

Fudging the Numbers: Understanding the Politics and Dynamics of Population Census Figures in Nigeria

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Abstract

The Policymakers use population census as a reference for efficient social mobilisation, economic planning, and overall national development. However, its manipulation and politicisation have the negative impact of inadequate planning, which obstructs actual advancement. Ascertaining Nigeria's population has been a complex endeavour with its controversies since 1866, and as such has been based on conjectures rather than precise enumeration and valid data presentation. This study employed a qualitative research methodology, thus highlighting the controversies surrounding Nigeria's census exercise over years and how this affects economic and development planning. The study made the case that the British colonial government intentionally favoured the then Northern region throughout Nigeria's history of population census manipulation for ostensibly ulterior purposes. It discovered that since the North has held political power for over thirty of Nigeria's sixty-four years of independence, successive federal governments that were, in a sense, controlled by Northerners have persisted in politicising and even weaponizing head counting in the country. The paper concluded that the manipulation and politicisation of population census figures in favour of the North vis-à-vis the South is a major impediment to national integration and development.

Keywords: Census, colonialism, development, economic planning, national integration.

Introduction

Population census has remained a contentious issue in Nigeria due to its effect on geopolitical configurations, state creation, economic development, ethnic relations, as well as political power distribution. In Nigeria has evolved into a contentious and disputable subject matter due to its implications on geopolitical configuration, resource allocation, and ethnic relations, as well as the distribution of power. The significance of population census in any nation is pictured in its role in shaping developmental strategies by furnishing essential data for effective national planning, equitable governance, and future projections. It also serves as the foundation for fair resource allocation, including revenue sharing, electoral representation, job distribution, establishment of industries, and provision of social amenities (Sunday, Jibo and Yohanna, 2024). To an extent, this has necessitated the manipulation and distortion of census data pertaining to specific groups or regions within the country to get advantage, thereby breeding political, social, ethnic, and religious contentions, along with geopolitical tensions and disputes that impede nation-building and sustainable progress in Nigeria.

The manipulation of census figures in Nigeria began during the colonial era. The British colonial regime never hid its hatred for the South, especially the Igbo. The simple reason is that it took the British about twenty years to conquer and pacify Igboland and other groups in the south-eastern part of Nigeria. This was not the case in Yorubaland and Hausaland, where the conquest was achieved with minimal resistance. The fierce resistance by the Igbo and their neighbours against British colonial penetration and occupation of their territory earned them the sobriquet of being an ungovernable people by the British (Okonjo, 1974). This was not helped by the fact that an Igbo – Nnamdi Azikiwe spearheaded the stiffest opposition to British colonial rule. Along with his newspapers, especially the *West African Pilot*, and the political party he led – the National Council for Nigerian Citizens (NCNC), Azikiwe was a torn in the flesh of the British colonialists.

British paternalism towards Northern Nigeria was responsible for manipulating census figures in the North's favour during the colonial era. The hidden agenda was to ensure the perpetuation of the North's domination of Nigerian politics, given the fact that National Assembly seats then (and even now) are allocated according to bogus population figures. In the end, census figures in Nigeria have remained controversial and have at various times, threatened the very existence of the country. The North has continued to claim numerical superiority over the South. The disdainful and arrogant disposition of the Fulani-led Northern Nigeria political oligarchy to other Nigerians on account of this portends enormous danger to national integration (Pierce, 2006).

National integration, according to Michael Hecter, involves the processes by which a heterogeneous state is transformed into a society composed of a single all-pervasive national economy, polity, and culture (Falodun, 1982). In other words, for any country to achieve national integration, there must be a shift in the locus of both identity and loyalty from the ethnic group to the national population as a whole (Emezue, 1998). This is an assignment that is entrusted to the political system and its managers. Therefore, national integration can only be discussed in the context of a nation, which in the case of Nigeria, began with the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates in 1914 by the British colonial regime. It is the intention of this paper to bring into focus the implications of the politicization of population census for national integration in Nigeria. To this end, it has been divided into three major parts, namely, a historicization of headcount in Nigeria before 1963; population census in Nigeria since 1973; the politicization of population figures; and the implications of the politicization of census figures for national integration and development.

