

Politics and Census in Nigeria: Challenges and the Way Forward

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Abstract

The population is essential to the government's efforts to build a nation, particularly Nigeria. Since colonial times, Nigeria's populace has been divisive and politicised. A necessary database prerequisite for gauging the social and physical well-being of a country's populace is census statistics. Therefore, in order for any nation to reach its full potential for development, it needs a thorough population database to direct the planning, execution, and socioeconomic programming of that nation. The 1962 general population census was cancelled due to controversy surrounding it, and it was rescheduled for 1963. The population of a region is seen as a political tool, a prerequisite for the provision of infrastructure and services, and in actuality, it directs the distribution of wealth and financial planning. Unfortunately, Nigeria has not yet provided sufficient and acceptable demographic data for the development of infrastructure and nation-building. Because of erroneous population databases, Nigerian history scholars don't seem to have given nation-building in Nigeria enough attention. Therefore, the perception of political and population census issues is what this paper primarily addresses. A qualitative research approach was used to ensure accurate analysis. The study came to the conclusion that the fundamental goal of population censuses as a tool for long-term strategy and sustainable growth has been undermined by enduring modern problems. Inaccurate census data has contributed to Nigeria's underdevelopment and policy reversals. Regrettably, Nigeria still lacks accurate and trustworthy census data in the twenty-first century. This is because political interference, the falsification of census results, religious competition, ethnic sentiment, and shifting census dates act as a brake on the accuracy of census data.

Keywords: Population Census, Politics, Politicization of Figures, Nigeria

Introduction

Because of its potential to influence state, ethnic, and geopolitical relations as well as the balance of power, the population census in Nigeria has grown to be a highly sensitive and contentious topic. The background to the census controversies the nation has been linked to is the people's attitude towards the population question, in terms of its absolute size, as it affects the states and the sub-regions. The problems associated with Nigeria's population census nowadays are complex, and there are often no easy answers. The population census has complex routes, processes, trajectories, and dynamics that call for an all-encompassing strategy and ongoing research (Okereka, 2015a). Because population counts have a significant impact on state, ethnic, and geopolitical relations as well as power equity, they have become a contentious topic. The historical context to the population census that the nation has been associated with is the people's attitude concerning the population question, with respect of its definitive size, as it impacts the states and the sub-regions. Since 1866, attempts to estimate Nigeria's population has been highly controversial, and estimates of the nation's total population have only ever been conjectured (Ottong, 2013). The Federal Republic of Nigeria is the most populous nation in Africa and the seventh largest country in the world, with over 200 million people living there as of right now. Nigeria will likely be the third-largest country in the world by the middle of the 21st century, despite the implementation of policies and programmes over the previous three decades to address the nation's explosive population rise and the development challenges it poses. Despite this, states, religious organisations, and ethnic groups manipulate census data for their personal gain. Stated differently, the fraudulent use of National census figures has been the subject of intense debate, controversy, and ethnic hostility more than any other issue. Undoubtedly, this has come at a significant cost to the country (Gwanshak & Hyeladi, 2019).

Throughout the colonial and post-colonial eras, successive Nigerian governments recognised the value of a precise census as the fundamental instrument for development planning. As a result, since 1866, censuses have been taken throughout Nigeria as well as in its constituent regions. Nevertheless, since Nigeria gained political independence (and became a sovereign state) in 1960, there have been significant obstacles to every attempt to carry out a national census. Inadequate census education and general ignorance of population issues in general and the use of census data in particular are among the many reasons why attempts to take a census have failed (Gwanshak & Hyeladi, 2019). The majority of Nigerians are unaware of the purpose of a census, its fundamental components, how it is carried out, and how important it is to a nation's economic and social strategy for overall development. Because of this widespread ignorance, people who are supposed to be tracked in a census have, in certain cases, been uncooperative or outright hostile towards enumerators. Some erroneous information provided to census workers or attempts by some to be counted more than once are primarily caused by erroneous beliefs about the context to which census data can be put to use (Salihu, 2016).

