

Give & Take: How Brazil's Digital ID Expands and Limits Rights

Brazil's new digital ID infrastructure—the CIN or *carteira de identidade nacional* ('national identity card')—promises identification procedures that are more secure, convenient, and inclusive for Brazilians who struggle to access ID services. Nevertheless, the CIN often reinforces the same inequalities it seeks to redress.

This dual dynamic is not new or uncommon. State identification is often portrayed as both granting and taking away rights from marginalized populations (Gordillo, 2006; Koster, 2014). Vulnerable groups frequently struggle to access state ID infrastructures; however, they also use these infrastructures to fight for their rights.

Within this dual dynamic, how do *digital* ID infrastructures grant and take away rights from groups and individuals? I analyze how the CIN's digital features contribute to this dual dynamic by introducing two significant modifications. First, the CIN obscures state accountability by shifting identification procedures from municipal and state authorities to federal and private actors. Second, it demands new resources and knowledge (e.g., a working smartphone and digital literacy) from citizens,—thus creating both difficulties and opportunities for Brazilians struggling with state identification.

My focus on Brazil's ID infrastructure and its card follows a long tradition in science & technology studies and media studies to address a research puzzle by tracing an object's social, material, and historical trajectory (Gitelman, 2020; Robertson, 2010). This paper contributes to that literature by presenting a recent case from the Global South that spotlights how digital ID infrastructures present new questions within well-worn dynamics of inclusion and exclusion.

Short Abstract

Following scholars who argue that state ID infrastructures both grant and deny rights to citizens, this paper centers Brazil's new digital ID infrastructure to analyze how digital and data-centric infrastructures create new mechanisms, subjects, and outcomes of ID inclusion and exclusion.

References

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