

Can the Government See You?

Making the Case for Enhanced National Identification and Civil Registration

A Policy Paper on National Identification, Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems



About BudgIT

BudgIT is a civic organisation that uses creative technology to simplify public information, stimulate a community of active citizens, and enable their right to demand accountability, institutional reforms, efficient service delivery, and an equitable society.

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Abstract

This paper argues that without a unified National Identification (NI) and Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) system, Nigeria cannot govern effectively. With over 49% of Sub-Saharan African children unregistered and fragmented ID systems across federal agencies, millions of Nigerians remain “invisible” to the state. The article emphasises that good governance—especially in budgeting, service delivery, and social protection—depends on credible, routinely updated citizen data. Among other things, it proposes that Local Governments, empowered by new financial autonomy, should lead CRVS efforts, supported by interoperable digital infrastructure, including biometrics, AI, and blockchain. Strengthening identity systems will not only increase policy efficiency but also enhance equity and inclusion in public service delivery. The paper holds that data is not just a technical issue—it is a governance imperative.

Keywords

National Identification, Civil Registration, Public Governance, Data-Driven Policy, Citizen Legibility

Introduction

Today, Nigerian citizens aged 18 years or younger have never experienced a proper census exercise; the last formal census was conducted about 8 years after Nigeria's return to democracy in 1999. The country has had a challenging history with counting its people, as three out of the only five censuses conducted since independence have either resulted in cancellation, contestation or outright rejection of the results.¹ Fortunately, the last two counting exercises were done with little to no issue. The need to know how many Nigerian citizens exist will remain important for the governments at all levels. This 'needed information' is not limited to the *number* of persons (or their identity) but also required on their birth, marital status and demise. This significance can be drawn from the theory of the Social Contract;² humans saw that the alternative to a violent state of nature was one where a select few were granted legitimate authority over the group. The agreement to relinquish part of individual sovereignty to the few came with the expectation that the few would govern responsibly. It is logical to hold that the responsibility to govern a group of people comes with the duty to know who the group is composed of and what their characteristics are.

The relevance of citizen statistics and information is non-negotiable. Without it, the government would operate on assumptions or guesswork. Public policy implementation is significantly influenced by the quality of day-to-day public governance or administration. This is because the information and data gathered inform the nature, form, and sequence in which policy is implemented, as well as how subsequent policies

are formulated. This paper views public administration as a broad and somewhat contested space where government/state decision-making is evaluated, implemented, and operated. 'Good' public administration (and by extension, good governance) connotes a government that is efficient and effective at making decisions regarding the welfare of people and the management of its resources. Governments need vast amounts of legitimate and high-fidelity information (on their workforce) and the people over whom they superintend. However, it is one thing to know how many Nigerian citizens there are and another thing for the government to know them as *distinct and unique* individuals. While the two notions of knowing the number of citizens and their characteristics are related, they still have their





49%

The urgency to have a rich register of Nigerians is non-trivial. UNICEF estimates that 49% of children in Sub-Saharan Africa are unregistered. In the main and more principally, the ascertaining and verification of Nigerians will ensure that citizens are 'legible' to the government and the state.

distinctions. This paper takes the position that NI is salient for the same reasons that census data is major, but NI goes a step further to verify the identity of the individual and ascertain her full characteristics, in addition to their legal characteristics. Another key claim of this paper is that a robust NI framework will positively impact the census function as well. Where demographic data on citizens is routinely gathered at the Local Government level, it can be better extrapolated for national purposes, thereby dispensing with the need for conducting routine censuses. The urgency to have a rich register of Nigerians is non-trivial. UNICEF estimates that 49% of children in Sub-Saharan Africa are unregistered.³ In the main and more principally, the ascertaining and verification of Nigerians will ensure that citizens are 'legible' to the government and the state.

In general terms, population, birth, marriage, physical characteristics, sex, and death data are essential for establishing the identity and legal status of citizens. Both identity (which consists of biometric, demographic, and other defining characteristics) and legal status are key for the government because public resources are scarce and human wants are insatiable. It is also because the wants are in competition with the wants of numerous other groups, all seeking priority. Additionally, the government has limited time and resources to implement public policy. This means the government must be certain—to a very high degree—how many citizens are within its borders (and the legal citizens in other countries) and what kinds of characteristics those citizens possess. All of this information should be routinely updated in a repository accessible to different levels of government.⁴

Are You Visible or Invisible? Legibility as a Concept and Practice

Legibility speaks to the capacity of the government (or, more specifically, the 'state') to have the knowledge, awareness and information about its citizens.⁵ The government must be able to see citizens and be seen by those citizens. Peters notes that: ***"Not registering citizens ... creates a 'scandal of invisibility' in which people simply do not appear on the cognitive maps of decision makers in the public sector ... and therefore are irrelevant to those decisionmakers ... Unless each set of actors is aware of the other and understands changes in the other, effective management is not likely to occur"*** (emphasis by author).⁶ Both the government and citizens need to know each other. This ensures that the daily operation of public administration and governance is carried out by entities that exist in a very real and physical sense.

