

# Perception of Freedom of Information Act and Practicing Journalists in Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria.

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigates Perception of the Freedom of Information Act and Practicing Journalists in Awka. The specific objective of the study focused on the need to assess the perception and the use of the recently enacted FoI Act to the practice of journalism now it has become a law in Nigeria. Considering the peculiarity of the Nigeria situation, the recently enacted Freedom of Information Act may be ineffective if journalists do not indeed make use of it in their reportage. The study was anchored on the theoretical framework of Libertarian and Social Responsibility theories. It examines these theories in relation to freedom of the press to assess information but that this freedom should be exercised with caution and responsibility. Designed as a survey, the study using a sample size of 340 practicing journalists in Awka, seeks to find out their perception of the recent FoI Act in Nigeria. Census sampling technique was applied, by dividing them into three relevant groups: Broadcast, Print media journalists and Freelancers. The study found that FoI Act is totally a democratic act which drives home the principle of rule of law, due process, transparency, and accountability. The research findings further shows that the Act helps to strengthen democracy and is beneficial to journalists in Awka as it makes their job less cumbersome. Based on the findings, the study recommends that the act should not be for journalists alone to allay the misconception that it is a media act, legislators should see it as essential to the survival of democracy in Nigeria, Journalists should perform their job effectively by holding the government accountable to the people as enshrined in the constitution as the act removes impediments to information gathering and news reportage. Government must ensure full utilization of the act to help fight corruption in Nigeria.

Keywords: Perception, freedom of information, journalist and Awka.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Freedom of Information Act (FoIA) seeks to make public records and information more freely available. It provides for public access to public records and information and project public records and information to the extent consistent with the public interest and personal privacy. The act also seeks to protect serving public officers from adverse consequences for disclosing certain kinds of official information without authorization [1, 2, 3, 4, 5]. It establishes procedure for the achievement of those purposes and related purposes thereof. The emergence of this act has now empowered

journalists and Nigerians in general to access information freely. Prior to this, journalists and the general public were not allowed to inquire into the governance process of Nigeria [6, 7, 8, 9]. There was a secrecy surrounding government functionaries such as the President, ministers, Permanent Secretaries, Governors, Commissioners, etc. Hence the need for the Freedom of Information Act as journalists perceive as necessary for the enthronement of good governance in the country. However, it is important to determine the extent journalists are able to make use of this act considering the harsh economic situation, state of insecurity and unemployment rate in the country. It is also necessary to ascertain how easily journalists can access information given the level of corruption prevalent in Nigeria [10, 11, 12, 13, 14]. Moreover, given the level of bureaucracy and official corruption within the democratic structures it becomes imperative to ascertain the extent journalists in Nigeria can and have been utilizing this act in the daily performance of their function within the ethics of journalistic profession. Or has the act succeeded in entrenching powers within the prevalent hegemony or as it should, is it serving public interest and furthering democracy in the country. That is why this study sought the opinions of practicing journalists in the country in the light of these prevailing circumstances to determine the extent of applicability of the act in their professional duties. In the same vein it is important to state that if journalists cannot meet this objectively, the purpose of enacting this law will not be felt [15, 16, 17, 18, 19].

#### **Statement of Problem**

Considering the peculiarity of the Nigeria situation, the recently enacted freedom of information act may be ineffective if journalists do not indeed make use of it in their reportage. Information gathering and news reportage may suffer setback if journalists after the passage of this law still experience obstacle in accessing information required in carrying out the duty of reportage appropriately. Since journalism profession is such that practitioners have to wade through obstacles in their quest to access true and authentic information, only effective use and proper enforcement of this act can enable them out of the rigor. Nigeria being a developing country, proper awareness and enlightenment need be instilled into the citizenry in order to be in tune with the benefit the act can provide [20, 21, 22, 23].

In the light of the above, it becomes pertinent to therefore determine the extent journalists in Nigeria can access information considering the level of official corruption within democratic structures within the Nigerian government. Against the speculations by majority of Nigerians regarding the removal of certain sections of the act that can indict government officials the need to ascertain journalists' opinion regarding the effectiveness of this act in the quest for information gathering and reportage becomes imperative [24, 25, 26, 27].

### **Objectives of the study**

The overall aim of the study is to assess journalists' perception and use of the Freedom of Information Act in their day to day gathering and reportage of news in the country considering the state of insecurity, level of official corruption, harsh economic situation and bureaucracy within the democratic structure. The specific objectives of this study are to:

1. Assess the perception and the use of the recently enacted FoI Act by journalists in Nigeria.
2. Ascertain the benefits of the act to journalists in accessing and disseminating information.
3. Determine the obstacles contained in the act as it affects journalism practice in Nigeria.
4. Find out the extent of compliance with the act by the different sectors of the public with regards to the provision of information to journalists.
5. Assess journalists' perception of the act in enhancing the Nigerian democratic structure

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The Freedom of Information Act, 2007 as enacted by the National Assembly of the Federal Republic of Nigeria but never assented by former president Obasanjo described the Freedom of Information Act as "A Law which makes Public records and information more freely available, provide for public access to public records and information, project public records and information that is consistent with the public interest and the protection of personal privacy, protect serving public officers from adverse consequences for disclosing certain kinds of official information without authorization and established procedures for the achievement of those purposes; and for related matters" [28].

