

Knowledge and Utilisation of the Freedom of Information Act Among Journalists in North-Central, Nigeria



Iliya Jeremiah Ovey, Muhammad Sani Rabi, Tsegysu Santas

Abstract: *The crux of the Freedom of Information Act, enacted in Nigeria in 2011, is to promote transparency and openness in governance by granting citizens, including journalists, open access to public information and records. Journalists are required to utilise the Act to perform their duties. But a significant observation since the enactment of the Act in Nigeria is the vagueness of its values among Nigerians, including media men, which raises questions about the Act's potency. Hence, this study assessed the knowledge, use, and challenges associated with the Freedom of Information Act among journalists in North-Central Nigeria, specifically in Benue, Nasarawa, and Plateau States. Guided by the libertarian theory of the press, the study employed a mixed-method approach, combining survey and in-depth interviews to gather data. The Findings of the study revealed that a good number of journalists across the three states under study are aware of the FOI Act and reasonably understand its provisions. Still, there is a generally low utilisation of the Act among them. It was also discovered that the majority of the journalists have never used the Act or invoked any of its provisions to seek information from a public institution. The low utilisation of the Act is attributed to difficulties in the application process, hectic bureaucratic and legal processes, safety concerns, and self-censorship by some journalists. In conclusion, based on the study's outcomes, the gap between the Act's awareness and knowledge and its practical utilisation has affected the potency and effectiveness of the Act in Nigeria.*

Keywords: Information, Freedom, Act, Knowledge, Utilisation, North-Central, Nigeria.

Abbreviations:

FOI: Freedom of Information
FOIA: Freedom of Information Act
NUJ: Nigeria Union of Journalists

I. INTRODUCTION

The battle between the media and the government in Nigeria has been an age-old issue spanning decades [1].

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* Correspondence Author (s)

Iliya Jeremiah Ovey*, Department of Mass Communication, Faculty of Communication and Media Studies, Nasarawa State University, Keffi, Nigeria. Email ID: Jeremiahiliyaovey@nsuk.edu.ng, ORCID ID: [0009-0006-2886-0020](https://orcid.org/0009-0006-2886-0020)

Prof. Muhammad Sani Rabi, Department of Journalism, Faculty of Communication and Media Studies, Nasarawa State University, Keffi, Nigeria. Email ID: Rabiums123@gmail.com

Asso. Prof. Tsegysu Santas, Head, Department of Mass Communication and Journalism and Media Studies, Nasarawa State University, Keffi, Nigeria. Email ID: tsegysu@nsuk.edu.ng

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The media in Nigeria has been subjected to the enforcement of various decrees by the military government, which has made its citizens familiar with withholding information. Despite the establishment of media houses, successive governments in Nigeria have, to some extent, consistently denied total freedom of information [2]. To further reinforce this claim, previous military and civilian governments have closed down mass media institutions, particularly the print media. Similarly, decrees have been issued to curb press freedom, prompting various protests. In the beginning, there was the colonial government, which enacted several restrictive laws to prevent the media and reporters from holding the government and other powerful institutions accountable. Hence, the earliest laws passed by the government to curb press activities in Nigeria before independence were the Newspaper Ordinance of 1901 and the Seditious Offences Ordinance of 1909, prompted by the operations of the first newspaper, *Iwe-Irohin* (1859-1867) [27]. These were tactical measures to curb media activity by colonial governments, paving the way for more repressive media laws.

Then, after independence, several repressive acts continued unabated. For instance, the military prohibited the publications of *The Concord*, *The Punch*, *The Sketch*, and *The Observer* under General Ibrahim Babangida in 1993 [3]. In addition, the military of that time passed five more decrees, all of which were intended to punish any journalist or media organisation who tried to look into or write a negative opinion/report about the government's actions or those of its officials.

