HUMANUS DISCOURSE Vol. 6. NO 6. 2026
ISSN 2787-0308 (ONLINE)

When spider webs unite, they can tie up a lion: Money, mercenaries, machines and the power of voters in the 2026 Osun state off-cycle election

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Abstract

Nigeria's democratic development continues to face challenges associated with vote buying, patronage-based political mobilisation, and electoral violence. This study examines the implications of money, machines, mercenaries, and voter power for democratic consolidation, using the 2026 Osun State off-cycle governorship election as a case study. The study adopts a qualitative research design, drawing on documentary sources, electoral reports, media accounts, and relevant scholarly literature. It is anchored in rational choice theory and democratic consolidation theory. Findings indicate that monetary inducements influenced voter behaviour, political machines enhanced partisan mobilisation and resource distribution, while intimidation and coercion constrained voter autonomy and peaceful participation. The interaction of these factors produced an uneven electoral environment and undermined public confidence in democratic processes. However, the study also highlights the capacity of voters to resist

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manipulation and assert electoral agency. It concludes that elections alone cannot consolidate democracy where financial inducement, organised political machinery, and coercion remain influential. The study recommends stronger enforcement of campaign-finance regulations, prosecution of electoral offenders, enhanced institutional independence, and sustained civic education to strengthen voter autonomy, electoral accountability, and democratic consolidation.

Key words: Money Politics; BVAS; IReV; Political Violence; Democratic Consolidation, Osun, Elections, Adeleke

Introduction

Democracies are becoming increasingly expensive to operate. This is because substantial financial resources are required from the pre-election period through election day and even during the post-election phases by the electoral management body and political parties. In developed democracies, significant frameworks are provided for both private and public funding, disclosure requirements, and enforcement challenges thereby making helping to safeguard the potency and acceptability of its elections.[1]

Elections constitute a central mechanism through which democratic societies select leaders, confer political legitimacy, and hold governments accountable. However, the existence of elections does not automatically guarantee democratic consolidation. The credibility of electoral democracy depends on whether political competition is conducted within accepted rules, whether citizens can vote freely, and whether electoral institutions can constrain money, coercion, manipulation, and other forms of malpractice. All these seem to be bereft in developing democracies especially Nigeria.

Nigeria is Africa's largest population and democracy. Yet, abuse of money has have remained persistent despite successive electoral reforms and the increasing deployment of technology.[2]Beyond money, machines consist of the digital technologies deployed by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), while mercenaries include political thugs, hired mobilisers, security-linked actors, and other informal agents deployed to intimidate opponents, influence voters, protect political interests, or disrupt electoral activities.

While a lot of studies have examined democracies and democratisation in Nigeria,[3] off-cycle elections,[4] fundings and topical issues on Nigeria's election,

[1] ACE Electoral Knowledge Network. 2012. "Public Funding of Political Parties." In *ACE Encyclopaedia*. ACE Electoral Knowledge Network
[2]Chinye, Chukwuma Jnr. 2023. "Managing the Influence of Money in Nigerian Elections." *Centre for Democracy and Development*, April 27, 2023; Adetula, V. A. O. (Ed.). .*Money and politics in Nigeria*. International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), 2008
[3]J. S. Omotola,. "Elections and Democratic Transition in Nigeria under the Fourth Republic." *African Affairs* 109, no. 437: (2010): 535–553. https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adq040; Ashindorbe, Kelvin. 2018. "Electoral Violence and the Challenge of Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria." *India Quarterly* 74, no. 1: 92–105. https://doi.org/10.1177/0974928417749639

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adequate attention has not been given to the issues of money, machines and mercenaries as deployed for the Osun State governorship election. This study therefore examines the Osun election through the interconnected dimensions of money, machines, and mercenaries. The study asks three central questions:

What roles did money, political machines, and mercenaries play in the 2026 Osun State governorship election? How did voters respond to the use or abuse of these tripartite forces? What implications did their deployment have for Nigeria's democratic consolidation?

The study illuminates how money, machines, and mercenaries shape voter autonomy, electoral competition, and democratic consolidation, while offering insights into strengthening Nigeria's electoral institutions. Methodologically, the paper adopts a qualitative research design, relying on secondary data drawn from documentary sources, scholarly literature, newspapers, new media platforms including the personal handles of some of the actors, and verified video materials.

Literature Review

Elections enable citizens to choose leaders and demand accountability, but in emerging democracies, political parties and candidates use money, patronage, technology, organisation, and coercion to shape electoral outcomes. Lindberg argues that repeated elections can promote democratic learning as political actors adapt to democratic rules, although weak institutions may reproduce authoritarian practices.[5] Bratton and van de Walle similarly highlight patron-clientism, personalised politics, and material inducements in African political competition.[6] Linz and Stepan, alongside Diamond, stress that democratic consolidation requires legitimate institutions, procedures, and norms.[7]Girisanker and Aravind further show that illiberal practices can undermine consolidation. Thus, elections shaped by money, coercion, technology, and institutional weaknesses may either strengthen or weaken democracy.[8] This study extends these perspectives by emphasising **voter agency**, examining how citizens strategically respond to elite electoral

[4] J.S. Omotola, &Oyewole, S. (2025). Electoral Violence in Nigeria: Insights from Off-Cycle Subnational Elections. *Journal of Asian and African Studies, 60 no 2.* (2025): 947-959; Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD). 2023. *Off-Cycle Elections in Bayelsa, Imo and Kogi: An Early Referendum*. Abuja: Centre for Democracy and Development, November 7, 2023

[5]Staffan I. Lindberg, *Democracy and Elections in Africa*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006.

[6] Michael Bratton and Nicolas van de Walle. *Democratic Experiments in Africa: Regime Transitions in Comparative Perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

[7] Juan J. Linz and Stepan Alfred. "Toward Consolidated Democracies." *Journal of Democracy* 7, no. 2 (1996): 14–33. https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.1996.0031; Larry Diamond. *Developing Democracy: Toward Consolidation*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999.

[8] Sb, Girisanker, and Vrinda Aravind. 2022. "Challenges to Democratic Consolidation In Ecuador -Space For Opposition And Indigenous Representation Under Rafael Correa And Lenin Moreno." Democracy and Security 18 (1): 51–66. doi:10.1080/17419166.2021.1978844.

pressures and whether collective voter action can constrain powerful political actors during Nigeria's 2026 Osun off-cycle election.

This now brings us to the tripartite concept of money, machines and mercenary. Money is important to elections and democracy.[9] In Nigeria like other developing democracies, it remains one of the most extensively discussed instruments of electoral competition from mobilisation, planning to vote buying.[10] Vote buying involves the exchange of material benefits for political support and represents an important dimension of clientelistic politics.[11] Stokes defines vote buying as a contingent exchange in which politicians provide benefits in return for electoral support.[12] In African contexts, however, the relationship between payment and voting behaviour is not necessarily straightforward. Kao, Lust, and Rakner show that vote buying interacts with anti-corruption campaigns and identity, shaping electoral behaviour across African contexts.[13] Vicente and Wantchekon argue that electoral clientelism can become an important campaign strategy where institutional and socioeconomic conditions make voters vulnerable to material inducements.[14] In Nigeria, electoral spending may take the form of direct cash payments, gifts, transportation, food, employment promises, or other benefits. Bratton demonstrates that vote buying and electoral violence are interconnected features of Nigerian elections, undermining electoral integrity and democratic legitimacy adding that it can cause voter apathy and partisan loyalty.[15]Adetula argues that money politics, political godfatherism, patronage, and weak institutions reinforce electoral violence in Nigeria.[16]Though rare, evidence suggests that some voters can accept inducements without necessarily voting for the politician who provides them as seen in Osun election.