As a result, Nigerians, whether by a civilian and military government, have come to believe that no census can be successful in Nigeria and have developed a systemic apathy towards them (Adeline & Eme, 2015). Subsequent Nigerian

governments, both during and after colonialism, recognised the value of precise population counts as the cornerstone of sound national development planning. Therefore, meaningful development in a country requires a sufficient and accurate understanding of its population trends and characteristics (Okereka, 2015ab). This is true because development which entails making the best use of the country's natural and human resources to raise living standards cannot occur without planning. One of the main factors impeding the effective planning and management of Nigeria's development plan is the general lack of sufficient quality population census data (Ikeji, 2011). Experiences in Nigeria have amply demonstrated that trying to get a precise population count is just one of the numerous problems that have greatly increased anxiety and nearly brought the nation to its knees.

One of the main responsibilities of the government is to conduct population counts. It now serves as a backdrop for the formulation of political, economic, and social policies by the government. One of the most important planning tools for a country's advancement and sustainable development is the population census. It offers an answer to the following question: How many people do we represent in relation to the total population of the country? Who we are in terms of our age, sexual orientation, level of education, occupation, level of economic activity, and other relevant characteristics; and Where we live in terms of our housing and proximity to public facilities. By supplying, extending, and maintaining the infrastructures that will improve the quality of life for the population, the responses to these questions do offer a numerical profile for planning and development within a country. In Nigeria, petty bourgeois politics and census politics coexist. It alludes to the conflict between states and/or ethnic nationalities over the exploitation of census data for personal gain. Stated differently, the distorting of National census numbers has been the subject of intense debate, controversy, and ethnic hostility more than any other issue. Without a doubt, this has cost the country a lot. Because of this, Nigerians have grown apathetic towards censuses in general and think that they will never be successful, regardless of whether they are carried out by a military or civilian government. This paper focuses on how people perceive political and population census issues.

Literature Review

The Latin word "censere", which means "to tax, assess, or value", is where the word "census" originated (Ezeah, Iyanda & Nwangwu, 2013). The entire process of gathering, organising, evaluating, and disseminating demographic, economic, and social data pertaining, at a given moment, to every individual living in a nation or a clearly defined region of a nation is known as a population census. This suggests that a census is only a statistical endeavour. Put differently, a census consists of a count, an enumeration, and the publication of the exercise's results following thorough verification. A population census is an archive of information that both developed and developing nations need. According to Madans (2011), a census is a technique for gathering statistical information regarding a population, which is widely acknowledged as essential to democracy and progress. The actual process of getting to know society's members in terms of age, sex, education, occupation, and economic activity is known as a census, according to Mimiko (2006). Every country must conduct a census in order to fully comprehend its population composition and size and to carry out sound economic planning. Population censuses, according to Ezeah et al. (2013), are one way for a nation to learn about the structure, direction, and rate of its population. It involves determining a society's demographic structures as well as additional socioeconomic indicators of a person's standing in the community (Madans, 2011). The United Nations has mandated population censuses, whether they are strictly adhered to or not, for all countries in order to ensure some level of consistency in understanding and awareness of population expansion and shifts across the world (United Nations, 2008). As a result, a properly executed census needs to possess the following four essential qualities: Individual enumeration, universality within a predetermined region, simultaneity, and defined periodicity are the first four.

Citing the 1970 United Nations Draft recommendation on census, Adeline and Eme (2015) defined a census as the process of gathering and publishing or distributing demographic, economic, as well as social data pertaining at a specified time to all persons in a country. All that is meant by the term "population census" is the complete count of the human population, which is legally conducted periodically, usually every ten (10) years. The term "census politics" was coined to clarify the nature of the politics underlying the census process in any given country. The problem in Nigeria is that governments and/or ethnic groups have a tendency to manipulate and/or fabricate demographic data in order to increase their share of the nation's resources (Gwanshak & Hyeladi, 2019). The problem of "national development" arises from this propensity to inflate census results. The Chairman of the National Population Commission said the following about previous census exercises in Nigeria: The bitter circumstance coupled with certain technical errors has been culpable for the recount of failure which characterised the conduct of the public attitude towards the post-independence censuses of 1963 and 1973 (Odenyi, 2005). The Chairman was presenting the preliminary outcomes of the 1991 census to the Temporary Ruling Council of Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida's administration. In fact, the realisation that census results decide the relative economic and political strength/positions of various ethnic communities in the nation is what sparked this type of response to population counts. Gwansha and Hyeladi (2019) have identified the census as one of the primary sources of demographic information. To put it simply, a census is a regular headcount of the people living in a specific area. Adeline and Eme (2015) further described it as the procedure for gathering, organising, and disseminating social, economic, and demographic data related to every person living in a nation or defined region at a specific point in time. Ikeji (2011) states that gathering data on each resident of a specific area at a specific time is a necessary part of conducting a census. Basic census data includes things like age, sex, employment status, place of birth, residential status, education level, tribe, religion, and marital status, among other things. The population of a nation has continued to pique interest among academics, administrators, and foreign countries alike with regard to the validity and dependability of such data as well as how it is produced.

