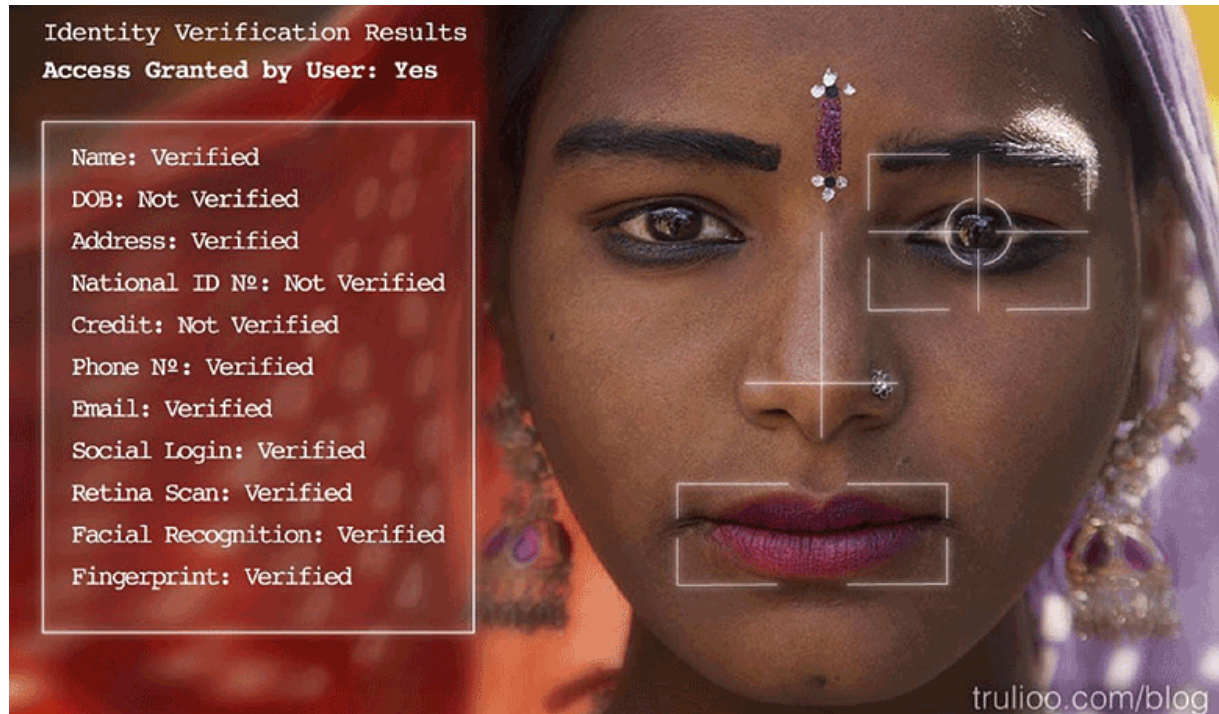


# “Historic Judgment” As India’s Nationwide Biometric ID Database Ruled Constitutional

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As the march toward a cashless (and privacy-less) society accelerates forward, a new high watermark has been reached.

India first introduced its concept for a nationwide biometric ID database more than 7 years ago, which they touted as a necessary “social welfare” program to assist the millions of India’s unbanked, streamline welfare distribution and reduce corruption. At the time, Brandon Turbeville reported on the plan for Activist Post.

Yet, although the justification for the billion person database is the increased ability to accurately disperse social welfare benefits, it will not be just the Indian government’s social welfare programs that have access to and utilize the UIDAI. Indeed, even before the program has been completed, major banks, state/local governments, and other institutions are planning to use the UIDAI for identification verification purposes and, of course, payment and accessibility.

As Aaron Saenz of the Singularity Hub writes:

Yet the UID is going to be used for much more than social welfare programs. The UIDAI is in discussion with many institutions (banks, local/state governments, etc.) to allow them to use the UID as a means of identity verification. These institutions will pay the UIDAI some fee to cover costs and generate revenue. There seems to be little doubt that once it is established, the UID will become a preferred method (if not the preferred method) of identification in India. Saenz also sees the eventuality of the UIDAI program becoming a means of payment and accessibility. He continues:

Ultimately, I wouldn't be surprised if the UID, with its biometric data, could be used as a means of payment (when linked to a bank account), or as an access key to homes and cars. Purchase a meal with your fingerprint and unlock your door with the twinkle in your eye. Similar results could be expected in other nations that adopted biometric identification systems.

This appears to be exactly the path the country is on now that more than 1 billion people are signed up. According to a new article in The Wall Street Journal, India's top court addressed the constitutionality of the program as well as deeper concerns about ongoing privacy violations.

The country's controversial Aadhaar program uses photos, finger and eye scans and has already signed up more than 1 billion people. It has sparked an intense global debate over how far a democracy should be able to go in collecting the personal data of its citizens and how that data can be used, shared and protected.

Wednesday's Supreme Court ruling was a response to multiple challenges to the system.

A five-judge panel ruled in a 4-1 decision that the program is constitutional and helps the poor by streamlining disbursement of welfare benefits. Being in the database, however, shouldn't be required for using mobile phones, opening bank accounts or for school admissions, according to the 1,448-page document outlining the court's decision. It had been unclear for some time whether such organizations could compel people to supply Aadhaar numbers.

"It's a historic judgment," Finance Minister Arun Jaitley said. "Everyone must realize, including critics of Aadhaar, that you can't defy technology or ignore it." (N.W. emphasis added)

In case it's not ultra clear, that last statement is as close to an admission of technocratic policy as you're likely to get coming from a supposed democracy. Or if you prefer the Star Trek version: Resistance is Futile ... as you give up your freedom and are assimilated into the Borg.

To WSJ's credit, they do address some of the practical problems that people are already facing with the arrival of "the machines."

Time and again, we have seen countries both democratic and autocratic serve as blueprints for others to follow. Given the surge in the use of biometrics for airline travel and other forms of "elective" identification in the United States, is it really unreasonable to assume that if a country of more than 1 billion people can implement this, the U.S. population of 350 million will be protected by its own Constitution?