

# ***Party ideology in Nigeria’s Four Republics: a case of right-wing convergence***

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## ABSTRACT

Do Nigerian political parties take left/right ideological positions? Perspectives in comparative politics see party competition in Africa’s ‘third wave’ democracies as devoid of disagreement on class or economic grounds – and thus as ‘absent’ of left/right ideology. Yet, a dearth of disagreement among governing parties can also suggest ideological agreement or ‘convergence’. This article maps the development of the left/right cleavage in Nigeria’s party system, examining the evolution of economic pledges in the manifestos of parties that took power across Nigeria’s four attempts at electoral democracy. It finds that relative to the deeper levels of economic disagreement voiced in earlier periods, the governing parties of Nigeria’s Fourth Republic are now largely unanimous in the enunciation of their economic visions. Evidence of such convergence troubles a strict insistence on either the polarisation or ‘absence’ of economic ideology among governing parties in Africa’s largest electoral democracy.

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## INTRODUCTION

That pre-election analyses showed a high level of interest in the socio-economic proposals of the main contenders was one novel feature of Nigeria’s 2023

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presidential poll which,<sup>1</sup> understandably, has gone unnoticed in the shadow of the election's more striking peculiarities – including its 'cashless' nature, and the rise of the previously marginal Labour Party (Fourchard & Sikiru 2023). This growth in popular interest in policy issues echoes an initially subtle turn in the study of Nigerian party politics that has grown more noticeable in recent years (Thurston 2018; Levan 2019; Obe 2019; Husaini 2020; Usman 2020; Egwim 2022; Roelofs 2023). Whereas a long-held perspective on Nigerian political parties dismissed the electoral salience of ideology relative to patronage politics and ethnic, regional and religious messages (see Omotola 2009; Liebowitz & Ibrahim 2013; Olanrewaju 2015; Angerbrandt 2018), this more recent revisionist scholarship has increasingly pointed to the ways in which socio-economic convictions profoundly shape Nigerian politics.

This shift was partially pre-figured by earlier comparative studies on elections in Africa's 'third wave' democracies, which observed that African political parties do express programmatic issues in their electoral discourses, even if they might stop short of taking left/right economic positions (Bleck & Van De Walle 2013; Elischer 2012). In this vein, Bleck & Van de Walle (2013: 1395) contend that parties stick to 'valence issues' on which there is little disagreement, accounting for the 'absence' in African elections of appeals to 'class cleavages' and 'economic ideological debate'. Missing from these earlier accounts, however, is an acknowledgement of the possibility that an ostensible absence of partisan economic disagreement can also suggest ideological consensus, representing the *predominance* of a given economic ideology rather than the absence of any.

Usefully, a strand of the more recent turn in the study of Nigerian political parties has gone beyond this earlier emphasis on 'valence' rhetoric, arguing that distinct ideological positions are discernible in governing practice as much as in electoral discourse. While Thurston (2018) and Obe (2019) point to subtle but important differences in left/right terms in the economic platforms of the All-Progressive's Congress (APC) and People's Democratic Party (PDP), Egwim (2022: 446) argues that these dominant parties have 'converged ideologically at the centre' having embraced 'the post-Cold War global consensus on neoliberal ideology'.

Yet, an important limitation that unites this recent revival of debate on ideology in Nigeria and earlier Africanist accounts of the 'absence' of ideology is a shared reliance on universal conceptions of the left/right economic spectrum. While Western-derived left/right delineations permit cross-continental comparison, this comes at the cost of a contextually grounded construal of the economic spectrum that is more cognisant of how positions adopted by political parties relate to the ideological status quo in a given historical time and place.

Drawing on Crawford Young's (1982) early typology of the economic spectrum among post-independence African political regimes, this article attempts such an analysis. Specifically, I trace the evolution of the ideological cleavage across Nigeria's four multiparty electoral republics through mapping the left/right valence of the economic pledges set out in governing party manifestos.<sup>2</sup>

This re-examination enables me to argue that, despite an earlier history of left/right differentiation, Nigeria's contemporary governing parties have now largely converged on shared ideals about the desirable level of economic distribution in society. The progressive narrowing of economic disagreement among Nigerian governing parties over the course of their development suggests that ideological convergence on the economic right-wing more adequately accounts for the contemporary electoral confrontation between governing parties than does an emphasis on either ideological 'absence' or polarisation.

#### MANIFESTOS AND ECONOMIC IDEOLOGY IN AFRICA

Two main objections usually arise against taking party manifestos seriously. The first relates to the fact that voters are often seen as the primary audience of party manifestos. And since most voters are unlikely to read them, some observers discount manifestos as a useful source of information. Yet, parties evidently speak to various other 'target audiences' (Harmel 2018) aside from voters, including the media, government officials, other parties or multiple levels of a party, including its grassroots activists, parliamentary members and party leadership. Manifestos thus serve important internal and external functions beyond their import to voters. A second common objection is that parties hardly ever deliver on all that they promise, leading some observers to dismiss manifestos as essentially works of fiction. Yet, even if governing parties do not execute electoral manifestos to the letter, what they choose to commit to writing provides an important window into what might fall within their horizons of possibility. As Harmel (2018: 3) summarises 'while manifestos may include promises geared directly toward keeping or luring voters for a particular election, they may also – or alternatively – be seen as statements of "the party's identity and philosophy"'. These factors might explain why parties – including every Nigerian governing party since independence – persist in writing manifestos.

If these factors establish *why* manifestos can be useful for mapping party ideology, it is still important to clarify *how* such an exercise might proceed. Various comparative methods exist for assessing left/right ideological positioning in party manifestos. Coding schemes based on content analysis are frequently utilised by manifesto scholars. Elischer's (2012) study, for instance, relies on the 'MRG/CMP' coding scheme typically used to analyse the content of European party manifestos based on 56 predefined policy categories – 26 of which are typically considered either left- or right-wing. While such quantitative measures of left/right manifesto positions can be insightful, they are better suited for assessing the frequency with which phrases are mentioned than to interpreting how particular features of a given manifesto – including the rhetorical style, ordering of different headings and the framings of issues – might contribute to communicating a wider worldview. As Bennie & Clark (2020: 7) note, quantitative content analysis 'cannot tell us about meanings associated with words, nor how topics are presented to create a particular impression of a party, its goals and the role of the manifesto in an election'.

Furthermore, such approaches gloss over contextual and historical specificities that might inform more nuanced understandings of the economic policy spectrum. For instance, as observed in Young's (1982: 188) comparative study of African ideological regimes, political parties with varying ideological predilections have generally articulated a shared recognition of the need to address Africa's 'poverty lag'. This, coupled with the fact that African states 'achieved sovereignty at a time when all modern polities were committed to the welfare state' (*ibid.*), contributed to a widely embraced 'commitment of the state to the creation of social infrastructure', across both 'capitalist' and 'socialist' regimes. Such a contextually grounded account, which sees welfarism as part of the ideological centre-ground in Africa, means delineations of the left/right spectrum that categorise commitments to welfare policies as universally belonging to the 'left' (as does Elischer 2012), miss out on historical specificity of the economic policy spectrum in Africa.

