

Topic: Bureaucracies of National Identification and Citizen Certification in Uganda

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Abstract

This study examines Uganda's bureaucracies associated with national identification and citizen certification and how they impact differentiated groups of citizens, such as marginalized communities, particularly at the borderlands, rural populations, and ethnic minorities. Focusing on the National Identification and Registration Authority (NIRA) that was established following the introduction of the national identity card system in 2014, the study investigates how the evolving national ID system has reshaped the bureaucracies of registration, identification, and certification, and reconfigured the interaction between the state and its citizens. The study was guided by three interrelated objectives: to analyze the evolution of Uganda's citizenship identification from 1962 to 2014; to examine bureaucratic changes following the introduction of the national ID system; and to analyze their implications for citizen–state interaction. Guided by interrelated theoretical frameworks of *governmentality* and *developmentality*, the study conceptualizes the national ID system as a technology of governance and development. Drawing on qualitative interviews with bureaucrats involved in the registration process and citizens, and complemented by document analysis and archival sources, the study examines how bureaucratic practices mediate access to citizenship documentation and state services. It argues that the bureaucratic procedures and practices in Uganda's identification system grant the state absolute power to determine who belongs to the state and who does not. The findings reveal that the national ID system centralizes state authority regarding citizenship, making the ID card the principal document for belonging and eligibility. This consolidation of bureaucratic power has heightened surveillance and exclusion, while also fostering informal practices such as brokerage, bribery, and document forgery as citizens navigate access to identification. The study contributes to broader debates on digital identity, bureaucracy, and citizenship by demonstrating how the national ID system simultaneously complicates governance and deepens inequality. The study underscores the need for equitable, transparent, and inclusive identification regimes in Uganda.