



National ID Cards and the Rise of Fake IDs

Paranoia gripped nations of the world as the true face of terrorism revealed itself at the September 11 tragedy. The U.S. and other governments tried to seek answers on how to prevent such things from happening again. The world's security measures were on full throttle. Malls and parks, even movie houses posted security guards on their entrances. Sea and air transport became such a bother, banning even nail cutters from hand-carry luggage. Every precaution was made to secure everything, and steps have been taken to ease the fear of the citizenry of getting blown to pieces on their commute to work. In response to this fear, the National ID System was proposed many times in many countries such as the Netherlands, Philippines and United Kingdom. Terrorism is indeed a big issue, but would a catastrophe like September 11 be prevented by such a scheme?

The (1) [National ID System](#), as explained by the Computer Professionals for Social Responsibility, is an identification scheme wherein the functions of separate government IDs and licenses (Driver's license, immigration documents, social security cards, taxpayer's ID) will be merged into one "smart card". A smart card contains a microchip that can hold data about its owner or even access more data over the government's online database. DNA, retina patterns and fingerprints can also be included in the data stored in the card. This can then be used to verify the holder's identity, check for criminal records since it gives the link to the government database, and also make government, bank and business transactions easier. A lot more information could be included, and it would just be up to the government to make it either mandatory or optional.

Imagine if this system would get implemented, our wallets would definitely look more spacious. People would just need to carry their National ID and their credit card, while the company or school ID is slung over their neck. No more misplacing of licenses in different bags or in the deep crevasses of the car seat. The ID would be used much more often that you wouldn't dare leave it at home. What a great convenience it is to have one. However, despite all the benefits it offers, there remains the issue of privacy.

Identity theft and hackers who can infiltrate the government database and alter and delete information bring about new fears. It might be that they've watched too many movies, the likes of The Net, Bourne Identity, Gattaca or The Michelle Brown Story that made them paranoid. But (2) [privacy is a very big issue for everyone](#), and that's the reason why a system as extensive as this has never been thoroughly implemented. Organized groups such as Privacy International have done countless campaigns opposing the National ID System, and they have gained much support. They raise such questions as the validity of the claim that the system could prevent or minimize the threat of terrorism, the security from fraud and hacking, and of course protection from getting too "exposed" to authorities. They argued that if a scheme such as that was in use in 2001, it would not have prevented the 9/11 attack. It wouldn't have made a difference since the licenses the hijackers carried were legally obtained and the hijackers had no record of prior offenses. People would feel that their freedom would be threatened, stripped off their legal immune system, and the prospect of constantly being monitored. People who are already under surveillance or those who have had previous records might develop nervous breakdowns from the stress of knowing that all their deeds are in that innocent-looking card they carry around every day.

So society is shunning the idea of the system because of privacy, and the government sees this as an opportunity to make their work a lot easier. Imagine someone getting caught for beating the red light. The traffic enforcer would, instead of the driver's license, ask for the National ID since it holds the data for your license as well. He scans it and out comes your information: information that says you've been caught the year before for speeding that you've shoplifted when you were in your teens, how much you owe the government for taxes, the name of your wife, etc. So much information in one swipe! This could be the answer to lowering crime rate. Everyone would swear not to add even a small blemish on their record, else



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their future employer or Mr. Trafficman would find out. This all sounds good, but considering how easy it is to manipulate and acquire data digitally, anyone would feel threatened. It's as if you are handing all your information on a silver platter, and to whom? Definitely, it's not a good choice for all of us unless you want to grab a risk.

- (1) <http://www.cpsr.org/issues/privacy/natidfaq>
- (2) www.privacy.org