

Research Article

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Kleptocracy and Nigerian politics: A reflection on the fourth republic

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Abstract: Kleptocracy scores high in weakening rule of law and undermining the development of the global south. Despite different anti-corruption measures by nation-states, political evil continuously assumes a political culture. Kleptocracy consists of embezzling and stealing public funds and resources for selfish profits (consumption and glorification). In Nigeria particularly the fourth republic, political offices have turned to channels for unchecked sources of riches to both oneself and family members. Political elites take turn engaging in siphoning, embezzling, stealing, looting, and diverting public funds which create a kind of political culture where feeding fat on the states' treasuries become the order of the day. This significantly results in an economic mess, underdevelopment,

unimaginable sufferings and a thriving environment for penuries, particularly in Nigeria. To achieve the purpose of this study, interpretivism approach was used to analyse previous literature on the meaning, features and consequences of kleptocracy in society. The incidences of embezzlement and looting of public resources of the fourth Nigerian republic were investigated. The study finds that kleptocracy is politically evil because it undermines human dignity by recreating poverty and corruption. It recommends that to eradicate the practice from Nigerian politics, honest yearly assets declarations should form a bedrock for every public officeholder.

Keywords – Kleptocracy, Nigeria, Politics, Republic, Treasury

1. INTRODUCTION

Psychologists take kleptomania to mean uncontrollable tendencies to steal emanating from emotional disturbances other than material passions. By this, some people are genetically born with inherent drive to steal and those with such syndromes exhibit uncontrollable tendencies to impulses like stealing even when those things do not matter at the particular moment. Critics take kleptomania to mean the bodily and emotional failure of human being to control and resist stealing. This uncontrollable tendency to steal is not only seen in pure psychology, it also happen in politics coined as kleptocracy. The word 'Kleptocracy' is a derivation of two Greek words, 'kleptes' - thief and the verb 'klepto' – to steal and then 'kratia' - power or rule. According to Wikipedia (2019), kleptocracy is a system of government where dishonest and unpatriotic leaders (kleptocrats) use political office to illegally 'cart-away' public treasuries through embezzlement, privatisation and other treacherous method. In the opinion of Walker and Aten (2018), kleptocracy is a system of government whereby the ruling elites use political offices as channels of diverting public funds for personal or selfish uses. This system of government portray a government controlled by crooked rulers who manoeuvre political power to accommodate bribes, unusual favours and kickbacks primarily at

the detriment of the subjects (Adisa, 2019; Acemoglu, Verdier & Robinson, 2004). Under kleptocracy, political rulers (civilian or military) and ruling group engage in looting and embezzlement and also strategize plans in diverting public treasuries for self-enrichment and power-aggrandisement. This system thereby creates rooms for political elites to selfishly make themselves rich not minding the existence of rule of law which result in unrestrained political corruptions. No wonder Johnston (1996) states that political corruption occurs when rules are systematically abused, circumnavigated, ignored, covetously used or diverted for selfish interests by rulers and power-coercive authorities while Ogundiya (2014) equally notes that it is the exploitation of political authority for personal interests. Kleptocrats use political offices as leverage to enact, sponsor and implement bills that will benefit them economically and also protect guard assets. The causes and consequences of political corruption attract much investigations particularly when government privatise national assets without sufficient and provable reasons, when allocations do not achieve desirable results or goals and when government depend massively on borrowings.

