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Historizing Population Census and the Question of National Development in Nigeria

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Abstract: The issue of demography is very critical and essential in the growth and development of any country such as the projection for public health facilities, unemployment, aging population, mortality rate, growth rate, school enrolment, agriculture among others. However, in Nigeria population census has always been politicized for fear that it would be used as an index for religious affiliation and to determine the number of registered voters during election. Also, quiet alarming are the general human and environmental poverty, the declining quality of life and the underutilized as well as barely tapped wealth of human resources as a result of the inadequacies of the population census. This paper therefore, argues that population census provide statistics that affords the country the opportunity to plan for its citizens and concludes that accurate and trustworthy population, census barring falsifications would put Nigeria in a better pedestal for development.

Keywords: Population; Census; National development; Population census; Politics, Ethnicity.

1. Introduction

The population census is a crucial and fundamental matter in any nation, since population size and composition have significant consequences for change, progress, and societal quality of life. It offers the most reliable framework of the nation's population and its characteristics at the specific moment to which the census pertains. This is due to the provision of information essential for successful national planning, egalitarian governance, and future-oriented strategies. It functions as a foundation for resource distribution, including tax allocation, constituency representation, employment, placement of industry and social facilities, and the allotment of seats for each state in the federal and state houses of assembly [1].

In Nigeria, population censuses provoke difficulties due to its impact on geopolitical, state, and ethnic relations and the balance of power, resulting in litigations and court judgments that reject some elements of the census [2]. The competition for political supremacy among Nigerian geographical areas has resulted in the manipulation and fabrication of population census data for various groups or regions within the country. In other words, the prevailing public impression is that a larger population serves as a political instrument in a diverse culture such as Nigeria.

Reliable demographic statistics will facilitate political and economic growth in Nigeria, assisting the government in ensuring equitable political representation and access to essential governmental resources. Biased or flawed census data would result in erroneous judgments, inaccurate future forecasts, and mislead planners and administrators. Unfortunately, in the 21st century, Nigeria still lacks reliable and accurate census data. This has persistently hindered the efficacy of population census as a tool for

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national development. Nevertheless, ethnicity, religious affiliations, and the pursuit of dominance have impeded the proper execution of a national population census essential for fostering necessary growth.

Nigeria's history with population census has been marked by challenges, inconsistencies, and controversies, making it a critical subject of study in the context of national development. Since colonial times, census-taking in Nigeria has often been riddled with political interference, ethnic rivalries, and administrative inefficiencies[3]. The early censuses conducted in the 20th century lacked standardization, and post-independence enumeration exercises were largely contested, especially in the 1963 and 1973 censuses, which were marred by allegations of inflation and manipulation [4]. The absence of accurate demographic data has hindered effective policymaking, leaving national development efforts vulnerable to misallocation of resources. A reliable census is indispensable for proper planning in infrastructure, education, healthcare, and economic growth. Thus, understanding the historical trajectory of Nigeria's census process provides insight into its developmental challenges and the necessary reforms for future progress.

The population census plays a pivotal role in shaping national policies and governance. Beyond mere headcounts, census data serve as a foundation for electoral constituency delineation, revenue allocation, and public service distribution[5]. However, Nigeria's census history reveals deep-seated tensions fueled by political and regional interests, where numbers are often manipulated to confer economic and political advantages on certain groups. The 2006 census, the last fully conducted enumeration, faced significant criticism over its reliability and methodology, further exacerbating mistrust in the system [6]. Many scholars argue that without a credible census, Nigeria's development trajectory remains uncertain as key economic and social programs are implemented based on outdated or estimated figures. Thus, historicizing the census process provides a lens to evaluate Nigeria's governance structures and the role of demographic data in national planning.

Despite advancements in census technology globally, Nigeria continues to grapple with logistical constraints, ethnic rivalries, and an underdeveloped data infrastructure. The failure to conduct regular and transparent censuses has implications for national identity, economic growth, and international development goals, such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Many developing nations rely on census data for investment decisions, yet Nigeria's inconsistent census results deter potential investors due to the lack of credible demographic information[7]. Given the critical role of census data in governance and national progress, there is an urgent need to historicize the country's census processes to identify lessons from the past, propose structural improvements, and build a transparent and functional census framework for the future.

Statement of the Problem

The conduct of population censuses in Nigeria has been marred by historical inconsistencies, political interference, and systemic inefficiencies, making the quest for accurate demographic data an enduring challenge. Since the colonial era, census-taking in Nigeria has been fraught with credibility issues, with figures often disputed due to allegations of manipulation for political or economic advantages [7]. The 1962 and 1963 censuses, for example, were heavily criticized for their alleged political bias, as different regions sought to inflate their numbers to gain a greater share of national resources and political representation. This legacy of contested census figures has persisted, with the 2006 census—the last nationwide enumeration—also facing allegations of inaccuracy and exclusion of certain regions[4]. Without accurate and reliable census data, national planning becomes compromised, as resource allocation and infrastructural development remain speculative rather than data-driven. Consequently, Nigeria's inability to conduct credible censuses has hindered the effective implementation of developmental policies and economic planning.

