMDc POV (hence, perhaps, early approving comments here from several people with past/present associations with such). If you believe some of those, I harass here every day and will continue to do so due to my belief that the content is what counts, not the people. I'm not here to be nice. - [Sitush](#) [\(talk\)](#) [06:01, 1 October 2019 \(UTC\)](#)

[Sitush](#) - I don't want to read too much into your statement, "I'm not here to be nice", thus this question: Along the lines of my response above ("I

am a long-term, occasional editor ..."), do you modulate your response to new editors who make mistakes? Thanks! - [Mark D Worthen PsyD \(talk\)](#) (I am a man. The traditional male pronouns are fine.) 12:06, 1 October 2019 (UTC)

- You are wrong that nobody praised the WMF for finally taking action. It was long overdue but very welcome. It is great that the ArbCom finally picked up this bone of contention that is the real misery in all this; that it took an office action in the first place. Thanks, [GerardM \(talk\)](#) 03:47, 2 October 2019 (UTC)
- Here's a possible mechanistic solution: Let any editor flag any commit as uncivil, and have some way for uninvolved editors to notice when a specific editor or conversation is generating a lot of incivility. I've encountered a few editors whose vitriolic debate style makes it difficult and emotionally draining to reach consensus over changes to articles or policies. I think once or twice I've nearly filed a complaint, but in the end didn't and just pushed through to consensus or abandoned the session. No doubt many ill-behaved editors are getting feedback only after a specific discussion goes very badly, but not after adding small amounts of pain to many minor discussions. Maybe some sort of civility patrol that provides friendly feedback to editors who have been flagged as uncivil in a certain number of discussions or by a certain number of other editors could deliver feedback a lot earlier and reduce the overall problem. Don't the more responsible giant social media companies do something like this? -- [Beland \(talk\)](#) 22:05, 2 October 2019 (UTC)

^ **Upvote!** ^ A capital idea! I strongly support Beland's idea (proposal) based on my (very similar) experience and Beland's cogent rationale for such a feature. - [Mark D Worthen PsyD \(talk\)](#) (I am a man. The traditional male pronouns are fine.) 02:06, 3 October 2019 (UTC)

Created ticket T234520, thanks [@Beland](#) and [Markworthen:](#), [Ad Huikeshoven \(talk\)](#) 11:26, 3 October 2019 (UTC)

Awesome! Thanks so much. - [Mark D Worthen PsyD \(talk\)](#) (I am a man. The traditional male pronouns are fine.) 15:18, 3 October 2019 (UTC)

Agree [User:Beland](#) excellent idea. Would allow people to anonymously raise concerns about incivility (but the concerns in question would be viewable and thus discussable by the community). [Doc James \(talk · contribs · email\)](#) 17:05, 4 October 2019 (UTC)

How far should administrators go to protect Fram, now that he is not an administrator?

How far should administrators go to protect Fram, now that he is not an administrator?

Administrator [Sitush](#) said, above, *"I harass here every day and will continue to do so due to my belief that the content is what counts, not the people. I'm not here to be nice."* I left a comment on [User talk:Fram](#) shortly before he moved the draft of his RFA from userspace. [Sitush](#) [left me \(https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=User_talk:Geo_Swan&diff=917826694&oldid=917179833\)](#) the warning *"I think you should stop pestering Fram."*

[KillerChihuahua](#) also left me a series of warnings ([https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=User_talk%3AGeo_Swan&type=revision&diff=917897326&oldid=917826694#Fram's_talk_page](#)); and I see other administrators are leaving similar warnings for other people.

We should all be civil. We should all not only start with civility, but do our best to remain as civil as possible, even if we think we are dealing with a very difficult person, or with a very clueless person, or a very rude person, or someone who is difficult, rude and clueless.

Would it be okay for an informal cabal of administrators to decide that Fram needs extraordinary protection, to make sure he is treated with kid gloves, until he has a chance to open RFA 3.0?

I suggest this would be a very bad idea.

What if you are an administrator who is a friend of Fram, or even just an administrator who remains angry with the WMF for banning him? Should you take extraordinary steps, independent from a cabal, to see that he is treated with kid gloves?

I don't think that is a good idea.

Fram made comments, when he withdrew his RFA, that implied he was going to try to learn from the opinions of those who opposed restoring his administrator bits. Now that he is not an administrator, I suggest it would be best if Fram enjoyed no more protection against uncivil or unfair comments than anyone else. If he is really going to learn what people were talking about, when they described him as uncivil, it would be best if Fram experienced what is our current normal level of civility, without extraordinary protection.

To return to the comment where Sitush said he or she is *"not here to be nice"*, because *"the content is what counts, not the people."* Sitush, please remember, just as I am subject to normal human fallibility, and everyone else in this discussion is subject to normal human fallibility, you, Sitush, are similarly subject to normal human fallibility. You will make mistakes. Like everyone here, you will make mistakes.

Here is a thought experiment. Suppose you and I come across an edit to an article, or a comment, that strikes us as so terrible that go after the perpetrator, without restraint - only to realize we had completely misread the situation? I suggest that the attacking people without restraint is very damaging to the project. Every question, every disagreement, is a teachable moment.

So, please abandon the approach you described. I think administrators have an obligation to do their best to set an example of civility and collegiality -- *"being nice"* to use your term. I think it is essential because less experienced contributors look to administrators for an example of what is acceptable.

In addition, doing one's best to always be civil, and collegial, can turn out to be a huge relief, when one realizes the other guy was right, all along. Geo Swan (talk) 02:36, 6 October 2019 (UTC)

I don't know about anyone else, but I'm not a friend of Fram and I'm not defending him. I *am* defending the process, and in your case, defending the policy. Don't confuse this with defending any particular editor. KillerChihuahua 11:52, 7 October 2019 (UTC)

Facebook tracker on this page?

My Facebook container plugin found and warned me about an element on this page. Sure enough when I inspect the element, there is a div containing a CSS class called "fbc-badge" containing other facebook-related div's. What's odd though is Viewing the source doesn't find any of that. Anybody else's facebook container triggering on this page? First time I've seen this on Wikipedia. Jason Quinn (talk) 07:17, 6 October 2019 (UTC)

I don't know what that plugin is or does, but Ghostery reports zero trackers. It could be your container object is just triggering on the class name.--Jorm (talk) 15:44, 6 October

2019 (UTC)

SNIPPED MY COMMENT BECAUSE SEARCH TERMS WERE MAKING IT HARD TO TRACK ISSUE DOWN. Jason Quinn (talk) 14:17, 8 October 2019 (UTC)

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