

THE OUTLIER BRIEF

Business Intelligence · Finance · Strategy · Governance · AI Advisory

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THIS WEEK

The Macro Is Turning. Position, Don't Predict.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Inflation eased to 14.63% in September — a second straight fall and a fresh low while the policy rate is already cut to 23% and reserves hold at an 18-year high. The cost of money is beginning to fall and the naira is steady. For businesses, the question shifts from how to survive a hostile macro to how to be ready when it eases. The advantage goes not to those who predict the turn, but to those whose numbers are prepared to act on it.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

CEO in 60 Seconds · Executive Summary · Business Intelligence Dashboard · The Numbers Behind the News · Outliers Index™ · Feature · Visual Process · Outliers Intelligence™ · Business Numbers That Matter · What We're Seeing · Finance School · AI & Technology Spotlight · Practical Toolkit · Compliance Watch · Case Study · Outliers Recommendation · CEO & Boardroom Questions · The Outliers Perspective

01 CEO IN 60 SECONDS

THE WEEK IN FOUR LINES

What happened. September inflation eased to 14.63%, a second straight fall, with the policy rate already down to 23% and reserves at an 18-year high.

Why it matters. A falling-rate, steady-naira backdrop rewards businesses ready to borrow, invest and price — and punishes those caught flat-footed.

What to do today. Get your numbers decision-ready: clean books, a financing plan, and scenarios for a cheaper-money environment.

Biggest mistake. Waiting for certainty. By the time the turn is obvious, the prepared have already acted on it.

02 EDITOR'S NOTE

Welcome to this week's Outlier Brief. For nearly two years, Nigerian businesses have run their finances in defense: high inflation, punishing interest rates, a volatile naira. The instinct to hunker down was correct. But the data this month tells a different story — inflation easing for a second straight month to 14.63%, the policy rate cut to 23%, reserves at an 18-year high, and the naira firm. The macro is turning.

This week is about what that turn means for you. Not a prediction — no one owns the future of rates or the naira — but a posture. When the cost of money falls and the currency steadies, the advantage flows to the businesses whose books are clean, whose financing is ready and whose plans already account for a kinder environment. Positioning beats predicting, and this is the quarter to position.

Rafiu Olawuyi, FCA — *Lead Consultant, Outliers Professionals*

03 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY — WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW THIS WEEK

- **Disinflation has arrived.** Inflation eased to 14.63% in September, a second straight fall and a fresh low — though food inflation edged up, so the relief is uneven.
- **The cost of money is falling.** The MPC's cut to 23% signals a turn in the rate cycle; borrowing that was prohibitive is becoming financeable again.
- **The backdrop is steadying.** Reserves hold at an 18-year high (~\$55.1bn), the naira is firm near a two-year high, and the trade surplus is strong — a calmer macro.
- **Position, don't predict.** The turn rewards the prepared: clean books, a ready financing plan, and scenarios built for a cheaper-money environment.

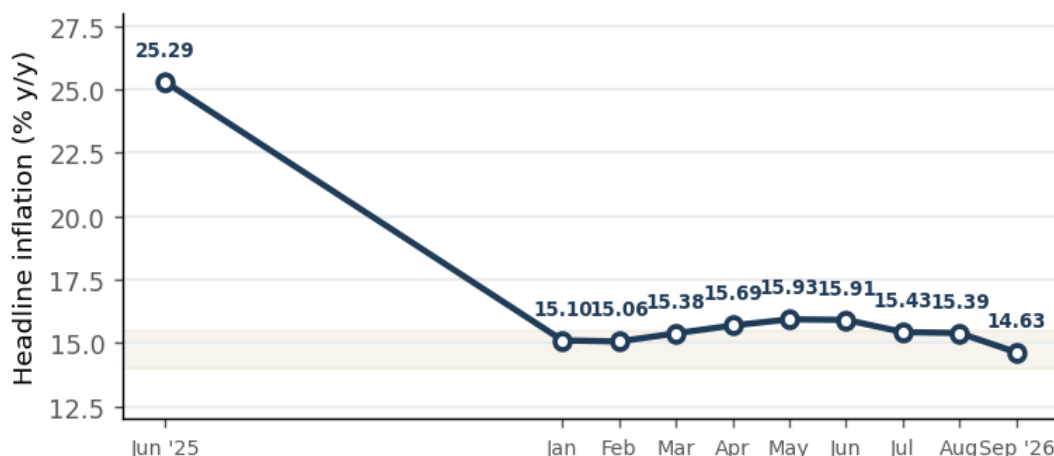
04 BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE DASHBOARD

Key indicators for Nigerian businesses, current at preparation (week of 13–17 October 2026).

