



Research Article

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Treasury Looting and Carting Away of Government Property by State Governors in South Western, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study discussed the factors that are responsible for treasury looting and carting away of government property by state Governors in South western, Nigeria. It also examined the methods and dangers of the menaces. The study used Rational Behaviour Theory as theoretical framework and thirty purposively selected respondents, with five from each of the six states. We purposively picked the sample for in-depth interviews because they had occupied or occupying critical political positions in their states. Secondary data used are books, journals, government official documents and Nigerian dailies. Data were content analysed. The study found that greediness, political bitterness, and not poverty or poor political culture is responsible for the menaces. Contract awards and inflation, travels, and appointments are some methods used while stealing of government assets cripples good governance, results in indebtedness, poverty, mass suffering, and gloomy democracy. The study suggests legislations for hurried appointments, projects, auction of property, and inauguration of assets management and forfeiture commission to combat the menaces.

Keywords: power shift, public, treasury looting, government property, expired administration

1. Introduction

Treasury looting and carting away of government property by some state Governors or their appointees have become political thorns in Nigeria. State governments' lean purses become further empty on daily basis due to looting of the treasuries (Thandiubani, 2024). There is a new perspective to the challenge between some incumbent state Governors and Governors-elect due to allegation of treasury looting and theft of government property. The menace is gradually becoming new antics by which some state Governors crippled their state finances. There are rising concerns against 'expired administration' that engage in actions aimed at looting the treasury at the twilight of their handing over. Many times, "expire administration" under incumbent governors spend state monies in a questionable manner. There are allegations and rebuttals between serving state Governors and Governors-elect on the "merit" of certain expenses after declaration of gubernatorial election results to replace them. Looting of the treasury is common when Governors are about to hand over power to newly elected ones, especially who are not from their political parties (Ukase and Audu, 2015)

Treasury looting aims to weaken the financial strength of the incoming administration (Olu-Adeyemi, 2022). It is a cruel financial blow on the elects, and their political parties. Treasury looting

is a vindictive financial step to deal with an opposition party (Oshey and Ogoh, 2020). It is also a brazen method to amass public wealth, especially when an incumbent state Governor loses his second term bid (Olu-Adeyemi, 2022). Thus, when some Governors complete their term(s) or lose second term to an opposition political party, they steal public funds. According to Sheidu (2022), state Governor rarely loots the treasury when his successor is from his political party. Ridwan (2022) notes that looting of the treasury is a financial practice to cover for electioneering losses by incumbent governor. In addition, Rowland and Akhum (2021) were of the view that politicians make appointments that are not important in order to waste public funds in government accounts. Some governors hurriedly pay accomplice-contractor outrageous bills when they have limited days in office. Such governors transfer huge sums of money to firm accounts that secretly belong to them.

There are controversies as to the period a serving Governor could award contracts. A school of thought believes that award of contracts by a serving state Governor could continue until the last day of his term in office. Another school of thought is of the few that states helmsmen should not award any capital project after declaration of gubernatorial election results to bring a change in state leadership. Those in the last school of thought are of the view that incumbent Governor should be rounding up and faithfully completes all ongoing projects. The few months that remain for an incumbent Governor should be for him to prepare his handover notes and supervise all ongoing projects. However, there are cases of fresh award of roads, blocks of classroom, bridges, and so on, for outgoing Governor's selfish interest. According to Tar (2020), award of contract by 'expired' administration is not always in the interest of members of the public but an attempt to make last-minute theft. Aside of the fact that such contracts do not pass through due process, some state Governors award them in outrageous bills, speedily approve the payment and not monitor them (Ridwan, 2022).

In addition, key appointments of permanent secretaries, directors, expanded local government caretaker committee, heads of local government or creation of new ministries or departments and agencies is also ways of looting the treasury. To pauperise the state, some Governors appoint personnel with huge pay into some or many of the government's service units to siphon public funds as last joker. While some of the state Governors are aware of the implications of the huge pay or making appointments into some or all the sectors, they would not do so until the last minute. In some instances, some Governors owe workers huge salaries and allowances and make incoming Governor to grapple with the financial burden.

In some instances, some Governors or their appointees steal public property such as cars, landed property, stationeries and office equipment, furniture, refrigerators, carpets and cutleries as well as kitchen utensils' from government houses. Some Governors sell government property in auction and use their cronies as accomplices. They perfect the process of auctioneering to ensure that they buy government property at a very ridiculous price. Many times too, they label government property that have minor or no fault for auction to make them theirs. This idea makes the state government to be at loss. In recent times, government officials take property such as furniture, cars, home appliances and cooking utensils as part of their severance benefits. Some government houses have to buy new spoons, forks, plates, beds and mattress when new Governors resumed work because the last administration has taken away old items in government houses (Sheidu, 2022).

In Oyo, Osun, Ogun and Kano States, the new Governors have to issue deadlines to past political office holders before they returned some of the items they allegedly took away. Some newly elected state Governors used security personnel to take back some automobiles from certain former public officials. To show the level of the degeneration of the issue, some newly elected Governors gave executive orders that security officers should seize some state utilities cars, SUVs and Hilux vans from past elected or political appointees at social events, markets, worship centres and their homes because they did not lawfully return them. A number of former political officials claimed they were entitled to some of the government property as severance benefits. Thus, the need to interrogate the subject matter is to have some sanity in governance, especially in the management of public funds and government property during the period of power shift at state levels.

2. Objectives of the Study

This research study intends to achieve the following objectives:

- i. discuss the factors that are responsible for treasury looting and carting away of government property by state governors in South western, Nigeria.
- ii. examine the methods involved in the acts of treasury looting and carting away of government property by state governors in the study area.
- iii. find out the dangers of looting the treasury and carting away of government property by 'expired' administrations in South western, Nigeria.

