

Contemporary Issues of Population Census in Nigeria

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Abstract: Ever since before independence and the establishment of National Population Commission (NPC) by Law of Federal Republic of Nigeria, with stipulated mandate to conduct census for the country. Over the periods of times census was conducted with issues of politicking, falsification of population census result, religious rivalry and ethnicity stimulation raising from different groups about the inaccuracy and manipulation of census figure to fit in to desire of certain individual. It has been rejected, dismissed and for correction from both south and northern part of the country. There has been a mixed reaction from a number of Nigerians regarding the acceptability or otherwise of the figures released. Census-taking is a very sensitive issue that has remained intractable in Nigeria and series of censuses makes it possible to appraise the past, accurately describe the present, and estimate the future. This research gives account of population census in Nigeria; contemporary issues align with it and reasons for. And way forward for a credible and accurate future census that would be acceptable to the populace.

Keywords: Contemporary, Census, Ethnicity, Falsification, Population, NPC

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I. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary issues of population census in Nigeria are complicated and the pathways to resolve such issues are not always straight. The route, processes, trajectories and dynamics of population census are complex that necessitate a holistic approach with a continuous investigation (Olutayo et al, 2015). Population census has become a sensitive issue due to the facts of its implications for shaping geopolitical, state and ethnic relations and equity of power. It is the attitude of the people towards the population question, in terms of its absolute size, as it affects the states and the sub-regions that constitute the background to the population census which the country has been associated with (Ottong, 2013). Attempts at determining the population of Nigeria has been a very contentious issue since 1866 and establishment of the total population in the country, has been mere speculations (doublegist, 2013). With a current population exceeding 180 million, the Federal Republic of Nigeria is the seventh-largest country in the world and the most populous in Africa. Despite the introduction of policies and programmes over the last 30 years to address Nigeria's rapid population growth and the challenges it poses for development, the country is projected to become the third-largest nation in the world by midcentury (United Nations Population Division, 2015). Even though, states, religious and ethnic group inflate census figures to their selfish advantage. Put differently, no issue has generated controversy, intense debate and ethnic antagonism than that of manipulation of National census figures. This no doubt has cost the nation a great deal.

Consequently, Nigerians have developed systemic apathy towards census and have the belief that no census can succeed in Nigeria, whether conducted by a civilian or military government (Adeline and Eme, 2015). Successive Nigeria government during both colonial and post colonial periods understood the importance of accurate population census as the basic tool for good development planning in a country. An accurate and adequate knowledge of the population characteristics and trends of a country are therefore, a sine qua non for meaningful development in the country. This is so, because development which involves optimum utilization of the nation's human and natural resources to improve the conditions of living cannot take place without planning. Lack of population census data in sufficient quality and quantity has been generally accepted as one of major factor militating against efficient planning and administration of development plan in Nigeria (Salihu.B, 2015). Nigerian experiences shown clearly that among the many issues that have created great anxiety and brought the country to the brink of collapse has been the attempt at obtaining accurate count of the country's population. It is a perception of issues of population census this paper tend to address.

CONCEPT OF POPULATION CENSUS

The term census originated from the Latin word 'censere' which literally means to tax, assess or value (Peter Ezeah, et al, 2013). Population Census is the total process of collecting, compiling, analyzing or otherwise disseminating demographic, economic and social data pertaining, at a specific time, to all persons in a country or well defined part of a country (Census of India, 2011). This implies that a census exercise is purely a statistical exercise. In other words, a census is a count, an enumeration and the publication, after careful checks, of the results of that exercise. Population census is a source of data required not only by the developing countries but also by the developed ones. Osinaike, et al, (2006) explains that census is a method used for accumulating statistical data about a population, which is acclaimed to be vital to democracy and development. According to Mimiko (2006), census is the actual process of knowing the members of the society in terms of age, sex, education, occupation and economic activities. For Olusanya (1989), "census taking in every nation is the bedrock for understanding the population size and structure in order to execute a perfect economic planning". Ezeah, Iyanda and Nwangwu (2013), maintained that population census is such an avenue through which a country can access the knowledge and understanding of the rate, direction and composition of her population. It's ascertaining the demographic structures of a society and other socio-economic indicators of individual's status in the society (Ketende, Calderwood & McDonald 2011, Madans, 2011). Population census is one of the fundamental tasks of the government. It has become a backdrop for government's political, economic and social policy formation. Population census is one of the key planning strategies towards sustainable development and progress of a nation. It provides answer to: "How many we are" in terms of the total number of people living in the entire nation, —"Who we are?" in terms of age, sex, education, occupation, economic activity and other crucial characteristics, as well as "Where we live" in terms of housing and access to social amenities. The answers to these questions do provide numerical profile for planning and development within a nation by providing, expanding and sustaining the infrastructures that will enhance the quality of life of the people (Mimiko, 2006).