Principles of kleptocracy become popular through the works of Oliver Bullough (*Money land*), Burgis Tom (*Kleptopia*) and Chayes Sarah (*Thieves of State*) which share some political features with theories such as autocracy, oligarchy, nepotism, dictatorship, and the military dictatorship. The principles talk about public office holders whose intrinsic interest is to enrich themselves and family members by coveting public funds (Adegbami & Uche, 2016). Autocracies or dictatorships to political scientists appears in diverse forms. Linz and Stepan (1996) on their part uphold on the existence of totalitarian, post-totalitarian, authoritarian, and sultanistic of which the last shares similar characteristics to kleptocracy. Researchers on African politics refer to sultanism as neopatrimonialism, personal rule, or prebendalism. Kleptocrats engage in illicit money acts such as investing secretly in luxurious goods/items, expensive lifestyles like shopping in costly malls abroad, using known designers wares (clothes, wrist-watches, shoes, cars), secretly stock money in foreign banks and secretly acquire state property in the name of privatisation (Adisa, 2019). Walker and Aten (2018) write that there is no a day without new evidence of Russian oligarchies and political officials engaging in profligate lifestyles and flaunting of expensive houses in the 'poshest' corners in Europe. Chinese politicians and their families spend indescribable and immeasurably 'hard currencies' abroad, beyond the expectations of the Chinese. Children of African politicians flaunt expensive cars and other customised wares as they enjoy the immunity provided by African bourgeoisie. These syndrome are prompted by the political phrase "winner-takes-it-all" that proactively sustain kleptocracy despite the severe humanitarian crisis and political ills. It also justifies the looting and stealing of public funds which shifts tremendously traditional political value from the sense of patriotism/welfarism to the feelings of egoism. 'Winner-takes-it-all' syndrome propels kleptocrats to manage and control state resources in a selfish manner. For example, some kleptocrats initiate state economies by exporting natural resources because export incomes will form economic rents free to siphon off foreign coasts with lesser investigations and interrogations. This soars political corruption, abuse of constitutional immunity for the sake of selfish interests also known as 'thievocracy'. However, kleptocracy is not limited to any particular country, political party or ideology, it happens everywhere in the world but its wave is deemed severe in the Global South particularly in Nigeria.

Since independence, Nigerian political leaders utilise their political positions to loot, steal and exploit public resources (Otoghile, Igbafe & Aghontaen, 2014). According to Adeosun (2012), just like political culture and institutionalised system, political leaders under the disguise of political positions divert public funds through looting, embezzlement, and unjustified preferences to allies, and family members (award of contracts, ministerial appointments). This has been the pattern through which corrupt leaders steal public wealth by means of crony 'capitalism', no-bid contracting, privatize public property via relatives and proxies. No wonder Belfut, Jurji and Olusegun (2012) see Nigeria as a corrupt state, rule by dishonest political leaders who have converted the nation as a channel for wealth amassing. These make democracy and good governance unrealisable while human dignity is assumed a deception (Arowolo & Aluko, 2012). The thrust of this study is to evaluate some kleptocrats of the Nigerian fourth republic.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Fund diversions, money laundering, money bag politics, budget padding and embezzlement assume new political culture in Nigeria. There are stories of monkey that ate public funds, and snake that swallowed billion naira – all were designed to cover up stolen and diverted public funds. Hardly a month passes without the media broadcasting Federal government plans to borrow from World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), Paris Club or Chinese Banks in a bid to facilitate ‘elephant’ projects. What about grants from various international agencies and organisations? Neither any of these borrowed money nor grants achieved the desired objectives. For instance, the Federal Public Expenditure Review of the World Bank in 1995 reported that between 1973 and 1993, approximately \$200 billion invested in Nigeria had no evidence of completed projects. Even trillions of dollars borrowed by Nigerian government between 2015 and 2023 have no clear records of desirable goals. In fact, since independence down to this present administration, various administrations (civilian rules and military regimes) recorded different cases of financial mismanagement – money laundering, diversion of public fund, embezzlement, disappearance of fund, unaccountability, and budget padding.

Misappropriating and stealing of public fund are also seen among public office holders in order of their cadre. Because of this increasingly rate of financial crimes and corruptions in Nigeria, government successively institute legal means, policies and measures to combat and eradicate the act. On the 29th of September, 2000, Nigerian government under Chief Olusegun Obasanjo inaugurated the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC). The legal validity upheld against (ICPC) by the Supreme Court of Nigeria on 7th June, 2002 necessitated the formation of another agency known as Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) on 13th April, 2003. Sadly, these anti-corrupt bodies were directly answerable to the same kleptocrats who inaugurated them. As a result, Nigeria continues to wallow in financial crimes, uneven development, high costs of living, increased dependency rates, poverty, depressions, prostitutions, workers strikes, scarcity of petroleum and unemployment as seen today in the Nigerian polity. Funds allocated for development and public resources in all ramifications are diverted by Nigerian politicians. The Global Poverty and Development ranks Nigeria as a member of Global South with 80% rate of poverty and unemployment. The question is: - Who are the kleptocrats of the fourth Nigeria Republic and to what extent does kleptocracy affects Nigerian society?