3. Methodology

This research is a descriptive design and used both primary and secondary data. The study's primary data is from in-depth interviews on thirty purposively selected former and serving critical elected and appointed political officeholders, and civil servants within the South western, Nigeria. The study used five purposively selected interviewees from Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Osun, Ekiti, and Ondo states. We used purposive sampling technique to select the samples because of the political positions they had occupied or occupying and their experience to provide useful information on utility of state funds and property in their states. They also have experience of what of good governance supposes to mean. We involved the top civil servants because they are deeply involved in some instances. We engaged the chairpersons and secretaries of the People's Democratic Party and All Progressive Party being either the ruling party or main opposition party in the sampled states. We focused more on the states' Ministry of Information, Works, and Finance. We interviewed one critical stakeholder from the above named ministries on the subject matter. In all, we interviewed five persons per state who provided useful information with assurance of confidentiality. We collected the secondary data from relevant online reports, government official documents, books, and Nigerian national dailies. We used thematic method in line with the objectives of the study and content analysis to present interview reports and secondary data.

4. Theoretical Framework

This study utilises rational behaviour theory. Rational behaviour refers to a behaviour that brings optimal satisfaction or benefit to an individual. This theory believes that people would rather take actions or embark on behaviour, whether it is good or otherwise that benefit them against actions that could harm them. Human rational behaviour theory is the assumption that rational choice theory is an economic thinking that makes individuals to embark on decisions that provide him or her the highest amount of satisfaction or benefits. The theory believes that individuals use their self-interests to make choices that will provide them with the greatest benefit. Thus, people weigh their options and make the choice that will serve them best, and not with consideration for any other. Therefore, individuals rely on rational calculations to make rational choices that align with his or her interest.

Adam Smith, a renowned philosopher is the originator of rational choice theory. His Essay, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of Wealth of Nations* in 1776 argued that human nature towards self-interest resulted in prosperity. According to Aristotle, human beings are rational and have a rational principle that allows them to know what is good for them. He believes that human beings are different from animals because they have ability to reason and think in abstract way. However, Plato is of the view that rationality demands self-interested action. He distinguished between perceived self-interest and actual self-interest and argued that any conflict between rationality and morality is a question of conflict between one's self-interest and requirement of justice. In summary, rational behaviour is the basis of rational choice theory that assumes individuals always make decisions that provide them with the highest amount of personal comfort, benefit or satisfaction. The issue of

morality in rational theory is divergent. According to Kant, as human, individual has a moral duty to do only what is rational, and has duty to those things because they are rational. However, there are moral angles to the rational theory because what is morally right may not be rationally beneficial and vice versa. Therefore, we can explain the idea of stealing public funds or government property by state Governors or their appointees from a rational behaviour angle. To the Governors who engage in the act, it could be what they considered most beneficial to them, and may not even look at the matter from a moral angle, to say it is not morally good. Thus, personal benefits of some of the state Governors or their appointees could be reason why they indulge in stealing government assets.

5. Literature Review

Stealing of public funds or property falls within the context of corruption. In Nigeria, political office holders and career officers are not free from corrupt allegations. It is not to say that all political office holders and career officers are thieves or engage in looting. However, the new twist is the way some elected-Governors now indict their outgoing colleagues of looting public funds and stealing government property. Stealing by some elected or appointed politicians is not a new thing but it is a top secret if the outgoing Governor and the Governor-elect are from the same political party (Lawrence and Ariyo, 2022). In recent times, the media is flooded with allegations of reckless withdraw of money from state's bank accounts in suspicious manners. There have been allegations that some state Governors frivolously withdraw monies in an attempt to leave a blank account for their successors (Moses, 2022). It is now becoming more or less a normal practice.

What then is treasury looting? Treasury looting is generally a state of leaving a state finance in hopelessness. For this study, looting of public treasury is a way by which state Governors or their appointees divert public funds for personal use. In other words, looting of the treasury means a state of desperation by which state Governors or their aids siphon public money when they have few months to hand over to successors. Looting is however monetary or financial (Oduahy, 2019). It is sometimes in the form of awards. The most common means as captured by Odion and Iddokko (2022) are use of contracts or inflation of contract sums. According to Olu (2021), political office holders hurriedly award contracts to their cronies, relatives, loved ones or political allies. In addition, some Governors embark on needless travels with several aids. In addition, Governors pay severance or other allowances to themselves and their aids at the expiration of their term in most revengeful manner while leaving other very important bills such as salaries and allowances of workers. Some Governors organise empowerment programmes such as conferences and workshops, that they have not done for a long time when they have few weeks to go (Olujobi, 2021). They sometimes embark on hasty appointments of teachers, directors, permanent secretaries and not pay other vital bills to leave huge debt for the incoming Governors.

Stealing of public property is a situation whereby outgoing Governors, their appointees divert government property they use while in office into personal use. Stealing of public property means inability to hand over government property under one's care for future government use. It is a situation when an elected Governor or his aids refused to return government property in their care to political successors. Stealing of public property can be in the form of taking cars, refrigerators, mattresses, television sets, fans, air conditions, rugs, irons, plates, cutlery, furniture, and several others away at the expiration of a regime. The practice is widely reported when some of the above items are declared missing in some government houses (Olu, 2021), and Odion and Idokko, (2022).

By 'expired' administration, we mean a regime or administration that has few months in office to hand over. It is a term we use for a period that a state Governor and his appointees have after a gubernatorial election to replace them has taken place. It is a time that incumbent political office holders prepare to hand over power or take a new oath of office.