Population census whether seriously observed or otherwise has been made relatively mandatory by the United Nations for every nation in order to warrant a form of uniformity in the knowledge and understanding of population growth and changes, among the nations of the globe (United Nations, 2008) Therefore, a well-conducted census must have the following four major characteristics:

1. individual enumeration;
2. universality within a defined territory;
3. simultaneity; and
4. defined periodicity.

The National Population Commission was established as a federal and an independent executive commission by Section (153 [1j]) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The Executive President of Nigeria is constitutionally empowered to appoint the chairman and members of the National Population Commission but shall consult the Council of States whenever making such appointments which are to also be confirmed by the Nigerian Senate. The chairman and members are appointed for a tenure of five (5) years each and renewable once (maximum of two terms for ten years). Administratively, the commission comprises of a Chairman and one member each from all the 36 states and Abuja as (Commissioners) representing their states. The commission was mandated to carry these functions: The Commission shall;

- (a) Undertake the enumeration of the population of Nigeria periodically, through censuses, sample surveys or otherwise;
- (b) Establish and maintain machinery for continuous and universal registration of births and deaths, throughout the Federation;
- (c) Prepare and maintain a national framework, including locality list and house- numbering, for the delineation exercise for census and sample surveys in each local government area in Nigeria; [1991 No. 31.]
- (d) collect, collate and publish data on migration statistics;
- (e) Research and monitor the national population policy and set up a national population information data bank;
- (j) Arrange for the appointment and training of enumerators and all other categories of staff of the Commission;
- (g) Provide information and data on population for purposes of facilitating national planning and economic development;
- (h) Advise the President on population matters;
- (i) Disseminate information and educate the general public about the functions of the Commission under this Act;
- (j) Do all such things as may be considered by the Commission to be necessary, desirable, expedient, supplementary or incidental to the performance of the functions or the exercise of the powers conferred on the Commission under the Act

ACCOUNT OF CENSUS EXERCISE CONDUCT IN NIGERIA

Generally, counting and observing regular evaluation of the number of individuals in the society has become a necessary exercise by every government across the globe (Adele, 2009). Nigeria as largest black nation in Africa conducted census by British colony in 1866. Subsequently, others censuses were conducted in 1871, 1896, 1901, 1911, 1921. All the above censuses were conducted in the Southern protectorate. The first census that included the Northern Protectorate was conducted in 1952. This attempt yielded a total population figure of 31.6 million within the current boundaries of the country as at that time ([www. Nigeriacensus-history.com](http://www.Nigeriacensus-history.com)). The 1952 census of Nigeria indicated that the Hausa Fulani had the largest share of the population, and so they dominated the first post-colonial government set up after independence in 1960. The newly independent nation ordered a census to be taken in 1962, but the results showed that northerners accounted for only 30 percent of the population. A —recount in 1963 led somewhat suspiciously to the north accounting for 67 percent of the population (Library of Congress, 1999). The 1963 census was the first after Nigeria's independence to give an officially recognized result- a total population of 55.6 million.

The census conducted in 1973 census was also worse as there were disagreements among the Census Board members themselves over its accuracy and thereafter followed by calls for its total cancellation. The results could thus not be published up till General Gowon's overthrow in July 1976 after which the regime of Murtala/Obasanjo cancelled the census. The exercise and results were cancelled by Murtala/Obasanjo's regime even before the validation exercise was concluded as a result of controversies (within and outside the Census Board) that raged the release of provisional figures to the public which made it the second conducted controversial census exercise in just twenty years of 1962/63 and 70 (Kurfi, 2004). It had a grand total of 79, 758, 969 (Kurfi, 2004& Owuche et al, 1991) with North having 51m or (64%) and South (East and West) 28m or (35.6%). With stipulation an interval of 10 years, government could not conducted census until 1991.

The 1991 census exercise was conducted under former military president General Ibrahim Babangida. The 1991 census result shows that Nigeria had a population of 88, 992, 220 persons out of which the North had 47,369,237 of Nigeria's population while the South had 41,622,983 and was partly successful and least controversial because sensitive and controversial questions relating to religion and ethnicity were avoided in the secondary variable questions (Kurfi, 2004).

