

Nigeria's 2006 Population Census: Issues and Implications

Fashagba Irewolede (Ph.D.)¹ and Ishiaq Yusuf²

¹Department of Environmental Management
Federal University Lokoja, Kogi State

²Department of Environmental Science and Management Technology,
Kwara State Polytechnic, Ilorin Kwara State

Abstract

Population census is the main source of social, economic and spatial data. It is usually undertaken decennially. However, census is not only irregularly conducted but also being manipulated whenever the exercise is undertaken in Nigeria. This study assesses the 2006 population census data. The specific objectives are to i. highlight the historical perspective population census in Nigeria; ii. identify issues in the population figures reported by NPC in the 2006 census; iii. highlight the implication of population distribution on socio-economic development. The study employed population census data and analysed them using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Population of people in the last 5 years preceding years ending with "0" were summed up and compared with those years ending with "0". The findings reveal that more than half of the children from Kebbi, Zamfara, Katsina and Gombe states are below age 15. Borno State with 49.1% being children population, majority are illiterate. Furthermore, Yobe, Borno, Kebbi and Jigawa states where majority of the adults and aged appeared in ages ending with "0", the literacy rates are 25.3%, 27.4%, 36.5% and 38.7% respectively. The figures that are obviously low can of course affect census outcome when embarked upon. The relatively large children population seemed to affect school enrolment. The paper therefore recommends that reliable census should be undertaken regularly. Literacy rate should be improved upon.

Key words: Census, Administration, Demographic Data, Literacy and Development

Introduction

Census is the primary source of demographic, social and economic characteristics of the people. According to United Nations (1967 cited in NPC, 1990; Bhende & Karitkar, 2003; Fashagba & Olorunfemi, 2021), census encompasses the process of collecting, compiling, valuating, analysing, publishing and disseminating demographic, economic, social and housing data, pertaining, at a specific time, of all the persons in a country or in a well delimited part of a country. Enumeration is recommended by the United Nations (1969) to be undertaken decennially. Thus, it is the best source of obtaining reliable demographic data for developmental planning (PARP, 2007, 2009). As a matter of fact, social, economic, political and spatial planning in most developed and developing countries depend on the demographic data to achieve their desired goals (Fashagba, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2018, 2021; Olorunfemi, 2005; Olorunfemi and Fashagba, 2021).

Emanating from the importance of the demographic data, Nigeria has undertaken a number of head counts. The first enumeration in Nigeria took place in Lagos area around 1866 (Olusanya, 1989; Olorunfemi & Fashagba, 2014), while the second and third censuses occurred in 1891 and 1896 respectively (Ekanem, 1972; Fashagba, 2015, 2024). Population census administration became decennial from 1901 and subsequent censuses were taken in 1911, 1921 and 1931. Unfortunately, the enumerations could not cover the whole country (Ekanem, 1972). Counting was undertaken in some settlements, while estimates were made for others (Ogunlesi, 1968; Ekanem, 1972; Population Association of Nigeria, 1990). When census administration became total- covering the whole country, the exercise became infrequent (Olorunfemi & Fashagba, 2018a) and most often, the results were manipulated (Bamgbose, 2009; Olorunfemi & Fashagba,

2021). Usually, the censuses were faced with diverse challenges (Kunnuji 2012 & Odimegwu, 2013). Beside these challenges mentioned, data collected from one census were often out of date before the next head count. For instance, the last census undertaken is almost 20years ago. Past efforts of the previous government headed by Mohammadu Buhari to conduct between another head count 2019 and 2023 apparently failed. There is the feasibility that the demographic data quality affecting various developmental planning. Thus, this paper examines the Nigeria 2006 population census administration. The objectives are to unveil issues in the population figures reported by NPC in 2006 census; and reveal the implications of the 2006 population census administration on the overall development in Nigeria.

