

**Catholic Social Teaching and Governance:
Assessing the Relevance of Its Core Principles for Inclusive Policy Formulation in Abuja,
Nigeria**

By

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Abstract

This study assessed the perceived relevance of the core principles of Catholic Social Teaching (CST) to governance and inclusive policy formulation in Abuja, Nigeria. It was motivated by persistent concerns about accountability, inequality, exclusion, and limited citizen participation in public decision-making. Rather than treating CST solely as a body of religious doctrine, the study examined human dignity, the common good, solidarity, subsidiarity, the preferential option for people experiencing poverty, and stewardship of creation as ethical principles relevant to public governance. A descriptive survey design was adopted. The study population comprised 950 respondents: 599 senior staff of the Office of the Secretary to the Government of the Federation and 351 Catholic clergy across the six Area Councils of the Federal Capital Territory. From a sample of 274 respondents, 231 valid questionnaires were analysed, for a valid-response rate of 84.3%. Data were collected with a structured four-point Likert-scale questionnaire and analysed using frequencies, means, standard deviations, and Pearson product-moment correlation. Respondents reported high awareness of CST principles and strong agreement that the principles are relevant to ethical decision-making, transparency, accountability, equity, and justice in governance. The hypothesis test showed a strong positive and statistically significant association between the measured CST-principles construct and governance and policymaking perceptions ($r = .742$, $p = .001$). The finding reflects an association, not evidence of causation. The study concludes that CST may contribute to public governance when its principles are translated into broadly accessible ethical values rather than imposed as religious doctrine. It recommends ethical-governance capacity building, participatory policy processes, stronger accountability mechanisms, and structured collaboration among public institutions, faith-based organisations, civil society, and communities.

Keywords: Catholic Social Teaching; governance; inclusive policy formulation; social capital; public participation; Nigeria

Introduction

Governance is ultimately concerned with how public authority is exercised, how collective resources are managed and how decisions affecting society are made. In democratic societies, however, effective governance cannot be assessed by institutions alone or by policy adoption. It must also be assessed by whether public institutions protect human dignity, promote justice, respond to citizens' needs and create opportunities for meaningful participation. This concern is particularly important in Nigeria, where questions of corruption, inequality, institutional effectiveness and public trust continue to shape debates about the quality of governance. Transparency International's 2024 Corruption Perceptions Index, released on 11 February 2025, reported that more than two-thirds of the 180 countries and territories assessed scored below 50 out of 100, indicating persistently high levels of perceived public-sector corruption globally. Nigeria scored 26 out of 100, placing it among countries with significant public-sector corruption concerns (Transparency International, 2025). Similarly, the World Bank, in its report published on 13 December 2023, identified weak governance and low levels of trust between citizens and the state as important challenges across Western and Central Africa, including the need to strengthen transparent, inclusive and accountable institutions to rebuild public trust and establish a stronger social contract (World Bank, 2023).

These concerns create a need to examine ethical frameworks that can complement institutional and administrative reforms. Catholic Social Teaching (CST) provides one such framework. CST is a developing body of social reflection that places the human person, the common good, solidarity and subsidiarity at the centre of social and political life. Recent scholarship demonstrates that these principles have relevance beyond explicitly ecclesial settings. Wright (2017), for example, identifies human dignity, solidarity and subsidiarity as central principles for evaluating social and policy questions, while Cremers (2017) shows how the same principles can inform approaches to governance and responsible institutional relationships. Himes (2019) further links CST's concern for the common good and solidarity to inclusion, participation and the reduction of inequality.

CST's relevance to governance is also evident in contemporary Catholic social teaching. Pope Francis's *Fratelli Tutti* (2020) places human dignity, fraternity, dialogue, social friendship and the common good at the centre of responses to social division. The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria has similarly called for good governance, respect for democratic institutions, transparent accountability and the practical application of Catholic Social Teaching in Nigeria (Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria, 2019). These positions indicate that CST can provide an ethical vocabulary for discussing governance without suggesting that religious authority should govern public institutions.