INFLATION 14.63% ▼ Sept · eased from 15.39%	POLICY RATE (MPR) 23% ■ held · cut to 23% Sept	NAIRA / US\$ (OFFICIAL) ₦1,332 ■ firm · ~2-yr high
NAIRA / US\$ (PARALLEL) ₦1,370	PETROL (PMS) ₦1,330	BRENT CRUDE \$105

■ gap · ~N38	■ steady · crude firm	■ firm · above \$100
EXTERNAL RESERVES \$55.1bn ▲ holding · 18-yr high	TRADE BALANCE ₦12.6tn ▲ surplus · Q2 2026	FDI \$135m ■ Q1 2026 · 1.3% of inflows

Disinflation resumes: September eased to 14.63%



Actual NBS readings. Inflation eased to 14.63% in September — a second straight monthly fall and a fresh low — while the MPC's cut to 23% gives the disinflation official backing.

05 THE NUMBERS BEHIND THE NEWS

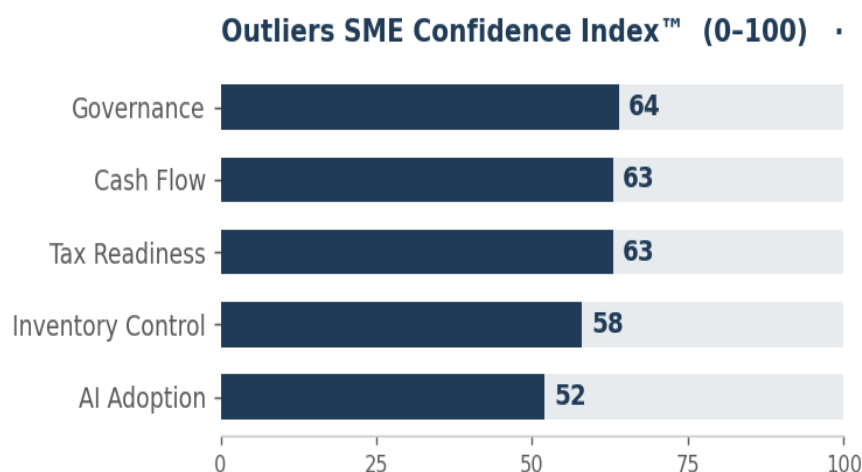
WHY THE TURN REWARDS THE PREPARED

When rates fall, the businesses that benefit first are those that can act immediately — a credit facility already arranged, a capital project already costed, numbers already clean enough to put in front of a lender. The business still untangling last year's books when money gets cheaper spends the window getting ready instead of moving, and the advantage passes to a competitor who was.

The lesson: a macro turn does not reward the business that predicted it. It rewards the business that was positioned for it — ready to borrow, invest or price the moment the environment allowed. Readiness is a decision you make before the data confirms it, not after.

06 OUTLIERS INDEX™

The Outliers SME Confidence Index™ is our proprietary weekly read of operating conditions for Nigerian small and mid-sized businesses, scored from 0 to 100 across five dimensions. It is an expert index maintained by the Outliers editorial office.



How to read the index: The Composite Index is the average of the five dimensions shown above. The underlying average is 60.0.

Governance led at 64 and the overall Composite Index crossed to 60 — another new high — as the easing macro lifted sentiment. Cash Flow and Tax Readiness held at 63, while Inventory Control (58) and AI Adoption (52) remained the lower two, the gap the quarter's positioning work should close.

WHAT CHANGED THIS WEEK

Confidence crossed to 60, a fresh high, as the disinflation print and the rate cut lifted the macro dimensions. Governance rose to 64 on year-end discipline; Cash Flow and Tax Readiness steadied at 63, and AI Adoption edged to 52 — slow, but moving.

07 FEATURE: POSITION FOR THE TURN — BEFORE THE DATA CONFIRMS IT

For almost two years, the right posture was defense. Inflation above 20%, interest rates past 26%, a naira in freefall — the sensible business hunkered down, protected cash and waited out the storm. That instinct was correct. This month, the data says the storm is easing: inflation down to 14.63%, rates cut to 23%, reserves at an 18-year high, the naira firm.

A turning macro changes the question. In a hostile environment, the goal is to survive; in an easing one, it is to be positioned — because the gains do not wait for certainty. When borrowing gets cheaper and the currency steadies, the businesses that move first capture the opening: the expansion financed while rates are falling, the stock bought before competitors restock, the price set with confidence the naira will hold. By the time the turn is undeniable, the advantage is already taken.

