



Restoring Public Trust in WAEC

Safeguarding Examination Integrity in Nigeria

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Cover Image: The West African Examination Council (WAEC) Headquarters, Yaba, Lagos.

Executive Summary

The West African Examinations Council (WAEC) plays a pivotal role in Nigeria's education system. For over seven decades, it has shaped the academic and career paths of millions of young Nigerians. Yet the 2025 West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) exposed serious institutional weaknesses. A grading error that led to a revised pass rate, prolonged portal downtime, delayed examinations under poor conditions, and the withholding of over 200,000 results triggered a legitimacy crisis. Without urgent reform, public confidence in WAEC—and in the fairness of educational opportunity—risks further decline.

This policy brief examines the origins and dimensions of WAEC's credibility crisis, situates it within broader regional experiences, and offers a practical reform framework for restoring integrity and trust.

Comparative experience offers guidance. Kenya restored confidence through biometric registration and secure logistics; South Africa through independent oversight by Umalusi; and Ghana through transparent reporting of withheld and cancelled results. Nigeria must now adapt these lessons to its own context.

Two paths are open: (a) strengthen WAEC internally through accelerated computer-based testing, decentralised secure printing, stronger result-processing systems, and proactive communication; or (b) pursue a broader WAEC Trust Restoration and Modernisation Initiative (WTRMI), embedding digital examinations, independent integrity oversight, and structured stakeholder engagement.

A combined approach that modernises systems while institutionalising transparency is most effective. Implemented effectively, these reforms can restore WAEC's integrity and reaffirm Nigeria's leadership in regional education standards. If Nigeria succeeds in revitalising WAEC, it will not only safeguard the fairness of its educational system but also reaffirm public faith in one of its oldest regional institutions.

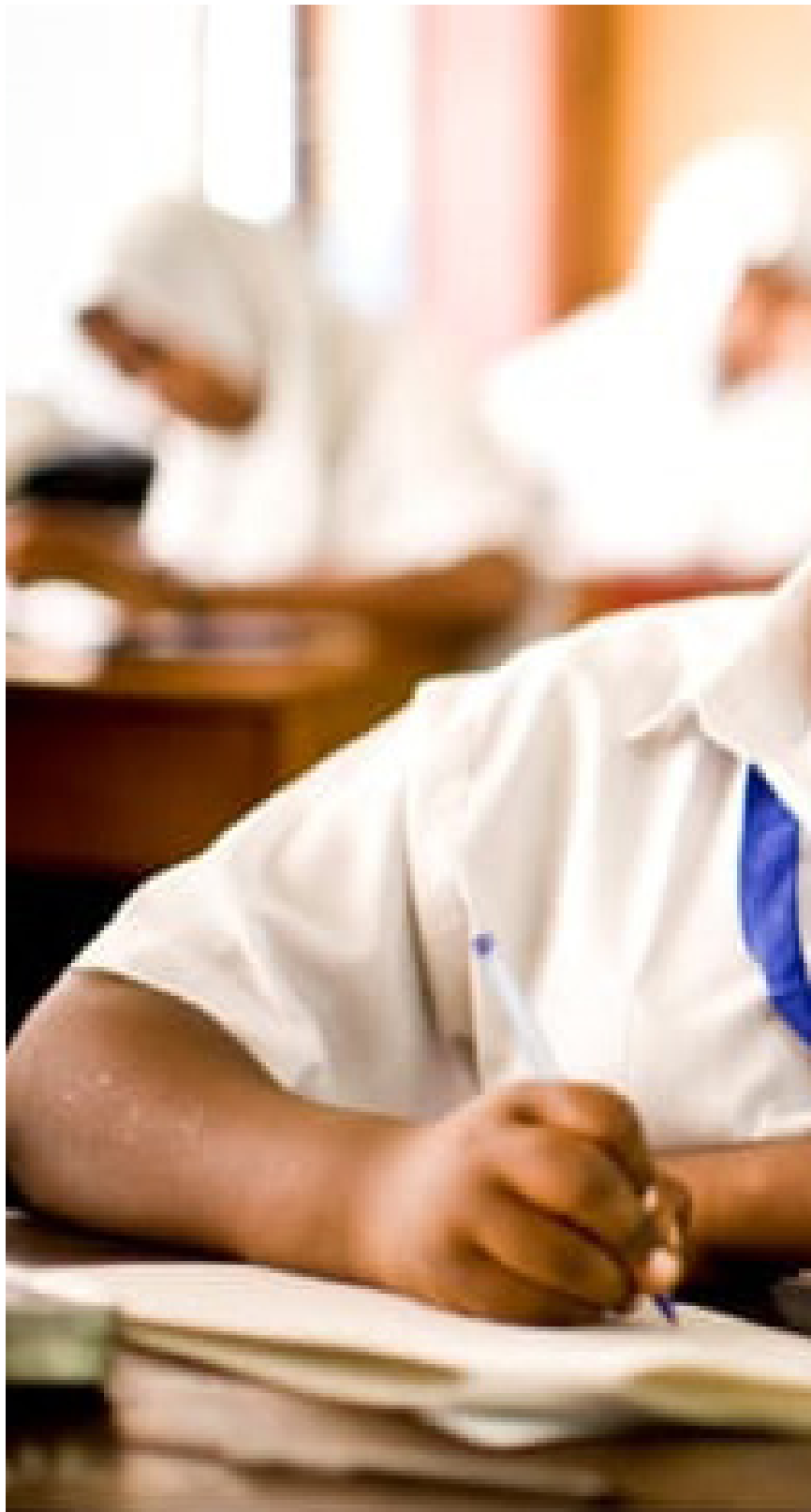
Introduction: Institutional Trust and the WAEC Mandate