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Every research aims at solving a particular problem and it is systematic, carefully investigated and undertaken in order to initiate principles or facts (Kothari, 2004). Howell (2013) writes also that study, experimentation, scrutiny, enquiry, judgment and reasoning facilitate research processes backed-up with experiences and authorities proven to be valid and reliable. Thus, research is simply a quest for knowledge aimed at finding solutions to problems. This study adopts interpretivism approach which according to Arnett (2007) uses shared principles and perceptions whereby realities are known by the means of unfolding proceedings and social construction. Data were sourced from relevant literature from textbooks, libraries, internet and documentaries which provided clear understanding in analyzing the features of kleptocracy and stating history of Nigerian politics. The justification for the use of interpretativism approach anchors on the claim that as humans, our reasoning and belief system are influenced by our perception of life. By this, reality is subjective, product of social construction with diverse opinions. This deduction acts as a guide to this research since the use of interpretivism approach in studies will offer more diverse contributions and learning opportunities (Rogers, 2020). Therefore, the study seeks to analyse diverse forms of kleptocracy in the Nigerian fourth republic. The direction of this investigation will be influenced by the researchers’ position as Nigerians. However, at all points of the investigation, the researchers will always think about their positions in the course of the study.

4. BRIEF HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO THE FORMATION OF NIGERIAN FOURTH REPUBLIC

Nigeria began as a political entity in 1914 with the merging of the southern and northern protectorates by Lord Lugard. Proceeding from that, Nigeria registered three dominant ethnic groups: Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo which formed a tripod political zone that has staid implications on the socioeconomic control and administrative organisation of the nation (Aguzie, Orji, Umunakwe & Okereke, 2019). Nigeria first, was divided among regions but the post-independence predicaments of 1967-1970 civil war brought radical changes such as the creation of states, constitutional developments and sharing of zones. The despotic government of Major General Sani Abacha recorded the official administrative divisions of Nigeria into six geo-political zones with these states: -

- a) North Central include states include: – Plateau, Kogi, Benue, Nasarawa, Kwara and Niger including Abuja.
- b) North-East states are: – Taraba, Adamawa, Yobe, Borno, Bauchi, and Gombe.
- c) North-West states are: - Kano, Jigawa, Kastina, Kaduna, Sokoto, Kebbi and Zamfara.
- d) South-East states include: Ebonyi, Abia, Enugu, Imo and Anambra.
- e) South-South (Niger Delta zone) include these states: - Delta, Bayelsa, Rivers, Cross River, Edo and Akwa-Ibom.
- f) South-West states include: - Oyo, Ondo, Ogun, Lagos, Osun and Ekiti.

These geo-political regions were politically divided according to the economic, political and ethnical preferences of Nigeria (Ogundiya, 2010) and this facilitate the distribution of resources across the nation. The history of Nigerian politics depicts that shifts in constitutional development necessitates the formation of a republic. While constitutional development shaped the mode of governance, republic has its existence to a legal order; the constitution.

Nigeria first became a republic with the implementation of 1963 Republican Constitution. By this, Nigeria became a full self-governing state with the political detachment from the British control. The first republic ended with the first military coup. The Second Republic began with the 1979 Presidential constitution which was brought to an abrupt end when General Muhammadu Buhari deposed President Shehu Shagari's government. The transition of General Ibrahim Babangida to civil government brought third Republic following the enactment of the 1989 constitution. Though there were elections into all the elective offices but office of the presidency was exempted. The Fourth Republic was facilitated by the national transition program initiated by General Abdulsalam Abubakar following the demise of General Sani Abacha in June, 1998. This republic recorded also the creation of 1999 constitution which have been in use till date. Fourth republic witnessed four successful transitional government from one civil administrator to another, power shifts from the governing party to a rival party in sequence and seven general elections (1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015, 2019 and 2023). Elected presidents under the fourth republic include:

- i. Olusegun Obasanjo (Ogun) 1999-2007 (Yoruba)
- ii. Musa Yaradua (Kastina) 2007-2010 (Fulani)
- iii. Dr Goodluck Jonathan (Bayelsa) 2010-2015 (Ijaw)
- iv. General Muhammadu Buhari (Kastina) 2015- 2023 (Fulani)
- v. Yet to decide as of the time of this research.