Abuja provides an appropriate context for such an assessment. As Nigeria's political and administrative centre, the Federal Capital Territory brings together citizens from different ethnic, religious, regional and socio-economic backgrounds. Governance in such a context requires policies that are responsive to diversity while maintaining a commitment to equal citizenship and the common good.

This study argues that each major CST principle connects to a specific inclusive policy challenge. Human dignity speaks to equal treatment and rights; the common good speaks to public-interest decision-making; solidarity addresses social fragmentation and inequality; subsidiarity supports participation and decentralisation; the preferential option for people experiencing poverty directs attention to vulnerable groups; and stewardship of creation connects governance to environmental responsibility. The study therefore examines whether selected stakeholders in Abuja perceive these principles as relevant to governance and inclusive policy formulation.

Statement of the Problem

Nigeria has established formal institutions for democratic governance, public administration, and policy formulation, yet significant gaps remain between these institutional arrangements and the governance outcomes citizens experience. These challenges include corruption, misuse of public resources, weak public-sector effectiveness, inadequate accountability, poor service delivery, weak rule-based governance, inequitable access to public resources and limited opportunities for citizens to participate meaningfully in decisions that affect them.

Igbokwe-Ibeto et al. (2020) found that Nigeria's public sector has experienced declining service delivery and weaknesses in bureaucratic accountability, with corruption undermining public-sector management effectiveness. At the subnational level, Akinyetun and Jijoho (2021) identified corruption, poor planning and inadequate institutional autonomy as major constraints on local government service delivery. These findings are consistent with the World Bank's Country Policy and Institutional Assessment (CPIA) 2024, which gave Nigeria scores of 2.7 for Public Sector Management and Institutions, 2.5 for Property Rights and Rule-Based Governance, 2.5 for Quality of Budgetary and Financial Management, and 2.5 for Quality of Public Administration. Nigeria also scored 3.0 for Transparency, Accountability and Corruption in the Public Sector and 3.0 for Equity of Public Resource Use, demonstrating continuing weaknesses in public-sector governance and the equitable management of public resources (World Bank, 2025).

These governance weaknesses directly affect inclusive policy formulation, as policies developed through weakly accountable or insufficiently participatory processes may fail to reflect the needs of affected citizens, particularly poor and vulnerable groups. Research on public participation in Nigeria indicates that existing consultation mechanisms do not always provide citizens with meaningful opportunities to influence public decisions (Oni et al., 2020). Similarly, Durokifa (2021) found that corruption, mismanagement and weak monitoring have undermined the effectiveness of poverty-reduction programmes in Nigeria. The World Bank has also identified poverty, insecurity and fragility as significant constraints on Nigeria's development and emphasised the need for reforms that promote inclusive growth and improve outcomes for vulnerable populations (World Bank, 2024). Thus, the problem is not simply the absence of policies or governance institutions, but whether existing governance processes are ethical, accountable, participatory and responsive enough to ensure that public policies serve the broader population rather than disproportionately benefiting powerful interests.

The problem is therefore also one of ethical orientation. Technical reforms and institutional procedures may be insufficient when the values guiding public decisions do not adequately address justice, human dignity, participation and the common good. Catholic Social Teaching (CST) provides principles that speak directly to these concerns. However, empirical research on the relevance of these principles to specific governance and policy challenges in Nigeria remains limited. The study therefore seeks to assess stakeholders' awareness of, and perceived relevance of, CST principles in Abuja and determine their relationship to governance and inclusive policy formulation.

Objective of the Study

The study assessed the perceived relevance of the core principles of Catholic Social Teaching to governance and inclusive policy formulation in Abuja, Nigeria.

Research Question

What is the perceived relevance of the core principles of Catholic Social Teaching to governance and inclusive policy formulation in Abuja, Nigeria?

Hypothesis

H₀: There is no significant relationship between the measured core principles of Catholic Social Teaching and perceptions of governance and inclusive policy formulation in Abuja, Nigeria.