In other words, this Act seeks to provide right of access to public information or records kept by government, public institutions or private bodies carrying out public functions for citizens and non citizens of the country. It also seeks to increase the availability of public records and information to citizens of the country in order to participate more effectively in the making and administration of laws and policies and to promote accountability of public officers [29].

However, in Nigeria, what we have is "secrecy" and behind 'closed doors" exhibited in 'National Security", "top secret", "secret", "confidential", etc. A typical and most recent example was everything surrounding the protracted sickness and subsequent death of former President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua that was shrouded in secrecy.

The system of government in 'most developing countries including Nigeria is a cabal, with a secret clique operating behind closed doors that remains inaccessible to the common people... In fact, this has been one of its major sources of power. For too long, our government has operated on a culture of "keep our secrets secret,' which treats government as the property of military dictators and public servants. Even our elected leaders have inherited and maintained this undemocratic tradition. Mercifully however, this culture of secrecy that characterizes government functioning is gradually changing due to global developments [30].

The right to information is growing, and assuming prominence in the contemporary world with the spread of democratic culture and the increasing credence given to peoples' participation in the process of sustainable development. It is being viewed as fundamental to the realization of economic and social, as well as civil and political rights. Effective democracy requires participation by all [31, 32].

Consequent upon this, the right to access information underpins all other human rights. Freedom of Expression and thought for instance inherently rely on the availability of adequate information to form opinions. Fundamental human right is entrenched in the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, though we are still far from having access to information as and when required [33].

Our local, state and federal governments deny the citizens this right and perpetuate their own rule through a culture of secrecy. Nigerians, haven been left out of the process of governance due to poverty, and illiteracy, the majority of the population being governed cannot comprehend the processes that affect their lives. Suppression of information of the state thus often leads to the most blatant forms of human rights violation [34].

In recent years, large scale corruption and abuse of power by governments have placed a renewed emphasis on the need for transparency and accountability which can only be re-established where there is easy access to information not only by those in governments but by the generality of the citizenry. Before now the newly approved Law/Act, formerly a bill had appeared on the order paper of the House of Representatives over several times and it was either pushed to question time or stood down. On Thursday, July 31, 2008, on the instance of majority of the members of the house the bill now a law came fore as they stood down the bill after a rowdy session in spite of all efforts by stakeholders to have it passed and signed into law [27].

The Freedom of Information Act is totally a democratic act which further drives home the principle of rule of law, due process and transparency. The law if effectively utilized would bring about good governance and accountability on the part of government with better public participation in the affairs of the state.

### **Historical Background of the Freedom of Information Act**

The idea for a Freedom of Information law for Nigeria was conceived in 1993 by three different organizations, namely: Media Rights Agenda (MRA), Civil Liberties Organizations (CLO) and the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ). MRA was designated the technical partner in the project under the agreement for advancing the project.

In keeping with this role, MRA's legal directorates headed by Mr. Tunde Fagbohunlu of the law firm of Aluko and Ayebode, produced in 1994 a draft bill titled, 'Draft Access to Public Records and Official Information Act.' The content of the draft bill drew substantially from the experiences of other countries operating Freedom of Information laws. It was also based on consultations made by practicing journalists as contained in the questionnaire administered by MRA. The "Draft Access to Public Records and information Act' thus became the basis for further discussions and debates on the issue and was subjected to series of review exercises involving various stakeholders [22, 23].

The first of such exercises was a two-day technical workshop jointly organized by the three partner organizations on the 10th and 11th of March, 1995. This was to examine and revise the draft. In the workshop were human rights workers, lawyers, journalists, representatives of the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC), the Ministry of Information and University lecturers.

Based on the concord at the workshop, a revised second draft of the proposed legislation by the MRA was produced later that year to reflect the consensus of the participants and stakeholders on the content of the proposed law.

It is worthy to note that, working with Article 19, the International Centre against Censorship in London, and the Nigerian Human Rights Commission; the MRA on March 16th and 17<sup>th</sup> 1999 organized another workshop on media law reforms in Nigeria at Ota in Ogun State to further review the draft law.

As a result of the recommendations of a consensus document at the end of the Ota workshop captioned 'Ota Platform of Action on Media Law Reform in Nigeria' the MRA further again reviewed the draft law to give more support/ to the agreement at the workshop.

In July 1999, the Freedom of Information Bill (FOIB) now Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) was introduced to the National Assembly. It had a steady and tremendous progress all through the 1999/2003, as the House of Representatives undergoing the first and second readings in addition to a public hearing before the Assembly was dissolved in May 2003 without passing the bill into law [18, 19].

However, the bill was also re-introduced to the 2003/2007 National Assembly after their inauguration in June 2003. The Lower House passed it on August 25, 2004. It was not a

surprise to say that the Senate passed the bill also with a consensus vote on November 15, 2006.