9 Wagner Pralon, Mancuso, Vanessa Elias de Oliveira, Bruno Wilhelm Speck, and Rodrigo Rossi Horochovski. 2023. "Money in Electoral Campaigns: The Relationship between Money and Politics as a Cause of the Judicialization of Electoral Processes in Brazil" Social Sciences 12, no. 12: (2023) 656. https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci12120656; Mukulika Banerjee "Money and Meaning in Elections: Towards a Theory of the Vote." Modern Asian Studies 54, no. 1 (2020): 286–313. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X17000798.

10 Bratton, Michael. "Vote Buying and Violence in Nigerian Election Campaigns." *Electoral Studies* 27, no. 4 (2008): 621–632. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2008.04.013

11 Alice Guerra, and Mogens K. Justesen. 2022. "Vote Buying and Redistribution." *Public Choice* 193 (3): 315–344. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11127-022-00999-; Hidalgo, F. Daniel, and Simeon Nichter. "Voter Buying: Shaping the Electorate through Clientelism." Working paper, February 20, 2013. https://www.bu.edu/polisci/files/2010/10/voter_buying_Jan_2013.pdf

12 Stokes, Susan C. "Political Clientelism." In *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics*, edited by CarlesBoix and Susan C. Stokes, 604–627. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

13 Kristen kao, Ellen Lust, and Lise Rakner. "Vote-Buying, Anti-Corruption Campaigns, and Identity in African Elections." *World Development* 160: (2022): 106064. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2022.106064

14 Pedro C Vicente, Pedro and Leonard Wantchekon. "Clientelism and Vote Buying: Lessons from Field Experiments in African Elections." *Oxford Review of Economic Policy* 25, no. 3 (2009): 292–305. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxrep/grp018.

15 Michael. Bratton, "Vote Buying and Violence in Nigerian Election Campaigns." *Electoral Studies* 27 no 4 (2008) 621–632. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2008.04.013.

16Adetula, *Money and politics in Nigeria*

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Machines in this context refer to technology or digitalization of Elections. No doubt that most developing countries and democracies are adopting and adapting to technologization of elections.[17] In Nigeria, electoral reforms have introduced biometric voter accreditation and electronic result-management systems intended to improve electoral integrity.[18]Agunyai et al further finds that finds that although BVAS and IReV improved electoral transparency and reduced some forms of fraud, implementation gaps and technological vulnerabilities limited their effectiveness, while inadvertently facilitating more sophisticated vote-buying practices.[19] The deployment of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Result Viewing Portal (IReV) represents an attempt to reduce electoral fraud and increase transparency.[20] However, technology does not automatically produce credible elections.[21] Cheeseman and Klaas observe that technological reforms can strengthen electoral institutions but may also create new forms of contestation when implementation is weak or public trust is low.[22] Similarly, electoral technology can generate expectations of transparency that are undermined when devices malfunction, results are delayed, or citizens cannot independently verify information.

The third component of the study concerns **mercenaries**, understood broadly as hired political thugs, informal security actors, political enforcers, and other non-state agents mobilised to influence electoral competition. Electoral violence is a longstanding feature of Nigerian politics. Human Rights Watch and other studies have documented how political actors have historically employed youth groups and informal networks to intimidate opponents and voters.[23]Bekoe argues that electoral violence in Africa is often linked to the stakes associated with political power, weak institutions, and the expectation that electoral competition may determine access to state resources.[24] Political violence can occur before, during, or after elections and may include threats, attacks,

[17] Grace Ganz, Electronic Voting in Developing Countries. The Borgen Project (nd): https://borgenproject.org/electronic-voting-in-developing-countries/
[18] Samuel ChukwudiAgunyai,,SaheedAyinlaOgundare, and Victor Ojakorotu. 2026. "Technological Innovations and the Credibility of Nigeria's 2023 PresidentialElection." African Identities, March, 1–18. doi:10.1080/14725843.2026.2640926.
[19] Ibid
[20] Olasupo Thompson, Idris, R.T., Aina, O.S., Adekola, J.S & Oladele, S.O (2025) Digital Electoral Reforms and Democratic Consolidation: A Critical Assessment of BVAS and IReV in 2023 Nigerians general Elections. Gusau International Journal of Management and Social Sciences, 8(2), 297- 314
[21] Ibid; Chris Onyekwelu, "Digital Technology and Democracy in Nigeria: A Study of How Technology Is Transforming Elections without Necessarily Deepening Democracy." The Round Table 112 no. 6 (2023): 596–612. doi:10.1080/00358533.2023.2286840.
[22] Nic Cheeseman, and Brian Klaas. *How to Rig an Election*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018.
[23]Awopeju, A. (2025). Election, Electoral Violence and Political Development in Nigeria. *AKSU Journal of Administration and Corporate Governance (AKSUJACOG). 5*(4), 30-42 10.60787/AJACG.VOL5NO4.30-42; Human Rights Watch. 2003. *Testing Democracy: Political Violence in Nigeria*. April 10, 2003. Vol. 15, no. 9 (A). New York: Human Rights Watch. Human Rights Watch report
[24]Dorina A. Bekoe, *Voting in Fear: Electoral Violence in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2012.

destruction of campaign materials, disruption of rallies, and intimidation at polling stations. The concept of mercenarism therefore extends the analysis beyond conventional electoral violence. It draws attention to the **outsourcing of coercion** to actors who may not formally belong to political parties or state institutions. Ashindorbe demonstrates how electoral violence undermines popular participation, political legitimacy, and democratic consolidation, revealing the fragility of Nigeria's democratic institutions.[25] Similarly, Ikpe argues that electoral violence undermines democratic consolidation in Nigeria by weakening institutions, discouraging participation, and compromising electoral legitimacy and political stability.[26]

Existing literature examines vote buying, electoral violence, political machines, technology, and democratic consolidation, but often overlooks voter agency. This study addresses this gap by examining how Osun voters collectively resist, negotiate, or circumvent elite electoral pressures, asking whether ordinary voters can constrain powerful actors despite inequalities in political resources.

Theoretical Framework

The paper is anchored on the rational choice theory and democratic consolidation theory. Rational Choice Theory explains political behaviour by assuming that individuals are purposeful actors who evaluate available alternatives and select choices that they perceive will maximise their interests or expected benefits. Although its intellectual roots extend to classical economics, Anthony Downs was instrumental in applying the rational-choice approach systematically to democratic politics.[27] Downs conceptualised voters and political parties as decision-makers whose behaviour is shaped by preferences, expected benefits, costs, and available information. Mancur Olson further developed the rational-choice tradition by demonstrating how individual interests influence collective action and participation in groups.[28]Olson shows that individuals sharing common interests do not necessarily act collectively unless incentives or other mechanisms encourage participation.

The theory is significant to this study because it provides a framework for understanding voter power in the 2026 Osun State off-cycle election. It allows the study to examine how voters assessed competing political alternatives despite money, party machinery, electoral technology, intimidation, and other pressures. In particular, it helps explain why receiving electoral inducements does not necessarily mean that voters will vote for the political actor who provides them. Voters may strategically accept material benefits while privately making electoral choices based on performance, identity, expectations, or perceived interests. Thus, Rational Choice Theory helps explain the central

[25]Ashindorbe, Electoral Violence
[26]Ikpe, U. B. (2015). Rethinking Electoral Violence and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, *50*, no. 1, (2015): 96-108.
[27]Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957.
[28]Mancur Olson *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965.
https://doi.org/10.4159/9780674041660.

