Bureaucratic failings in the National Register of Citizens process have worsened life for the vulnerable in Assam[1]

Briefing

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Summary

The update of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Assam will have huge implications for those that are left off the final list. However, the bureaucratic process itself has been marginalising and its ongoing effects must be scrutinised. In our survey of 64 individuals across Lower and Upper Assam we found that clarity about the application process has been, since 2015, almost absent at the ground level. This is a government failure that has allowed misinformation and anxiety to flourish and has resulted in draft list (and potential citizenship) exclusions on the basis of technicalities. People have suffered direct economic costs in attempting to complete the NRC process, since they have had to miss work and travel long distances to obtain documentation and for verification. This has hit the poorest residents of Assam the hardest. There is also widespread incredulity over the lack of transparency of the application process and the shifting rules given by the Supreme Court, which is taking a negative psychosocial toll. Half of the men and two-thirds of the women described their experience of undergoing the bureaucratic exercise in negative terms, with several describing the environment as "fearful", "intimidating" or recounting harassment. This disorganisation has produced an arbitrariness on the ground that is structurally, materially and physically affecting almost all communities, particularly the poor and women.

Keywords: Assam, National Register of Citizens, Bureaucracy, Marginalisation, Citizenship

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INTRODUCTION

The National Register of Citizens (NRC), compiled in Assam in 1951 based on the census the same year, is the official register containing the names of all Indian citizens who are residing in India.[4] The NRC is now being updated in Assam to include the names of persons who can "prove" their Indian citizenship through the submission to the government of a select list of personal and/or family legacy documents that have pre-1971 validity. The Supreme Court, in the case of *Assam Public Works* v. *Union of India & Ors.*[5]*,* has been monitoring this process since it began in 2015, and it is only in Assam that the register is currently being updated. The necessity of an update in this region has arisen from historic violent and non-violent protest and political movements variously demanding "solutions" to apparent mass-migration to Assam from Bangladesh since 1971 (and earlier), and successive regional and national governments promising, though not always following through with, action. Publication of the first two drafts of the list in December 2017 and July 2018 have come against a backdrop of wider anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim sentiment across India which have framed the public discourse on the issue.

Since the update began in earnest, the process has involved the Northeast Indian state's 32 million inhabitants searching for historic identity documents, piecing together family history through distant family members, and writing a lineage spanning over at least six decades that few elsewhere would be able to. While the end goal of citizenship and the consequences of being excluded are rightly the centre of much public concern and focus, the process itself has not been without its marginalising and discriminatory effects and requires closer scrutiny.

In September and October 2018, researchers from O.P. Jindal Global University and the Development and Justice Initiative undertook a survey and in-depth interviews aimed at understanding people's experiences with the application process itself (see Box 1). Questions were grouped under three broad themes: What information/assistance have respondents received while undergoing the process; what were respondents' experiences of collecting the documents and applying; and what should change about the process? The answers reveal experiences of a systematised arbitrariness in both Upper and Lower Assam that is exacerbating marginalisation, insecurity, and anxiety – particularly for the poor, women, and those with established refugee status.

This report offers an initial snapshot of those findings by sharing key trends in the data collected, followed by discussions around the significance of these statistics and their implications for the inhabitants of Assam.[6] For each theme we have also offer more detailed experiences and perspectives from a selection of our interviewees with whom we undertook more in-depth interviews. The insights that have emerged from the survey questions and in-depth interviews highlight troubling failings that, at the very least, raise important question around the integrity of the bureaucratic process and its impacts on many of Assam's already vulnerable residents – even before the final list is published and communities have to deal with the implications of exclusion.

Box 1. Study Overview

- 64 surveys conducted: 23 in Upper Assam (Golaghat, Jorhat, Mariani), 41 in Lower Assam (Barpeta, Chhaygaon, Guwahati, Tamulpur).
- 21 were female and 43 male, all adults.
- Demographic breakdown of survey respondents (self-identified):
  - 16 Assamese (11 Hindu, 4 Muslim and 1 Christian);
  - 33 Bengali (11 Hindu, 22 Muslim);
  - 7 tea garden workers (2 Hindu, 5 Christian);
  - 2 Tribal Assamese (1 Christian, 1 Hindu);
  - 6 other non-Assamese (4 Hindu, 1 Muslim, 1 Jain).
- 7 additional in-depth interviews and 3 group discussions
- 8 key informant interviews were taken among professionals working on issues in Assam linked to, or affected by, the NRC (3 NGOs, 2 lawyers, 1 NRC officer, 1 academic, 1 Karbi community leader).