As a result of the frequent media and journalist embargoes in pre- and post-independence Nigeria, some autonomous organisations, including the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ), took the bold step of advocating for a Freedom of Information law in Nigeria in 1993 [4]. The continued agitation for an FOI bill to be made into law was championed by journalists for many years, who took it personally during that period. The Senate first approved the Bill for this Act on November 15, 2006, but President Olusegun Obasanjo vetoed it while in office [2]. The bill remained in the National Assembly for more than 6 years before President Goodluck Jonathan ultimately approved it in 2011 [4].

The primary objective of FOIA in Nigeria is to "Enhance the availability of public records and information, facilitate public access to such records and information, and safeguard them to the extent that aligns with the public interest" [5]. However, many years after its passage into law, the practical knowledge and use of the document as a legal mechanism for procuring information from public office holders and



institutions remain vague. This study aims to assess journalists' knowledge and utilisation of the FOI Act in North-Central Nigeria. Therefore, the specific objectives of the study are to evaluate journalists' understanding of the FOI Act in North-Central Nigeria and to determine how journalists utilise the Act's provisions to request information.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. An Overview of the FOI Act in Nigeria

The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), also referred to as “access to information”, [6] is an essential law that promotes transparency and accountability in society. This is because it gives every citizen the mandate to seek and obtain all information and records regarding the activities of public offices and public officials. Therefore, the FOIA aims to diminish secrecy, enhance openness, and improve public data management, thereby fostering accountability and accessibility in government [7]. The Freedom of Information law further enables individuals or entities to request and obtain identifiable documents without justification. Although there are a few exceptions to the rule, such as medical, security, and journalism records, which are usually protected.

In terms of potency, the FOI Act primarily empowers citizens, upon request, to demand and obtain information from public institutions [8]. Consequently, the Freedom of Information Act, mandated by legislation, offers citizens the right to access information held by the government. That is to say, the power of the Act is sacrosanct to the stability of democratic governance and journalism in a nation [27].

The place of the FOI Act in any country, especially in democratic countries, cannot be overemphasised. This is because government transparency in handling records and information enhances mutual trust among its citizens. As noted by some authors, when citizens are informed about government decisions and choices, they tend to have a positive perception of their society. The FOIA is targeted to equip citizens with the necessary legal authority to uncover facts, combat corruption, and ensure accountability from public officials and institutions. The practical implementation of this law is expected to improve governance in Nigeria. The FOI Act was also designed to remedy the deficiencies in Section 39 of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution.

A brief assessment of the FOI Act in Nigeria shows that it is enacted to protect citizens' rights to request information, including journalists' rights to report news and other information. Hence, there are immunity clauses under this Act for public officials who disclose information upon request. Moreover, public institutions are also permitted to classify and preserve information or archives that can be retrieved proactively at any time if required (S.3). However, there are procedures to follow to request such information, pay an acceptable fee, and determine the period necessary to make the requested information available. Section 6 of the Act states that requests for information should be granted or denied within seven days, with refusals allowed only for sensitive information that threatens national security, involves third-party data, or falls under professional exemptions. Some of the exemptions include restrictions on international affairs and national defence, as well as data related to administrative enforcement. Additional limitations

are in place to protect individuals' right to a fair trial and to ensure confidentiality in client relationships, including those between doctors and patients, journalists, and legal practitioners (S. 16) [10].

Furthermore, the Act also stipulates that if an applicant is denied access to requested information, he or she has the right to take the matter to court. Consequently, if the government officer who deprived the applicant of access to the information is found guilty by the court, a fine of N500,000 will be imposed. 00 will be awarded to the applicant [10].

In summary, the four cardinal provisions of the FOI Act in Nigeria are: the right of access to records; responses to access requests (Sections 6, 7, and 8); sanctions for the destruction of documents; and protection of whistleblowers [9].

B. Journalists and Awareness of the Freedom of Information Act in Nigeria

Journalism is one of the social institutions that requires complete freedom to function effectively. Journalists are responsible for monitoring governance activities. Through this, media men set agendas and perform their watchdog role, keeping people informed, entertained, educated, and engaged in other forms of socialisation [11]. To complement these journalistic roles, the FOI Act is widely regarded as highly beneficial for journalists in Nigeria. The law also allows any individual to request information from government bodies, regardless of age, gender, or location, subject to certain exemptions.