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proposition of this study: money, machines and mercenaries may influence voters, but collective voter decisions can ultimately determine electoral outcomes.

Democratic Consolidation Theory provides a useful framework for assessing whether democratic institutions and practices have become sufficiently established to withstand political pressures and sustain legitimate competition. Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan are among the principal proponents of the theory. They argue that democracy becomes consolidated when democratic institutions and procedures become the "only game in town," meaning that major political actors and citizens accept democratic rules as the legitimate framework for resolving political conflicts. Consolidation involves more than the conduct of periodic elections; it requires behavioural, attitudinal, and constitutional dimensions that reinforce the stability of democratic institutions.[29] Larry Diamond further conceptualises democratic consolidation as a process through which democracy becomes broadly accepted as the preferred system of government and gains sufficient legitimacy to resist serious challenges from authoritarian alternatives.[30] Consolidation therefore depends on effective institutions, political accountability, respect for electoral rules, citizen participation, and confidence in democratic procedures.

The theory is relevant to the 2026 Osun election because it assesses whether money, political machinery, technology, intimidation, and alleged mercenary mobilisation strengthened or weakened democratic legitimacy. Voter resilience, electoral participation, and monitoring demonstrate democratic agency, while vote buying, intimidation, technological failures, and alleged interference raise concerns about Nigeria's democratic consolidation.

Osun Governorship Elections and Performances since 2010

Since 2010, Osun State's governorship elections have largely revolved around competing assessments of performance, workers' welfare, infrastructure, debt, and political legitimacy. Rauf Aregbesola, who won the 2010 election, was re-elected in 2014 with 56.68 percent of the vote. His administration was associated with extensive infrastructure development. The government justified the policy by citing fiscal constraints and its decision to avoid mass retrenchment. Aregbesola nevertheless maintained that his administration invested heavily in infrastructure and eventually cleared significant salary arrears, including ₦14.2 billion in late 2016.[31]Another major initiative was the O-Meals School feeding programme,[32]which provided meals to pupils in

[29] Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, "Toward Consolidated Democracies," *Journal of Democracy* 7, no. 2 (1996): 14–33, https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.1996.0031.
[30] Larry Diamond, *Developing Democracy: Toward Consolidation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999). https://jhupbooks.press.jhu.edu/title/developing-democracy.
[31] Osun State Government, Aregbesola Clears All Salary Arrears with N14.2bn. January 5, 2017. https://www.osunstate.gov.ng/2017/01/aregbesola-clears-salary-arrears-n14-2bn/
[32]AbdulkareemMojeed, ANALYSIS: OsunDecides2026: Ex-governors, their remarkable feats, low moments. August 12, 2026. https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-

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public primary schools. Despite his significant investments across various sectors, particularly in infrastructure and education, including the **Opon Imo (Digital Notebook)** initiative for students, his administration was constrained by persistent revenue shortfalls. The dwindling federal allocation to the state made it difficult to meet the government's financial obligations, resulting in the inability to pay workers' full salaries and prolonged salary arrears.[33] From 2015, the government introduced a modulated salary system: junior workers received full salaries, while some senior workers received 75 percent or 50 percent.

Gboyega Oyetola succeeded Aregbesola in 2018 after a closely contested election. INEC had ordered a rerun which Oyetola later won. The Osun State Governorship Election Tribunal, in its judgment of 22 March 2019, upheld Senator Ademola Adeleke's petition against the September 2018 election result. The Tribunal found substantial non-compliance with the Electoral Act 2010 during supplementary elections in seven polling units and declared Adeleke the winner, having secured the lawful majority of votes. Mr Rhodes-Vivour added that five members of the panel agreed with the judgement while two others disagreed with it. One of the dissenting judges, Kumai Akaas, accused the Independent National Electoral Commission of rigging the elections during the rerun. MrGalinje said INEC had no cogent reasons to have conducted a rerun and added that "the decision of the commission to have pronounced that election inconclusive meant that INEC had something up it sleaves.[34]The victory was however upturned by the Supreme Court. His principal strength was administrative and financial continuity, with emphasis on completing inherited projects and attracting investment. However, the continuation of the modulated salary regime remained a major political liability. During the 2018 campaign, Oyetola defended the policy, explaining that workers on Grades 1–7 received full salaries, Grades 8–10 received 75 percent, while Grades 12 and above received 50 percent.

However, in 2022, Mr Ademola Adeleke once again defeated him though the case went to the supreme court, Adeleke was decaled winner.[35] Adeleke's administration represented a significant departure in workers' welfare. It inherited substantial salary, pension and deduction arrears, but restored regular full salary payments while simultaneously paying inherited half-salary debts. By 2026, the state government reported that local-government workers continued receiving their full salaries despite approximately ₦230 billion in

news/902072-analysis-osundecides2026-ex-governors-their-remarkable-feats-low-moments.html

[33] Osun State Government, We Are Not Happy Paying Modulated Salary To Workers – Aregbesola. October 30, 2017. https://www.osunstate.gov.ng/2017/10/notappy-paying-modulated-salary-workers-aregbesola/

[34] Evelyn Okakwu, Osun Governorship: Supreme Court delivers final verdict, in Adeleke, Oyetola's tussle (LIVE UPDATES). Premium Times, July 5, 2019. https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/338977-osun-governorship-supreme-court-delivers-final-verdict-in-adeleke-oyetolas-tussle-live-updates.html?tztc=1

[35] Rejoice Ewodage, #OsunDebate: We Don't Pay Half Salaries, We Pay Modulated Salaries – APC's Oyetola. Channels Television. September 16, 2018. https://www.channelstv.com/2018/09/16/osun-debate-we-dont-pay-half-salaries-we-pay-modulated-salaries-apcs-oyetola/

ISSN 2787-0308 (ONLINE)

local-government allocations being withheld, arguing that the state had intervened with its own resources to protect workers. This provides an important contrast with the APC administrations and helps explain why workers' welfare became a significant component of Adeleke's political narrative.

Figure 1: List of Governors and their scorecard in Osun State, 2010-date

Governor/ political party	Period/Election	Major strengths	Major weaknesses/controversies	Workers' welfare
Ademola Adeleke (PDP/Accord)	2022–2026; re-elected 2026	Strong emphasis on workers' welfare; payment of inherited salary and pension obligations; infrastructure and social programmes; implementation of higher minimum wage; ability to maintain salary payments despite severe fiscal pressure	Inherited substantial financial obligations; faced criticisms over governance and project prioritisation; dependence on state resources to cushion fiscal pressures	Full salaries paid regularly. In February 2026, the state government reported that core local-government salaries were being paid fully and on time despite approximately ₦230 billion in withheld local-government allocations, with the state intervening to sustain payments.
Gboyega Oyetola (APC)	2018–2022; elected 2018	Administrative continuity; continuation/completion of inherited projects; emphasis on fiscal management and investment; full salary payments resumed under his administration	Inherited significant salary, pension and other obligations; faced political dissatisfaction over the unresolved financial legacy of the Aregbesola administration; lost re-election to Adeleke in 2022	Modulated salary payments, but substantial inherited arrears and obligations remained. Levels 1 to 7 have full salaries. Levels 8 to 10 now earn 75%. Its only 12 and above that earn 50%
Rauf Aregbesola (APC)	2010–2018; elected 2010 and re-elected 2014	Major infrastructure projects; road construction and urban renewal; school and public-building projects; strong grassroots political mobilisation	Severe fiscal crisis; accumulation of salary and pension arrears; introduction of modulated salaries, which became one of the most politically damaging aspects of his administration	Modulated/partial salaries became a major controversy, with some categories of workers receiving less than their full monthly salaries. The policy was defended by the government as a response to fiscal constraints and an attempt to avoid mass retrenchment.