Survey areas were chosen in order to capture a cross-section of communities resident in Assam. Participants were selected through snowball sampling and initial contacts were community leaders, NGO workers, or individuals already known to the research team and our wider networks. The final sample size remains relatively small and therefore this study cannot claim representativeness of wider Assam. Nonetheless, it was undertaken with the intention of being a foundation study that, through a qualitative approach, would begin to capture the overlooked experiences of ordinary people undergoing the challenges of documentation collection, form filling, application submission, and verification.

Note: All names of research participants used in this report are pseudonyms.

FINDINGS

I) Sources of information and assistance.

The data

- **Initial information.** Respondents were offered multiple choice options to identify where they first heard about the NRC. Of the 60 respondents to the question, 53% (32) indicated that they received initial information from TV, news or mobile media. A third indicated that they received/also received information through word of mouth from family, friends or neighbours. Only 14 (23%) respondents (all male) recalled hearing information initially from some form of government source, such as panchayat officials or Booth Level Officers.

- **Ongoing information.** A significant 53% of the 51 respondents who answered this question indicated that they received subsequent information mainly from media outlets. The second and third most common forms of information were word of mouth (29%) and village leaders (16%). Only 4 of the 51 respondents (3 male, 1 female) indicated that they received information from officials responsible for overseeing this process – i.e. NRC representatives.

- **Requests for assistance.** Of the 61 respondents that answered "*Which individual/ organisation did you turn to for assistance/ questions regarding the NRC?*" 43% turned to their friends, family and neighbours. School teachers/masters were also an important source of assistance at 18% (11 respondents). Additional local assistance was sought from Booth Level Officers, with 21% indicating they turned to them. Just less than a quarter (14 out of 61 respondents, 10 of them men) indicated that they sought assistance from NRC officials, with some explaining that access to them was impossible given long queues outside of the offices. Only 8% of individuals that answered this question indicated that they sought assistance from non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

Discussion

Whispers and Whatsapp

The main sources of information about the NRC and how to fill in the forms came from media platforms (TV/newspapers/radio/mobiles) or word of mouth from family, friends and/or neighbours. Next, people turned to educated and/or senior figures within their communities, such as teachers, Booth Level Officers (BLO), and panchayat officials.

While BLOs and other local government officials had been appointed to assist the higher levels of government involved in NRC completion, their remit was largely limited to local assistance in form-filling, as literacy levels (especially bureaucratic and digital literacy) in the poorest areas remain low. Clarification these officers gave other village members about required documentation often became outdated or confusing as checklists over valid documents shifted.

In these gaps, informal and uninformed information networks have emerged and created a situation of misinformation, errors in form-filling, and rumour-mongering. Several respondents expressed concern over (untrue) rumours that this process was linked to other social protections, such as rations, and that exclusion would result in automatic destitution. In the tea estates, tea garden workers stated that they have been reassured that tea company documents dating before 1971 would be treated as valid documentation, but this is not reflected in the list of admissible documents for the NRC.

Changing rules around document eligibility and deadlines from the Government and Supreme Court have exacerbated confusion, a sense of arbitrariness and anxiety. For instance, Nepali-origin Gorkhas living in Assam were reassured by a Home Ministry notification in 2018 that they would be eligible for inclusion under the NRC pending valid pre-1971 documentation, or that they would at least be recognised as legal migrants as a result of a 1950 treaty between India and Nepal. Refugees from East Pakistan, too, have been caught between changing terms, with Refugee Certificates issued to them by the government of India rendered ineligible until a revision was made to the rules in Autumn 2018 (see Box 3 on p.7). Such reactive, ad hoc notifications indicate an arbitrary process rife with unequal layers of inclusion and exclusion.

Limited training, no consistency

Our key informant interviews explained that front-line officials stationed on the NRC Seva Kendra's information desks were overwhelmed with queues of people seeking assistance or submitting documents, and their capacity was not sufficient to manage these queries. One official deputed from another government department to the NRC (in document verification) stated that he had received only one day's training to get him up to speed on the role.

Survey respondents noted that they when they

approached NRC and other local officials with queries, they were given different information about which documents would be relevant on different days, creating much confusion and multiple wasted journeys.