While identifying elements of various ideological regimes characterised as 'African socialist', 'Afro-Marxist' and 'African capitalist', Young's classic typology provides an adaptable set of characteristics from which we can derive a left/right economic spectrum among African political parties. In reference to the 'African capitalist' cases, Young points out that, despite being 'deeply tinged with statism', the 'content and orientation' of such state intervention is 'distinct from those of the socialist states' (188–189). In the former, Young (189) notes, state intervention is geared towards assuring a congenial environment for foreign and domestic capital. Young further points out that this ideological standpoint can be understood as 'nurture capitalism' whereby indigenous capital and a 'nurturing' state develop a close relationship, maintaining either an ambivalent attitude towards foreign capital in more nationalist states, or an embrace of foreign investment in more liberal states. What unifies such cases, then, is that private enterprise, regardless of its origin, is expected to 'provide the basic developmental thrust in the directly productive sectors' (*ibid.*).

Young further suggests shared characteristics of the Afro-Marxist and African-socialist regimes: an outright repudiation of, or stated desire to eventually surmount capitalism, and an avowed association with 'popular' economic constituencies, often defined in explicit class terms – be that the 'proletariat' of urban labourers, or the 'peasantry' of rural smallholder agriculturalists. Furthermore, while Afro-Marxist and Afro-socialist regimes according to Young share these 'radical' anti-capitalist and 'economic populist' orientations, Afro-Marxist regimes lay a stronger emphasis on conflictual relation between economic classes (*ibid.*: 102) thereby going further than more moderate variants of economic-populism evident in Afro-socialist proposals. As I demonstrate in Table I, Young's typology of African ideological regimes can serve as a useful heuristic model for classifying economic discourses in governing party manifestos along a left/right spectrum. Through an analysis of economic pledges in each manifesto, the remainder of the essay assesses Nigeria's governing party pledges according to these criteria. This also enables me to justify the

TABLE I.

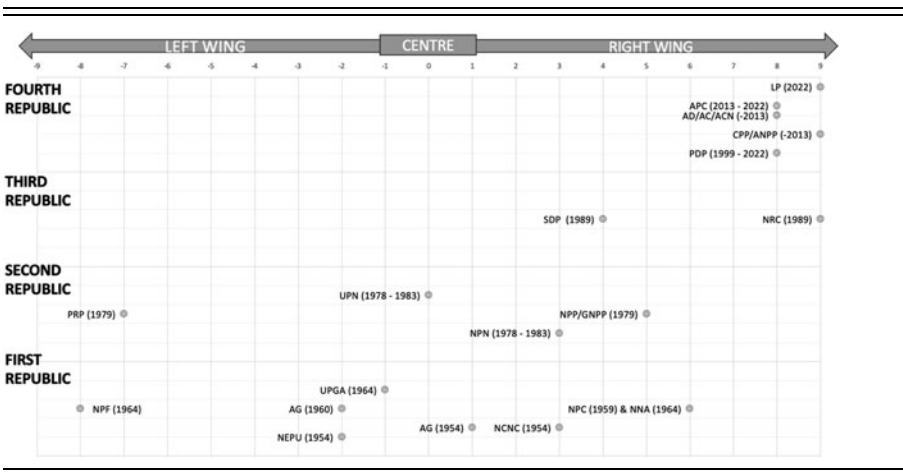
Governing parties qualitatively scored based on relative emphasis on Young's economic discourses.

	NPC (1959 & NNA (1964)	NEPU (1964)	NCNC (1964)	NPP (1964)	AG (1964)	AG (1960)	UPGA (1964)	NPN (1978 - 1983)	LPN (1978 - 1983)	PRP (1978)	NPP/GNPP (1979)	SDP (1989)	NRC (1989)	POP (1999 - 2022)	AD/AC/ACN (2013)	CPP/ANPP (2013)	APC (2013 - 2022)	LP (2022)
<b>Left-Wing Proposals</b>																		
Anti-capitalism	0	0	0	3	0	2	1	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Class Antagonism	0	2	0	3	1	2	1	0	1	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Economic Protection	0	2	1	3	1	2	2	2	3	3	2	2	0	1	1	1	0	1
Industrialism	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO
<b>Centre</b>																		
Market-led Economic Capital	3	1	2	1	2	2	2	3	2	1	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
<b>Right-Wing Proposals</b>																		
Market-led Foreign Capital	3	1	2	0	1	2	1	2	2	0	3	2	3	3	3	3	3	3
Privatization	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	3	3	3	3	3	3
Total Right-wing	6	2	4	1	3	4	3	5	4	1	7	7	9	9	9	9	9	9
Total Left-wing	0	4	1	9	2	6	4	2	4	8	2	3	0	1	1	0	1	0
Difference	6	-2	3	-8	1	-2	-1	3	0	-7	5	4	9	8	8	9	8	9

0 = No emphasis; 1 = Weak Emphasis; 2 = Moderate Emphasis; 3 = Strong Emphasis

TABLE II.

Mapping of parties based on left/right 'difference' score in Table I.



overarching argument, simplified in Table II, that the left/right economic cleavage has, over the course of Nigeria's four republics, veered towards a convergence on the economic right.

FIRST AND SECOND REPUBLICS: DEEPENING DIFFERENTIATION

*First Republic (1959–1966)*

The coalitions which gained power in Nigeria's first republican election of 1960 can be grouped into three. These are the Northern People's Congress (NPC)

and its allies which gained a plurality of parliamentary seats, the National Council of Nigeria, and the Cameroons (NCNC) and its ally the Northern Elements Progressives Union (NEPU), and the Action Group (AG) and its allies. These groupings were further consolidated into two broad coalitions in the second and final (1964/65) elections of Nigeria's first republic. These coalitions were the victorious Nigerian National Alliance (NNA) dominated by the NPC, and the United Progressive's Grand Alliance (UPGA) of the NCNC, NEPU, the AG and a series of smaller allied parties.

Among these parties, the NPC/NNA most closely aligns with Young's characterisation of the non-nationalist nurture capitalist orientation. Separate sections in the NPC 1959 manifesto under the headings of 'Economic Policy' and 'Commerce and Industry' spell this out. In the Economy section, the manifesto speaks of a desire to 'pursue a vigorous policy which will stimulate the flow of external [i.e., foreign] capital from government and private sources, and we shall offer incentives to attract this external capital', as well as to 'encourage the creation and expansion of independent Nigerian business enterprises'. Likewise, while expressing support for the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) treaty established in 1947 to promote the global reduction of tariff barriers, the manifesto specifies the party's intent to 'protect local industries', in order that 'Nigerian traders and businessmen should greatly increase their present share of the country's internal and external trade', adding that 'it will definitely be our policy to protect Nigerian business from competition in certain fields' (16). This same desire to encourage foreign investment while protecting domestic capitalists in certain sectors is echoed in the 1964 manifesto of the NPC-dominated NNA coalition, which states that, 'a liberal industrial policy which will encourage foreign investors and mobilise local capital will be pursued vigorously', while also asserting that 'the national interest shall be supreme in the commercial policy of the Alliance' (10).