Source:[36]

Figure 1 shows the score-card of the governors of Osun Satte from 2010 till date. The contrast is particularly significant for analysing the 2022 and 2026 elections. While Aregbesola and Oyetola could point to infrastructure and administrative continuity, the salary question created a persistent political vulnerability. Adeleke converted this vulnerability into a governance narrative centred on "full salary, payment of inherited arrears and workers' dignity." His administration reported continued full payment even amid the withholding of local-government allocations, making workers' welfare a particularly important indicator for evaluating the political meaning of Osun's electoral choice. the Commissioner for Information and public enlightenment, OluomoKolapo Alimi stated unequivocally that

> There has been no interruption in the payment of core salaries to local government workers. Salaries are being paid fully and as at when due.Despite the hijacking of local government allocations for almost a year, funds now totaling approximately ₦230 billion, the Osun State Government under Governor Ademola Jackson Nurudeen Adeleke has sustained salary payments through the state's resources.

[36]Mojeed, ANALYSIS: OsunDecides2026:

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This intervention has ensured financial stability for workers and shielded families from avoidable hardship.[37]

Electoral laws on Vote Buying, BVAS and Violence

Nigeria's Electoral Act, 2026 provides a comprehensive legal framework for addressing some of the principal threats to electoral integrity, particularly vote buying, manipulation of electoral technology, and electoral violence. These provisions are important for assessing the integrity of contemporary Nigerian elections because they seek to regulate both the conduct of voters and candidates and the procedures through which votes are accredited, recorded, transmitted and collated.

Vote Buying and Electoral Bribery (Money)

The Electoral Act, 2026 expressly criminalises electoral bribery and the use of financial or other inducements to influence electoral behaviour. Section 125(1) prohibits a person from directly or indirectly offering or promising a gift, loan, money, procurement, agreement or other inducement to influence the election of a candidate or the vote of an elector.[38] The provision therefore captures the central mechanism of vote buying: the exchange or promise of a material benefit for electoral support.

The Act also criminalises the acceptance of such inducements. Section 125 addresses both the giver and recipient of electoral bribes, while extending liability to persons who conspire, aid or abet the commission of the offence.[39] This is significant because contemporary vote buying may involve intermediaries, party agents, political brokers and other actors rather than a direct transaction between candidate and voter.

In addition, section 131, dealing with *undue influence*, specifically prohibits the corrupt payment or provision of money to influence a person to vote or refrain from voting. It also makes it an offence for a voter to corruptly accept money or another inducement during the relevant electoral period. The prescribed punishment is a fine of ₦500,000, imprisonment for 12 months, or both.[40] The legal framework therefore treats vote buying not simply as an unethical electoral practice but as a statutory electoral offence capable of attracting criminal sanctions.

For the purposes of analysing the Osun governorship election, vote buying can consequently be operationalised as the offering, giving, soliciting or accepting of

[37] Osun State Government, Osun Government Clarifies Position On Local Government Salaries. February 19, 2026. https://www.osunstate.gov.ng/2026/02/osun-government-clarifies-position-on-local-government-salaries/
[38] Federal Republic of Nigeria, *Electoral Act, 2026*, Act No. 1, sec. 125(1), Official Gazette No. 40, March 2, 2026, 58–59.
[39] Ibid
[40] Federal Republic of Nigeria, *Electoral Act, 2026*, sec. 131, 62.

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money or material inducements intended to influence voting behaviour, whether undertaken directly by candidates or indirectly through agents and intermediaries.

BVAS and IReV (Machine)

The Electoral Act, 2026 provides an explicit statutory foundation for the use of technology in voter accreditation. Section 47(2) requires the Presiding Officer to use the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) or another technological device prescribed by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to verify, confirm or authenticate the particulars of an intending voter before voting.[41] BVAS is therefore not merely an administrative innovation but part of the statutory procedure for voter accreditation.

The Act also provides for the electronic transmission of polling-unit results. Under **section 60(3)**, after the prescribed Form EC8A has been signed and stamped by the Presiding Officer and, where available, countersigned by candidates or polling agents, the Presiding Officer is required to electronically transmit the result from the polling unit to the IREV portal.[42] The provision is particularly important for electoral transparency because it creates a direct electronic record of polling-unit results. The Act, however, recognises the possibility of technological or communication failure. Where electronic transmission fails because of communication problems, section 60(3) provides that the duly completed and signed Form EC8A remains the primary source for the collation and declaration of the result.[43] Thus, failure to transmit a result electronically does not automatically invalidate the polling-unit result.

Furthermore, section 62(2) requires INEC to maintain a National Electronic Register of Election Results, containing polling-unit-by-polling-unit results and collated results.[44] Section 62(4) requires collation and returning officers to verify that the number of accredited voters in collated results is consistent with the accreditation data transmitted from polling units and that the votes in the collated result correspond with the results transmitted from the polling units.[45]

The technological provisions can therefore be understood as creating three interconnected safeguards: electronic voter accreditation through BVAS, electronic transmission of polling-unit results through IReV, and electronic storage and verification through the National Electronic Register of Election Results. These provisions provide a legal basis for assessing technological integrity during the Osun election.

Violence, Threat, Intimidation (Mercenary)

[41] Federal Republic of Nigeria, *Electoral Act, 2026*, sec. 47(2), 27.
[42] Federal Republic of Nigeria, *Electoral Act, 2026*, sec. 60(3), 28–29.
[43] Ibid
[44] Federal Republic of Nigeria, *Electoral Act, 2026*, sec. 62(2), (4), 29–30.
[45] Ibid

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The Electoral Act, 2026 contains several provisions aimed at preventing political violence and intimidation. Particularly relevant to the concept of political "mercenaries" is section 96(5), which prohibits a political party, aspirant or candidate from retaining, organising, training or equipping persons or groups for the purpose of using physical force or coercion to advance a political objective.[46] The same section also prohibits political parties, aspirants and candidates from keeping or using armed private security organisations, vanguards or other groups or individuals to assist them during campaigns, rallies, processions or elections.[47]

This provision is particularly relevant when analysing the use of political thugs or hired groups in Nigerian elections. Although the Act does not primarily employ the term "mercenary", section 96(5)(6) provides a statutory basis for examining the recruitment, organisation and deployment of individuals for political coercion or violence. A person or group that aids or abets such conduct may also incur criminal liability under section 96(8).[48]

The prohibition is reinforced by section 97(1), which provides that a party, candidate, aspirant, person or group of persons must not directly or indirectly threaten another person with force or violence during a political campaign in order to compel support for, or opposition to, a political party or candidate[49] The provision consequently links political violence directly to the coercive manipulation of political choice.

On election day, section 130(1) prohibits possession of offensive weapons within a polling unit or within 300 metres of a polling unit. It also prohibits conduct, dress or facial decoration calculated to intimidate voters and criminalises the snatching or destruction of election materials.[50] These provisions are particularly relevant to incidents in which armed or violent groups are deployed to polling locations to frighten voters, disrupt voting or interfere with election materials.

The Act further addresses undue influence under section 131 and threatening under section 132. Section 132 prohibits the use or threat of force, violence or restraint; threats of injury, damage, harm or loss intended to compel a person to vote or refrain from voting; abduction or duress that prevents the free exercise of the vote; and conduct preventing political aspirants from freely accessing the media, political mobilisation and campaign activities.[51] A violation attracts a fine of ₦2 million or imprisonment for three years.