The above also addresses the key and related concept of Identity Management, which Ibrahim and Abubakar describe as: ***"The administration of individual identities within a system, such as a company, a network or even a country ... identity management is about establishing and managing the roles and access privileges of individual network users. Identity management systems provide ... managers with tools and technologies for controlling user access to critical information within an organisation"***.⁷ This envisions a situation where the state has firsthand, cross-cutting, regularly updated and secure information on the location, age, occupation, marital status and demographics of its citizens. This is all within a system that enforces the requisite data protection safeguards and standards to the highest degree. Without exaggerating, the government's capacity to ensure the legibility of its citizens is crucial for maintaining law and order, ensuring a robust financial system, administering a comprehensive social benefits system, and planning for the future. The Nigerian government claims to govern a country of over 223.8 million people (NPC, 2023), which means that having wide-ranging data on the identity of citizens (within reasonable limits) is pivotal.



223.8m

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However, the Nigerian government, deliberately or inadvertently, has (since the commissioning of the National Identity Management Commission and its subsequent projects) initiated nearly 10 different identification protocols.⁸

Legibility is paramount for the government, particularly for the following agencies and departments: the Nigeria Immigration Service, the Nigeria Revenue Service, the Federal Road Safety Commission, the National Population Commission (NPopC), the Independent National Electoral Commission, the National Identification Management Commission (NIMC), and the Nigerian Police Force, among others. However, it extends beyond federal agencies; an extensive NI system encompasses information and data from State Statistical Agencies. It is the responsibility of both federal and state governments to maintain a database of citizens and to ensure that this database informs public governance and public policy. This database ought to cover what NIMC refers to as registrable persons. The NIMC Act, (No. 23 of 2007) provides who a registrable person is, as:

“Any person born in Nigeria since the introduction of the NIN (Nigerian Identity Number) is required to be registered within sixty (60) days of his/her birth, or at any time after this period not exceeding one hundred and eighty (180) days, or any other period as the NIMC may specify from time to time by regulation.”⁹

There are several transactions where the NIN is consequential to the life of a citizen, and they range from the sale of land, to SIM card purchase, to access to finance, to passport acquisition, to criminal and civil legal actions.¹⁰ The foregoing is the position of the law on NI, but this says nothing about how the government’s provision of goods and services ought to operate. Armed with the information and data on Nigerians, what should fiscal policy, for instance, look like from the government’s point of view? These are challenging questions for public administration and government more broadly.

A Paean to Identity, Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Data

The data requirements regarding Nigerians, demands more than mere counting; it involves noting those key characteristics and features of individuals that enable the best decisions to be made on their behalf. Planning for the present and the future requires knowledge of the number, characteristics and potential demographic change of people, as it can provide information for the most optimal decisions to be made for future generations. According to reports, 133 million Nigerians are currently living below the multidimensional poverty line,¹¹ meaning the urgency to provide solutions is unmistakable. Therefore, policy decisions at the federal, state and local government levels (and even the global level, such as the Sustainable Development Goals-SDG 16.9, which include a commitment to providing a legal identity for all by 2030) must focus on actions that lift people out of poverty; requiring targeted interventions in public infrastructure, education, health, skills development and credit for businesses. However, regarding decision-making and citizen information, the Nigerian public governance system is: **“Weak, lacking in leadership and frameworks, just as in many other developing countries. The greatest challenge to the registration of vital events is with the non-enforcement of the law and not with the law itself.”**¹² Furthermore, the problems with the country’s identification and general demographic registration system may also be cultural, as in some parts, formally registering the death of a family member is seen as ‘glorifying’ an otherwise unpleasant happening.¹³ Be that as it may, the necessity to improve Nigeria’s identification and demographic management system is critical. Evidence-based policy making¹⁴ will benefit immensely from the use of statistical and other data on citizens. This may have the potential to create a positive feedback loop, where the public service engages more intelligently and sophisticatedly with data, thereby encouraging more comprehensive collection and analysis of data.¹⁵



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The Role of Technology and Its Interface with National Identification and Demographic Information Systems

Our world is constantly changing, and the roles (and impacts) of technology, the internet, and Artificial Intelligence (AI) are growing. While it is clear that the involvement of technology in public administration will differ, based on location and level of development, it is also clear that technology can be used for positive and negative purposes. This positive use, by the state or its citizens, can include instances where the government utilises biometrics to gather information on citizens for targeted social services. Or where civil society organisations use technology and the internet to provide data and information on government activity that spurs citizens to better engage with the democratic process (through holding their representatives and leadership accountable). Negative use can occur when a government manipulates technology and information to favour certain groups over others, or when citizens use technology to exploit government services. Whether positive, negative or neutral, technology is what the users make of it. Ojaide notes that: ***“There is no such thing as a totally secure National identification (NI) system, nor can there be a system that is completely immune to the risk of taking in multiple or false identities. It is known that biometrics can be spoofed and registration data falsely represented. There can be problems at both human and technological levels”***.¹⁶

Be that as it may, the importance of having an NI system for a developing democracy is not debatable. NI systems are platforms, repositories, and interoperable data sets that produce, warehouse, exchange and utilise information on citizens. This information consists of Birth (and by extension sex), Marriage, and Death data (acquired via Civil Registration and Vital Statistics frameworks or CRVS)¹⁷ and the information on personal characteristics (for instance: height, build, blood type), education level, income profile and employment status, among others. These structures are indispensable for proper decision-making and, by extension, good governance. This is because: ***“These systems are an essential source of information for designing and implementing public policies, supplementing the census and other conventional instruments for collecting personal and demographic information ... coupling big data and analytics with civil registration can enable governments to identify social patterns and proactively enhance programs and infrastructure with the aim of better serving rapidly changing populations”*** (emphasis mine).¹⁸

These systems are important for public administration, planning and all-round good governance. Drawing from our Social Contract parable above, governments must devise and implement routine but safe gathering and update of citizens' information, to ensure that decisions are made based on existing citizen realities and characteristics.