In addition, the differences in both versions of the bill were however harmonized by the conference committee of the National Assembly on February 14, 2007. The Senate on February 21 and the House of Representatives on February 27, 2007 respectively adopted the harmonized version of the bill.

On March 23, 2007 the said bill was dispatched to Chief Olusegun Obasanjo the then President for his assent. Unfortunately, he, Obasanjo refused to sign the bill into law.

Fortunately, this administration under President Goodluck Jonathan assented it into law on 28th, May, 2011 and announced it to Nigerians during his Democracy speech [20, 21, 22].

### **Freedom of Information in Nigeria: The Journey So Far**

For over twelve years, the protagonists of the freedom of information act toiled to get it passed at the national assembly. The bill was originally presented to the house in 1999 when the return to democratic governance heightened the expectation that there will be increased disposition towards freer information access by those in power. Finally in August 2004, the House of Representatives passed the freedom of information bill and after two years, the Senate by a consensus vote passed the same bill. Incidentally for the entire two-term duration of the government, the then President Olusegun Obasanjo himself willfully withheld his assent. Strangely, he neither vetoed it nor tried to amend it. Apparently the many years of lobbying and pressure by many groups such as the Media Rights Agenda, the Civil Liberties Organization, the Nigerian Union of Journalists etc within that dispensation were squashed.

As it currently stands, Nigeria has become the fourth in Africa to pass the freedom of information (FoIA) into law and has followed the examples of such countries as South Africa, Uganda and Angola.

Before the recent time however, the pressure for the resurrection of the bill was resumed again at the national assembly thus making the bill the longest surviving in the Senate. The Freedom of Information Act is the only act that went through more than three public hearings. The House of Representatives held its first public hearing on October 3 and 4, 2001. The Senate, five years later, held its own on April 25, 2006 under the Committee on Information. Three days later, there was a separate hearing on the bill with all security, and anti-corruption agencies in attendance. Thereafter, the bill was committed to an ad hoc committee in the national assembly to handle. Finally, after dilly-dallying for a long time, the National Assembly passed the bill and forwarded it to former President Obasanjo for the assent it never got. But that did not mark the end of the troubles which the bill was going through. For the umpteenth time, the legislators

refused to debate on the bill. The fear always was largely due to the possible new fillip to the media in its conduct of investigative journalism. The Nigerian press has for many years been accused of sensationalism as against fact based journalism because their reports appear not to be backed with evidence(s).

Restricting access to information deprives the press of the legal authority to publish what they even know is true. But the more the delay in the passage of this bill; the more delay in the eventual prosperity of this country. This is because as a nation, we have been held down by a network of cabals of corrupt government officials, politicians and their cronies. Unless the lid is opened on their activities, it is most unlikely to abate.

It is important to know that we would not have expected any progress less than what we see currently in the country because many ex-civilian governors and other government officials who held the political forte prior to this dispensation bulldozed their ways using variety of combinations of state brutality into the legislative chamber so as to be able to shape the laws which will govern them in the years to come. It is very unlikely that these people become legislators because they truly want to help and positively transform this country for as far as one can guess, they had the opportunities of impacting meaningfully to the economic and social wellbeing of the citizens of their states while they reigned as governors or whatever position they held, but they misused it and turned themselves rather into deadly economic parasites and venom. The question now is 'can they change now?' The reason for their being in the chambers is primarily to kill laws that will permit unfettered investigations into their past criminalities. The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission's embarrassing pursuits of these high profile criminal suspects lend sufficient credence to these assumptions.

There were no way these fraudulent and dubious people can easily lend themselves to public scrutiny and ridicule. Thus the fear of unfettered access to their unholy deals by the public and the consequent escalation of this information through the media lie behind the unrelenting attempts to get the project stifled. This posture in any case is hypocritical because only recently, the national assembly has been embarking on series of probes apparently determined to unearth the true facts behind the failures of many projects of the past administration such as the Power Project.

Incidentally, we need the Freedom of Information Act to save this situation and be on appropriate course for a prosperous Nigeria. In the first instance, the act will promote transparency. The activities of those who complicate information in order to misinform and scuttle investigation will be reduced. Heightened transparency goes hand in hand with credibility and confidence. What it simply means is that there will be heightened trust and confidence in the Nigerian people: not only the government but also the ordinary people particularly business men who carry out cross-border transactions.

For many years, opportunities lost by far outweigh what has been gained and converted because of the size of shady and filthy transactions that take place within public sector circles which in turn provides enormous incentives for the fraud that takes place at the level of entrepreneurs.

Anybody who supports accountability has no choice but to support the freedom of information act which invariably leads to one asking whether the legislators who on one hand are probing past regimes' activities are at the same time throwing away the mechanism through which they can have increased access to such information that they seem to be probing [24].

Considering these numerous advantages, it is apparent that the secrecy mindset of public sector officials be minimized as much as possible. It will not only heighten confidence on the Nigerian economy as earlier mentioned but also strengthen the structures for value creation in the country. Ignorance is a killer of the society and economy. Information is the only cure of this disease. By extension therefore the freer the access to information by the Nigerian public the more enlightened they become on very important private and public matters and the better it is for the growth and development of the country.