Correspondingly, the NPC-dominant manifestos are silent on the questions of economic populism and class conflict. Where the manifestos do refer to economic interest groups aside from 'investors' – for instance, in the section under the heading of 'Labour' in the NNA 1964 manifesto – they make sure to emphasise the necessity of partnerships between such groups, the government and business interest. Of Labour, the document states, 'the principle of the Alliance is that the approach to labour must be fraternal and liberal and labour itself must be responsible and exercise restraint', while avoiding, 'interference from outside forces which do not understand the problems of Nigerian workers' (11). Across the NPC/NNA manifestos, then, it is clear that state intervention is geared towards creating an enabling environment primarily for foreign private investment, but with the aim of slowly building up the strength of indigenous capitalism.

The economic pledges expressed by the NCNC/NEPU alliance, on the other hand, seem to cut across the distinctions set out in Young's framework. However, in the case of NEPU, economic positions evolve from the first to the final election of the republic. Like the NPC, the NCNC proposes a liberal

nurture capitalist market economy that, in the words of its 1954 manifesto, shall 'encourage the inflow of foreign capital into Nigeria on a basis of equal partnership', while also offering 'support through State banks and Trade Commissions, to all Nigerian businessmen in their legitimate effort to establish themselves in foreign trade' (11). However, relative to the NPC/NNA, the NCNC adopts a more populist stance in its manifestos, not only referring to itself in the opening line of its 1954 manifesto as a 'Party of the Common Man' but more specifically asserting that its membership comprises 'not only the businessman and professional, but also the Peasant, the Worker, the Petty Trader, the Ex-serviceman and even the unemployed' (1). Yet, like the NPC, the NCNC does not emphasise possible economic antagonisms between or among such groups. Instead, the party offers a raft of economically populist appeals specifically addressed to 'The Worker' and 'The Peasant', including a promise to introduce price and rent controls, as well as price guarantees for farm produce. The NCNC thus articulated a preference for a nurture capitalist economy, tinged with economic populism but absent of a desire to stimulate class conflict or move beyond capitalism.

NEPU's earliest manifesto spells out a nurture capitalist economy, even if one with a preference for domestic capital and for small producers. Under the heading of 'Economic Development', its 1954 manifesto notes that the party 'shall encourage foreign investments in various development enterprises, but we shall always see that the Government and private indigenous shareholdings are greater in such enterprises' – later noting that, 'with regard to private enterprises, we shall give necessary financial aid such as loans to farmers, crafts men, traders, co-operative societies, and transport owners'. Notable in this quote is a preference for small producers and popular economic constituencies. There is, relative to the NCNC, also a stronger emphasis on class conflict in the NEPU manifesto. Characterizing the NPC, the document asserts that, '[its] ideology is first and last defense (*sic*) of property and privilege and rear-guard action against equality... To be NPC means to believe in a ruling class and to surrender one's conscience and rationality' (3). Yet, in NEPU's early manifesto, class conflict as a precursor to a revolutionary overthrow of capitalism does not appear to be desirable. Indeed, in a section under the heading of agriculture, the manifesto notes that 'the persistent hunger plus an increase in population is one of the fertile grounds for extreme leftist revolution', clarifying that, 'that must not be allowed to happen in this Region or anywhere else in Nigeria' (10).

Interestingly, by the time of the 1964 election, NEPU's earlier cautious approach to addressing questions of class and capitalism had evolved in a more radical direction. As part of the wider UPGA alliance, NEPU-allied political parties formed the Northern Progressive's Front (NPF) issuing a separate manifesto ahead of the election. Though stopping short of a call for the 'extreme leftist revolution' it had earlier repudiated, this latter manifesto is strident in articulating conflictual class relations, referring to the ruling party's constituents as 'feudalist and aristocratic' (1), while addressing its own appeals to the 'mass of farmers, workers, traders, youth...' (2). Likewise, the manifesto

asserts an explicit desire to surmount a capitalist economy, asserting that, 'nationalisation shall be accepted as a basic instrument of transformation to a socialist form of economy' (12). The document similarly proposes to withdraw significant portions of economic life from the purview of market relations, stating that, 'all Nigerian lands shall be the common collective property of the Nigerian people and vested in a competent authority' (9), and that, 'all major means of production are vital (*sic*) to our economy shall be nationally owned and all development shall proceed under a Nigerian-Wide-Plan into which all enterprises in the country shall be geared' (11). 'Private ownership of the means of production', it further clarifies, 'shall be allowed in light industry and without prior authorization of the state', but such industry, 'must operate as part of the national industrial development programme' (*ibid.*). In further reference to economic constituencies, the document dedicates extensive sections to co-operatives, to women workers, and to trade unions (6). Directly contrasted with 'state industrial and commercial enterprises', co-operatives are framed as a 'superior vehicle' through which to 'eliminate all forms of capital production practices', based on the premise that co-operatives are 'the most rational system... to turn back the fruits of that labour to the benefit of the man who works' (6). The document also proposes a raft of protections addressed to trade unions, including a union-managed unemployment fund and the introduction of worker 'appointments and representation' across the boards of all state-owned corporations and agencies. Given the economic commitments expressed in its 1964 manifesto, the NPF alliance thus mixes essential aspects of Young's African-socialist and Afro-Marxist economic orientations.

Like the earlier NEPU document, the first AG manifesto seeks a balance between African capitalism and populist-socialism in its colonial manifestos, only to express a more radical turn in its post-independence manifesto. To the question of the overall form the economy should take, the AG's 1954 manifesto follows the ambivalent nurture capitalist path laid out by the NPC and NCNC, stating that: 'The Action Group welcomes foreign capital for the purpose of industrialization, so long as it enters into partnership with indigenous capital which is provided either by Government, Public Corporations, or private investors in such a proportion that at least 51 per cent of the total capital is owned by the latter' (17).

Gesturing towards the populist rhetoric of Young's Afro-socialist regimes, the 1954 document makes numerous direct appeals to popular and collective economic interests, with commitments to expand co-operative ownership and production across numerous sectors through the establishment of 'agricultural co-operatives, consumer co-operatives (including housing and building co-operatives), artisan, productive and labour co-operatives, and co-operative banking and insurance' (6). While avoiding the explicit language of class conflict, the document nonetheless proposes to 'co-operate with Nigerian workers in their quest for genuine leadership... and the opportunity to contribute materially towards the building of a welfare state in Nigeria' (13), further noting that it would, 'encourage the growth of the labour movement and thereby strengthen its power of collective bargaining' (16).