Headcount in Nigeria: A Historical Survey

Population figures worldwide are used not just to ascertain the number of persons living within a given country based on sex, age, ethnic origins, educational levels, and occupation, among other things; they are essentially used to know how the government can work out modalities for meeting its statutory obligations to its citizens. In other words, accurate population censuses serve as parameters for how resources could be managed for the benefit of the citizens. Therefore, the importance of accurate headcounts cannot be over-emphasized. If the population of a country is not properly assessed, there might be shortfalls in the allocation of resources to certain regions or certain categories of individuals within such a country. These include projects such as education, health, housing, et cetera, which constitute the fulcrum of national planning.

Emezue (1998) explained that the first population census in what is today called Nigeria was conducted in the 19th century (precisely in 1866) in Lagos. This was soon after the British had

annexed Lagos and converted it into a colonial territory. Subsequent headcounts were conducted in the colony between 1868 and 1871, and after that, every ten years. Thus, there were census enumerations in 1881 and 1891 in Lagos. Following the amalgamation of the colony of Lagos and the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria in 1901, the colonial government considered it expedient to know the population of the new administrative structure. It did not do this through a census; rather it made estimates which put the population at twenty million. Between 1904, 1905, and 1906, the government reduced the estimates to nine million, one hundred and sixty thousand, seven hundred (9,160, 700), eight million, seven hundred and eighty-three thousand (8, 783, 000), and seven million, one hundred sixty-four thousand, seven hundred and fifty-one (7, 164, 751), respectively (Meek, 1925).

Okoroafor (1982) explained that it was in 1911 that the first attempt was made to have a population census covering the whole of Nigeria. At the end of the exercise, a population of eight million, one hundred and fifteen thousand, nine hundred and eighty-one (8, 115, 981) was ascribed to the Northern Protectorate, while the Southern Protectorate (including Lagos) was given a population of seven million, nine thousand and four hundred (7,009, 400 million). The total population was thus put at 15,125,381 million. For instance, the provincial administrators in the North made their own estimates and disagreed with the figures returned by the Acting Governor of the North.

In 1921, another census exercise was undertaken by the colonial government. Because of the relative improvement in literacy level, especially in the urban areas, a standard procedure for the exercise was provided. For instance, when enumeration was to be conducted in the urban areas in April 1921, the enumerators were required to collect every information regarding the languages, religion, and educational qualifications of those enumerated. Also, to be provided was information on the age, ethnic origins, and civil conditions of those enumerated. When the results were released, the North had a population of nine million, nine hundred and ninety thousand, three hundred and fourteen (9, 990, 314), while the South had eight million, three hundred and sixty-eight thousand, five hundred and twelve (8, 368, 512) (Emezue, 1998). But this census-taking was also controversial because the exercise was not done simultaneously in both the North and South, and in the cities and rural areas. The exercise was spread over two months in the rural areas whereas it lasted for just a day in the cities. It has been argued that because of the tabulation errors noticed in the figures returned, a decision was taken to inflate the returns of indigenous populations in the urban areas by five percent and in the rural areas by ten percent (Sklar, 1965; Emezue, 1998).