Moreover, students and researchers will find some of the documents classified as 'secret' useful for their research but are deliberately denied the opportunities inherent in them. Since democracy survives best under the conditions of transparency, openness and information, the freer the access to information the better for democratic success and invariably the possibility of effectively handling many issues that affect the well-being of the citizens. Increased access to information will make the government more responsive to the circumstances of the citizens.

Freedom of information is the biggest blow that can be dealt to the corruption-empire which has been built within and across this country for decades. Not only will it open up the sleazy secrets of the corrupt and criminal minds among us, such as those who perpetrated the murders of Dele Giwa, Bola Ige, Harry Marshal etc, it will enhance the dispensation of justice generally. The reason for this is that it will help the police and other security agencies in their investigation process and enable the extraction of witnesses' cooperation where necessary and possible.

The human society by nature has been endowed with the free will to obtain and use information that is geared towards achieving its goals. In like manner, a well informed citizenry is a necessary vehicle for social change and progress of a nation. What has become worrisome, however, is the fact that the Senate Media and Information Committee on the Freedom of Information Bill has whittled some of the provisions of the draft bill in a way that would make it less effective.



### **Information and Democratic Governance**

In a true, democratized society, the citizenry have the right to know the fundamental issues affecting them which border on economy, politics, religion and facets of human life. This is translated in the manner that would make officials of government accountable to the people whom they serve. This right could be access to public records such as contracts, budget provisions, legislative votes, rules and regulations and other government decisions. However, it is disheartening that government runs its business like a private affair common among spouses. Any demand by the public to know about such public 'business' is regarded sabotage. This, perhaps, explains why our ruling class regards itself largely as unaccountable to the people, as Olajede ([www.punching.com](http://www.punching.com)) puts it:

The public business goes on largely behind closed doors, and the sharing of the most elementary information is viewed with horror. Even the President's health is seen as government secret, leading to wild rumours and dark prophesies about the fate of the leader of the country. The specific ailments of a man supposedly hired by 140 million people to help run their affairs is deemed to be non of their business.

Access to information is the engine room upon which any democracy depends. Information helps a society to confront its true condition with sober sense and make swift developmental strides. It is no wonder that the Americans who run a system that is more open, enacted into law a freedom of Information Act more than 40 years ago. On our part, however, we attempted and achieved a new ground; our dream for the freedom of access to information has come true, even after 50 years of nationhood. The passage of the law which was characterized by series of delay, smuggling in and out, impingement and or deletion of some vital provisions of the Act by our lawmakers has finally come to fruition. This, in the real sense, is in the spirit of transparent democracy. When information about the running of government is made open, for instance, the people would know the amount allocated to their constituencies by the government. It would also be possible for the people to know how much has been allocated for the social transformation of their local government areas, hence the local government Chairman would not claim the 'zero allocation; a bad cliché that has become a political term. It would have also been possible for the good people of any community to question the utilization of resources channeled to them for the purpose of development. It is based on this philosophy that first class world economies grew resulting in the establishment of functional infrastructure. An example is the

publication of monthly federal allocation to states and local governments in the country by the Minister for Finance Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala which President Goodluck Jonathan approved to enable state governors pay the minimum wage [10].

The need for FoIB to be passed into law was further stressed by the Catholic Bishops of Nigeria at their 2008 second plenary meeting. They declared that: “we cannot talk of democracy without the freedom of information duly put in place to make it work. The free flow of information promotes participation which is the engine that drives democracy. The hoarding of information, on the contrary, leads to dictatorship, corruption, marginalization and anarchy”.

### **Freedom of Information, Transparency and the Rule of Law**

The rule of law is one of the cardinal ingredients of democratic governance. [7] states that:

The rule of law means the governance of law. By this we mean that the entire society including democratic institutions, organs of government and the civil society must be subject to legal rules..., the rule of law demands that all actions of government officials and the citizenry be justified in law.

Section 14(2a) of the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999) also states clearly that all government power should be exercised according to law and without arbitrariness. The importance of this is that the entire Nigerian citizenry are guided by the tenets of the constitution hence the principles of the rule of law must be followed. But it beats one’s imagination that our elites, especially those in positions of authority, seem to negate this; they most often than not, see themselves as highly and above the law. It explains vividly why our ‘honourable’ members have tactically expunged some of the provisions of the freedom of information Act in a manner that would suite them forgetting that they are accountable to the people and must, therefore, be transparent in their dealings. They do not only sit on and delay the passage of the act but perform surgical operation on some parts to suite their interest. Can we make meaningful progress as a nation if this continues?

Olajede ([www.punching.com](http://www.punching.com)) observed that the draft law carefully balances the public’s right to know the agencies of government but it exempts, for example, information that has direct bearing on national security. He declares: “in reality, the fervency of the proclamation of the “rule of law” has proved inversely proportional to actual law enforcement, as anyone who lives in our beloved land can attest through everyday experience. One needs only to drive around or visit a police station or engage in any kind of exchange with another citizen, to understand that the rule of law, no matter

how repeated with great affection, is the farthest thing from the reality of life on these shores.”

