



No License for ID

Apparently, most Americans immediately cough up the license, judging from the blank looks or even outrage I endure from clerks when I don't. And no wonder: Our Rulers have conditioned us to show our papers reflexively whether we're boarding a plane or buying beer at the supermarket.

But "Papers, please!" is the cry of the police state; it is to our shame that government has shrieked it for decades without objection from us. And it's unpardonable that the private sector is now following suit. It gets away with this because politicians and bureaucrats have convinced Americans that there's a link between ID and safety. But as always, they lie.

The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) contends that scrutinizing driver's licenses and passports at airports helps catch terrorists. Yet it has never apprehended a single one despite studying 2,000,000 ID's daily.



Meanwhile, unless cops have previously arrested the "terrorist" on charges that stuck, the TSA can match his ID to the name on his ticket all it pleases without even beginning to thwart his plot. Perhaps that's why al-Qaeda recruits foot-soldiers without rap sheets even if some of its leaders boast impressive ones: [Marc Sageman, a former "CIA case officer in Afghanistan" who "is now a forensic psychiatrist"](#) found that "of the nineteen 9/11 terrorists, none had a criminal record." Requiring IDs that tragic morning might have helped identify the dead, but it would have done zilch to stop the catastrophe.

The TSA's obsession with ID proves in part that it stages "security-theater" rather than meaningful protection. At the same time, identifying passengers allows the Feds to compile extensive dossiers on citizens who have committed no crime beyond buying a ticket, linking their names and addresses to telephone and credit card numbers, destinations, companions with whom they're traveling, etc. — all under the guise of "protecting" them.

Likewise, the private sector indulges in nothing more than security-theater. Has a clerk ever disappeared into a back office with your license to see if you've made the FBI's "Ten Most Wanted List"? Does he compare the signature on your license against that on your credit card? Indeed, does he give your ID more than a cursory glance? Some stores now dispense with our signing for credit-card charges under a certain amount, usually \$25; I eagerly await a clerk's request for ID In this situation.

Demanding ID empowers the institution asking for it while doing nothing to protect the person flashing it, however much the institution pretends otherwise. Governments gain tremendous authority when



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they know who citizens are, whether for fining, ticketing and taxing them, or to intimidate dissidents. And this vile principle applies in the private sector, too: [businesses crave our ID to protect themselves and to enhance their sales.](#)

Yet companies and their employees insist that their silly commands are for our benefit. A cashier at a chain of 17 supermarkets in one Midwestern county pointed to a sign near the credit-card reader when I demurred at producing my license before charging the \$130-worth of merchandise I was purchasing. "It's a new policy," she huffed, as if no one could possibly disagree with policy, let alone a new one. "It's for your own protection, I always appreciate it when a store wants mine because I know they're protecting me."

"From what?" I nearly asked. Meanwhile, I'd already handed her my frequent-shopper card for the discount it earns, and she had successfully swiped it. But that wasn't identification enough: I must show my license, too.

I asked her to tell her manager I resent the implication that I'm lying about my identity and that I won't shop there again until they suspend this obnoxious rule. I also emailed the headquarters when I returned home. "Rachelle" responded a day or two later:

This is a company wide policy and yes it is meant to protect you as a customer as well as [us]. Unfortunately in today's society we find that we sometimes have to take measures one step further to protect our customers and ourselves against fraudulent transactions.

So in addition to impugning my integrity, the company was now insulting my intelligence: I had swiped my credit-card through the store's reader, so the cashier never had possession of my card and could not have compared it to the license she was demanding. And I doubt she had obtained a list of credit-card thieves from the sheriff, let alone memorized their names.

One of the home-improvement chains carried this absurdity to its logical extreme. I happened to be with a male friend that day, and when I refused to show the cashier my license, she demanded his. Not that she asked, but this man is a distant cousin whose finances differ from mine as much as his last name does. When I notified the headquarters office of this buffoonery, I received another email similar to Rachelle's, defending the nonsense though it cost them my business.

A charade is bad enough; worse is when the company treats the ID seriously. Last week, I tried to take advantage of after-Christmas sales at a national department store. Once again, I was with a man, this time a close relative. Once again, when I didn't ante up my license, the cashier requested his — and proceeded to enter all sorts of numbers from it into her register. I complained to the store's national office, so far without a response. Wanna bet if someone answers, he'll recite the usual twaddle about insulting me to protect me?

In fact, recording our information is the only reason for demanding ID — and it's entirely for the company's benefit, not ours. [Thad Tinkelbaum, "an industry expert in the ID scanning technology field," explains why](#) in an article advising bars and pubs to buy scanners. Though much of the piece deals with problems unique to those heavily regulated establishments, one of Thad's ideas applies to all businesses: "Understand Your Clientele and Increase Sales: ... ID scanners provide a unique opportunity to collect information on your customers. In addition to age, drivers' licenses and state IDs contain addresses and gender. This data can be used to create direct mailing lists and track the type of customers who visit your [business]."

If you object to the creeping police-state, if you're tired of the butcher, the baker and the candlestick-



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maker's invading your privacy when you've paid them the compliment of patronizing their business, join me in just saying "no" at the register. Tell the cashier and the manager, "Your choice: you can have my money or my ID, but not both."



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