Public confidence in examination bodies is fundamental to the legitimacy of an education system. Since its establishment in 1952, [the West African Examinations Council \(WAEC\)](#) has served as the region's foremost examining authority, providing certification recognised by universities and employers alike. In Nigeria, WAEC results determine access to tertiary education and employment. Hence, the examination body serves as both assessor and gatekeeper.

The 2025 West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) controversy has, however, raised concerns regarding WAEC's reliability. The year saw a record decline in performance, technical failures in result release, and public dissatisfaction with the Council's communication. These problems exposed [deep structural weaknesses](#) in result management and governance that, if unaddressed, could corrode institutional trust.

WAEC's historical reputation was built on standardisation and fairness. Yet persistent examination malpractice, recurrent result withholding, and operational lapses have eroded this legacy. For instance, between [170,000 and 365,000](#) results have been withheld annually over the past seven years. This reflects weak enforcement and opaque processes within the system.

Restoring WAEC's reputation is thus not simply an administrative challenge; it is a moral imperative central to safeguarding the integrity and credibility of Nigeria's educational system





Understanding WAEC's Credibility Crisis

The 2025 WASSCE marked a turning point in WAEC's integrity challenge. Initially, the Council reported that only [38.32%](#) of candidates obtained five credits, including English and mathematics, the lowest rate in five years. The report triggered public alarm. Within days, WAEC admitted to grading errors caused by misapplied serialisation keys and issued a [revised pass rate of 62.96%](#). Though the correction calmed panic, it exposed a serious failure in result verification and internal quality control.

Operational shortcomings have further exacerbated the problem. Examination papers arrived late at several centres. Some candidates wrote under [inadequate lighting and exhausting conditions](#). The [online result portal experienced a prolonged outage](#), leaving candidates unable to access their results. The incident sparked damaging rumours of incompetence and a potential cover-up.

As in previous years, the routine withholding of results persisted. According to WAEC's 2025 provisional data, 215,149 candidates had their results withheld pending investigation. This figure aligns with the Council's historical pattern, which has seen an average of 192,000 results withheld annually since 2014. In 2025, the withheld results account for an estimated 9 to 12 per cent of the total candidature.