Historical perspective of census in Nigeria

The earlier censuses were undertaken towards the end of the 19th century. That is the era before amalgamation of the Southern and Northern protectorates in Nigeria. At the early part of the twentieth century, census administration was decennially conducted till 1931, though those enumeration exercises could not cover the whole country. However, population estimates were made for settlements where census could not take place (Ogunlesi, 1968; Population Association of Nigeria, 1990). In the subsequent era when census began to cover the whole country, headcounts became infrequent. As a matter of fact, Nigeria only had enumerations in 1952/53, 1963, 1991 and 2006. It is important to note that, the earlier head count exercises witnessed cases of under count, while the later ones witnessed multiple counting. Over counting became a major issue when the population figures enumerated from each region became a main factor used in determining the number of representatives in the legislative houses.

The problems facing censuses in Nigeria are diverse (Fashagba et al., 2014; Olorunfemi & Fashagba, 2021); they are complex in the real sense. Several of these had been identified by population scholars and/or demographers (Ekanem, 1972; Olorunfemi 2006; Olorunfemi & Fashagba, 2021). This notwithstanding, the problems tend to emanate from the low educational level of a large number of the people, the negative attitudes of those at the political arena and poor organisation of those conducting censuses as earlier mentioned, among others.

The focus of this paper is to examine the quality of the last Nigeria census undertaken in 2006. The 20years old population distribution by states is as presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Nigerian states and their total population

S/No	Name of State	Population
01	Abia	2,845,380
02	Adamawa	3,174,950
03	Akwa Ibom	3,902,051
04	Anambra	4,177,828
05	Bauchi	4,653,066
06	Bayelsa	1,704,515
07	Benue	4,253,641
08	Borno	4,171,104
09	C/River	2,892,988

10	Delta	4,112,445
11	Ebonyi	2,176,947
12	Edo	3,233,366
13	Ekiti	2,398,957
14	Enugu	3,267,837
15	Gombe	2,365,040
16	Imo	3,927,563
17	Jigawa	4,361,002
18	Kaduna	6,113,503
19	Kano	9,401,288
20	Katsina	5,801,584
21	Kebbi	3,256,541
22	Kogi	3,314,043
23	Kwara	2,365,353
24	Lagos	9,113,605
25	Nassarawa	1,869,377
26	Niger	3,954,772
27	Ogun	3,751,140
28	Ondo	3,460,877
29	Osun	3,416,959
30	Oyo	5,580,894
31	Plateau	3,206,531
32	Rivers	5,198,716
33	Sokoto	3,702,676
34	Taraba	2,294,800
35	Yobe	2,321,339
36	Zamfara	3,278,873
37	FCT, Abuja	1,406,239

Source: NBS 2006, adapted from NPC 2010

The census results above have often attracted the attention of demographers, population study specialists and other population data users. The figures are often questioned, with claims that they do not reflect the true population of some states. The quality of the figures released from the enumeration has been an issue of

contention, with arguments that the population figures have discrepancies (Bamgbose, 2009). According to Odimegwu (2013), there appears to be errors in the collection or computation of the census data whereas Fashagba, Akinnubi & Olaoye (2025) opined that some figures released for people in ages 30, 40, 50 and 60 for most states are unrealistic.

Issues in population figures reported in NPC 2006 census

Nature of Figures Reported in the 2006 Census: The figures reported for various ages in all the 36 States and Abuja would appear to be inaccurate. The years ending with “0 and 5” obviously contain more people than other years. This is more apparent from age 40 upward. The age distribution of people from age 50 to 70 is as presented in Table 2. In most states, those counted in ages ending with “0 and 5” far exceed the sum of the four years preceding them. For instance, when compared with the total population of people from age 56-59 to those in age 60 alone, the latter far exceeds the former in states such as Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Jigawa, Kano, Katsina, Niger and Sokoto. According to the table, Kano State has 128,842 people for age 60, while the sum of all those in age group of 56-59 are just 32,457. Similarly, Kebbi State enumerated a total of 77,942 people for age 60 when all those enumerated from age group 56 to 69 are only 19,933.