One of the major issues surrounding Nigeria's population census is the interplay between politics and ethnicity. The country's federal structure, which ties revenue allocation and political representation to population size, has turned census exercises into a battleground for regional dominance[5]. The North-South dichotomy has particularly

been a source of contention, with accusations that certain regions manipulate census figures to gain political leverage. This ethnic and political interference has led to the rejection of census results by different factions, further deepening the mistrust in national population figures. Additionally, the lack of technological integration in past censuses has exacerbated inefficiencies, with manual counting methods leading to errors, fraud, and logistical failures. While many countries have embraced digital census methodologies to improve accuracy, Nigeria's reliance on traditional enumeration methods has perpetuated inconsistencies and undermined the credibility of its demographic data. Without addressing these systemic issues, census-taking in Nigeria will continue to be an exercise in controversy rather than a reliable tool for development planning.

Another critical challenge is the lack of transparency and public confidence in census processes. In many instances, census figures have been released without clear methodologies or independent verification, leading to widespread skepticism among citizens and policymakers. The failure to adequately engage civil society organizations, academia, and international bodies in the census process has further contributed to its credibility deficit [8]. Moreover, logistical constraints such as inadequate funding, poor coordination, and insecurity in certain regions have led to undercounting and marginalization of certain groups, particularly rural communities and internally displaced persons. The absence of a well-maintained national database has also made it difficult to cross-verify census figures, creating a vacuum in reliable demographic statistics. In a country where planning for education, healthcare, and employment depends on population data, the consequences of inaccurate census figures are far-reaching.

The consequences of Nigeria's unreliable census figures extend beyond governance and economic planning to international investment and development partnerships. Foreign investors and international development organizations rely on demographic statistics to assess market potential, labor force size, and economic viability [6]. However, the inconsistencies in Nigeria's census data create an environment of uncertainty, discouraging investment and limiting the country's access to global development opportunities. Without a credible demographic framework, national policies on poverty alleviation, housing, and infrastructure development remain largely speculative rather than evidence-based. The discrepancies in census figures also affect electoral processes, as constituency delineations are often based on population estimates rather than accurate data. Thus, the failure to conduct credible censuses undermines not only Nigeria's internal governance but also its global economic competitiveness and development trajectory.

Why has Nigeria, despite its advancements in technology and governance, failed to conduct a transparent and widely accepted population census? How long will the country continue to plan its development agenda based on estimates rather than accurate demographic data? These questions highlight the urgency of addressing the challenges associated with census-taking in Nigeria. The need for an independent, technologically driven, and politically insulated census process has never been greater. It is against this backdrop that this study was undertaken to critically historize population census and the question of national development in Nigeria. To this end, the followings research questions were stated to guide the study:

Research Questions

- 1) what are the relevance of population censuses in Nigeria
- 2) what historical factors influenced the credibility and accuracy of population censuses in Nigeria, and how have these factors impacted national development?
- 3) how has historical factors influence governance and resource allocation in Nigeria?

Conceptual Issues

The Nigerian population census has been significantly impacted by the overt and covert ways in which ethnicity is reflected in the country's body politics. Conflicts between different ethnic groups, characterized by members' efforts to assert their uniqueness and individuality, are what Abner Cohen calls "ethnicity" [9]. Ethnicity, according to Debroya, is associated with a multiplicity of social tensions. Otite made a

valid point when he said that ethnicity is seen as a big roadblock to Nigeria's political and economic progress, and that the ethnic virus is among the most significant causes of social crises and political instability in the nation. In order to get an advantage in competitive, conflictual, or cooperative circumstances, Osaghae defines ethnicity as the use of ethnic identity and distinctions. When it comes to social, economic, and political changes, ethnicity, according to Alvin Boskoff is just a collection of quantifiable patterns in how the masses react. The majority of population and a select few leaders both make these predictable reactions. Ekeh argues that the elite in Nigeria, who inherited the colonial state, saw growth as a redistribution of wealth from the civil to the primordial public, which promoted ethnicity.

Ethnicity was described by Nnolias a social phenomena linked to interactions between distinct groups of people. Members of an ethnic group don't need to have a same language or culture, he went on to say; rather, they are social formations defined by the communal nature of their borders. This means that there is a sense of group feeling and self-identity characterized by shared cultural traditions, a common language, and a sense of loyalty to one's social group.

As a result, ethnicity is related to a sense of belonging to a particular nation or state based on shared traits that set a group apart from others. On the other hand, ethnicity promotes violence and has been a dividing factor in the country's political relations, leading to strained progress.

The term "development" has a plethora of accepted meanings. Regardless, this article will examine a few definitions. To Naomi, development is about more than just making more money; it's also about making sure everyone has a roof over their heads, access to healthcare, education, and a decent place to live.

According to Gboyeg, development is the overarching concept that encompasses any and all efforts to better people's lives. It necessitates the eradication or significant reduction of poverty and inequality in access to the good things of life, as well as the sustained material well-being of all people, not just the powerful and wealthy. The growth of life changes, as well as the improvement of individual physical security and livelihoods, are the goals of development, he continued to argue.

Todaro argues that development encompasses the full spectrum of social change, from an overall unsatisfactory state of life to one that is materially and spiritually better, by catering to the various needs and desires of individuals and social groups within a society. Sustenance of life, self-esteem, and independence from slavery should be the guiding principles of growth.