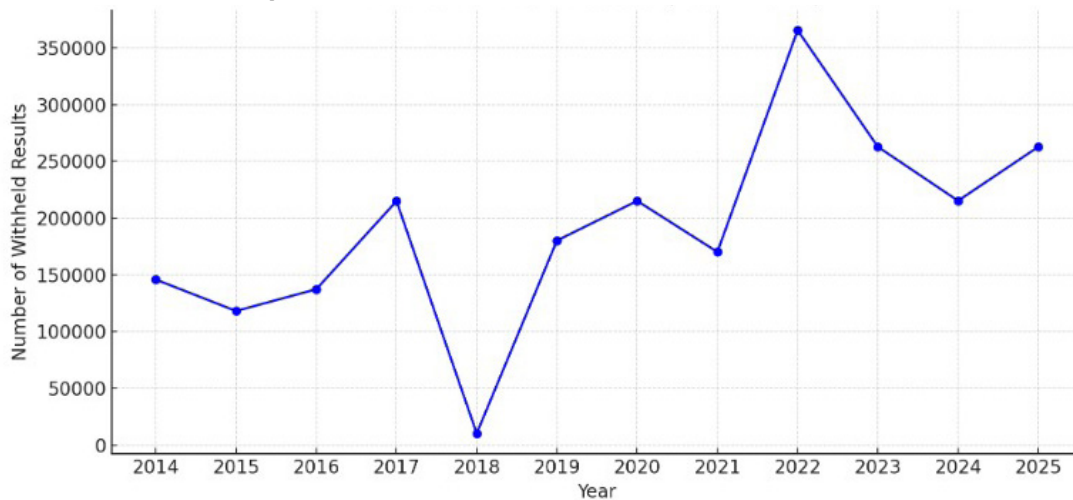
Table 1: WAEC withheld results (2014–2025)

Year	Number of Withheld results
2014	145,795
2015	118,101
2016	137,295
2017	214,952
2018	10,211
2019	180,205
2020	215,149
2021	170,146
2022	365,564
2023	262,803
2024	215,267
2025	262,803

The erosion of WAEC’s credibility has consequences that extend well beyond examination halls. University admissions rely heavily on WAEC certification, and delays or disputed results put thousands of placements at risk each year. In the labour market, employers are increasingly scrutinising the authenticity of certificates, necessitating costly and time-consuming verification processes.

Over time, this erosion of trust undermines the social contract that sustains Nigeria’s merit-based mobility. It deepens inequality between those with access to reliable certification and those left in a state of uncertainty. This situation demands comprehensive reform to restore public confidence and safeguard the integrity of Nigeria’s educational assessment system.

Figure 1: WAEC withheld results (2014–2025)