Fourth republic is primarily known as an epoch of complete return to democracy in Nigeria on 29th May, 1999 which sets the stage for political and socio-economic transformations.

4.1. Some kleptocratic experience in the fourth republic Nigeria

The global Independent watchdog Transparency International (TI) describes Nigeria as a corrupt country popularly known with public office holders that loot national coffers with impunity. Embezzling of public funds has become a political culture in Nigeria since the first republic but the events of the Fourth Republic (as of the

production of this study) remains the only republic not only has massively produced kleptocrats, but has also exhibited, replaced, recreated and recycled dishonest politicians with selfish motives against peoples' interests. Kleptocrats gained political access in the fourth republic government through the process of re-election and re-appointment. No wonder Joseph (1996: 191) stated that: "Nigeria was a national cake to be divided and subdivided among officeholders." Adisa (2019) writes that kleptocrats under the shield of political offices engage in different financial corruptions - embezzlement, looting, money laundering, privatisation of state owned property, diversion and as well share recovered loots. They also engaged in the act of siphoning public funds by the means of awarding unofficial contracts to family members, closed-allies and associates in an immeasurable manner. For instance, the institution of 'familiocracy' initiated by Rochas Owelle Okorochoa, Imo state ex-governor as was widely reported by Vanguard Newspaper, 13 December, 2017. Kleptocrats mostly spend lavishly and live luxuriously, take, save and invest their loots abroad. According to Aliu (2014: 7), "most of the ruling elites of the fourth republic like most of their predecessors of the previous republic are 'corrupt, self-centred, incompetent, kleptocratic, ideologically and morally bankrupt, visionless, intolerant, autocratic, dishonest, naive, opportunistic, and parochial.'" Cases of financial corrupt practices such as fund misappropriation, diversion and embezzlement that run into trillions of naira are apparent in different tiers of Nigerian government - federal, state and local. These are funds allocated for wide-ranging development at each of these levels of government but they have been stealthily ended in the private pockets of these kleptocrats (Akhakpe, 2020). According to a report by Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), politicians and government officials since the transition to civil rule have stolen billions of dollars belonging to Nigerian government (Salisu & Avidime, 2016). Indeed, fourth republic is an era of boom for kleptocrats, and yet a period of doom for Nigerians because the revenue generated from excess crude oil revenue particularly in 2012 and 2015 running into trillions of naira from the crude oil, and whooping amount realised between 1999 and June 2016 attracted no even development - creation of employment opportunities, alleviating poverty, and social services facilities rather, the proceeds were embezzled, diverted and shared by thieves in government (Adegbami & Uche, 2016).

Some past and serving political rulers of the fourth republic have been indicted with diverse cases of financial corruptions. Members of the National Assembly were enmeshed in widespread public funds embezzlement. Enwerem Evans, Okadigbo Chuba and Nwabara Adolphos (former senators) were forcefully removed as Senate Presidents for allegedly financial misappropriation (Alabi & Fashagba, 2010). Farouk Lawan - a honourable member of House of Representatives and also the chairman ad hoc committee on fuel subsidy scam was purported to have collected bribe of \$3m (three million dollars) in 2012 from a mogul, Femi Otedola whose firm was under investigation for corruption by the committee (Aliu, 2013). The Federal Ministry of Health in 2008 allegedly discovered that Professor Adenike Grange, the then minister of health, and some other top officials of the ministry together with the involvement of the senate committee chairman on health shared the 2007 unused financial plan allocation of over #400 million (\$2.7 million) (Dhikru, 2011). Other kleptocrats are: Edo state former governor, Lucky Igbinedion in 2008 was indicted for embezzling more than \$25 million from the state treasury (Human Right Watch, 2011). James Ibori, an ex-Delta State governor, in 2012 was arrested in Britain for diverting state fund about £50 million (BBC, April, 2012). Ex-National Security Adviser (NSA) to Nigerian former president Goodluck Jonathan, Colonel Sambo Dasuki (retired) was arraigned in 2015 for involving in financial scandal of about \$2.1 billion of arms deal. Arraigned along with Dasuki in the arms deal include: ex-NSA Finance Director: Salisu, Shuaibu and ex-Aide to Goodluck Jonathan (former president); Waripamowei Dudafa, the Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) former general manager: Baba Kusa Aminu, including two business firms: - Acacia Holdings Limited and Reliance Referral Hospital Abuja (Aljazeera News, 2015). Other big-wig politicians indicted are: ex-Nigerian president - Goodluck Jonathan, Sambo Namadi - ex-vice president; Falae Olu - All Peoples Party (APP) ex-presidential flag bearer during 1999 general election. At the onset of fourth republic were the ex-chairman Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) Board of Trustee (BOT) - Chief Tony Anenih; ex-military governor of Kaduna state and Congress for Progressive Change (CPC) gubernatorial aspirant: Jafaru Lawal Isa; DAAR Communications