Identity and Demographic Data for Improved Budgeting and Public Finance

How can one determine an optimal spending threshold, *vis-à-vis* a population? Bearing in mind fiscal constraints, the macroeconomic environment and political considerations, what kind of spending conclusions can be derived from an assessment of the population and its demographic characteristics? It is the central claim of this paper that the government at all levels must take the complete registration of Nigerians (both NI and CRVS combined) as an urgent duty, as the implications for not doing so have consequences that touch on economic productivity, election management, census administration, crime, security and justice, transportation, social interventions and the legitimacy of the government itself. Peters explains that: ***“Coupling big data and analytics with civil registration can enable governments to identify social patterns and proactively enhance programs and infrastructure with the aim of better serving rapidly changing populations. Using CRVS creatively across sectors of the economy can improve the quality of management and reduce the total cost to the government of collecting information”***.¹⁹ This simply means that alongside identification, there is the need for a level of description (demographic characteristics) of individual citizens that will, in turn, improve public administration and (by extension) government spending.

For instance, inclusive data in the healthcare system would be immensely helpful not only for planning and administration but also for providing information to complementary line ministries, such as Water and Sanitation, Environment, and Finance. But how does that connect to budgeting? Budgeting for any kind of administrative entity requires information on the number (and features) of those within the scope of the entity’s authority and responsibility. While it is impossible to determine the precise health, education and security requirements for every individual, it may be possible to determine these requirements in the aggregate. This aggregate data is not meant to supplement detailed information, but can serve as a reliable proxy for public administration and public service delivery. Regarding spending per person, it is unclear whether there is an optimal amount to be spent; however, there are baselines that countries are advised not to exceed. For instance, the World Health Organisation suggested that countries should spend at least \$60 *per capita* for essential health

services.²⁰ Though this number was based on pre-2015 global context and a host of other variables, it is obvious there ought to be a minimal value that should be spent on a person (i.e., the aggregate amount for pharmaceuticals, medical equipment and Doctors and Nurses, per person, for instance). This value will vary across different levels of government, as they have distinct fields of authority and responsibility. For instance, the federal government is responsible for tertiary institutional health spending, contributory spending on health insurance and primary health care (though shared along certain dimensions). States and Local governments have their spheres of authority. It can be deduced that there is a calculable amount of medical services that an average Nigerian is entitled to, which the federal government should provide. The precise average amount would then depend on whether the person is male or female, their income level, marital status, age, disease history, etc.; all these are data points that are meant to be captured by NI and CRVS systems. The table below provides a snapshot of the budget allocation for health and education by the federal and subnational governments, per capita. Combined, in 2025, the federal government and states are budgeting approximately only 30% of what the WHO suggested as a minimum amount per person in 2010.²¹



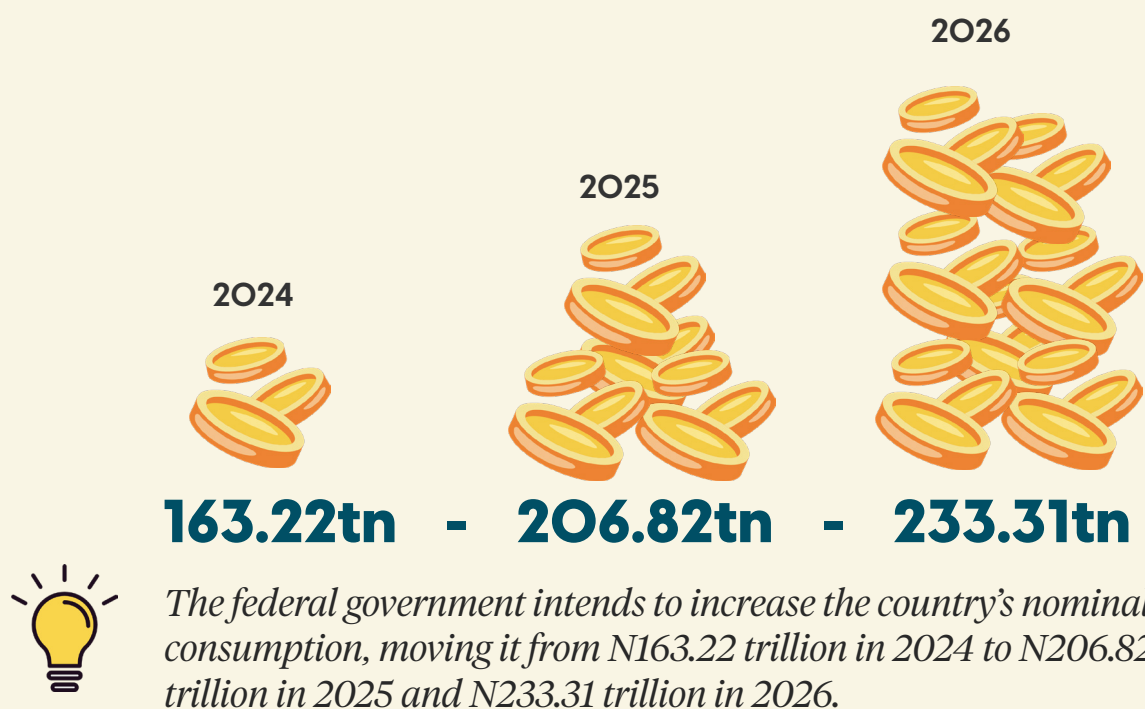
\$60

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Table 1. 2025 Health and Education Budgets at Federal and State Levels.