Interrogating the factors responsible for looting of public funds and stealing of government property from extant literature, Ojumu (2022) was of the view that greediness makes high-ranking politicians, to steal what they could ordinarily afford. The above position tallies with that of Akinajo

(2019), who notes that politicians steal and loot because of desperation and greediness. Nevertheless, in the view of Agbanusi (2021), he notes that politicians steal public funds or property because of bad or bitter politics. He notes that politicians do not wish their successors well, especially not to surpass their achievements. Thus, the goal of government property theft is to frustrate successors. The views of Oluwole and Ojeh (2022) negate the above. He linked looting and stealing of government property to desperation arising from loss of second term. He was of the view that political office holders who lost a second term bid would wish to compensate himself in any form including stealing. Thus, second term failure leads to looting. From the above literature, we could then say that some of the factors are induced from outside while others are based on personal urge.

None of the literature above directly identified the methods as meant to steal but described them as conduit-pipes to siphon public funds or property. In his opinion, all last minutes fresh contracts are avenue to steal public funds (Ashuny, 2023). In a relative way to the above, Criminal Code Act in Nigeria (2007) notes that any project or contract that do not follow due process has a hidden mission, and could be to steal money. From a different perspective, Agbanusi (2021), remarks that any contract awarded to a close ally is not likely to benefit a state. It is likely to be costly or poorly executed, and therefore makes the state to lose. In another angle, Akinajo (2019) and Ridwan (2022) express their views that large appointments made at a regime's last moment such as directors and permanent secretaries are to cripple governance. On their own, Oshey and Ogoh (2020) concludes that ex-political officers have been disgraced for taken away government SUV cars, Hilux Vans, Jeeps and other models for mobility. In his view, (Ashunnnny, 2023) reports that Osun state government under Governor Ademola Jackson Adeleke made a public announcement that former political office holders should submit all vehicles in their custody within a particular period. At another time, Osun state government announced that it has deployed security agencies to retrieve Osun state government vehicles at any place (Moses, 2022). To say the least, report says that Osun state government forcefully took back the bus given to Osun state "Iya-Loja in General" (Head of market women) by immediate past governor (Ojumu, 2022). Not only in Osun state, Oyo state government also made similar announcement compelling some political office holders that served under late Governor Abiola Ajimobi to return their official vehicles before they did so (Oluwole and Ojeh, 2022). All these are pointers that some politicians go away with government property perhaps, against laid down rules.

Stealing of government funds or property is bad. A state that faces such challenge cannot forge ahead. In his view, Olujobi (2021) notes that there cannot be quick development where people in position of trust steal government money or property. In other words, it slowed down good governance because of indebtedness (Lawrence and Ariyo, 2022). According to Ridwan (2022), if state funds and property become all-comers affairs, such state would be in perpetual loss. The above view supports the opinion of Sheidu (2022), who notes that there shall be endemic poverty in the land so long every political office holders that served a system steals from its cover. Theft of public property is not a good trend for a democratic system. If the wish of all political gatekeepers were to come and steal, where is integrity in public service? People should have trust in their leaders. This is only possible where people serve their constituents faithfully, and not to take what belongs to all.

6. Presentation of Results and Discussion

The factors that are responsible for treasury looting and carting away of government property by state governors in South western, Nigeria.

This section presents the primary data and discusses them alongside the first objective. The findings showed a number of factors that are responsible for treasury looting and carting away of government property. For instance, the Commissioner of Finance, Mr. Rabiun Onaolapo Olowo' in Lagos state, noted that:

Politics of bitterness is endemic in Nigeria. In addition, such people are greedy but not definitely poor.

Frankly speaking, most of them know it is not a good thing but they still do it. I cannot say that they have poor political culture. No.

In the same vein, former state chairperson of the People's Democratic Party in Lagos State² also bares his mind that public official's loot public funds and government property because they see it as a national cake, greedy and have bitter political mind-set.

The permanent secretary of the Ministry of Works³ in Lagos state added impunity to greediness and politics of bitterness. He said:

High-ranking politicians such as governors, commissioners and senior assistants loot public treasury because of greediness not that they do not have. Impunity is responsible for theft of public funds and property.

The above position also corroborates the view of the state chairperson of the ruling All Progressive Congress⁴ in Lagos state, who was of the view that:

It is a sheer wickedness to loot public funds. What does the incoming administration work with? Yet, they do not care because they are embittered and wicked, more so, if they have lost election for their second term. They can do and undo. Ex or serving governors who indulge in such act are not poor but greedy.

Former Commissioner of Information⁵ during the administration of Governor Akinwumi Ambode in Lagos state has this to say:

State governors looting public treasury and stealing government property are no doubt bitter politicians, who destroy future successes of incoming administration. They desperately do so in order to put a bad economic situation in place for incoming administration. They are wicked.

Opinions expressed from another state do not discard the earlier factors. Former Special Assistant on Media⁶ to the former governor of Ogun state, Senator Ibikunle Amosun identified poor political culture as a major factor.

Those that are guilty of the indictment are greedy, desperate and we can say that they do not have poor political culture. They have the mind-set of 'me' and not 'we'. They are self-centred. I said this because I know they are not poor. A governor, even if for a year, is not a poor person.

In addition, the state chairperson of the People's Democratic Party in Ogun state⁷ was of the view that several reasons account for the menace such as frustration, loss of second term, bitterness and vengeance, and poor political culture. The Commissioner for Works and Infrastructure, Engineer Ade Akinsanya⁸ in Ogun state corroborated the above position. He said "definitely not because the governors are poor. May be, as well, due to lack of enabling law that prevents them to spend money or sell certain property. He said that non-existence as to when they could spend money or sell property. Governors remain governors in Nigeria until their last day in office. This makes them to behave anyhow".

A serving permanent secretary in the Ministry of Works in Ogun state⁹ paid more emphasis on sale of landed property. He opined thus:

It has become a norm for governors to engage in selling government property. The horrible side is that the sellers of government property are also the buyers. They sell government cars, office items, domestic appliances and land to themselves through their proxies. They do so not because they are poor but as a result of greediness, poor public spirit, political bitterness and mental insensibility to public welfare.

The Commissioner for Information, Alhaji Abdulwaheed Odusile¹⁰ in Ogun state was of the view

that:

Governors steal public funds and property because they are greedy and selfish. They do not keep to their promise and use the act to punish upcoming political party.