Journalists who are well-versed in the Act will be able to conduct thorough research and effective investigations. This is because fact-finding (investigative) journalism is one of the fulcrums of journalism practice. The essence of investigative journalism is to address social ills such as corruption, terrorism, and drug abuse [12]. Investigative journalism also aims to expose wrongdoing, crime, and corruption, which often affect society and occur in both public and private organisations [13]. Hence, officials can share accurate information regarding violations of laws, mismanagement, or risks to public health and safety, regardless of authorisation. Additionally, those who receive or disclose such information are protected from legal action [9].

The following are some of the FOIA provisions that media and journalism practice will utilise in the Act [13];

- i. *Right to Access Information:* Section 1(1) grants individuals the right to request information from public institutions, which must comply unless specified otherwise by the Act.
- ii. *Writ of Mandamus:* Section 1(3) allows individuals to compel public officials to release information, with exceptions for copyrighted or privileged materials.
- iii. *Journalists' Privilege:* Section 16 protects journalists from disclosing confidential sources.
- iv. *Protection for Whistleblowers:* Section 27(2) ensures that public officials can disclose information about mismanagement or fraud without facing repercussions from the Criminal Code or Official Secrets Act.

The Nigerian FOIA is legally grounded in the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. Thus, some sections of



Nigeria's national law in the African Charter are also secured by the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria [14]. Relatedly, the FOIA is central to media practice by promoting open discussion and transparency, both of which are essential for a functioning democracy. Journalists need to know FOI laws well to protect their rights.

III. REVIEW OF RELATED STUDIES

Many scholars and researchers have also evaluated the impact of the FOIA on journalism practice in Nigeria. There is a strong affirmation that freedom laws create an enabling environment that allows journalists to flourish in their watchdog roles [15]. Under this law, reporters have the liberty to seek and speak truth to the government by using the tips and information received from sources. An empirical study which employed survey research methods found that while 100% of journalists in South-East Nigeria are aware of the FOI Act, public institutions have failed to comply with its provisions. Journalists frequently have their requests for information denied due to a lack of understanding of the application procedures. Hence, the study concluded that journalists do not adequately utilise the Act due to their ignorance of the application processes [16].

Similarly, another survey study on the effectiveness of the FOIA for journalists in Nigeria, with a focus on Auchi, Edo State, revealed that while journalists are cognizant of the FOI Act, its implementation is hindered by inadequate cooperation and poor documentation from government agencies. The civil service is identified as the most cooperative, while the police are the least cooperative agency in requesting records and information. The study concludes that most sampled journalists are familiar with the Act and recommends revising its provisions to legally empower journalists and other citizens to boost access to information [17].

Further studies found that while journalists in Kogi state are aware of the Act's existence, their knowledge of its provisions is inadequate. The study also assessed their usage of the Act and identified challenges in its implementation. Using focus group discussions and in-depth interviews as research methods, the study revealed that journalists in Kogi do not effectively use the FOI Act regularly. This is attributed to a low understanding of the Act and a lack of commitment to learning its provisions. The authors concluded that, in the current societal context, these journalists are challenged in fully leveraging the FOI Act for information gathering [18]. Another study on journalists' perceptions of the Freedom of Information Act in Osun State found that journalists generally have a positive perception of the FOI Act and adequate knowledge of it. However, they are reluctant to utilise it. The study concluded that journalists should be encouraged to use the FOI Act while recognising its limitations in withholding sensitive information, as it can help compel public institutions to disclose government documents [19].

However, only one study showed a positive disposition towards the FOIA by revealing that Nigerian journalists possess a strong understanding of the FOI Act despite governmental challenges and a culture of secrecy. They view it as a valuable tool for fact-checking, writing on contentious issues, and understanding government operations. The study,

which sampled 313 journalists, concluded that, generally, the positive perception of the FOI Act and its potential contribution to improved journalism in Nigeria indicate its potency to enhance effective practice [5].