Ten years later in 1931, another population census was planned. Initially, the idea was to cover the whole country. But the Southern provinces had to be excluded due to the Aba Women's War of 1929. The women from these provinces had taken up arms to resist the attempts by the colonial government to introduce a uniform system of direct taxation which the government had successfully implemented in the Northern provinces. For the women, there were palpable fears that the government was going to tax them. This, coupled with the global economic recession of 1929 which reduced the revenue available to the colonial government, and the locust invasion in the North, compelled the government to restrict the 1931 enumeration to Lagos in the South and five cities and two hundred and one villages in the North. The figures put the national total at nineteen million, nine hundred and twenty-eight thousand, one hundred and seventy-one (19, 928,171), with the Southern province (including Lagos) having a total of eight million, four hundred and ninety-three thousand, two hundred and forty-seven (8, 493, 247) and the North having eleven million, four hundred and thirty-four thousand, nine hundred and twenty-four (11, 434, 924) (Emezue, 1998).

Implicit in these returns is the fact that the population of the North increased by over a million (1,436,610) within a decade, while that of the South increased with just a hundred and twenty-four thousand, seven hundred and thirty-five (124,735). There was no official explanation for this “miracle”.

The Politicization of Population Census Figures Since 1953

The Second World War constrained the conduct of a population census in Nigeria before 1952. The next population census was conducted in Nigeria in 1952/1953. The exercise was staggered over a long period due to challenges such as logistics. It was also highly politicized because the figures returned were to be used in determining the allocation of seats in the new Federal House of Representatives which came on the heels of the 1951 promulgation of the Macpherson constitution (Serra and Jerven, 2021). Out of a total national population of 30.4 million, the North was given 16.8 million, which meant that 50% of the seats were given to that region. Naturally, politicians from the South disputed the figures. It was argued that it was a deliberate ploy by the British to ensure Northern domination of national politics and control of economic resources.

It is instructive to note that the politicization of the 1952/1953 census dates back to 1949 when plans for drafting a new constitution for Nigeria began. The new constitution, as it was taunted, would introduce a strong central government with executive and legislative bodies, and the North, with obvious British duplicity, insisted on not just having half of the seats in the federal legislature, but also half the federal revenue which the regions would get from the federal government. Northern leaders met in Kaduna in 1949 to perfect their plans and adopt a common position at the All Nigeria Constitutional Conference held at Ibadan. Their plan to dominate the national legislature and to have a greater share of the national revenue did not sail through at the Ibadan Conference. As a result, the political leaders of the North raised money and sent a delegation to London to present and canvass their region's position before the Colonial Secretary (Emezue, 1998). The Colonial Office, despite stiff opposition from the South, allowed the North to have its way. In other words, the region's plan to dominate the national legislature and control the revenue was supported by the British government. This action was the first clear example of where population census and political representation became politicized in Nigeria.

Following her political victory in the 1952/1953 census, the North has continued to predicate its membership of the Nigerian state on her dominance of the political system and by extension, the country's resource allocation. Even the first post-independence census exercise was manipulated in favour of the North. The 1962 census was a purely Nigerian affair and was held simultaneously all over the country. However, based on the fact that the Independence Constitution placed census on the concurrent legislative list, each region organized the 1962 census in its area, though they all had to send the processed and analysed results to the Federal Chief Census Officer in Lagos for publication. At the end of the exercise, approximately fifty million people were enumerated, and the overall distribution saw the Northern Region having 29.8 million; the East had 12.4 million, the West had 10.3 million, the Mid-West had 2.5 million, while the Federal Territory of Lagos had 675,000 (Sklar, 1965:210). The initial result had seen the population of the North reduced from between 55% to 57% in earlier censuses, to a little below 50%. This development made the North to decide to conduct a supplementary census which added nine million people to its earlier population, thereby giving it a total share of 57% of the national population (Uwazie and Ihuagha, 2010). The truth of the matter is that the 1962 census put Nigeria's population at 42.2 million and not the 55.6 million that was accepted by the government.

Table 1: The Distribution of the 1962/63 Census Figures on a Regional Basis

Northern Region	29.8 million
Eastern Region	12.4 million
Western Region	10.3 million
Mid-Western Region	2.5 million
Federal Territory of Lagos	675,000

Source: Compiled from Richard Sklar, “Contradictions in the Nigerian Political System,” *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 3 (2), 1965, 209.