By its 1960 manifesto, however, the AG had embraced a more radical stance, as evident in the title 'Democratic Socialism' (Figure 1) which the party adopts for its manifesto. The document takes a self-critical posture towards the party's earlier policies, explaining that, 'constrained to work within the context of colonial rule, the party was obliged to adopt the expedience of a compromise of forces and ideals' (2). Heralding a departure from class and ideological compromise, the document identifies the 'self-employed', 'workers' and 'employers' as the three main 'classes' comprising Nigerian society, declaring that 'a political party of the common people must strongly project and protect the best interest of the first two classes' (6), and further stating, 'in its nakedness, politics is a clash of economic interests' (7). However, stopping short of the antagonism for private capital expressed by the NPF, the document clarifies, 'it is desirable... that the employer class be allowed to develop further within certain limits' (6), later clarifying, 'in this great task of economic reconstruction we have to mobilise our domestic capital [and] attract more foreign capital' (13). Likewise, though eschewing the NPF's desire for a full command

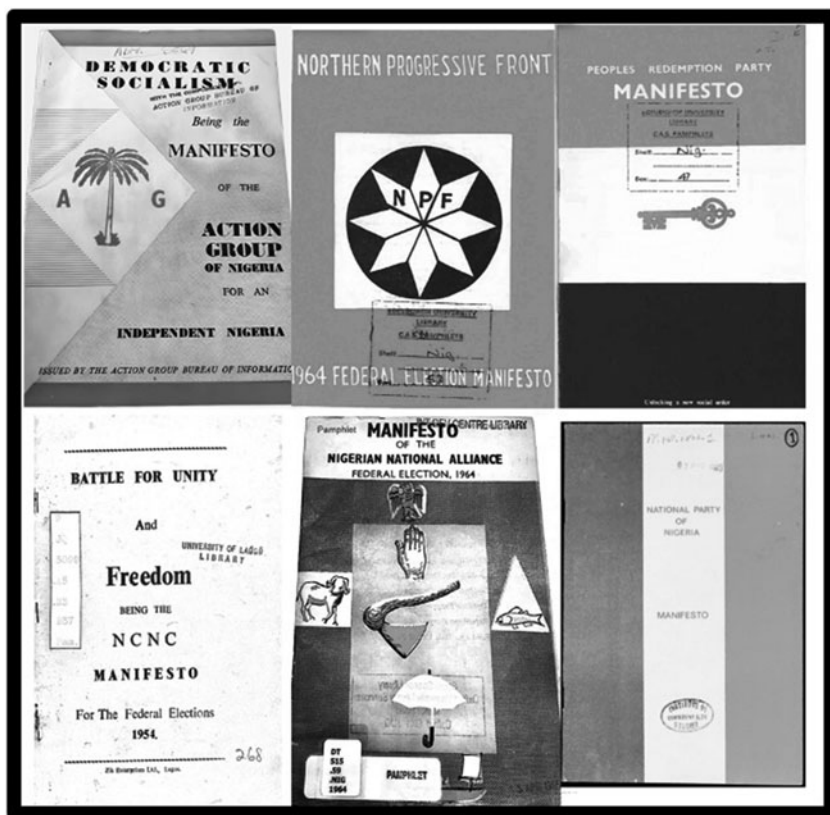


Figure 1. Cover pages of select party manifestos.

economy, the AG's 1960 manifesto opts for comprehensive planning, stating that, 'we envisage a mixed socialist economy in which state and private enterprise exists side by side within the framework of a National Plan' (14). These stances adopted by the AG and NPF seem to have influenced the moderate populism and anti-capitalism expressed by the later UPGA coalition, despite the fact that the coalition also included the more liberal NCNC. Thus, UPGA's 1964 manifesto strives to forsake 'the dying capitalist society... to build a socialist society' (5), asserting that the 'labouring (sic) classes are the prop that bears the nation' (11).

Evidently, electoral discourses during the First Republic featured a deepening measure of ideological differentiation on precisely the class and economic grounds seen in some comparative accounts to have been historically absent in Africa. Based on these pledges, it is possible to locate the parties on a relative left/right economic scale, with the NPC and NCNC on the right-wing economic pole, the early AG and NEPU at centre and the NPF coalition on the left-wing. Such contrasting visions on the economic future of Nigerian society re-emerged at the resumption of electoral democracy in 1979.

### *Second Republic (1979–83)*

The military-guided transition to the Second Republic was marked by important changes to Nigeria's constitutional order which shaped the economic positions governing parties articulated. A new 1979 constitution not only replaced the parliamentary system with a presidency and bicameral legislature but also included explicit provisions setting out a 'mixed economy' – wherein private enterprise would be permitted while the state would maintain control over the 'commanding heights of the economy' – as most desirable for the Nigerian society. Due to the first set of these changes, the inaugural election of the Second Republic saw newly registered parties compete for Presidential office and over seats in a freshly minted National Assembly. Across these races, the share of votes cast in 1979 and 1983 election were split between five parties. These were the victorious National Party of Nigeria (NPN), and the main opposition parties: the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), the People's Redemption Party (PRP) the Nigerian People's Party (NPP) and the Great Nigerian People's Party (GNPP). What economic visions were articulated in the manifestos of these parties?

Since historical scholarship on Nigeria's Second Republic parties has tended to see the NPN as a renamed version of the First Republic's NPC (Joseph 1978), we would expect in the NPN manifestos a re-articulation of the same whole-hearted embrace of large-scale foreign and domestic private capital expressed in the NPC-dominated alliances of the First Republic. However, evidence from NPN manifestos is more equivocal, reflecting the new 'mixed economy' provisions in the 1979 constitution, as well as a moderately more populist inclination. Indeed, while its 1983 manifesto under the heading of 'Economic Philosophy' begins by asserting that, 'the NPN will pursue a policy of encouraging the fullest development of private initiative and private enterprise', it

also hastens to clarify that this would need to be undertaken, 'consistent with and complementary to government's control of the commanding heights of the economy as defined in the constitution' (7). Yet, despite its re-capitulation of the constitution's Marxian reference to the 'commanding heights of the economy', nowhere in the manifesto is a particular sector or industry reserved exclusively for state or collective control.

Nevertheless, a moderately populist inclination, at least relative to the standpoints expressed by its NPC forbearer, is notable in various passages of the NPN documents enunciating a desire to balance the interests of large-scale capital investment and of smaller-scale commerce and popular economic constituencies – especially labour unions and cooperatives. This is most evident in the party's articulation of its vision for the agricultural sector, which formed the bedrock of its policy thrust across all of its manifestos. Under its 'Food and Agricultural Policy', its 1978 manifesto proposes to encourage both 'the formation and the use of rural producer co-operatives', and 'the promotion of rural based producer and credit societies', even as it simultaneously promises, 'the encouragement of individuals and organizations to establish large scale farms by providing them with credit facilities' (3–4). Similarly, the NPN's 1983 manifesto dedicates the section on 'Agricultural Development' to the promotion of 'individuals, corporate bodies and invest(ment) in large-scale farming and agro-allied industries' (7), while a separate section on 'Rural Development' specifies the 'establishment of co-operatives' as a means for 'achieving greater well-being and happiness of the people in the rural areas' (8). This attempt at balancing interests is retained in the NPN's discussion of industrial policy, where it proposes to 'encourage, protect, and induce foreign capital into Nigeria', as well as to 'stimulate the inherent enterprising qualities of Nigerians and encourage Nigerian entrepreneurs to take a leading role in the manufacturing sector' (7).

