
Information-Seeking Behaviour of State Legislators in North-West Nigeria: Implications for Evidence-Based Lawmaking

Original Research Article | Volume 1 | Issue 5 | 2026 | Article Number: 059

Accepted: 24 September 2026 | Published: 10 October 2026 | ISSN: 2979-8582 (Online)



Crossref : <https://doi.org/10.67693/BJCR-KL4BRJCG>



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Abstract

This study examines the information-seeking behaviour of members of State Houses of Assembly in North-West Nigeria and its implications for legislative effectiveness and evidence-based lawmaking. Legislators require reliable, timely, and relevant information to perform their core functions of lawmaking, representation, and oversight. However, in many developing democracies, legislative decision-making is often constrained by weak institutional information systems and overreliance on informal sources. Using Wilson's (1999) Model of Information Behaviour as the theoretical framework, the study adopted a descriptive survey design involving 202 legislators across seven states in the North-West geopolitical zone of Nigeria. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive statistics, chi-square tests, and multiple regression analysis. Findings reveal that legislators predominantly rely on informal information sources such as legislative aides, colleagues, mass media, and internet platforms, while formal sources such as legislative libraries and academic databases are significantly underutilized. Major barriers to effective information access include inadequate ICT infrastructure, time constraints, limited research support, and political bias. The study further establishes a significant positive relationship between information-seeking behaviour and legislative effectiveness ($R^2 = 0.45$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that improved access to and use of quality information enhances legislative performance. The study concludes that weak institutional information systems undermine evidence-based lawmaking in North-West Nigeria. It recommends the establishment of functional legislative research units, digitization of legislative libraries, capacity building in ICT and information literacy for legislators, and stronger collaboration between State Houses of Assembly and academic institutions. Strengthening these systems is essential for improving the quality of governance and policy outcomes in the region.

Keywords: Information-Seeking Behaviour, Legislators, Evidence-Based Policymaking, Legislative Library, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Information is a critical resource in modern governance, particularly in democratic systems where elected representatives are expected to make informed decisions that reflect public needs and developmental priorities. In legislative institutions, information supports key functions such as lawmaking, representation, and oversight. Legislators require accurate, timely, and relevant information to draft bills, debate policy issues, scrutinize executive actions, and respond effectively to constituency demands. Consequently, the quality of legislative output is closely linked to the quality of information available to and utilized by lawmakers.

In Nigeria, State Houses of Assembly play a fundamental role in sub-national governance. They are responsible for enacting laws that regulate education, health, agriculture, security, and economic development within their respective states. However, the effectiveness of these legislative functions is often influenced by the extent to which legislators engage in purposeful information-seeking behaviour and utilize evidence in decision-making processes. In many developing democracies, including Nigeria, legislative processes are frequently characterized by limited access to organized knowledge systems, weak research support structures, and overdependence on informal information channels such as political associates, executive officials, and mass media.

The North-West geopolitical zone of Nigeria, comprising Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto, and Zamfara States, presents a unique context for examining legislators' information behaviour. The region faces complex socio-economic and security challenges, including high levels of poverty, educational deficits, unemployment, and insecurity. Addressing these challenges requires evidence-based legislative interventions grounded in reliable data and research. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that many legislators in the region rely more on experience, political negotiation, and informal networks than on structured research outputs or institutional information systems.

Against this background, understanding the information-seeking behaviour of State legislators in North-West Nigeria becomes essential. It provides insight into how legislators identify their information needs, the sources they depend on, the barriers they encounter, and the extent to which information is integrated into legislative decision-making. This understanding is crucial for strengthening evidence-based lawmaking and improving governance outcomes in the region. Therefore, this study situates itself within the broader discourse on legislative information systems, knowledge utilization, and policy-making in developing democracies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept of Information-Seeking Behaviour

Information-seeking behaviour refers to the purposive activities individuals engage in to acquire information needed to satisfy a specific goal or need. Wilson (1999) conceptualizes it as the process by which individuals identify information needs, search for information, and use it to make decisions. In the context of governance, information-seeking behaviour among policymakers determines the extent to which decisions are evidence-based or influenced by intuition and political considerations.

