



National Censuses in Nigeria: Political – Economy, Intricacies and Controversies

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Abstract

Conduct of population and housing census is an integral and an indispensable part of socio-economic and political developmental process of every state especially the developing ones that hardly have any comprehensive, permanent and or sustainable policies on census. Nigeria, which began to have headcounts since 1911 (separate for the North and South prior to the 1914 amalgamation) has conducted series of census exercises up to the year 2006. Like other things in Nigeria, the conducts of those censuses were surrounded by many problems, controversies, politics and economy (political-economy of number and resources allocation). The controversies and political-economy of censuses conducts in Nigeria have raged on for several years with attempts at inflation, manipulation and politicization of figures to derive long term economic and political benefits of revenue sharing, allocation of Federal House of Representatives seats and politics of number between North, South, Islam and Christianity. This study used secondary sources to gather data for the study. It found that censuses conducts in Nigeria were marred by economic motives of resources allocation, inefficient and ineffective mobilization, publicity and enlightenment; it has over time been affected by corruption; excessive politics derailing the main purposes of such exercises; there is fear among Muslims and Christians over dominance; the North-South rivalry and dichotomies intensified the mutual fear and suspicion over the exercises and acceptance of results. The paper recommends usage of comprehensive forecasts made by the Population Commission to national planning and other related exercises such as voter registration, education planning and policies, housing and environmental plans and provision of other infrastructures and essential services, advanced preparations for such future conducts, avoidance of secondary but sensitive questions, adequate and timely funding to the commission and recruitment and or employment of competent permanent and ad-hoc staff for future conducts of such important national exercises.

Keywords: *Census, Controversy, Population, Nigeria, Politics and Economy.*

Background to the Study

One of the major challenges facing the developing states and economies is the issue of population, population density, explosion and census. As a vital ingredient of state and societal growth and development, each and every state should know exact or near of its population and other indices in it for good and proper economic planning, sustainable growth and development to be achieved. Conduct of Population and Housing Census is therefore, an important and strategic ingredient to all states. In most states, censuses are conducted after every specified number of years and daily update of birth, death, marriages, migration, housing et cetera. In Nigeria like many others, it has become a tradition and an official policy that census is conducted after every ten (10) years.

Although there were such times when the census were not conducted (1941, 81 and 2001), the successive governments have at different times conducted the censuses. Population and Housing census is simply conducted to know the total number of a state's population, plan for provision and distribution of essential services and properly design migration policies. But immediately after the granting of independence to Nigeria by Britain in 1960, census became an instrument of politics, controversy and superiority/inferiority syndrome especially among politicians and North and South. From then on, every census exercise in Nigeria was greeted with politics, mutual fear, suspicion and possible manipulations (inflations of figures et cetera). Additionally and in the recent past, more sensitive and dangerous issues of religion and ethnicity are surfacing and whether their inclusion or exclusion in future exercises.

Statement of the Problem

Conducting Housing and Population census in Nigeria has through its history been characterized by controversies, political - economy, threats of secession, religious and socio-ethnic/regional undertones which all negatively affect the conduct, result and successes of the exercises. It has similarly been very expensive to conduct it and the data are often mutilated, mis-used and or politicized. In the recent years also, it has been 9 years since the last such exercise was conducted in Nigeria. The Exercise is traditional conducted after every 10 years but there is little preparation of finances and logistics for the next exercise which is supposed to be held in 2016. The republic also has relative and often stereotyped conception of conducting such exercises which often posed threats to the successes of such exercises in the past and same negative stereotyping and misconceptions are in the minds of most Nigerians, hence, the need to squarely address the issues from an intellectual capacity.

Objectives of the Study

Conducting National Census is of paramount importance to the socio-economic, security and political settings of a state. This study has main objectives of:

1. Exploring the need and importance of National Population and Housing Census for Nigeria.
2. Exploring the politics and controversies that surrounded the conduct of such exercises in the past.
3. Alert the Nigerian state authorities on the timeliness, importance and strategic

- planning of the exercise.
4. Make further recommendations on how best to ensure the success of such exercises in future.

Literature Review

Census is originally a Latin word 'censere' meaning to 'assess' and so an exercise on 'the collation of information on the size and characteristics of populations' (Mimiko in Ojo, 2006:95). According to Bulmer (1979:123-4), Census is:

A method of collecting demographic and social data by means of individuals enumeration. Within a given territory it is a universal, simultaneous and it is carried out at fixed intervals. It is usually conducted by the Government of the territory and it is compulsory.