The state secretary¹¹ of the People's Democratic Party in Oyo state, Mr. Wasiu Adeleke noted that:

Governors' brazen theft of public funds and property is not because of burden of poverty but greediness. The spirit to have more and more...They see the loot and property as easy to exploit, with nobody to question them. Even the coming governor may be worse off.

In his view, Mr. Taiwo Otegbeye¹², a former Commissioner of Information in Oyo State noted that:

A mind-set to run down public institution is due to greediness. A governor is not poor at all. They were not poor before they become governor but they play bad politics. It has become a norm, and it is bad. The spirit to serve the public is not there.

The permanent secretary in the Ministry of Works and Transport¹³ strongly condemned looting of public treasury and theft of government property and was of the view that:

I do not succumb to such practice but some governors are fond of it. It occurs because they are greedy; do not want their successor from other opposition party to succeed, and their strong desires to have more. They do not have the fear of God because they know it is not good.

In his view, Mr. Akinola Ojo, the Commissioner for Finance¹⁴ in Oyo state also puts his view thus:

A right thinking governor should not steal anything that belongs to the public, if they do, it could be due to loss of second term to opposition – greediness, and not because they are poor. It is also incorrect to say that they do not know that it is not good. They know but have bad desires to divert what belongs to all...

The Director General, Bureau of Public Procurement in Oyo state, Ms Tara Adefope¹⁵ in Oyo State

It is not an acceptable thing to steal public funds or property by those that are to utilise them. If they do, however, it could be to cover losses in their second term bids or out of wickedness. However, those in authority who are guilty of these antics know it is not good.

In Osun state, the state chairperson of the ruling People's Democratic Party, Mr. Sunday Bisi¹⁶, noted that people or even governors that steal public funds or property, either when in office or leaving are greedy, have no sense of reasoning and callous. They do not mean well for their states. They are either planning to render the state in financial mess for the opposition party, or bad thought of having lost their second term. Loss of power tempts them to do so. The Media Aide to the Osun state Governor, Mr. Rasheed Olawale¹⁷ in his view condemned political office holder who were fond of public theft. He categorically maintained that such practice is born out of vindictiveness. In his words:

When governors that have served their tenure still steal public money or property, it is due to being vindictive, greedy or plan to make the incoming regime fail. It is born out of dirty politics and greediness. Governors are well exposed and they know the needful.

The chairperson of the All Progressive Congress, Mr. Tajudeen Lawal¹⁸ in Osun state expressed

his disdain for stealing public assets and was of the view that there is no reason for its justification. According to him:

Elected officials that steal government money or property might have lost their hopes, desperate and be greedy. They actually want to pay the new government in the same coin they paid them initially. It is a way to frustrate new regime in the state.

On the same issue, the Commissioner for Information and Civil Orientation, Baarrister Kolapo Alimi¹⁹ in Osun state confirmed that such bad practice occurred in the state and that, the state retrieved some cars forcefully from those who took them away. He attributed the causes to politicians' bad culture among other:

How can a Governor and his allied be sweeping public money when they have less than three months. They also took several government property away, although we retrieved some cars forcefully. Why did they behave like that? They are selfish, desperate, and greedy, and wanted to frustrate our government then. It is simply politics of bitterness.

In addition, the Commissioner for Transport in Osun state, Hon. Olusesan Oyedele²⁰ linked the practice with recklessness on the part of the culprits. His words:

What is bad is bad. What reasons would elected officials give for such abominable practice? None. We cannot take that. Those that engage in such behaviour do so to frustrate the coming administration. It is because they are wicked. Such politicians are immature. They do not truly serve the people but their pockets.

In Ondo state, the Commissioner for Finance, Mr. Adewale Akinterinwa²¹ reacted that the practice did happen. He noted that the state is peculiar given the recent vacuum in the governorship seat but noted that it is fear of losing power that makes whoever did so to do that. In his words:

I have nobody in mind but it happened. Fear of losing the seat of power makes people to steal government money or property. Elected or appointed government officials loot public funds or property because they are desperate, anticipate glaring loss of power, are greedy and are politically embittered.

In a new twist, the Ondo state chairperson of the People's Democratic Party, Mr. Fatai Adams²² was of the view that democratic project in Nigeria has been under threat due to massive loot. He noted that theft of funds or government property by the keepers of the gates is scandalous and criminal. He however attributed the factors to the following. For him:

We have heard that some elected and appointed political officials are involved in public money or property theft. They know that it is scandalous, yet they do not refrain because of party politics, their greed, desperation and loss of power.

The Commissioner of Information in Ondo State, Mrs Ademola-Olateju Bamidele²³ captured the same menace succinctly as narrated below.

Stealing of public funds could be due to desperation to make more money, being greedy, highest level of exhibiting bitter politics, and or hatred for new administration. All of these factors could play out individually or in combination.

Also supporting the above narration in the same state, Commissioner for Budget and Economic Planning, Mr. Emmanuel Igbasan²⁴ underscored the factors. He remarked that stranded politicians who are desperate and loss relevance are the ones that steal public funds and property. The All Progressive Congress state chairperson²⁵ made his views known that theft of public funds and

property is a dangerous trend to Nigerian democratic project. He noted that politicians' arbitrariness to behave anyhow is the major cause. Thus, his views added candour to existing factors given by earlier respondent. From Ekiti state, the methods identified by respondents are not different from what earlier interviewees from other states had said. According to Lere Olayinka, the Media Aid²⁶ to former Governor Ayodele Fayose, stealing of public funds and government property is a thing of the mind. In his view:

We need to examine anybody, be it Governor or his appointees. They must be greedy. Their mind-set of placing the opposition party at disadvantage is also a factor.