The last headcount conducted by NPC was in 2006, it was supposed to be conducted between 2001 or 2003. This put Nigeria's population at 140 million. For the 2006 census, the estimated population threshold of Enumeration Areas for the urban areas was 500 persons per Enumeration Area while the rural areas were put population threshold of 200 persons per Enumeration Area. From the 2006 census, further projections by the National Population Commission reveal that the population rose to about 167.9 or 168 million by October 2011. It was also projected that Nigeria's population will be 177 million by July 2013; and 194.8 million by July 2016 and 221 million by July, 2020. These projections are based on 3.2 percent annual growth rate calculated using the 2006 census figures. It is clear that between 2006 and 2011, Nigeria's population has by the projection increased from 140 million to 168 million. Currently, the most populous and least populous states in Nigeria include Kano, Lagos, Kaduna and Bayelsa, Nassarawa, Ebonyi respectively (NPC, 2013).

CONTEMPORARY ISSUES OF NIGERIA POPULATION CENSUS

In spite of the fact that population number represents an important substance of any country as it relates to planning, most of the developing Countries are faced with contemporary issues that have been affecting accurate and utilization of population census data. These challenges were faced right from inception of head counting as it transmitted to a contemporary time as such. Every population census held in Nigeria before and after independence has ended in national controversy, strong allegations of population falsification and in fact no general consensus among the populace as to the size of the total population of Nigeria (Eniayejuni, A. T. and Agoyi, M, 2011). Some of these issues are categorized base on the way they emerge to be seen as a problem to population census in the following phases:

Politicization of Population Census

As one of the factors responsible for the politicization of census in Nigeria, political strength and influence is visible historically. During the preparations for the election into the federal House of Representatives, the data from the 1952/53 census were used as the basis for allocating 50% representation to the North. This to a great extent indicates fundamentally the relationship between population counts and political strength and influence. Population issues precipitated the Constitutional Crisis in the country in 1962. They played a major role in the crisis of the old Western Region of 1965, and were largely responsible for the military take-over in 1966. They also contributed greatly to the fall of Gowon's regime in 1975 and still loom large in the minds of many Nigerians with the incessant demand for the creation of more states soon after the return to civilian rule. It has been observed that out of several censuses conducted in Nigeria, the figures were

irregular and controversial. It was only the 1963 and 1991 census figures that were accepted and used for general planning.

The 2006 population census was to a reasonable degree accepted, despite the fact that the exercise witnessed some controversies. For instance, the Lagos State government declared to the public that their population was under-estimated by the National population commission. The 2006 Nigerian census is argued to be one of the most heated and politicized in the history of Nigerian census counts irrespective of the various preparations as well as huge sums of money that was provided for the exercise from the international communities such as the European Union and the World Bank (Bamgbose, 2009). The enumerators alleged that some powerful politicians in the state hijacked the recruitment of census officials, replacing trained officials with names of their favourites (Suleiman, 2006). The same scenario was found in Benin, Edo state. In Benin, the nonpayment of enumerators' allowances and substitution of names of trained officials with names of favourites of political leaders almost stopped the census exercise there, especially as the move was protested against, leading to a clash between enumerators and policemen. Powerful politicians hijacked the recruitment of census officials, replacing names of trained officials with names of their loyalists (Suleiman, 2006).

Falsification of Population Census Figures

Nationalities compel governments in Nigeria to falsify census results either by inflation of census figures or double counting or even inclusion of non-existing figures in the census results. Even with the introduction of computerized system of carrying out census exercise in Nigeria, the exercise has not been entrusted in the hands of sufficient adhoc staff and field workers of the National Population Commission, despite the huge sums of money from the Central government and international agencies such as the European Union (EU), the United Nations (UN) and the Commonwealth of Nations for the 2006 census exercise. No amount of adjustment done to the figure can make it right. Tinubu, (2007) rejected Lagos state figure and requested for recount since there was enough support funding from the United Nation and also the European Union. Falsification of figures was a do or die affair, in that states not only worked towards the inflation of their figures but also influenced enumerators and top census personnel towards deflation of figures of other states either through the publication of inaccurate figures or deliberative exclusion of some localities in the exercise (Bamgbose, 2009). Also apart from this case of deliberate falsification, the authorities were also corrupt, because they are the ones who gingered the motion. The census committee in the 2006 population census in Nigeria were been rebuked by foreign agencies for introducing 20 strategies rather a deceptive tactic of data falsification of result.