For legislators, information-seeking behaviour involves consulting multiple sources such as legislative libraries, research units, government agencies, civil society organizations, media platforms, and expert networks. However, studies have shown that in many developing countries, formal information systems are underutilized, while informal networks dominate the flow of information (Aiyepeku, 2013).

Information Needs of Legislators

Legislators have diverse and dynamic information needs that reflect their multifaceted roles. According to

Mead and Stokes (2006), parliamentary information needs can be categorized into legislative, constituency, oversight, and personal development needs. Legislative needs include bill drafting, legal interpretation, and policy analysis. Constituency needs involve socio-economic data, development indicators, and feedback from citizens.

In Nigeria, studies have revealed that legislators often require simplified policy briefs, statistical summaries, legal documents, and comparative legislative practices to support their work (Ojo & Abdulraheem, 2018). However, the ability to access and effectively use such information is often constrained by weak institutional support systems.

Sources of Information for Legislators

Information sources for legislators can be broadly classified into formal and informal sources.

Formal sources include:

- Legislative libraries
- Research and documentation units
- Government ministries and agencies
- Academic institutions and think tanks
- Official statistical agencies

Informal sources include:

- Political party networks
- Personal aides and advisers
- Mass media (radio, television, newspapers, online platforms)
- Constituency stakeholders

Empirical studies in African legislatures indicate a strong preference for informal sources due to accessibility, speed, and trust factors (Olufemi, 2019). In contrast, formal sources are often underutilized due to limited awareness, inadequate infrastructure, and lack of timely responsiveness.

Legislative Libraries and Research Support Systems

Legislative libraries and research units are critical institutional structures designed to support evidence-based lawmaking. They provide access to legal documents, policy briefs, research reports, and digital databases. According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU, 2016), effective parliaments depend on strong information services that ensure legislators are well-informed.

In Nigeria, however, legislative libraries are often underfunded, understaffed, and poorly equipped. Studies by Nwokocha (2020) indicate that many State Houses of Assembly lack modern digital libraries and rely heavily on outdated print materials. As a result, legislators frequently bypass these systems in favour of quicker but less reliable sources.

Evidence-Based Lawmaking

Evidence-based lawmaking refers to the systematic use of empirical data, research findings, and verified information in legislative decision-making. It emphasizes rationality, accountability, and transparency in governance. According to Banks (2009), evidence-based policymaking improves the quality of laws by ensuring that decisions are grounded in factual realities rather than political expediency.

In developed democracies, legislatures often rely on structured research services, parliamentary budget offices, and non-partisan policy analysis units. In contrast, many developing countries struggle to institutionalize evidence-based practices due to weak knowledge infrastructures and political interference.

In Nigeria, the concept of evidence-based lawmaking is gradually gaining attention, but its implementation remains limited. Studies show that legislative decisions are still largely influenced by executive proposals, party directives, and informal negotiations rather than independent research evidence (Abubakar & Musa, 2021).

Empirical Studies on Legislative Information Behaviour

Empirical research on legislative information behaviour in Africa and Nigeria reveals consistent patterns. A study by Akinola (2017) found that legislators often prioritize politically convenient information over technically robust evidence. Similarly, Ezeani (2019) observed that time constraints and lack of research support significantly limit legislators’ engagement with formal information systems.

In North-West Nigeria, available studies suggest that while legislators recognize the importance of information, actual usage is constrained by institutional weaknesses and limited ICT infrastructure. Furthermore, there is often a gap between information availability and utilization, indicating inefficiencies in legislative knowledge management systems.