In addition to appeals to cooperatives, the NPN manifestos also acknowledge unions as a discreet economic interest group, with the 1978 manifesto affirming the need for a 'labour movement' that is 'truly free, and democratic, strong, virile...' (15). However, as with its NPC predecessor, the emphasis in such appeals is placed on minimizing conflict between unions and management, insisting on the 'peaceful resolution of labour disputes through negotiation or arbitration in furtherance of our national... interests' (1983: 16). On the other hand, when compared to the NPC, the NPN proposes a wider range of welfare measures. NPN manifestos enunciate support for free medical care, which was explicitly denounced in NPC manifestos, as well as 'free and qualitative' (10) public education at all levels, and an 'Open University System' which would offer vocational education training geared particularly towards upgrading 'the skills and competence of artisans and craftsmen' (11). Thus, based on a specific examination of their manifestos, we can surmise that if the NPC's nurture capitalist orientation was inherited by the NPN, the latter tempered this through economically populist appeals.

Conversely, the UPN appears to back away from the most anti-capitalist and economically populist proposals enunciated by the AG, widely seen as the

former's predecessor. Instead of the more strident language of social classes and economic interests, greater emphasis is placed on establishing an ambitious welfare state to reverse the prevailing circumstance 'withal the rich grow unstoppably richer while the poor become abysmally poorer' (1983: 2). As echoed verbatim in both 1978 and 1983 manifestos, the party states that its 'main aim in seeking the rapid transformation of the Nigerian economy is to improve the economic and social conditions of the masses ... the quality of life of the average Nigeria may suffer... if measures are not taken to increase the social wage of the worker or the self-employed small-scale farmer or businessman' (1978: 7; 1983: 14). Reflecting these principles, the UPN manifestos propose a raft of social policies spanning universal free and compulsory primary education, free secondary, tertiary and vocational education, and free medical services to those below 18 or in state educational institutions (1978: 8–10). Most ambitiously, the 1983 manifesto proposes a policy of 'full employment' guaranteed by the Federal government as one of the key pillars of its economic proposal (18). Such references to 'the masses' or to particular popular economic interests abound throughout the UPN manifestos, with special emphasis placed on rural constituencies – including the 'small-scale farmer' and 'livestock farmers' (1983: 6). As with its predecessor, the ideal of 'rural development' offered to these constituencies is invariably framed as requiring collectivist interventions, especially the establishment of a 'vigorous programme of co-operative farming' (1978: 2). In addition – and echoing the discourses of the First Republic's NEPU/NPF coalition – the UPN's 1983 manifesto articulates a modestly sharpened class critique when, in contextualizing its approach to commerce, it lambasts what it sees as the ruling NPN's support for a 'closed-shop feudal class', transformed from 'indigent idlers' into 'billionaires' through preferential access to 'oil-funded largesse' (7).

Yet, despite economic populist echoes, the UPN manifestos remained within the nurture capitalist frame, maintaining the expectation that private enterprise will provide the basic developmental thrust in the directly productive sectors. Indeed, as with the ruling parties, proposals for commerce and industry focus on finding the appropriate balance of foreign and domestic private investment, laying an emphasis on expanding the participation of 'Nigerians and Nigerian companies' (10) – as against the desire for the dramatic expansion of the share of public and collective ownership earlier expressed by the NPF. Illustratively, the UPN's criticism of the NPN's indigenisation policy 'by which Nigerians are supposed to hold controlling equity shares in big business and industrial establishments' offers as its alternative, 'more effective indigenisation', balanced against maintaining a 'favorable climate for foreign capital investments' (8). For the UPN, then, social welfare and economic populism were held as complimentary to expanding indigenous and foreign capital.

An even more liberal approach to foreign and domestic capital investment emerges in the manifestos of the NPP and its breakaway faction, the GNPP. While seen as a reconstitution of the First Republic's NCNC (Joseph 1978), the NPP manifesto placed a much greater emphasis on free trade and the

development of a market economy than did either its predecessor or any of the other governing parties of the Second Republic. This orientation was also reflected in the manifesto of the GNPP which parrots – in many cases verbatim – the aspirations of the NPP. In both cases, the locus of the developmental impetus is placed in private investment nurtured by an enabling state, with only a moderate preference expressed for domestic over foreign capital. This liberal attitude to capital of any origin is expressed at the outset, when one of the initial pillars under the ‘economy’ subheading in the NPP manifesto promises to, ‘review the existing laws with a view to creating incentives to encourage foreign investment and the transfer of technology...’ (85). A moderately more nationalist orientation to nurture capitalism emerges in reference to agriculture and industry, where both manifestos propose to ‘liberalize the industrial policy by the granting of loans to indigenous entrepreneurs’ (88, 98), and to ‘review company taxation laws in such a way that firms will be encouraged to invest more...’ (*ibid.*).

Notably, both manifestos – but particularly that of the NPP – place a specific emphasis on encouraging private sector competition in the provision of services largely considered by the other parties to fall under the purview of the state. This is first mooted in the NPP proposals for transportation where the manifesto proposes to encourage the development of indigenous private airlines companies to compete with the state-owned carrier in order to improve the efficiency of the latter. The NPP takes this even further in proposing to stimulate private investment in education (90) and to ‘provide inducements to private medical establishments... by offering financial and tax incentives’ (91). Indeed, both documents most significantly upstage their contemporaries in this direction, establishing a precedent that reemerges in the Third and Fourth Republics, when, in proposing to ‘relinquish the shares of interests of government in those [newspapers] owned by the various governments, and sell these shares to the general public’ (93, 103), they make the first promise of privatisation to have been articulated in a Nigerian governing party manifesto.

Yet the moderately populist emphasis of its parent NCNC is also retained by the NPP, as much in its slogan of ‘power to the people’ (83) as in several concrete proposals – expressed verbatim by the GNPP. These include plans to introduce ‘legislative measures aimed at ensuring that all public and private enterprises have democratically elected representatives of the workers in their various management committees’ (86, 98), with the GNPP even promising ‘a price and incomes policy’ to ‘peg’ the cost of goods as a measure for reducing the impact of inflation on wages (97).

On the opposite ideological pole and seen as the inheritor of the First Republic’s NEPU/NPF, the PRP articulated a platform which among those of the Second Republic parties tacked most closely to the populist-socialist and Afro-Marxist positions straddled by its predecessor. While the PRP’s 1979 document omits explicit mention of the promised transition to socialism promoted by the NPF, the ‘new social order’ proposed in the PRP’s manifesto in many respects maintains the anti-capitalism of the earlier programme. For instance,

echoing the rhetoric of the new constitution, the manifesto yields to the state 'control of the commanding heights of the economy' (2). However, unlike the ruling party, the PRP makes clear what sectors it considers the commanding heights, submitting 'banking, insurance, and heavy industries' to state control, before going even further to propose the nationalisation of 'all enterprises in which [government] holds more than fifty percent shares' (*ibid.*). Indeed, besides a concession permitting trade unions to 'build workers estates, to run workers canteens and shops, to organise adult education classes to (*sic*) members, to run its own newspaper and to run a trade union college', only a handful of sectors are explicitly placed outside of state management. These include 'the fields of consumer manufactures, processing industries, and the manufacture of building materials', where the documents note 'genuine Nigerian businessmen shall be given state backing to operate' (2).

