

Compulsion and Attitudes to Identity Cards in the United Kingdom

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Summary

- An Identity Card issued alongside a passport without an opt-out is seen as significantly more *compulsory* than an opt-out system.
- Providing an opt-out to the Identity (ID) Card process during application increases support for ID Cards, but not significantly, and reduces the *certainty* of those opposed to ID Cards.
- Distrust in the UK Government, alongside the perceived privacy threat of ID Cards, and the perceived degree of compulsion, predicts opposition to ID Cards.

Background

In May 2005, the UK Government introduced its Identity (ID) Card Bill. This Bill has raised concerns amongst civil liberty, privacy and data-protection groups (see <http://www.no2id.net>). At the time of the present research, the ID Card Bill was subject to an amendment focussed on whether or not the ID Card, and entry of personal details to the proposed National Identity Register (NIR), would be voluntary or compulsory. The specific amendment proposed by the House of Lords sought to enable people to opt-out of an ID Card when applying for a new passport or renewing an existing passport. The Identity Card Bill as presented by the UK Government legislated that there would be no such opt-out, and that people would be required to have an ID Card when applying for a passport. Following the completion of the research, legislation was passed that enabled people to opt-out of the physical ID Card, but not entry to the National Identity Register during the initial stages of ID Card implementation. Although this was presented as a compromise (see: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/4856074.stm), campaigners against ID Cards in the UK were generally more concerned about the NIR than the physical card.

The aim of the present study was two fold: First, to examine the UK Government and alternative approaches to the implementation of ID Cards in terms of attitudes towards ID Cards, and second, to compare the impact of these different approaches to the attitudes of politically-involved people with a general anti-ID Card attitude and the attitudes of non-politically involved people with mixed views on ID Cards.

Participants

Participants were recruited from a number of sources. The politically active group of participants were recruited using postings to three UK politics discussion groups: uk.politics, uk.politics.id-cards and on the 'Westminster' forum of <http://www.politicsforum.co.uk>. The non-politically active participants were recruited using postings on general Open University UK student discussion boards. The Open University is a large distance education higher education institution with a diverse student body.

In all cases, participants were directed to an online survey hosted by the Open University's online survey system (called ELSA). The front page of the survey randomly assigned participants using javascript to one of three conditions, (1) The UK Government approach to ID Cards, (2) the Lords' amendment; or (3) the LSE approach combined with the Lords' amendment. An alternative procedure (season of birth) was automatically used if people did not have javascript enabled on their browser. The ELSA system also sets a session-based cookie to help track multiple sessions, and records the IP number associated with each submission to identify multiple submissions.

The data collected was cleaned in a number of ways. First, any responses with less than 50% of items answered were discarded. Second, the server log files were examined for instances of multiple submission. There were no cases of multiple submissions with the same session based cookie. There were 39 instances where a response shared an IP with another response. Examination of these responses showed that in 37 cases, the IP belonged to the proxy or cache server of a large UK-based Internet Service Provider. In 8 cases, the shared IP were identified as belonging to different people because the one record originated from an internal Open University

posting, and the second from a public posting. In these cases the data was retained. In the remaining 31 cases, the data was discarded from the analyses.

Politically active participants

There were 181 responses from the postings to the three politics groups. Of these, 137 (75.7% were male) and 41 female (22.5%). Demographic data was missing for three people. The mean age of the sample was 36 years (SD = 12.92).

Open University participants

There were 223 responses from the postings to Open University student tutorial groups. Of these, 66 were male (29.6%) and 156 female (70%), and data was missing for 1 respondent. The mean age was 39 years old (SD = 11.49).

Measures

Identity Cards attitudes

Participants were asked to respond to the question, “The United Kingdom Government is planning to introduce Identity Cards and a National Identity Register. What is your attitude to this proposal?” using a 7-point scale anchored at ‘Strongly against ID cards’ and ‘Strongly in favour of ID cards’. They were also asked “How certain are you about your attitude towards ID cards in the UK?” as a measure of attitude strength (7-point scale, anchored at ‘Very certain’ and ‘Very uncertain’). Participants who are not UK citizens, or who do not live in the UK, were excluded from any analyses of ID card attitudes ($n = 6$).

Implementation of Identity Cards

Participants were told:

There are various ways in which an identification card system can be operationalised. Please read the outline below carefully, and imagine what your attitude towards a UK-wide identity card would be if the system were like this. Please assume that Identity cards would be compulsory, not voluntary.