Religious Rivalry

The controversy in relation to religion has a fundamental effect in issues of population census and serves as a threat to even nation building. Conflicts over national censuses religious rivalry that is the source of census controversy and this is so because the competition for political control is between Muslims and Christians rather than rival ethnic groups. Group's actions are influenced by their religion. Religion provides standards and guidelines against which people's conducts can be evaluated (Parsons cited in Haralambos and Holborn, 2004). Religion directs and shapes actions, beliefs, orientations, and behaviours. The behaviours include fertility. Religion influences fertility behaviour. The fact that an average Nigerian is very religious was observed by some sources (Oluduro 2010; Ekundayo 2013). Religion plays a critical role in Nigerian society and has expressed itself as a potent force in the geopolitical development of the country. This force which has been used to unite Nigerians is the same force that has led to numerous conflicts in the country. Nigeria has been engulfed in numerous religious crises and/or conflicts between 1980 and 1994¹ (Warner 2012).

Nigeria last had a population census in 2006, putting the population at 140 million, a figure now being discredited. Even with the removal of the two complex variables militating against a credible census figure that is religion, yet the figures were still doctored in favour of the north who claims to greater population (Etete 2006). Population census is always carried out in Nigeria in order to know the actual figure of Nigerian citizens to enable government to equitably allocate resources. It is pertinent to note that religion is one of the factors that have contributed to unsuccessful population census ever conducted in Nigeria. For instance, Muslims do not permit their women to be counted, reason been that, their culture does not permit such, this accounts to over estimation resulting in Northern figure becoming higher than any other ethnic group in Nigeria (2016).

Ethnicity Stimulation

Ethnicity implies negative feelings directed against an ethnic group. It is ethnicity as the contextual discrimination by members of cultural group against others on the basis of differentiated system of socio-cultural symbol (Obasanjo, 2006). Ethnic classification either externally imposed or intrinsically engendered, often defines people's membership to a group. Aside from social constructs, ethnicity is innately more central to human experience and identity than race. In turn, ethnic distinctiveness is more likely to invoke an innate sense

of peoplehood. This ethnicity wide difference in population has created serious problems and has generated so much hatred among the various ethnic groups in the country. For instance, the Hausas in the northern part of Nigeria who believe huge population should have large portion of national proceeds while other ethnic group rejects such doctrine. A call from then a faction of Ohaneze Ndigbo, a Pan-Igbo cultural organization described the figures as a fraudulent exercise. Employing the services of experts, demographers and geographers to analyze the figures, they concluded that the population allocated to the southeast cannot be a reflection of their number. They therefore declared it doctored and tailored and so rejected it. Afenifere – a pan Yoruba socio-political group described the exercise as a well-managed and manipulated demographic figures (Tell Magazine, 19 Feb, 2007).

Some of these ethnic groups go a long way in inflating the census figures in a bid to have a comparative advantage over other ethnic groups. And also in an attempt to secure more social amenities than others, engage in inflation of census figures. These practices arise from the belief that such ethnic groups would be incapable of securing those social amenities distributed by the government to the various ethnic groups in the country. The ethnic group with the highest population census figures uses it as a systemic institutional platform to discriminate and exercise dominance over the ethnic groups that have lower census figures. It is usually assumed that whichever ethnic group that control the highest population controls the greater share of the national resources respective of the ethnic group that actually needs the resources at that time to foster development. This scenario clearly mirrors ethnic battle for dominance especially between the three dominant ethnic groups as it relates to census figures in Nigeria. (Challenge National.208) This is due to the fact that governmental decisions concerning the sitting of industries, the building of roads and bridges, award of scholarship, revenue allocation and the allocation of parliamentary seats to constituencies of these ethnic groups are guided by population figures of the regions involved. It was gathered that most states worked to inflate their population. Multiple registrations and/ or double counting of citizens were one of the major tools used by states to actualize the drive up to their population. It was in some states/ ethnic leaders ventured into census inflation by unduly influencing census enumerators by promising them large sums of money if they cooperated with them (The Nation, 2006)