chairman: Chief Raymond Dokpesi; and Bode George – ex-member Board of Trustees and ex-Southwest national vice chairman Peoples’ Democratic Party (Aljazeera News, 2015). Others include: - Odili Peter - A two-term River state ex-governor; Attahiru Bafarawa - a two-term ex-governor of Sokoto state; Bashir Yuguda, ex-Minister of Finance; Oyo state ex-governor, Chief Rashidi Ladoja; former PDP national spokesperson, Olisa Metuh; Enugu state ex-governor and former sports minister, Jim Nwobodo; two-term Bauchi state ex-governor and PDP former national chairman, Adamu Muazu; and ex- Defence Minister and former acting PDP national chairman, Mohammed Bello Haliru (Aljazeera News, 2015).

In 2017, anti-financial corrupt agency; Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) arraigned an ex-petroleum minister, Diezani Alison-Madueke for money laundering and other count charges: - diverted the sum of \$6 billion (N1.2 trillion) from the National coffers, missed \$20 billion from the Petroleum agency, awarded multi-billion naira contracts in breach of concession agreement, recklessly spent unimaginable government funds, wasted billions of Naira wrongly on private jets, unduly transferred #1.2 billion naira into the personal account of a toll company, accepted gifts and property worth \$17 million in exchange for favours accrued to her office as petroleum minister from three Nigerian oil businessmen (Vanguard News, 2014). In 2022, National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) arraigned Abba Kyari (a suspended deputy commissioner of police (DCP), police intelligence response team (IRT) members: Sunday J. Ubia, Bawa James, Simon Agirigba and John Nuhu and, Chibunna Patrick Umeibe and Emeka Alphonsus Ezenwanne over drug trafficking and similar offences. They faced an eight count charges allegedly involving unlawful treachery, ignominious, unprofessional conduct, sanctioned corruption and exhibits meddling in a case of illicit drug trafficking linking a transnational drug cartel. (The Guardian Newspaper, 2022). During president Buhari led APC government of 2015, some of the kleptocrats that expropriate the wealth of Nigerians: Adamu Abdullahi (APC chairman) - N15billion, Omisore (APC national secretary) - N4.7billion, Dariye - N2.7billion and Jolly Nyame - N1.6billion (both pardoned by Buhari), Akpabio (minister of Niger Delta) - over N108 billion case still with EFCC, Babachir - N250million of purchasing grass cutter, Yakubu ex- Nigerian National Petroleum Cooperation (NNPC) General Managing Director. However, kleptocracy and its principles continue to undermine Nigerian development.

