

Public resources should be directed toward welfare programmes, infrastructure, education, and healthcare

The irrational exit package recently approved by President Bola Tinubu for military top brass highlights the troubling disparity in allocating public resources for retirement benefits. In Nigeria, military generals, governors, and top politicians retire into opulence funded by the public purse. Conversely, civil servants and ordinary soldiers endure delayed pensions and financial uncertainty. This growing inequity is a glaring reflection of systemic injustice and a misalignment of priorities in governance. While millions of citizen's wallow in misery, the President had no scruples in approving a retirement package for service chiefs and generals that includes \$20,000 for foreign medical treatment, bulletproof SUVs, cooks, and other incendiary benefits. The discriminatory package in the Harmonized Terms and Conditions of Service provides that vehicles will be replaced every four years and maintained by the military. They will enjoy a retinue of aides paid from the public purse. An armored SUV sells for a minimum of N1 billion. The luxury perks mimic the scandalous retirement packages governors have approved for themselves. After serving only four or eight years, governors receive extravagant retirement packages that include multimillion-naira gratuities, mansions in choice locations, luxury vehicles, domestic staff, and security details for life. Some governors return to serving as senators and ministers, receiving outrageous salaries and benefits without relinquishing the retirement perks they already enjoy.

The humongous perks extend to top legislative and judicial officers. The Senate President Godswill Akpabio, Speaker Abbas Tajudeen, and their deputies, Barau Jibrin and Ben Kalu are set to receive N10 billion for housing and furniture per the Federal Capital Territory 2024 supplementary budget. The FCT has already funded other expensive housing projects, including a N21 billion home for Vice-President Kashim Shettima. In August 2024, Tinubu bought a presidential jet worth \$150 million amid public outrage. Public funds finance these excessive benefits in a country where education and health facilities are inadequate and decrepit while poverty, unemployment, and underdevelopment remain widespread. Yet, it is common knowledge that

these top public officials and politicians who enjoy these unjustifiable benefits amass staggering wealth in office. Former Accountant General of the Federation, Ahmed Idris is facing trial for allegedly stealing N104 billion. Last January, the EFCC revived the cases of 13 former governors accused of stealing N722 billion. In contrast, civil servants and soldiers struggle for their entitlements. Pensioners queue for hours, often in deplorable conditions, for delayed payments that are meagre compared to the fortunes lavished on the political elite. Last December, military pensioners protested at the Ministry of Finance to bemoan the non-payment of pension arrears from October 2023 to November 2024. Retired Federal Government workers had to wait more than 18 months before the accrued pension rights were paid in December. Many have died without receiving their rightful pensions, leaving their families in hardship. The lavish benefits for governors, politicians, and generals deepen the perception of public office as a means of personal enrichment rather than service. It fuels corruption, as many see politics as a pathway to wealth. This has dangerous implications for governance, as leaders become more focused on securing personal gains than addressing the pressing needs of their constituents.

These perks weigh on an already overburdened treasury. The N49.7 trillion 2025 budget has a significant deficit of N13.08 trillion with an alarming N15.81 trillion (45 per cent of revenue) for debt servicing. Yet, a huge chunk of public funds goes to catering to the comforts of public officeholders.

Therefore, the laws and policies governing retirement benefits must be urgently reviewed. State legislatures, often complicit in passing outrageous pension laws for former governors, must be held accountable by civil society and citizens. Public resources should be directed toward welfare programmes, infrastructure, education, and healthcare that benefit the majority rather than a privileged few.

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