Item	Total Budget (2025)	Amount Per Capita in NGN	Amount Per Capita in \$
Federal Government (Education)	3,660,000,000,000.00	15,685.06	9.80
Federal Government (Health)	2,860,000,000,000.00	12,256.64	7.66
State Governments (Education)	2,377,565,161,530.16	10,189.14	6.37
State Governments (Health)	3,832,822,805,808.98	16,425.70	10.27
Total Education (States + FG)	6,037,565,161,530.16	25,874.21	16.17
Total Health (States + FG)	6,692,822,805,808.98	28,682.34	17.93

Source: 2025 Appropriation Acts of the Federal and State Governments



The population growth rate can provide evidence on how much the country should spend on certain government goods and services. The government, being the principal entity responsible for ensuring that markets and the overall economy are appropriately and optimally managed, can use the population growth rate to plan for how much its budget should grow or reduce in the future. For emphasis, the government is meant to step in to correct market failures, ensure an equitable distribution of resources and maintain macroeconomic stability.²² The population growth rate, viewed alongside the population age structure, can provide information on how many persons are in their infancy, adolescence, young adulthood and adulthood. This will make available essential information on how much the government should allocate towards interventions and development planning in housing, credit provision, different forms of healthcare, job training and employment, among others.²³ This is because: **“Government spending can spur economic growth ... the increase in government spending will encourage an increase in the demand for various goods and services produced in an economy in the aggregate to encourage economic growth”.**²⁴ However, it

should be noted that: **“The Keynesian model also suggests that excessive and wasteful government expenditure can have negative effects on economic growth, such as crowding out the private sector, inflation, debt, and fiscal deficits”** (emphasis mine).²⁵ The Nigerian federal government is no stranger to large budgets that, at times, do not provide a clear picture of the direction of public policy.²⁶ This is perhaps made worse by the low level of budget credibility²⁷ that arises from a multitude of causes. In addition to the moderating impact of excessiveness and wastefulness, corruption has also been held to have a significant negative effect on government spending, for obvious reasons.²⁸ Be that as it may, it has been empirically tested that the rate of economic growth is sensitive to even minor increases in *per capita* spending.²⁹ At present, it has not been publicly demonstrated how the Nigerian federal government determines the size of its intervention packages and whether they relate to known demographic and vital statistics data. However, the importance of having this data is underscored by the fact that integrated NI and CRVS can create the foundation for better equality in Nigeria. This is because ‘well-off’ individuals (who are more likely to reside in urban or peri-urban areas) are more likely to be



registered and appear on a national registry. On the other hand, those who are excluded from legibility due to poverty, geographic isolation, or gender, for instance, would likely not be included in national registry systems. This means they are effectively ‘locked out’.³⁰ Where the government works towards bringing in greater segments of the population, especially those that are often excluded, this can serve as better data for decision-making and potentially reduce inequality in the provision of critical services.³¹ The social mobility (acquisition of affordable housing, healthcare, education and other consumables)³² that the President intends to provide for Nigerians can be better actualised where this data is gathered efficiently and effectively. The federal government intends to increase the country’s nominal consumption, moving it from N163.22 trillion in 2024 to N206.82 trillion in 2025 and N233.31 trillion in 2026.³³ As such, the Nigerian Consumer Credit system would benefit immensely from the existence of a database of verifiable and known persons. According to the Presidency,

the Consumer Credit program aims to: **“Strengthen Nigeria’s credit reporting systems, ensuring every economically active citizen has a dependable credit score. This score becomes personal equity they build, facilitating access to consumer credit (emphasis mine).”**³⁴ The implication of this charge (vis-à-vis the soon-to-be-initiated Tax Identification Numbering system to be rolled out to all adult Nigerians) means that data collection and coverage of this specific demographic segment is imperative. About the Consumer **Credit project, Veriv Africa also notes that: “CrediCorp will also collaborate with the National Identity Management Commission (NIMC) to link Nigerians with credit scoring systems through financial institutions.”**³⁵ With biometric data available, credit providers can structure their offerings with confidence, knowing they are dealing with identifiable individuals. Unlike the United States, with a credit system that does not use the full demographic information of Americans, the inchoate Nigerian system can guard against the noted discrimination and bias³⁶ of one of the most sophisticated systems in the world.

The above is serious for the development of an efficient tax system and the simultaneous need for an overall just tax system. The nation's tax framework will receive a considerable boost, as the Nigeria Tax Bills have now been signed into law. In particular, the Nigerian Tax Laws aim to reorganise the Personal Income tax system fundamentally. It seeks to do this in 2 major ways. Firstly, it will mandate the allocation of Tax Cards for individuals, replacing the Tax Identification Number (TIN) system, which was previously only required for certain entities and transactions. With the introduction of this Tax Card for Nigerians, the need to verify their identity and economic characteristics is more pressing. Secondly, the laws intend to create tax bands for specific amounts of earned income. Each income band has a specific tax rate applicable to it. Persons who earn N800,000 *per annum* or less will be taxed at a zero rate. But this can only be achieved successfully where the government has an appropriate level of information on Nigerians. This highlights the need for urgency in strengthening a unified citizen database.