These gaps highlight a concerning lack of capacity and knowledge among officials handling the process, and an arbitrariness producing uneven experiences on the ground. They also expose the flawed way the central government has understood the application document in the first place: as a neutral means to an end, rather than a mediator of power in its own right. As scholars have written elsewhere, the mediating role of documents has often been overlooked because these pieces of paper are only viewed in light of what they give access to (in this case, citizenship).[7] However, bureaucratic documents – and the functioning of administrative assistance to aid their completion – also symbolise and transform power relations themselves. The difficulty that ordinary residents in Assam had in understanding the form's instructions and filling the forms in correctly, as well as the insufficient infrastructure set up by the government at a local level to assist in their completion, has resulted in the bureaucratic process determining exclusion even before the assessment stage of the applications. This pre-assessment exclusion is administrative and not legally determined, and yet it will have profound legal and social consequences for many individuals, families and communities.

Women and information isolation

Women have been particularly affected and marginalised by the government's poor communication and inadequate NRC assistance infrastructure. For all three questions around access to information and assistance, female respondents reported significantly less contact with officials than did the male respondents. Moreover, while the government and the Supreme Court endeavoured to share initial and evolving information about the process on their websites, women did not have ready access to these online information channels. A 2018 study on mobile internet penetration found that in India as a whole, 65% of women own a mobile phone, however only 8% of them are internet users and they tend to be based in urban areas.[8] This was in contrast to men across India – 84% of whom own a mobile phone and 26% use mobile internet (which is still a low figure and again dominated by those in cities). These low mobile penetration and digital literacy rates are exacerbated by women's overall lower literacy (as low as 30% in the tea estates).[9]

All of these factors have combined to make women more reliant on family and informal connections for information and assistance in filling out the forms.

This oversight of women's specific bureaucratic vulnerabilities has resulted in arbitrary NRC application experiences and heightened the likelihood of mistakes and exclusions for women. Asha and Rupali's experiences highlight the difficulties faced at both ends of the support spectrum for women – one with an extensive family network, the other with none.

Box 2. Asha, Rupali and bureaucratic marginalisation.

Asha is a literate health worker in a tea garden estate in Upper Assam who had a strong familial network.

"I heard about NRC last year… Oh my god, I do not recall how many times I visited to NRC offices. Once I got to know about NRC list, I went to NRC offices … regularly. "Today, this document is required, tomorrow that document is required, that should be done" [the officials said]. For example, I was going to people with documents [to ask] that if anyone can correctly fill the forms then I could submit the documents…

I had to go to my mother's house couple of times. I had to ask support from my mother and my brother. My siblings had to go together to the NRC office to prove legacy… I asked NGO worker for help. How do we submit the documents?... We collected all the documents and submitted the same. My name came but my husband and children's name did not come in the list. I felt bad. Why did their names not come in the NRC?... People say that we would not be able to stay here and will be sent to somewhere. They bother us by saying these things… I had to go to the Civil Hospital, Golaghat due to high blood pressure after worrying so much".

Rupali is an illiterate tea garden worker based in Upper Assam.

"I do not have any documents. I got married [in] January, 2016. I was happily married for one year. My husband got sick and passed away in February last year. My in-laws are not providing me any documents to submit in NRC… I am not feeling good [about the process]. My name is not in the list, neither from my husband's side nor my parents' side. I am thinking to get married again. But [I] do not know what will happen as my name is not in the list. I am not sure about my future."

Rupali's experience of estrangement from her in-laws and subsequent difficulty getting documentation is not unique. An Assamese NGO focused on women's empowerment recounted to us that they had worked with women survivors of domestic violence who have no legacy data and have been left off of the draft lists. For these women to retrieve paperwork held by husbands and families that they fled puts them at great personal risk, but there is no NRC mechanism to account for such protection concerns.

II) Experiences of undergoing the NRC

Respondents were asked to describe in one word or a short sentence their overall experience of undergoing the NRC process, and 60 answered this question.

The data

- **Positive.** In total, 24 out of 60 (40%) respondents to this question described the experience of undergoing the NRC in positive terms, with 18 respondents describing the process as either "easy", "not difficult" or "simple", at least at first.
- **Negative.** 30 out of 60 (50%) described the experience of undergoing the NRC in negative terms, with 25 respondents using words such as "difficult", "puzzling", "complex", "unclear" and "tough".
- Positive and negative experiences were broadly equal when respondents are categorised via ethnic identity. For instance, 50% self-identified Assamese respondents described the NRC process in broadly positive terms, compared to 44% in negative terms. Among the Bengali respondents, this was slightly reversed, with 41% describing it in positive terms, 52% in negative.
- However, when looking through the lens of faith identity, the discrepancy widens. Of the 27 self-identified Hindus that answered this question, 52% described the process in positive terms, 37% negative. Of the 25 Muslims that answered this question, 32% used positive terms compared to 60% using negative descriptors.