He also noted that census has a very old history and to Biblical times. Census is only possibly conducted by the state and so, it is noted that “.....one of the most important features of the census is that it is compulsory and has the force of law behind it”. Conduct of population and or housing census is an exercise that requires commitment of huge human and material resources (funds, manpower, intensive and extensive training, security, long period of time and most modern scientific equipments and other logistics). The conduct of census therefore, is not an easy exercise especially for large population, vast geographical entity and plural states like Nigeria. This partly explains why many countries especially developing are unable to conduct such exercises until great deal of support is received from the International Development Partners (USAID, DFID, UNO, EU, CIDA et cetera). For example, the November-December, 1973 Census costed Nigeria N36.9m (Kurfi, 2004:168), while the 2006 National Population and Housing Census costed Nigeria N38 billion, of which the European Union and Development Partners contributed 48% while the Federal and States governments contributed 52% (see Daily Trust, *July 15, 2013*) and so censuses are expensive to conduct Bulmer (1979:124). For a population and housing census to be credible, all scientific methods of census taking have to be put in place, with proper enumeration and demarcation of areas to be followed by trial and then the substantive census. The data is then properly processed with appropriate tabulations and validation. Census empirically deals in statistics, in which a 5% margin of error (plus or minus) is universally accepted as there is no exactitude in human observable facts. And because no census is 100% perfect anywhere in the world, the 5% margin of error is accepted.

In modern census process and using the automated finger print system, a computer will recognise only one finger print per person which checks incidences of multiple counting. Every country decides the variables (type of questions/what to ask) in addition to the core questions (name, age, sex et cetera) which also depend on the use to which to put the variables. The social set up of a country also largely influences the variables. The variables are basically of two types as: 'core questions' which are universally the same and 'secondary questions' that may relatively be asked depending on the composition and social settings of a state. It is on the Secondary aspect that controversial questions are avoided. Questions are therefore asked depending on a state/societal social setting.

Background to Housing and Population Censuses in Nigeria

Headcounts in Nigeria started in the Lagos Colony in 1866 and were repeated in 1871, 1881 and 1901. Then followed by the 1911 one which covered Lagos and Southern Protectorate as one entity with a separate count in the Northern Protectorate of what later became Nigeria. After the January, 1914 amalgamation of the North and Southern Protectorates, the British Colonial government passed the popular Nigerian Census Ordinance, 1917 which later resulted in the first national census in 1921. That national census gave birth to conduct of censuses every ten years thereafter. The 1933 Nigerian census figures showed that the North had 11.4m, East 4.3m, West 3.6m and Lagos 0.126m. While the documented percentage increases in Nigeria's population (per region) revealed that the North had 161%, East 188, West 256% with overall average national increase of 184% between 1933 and 64 (Paden: 1986:428). But the attention of the world generally and British Colonialists in particular shifted to the world II and no census was held in Nigeria around 1941 as was suppose to be. The 1952 census showed that Nigeria had a total population of 30.4m of which the North had 16.8m, East 7.2m, West 4.4, Mid-West 1.5 and Lagos 0.5. For the repeated 1963 census there was a total of 55.7m with North having 29.8m, East 12.4m, West 10.3m, Mid-West 2.5m and Lagos 700,000 with growth rates of 5.3%, 5.1%, 7.3%, 4.7% and 9.8% respectively (Ayida, 1987:120 & Uwuche et al, 1991:1458). The 1951-1953 census showed results of 55.4% of Nigeria's population for the Northern Region and 44.6% for the South.

The first Nigerian post independence census was conducted in May, 1962 but was widely rejected especially by politicians and that controversy led to a recount in 1963 under the Balewa regime. It was officially established that East and Western regional governments had made gross inflation of their regional figures as they wanted to secure more political representation and federal revenues as those were dependent on population while the North sought to maintain its relatively populated advantaged. The result showed average increase of 71%, 70% and 30% for the East, West and North respectively (Shagari, 2001:109). After the announcement of the census results, there were allegations of cheat, inflation of figures, deceptions and irregularities with particularly the Eastern and Northern regions pointing accusing fingers and holding press conferences by the Northern and Eastern Premiers. The most controversial census conduct and politics in the history of Nigeria was that of Mach, 1961 which according to Ademoyega (1981: 10) had shown that the Southern Nigeria had a higher population and would have necessitated re-adjustment in federal constituencies and seats allocation but was rejected and cancelled by the Balewa regime. Mainasara (1982:41) stated that the 1962 census was cancelled as a result of obvious and blatant figures inflation by some parts of Nigeria which led to the South having more population than the North which had traditionally and consecutively been more populous since the 1911 headcount. A new census held in November, 1963 generated more heated controversy among the politicians with acceptance and rejection of the results by the North, West and East respectively. The 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 1973 Census 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, 2004:169-70). The 1973 census result (though cancelled) had grand total of 79, 758, 969 (Kurfi, 2004:169& Owuche et al, 1991:1462) with North having 51m or (64%) and South (East and West) 28m or (35.6%). As censuses are conducted after every 10 years in line with United Nations (UN) specifications (Bulmer, 1979:123), there was suppose to be next census exercise ten (10) years after that in(1983) for which there was a Census Board since 1981 appointed by the then civilian regime opresident Shehu Shagari but there was no headcount up till the regime's overthrow in December, 1983. 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, 2004:175).

In 2006, there was the latest in the series of censuses (supposed to be conducted in 2003) and that result puts 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).