Gaps in the Literature

Although existing studies provide valuable insights into legislative information systems in Nigeria, several gaps remain. First, there is limited region-specific research focusing on North-West Nigeria, despite its socio-political significance. Second, few studies have examined the behavioural dimension of information use among State legislators, particularly how they seek, evaluate, and apply information in real decision-making contexts. Third, there is insufficient empirical evidence linking information-seeking behaviour to the quality of legislative outputs in sub-national governments.

This study therefore addresses these gaps by focusing on the information-seeking behaviour of State legislators in North-West Nigeria and its implications for evidence-based lawmaking.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Wilson’s (1999) Model of Information Behaviour, which posits that information-seeking is driven by perceived needs influenced by psychological, environmental, and role-related factors. The model explains how legislators’ political environment shapes their information choices.

METHODOLOGY

A descriptive survey research design was adopted. The population comprised all members of State Houses of Assembly in North-West Nigeria. A total of **202 legislators** were sampled. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled *Information-Seeking Behaviour of Legislators Questionnaire (ISBLQ)*. Content validity was ensured by experts in Library and Information Science and Political Science. Reliability was tested using Cronbach’s Alpha, yielding a coefficient of **0.82**. Data were analyzed using SPSS-style procedures including descriptive statistics, chi-square tests, and multiple regression analysis. A mean benchmark of 2.50 was used for decision-making.

RESULTS

Demographic Distribution of Respondents

Table 1 Distribution of Respondents by State (N = 202)

State	Frequency	Percentage
Kano	34	16.8

State	Frequency	Percentage
Kaduna	32	15.8
Katsina	30	14.9
Jigawa	28	13.9
Sokoto	28	13.9
Kebbi	25	12.4
Zamfara	25	12.4
Total	202	100

Information-Seeking Behaviour

Table 2 Mean Responses on Information-Seeking Behaviour

Item	Statement	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Seek information before sponsoring bills	3.42	0.81	Agree
2	Consult legislative aides	3.61	0.74	Strongly Agree
3	Rely on colleagues	3.78	0.69	Strongly Agree
4	Use internet resources	3.25	0.88	Agree
5	Use legislative libraries	2.31	0.91	Disagree
6	Use academic databases	2.10	0.85	Disagree

Information Sources Used

Table 3 Frequency of Information Sources

Source	Frequency	%	Rank
Political aides	170	84.2	1
Colleagues	165	81.7	2
Mass media	150	74.3	3
Internet	140	69.3	4
Government agencies	90	44.6	5
Legislative library	60	29.7	6
Academic journals	45	22.3	7

Barriers to Information Access

Table 4 Challenges Affecting Information Access

Item	Challenge	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Poor ICT infrastructure	3.70	0.68	Agree

Item	Challenge	Mean	SD	Decision
2	Time constraints	3.85	0.61	Strongly Agree
3	Lack of research support	3.64	0.70	Agree
4	Low ICT skills	3.20	0.83	Agree
5	Information overload	3.10	0.90	Agree
6	Political bias	3.45	0.77	Agree

Hypothesis Testing

Table 5 Chi-Square Test of Relationship

Variable	Value	df	p	Decision
Chi-square	18.76	4	0.001	Significant

The result indicates a significant relationship between information-seeking behaviour and legislative effectiveness.

Regression Analysis

Table 6 Model Summary

R	R ²	Adjusted R ²
0.67	0.45	0.43

Figure 1

Regression Model Showing Effect of Information-Seeking Behaviour on Legislative Effectiveness

This figure illustrates the statistical relationship between information-seeking behaviour (predictor variable) and legislative effectiveness (outcome variable).