### **Challenges to the Effective use of FoIA in Nigeria**

Indeed, the odds against the effective use of the FoIA in Nigeria are tremendous and have impacted on the quality of the output of journalists over the years. For ease of reference, I have delineated these in cultural, technological; Socio-Economic, legal and Educational. These, I will treat sequentially in the course of the chapter.

The Political challenges/impediments weigh heavily as journalists have had to brave credible odds in reporting the country’s political situation and environment. This fact is clearly exposed by the former National President Nigeria Union of Journalists Mr Smart Adeyemi (now a Senator) when he said;

“I foresee a situation where many journalists may be killed because of the high level of poverty and corruption in the media. If you allow politicians to buy you...don’t forget that the man that has hired you to carry a particular report, has opponents...those opponents may not forgive you. Though the Nigeria media is sometimes daubed as vibrant, like most countries in developing world, journalists are still underpaid, thus Nigeria media suffers corruption [12].

This is evident in the killing of some journalists at different parts of Nigeria since the recent time. On April 2010 a journalist Mr Epele was killed on his way home after the day’s hurdles. Between the months of May 2009 and April 2010, 6 journalists have been killed in the course of their job. The contribution of Dr Stanley Macebuh, former M/D of the Guardian Newspaper, on the issue, is no less instructive

“The Nigeria journalists have done better than others elsewhere in the third world. However they have done their worst in civilian times, when they break into campus abandoning the profession”.

Nevertheless, the slain journalists may not have met their untimely deaths if there is effective press freedom in Nigeria. If then, the FoIA was passed into law and assented by Mr. President; journalists may not have been going through hurdles in order to secure document/information.

Also the former Editor of the Newswatch Magazine the late Dele Giwa was killed with letter bomb in 1986 because he was able to secure information about the drug business by a government syndicate.

The gamut of the political challenges faced by journalists is very wide and therefore can only be sparingly treated to make for the analysis of other challenges faced by journalists.

Another challenge is the cultural impediment faced by journalists in Nigeria. These range from the cultural sensibilities that journalists must navigate in the course of reporting to the very poor perception of journalists by the average Nigerian. Gbenga Olusegun Obasanjo; son of former President Obasanjo in an interview with the News Magazine railed ‘Because I don’t give them money, they write all kinds of things about me... The press guys are hungry bunch”

Nigerians especially those in positions of authority view journalists as not the fourth estate of the realm rather as paupers who are not supposed to know the secrets about governance and as such, see them as over-stepping their bounds whenever journalists interview or try to get relevant information from them. This poses great challenge as to the full implementation and effective use of the FoIA.

Technologically, Nigerian journalists especially those in Anambra state experience no less bitter challenges .in the course of information gathering and dissemination especially those under the employ of the state owned media. Information gathered are censored and watered downed seriously to suite the government of the day before being disseminated. Example government of Mr Peter Obi frowns at any negative news about security situation in the state especially when the state media reports/comments on such negativity rather to report that for security; all is well to attract foreign investors, yet on daily bases one hears about incidents of kidnapping, armed robbery and killing in and around Anambra state.

### **Summary of Literature Review**

In the interest of our dear country, the passage of the Freedom of Information Act (FoIA) into law by the legislature on the 24th May, 2011 and assented by President Goodluck Jonathan on 28<sup>th</sup> May, 2011 must be appreciated as a long awaited answer to the clarion call by Nigerians to put the law into use in Nigeria. The many paraphernalia of governance have been redeployed only in the hand of the big wings and the most privileged citizens, while the ordinary citizen is deliberately kept in the dark. This is exemplified by the lack of interest by previous administrations in the country to pass the draft bill into law. But now it has been given the full weight of the law, all hands must be on deck to ensure its full and effective use by not only practicing journalists but Nigerians at large as we work towards a better Nigeria through access to true and adequate information.

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Research Design**

The researcher used the Survey method of research to carry out this study. This was considered because the survey method allows the collection of a large amount of data from a sizeable population in a highly economical way.

### Study Population

The population of this study comprised 340 journalists working in both private and public media establishments in Anambra State. This figure was obtained from the office of the Nigeria Union of Journalists, Awka according to the nominal list of 2009. This number also includes those journalists working in both print and electronic media and freelancers. They also include both the practicing and non practicing journalists in the state. The practicing journalists in Anambra State are among the most affected by this Freedom of Information Act as they regularly seek for information that will enable them serve the public better. The masses in the state depend on them for objective, accurate, balance and up-to-date information about governance in Nigeria. These classes of journalists are assumed to possess the necessary characteristics that would help facilitate and achieve the desired objectives of this study. It is therefore, expected that the result of this research will yield reliable result that could adequately apply to all practicing journalists in Nigeria.

### Sample Size

The sample of this study comprised of three hundred and forty (340) practicing journalists in Awka, cutting across private and public broadcasting and print media organizations as well as those who are freelance journalists in Awka the capital of Anambra State were chosen.