Three years after the Nigeria-Biafra war of 1966-1970, the Gowon-led military regime conducted a population census. Many hoped that the 1973 census would not be a victim of wilful manipulation since it was the first to be handled by a military government. Moreover, there was the belief that it would be free of political intrigues since there were no political parties to bicker over the results. The provisional figures from the exercise indicated a population of 79.76 million. But Gowon was overthrown two years later in 1975 by Murtala Mohammed who wasted no time annulling the census, which, like that of 1963, had generated heated controversies and polarised the country along regional, ethnic and religious lines (Uwazie and Ihuagha, 2010). From the census figures, some states in the North and South recorded decreases in their numbers.

In the end, the cancellation of the 1973 census and the new military regime had no immediate plans for another census, meant that Nigeria had to revert to using the discredited 1963 census for purposes of national planning. It was not until Ibrahim Babangida mounted the saddle of leadership as Nigeria’s first military president that another headcount was held. The 1991 census gave a total population of 88,514,501 million and formed the basis for national planning and resource allocation. The figures also gave the North a numerical advantage, just like the one conducted in 2006 which did not include such details as religion, ethnic group, and state of origin. People were merely enumerated as Nigerian residents in the places where they were counted. Thus, Kano state was ascribed more persons than Lagos, from 9.4 million to 9.0 million. In all, by the figures of the 2006 census, the North had 75 million people as against 65% for the South out of a total of 140 million (Uwazie and Ihuagha, 2010). The results, as usual, elicited controversies, with the South opposing it and the North applauding it.

Table 2: Nigeria's Population Figures based on the 1963, 1991, 2006 and 2016 Census Figures

STATE	1963	1991	2006	2016
ABIA	---	2,338,487	2,845,380	3,727,347
ADAMAWA	2,606,000	2,102,053	3,178,950	4,248,436

AKWA IBOM	---	2,409,613	3,902,051	5,482,177
ANAMBRA	3,596,00	2,174,641	4,177,828	5,527,809
BAUCHI	2,432,000	4,351,007	4,653,066	6,537,314
BAYELSA	---	---	1,704,515	2,277,961
BENUE	2,427,000	2,753,077	4,253,641	5,741,815
BORNO	2,998,000	2,536,003	4,171,104	5,860,183
CROSS RIVER	3,478,000	1,911,297	2,892,988	3,866,269
DELTA	---	2,590,491	4,112,445	4,112,445
EBONYI	---	---	2,176,947	2,880,383
EDO	2,461,000	2,172,005	3,233,366	4,235,595
EKITI	---	---	2,398,957	3,270,798
ENUGU	---	3,154,380	3,267,837	4,411,119
GOMBE	---	---	2,365,040	3,256,962
IMO	3,673,000	2,485,635	3,927,563	5,408,756
JIGAWA	---	2,875,525	4,361,002	5,828,163
KADUNA	4,099,000	3,935,618	6,113,503	8,252,366
KANO	5,775,000	5,810,470	9,401,288	13,076,892
KATSINA	---	3,753,133	5,801,584	7,831,319
KEBBI	---	2,068,490	3,256,541	4,440,050
KOGI	---	2,147,756	3,314,043	4,473,490
KWARA	1,715,000	1,548,412	2,365,353	3,192,893
LAGOS	1,144,000	5,725,116	9,113,605	12,550,598
NASSARAWA	----	---	1,869,377	2,523,395
NIGER	1,194,000	2,421,581	3,954,772	5,556,247
OGUN	1,551,000	2,333,726	3,751,140	5,217,716