In addition, explicating the party's agricultural policy, the document permits some measure of private investment when it notes that a 'PRP government will encourage three types of farming, namely: large state-owned or joint State/company owned plantations, medium-size cooperative farms; small privately owned holdings' (3). Yet, despite passing nationalist-tinted concessions to 'genuine Nigerian private enterprise', it is clear throughout the PRP platform that the state, in partnership with popular and collective economic interests, is expected to drive development in the productive sectors (3). Furthermore, based on its premise that the 'Nigerian economy is still neo-colonial and essentially foreign-regulated and controlled' (2), the document reserves vociferous criticism for foreign capital and its local 'front men', who it proposes to 'flush out', banning expatriates from retail, service industries and all-except-University teaching, and ending 'all concessions (tax holidays, etc) meant to aid foreign-owned manufacturing companies' (*ibid.*).

Yet, as compared to the overt class opposition enunciated by its NPF for-bearer, the PRP's 'new social order' frames economic antagonisms in more populist terms, with the question of class antagonism remaining implicit. This is as evident in the commitment enunciated in its preamble – to 'liberating the ordinary citizen of this country – the worker, the peasant, the petty trader, the messenger, the clerk' (iii) – as in its proposals for agriculture where the manifesto calls repeatedly for a 'mobilised politicised peasantry', stating that 'an end must be put to elitist, pleasure farming that robs peasants of their small holdings' (3). In such passages, we see that the earlier NEPU/NPF antagonism towards a more specific 'feudal aristocracy' has given way to a more general anti-elitism. Yet a degree of class antagonism remains implicit here, as well as in the various 'social sector' proposals articulated by the manifesto. While such appeals echo the UPN's welfarist proposals for free medical and educational provision (7–10), they also go beyond them in a more class-conscious direction. This is reflected in proposals for: 'an end to the wage freeze and the linking of wages to the cost of living index' (1); that, 'management will be obliged to pay housing allowance to its workers'; that all state offices be 'mandated to provide transport to and from work for all state and

workers'; and that the government's ministry of labour be abolished so that 'factory inspection, reconciliation and mediation' would instead be taken over by the representatives of organised labour (17). It is clear, then, that while the PRP document did not speak in explicitly class antagonistic terms, many of its proposals not only took inequality and conflictual economic interests as a given, but also sought to tip the scales of that conflict in favour of organised labour and collective over individual economic initiatives. In these respects, the PRP carried on the ideological project of its predecessor, remaining a parliamentary party while maintaining a hostility towards capitalism.

Thus, placing the economic positions of the governing parties on a relative left/right scale, we might locate the NPP/GNPP on the right-wing pole, the NPN on the centre-right, the UPN on the centre-left and the PRP on the left-wing. Yet, when we look comparatively across the dominant parties of the first two republics, two further dynamics become evident. The first is that populist rhetoric, which was outrightly rebuffed by the First Republic's ruling NPN, had by the Second Republic, come to largely be embraced across the policy spectrum. Conversely, the Second Republic also featured a diffusion beyond the discourses of the ruling party of a strong liberal economic sentiment, with the NPP/GNPP manifestos articulating a newfound nurture capitalist emphasis and even introducing an innovation in this direction with its inauguration of the rhetoric of privatisation. However, despite such instances of policy 'contagion' from both left and right, it is clear that the Nigerian party system still retained a significant degree of economic differentiation among the main parties to have gained parliamentary representation in the first two republics. This trend would steadily be reversed in the two subsequent attempts at electoral democracy that followed the 1983 military coup, which brought the Second Republic to a close.

#### THIRD AND FOURTH REPUBLICS: CONVERGENCE EMERGES

##### *Third Republic (1992–1993)*

The economic pledges ultimately adopted by the Third Republic's dominant parties were shaped by two related aspects of the transition process preceding the ultimately annulled 1993 elections.<sup>3</sup> Firstly, the Babangida military junta (1985–1993), while overseeing the attempted democratic transition, had embarked on a simultaneous project of 'home grown' structural adjustment programmes – including privatisation, currency devaluation, reducing budget deficits and liberalizing trade – thought to represent 'the most sweeping reversal of macro-economic policy in Nigeria's post-independence history' (Diamond et. al 1997: 339). Secondly and more directly, the junta introduced and permitted only two new political parties, whose names had been chosen and manifestos written and approved by the regime. The process birthed a Social Democratic Party (SDP) designed from the regimes perspective to lean 'a little to the left' and a National Republic Convention (NRC) oriented 'a little to the right' (Oyediran & Agbaje 1991). However, accounts from the period generally

argue that both manifestos adopted the economic rhetoric of the prevailing authoritarian regime (*ibid.*). In light of these factors, what economic visions did the manifestos propose and how might they fit within the trajectory of economic position taking among Nigerian governing parties?

In the case of the SDP which gained the majority of parliamentary seats, its 1989 manifesto at first glance appears to straddle populist-welfarist and nurture capitalist economic visions, reminiscent of the centre-left traditions of the first two republics. We thus encounter familiar populist pledges to, 'protect the welfare of the masses', through 'moderating' the prices of 'essential commodities', (7) as well as through introducing the 'taxation of excessive profits and enhanced urban minimum wage' (*ibid.*). Frequent mention is also made of 'peasant farmers and co-operatives' (7–9) who are promised improved access to loans at 'reasonable interest charges with long period(s) of repayment' (8). Also revived in the document is the classic UPN rhetoric of 'free education at all levels' as well as free medical services for children, students and the elderly (15). While the document shies away from any overt reference to class conflict, its unique emphasis on redistributive taxation, including its promise to 'ensure that workers benefit from the huge profits being declared by the private sector' (10) does suggest an awareness of conflictual economic interests.

Yet, several other aspects of the 1989 manifesto point to the SDP's accommodation with the authoritarian-imposed economic context of its emergence. This first arises as an approving allusion in the preamble to the SDP's manifesto, which affirms that the party would 'take off from the on-going reforms of the present Administration, which are progressive in content and operation, and which we believe will improve the lot of the generality of the people' (5). On the other hand, a later section in the manifesto provides a nationalist-tinged criticism of the reforms, when the manifesto states that, 'we will not under the pretext of liberalization, open the nation's economy to the flood of imports from protected industries abroad' (6–7). These seemingly contradictory positions are better clarified in a later official statement of the party's 'national agenda', offering a 'synopsis of the SDP position' (1992: 3). While a section entitled 'SAP' offers only vaguely populist promises to 'develop a people-centered policy' (15), later sections express more explicit endorsements of specific pillars of the reform program. This includes the affirmation that 'the SDP supports deregulation...', insofar as this represents 'the congruence of free enterprise and public purpose' (*ibid.*), as well the promise that the party would 'support privatisation and commercialisation, with due regard to fair play, equity and social justice', and that the SDP would be a 'catalyst and facilitator for the private sector rather than its rival' (16). Reading across these proposals, it appears that, while accepting key pillars of the SAPs, the SDP sought to rhetorically position itself as disposed to providing ameliorative cushions for the reforms, both for indigenous entrepreneurs and some popular economic constituencies.