Actually, the record of NPC 2006 census indicates that Jigawa, Yobe and Zamfara states have more people in age 60 than the sum of the people in ages 51-59. Specifically, more than 83% of those reported for 56 to 60 in Zamfara State are in age 60. Not only that, out of the total population of people in age group 56-60 in Jigawa, Yobe, Sokoto, Kebbi and Kano, 82.1%, 80.9%, 80.5%, 80.4% and 80.0% respectively are within the age of 60. Summarily, the figures reported for people aged 56-59 in the five states are less than 20% of people in age 56-60. However, the results reported for Delta, Edo and Lagos States are different. The total percentage of people in age group 56-59 is slightly higher when compared to those reported for the five States.

Further, the total figures reported for people age 70 alone in all the states of the federation are more than the sum of the people in age group 66-69 except in Gombe State. When considering three consecutive ages of 59, 60 and 61 reported in the head count, one may discover that there is no feasibility of having such births in the distribution. As can be seen in Table 2, Katsina State has 3,027 people in age 59, 77,942 in age 60 and 2,980 people in age 61. This is the situation in most states. As a matter of fact, the figures reported for ages of 59, 60 and 61 in Jigawa State are 2,114, 69,109 and 2,610, respectively. In Kebbi State, the age distribution is the same. The number of people reported for age 59, 60 and 61 are 1,403, 47,653 and 1,469 respectively. This distribution is obviously doubtful. It is apparently impossible to have the age distribution reported in those states. It is not possible for 1000 or 2000 people to be born in a year and in the year following the births rose to over 50,000; and in a subsequent year, the birth returned to a 1000 when there had not been any major epidemic outbreak.

The age distribution therefore suggests that there are errors somewhere. First, it is possible that the census figures had been manipulated or some of the people born in the years preceding years that end with ‘0’ especially 50, 60 and 70 had been counted among those born in years ending with “0”. Perhaps, some of the illiterates had been counted into years ending with “0” in states where the literacy rate is low. If it is held onto the fact that majority of the people are illiterates, the issue of literacy may be established to be a serious factor. Of course, the effects of this will be discussed later using data presented in Table 3 and 4.

Table 2: States in Nigeria and their age distributions from 56years - 70years

S/No	State	56-59	60	% diff.	66-69	70years	% Diff.
		A1	A2	Betw A&B	B1	B2	betwA&B
01	Abia	35,205	40,621	53.6	16,779	23,649	58.5

02	Adamawa	16,259	38,353*	70.2	11,363	26,602	70.2
03	Ak/ Ibom	40,991	59,107	59.1	19,830	26,762	57.4
04	Anambra	51,639	55,854	51.9	25,047	29,953	54.5
05	Bauchi	19,748	57,151*	72.6	9,847	33,969	77.5
06	Bayelsa	18748	20,551	52.3	8,922	10,379	53.8
07	Benue	26,953	55,340	67.3	12,207	30,369	71.3
08	Borno	20,096	60,750*	75.1	9,156	33,870	78.7
09	C/River	25,229	40,068	61.4	12,663	18,738	59.7
10	Delta	53,924*	46,583	46.4norm	24,711	26,924	52.1
11	Ebonyi	20,123	31,448	60.9	9,619	15,133	61.1
12	Edo	44,004	35,280	44.5norm	18,886	21,373	53.1
13	Ekiti	24,620	35,537	59.1	11,296	17,781	61.1
14	Enugu	42,109	53,527	55.9	20,524	29,720	59.1
15	Gombe	12,440	25,193	66.9	15,112	6,470	30.0
16	Imo	47,292	59,269	55.6	23,764	33,487	58.5
17	Jigawa	15,049	69,109*	82.1	6,377	44,171	87.4
18	Kaduna	37,532	62,018	62.3	15,572	38,412	71.2
19	Kano	32,457	128,842*	79.9	15,193	82,307	84.4
20	Katsina	19,933	77,942*	79.6	9,804	45,769	82.4
21	Kebbi	11,653	47,653	80.4	5,927	26,479	81.7
22	Kogi	21,644	38,954	64.3	10,410	19,097	64.7
23	Kwara	17,285	30,234	63.6	7,681	16,093	68.0
24	Lagos	109,990	59,632	35.1nor,	41,380	27,002	39.5
25	Nassarawa	11,233	18,277	61.9	5,475	10,932	66.6
26	Niger	18,794	42,958*	69.6	8,928	24,579	74.0
27	Ogun	40,158	45,297	53.0	19,698	26,258	57.1
28	Ondo	33,733	50,293	59.9	15,697	26,104	62.5
29	Osun	32,877	52,568	61.5	14,244	27,039	65.5
30	Oyo	56,467	78,778	58.3	41,805	25,343	37.7
31	Plateau	23,568	33,311	58.6	11,189	22,647	65.7