Source: *Statisense*

Figure 1: Dimensions of WAEC's Credibility Crisis

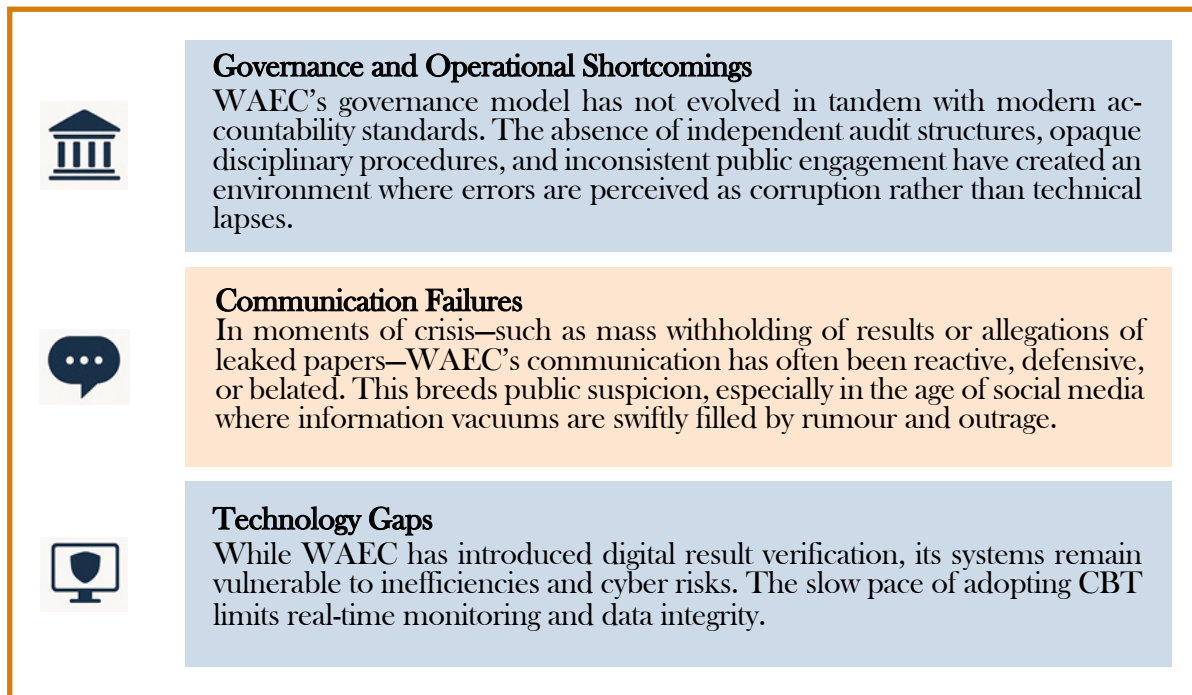
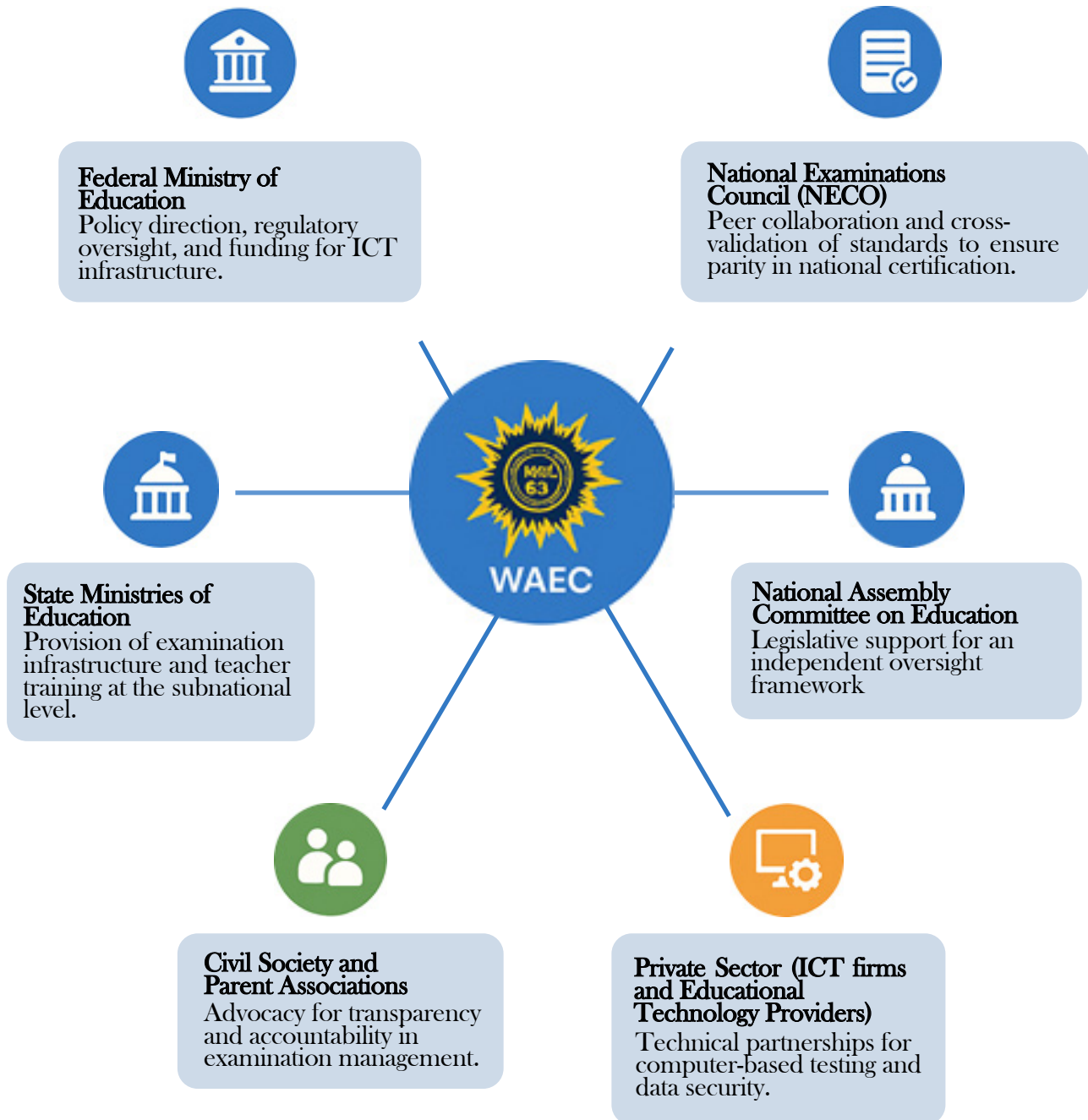


Figure 3: Key Stakeholders in Examination Integrity

Restoring public trust in WAEC demands cooperation across a network of institutions and actors. Collaboration among these stakeholders ensures credibility, transparency, and public confidence in Nigeria’s examination system.