Conceptual and Empirical Review

Catholic Social Teaching and Its Core Principles

Catholic Social Teaching (CST) represent a coherent and evolving body of ethical and social principles developed by the Catholic Church to guide human relations, governance, and broader societal development. Rooted in Sacred Scripture, papal encyclicals, and centuries of theological reflection, CST provide a structured ethical framework for interpreting social realities and responding to human needs in a just and humane manner.

At its core, CST holds that governance and social institutions should be oriented toward justice and the inherent dignity of the human person. This means every social structure should serve the human person rather than exploit or marginalise them, ensuring that policies and institutions reflect fairness, respect, and accountability. These principles are not only theological or doctrinal but also deeply practical, translating into real-world guidance for political leadership, economic systems, and community development.

A foundational principle of CST is the dignity of the human person. Human dignity requires public institutions to treat every person as inherently worthy. Applied to governance, it challenges discriminatory practices and policies that treat citizens merely as beneficiaries, voters or economic units.

It requires equal respect, access to basic services and protection of fundamental rights. In inclusive policy formulation, dignity means recognising people affected by policies as persons whose interests and voices matter.

The common good shifts governance away from narrow sectional advantage toward social conditions that allow individuals and communities to flourish. It does not mean simply aggregating majority preferences; it requires attention to the conditions necessary for social wellbeing. Himes (2019) links this principle to participation, inclusion and relative equality, making it particularly relevant to policy decisions involving the distribution of public resources.

Solidarity recognises the interdependence of people and groups and therefore supports collective responsibility for social problems. In a diverse society such as Nigeria, solidarity can inform policies that reduce social fragmentation, strengthen social cohesion and address inequalities between groups. Subsidiarity complements solidarity by insisting that decisions should be taken as close as possible to the people affected, while higher levels of authority provide support where local capacity is insufficient. This principle therefore has direct relevance to decentralisation, community participation and responsive public administration (Cremers, 2017).

The preferential option for the poor and vulnerable directs ethical attention toward those who face the greatest disadvantages. In policy terms, it supports the deliberate inclusion of people whose interests may otherwise be overlooked, including low-income households, persons with disabilities, vulnerable children, displaced persons and marginalised communities. Massaro (2021) demonstrates that CST has long supported social welfare approaches aimed at assisting poor and marginalised populations.

Stewardship of creation extends governance's ethical responsibility to environmental sustainability and future generations. Christie et al. (2019) show how CST's common-good tradition and integral ecology can contribute to frameworks for sustainable transitions. For Abuja, this principle is relevant to urban development, waste management, land use, climate resilience and the distribution of environmental benefits and burdens.

The Concept of Governance

Governance extends beyond government institutions to include the processes, relationships and mechanisms through which public authority is exercised, decisions are made, resources are managed, and collective interests are pursued. It involves government agencies, civil society organisations, communities, private-sector actors and citizens in shaping public decisions and outcomes. Ikeanyibe et al. (2017) explain that governance represents a shift from a state-centred approach towards stakeholder participation, networks, collaboration and partnerships.

Effective governance is associated with accountability, transparency, responsiveness, participation, effectiveness, equity and the rule of law. These principles determine not only institutions' capacity to implement policies but also whether public authority is exercised responsibly and responds to citizens' needs. In Nigeria, weaknesses in accountability and public-sector performance continue to affect governance and service delivery. Idris, Tanimu and Muhammed (2019) identify accountability and good governance as important to effective public service delivery, while Bamidele and Alabi (2024) highlight corruption, inadequate accountability, bureaucratic bottlenecks and limited administrative capacity as continuing governance challenges.

Governance also requires citizen and stakeholder participation in public decision-making. Policies developed without adequate understanding of citizens' needs may fail to reflect the realities of the populations they serve. Oni et al. (2020) found that conventional public consultation mechanisms in Nigeria are often limited, which can result in policy decisions that do not adequately reflect citizens'

aspirations. They therefore emphasise the importance of broader consultation and alternative mechanisms for citizens to participate in policy formulation.