32	Rivers	56,033	64,118	53.4	26,412	29,208	52.5
33	Sokoto	14,111	58,300*	80.5	7,017	32,196	82.1
34	Taraba	13,615	25,332	65.0	6,415	14,545	69.4
35	Yobe	8,378	35,468*	80.9	3,971	21,304	84.3
36	Zamfara	10,196	50,025*	83.1	5,058	28,536	84.9
37	FCT, Abuja	12,485	7,264	36.8norm	2,769	3,864	58.3

Source: Author's compilation, 2024, from NPC 2010

Implications of the population data documented for development planning

Most of the times people concentrate on quantity of the population. The structure of any population is actually the most important. Knowing the age or sex structure can be of great help for all development planning. This structure in Nigeria comprises more children when compared to the developed countries. The size of underage population usually affects poverty and literacy rates. Thus, adequate information about age and sex population structure would of course go a long way in impacting the overall developmental planning. In this section, the distribution of underage population, poverty and illiteracy by states in Nigeria is examined.

Underage Population and Poverty

Children population is often substantial according to past Nigerian censuses. This large number of children population in Nigeria should be of utmost concern. Without any doubt, it usually impacts the economy. Table 3 shows the distribution for the population below 15 years. According to the table, more than half of the population for ¼ of the 63 states including Abuja is children below age 15. Specifically, children population for Kebbi State is 51.9%, Zamfara 51.6% and Katsina. In Gombe, the population is 51.1%, Kano 51.1%, Sokoto 51.1%, Bauchi 50.8%, Niger 50.0% and Yobe 49.9% (Table 3). This type of age composition often affects the living standard of the people. According to Olorunfemi and Fashagba (2017) most of the children are dependants and are economically unproductive. In the mean, they require some essential economic needs for their development. In most developing countries including Nigeria, these needs are usually difficult to meet.

Poverty tends to be more pronounced in states where majority of the population are children. States with higher number of children population apparently have more people living in poverty (Table 3). As revealed in the table, Kebbi State which accounted for the largest children population (52%) also has the second largest population (89.7%) living in poverty. Furthermore, Zamfara and Katsina states with the second and third largest children population also account for 80.9% and 71.1% people living in poverty. Surprisingly, Jigawa State with only 35.9% children population accounts for as high as 95.1 people living in poverty. This notwithstanding, in Yobe State where 49.9% of the population are children, as high as 83.3% of the population are poor.

Table 3: State name, population age 15 and below, poverty rate in Nigeria

S/No	State	0-15years	% (Pop Under 15)	% (Poverty)
01	Abia	1,086,595	38.2	22.3
02	Adamawa	1,503,362	47.3	71.7
03	Akwa Ibom	1,570,672	40.3	34.8