In their individual input, Adeline and Eme (2015) had harshly criticised the rising cost of census figures when they

claimed that the most recent census exercise was shocking to organisations both locally and globally at the time it was released due to the large discrepancy between the country's population estimate and the actual census result – roughly 30 million people. Brass was attempting to highlight the fact that there were glaring anomalies in the 1991 population exercise. Ikeji (2011) questioned the validity of census data, suggesting that given Lagos' dense population, the actual population could range between 10 and 12 million. According to Ekwueme (2013), based on the preparation, organisation, and leadership of the census, a census is a massively complex exercise made up of closely related steps that need to be meticulously scheduled in advance to guarantee an uninterrupted sequence. Small planning mistakes could lead to mistakes and inefficiencies, which would degrade the statistical data's quality. For the census process to be successful, an effective blend of professional leadership, exercise, organisational structure, and competence is required.

Despite this, the UN has advised nations to conduct censuses at least immediately every 10 years. However, in previous censuses, the Nigerian national population census activity has not maintained this interval. The authorities of the state or nation conducting the census should be in charge of it; it should also be carried out simultaneously nationwide and involve routine counting at predetermined intervals of time. Nigeria's political and economic development has been severely hampered by the lack of reliable and accurate statistical data (Orhero, 2019). According to Enieayejuni and Agoyi (2011), planning is done with people in mind, thus having sufficient information about the population's size, geographic distribution, age and sex, and educational attainment is essential for Nigeria's sustainable development. Although population figures are a crucial component of any nation's planning, the majority of Third World countries struggle to obtain reliable population statistics due to various issues. These issues include a shortage of personnel with the necessary technical skills, the absence of a permanent organisation in charge of data collection, unfamiliarity with socioeconomic research, and inadequate communication and transportation infrastructure. Even so, the majority of the previously listed factors have been minimised. According to Ekwueme (2013), although Nigeria can now take pride in having a large number of competent technical staff who can handle enumeration properly, these staff members have also grown resentful of the country's population census because they were involved in the deception of population figures. Therefore, since taking censuses is a technical exercise, it is best left to experts in the relevant scientific fields of administration, mass communications, computer science, demography, statistics, mathematics, and geography, sociology, and economics. The following features of a population census are present: Government accountability, individual counting, ubiquity, concurrently, and regularity are the first three.

Brief History of Census Exercises in Nigeria

Nigeria faces many obstacles when conducting censuses. Social, economic, and political variables have consistently affected Nigeria's census exercise outcomes over the years. The British carried out the first official census in the region now known as Nigeria in 1866. There were further censuses in 1871, 1896, 1901, 1911, and 1921 after that. The Southern Protectorate served as the site of all of the aforementioned censuses. The Northern Rule was incorporated into the initial census in 1952. At the time of this attempt, 31.6 million people were counted inside the nation's current borders. The Hausa-Fulani constituted the majority of Nigeria's population, according to the 1952 census, and as such, they controlled the country's first post-colonial government, which was established following independence in 1960. In 1962, the recently independent country ordered a census, but the findings revealed that only thirty percent of people were from the north. According to a somewhat dubious recount conducted in 1963, the north accounted for 67% of the population (Ekwueme, 2013). Following Nigeria's independence, the 1963 census produced the country's first officially recognised population count of 55.6 million. Most people believed this to be a significant overstatement. This intensified long-standing ethnic tensions, which led to the 1970 end of the Nigerian civil war. The government never approved the 1973 census. There wasn't another census taken until 1991. 88.5 million people were counted in the official census, far fewer than the 110 million that many population experts had predicted (Okolo, 1999). However, thorough analysis has shown that the inflated figure from 1963 was to blame for this expectation. Ekwueme (2013) claims that there were significant disputes surrounding the 1991 census due to accusations and denials of falsification and inflating of data. Furthermore, the reported sex ratio of 101.3 was contested as it was found to defy world standard and expectation. There were complaints of undercounting and over count, and even manipulation of figures with the torrents of complaints and even rejections that trailed the current figures.