ONDO	2,720,000	3,785,338	3,460,877	4,671,695
OSUN	---	2,158,143	3,416,959	4,705,589
OYO	5,208,000	3,452,720	5,580,894	7,840,864
PLATEAU	2,028,000	3,312,412	3,206,531	4,200,442
RIVERS	1,719,000	4,309,557	5,198,716	7,303,924
SOKOTO	4,539,000	4,470,176	3,702,676	4,998,090
TARABA	---	1,512,163	2,294,800	3,066,834
YOBE	---	684,958	2,321,339	3,294,137
ZAMFARA	---	---	3,256,846	4,515,427
F.C.T	---		1,406,239	3,564,126

Source: Compiled from Sunday, A.P, Jibo, A, and Yohanna, L. (2024). A meta-analysis of Nigeria's population census results falsification and its implications. *Wukari International Studies Journal* 8 (3), July; <https://nationalpopulation.gov.ng/census-enumeration>

Bamgbose (2009) argue that there is in existence irrefutable evidence spanning over years substantiating the fact that census activities in Nigeria have often been marred by deliberate misinformation, with the goal of securing advantages from the government by regions, zones or states. Though the 1963 spearheaded post-colonial and post-independence census in Nigeria, yet its outcomes have been argued at different platforms as failing to reflect the true state of facts and attain a level of public acceptance. The 1963, 1991, 2006, and 2016 census figures have been argued to reflect inflation of figures which are incongruent with census data, with intra-regional inconsistencies, highlighting elements of falsification of information gathered during the processes. In most cases there were allegations of under-counting and over-counting, and even of manipulation of figures, with the torrent of complaints and rejections that followed the figures, especially during the 1991 census and others that followed. Weeks (2008), argue that the 2006 census exercise cannot be described as successful considering complaints from different quarters of manipulations and even from enumerators about shortage of vital census materials.

The Implications of the Politicisation of Population Census Figures for National Integration

An integrated country is one where the harmonisation of economies, politics and cultures has been achieved. It is a situation where a given state or society has attained a single all-pervasive transformation in economic, political and cultural matters (Falola and Heaton, 2008). For many countries, national integration has remained a major challenge, and Nigeria has not been an exception.

Whereas the country's political leaders collaborated in the anti-colonial struggles of the 1920s up to the 1940s, the promulgation of the Richards and Macpherson constitutions of

1946 and 1951, divided Nigeria into regions and factionalized Nigeria's nationalistic outlook. The 1952/3 census and even its predecessors, further exacerbated suspicion and antagonism between political leaders from the North and those from the South. While the North has been consistently and persistently favoured by every census figure since the colonial era, the South has always expressed indignation at what it justifiably regards as a deliberate plan to ensure the continued dominance of the North in national politics. That is why it has been observed that population census exercises in Nigeria have been politicized and transformed into a complex form of rivalry and competition between the North and the South (Amor, 2016).

One of the reasons for embarking on census enumeration is to obtain data necessary for planning the country's economic growth and development. In addition and as already noted, it shows the distribution of the population based on age, sex, level of education, and so on. Most importantly, for Nigeria, it is used to allocate seats in the National Assembly (House of Senate and House of Representatives) and for the determination of eligibility of voters (Ota, 2019). In essence, there is a relationship between population figures and political appointments, as well as resource distribution and power-sharing, especially at the federal level. That explains why population figures have always been tainted with political considerations far and above the real economic and social necessities (Suberu, 2004).

An unfortunate outcome of this persistent politicization of census figures is the presentation of the North as having the numbers in terms of population. Hence, the North which has contributed the least to the national treasury has continued to be the major beneficiary. It is a fact that taxation is a veritable instrument for generating money for development. Despite its assumed numerical advantage, the North's financial contribution to the national treasury is low. Yet, the accumulated finances are shared based on population. Thus, the revenue from Value Added Tax (VAT) which is paid on alcoholic drinks, for instance, makes states like Sokoto, Kano, Jigawa and other predominantly Muslim states in the North have more money allocated to them than states in the South where the sale and consumption of alcoholic beverages as well as the hospitality sector (hotels, night clubs, et cetera), generates most of the revenue. A state like Kano has a security outfit known as Hisbah which routinely destroys alcoholic drinks. Yet, Kano benefits from taxes on alcoholic beverages (Shuaibu, 2023).