An NI system that is integrated between the three tiers of government will provide the foundation for improved governance in numerous ways. Fundamentally, it will aid in better planning, monitoring and evaluation of government policy. For instance, where the total number (or a close approximation) of children of Primary school age within the Local Governments of a State is known, it will aid in the planning, design and implementation of education policy. This would entail education infrastructure classrooms, labs, toilets, etc.) and staffing, provision of textbooks and other learning materials, for instance. Furthermore, the integration and interoperability of data at all levels (federal, state, and local) have the potential to promote equality, increase transparency, control fraud and corruption, enhance policy coordination, and improve policy planning.³⁷

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Conclusion and Recommendations

With the federal government's claim that it intends to spend N294.2 billion on Social Welfare in 2025,³⁸ this paper makes the case that such interventions would be better served with thorough data on citizens. Ojaide notes that NI systems are not foolproof, nor are they perfect. Both the human element and machine element are vulnerable to bias, compromise, fraud, mistakes and malfunctions.³⁹ In fact, da Silva notes that ***"Statistics can always be interpreted in diverse ways, depending on how one presents them, the story one attaches to them or how one frames the discussion around them"***.⁴⁰ However, the benefits of a panoptic system far outweigh the costs. This would require a series of protocols and frameworks that involve AI and Blockchain to eliminate the incidence of bias and compromise. The management of the Nigerian population requires immediate attention, as over half of the population is living in multidimensional poverty, and more than half of the population (59%) is below the age of 35⁴¹. Furthermore, there are numerous vulnerable groups that require special focus regarding nutrition, housing and economic assistance.

A key action required for the integration of identification systems at all levels is to address the weak collaboration and coordination among the core CRVS stakeholders, which has led to inefficiency and duplication of efforts in civil registration, data processing, access to and use of data, and reporting.⁴² It is evident that a new plan needs to be drawn up that builds on lessons and challenges experienced. It has been suggested that solutions to this problem should range from establishing well-defined formal communication practices and smooth coordination and collaboration mechanisms between the vital statistics departments of NPopC agencies⁴³, to organising annual interactive sessions with the National Assembly Committee on Population and CRVS system laws and policies. Nigeria has had a strategic plan for the enhancement of the CRVS system (2019 to 2022). It may be reasonable to assume that the implementation plan was not fully successful, and hence a new plan needs to be drawn up that builds on lessons and challenges experienced.

The newfound financial autonomy of the Local Government can serve as the impetus for Local Governments to take over the administration of collecting vital statistics and other key demographic information. This is because there is no publicly available evidence that the NPopC is capable of managing the collection, collation, and routine updating of citizen information independently. This paper argues that the system through which the NPopC engages with local governments can be strengthened. While it is clear that the Local Government offices of the NPopC are better placed to collect such information due to their proximity and location, their

management should be taken over by the Local Government. This is because it makes little sense for officials in Abuja to be responsible for collecting CRVS data. This presents an opportunity to fully reintroduce the Local Government administration into public policy and public administration, and to provide the local government with the chance to enhance and develop its public administrative capabilities. Such information gathered by local governments can then be fed into the State Statistical information systems and further integrated into the Federal Statistical System.

That Local Governments are en route to having more funding is a reason why they can, from the onset, commit resources to the collection, analysis, operations and capacity building required for in-house officials and analysts. This data, when gathered, has the potential to reliably inform the planning and administration of local governments and serve as a fundamental basis for their interaction with state governments. While it is unclear how many states have functioning Statistical Bureaus (as of 2021, there were 28 well-functioning ones in the federation), the exigent issue is for the Local Government administration to accept its duty to collect vital statistics and carry out that function in collaboration with the states. The NPopC has presence (or oversight) in the Local Government Areas, but this must be strengthened and integrated among national systems (Health, Education, Humanitarian Affairs, Finance, etc.).

Technology will continue to play a significant role in the development of Nigeria's Civil Registration and Vital Statistics gathering system. This means that the appropriate types of investment and infrastructure to support this system must be the prerogative of all levels of government. The use of AI and Blockchain technologies can be adopted to enhance the quality and efficiency in the data collection, storage and analysis process. Mobile technology integration and application can be an additional intervention to improve the process. This also means that data interoperability is key for all stakeholders, particularly for the government. This is crucial, as even the National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) in an August 2019 report acknowledged the government had not achieved integration with other relevant e-government solutions, making it difficult to meet the increasing demand for efficient service delivery from Nigerians. This failure was attributed to the absence of a framework for interoperability between government agencies.⁴⁴ Since then, a framework has been initiated and is in the process of being integrated, but there is still a lot more ground to cover.

In the main, data and evidence must become a more significant and core part of government decision-making. Funding for the collection of data and information on Nigerians also requires prioritisation in order to have identity and CRVS data gathered better and more efficiently. It must be articulated that the costs of investing and spending better on data gathering far outweigh the costs of not using the data. This use of data needs to go beyond platitudes and sloganeering and resemble a deliberate and government-wide reorientation towards the importance of the purpose of data and information on citizens, who are meant to be the focus and centre of government and public administration.



