

# Aadhaar: It's Not Black & White

*While most respondents have Aadhaar cards, their motivations to obtain it and their concerns around it vary greatly based on their demographic profile.*

The Aadhaar card is widely touted as a game-changer for the Indian economy. In the seven years since its inception, it has generated over one billion digital identities, spanning nearly 98% of the adult population of India. Aadhaar cards have been promoted by the World Bank as a tool for social inclusion and garnered interest from countries such as Tunisia, Russia and Morocco, who are looking to implement a similar model.

*Little has been done to understand how the Aadhaar card has improved quality of service provision in India*

While its outreach is a clear indicator of operational success, little is known about how the Aadhaar card has improved quality of service provision in India, or how possession of an Aadhaar card affects citizens in their daily lives. Though the Aadhaar card remains a hotly contested issue, the purview of debate rarely moves beyond highlighting its potentially Orwellian nature, or the likelihood of breaches of privacy. These concerns, while relevant, do not capture the day-to-day impact of the scheme.

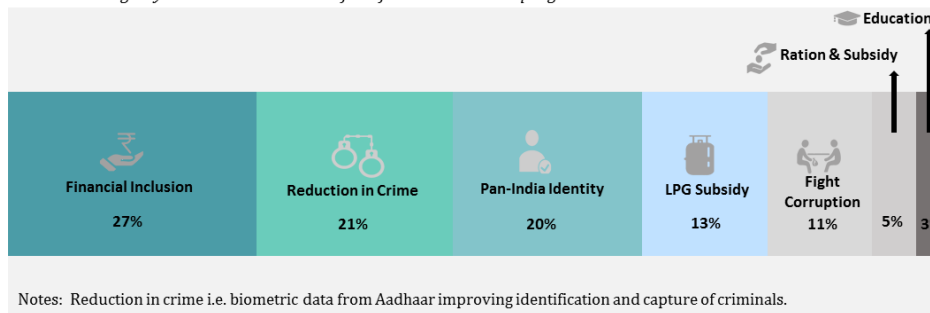
## If Aadhaar is indeed a game changer, what has it really changed?

To find out, we at Outline India conducted a survey of 800 respondents across Delhi, to gauge their reception of the Aadhaar card, its impact on their lives, and their thoughts on making the Unique Identification Scheme mandatory to access government services and schemes. This is the first effort to get rigorous data on the Aadhaar card's impact on regular citizens.

Proponents of Aadhaar argue that it will enable good governance through unprecedented effective delivery of welfare services. This assertion is one that respondents largely agreed with: not only did an overwhelming 96% report that they have an Aadhaar card, we also found that when asked about perceptions of governmental policy or their impacts, the results were heavily skewed toward the positive end of the scale.

### Financial inclusion is the most common benefit of the Aadhaar card programme.

*What according to you are the overall benefits of the Aadhaar card programme?*



*I don't have to take a pile of papers with me if I want something*

As one respondent stated, "I was able to get a bank account easily with one card". Indeed, the increased

financial inclusion emerges as the most frequently cited benefit from the Aadhaar card by respondents. This aspect has gained particular salience since demonetization.

## Has Aadhaar led to improvements in access and accountability?

While a key benefit identified by respondents is minimizing bureaucratic processes, the act of acquiring an Aadhaar card itself can be tedious. Several respondents reported waiting for months for its arrival and being caught in a no-man’s land in the meanwhile. Respondents also highlighted that it was particularly difficult to correct inaccuracies in the card, as this meant re-starting the application process. Some respondents even pointed out that while an Aadhaar card is intended to be free, they had to pay a middleman to obtain it.

Nevertheless, 87% of respondents considered it either very or somewhat easy to get an Aadhaar card even when they reported one of the above issues. This contradictory finding suggests that either respondents have low expectations on accessibility, or that they are buying into the dominant narrative of the successful implementation of the Aadhaar card.

*My birthdate was entered incorrectly. We had to pay to get it corrected*

Respondents are also optimistic that the Aadhaar card will make the government accountable to citizens. However, there were significant variations by profession – 80% of respondents who were employed in the formal sector believed that the Aadhaar card would make the government very accountable, while only 70% of respondents working in the informal sector were as enthusiastic.

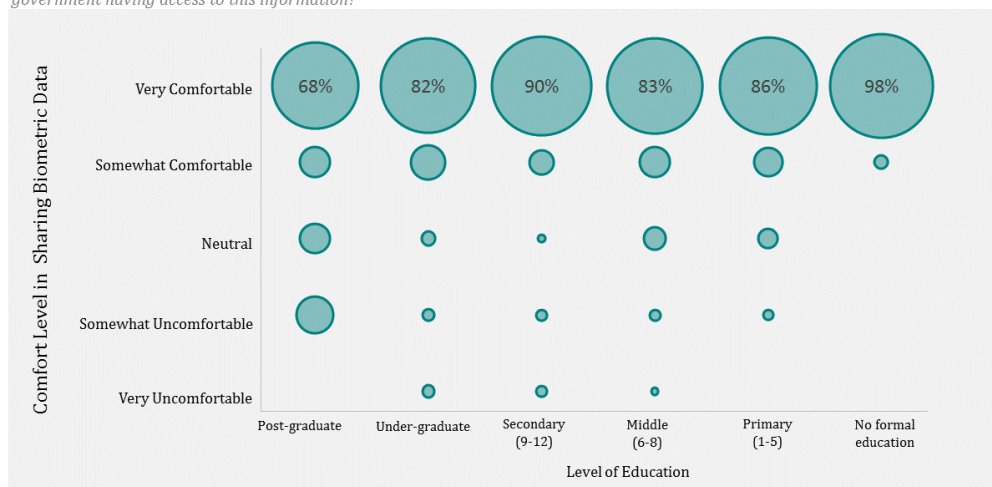
## What about privacy? Are respondents concerned about handing over their biometric data?