An implementation scenario then followed the introduction. The scenario proposed varied across a single dimension based on differing options proposed by the UK Government, the Lords' amendment and the LSE. Each scenario was tested for ease of understanding, and matched for word-count. The component parts of the scenarios were:

UK Government (UKG):

When you apply for a new or renewed passport, you will be compelled to also have an Identity Card. You will be told to report with existing documents (e.g. birth certificate, old passport, national insurance number) to a named processing centre at a specified time. You would need to allow yourself to be fingerprinted, have your iris scanned and your photograph taken.

Lords' Amendment:

When you apply for a new or renewed passport, you will be given the choice of whether or not to also have an Identity Card. If you choose to also apply for an Identity Card, you will be told to report with existing documents (e.g. birth certificate, old passport, national insurance number) to a named processing centre at a specified time. You would need to allow yourself to be fingerprinted, have your iris scanned and your photograph taken.

London School of Economics (LSE):

When you apply for a new or renewed passport, you will be given the choice of whether or not to also have an Identity Card. To get an identity card, you would visit a post office and enter a kiosk at the time of your choosing. You would choose the biometric identifier you wished to use (e.g. fingerprint, digital photograph or iris scan). The kiosk would automatically generate a form, which you would get validated by two people in a position of trust. You then send this form to receive your card.

In all three cases, the National Identity Register (NIR) as proposed by the Government was also included in the scenario. The wording was identical in the Lords and LSE scenarios, and omitted the ‘If you choose to have an ID card’ part for the UK Government version.

National Identity Register part of scenarios:

If you choose to have an ID card, your biometric identification, along with information like your name, date and place of birth, current and all previous addresses and driving licence number and expiry date (along with other relevant information) would be stored in a centralised government database. This database would be held securely by the Government, and could be queried by all other government departments, the police, public service providers (e.g. NHS) and approved private sector organisations (e.g. banks, employers).

When participants accessed the front page to the study (which contained basic information and contact details about the researchers), they were randomly directed to one of the three different scenarios. Thus, each participant only responded to a single scenario. Following the scenario, participants were asked “If this were the way in which ID cards were to be introduced, what would your attitude towards identity cards in the UK be?” and “How certain are you about your attitude towards ID cards if this scenario were the one introduced?” using the same scales for the pre-scenario measures. A measure of attitude shift was calculated by subtracting the scenario attitude score from the pre-scenario attitude, such that a negative score meant a shift against ID cards, and a positive score, a shift in favour of ID cards. Participants were also asked, “In this scenario, to what extent would you consider yourself to have been forced to comply to receive an identity card?” This question was answered using a 7-point scale anchored at ‘Not at all forced’ and ‘Very forced’.

On the final page of the study, participants completed a short measure to test their privacy attitudes (three questions from Westin-Harris), their trust in the UK Government, (three questions) and the perceived threat to their privacy of the ID Card proposals (two questions).

Trust in the UK Government

Participants’ completed answered three questions: “The United Kingdom Government can be trusted”; “The United Kingdom Government is competent enough to create a secure Identity Card system”, and “The United Kingdom Government is motivated by the desire to protect its citizen's best interests” using a 4 point scale anchored at ‘Strongly Agree’, ‘Somewhat Agree’, ‘Somewhat Disagree’ and ‘Strongly Disagree’. These items cover three dimensions often associated with the

measurement of trust: general trust, competence and benevolence. The trust scale had an alpha of .82, showing acceptable internal reliability.

Perceived Privacy of ID Cards

Participants also completed two items designed to measure the perceived privacy threat of ID cards: “The introduction of Identity Cards in the UK is a threat to people's personal privacy” (Reversed), and, “Data collected as part of the Identity Card system would be treated confidentially” using the same 4-point Likert scale for Trust. The perceived privacy items had an alpha of .60, showing low but acceptable internal reliability for a two item scale.

Results and Discussion

Respondents who were not UK citizens, and currently lived outside of the UK (n=6) are not included in these analyses.