Endnotes

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2. See Lloyd, S. A., and Sreedhar, S. (Fall, 2022). Hobbes's Moral and Political Philosophy. The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (F, Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.). Available at: <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2022/entries/hobbes-moral/>
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4. The World Bank refers to this and similar data as “Development data”. They describe it as: “Administrative data which is the by-product of routine public services delivered by either local or central government (registration of births, marriages, and deaths; issuing drivers’ licenses; registration of land titles; and recording vaccinations); Census and Survey data, which are data collected periodically for the whole population and purposively for a sample; Economic data on prices and interest rates, employment, trade, and national income; Big data, from data sets distinguished by size and the speed of their generation; and Open data, referring to features including open and free availability, access, and reuse”. See the World Bank. (2018). Data for Development: An Evaluation of World Bank Support for Data and Statistical Capacity. An Independent Evaluation, at p. 2. International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/The World Bank 1818 H Street NW Washington, DC 20433. Available at: <https://ieg.worldbankgroup.org/sites/default/files/Data/Evaluation/files/datafordevelopment.pdf>
5. See Lee, M.M., and Zhang, N. (2017). Legibility and the Informational Foundations of State Capacity. In the Journal of Politics, Volume 79, Number 1; January 2017. Available at: <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/suppl/10.1086/688053>
6. See Peters, B.G. Civil Registration and Vital Statistics as a Tool to Improve Public Management, op.cit., at p. 11. Peters gives an example of the Chilean experience that highlights the benefits of being seen by citizens. He explains that: In Chile, for example, making civil registration information publicly available has led to some improvements in the information included in the registration database, especially on children. Citizens have been able to identify mistakes in the information relating to them and their families and to have the errors corrected. These corrections, in turn, appear to be related to improvements in healthcare services provided to newborns.

7. See Ibrahim, I.A., and Abubakar, Y. (2016). The Importance of Identity Management Systems in Developing Countries, at p. 1. International Journal of Innovative Research in Engineering & Management (IJIREM), Volume-3, Issue-1, January-2016. Available at: <https://isaalipantami.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/TheImportanceofIdentityManagementSystem sindevelopingcountries.pdf>
8. See Eke, D., Oloyede, R., Ochang, P., Borokini, F., Adeyeye, M., Sorbarikor, L., Wale-Oshinowo, B., and Akintoye, S. (2022). Nigeria's Digital Identification (ID) Management Program: Ethical, Legal and Socio-Cultural concerns. Journal of Responsible Technology, Volume 11, 2022, 100039. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrt.2022.100039>
9. See s.18 of the National Identity Management Commission Act, No. 23 of 2007—Federal Republic of Nigeria.
10. The transactions are as follows: Application for, and issuance of a passport; Opening of individual and/or personal bank accounts; Purchase of insurance policies; Purchase, transfer, and registration of interest in land (subject to the Land Use Act); Transactions relating to pensions and Health Insurance Schemes; Consumer credit transactions; Payment of taxes; Registration of voters and transactions having social security implications; registration for, and provision and use of hospitality services; Registration and licensing for, and use of health or medical services; Application for the adoption of an infant, child or person (under applicable laws); Purchase and registration of aircrafts, ships, boats, motor vehicles and motorcycles; Registration and use of aviation services by airline operators and customers; Boarding of aircrafts, trains, commercial vehicles, ships and boats; Purchase of travel tickets or tokens for air, rail, road and water transportation; Acquisition, sale or transfer or transmission of shares or equities and other financial instruments; Enrolment into primary, secondary and tertiary schools and continuous professional studies in Nigeria; Registration of companies, sole proprietorships, partnerships and non-profit organisations and other post-incorporation documentation with the Corporate Affairs Commission; and Filing and registration of criminal and civil actions in courts or other arbitration processes. See s.27 of the NIMC Act, 2007 and s.1(1), Mandatory Use of the National Identity Number Regulations, 2017.
11. See World Bank. (April, 2025). Nigeria Poverty and Equity Brief. Washington, D.C. World Bank Group. Available at: <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/099253204222517873>
12. See Ukoji, V.U., Okoronkwo, E., Imo, C.K., and Mbah, C.S. (2019). Civil Registration and Vital Statistics as Sources of SocioDemographic Data for Good Governance in Nigeria, at p. 107. The Nigerian Journal of Sociology and Anthropology. Volume 17, No. 1, June 2019 Pages 102-120. Available at: <https://d-nb.info/1242921206/34>
13. See Ukoji, V.U., Okoronkwo, E., Imo, C.K., and Mbah, C.S. Civil Registration and Vital Statistics as Sources of SocioDemographic Data for Good Governance in Nigeria, op cit at p. 108. On a related note, Atama, Igwe and colleagues explain that: "Low registration of death may be because of the circumstances surrounding death. To illustrate, birth occurs mostly in health facilities where health professionals can influence the registration process; most deaths, however, occur outside health facilities where health workers cannot influence the registration process. Also, people have been known to purposely underreport deaths for social and cultural reasons; and this would limit the willingness to register the death of a relation". See Atama, C., Igwe, I., Odii, A., Igbo, E., Ezumah, N., Okeke, V., Okonkwo, U., and Ugwu, C. (2021). Challenges to vital registration in Nigeria, at p. 5. International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology. Vol 13(1), pp. 1-8. Available at: <https://academicjournals.org/journal/IJSA/article-full-text-pdf/620DBFE66221>