Following several delays, the most recent and subsequent census was conducted in March of 2006. The National Population Commission (NPC) released the first report in December 2006. An annexe to the report provides an interim population total by state and sex as well as the average growth rate from 1999 to 2006, along with a brief defence of the census procedures (Ikeji, 2011). As of March 2006, the estimated total population was 140.0 million. The total exceeds the 134 million people that the UN's revised estimates for Nigeria's population in mid-2006 predict. The census reveals a nearly unchanged split on the politically touchy subject of the relative population proportions in the northern and southern states. Unlike the 1991 census, the 2006 one avoided asking questions about race or religion in an effort to reduce controversy. It was unable to overcome state-level challenges to the accuracy of its estimation, though. Lagos in particular was feeling left out. There was mixed reaction to the proposal to remove respondents' ethnic and religious status (Salihu, 2016). As a result, the 2006 counting exercise was not entirely successful. Numerous complaints came from various sources. For example, enumerators expressed dissatisfaction over the lack of essential census supplies (Madans, 2011). The projected population threshold for each enumeration area in the urban areas for the 2006 census was 500 people, while the population threshold for the rural areas was 200 people. According to additional National Population Commission estimates based on the 2006 census, by October 2011, the population had increased to approximately 167.9, or 168 million. Nigeria's population is expected to reach 177 million by July 2013, 194.8 million by July 2016, and 221 million by July 2020, according to projections. The 3.2 percent annual growth rate used in these projections is based on data from the 2006 census. It is evident that

Nigeria's population grew from 140 million to 168 million between 2006 and 2011. According to Salihu (2016), the states in Nigeria with the largest and lowest populations at the moment are Kano, Lagos, Kaduna, and Bayelsa, Nassarawa, and Ebonyi, respectively.

As a result, cultural political motives and goals were favoured during the 2006 population census through manipulation. The country's many ethnic groups continue to foster ethnic rivalry, which is a major contributing factor to the politicisation of the 2006 census. The country's use of population census data for revenue sharing has increased the willingness of the federation's several states to engage in irregularities. Thus, there are significant obstacles in the way of achieving non-politicized population counts in Nigeria due to the growing awareness of the relationship between population size and the distribution of federal revenues as well as representative posts. Further obstacles include the absence of a national framework for the proper boundaries and identification of stated areas, the lack of organised training for a large number of census officials, the absence of experts in census operations, the double allegiance of those employed to conduct the census, inadequate funding and budgeting, poor logistics and topographic issues, corruption, illiteracy and ignorance, ineffective field operations supervision, and the unavailability of necessary. These and a host of other challenges were the reason behind the hitch-free exercise becoming the norm during the 2006 count of people. Due to these flaws in the 2006 census process, Nigeria's efforts to expedite development have gotten worse as a result of the haphazard realisation of census objectives.