Furthermore, population and land mass have often been used as criteria for creating states and local government areas. Considering this, the North has more states and local government areas than the South. Out of Nigeria's thirty-six states, the core north has thirteen, while the West (Yoruba) has six, and the East (Igbo) has five. Out of the 774 local government areas in the country, the North has more than half (419). The three North-East states of Kano, Katsina and Jigawa (with 44, 34, and 27 local government areas, respectively), have more local government areas than the five states of the Southeast geo-political zone (Igboland) combined, which has a total of 94 local government areas (Suberu, 2004; Ota, 2019).

As a result of the numerical advantage that the North has continued to enjoy, including having the largest chunk of federal revenue allocated to it, there is, therefore, a crisis of confidence which has persisted among the various ethnic groups. It is, in essence, no longer a question of regional numerical superiority alone, but more intimately, an ethnic sense of marginalization and deprivation. If it is true that the North has more population, why is the primary and secondary school enrolment there still abysmally low? The fear of educational advantage by the South has continued to haunt the North (Pierce, 2006).

This has impacted negatively on national integration in the sense that the North considers itself more powerful politically than the South, yet feels inferior educationally. That is why it

has used its political dominance, especially during the military era, to introduce such principles as “federal character”, “quota system”, “educationally advantaged”, and “educationally-disadvantaged states”, among many other ridiculous policies, to help the North “catch-up” with the South in the areas of education and employment in the federal civil service. This has not helped foster a sense of national unity and integration because one section of the country has been deliberately held down to enable the other to meet up.

The unitary federal system which Nigeria has continued to operate since 1966 and which the North has benefitted most from, has made ethnic nationalities in the South experience a wicked type of internal colonization (Amor, 2016). This is especially the case in the Niger Delta region. As Amor (2016: 48), rightly observed:

...a fact too potent to be disputed is that the deepening grouse of the people of the oil rich Niger Delta has largely gravitated to the growing consciousness that what the Nigerian state and the international monopoly oil companies take from their soil is not commensurate with what they give in terms of provision of social amenities, quality of life and the maintenance of a delicate balance between the human being and the natural environment.

This situation is so because the Northern-dominated military decided to change the derivation principle in revenue allocation from the 50% it was in the 1960s, to less than the 20% it is today. In fact, at the 2005 National Constitutional Conference organized by the Obasanjo administration, delegates from the oil-producing South-South geo-political zone had made a strong case for a reversion to the 50% derivation formula. But the Northern delegates argued that even the 17% derivation allocated to states of the Niger Delta was an “excessive generosity” from them (the North) (Amor, 2016).

Another example of the arrogance of some Northern Nigerian political leaders which is no doubt anchored on their alleged numerical superiority is the reaction of a former governor of Kano state, Musa Kwankwaso, to the demand by the Igbo in 2012 for an additional state to bring them at par with other geo-political zones in the country. According to Kwankwaso, the Igbo have no justifiable reason to ask for an additional state because, according to him, they lack the numerical strength to do so. He cited Kano and Jigawa states in the North as more populous than the whole Igboland (Isiguzo, 2012). It is such an obvious display of ignorance and unbridled arrogance that made a commentator lament thus:

It is unfortunate that rather than proceed to some penitence, those who have held this country hostage for too long, those who are openly associated with this orchestrated process of domination and oppression, are still making provocative statements even in what they term “a democratic dispensation. (Christopher Isiguzo, “Nigeria: Igbo group chides Kwankwaso over stance on state creation.” - THISDAY Newspaper, September 24, 2012).