Lessons from Other Examination Bodies

Reforms across Africa provide instructive lessons for Nigeria. Three countries—each representing a distinct region of the continent, West, East, and South—have pioneered multidimensional approaches to tackling the complex challenges that beset public examinations.

The Kenya National Examinations Council ([KNEC](#)) adopted a National Examination Integrity Framework in 2016, combining ICT-driven monitoring with real-time publication of examination data.

Ghana’s WAEC office reinforced its [internal audit mechanisms](#) and collaborated with the Bureau of National Investigations to curb [malpractice](#), resulting in a marked reduction in reported irregularities.

South Africa’s [Umalusi](#) Council sustains credibility through legislative independence and annual integrity audits, ensuring transparency and public confidence in certification.

Table showing comparative analysis of the examination process in three African countries

Country	Key Challenge	Reform Measures	Communication Approach	Evident Outcome
Kenya (KNEC)	Paper leaks; impersonations	Biometric registration; secure, containerised paper handling	Circulars with firm deadlines; publicised penalties	Fewer mass cancellations post-2016; improved integrity
South Africa (NSC/ Umalusi)	Cheating; printing errors	Independent oversight (Umalusi) validates items and irregularities	Media briefings with integrity verdict	In 2024: No systemic leaks; 407 cases disclosed transparently
Ghana (WAEC-GH)	Social media leaks; collusion	QR-coded papers; targeted arrests	Public dashboards listing cancellations	Greater transparency and deterrence

Three Key Lessons for Nigeria

First, independence builds integrity: South Africa’s model shows that when examination results are validated by a neutral oversight body, public trust deepens.

Second, technology and logistics must work hand in hand: Kenya’s integration of biometric verification and secure paper handling effectively eliminated impersonation and leakages.

Third, transparency remains the strongest safeguard: Ghana’s practice of publishing cancellations by category fostered accountability and reinforced public confidence in its examination system.

Policy Options

Addressing WAEC's reliability challenges requires a comprehensive, multi-layered reform strategy. Two principal pathways merit consideration.

Option A - Strengthening WAEC from Within

1. Accelerate Computer-Based Testing (CBT): Begin with objective tests in 2026 and expand to essay-based assessments once the infrastructure is mature.

2. Improve Logistics and Contingency Planning: Establish regional secure printing hubs; deploy real-time paper tracking; partner with power firms to prevent disruptions.

3. Reinforce Result-Processing Systems: Adopt dual-layered digital systems with automatic error detection and cloud backup. Conduct pre-release stress tests and maintain quick-fix protocols.

4. Institutionalise Crisis Communication: Implement structured media briefings, real-time dashboards, and clear data on withheld results.

Option B - WAEC Trust Restoration and Modernisation Initiative (WTRMI)

1. Full Digital Examinations: Integrate biometric registration, e-PIN verification, and digital capture of scripts to eliminate impersonation and ghost candidates.

2. Decentralised Logistics Reform: Develop regional printing hubs with tamper-proof technologies and independent monitors. Form an emergency logistics taskforce to manage disruptions.

3. Independent Integrity Oversight: Establish an Examination Integrity Panel, akin to South Africa's Umalusi. The proposed Examination Integrity Panel should be constituted under the joint authority of the Federal Ministry of Education and WAEC Council, with observer status for civil society and academic bodies. Its mandate would be statutory, reporting annually to the National Council on Education and making its findings publicly available. This arrangement balances independence with institutional accountability.

4. Stakeholder Engagement and Transparency: Hold quarterly public briefings, issue integrity bulletins during marking, and maintain open complaint channels to rebuild stakeholder confidence.