What positioning actually means

- **Clean the books first.** No lender finances, and no board approves, on numbers they cannot trust. A clean, current ledger is the entry ticket to every opportunity the turn creates.
- **Model the scenarios.** Build a simple view of your business at 23% versus 20% versus 18% borrowing — so when rates move, you already know what it unlocks.
- **Ready the financing.** Open the conversation with your bank now, while you are not desperate. The facility arranged in calm is the one available when you need it.
- **Hold the discipline.** Easing is not the all-clear. Food inflation still rose, and a turn can stall. Position to move, but keep the cash discipline that got you here.

None of this requires predicting where rates land. It requires being ready for a range of them — so whichever way the data breaks, your business can act while others are still reacting.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOUR BUSINESS

If the last two years taught your business to protect cash and wait, that discipline was right — and it is now the foundation to build on, not abandon. This week, take the easing macro as a cue to get decision-ready: clean the books, model your business under falling rates, and open the financing conversation before you need it. You cannot predict the turn. You can be the business that is ready for it.

08 POSITIONING FOR THE TURN

Catching an easing cycle is a sequence, not a gamble: clean the books so the numbers can be trusted, model the business under a range of rates, ready the financing while conditions are calm, then act early — before the turn is obvious and the opening is gone.

Positioning for the Turn — ready before the upside arrives



The turn rewards the ready: positioned businesses move while others are still preparing.

09 OUTLIERS INTELLIGENCE™

ONE INSIGHT · ONE DECISION

Most businesses will treat this month's data as a headline to note and move past. The disciplined will treat it as a signal to prepare — not because they know where rates go next, but because being ready costs little and being caught flat-footed costs the opportunity. Same data, opposite response, very different outcome.

The decision this week: pick the one piece of positioning you are furthest behind on — clean books, a financing line, or a rate-scenario model — and start it, before the easing you can see in the data becomes the easing everyone is acting on.

10 BUSINESS NUMBERS THAT MATTER

Indicator	Latest	Why it matters
Inflation	14.63%	Eased a second month to a fresh low — though food inflation ticked up
Policy rate (MPR)	23%	Cut to 23% in September — the cost of borrowing is set to fall
Naira / US\$ (official)	~₦1,332	Firm near a two-year high — eases import costs
Naira / US\$ (parallel)	~₦1,370	Gap to official ~₦38 — retail FX broadly steady
Petrol (PMS), pump	~₦1,300–1,350	Depot ~₦1,300–1,330; crude firm above \$100
Brent crude, per barrel	~\$105	Firm above \$100 — aids reserves, pressures pump prices
External reserves	~\$55.1bn	Holding at an 18-year high after a CBN data revision

Indicator	Latest	Why it matters
Trade balance (Q2 2026)	₦12.6tn	Surplus nearly doubled on surging exports
FDI (Q1 2026)	\$135.1m	Direct investment — a small share of capital inflows

11 WHAT WE'RE SEEING

Across the Nigerian market this month, as the macro eases, early patterns are visible among small and mid-sized businesses — shared at market level, without reference to any individual client:

- Owners asking about credit again after two years of avoiding it entirely.
- Expansion and equipment plan, shelved in the high-rate years, being dusted off.
- Books still not clean enough to put in front of a lender on short notice.
- Pricing still set defensively, as though the naira were still in freefall.
- Few businesses modelling what a cut to 20% or 18% would actually unlock.

12 FINANCE SCHOOL

LESSON 11 OF AN ONGOING SERIES

The three statements tell one connected story.

The income statement, the balance sheet and the cash flow statement are not three separate reports — they are three views of one business, and they tie together. Profit on the income statement flows into retained earnings on the balance sheet; the cash flow statement explains why the profit you earned and the cash you hold are rarely the same number. Read alone, each misleads; read together, they tell the truth.

The skill is learning to move between them: a profit with no cash asks a balance-sheet question (where did it go — receivables, stock, debt repayment?); strong cash with thin profit asks another. An owner who reads the three as one story is hard to mislead and quick to spot trouble. Next lesson: working capital — the cash trapped between the statements.

13 AI & TECHNOLOGY SPOTLIGHT

AI IN FINANCE — PART 11 OF AN ONGOING SERIES

AI for scenario planning and forecasting

AI's eleventh role fits the moment: pressure-testing the future. Fed your actuals, modern tools can build and compare scenarios in minutes — your business at 23%, 20% or 18% borrowing; the naira at ₦1,300 or ₦1,450; revenue up a tenth or flat — so you see what a macro turn unlocks or threatens before it arrives, not after.