Discussion

A 'positive' experience of applying to the NRC seemed to be broadly determined by how respondents initially understood the purpose of the NRC, the rules around document eligibility, and what the form itself required them to do.

Several respondents from across the ethnic and faith groups stated that they were hopeful the process would 'settle' the foreigner debate once and for all in Assam. When asked whether they felt they understood what they had to do, 62% of the 58 respondents to this question answered "yes". This data suggests that people agreed with the general principle of the exercise and felt confident in the initial stages of their ability to meet the evidence requirements based on rules advertised by the NRC in 2015.

Negative experiences seemed to be determined by a range of factors, such as literacy levels (one respondent remarked that it was "tough for illiterates" because the NRC Seva Kendra would send them away if they were unable to fill out their form). But also other factors that evolved over time: whether respondents already had documentation to hand; changing SOPs [Standard Operating Procedures]; and a retrospective assessment as a result of their exclusion from the drafts.

Gathering documentation

A positive assessment significantly correlated with whether the respondent already had the documentation: 75% of those who described the application process in positive terms already had the necessary documents to hand. Those that did not often had to face difficult and costly travel. Looking across the 64 surveys, 28% of respondents noted instances of having to undertake multiple, long or inconvenient trips to collect documents, submit and/or verify their application.

When asked specifically how many times respondents had to visit the NRC Seva Kendra, 48 people responded. One person reported never having to visit an NRC office herself, seven respondents (15%) visited the office only once, another 15% visited twice and the rest (69%) reported travelling to the offices three times or more in order to apply and verify their paperwork. One tea garden worker from Upper Assam who remains excluded from the July 2018 draft list stated that he visited the centre nearly a dozen times *every month* for the past 7 months. Of those that visited 5 times or more to complete and/or verify documentation, only 39% ended up with their names on the July 2018 draft.

Distances to these centres vary significantly and the ability to reach them has been affected by weather conditions, as many areas do not have all-weather roads.

In June 2018 heavy flooding throughout the state directly affected the work of 70 NRC Seva Kendras, which supported approximately 700 villages, and a full working week was lost just before draft publication was due.[10] Over 200,000 people were displaced during these floods, and a further 25,000 were displaced by later floods in August, causing significant difficulties for those affected.[11]

Huge personal costs – time and money

Of the 35 respondents that answered the question regarding how long it took them to collect their documentation, 34% stated that it took them 10 or more weeks. Three respondents stated that they or a family member had to travel to a different state in India to get the documents required. One of these respondents is a welder who stated that this process has already cost him Rs. 3,000 – 4,000, which amounts to over half a month's salary. Another, a social worker, has spent Rs.6,000 – 7,000 (and rising) in order to collect all documentation from Assam and Rajasthan. Another, a clothes stall owner in his late 50s/early 60s had to twice travel over 600km to verify his documents after applying, spending around Rs.15,000 on the whole process.

Six respondents stated that they felt the environment was "fearful" or that "rumours" were creating tensions, and an additional four stated that they experienced some form of harassment, overly-heavy questioning, or were unduly turned back by officials.

Inclusion in the July 2018 draft did not automatically result in a positive description of the process – 59% of those that were included in the July 2018 draft still described the process in negative terms, and this statistic cuts across ethnic and religious lines. Sandip's experience (Box 3) highlights why perceptions might have changed over the 3 years.

Box 3. Sandip – optimism then arbitrariness

Sandip, who is a Bengali Hindu refugee in his 60s, lives in a small, simple house with his wife, his son and daughter-in-law, and grandchild in Lower Assam. He and his neighbours described how the refugees in their community first started arriving from East Pakistan in the mid-1960s. The Indian government welcomed them, gave them small allotments and refugee certificates in recognition of their flight from persecution. He narrated a sense of optimism followed by confusion and concern:

"When NRC came, we were happy only – because we have documents, we have nothing to fear. Old people came here, died, left their families here. I was married here, my son was born here, did graduation here, if his name doesn't come in NRC, will he believe [or] follow it? We thought NRC would be good, but it's bad – it has made people mad. We all have documents, we submitted accordingly – some people's names came, some didn't, they don't tell reasons for anything – just say we are following Supreme Court's orders. They are not giving reasons properly…