4.2. Political Implications of kleptocracy in Nigeria

The amended 1999 Nigeria constitution, Section 14 (2) (b) emphasised that “the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of the government”, but it is quite surprising that most Nigerian political leaders have acted and still acting in opposition to this fragment of the body of law which they promised to abide with. From its nature, kleptocracy heightens parasitism, a non-reciprocal existence between parties. By this, one party soars at the disadvantage or detriment of the other. The kleptocratic nature of Nigeria rulers significantly lead to economic mess or sabotage, budget deficit, penuries, injustice, favouritism, nepotism, hunger, suicide, underdevelopment and death. According to Adegami and Uche (2016), kleptocracy recreated joblessness, poverty, insurgencies, armed robbery, bad governance, borrowing, poor social services delivery system particularly to the workforce that supposed to sustain the economy of the nation-state. According to Nigeria Debt Management Office, constant borrowings have caused Nigeria’s debt to rise to 44 trillion as of June, 2022. While the kleptocrats and their families enjoy the best luxurious lives powered by public funds, the masses are left to languish and deteriorate with abject poverty. The existence of kleptocracy in Nigeria amounts a threat for a peaceful nation, human dignity and good governance. Regrettably, the same kleptocrats are celebrated despite the negligence of their political responsibilities. Some are given chieftaincy titles provided that they met the requirement or still in office. These singular attitude of Nigerians tends to support kleptocracy. Because of the evils imbedded in kleptocracy, various administrations and regimes have devised different approaches towards minimising the act. For example, President Buhari’s administrations introduced the Treasury Single Account (TSA), a financial tool purposefully designed to consolidate and manage governments’ cash resources though the template was actually introduced and designed in 2014 under President Jonathan’s administration. Sadly despite different measures by

Nigerian governments to protect public funds, lessen borrowing rates, and regulate and control excess spending of the government, the objectives for introducing these institutions have not been achieved.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that clear declaration of assets should be a stepping stone for screening exercise before any political contest, appointment and assumption of any political office. Every assets declarations should be documented and reviewed annually. This will place the activities of every political ruler under a lock by showing what a political ruler has before, during and after political appointment. Declaration of assets will enable anti-corruption institutions/agencies (ICPC, EFCC, police, and many more) and the masses to evaluate and probe what the politicians have before and after leaving the office. It should form a part of policy base in Nigeria that anybody found guilty of false assets declaration should be removed from office, tried, jailed and punished with capital penalty. The Federal Republic of Nigeria in their endeavour should assist in setting plans and measures for asset recoveries so as to mitigate and redress the damage caused by kleptocrats. Moreover, Nigerian government should consider bills like placing of all political officials on the same salary scale with civil/public servant, whistle blowing and signing of freedom of information bill to be appropriate measures in curbing kleptomaniac practices.

6. CONCLUSION

The study discovers that though looting and siphoning of national treasuries by rulers trail in Nigerian politics since independence but it is an undeniable fact that the level of looting, stealing, diverting and embezzling in the fourth republic is much. Political office is ascribed to a ruling party or group rather than an office despite the existence of Nigerian written constitution. Ruling group pounds national treasuries with impunity while selfish interest assumes the primary attitude of the ruler – one individual often the president dominates the nation's apparatus and stands above its laws. Embezzlement, authoritarian regimes, neo-patrimonialism, illegal confiscation, bribery, fraud, extortion, nepotism, money laundering, unemployment, insufficiency, famine, ethnicity, marginalisation among other negative elements breeding out of kleptocratic system in the Nigerian fourth republic. The system increases when the political elites who are meant to legislate and implement the laws for the masses turn to thieves. They use their political sovereignty and legitimacy to sustain and hold onto power, status and wealth. Kleptocracy is common at all levels of government and this significantly made Nigeria a failed state. Political institutions are not accountable, transparent while the attitudes of political leaders towards their subjects are unpatriotic. This deforms good governance and fundamental human rights because by the principles of kleptocracy, state resources are enjoyed by the few. Kleptocracy thus, is an unwanted political practice because it breeds political evils such as increase in poverty, promotes oligarchy and heightens dependency ratio. This shows that immediate problem of Nigeria does not lie on resources inadequacies, rather government managed, controlled and ruled by kleptocrats. Political rulers should know that every loyalty should target at promoting humanity which does not share in status discrimination instead, functions under the principles of justice and equity. Declaration of assets bear loyalty to humanity which is the gate way to human capacity development and economic growth with the unspoken road map to social, urban and infrastructural development. This is because those who abide by their loyalty to humanity do everything within their powers to see that the right things are done at all times. Such rulers should ensure that they avoid every form of economic sabotage, budget padding, capital flight, abuse of official power. Transparent rulers are ambassadors of equity and justice for all with an increased and sharpened distaste in diverting, looting or stealing of public resources.

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