The guardrails hold: a model is only as good as its assumptions, and those are a judgement call AI cannot make for you. Use it to run the scenarios faster and more thoroughly than a spreadsheet allows — but own the assumptions, and treat the output as a map to interrogate, not a forecast to trust blindly.

TOOL OF THE WEEK

Scenario-Planning & Forecasting Tools

Examples. Rolling-forecast and scenario modules in cloud accounting and FP&A tools, or a well-built driver-based model in your spreadsheet software.

What it does. Let's you flex key drivers — interest rate, FX, volume, price — and instantly see the effect on profit, cash and the balance sheet.

Who should use it. Any business facing financing, pricing or investment decisions as the rate cycle turns — which, this quarter, is most of them.

Common mistake. Building one “base case” and treating it as the plan. The value is in the range of scenarios, not a single confident guess.

Business benefit. Decisions made with eyes open — you know in advance what each move in rates or the naira does to your business.

14 PRACTICAL TOOLKIT — POSITIONING-FOR-THE-TURN CHECKLIST

Work through these this week. Each item closed sharpens how you steer.

- ☐ Confirm the books are clean and current enough to show a lender on short notice.
- ☐ Build a simple model of the business at 23%, 20% and 18% borrowing costs.
- ☐ List the investments or expansions shelved in the high-rate years — and recost them at today's rates.
- ☐ Open or refresh the conversation with your bank before you need the facility.
- ☐ Review pricing — is it still set defensively for a falling naira that has steadied?
- ☐ Stress-test cash: confirm the discipline holds even if the easing stalls.
- ☐ Pick the single weakest area of readiness and assign it an owner and a date.

15 COMPLIANCE WATCH

- **This month.** September PAYE was due by 10 October and September VAT is due by 21 October — clear both to keep the compliance record clean.
- **Watch.** The next MPC meeting will test whether September's cut to 23% was the start of a cycle — track it for your financing timing.
- **Year-end.** For a 31 December year-end, companies income tax and audit planning should already be under way — clean books now double as positioning.

16 CASE STUDY

ILLUSTRATIVE · ANONYMISED

A mid-sized distributor spent 2025 in pure defense — cash protected, no borrowing, expansion frozen. Correct for the time. But when conditions began to ease, its books were six weeks behind and no bank facility was in place; by the time it was ready to move, a competitor had already financed the larger order and taken the shelf space.

The lesson is not that defense was wrong — it kept the business alive. It is that defense and readiness are not opposites. The firm could have held its cash discipline and kept its books lender-ready at the same time. Positioning is not abandoning caution; it is caution that can move the moment it needs to.

17 OUTLIERS RECOMMENDATION

THIS WEEK'S RECOMMENDATION

Treat this month's data as a cue to get decision-ready, not as a signal to predict the future. Clean the books, model the business under a range of borrowing costs, and open the financing conversation now — so when the rate cycle turns, your business acts while others are still preparing.

18 CEO & BOARDROOM QUESTIONS

TWO QUESTIONS WORTH SITTING WITH

CEO question. If borrowing dropped to 20% next quarter, what would you do — and are your numbers ready to do it tomorrow, or in six weeks?

Boardroom question. Which opportunities did we shelve in the high-rate years — and which of them should we be recosting and reopening now?

19 THE OUTLIERS PERSPECTIVE

Turns are only obvious in hindsight. Standing inside one, all you have is a run of data pointing the same way — inflation easing twice over, rates cut, reserves high, the naira firm — and a choice about how to read it. The business that waits for certainty waits forever; by the time the turn is undeniable, the opening it created has closed.

The disciplined answer is not to bet the business on a forecast. It is to be ready for a range of outcomes — books clean, financing arranged, scenarios modelled — so that whichever way the data breaks, you can act. Positioning is humility and readiness at once: an admission you cannot predict, paired with a refusal to be caught unprepared.

20 CLOSING INSIGHT

Businesses rarely regret being ready too early. They regret the opportunity that came while the books were behind, the facility they tried to arrange only once they were desperate, the expansion a competitor financed first. The macro is giving an early signal of a turn. The work is not to predict it — it is to be the business that is prepared to move the moment it arrives.

YOUR MOVE THIS WEEK

Get your business decision-ready for the turn — or book a 45-minute session to clean the books, model the scenarios and plan the financing. outlierspro.com · Lagos | Abuja.

Each week rotates the action: download a checklist · complete an assessment · register for a webinar · read the full guide · book a consultation.