Expectedly, the NRC's 1989 manifesto is comparatively less ambiguous in its support for the reforms. As its preamble states: 'we of the NRC believe that there



is need to continue with and strengthen the present reforms... unless we build a system of political economy erected substantially on individual initiative, open choices, and free competitive markets, Nigerian cannot achieve its historic mission' (5). Consonantly, the wider document places emphasis on encouraging 'the greater participation by Nigerians in the economic affairs of their nation' (5). This entailed the proposed 'individual and corporate initiatives, innovation and entrepreneurship' across virtual every economic sector spanning electricity production and distribution (10), transportation and education (13) and health and housing (17). Indeed, even its position on labour includes a proposal to 'make available adequate opportunities for qualified individuals to go into their own private business' (11). Furthermore, despite its emphasis on indigenous capital, the manifesto expresses no real ambivalence towards foreign investment, instead proposing to encourage 'foreign capital in large-scale farming projects' (8), as well as to 'move away radically' from a nationalist-inspired foreign exchange policy, towards a new regime governed by 'the... demand and supply for foreign exchange' (6). In all of these respects, the NRC manifesto can be seen as deepening many of the liberal proposals advanced by earlier parties of the economic right, with only the NPC of the First Republic having expressed stronger support for foreign investment and the removal of tariff barriers.

Reading across the economic pledges in these manifestos, it appears that assertions by commentators who saw both platforms as 'offering the same ideological outlook' (Oyediran & Agbaje 1991) moderately overstated the case. Nevertheless, both military-authored party platforms accepted several key pillars of the regime's economic programme – especially privatisation and trade liberalisation. Coupled with the severe restrictions the Babangida junta placed on dissenting voices (Joseph 1978), the imposed uniformity in the platforms of the permitted governing parties introduced to the economic rhetoric of Third Republic a level of ideological harmony not previously witnessed in the Nigerian party system. This trajectory would only deepen in the Fourth Republic, following the resumption in 1999 of multi-party elections.

#### *Fourth Republic (1999–present)*

The inaugural elections were dominated by three parties: the victorious PDP, and two opposition parties, the All People's Party (APP) and the Alliance for Democracy (AD). Subsequent elections in 2003, 2007 and 2011 saw the opposition APP and AD suffer factionalism and undergo name changes, while each largely retaining some aspects of their original networks and identities. The APP morphed into the All Nigerian People's Party (ANPP) in 2002, birthing its Congress for Progressive Change (CPC) faction in 2009, while a leading faction of the AD formed the Action Congress (AC) in 2007, with the latter becoming the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) in 2011. The configuration of major opposition parties witnessed a further evolution in 2013, when the ACN, CPC, ANPP – as well as dissident factions of the PDP and the smaller

All Progressive's Grand Alliance (APGA) – agree to merge, birthing the All Progressives Congress (APC). Following its historic victory over the PDP in 2015, the APC retained presidential power and majorities in the National Assembly. This seeming two-party system (Obe 2019) that persisted for nearly a decade following the APC's founding was challenged in the 2023 election, with the Labour Party gaining significant parliamentary representation. What economic visions have the Fourth Republic's ruling and major opposition parties expressed and to what extent have these fit within or departed from trajectories shaped by earlier republics?

The most striking feature of the PDP's founding manifesto is its attempt to synthesise the spirit – and in several sections, the letter – of the economic pledges put forward by the Third Republic's SDP and NRC manifestos. Evidence of this emerges in the opening statements of the party's 'economic objectives' when the document pledges both a 'reduction of the gap between the rich and the poor thereby creating the middle class' and that 'the policy of privatization in the Nigerian economy shall be encouraged and expanded' (1998: 14). This attempted fusion of the economic visions of the prior parties verges on plagiarism in the sector-specific segments of the PDP's 1998 manifesto where alternate clauses of the NRC and SDP manifestos provide inspiration. For instance, the sections on agriculture and rural development pledge to 'mak(e) agriculture more profitable' (14) and to 'encourage plantation agriculture' (15) harkening back to the NRC's preference for large-scale commercialised farming, while simultaneously gesturing at the SDP's pledges to 'improve the co-operative society system' and to 'encourage the establishment of small scale cottage industries' in the rural areas (16). The NRC influence also emerges strongly in sections on industrialisation and communication, which pledge the 'privatization of those public enterprises for which private entrepreneurship and capital (*sic*) available locally' (16), the 'provision of tax holidays for newly established industrial ventures' (17) and the 'privatization of NITEL and NIPOST', the previously state-run postal and telecommunications services. Indeed, the section on housing in the PDP document, which proposes to strengthen the role of 'corporate bodies' and 'privately owned real estate companies' is *copied wholesale*, save typographic alternations, from the NRC's 1989 manifesto.

On the other hand, the document sounds most like the SDP in the sections on social provision, where it promises to 'ensure that all Nigerians... shall have access to free medical services', as well as to 'ultimately provide free, functional education at all levels' (18). Indeed, the entire section of the document dedicated to 'labour employment and wages' is copied, virtually unaltered, from the SDP manifesto. While less derivative in phrasing and format, subsequent PDP manifestos maintain this fusion of the Third Republic platforms: on one hand ensuring the continuation of the privatisation process and a creation of a 'private sector-led economic growth strategy' (2003: 8), while on the other hand proposing various moderately populist and ameliorative measures to 'protect the weak and the poor' (*ibid.*: 4).

Though stopping short of the direct reproduction adopted by the PDP, the economic rhetoric adopted in the manifestos of the main opposition coalitions – the AD/ACN and the APP/ANPP/CPC – prior to their merger demonstrates the same desire to chart a middle path through the already narrow ideological partition permitted in the Third Republic. For instance, while proposing the ‘poverty alleviation’ (230) and the ‘enthronement of social justice’ (231), the ANPP’s manifesto proposes to continue ‘the divestment of government from commercial entrepreneurship’, with the caveat that ‘transparency must rule the privatization process’ (237). Likewise, the CPP document advances a programme of social services aimed to ‘care for the weak, poor and needy’ (2), including through the provision of free health services for children and the elderly and free primary and secondary education (13–14); also promising ‘economic liberalization through enabling domestic private sector participation... as well as foreign capital’, and ‘privatization through consultation with stakeholders’ (4).

