Colonialism instituted and maintained certain practices of conducting a census, going far beyond just a simple enumeration of a population, to act as tools of authority, resource management, and social manipulation. Kenya is one country of many that has been impacted by this colonial legacy when it was under British rule. British-assigned tribal groups are still used today and have a tangible impact on census results. In the 2009 and 2019 census, for instance, Kenyan authorities' fear of a fast-growing Somali population led to accusations of an intentional undercounting compared with other records of population counts such as voter registration.

Censuses were important for colonial authorities in marking territories, imposing taxation, and enforcing government directives. They were also used to categorize populations along racial, ethnic, or tribal lines, almost exclusively done from the perspective of an occupying power ignorant of local customs and culture.

How Can the Global Census Archive Simplify Research?

The Global Census Archive presents census data and publications using a simple and intuitive interface that makes discovery easy. A researcher who is interested in Kenya can jump straight to the Kenya country landing page, which contains all East View-collected censuses that were conducted by Kenya or the British colonial authorities. Every publication is then organized within its associated census year to further enhance discoverability. This makes it incredibly easy to identify and jump to a single country year landing page to view all materials associated with, for instance, Kenya’s 1962 census, the last to be conducted by the British before Kenya’s independence. Searches can be applied to all Kenya publications or limited to a specific census year.

Also, a researcher can do a broad search of the entire Global Census Archive. By searching “Kenya” across the entire platform, results contained within publications from the British Empire or from adjacent colonies and countries can yield additional insights.

Read on below for more information on GCA’s coverage of Kenya.
Kenya’s Story Told Through Publications

Within the Global Census Archive, the 40 tribes used by the British colonial authorities are readily apparent in tables and text. In the Kenya Population Census, 1962: Tables: Volume II, a table of all 40 tribes is presented. This can be compared directly with a document from the 2009 census, Population and Household Distribution by Socio-Economic Characteristics, where the same tribal groups are often used, but Kenyan authorities now provide far more tribal sub-groups to recognize the true diversity of the country. Maps found within the Kenyan censuses also help tell the story of the country by presenting historical visualization of variables such as fertility rates, population distribution, sex-ratios, and more. The rapid population growth experienced by Kenya has brought the current population to almost 48 million people as of the 2019 census. Areas of population growth can be seen by looking at a population map from 1979 and identifying which regions have seen a notable increase, whether through natural fertility rates or migration.

The Global Census Archive platform provides researchers with a valuable tool to discover important historical documents that help explain the legacy of colonialism on specific countries and how these same countries are forging their own paths as sovereign nations.

Further reading on Kenya’s complex relationship with censuses and colonialism:

- The Myth, Consequences And Benefits Kenya’s 42(+) Tribes

- Population numbers: Somalis race to join big four
  https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/article/2001275101/population-numbers-somalis-race-to-join-big-four

- Somalis rubbish census results, claim higher figures
  https://www.the-star.co.ke/news/2020-02-23-somalis-rubbish-census-results-claim-higher-figures/

- Kenya defends tribal census figures

- Counting groups left behind: a stellar step for inclusion in Kenya

The Global Census Archive® (GCA) is an innovative program to collect official data and publications issued by the national census authorities of more than 175 countries, from the early 19th century to the present day, providing a key resource for scholars and analysts to find current and historical census data to support critical research into our changing world. GCA provides a single platform experience to explore the world’s census publications: all countries and regions, the complete depth of published census materials, including original census publications in e-book form, as well as modern tabular data in Excel format and GIS files for advanced users.