

Establishing a National ID Card: Definition and Debate

Gartner analysts worldwide analyze the issues surrounding the U.S national ID debate. Their conclusion? The United States can learn from initiatives being undertaken at home and abroad.

The United States needs improved identification and authentication of its citizens. People issues may prevent a national ID from achieving touted benefits on such a large scale today. Biometric technology also must improve to be effective for real-time authentication on a national scale, and it will improve during the next 10 years. U.S. government organizations have opportunities to learn from smaller implementations at home and around the world. They can begin immediately by consistently strengthening laws and processes associated with identity verification before issuing the current versions of IDs.

The tragic events of Sept. 11 have spurred intense public debate in the United States on the topic of a national identity card. Proponents highlight the ability of a strong and technologically advanced ID to help prevent terrorism. Opponents question this ability and point out the potential for abuse of civil liberties. Much of the debate has been clouded by lack of definition.

Supporters advocate a national ID, not just for preventing terrorism, but for accessing government and healthcare services, conducting business transactions, and preventing underage drinking and smoking. Detractors emphasize the privacy traps awaiting an implementation. They raise issues pertaining to data aggregation and matching, citing the historical "function creep" of the Social Security number and eliciting imagery of the ID as an enabler of persecution and discrimination based on religious or ethnic background.

An identity document can be used for many purposes. However, cost, complexity and resistance all rise in proportion to the number of functions supported by an ID. The United States is a large, populous country with great ethnic and religious diversity. Each proposed use for an ID must be scrutinized to determine its benefit and feasibility. Factors include costs, technological efficacy, population dynamics and logistics, identity verification and issuance processes, and privacy implications.

To help fight terrorism, a national ID document must have the following characteristics:

- It must be issued to all who enter the country and remain for any period of time.
- The process for issuing the ID must include strenuous verification of identity prior to document issuance.
- The process must be distributed to serve the dispersed public and cover the vast number of entry points.
- The process must be free from corruption.

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- The ID must uniquely identify the individual.
- All ID checkpoints must have access to information resources with the capability to link the identity to terrorist activity or potential terrorist activity.

Each of these characteristics faces tremendous pressure stemming from the country's geographic vastness, the size of its population, its diversity and a Constitution that makes civil liberties paramount.

Gartner has brought together analysts from around the world to provide insight and inform the U.S. debate, exploring the issue of a national ID from several perspectives.

Features

"Soft Factors Will Impede Acceptance of a U.S. National ID" (SPA-15-2129). An examination of the change in public opinion since Sept. 11 and the cultural aspects of implementing a national ID. **By Richard DeLotto, Laura Behrens and Christopher Baum**

"Public Support Fades for U.S. National Identification Card" (SPA-15-2128). Immediately following Sept. 11, Americans demonstrated strong support for a national ID card. We explore the change in public sentiment since then. **By Richard DeLotto**

"The Case Against Biometric-Based Identity Cards" (COM-15-3648). Identity card supporters often propose including biometric identifiers as part of a national ID card. Are biometrics ready for national implementation? **By Conal Mannion**

"Smart ID Cards in Europe: Different Views, Uncertain Future" (SPA-15-4207). Many countries have national IDs, or have ambitious plans to upgrade them to smart-card-based systems. We provide the European Union view on smart identity card initiatives. **By Andrea Di Maio**

"China Starts Rollout of National ID Smart Card" (COM-15-4370). Touting the digital-society benefits of a national ID card in China. **By Louisa Liu and Robin Simpson**

"Hong Kong's Multiapplication Smart ID Card" (COM-15-4907). Highlights of Hong Kong's aggressive plans to update its national identity programs with a biometric-based smart card, and its intent to use this multiapplication card for mandatory government functions and optional business functions. **By Dion Wiggins**

"Non-American ID Cards — Travel Visa Cards," (COM-15-4287). Exploring the role of an ID at national borders and its effect on other countries. **By Maria Luisa Kun**

"Stronger Driver's License, Questionable Security" (E-15-4127). The United States already has identity documents that are used for a variety of purposes — driver's licenses. The American Association of Motor Vehicles is proposing to standardize and strengthen these IDs. **By Gregg Kreizman and Scott Porter**

"Can the 'Smart State' Implement a Smart Driver's License?" (COM-15-3487). The Australian state of Queensland is planning a smart driver's license. **By Robin Simpson and Steve Bittinger**

"The Global Economy Already Has IDs" (COM-15-4167). Could credit cards become a de facto international ID? **By Richard Hunter**