The participatory dimension of governance is especially important in Nigeria's socially and culturally diverse environment. Effective governance requires institutions to recognise different interests and create opportunities for these interests to be represented in public decisions. Ikeanyibe et al. (2017) argue that greater attention to stakeholders, networks and collaboration is necessary because conventional state-centred approaches may not adequately address the aspirations of diverse groups. Similarly, research on democratic budgeting in Nigeria indicates that greater civic engagement can strengthen budgetary accountability and promote more inclusive resource allocation.

Governance, therefore, concerns not merely the capacity to formulate and implement policies, but also the quality, fairness, legitimacy and inclusiveness of the processes through which decisions are made. This understanding connects governance directly with Catholic Social Teaching. Principles such as human dignity, the common good, solidarity and subsidiarity provide ethical criteria for assessing whether governance processes are responsive, participatory, equitable and attentive to vulnerable groups.

The Concept of Inclusive Policy Formulation

Inclusive policy formulation refers to a policy-making process in which the views, interests, experiences and needs of individuals and groups affected by public decisions are deliberately considered in policy design, implementation and review. It goes beyond consultation and requires meaningful participation, representation, accessibility, and responsiveness. Thus, inclusion concerns not only whether citizens are invited to participate, but whether they have genuine opportunities to influence decisions and whether their contributions are reflected in policy outcomes (Siddiki et al., 2020).

Inclusive policy formulation is important because public policies affect social groups differently. Without adequate understanding of citizens' circumstances, policies may overlook groups with limited political, economic or institutional influence. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2022) emphasises inclusive, responsive decision-making as a key component of sustainable development. It highlights the need for citizens to have opportunities to influence decisions that affect their lives.

In Nigeria, formal opportunities for participation do not always translate into meaningful influence over public policy. Oni et al. (2020) found that conventional public consultation mechanisms are often limited and may result in policy decisions that do not adequately reflect citizens' aspirations. They therefore emphasise broader consultation and alternative mechanisms, including e-consultation, for strengthening citizen participation and public trust.

Inclusive policy formulation also requires the representation of groups that are commonly excluded, including women, young people, persons with disabilities, low-income populations and other vulnerable communities. UNDP (2021) emphasises that greater representation of marginalised groups in public institutions can contribute to more responsive governance and improved public trust. Participation should also extend across the policy cycle, from identifying problems and setting priorities to implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

This concept provides a basis for examining the relevance of Catholic Social Teaching to policy processes. Human dignity supports equal recognition and participation; the common good directs attention to collective welfare; solidarity encourages consideration of others; subsidiarity promotes participation closer to affected communities; and the preferential option for the poor highlights groups vulnerable to exclusion. Thus, CST adds an ethical dimension to inclusive policy formulation by asking

who participates, whose interests are protected, whose voices are heard and whether policy outcomes promote justice and the common good.

Core Principles of Catholic Social Teaching and Their Relevance to Governance and Inclusive Policy Formulation

The core principles of Catholic Social Teaching (CST) provide an ethical framework for assessing governance and public policy in relation to human dignity, justice and the common good. Wright (2017) identifies human dignity, solidarity, and subsidiarity as foundational principles that can guide decision-making from institutional to national levels, while McCarty (2023) highlights their relevance to rights, responsibilities, and human flourishing. In Nigeria, these principles are particularly relevant to governance challenges involving exclusion, inequality, limited participation, inadequate attention to vulnerable groups and environmental concerns.

Human dignity requires every person to be recognised as possessing inherent worth and deserving equal respect, rights and opportunities. In governance, it provides an ethical basis for addressing discrimination, exclusion and unequal access to public services. It encourages policymakers to consider how decisions affect different groups and to treat citizens not merely as recipients of government programmes but as persons whose rights and voices matter. In Nigeria, this principle can therefore support people-centred policies that promote equal access to public goods and meaningful participation in governance (Wright, 2017).