There are several facets to human society's growth, according to Rodney[10]. On a personal level, it means more competence and capability, more independence, more creativity, self-control, accountability, and financial security. Achieving any of these components of human growth is highly dependent on the condition of society overall, according to Rodney, even if some of them are moral categories and are hard to assess. That within the context of men's social connections does the meaning of freedom, responsibility, and talent exist. To rephrase, progress is something that every society has to deal with.

Laninhun cites Youn who argues that development means positive change: social and economic processes should be organized to eradicate extreme poverty, illiteracy, and low standards of life, and to provide increasing material comfort. Essentially, development has to be a multi-faceted process that includes accelerating economic growth, eliminating inequality, and completely eliminating poverty, as well as fundamental changes in social structures, public attitudes, and national institutions. Development on a national scale: "national" refers to the whole country, as defined in the New Webster's Dictionary of the English Language.

In other words, national development is the collective progress of a country in all spheres of society, including economics, politics, and religion. This progress can be

measured in monetary terms, such as an increase in the gross domestic product, or in social terms, like the provision of clean water, adequate healthcare, well-developed transportation systems, and high-quality educational opportunities. The government's collection of plans, known as development planning, is the most effective means of doing this. This is particularly true, but a reliable national census is essential for any progress toward betterment of the country.

Counting people is "the overall process of collecting, compiling, evaluating, analyzing and publishing or otherwise disseminating demographic, economic and social data pertaining at a specified time to all persons in a country or in a well delimited part of the country," as stated by Odewiimi. According to Osinaike, Ayeola, and Alao, a census is a way to gather statistics on a people. This data is widely recognized as important for democracy and progress.

The United Nations (UN) posits that a good census must have the following characteristics;

1. Individual enumeration: meaning that each person that meets up the criteria of being in the population under consideration must be counted.
2. Universal coverage of the population all persons in the population must be covered.
3. Conducted at a single point in time-must be done within a specific period in the census year. This feature disallows staggering a census that moves from pre-year to census year or from census year.
4. Defined periodicity - census can be five yearly, or a ten — yearly etc. the census cycle must be well defined With a focus on their significance, the United Nations has long advocated for national censuses to be held every ten years. It is within this time frame that changes in population structure and mobility may be recorded.

In essence, benchmark figures on the demographics and housing conditions of a country are derived from censuses. They detail demographics (such as age and sex distribution), housing features and amenities, and geographic distribution, all of which impact housing's social elements.

The primary goal of conducting a population census is, as said before, to provide the government with essential statistics for the purposes of administration, planning, and policymaking. Because of this, social and economic policies that improve people's lives are being formulated. Also, the demographic makeup of a country can be better understood by looking at recent census data, which sheds light on topics like the growth of cities, the distribution of people in different regions based on factors like education and employment, and the changing patterns of rural-to-urban migration and concentration. These factors also provide the groundwork for intriguing scientific inquiries that have relevance to both academic inquiry and the resolution of real-world issues related to the expansion and administration of businesses and industries. The commercial sector also takes the census into account when deciding where to set up shop in order to meet the demands of a certain demographic.

Local, urban, and subnational populations may be best studied by consulting population censuses, which provide the most up-to-date and comprehensive data available. In contrast, the collected data serves as the foundation for public and private sector decision-making tools at the national and local levels, impacting a wide range of citizens' lives (uses of census Data.html&Accesed22 July 2016).

Olusanya made the astute observation that planning is ultimately about people. Therefore, it is crucial to have a good understanding of people's demographics, including their age, sex, material status, level of education, mobility, rate of increase due to key life events (primarily births and deaths), and spatial distribution, in order to plan development efficiently.

Brief History of Population Census in Nigeria

The Latin verb "centre," meaning to tax, assess, or value, is the root of the English word "census," which is the most reliable way to get population statistics history of Nigeria"[12]. Several ancient civilizations benefited from this, including Egypt, Persia, Greece, Israel, China, India, Rome, Japan, and medieval Europe. All adult males suitable for military duty were recruited via some of these censuses, and their results were used to decide tax collection, tribute payment, and community labor. The modern census was born out of this census's revisions, even though it had a specified goal.

Despite the inherent difficulties, population censuses are required because, as the concept of a census suggests, everyone should be counted. However, there is currently no feasible way to determine the number and characteristics of any big population with absolute certainty. The interplay between development and population is becoming more complicated, as Fred (1988) points out. The importance of the census to Nigeria's pursuit of sustainable development is also recognized by President Obasanjo.

Even though the Nigerian government has invested a lot of time and energy over the years on conducting a trustworthy census, the exercises continue to face significant obstacles. This is because the effectiveness of census exercises has been affected by political, social, and economic issues over the years. The British confined the scope of their 1866 census in Nigeria to the city of Lagos. Later on, in 1871 and 1896, it was limited to Lagos. The second one occurred in 1868 as well. According to Aluko, the first of what would be ten annual censuses in the nation was conducted in 1871. The population counted 29,000 in 1871, 37,000 in 1881, 33,000 in 1891, 42,000 in 1901, 74,000 in 1911, 100,000 in 1921, and 126,000 in 1903. These numbers only applied to the mainland and Lagos.