Challenges of Population Census in Nigeria

Despite the fact that a nation's population is a crucial component when it comes to planning, the majority of developing nations deal with modern problems that have an impact on the accuracy and application of population census information. These difficulties have existed since the beginning of head counting and have persisted to the present day. There has never been a national consensus among the populace regarding the size of Nigeria's total population, and all population counts conducted in the country both before and after independence have resulted in intense controversy and serious accusations of population falsification. Certain issues are classified according to how they manifest themselves as challenges for population censuses during the subsequent stages:

Falsification of Population Census Figures: Governments in Nigeria are compelled by nationalities to manipulate census results, either by inflating figures, double counting, or even adding figures that don't exist. Despite the large sums of money from the federal government and international organisations like the European Union (EU), the United Nations (UN), and the Commonwealth of Nations for the 2006 census exercise, the exercise has not been entrusted to the hands of enough special-purpose employees and field workers of the National Population Commission, even with the introduction of a computerised system for carrying out census exercises in Nigeria. No amount of figure adjustment will make it accurate (Orhero, Okereka & Ogbe, 2021). Salihu (2016) rejected the Lagos state figure and asked for a recount because the United Nations and the European Union provided sufficient funding for support. Falsifying census data was a "do or die" situation, as states not only sought to inflate their own numbers but also exerted pressure on top census personnel and enumerators in other states to deflate their own numbers by either publishing false data or purposefully leaving out certain areas from the count. In addition to this instance of intentional deception, the authorities were also dishonest since they initiated the motion. Foreign agencies chastised the Nigerian census committee in 2006 for introducing 20 strategies instead of using a deceptive data-gathering technique.

Politicization of Population Census: Political power and influence have historically been evident as among the variables contributing to the politicisation of the Nigerian census. The information from the 1952-1953 census served as the foundation for the allocation of 50% of the representation to the North in the national House of Representatives during the election preparations. This essentially illustrates the connection between population sizes and political power and influence. The nation's 1962 Constitutional Crisis was sparked by population concerns. They were primarily to blame for the military takeover in 1966 and for the crisis that arose in the former Western Region in 1965. They also had a significant role in the overthrow of Gowon's government in 1975, and many Nigerians continue to hold them in high regard due to their persistent calls for the formation of new states as soon as civilian rule was restored. It has been noted that the results of multiple surveys carried out in Nigeria were inconsistent and contentious. Only the census results from 1963 and 1991 were recognised and applied to overall planning (Salihu, 2016). Despite certain controversies surrounding the exercise, the 2006 population census was generally accepted. For example, the Lagos State government told the public that the National Population Commission had underestimated their population. Despite extensive preparations and substantial financial support from international organisations like the World Bank and the European Union, the 2006 Nigerian census is regarded as one of the most contentious and politicised in the country's history (Salihu, 2016). The enumerators claimed that a few influential state politicians had rigged the hiring process for census workers, substituting the names of qualified candidates with those of their favourites. The state of Edo in Benin had the same situation. The census effort there was nearly put on hold due to the refusal to pay enumerators' allowances and the replacement of names of qualified officials with those of political leaders' favourites. This was particularly problematic because it sparked protests and a physical altercation among respondents and police officers. Strong politicians took control of the census recruitment process, substituting the names of their supporters for those of qualified officials (Adiele, 2009; Okereka, 2016).

Religious Rivalry: The religious controversy is an obstacle to mere building a nation and has a fundamental impact on population census issues. Religious rivalry over national censuses is the root of controversy surrounding them, as Muslims and Christians compete with one another for political power rather than with rival ethnic groups. A group's religious beliefs impact their behaviour. Religion offers benchmarks and principles by which individuals' actions can be

assessed. Beliefs, orientations, behaviours, and actions are all influenced by religion. Among the behaviours is fertility. Fertility behaviour is influenced by religion. Some sources have noted that the average Nigerian is deeply religious (Ekundayo, 2013). Nigerian society places a high value on religion, which has also had a significant impact on the nation's geopolitical evolution. The same force that has brought Nigerians together has also given rise to multiple conflicts within the nation. Between 1980 and 1994, Nigeria experienced multiple religious crises and/or conflicts¹. Nigeria's population was last counted at 140 million in 2006, although that estimate is now disputed. The census results were manipulated to favour the north, which claims a larger population, even after the two complicated factors that impeded the accuracy of the religious data were removed (Ikeji, 2011). Nigeria always conducts a population census to determine the true number of citizens so that resources can be distributed fairly by the government. It is important to remember that one of the things that has made every population census attempt in Nigeria unsuccessful has been religion. For example, Muslims forbid the counting of their women because it is against their culture. This leads to overestimation, which makes the Northern figure in Nigeria higher than that of any other ethnic group (Gwanshak & Hyeladi, 2019).

