

Primer for Students: National Identity Cards

Permanent residents are people who moved to Canada from a foreign country. They have applied to the government for permission to stay in the country, but are not citizens. Only people who are born in Canada or people who apply for citizenship and fulfill certain requirements are Canadian citizens.

Consider a proposal where only permanent residents would be required to carry national identity cards, as has been suggested by many government officials and politicians.³⁴

A national identity card is simply a tool which permits holders to prove, with a high degree of certainty, that they are who they say they are. The card provides certainty because of security measures used in issuing it and the technology used in the card.

While the new focus on a positive proof of identity is partially rooted in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks, other forces are at play. Identity theft is seen as a serious and growing problem in Canada.³⁵

The primary feature of the national identity card will be the inclusion of biometric information. Biometrics takes the physical or behavioural characteristics of individuals and converts them into digital data.³⁶ Some examples of biometrics are fingerprints, eye features (scans of the retina and iris), facial features, hand geometry, and voice recognition that are considered unique or at least relatively unique to the individual. These identifiers are used for the purpose of verifying a person's identity.

What do you think...

- 1) Do you have a reasonable expectation of privacy in your biological, physical or behavioural characteristics? Why or why not?
- 2) What are the benefits and risks of using national identity cards? Do the benefits outweigh the risks/costs, in your opinion? Do you feel that this invasion of privacy is justified?
- 3) Considering s.15 of the *Charter*, do you think it is fair that only permanent residents would be required to carry them? Why or why not?

Think about it...

Given your understanding of these *Charter* rights and their approach to privacy, how would you evaluate the following scenario?

What if your school decided to install video surveillance cameras in the hallways and outside the school to control vandalism? The video would be monitored by trained camera operators and the tapes could be viewed by police at any time.

- 1) What other activities might the cameras catch on tape? How would this proposal affect your privacy interests?
- 2) Is the prevention of vandalism a good justification for the resulting loss of privacy? Can you expect a right of privacy in school owned space? Should there be any limits on this right?