

Media LitLab - Essay Competition

Would the implementation of identification requirements or Digital IDs help make the digital world more democratic?

In my opinion, the answer is not a straight yes or no like many other questions in politics. From my point of view, there are many consequences to implementing Digital IDs. On the one hand, it does make it easier for governments and law enforcement to regulate the digital world and ensure political equality is provided for all citizens. On the contrary, its enforcement requires large-scale digital tracking and data collection, which is a breach of privacy.

Immediately after Elon Musk took over Twitter, the social media platform was brimming with racist and homophobic tweets, which would most likely not be said in reality. Due to there being no consequences for individual's actions, they indulged in hate speech, as the only consequence they would face is the banning of their account. In this scenario, a Digital ID is ideal as hate speech is a punishable offence worldwide and it makes it easy for law enforcement to track them down. Therefore, it would require large-scale investments in expensive assets by governments. Consequently, Digital IDs makes it easier for businesses to reach their target audience much more effectively as they have exact details for each individual. I believe this is where a more stringent version of GDPR can prevent this from happening on a large extent. However, other governments would require a similar set of laws that protect citizens online.

Nonetheless, this idea of Digital IDs can only work in democratic countries. For example, the idea is very similar to the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) massive surveillance of its citizens where the use of AI enables them to censor its citizens from

raising their voices against the regime. The CCP has also implemented a 'Social Credit System' which aims to reward a 'model citizen/business' while punishing the 'unruly citizen/business.' There have been cases where citizens were discriminated against through false acquisitions resulting in them losing access to governmental resources. Yet, there are countless cases of online and offline scams suggesting that the administration is not fully ready to reduce all crimes. This ongoing 'experiment' proves that digital tracking of citizens or similar ideas like Digital IDs are hard to implement as the internet is an open resource that connects the world.

I believe that a better solution would be 'Web 3.0', where the digital space is more decentralized rather than tech companies holding bargaining power over their consumers. While there is no set definition for 'Web 3.0' as of now, the general expectation is the shift towards blockchain and AI to increase security and provide consumers power over their own data. Also, a blockchain system acts as a Digital ID because any action taken by a user is verified by other users' computers. This would make the internet more secure, and a decentralised network. Therefore, I believe it would not lead to a more democratic digital space.

To conclude, I believe Digital IDs is an interesting suggestion nevertheless will not make the digital space more democratic, rather contrary depending on the enforcing government. Moreover, the consequences of data breaches would be devastating. Nevertheless, it can potentially be a solution with 'Web 3.0' through blockchain.