The process was easy. The documents were there. Some people had to get documents – for example after marriage, some people also mingled with people from outside – to get documents from families, to get out legacy there, they had to [travel]. Refugees didn't just marry with refugees, some married Assamese, some Garos [and so on]. So, they had to get from their native places. But people eventually did have genuine documents, that's why they [were] accepted it in the first place – in the first list names even came, but in second list they were deleted, all confusions start happening after first list. Now what will happen is difficult to say… Even IMDT [Illegal Migrants Determination Tribunal] court people have come here numerous times way back to check our documents. They have also been accepting these documents. But in NRC it's not 'sufficient'."

III) What needs to change in the process?

At the end of the survey, respondents were asked "*If there was one thing you could change about the NRC process, what would it be?*"

The data

- **Follow guidelines.** The most common answer at 27% (13 of the 49 respondents) was that the initial guidelines advertised by the NRC in 2015 should be (or should have been) properly followed by officials.

- **Fairness.** Relatedly, 18% of respondents said they wished that the process was done fairly, without arbitrariness, harassment, or violations of rights. There was a majority sense that the process was arbitrary and undermined itself through constant shifting by the Supreme Court around which documents were acceptable, and what the deadlines for various stages would be.

- **Realistic about documentation.** A fifth of respondents to this question (10 out of 49) stated specifically that documentation requirements needed to be revised to account for ground realities.

Discussion

Trust deficit

There is a prevailing sense by many that there is an alternative government agenda sitting behind the current NRC process, which is creating arbitrary outcomes, particularly for certain communities (such as Bengali Muslims and Hindus). Views over what those agendas might be and the extent to which they may be true have not been the focus of this study. What is relevant, however, is that the whispers of these agendas, which are permeating among all communities, are evidence of a widening trust deficit between communities of Assam, and the state and central governments and the Supreme Court.

Interviewees identified a lack of consistency and transparency throughout the process (see Rahul's experience in Box 4).

Box 4. Rahul's experience of bureaucratic inconsistencies

Rahul is a 30-year-old Bengali Muslim male whose grandfather migrated there in the early 20th century. He applied on behalf of all 14 members of his family. In the first list, only Rahul and one of his siblings were included. In the latest draft, July 2018, their names had both been dropped while his elder brother, his brother's wife and their children were included. All used the same legacy data. Rahul explained his understanding of the process:

I was fully confident that our names would be there. […] I went across the state and did awareness programs helping [other] people with the application process. […] Since I knew the process fully, I was confident that no person from our family would be excluded. But [now] I'm not able to understand why our names got rejected and what to do next about our applications.

[…] The Supreme Court is saying one thing and on the ground, we are seeing the process was being changed in a technical [way]. Look at the verification process, the Supreme Court had given an SOP [standard operating procedure]. However, the SOP is not being followed. During all the hearings, it was not followed.

In my case during the verification, where there was an issue about [our] family tree, we gave all the documents and they said that it was resolved. They did not specify that there was [another] issue with the Gram Panchayat documents. If they had, we could have submitted any other document. Now, the reason that we have got for exclusion is that family tree only.

[…] In the claim form, it says that it will be according to the SOP. So, if I submit my document now and the SOP says something different, then it will be rejected. There's another rule that if my claim does not succeed at this stage, then I will not even get a reason for the exclusion. Then I will have to go to the Foreigner Tribunal.

Draining public resources

Key informants noted that identity politics seems to have taken precedence over human rights. Moreover, regional development is suffering as a direct result of the process. One local NGO we interviewed noted that there has been a significant slowdown in development since 2015 as officials from different departments have been deputed to the NRC. At a village level, local officials have been directed to support the functioning of NRC Seva Kendras in addition to their ordinary workload. Within families, it has been common for one or two more literate members to shoulder the responsibility of completing all documentation for the wider family network, which has taken their time away from other economic and social responsibilities. This will have implications across the state for health, education, and economic development as well as village and family-level wellbeing, and it will have a disproportionate impact on the poorest of Assam. Further research is urgently needed to assess the impact the redirection of resources has already had on vital public services.

Conclusion

In the most recent draft of the NRC, 4 million applicants have been left off and face a legal protection black hole in Assam. While that number may reduce in the final draft, it is predicted that over a million will remain excluded. It is difficult to foresee what this exclusion will mean for these individuals and their families, but what is clear is that significant damage has already been done by the bureaucratic process itself.

