

## U.S. ID Card Proponents Must Persuade Public

**A Gartner survey reveals that U.S. citizens are suspicious of national identification cards and a national identification database. Those who want to promote such schemes must make a compelling case.**

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**Event:** On 12 March 2002, Gartner announced the results of its survey on establishing a U.S. national identity database. The survey found:

- 41 percent of U.S. citizens oppose creating a national ID database to identify citizens and visitors to the United States.
- Only 26 percent of U.S. citizens agreed to such a database.
- Opposition to a national ID database ran particularly strong in the southern, western and midwestern regions of the United States.
- U.S. citizens ranked private institutions — especially banks and credit card companies — as more trusted than government agencies to administer a national ID program.
- Among government agencies, the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation ranked as the most trusted to manage a national ID database, followed closely by the Social Security Administration. Least trusted were state motor vehicle departments and the Internal Revenue Service.

**First Take:** The survey demonstrates that U.S. citizens remain wary of a national ID system and a national ID card — even though virtually all U.S. citizens already have a de facto national ID in the form of a driver's license or a taxpayer ID number. Furthermore, most U.S. citizens also have at least one credit card, which increasingly can be used to identify and track its holder. But Gartner's survey shows that the public supports a national ID only for very specific purposes, and people are quite suspicious of what governmental agencies might do with it.

Public support for a national ID system varies greatly, depending on the public's perception of how such information might be used. For example, the survey shows overwhelming support for the use of national IDs at airports and as a means to gaining entry to the United States. However, the public accepts much less readily the use of national IDs to control access to healthcare and banking services.

People fear what they don't know, and many U.S. citizens apparently fear the worst with a national ID. Gartner believes the distrust of public institutions as keepers of a national ID database disclosed by the survey indicates that the public is concerned about the potential for abuse. If the government considers a national ID system important to homeland security, supporters must take steps to clearly inform the public of the uses which such an ID will serve, to define and publicize limits on those uses, and to explain how personal information will be managed and safeguarded against misuse. Absent clear, thorough

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communication on these issues to the public, Gartner foresees strong overt and covert public resistance to a national ID program.

**Analytical Source:** Richard Hunter, Information Security Strategies

**Need to Know: Recommended Reading and Related Research**

- “The Global Economy Already Has IDs” (COM-15-4167). The global economy is pushing forward commercially sponsored de facto international IDs — credit cards. **By Richard Hunter**
- “Soft Factors Will Impede Acceptance of a U.S. National ID” (SPA-15-2129). National ID cards will face an uphill battle in the United States. **By Richard DeLotto, Laura Behrens and Christopher Baum**

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