Taken together, the Electoral Act 2026 provides a useful framework for understanding electoral violence beyond physical attacks. It covers threats,

[46]Federal Republic of Nigeria, *Electoral Act, 2026*, sec. 96(5), 43.
[47]Ibid., sec. 96(6).
[48]Ibid., sec. 96(8)
[49]Ibid., sec. 97(1)–(2), 43.
[50]Ibid., sec. 130(1), 61–62.
[51]Ibid., sec. 132, 62.

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intimidation, force, abduction, weapons, destruction of electoral materials, and organised political coercion. These provisions capture the roles of political thugs and hired groups in undermining voter autonomy. Thus, money may distort choice, technological failures may compromise electoral integrity, while violence may suppress participation. The Act consequently offers an appropriate legal basis for assessing electoral threats in the Osun governorship election.

Money in the Osun Election

Money was one of the most visible instruments of political competition in the 2026 Osun State governorship election. Allegations of large-scale spending, direct voter inducement and the use of public resources featured prominently before and during the poll. Deji Adeleke alleged that the APC spent about ₦60 billion on election-day vote buying, with some voters allegedly offered as much as ₦50,000. This figure remains an allegation rather than an independently audited expenditure. Other reports placed combined APC and Accord expenditure at more than ₦100 billion, although these figures should similarly be treated cautiously because they are not official audited accounts. On the other hand, Ayodele Fayose also alleged that Accord party also spent at least N40 billion on the elections adding that both major parties deployed money for inducement and trading.[52] According to the APC, while Deji Adeleke was reported to have alleged that the party spent N70 billion on vote-buying, Davido reportedly put the figure at ₦120 billion, while Melaye allegedly claimed N60 billion.[53] While nobody knew the exact amount, no doubt that huge monies was deployed by both parties.

Money also entered the election through government welfare payments. The APC alleged that Adeleke's administration paid ₦20,000 into the accounts of workers and residents shortly before the election and petitioned the EFCC, ICPC and INEC, describing the payments as vote buying. The government disputed the political interpretation of such payments. Importantly, Adeleke had publicly instructed voters to "collect their money and vote against" election riggers, illustrating how monetary inducement had become openly acknowledged within the political contest itself. The APC campaign council, in a statement by its Media Committee Chairman, Remi Omowaye, accused the administration of Governor Ademola Adeleke of using public funds to influence voters, stating that "It is deeply disheartening that the Osun State Government has officially commenced a widespread vote-buying scheme. The administration is systematically requesting citizens to submit their bank account details to receive a political inducement of ₦20,000," [54]The EFCC subsequently placed a

[52] Matthew Atungwu, Osun Election: Accord Party spent N40bn – Fayose counters Davido's claim. Daily Post. August 19, 2026. https://dailypost.ng/2026/08/19/osun-election-accord-party-spent-n40bn-fayose-counters-davidos-claim/

53Ademuidakwo, Osun APC Tackles Adeleke's Brother, Davido, Melaye Over Vote-Buying Claims. Leadership. August 23, 2026. https://leadership.ng/osun-apc-tackles-adelekes-brother-davido-melaye-over-vote-buying-claims/

[54] Shina Abubakar, Osun Election: APC petitions EFCC, ICPC over alleged vote buying with state funds. Vanguard, August 5, 2026. https://www.vanguardngr.com/2026/08/osun-election-apc-petitions-efcc-icpc-over-alleged-vote-buying-with-state-funds/

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post-no-debit restriction on the Osun State Government's accounts, triggering public concerns over federal overreach, political interference, the limits of federal authority, and the implications for state autonomy and fiscal independence. It was not until after the election and the president's supposed intervention that the

Evidence from polling locations suggested direct inducement. Voters reportedly described payments ranging from ₦10,000 to ₦50,000, while one report claimed APC agents offered ₦20,000 compared with ₦2,500 allegedly offered by Accord at a polling unit in Irewole. These accounts demonstrate the difficulty of separating legitimate campaign expenditure from illicit vote buying. The Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room has alleged widespread vote-buying during the August 15 Osun Governorship Election, claiming that some voters were offered up to ₦50,000 to influence their choices.[55]

Machines in the Osun Election

Technology became a major component of the 2026 Osun governorship election, particularly through the deployment of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Result Viewing Portal (IReV). Before the election, concerns were already being expressed about the reliability and integrity of the technology. Former Vice-President Atiku Abubakar questioned INEC's decision to use Android 10 on BVAS devices, arguing that reliance on outdated software could undermine confidence in the electoral process.[56] On election day, these concerns were partly realised. Reports from observers documented BVAS malfunctions, slow accreditation and difficulties recognising some PVCs in several LGAs, including Ede South, Ola-Oluwa, Ilesa East, Ejigbo and Ife North. Adeleke himself complained that BVAS machines were malfunctioning or operating slowly at several polling units.[57] Similar concerns emerged from the Accord Party and Governor Ademola Adeleke, who complained about possible BVAS/PVC problems shortly before the poll.[58] According to Adeleke,

> Right now, there are complaints that BIVAS are not working well. I am not happy at all. The police are aiding the APC. Enuku, the thug, is disturbing people. People came out to vote, but the machine is slow. It is not working well. INEC should find a solution. My people are being chased in Ikire. I

[55] Monica Salihu, Situation Room alleges widespread vote-buying in Osun gov election. Radio Nigeria. August 18, 2026. https://radionigeria.gov.ng/2026/08/18/situation-room-alleges-widespread-vote-buying-in-osun-gov-election/
[56]Chuks Okocha, Atiku Raises Concern over Plans to Use Alleged Outdated BVAS in Osun Guber Poll. This Day, August 12, 2026. https://www.thisdaylive.com/2026/08/12/atiku-raises-concern-over-plans-to-use-alleged-outdated-bvas-in-osun-guber-poll/
[57]DapoAKinferon, INEC must address BVAS malfunction — Adeleke's camp Vanguard. August 15, 2026. https://www.vanguardngr.com/2026/08/inec-must-address-bvas-malfunction-adelekes-camp/
[58] Ibid

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> am still watching them. I don't know if the police are working for APC. I am still watching.[59]

These problems raised questions about whether electoral technology was actually improving efficiency or creating new obstacles to participation. The more significant technological controversy emerged after voting. Although IReV was designed to provide near-real-time public access to polling-unit results, uploads were considerably delayed. IReV uploads reportedly remained at 3,292 of 3,763 polling units, leaving 471 outstanding nearly eight hours after voting ended. While voting had ended in some polling units between 2:00 p.m. and 3:00 p.m. and the collation of results had commenced, the delayed uploading of results to the IReV portal generated suspicion, apprehension, and fears among voters and observers. The delay fuelled concerns about the possible deployment of **federal might** and the emergence of a perceived **"take Osun at all costs" syndrome,** thereby casting doubt on the transparency and credibility of the electoral process. It was on that basis that questions began to troop in. to be sure, David Adeleke wrote, "INEC (@inecnigeria), it is now 2:33 p.m., yet no result has been uploaded to the IReV portal. What is the delay? Nigerians deserve transparency and timely updates."[60]Subsequently, the upload to IReV started around 4.00pm.YIAGA reports through its monitoring applications, ERAD 2.0 found that the first 41 results appeared around 3:40–3:48 p.m., approximately 1 hour 40 minutes after the expected close of voting.[61]

A notable period of stagnation later occurred when uploads remained at 3,292 results between 8:48 p.m. and 11:50 p.m., leaving 471 outstanding.[62]Kimpact Development Initiative (KDI) similarly reported that the unexpected pause began at approximately 8:30 p.m. and continued for more than two hours. During this pause of upload in the evening again, people began to raise questions. The governor wrote via his twitter