To cover the whole nation in mind, the census area was expanded from 1911 to 1931. However, owing to logistical, economic, and other issues, the exercises relied on approximations. Disruption of the decennial exercise that had been going on since 1871 was caused by the onset of World War II in 1941. In 1911, the Northern Province's population was estimated at 8.122 million and the Southern Province's population at 7.94 million, for a total of 16.06 million in the territory that would eventually be called Nigeria.

The impulse or hypothetical census in 1921 came from Lord Lugard's 1914 amalgamation of the Southern and Northern protectorates into the Federation of Nigeria. This resulted in a much more comprehensive and detailed census of the population. The township census came first, followed by the provincial one. There were 10.26 million in the Northern province and 8.37 million in the Southern province.

Ensuring comprehensive coverage of the nation was the goal of the 1931 population census. Although there were several obstacles, the exercise's final tally put Nigeria's population at 19.92 million, with 8.49 million living in the southern provinces (including the colony) and 1,143 million in the northern provinces.

According to Bamgbose,

1. There was a severe economic depression in the early 1930s.
2. Civil disturbance by women in the Eastern province comprising Onitsha, Owerri, and Calabar who reckoned that the intent was to tax women and increase taxation for the men had a tremendously disruptive effect on the arrangement.
3. As such, only a few places were enumerated. Also, the colonial administrators lacked expertise in the census,

The last population census performed before to independence occurred between 1950 and 1953. This was considered the first modern, nationwide, and meticulously organized census in Nigeria. In 1950, the population of Lagos was 272,000. In 1952, the population in Northern Nigeria was 10.8 million people. In December 1952 and January 1953, the census population in Western Nigeria was 6.08 million. In 1953, the population of Eastern Nigeria was 7.2 million. The documented population from these censuses was 30.42 million. The population census results served as the foundation for distributing

parliamentary seats at the federal level among the three regions of the nation at that time. The Federal House of Assembly of 312 members, was allocated as follows: the northern area had 174 seats, the eastern region had 73 seats, and the western region had 65 seats, determined by population distribution.

In 1962, ten years later, the first post-independence census was executed. Despite the organization's significant progress compared to prior exercises, the outcome was annulled due to disagreements over inflation or numerical data. The government's rejection to acknowledge the Ellis population census necessitated the holding of a new census in November 1963. The 1963 population census recorded Nigeria's population at 55.6 million, including 29.7 million from the Northern area, 13.5 million from the Southern region, and 12.4 million from the Eastern region.

The 1973 census, which recorded the population at 79.8 million—significantly lower than the anticipated 110 million by several demographic experts—was subsequently dismissed and annulled by the government. An article in the Nigerian Daily Times said that “a census exercise lacking public confidence is a futile endeavour; these unverified figures have generated significant depression, anger, and fear among various segments of the Nigerian population.” A subsequent population census in 1991 recorded the Nigerian population at 88.5 million. This was considered to be an undercount. Okeibunor states that the census faced significant problems due to allegations of data fabrication and inflation. The claimed sex ratio of 101.3 was disputed since it contradicted global norms and expectations.

The subsequent population census was conducted in March 2006 after many delays. This marked the inaugural instance in which the National Population Commission (NPC) utilized Geographical Positioning System (GPS) technology and satellite imagery to create geo-referenced Enumeration Area Maps. The report released by the NPC in December 2006 tentatively estimated the population at 140.0 million. The study provides a concise justification of census techniques and includes an appendix that enumerates provisional sex ratios, state data, and average growth rates from 1999 to 2006. In contrast to the 1991 census, the 2006 census aimed to mitigate controversy by excluding inquiries on religion or ethnicity. The proposal to eliminate the religious and ethnic status of responders elicited a range of reactions.

Following the publication of the 2006 population census, Nigerian newspapers were inundated with discontent, deeming the procedure absurd. The previous Governor of Lagos State, Senator Ahmed Tinubu, said in 2007: “We can afford a recount nationwide.” We want a recount of the Lagos State election results. This exemplifies the pinnacle of corruption: manipulating census data just to benefit certain individuals. No degree of modification to the figure can make it correct. The figure is entirely dismissed. We possess sufficient backing and funding from the United Nations and the European Union. Therefore, let us do a recount. There were diverse complaints from different quarters - including those of ‘the enumerators complain of shortages of vital census materials.

Theoretical Underpinning

The study will be anchored on the Institutional Theory. Institutional Theory, developed by John W. Meyer and Brian Rowan in the late 1970s, provides a framework for understanding how institutions influence social and political behaviours, including policy implementation and governance structure. The theory posits that organisations and governmental institutions adopt formal structures not solely for efficiency but also to conform to established norms, rules, and societal expectations. Institutional Theory has evolved, particularly with contributions from Paul J. DiMaggio and Walter W. Powell, who introduced the concept of **institutional isomorphism**, explaining how institutions become similar over time due to coercive, mimetic, and normative pressures [11]. In the Nigerian context, population census-taking is significantly influenced by institutional norms, political pressures, and systemic inefficiencies. Institutional Theory helps to explain why Nigeria's census exercises have historically been fraught with controversy,

as census institutions often align with political and economic interests rather than objective demographic data collection [4]. The National Population Commission, responsible for conducting censuses, is often subjected to political and regional pressures that shape its operations, leading to discrepancies in census outcomes.