REASONS FOR CONTEMPORARY ISSUES

From the foregoing, census politics could therefore be said to be a ensuing consequence of interethnic struggle for national resources. This struggle has as a matter of fact engendered the following activities: the inflation of census figures, the demand for more states and local governments etc. On the usefulness of population census, it is generally noted that the more one considers the economic importance attached to population census in developing countries, the more one would be able to discover the reasons for the inability of such countries to undertake an accurate population count. And subsumed in the general data planning usage and articulated some of the basic functions to include health planning, educational planning and economic development (Adeline and Eme,2015). According to a publication by the National Population Commission, data from the population censuses are basically used for planning in the various economic sectors such as the health sector, industry, communication, transportation, education, housing, agriculture, and public utilities. It is also vital for development and governance, and plays a major part in determination of the supply of labour. A report by the population Association of Nigeria has it that population figures to a great extent determine the sharing pattern for national income. In this stance , populous groups whether real or manipulated are often times are being provided with more public utilities and social welfare benefits than the smaller ones (Problems of conducting population Census In Nigeria, 2016www. u12mm13deupdates.wordpress.com). Accurate population census might be seen as unattainable if considerate in not put in place to address those contemporary issues.

THE WAY FORWARD FOR NIGERIAN POPULATION CENSUS

To posit here that in order to curtail the trend of census of these contemporary issues of population Census in the country, it is imperative to reverse the revenue allocation criteria to reflect more of even development of the various states. This would afford the ‘weaker’ states some ample opportunity to consolidate their hold on fast tracking development. Adequate financing is required for population census if the country must realize the goals of population enumeration. Adequate financing is required to cover the heavy demand for diverse activities involving, expenditure. Budgeting adequately for the exercise would cover the cost of going through the entire country in order to ensure that individual is counted. A major pre-census activity is to prepare every realistic budget of needs, expenses and cost in order to determine how much money would be required for successful completion of the exercise. Generally, considerable sums of money, huge material and human resources, lots of time and efforts should be devoted towards a successful completion of census exercise.

As a nation, continuous re-orientation of the citizenry not to think of population census as a means of distributing government resources but more to accruing national wealth via large population figure but for accurate plan for sustainable development for now and for future generation. Citizenry need to be aware of

census for the speedy implementation of government policy, efficient allocation of scarce resource. This is design for implementation, and evaluation of programs and policies in every government realm, including education, health, housing, employment, transportation, small business development, human services, emergency preparedness and response, and environmental protection. In addition, states should be recreated and re-organized in such a way that the population of all the states will be almost equal. It is also suggested that the states are re-organized with the boundaries having no regard to ethnic and cultural boundaries (Eze 2015). It is expected that such measures will douse the proclivity to falsify figures. The issue however is that the contention and the politics of population size are not situated in rivalry form.

One idea that would be a source of discouragement of politicization, falsification, religious rivalry and ethnicity stimulation is population taxation. This means that each state will be made to pay a particular type of tax to the federation account based on its population number. So the more you claim numerical strength, the more the quantum of tax you will pay to the federal government. Considering the condition attached with higher population figure in terms of payment of tax, manipulation of population census figure would drastically minimize to a great extent, no group would desire to have high allocation of tax and would lead to accuracy in population figure.

Application of modern powerful Geographic Information Techniques such as remote sensing (high resolution satellite imagery and aerial photographs), Geographical Positioning System (GPS), digital cartography and Geographic Information System (GIS), should be used to facilitate the production of all base maps needed for successful conduct of population censuses. It gives room for geo referencing the point of interviews using GPS, another potential advantage of electronic instrument is the ability to include pictures, audio or video links along with text. Accurate, comprehensive, geographically-referenced, mutually exclusive and non-overlapping Enumeration Area maps, supervisory area maps and locality maps covering every nook and cranny of the country must be made readily available to enumerators to access locations. Finally, population census timing interval must be well thought-out, ensuring an interval of ten (10) is maintain for accuracy, unlike the previous one held. As National population Commission for the next population census, If Nigeria must get it right and plan with facts, it must strive to conduct credible and widely acceptable censuses in future. This is one way in which it can enjoy the respect of the international community. For this to happen, early planning, proper organization and deployment of modern and improved technologies for data collection must be adopted by the National Population Commission.

II. CONCLUSION

The inherent contemporary issues have continued to defeat the main aim of population census as an instrument for strategic planning and sustainable development. Lack of accurate census figures may have contributed to Nigeria's policy summersault and under development. It is unfortunate that in this 21st century Nigeria still does not have effective and reliable census data due to the fact that politicization, Falsification of population census result, religion rivalry, ethnicity stimulation and fluctuation of period of conducting census serves as a controlling force against accuracy of population census figures. By looking inward to nature of the ethno-religious existing of the nation, addressing those contemporary issues would explore a means to end inaccuracy of population census in Nigeria.

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