> It is imperative that you use your good office to issue a clear warning to the heads of security agencies deployed to protect the good people of Osun State and safeguard the integrity of the electoral process. Reports of attempts to hijack or disrupt collation centres by desperate and rejected politicians across the state are deeply concerning and unacceptable, particularly given the large number of security personnel deployed to ensure a peaceful and credible election.[63]

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[59] Ibid.
[60] Davido, Osun Decides 2026. Twitters August 15, 2026. https://x.com/davido/status/2088626061017780504 accessed August 24, 2026
[61] Sam Itodo, Osun 2026: Is IReV reclaiming its title as Nigeria's electoral game changer?, By Samson Itodo. Premium Times. August 20, 2026. https://www.premiumtimesng.com/opinion/904245-osun-2026-is-irev-reclaiming-its-title-as-nigerias-electoral-game-changer-by-samson-itodo.html
[62] YIAGA Africa, https://x.com/YIAGA/status/2068432184906600713?lang=en
[63] A. Adeleke, @AAdeleke_01 https://x.com/AAdeleke_01/status/2088693536237535332 7.25PM August 15, 2026

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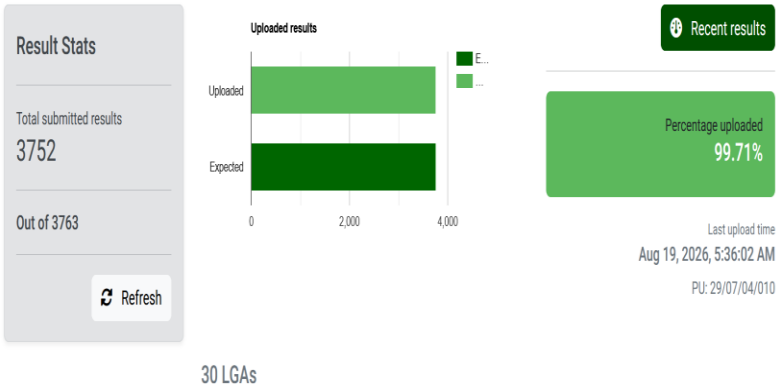
On social media, observers, commentators and users started questioning the INEC. A few excerptwere: "So it begins, activation of the clause;""We are watching;" "Osun people don't allow Nigeria INEC to deceive you people and say go to court because inside court na den den" "They will never succeed in their hidden plans at this stage of final Election Results Announcement oh!" Others were, "Very dangerous time. They must guard their votes.This is when they do African Magic. Activation of Wike's formula of mutilating already announced results.Then they will ask you to go to court" and "That hand that stopped it is the hand of Balogun Persia and that hand will wither;" among others.[64]

YIAGA reported that after sometime, transmission resumed around 11:50 p.m. nevertheless, the pause raised some fears and distrust on the intentions of the president, opposition which is the national ruling party which had vowed to claim Osun at all cost for Mr President and even the INEC. INEC subsequently explained that the lull lasted about two hours, attributing it to network-connectivity problems and discrepancies between uploaded result sheets and BVAS accreditation data.[65]Atedo N. A. Peterside (Anap) Foundation asked the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to explain why results from 62 Polling Units were yet to be uploaded to its Result Viewing (IReV) portal after the conclusion of the Osun State governorship election.[66] Though it had uploaded 51 more polling units as at August 19, 2026, nothing was uploaded afterwards as at August 24 which is almost 10 days after the election.

Figure 2: IReV as at August 24, 2026



[64] The Whistlers' Post. Anxiety In Adeleke's Camp As INEC Stops Results Upload On IREV. August 15, 2026. At 23.11PM.https://www.facebook.com/thewhistlerng/posts/anxiety-in-adelekes-camp-as-inec-stops-results-upload-on-irevread-more-in-the-co/1383466567317231/

[65] Lawrence Agbo, "Osun Election: INEC Explains IReV Delay, Says Uploads Stalled for Two Hours," *The Sun Nigeria*, August 17, 2026. https://thesun.ng/osun-election-inec-explains-irev-delay-says-uploads-stalled-for-two-hours/

[66] Bob Emeka, Osun Poll: Peterside Calls Out INEC Over Missing Results From 62 Pus. New telegraph, August 16, 2026. https://newtelegraphng.com/osun-poll-peterside-calls-out-inec-over-missing-results-from-62-pus/

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Source[67]

Figure 2 shows that only 99.71 percent of the polling-unit results had been uploaded to the IReV. As of 24 August 2026, the platform had still not reached 100 percent. Although the outstanding results may not necessarily have altered the final electoral outcome, their absence raises important questions about the completeness, transparency, and credibility of the electoral process. More importantly, the delay and incomplete upload may have affected public confidence in INEC's technological systems and further undermined trust in Nigeria's electoral process

The delay generated public suspicion and intense demands for transparency. AtedoPeterside questioned why the final 13 percent of results took substantially longer to upload, while Davido publicly demanded that results be uploaded to IReV rather than relying on unofficial figures. Samson Itodo did not mince words when he said that if IReV is to function as a trust infrastructure, delays or interruptions must be matched with prompt public communication.[68]

Mercenary in the Osun Election

The "mercenary" dimension of the 2026 Osun governorship election was reflected in allegations that political actors mobilised outsiders, thugs and other informal security networks to influence the electoral environment. In the days immediately preceding the election, reports emerged of suspected political thugs from Edo State entering Osun and allegedly issuing threats. One report on 14 August alleged that two men from Edo had arrived in Osun and threatened to "capture Adeleke" and "finish Davido." Whether these statements were intended as political rhetoric or not, the pronouncements of APC chieftains during the final phase of the campaign, coupled with the calibre and number of party leaders mobilised to Osun, suggested a highly coordinated determination to secure victory. The reported meeting of 76 APC leaders with President Bola Tinubu, where they were urged to close ranks and work for the party's success, further reinforced the perception that the election was being approached as a high-stakes political contest in which the APC was determined to "capture" Osun.[69]

The issue of outsiders and political mobilisation became particularly contentious because several APC governors and senior party figures were present in Osun around the election. Former President Goodluck Jonathan, in his post-election assessment, criticised the increasing practice of serving governors and senior political actors converging on off-cycle elections, warning that such mobilisation could undermine democratic stability. This is significant because off-cycle elections can attract political actors from outside the state, thereby transforming a state election into a wider national partisan contest.

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[67] INEC, Governorship election - 2026-08-15 – OSUN. https://www.inecelectionresults.ng/elections/6a7f788adcbc755a763f082a

[68] Itodo, Osun 2026:

[69] Ismaeel Uthman and Bola Bamigbola, "Osun: Inside Tinubu's Emergency Meeting with 76 APC Leaders," *PUNCH*, August 9, 2026. https://punchng.com/osun-inside-tinubus-emergency-meeting-with-76-apc-leaders/

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Another major incident occurred in Ikire, where police arrested Osun State House of Assembly member Abiola Ibrahim Inaolaji and about 146 people found at his residence. Police questioned the lawmaker, while reports described those arrested as suspected electoral mercenaries or intending voters. The incident is particularly important because it demonstrates how the boundary between legitimate political mobilisation, voter mobilisation and electoral mercenarism became blurred.

There was also a separate confrontation involving the Nigerian Navy and suspected political thugs associated with Asiri Eniba in Ile-Ife. The Osun Government alleged that five suspects were arrested after residents reported gunshots and an attempted takeover of a motor park. It further alleged that police subsequently sought their release and confronted naval personnel. A further controversy involved Babatunde Festus Komolafe, an APC House of Assembly candidate, who was reportedly arrested by naval personnel in Ifewara after a firearm was allegedly found in a campaign vehicle. His subsequent release and the alleged redeployment of the naval commander were described by some sources as resulting from "orders from above." However, this claim remains contested and has not been verified.