A key assumption of institutional theory is that organisations and state institutions adopt practices to gain legitimacy rather than purely for functional efficiency [12]. In Nigeria, census figures are often influenced by political actors who seek to inflate population numbers to secure more representation in governance and higher revenue allocations. This phenomenon aligns with the theory's assertion that institutional behaviour is driven by socio-political expectations rather than strict adherence to objective processes. Moreover, the reliance on outdated enumeration methods despite technological advancements is an example of institutional inertia, where census agencies resist adopting innovations due to entrenched bureaucratic norms. Institutional Theory also underscores the role of **path dependency**, where past census controversies and manipulations create a cycle that is difficult to break without significant institutional reforms [13]. Furthermore, the theory explains why census reforms in Nigeria are slow, as powerful interest groups within institutions resist changes that might disrupt existing political advantages. These institutionalised behaviours ultimately hinder the production of reliable demographic data, which is essential for national planning and development.

The relevance of Institutional Theory to this study lies in its ability to provide insights into how systemic weaknesses in Nigeria's census-taking processes impact national development. A credible census is fundamental to governance, economic planning, and social infrastructure development. However, when census institutions are plagued by political interference and inefficiencies, data-driven policymaking becomes compromised [14]. Nigeria's history of disputed census results exemplifies the challenges of institutional weaknesses, where census processes are shaped by external pressures rather than adherence to best practices. The theory also highlights the necessity of strengthening institutions by implementing policies that insulate census-taking from political manipulation, ensuring transparency and credibility. As other nations have demonstrated, institutional reforms, including the adoption of digital census methodologies and independent monitoring systems, can enhance census reliability. Therefore, applying Institutional Theory to Nigeria's census processes provides a framework for diagnosing the root causes of census controversies and proposing institutional reforms to improve data accuracy and national development outcomes.

2. Materials and Methods

The paper employs a historical approach to examine the Population Census and its implications for national development in Nigeria. By historicizing census exercises, it explores their socio-political and economic impacts over time. Data is sourced from secondary materials, including textbooks, journal publications, and government reports, which provide a broad and well-documented perspective on the subject. These data are analyzed using content analysis to identify patterns, trends, and inconsistencies in census administration and its developmental consequences. The historical approach is justified as it enables a comprehensive understanding of past census activities, shedding light on recurring challenges and their effects on policy formulation. By critically assessing historical data, the study provides insights into how census practices have shaped national development and governance, offering valuable lessons for future policy planning.

3. Results

What are the relevance of population censuses in Nigeria?

Notwithstanding the many obstacles linked to the Nigerian censuses, the significance of an accurate census for a nation's progress cannot be overstated. The

population census assists the government by supplying data on employment, birth rates, mortality rates, and urban population densities, among other factors. It also guarantees representation in government and other public organizations. It facilitates the equal allocation of resources in areas like as taxes and decision-making at all levels across both government and the private sector.

According to UNEPA, the data produced by a population and housing census — such as population figures, distribution, living conditions, and other vital information — is crucial for development. This data is necessary for policymakers to determine investment priorities. Regrettably, several nations possess obsolete or erroneous demographic data, rendering them unable of effectively addressing the requirements of their populace.

UNFPA further stated that;

The distinctive benefit of the census is its representation of the whole statistical universe, even the smallest geographical units, of a nation or area. Planners require this information for various development activities, including evaluating demographic trends, analyzing socio-economic conditions, formulating evidence-based poverty alleviation strategies, monitoring and assessing policy effectiveness, and measuring progress towards national and international development objectives.

(<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/census>).

Besides informing policymakers on population problems, it serves as a crucial instrument for detecting instances of social-demographic or economic exclusion, including those with impairments and the impoverished. A precise census may empower local communities by furnishing them with essential information for participation in local decision-making and assuring their representation.

Development, as previously said, entails progression or growth, including economic progress and the enhancement and supply of social welfare, education, healthcare, the mitigation of inequality and poverty, along the establishment of service-related infrastructure. It generally encompasses advancements in political, economic, and social aspects. Shangodoyin and Lasisi defined development as a complex process including significant transformations in social structures, prevailing attitudes, national institutions, economic growth acceleration, inequality reduction, and the elimination of absolute poverty. Furthermore, UN-CCA and Ude said that development encompasses both a growth in output and modifications in the technological and administrative frameworks governing its production. The structural component of development is crucial for a country's prosperity; its neglect, particularly when inappropriate structures are established, renders all developmental efforts futile. Agbodike asserts that the rapid population growth rate has significant implications and severe socioeconomic repercussions for many Nigerians, particularly in rural regions, due to the intrinsic connection between economic growth and population dynamics. Economically, the national population growth rate of 3.18 percent annually is reportedly outpacing food production and overall agricultural output [15]. This condition is exacerbated by "inequalities in access to available food supplies." These situations lead to significant deficiencies in protein, calories, and vitamins in people's diets, resulting in acute malnutrition. This abnormality jeopardizes not only the current generation but also the subsequent generation of Nigerians, resulting in intellectual deficiency and diminishing Nigeria's prospects for long-term growth. Adewole, 2012 The swift increase in population has led to surging food price inflation, severely impacting the living standards of numerous families in Nigeria, the majority of whom allocate over 60 percent of their income to food and subsist on minimal survival budgets. A new research by a panel of doctors in Nigeria indicates that one in four children under the age of three is experiencing stunted development as a result of rising food expenditures. Given the fast population growth rate in Nigeria, it logically follows that a rising number of job searchers would pursue employment opportunities in the labor market. This situation