The Commissioner for Finance and Economic Development, Mr. Akin Oyebo²⁷ noted that politicians who steal public funds are not poor but are simply greedy. The Commissioner for Works, Mr. Adesola Adebayo²⁸ did not refute the previous views by saying:

People that steal government property do so because they are greedy and have lost their hopes. As a state Governor, you can never be poor in life. So, why would you steal? It is because of wickedness.

Joining his voice also, Barrister Paul Omotoso²⁹, the state chairperson of the All Progressive Congress, also supported the factors that made people to steal such as greediness, political bitterness and desperation. Corroborating the various methods earlier mentioned, the former chairperson of the People's Democratic Party, Engineer Alaba Agboola³⁰ position was in affirmation of the initial reasons. Given the responses from the states in the southwest, Nigeria, we can conclude that elected and appointed politicians steal public funds and property due to greediness, politics of bitterness, absence of enabling law to limit their power on award of contracts when they have limited time in office, rather than due to poverty or poor political culture. The above conclusion is in tandem with the view of Olu-Adeyemi (2022), Moses (2022), and Ashuny (2023) who concluded in separate but related studies that greediness makes people to steal rather than poverty. The conclusion that people steal because of politics of bitterness rather than having poor political culture correlates with Lawrence and Ariyo (2022) study that public officials, especially politicians indulge in sharp practices because of their greedy nature and not because they do not know that, it is bad. We can therefore say that some elected and appointed political office holders, such as governors, deputy governors, commissioners and special or executive assistants steal public funds and property because of greediness, politics of bitterness and not because of poverty, poor political culture or absence of enabling laws that incapacitate them.

The methods involved in the acts of treasury looting and carting away of government property by state governors in the study area.

This segment presents the methods involved in the acts of treasury looting and carting away of government property by state Governors in the study area. Accordingly, the Commissioner of Finance, Mr. Rabiun Onaolapo Olowo¹ in Lagos state, noted that:

Politicians hurriedly award contracts without due process, and at times to their cronies, and sometimes do so without embarking on the projects at all. They do direct labour to steal money.

The former state chairperson of the People's Democratic Party in Lagos State² also bares his mind thus:

The most common method is award of contract in hurry. In addition, they embark on travels that are unnecessary, especially to foreign countries, and pay themselves severance and other allowances when in office or about to leave.

The permanent secretary of the Ministry of Works³ in Lagos state added that contract award is the popular method. He said:

The current system of receiving severance allowance by governors and deputy governors is a way to steal money. Award of contracts that politicians cannot complete, especially without due process is another method. They also hastily appoint aids, permanent secretaries, directors or create new ministries, commissions or agencies that are not compulsory.

The above position also corroborates the view of the state chairperson of the ruling All Progressive Congress⁴ in Lagos state. He said:

Politicians do not award contracts properly. It is a way they use to steal money. Their travels are too many because of claims they earn them with many assistants in such trips. In addition, the hurried manner with which they pay their severance and other emoluments calls for worry.

A former Commissioner of Information⁵ in Lagos state, and member of the ruling All Progressive Congress buttressed the methods by saying:

The manner of awarding contracts by some governors revealed it is for ulterior motive. No due process, no bidding. Unnecessary and meaningless travels is a way to steal. Making appointments that the state does not need gulp much money. They sell government property to themselves. The use of auction to sell landed property is a terrible method to fetch themselves money.

In addition, former Special Assistant on Media⁶ to the former governor of Ogun state, Senator Ibikunle Amosun gave the methods in not different way from the ones mentioned above.

Even with due process, some governors and their associates award contract to loved ones, sons, daughters, relatives, friends and political associates with highly inflated sums. They travel within and outside the country anyhow. They make appointments that are not required. How can a state appoint close to fifteen permanent secretaries with less than two months in office? They also process their allowances y when it is not auspicious at that time for the state to pay.

The state chairperson of the People's Democratic Party in Ogun state⁷ identified the methods by saying that government sell its property when government intends to steal money. The award of contracts are without due process, highly compromised and inflated amounts. Travels are numerous and unnumbered. Of recent, they now pay themselves severance allowance and collect it before they leave office. The Commissioner for Works and Infrastructure, Engineer Ade Akinsanya⁸ in Ogun state supported the above position as he noted:

Contracts sums are means of defrauding states. Government disposes its assets anyhow. Government sells its landed property within government official cycle. Several officials and assistants travel with government officials when it is needless. Government officials use auctions to buy government property.

A serving permanent secretary in the Ministry of Works in Ogun state⁹ paid more emphasis on sale of landed property. He opined thus:

It has become a norm for governors to engage in selling government property. The horrible side is that the sellers of government property are also the buyers. They sell government cars, office items, domestic appliances and land through proxies.

Also in Ogun state, the Commissioner for Information, Alhaji Abdulwaheed Odusile¹⁰ was of the view that:

Some Nigerian governors sell property the way they like, lease government lands for peanuts because they are indirectly the beneficiaries. Unsolicited travels with many aids siphon public funds. They pay themselves severance allowance.

From Oyo state, the People's Democratic Party state secretary, Mr. Wasiu Adeleke¹¹ captured some of the methods. He notes that theft of public funds and property are commonly through the award of contracts, sale of government property, collection of severance allowance and hurried manner of making some appointments. Mr. Taiwo Otegbeye, a former Commissioner of Information¹² in Oyo State noted that:

Some Governors award contracts anyhow, not all of them. In an attempt to generate funds for the state, they sell government property indirectly to themselves and appoint civil servant who are their loyalists to career positions that are not required.

In addition, the permanent secretary in the Ministry of Works and Transport¹³ identified some methods of looting public treasury and steal government property. He was of the view that:

Sudden sale of government property and award of contract is a way to steal government money and property. Elected officials pay huge allowances to their outgoing public officials in haste.