14. Scott describes this as: “[W]herever possible, public policy decisions should be reached after an open debate which is informed by careful and rigorous analysis using sound and transparent data. More specifically, it may be defined as the use of statistics to: Achieve issue recognition; Inform programme design and policy choice; Forecast the future; Monitor policy implementation; and Evaluate policy impact”. See Scott, C. (2005). *Measuring Up to the Measurement Problem: The role of statistics in evidence-based policy-making*, at p. 11. Paris, 21. London School of Economics. Available at: <https://paris21.org/sites/default/files/MUMPS-full.pdf>

15. This potential is extremely tentative and with serious reservations. It does not logically follow that simply because better data is provided to decision makers, they will engage with it better and demand better. Decision makers in Nigeria will always have a wide range of reasons, motivations and incentives to use or not to use data. Moreover, it is possible for justifiable and reasonable decisions even in the absence of comprehensive statistical data. However, if better data is available, it should be used to inform that process. This is more of a normative argument, and what is required is a practical statement. It is the position of this paper that politicians need to see the importance of comprehensive data usage from their constituents. It is the latter that decides whether politicians return to their positions or not, so the constituents wield significant power to determine the policy making agenda of the politicians. However, this creates a deeper challenge: are constituents knowledgeable enough to see the significance of high quality statistical data for decision making? One could argue that voter education could positively impact voter decision making and citizen/politician engagement. But the further question would be: who would carry out voter education? The media, Civil Society Organisations, Schools (via civic education) or Local Governments? The need for the use of statistical data is paramount but there is a wider and more uncertain political and intellectual environment where this significance is constantly negotiated, revealed and critiqued.

16. See Ojaide, C.L. (2010). *Information Flow In A Restructured Nigeria National Identification System: Election and Census Fraud Solution*. Being a thesis is presented as part of the Degree of Master of Science in Electrical Engineering. Blekinge Institute of Technology School of Engineering. Available at: <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:831149/FULLTEXT01.pdf>

17. This paper defines Civil Registration as: “The continuous, permanent, compulsory and universal recording of the occurrence and characteristics of vital events pertaining to the population as provided through decree or regulation in accordance with legal requirements of a country. While it views Vital statistics as the collection of statistics on vital events in the lifetime of a person, as well as the description of relevant characteristics related to the events themselves and to the person or persons concerned. CRVS systems involve an established mechanism for the purpose of legally registering and recording data on vital events related to civil status of the population, including births, deaths, causes of death, marriages and divorces, on a continuous basis and as provided by the laws and regulations of the country”. See Ukoji, V.U., Okoronkwo, E., Imo, C.K., and Mbah, C.S. *Civil Registration and Vital Statistics as Sources of SocioDemographic Data for Good Governance in Nigeria*, *op.cit.*

18. See Peters, B.G. (2016). *Civil Registration and Vital Statistics as a Tool to Improve Public Management*, at p. 4. Discussion Paper No. IDB-DP-473. Institutions for the Development Sector. Institutional Capacity of the State Division. Inter-American Development Bank. Available at: <https://publications.iadb.org/publications/english/document/Civil-Registration-and-Vital-Statistics-as-a-Tool-to-Improve-Public-Management.pdf>

19. See Peters, B.G. Civil Registration and Vital Statistics as a Tool to Improve Public Management, *op.cit.* See also Ikubaje, J., and Bel-Aube, N. (2016). Civil Registration, Vital Statistics and Effective Public Sector Governance and Service Delivery in Africa. *Open Journal of Political Science*, 6, 179-185. doi: 10.4236/ojps.2016.62017.

20. See the World Health Organisation (WHO). (2010). Health systems financing: The path to universal coverage, at p. 10. The World Health Report. Executive Summary. Available at: https://iris.who.int/bitstream/handle/10665/70496/WHO_IER_WHR_10.1_eng.pdf. Interestingly, a Chatham House Working Group updated that figure to \$86 (N129,000 naira in 2025) per person, per year. However, “[These] targets have little connection with the size of the economy and are unrealistic for low-income countries. A 5% of GDP target is theoretically possible for all countries ... In Nigeria, it would mean \$105 per capita, per year”. See the Civil Society Engagement Mechanism for UHC2030 (CSEM). (2019). Why 5% of GDP? Why the 2019 UN High-Level Meeting on Universal Health Coverage should encourage all countries to achieve this target, at pp. 4 - 5. Available at: <https://csemonline.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/WHY-5-of-GDP-1.pdf>

21. See the World Health Organisation (WHO). Health systems financing: The path to universal coverage, *op.cit.*

22. See s.16 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 as amended.

23. See Amangwai, J.M. (January, 2016). The Role of Population Data and Vital Statistics in National Planning and Development in Nigeria. *International Journal of Advanced Studies in Economics and Public Sector Management*. Vol. 4, No. 1. Available at: <https://internationalpolicybrief.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/ARTICLE-10-8.pdf>

24. See Ambya, A. (2020). How Government Spending on Public Sector Affect [sic] the Economic Growth?, at p. 220. *JEJAK: Jurnal Ekonomi dan Kebijakan*, 13(1). DOI:<https://doi.org/10.15294/jejak.v13i1.21943>

25. See generally, Daniel, J., Davis, J., Fouad, M., and Van Rijckeghem, C. (2006). Fiscal Adjustment for Stability and Growth. Pamphlet series (International Monetary Fund); No. 55. Available at: <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/pam/pam55/pam55.pdf>

