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Information Systems Research Forum
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Intrusion plus Retreat:
Questions on the Unique ID Project in India

In this seminar, I discuss certain social and ethical aspects of a new national project to supply unique ID (UID) numbers to Indian residents. The UID project is presented as a "technology–based solution" that would change the face of governance in India. I argue that the UID project, given its origins in the idea of national security, would lead to the violation of a large number of the freedoms of Indian people. No amount of assertion vis-à-vis improved service delivery can justify the violation of citizen's freedoms and liberties.

Next, I argue that there is a misplaced emphasis on the benefits of technology in this project, when the robustness of that technology to handle large populations remains largely unproven. Further, I argue that no detailed cost–benefit analysis of the project has yet been carried out. Finally, I show, with illustrations, that the roots of inefficiency in public welfare schemes in India do not lie in the absence of identity proofs. The project represents an effort to transform the role of the state from a direct provider to an indirect provider, leaving the citizen unmarked in the "market" for social services.

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