In similar vein, along with framing the ‘central focus of our economic policy’ as ‘the greater entrepreneurial development and participation of Nigerians’ (18), the AD manifesto proposes ‘private sector participation and investment’ (52) across virtually all economic sectors, while reproducing the rhetoric of ‘commercialization and privatization’ (54). Among its pledges to ‘address poverty’ (19), the document also offers the provision of ‘free and compulsory education at primary and secondary levels’, though even here, breaking with the centre-left UPN and AG documents, it also commits to encouraging ‘private participation in education at all levels’ (12). The AD’s inheritor, the ACN, adds more economic populism to this mix, expressing among its ‘main objectives of economic planning’ a desire to ‘reduce the income gap between the rich and the poor’, as well as to ‘promote free trade’ (12), as part of a wider desire to ‘create a middle-class for the development of the economy’.

The manifestos issued by the APC following the merger reflect more of a synthesis of the platforms of its predecessors (including the PDP) than a deviation from them. The vision for ‘economic diversification’ spelled out in the party’s founding 2014 manifesto, and maintained in a largely unchanged 2018 reissue, retains the general scepticism for state participation in directly productive sectors that attained consensus in the Third Republic. The 2014 document repeatedly proposes to reduce, ‘through amalgamation or abolition’ (37), the number of state bodies with an economic mandate, in order to ‘push forward our economic agenda’ (*ibid.*). In this vein, it proposes to ‘break up’ the state-owned oil company in order to permit the resulting entities to ‘sell equity on the local stock exchange’ (39). These proposals to limit the state’s economic participation go further in the 2023 manifesto, which promises to ‘phase out’ fuel subsidies (37). The APC manifestos also lay repeated emphasis on providing private sector ‘incentives’ (2014: 11, 26; 2022) and encouraging ‘massive private sector participation’ (40) in order to ‘ensure (the) creation of a domestic capital base in export industries’ (2014: 33). Its agricultural proposals likewise speak of the need to transform Nigerian into a ‘medium and large-scale

farming nation' (43), championing public–private partnerships in areas of social and infrastructure provisioning where some state participation appears unavoidable (2014: 16–18; 2022: 37).

Furthermore, while retaining the promise of 'free education' (16) and a proposal to introduce 'mobile clinics providing free health services and drugs' (14), its wider 'social development agenda' (27) is aimed at generating an 'educated middle class'. The APC's 2023 manifesto does expand on the economic populism of the previous documents, reviving some of the SDP's proposals to support cooperative agriculture and to moderate the prices of essential commodities (27). However, the document avoids the most ambitious populist proposals of the SDP pertaining to redistributive taxation. Though to a lesser extent than the Fourth Republic's earlier governing parties, the APC's rhetoric features a muting of the economic populism expressed not only in the more class-antagonistic manifestos of yore, but even in the more constrained rhetoric of the SDP.

The manifesto of the Labour Party released ahead of the 2023 election does not much deviate from these patterns. LP's proposals hark back to the PDP and NRC tradition in its vision of an economy driven primarily by large-scale producers (19) as much as in its commitment to the 'liberalization of the foreign exchange market', 'reducing the cost of governance' (22) and 'eliminating the petrol subsidy regime' (23). Likewise, the party's 'poverty alleviation' plans evince the NRC's aversion to populist rhetoric, emphasizing a focus on 'economic growth' and 'human capital development' (32) while avoiding redistributive proposals. Indeed, with the partial exception of a proposal to shift from a monthly to an hourly wage, the single direct reference to working class constituencies enunciated in the entire manifesto is a proposal to revamp existing occupational safety laws (14), meaning that even the NRC offered more direct appeals to Labour.

In light of the foregoing evidence, how do the economic positions of the Fourth Republic's governing parties map unto a left/right spectrum? It is apparent that Nigeria's fourth and longest running republic has also been its least ideologically adversarial. This is so, even when the current rhetoric is compared to that of the parties of the Third Republic. The earlier emphasis on the economic interests separating rural cooperatives and urban workers from large-scale agriculturalists and industrial managers respectively has, among the contemporary governing parties, given way to an unambivalent embrace of foreign and domestic capital, combined with an aspiration to generate a middle class out of an undifferentiated 'poor'. The Fourth Republic's dominant parties thus ideologically straddle the narrow divide between the Third Republic's parties. The NRC's embrace of SAP reforms is echoed by all parties while a moderated version of the SDP's constrained populist rhetoric is revived by the PDP and APC. While economic position-taking among these parties demonstrates a near ideological consensus, per Egwim (2022), it becomes clear when juxtaposed with dominant party rhetoric of earlier republics, that such convergence has occurred on the right-wing of Nigeria's economic spectrum and not its centre (Table II).

## CONCLUSION

The evolution of economic position-taking in governing party manifestos from Nigeria's First Republic to its Fourth suggests that the left/right cleavage has diminished but not disappeared. In addition to the depletion of anti-capitalist rhetoric and the tempering of previously adversarial expressions of economic populism, governing party manifestos have arrived at a less ambivalent stance towards both foreign and domestic capital and a shared embrace of the discourse of privatisation. Convergence more plausibly accounts for the ideological evolution of partisan economic rhetoric in Nigeria than does an emphasis on ideological polarisation or 'absence'. From a normative standpoint, this means that what is missing in electoral discourse is not economic ideology in general, but, rather, alternatives to the dominant ideological consensus.

In making this case, the article contributes to re-emerging debates on party ideology in contemporary Nigeria, demonstrating how Africa-specific conceptualisations of the ideological spectrum can facilitate a fruitful assessment of economic positions in Nigerian electoral discourse. This also opens up avenues for further comparative research into the evolution of economic rhetoric in other African contexts, as well as more historically specific scholarship into the political conditions of manifesto development. The re-construal pursued here also raises further questions about the links between economic rhetoric and political practice, increasingly taken up in emerging scholarship about Nigeria. Taking seriously partisan economic position-taking in Africa allows us to access how far such rhetoric shapes policy outcomes when parties on the campaign trail become parties of government.

## NOTES

1. The manifestos of the leading candidates – in their content as much as in the timeliness of their publication – were heavily scrutinised during the campaign, with several news, and popular analysis websites running detailed comparisons across various policy issues. For instance, *BBC Pidgin* and *Premium Times* provided summaries and comparisons, also examining how parties address particular issues such as climate change, while *Stears* ran a dedicated 'Manifesto Week' comparing the major parties across various economic issue areas.

2. I define 'parties of government' as those that have had a coalition or blackmail potential, following Bogaards (2004: 183). I operationalise this by including only parties or coalitions whose representation exceeds 10% of parliamentary seats. See African Election Database, for records of each Nigerian election since Independence. Accessed: <https://africanelections.tripod.com/ng.html>.

3. Despite the authoritarian origins of the Third Republic's parties, their economic pledges are important to include in the trajectory of Nigerian party manifesto development. This is because the parties were embraced by partisan actors and voters and the 1993 elections were considered one of the most credible in Nigerian history. In contrast, I exclude the widely denounced and boycotted 1998 parliamentary elections, in which all five junta-created parties endorsed the Abacha regime.

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