26. In Nigeria, it can be argued that the Executive is better at policy formulation than the other arms of government. This is because the Executive is often compelled by convention to produce a plan for its governance (this could be in the form of a manifesto, a short to medium term plan or an ‘agenda’). These policy statements are generally informed by statistical data, though this tends to be minimal and the datedness of the data is often suspect. In any case, the Legislature (and the Judiciary) however, generally provide no evidence that statistical data is used in arriving at decisions. For the Legislature, this tends to create “*Anywhere-belle-face*” policy making, which envisions a situation where serious public policy decisions are not made with any mind paid to existing statistical data but the whims and caprices of the Legislators. In other words the decisions are informed in the direction one’s stomach (‘belle’ in pidgin English) faces. Scott (more formally), refers to this as ‘arbitrariness’ and ‘anecdote’. See Scott, C. Measuring Up to the Measurement Problem: The role of statistics in evidence based policy-making, at pp. 7 - 8, *op.cit.*

27. See generally, Atiku, S., and Lakin, J. (September, 2019). That's Incredible! The Contours of Budget Credibility in Nigeria. International Budget Partnership & the BudgIT Foundation. Available at: <https://internationalbudget.org/wp-content/uploads/the-contours-of-budget-credibility-in-nigeria-ibp-2019.pdf>
28. See Oyadeyi, O. (2023). Banking innovation, financial inclusion and economic growth in Nigeria. *Journal of Knowledge Economics*. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13132-023-01396-5>. Corruption harms government spending by: “[I]mpeding government and private sector investment spending, as well as reducing the effectiveness of public services; dishonest public servants are likely to allocate funds in a way that allows them to accept and conceal bribes; and by leading to a focus on large, specialized projects such as major weapons systems and civil engineering projects (such as missiles and bridges), as these projects are expensive and their exact market value is difficult to determine”. See Okunlola, O.C., Sani, I.U., Ayetigbo, O.A., and Oyadeyi, O.O. (2024). Effect of government expenditure on real economic growth in ECOWAS: assessing the moderating role of corruption and conflict. *Humanit Soc Sci Commun* 11, 768. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-024-03285-x>
29. Ambya notes that: “T-test statistical One-way proves that the expenditure of education, health, and health spending in the previous year (log-1), spending on infrastructure and labor have a positive and significant effect on economic growth at $\alpha = 5\%$ ”. See Ambya, A. How Government Spending on Public Sector Affect [sic] the Economic Growth?, at p. 225, *op.cit.*
30. See Peters, B.G. Civil Registration and Vital Statistics as a Tool to Improve Public Management, at p. 10, *op.cit.*
31. *Ibid.*
32. See Ngelale, A. (July 3 2024). “President Tinubu Appoints Board of Nigerian Consumer Credit Corporation (CREDICORP)”. Press Releases. State House. President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Available at: <https://statehouse.gov.ng/news/president-tinubu-appoints-board-of-nigerian-consumer-credit-corporation-credicorp/>
33. See the Budget Office of the Federation. (2024). 2025 - 2027 Medium Term Expenditure Framework and Fiscal Strategy Paper. Ministry of Budget and National Planning. Federal Republic of Nigeria.
34. See Ngelale, A. (April 24 2024). President Tinubu Approves Takeoff of Consumer Credit Scheme. Press Releases. State House. President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Available at: <https://statehouse.gov.ng/news/president-tinubu-approves-takeoff-of-consumer-credit-scheme/>
35. See Agbai, H. (September 20 2024). Consumer Credit Scheme: Potential Gains for Nigerians. By Veriv Africa. Available at: <https://www.verivafrika.com/insights/consumer-credit-scheme-potential-gains-for-nigerians#:~:text=Moreover%2C%20CrediCorp%20aims%20to%20provide,amount%20an%20individual%20can%20borrow.>

36. See Stellar Fi. (2025). Why does this one number dictate so much of your life? By Stand Together. Available at:
<https://standtogether.org/stories/the-economy/why-does-credit-score-matter-and-why-it-shouldnt-define-us>
37. See Peters, B.G. Civil Registration and Vital Statistics as a Tool to Improve Public Management, at p. 9.
38. Note, this is the amount dedicated to Capital spending of all the MDAs within the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Poverty Alleviation, in the 2025 Federal Government budget. See the Budget Office of the Federation. (2026). Appropriation Act of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2025. Federal Republic of Nigeria.
39. See Ojaide, C.L. Information Flow In A Restructured Nigeria National Identification System: Election and Census Fraud Solution, *op cit*.
40. See Da Silva, I.S. (April 3 2022). Why data is vital for policy making and development. In Good Governance Africa. Available at:
<https://gga.org/why-data-is-vital-for-policy-making-and-development/>
41. See the International Fund for Agricultural Development. (n.d). Nigeria. Available at:
<https://www.ifad.org/en/w/countries/nigeria>
42. See the Centre of Excellence for CRVS Systems. (2019). Snapshot of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems of Nigeria. International Development Research Centre. Available at:
<https://idl-bnc-idrc.dspacedirect.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/cd194c14-df64-43fb-aab1-11871ac7907b/content>
43. The agencies are the following: the National Bureau of Statistics, Immigration Services, National Planning Commission, Independent National Electoral Commission, Police, National Health authorities, religious organizations, Civil Society groups, National Identity Management Agency etc. See the Centre of Excellence for CRVS Systems. Snapshot of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems of Nigeria, *op.cit*.
44. See Olufemi, J., and Adebayo, A. (May, 2025). Assessing The Current State of Nigeria's Digital Public Infrastructures, at p. 11. Policy Brief. Dataphyte. Nigeria.

