
PRESS RELEASE

**Osun 2026 Governorship Election: VARCE Commends INEC's
Administration but Says Vote Buying Seriously Undermined Electoral
Integrity**

Calls for Economic Empowerment, Stronger Enforcement and Greater Accountability from Political Actors

Osogbo, Osun State — 17 August 2026

Value Re-orientation for Community Enhancement (VARCE), a civil society organisation committed to sustainable human and community development, youth capacity building and social inclusion, has released its preliminary findings from its observation of the 15 August 2026 Osun State Governorship Election.

VARCE participated in the electoral process as an accredited election observer organisation and monitored developments before, during and immediately after the election. The organisation also relayed observations from polling units through its social media platforms.

VARCE's engagement was informed by its belief that good governance is fundamental to sustainable community development. As an organisation with a strong focus on young people and women, VARCE considers meaningful political participation, accountable leadership and credible elections essential to the development of communities.

Ahead of the election, VARCE engaged the INEC Resident Electoral Commissioner (REC) to formally communicate its intention to participate in the electoral process. VARCE also joined other youth-led civil society organisations in developing a Youth Charter, articulating the priorities and demands of young people for consideration by political actors and other stakeholders.

ELECTION-DAY FINDINGS

VARCE's observation indicates that the election administration at the polling-unit level was, in many respects, orderly and transparent.

Across the polling units observed, the majority of polling units opened on time, election officials explained voting procedures, election materials were deployed, BVAS was used for accreditation, and voters were generally able to cast their ballots in secrecy.

VARCE also observed substantial compliance with result-management procedures. In most of the polling units observed, results were publicly announced, result sheets were displayed for public viewing, and observers witnessed the electronic transmission of results.

These observations demonstrate that important components of Nigeria's electoral process can function effectively when the relevant institutions, personnel and procedures are properly deployed.

VARCE therefore commends the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) for its efforts in administering the election and particularly recognises the Commission's engagement with civil society organisations in voter education and electoral participation.

VARCE believes that the partnership between INEC and credible CSOs should be strengthened and sustained beyond election periods.

VOTE BUYING: A SERIOUS THREAT TO ELECTORAL INTEGRITY

Despite the relative strength of polling-unit procedures, vote buying emerged as the most prominent concern in VARCE's observations.

Vote buying was repeatedly observed or reported across the sampled polling units, sometimes occurring alongside intimidation, disruption and other forms of electoral malpractice.

For VARCE, this represents a serious threat to the integrity of democratic participation.

An election cannot be considered fully credible simply because voting procedures are followed if citizens are simultaneously subjected to financial inducement, intimidation or other forms of undue influence.

VARCE is particularly concerned that political actors are increasingly exploiting economic hardship to influence the political choices of citizens.

POVERTY MUST NOT BECOME A POLITICAL WEAPON

VARCE strongly condemns the weaponisation of poverty for electoral advantage.

Citizens should not be placed in a situation where immediate economic hardship makes them vulnerable to exchanging their democratic choices for temporary financial benefits.

The organisation therefore calls on government at all levels to recognise that economic empowerment is also an investment in democratic resilience.

Government must prioritise:

- Creation of decent and sustainable employment opportunities, particularly for young people;
- Stronger support for micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs);
- Accessible financing and skills development for entrepreneurs;
- Social protection programmes for economically vulnerable households;
- Youth-focused economic empowerment initiatives;
- Policies that expand opportunities for women and young people; and
- A broader enabling environment in which citizens can build sustainable livelihoods.

The solution to poverty is not vote buying. The solution is good governance, decent work, economic opportunity and accountable leadership.

VARCE calls on political parties and candidates to reject the use of financial inducement as a means of securing electoral support and to strengthen internal mechanisms for preventing electoral malpractice by their candidates, agents and supporters.

SECURITY PRESENCE: COMMENDABLE, BUT MORE PROACTIVE ENFORCEMENT REQUIRED

VARCE commends the security agencies for maintaining a visible presence at polling locations and notes that, based on the organisation's observations, security personnel generally did not intimidate voters or prevent citizens from exercising their franchise.

However, VARCE observed that the presence of security personnel did not always translate into active intervention when electoral malpractice occurred.

In some locations, security personnel appeared indifferent to lawlessness, including alleged vote buying.

VARCE therefore calls on security agencies to move beyond simply maintaining a physical presence at polling units. Security personnel must act professionally, impartially and proactively when electoral offences are taking place.

The role of security agencies should be to protect voters and the integrity of the process, irrespective of political affiliation.

BVAS AND ELECTORAL INCLUSION

VARCE's observations also identified instances of difficulty with the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS). While the system functioned successfully in many locations, challenges were recorded in a significant proportion of the polling units observed.

VARCE recommends that INEC continue to strengthen the technical reliability of BVAS, improve contingency arrangements and ensure that technical challenges do not unnecessarily disenfranchise or discourage voters.

The organisation also observed that while polling units were generally accessible, voting aids for persons with disabilities were not consistently available.

VARCE therefore calls for stronger implementation of disability-inclusive electoral measures, ensuring that accessibility means more than physical access to polling locations and includes the ability to participate independently and meaningfully.

VARCE'S RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on its observations, VARCE calls for:

1. **Stronger enforcement against vote buying:** Relevant institutions should investigate credible reports of electoral inducement and prosecute electoral offences where evidence establishes wrongdoing.
2. **Sustained voter education:** INEC and CSOs should maintain voter education between elections, with particular attention to vote buying, citizens' rights, electoral offences and reporting mechanisms.
3. **Greater economic empowerment:** Government should expand employment, entrepreneurship, MSME financing, social protection and youth and women empowerment programmes to reduce economic vulnerability.
4. **More proactive security enforcement:** Security agencies should intervene impartially when vote buying, intimidation, violence or other forms of electoral malpractice occur.
5. **Stronger CSO-INEC collaboration:** The successful engagement between INEC and civil society organisations should be institutionalised and expanded throughout the electoral cycle.

6. **Youth and women's political participation:** Young people and women should not be treated merely as electoral voting blocs. They must be meaningfully involved in policy development, governance, political leadership and accountability.
7. **Improved accessibility for persons with disabilities:** INEC should ensure consistent availability of appropriate voting aids and inclusive procedures at polling units.
8. **Post-election accountability:** Reports of electoral malpractice should not end with the declaration of results. Relevant institutions should document, investigate and appropriately address credible allegations arising from the election.

A CALL FOR A STRONGER DEMOCRATIC CULTURE

VARCE believes that the lessons from the Osun 2026 Governorship Election must extend beyond political victory or defeat.

The central question should be whether elections are strengthening citizens' confidence in democracy and creating a pathway towards better governance and community development.

Democracy is weakened when poverty becomes a bargaining tool, when votes become commodities and when electoral offences are allowed to occur without consequences.

VARCE therefore calls on political parties, government institutions, security agencies, civil society organisations, traditional and community leaders and citizens to work collectively towards an electoral culture in which votes are earned through ideas, competence, integrity and service — not purchased through poverty or fear.

VARCE remains committed to promoting value re-orientation, self-reliance, community transformation, social development and accountable governance.

As the organisation's broader mission emphasises, sustainable community development requires empowered citizens and institutions capable of delivering responsive and accountable leadership.

Signed:

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