becomes perilous in current economic climate, where work options are increasingly diminishing each day. Consequently, millions of young individuals traverse the streets and villages. Due to the fast and continuous population growth in the nation, the issue of reliance, stemming from the substantial proportion of children and the elderly reliant on the income of the economically active workforce, is expected to increase significantly. The reliance issue has intensified, as noted by Osabu-Kle, who states that "the extended family system is becoming increasingly ineffective in addressing the challenges of aging in Africa." In a nation such as Nigeria, characterized by a fast population growth rate and families with several children and dependents, the savings accrued from wages, if any, are significantly diminished. In this context, investments are diminished due to limited savings from consumer expenditures, hindering capital growth and national development [16].

Comprehensive Strategy According to Dalton's definition in Jhingan, "the deliberate direction by persons in charge of large resources of economic activity towards chosen ends" is the term's broadest context. Another way of looking at it is that "planning entails and leads to centralization of the national economy" since it involves "the expansion of the powers of public authorities to organization and usage of economic resources.... It follows that the central government, via its officials, is solely responsible for development planning, with the aim of accomplishing certain goals and targets within a fixed time frame. Similarly, according to Egonmwan and Ibodje, development planning is "a consciously directed activity with predetermined goals and predetermined means to achieve the set goals." They went on to say that "it provides the rallying point for social and political mobilization whereby the society is able to set development objectives and goals, map out strategies and programs for the attainment of such goals and mobilize resources for their attainment." **Population Census: Its Significance** Some of the most important aspects of the Nigerian population census are as follows: **Giving Accurate and Reliable Information:** The official population count in Nigeria is revised every time a new census is conducted using the most recent official population count. Births, deaths, and transient arrivals and departures are the primary data points used to construct population updates for each village and municipality. **Sample Survey Foundational Data:** The findings of the census serve as a foundation for sample surveys and extrapolation in other statistical applications. Extrapolating findings from sample surveys and obtaining data on the universe is only feasible with updated census results[4]. No matter whether they are carried out by statistics offices, scientific institutes, or commercial enterprises, this rule applies to all sample surveys that are based on the distribution and structure of the population. There are two main ways in which census findings are significant when looking at them from a statistical-methodological perspective. The sampling systems are first adjusted in response to the revised figures. Changes in the distribution by area, the age and sex structure, and other demographic or other characteristics need adjustments to sample designs. Secondly, the new data will need to be used for future weightings and extrapolations. These changes guarantee that future polls using this sample will be accurate and representative. **Keeping an Eye on Economic Growth:** The Federal Statistical Office's national accounting system typically bases its descriptions of Nigeria's economic progress during a given time period on a wide variety of official statistical data. Although demographic data are more often used, economic statistics do play an important role as well. Nevertheless, the word "population" is defined in a certain way in fiscal reports. Everyone residing in the economic area of a country, whether they are citizens or not, is considered part of the population according to the worldwide principle of national accounts. In this instance, that country is the Federal Republic of Nigeria. A person is deemed a resident of Nigeria if they have maintained their permanent residence for a period of fifteen years.

Since Nigeria's declaration of independence in 1960, every attempt to conduct a census has been thwarted. Because of this, the nation's socioeconomic development

plans have been hampered by inaccurate, outdated, and unreliable demographic data. One reason previous national development programs failed was a dearth of demographic information. So, the nation needs a census that is accurate, trustworthy, and well-received. Given the ever-changing nature of contemporary macro and microeconomic planning, this issue has taken on even more importance.

What historical factors influenced the credibility and accuracy of population censuses in Nigeria, and how have these factors impacted national development?

The population census serves as a fundamental tool for national planning and development, providing critical demographic data that inform policy decisions. However, in Nigeria, the credibility and accuracy of population censuses have historically been compromised by various factors, leading to controversies, disputes, and developmental setbacks[17]. These factors, ranging from colonial legacies to political interference, have shaped census outcomes, influencing governance, resource allocation, and national unity. Understanding these historical influences is essential for evaluating their long-term impact on Nigeria's socio-economic development.

Colonial Legacies and Census Manipulation: Nigeria's colonial history laid a problematic foundation for population enumeration. The British colonial administration conducted censuses primarily for taxation, forced labor recruitment, and indirect rule, leading to widespread resistance and underreporting. The 1911, 1921, and 1931 censuses were characterized by inaccuracies due to the fear among indigenous communities that enumeration would result in increased taxation and forced conscription [17]. These early censuses set a precedent for distrust in government enumeration exercises, which has persisted into the post-independence era. The colonial census figures also played a role in the political structuring of Nigeria, as they were used to justify regional imbalances that later fueled ethnic tensions. Consequently, these manipulations created a legacy of skepticism towards population data, affecting national planning and governance in post-independence Nigeria.