The Commissioner for Finance in Oyo state, Mr. Akinola Ojo¹⁴ also identified methods of looting of public funds or property. His view:

When Governors award contracts hastily, something is wrong. There must be due process. Countless irrelevant travels are to enrich personal pockets. Why should government sell its property that needs simple repair cheaply? Just to rake money and make the property their own.

The Director General, Bureau of Public Procurement in Oyo state, Ms Tara Adefope¹⁵ in Oyo State noted that it is not acceptable to award contract discretionally because there procedures to follow but some governors do so to steal money. They travel frivolously. They sell government property or lease them for years and collect the money into private accounts before leaving office. The methods of stealing public funds and government property in Osun state aligned with speakers from other states in South western, Nigeria. The state chairperson of the ruling People's Democratic Party, Mr. Sunday Bisi¹⁶, in Osun state noted that some political office holders that steal public funds or property use award of contract, lease, reconstruction, repair or demolition of existing facilities to do so. The Media Aide to the Osun state Governor, Mr. Rasheed Olawale¹⁷ in his view identified methods that political office holders employ to steal public funds and property. In his words:

Overnight award of contract is to steal public funds without due process. Sale of government property is another way. Persistent travelling to search for foreign investors with no result is to steal.

Also from Osun state, the chairperson of the All Progressive Congress, Mr. Tajudeen Lawal¹⁸ expressed his opinion on the methods of stealing government funds or property. According to him:

Some governors bend due process to award contracts to themselves or close allies. They pay themselves huge allowances and kill the state with useless awards. They travel much that do not bring profit.

When speaking on the same issue and disputing the methods, the Commissioner for Information and Civil Orientation, Baarrister Kolapo Alimi¹⁹ in Osun state confirmed that such bad practice occurred in the state but only in the past. He noted:

The state under the current administration has blocked all means of stealing public funds or property. It was in the past that government awarded contracts anyhow, conferences aimed at empowering public officials' not gainful, permanent secretaries in excess of the financial capacity of the state are appointed and travels made with many aids on the move. Government recklessly sell its property or lease them to siphon government funds.

The Commissioner for Transport in Osun state, Hon. Olusesan Oyedele²⁰ discussed the methods used by the few government officials as follows. He is of the view that:

Hasty award of contracts and sale of it are suspicious. It is a decoy to steal funds from public purse. Government pays itself jumbo severance allowances and benefits. Government also sell or lease its property in bad faith to make money for personal use.

In Ondo state, the Commissioner for Finance, Mr. Adewale Akinterinwa²¹ though denied involvement in the acts but identified some methods of stealing government money and property as well. In his words:

It is always in hidden way. By my experience, we always block it. Some political officials sometimes want to play smart to divert money meant for public projects, claim travel allowances beyond what they are entitled to, and request that we sell government property anyhow. We do not approve such and we quickly puncture the motives.

The Ondo state chairperson of the People's Democratic Party, Mr. Fatai Adams²² was of the view that that theft of funds or government property by the keepers of the gates takes the following methods. He captured his opinion in this way:

In most cases, government official award contracts to government officials or their clique. That is very funny. That is Nigeria. They sell government property among themselves in a kangaroo manner. Appointments they make are worrisome, in excess of what state financial capacity can handle.

The Commissioner of Information in Ondo State, Mrs Ademola-Olateju Bamidele²³ on her own captured the same methods summarily.

An expired administration perpetuate public funds theft with few days to go by contract inflation, sale of awards, property and travels. Illegal travels and lease of government property are part of it.

In his view to identify the methods of stealing public funds in the same state, the Commissioner for Budget and Economic Planning, Mr. Emmanuel Igbasan²⁴ identified the methods thus. He remarked that politicians use contract inflation, travels, appointments and lease or outright sale of public property to make public funds and property their personal assets. The All Progressive Congress state chairperson²⁵ identified methods of stealing public funds and property as discussed above. From Ekiti state, the methods identified by respondents are not different from what earlier interviewees from other states had said. According to Lere Olayinka, the Media Aid²⁶ to former Governor Ayodele Fayose, stealing of public funds is a clandestine thing, suggesting that all political office holders know that it is not good. Government official also use cunning methods to do steal other government property. In his view:

For the monetary part, greedy politicians use contracts, relatives, political associates and cronies. They also directly do so by travel claims, receiving bloated claims and allowances. They sell government property, some in auction to make them theirs.

Expressing his view, the Commissioner for Finance and Economic Development, Mr. Akin Oyebo²⁷ noted that politicians hurried award of contract is an avenue for them to steal money. Baring his mind, the Commissioner for Works, Mr. Adesola Adebayo²⁸ did not refute the views of others. He only support them in a by saying:

Political officer holders, particularly Governors, steal funds by inflating contracts, use of cronies to bid for contract, irrelevant local and foreign travels, and appointments of aids and career officers. They take away state property with monetisation policy and pay themselves severance allowance. They sell government property by auction and they are the ones buying those things.

Speaking also, Barrister Paul Omotoso²⁹, the state chairperson of the All Progressive Congress, also identified the methods of looting public funds and stealing government property, as he perceives them. He notes:

Some governors steal public funds or government property in most bizarre and crook ways. Sometimes, some of them inflate contract sums. They award contracts to themselves directly or somebody that is close to them and collect returns. At times, they award contract, allocate money and not do the contract. They travel a lot at the expense of the state. They occasionally auction government property to corner them or for their loved ones. It is a terrible thing.

Corroborating the above, the former chairperson of the People's Democratic Party, Engineer Alaba Agboola³⁰ also added that:

While I do not have anyone in mind. Some Governors loot public funds in many ways. They award contracts without due process, inflate prices of projects, travel too much by looking for investors that we have not seen over the years, appoint assistants and civil servants when they are almost gone. They also pay huge allowances to themselves in most notorious manner.