Politics and OU groups – general attitudes

The initial attitudes of the high involvement and low involvement groups differed significantly in both their attitudes towards ID Cards, the certainty with which they held those attitudes, their trust in the UK Government, the perceived privacy violation posed by ID Card proposals, and their general privacy concerns (see Table 1)

Table 1: Politics versus OU Students: general attitudes (Mean, SD) and one-way ANOVA results (F, df, p)

| <i>Measure</i> | <i>Mean (SD)</i> | | <i>F (df)</i> | <i>p</i> |
|---|------------------|------------------------|-----------------|----------|
| | <i>Politics</i> | <i>Open University</i> | | |
| Pre-scenario attitudes to ID Cards (1 = very against, 7 = very in favour) | 1.62 (1.34) | 3.99 (2.16) | 162.08 (1, 393) | .000 |
| Pre-scenario certainty of attitudes (1 = very uncertain, 7 = very certain) | 6.27 (1.50) | 5.22 (1.87) | 37.07 (1, 393) | .000 |
| Distrust in UK Government (high = distrust, range 1-4) | 3.64 (0.53) | 3.05 (0.70) | 85.98 (1, 385) | .000 |
| Privacy threat of ID Card proposals (high = increased privacy threat, range 1-4) | 3.66 (0.59) | 2.99 (0.80) | 84.60 (1, 385) | .000 |
| Westin-Harris Privacy score (high = increased general privacy concern, range 1-4) | 2.94 (0.59) | 2.78 (0.55) | 7.86 (1, 385) | .005 |

Participants in the politics groups were more anti-ID Cards, held these attitudes with greater certainty, distrusted the government more, perceived ID cards as a greater threat to privacy, and had greater general privacy concerns. However, even amongst OU students, who on average were in favour of ID cards, levels of distrust in the UK Government and the perceived privacy threat of ID cards, were still relatively high.

Attitude change

A measure of attitude change was calculated by subtracting post-scenario attitudes from pre-scenario attitudes. As such, a negative score equals a move against ID cards, and a positive score a move in favour. The average ID Card attitude change

was $-.41$ ($SD = 1.23$), indicating an overall move against ID cards across all three scenarios. In the following analyses, the responses of the politics participants and the OU students are analysed separately.

OU Student Groups

The presentation of different implementation scenarios did not have a significant effect on attitude change ($F(2, 214) = 1.20, p = .31$) or the certainty of the later attitude ($F(2, 213) = .19, p = .82$). However, there was a significant effect of scenario on perceived compulsion ($F(2, 214) = 16.22, p = .000$). Perceived compulsion was highest when the scenario presented linked the passport to the ID Card (Mean = 5.57, $SD=1.92$), compared to the Lords' opt-in approach (Mean = 4.26, $SD=2.35$) and the LSE approach (Mean = 3.63, $SD=2.17$).

Politics Groups

The presentation of different implementation scenarios also did not have a significant effect on attitude change for the politics groups ($F(2,172) = .97, p = .38$). Interestingly, attitude change towards ID cards was positive when the LSE scenario was presented (the only positive shift in any condition).

However, the scenario presented did have an impact on the certainty of the later attitude ($F(2, 172) = 3.20, p = .04$). Members of the politics groups were less certain of their attitude when faced with the LSE approach (Mean = 5.95, $SD=1.83$), compared to the Lords' amendment (Mean = 6.46, $SD=1.36$) and the UK Government approach (Mean = 6.62, $SD=1.29$).

There was also a significant effect of scenario on perceived compulsion ($F(2,170) = 16.23, p = .000$). Perceived compulsion was highest when the scenario

presented linked the passport to the ID Card (Mean = 6.49, SD=1.22), compared to the Lords' opt-in approach (Mean = 4.83, SD=2.4) and the LSE approach (Mean = 4.51, SD=2.37).

Trust in Government, privacy attitudes and ID Cards

As noted above, the level of compulsion proposed by the three scenarios had no significant effect on attitudes towards ID Cards, although it did have an effect on the certainty with which attitudes were held. Given that the three scenarios did differ, as predicted, on perceived compulsion, this would suggest that compulsion has little impact on the people's attitudes towards ID Cards. However, it also suggests that the UK Government argument that choice is embedded in the decision to have a passport is not correct.