The common good directs governance towards creating conditions that enable individuals and communities to flourish. It provides a basis for assessing whether public decisions serve broad societal interests or primarily benefit particular groups. The principle is relevant to decisions concerning the allocation of public resources, infrastructure, healthcare, education and social protection. It encourages policymakers to consider whether policies distribute benefits fairly and address the interests of less powerful groups alongside those of politically and economically influential stakeholders (Wright, 2017).

Solidarity recognises the interconnectedness of individuals and communities and promotes shared responsibility for social wellbeing. This principle is particularly relevant to Nigeria's ethnic, religious and socio-economic diversity. Rather than allowing differences to become grounds for exclusion, solidarity encourages cooperation and recognition of shared interests. McCarty (2023) demonstrates its relevance to relationships between rights, responsibilities and collective human flourishing. Applied to Nigerian governance, solidarity can support policies that reduce inequality, strengthen social cohesion and prevent development initiatives from systematically disadvantaging particular communities.

Subsidiarity addresses excessive centralisation and weak grassroots participation. It holds that decisions should, where possible, be taken at the level closest to those affected, while higher authorities provide necessary support. Wright (2017) identifies subsidiarity as an important principle for determining how decision-making responsibilities should be distributed. It has implications for decentralisation, local governance and participatory policymaking. It encourages communities to participate not only in implementing policies but also in identifying problems, setting priorities and shaping interventions. This can make governance more responsive to local needs.

The preferential option for the poor and vulnerable requires particular attention to people experiencing poverty and disadvantage. It challenges policies that focus only on aggregate benefits while overlooking groups with limited political or economic influence. Schlag (2019) identifies this principle as an important dimension of CST's concern with inequality and vulnerability. It can inform poverty-reduction programmes, social protection, access to essential services and policies addressing the needs of persons with disabilities, displaced persons and other marginalised populations.

Finally, stewardship of creation extends concern for the common good to environmental sustainability and future generations. Environmental degradation can become a governance and social-justice issue when its effects fall disproportionately on vulnerable communities. Christie et al. (2019) demonstrate how CST and integral ecology connect environmental responsibility with social values and the common good. This principle is relevant to urban expansion, waste management, land use, infrastructure development and climate resilience.

Collectively, these principles constitute a comprehensive framework for addressing governance challenges. Human dignity addresses exclusion and unequal treatment, while the common good underpins public-interest decision-making. Solidarity seeks to reduce inequality and social fragmentation. Subsidiarity encourages decentralisation and participation. The preferential option for people with low incomes prioritises vulnerable groups, and stewardship of creation promotes sustainable governance. Catholic Social Teaching (CST) thus offers policymakers ethical questions for evaluating public decisions: Who is affected? Who participates? Whose interests are protected? Who may be excluded? Does the policy advance the common good? Does it safeguard present and future generations? These questions form the foundation for assessing CST's relevance to governance and inclusive policy formulation.

How to Strengthen Catholic Social Teaching for Governance and Inclusive Policy Formulation

The relevance of Catholic Social Teaching (CST) to governance and inclusive policy formulation depends not only on the existence of its principles but also on how effectively those principles are translated into practical institutional and policy processes. CST should therefore move beyond theological instruction to provide an ethical framework that can inform public decision-making, civic education, stakeholder engagement and accountability. The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) has called for CST to be simplified, translated into concrete actions, and used for socio-political formation, particularly among young people and families (CBCN, 2019).

First, CST can strengthen governance through sustained ethical and civic education. Public officials, political leaders, civil society actors and citizens can be introduced to human dignity, the common good, solidarity, subsidiarity and concern for vulnerable populations as practical principles for evaluating public decisions. This would enable CST to move from abstract ethical teaching to questions such as whether public resources are fairly distributed, whether institutions are accountable and whether policies respond to citizens' legitimate needs. Marek and Jabłoński (2021) similarly demonstrate the usefulness of the common-good principle as an ethical basis for institutional responsibility.