04	Anambra	1,594,673	38.2	20.1
05	Bauchi	2,367,054	50.8	86.3*
06	Bayelsa	694,567	40.8	20.0
07	Benue	2,071,014	48.7	55.6
08	Borno	2,048,731	49.1	53.6
09	C/River	899,947	31.1	41.6
10	Delta	1,649,714	40.1	45.4
11	Ebonyi	962,557	30.3	NA
12	Edo	1,261,562	39.0	33.1
13	Ekiti	961,437	40.1	42.3
14	Enugu	1,252,380	38.3	31.1
15	Gombe	1,187,703	50.1	77.0*
16	Imo	1,154,703	29.4	27.4
17	Jigawa	2,196,296	35.9	95.1*
18	Kaduna	2,992,317	48.9	50.1
19	Kano	4,709,153	50.1	61.3
20	Katsina	2,990,565	51.5	71.1*
21	Kebbi	1,691,794	51.9	89.7*
22	Kogi	1,601,035	48.3	58.6
23	Kwara	1,101,388	46.6	85.2*
24	Lagos	3,136,921	34.4	63.6
25	Nassarawa	856,004	45.7	61.3
26	Niger	1,977,304	50.0	61.6
27	Ogun	1,516,626	40.4	31.7
28	Ondo	1,415,657	40.9	42.3
29	Osun	1,365,804	39.5	27.0
30	Oyo	2,263,567	40.6	24.1
31	Plateau	1,502,248	46.8	60.4
32	Rivers	2,015,602	38.8	29.1
33	Sokoto	1,893,703	51.1	76.8*

34	Taraba	1,109,684	48.4	62.2
35	Yobe	1,157,554	49.9	83.3*
36	Zamfara	1,691,290	51.6	80.9*
37	FCT, Abuja	566,259	40.2	54.4

Source: Author's compilation, 2024. States with high poverty rates are asterisked "*" "NA" denotes figure Not Available. Poverty data were adapted from NBS,2024

Furthermore, states where children population is low, poverty rate is also low. Osun, Ogun, Oyo and Ondo that have 39.5%, 40.4%, 40.6% and 40.9% of their populations being children, only about 27%, 31.7%, 24.1% and 42.3% respectively are poor. In Abia and Anambra states where the percentage of children population is 38.2, only about 22.3% and 20.1% live in poverty. Not only that, in Imo and Enugu states where 29.4% and 38.3% are children, only 27.4% and 31.1%, respectively live in poverty. This shows the strong relationship between large children population and poverty in any state. Thus, efforts must be made to address high fertility rate in Nigeria since a reduction in the family size could bring down the high poverty rate.

Population under age 15 and literacy rate

The age composition in Nigeria at the time seems to affect the literacy rate. States with high percentage of population age 15 and below also accounts for low literacy rate (Table 4). The two tend to have inverse relationship. Thus, Yobe State with 49.9% of people age 15 and below accounts for 25.3% literacy rate. Apparently, majority of those in the state are illiterates. Only a limited number of them are in working population. Borno State with 49.1% of children population accounts for a very low literacy rate of 27.4%. Further, Katsina and Niger states, with 51.5% and 50.0% of people age 15 at most, account for low literacy rates of 36.5% each. Evidently, a large number of the children, within the period under review, are not in school in Nigeria. This is perhaps the reason for the low literacy rate. On the contrary, states with high literacy rate account for low number of underage population (Table 4).

Table 4: States, population age 15 and below and literacy rate

S/No	State	0-15years	% (Pop Under 15)	% (Literacy Rate)
01	Abia	1,086,595	38.2	79.2
02	Adamawa	1,503,362	47.3	56.1
03	Akwa Ibom	1,570,672	40.3	67.0
04	Anambra	1,594,673	38.2	77.8
05	Bauchi	2,367,054	50.8	39.5*
06	Bayelsa	694,567	40.8	64.3
07	Benue	2,071,014	48.7	67.0
08	Borno	2,048,731	49.1	27.4
09	C/River	899,947	31.1	75.5
10	Delta	1,649,714	40.1	72.9
11	Ebonyi	962,557	30.3	57.7

