

# Why Aadhaar Has No Parallel

The idea of a single over-arching identity number for all citizens issued by the state is not new, but in most developed countries, passport and driver's licence remain the most-accepted IDs

**ID cards started as a tool to track citizens**

**1803-04** France was the first country in the modern world to issue identity cards. Introduced during Napoleon's time, the card was issued mostly to the working class to control their movement and keep wages down. Workers had to submit their cards (livret ID) to employers and take it back if they wanted a change of job — getting the card back was difficult



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**1839** Ottoman emperor Sultan Mahmud II was witnessing a decline in influence amid increasing interference of other European countries in his territories. In his bid to enhance the state's power on citizens, Mahmud's Tanzimat introduced a national ID card

**WW II** In the pre-World War II era UK and Germany made it mandatory for citizens to have ID cards in 1938. Vichy France introduced cards in 1940. Cards issued in Germany and Vichy France were used to identify and target Jews. In UK, the national registry act was repealed after the war

**Post WW II** In 1949 Hong Kong and Taiwan introduced the card to check immigration from mainland China. In 1958 China introduced Hukou Registration Regulation, used to provide the underprivileged benefits to underprivileged citizens and was also used to restrict movement inside the country. In 1960s South Korea and Singapore also introduced national identity cards

**What works today as proof of identity**



**AUSTRALIA**  
Two proposals abandoned in 1987 and 2007 over privacy concerns  
**DOCS CLOSEST TO ID:**  
Driver's licence, tax file number, medicare number



**UNITED KINGDOM**  
Identity Cards Act 2006 abolished by the Identity Documents Act 2010  
**DOCS CLOSEST TO ID:**  
Driver's licence, passport, age-proof cards (Proof of Age Standards Scheme)



**UNITED STATES**  
No national ID cards  
**DOCS CLOSEST TO ID:**  
Driver's licence, passport, social security card, state ID, military CAC card



**RUSSIA**  
Citizens above age 14 and living in Russia required to have internal passport that is renewed at age 20 and 45



**CHINA**  
Citizens over age 16 must apply for resident identity card



**JAPAN**  
The My Number law (2013) allots every citizen a number that links personal information on taxation, social security and disaster-relief benefits that central and local govts have



**FRANCE**  
The national ID card can be a travel document as well within Europe and French overseas territories and for purposes like opening a bank account. There is widespread opposition to a centralised database of the information in the cards



**GERMANY**  
Mandatory to have an identity card or a passport, but individual decides what information he wants included on ID Card, like fingerprints



**BRAZIL**  
A non-mandatory national identity card, also known as RG card. Driver's licence, passport



**Why Aadhaar is causing such alarm**

■ The 12-digit number issued by Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) is stored in a centralised database and linked to demographics and biometric information — photograph, ten fingerprints and iris. Apart from being identity proof, the Aadhaar number is also used for governments' direct benefit transfer schemes. The recent breach of the data and service providers' and banks' aggressive drive to obtain users' Aadhaar numbers has raised serious questions and objections. In France, a state initiative for a centralised database was killed when critiques argued that the data was vulnerable to exploitation. After UK's Repeal ID Cards Act, government destroyed all biometrics information that had been collected.

Graphic: Sajeev Kumarapuram