Ethnic and Regional Politics in Census Enumeration: The ethno-political landscape of Nigeria has significantly influenced census credibility. Since independence in 1960, censuses have been marred by accusations of data inflation to gain political and economic advantages. The 1963 census, for example, was highly contentious, with regions allegedly inflating their population figures to secure greater representation in government and higher federal allocations. The distrust generated by these manipulations led to the annulment of the 1973 census and the reliance on outdated population estimates for policy decisions[18]. The struggle for demographic dominance has turned census-taking into a political battleground, where population figures are seen as tools for power rather than as instruments for development. This has undermined data reliability, leading to skewed resource distribution and ineffective national planning.

Technological and Administrative Deficiencies: Beyond political interference, Nigeria's censuses have also suffered from technological and administrative challenges. Poor funding, logistical inefficiencies, and inadequate census infrastructure have resulted in undercounts and duplications. The lack of modern census technologies, such as biometric verification and Geographic Information Systems (GIS), has exacerbated data inaccuracies. Additionally, census officials have often been accused of bias and corruption, further eroding the credibility of population figures. These deficiencies have led to unreliable demographic data, negatively impacting evidence-based policymaking and developmental planning. For instance, inaccurate census figures have hindered effective electoral planning, urban development strategies, and social welfare programs, leading to poor service delivery and governance inefficiencies[19].

Religious and Cultural Influences on Census Accuracy: Religious and cultural beliefs have also played a crucial role in distorting census data in Nigeria. In some regions, particularly in the north, there has been resistance to enumeration based on religious

misconceptions and traditional beliefs that associate census-taking with divine predestination. Some communities have perceived census registration as an infringement on privacy or a government ploy for political gains, leading to non-compliance and data gaps. Furthermore, polygamous family structures, which are prevalent in parts of Nigeria, have posed additional challenges in data collection, as some households intentionally underreport family sizes due to social and economic concerns [20]. The interplay of religious and cultural factors has, therefore, contributed to the inaccuracies that have plagued population censuses, ultimately affecting national planning and service provision.

Impact on National Development

The cumulative effect of these historical factors has had profound implications for Nigeria's national development. Inaccurate census data have hindered effective economic planning, leading to resource misallocation and suboptimal infrastructure development. For example, unreliable population figures have resulted in improper budgetary allocations for education, healthcare, and social welfare, exacerbating regional inequalities and social unrest. Additionally, flawed demographic data have impeded Nigeria's ability to meet international development targets, such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), due to the lack of accurate baseline statistics for tracking progress. The persistent credibility crisis in census-taking has also fueled political tensions, as population figures remain a contentious factor in electoral processes, further destabilizing governance and national cohesion.

The historical factors influencing the credibility and accuracy of Nigeria's population censuses are deeply rooted in colonial legacies, political manipulations, technological deficiencies, and socio-cultural dynamics. These challenges have not only undermined the reliability of demographic data but have also had far-reaching consequences on national development.

How has historical factors influence governance and resource allocation in Nigeria?

Nigeria's governance and resource allocation have been profoundly shaped by historical events, ranging from colonial rule to post-independence political struggles. The legacy of these historical factors continues to influence political structures, economic policies, and regional development disparities. The colonial foundations of governance, ethnic and regional politics, military interventions, and structural economic policies have all played crucial roles in shaping how resources are distributed and how governance operates.

Colonial Legacy and Governance Structures: Colonial rule significantly influenced Nigeria's governance system, introducing an administrative structure that prioritized British economic interests over indigenous development. The British adopted an indirect rule system, governing through local traditional leaders while centralizing power in a manner that favored certain regions over others [17]. This resulted in uneven development, as resource allocation was disproportionately directed towards regions that aligned with colonial economic objectives. The legacy of this governance model persists today, as Nigeria continues to struggle with centralized decision-making and regional disparities in economic investment. The colonial economic policies that emphasized resource extraction rather than local industrialization have left lasting implications on the country's economic structure, fostering dependency on oil revenues while neglecting agricultural and manufacturing sectors.

Ethnic and Regional Politics in Governance: Nigeria's political landscape has been deeply shaped by ethnic and regional rivalries that trace back to colonial-era divisions. The amalgamation of different ethnic groups into a single political entity without consideration for their socio-cultural differences created persistent tensions[21]. These tensions became evident in post-independence governance, where political elites manipulated ethnic sentiments to consolidate power and control resource allocation. For instance, the competition between the northern, western, and eastern regions led to the

politicization of census data, as population figures were inflated to secure greater federal allocations[22]. Ethnic considerations have also influenced electoral politics, with governance often skewed toward dominant ethnic groups, leading to marginalization and political instability. This pattern has resulted in uneven development, where certain regions receive disproportionate funding while others experience neglect, exacerbating socio-economic inequalities.