### Sampling Technique

All the members of the population were examined. This implies a Census. Census is the process of examining every member of the population. [17], In many situations, however, the chance of investigating an entire population is remote, if not nonexistent, due to time and resource constraints. But in this study, the population is quite small therefore the entire population (340) were chosen. The researcher divided the population into three relevant and significant groups chosen from media organizations existing in Anambra State irrespective of their sexes or official status.

The selected respondents include one hundred and seventy (170) broadcast media journalists, one hundred and thirty (130) print media journalists and forty (40) freelance journalists who are not attached to any broadcasting or print media organization. Below is a tabular representation of the distribution of respondents from each selected sample area.

<b>Journalists Distribution</b>	<b>No. of Respondents</b>
Broadcast media Journalists	170
Print media Journalists	130
Freelance Journalists	40
<b>Total</b>	<b>340</b>

### DATA AND ANALYSIS

All data obtained from the respondents through the structured questionnaire administered are presented in the following tables.

**Table 1: Respondents Years of Service**

Years	Number of responses	Percentage
1-5 years	67	20%
6-10 years	75	22%
11-15 years	93	27%
16-20 years	48	14%
21-25 years	35	10%
26 years above	22	6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>340</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Authors Analysis**

Table one above indicates that majority of the respondents are journalists who have worked for a period between 11-15 years. They constitute 27% of the total sampled respondents. This is followed by journalists who have worked for between 6-10 years (22%). Those respondents who have worked for between 1-5 years are 67 or 20% of the total sampled respondents. Forty-eight of the sampled respondents, representing 14% have worked for between 16-20 years, 35 of the respondents, representing 10% have practiced for between 21-25 years while the remaining 22 journalists (6%) have practiced for between 26 years and above.

**Table 2: What do you understand about the Freedom of Information act?**

Options	Number of responses	Percentage
An act that seeks to strengthen the information seeking power of the people	243	71%
An act that will expose the ills of politicians and government agents	0	0%
An act that will give more power to journalists	21	6%
An act that will make the government more transparent	76	22%
<b>Total</b>	<b>340</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Authors Analysis**

Data from Table 2 above reveal that the majority of the sampled respondents 243 or 71% agreed that the act seeks to strengthen the information seeking power of the people. This is followed by the respondents 76 or 22% who agreed that the act makes government and the process of governance more transparent. The respondents who indicated that the act gives more power to journalists are 21 or 6% of the sampled respondents.

**Table 3: Who do you think the act is meant to serve?**

<i>Options</i>	<i>Number of responses</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Journalists and media workers alone	0	0%
Civil rights activists and organisations alone	0	0%
Academics alone	0	0%
Opposition parties alone	0	0%
General public	340	100
All of the above	0	0%
None of the above	0	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>340</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Authors Analysis**

On the issue of who the act is meant to serve, all the sampled respondents, 340 or 100% agreed that the act was meant to serve the interest of the general public. This means that it is not an act for journalists alone, it is not an act for civil rights organisations alone, not for academics alone, neither is it for the opposition political parties.

**Table 4: Do you think the act is necessary considering the fact that Nigeria is now practicing Democracy?**

<i>Options</i>	<i>Number of responses</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Yes	313	92%
No	0	0%
Undecided	27	8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>340</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Authors Analysis**

Table 4 above indicates that the majority of the sampled respondents 313 or 92% are of the opinion that even though Nigeria is practicing democracy, the act remains necessary. Twenty-seven (27) of the sampled respondents, representing 8% were undecided.

**Table 5: Do you think the act will remove all existing impediments to obtaining information by journalists?**

<i>Options</i>	<i>Number of responses</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Yes	313	92%
No	0	0%
Undecided	27	8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>340</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Authors Analysis**

On the issue of the act being able to remove all existing impediments to obtaining information by journalists in Nigeria now it has finally been passed and accented to by the executive arm of government, Table 5 above shows that the majority of the respondents 313 or 92% are of the view that the act will remove all existing impediments to obtaining information by journalists. The remaining 27 respondents or 8% were undecided. None of the sampled respondents disagreed on this issue.

**Table 6: Do you think the act can make the job of journalists easier?**

Options	Number of responses	Percentage
Yes	311	91%
No	22	6%
Undecided	7	2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>340</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Authors Analysis**

Majority of the sampled journalists 311 or 91% based on the data from the above table indicated Yes on the issue of the Freedom of Information act being able to make the job of the journalists easier. Twenty-two (22) respondents, representing 6% of the sampled respondents however disagreed with the view that the act will make the job of the journalist easier. The remaining 7 respondents or 2% however, were undecided.

**Table 7: By your assessment, do you think the act received favourable response at the National Assembly?**

Options	Number of responses	Percentage
Yes	74	22%
No	223	66%
Undecided	43	13%
<b>Total</b>	<b>340</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Authors Analysis**

Table 7 above indicates that the majority of the sampled respondents do not agree that the act received favourable response from the lawmakers at the National Assembly. The respondents are 223, representing 66% of the sampled respondents. Seventy-four (74) of the total sampled respondents however agree that the act received favourable response from the lawmakers at the National Assembly. The remaining 43 respondents or 13% were undecided on the issue.