Figure 3: Reported Incidences Involving Mercenaries in Osun Election

Date	Location	Actors involved	Reported incident	Security response	Subsequent development
15 Aug. 2026	Ikire	Abiola Ibrahim Inaolaji and about 146 persons	Police found approximately 146 people at the residence of the Accord lawmaker; they were described as suspected electoral mercenaries/intending voters	Police arrested/questioned the occupants and the lawmaker	Investigation reported; the circumstances and political purpose of the gathering remained contested.
14 Aug. 2026	Osogbo	Two suspected Edo-based political thugs	Allegedly entered Osun and issued threats against Adeleke/Davido	Public/security concerns raised	Allegations circulated before election; sponsorship not conclusively established
13–14 Aug. 2026	Ifewara	Babatunde Festus Komolafe, APC candidate, and alleged thugs	Navy reportedly intercepted campaign vehicle and allegedly found a firearm	Navy reportedly arrested the candidate and others	Campaign council alleged subsequent release under pressure; alleged "orders from above" and commander redeployment remain unverified.
15 Aug. 2026	Ede	Police personnel and political actors	Adeleke alleged that a police officer nicknamed "London" had been brought from Port Harcourt, Rivers State, to disrupt voting in Ede	Allegation publicly raised by Adeleke	The claim was an allegation and should not be presented as established fact without further official confirmation.
July 2026	Ile-Ife	Five suspected thugs allegedly associated with Asiri Eniba	Alleged gunfire and attempted takeover of a motor park	Nigerian Navy arrested five suspects	Osun Government alleged that police attempted to secure their release and confronted naval personnel.

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Source:[70]

The Osun experience suggests that "mercenarism" was not simply about thugs physically attacking voters. It encompassed the movement of political actors across state boundaries, informal mobilisation networks, alleged armed groups, competing security interventions and attempts to influence the electoral environment. The most important issue for democratic consolidation is therefore not merely whether thugs were present, but whether security institutions were sufficiently neutral, coordinated and accountable to prevent political actors from converting coercive capacity into electoral advantage.

The 14 August 2026 APC event in Osogbo was the party's final major mobilisation immediately before the 15 August election. Contemporary reports confirm the presence of several high-profile APC figures, including "governors from Lagos, Ogun, Ekiti, Edo among others, members of the APC national Headquarters and national assembly and house of representatives among others.[71]

When Spider Webs Unite, They Can Tie Up a Lion: Power of the Voters (people)

The 2026 Osun governorship election provides an important illustration of voter agency in the face of money, political machinery, coercion and technological difficulties. Although the election was characterised by allegations of vote buying, the movement of political actors and alleged mercenaries, and repeated BVAS difficulties, voters did not remain passive. Instead, in several locations, citizens challenged practices they considered capable of compromising the integrity of their votes.

One of the clearest examples occurred in Ejigbo, where voters confronted individuals suspected of distributing money to influence voters.[72] At Ward 4, Unit 7, voters reportedly confronted persons accused of sharing cash, forcing them to flee with some of the money in polythene bags. A similar confrontation occurred at another polling unit in the area. In Olorunda, voters also confronted individuals reportedly carrying bundles of naira suspected to be intended for voter inducement, although the allegation could not independently be established at the time.[73] These incidents demonstrate that vote buying was not universally accepted by citizens as an inevitable feature of elections. After the election results were announced at the polling units, some citizens, particularly Accord Party members, took the confrontation to another level by chanting songs to mock opposition supporters who had distributed money, bread, rice,

[70] Compiled from several sources
[71] Ayo Aluko-Olokun, "Osun Decides 2026: APC Leaders Urge Osun Voters to Embrace Mainstream Politics," *Nigerian Democratic Report*, August 14, 2026. https://www.ndr.org.ng/osun-decides-2026-apc-leaders-urge-osun-voters-to-embrace-mainstream-politics/?utm_source=chatgpt.com
[72]Isiaq, Hafsoh. 2026. "OsunDecides: Police Watch as Residents Stop Vote Buying Attempt in Ejigbo." *Osun Defender*, August 15, 2026. Osun Defender.https://osundefender.com/osundecides-police-watch-as-residents-stop-vote-buying-attempt-in-ejigbo/
[73] https://web.facebook.com/reel/4529129820690028

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garri, and other small quantities of staple foods in support of the APC. Citizens transformed the electoral result into popular cultural expression, using humour, ridicule and song to celebrate the defeat of a prominent APC figure, Alhaja Falilat Oyetunji, popularly known as EroArike. Sheis an Osun State-based businesswoman, herbal product entrepreneur, and political figure.[74] In the song, some voters could be heard singing "*Eroarikewole lo…Eran Arikewole lo, Eran Arike di ewure*"[75] In another song on money spent on vote buying, songs like *"owo wo igboooowo wo igbo*₦20,000;*owo wo igbo..owo wo igboooowo wo igbo*, ₦50,000 *owo wo igbo* ..meaning money worth ₦20,000 or ₦50,000 is lost"[76]

Voters also demonstrated considerable patience and resilience in dealing with BVAS problems. In several polling units, citizens waited for INEC officials to resolve malfunctioning or slow BVAS devices rather than abandoning the process. At Odi-Olowo, for example, voters who had arrived as early as 7:30 a.m. waited for officials who had not arrived by 8:40 a.m. At Alajue in Ede South, long queues persisted despite reported BVAS difficulties. Such behaviour is significant because technological failure could otherwise have translated into voter frustration and disenfranchisement. The citizen response extended beyond voting itself. As counting commenced, voters and party supporters remained attentive to the movement of results and the collation process. Adeleke's supporters, for example, gathered at the INEC state collation centre in Osogbo as results from the 30 LGAs were announced. This citizen presence complemented the role of election observers and party agents in monitoring the transition from polling-unit counting to higher-level collation. Yiaga Africa subsequently reported that the official results were consistent with its independent verification of ballots counted at polling units.

The significance of this behaviour is that voter power was expressed not only through the ballot but through vigilance. Citizens challenged alleged inducement, endured technological delays, monitored counting and remained attentive to the collation process. In this sense, the people confronted the three principal challenges examined in this study: money, mercenaries and machines.

Table 1: Voter Participation and Final Electoral Outcome

Indicator	Figure
Registered voters	2,339,544
Accredited voters	1,010,684
Total votes cast	1,005,800
Valid votes	985,079
Rejected votes	20,721
Approximate turnout	43.2%

[74] She had become popular after a video showing her distribute gari to some voters with curses that if they collected her gifts without voting her preferred candidates, the beneficiaries will find life uneasy. Osun Defender, EroArike Announces Increase in Product Price. August 18, 2022. https://osundefender.com/ero-arike-announces-increase-in-product-price/

[75]https://web.facebook.com/olaryidejnr/posts/bi-awada-bi-ereero-arike-wole-lo/27869668596029595/?_rdc=1&_rdr#

[76] https://web.facebook.com/watch/?v=1813341829848686

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(accredited/registered)	
Accord – Ademola Adeleke	511,067 (51.88% of valid votes)
APC – Bola Oyebamiji	444,815 (45.16%)
ADC – Najeem Salaam	17,180 (1.74%)
Adeleke's winning margin	66,252 votes
LGAs won by Accord	19 of 30
LGAs won by APC	11 of 30

Source[77]

Table 1 shows that 1,010,684 of the 2,339,544 registered voters were accredited, producing an accreditation-based turnout of approximately 43.2 percent. Adeleke secured 511,067 votes, against Oyebamiji's 444,815, while ADC's Najeem Salaam received 17,180 votes. The result is particularly important when considered against the enormous political mobilisation preceding the election. The APC deployed governors, national party leaders and extensive campaign machinery, while allegations of financial inducement and the mobilisation of outsiders persisted. Yet the final result demonstrates that political resources did not translate automatically into electoral victory. Adeleke won 19 of the 30 LGAs, including substantial margins in Ede North, Ede South, Osogbo, Iwo and Ife East.