Generally, the methods given by respondents which some of the state Governors and their appointees use are in the same direction and range from award of contracts, inflation of contract sums, use of severance allowances, undue travels, use of auction and appointments of political and career officers, among others. The opinions of most interviewees in this study affirmed the views of extant literature. For instance, Lawrence and Ariyo (2022) are of the view that politicians award contracts to their loved ones in order to enrich themselves, and thus affirmed that state Governors also do the same. In addition, the methods identified here also corroborate the views of Odion and Idokko (2022) on theft of government property. In another study, Ojumu (2022), noted that travels that are not regulated are means to siphon public treasury, which also tallied with this findings. The use of severance allowance as part of the methods to steal also confirmed the finding of Tar (2020) that state's helmsmen pay themselves severance allowance to make the state financially helpless. Dangers of looting the treasury and carting away of government property by 'expired' administrations in South western, Nigeria.

This segment presents the dangers of looting the treasury and carting away of government property by state Governors or their appointees that have few months in office. The Commissioner of Finance, Mr. Rabiun Onaolapo Olowo¹ in Lagos state noted that:

Stealing of public asset makes good governance elusive in a state. The state would not be able to provide for the masses wellbeing.

The former state chairperson of the People's Democratic Party in Lagos State² was also of the view that members of the public, the masses would be at the receiving end. On his part, the permanent secretary of the Ministry of Works³ in Lagos state added that stealing of government funds or property has aftermath effect of breeding poverty. He said:

There is no way government can tackle poverty where public officials, either political or career steals government money or property. It shall have a spiral effect on poverty.

The above position also corroborates the view of the state chairperson of the ruling All Progressive Congress⁴ in Lagos state. He was of the view that there cannot be noticeable development where everyone grapples public money or property. According to him, backwardness shall be the order of the day. In his view, a former Commissioner of Information⁵ in Lagos state viewed the implication differently. To him:

The future of democracy in a state where public officials are fond of stealing is gloomy. The mentality

of upcoming new breed politicians would be to drain the state's financial power.

The former Special Assistant on Media⁶ to the former governor of Ogun state, Senator Ibikunle Amosun, when public funds and property missing to the hands of the state political class, such state is doomed. In a related way, the state chairperson of the People's Democratic Party in Ogun state⁷ noted that theft of public funds and other property breeds deceit, poverty, greediness and future of democracy becomes shaky and uncertain. The Commissioner for Works and Infrastructure, Engineer Ade Akinsanya⁸ in Ogun state supported the above position as he noted:

People that steal public asset, whether money or any other thing are gradually digging the grave of democracy.

Another official, a serving permanent secretary in the Ministry of Works in Ogun state⁹ noted that stealing of government assets in any form slows down development. According to him, it makes a state to be backwards. The Commissioner for Information, Alhaji Abdulwaheed Odusile¹⁰ also from Ogun state was of the view that:

The habit of stealing government assets by those that supposed to preserve or utilise them destroys public confidence in governance. It makes the public to hate their leaders.

The People's Democratic Party state secretary, Mr. Wasiu Adeleke¹¹ from Oyo state, captured the dangers as:

Public officials that steal would lose their respect. The essence of voting for them would be defeated. They cannot give a credible governance. The masses are likely to suffer.

A former Commissioner of Information, Mr. Taiwo Otegbeye¹² in Oyo State noted that:

It is a thing we must discourage. It kills good governance, the masses suffer, the future of democracy is uncertain.

In addition, the permanent secretary in the Ministry of Works and Transport¹³ puts the dangers as:

Thieves of government property retard state progress. They multiply poverty, take the state to backwardness and stagnation.

The Commissioner for Finance in Oyo state, Mr. Akinola Ojo¹⁴ also supported the points above. His view was that stealing of government property is a bad thing because such states cannot develop. It kills loyalty and patriotism. Such leaders become dishonourable. The Director General, Bureau of Public Procurement in Oyo state, Ms Tara Adefope¹⁵ in Oyo State believes that stealing public funds results in backwardness, stagnation, debts, disrespect for political leaders and it injures democracy. In Osun state, no interviewee sees any good thing that stealing of public assets could bring. The state chairperson of the ruling People's Democratic Party, Mr. Sunday Bisi¹⁶, noted that some political office holders lost the electorate respect because they are thieves. Most of them cannot win ordinary councillorship seat because voters know them to be thieves. The Media Aide to the Osun state Governor, Mr. Rasheed Olawale¹⁷ in his view was of the view that several ex-political officials in Osun state are still hiding. They are now burying their faces in shame. They cannot win any election again. They brought our good state to the high level of indebtedness, which was not the way our state was. People were almost stoning them. In addition, the chairperson of the All Progressive Congress, Mr. Tajudeen Lawal¹⁸ from Osun state was of the view that:

Politicians still in disguise and bring untold hardships on the state. Hardships of debt, stagnation,

poverty, and complaints are products of stealing government resources.

The Commissioner for Information and Civil Orientation, Baarrister Kolapo Alimi¹⁹ while dissecting the dangers in Osun state confirmed that government officials that steal are robbers. He showed his anger that:

Thieves of government assets are crippling governance. They brought stagnation to our state. They are setting traps for development and democracy.

The Commissioner for Transport in Osun state, Hon. Olusesan Oyedele²⁰ discussed the dangers as:

Stealing while occupying political positions draws the state backward. The state becomes standstill. The electorates lose interest in democracy.