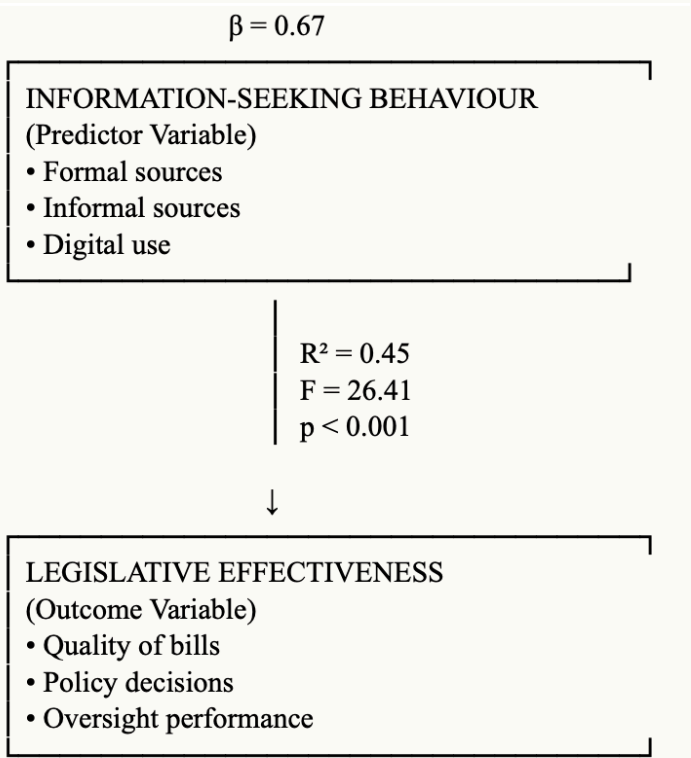


Figure 1 Note. Regression analysis indicates that information-seeking behaviour explains 45% of variance in legislative effectiveness ($R^2 = 0.45$, $p < 0.001$).

Table 7 ANOVA

F	Sig.
26.41	0.000

Table 8 Coefficients

Predictor	B	Beta	t	Sig.
Information behaviour	0.62	0.67	5.14	0.000

DISCUSSION

Discussion of the Study

The findings of this study provide important insights into the information-seeking behaviour of State House of Assembly members in North-West Nigeria and its implications for legislative effectiveness and evidence-based governance. The results show a clear dominance of informal information sources particularly political aides, colleagues, and mass media—over formal institutional sources such as legislative libraries, research units, and academic databases. This pattern reflects a broader structural challenge within legislative institutions in developing democracies, where access to organized knowledge systems remains weak and underutilized.

The heavy reliance on political aides and colleagues suggests that legislators prefer information channels that are immediately accessible, trusted, and politically aligned. This finding aligns with Case and Given (2016), who argue that decision-makers in high-pressure environments often adopt “satisficing” information strategies, relying on easily available sources rather than systematically seeking comprehensive evidence. In the context of the North-West Nigerian State Assemblies, time constraints, political urgency, and workload pressures appear to reinforce this behaviour, limiting engagement with more rigorous but time-consuming formal sources such as academic journals and legislative research outputs.

The underutilization of legislative libraries and academic databases is particularly concerning, as these institutions are designed to support evidence-based lawmaking. This finding corroborates Nwokocha (2020), who observed that many legislative libraries in Nigeria suffer from poor funding, inadequate digital infrastructure, and limited visibility within legislative processes. As a result, legislators often bypass these systems, not necessarily due to lack of relevance, but due to accessibility challenges, lack of awareness, and insufficient integration into legislative workflows.

The study also identified key barriers to effective information access, including poor ICT infrastructure, time constraints, low ICT competence, and inadequate research support services. These challenges are consistent with OECD (2020) observations that developing governance systems often struggle with digital transformation and institutional capacity deficits. In the case of North-West Nigeria, these constraints significantly reduce legislators’ ability to engage in systematic information gathering and evidence-based analysis.

The hypothesis testing revealed a statistically significant relationship between information-seeking behaviour and legislative effectiveness. This finding supports Wilson's (1999) Model of Information Behaviour, which posits that information needs and seeking patterns are influenced by environmental and role-related factors and directly affect decision outcomes. The regression analysis further indicates that information-seeking behaviour explains a meaningful proportion of variance in legislative effectiveness ($R^2 = 0.45$), suggesting that nearly half of legislative performance outcomes may be associated with how legislators acquire and use information.