Thus, the fact that the people spoke in one voice does not mean that every voter supported the same candidate. Rather, it captures the collective capacity of voters to assert their electoral choices despite attempts to influence, intimidate, delay or manipulate the process. The Osun experience suggests that money can induce, machines can malfunction, and political actors can mobilise coercive resources, but none of these necessarily eliminates the capacity of citizens to determine the final electoral outcome.An APC chieftain, Farouq Aliyu, was unequivocal in his post-election assessment, stating, "We did everything humanly possible to win the election."[78]The statement, though brief, captured the intensity of the party's determination to secure victory in Osun.

No wonder national and international observers commended the high level of civic engagement and resilience demonstrated by the people of Osun**,** who not only turned out en masse to exercise their franchise but also actively monitored the electoral process, defended the integrity of their votes, and ensured that their choices counted despite numerous challenges and pressures.[79]

[77] INEC and other sources

[78] *Premium Times*, "Editorial: Osun Election, the Rise of Civic Action, and 2027," August 24, 2026. https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/905021-editorial-osun-election-the-rise-of-civic-action-and-2027.html

[79] Adejumo Kabir Adeniyi and Ola Bello, "Osun 2026: Electoral Resilience, Voter Behaviour and Democratic Accountability ahead of Nigeria's 2027 Elections," *Good Governance Africa*, August 24, 2026. https://gga.org/osun-2026-electoral-resilience-voter-behaviour-and-democratic-accountability-ahead-of-nigerias-2027-elections/; Olusola Oludiran, "Jonathan, British High Commission Commend Osun Poll, Flag Political Influence, Other Electoral Concerns," *Nigerian Democratic Report*, August 18, 2026. https://www.ndr.org.ng/jonathan-british-high-commission-commend-osun-poll-flag-political-influence-other-electoral-concerns/

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ISSN 2787-0308 (ONLINE)

Implications of Money, Machines and Mercenary for Nigeria's Democratisation

Money, political machines, and mercenaries can distort political choice, weaken voter autonomy, and undermine electoral credibility. Osun's 2026 off-cycle election therefore offers an important context for examining democratic consolidation

From the perspective of clientelism and social exchange theory, money transforms the relationship between politicians and citizens into an exchange in which immediate material benefits are offered for political support. Adetula argues that unrestrained political financing can undermine democratic ideals, encourage corruption and weaken public trust.[80]Thompson et al. argue that the fight against corruption in Nigeria has been tainted by clientelism and partisan politics, as the EFCC and other financial crime agencies are often perceived to overlook alleged financial misconduct involving individuals aligned with the ruling party or prospective political allies.[81] This was particularly relevant where voters received cash or basic commodities such as rice, bread and garri during the Osun election. As Bayaatdescribes the use of political power and state resources for personal enrichment, patronage, clientelism, and the distribution of benefits among political networks[82]Such practices may appear to benefit economically vulnerable citizens in the short term, but they undermine the principle that electoral choices should be based on relatively autonomous preferences. Bratton similarly demonstrates that vote buying and political intimidation have become characteristic features of Nigerian election campaigns, with their effects concentrated among poorer voters.[83] Thus, money does not merely purchase votes; it potentially reproduces a patronage-based political relationship in which citizens become clients and politicians become providers.

The political-machine perspective further demonstrates how money acquires greater electoral significance when combined with organised party structures. Political machines provide the networks through which candidates mobilise voters, distribute resources, monitor electoral activities and coordinate supporters. Consequently, electoral competition may favour candidates with stronger financial and organisational capacity rather than those with superior programmes or public legitimacy. This raises concerns about political equality because citizens and candidates do not enter electoral competition with equal

[80]Adetula
[81]O. O. Thompson, Afolabi, A. S., Raheem, A. N., &Onifade, C. A. 2020 "When I see the broom, I will Pass Over You: Assessing President Muhammadu Buhari's Anti- Corruption Crusade in Nigeria, 2015-2019." UJAH: Nnamdi Azikwe Journal of Humanities. 21 no. 2 (2020): 195 - 232.; O. O. Thompson Aina, O.S., Babalola Oshode& Tobi Popoola, (2025) Marketer or Crime Fighter? The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Political Defections and the Struggle for Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria, 2015–2025. In Thompson, O. O. &Adediran, A. A. Eds Contemporary Socio-Political National Issues and Sustainable Development Goals in Nigeria: A Festschrift In Honour Of Professor Comfort AdenikeOnifade. Abeokuta: Initiative for Peace and Comfort. Pp295-312
[82]Bayart, Jean-François. 1993. *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly*. Translated by Stephen Ellis. London: Longman
[83] Bratton

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resources. In this sense, money and machines reinforce one another: financial resources sustain political structures, while organisational structures facilitate the distribution and mobilisation of financial resources. The consequence is an electoral environment in which political competition can become increasingly dependent on patronage, party machinery and access to state and private resources.

The role of mercenaries, political thugs and other coercive actors introduces a more direct threat to democratic participation. Electoral violence literature shows that intimidation, thuggery and threats can suppress participation and compromise electoral credibility. Bratton finds that political violence can reduce voter turnout, while studies of Nigerian elections identify thugs, intimidation and vote buying as factors that undermine electoral credibility.[84] Ikpe argues that electoral violence persists partly because political office is treated as a means of accumulating private wealth, creating incentives for politicians to employ ruthless strategies to secure victory.[85] The implication is that mercenaries are not simply agents of disorder; they can constitute an informal political instrument through which candidates attempt to influence competitors, voters and electoral officials.

Taken together, money, machines and mercenaries represent complementary mechanisms of electoral control. Money can induce compliance, political machines can organise and sustain electoral mobilisation, while mercenaries can intimidate those who resist or challenge political interests. Their combined effect is potentially more damaging than any single mechanism operating independently. This is particularly important for democratic consolidation because elections require not merely the formal presence of electoral institutions but also meaningful political equality, voter autonomy, peaceful competition and public confidence in electoral outcomes. Evidence from Nigeria demonstrates that vote buying, political violence and organised electoral manipulation can weaken accountability and contribute to poor governance.

Thus, regular elections alone cannot consolidate democracy when financial power, political machinery, and coercive networks dominate electoral competition and constrain voters' autonomous political choices.

Conclusion

The analysis demonstrates that money, machines and mercenaries constitute interconnected instruments through which electoral competition can be distorted. Money can convert citizens' immediate economic vulnerabilities into electoral inducements; political machines can transform financial resources into organised electoral influence; while mercenaries can employ intimidation and violence to restrict political participation. Their convergence threatens voter autonomy, political equality, electoral credibility and democratic accountability. Existing Nigerian literature confirms that vote buying and electoral violence weaken democratic development, particularly where poverty, patronage and

[84]Bratton
[85]Ikpe

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ISSN 2787-0308 (ONLINE)

weak institutional enforcement prevail. The central implication for Nigeria is that democratic consolidation requires moving beyond the mere conduct of elections towards elections characterised by autonomous voters, accountable political parties, transparent political finance, neutral security agencies and effective sanctions against electoral manipulation.

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