A. Theoretical Framework

Based on the various reviews, the libertarian theory is helpful for this study. The libertarian theory underpins media in a democratic society, emphasising that there should be no coercion to adhere to any theory and no restrictions on information gathering for publication, provided it is conducted legally. Therefore, the principles of this theory support the effective exercise of complete freedom of the press in society. There should be no legal limits on gathering information, and critics of governments should not be penalised for personal attacks. Journalists should have autonomy from their employers, and restrictions on news importation or exportation should be eliminated [20]. Hence, the libertarian theory supports freedom of the press and opposes press censorship. It is assumed that for the press to function effectively, it must have some relative freedom from the government's regulations and power.

This theory is valuable to this study because the FOI Act aims at providing the press with unrestricted access to information. Consequently, the free press theory is democratic, and the FOI Act is a democratic document that protects and allows citizens to exercise the right and privilege to scrutinise government activities. Journalists must be knowledgeable about the act and willing to work with the provisions of the FOI laws. The theory explains the possible outcomes of the research objectives, which aim to deepen understanding and practice of the FOIA among journalists in North-Central Nigeria.

B. Methodology

A mixed-methods survey and an in-depth interview were used to conduct this study. A simple random sampling technique was used to select respondents for the survey. At the same time, participants for the in-depth interview were purposively selected. The population of this study consists of journalists who are practising members of the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) in the three selected North-Central states of Nigeria: Benue, Nasarawa, and Plateau. The populations of journalists in Benue, Nasarawa, and Plateau are 465, 318, and 270, respectively. Therefore, the total population in the three states put together is one thousand and fifty-three (1,053) journalists (NUJ Benue, 2025; Nasarawa, 2025; Plateau, 2025).

Hence, for the survey, three hundred eighty-eight (388) copies of the questionnaire were administered to respondents who were practising journalists in the Benue, Nasarawa, and Plateau states across the NUJ Councils. A sample size of 388 was determined using the Cochran formula. Out of the 388 questionnaires administered, 387 (99%) were completed and returned. At the same time, Interviews were conducted with three senior editors from each of the selected states. Their knowledge and utilisation of the FOI Act were explored. Interview participants were coded by state using numbers 1-3. Hence, these are the state codes: Benue were BEN_01, BEN_02, and BEN_03; Nasarawa were NAS_01,



NAS_02, and NAS_03; and For Plateau are PLA_01, PLA_02, and PLA_03. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. The senior editors were selected from: Benue-Radio Benue, Agate Radio/TV and Pavilion Newspaper; Nasarawa- Nasarawa Broadcasting Service (NBS) Radio/TV, Nigeria Television Authority, Lafia, and News Agency of Nigeria (NAN); Plateau- PRTV Jos, Jay FM, and Highland FM. All interviews were conducted across the three states in their respective organisations. Consequently, the data from the survey and In-depth interviews are presented using an interpretative data presentation method. The data are analysed using frequency counts and simple percentages for the quantitative data and thematic analysis [26] for the qualitative data, to arrive at the findings.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Survey Data

Table I: Familiarity with the FOIA

S/N	Option	Frequency	Percentages [%]
1	Extremely familiar	116	30
2	Moderately familiar	187	48
3	Somewhat familiar	22	5
4	Slightly familiar	57	5
5	Not all familiar	5	1
Total		387	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 1 above shows that the majority of respondents are moderately or significantly familiar with the Act.

Table II: Awareness of the FOIA to Empower Reporters to Seek Information

S/N	Option	Frequency	Percentages [%]
1	Extremely aware	197	51
2	Moderately aware	89	23
3	Somewhat aware	48	12
4	Slightly aware	30	8
5	Not all aware	23	6
Total		387	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025

As seen in Table 2 above, the data reveal that a greater number of the respondents are aware that the Act empowers them to seek information from government and public institutions.