Within the privacy literature, factors such as personality, experience, trust and privacy attitudes have been proposed to influence people's attitudes to potential privacy threats (e.g. Joinson & Paine, in press). In the present study, gender, age, political involvement, distrust in the government, and privacy attitudes, were collected. A stepwise multiple regression was calculated to examine the impact of each of these, and compulsion, on attitudes towards ID cards. Pre-scenario attitudes and attitude certainty were also included as predictors, as was the participants' group (politics vs. OU students), the type of scenario (UKG, Lords and LSE) and the perceived degree of compulsion. The results of the regression are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Stepwise regression: Dependent variable: Post-scenario attitude toward ID

Cards.

| Model fit | Pre-scenario attitudes | | Variables entered | | | | | | | |
|--|------------------------|-------|----------------------------|-------|----------------------------------|-------|---------------------------|-------|-------------------------------------|------|
| | β | t | Privacy threat of ID Cards | | Perceived compulsion of scenario | | Distrust in UK Government | | Certainty of pre-scenario attitudes | |
| | β | t | β | t | β | t | β | t | β | t |
| F (1, 383) = 840.26, p<.001, R ² =.69 | .83 | 28.99 | | | | | | | | |
| F (1, 382) = 521.98, p<.001, R ² =.73 | .56 | 13.08 | -.34 | -8.03 | | | | | | |
| F (1,381) = 372.49, p<.001, R ² =.74 | .53 | 12.47 | -.30 | -7.12 | -.14 | -4.52 | | | | |
| F (1, 380) = 283.80, p<.001, R ² =.75 | .50 | 11.30 | -.27 | -5.86 | -.13 | -4.40 | -.09 | -2.29 | | |
| F (1,379) = 230.65, p<.001, R ² =.75 | .51 | 11.55 | -.26 | -5.66 | -.13 | -4.21 | -.10 | -2.65 | .06 | 2.30 |

Note: all *ps* <0.01. Variables not entered at stage 5: Gender (β =0.009), Age (β =0.01), Ownership of passport, reasons (β =0.016), Politics vs. OU source (β =-.007), Scenario type (β =-.02), Harris-Westin (β =-.007).

The results of the regression suggest that the source of the respondent is not in itself important – rather, it is the attitudes towards the UK Government and the privacy implications of ID Cards that explain the differences between the groups reported earlier. Once respondents’ pre-scenario attitudes were taken into account, the next strongest predictor of their attitudes towards ID Cards was the perceived privacy threat of the ID Card proposals, such that an increased perceived threat led to more negative attitudes. The second predictor was the perceived degree of compulsion

involved in ID Cards, such that higher perceived compulsion led to significantly more negative post-scenario attitudes. As reported earlier, the UKG approach was seen as involving the highest amount of compulsion, although given that scenario type was not significant, we should also assume an affective component to this evaluation alongside the content of the scenarios. Third, the level of distrust in the UKG also predicted post-scenario attitudes to ID Cards, such that higher levels of distrust led to more negative attitudes. Finally, the certainty with which pre-scenario attitudes were held also predicted post-scenario attitudes – if pre-scenario attitudes were less certain, this led to more negative attitudes after the scenario was presented.

The results of the stepwise regression strongly suggest that privacy concerns associated with ID Cards, distrust of Government motivation and competence, and perceived compulsion of the implementation, significantly predict people's attitudes towards ID Cards. These results are in keeping with considerable research within the Human-Computer Interaction and e-commerce fields that have highlighted the importance of trust in people's acceptance of privacy threats. That perceived compulsion was also a significant predictor, while scenario type was not, strongly suggests an interaction between trust in the Government, privacy concerns and perceived control over whether or not an ID Card (and entry to the National Identity Register) is perceived as compulsory.

Conclusions

The UK Governments' argument that linking an Identity Card to the renewal of a passport constitutes a voluntary application is not supported by the present research. For both groups of respondents sampled in this study, perceived compulsion of ID Cards was significantly higher when passports and ID Cards were linked. Although

the different scenarios did not significantly impact on attitudes to ID Cards, the degree of perceived compulsion did significantly predict overall attitudes, such that increased compulsion led to more negative attitudes towards ID cards, That the three scenarios did not differ in attitudes may be explained because of the inclusion of the National Identity Register in each scenario. The NIR has previously been found to critically influence people's attitudes towards the UK Governments' ID Card proposals (Joinson, Paine, Buchanan & Reips, 2005).

Although the politically involved groups and OU students differed in a number of ways (e.g. in their original attitudes towards ID Cards), group membership had no significant effect on post-scenario attitudes. The results of the stepwise regression suggest that distrust in the UK Government, and perceived privacy threat of ID Cards, exert a stronger influence on post-scenario ID Card attitudes, and may explain the initial differences between the groups.

This pattern of results suggest that in the absence of general trust in the competence or intentions of the UK Government, compulsory ID Card proposals are unlikely to be welcomed by many sections of the UK population – whether they are politically involved or not.

Cited References

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