Implementation Timeline

Short-term (0-12 months)



Establish the examination integrity panel



Initiate public briefings



Pilot biometric registration for 2026 WASSCE

Medium-term (1-3 years)



Deploy regional secure printing hubs



Integrate e-verification and cloud-based result systems

Long-term (3-5 years)



Transition to full digital examinations across all subjects



Institutionalise annual integrity audits under the Panel's supervision

Recommendations

Restoring confidence in WAEC calls for a reform agenda that is both ambitious in scope and practical in execution. The recommendations below correspond directly with the four strategic pillars outlined in the proposed policy options.

1. Fast-Track Computer-Based Testing (CBT)

Pilot CBT in core subjects by 2026. Government should finance infrastructure upgrades in public schools, while private schools meet ICT standards. Introduce biometric verification to eliminate impersonation. For rural areas, designate community-based CBT centres supported by state governments.

2. Strengthen Logistics and Infrastructure Resilience

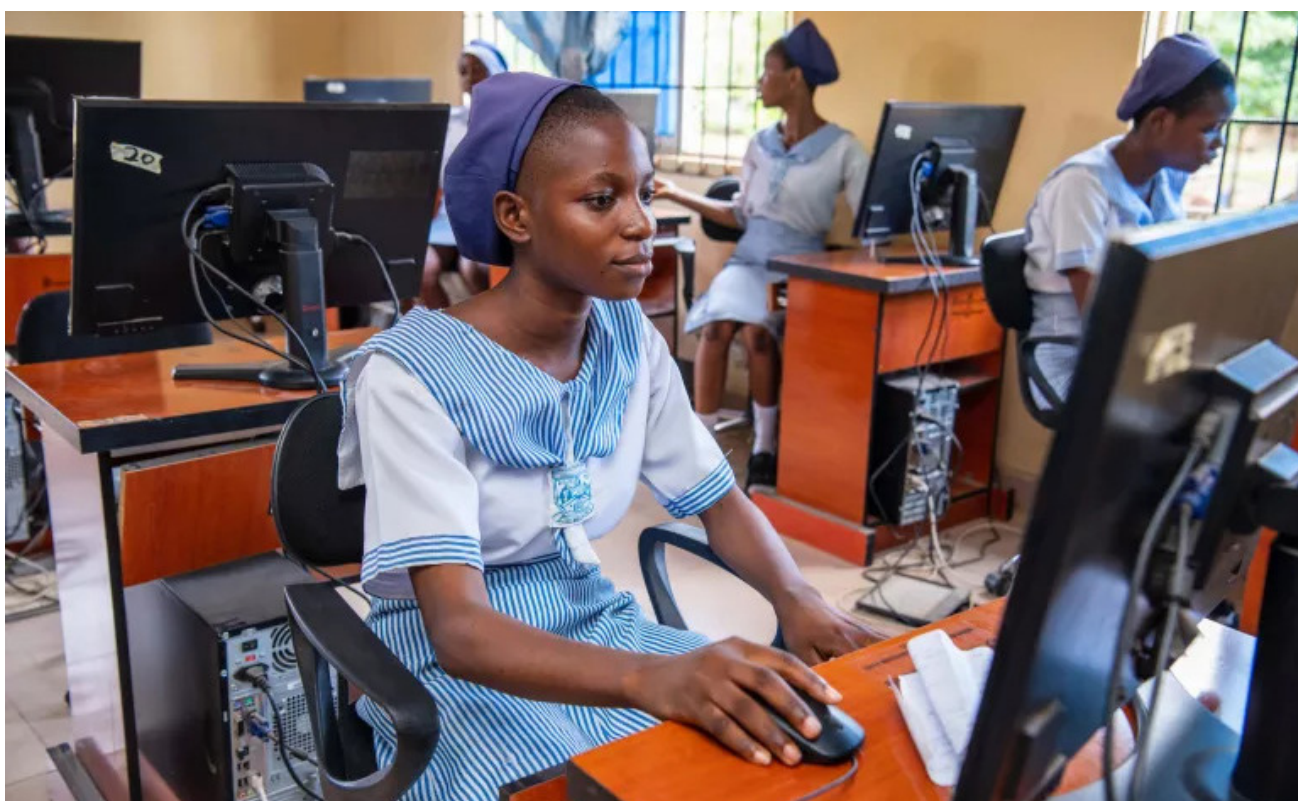
Establish regional secure printing hubs using barcoding and QR tracking. Create a trained logistics taskforce for rapid response to emergencies such as paper shortages or power failures. Guarantee reliable electricity through generators or solar systems.