Table III: Knowledge Level of the Usage of the FOIA

S/N	Option	Frequency	Percentages [%]
1	To a high extent	56	14
2	To an extent	185	48
3	Neutral	92	24
4	To a low extent	54	14
5	To no extent	-	-
Total		387	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The data in Table 3 indicate that a significant number of respondents are aware of how to utilise the Act to request information from government and private institutions.

Table IV: On Using the FOIA

S/N	Option	Frequency	Percentages [%]
1	Always	47	12
2	Often	69	18
3	Sometimes	82	21
4	Rarely	61	16
5	Never	128	33
Total		387	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Data from Table 4 above indicate that many respondents have never used the Act in their practice.

Table V: Utilising the Provisions of the FOIA to Apply for a Record

S/N	Responses	Frequency	Percentages [%]
1	Every time	51	13
2	Often	41	11
3	Sometimes	118	30
4	Rarely	33	9
5	Never	144	37
Total		387	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The data in Table 5 indicate that most respondents have never used the Act's provisions to request a record from government or private institutions.

Table VI: Difficulty in Using the FOIA to Seek Information

S/N	Responses	Frequency	Percentages [%]
1	Very difficult	94	24
2	Difficult	109	28
3	Neutral	135	35
4	Easy	38	10
5	Very easy	11	3
Total		387	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The data in Table 5 show that respondents are finding it difficult to use the Act to seek information from the government or their institutions.

Table VII: Intending to Use the FOIA in Future

S/N	Responses	Frequency	Percentages [%]
1	Strongly agree	121	31
2	Agree	155	40
3	Undecided	72	19
4	Disagree	26	7
5	Strongly disagree	13	3
Total		387	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 6 above shows that respondents have decided to use the Act going forward.

B. Thematic Analysis of In-depth Interview

i. Awareness and Understanding of the FOIA

Participants in the three selected North-Central states are aware and familiar with the FOIA document and its provisions. As senior editors, most followed the debates on the Act during its time as a bill in the National Assembly. For instance, some of the respondents stated that "Yes, I am aware of the Act, and I even have a copy in my room, which I used to receive several on-the-job trainings regarding the use of it. I have a hard copy of the act" (BEN_02). Another participant added that "Yes, I am aware that there is an act called the FOI Act that has been passed and even assented to by the Nigerian government" (PLA_02).

However, some participants likewise believe that every journalist and reporter must know about the Act because it serves as a mirror that guides their practice and ensures accountability and transparency in governance. A participant noted that "Of course, any professional journalist should be aware of the Act. If at all you are a professional, you should be aware of it" (BEN_01). Another participant from Nasarawa state NUJ observed that:



The Freedom of Information Act is an act of the Nigerian parliament, comprising the Federal and National Assemblies, and was enacted in 2011 during the administration of Goodluck Jonathan. The president signed it to guarantee Nigerians and practising journalists access to information. So as a journalist, since it is one of the major laws or legal frameworks that empowers my job and that of my profession, of course, we were quite inquisitive to know how the act was going to stream on and how it was going to impact the job of journalism. So, it is a law I am well aware of. (NAS_02)

It is not surprising that all participants have a good knowledge of the FOIA, as many of them have been in the industry for a considerable number of years.

C. Comprehensive Knowledge of the FOIA

On this, some participants acknowledge a high level of knowledge of the Act's provisions, while others still lack a broad understanding of the Act's provisions and its operations. Some participants attest to a shallow understanding of the Act by stating that: "I would say my level of awareness of the provisions of the Act is around 40 to 45 percent" (NAS_03), "I have never really sat down to know the details of the Act or to know it clause-by-clause (PLA_01).