Controversies and Politics of Conducting Censuses in Nigeria

The conduct of census is surrounded by politics and controversies in many parts of the world as observed by Bulmer (1979:123), Lutz (1994:18) and Gupte (1994:45). The major factors influencing census controversies in Nigeria especially from 1950's are as national resources sharing/allocation, elections and constituencies' demarcation and distribution of seats in the states and Federal House of Representatives, the North-South rivalry and mutual suspicion, ethnicity and recently religious undertones by the two main religions (Islam and Christianity) trying to outnumber each other and census in Nigeria's history has been highly politicized (see Paden, 1986:42, Kurfi, 2004:172 & Achebe, 2012:64). Dan Madami in Imobighe (1987:106) has also identified politicization of census as one Nigeria's major internal security threats. The 1962/63 census controversy fuelled formation of political parties and alliances towards the 1964 federal elections (Owuche et al, 1991:1458) and it was according to Kirk-Greene (1971) one of the gunpowder trail that

laid and resulted in the final conflagration on 15 January, 1966. The first Nigerian census after independence was conducted in 1962 but was widely rejected especially by politicians and that with controversy led to a recount in 1963 under the Balewa regime. While the Northern and Western Regional Governments of (Ahmadu Bello and Akintola) accepted the census figures, the Eastern Premier (Michael Okpara) rejected the figures despite the Census Board and federal government's authorization of the results (Clark, 1991:469). In February, 1964, the federal government announced the earlier conducted census result which showed that the Northern Region had 54% of the federation's total population but the East and Mid-West regions rejected the results (Ademoyega, 1981:10). The Eastern Regional government filed a suit against the Federal Government but the Supreme Court in May, 1964 ruled that it had no jurisdiction to entertain actions on census because it (the census) was a political issue. Lamenting the intensity of census politics and controversy, Mainasara (1982:41) has observed that as per as politics of regionalism was concerned, the only census that could be accepted is one that would give the South more population figures than the North while every census conducted in Nigeria has been marred by especially the elites for political and material reasons (Mimiko in Ojo, 2006:97). In his submission, Gupte (1994:44) has observed that "the question of population and politics is especially thorny in Nigeria".

National Population Commission and Conduct of Census Exercise

The National Population Commission is 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 major functions of the commission include: continuous registration of deaths, births in Nigeria, provision and publication of data for the country's socio-economic development, undertake periodic enumeration of population and proper training of its ad-hoc and permanent staff as may be required by their services (Third Schedule, Part I [J-23] of the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria). The Commission has constitutionally guaranteed and absolute independence to appoint and train census enumerators or any other staff towards conducting census exercise; has the discretion to accept or reject any results of any of its staff or in compilation of the census reports conducted in any part of Nigeria (Section 158 [2a-d]).

Summary and Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, conducting population and housing census is very vital to the socio-economic and political prosperity of every state. The conduct of such exercises in Nigeria though used to, have remained controversial, very sensitive as sentiments and politics are infused which often mar the end results, essence and overall targets to be achieved. Census exercise has also become an instrument of disunity among

Nigerians especially on the North-South/Islam Christianity dichotomy. Politicians on the other hand manipulate the exercises to derive fallacious advantages of larger population, more revenue and larger allocation federal legislative seats to their areas. The coping amount of money spent in the conduct of such exercise is also of grave concern as corruption has eaten deep into the Nigerian system. Voters' and National Identity Cards Registration can all be more properly managed and optimally utilized if census is properly conducted and the data managed accordingly. More have to be done to proper management of Nigeria's census and population to ensure proper and efficient data gathering and management, adequate employment, good nutrition, qualitative and accessible healthcare and sound education and other socio-economic, political and environmental policies. Both policies and actions have however not been favourable in most times to the proper conduct of census exercise in Nigeria as most of the times, the conduct is marred by inadequate and hasty preparations, poor logistics and personnel.

Recommendations

Accurate census exercise whether periodical or continuous is paramount to every state's socio-economic, political and development plans, drives and many other things. Therefore, for Nigeria to arrive at an accurate and realistic census figures and related data, this study has made the following recommendations:

1. Advanced preparations should always commence on time before the conduct of trial and main census exercise.
2. Government should avoid any variable or secondary questions likely to generate controversy and or suspicion among Nigerians.
3. There should be extensive and intensive enlightenment campaign especially in the rural areas using the most accessible media to reach all.
4. Politicians who use such exercises to politicize issues and policies should be accordingly be dealt with by the law enforcement agents and the justice system.
5. Data collected by National Identity Management Commission (NIMC) and National Population Commission (NPC) should be used in policies making and programmes especially for INEC, NCC, NIS, FRSC, INEC et cetera in order to save costs and reduce time spent in gathering and analyses of data by such bodies.
6. Government should ensure adequate funding of Population Commission as its functions are strategic and indispensable to Nigeria's socio-economic and political prosperity.
7. The Population Commission should ensure proper maintenance and further exploitation of data in its possession as such are useful for varied purposes (security, economy, politics, development planning et cetera).
8. The Population Commission should always ensure employment and or recruitment of competent permanent and ad-hoc staff to guard against distortion and mutilation of data in its possession.

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