12	Edo	1,261,562	39.0	70.3
13	Ekiti	961,437	40.1	75.6
14	Enugu	1,252,380	38.3	75.6
15	Gombe	1,187,703	50.1	54.3
16	Imo	1,154,703	29.4	75.4
17	Jigawa	2,196,296	35.9	38.7*
18	Kaduna	2,992,317	48.9	66.4
19	Kano	4,709,153	50.1	57.5
20	Katsina	2,990,565	51.5	36.5*
21	Kebbi	1,691,794	51.9	51.1
22	Kogi	1,601,035	48.3	64.5
23	Kwara	1,101,388	46.6	55.6
24	Lagos	3,136,921	34.4	89.9
25	Nassarawa	856,004	45.7	53.7
26	Niger	1,977,304	50.0	36.5*
27	Ogun	1,516,626	40.4	69.6
28	Ondo	1,415,657	40.9	76.6
29	Osun	1,365,804	39.5	74.8
30	Oyo	2,263,567	40.6	73.3
31	Plateau	1,502,248	46.8	61.6
32	Rivers	2,015,602	38.8	70.3
33	Sokoto	1,893,703	51.1	70.3
34	Taraba	1,109,684	48.4	55.7
35	Yobe	1,157,554	49.9	25.3*
36	Zamfara	1,691,290	51.6	53.4
37	FCT, Abuja	566,259	40.2	79.0

Source: Author's Compilation, 2024. States with low literacy rates are asterisked (*)

Cross River State which has 75.5% literacy rate accounts for 31.1% of people age 15 and below. Similarly, in Abia, Anambra, Enugu and Ekiti states where 79.2%, 77.8%, 75.6% and 75.6% are literates only 38.2%, 38.2%, 38.3% and 40.1% of populations are below age 16. The situation is not different in Lagos State where the literacy rate is 89.9%, the percentage of underage population is only 34.4%.

Another implication of the poor literacy rate is that, in states where the literacy rate is low, most of the adults and aged population tend to appear in years ending with “0 or 5”. According to Table 4, Yobe, Borno, Kebbi, Jigawa and Bauchi states where the literacy rates were 25.3%, 27.4%, 36.5%, 38.7% 39.5%, majority of the adults and aged seem to appear in years ending with “0”. Apparently, most of the illiterates born within certain decades would appear to have been reported in years ending with “0”. This appears to be the reason why majority of the people in those states appeared in ages 50, 60 and 70. This may by extension be responsible for the sudden increase witnessed in population aging in Nigeria in the last few years.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the Nigerian 2006 population census administration. As an essential source of population data, census usually provides information of demographic, social, economic and spatial characteristics for development. Unfortunately, the exercise is often faced with several challenges in Nigeria.

Apart from other challenges, majority of the people from age 40 upward in the 2006 census were counted in ages ending with “0 and 5”. Obviously, people in the two age groups far exceed the sum of the four preceding years. Indeed, the total number of people enumerated from age 56 to 59 is lower when compared to those in age 60 alone in Kano, Katsina, Jigawa, Sokoto, Borno, Bauchi Niger and Adamawa states. About 128,842 people are within age 60 in Kano State, while people in age group 56-59 are only 32,457. There are more people in age 60 alone in Jigawa, Yobe and Zamfara states than those in age group of 51-59.

Furthermore, more than half of the population are children below or age 15; and in Kebbi, Zamfara, Katsina, Gombe, Kano, Sokoto and Bauchi. In these states, majority of the people are children who are economically unproductive, but required enormous capital for training.

Borno with large children population have low literacy rate. Such distribution tends to affect the quality of population data captured via enumeration. Often, majority of the adults and aged appear in ages ending with “0 or 5”. Specifically, Yobe, Borno, Kebbi, Jigawa and Bauchi where illiteracy is low, majority of the adults and aged appear in the age group- large number of people enumerated in age groups of 50, 60 and 70. Thus, this paper recommends that efforts be made to improve on child literacy in Nigeria and population census decennial be made compulsory in Nigeria. This would enhance various developments.

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