3. Build Robust and Auditable Result Systems

Implement redundant digital result platforms with real-time error detection. Engage independent IT auditors annually to stress-test systems before release. Maintain transparent audit trails and cloud-backed result portals to prevent downtime.

4. Institutionalise Oversight and Transparency

Create an Independent Examination Integrity Panel to validate WAEC's processes before publication. Issue periodic integrity bulletins detailing investigations, withheld results, and timelines. Adopt proactive communication—regular media briefings, accessible dashboards, and stakeholder



Conclusion: Rebuilding Integrity Through Reform

WAEC's fragility lies not merely in technical failings but in a deeper rupture of public confidence. For more than seven decades, its certificates have stood as emblems of academic honour across West Africa. Today, that honour is under strain. If unaddressed, the crisis will entrench cynicism and erode confidence in Nigeria's educational potential.

Yet adversity can be a crucible for renewal. The experiences of Ghana, Kenya, and South Africa affirm that reliability in assessment systems thrives where transparency, oversight, and technology converge. By modernising its systems, decentralising operations, and embedding independent scrutiny, Nigeria can restore the integrity of WAEC and reaffirm its leadership in regional education.

The task will demand courage, resources, and sustained resolve. But if pursued with conviction, it can yield an institution renewed in purpose and integrity—one that secures the futures of millions and restores the nation's belief that merit, not manipulation, must determine achievement.

Author

Chinaza Igwe is a Research Assistant at Athena Centre for Policy and Leadership



Rivers Governor Fubara Returns After Six Months of Emergency Rule

Governor Siminalayi Fubara of Rivers State resumed office on September 18, 2025, following the conclusion of the six-month emergency rule declared by President Bola Tinubu. The move restores democratic governance in Rivers State, allowing Fubara, Deputy Governor Ngozi Odu, Speaker Martins Amaewhule, and the State Assembly to return to office after their suspension.

The emergency rule was imposed amid a political crisis involving former Governor Nyesom Wike, legislative splits, violent protests, and threats to state institutions. President Tinubu defended the measure as constitutionally justified to safeguard governance and protect vital infrastructure.

<https://punchng.com/emergency-rule-winners-losers-as-tinubu-reinstates-fubara/>

Death Toll Rises to Six After Police Shooting in Lagos Market

The death toll from the Owo-de Onirin Spare Parts Market shooting in Lagos has risen to six. The incident on the 27th of August involved four mobile policemen who opened fire on traders. Two victims later died in the hospital, following surgery.

The Centre for Human and Socio-Economic Rights, CHSR, condemned the Lagos State Government for ignoring earlier warnings from the traders.

CHSR has called for the prosecution of the officers, public disclosure of their identities, and compensation for the victims' families. The group urged the Federal Government to take over the case, citing concerns that state authorities may fail to deliver justice.

<https://punchng.com/lagos-market-massacre-death-toll-rises-to-six-after-police-shooting>

Afriland Tower Fire Victims Die From Inverter Smoke Complications

Emergency and health officials said the victims of the Afriland Tower fire in Lagos Island did not perish in the flames but from inhaling thick, toxic smoke released by a burning lithium battery inverter system. The clarification comes as the death toll rises to ten victims.

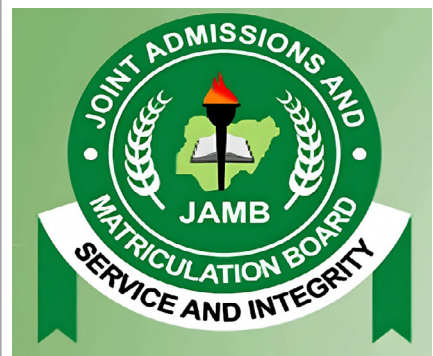
The hazardous smoke, containing carbon monoxide and heavy metals, rapidly displaced oxygen within the building, causing severe inhalation injuries. The victims all later died in various hospitals. Authorities warn that the incident underscores the extreme danger posed by fumes from burning lithium batteries, raising serious concerns about safety standards in commercial buildings.