Second, CST can strengthen inclusive policy formulation by encouraging meaningful participation. The principle of subsidiarity provides a basis for involving communities and affected groups in identifying problems, setting priorities and evaluating policies. In contrast, solidarity requires policymakers to consider others' interests, not only those of their immediate constituencies. McGovern et al. (2020) demonstrate how CST principles can provide an ethical framework for policymaking in socially divided contexts by promoting unity, shared responsibility and attention to competing interests.

Third, CST can be strengthened through institutional collaboration among government, Catholic institutions, other faith communities, civil society organisations, academic institutions and community groups. Such collaboration should not seek to impose Catholic doctrine on public institutions. Rather, it should translate CST principles into broadly accessible values such as dignity, justice, participation, accountability and social responsibility. This approach is particularly relevant to Nigeria's religiously plural society.

Finally, applying CST should be accompanied by accountability and measurable outcomes. Institutions using CST-informed approaches should assess whether policies actually improve participation, protect

vulnerable groups, promote equitable resource distribution and strengthen public trust. The CBCN's emphasis on good governance, justice, equality, transparent accountability and concern for underprivileged Nigerians provides a useful Nigerian foundation for this approach (CBCN, 2019). Thus, strengthening CST for governance requires translating these principles into education, participation, institutional partnerships, and measurable policy practice.

Empirical Review and Research Gap

Studies of governance in Nigeria consistently identify accountability, service delivery, citizen participation, and institutional capacity as persistent concerns. Igbokwe-Ibeto et al. (2020) associate weaknesses in bureaucratic accountability with poor public-sector performance, while Akinyetun and Jijoho (2021) identify corruption, weak planning, and limited institutional autonomy as constraints on local-government service delivery. Oni et al. (2020) show that conventional consultation mechanisms can be inadequate and argue that broader channels of citizen consultation can strengthen inclusive governance. Durokifa (2021) similarly links weaknesses in programme management and monitoring to disappointing poverty-reduction outcomes.

By contrast, the CST literature has largely developed the normative relevance of human dignity, the common good, solidarity, subsidiarity, concern for vulnerable groups, and environmental stewardship. Cremers (2017), Himes (2019), Christie et al. (2019), Massaro (2021), and McCarty (2023) demonstrate how these principles can inform institutional responsibility, inclusion, inequality, sustainability, rights, and responsibilities. Ansell et al. (2020) further show, in the collaborative-governance literature, that inclusion depends on conditions such as trust and active management.

Empirical evidence remains limited on whether selected Nigerian governance stakeholders perceive CST principles as relevant to governance and inclusive policy formulation. This study addresses that gap in the Abuja context by examining respondents' awareness and perceived relevance of CST principles and testing the association between the measured CST-principles construct and perceptions of governance and policymaking.

Theoretical Framework

Social Capital Theory

The study is anchored on Social Capital Theory, developed through the works of Pierre Bourdieu (1986), James Coleman (1988), and Robert Putnam (1993), with particular emphasis on Putnam's application of the theory to institutional performance and democratic governance. Social Capital Theory explains how networks, trust, shared norms, reciprocity and social relationships create resources that enable individuals and groups to cooperate and achieve collective goals. Coleman (1988) conceptualises social capital as resources embedded in social structures that facilitate collective action, while Putnam (1993) shows that networks of trust, reciprocity, and civic engagement can strengthen institutional performance and democratic governance.

The theory is particularly relevant to this study because inclusive governance depends on relationships between citizens, communities and public institutions. When trust, cooperation, information-sharing, and civic participation are strong, citizens are more likely to engage with institutions, contribute to public decision-making, and support collective solutions. Conversely, weak social relationships and low institutional trust can limit participation and undermine the legitimacy of public policies. Thus, Social Capital Theory provides a basis for examining how relationships and networks can facilitate more participatory and responsive governance.