**Table 8: The Freedom of Information act entails?**

Options	Number of responses	Percentage
A provision that grants unrestricted access to classified information to journalists and other media workers.	104	31%
A provision that enables journalists to seek, acquire and publish information without harassment from government.	153	45%
Seeks to ensure that Nigerians have access to the right and true information	83	24%
None of the above	0	0%

**Source: Authors Analysis**

The majority of the respondents 153 or 45% as seen from Table 8 above are of the view that the Freedom of Information Act entails a provision that enables journalists to seek, acquire and publish information without harassment from government. This is followed by 104 respondents, representing 31% who noted that the act entails a provision that



grants unrestricted access to classified information to journalists and other media workers. The remaining 83 or 24% of the sampled respondents indicated that the act seeks to ensure that Nigerians have access to the right and true information.

**Table 9: Do you think that the act seeks to give undue powers to journalists in the country?**

Options	Number of responses	Percentage
Yes	0	0%
No	313	92%
Undecided	27	8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>340</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Authors Analysis**

Data from Table 9 above indicates that 313 or 92% of the sampled respondents do not agree that the act seeks to give undue powers to journalists in the country. The remaining 27 or 8% of the total sampled respondents however were undecided on the issue.

**Table 10: Do you think the act can expose the government to ridicule?**

Options	Number of responses	Percentage
Yes	0	0%
No	307	90%
Undecided	33	10%
<b>Total</b>	<b>340</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Authors Analysis**

The table above indicates that the majority of the sampled respondents 307 or 90% are of the view that the Freedom of Information act does not expose government to ridicule. The remaining 33 respondents or 10% were undecided as to whether the act can expose government to ridicule since it has been passed and signed into law.

**Table 11: Do you really think that journalists have misused the advantage of the act since its passage?**

Options	Number of responses	Percentage
Yes	27	8%
No	270	79%
Undecided	43	13%
<b>Total</b>	<b>340</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Authors Analysis**

Table 11 above, indicates that the majority of the sampled respondents (270 or 79%) are of the opinion that since it was passed, journalists have not misused the advantage of the act. Another 27 respondents, representing 8% of the entire sampled respondents disagreed by indicating that journalists have misused the advantages of the act since it became operational. The remaining 43 respondents or 13% however were undecided on the issue.

**Table 12: How would you attribute the lawmakers' hesitation towards the passage of the act?**

Options	Number of responses	Percentage
They want to protect the ill deeds of the executive	23	7%
They are opposed to press freedom	17	5%
They want to checkmate the powers of the media	31	9%
They want to protect corrupt politicians	47	14%
They do not think Nigerians are ripe for the act	95	28%
All of the above	127	37%
None of the above	0	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>340</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Authors Analysis**

On the issue of why the lawmakers are hesitated on the passage of the act, the majority of the respondents 127 or 37% were of the view that they want to protect the ill deeds of the executive. This is followed by 95 respondents or 28% who indicated that the law makers hesitation can be attributed to the fact that they do not think Nigerians are ripe for the act. Forty-seven respondents or 14% believe that the lawmakers want to protect corrupt politicians, 31 respondents or 9% say the lawmakers want to checkmate the powers of the media, 23 respondents or 7% believe that they want to protect the ill deeds of the executive while the remaining 17 respondents or 5% say that the lawmakers are opposed to press freedom.

**Table 13: How would you rate the input of journalists in Awka to the passage of the act?**

Options	Number of responses	Percentage
Satisfactory	116	34%
Not Satisfactory	167	49%
Undecided	57	17%
<b>Total</b>	<b>340</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Authors Analysis**

The input of journalists in Awka to the passage of the act as indicated by the majority of the sampled respondents 167 or 49% is not satisfactory. Another 116 respondents, representing 34% of the total sampled respondents agreed that the input of journalists in Awka to the passage of the act was satisfactory. The remaining 57 or 17% of the sampled journalists were undecided on the issue of the input of journalists in Awka to the passage of the act.

**Table 14: What role(s) did you think Journalists in Awka played to actualise the passage of the law?**

Options	Number of responses	Percentage
Sensitised the people of Awka on the essence of the act	213	63%
Mounted pressure on the lawmakers to pass the law	22	6%
Mobilised Nigerians in Awka towards the passage of the law	55	16%
Lobbied National Assembly members from their state to pass the law	50	15%
<b>Total</b>	<b>340</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Authors Analysis**

On the role(s) which Journalists in Awka played to actualise the passage of the law, the majority of the sampled respondents (213 or 63%) are of the view that they sensitised the people in Awka and Anambra State on the essence of the act should be the role of the journalists. Fifty-five (55) or 16% of the sampled respondents agree that the journalists in Awka and Anambra State played effective role in the actualisation of the passage of the Freedom of Information law by mobilising Nigerians in Awka and the entire Anambra State towards the passage of the law. Another 50 respondents or 15% were of the view that their role was lobbying the National Assembly members from their state to join hand to pass the law, while the remaining 22 respondents or 6% believe that their role was to mount pressure on the lawmakers to pass the law.