While another participant from Plateau affirmed his position on the Act by stating that "As a person, I think I have a fair knowledge of it, but for colleagues, most colleagues across various media organisations, for the fact that it is something we don't activate more often, it is very possible that they just know that it exists and they don't know deeply about anything and that" (PLA_03)

Aside from individual journalists, the general familiarity with the FOIA's provisions, or even its overall awareness, remains questionable. As observed by this participant:

Journalists are aware that an act has been passed by the national assembly and signed into law. But the issue is that most journalists are unaware of many of the act's provisions. (BEN_01)

From the responses, it is evident that journalists in the selected states lack in-depth knowledge of FOIA provisions. Reactions to the themes above show that participants are aware of the Freedom of Information Act and its functions, but there are still mixed feelings about its effectiveness due to its limited implementation. As put by PLA_02, "the act has eased some of our work, but up till now I think more needs to be done". While NAS_01 also affirm that "the use of the Act is below average".

D. Utilisation of the FOIA by Journalists

The FOI Act is instrumental to investigative journalism in Nigeria, according to some participants in the selected states, who acknowledged that it is a positive document for investigative reporting. Some of them noted that:

It is an act that journalists are supposed to leverage, especially in investigative journalism. NAS_02

The Act gives journalists the right to make enquiries or access information that was previously classified and accessible only to government officials. But the Act generally empowers journalists to have access to classified information. PLA_03

Therefore, some reporters have used the Act for investigative journalism. For instance, in Benue State, there

were cases of reporters using the Act's provisions to obtain information from public institutions. As deduced by a participant who agreed that "Yes, the reporter used the Act to seek the information he used in writing the report" (BEN_01)

Hence, the place of the FOIA on investigative reporting and journalism is sacrosanct, and reporters have continued to leverage the Act to seek information.

E. Limited Use of FOIA Among Journalists

Despite the presence of the FOI Act in Nigerian society, journalists are still not bothered with utilising it to seek information. Although they are aware of the Act, some participants attest that they have never had any concerns about using it for any purpose. A participant upheld that "I have never used it in the past, and none of my colleagues that I am aware of have tried to invoke it to get any information yet" (NAS_03). In contrast, another participant maintained that "But to be frank with you, as a person, I have never used it once, even though I know that it is there" BEN_03.

For some, their inability to use the Act can be attributed to professional and safety measures that limit its application. A participant from Plateau State narrates that "Basically, I have never tried to use the act, and I have never encouraged any reporter to use the act as a yardstick or as a basis for receiving classified information from the government" NAS_02. Another participant added that "I will rather advise my reporters to be careful, diplomatic, and make sure that they avoid any information on their story that will end up causing too much trouble... embrace self-censorship in a way, because for me, that is how it works in the field. You need to be smart enough to censor yourself, you need to be alive to tell the story, and you also need to be diplomatic enough to understand the space that you are operating in" PLA_02.

In summary, the FOI Act is powerful for journalism practice. But limitations stem from the fact that some reporters and editors are unable to use it for personal, professional, or safety reasons.

F. Discussion of Findings

The first objective of this study was to evaluate journalists' understanding of the FOIA in North-Central Nigeria. Hence, the findings revealed a high level of FOIA awareness among journalists in North-Central Nigeria. The majority of respondents in Benue, Nasarawa, and Plateau states — 78% (48% moderately, 30% extremely) — are familiar with the FOI Act. In addition, over 74% are highly aware that the Act authorises them to seek government-held information from their institutions and staff.

Similarly, the thematic analysis indicates that all senior editors are fully aware of and familiar with FOIA as a result of personal training and efforts. This finding corroborates previous studies, which also found that journalists in the South-East and Edo State, Nigeria, are also aware of the FOIA [16]. The same applies to journalists in Rivers State [21]. Journalists need to know the Act they intend to use to anticipate its actualisation in seeking information from government and other public offices.

A further probe into how journalists utilise the provisions of the FOIA to request information in North-Central Nigeria found that journalists

underutilise the Freedom of Information Act in the North-Central states of Benue, Nasarawa, and Plateau. Despite their awareness of the Act, they rarely use it. From the tables, 33% respondents have never used the Act, and 37% have also never used the Act's provisions to seek or apply for any record. Only 13% used the Act "every time", with 12% using it "always". Findings from the thematic analysis also show that some of the senior editors and their staff have never used the FOI Act due to safety concerns or self-censorship.