Our study has shown that, from the outset, this process was structurally flawed with marginalising effects. Detailed, accurate and consistent information and support on how to fill out the from and gather the documents has been absent or inaccessible at village level, leaving people reliant on word of mouth, media updates and informal assistance from (literate) relatives and neighbours. This has contributed to an increased number of errors in the final forms, which has resulted in exclusions on the basis of bureaucratic technicalities rather actual (in)validities of individual claims.

Moreover, access to documentation, abilities to fill in the forms, and access to officials trained in the process has not been equal among all residents. Some have had to travel great distances at a great personal expense for documentation and verification, and others (primarily women) have had less access to officials and the online information often necessary to complete the application accurately. These equality failings risk citizenship being determined more by financial resources and ability to travel than the fundamental rights to claim it. Inequality of documentation and information access, and their potentially exclusionary consequences, also undermine the spirit of equality, inclusion and accessibility that is supposed to be protected under wider governance norms. If the Electoral Commission of India rules that no voter in India should be more than two kilometres away from a polling station to enable equal access, why then must residents of Assam travel dozens, sometimes hundreds, of kilometres to collect documentation, submit their application and verify their claims?[12]

Beyond the material impacts, the NRC application process has also resulted in negative physical and psychosocial health effects (including anxiety and blood pressure spikes), and safety risks for women and men estranged from abusive relations. NRC Seva Kendras have not been sufficiently staffed to cope with the volume of queries, and the deputation of government officials from elsewhere to process NRC documentation has potential resource and capacity consequences for other government service areas.

Among the hardest affected by this process have been:

- The poor, who have lost days and weeks of work in attempts to gather documentation, fill out forms and attend verification meetings – often with no inclusion in the end. As well as directly impacting individuals and families through loss of earnings, this will also have had an indirect impact on the wider economy with working days lost.

- Illiterate applicants, who could not understand or fill out the form and only received their information via informal networks. Lawyers recounted numerous examples of name spelling errors where names have been written carelessly or transliterated inconsistently in present and past documentation, resulting in exclusion.

Moreover, particularly in poor and illiterate villages, a lot of responsibility and power has been placed on the most educated members of each community, typically teachers and booth level officers. This has taken them away from the public services they are meant to provide day-to-day.

- Women, especially poor and illiterate women, are by far some of the most marginalised by this process. Our surveys showed that women were the least likely to receive official information, the least likely/able to seek official assistance, and have been excluded on the basis of ineligibility of the only documentation they often hold (i.e. marriage certificates/ *gaonbura* (village headmen) certificate). Survivors of domestic violence are forced to choose between returning to their abusers in an attempt to retrieve documentation or face exclusion. Others (including men) have migrated to Assam from different states to marry and do not have the resources to return for legacy data.

While the sample of this survey is relatively small, the findings suggest significant bureaucratic failings and a pattern of marginalisation and arbitrariness that characterises the system as a whole. Even if only partially generalised, they have significant implications for the experiences of millions across Assam.

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4. The power to maintain the National Register of Citizens has been inserted (Section 14A) in the Citizenship Act, 1955, through an Amendment of 2004, w.e.f. 3 December 2004. Section 14A states:

Issue of national identity cards—(1) The Central Government may compulsorily register every citizen of India and issue national identity card to him.

(2) The Central Government may maintain a National Register of Indian Citizens and for that purpose establish a National Registration Authority.

(3) On and from the date of commencement of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2003 (6 of 2004), the Registrar General, India, appointed under sub-section (1) of section 3 of the Registration of Births and Deaths Act, 1969 (18 of 1969) shall act as the National Registration Authority and he shall function as the Registrar General of Citizen Registration.

(4) The Central Government may appoint such other officers and staff as may be required to assist the Registrar General of Citizen Registration in discharging his functions and responsibilities.

(5) The procedure to be followed in compulsory registration of the citizens of India shall be such as may be prescribed.

5. Writ Petition (Civil) No. 274/2009. *See generally* orders therein dated 23 September 2014 and 2 July 2018.

6. Each section highlights significant data trends that emerged from the study and the discussion section is based on initial observations grounded in preliminary research. We aim for this to be the first of a series of papers and commentaries that uses the data along with further studies to analyse in greater depth the integrity of the bureaucratic NRC process and wider the issue of citizenship and exclusion in Assam.

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12. Thanks to Snehal Shah for highlighting this comparison.