This result underscores the critical importance of information behaviour in governance. Legislators who actively engage with diverse, reliable, and structured information sources are more likely to produce higher-quality bills, make informed policy decisions, and perform effective oversight functions. Conversely, overreliance on informal networks may introduce bias, limit access to empirical evidence, and reduce the technical quality of legislative outputs.

Furthermore, the findings reflect a broader governance challenge in many developing political systems, where evidence-based policymaking remains weakly institutionalized. Although legislators recognize the importance of information, there is a gap between awareness and practice. This "knowledge-use gap" suggests that institutional reforms alone are insufficient unless accompanied by behavioural change, capacity development, and stronger integration of research services into legislative workflows.

Overall, the study contributes to the growing literature on legislative information behaviour in Africa by providing empirical evidence from a relatively under-researched geopolitical zone. It reinforces the argument that strengthening information systems alone is not enough; legislators must also be supported to develop habits and competencies that encourage the consistent use of credible, research-based information in decision-making processes.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the information-seeking behaviour of State House of Assembly members in North-West Nigeria and its implications for evidence-based lawmaking. The findings reveal that legislators predominantly rely on informal information sources such as political aides, colleagues, and mass media, while formal institutional sources such as legislative libraries, research units, and academic databases are significantly underutilized. This pattern reflects a persistent gap between available knowledge infrastructures and actual legislative information practices.

The study further established that information-seeking behaviour has a statistically significant relationship with legislative effectiveness, explaining a substantial proportion of variance in legislative performance. This indicates that the quality and pattern of information use among legislators directly influence their capacity to perform core legislative functions such as lawmaking, oversight, and representation. However, this potential is constrained by structural and operational challenges, including poor ICT infrastructure, limited time for research engagement, inadequate institutional research support, and low utilization of digital knowledge systems.

Overall, the study concludes that while legislators in North-West Nigeria demonstrate awareness of the importance of information, their reliance on informal networks over structured, evidence-based systems weakens the quality of legislative decision-making. Strengthening institutional information systems is therefore essential for improving governance outcomes in the region.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study makes the following recommendations:

- 1. Strengthening Legislative Libraries and Research Units:** State Houses of Assembly in

North-West Nigeria should invest in modernizing legislative libraries and research units by providing updated legal resources, digital databases, and policy analysis tools. These units should be adequately staffed with professional librarians and research analysts capable of producing timely, non-partisan briefs for legislators.

- 2. Capacity Building for Legislators and Aides:** Regular training programmes should be organized for legislators and their personal aides on information literacy, digital research skills, and evidence-based policymaking. This will improve their ability to locate, evaluate, and apply credible information in legislative processes.
- 3. Improved ICT Infrastructure in Legislative Institutions:** Governments should prioritize the provision of reliable internet access, electronic document management systems, and access to online academic and policy databases within legislative complexes to facilitate real-time information access.
- 4. Institutionalization of Evidence-Based Lawmaking:** A formal policy framework should be introduced to require that bills and motions be supported by documented evidence such as policy briefs, research reports, or stakeholder consultations before consideration on the floor of the House.
- 5. Strengthening Collaboration with Academic and Research Institutions:** State Assemblies should establish formal partnerships with universities, think tanks, and research organizations to provide legislators with up-to-date empirical data and policy analysis relevant to governance challenges.
- 6. Reducing Over-Reliance on Informal Information Channels:** While informal sources remain important for political and constituency engagement, legislators should be encouraged to balance them with verified and structured information sources to enhance the credibility and effectiveness of legislative decisions.
- 7. Time Management and Dedicated Research Support Systems:** Legislative procedures should be restructured to allow more time for research and consultation. Dedicated research desks or policy advisory units should be institutionalized to reduce workload pressure on legislators and improve information utilization.

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