<https://punchng.com/afriland-tower-fire-victims-developed-complications-from-inverter-smoke-officials/>

Ekiti Parents Urge FG to Scrap JAMB's 16-year Age Limit

Parents in Ekiti State, under the Coalition of Concerned Parents, Students and Stakeholders, have urged the Federal Government to reverse JAMB's age restriction policy for university admission. In a letter to Education Minister Tunji Alausa, they argued that barring candidates under 16 from admission has jeopardised the future of young Nigerians. They requested a waiver for all qualified 2025 candidates, regardless of age, and called on JAMB to remove portal restrictions. The parents described the policy as unconstitutional, citing Section 18(1) of the 1999 Constitution, and joined other groups that have recently protested, demanding that the rule be scrapped immediately.

<https://punchng.com/ekiti-parents-reject-age-restriction-on-varsity-admission/>





Cameroon: Opposition Urged to Unite Against Biya

With less than a month to go before the presidential election of October 12, 2025, the president of the Movement for the Renaissance of Cameroon (MRC), Maurice Kamto, on Wednesday, September 17, launched an urgent appeal to the 11 opposition candidates to unite behind a single candidacy or form a solid coalition against Paul Biya, outgoing president and candidate of the Cameroon People's Democratic Rally (CPDM).

In his statement, Kamto insisted that the country is going through “a historic moment where a political shift is possible”, urging opponents of the government to avoid the dispersion of votes. According to him, the opposition must “clarify the situation and simplify the choice of voters through a political alliance” to allow for change “in peace and through the ballot box”.

<https://fr.apanews.net/news/cameroun-presidentielle-maurice-kamto-appelle-lopposition-a-lunite/>

Chad: Traffic Restored at Presidential Palace After January Attack

Traffic on Kerim Nassaour Avenue, which passes in front of the Chadian Presidency, will again be allowed in both directions from September 17, 2025, the N'Djamena City Hall announced.

Since January, this lane had only been open in one direction from 6 am to 6 pm and completely closed at night, after the attack on January 9, 2025, carried out by knife-wielding assailants, which left 18 assailants and two presidential guards dead. During this period, at least six people were killed on this avenue.

The complete lifting of the ban is a relief for the inhabitants of N'Djamena, who had repeatedly questioned the municipal authorities about this situation.

<https://fr.apanews.net/news/tchad-circulation-devant-la-presidence-rouverte-dans-les-deux-sens/>

Niger: Market Shuts Over Security Concerns

The Prefecture of Maine Soroa, in the Diffa region, has ordered the temporary closure of the weekly market of Malam Boulamari for security reasons, APA has learned.

This measure, which takes effect immediately and until further notice, aims to “preserve the safety of people and property”, according to the document made public by the prefectural authorities.

The Diffa region remains one of the areas most exposed to Boko Haram attacks in Niger. The jihadist group, split into two factions, one of which is affiliated with the Islamic State, is increasing incursions into this part of Nigerien territory.

In his statement, the Prefect of Maine Soroa formally prohibits “any attempt to open or hold the market in violation of this decision”. Offenders are exposed to the penalties provided for by law, warns the administrative authority.

The authorities also call on the population to be vigilant and to collaborate with the defence and security forces “in the common interest”.

The closure is part of a series of security measures taken by Nigerien authorities to address persistent insecurity in the border region with Nigeria and Chad.

<https://fr.apanews.net/news/niger-un-marche-ferme-temporairement-pour-des-raisons-securitaires/>

Benin: Two Police Officers Killed in Ambush

Unidentified armed men killed two police officers on patrol in northeastern Benin near the border with Niger on Sunday, a local official said on Monday.

Benin's northern neighbours are insurgency-plagued Burkina Faso and Niger, making it vulnerable to cross-border attacks by groups linked to al Qaeda and Islamic State. The two officers were travelling by motorbike when they ran into an ambush in Karimama district around 750 km (460 miles) north of the commercial capital Cotonou.

In June, seven soldiers were killed by attackers suspected of being Islamist militants in northern Benin's Pendjari National Park, according to sources.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/two-police-officers-killed-ambush-northern-benin-2024-09-16/>

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Block A10, Phase 2, Sani Zangon
Daura Estates, Kado, FCT.



info.centre@athenacentre.org



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