The theory is further integrated with the principles of Catholic Social Teaching (CST), particularly subsidiarity and solidarity. Subsidiarity strengthens the social-capital perspective by emphasising that decisions should be taken as close as possible to the people affected, thereby encouraging community

participation and local ownership of policy decisions. Solidarity complements this by emphasising shared responsibility for others' wellbeing. Consequently, the study does not treat CST merely as a religious description of moral principles; rather, it examines how these principles can shape the relationships, participation and collective responsibility necessary for effective governance.

Social Capital Theory explains the relational conditions that make participation and collective action possible, while CST provides the ethical standards by which those relationships and actions can be assessed. Social capital addresses how citizens and institutions cooperate through trust, networks and participation; CST addresses what that cooperation should achieve.

Conceptually, the study treats CST principles as an ethical orientation that may operate alongside social-capital mechanisms such as trust, shared norms, participation, and networks. The analytical logic may be expressed as: CST principles → ethical orientation and social-capital mechanisms → perceptions of participation, accountability, equity, and inclusiveness in governance.

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The population comprised 950 respondents: 599 senior staff of the Office of the Secretary to the Government of the Federation (OSGF) and 351 Catholic clergy across the six Area Councils of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). The source manuscript reports that a sample of 274 respondents was selected and that 231 completed questionnaires were valid for analysis, representing an 84.3% valid-response rate.

A structured questionnaire collected data on respondents' awareness of, and perceived relevance of, CST principles to governance and inclusive policy formulation. Items were rated on a four-point Likert scale from Strongly Agree (4) to Disagree (1) Strongly. We used frequencies, means, and standard deviations for descriptive analysis, with a criterion mean of 2.50 for agreement. We used Pearson product-moment correlation to test the null hypothesis at the .05 significance level.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Research Question: What is the perceived relevance of the core principles of Catholic Social Teaching to governance and inclusive policy formulation in Abuja, Nigeria?

Table 1

Respondents' awareness and perceived relevance of CST principles to governance and inclusive policy formulation (N = 231)

Item	SA	A	D	SD	Sum	Mean	SD	Decision
Awareness of core CST principles	212	6	6	7	885	3.83	0.613	Agree
CST and ethical policy decisions	184	29	12	6	853	3.69	0.689	Agree
CST and transparency/accountability	183	15	30	3	840	3.64	0.756	Agree
CST and equity/justice	183	19	17	12	835	3.61	0.836	Agree
CST and perceptions of ethical governance	196	11	20	4	861	3.73	0.691	Agree

Note. Response scale: Strongly Agree = 4, Agree = 3, Disagree = 2, Strongly Disagree = 1.

Criterion mean = 2.50. Grand mean = 3.70; average SD = .717. Source: Author's analysis of survey data using SPSS Version 25.

The results show strong agreement among the 231 respondents. The grand mean of 3.70 is above the 2.50 criterion mean. Awareness of the core CST principles recorded the highest mean ($M = 3.83$, $SD = .613$), while the item on equity and justice recorded the lowest mean ($M = 3.61$, $SD = .836$). Overall, respondents perceived CST principles as relevant to ethical decision-making, transparency, accountability, equity, and inclusive governance.

Test of Hypothesis

H_0 : There is no significant relationship between the measured core principles of Catholic Social Teaching and perceptions of governance and inclusive policy formulation in Abuja, Nigeria.

Table 2

Pearson correlation between CST principles and governance/policymaking measures (N = 231)

Variables	Statistic	CST principles	Governance & policymaking
CST principles	Pearson r	1	.742**
	p (2-tailed)	—	.001
Governance & policymaking	Pearson r	.742**	1
	p (2-tailed)	.001	—

Note. ** Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

Pearson product-moment correlation showed a strong positive association between the CST principles and governance/policymaking measures, $r = .742$, $p = .001$, $N = 231$. Since $p < .05$, the null hypothesis is rejected. The result indicates association, not causation.