Most of the criticisms surrounding the Aadhaar card highlight its ramifications on individual privacy. In recent times, this issue particularly came to the fore when M.S. Dhoni’s Aadhaar details were leaked.

Yet, we found that respondents were not significantly concerned by this threat with only 2% stating that they are somewhat or very concerned about handing over their biometric data.

### Highly educated respondents are less comfortable sharing their biometric data.

The Aadhaar card requires biometric data like finger prints and eye iris scans. How comfortable or uncomfortable are you with the government having access to this information?



However, those who did register concern were likely to be more educated. Evidently, the media coverage criticizing Aadhaar for flouting individuals’ privacy has greater influence on the well-educated elite.

## Do respondents believe the Aadhaar card should be mandatory?

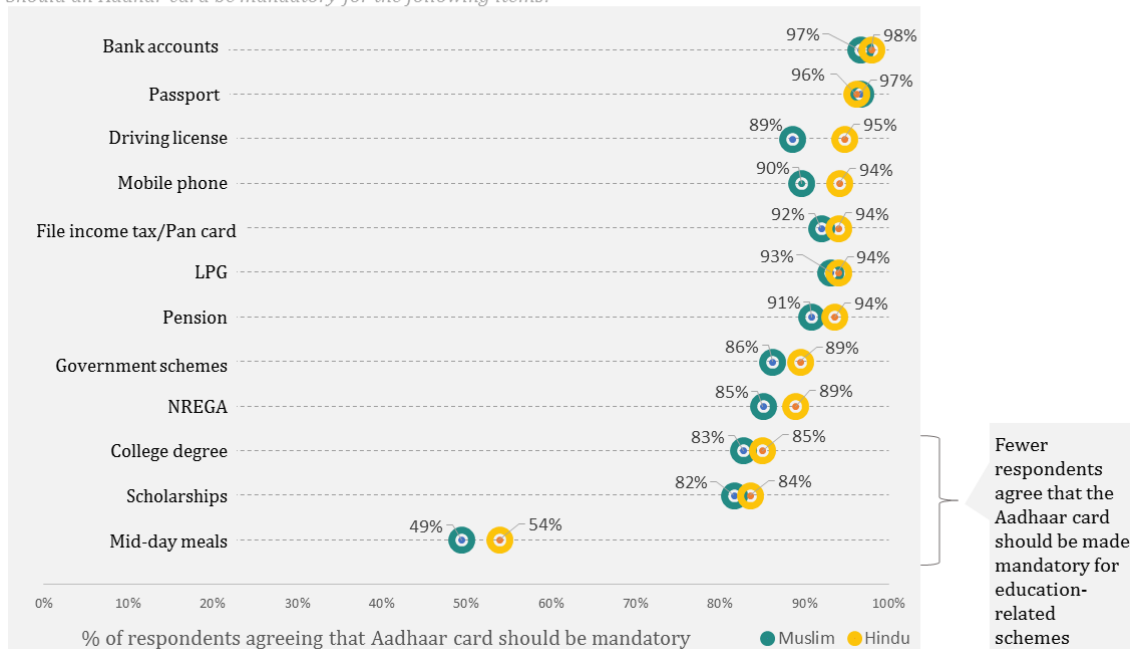
*The reception of the Aadhaar card is not uniform across social strata.*

Except for educational schemes such as the mid-day meal and scholarships, respondents largely approved of the mandatory linkages established between Aadhaar and the provision of welfare amenities.

Even so, the reception of the Aadhaar card is not uniform: we found that the Muslim respondents in particular were less likely to be supportive of mandatory linkages between the Aadhaar card and welfare services. While these differences were not statistically significant responses, these results suggest that Aadhaar's reach may be hampered amongst marginalised social groups, who do not 'buy in' to the scheme, because they are suspicious of its motives.

### Muslim respondents want lesser mandatory linkages to the Aadhaar card.

*Should an Aadhar card be mandatory for the following items?*



## How do we move forward with Aadhaar?

Though Aadhaar has rarely strayed from the headlines over the last few months, the purview of debate has been limited to its political implications. However, this is a reductive analysis of its true impact, as it is ultimately the dynamics which play out at the street level which will define this system. To this end, further research is necessary to explore the impact of Aadhaar. As of now, concerned citizens have shifted through the many claims of the Aadhaar card reducing service leakages and ensuring government accountability and transparency. Yet, these claims still need to be substantiated. Conversely, there have been cases reported where subsidies and services have been denied to the poor, in the absence of Aadhaar cards. Nonetheless, our survey finds that respondents, in general are optimistic and are excited about the benefits Aadhaar will bring, particularly with regard to negotiating post-demonetization India.

# Annexure

## Methodology

The survey was conducted with 800 respondents across 16 metro stations in New Delhi. The sample size and location for the survey was determined based on convenience sampling. A mixed methodology approach was deployed to conduct the survey. The survey covered respondents from diverse socio-economic backgrounds and included metro commuters, petty shop dealers, street vendors, rickshaw pullers, auto and cab drivers.

The survey is not intended to be representative for Delhi but it does provide statistically rigorous data on opinions of respondents.

Table 1 on the right gives the demographic breakdown of the respondents.

**Table 1: Demographics**

CHARACTERISTICS	RESPONDENTS
<b>Gender</b>	
Male	529
Female	271
Other	0
<b>Religion</b>	
Hindu	691
Muslim	87
Christian	1
Sikh	20
Other	1
<b>Caste</b>	
General	284
ST	47
SC	126
OBC	290
Other	50
No response	3