



Now, More Than Ever, We Need Fake ID

To evade legal restrictions on our actions and government monitoring of our movements, bogus documents are an irreplaceable boon.

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"Record number of fake ID seizures," New York's government boasted at the end of last year, presenting the Empire State's residents with a (not unfamiliar) holiday-season gift of arrests and petty law enforcement. "Governor Andrew M. Cuomo today announced that underage drinking sweeps conducted by DMV investigators in 2016 resulted in the seizure of 862 fraudulent licenses and the arrest of 818 individuals for underage drinking, both single year records."

Great going, gov! Your intrepid investigators managed to slap cuffs on bunches of 19-year-olds for sneaking beer two years earlier than politicians would allow. How about some medals for your brave enforcers?

This is an old dance. Identification documents don't always present convenient information to prying officials, so there's wide demand for forged and altered documents to bypass legal restrictions and evade monitoring.

Now, with restrictions and monitoring a growing threat, more than ever we need fake ID.

This year, after years of shifting deadlines on the federal government's effort to create a backdoor national ID card, the TSA began posting signs at airports warning travelers that, as of January 22, 2018, they'll need identification documents compliant with the Real ID Act, passed in 2005, to be allowed to fly.

"The REAL ID Act sought to strengthen each step in the process by which people are identified using ID cards," notes the Cato Institute's Jim Harper, "and it would tie state IDs together as a national ID."

The scary signs are meant to apply pressure to those states balking at making their driver's licenses compliant with federal requirements—a list including eight states that have flat-out refused to comply, and others that are dragging their feet because of concerns over privacy and meddling from Washington, D.C.

"Montanans do not want or need REAL ID," that state's Governor Steve Bullock (D)announced in 2015. "REAL ID raises real concerns about the unnecessary collection of Montanans' personal and private information by the federal government."

The feds hope that travelers panicked by the prospect of being turned away at the airport will bring recalcitrant state governments to heel. The move may work—Arizona caved under pressure last year.

That's unfortunate because, as Harper points out, "If the United States is to avoid having a national ID, all states should cease implementation of REAL ID." Too few seem willing to follow that advice, so it looks like we're on our way to having that national ID.

But as the underage drinkers making Democrat Andrew Cuomo so upset could testify, identification documents are only controlling and restrictive to the extent that they're accurate. If they show birth date different than what reality might reflect, then age limits are less of a concern. If they display names different than those that holders use in their everyday lives, then travel might be undertaken with a modicum of privacy. And if they claim residency status without regard to where somebody was actually born, they expand employment prospects for people looking for opportunity.

That last point is especially important as we await the inauguration of a president who vows to build on the current administration's record deportations of illegal immigrants with threats to deport millions more. John Sandweg, the former acting director of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, calls the scheme "impossible," but any raids and arrests attempting to implement the plan could be incredibly disruptive to people's lives. They could also be brutally damaging to the economy—even as far from the Mexican border as Idaho, where 43 percent of all farm workers are in the country in defiance of the law.

Well, they could be, unless people subject to deportation have access to good-quality bogus ID saying they have legal residency in the U.S.

And where there's demand, somebody also rises up to make sure there's a supply. Fake ID vendors are often found on the internet these days, as New York's Cuomo frequently complains. Cuomo has even taken to warning that overseas firms selling forged driver's licenses might steal identities (fake identity theft?) potentially creating a world, I guess, full of miscreants named "McLovin."

Real ID is supposed to make life much harder for forgers, and it probably has, so they've upped their game too. Instead of somebody like me pocketing a few bucks to change names and dates on driver's licenses with sheets of dry-transfer numbers and letters as I did in my college days, you now have sophisticated companies in China peddling documents around the globe—with discounts for bulk purchases. "[O]ne undercover investigator told us it's the best he's ever seen," Salt Lake City's KSL reported after placing an order.

Or you have corruptible officials selling the real thing with phony information. Hey, it can be a lucrative side job—a Nevada Department of Motor Vehicles technician arrested in 2011 was charging between \$1,500 and \$3,000 for each license. And sure, those officials are doing it for the money, but that's a necessary service they're providing, by greasing the wheels of the modern surveillance state with their necessary scams.

Let's admit here that there's a real value, in many circumstances, to having reliable proof of identity. Anybody keeping an active eye on their credit rating and bank accounts understands that. But when identification documents are so frequently used by government to restrict us,

monitor us, and herd us like cattle, it's at least as important that we have access to good-quality bogus documents.