Table 3: Horizontal Allocation Formula in use as at 2003

PRINCIPLE/FACTOR	ALLOCATION (%)
Equality	40.00
Population	30.00
Internal Revenue Effort	10.00
Landmass and Terrain	10.00
Education	4.00
Health	3.00
Water	3.00
Total	100%

Source: *Onuigbo, R.A and Eme, O.I (2015). State Governors and revenue allocation formula in Nigeria: A case of the Fourth Republic. International Journal of Accounting Research 2 (7), 1-24.*

Table 4: The North's Gains of Census Manipulations

	Former Northern Region	Former Eastern Region	Former Western Region
Census 1952/53	55.4%	23.7%	20.9%
Census 1963	53.5%	22.3%	24.2%
Census 1991	53.4%	21.3%	25.1%
State Creation	54.1%	24.3%	21.6%
Local Govt. Creation	54.1%	22.6%	23.3%
Fed House of Rep.	53%	27.6%	21.9%
Senate Members	53.2%	24.8%	22%
Presidential Electoral Votes 1999	52.5%	24.2%	23.3%
Revenue Allocation to Local Government Areas, January to September 2001	55.3%	21.6%	23.1%

Source: Computed from Tables 2 and 3

Conclusion and Recommendations

The enumeration of people for planning and development purposes in Nigeria started with the British colonization of the area in the 19th century. Coming from aristocratic backgrounds, many colonial officers felt at home with the feudal Emirs of the North. Okonjo (1974) argued that the British preference for the Northern way of life cannot be compared with what was obtainable in Southern Nigeria. Thus, the politicization of census figures was initiated and sustained by the British colonial regime. The Northern Nigerian political and military elite has held on to this British-inspired advantage to ensure that every census exercise allocates more numbers to that part of Nigeria. This has enabled the North to dominate the national legislative houses, producing most of the Heads-of-State of Nigeria for thirty-nine years out of the country's fifty-six years as a sovereign nation.

The lop-sidedness in the political structure has impacted negatively on national integration as well as national planning. The derivation principle determined the allocation of federal-controlled resources up to 1966. But since the end of the Nigeria-Biafra war, that is, between 1970 and date, the principle of need, anchored as it were on population and equality of states, has become the major criterion for revenue allocation. Today, the politicization of census figures has led to cries of marginalization by some ethnic groups and regions. The Igbo are the worst hit among the three major ethnic groups. They have fewer states and local government areas and have been marginalized because fewer population figures have always been allocated to them, especially since 1963.

The Niger Delta states where the bulk of Nigeria's wealth comes from via crude oil exploration, exploitation and sales, have equally been short changed in the allocation of revenue vis-à-vis the Northern states. It was against this background that militancy began in the area as a way of expressing the indigenous people's opposition to the Federal Government's policy of robbing Peter to pay Paul. The drums of war are also beating loud in the Southeast, where the youth have experienced and witnessed the pangs of poignant injustice in the allocation of federal resources and appointments in their states vis-à-vis the North.

The way forward is for Nigeria's political class to understand the essence of population censuses. In particular, the Northern political leadership has to shed its arrogant disposition towards other Nigerians and realize that national integration needs the cooperation of all segments of the Nigerian population. Most importantly, there is a compelling need to review the 1999 constitution to incorporate some of the recommendations of the 2014 National Conference Report, especially as they relate to the vexatious "National Question". Finally, honesty on issues relating to the country's population figures should not be based on political considerations and advantages. A post-enumeration survey (PES) should be conducted independently to assess the validity of the authenticity of the census result, thereby ensuring an objective exercise. In 2013, for instance, a former chairman of the National Population Commission, Festus Odimegwu, was relieved of his duties by then President Goodluck Jonathan for saying an obvious truth, namely, that there has never been a credible population census in Nigeria (Agande, 2014). The truth remains that population census figures are meant to provide the structure of the population in terms of meeting the citizens' food needs, health needs, employment, human development, and infrastructure, especially housing, among others. Therefore, manipulating census figures for political gains vitiates what ordinarily should be a guide for national integration and development.

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