**Table 15: Do you think that journalists in Awka played a role in the formulation and passage of the Act?**

Options	Number of responses	Percentage
Yes	317	93%
No	0	0%
Can't say	23	7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>340</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Authors Analysis**

On the issue of journalists in Awka playing a role in the formulation and the passage of the act, the majority of the sampled respondents 317 or 93% indicated that they played a role in the formulation and passage of the law. The remaining 23 respondents, representing 7% however, were undecided on the issue.

**Table 16: At what level were you involved in the agitation for the act?**

Options	Number of responses	Percentage
Organising local workshops and seminars on the act	71	21%
Sensitising journalists and other stakeholders in Awka on the need of the act.	51	15%
Mobilising with the National NUJ to ensure the passage of the act.	143	42%
All of the above.	75	22%
None of the above	0	0%

<b>Total</b>	<b>340</b>	<b>100</b>
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**Source: Authors Analysis**

As shown in Table 16 above, the majority of the sampled respondents 143 or 42% are of the view that they were involved in the agitation for the act by Mobilising with the National NUJ to ensure its passage. This was followed by 75 respondents or 22% who indicated that their level of involvement encompasses organising local workshops and seminars on the act, sensitising journalists and other stakeholders in Awka on the need for the act as well as mobilising with the National NUJ to ensure its approval/passage.

**Table 17: Does the Freedom of Information act guarantee a free and responsive press in Nigeria?**

Options	Number of responses	Percentage
Yes	174	51%
No	69	20%
Cant say	97	29%
<b>Total</b>	<b>340</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Authors Analysis**

The table above indicates that the 174 respondents, representing 51% of the sampled respondents believe that the Freedom of Information act guarantees a free and responsive press in Nigeria. Sixty-nine (69) respondents or 20% indicated that it does not guarantee a free and responsive press in Nigeria. The remaining 97 respondents or 29% however were indifferent.

### Summary of Findings

The study was directed at finding the perception of the importance of the freedom of information act by practicing journalists in Awka. Thus related literatures were reviewed as well as questionnaire administered. Arising from above, it was revealed that the freedom of information act is an act that seeks to grant information access to Nigerians and not an act for journalists alone as was being misconstrued.

The methodology used for the study was the survey method of research. It was designed to enable the researcher discover the perception of the importance of the Freedom of Information Act by practicing journalists in Awka. Three hundred and forty copies of questionnaire were used in this study and were designed in a manner that elicited answers to the research questions guiding the study. The research questions were answered based on the response of the respondents as seen from the questionnaire retrieved.

### Conclusion

The Freedom of Information Act is totally a democratic act which can further drive home the principle of rule of law, due process and transparency. The enactment of the

act would encourage/facilitate good governance and accountability on the part of government with better public participation in the affairs of the state. This is why the study was set out to assess the views of journalists in Awka to the import for the act and to understand the benefits of the act. Arising from this, findings from the research revealed that the act seeks to strengthen the information seeking power of the people and that the act is to serve the interest of the general public. It is also revealed that even though Nigeria is practicing democracy, the Freedom of Information Act remains necessary as it helps to strengthen democracy by removing existing impediments to information gathering and news reportage by journalists. Ultimately, this is beneficial to journalists in Awka and Anambra State in general as it makes the job of the journalists less cumbersome. It also revealed that the major constraints being faced by journalists was the misconceptions by government that the act seeks to give undue powers to journalists in the country, that the act would expose the government to ridicule and that journalists would misuse the act. The study further revealed that journalists in Awka are presently playing numerous roles in ensuring that the act becomes operational. Some of these roles include sensitising the people in Awka and Anambra State on the essence of the act, mobilising journalists, the entire state and members of the national assembly from Anambra on the essence of the act.

### **Recommendations**

No doubt, a research involves an investigation geared towards increasing knowledge and providing ideas to solve problems. From this fact, coupled with an enthusiastic desire to ensure confirmatory evidence on this study, particularly in the aspect of achieving a greater feeling of certainty for likely purpose of making generalizations in the future; the researcher, therefore, deem it fit and necessary to make some useful recommendations:

The use of the FoI Act should not be left in the hands of journalists and media practitioners alone. Perhaps, this is the reason for the misconception that the act is a media act that is meant for journalists alone.

The legislature should see the Freedom of information act as essential to the survival of Nigeria's democracy. By so doing, the people will be able to understand government better and participate in democratic activities effectively. For journalists to effectively carry out their role of holding the government accountable to the people as enshrined in the constitution, all impediments to obtaining and use of official information must be removed through the act.

Lastly, for the fight against corruption to be effective and meaningful, the executive arm of the government must ensure that the act assented to, is fully utilized. This is the only way the anti-corruption agencies can obtain necessary information and documents

needed for the prosecution of corrupt public officers and make our democracy worthwhile.

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