Military Rule and Economic Resource Allocation: The era of military rule (1966–1999) brought about significant changes in Nigeria's governance and resource distribution. Military regimes, often characterized by authoritarianism and centralized control, restructured the country's federal system by creating states and local government areas to weaken regional power blocs. While this was intended to foster national unity, it also facilitated resource misallocation, as state creation was frequently motivated by political rather than developmental considerations. The military government's control over the oil sector led to the emergence of a rentier state, where revenues from crude oil were mismanaged, exacerbating corruption and economic inefficiencies. The excessive reliance on oil revenue and the neglect of other economic sectors during military rule have had lasting consequences, contributing to contemporary economic volatility and fiscal mismanagement.

Federalism and Revenue Allocation Conflicts: Nigeria's federal system has been a major determinant of how resources are distributed among states and local governments. The revenue-sharing formula, which allocates federal earnings, particularly from oil, has been a subject of intense debate and conflict. Historically, resource control was based on the principle of derivation, where regions retained a significant portion of the revenues they generated. However, with the discovery of oil and the shift to centralized resource control, revenue allocation became highly politicized. Oil-producing states, particularly in the Niger Delta, have since agitated for greater resource control, citing environmental degradation and underdevelopment as major. The failure to equitably distribute resources has fueled militancy, social unrest, and economic disruptions, further complicating governance and national stability.

Impact on National Development and Governance Stability: The historical factors influencing governance and resource allocation have had profound effects on Nigeria's development trajectory. Unequal resource distribution has perpetuated poverty and underdevelopment in certain regions, while political instability arising from governance failures has hindered sustainable economic growth. Corruption, fueled by historical governance structures that prioritize patronage over meritocracy, has resulted in inefficient public spending and infrastructural deficits [17]. Additionally, the politicization of resource allocation has created a governance environment where policy decisions are often influenced by vested interests rather than developmental priorities [23].

Historical factors have played a defining role in shaping governance and resource allocation in Nigeria. From colonial legacies to ethnic politics, military rule, and revenue-sharing conflicts, these influences have contributed to governance challenges that persist today. The resulting inequalities in resource distribution and economic opportunities have fueled socio-political instability and hindered national development.

Challenges of Population Census

In light of the heterogeneous composition of Nigerian society, where the population size of each region significantly influences its political and economic standing, the elites have become excessively zealous regarding the significance of population census. They are eager to undertake measures to enumerate their constituents, often resorting to illegal activities, electoral violence, inflated statistics, falsification, and manipulation of demographic data [24]. Population census findings have been the subject of debates, misunderstandings, half-truths, and falsehoods. Certain myths about the population

census stem from our customs, religious beliefs, or misunderstandings about the causes of surrounding events- ethnicity, religion and their likely effect on it.

Allegations suggest that censuses serve as diversionary strategies to circumvent the fundamental issues of social and economic growth. There is a deficiency of qualified personnel to conduct comprehensive house-to-house enumeration, resulting in the absence of a general census to ascertain the total population of Nigeria. Additionally, there exists an ethnic struggle for dominance, particularly among the three predominant ethnic groups concerning census data in the country.

Odimegwu observes that census data in Nigeria have transformed into a kind of legal cash for the country, used primarily as a tool of supremacy rather than as a means for equitable or sustainable development. He also asserts that demographic manipulation adversely affects all aspects of a nation's existence, since a dubious leader necessarily weakens the whole of socio-economic progress of a country. The inaccurate census has consistently highlighted ethnicity and religion as important concerns in the power struggle among the three ethnic groups in the nation. Odimegwu asserts that the competition for dominance among the three major ethnic groups in the nation must be addressed for progress in citizen data collection to occur. The challenges of the Nigerian census Ethnic prejudice and religious biases undoubtedly distort the judgment of many individuals in Nigeria. It is noteworthy that we inhabit an era that ought to have progressed past these attitudes that contradict the general good and public profitability.

4. Discussion

The discussion on population census in Nigeria highlights various historical, political, and administrative challenges that have hindered its effectiveness as a national planning tool. One major issue is the politicization of census data, where population figures are often manipulated for political and economic gains, particularly in resource allocation and political representation. Additionally, the lack of transparency and public involvement in the census process has diminished public trust in the validity of the collected data. Historically, colonial influences also contributed to census inaccuracies, as administrative approaches failed to account for Nigeria's complex social structure. These factors have impacted national policies, leading to unequal resource distribution and ineffective development planning. Therefore, structural reforms in Nigeria's census system are necessary, including the adoption of modern technology and the strengthening of responsible institutions, to ensure the accuracy of demographic data that can support more sustainable and inclusive development planning.

5. Conclusion

The population census acts as a catalyst for the direction, growth, and development of a country. The census should be seen as a planning tool rather than a means of expressing religious and ethnic sentiments or a political instrument for dominance. Nevertheless, based on historical experiences with population censuses, use population census data as a criterion for the distribution of governmental benefits should be minimized. The government should guarantee the fair allocation of resources. This would improve the quality of life for Nigerians and diminish the distortion of statistics, which has hindered accurate demographic data and obstructed national progress.

Achieving this will need the support, commitment, cooperation, and collaboration of all stakeholders, including politics and opinion leaders, policymakers in government as private sectors, traditional and religious leaders, country leaders, mass media and the general public.

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