Ethnicity Stimulation: Ethnicity suggests animosity towards a particular ethnic group. Ethnicity is defined as the context-dependent discrimination against others practiced by members of one cultural group based on a distinct system of socio-cultural symbols. People's membership in a group is frequently defined by their ethnic classification, which can be either internally generated or externally imposed. Ethnicity is inherently more fundamental to the human encounter and a sense of self than race, excluding social constructs. Conversely, an intrinsic sense of peoplehood is more likely to be evoked by ethnic distinctiveness. The significant disparity in population between different ethnic communities in the nation has led to grave issues and a great deal of animosity (Gwanshak & Hyeladi, 2019). For example, some ethnic groups disagree with the Hausas of northern Nigeria, who believe that their large population should receive a larger share of national income. The figures were referred to as a fraudulent exercise in a call from a faction of the Pan-Igbo cultural organisation Ohaneze Ndigbo at the time. After using specialists, demographers, and geographers to examine the data, they came to the conclusion that the population assigned to the southeast could not be representative of all of them. As a result, they rejected it, saying it was altered and fabricated. According to Afenifere, a pan-Yoruba sociopolitical organisation, the exercise involved carefully controlled and contrived demographic data (Ikeji, 2011).

There are numerous obstacles that have persistently obstructed Nigeria's population census effort. These problems include, but are not limited to, lack of education, nepotism, inadequate funding, outdated technology, data fabrication in censuses, inaccessibility of rural areas, excessive politicisation, and manipulation of census results. It is difficult to ignore the obstacle that illiteracy has presented to the Nigerian population census's progress. Since the majority of Nigerians are illiterate, particularly those living in rural areas, they are unaware of the significance of population census information. At the time, the majority of residents in rural areas believed it was a means for the government to raise taxes on them. Since the number of wives a man has was factored in to determine his wealth. Also, many feared that it was a way of conscripting people into the army.

The Way Forward

To suggest here that it is essential to reverse the revenue allocation criteria to reflect more of an even development of the various states in order to curb the trend of these contemporary issues of population census in the country. The "weaker" states would have plenty of opportunity to solidify their control over rapid development as a result. If the nation is to achieve the objectives of population enumeration, adequate funding is needed for the population census. Sufficient funding is needed to meet the high demand for a variety of expensive activities. A sufficient budget would pay for the expenses of conducting the exercise across the entire nation to guarantee that every person is counted. Preparing a feasible spending plan of needs, expenses, and costs is a key pre-census activity that helps identify the amount of money will be needed for the exercise to be completed successfully. In general, significant financial resources, vast quantities of material as well as human resources, a great deal of time, and effort should be put into making the census exercise successful.

As a country, we must constantly reorient the populace to view population counts less as a way for the government to distribute resources and more as a way to amass national wealth through high population numbers and precise plans for sustainable development that will benefit both the present and the future generations. For the effective distribution of limited resources and the prompt execution of government policy, citizens must be aware of censuses. In every area of government, including health, housing, education, employment, transport, growth of small businesses, human services, response to emergencies, and environmental protection, this is the design for implementation and evaluation of policies and programmes. Furthermore, states ought to be reconstructed and rearranged so that their populations are nearly equal in each. Additionally, it is proposed that the states be reorganised with no consideration for boundaries based on ethnicity or culture (Gwanshak & Hyeladi, 2019). It is anticipated that taking such action will suppress the tendency to inflate numbers. The problem, though, is that the politics and dispute surrounding population size cannot be framed as rivalries. Population taxation is one idea that would serve as a deterrent to the politicisation, falsification, religious rivalry, and ethnicity stimulation. This implies that, depending on the size of its population, each state will be required to contribute a specific kind of tax to the federal account. Therefore, the more you assert your numerical strength, the more tax you will have to pay the federal government. Taking into account the requirement associated with a higher population number for tax payment, 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.