In Ondo state, the Commissioner for Finance, Mr. Adewale Akinterinwa²¹ was of the view that stealing of government money and property is dangerous because it blocks growth, development, as well increases poverty on the part of the masses. The Ondo state chairperson of the People's Democratic Party, Mr. Fatai Adams²² was of the view that that theft of funds or government property reduces confidence on political officials. It also endangered Governance suffers and democracy badly. The Commissioner of Information in Ondo State, Mrs Ademola-Olateju Bamidele²³ was of the view that the current financial position of most state is due to theft in government cycle. Most states are witnessing no progress because of past huge thefts. The Commissioner for Budget and Economic Planning, Mr. Emmanuel Igbasan²⁴ remarked that politicians have crippled governance and makes democracy unattractive because of massive theft of government assets. In addition, there is backwardness, indebtedness, poverty, and loss of interest in governance because people steal as noticed by the All Progressive Congress state chairperson²⁵. From Ekiti state, the dangers mentioned by respondents are not different from what earlier interviewees from other states initially noticed. In the view of Lere Olayinka, the Media Aid²⁶ to former Governor Ayodele Fayose, stealing of public funds is a curse to the culprits. It can make democratic project to collapse. No meaningful progress can take place. In his view, the Commissioner for Finance and Economic Development, Mr. Akin Oyebode²⁷ noted that politicians that steal government assets set governance on fire. They are destroying the state and want the downfall of democracy. Revealing his mind, the Commissioner for Works, Mr. Adesola Adebayo²⁸ reject earlier mentioned dangers. He was of the view that:

A state with continuous theft of government assets by its own political officials would be crawling. Such state cannot stand easily. There would be poverty, and loss of trust in governance.

Expressing his view, Barrister Paul Omotoso²⁹, the state chairperson of the All Progressive Congress also said that stealing of government asset is not a good thing in governance because it is retrogressive and breeds stagnation. The dangers earlier mentioned are in line with the view of the former chairperson of the People's Democratic Party, Engineer Alaba Agboola³⁰ who also strongly condemned the practice.

Considering all shades of opinion from the above, we can conclude that stealing of government funds and property portend serious dangers for the state in diverse ways. It cripples good governance, breeds poverty, places the masses at the receiving end, and on the long run the masses suffers. In other words, there is stagnation, loss of interest in democratic practice and heavy indebtedness on the part of the state. There is also absence of trust in our political leaders. This finding affirmed the view of United Nations Conventions against Corruption and the Process of Asset Recovery (2022) that states that public theft a form of corruption is retrogressive. The position of Sheidu (2022) also corroborates the finding of this study that political office holders and state suffer challenge of dignity and respect where it is government theft spree. This finding is also in line with the position of Ashuny

(2023) that no right thinking person should feel that stealing of government property by political or career officers would bring any progress. Therefore, stealing of public assets must be the concern of everybody to confront because it cannot do the state any good.

7. Conclusion

In addition to shortage of funds, states are financially backward given the manner some Governors and their appointees steal government assets. Some Governors or their aids stealing public funds through award of contracts, inflation of projects, irrelevant travels, and auction of government property or lease. Governors also make appointments of aids or career officers when they are out rightly needless. The most terrifying of the theft is when some of the Governors have lost their second term bid and have few months to go. The loot of public funds and property have been found to be carried out in reckless manners that showed greediness and bitter politics, because most of the Governors are not poor and know the implications of the atrocities. Stealing of public funds or other items has been war in the media and it is heating up the polity with accusations, counter-accusations and altercations between former Governors and the new ones. It is important we put such retrogressive behaviours on the part of our leaders in control.

8. Recommendations

Given the dangers occasioned by looting of state's treasury and stealing of public property, we suggest the followings policy options.

The political class across all levels must shun greediness and bitter politics. They must see good governance as sacrosanct. It is time to put the thinking of seeing public funds as national cake behind them. The state leaders, that is, the state Governors must show by good example. The era of do-or-die politics should be over. Elective positions should not be for vindictiveness or vengeance on opposition party.

There is need for legislative Act of the National Assembly that state Houses of Assembly should domesticate, which shall stipulate deadline for award of huge contract sums or project after gubernatorial election. It is necessary that the National Assembly come up with an Act that would stipulate a time line when a state Governor cannot award a contract again, especially after a gubernatorial election, until he retakes oath of office or a new Governor takes over. States should obey such Acts to check the hurried manner of theft after gubernatorial elections. Such Acts should also set a general standard on when to appoint political or career officers that incumbent Governor cannot pay, for once, until he vacates office. Upcoming laws should also set a limit to the numbers of such appointments at a time.

Nigeria's political class should strengthen existing forfeiture laws of the Criminal Act. An end should come to the business as usual in the courts, where Economic and Financial Crimes Commission cases linger on for years. The judiciary must be overhauled. The judiciary in Nigeria should toe the line of integrity to deploy appropriate judicial weapons to recoup looted property or funds. As a country, we must strive for excellence in public accountability and transparency. A good way to go is the example of Jersey's Attorney General, Mark Temple KC ruling to return \$8.9 million looted funds back to Federal Republic of Nigeria (Forfeiture of Assets (Civil Proceedings) (Jersey) Law 2018).

All states of the federation in Nigeria must inaugurate Public Asset Management and Forfeiture Commission, PAMFC with mandate to take stock of public assets, monitor their use, retrieve stolen, and dispose government assets. The members of the PAMFC must be people of impeccable character across religion, civil society groups and ex-jurists. The PAMFC must work with the inauguration Committee, when new Governors are to take over. The PAMFC needs legislative protection to be able to do its assignment with confidence.

There have been abuse of auction to dispose public assets, and needs appropriate legislative

instrument to put it under check. The legislature must be alive to its oversight function. There must be proper and satisfactory verification of the status of all disposable government assets and found to be desirable. All buyers must bid for such assets with the National Identification Number and the legislature establish there is no ulterior motive for selling them. The PAMFC must not sell government assets in ridiculous prices. There must be true open bidding with adequate publicity and time before disposing government assets.

There is need to scrap the current severance allowance that ex-state Governors collect. It is a waste of public funds and no longer sustainable. The state finance can no longer cope with such pay. It is necessary to use merit to appoint all states' Account Generals in Nigeria to make them deliverable. As long as their appointments are through crooked means, they would continue to be accomplice in looting of public funds. Therefore, credible credentials and seniority should be part of the criteria to pick them.

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