Discussion of Findings

The findings indicate that respondents were highly aware of CST principles and perceived them as relevant to governance and policymaking. The grand mean of 3.70, above the 2.50 criterion mean, shows broad agreement across the five reported items. This pattern aligns with normative literature that presents human dignity, the common good, solidarity, and subsidiarity as principles that can inform institutional responsibility, participation, and public-interest decision-making (Cremers, 2017; Himes, 2019; Wright, 2017).

The correlation between the measured CST-principles construct and perceptions of governance and policymaking was strong and positive ($r = .742$, $p = .001$). The null hypothesis was therefore rejected at the .05 level. This means higher scores on the CST-principles measure were associated with more positive perceptions of ethical and inclusive governance. Because the study is cross-sectional and survey-based, the result does not establish that CST principles cause better governance outcomes. It is better interpreted as evidence of a substantial association in the respondent data.

The result is also compatible with Social Capital Theory. Trust, shared norms, networks, and civic participation can facilitate collective action, while CST supplies normative criteria concerning the purposes toward which such cooperation should be directed. Subsidiarity is particularly relevant to participation closer to affected communities, whereas solidarity stresses shared responsibility across

social groups. In this sense, social capital explains relational capacity for cooperation, while CST provides an ethical orientation toward dignity, inclusion, and the common good.

The findings further support the relevance of stewardship of creation to environmental governance, because environmental burdens and benefits are often distributed unevenly and extend to future generations (Christie et al., 2019). In Nigeria's religiously plural setting, however, the public-policy relevance of CST depends on translating its principles into constitutionally accessible values—dignity, justice, participation, accountability, social responsibility, and environmental stewardship—rather than treating Catholic doctrine as a source of public authority. This distinction is central to the study's contribution.

Conclusion

The study concludes that surveyed respondents perceive the core principles of Catholic Social Teaching as highly relevant to governance and inclusive policy formulation in Abuja. Respondents reported strong awareness of CST principles and strong agreement that they can inform ethical decision-making, transparency, accountability, equity, and justice. The statistically significant positive correlation further indicates that respondents with higher scores on the CST-principles measure also tended to report more positive perceptions of ethical and inclusive governance.

The findings should not be interpreted as evidence that CST causes improved governance, nor as an argument for religious control of public institutions. Rather, the study demonstrates the potential relevance of CST as an ethical framework whose principles can be expressed in broadly accessible public values. Human dignity directs attention to equal treatment and rights; the common good to public-interest decision-making; solidarity to shared responsibility; subsidiarity to participation and appropriate decentralisation; the preferential option for people experiencing poverty to vulnerable populations; and stewardship of creation to environmental responsibility and future generations. Applied within Nigeria's constitutional and pluralistic order, these principles can enrich ethical reflection on inclusive governance and policy formulation.

Recommendations

- i. Public institutions in Abuja should incorporate practical ethical-governance modules into leadership and policy-development programmes, using human dignity, the common good, solidarity, subsidiarity, equity, and concern for vulnerable groups as analytical lenses rather than as religious tests.
- ii. Relevant FCT and federal institutions should strengthen structured citizen-participation mechanisms—including stakeholder consultations, accessible feedback channels, and documented responses to public submissions—across policy design, implementation, monitoring, and review.
- iii. Policy appraisal processes should include an explicit inclusion check that identifies likely effects on low-income households, persons with disabilities, displaced persons, women, children, and other underrepresented groups.
- iv. Public institutions should strengthen transparency and accountability by publishing clear policy objectives, implementation responsibilities, consultation outcomes, and measurable indicators of participation, equity, and service impact.
- v. Collaboration among government institutions, faith-based organisations, civil-society organisations, academic institutions, and communities should be organised around constitutionally accessible values such as dignity, justice, accountability, participation, social responsibility, and environmental stewardship.
- vi. Future research should use broader and more diverse samples and, where feasible, longitudinal or mixed-method designs to test how ethical orientations, institutional trust, participation, and observable governance outcomes are related.

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