The application of powerful modern geographic information techniques, such as digital cartography, geographic information systems (GIS), imagery from satellites (high resolution satellite fictitious and aerial photographs), and

geographic positioning systems (GPS), should be utilised to facilitate the manufacturing of all base maps required for population censuses to be conducted successfully. In addition to allowing for GPS-based georeferencing of the interview location, electronic instruments also have the advantage of allowing the inclusion of images, audio, or video links in addition to text. Enumerators must have easy access to supervisory area maps, locality maps, and enumeration area maps that are accurate, comprehensive, geographically referenced, mutually exclusive, and non-overlapping, covering every corner of the nation. Lastly, the timing of the population census needs to be carefully considered. Unlike the previous one, an interval of ten (10) must be maintained for accuracy. In the capacity of the National Population Commission for the upcoming census, Nigeria must endeavour to carry out reliable and broadly accepted censuses in the future if it is to get things right and make fact-based plans. It can gain the trust of the global community in this way, for example. To make this happen, the National Population Commission must implement early planning, appropriate organisation, and the use of cutting-edge technologies for data collection.

Theoretical Framework

The significance of population to a nation's development or lack thereof is explained by the Malthusian theory of population. Many people's perspectives on population have been altered by Malthus (1926) and his *Essay on the Principle of Population*. According to him, "the human population exhibits exponential growth, whereby the rate of increase is commensurate with the existing population." He continued by stating that food grows arithmetically while population grows geometrically, meaning that as food supplies rise, population will expand quickly to drive out abundance. Malthus emphasises the significance of population as a factor that determines a society's well-being. Ignoring the force of population growth could result in disaster and suffering, which are indicators of poverty and underdevelopment. According to Malthus, moral restraint, vice, and suffering repress the population's superior power, and the means of subsistence must inevitably limit population growth (Orhero, 2020). Population growth also inevitably follows increases in means of subsistence.

Based on Malthus's theories, it is practically suicide to lack an accurate population database for effective planning. The serious risk of overcrowding prevents any society from developing. The Malthusian theory is relevant to the Nigerian situation because the country's nation-building process has been aided over time by the deliberate manipulation and inflation of population census figures. It has even made planning for the nation's development and sustenance impossible, let alone providing for the needs of the Nigerian people. The theory of the Nigerian population estimate and its implications for democracy and nation-building is adopted in this work.

Conclusions

The primary goal of population censuses as a tool for long-term strategy and equitable growth has remained elusive due to innate modern problems. Inaccurate census data has contributed to Nigeria's underdevelopment and policy reversals. Regrettably, Nigeria still lacks accurate and trustworthy census data in the twenty-first century. This is because political interference, the falsification of census results, religious competition, ethnic sentiment, and shifting census dates act as a brake on the accuracy of census data. By examining the ethno-religious nature of the country, addressing these modern issues would investigate ways to stop Nigeria's population census from being inaccurate. The study has demonstrated the urgent need for precise population statistics for the nation. As demonstrated by other developed democracies and regions, conducting a proper population census across Nigeria has been shown to be the most efficient instrument for forging a strong national identity and a democratic system. Therefore, government officials and policy makers should reevaluate this need and take unwavering action to fulfil it. In order for the nation to survive, it is imperative that the National Population Commission carry out an impartial population census that will guarantee the proper and equitable allocation of resources and democratic dividends. Additionally, the general public needs to be adequately informed about the importance of conducting a population census, and they ought to be encouraged to play part in the process. In addition to providing the enumerators with sufficient security, the countryside should be improved to facilitate the enumerators' access to the interior. Actually, in order to guarantee accessibility and prevent the falsification of census results, indigenous people from the isolated villages ought to be employed, closely supervised by NPC employees.

The nation's census efforts ought to be scheduled with precision. The exercise should be appropriate for the season. It could be very challenging to count some terrain during the rainy season. Similar to this, unforgiving conditions could have a negative impact on people's willingness to engage in exercise. Attempts should be made to guarantee that the countdown is conducted simultaneously, which entails having appropriately trained enumerators perform the exercise at the same time across the nation. Additionally, completed census forms need to be properly stored so they can be retrieved. This is a crucial strategy for reducing the politicisation of the nation's population counts. At the conclusion of the enumerations, the census results should be critically assessed to determine the effectiveness of the exercise in terms of the veracity of the information gathered.

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