The finding above suggests that, despite being aware of the Act, many journalists in the studied states have not utilised it to seek information as expected of them. This corroborates a similar study, which found that journalists in the North-Central region are not using the FOIA to seek information that would enhance their professionalism [22]. Another study revealed that journalists in Kogi State, North-Central Nigeria, are not using the Act effectively in their practice [18]. The result of not using the Act is also evident because the media (journalists and reporters) have not effectively utilised the FOIA to enhance their watchdog role [13]. Corroboratively, the impact of the FOI Act on journalism remains limited, mainly due to its limited utilisation by journalists and its lack of firm grounding in Nigeria's journalistic culture [20].

Thus, a study also concluded that, despite their (journalists') deep understanding of the concept of investigative journalism, the respondents (journalists) did not fully utilise the provisions of the FOIA in their work [23]. A similar study shows that non-media individuals, like Civil Rights Organisations, are using the Act more effectively than media men [24].

An additional enquiry into the utilisation of the Act revealed that the FOIA application process is deemed difficult. This is based on the opinion of 52% respondents who affirm that the FOIA is complex or very difficult to use. Hence, the Act is seen as a mere theoretical document rather than a practical solution to journalists' access to information in North-Central Nigeria. This supports an earlier assertion that the poor utilisation of the FOIA by journalists is a result of their lack of knowledge of the application processes involved in using it to seek information [16].

The consideration of using the FOI Act in the future to enhance their practice was one of the questions thrown at the survey respondents. On this basis, the data showed that a combined 71% have agreed to use the Act in the future. This result implies that this study has consciously reawakened most respondents to the need for adequate knowledge of the FOI Act and how to utilise it. The majority of them are ready to embrace positive changes in their use of the Act. Therefore, it is recommended that journalists thoroughly apply for information records in accordance with the FOI Act's stipulated guidelines, with a view to increasing the frequency, testing its effectiveness in making information held by public authorities available to the people, and detecting any inherent flaws in the Act [25].

V. CONCLUSION

Therefore, based on the findings, this study concludes that although journalists in the North-Central states of Benue, Nasarawa, and Plateau are aware of the importance of the FOIA as a vital tool for promoting investigative reporting,

good governance, and accountability, the majority still rarely use it. Consequently, the gap between awareness/knowledge and the actual utilisation of the Act among journalists limits its effectiveness, contrary to the tenets of libertarian theory, which promote the media's access to information as an instrument of transparency and accountability in governance. Journalists, as societal watchdogs, are expected to go beyond just knowing about the FOI Act. They are expected to study the Act's provisions and learn about its application process so they can use it effectively to probe governance. Consequently, the findings in this study reveal a gap between merely knowing about the FOIA and its practical applications, which calls for urgent action.

DECLARATION STATEMENT

Some of the references cited are older and are explicitly noted as [10]. However, these works remain significant for the current study, as they are pioneering in their fields.

After aggregating input from all authors, I must verify the accuracy of the following information as the article's author.

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AUTHOR'S PROFILE



sensitive journalism.



Iliya Jeremiah Ovey is a PhD candidate with the Department of Mass Communication, Faculty of Communication and Media Studies, Nasarawa State University, Keffi, Nigeria. His research interests include broadcast media and journalism, media ethics, international and intercultural communication, and peace, conflict and

Muhammad Sani Rabi is a professor of journalism and media studies at the Faculty of Communication and Media Studies, Nasarawa State University, Keffi, Nigeria. With over 35 years of experience in journalism and teaching, Prof. Rabi has mentored many students and written extensively in journalism and media studies.

Tseguy Santos, PhD, is an Associate Professor of Mass Communication and the current Head of the Department of Journalism and Media Studies, Nasarawa State University, Keffi, Nigeria. He is a leading communication researcher with over 100 publications, including books, journal articles, and conference papers.

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