



Identification and the Politics of Information Security

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Abstract: The security of identification systems such as passports and national identity cards is a current policy priority for many governments. False identities allow criminals to cross borders, launder money, claim benefits and gain access to other people's information; whilst perceived insecurity in identification systems is widely seen as holding back the development of e-government and online commerce. All over the world, nation states are investing heavily in the security of their identification systems, trying to protect themselves against such threats, especially through the creation of "electronic" identification cards and the increased use of biometric technology.

Existing literature on these new identification systems has so far focussed on the politics of security, especially security crises like 9/11, and how the legitimating power of this politics enables the creation of these systems. Many authors have argued that this politics serves expand the powers of government surveillance systems, whilst drowning out competing concerns about the impact these systems may have on human rights such as privacy and liberty, and some have even gone as far as to claim that European nations are developing into "surveillance states".

Ten years on from 9/11 it is clear that this literature is at best incomplete. Far from instituting totalising societies of surveillance and control, many of these systems have run into significant trouble following their creation. Some have suffered from years of delay, going vastly over budget in the process; others, once created, have seen poor usage of supposedly central features. The implementation of new electronic services remains difficult; whilst many question if our borders are really any more secure than they were a decade ago. This thesis seeks to explore what happened, and in so doing provide an insight into how the dynamics of security politics affect the construction of identification systems.



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Bio: Jonathan Bright holds a BSc in Computer Science from the University of Bristol, an MSc in International Politics from the School of Oriental and African Studies, and an MRes in Political Science from the European University Institute, where he is currently completing his PhD on the impact of security politics on state run information and surveillance systems.

His research interests include surveillance and civil security policy, cyber security, and the impact of crisis politics on democracy. Apart from his PhD, he is currently working on research projects on the impact of crises on elite career pathways (in conjunction with the ParlGov project), and on how parliamentary oversight is affected by the dynamics of security politics.